

MLP Loops

by Saphroneth

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Summary: Twilight Sparkle has been here before. In fact, she's been here so often she's thoroughly bored. Time Loop stories for Equestria.

## 1. Chapter 1

1

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><p>Twilight sighed.<p>

She was stuck in some kind of time loop. By now, the evidence was incontrovertible â€" despite what everything she knew about magic, even time magic, said.

Every time the loop reset, she was right back here in the Canterlot library, just before trying to warn Celestia about the return of Nightmare Moon. It had taken her three loops to determine, experimentally, that nothing from one loop was carried over into the next.

Except her memories.

"Well," she said, brightly, "If there was a better opportunity for study, I've never encountered it before. Spike! A book, please! Which doesn't matter."

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><p>Nightmare Moon spread her wings, laughing as the inhabitants of

Ponyville panicked. "The night will last forever!"<p>

After a moment, she noticed something on her left wing. A small red dot of light, that was moving towards her body proper even as she watched.

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><p>A huge blast of rainbow hit Luna's alternate form, as Rainbow Dash broke the sound barrier right before impact.<p>

Turned out that Dash didn't actually channel harmony itself when she did that. But on seeing a thoroughly concussed Alicorn collapse to the floor, Twilight considered it at least progress.

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><p>Another loop, another Summer Sun celebration.<p>

It was sort of cruel, beating up Luna like she was. But then, so far she'd been grateful for being freed from the darkness every time, no matter how strange the method Twilight used.

This was shaping up to be an exceptional one, though.

"Ooh! And that's definitely an uppercut she'll feel in the morning!" Pinkie shouted, from the balloon floating over what was left of Ponyville.

"But Black Sooty comes back with a bolt of pure night, and â€" no, it's splashed off his scales!"

AJ shook her head as she adjusted the camera. "Gotta say, Twilight, this ain't what ah was expectin' to be the reason y'all asked for extra apples."

Twilight shrugged. "Dragons like Spike undergo an exceptional growth phase when their hoard is in danger. I was able to get him into the frame of mind with the apples and a load of other stuff, then when Nightmare Moon turned up I told him Rarity would be in danger if her plan went through, and, wellâ€|"

Pinkie spread her forelegs. "Spikezilla versus Nightmare Moon! Round 1! Fight!"

Spike spat out a blast of flame that turned the arrested dawn into daylight.

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><p>"umâ€| excuse me, miss nightmare, but, uhâ€| do you want some tea?"<p>

Twilight watched in disbelief as Luna's corruption flowed off of her like water and dissipated. "To think it took me this long to try Fluttershyâ€¦"

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><p>Sombra, now, was more amusing. While she came at Nightmare Moon with barely a day's prep time each new Loop, she could have as much as a year and a half when the Crystal Empire situation came up.<p>

Her former number one method had just been getting Rainbow to hit him at half again the speed of sound after loudly praying for divine intervention. The look on Sombra's face for the split second before he bounced off the wall had been priceless.

But nowâ€¦

"Thanks for your help, Gilda."

"No problem, general." The griffin saluted, then chuckled. "Wasn't sure what the hell you were thinking, but you were right. We did all want a bit of fun."

Two thousand griffins swarmed into the Crystal Empire's palace, and then out again with a dozen of the largest carrying Sombra between them.

"What do you want us to do with him, general?"

Twilight considered. "Slap two power limiters on him and leave him tied up on Rarity's doorstep with a bow. And a label saying 'new model'."

"Evil." Gilda grinned. "I approve. What next?"

The unicorn shrugged. "I've heard this place has some good wine in the cellars. Comes of centuries of isolation, or whatever happened to it. I think we could consider themâ€¦ spoils of war?"

"That'll piss off your brother."

"Well, he did forget to let me know about his wedding last week." Again.

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><p>"The Winter Wrap-Up in Ponyville is traditionally done without magic, Miss Sparkle."<p>

"Oh. How do you do the clouds?"

The Mayor blinked. "Pardon?"

"Pegasi use magic to fly and move clouds. And the reason earth ponies are so strong is because of their magic. So is it going to be groundbound pegsasi and unicorns without use of their horns doing all the work?"

"â€|erâ€|"

"Because it might take a while."

"I'llâ€| see if I can talk to my subordinatesâ€|"

Twilight felt like laughing beneath her pleasant expression. She hadn't caught that the first time through, but it was a good pointâ€|

What did she think this cutie mark meant anyway, shovels?

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><p>Discord's statue cracked, then shattered. Out of the stone ruins came the chaotic draconequus. "I'm back, baby! Okay, time to screw with Tia and Lulu andâ€| whoever she's got wielding the Elements this time. This should be fun."<p>

A dot of purple light appeared on the ground next to him. Discord materialized a microscope, turned it upside down, and examined it minutely at a distance of eight feet.

Then he threw the microscope away and looked at the dot of light. "Wonder what this isâ€|"

"Hate detected."

The voice seemed to come from everywhere at once.

The purple dot was joined by a red one, and then a green one, to either side. Turning, he saw blue, pink and yellow. They thickened, becoming searchlight beams, which at least let him know where they were coming from â€" above.

"Firing orbital friendship cannon."

Discord slapped his forehead, producing a fish. "Oh, bodkins."

\* \* \*

><p>"I feel kind of bad for himâ€|" Fluttershy muttered.<p>

Twilight shrugged. "Now we've shown him we're not to be trifled with, we'll let him out again and see if we can make him behave. Okay, Rainbow, take the cloud down!"

"You got it, Twi! Hah, I wish I'd seen the look on his face!"



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><p>"Right, how did that spell goâ€|"<p>

Twilight looked at the sky. It was only a few minutes from dawn, on the summer solstice.

If everything went as it had first time, Nightmare Moon would arrive in just a few minutes to start going on about how the night would last forever. Honestly, it was getting a little boring.

Twilight sometimes considered she'd gotten a little jaded. Well, what could the universe expect if it made her keep doing the same thing over and over?

Anyway, this at least would be hilarious.

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|forever!"<p>

As Nightmare Moon started her evil laugh, Twilight closed her eyes and focused.

A faint touch to the Element of Magicâ€| a spell from an ancient spellbook...

"Not today, villain!"

Nightmare Moon paused, looking around to the source of the loud voice, and saw a purple unicorn rearing back on her hind legs.

"I will defeat you myself, in the name of Princess Celestia!"

"You? You're nothing but a \_child\_. Is this all Celestia has to stop me?"

"Yep! Magic power, go!"

At that point, Twilight's spell triggered. Everything went white, and when it faded she had the Element of Magic on her forehead, and a familiar dress on her back.

More importantly, though, she was once more \_Princess\_ Twilight.

"â€|what?" the Nightmare of the Moon managed. "Butâ€| what?"

"That's kinda cool." Spike muttered. "When'd you learn\_ that?\_"

"It was in the Star Swirl wing." The newly ascended alicorn replied, before launching herself into the air and conjuring dozens of balls of lightning.

A good old fashioned punch up would be just the thing.

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><p>"Weirdest. Loop. Ever." Twilight muttered, watching the plaid sky turning amber as the moon rose in the north.<p>

It was. For one thing, she wasn't Celestia's student this time â€" though that wasn't all that unusual in and of itself. For another, she was viewed a lot like Pinkie Pie had been in the original loop.

That would be because Pinkie Pie in this version of Equestria was the faithful student of King Discord, benevolent ruler of the surreal land of Equestria. And, furthermore, there was evidence that the dreaded Infernal Blaze was returning.

"It's like someone held the whole country up to a funhouse mirrorâ€"|" "

She shook her head. At least there were some benefits. For one thing, things made sense around her â€" it was like she normalized the area nearby.

"Right. I lay about even odds on either me being the Element of Laughter this loop, or the Element of Magic being one of the five necklacesâ€"|" "

\* \* \*

><p>"Fools! I shall destroy your pitiful ruler, and then restore my rightful Empire of the Sun!"<p>

Twilight raised a hoof. "Excuse me, miss Infernal Blaze, butâ€"|" you're kind of on fire."

"Of course I'm on fire! I am the goddess of the sun! Iâ€"|" Infernal Blaze broke off, sniffed, and started screaming. "Oh me I AM on fire! Help!"

"Lake's over there." Applejack volunteered.

Infernal Blaze jumped bodily into the lake, which happened to be one of chocolate sauce. There was a splutch, a hiss, and a delicious smell.

After a moment Celestia's head came out of the sauce. "Towel please."

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><p>"So, Twilight Sparkle. Your friends have abandoned you. What do you say to that?"<p>

Twilight conjured a notebook. "Well, I am looking for a thesis subject—I think 'the long term effects of chaos magic' sounds good."

Discord blinked. "Pardon? You're not going to stop me?"

"Eeeenope." The unicorn began writing. "So, discordification of a pony involves inverting one of their key personality traits along its own axis. Do you take a guess as to what that is, or is one of your salient divine powers the ability to analyze that sort of thing?"

"What?" Discord frowned, and turned the notebook into a bluejay. "You're far too analytical, Twilight Sparkle. This is the realm of chaos!"

Twilight glared at him, flared her horn, and a bubble of normality bloomed out from her to the size of a small room. The bluejay flew into it, turned back into a book, and fluttered over to Twilight to let her keep writing. "I know, that's why I'm writing all this down."

"You—that's a failsafe spell, isn't it? How is that working?"

"I cast the spell backwards." She noted that down along with everything else. "Wild magic traits in area under influence—do not—always scramble a pre-scrambled spell. Thanks for the info!"

She looked up at him. "If you're not going to let me interview you, then don't let me keep you. I'm sure you have lots of plans for redecorating."

Discord looked at her, then off into the middle distance at nothing, shrugged, and shot off towards Manehattan.

"Right, that's got rid of him. Now, where did the Crusaders go?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Day eighteen—or thirty-seven, depending on if you trust the sunrises. Discord has apparently spent three entire days converting every single cloud in the country into an elaborate topiary sculpture. On a related note, it now rains nectar." Twilight hummed, watching a parasprite playing tennis with Angel Bunny. "That one almost makes sense, really. Plants and nectar."<p>

"I'm hurt." Discord slid out of the pages of her book. "I'd hate to become too predictable."

"You kind of are, actually. I mean, there'd be no point turning the roads from flagstones into granite, it wouldn't be funny."

"Really?" He snapped his claws, and an explosion of heat washed over them.

Twilight held up another notebook. It was turned to a page with the words 'and then Discord turns it into high temperature, nearly molten

granite'. "See what I mean?"

"Give me that!" He snatched the whole set out of her magical grip. "This is eight hundred predictions for how I'll react to certain straight lines!"

"Exactly. And I've been ticking off the ones you've done." This time, Twilight held up a bingo sheet. "If you do two more, I get a full house."

Discord ground his teeth into flour, then blew flame on the flour to make some bread, pulled it into a baguette and ate it. "That is very annoying."

"Yep. Oh, and that's another one off the list!" Twilight said, calmly. "I expected more from you."

"I can be unpredictable if I feel like it!" Discord said. "Go on, test me."

With a flash of purple, Twilight vanished. She came back two seconds later with some Poison Joke in a careful telekinetic grip. "Is this one of yours, by the way?"

"Yes, last time I was out. Same with timber wolves and zap apples, I was quite the gardener!" The draconequus summoned a hoe with a flash of light and prodded the ground, which collapsed away under him. "Hm. That isn't encouraging."

"Nice to see you're keeping up old habits." The blue plant was crushed by telekinetic force into a dense mass. Twilight next brought out a painting from a famous surrealist. "This is not a pipe."

"Yes it is." Discord plucked it out of the picture, leaving behind a traffic cone. "I do like that pony's art, though."

"Right. Anyway, want to try smoking the Poison Joke? That should do with your nasty case of predictability." Twilight showed the bingo card again. She'd crossed off the last square when Discord pulled the pipe out of the painting.

"Oh, go on then." Discord rammed it into the pipe, set it on fire, and took a deep pull. From the wrong end, of course.

Twilight held up her notebook one more time at the last page, with a triumphant grin. 'Discord gets stoned'.

"Oh, you crafty little!" Before he'd quite finished the sentence, Discord was a statue again.

"Right." Twilight frowned suddenly. "Now, where did the others go? I'm going to need them to help operate the Elements!"

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><p>Trixie laughed as she cast two powerful age-altering spells on

Snips and Snails, luxuriating in the power the Alicorn Amulet gave her. "See, Twilight Sparkle? Now Trixie is the greater unicorn!"<p>

"Maybe, yeah." Twilight said, nodding. "Oh, is that an Alicorn Amulet? I read about those, they give you a huge power boost. Are we allowed those?"

"Silence! Of course Trixie is allowed the Amulet, it took her many months of effort to obtain!"

"Okay." Twilight's horn flickered slightly, and the Element of Magic appeared on her brow. "Hey, watch this!"

There was a brilliant wash of purplish light.

When it faded, Twilight checked her new wings over. "Hmmm, bit larger than last time. Maybe I'm getting better at doing this alone."

Trixie gibbered. "Butâ€| butâ€| how? What?"

"Well, I am the bearer of the Element of Magic." Twilight shrugged her wings. "Turns out it comes with benefits."

"That is completely unfair on Trixie!"

"Oh, hush. You're the one who brought a magical superweapon to this duel first, don't complain now it's not the one sided battle you hoped it was." Twilight conjured a spell circle fifty feet across, which shunted the two male unicorns away and sealed the two mares in a shimmering opalescent dome. "Now, I'd actually quite enjoy a duel for once. Are you going to chicken out, or give me a good workout?"

Trixie replied with a fireball the size of a house. Twilight grinned, and started with four Marelin's Magical Missiles and a Cone of Lightning.

This would be fun.

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><p>Applejack was a very confused pony. She'd gone to bed that night with everything normal, and the next morningâ€| well, apart from anything else Big Mac asked her if everything was ready for the family reunion.<p>

She hadn't known one was going on at all.

To make things worse, there was no sign at all of her friends. More to the point, it was a completely different season than when she went to bed, and topping everything off was that Applebloom was quite visibly bored.

She'd asked where her friends Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo were, and

'bloom had looked at her like she'd gone funny in the head.

\* \* \*

><p>In fact, it was all so confusing she wondered if she'd tried bucking all the trees in the orchard again.<p>

And then the whole Apple family had shown up, and she'd spent the morning scrambling to keep up with details she didn't know. Something somepony had said suggested this was years in the past, which couldn't be rightâ€| but which made sense, from what 'bloom was acting like.

Then there was a loud bang, and a cloud of smoke.

"Watch in awe!" a voice shouted from inside the smoke.

"Ah, ponyfeathers. What all is Trixie doing here?" Applejack muttered.

Then the cloud cleared, to revealâ€|

The farm pony's jaw dropped. "What th' hay? Twilight?"

"Indeed! It is I, the Great and Infinitely Knowledgeable Twilight!"

The baby dragon next to her â€" Spike, clearly, Applejack realized â€" sighed and shook his head. "She's been like this all morning. I have no clue why."

\* \* \*

><p>"So, Twi. Spill. What in Tartarus is goin' on?"<p>

Twilight shrugged. "I have no idea. For some reason, I â€" and now you, apparently â€" keep going back to the dawn of the day we first met. I've been doing this for a hundred and thirty five loops, so I get kind ofâ€| stir crazy." Behind them, Spike tried to eat too many apples at once, incidentally doing a nice job of keeping the rest of the Apple clan distracted from why Applejack was talking so familiarly with the strange unicorn.

"So, what now? And ah could swear you were a Princess last time we metâ€|"

"Sometimes." Twilight shook her head. "About fifteen loops ago, I went full alicorn right in front of Nightmare Moon tomorrow. It confused her so much, it was hilarious. Anyway, I think we should, wellâ€| learn what we can, keep ponies safe, try to work out why these loops are happening, and have fun. By the way, don't be surprised if things areâ€| different."

"Different how?" Applejack looked sceptical.

"Well, I once started a loop to discover that I was actually the student of Queen Nightmare Moon. Justâ€| take a moment to check your memory each time, okay?"

The orange mare nodded. "Got it. Now, what do we do about Nightmare

Moon?"

Twilight grinned evilly. "I spent two loops learning everything Trixie had to teach me. She actually knows quite a lot about illusions. Nowâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>"â€¦last forever!"<p>

"Ah can see why you said you were bored, Twi." Applejack muttered. "Does she say that every time?"

"Every time." Twilight confirmed, and lit her horn for a moment. "It's done. Go."

She raised her hoof. "Excuse me!"

"What?" Nightmare Moon said, turning her gaze onto Twilight. "Do you have a question for your new empress?"

"Yes, actually. It's justâ€¦ how, exactly, will we grow crops?"

"â€¦pardon? You interrupt me with farming?" The dark goddess' eyes blazed.

"Well, mortals â€" like us â€" kind of need food to survive. I'm sure you lost track of that a bit on the moon, but plants need the sun to supply them with energy â€" which they convert out of sunlight via chlorophyll and a source of water, as well as carbon dioxide in the air. That becomes glucose which is then converted into other sugars, like fructose, or just left as it is, and so that energy is stored in a form ponies can eat â€" so, without the sun, no food."

Even Nightmare Moon's eyes had glazed over during that explanation. After a moment, she shook her head to clear it and pointed her horn directly at Twilight. "Such concerns are nothing to me! I will not be denied my rightful overlordship by such ridiculous problems as plants!"

At that point, an invisible Applejack bucked her in the chin so hard she went flying backwards through the rear wall.

"Buck that." the farmpony said, then turned to Twilight. "That work?"

"Nicely, thanks AJ." Twilight replied. "I'll just go get the Elements of Harmony. Be back in a tick!"

She vanished in a flash of purple.

\* \* \*

><p>Outside, Nightmare Moon picked herself up from the wreckage of one whole side of the building. "What impertinent insect has the temerity to-"<p>

She paused. She could hear a voice talking.

"Right, when my one starts to glow, just think about what I told you all to."

It was that annoying unicorn who'd been arguing with her. What was she talking about \_now?\_

"So, mine's Loyalty, right? Awesome!"

"I think Laughter is perfect for me!"

Those were new " and annoying " voices. Wait she could swear that those words were ominous.

"Kindness, kindness" oh, I hope I get this right. Sorry, miss Nightmare Moon, ma'am, but it is for your own good"

"This is marvellous! It matches my cutie mark perfectly!"

Oh. That's right. Horsefeathers.

Six colours of harmony hit her almost as hard as the earth pony had.

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><p>13<p>

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><p>Twilight grinned at the three other Loopers. "Right, you three, you'll like this."<p>

"What are you planning this time?" Dash asked. "Bet it'll be fun!"

"Yeah. Oh, actually" she conjured four pairs of mirrored sunglasses, and slipped them over their faces. "We'll need these."

Nightmare Moon finished her speech.

Twilight promptly hit her with a Want-It-Need-It spell.

"And that is what we call poetic justice." The purple unicorn lectured, as several hundred ponies swarmed the stage to hug the startled Nightmare Moon.

Pinkie giggled. "That \_is\_ funny! Better than when you showed us Spikezilla!"

"We love you!" somepony shouted, and then there was a \_crash\_ as Big Mac managed to tackle Luna's corrupted self.

"Well, now ah wonder if he's just easy to affect with spells like that" Applejack said, frowning at her brother. "Or if he just has a crush on her like ah heard."

"I dunno." Twilight shrugged. "Hey, want to try to work out what else the Elements can do? I bet you could tell if somepony's telling the truth or not if you get a strong enough connection with the Element



of Honesty."

Dash looked up, grinning. "What would Loyalty let me do?"

"I don't know. This calls for science!"

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><p>14 (HTTYD crossover 1)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"You are kidding."<p>

The small black Toothless looked over at his (unusually, four-legged) companion through time and space. "Afraid not. This place is mainly populated by ponies."

As Hiccup â€" well, his memories said he was called Hocus Hiccup, which was even worse than normal â€" contemplated this, a cyanâ€| pegasus?... came through the door.

"Hey, Twi, what's the plan for â€" you're not Twilight. Where is she?"

Hiccup rolled his eyes. "Never seen her before. Is she the local Loop anchor? I think I've replaced her."

"Don't know what 'anchor' you're talking about, don't care. Where is she, buster?"

Hiccup and Toothless exchanged glances. "Welcome to your first fused loop, then. Sorry, you're not getting your friend â€" Twilight, right? â€" this loop. I'm taking her place for all intents and purposes."

The cyan pegasus looked suspicious for another second, then closed her eyes and concentrated. Hiccup felt some strange, deep magic pulse for a moment.

"Okay, yeah, she's not anywhere I can feel for some reason. I'll believe youâ€| for now. Until AJ can give you a look over, anyway."

"Another looper? Sorry, another time looping person?"

"Yeah, she is. Oh, I'm Rainbow Dash â€" but you can call me awesome."

"Suddenly I'm reminded of Astrid." Hiccup muttered to Toothless, who nodded in return.

\* \* \*

><p>As Nightmare Moon proclaimed her eternal reign, Hiccup looked to the five native Loopers. "This happen every time?"<p>

"Like clockwork." The orange pony â€" AJ â€" said wearily. "Last few times, Twi had us blast her with the elements mid-speech for the hell of it."

"Does it have to be that? Or can she be defeated another way?"

"She can!" The pink pony said. "We usually use Spikezilla every twenty or so loops!"

"Right. Toothless, you're on."

The little dragon nodded, and ran forward. As the girls gasped, he swelled and shifted form into the twenty foot lithe predator from Berk, then took wing.

"Fun fact." Hiccup said, brightly. "Toothless' breed of dragon is called the Night Fury. They're nearly invisible in the dark, and they've evolved as ambush predators against other flying entities at night."

Blue flame shot through the air and erupted on something overhead.  
\_Wing! Two points!\_

The next shot was green. \_Oh, cool. The postal magic can mix in with my fireâ€| hey, Hiccup?\_

\_Yeah?\_

\_I just found out how to teleport other objects at range.\_

Hiccup winced in sympathy for any enemy they would fight in the future. Ever. Except possibly Aizen, who frankly deserved it.

A green fire burned overhead for a moment, and a startled looking Princess Luna slammed into the ground horn first.

Toothless alighted next to her, looking incredibly smug, and shifted back to his loop-native form. "I just teleported her armour right off her. Who's awesome?"

Pinkie raised a hoof. "Ooh, I know this one! It's Dash!"

"You know it!"

Toothless looked slightly deflated. "Whatever. Regardless, Rider, that power is a keeper."

Fluttershy eeped. "Umâ€| did you say, rider? As in, dragon rider?"

"Yeah, I'm normally bipedal. Human, actually, if that means anything toâ€| you?"

All of them were staring at him.

Rarity spoke first. "You mean Lyra was actually \_right?\_"

With a sigh, Toothless reached into Hiccup's mane, connected to his subspace pocket and pulled out some projection equipment. "We're going to have to give them the 'welcome to the multiverse' talk. Why is it always us?"

"Ranma's having a year off?" Hiccup suggested, then sniggered at the

thought of how \_he'd\_ take this universe. Wild horse indeedâ€| especially since the gender ratio seemed about five to one in favour of female, here.

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, in an entirely different universe, Harry Potter watched with interest as Quirrelmort was used as a ping-pong ball by the unicorn he'd tried to kill.<p>

"And \_this\_ is for basing your strategy on inadequate research!"

\_Note to self, make sure this unicorn never meets Hermionie.\_

A phoenix flamed in for a moment, then vanished towards Hagrid's hut and the young dragon within.

\_Huh. I thought he didn't feel like Fawkes. And Norbert wasn't femaleâ€| wonder if that's linked somehow.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"So, how do we beat Discord this time?" Dash asked. "New guy, you got any ideas?"<p>

Hiccup mulled over everything he'd been told about the chaos entity. "Okay, I know. I'll Befriend him."

"We tried that. Pinkie's the only one who can do it reliably. Fluttershy sometimes works too."

"You're not familiar with Nanoha's world. The word has a different meaning there. Toothless?"

The rest of them looked over to the black dragon â€" and didn't find him. Instead there was a small black octahedron.

\_Stand by. Ready.\_

Hiccup picked Toothless' Device form up in a hoof. "Right, let's go."

\* \* \*

><p>"Ah, hello." Discord said, emerging from the stained glass window.<p>

Hiccup tilted his head, examining the magic. "Okay, this'll work." With a thought, he transferred Raising Dragon to his back, where it transformed into a kind of harness with a pair of gigantic cannons.

\_Set up.\_ \_Blaster-three.\_

With a grin, Hiccup planted his hoof. The floor cracked, and strings music came from nowhere. "I always wanted to do this."

\_Firing Lock is cancelled.\_

"Oh, I saw thisâ€|" Discord said, sounding nervous. "Can't remember how it ended, though."

\_Cartridge load. Divine Buster.\_

"Right, right, that was it." The draconequus fled the palace through the window.

Pinkie grinned. "I remember this video too!" Her voice changed slightly. "He's going to blast right through the walls? Oh dear sweet mother of Celestia!"

Said deity's eyes widened, just before the gigantic eruption of magic demolished one of the load-bearing walls of her palace.

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><p>"Owie." Discord said, coughing out smoke.<p>

There didn't seem to be much else to say.

\* \* \*

><p>15 (HTTYD crossover 2)<p>

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><p>"â€|what the hay?" Twilight muttered, falling forwards onto her stomach. "Oof!"<p>

"What is it?" A voice that was at once familiar and not familiar asked. "Oh, huh. New looper this time."

"Looper?" she asked, trying to push herself back up again. It hurt. For one thing, she didn't seem to have hooves any more. "Do you mean time loops?"

"Yeah. You don't look used to human body shape, hold on." The owner of the voice grabbed her arm and pulled her up.

She turned, barely giving her own new body a glance, and saw that the speaker was a green-eyed human. He reminded her (very slightly) of the human boy she'd seen last time, which had been only a few months long before something blew the castle up.

"There you go. Strange. According to this loop's memories, you're my twin sister. Well, welcome to Berk."

"Loop memories?" After a moment, Twilight realized what he meant by the term. This version of her â€" Twit? Seriously? Worst name ever â€" had her own complete set of memories from birth. She remembered growing up on an island full of Vikings, being mocked along with her brother â€" Hiccup â€" for not being Viking enough, and their village being constantly attacked by dragons.

"Wow, that's unusualâ€|" she muttered. "I feel like I know you now."

"Yeah, that's how it works. I take it you're relatively new to the Loops?"

"I've done several hundred!"

Hiccup shrugged. "I'm at over ten thousand, and some of the first generation Loopers have done several million. What's your original name?" Seeing her surprise, he shrugged. "Berk is the only place that could possibly come up with a name as silly as \_Twit.\_ I don't doubt you'd rather use your real one."

"Twilight." She answered, after a moment. "Twilight Sparkle."

"Oh, neat. I took your place last Loop. The others are fine, by the way."

"You did? Huh." Twilight frowned. "So, I'm not used to other loopsâ€¦ what happens here?"

"Dragon riding, basically." Hiccup reached into his leather jerkin and pulled outâ€¦ projection equipment?

"I'll give you the 'welcome to the multiverse' talk, if you haven't had it already."

\* \* \*

><p>"Hi, Spike."<p>

The purplish dragon gave a rumbling growl. It sounded peeved.

"Yeah, they can't speak." Hiccup explained for her. "Toothless is telepathic now, but that's the result of a Pern Loop. Fun place, if you ever end up there."

He frowned. "Actually, if it's Spike there too, I wonder how the Loop would resolve that. Dragons and riders on Pern tend to be same-gender. Anyway, I've got a couple of harness designs that might work for himâ€¦"

Spike roared.

\* \* \*

><p>16<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight blinked awake, and did the near-instinctive check all Anchors and Loopers learned to do.<p>

Memoryâ€¦ normal time line. Nothing too unusual.

Next, she felt the local magic to see if anyone else was Awake this Loop. None of the other Elements were active, meaning that Rarity and the rest were all their Prime Loop selves, and there was no sign of outside Loopers either.

"Huh. Looks like I'm alone for once." Twilight frowned. "What should I doâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>"I won't tolerate this anymore!"<p>

Celestia looked up from where Mrs. Cake had just overfilled her teacup. "What is it, my faithful student?"

"You mock your subjects like that, tricking them into embarrassing themselves. It's a terrible abuse of power!" Horn flaring, Twilight teleported away.

"Oh, dear. I'm sorry, Mrs. Cake, it seems my student is a littleâ€| off, today." Celestia apologized.

"That's quite alright, your majesty." Both Cakes chorused. Mr. Cake continued, "We're quite familiar with Pinkie, and it seems as though Twilight is just as highly strung sometimes."

\* \* \*

><p>Three hours later, Celestia was trying to work out what on Equestria had happened.<p>

There were thousands of ponies of all three breeds marching on Canterlot, with red flags waving, singing a rather grim song about how the flags were red because they were dyed withâ€| \_blood,\_ of all things.

And her student was apparently behind all this, giving speeches about "the proletariat" and "the bourgeoisie" and so on.

It seemed as though Twilight had invented what she was calling 'communism'.

\* \* \*

><p>"Right." Twilight said as she trotted across the moon, reading by the light reflected off the planet below. "That's communism ticked off the list. One more revolution and I'll be able to write the best researched politics essay in history!"<p>

\_"That's\_ why you did all this?" Luna asked, sitting next to her. "I thought you were serious! It's why I joined in!"

"I was, sort of. It's just, well, I'm actually in a time loop. I've already tried out at least fascism, anarchism â€" that one was fun, I basically gave Pinkie a megaphone and waited â€" a democracy, a direct democracy, rule by the short and mercantile republicanism. Communism seemed like a good idea."

"Yeah, brilliant idea." Luna said, stamping on the moon's surface. "If I hadn't fired off that lunar survival spell, you would have exploded."

"Oh, shutup. I didn't know that Celestia would get desperate enough to shove MY Element of Magic onto Trixie's forehead and hope for the best." Twilight stretched. "And you're taking the idea of a time loop very calmly."

"Twilight Sparkle, I happen to think you've snapped. I'm just humouring you." Luna answered glibly.

Twilight turned. "You seem awfully sassy for once."

"We're in private. It's allowed."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Note:<strong>

This has been simmering for a while.

So, here's the full guide to the loops:

Nobody knows exactly how the Loops happen, at first.

They tend to involve a complete reset to the start of the "series" in question. Only Loopers keep their memories.

One Looper (in this case Twilight) is the "Anchor", which means the first one to loop. Others will eventually start to join her, and retain their memories as well.

The reset is not always perfect. Sometimes a loop's history will be different to the "prime" loop, or canonical plot. An example of this would be the twilight in "King Discord"'s Equestria.

"Crossover" or "Fusion" loops also occur, randomly. These can involve the home loopers having a guest, or the anchor for one universe spending time in another, or replacements (say, Spyro the Dragon replaces Spike?) or similar.

Vacation Loops are where the Anchor (or others) decide/s "buck it" and lets off steam by doing whatever comes to mind. There's little or no attempt to maintain the original timeline.

Loop duration is variable, and associated with the series in question. For a Harry Potter Loop, it'll reset around a month after the end of Seventh Year unless something else ends it. For a Naruto loop, it tends to be "until death".

Ranma Saotome, Lina Inverse, Shinji Ikari, Harry Potter and Naruto Uzumaki are the original five Loopers.

All Loopers are mind-bogglingly stir crazy.

That first How To Train Your Dragon crossover loop is actually from the other set of Loops I've done, which focus on Hiccup and Toothless.

## 2. Chapter 2

2-1

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight teleported into Ponyville. "Right, let's seeâ€|"<p>

Pinkie bounced over. "Hiya again Twilight! I'll go get the

others!"

"Thanks Pinkie!" she shouted, after the receding earth pony. "You alright, Spike?"

"Yeahâ€|" Spike muttered. "But who was she?"

Twilight shrugged. "I met her before, we stayed in touch."  
\_Technically trueâ€|\_ "Come on, let's go over to that library we were assigned."

\* \* \*

><p>"What's the plan for this loop?" Applejack asked.<p>

"Nothing much." Twilight shrugged. "No big plan, anyway. As for the Summer Sun celebration, I think it might be Pinkie's turn."

"Yay!" Pinkie started drawing a plan. "I think that if Rarity helps set it up it won't make anyone suspiciousâ€| and I can order a big shipment from Canterlotâ€| you've got some spare money, right Twilight?"

"Yep." Twilight nodded. "Dash, you're the fastest. Mind helping Pinkie with getting that delivered?"

Dash grinned. "Not at all!"

"Right. Oh, what \_is\_ your plan?"

"Well, you know how Nightmare Night is all about appeasing Nightmare Moon with sweets?" Pinkie's smile got wider. "I thought about thirty tonnes rigged up to pour on her when I pull the rope should work!"

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|last forever!"<p>

Pinkie pulled the rope. The avalanche of sweet things crashed down on Nightmare Moon - and stopped, before flying sideways to cover Pinkie in confectionary.

The other five Loopers started. "Pinkie!"

"Did you think you could stop a goddess so easily?" Nightmare Moon laughed, then dissolved into sparkles of starry night which shot out the door. There was a crash.

"Help!" Roseluck shouted from outside. "That horrible nightmare thing stole the library!"

Twilight blinked. "Did Nightmare Moon just steal my house?"

"Looks like." Applejack said. "Come on, let's dig Pinkie out before she tries t' \_eat\_ her way out."

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie had swirls around her eyes when they got her out. "Owieâ€| that must have been some hard candyâ€|"<p>



"What do we do?" Fluttershy asked, as Pinkie shook it off and started popping caramel chocolates into her mouth. "That's not normal, is it?"

"No, it's not. We'd better hurry and find her before things get worse." Twilight frowned. "How can the rest of you do with manifesting your elements?"

"Ah'm afraid ah need to have touched it first." Applejack said. "Remember? We normally go collect them from the castle if we plan on blasting Nightmare Moon."

"Right. I'll go get them now, just in case." Twilight vanished.

After about a minute, Rarity raised a hoof. "Shouldn't she be back by now?"

Dash focused on the secondary powers of her element. "She's not harmed, I can tell that much. But she's just not come back."

\* \* \*

><p>"What the hay?" Rarity said, shocked, pausing as she exited through the large building's door. "What has happened to my boutique?"<p>

The others looked it over. There didn't appear to be any change â€" certainly nothing that would promote such a strong response from the elegant mare.

"Look at it! Just look! Fluttershy, you must see!"

"Erâ€|" Fluttershy trotted closer, squinting. "That dress in the window hasâ€| oh, my. That's terrible."

"What's terrible?" Dash asked. "It can't be that bad, can it?"

"It's been re-stitched half an inch off the join line!" Rarity said, her eyes wide. "And the one on the left side has been dyed four shades too dark!" She burst into motion, galloping into the building.

A high scream came from inside. "Nooo! They've \_all\_ been \_ruined!\_ What cruel pony would pair \_teal\_ with \_chartreuse?\_"

The others exchanged looks.

"Ah'm startin' to suspect somethin's up this loopâ€|" Applejack muttered.

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy sadly read the sign placed in front of her house. Dash peered over her shoulder. "What? 'I have your animals, if you want them back pay the ransom of twelve hundred bits'? What kind of low-down, no good coward would do this?"<p>

"Ah thought it was Nightmare Moon." Applejack pointed out. "What with

her bein' two steps ahead of us this loop an' all."

Rarity was still mourning her dresses.

Applejack took an uneasy look at Pinkie, who seemed to be on a sugar rush. Well, it could just be Pinkie being Pinkie, but her eyes looked just a little dilatedâ€|

No, that had to be the sugar. Even Pinkie didn't normally emit a faint musical hum.

\* \* \*

><p>Big Mac caught up with them as they entered the Everfree proper. "Sis! Ah've been lookin' all over for you. The treesâ€|"<p>

"What?" Applejack asked. "Nothin' bad happened, ah hope?"

"That's just it." Big Mac shrugged. "They'reâ€| lemons."

"Wait, what?" Dash said. "But you're the \_Apple\_ clan. Apples. Right? How could you miss planting lemons?"

"They weren't lemons yesterday." Both siblings chorused.

"How does that even make sense?" Dash was starting to feel like the voice of reason. It didn't feel comfortable.

"That's just it, RD." Applejack said. "It don't."

\* \* \*

><p>Halfway to the Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters, there was an explosion overhead. All five ponies' heads snapped back, but all they saw was a series of expanding black rings.<p>

"I don't like thisâ€|" Fluttershy said, looking around nervously.

"Ooh!" Pinkie said. "A letter came down! Hey, Dash, it's for you!"

The indicated pegasus took it. It was thick paper, with an official-looking seal on the front.

Holding it gingerly away from her, she opened it. When it failed to explode, she looked more properly.

\_Dear Rainbow Dash\_

\_We would like to inform you that you are our first choice for the position of Shadowbolt Captain, from over a hundred applicants.\_

\_The position carries a very competitive salary, and all our members have expressed interest in working with you.\_

Dash laughed, pausing in her reading of the letter. "Hah! Like that'll get me. We did this before!"

"Well?" Pinkie said. "What does the rest of it say?"

"Huh? There's more?" Pinkie pointed. "Oh. Erâ€¦"

\_If you are unable to give this offer your time, we will of course have no hard feelings. In this case, the number two option for this position will be used, and hence the role will go to\_

"Lightning Dust?" Dash shouted. "That no-good two-bit carelessâ€¦|  
grah! Well, she's not going to beat \_me\_ this time!" She bunched up her legs to launch into the air, and got tackled by four ponies at once.

"Stay good, Dashie!" Pinkie shouted.

"It's just another of Nightmare Moon's tricks." Rarity pointed out.

"Umâ€¦| I think it would be a bad idea."

"All right, all right. Sorry, okay?" One by one, her friends got off her. "Sorry. It just caught me by surprise, alright?"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight slowly returned to consciousness. She'd materialized in the room with the Elements, like normal, and thenâ€¦|<p>

Oh. She'd been hit on the head by a book. Judging by the impact, it was probably Edgar the Griffin's \_Decline and Fall of the Romane Empire\_. The omnibus edition.

She looked around. Still the castle of the royal pony sisters. In fact, this was quite near the main entrance.

And there were voices coming from said entrance. The others were nearly here? How long had she been out?

Even as she tried to work out what else was wrong, they burst through the door.

"Nightmare Moon!" Dash shouted. "You better give Twilight back!"

Twilight tried to turn, to see where Nightmare Moon was-

"Hey!" Pinkie shouted. "Don't pretend we're not here!"

Then Twilight realized what had been so off when she woke up.

She'd been meticulously painted black and dark purple, her mane styled, her cutie mark painted overâ€¦| she'd been dressed in armour which looked awfully familiarâ€¦| there were fake black wings strapped to her, and she was wearing contacts.

"Girls, wait!" she said, urgently. "I'm not Nightmare Moon!"

"That voice trick isn't going to fool us!" Dash said.

Applejack nodded. "RD? On three."

Then somepony started laughing themselves sick. With a crash, a figure fell through a hole in the ceiling and slammed into the floor, still shaking with mirth.

Twilight regained enough presence of mind to use some of the spells Rarity had taught her and recolor her coat to normal, then teleported out of the armour and summoned her Element of Magic.

Everyone recognized the pony heaving with laughter over in the corner at once.

"\_Luna?\_"

"Ahh haa haa, hee hee, oh, my sidesâ€¦" Luna finally contained her mirth enough to speak, and rolled onto her front before standing up. "Yes, it's me... I assume there's some kind of time travel going on?"

Twilight nodded. "Time loops. We've all done a good few hundred by now."

"Wellâ€¦ ah, I needed that." Another giggle escaped. "I pranked you all, for once! Ah, that was better than anything Celly's ever done!" Luna shook her head, and tried to stay on topic. "Right. So â€¦ pfftâ€¦ so, you all seem to have been doing this for a while."

Pinkie nodded enthusiastically. Twilight elaborated. "I've got no clue exactly how it happens, but it seems like I loop the most often and the rest of us are on-and-off. Somepony like you might be only around very rarely."

"We kin only hope." Applejack said sarcastically. "Do y'all have any idea what I'm going to do with eight hundred lemon trees? Cuz I don't."

\* \* \*

><p>2.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke in the Canterlot library as usual. She felt for her magic, and foundâ€¦ not quite nothing, but a very different sensation to normal.<p>

"What'sâ€¦"

Her voice trailed off as she realized something else was missing. More specifically, Spike was â€¦ normally, she Awoke with him in the same room of the library.

Then the doors slammed open in a flash of pink magic. "Hiya Twilight! You'll never guess what Celly told us to do!"

At that point, the Loop memories returned. Ah, that's right. She was Twilight Sparkle, an earth pony whose theoretical knowledge of magic was good enough to get her a scholarship into the Academy anyway. And her best friend was Pinkie Pie, the craziest unicorn in

Canterlot.

\_I'm going to need a freaking drink before this Loop is overâ€|\_

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight felt an eye twitch coming on.<p>

This wasn't as crazy as the "King Discord" loop, but it was starting to get close. Fluttershy was an earth pony (which made a fair amount of sense), Rainbow Dash was a unicorn with an obsession with speed and weather spells, and Applejack and Rarity were pegasi.

Everypony's special talent was still the same, though. It had made for a thoroughly strange loop so far, especially when Dash managed to break the sound barrier in a sprintâ€|

The reason for the eye twitch was just because Pinkie had access to teleport magic. It would go away once she managed to repress the memory again.

\* \* \*

><p>It <em>was<em> nice being an earth pony in one way, actually. She could finally properly study how much stronger and tougher she was now than when she was a unicorn. Of course, she'd tried examining the same thing when she was \_Princess\_ Twilight, but alicorns had much stronger versions of all three kinds of pony magic.

Mind you, the idea that earth ponies were stronger and faster than unicorns had had to compete with Rainbow Dash this Loop, and given up.

\_Hmm, let's seeâ€| what happened next first time aroundâ€|\_

"Hey, Twilight, can you come over to the library pleeease?" Pinkie asked, materializing in a flash.

"Sure, Pinkie!" For a fraction of a second, Twilight tried to teleport, then felt like facehoofing. \_You're an Earth Pony this loop, Twilight!\_ "What for?" she asked, to cover her mistake.

"Oh, I found a spell under 'A' in some old book, and it says it needs the Elements of Harmony to help with it! It'll be super-duper-nice!"

\_Ah, horsefeathers. This won't end well.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Discord applauded. "I never thought of making the moon into a disco ball! I have to say, Celly, I do approve of your choice of new princess."<p>

"Shut up." Celestia said, sitting down next to him. "I forgot how hyperactive she gets, okay?"

Overhead, Princess Pinkie Pie shot past trailing a rainbow and making cat noises.

\* \* \*

><p>2.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>With a flash, Twilight materialized in Canterlot Castle right next to her brother. "Hi, B.B.B.F.F! What's this I hear about a wedding?"<p>

Shining Armor flinched back. "Gah! Who the hellâ€¦ Twily?"

"That's right!" Twilight replied, grinning. "What's wrong?"

"Yourâ€¦ your mane and coatâ€¦" Shining pointed. "You've dyed them bright pink."

"Yep! My friends and I formed a band, and Pinkie's in charge, and she asked us to all dye our manes and coats! Sorry, I forgot to tell you about it. My bad, huh?"

The other five Elements came in, having been dropped off outside by Twilight. Every last one of them was blazing fluorescent pink everywhere except for their tails.

"Butâ€¦ butâ€¦ what are our parents going to think?"

Twilight shrugged. "I'm sure it'll be great fun! Hey, Pinks, what are we going to start with?"

Pinkie Pie pulled sheet music out of her mane. "Weee-ll, we have a choice between \_The Song That Never Ends\_ or \_Discordian Rapshody.\_"

Applejack frowned. "Why not \_Nightmare Moon's Revenge\_, Pinkie? Twilight wrote that one."

"Yeah, sounds great!"

Shining Armor collapsed with a \_thud\_, finally overcome with shock.

Twilight hoofbumped the others. "Nice work, girls! That'll teach him to not let me know he's getting married."

\* \* \*

><p>2.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stumbled, almost falling, and shivered. "That was <em>not<em> fun!"

Spike watched, dumbfounded, as she teleported out of Canterlot library.

\* \* \*

><p>Six bright flashes of light later, the other five Elements found themselves inside the Ponyville library's upper bedroom.<p>

"Girlsâ€¦" Twilight tripped over her words. "Justâ€¦ \_hold \_me."

Mutely, she spread her forelegs, and the others hugged her.

"What's wrong, Twi?" Dash asked. "Bad Loop?"

"Basically." Twilight sighed, and shook herself. "Okay. So, I ended up there after, you knowâ€¦ trying to see if the Element of Laughter worked for Discord."

Everyone contemplated that silently.

"Where'd you end up, Transformers again?"

"Applejack!" Fluttershy rebuked, then flinched. "Oops. Sorry for raising my voice."

"It's fine," everyone else chorused.

"No, it wasn't Transformers. Okay, I think I'm fine now, girls."

One by one, Applejack, Rarity, Dash and Fluttershy got off Twilight. Pinkie stayed hugging her.

"Er, Pinkieâ€¦ you as well, please."

"Nope!" Pinkie said. "You'll need it again in a minute!"

Twilight shrugged. "Whatever makes you happy. Anyway, I ended up in this kind ofâ€¦ bizarre version of Ponyville. Almost nobody actually \_did\_ anything."

"Liiiiiike?"

"Well, you know how Cheerilee works as a school teacher?" The others nodded. "Yeah. There, she was a storyteller."

Applejack frowned. "So what was her job, then?"

"She didn't have one. Nor did Pinkie â€" she just ran around giving everyone parties."

"Ooh!" Pinkie said. "I like the sound of that place!"

Twilight shook her head, sending Pinkie's mane flying. "No, you wouldn't. You didn't have any of your Laughter powers â€" you just occasionally used balloons to fly around."

"Whaaaat? This place made \_me\_ boring?"

"Yeah." Twilight pointed at Rarity. "I only saw you and Dash there, apart from Pinkie. You were some kind of stuck up princess."

"I was a \_Princess?\_" Rarity wobbled slightly, and materialized her couch just in case. "Twilight, I don't see how you could possibly

dislike the place!"

"No, small-p. You were an heir, about the age of the Crusaders or less, and there wasn't a queen that I saw."

"Oh." That sounded much less inviting to the white unicorn. "That's no good."

"It justâ€¦ nothing \_happened\_."

"What about me?" Dash said. "Please tell me I was awesome, at least!"

Twilight gave her a look. "Dash, when I tell you this, I want you to remember the time that you replaced every book in my library with ones that were slightly out of print, and made me think I needed glasses."

"â€¦yeah?"

Twilight's voice took on a syrupy sweet quality. \_"Rainbow Dash always dresses in style."\_

Dash twitched, and fell over in a faint onto Rarity's convenient couch.

\* \* \*

><p>2.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, uhâ€¦ Miss Twilight?"<p>

Twilight looked up. It had been a fairly pleasant early Loop this time. None of the others were Awake, and she'd handled Nightmare Moon the normal way for once.

Surprisingly, though, in front of her were Applebloom, Sweetie Belle and Scotaloo.

\_That can't be rightâ€¦ it isn't until Twist's cute-caneara that they normally meet properlyâ€¦\_

"What is it, you three? Uhâ€¦ I recognize you, you're Applejack's sister."

"Yep!" Applebloom said proudly. "This is Sweetie Belle, Rarity's sister, and this is Scootaloo. And we'reâ€¦"

Twilight braced herself for the shout.

"â€¦well, we don't know what's happened. We're in the past, somehow. Or, we're in the present now, but we were in the future! But it wasn't the future back then, andâ€¦"

Raising a hoof, Twilight headed off Applebloom's babbling explanation. "Okay, I understand. Now, I don't know exactly \_why\_ this has happened to you, but I know \_what\_ has happened."



"Really?" Scootaloo said. "You're so smart, pr-uh, I mean, Miss Twilight!"

Twilight grinned, summoned the Element of Magic, and momentarily flashed into alicornhood before undoing the spell again. "I've come back in time too. And this isn't the first time. Basically, I keep looping back to the first day I came to Ponyville, and so do the other Elements of Harmony â€" sometimes. I don't know how often you three will or if you'll do it alone."

The Crusaders absorbed that information.

"Miss Twilight?" Sweetie Belle said.

"Just call me Twilight, please."

"Alright. Uhâ€¦ Twilight, you said you'd come back more than once?"

"I have." Twilight confirmed.

"Thenâ€¦ can you tell us what our cutie marks are?"

Twilight chuckled. "It doesn't work like that. Even if you think you know what your cutie mark is going to be, you can end up with something completely different."

"Awwwâ€¦" the crusaders chorused.

"Besides, you've each had at least three different ones that I've seen."

Now they were just dumbfounded.

"Uhhhâ€¦ how does that work?" Applebloom asked.

"Okay." Twilight conjured a blackboard. "Do you want the long version, or the short one?"

"Short!" Scootaloo and Applebloom said hastily. Sweetie nodded.

\* \* \*

><p>"That wasn't shortâ€¦" Sweetie moaned. "That took half an hour!"<p>

"Of course it was!" Twilight said indignantly. "This is one of my thesis projects!"

"Rightâ€¦ hey, I got a great idea!"

Scootaloo whispered to the other two, who exchanged nods with her. "Cutie Mark Crusader timeline fixers go!"

Twilight watched them leave at a run. "This won't end well. I don't know where it's going, but it won't end well."

\* \* \*

><p>From a distance, Twilight watched as the changeling army overran

Canterlot.<p>

"I was right, it didn't."

"Sorry, Twilight." Applebloom said morosely.

"How did you even \_do\_ this?"

"Well, we wanted to get revenge on that mean Changeling Queen!" Scootaloo began. "But when we did our 'this is why we're beating you up' speech, she justâ€¦ took notes."

Twilight shook her head. "I think you girls still have a lot to learn about how everything has a result when you mess with time travel."

"Yeah, we worked that out." Scootaloo kicked a pebble. "What now?"

At that point, the changeling army captured Rarity, and Spike went off.

"\_This\_ is planning ahead, girls." Twilight said smugly, as Spikezilla punched Chrysalis right out of the city. "Take notes."

\* \* \*

><p>2.6<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Pinkie?" Twilight mused, glancing over at the recently Awakened pink party pony.<p>

"Yeah, Twilight?" said pony replied, bouncing in place.

"You know Nightmare Moon?" Twilight nodded at Luna's dark side, currently mid speech.

"Of course!"

"Well, it just struck me that she's not had a proper birthday party celebration since she got stuck on the moonâ€¦ a thousand years ago."

Twilight handed Pinkie a key. "Here. I put supplies in the basement of the library. Go nuts."

A pink blur shot past her out the door, then back in again and landed on Nightmare Moon in a shower of pastries.

"It's your first belated birthday party!"

Nightmare kicked out with her legs, missing Pinkie entirely. "Get OFF me, you worthless nag!"

"Somepony's cranky! Must be party withdrawal!" Pinkie chuckled. "Hey, Twilight, go grab my party howitzer!"

Twilight nodded. "On it."

"Applejack, I need more apple flavoured pies, stat! And balloons, I must have balloons! And somepony bring me \_sprinkles!\_"

Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy exchanged looks.

"Well, they're excited." Dash eventually said, as Pinkie hog-tied Nightmare Moon with a length of tinsel and plonked her down in front of a cake that looked more like a bonfire.

"Yeah." Fluttershy replied.

\* \* \*

><p>Ten minutes later, Rarity polished off the last of the cake after being assured that one slice wouldn't ruin her figure.<p>

"While that was anâ€| irritating diversion," Nightmare Moon simmered, "Now you have released me, I will continue. The Night Will-"

"Fire, Twilight!"

The party howitzer round detonated, covering everything with frosting half an inch thick and landing Nightmare Moon up against the wall again.

"Now it's time for your \_second\_ belated birthday party!"

There was another cake. There were more presents. There was a fresh supply of balloons.

Nightmare Moon shook her head. "This is not how I envisaged my triumphant return."

\* \* \*

><p>"Nine hundred and ninety nineâ€|" Pinkie said chirpily. "Time for the last one!"<p>

She looked around. Sadly, not many ponies were really in the spirit of a birthday party any more, being mostly passed out in a satiated haze.

And the country was kinda-sorta-running out of sugar.

"Why?" Nightmare Moon croaked. "Why do you torment me like this?"

"Torment? Silly, you don't understand parties at all! They're for fun! And they show that other ponies want to have fun \_with\_ you!"

"Besides." Twilight said, delicately eating a scone. "If she hadn't gotten it all out of her system now, you'd be being ambushed at random times for the next decade. Anyway, I thought you wanted to be appreciated."

"I have a new respect for the problems my sister faced." Nightmare Moon deadpanned. "Now, can I please go? I need toâ€| go and work off some of this sugar."

"One more candy apple and a smileâ€|" Pinkie coaxed. "And off you go."

"â€|fine." Nightmare Moon took the candy apple, and forced a grin. Pinkie clapped.

"There you go! Don't you feel better?"

"A bit." Nightmare Moon allowed.

"Yay! Mission successful!"

"And it only took y'all most of mah apples." Applejack said. "Along with makin' the Cakes the richest family in Equestria."

\* \* \*

><p>2.7<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon strode back and forth upon the surface of her celestial home. <em>Not long nowâ€|<em>

"Hi!"

She turned, eyes flashing, and saw an eager looking young unicornâ€| standing on the moon.

"How are you alive?"

"Oh, that. Well, I guessed that lunar survival probably involved pressurized air in a bubble around the pony, so I adapted a bubble-head charm. Anyway," the unicorn held out a sheaf of papers. "You hiring?"

Confused, Nightmare Moon took the paper and began reading. "Twilight Sparkleâ€| Adept class mage â€" really? You look very young for it."

"I can do the test, just like any other Adept." Twilight said. "Anyway..?"

Nightmare Moon kept reading. "So, you're my sister's personal student?"

"Yeah, but I'm trying to keep my options open. I think a bit of time rounding out my knowledge of black magic would help."

"Indeedâ€|" Nightmare Moon looked sideways at Twilight. "I think I could use somepony like you."

\* \* \*

><p>The Ruler of the Night, Empress of Equestria, scowled out of her window.<p>

"It's just not the same."

Twilight shrugged. "Well, it's letting ponies grow plants, and it still IS night."

"Yes, but my moon is supposed to be a pale orb of light, shimmering in the night sky. Not a giant mirror."

"Can't blame me for getting rid of the inefficiencies in the system."

Two Night Guards alighted on the balcony. "Your darkness, there is a meeting of parliament in ten minutes."

"\_And \_you introduced this as well." Nightmare grouched. "I don't see why we have to listen to all those idiotic minor nobles and sleazy politicians."

"That's easy." Twilight answered. "This way, everyone's too busy trying to work out how to exploit the system to be able to find the Elements of Harmony."

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia kicked at the surface of the sun, which flared up in a burst of plasma.<p>

"Nopony knows the trouble I've seen, nopony knows my sorrowsâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>2.8<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"These are my three sons. Spyro, age nineteen; Toothless, age seventeen; and Spike, age sixteen. Pick which one you want to be your fiancÃ©."<p>

Rarity groaned. "This is not going to be a fun loopâ€|"

"You're telling me?" Twilight said, from the door. "I keep turning into a panda!"

\* \* \*

><p>2.9<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The last thing Twilight remembered was a flash of multicoloured light, then-<p>

"What were we doing?" she mumbled, as she forced her eyes open. "Something about giving the Crusaders the Elements of Harmony?"

"Yep." Applejack said from next to her. "And ah think we bucked the universe up."

Twilight looked around the furnished train compartment. "Oh. Hogwarts again. But why are we still ponies this time?"

"Beats me." Applejack shrugged. "Let's go see if the others ended up in a different compartment of the train."

\* \* \*

><p>"So, this isn't a fused loop." Twilight mused, as she watched everyone cheer Dash going into Gryffindor. "Looks like we're replacing people. Dash for Harry seems vaguely appropriate â€" you know, lightning bolts â€" but nobody seems to be really noticing that we're ponies."<p>

"Is that unusual?" Fluttershy asked.

"Fairly. They were really confused when I Looped into the Trek universe."

\* \* \*

><p>"There, thereâ€|" Fluttershy said, scratching the enormous reptile under the chin. "You didn't mean to hurt anyone, did you? It was that nasty Mister Riddle who made you do it, wasn't it?"<p>

The Basilisk crooned, thumping the floor with its enormous tail.

Pinkie snatched up the diary. "Dibs! Ooh, this'll be nice. My very own book friend I can write in and it can talk to me and I can tell it about parties andâ€|"

The Diary Horcrux twitched, then self destructed.

\* \* \*

><p>"The first challenge is to, ahâ€| <em>retrieve the golden egg<em>."<p>

Twilight and Dash exchanged glances.

"Right, so you first, Miss Rainbow Dash, of, ahâ€|"

"The Wonderbolt Academy!"

"Oh, sorry. I should have remembered."

As Dash drew out a Ukranian Ironbelly, Twilight rolled her eyes. The Twiwizard Tournament had got seriously broken this Loop â€" the Goblet of Fire had entered her as a student in Celestia's Academy and Dash as part of the Wonderbolt Academy.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight teleported to the egg, picked it up telekinetically, and teleported back. "Right, that was easy."<p>

As she trotted over to the stands, Dash got her own at five hundred miles per hour.

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, come on!" Dash shouted. "We have to <em>swim</em>? Wings don't go well with water!"

Twilight shrugged. "Come on. Unless you want to forfeit, and I'll get both Fluttershy \_and\_ Rarity?"

"Why did they choose those two, anyway?" Dash muttered.

"Same race, I think. Anyway, there \_is\_ another option."

"If it means I don't have to lose, I'll take it!"

"Right." Twilight's horn flashed.

\* \* \*

><p>"Shoo ba doo."<p>

"Language!" Twilight said. "Right, that spell should wear off in another ten minutes. And at least you got third place!"

"Bloop." Rainbow flipped her seapony's fins, and gave Twilight a dirty look.

\* \* \*

><p>"Rainbow Dash, go!"<p>

Dash took off like a rocket, flew over the maze and grabbed the trophy. There was a surge of motion, and she was in a graveyard.

Two seconds later Twilight teleported in next to her. "Hi, Rainbow. Yeah, this is Little Hangleton alright. Hang on a sec, I'll get the others."

Twilight flashed away again.

A high, cold voice shouted something, and Dash collapsed.

\* \* \*

><p>She came around a minute later, tied to a gravestone.<p>

"Do you have any idea how long I've waited for this, Rainbow Dash? Your mother-"

Twilight, Applejack, Rarity, Fluttershy and Pinkie materialized next to her, and Twilight severed the ropes holding Dash in place. "Here, catch."

Rainbow grabbed the flying necklace out of the air and slipped it on. "Right, let's do this!"

"Wait, what are those?" Voldemort asked, before he and his lackey Crouch got a faceful of harmony.

\* \* \*

><p>"Fiveâ€| sixâ€|" Twilight ticked off a list. "Last one left's the Ring."<p>

"Right." Dash frowned. "Aren't I supposed to be one?"

"Not after using the Elements. I blasted it with a side beam â€" it didn't stand a chance."

"Cool."

"Right. Hey, Fluttershy! I'm going to need Chompy's help!" Twilight called.

Fluttershy nodded. "All right. Here, boy! Come on!"

The Basilisk (wearing a sleeping blindfold) slithered across the Chamber floor and nuzzled Fluttershy, before vanishing with her and Twilight in a flash of light.

\* \* \*

><p>"There we go." Twilight said, carefully lifting the ring out of a box. "Wow, that <em>is</em> pretty impressiveâ€|"

"Twilight?" Fluttershy said. "Stop looking at the ring like that, it'sâ€| erâ€| worrying."

Chompy rolled his blindfolded eyes, then spat a glob of venom at the hovering ring. It hissed, and exploded.

Twilight shook her head. "Ergh. Sorry, I wasn't ready for it. The others were a lot easier. Anyway, it's almost the start of year five now, so we finished just in time."

"Yay." Fluttershy cheered.

\* \* \*

><p>2.10 (Contributed by Finagle007 from SpaceBattles)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Congratulations upon your graduation. Team One will be... Applejack, Fluttershy, and Rarity, with jonin sensei Luna." Iruka proudly announced, with a wide smile on his face.<p>

"Yay," Fluttershy whispered, while Applejack and Rarity's faces lit up like the sun.

"Team Two..." Iruka continued, "Pinkie Pie, Rainbow Dash, and Twilight Sparkle, jonin sensei Celestia â€" what the-!"

With an almighty crash, a terrified and slightly burned Jiraiya came hurtling through the window, pursued by a furious (and damp) Celestia and Luna.

"HOW DAREST THOU SPY UPON US WHILST WE RELAX IN THE HOT SPRINGS, VILE PERVERT!" Luna boomed, Royal Canterlot Voice in full effect.

Jiraiya hopped back onto his feet and started to dance. "I'm no pervert, I'm a \_super\_ - YOW! Watch where you point that thing!"



"Oh, I am," snarled Celestia, her horn glowing brightly as she unleashed another bolt of sunfire at the (very, very doomed) perverted sage.

"This is beyond troublesome..." Shikamaru muttered. Shino nodded in agreement.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Well, that was fairly quick.

Don't necessarily expect this rate to be sustained, though...

And yes, that was indeed Nyan Princess Pinkie Pie. It's the sort of thing she'd DO with divine power...

### 3. Chapter 3

#### 3.1

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight!"<p>

"What is it, Dash?" Twilight turned from where the Alicorn Amulet was under the microscope.

"I want to be able to become an alicorn, like you can. I'm already the most awesome pegasus, what's wrong with becoming the most awesome alicorn?"

"â€|right." Twilight pulled out a notebook. "Cadence told me how she ascendedâ€| let's seeâ€|"

A flash of light enveloped them both. When it faded, Dash found herself on a small island in the middle of the ocean. Strangely, it was now night-time.

"Okay." Twilight said. "Summon the Element of Loyalty."

Dash frowned, and the lightning-bolt necklace burst into existence.

"Good. Now, then. I am going to post a letter in twenty minutes that insults the Wonderbolts and calls them second-rate losers. It is in your name. If you want to stop it, you will have to get back to Ponyville before then."

The pegasus' eyes widened. "That's cruel and unusual punishment, Twilight! I don't even know where we are!"

Twilight gave a wicked grin. "It doesn't matter. Go straight in any direction from here and you'll get to Ponyville. Just hurry â€" we're on the other side of the planet."

She vanished in another purple flicker.

Dash stared dumbfounded for a second, then shot into the air with a thunderclap of displaced air and broke the sound barrier before she'd gone a hundred metres.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Okay, I'm going at about two thousand miles an hour, and I need to goâ€¦| a lot faster than that.<em> Dash's wings blurred as she kept ramping up the speed. Weather magic reached out in front of her and pushed the air aside, and more pushed her from behind.

There was a sudden burst of multicoloured fire, blinding her, so she closed her eyes and pushed harder.

Behind the pegasus, the plasma sheath recombined back into air molecules. And around her neck, the Element of Loyalty began to faintly glow.

\* \* \*

><p>Squinting against the wind and the heat, Dash looked down.<p>

There was land, then waterâ€¦| then land again. \_Huh. I always thought the ocean was wider than that.\_

The prairie around Appleoosa blurred past, too fast for her to spot the town, and then she was coming into Ponyville and \_oh buck slow down-\_

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight dove for cover.<p>

What looked for all the world like a meteorite shot overhead, set fire to the library, and embedded itself in the Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters.

\* \* \*

><p>Luna shot upright in bed. "WHAT VILLAIN HATH DESTROYED MINE SPARE ROOM?"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight leant over the hole. "Hey, Rainbow?"<p>

A groan answered her.

"There's some bad news, and some good news. I'll give you the bad news first."

What sounded like a more resigned mumble.

"Right. The bad news is, you obliterated your house on the way into town, broke every window and set fire to my house on the way through, and I think Applejack's going to be annoyed about half her orchard as soon as she works out what happened. And you're a hundred metres deep in a mountain."

"What's the good news?" Rainbow asked, a little more coherently this time.

"Well, you're embedded a hundred metres deep in a mountain that you hit at seventy times the speed of sound, and you're still alive. I think it worked."

"It did?" A blue blur came flying out of the hole, flipped, and landed next to Twilight. Rainbow Dash had indeed picked up a horn.

"Right. That's a check, then. It looks like I was right!"

"Wait, what?" Dash looked at Twilight. "I thought you said you knew how this worked."

"Well, guessedâ€¦" Twilight shrugged. "Basically, from what Cadence said, it looks like becoming an alicorn involves both an action that's related to the extreme edge of your capabilities â€" with your special talent involved, of course â€" and a magical catalyst, like a lump of Heart stoneâ€¦ or an Element of Harmony."

Dash pointed her new horn at Twilight. "You tricked me!"

"Yep!" Twilight grinned. "Had to, or it wouldn't have worked. I think."

The new alicorn sighed. "Okay, what's next?"

"Well, hopefully you won't need to hit that kind of speed to reascend. I think once you've done it once it gets easier. I'm going to teach you Star Swirl's spell, because that's the only thing I know that can undo a transition to alicornhood, and we'll test if you can do it with just the Element alone."

Twilight pointed. "But we might need to do that next loop. I think we finally found out what it takes to turn Ponyville into an angry mob."

Dash followed the pointing hoof, and saw Big Mac passing out torches and pitchforks with an amiable air.

"They're not all that angryâ€¦" she said critically.

"Well, explaining would be awkward." Twilight countered.

"Yeah. Alright, what's the plan?"

The unicorn pondered. "Well, that island I teleported you to was niceâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>3.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"-last forever!"<p>

Twilight released her spell, and then released the parasprites. Four of the little magical bugs flew forwards, looked around for something they considered to be "food", then locked onto the only thing that currently qualified.

Nightmare Moon's armour.

"Huh." Twilight said, watching as Nightmare Moon ran in and out of doors, pursued by a gradually growing cloud of parasprites and slowly losing her armour. "It is funny when I'm not worried about them eating the town."

Pinkie pulled a saxophone from somewhere, and started playing a raspy piece of music that seemed very appropriate. Especially when Nightmare Moon went into one door, and then came out of the other side of the street two seconds later.

\* \* \*

><p>3.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight tuned out Chrysalis' ranting about how she'd be trapped in the old mines forever.<p>

She was just waiting for the fireworks to start. Thanks to a single forged invitation, a bit of careful magic, and quite a lot of boredomâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis finished belittling the annoying little purple unicorn, and closed the connection. <em>Ah, that was good<em>.

She'd had a point, though. It wouldn't do to let the quality of her disguise slip, not this close to her triumph.

Checking in the mirror, she adjusted a few very minor details. The hair colour, the precise shape of the horn, and the coverts on the wings.

Green magic couldn't be avoided, so she was being careful only to use it on Shining Armor â€" that one was so out of his gourd much of the time he probably wouldn't have noticed if she'd detransformed.

Then, a wash of somethingâ€| unusual came across her empathic senses. It didn't feel like a pony, that was for sure.

\*\*"Crystalsâ€|"\*\*

Chrysalis turned, to see an unusual looking dark unicorn with an aquiline bearing.

"Who the hell are you?"

The connection to the purple unicorn reopened without her touching it. "Just to let you know, his name is Sombra. He's the pony who took over the Crystal Empire. As far as he's concerned, he's finally found

you " you being Cadance " and is going to" yeah, probably try and drain your magic, at the very least."

Twilight grinned. "Imponysonating someone with their own problems is a right bitch, isn't it?"

\* \* \*

><p>The room of Princess Cadance exploded in a fountain of black and green magic.<p>

Everyone turned, shocked, to see Princess Mi Amore Cadenza and an unknown black unicorn locked in a spectacular magical battle. Cadance' form was flickering, as though it was being projected onto a sheet of cloth in a high wind, and black chitin occasionally showed through.

"What the hell?" Celestia said, trying to make out what was going on through the storm of magic. "Isn't that" Sombra?"

Twilight materialized next to her, with a badly exhausted Cadance along for the ride. "Hi, Princess. I found the real one! Where'd my brother get to?"

The Solar alicorn reacted automatically, pointing to the startled looking guard captain in a nearby plaza.

"Thanks! Right, hang on a sec, I'll go get him."

Twilight galloped off.

Cadance looked up at the explosions. "That does simplify my situation a bit, actually. I was wondering how we were going to handle Sombra."

A badly singed piece of gold-chased card fluttered down from above. Celestia took it in her grip. "Er" Dear King Sombra. You are cordially invited to the wedding of Princess Mi Amore Cadenza and someone you probably don't care about. Her room is shown on the included map. Yours, Twilight Sparkle. Twilight did this?"

The pink alicorn shrugged. "Like I know. I've spent the last two months in a mine. By the way, how's the wedding planning going?"

"You're still worried about that?" Overhead, Chrysalis dropped her shapeshift and started to concentrate on pure firepower.

"I have spent two months trapped in a mine." Cadance enunciated clearly. "I have spent a lot of time dreaming about that wedding. If you tell me it is going to be called off because of something so minor as a war, then I think I might cause you and Luna to both fall in love. With the same stallion. That one from Cloudsdale with the giant biceps."

Celestia shuddered. "All right, point taken."

Hundreds of changelings shot into the air from all over Canterlot, hurrying to reinforce their queen, then got bowled backwards by a colossal blast of air.

"Has Sombra even noticed that the pony he's fighting doesn't look like you any more?" Celestia asked, suddenly curious.

"I doubt it. He never was all that observant."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, this is a fine mess you've gotten us into." Chrysalis grumbled, staring down at Equestria hanging below them.<p>

\*\*"Crystals?"\*\*

"Oh, shut up."

\* \* \*

><p>3.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twiiiiiight?" the blue alicorn moaned.<p>

"What is it, Dash?"

"I'm bored."

"Well, sorry, but it's taking me quite a lot of concentration to maintain this stability bubble." Twilight flared her wings, slammed her forehooves onto the floor, and a magic circle bloomed out from her to five lengths in every direction. "There. Now, Dash, can't you be at least a bit serious?"

"Why?" Rainbow Dash countered.

"We're in the past. A long way in the past, in case you hadn't noticed." A raven shaped like a writing desk flapped past.

"I never was much of a fan of history." Dash shrugged.

Twilight facehoofed. "I'd think even you would remember about how Discord was in charge before the Royal Sisters showed up."

"Huh. So we're that far back? Be neat to see what the Princesses looked like when they were younger."

"No, you're not getting it." Twilight pointed from her to Dash. "We're the Sisters this time. We've replaced Celestia and Luna."

"â€|huh." Dash absorbed that for a while. "Dibs on being Luna!"

"Why?"

"Twilight," Dash said, as if talking to a filly. "Luna gets a thousand year nap."

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, what a world, what a worldâ€¦ my only regret is, that I never got toâ€¦ sing! I am the enemy, I will succeedâ€¦"<p>

Twilight tried to ignore Discord's blathering. \_How long is this going to take?\_

"Twi! Can't you make those elements go any faster?"

"I'm not used to using Honesty and Generosity, Dash! You should know how hard it is to use Elements you're not used to!"

Dash shrugged, then wobbled and shifted to make sure the pair of necklaces around her wings didn't fall off. "Laughter seems to like me."

Stone crept another inch up Discord's mismatched legs.

"â€¦couldn't you have come up with a better way of wearing these, than putting them around-"

"We are \_not\_ having this argument again, Rainbow Dash!" Twilight snapped. "I didn't see you coming up with any better options!"

\* \* \*

><p>An excruciating half hour later, Discord was finally sealed.<p>

"\_Me\_, but that took too long." Dash panted.

"I knowâ€¦ wait." Twilight looked over suspiciously at her 'sister'. "Did you just use 'me' as an oath?"

"Yeah!" Rainbow replied. "Why not?"

"â€¦never mind. Anywayâ€¦" Twilight pointed over to a growing crowd of ponies in the distance. "I think it's time for our first public appearance."

Dash looked at her, confused. "What do you mean?"

"Well, we beat Discord, now we have to set up the government of Equestria. That means paperwork."

The former pegasus gagged. "Can I launch my coup now? Please? I want to relax on the moon!"

\* \* \*

><p>3.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"We don't have all day, Miss Sparkle."<p>

Twilight blinked, disoriented for a moment as the Loop began. \_Where the hell am I? I hope it'sâ€¦\_

Then she saw the egg in front of her. \_Oh, cool. The entrance

exam.\_

Having researched it, Twilight knew that technically there was no one answer to the exam. You were basically supposed to show your ingenuity. The examiners were even allowed to offer advice if you asked.

Butâ€| that was boring.

With a crackle, she fired an age alteration spell at Spike's egg. Carefully modulating it to overcome the natural magical resistance all dragons had, she aged the egg in a matter of seconds to the point it hatched.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw that several of the unicorn examiners had dropped their clipboards in shock. Her parents were a little startled too.

\_Oh, yeah, that's a high level spell. Ah well.\_

"Did I do alright?"

A tingling in her flank reminded her that she also had the nearly-unique experience of getting her cutie mark for a second time. Twilight more or less ignored what everyone else in the room was saying to meticulously examine how the magic worked.

\_Hmmâ€| that's five thousand words of thesis that need to be rewrittenâ€|\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Huh." Rarity said, and shrugged. "So much for being pulled sideways. Suppose knowing what my talent is going to be helps."<p>

Whistling to herself, she started digging gems out of the ground and constructing a dress. "Wonder if I can make enchanted items without it being too suspicious. Perhaps a Cape of Charisma?"

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy awoke falling out of the sky. Shaking off her brief daze, she frowned. While getting to know her animal friends was nice, she didn't feel like quitting. <em>Not this time.<em>

While the demure pegasus wasn't nearly as fast as Rainbow Dash, neither was anyone else. She still got back to the academy faster than she'd been falling.

\* \* \*

><p>Dash hit the sound barrier almost as soon as she became conscious. Seeing that Fluttershy could handle herself, she made a u-turn and aimed <em>up<em>.

A column of rainbow fire shot into the air over the Young Fliers' Academy, climbing quickly until it was above the clouds. Now too far to be seen from the ground, she went Alicorn, wrapped herself in air, and accelerated.



\_Let's see just how high I can go!\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Mum, Dad, Inkie, Blinky, watch this!"<p>

There was a thunderous explosion, and it started to rain chocolate.

"Pinkamena, what on this good green Equestria was that?" Clyde asked, coughing in the clouds of sugar.

"It's my patent pending Pinkie Pie Cotton Candy Cloud Contraption!" Pinkie rattled off, bouncing. "It's fuelled by Peridot, Calcite and earth magic!"

Inkie stuck out a tongue. "Hey, this tastes of strawberry."

Pinkie kicked at the field. "Well, I didn't have much chance to do taste testingâ€¦ I was aiming for banana and chocolate."

"Oh, I like them." Clyde said. "Good of you to think of me like that."

"I try!" Pinkie beamed.

"So, how'd you find the time to build this? Ah hope the chores are done."

"I did my chores before I got to work." Butter wouldn't have melted in Pinkie's mouth. It was even true â€" she'd finished it last Loop, but hadn't found enough calcite. "Hey, why don't we have a party to celebrate?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Ah do still want to come and see y'all, aunt Orange." Applejack said. "Ah just don't want to forget the farm, and all. How's about ah spend the harvest 'n plantin' down there, and ah come here for the growin' season?"<p>

Valencia Orange clapped her hooves together. "That does sound nice. We'll be waiting, then."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right." Twilight said, looking around the abandoned Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters that night. "Everypony happy with what they've done?"<p>

There was general assent. Fluttershy raised a hoof. "For some reason, er, my cutie mark is a bit different. Do you know why?"

Twilight checked. "Oh, yeah, it is. Interesting. Well, butterfly with speed lines is close to your original one."

She then rounded on Dash. "And what were you thinking?"

"I wanted to go as high as I possibly could!" the alicornified filly

answered.

"Dash, I had to rescue from \_orbit\_. Now, you can't go back until you've managed to untransform â€" it'll be strange enough that you hit escape velocity." Twilight sighed. "Okay. Here's my plan. We basically all get lost in a few days, somehow, and each of us turns up back at home half an hour later with our Element â€" we say we just found them somewhere. That should mean Celestia intervenes and gets us introduced to one another."

"That makes sense." Applejack nodded. "Don't she know where the Elements are supposed to be, and all?"

"Well, the Element of Magic starts a Loop nowhere at all. I asked about that once â€" apparently they do sometimes just disappear, when they're not attuned." Twilight looked from one face to the next. "Anything else?"

There wasn't.

"Okay. The rest of you can leave â€" Rarity, you can get them home, right?" Rarity nodded, building magic for a series of teleports. "Good. Dash, pay attention!"

Rainbow Dash kicked the floor. "Aw, shucks. Okay, let's try this."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Several years laterâ€|<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon crept into Ponyville. This was the pathetic town that her sister's Summer Sun celebration was to be held at this yearâ€| the perfect place to announce her return.<p>

Bursting through the curtain, she began to laugh â€" then slowed, as she realized something was just not right.

No pony was running. No pony was screaming. And there was a giant banner announcing that 'the Elements of Harmony' were in Ponyville for the Summer Sun concert along with Celestia.

"Erâ€|" Nightmare said, looking around and spotting the six ponies wearing Element regalia. "â€|wrong stage?"

A pink pony wearing what looked like her version of the Element of Laughter trotted over. "Yeah, I think it might actually be the wrong \_night\_. I don't know how you got confused, but the special Nightmare Night stage show isn't for another four months."

"Oh." Moon tried to play along. "Sorry?"

"It's good your costume is so well done, though. That'll be a great help." The pony smiled knowingly. "Tell you what, I'll walk you home later. Just sit in the audience with us for now."

Bemused, Nightmare Moon followed her off the stage. Somehow, she couldn't help but feel like this wasn't in the scriptâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>3.6 (Metal Wolf Chaos)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Twilight, what's on my appointments for today?" Rainbow Dash asked.<p>

"Uhâ€¦ looks like you have an interview with diplomats from Saddle Arabia over scheduling a Wonderbolts show in their capital." Twilight replied.

Dash piloted her giant mecha forwards. "Sorry, I'll have to cancel that. I'm off to SAVE EQUESTRIA!"

As the robot went to town on an entire small army, Twilight rubbed her temple with a hoof. "Something is seriously off about this Loopâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>"GIIIIILDAAAAAA!" Dash roared, surfing out of the sky on a hunk of metal.<p>

"RAAAINBOW DAAAAASH!" Gilda roared back, igniting the jets on her own giant robot and rocketing up to intercept her.

Twilight quietly let herself out of her prison cell. "Honestly. Did someone let Dash write the script for this one?"

Though she had to admit, the gigantic energy cannon on top of Canterlot Castle was actually pretty cool.

\* \* \*

><p>3.7 (gen 2)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Note to self." Twilight said. "<em>Stop having Discord try on the Elements of Harmony!"<em>

She crumpled up the paper she was working on, wished once more that she had a \_horn\_ in this Loop, and tried to work out what clothes wouldn't get her laughed at.

When she'd discovered that this Loop involved high school, she was cautiously optimistic. But then it had turned out that the actual lessons part of high school was almost irrelevant â€" instead, every other pony in the entire school seemed to consider dates, boys (or girls) and dresses much more important.

And for some reason every pony was bipedal, which felt \_weird\_.

Once more, she tried to use magic â€" both unicorn and otherwise â€" and came up blank.

"I wouldn't mind so much if the lessons were actually interestingâ€¦ it's like someone made the school just for the datingâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>3.8 (Law and Order)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Detective Rainbow Dash looked over at her counterpart, as she closed the cell door. "So, was it him?"<p>

"Yep." Detective Applejack replied. "It's him alright. But we kin hardly say in court that ah 'just knew he was lyin' with my magical honesty powers', can we?"

"Guess not." Dash kicked the wall in frustration. "I still say we should have kicked him around a bit."

"That ain't legal, Dash." AJ replied sternly.

"Yeah, yeah. At least we managed to get him in on suspicion."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right." Twilight adjusted her lab coat and glasses. "Okay, DNA analysis, fibre matching and a hoofprint checkâ€| that'll take a week or two."<p>

"What?" Dash said, shocked. "You kidding me?"

"Well, if I actually had to use the equipment normally it would." Twilight lit her horn, and the computer began flickering through databases. "Good thing I can just use \_magic\_."

There was a \_ding\_ as the computer spat out a hoofprint match. The DNA analyzer was next, and began printing a list of concordances.

"Wonder how they do it on the human TV showsâ€|"

"Ah think they just make it up, Twilight." Applejack said, deadpan.

"Oh, that's disappointing." Twilight picked up the sheaf of papers. "Right, that's a good match on the hoofprint, complete on the DNA, and the fibres are from the same batch of material. But that's all circumstantial."

"That'll be enough." Applejack grinned. "With \_our\_ prosecution lawyer."

It was nice to know more than Twilight about a given Loop for once â€" though if this were a CSI partial fusion rather than a Law and Order partial fusion (Twilight having identified the differences) then they'd have just been watching Twilight do everything \_again.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"The prosecution may cross-examine the defendant."<p>

"â€¦thank you." District Attorney Fluttershy stood up, her wig slightly askew. "Now, mister Striking Sparks, I have an important question for you. Please listen carefully, and answer correctly... if that's alright, that is." She gave him a look. "You are accused of grand larceny of jewellery from the shop of one Rarity Belle. Did you do it?"

Striking Sparks stared back, looking straight at her. The defence lawyer frowned, confused by the tactics being employed by the gentle pegasus.

"...Yes! Oh, I've wasted my LIFE!" Striking Sparks broke down sobbing. "I did it. I stole all the diamonds I could carry from that shop! I hid them in a flat belonging to my brother-in-law at the corner of ninth and main, on the sixth floor, flat D. It's the sixth time I've stolen in five years, and I'll give you the list of where everything else went and who helped me!"

"Wow." Dash muttered, up in the gallery. "That's one hell of a Stare she has now."

"Yep." Applejack nodded. "Ah helped her practice it all last Loop."

\* \* \*

><p>3.9 (Power Rangers)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Welcome, ponies." Celestia's voice boomed from some kind of magical portal in the centre of the room. "I have brought you here to become the Elements of Harmony."<p>

All six Loopers looked between themselves, and eventually shrugged. \_Meh, may as well go with it.\_

"I and my sister were caught in a time warp by King Sombra in the distant past. He is trapped, but his wife Chrysalis has been sending out bands of Changelings to attack Equestria." Celestia continued.

"Wait, hold on a second." Dash said. "\_Wife?\_"

"Yes." Luna replied from inside the same portal. "Their wedding was quite nice, actually, but the reception was when the vagabonds struck."

"Anyway." Celestia overrode her sister. "The six gemstones before you are ancient magical artefacts. You can use them to become the Elements of Harmony, and fight off the Changelings."

"What crystals?" Twilight asked.

There was a muttered argument in much quieter voices, then Celestia shouted again. "Spike!"

The dragon poked his head out of a door. "Yes?"

"Go get the Elements."

"Sorryâ€|" he disappeared into the back room, and came out again a few seconds later with a pile of gemstones. "Ai yi yiâ€|"

"Right." Celestia said, after they'd arrived. "Sorry about that. Now, er, take up the Elements, and save Equestria!"

Twilight moved forward, and picked one up in her magic. "I don't see we have much choice, reallyâ€|"

The others followed her and picked up their relevant gems â€" each one a jewel cut stone, but the same colour as the Elements they were used to.

"Now." Luna added. "To transform, say-"

"NO." Celestia interrupted her. "You don't have to say Morphing Time, Power On, or whatever it was you were going to tell them! Just concentrate on the gem."

All six nodded, and the gems glowed in unison.

"I wanted them to be called the Pony Rangers." Luna sulked.

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh." Twilight said, staring up at the eighty foot tall Changeling standing in the middle of Manehattan. "That's new."<p>

"Hey, Twilight! Don't be so upset!" Pinkie shouted from behind her. "Look!"

Twilight turned, and looked up. And up. And up again for good measure.

"We get a \_giant robot!\_" Dash and Pinkie shouted in perfect unison.

"â€|where'd that come from!?"

"Well, Spike gave us the keys to a garage after you left, and there were five giant robot animals in it! I just put them together like a jigsaw puzzle!"

"Now, Rarity!" Rainbow said, apparently driving the robot that was making the head. "Form emerald sword!"

"Can you even \_do\_ that?" Twilight asked, then blinked. "Huh. Apparently yes."

\* \* \*

><p>"I have returned!" Sombra shouted. "Now, <em>dearest<em>, why didn't you try to free me from the moon?"

Chrysalis gave him a toothy grin. "Well, you needed your beauty sleep, dear. A thousand years wasn't \_nearly \_enough."

"Oh, you are evil." The king tossed his head. "But I like you. For

some reason."

"You only married me for my enormous horde of interchangeable minions." Chrysalis accused, then shrugged. "Eh. I'd have done the same. Now, where should we attack next?"

\* \* \*

><p>There was a <em>slam</em>, as Sombra bucked down the door of the Elements' base. "We have captured the pink one! Now, if you want her to live-

"Want who to live?" Pinkie said, from behind the others.

Sombra sighed. "Chrysalis! Next time, capture one of the ones who isn't pink!"

"We already tried that with the purple one!" Chrysalis shouted back.

"Grah." Sombra turned to the Mane 6. "Which of you can NOT teleport, fly faster than sound, or otherwise easily escape?"

Everypony pointed at Rarity.

"Thank you for your assistance. We'll see you in a week or two." Sombra trotted out again, and was wreathed in black shadow which dissolved to nothing.

"Should we have told them that?" Fluttershy asked.

"Yep." AJ replied.

\* \* \*

><p>"This is hopeless!" Chrysalis said. "I mean, LOOK!"<p>

Sombra followed his wife's pointing hoof. "Are those changelingsâ€| holding their hooves over their ears?"

"\_No\_. Chrysalis replied, simmering. "\_Because they don't have them.\_ That batch don't have ears, and she's \_still\_ whining enough to annoy them!"

"Should we just send her back?"

Chrysalis nodded. "Go ahead. I give up. There's no point trying to capture them. Let's just try more giant armies."

"I did have a plan to make \_evil\_ Elementsâ€|" Sombra mused. "We could try that?"

After a pause, Chrysalis thwapped him with her wing. "That's stupid. Butâ€| actuallyâ€| hmmm. Do we still have Discord's phone number?"

\* \* \*

><p>Two giant robots wrestled in the ruins of Canterlot.<p>

Twilight trotted up a nearby hill. "Hi, Chrysalis, Sombra,

Discord."

"Grah." Sombra said, then Chrysalis shook her head at him. "Sorry. Hello."

"Where did you get this idea from?" Before them, the Megalicorn picked up half of Canterlot Castle and used it as a bludgeon against the Dark Changewing.

Discord pointed at himself. "The giant robot was all \_moi\_."

"And Sombra here came up with the idea of negative Elements. Speaking of which?" Chrysalis looked around. "Where \_is\_ the Element of Dark Magic?"

Sombra burped.

"Oh, dear?" Chrysalis shook her head. "You just couldn't resist, could you?"

"Sorry."

There was an explosion of red magic, and Trixie appeared. "Trixie found a replacement!" The alicorn amulet swung from her neck. "And is this Trixie's counterpart?"

"Yep." Twilight nodded. "Look, can we skip the normal fight and get straight onto the giant robot one?"

Trixie mulled it over. "Trixie thinks this is acceptable. Wagonlord, form!"

A gigantic thing of wood and canvas rose from the ground, held in Trixie's telekinetic grip.

"Right?" Spikezilla!"

Sombra turned to Chrysalis. "Don't you miss the days when battles were \_small?\_"

\* \* \*

><p>3.4 part 2 (expanded from Madfish)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"And so, in her boredom, Princess Rainbow took to pranking the whole of Equestria, until a particularly humorous jape on the Elements of Harmony themselves resulted in them giving her a timeout on the moon. But it is said that after one thousand years pass she will return, completing her Final Joke of Doom."<p>

Finishing reading that last line, the personal student of Princess Twilight, Society of Creative Anachronisms member and self styled 'Knight of the Arcane' Luna did the maths on her abacus. Checking it twice, she came up with a four digit number that she found extremely worrying.

"Forsooth!" she swore, grabbed the abacus and book with her telekinesis, and took off at a gallop. Somepony called out to her,



but she shot past too fast to catch what was said. She was on a mission! Her liege needed to be warned!

\* \* \*

><p>"We must be prepared, Squire Spike! This must be a test of our ability; we will complete the tasks that will keep the expectant populace calm while our liege prepareths for the unknown Final Joke." Luna expounded.<p>

"Prepareths?" Spike said, dubiously. "I don't think that's a word. And stop calling me Squire."

"But 'tis thy rank, is it not, brave Spike?"

"Well--"

The lengthy argument over the precise definition of 'squire' as opposed to 'armsdragon', 'courtier', 'page' and 'overly romantic unicorn' continued for most of the trip to Ponyville.

\* \* \*

><p>"The ponies who inhabit this town are truly unhinged." Luna said, shaking her head. "What remains to be done, Squire?"<p>

Spike rolled his eyes. "The main remaining issue is the weather. If Princess Twilight's cometary display is to be properly seen, the weather has to be perfect."

"Verily." Luna nodded.

"That'd be my job!" A white pegasus landed next to them. "Hi! My name is Celestia. My special talent is to remove clouds from the sky. Watch!"

The pegasus flared her wings, darted into the air, and spun in place twice. Air shot out in lumps, smashed into various small clouds, and made them fall apart.

"There!"

Luna closed her mouth. "'twas most impressive, fair Celestia."

"Oh, you flatter me." Celestia shook her tricoloured mane. "Oh, are you here for the sky display?"

The unicorn nodded. "Indeed, though--"

"I love it!" Celestia said, speaking over the top of Luna. "Especially when the sun rises right at the end, and it makes the colours of the sky change from deepest black and violet right through the spectrum to blue!"

"â€|agreed." Luna looked over at Spike, unsure.

"But don't let me keep you." Celestia added. "I'll keep an eye out for you tomorrow."

In a blur of white, she shot off.

"That was strange." Luna muttered. "Another for the theory that ponies here are a little crazy." She spotted Spike snickering. "Er, ahem, I meanâ€¦ lord, what fools these ponies be."

\* \* \*

><p>The six Elements of Harmony blasted their foe, enveloping Danger Dash in rainbow light.<p>

When it faded, what stood there was a blue alicorn barely taller than any of the six Element bearers.

"It is done." Luna said, wobbling slightly on her hooves. "Repent, blaggard, or-"

"I hope you've learned your lesson."

Princess Twilight materialized abruptly in the hall, and every pony bowed automatically.

"Oh, rise, all of you." Twilight said, shaking her head. "All of you, in particular, deserve not to bow to me. You've managed to knock some sense into my sister, Princess Rainbow Dash."

"Twi." Dash said, staggering over. "Worst. Time. Out. Ever."

The purple alicorn frowned, a little put off. "How so?"

"The Elements kept me awake! All thousand years. Every time I dropped off to sleep, there was this \_bzzz\_ and they woke me up again! I just came back because I wanted to \_shut them up!\_" Dash ranted. "Now, get out of the way of that window. I'm going to go into my room, and I am going to go to \_sleep\_, and I am going to not come out again untilâ€¦ untilâ€¦ what's a good holiday after midsummer?"

"That'd be the Day of Danger, when we fire off fireworks by the tonne." Princess Twilight said. "It was supposed to be in memory of you, but I think it turned into 'we need to keep her distracted with shiny things so she doesn't prank us'."

"Right. That. Anyway, don't wake me until the Day of Danger, the one \_after\_ next." Princess Dash shot off at two hundred miles an hour, barely moving by her standards.

"Wow. She really \_is\_ off her gameâ€¦" Twilight muttered. "Anyway, where were we?"

\* \* \*

><p>3.10<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia couldn't help but think something was a little off about her favoured student.<p>

Not only had she found the Elements of Harmony with frankly slightly disconcerting speed, but she'd also assembled a team of ponies who were fully compatible with them so fast that she'd managed to catch

Nightmare Moon \_on the way down\_.

Then she'd begun doing some extremely esoteric research into pegasus magic, material that Celestia found herself totally unable to follow. Something about "interferometry with standing waves of magic forming in the pinnules".

Still, at least she seemed happy. But it was getting a little worrying how vague her reports were about the occasional trouble going on in Ponyvilleâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>Flim and Flam materialized with their cart in a large, grey-floored room.<p>

"Oh, hello." A blue unicorn said, looking up and adjusting her large hat. "Trixie sees that Twilight Sparkle got disturbed when doing research again."

Next to them, a huge crate of food slammed to the floor.

"Right. Trixie will show you around. This is the mezzanine level. A large number of rooms are provided on the upper floors, and the lower floors are where the space suits are kept."

"The what?" Flim asked.

"Space suits. Did Trixie stutter?"

"Trixâ€|" A griffin stepped out of a nearby door. "You have to \_explain\_ things to the newbies. Hi, I'm Gilda. This is a moon base, by the way."

"We're on the moon?" Flam said, shocked.

"Everyone â€" pony, griffin, or whatever â€" who annoys Twilight Sparkle too much ends up here." Gilda shrugged. "I have to admit, it \_is\_ pretty cool. And honestlyâ€| I pissed off a pony who teleported me to the \_moon\_, and provided a base. She could have done worse."

"Why are you so accepting of this?" Flim said.

Trixie pointed to some much larger doors. "Thatâ€| would be the spaceship in the hanger over there. Trixie calls dibs on captain as soon as we have enough to crew it." She looked sullen. "Trixie could totally have run it by herself, but the computers demand a minimum crew size."

"Yeah." Flam said, after contemplating that with his brother for a moment. "That \_is\_ pretty cool."

\* \* \*

><p>"Erâ€|" Rarity ventured. "Where <em>are<em> you sending them all?"

Twilight shrugged. "Space camp."

\* \* \*

><p>3.5 part 2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon stayed shrunk into her seat as much as possible the whole time Celestia was on stage, only beginning to relax when the elder alicorn finally left.<p>

"So, erâ€|" she cast around for a topic. "What do you all do, then?"

Apparently her conversation skills weren't great after so long on the moon.

"Well," the pink pony started. "I'm Pinkie Pie, and I'm in charge of Pie Enterprises. Well baked ideas for any occasion! Here, have a moondial."

Nightmare caught the strange device, which had a triangle on it. "â€|right. What do I do with it?"

"Put it on your lower foreleg, silly!" Pinkie said, holding up her own to demonstrate.

Still feeling a little silly, Nightmare complied. The triangle spun around a few times, then stopped, and cast a shadow despite there being nothing to cause it.

"It shows the time by using the position of the moon! Look, it has the phases, too!" Pinkie pointed to the orange pony next to her. "This is Applejack."

"Charmed." Applejack said, nodding to her.

"She's kinda-sorta-got a financial lock on the majority of farming in the country." Pinkie said. "I've seen her speak to farmers and Manehattan socialites in their own styles without missing a beat!"

The blue pegasus butted in. "I'm Rainbow Dash, \_official\_ fastest pony on the planet. I do space missions!"

"â€|how?" Nightmare asked, feeling a little overwhelmed.

"I fly up!"

Nightmare waited. "Wait. That's it?"

"Wellâ€|" Dash stretched the word out. "Twi \_does\_ give me that air bubble spell so I don't explode, but apart from that it's all me. I fly up there, drop off a satellite, and come right back down on my own."

The purple pony stepped in, seeing their guest a bit lost. "Satellites are something that sits in orbit and transmits or measures things â€" like radio."

"And you invented 'em, Twilight!" Dash pointed out. "Don't be modest."

Wish you wouldn't give me so many geostationary ones to lift, though, that is a long way up!"

Twilight shrugged awkwardly. "It's the best placeâ€¦"

"Oh, sorry, I forgot." Dash took the conversation over again, making Nightmare look back and forth between them like she was watching a tennis match. "This is my best friend Fluttershy. She's usually the one who catches me when I come back down again."

"That's just a favour, thoughâ€¦" Fluttershy said. "Normally I work making sure the launch area is nice and clear, and sort out the logistics, and so on. It keeps me run off my hooves, but it'sâ€¦ good work."

"And I know you invent thingsâ€¦" Moon said, pointing to Twilight. "What about the Element of Generosity?"

"I'm surprised you don't know." The white unicorn said. "I am Rarity, Dressmaker and Crafter to her highness, founder and owner of the Rare Materials company and item enchanter extraordinaire. Dear, you do look nice, but that regalia could be enchanted to increase the effect, you know. Make you a much more visually stunning pony."

Nightmare Moon felt vaguely insulted. But it was temptingâ€¦

"By the way." Twilight said causally. "Don't try anything, Nightmare, or we'll use the Elements." Nightmare stiffened in shock, but the six Element bearers stayed perfectly at ease. "So long as you're not harming any pony, you'll be fine. Hay, maybe you could try and work through your issues yourself."

"Heeey!" Pinkie all but bounced out of her chair. "Maaybe we could go out clubbing tonight! Dash usually does with me, but the others are all such boring stick-in-the-muds."

"â€¦clubbing?" Moon asked, rolling the unfamiliar word around in her mouth.

"Yeah! Night clubs, you know?"

"This idea intrigues me." Nightmare admitted.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Part three!

(Apparently, Cadance ascended to alicorn by a particularly impressive use of her talent while colliding with a lump of "Crystal Heart" stone. I'm rather assuming the Elements are similarly capable, what with one thing and another.)

Some of these Loops would be quite neat AUs on their own, actually... if anyone wants to use them, do feel free.

## 4.1

\* \* \*

><p>"Right." Dash trotted back and forth in front of the other pegasi. "We have precisely six months until the Grand Galloping Gala. I want us all to be ready."<p>

Lightning Dust sneered. "For what? I thought this was some kind of special flight camp."

Other pegasi nodded their agreement, or just rustled their wings awkwardly.

"I'm glad you asked." Dash crouched, shot upwards, and broke the sound barrier after about ten seconds before circling around, shedding speed again, and landing in front of them.

"That is the Sonic Rainboom. Now, the Dash Certificate of Awesomeness is only awarded to those who can pull off a Sonic Rainboom on command." The rainbow pegasus grinned. "Any other questions?"

"How the hay did you do that?" a pony halfway to the back blurted.

"Training. Meticulous training, and being awesome." Dash's grin didn't change. "Now, who doesn't want to be able to do that? Because you can leave."

\* \* \*

><p>"No, no, no!" Dash shook her head in exasperation. "You're not going to break the sound barrier like that. You have to actually USE the weather magic. Make the wind push you, make it strengthen your wingbeats."<p>

"â€|so that's how you did that?"

Dash shrugged. "This isn't easy stuff."

Overhead, Lightning Dust flubbed a wingstroke and bounced off the sound barrier. Fluttershy caught her just before she hit the ground.

"Oh, right." Dash grinned. "Yeah, I did that at least a dozen times before I managed to get it right. Don't worry!"

"The idea of screwing up a dozen times in a row isn't a nice oneâ€|" Dust muttered.

\* \* \*

><p>"Andâ€| go!"<p>

One by one, fifteen pegasi dropped off the cirrus cloud. Successive booms sounded across the prairie as each left their own individualized explosion of weather magic.

\* \* \*

><p>"Nice work!" Dash said later, to the exhausted ponies. "Tomorrow we just rest, because we're doing part of the entertainment for the Grand Galloping Gala."<p>

"How?" asked Cloud Dancer.

"Hell if I know." Dash shrugged. "Twilight Sparkle gave me the details."

\* \* \*

><p>"Goodness, Twilight." Celestia said, watching as the instruments were moved into the dance hall. "That's a little much, isn't it?"<p>

"Well, for the dance music, yes." Twilight hefted a carillon in a magical grip. "But I'd like to have a piece about halfway through using all of these."

"What piece could possibly involve a carillon, a full orchestra and a pipe organ?"

The purple unicorn grinned to herself. "You'll see."

\* \* \*

><p>"Attention, everypony." Twilight said. "I would like to present a piece of music I researched exhaustively over the last year, the *Overture*."<p>

Rarity looked glad of the distraction from Blueblood. Pinkie and Applejack, meanwhile, were comforting Fluttershy after having made sure she wasn't going to go after the animals this time.

Twilight's horn glowed, and the music began gently with strings.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was having a great deal of fun doing this, actually. Running an entire orchestra " especially doing two counterpointing themes at once " was tricky enough that it was hard for even her to manage properly.<p>

Maybe I could ask Rarity how she manages so much telekinetic control at once| I'd probably have to wait until she next Loops, of course.\_

The second theme built towards a crescendo. Unnoticed, she slipped in a little signal spell into the magic she was doing.

\* \* \*

><p>Dash spotted it at once. "That's the signal! Dust, go! Now Dancer, aaaand" | Raindrops!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Three explosions sounded over Canterlot in quick succession, making most of the listening ponies jump. Twilight grinned, and then

got the carillon going. <em>You thought that was surprisingâ€|<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Andâ€| now!"<p>

Dash set the second fight of pegasi going.

\* \* \*

><p>The spectacular finale of the <em>1812 Overture<em> blasted holes in the sky over Canterlot and shattered every window in the city.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well?" Twilight asked brightly, turning around to see every other pony in the building trying to hide under tables. "What did you think?"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>4.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"And that's why I think Cadance has become evil." Twilight finished, and cancelled the creation spell that had provided her slide projector.<p>

No pony said anything for a moment. Then Celestia frowned. "Twilight, my dearest studentâ€| are you sure you're not just jealous? I mean, your brother has apologized for not letting you know earlier-"

"I can prove it!" Twilight overrode her. "Dispel magic!"

The purple-tinged spell shot across the room, and hit a shocked Cadance.

Who detransformed, becoming Queen Chrysalis.

"Quod Erat Demonstrandum. Q.E.D." Twilight said. "Thanks for your confidence, by the way, guys."

All the others looked thoroughly embarrassed.

Chrysalis looked from the six Elements of Harmony, to the Princess of the Sun, to a rapidly recovering (and pissed) Shining Armor. "Erâ€| I plead Queen's Evidence?"

"We don't have that law." Twilight said. "We do have laws against kidnapping, mind control, impersonation, all-up identity theftâ€|" Twilight kept going for several minutes, "â€|and looking at you I think you're even in trouble for entry into the country without a passport."

\* \* \*

><p>4.3<p>

\* \* \*



><p>"Right!" Twilight said. "I'm sure this'll work."<p>

Element of Magic, check. Lump of Cosmic Spectrum stone, check. Alicorn Amulet, check. The Rainbow of Light, from that Loop with that nice Megan girl, check. Rainbow of Dark looted from Tirek in a different iteration of the same loop, check.

Hanging both Rainbows â€" one pouch, one locket â€" around her neck and then the lump of crystal, she put on the Element of Magic, transformed, took up the Alicorn Amulet, and came back to awareness in a gigantic crater.

In front of her were her friends â€" and Trixie, strangely â€" wearing five of the Elements of Harmony. A circlet with a wand on it graced Trixie's forehead, and they were all panting heavily.

Twilight looked around, then up â€" and noticed that the sky was full of gradually shrinking stars, returning to their normal sizes.

\_Oh. Note to self, don't push your luck.\_

"â€|sorry." She muttered, glancing down at her feet and seeing the ruins of most of the magical artefacts she'd been wearing. "I kind of overdid it, huh."

\* \* \*

><p>4.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight nodded to Fluttershy. "Alright, 'shy, I've got a job for you."<p>

"Y-you have?" Fluttershy said. "Okay. I'll give it a go."

Picking the Kindness necklace up from the floor, she handed it to Fluttershy. "Here. This has a spell attached to it which should keep you safe. Now, I'd like you to see if you can negotiate with Chrysalis."

"Eep!" Fluttershy flinched. "Iâ€| why?"

"I think you'll do fine." Twilight said firmly. "Remember, you've not let us down yet, in any Loop. And I'd like for the wedding to go smoothly for once."

Fluttershy mulled it over, then her face set determinedly. "I'll do it, Twilight."

\* \* \*

><p>"So." Chrysalis laughed. "A lone pony comes to us, speaking of peace and coexistence. Something we have not been shown in a thousand years or more from your Princess Celestia."<p>

"Really?" Fluttershy said. "Do they know about you?"

"Clearly." Chrysalis replied sarcastically. "How else did you find us?"

"â€|actually, I was just seeing who built the building I saw from the air." Fluttershy answered, truthfully. After all, it might have been Diamond Dogs.

A few changelings looked quizzically at the yellow pegasus, feeling waves of universal affection rolling off her. She liked all of them.

"Feh. Words." Chrysalis, and made to turn away. A ripple ran around the assembled changelings, and she stopped mid-movement. "Oh? How strange. It seems the hive has some affection for you, little pegasus. I may keep you aroundâ€| for their amusement."

"Alright." Fluttershy said, agreeably. "If they feel that way, that's fine."

\* \* \*

><p>"I don't understand it, Twilight." Rarity said. "Fluttershy has gone missing. She wasn't at the spa for our appointment yesterday. Do you know where she is?"<p>

"Don't worry, Rarity." Twilight soothed. "Fluttershy is fine. She's just making some new friends, that's all. She might be a while, I'm afraid."

"Oh. She mentioned she was going, but I didn't realize it would be for that long. Well, tell her to stop by the second she gets back."

Twilight nodded, and Rarity left the library.

Dash looked up from her Intricate Webber book. "That's totally not the whole story, is it?"

"Nope." Twilight replied easily. Ever since they'd shared a Loop as the Princesses, she'd felt closer than ever to the pegasus. Dash seemed to have the same comfortable familiarity with her, as well â€" a result of having been sisters-in-name for centuries. "Fluttershy is making friends. They're just insectoid shapeshifters, if you get my meaning. And I sent her off with her Element, too."

"What â€" oh." Dash grinned. "Be nice to have her in the club."

\* \* \*

><p>As ponies took their places in the seats before the wedding, a cry of surprise went up from one of the guard detail. Others followed his pointing hoof, and then started to see it as well.<p>

Shining Armor sighed, upset at the interruption and what it might mean. "Sorry, dear. I hope this is nothing."

"That's alright," his fiancÃ©e sighed. "I wish it hadn't happened, but it's not your fault."

She stole a peck on his cheek, and he gave a little silly grin before

putting on his work face.

By now, the approaching objects were close enough to be seen by everypony. There was a loose cloud of black-looking shapes flying through the air towards them, with two slightly larger ones leading them.

Of the Element bearers not in on what was going on, Pinkie worked it out first. "Yay, Fluttershy's back! And she brought friends!"

Circling the field once, Fluttershy led Chrysalis and a hundred changelings in to land. The way her landing pushed up her hair made most of the watching ponies gasp " she had a small but still quite apparent horn on her forehead.

Trotting up to Celestia and Luna with Chrysalis half a length behind, she bowed. "Princesses, may I present Queen Chrysalis of the Changelings, here to pay her respects to the happy couple."

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity pushed Fluttershy bodily towards Carousel Boutique. "You <em>really</em> should get your mane done, darling, it needs to show off that horn much better. And I need to make a dress for you " one suitable for a coronation, no less! Come on, you do need these measurements."

"Um" okay" Fluttershy said, skidding slightly on the floor. "I'd rather" no, never mind, if you think it's important."

Chrysalis watched with some confusion, and leant over to Twilight. "Is this normal?"

"For Ponyville? Yes." Twilight, Applejack and Dash chorused.

Pinkie was currently suffering from a mild case of party overload, trying to work out which event to celebrate first. "Ooh, I could do the diplomatic reception" but that didn't go so well with the Buffalo. Maybe if I started small with the Fluttershy's Back party, and went straight into the Fluttershy's a Princess party"

"Out of curiosity, how do changelings react to sugar?" Twilight asked.

"It's a useful nutrient, and we can eat a lot. It can substitute in for love for a little while " not that we've had any problems since Fluttershy showed up." Chrysalis said. "She is just remarkably" nice."

"Pinkie's going to like you." Twilight said with conviction. "Ask her to show you her Genocide By Toffee." Seeing the queen's reaction, she tossed her head. "It's not actually fatal" that is, if you stop in time. It should feed every changeling you brought, with some to spare."

" that concept is actually strangely terrifying." Chrysalis muttered, watching the bouncing pink pony. "And yet I find myself suddenly hungry."

\* \* \*

><p>4.5 (Sonic)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>"In the world (her world!) where life is strong,<em>

\_In the world (her world!) life's an open book-\_"\_

"Can you stop singing!" Twilight snapped. "I know you like having your own theme tune this time, but come \_on!\_"

Dash shook her head unrepentantly. "I love this world! I thought you'd enjoy it too, Twilight!"

"Being eight years old is putting a dampener on it." Twilight adjusted the manifold to the piston engine on their biplane. "But yeah, I'm not surprised you enjoy a world where you have to run at four hundred miles an hour just to go shopping."

"They have \_loop-the-loop roads\_, Twilight!" Rainbow looked like she wanted to introduce them to Equestria. "The only downside is that Dr. Robotnik. And I like kicking robots in half, too, so that's not all bad."

\* \* \*

><p>4.6 (Evangelion)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight staggered against the wall of a railway car as she Awoke into what seemed a fairly high tech loop. "Oof! Ah, great, I'm humanâ€| "<p>

"Hi. You sound new to this Loop," a voice said. She turned, memories of the Loop settling into place, and saw-

"What \_is\_ it with me and being the sister of human Anchors?"

"Oh." Shinji Ikari said. "So you'reâ€| Twilight Rokobungi, right? My half sister, this Loop?"

Twilight nodded. "Yeah. Equestria is my home Loop."

"Ah, you'll be familiar with this kind of thing, then." At her perplexed expression, Shinji elaborated. "We have giant robot fights here too."

For a moment, the normally-a-unicorn wasn't really able to make a sound. "Pardon? You think we have giant robot fights?"

"Wellâ€| yeah. I was in one of your loops. I mean, I stayed out of the way, but I was there alright. There was some giant robotâ€| the megalicorn or something?"

Twilight slapped her forehead with her palm, staggering slightly as she got the hang of bipedalism again. "That wasn't our prime loop. Nothing close."

"It did seem a little too 'Power Rangers'." Shinji agreed. "Right, come on. Time to get out of the danger zone of Lord Derpface the Easily Defeated."

He pulled on Twilight's arm, and she followed him at a staggering run out of the way of a flying machine crash.

\* \* \*

><p>"I don't get it." Twilight said, frowning.<p>

"You are not required to understand." Gendo said, staring down at his daughter. "You are only required to obey."

"No, what I mean is, why did the giant monster thing attack here? I mean, it is statistically incredibly unlikely that a giant monster with no understanding of language or humanity would come down one of the few places with one convenient giant robot, let alone with three."

Shinji stood back, interested.

"We will discuss this later. If the Fourth Child will not obey orders, then the First Child will be used instead."

Twilight shook her head hastily. "No, I'm notâ€| okay, look. I'm questioning your methods and motives, not the necessity of stopping that thing from stamping up and down on the city until it breaks. Excuse meâ€| is it Doctor Akagi?"

The scientist nodded.

"Would I be able to look at the literature concerning those monster things? I might have a few ideas." With that, Twilight started walking briskly towards the gantry to Unit 03.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight didn't listen to the briefing much. In fact, she wasn't really able to <em>hear<em> much. Her talent with magic apparently extended to this artificial machine's 'AT Field', and she was able to sense everything within a mile of her Unit's location.

But ick. This is not a robot. Just ewwwâ€|\_

She finally noticed Sachiel, and grabbed it in a telekinesis-style AT grip before holding it fifty feet off the floor. "What should I do with this?"

Shinji was laughing himself sick in Unit-01, and everyone else was shouting about sync ratios.

"Umâ€| don't know?" Misato eventually said.

"Just throw it into the sun!" Shinji gasped out through his paroxysms of laughter.

Twilight gave a mental shrug, and threw Sachiel as high as she could. While she didn't think it would make the sun, it did seem to hit

escape velocity.

\* \* \*

><p>"Only units 01 and 02 will be deployed on this mission." Misato said, pointing at Israfael.<p>

"Why?" Shinji asked. "Twilight's doing fine, throwing Angels at the moon."

Asuka looked torn between being impressed and being upset. She'd been rather startled when Twilight made her Unit throw Gahgiel into space, but at least it was another girl showing her up.

"We're kinda getting complaints from the JSSDF that we're showing them up." Misato said, stifling a grin. "But orders are orders."

"Okay." Twilight shrugged. "I'll go chase up that classified information. Ritsuko owes me a favour anywayâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>Rei brought out the Lance of Longinus.<p>

"Wait." Twilight said, incredulous. "We have an \_anti angel melee weapon\_ and you've not used it? Right, that's it."

Twilight opened fully to Unit 03, wrapped an AT field around it, and materialized in low earth orbit. She grabbed Araël and threw it at the moon, then caught the Lance as it went past. "Okay, I'm keeping this."

\* \* \*

><p>Lilith rose from the earth, and began Instrumentality.<p>

"Does this happen \_every\_ time?" Twilight asked.

Shinji nodded wearily. "It's scary the first time, trippy the second time, and after that it gets kind of boring."

"Your Loop is weird. And I say that in full knowledge of how strange all the other Anchors would find a world inhabited mainly by ponies."

\* \* \*

><p>4.7 (from Filraen)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Tia, wake up!" The piercing voice of her sister Luna woke Princess Celestia in her room at Canterlot Castle.<p>

Had Celestia been in a clearer mind she would have given thanks that Luna didn't use the Canterlot Royal Speaking Voice, it was especially annoying to wake up to that. "Nnnrrgh, give me five minutes Luna. The Sun isn't even out yet."

A not-so delicate eyebrow rose on the Moon Princess' face "You \_raise\_ the Sun, Tia. Of course 'tis still night."

"All right Lulu, you win." And, yawning extravagantly, Princess Celestia raised herself from her bed. "Was there something important today?"

"We'll need to check preparations for the celebration for the Elements of Harmony bearers after defeating Discord... again" Luna answered with an annoyed-sounding voice; but Celestia knew better.

Both Luna and Celestia, due to being alicorns, had great magic power and amplified traits from earth ponies, pegasi and unicorns. More importantly, they were also well aware they were very long-lived in comparison to the other pony races, having seen their subjects live and die many times before. And while she had lived a long time, this relatively new "time loop" incident around Twilight Sparkle was most unusual.

Celestia then went to a nearby mirror to start brushing her mane, noting the amused look in her sister's face. The movement of the brush was calming, not at all like it was the first time she looped. She was so worried all her recent work was for nothingâ€¦

It had actually been Twilight Sparkle who informed her about the time loops. And while she was initially worried Equestria was in danger from some unknown force and worried as much again for the Element bearers as the Royal Pony Sisters weren't Awake often enough to protect them, she soon realized the loops were a blessing in disguise.

While Celestia may admit that was a selfish thought, the long years of her sister's banishment made her realize that effective immortality is only good if you can enjoy it with other, hopefully also long-lived, ponies. After her faithful student claimed the Element of Magic that fateful day, Celestia could enjoy it with Luna again, and now they could also share their long life with Twilight Sparkle and the other Element holders due to the time loops. However, should they get separated from one another, Celestia also asked them to write Friendship reports about those other worlds Twilight sometimes went intoâ€¦ those "pseudo-loops". It wasn't much, perhaps, but for Twilight to remember she would meet her friends and mentor again was all the help Celestia could giveâ€¦ and she was a bit curious on what those other worlds were like, after the loop in that Konoha place.

After finishing brushing her mane Celestia walked towards her sister, thinking how glad she was that the loops always started the day before the thousandth Summer Sun celebration â€" instead of, say, just after Nightmare Moon was imprisoned. \_'Thank Harmony for small miracles'\_.

Finally Celestia stood in front of her sister, looking directly at her. "Luna, can you do a little favour for me?"

"What would it be, Tia?"

Luna's level look lasted until her sister nuzzled her and said "The next loop we both are awake... would you be my sister again? No

matter who we are?"

Luna just smiled, and nuzzled her back. "Always."

It was a good day to be alive.

\* \* \*

><p>4.8 (Any human self insert. Preference is "Hands" by AJT, I think.)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I honestly have no idea how to solve this." Twilight said, looking at the unconscious human lying on Fluttershy's lawn. "I didn't know this could happen."<p>

"Ooh! Ooh! I know!" Pinkie said. "You could make a conver-mmmph!"

Twilight's hoof had gone into Pinkie's mouth without her looking. "Let me make one thing clear, Pinkie. \_We Do Not Talk About The Bureau!\_"

"Mmkay." Pinkie mumbled.

After a moment, Twilight pulled her hoof out again. "Right. Now, there's a few options. We could put an illusion on him and pretend he's a Diamond Dog."

"Thatâ€¦ could workâ€¦" Fluttershy mumbled.

Twilight nodded. "Only problem is getting him to go along with it. Second option is that we keep him out of sight."

"Booooring." Pinkie said flatly.

"Or we just let things happen and see how it goes." Twilight finished.

"Well-" Fluttershy stopped. "Do you hearâ€¦ something?"

"â€¦omigosh omigosh omigosh \_omigosh\_ I WAS RIGHT!" Lyra dopplered over the closest hill and skidded to a halt, throwing up big rooster-tails of dirt. "\_You guys found a \_human!\_"

"Right." Twilight said, calmly. "Option three it is, then. Pinkie, go let Celestia know to ignore any reports of mass panic out of Ponyville in the near future."

\* \* \*

><p>4.9<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight!" Spike said, as they Awoke. "What the hell-"<p>

"Sssh!" Twilight said, then dropped a privacy spell around them.



"Calm down, Spike."

"What the hell happened!" Spike said, unrepentant. "Last I remember, I was thirty feet long, couldn't talk, and you were a human!"

It took Twilight a moment to remember. "Wow, your luck isn't great. That was when we met Hiccup, which was ages ago for me." Loop memories settled. "And it's Twi-gon Jinn, here. And you're Spiky-one Kenobi."

"Those are stupid names." Spike muttered.

"Stupid or not, they're what we've got to work with. Now, do you remember what we're supposed to be doing?"

"Yeah, I â€" yeah! That's really bizarre!" Spike took the lightsaber from his hip and looked at it. "Cool, I can swordfight now."

"Focus." Twilight reminded him. "We'll need to be â€" oof!"

A pulse of darkness rolled across the Force, as their ship was destroyed.

Twilight enclosed herself in a bubble of air as poison gas flowed into the room. Spike didn't catch what was going on, and took a sniff.

"Hmm. Quite tangy."

After a moment staring, the Jedi Master rolled her eyes. Of course Spike could breathe poison gas. He could eat Baked Bads, this was nothing.

The door hissed open, admitting battle droids. Twilight sent them flying down the corridor with a telekinetic shove. "Come on, Spike, let's go register our disapproval with the accommodations."

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright, that is *it*." Twilight said, as Destroyer Droids rolled up. "Come on, Spike!"

With a flash, she teleported them both to the Naboo surface.

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack struggled woozily awake. "What th'hell happened to me?"<p>

"Please be calm, you are still recovering." A voice said gently. Applejack's vision cleared enough to see it belonged to a human-like figure wearing bandages and goggle-lenses. "We found you near the wreckage of a crashed ship. There were no other survivors. Do you remember what happened?"

She scanned her Loop memories, getting a basic sense of how this Loop operated, and winced. Apparently she'd been captured as a slave by pirates or somethingâ€|well, at least she'd escaped, if that was how you wanted to put it.

"Here." The figure reached behind itself. "There is something we found in the wreckage â€" it was the only other thing of value, instead of basic supplies and metal. You should probably have it."

Applejack's eyes lit up. \_Well, I'll be darned. That's the Element of Honesty. Ah guess it followed me here.\_

"Thanks," she said, slipping the Element around her neck for safe-keeping. "How kin ah repay you?"

"I will admit that we do not have much in the way of surplus. Perhaps you could help us gather food and water?"

"All right." Applejack nodded. "Soon as you say ah'm ready, ah'll do it."

\* \* \*

><p>"So, how's Rarity doing?" Spike asked, slicing a battle droid in half.<p>

Twi-gonn spun her saber telekinetically and deflected blaster bolts with a shield, then coupled it with a lightning spell. "Fairly well. She's using the Loops to try to find the perfect dress for every possible occasion."

"Neat." Spike finished off the last droid. "Right, everyone on the ship! You as wellâ€| Queen, right?"

"That is correct, my young padawan learner." Twi-gonn said.

"Twi, that sounds like I use a paddle to hit things."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right, let's seeâ€|" Applejack focused. There was that one loop she'd been blind, which had taught her a lot about earth chi, and then there was earth <em>magic<em>â€|

Breathing deeply, she took a stance and pushed. \_Channel the energy. Don't try to provide it yourself, just act as a channel.\_

The Sand People watched, astonished, as an apple tree sprouted from the bare sand. It got to about four feet high before Applejack staggered.

"Erghâ€| sorry, I don't exactly have this all down yet. Ah'll give it another go tomorrow."

\* \* \*

><p>"No!" Spike shouted, as Darth Maul thrust his lightsaber into Twilight's body.<p>

Then Twilight flashed purple, and exploded with magic that bounced Darth Maul off two walls and into a giant pit. When the flash blindness had worn off and Spike could see again, he saw Twilight with wings and a tiara.

His jaw dropped. "â€|wait, you can DO that now?"

"Whenever I want, pretty much." Twilight confirmed, then detransformed after checking her injury was healed. "Come on, let's get back to wherever the Queen is."

\* \* \*

><p>"So, how'd you swing <em>this<em> with Yoda?" Knight Spike asked, looking across at Padawan Skywalker. "I mean, if we're still a team?"

"We are." Twilight confirmed. "I said that young Anakin would need both of us as guidance rather than just one master, because he's older than normal."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight fretted as she paced on the starship. Having Spike go off on his own to investigate Kamino was worrying enough to her â€" never mind that he was an adult himself now, he was barely even a stripling by Looper standards â€" and now Anakin had managed to get them onto a trip to look at his mother's condition.<p>

Admittedly, though, from what Hiccup had told her, she was lucky Anakin wasn't Awakeâ€|

"Coming out of hyperspace." Anakin said. "â€|huh. I think we got the wrong star system. That \_can't\_ be Tatooine."

"Why not?" Twilight asked, peering out the window.

"Well, look at it!" Anakin pointed. "It'sâ€| \_green\_. And that's an ocean!"

The Jedi Master levitated up a holonet comm. "No, this is the right system. Right planet, as well. Andâ€| oh, okay. You know how there's a million planets in the galaxy?"

Anakin and Padme nodded.

"Turns out that even interesting news doesn't show up if it happens in the outer rim. There's just too much to keep track of. This has been going on for years."

\* \* \*

><p>The H-type yacht landed in Mos Espa, now a city with verdant plant life everywhere the eye could see, and a party came up to greet them.<p>

Twilight gaped, almost stumbling down the ramp. "\_Applejack?"\_

"Howdy!" Applejack said, grinning broadly. "Ah \_thought\_ y'all had to be somewhere. And you're a Jedi, eh? Can't say ah'm surprised."

"Butâ€| butâ€|" Twilight gibbered, pointing between Applejack's wings

and horn. "How?"

"Beats me." Applejack shrugged. "Happened about when ah'd managed to green the whole Jundland Wastes, and it made the rest of the job all much easier ah kin tell you."

"â€|right." Twilight started to recover. "Of course. Massive achievement involving trees, and earth magic and stuff. And if you have the Element of Honesty here, that'd catalyze it properly. Well, welcome to the alicorn club."

"Am I missing something, master?" Anakin asked.

\* \* \*

><p>Spike looked up defiantly at Count Dooku. "Twilight will take your entire separatist movement apart!"<p>

"Oh, I don't think so, young Jedi Knight." The tall Sith stalked around Spike's force cage. "We are quite ready for one Jedi Master."

There was a sudden rumbling BOOM, and the top half of the Geonosian hive went flying, exposing them to the air. Two alicorns flew in, the purple one spinning two lightsabers by telekinesis and the orange one slamming her hooves into the floor to cause huge waves of earth and rock.

"â€|oh, you meant literally." Dooku said, in the tones of someone hoping he had spare trousers somewhere. "In that case, Chancellor Palpatine is Darth Sidious, please don't kill me."

\* \* \*

><p>"That was evil." Spike said, nodding in approval.<p>

"I'm quite proud of it." Twilight agreed. She'd taken Darth Sidious and Darth Tyrannus, slapped Sombra-grade power limiters on them and dumped them on the surface of the forest moon of Endor. Let them try learning Ewokeseâ€|

"Oh, why did you get the Jedi Council to change the rules on marriage? And, er, \_how?\_"

"Basicallyâ€|" Twilight tailed off. "\_Why\_ is because Anakin and Padme are clearly in love. \_How\_ is that I gathered up a list of all the Jedi who have had children. It includes a fair number of the founders of the order â€" like Nomi Sunrider and the whole Sunrider family â€" and one of the sitting members of the council, Ki-Adi-Mundi. But to really make my point, I printed it out. I used up the paper in that printer."

"Huh." Spike muttered. "So it just doesn't work."

"Yep!" Twilight said, then shrugged. "Besides, Cadance would try to strangle me if she heard I'd gone along with a Loop where love was \_banned.\_"

\* \* \*

><p>4.10 (from Vulpine Fury) (first time in Gen 1)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sighed as she looked at herself in the mirror. The new coat colour was going to take some getting used to, almost as much as looking exactly like her mother in one of the 'normal' loops.<p>

But then, this loop, it seemed, every first-born mare looked like her mother.

"Baby Twilight!" a grandfatherly voice called from behind her. "What brings you to the old Moochik?"

She seethed slightly at the "Baby." She was at least as old as the Cutie Mark Crusaders in a normal Loop, for Celestia's sake! She took a deep breath like \_her\_ Cadance had shown her and hoofed away the annoyance.

"Mister Moochik? Can you teach me?" He might not be Celestia, or even Cheerilee, but he was definitely at least as good as Professor Bastion Yorsets from Celestia's Academy. Far be it from her to pass up a magical education of any sort. Who knew? She might be able to apply some of the lessons when the Loops were over.

\* \* \*

><p>"Huh." Twilight said, looking from the book titled <em>Enemies of Ponyland<em> to the enormous chariot-riding Centaur, Tirek. "This Loop might be a lot more fun than I was expectingâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>AN: Thanks as usual to the people on the SpaceBattles thread who've been helping me come up with ideas and contributing a couple of their own.<p>

Also, Intricate Webber is a ponified version of David Weber. (Well, I think Dash would rather like military sci fi as her literary tastes expand... though for ponies it's probably more like military magitech fiction.)

## 5. Chapter 5

### 5.1

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, Spike." Twilight said. "Since this is your first time looping in a home loop, you get to pick where to diverge from the original timeline."<p>

Spike pondered. "Hmmmâ€| I kind of want to do something awesomeâ€| I know! Can you make a lightsaber?"

"No need." Twilight's horn flickered, and one levitated out of her mane. "One of the things Hiccup told me all Loopers eventually get working is a pocket dimension trick. He showed me how some time ago, and I shoved our lightsabers in there last time since I didn't have

any yet."

Spike reached out his hand, concentrating, and his face lit up as the lightsaber left Twilight's grip and floated gently over to him. "This is so cool!"

He coughed, suddenly feeling embarrassed. "Right. Okay, are any of the others awake?"

"No." Twilight shook her head. "I checked. I'm guessing one of the next few loops I'm going to be having a run as one of the Royal Sisters, with AJ as the other one â€" that always seems to happen when somepony first ascends. But no-one is this loop."

"Good." Spike rummaged in the closet, found a belt, and threaded the lightsaber's detachable clip through it. "I'll let you know when I think of a good time."

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity vanished underground as the Diamond Dogs pulled her down.<p>

\_Right, now would seem to be a good time,\_ Spike decided. He pulled his 'saber from the belt Rarity had made for him last month, for what he'd said was a torch, and took a two handed grip. Igniting it, he set his stance and faced Rover. "I won't let you ponynap Rarity."

Rover laughed. "You too little."

\_Shii-cho. Sun Djem.\_

Spike \_moved\_, and when he stopped Rover had had a drastic manicure â€" his claws down to stubs.

"I dunno. I think I'm doing alright," he said lightheartedly.

"Uhâ€|" Rover examined his lost claws. "How you do that?"

Spike shrugged. "Now, you \_will\_ tell me where your pack took Rarity." He waved his off hand.

Diamond Dogs were just about the textbook description of a weak mind.

\* \* \*

><p>"Really?" Twilight said, giving Spike a sardonic look after Rarity left. She'd spent almost twenty minutes gushing about how brave and dashing Spike had been in rescuing her. "You went with that?"<p>

Spike grinned. "Hey, you \_did\_ say I got to pick."

Then his face clouded. "Oh, great. Do I have to go on the dragon migration every single time to pick up Peewee?"

"Nope." Twilight replied, happily. "\_That\_ problem I solved some time

ago. I can pick up the right egg for you about the time of the Gala."

"Good." Spike breathed out, relieved. "Glad that isn't a problem."

"Though, speaking of thatâ€¦" Twilight added, "I do know roughly how to swing it so that Rarity asks you to go to the Gala with her. Only problems are, you have to spend over a year working on being as mature as possible and it'll be the one the year after next."

Spike considered that. "Yeah, sounds worth it. Okay, how do I start?"

Twilight slammed a giant tome down in front of him. "Memorize this."

"â€¦did you ever manage to convince the non-looping me to do this?"

"Yep!" Twilight said. "Once or twice."

"And how many times did you try?" he pressed.

"I lost count." The unicorn shrugged. "A lot."

\* \* \*

><p>5.2 (PokÃ©mon)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"You know, Fluttershy," Twilight said, sitting down on the side of Kanto Route 14. "I can't help but think you have an advantage here."<p>

Fluttershy tickled a Shinx under the chin. "You're a good girl, aren't you? Sorry, what was that, Twilight?"

Twilight shrugged. "Never mind. But all I've caught so far is a Hoothoot, and that was when you were asleep. The PokÃ©mon all head for you so fast I can never catch them."

"Wellâ€¦" Fluttershy said, "At least you have your starter."

The Charmeleon that was Spike this Loop looked resigned. "Char."

Twilight made a face. "I can't actually train Spike very well because of the same problem! We're having to rely entirely on battles with trainers, and that doesn't usually go very well."

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, look, Twilight!" Fluttershy said, pointing at the PokÃ©mon Blake had just sent out. "It's you when you're annoyed!"<p>

Twilight's eye twitched as she looked between the Rapidash and her PokÃ©dex screen. "That's just not fair."

\* \* \*

><p>"Wow." Twilight said. "It looks like you really <em>did<em> manage to catch them all." Then, because she was still a pedant, added "well, not so much catch, as recruit."

Fluttershy beamed.

Twilight then gave a sour look at the Rapidash in the paddock, who had been joined by Ponyta, Cobalion, Virizion, Terrakion and Keldeo. "Though I can't help but think someone's playing a trick on usâ€|"

Still, that they'd finished was nice. No more overenthusiastic kids throwing PokÃ© balls at themâ€|

"Ah, there you are!" Professor Oak said, causing a feeling of dread in Twilight's stomach. "I just got permission for the two of you to go explore the Kalos region!"

Spike â€" still one of Twilight's only three PokÃ©mon, to go with her Noctowl and a rather incongruous Moltres â€" gave a resigned growl.

Here we go again, her PokÃ©dex translated helpfully.

\* \* \*

><p>5.3: "Diplomancy" (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>This loop round it appeared that only Twilight herself had looped, the others had defaulted to their pre-loop memories. It had meant following the original path of events pretty much, though since she'd already known the answers, she managed to get make her friendship connections during the day she arrived.<p>

She'd taken her new friends into her confidence shortly after they arrived at Pinkie Pie's welcome party, rather than wasting the whole night worrying and complaining. Pinkie found the Reference Guide, and as she'd hoped, they'd insisted on going with her to collect the Elements.

While things had been easier without Nightmare Moon attacking them, they'd still had challenges, and her friends' characters had shone through. The upshot had been, even without the others having their loop memories, when Nightmare Moon had finally appeared, they were all ready to give her a face-full of rainbow.

Still that didn't solve the current problem, Trixie had appeared right on schedule. However, Twilight had decided to try a different approach. For once, she'd try diplomacy. Her friends had reacted in their usual fashion, complaining about Trixie's boasting, but when Dash started to boo, Twilight cast a one way silence charm around her head and turned to face them.

"Guys I'm surprised at you! What's with all the hate? Her talent is stage magic, showy magic! Her boasting is all just part of the act!"



Rarity, when you create clothing, you show it off to its best advantage? Rainbow, I'd have thought you of all ponies would appreciate a good performance!

And Applejack, I know you don't boast about your skills, but you enjoy showing them off, don't you? How would you like it if someone started booing you in the middle of a rodeo? Let's just enjoy the show."

The stern look that accompanied her comment chastened the three ponies, and they quietened down. However, Spike loudly exclaimed, "But you've got more magic in the tip of your horn than she has in her whole body!"

Twilight winced as Trixie's voice carried over the crowd. "Well, well, well, it seems we have a neighsayer in the audience! Who is so ignorant as to challenge the magical ability of the Great and Powerful Trixie? Do they not know that they're in the presence of the most magical unicorn in all of Equestria? You, with your back turned!"

Twilight sighed and turned to face her. "That was my companion, Spike. I'm sorry if we interrupted your show, I was quite enjoying it. Your grasp of manifestation magic and illusions is quite good, and your practical application is first rate!"

Trixie preened. "Ha! So you admit no-pony has more magical power than the Great and Powerful Trixie!"

Her fanfare and fireworks went off again. Spike started to protest, but Twilight cast a zipping spell on his mouth.

"For only the Great and Powerful Trixie has magic strong enough to vanquish the dreaded Ursa Major!" She spun her usual tale of heroism, and suitably awed the surrounding ponies. Snips and Snails started their fan-colting rant and Twilight winced.

She made a mental note to watch Snips and Snails like a hawk. If she could head them off, she could prevent both the Ursa Minor attack and Trixie's humiliation, which should prevent the business with the Alicorn Amulet as well. Not that that was a problem in itself, alicorn Twilight could spank amulet enhanced Trixie both in magic, and physically, as she'd once proven with Trixie's own whip when the mare was being particularly aggravating.

"It's true, my enthusiastic little admirers. Trixie is most certainly the best in Ponyville. Don't believe the Great and Powerful Trixie?" The unicorn showmare chuckled. "Well then, I hereby challenge you, Ponyvillians - anything you can do, I can do better. Any takers? Anyone? Hmm? Or is Trixie destined to be the greatest equine who has ever lived!?"

Spike finally unzipped himself and complained. "Please, she's unbearable! Ya gotta show her, you just gotta!"

"I don't need to prove anything! Besides, it'll only cause problems laterâ€¦" Twilight was interrupted by Trixie again.

"Hmmâ€¦ How about you?" Twilight wrestled with her conscience as the mare hectored her. She wasn't worried about showing off her power,

she knew her friends would understand, she just didn't want to get in a horn waving contest with the blue unicorn. "Well, how about it? Hm? Is there anything you can do that the Great and Powerful Trixie can't? Well, little hayseed?"

She saw Applejack start forward out of the corner of her eye, and that decided her. She'd done her best to avoid aggravating Trixie, but events still seemed to be playing out the way they had originally, and she was not going to let her friends get humiliated to save Trixie's feelings.

Her horn glowed and she teleported on stage alongside Trixie. "It's one thing to challenge your audience to a contest, another to show contempt for them! Ponyville may not be a city the size of Canterlot or Manehattan, but they are good ponies, not 'hayseeds'!"

Trixie took a few steps back. "What? How didâ€¦ I mean, a simple trick, and I can accomplish easily!"

She stepped up to the curtain at the back of her stage, and disappeared in a cloud of smoke, then reappeared in another on the opposite side of the stage. Twilight didn't mention she noticed the tops of the curtains twitch as something moved through them each time. You probably wouldn't notice it if you weren't up there on the stage with her. The unicorn had also recovered some of her aplomb.

"You're a brave mare to challenge the Great and Powerful Trixie!"

Twilight shook her head. "I didn't come up here to challenge you, just to ask that you show a little respect to other ponies. I don't need to prove anything, and neither do you."

She remembered Dash's speech to Lightning Dust and hoped it might work better on Trixie. "I get that you're all about doing impressive magic, really, I'm a student of magic myself so I understand how much fun it is to demonstrate a new spell. But you don't need to make other ponies look small to make yourself look big."

"Hmmpf! Who are you to tell the Great and Powerful Trixie what she can and can't do? Well, come on, show Trixie what you've got. Show us all."

"Told you, not interested. I'm just your regular run of the mill Ponyville citizen. Nothing to see here, move along..."

Twilight turned away, casting two hastened spells against Trixie's likely reaction. The first was a modified medical imaging spell she'd learned during a loop where she'd been a nurse at Ponyville General Hospital. The glow of her horn faded and winked out as the characteristic frequency shifted up into the X-ray region and flared off the tip. The second was a custom contingent pocket dimension spell she'd figured out. Unlike shield spells, it was invisible and undetectable until you triggered it.

There was a crackle of lightning and a yelp from Trixie as the approach of the lightning spark from the cloud the stage unicorn had manifested tripped the spell. It formed a Klein bottle pocket dimension with a surface incident to an incoming attack. The upshot

was, anything aimed at her would end up reversing direction while still going in a straight line.

She suppressed a small smirk as she stepped down into the crowd, who didn't look to be particularly pleased with the blue unicorn. However, Applejack had already jumped upon the stage.

"That's it. I can't stand for no more of this! Twilight was defending you earlier, you stuck up mare, and then you attack her, from behind even! You're just plain mean!" The farm pony glared at the smug unicorn and said, "You want a challenge? You got one! Can your fancy magic powers do this?"

She hauled out her rope and did her party piece to oohs and ahhs from the crowd. "Ha! Top that you two bit trickster!"

"Oh ye of little talent," Trixie's hat floated off her head, revealing her glowing horn. "Now watch and be amazed at the magical power of Trixie!"

Twilight cast another spell, threading a tendril of her own magic into the telekinetic grip Trixie had of Applejack's discarded rope, carefully avoiding disturbing Trixie's weave. Of course, with the X Ray spell still going, there was no visible sign of her spell-casting, something that would have been impossible to hide with any ordinary illusion effect.

She let it grab an apple, but when it went to hog-tie Applejack, she tweaked it so it overshot, and wrapped around Trixie's legs. Before the unicorn could cancel her grip, she found herself hog-tied, with an apple in her mouth.

"Well, I gotta say, that is pretty amazin'!" Applejack chuckled as the rest of the audience burst into laughter. Trixie untangled herself and jumped to her hooves, glaring furious over at Twilight.

"You! You must have sabotaged the Great and Powerful Trixie's spell somehow!"

Twilight yawned. "Was my horn glowing? Did anyone see my horn glowing? How could I affect your spell without casting one of my own? Not to mention that kind of fine control without you noticing it would require an incredible level of skill. Maybe your conscience just got the better of you."

Rainbow Dash was laughing loudly. "He he he! Hey Trixie! Just as well you got yourself an apple for the teacher, 'cause you just got schooled!"

"Oh yes, you technicolor trollop?" Trixie sneered. "Maybe you think you can show me something worth my time?"

"Ha, I know so!" Dash took off, and pulled off her Rainbow Road stunt. At the end, surrounded by a sparkling rainbow corona, she posed and stated, "They don't call me Rainbow, and Dash, for nothing!"

"When Trixie is through, the only thing they'll call you is loser." As the stage unicorn grabbed hold of Dash's rainbow, Twilight countered by pushing a thread of magic through her connection to the

elements and into Dash via hers, temporarily giving Dash access to her alicorn form's level of toughness and speed.

This time, as Dash was spun and hauled up into the air, she blasted free at the peak of her loop, coming out of the spin in seconds. Unused to her new level of power, she slammed instantly through the Rainboom barrier and created a rainbow coloured shockwave that spread out over Ponyville.

Dash slammed back down onto the stage like a thunderbolt, grinning madly and punching the air with a hoof. "A Sonic Rainboom! Yeah! That was a rush! I never figured I could use a tornado rather than a power dive to give me the boost I needed!"

"But that wasn't..." Trixie was still stunned. "You were..."

"Awesome, as usual!" Dash grinned, "But I couldn't have done that without your spell. Maybe you aren't so bad after all. Tell you what, call it a draw."

As she flew off stage, Twilight threw another pocket reflector around the cyan pegasus, but this time, Trixie was still so flabbergasted she didn't follow up with another thunderbolt. As Dash landed, Twilight said, "I'm proud of you Dash, the way you handled that. You showed you were the bigger pony, not rubbing her face in it."

The cyan mare rubbed the back of her head, looking slightly bashful. "Aww, after all, she did help me pull off an awesome stunt! Besides I figured if you were trying to avoid a scene, I should help. The truth is, I felt like you were there with me, all the way."

Twilight felt along their connection, and was surprised to find that her tampering had permanently pushed Dash into a slightly more mature state. It was likely she'd be able to trigger a Sonic Rainboom reliably from now on, and might have fewer other problems.

Trixie showed her spells included eavesdropping, as she declaimed, "Aha! You were interfering again!"

Twilight sighed, "Not this again! All that power, all that speed, that was all Dash." The literal truth. "But you're right, I was up there with her all the way. But the only magic I supplied was the magic of friendship." Also true. "You should try it some time."

"Grr! That's it! I demand you come up here and face me yourself!" Trixie exclaimed. "You talk a lot, but I don't see you putting your magic where your mouth is!"

"That would involve me sticking my horn in my mouth. Unhygienic, not to mention physiologically impossible." Twilight mused. "Look, everyone's had a good time, you did show some pretty fine telekinetic control on that rope trick, not to mention grabbing that rainbow, something few unicorns could do. I'm sure Applejack will call her challenge a draw too."

"If you ain't bothered by that sneak attack she pulled sugar-cube, I'll be happy to." Applejack responded.

"You see? Call it quits, and everyone goes home happy."

"Stop being so... so... reasonable!" Trixie ranted. "I want a proper challenge, and that means you!"

Spike called out. "It's about time! Go on Twilight, show her what a real unicorn can do!"

"Spike, I really don't want to do this." Twilight said, but he wasn't the only one. A lot of the crowd were with him. She cancelled her X-Ray conversion spell, and stepped forward.

"Very well, if this is the only way we can resolve this, I guess I have to. Guys, I hope you won't think I'm showing off, but she seems immune to reason, so it may be the only way to get through to her is to beat her at her own game."

She stepped up on the stage. "Okay, shall we get on with it?"

Trixie sneered again. "First, I want to know who I have the pleasure of beating today."

"The name's Twilight Sparkle, I run the local branch library and study magic."

"Ha! A bookworm egghead! There is no way you can match the amazing, show-stopping ability of the Great and Powerful Trixie!"

"If you say so." Twilight shrugged.

"Watch in awe, as I draw on my vast magical power..." Her horn glowed fiercely, and the stage started to creak. She started to sweat, and the whole wagon lifted up into the air several hoof lengths to the oohs and ahhs of the crowd. "... do you give up?"

Twilight nodded approvingly. "That is pretty impressive. Very few unicorns can levitate this much mass."

Her own horn glowed and the entire platform shot up another dozen feet. Then it started to rotate until it was inverted, with the two of them standing on the underside. "I just happen to be one of them."

Trixie was so surprised, her horn's glow faltered, but the platform stayed steady as a rock. She gasped and looked down in fear when she realised what she'd done, but she was still stood on the stage as normal, even if the sky was underneath her and the ground overhead. "How..."

"Reverse gravity spell. Never know when you might need it." Trixie looked ill, and Twilight took pity on her, returning the wagon to the ground, the right way up.

Trixie recovered herself. "So, you have some small skills after all, but can you do this?"

A bunch of flowers appeared hovering in front of her, and streamers of flags burst forth from within them, swirling around Trixie in colourful, ever-changing patterns.

"Nice manifestation. It's so real I can even smell the scent!" Twilight said approvingly. "How about adding these."

Butterflies started appearing among the streamers, giant monarchs, tiger moths, fritillaries, all weaving in and out, wings iridescent in the sunlight. They perched on Trixie's flowers, almost covering them. She'd considered summoning parasprites, but had decided that would be too mean spirited. The trick was to beat Trixie without embarrassing her too badly. "Manifestations, not simply summoned."

The distinction might be lost on the audience, but Trixie should know manifesting animate creatures was harder than for plants or non-living flags. Trixie's items vanished, and she cried out, "Very well then! Try to match these!"

A spectacular fireworks display appeared overhead, flashing and sparkling.

"So, Evocation next?" Twilight asked. "Fire, and we've already seen you do lightning. How about water then?"

Hogwarts had been fascinating, and broadened her horizons. Adapting the Agumenti spell had been a simple enough project. A jet of water spouted from her horn, spraying out in a fountain. It puddled neatly around her in a ring, and rose up, forming into the shape of a pegasus which started to trot around the stage.

"Cold is good too!" A carefully shaped Cone of Cold froze it in place, rearing with it's wings outstretched.

"I notice you didn't try to do fire!" Trixie said, dismissively. "What's wrong? Too hot for you to handle?"

The statue exploded outwards, and in it's place was a similar shape made of fire, which flapped it's wings and rose into the air, leaving behind hoof prints burned into the deck. "Not really, I just didn't want to damage your stage."

There was hoof stomping and wild cheers from the audience as they watched the two unicorns match wits and magic. Wire frame illusions of Trixie's were countered by full colour images of Twilight's, her shield spell was tested by a fireball of Trixie's, while an irresistible dance enchantment was cancelled by Twilight's fail-safe spell.

Twilight countered by casting a want it-need it spell on Trixie's hat, but one targeted at Trixie alone, which led to an amusing scene of Trixie hugging her hat to herself, stroking it and calling it 'my precious'. Finally, a fed up Trixie conjured chains and a box and bound her in it, locking it with many locks, which did no good, as Twilight was still able to teleport.

In return, when Twilight reappeared, she decide to show off a spell she'd figured out from something she'd heard human magicians did. A box appeared around Trixie's body, her head poking from one end, her tail from the other, and her legs sticking out the bottom. It was supported by two wheeled stands, and split into two sections, each with the sides cut out to show Trixie's body was still inside.

Twilight cast a paired dimensional portal along the centre, then conjured two wooden dividers that dropped into place between the halves, to the shock of both the crowd and Trixie. Twilight pulled the halves apart and spun them so Trixie was looking at her own tail. "You might want to add this to your act."

"I can't..." Trixie slumped. "... I surrender! Put me back together! Please!"

"Okay." Twilight reversed things and Trixie was soon back in one piece. The stage unicorn turned to the crowd. "The Great and Powerful... That is all for today. The show is over!"

There were groans and cries of more, but her friends helped get the crowd moving.

Trixie was looking at Twilight as if for the first time. "Who are you, really?"

"Exactly who I said I was. Though I may not have mentioned that before I came to do research here in Ponyville, I was a student at Princess Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns. Princess Celestia's own student actually."

The blue unicorn slumped on the floor of the stage. "You tricked me! All the way from the beginning. Now I'll never be able to show my face in Ponyville again!"

Spike had come up on stage and added, "Yeah, you really showed her Twilight!"

Twilight frowned. "That was never my intention. I kept on offering you a way out, and I meant it. If you'd been willing to let things lie, we could have all walked away happy. Besides, all anyone will remember tomorrow was that the two of us put on a great show. Anyway, I would genuinely like to study your techniques. You're self taught?"

She knew the answer, having gotten Trixie very drunk on Applejack's best cider in a previous loop. Trixie was just as talkative in her cups, if not more so than usual. However, all she got right now was a nod.

"Then maybe an egghead bookworm can help you fill in the gaps. I'm sure you could learn that 'Dividing a pony in two' effect for a start. It's just a pair of linked dimensional portals. I'm sure you could use it in your act."

"Why are you being so nice to me?" Trixie asked, and Spike echoed it. "You know I was trying to show up you and your friends."

"I already told you, you don't need to make others look small to make yourself look big. You're better than that. Princess Celestia sent me here to study the magic of friendship, and that's the most powerful magic of all. So which is the better option? To humiliate you and send you packing, a laughing stock? Or to help you become better, become something more, and hopefully gain the friendship of a talented unicorn in return?"

"You'd do that for me?"

"Uh... yes!" Twilight's expression made it clear that her hesitation was purely for effect. "I love my friends, and I love spending time with them, but I can't really talk about my studies with them. In Canterlot, I spent all my time studying, and no time making friends, and it's only now that I realise what I missed out on. The only ponies I can really talk to about my magic studies are the Princesses. Well, Luna and Celestia, anyway."

"You know... oh, you said didn't you. But what about Princess Luna?"

"I helped her out a while back. We've stayed in touch."

Spike snorted. "For 'helped out' try freed her from Nightmare Moon and saved all Equestria from eternal night! She's also the Bearer of the Element of Magic."

"Spike!" Twilight huffed. "It was a team effort, and besides there was a whole destiny thing going on. I don't make a big thing about it, some of the other Bearers would die from the attention. So I'd ask you not to spread it around. I just want to be let alone to be with my friends and do my research. So, the offer's open..."

Trixie was wide-eyed. "You are an unnatural pony, Twilight Sparkle. You have the ears of the Princesses, and you could be one of the most famous ponies in Equestria, nay, the world! But you are happy to live here, in this village, almost unknown."

"Different harmonies for different ponies. I know you'd enjoy the fame, but I wouldn't."

Trixie hung her head. "The Contrite and Eager to Learn Trixie would be only too glad to study with you."

Trixie had spent several hours with Twilight, running through some theoretical basics, and as a reward, getting taught the portal spell Twilight had used. She'd returned to her wagon, and Twilight was just finishing off her nightly observations. Her plan had been a stunning success, and she only hoped that Trixie would end up being aware of the loops.

She'd felt a new bond of friendship forming, still weak and nascent, so the possibility existed. As the local anchor, she seemed to affect which ponies were able to loop, and friendship definitely had something to do with it. However, there was something niggling at her, like an un-ticked box on her check-list.

A roar suddenly reminded her, and a quick glance from her vantage point on the observation deck confirmed it. She winked down to the ground and kicked in some alicorn speed to head towards where the Ursa Minor was heading for Ponyville. Hopefully she could get there before... There was a crunch in the distance as the Ursa Minor stepped on Trixie's wagon. She saw Spike approaching and scooped him up en passant.

"Twilight, we've got a..."

"I know, I saw."



She skidded to a stop as Snips and Snails egged the unicorn on. She saw Trixie take her stand with the Ursa roaring in her face, and say, "Uh, okay, stand back!"

Trixie's rope trick failed as Twilight knew it would, but by that time she was up alongside the other unicorn. "Huh, you don't see that every day. Need some help?"

"Uh uh!" Snips called out. "She's the Great and Powerful Trixie!"

"Yeah! She defeated an Ursa Major all by herself, she doesn't need your help!" Snails added.

"Yes! Yes, I do I do I do!" Trixie exclaimed. "I just made that story up to make myself look better! No-one can vanquish an Ursa Major!"

"Made it up?" Snips and Snails chorused freaking out in stereo.

"Then it's just as well that's an Ursa Minor, a baby."

"That's a baby?" Trixie squeaked.

"Yep, looks cranky too. Someone must have woken it up and brought it here. But that would require a combination of insane luck and abject stupidity bordering on the imbecilic!"

Spike just pointed at Snips and Snails, while the Ursa, clearly feeling left out of the conversation, brought it's head down and roared again.

Twilight sighed rather theatrically. "Right... Trixie, ready for a practical exam?"

Her horn glowed and she cast the lullaby spell, flaring her magic so it touched Trixie through her still weak friendship link, letting her feel the spell weave. "Feel that? Think you can take over?"

The music started to affect the Ursa, and it stopped roaring.

"Yes, but what are we doing?" Trixie's magic flowed out, taking over as the Ursa's eyelids drooped.

"Sonic enchantment, a number 16. Your story made me curious, so I did some research. It looks like some spirit, but it's actually a magical beast, though it does have an astral sub-type. That means it's toughness and strength are off the charts, so direct physical attacks won't cut it.

"It also has a degree of resistance to energy type magic attacks, and some general spell resistance. However, it's will isn't so hot. So enchantment and illusion spells work best, and using a sonic medium rather than a direct casting makes it harder for the spell resistance to stop."

The Ursa's eyelids were drooping, and it started to sway. "Okay, if you can keep it pacified, I'll get it back where it

belongs."

Trixie's eyes widened, "You can't mean..."

The Ursa started to topple over, and Twilight caught it with her magic. With Trixie maintaining the lullaby, she didn't need to give it a bottle. Admittedly, she could have done it all by herself, but she was trying to avoid showing too much power.

"Let's go!" Her horn glow intensified, and the Ursa, curled up and looking almost cute, was lofted over the rooftops in the grip of Twilight's power. "Manifest one of those clouds down on the ground, okay?"

Trixie dropped the lullaby for a second to manifest a storm cloud, then caught it and restarted it before it had faded completely. Twilight's horn pulsed, and their hooves glow. She jumped up onto the cloud. "Now hop on. Cloud walking spell."

Trixie climbed on more gingerly, and tested the soft but supporting cloud underfoot. "Good, guide us after the Ursa."

The Ursa was delivered back to its cave, and the trio returned on Trixie's cloud. Many of the ponies of Ponyville were up and about, including her friends. Trixie couldn't resist finishing off the music with a triumphant little flourish.

"Whoo!" "Unbelievable!" "Amazing!" "Trixie did vanquish the Ursa Major." "Yay for Trixie!"

Twilight jumped down alongside Trixie, but said nothing. For a moment the other unicorn posed proudly, head high, then glanced aside at Twilight and relaxed into a more normal posture and sighed.

"I may have... exaggerated a bit on stage for effect. The Great and Powerful Trixie is not quite that great and powerful. Trixie may have helped, but it was Twilight who lead the way, and did most of the work."

Twilight grinned. This was beyond her best expectations. "It was a team effort, and what she doesn't say is that she was ready to take it on alone until I showed up."

"Whoee!" Applejack exclaimed. "And there I was figuring she was all hat and no cattle. I'm sure sorry, Miss Trixie. I take my hat off to you, miss. Any-pony who can impress Twilight is a good apple in my book."

"Thank you!" Trixie looked genuinely pleased and happy until she saw... "My wagon!"

Twilight gave Snips and Snails a frown. "I think you owe Trixie a major apology!"

"Yeah, an Ursa Major one!" Spike quipped.

"We're sorry oh great and powerful one!" "We just wanted to see some awesome magic!" "And the way you and Twilight vanquished it was awesome!"

The two colts prostrated themselves in front of Trixie. "We deserve whatever punishment you give us."

Trixie glowered at them for a moment, then glanced over at Twilight again and smirked. "Very well, you can be my assistants for my show, when my wagon's fixed. I have some new tricks, experimental ones, that I want to try out."

"Yes, oh great and powerful one!" "Cool!" It seemed this particular punishment didn't hold any great fear for the pair.

"Actually, Trixie, if you're up for another new spell, maybe we can do something about that." Twilight stepped over beside her.

"But look at it, I'll have to utterly rebuild it!"

"Not necessarily." Actually, Twilight felt bad about it. If she hadn't gotten distracted training Trixie, she could have headed this off. "While the bonds between ponies are strongest, you can love and care for other things too. Your cart wasn't always wrecked. Envision it in your mind, as it was when it was brand new. Smell the fresh paint, the wood, see the stage, the decorations... Do you have it well in mind?"

"Yes..." Trixie was actually starting to tear up.

"Good, now push that image into your magic, and push it into the wreckage. Tell it to go back to the way it was."

A beam of lavender energy blasted from Trixie's horn, and the pieces of the wrecked wagon were thrown into the air, to swirl around in a vortex of energy. They fused together, shards and splinters slotting seamlessly into place, and eventually the spinning slowed down to reveal a fully restored wagon, shining in the moonlight to the awe of the crowd.

"Oh, thank you Twilight!" Trixie surprised the other unicorn by giving her a hug.

"You did all the work." Twilight gave an honest smile. Now this was a better way to end up than having Trixie running off, swearing vengeance. "I'm guessing Pinkie will have a 'you vanquished an Ursa Minor' party before too long."

"Pinkie?"

"You'll see..." she grinned.

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><p>5.4: "Turning the Tables" (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

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><p>Twilight awoke staring at her usual reference book. Her local memories cut in, and she decided this was pretty much a vanilla loop. She reached out to check something and found that Princess Celestia hadn't looped, not unexpected. She'd decided the next opportunity she got to prank the Princess and this was it.<p>

She was well aware of Celestia's habit of using pranks to teach life lessons, and had decided to turn the tables for once. The Princess had left a lot of things to chance in the way she'd manoeuvred Twilight into defeating Nightmare Moon, and this loop Twilight was going to call her on it.

She stowed the book and headed for her study. On the way, as always, she met Twinkleshine and her friends, as normal.

"There you are, Twilight! Moondancer is having a little get-together in the west castle courtyard. You wanna come?"

Twilight gave a pleasant smile. "I'd love to. But I have to study right now. I 'll do my best to get over there later."

Leaving the stunned ponies behind, she smirked. The game was afoot.

Twinkleshine finally managed to close her open mouth. "Did Twilight Sparkle just accept a party invitation?"

Carefully entering the tower room that was her study, she avoided bouncing Spike off the walls and wrecking his gift. "Hi Spike! For me? You shouldn't have."

"It's for Moondancerâ€|" The little dragon looked at her oddly.

"Oh, that party they were talking about?" She pretended to give the matter some thought.

"You know I don't normally have time for that sort of thingâ€|." Seeing Spike's tail droop, she added. "But I guess there's nothing time critical about a bunch of ancient legends. Okay, Spike take a letter."

'Dear Princess Celestia,

I'm writing to you to request continued access to the restricted archive. As you know as part of my continuing studies on pony magic I have been working on a research project on ancient legends. I had hoped to complete it before the Summer Sun Celebration, but my friend and companion Spike wishes to go to a party being held by Moondancer this evening. As his guardian, I feel that I should go with him. Of course, then there will be the preparations for Summer Sun Celebration, and it's likely to be impossible to get any work done until after that.

As you know, my studies are my paramount concern, and I don't want you to think I'm making light of the honour you gave me in making me your student, or the unique opportunities for study you've provided me. However Spike is important to me too, and putting aside my studies for one night is a small thing compared to making him happy.

Your faithful student,

Twilight Sparkle.'

Spike had stopped writing half way through, as flabbergasted as the students earlier. "You'd do that? For me?"

Twilight felt genuinely shocked and sorry at his surprise. Had she really been so insensitive in the base timeline? "Of course! You're my number one assistant, and my best friend. And if you're that surprised by the fact, then this is long overdue!"

She repeated her message so Spike could write it down, and got him to send it. Of course, now she'd made the commitment, she realised it was something she should have done long ago. Awake or not, Spike deserved it, and one of the few things she'd never done was actually gone to that party.

She was very interested to see how the Princess would react. Without Twilight finding the Mare in the Moon prophecy on her own, she'd be in the position of having to either order her to continue her studies, which would then make it impossible to do the whole 'stop reading those stuffy books and make some friends' line, or find some other way to guide her to the same end.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

This set's a bit unusual, because there's only four of them. That's because Stainless Steel Fox from on here provided one ridiculously long one and one somewhat shorter one. So thank you to him.

(Go read his fics, they're very good.)

## 6. Chapter 6

Caution - this loop (6.1) is probably the worst in the entire compilation, almost certainly the worst by me. It's poorly done, has misconceptions, has outright mistakes, and generally speaking is rubbish. Do NOT rely on it for an accurate impression of the setting it crosses with; indeed, go read that setting and decide for yourself.

I'm keeping it here only to remind myself, in the future, that I can write absolute tat. So I should try not to.

### 6.1

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight blinked awake. "Oh. Hmmm, large wagon stuffed with booksâ€¦ ooh, maybe I'm replacing Trixie this Loop. That might be fun-"<p>

At that point, the Loop memories arrived.

"WHAT?" The shout almost shook the wagon. "Okay, no. No way in Tartarus am I going along with this loop."

Luna being the reigning Princess? Fine. That had happened before.

Trixie, not her, being the Element of Magic? Entirely sensible. No problems there.

But her being obsessive about the technical definition of magic?  
Having grown up nearly friendless, with Shining apparently having  
taken no hoof in her life?

\_Like. Buck.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Hi."<p>

Trixie, Element of Magic and Student of Princess Luna, turned. "What  
is it?"

"Oh, well, I'm Twilight Sparkle. Kind of a fan, actually, but anyway  
â€" I had a question. Those Elements of Harmony? Ever tried setting  
them to broad beam?"

Trixie frowned. "Do what?"

"Broad beam. As per the paper by Lucky Strike in seven-thirty-four,  
any harmonic effect spell can be set to a number of modes from narrow  
beam to continent cleanse, as they're refinements of the original  
area-burst effect made use of by Clover, Pansy and Cookie at the  
Founding." Twilight rattled off magical formulae, parading out  
academic papers in front of the increasingly bewildered Trixie.  
"â€|so if you induce a deliberate harmonic of 14 hertz on the primary  
element and 15-20 inclusive on the others, it should produce a  
cresting-wave form which spreads to cover an area of reasonable size,  
and hence catch any quiescent or otherwise unnoticed corruption of  
any type in the area. And, well, better safe than sorry and all  
that."

"â€|sorry, did you have a point?" Trixie asked. "I lost track less  
than half way into that."

"But I thought you were Princess Luna's special student?" Twilight  
asked, puzzled. "This stuff is final year optional material at the  
academy, admittedly, but I read the syllabus and it's on one of the  
most often taken secondary modules. Youâ€| didn't take it?"

"No." Trixie replied. "I focused more on practical applications of  
magic, thank you."

"Huh." Twilight frowned. "That's actually very disappointing. Well,  
sorry to trouble you." With a flash, Twilight disappeared, leaving  
her notes and papers.

Trixie blinked. \_I didn't even feel a magical signature from that  
teleportâ€| it just happened.\_

Maybe this Twilight \_was\_ onto somethingâ€| it couldn't hurt to look,  
she supposedâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|so, long story short, there's a big difference between  
working hard and actively trying to push out all competitors."  
Twilight explained to Applejack. "It's just not conducive to good  
will, if nothing else."<p>

"Well, that explains a whole lot." Applejack said, looking into the middle distance. "If they'd only gone and told me that instead of carryin' on about that ah was wrong, ah'd have had a lot better idea what they were after tryin' to say."

Twilight shrugged. "Glad to help."

\* \* \*

><p>"What the hell are you doing asleep!"<p>

Dash jerked awake, and looked over to see a purple pegasus with her forelegs crossed, hovering next to the cloud.

"Who are-"

"You're Rainbow Dash, right?"

"Yes!" Dash replied, confused. "Why?"

"What did you get your cutie mark for, sleeping? You're an athlete, not a lazybones!"

Stung, Dash made a grab for her tormenter, who slipped easily out of the way. "Hey, get back here!"

"You're supposed to be fast." The pegasus stuck her tongue out. "Make me."

Seeing red, Dash launched herself forwards.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight grinned, pumping her wings hard. This version of Dash was a layabout, which made frankly <em>no<em> sense given she still had the rainbow-thunderbolt cutie mark indicating that she'd broken the sound barrier in the past. Twilight had the sense her friend had slipped into a destructive spiral at some point in the past, like Applejack and the others.

And when Dash went into a destructive spiral, there was precisely one way to get her out of it.

Going into a spin, Twilight shaped the weather magic around her, then flared her wings and dropped abruptly out of the chase. Dash, startled, overshot and kept going â€" into a horizontal tail wind Twilight had set up.

BOOM.

"My work here is done." Twilight grinned, transitioning through alicorn and back to unicorn. "Now, where's Fluttershyâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>"Why are we doing this?" Lyra asked.<p>

Trixie sighed, rubbing her temples. "Look, some unicorn came up to me and handed me this ridiculously detailed â€" like, thesis length â€"

documentation on how harmony based effects work, and she seemed really disappointed I couldn't follow it. Like I'd let her down, or something. I just thought Iâ€¦ I didn't want all her work to be in vain, okay?"

Ditzy nodded. "Makes sense!"

"Right." Trixie focused, pulling gently on the thread connected to the Element of Magic. It responded, slightly wilfully at first â€" then there seemed to be an almost audible \_click\_ and it fell into place.

Concentrating hard, she worked in a frequency flutter to each element as it activated. \_Right, that's all of them, now what\_--

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow light chased across the country. Misty shapes, like horses, fled as it approached.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Luna blinked. "What the <em>buck<em> was I \_thinking?\_ Of \_course\_ hereditary nobility is a bad idea if you don't give them oversight and let them punish entire towns for a slight! \_Gaah!\_"\_

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight nodded to herself â€" job well done. "I thought so. Celestia's magic is kind of important in keeping the northern barrier intact, so without her we had a serious case of Windigo."<p>

Rarity and Fluttershy were a little more shocked â€" having just got at least a bit used to a Pinkie Pie Party, the rush of strangely familiar magic had caused them to drop their cake.

"Oh, that reminds me." Twilight levitated out an orange-chased egg. "This is a phoenix egg I found. Would you mind taking care of it, Fluttershy? I'm sure you'll do fine."

\* \* \*

><p>6.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Marvellous work, Rarity." Sapphire Shores said, looking her new dress over. "I must say, you did <em>excellent<em> work."

Rarity nodded. Every time, the dress for Sapphire was different. No coasting for \_this\_ fashion designer!

"Oh, that reminds me," the diva continued. "I was having a talk with one of your friends outside, and she made the most marvellous suggestion. I'd like to have at least fifty-two dresses, please. By next week if possible."

Rarity's eyes bulged beneath her mane. "\_How\_ many?"

"Fifty two. Oh, and they each have to be made of a single, different



material. Must rush, so I'll be back for them in a week." Sapphire said, and left before Rarity could close her gaping jaw.

Twilight came in, looking over her shoulder at the departing fashion icon. "Sorry, Rarity. I didn't think she'd actually do it."

"No, this isâ€¦ isâ€¦ perfect!" Rarity gasped, and began moving things around. "Right, I needâ€¦ let's seeâ€¦ I need the element of Generosity. Magical healing does away with the need for sleep, right?"

"I-" Twilight cut off her own sentence, as she watched Rarity dashing around and picking up more and more objects in her TK. "Did she say how much she'd pay?"

"Well, noâ€¦" the levitating tools slowed for a moment, then accelerated again. "But who cares! This shall be my crowning achievement!" Rarity summoned the Element of Generosity, and activated its secondary healing power. "To work!"

"Right, you seem to have things under control." Twilight said brightly, backing out of the door. "Let me know if you need anything."

\* \* \*

><p>"Okayâ€¦" Rarity ticked off, eyes shining. "Silk, cotton, flax, linen, satin, velvet, lycra, hay, that newfangled nylonâ€¦ oh, of course, wool! I must not forget wool!" Two knitting needles levitated into the air, and got to work knitting a dress. "I have to <em>emphasize</em> the unique qualities of each material, not downplay themâ€¦"

She frowned. "Does Cashmere count as a kind of wool? I don't know, how frustrating! Oh, it must be, I'll make it very distinctive!"

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetie Belle held her pillow over her ears. Rarity was <em>still</em> going! It had been three days!

Eventually she reached a decision. "Hey, Sis, I'm going to go sleep over at Applebloom's house!"

"Okay!" Rarity replied, distractedly. "Ask Twilight to take you!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Thirty-one." Rarity said, eyes drooping. "And I can't think of <em>any</em> fabric I've missed."

Then an idea came to her. "Unlessâ€¦ it doesn't have to be fabric, exactlyâ€¦"

She turned the taps on in the bathtub, letting them run with the plug in while she cleared more space in the central room of the boutique. Once there was most of a tub full of water ready, she drew it out in a shimmering sheet and applied Oerth magic to it.

\_Shrink Item.\_

The tub full of water compacted to a small sheet of glittering, deep blue, translucent cloth. It gradually grew as more water was directed into it, and Rarity pondered if maybe she could mix in fresh water and salt water into the resultant outfit.

"Oh, and if there's water, then there simply \_has\_ to be \_fire!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes, kicking water down on the fire.  
"Rarity, you could have at least put the thing out before you leftâ€|"<p>

"Be fair." Twilight replied. "She's not slept in, what, five days? Even the Element of Generosity can only do so much to prevent tiredness."

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|Rarity?"<p>

Twilight knocked on the door. No reply.

"Rarity!"

Eventually, she decided there was nothing for it and opened the door telekinetically. There was a \_flumph\_ as a dozen outfits landed on her, driven out by the sheer pressure.

"Pleh." Shaking her head, she kicked herself free, rolled upright and teleported into the boutique.

"Rarity?"

A mumbled reply came from upstairs. Twilight followed it, stepping over the piles of clothes. They started off fairly normal, but got more and more outlandish as she moved into the building. Just in the ones Twilight stepped over, there was a translucent ball gown that looked like it was made of water â€" and, it would seem, \_was\_â€| a piece made of condensed moonlight, and how Rarity had pulled \_that\_ off Twilight had no idea, and â€| â€|

Twilight stopped. "That's a barrier jacket. Those are made of solid \_magic\_. Wow, she really is pulling some special stuff off. Ooh, diamond chain mailâ€|"

Shaking her head, she got back on task. She'd counted fifty-three on the ground floor, and another two on the stairs (extruded sapphire scales bound together by wafer-thin sapphire sheets, all with an ocean motif, and a glittering gold foil outfit that \_had\_ to be held together by magic.)

"Twilight." Rarity's exhausted voice came from her room. "Would it be proper for me to make the last one out of my own feathers, or is that a bit gauche? I can't tell any more."

Rounding the corner, Twilight looked in. Rarity was staring at herself in a mirror, deep bags under her eyes and mane unkempt. And she had wings.

"Rarity, how long is it since you slept?"

The alicorn blinked slowly. "â€|I don't remember. I think it got dark six times but I didn't go to sleep. Too much work. Too many ideas. Just one left."

Twilight facehoofed. "Rarity, you're an alicorn."

"Am I?" Rarity said, looking back at herself. "Huh. Wings. Must be where the feathers came from."

"Get some sleep, Rarity." Twilight said gently. "You lost count â€| you've done fifty-five. More than enough."

"â€|oh. Okay." The couch zipped in out of nowhere, and Rarity collapsed onto it.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well?" Dash asked.<p>

Twilight shot her a grin. "It worked, all right."

The two sat in companionable silence, watching as Sapphire Shores and her assistants went ga-ga over every single outfit they got out of the building.

After a while, Fluttershy joined them. "I heard from Applejack. Rarity really is something, isn't she?"

"You all are." Twilight countered. "I'd say I was, too, but that's boasting."

"I'll say it for you!" Dash volunteered. "So long as you do the same for me."

"Sounds like a deal."

Fluttershy raised a hoof. "Uhâ€| how long is Rarity going to be asleep? Shouldn't we be there when she wakes up?"

"Don't worry." Twilight replied, with a grin. "I think we'll know."

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|eeeeeeeeeeEEEEEEEE! OH. MY. GOSH!"<p>

Applejack looked up from her work. "Yep, ah'd say she's awake."

\* \* \*

><p>6.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie looked around. "Ooh, wow, human people. Only, not human people. They've got pointier ears. Hi!"<p>

A harsh-faced humanoid looked her over. "â€|okay, what am I on?"

"Silly, you're not on anything! Except a planet. But I know what you're going to be in!" Pinkie reached into her mane, and pulled. Out came a large, cartoonish bomb with a fizzing fuse. "Party petard armed! Firework in the hole!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stumbled, having Awoken mid-trot. Getting back into the rhythm of things, she reached out with her supernatural senses. "Okayâ€| habitable planet, unoccupiedâ€| hugely stormy space, lots of psychic-magic energy everywhereâ€| wow, but I can't really tell where I amâ€|"<p>

There was a small positive signal on her Element, though. The Element of Laughter was active, and it was Pinkie's one. "Wonder where she is," Twilight said, sitting down on the surface of the world that would later be known as Macharia.

\* \* \*

><p>"No, no, no!" Pinkie said, shaking her head. "That is <em>NOT<em> how you do a party!"

Two of the figures looked belligerent, and the third turned from a (thankfully as-yet unused) set of knives. "Oh? What would you know about it?"

"Let me show you!" Pinkie grinned. "Hey, hand these out." Reaching into her mane again, she pulled out a huge number of sealed envelopes. "Use that cool glowy-walky thing!"

"The web way," one of them deadpanned.

"Yeah, that!"

\* \* \*

><p>Eldarad Ulthuan tripped over his own cloak and fell face down on the floor.<p>

That was when he realized two things. The first was that being the butt of a joke wasn't very fun. And the second was that it was time to get out of Eldar space right now.

\* \* \*

><p>The Emperor looked to the heavens. By fire and blood and steel he had unified humanity, and then the three Chaos Gods had cast his sons into the depths of space. But there were ripples in the Warp. The long storms were about to clear, and-<p>

Everything went pink.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hiya Twilight!"<p>

Twilight startled awake. "Whâ€ Pinkie!" Her friend was standing upside down on thin air, looking at her with a big grinâ€ and a hornâ€ and wings.

\_Oh, buck.\_ Her mind calmly delivered. \_Pinkie's ascended\_.

"Yeah, it's me! Hey, I ran into some nasty stern people who didn't know how to party. But I showed them \_exactly\_ how to party!" Pinkie bounced upside down. "They \_all\_ really, really liked my party!"

Twilight counted under her breath. She'd turned up in this Loop about two years ago, soâ€ and it all looked horribly familiar all of a suddenâ€

"Pinkie," she asked, carefully. "Did you just hold a year-long party for an entire starfaring civilization?"

"Yep!" Pinkie replied.

"Great. Well, I suppose that makes sense. Congratulations, you have actually topped the list of strangest things we've ever replaced in a Loop." True to form, Twilight got out a list. She went past things like \_Rarity â€ Marigold Heavenly Nostrils\_ and \_All of us â€ The Power Rangers\_, and then slowed down at the very end of the list. Plucking a quill and ink out of the air, she wrote on a new entry. \_"Pinkie Pie â€ Slaanesh.\_ Right. Well, this universe is FUBAR nowâ€ feel like messing with the Chaos Gods?"

Pinkie's smile shone. "DO I?"

\* \* \*

><p>\*\*from the memoirs of Ciaphas Cain\*\* (via Nikas)<p>

"Jurgen, were did you get that cake?"

My aide pointed behind me, "The pink pony brought it for the party."

"What part..." I turned and beheld it, her. A pink, or rather \*\*PINK\*\* hide that would glow in the deepest starless space. Incredibly wide blue eyes. If one could be said to drown in eyes, these could sink Holy Terra without a trace. The Xeno had a form that could be considered Equine, if only in a child's scribblings. Crowned by wings and a spiral horn there was no doubt, she was Pinkamena Diane Pie, Warp Goddess of Laughter and Celebration.

Once again poorly imitating a proud Commissar of the Imperium I did my duty, and accepted the plate with a piece of cake upon it from her forelimbs. (1) She gave a sudden gasp as I saw recognition in her alien eyes.

"I know you!" she accused, pointing one flat ended forelimb at me, her wings flapping to get her to eye level with me. I readied to do my pitiful best to sell my life dearly for the Emperor. I was completely taken by surprise by the form of her attack.

Her eyes glittered with twinkling stars as she blurted out "You're \*\*CANDY CANE, HERO OF THE IMPERIUM\*\*! Oh, I never got to throw a

'Megabestest hero ever party! Just a minute, I have to call in the orbital party support!"

\* \* \*

><p>(1) How a Xeno without grasping appendages managed to hold the plate is best left unconsidered. Several Inquistors of the Ordo Xenos have gone mad trying.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>6.4 (from Mandemon)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"And here comes Sovereign!" Shepard said, just as the massive Reaper's hologram appeared. " Seriously, I can't believe you didn't meet him during your turn."<p>

"Wow, so you are dealing with this thing?" Twilight asked, looking up to the Reaper. "And yeah, we never even heard of him. Only thing weird in that loop was that we never found Pinkie."

"Him and several thousand more." Shepard scratched the back of his neck. "Though he's kinda cool dude once you get to know him, actually. Yo Sov, how are the bitches?"

"Wazzup Shep... OH FUCK NO!" Sovereign's voice, while originally a menacing yet relaxed tone, suddenly devolved into panicked screams.

"Oookay... that was new." Shepard said.

"NO! NO NONONONONONONONO! NO!  
IFYOUAREHERETHEPINKONEISHEREANDIFTHEPINKONEISHERES  
HEWILLOHGODIAMSOFOUCKEDFUUCKFUUCKFUUCKFUUCK-"

"Oh! Hey Sovvy!" Pinkie Pie said cheerfully and waved her hoof, climbing from the ducts.

"FUCK THIS SHIT!" Sovereign's voice boomed and the hologram disappeared.

After a startled pause, Joker contacted Shepard. "Uh, Shepard, I don't know what you did, but the big dreadnought? I think it just beat the speed of Mass Relays. It pulled an impossible turn and sped away."

"Right Joker, stand by." Shepard said to the comm before turning to Pinkie Pie. "Want to explain?"

"Oh, there was this one loop, you remember, where we replaced Shepard and co, and you became Twipard and Dash became Darrus and I ended up in Geth space and I met Sovvy and I talked with Sovvy and Sovvy said it was ancient and never had a birthday party and it was really sad and we had parties and Geth were really nice and then he mentioned his friends and-

"Oh... that one." Twilight said. "I was kinda wondering why the heck you were so worried about these Reapers, since we never met them

during our loopâ€|"

"...Tali, can you figure out a way to clone Pinkie? We could use her to blackmail Sovvy next time." Shepard said, turning to Tali who was barely holding her laughter.

\* \* \*

><p>6.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?" Pinkie said, suspiciously.<p>

"Yes?" Twilight replied.

"How come you aren't freaking out?"

Twilight shrugged, squashing to an inch's thickness under a colossal anvil and bouncing back moments later with a \_sproi-i-i-ing\_. "Maybe I'm just a natural."

"Nice work, guys!" Bugs Bunny said. "Especially you, Twilight."

Pinkie simmered.

\* \* \*

><p>"Aha!" Pinkie shouted. "I know what's happened!"<p>

Twilight looked innocent. "Yes?"

"You've been to Toon University before!"

"â€|alright, guilty as charged." Ten thousand volts ran through both of them, causing an interesting light display. "Strange Loop, that was, actually â€" the Toon university was run by Discord out of White Tail Woods."

Pinkie looked sad. "I'd have loved that one!"

"Yeah." Twilight tossed her head. "At least the non looping you graduated top of the class."

\* \* \*

><p>6.6 - Disney (from Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Okay, this was a weird one, definitely a wild solo loop. Twilight's memories told her she was apparently a feral unicorn who was wandering the world after her old home had been destroyed, a world which apparently contained humans. She was in a forest, which thinned out ahead, and animals were fleeing past her. There was also the sound of what she could now identify as gunshots.<p>

She ran forward to the edge of the woods, which opened out onto a snow-covered meadow, with grass just starting to peek through. Deer

were fleeing, and even as she watched, one of them fell, her young foal racing ahead without seeing it happen. Seeing the hunters getting closer, led by an arrogant looking human with a cleft chin and bulging muscles, she reacted instinctively.

A massive illusion of Spike in his Nightfury form swooped down on them, sending the group fleeing, and under cover of it, she teleported out, reached out to encompass the deer in her teleport, and warped back, deep into the forest. Drawing on her loop as a nurse, she examined the wound. It wasn't fatal, but soon would be.

Fortunately, her fine telekinetic control allowed her to withdraw the bullet, and healing magic cleaned and healed the wound. A foal stumbled across her a few moments later, calling out.

"Mother, where are you?" He came to a splay legged stop on seeing his mother, who was just starting to stir. He dropped down by her and snuggled up, crying.

"Bambiâ€¦ you have to get awayâ€¦" She said weakly.

Twilight realised that they weren't actually speaking in the normal sense, and that this version of unicorn apparently came with the gift of tongues. That was a keeper. "It's alright, you're deep in the forest. I don't think any of those hunters will be coming in here any time soon."

The snow had started up again, but Twilight just put up a low level shield to guide it away. The older deer just looked at her curiously, but the foal, Bambi spoke out. "Gosh, you look funny."

That got Twilight conjuring a mirror to get a first good look at herself. She was her normal colouration, but her body was shaped more like a horse, and scaled as one if the deer were anything to go by. "I'm a unicorn. Your mother was hurt, but she'd going to be alright. You should stay with her. "

Noticing that they were both quite thin, she pulled a bale of hay from her subspace pocket and dropped it by them. She heard rustling, and saw another deer, a stallion with magnificent antlers approaching and decided that she could leave them alone. Besides, she'd thrown out an alarm spell, and it had just tripped. It appeared one of the hunters hadn't been scared off, at least not far enough.

She teleported to near his location and stepped out in front of him, glaring.

"I thought I saw something in the meadow. What a magnificent beast! You will make a fine trophy for the wall of the inn!"

Whatever else was wrong with him, there was no problem with his reflexes, and he brought his musket up to his shoulder and fired in a single smooth motion.

The bullet came to a dead stop three inches in front of Twilight's chest. "No, I won't."

Her telekinesis lifted him off the floor and held him immobile as she pried the weapon from his hands.



"Hmmm. Muzzle loading, flintlock action, rifled barrel. Basic but useful."

"Give that back! I am Gaston, the finest hunter in the village, and demand you return it, creature!"

A small application of energy made the barrel glow red hot, and her telekinesis quickly twisted it into a pretzel. Cooling it equally quickly, and wrecking the temper of the metal in the process, she dropped it back in his hands.

"There you go. Now, we're going to this village, and I will discuss the proper way to treat a unicorn."

With him still floating along behind her like an impatient balloon, she trotted through the snowstorm in the direction of the other hunters. Gaston kept up a litany composed in equal parts of how awesome he was and what he'd do to her when he got free of her sorcery. He even started singing about it.

She could have shut him up with a silence spell, but his discourse was so illuminating, she let him carry on. He sounded across between Rainbow Dash at her worst, and the Trixie in full boast mode. His musical enumeration of his many 'virtues' confirmed her initial opinion that he was a brutal, bullying thug, with all the grace and charm of a slug—no that was being unfair to slugs.

\* \* \*

><p>6.7 (via Filraen)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>(The Ranma loop that used to be here was incomplete, and has been removed at request of the original author. This is also one of his, which I erroneously concatenated with another of his loops earlier on.)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia,<em>

\_Thanks for letting me know you are awake this loop. As usual, this is my Friendship report for the loops you weren't awake.\_

\_I learned Friendship can come in many shapes and forms. Not long ago I met one of those "human" creatures, another looper, who showed me her ways to do Magic of Friendship. And while I was bit sceptic of the methods at first the stories of the results she told me and the pictures she showed me of how her friends had lived after put my fears to rest. I'd like to request a meeting with you and Princess Luna to compare and contrast the Magic of Friendship used by the human Nanoha Takamachi.\_

\_Your faithful student,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle\_

\_PS: I'm sorry for this report being so short, but as result of a

practical test of her Magic of Friendship the loop ended suddenly, leaving me in that strange pony land (please don't ask me about that loop, I'm still trying to recover from it).\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>6.8 (from Mandemon)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Trinity, New Mexico, 1946<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, let's see if this works. I was quite surprised to see you here. Perhaps this time everything will go well." Einstein said as he made final adjustments to the time machine.<p>

"Don't worry, it will work. I had practice. Let's just hope everything goes well." Twilight replied, standing on the platform..

"Alright, here we go. On 3... 2... 1..."

A flash and Twilight disappeared.

\* \* \*

><p>Landsberg, Germany, 1924<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight watched as a man walked out of prison, looked and whistled, before heading off.<p>

"Herr Hitler."

"Ja? Was ist loss? Ich ha-" The man fell silent when he saw who, or what, had spoken to him.

"Ja... Ich verstehe..." A bright flash of pink light later, history was changed. Again.

\* \* \*

><p>Trinity, New Mexico, 1946<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Another flash and Twilight reappeared.<p>

"Did it work?" She asked right away.

"Yes, and no. Take a look." Einstein said and turned the television on.

"As the chancellor of European Confederacy declared war against United Soviet Socialist Republics to be over, United States has requested aid from EC to aid against the invasion of The Empire of The Rising Sun. After Empire deployed it's Super Fortress on Pacific,

United States have been on defensive. However, recent discoveries indicate, that The Empire is trying to deploy another fortress on Atlantic. Chancellor Hitler had declared that Confederacy would not stand for any attempt to demean human life or freedom and has vowed to bring the Confederacy into the war. Latest polls however, indicate war weariness among-

Einstein turned off the TV.

"Well, we did succeed in making Europe resist Soviets, quite successfully, but we ignored whole other problem, the Japanese. With nobody to stop them, they took quite a large part of East-Asia and are currently trying to knock out United States, who have been preventing them from expanding to Australia or anywhere else."

"Sorry it didn't work so well, I was sure we could prevent a world war." Twilight said, sadly.

"Oh, I've seen worse. The loop where I tried to establish MAD situation among every side went a lot worse. However, I did learn something. Nuclear Winter does not actually happen."

\* \* \*

><p>6.9<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, this is strange." Twilight said, tapping away at a PADD from her pocket universe. "We're on Earth, in the early twenty-first century, and&#124; guys, I think this is the hub universe."<p>

"What's that?" Dash asked, peering over.

Twilight hit three more buttons, and levitated the display so all six of them could watch.

\_"I used to think&#124;\_"

"Huh." Applejack eventually said, as the video of \_Elements of Harmony, part 2\_ ended. "So we're a TV show here?"

"I think \_everyone \_is." Using telekinesis this time, Twilight used the Trek-loop computer to bring up a dozen web pages. How To Train Your Dragon, Naruto, Power Rangers, Neon Genesis Evangelion&#124; they were used to the idea that some Loops were fictional material in other Loops, but this was a \_lot\_ more than usual.

"Okay." Rarity said, tapping her hoof. "What do we do now?"

"I have an idea." Twilight said.

\* \* \*

><p><em>"&#124;by a cosmic coincidence it would take too long to explain, we have ended up here on your Earth. We only have a relatively short time here before we must depart anew, but we feel that we owe it to you, if none other, to tell us how grateful we are.<em>

\_In a way we cannot understand, you may have created us. If that is not the case, then you faithfully recreated us and told our story to millions. So thank you.\_

\_Yours,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle, Pinkie Pie, Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, Rarity and Applejack.\_

\_P.S. please find enclosed some photographs. We're sure you'll like them."\_

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sealed the envelope. "There we go. I'll send it to her in a minute. Anything else we want to do?"<p>

"Ooh!" Pinkie said. "Let's go to fan conventions and pretend to be cosplayers!"

"â€|actually, yeah, that sounds cool." Dash weighed in.

Grinning, Twilight shook her head. "I heard that when Naruto and Sasuke turned up here, they tried to interrogate their own author to force him to answer some tricky questions. Wonder what the other Loopers will think when they heard our main response was a thank-you letter?"

\* \* \*

><p>6.10 (from Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong><span>The power of love<span>\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>The shopkeeper complimented his client. "Ah, you have a keen eye. The Alicorn Amulet is one of the most mysterious and powerful of all the known magical charms. Uh, ah- I'm afraid <em>this<em> isâ€| far too dangerous."

A bag of bits only slightly larger than his head landed on the counter.

"Would you like that gift-wrapped?"

Twilight Sparkle just grinned evilly.

\* \* \*

><p>'Dear Cadence,<p>

I suppose I should be calling you Princess Mi Amore Cadenza now, but I hope you don't mind that I always think of you as Cadence, my foal sitter and one of my favourite ponies in all of Equestria. I should have written before now, but I've been crazy deep in my studies, and I know you're really busy too. I'm ashamed to say this isn't just a

social letter, I need your help really badly. I found an ancient legend about Nightmare Moon. From my research, she isn't just some fantasy figure to appease with sweets on Nightmare Night, she really existed!

The legends say she was Princess Celestia's sister, and once controlled the moon and night, but she turned evil and Princess Celestia locked her away using something called the Elements of Harmony. I haven't been able to find out anything more about these, but they appear to have been a really powerful magic artefact.

Why am I telling you this? Because the same legends say Nightmare Moon will return on the longest day of the thousandth year, the day after tomorrow. There's a superior conjunction of minor moons which will align with our primary moon, and cause an amplification effect. The legend refers to it by saying 'the stars will aid her escape'. Her stated goal was to bring eternal night, so her first action will obviously be to attack Princess Celestia.

I've passed my findings to Princess Celestia, but she's just told me not to worry, and is sending me to oversee the Summer Sun Celebrations in Ponyville. I know I should trust her judgement, but I'm worried that without the Elements of Harmony, and with Nightmare Moon's powers amplified by the conjunction, she might not be able to handle Nightmare Moon on her own.

That's where you come in. I know it's asking a lot, but if you can find a way to visit Ponyville tomorrow and stay for the Summer Sun Celebration, you could be on site to help. In my studies, I've located a magical amplifier called the Alicorn amulet that would boost your powers. It has the side effect of corrupting the user, but I'm certain that with your power of love, and my wide knowledge of spell-craft we can purify it before you use it.

I'll continue to research other avenues as much as my duties allow, but this could be the one chance we have to defeat Nightmare Moon, not that it wouldn't be wonderful just to see you again. Maybe the library in Ponyville has something on these Elements.

Your friend,

Twilight Sparkle.

P.S. Please don't tell Princess Celestia, I am kind of disobeying her. I only hope she'll forgive me.'

\* \* \*

><p>6.11<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The background murmur of voices died away as Princess Twilight, Princess of Magic, stepped up to the podium.<p>

"Equestria is an idea," she began without preamble. "A bold, daring idea, by three ponies long ago. They decided to see if it was possible that a society could last built not upon pragmatism and wariness, but upon trust and friendship.

"Five hundred and fifteen earth ponies, four hundred and ninety-two unicorns, and five hundred and six pegasi first founded this country. They made it a haven for all, regardless of race, breed or species."

Everyone in the plaza already knew this, but such was the reputation of the Princesses that her voice was the only sound in the whole massed square.

"When I and my sisters first came across Equestria, we joined as any other " farmers, shopkeepers, students. We were asked to become the rulers of the country three times. Twice, we refused and the third time, of course, we accepted. But only on condition that we be \_princesses\_, never queens, for the people of Equestria are her true rulers.

"We have ruled long, and " we hope " well, but nothing can last forever and it falls to us all to make plans for the future, even if that future may never come. Accordingly, my sisters and I have discussed the matter at great length, and have decided to each select one champion to bear our symbol."

Twilight stepped back, and Pinkie Pie, Princess of Laughter, replaced her.

"I pick Dissy! Oh, er, Discord of Wizard's Peak!"

A rather startled dragon jumped. "Er me?"

"Yes you, silly!" Pinkie giggled. "Unless you're just pretending to be Dissy, because if you are then no."

The indicated dragon, still looking a bit shocked, walked numbly up to the stage.

Pinkie levitated her Element necklace off her neck and onto Discord's. "There ya go!"

Applejack had already taken the stand. "Ah think the best representative of me'd be Cadance."

\* \* \*

><p>One by one, the six Princesses picked their 'champions'. Discord for Laughter, Cadance for Honesty, Celestia for Loyalty, her sister Luna for Generosity, and Chrysalis of the Changelings for Kindness.<p>

Finally, Twilight retook the stage. "And for my own symbol, the symbol of magic I hereby select Sombra of the Crystal Empire."

Chrysalis looked elated. \_Not surprising,\_ Twilight thought. For some reason, Sombra and Chrysalis just kept being in relationships

It would be interesting to see how this loop played out. All six of those they'd chosen were only about twenty or so. The same age \_they\_ had been the first time they'd taken up their own Elements, in the original Equestria.

Actually, engineering a completely cosmopolitan Equestria had been a fun enough challenge.

\* \* \*

><p>6.12 (via Nikas)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Usagi wanted to cry. She went on this trip with Mamoru to get away from this! Though the locals seemed rather blasé about things as the police evacuated everyone from the monster. A flash showed why as to the crowd's cheers the local senshi showed up. Her outfit lacked the bows of her own, and the frills were a western fringe, more Annie Oakley than Idol Singer. Complete with a small arsenal of guns which the American Magical Girl quickly employed.<p>

The situation was stalemated, and Usagi and Mamoru were looking for a discreet place to change when a pony in a western dress and cowboy boots nudged her aside with a muttered "excuse me". Whirling a lasso she roped the monster, pinning it in place. "Now sugarcube!" the magical mascot yelled.

With a smile Megan shot the current monster with a rainbow charge out of her Winchester to disperse it. She waved to the crowd before she and Applejack shot off. Leaving behind Usagi, who was ranting to her fiancé: why did the gaijin get a useful mascot, while she was stuck with a lazy cat!

\* \* \*

><p>"You realize that I haven't had to do <em>anything<em>?" Twilight asked. "Admittedly, being a spiritual advisor is kind of neatâ€|"

"Just shows Megan's up to the job." Applejack replied calmly.

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack lowered her hat, and spat out the wheat stalk she was chewing. "Mount up Megan, time to show this here badguy how we buck the apples."<p>

Rummaging for a moment, Megan got out a Springfield Carbine and slapped in a round. "You got it, Applejack."

\* \* \*

><p>6.13 (from Namar13766)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked around. "Okay, it's the day before Luna's first Nightmare Night. Any suggestions so that she enjoys it from the get-go instead of canceling it first?"<p>

Fluttershy gave what would have been an uncharacteristic smile for her pre-loop self. "Pinkie and I had an idea..."

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie nodded to Vinyl, who put the record on, and then started cuing in the dancers. If she got this perfectly, it would hit the chorus just as Luna broke the cloud layer.<p>

\_ "It's close to midnightâ€|\_

><em>Something evil's lurkin'in the dark<br>Under the moonlight

>You see a sight that almost stops your heart<br>You try to scream

>But terror takes the sound before you make it<br>You start to freeze

>As horror looks you right between the eyes<br>You're paralyzed\_

'Cause this is thrillerâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>"How did your night out go, Sister?" Celestia asked, as Luna walked up the steps.<p>

"BRILLIANT!" Luna boomed, then flushed and lowered her voice. "The pink one played a song that could have been \_written\_ for Nightmare Night! And I got so. Much. Candy!"

"She's right, you know." Meadowlark muttered around a mouthful of toffee, the guard not missing a step as he followed his principal. "I didn't know there was that much sugar in Equestria."

"Oh, dear." Celestia said, stifling a grin. "That explains the letter I got."

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Dear Princess Celestia.<em>

\_I think I'm having a sugar rush. This is a bit strange because I haven't eaten anything yet, so it must be all the sugar in the air!"\_

\* \* \*

><p>AN: That's another lot done.<p>

If any of the previous loops are continued, I'll try to make it clear.

## 7. Chapter 7

### 7.1

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight!"<p>

Twilight looked around. It was the evening after the formation of the Elements, and the purification of Luna. Since the purple Anchor was planning on experimenting with events at the Gala, she'd done it



effectively as she had in the original time line.

The pink-and-yellow alicorn hovering outside her bedroom window sort of suggested her plans were going to have to change, though.

"Cadence!" she said, quietly but happily. "Hold on." A silence spell manifested around Spike's bed. "Okay, come around to the balcony, I'll let you in."

\* \* \*

><p>"So you're Looping this time?" Twilight asked, levitating over a glass of sparkling water. "It's nice to see you. What's the plan this time?"<p>

"You always let me plan things, Twilight." Cadence said, accepting the drink and sipping it. "That's nice of you."

"Well, it is fairly rare I see you." Twilight reminded her. "I know it seems different from your perspective, but I do have a fair number of lonely Loops."

"I can imagine." After a moment, Cadence changed topics. "Anyway, there's some good news. And I need to ask you for a few favours."

"â€|okay." Twilight answered warily, suddenly suspicious.

"Favours first." Cadence said. "First, I'd like everything right up to my wedding to go exactly the same as it did the first time around. I'm sorry if that's wearing on you, but I'd really like the wedding to go as planned the first time."

"No, it's no hardship." Twilight assured her. "Actually, after the last loop it might be nice to relax a bit."

"Last Loop?" Cadence pried.

"Something very energetic involving giant robots again. Fun, but after a while you just want to relax, you know?" Twilight tapped a hoof. "Though Dash did beat up that Starscream robot in a very impressive wayâ€| anyway. The second thing?"

"Do you know a temporary memory spell?" Cadence asked. "Something that temporarily â€" not permanently â€" prevents a pony from remembering something?"

"Iâ€| think I do." Twilight said. "Or I can have one fairly soon, an adaptation of Obliviation. But why? You're starting to worry meâ€|"

"And third," Cadence said, "I want you to bring a lump of Cosmic Spectrum with you when you rescue me from the mines."

Twilight put two and two together. "Shiny's awake?!"

"Well done." Cadence grinned. "Yes, he is, and it's such a relief. But you know why I'm asking for all those things?"

"Yes." Twilight began pacing. "You want the wedding to go exactly as it did the first time, so if Shiny's awake you'll need him to not remember about Chrysalis â€" otherwise, even if he's good at acting, his emotions will give him away. You have much better control of your emotions because that's what your talent is about, so you're fine, and I can fake what we need effectively. And it's too good an opportunity to miss."

"Precisely." Cadence said. "Now, if we do want things to go right, we'll have to stay out of touch for a fair while. Otherwise you'll be just too credibleâ€|"

"I understand." The unicorn gave a determined nod.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sat back, watching the familiar glow building on the horns of Shining Armor and Cadence. It was always impressive to watch, this, but â€" considering that she could see the lump of Cosmic Spectrum Cadence had stuffed into his outfit â€" she rather thought her brother was about to outdo himself.<p>

With a concussive boom, the shield/exclusion spell hit criticality and bloomed outwards, picking up all the Changelings and throwing them away.

â€|actually, by the looks of things the shield had expanded to the size of the entire country. That was a first.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well done, Shiny." Cadence said, and snapped the thread of the spell Twilight had applied last month with a quick flicker of magic.<p>

"What- oh." Shining Armor stood up, shakily, and looked around. "Did you block my memory of last time that â€" thatâ€| of last time Chrysalis attacked?"

"Yes." Cadence said, looking down and shuffling her hooves. "But it was for a good cause."

"Really?" Shining asked. "Really?"

"Yep." Cadence flicked a hoof out, and Shining's thought processes abruptly shut down as his girlfriend tapped him on the wing.

"Darlingâ€|" he asked, with impressive calmness, "Why do I have wings?"

"I said it was for a good cause," she replied impishly. Then glanced over at Twilight. "You can explain things, right?"

"Think so." Twilight replied. "I'll say it was a wedding gift you were going to give, and explain to Celestia and Luna a shortened version of what happened. But in my experience it takes an hour for the wedding to get back on track, so be back by then."

"Right." Cadence nodded her thanks, then grabbed Shining Armor in a

curtain of magic and teleported fifty miles east to an unoccupied country estate.

\* \* \*

><p>7.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight watched as Gilda ranted, berating Dash and every other pony in the room.<p>

She knew it was hard on her friend to face this, and more so when she'd recently started looping and had to face it more than onceâ€|

The griffin finally finished, panting, and turned to go.

"Wait." Dash said, the calm word sounding all the louder by contrast with Gilda's shouts.

Gilda turned, almost against her will.

"Look," the pegasus continued. "I'm not good at speaking â€" you know that â€" so sorry if this isn't all fancy andâ€| I'm making this up as I go, okay? Iâ€| I \_do\_ like you. You're one of my oldest friends. You were \_there\_ for me, back at flight schoolâ€|"

Everyone else was silent, listening to Dash's voice. She'd lost the calm she'd had earlier, and the words were strained.

"Butâ€| I don't know. Maybe you've changed, maybe I've changed, maybe I'm just noticing it now and I didn't care before. But you justâ€| you aren't nice. More importantly â€" though it shouldn't be â€" you aren't nice to my other friends." Twilight spotted that Dash's eyes were shining with unshed tears, and a look over at Gilda showed that the griffin's own face was screwed up like she didn't know \_what\_ to think.

"Please, Gilda." Dash said, her voice wavering. "Don't make me choose between my friends."

Gilda blinked, scowling, then shook her head. "Iâ€| gaah! Why does this have to be so hard! I don't know what to â€" and â€" aargh!"

"Look, you don't have to be all sweetness and light. That wouldn't be \_you.\_" The ghost of a smile crept across Dash's face. "Justâ€| I dunno, give me your address or something. We'll work from there."

"Yeah, I guess that works." Gilda said, then looked around at the other ponies. "This never happened, okay?"

Twilight nodded encouragingly. "For some reason, I've been struck blind. And deaf."

"Me too!" Pinkie said. "Ooh, where am I?"

Gilda surprised herself with a tired chuckle. "Heh. Okay, fine. I

think I know your address. I'll send you a letter after I think it over, alright?"

"That's fine." Dash nodded. "Hey, maybe you can come to the Best Young Fliers. I've got a great set planned!"

"Wouldn't miss it." Gilda said, and Twilight realized she meant it.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well done, Dash." Twilight said, beaming. "That must have been tricky for you."<p>

"Yeah." Dash replied, shaking her head. "I can't believe I \_said\_ half the stuff I said there."

Twilight chuckled. "Yeah, funny how that works. Maybe next time you can try and get it sorted out earlier â€" I mean, if you get to know how she is now this loop."

"Sure." Dash shrugged. "I justâ€¦ I dunno. Maybe she felt like how Pinkie was behaving was too much like what it was like when we were bullied? I know she stuck up for me back at Flight School."

"Could be." Twilight agreed. "From what I know of griffin culture, though, they're very impressed by strength â€" not just strength in battle, either. Strength of character, strength of willâ€¦ maybe if Fluttershy was a bit more confident, orâ€¦"

"Don't know." Dash replied. "Something to try out, maybe. Now I'm going to go and see if I remember how to write a letterâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>7.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon spread her wings, rearing back. "The Night Will-"

As was getting fairly normal for Equestria's Time Loops, she didn't finish the sentence. What was \_un\_usual, though, was that she got tackled by a gigantic purple dragon.

"Excellent work, my faithful minion!" a dark-purple-and-black alicorn boomed, eyes flaring and a wan light emanating from her. "Day and Night are outdated. This shall forever more be the land of twilight!"

"Actually," the dragon asked, looking up from hog-tying Nightmare Moon. "How are we going to do that? I mean, the sun has to be up or down, right?"

"Use my title!" the alicorn snapped.

"Fine, then." The eighty-foot dragon rolled his eyes. "Eternal Twilight, Lady of the Morning and the Evening. How are we going to actually \_do\_ this?"

"Wellâ€¦ put the sun at the place it is at sunrise, and the moon at moonset." Eternal Twilight said, her voice losing the echoing quality slightly. "You know. Like in the morning. Or the evening."

"Butâ€¦" the dragon didn't let it go that easily, and ponies began to creep back out of their hiding places to watch. "The world is round, right?"

"Of course, Spykoranuvellitar!" Eternal Twilight answered promptly. "You know that."

The Great Wyrn nodded. "Yeah, yeah. Soâ€¦ if you make it so it's twilight in Ponyville, then if you walk forty miles eastâ€¦ what is it?"

"â€¦oh." The alicorn kicked the stage. "I didn't think of that. It would be morning, of course. Cursed Celestia! She foils me without even trying!"

The two interlopers stood there for a moment, awkwardly shuffling their feet.

"What about overcast?" Spykoranuvellitar suggested. "Maybe you could invent glowing clouds or something."

"Of course!" Eternal's voice went right back to the booming, echoing shout. "Hurry, my faithful minion! We must establish a major and permanent cloudbank, which is also on fire at the top. To Cloudsdale!"

"And that's another thing." Spykoran added, taking flight after the alicorn and smashing a hole in the roof. "Why am I a \_minion?\_"

"Villains have minions!" the alicorn replied, and after that they were out of earshot.

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia blinked at the thoroughly restrained Nightmare Moon. "What on Equestria happened to you?"<p>

"Mmmfff." Nightmare replied, rolling her eyes towards the rope tying her muzzle shut.

"Oh, sorry." With a flash of fire, Celestia incinerated the rope. Nightmare gasped in air.

"Celestia, sister of mineâ€¦ why?" Nightmare managed. "Why must you torment me so?"

"Pardon?" Celestia asked. "This wasn't me."

"It can't have been coincidence." Moon said, pointedly. "A thousand years. A \_thousand\_ years on the moon, I planned my revenge. And when I got here, and announced my arrival to the world, I got halfway through my planned speech and then got body-checked by a great wyrn. It's just not \_fair.\_"

"A great wyrmâ€¦ hmmm, there aren't any I can think of." The Princess of the Sun mused. "Not that would get involved, anyway. Andâ€¦ what's happening to the sky?"

"Don't ask me." Nightmare Moon finally got a spell off, and dissolved into stars before reforming with the ropes left where they'd been shed. "Is that cloudâ€¦ rainbow coloured? Did you redecorate while I was gone?"

\* \* \*

><p>"We have ignition!" Spike said.<p>

Twilight grinned. "This is probably a really stupid thing to do, but who cares. We're the only ones in danger."

'Eternal Twilight' dumped a last batch of liquid rainbow into the cloud layer, then kicked the pilot cloud into the main cirrostratus.

There was a huge flash, and when it died down Twilight was short most of her hair and Spike had a singed tail.

On the other hoof, the cloud layer was merrily burning.

"Success! Now to go and make my demands to Celestia!" Twilight cackled, getting back into character. "Though I might want to apply a hair regrowth spell first. I look ridiculous."

"Don't you have a magicâ€¦ thingâ€¦ with your mane?" Spike waved a claw vaguely. "You know, like Luna and Celestia do?"

"No, but it might be nice to invent one." Twilight agreed. "I'll ask for how they did it next time. Anyway, let's seeâ€¦" she checked a list. "Our demands include, but are not limited toâ€¦ the town of Trottingham except the left half, every first edition book in Equestria, the treasury â€" with condiments," she nodded to Spike, "free passes to Ponyville sauna, a cool set of armour for me, andâ€¦"

Spike started whistling.

"You added this bit, didn't you?" Twilight asked accusingly. "The dressmaker known as 'Rarity' to perform Damsel in Distress duties for one day a month?"

"You know it's not a proper horde without a proper horse." Spike said glibly. "Actually, thoughâ€¦ why are we doing this?"

"It is very funny." Twilight replied.

"No, I mean what are we going to tell them?"

"Oh. Hadn't really thought that through." Twilight admitted. "I suppose that if we can get Celestia and Nightmare Moon to put aside their differences, that'd be nice. But the reason we'll tell them? Hmmmâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>"Why, Twilight?" Celestia asked, pushing with her magic at Eternal Twilight's shield. "Why did you become so twisted and dark?"<p>

"Ahem." Nightmare Moon interjected, horn blazing right alongside her sister.

"Sorry." Celestia apologized. "Force of habit."

"That's alright." Moon accepted her sister had simply made a slip of the tongue, and kept hammering away at the shield.

"You weren't ready for Nightmare Moon's return!" Eternal Twilight shouted. "Neither of you are fit to rule, and so I decided to take over!"

"And what about young Spike?" Celestia slammed her hooves on the floor, increasing the intensity of her attack.

Spykoranuvellitar, standing to one side and taking up most of the Ponyville Square, looked embarrassed. "The pay's good. She does dental."

Nightmare Moon suddenly looked interested. Celestia nudged her. "Stay on-task, sister!"

"Fine." Moon grumbled. "\_Did\_ you have a plan for my return?"

"You're looking at her." Celestia replied. "She seemed like a good fit to use the Element of Magic."

Twilight's shield dropped so suddenly that the two estranged royal sisters' attack overshot, and demolished the empty library.

"Oh." Twilight said, shrinking back into a unicorn. "You could have \_said\_. Hey, Spike, go put the clouds out."

"Why me?" Spykoranuvellitar asked, crossing his enormous arms.

"You're fireproof, and you still have wings." Twilight replied. "Besides, I need to go rebuild the library."

"â€|that's \_it?\_" Nightmare Moon asked. "\_Seriously?\_"

"Shut up and stop complaining!" Celestia hissed. "Do you \_want\_ to fight her again?"

"â€|you have a point." Moon admitted.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia.<em>

\_Sorry about the misunderstanding. I may have overdone it a bit there. But you have to admit, it would have set my mind at rest a lot more if I'd had the sense you were doing something.\_

\_The thing I learned about friendship today is that sometimes ponies

who have grudges will team up against a more important enemy, and that that can help them get over the grudges.\_

\_P.S. if Spike's sent most of the desk with this one, that's because I haven't managed to undo the growth spell yet.\_

\* \* \*

><p>7.3 additional<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The library door creaked open.<p>

"Oh, who is it- Nightmare!" Twilight said, startled.

"Please, call me Luna," the alicorn of darkness said. "My sister and I have discussed things in great detail, and I wish to put the whole sorry affair behind us. No, I was here for a different matter. I heard about this 'Nightmare Night'. What would be a good costume?"

Twilight blinked. "Why ask me, your highness?" She looked Luna up and down. She actually lookedâ€¦ like she hadn't changed anything from how she looked when she'd turned up in battle rattle to try and overthrow Celestia.

"â€¦I don't actually know many ponies." Luna said. "It's only been a few weeks, after all. And you at least know who I am."

"True." Twilight nodded. "Well, you're ready."

"I am?" Luna seemed surprised. "But the holiday is not for months!"

"Yeah, butâ€¦" Twilight shrugged. "You're kind of the patron slash scary thing of the holiday. You could go as, erâ€¦ you."\_

"What are you going as, then?" Luna asked.

Twilight frowned. "I might actually go as Eternal Twilight. Hmmmâ€¦ can you encourage your sister to come to Ponyville too? If she dresses up as, I don't knowâ€¦ Infernal Blaze, or something?"

"Ah, a theme!" Luna said, enthused. "Much like the costume balls I remember. Yes, I shall enjoin her to do so."

\* \* \*

><p>"TREMBLE IN FEAR, MORTALS!" boomed out from a black shape wreathed in stars.<p>

"THE NIGHT SHALL NOT SAVE YOU NOW!" added a second voice, accompanied by the crackling of flames.

The light in Ponyville gradually washed out, diffused by fog into a featureless grey. "THERE IS NO HOPE OF DAWN, NO SOLACE OF THE NIGHT."

Gradually, almost every pony in the town gravitated to the main



square " which the three figures had left alone, preferring to stalk the streets instead.

Then the front of one of the houses moved. "Boo."

\* \* \*

><p>Spike, Twilight, Celestia and Luna exchanged hoofbumps and high fives.<p>

"That's the most fun I've had in a century!" Celestia said, still grinning.

"Indeed, 'twas most enjoyable." Luna added, slipping back into archaisms.

Twilight nodded. "Though it might have gone down a bit less well if Spike hadn't dumped so many sweets into the square " after scaring every pony silly, I mean."

"True." Celestia said. "Now, I wonder how we're going to top that next year"

\* \* \*

><p>7.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"How are we dividin' this up?" Princess Applejack asked, bodily lifting the newly statue'd Discord into position in what would become the gardens of Canterlot palace. "I mean, ah know Dash did one o' these loops with you, but"

"Hmm" Princess Twilight Sparkle frowned. "What about if I get the heavens and you get the earth?"

"Seems t' work." Applejack nodded. "Now, what first?"

"First," Twilight levitated up a huge stack of books. "I'm afraid we \_do\_ need to get rather good at paperwork."

"Ah, horsefeathers." Applejack said morosely, and picked up a quill with her telekinesis. "Good thing ah went to that nice school in Manehattan that one time"

\* \* \*

><p>"Er, Applejack" Twilight ventured. "You don't think you might be getting perhaps a little fixated?"<p>

"What's that, Twi?" Applejack mumbled, around a mouthful of papers. "Ah'm too busy settin' up more land grants."

"Yeah, that's the thing." Twilight spread out a map with a crackle of paper, and markers appeared. "You've dedicated seventy-three percent of the continent to apple production. There was a 'please, not apples \_again\_' riot in Trottingham!"

Applejack shrugged. "They're ingrates, then."

"Lookâ€¦ I know you're in charge of what happens on the ground, butâ€¦ there \_are\_ other foods besides apples." Twilight pressed, feeling a strangely familiar sinking sensation.

There was a \_whump\_, and the yellow-orange alicorn in front of her was consumed by crimson fire. \*\*\*"Say that again, Twilight Sparkle!"\*\*

\_Here we go againâ€¦\_ Twilight thought to herself.

It seemed like the first time one of her friends became one of Equestria's two rulers, they always overdid \_something\_. Twilight was probably quite lucky to have Celestia and Luna to keep an eye on her the first time, actuallyâ€¦

\* \* \*

><p>"Right." A sceptical pegasus said to her teacher. "So you want me to go to Ponyville and make sure the sky is clear for that star show thing?"<p>

"\_Yes\_, Dash." Princess Twilight replied. "And take Spike with you, he needs a bit of exercise. Oh, actually, if you could handle organizing things as well?"

"Pfeh." Dash shrugged. "If you want. What do you need?"

"Hmmmâ€¦" Princess Twilight frowned. "I think it's on the checklist, but I'm particularly concerned about making sure there's a mage on hand andâ€¦ make sure the local schoolchildren have their trip to see the display scheduled right, as well. You should find who you need in the notes."

"Then I \_am\_ taking Spike." Dash said firmly. "No way \_I'm\_ going to read that much paperwork."

\* \* \*

><p><em>What do you know,<em> Twilight thought as she teleported into the familiar room of the Sisters' castle. \_Loyalty was the crown this time. Neat.\_

Celestia as an earth pony was a bit stranger, but not by much. Her once-and-future mentor was equally comfortable as all three of the pony breeds, even more so than Luna (who was a unicorn for this particular loop).

"Well, \_ah\_ screwed up." Applejack muttered. "Nice of y'all to keep th' ecological reforms goin', though."

"Least I could do." Twilight replied sincerely. "It \_was\_ amazing work."

Then she turned to the Elements for this particular Loop. "Well done, by the way. All of you. Thoughâ€¦ Dash, was it really necessary to carry all of them most of the way to the castle?"

"They were so slow!" Dash complained. "It was driving me nuts!"

"What did you expect?" Celestia replied. "You're so good at pegasus magic that you're taught by \_Princess Twilight.\_"

Celestia was an interesting one, actually. She was the schoolteacher this loop. Cheerilee, meanwhile, was part of the local ecology team.

It was always interesting, how the Loops shuffled ponies around to fit their talents.

"Anyway." Twilight continued. "There's a harvest festival in a few months, sister. It's technically in your honour, soâ€¦ perhaps you could spend it with these fine ponies?"

Several of the Elements flinched.

Fluttershy raised a hoof timidly. "Uhâ€¦ will she let us have foods that aren't apple based?"

Twilight turned to Applejack.

"â€¦all right, fine," the currently-smaller alicorn said. "But this is a big concession on my part."

\* \* \*

><p>7.5 (Moonstuck)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>You are Princess Twily. You are on the moon for some reason.<em>

"Huh." Twilight said, looking around, and noticing that she was much younger than she usually started a loop. "This is new. And \_by the princesses I am cute\_!"

\_You are overcome by your own cuteness.\_

"Hmmmâ€¦" Twilight looked up. "Where did that voice come from?"

\_Stop breaking the fourth wall.\_

"Oh, sorry. Uhâ€¦ inventory?"

\_You have hooves. There is a chair and a fedora.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Additional from 6.3 (40K) (from Madfish)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy walked among the drifts of the freezing valleys she found herself on at the start of the loop. She had had to restore her alicorn status just to survive the frozen wasteland, as the weather was the harshest she'd ever seen. She <em>could<em> have allowed herself to die and end the loop for herself, but if the others were here

somewhere they would need her help â€" given that the few times she had tried a spell beyond telekinesis, she'd felt sick as if monsters had tried to climb through her horn into her skull. Besides she owed it to her current companions' mother to make sure they grew up big and strong first.

"I hope Twilight's going to be ok," she said to the wolves beside her, "Without her magic she gets- twitchy..."

She trailed off as one of the wolves, a cub a bit larger than her pegasus self, drew her attention to a light flickering in the distance. Lights meant people, hopefully friendly people.

As they approached she found herself disappointed as all that was there was some sort of pod covered with ice. Scraping the ice of the hatch she gasped as she saw the child within.

The wolves panted, breath frosting in the air as they looked in at what had surprised their surrogate mother.

"No! You can't eat him. We're going to take this pod to shelter and we're going to help the poor dear. If no one comes for him you can think of him as your new little brother."

\* \* \*

><p>7.6 (from Namar13766)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, it's the Summer Sun celebration." Twilight paced. "How do we deal with Nightmare Moon this time?"<p>

"I already took care of it," Rarity said, smugly.

"Rarity, do we have to worry about ending up in Hogwarts, Eikan, or the Bureau?" Twilight, and most of the others, shuddered at the thought. Rarity, for her part, simply looked indignant.

"Of course not! I've been planning this one for several loops."

Dash rolled her eyes cynically. "That just means it could blow up worse because you just told us."

"Dashie!" Pinkie tried to look stern, though the giggles ruined the effect. "Don't be a meanie pants!"

"Is it musical? Who's in it?"

"Well, I went to see Steven Magnet..." Rarity hinted.

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh-hohohoho! My <em>mustache</em>. How \*\*wonderful\*\*."

"You look \_smashing\_. \_CURSE YOU NIGEL THORNBERRY!\_"

\_"I. MUST. SING."\_"

It was a kind of sick fascination that kept Nightmare Moon

watching.

"\_25 years and I'm alive here still...,"\_ He sang, dropping his head in sorrow.

\_"Trying to get up that great big hill of hope\_,\_"\_ drawing out the P with tears in his eyes.

\_"For a destination."\_ He looked up with a miserable face.

\_"I realized quickly when I knew I should,"\_ Steven drew up his hands operatically.

\_"That the world was made up of this Brotherhood of man,"\_ crossing his arms across his chest.

\_"For whatever that means."\_ Steven shrugged, and drew himself up.

Out of sight, Vinyl Scratch switched out the piano for a drumbeat, simultaneously making streaks of color with sparkles liberally interspersed appear.

\_"And so I cry sometimes when I'm lying in bed, just to get it all out what's in my head, and I'm"\_ He threw his head back as "I" echoed.

\_"And I'm, I am feeling a little peculiar."\_ His headbang was more of a headbob.

\_"So I wake in the morning and I step outside\_, a\_nd I take deep breath and I get real HIGH,"\_ looking directly at Nightmare Moon's astral form.

\_"And I scream from the top of my lungs, What's goin' on?"\_ He then grabbed her, shock preventing her from reacting.

\_"And I say HEEEEY EY AAAEY EY AAAEY AY AY, HEEEEY EY AAAEY EY AY! I said Hey!\_" He brought the princess poltergeist in close.

\_"What's goin' on?" Steven then dramatically flung his arms out...sending her flying.

\* \* \*

><p>Several Loops later<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Several human loopers looked at each other with varying degrees of shock. Then they looked back at the earnest-looking purple unicorn.<p>

"Your friends are scary," someone muttered.

Ranma smirked. "Okay, who can beat having a villain purified by a Meterosexual British River Serpent's Singing?"

\* \* \*

><p>7.7 (from Mandemon)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Mama!" A way too cheery voice shouted. Twilight grumbled in her sleep. Had one of the Crusaders got into the Library? She merely turned her head instead of waking up.<p>

"Mama!" The voice insisted. Aww, she was having such a good nap, they didn't make beds like these often.

"MAMA!" Guess there would be no rest. She slowly opened her eyes and turned to voice the annoying voice.

"What is it Celestia..." Twilight fell silent. In front of her, \_a filly sized Celestia\_ stood with an incredibly grin on her face, holding a picture. Next to her, equally small and equally smiling Luna was holding her own picture.

"We made pictures!" Celestia said. Then the memories came. Twilight tried really hard not to show the rising panic on her face.

"Um... yes, they are very nice, now let mommy sleep, okay?" she managed.

"Aww, but you promised we would go see Aunty Pinkie!" Filly Luna pouted. Twilight was not sure whenever she should squee and hug her or be disturbed.

"Yes, um, we will be. Just, let mommy nap for five more minutes, okay?" She needed it. She needed \_a lot\_ more time than that, actually, but five minutes was probably all she could get.

"Okay!" Both fillies ran off. Once she was relatively sure they were gone, Twilight cast a silence spell and stuffed her head into the pillow. She really did not need memories of \_a foal birth\_.

\* \* \*

><p>"Celestia and Discord, sitting in a treehouse,  
<em>kiiiiisss-<em>"

"SHUT UP! I don't have a crush on him!" Celestia shouted at Luna, who was giggling. Twilight was \_still\_ trying to adjust to the whole idea of suddenly being a parent. To her own mentor, to boot. According to her memories, she had been Chief Librarian of what was known as the Holy United Kingdom of Equestria and Griffin... lead by a several thousand years old \_Spike\_. According to those same memories, she had moved to Ponyville to raise her two children.

"Oh, hey Twilight!" Pinkie shouted. "Dissy! It's Twilight and the sisters!" A small draconequus looked out the upper floor, before jumping down and turning the land under him into a pillow. He tried to run to the sisters, but Pinkie stopped him. "Dissy, what have I said about turning things and not turning them back?"

"Never turn anything into different things and not revert them unless it is to help someone or it is very amusing." Discord said, looking down and holding his hands behind his back. Pinkie nodded happily and gave him a nudge.

"Okay, now go play with your friends."

"YAY! Divine Cutie Mark Seekers go!" All three shouted and ran off.

"That... was disturbing." Twilight muttered. "So, you're Discord's parent?"

"YUP! He is such a sweetie, really! Never cleans his room, but he has his heart in the right place." Pinkie said. "Oh, and he just loves having fun, just like me!"

\* \* \*

><p>"So, while ourâ€| childrenâ€| are looking for their cutie marks," Twilight paused, and went down a different track, "seriously, can Discord even have one?"<p>

"I don't know, you're the one with the big library! I just know he is equally excited as your two little girls!" Pinkie said. Twilight was starting to doubt that Pinkie was even Awake. She was taking all this way too easily.

"Anyway, we might as well as see what others are doing." Twilight said, turning around the corner to see the orphanage where â€" according to her memories â€" Rarity and Applejack worked. However, before they got there they met Fluttershy, who was trying to hold down a very exited Cadance.

"Please mommy!? Can we go see Shining Armor? Please please please pleaaaaaaase!?" Little Cadance was asking, while doing the best puppy eyes impression she could. To her credit, Fluttershy managed to hold outâ€| for about five seconds.

"Alright, after we have bought these items, then we can go see Shining." Fluttershy said meekly. She did have experience with animals, but Cadance was something she had never faced before.

"YAAAAAAAAY! Come on Mom! You're so slow!" The little filly said, jumping up and down, running back and forth the shop and Fluttershy.

"Need help?" Twilight asked she and Pinkie walked to her.

"Oh, it's okay, she's just eager to see Shining Armor..." Fluttershy began.

"Ohh! Pinkie Sense says someone has a cruuush~!" Pinkie Pie said, with Candance nodding.

"YUP! We are going to get married and then we are going to have a big wedding and cakes and a big castle and he is going to be my personal knight and..." Twilight more or less tuned out Cadance' increasingly rapid fire fantasy.

"Is Shining Armor aware of this... relationship?" Twilight asked.

"I think he likes her too, but is afraid other boys will make fun on

him because of it..." Fluttershy said. "So, where are the Princ... Celestia and Luna?" She asked.

"Ran off with Discord to seek their cutie marks, though seeing how they seem to have kept their powers, I fe-" At that moment, a sudden down pour of orange juice fell on Twilight. Twilight merely looked upwards and saw the three kids, Celestia, Luna and Discord with a rather large bucket.

"Aww, apparently our specialty ain't pranking..." Discord said.

"How about farming?" Luna suggested.

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright, so, we are all here." Twilight said, looking down at her notes so far. "Spike is an ancient dragon that one day decided he'd grown tired of mortals ruining his day nap and&#160;| conquered the continent."<p>

"Don't forget the part where he dried out the ocean between Equestria and Griffin Kingdoms, making them a single continent." Dash said, smirking. "All because one of the griffins dared to poke him."

"Right, that too. Well, looks like he isn't Awake, and if he is, he isn't showing it. So, main thing is... we are all parents. In one sense or other." Twilight said, shaking her head. "I really didn't need to those memories to begin with."

"Oh, it ain't that bad." Dash said. "At least it's fun to wat-SOMBRA! STOP PICKING ON YOUR SISTER!" She shouted at the sight of Sombra trying to scare Chrysalis with a bug. Which, seeing that Chrysalis was still a changeling, was kinda weird.

"But moooom!" The little Sombra said, trying his best puppy eyes impression.

"No buts! Into the corner!"

"Aww..." Grumbling, but still obeying, Sombra walked into the corner and sat down. Chrysalis blew him a raspberry, before noticing the look Dash was giving to her and stopping.

"So, an orphanage?" Twilight asked Rarity.

"Yup. All those little ones, all in need of someone to hold them. Besides, Big Mac is just adorable when he pouts!" Rarity said.

"Adorable? It's hilarious!" Applejack said. "I can never take him seriously again! I mean, sure, Granny Smith did hint at it but I never knew he was such a cry baby!"

\* \* \*

><p>7.8 (from Zulaq)<p>

\* \* \*



><p>"Ok," Princess Twilight Sparkle turned away from the just closed doors to the throne room, "Whose turn is it to go evil and try and take over Equestria now?" she surveyed the nine other alicorns in the room.<p>

"Oh, oh, me, me!" Princess Pinkie Pie shouted, bouncing up and down, "I have just the idea! I can throw a party! And then another party! And then another! And get this, all those parties will be part of my plan to TAKE OVER THE WORLD! Or they would be if it weren't for the fact that I'd rather party than actually rule. I wonder if that takes me out of contention?"

"Darling, I don't really think you can use parties to take over the world," Princess Rarity said somewhat haughtily.

"She can," Twilight replied flatly, before shuddering slightly "And you don't want to know the details."

"Whose stupid idea was it to alternate who goes evil, and who gets to be a mentor to a new hero anyway?" Princess Rainbow Dash asked.

"Yours Dash. I think you said something about not wanting to spend a thousand years trapped on the moon and not being able to take a nap, again." Twilight explained somewhat tiredly, "And seeing as there are ten of us alicorns now," she gestured to the others who hadn't spoken yet, those being Princesses Luna, Celestia, Applejack, Cadence, Fluttershy, and the sole male among them, Prince Shining Armor. "We thought it would be fair if we each took 100 years, rather than any of us spending a full thousand on the moon."

"Well this stinks," Rainbow said, "I mean just look at what some of you guys have done," she turns to Princess Applejack, "I mean seriously, Hard Truth? Couldn't you come up with a better name for yourself? It was kina' hard for me to keep a straight face when I told Spirit Wind about you."

"Now wait one doggon minute!" Princess Applejack countered Rainbow Dash, "Danger Dash wasn't even dangerous. You just pranked the country enough that people were practically on all four knees begging us to stop you!"

"Yeah, well that's better than simply making everypony tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth!" Dash argued.

"Now ladies," Princess Celestia interrupted, "I'm sure that you know that the truth can be a beautiful and terrible thing."

"Dids't thou just quote Albus Dumbledore?" Princess Luna inquired of her sister incredulously, "Really?"

"Oh come on, stop arguing," Twilight interjected, "It's getting us nowhere, and besides we already have a schedule written up, and it's-"

"My turn, little sis." Prince Shining Armor broke in with a grin, "I can't wait."

"What are you smiling about, Shining?" Princess Cadence asked her husband, "It means that we won't be able to see each other for a

century!"

"Two words darling." Shining said with an even bigger grin, "Makeup sex."

"Ohhh." Cadence said, her eyes glowing a bit. Her voice dropped a bit and became husky, "I can't wait. We can do that thing using those pirate outfits you think I haven't noticed."

"Gah!" Twilight practically screamed, bringing her hooves up to her eyes, "I didn't need that mental image of my brother!"

"Well it's a good thing you're not married to him isn't it, little sister." Cadence said cheerfully, before turning back to Shining, "So what's your plan for going evil?"

"Oh, I was thinking about something along the lines of kidnapping a certain princess." Shining said with a lecherous grin, "and holding her hostage until the other Princesses agree that I become the sole ruler of Equestria!"

"So when do you want to start?" asked Celestia.

"Right now!" With that Prince Shining Armor leaped up, used his magic to levitate Princess Cadence and leapt out of the adjoining balcony, "Catch me if you caaan!" He shouted on his way out.

The remaining eight princesses just stared after him in silence before Princess Fluttershy asked, "So, maybe we should go after them?"

Rainbow Dash just looks at Fluttershy askew, "Seriously? I think we'll need to give them a bit of time to 'cool off' first. Maybe a decade or two will do."

\* \* \*

><p>"Ok, so who's left?" Princess Twilight Sparkle asked of her fellow co-rulers of Equestria, "We've had Nightmare Moon attempt to make an eternal night."<p>

At the mention of Nightmare Moon, Princess Luna perked up, "We have had much time to practice our detransformation, but that was the first time we've ever repeated the transformation. I daresay we outdid ourself."

"Yeah, yeah," Princess Rainbow Dash waved her hooves, "I don't get what was so special about turning the moon to cheese, or that thing about 'Night Eternal' is the only way you could get it to age properly."

"Thou simply hast no sense of taste." Luna scoffed, "It was the finest brie ever made."

"It was!" Princess Pinkie Pie interjected, "It was just perfect for all those parties I threw as Party Pink!"

"That was a lot of parties, darling." Princess Rarity sighed, "I daresay I probably put on more than a few pounds at them."

"A few pounds!" Princess Applejack said, laughing, before making a gesture with her hooves as far apart as she could make them, "I think you were about this big by the time you realized. And then you singlehoofedly beat her and banished her to the moon. Or at least what was left of it after Pinkie finished carving it up for parties."

Princess Rarity looked like she was about to start a big argument with Applejack, but Twilight stepped in before the two mares could really get going, "Moving on. After Party Pink, we had Blazing Sun. I have to say you did an excellent job with that Celestia."

Princess Celestia blushed a bit, "It wasn't much. I've had a lot watching Lulu do it, so I just sort of copied her actions a bit." She turned to Princess Luna, "Although I am sorry about your cheese."

Princess Luna looked rather downbeat, "It took over two hundred years for it to get just ripe enough. And then thou melted it!" And with that she began crying.

"There, there," Princess Fluttershy reassured her, "At least it made the moon round again after Pinkie's parties."

"But all that cheese, Wasted!" Luna wailed, "And that cute little cottage cheese cottage we made for us to stay in was completely gone. And what was left was burnt!"

"Uh, moving on again," Twilight interjected in-between Luna's wailing about dead cheese, "After that we had Danger Dash, who pranked people until they could be pranked no more."

"Eh, the old fall back was good enough for me," Princess Rainbow Dash said, "It worked the first time, and I moderated myself a bit so the elements would let me sleep this time." She paused a bit, before running a hoof along her wings, "Although getting all that goopy, melted cheese off of my wings was a bit of a pain."

"After Danger Dash, we had me, Eternal Twilight." Twilight said proudly.

"Meh," Rainbow Dash yawned, "You didn't really do that much. I mean your whole plan revolved around owning a copy of every book ever written, and then enslaving everypony in your library paradise. Where was the action! The excitement! I mean you even made sure to treat your slaves well; I think the worst thing that happened to them was a papercut."

"Well it's not exactly efficient to work them to death." Twilight defended herself, "Do you have any idea how hard it is to train someone to work in a library properly?"

"Yeah, Twily," Prince Shining Armor put in. "I mean, the only reason why we had to banish you was because you wanted to expand your library to the whole castle. Not exactly threatening."

"Oh really," Twilight said, her eyes narrowing, "And what about you. You turned into Dashing Armor, then you kidnapped Cadence."

"And?"

"And there is no 'and'. You kidnapped her, and then the two of you took a century long second honeymoon! At no point did we have to send you to the moon. Do you know how embarrassing it was to explain to my student that she had to go get my brother and sister-in-law because they let their second honeymoon go on too long, and we really, really needed them back at the court?"

Twilight paused, and gathered her thoughts for a moment, "Anyway, moving on, again. After that we had Hard Truth. I must say, I didn't really think making everypony tell the truth all the time was much of an evil plan, butâ€¦ you made it work, Applejack."

"Shucks, It weren't nothin'" Princess Applejack blushed, "Nopony knows more than me how the truth can make or break a relationship."

"Ok, and after that we had Loving Evening," at this Twilight drooped a bit, "whose plan consisted of kidnapping Shining Armor, and going on your third honeymoon. Seriously, Cadence?"

Princess Cadence blushed a bit, "Well when a pony has an itch, she wants it taken care of." She looked at Shining Armor, and her blush deepened. "And I daresay that I have the best way to relive it, ever."

"Please, spare me the details," Twilight said dryly, "And after that we had The Fasionista! (exclamation mark included), who forced everypony to wear fashionable clothes, whether they wanted to or not."

"Oh darling, The Fashionista! was my most brilliant idea ever." Rarity gushed with a glow in her eyes, "If it weren't for Rainbow Dash I'd never have had to have seen somepony wearing anything out of fashion ever again!" She let out a somewhat disturbing laugh, and the other nine alicorns moved away from her nervously.

"And now it's Fluttershy's turn" Twilight said once she'd recovered, "So-"

"Wait a moment!" Rainbow Dash interrupted, "I don't think this is a good idea Twi."

"Nonsense," Twilight dismissed her, "We all agreed in the beginning we'd take turns being the villain, and now it's Fluttershy's turn."

"I hate to say it," Applejack interjected, "But I agree with Dashie. You haven't forgotten that incident with Iron Will, have you?"

"Oh come on. What could go wrong?" Twilight said blithely, overriding her friends' concerns, "It's Fluttershy's turn, and that's all there is too it."

"Well," Princess Fluttershy said quietly, "I guess, if you think it's alright."

Fluttershy seemed to compose herself, before her eyes flashed red and she turned to Twilight Sparkle. She spoke, her mouth containing far

too many, and far too pointed teeth for a normal pony, "I AM FLYING HATRED. AND YOU ALL WILL BOW BEFORE ME! ALL SHALL LOVE ME AND DESPAIR!"

\* \* \*

><p>7.9 (from DrTempo) (Metal Gear Solid universe)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Spike shook his claw in pain.<p>

"Why won't you die?"

Spike had enjoyed this loop. Not every day he was a badass cyborgâ€¦ Though the beginning where he was a whiny rookie on the Big Shell bothered him. Man, that whole ending had given him a MASSIVE headache.

And now, he was fighting Bluebloodâ€¦ or his counterpart, anyway. And he wouldn't stay down!

Cue Blueblood tearing off his shirt.

"Nanomachines, son!"

Spike shook his head at this. "Forget this." He drew a lightsaber, and went to town on Blueblood.

"Protect yourself from THIS."

\* \* \*

><p>At Mission Control, Twilight shook her head. "And he was doing so wellâ€¦ right, how do I explain away a lightsaber." After a moment, she answered her own question. "Of course. Nanomachines. Silly me."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>As Blueblood went down, deader than dead, Spike smirked. He'd enjoyed cutting that jerk up like a Hearth's Warming turkey. Then Blade Wolf arrived, carrying the Murasama.<p>

His jaw dropped. "Oh. Why did you need this thing again?"

\* \* \*

><p>7.10 (Namar13766)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked at her friends in the library. "So what's our plan for this loop?"<p>

Rarity chuckled. "Fluttershy, Rainbow Dash, and I think we'll take a vacation for this loop. What about you?"

Applejack chuckled, "Well, after hearing Sheppard's music, I think I'll turn Big Macintosh into a Country Music Singer."

Pinkie smiled, before turning into Pinkamena Diane Pie, causing her friends to flinch...before noticing that the expression was the same Pinkie. "I'm also going to take a vacation." Fluttershy opened her mouth, before being cut off by Pinkie. "While looking like this, just to see how people react."

Rainbow rustled her wings slightly. "So what will you be up to Twilight?"

"I'm thinking of trying something with Zecora." She levitated a familiar book in front of herself.

\* \* \*

><p>Five of the loopers looked at the coronation of a new Alicorn in shock. Twilight looked slightly smug.<p>

"Well, I think this settles the question of how similar zebras are to ponies, wouldn't you say?"

It was sort of a pity that Zecora wasn't looping, actually, because that meant the ascension was for this loop only. But it was an interesting proof of concept.

\* \* \*

><p>7.11 (Mandemon)<p>

(This one came from a typo which misspelt Sombra.)

\* \* \*

><p>"You have to be kidding me." Twilight said.<p>

"Cryyyyyysssstaal... heaaaaaarts..." A drooling Crystal Pony was walking towards Twilight and her friends, who were not awake in this loop.

"Unfortunately, Zonpies created by Zombra tend to be like this." Candance said, blasting one of the infected ponies. "They spread the infection by biting you."

"And you want us to go into the deepest pit of their lair, to find the source of the infection?" Applejack asked.

"You know what? Buck it." Twilight said, and turned into an alicorn.

"WHOA NELLY!" Applejack jumped a foot into the air. The others were a little better able to control their shock, but not much.

"Let's see... how did Nanoha do it again... Oh right!" Twilight planted her hoof with a \_crack\_. "STARLIGHT BREAKER!"

A massive beam hit the castle, tearing through the walls and mindlessly shambling infected Zonpies. In the middle of the hive, a mass of flesh and crystals opened one of its many eyes to see a bright light approaching. Funnily enough, its last thought was "Not

again."

\* \* \*

><p>7.12 (Filraen)<p>

**\*\*PLEASE NOTE\*\***: this loop was previously posted incomplete. This is entirely my fault, and the following version is the complete, edited, definitive one.

\* \* \*

><p>Ranma Saotome was going on a walk, getting used to this new body and loop.<p>

He was on a new loop, of that he was certain, after distracting the Lovely Angels into a mission to a G-Stone powered Death Star, whose predictable result was the destruction of the whole galaxy. Honestly, given how bad the loop ended he was surprised he wasn't on Eiken. \_'Then again, better lose a G-Stone and a Death Star than deal personally with Kei and Yuri when Awakeâ€|'\_ , Ranma shuddered at the thought of what could have happened again.

Then there was his body: a dark blue-colored small horse. While it wasn't the strangest body Ranma has inhabited, having replaced the bodiless Voldemort a few times, the lack of fingers felt just plain weird. Thoughâ€| he didn't seem to stand out, in this population of small horses as colorful as the rainbow. It actually made him remember Nanoha's tale of a certain unicorn, a new anchor, she met some time ago. Probably he was in the unicorn's loop.

Apparently his name here was Rapid Hooves and the town he was in was named Ponyville, a nice enough place at first glance, \_'though with my luck I can only hope it stays like that'\_. Still, better be careful: learn the ropes now to play pranks later.

"Aaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!" an acute shriek filled the air. When Ranma looked at the direction he saw a cloud of smoke going into his way, whose cause was apparently a bright pink colored horse with a cotton candy-like mane, probably a she.

The mare rounded Ranma a few times looking at him carefully while his sense of panic started to fire like crazy and he finally realized three things: first, he was definitely a stallion here; second, he didn't remember seeing any males; and third, he was naked. \_'Why I always have to get the crazy ones?'\_ To his surprise though, the crazy pink mare just stopped, looked at him in the eye and began running in another random direction.

That was strange.

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight! Twilight!" The pink earth pony jumped by Twilight Sparkle's side.<p>

"What's up Pinkie Pie?" The unicorn kept reading her book.

"I met a new pony today!" That made Twilight stop reading. She knew

Pinkie Pie knew everypony who lived in Ponyville from her custom to launch "Welcome to Ponyville" parties, and then even extended to Equestria since the loop the Princesses asked Pinkie Pie to make a census of Equestria's pony population. To have Pinkie Pie meet somepony she had never met before it was very strange.

\_ 'Unless...'\_

"How does this new pony look?" On this question Pinkie Pie started to jump again, even more quickly.

"Oh! Oh! Oh! I know that one! Let me see... he was an earth pony who had two eyes, two forelegs, two hindlegs and a mane. Also he was dark blue in color and had his mane in a black braid." That solved a few things, she didn't remember an earth pony with a braid other than Applejack. "Oh! and I also found him by following the most strange doozy: left ear three round right, right ear two rounds left and four pulls from my tail."

Twilight frowned a little. "That's a new Pinkie Sense, what does that mean?" One of there loops she had to understand how that worked.

"I'm not sure, but I've only felt it once before, when we met Hiccup and you weren't around." Pinkie tried to show how big Hiccup's dragon had been.

\_ 'That loop? Then that means...'\_ "Ok Pinkie, you win. Looks like you'll host your first 'Welcome to Equestria's Loop' party. I want to inform the Princesses though, they are awake this time."

"Okie dokie lokie! I'll prepare my Party Cannon Mk. pi for this new friend!" Pinkie said, putting her right hoof in a salute.

Twilight Sparkle put a leaf inside the book to continue reading it later "All right Pinkie. By the way, what's his-" but by the time Twilight looked again at her friend Pinkie had already left "-name?". Ok, never mind. Better find Spike, she had a letter to send.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia,<em>

\_I send this letter to tell you information of great importance. Not five minutes ago I received a visit from Pinkie Pie to tell me she found a pony she has never meet before, who she believes is actually a looper. As such Pinkie decided to throw him a 'Welcome to Equestria' party.\_

\_Since Pinkie Pie is already making preparations for the party I believe it will start within the hour. Should you and Princess Luna wish to attend it I think you should teleport directly into Ponyville Library.\_

\_I'm sorry to send this letter so little time beforehoof but Pinkie Pie was very enthusiastic to throw the party quickly. Nevertheless, I have great hopes in Pinkie Pie and everypony to make this party a success, both as a student of the Magic of Friendship and as Equestria's Anchor.\_



\_Your faithful student,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle\_

\* \* \*

><p>"...and send it, Spike."<p>

The child dragon looked at the scroll suspiciously "Looper? Anchor? You aren't making any sense, Twilight."

The purple unicorn just threw him an apologetic look "Sorry, I'll explain later. Please just go along for now, OK?"

"Fine," and with a burst of flame Spike sent the now rolled letter to the Princess. "Letter on its way. Now what?"

"Now we find the girls. Let's meet at the Library in half an hour." Twilight said.

Hearing that, Spike started to run. "I'll go to Carrousel Boutique first! See you later, Twilight."

Twilight Sparkle just smiled.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey!"<p>

Ranma looked around for the voice who was calling him, but saw nobody.

"Hey, you, new pony!"

Well, if there's nobody around there must be - \_\_'Up there! '\_\_

"At last! You'd swear nopony ever looks up." That was a light blue horse, apparently standing in the cloud looking down on him.

"I don't remember seeing you around here, and Pinkie Pie said she had met somepony new today." And apparently he was wrong, as when flying down the cloud he realized the horse was actually a pegasus, a pegasus whose mane was literally as colorful as the rainbow.

The pegasus grinned "I'm Rainbow Dash, the coolest and fastest pegasus of all Equestria and local weather manager. Your name?"

"Ran-pid Hooves. I just arrived here."

Rainbow Dash looked at Ranma as if measuring him. "Rapid Hooves, huh? So, how fast do you are?"

"Never really pushed myself, but I think I can do pretty good." Technically true. After all he had just found himself in this body.

"But not as fast as me." For Ranma the feeling of a yet-untold challenge from a stranger met just by walking around was... nostalgic.

Not being one to stand down, Ranma upped the ante. "You'd think, but you're the fastest pegasus only because I don't have wings."

"All right Rapid Hooves, it's on! See the tree by the end of the street? That's Twilight's house, the first pony to enter the house wins."

Why not? After all a bit of a run may help to understand this new body. "Just say the word, Rainbow Dash. And prepare to lose."

"At the count of three. One, two, three!" And then they started.

In the end Ranma wasn't sure who won the race as he got entangled with Rainbow Dash to enter through the designed-for-one-horse door. He knew neither he nor Rainbow was going as fast as they could, though, and he suspected the pegasus also knew it. Overall, the body may need a little time to get used to but he had the whole loop for that. Still, he'd miss having fingers.

Now that he thought about it, it was strangeâ€¦ the door was opened yet it was dark inside-

\*click\* "SURPRISE!"

Ranma looked around to what looked like a surprise party: balloons, confetti, foods, drinks and some cake on tables... for the pegasus perhaps? It wasn't like he knew anybody yet in this world. Until he looked at a giant banner over the horses and unicorns.

**\*\*Welcome to Equestria's Loop.\*\***

"What?"

"It's him, right? The looper you found, Pinkie Pie." Rainbow Dash called to the crazy pink mare from a while before.

"Yes Rainbow!" Pinkie looked even more like she was in a sugar rush. She took Ranma's equivalent to right hand into of her forelegs and shook them energetically. "Hi, I'm Pinkie Pie. What's your name? How long have you been on Equestria? What is your world called? Do you like cake? Everypony I know loves cake, and that's one of the reasons I love to work in Sugarcube Corner here and why I want to..."

"Pinkie! Let him stand up." A purple unicorn interrupted Pinkie Pie. Thankfully.

"Oops, sorry." Said the pink horse... pony? Before letting go of Ranma.

After standing up, the looping male pony asked the group "So, let me this straight. All of you are Awake right now."

"Except Spike here, yes." The purple unicorn pointed to the little lizard by her side.

"And she found me and realized I was also a looper." Ranma asked pointing to Pinkie Pie.

"Yes." The unicorn answered again. You'd expect one of the bigger unicorns in the back might be better choices to play spokesperson.

"And then you decided to throw a welcome party for me?"

"Actually the party was Pinkie Pie's idea." The unicorn said while pointed to the pink mare.

"I wasn't going to let the chance to throw a 'Welcome to Ponyville' party go, but in your case you were new to Equestria so the other banner wouldn't work here; to think I'd have the chance to make a welcome party for somepony from another world... I think I'd have used few more star-pattered balloons because stars and worlds are so close but I couldn't find them, and then I decided on starfish but I realized 'aren't we too far from the sea to get starfish?' so I threw away the idea and decided to go with the multicolor balloons..."

"Wait, just one question: how did you realize I was a looper too?" Ranma asked, stopping Pinkie Pie's rambling once again.

"But that's obvious, because I know everypony who lives in Equestria." Wait, just like that?

"Everyone everyone?"

"Nope, everpony." The others don't seem to be surprised by the answerâ€¦ so it was probably true.

"Well, I think I'll take your word from it. Better start with introductions: my name here is Rapid Hooves, but you can imagine that isn't my real name because I'm looping too. My real name is Ranma Saotome."

"What?! The first anchor?!" The purple unicorn was about to start talking excitedly when a single word stopped her.

"Twilight..." From one of the bigger unicorns in the back, the white one... they also have wings too, so pegacorn.

The purple unicorn flinched before throwing her a short apologetic look and returning to business. "Oh yes, sorry Princess. My name is Twilight Sparkle. I'm Equestria's Anchor and my friends here are the other loopers from this world..."

\* \* \*

><p>In the end, Twilight Sparkle <em>was<em> the unicorn anchor who had met Nanoha. She introduced herself as the local librarian and calling herself a student of "the Magic of Friendship." \_'No wonder Nanoha seemed to like her'\_. The party itself had gone without incident other than some spontaneous firing of cannons from Pinkie Pie. Oddly, it happened to use a table with tablecloth, a punch bowl, glasses and snacks as ammunition... a trick to learn later.

Now there was time to meet the Princesses, something Ranma was a bit wary of. Apparently they had to make the party private so nobody realized they were here.

"So, do you have any plans for this loop?" Celestia asked.

"Not really, Your Highness" Better be polite with royalty, they always know how to screw with you.

"Princess, please." The Sun Princess corrected.

"Oh, right. Well, Princess, I just started this loop and I was actually thinking of going and learning how things worked in this world."

"I can see that, there are many things that are better to learn first hoof. But please, if you have anything you'd like, big or small, don't be afraid to ask Twilight Sparkle. We are in constant communication." As on cue Spike appeared and burned a rolled scroll, which vanished and appeared right in front of her.

"Well, Princess..." why did his weakness have to be women? "â€|in my own experience, most rulers who are as generous as you claim to be always have something you do for them." Even a Seto Kamiki Jurai, hopefully still non-looping, can be a pain after she got her sights on you.

"Oh, but there is one little thing you can do for me..." Celestia told Ranma, closing her eyes with a predatory grin, and Ranma felt the blood draining from his face. Looked like Equestria won't be the safe haven he thought it would be.

"W-hat is it P-princess?"

Princess Celestia opened her eyes as if she was a child entering a sweet shop. "Stories of your previous loops, of course!"

Huh?!

Celestia's composed yet cheerful tone continued "According to Twilight Sparkle, Equestria's loop is relatively new in relation to other worlds, and I'm even not Awake as often as I want! Twilight has told me about other places but I've been out of Equestria only a few times. But sadly we have an important mission here in Equestria, as I raise the Sun every day and my sister raises the Moon every night.

"I understand that by your looper standards I'm just a filly so I want to know what happens. This is the most interesting development we've had in centuries, and I want to help them," Celestia pointed to the other ponies in the room, "as much as I can."

Internally Ranma sighed in relief. \_'For one moment I thought the mares were going to-'\_

"But there's also another reason." Celestia told him when the dark blue pegacorn... alicorn walked to her side, Princess Luna, both hardening their expressions and shifting their positions into a more regal one.

"Even before the loops started my sister Luna and I have ruled Equestria for over a millenia, and we are proud to believe in its founding principles: Harmony and the Magic of Friendship. We believe

in friendship and redemption, in always working together so the next day, even if that day is in the past, is better than today, and in always have a place to call home and return."

Princess Luna continued where her sister left off "And 'tis with conviction and knowledge, true and certain in equal measure, that a soul may become heavy in the course of long life; that we, the Diarchs of Equestria, offer you, Ranma Saotome, together with any other Looper willing to accept, be they pony in form or no, our fair land as a place of sanctuary and respite from the wearying travel 'twixt worlds and loops."

Ranma was dimly aware that the other ponies bowed to the Princesses while he weighted what he was really being offered.

After coming to a decision, Ranma sighed heavily, stood tall in front of the Princesses and nodded with a smile in his face. "Sure, let's give it a shot." Who knows, it may even work for some time after all. They all seem to be a nice enough group.

He was going to miss having fingers though.

\* \* \*

><p>7.13 (Rufus Shinra and Lord of Bones)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Celly,<em>

Got over the Eternal Night thing. Am on vacation. Will send postcard with pictures of any studly pool colts.\_

Hugs and kisses,\_

Luna.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"What's that sound?" asked the waiter stallion on the beach.<p>

"Just my sister's plans for the next few years crashing and burning," answered the alicorn, drinking another cocktail with a smile on her face.

\* \* \*

><p>7.14<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia knocked on the door of her sister's apartments.  
"Luna?"<p>

No reply.

"Luna! The sun's going down in a few minutes."

Still no reply. Celestia opened the door and peered in. "Are you

sleeping in ag-aaaah!"

"What?" the jet-black alicorn inside asked, her slit green eyes blinking in the sudden light. "Oh, Our apologies. We forgot to set Our alarm."

"Nightmare Moon!" Celestia said, getting over her shock and lighting her horn.

"Yes, We know We have slept in, Infernal Blaze." Nightmare Moonâ€| rolled over out of bed and started getting dressed.

Celestia's spell collapsed, as she tried to work out what the her was going on.

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight!" Celestia said, teleporting into the Books and Branches library. "Nightmare Moon is back!"<p>

"So?" her students' voice said from behind her. "It is the evening. That's her job."

Celestia turned to the voice, and saw her studentâ€| with an aura of dim light around her, a pair of wings, and her eyes blazing with an internal fire.

Spike was standing next to her. Or, more lying next to her. That was because he was fifteen feet long, matte black and possessed of both a wide, salamander-esque mouth and huge wings.

Celestia stared for a moment more, then ran out the door.

\* \* \*

><p>"*Five* of them." Celestia said to herself. "How could this have happened?"

It had been bad enough when the two other Elements of Harmony in town had also turned out to be alicorns â€" their coats with the unnatural colouration of corruption. Worse still were the huge fangs of whatever sweet Fluttershy had become, and the crimson fires coursing over Applejack's body.

The fact that they were still doing their daily routines was just weird.

She was distracted by a flash of blue. "Wait!" she called, hoping it was who she thought it was.

A moment later, Rainbow Dash came back down to land in front of her. Mercifully, the pegasus was unchanged.

"Thank goodness. I have terrible news, Rainbow Dash. All the other Elements are-

There was a loud BANG, and she jumped at the shock.

"Hah!" Dash shouted. "Got you! The old firecracker trick!" As she spoke, she shifted. Her mane grew more vibrant, then got pushed

aside by a horn. She gained an extra few inches, and her eyes flashed with fire. As an afterthought, she added "Oh, and it's Danger Dash, by the way. Well, so long, I have to go deliver some rain."

Celestia sat back on her haunches, flabbergasted.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well?" Dash asked, crowding around the table where the other Elements, Spike and Luna were already sitting.<p>

"I think it worked." Twilight replied, grinning. "She's boarded up her room and says she won't come out until things start making sense."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Okay, here's number seven. My thanks again to everyone who contributed.

And yes, 7.13 really DID have that many people contributing.

## 8. Chapter 8

### 8.1

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, this sucks." An earth pony with a pink mane kicked at the moon's surface. "Looks like they weren't lyingâ€|"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The remaining two ponies from that group stared at the Elements of Harmony.<p>

"â€|really?" the orange pegasus asked, like someone who had given up all hope and who was now seeing a chance again.

"Hn." The black unicorn from the group put in. "Nice to see \_someone\_ can control Sakura."

Twilight blushed, as she and the other five Elements powered down. "Thank you. But we said this was a safe Loop, and we \_meant\_ it."

The orange pegasus beat the air with his wings and took off. "I'm going to go spend the entire loop doing something nice and safe. Like sculpting. Clouds. Later, Sasuke!"

Sasuke considered. "Yeah, I agree with Naruto. Any calm, safe, boring things we could do?"

Fluttershy hummed. "Your speciality isâ€| lightning, I think?" Sasuke nodded. "Then perhaps you could do transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation. You know, little electrical shocks to help with therapy."

"â€|that doesn't sound that bad, actually." Sasuke said.

\* \* \*

><p>8.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash Awoke, and saw Fluttershy falling in front of her. The pegasus paused, taking a fraction of a second to check the others via her link to Loyalty.<p>

All six of them were here, and Awake.

\_Excellent.\_

She dove into a stoop, wings whirring. "I'm coming, Fluttershy!"

They'd discussed what to do next time this particular variant loop came upâ€|

Rainbow Dash hit mach one, broke the sound barrier, and was engulfed in a flash of prismatic light.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked determinedly at the egg. <em>Right.<em>

The first time, it had taken the boost from the Rainboom to hatch Spike. The second timeâ€| it had been easier.

The third time, Twilight poured as much magic as she could muster into the egg. There was a crackling \_boom\_, and half the wall was pushed aside by Spike's body as he exploded from egg to young adult dragon in an instant.

Twilight wobbled on her hooves. "Oohâ€| I don't feel so wellâ€|" and fell backwards. "Wowâ€| hey, cool. Look, Mum, Dad! I've got wings!" She fluttered them. "They're pretty!"

Twilight Twinkle and Night Light exchanged a look. The look spoke eloquently of the need for alcohol.

Princess Celestia galloped into the room. "What happened? I heard the wall collapse-" she saw the dragon trying to extract himself gently from the wall, and the filly alicorn in front of the hole, and her brain went blank. "Huh."

"Oh, wow!" Twilight said, stumbling back to her feet. "Princess Celestia!" She gave a bow. "It's nice to meet you, your highness."

"â€|yes. Nice to meet you." Celestia managed.

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you okay?" Gilda asked, backwinging hard to land next to the tangle of pegasi. "Dash? That was awesome, but I hope you managed to



slow downâ€| "<p>

A blue wing twitched feebly, then Fluttershy extricated herself from Rainbow Dash and started to help her get back on her feet. "Umâ€| thank you, Dash. For saving me."

"Yeah, yeahâ€|" Dash muttered, rubbing her forehead. "I wish those butterflies had slowed us down more, thoughâ€| at least I cushioned you."

Now that her friend was clearly out of danger, Gilda relaxed. "That \_was\_ cool, like I said. You broke the flippin' \_sound barrier\_, Dash! I â€" wait, what's that on your forehead?"

"Huh?" Dash reached up and felt it. When her hair moved aside, it was clearly a short horn â€" like one might find on a unicorn.

Gilda boggled. "You been hidin' things, Dash?"

"No, this is new." Dash said, sounding bewildered. "And I â€" hey, Flutters! You've got your cutie mark!"

"So have you." Fluttershy said.

"And \_you've\_ got a horn too, what was it - Fluttershy?" Gilda looked completely lost. "Is that something that happens to \_all\_ you pegasus ponies? Or just the ones that hit the ground after a rainboom?"

"Hay if I know." Dash wobbled on her feet slightly, steadied, and gave her wings an experimental flap. "Okay, I think I can fly now. Let's go back up there."

\* \* \*

><p>"Mum! Dad!" Rarity shouted. "Look what I made!"<p>

"Wow!" Rarity's mother said, looking at the dress Rarity hovered up for her. "That's very impressive. What's it made of?"

"Water." Rarity replied. "I did magic on it."

"Oh, and did you do the same for the costume you're wearing?" her father said. "Did you do magic on that too? You've worked very fast. I guess we found your special talent."

Rarity inclined her head. "Nah, these aren't a costume." Her parents' eyes widened as she spread the wings they'd thought were fake, and hovered up to eye level. "They just came from somewhere. Is this one of those things you said you'd explain when I was older, like where my sister came from?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Huh." Clyde said, watching as his daughter took to the air and began casting spells. "I ain't as surprised as I might be."<p>

"She always did have her head in the clouds," his wife nodded.

"Oh, you." Clyde gave her a look.

\* \* \*

><p>Valencia Orange jumped as Applejack materialized next to her in a flash of orange magic. "Hi, Auntie! Fer some reason ah got a horn an' wings, an' so ah'm going to commute!"<p>

"â€|what?" Valencia said, her urbane nature completely deserting her.

"Well, ah saw this big flash o' light in the sky as ah was decidin' to go back to Sweet Apple Acres, and then ah got my cutie mark," she showed it off to the staggered mare, "And then ah justâ€| found ah had wings. And a horn."

Applejack shrugged, bouncing around. "Ah don't know where they came from, but ah worked out how t' teleport easy! So, anyway, ah can come over here whenever ah feel like it! Ah don't have t' choose!"

"â€|okay." Valencia managed. "Hold on a minute, Applejack, I have to go andâ€| calm my nerves."

Applejack nodded. "Okay!"

\_Wonder if she's going to have a brandyâ€|\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Right." Celestia said, looking slightly awkwardly over the half-dozen alicorn fillies sitting in front of her. "I don't know why, but all six of you became alicorns at more-or-less the same time last week. I realize you might be having some trouble fitting in with your peers afterâ€| what happened," that was probably a considerable understatement, "and so I've asked someone else who has also been through something like this to help you through it. Any of you can speak to her if you have trouble, over anything â€" not just what is related directly to your transformation."<p>

Celestia gestured. "Cadence, if you would."

The eighth and last alicorn in the room stepped forward. "Hello. My name is Cadence, and I used to be a pegasus until about two years ago. It's nice to meet you all."

"Hello, Cadence." Five fillies chorused.

Twilight, meanwhile, was sniggering. "I know you! You're my foalsitter. And my brother has a photo of you that he keeps trying to hide from me!"

Cadence flushed, and the rest of the fillies started giggling as well.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, this seems to be working out well." Rarity said, sipping some juice.<p>

"Yep!" Pinkie agreed. "This is the earliest we've ever been introduced to each other!"

\* \* \*

><p>8.3 (continuation of 7.14)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Princess?" Twilight's voice asked.<p>

Celestia mumbled something from beneath her pillow.

"We'd like to come in and apologize."

Celestia thought it over. On the one hand, the corrupted version of Twilight had sounded just like thatâ€| but on the other hand, if there were seven evil alicorns after her they could probably have demolished the castle, whatever Celestia answered. "Alright, come in," she said, pulling the nails out of the planks across her door.

One by one, the ponies outside filed in. Luna was back to normal, but the Elements of Harmony were allâ€| different, was the best way to put it. They still had their horns and wings, and were their normal colours.

"Okay." Twilight said, once they'd all entered. "Basically, there's a strange phenomenon that's been going on for a long timeâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>"Did you have to promise that?" Dash asked.<p>

"Well, we \_did\_ scare her quite badlyâ€|" Twilight replied. "And when you think about it, she's been working for over a thousand years without a break."

"Yeah, I suppose." The alicorn rustled her wings. "I could have done without us becoming the government this time, though. I did have a planâ€|"

Twilight shrugged. "At least there's seven of us to spread the load."

"True."

Pinkie grinned. "I've never seen a coronation ceremony happen so fast! She got all six of us confirmed as Princesses Regnant in five minutes flat!"

\* \* \*

><p>Discord's statue shattered open. "Right, time for some funâ€| where's Celly, she's usually good for a laughâ€| oh." He looked around. "Are alicorns more common these days?"<p>

Princess Twilight nodded. "Pretty much."

The others moved into position.

Fluttershy spoke up. "Now, mister Discord, we can do this the easy

way, or the hard way, or the angry way."

"You really want to take the easy way." Twilight confided.

"Hmmmâ€|" Discord pulled an application form out of thin air. "Where's the small print?"

"The easy way is that you don't get all chaotic." Rarity started. "Then we see if you're willing to learn about friendship."

"Hmâ€|" the draconequus tapped his beard. "Boring. What's the hard way?"

Five necklaces and a crown flashed into existence.

"Right, right. More statue time. I think I've had my fill of that for now. What's the angry way?"

Most of the alicorns dove for cover.

Fluttershy blinked. Once, twiceâ€| and then she smiled.

It wasn't a nice smile. There were too many teeth for that.

\* \* \*

><p>Discord hovered past Twilight, dropping his tattered application form.<p>

She picked it up. The box for 'easy way' was ticked three times, and had a note attached saying 'for the love of me, easy waaaaay'.

"That's nice of him." Twilight mused, grinning. "Okay, 'shy, you can stop now."

Flying Hatred reverted instantly to Princess Fluttershy. "Okay. I hope I wasn't too hard on himâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia.<em>

\_Discord tried to escape. Can you believe it? Fortunately, we were all ready for him, and he's doing community service â€" mainly in local classrooms. Apparently he's demonstrating what physics isn't.\_

\_I liked the last postcard of yours. It looks like there's a lovely view from the top of that mountain.\_

\_I'm glad you're enjoying your holiday. Might I suggest the griffin lands next? I've heard there are some canyons there where the wind plays a tune as it blows through the rocks.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Disguised as a common guard, Chrysalis of the Changelings waited for her chance to strike. She'd spent the past month learning the

routine and personality of Princess Mi Amore Cadenza, and the time was ripe for her to replace the fool pony and usurp her place at the wedding in a months' time.<p>

"Oh, that's nice." She heard her target say. "Shining, your sister says she's visiting with her friends."

Chrysalis' ears pricked. Another distraction. Another wait.

"Did she say when she's coming?" The unicorn asked.

"Erâ€| right now."

Chrysalis nearly fell over as a huge flash of teleportation magic erupted not a length from where her disguised self was standing. When she'd recovered somewhat, she looked and felt for whoever this sister was-

And saw no fewer than six more alicorns standing there.

Quietly planning to fire her spies â€" possibly out of a cannon â€" she sent an abort signal through the changeling empathic network and started planning how to leave the country.

Fast.

One alicorn, she'd be able to deal with if she had the element of surprise. The country's ruler, the thousands-of-years-old Celestia? Surprise and a great deal of magic from Shining Armor.

Six at once? Buck that.

\* \* \*

><p>8.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Sorry," Cadence said awkwardly. "I'm afraid this is how this loop looks like going."<p>

Prince Shining Armor shrugged. "At least I get paper based magic. Shields are nice, but I sometimes want a little more variety."

The six ponies normally known as the Elements of Harmony stared at Cadence with fixed expressions for another moment. Then Twilight (also known as the Deva Path of Love, this Loop) shook her head wearily. "Whatever. I do notice everyone in Naruto's Loop seems to have been turned into a pony in some wayâ€| he's not around, in case you were wondering. I checked."

Akatsuki looked even stranger than normal when they were ponies wearing matching cloaks. Rarity looked like she was barely restraining a redesign fit.

"Erâ€| so who's Naruto been replaced by?" Animal Path Fluttershy asked.

\* \* \*

><p>A dozen Village Hidden in the Everfree ponies jumped after the local troublemaker.<p>

"Ha!" he shouted, snapping his fingers and materializing a large trampoline. Most of them bounced off it, flying out of the village entirely, but one pony snapped out her wings and flew around it.

"Huh?" With a \_thud\_, Scootaloo body-checked the joker into the ground. "Awwwâ€|"

"Discord," she shook her head. "Right, you're cleaning up the monument. And without magic."

"Do I get chocolate milk afterwards?" Discord asked.

"Alright," she sighed.

\* \* \*

><p>Discord sat in the corner of the classroom, waiting for their teacher to show up. He'd enjoyed his meals with Scootaloo and the other two academy teachers, and of course he'd passed his testâ€| but apparently you got points off for pranks.<p>

So he'd \_barely\_ passed. (It was a good thing that point deductions couldn't result in a failing grade, or he'd have got negative eight hundred and twenty three percent.) And that got him on the team with the unicorn and the changeling making goo-goo eyes at one another while they waited.

Then the door opened, and a blue-black pony stepped through. "Sorry I'm late. I got stuck on the moon after the Hokage got annoyed. I'm Luna, and I'll be your teacher. Come on."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight ended the scrying spell, and the eight alicorns took deep breaths.<p>

"Discord. Discord is Naruto." Cadence threw up her hooves. "Well, we're doomed. He's going to have to teach us the power of chaos, or something."

"Who's the Hokage?" the Pony path, Dash, asked.

"Celestia, of course." Twilight rolled her eyes. "\_That\_ one was obvious. But I checked â€" aside from the CMC being academy teachers like I showed you, no Mizuki, and us, we've seen all the changes. Orochimaru is as per normal, just a pony."

"Ew." Everypony said.

"Oh, that reminds me." Cadence got out a notebook. "My current motivation is that an old friend of mine didn't get married. Because of that, I want to make sure everyone in the elemental nations gets hooked up â€" and to do that, I will build the Dating Simulator."

"â€|did I imagine those capital letters?" asked Twilight.

"Nope." Cadence grinned.

"Well, this'll be funâ€|" the Paths of Love chorused.

\* \* \*

><p>8.5 (L337 m4n)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Berry Punch walked into a bar, like she did most days, and asked one of her favourite questions. "Bartenderâ€| give me the hardest liquor you got!"<p>

The bartender shrugged. "Sorry but we ran out of Liquor, Wine, and Aleâ€| would you like a warm glass of milk instead?"

\* \* \*

><p>Berry came awake with a violent start, stifling a scream.  
<em>No<em> alcohol?

After a moment, she realized where she was, and went downstairs to get herself a nightcap to steady her nerves.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle walked into a large library, found herself a book to read, and sat down. Opening it, she was startled to find herself looking at blank pages.<p>

Blinking, she looked down the page, then rifled through the book. A feeling of dread building, she grabbed two more books from the case â€" only to see the same thing â€" before screaming "Where are the words!"

Twilight woke up sweating and ran downstairs to her library. It took her four novels before she was certain her books were still fine.

\* \* \*

><p>"Rather crude Luna. Messing with the dreams of our citizens," Celestia admonished, before turning her attention back to the nightmares.<p>

"Sister, given how many times I have been told they pranked me, I feel I deserve one night of revenge. Now be quiet, I plan to mess with a certain apple for that bucking one loop." Luna looked into each dream, then gained a grin that would look more fitting on Nightmare Moon.

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack came out to the front door of her farm, to find a number of ponies wearing black suits busily stripping it down.<p>

"Hey, what are you doin'?" Applejack protested, getting in the way of one.

"We're the Internal Revenue Service and you owe us back taxes for seven yearsâ€¦ your assets are being liquidated," the Pony in black stated calmly.

Applejack gave the biggest scream yet, startling her siblings, and looked out every window in the house to check for tax ponies before finally going back to bed with the shakes.

"Yes, oh yes! Next one on the revenge list isâ€¦ Pinkie! She'll be the next to fall for her constant parties that one loop. So much cakeâ€¦ so much," Luna brooded, thinking about the picture she'd been shown of how much weight she'd gained that Loop.

\* \* \*

><p>8.6 (continuation of 7.13)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"That's right," Celestia said. "Just one attack, nothing major."<p>

The individual she was talking to twitched his nose.

"No, you don't need to actually kill anyone." Seeing his reaction, the alicorn frowned. "Though I suppose you can threaten it if you feel like it."

After a moment, Angel Bunny rubbed the fingers of his forepaw against his thumb.

"Five carts," Celestia offered.

Angel turned away in a huff.

"Six?"

The rabbit looked over his shoulder, and made a circling gesture with his hand.

"All right, seven then."

Nods.

"Right. I need to go contact the Golden Harvest family, they're the only ones with that many carrots." Celestia pointed a hoof. "You are a harsh negotiator for a lagomorph."

Angel shrugged.

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia counted in her head. <em>Right. One rabbit attack, then a couple of timber wolf attacksâ€¦ that sea serpentâ€¦ a mantichoraâ€¦ and, finallyâ€¦<em>

This would cause her student to awaken the Elements if anything would. Admittedly, she wouldn't have even tried this if it were not for how Twilight had gone exploring and found the things, but they



still needed to be usable for Equestria to be safe. And with Luna out having a beach holiday, there had to be some other kind of threat.

Which led to why the alicorn of the Sun was poking an Ursa Major with a stick.

The enormous beast finally snorted, opened an eyeâ€| grabbed Celestia in a massive paw, and rolled over back to sleep with its new 'soft toy'.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight scanned the Everfree forest, homing in on her mentor's magical signature. She'd already contacted the Awake Luna, and knew it wasn't her doing that the sun hadn't come up yet â€" but a missing Celestia could be a serious problem.<p>

Possibly it was connected to why Angel Bunny had somehow demolished the town hallâ€|

Finally finding the right place, she cautiously entered the cave.

\* \* \*

><p>"While I'm sure you're amused, Twilight," Celestia said with her precious little remaining dignity, "I do rather need help. Ursa Major are so resistant to magic I can't teleport out."<p>

Twilight rolled around on the floor, still giggling. Every time she'd tried to come to her hooves, she'd caught sight of the complete opposite of 'a pony with a teddy bear' and gone right back to laughing herself silly.

\* \* \*

><p>8.7 (L33t M4n)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Girls! I thought of something for this loop to prepare for the changelings. The idea came to me after that time I accidentally caused a Soviet victory in that Loop with Einstein." Pinkie bounced happily along before pulling a projector out of nowhere and setting the film up.<p>

"Fellow ponies! There is an enemy hidden amongst us! CHANGELINGS! Trying to steal our home, the changelings lurk in the background!" the narrator showed a scene of shadowy eyes peering from the dark.

"But how do you recognize those dangerous fiends? With a simple question."

An earth pony with a shovel appeared on the screen.

"Do you like working Lucy?"

"Yes, sir!" Lucy saluted with shovel in hoof.

The camera panned right. Next to her was a pegasus in horrible changeling make-up

"And do you like workingâ€|?" the narrator paused while a close up was used on the changeling.

"Huuuhâ€|" she spoke unconvincingly before the scene shifted to the Equestrian flag.

"If her answer is anything but a yes, she is a CHANGELING!"

\* \* \*

><p>8.8 (Chojomeka)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Just get it over with already, Ikari," growled the light coated Diamond Dog.<p>

"â€|Well I guess the universe just decided to show you as you are in this loop, Asukaâ€|" a tan pegasus replied. "You knowâ€| as a bitch?"

If Shinji's grin were any bigger it would have split his face in two.

\* \* \*

><p>8.9 (Belgarion213)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"My dear Twilight, there is more to a young pony's life than studying, so I'm sending you to supervise the preparations for the Summer Sun Celebration in this year's location: Ponyville. And, I have an even more essential task for you to complete: make some friends!"<p>

Spike was about to counsel the miserable Twilight Sparkle after the princess's words, but paused. He had been with the purple Unicorn since he was hatched at her entrance to the prestigious Academy she attended, but the almost unholy light that shone in those eyesâ€| it worried him.

He shrugged it off. After all, what was the worst that could happen?

"Make friends," he could hear Twilight muse, "â€|Spike! That just might work!"

â€|Why did he ask these questions?

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia, <em>

\_I have arrived in Ponyville and am continuing my supervision for the upcoming Summer Sun Celebration. Ms Applejack of Sweet Apple Acres has assured me that the food is coming along swimmingly, while

Rainbow Dash, leader of Weather Ponies in Ponyville, has been maintaining a clear sky. Ms Rarity has created some impeccable decorations, awaiting your arrival, while Ms Fluttershy has orchestrated a truly magical orchestra.\_

\_I have made some few suggestions and eagerly await your arrival for the Summer Sun Celebration. \_

\_Your faithful student,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle. \_

\_PS: I am running into problems keeping the spark of life in the animated golems from escaping. Do you have any suggestions for how I can keep the mana flow variation within safe parameters without using self-perpetuating seal script? I dislike the thought of using that option because of the problems Starswirl encountered in his examination with the 'Tribbles' but I cannot seem to get the mana flowing safely without it. These won't be very good friends with that level of instability.\_

Princess Celestia lowered the letter for a moment and stared into the distance. "â€|I didn't mean it that way," she said weakly. She supposed she \_should\_ have been more direct to poor Twilight. A brilliant Unicorn but sometimes so distressingly literal minded.

\* \* \*

><p>"I don't know about you," Rainbow Dash said, edging away from 'Bright Wind', "But they give me the creeps." There was something about the friends of this newcomer, 'Twilight Sparkle', which just put her on edge. Maybe it was the way they didn't seem to blink?<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|are you sure this is what the Princess wanted you to do?" Spike asked his friend nervously, staring <em>far<em> below him at the giant pit of boiling metal. He didn't know \_why\_ the Ponyville library had a shaft that lead to what he assumed was Equestria's mantle, or how Twilight had found it, but even a Dragon was a bit frightened of the level of heat down there.

"Of course Spike!" Twilight said, a dizzying number of glyphs floating around her in interlocking circles, half of them rotating clockwise, the other half counter-clockwise as her horn glowed almost scalding white and she wrote script directly onto raw metal refined from that furnace far below. "I can't believe that I didn't see it before! It's obvious this is what she means!"

"I don't knowâ€|." Spike said slowly.

Twilight kept smiling, while writing with a fine touch that only experience could bring on the metal far below. Of course she knew this wasn't what Celestia had meant, but well there were \_needs\_.

The dimensional pocket that she had learned (and dissected the spell array for) from one of the older Loopers was impressive, very impressive. It was obvious that it had been an incredible spell at

its beginning, but centuries â€" perhaps millennia â€" had gone into increasing the efficiency it had, allowing her to sustain a small, self contained universe from her own power. One that would follow her between loops.

That meant she could carry things between them, and Twilight Sparkle was a Mage. After that Star Wars loop and the \_millions\_ of Pinkie Pies, the \_hostile\_ Pinkie Piesâ€¦ she would never feel safe again without her own subordinates.

Most of the older Loopers used clones. They \_were\_ useful, but Twilight kept trying to micromanage the sensory input and motor control of \_all\_ of her bodies, not letting 'shadows' of her mind form. A habit most mages really interested in the workings of magic had, though it could be worked around according to Lina anyway.

Twilight Sparkle spun the metal in the air, as script so tiny and so dense that it looked like two giant swathes of purple magic formed over the glowing white pieceâ€¦ she fought the desire to cackle. She was not the cackling kind of Pony!

\* \* \*

<p>8.10 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

(Note: this ficlet assumes a "Dumbledore" or "manipulative-in-the-name-of-the-greater-good" Celestia.)

\* \* \*

<p><strong><span>Turning the Tables part 2<span>\*\*

Celestia caught the arriving scroll effortlessly as it flashed into existence. Philomena was perched on a stand in front of her as she took mid-afternoon tea in her private quarters. She noted the seal on it and smiled at the phoenix.

"It seems my favourite student has found the Legend of the Two Sisters, and drawn the correct conclusions. Now all I need to do is get her to Ponyville."

She took a sip of tea and opened the scroll. Seconds later, the phoenix squawked in distress as she got doused in hot tea, courtesy of the Princess's absolutely spectacular spit-take.

"Butâ€¦ sheâ€¦" Celestia stared at the scroll wide-eyed, as if continued observation would make the words on it change. "Going to a party with Spike? Just to make him happy?"

Philomena flared up, instantly drying herself and chattered at the Princess.

"Yes, it is a worthy thing to do, and I'm proud she showed consideration, but she couldn't have chosen a worse time! If I send her to Ponyville without knowledge of the legend, she won't know what she needs to doâ€¦"

The phoenix chattered again.

"Too clever for my own good am I?" Celestia looked distant. "I knew from the moment I saw and felt that rainbow shock-wave of magic that the spirits of the Elements of Harmony had arisen once again in the souls of ponies. I felt Twilight's magic resonate with it, so strongly, I knew she was the missing element, the one who could bring the others together, use them to their full potential for the first time sinceâ€¦"

She shook her head. "I felt the other elements being touched, connected by that rainbow wave, and I've since felt them congregating in Ponyville. While I no longer have power over them, I still remember the sense of their magic. I'm sure they're being drawn to one another, and if I can just put Twilight in close proximity, she should act as the focus, awaken them with the spark of friendship. But she'll need the husks of the crystals that once housed them as well, to store the awakened elements.

"That was why I laid down those clues so many centuries ago, so they could be discovered at our old palace at the right time, to bring together the elements in the right way. I had worried that the element of magic might not be studious, but Twilight seemed perfect in that regard. They were cryptic against the possibility that the bearer might on realising the power they would come to wield, decide to use it for selfish reasons."

The phoenix gave a flaming snort, and series of squawks.

"No, I don't think Twilight would misuse them either. She has consistently exceeded my expectations in every area, except that she could be more social. At any other time, going to that party with Spike would have been a good thing; it's only the timing that is inconvenient. Maybe I should have told her more directly, but everything seemed to be going so well without any further intervention. Now I may have no choice."

There was an interrogative cluck from Philomena.

"I will summon her here, and tell her what she needs to know about my sister's banishment. Then I will tell her I need her to find the Elements, that they were hidden from me, but that I believe there may be records in Ponyville library. Then I will suggest she go in undercover as the overseer for the Summer Sun Celebration. That should put things back on the rails."

Philomena fluffed up and gave her another chattering telling off.

The alicorn shook her head. "Tell her everything? I don't want to burden her with anything more than I have to. She can start out believing she merely has to find them, that she will ultimately have to wield them is something best left until she's had a chance to adapt. Maybe she could handle it all, but why take a chance? It's the same reason she can't know I intend to be captured. With the power of the conjunction, Nightmare Moon can overpower me, but keeping me from escaping the sun will weaken her greatly. So she won't be able to simply overpower Twilight and the other spirits before they can reactivate the husks. She'll have to use guile, and thankfully that isn't her strong point."

Celestia sighed. "I could have gotten everything prepared months in

advance, but I couldn't risk the possibility that Nightmare Moon might be able to sense the spirits or the husks of the elements. Luna was once connected to them too, remember? The wild magic of the Everfree hides them, and Nightmare Moon will come after me, even if she senses the spirits in Ponyville, because "as far as she knows I'm the bearer, and the only one who could use them against her."

The phoenix made a rasping sound.

"You still think I should have told Twilight some of this, don't you? In hindsight, maybe I could have, but my original plan has been working up until now, and I'd prefer not to change Wonderbolts in mid race." Princess Celestia's horn glowed, and a quill and sheet of parchment appeared in front of her. "The less of all this I have to put in a letter, the better."

She smiled at her own unintentional poetry, and set to work, ignoring that Philomena had put a wing across her eyes and beak, clearly unhappy with the decided course of action.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight had millennia of real experience of social situations from her many loops, including the loops where she'd substituted for Celestia. Adding background memories from those same loops expanded that even further. So she was no longer the socially awkward filly she'd started out as in the base time-line. Indeed, she could duplicate her mentor's air of sangfroid quite easily. Added to her own talent and understanding of the magic of friendship, she could have had the entire party eating out of her hoof in five minutes.<p>

Of course, being the sort of pony who could gain her alicorn-hood through her understanding of friendship, the idea of ponies worshipping her like that was repugnant. In all her loops, that was the one thing she'd never attempted. However, that didn't mean she wouldn't use her abilities to help Spike and accomplish her overall plan. Though in part, that meant hiding her abilities, and reacting more like base time-line Twilight would have.

So when her appearance at the entrance to the west castle courtyard with Spike on her back caused the conversations to quieten down, and most of the eyes of the mares and stallions assembled to turn on her, she made herself flinch with a nervousness she didn't actually feel, then visibly stiffened her shoulders and her resolve and headed for Moondancer, lowering Spike gently to her side.

Trotting over to the white unicorn, she said, "Uhâ€ hi, Twinkleshine told me about your party, and Spike wanted to come, and I felt I should come with him. I know you didn't exactly invite me directly, but Twinkleshine implied it'd be okayâ€"

Clearly, the white unicorn opposite her was still stunned by the fact that Twilight Sparkle, the Princess's own student, and the pony who never came to parties, was at hers. It would be a considerable social coup for her.

Twilight reacted the way she once would have, starting to speed up her words, and glance around nervously. "â€ if it's a problem, I'm

sorry I intruded on your party, I didn't mean to cause problems, I really have to be getting back now I've seen Spike safely here, I feel guilty enough that I told the princess I was taking time off to do this and I should go now before I make myself look any more foalishâ€|"

Twilight started to turn away only to hear, "Wait! I'm very happy to have you here! I was just surprised. You don't normally come to any-pony's parties!"

She let herself visibly relax, smiling at the other pony. "That's why I thought maybe I should start. I'm good with magic, other poniesâ€| not so much. I was reading some ancient legends about Starswirl the Beardedâ€| I'm sorry, I'm babbling, and Spike wanted to come see you especially."

That got the dragon exclaiming "Twilight!" in an embarrassed tone of voice, which made the other ponies giggle. Twilight had used magic and memory retention techniques to sharpen her already excellent memory to near perfect recall, but she'd actually forgotten that before Spike had gone gaga over Rarity, he'd been crushing on the pony in front of her.

Still, the little dragon came forward and handed over his gift. Shyly, he said, "I got this for you, I hope you like it."

Twilight decided to make it up to her companion by tweaking it with a very low power want-it, need-it spell, synchronised to Moondancer. It would decay to untraceable levels in a few moments, and leave no permanent effect other than a vague fondness for the object. Moondancer reacted by hugging the teddy bear to her, and squealing "I love it!"

Spike got picked up in her telekinesis too, and got a big kiss on the cheek. He floated away with hearts in his eyes. Towards the buffet table, of course, even romance didn't interfere with his appetite. Meanwhile Twilight was introduced around, Moondancer and Twinkleshine somehow coming to a time-sharing arrangement of some kind, possibly by telepathy.

Twilight found she was enjoying herself immensely. For a looper, especially one as experienced as she was, novelty was more precious than goldâ€| or, in her case, books. And yet here were dozens of ponies who before now she'd known only as part of the background, each with their own histories, ideas and quirks.

Of course, they wanted to ask her things, about the princess, about problems they were having with some of the tougher parts of their studies, and a surprising number of them about her brother. It seemed that the Captain of the Guard had a lot of admirers, not all of them mares. It was something of a shock to find at least a couple of stallions, and one mare who were more interested in her as well. Those she deflected as gently and nicely as possible.

She did her best to answer ponies' questions where she could, but mostly she asked her own questions, and listened. Centuries of experience had shown her that you could be accounted a great conversationalist simply by getting other ponies (and most other sentient beings) to talk about themselves, and listening. Of course, all this new information was also like fine wine or new book, to be

drunk in and filed carefully in her highly organised memory.

In the cases of the people asking her for help, her questions explored what they did understand, and helped them to see what they didn't. Something she'd learned from Princess Celestia was that guiding ponies to understanding something on their own made it stick far better than simply telling them. She'd wondered if that was part of the reason Princess Celestia had handled the quest for the Elements of Harmony the way she had, but the cases weren't parallel. There was more at stake than just Twilight's development as a pony, and while she was a bit awed that the Princess might have put that much value on it, she disagreed.

She did play one small prank. While she'd finally forgiven her brother for all the past times that he hadn't let her know about the wedding until the very last minute (after all, from his point of view, it was just the once) that didn't mean she couldn't prank him. Ponies asking about her brother were informed of his weakness for double chocolate cookies, though in fairness, she did tell the stallions that she was sure her brother didn't walk that side of the paddock.

It was working with no more than her base time-line self would have known, but the results should be that over the next couple of months, Shining Armour should end up getting a lot of love letters and boxes of cookies, not to mention approaches of varying directness. Before the end of it, he'd probably be sick of them.

Of course, there was always some-pony ready to upset the apple cart.

"Look at her, that stuck up little bookworm finally deigned to come mingle with the rest of us! Swanning around, showing off how smart she is!"

It was a unicorn who went by the name Sharp Retort. While she had considerable talent as an alchemist, her magic scores, both theory and practical, were generally near the bottom of the table. Twilight had never really met her, but she'd heard the other defining characteristic of this pony was her sharp tongue, and her desire to make a big splash socially.

In other words, she was a marginally more adult unicorn version of that evil minded little filly, Diamond Tiara, though with at least some actual redeeming features. After centuries of observation, Twilight had come to the conclusion that the only thing DT was good for was as a bad example.

Twilight apologised to the mare she was helping to understand Marelin's theory of Morphic Fungibility, and turned to face the other unicorn, who was also wearing a fancier dress than most of the ponies there. "That's not how I'd have put it, but I assume you have a reason for saying so?"

"You shouldn't be here!" Sharp Retort sneered, "Go back to your books, it's where you belong!"

Base time-line Twilight would have bailed at this point, so she flinched, ears flicking back. She took a step back, then she visibly steadied herself. She glanced around and saw that most of the ponies,



other than a couple who were obviously Sharp Retort's pals, were looking on with sympathy or encouragement for her, or annoyance at Sharp Retort.

Taking a deep breath, she replied, "Still not hearing a reason for your aggressiveness, but based on your test scores, attire and general attitude, it could be one of three possibilities. Either you are jealous of my academic achievements, my proximity to the Princess, or that you hoped to be the centre of attention here and my arrival spoiled that. Or it could be varying degrees of all three."

Sharp Retort's body language told her she'd zapped the alchemist's weather-pony right between the wings. "Why youâ€¦ why should I be jealous of a pathetic little bookworm like you? You don't have any real friends, or any real life! You're just a bunch of books in the shape of a unicorn!"

That got a number of looks of shock and disgust from her new friends, and she saw Spike, who'd been relaxing on a recliner by the buffet table, being fed tid-bits by a number of mares, jump up and start over, little arms swinging belligerently.

The comment would have hurt base-line Twilight deeply. She gave another wince, then took a deep breath, speaking calmly. "You know, you're absolutely right. It is rather sad that until today, the only thing I knew about most of the ponies around us were their test scores. Thank you for reminding me exactly why coming to this party was such a good idea. On that basis, you have nothing to be jealous of. So why are you?"

"I'm not jealous! I can't believe you're all falling for her innocent act!" Sharp Retort looked around, but seeing no support from any-pony except her book ends, she gave a growl of annoyance and flounced out.

Twilight went over to the host of the party, head slightly bowed. "I'm sorry, Moondancer, I didn't mean to cause a scene."

"You weren't the one causing it." The other unicorn reassured her. "I'm sorry you had to deal with all that. That was just plain mean."

"However, she had a point." Twilight sighed. "I should be getting back to my studies. I still feel really guilty that I went to this party without the Princess okaying it."

Spike had come up and hugged her leg. "C'mon Twi, we're on break! I'm sure she won't mind you taking one night off."

"Yes, surely you're learning stuff here too?" Moondancer asked.

Twilight decided they deserved a proper answer. While any-pony could generate a heart-song, it only happened when they were in the grip of some deep emotion. It had taken many loops to learn Pinkie Pie's music-on-demand ability, but it was worth it for universes with a musical component, such as Equestria. "Oh yes, so muchâ€¦"

"My researches they were enough,

And keeping my work up to snuff,  
Ponies as friends I did not miss,  
But I wasn't prepared for this! "Who'd have thought that chatting was such fun,  
Learning about ponies one by one,  
Sharing memories and helping them out,  
It's a wonderful new feeling without doubt!  
"Companionship that I did dismiss,  
Now I know that it's simply bliss.  
Making some new friends,  
Helping ponies,  
Seeing what life sends,  
Not books only,  
I want to do more of this!"

She had some idea of the workings of narrative causality from her long study of many universes, and there was no way the fates would let something like that pass without reacting. Cue Spike burping up a scroll with the Princess's own seal. Depending on what was on it, the prank might end right here. Had Celestia learned that not providing enough information or guidance risked things going badly wrong, or was she still convinced that only she had the need to see the full picture?

'Twilight, my faithful student,

I need to see you on a matter of great urgency. Come immediately to my chambers.

Princess Celestia.'

Apparently not. Twilight let the scroll drop to the floor, face an expression of shock. "It's from the Princess, she wants to see me right away!"

Spike shrugged. "Okay, so what's the problem? You love spending time with her."

"Oh Spike, don't you see? I said I'd come here rather than continue working! She must think I'm not taking my studies seriously!"

She was a bit embarrassed about acting like this, or rather the fact that she'd originally acted like this for real over a simple late letter. However, it was how she would have reacted back then, or rather how she believed she would have reacted. So she paced around, acting fuming and flustered, ears twitching.

"What if she gives me a test on what I was supposed to be learning? What if I fail? You know what teachers do to students who fail? They send them back a grade!"

"But Twilight, this was your project in the first place, and you're not even in a grade!"

"No, you're right! She may just send me back to magic kindergarten!" Creating an illusion of herself sitting in a tiny desk seat, being laughed at by colts was easy enough, while she did her best impression of a thousand yard stare. "No, she'll probably dismiss me as her student altogether!"

She was rather proud of managing to put three exclamation marks into a spoken sentence. Now it was time to put the cherry on top of this particular piece of humble pie. Before Spike could act as the voice of sanity, she teleported away to her tower study. She had a lot of things to do to enact the next part of her plan, and very little time to do them in.

Moondancer looked confused. "Whatâ€¦ just happened?"

"Twilight's off on one of her things again." Spike sighed. "Maybe it's because she's so smart. She can find things to worry about that no-pony else would even think about. The Princess probably just wanted to ask her how she enjoyed the party. I'll go find her and calm her down. She's probably in her studyâ€¦ frantically studying whatever it was she thinks she was to be tested on."

After he'd left, the party was a bit subdued, but soon got back into full swing. Said swing came to a dead stop when Princess Celestia herself flashed into existence at the entrance to the courtyard. Every-pony turned towards her and bowed deeply.

"Thank you, my little ponies." The princess said with her usual grace. "I did not wish to interrupt your party, but I'm looking for Twilight Sparkle. I summoned her some time ago, and she had said she was at this party. Does any-pony know where she is now?"

Moondancer answered, a bit nervously. "When she saw your letter, sheâ€¦"

"Freaked out!" Some-pony else said, after an awkward silence.

"â€¦ freaked out. She was going on about you dismissing her as a student because she came here rather than studying." The white unicorn took a few seconds to work up his nerve, then asked, "You, you wouldn't really do that, would you?"

"Of course not!" Celestia was genuinely shocked. "I'm pleased to see her making new friends, I just needed her for an important job."

"Spike did say she did this kind of thing occasionally. He said he was going back to her study to calm her down."

Celestia's mind was set at ease now that she knew where to find her errant student. However, she was curious, in part because how Twilight did here would be a good indicator of how she might do in

Ponyville. "Twilight is not the most social of ponies. Was she enjoying herself up until my message?"

"If you call singing about it enjoying yourself, then yes I think she did." Moondancer smirked. One way or another this party would be the most talked about of the year.

"Twilight? Singing?" In her millennia of experience, she'd had many surprises, but she'd never have imagined Twilight engaging in a heart-song, unless it was about a new book. "I see I may have to apologise to her, I had no idea she was that engaged in this party. Thank you all for making her welcome."

"Oh, it wasn't all one way, your highness." Twinkleshine responded. "I mean, she was shy to start with, but as soon as she got talkingâ€¦ after five minutes you felt like you'd known her for ages."

There was a general agreement from the ponies around her. One of the stallions added, "She really helped me too. You hear that she's this magical prodigy, but it's another thing to actually see it."

"How soâ€¦ Flash Card, isn't it?"

"Yes, your highness." He looked a bit nervous when the princess turned her attention to him, but carried on. "I've been having trouble understanding amniomorphic spells, I can do them, but I have trouble with the theory side. Or rather, I did until I talked to Twilight. Professor Speller's taken me through it, but I could never get what he was going on about. However, Twilight managed to figure out where I was going wrong, and show me. She did it all in about ten minutes, and she didn't make me feel like an idiot for not understanding it already."

Celestia was impressed, not just at the level of skill his tale suggested, but that these ponies were all willing to come to Twilight's support. As she knew herself, simply because you knew a subject didn't mean you could teach it effectively. Once again, she wouldn't have pegged Twilight as being one of the ones who could. She made a graceful departure, and headed for Twilight's private tower, her confidence restored. It seemed, if anything, that her student was even more suited for her task than she'd imagined.

As she flew up to the entrance to Twilight's study, she composed herself to help Spike perform any remaining calming down that needed doing. When she reached the door, it was ajar, which seemed odd, so she went straight in. Spike was sitting in the middle of the room, staring blankly at the opened letter that was clutched in his paw..

Another sealed letter sat on Twilight's work table, with the seal that showed it was for Celestia's eyes only. She picked it up and opened it, her earlier confidence replaced by worry. The writing was Twilight's, but it was not her usual immaculate cursive script. The shakiness was slight, but it was clear her telekinesis had been disturbed by some great emotion.

'Dear Princess Celestia,

I most humbly apologise for neglecting my studies in favour of socialising. I honestly believed a few hours delay in doing that

research would make no difference. I will endeavour to avoid friendships in future as they are clearly too distracting. I so enjoyed myself that for some time I completely forgot about my work, something that is clearly unacceptable.

However, that does not excuse my error. I have failed you, and as ruler of Equestria, you can not let that go unpunished. To save you the embarrassment of having to dismiss me, and myself the shame, I hereby submit my withdrawal from Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns. I will leave quietly, and find some other position. I hope you can eventually forgive me for not living up to your standards.

>I remain your most devoted and faithful subject,<p>

Your ex-student,  
>Twilight Sparkle.'<p>

Celestia had experienced much in her vast lifespan, but she'd rarely felt the shock she did right then. Twilight had left? Her telekinesis snatched Spike's letter from his paws, desperate to find any further scrap of information as to where she might be.

'Dear Spike,

I have to leave for a while. I'm sorry to leave so abruptly, without saying good bye or explaining in person, but I have no choice. I've disgraced myself, disappointed the Princess, so I can no longer stay here. I can't return to my parents house either, not after this. Leaving you there was one of the hardest parts of my decision to do so. I would have taken you with me, but I shall have to find a new place to live, some other way to support myself, and in the meantime, things are likely to be tough.

I can hear you as if you're standing there in front of me, saying it doesn't matter. Best of dragons, it does to me and I couldn't ask you to share the hardships I've brought on myself. Princess Celestia will care for you, I'm sure. As soon as I have somewhere to live, some way to provide for us both, I will let you know. If you still want to be assistant and best friend to a plain old unicorn, rather than Celestia's favourite student, I certainly want you to be with me.

Your friend,  
>Twilight Sparkle.'<p>

Having his letter taken off him had broken Spike out of his trance. He noticed Celestia for the first time, and his expression crumpled. "She was already gone when I got here!"

He ran over to her, and she patted his back as he hugged her leg tightly. "Do not worry, this is all a silly misunderstanding, one that will be fixed as soon as I talk to her. I only needed her to undertake an important mission."

"But she's gone!" Spike cried out.

"Not for long. Canterlot isn't Manehattan you know. I shall have Shining Armour and the entire Royal Guard comb the city for her. I'm sure they will find her within the hour, and then we can put this whole unfortunate incident behind us."

She placed him on her back, and carried him out of the tower, mind whirring. She considered the dragon on her back, and what she'd found out earlier. "Tell me Spike, does Twilight truly see me as so strict? I would never punish her so harshly, even if I felt her taking time off from her studies to make new friends to be a bad thing, which I don't."

"Maybe you should have told her that!" Spike snapped, then looked away, ashamed. "I'm sorry, Princess."

"Never be ashamed of speaking your mind." Her magic gently brought his chin up. "Your loyalty to her does her credit, and you too. Now, please tell me your mind."

Spike was clearly debating with himself on exactly what to say, loyalty warring with honesty. "No, it's sort of... You know she's kind of nuts about getting everything just right. She worships you, too. When she's pushing herself with another all-nighter, I think she uses the idea that it's what you expect of her to push herself that bit more. She invents these over the top punishments because to her, pleasing you is the most important thing in the world. So failing is the worst crime, and deserves the worst punishment."

"So she projects her own desire for perfection onto me?" Celestia was feeling rather guilty as she flew towards the Royal Guard barracks. She'd left well enough alone because a studious Twilight was exactly what she needed the sixth element to be. It sounded like Twilight had been heading down the wrong path that Starswirl the Bearded had once trod. Maybe if she'd encouraged her to have more of a social life outside her studies, she'd have been less likely to see it as a failing.

In an immortal, self honesty was even more important than in most ponies. The accumulated subconscious garbage of facts you kept yourself from acknowledging as the centuries piled up could send you into madness as surely as Discord. So when she realised something she had hidden from herself, she faced it squarely.

It was clear now that she'd made not one but two grave errors. Firstly, she had focussed on developing Twilight's magical abilities and studious nature in preparation for her destiny as the Bearer of the Element of Magic, and in the process unconsciously dismissed her development in other areas as unimportant. As long as Twilight was able to make friends with the other bearers and was loyal to Celestia, that was enough.

It was not something she'd have ever decided consciously, indeed the idea of using a pony like that horrified her. Twilight was more to her than some magical super-weapon, even without her destiny, Celestia would still have taken her on as a personal student, as someone with that sort of raw magical potential and desire to learn came along once in a millennium (and she was one of very few ponies who could confirm that from personal experience). She was dear to Celestia, and the alicorn princess only wanted the best things for her.

But the fact that she hadn't consciously considered what that meant, that she'd assumed that everything was working out well had led to this mess. Now that that unconscious assumption had been brought out

into the light, she could easily pick it apart. Without prior experience of making friends, how would Twilight have even the tools needed to make those vital friendships, or understand their importance in the first place? While Twilight seemed to have avoided that, from her performance at the party, the very fact that her existing social circle was so sparse and her development in other areas so limited had left her without other sources of strength, without the more balanced appreciation of things when her very loyalty and over-commitment had made her turn a minor incident into a huge betrayal.

It was symptomatic of a larger problem, the way she'd approached both the task of Twilight's personal development and the restoration of the Elements. She'd ruled for millennia, and in that time, she'd formulated some basic guidelines for successful rulership, the most important of which was not to do anything unless it was absolutely needed. As her Appleloosian subjects would say, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.'

She could so easily have become a tyrant, not in the manner of King Sombra, but simply by helping out her subjects too much, making them any more dependant on her and not able to solve their own problems, or grow from that experience. Yes, she could have made Equestria a place where no-pony ever wanted for anything or had to do anything other than exist and fill their time with parties and play, but she'd rather go Nightmare herself than live in such a 'utopia'.

As a result, she'd become master of the subtle nudge, the indirect approach, never acting directly where she could get other ponies to do it, or even find a solution for themselves. Most of her direct actions apart from raising the sun were stopping some-pony from doing something self-aggrandising, or that while appearing good in the short term would have long term negative consequences. But while her breadth of knowledge and long term viewpoint gave her a degree of wisdom, she was neither omnipotent nor omniscient. Philomena's arguments came back to her, and Spike's outburst. After so long she'd become set in her ways, and been unable to realise that this situation required a different approach. After so many centuries as the subtle manipulator, when a situation came up that did require a more horn-on approach, she hadn't recognised the fact, content to let things develop as they'd seemed to be working out.

She resolved to make it up to Twilight when she next saw her. She'd done what was easy rather than what was needed and it had cost her, and possibly many others including Twilight and her sister. She could have made the argument that she'd trusted Twilight to figure out what to do on her own, but the case could also be made that she'd showed a lack of trust in not believing Twilight could handle the information, a lack of faith that the unicorn could accept the responsibility without being tricked into it. When she next saw Twilight, there would be full disclosure, and a serious apology. She was Princess Celestia, and she would make things right.

"Don't worry Spike. I will fix this." She landed in the courtyard of the barracks, taking the startled salute of the guards training there. "I need to see Captain Shining Amour, at once!"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Yeah, this is ridiculously soon. Apparently it was a productive weekend for posters on the SpaceBattles thread...

If the characterization of Celestia in the Turning the Tables Loop is a bit off to you, then just assume it's a slight variant of the normal loop. Those do happen.

I mention it because Stainless Steel fox specifically mentioned it was getting a bit serious for the tone of the rest of the Loops, and wondered if it would fit.

We've had a bit of a discussion about the characterization, because it does feel a BIT off to me but not enough that I can actually pinpoint anything about it. (Well, except that Celestia would probably have managed things successfully if she'd been dealing with the Twilight she thought she knew rather than a Looper explicitly trying to screw with her plans...)

The other thing to say: Sakura is the "go to" example of a Looper whose mind couldn't take it. She basically went nuts for a long, long time - even by Loop standards.

## 9. Chapter 9

### 9.1

\* \* \*

><p>"You knowâ€|" Sweetie mused. "There's something we should really do in these loops."<p>

"What?" Applebloom asked. "Like, look for our cutie marks? Again?"

"No," Sweetie said, "not that. I mean, we should learn how to actually do things. Not just try to find the one thing we're magically good at."

Scootaloo shrugged. "I dunno. What do you mean?"

"Wellâ€|" Sweetie blushed. "I'd kind of like to know how to cook. Not, special talent, know how to cook, but moreâ€| actually-the-right-shape-food cook."

The other two nodded, understanding.

"Anyway," Sweetie continued, "I was going to ask Rarity about that. She's fairly good. We'll see how it goes. What about you, 'bloom?"

The earth pony thought for a bit. "Perhaps ah'll pay more attention when Big Mac tries to get me to help on th' farm."

Scootaloo spoke up. "And I'm going to try to learn some math. Last time Dash and I both looped, she said that math was important in understandingâ€| well, cool stuff, like fighter planes."

\* \* \*



><p>"Oh, dear," Rarity said, "Well, it's nice that you want to learn, but I'm afraid I'm really not good atâ€¦ wellâ€¦ simple foods." She shrugged. "Perhaps you could ask Big Mac? I've heard that he's the one who does a lot of the cooking whenever there's an Apple family reunionâ€¦"<p>

"Okay," Sweetie replied.

\* \* \*

><p>Big Mac slumped into bed.<p>

Oh, it wasn't the work that had him tired out. No, it was that his littler sister and her two friends were constantly pestering him for help.

If it wasn't how to help run the farm, it was maths. If it wasn't either of those, it was how to cook.

Still, there were compensations.

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack nodded. "Thanks, Twi. Ah felt like Mac deserved somethin' for handlin' all three of the Crusaders so well this Loop."<p>

Twilight grinned. "It wasn't much, really. All I did was point out to Cheerilee that he was probably halving her workload, and she sent him a thank you card, andâ€¦"

"This happen a lot?" Applejack asked. "Mac and Cheerilee, ah mean."

"Somewhat." Twilight shrugged. "It can go either way."

\* \* \*

><p>9.2 (L33t m4n)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Girls, I know this is a new loop, but I have a plan. When the wedding occurs I want to do something drastic." Twilight had gone through this a thousand times, but a new twist is what made the monotony nonexistent.<p>

"Twi, I don't like that grin on your face. That's the grin that made the town go through a crazy compulsion for a doll," Applejack worried â€" not entirely without justification.

"Relax. I just need the magic pool, some training grounds, and a place to keep the clones. As a great sorceror once said: magic must defeat magic!"

Twilight may have had a crazy streak, but her craziness was warranted at times.

"So you're hoping to use clonesâ€¦to defeat clones!" Pinkie realized

that this was something that was worth the crazy streak. She had a plan to differentiate the clones from herself this time if she was to take a dip in that clone pool again.

"Yep! Wanted to save it for a Star Wars loop, but a little sneak peek won't hurt." The grin was going cheshire by this point, and making some of the loopers uneasy about how this would go.

"And personality dear? You have a plan for that?" Rarity asked.

"Planned for that as wellâ€¦ look, girls, I have it all planned out. Just need a little help with getting it accomplished." Twilight replaced her grin with a reassuring smile which broke the remaining resistance towards the plan.

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright listen up! You want to be the best! You want to fly circles around the others and make them wail! You want to be the coolest!" Rainbow yelled out, flying above the others in drill sergeant mode.<p>

"YEAH!" a number of clones responded with equal fervor.

"Then you are going to start off with being cool!" Rainbow brought a board down with her list of attributes to succeed.

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright dears, today we're learning how to cross-stitch, and make an outfit with a fitting theme." Rarity brought the needle up with magic before bringing up several spools of thread and fabric from her table. "Now watch, and do as I do."<p>

\_Teaching care and attention to detail is always goodâ€¦ as well as getting my work backlog cleared, of courseâ€¦ \_Rarity thought to herself.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okayâ€¦ now if it isn't a problem, I hope to show you â€¦ um excuse me," Fluttershy was teaching about looking after the critters at her place but the clones were too simple â€¦ most were too busy either chasing the animals or playing with them to focus on the shy, little pegasus' words.<p>

"I SAID LISTEN!" Fluttershy entered Flying Hatred mode, before calming down and turning her dark form off. "Alright now return to your seats and take care of each animal. Also no fooling around or being rough, understand!" Fluttershy ended her sentence with a 'Stare' which drove any disobedience out of the clones before resuming her lesson.

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie didn't focus much on teaching, instead concentrating on keeping the group together and teaching them how to make a fantastic party and how the party cannon worked.<p>

"And that's how you make an amazing gazpacho. Any questions?"

One clone raised her hand before jumping back when Pinkie appeared in front of her. "Yes Twi-clone 265?"

"Uh, how does any of what you said relate to partying or teaching us?" the clone asked cautiously.

"Oh! How silly, I'm supposed to be teaching you skills. Right we'll start with making the perfect surprise . . ."

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright ya'll now bring that harvest in and we'll be ready for the coming winter." Applejack figured she'd teach them the appreciation of hard work, and benefit from the process. Rarity had done it, why not her?<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Good job, girls! When the wedding happens Chrysalis won't know what hit her. This might be something to do more often." Twilight cheered, looking the clones over alongside her friends.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis crouched behind an overturned table, using a fruit bowl as a helmet. "This is not going well."<p>

Another Changeling went flying through the air and bounced off her makeshift barricade.

\* \* \*

><p>9.3 (L33t m4n)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The telephone rang.<p>

"Hello, may I speak with the owner of the "Stone Pony" bar?" Ruby Pinch spoke, her tone anxious.

"Yes, what can I do for you, kid?" said owner groggily answered while checking his clock.

"My mom is asking if you could please, open the bar a bit earlier today." Ruby Pinch asked hopefully into the phone

"Let me guess, your mommy must be a Berry Punch, right?" the owner frowned.

"Well, yes, she's Berry Punch and..." Ruby got out before the owner interrupted her.

"Figures...look kiddo, the bar strictly opens at 8:00 pm and it's barely 2:00 pm right now so..." he gruffly replied while barely stopping himself from hanging up right there

"But mister..." Ruby pleaded

"No butts young filly, tell your mommy that if she wants to get in the bar..." he was used to Berry trying stunts like thisâ€| but never before had she roped her daughter into it.

"But mister, you don't understand..." Ruby pressed.

"I don't understand what?" The stallion was seriously considering just putting the phone down.

"My mom doesn't want to get in; she wants to get out..."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight blinked. "Wait, Berry is Awake this Loop?"<p>

Applejack shrugged. "Ah only found out when she volunteered t' help with th' Super Squeezy thing next week. Guess she just ain't one for movin' and shakin'. Actually, she's mostly been breakin' into bars."

\* \* \*

><p>9.4 (Madfish)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Hundreds of loops had passed and, finding herself nostalgic and the only one Awake, Twilight had set about trying to relive that first time as closely as possible.<p>

Checking on her mental script Twilight finished her speech, "It creates the sixth elementâ€" The Element of Magic!"

She felt her magic and that of the others fill her and expandâ€| but was surprised when their energies pulled together without levitating them. "That's odd," she thought as suddenly instead of forming the Rainbow of Light it instead glared a brilliant white.

Familiar with magical overloads she was about to dive for cover when a humanoid dived forth from it into the air with a cry of "By your powers combinedâ€" I am Captain Planet!"

\* \* \*

><p>Hundreds of loops had passed and, finding herself nostalgic and the only one Awake, Twilight had set about trying to relive that first time as closely as possible. Yes, last time it hadn't worked, but this time there was no sign of a fused loop to interfere.<p>

Once more checking off her mental script Twilight finished her speech but focused more on the world around checking for any anomalies that would throw things off, "It creates the sith elementâ€" The Element of Magic!"

She felt her magic and that of the others fill her and expandâ€| but was surprised when their energies pulled together without levitating them. "Not again," she thought as suddenly instead of forming the Rainbow of Light it instead pulsed a dull marble grey

light.

Familiar with magical overloads but rather less worried this time she waited and a humanoid stepped with a definite finality from it into the air.

"Buck me," Twilight said in surprise as she took in the black clad figure before her, "this won't end well."

As the figure drew its iconic weapon, it spoke with a voice filled with loss, pain and bitterness. "Bearer of Friendship. I find your lack of faith disturbing."

\* \* \*

><p>Again the only one Awake, Twilight had yet again set about trying to relive that first time as closely as possible. Hopefully, this time it would be perfect!<p>

Checking on her mental script Twilight launched into her speech.

This time she didn't even get as far as before. Upon declaring "These are my friends!" Instead of the spherical form of the Element of Magic appearing a large bronze oil lamp beamed her on the head.

Face hoofing she gave it a look as it lay on its side on the floor. "You know what? I can work with this," she snarked, giving it a rub. Not even looking as clouds appeared she spoke quickly so as to finish with the dangerous object as soon as possible. "Genie! First wish! That all those who threaten to take over or harm Equestria and/or its inhabitants would be healed by the Elements of Harmony of such desires! Second Wish! I wish that from when I next wake up I'd understand how Pinkie does what she does! Third Wish! I wish you were free!"

Taking a deep breath she turned aroundâ€| expecting to see the Blue genie she'd been dying to introduce Pinkie Pie to, and instead seeing a rather more intimidating red one.

\* \* \*

><p>Many many many loops later, Twilight was the only one Awakeâ€| "Sod it." She went Alicorn, cast age regression on Nightmare Moon and summoned Celestia. "Your problem. I'm not taking any more chances."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>9. 5 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash looked down at the two fillies standing by the two seater Mareitech space fighter. "Cadets Scootaloo, Apple Bloom, you made top scores in the simulator, but I wouldn't be sending you out if our losses to the Zentradi weren't so high. Command thinks I'm nuts for giving two Cadet fillies who don't have a cutie-mark yet a Mareitech, especially with your handicap Scoots. Prove them wrong! You've got the makings of greatness, both of you, if you can keep it

together. I'll try and look out for you out there, but Rainbow Squadron is going to take up most of my time."<p>

"Yes mam, Captain Dash!" Scootaloo beamed. Dash didn't seem to be Awake, unlike the three fillies, and they hadn't even worked out where the Anchor was. From what Princess Twilight had said in their first loop, there had to be one, though this was an odd loop. They were on board a ten mile long spaceship, the Marecross, which had crashed into Equestria a millenium ago, filled with advanced technology. Only Princess Luna's efforts had prevented it from crashing with a force that would have wiped out Equestria, and since then, it had almost been forgotten that the Guardian of the Night Skies had once not been as revered as Celestia.

The vessel had turned out to be a warship, and one that had been in multiple battles before it was abandoned and Princesses Celestia and Luna had decreed that it must be studied. While they could guard the world, there might be other live ships out there, and whatever had attacked this one. Over the centuries pony scientists and mages had figured out the principles behind it's construction and in the process had advanced Equestria's own technology level. They'd rebuilt the ship and in the fillies own lifetimes, figured out how to repair the automated factories and variable configuration space fighters that made up it's primary armament with a mix of technology and magic.

Just in time as well. The Zentradi had attacked, and with a fleet so huge even the Princesses had been hard pressed to shield Equestria from it. The ship, renamed the Marecross had performed an emergency Hyperwink to get out behind the enemy fleet, and through a malfunction in the generator system taken the whole of Ponyville with it. They'd rebuilt the town in one of the cargo holds, and now they fought against the Zentradi, trying to find a way to defeat the fleet and save Equestria.

Sweetie Belle came up to them as the two put on their interface helmets and they indulged in a three way hug. "Be careful out there!"

"Don't worry!" Scootaloo gave a cocky grin. "It's just a scouting patrol. We'll be back in time to see you win the Miss Marecross competition."

"Yep!" Apple Bloom tapped the side of the fighter, currently kneeling down in pegasus mode. "I've got this baby tuned sweet as Granny Smith's Zap Apple pie. Who'd have thought I'd be good at fixing protoculture tech?"

They scrambled up into their positions, resting on the belly saddles and locking their hooves into the fore and aft control boots. The canpies came down, and Scootaloo trotted the fighter onto a vehicle lift.

"Mareitech 86, Red Squadron Beta 4, Marecross Control, ready for launch!"

"You are cleared for launch Beta four. Moving you to launch position. Beta One will meet you at Waypoint One to begin your patrol. Sending guidance co-ordinates."

The fighter rose up through multiple sets of air-tight locks to the landing deck, open to space but normally pressurised by the bubble of air retained inside the Marecross's navigational deflector shield. As Apple bloom programmed the navigation waypoints with the bootstick controls, Scootaloo walked the vehicle onto a launch catapult, and folded it down into fighter mode. A prssure suited deck unicorn signalled all clear with an illuminated baton, and they were pressed back in their saddles as the fighter was shot into space.

\* \* \*

><p>9.6 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong><span>Scootaloo the Pegasus<span>\*\*

"Rainbow Dash was right!" Scootaloo called out as she dived down from her wing assisted jump and smashed her fore-hooves through the moto-bug. "This is awesome!"

Her wings blurred like a humming bird as she glided across the now battered turf of Green Hills zone on her red and white patterned Lightspeed horseshoes at speeds beyond sanity, while doing manoeuvres that most jet fighters would find nauseating. She passed down a line of floating gold rings and felt them vanish as they touched her.

She skidded to a stop short of the striped pole, that generally meant something bad up ahead, and glanced up. "Though it's kinda silly that you can fly and I can't."

Apple Bloom floated down, tail whirring as she spun a ring shaped rotor blade with it. She dropped the last few feet and let the ring collapse in on itself forming a band on the tip of her tail. "You've got super-speed and you're tougher than an alicorn, what more do you want? Though I gotta admit, being a tech genius is kinda sweet all by itself. How're the new boots holding up?"

"I figure I'm at least 20% faster! Watch out!" A flight of buzz bombers swooped in and the pair spilt, Scootaloo bounding into the middle of the cluster and zipping back and forth, jumping and smashing as she went, while Apple Bloom spun up her tail, expanding the rotor to its full size. She flicked it, and it span away bisecting a buzz bomber that was diving at Scootaloo's back and freeing the bird trapped inside.

It kept spinning back to her like a boomerang, and each time, she caught it on her tail by the padded interior ring, and flicked it out again to demolish one of the outriders while Scootaloo wreaked havoc in the heart of the formation. "Whooee! Take that you mechanical bozos!"

Even as the last of Dr Robotnik's latest wave of creations fell to the earth in smoking, sparking pieces, the Earth pony was in among the carcasses, transferring various parts into her saddle bags. Scootaloo landed beside her and asked, "What're you doing?"

"I wanted to build something like your old scooter but better. Using Kuttaâ€™s Joukowski Lift Theorem, and some of the kinematic motivators I just scored off these badniks, I should be able to build a sort of

hover board. You should be able to do all your old stunts and a bunch more besides. I could also use some parts for the Tornado."

"Sounds cool, but isn't hover-board kind of a dorky name for a piece of gear that extreme."

"Okay, how about Extreme Gear?" Apple Bloom mused.

"I like it!" Scootaloo grinned. "Extreme Gear it is!"

"Only problem is the wind-chill factor from moving that fast, It's going to be way past cool. Maybe I can apply a diverting force to the air current flowing over the noseâ€¦"

"Later, we've got more company, and it looks like the big cheese omelette himself!"

The pair of them set themselves up and raced off to face the Doctor's latest creation.

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm boredâ€¦" Sweetie muttered. "When do we get to do something?"<p>

"Based on what I rememberâ€¦" Twilight trailed off, counting in her head. "About another six months. Now, keep practicing telekinesis. You're going to need to be good at it forâ€¦ whatever the hell we have to do."

"You don't know?" Sweetie asked, levitating a box.

"No," Twilight said. "And it's very annoying. Basically, something happened last time with a telekinetic and a pyrokinetic, but it got very confusing and neither Dash nor I have much idea what it was."

\* \* \*

><p>9.7<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke, and stretched. Unlike some Loops, she'd actually been lying down when she gained awareness.<p>

The ground under her was dusty and hard. When she opened her eyes, she saw a black sky with twinkling stars overhead and a cratered landscape.

That's vaguely unfair, she thought as she looked around. I've started the Loop already banished. Twilight got up, using her wings as counterweights rather than flapping them given the lack of air. A moment later, there was a pop as she fired off a huge air-bubble spell â€" while she didn't need to breathe, it was nice.

"Hi," Dash's voice said from behind her.

"Oh, hi, Dash." Twilight frowned, and shook her head as she turned. "Why are there two of â€" erk!"



The other nine Looping alicorns all waved at her. Pinkie then started pulling things out of her mane â€" a table, some chairs, and a board game.

"Yeah, we're going to be here a whileâ€|" Applejack muttered. "Hope Pinkie has enough board games."

"Wait," Twilight said, trying to get her Loop memories to return. "If we're \_all\_ up here, what's going on down there?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Right," the newly self-crowned Queen Chrysalis said. "Now we've managed to turn those pesky Elements against the very rulers who relied on them, we have a thousand years to rule Equestria before they get back."<p>

King Sombra nodded. "And, of course, actually get married."

"True, trueâ€|" Chrysalis frowned. "How does an outdoor wedding sound?"

\* \* \*

><p>9.8 (Vulpine Fury)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight came to in a familiar Canterlot Park and waited for her loop memories to come in.<p>

And waited.

She frowned. "Shouldn't I be remembering what my life is like here?" Opening her eyes, she did a quick inventory. She was an alicorn and had her Haversack saddlebags from Eberon in easy reach. From the heft of it, she was wearing her ceremonial tiara, and not the 'big crown thingy' the Element of Magic tended to manifest as for her. She was almost to her hooves when a familiar voice, distorted by not coming from \_her\_ mouth reached her ears.

". . . and Harmony has been maintained for generations ever since."

Princess Twilight Sparkle very carefully poked her head from the bushes and watched a perfectly normal pre-Ponyville version of herself ponder a very familiar book.

"The Elements of Harmony..." the younger Twilight mused. "I know I've heard of them before... but where?"

"Huh." The princess wondered. "Dash was right. I \_was\_ adorkable." She settled her wings and decided to follow as stealthily as she could. It might be kind of interesting to see how things went when she herself wasn't the focus of everything. "Hm. Should I help her... or finally see what Moondancer's party was like?"

\* \* \*

><p>It had been difficult keeping back and letting the native Twilight meet her future friends. "Not least because I want to strangle the little recluse at times," Princess Twilight muttered. The additional difficulties of keeping herself hidden from Princess Celestia and an astral projection of Nightmare Moon were as nothing to keeping her first actual encounter with Pinkie Pie this loop from interfering with destiny.<p>

"Miss Pie," she said gently. "Go ahead and take care of your other new pony-slash-Summer Sun party. She needs it more than I do."

"B-but Princess Vespertine! You're a new princess! Don't you deserve one, too?" The Pink Party Pony pouted.

'Vespertine' laid a gentle wing across Pinkie's withers, glad she'd been able to come up with an alias so quickly. "I promise I'll attend one of your parties very soon, just not this one. Cross my heart -"

Pinkie's eyes widened.

The looping Twilight twitched the tips of her wings. "- Hope to fly -"

Pinkie's smile widened.

"-stick a cupcake in my - OW!" The alicorn sheepishly lowered her hoof. "That last bit always gets me. Now, let me help you get into the library to set up before I have to go take care of 'Princess Stuff.' Oh, for the banner? Her name is Twilight Sparkle."

\* \* \*

><p>It was actually kind of nice to see the rest of Ponyville during that first day without the pressure of making sure she met her friends at the proper times to ensure they became friends during the trip to the Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters.<p>

However it seemed that "Vespertine's" attempts at subtlety had failed. Somepony had told the Mayor about her.

"Here she is, your highness," Mayor Mare said, pointing right at her and looking at somepony else around the corner.

"Cadance! What a surprise!" Celestia said, with her eyes closed in a friendly smile. The smile turned to shock when she opened her eyes and the princess before her had the wrong coat color. "Twilight? What? How?" Under the shock was pride; Twilight could tell.

Twilight curtsied exactly the same amount Luna would have if she were in her right mind, a bit of archaic formality to drive her point home. "I'm not the Twilight you sent to check on the preparations today." She tilted her head and checked the position of the sun and the weather. "She's doing exactly what you assigned her to do, despite herself. And from what's going on with the weather, she's just meeting the third of her new friends." She chuckled at herself. "For convenience's sake, call me Vespertine."

Celestia's guarded expression would have wounded her deeply before

the loops, but she'd been through enough loops to know this was mainly a show for the Mayor. Most wouldn't have the sheer knowledge of Celestia to know where she got her tells from. After the Mayor was gently dismissed, the two alicorns began to converse in earnest.

\* \* \*

><p>"You foal!" Nightmare Moon gloated. "I've destroyed the Elements of Harmony! Celestia is imprisoned in the sun! And best of all, I've got your alicorn sister at my mercy. What chance does a normal unicorn such as you stand against me?"<p>

The native Twilight Sparkle scrunched her nose up. "Sister? I don't have a sister."

"I know I've said this before, but... You're kidding. You're kidding, right?" Nightmare Moon asked.

Vespertine smirked from within her bonds as she heard her friends, or at least this loop's version of them. "You're about to get schooled, Luna."

\* \* \*

><p>"But Princess Vespertine!" Twilight Sparkle protested. "I don't get it! Where did you come from? I mean, I appreciate the distraction you provided..."<p>

"Well, Twilight," Pinkie Pie said. "When a momma alicorn and a daddy alicorn love each other very much..."

"Pinkie!" Rarity gasped, scandalized.

The looping Twilight laughed. "Let's just say that Cadance and I share some things in common, and you and I share common ancestors, Twilight."

\* \* \*

><p>9.9 (Rufus Shinra)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight woke up and took quickly notice of her surroundings, with the casual expertise that came with a very long experience in finding out the most information possible from a single glance.<p>

\_Human housing, Japanese traditional\_, she immediatly deduced as she saw the paper walls. The next item was another obvious help to her. \_A TV set, early nuclear era and... OK, I'm still in unicorn shape and no additional memories. So... where am I?\_

She turned around when she heard one of the doors sliding, facing a mid-twenties human, holding a wrench while his clothes and hands had some traces of motor oil. He apparently didn't look surprised in any way to the purple unicorn that appeared in his house:

"So... Looper?"

"Yes," answered the wielder of the Element of Magic, pleased to see that she wouldn't have to wait too much to know where she ended up.  
"You too?"

"Not exactly," he said, before putting back his tool in a cupboard.  
"You could say that I'm 'Awake', but not in the sense you guys are."

"How so?" she asked, interested in a possible variation of the common pattern of Loopers and Anchors.

"Have you met Ranma, Harry or the others? Have they told you why the multiverse is looping like that?"

"Yes," Twilight admitted. "They told me about that computer, Yggdrasil, and how they had to reboot the various universes periodically with us inside."

"Right," the young man said, nodding.

"And what does this mean for your universe? You said you were 'Awake' in a different way? Are you an Anchor?" Twilight continued.

"No, just the sysadmin's boyfriend."

"Oh. You must have seen..." Twilight trailed off.

"Pretty much every Anchor and quite a few regular Loopers end up here sooner or later so they can meet the Norns. Beyond that, it's quite straightforward around here: no special memories, you come with your original body and such. Take a break, enjoy the food, things like that." He shrugged.

"Right..." Twilight accepted the information, thinking. "Anything of note?"

"Yes: don't get between Urd and the TV, unless you want to get in a prank war with a goddess. Anyway, tell me about your Loop, I saw quite a lot here, but colored unicorns are a first."

Twilight looked around as the noisy machines were apparently doing their work, under the frantic orders of an apparently young teenager. However, having known immortal beings even before awakening to the Loops, the unicorn knew better. Especially as the engineer who welcomed her in this dimension introduced said young girl as the Norn of the Future, which, according to the few things she heard from the older Loopers, was a full-blown Goddess, with a capital G.

Which did not stop her from acting like a child as her older sister teased her during the measurements. The unicorn took a brief look at the electronic-covered helmet which was perfectly fitting her cranium and her own horn, and shifted positions.

"Nice flank," commented the white-haired Norn of the Past.

"Huh, thanks. I guess?" Twilight replied, uneasily.

"I checked on Yggdrasil about your universe. Cutie Marks, they're called? That's cute! Everyone with a nice little brand on their flanks..."

"That's not worse than the ones on your face," replied Twilight, pointing her hoof at the sigils on Urd's face.

"Ours are more... stylish."

"If you say so," commented the unicorn before turning her attention to the younger goddess. "So, what exactly are you measuring?"

"Your dimensional signature, to have a precise fix on your original dimension," answered Skuld without looking away from her computer. "I have to be sure about your original timeline if we want to get this mess fixed one of these millenia."

"Doesn't your 'Yggdrasil' manage that already?"

"I don't know precisely when you started looping. That's one of the problems with dimensions where time-travel is actually accessible to non-divine beings. So, since that you're the Anchor and a time-traveller of your own, I can get that information from you."

"Oh," said the purple unicorn while remembering her first experiment with time travel. "Oops?"

"Yes, 'oops'," said Urd. "But she can probably deal with that. Emphasis on 'probably'; she'll most likely need a helping hand from her nice older sister."

"Why would I need Belldandy for that?" snarked back Skuld.

"Anyway," said Urd while bringing her attention back to Twilight. "Do you plan to stay here for a while?"

"If that's not intruding on you. And it depends how long 'for a while' would last."

"Long enough to meet humans unaware of magic, other dimensions and stuff," Urd said vaguely.

"Done!" said the childish voice to her right, interrupting them.

She felt the helmet release itself from her head, letting her mane free from its tight hold. At the same time, one of the doors opened itself, letting in the Norn of the present, followed by Keiichi. Twilight felt the urge to bow her head to the young woman whose pace and standing reminded her of Celestia, back in her home universe. Behind the appearances of youth and frailty were hidden power and kindness she could feel in every part of her body.

The goddess was holding a plate filled with food while Keiichi, behind her, carried in his arms some mechanical contraption that reminded her of some of the Loops where Pinkie took the role of one of the Flim and Flam Brothers. When the plate was delicately left in front of her, she knew instantly that she would not eat more perfect food in a thousand loops.

"Err...", began the engineer while nodding towards his device, "I don't know if you need that, but..."

"Yes?"

"Well, you have... hooves. So, well, it may be difficult to eat and..." Keiichi trailed off in a cloud of politeness.

"Keiichi-san wants to say that he designed this prosthesis to allow you to use sticks or other food utensils if you want to," Belldandy intervened helpfully.

"Excuse me? You designed and built a prosthesis for a species you never saw before? In less than two hours?" Twilight blinked.

"... Yes?"

"Are you sure that you are not a wizard of some kind yourself?" Twilight asked.

"As far as I know."

"Keiichi-san is very talented with machines," the goddess said with a cheerful smile. "He loves them and they love him back."

Twilight thought for a moment about simply using her telekinesis to take the sticks and start eating.

Oh, why the hay not, after all?

She held her front hooves forward, in a position allowing the engineer to fit his devices to them.

\* \* \*

><p>The small prefab was, despite her initial expectations, as welcoming and full of life as her library tree could be back in Ponyville, albeit in a different way. While a few books, mostly technical and scientific, were left here and there, most of the internal space was taken by hundreds of tools, spare parts and the occasional vehicle, everything having some order beneath the apparent chaos.<p>

An order ruled by Keiichi's boss, Chihiro. Twilight heard her name spoken by the engineer, always with respect and even some kind of awe, sparking her own curiosity at someone who could inspire such feelings to a man whose instinctive grasp of mechanics was only surpassed by his theoretical understanding of the scientific principles behind every engine or device he owned.

So she asked to see her, and Urd said a few seconds later that she would help, shoving a pill into her mouth.

Thus her current human shape, with no extravagance beyond a small tattoo on her arm representing her cutie mark. It wasn't exactly normal, but at least it had hardly come at her cold.

"Twilight, huh?" said Chihiro as Keiichi left the workshop to deliver a freshly-repaired motorcycle to its owner.

"Yes," answered the newly human Anchor.

"Quite the meaningful name...", commented the engineer before looking back at the engine in front of her. "Could you give me the size 8 wrench, Twi'?"

"Of course," she answered before taking the right tool from the wall where it was fixed.

"So, how long will you stay in Nekomi?" asked Chihiro while receiving the wrench.

"I'm not sure right now, but since Keiichi and Belldandy's... family are letting me stay at their home, I'm trying to make myself useful around here." Twilight made a noncommittal gesture.

"Hmm, do you have any engineering training?"

"I can work my way around a few things, but I'm a scientist myself, not an engineer..." Twilight said apologetically, before adding "â€|but I'm eager to learn."

The owner of the 'Whirlwind' workshop turned her head towards Twilight and examined her.

"What did Keiichi say?" she finally asked.

"That you'd probably give me a chance to get some experience."

"... of course he'd say that." Chihiro tapped her chin. "OK, here's what we're going to do: there's an old engine near the rear door, behind the shop. I want you to take it apart... nicely, and get as much spare parts as you can from it. And I expect you to tell me why you kept or threw away each part. That'll give me an idea of what you can do."

"Thank you," answered Twilight. "Can I use your tools?"

"I don't expect you to use your hands or magic!" joked Chihiro. "Make yourself some place inside so I can keep an eye on you while you do the job."

Twilight nodded and went outside to find the engine.

Two hours later, the Anchor was still struggling with some parts, under the amused eye of Keiichi's boss and, as she went for another Allen key, asked her:

"Why isn't Keiichi back by now?"

"Huh, the customer was quite far... and K will come near his home on his way back, so he's probably having lunch there and be back in half an hour or so."

"Oh, OK," answered Twilight while ignoring the feeling that she was forgetting something. "So, how am I doing for now?"

"Not that bad for a beginner," the mechanic commented. "You have a knack for choosing the good tools, so that's good, but you don't have the experience and it shows in the order you're choosing the pieces to remove. But... I'll probably be able to get you in shape if you're willing to, and have the time, of course."

"Thanks a lot, I'd appreciate it."

\_Some advanced engineering could really be useful back in Equestria. So many opportunities for pranking... and useful things too!\_ Thought the humanized unicorn with a smile, before going back to her previous chain of thoughts.\_ Anyway, what am I forgetting now...\_

"Oh, by the way, I couldn't help notice some of the textbooks on the shelves," she said, pointing to one of them. "I didn't really expect some theoretical quantum physics in an automobile workshop."

"Huh? Nothing of interest here, just some reading for myself. There's always something else to learn, you know."

"I'd never say anything else in a million years," answered Twilight.

\_And that's probably not a figure of speech.\_

"Anyway, I've got to finish this transmission and then we'll take a break to eat, OK?" Chihiro said.

"As you wish, Chihiro."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight went back to her engine, struggling with a screw she couldn't get unstuck and, after a few minutes, sat on the ground, trying to think at another way of getting the job done. Her thoughts were however interrupted by Chihiro's voice:<p>

"Can I have the size 2 wrench, Twi?" the engineer asked without turning around.

"Sure," she answered, before using her horn's telekinesis to carry the wrench to Chihiro's open hand.

\_Wait a sec. My horn?\_

Twilight put her hoof in front of her and realized she turned back into her original shape at some point during the past minute, without even noticing it as she was thinking about that damn screw.

\_Urd's shapeshifting pills had a limited duration! \_That\_'s what I was forgetting!\_

The surprise made her lose her grip over the wrench, which fell with a loud noise on the ground.

She saw Chihiro turn her head towards the noise... and the purple unicorn now in her workshop.

Twilight had an embarrassed smile.

Chihiro's eyes met hers.

"There's a perfectly logical explanation..." began the unicorn.



Chihiro began twitching.

"Give me a few seconds to think about one..." she continued as she took back the wrench through her telekinesis.

She, however, did not have those few seconds, as the engineer started yelling:

[illegible]

Before Twilight had any time to react, the engineer was over her, hugging her.

"What."

\* \* \*

><p>When Chihiro finally calmed down and stopped brushing Twilight's mane, the two of them sat near a table in front of each other:<p>

"So..." began the engineer. "You're not from around here, are you?"

"Not really. And you're taking it really well," Twilight complimented.

"What? The fact that you are actually a magical purple unicorn with a recommendation from Keiichi?" Chihiro shrugged.

"Yes, that," Twilight said, deadpan.

"Giving who he's living with, I find it difficult to be surprised anymore."

"What are you talking about?" Twilight asked, suddenly curious. \_She couldn't meanâ€¦|\_

"Twilight, please. He has two sentient robots living in his home, I've seen quite the lightshows in the direction of his house, a speaking cat and... well..."

She took one book off its shelf and left it in front of Twilight so she could read its title:

"Norse Myths, Legends and Pantheon," she read aloud. "Oh... it was obvious, wasn't it?"

"Pretty much."

"But why haven't you spoken to him about it? Or with anyone else?"

"It's his private life. Why should I get involved?" Chihiro shook her head. "He works well, his goddess of a girlfriend too when she comes here, so why should I get thing more complicated than they are. When he introduces me one of his 'foreign correspondants', I know I should expect some weirdness here and there, but he's some good judge of character overall, so if he tells me that you can learn something from me, why the hell not?"

"That was... unexpected."

"Says the purple unicorn," Chihiro snarked. "Anyway, who should I call to get that shaping problem fixed?"

"Probably Urd. Just a question... How long have you known about, well, all of that?"

"Decades, probably more."

"... What? You're a Looper too?" Twilight asked, surprised.

"Not exactly," she answered. "I asked one of your 'foreign correspondants' friends about what was happening some time ago, and apparently, our proximity to Keiichi and the goddesses makes some memories about these 'Loops' of yours leak back to us. Some unconscious thing, apparently, but that's fine too."

"So that's why you have advanced textbooks and everything, because you have had..."

"More time, yes. And, well, that's probably required to keep up with Keiichi now."

"How so?"

"Let's just say that he's probably the most knowledgeable engineer on our world, now. So, when you'll be over with me, if you want some additional training, you should go and see him." Chihiro picked up the textbook and slotted it back into the shelf. "Now, where were we?"

\* \* \*

><p>9.10<p>

Nightmare Moon burst into the building. "Tremble-"

"Welcome back!" shouted a hundred voices, so loud together that they drowned out most of her first sentence.

Chopping off her triumphant speech in favour of actually looking, Nightmare Moon blinked in shock.

There was a big banner hung over the top of the room, reading 'Welcome Back, Princess Luna!' Every table was surrounded by ponies all looking at her, with broad grins instead of the fear she was expecting. And there were a dozen day guards at the walls, with \_two\_ dozen guards in black armourâ€| the night guards still existed?

Nightmare was astonished. She'd thought her sister would instantly disband the Night Guards as punishment for her rebellion â€" if not execute them outright, in her darker moments.

While she was thinking, the pegasi in black-and-purple armour had marched up to the area just below the stage. The two in the lead bowed.

"Princess Luna, it is good to see you have returned to us. While our organization has dwindled until recently, we have maintained our traditions and wish to swear allegiance to you anew," the one on the left said. He was the spitting image of her old, old friend, Sunshineâ€|

With a flash of internal guilt, Nightmare realized she hadn't thought of her friends in a thousand years.

Still, she concealed it admirably, and bowed to them in return. "My thanksâ€|?"

"I am Sunshine, of the line of your guards since time immemorial," he answered. "Princess Celestia informed us you were returning, and authorized us to recruit back up to strength â€" and recommended this party, as a matter of fact."

Another crack opened in the layer of ice around Nightmare's heart. This was not how she had imagined her return to Equestria going, but it feltâ€| better. Cleaner.

Every muscle in her body twitched as a warm feeling rubbed against her cheek.

"It's good to have you back, my dear sister," Celestia said, nuzzling the other alicorn. "Would you like some cake?"

Nightmare focused on the plate that hovered up to her. The cake on it was made with sponge, and smelt of bananas, and there was a hint of moonberry jam. It was covered with icing in the shape of her cutie mark.

\_Oh, buck it.\_

"Yes, thank you." Princess Luna said.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight grinned. "Told you."<p>

Celestia nodded to her. "Yes, you did. I should have done this the first time."

"Though," Twilight continued more seriously, watching as Luna took the oaths of her guards, "one of the main reasons this worked was because we know her so well now. Not just how she is normally, but how she thought as Nightmare Moon. And if it had gone wrong, there would have been a lot more ponies in the danger zone."

The Princess of the Sun nodded, accepting the point. "I am sometimes astonished by your growth, Twilight. Every time I see you, you've gained another few decades â€" or centuries, or even millennia â€" of experience. And I'm glad to have a Loop alone with you, so I can get to know you all over again."

Twilight shifted uncomfortably. "You know I'm not comfortable with praiseâ€|"

"That is one of the very things that is praiseworthy." Celestia nudged her. "Come on, I want to introduce Luna to you."

\* \* \*

><p><p>

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

And another set. Again, please take note of who is mentioned as the author, for many of these loops - I have in the past been encouraged to "focus on" Loops that aren't actually mine...

Thanks to everyone who contributed.

References:

9.4 includes Captain Planet, Star Wars (note: sith element), Aladdin.

9.5 has the Macross setting (AKA Robotech, I think.)

9.6... Sonic the Hedgehog, of course.

9.9 is Ah! My Goddess, which is (as stated) where the admins running the multiverse live.

## 10. Chapter 10

### 10.1

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|Friendship isn't always easy. But it's definitely worth fighting for!" Twilight finished.<p>

Beating Discord as per the first time was relatively unusual â€" but, well, it was nice to go along with things. Besides, she wanted to analyze how the corruption effect worked.

The rainbow of light crashed down on Discordâ€| and bounced off.

"Yes!" Discord shouted, materializing a guitar and playing a chord. "I knew it!"

"Knew what?" Twilight asked, feeling a bit lost all of a sudden. The rest of the world was being fixed by the Elements, so they \_were\_ still workingâ€|

"Why, that the Elements of Harmony don't work on someone who's actually, genuinely good and redeemed!" Discord said, winking. "I'll admit that they got me the first time, Twilight Sparkle, but not when I'm just pranking the lot of you."

"...oh. Well, welcome to the Loops, Discord." Twilight said.

"Glad to be here." Discord snapped his claws, and drinks materialized. "You've won an exclusive interview with the Spirit of Chaos! Someone get the Foal Free press. Or has that not formed yet?"

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia flashed into existence at the edge of Ponyville. "Well done, Twilight, and all of you, for defeatingâ€| Disâ€|cord?"<p>

"Anyway," Discord said, as he passed the last of the cupcakes out. "That's enough Generosity to be going on with. What's nextâ€| oh, yes. Honesty! Oh, come and join us, Celly. Do let me know if I get anything wrong."

Celestia sank back on her haunches numbly. \_What the hayâ€|\_

"Anyway. One of the moments that always sticks in my mind, with your \_dear\_ ruler there, is when she was a little filly and tried to make her bedroom lamp brighter."

Celestia shook her head frantically. "Discord!"

"What?" Discord looked over at her, pouring her a cup of tea. Sideways. "I'm hurt, I really am. Look at me being all honest. That's an Element of Harmony, isn't it? Anyway, she basically pulled a tiny bit of the sun into the bedroom lamp, it exploded, and her face was this hilarious sooty black colour for weeks! It took her months for her eyelashes to grow back!"

\* \* \*

><p>10.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"But that doesn't make any sense!" Twilight said, pacing in front of Pinkie. "You can't justâ€| have physical reactions which predict the future! It causes an information paradox, which meansâ€| andâ€| the wholeâ€| where does the party cannonâ€| gaaaaah!"<p>

And then Twilight's head exploded.

There was surprisingly little blood, but a great deal of flame and smoke. Twilight's body stood there with smoke pouring out of it, as Pinkie stared in shock.

Then the library door opened, and Twilight came out. "Hi, Pinkie â€" oh, no. Not again." Lifting up 'her' headless body, she began to carry it back inside. "Sorry. One of the experimental Twibots got out. I suppose I should have installed an extra safety valveâ€|"

Pinkie's head swung between the unconcerned purple unicorn, and the blast scarring on the road. "â€|what?"

"Experimental Twibots. I was trying to make them so that, in case one of us ever gets hurt, we can still activate the Elements." Twilight indicated the body she was carrying. "Only thing is, I haven't got them nearly good enough yet to even let them start learning about how their element works. Did you show off your Pinkie sense?"

"â€|yeah," Pinkie said, still a bit stunned.

"That'll be it." Twilight nodded, pleased. "I'll make sure to lower the gain on their cognitive engines. There's some things it takes a \_lot\_ more experience to understand."

Over where the robot Twilight had been standing, several large and heavy objects landed from a pegasus removal van.

\* \* \*

><p>10.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|girls," Scootaloo began, "What <em>is<em> Diamond Tiara's special talent?"

"Huh." Sweetie frowned, thinking. "Bullying?"

"But that's not very relevant to a diamond tiara, is it?" Scootaloo said, still thinking. "I mean, you know all those talks we got from Twilight and Rarity and Appejack and Dash an' stuffâ€| how every cutie mark is worth somethin'?"

Applebloom nodded. "Right, an' bullyin' ain't much of a talent, either."

"Wait." Sweetie looked up. "I think I might have it. You know how she \_never\_ admits she actually got something wrong?"

The other two nodded.

"Well, diamond is the hardest gemstone. Rarity told me that once."

"Just once?" Scootaloo snarked.

"All right, probably more than once. But I remembered it that time." Sweetie shrugged. "Anyway, I think she just won't change her mind, or break, or anything."

"Too bad she's stuck on jerkâ€|" Applebloom muttered.

"Actually, I wonder what \_she\_ thinks her talent is," Scootaloo said, "Maybe we should ask?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, how tragic," Diamond Tiara said as the Crusaders approached. "It's the opposite of a jackpot. Triple blanks."<p>

The Crusaders stopped, looking from one to another.

"That was actually a pretty good one," Sweetie said. "Seven?"

"Eight." Scootaloo countered.

"Yeah." Sweetie nodded. "Anyway. Diamond, we were wonderingâ€| what

does your cutie mark represent?"

Diamond Tiara blinked. "Erâ€¦ it meansâ€¦ I'm daddy's special princess!"

"That's more like her speed." Scootaloo pointed up, where Princess Twilight â€" having ascended while handling Nightmare Moon for a change, this Loop â€" was flying to the shops. "You know. Alicorn."

"â€¦oh." Diamond frowned. "Iâ€¦ don't actually know."

"Kin ah have a look?" Applebloom asked.

"What?" Diamond Tiara tried to turn her flank away from them, which only revealed the other one. "Why?"

"Well, we're tryin' to work out how cutie marks work," Applebloom continued, as Sweetie Belle snapped a picture with a camera she'd borrowed. "So we're tryin' to work out what they all mean. How'd you get yours?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that story didn't make much sense," Scootaloo muttered, "Why would Princess Celestia specifically send a letter to her dad saying his daughter was a nice filly? Especially if they'd never met."<p>

"Yeah. I kinda think she was makin' it up." Applebloom agreed. "Pity. It'd be nice to know how she really got her cutie mark."

"Aha!"

The others turned to Sweetie. "What is it?"

"Well, it looks like most of the diamonds in her tiara are brilliant-cut. That means they're the best kind of cut for a generic diamond. I can't see any princess-cut gems, but this is the important one." Sweetie pointed to the stone right at the middle of the cutie mark tiara. "That's a well polished but uncut stone."

The others stared at her as though she'd grown a second head.

"What? I helped Rarity for a couple of Loops." Sweetie blushed. "Anyway. That means she might actually be â€" literally â€" a diamond in the rough. She's just never had the chance â€" never faced the stress â€" that would let her shine."

Scootaloo rasied a hoof. "By stress, we're talkin', like, an alien invasion, right?"

"Probably," Sweetie giggled. "But it does mean something. She's been too spoiled to develop her full potential."

"Huh." Applebloom kicked the floor. "An' now ah feel bad for her. Why did we have t' do this, again?"

\* \* \*

><p>10.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Why are we here, again?" Rainbow Dash asked Twilight.<p>

"Well, I don't feel like dealing with Discord, so we are going to nip that in the bud right away," Twilight answered as they turned around another bush. "Besides, this shouldn't take... long..." Twilight fell silent as they arrived at the place where Discords statue was supposed to be.

Emphasis on \_supposed to.\_

"Okay, looks like we have a looper," Applejack said. "Well, this should be interesting." The group went inside to find Celestia and whatever trick Discord had set up, only to find a very confused Celestia reading a report.

"Um, princess? We think..." Twilight began before being cut-off by Celestia.

"That Discord has returned? Yes. Yes he has. Also, he is re-organizing our tax system to more efficient form and has cleared several our laws to be more streamlined and, oh yeahâ€ he is \_not acting like Discord\_!" The Sun Princess shouted. "He is... not chaotic! He even organized the guard rotation to be clearer."

Luna walked out of a room next door and handed a cup of wine to Celestia, before taking a long snip from hers.

"He just looked over the workers union proposal and reformed it into the most efficient organization We have ever seen," Luna said, shaking her head. "He is currently looking over our diplomatic relations."

"Should we stop him?" Twilight asked tentatively.

"That's just it. We are not sure! On the one hoofâ€ IT'S DISCORD! On the other hoof, the entire system would be improved drastically by these changes! I can't decide!" Celestia cried. Discord entered the room carrying another report.

"See, 'Tia, if you had replaced the old inherited nobility with 'Nobility through achievement', you could have reduced the deficit by 32% and increased the general happiness by 22%!"

Celestia stared at Discord as he explained in great detail, before simply taking the paper and leaving. Luna soon followed.

"You're having too much fun," Twilight said to Discord, who had a crocodilian grin on his face. "But isn't this against your nature?"

"What? Randomly re-organizing the entire nation? Nah, I am merely being myself. I bet \_you\_ never saw this one coming!"

\* \* \*



><p>10.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"TREMBLE IN FEAR, MORTAL!" Nightmare Moon shouted. "WHEREVER YOU ARE, WHEN I FIND YOU THEN I SHALL WREAK MY VENGEANCE!"<p>

"Wait," Twilight said, frowning. "Mortal, singular?"

"Indeed." Nightmare Moon's voice was a bit less loud this time. "I, Nightmare Moon, noticed that for the last few years my Nightmare Night tribute from Ponyville has been \_significantly lower than normal.\_"

Twilight realized that clearly Luna was Awake â€" either that or something was very wrong with the world â€" and decided to go along with it anyway. "Do you know why?"

"I suspect." Nightmare Moon walked down from the dais, casually batting away two guards with her wings. "I suspect that it is a pony who arrived here between three and five years ago, and one who has \_far\_ too much of a taste for candy." Her nostrils flared, as she sniffed. "There is one here who smells of sugarâ€|"

Pinkie Pie dove out the window.

"AHA!" Nightmare Moon bellowed, launching herself into the air with powerful wing beats and following. "YOU SHALL GIVE ME RECOMPENSE, GLUTTON!"

"Nevar!" Pinkie's voice came from outside. "Whoops!"

There was a crash.

"DECOYING ME INTO A HOUSE IS NOT RECOMPENSE!" Nightmare Moon shouted, amid the crunch of falling masonry.

Twilight trotted outside to watch. It was all very impressive, actually â€" while Pinkie wasn't Awake, she was treating this as just as much of a game as Luna was, and kept tricking the alicorn into overshooting or hitting trees.

After about twenty minutes, Celestia appeared in a flash of light. "Twilight! I heard thatâ€| what is going on?"

Twilight shrugged. "As I understand it, Nightmare Moon is annoyed that she wasn't getting enough candy from Ponyville, and wants to get payback."

Celestia's jaw dropped. "â€|you mean it actually worked? I thought it was an old mare's tale!"

"What, Nightmare Moon?" Twilight asked.

"No, Nightmare \_Night\_." Celestia watched as Pinkie pulled off what could be best described as a Double Team, tricking Nightmare Moon into embedding herself into the floor. "I had hoped that a holiday where ponies spent their time outside, at night, enjoying themselves and enjoying scaring themselves, might help to convince her that her night was not truly neglected. I did not expect that the mythology

that has grown up around it would be accurate. In every particular."

Pinkie dodged again, and then gasped as Nightmare Moon collided with Sugarcube corner. "Oh, no!"

"AHA!" Nightmare Moon boomed. "SO THIS IS WHERE YOU'VE BEEN KEEPING IT!" The black alicorn emerged from the attic with a comically large bag labelled 'candy', and flew off towards the moon.

"What the \_buck?\_" Rainbow Dash managed.

\* \* \*

><p>10.6 (Mandemon)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight, return to the castle. Carriages are waiting for you and others. Yes, I am Awake. So are they. Celestia."<p>

A short and precise letter, so unlike Celestia, Twilight noted. Had something happened? She had come to Ponyville in advance to set up things, but had noted that the others were Awake and thus she didn't really have anything to do. However, it was the day when Nightmare Moon would return and Twilight was slightly anxious to see whenever Luna was Awake or not. Lately, she had been Awake more often than previously and had made each appearance varied. The time she had appeared singing \_Hello my baby \_had been particularly funny. Twilight had never expected her to juggle all those instruments alone with magic.

She was not surprised to see the carriage waiting for her, with the others already there. When Celestia really wanted something done, it was done. She remembered that one loop with that whole three way Pony-Zebra-Griffin war. It took less than a week for Celestia and Luna to smash two other nations. As it turned out, the problem was not having enough power to deal with problems, but in knowing how to solve problems without using a metaphorical hammer on them all.

The group arrived at the Canterlot just as the night was falling. They noted that the place was rather full of nobles from pretty much everywhere " Celestia must be planning for something big. They were guided into the throne room, where Celestia was waiting for them.

"Oh good, you girls are here. Now, we just need to wait for one more pony and we are ready to proceed," Celestia said with a smile.

"Oh? Who?" Twilight asked.

Right on cue, Nightmare Moon appeared right next to Celestia, rousing a shocked gasp from the gathered nobles. Just as quickly as she appeared, Luna also shed her Nightmare Moon appearance and assumed her normal one.

"Ew, icky stuff. I never get used to that." Luna said. "Right, let's get this show on the road."

Right on cue, both used their magic to induce Alicorn transformations

in all six Element bearers, confusing pretty much every pony in the room.

"Right, so here is the deal. Me and my sister here, we are kinda tired of this, so we are holding a vacation. Every single petty argument or whatever you suckers have, these six will deal with it. We are going to go and relax. Ciao!" Celestia said with a smile, before teleporting away alongside Luna. She reappeared five seconds later, causing everyone to sigh. Of course their beloved Princess would not do anything like this.

"Oh yeah, I am not joking. Also, you six, don't call us unless it's multiverse threatening stuff, okay? We really need this," Celestia said, and disappeared again.

A stunned silence descended.

"Um, surprise?" Twilight said, with an embarrassed smile on her face.

\* \* \*

><p>10.7<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"ATTENTION, PONIES!" Luna shouted, appearing above the Ponyville town hall an hour into the Nightmare Night celebrations. "I AM ON A DIET! PLEASE PAY TRIBUTE IN VEGETABLES!"<p>

Applejack and Carrot Top exchanged glances, then both started trotting to their respective homes to get their market stalls.

\* \* \*

><p>10.8<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hello, Princess!" Twilight said, stepping aside from the door. "It's good to see you. I was wondering whether you'd come, since there was that meeting with dignitaries from Saddle Arabia."<p>

Celestia paused. "What do you mean? I set it up so that they would be coming here. It is a diplomatic visit by them, not to them."

Twilight shrugged. "I don't know. I got a letter saying that you wouldn't be able to make the magic show because of a need to visit another country." Which was a surprise, actually "I invited Luna and Cadence instead, and they both seemed very pleased by the idea."

A sky-blue unicorn went past, reading from one of Twilight's notebooks. "Trixie seesâ€| so that is the basis behind advanced manifoldic formation of friendship harmonicsâ€| oh!" The notebook closed with a snap, and Trixie swept her hat off her head in a bow. "Princess. I had not realized that you would be present as well as your sister and niece. You do me honour."

"Ah, you must be Trixie." Celestia returned the bow. "Twilight told me that you had reconciled after a minor disagreement last year, though she did not tell me you were going to be a part of this display."

"Well, she was in the area," Twilight said, nodding to a cart that was parked out near the back window of the library. "I didn't realize until after I was told you were going to Saddle Arabia."

"Yes, about that." Celestia frowned. "I don't know why you think that â€" it certainly wasn't in the letter I wroteâ€" may I see the one you received?"

Twilight passed it over readily. Truth be told, she wasn't sure why Celestia had changed her plans this Loop, but had assumed it was something to do with the newly Looping Trixie's different behaviour. It was hard to tell what effect a change would haveâ€" but if she hadn't in fact changed them, then it made no sense.

"You are indeed correct. How strange." Celestia shook her head. "While I confess I do not understand the reason for the altered correspondence, it was never my intent to miss your display â€" which I now understand will be a joint one. Since the Saddle Arabian diplomats should be arriving at some point, perhaps we shall just go ahead as scheduled."

"Works for me." Twilight opened another of her notebooks, and held it out for Trixie. "What about one of these to start with?"

"A meteor swarm?" Trixie examined the magical formulae. "Very daring. I see it is something of a trust exercise â€" since the pony running the spell cannot also run the shield."

"Basically." Twilight grinned. "Be an impressive opener, won't it?"

"Indeed." Trixie nodded her respect to Twilight. "You are clearly learning what Trixie has to teach you about showmareship, Twilight."

\* \* \*

><p><em>"You<em> are Princess Celestia?" one of the Saddle Arabian emirs asked, blinking at the figure in front of them. "You do not look very much like a pony..."

"Well," Discord replied, adjusting his fake wig and dress and keeping his voice to a falsetto, "We pride Ourselves on an egalitarian nation, where any may be whatever she or he desires."

\* \* \*

><p>"Most impressive, both of you." Luna said to the two panting unicorns after nearly six solid hours of magical pyrotechnics. "I had not known half of those spells were possible."<p>

"Neither did Trixieâ€" Trixie muttered. "She has learned muchâ€" er, I mean, I have learned much from Twilight."

"Indeed." Luna turned to Celestia. "Why so worried, sister?"

"I don't know why those diplomats didn't turn up. It's such a shame, they would have found that \_very\_ impressiveâ€|" Celestia fretted. "I can't help thinking something went very wrongâ€|"

A scroll materialized next to her. Twilight automatically caught it, then relinquished it to Celestia who opened it.

"Let's seeâ€| oh dearâ€| 'Dear Celly. Sorry for messing with your letters, I wanted a holiday. Don't worry, I'm not evil any moreâ€| muchâ€| but it's just so boring staring at hedges the whole time. Anyway, the Saddle Arabians loved me. Apparently I'm very good at belly dancing, who knew? I should have known I had a hidden talent. So, long story short, you've got all the agreements you wanted and then some, but they think I'm you. I look lovely in a dress. Paradoxically yours, Discord.'" Celestia put the letter down, and breathed deeply. In, out. Inâ€|

"HE DID WHAT?!"

"Well," Twilight muttered to Trixie, "That's one way to cause chaos."

"Indeed." Trixie blinked. "Him too?"

"Occasionally. It's just so hard to \_tell\_, with himâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>10.9 (Madfish): Fluttershy and Rush (offshoot of 40K Loop)<p>

(this first few paragraphs is a repeat from earlier, just to remind people where we are.)

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy walked among the drifts of the freezing valleys she found herself on at the start of the loop. She had had to restore her alicorn status just to survive the frozen wasteland and though the weather was harsher than any other. She could have allowed her self to die and end the loop for herself but if the other's were here somewhere they would need her help given the few times she had tried a spell beyond telekinesis she had felt sick as if monsters had tried to climb through her horn into her skull. Besides she owed it to her current companions mother to make sure they grew up big and strong first.<p>

"I hope Twilight's going to be ok," she said to the wolves beside her, "Without her magic she gets- twitchy..."

She trailed of as one of the wolves, a cub but larger than her pegasus self, drew her attention to a light flickering in the distance. Light's meant people, hopefully friendly people.

As they approached she found herself disappointed as all that was there was some sort of pod covered with ice. Scraping the ice of the hatch she gasped as she saw the child within.

The wolves panted, breath frosting in the air as they looked in at what had surprised there surrogate mother.

"No! You can't eat him. We're going to take this pod to shelter and we're going to help the poor dear. If no one comes for him you can think of him as you're new little brother."

\* \* \*

><p>The Emperor stood over the unconscious form of his son. Victorious in battle, as he had not been in feasting, he turned, letting those around stare at his mighty form and their fallen King. It was good to see that these people were strong. They mastered their world and its beasts, as the mighty wolves with the guards and strange winged equine creature his son kept as a pet attested.<p>

The time for asserting his victory done, he turned back to reach down and pick his son up " only to be stymied. He found himself staring into the yellow creatures' eyes and felt its will slam into his own. Now the Emperor knew himself to be the most powerful psyker in the galaxy " but, while it takes great will to wield such power, that power is not in itself will. So, taken by surprise, he found himself frozen under its stare as the Creature had the gall to start to \_lecture\_ him!

"How dare you! How \_dare\_ you!" The Creature raged, "My Son freely invites you into his hall and even when you lost your challenge he gave you your request of victory for the second, you spit on his generosity and hospitality then strike him down by bringing an artifact of power to a duel of honour! What do you...?"

The would be Unifier of Humanity tuned out the Xeno's speech as he began to reassert his will as his own master. Only surprise had stayed his hand that long, and though he felt the force of the Xeno's attack strengthen enough to slow his limb it would not be enough to save it from being crushed under the force of his glove's powerfield.

Sometimes a fraction of a second is enough, though, and a sliver of time before he connected his chin was met by the rising Russ' fist throwing him back to the Great Hall's doors.

"You eat my food, drink my drink, then insult my household and try to kill my Mother. Let's see how you do in a fair fight!" With that Russ gestured and the two greatest wolves in the hall were at his side, one presenting him with his axe and the other with a shield.

Even from the door and with his brains rattled the Leader of Mankind could feel the touch of the warp on them. Apparently bringing his son home would be more difficult than he'd expected.

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy had learned many hard lessons in this loop; She had learned that despite her talent and the abilities she had gained through the loops some creatures could not be reasoned with, she had learned to be a good mother making sure her charges were safe and able to grow in a harsh environment, she had learned of a deep abiding pride when her sons had brought the wolves and humans of this

planet together uniting them for survival and protection as a greater whole.<p>

"I thought I was stronger now," she thought as she shivered. The fear she had conquered centuries ago rekindled by near death, the implacable, disturbing eyes she had looked into and the sheer power she witnessed there. The sound of battle and the barking of wolves carried into the hall as the people within looked out to what she couldn't see. A few of them began brushing her mane to try and offer comfort.

"Why can't I help? I'm not strong like Twilight." The sound of what could only be a building collapsing made her flinch. Her son needed her and she was so weak that she was just lying down, shivering, like she always did.

"But I wasn't strong when I went into the Everfree that first time... or when I faced the Dragon... but they needed me... noâ€¦ I \_was\_ strong, \_because\_ they needed me!"

She took flight with a speed that was distinctly atypical of her, kicking open the hall shutters to avoid the battle outside. Glancing down as she made for the clouds she saw her little Leman charge out of a pile of rubble and hook the man's artifact gauntlet out to the side with his axe. Geri took the opening and leapt, teeth scoring his armoured shoulder to little apparent effect, before he was grabbed and swung bodily at Leman to break their mutual weapon lock.

Reaching the clouds, she wove an illusion to hide her actions and began to work them vigorously. "I might not be Rainbow Dash, but if Applejack can do this then I can too!"

\* \* \*

><p>"It seems, my Son, you've been abandoned! Like humanity ever is by the xeno when comes their time of need."<p>

"She would never abandon me! It was she that taught me of Loyalty and Kindness on this harsh world. She took me in and made sure neither myself nor my brothers starved. With her teachings all of my Pack have prospered!"

"And yet she is gone." Punching Leman's shield squarely in the centre, sending the Primarch flying, he turned his back on him. The Emperor dealt Freki a viscous kick to the head, rendering the wolf insensate, while a gesture at Geri resulted in him flying over the surrounding buildings and out of sight.

With a berserker roar Russ returned to the fight hewing and chopping at air as the man before him skilfully evaded each strike, watching the rage in Leman's eyes build.

"I find myself disappointed. I have searched the galaxy for my stolen son, and I find that he sacrifices his skill for rage so easily." So saying he grabbed the haft of the axe swung at him and wrenched hard to break his berserking son's grip, familiar from a hundred battles against Chaos with the madness he saw before him. So he was understandably surprised to have misread the King of the Russ when Leman abruptly released both axe and rage and rammed the edge of his

shield around his guard, aiming for his throat with all the skill that he'd apparently abandoned.

The Emperor jumped back, sparing himself, but the power feeds to his glove were severed as he brought it up to shield himself.

"Perhaps you are a worthy son after all!" He crowed with a smile, before he frowned seriously, "But we have much to discuss â€" as fun as these games have been."

Like Feni before him Russ was lifted into the air but instead of being launched away he was kept pinned to nothing as the Emperor began to talk.

\* \* \*

><p>Hidden above Fluttershy's illusion of stratocumulus, the clouds churned, transformed by her magic into a roiling charged mass. She carefully opened a gap in the illusion and saw Leman held aloft far below. Her reservations were put aside as she flew higher and higher straining to keep her telekinesis caressing the massive cloud bank below. Inverting herself she took a deep breath of the rarefied air and allowed herself to plummet.<p>

Flap.

She aimed for her gap.

Flap. "I'lll-"

She sped up.

Flap.

Her telekinesis firmed and began closing the gap and pushing the cloud bank down, creating a funnel.

Flap. "Not-"

She neared the wall.

Flap.

She was through the closing gap.

Flap. "Let-"

Telekinesis pulled the clouds into contact with her tail.

Flap.

She flooded the clouds with her pegasus magic and pulled them faster.

Flap. "You-"

Nearly.

Flap.



The-

Flap. "Down-"

-re.

FLAP.

Her acceleration soared as her body plummeted. Her sons' attacker beginning to look up at the funnel of storm clouds trailing her and the clearing skies as her illusion shattered.

FLAP! "Ever-"

Straining to bring her tail past her hooves as she tucked her legs.

\_FLAP!\_

\*\*\_BOOM!\_\*\*

Through the wall she watched as Russ fell and was dragged away by Geri, as the man raised some form of shield spell.

\*\*\_FLAP!\_\*\* "Again!"

Releasing the clouds she twisted to the side and bucked the the cloud funnel still moving down as hard as she could.

\*\*\_KRACKKK!\_\*\*

Lightning crawled across the funnel like the biggest plasma globe in the universe, then lanced down at the God Emperor of Mankind with the precision of a sniper and the force of a lance barrage.

Then the world was silent. And down from above came a yellow alicorn, her unconscious form spinning like a falling sycamore seed, a few tattered wisps of cloud catching round her like a torn parachute.

\* \* \*

><p>"...did you see that?" Bjorn the Fell-handed asked. "I never thought someone would beat the little mother, or Russ!"<p>

"Well," Grimbold the Aethling chuckled, "I don't think our \_guest\_ thought they were that strong either. Look, he's out too!"

"A draw, by Fenrir!" Bjorn called. "Only a draw gives both sides full honour!"

"Oh, give over," one of the clanners said, gesturing at a wolf that was looking at Fluttershy. "They'll be fine in the morning."

"To lord Russ and the little mother!" Grimbold raised his horn.

Freyja Hearth-Mistress' snort could be heard over raucous cheering of the menfolk. "Honour implies our 'guest'," a word she spat like cursed Winter, "has some to regain. You saw him try and strike down

our Little Mother when she justly chastised the lout. He's already shown his colours. He can stay in the stables, for I won't have him under our roof till our King is well."

From beside her a huge wolf bitch growled.

Freyja nodded, "You're right. I wouldn't trust him near the kennels with the pups either. Bring them into the Hall for now and we'll all keep watch over them."

\* \* \*

><p>10.10 (Filraen)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So girls, who gets to choose how to deal with Nightmare Moon this time?"<p>

"Ah think it's Fluttershy's, ain't it Pinkie?" Applejack offered.

"Yep," Pinkie Pie confirmed.

The yellow pegasus blinked. "In that case... Twilight, do you have that thing I asked you to keep that human loop? The one we wrote the thank-you letter?"

Twilight Sparkle grinned. "I like what you're thinking."

Fluttershy smiled. "Yes, I want to try some other magic than the Elements of Harmony to see if we can break Princess Luna out of Nightmare Moon."

"Sounds like a plan. Hang on, girls," and concentrating her magic Twilight teleported them all to Canterlot Royal Library.

"Oh, dear, when did you learn to use magic without flaring your horn?" Rarity asked, surprised.

"Oh, that?" Twilight answered, slightly flustered. "One loop I worked at Ponyville Hospital. And my horn is still flaring, it's just the light isn't visible. I had the conversion spell up because-

"How comes the light isn't visible?!" Rainbow Dash countered. "Light is light, if there's light you can see it, if there isn't it's dark."

\*\*"SHHHH!"\*\*

Rainbow quickly looked around with a panicked look on her face.

Twilight whispered in response "Keep it down Rainbow! We are in a library."

"Oops, sorry."

Twilight continued explaining "Anyway, it's like the X-Rays they use to check broken bones. You can't see light but-

"All right, egghead stuff." Rainbow Dash waved with one hoof, dismissing Twilight's words.

Twilight just glared at Rainbow for a moment before returning to Rarity. "Sorry for forgetting to tell you, but we are going to do this at nighttime and we don't want the Princesses getting distracted with a horn flaring in the dark if we want to put Fluttershy in the spotlight."

Rarity nodded "Makes sense to light only the most important part of the scenery to draw all the attention; which reminds me, are you going to be all right Fluttershy?"

"I... want to try this, so don't worry Rarity, I'll be fine." The yellow pegasus tried to reassure her friend.

"All right."

"However," Fluttershy added, "I'm going to need your help with Princess Luna."

"Sure."

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia was alone in Canterlot Castle's Royal Hall. She had dismissed the Royal Guard just after sunset with the justification that she needed to get ready for the Summer Sun Celebration ceremony in Ponyville. In reality, she was setting herself as a first line of defense against Nightmare Moon and as bait, should she fail, so her faithful student Twilight Sparkle could reclaim the Elements of Harmony.<p>

At some point her patience bore fruit, as she felt an intimately familiar magical presence attacking her. Dodging to one side, she found the figure she was waiting for in the royal throne.

"Celestia," Nightmare Moon spat, as if it were the worst imaginable insult, "we meet again."

Suddenly Celestia felt a strange wave of magic pass through her. The sky had somehow lost part of its color, leaving it gray. Celestia tried her connection to the Sun, finding it farther from her control than ever. Was she beaten so easily? Had she failed in rescuing her sister? Why did Nightmare Moon look so surprised right now?

Celestia didn't really have time to ponder such questions as she started hearing music, a soft and slow tune. Then suddenly a spot in the dark hall became illuminated, showing a yellow pegasus who seemed to look at both her and Nightmare Moon. After a while, and following the music, she started to sing.

Fate has been cruel and order unkind  
><em>How can I have sent you away?<em>

The pegasus had a soft voice, a nice match for the sad song she was singing.

\_The blame was my own; the punishment, yours\_  
><em>The harmony's silent today.<em>

Celestia felt... something, as if the song captured her own self  
\_'That song, could that be about...?'\_

\_But into the stillness I'll bring you a song\_  
><em>And I will your company keep<em>  
><em>Till your tired eyes and my lullabies<em>  
><em>Have carried you softly to sleep<em>

Suddenly a white unicorn appeared by the side of the yellow pegasus, who continued singing where the pegasus, who looked in the verge of tears, left.

\_Once did a pony who gleamed like the moon\_  
><em>Look out on her kingdom and sigh<em>  
><em>Dejected she cried, "Surely there is no pony<em>  
><em>Who loves me, or finds any love in my night."<em>

Nightmare Moon's face betrayed her bewilderment, as if the song affected both alicorns equally.

\_So great was her pain, she rose in rebellion\_  
><em>Against those who cared for her most.<em>  
><em>She let the Nightmare fall on those she ruled<em>  
><em>And threatened to grip them in permanent cold.<em>

It was only then when the pegasus resumed singing, now in a duet. Somehow Celestia knew the words of this unknown song even before they were sung by the ponies.

\_Lullaby dear princess, goodnight sister mine\_  
><em>And rest now in moonlight's embrace<em>  
><em>Bear up my lullaby, winds of the earth<em>  
><em>Through cloud, and through sky, and through space<em>

><em>Carry the peace and the coolness of night<em>  
><em>And carry my sorrow in kind<em>  
><em>Sister, you're loved so much more than you know<em>

><em>Forgive me for being so blind<em>

The sky suddenly returned to its usual color, and Celestia realized there weren't just only other two ponies: they were six, including Twilight Sparkle! The ponies also started to move in a slow yet captivating choreography while their singing continued, the lyrics telling the simplest, yet truest, version Celestia had known of the long ago tragedy. The turning of her sister Luna into Nightmare Moon, and her banishment to the moon by Celestia's own hoof a millennia ago.

After the second verse and a section of music without lyrics finished Celestia couldn't hold it anymore: with tears she only now noticed flowing, she started singing in conjunction with Twilight Sparkle and the other ponies and - to her surprise - Nightmare Moon.

\_The years now before us fearful and unknown\_  
><em>I never imagined I'd face them on my own<em>  
><em>May these sunless seasons swiftly pass, I pray<em>

><em>I love you; I miss you all these miles away<em>

At this point everypony except the alicorns had stopped singing, but Celestia hardly realized it. She had only eyes and voice for Nightmare Moon, who was still singing and crying to a song which touched both of their souls, none daring to move for fear breaking what seemed an illusion.

May all your dreams be sweet tonight\_

><em>Safe upon that bed above the lights<em>

><em>And know not of heartache, fear, nor, gloom<em>

><em>And when I dream, I'll fly away to meet you soon<em>

><em>Sleep, sleep, sleep...<em>

When the song ended Celestia felt expectant. Now what? After what appeared to be another thousand years Nightmare Moon closed her eyes and Celestia saw magic enveloping the darker alicorn. A moment later the magic vanished and it was Princess Luna who opened hers.

"Celestia," Luna said in a cracking voice, "we meet again."

Only then both alicorns dared to move, this time to reach each other's embrace.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle tried to contain her tears, and her excitement. At least the reunion of the Princesses helped with the latter â€" but not with the former. During the musical number not only was she "lightlessly" casting a Dimensional Barrier to distract the Princesses and the music spell for the song Fluttershy found, but also she was taking care on observing how the song affected the Princesses.<p>

Fluttershy's plan was a complete success: using what she dubbed "heart-songs", the way ponies seemed to spontaneously inspire and create musicals, combined with a song specially tailored for the Princesses to dispel the corruption in Nightmare Moon. This time they didn't even need to use the Elements of Harmony or to become alicorns, and the best part of all: she had material for yet another Thesis!

Drying her tears she rounded up her friends and started to leave. "Princess Celestia, Princess Luna. Now we have to go to finish the preparations of the Summer Sun celebration in Ponyville. We'll wait for you there." Celestia could only answer with a nod.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Set ten.

Just to remind everyone, Loops do not have to take place in the order they're shown - far from it.

And the music from 10.10 is "Lullaby for a Princess", I am told.

## 11. Chapter 11

### 11.1 (Stainless Steel Fox)

\* \* \*

><p>The three Crusaders eagerly awaited the arrival of 'Nightmare Moon'. Twilight had agreed to let them handle her appearance this loop. Luna wasn't awake, but that would be part of the fun.<p>

Ah, here she was.

"Oh, my beloved subjects. It's been so long since I've seen your precious, little, sun-loving faces."

Rainbow Dash wasn't awake, and did her usual non-awake attack run on Nightmare Moon, and was as usual stopped by the unawakened Applejack. "What did you do to our princess?"

Nightmare Moon chuckled. "Why, am I not royal enough for you? Don't you know who I am?"

Before Pinkie could guess, Applebloom stepped forward, and called out, "You're Nightmare Moon! But you shouldn't be here for a couple of months yet!"

"I am gratified that at least some-pony remembers the legend, but I have returned on the longest day of the thousandth year, as prophesied."

Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo stepped up beside Applebloom as she continued. "Soâ€| you're not here for Nightmare Night?"

The Nightmare looked honestly confused. "No, silly foal, I am here to bring the Night Eternal!"

"Whoa!" Applebloom exclaimed, "Isn't that a bit steep for not getting enough candy?"

"Candy? What is this 'Nightmare Night' you speakest of?"

The trio inwardly grinned. They'd seen Luna restored by talking before, and starting to speak ye olde butchered equestrian was one of the signs of her breaking through the Nightmare persona.

"It's a night where we dress up and collect candy to offer to you so you don't eat pony fillies and colts," Applebloom rattled off, with just a hint of nervousness.

Nightmare Moon actually looked disgusted. "Eat ponies? What calumnies hath my sister foisted on this world in my absence?"

"Told ya!" Scootaloo nudged Applebloom as they'd rehearsed.

Sweetie Belle added, "Well, nobody actually believes that bit, but it's a good scary story, and you're an awesome, scary pony!"

"Thou wantest to be scared?" Nightmare Moon was clearly all at seaâ€|

so they kept pushing out the boat.

"Oh yeah! Scary can be fun when it's all just a game! Nightmare Night is one of my favourite days of the year," Applebloom explained. "We get to dress up and stay up late and party all night, and get lots and lots of candy. And Nightmare Night wouldn't be Nightmare Night without Nightmare Moon."

The Nightmare turned to smoke and flew down to the three pony fillies, appearing right in front of them, a black aura and lightning crackling around her. "Doth thou still think me a figure of fun?"

"Whoo!" "Cool!" "Do it again!" The three fillies, rather than being intimidated, applauded her. A few other ponies started joining in, Pinkie chief among them.

The Nightmare was taken aback. "Thou art not terrified? Why doth no-pony get it? I am here to imprison my sister Princess Celestia, as she once imprisoned me in the moon, and bring eternal night! I know nothing of this Nightmare night you speak of!"

Sweetie Belle's lip quivered. "Does that mean Nightmare Night is cancelled?"

Applebloom asked, "Your sister? Why would any-pony do something like that? Especially a sister. My sister Applejack and I are the closest of friends. She'd never banish me to the moon for a thousand years, not even if i was really naughty. Well I guess she couldn't in the first place, not being an alicorn and all, but even if she could, she wouldn't."

Nightmare Moon huffed. "Very well, since it is clear no-pony understands how I was wronged, I shall have to explain. A thousand years ago, my sister and I did work together as princesses of Equestria, she raising the sun and bringing the day, while I did raise the moon and brought the night as Princess Luna. But while ponies enjoyed my sister's day, they feared and shunned my beautiful night, sleeping through it. I ultimately resolved that I would make the night last forever, so they would have to appreciate it. But my sister managed to defeat me and locked me away in the moon for a thousand years."

"That was really mean!" Applebloom commented.

"It was the only way for ponies to see my night..."

"No, I mean ponies ignoring your night. Nights are cool too." Applebloom decided not to mention the whole 'diurnal biology' thing.

Scootaloo continued, getting excited. "Yeah, there are all kind of things you can do at night, like have sleepovers, or bonfires, or watch the stars... we even study them in school, and pegasi and ships use them to navigate by."

"Or have a long romantic stroll and snuggle up together under the moon..." Sweetie Belle sighed, eyes distant.

Nightmare Moon shook her head from side to side as if trying to

dislodge a fly, her mane wavering in colour. "You no longer fear the night? But..."

Applebloom pressed on. "Of course, making it night forever was a bit of an over-reaction. I mean we need day too, to grow crops and stuff. Eternal night would mean every-pony would die of starvation, and then who'd appreciate your night?"

The Nightmare's mane turned darker, then lighter, so Sweetie Belle added, "But banishing you for a thousand years? That's kind of over-reacting too. My sister and I sometimes argue, but she's never given me a thousand year time out. But even though we argue sometimes, we're still sisters, and we still love each other. You should have been able to talk it through, work out some way that to get ponies to appreciate you more."

"Maybe they were just too mad at each other," Applebloom said, "Even Applejack and I get mad at one another sometimes, and we say and do things we don't really mean. I'm sure princess Celestia is sorry about what happened."

The three ponies put their heads together and whispered, then pulled some sacks from under the table. Applebloom said, "These were our special Summer Sun Celebration candy stashes, they took weeks to put together. If we give them to you, could you bring back Princess Celestia, and not do the whole eternal night thing, just talk with her and make up, maybe?"

Nightmare Moon looked incredulous and rose up on her hind hooves, mane flaring. "You're kidding, right? Thou doth have the temerity to bargain with an alicorn princess, and more so you do offer sweetmeats as your prize?"

Scootaloo started looking through the bags. "We don't have any temerity or sweetmeats, but we do have hard candy and chocolate and gummies and boiled sweets and even some cloud cupcakes..."

That utterly wrong footed her. She landed back on all fours, face scrunched up, and then bust out laughing. Not evil laughter, but a good honest belly laugh. The darkness in her mane flared and was blasted away, and her armour shattered. Her eyes turned from green and slitted to regular irises of a cyan blue, and after a few moments she recovered enough to speak.

Very well, young fillies, we have a bargain." She raised her head and her horn flashed. The sun rose, and from its centre came a ball of light, which landed by her and resolved itself into Princess Celestia.

Every-pony bowed. The elder alicorn blinked, looking around, and saw her sister standing in front of three fillies with a bag of sweets.

"Well, Iâ€| did not expect thatâ€|" Celestia said, trying to work out how that had just happened. "It seems I owe you three fillies a great debt of gratitude for freeing me and restoring my sister."

"Aw, it was nothing..." Applebloom blushed.

Sweetie Belle piped up. "Yes, we know how sometimes things get out of



hoof between sisters."

"I don't..." Scootaloo sighed and looked meaningfully over at Rainbow Dash. "I wish I did..."

Princess Celestia gave all three of them a gentle smile. "My deepest thanks to all of you anyway. I wouldn't have considered it possible if I hadn't seen it myself."

"Indeed sister." Princess Luna added. She rubbed her forehead. "They bargained for your freedom with words of wisdom and bags of candy. Now I do consider the matter, bringing eternal night just so ponies could appreciate my night sky was possibly the most idiotic idea since Romane Numerals. In truth, I can not imagine what I was thinking!"

Princess Celestia teared up. "Oh Luna, it's been centuries since I've seen you like this. I would have done anything to spare you your exile, but there was a taint of darkness in you, something foreign, and it twisted you. Working alone, I could not use the full power of the Elements and free you from it, so I had to freeze you in the moon until I could find a way to separate you from it. I thought only the full power of the Elements of Harmony could do it, and using them the way i did even at lower power would ruin them for centuries, so I gave myself a millenium to find an answer and for the Elements to recover. If I had known the answer was so simple..."

She moved in and hugged the startled Luna. "I have been so lonely these past thousand years! We were meant to rule together little sister. Will you accept my apology, and my friendship?"

Luna hesitated for a moment, then returned the hug. "Only if you will accept mine."

Many joyful tears were shed, then Pinkie Pie exclaimed, "This calls for a party!"

The three fillies gave each other a big grin and high hooved. "Cutie Mark Crusader Diarchy Restorers! Yeah!"

\* \* \*

><p>11.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Your majesty?"<p>

Mufasa, ruler of the Pride Lands, turned. "What is it, Twilight?"

The shaman (well, this Loop anyway) spread her hooves. "I do not have anything definite, but I suspect that your brother may be planning something."

"Scar?" Mufasa frowned. "Why do you suspect that?"

"A number of reasons, some of them too arcane to be understood." \_Well, yeah,\_ Twilight thought, \_as in, I've watched the film.\_ "But I think there are things that could be done to mitigate what might

happen."

The lion began pacing down the side of Pride Rock, following his zebra shaman. (Twilight had been intrigued to discover that the Loop had made her into a horned zebra, and that her cutie mark was more tribal in design, for some reason.) "What do you suggest? I strike first?"

"No." Twilight shook her head emphatically. "I suggest that you begin a phased plan of increasing the opportunities available to hyena."

"Pardon?"

"The lions, aside from Scar, are content with your rule. Most other predators on the plains are too small to pose a threat. It seems that the most likely source of power for any coup is not just one from Scar, if such is possible, but any is the hyena, since they're angry." Twilight took some powder from a pouch that Loop she'd spent learning from Zecora was coming in very useful and cast it into the air.

She manipulated the bound spell in the powder to show what she wanted it to show. Shanzi, Banzai and Ed, prowling through the Elephant Graveyard.

"See, my liege?" she said, pointing. "They are gaunt with hunger is not starving, certainly, but nor are they able to eat their fill."

"This bears consideration." Mufasa frowned. "Thank you, my shaman. Continue your work."

It was as good as a dismissal.

\* \* \*

><p>"You know, there's only one thing I wanna know," a boar said, pausing in his meal.<p>

"What's that?" his companion asked.

"Why are you a meerkat?"

Angel frowned. "Why not?"

Spike shrugged. "I dunno. Just seemed like you'd be... well, something more rabbit. And how come you're Looping anyway?"

Angel copied the shrug. "Like I care. Pity Fluttershy isn't around, though."

\* \* \*

><p>"So, what you're saying is," Shanzi paced, her two packmates circling further out, "that if we do what Mufasa says, he'll let us have his scraps?"<p>

"Rather more than scraps," Twilight replied. "Anyway, why are you following Scar? Doesn't he offer basically the same thing but with

more effort?"

She blinked. "For that matter, aren't you matriarchal?"

"Eh." Banzai padded closer. "She doesn't tell me what to-awp!"

Shanzi lowered her paw from the cuff that had sent him sprawling. "\_Yes. I. Do.\_ Anyway, it is an interesting offer, but there's one problem."

"And that is?" Twilight asked politely.

"We could just eat you, right now." Shanzi nodded sharply, and Ed leapt at Twilight from behind.

There was a pop, and he landed on Shanzi's face.

"Argh! Gerrof, idiot! I said gerrof, I'm not a zebra, oow!"

"I'll speak to you later," Twilight told Banzai (the only one currently listening) and vanished in a magical flare.

\* \* \*

><p>11.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Right, here we go!" Applebloom said. "You ready, Scoots?"<p>

Scootaloo nodded from the cockpit of a credible imitation of a Sopwith Camel. "Ready!"

"Okay!" Applebloom bucked the propeller, and the engine sputtered once or twice before catching and starting to run properly.

Scootaloo waited a moment, then nodded again. "Looks good."

Applebloom ran back to the left wheel, took a string attached to the left chock in her mouth and hurried over to the outer edge of the lower left wing. Once there, she fitted herself under it. "Mfree, Twmmf, Mmneâ€|"

Sweetie pulled the right chock out at the same time Applebloom pulled on the string attached to the left one. They both started running forwards, holding up the wings as the biplane got moving. Once it was faster than they could run, they slowed down and watched.

The biplane bumped over the ground, accelerating, and began to jounce as it hit slight irregularities in the field. Once, twiceâ€| then it didn't come down again.

"Woo!" Applebloom shouted, jumping up and down, as the Crusader I climbed steadily into the air. Once it was a couple of hundred yards up, it banked slightly and began to circle as Scootaloo carefully gained height.

"Well, it worked," Sweetie said, watching with a grin on her face.  
"What next?"

"Next, ah think we try for an improved version that don't need two sets of wings." Applebloom frowned, already thinking of other ways to make the \_Crusader II\_ better. "Or we could try makin' the wings outta wood, instead of bein' fabric."

"Sounds like a good idea." Sweetie nodded. "I know Rarity is going to be amazed when she sees what we did with her waste bolts of cloth, though."

The airplane overhead waggled its wings, then dove gently. They could hear Scootaloo's voice, faint over the engine.

"This is \_so cool!\_ Iâ€|"

Applebloom didn't catch the next bit. "What did she say, Sweets?"

Sweetie Belle lit her horn. "Secâ€| rewindâ€| oh."

"What?"

"That's what she said." Sweetie deadpanned. "She said 'oh.'"

The buzzing drone of the engine above cut out.

"Ah, horsefeathersâ€|" Applebloom muttered. "Must be the carburettor."

A large parasail opened overhead as Scootaloo bailed out. The \_Crusader I\_ kept going without her in a gradually steepening dive, which ended as it hit the nearby lake with a huge splash.

Sweetie slowed Scootaloo's landing with telekinesis, and the pegasus stomped over to Applebloom.

"I've got some issues with the design." Scootaloo shook her hooves, which seemed to be wet. "The engine leaks."

Applebloom bent down and sniffed. "â€|yeah, that's fuel alright. Guess a combustion engine wasn't a good idea."

"You're telling me?" Scootaloo pointed to the plume of smoke. "The fuel leaked into the cockpit, and then the engine cut out! That was \_not\_ fun!"

Sweetie looked smug.

"Alright, alright, you win Sweets." Applebloom kicked the ground. "We'll build a crystal engine for the second one. Now, erâ€| how do we explain this to Steven Magnet? I think the \_Crusader I\_ hit his summer home."

"We have a \_long\_ way to go before we can build a Mareitechâ€|" Scootaloo shook her head.

\* \* \*

><p>11.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|okay," Fluttershy said timidly. "I know I can become an alicorn now, butâ€| I don't really feel up to thisâ€|"<p>

Twilight finished establishing her stability bubble, pushing back the chaos of Discord-controlled Equestria with a variant failsafe spell. "Well, it seems to happen every time somepony ascends. Well, except meâ€| I did have a Loop where I replaced Luna, but that wasn't straight after my ascensionâ€| anyway. We have to deal with Discord."

"Okay." Fluttershy's face set. "I can handle this, Twilight."

"Good." Twilight tapped a hoof. "I get Magic, you get Kindnessâ€| which two other Elements do you feel up to?"

"No, I can handle this." Fluttershy flew off.

"â€|huh." Twilight said. "That's unusually bold for Fluttershy."

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|so, anyway, the point *is*, I just don't see the upside of harmony for me." Discord lay back on the couch he'd conjured. "I mean, I'm a being of chaos and disharmony. Harmony is sort of opposite of me."

"Perhaps you just haven't had the right examples," Fluttershy replied. "I mean, take as an example what happened with the Windigoes. Alone, the three tribes were completely unable to resist their effects â€" but together, they were much more powerful. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, you seeâ€|"

"Fair point," Discord allowed. "What do you suggest I would enjoy, then?"

"Well, my â€"sister," Fluttershy said, remembering just in time what was going on this Loop, "is quite an expert with magic. I'm sure she'd love to work with you. And I can tell that you're quite a fun draconequus to be around â€" if you can resist turning ponies into things they'd rather not be, at any rate."

"A difficult challenge," Discord said airily. "I'd much rather do a bit ofâ€| discordianism." He snapped his fingers, and tapped Fluttershy on the forehead just below her horn. "Let's see what you think now!"

Fluttershy blinked, and frowned. There was a burst of magic which bowled Discord over.

"\_You have been a very naughty boy!\_"

"â€|this feels like Karma," Discord said. "I don't like it."

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|I said I was sorry," Discord muttered.<p>

Next to him, Fluttershy's wings twitched. She could have been shrugging slightly â€" it was hard to tell.

"Though I am impressed with your sister," the draconequus continued. "I mean, she tried working with you instead of against you for nearly a year after you kicked me up here." He pointed to the crater he'd left when he hit the moon. "Nice shot, by the way. Anyway, what finally got too much for her?"

"â€|wolves."

"Pardon?" Discord bent down.

"I set Canis Major on the castle!" Fluttershy shouted. Discord went flying backwards from the sheer force.

"I don't know what you did to me," Fluttershy continued, shaking her head. "I keep getting angry so easily, and for no reason! Iâ€| I thought she wasn't putting enough effort into zoological funding, and so I decided to use my part of the gardens to take care of a few animals, and by the time I'd finished putting all the rest of them in there it filled the Everfree forest, and I didn't have anywhere to put the Canis Major, soâ€| I got them to invade Twilight's part of the castle, to show her why she should respect our little friends." By this point, Fluttershy was hiding herself almost entirely inside her wings. Only her horn and eyes were poking out.

Discord whistled. "That's actually quite impressive."

The two divine entities sat awkwardly for a bit.

"â€|can you make a sauna?" Fluttershy asked tentatively.

"That sounds like a good idea," Discord replied. "Water, grape juice, or key lime pie?"

"Water, please." Fluttershy paused. "Can it be lemon scented?"

"I can make it fizzy, too!" Discord replied with a grin.

\* \* \*

><p>"Stupid things!" Twilight said, barely restraining the urge to kick the Element of Loyalty. "I wanted to undo whatever Discord did to destabilize her moods, not send her up there for a thousand years!"<p>

She sighed. "Oh, well. Looks like it's going to be waiting until our friends turn up againâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>"You want me to organize a welcome home party?" Pinkie Pie, special student of (a <em>very</em> tired) Princess Twilight asked with glee.

"Yes, Pinkie." Twilight massaged her temples with her forehooves.

"There are two deities up on the moon who are going to be coming back down in a month or so. Neither of them is actually evil, or nasty, they were justâ€¦ put in time out. I'd like you to make it clear to them that they're welcome in Equestria."

"Okay!" Pinkie said, bouncing. "Who are they?"

"One of them is Discord." Twilight paused. "Just design a party for yourself, for him, only more so. The other one is my sister, Princess Fluttershy. She's very sweet, and likes things subduedâ€¦ but she does have a bit of a temper, so make sure things are done well."

"Okie Dokie!" Pinkie bounced off.

Twilight let out a heartfelt sigh of relief. Pinkie Pie was a true friend, but not to be taken in extended doses.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, Spike!" Pinkie said. "How's things going on the Discord side?"<p>

"Well, we've got all the local ponies who are into intensive partying lined up." Spike turned a page on the clipboard. "One 'Rainbow Dash' has said she'll do her speciality piece to open the disco, and there's a DJ who's going to keep it going." The young dragon frowned at the paper. "DJ Lunacy? Whatever. Anyway, that was the last thing left to handle."

"They sound fun!" Pinkie nodded to herself. "I'll go see them in a moment! What about the other side?"

"One Octavia is going to do the music for that one. All classical, nothing too startling. There's also a pegasus dance troupe who've volunteered to helpâ€¦ Cirque du Celestia? Sounds interesting. They're supposed to be very good. Anyway, a very nice â€" very, very nice â€" unicorn called Rarity is helping to outfit everypony for that, all in period dresses and suits to add a touch of the familiar for her." Spike looked a bit distracted by the subject of said unicorn, but rallied quite well. "And the catering's lined up too."

"Good!" Pinkie said. "Now to let Princess Twilight know! Get that flame ready, Spike!"

\* \* \*

><p>"â€¦huh." Twilight muttered, reading the letter. "Luna's a <em>DJ</em> this time? I have to admit, given nightclubs, it makes a certain amount of senseâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>"It started well!" Pinkie said brightly, looking over the smoking ruins of Ponyville.<p>

"I believe you," Princess Twilight replied. "I was there. But I didn't see where it went \_wrong.\_"

"Oh." Pinkie thought. "I think it was about when Luna overloaded the spell that was maintaining a sound barrier between the two parties, deafened everypony at the soiree, and startled Princess Fluttershy."

"Okay." Twilight spread her wings. "I'll go look for my sister, she's probably in the Everfree somewhere. You try and find Discord."

\* \* \*

><p>"Don't worry, Fluttershy," Twilight said. "No pony actually got hurt."<p>

"I just feel like I keep breaking things!" Fluttershy wailed. "I'm not cut out for being an alicorn!"

"No, you're doing better than almost anypony else hasâ€|" Twilight said critically, thinking back on 'Danger Dash'. "You coped with the moon very well. Besides, it seems like being an alicorn actually makes emotional extremes stronger. You weren't ready for it â€" that's all."

She stretched out a wing, and laid it over Fluttershy's back. "Come on. Besides, Luna and Dash both had their episodes last a thousand years. Yours tend to be a lot shorter." Twilight pondered for a moment, trying to think of something to say.

"â€|I found Angel Bunny."

Fluttershy's eye peeked out of her wings. "You did?"

"Yep. He actually runs the griffin empire, for some reason. Strangest trade agreement signing I've done yet." Twilight considered that statement. "Well, apart from the one from last Loop, where we agreed to trade love to the Changelings. Actually, speaking of them, I normalized relations five hundred years ago. Want to see if Chrysalis can help you with that emotions problem? There's a state visit next month."

"â€|alright, then," Fluttershy whispered.

\* \* \*

><p>11.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"THE NIGHT WILL LAST FOREVER!" Nightmare Moon shouted, glorying in her own return.<p>

"Really?" A suspiciously familiar voice asked. "Hel\_lo?\_ \_So\_ consistent."

"Discord?"

"How did you \_know\_, lulu?" Discord raised an empty glass, then quaffed the air in it. Mead flowed in from nowhere to fill it up from the top, and when he finished the glass was completely full with liquid that didn't spill. Picking up an empty bottle on the table, he 'emptied' his glass from it. "But I don't like the idea of the night



lasting \_forever\_. I mean, it'd get boring inside three minutes."

"Night and day are irrelevant!" The mayor shimmered, and turned into a large, insectoid creature. "Changelings! Sieze them!"

Almost every other pony in the room also dropped shapeshifts.

"We cannot allow them to jeopardize our infiltration!" Chrysalis said.

There was a knocking on the door. All three divine entities paused, looking towards it.

After almost a full twenty seconds of staring, Discord sighed and snapped his fingers. The door opened.

A large, armoured unicorn stepped through. \*\*"Crystals?"\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>"Oooohâ€|" several dozen ponies said, watching the fountain of magical backlash as four immensely powerful beings battled hammer-and-tongs.<p>

"Aaaaahâ€|"

A Changeling went soaring into the air, clinging grimly to a large firework labelled 'Komodo 3000.'

"Hey, Pinkieâ€|" Twilight began slowly. "Is that the one that-"

"Duck and cover!" Pinkie overrode her, diving to the ground.

There was an enormously bright flash, and night became day for about five seconds.

"I told you not to store that in the town hall!" Twilight said, once the firework had finally burnt out. "Actually, I told you to store it in your pocket dimension inside a water-jacketed box."

"Eh." Pinkie shrugged. "I wanted to see what Dissy would do with it!"

A smouldering changeling landed next to them, stumbled upright and promptly collapsed again. "I can't see!"

"Don't worry," Twilight replied. "The box said your eyesight comes back in two days."

"Are you \_sure\_ this will solve all our problems, Twilight?" Princess Celestia asked, looking dubious.

"Oh, yeah," Twilight reassured her. "I mean, once they're all tired enough we could probably actually talk them through things."

She winced as a bolt of pure night removed the top half of her library. "Granted, that could take a whileâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>Discord panted on the floor, utterly exhausted. There were three hundred changelings surrounding him, covered with various flavours of pie or jam, and one duct-taped expertly to the remains of the wall behind him.<p>

Chrysalis wasn't much better. She was still standing, but visibly supporting herself with a table.

Sombra had discovered that the goblets in the room were made with crystal glass and was busily trying to chew his way through some, mainly to get up the energy to move.

And Nightmare Moon still had a spell sizzling on the end of her horn. Granted, it was a low grade stun spell, but it was more than the others could manage. "Hah! You, youâ€¦ fools, youâ€¦ foals, couldn't defeat the true might ofâ€¦ Equestria's true ruler. Who's the winner now?"

Celestia stepped through a hole in the wall. "Me, actually."

Discord rolled his eyes. Chrysalis finally collapsed to the floor, her last two conscious changelings standing guard over her. Nightmare Moon's spell fizzled out, and she wobbled on her hooves.

Sombra started snoring. \*\*"Cryyyysâ€¦ taaaaalsâ€¦" \*\*

"Right." Celestia decided to ignore him for now. "Anyway. Who wants some tea?"

\* \* \*

><p>"This is stupidâ€¦" Chrysalis muttered, finishing off the paperwork and passing it to Princess Cadence.<p>

"Oh, sorryâ€¦" Cadence replied, after checking the date. "I'm afraid that Sombra has booked that month to attempt a hostile takeover of Equestria. You'll have to reschedule."

"What?" Chrysalis stamped on the floor. "That's not fair! You've only \_got\_ one wedding!"

"Sorry." Cadence shrugged. "At least it's better than another double booking, right?"

"I supposeâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>11.6 (Mandemon)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"3... 2... 1... Get ready..." Twilight said, as the moment of Nightmare Moon's return came closer. Her latest plan to speed up the whole collecting Elements of Harmony had worked well. Too bad the others weren't Awake in this loop.<p>

Right on time, Nightmare Moon appeared on the stage.

Wearing a top hat and wearing a monocle.

"I say, this is the most joyous time indeed! For I have returned from my enforced leave of this word, as decreed by my sister!" the dark alicorn said, in an affected accent.

"What," Twilight said, echoing the feelings of everyone else.

"Gotcha! How's it going, Twilight?" Luna said, shifting away from her Nightmare Moon appearance and dropping her disguise.

"..." Twilight had the sinking feeling that she'd just been punk'd.

"Oh, come on! Don't look at me like that. You pulled all kinds of tricks on me in numerous loops, for once it's my turn," Luna said with a smile. "Now, how shall we trick my sister? I assume she is not Awake, seeing how your friends there are very confused."

Twilight pondered. "Hmmmâ€¦ Pinkie, do you have a clown wig available?"

"Of course!" Pinkie reached behind a bushâ€¦ no, on second glance she picked up the bush, and pulled a cord to turn it from green to rainbow coloured. "I have them all around Ponyville!"

Luna developed a grin. "I like where this is going."

"Can somepony explain what's goin' on?" Applejack asked.

\* \* \*

><p>11.7 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Sweetie Belle? Where are Scootaloo and Applebloom? And where is your project for the Science fair?" Cheerilee looked around, in case she'd missed two fillies and a project.<p>

"They're bringing it here right now, Miss Cherrilee. We did ask if we could do a combined project and you did agree." Sweetie gave a nice smile.

"Yes, I did, but I expect something that reflects a high level of effort from all three of you." The teacher frowned; it would be a hard one to mark, in truth, but they worked so much better together she didn't have the heart to say no.

"Ha!" As usual, Diamond Tiara cut in. "I bet those three blank flanks produced a big fat nothing, just like the cutie-marks they don't have! My daddy brought me the finest model airship kit money could buy!"

"Oh really, Diamond Tiara? I thought you said you built it yourself." Sweetie looked sly for a moment.

"I did, I built it all myself! I even read the explanation of how it

worksâ€¦" Diamond tailed off, realizing she'd just be digging herself a hole if she kept going, and changed tack. "At least I have a project; Sweetie Belle doesn't even have a paper airplane!"

"Not a paper one, no..." Sweetie Belle heard the howl of jet engines and grinned.

A shadow fell across the school yard as a winged shape swept over it on jets of flame.

"Ahh! It's a dragon!"

"Hide!"

"Call for help!"

The blocky, angular shape of a Mareitech space fighter did a vertical landing in the field beside the school, and the whine of its engines died down. It was painted white with burgundy trim and tail fins, on which was emblazoned the blue and white Cutie-mark Crusaders logo. The twin canopy lifted up, revealing Scootaloo in the front seat and Applebloom sitting behind her and to the side. There was an empty space beside the earth-pony filly.

"What is it?" Cheerilee finally stuttered.

"It's our flying machine, the Cutie Mark Crusader Mark VIII. Applebloom did the primary design and engineering, Scootaloo developed the flight control systems and aerodynamics, and I worked on the thaumic power core and avionics, though I did get Twilight Sparkle to help me with the power core design. But that's allowed; you did say we should get an adult pony to help us if we were doing anything dangerous." Sweetie looked earnest. "That's okay, right?"

The three of them had been hiding their looped abilities until now, specifically for the fun of the reveal, but now she could show off a bit. Her horn glowed and she started showing a slide show of illusion images showing the design and construction of the CMC8 in the workshop/hangar they'd created under the tree-house.

\* \* \*

><p>11.3 additional (Madfish)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The Crusaders' attention was drawn from the pyre of their first biplane by a small herd of four unfamiliar ponies racing in their direction.<p>

None of them were much out of colthood from their looks, and one shouting, "I say, are you three alright?" revealed at least one of them had a strong and unusual accent.

"We're fine. We remembered to make parachutesâ€¦ this time." Applebloom blushed.

Sweetie winced, remembering what had happened when they'd tried making their own balloon. It had taken a very alert Rainbow Dash to

catch them when the thing caught fireâ€¦

"Well, jolly good, I supposeâ€¦" the speaker was a sightly overweight pale green pegasus. Having said his piece, he trailed off in confusion.

Scootaloo broke the silence by asking, "So who are you anyway?"

"Oh. Yes, how rude of us," clearly now they had ascertained that the fillies were safe the pegasus had other things on his mind. Refocusing, he started introductions, "I am Algae- Algy, my friend here I think is Jams," he wiped a frustrated hoof across his brow as he nodded to the other pegasus with him, a tan stallion with his mane tucked into a flight cap. "Sorry- James," clearly wanting to finish he sped up, "Smyth and Ginger," he finished with a gesture to a grey earthpony with black mane and mustache, and an appropriately coloured unicorn who was clearly the youngest there.

With some concern Sweetie asked, "Are you feeling all right?"

Chuckling the tan pegasus added, "Just a bit under the weather. I don't think any of us have ridden the dragon quite as hard as this before. I don't even remember getting the cigâ€¦"

"You were riding a dragon? That's kind of cool, most ponies just run scared of them," Scootaloo said. "Soâ€¦ you're Loopers, right?"

Blank looks.

"You know, repeating the same things over and over?" Applebloom tried, wondering what a \_cig\_ was.

More blank looks.

"Your \_first\_ loop and it's a Crossed Loop? How's that even work?" Sweetie gestured in the air, trying to show how strange that was.

"We can't even get Twilight to explain this stuff to themâ€¦ she's gone to set something up for Sombra and we're the only other ones Awake," Scootaloo sighed.

James blinked, "I think it would be best if we saw a doctor. I don't think we're hearing what you're actually saying."

\* \* \*

><p>11.8 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you okay?" Applebloom still found it hard to see the lack of recognition in her best friends' eyes. This was the hardest part about looping, everything you'd done and seen with your friends justâ€¦ wiped away.<p>

At least she knew, thanks to Twilight in their first â€" and joint â€" Loop, that there \_was\_ a Looping Sweetie out there, and a Looping

Scotaloo. Fillies who remembered trying to beat up Chrysalis, and accidentally causing a major invasion of Equestria€|

Still, these were versions of her friends too. She owed it to them to give them the best time she could.

Sweetie Belle shivered slightly, but looked over gratefully at the earth pony. "I think so, but she was really scary!"

"Aw... Rainbow Dash could have taken her!" The pegasus on the other side of the unicorn exclaimed.

Applebloom grinned, having seen the previous loop where Dash had gone full alicorn and done exactly that. "I'm sure she could. My sister just wanted to make sure she didn't take her on before any-pony else was ready to help."

That had to be done carefully. Implying Dash \_couldn't\_, or calling her reckless, was an easy way to make Scotaloo hostile.

"That was your sister?" Scotaloo asked.

"Yep! Mah sister Applejack, and I'm Applebloom. Pleased to meetcha."

"Scotaloo... and I wish Rainbow Dash was my sister."

The unicorn had moved back slightly, looking down, but Applebloom quickly turned her attention to her. "How about you? We've shared the underneath-of-a-table-hiding from the real life Nightmare Moon. Am I ever going to up my offering on Nightmare Night!" That got a chuckle. "But that makes us 'hiding under a table' buddies. We should know each others names, at least."

"Sweetie Belle." She looked more confident. "And Rarity is my sister, the white unicorn with the three diamond cutie-mark. Ooh! That Nightmare Moon isn't getting any of \_my\_ candy, not after the way she treated Rarity!"

Applebloom hauled herself from under the table, very deliberately trying to hide her flank with a fold of cloth. "Well if she tries to eat you, I'll help stop her! I know kung fu! She'll have trouble eating any-pony with no teeth!"

"I can help too!" Scotaloo exclaimed. "I'll run rings around her!"

"You can fly that fast?" Applebloom felt a rush of warmth, as Sweetie started engaging in the conversation again and it began to move from 'her talking to the others' to 'all three of them talking together'.

Scotaloo slumped. "I can't fly, not yet, but I'm the fastest on a scooter in all of Ponyville. And I will fly one day, just as awesomely as Rainbow Dash!"

"Don't doubt it." Applebloom finally let the cloth slip, making it look like an accident as she helped the other two out from under the table. She glanced back and then hung her head. "No! It's okay, you don't have to hang around with a blank-flank if you don't want to. In

class, it's only Twist and me."

"You got a problem with blank-flanks?" Scootaloo sounded half annoyed, half amused. She presented her own bare flank. "I thought I was the only one."

"Oh! I thought I was!" Sweetie Belle exclaimed. "Let's be friends!"

Applebloom still teared up slightly at that. "I'd like that."

"Yeah, that'd be great!" Scootaloo bounced, fluttering her wings to get some hang time. "The three of us are totally alike! No cutie-marks, lots of awesome..."

"Maybe we can do something about that, the first thing I mean." Applebloom suggested. Without the common cause of cutie-mark hunting, their friendship grew more slowly and she wanted every moment before it was snatched away. Despite the fact that she'd pretty much given up, she still held out hope she could help her friends. "We could work together to find out who we are and what we're supposed to be."

"Oh oh! I know, we could form our own secret society!"

"I'm liking this idea!"

"How about we call ourselves, the Cutie Mark Crusaders!"

Applebloom grinned with the others, feeling at home again, but part of her was still wistful. Well, maybe this time it would be different. After all, these loops were endless, maybe in eternity even she'd be able to find her cutie-mark.

\* \* \*

><p>11.9 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><span>Calling out the Cutie<span>

\* \* \*

><p>Applebloom had experienced about a dozen loops by now, and was fed up. Neither Sweetie Belle nor Scootaloo was looping with any regularity yet, and while she had loopers like her sister and Twilight Sparkle to help, having to make friends with her cutie mark compadres over and over again was frustrating. But worst of all was having to deal with the ever increasing nastiness of Diamond Tiara, over and over again. It wasn't that it hurt so much any more, after you'd been called Blank Flank enough times, you developed scar tissue over your sense of self esteem.<p>

No, it was just annoying, and dull. It wasn't even as if the two stooges were particularly inventive. Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon were so shallow, you could use them as a ford. They delighted in making ponies' lives miserable, though Applebloom was ashamed to admit that she hadn't really noticed until she'd become one of their primary targets. The endless stream of 'blank flank' and 'loser'

comments was more like Neighponese water torture. Well, it was time to do something about that, for this loop at least.

This was the critical point. Cheerilee followed the script for her lesson on cutie-marks to the letter, and when Diamond Tiara hissed to her and tried to get her to take the blank note, she went along with it. As per usual Cheerilee didn't notice anything when the evil minded brat started messing around, but as soon as the note was in Applebloom's hooves, she homed in on the earth pony like a stooping hawk.

Applebloom had considered replacing the blank paper with a vicious note from Diamond Tiara to Applebloom, written in disappearing reappearing ink so it would make sense when she jumped up and made her smart remark about Applebloom's blank flank being like the blank paper. She'd even found a discarded report by the other pony and practised her hoof-writing style to add authenticity, but ultimately she'd decided that was the sort of thing Diamond Tiara would do, and she wasn't going to let the mean spirited brat turn her into something similar.

No, this was better. She'd fight the bully honestly and directly, not by sneaky tricks. The whole thing with Babs Seed had taught her that sometimes the only way to deal with bullying was openly, not by becoming what you hated, much as you'd get some temporary pleasure out of turning the tables. She'd also have a chance to talk about something that she'd been thinking about more and more as loop after loop had ended as it started, without a cutie-mark.

She'd talked it over with Twilight Sparkle and Zecora, as well as her big sister. They'd helped her to get her thoughts in order, and prepare for this. Two of them were loopers with literally millennia of experience, as well as being the smartest and most sensible ponies she knew, and while Zecora wasn't a looper, she had a vast reserve of wisdom.

Cheerilee took the note, as usual. "What could be so important that it couldn't wait until after class? It's blank!"

"Remind you of any-pony?" As usual Diamond 'witted' Tiara made her snarky remark and got the entire class laughing at her oh so hysterical comment. She must have spent hours coming up with that one.

\_Time to change the script\_, the farm pony thought. Applebloom let the laughter die down a bit, then asked; "Miss Cheerilee? Do you believe Diamond Tiara is right?"

The teacher looked confused. "What do you mean?"

"Well, apart from the fact that you let her just stand up and make what was clearly meant to be an insult about blank flanks in general and me in particular, you've been saying how wonderful it is to get your cutie mark. So that it means if you don't yet have your cutie mark, you're an object to be pitied at best and ridiculed and laughed at at worst, at least that's the way Diamond Tiara reckons itâ€¦!"

That cut off any remaining laughter like a knife.



"Of course not! Just because you haven't found what makes you special, doesn't mean you aren't. As I said before, your cutie-mark comes in its own time." Cheerilee seemed genuinely shocked, and Applebloom gave a relieved grin. However, there was still another point to be made.

"I'm right glad to hear that, but it still leaves a problem. You tried to make me feel better by talking about me finding a cutie-mark talent, which is kind of saying that it's your cutie-mark based talent that makes you special. Is that the only way a pony can feel worthwhile?"

She sighed. "Take me for example. Yes, I've never found that one talent I'm really good at, but that doesn't mean I don't have useful skills. I can do lots of different things, I can cook up to the level of a short order chef, balance a ledger, and not just on top of my head, clean a house, field repair a plough or a cart or build one given the tools and materials, then pull it fully loaded over 2 miles of rough ground in 15 minutes" and that takes more than strength and endurance, you have to be able to pick your route or you'll end up axle deep in the ground" care for and feed most domestic and farm animals, herd many of them, change a baby, sew a dress, change a wound dressing, care for most minor ailments and trauma injuries up to setting a bone or sewing up a wound, speak Zebra" though I'll admit I'm only conversation level, not fully fluent" make a speech," she grinned, "identify dozens of common and uncommon herbs and magical plants, brew 32 different herbal medicines and 3 actual magical potions, have a brown belt in Northern Shire-lin Karate and will test for my black next month, navigate the Everfree, abseil, free dive, find my way by the stars, and name a good chunk of the constellations."

She took a deep breath. "and that's all I can think of at the moment. But if one of them is my particular talent, my flank hasn't gotten the message, so by cutie-mark based thinking, I'm second rate, to be told, not to worry, 'your cutie-mark will appear in time'. I'm not saying you're doing it to be nasty, Miss Cheerilee, I'm just trying to show that your cutie-mark and your cutie-mark talent might not be the only way of judging a pony's worth."

She'd started connecting with Zecora and Temple Fortress, her martial arts sensei, from the moment she awoke each loop, and done her best to start off from where she'd left the previous loop each time. While she still worked with the other Crusaders, trying out many things, she'd found skills she'd liked, and done her best to learn them the long way round. Add to that some of Twilight's training on how to organise the memories of many loops so they didn't drive you insane, and she'd become a lot better at retaining knowledge.

It wasn't perfect, the muscle memories didn't carry over from loop to loop, but even there the effort to get them back was purely re-training, as if she'd slacked off her training for a few months and had to get back into shape. She'd had subjective decades to train, so she was a lot better than she admitted. Plus she'd had those same decades to learn all the skills that ran a farm, of which there were a lot. Helping Fluttershy, Rarity and Twilight out, and learning what they could teach in return, had added to her broad base of skills and knowledge.

Of course, Diamond Tiara couldn't let her litany pass. "Ha! As if you

could really do all those things! Where would you even find out about Zebras, or learn how to make magic potions? Only unicorns can do alchemy!"

"Some potions don't need a unicorn to enchant them. If you use innately magical ingredients any-pony can create one. And I was taught by Zecora. She's the zebra that lives in the Everfree forest."

That got shocked gasps and a few small screams. "But she's a monster." "Evil witch!"

Even Miss Cheerilee looked horrified. Applebloom rounded on her classmates.

"She's not some kind of monster just because she lives in the Everfree! She's really cool, a shaman, a healer and student of magic and herbalism. She came all the way from her homeland to the Everfree because it has so many unique magical plants and herbs and she wanted to study them. Can you imagine the courage that took, to leave everything â€" everyone â€" she ever knew?"

"It doesn't help that the inhabitants of the only nearby town have only avoided driving her away or worse because they're too scared of what she'd do to them if they tried. I guess us colts and fillies could be forgiven, after all, we just believe what our parents tell us." She turned to face Cheerilee. "But I'd have thought at least you'dâ€¦ I don't know, be willing to find out the truth. That's what you've always taught us, to learn and understand, find out for ourselves."

"Sure, right!" Diamond Tiara sneered. "It's convenient that you're claiming to be taught by someone who no-one wants to go near, so no-body can ask her! As for you, how would you get to even talk to her without being turned into a toad? Though that might be an improvement!"

"Uhâ€¦ hello? Sweet Apple Acres is next to the Everfree Forest. We check the boundaries regularly to see nothing freaky comes out. Zecora was collecting some herbs near the boundary, and she didn't seem to be turning any-pony into anything, any more than she does anything bad when she comes in to town. So I screwed up my courage and talked to her. She was really nice, and explained what she was doing, andâ€¦"

Applebloom shrugged. "We got to be friends. I could go on about how Applejack and Twilight Sparkle got involved, and how they eventually trusted her to see me safely to her place, and how she eventually let me start learning from her. Zebra magic is closest to earth pony magic, but they can do things with it Equestrian ponies never thought of."

"Our earth magic is focussed inwards, such as our magic strength and toughness, or passive like our connection with growing things. But they can project it like unicorn magic. It can't do all the flashy spells unicorns can, but it can affect living and natural things. Some of Zecora's brew are just non-magical herbs, some use magical ingredients, and some are use the magical herbs as a base to invest some of their own earth magic. You can get some really powerful healing and enhancement effects that way."

"Oh, and I suppose you can do all that!" Diamond Tiara sniffed.

Applebloom gave an amused snort. "I already said I only know three real potions, and they're all purely based on magical ingredients. I'm gonna need a lot more training before I can project earth magic like a zebra. Though I'm hoping my martial arts will help. Northern Shire-lin is based on drawing on the magic of the earth actively to enhance your attacks and toughness beyond what passive earth pony magic can do. If I can learn to draw on it, I should be able to learn to project it. Once again, it's going to take a lot more practice and hard work, but it'll be worth it."

"I still think you're lying just to be the centre of attention!" Actually, that was probably a fairly sensible thing to assume. The list of skills she'd rattled off had taken decades to pick upâ€| but it was also wrong, and she wasn't going to let the accusation stand.

"Ask Twilight Sparkle or my big sis." Applebloom gave a small smirk. "As for the rest of my skillsâ€| try me!"

Then she turned to Miss Cheerilee. "Sorry about going off like that, but I've been thinking about this stuff for a long time, and hearing her act like that just set it off. I've worked hard for my skills, tried a lot of different things to see if they were my cutie-mark talent, then decided to continue them and learn them anyway."

This was absolutely true, she was only omitting that she'd done so over a dozen or so time-loops.

"I'm proud of what I've achieved, and hearing it dismissed simply because I don't have a, â€| sticker, got me riled up. Which reminds me, we all know her cutie-mark is that diamond tiara she's so proud of, but I don't remember hearing what her actual talent isâ€| Oh, and I've helped Applejack nurture and hoof pollinate plenty of apple tree seedlings, and my flanks still bare, so despite my name, my talent is not making apples bloom. So what about it, Diamond Tiara? This is a lesson about cutie-marks. What does yours mean?"

"I don't have to answer you!" Diamond Tiara exclaimed defensively.

"Nope, you don't. I just figured since your so all fired proud of that cutie-mark, your talent must be awesome. Strange you don't want anyone to know it; I'd have reckoned you'd shout it from the highest rooftops. I'm still looking for mine, despite what I said, and me and my friends are going to have fun doing it too." She finished her little speech with a broad grin; it was true, too. Next up, surfing!\_

Diamond Tiara's face was furious, and Applebloom knew she'd won. This round, at least. She'd already made friends with the other Crusaders, so going to that cute-ceanera wasn't necessary, and having put Diamond Tiara in her place she intended to ignore her, possibly the worst possible thing she could do to an attention seeker like the pink earth pony.

Since Applebloom wasn't going to steal the Heart's Desire plant this

time, there'd be no cutie-pox, and she thoroughly intended to get Sweetie Belle singing and Scootaloo dancing at the talent show. So the next time they'd cross horns wouldn't be until Family Appreciation day. She already had a plan for that, and the Gabby Gums episode, not to mention her cousin's visit. Yes, time-looping wasn't exactly fun, but it had compensations.

\* \* \*

><p>11.10 (Lord of Bones)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Hiding behind one of the potted plants along the hallway, Celestia watched and waited for her sis...no, for <em>Nightmare Moon<em> to take the bait. She didn't know what the dark alicorn was planning, but behind the pranks there had to be somethingâ€| undoubtedly something nefarious. All the same, she'd gone to all the trouble of making her trap decidedly harmless, but more than potent enough to buy time for a follow-up binding spell.

So, she waited.

And, like Grogar himself, Nightmare Moon slipped out of the shadows and looked down at the trap. The elegant head looked to and fro, then bent down to eat the cake holding down the pressure plate.

Celestia bravely held back a sob as her prized cake; so prized that she could only have it once a year, was demolished by the moon princess. Still, it was for a good cause, and when the pressure plate was set off-

Nightmare Moon burped, and blushed. The empty plate vanished in a dark blue burst, leaving Nightmare Moon alone with nothing other than the crumbs around her muzzle and a conjured napkin.

And a conspicuously absent trap.

"Oh, come on!" snapped the Sun Princess. She sprung out of her hiding place and pushed the surprised night alicorn aside, before stomping on the plate to no effect. She struck it a few more times with her hoof, until she heard the 'click'. "Fina...oh, \_horseapples."\_

There was a decidedly uncouth 'SPLAT'. Nightmare Moon winced, and Celestia poked her head out of several hundred pounds' worth of cake batter and extra-thick whipped cream.

Stumbling and swearing, the Sun Princess tossed and turned in the mixture, before she saw Nightmare Moon's face; a face that was crinkled up in a smile so very \_Luna \_that it made Celestia's heart ache.

A silver-shod hoof bopped her playfully on the nose. "Beep beep," laughed Nightmare Moon, before zooming away in a burst of speed.

\* \* \*

><p>AN: Set eleven.<p>

As normal, remember that I'm not the only author here... (In

particular, Stainless Steel Fox really likes writing CMC Loops.)

And I like comments.

## 12. Chapter 12

### 12.1 (Stainless Steel Fox)

\* \* \*

><p><span>Diplomancy â€" Ticket Master<span>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight had had a suspicion of what was going to happen from the time she'd come to help out Applejack, which had turned into a solid belief when she heard about the farm-pony's bet with Big Mac and now turned to certainty as Spike burped up a letter with a Royal seal. Oh great, it was that time again.<p>

"A letter from Princess Celestia!" Twilight had been thinking about this day, and how to handle it better than she had the first time. She'd always felt guilty about how the Grand Galloping Gala had turned out for her friends. The after-party they'd had at Donut Joe's had been fun, but all the anticipation and excitement, leading up to that massive disappointment... At least these loops would be good for something. Spike was reading the well remembered words.

\_Hear ye, hear ye. Her Grand Royal Highness, Princess Celestia of Equestria, is pleased to announce The Grand Galloping Gala to be held in the magnificent capital city of Canterlot, on the 21st day of\_, eh, yadda yadda yadda, \_cordially extends an invitation to Twilight Sparkle plus one guest.\_

"The Grand Galloping Gala? Woo hoo..." As Applejack's expression lit up, she schooled her own to be less illuminated. "What's the matter sugar-cube? I'd have figured you'd have been as pleased as a hound dog with two tails to wag!"

As Spike burped up the two golden tickets, Twilight replied, "It's a great honour to be asked, and it'll be wonderful to spend time with Princess Celestia... when she's not doing her duties as host. I guess that's why the two tickets, so I can bring a friend to keep me company. It's just, I've never been, but from what I've heard there's certainly no galloping. It'll be a big bunch of nobles standing around comparing egos and wallet sizes. I'll fit in about as well as a spell book in a rack of ledgers and fashion magazines. Have you been to one Spike?"

"No, and I plan to keep it that way. I don't want any of that girly frilly frou-frou nonsense. "

Applejack cut in. "Well if he ain't interested, I surely would. Land sakes, if I had an apple stand set up, ponies would be chowin' our tasty vittles till the cows came home. Do you have any idea how much business I could drum up for Sweet Apple Acres? Why, with all that money, we could do a heap of fixin' up 'round here." Applejack's eyes became distant. "We could replace that saggy old roof, and Big Macintosh could replace that saggy old plough, and Granny Smith could

replace that saggy old hip. Why, I'd give my left hind leg to go to that gala."

"Uh..." Twilight raised a protesting hoof. "You do realise it's held in the palace grounds? It'll probably be catered by the palace chefs. Your wares would be up against fancy hors d'oeuvres made by the finest chefs in Equestria..."

She was interrupted by a vertically descending Rainbow Dash. She glanced up and materialised a thick mattress over her and Applejack's head that intercepted the plummeting pegasus like a catcher's mitt. As she lowered it down, the pegasus sprang off and asked, "Are we talking about the Grand Galloping Gala?"

Applejack huffed. "Rainbow Dash, you told me you were too busy to help me harvest apples. What were you busy doing, spyin'?"

"No, I was busy napping, and I just happened to hear that you have an extra ticket?" The irrepressible pegasus replied, hovering upside down in front of Twilight.

"Yes, but I'd have thought you of all ponies wouldn't find a fancy dance like the Gala interesting," Twilight replied.

Dash began to spin her fantasy about how going to the Gala would be her ticket into the Wonderbolts, and Twilight wondered why she hadn't spotted the many, many flaws in the pegasus' plan the first time. Probably because she had no more idea of what the Gala was really like back then than they did, and had been just as excited. She felt even more guilty. She was the one who always did her research, who found things out, and she'd let her friends down by not checking this. Still, she could at least do something for Dash.

"This performance... It's one of their most spectacular and important?"

"Yup!" Rainbow Dash preened.

"Requiring split second precision and teamwork?" Twilight pressed.

"You betcha!"

"And if some-pony dived in the middle of it and threw off their timing, the whole thing could unravel?"

"Yes... wait what? Uh..." Rainbow Dash gave a rueful chuckle and rubbed the back of her neck with a hoof. "Heh, heh, I guess I hadn't thought of that. But I could still go and spend time with them, get to know them."

"Uh huh, Twilight was goin' to offer me the ticket, weren't ya?" Applejack interjected. "I asked first!"

"That doesn't mean you own it, c'mon, I'll hoof wrestle you. Winner gets the ticket." Rainbow dashed over to a stump and held up a hoof and Applejack quickly joined her.

Twilight managed to push them apart before they got started. "I'll decide who gets the ticket, they're mine after all. But I don't think

either of you would get as much out of going as you think. As I was saying to Applejack, the Gala will be catered by the Palace kitchens part of the ticket price, and while I'd pick her confections over some frilly palace hors d'oeuvres any time, those upper crust Canterlot party-goers will probably stick their noses up at buying stuff off a cart."

She rounded on Dash. "As for hooking up with the Wonderbolts, I suspect every-pony at the party will have the same idea. I doubt you'd get any more time with them than I'll have to talk to the Princess. I have to go," Twilight emphasized, adding just a bit of a slouch to her stance. "The Princess invited me by name, and I can't disappoint her, but you don't have to." Her stomach rumbled, and she gave an embarrassed little grin.

Neither Applejack or Rainbow Dash looked pleased.

Applejack exclaimed, "It sounds like you'll don't want us to go!"

"Yeah, what's the matter? Aren't we fancy enough to be with you at the Gala?" Rainbow huffed.

"Girls, that's not it at all..." Twilight cried out, but the pair of them were walking off in opposite directions. She gave a big sigh and hung her head. This wasn't going to be as easy as she thought. "C'mon Spike. I'll wait until they've both cooled down. I need something to eat anyway."

"Now that's an idea!" the little dragon enthused.

She levitated the dragon up onto her back, and as an afterthought, levitated all the remaining baskets of Golden Delicious over and into the barn before heading back into Ponyville. In the distance she could see the two other ponies continuing their interrupted hoof-wrestling match.

\* \* \*

><p>As they walked through the town towards the central square, Spike asked, "So who <em>are<em> you giving the ticket to?"

"I'm hoping no-pony!" Twilight said. "Not that I wouldn't love to have both of them there as friends, I was just trying to make sure they weren't disappointed..."

Even fore-knowledge couldn't always save you from the bouncing ball of chaos that was Pinkie Pie. Exactly why she shot out of the top half of an open door would remain a mystery, but her destination quickly turned out to be Twilight. Pinkie Pie landed on the road, and the two golden tickets landed on her muzzle.

"Gah! Bats! Bats on my face!" She engaged in the usual zipping around like some insane ground bound firework, then finally realised what they actually were and went off into her own little fantasy land about what the Gala was like. Twilight reckoned it was better to let her run down on her own, so she left well enough alone until Pinkie finished with, "Oh thank you Twilight, it's the most wonderful-est gift ever. "

Twilgiht attempted some damage limitation. "Y'know, that doesn't sound like any description of the Gala I've ever heard. It's more of..."

"Are those what I think they are?" Rarity was there gazing at the tickets clutched in Spike's hand.

"Yes, yes, yes! Twilight's taking me to The Grand Galloping Gala in Canterlot," Pinkie said, completely ignoring Twilight's hoof-waving.

Rarity was starry eyed. "The gala? I design ensembles for the gala every year, but I've never had the opportunity to attend. Oh, the society, the culture, the glamour! It's where I truly belong, and where I'm destined to meetâ€| \_him.\_"

"Him! â€| Who?" Pinkie Pie asked, and boy did she get an answer. Twilight still couldn't believe that Rarity had ever fantasised over a worthless piece of horseflesh like Prince Blueblood, but then for someone who'd never met him, his title and appearance might make his superficially attractive. Prince Blueblood was one pony she thought couldn't improve even if he \_were\_ stuck in a time loop. As for becoming a Princess, well, Twilight had ideas along that line for those of her friends, but hooking up with Blueblood wasn't one of themâ€|

"Twilight, I simply cannot believe you would invite Pinkie Pie so she can... \_party\_, and prevent me from meeting my true love. How could you? Hmph!" Rarity folded her forelegs.

Twilight couldn't help it, the idea of Rarity calling Blueblood her true love was just so silly she burst out laughing.

"Well, really!" Rarity growled. "You don't believe that the Prince would be interested in a simple Ponyville girl such as myself?"

"No, I mean yes, but..."

"Maybe he'd see more to me than you obviously do!" The white unicorn flounced off, looking annoyed.

"That's okay, you were going to give the ticket to me anyway..."

Pinkie Pie was interrupted as the ticket was snatched out of his claws by Angel, who dashed back to Fluttershy with it. "Angel, these are perfect."

Twilight rubbed her forehead with a hoof. "I haven't made \_any\_ \_decisions about the extra ticket yet."

"You haven't?" asked Pinkie Pie, shocked, and Rarity appeared by her side.

Fluttershy asked. "Um, excuse me, Twilight. I would just like to ask, I mean, if it would be alright, if you haven't given it to someone else..."

Twilight sighed. "Let me guess, you're interested in seeing the Princesses' private garden."



Fluttershy hesitated, then was urged on by Angel. "Oh my, yes! Well it is only open the night of the Gala, and that's the only night all the flowers will be in bloom, not to mention the fauna, the humming hummingbirds and the buzzing buzzards... "

"Wait just a minute!" Rainbow Dash dropped down from the sky.

"You were following me, " Twilight sighed.

"No. I mean, yes. I mean, maybe. Look, it doesn't matter. I couldn't risk a goody-four-shoes like you giving that ticket away to just anybody."

"Wait just another minute." Applejack was there too.

"And the gang's all here!" Twilight rolled her eyes. The five ponies were getting into a five way argument, and her stomach was rumbling. "Right now I could eat just about anything, even oatmeal."

"For lunch? Oatmeal? Are you crazy?" called out Pinkie Pie before she returned to the fray.

No-pony was happy right then and there, and they made no secret of it as they complained. Applejack, Rainbow Dash and Rarity all seemed to share the opinion that she didn't think them suitable for a fancy party, Pinkie Pie wasâ€| wellâ€| Pinkie Pie, but it was the depressed Fluttershy who tugged at her heart strings the most. Maybe she should tell them what she had planned, but she wanted to get everything organised first.

Twilight lit off her horn and threw up a firework spell which went off with a bang. "Quiet!"

She sighed. "Girls, please don't argue. Applejack, I already explained why I don't think you'll get much out of going to the gala with a cart, and Rainbow, it's not going to get you into the Wonderbolts. Rarity, Prince Blueblood may look the part, but he's really not your type. Pinkie Pie, the Gala isn't the sort of party you're thinking off, a formal ball, not a carnival. And Fluttershy, you aren't even bothered about the Gala, you're only interested in the gardens."

"Huh, it sounds like you don't want any of us to go to the Gala!" Applejack said.

"Not like this!" Twilight was getting fed up of not being fed. "Right now, I'm going to get myself some food. Meet me at the library at sundown, and I will try and work this out so everyone goes away happy."

"You will?" They chorused, looking happier.

"Yes, now I've got to go!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Rainbow, I am <em>not <em>comfortable accepting unwanted favours, so I'd appreciate it if you close up that rain cloud right now."

Twilight materialised an umbrella for the table at the restaurant as Rainbow Dash sealed up the hole she'd made in the clouds. "I said sundown, and I meant it!"

Just as she was about to take a bite of the sandwich, Rarity appeared with her own private rain shield. "Twilight, it's raining!"

"Yes, yes I had noticed," Twilight sighed.

"Come with me, you should get inside before you catch a cold."

"Let me guess, you just happen to have a dress for me that's perfect for the Gala, and you just happen to have a matching dress." The Anchor rolled her eyes.

Rarity blushed. "Well, maybe? But that's what friends do for one another, and we are the best of friends, are we not?"

"A true, true friend would trust me to do the right thing, and wait until sundown." Twilight growled. "Oh, and let me eat my meal in peace!"

"Did someone say eat?" Applejack's voice drifted over. Twilight quickly munched on her daisy sandwich before the farm-pony's covered cart got there. Seeing all the goodies stacked inside would make her even hungrier.

Before the farm-pony could even speak, Twilight cut her off. "No, your farm made treats may be delicious, but they're a bribe, just like the dress Rarity made. I expected more from you. I told you, sundown!"

She finished off her sandwich and dashed away, with Spike on her back and a purple shield protecting her from the rain. As expected, Fluttershy was inside, spring cleaning.

"No. Thank you for the help, but I'm not accepting favours from anyone. That's not what friendship is about. Sundown!"

As she let the pair out (and had Angel bunny kick her in the fetlock en passant) she was dragged out of the door by a pair of pink fore-hooves.

Her horn lit up at the top of the first bump, and she brought herself to a stop in mid-air. "Pinkie! Sundown, no sooner!"

She teleported back to the library, and slammed a purple energy dome over the whole place. She had a lot to do, and she couldn't afford interruptions—or being chased around by the crazed horde of ponies that would manifest when Pinkie spilled the beans.

At sundown, with her preparations done, she raised the dome. A few moments later, there was a knock at the door. Spike opened it, and the five ponies trooped in.

"Have you decided...?" It was hard to tell which pony had asked first.

"Will you let me say something first?" Twilight's tone made them all

pause. "Do you have any idea how bad you made me feel by trying to force me to choose one of you? Whoever I chose, I'd leave four other disappointed ponies, four friends I let down. I may be still learning about friendship, but bribing me and trying to cheat each other out of the ticket? I'm sure that's not it. You are all my friends, and I want to make you all happy, and with just one extra ticket I can't!"

All five ponies looked back and forth between each other guiltily. As she hoped, each of them relinquished their claim on a ticket, even Rainbow Dash.

"We're sorry, Twilight!" they all said, in chorus.

Twilight smiled. Just because she intended to change things up, didn't mean she couldn't make the same point as originally. It had been a lesson for all of them the first time, and one of the first bonding experiences as a group. Now to the fun bit.

"That being said, it did teach me an important lesson about friendship. That while sharing your blessings with friends is one of life's great pleasures, it isn't fun unless you share it with all your friends equally." As she finished, the others' faces went through various shades of puzzlement.

She levitated seven tickets from the open saddlebag on the table and laid one in front of each of her friends. "I wrote to Princess Celestia asking if you could all come. She said yes."

The other ponies burst out in cheers. So far so good.

"Don't thank me just yet. I heard some of you say I didn't want you to go because I thought you weren't good enough for a fancy place like Canterlot." That stopped Rarity, Applejack and Rainbow Dash cheering, and the others stopped out of politeness. "Nothing could be farther from the truth! You're my friends, and I want the very best for you. I didn't want you to go to the Gala because I was trying to protect you from being disappointed!"

That got them all looking curious.

"I spent the afternoon doing research, and gotten direct confirmation from the Princess herself. She considers the Gala to be one of the dreariest, awful, most stuffy events of the year. And she's been doing it for a thousand years or more!" Twilight doubted that any of them understood quite how wearying a thousand years of boring social occasions would be, but she herself had at least some idea, and a little of that came across in her speech. "As host, she has to put up with it, and if I can do anything to relieve her boredom, I will be by her side. That's why I have a ticket."

"Applejack, taking a cart of goodies to the Gala will not net you the piles of money you hoped. It's fully catered, as I thought, and the sort of ponies you'll be selling have never bought off a stall in their life. They'll snub you, and all you'll bring home is sore hooves from standing around all night," she shook her head, "along with a cart full of leftovers."

Seeing the farm-pony slump, she continued.

"But if you go as a business mare, and talk to the ponies there, you might be able to pick up some contracts for Sweet Apple Acres. Speaking of which," she winked, "I also found out who to talk to at the palace about supplying the apples for those fancy hors d'oeuvres I mentioned, and you've already catered the Summer Sun Celebration for the Princess. I can set up a meeting, and I'm confident once the chefs at the palace have tried your apples, you should get that contract. That should net you enough money for your Granny's new hip. As for the plough and the barn..."

She lifted the pony bust off its pedestal and smashed it to pieces with her telekinesis, then cast a Reparo spell. It magically restored itself. "Let me have a look at them first before you hoof over any money."

"Twilight, this is too much..." Applejack started to say, but Twilight waved her silent.

"Rainbow, I did some checking and I was right, the Gala is the busiest night of the year. I sent a letter to Spitfire herself, and she gave me a good idea of what they expect. It's the duty no-pony wants, being dragged around by ponies eager to get their picture taken, having to listen to endless dull stories from ponies who just want to be able to name drop. It's possibly the worst time to try and get to know a pony." After all, Dash had only managed what she did the first time by a complete fluke that had proven nearly impossible to re-engineer.

"You talked to the commander of the Wonderbolts directly?" The cyan pegasus was incredulous.

"Not directly. I never really thought about it, but my position as Celestia's personal student does mean I have some status in court." Rarity hid a grin at her self-deprecation, guessing at the probable depth of understatement. "Besides, my brother Shining Armour is adjutant to the Captain of the Guard at Canterlot castle, and it's likely he'll take over the top slot when Commander Ironhoof retires next year.

"As adjutant, he deals with relations between the Royal Guard and Equestria's other services such as the Wonderbolts. They are often drawn from the Royal Guard and vice versa. He knows Spitfire personally, and he helped get my message through."

Rarity's eyes went wide. "Your brother is going to be Captain of the Royal Guard?"

"Yep!" Twilight giggled. "Sorry, though, I think he's spoken for. My old foal sitter, Princess Cadence, I think she has a thing for him, and vice versa."

That had all of the ponies wide eyed. "Sugarcube, I had no idea..."

"I don't normally talk about it, I don't want ponies to think I'm all high and mighty."

Spike chuckled. "Yeah, High And Mighty is a unicorn stallion and the second biggest snob in Canterlot after Prince Blueblood."

Twilight grinned. "I also mentioned that I knew a pegasus called Rainbow Dash who was one of the most awesome fliers I knew. We shall have to see if that goes anywhere, but mentioning things like your one pony controlled tornado and the way you cleared the sky in ten seconds flat apparently piqued her interest. I'm hopeful she'll spare a few hours to come down and see you before the next Young Fliers Competition in Cloudsdale. I've gotten you your chance to meet her, what you do with it is up to you."

"OhmygoshohmygoshohmygoshohmygoshohMYGOSH!" Rainbow Dash didn't look like stopping any time soon, so Twilight moved on to Rarity.

"When I said Prince Blueblood wasn't your type, I didn't mean you weren't good enough for him, I meant the opposite. Spike will back me up on this," and a glance at the dragon showed he was nodding vigorously. "He's efficient, I'll give him that. No-pony else could combine such stupidity, arrogance, narcissism and inability to admit any other point of view than his exists, let alone has any validity, in one pony. In fact," a grin flashed across Twilight's face, "it would normally take three. I would not set my worst enemy up on a date with him, let alone one of my dearest friends."

Twilight could remember how Blueblood had treated Rarity originally, and in some of her earlier loops had found out far more about him than she wanted to know.

"\_However,\_ I've decided that I shouldn't assume any pony is beyond help, even Blueblood." After all, miracles happened "and that wasn't an entirely sarcastic thought, either, what with one redeemed deity and another. "Also, I think you'd be the one pony who'd enjoy the gala for what it is. So what I'm going to do is give you a chance to study him and decide for yourself before the Gala. You said when we first met you wanted to go to Canterlot and enjoy the sophisticated atmosphere. I should have seen I could help with that long before now."

"It's going to take time to arrange, but Princess Celestia has agreed to let you stay at the palace for a couple of weeks, in the East Tower. It's normally used by visiting ambassadors, so it should be comfy enough." Vast understatement. "I'll write to Cadence and let her know you're coming, I'm sure she'll want to meet one of my new friends, and she's about the friendliest pony I know."

"Spike knows more ponies outside the Royal family, as Princess Celestia brought him up after I hatched him. I was thinking of asking him to go as \_your \_assistant." She turned to Spike. "You know Hoity Toity, don't you?"

Spike hadn't been privy to this wrinkle, and was over the moon. "YES! I mean yes, after I helped him out with the thing at the place. I know High Hat, Fancy Pants, Diamond Dust... all the ponies any-pony should know! But don't you want me here as your assistant?"

It was clear he was torn between going with Rarity and worrying Twilight didn't need him any more. She gave him a gentle smile. "Oh Spike, I'll always need you, but I can manage for a few days on my own. If things become desperate, I'm sure I can come ask for help."

Rarity was still stunned at the idea of staying at the palace and getting personal introductions to the most important ponies in Canterlot. "I... East Tower... Princess... oh, my..."

She collapsed backwards in a swoon with a smile that looked like it would have to be surgically removed. Twilight manifested a fainting couch to catch her.

"Well, that went well." Twilight grinned. "Rarity, eyes on the prize, or rather Prince Blueblood!" (Still a prize, though usually with the word 'buffoon' appended to the end.)

That got her unfainted in a hurry. The purple unicorn continued. "The idea is to give you a way into Canterlot society, and go to the same sort of events he goes to. You'll be able to watch him and make your own decisions, and in the meantime, I'm sure you can promote your skills and get lots of dress orders as well. So when you go to the ball, it won't be as some unknown, but as the exclusive fashionista Rarity. So even if Blueblood turns out to be unsalvageable, you'll still enjoy the night to its fullest."

"Oh Twilight!" Rarity gasped, "It's more than I ever dreamed!"

Twilight turned her attention to Fluttershy. "I can get you in to the Royal Gardens a lot sooner than the Gala, if you're willing to accept some restrictions. The problem is, the animals in there aren't as... well, they've all lived in the gardens their entire lives and they're not used to strange ponies as your animal friends. If you just appeared, you might scare them off before they could get to know you."

"Oh my, that would be terrible!" Fluttershy gasped. "But I'm sure I could get them to come to me if I just treat them gently."

"Maybe," Twilight replied, knowing otherwise â€" Fluttershy's talent was one thing, but for animals that delicate it would take weeks to work on its own. "But if you want to visit them, you'll have to do it in the company of Mr Greenhooves, the palace gardener. I think you'll like him, he'sâ€¦ sort of your counterpart for the palace gardens. I think he knows every animal there by name. With him along, he can help you overcome any timidity they show. By the night of the gala, you'll be familiar to them, and you should be able to enjoy the blooming without a problem."

"Well, if I have to..." Fluttershy said in a slightly downcast tone.

"Trust me; I want this to be the best night ever for you, which is why I'm not leaving anything to chance. Though there is one other pony you may meet. Princess Luna spends a lot of time in the gardens, in the evening at least."

"Princess Luna?" Fluttershy asked nervously. "She won't be... mad at me?"

Twilight sighed, rather theatrically. "Right now even getting mad would be an improvement. I've been corresponding with Princess Celestia, I kind of felt responsible as I was directing the Elements of Harmony when we freed her. She still feels really guilty about

Nightmare Moon, about what she did, she's not a happy pony. I guess there's no way she could be after what she's gone through. She's hiding away from things. Princess Celestia is worried about her, and I am too. She's back to her original form physically, but she's nowhere near ready to take back her duties."

Twilight could see Pinkie ready to explode, and cut the fuse.

"Pinkie, normally you'd be perfect for cheering her up, but for now she needs some-pony less... energetic. What she really needs right now is a friend, somepony who won't judge her, won't try to force her to be anything she isn't ready for. That's why I'd hoped if Fluttershy met her, she might be the right pony to bring her out of her shell."

"Oh! Oh! Has she turned into a snail?" Pinkie asked. "Is that why you need Fluttershy to talk to her?"

"No she hasn't, but she needs gentleness right now." She turned back to the pegasus. "Fluttershy, you don't have to if you don't want to, in fact I can make sure your visits are scheduled so you don't, but if ever there was a job for the Element of Kindness, this is it."

Twilight felt slightly guilty, she knew what buttons to push, and engaging Fluttershy's 'mother to all things living' reflex and pointing it at Princess Luna could be considered manipulation of the worst sort. But it should be so good for both of them. With Fluttershy's support, Princess Luna would hopefully recover much sooner than she originally had, and having someone like Luna as a friend should help Fluttershy's confidence no end.

She could see the subtle changes, the straightening of the wings, the slight narrowing of the eyes, and knew the bait had been well and truly taken. Fluttershy was now on a mission.

Finally, she turned to Pinkie. "I'm sorry, there's no way to make over the Gala into the kind of festival you described. It's a fancy formal ball, and that's what all the other guests will want. It may not be what you or I consider fun, but it is to them. I can get you books on what the Gala is supposed to be like, but I can't do anything more about it."

"Don't worry Twilight!" Pinkie beamed. "There's no kind of party I can't handle!"

"I'm trying to get you a chance to help out at the Hearth's Warming Eve celebrations at the castle, which will be exactly that sort of festival you want. We can all go together, and I'm sure with your unique touches, it will be the best Hearth's Warming Eve ever!"

At that Pinkie did explode in a burst of streamers, and started bouncing around. "Two parties for the price of one! Of course, we're not paying admission so that's still zero, but this will be so super-duper-fantastically-amazing."

Twilight relaxed, it seemed she'd succeeded. Every-pony seemed happy, and if she'd advanced things several months for most of them, that just meant they'd have more time afterwards to enjoy the

memories.

"Uh, Twilight?" Applejack spoke, and Twilight worried that she'd left something out. "I think we all owe you a huge apology. You went to all this trouble, and after the way we squabbled over that durned ticket. You didn't need to do this. We're your friends, through thick and thin, and that ain't gonna change."

"Yes, I did." Twilight was relieved. "I know you're all my friends, and what I did wasn't some kind of trick to get you to like me more. I just want the very best for my friends, I didn't think you could get what you wanted from the Gala, and I just happened to have the ability to make sure that you could get it some other way. It isn't like I've given it any of you on a silver plate, you'll still each have to work to get what you want, but I could help you along, and that's what friends are supposed to do."

A tea pot floated out of the kitchen, followed by a box of the Cakes' finest cakes. "Now let's have some tea, and enjoy just being friends."

\* \* \*

><p>12.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"You did what."<p>

Dash shrugged helplessly. "He asked!"

Twilight sighed. "\_What\_ did he ask?"

"He asked me what would be a good idea for a story, and I told him about one of those Transformers Loops. Then he got all excited, and started writing." Dash pointed. "He's over there. Scorch Mark, I think his name was."

Twilight shook her head, looking the unicorn over. He seemed entirely too excitableâ€|

"Ah, there you are!"

Before she could fully process his words, he'd hurried over. "I love this story! Do you know anypony who could help with the special effects? I changed a few things, of course, because doing giant robots is a little bit harder to make work than magical transforming beings, butâ€|"

Twilight picked up the script â€" surprisingly complete, given he'd only had lunch to work on it. "Transfor\_mares\_?" She opened it and skimmed through. "Thisâ€| actually, it's not as bad as I'd fearedâ€|"

"I could help with the cool explosions!" Dash volunteered. "I love them!"

"Hmmâ€|" Twilight pondered. "I could go find Trixie. She's good with this kind of thing too. Especially explosions. And Rarity's always good for costumes."



"The only problem is who would fund such a film," Scorch Mark said, slumping slightly. "Making convincing transformations is going to be \_very\_ expensiveâ€|"

"Actuallyâ€|" Twilight slowly smiled. "I have an idea that could save money."

\* \* \*

><p>"Hello, Queen Chrysalis of the Changelings. My name is Twilight Sparkle, and I'm helping with the production of a film which could use your talents and those of your hive. As such, I've negotiated with the director and producer to secure their approval to offer you a very lucrative contract, with ten percent of the gross being transferred to your hive and with sundry other benefits."<p>

"â€|what?" Chrysalis managed, staring at the purple unicorn who'd materialized in her inner sanctum.

"By sundry benefits, I include but do not limit the description involved to the fact that you and all other Changelings will become film stars, resulting in an overall highly positive opinion of your race and making it much more easy for you to sustain yourselves. Any transformation for which a given changeling requires more magic than they currently possess will be facilitated by our Kindness and Laughter assistant directors, who specialize in positive feelings," Twilight rattled off.

"And you want us toâ€|" Chrysalis read through the contract in front of her, feeling \_very\_ confused. "â€|be actors in a film? Where we change from normal ponies into giant beasts which fight one another?"

"One set of them the villains, the other set the heroes," Twilight confirmed. "Remember, amongst the benefits there's that you'll end up able to integrate with the ponies of Equestria freely, and that ponies will have overall positive opinions towards you."

"â€|this bears some thoughtâ€|" Chrysalis mused.

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy staggered out of the movie theatre, and collapsed onto a bench. "I feelâ€| overwhelmedâ€|"<p>

Dash and Pinkie left next, excitedly talking about the premiere. "So awesome!"

"Yeah!" Pinkie bounced. "And was that big blast of prism dragonbreath-"

"You bet it was! Sonic Rainboom, perfectly timed!"

Spike hurried out with a big box of popcorn, entirely finished. He was keeping it because he was on the side â€" Twilight had managed to make his 'Spike-Zilla' transformation controllable, so he was one of the biggest monsters in the film.

Rarity took off her earmuffs. "I \_knew\_ these were a good idea! That film was very impressive, but just \_so\_ loud!"

"Yeah," Applejack agreed. "Still, it was kinda cool seeing all o' them giant monster fights."

"I don't know if you've heard," Twilight said to Trixie, as they left last of their group, "But he's already started work on a second script. He wants Princess Luna to get involved."

"Oh?" Trixie still had a flush from excitement â€" seeing hundreds of ponies loving \_her\_ work was an amazing thrill. (And the huge amount of bits she was going to get from the film wouldn't hurt, eitherâ€|)  
"What is this one about?"

"Not sure yet. Probably going to have even more explosions, though, so you and Dash won't be out of work." Twilight winked. "I do have the title, though. \_Transformares: Dark of the Moon.\_"

She'd finally worked out what was going on, after checking her extensive collection of fiction from the hub-loop. They'd found a pony variant of Michael Bay.

\_No wonder he got on so well with Trixie and Dashâ€|\_

\* \* \*

><p>12.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Heyâ€| Spike?"<p>

Spike turned, nearly knocking over a shelf with his tail. "Whoopsâ€| what is it, Twilight?"

"Well, two things. Firstâ€| don't you think you're overdoing it a bit?" Twilight pointed. "I mean, you're kind ofâ€| bigâ€|"

Ever since Twilight had showed Spike how to adjust his own relative age (and hence size), he'd taken to growing at least three feet right as they arrived in Ponyville â€" usually overnight â€" and calling it a growth spurt.

"Maybe. If this doesn't work, I'll go back down a notch." Spike shrugged. "What was the other thing?"

"Well, I've been meaning to askâ€| why is it that you like Rarity?" Twilight winced, and tried to clarify. "That might have come out wrong. What I was actually asking wasâ€| okay, first time around when we turned up in Ponyville, it seemed like a crush, andâ€| you know. But you're older now, andâ€|" Twilight made a helpless gesture. "I don't know how to put it."

"No, I get you." Spike carefully manoeuvred around the stacked returns and headed for the kitchen. "I'll make some tea."

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, so you're kind of right." Spike passed Twilight her tea.

(Earl Bay.) "It did start off as just a crush â€" like with Moondancer, in Canterlot. Butâ€"|"<p>

Spike stopped, and sighed. "It's hard to put. I think it really got started back when I had thatâ€"greed growth incident."

Twilight nodded sympathetically.

"Seeâ€" I don't know if you've noticed, but Rarity isn't a particularly nice pony, by nature." Spike waved his claws, as if to fend off disagreement. "Let me finish. Her first instinct is always for herself â€" stealing some of a dragon's hoard, or how well she's doing with her dresses, or how much she'd love to be a modelâ€" but â€" and it's a big but, a big, glorious-

"Get on with it," Twilight mock-growled. "Or I'll start thinking there's an extra t in there."

"You got me." Spike grinned. "Anyway. Her first instinct is for herself, but she knows that and she tries as hard as she can to overcome it. Even when she's not Awake, you can see it â€" and the Looping Rarity has pushed it so far back you could barely tell it was there."

The dragon paused, and blushed. "Is it strange that I really like a mare with self control? The kind of self control that could make a dragon into an altruist?"

"Yes," Twilight said flatly, and Spike chuckled at her tone. Inside, however, she was making all sorts of realizations.

"â€"she reminds you of you, doesn't she?" Twilight said softly. "Or who you want to be, I don't know. Somepony â€" someone, I suppose â€" who's got the control to restrain their darker impulses."

"Pretty much." Spike shrugged. "There's other bits, too â€" she's smart, graceful, we like a lot of the same things and she does look very good, but what I just said is kind of the core."

"And you know it's real because of her Element," Twilight continued.

"Yeah. Mind you," Spike momentarily let a flame-gem in a golden gorget flash into being around his neck, "I've got one tooâ€"|"

"You're really proud of that, aren't you?" Twilight could remember when he'd got it. A very, very strange Loop where Spike â€" as a young adult dragon â€" had replaced Rainbow Dash as local weather coordinator, Element of Harmony et cetera. (It turned out he really was the new Rainbow Dash, for certain values of 'new'. Though Ponyville had had a suspiciously arid climate that Loopâ€"|)

Spike nodded, his hand going to where it had been. "It's kind of theâ€" proof, I suppose, that I'm doing things right."

\* \* \*

><p>12.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|aaaaaaaAAARGH!" Applebloom screamed, and ran out of the class.<p>

Scootaloo put up a hoof. "Miss Cheerilee? Shall Sweetie and I go get Applebloom back?"

Cheerilee nodded tiredly. "Fine. Just go ahead. I'll expect you to do well on the history test next week, thoughâ€|"

The other two fillies shot out after their friend.

"And as for you, miss Tiara, you're going to take notes for poor Applebloom," Cheerilee continued.

"But I only-"

"I know all you said was that she didn't have a cutie mark, and I don't know why she reacted so strongly." Cheerilee dropped some extra sheets of paper in front of the pink filly. "But she did. So get writing. And I'm going to check them afterwards to be sure they're good ones."

Diamond Tiara gave an exaggerated sigh, and started writing down notes about the founding. Cheerilee stayed another moment to see how they were going, then nodded. Not bad, actuallyâ€| Tiara did good schoolwork, and got along fairly well with the rest of the class most of the time, but something about her and the 'crusaders' just kept striking sparks.

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo bounced over a hill, using her wings to control her jump even if she couldn't fly with them. "Over here!"<p>

Sweetie came over the slight rise next, and the two of them sat down on either side of Applebloom.

"Okay, what is it?" Sweetie asked.

"I justâ€| gaah!" Applebloom kicked the ground. "If she was just an idiot I could ignore her. It'd be hard, but I could. Butâ€| I keep thinking of that second Marecross Loop."

The others nodded, understanding. Flight Coordinator Diamond Tiara had run her squadron with a rod of iron, browbeating them in public over the slightest mistakeâ€| and had brought eleven out of twelve pilots out the other side of the war alive. That was a little over half the entire surviving roster from the six squadrons on board.

"She was a bitch, but she was a bitch for a reason," Scootaloo agreed. "I hated it when she was tearing me apart over that flubbed transformation timing, but if we'd done it against the Zentraediâ€|"

"Yep." Applebloom made an explosive gesture with her hooves. "Bang, zoom, right to the moon. And when that isn't coming up, it's the time she ended up in charge when the machines attackedâ€| you know, the

metal-changeling-things?"

"Yeahâ€|" Sweetie agreed. "I think I'm seeing why you left."

"Exactly." Applebloom shook her head. "Every time there's serious trouble, she rises to the occasion like she was born to it! And then she goes back to being the petty, small minded \_jerk\_ we're used to."

"Maybe we could ask Twilight to have Nightmare Moon win next time, to see what happens," Scootaloo suggested idly.

Then the Crusaders exchanged glances.

"Actuallyâ€|" Applebloom said, slowly.

\* \* \*

><p>"Diamond tiara action!"<p>

Nightmare Moon flinched backwards as the spinning item of jewellery came close to her face.

Below the rooftop that Applebloom and the other Crusaders were hiding on, a battle was taking place. Golden Voice, Silver Spoon, Platinum Star and the other Jewelry Scouts were devastating dozens of moon-born creatures of the night, while their leader â€" Diamond Tiara â€" kept Nightmare Moon herself at bay.

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|ah think we got a defective Loopâ€|" Applebloom said, watching in stunned amazement.<p>

"Yep," Scootaloo concurred. "It's like somepony took a Sailor Moon Loop and reversed the naming theme."

\* \* \*

><p>12.5 (Lord of Bones)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia backpedalled in fright as her student was consumed in a pillar of seething violet fire. Around her, the court assembly panicked as they heard the roar of a dragon just before the entire palace shook, as though a small earthquake had hit it. The sides of a vast pair of spread wings were easily visible outside, considering they blotted out the sunlight streaming in from between the pillars and windows.<p>

The firestorm in the audience chamber slowly died away, revealing an alicorn only slightly smaller than Celestia herself. An armoured brace ran from the base of the glowing black horn down her neck, with a cuirass of the same metal protecting her chest. Both wings blazed like fire; one the feathery wing of a pegasus, the other the bat wing of a thestral. Her mane and tail were clouds of hissing violet flame, and her hooves were shod in silver.

On her flank, the deep purple of Twilight's cutie mark glowed malevolently.

Her former student spread her wings and opened sultry violet eyes. "I am queen of the end of day and the beginning of night! Here I say, and so it is truth, that I shall rule! Bow, my little ponies, for the Hour of Twilight has come! \_THE DUSK SHALL LAST FOREVER!" \_Her voice thundered as the Bearers of Harmony flanked her, all grown to her size and just as darkly beautiful.

There was a dull "thud!", and both assembly and nightmares turned to the sight of Princess Celestia passed out from shock next to a slack-jawed Luna.

"â€|too much?" Twilight asked meekly.

\* \* \*

><p>12.6<p>

\* \* \*

><p>For once, Twilight woke up in bed.<p>

\_Wait a minute\_, the lavender pony thought as she stirred, \_that's not quite right. Erâ€| for once, I've started the Loop in a bed. That's much less ambiguous.\_

Delicate matter of nomenclature thus resolved, she crawled out of bed and looked around.

\_Er, wowâ€|\_

The room was expensively decorated, to put it mildly. Nothing \_too\_ excessive, certainly not opulent, but the simple cut of the furnishings â€" which were made with fine cashmere and velvet and dyed in her precise coat and mane colours â€" was a statement in and of itself. And the deep pile carpet was another.

She did a quick check, discovering that she was an alicorn this loop. Further investigation revealed that a number of familiar looking dresses were hanging in the closet, and her Magic tiara was resting on the dresser atop a pile of books.

\_Now, if only my Loop memories would returnâ€|\_

Someone knocked on the door. "You up yet, Twily?"

"Yeah, just a minute!" Twilight called back automatically, then blinked. Apparently she was still living with her parents. Which meant something unusual was going on this Loopâ€|

"Okay, but hurry up," the voice continued. Twilight frowned, because despite it being male she couldn't quite identify it â€" it certainly wasn't her father's, but the door distorted it, "or I'll have to reverse gravity in there to make sure you're not still in bed!"

At that precise moment, the memories arrived.

"Oh, buck meâ€|" Princess Twilight Sparkle, Princess of Trottingham,

younger child of King Discord and Queen Celestia, said to herself.

Not only were she and Crown Prince the Prince of Horseshoe Bay Shining Armor (both alicorns, as it happened) the children of Discord and Celestia — who had taken kingdom titles, for whatever reason — but several other familiar faces were also turning up in various important positions.

Princess Luna, for example, was the former heir to Equestria's throne, but was now third in the line of succession after her sister had produced two children. For her part, she was as of yet unmarried — something of a blessing for Twilight, who was starting to wonder if the alicorn of the night would have been married to Angel Bunny or something. Or Blueblood — shiver. (He was, as it happened, a duke this time — duke of Canterlot. And one without any blemishes on his record of service. Either this was a different Blueblood or he was planning something.)

Furthermore, the nearest other kingdom was Amoria. Ruled by — Twilight was almost expecting this — King Sombra and Queen Chrysalis, though the fact that their daughter was Cadence was a completely new twist. Oh, and then there was the fact that Spike was pulling his occasional "ruler of the Griffins" trick, and that there had been several border incidents between Equestria and Amoria in the last few years.

It was obvious what the Loop had planned for her.

"\_Politics —"

\* \* \*

><p>"Shiny." Twilight walked into her brother's room, noticing the same combination of tasteful and insanely expensive that marked her own room — though with the addition of maps and a complete suit of armour piled in various places around it. "Please tell me that the word 'anchor' means something to you."<p>

Her brother blinked, then grinned. "Yep. This is one hay of a strange Loop, isn't it?"

"Yep." Twilight pulled two bottles of Applejack's finest cider out of her subspace pocket, then blinked at Shining. "Do you want one?"

"Er — okay." Shining watched, bemused, as Twilight pulled a third bottle out, levitated it across to him and then started on the first of the two she was apparently going to have.

After a long draught of apples — well, mainly apples — Twilight felt a lot more alicorn. "Okay. What happens now?"

"Seems fairly obvious." Shining's grin could have lit up the room. "Two words, little sister. Dynastic marriage."

" — oh. \_" Twilight managed a weak smile. "Okay, I suppose that is a good thing on your part, then. You and Cadence, just like every time."

"Exactly. You know, you should find a somepony for yourself," Shining ventured.

"Nope." Twilight shook her head. "Most other Loopers are female, whichâ€¦ just doesn't really interest me. The rest are Spike â€" who is spoken for â€" and Discord, who doesn't loop often anyway and who I didn't have an interest in even before he became my dad for this loop." She took another drink of the cider. "Good thing this stuff is non alcoholic."

"Erâ€¦" Shining raised a hoof. "How long has that been in your subspace pocket?"

"â€¦oh, right. I wondered what the extra tang was." Twilight levitated a drop out of the bottle and put it on a spatula, which promptly dissolved. "Huh. Probably best not to drink much more of that now, then."

"I'd say so." Shining nodded. "And I can see you've put some considerable thought into this, so I won't press you on it. Anyway, I'm going to get dad-"

"La la la!" Twilight interjected.

"Look, we have to get used to calling him that for now, okay?" The elder, male, alicorn wondered just how strong that cider actually was, watching his little sister bounce around the room with her hooves over her ears. "Right. Okay. So, I'll make sure a message is sent asking about the possibility, because quite frankly when we turned up things were on the slippery slope to a war."

"Cool." Twilight nodded. "Well done, Shining, for preventing a war by getting nookie. Anyway, I'm going to go to the library." She spread her wings, and Shining caught her tail in a telekinetic grip.

"No flying while drunk, Twilight."

"No fair." Twilight pouted, then began walking to the library instead.

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Luna, Princess of Manehattan, stomped into the throne room. "Thy younger child, mine sister, has taken a quarter of the books in the library and removed them to her room."<p>

"â€¦oh." Queen Celestia frowned. "Can't you get her to give them back?"

"She is." Luna shook her head wearily, and the rulers noticed a bruise on it. "She's throwing them back out, with little slips saying 'finished' on them, at a rate that approximates to three per minute."

King Discord nudged his wife. "Told you that my side would come through eventually!"

There was a small explosion, and the castle shook.

Luna rolled her eyes. "If my liege will excuse me, I suspect that



that may have been the distillery I saw her setting up."

Celestia buried her head in her hooves. "And she was doing \_so\_ wellâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, this is a new experience," Twilight muttered.<p>

Her brother shrugged. "Next time, make sure to put stasis spells on magically potent drinks, or they'll turn into magically potent \_alcohol.\_"

This time they were in her room, and Twilight was busily writing an essay. The theme was 'why princesses should not brew volatile alcohol in their rooms'. (That was from her mother. Her father had added to that punishment, but also given her three gold stars and a new bathroom.)

"Still." Twilight finished the current paragraph with a flourish, and cast a word-count spell. Nine thousand, two hundred and fifty three words.

"Cheer up!" Shining said, nudging her. "Only another thirty-one thousand to go."

Twilight suspected she'd have gotten off lighter if the scumble hadn't gang-detonated and blown her outside wall clean off the castleâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>"Your majesty," Blueblood raised a hoof, "There is one more matter, now that the vows have been taken."<p>

"What is it?" Celestia replied, with a smile. Blueblood had been very helpful in getting the wedding organized, so this was hardly unusual.

"Well, this needs to be a bit more of a \_Blue\_ wedding." There was a sudden flash of steel, and a dagger emerged from his tuxedo. Dozens of ponies charged into the room, wielding weapons, and a goodly number of the guests also drew steel. The dozen griffins around Emperor Spykoran looked around warily.

"You see," Blueblood continued in the sudden stillness, "I've always wondered what it feels like, sitting on a throne. And now I get the change to have three at once."

Twilight started laughing. "You're a \_moron.\_"

"What?" Blueblood turned, stung. "It's valid! So long as I kill you all in the right order, so that the two lovebirds technically inherit, and then I kill them too, since I have a position in the line of succession I can legally obtain the twin crowns. And the griffins give the throne to whoever kills the previous Emperor."

"No, not that!" Twilight fell over, rolling around on the floor in paroxysms of hilarity. Between the gasps of laughter, she managed to

get out, "You just tried to assassinate eight \_deities\_ and a greater dragon!"

Blueblood turned back to Celestia, who was by this point glowing a dull yellow with heat. "Ah. Erâ€¦ parley?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Good suggestion, Twilight!" the king of Equestria said, grinning. "I never thought of using the moon as a holding cell."<p>

"So long as thou dost get them off mine satellite soonâ€¦" Luna said, less happy about the whole thing.

"Oh, I had an idea for that, too." Twilight levitated up a map. "Here. The island of San Equus. No pony habitation there, the griffins never run trade lines that far south and there's enough grass to keep them alive." The young alicorn's grin grew malicious. "Why not even make it an independent kingdom? See how many of them are content with being bossed around by \_Blueblood.\_"

Chrysalis matched her daughter-in-law's grin. "I like it. Poetic justice."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Set 12!

Again, I like feedback. And is it me or are a LOT of these actually suitable as entire fics on their own? (It seems like the MLP Loops are fanfic concept generators \_par excellence\_.)

><em>

Anyone guess where the Jewel Scouts' names are from?

## 13. Chapter 13

### 13.1 (Stainless Steel Fox)

\* \* \*

><p><strong><span>Calling out the Cutie - Revenge of the Everfree<span>\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Diamond Tiara cursed as she pushed her way through the underbrush. This whole thing was turning into an even more massive debacle than her original actions. Why couldn't that rotten little farm filly have known her place and been properly humiliated? Instead, she'd turned the tables with her preposterous speech and gotten the entire class on her side, making it look as if it was Diamond Tiara who was in the wrong.<p>

Obviously, this set of circumstances couldn't be allowed to stand. There was no way one pony could know all those things, especially a

blank flank loser like Applebloom. So Diamond Tiara had challenged her to back up her boasts. When it started to snowball, and turn into something the whole of Ponyville had gotten interested in, Diamond Tiara had felt smug â€" after all, what was the point of letting somepony lie to you? \_This\_ would teach her a lesson.

But the annoying bumpkin had so far gone through the tests set up for her without a bobble. She'd fixed up a broken wheel and damaged harness on a two wheeled farm cart, then slipped into the harness and hauled it back and forth over the back forty of Sweet Apple Acres under the watchful timer of Time Turner.

Building a wooden wall from the planks and supplies she'd brought in the cart, then raising a single room sized barn and roofing it using parts she claimed to have made earlier, using the rest of the supplies to build some training dummies that she then enthusiastically demolished under the watchful eye of that crazy old earth pony Temple Fortress.

That was the \_other\_ annoying thing, the number of ponies who seemed to spring out of the ground to help run her through her tests. After finishing off the dummies, she fought a couple of other students from his dojo, and beat them, though she was sure it had all been a set up despite the assurance that they wouldn't going easy on her. Seeing her sweeping the legs out from under a stallion half against her size and holding him to the floor with a 'Mountain stance', it had to be! (Though they had made noises about her using skill to compensate for relative lack of strength, whatever that meant.)

Which brought them into the Everfree forest. Applebloom was up ahead with Miss Cheerilee and Zecora, identifying plants and picking some of them for later use in showing her brewing skills. Diamond Tiara growled again. Who could tell if that gibberish the two had spouted at each other was a language? But it had impressed Cheerilee. That was why Diamond Tiara was following them. She had to do something to sabotage Applebloom, before she succeeded and humiliated Diamond Tiara again. Anyway, there had to be something behind a curtain somewhere, right?

She'd been a bit nervous about following them into the Everfree, but so far it hadn't been any different to walking through Whitetail Woods, a bit darker and creepier, but nothing like the horror stories she'd heard. Of course, that blank flank did it, so it couldn't be that hard. She strained to hear what they were talking about up ahead, and trampled her way through the large patch of blue flowers without even thinking about it.

\* \* \*

><p>Diamond Tiara woke up from a nightmare, remembered what had happened yesterday, and wished she was back in it. As if watching Applebloom cook and bake and brew potions wasn't bad enough, it hadn't been Twilight who'd come to test her knowledge of stars and navigation. Princess Luna herself had shown up. Apparently Twilight had been telling tales, and the description of this contest had piqued her interest.<p>

Applebloom, of course, had somehow weaselled her way through Princess Luna's questions. It had been evening when they started, and Luna had raised the moon, then started switching around the star patterns to

test if Applebloom could identify the time of yearâ€¦ which, of course, she could.

Now she'd have to go to school and face the class as the neighsayer who had been made to look like a fool by the foul farm filly. She rolled out of bed, grappling for her comb as she turned to look at herself in her palatial room's full length mirror.

The scream was audible in Canterlot.

\* \* \*

><p>Applebloom had finished her morning chores and was just getting ready for school when there were angry voices from outside, near the gate. She grabbed a last piece of toast in her mouth as she trotted out to see what all the hoo-ha was about. As soon as she came in sight of the gate, there was a scream of "There she is!" and some more raised voices.<p>

Applejack and her big brother were at the gate, talking or rather arguing with a bunch of ponies led by Filthy Rich, and centred on Diamond Tiara.

"You're plumb crazy! What makes you think that Applebloom had anything to do with it?" Applejack asked, as angry as Applebloom had ever heard her â€" well, when there wasn't some kind of invasion going on, anyway.

"She's been humiliating me ever since I teased her about that blank flank. This is her latest revenge, another way to punish me!" Diamond Tiara sobbed.

"We did see her brew up magic potions yesterday, soâ€¦" Filthy Rich began.

Applejack got right in his face. "Finish that sentence and you can forget ever getting another jar of zap apple jam. Applebloom would never do something like that!"

Applebloom swallowed the last bite of toast and asked, "What the hay am I being accused of? Before you bring out the boiling oil, I'd at least like to know why."

"This, you rotten little peasant!" Diamond Tiara presented her flank, which was as unblemished as the day she was born.

Applebloom couldn't help it, she burst out laughing.

"You see!" The pink pony growled.

"Iâ€¦ I'm sorryâ€¦" Applebloom chuckled. "I had nothing to do with it, but whoever did it must have had a major sense of poetic justice. The queen of cutie-marks deposedâ€¦ Hmmâ€¦ Hold on a secondâ€¦"

She trotted over to Diamond Tiara, who tried to scramble back with an 'Eek!'

"Oh stop it, I'm not going to hurt you, I just need to smell something." She ducked her head towards Diamond Tiara's hooves and sniffed.

"What are you doing you freak!"

"Figurin' out that you mosied on into the Everfree forest, and ran longwise through some blue flowers." Applebloom lifted her head and looked back at Applejack. "Poison joke. Zecora told me all about it. It has a unique scent, and some \_nasty\_ effects."

Of course, looper Applejack would know perfectly well what poison joke was, but in-loop she had no reason to, hence the little piece of play acting.

"How could a flower make my daughter's cutie-mark vanish?" asked Filthy Rich.

"It's wild magic, it does what the name says, plays a nasty prank on any-pony that walks through it. She's lucky; you could have been turned into a diamond statue, or a duplicate of her own tiara."

"Lucky?" Diamond Tiara was still sobbing. She threw her hoof to her forehead in a dramatic gesture worthy of Rarity. "My life is ruined!"

Applebloom rolled her eyes. "Oh stop with the drama. Zecora has a recipe for an antidote, you can be back to normal as soon as you take a dip in it. And I won't even ask why you were sneaking around after me in the forest. If there was ever a case of some-pony upsetting their own apple cart, this is it."

"There's an antidote?" Filthy Rich asked. "Then you must fetch it at once!"

Applejack growled. "So you were accusing my little sister of poisoning your daughter, but now she can help you change your tune."

The stallion hung his head. "I'm sorry, I was just scared for my daughter's health. Please, help her!"

Applebloom nodded. "Sure I will. But I'm not missing school and chasing off into the Everfree right away. There's no further danger, she's just minus a cutie-mark for a bit."

"I can't go to school like this!" Diamond Tiara exclaimed.

"Nope, you need a shower." Applebloom giggled. "I'll go get Zecora as soon as school breaks for the afternoon."

\* \* \*

><p>At the school it was a zoo. Rumour had apparently gotten there ahead of Diamond Tiara, though considering the fuss she'd been making on the way to Sweet Apple Acres it wasn't hard to guess why. Normally, the pink pony would have been happy to be the centre of attention, but in this case, she was practically cringing at the fillies and colts looking at her.<p>

She'd rushed home for a quick shower, then put on the dress she'd had made up for her cute-cenera, which oddly enough covered her flanks,

obscuring her cute mark, or rather where her cutie-mark should be. Considering the other ponies had come in their normal attire, i.e. buck naked, this only served to make her look dreadfully out of place. Even Silver Spoon didn't have a dress on, which made things worse.

Diamond Tiara had dawdled at home, wanting to give the other ponies as little time as possible to interrogate her before class started, but that just seemed to have allowed a bigger crowd to gather. As well as her class mates there were ponies from the other classes that normally had their lessons at other times, and Applebloom, always Applebloom in the middle of it.

She was chatting to that geek Twist, and a pair of other blank flanks, a unicorn and a pegasus who she'd seen around. She hadn't bothered to learn their names, but that hadn't stopped her and Silver Spoon using all of them for verbal target practice several times in the past. After all, they'd been easy targets. She'd even managed to make Twist and the unicorn cry, which had been particularly satisfying.

As she approached, the pegasus gave a smirk. "Ha! Not so high and mighty now, are you? I may not have my cutie-mark yet, but at least I'm not afraid to show my flank!"

She winced. So that was it, Applebloom had been getting together a group to continue to persecute herâ€¦

"Scootaloo!" Applebloom exclaimed. "I may not like her any more than you do, but I ain't going to stand by and let any-pony get picked on because she has a blank flank! How do we expect to get any respect if we turn around and do the exact same thing?"

Diamond Tiara growled back. "Don't play innocent, I'm sure you've told the entire school what happened!"

"Yep, I figured I should tell them about the poison joke before some-pony decided I'd fed you some crazy potion, or Sweetie Belle had used Rarity's blemish concealment charm on you. Though considering the way you treated her last week, I wouldn't have been shocked if she had."

"I never thought of that!" The unicorn in question suddenly said, eyes wide.

Applebloom gave her a quick hug with one fore-leg. "Just as well, that's the sort of mean trick she'd play. Do you really want to drop to her level?"

"No, but I'd have liked to have seen her without her cutie-mark."

"C'mon, she's already managed to embarrass herself far worse than any prank we could ever pull. Twist and I have to get to class. I'll be late to the club-house, I've got to go ask Zecora to brew up an antidote for her."

The other three agreed and gave a four way high hoof. "Okay!" "See you then." "Cutie Mark Crusaders, ho!"

Diamond Tiara's ears pricked up at that, and as they moved inside she sneered, "Ha! After all your talk, you're just as obsessed with getting a cutie-mark as any-pony! Or are you going to tell me that's not what your pathetic club of misfits is about?"

That got her a sharp look from Miss Cheerilee, who'd heard the tail end of her sentence. Twist cringed slightly, but Applebloom just shook her head.

"Just because I think there's more to a pony than a cutie-mark, doesn't mean I'm not interested in seeing what mine is, if any. I guess I was when I started, but now it's as much a fun thing to do. We hang together at a tree-house on the farm, play games, go out trying different activities to see if we get a cutie-mark, and basically have fun. If we actually get a cutie-mark out of it, that's a bonus."

She shook her head. "You're focusing on the destination and ignoring the journey, at least that's what my sister would say. Well actually, I figure you're just feeling bad and wanting to spread it around, but it comes to the same thing."

Miss Cheerilee cleared her throat. "Every-pony, quieten down. I'll take register, and then I think Applebloom should give a short explanation of just why it's not a good idea to go into the Everfree forest without some-pony who knows what they're doing. If then."

Diamond Tiara just sat there and fumed.

\* \* \*

><p>13.2 (crossover with Spyro)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Wwwwwelcome to Magic Crafters!" Cosmo said, looking down at the purple dragon who had just freed him and stretching sinuously. "I want you to rrrelease the dragons, rrreclaim our treasure, and rrrecover the eggs from those pesky blue Thieves."<p>

He disappeared in a flash of magic, leaving behind his pedestal.

"Reclaim, huh?" Twilight the Flutterpony sniggered. "Yeah, bit late for that."

"Hey!" Spike the Dragon replied, looking hurt. "I've only eaten the tasty onesâ€¦ it's not my fault that they're \_all\_ tastyâ€¦"

"Admittedly, I \_do\_ wonder what Spyro usually does with all his." Twilight hummed. "Hey, try not to fall off any more cliffs, okay? I can only save you so many times before I start to get tired."

"Yeah, thanks for that." Spike crouched down (easier than normal, because he was an all-up quadruped this time) and launched himself forward in a charge.

Gnорcs in silly metal dresses went flying.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Twilight!" Spike looked around, towards some sheep (which promptly fled) and then at a large portal. "I fancy a trip to the beach. Can you take me?"<p>

"No." Twilight said. "You're always making me teleport you everywhere, use the portal for once."

"Okay," Spike grumbled, and gestured towards the portal to Dragon Shores. "Come on, then. And when are you going to work out how to get me to fly properly? Age-shifting doesn't work here."

"When I work out how the Flights do it, that's how. And no sooner." Twilight did a loop-the-loop in irritation. "I can't even READ here! The dragons' books are all twelve feet tall, and I'm barely bigger than the words!"

There was a tugging sensation as they passed through the Dragon Shores portal, and then they were in some strange, non-beach place with a cheetah, a faun and a mole talking at them.

"Okay, look," Twilight said. "We weren't supposed to be here, so if you'd just--"

"But we need your help to defeat Ripto!"

Twilight picked up a fireball headed her way, and fed it through a one-way magical mirror â€" also, incidentally, pumping the energy in it up by a factor of a hundred.

There was a loud explosion.

"Okay? Can we go now?" Twilight did not like it when she was proven wrong by Spike, especially when his argument was actually based off not wanting to walk.

"Uhâ€|" the cheetah, Hunter, looked back and forth between her and the crater. "Did you-?"

"Twilight!" Spike shouted. "They have gems bigger than ME here! Let's stay for a bit!"

"â€|oh, alright. Maybe here they have books," Twilight sighed.

"Oh, splendid!" the mole said. "I was wondering, do the portals you normally use follow a longitudinal or transverse wave pattern? Because I tried the first one, but it didn't pick up well until I'd gone through transverse and back."

"A mix, actually." Suddenly, Twilight was also an enthusiast for staying in Avalar. At last, someone who has an intellectually stimulating task to work on! "We use Rayleigh waveforms, because those allow for more specific origin points which can be in the air andâ€| oh! So that's how the Flight portals work â€" they must carry the superfly spell in the waveform!"

"Splendid!" The studious mole took out a pencil and started writing



that down. "We have a similar enchantment on the daises leading to Speedway portals, but that's in the arch and not the warp torus itself."

"Right." Twilight checked on Spike, and saw he was trying to get a gemstone almost as big as Princess Celestia out of the ground. "Okay, we tend to use Runcible-type gates with more flexibility on the waveform, but the downside is that the Horns of the Spoon take a lot more powerâ€¦ I did wonder why they botheredâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>"Don't worry, Bianca," Twilight said, the purple glow around her intensifying, "I'll handle this. Hey, Spike!"<p>

"What?" the dragon asked, halfway through a game of Ancient Egyptian Tanks.

"I managed to locate the Sorceress, so we can teleport straight to her. And I think I can apply Superflame, Superfly and Invincibility in the teleport flare."

Spike jumped out of the tank and was next to her in a second. "Cool. Let's go."

"Yep." Twilight's glow became blinding for a moment.

\* \* \*

><p>"And so, we say goodbye to the Forgotten Worlds," Spike said with an affected voice. "Land of giant monsters, malfunctioning portals, stolen dragon eggs and ludicrous numbers of Rhynocs."<p>

Twilight grinned. "Wasn't so bad, was it?"

"Nah. Fun place, once you get past the occasional deathtrap or horde of giant scorpions." Spike hopped through the portal, and Twilight followed a second later. "What now?"

"Iâ€¦ guess we wait until the next disaster." Twilight paused. "Well, you wait, anyway. I'm going to go try and work out how the Supercharge ramps work."

\* \* \*

><p>13.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I don't understand it," Celestia said, shaking her head.<p>

The object of her confusion lay in the gardens of Canterlot palace. A three-hundred-foot-tall building, containing inside it a statue of herself â€" at thirty times normal scale.

It had appeared overnight. And she had no idea where most of her gardens had goneâ€¦

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, how flattering." Luna looked around the huge building. The outside was covered with frescoes depicting her at her work of shaping the night sky, and the inside held silver sculptures of her surrounding a great replica moon.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Explain," Firefly said flatly.<p>

"Hey!" Dash raised her hooves. "This one totally wasn't me. Anyway, why \_would\_ I build a giant lighthouse out of clouds? It sounds like \_far\_ too much effort for me."

After a moment, Raindrops nodded. "Yeah, it is. You'd have left it half finished."

"Hey!" Dash paused, then realized what she was objecting to. "I mean, er, yeah! Exactly my point."

"Only question is, then, who \_did?\_" Firefly said. "I mean, it's helping pegasi find their way home, but these strange black insect-ponies calling themselves changelings keep bumping into the main mirror."

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy flew up to get a closer look at the strange sight. "Oh, my."<p>

A jet-black obelisk, covered with runes which glowed purple, jutted out of the Everfree forest canopy. And above it, held in a deep purple glow, hovered a magnificent garden " with rare animals and plants which she was \_sure\_ were only supposed to be in the Canterlot palace gardens.

\* \* \*

><p>"Was this your doing, Braeburn?" Sherrif Silver Star asked, pointing to the east.<p>

"Nope," the Apple replied, shaking his head. "Weren't me."

"Well, who \_would\_ put four giant stone pyramids out here?" Silver Star squinted. "And that's a griffin statue next to 'em, too."

\* \* \*

><p>"Down a bit" left a bit" and done!" Spike said, checking off the sixth item on the list.<p>

Twilight finished off by casting the spells that secured the enormous earth pony statue in place, and then dropped the cloaking spell. "Right. That's the Colossus of Horseshoe Bay set up" now, one to go. Which one is it?"

"The mausoleum." Spike tapped his chin idly. "Not sure who to commemorate, really. I mean, most of our rulers are still around."

""easy. The Founders." Twilight frowned. "Only problem is finding

where they were buried. Any ideas?"

\* \* \*

><p>"â€| anyway, we managed to get them all done inside the same twelve hour period," Twilight finished. "With a lot of magic, anyway."<p>

Discord clapped. "Very good, Twilight. Most impressive. So, you set up the Seven Wonders of Equestria? What was the reaction?"

"â€| Celestia was a bit annoyed that I'd pinched her garden," Twilight admitted. "But I had to move it anyway to put down the Temple of Celestia at Canterlot, soâ€|" she shrugged. "Fluttershy was very happy."

\* \* \*

><p>13.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"â€| Princess?" Twilight started at the unexpected sight. "What is it?"<p>

"While I am grateful that you've made such good friends, Twilight," Celestia said, stepping into the Ponyville library, "I must confess that I originally sent you to Ponyville for reasons that were not entirely altruistic."

"Okay, then." Twilight frowned â€" was this connected to why Luna was over two months late? "Go on."

"It was my original intent to allow you to form friendships, it is trueâ€|" Celestia looked pained, "but that was in part due to the Elements of Harmony. They can only be wielded by a group of ponies with true friendship between them, and I feared the return of my sister â€" who has become Nightmare Moon."

Twilight nodded. "I see, and I do understand the logic. Butâ€| I remember that book. Wasn't Nightmare Moon supposed to return on the Summer Sun festival?"

"She was." Celestia nodded. "I was most impressed by how well you and your friends organized it, by the way â€" masterfully done. But the absence of my sister still troubles me." The alicorn of the sun lit her horn. "Twilightâ€| I ask a great favour of you. Will you accompany me to the moon where my sister has spent these last thousand years, so as to determine whether she is still there or has escaped without my notice?"

The Element of Magic blinked. "Er, why me? I'm flattered, butâ€|"

"You are the pony I would trust more than any other, Twilight." Celestia's voice held a quiet serenity. "And, in truth, my sister and I are closely matched â€" your power would, perhaps, be enough to tip the balance."

Suppressing a grin at the private joke "if it came to it, she had more than enough power" Twilight nodded in turn. "Okay, then, Princess. I won't let you down."

"Thank you." The glow turned to a blinding flash.

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia and Twilight materialized inside a gigantic frosted-glass dome.<p>

The ruler blinked, her air-bubble spell being completely unnecessary in the atmosphere already present in the dome. "I don't remember this being here!"

"Oh, hi!" said a voice from overhead, in the distant heights of the dome. There was a series of bright magical flashes, and the dome turned fully transparent.

Twilight blinked as Princess Luna flew down, carrying a huge slab of quarry-fresh stone. "Celly! I haven't seen you in SO long! And who's this?"

Celestia recovered her poise quite quickly. "Dearest sister. This is my student, Twilight Sparkle."

Twilight bowed. "It is an honour."

"I bet she's a regular anchor of strength for you," Luna said, and winked at Twilight. "Anyway, I got over the whole Nightmare thing about three years after I came up here, and I've spent the rest of the time building. There's a complete environmental dome here, which stretches out across about half the nearside." Creating a series of illusions, Luna continued explaining. "I made the dome light-reactive so the sunlight isn't too intense " that's to compensate for the lack of the atmosphere " and the top surface has the Mare in the Moon motif. I know it might be interesting to have the whole thing transparent to emerging light so that the greenery I hope to transplant up here will be fully evident " imagine it, Celly, the moon having as many ponies and as much life on it as the planet below!"

The long, rambling explanation by an evidently Awake Luna about what she'd done over the course of the last ten centuries wound on for about twenty more minutes. Twilight was impressed " Luna had not only built a habitable area rather larger than any one continent, but she'd also constructed future cities, towns and villages within it. Any prospective colonists would almost literally just have to move in.

Celestia's jaw was just getting gradually more slack.

" anyway," the alicorn of the moon finished, "Why are you up here? I mean, it's nice of you to visit, but " she gasped and checked a moondial Pinkie had given her once. "Oh! I completely missed the date! Sorry, Celly, I hadn't realized I could come down by now. Anyway. Do you want to write the colonist adverts or shall I?"

\* \* \*

><p>13.5 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong><span>Squeezing out the Competition<span>\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, looky what we got here, brother of mine, it's the same in every town, Ponies with thirsty throats, dry tongues, and not a drop of cider to be foundâ€¦!"<p>

Flim's musical number came to a halt with the sound of a gramophone record needle scratch as he got a chance to look around at the road outside Sweet Apple Acres. Lots of ponies, all of them merrily drinking mugs of cider. One rainbow maned Pegasus had a pyramid of empty mugs in front of her, and another mug raised in salute to the stall which was clearly selling it.

There were still barrels stacked behind the stall, and a massive pile of bits overflowing the cash box. The orange pony in the hat who seemed to be in charge of the stall looked over at them sourly. "I hope you can pay for that post you just knocked down."

"What in Equestria?" Flim couldn't help saying. "We heard that there was a cider shortage here in Ponyville! That's why we brought our unique and superbâ€¦!" The music started up again. "Unseen at any time in this modern world, born of creativity."

Seeing ponies starting to pay attention, the two started trading off.

"Folks it's the one and only, the biggest and the best,"

"The unbelievable,"

"Unimpeachable"

"Indispensable"

"I can't believ-able"

"Flim and Flam Brothers' Super Speedy Cider Squeezy 6000."

The music came to a halt again as Applejack retorted, "That's nice and all, but you're a mite out of date. Last year we couldn't produce enough cider, that's true, and we wanted to do better without compromising on quality."

She waved back at the orchard behind her. "That's why we got my friend Twilight in to do what she called a 'time and motion study'. We were doing the whole process by hoof, even driving the apple press of a treadmill, and changing the full barrels for empties. Turns out the only stages which really needed to be pony-intensive was bucking the trees to get the right apples, and quality control on the apples to see that only the best get in. Takes a skilled pony to tell which apples are just right for our cider."

"Our machine has a selector that does it automatically, and turns it into grade-A top-notch five-star blow-your-horseshoes-off

one-of-a-kind ciderâ€¦" Flam stopped, turning. "Hey, get away from there!"

Applebloom was tapping the wheel of their transport. "Huh, seems like a thaumic boiler system and a magically controlled spectro-mechanical analysis device feeding an undershaft powered processing line hooked up to a vacu-motive collector. Fast, but I bet it takes a lot of maintenance, not to mention a dedicated unicorn to power it. You'll get maybe a couple of hours of use out of it before you have to tear it down for an overhaul. No wonder you were riding around looking to make a quick bit rather than trying to market it."

Applejack grinned. "Mah little sister Applebloom has a knack for mechanical dohickeys. She built our new cider processing system."

Applebloom pointed over to a long line of wooden struts and machinery half hidden by the trees.

"Tain't as fancy or mobile as your contraption, but it's practically all mechanical, a simple conveyor system driven by an electric motor. Rather than a complex magical gadget, we just pre-filter using a simple feeder system onto a scale which drives a flipper that diverts the apple out of the process line if it's obviously too light. With the pre-washing stage and stirrers running off the same drive shaft, we can remove any leaves and twigs that got that far too."

"That allows Applejack and Big Mac to buck, and me and Granny Smith to check the apples that make it through the pre-filter. We have push button flippers to drop out bad apples rather than taking them off the conveyor by hoof, which saves a couple of seconds on each apple. May not sound like much, but over thousands of apples it adds up." Applebloom shrugged. "It was the bottleneck for the whole process, so with the two of us working on it and the other improvements we've managed to more than double our throughput, while still keeping the hoof picked quality that makes our cider the best in Equestria!"

"I'll say!" called out the pegasus. "This has got to be your best year yet!"

"I even rigged up an automatic feeder system for the barrels. Just a simple ramp and counterweight driven mechanism, but it does the job. And the best bit is that it's all \_way\_ overbuilt, it should run for days without any maintenance other than changing the filters in the washing stage and refilling the barrel magazine." There was a clunk as another barrel entered the mechanism. "All wood construction too, apart from the hardware, so it was cheap to build too."

Applejack couldn't help smirk slightly at the crestfallen faces of the two hornswagglers. "I'll tell you what; you can buy a bunch of apples at wholesale rates. Even with our new system, we won't have much left to export. You might find a market for what that gadget makes in Trottingham or Hoofington. We'll even knock off five points if you credit the apples as coming from Sweet Apple Acres. Of course, that's on top of what you owe us for the fence postâ€¦"

Flim fidgeted under Applejack's gaze.

"Ah, about that, we're sort of, low on funds just at the

moment."

"So, you're broke." The farm-pony gave a sigh. "Figures!"

Flam replied, "We have plenty of assets, it's just they're all tied up in the Super Speedy Cider Squeezy 6000!"

"Like I said, broke." Applejack replied, giving them both a look. "Well, you can always work it off in kind. Since we know your names, I guess you should know ours. I'm Applejack, and this's my little sis Applebloom. Over there you've got my brother Big Macintosh, and Granny Smith."

Truth be told, she had very little time for these two swindlers. They'd tried to steal the farm out from under her family, though the Apples hadn't exactly made it hard for them. However, only she and Applebloom knew that, as neither Big Mac nor Granny were loopers. Still, it went against her nature to just kick these guys out in the cold, as they hadn't actually done anything this time.

She'd let them earn the price of the fence post and their stake in apples, but she did intend to work them hard. Maybe she could teach them the value of an honest day's work, rather than a get rich quick scheme.

Applebloom was still examining the device with an appraising eye. She still dimly remembered that she'd been excited by the machine, and ready to use it, until the Flim Flam Brothers had suggested their yellow dog terms. Even in the original time-line, it had lead to her learning more about mechanics and the idea to design a float for the Summer Harvest Festival.

In a way, it had ultimately led to her finding her cutie-mark, a couple of dozen loops later. The problem had been, her talent wasn't just fixing stuff, though that had been a part of it, but inventing new devices and new machines, especially electronics. It had taken a fused loop, that first one where she'd subbed for a fox called Miles 'Tails' Prower, to show her where her skills really lay. (And annoyingly, it was never the same thing to get her mark two loops in a row.)

A lot of the technologies she was best at hadn't yet been invented in base-line Equestria. Her cutie-mark expressed itself as a number of different things, depending on the circumstances, spanners and apple carts had frequently figured, but whenever she went really deep into computers and electronics she got a rainbow striped apple with a bite out of it. She guessed it represented a zap apple, since they involved electricity and innovating new techniques to turn them into an amazing jam.

Still, this machine had been the first thing to turn her thoughts to creating rather than fixing up, so maybe she owed them at least something. Besides, she could use their knowledge. "Y'know, it isn't a bad design. Over-complicated, but the ideas are actually pretty sound. It looks to me like you got interested in adding all kinds of bells and whistles rather than making the basic systems reliable."

She couldn't actually blame them for that; it wasn't as if she hadn't suffered from that herself on occasion, especially when she was

trying to tech up to building her own Maritech. Some of her more enthusiastic experiments had ended in malfunctions that involved terms like 'blast radius', and in a couple of particularly bad cases, 'funeral'. At least it had been her own. Even with every-pony being resurrected at the start of a loop, killing one of her friends would have been something she'd not have wanted to cope with.

"I wouldn't have thought an earth-pony filly would know much about magical engineering," Flam said carefully, clearly aware that Big Macintosh was watching them both with a stern expression.

"You'd be surprised. Maybe I could help out, in return for some help myself. When I want to get some magical elements into my designs, I have to get in Twilight Sparkle or my filly friend Sweetie Belle to help out. But Twilight Sparkle's more of a straight up artificer, she makes purely magical items, and Sweetie Belle's talent is more to do with singing, and using her magic to enhance it, or vice versa." Applebloom shrugged. "Besides, Sweetie doesn't have much in the way of actual magical power to access yet."

"They can both do it, but I feel bad about getting them to help me out for nothing. I figured if I could find a way to substitute my earth pony magic for unicorn magic in the rune sets, I could do the whole thing myself. Since you're the only two ponies I've seen apart from me who mix unicorn magic with machinery, I thought you might be able to help me figure it out. In return, maybe I can help you iron the bugs out of your doodad so it's actually a product you can sell, rather than a garage queen."

Flim, seeing a chance to ingratiate himself, and avoid more arduous farm work immediately said, "Why sure, little lady!"

Then he back pedalled, seeing the obvious flaw. "But we can't promise anything, earth pony magic can't be projected the way unicorn magic can."

"That ain't exactly true." Applebloom grinned, and picked up an almost empty mug of cider. She passed a hoof over it and the mug was full again. That had the two unicorns buggy eyed.

"Zebra use similar magic to earth ponies, but they've learned to project it. I learned potion-making, off of a zebra named Zecora, who lives in the Everfree forest, which often involves investing a brew with your own magic. I even managed to learn a couple of other tricks, like multiplying the dregs of a liquid to refill a cup. A simple application of the law of homeopathy." Sure, it took a \_hay\_ of a lot of magic "far more than you could make back from the potion" but it was a neat party piece to pull off once or twice.

She sighed. "But investing magic into rune sets etched into metal requires different techniques to investing it into a magically active organic base. My martial arts training helped too, but I still can't quite get it." She didn't say that it hadn't been her training under Temple Fortress, but under Master Roshi that had really buffed her earth magic manipulation.

From what Goku had said, the original Bulma hadn't been in the least interested in martial arts, though she was a genius engineer, but at least some of Applebloom's earth pony nature had carried over into



her human body, and she'd been able to take the Turtle School training regime. She'd never be a Tenka'ichi Budo'kai Winner, but an also-ran by Dragonball world standards was still a serious martial artist by almost any other universes standards. Except Nerima, but then that was a special case.

"Don't get too comfy with those two, little sis. I aim to make them do some heavy work to pay for their apples. You can have them when I'm finished with them." Applejack motioned with her head in the direction of the rise that held the Crusader's tree-house. "Have them park that contraption at your workshop and bring them back down. We've still got a passel of work to do before the sun sets."

"We haven'tâ€¦" Flam started to say, but Flim put a hoof over his mouth. "You'll provide food and a place to sleep too?"

"I reckon we can manage something." Applejack replied, tersely.

"C'mon!" Applebloom waved at the two of them, and stepped through the gates to Sweet Apple Acres. "And be careful with that thing, you don't want to knock anything else down."

She walked on ahead, leading them along the path through the orchards, and listened closely. The two of them were talking, and probably thought their low voices were drowned out by the background noise of their machine, but Applebloom had a lot of experience picking out voices from over the roar of machinery.

"Brother, why were you so eager to accept their offer?" Flam was asking. "Sure that filly did a party trick, but we could just try the next town over and see if we could scare up some business there. I didn't like the gleam in that Applejack mare's eyes when she talked about putting us to work."

Flim gave a little smirk. "Brother, you're missing the point. What we have here is opportunity. At the very least we can get a meal and a bed for the night. Who knows what else a couple of well groomed and devilishly handsome stallions might be able to accomplish? At least that filly up front isn't as hostile as the rest of her family. I'm sure we can charm her into putting in a good word for us with her sister."

The moustachioed stallion gave a huff. "If we can convince her that we've actually helped her. She's probably read a couple of books and is just playing at inventing. Or do you think she can actually help fix the 6000?"

"Who cares? We play along. Hopefully she'll have some basic tools, and maybe even parts we can use. We should be able to convince her to provide parts to show off our artificing skills on. It's better than nothing, at least."

Applebloom gave a little chuckle. This was going to be fun. She stopped at the foot of the hill that the Crusader's tree-house sat on. It was built up with a main house, a lookout post surmounted by a telescope poking from the top, and a couple of small air-boat hulls and other platforms sticking out from the upper branches. A broad grassy path lined by apple trees on both sides, led up the side of the hill but stopped well short of the tree-house itself.

"Okay, park it here," Applebloom called out. "I have to open up the workshop."

She scampered up the hill, and disappeared into a small shack at the base of the tree-house.

Flam rolled his eyes. "That's her workshop? It's barely big enough to fit a wagon, let alone this."

There was a crunch, and a rumbling sound. A line appeared in the grass in front of them, and the lines of trees running up either side of the wide path tilted outwards as the 'path' split to open upwards into a pair of massive doors, running the entire length of the hillside. The opening was wide enough to fit a dirigible, let alone the Super Speedy Cider Squeezy 6000.

A paved road with dotted lines of lights running along each side ran into the hill. As they watched, blowers started up in the grates that ran along the centre line, clearing away the dirt that had fallen from the crack between the doors.

"Okay, bring it in!" Applebloom's voice came from nowhere, or rather, they guessed concealed speakers. They followed the instructions, filled with equal parts trepidation and curiosity. Both were well rewarded. As soon as they were in, the doors started to close over them, sealing down to a shallowly angled ceiling, lit from underneath by the runway lights.

The space at the end of the runway clearly took up most of the interior of the hill. A massive main hangar, at least twenty pony-lengths high and over a hundred each way dominated, but along each side were smaller bays containing still massive machines. An open frame lift at one end clearly rose up to the 'shack' by the tree-house, and the entire place was lit by banks of electric lights of a power and density they'd only seen in Manehattan. The smell of metal and lightning hung in the air.

Applebloom was enjoying the expressions of shock on the two pony inventors faces. A Maritech fighter was parked up alongside a humanoid robot that stood over halfway to the ceiling, painted in yellow with crimson trim, her Apple Labour. Several smaller suits of armour stood on pedestals, and various other vehicles and devices such as a sizeable Extreme Gear board were neatly arrayed along the walls.

She trotted over. "I'm sure we can find some basic tools in here somewhere. I even have a couple of books, though most of them are on my computer system."

Back when she was starting out, it had generally taken months to build even a basic workshop, and it had been frustrating to have to start over each loop, even when she'd managed to get Twilight Sparkle to store some of the key equipment she needed in her stuff-space pocket. But that was before she'd been through the world of the dragon balls.

While capsules should have been the answer, they'd proved to be awkward to store in her sub-space pocket. The two incompatible spaces had interfered with each other and tended to dump out whatever she

was storing at random times. She'd invented a shrinking watch which miniaturised things in real space, but that had proved to awkward to produce for pieces of kit much beyond the size of a human.

Ultimately it had been the martial arts training that she'd undergone that had pumped up her energy reserves and ability to manipulate earth magic. It had also fed into her being able to maintain a much bigger volume of stuff space. Now she could pack everything she needed, all her heavy production machinery and equipment, into her own stuff-space pocket. Setting up the workshop was just a matter of days, hours if she got Applejack to pitch in.

"This isâ€¦" Flim was flabbergasted, and Flam was flummoxed.

"Oh, this is nothing," Applebloom said. "You should see the Geofront Twilight Sparkle built under Golden Oaks Library, well under all of Ponyville. It's a couple of miles across, has its own eco-system even. It's designed to store the whole of Ponyville in case of an emergency, but she mainly uses it for her artificing. She drives her mage furnace off a magma core-tap, it makes this place look like a rabbit hole."

Admittedly, Twilight only built the danged thing once every few dozen times Applebloom met her â€" too much effort otherwise â€" but it was there this time, so it was a valid point to raise.

She waved to an empty section of wall. "You can park up there. It's handy for the photo-etching process line. I figured one way to reduce your maintenance is to replace those magical valves with one hundred nano-meter integrated rune-sets. Completely solid state, using a magically active mithril/orichalcum layer on a cold iron substrate. I can probably shrink the entire quality control module on your gadget down to a square about the size of a single bit piece."

"That's impossible! No-one can etch magical symbols that finely!" Flam flustered. "A unicorn horn is only so sharp."

"Photo-etching, I said. I use a resist dye made from black hellbore, a common base for potions. It's magically active and leaves a magical trace on the runic pattern, which is raised rather than engraved. All a unicorn horn has to do is spray it with magic, and the runic pattern is charged up. No need to etch each symbol with your horn while investing magic into it." It occurred to Applebloom, perhaps a bit late, that she was probably overdoing it on the advanced terminologyâ€¦ ah well, they'd learn.

She chivvied them towards the lift. "Now come on, my big sis doesn't like to be kept waiting."

\* \* \*

><p>13.6<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia felt herself tense up involuntarily. While the preparations for the Summer Sun festival seemed complete, at least those which Twilight had overseenâ€¦ there was also the matter of Nightmare Moon's imminent return.<p>

If her crazy plan had worked, then she just maybe she could see her sister safe once more. But if not, then all she had worked for in the last thousand years would be erased.

\_Time.\_

She walked out onto the small stage in Ponyville town hall.

\* \* \*

><p>About halfway through the preparatory speech, she saw something out of the corner of her eye and stopped in confusion. Her audience rustled, wondering why she'd stopped, then turned to look at the same thing she was.<p>

A mug with steam wafting off of it, hovering in the air.

Then Celestia's knees went weak with shock. Luna followed the cup, which was clearly held in her magic, blinking sleepily and wearing a dressing gown.

"Celly? Sorry to interrupt" Luna lowered the mug slightly, and Celestia caught sight of plain milk in there, "But I can't find where you keep the cocoa. Did you rearrange the kitchen?"

"what?"

"Well, I was getting ready for bed," Luna said, breaking off in a jaw-cracking yawn, "anyway, I was getting ready, and I was going to have a cup of cocoa and some biscuits before I turned in. But I couldn't find the cocoa, and I've already heated the milk so I thought I'd ask."

Luna raised something to her mouth, and ate it. There was a crunching sound. The next words she spoke were slightly muffled. "Excellent biscuits, though. I approve of the chocolate shards baked into them."

"Luna?" Celestia tried to get over her shock. "Er second cupboard from the left, behind the sugar."

"Thanks. Sorry for the interruption." Luna vanished in a flash of dark.

\* \* \*

><p>13.7<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia massaged her temples. "I'm sure I must be imagining it"<p>

"What is it, dear sister?" Luna asked, finishing off her evening breakfast.

"Earlier today I went for a walk in the gardens," Celestia explained. "And I could have sworn blind that Discord's stone prison had

moved."

"Surely not!" Luna said, shocked. "He has escaped?"

"No, no, his statue's still on the pedestal, it was justâ€| differently posed." Celestia shook her head. "Or that's what it looked like. Maybe I'm just tired."

Her sister put a hoof on her foreleg. "Go to sleep, Celestia. I should be handling more of your workload than I am, anyway."

\* \* \*

><p>The next morning, Celestia flash-heated some toast (a bit extravagant, but she was feeling chipper after her extra sleep) and passed Luna making herself dinner.<p>

The lunar alicorn pointed at her. "I think that you might be right, sister."

"What?" Celestia asked, a butter-loaded knife paused mid-spread.

"He's sticking his tongue out." Luna said, pointing towards the gardens.

The elder alicorn forewent jam and hurried out into the grounds, eating her toast on the move.

\* \* \*

><p>"Is it the stress, Luna?" Celestia asked, shaking her head. "Are we <em>both<em> losing it?"

"I do not know." Luna frowned. "What did he look like this time?"

"Jazzhands." At Luna's look of confusion, Celestia created an illusion. "There was a minotaur a few decades back who called this pose jazzhands. Not sure whyâ€|"

"No headdress any more?" Luna checked. Celestia nodded in confirmation.

"Right, there's only one way to solve this," the elder sister added. "Luna, I would take it as a favour if you would handle my duties for the day. I am going on stakeout."

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia ignored the rain pattering on her wings. There was no <em>way<em> she was going to spend five minutes asking for the weather schedule to be changed, and potentially waste six hours of staring through binoculars.

Lulled by the whispering of the rain, it took her about three seconds to notice when the statue abruptly disappeared.

"â€|wait, what?" she said, lowering the binoculars. "Butâ€| all I did was blinkâ€|"

Grey stone caught her eye, and she turned towards it. It was almost a hundred metres from where Discord's statue had been, and it wasâ€|

â€|frozen in a running pose.

Another blink, and it disappeared again. This time, it appeared precariously dangling from the roof.

Another â€" and it vanished altogether.

Celestia swept the gardens, looking for the grey stone of Discord's statue and backing up in slight fearâ€|

Then bumped into something. She whirled, seeing the statue only a yard or so away from her.

Dangling from its hand was a sign that read 'boo!'

\* \* \*

><p>Luna galloped onto the colonnade. "What is it, Sister! I heard your scream-"<p>

"Don't blink, Luna!" Celestia shouted without turning around. "I think it moves when we blink!"

"Actually, I don't need you to blink," Discord replied conversationally, brushing grey dust off his skin and fur, and tossing the sign into the distance. "It's just funny."

He looked at the two glowing horns pointed right at him. "Oh, what? It's just a bit of fun!"

"This is what I think of your joke, Discord," Celestia countered. "Fire!"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Twilight Sparkle,<em>

\_I am sending you a large fridge containing the draconequus known as Discord. This chaotic entity ruled over Equestria in times long past, but was defeated and sealed by my sister and myself using the Elements of Harmony.\_

\_He escaped at some time last week, and attempted to play games with Luna and I. We did not take this well, and as a result he was hit by two very powerful spells â€" one fire, one ice.\_

\_Since I'm sending him to you in a fridge, I'm sure you can work out which order they were in. In any case, he survived, but it is our hope that he will not be ready to attempt his mind games again for some time â€" at least until the ice thaws.\_

\_Please either re-seal him or attempt to rehabilitate him as you did my sister.\_

\_Always ready to speak with you,\_

\_Celestia.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight heaved the fridge open. "I told you that imitating the Weeping Angels was going too far."<p>

Discord declined to comment. Possibly because of the foot-thick coating of ice.

\* \* \*

><p>13.8<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia felt the by-now-familiar surge of the world reorganizing itself around her, as she Awoke into a Loop.<p>

She took a moment to scan her memories. After the Loop where she'd nearly missed an ongoing invasion, it was something she never forgotâ€|

"Goodness," she said, blinking. "That's a long way backâ€|"

It was, in fact, barely three years after Luna had first transformed into Nightmare Moon.

Celestia pondered what to do. She could wait over nine hundred and seventy years for Twilight Sparkle to be born, orâ€|

"I think 'or', this time," Celestia decided.

In the first place, she wanted to see what the Griffin lands were like. In the second, she wanted to see if giving Luna her own subjects would help her recover.

And in the third, there \_was\_ a bit of the trickster in Celestia. Just a bit.

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon was woken from a deep, decade-eating slumber by a WHUMP of displaced air.<p>

Air? On the moon? She quickly drew herself erect, breathing in deeply as she realized that, yes, for whatever reason there was air available.

Also, there was a fifteen-foot tall slab of bedrock and soil in front of her, stretching at least a mile to the left and right. Flying up, she saw it was just as large in the forwards direction â€" and it had trees on it. Trees, and flowers, and grass, andâ€|

For a few minutes, Nightmare Moon looked more like a filly prancing amongst something she'd not thought she could enjoy any more.

Another \_WHUMP\_ drew her out of her reverie, this one coming from

much further off. The alicorn took flight, circled, and looked out in the direction it had come from.

This new slab, like the first one, turned out to be dozens of miles on a side. Instead of forest, it held grasslands.

A third concussive wash of air, followed by an almighty splash. Millions of gallons of sea water appeared in one of her large craters, filling it almost to the brim.

\* \* \*

><p>By the time half an hour had gone, there was enough transplanted land on the moon to equal a small continent, and Moon was utterly baffled.<p>

Then an earth pony materialized with a \_pop\_.

"â€|eh?" he said.

"Why art thou here?" Nightmare Moon asked, flying down in front of him.

"Mine ruler, Princess Celestia, enquired of me as to whether bananas were the fruit I preferred," the pony replied, frowning at the alicorn. "Upon my negative answer â€" since my family are more into the trade of growing apples â€" she made some bespellment and transplanted me here. Where might here be, if I be so bold as to enquire?"

"This? This is the moon!" Nightmare gestured around, then blinked. "Though in truth it does not look like it did when We awoke this morn."

She frowned. "One supposes that if mine sister's tyranny hath progressed this far, it behooves Us to offer sanctuary to those others who fall afoul of her ire. Attend meâ€|?"

"Crab Apple, your highness," the earth pony supplied. "We had wondered at thy disappearance, Princess Lunaâ€|"

"Crab Apple." Nightmare nodded. "Come, then, and we shall find you an area of land to till."

There were three more pops, and two pegasi and a unicorn materialized.

"â€|but I said I \_did!\_" one of them protested. "Why ask the question if thou art going to apply the same result in any case?"

Nightmare Moon blinked. "A moment, stout Crab Apple. It seems We may need to establish an immigration desk."

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia let a grin cross her face. At last, she was finished.<p>

Every single pony in Equestria, and about eighty percent of the land, had been transferred to the moon. The resultant patchwork



green-blue-yellow orb overhead lookedâ€¦ different, but interesting  
â€œ especially as Celestia had tried to arrange the teleported bits  
to recreate the shape of the Mare in the Moon.

\_And Lulu always wanted more ponies to appreciate her. Right, now  
then, what shall I do?\_

Celestia realized that she had, for once, managed to escape  
paperwork.

"\_Right.\_ I am going to go try out surfing."

\* \* \*

><p>"What," Twilight said, as she finally Awoke into this version of  
Equestriaâ€¦'s moon.<p>

"â€¦huh. That's actually kind of neat."

She was the student of Princess Luna, and currently taking a course  
at the Lunarium Academy of the Magical Sciences.

Luna was still a princess, but she wasn't a ruling one. One hundred  
years ago, she had handed power over to an assembly of ponies  
electing their heads of state and of government by popular vote, and  
now held a purely religious role in this new lunar republic.

From what Twilight could determine, Luna didn't actually want that  
religious role, but when a single pony is a one-horned meteor shield  
they become a religious figure all over again quite quickly. And  
there was the occasional little smile on Luna's face when she rolled  
her eyes in exasperation that said her annoyance might not be quite  
full-bloodedâ€¦

Of course, she was still on the moon. What had happened?\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Thank you, Twilight," Luna said. "I don't know why my sister  
sent every pony in the country to the moon for a thousand years, but  
if an answer can be found I'm sure you and your team will find  
it."<p>

Twilight shrugged. "Good thing we managed to get Shadowbolt support  
through the senate, so we're not going to be going in completely  
alone."

"Indeed." Luna nodded. "Go well, Twilight Sparkle. And your  
friends."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight and her team â€œ her five friends from the original  
timeline, of course, as well as two Shadowbolts â€œ flashed into  
existence on the pristine shoreline of Equestria.<p>

"Okay, everypony," Twilight said. "Keep an eye out for  
trouble."

"Hello!" a cheery voice said. Twilight turned, and her jaw dropped in

disbelief.

Princess Celestia was riding a huge curler into shore, wings beating to let her keep up an impossible angle on the crest of the wave with her surfboard.

Dash's eyes glistened. "Soooo cooolâ€|"

With a rumbling crash, the wave finally broke, and Celestia rode the swash right up to their hooves.

"I never get tired of that!" Celestia said, grinning. "Anyway. I assume you're from my sister?"

"â€|yeah," Twilight managed.

"Good. Here's a letter for her." Celestia passed over an elaborate envelope. "Hold on, the waves are good, I want to keep going while they're big."

Picking up the surfboard, she galloped back out to sea.

Twilight's eyes were drawn to a very familiar purple dragon, also on a surfboard.

"â€|has she spent the last thousand years just faffing about having a good time?" she asked incredulously. "Well, apart from hatching a baby dragonâ€|"

Then she noticed the slip of paper hidden underneath the letter. Hey, Twilight, I awoke really early this time!

"Oh. Okay, then," Twilight shrugged. "Fair enough. Right, I'll teleport us back."

\* \* \*

><p>"That's just not fair," Luna said, grinning despite her words. "She swindled me <em>into<em> a job."

"Well, you managed to give it to us," Twilight countered. "So you've got just as much free time nowâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

And set 13. (Note: the Squeezing out the Competition Loop features a particularly late-model version of Equestria's Loops - Applebloom took a LONG time to get enough subspace pocket size to fit industrial plant.)

## 14. Chapter 14

### 14.1

\* \* \*

><p>Reconciliation<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I've heard you're having someâ€¦ problems?"<p>

Applebloom spun in place, trying to ignore a sinking feeling. She recognized that voice. "Discord!?"

"Exactomundo." Discord started playing keep-up with his fang. "One, two, threeâ€¦ anyway, I'm not actually evil any more. For given definitions of 'not evil'â€¦ I'm not sure I've got the hand of it, to be honest."

Discord broke off his ramble for a moment, caught the fang, and used it to write on a scroll. "Wasâ€¦ honest. Ooh, three more times and I get a free pen!"

Applebloom blinked. Discord was a bit overwhelming at the best of timesâ€¦

"Anyway. Enjoy the trip!"

He snapped his claws. Applebloom had just the time to frame the question in her mind â€" \_what\_ trip? â€" before the magic triggered.

\* \* \*

><p>Diamond Tiara began to come awake. "Nnnghâ€¦ can't be time for school yetâ€¦"<p>

As she stirred, the back of her (still very drowsy) mind began to notice things that didn't make sense. For one thing, there was sunlight beating down on her. She could feel the heat on her coat, especially on her left side.

But that didn't make sense, did it? She'd certainly gone to bed at homeâ€¦

And then there was the fact that on her \_right\_ side, the cooler one, there was somethingâ€¦ itchy.

She shifted position, and something gritty dug into her forelegs.

Suddenly, she realized what it was.

"Why is there sand in my bed?" Diamond asked, blinking and getting up. And seeing that, instead of her familiar bedroom, she was on some kind of beach. "Am I dreaming?"

"Nope," a \_horribly\_ familiar voice answered from landwards of her. Diamond spun, wobbling slightly, and saw thatâ€¦ as she'd thoughtâ€¦ it was Applebloom.

"Basically," the other filly continued, "I dunno exactly why or how this happened, but we're stranded together on a desert island." Applebloom rolled her eyes. "Go team."

Diamond Tiara felt like sneering, but that was quickly subsumed by a

rising wave of panic. "Stranded?"

"Yeah, pretty much." Applebloom pointed further inland. "I kinda woke up first, so ah went t' the top of the biggest hill ah could find. There ain't anythin' else ah can see â€" no fields, no other land, nothin'. Just sea, and this here island."

"Why? What happened? Did you do this?" Diamond felt sick. "Iâ€| Iâ€| what about school? I've \_never\_ been tardy!"

"We got bigger things to worry about," Applebloom pointed out firmly. Diamond resented the tone of voice â€" and the fact that it made her feel like an idiot â€" but it let her get a clamp on part of her hysteria. That just made the rest of it come to the fore, though.

"Wâ€| what do we do?" she asked quietly.

For a moment, Diamond could swear that Applebloom was gauging her with the kind of look that she was more used to getting from miss Cheerilee. Then the moment passed, and there was just the cool appraisal of another filly. Imagination painted a sneer beneath.

"Okay." Applebloom put aside her assessment of Diamond, and began pacing. "I know a bit about surviving in th' wilderness â€" you know, the Everfree-"

"\_You\_ have been in the \_Everfree?\_" Diamond blurted, unable to stop herself. "How? Wasn't that unicornâ€| Twilight something, \_petrified\_ last month? And if she's the student of Princess Celestia, howâ€|"

"Huh." Applebloom's short statement carried some surprise. "I didn't know you knew that. About miss Twilight, I mean."

"\_My\_ father keeps me up to date on all the local ponies of importance." Diamond puffed out her breast. "It's something I should know, as a pony who'll be important herself one day."

This time, Applebloom looked very sad.

Diamond shook her head. \_Can't be anything important.\_

"Okay, anyway," Applebloom resumed, "'cause our farm's right up next to the Everfree, ah know how to survive in there for a bit just in case ah get lost, or somethin'. But this ain't exactly the Everfree."

"Oh, well spotted," Diamond rolled \_her\_ eyes this time. "Sure you don't have some Buffalo blood in you?"

Applebloom looked up for a moment. "â€|nah, don't think so. But mah cousin's kinda interested in a buffalo girl, so might be that ah'll have one in the ol' family tree soon enough."

"â€|no, that was aâ€|" Diamond sighed. "Never mind."

"Ah, I gotcha." Applebloom gave a sage nod. "Still, there's a few things ah \_do\_ know. Most important things are normally shelter,

water an' food in that order. Hereâ€¦" she looked up at the sun, burning fiercely with a midday heat which felt \_wrong\_ to the earth pony filly â€" seeing as she felt like it was only eight or so in the morning. "Ah think water's the most important."

"Well, go on then." Diamond waved. "You know this sort of thing, so go find some water."

"Yeah, about thatâ€¦" Applebloom rubbed the back of her neck. "If this were the Everfree, ah'd be able to do it easy. But it ain't. And there's two of us."

"â€¦so?" Those details seemed quite unconnected.

"Ah just plumb don't have th' \_time\_." Applebloom gestured around at the whole island. "In th' Everfree, ah'd know where to look for water, food, shelter, all that. But here? It might be that th' water's halfway across the island. I could \_probably\_ manage myself, but not both of us."

Diamond started to get a sinking feeling.

"So, we've got a problem." Applebloom nodded to her. "Well, you have the main one. Basically, y'all got a choice. Either we each look for our own needs, or we work together. And ah \_do\_ mean together."

Diamond Tiara knew almost exactly what 'together' meant. She'd have to do some of the backbreaking work, as much as thisâ€¦ \_farmer\_, who was much better at it anyway even if she didn't have a cutie mark for it, and even take orders \_from\_ her.

"No way am I working with you!" she said, suddenly coming to a decision. "You don't have a cutie mark for this, so you'll probably just screw it up!"

Part of her thought that annoying the pony who was clearly the expert around here was a very bad idea. But it was a small part, and she didn't really pay any attention.

"Alright, then." Applebloom nodded to her, in a very good imitation â€" good enough that Diamond had to admit she couldn't find any actual flaws in it â€" of court style. "Ah'll go get lookin' for mah water, then." And she turned around and trotted off.

\* \* \*

><p>14.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Dear Princess Celestia. Since I find it very, very hard to choose between my friends â€" and I do not think it fair to invite a pony to a ball without also inviting their friends â€" I will have to decline your invitation and return my gala tickets.'<em>

Twilight finished writing, signed the scroll, and passed it to Spike. "Send it, please."

"Right." Spike incinerated the scroll and tickets.

"Butâ€¦" Pinkie gazed at where the tickets had been, stretching out a folorn hoof. "Party?"

The unicorn shrugged. "Look, I'd rather just not go than have us fight over itâ€¦"

Spike gulped. "Uh ohâ€¦ I don't feel so goodâ€¦ uhâ€¦"

Green flame erupted, and a wrapped package coalesced to land on the table with an almighty \_thump.\_

As an afterthought, a scroll appeared on top of it.

Twilight picked this one up herself. "Spikeâ€¦ there's some throat sweets in the bathroom cabinet, third row on the left. I think you need one."

"Yeah," Spike croaked and headed off.

Twilight scanned the scroll. \_'Dear Twilight Sparkle. Sorry, I wasn't thinking. Here â€" the Ponyville census data should be up to date, so this should be about the right number. Yours, Princess Celestia.'\_

She lowered the scroll. "Pardon?"

Pinkie ripped the paper off the package. "Hey, it's hundreds of gala tickets!"

Rarity nodded. "That must be what she meant by census data. Oh, this will be marvellous!" She took two tickets and headed off to her shop. "I will have \_so much \_business!"

Twilight resolved to try a slightly different way of phrasing things in the future.

Though this would probably be a lot more enjoyable, actually, if the snobbish attitudes of Canterlot high society were simply buried under the entire population of Ponyvilleâ€¦

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, we'll certainly give you a try-out," Spitfire said. "I've never seen a pony that can do what you can in the air."<p>

"Yay!" Dinky cheered, as the Ponyville mailmare accepted an application form that Soarin' passed her. "Go mum!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight!" Applejack said, hurrying up to the unicorn. "You gotta teleport me home!"<p>

"Why?" Twilight blinked. "I thought you were doing a roaring trade?"

"Ah ran out," Applejack said bluntly. "Now get me to somewhere ah can resupply, afore Carrot Top overtakes me!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Sho, anyway, enough aboutâ€| aboutâ€| me!" Berry said, taking another drink of the excellent vintage. "Wha' about you?"<p>

Blueblood adjusted his tie nervously, looking for an escape route. There were other ponyville mares eying him from all directions, waiting for their chance.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, the next thing you do is you put your hooves up like this!" Pinkie said, demonstrating.<p>

Princesses Celestia and Luna tried to copy her, wobbling slightly.

"Close enough!" Pinkie grinned. "Almost there, just three or four more steps to go, and then we try with the music!"

"What is this called?" Luna asked, steadying herself with wingbeats.

"Well, Angel Bunny and I invented it, so I call it the hare hare dance!"

Dozens of nobles looked on, most of them undergoing partial brain reboots.

\* \* \*

><p>"Wait," Sparkler said, casting a spell over herself and Fluttershy. "That should help. It's what I always use at Winter Wrap-Up when the animals are cranky."<p>

"Oh." Fluttershy shuffled her hooves. "What does it do?"

"Basically, it just makes animals calmer. I know it's what your talent is supposed to do already," Sparkler shrugged, "But I don't have it, and any little helps."

\* \* \*

><p>Dash helped Cheerilee corral some of the colts and fillies who had started to wander off. "Hey!"<p>

"Thank you, Dash," Cheerilee said, sighing. "They're hard enough to handle at the best of times."

"You're telling me!" Dash gasped, having just intercepted the Crusaders about to do what would have started as an attempt to get a high society cutie mark and ended as an international incident. "I'm the fastest pony in Equestria and I can't keep up! Hey, Featherweight, put down that camera!"

\* \* \*

><p>Spike cracked his knuckles, and sat on the piano's stool. "Right. What did you want me to play?"<p>

Rarity frowned. "Let's seeâ€¦ what about the Moonlight Sonata?"

"Right." Spike ran over the music in his head. "Yeah, I know that one. You go get Cadance, I'll grab Shining Armor."

Neither of them were quite sure why they'd decided to play matchmaker, especially with ponies who'd clearly already fallen for one another. Perhaps it was just an excuse to be out of the â€"riotous â€" main room, which had been fairly annexed by the Ponyville contingent.

Or maybe it was because Rarity wanted an in with the couple to design their wedding outfits, and Spike wanted an excuse to play romantic music in the same room as Rarity.

Whatever the reason, they were both quite happy with the arrangement.

\* \* \*

><p>"That was the most fun I've had in a thousand years," Celestia said quite seriously, as caretakers started to clear away the detritus of the evening. "Can I invite them all again next year?"<p>

"Well, I doubt any of them will complain," Twilight mused. "But you might have a mass boycott by the Canterlot nobility."

Celestia shrugged. "Bunch of stuck-ups anywayâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>14.1 b<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Reconciliation, part two<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Applebloom trotted briskly into the island's forest, looking around for anything that might be useful.<p>

\_And ah \_had\_ to unpack everythin' that might be useful into th' lab againâ€¦\_ About all that was left in her subspace pocket â€" such as it was, and what there was of it â€" was a ream or so of paper and some pencils, as well as a mobile phone. Which would have been rather more useful if Equestria had cellular phone towers or even satellites.

She stopped, as something caught her eye. A coconut lying on the ground. Looking up, she saw the tree it had come from.

A quick, expertly measured buck, and she had a fresh coconut. A minute or so with a convenient stone, and she'd broken into it and drunk some of the 'milk' â€" which was a relief, given the climate.



She also now had a gourd to carry water, as and when she found it. Pity she didn't even have any \_saddlebags\_.

"Ah guess that's another thing t' work onâ€|" Pushing herself back up, she took the husk of the coconut in her teeth and began carrying it awkwardly with her towards the hill.

Sure, she could store it in her subspace pocket, but that would get blatantly obvious to Diamond. Andâ€| it didn't seem fair to her, either, to make a big thing about sharing the effort and then use advantages like that.

\* \* \*

><p>The first stream she found was ten minutes into the forest, but it was a pitiful and muddy thing. Taking the stop as an opportunity to finish off the coconut milk, Applebloom then crouched down where a tree shaded the water somewhat and decided to test something.<p>

One of the first things Zecora had taught her was what almost amounted to an earth magic 'spell'. It simply told the user how pure water was.

The spell was almost unbelievably primitive in nature, and took quite a lot of effort to do, but it was useful for making sure that the water you were about to use for a potion wasn't contaminated â€" or, for that matter, to test if the water you were about to \_drink\_ was potable.

As she'd expected, the test came back negative. But it was good to know that she could still pull it off.

"â€|kayâ€| what do ah know about geographyâ€|" Applebloom studied the island carefully. "Right. Ah reckon that, if it rained, there'd be waterâ€| onâ€| oh, ah'm an idiot."

Picking up the coconut again, she headed for the beach. If there was a good stream, it would of course flow into the seaâ€| and she could follow it back up, to find where it was easily accessible.

\* \* \*

><p>"Stupid flies, stupid sand, stupid sun, stupid islandâ€|" Diamond Tiara muttered continuously as she trudged through the undergrowth.<p>

Rivers justâ€| happened, didn't they? No, that didn't make sense. She tried to remember what they'd been taught about the founding of Ponyville â€" why it had been set up near (though not on) a riverbank, and why the river had been dammed a decade or so later.

"â€|okay, I need to find a canyon. Stupid trees, stupidâ€|"

Diamond tripped over a rock, and stumbled. There was a moment of sharp pain, but when she looked it seemed like she hadn't actually cut herself. It still felt horrible. And she was getting sweaty in this horrible heat, and she was thirsty, and there were \_still\_ all those insects andâ€|

She wanted to go home.

The filly forced herself back upright. There was no way she was letting Applebloom beat her at something!

\* \* \*

><p>"Finally." Applebloom picked up the coconut shell, and filled it from the clear water of the spring she'd just found. That would do for a while, but it would probably be best to pick up another coconut or two " and then get to making some kind of set of saddle-bags to let her go further with a water supply.<p>

Hmmm perhaps more coconuts, strung on twine? Ah don't know how to make twine, o' course, but ah, I'll see if there's some vines.\_

Water thus taken care of, the next thing on the list was food. That was easy enough for now " more coconuts, since there were several palm trees along the beach alone. Applebloom had also seen a few grasses and quite a lot of ferns " hardly gourmet, but perfectly edible.

Shelter. That was the third thing which was important. It could get very cold at night, especially out in the open " sand, in particular, lost heat within minutes. (One Loop, she and Applejack had moved to Appleloosa " the stargazing trips they'd taken were beautiful, but she'd never before known you could be shivering in the desert!)

How can ah do this " palm fronds, ah guess, for a kickoff. Ah'd try knockin' down a tree, but that might have to wait until ah have a saw or somethin' to turn it into planks.\_

That led to her thinking about an artesian well, because the spring wasn't exactly strong. Just a trickle, really, into a thankfully large pool.

\* \* \*

><p>As the sun set, Applebloom stood back and looked at her work. She'd only had a few hours to really work on it, but she felt fairly proud of what she'd created.<p>

It was, fundamentally, a lean-to. Built around the base of one of the largest trees she'd found, dozens of medium-sized branches had been piled on to a frame supported by a couple of forked ones. Using the hairy husks of the coconut to rope bits of it together with fragile ties had brought her some time to work with it, and by the time the ties had parted the accumulated weight was enough to hold the frame fairly stable.

Finally, she'd piled sand around the outer edge of the shelter, and more of it to make a simple firepit.

Now, where's those dry bush bits ah wanted to use with a fire drill " \_

\* \* \*

><p>About half a mile away next to the stream she'd found late in the day, cold, hungry and scared, Diamond Tiara cried herself to sleep.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>14.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay," Twilight said. "This should be fun."<p>

The other pony in the room nodded. "I've got my costume."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight took a stance, all four hooves on the floor.  
"Ready?"<p>

"Laughter!" Pinkie said, following the instructions of the strangely knowledgeable purple pony.

"Honesty." Applejack was a little less eager, but willing to give this Twilight the benefit of the doubt that she knew what she was doing.

"Generosity!"

"Loyalty!"

"Kindnessâ€|"

"Magic!" Twilight finished, and flared her horn.

Nightmare Moon watched, confused and worried, as six beams of light coalescedâ€|

And out of them came a pink-purple-yellow alicorn decked out in a fuku, who kicked her in the jaw. "In the name of Harmony, you shall not trouble Equestria any more, blaggard!"

Twilight held in a snigger.

\* \* \*

><p>"You're sure you don't know what happened?" Celestia asked.<p>

"No," Cadence replied, shrugging. "Poor Shiny was very worried when I collapsed, but it must have just been a faint or something."

"Perhapsâ€|" Celestia left, and Cadence could imagine the confused thoughts running through her head.

Shining entered the room. "I don't feel comfortable lying to Celestia about something like this."

"Oh, Shiny!" Cadence fluttered her eyelashes. "No harm done, right?"

The stallion frowned, then shrugged. "I suppose."

In all honesty, he didn't know precisely what had happened â€" or \_why\_ his girlfriend had suddenly got changed into a short dress and teleported out of the room.

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|I suppose the Elements did look a <em>bit<em> like my old foalsitter," Twilight allowed. "But it could just be that they take the form of someone familiar to me? I mean, she is who I associate with comfort and with harmony â€" it's her talent, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is. It isâ€|" Celestia finally shrugged. "I suppose they did work â€" my little sister is back, and that's what matters here."

\* \* \*

><p>Discord appeared in Celestia's study. "Hey, Celly! Long time no see. Oh, where are the Elements?"<p>

"That is just the problem!" Celestia shouted, startling Discord. "I have \_no\_ idea. For some reason, whenever Twilight and her friends doâ€| something, they summon a duplicate copy of my niece who kicks the problem until it is not a problem any more."

"They do, huh?" Discord asked. (Hey, he wasn't going to lose this opportunity to press Celestia for information. Especially when she apparently hadn't noticed it was him.)

"Yes! Nightmare Moon comes back â€" kicked in the face. Dragon causes problems in Ponyville â€" kicked in the chest. Rampaging hydra? Kicked in all the faces. And then there was the Ursa Minor that got kicked in the fundament." Celestia sighed. "I don't know what is going on."

Then she blinked. "Wait. Discord?"

"Thank you, come again!" Discord said, jumping out the window.

\* \* \*

><p>"A-ha-ha!" Discord said, holding up a grey Cadence. "I managed to corrupt the pony who was using the Elements of Harmony, and now there's nothing you pathetic ponies can do to stop me!"<p>

Twilight rolled her eyes. "There's two problems with that. First, that's my mild mannered foalsitter, not the Elements summon. And my foalsitter's talent is, wellâ€| harmony. As in, getting on well with everyone. Reverse that, andâ€|"

The grey Cadence kicked Discord in the teeth.

"Second, we can still perform the summoning."

She and her five friends rattled off the names of their Elements, and the by now familiar Cadence-in-a-Fuku appeared in front of them. The other Cadence promptly collapsed.

"Erâ€|" Discord mumbled around the hand massaging his injured jaw.  
"This isn't going to go well for me, is it?"

"Nope!" Twilight replied cheerfully.

Admittedly, making a magical double of Cadence with the mirror pool could have gone very wrong, but it did let her be in two places at once as and when they needed her to be.

And, as fuku-Cadence kicked Discord in both knees and followed up with a roundhouse kick, Twilight could just about spot Celestia on a balcony in the distance. And judging by her movements, probably tearing up her latest theory and stamping on the bits of paper.

\* \* \*

><p>14.1 c<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Reconciliation, part three<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Applebloom whistled to herself as she finished making a hole in a piece of good stone. With the branch she'd prepared for it, it would be a passable hammerâ€|<p>

"Applebloom," she heard a familiar voice croak.

"What is it?" she asked, turning around. "Ouch. You're a sight."

Diamond Tiara's mane was unkempt and ragged at the ends, where it hadn't held up to the night on hard ground well. There were runnels of salt down her muzzle where she'd clearly been crying. Her coat seemed matted with sweat, her colour was quite unhealthy, and she was actually trembling slightly just standing there.

"Yeah," Diamond said, not even reacting to Applebloom's comment much. "Iâ€| Iâ€|" She seemed to be struggling with something. "â€|help? Please?"

Applebloom blinked, surprised. Then chastised herself for that response. She ain't a monster, and ah should remember that. "Sure. I guess this means we're working together now?"

"Yeah." Diamond Tiara nodded jerkily. "I don't know anything about this. I justâ€| I want to go home."

Applebloom nodded. "Okay. Come with me, ah'll show y' how to find stuff. You'll have to pick your own up, but ah'll tell y' what to do."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right," Applebloom said, about an hour later, to a much recovered Diamond.<p>

By kicking up water from the pool she'd found yesterday, she'd

managed to give Diamond a cold shower (since having her bathe in the pool might have left it too dirty for drinking) and that followed by drying in the sun had had a considerable effect on the earth pony filly.

"Now, one of th' most useful things is these here palm trees. Y'll have had coconut at those fancy dinners o' yours?"

"Yes, I have." Diamond looked up at the tree. "But where's the coconut? Isn't it supposed to be white?"

"Only on th' inside," Applebloom replied. "And it ain't shaved, either. But the real important stuff is actually th' milk. Okay, watch me first." Backing up carefully to the tree, she kicked out at it and knocked one coconut loose. This one she let fall, and it bounced to the floor without breaking (as it was supposed to).

She scooped it up. "Okay. Think y' can do that?"

"â€|what, kick a tree? Butâ€|" Diamond seemed lost. "â€|don't you have to be very strong to do that?"

"T' do it for a living, yeah." Applebloom nodded readily. "Mah sister and brother are two o' the strongest ponies in Ponyville for that reason. But any earth pony â€" hay, any pony at all â€" can buck once or twice. Come on, ah'll spot y'all."

Seeing Diamond's reluctance, she sweetened the deal. "Since you're new, and all, you get this one as well if you knock one down. It's only fair â€" you ain't trained for this."

The shock on Diamond's face was followed by a flash of genuine gratitude, before it was replaced in turn by suspicion. "Is there something wrong with that one?"

"What? No!" Applebloom shook her head vigorously. "Hay, if you're worried about that ah'll let y' have one of the ones in th' stores back at th' shelter instead."

"No, Iâ€|" Diamond struggled again. "â€|sorry. Iâ€| Father made sure I was familiar with business practices, andâ€| you just don't get gifts, there."

Applebloom nodded. "Ah get what y' mean. Guess they just ain't used to bein' honest."

"Suppose." For a moment, there was an actual smile. But then Diamond seemed to realize it was there, and crush it down again.

It was a start, anyway.

"Right, so first ah'll have y' do it slowly, so y' know what you're supposed to do." Applebloom reached out and supported Diamond's midriff.

"Hey! Get off!"

"If y' do it slowly, you'll just fall over unless ah spot you." Applebloom replied, using the same tone she remembered Applejack teaching her with. It seemed to help, as Diamond just tried kicking

out instead.

"Right, that's actually pretty good." Applebloom pushed Diamond's knees down slightly and raised the angle of her hooves. "That lets you kick the hardest. Martial arts, actuallyâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>"Not again!" Diamond said, scowling. Despite six or seven blows to the palm tree, it remained resolutely unbuckled.<p>

"Hmmmâ€¦" Applebloom said, frowning herself. "Your technique is fine now. Ah know what it must be â€¦" you're just not hitting hard enough."

"This is as hard as I can \_do!\_" Diamond whined.

"No, it ain't," Applebloom denied. "It's just as hard as y'all think y' can do. Now, ah want you to know how ah used to help mahself learn. Ah pictured th' tree as the thing ah felt th' most angry about, and ah bucked it as hard as ah possibly could, and that made me kick it harder. And th' thing is, it actually made me feel better about what ah was angry about. What is it that makes y'all angry?"

Seeing Diamond blush slightly, and deciding to not ask for now, Applebloom shook her head. "Never mind. Just imagine that palm tree is the thing that makes you angry. And you're gonna buck it so hard you'll send it flyin!"

"â€¦aaaaAAAARGH!" Diamond let out a scream of rage, and kicked the palm tree with all her might. The force of the blow sent her mane flying in all directions, finishing the work of unravelling her original delicate hairdo, and drove her forwards as the tree bounced back. She tumbled forward in a complete somersault, landed sprawled on her back, and panted with the effort.

Applebloom whistled, walked out of her sight-line for a moment, and then came back with \_four\_ coconuts.

"Well, if you ain't a natural at this!" she said, grinning. "Ah said ah'd give y'all one for the one y' knocked down, and so here y' go. You got two, so here's two more."

Diamond Tiara blinked. "Iâ€¦ did two?"

"You sure did. Nice work, pardner!"

Diamond matched the grin. "Maybe that's why you don't have a cutie mark for it, then, if a posh filly's better at it!"

She froze, mortified. That had justâ€¦ slipped out.

But Applebloom only laughed. "Good one. Ah admit, y'all have a pointâ€¦ anyway, here's the important bit. 'cause of that bright sun, y'all are sweatin' a lot. That's kinda salty, so y' need t' get the salt back. Now, the milk in a coconut ain't actually milk, but it's got a lot of those saltsâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>"Good," Applebloom said, as Diamond dragged another branch into the area around the (now expanded) shelter. "That should do us for firewood for th' evening."<p>

Taking two of the sharpest-tipped branches, she speared some coconut meat on each one and passed one to Diamond. "Here y' go. Don't worry, ah'll handle dinner. Y'all have earned it."

The pink filly accepted the speared coconut, and felt tears prickle in her eyes. "â€|\_thank\_ you. I'm soâ€|"

"Nah, like ah say, y' earned it," Applebloom said, trotting off. "Now, where did ah see that Taroâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>14.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Shining Armor woke up.<p>

Blinking, he realized just where he was. It wasâ€| his room, back at Mom and Dad's house. But it lookedâ€| old.

Like it used to when he wasâ€| \_oh.\_

\_Twily told me about these,\_ Shining thought to himself as he got up. A quick check revealed that he did indeed have his cutie mark â€" and there were cards on the bookshelf congratulating that fact. It must be the morning after his cute-ceneara.

\_I think that makes Twily aboutâ€| four? Three? Something like that.\_

That meant he hadn't met Cadence yet. Pity, really.

\_Actually\_, it meant Cadence was still a pegasus. Which really sucked, because that meant he couldn't meet her again until after she'd ascended â€" throwing off those delicate circumstances would be a \_bad\_ idea.

\_Right, what was I supposed to be doingâ€|\_ he dug through his old memories. \_Right. School.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Well done, Shining!" the teacher said, reading over the essay. "Though I'm surprised you gave me five pages â€" I only set half a page."<p>

"â€|oh, sorry," Shining rubbed the back of his neck apologetically. "I guessâ€| yeah, I was just really interested."

Actually, he was having trouble adjusting to being a colt again. Twilight might think she was the most academically inclined of the family, and that was for the most part trueâ€| but writing? Shining wrestled Guard paperwork every loop. Compared to that, essays were nothing.



\* \* \*

><p>Twilight grinned, shaking her head. "Shiningâ€¦ I can't believe you accidentally used a spellform that hasn't been invented yet."<p>

"Look, I said I hadn't had a loop like this before!" The colt pointed at his little sister, now about seven. "And you're one to talk! Literally. You've been this articulate since we looped in, and that was ridiculous for \_four\_."

"I'm a prodigy, Shiny." Twilight shrugged. "Even more now, I supposeâ€¦ I think Celestia's already noticed me. Hey, when's the graduation party for your school?"

"Uhhâ€¦ three weeks. I'm probably going to be top of the class," Shining said, grinning uneasily.

"I'd be disappointed if you weren't, it's only junior high," Twilight rejoined. "Anyway, here's an early present for you. It arrived yesterday."

She plucked a letter out of her schoolwork and passed it over. Shining took it, opened it, and then just stared.

He could just about hear Twilight saying something through the rushing sensation that made him feel weak-kneed with relief, but he didn't care what it was. The letter was the only important thing, right then.

\_Next year, love. Next year.\_

\_-Cadence.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Right, you 'orrible lot!" Drill Sergeant Emery Paper shouted. "I don't want any of you wannabe Private Pansies who can't handle the pace! Thirty times around the ground at a gallop, and that's <em>on<em> the ground for you pegasi! Move!"

Shining fell into a comfortable rhythm fairly quickly. He'd kept up his own personal regimen since he'd first turned up this Loop, out of sheer habit, and it had paid dividends â€" he was \_very\_ fit. As might be expected for a young stallion who'd trained daily since he was ten.

Actually, he finished first. Well ahead of all the other unicorns, and beating out an earth pony called Steel Resolve by about two seconds.

"Well, wellâ€¦" Emery came over and looked him up and down. Taking in, in particular, the fact that Shining quickly recovered from the exertion. "Looks like you ain't just a smart-arse, cadet Armor. Does your ladyfriend like that stamina of yours?"

Shining nodded. "Yes, sir! Makes it easier for me to keep up when she goes flying, sir!"

Emery blinked, thrown off slightly. But he recovered quickly enough that only Shining's veteran eye noticed. "Glad to hear it! Now, the rest of you get the message?"

One pegasus staggered as he reached the finish, nearly collapsing from the sustained exertion of the sprint.

Emery shook his head theatrically. "Clearly not! Cadet Armor's lady friend doesn't seem to have trouble managing something you lot clearly can't keep up with!"

Shining felt dozens of death glares on him. Well, looked like he was the designated target for \_this\_ round of Basicâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>"What's that you're working on, lieutenant?"<p>

Shining turned, seeing that the speaker was a major, and saluted. "Sir!"

"At ease." Major Jump â€" High Jump, son of High Class â€" looked over the spell formulae scattered across Shining's table. "This looks very complex, lieutenant. I can't quite follow it myself. What's the intent?"

"Right. This here is the intent formulation â€" basically, it defines the target of the warding. And this one defines the sink end of the equation." Shining tapped the paper, pointing out buffers and flow directors and overflow systems. "More or less, it allows for a protective spell to be cast over a principal that deflects the effects of hostile magic spells â€" there's the intent filter, see â€" into an inanimate sink which takes the damage."

The younger unicorn shrugged. "It's still not very good, since it can't take more damage than the sink can absorb before failing and it doesn't last more than an hour or so, and it takes a prepared sinkâ€|"

"This isn't good?" Major Jump shouted, banging the table and making Shining jump. "Lieutenant, if this spell is overloaded then the pony it protects would have been severely wounded or outright killed anyway by the attack it deflects! What's the problem?"

"Wellâ€|" Shining trailed off, embarrassed. "The spell formula takes up eight pages of dense script. The only ponies I know of who can actually \_cast\_ the damned thing are my sister and I."

"Sister?" Jump frowned. "Oh, I know the one. Twilight Sparkle, right? That filly who's revolutionizing the academy. Yes, if it takes that kind of ability to pull off I can see why it would be a problem. You're trying to simplify it down, then?"

"Yes, sir." Shining nodded smartly.

"Good stallion. Keep at it. And I'll expect to see you and your girlfriend at the party my wife's setting up next week, as well â€" I'll want an update." Jump tapped his forehead and trotted off.

\* \* \*

><p>"I forgot how much effort this whole thing was," Shining said, shaking his head. He'd just received the information that he was to be promoted to captain " and even with all his foreknowledge, he'd only shaved about a year off the total time.<p>

Cadence shrugged. She'd avoided ascending this time, claiming that it would be 'interesting' to stay as a pegasus for once. "Well, you were very good the first time around, dear."

"Suppose. Oh, Twilight reminded me that Nightmare Moon's return is scheduled for next week. What do you say we go and watch?"

"Sounds good to me," Cadence said. "What's she planning this time?"

"Actually, she wanted my help. I wonder why" Shining trailed off.

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight," Cadence said, "This is just cruel." She was giggling, though " the sight before them was just too funny.<p>

Twilight shrugged. "I'm thinking of making an artefact that casts this spell when triggered, actually. You up for that, Shining?"

Shining nodded. "Why not."

In front of them, Nightmare Moon tried desperately to retain either dignity or threat level. It was difficult, because she was trapped inside a giant pink shield that rolled around like a hamster ball.

\* \* \*

><p>14.1d<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Reconciliation, part four<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Diamond," Applebloom said sharply, "Ah think it'd be best if you saw this."<p>

Diamond Tiara hurried over. The week or so they'd spent on the island had been wearying for her, but she'd gained no lack of respect for Applebloom's practical skills. Anything which worried her was probably cause for alarm.

"What is it?"

"Well, ah don't have a weather forecastin' cutie mark," Applebloom said, deadpan, and Diamond held back a giggle, "but that don't look good." The engineer and Looper nodded to the east, where clouds were gathering on the horizon.

"So? It's just a storm, right?" Diamond asked.

"Yeah, it's a storm," Applebloom agreed readily. "And no, it ain't \_just\_ a storm. They ain't scheduled out here, there ain't a team of pegasi watchin' it to make sure it's safe, and we ain't got much of a shelter against that kinda winds."

"â€|oh. Sorry," Diamond said. "I justâ€| yeah, you know."

"No sweat." Applebloom thought for a moment. "Ah think it might be a good idea for us to look for a cave, or somethin'. Either that or a big ol' tree which is good and sturdy."

"Right." The pink filly nodded. "I'll look on the north side, you take the south."

"Fine by me." Applebloom paused. "You know how to check if a tree's after bein' sturdy?"

"Noâ€|" Diamond said, drawing the word out. "But I \_do\_ recognize what a cave looks like, and what a tree looks like. And â€" gosh! â€" I can even recognize the difference between a big tree and a small one. So I'll find the ones for you to check."

This time, it was Applebloom who chuckled. "Alright, you got me."

\* \* \*

><p>"Hmmmâ€|" Applebloom said, looking the large fallen Monkeypod tree. It still had earth on the exposed roots and hadn't rotted away at all, so presumably it hadn't fallen too long ago. "Yeah, this might actually be better than an intact one."<p>

"Good." Diamond's voice had nothing but relief. "I thought it might be, but I didn't know if that was a good idea, andâ€|"

"Well, you're right." Applebloom started looking around. "If we use some big logs, or maybe fell another tree so the canopy is a kinda umbrellaâ€|" she paused. "Tell you what. Can you go get some more coconuts, and make sure all the ones we got which we use for water are full, and bring 'em up here? Except two. Leave them by th' firepit, because ah think it might be a good idea fer us to get ourselves around a hot meal before the storm comes."

"That sounds like a good idea." Diamond waited for a moment, then set off.

"Well, ah knew she \_could\_ rise to it, but ah'm still surprised she \_did\_, " Applebloom said to herself. "And ah shouldn't be."

Applebloom had been careful to keep in mind what her unexpected companion could and could not do so far, and never set her a challenge she couldn't do. Granted, a couple of times at least she'd \_thought\_ she couldn't do something, but after enough prodding she gave it a try â€" and promptly proved herself wrong.

Watching her, the farmpony-in-training had been struck by a realization.

Diamond Tiara, loud-mouthed spoiled bully that she was, wasn't

actually very self confident. Oh, she \_seemed\_ it, and probably even \_felt\_ like it, but her obvious surprise at being able to do the tasks Applebloom set her told its own story.

And she'd been \_so\_ proud of anything she and 'bloom had built together, it was almost heartbreaking.

\_Guess that comes of having everything done for youâ€¦ you start to think you can't do it yourselfâ€¦\_

Applebloom had been analyzing the trees while she thought. Selecting a breadfruit tree, she gave it an almighty buck â€" which sent it crashing down, the bulk of the foliage on top of the fallen trunk but with a substantial amount over the area she'd selected to be their 'cave'. A second, this one some kind of ash, finished the job.

"It ain't perfect, but it'll do," she said with satisfaction. "Now, ah'd better get some vine, too, for ropes to tie the branches togetherâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>Diamond Tiara huddled next to a pony that, only a little more than a week ago, she wouldn't have been seen dead with.<p>

\_That might still be an option\_, she thought. \_No. Shut up.\_

"Hey, Applebloom?" she asked, shakily. "You heard how the wind's always the best part, right?"

Applebloom chuckled. "Yep. And ah heard when you said the waitin' was the best part, and ah bet in ten minutes you'll say the rain's the best part."

"Oh, no, you worked out my cunning plan." Diamond paused. "How did you manage to make the soup? What did you cook it in?"

Both of them knew what Diamond was doing â€" trying to distract them from the storm. But it was nice to pretend they didn't.

"Okay, this is actually kinda neat," Applebloom said. "You know how you heat up water and then it boils?"

"I have noticed. Once or twice." Diamond Tiara's sarcasm was almost a physical object, no matter how brittle her voice was.

"Good. Well, don't know if you know \_this\_ bit, but things have to heat up to burn too. It ain't enough for them to be held in a fire. So, paper burns a lot easier than wood does."

There was an almighty \_crash\_ from outside, and both fillies jumped.

"Really makes one appreciate pegasi," Diamond said shakily.

"Yep," Applebloom agreed. "Anyway, as ah was sayin', ah cooked it in a coconut. The coconut had to get so hot to catch fire that it couldn't do that when there was water right next to it â€" the water would get to boilin' long before the coconut would get to burnin'."

"Wow." Diamond blinked. "That is neat. Why doesn't Cheerilee ever teach us about that?"

"'cuz if she gave us access to fire, then me and Sweetie and Scoots would probably burn the Everfree down," Applebloom deadpanned.

Mention of the other two Crusaders wounded the conversation severely, but it wasn't more than another thirty seconds before Diamond Tiara got it going again with another question. "What about the hair?"

"The coconut hair?" Applebloom grinned uneasily. "Well, see, ah kinda ruined the first batch, 'cuz ah forgot to take the husk offâ€|"

Despite â€" or perhaps because of â€" the tenseness of the situation, Diamond Tiara giggled. That turned into a shriek when a lightning bolt struck very near by.

"Y' know, you probably saved mah life," Applebloom said, into the relative stillness. "Ah was all for hidin' under a tree, and ah think they're supposed to either fall over or explode if they get hit. But this tree ain't the tallest around, not any more, so it ain't gonna get struck."

"Hehâ€| does this mean I owe you less?" Diamond asked, still shivering. She felt Applebloom move closer, until they were touching.

"There ain't any question of who owes who, Diamond," Applebloom said. "We work together, and we stay alive."

\* \* \*

><p>The storm blew itself past them overnight. Exhausted, wet and emotionally drained, the two fillies fell asleep once the wind dropped and woke nearly at midday.<p>

The island â€" the one they'd started to think of as 'their' island â€" was an incredible mess. Trees were bereft of limbs, small floods had cut muddy incisions into the surface soil, and their beach-shelter had been carried away by the winds. The whole beach was covered with driftwood.

"So much for a week o' work," Applebloom sighed. "Ah well. At least we got more wood to work with-"

There was a sudden explosion of light, nearly overhead.

"What's that?" Diamond Tiara asked, squinting into the sky.

Applebloom laughed, beating her hooves on the floor and then started dancing â€" not very well, of course. "Woo-hoo!"

"What is it!?" the other filly insisted.

"That's a sonic rainboom!" Applebloom said, grinning fiercely.

"There's only one pony who can do one o' those!"

A purple flash appeared a few hundred yards down the beach.

"Applebloom? Diamond Tiara? Wonderful!" Twilight shouted, galloping over. "Oh, I'm so sorry it took so long for us to find you!"

"Well, ah could wish y'all had turned up sooner," Applebloom said, still grinning with the euphoria of being finally rescued. "But it weren't all that bad, 'cept for the first day and the last."

"Yes, we saw the storm." Twilight winced. "Must have been terrible."

"Diamond here found us a place to ride it out," Applebloom said, nodding towards her. Said pink filly started at being addressed, looking a bit overwhelmed.

Rainbow Dash landed next to Twilight. "Okay, I told the crew where we are. They should turn up by evening."

"Crew?" Applebloom asked.

"Yeah." Twilight nodded. "I forgot to mention â€" Filthy Rich hired a zeppelin to help with the search. Dash and I have been using it to quarter the entire ocean, once Discord finally told us he put you on a desert island."

"Pity you didn't manage to get him to say which oneâ€"|" the young Apple groused.

Diamond Tiara was nearly speechless. "Father hired a \_Zeppelin?\_"

"Yep!" Dash nodded. "He really \_is\_ \_filthy rich, isn't he? Hay, the Wonderbolts volunteered to help, too. It was just luck that I was on the south-flank sweep today."

Twilight eyed the two fillies, but said nothing about their unusual lack of friction. "Okay, want to show us around? We've got about four or five hours until \_Jack of all trades\_ is within easy teleport range â€" I was pushing it a bit with that oneâ€"|"

Applebloom knew that was a flat lie, given that this was the Looping Twilight (as always), but didn't press it. "Okay. Hey, Diamond, you found where we stayed last night, you show 'em."

"Oâ€"okay." Diamond looked around for a moment, getting her bearings. "Right. This way."

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Diamond, you got a moment?" Applebloom asked.<p>

The filly looked up. It was their third day back in Ponyville, and the first day back at school (the first had been consumed with reunions and the second with a combination of the press and medical checkups).

"Uhâ€|" for a moment, Diamond's eyes flicked over to Silver Spoon, next to her.

Applebloom held her breath.

"Yeah." Diamond got up. "Hang on a minute, Silver."

"Sure." Silver Spoon nodded.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay. There's something ah didn't tell you," Applebloom said, once they were in a fairly out of the way corner. "Thisâ€| is kinda hard to explain. Twilight does it better. Basically, ah'm one of a load of ponies in a time loop. Every few years, we go back to the day before that Summer Sun celebration where Nightmare Moon turned up. Not all of us always turn up, and ah'm one of them â€" Twilight's the one who always does thisâ€|"<p>

"Soâ€| we've been through this before?" Diamond asked, eyes widening.

Before she could decide what to feel, Applebloom waved her hooves. "No! The whole desert island thing, that ain't never happened before. And ah'm going t' try to make sure it ain't never going to happen again."

"â€|do you mean it happens all the time, orâ€|?"

"No, that's just me bein' a farmgirl." Applebloom scratched the back of her head. "Anyway, I justâ€| wanted to let you know. It don't feel right, keepin' secrets from y'all after that."

"â€|I kind of have one too, then." Diamond swallowed. "When you told me to imagine the tree was the thing I was the most annoyed with? It was, er, you and the other bl- the other crusaders."

Applebloom laughed. "That's all? Ah kinda guessed it might be!" The laughter died down. "But thanks for tellin' me."

"That's okay." Diamond smiled. "And thank you for telling me. Erâ€| am I ââ€| a bitch, in the other loops?"

"Kinda, yeah." Applebloom nodded. "Ah ain't gonna lie. But it actually ain't all that surprisin', cause you're ten and ah'mâ€| lots." She then looked around and whispered to the other filly. "It ain't the first time you've saved mah life, either. It seems like whenever you're in one o' these loops and it goes strange, you're actually kinda awesome."

Then the Apple gave a shrug. "Still a bitchâ€| but an awesome bitch."

Diamond broke out laughing herself. After she'd managed to push it back to giggles, she said "well, if that's the best I can getâ€|"

Applebloom grinned. "Hay, I dunno. There was this one time you were a magical filly warriorâ€|"



"Do you have pictures?" Diamond asked. Then frowned. "Butâ€| next time, Iâ€| oh, I wish I knew how to make it so I didn't act so nastily to you."

Suddenly she gasped. "Wait, I know! It might work, anyway."

"What's that?" Applebloom asked.

"You knowâ€| \_loads \_of stuff from these loops, right? Make a business deal with my father, some time shortly after the Summer Sun celebration. It's about two weeks after Nightmare Moon's return that Father started walking me through our business partners and why they are what they are, soâ€|" Diamond shrugged. "Best I can do, I think."

"â€|that might just be the best gift y' could have given me, if it works," Applebloom said. "Ah don't want to have you as an enemy, in any life. Friends are much nicer."

"Yeah," Diamond replied, nodding. "They are. Sorry I didn't know that before."

\* \* \*

><p>14.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Goodness," Princess Rarity said, looking around. "So <em>this<em> is what the Discordian era looked like. I have to say, he didn't have much of a sense of style back thenâ€|"

Princess Twilight Sparkle nodded. "Maybe it took him over a thousand years in a statue to think of good jokes?"

"Possibly. Right, what happens now?"

Twilight gestured to the other four elements. "Pick two, we have to use three each to do the sealing."

"Do we \_have\_ to? I mean, can't we just talk it out?"

"Nope," Twilight shook her head. "Fluttershy tried. It justâ€| didn't work. He's not got the perspective being defeated can give you."

"Right." Rarity looked the elements over. "I pickâ€| Kindness and Laughter."

"Okay." Twilight paused. "Why?"

"Because that way they are colour coordinated." Rarity looked offended that Twilight even had to ask. "Alright, how do I put these on?"

"Wings. Sorry, I never worked out a better way." Twilight levitated the Loyalty and Honesty necklaces over her own wings, fastening them at the base.

Visibly cringing, Rarity followed suit. "This looks dreadful."

"It's Discord, he won't mind." Twilight shrugged.

"Yes, but I \_do\_â€|"

\* \* \*

><p>"Look, Rarity," Twilight said warily. "I'm just giving you a warning. Dash, Fluttershy and Applejack all overdid something massively when it was their turn with me in this loop variant, soâ€|"<p>

"Oh, you worry too much," Rarity replied. "Anyway, I have some political manoeuvring to get done. Remember? We agreed you got the natural world and I got the work of civilization."

"Trueâ€|" Twilight nodded. "But I'm stillâ€| oh, maybe it \_is\_ nothing."

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Rarity paced back and forth. "I don't understand it! No matter how fabulous, ornate, utilitarian or subdued the clothes I create, the griffins don't like them! We're running a heavy trade deficitâ€| I must find <em>something<em> that they like!"

Her problem could be summed up with the fact that most supplies of cotton and silk came from the Griffin Lands. Since they had claws, as opposed to hooves, it was much easier for them to make fine cloth.

"Hmmmâ€| oh, this is so frustrating!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight blinked. "Okay, explain that again."<p>

"So, we were running a trade deficit with the griffins," Rarity began.

"I got that bit."

"I discovered that the one product that we make which griffins are willing to purchase is our range of magical items."

"Okayâ€|" Twilight pressed. "And how did you get from that to \_invading their country?\_"

"I'mâ€| not entirely sure," Rarity said, frowning. "But it involved catnip at some point in the process. Possibly we started selling it to them, I'm not sure."

"So." Twilight massaged her temples. "You \_personally\_ invaded the Griffin Lands, overthrew their government, seized their entire supply of fabric for the last three years and went on a month-long bender making dresses."

"That about sums it up," Rarity nodded.

"Right. Sorry, but you're probably going to have to head to the moon."

Quite apart from anything else, we need to salvage Equestria's international reputation â€" and that means making it clear you weren't acting according to official policy. At least you didn't take the army."

Rarity raised a hoof, then sighed. "Alright, Twilight. Sorry, it looks like I did go over the top."

"Yeah, you think?" Twilight asked sarcastically. "Look, I'll send you up some supplies or something. Make it a yearly event."

"Alright." Rarity frowned. "But they'll get so dusty if I just leave them thereâ€¦ perhaps I should send what I make back down again?"

"Why not." Twilight lifted up a calendar. "I think 'Charity Day' would work. The rich donate, the poor get the clothes."

"Sounds good to me." Rarity looked a bit more chipper. "Alright. See you in a millennium."

\* \* \*

><p>"Sorry?" Celestia asked. "You want me to <em>what?<em>"

"I want you and your sister to go dig Princess Rarity out," Twilight repeated. "Since she may be a littleâ€¦ obsessed, after that long on the moon, you may need to find ponies who can operate the Elements of Harmony. Perhaps those friends Luna's made in Ponyville?"

"Alrightâ€¦" Celestia said, dubiously. "But why dig her out?"

"Off-cuts," Twilight answered. "A thousand years of accumulated off-cuts from a thousand years of Charity Days."

The power-spell specialist unicorn left, still looking a bit flabbergasted.

"It'll be nice to see her again," Spike said. "I didn't know she'd ascended too."

"It was only last Loop," Twilight explained. "I think this is the first time someone aside from me and the newest alicorn has been awake in one of these, actually."

"Neat. And, uh, thanks for hatching me so early."

Twilight nodded. She'd hatched Spike's egg personally the minute it turned up, meaning that the dragon was about thirty now and a well-known sight around the palace.

\* \* \*

><p>14.6<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, you've got a blank flank!" Diamond Tiara shouted into the

stillness of the cute-caneara, pointing at Applebloom's exposed side.<p>

Applebloom winced. Not again-

"No fair!"

-wait, \_what?\_

The other ponies were looking at Diamond Tiara with equal confusion.

"Well, she could have a talent in \_anything\_! Hay, I don't even know \_what\_ mine meansâ€|" Diamond indicated her own cutie mark. "I mean, what does that mean? I'm good at wearing jewellery?" Her tiara slipped down slightly. "Guess notâ€|"

There were giggles, and Applebloom watched in shock as Diamond Tiara proceeded to joke about every cutie mark in the room.

When she got around to Applebloom, Diamond winked, and whispered "Gotcha there, Applebloom!"

"Wait, are you-"

Diamond nodded, and winked again. "Lucky you, huh?"

\* \* \*

><p>AN: Reconciliation is something that's been simmering for a while. I actually think that, stripped of time loop references, it could make a fair short fic in and of itself...<p>

Also, that's Rarity's "Sisters" Loop done.

## 15. Chapter 15

### 15.1 (expanded by Filraen)

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash awoke lying down in a cloud over Ponyville. The sun was warm and the wind soft so instead of checking through her loop memories, apparently too much work for now, she lazily decided to check which other ponies were Awake. Feeling the connection to the Element of Loyalty she realized everypony was-<p>

\_Pain.\_

\_Sorrow.\_

\_Hurt.\_

\_Desolation.\_

\_Grief.\_

One of her friends was in pain. It couldn't be a physical feeling,

because no physical injury would hurt so deeply or cause sadness so deep. \_One of her friends needed her.\_ The response from the Element of Loyalty was as automatic as breathing: making a Sonic Rainboom from her lying position she flew in a direct line towards the source of this feeling. It was only moments later, only because she realized she was going to crash into her friends arriving at the front door, when she realized she was heading straight to the library.

She managed to dodge them, though the library now had a Rainbow Dash shaped hole in a wall and had a few bookshelves that had to be organized, but it was all right as she could see Applejack, Pinkie Pie, Rarity, Fluttershyâ€|

"You all right, Rainbow?" Applejack asked, pushing some books off her.

Twilight.

"Yeah, AJ." Rainbow stood up and looked to her friends "Must be Twilight."

Noting how Rarity, Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie were already going into the next room Applejack nodded once and then pointed to them "Come on, let's hurry."

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy was glad all she and all her friends were awake this loop. She was sure none of them would have forgiven themselves if they were unable to do anything for Twilight because of not being awake, even if she'd have preferred Rainbow not making another door in Twilight's house. But that barely mattered as they went to the bedroom, to meet Twilight Sparkle crying on her bed hugging a photo frame.<p>

"Erâ€| Twilight," Fluttershy blinked, "what's the matter?"

Leaving the frame on the bed Twilight spread her hooves. Recognizing the signs of a recent bad experience, the others crowded around her to give her a group hug. To Applejack's surprise, Twilight started really wailing this time. Not just the confusion or sadness from one or other of the strange loopsâ€| this was a deeply personal grief. As time passed and the sun set she could feel the pain receding, if only slightly.

Eventually Twilight hiccupped to a stop. "Okayâ€| sorry, guys. This was justâ€|" a sniffle. "I hate this."

"Bad Loop?" Dash asked. "How bad could it be?"

"No, not bad." Twilight shook her head. "In many ways it was the complete opposite. Okay, basically, I was the only one there, and it was fairly close to our prime loop." she broke off to sniffle again. "I thought it was just like baseline Equestria, actually, and I was planning on something to do with the â€" with Sombra, so I let things happen. But I gotâ€| attacked, by some kind of cult who wanted to resurrect Nightmare Moon."

"That doesn't sound much like Equestriaâ€|" Applejack muttered. "All the cults ah ever heard of turned into fan clubs when the relevant

god or alicorn turned back up."

"Yeah, there's a reason this one was different." Twilight sniffed. "But, basically, it was successful and really wrong at the same time. They got Nightmare Moon back, alrightâ€¦ but about Apple Bloom's age, with no memory of her past life and \_not evil\_.

"I justâ€¦" Twilight shook her head. "I let my guard down. I was stupid, really. I know we â€" all Loopers â€" are prevented from having children by Yggdrasil, but I forgot why."

Fluttershy felt a sinking feeling inside her when she realized what she would have done in Twilight's case. If this filly was a reincarnation from Nightmare Moon she would have been received so much rejection from many ponies, and if she really didn't have any memories from her time as Nightmare Moon, if she really wasn't evil, if this really was the chance to redeem the corruption on Princess Lunaâ€¦

"You adopted her, I bet!" Pinkie said, as if completing Fluttershy's thoughts, then her face fell. "Oh, Twilightâ€¦"

"Yeah," Twilight croaked, taking the frame photo on her bed and showing the photo -of her and a black filly alicorn- to her friends. "After all, if she really was a threat, Nightmare Moon was still weak so it was supposed to be safe. So I called her Nyx, andâ€¦ and she was dear to me as anyone I've ever known. Andâ€¦"

Twilight didn't finish. Everypony there felt her pain of what happened. One moment, Nyx was thereâ€¦ and the next, gone as if she'd never existed, and to never exist again.

"Anyway," Twilight forced herself back up, "I don't really feel like dealing with Nightmare Moon this timeâ€¦ can you girls handle it?"

Rarity pondered. "Probably. Can I borrow the Element of Magic?" Twilight wordlessly took it from her subspace pocket and placed it on Rarity's head. "We won't be subtle, though."

\* \* \*

><p>15.2 (Another Kind of Magic fused loop)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Trixie is confused."<p>

"Yes, I know." Twilight looked over. "Remember I mentioned the loops? Sometimes they do strange things like this."

"It is just Trixie's luck that her first proper one is so unusual." Trixie frowned, then her eyes widened. "Wow. Tri-I mean, \_I\_, have a whole new set of memories?"

"Yeah, those happen too," Twilight said casually. "Apparently we're sisters in all but name here. Neat."

"Soâ€¦" Trixie grinned. "This is actually quite fun. Apparently that dragon of yours rather prefers me over you."

"Well, Spike isn't mine, or yours. He's his own beingâ€¦ we just pay him." Twilight shrugged. "Actually, thoughâ€¦ here's the deal. I won't get involved this Loop."

"In what?" Trixie frowned.

"Well, I'll still do all the library stuff, and so on. And help you out with learning more magicâ€¦ but I won't take the Element of Magic this time. It's your turn." Twilight grinned. "Consider it a final exam."

"What?" Trixie's jaw dropped. "I can'tâ€¦ I meanâ€¦ you're ridiculously skilled at magic! How could I be worthy of it if you-"

Twilight chuckled. "It's sometimes hard to get the hang of just what the time loops mean, isn't it? I've been Looping for a long time, Trixie. I'm not much like the introverted scholar who first went to Ponyville. In fact, you might find it easier making friends than I did. Justâ€¦" she made an indefinable gesture. "Make sure to be more like the Trixie that you became after Ponyville, notâ€¦ before."

"You do not need to tell Trixie twiceâ€¦" the blue-coated unicorn muttered. "And why do I remember your brother being very unfair to me?"

Twilight scanned her own Loop memories. "That would be because this version of you likes setting off homemade explosives. Hey, look!" She opened a chest and brought out a scroll. "Twilight Sparkle's five step checklist for when Trixie Lulamoon has access to explosives."

Trixie snatched it from her. "Stage four: duck and cover? And stage five is how to fill out an incident report for the Guard!"

"Guess this version of me really knows you well," Twilight teased.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, well done," Twilight said, as Trixie climbed into bed in the library after a long day of celebration, for the return and purification of Princess Luna. "Butâ€¦ what did you say you did to Nightmare Moon?"<p>

Trixie paused, adjusting the covers. "Uhhâ€¦ a flashbang spell that blinded her long enough for me to retrieve the elements, then I threw an anvil at her, launched a firework bigger than my entire body and blew half the castle wall off, then dropped the ceiling on her. After that I used a triple-detonation spell, an accurately kicked rock, an attracting point, and was about to start working up one of those Force Burst spells you taught me when the others arrived."

"â€¦wow, overconfident much?" Twilight managed.

"Actually, no," Trixie flourished her hat. "Part of my talent is knowing how to trick a crowd â€¦" and so I launched a combination of highly pyrotechnical attacks mixed in with ridiculous cheap shots. It kept her off balance for long enough that the others could turn up, but I didn't think I could actually beat her."

"No, for direct combat I usually have to use alicorn mode," Twilight confirmed.

Trixie stared at her. "You have to use \_what?\_"

"â€¦I'll explain later."

\* \* \*

><p>15.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hmmmâ€¦" Twilight paged through a book on Zebra potion making. "I wonder how that would workâ€¦" <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis looked over the pilfered map from the Canterlot guardhouses, and sent approval to the changeling who had stolen it. "Good, good. Not too much longer before we can strikeâ€¦" <p>

There was a purple flash overhead.

\_Intruder!\_ jangled through the empathic Changeling network, alerting the guards and sending them soaring into the air in their hundreds.

By the time they reached the place the flash had occurred, however, there was nothing there. Not even on their empathic senses.

Just a bottle, which said 'open'.

The changelings conferred amongst themselves, deciding to let their queen handle it. Accordingly, one of them picked it up â€" and it slipped out of his hooves.

\_Good going, Murphyâ€¦\_ every other changeling in the hive thought at once.

Then the bottle smashed on the hive floor.

\* \* \*

><p>"Right," Twilight said, adjusting her binoculars. "Potion bottle applied to changeling hive. Bottle has been dropped, potion release anticipated at ten-twenty-three and fourteen seconds." <p>

The magic-crystal recorder next to her took down every word.

Then there was an almighty green flash and she was standing in Paradise Valley.

"â€¦oh, buck," Twilight muttered. "Experiment conclusion: Love Poison applied to changelings results in explosive positive feedback. Not recommended."

She let out a long sigh. "Now I have to endure a Loop where Rainbow Dash dresses in style. Again."



\* \* \*

><p>15.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Does any pony dare to challenge Trixie?"<p>

Twilight had a slight smile on her face. This was Trixie's first 'baseline' loop, so it would be interesting to see how she handled itâ€|

This time, Applejack went first. She spun her lasso, demonstrating a most impressive grasp of how to handle a rope and how to make the practised little flips that would cause it to change direction seemingly out of nowhere.

Trixie nodded. "So, your weapon is a lasso. Interesting." Trixie's horn lit, and she unfolded the back half of her wagon to make a larger, square stage. "First fall, first contact or surrender?"

Applejack blinked. "What?"

"Well, Trixie did say challengeâ€|" Trixie shrugged. "Trixie thought a battle would be more impressive."

Twilight frowned. This had the potential to go wrongâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>Within five minutes, though, she saw that Trixie had judged right.<p>

Though it had the trappings of a duel or combat challenge, it was actually a bit more like a presentation match. Applejack used her lasso to try and catch Trixie, who evaded â€" barely, on many occasions â€" with fancy hoofwork or teleports. Trixie replied with a series of low-power spells, many of which Applejack blocked with the rope of the lasso itself and the rest of which just about missed.

Overall, the effect was of a pair of closely matched and fast-thinking pair of ponies having a fun and entirely non-lethal 'fight'. Trixie even came off worst, Applejack's lasso coiling around her tail as she dodged and pulling her backwards before she managed to teleport out.

A bell dinged as Trixie skidded to a stop from a shield-blocked buck. "Right, time is up."

Applejack stopped twirling her lasso, confused.

The showmare trotted over to her and shook her hoof. "Trixie is most impressed. Good match."

Applause broke out.

\* \* \*

><p>After Dash had demonstrated her own skills, Trixie pondered for a moment. "Hmmâ€| well, Trixie can't fly. So no luck there. A race?"<p>

"Sure!" Dash replied, grinning. "What rules do you want to use?"

Trixie held up a convenient book. "What about Canterlot rules, third revision, to the outskirts of the town and back?"

Dash took the book, skimmed it for a bit and nodded. "Yeah! If you think you can beat me!"

"On the starting blocks," Trixie rejoined. "Put your muscles where your mouth is."

At the 'go', the pegasus shot off at high speed. Trixie ran after her, and then vanished in a puff of smoke.

"Hey!" someone shouted.

"That can't be fair!" another pony said.

Trixie materialized back on stage and crossed the finish line, then looked nonplussed at the booing coming from the crowd. "Oh, what is it now?"

Twilight walked over, having worked out what was going on. "You did say Canterlot rules third revision, right?"

"Yes." Trixie nodded. "The ones which allow teleportation."

"No, that's second. Third only permits non-cast magic." Twilight pointed to the relevant line in the book.

Trixie blinked. Blinked again, slowly and theatrically. "â€|oh. Oopsieâ€|"

The booing turned to giggles.

"Oh, shut up!" Trixie said to the crowd, stamping a hoof foalishly. Her hat fell off. "Any pony could have done it!"

Dash shout out of the sky, panting. "Okay, I guess you beat me. How the hay are you that fast?"

More giggles.

"â€|did I miss something?"

\* \* \*

><p>After that, several more ponies tried their hoof at challenging Trixie to something. Several of them lost, more of them won, and Trixie usually either made them look good or made herself look the fool, or more often both.<p>

Though Derpy's trick, which involved a Klein bottle, just let her to scratch her head and give up.

Finally, she challenged Twilight directly. This time, she let Twilight pick the form of the challenge.

Twilight mused for a moment, and decided.

Tennis. With fireballs.

It was already fairly impressive when there was one fireball going. It was a lot more so when, on an unseen signal, both Trixie and Twilight lobbed another fireball each into the air. And when there were no fewer than fifteen fireballs going back and forth, it started to become obvious that there wasn't going to be a quick winner in this challenge.

After about ten minutes, Twilight called a halt. "I think we'll call that a draw."

"Indeed," Trixie said, panting a lot more than Twilight was. But then, she'd been on the go all afternoon. "Good game, Twilight Sparkle."

Trixie gave her a bow, then extended that to her whole audience and many challengers. "And Trixie hopes you have enjoyed the show!"

Fireworks went soaring into the air.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well?" Trixie asked, that evening in the Books and Branches. "How was that?"<p>

Then she frowned. "Though I wonder where you put that chair I brought from Canterlot when we movedâ€|"

"That was last Loop, it didn't happen in this Equestria," Twilight reminded her. "I know it's tricky to keep track. And yes, I'm very impressed with how mature you were."

"It was hard," Trixie admitted. "But at least this time there hopefully won't be an Ursa attack."

Something roared in the distance.

"â€|oh, you are kidding me." Trixie sighed, and picked her hat up off the floor. "Can I count on your help?"

"Sure." Twilight headed for the door. "And yeah, this might not happen every time, but it happens far too often."

\* \* \*

><p>15.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hi, Matilda!" Pinkie said cheerfully, mentally crossing her hooves. "What brings you into town today?"<p>

"Ah, hello, Pinkie." Matilda nodded to her. "It's good to see you. Well, actually, I wanted to buy some carrots and flour. I plan to make a carrot cake."

"Oh, neat!" Pinkie's smile lit up the square. "I know a Carrot Cake! Well, a different kind of carrot cakeâ€¦ anyway, I know how to make an edible carrot cake too! Hold on a minute, I've got a special recipe!"

Pinkie hurried back into the shop and started looking, half her mind counting. \_Fifteen, sixteen, seventeenâ€¦\_

On 'twenty-three', she bounced back out again with the recipe and handed it to Matilda. "Here you go! I'm afraid it needs to have a \_few\_ things that aren't on a normal carrot cake recipe, but I know just where to get them. Applejack's stall started having a sideline in oranges recently, so you can ask for orange peel there â€" or just whole oranges and eat the rest, if you want to be daring." Pinkie giggled. "And the raisins are sold over there, by Sour Grapes."

"Is heâ€¦ sour?" Matilda asked.

"Nah, he's really sweet. But Sweet Grapes isn't as funny so he wasn't called that." Pinkie shrugged.

"Okay. Thank you, Pinkie." Matilda picked up the flour that Pinkie had put on the table when she wasn't looking and paid for it. Pinkie's gaze alternated between Matilda and the other side of the square.

"Oh, did you hear the one about the bats?" Pinkie suddenly said.

"No, I didn't," Matilda replied politely.

"Neither did I, but I bet they did." Pinkie huffed. "Bats hear all the best jokes. Stupid earsâ€¦"

The donkey giggled. "Ah, Pinkie, you always surprise me. Well, thank you again!"

"No problem!" Pinkie smiled, then started handling the next customer. \_That joke should have just about done itâ€¦\_

There was a commotion across the square as Lyra stepped up to the counter.

\_Yes!\_ "Excuse me," Pinkie asked the green unicorn, and shot over there.

Two shoppers had collided, as one of them wasn't looking where he was going. Pinkie helped both of them up, babbling something about how if they'd bumped together closer to a bush she could have helped them with any boo-boos, because she had medical kits hidden all around Ponyville in case ofâ€¦ well, emergency.

"Oh, sorry," Pinkie said, "where are my manners! I'm Pinkie Pie, and this is Matilda. Who are you?"

"Cranky Doodle. And-" the donkey froze. Pointed at who he'd bumped

into. "I remember you."

Matilda gasped.

Pinke gave them some space. She wasn't the kind of pony who would interrupt a happy reunion.

But she'd have to get permission to organize a \_carnival\_ after this. There was party going to waste!

\* \* \*

><p>15.6 (Elmagnifico)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The door to the Sweet Apple Acres farmhouse creaked on hinges that honestly ought to be oiled at some point. Applejack made a note to ask her sister to do it in the morning, then looked to the reason for her door-opening.<p>

Twilight Sparkle stood on the threshold, her hair distorted in unkempt disarray, framing bloodshot eyes underscored by black circles. Applejack looked askance at her friend as the purple unicorn stood in the light shed from the doorway, a slice of brightness against Luna's backdrop and left eyelid twitching.

"Can ah help ya, Twilight?" the farmpony asked, with some trepidation.

Purple eyes moved, shifting from gazing into empty space to fixate on Applejack.

"I finally figured it out."

One of Applejack's eyebrows quirked.

"Figured what out, Twi?"

The manic grin never faltered even as the unicorn it belonged to spouted exposition.

"Why nothing seems to go wrong anymore. I told myself I'd let this loop develop naturally, but something keeps changing it."

Applejack's quirked eyebrow shifted to meet its counterpart, shifting from curiosity to skepticism.

"Beg pardon?"

"I think it started just after we defeated Nightmare Moon. Remember how Rainbow Dash, Rarity and Pinkie Pie pestered me about going to the Grand Galloping Gala?"

Applejack nodded. "Yep. Took y'all pretty much the entire day to get them to lay off ya before th' Princess sent ya more tickets."

A purple eyelid twitched.

"Indeed. But you ALL were supposed to be obsessed with going."

A hoarse voice interrupted Twilight's tirade and caused Applejack to divide her attention momentarily. "Applejack, who is it?"

"It's Twilight, but she don't seem right in the head."

"Course she ain't. Ye've kept th' poor thing on th' doorstep for a while now, invite her in!" Granny Smith said with assurance.

"Right, Granny. Why don't ya come in, Twilight, and explain around the fire?"

Violet bangs rippled back and forth as Twilight Sparkle's head shook in response, and she continued.

"It's happened other times. Fluttershy for instance. When we went to confront that dragon that was blotting out the sun, she grew the confidence to pull through almost a quarter of the way up the mountain. She was meant to not overcome her fears until she was at the top. Mayor Mare knew to put me in with the organizing committee right out of the gate. We visited Cloudsdale without a hitch. Met Zecora so naturally, when ponies had been avoiding her for months. Resolving the Appleloosa situation before it escalated. I never did find out why Discord never showed his face. The parasprites I traced though. I've seen it all play out countless times, and there have been changes before. But not this go 'round. This started as a baseline Loop. I meant to leave it that way, or work out why it wasn't one. But I've figured it out. Traced it all back to one somepony."

Applejack looked at her friend askance.

"Care to clarify?"

"Somepony else knows what's going to happen ahead of time, and has been changing things so it happens more gently, or the problem doesn't occur at all. Countless disasters have been averted already."

Applejack relaxed slightly, a smile playing at her lips, even as confusion threatened to slip behind her eyes.

"Well if'n they're makin' things easier, ah don't quite see th' problem."

Twilight stamped a hoof against the threshold, the wood responding with a \*thunk\* that punctuated her statement.

"That's the thing, you have no idea how this has affected the timestream, many valuable lessons haven't been learnt!"

A frown of doubt crossed Applejack's face as she responded.

"Now that's just plain wrong. Y'can't judge somepony by the disasters they avert. Seems to me that's the opposite of what ya should be doin'."

By this point, the other Apples had taken notice of the debate going on across the doorstep. Granny Smith had a hoof to her ear, straining

to make the discussion audible. Applebloom was riveted, her eyes and ears soaking in every word. Big Macintosh was just peering over the top of a farmer's almanac, taking in the scene quietly. Twilight's tirade continued.

"Oh, I wouldn't have worried so much if they'd come round and told me what was going on, then I would have been sure this was a normal loop. But nooo. They just continued on. Another pony might have been flashier, utilized the situation more directly to their benefit. Taken some credit, acted more directly or netted some abnormally large benefit. But not our culprit. They're subtle-like. Degrees of separation, a word here, some wisdom there, a bit of encouragement or a pick-me-up right when it's needed, so very innocuous. That's why it took so long for me to realize who was behind it. He almost got away with it too."

Behind Applejack, her younger sister was staring slack-jawed at her brother.

Big Macintosh the Looper had turned an even brighter shade of red than normal, and he was being careful to avoid eye contact with anyone.

"Shucks."

\* \* \*

><p>15.7<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Good news," Twilight said, passing Trixie some herbal tea. (The showmare had encountered the blend last Loop, learning what Zecora had to teach her, and taken to it with gusto.) "I think I've worked out a way to get you introduced to Ponyville early."<p>

"You have?" Trixie blinked. "I thought I usually turned up fairly earlyâ€|"

"Fairly, yes," Twilight dragged the words out, "but not soon enough that I can finagle you an invitation to the Grand Galloping Gala. I know you like that sort of thing."

Trixie nodded. "Fair point. Can I have Rarity make me a dress made of fire?"

"Iâ€| actually don't think she's Awake this time, so only if she is when you next turn up." Twilight shrugged. "Sorry."

"Ah well." Trixie gave a theatrical sigh. "I suppose I'll have to rely on my dazzling wit to wow the crowd."

"Knowing Canterlot nobilityâ€|" Twilight stopped, and pondered. "That might actually work. They do tend to spend a fair fraction of their time coming up with cutting barbs and performing social manoeuvring."

"Anyway." Trixie tossed her head. "With that out of the way, what is this plan?"

"Right." Twilight winked. "Basically, I think by now you can technically count as an old friend. So I'll simply set things up with an old friend so that they perform the opening act at the Summer Sun festival."

Trixie gulped. "â€|doesn't that mean Nightmare Moon will come onto the stage directly behind Trixie?"

The Anchor shrugged. "Basically. But my brother worked out a spell that should help keep you safe â€" I can cast it on you before you go up." Twilight began counting under her breath, then looked up again. "Actually, I haveâ€| a spare Intelligent Device, a copy of a thing called the Rainbow of Light, a full set of battle armour from when I recruited you as the head of my guard â€" back before you Awakened â€" andâ€|"

Giggling at Trixie's gradually opening mouth (and expression like Hearth's Warming had come early), Twilight rummaged in her subspace pocket. "Aha!"

Twilight sprinkled what she'd found on the table. "Twenty-four Cartridges for an Intelligent Device's feed mechanism. That's enough for two reloads, assuming you go in with six in the chamber and we spend six practising."

Trixie blinked. "Are you trying to set me up to fight Nightmare Moon?"

"Yep." Twilight nodded. "I think I taught you all the really powerful spells over the last few Loops, and an Intelligent Device isn't actually all that hard to learn to use. Since the plan is to do this next time you're Awake, we can probably get that practise in now." Then the purple unicorn grinned. "Even if the result is a stalemate or that you eventually get beaten â€" and I honestly don't know which way it would end up going â€" then it should at least look like you've brought me time to get the Elements running."

"Right." Trixie's face set. "That does sound like quite the introduction."

"That's the plan." Twilight frowned. "Oh, don't forget your Element, either. The passive power of the Element of Magic does things like make spells more efficient, which should help."

"To say the leastâ€|" Trixie muttered. "Trixie cannot believe she is doing this."

\* \* \*

><p>"Anyway. Any pony here from Manehattan?"<p>

Some of the audience raised their hooves.

"Well, so much for thirty percent of Trixie's material." Trixie pulled some pages out of her stack of notes and crumpled them up, then threw them away.

Looking at what was left, she blinkedâ€| then cantered across the stage to where the bits had gone and picked them up. "That was not according to plan. Trixie definitely did not plan to crumple up the



page she was on. Anywayâ€| "

She pointed at a pony in the audience. "What is it that you do?"

"Me?" The pony looked around. "Erâ€| I sell quills and sofas."

"Quills and sofas." Trixie nodded. "Right. Trixie supposes that makes as much sense as anything. But doesn't it get you down sometimes?"

There was scattered laughter.

"The rest of you can ask whoever's closest to you who actually got the joke," Trixie said with a sigh.

This time, there was a bit more laughter.

"It'll do." Trixie leafed through her notes. "You're not getting this whole gig, are you, audience? Trixie tells jokes, you laugh. That is how it is supposed to work."

She put them back down on the nearby lectern. "So, anyway. The Summer Sun festival. Longest day of the year. Trixie can't help but think we might have got the wrong end of this one, to be honest. I mean, it's four AM and here we are, up before the sun. If ever there was a day to be asleep when the sun's up, it's when the sun's up for so much of it."

Suddenly, there was a commotion backstage.

Nightmare Moon stepped through the curtain, batting away incoming guards. "Oh, my beloved subjects--"

Trixie interrupted her. "You."

Nightmare Moon focused on her, an expression of astonishment on her face. "Why do you provoke me?"

"My name is Trixie Lulamoon. You interrupted my comedy routine." Trixie grinned as the adrenaline began to kick in. "Prepare to cry."

She heard Twilight's voice taking charge behind her, evacuating the building, and reached out to the contingent spells Twilight had helped her set up.

One-two-three, and she was ready for this.

Hat and cape were in place, though the clasp for her cape had been replaced by the Rainbow of Light. Beneath her hat was concealed her Element of Magic â€" a slim circlet with a wand at the top â€" and her new Intelligent Device, Loki, was held in one hoof.

But what really showed something was different was the armour. Twilight had made it to the same standards as the Princesses' own battle armour, and it showed. (It also held the bound-spell version of Shining's protective enchantment, the other end of which was apparently keyed to an entire mountain.)

Stand by, ready. Set up.

Loki finished the preparations, hovering over her right shoulder in staff form.

Nightmare Moon blinked. "What-"

"You wanted to come back here after a thousand years?" Trixie asked. "Come back and take over as though you'd never tried to usurp sole rule in the first place?"

"My night never got the attention it deserved!" Nightmare Moon shouted back. "It-"

Trixie held up a hoof. "Wait a moment. While this is probably going to end up as a fight, I deplore starting a fight in which I don't have the element of surprise."

Before Nightmare Moon had quite finished processing that sentence, Trixie launched off a Missile Storm, and then things got quite loud.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight winced as the town hall exploded. "That's going to be costly to fixâ€|"<p>

Mind you, it was hardly the first time Ponyville had needed substantial rebuilding. Well, it was the first this Loop, but it seemed to average three or four times per Loop.

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie teleported away from an attack by a sliver of a second, fired off three illusions â€" two of them obvious, one of them just within what she guessed was Nightmare Moon's skill to localize â€" and used the moment of confusion to expend three cartridges.<p>

The resultant lightning bolt split the night, shaking the ground and hammering through most of Nightmare Moon's defences. As she turned to locate the origin point of the blast, a tree fell on her.

"Always the way," Trixie said to herself. "Misdirection. Feint, feint, kick to the head. Loki, Blaster One."

Affirmative. Blaster One engaged.

Two semi-autonomous blaster bits flew out of Loki's launch bay, leaving four still in there. That let her split her fire more effectively, but she still had to actually cast all the spells herself and her horn was starting to ache.

Let it! This is the most fun I've had in SO long!\_

Another dark bolt flew off the Nightmare's horn, hitting her in the thigh. Protective magic crackled, and what would probably have blown her apart became just a faint ache in the left rear leg. Though there was probably a chunk of mountain missing somewhere.

As the battle escalated, she started relying on Nanoha-style spells more. Thrown objects, fireworks, illusions and just the occasional loud noise had their place, but to actually keep Nightmare Moon off balance took some serious firepower " if she didn't feel under threat, she'd stop taking the distractions seriously.

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare snarled, as another of the annoying unicorn's illusions turned to dust under a Dark Bolt.<p>

This was the most infuriating foe she had ever faced! The illusions were too good for her to properly unravel half the time, and when they weren't they were just there to make her think something. She was being manipulated, and didn't like it.

And she had to treat all the illusions as serious threats, too, which meant spending FAR too much magic on them. Earlier, the unicorn " Trixie something " had somehow endured an attack that would have blown a hole in a castle wall, and probably the whole castle.

Another illusion appeared, this one just a little bit off. Nightmare Moon determined to ignore it, focusing on the slightly better-hidden signature which could be-

And then a bolt of blue magic speared out of what she'd written off as an illusion, smashing her in the flank and nearly knocking her over.

Then a house landed on her.

Snarling, Nightmare Moon disintegrated the house and took to the air. That pesky unicorn couldn't be up here!

\* \* \*

><p><span>Flier Fin.<span>

Trixie winced as Nightmare Moon started levelling the town, methodically pulverizing buildings one by one. Better than me" that protection spell is feeling ragged.

"The illusion is working?" she asked, hoofing the spent cartridges out of Loki and loading her last six.

Affirmative.

"Good" and the town is clear?"

Indeed. A pause. The answer is the same as last time you asked.

"Sorry."

Trixie looked around. All six of the blaster bits were active" she still had enough magic" and Nightmare Moon was still shooting things only she could see.

"Cartridge load."

Loki fired off all six remaining cartridges, and Trixie's reserves swelled back to full. Enough.

Then she dispelled the illusion she'd been maintaining. Across Nightmare Moon's eyes and ears.

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon blinked as the town below her wavered like smoke.  
<em>What-<em>

"Hey!"

She turned towards the origin of the voice, and saw that infernal unicorn again. Hovering in mid air, exactly as Nightmare had thought she couldn't. Gratifyingly, Nightmare had apparently done some damage â€" the armour was torn in places, and Trixie's hat was missing. But-

There was a ball of magic building on the end of that strange staff thing.

And something atop the unicorn's head, which felt surprisingly familiar. A circlet of crystal, with the wand atop it burning with an intense blue flame.

Then, two objects darted from nowhere and wrapped a golden chain around her middle, holding her in place.

"It's called Enkidu," Trixie said. "It's the most powerful binding spell I know, so it should hold for at least a few minutes. I just wanted to explain something to you."

Nightmare growled.

"Villains â€" evil doers â€" ponies who want to be powerful, who want to win and who want to rule over others. They're always the ones who have all the impressive powers. They're the ones who you read the stories, and you think 'wow. I didn't know any pony could do that.' You want to be able to do what they could." Trixie shook her head. "But you never want to be them. And that's because of something thatâ€" almost everyone understands, somewhere deep down. It's that being selfish doesn't really work."

"And that's for a good reason." As Trixie continued, Nightmare Moon caught sight of four other objects, each of them with the same gradually growing ball of magic as the staff.

"Basically, good ponies aren't any less powerful than evil ones. In fact, because they cooperate, because they learn from one another, they can become more powerful. No, it is something elseâ€" Tell Trixie, one thousand years agoâ€" did your sister ever fight you?"

Nightmare blinked. "â€"no. She just hit me with the Elements of Harmony."

"And do you think that that was because you could defeat her?" Trixie bobbed her head. "Possibly, possibly. But there's another good

reason. Look at the town below you."

The bindings gave Nightmare enough movement to do so.

"See how devastated it is? That's the point. Good ponies aren't less powerful. They just care more about collateral damage."

Trixie grinned. "But this town was evacuated. Starlight Breaker."

Five bolts of surprisingly pink magic erupted.

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie coughed. "Ow. My horn hurts."<p>

"I bet it doesâ€|" Twilight said, trotting briskly over. "Did you really have to do this much damage?"

The blue pony giggled. "So much for being acceptedâ€|" After a moment, Trixie shook her head, and recovered some of her composure. "I think I did fairly well, actually."

"Yeah, you did. You tricked a goddess, manoeuvred her into a trap, and then hit her with enough magic that sheâ€|" Twilight craned over the rubble of a wall, "Seems to be cured, actually. Guess Nanoha universe magic really can just about manage it, with enough boosts. Congratulationsâ€|"

Twilight conjured a mirror.

"â€|Princess Trixie."

Trixie blinked, taking in the sight of her new wings. "Oh." Then she frowned. "Wait a minute. Was this your plan all along?"

"â€|kinda." Twilight shrugged. "I honestly had no idea if it'd work, but even if it didn't it would still be a useful test."

"You should have told me!" Trixie accused. "Turning ponies into deities without their permission isâ€| erâ€| Trixie was going to say impolite, but she thought impossible would have fit until a few hours ago, so she stands corrected."

"I don't really know if it would even work like that," Twilight admitted. "Anyway, no harm done, right?"

"No, Trixie supposes not." The new alicorn then slumped over and started snoring.

"Yeah, yeah, leave me to explain everythingâ€|" Twilight groused.

Celestia appeared in a flash of light. "Twilight! What happened here? Andâ€| wait, is that my sister?"

"No, cutie mark's wrong. Though she is called Lulamoonâ€|" Twilight pointed. "Luna's over there."

\* \* \*

><p>15.8<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity stepped outdoors, and breathed deeply. <em>Ah, midsummer's eve.<em>

A new Loop, and new opportunities.

\_Wonder who else is Awakeâ€|\_ she pondered with half her mind, the other half trying to decide what was 'in' this Loop.

\_Ooh, perhaps I could go with a theme focused on birds? It would be simply \_marvellous!

With a flash of green fire, something appeared in front of her. Surprised, she caught it. \_Now what does Twilight want this time?\_

The envelope was alabaster in colour and slightly scented with saffron. Frowning, she opened it, and took out the letter.

\_Dear Rarity,\_

\_Spike here. I thought I should let you know that I've finally actually started Looping. Twilight let me know that you were Awake this time, and so I thought I'd try going about this whole thingâ€| right.\_

\_I know I had a silly crush on you. I would like to hope that that crush has gone away with maturity, but I can't be sure, since I certainly don't feel any less attracted to you.\_

\_If I was a proper dragon, I'd probably try to steal you away, or something like that. But I'm not, soâ€| I'd like to do something a bit more sensible.\_

\_I've made a reservation for two seats in a restaurant in Canterlot, for the evening meal â€" the one run by Blue Cordon. Twilight's agreed to help with the teleportation required, so I would be honoured if you would give me the pleasure of your company.\_

\_Yours,\_

\_Spykoranuvellitar (Spike).\_

\_P.S: Twilight found a way to help me change my physical age. I won't look like a baby, so don't worry on that front.\_

Rarity blinked.

Then started to smile. "Well, he certainly doesn't do things by halvesâ€| I can never be sure of managing to get a meal there. Wonder how he got the reservationâ€|"

Yes, this could be interesting. Spiky-wikey was always so sweet, and this much more mature Spike â€" she'd never seen or heard him use his full name beforeâ€|

\_Most\_ interesting.

Then she gasped. "Only seven hours to do all the normal preparations and get ready! And I \_must\_ look my best! Oh, maybe I should make him a suit as well! No, perhaps that would be taken as an insult!"

She shot back into the boutique, already planning what she was going to make. Romantic dinner, simple meal, or whatever else it turned out to be, she was \_not\_ going to waste the chance to show off her dressmaking skills in \_the\_ premier Canterlot restaurant!

\* \* \*

><p>"Thanks," Spike said, scratching the back of his head. "I know this is short notice!"<p>

"Oh, no problem," Cadence assured him. "In all honesty, Shining and I had booked the seats before we discovered that his parents would be free this evening. We'll be able to visit Twilight Twinkle and Night Light – that'll probably be just as nice." She giggled. "\_Shining\_ certainly thought so! I swear, he calls that formal outfit of his – the one he'd have had to wear there – worse than full plate armour. I barely had time to suggest it before he agreed."

Then she grew sly. "Besides, what else am I doing here, but my job?"

Spike coughed. "Well, yes, that is my hope. But I'd rather it all start slow."

"Good attitude." Cadence nodded. "Try to win a lover, and you might gain an enemy. But try to gain a friend, and you might just win a lover!"

This time the dragon blushed slightly, and adjusted the tie she'd helped him with.

\* \* \*

><p>"So," Rarity said, halfway through the main course. (She was having something inventive involving bamboo shoots stuffed with cheese; Spike had opted for a pasta dish.) "<em>Do<em> tell me, Spike. How on Equestria did you get us a table at such short notice?"

Spike smiled, ever so slightly nervously. "Well, Cadence and Shining had a reservation they didn't particularly want to make use of – apparently they booked it well in advance, and then it turned out that Twilight's parents were having a night in." The dragon – currently about the same size as Rarity – broadened his smile. "More power to them."

"Indeed – I wish I'd known about that. But, then, you have rather more of an in with the two of them than I do." Rarity paused, checking that the table was indeed far enough from other ponies who might overhear them. "How did she handle your unexpected size increase?"

The dragon shrugged, and swallowed his latest mouthful. "I passed it

off as a growth spurt, to tell the truth. It isn't as though dragon biology is well enough understood to preclude it."

"Of course." Rarity nodded along with the explanation. Then she put a hoof to her chin in thought, expertly keeping the fabric of her sleeve from touching the table. "Though â€" one has to wonder. Have you taken advantage of theâ€" well, the loops, when I wasn't present, toâ€" become involved with me?"

Spike hid his discomfort at the topic. Then decided he didn't need to, and permitted a wince to escape. "Honestlyâ€" yes. One which was the first time I'd actually turned up in Equestria itself, and then another time about two loops after that."

Rarity nodded. "I'm glad you let me know. How did it go?"

"The first timeâ€" Spike smiled slightly. "Basically, I saved you from the Diamond Dogs â€" rather than you save yourself, I mean. I like to think I was quite dashing, butâ€" The dragon shrugged. "I \_was\_ still young, then. Twilight and I hadn't worked out the age changing trick yet. In any case, the farthest it got was that we went to the Gala together a few times."

The unicorn digested the information. "I imagine I was quite grateful. The first timeâ€" those dogs were \_scary\_."

"You were." Spike sighed. "I felt really good about it, actuallyâ€" but, at the same time, there was this nagging question at the back of my mind. Two, really. The first one was \_is this right?\_ I mean, I was using my knowledge of the future to develop a relationship with a pony who hadn'tâ€" it kind of felt wrong."

"And the second one?" Rarity asked, when he didn't continue.

"I couldn't shake the feeling that you saw me as a child. You probably did."

"I'd sayâ€" more than that, probably," Rarity replied, thinking back to her own mental state from all those years ago. "I always did like a knight in shining armour â€" though not the actual Shining Armor, of course."

Both of them chuckled.

"I imagine I did have some stronger feelings for you, butâ€" Rarity shrugged, sending the dress rippling and causing the colours down it to change as she moved. "Well, I'd have wanted to wait until your majority."

"Which would never come, of course, but you couldn't know that." Spike took a drink from his glass â€" he'd asked for the sourest vintage they had, which had raised a few delicately manicured eyebrows but which suited him quite fine. (They'd been grateful to be able to sell something they'd have had to throw out, once he explained the biology involved.)

"What was the second time?"

"That wasâ€" stranger." Spike shrugged. "I got Twilight to try turning me into a pony, basically. Stupidest idea I've ever had. I



didn't get far with youâ€¦"

Rarity giggled despite herself. "Oh, dear. Sorry, Spike, butâ€¦ that \_is\_ rather a funny image."

The dragon nodded. "Yeah, once I got a bit of perspective I could see how it was funny too. I was trying to look all suave when I didn't even know how to \_walk\_ properly, it must have been dreadful."

"And after that?"

"Iâ€¦ just didn't bother. Partly because of those same problems I mentioned, but partlyâ€¦" Spike sighed. "I don't want it to beâ€¦ orâ€¦ okay. In simple terms: I \_think\_ that I love you. But I can't be sure. I don't know if this is still a crush, I don't know ifâ€¦ well, if the things which I like about theâ€¦ the \_you\_ that I know, are the ones which you like about yourself. The ones you've kept. And I don't know if you like \_me\_."

"Which me do you mean this time?" Rarity said quietly.

"Theâ€¦ looping you. Iâ€¦ basically, it's like I knew what you were like as a child. And like you knew what I was like as a child." The dragon rubbed his forehead. "So, before I â€" before either of us starts even thinking about going further, we should make sure we each know what the other is actually like." Spike then flashed a grin, this one with a lot more humour in it. "Hi. I'm Spykoranuvellitar, but everyone calls me Spike, and I'm Twilight Sparkle's assistant. What's your name?"

Rarity matched the smile. "Rarity. I'm a dressmaker, and I like making magical items as well."

"Nice to meet you, then."

Then they remembered the meal, which had sadly cooled off a bit.

\* \* \*

><p>15.9<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Mister dragon?"<p>

The dragon who had set up in the mountains overlooking Ponyville opened one eye. "What is it, little pony?"

Fluttershy pressed the tips of her hooves together. "Well, you see, we're having a bit of a smoke problem. We were wondering if you could stop?"

That only got laughter. "Why should I stop? Are you going to make me, little pony?"

"I'dâ€¦ really rather not," Fluttershy said, "but if I have to, then I will."

More laughter.

Fluttershy's eyes hardened. "Alright, then. Angel? Sic 'em."

\* \* \*

><p>Applebloom held up cards. "Eight point six!"<p>

Scootaloo disagreed. "Only four point five, I think. He's really not controlled his landing well."

Sweetie Belle held hers up. "Six and a half. I really like the startled yowp noise he made."

There was a \_crack\_, as Angel Bunny kicked the dragon entirely into the air a second time. The three fillies gauged this new trajectory, and then started holding up more scorecards.

\* \* \*

><p>"How did you do this?" Twilight asked. "Whatever it was, it was coolâ€|"<p>

"Oh." Fluttershy blushed. "I basically made Angel my animal companion â€ you know, like druids have. And then I went alicorn and pumped more power into him."

Twilight nodded, watching Angel twist all six of his target's limbs into a single chokehold. "I have to say, he took to it well."

\* \* \*

><p>15.1 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"By the way, Rarity," Fluttershy asked, when they were arriving to Ponyville Town Hall in preparation to take care of Nightmare Moon, "why did you ask Twilight for the Element of Magic?"<p>

"Because I want to try wearing and using it. Doesn't it look fabulous on me? I must definitely must have a few pictures taken wearing it." Rarity posed.

"You sure it's gonna work, sugarcube?" Applejack asked as she, like the others, summoned their Elements.

The white unicorn frowned slightly. "Not really. But in that case we are still five alicorns against one."

The rest of the night was a silent wait. Even the usually energetic Pinkie Pie wasn't in the mood for talking, everypony mourning Twilight's loss.

Eventually, Rainbow Dash pointed to the moon, now without the alicorn shaped shadow. "Here she comes." That was all the signal Rarity and the others needed to start activating the elements, from a place hidden enough to conceal them, so that they'd be ready by the time Nightmare Moon made her appearance.

"My beloved subjects, it has been so long."

â€|or so they believed, because the Element of Magic wasn't activating.

\_Please, Element of Magic! Twilight really doesn't need to deal with Nightmare Moon this loop.\_

The lack of response from the crown only angered her. "Oh, buck it! Plan B!" And then the Element holders started running towards Nightmare Moon just in time for her usual declaration.

"The night will last-" â€| which was as far as she got, because Nightmare Moon's speech was interrupted by a blur of blue movement which punched her in the jaw.

"\*\*OUR\*\* NIGHT" Princess Luna said to Nightmare Moon with the full force of the Canterlot Royal Speaking Voice, and blew on her right forehoof.

"Princess Luna?" all five Element bearers chorused, skidding to a halt in confusion.

"Oh, hi!" Luna waved to the Elements bearers, and trotted over as guards covered the recumbent form of Nightmare Moon.

Once in range, she lowered her voice so only they could hear her. "For some reason I turned up separate to Nightmare Moon this time, any idea why? And where's Twilight?"

"Ohhâ€| my headâ€|" Nightmare Moon said, clutching it. There was a burst of light, and she shrunk down to filly size. "What happened?"

That filly wasâ€|\_By Harmony.\_ "Dash! Get Twilight NOW." She only received a Sonic Rainboom as answer.

"Rarity, what's the deal?" Princess Luna asked.

"It's about Nightmare Moon, it could be a very long shot but-" The crack of teleportation interrupted her, bringing Twilight Sparkle and Princess Rainbow Dash. Rarity wondered if there was any library left as of now.

"We're here," Twilight said, bloodshot eyes showing she hadn't stopped crying after they had left. "What did you want-?"

She broke off mid sentence, locking eyes with the little alicorn on the dais. "â€|Nyxie?"

"Momma! I mean, Twilight!"

Luna gestured to the two guards to stand down, as Nyx launched herself across the room into Twilight's forelegs.

"What happened? I was going to bed and then suddenly I was on the moon, and then I tried to play Nightmare Moon when I saw the Summer Sun celebration. Are we in the past?"

"Thank youâ€| whoever's organizing this, thank you. For letting me have my daughter back." Twilight muttered while hugging Nyx tighter.

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|so I won't be around much?" Nyx asked. "That kinda sucks."<p>

Twilight nodded. "I know, I wish you would be more but it's just the way these loops seem to work. But promise me, please let me know the moment you awake in any loop â€" that'll be the very next loop for you, but I don't know how long it will have been for me."

"I promise momma."

Then the purple unicorn smiled. "But what matters more is that you're going to be here at all. When I thought I'd lost youâ€|"

After a moment, Nyx adjusted her glasses. "Heyâ€| next time I turn up, can we play a prank on Princess Celestia?"

"Whatever you want," Twilight said. "Whatever you want."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia,<em>

\_By unexpectedly using a loophole in the "no children" policy for loopers I ended adopting a small filly I named Nyx. I think I could gush for a long time about her, so I'll leave it for when we meet in person (feel free to ask Princess Luna for pictures, you'll be for a surprise). The important part is, I found myself heartbroken when the loop reset and I couldn't even give my farewells to my daughter. However, thank Harmony, Yggdrasil somehow decided to make Nyx awake the very next loop.\_

\_I think I now finally understand why you requested me to write you these Looper Reports so many loops ago. I may not know when, I may not know how, but now that both Nyx and myself are looping I know we will meet again someday, in the same way the Looper Reports are a promise for us to meet again. Now I see how those promises give me the strength to go on each day.\_

\_Thank you, Princess. For taking care of me even when you aren't awake.\_

\_Your faithful student,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle\_

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Bit of an increase in cast size this time... that wasn't precisely planned, it just happened.

>And I'm going to try and have Spike and Rarity develop naturally. They have every chance to take things slow.<p>

Loop 15.2 is based in part off of one of my other fanfics, Another Kind of Magic. Basically because that way I can use my slightly crazy Trixie from that fic. And 15.7 includes some technology from the

Nanoha universe, an Intelligent Device. Basically, a technological version of a familiar spirit, which helps with spellcasting.  
>And, of course, 15.1 features Nyx from Past Sins.<p>

Thoughts?

Also note: chapter eight's part of Turning the Tables has been revised, to make clearer the distinction between what Celestia wanted to do and what she accidentally did.

## 16. Chapter 16

### 16.1

\* \* \*

><p>Discord snapped his fingers. "Well, so much for the gallant captain of the guard."<p>

Shining Armor's coat washed out and became grey, as his Discordification took effect.

"â€|waitâ€|" Discord looked over at the Element bearers. "Why aren't you worried?"

"Discord?" Twilight said, sniggering. "My brother's talent is defensive spells. What's the opposite of defence?"

The Draconequus started to say something, paused, and then sighed. Snapping his fingers, he created a podium and stepped onto it. "Can I at least have time to pose?"

"Ooh!" Pinkie hopped up and down. "I know the answer! It's offense!"

Twilight shaded her eyes as the Plasma Lancer spell triggered.

\* \* \*

### ><p>16.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Thanks, Shining." Cadence said, nuzzling him for a moment. "Just a month to go."<p>

Shining Armor blushed, then nodded. "Can't wait."

After a moment more, Shining left his fiancÃe's rooms and headed home.

"One month?" A voice said from down the corridor.  
"Excellentâ€|"

Cadence looked around. "Who was that?"

A servant, one who had gone past not five minutes ago doing laundry, flashed green and became a black, insectile alicorn-like creature.

"Me. Queen Chrysalis. And I'm sorry to sayâ€¦ \_little\_ ponyâ€¦ but your wedding isn't going to go as planned."

Chrysalis walked forward, green magic glowing around her horn. "Well, in one way in particular. It won't be you up there with Shining Armorâ€¦ it'll be meâ€¦"

Another flash of magic, and Cadence was facing her double.

The newest princess of Equestria blinkedâ€¦ then grinned. "Excellent!"

"â€¦what?" Chrysalis nearly tripped over.

"Oh, hang on, there's some mistakes with your disguise. That shade isn't quite the colour of my coatâ€¦ and that's the wrong horn spiral curvatureâ€¦ yes, that's better." Cadence stepped back and walked around the befuddled Chrysalis. "And I don't think much of those fetlocksâ€¦ wait, is my rear really \_that\_ large? I need to lay off the cakesâ€¦"

"You won't have \_any\_ cakes where you're going!" Chrysalis rejoined, trying to regain the initiative.

"Wellâ€¦" Cadence used her magic to lift over a huge pile of paperwork. "Here. I discovered that my aunts were taking on \_far\_ too much of a load of paperwork, and so I volunteered to help out. Of course, they then each gave me half of theirs, so I've ended up overworked myselfâ€¦ honestly, I was letting it pile up a bitâ€¦ of course, you'll have to handle that yourself, if you're going to replace me."

Cadence looked over at the faux-alicorn. "Or did you not expect that?"

"NO!" Chrysalis shouted. "Of course I didn't! I thought it would be a pleasant month or so in nice surroundings, draining love from your sickeningly devoted fiancÃ©, and then I would invade Equestria!"

"Yeah, no." Cadence shrugged. "Funny how plans don't work out, isn't itâ€¦ I wanted a quiet wedding." \_This time,\_ she thought to herself.

"Anyway," she summoned magic to herself, "Bye!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Well?" Shining asked, as Cadence materialized in <em>his<em> room.

"Either she's left, or she's going to do all my paperwork. Either way, I think we can get away with a weekend in the mountains." Cadence grinned. "Twilight was right, this \_is\_ more satisfying than just kicking her or something."

\* \* \*

><p>16.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>If there was one thing that Rainbow Dash had learned through the course of the Time Loops, it was restraint.<p>

It hadn't come easy to her, to be certain, but she did manage it now and again.

But this was one of the Loops Twilight had said she could cut loose on. So that wasn't a consideration.

\* \* \*

><p>Dash entered the first stage of her Best Young Fliers' competition set. Rather than go with something outwardly flashy, she simply executed a series of loops, Immelmann turns and finally five Kulbits in a row.<p>

Oh, they were well performed, certainly, but nothing to compete with her usual pyrotechnics. Butâ€|

She could already hear it. The pegasi in the audience with an experience of stunt flying were noticing it â€" her aerobatics were breaking the laws of physics quite thoroughly. Firstly, because she was doing the whole thing in a glide. And given thatâ€|

\_Heh.\_ Dash felt a grin emerge, as she let the airflow fall off her wings completely. \_Yeah, I'm stalling. And it doesn't look like it, does it?\_

A simple backflip in mid air, and she caught the airstream again. This time, she beat her wings â€" once only, the first time since she'd started her set. And rocketed forwards.

\* \* \*

><p>Spitfire gaped. "Soarin'? Is that supposed to be possible?"<p>

"Nope." Soarin' managed. "She just tripled her speed in one wingbeat."

"Oh, good. I did wonderâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Time for something more impressive.<em> Dash stopped abruptly, killing her entire relative velocity in one go and sending her slipstream rocketing upwards into the clouds around. Then, as she began to fall, the blue pegasus accelerated in earnest.

Again, she was focusing on pure skill. Holding her velocity down to the barest fraction below the speed of sound, a cloud formed around her â€" not the transient one from breaking the sound barrier, but one that just stayed and stayed.

It was likely only a few dozen pegasi in the audience would recognize what she was doing â€" controlling her speed to within a metre per second at the very edge of the sound barrier. But, as her personal weather magic signature interacted with the cloud, it produced a cone

of rainbow light all around her.

Her expert eye gauged the progress of what she'd set in motion overhead. \_Nearlyâ€| nearlyâ€|\_

A wide, sweeping turn took her over a mile away from the stadium. Dropping speed and executing a wingover, she took aim.

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|waitâ€|" Soarin' pointed up. "Should the clouds be doing that?"<p>

Spitfire followed his hoof. "Wh-no! Of course not!"

A minute ago, there'd been a scattering of light, fluffy clouds â€" just enough to make it interesting if the pegasi wanted to use them in their routines. But whatever was going on â€" was it this Rainbow Dash's doing? â€" meant that they were coalescing, and turning an ominous black.

Actually, it looked like they were about to do a spontaneous lightning discharge.

"Everypony d-"

Two huge explosions merged into one, drowning out her voice.

\* \* \*

><p>Dash landed in total silence, the cloud she'd created blown away by the blast.<p>

"And I call that the Lightning Cutter. Neat, huh?"

After about five seconds, it finally registered that she'd just used a \_sonic rainboom\_ to block a \_lightning bolt\_ in mid air.

\_Then\_ the applause started.

\* \* \*

><p>16.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sent off the usual letter to Celestia, warning her about the imminent return of Nightmare Moon.<p>

After a minute or so, she got the reply back â€" just the same as normal. But the top, as Spike read it out, said:

\_Dear Spike,\_

\_Please hand this to Twilight without unfolding it. I'm afraid there's something private I'd like to discuss with her.\_

"Huh," Spike said, stopping there. "Wonder what she wants. Secret mission?"



Twilight shrugged, already guessing what the subject was.

\_Dear Twilight Sparkle, \_

\_As you may have guessed, I'm Awake again. And, sorry to say, I'm feeling a little bit tired. What do you say, should we work out some kind of gigantic prank on Equestria as a whole? \_

"She wants to see me," Twilight interpreted to Spike. "I'd better head over there."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right," Twilight muttered, poring over the notes they'd been making. "Soâ€¦ it looks like the most likely option is number three."<p>

Celestia giggled. "Oh, I wish I could see the look on my sister's faceâ€¦"

"I'll make sure to record it," Twilight promised.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, basicallyâ€¦" Twilight said to a crowd which included the mayor, two of the other Element bearers and a fair fraction of the town, "The reason the Summer Sun is being held here is because it is closest to the old royal seat, in the Everfree. This has been scheduled for a full thousand years, though," Twilight shook her head, "it looks like most of the paperwork got lost over the intervening time. Anyway, Princess Celestia is stepping down-><p>

There was a sudden hubbub of conversation.

"Excuse me? Thank you. As I was saying, Princess Celestia is stepping down in favour of her sister, Princess Luna. One of the Royal Sisters has to be in the heavens at all times to maintain the cycle of the years, and the other on Equestria to maintain the cycle of the days. Celestia's time on Equestria is up, so she's off to the sun." Pure invention, but it sounded good. "And that means we need to give a good welcome to Princess Luna. After all, she's been a little out of touchâ€¦"

"Right." Mayor Mare gave a determined nod. "Let's get to work, then!"

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon stepped out onto stage. "Oh, my beloved subjects-><p>

Then she blinked. Banners on the wall saying "goodbye Celestia", "good luck" and "welcome back Luna"? What was going on?

Celestia trotted smartly up to her, so brazen that Nightmare found it difficult to react. "Welcome back, Luna. Your job now, I'm off to the sun."

And then she vanished. Completely.

"â€|what?"

Then a unicorn came onto the stage. "Welcome back, your highness. Now, we do have a plan of work in place, so let's start with one of the most important issues â€" you see, the construction of farming land was given a high priority under your sister's stewardship, but water conservation and control was rather less rigorously applied. I think a good first place for a tour of inspection would be-

"â€|what is going on?" Nightmare Moon managed.

"It's the Precession, of course." The unicorn smiled tolerantly, and started explaining in the tones of someone saying what everyone already knew. Just for the record, as it were.

It was all news to Nightmare Moon, butâ€| well, it couldn't be too bad if she was suddenly in charge.

\* \* \*

><p>"Why are there so many clouds?" Nightmare Moon asked, scowling into the sky. "Can the Pegasi not deal with them?"<p>

"Not really, no," Twilight said. "They're kind of overwhelmed. I mean, sun lamps and hydroponics have worked to provide sufficient food for the population, but a large increase in cloud cover is inevitable when it's constantly daytime over the largest ocean on the planet." Twilight conjured a visual aid, spinning the blue-green orb to highlight the huge ocean opposite Equestria itself. "See? The area of daylight is causing mammoth amounts of evaporation."

Nightmare sighed. "And would this problem be solved if We made sure it was no longer Eternal Night?"

"Pretty much." Twilight shrugged. "It's just climate science, really. And it's a little hard to admire a night through a thick layer of clouds."

"â€|fine, then." Nightmare Moon's horn glowed, and things got perceptibly lighter.

"It'll probably take a few months for the climate to settle back down, I'm afraidâ€|" Twilight said. "Still, the pegasi should earn their keep for the duration."

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia spun in the air on her magically-reinforced tungsten-diamond surfboard, the photosphere of her star like a warm breeze against her coat. "I never knew this would actually work! Prominences are much more awesome than mere waves!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>16.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"and then we used the Elements on Sombra," Twilight concluded.<p>

Celestia blinked. "Didn't I say not to take them? I know it was hard, Twilight, but I had to be certain you weren't vulnerable to corruption" I won't repeat my mistake with Luna." The alicorn of the sun rubbed her temples. "I was keeping an eye on you, scant though that excuse sounds, and"

Then she shrugged. "But it apparently doesn't matter, if you used the Elements anyway. Why did you take them?"

"Oh, we didn't take them," Twilight said innocently. "We summoned them once we'd got there." Putting action to words, Twilight summoned her Element of Magic to her forehead. "Neat, isn't it?"

Celestia nodded. "It is, actually. But oh, never mind. Apparently it is impossible to separate you from them then, so a lot of my worries are alleviated."

Twilight passed over some papers. "Here " I've got Sombra assigned to an anonymous group, to help him recover."

The elder ruler scanned what Twilight had given her. "Crystalholics anonymous?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Grar. I am Sombra, and I am obsessed with" crystals."<p>

"Hello, Sombra" chorused four diamond dogs, three teenage dragons, a sea serpent, Pinkie Pie and Discord.

"Wait." Sombra pointed at Pinkie. "Pink pony. How?"

Pinkie sniffed. "I like granulated sugar, okay?"

\* \* \*

><p>16.6 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><span>Playing Catch-up<span>

\* \* \*

><p>Apple Bloom's underground workshop was pretty much as Flim and Flam had seen it, though that was loops ago. She'd pretty much automated the process of setting it up, letting it run while she went off and did other things. The appeared near on alcove which had a whole lot of racks of herbs and plants, and tables full of brewing equipment. Though Diamond Tiara hardly noticed with all the other incredible things they could see.<p>

"You built all" this?"

The farm-pony grinned. "My talent is inventing and making stuff, the more sophisticated the better. That's why I had so much trouble

getting my mark in the base-line reality; most of the things I'm good with don't exist unless I invent them. And while I'm great at application, I don't have the spark of genius to make the original breakthroughs. Computer, give me a standard projection display and two bottles of apple juice, no ice."

"Working." A voice came from no-where. A vertical, translucent panel of light appeared in front of them, and a tray came flying over as if brought by unicorn telekinesis. However, it had four whirring ducted fans at the corners which were the probable cause.

"I've gotta wonder how many blank flanks just never had the opportunity to do whatever their talent was. I can trigger a making and fixing basic stuff cutie-mark now I understand it, but I'd probably never have found my true cutie-mark without the fused loops. Some of them have far higher base tech levels, and I learned everything I could from them."

She reached up and touched various pictures on the screen, and it flowed through a succession of cutie-marks, all involving apples and tools or brushes, one an apple cart with a hammer and spanner crossed underneath in the style of a skull and crossbones. It finally settled on her Zap Apple cutie mark, with the bite out of it exposing a golden tracery of circuits and runes.

"But we're not here to talk about me. I figured you deserved to know just how awesome you can be. The first one I was thinking of was in a loop where Equestria was being attacked by aliensâ€¦ I explained about fused loops, didn't I?" Applebloom checked. At the nod, she continued.

She pointed to the three versions of Maritech space fighter lined up, one in pega-form. She touched the screen at various points, and it showed a slide show of video clips from that loop, overflying the Marecross, a second cockpit view of a space battle, the three Crusaders, older and with two in uniforms. They were giving each other a three way high hoof.

"An alien battleship crashed on Equestria in the distant past, and the aliens had come to get it â€" and wipe out any inconvenient discoverers." That said with a grimace. "However, the Princesses ordered that it be studied and put back together. It advanced Equestria's technology, and we worked out how to replace some of the things we couldn't duplicate with magic. "

"But that's just background, I intended to show you what you can be when you aren't being a jerkâ€¦ Though in that case you still were, pretty much, but it was for good reason â€" you know, being an awesome bitch like I said. You two couldn't pilot, but you tested high for Operations. We were in Red Squadron, me and Scootaloo flying a fighter, and you ended up as our squadron's Flight Co-ordinator. Sweetie Belle and Silver Spoon were both bridge bunnies," Applebloom paused, and explained the unfamiliar slang for Diamond, "support operators."

"You were an evil minded sadist, a martinet, a drill sergeant who was such a hard ass we joked that was why you had a diamond on your flankâ€¦ and you brought eleven out of twelve teams in the squadron out the other side. You have to understand, we were hopelessly outnumbered, and most other squadrons suffered better than one

hundred percent losses. After we took that Zentran battleship and Scoots made squadron leader, \_we didn't lose a single pony\_."

She touched more symbols, and a scene appeared. The view from a camera looking down on part of a control room, with Diamond Tiara at a console, flanked by Silver Spoon and Sweetie Belle. "Got the bridge recording after the battle of Ares, it contained some particularly fine examples of Tiara-speak, and it was your birthday coming upâ€|"

The uniformed Diamond Tiara started speaking. "Red Five, FC. If you hold your formation any looser, you'll lose your grip completely, if you haven't already! Tighten up your interval and bring Beta flight round to 16 mark 125, Red Gamma needs support!"

"FC, Five. On it like a bonnet!" Apple Bloom's voice came back.

"FC, Red Eleven, I'm getting my cutie-mark shot off here!" The voice sounded on the edge of panic.

Diamond Tiara's voice cut through it like a knife. "Get that Maritech scratched and it's coming out of your pay! Use that planetoid at 206 12 as cover and pega-form to shoot them as those pods overfly. Beta's coming to support you."

FC, Eleven, thanks!" the un-named flyer had clearly calmed down.

The scene continued, Diamond Tiara's pithy comments not interfering with the way she managed Red squadron like a virtuoso. It was interspersed with take from Mareitech on-board and remote satellite cameras and edited together with an exciting soundtrack. It had the feel of a big budget science-fiction blockbuster, and it served to show Diamond Tiara in the best light as she repeatedly manoeuvred the components of the squadron to evade and destroy the Zentradi pods and mobile suits.

When the clip ended, Apple Bloom said, "The entire squadron collaborated on making that, Sweetie Belle put together a custom soundtrack , and we showed it to you at your party. I think that was about the only time I'd ever seen you lost for words.

She grinned, "Though that certainly wasn't the case after we captured that battleship. I didn't have footage for it, but I finally managed to build a memory reader neural interface a few loops ago. So, this one is direct from my memories."

A new scene formed, Diamond Tiara was facing Apple Bloom's viewpoint, wearing a similar uniform to the one they'd seen earlier.

"You are a pair of idiotic, grandstanding, lunatics!" She yelled, then cracked a tight grin. "However, you are a pair of successful, idiotic grandstanding lunatics, which makes up for it a bit. What were you thinking? Scootaloo, I thought you were better than to get boxed like that."

"I was riding heard on the rest of the flight, give me a break!" Scootaloo looked put-upon, but still flushed with excitement. "Some of those rookies are awfully green. I stayed in the fight after one engine got blown out and our avionics harness got hammered, and we covered the rest of the flight until they got to safety. But by that

time, that battleship had come up and it could have taken us with its point defence, let alone its main guns."

"Huh, they could have hit us with a spit-ball at that range, and that doesn't count the dozens of escort vessels." Apple Bloom added. "Even if I'd been able to get the engine back up, we'd still probably been nailed trying to escape."

"I read your after action reports. You let a near miss appear to take you out, played dead, though they could have just finished you off anyway. You somehow managed to jury-rig enough computer control to go pega-form with a saddlebag computer, and when they took you on board, bam!" Film-Diamond seemed to realize that she was losing her image, and went back to being coolly detached.

"They'd never taken prisoners before, and running away was certain death. To be honest, neither Scoots or I figured what we were doing would be any different, but we reckoned we could take more of them with us."

Diamond Tiara growled. "You do or die types give me an acute pain in the rump! You realise how much trouble I'm going to have try and get the rest of that space happy crew of reprobates in Red Squadron not to try and pull a similar stunt! You had the Princesses' own luck that you somehow managed to take them off guard, and when you did get blasted, you ended up being blown into one of the machine spaces."

Apple Bloom appeared to shrug. "We were working towards it. Zentran tech is either 'use until it stops working' or self-repairing. We figured no-pony would look for us in the machine spaces. Plus, they may be armoured and secured to Tartarus on the outside, but they've never needed internal computer security. Though even I didn't think I'd be able to crack them that easily. But the engineering forums are right, they don't innovate either. The same programs we used to interface with the Marecross's thousand year old original systems worked just as well for that one."

Scootaloo chuckled. "Oh, man, it was fun to see the havoc when she faked a power core overload and triggered an abandon ship. And scrambling the IFF files so the main guns started seeing everything over the size of a shuttle as an enemyâ€¦ It was beautiful!"

You could hear Apple Bloom's appreciation in her voice. "Scootaloo gets props too. She got that hulk moving with the controls I jury-rigged from our Maritech and flew it pretty much blind all the way back."

"If you keep patting yourselves on the back like that you'll hurt your fore-legâ€¦ or \_I\_ will." Diamond Tiara sniffed. "I guess I'd be just as mad either way. If you'd gotten your fool selves blown to atoms, it would have blotted my record. I guess having to ride herd on your fellow flying circus rejects to stop them from pulling something similarly insane is the lesser of two evils."

Apple Bloom chuckled. "We love you too DT!"

There was another growl. "Gahhh! Don't call me DT, it's Flight Controller or ma'am! Well, despite the fact that you both look and smell as if you've spent a week on the waste reclamation level, you

are in very good odour with the top brass. There was mention of medals, but we'll have to see exactly what comes of that, if anything."

She gave an evil grin, her composure restored. "However, I can tell you that they're detaching a prize crew to send that hulk you captured back to Equestria for refitting, and your good friend Rainbow Dash is getting bumped to Wing Commander and is in charge of the oversize squadron they're sending with it for fighter cover. That means the squadron leader slot of Rainbow Squadron is up for grabsâ€|"

Scotaloo was practically hovering in mid-air in excitement as she continued. "â€|and will go to Lightning Dust. But it means that Squadron Leader Soarin is going to move into Rainbow, and \_that\_ means you are the new biggest noise in Red Squadron, Squadron Leader Scotaloo and Senior Flight Engineer Apple Bloom. And may the Princess have mercy on our souls."

She sighed over-theatrically at the pegasus, who had a grin that would probably take surgical intervention to remove. "What did I do to deserve this? A poor innocent pony like myself, saddled with two of the biggest ding dongs in the whole of the MDF."

"I dunno. Just lucky, I guess." Scotaloo grinned.

The scene ended with Apple Bloom sporting a distant look and a big grin. "You'd have sooner walked the length of the Marecross's main deck without an pressure harness, but you did care for us, all of us, and we would have flown straight into Tartarus at your instruction because we knew you'd never ask us to do anything if it wasn't in the best way to protect every-pony."

\* \* \*

><p>16.7 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>(Alert: the previous part of Turning the Tables â€" located in chapter eight â€" has been edited somewhat, to better show what Celestia's intentions as opposed to her results were.)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong><span>Turning Tables (Continued)<span>\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>If Twilight had been privy to her mentor's thoughts she'd have probably thrown in the towel right then, considering her mission accomplished. In fact, she'd have probably felt a bit guilty at the way Celestia had worried about her. She might disagree with how her mentor had handled the Nightmare Moon situation in the base-line loop, but that didn't mean she didn't care for her deeply.<p>

As she stepped up to the ticket booth at Canterlot station, she reflected on the irony of what she was about to do. Celestia's horn-off approach would actually work for this version of Twilight, who was certain she could solve the Nightmare Moon crisis without any

assistance from the Princess. In fact, she was looking forward to the challenge of rekindling her old friendships without the framing device of being the overseer for the Midsummer Sun Festival, and doing it while staying under Princess Celestia's radar.

"Single to Manehattan, please." She horned over the bits to the counter-pony, schooling her expression to be slightly sad. This was another false trail she was laying. If her estimates were correct, Princess Celestia and her brother would assume a life-long Canterlot native such as herself, and one who'd spent a lot of time in libraries at that, to stay in Canterlot. Saying in her letter that she couldn't stay at her parent's house would imply that she was looking to stay somewhere else in Canterlot.

So the Princess's first response would probably to go through Canterlot with a fine tooth comb before checking the station or air-ship port. When they did, they'd discover she'd gotten a ticket to the far end of the line, and start looking for her there, rather than Ponyville. To further muddy the waters, she had no intention of letting any-pony see her get off there. Teleportation from a moving vehicle wasn't easy, but it was possible if you had as much experience as Twilight did.

Eager to be about it, she left the carriage and got out of sight of any-pony inside as soon as they were well clear of the station. First some changes, her horn glowed as she wrapped an illusion around herself that would take an alicorn to pierce. Her coat became a washed out blue, her mane white and tied back in a bun, and her cutie-mark, an open book with a red bookmark in it. Her saddlebags changed too, actually being changed into a simpler, less expensive design, and a pair of manifested pince-nez glasses completed the disguise.

Her horn glowed again and she and flashed away and reappeared a few hooves in the air on the outskirts of Ponyville, near the road from Canterlot. A double check to see she hadn't kept any of the trains' velocity, and that she'd not been seen, and her horn flared and lowered her to the ground. Walking into town she headed straight for the mayor's office.

\* \* \*

><p>"These credentials are very impressive, Miss Codex." The mayor examined the paperwork in front of her. "With these you could certainly get a job in any library or archive in one of the big cities. May I ask why you chose to come to Ponyville?"<p>

Twilight, now Codex, knew the question was just for form's sake. The old librarian, Flower Dew, had been offered a job in the Royal Canterlot Archives, which not only paid better but had put her far closer to her grand-children in Canterlot. Twilight suspected Princess Celestia's horn in that. As a result, the Mayor had been keeping Golden Oaks open ad hoc, whenever she could find a pony with a few hours to spare.

Since none of them were trained in Library Science, the books were in a terrible mix up, put back wherever the pony in charge thought they should go. It was one of the reasons Twilight had found it so hard to find the reference guide. It should not have been in the popular fiction section, under E. The upshot was that the mayor was ready to



hire just about any-pony, or a griffon or Diamond Dog for that matter, if they could show they could do the job.

She showed none of these thoughts and instead gave a sigh. "Big cities, and all the things that come with them, are exactly what I'm trying to get away from. I have personal reasons for wanting to find somewhere quiet to think things over and put my life backâ€|"

She stopped herself as if she'd said more than she intended. "Can we leave it at that? I'd rather not talk about it. I can do the job, if you want me too."

The mayor was a softy at heart, Twilight had worked with her long enough to know how she'd react. She felt a bit guilty at taking advantage of the other mare's good nature, but she could do the job, and although her references were faked, they were actually less impressive than her real ones. The mayor would eventually send off to the archives and to get statements from her referees and find out the deception, but that wouldn't be until after the Summer Sun celebration, which was all the time Twilight needed.

"I'm sure we can use you on a trial basis. Some-pony from Canterlot is coming to oversee the preparations for the Summer Sun Celebration, and the Princess has requested she stay at Golden Oaks, but if you don't mind giving up your room for the nightâ€|"

Twilight smiled. "I'm sure I can sleep on a cot for one night. I'll wait until after the Midsummer Sun Celebration to get unpacked. In the mean time, if she's interested in books, I should be there to help her find what she needs."

"Excellent!" The mayor smiled back at her. "That kind of attitude is exactly what we need!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight spent a couple of happy hours re-shelving and cataloguing the misfiled books and getting the place spick and span. When you knew the vast number of household charms she did, and had lived in the place for centuries, you knew exactly what needed doing. Then her stomach rumbled, indicating that teatime was fast approaching.<p>

She decided to head for Sugarcube Corner over Sweet Apple Acres, as she'd be able to get in groceries in town as well as some delicious cakes for tea. She knew that Pinkie would have been working at the counter when she first arrived, which explained the lack of an encounter, but she wasn't sure if she still would be by now.

"Hello, welcome to Sugar Cube â€" Wow! I've never seen you before!"

Twilight smiled at the hyperactive pink pony behind the counter. "That's probably because I just got into town today."

"That would be why! Gosh you're smart! I'm Pinkie Pie!"

"And I'm hungry. But my name's Codex. I'm the new town librarian." Twilight was basking in the banter. If there was ever a pony to lift your spirits it was Pinkie Pie.

"Ohhh! Codex the Librarian? Do you slay mighty Thesauruses with a single strike of your due-date stamp?" Pinkie's manner made it clear she wasn't mocking, just being her usual random self.

Twilight rubbed the back of her head with a hoof, playing along. "Well I have dealt with some fairly nasty Grimoires, even a few Incunabula. But my mind is sharp, my indexing skills intact, my heart is pure. And my knowledge of the Pony-decimal indexing system is encyclopaedic. Is this your shop? I mean with a name like Pieâ€|"

"Oh no silly," the pink pony giggled, "Just because I'm called Pinkie Pie, doesn't mean I own a bakery. No, the Cakes own Sugar Cube Corner, I just live here. So now we know each other, we're friends. Welcome to Ponyville, my newest best friend Codex."

At that, Twilight let her expression grow more wistful. Time to play her in-loop role. "Friends? Just like that? I shouldn'tâ€| but I guess it doesn't matter any more."

She gave a deep sigh. "I'd like that. I had to leave my friends behind when I left."

"Aww! It's okay, you can make new friends here! I can help, I know every pony in Ponyville, and all the cows and donkeys and mules and everyone else. It'll be easy, I mean, I'm your friend, and we've only just metâ€|" the pink pony's brow furrowed in thought, "â€| though it seems like I've known you for a long time."

That had Twilight confused. Was Pinkie's Pinkie sense, or one of the other reality bending talents that she regularly displayed letting her sense the loops? She covered it with a grin. "Well I'm glad to meet you, Pinkie Pie. Could I have half a dozen of your pineapple perfect muffins please?"

Pinkie's eyes widened. "Golly, you're even smarter than I thought! I only just invented them today! I hadn't even put them out for ponies to try yet."

She hoofed over a half dozen delightful looking muffins as Twilight mentally kicked herself. "Uhâ€| Mysterious Librarian Powers. You have to be able to sense hidden cake to stop people leaving crumbs or icing on the pages when they're browsing."

Pinkie gave her a long stare, then exclaimed. "Okie Dokie Lokie! Since you're new in town, have them on the house, or rather the shop."

"I'll need a long ladder then. Sorry, I mean that's very generous."

Fortunately Pinkie liked the joke and chuckled. "You're a lot more fun than our last librarian."

"Umâ€| I read a lot of joke books? Speaking of books, I've still got a ton of work to do getting the library sorted out before I go to bed."

Twilight went away with a smile on her face and a song in her heart.

Admittedly making friends with Pinkie was hardly a great feat, but to be honest, this was a far better first meeting than her original one. She was considering how to set up similar meetings with her other friends, and didn't notice when someone came around a corner.

She and a white coated unicorn ended up sprawled on the ground, but her telekinesis grabbed her bags of groceries, her muffins, and the bundle Rarity had been carrying before they hit the ground. Okay, maybe there was some force drawing her to the other elements. She reacted pretty much as she would have anyway.

"Oh my gosh! I'm sorry! I wasn't looking where I was going!" Twilight sprung to her hooves and offered a hoof up. Her bun was undone and white mane hair was straggling out.

"No harm done, I should have been more careful myself." The unicorn used the proffered hoof to help herself up and dusted herself off with deft flicks of telekinesis. "Thank you for saving my new design. If it had ended up in the dirt, it would have been ruined. And I made it especially for the Summer Sun Celebration."

"Glad I could help." Twilight had always wondered why Rarity had shown up to the Celebration without a dress, maybe in the base line she'd run into some-pony else with slower reflexes.

"Oh, my dear, aren't you straining to carry all that?"

Twilight realised that she was still holding up the various items, a tricky load for most unicorns, without showing visible effort. She moved her groceries back into her saddlebags, the box of muffins back onto her saddle, and proffered the dress to Rarity. "It's alright, I'm a librarian, I've had a lot of practice. Books are heavy."

"Oh? What's a librarian doing in Ponyville?" The white unicorn laid the bundle gently across her own saddle.

"Running a libraryâ€¦ I hope." Twilight quipped. "I'm taking over Golden Oaks, I just got into town today. I'm Codex, by the way."

"My goodness, where are my manners? I am Rarity, fashionista and proprietor of Carousel Boutique."

"Pleased to meet you." Twilight held out a hoof, which still had dirt on it. "Ohâ€¦ sorry!"

"Oh, come my dear, we must get you cleaned up after your little mishapâ€¦" Rarity turned around and started leading her towards the boutique. Despite the fact that this was perfect, Twilight felt she had to play her role.

She shook her head and hung back. "Please, you don't need toâ€¦"

"Nonsense, it's the least I can do for saving my dress." Rarity's tone brooked no argument, so Twilight reluctantly allowed herself to be led exactly where she wanted to go. As she expected, the quick clean-up turned into an impromptu dressing up session, as Rarity politely interrogated her. "So, darling, where exactly did you come from?"

Twilight had considered this, and decided it couldn't hurt to stick to the truth. Besides she knew how Rarity would react. "Sugar Cube Corner, but if you're asking where I lived before I came to Ponyvilleâ€¦| Canterlot."

"\_Canterlot\_?! Oh, I am so envious! The glamour, the sophistication! I have always dreamed of living there! I can't wait to hear all about it! We are gonna be the best of friends, you and Iâ€¦| \_Rubies\_ ?! What \_was\_ I thinking? Let me get you some sapphires!"

Twilight wanted to see how this would have played out if she hadn't run away. "Wait! I'm sorry, but I'm not some fashionable society mare. I spend all my time in libraries, reading about stuff other ponies have done. I never really went out and did anything myself. This is the first time I've ever left Canterlot."

It was completely true for her in-loop self. She hung her head. "I'd like to be friends, but I'm sorry if I'm not what you hoped forâ€¦|"

However, Rarity came through with flying colours as she'd expected. "Oh don't be silly my dear, you coming from Canterlot is merely the icing on the cake, so to speak. I'm sure we'll still be great friends. I love a good romance, or a mystery. Or even the occasional adventure novel."

Twilight didn't have to fake the big smile that brought to her face. "Do you like Daring Doo?"

She knew the answer to that; Rainbow Dash wasn't the only pony to be taken with the exploits of the pegasus professor of ponylithic puzzles. However, she wasn't that vocal about it. Rarity blushed. "I have to admit, I've read a tale or two. Not the most refined of ponies, but who can not love the way she finds lost treasures and beautiful magical gems."

"Now wait a second, what about the scene in The Griffon's Goblet where she has to get into the Griffon Ambassador's party to get a rubbing of the map on the ancient shield?" Twilight replied, showing her credentials as a Daring reader quite handily. "She may not be an elegant society pony normally, but she can pull it off when she has toâ€¦|"

Twilight headed back to the library as night came and the moon rose. The discussion had carried on for long enough that Rarity had insisted on making dinner for them both. Twilight, or rather Codex had offered the muffins as dessert. They'd chatted about Daring Doo and other stories Rarity liked, and Twilight had even kicked in some gossip from Canterlot, the sort of things any-pony might know. Once again she'd hinted that something bad had happened to her while avoiding talking about it directly.

As with Pinkie this new first meeting with Rarity had been a lot more successful than the original one, and the burgeoning friendship far more solidly based. She took a deep breath of the fragrant night air and looked up at the mare shadow on the surface of the moon. She might not be doing it the usual way, but by Celestia, Twilight was still going to defeat the Nightmare and free Luna, one way or another. She wondered how her mentor was doing. Hopefully she wasn't taking the derailment of her plans too hard.

\* \* \*

><p>"Your highness!" Shining Armour came galloping up to the Princess's chambers at an unseemly rate, only to find the Princess Celestia poring over a stack of papers and ancient tomes, and looking decidedly frazzled. "I have news of my sister!"<p>

"You've found her?" Shining was shocked at the naked relief in Celestia's voice.

"I'm afraid not. But I do know why. She bought a one way ticket to Manehattan at the railway station early this afternoon. I'm sorry your highness, I never even considered that Twily might leave Canterlot, I mean she's lived here all her lifeâ€|"

He stopped as Celestia waved a hoof at him. "It isn't your fault, neither did I. It seems my student continues to surprise me with her actions. I assume you've already sent pegasi out after the train?"

"The fastest in the Royal Guard, a flying chariot and escort. Unfortunately, they may not reach the train until it reaches Manehattan. I impressed on them the need for speed, but if Twily is trying to lose herself, then there would be no better place than Manehattan to do it."

"Assemble a second team, Captainâ€| Shining Armour. I will personally flash them there."

That knocked Twilight's brother back on his fetlocks. Princess Celestia's flash teleport ability was often talked about, but she almost never actually used it, much less carried others with her. With it, she could travel the length of Equestria in seconds.

"Yes your highness, at onceâ€|" he hesitated. "Forgive me, but why is it so important that we find her right away? I'm sure we can track her down in a few days, even in Manehattan. For that matter, I'm sure she'll eventually contact our parents or myself once she's settled down. I know how she gets sometimes, but she'll calm down."

Princess Celestia sighed, and reached a decision. Time to make good on her vow to be more open about what was going on. Telling her brother would serve as practice for when she found Twilight.

"I'm afraid we do not have time." The princess indicated one of the cushions in the room. "I have to tell you a story of something that happened long ago, and the part Twilight wasâ€| \_is\_ to play in righting it. Once upon a time, in this land of Equestria, there were two regal sisters who ruled together, and created harmony for all the landâ€|"

She explained the history of herself and her sister, throwing in some elements that she hadn't been sure of when she wrote the original legend. Centuries of research showed that there had been something more than just her sister making up Nightmare Moon, a darker essence that had twisted her sister from simply disgruntled into world ending monster.

Then came the hard bit, explaining about the Elements of Harmony, and

how his sister and five other as yet unknown ponies were apart of them. She even discussed her original reasoning as to why she'd handled things the way she had, and how she'd later realised her mistakes. By the end of it Philomena had flown over and was sitting on her shoulder, nestling into her mane, and crooning softly.

At the end, Shining Armour sat very quietly. It wasn't every day that you heard the confessions of a goddess. "You've given me a lot to think aboutâ€¦"

Celestia shook her head, getting a startled squawk from Philomena. "I wouldn't have asked of you or any of your troops what I've expected of Twilight, not without their full and informed consent at least. I'mâ€¦ sorry, truly sorry, can you believe that at all times I wanted what was best for Twilight, that the last thing I wanted was for her to get hurtâ€¦"

She stopped herself. "Only the full power of the Elements can free my sister from that Nightmare, and only Twilight can properly reawaken the Elements and use their full power. I was so focussed on preparing her for that, that I forgot that there were other important things she needed to learn. I was at least as close to Luna as you are to Twilight, wouldn't you do anything to free your sister in a similar situation?" By the end she was all but pleading in tone.

"Iâ€¦ you don't have to justify yourself to me, your highness," Shining said quietly. "I am sworn to your service, to give my life to protect you if need be, and I know Twilight is at least as devoted to you."

Celestia gave a rueful smile. "That actually makes me feel worse. It only confirms that if I had started out being open with Twilight about what I needed her to do, she would have instantly volunteered. Hopefully I will still have time to do that, but if I don't, I need you to be at the Summer Sun Celebration."

"Of course, I will protect youâ€¦"

"NO!" Celestia was edging on using her Royal Canterlot voice, and Shining Armour's mane was blown backwards from the force of it. "Whatever you do, do not interfere! Empowered by the conjunction, my sister will be too powerful for me to defeat. Your defensive spells are without peer, but defence will not win this battle and free my sister. She has to capture me, so I can force her to divert most of her power into restraining me, and trapping me in the sun. That will give Twilight the chance to collect the Elements from the Palace and activate them."

"But Princess, won't that hurt you?"

"Consider it the contribution of a foolish old mare to the task of defeating Nightmare Moon and freeing my sister. The bearers of the Elements are in Ponyville, and it's my hope that wherever Twilight is, when she learns what has transpired she will come to find out for herself. You must pass on this knowledge in my stead. If there is any-pony in Equestria that Twilight will trust, it is you. Tell her everything, tell her I do believe in her, that she can do this, tell herâ€¦. I'm sorry."

"I willâ€¦ I will prepare a recovery team at once."

Shining Armour bowed his head, and rose up from his cushion to take his leave, leaving the immortal alicorn princess alone with her thoughts, and her regrets.

"Princess Celestia?" The voice was Perriwig, her seneschal. "I apologise for disturbing you at this late hour, but there is the matter of a replacement overseer for the Summer Sun Celebrations. Who do I send in Twilight Sparkle's stead?"

The Princess sighed, the appointment was unimportant now that she couldn't use it to send Twilight Sparkle to Ponyville. However, she still had to find some-pony, or rather make sure some-pony was found. "Use your best judgement. I trust you will find some-pony suitable."

"As you command, your highness." he bowed and retreated. As he did he considered the choices. It should be some-pony of sufficient importance that the inhabitants of Ponyville wouldn't feel slighted. He'd thought Twilight Sparkle a poor choice anyway, while she might be close to Celestia and a good organiser she had little official standingâ€|

Of course, he had the perfect candidate. He'd overseen the Celebration last year in Canterlot, and was a suitably important pony for the purpose. With a sense of purpose, he headed off to organise things. Whatever distress the Princess might be feeling over Twilight Sparkle's disappearance, at least this was one thing she wouldn't need to worry about. The Summer Sun Celebrations in Ponyville would go off without a hitch.

\* \* \*

><p>16.8<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Huh. Human again." Twilight scanned through her memories. Nothing particular, just that she'd recently moved house.<p>

That made her feel uncomfortable. Loops almost always had something going on. And when the other (horse)shoe didn't drop for a while, that usually meant it was something big.

Twilight would never forget the time Pinkie Pie materialized in front of her, warp goddess of the Eldar Empire.

"Waitâ€|" A horrible suspicion dawned on her. Something Spike had teased her about for weeks.

She reached into her subspace pocket and pulled out a PADD, scrolling through the gathered fiction of the Hub Loop to find what she was after.

"Yep. Thought so."

Twilight put the PADD down next to her and sighed. "I'm replacing Bella Swan. Oh, I wish I had TMS Harmony with meâ€|" Right now, the dreadnought class ship would be a great equalizer. Sadly, it was a little big for her to easily fit in her subspace pocket â€" even

now, let alone when she'd been in that Loop.

After a bit of feeling sorry for herself, she got a determined expression and stood back up. "Right. Where did I put that wandâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>There was nothing quite so satisfying as letting a Loop sort itself out. Well, <em>almost</em> sort itself out.

"Right. And what happened next?" the assistant chief asked, flipping onto the third page of his notes.

"Well â€" I don't know if he actually did," Twilight said, shuddering, "but he told me that he was sneaking into my room and watching me sleep."

"Rightâ€¦"

"And that's when I asked dad to handle it. I mean, he'd been worried before, but I thought it was justâ€¦ nerves, you know? And he hadn't done anything really creepy until then, but looking backâ€¦" The girl shrugged helplessly.

"Thank you for your time, miss Sparkle." The police officer closed his notebook. "I'm afraid this might go to court, but we'll try to keep the disruption in your life minimal."

"I appreciate it," Twilight said. "I'd just like everything to go back to normal, really."

That, at least, was true. A chance for several uninterrupted years of schooling in a nuclear-tech level world? Excellent!

\* \* \*

><p>"But you <em>can't</em> arrest me!" Edward Cullen shouted. "My father will sort this out! He's done it before!"

"He has, has he?" Charlie Sparkle said, frowning. "And I thought he was such a nice man."

Edward thrashed at the handcuffs, which unaccountably failed to break.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight grinned inside. There were no better targets for Mordenkainen's Disjunction than the Cullens, in her opinion.<p>

And now the justice system could handle them quite nicely.

"Right, where did I put that physics textbookâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>16.9<p>

\* \* \*



><p>"You know what," Dash said suddenly, "buck it. Gilda, you take my slot."<p>

The griffin blinked. "Dashâ€| thisâ€| what? I mean, \_what?\_"

"Seems fairly simple, Gilda." Dash grinned. "You take my slot in the Best Young Fliers. You deserve a chance."

"Butâ€|" Gilda's beak opened and closed. She was at a loss for words for almost ten seconds, until she finally came up with something to say. "Dashâ€| don't do this! I mean, you've wanted to do well at the Best Young Fliers for years!"

"So have you, you told me as much training last week." Dash shrugged. Then she caught Gilda's eye, and winked. "Besides, I think I'm \_easily\_ awesome enough to get the attention of the Wonderbolts anyway. It isn't as if a broken down old hen like you is going to have a chance!"

Gilda's eyes widened, and her ruff rose. "Did you just call me a \_broken down old hen?\_"

"Wellâ€|" Dash drew out the word, now looking sly. "You \_could\_ always prove me wrong."

The griffin seethed. "You bet I will, Dash! You'll eat those words!" Suddenly, she laughed. "Well, I'm good and motivated now! I didn't think you ponies could be that devious!"

Dash gave her a fierce grin. "Hey, we haven't been invaded in decades. Why do you think?" Dash gestured skywards. "Make me proud, Gils."

Gilda shot into the air.

\* \* \*

><p>"Huhâ€|" Dash said, squinting up. "Don't remember seeing any pegasus use the clouds like that."<p>

Twilight nodded. Gilda was darting from cloud to cloud such that only a few ponies were able to properly follow her movement. To the rest of them, it looked like she was entering one cloud and then appearing from a completely different one seconds later.

She was definitely getting the full benefit from joining Dash's exhausting training regimen over the last few months, that was for sure.

Then the griffin started simply gliding. Most pegasi made use of thermals, but Gilda was clearly a master of the art â€" even spinning her own thermals with minute movements of her wings that resonated in the air.

"Hey, I think she's impressed Spitfire," Twilight suddenly said, pointing with a nod of her head. "Think they'll have to redesign the Wonderbolt outfit?"

Gilda had entered a dive while they weren't watching. Now she stooped

on the main stage at well over half the speed of sound, flaring her wings to cancel her momentum perfectly on the floor itself.

Her landing was light as a feather.

"Interesting," Twilight said as they applauded. "I like the combination of poise and grace, thereâ€|"

"\_I'm\_ wondering if I should get her to try for the Rainboom," Dash replied. "She was getting pretty fast there."

"Could be interesting. Let me know if you need help with that," Twilight said contemplatively. "I know a fair amount about pegasus magic theory, though you're second to none at the practical side."

\* \* \*

><p>16.10<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Luna stumbled.<p>

She wasâ€| \_Luna\_, again. Why? What had caused the burning rage, which had enveloped her for the last thousand years, to so abruptly dissipate?

Accepting there wouldn't be a quick answer, the Princess of the Night prepared to dream-walk â€" nothing major, just to observe. If she was to return, it had best be with a full understanding of how culture had developed.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight grinned. "Nice to see you, Nyxie."<p>

"Thanks, momma!" Nyx returned the grin. "Hey, I came up with a great idea for a joke to play on Celestia!"

The unicorn listened carefully, occasionally offering corrections or asking questions.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia,<em>

\_I have come across a young filly who I think would be an excellent applicant to your academy. While I understand that normally those wishing to attend are sponsored by their parents, in this case I feel that I must strongly recommend her attendance on my own authority â€" such as it is and what there is of it, of course.\_

\_Your faithful student,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked up as Spike burped up a scroll. "Is that the reply?"<p>

"Yeahâ€|" Spike skimmed through it. "Basically, yes. She's scheduled an exam for this afternoon."

"Yay!" Nyx said, bouncing around. "Thank you, Twilight!"

"You deserve it," Twilight said, smiling down at the overexcited filly. It was true enough â€" while Nyx didn't have access to quite the power of an adult alicorn, she still had a lot of magic at her disposal. And since she'd once turned Fluttershy into a treeâ€|

And, just to make a point of sorts, Twilight had given her a cosmic spectrum crystal pendant to wear. It looked good on her, tooâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright," Celestia said, entering the examination room. Since there was no need to bring parents along and since classes were in session, the room was nearly empty â€" she'd decided to attend personally, because that way she could also see how Twilight was doing.<p>

Then she blinked. "â€|what?"

"Hi!" the alicorn filly said, running over. "Are you Princess Celestia? Oh, sorry, that's a stupid question, of course you are! My name's Nyx!"

"Twilight," Celestia asked, "â€|where did you say you found her?"

"I didn't, actuallyâ€|" Twilight shrugged. "What's the first part of the test?"

Now seriously wrong-hoofed, Celestia answered without thinking about it. "Conjuration."

"Okay," Nyx said, concentrating. Her horn glowed, and her wings half-spread with the effortâ€|

And, with a cloud of smoke, Princess Luna fell to the floor in a tangle of limbs.

"â€|oops," Nyx blushed. "Who's she? I think I messed upâ€|"

Celestia's eyes darted from Nyx, to her Cosmic Spectrum pendant, then to her sister. "â€|pass, full marks."

Twilight grinned. She knew what Celestia would be guessing thanks to the presence of the pendant â€" Nyx had somehow ascended beforehand by way of her pendant, clearly wasn't evil because the stone would show up the presence of evil, and therefore this was an accident. "Hear that, Nyx?"

"Yay!"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

...not much to say this time, except that I like reviews...

## 17. Chapter 17

### 17.1

Rarity passed Spike another gemstone. "Can you round this one off?"

"Sure." Spike carefully whetted the ruby with his claws, slicing off the cornered edges and following that up by rolling it around in his paws. "There you go; that should be fine."

She plucked it from his hands without looking, and slotted it carefully into a recess in the outfit she was designing. "Right, that should doâ€¦" Needle and thread worked, sealing over the recess so that the gem was concealed beneath a thin layer of silk.

"So, what are you going for?" Spike asked, drilling a hole through a sapphire with his claw.

"Well," Rarity said, "I'm trying to make something to work as Applejack's semi-permanent coronation dress. Something for her to default to, if you see what I mean." She caught sight of the blue stone, and winced. "Oh, dear, did I give you a sapphire? Oops â€" that should have been an emerald, since I'm trying to stick to apple-related colours."

Spike nodded. "Right â€" I'll try to remember that myself. Can Iâ€¦?"

"Go ahead."

The dragon popped said sapphire into his mouth, shattering it with his teeth and swallowing. "Delicious. So, why are the gems not so apparent?"

"Well, you know Applejackâ€¦" Rarity moved her work light over the outfit. "The gems aren't immediately visible, but they still colour the silk over them. It's to represent how her country-girl nature is still her foundation â€" as the silk is foundation to the dress â€" but it conceals refinement within."

"Ah, I see." Spike frowned. "Wouldn't cotton work better? I mean, it is a plant, and silk thread is animal based and usually associated with wealth itselfâ€¦"

"â€¦drat." Rarity rolled her eyes, and the dress flew apart in a burst of telekinesis. Cotton snaked in and started to reassemble the base frame. "Well spottedâ€¦ I can't believe I missed that."

Spike started in alarm. "Won't that wreck all the work you've done so far?"

"Not really, noâ€¦" the unicorn assured him, still focusing on her work. "A lot of what I do isâ€¦ building the image in my mind as I build the dress itself. Since I've already got a fair way into the process, I can just reconstruct what I've already done."

Her horn glow died down. "There. See?"

Spike nodded. "Very impressive. Oh â€" what did you want next?"

"Peridot, please," Rarity said, frowning at the area of the spine. "And then some topaz."

"â€|there are yellow apples?"

"I admit," Rarity shrugged, "Applejack doesn't seem to grow many. But they do exist â€" from a different part of her family, but it's there. Now, how do I handle the wingsâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>"There we go," Rarity said eventually, "I think it looks fairly good."<p>

Spike evaluated the dress. It looked fairly simple, mostly white, but with more than enough trimmings in orange to keep it from being considered a bridal dress. But when the light hit it, it shimmered green-red-orange-yellow. In fact, the way the colours of the smaller gems moderated the larger ones, it had the rough complexion of an apple as well.

The wings were properly accommodated for, as well â€" an ingenious fold in the fabric on each side concealed holes, and when extended the wings would be able to beat without stretching the dress too much.

On the other hand, there were so many gemstones in it that it could probably deflect crossbow bolts, entirely separate from the enchantments woven into it. That made flying a chancy prospect for anyone who \_wasn't\_ either an alicorn or Rainbow Dash.

"Interesting, certainlyâ€|" he said diplomatically. "I'm just afraid that AJ might consider it too frou-frou for her."

"You aren't suggesting that my dresses are too frou-frou, are you Spike?" Rarity asked, with a pleading note in her tone that was almost entirely feigned.

"No, no," Spike assured her. "A hypothetical Applejack is suggesting that."

"Well, so long as it's only a hypothetical one, then I'll endure it quite well," Rarity said tartly. "I might test her reaction to a lesser version of this â€" one without the wing holes â€" though I'll probably need your help for that one as well."

"No problem," Spike said. "Same time next week?"

"Alright, then," Rarity replied. "It's a- time."

Neither of them commented on what she'd nearly said.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, how'd it go?" Twilight asked.<p>

"Alright," Spike said, shrugging. "I helped her make a dress â€" very gemstone heavy. Learned quite a lot about how gemstones hold enchantments, too, which was interesting." Then he grinned. "And I don't think I'll need dinner tonight, either â€" shaved crystals."

Twilight nodded. "I'm glad you enjoyed yourself."

"What are you working on, by the way?" Spike asked, looking at her paperwork.

"Oh," Twilight shifted the papers. "I'm trying to arrange a clerical error that has Discord's statue shipped to the Griffins."

"Huh." Spike paused. "Why?"

"Why not?" Twilight replied. "I mean, we'll be on call in case it turns out to be less funny and more tragic. But I'm partly wondering if he even can discordify a griffin â€" does he just rely on the magic of cutie marks?"

"Fair enough."

\* \* \*

><p>17.2<p>

"Twilight!" Trixie said, trotting over. "I have a perfect plan for Nightmare Night!"

"Oh?" Twilight asked, looking over Trixie's costume.

The younger looper was, in fact, dressed as Maleficent â€" hopefully just a fashion choiceâ€" but after a moment Twilight mentally shrugged. After all, she'd worn practically every Nightmare Night costume she could think of.

For that matter, she was just going to ascend for her costume this time.

"Observe!" Trixie said, lifting something from the nearest rooftop and bringing it down for investigation. "A simple firework."

"Yesâ€" Twilight said, warily.

"It is completely safe, having only enough fuel to fly for half a second, and burns up completely upon exploding â€" the actual pyrotechnics come from a small bound spell which produces only light," Trixie continued, indicating components of the rocket.

"Right." Twilight nodded. "Looks nice and safe. Entirely subdued. How many did you set?"

Trixie pondered. "Not sure. I lost count somewhere around twelve thousand."

"Celestia's star, Trixie!" Twilight said, then lowered her voice at

the looks of ponies around them. "Sorry. But with that many-"

"At least twice that many. I lost count many times."

"With a minimum of twenty-four thousand fireworks, it doesn't matter how small they are, it's going to look like the whole town's exploding." Twilight threw up her hooves. "Right, I suppose it's too late to take them down again. But be careful!"

\* \* \*

><p>Luna circled Ponyville, preparing for her return to partake of the festivities in this Nightmare Night.<p>

Something about her dark side? She wasn't sure of the details. About all she'd been able to get out of Celestia was that costumes were worn.

Then there was a huge \_bang\_, followed by a hissing shriek that went on and on. Her guards nearly flubbed their wingbeats as Ponyville was enveloped in fire and smoke.

Red and orange and yellow sparks fountained out of the top of a smoke-shrouded cone shape as she looked on, astonished. There were periodic explosions, sending the smoke rippling away, and then a huge shape of winged fire shot skywards. Extending feathered wings with a \_craaaack\_, it turned " revealing itself to be a huge phoenix " and ascended into the heavens.

\* \* \*

><p>"Don't you think you overdid it!?" Twilight shouted, hooves and wings over her head.<p>

Trixie adjusted her hat as firework launch sticks rained down. "Not really. All Trixie did was give Ponyville itself a Nightmare Night costume " as the site of the birth of a phoenix!"

"|phoenixes don't do that," Twilight deadpanned. "Seriously, when they hatch they just \_hatch\_. They're birds, not volcanoes."

"Oh." Trixie shrugged. "Better than nothing."

Luna's chariot half-crashed into the library. The princess and her guards tumbled out, running for cover as Luna snapped off spells skywards.

"Princess!" Twilight called. "Over here!"

"WE ARE UNDER ATTACK!" Luna shouted. "SOME KIND OF GRIFFIN TRICK, WE THINK!"

Twilight shook her head in exasperation. This was going to be one hell of a letter to Celestia. (The salient point would probably be 'please don't invade the Griffin Lands').

\* \* \*

><p>17.3<p>

Celestia ran, the sick taste of failure in her mouth.

Her student " her beloved student " had fallen into corruption no less deep than Luna's own, of a thousand years past. And all five of her friends had fallen the same way.

She was being chased through her own castle by six twisted alicorns, who blew walls and columns aside to follow her.

Then there was a blur of motion.

"Haha! Have at thee!" a familiar voice said, accompanied by a musical series of twangs.

Celestia turned to find Discord " Discord? " holding off dark-Applejack and dark-Fluttershy with a piano in one hand and a duck in the other.

"Celestia!" he said, shouting over his shoulder while making it rain tofu to slow the alicorns down. "Retreat! Get out of the castle, I'll join you outside!"

Thoroughly confused, Celestia looked for a good escape route. The windows caught her eye, but dark-Rainbow Dash shot past them as she made for the closest.

Another Discord ran past her in the other direction, wielding a swordfish and a scroll marked 'FiM script, S4E1'. "They're this way as well!"

Her head swivelled. Yes, the first Discord was still where she'd last seen him, and the second one wasn't something she'd imagined " he was dance-battling dark-Pinkie Pie.

"Hurry up!" Discord implored her. "You're the only one who can use the Elements of Blarmony!"

Celestia frowned. "Elements of WHAT?"

Both Discords and all four visible alicorns sighed. Twilight and Rarity materialized next to Celestia, and all six of them went back to normal.

"Smooth move, Doofus," Twilight said, hitting the left one on the head with a baguette the right one handily provided. "You couldn't have come up with a better name?"

"I was under pressure, so sue me." Discord crossed his arms and huffed. The other one put on a lawyer's wig and began taking depositions from the six Element bearers.

"|what?" Celestia said helplessly.

"Sorry, Celestia," Twilight apologized. "Next time we'll do much better."

"... What do you mean, next time?!"

Ignoring her mentor, Twilight turned to point at Discord and Pinkie. "This is the last time I let you two plan our pranks."



"Why's that Twilight?" Pinkie asked, tilting her head.

"Because you're really bad at it â€" too much improv. Seriously, next time Applejack and Fluttershy plan the prank, although you can of course offer suggestions."

\* \* \*

><p>17.4<p>

"Okay," Luna said, finishing her note. "Celestia's Awake, as wellâ€| I checked."

"How?" her double asked.

"We have a code. A flag she puts up if she's Awake, so I can scry for it." Darkness enveloped the note and it vanished. "Anyway, it's sent."

"Good."

Both of them sniggered.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, well, my beloved subjects," Nightmare Moon began.<p>

"Excuse me?" a cross voice said from offstage. Another Nightmare Moon walked onto the dais from the left side. "Your subjects?"

"They're mine as well," the first one said indignantly. "I think."

"Oh, you think?" the left one said. "Well, I know."

"Doesn't matter." One Nightmare Moon stuck her tongue out at the other one. "'cause it's my Night."

"No it isn't."

"Is too."

"Is not!"

"Is too!"

The assembled ponies of Ponyville watched with utter confusion as the two Nightmare Moons argued like fillies.

"Is too, a hundred thousand times!"

"Is not, infinity times!"

The one who hadn't just spoken paused, staring at her hooves. "Is tooâ€| infinity plus one times!"

"That's just infinity times. I win." Another stuck-out tongue.

"Why youâ€¦" The right-hand Nightmare Moon reared up, and slapped her counterpart on the cheek.

The other one touched the mark, and then slapped back.

"â€¦what the buck?" Rainbow Dash whispered to Twilight. "Is that evil alicorn having a slap fight with herself?"

Twilight shrugged.

Suddenly, there was an explosion of light in the corner.  
"GIRLS!"

Both dark alicorns froze, blushing guiltily.

"Why are you arguing?" Celestia asked, stepping from the flare of her appearance.

"She started it," the left one said quickly.

"Did not!"

"Girls!" Celestia sighed. "Fine, I don't want to know. Just say sorry to one another."

"â€¦sorry," the right hand one said grudgingly.

"Sorry to you too."

"Right. All better?"

The two Nightmares nodded. "Yes, big sister."

"Right. Now, go to your rooms. I'll deal with you later." As the two identical alicorns vanished in teleports, Celestia turned to the crowd. "Sorry, my younger sisters can be a little impetuous at times. Where were we?"

\* \* \*

><p>Laughter rang in the halls of Princess Luna's room.<p>

"That was \_hilarious!\_" Luna said, finally calming herself enough to speak.

The alicorn filly on the bed giggled. "Bet we confused everypony!"

Luna nodded. "Yep. You know, Nyx? I like your style."

\* \* \*

><p>17.5 (QI based Loop)<p>

Twilight shuffled her papers. "Good evening, good evening, good evening, good \_evening!\_ And welcome to QA, the show that's all about things which are amazing. With me tonight are the Monarch of Mirth, Discord!"

The assembled audience applauded.

"The Sovereign of the Stars, Nightmare Moon!"

More applause.

"The Mistress of Mutability, Queen Chrysalis!"

A buzzing underlay this applause.

"Andâ€| the court jester, Prince Blueblood."

Blueblood rolled his eyes. He didn't know either why or how Twilight Sparkle had managed to get three major threats to Equestria onto her panel game, but Auntie had made him be the recurring guest.

"Right." Twilight's horn glowed, and an illusion appeared in the air â€" the city of Manehattan. "The first question is, why is Manehattan called the Big Apple?"

Blueblood pressed his buzzer, which produced a short burst of circus music. That made him seethe â€" and he'd bet a thousand bits the other three had some kind of royal march.

"Yes, Blueblood?" Twilight said.

"It's from a series of race meetings," he answered confidently.

Alarms went off, the words "race meetings" appearing in place of the skyline.

Twilight shook her head, as Blueblood triggered one of the "wrong answer" traps. She had to set them up ahead of time, so it was just bad luck â€" or credulousness â€" which meant he kept hitting them. "No, sorry, that's not correct."

Discord buzzed in with a brief snatch of \_The Duke of Plaza-torro.\_ "It's because the Apple clan were involved in settling it."

"Is the right answer!" Twilight conjured more images.

Nightmare Moon spoke up. "Was that not when they were a family of nobility?"

"That's right, points for that," Twilight said. "Not many know that the Apples at one point had a patent of nobility. I understand that it more-or-less lapsed fifty years or so later when none of them really \_wanted\_ it; though their seat in the parliament lost through the patent was quickly replaced by one won in election."

\* \* \*

><p>17.6<p>

"What do you want to do, Rarity?" Spike asked. "Next time, I mean."

Rarity frowned. "â€|surprise me."

"Really?" Spike blinked. "Are you sure?"

"Yes." The unicorn nodded emphatically. "This is supposed to be a two way street, but you've just been a little too accommodatingâ€¦ which is sweet of you, but it doesn't give me much of an idea of what \_you\_ like."

"Fair point." Spike scratched the back of his neck. "I'll see what I can think of, then."

\* \* \*

><p>"I don't know," Twilight said, shaking her head. "And if I did I wouldn't tell you. She has a point."<p>

"I guess so." Spike hung his head, then looked up again and started walking off muttering to himself.

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright," Rarity said eventually, "this is a fairly pleasant walk, but I'm sure that's not what you were going for."<p>

"Not really, no," Spike replied.

"And I suspect what you \_are\_ going for is in that bag?"

"Yep." Spike adjusted the strap. "Not far to goâ€¦"

Around a minute later, they emerged into a fair sized clearing â€" the first they'd encountered in the hour or two they'd been walking through White Tail Woods.

At the far end were a number of round straw butts, with concentric rings painted on them.

Rarity squinted. "Are thoseâ€¦ archery butts?"

"Yep." Spike slung the bag down off his shoulder and extracted a yew longbow, as well as a smaller bow made with more modern composites. "Which would you rather use?"

She took the smaller bow. "This one, I thinkâ€¦ I didn't know you liked archery."

"It's a kind of Jedi training â€" I don't know if Twilight told you about that whole thing?" She shook her head, so Spike went on. "Basically, myâ€¦ third loop, I think, Twilight and I were part of this kind of awesome order of ninja magic monks. They taught a lot of self control stuff, whichâ€¦"

Spike broke off and gestured to himself. "It's been kind of helpful for me, it's where the age shifting got started. And it's been useful otherwise. But archery's really helpful training how to use some of the powers â€" because if you can see where the arrow would hit if you let go, then you can aim it properly. And that helps train precognition."

"You can see the future?" Rarity asked.

"Only really, really close in stuff. Second or two." Spike shrugged

self-deprecatingly. "It's based on what almost \_has\_ to happen, unless you do something different â€" more or less. I don't really follow it myselfâ€" anyway." He picked up the yew bow and an arrow, and began breathing steadily.

An image began to appear in his mind â€" an arrow, striking the outer ring of the straw. Concentrating on the image, willing it to stay stable, he tracked slowly across until the arrow hit dead centre.

Then he released the string.

Rarity applauded politely as it struck. "Very well done."

"Thanks," he said, blushing slightly. "Your turn."

The whole smaller bow glowed and lifted into the air, accompanied by an arrow. Rather than vertically as Spike had to, the unicorn held hers horizontally â€" sighting carefully down the arrow, and then raising it slightly.

\_Swoosh-thwack!\_

Spike blinked at the arrow, right on the outer ring of the bull. "Wow." Then he looked suspicious. "Have you done this before?"

"Guilty as charged!" Rarity said. "I actually do this a little myself â€" though not to any great standard."

"If that's not a great standard, I'd like to see what isâ€" Spike said. "Shall I move them further away?"

"That would be nice."

\* \* \*

><p>17.7<p>

\*\*\*Crystals.\*\*\*

"Okay!" Pinkie said abruptly, pulling out a hat and apron â€" followed by a table, a cash register and a sign. "Welcome to Crystal Catering, can I take your order?"

Sombra blinked. \*\*\*"What?"\*\*\*

"We~llâ€" Pinkie slid a menu across the table and checked her hat. "We have a full selection of crystal varieties â€" Olivine structure to Quartz structure, and in carbon or silicon-based with various additives. If you want an ionic structure, that's extra unless it's on the menu."

\*\*\*Umâ€"\*\*\* The startled unicorn took the menu and began reading it out of reflex. \*\*\*"Barite bonanza, please."\*\*\*

"Okay, coming up!" Pinkie vanished through a door that hadn't been there before, and turned up again after a lot of grinding noises. She passed the plate to him and pointed out a table. "Here you go! Extra Iridium on top."

\*\*\*"Thank you."\*\* Sombra dropped some bits on the counter and turned for the table.

"â€|\_seriously?\_" Shining Armor asked. "He was \_hungry?\_"

Pinkie shrugged. "I dunno."

\* \* \*

><p>17.8 (Serenova)<p>

Twilight awoke sitting in a chair. It was nice to be sitting down for once. Before she even opened her eyes she checked her loop memories. The fact that she felt funny sitting in the chair meant that she wasn't in her normal quadrupedal form.

She had to hold back a groan as she realized this was another Trek loop. At least she wasn't shaped like a pony this time - THAT had been one bucking weird loop.

Slowly taking inventory of her loop memories, she figured out her family history and that she was on the Enterprise-D. That would explain the slight vibration she felt through her boots. Finally opening her eyes she took a look around and took stock of her quarters. From what she knew of this loop, it was standard crew quarters. Bedroom, bathroom (sonic shower included) and living area. She was seated at the desk in the desk in the living area, apparently going over reports from some physics experiment she was working on. As she began reading through the notes on the PADD in front of her she was interrupted by the computer.

"Incoming transmission from Shining Armor," the computer intoned.

Twilight turned to the monitor on the desk and said, "On screen." The screen lit up and she was greeted with a very confused person, who, coincidentally was Shining Armor. "Shiny!" she said happily, "To what do I owe the honor?" She didn't know if this version of her brother was looping or not and didn't want to give anything away until she knew. None of the other elements were with her (she had felt along the connection and gotten nothing), but she had no magical connection with her brother to check.

"I'm awake Twilight, please tell me you know how to walk on two legs," Shiny said plaintively.

Twilight burst into giggles at her brother. "It's easier to use your loop memories for moving around," she said through her giggles. "I'm aboutâ€|" and she paused to check how far she was from their supposed home, "Twelve hundred light years from you right now, so you're on your own with getting around," she finished.

"Aww, man, and Cadence isn't awake either," Shiny almost whined.

"Don't you start that with me B.B.B.F.F.!" Twilight said with a smile, "You'd just grab her and go on another honeymoon. I'm going to try to grab some tech to have for when we're back home while we're here. I'm thinking some tricorders will do well, along with some

medical supplies."

Shining Armor just shook his head at his sister, "You do that, I'm going to figure out what in the world I actually do here. I'll talk to you later," he said, and the connection went dead.

Shaking her head, Twilight went back to what she had been doing this loop.

Three days and a skirmish with the Romulans later, she was praying for this loop to be over. She'd already replicated two tricorders (one science, one medial) and stuffed them in her subspace pocket. She'd also nabbed a hypospray and some extra PADDs with medical and scientific data in them. She figured the looping Applebloom and Scootaloo would appreciate it at least, along with adding to her own reading. She only wished that there was actual paper around, but she'd live. It was harder to not slip up around Captain Picard. She was very experienced with random loops by now, but even non-Looping Picard could be intimidating. Especially when Twilight's base self in this loop was much like the studious original Twilight before she started looping.

Eventually, Twilight managed to enjoy herself and relaxed for the rest of the loop. She was glad she wasn't replacing anyone important and simply let herself enjoy being along for the ride. Designating this as a recreational loop (even if she worked really " that science experiment she was running), would be nice.

\* \* \*

><p>17.9 (Indalecio) (Dragon Ball)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>As Apple Bloom woke up she felt, different, this loop. Coupled with the new memories slamming into her and the fact that she no longer had hooves, she could tell that she was going to be human for that loop.<p>

'Well, this is a new experience I reckon.' Twilight told her about some of the times that she was human, but it was the first time she was experiencing it for herself.

Apparently her name was Bloom Apple, and she along with her sister Jacqueline Apple were the heirs to the large and wealthy Seed Corp.

She turned back to the book and artifact she has been studying short before awakening. The Dragonballs, of which there were seven of, would grant one wish to whomever gathered them all. She had briefly considered wishing for the perfect colt...boyfriend.

'Need to watch those terms there.' Her sister Jackie, had always been the refined, social butterfly, and truth be told, she had been a little jealous of the attention she got. But, after awakening, it seemed a waste of the awesome power of the dragon.

'But what to wish for? I guess it'll come to me in time.' As she stepped out the door, she grabbed her backpack and took off for the unknown.

\* \* \*

><p>The boy named Goku sitting across from her kept giving her odd looks as they were eating. She was about to ask him about that when he finally spoke up.<p>

"You're a looper, aren't you?"

It shouldn't have surprised her that there would be other loopers in this world, but it did. She finally found her voice.

"Yes, how did you know?"

"This is the third time I'm looping. The person you're replacing, Bulma Briefs, looks different than you, also."

"So what this this Bulma like?"

"She's one of my oldest friends, she's a bit spoiled, but she's a genius engineer."

"Hmm.."

"So whats it like where you came from?"

"Well, I and all my friends are ponies where we came from."

"A what?"

"Little horse."

Goku pointed to his throat.

"No...little horses. Ponies."

"Ahhh.." said realization, but there was a hint of mischief in his eyes.

"You..made that joke on purpose, didn't you?"

"May...be.." continuing he said "Do you ponies have martial arts?"

"Yeah, I been studying with my master Temple Fortress."

"Would you like to learn human martial arts?"

"A..hmmm"

\* \* \*

><p>Goku took a few arm and leg bands from a bag he carried with him. They were indentical to ones he wore.<p>

"Put these on."

Taking the offered arm and leg bands, Applebloom noticed they were quite heavy.



"I spent a majority of my last loop learning Kaioshin magic, specifically learning on how to make thing heavy."

Realization hit her. "Oh these are for training."

"They seem heavy now, but after awhile you get used them. And then you get heavier ones."

Having put them on she felt like she could hardly move. This was definitely going to take some getting used to. She stretched her arms out and slowly waved them around.

"So what now?"

"We've got a turtle to rescue."

\* \* \*

><p>We awoke the next day and found the turtle just where Goku said he was. After talking with it, the turtle asked for some refreshments.<p>

"Salt water? Seaweed? I don't think we've got seaweed, but salt water is doable" I got out a bucket, and put some water and salt in it.

Taking the salt water, the turtle drank. "The truth is, I've wandering around the past year and I've been trying all this time to get back to ocean"

I got out a map, and did some quick mental calculations. "Thats 120km from here. You're going in the wrong direction. Wow. Thats far."

The turtle looked crespfallen. "We could take him to ocean. Thats no big deal." said Goku.

I thought for a moment and fished around for my packet of seed caps. I selected one and after using, a hand cart appeared.

"We can use this and take turns."

\* \* \*

><p>My arms were ready to fall off by the time we reached the sea. I was used to pulling carts in my pony form, but this was a totally different experience. In the end, I did most of the pulling, while Goku scouted. I could hear various roars and shouts as Goku cleared the path before us, and in the end we got there without problems.<p>

The turtle insisted on repaying us and after entering the ocean soon came back with a short, old man with a Turtle Shell on his back.

After greeting us and introducing himself as the Turtle Hermit, he sought to give us a reward.

"Come! Immortal Phoenix!" he shouted. After a few minutes of nothing happening, the turtle spoke up.

"Umm...the Immortal Phoenix died of food poisoning."

"Oh right. I was going to summon the Immortal Phoenix and grant you all eternal life.."

'If the Immortal Phoenix died of food poisoning, the immortality it granted probably wasn't it was cracked up to be' I thought to myself.

"...but instead, I'll give you this!"

"Nimbus! Come to me!"

This time, a cloud came down and stopped right in front of us.

"With this you'll be able to fly anywhere you want, but it only works for the pure of heart. Let me show you how it works." He jumped on it, and landed on top.

"Tada! Now you try it."

Goku seemed slightly surprised by this, but jumped on and rode around it for awhile and came back to a stop in front of us.

"Just like old times."

"What?"

"Nothing. Nothing."

I noticed what looked like the 3 star Dragonball hanging from the Turtle Hermits' neck. "Hey mister. Could we possibly have that ball thats hanging from your neck? It looks like one of the ones we've been searching for."

"She helped you out right?" the hermit asked the turtle.

"She practically pulled me all the way here!"

"Wow! Thats pretty impressive! Not many girls your age would've been able to do that. I guess you can have this. Its an old necklace I found at the bottom of the sea a hundred years ago." He handed the necklace to me and I examined it. It was the third star ball alright.

"Hey Bloom. Try to get on!" I gently tried stepping on the cloud and it took my weight. With more confidence, I climbed on and held onto Goku.

We thanked the Turtle Hermit and zoomed off into the night sky.

\* \* \*

><p>"Normally Bulma isn't able to ride this, but you seemed like a good person, and this opens up our options." he continued. "I think you impressed the Turtle Hermit, and I was a bit surprised as I've never seen him able to ride it before."<p>

"Oh? Why not?"

"He's actually a pretty decent guy, but he's usually really pervy." I giggled at that.

"So Goku, where to next?"

"I was thinking of trying to learn shapeshifting. Want to try?"

"Sure."

\* \* \*

><p>We dropped by a place called Aru Village and after settling things there between Oolong and the villagers, we received the Six Star ball for our efforts.<p>

"Oolong's a shapeshifter, but he never mastered it. Our next stop with Yamcha and Puar should go better as Puar's the better of the two."

"Who Yamcha and Puar?"

"Yamcha's a desert bandit. He joined us in our adventures, but never managed to keep up. He dated Bulma for awhile, but it didn't pan out. Puar is his friend and as I said, a shapeshifter. He looks like a blue flying cat most of the time, though."

After hitting a stretch of desert, Goku had Nimbus slow down. After searching awhile, we saw someone in the distance and sped to them.

What had seemed like one figure, quickly became two, a woman with rainbow hair and a flying orange pony.

"We're looking for Yamcha..the desert..bandit" and then Goku couldn't hold it together, he burst out laughing, nearly falling off the cloud, and after what he'd just told me, I couldn't blame him.

"Rainbow Dash? Scootaloo?" The two looked pretty angry by whole thing.

"Its Dashcha the dessert bandit!"

"And Scoot!"

"Whoever told you our names was way off. I'm not sure why you came out here, if you know of us, but you're going to regret it. Give us all your capsules and you money, and maybe we'll think of letting you live."

So, they weren't awake this time. And yet, being on this cloud, I couldn't help but smile at the irony of Rainbow being on the ground at this point. And apparently Goku couldn't either, for his own reasons, as he, unable to contain himself, finally did fall off the cloud.

"Sorry. Sorry. You just weren't what I expected." He sniffed and smiled. "Again. Sorry."

"Not sorry enough!" as she drew her sword and attacked Goku. Goku fought back, dodging and weaving and eventually knocking her on her butt.

"Feh. So you've got some skill afterall." Dashcha stood up and dusted herself off. "So why did you come out all this way."

I spoke up. "We actually came to see Scoot."

"We heard there was a shapeshifter in the area and wanted to see if you could teach us shapeshifting."

Scoot was about say something when Dashcha cut in. "Whats in it for us?"

"Ah've got one capsule with a car with a full tank of gas in it."

"Sounds fair. Alright, we accept." said Dashcha, Scoot still trying to get in a word edgewise.

\* \* \*

><p>"So I was going to say, I can unlock the ability to shapeshift, but after that, it takes a lot of practice in order to do it well."<p>

"Ah'm okay with that. You can't get very far in anything without practicing."

"Okay, the two of you stand still for a moment." Scoots hovered over and placed her hooves on mine and Goku's forehead. I felt warm for a moment and I felt a whole less solid, like I could collapse into a pile of jelly at any moment.

"Okay, now try to these simple exercises..."

\* \* \*

><p>Goku's POV<p>

While Bloom was practicing shapeshifting, I decided on trying to spar with Dashcha, again.

"So Goku, where'd you learnt to fight?" I dodged one of Dashcha kicks.

"From my grandpa, Gohan Son." And returned on of my own, which she didn't bother blocking, but as soon as she got up, she became all excited

"Oh my gosh! You're related to Gohan SOn? He's like really famous. After the Turtle and Crane Hermits, he's probably like the second strongest martial artist in the world. Oh hey! Let me get my scrapbook."

Living up her name, Dashcha ran off and in maybe 10 to 15 minutes later returned with a scrapbook. It had lots of old newsclipping and pictures of the Turtle Hermit, the Ox-King and Gohan Son.

"Wow. There isn't anything I'd wouldn't do to meet the Turtle Hermit, but he's probably dead by now. No one's heard from him decades. But I'd love to meet one of his students."

"Actually, we just saw the Turtle Hermit this morning. And my grandfather's on Mt. Paozu. I'm sure he'd love a visit from a fan."

"ohmygosh,ohmygosh,ohmygosh,ohmygosh,ohmygosh!" Dashcha started hyperventilating and grabbed me and screamed into my face. "Where! Where did you see him?"

"By the coast. I think he lives off on an island somewhere."

"This is so awesome! Scoots! We're going!" Dashcha grabbed Scoots hoof and ran off in the direction of the ocean.

"They didn't even take the capsule we promised them."

\* \* \*

><p>Bloom's POV<p>

"I know the next Dragonball is on Frypan Mountain. I'm a little anxious. This is the time and place I met my future wife Chichi and her father the Ox-King."

We were zipping along on Nimbus heading for a next destination.

"Eh? What are they like?"

"The Ox-King is a huge mountain of a man, and very protective of his daughter. Chichi was also a fierce martial artist, and had a clumsy awkwardness she later grew out of. In her later years, she was very education minded, and made our eldest son, Gohan, study all the time."

"You named him after your Grandpa?"

Goku got quiet for a moment. "Yeah. In my original timeline, Iâ€¦killed my grandpa without knowing it. You saw my tail right?" He wriggled it around for emphasis and it tickled my nose.

"Yeah, what's that got to do with anything?"

"If I have it, if it's not cut off, I transform into a giant ape when seeing the full moon, mindlessly destroying things andâ€¦people."

"In my first loop, I avoided looking at the moon, and my grandpa still lived in that loop. Along with learning Kaioshin magic, I also learned to control the were-ape form. It took a year of constantly transforming, but I managed to get it down. My grandpa still lives in this loop too, and for that I'm glad."

Goku continued.

"I think I see Frypan Mountain in the distance. Strange, it's not on fire. Let's land."

\* \* \*

><p>Goku's POV<p>

I hopped off of Nimbus with Bloom right behind me. Up upon Frypan Mountain, I could see Ox-King's castle. Down below, was a small village bustling with activity.

"It seems so normalâ€¦" I scratched my head.

"Ah! You must be tourists! I knew a little advertising would pay off. Please, please let me show you around." I turned to the voice, seeing a girl about my age. She looked like Chichi, sounded like Chichi, but she wasn't Chichi. It must have been the purple hair, and purple wizard robe and hat.

"Chichi?"

"Excuse me?" She looked inquisitively at me.

"Are you Chichi?"

"Twi Lee."

"Wait. Are you Twilight Sparkle?" Bloom interjected.

"Oh! You must be loopers! I was wondering when someone else was going to show up. Honestly, I haven't the foggiest idea what I'm doing this loop. It's all very refreshing."

Uh oh. Guess I'd better not spoil any of it.

"It's me! Applebloom!" She pulled Twilight into a quick hug.

"Applebloom! You'reâ€¦.can'tâ€¦.breathe."

Bloom eased up and let Twilight down. "How are you? Have you seen any of the Cutie Mark Crusaders?"

"I'm good. I've just seen Rainbow Dash and Scootaloo, but they're not loopers this time, though they've replaced some friends of Goku, here."

"Pleased to meet you"

"Oh, so you must be familiar with this loop."

"Looped two times already. So far each has lasted about 80 years."

"Wow! That long? Ours just lasts a few years." She paused, and then continued. "So, when you landed, you said everything looked normal."

"Yeah, usually everything's on fire. The Ox-king sets fire to the area surrounding his castle to protect his treasure, but it goes out of control, and he isn't able to get inside."

"Oh dadâ€¦ I guess it's kinda weird to be calling him dadâ€¦ I

convinced him not to do that. There's natural gas pockets all over the area. Instead, we're now mining the natural gas and using it heat the castle and surrounding residencesâ€¦."

At this point I zoned out. Bloom looked really interested, and conversed excitedly with Twi Lee. I was hoping to pick up some science and engineering-fu, but I guess it wouldn't be this loop.

\* \* \*

><p>Goku and Twi Lee rode the nimbus until they started passing over a mushroom forest.<p>

"Bloom, are you ready?" The disembodied voice of Bloom Apple answered from a suitcase that was also on this cloud.

"Ready as I'll ever be."

"You sure this is going to work?"

"Yes! This is going to be great! First they'll see the dragonballs, and then 'Pow'!"

A minute later a rocket propelled grenade shot at them. Goku narrowly dodge but dropped the suitcase. He quickly turned around, but someone in a mini-mecha ran up and grabbed suitcase.

"Ah!"

"Wait!"

"Stop!" cried Goku waving his arms.

"Your acting is terrible."

"It worked, didn't it? Now we just need to chase after them, but not too fast."

\* \* \*

><p>The self-styled Emperor Pilaf stood with his underlings Mai, a woman sporting ex-Red Ribbon army fatigues and duster, and Shu, a short, dog-faced Ninja. We're not sure what Emperor Pilaf is, but he appears to a goblin in what could charitably be called a clown suit.<p>

"All the dragonballs! At last the world will be mine!" Emperor Pilaf cackled loudly and his henchmen soon joined in.

"Wait, why does one of the Dragonballs have eyes?"

There was a large puff of smoke, and then 'Pow!'

\* \* \*

><p>"This is Bloom. Come in Goku and Twi Lee." Bloom spoke into her cellphone over the 3 unconscious forms of Pilaf, Mai and Shu and all 7 Dragonballs.<p>

"We read you."

"I've got the Dragonballs."

"Did you have trouble?"

"E-nope"

\* \* \*

><p>Miles away from there, on the desert floor, three figures assembled with all seven Dragonballs gathered before them. The balls glowed, and a giant purple dragon appeared.<p>

"I AM SPIKRON, THE ETERNAL DRAGON. SPEAK YOUR WISH NOW, AND I WILL GRANT IT."

Bloom stepped forward. "I want all our friends from Ponyville and all Goku's friends to be awake in this loop."

"I DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT."

Bloom explained the situation.

"THAT IS BEYOND MY POWER. SPEAK ANOTHER WISH AND I WILL GRANT IT."

Bloom thought for a moment. "You know Goku's saiyan heritage and giant monkey form. I want something very similar to it, just as giant equine form." Turning to Twi Lee, she asked "Do you want in on this?"

Twi Lee frowned. "No, I'm good."

"Okay, then just for me."

"IT SHALL BE DONE!"

Out of the base of Bloom's back appeared a long red pony tail.

"YOUR WISH HAS BEEN GRANTED! FAREWELL!" the eternal dragon vanished, the balls dimmed to pieces of rock and scattered to the four corners of the world.

\* \* \*

><p>Goku frowned for a moment. "That might not have been the best wish to make. You'll be at the mercy of the full moon, and the transformation is quite painful, blinding you to what's going on around you."<p>

"You mastered it, didn't you?" said Bloom absentmindedly, examining her new tail.

"Well, yeah, but it took me a year. A long year of waking up naked surrounded by destruction. Just be careful not to look at the moon until you get it. Meditate and train a lot, it should help, especially the meditation."

There was a pause and Twi Lee spoke.



"I kinda wish Spike had been awake, though. I can't wait to tell him about this."

Bloom continued examining her tail. "He was pretty cool."

"You know the Dragon?"

"He's my assistant back in my home loop, but he's only a baby at the time. Just yea tall", said Twi Lee, gesturing.

Goku turned to Bloom. "Well we found the Dragonballs, mission accomplished. What do you plan on doing now?"

"Hmâ€|Ah've got school in a couple of weeks, so I'm probably going to go home. What about you two?"

"Twi Lee and I have been talking. We're going to visit my grandpa on Mt. Paozu for a bit, and then maybe wander around. Maybe see Otherworld. I might be able to coax King Kai into teaching us more Kaioshin magic."

"Sounds fun. Do you want to meet up again when the Dragonballs return?"

"Count on it!"

\* \* \*

><p>And time passed. Goku and Twi Lee travelled around. They visited Goku's grandpa on Mt. Paozu, the Turtle Hermit, King Kai and finally found themselves on planet Yardrat, generally seeing the sights, and picking up new tricks when they could.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Goku and Twi Lee use instant transmission to travel to King Kai's planet, appearing in a flash of light. They fall before King Kai and genuflect.<p>

"Please train us!"

"Who are you people?"

\* \* \*

><p>After Bloom experimented with her were-pony for the first time, she vowed to make the creation of stretchy clothes a priority.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Dashcha finally found the Turtle Hermit and began training with him. Later as Bloom went to search for the Dragonballs again, Dashcha approached her with a request.<p>

"Training with the Turtle Hermit is a dream come true. But I keep wondering, with him being so old now, What was he like in his prime? I gotta know. I heard the Dragonballs can grant any wish. I want to see and be trained by Master Roshi in his prime. Can we ask the Dragon to grant that wish?"

\* \* \*

><p>We eventually found some of the other Elements of Harmony.<p>

Rarity and SweetieBelle had taken the place of Goku's old rivals Tien and Chaotzu and we confronted them at the world tournament.

\* \* \*

><p>Rarien, sporting a small blue gem in the centre of her forehead and clad in a purple sari, confronts Dashcha at the Tenkaichi Budokai tournament.<p>

"Your orange gi clashes with my purple sari. We'll have to fix that," said Rarien with a smirk and small emphasis on the way she said "fix".

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy took the place of Launch, now calling her self Kachushy, and was taking care of Piccolo Jr, after we had dealt with his genocidal father.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Kachushy stands before a Piccolo that's at least a head taller than her and stares him in the eyes.<p>

"No Piccolo, you're not killing anyone, you hear? I thought I taught you better than that!"

"Yes, mom."

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie Pie we didn't find until many years later.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>A dwarfish alien clad in wizard robes stands before a large organic sphere that suddenly split in two. The room fills with steam.<p>

"Yes, yes! Arise Majin Pie and serve Babidi as you've served my father before."

Finally a woman with bright pink skin and clad in a stereotypical genie's clothes appears.

"I feel sick"

She barfed four times, her mouth growing cartoonishly wide each time, each time vomiting up one the swallowed supreme kais.

"Ughhhhâ€¦".

\* \* \*

><p>17.10 (by Ranma-Sensei) (Hey, Arnold)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Huh, seems like I have a middle sister, this loop. Well, at least it's not Asuka, again. And it's definitely better than Ranma Heyerdahl."<p>

Twilight opened her eyes. The first thing she noticed was herself being human. The next, that before her stood a human girl, about 1.20 meters in height and wearing two pigtails of golden blond hair. "Uh, hi?"

The girl before her sighed exasperatedly. "Please don't tell me this is your first fused loop."

Twilight shook her head. "No, I just tend to awake mid-stride it seems, and I ran into a wall, this time." She smiled. "Twilight Pataki, nice to meet you. So, what do you do around hereâ€|. Helga?"

Helga G. Pataki grinned. "Oh, troll my peers, usually. When people around you have the mental capacities of Fourth-Graders, you've got to be inventive." She turned thoughtful. "I wonder if Arnold's awake."

Twilight searched her Looper memories. "The boy you have a crush on?"

Helga gave her a withering look. "I'm only saying this once: I. Love. Arnold. No crush, capiche?"

The pony-once-again-turned-human nodded frantically. "Okay, change of topic: Why am I wearing Gothic style clothes?"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sighed. Here she had hoped to get a chance at studying in a nuclear society school. Instead, all her peers seemed to want to do was slack off and beat up on younger students, as was currently the caseâ€|.<p>

"Yo, shorty!" the boy she had come to know as Wolfgang hollered, "Get your weird football head out of my way." The next moment he shoved Arnold against the hallway's wall.

Twilight bristled. "Wolfgang!" Stepping forward, she grabbed onto the boy's neck, which was considerably helped by the fact that she was bigger than him. "What do you think you are doing to my sister's friend?"

"More like \_boy\_friend, if you ask me." the spindly boy next to her sniggered.

Wolfgang flailed around. "Shut it, Edmund, and help me!"

At this point, Twilight had quite enough and swung the bully around, letting him drop on his ass behind her. "Get lost, Wolfgang."

"I will get you, Pataki, I swear. One day, I \_will\_ get you!"

"Yeah, right." Turning around, she said: "Boo." Laughing as the goon squad turned tail and ran, Twilight then helped Arnold up. "You alright?"

"I think so." Dusting himself off, the football-headed boy then extended a hand. "Arnold Shortman, Helga's boyfriend. And you must be Twilight, I presume?"

"Uh, yeah." Taking the proffered hand and shaking it, Twilight grinned. "So, I take it you are awake, too?"

"Yep, and as Helga, I am grateful you are nothing like Asuka orâ€|. " he shuddered, "Lina."

"Sayâ€|." Twilight gauged him. "What do I have to do around here to get some studying done?"

"Iâ€|. think I can help with that."

\* \* \*

><p>"This is great!" Twilight rolled around on her bed and squealed. The moment Arnold had shown her to the public library, her eyes had gone all watery. It was a little upsetting that it had taken so long to register for a library card, and only being allowed to borrow twenty books at once felt unfair, but according to Helga she had a rough timeframe of about one year and a half, so it was only a minor setback.<p>

"Time to start having fun," she said, and opened the book labelled \_Astrophysics 101\_.

\* \* \*

><p>17.11 (Elmagnifico)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So, why didn't you come forward? Most newly Awakened ponies seek me or the Princesses out for help within the first few Loops..."<p>

Big Macintosh looked sheepish. After the scene Twilight had made at Sweet Apple Acres last night, he had wanted nothing more than to bury his head in one of his freshly-plowed fields. The fact that both his sisters were constantly badgering him about the cause of said fracas made the subject even more awkward.

Now, to clear the air, Twilight had offered to straighten things out (after a good day and a half's rest), on the condition that he agree to be interviewed.

He sighed. Talking had gotten easier as time went by, but he still didn't like doing it unnecessarily. Might as well get it over with.

"Well, ya see Ms. Twilight, ah didn't right notice for a while mahself. Mah routine's pretty straightforward, and some days it just runs into itself, often the only way ah keep track of time is from the seasons. Don't have much goin' on aside from the farm, so

harvestin' and plantin's all that needs payin' attention to. Plus, weird stuff happens around mah sister an' y'all mighty frequent, so things lahk a moon goddess attackin' th' Summer Sun Celebration didn't tip me off the first time it all repeated."

Twilight nodded.

"I can see that, but you obviously noticed at some point. Why didn't you ask me then?"

"Well, after ah sussed that the first few repeats weren't a string a' coincidences ah couldn't pluck up the courage to ask."

"Oh? Why not?"

"When y' see somepony turn into ah goddess firsthoof, it don't seem quite appropriate to bother them just cause you think stuff oughta be happenin' different."

Twilight paused. 'Alicorn Mode' was certainly intimidating for non-Awake mortal ponies, a new Looper would plausibly have the same reaction.

"I suppose that's reasonable. For the first couple of days, at least. But why didn't you come forward later that loop?"

"An' then y'all turned evil and yer dragon friend grew fifty stories high. Somethin' about Eternal Twilight?"

Twilight's ears fell. That loop. Now that was bad luck—apparently she was too skilled an actor for her own good by now.

Macintosh continued.

"After thatn', ah was plum scared you'd do it again, so ah resolved to keep as far away from ya as possible. Weird stuff kept right on happenin', an from that point on ah just tried to help any way ah could. Ah kept mah family safe, no matter what. Sometimes, one or both of mah sisters'd act weird too, hangin' around you an' doin' strange stuff, so ah never explained to them either. They kept forgettin' stuff every time things reset anyway, so ah just kept quiet. Watchin'."

Twilight's eyes widened. She briefly wondered if there were any other Loopers in Macintosh's position, whether her crazy antics had driven any other ponies into hiding.

"Now, ah'm not normally th' kinda pony that needs change. Ah like a routine, an' for things to be reliable-like. Over time though, it got painful watchin' mah sisters, an' other ponies, gettin' hurt in stuff that ah could do somethin' about. Ma an' Pa may not be around, but they didn't raise me to be a stallion that'd stand by when he could help. On the other hoof, ah didn't want to be a snack for no dragon."

Macintosh sighed. Best to just get this out as quick as possible.

"So over time, ah saw how little things would change what happened.

Ah got to learnin' the patterns, how ta change things without gettin' attention off th' scary purple unicorn. Ah guess this time ah finally did too much good."

Twilight could feel her emotions roiling. Shame at scaring Macintosh, a touch of anger that he'd been so vexing, and many others warred for dominance behind her eyes.

In the end, she stretched up and put a hoof on Macintosh's shoulder.

"Well Big Macintosh, I guess I owe you an explanation. You see, it all started with this tree called Yggdrasil..."

\* \* \*

><p>17.3 redux (Filraen)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia ran, the sick taste of failure in her mouth.<p>

Her student " her beloved student " had fallen into corruption no less deep than Luna's own, of a thousand years past. And all five of her friends had fallen the same way.

She was being chased through her own castle by six twisted alicorns, who blew walls and columns aside to follow her.

Then there was a blur of motion.

"Haha! Have at thee!" a familiar voice said, accompanied by a musical series of twangs.

Celestia turned to find Discord " Discord? " holding off dark-Applejack and dark-Fluttershy with a piano in one hand and a duck in the other.

"Celestia!" he said, shouting over his shoulder while making it rain tofu to slow the alicorns down. "Retreat! Get out of the castle, I'll join you outside!"

Thoroughly confused, Celestia looked for a good escape route. The windows caught her eye, but dark-Rainbow Dash shot past them as she made for the closest.

Another Discord ran past her in the other direction, wielding a swordfish and a scroll marked 'FiM script, S4E1'. "They're this way as well!"

Her head swivelled. Yes, the first Discord was still where she'd last seen him, and the second one wasn't something she'd imagined " he was dance-battling dark-Pinkie Pie.

Suddenly dark-Pinkie Pie left a howlish scream "NO!" and vanished, just to appear in front of Celestia, except as an earth pony completely untainted by the corruption.

"EVERYPONY STOP!"

"What's the matter, Pinkie? We were doing so well." Twilight Sparkle appeared alongside her, now back as unicorn. Soon Twilight's friends appeared alongside them.

"It's... HER!" The pink pony suddenly moved to where a white pegasus with a brown mane was apparently leading other ponies away.

"Ah!"

"Hi, I'm Pinkie Pie. Who are you?" Pinkie Pie asked with a big smile.

The surprise from the white pegasus faded back into a knowing smile as she looked to where Twilight was "You caught me. I'm Starlight Breaker."

"Starlight... Nanoha?!"

Starlight Breaker nodded. "Even stopping a prank for a visitor? I'm not sure if I'm honored or disappointed. How have you been?"

"â€|what?" Celestia said helplessly as their lively chat continued.

\* \* \*

><p>17.12 (Filraen) (31 minutes)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight, we are already on air!"<p>

Fluttershy's voice brought Twilight Sparkle to her senses. One day wasn't nearly enough to get used to this loop. The world seemed nuclear-tech level but against all odds she hadn't seen any human or pony yet.

Then again, Twilight Sparkle knew this was going to be a weird loop wen she saw herself in the mirror after awakening and saw Smarty Pants looking back.

"Right," Twilight Sparkle, anchorpony plush, placed her woollen hooves over the desk she was and looked at the camera with her button eyes in front of her in a way so she could also see the screens by its side, on containing the live TV broadcasting and the other scrolling text. "Welcome back to 31 Minutes, the most important news bulletin on television.

"Mass protests have been happening in Puppetrolis in the last hours, and there it's our reporter Pinkie Pie to give us more information. Pinkie?"

The broadcasted image now showed Pinkie Pie, whose body was only a pink microphone with eyes, jumping up and down. "Oh, hi Twilight! You know there's a lot of people here in Puppetrolis getting together so I made a note about that's happening.

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Hi everypony, this is Pinkie Pie's Pop Poll! Today's question is 'what do they call you?'"<em> After a small introductory curtain the image showed Pinkie Pie asking different people the pop question. Answer ranges from 'no-face' from a beheaded doll, to 'Nim' from what appeared to be a black alicorn plushie, 'cool guy' from an ice cream and 'R2-D2' from a trash can from a park. What most confused Twilight was, except for the beheaded doll, everything could have eyes attached and if it had eyes it could talk even if it had no mouth. It didn't make any sense!

\* \* \*

><p>By the end of the note Twilight could swear Pinkie Pie was having a wide smile if she had a mouth, waiting for her feedback. Well, the note itself wasn't actually bad but... "Pinkie, what did it have with the mass protests in Pupp petrolis?"<p>

"Isn't it obvious, Twilight? No pony has a good nickname, that must be why everypony is out here!"

"O...k..." Twilight said barely containing the urge to scream in frustration. "Thanks for the note, Pinkie."

"Bye Twilight!" And with that the direction cut transmission with Pinkie Pie.

Focusing herself to talking to her viewers again Twilight continued "And now the weather forecast report with our meteorologist-"

"ME! Nightmare Moon!" Nightmare Moon looked as menacing as a big black alicorn plushie toy could be. "Good evening, Twilight Sparkle."

The anchorpony was confused: she had met Princess Luna in the editorial meeting earlier today, what could have happened?

"Psst, Twilight," Fluttershy, in a plastic doll body, approached her from the opposite side of Nightmare Moon. Apparently Twilight was dumbstruck for too long. "Just go along for now, we are almost finished."

Fluttershy was right, the weather report was the last part of today's program and it was Princess Luna's section.

"Right," the anchorpony continued with false cheer. "Good evening, Nightmare Moon."

"Very good night for you too, Twilight Sparkle." Nightmare Moon answered emphasizing the word 'night'. "The next week on Pupp petrolis will have clear skies all the time, giving a perfect opportunity to watch and enjoy the night sky."

"Temperatures will go on decline: for Tomorrow we expect zero degrees maximum and by the end of the week we'll have maximum around the one hundred negative degrees."

"How that can be?" Wronghooved, Twilight couldn't help but ask. "We are in the middle of summer, and not even in the coldest winter days we get under minus ten degrees!"



"But that's obvious Twilight Sparkle. Because the night will last... FOREVER! MUAHAHAHAHA!"

\_"Twilight Sparkle."\_ A voice could be heard loud and clear through all the studio.

"Director Celestia?" Hopefully she could help with this trouble.

\_"I left something for you under the desk just in case something like that happened. Please free my sister from the blackness."\_

Nightmare Moon's laugh stopped cold when she saw Twilight arming herself and Fluttershy with some sprayers. "No! Please! Anything but bleach!"

"Know what Nightmare Moon? I've quite frustrated since I awoke yesterday and now you've given me a great source of relief," Twilight said with a grin that matched Nightmare Moon's in her best days. "Let's go girls."

In the TV broadcasting screen Nightmare Moon's pursuit made the backdrop to the credits roll.

\* \* \*

><p>17.13 (Namar13766)<p>

Twilight Sparkle and the rest of the looping Six exchanged surreptitious grins. For this loop, their plan for dealing with Nightmare Moon involved the introduction of pizza to Equestria, a spare Lance of Longinus from an Evangelion loop, and an operatically trained Spike, who possessed a singing voice that could cause a pair of panties to spontaneously combust.

\_Wait for the mayor to finish, let the curtains pull back, see a black cloud, and watch it form...KING SOMBRA?!\_

"Who are you? What have you done with Princess Celestia?"

The early-returned banished king merely smirked, sipped from a glass of water before speaking.

\*\*\*\_GREETINGS! I'M KING SOMBRA! I HAVE WALKED PARTWAY FROM THE CRYSTAL EMPIRE TO CANTERLOT 3 TIMES! NOT TO ACTUALLY GO THERE, BUT TO GET A RUNNING START TO JUMP TO THE MOON! WHERE I WILL KNOCK OVER NIGHTMARE MOON AND CALL HER A MASSIVE POOF!\_\*\*\*

The silence that followed dragged on uncomfortably, until it was broken by Lyra dryly commenting to Bon Bon, "Well, at least it can't get weirder."

"MUCKLE DAMRED CULT! 'AIR EH NAMBLIES BE KEEPIN' ME WEE MARES!?"

As one the looping six \_twitched\_, as the memories of a particularly crazy loop, one which even Pinkie had described as \*\*\_Batshit Insane\_\*\*, resurfaced.

Spike for his part, merely facepalmed. "Oh, no. How did Granny Smith become Old Mare Henderson \*\*\_again\_\*\*?!"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Few more obscure ones there...

>That Sombra is based off of BRIAN BLESSED, while "Old Man Henderson" is a Call of Cthulhu meme.<p>

## 18. Chapter 18

### 18.1

Twilight grinned. "Do you like it?"

Princess Celestia blinked in shock. "This isâ€¦ I don't even know what this is."

"Oh, that's easy!" Twilight said. "I worked out exactly what you meant. I had to make some friends so that my plan for fighting back against Nightmare Moon would be safe!"

Celestia looked at the padlocked fridge. "Soâ€¦?"

"So, this is my plan." Twilight opened the door a crack, and grabbed at something with her telekinesis before slamming the door and repadlocking it in a trice.

"Twilightâ€¦ there is a Windigo on a leash in the room," Celestia observed, beyond shock into a kind of glassy coolness.

"Yep! That's my plan." Twilight held up the leash, easily corralling the thrashing monster with it. "It has double-code release authority â€" look, two leash handles!"

"So your plan to deal with Nightmare Moon isâ€¦"

"â€¦to freeze her solid!" Twilight grinned earnestly. "It should be completely safe, my friends and I can do that whole friendship-blast thing from the Hearths Warming myth â€" we spent the whole afternoon practicing!"

"â€¦right."

"I call him Polaris!" A pink pony skidded into the room. "Isn't he cute?"

"Pinkie," Twilight said with a groan. "Stop using puns that the Princess has no hope of possibly getting."

"But it's a good pun!" Pinkie protested. "It's totally high-brow satire! Look, he is a deterrent that would cause a winter and he's called Polaris! Oh, oh! And just in case he does somehow get off his leash and decides to be a meany meany pants, Twilight here got Applejack and Rainbow these neat toasting forks to poke him with! Fire beats Ice!"

"They're not toasting forks, Pinkieâ€¦" Twilight said wearily. "They're tridents."

"Hey," Pinkie looked upset. "Why do you get to make puns if I can't?"

"I don't know what you mean, Pinkie," Twilight said loftily.

\* \* \*

><p>"The Night Will Last Forever!"<p>

"So, thenâ€| " Twilight said, raising a hoof. Her other foreleg was still under the table. "Would you say you'reâ€| angry at Princess Celestia?"

"What?" Nightmare Moon laughed. "Anger does not even begin to encapsulate it!"

"And you're full of rage, pain and hatred?"

"YES." The alicorn stamped her hoof. "Y.E.S. I am angry. I am pained. I wish to make Celestia suffer on her sun for as long as I suffered on my moon, and then a thousand years more for every insult!"

"Right." Twilight nodded. "Rarity?"

Rarity nodded.

Together, they said, "Sic 'em, boy!"

And then there was a kind of howling roar and snow everywhere.

When Nightmare Moon refocused, she was inside a comically large icecube and there was a thrashing monster being forced backwards by two tridents and a leash.

Pinkie beamed. "Looks like you need toâ€| chill off."

"YYYYEEEEAAAAHHHH!"

Everyone jumped. "What was that?" several voices asked.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight blinked. "â€|huh."<p>

Discord petted the Windigo. "Oo's a good boy? You are! You're such an entropic little cutie, aren't you?"

The monster rolled over onto its back, tongue lolling out.

"Can I keep him?" Discord pleaded. "I will hug him and call him Polaris and-"

"Wait, why Polaris?" Dash asked.

"That's his name, duh." Discord indicated the tag.

"Huh. Was that Pinkie's doing?"

"Probablyâ€|" Twilight said. "Alright, if you're good. But we might need him on occasion."

\* \* \*

><p>"You eat emotions?" Twilight said. "Interesting."<p>

"Why?" Chrysalis asked.

"Well, Discord's pet invited friends over." Twilight dove for cover.

"What?" Chrysalis looked dumbfounded. Then there was a chill wind, as a thousand ghostly shapes came over the walls.

"So, what happens next?" Pinkie asked over the howling and buzzing. "One side feeds on love, the other side feeds on hateâ€|" who wins?"

"Us," Twilight said with a certain smug air.

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|yeah, this feels unfair."<p>

The Crystal Empire promptly turned to ice.

"Right," Twilight nodded. "Let's go remove the Sombricicle and get them thawed out again."

\* \* \*

><p>18.2<p>

Spike grinned. "Don't worry, it's safe. They have pegasi paralleling the jump, and they catch us if we're too close for a safe open."

"So you said," Rarity admitted, looking out the open bay door of \_Jack of all Trades\_. The airship's engines were humming gently as they countered the wind, but otherwise holding them stationary over a plain south of Trottingham.

"It's the main reason you managed to talk me into thisâ€|"

"Well," Spike adjusted his parachute unnecessarily. "I do love this kind of thing, and you \_did\_ say you wanted to see what I enjoyed. Just one jump, okay?"

"I should hope so!" Rarity looked uncertain, then her resolve firmed. "Alright, I'm ready."

"Good." Spike glanced over at the others â€" unicorns, earth ponies, even the odd pegasus with wings strapped or with wing injuries. Fellow thrill-seekers.

Oh, he'd flown before â€" even if his ponderous flight as an adult dragon couldn't compare to that one loop as a quicksilver pegasus â€" but somehow falling out of the sky wasâ€|" more.

At least he got a lot of fall time. They were high enough it would take something like two and a half minutes total to reach parachute-open time.

"O-kay," the jump master said. "On my count. Three. Two. One. Go!"

\* \* \*

><p>Spike grinned, feeling the air rushing over his scales. Now  
<em>this<em> was what he called fun!

There was a faint itch where his wings would be growing shortlyâ€| probably the instinctual reaction to being in the air. It was part of why he did this, really, the ability to get close to his species in a whole new way.

Then he glanced over at Rarity, and saw something that worried him. Her eyes were closed, and she was breathing fast.

It was a moment's half-formed thought for him to steer over to her and grab on. "Rarity! Are you alright?"

"No," Rarity said, her voice catching. "Iâ€| sorry, Spike, butâ€| Iâ€|"

"Don't worry. You're safe," Spike reassured her. "You're wearing a parachute. It's at least another minute until we need to open them. This isn't the Young Fliers' competition."

He kept talking, pitching his voice low, talking without really caring what he was saying so long as it was reassuring. Rarity started sobbing, clinging to him as if to reassure herself that he was there.

"Ten seconds," one of the pegasi said, as she began to quieten down. "Are you two alright?"

Spike nodded back, and pulled his cord. His extra-sized parachute bloomed overhead, jerking them both back "up" â€" really a simple slowdown â€" but they were still moving quite fast.

He adjusted his grip on the white unicorn as the grassy field below rushed up, and bore the brunt of the ground impact with a suppressed shout of pain.

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm so sorry." Rarity shook her head. "I didn't think I'd go to pieces like that."<p>

"No problem," Spike assured her, scratching a spot on his back. Dragon scales were tough â€" he'd only bruised. "Wasn't your fault."

"But I feel like it is. That's a weakness, andâ€|" Rarity trailed off, blinking furiously. "Iâ€| deplore feeling weak."

Spike spread his arms. After a moment, Rarity shook her head. "No thank you, Spike. Later, I thinkâ€| maybe yes. Butâ€| not now."

"Alright." The dragon nodded. "Kinda makes sense, anyway. Cadence told me once that you often second-guess actions you take when you're stressedâ€¦ especially things to do with, erâ€¦ relationships."

They sat there for a bit.

"Tell you what," he said, suddenly. "I'll ask Twilight if we can have the Gala tickets next time. Have it to ourselves."

"Isn't that terribly selfish?" Rarity asked.

"Nah." Spike shrugged. "Well, maybe a bit. But I am a dragon."

Rarity giggled.

"The great dragon Spykoranuvellitar, no less!" Spike puffed out his chest, knowing full well that he looked absurd. "Who could begrudge two tickets for his hoard, especially since at the moment it consists of two autographed books, a piece of cheese, and a wind-up toaster?"

"â€¦pardon?"

"Yeah," Spike looked shifty. "If you're a dragon, midnight snacking is kind of expensive."

This time Rarity's giggles lasted longer, and she was smiling at the end of them. "Thank you, Spike. I feel better now."

"No problem." Spike paused, wondering if he should risk bringing the matter up again. "Erâ€¦ have you considered asking Princess Luna to help with that fear of yours?"

"No, actually." Rarity frowned. "That might be a good idea. Thank you for suggesting it, Spike."

"No problem," he repeated.

\* \* \*

><p>18.3<p>

"Girls?" Twilight said, and the five other Elements turned to her. "There's somepony I'd like you to meet."

"Who is it?" Pinkie asked. "I like meeting new ponies!" She looked a bit dour for a second. "Especially since it's been getting kinda rareâ€¦"

By answer, Twilight stepped back from the door.

"â€¦hello," Trixie said. "Tr- I understand that you are the Looping versions, then?"

"Yep," Applejack replied simply.

"Then it is nice to meet you." Trixie sketched a bow. "I understand that myâ€¦ well, my normal self has acquitted herself less than

well on a few occasions with you."

"Pretty much." Dash nodded. "Does this mean you're Looping too?"

Trixie nodded, looking nervous. But she swallowed hard, and stood tall.

Suddenly Applejack stepped forwards and took her hoof. "Then it's nice to meet y'all. How long you been Loopin'?"

"Oh. Erâ€| only four so far." Trixie waved a hoof. "I'm still rather new to all this."

"Full barrage, party close, immediate effect!" Pinkie said into a radio, and dove for cover.

Trixie blinked. "What-"

SPLUT.

\* \* \*

><p>"Trixie does not even particularly like lime," the unicorn said, treading icing. "What just happened?"<p>

"Oh, right." Twilight shrugged. "I think Pinkie set up an autoloading party howitzer with voice activation earlier today. I don't know why."

"Can you please teach Trixie two things?" At Twilight's nod, Trixie continued. "First, that icing-walking spell you are using. It would be most useful."

"Sure." Twilight nodded, hoisting the magician out of the impromptu torte. "And the second thing?"

"How to subscribe to that party pony's news letter." Trixie's eyes shone suddenly. "She thinks in a way that I find \_very\_ interesting."

"â€|what have I done?" Twilight asked rhetorically.

\* \* \*

><p>18.4<p>

"So, let me get this straight," Spike said carefully. "I'm a pathetic excuse for a dragon because I was raised by ponies. Specifically, by a 'namby pamby pony princess'."

Garble and his two bookends nodded.

"Right. And you don't know what kind of dragon I am?"

"Like it matters!" the one on the left said. (Spike still couldn't really tell them apart.)

"Okay." Spike nodded. "Got it. So, what's your special power?"

"Huh?" Garble said. "Why would we need \_special\_ powers? We're already, you know, \_dragons\_. Is this some pony thing?"

"Oh." Spike shrugged. "'cause one of the namby pamby pony princesses I know kinda helped to raise me. And she taught me three main things. Number one: how to read."

The teens looked singularly unimpressed.

"Number two, how to make friends."

If anything, they got more apathetic.

"And number three: How to do this."

Spike stretched, and went on stretching. There was a brief period of morphic confusion, and then he tapped a claw on the ground.

\_Boom. Boom. Boom.\_

"Kinda cool, huh?" he rumbled, now at least Wyrms in size.

\* \* \*

><p>Luna opened her door. "Whom is knocking at this late hour?"<p>

Three dragons prostrated themselves on the floor in front of her door. "Teach us awesome stuff, pony princess!"

She blinked. "â€|very well, then. You shall be inducted into my Night Guards, and thence be taught the ancient power of balefire. The flame that burns cold."

Meadowlark grinned beneath his wing. He'd just been thinking the Night Guard needed a bit moreâ€| oomph.

\* \* \*

><p>18.5<p>

"â€|I can't run this!" Diamond Tiara shouted. "It's inconceivable! Incomprehensible!"

"Why not?" Scootaloo asked. "It's what happened."

"That's as may beâ€|" Diamond said, sighing. "But it would destroy the credibility of the paper if we printed it without evidence."

"We have credibility?" Sweetie asked.

"Sssh," Applebloom admonished her.

"Ah well. I suppose we have a civic duty." Diamond slid the copy over to the typesetter.

"â€|pardon?" that colt asked, looking at the paper. "Princess Luna is the one ambushing ponies with tennis balls?"



"Yeah," Scootaloo said, shrugging. "I didn't have time to take a photo before she saw me, though."

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Luna grinned as she read the headline.<p>

\_Luna-tic Princess?\_

"Ah, I do so enjoy creating bizarre headlinesâ€¦ let's see, what next?"

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia spat her tea out.<p>

\_Moon used for advertisement! Is the Princess of the Night hard up for cash?\_

She ran to the window and looked out. The slowly sinking satellite had the words \_Eat at Joe's!\_ written across it.

"â€¦hm. Well, not my problem." Celestia firmly put a lid on the issue, and decided to leave things to Luna.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Local pony breaks sound barrier!<em>

"That's not a headlineâ€¦" Twilight muttered. Then she read further.

\_No, seriously, we mean she broke it. As in, nothing has gone supersonic since.\_

"Butâ€¦" the anchor blinked. "How? She's not even Looping!"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Pinkie Pie declares independence, establishes republic of Sugaria<em>

\_Guard captain caught with Celestia's niece!\_

\_Luna rules, Celestia drools!\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Explain," Twilight said flatly.<p>

"Alrightâ€¦" Luna blushed. "I may have started bribing them."

\* \* \*

><p>18.6 (The Bill, perhaps?)<p>

"â€¦I don't believe that scum like you could possibly exist! To betray your people, your familyâ€¦ you make me sick, and if I was the one in charge of sentencing you I'd have you in a hole so deep you'd have to tunnel \_up\_ to Tartarus!"

Someone knocked on the door.

Inspector Dash stopped shouting, and moved away from the relieved criminal. "Ah, my shift's up. I'll get my partner to chat to you." The door opened, and Dash slipped out.

Inspector Gilda came in. "Yeah, Dash can be like that."

"Oh, I see!" The unicorn grinned. "This is good cop, bad cop! Well, it ain't going to work!"

Gilda grinned. "Yeah, you got it right. Except for one thingâ€¦ Dash always was a softy."

The unicorn paled.

"Yep. She was the good cop."

\* \* \*

><p>"Now that's professional," Twilight said critically. "No marks â€" not even real injuries â€" just a shave. And he did need one."<p>

"Yep," Dash replied, sitting down in the interrogation room. "Gils is good with those claws. Hell, I've seen her cut a feather in half â€" while it was falling."

"Oh," Twilight held up a hoof. "â€¦aaand he's confessing. How long was that?"

"Four minutes, seven seconds."

"Hmmmâ€¦" Chief Twilight Sparkle wrote it down. "Unusually resilient one, that oneâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>18.7<p>

"Hey, this is cool!" the alliteratively named Princess Pinkie Pie said, gazing around. "Discord's in charge, right?"

"Right now, yes." Twilight nodded. "This is the Discordian era. I'm surprised your one of these got deferred by one loop, actually â€" probably it was because of that nice colt who Fluttershy helped. You know, the guy from Fenris."

"Yeah!" Pinkie nodded back. "Lemon Rush was so nice â€" well, except when someone threatened Fluttershy, anyway. So what happens now?"

"Basically, we seal Discord and run Equestria." Twilight frowned. "Which Elements do you want?"

\* \* \*

><p>"This is the best job <em>ever!<em>" Pinkie said, beaming. "Where'd you get the idea of a Quaestor, anyway?" The brightly

coloured robes shifted a little.

"Rome," Twilight replied. "I knew you'd enjoy that kind of thing, so I made it so there's no weekends. Just about a hundred and eighty celebration days a year."

"All individually themed?" Pinkie's eyes shone.

"I certainly tried." Twilight smiled, enjoying Pinkie's obvious enjoyment of her new position. It had been tricky to work out how to divide their responsibilities, but this seemed to be working out fine.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, Pinkieâ€|" Twilight rubbed her temples. "What have we learned?"<p>

"Uhhhâ€| oh! Mortals can't cope with a blood sugar level in excess of eighty percent!" Pinkie said brightly.

"â€|Okay, what things, plural, have we learned?"

Pinkie frowned. "Don't try to summon a daemonette outside the forty-kay loop, cuz it doesn't work and I don't run them any more. Don't invite crocodiles to parties, at least not adult ones. And don't bake a special caramel cake shaped like floor and then startle the dragon ambassador with a bursting-paper-bag gag, cuz if he breaths fire then the whole thing explodes."

"Right," Twilight nodded. "That's better. Now, I have to say, this is a new one on me for these Loops."

Both of them turned to look at Equestria below.

"How long until the Elements let us go back down?" Pinkie asked.

"Not sure." Twilight shrugged. "I hope they can handle themselves down there."

She had to wonder why she'd been included in the lock out. Possibly it was because of the botched and overpowered daemonette summoning, which had instead finally produced a very confused Changeling in the instant before the explosion.

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|okay, then." Chrysalis looked around the smouldering crater. "Hmâ€| I wonder how much gratitude ponies would have for a nation of changelings that helped them rebuild their capital city?"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"We're back!" Pinkie shouted. "Now, who wants some chocolate?"<p>

"Me, please." A Changeling hovered over and took one. "Very nice. Thank you."

Twilight blinked, watching the insectoid critter buzz off and go into a furniture shop. "What happened while we were gone?"

"I dunno, but I like it!" Pinkie bounced into the air and stayed there, beating her wings. "Hey, look, free daily concerts!"

"Oh, those must be so that Changelings can get their fill of love," Twilight realized. "Well, we seem kind of superfluous. Shall we just go to the concert?"

"Yay!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Should have known," Twilight muttered to herself.<p>

Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash worked their bass and guitar respectively on stage. Applejack drummed away in the background, Rarity was doing rather well on piano, and as for the singersâ€|

"\_I'll give you all I've got to give \_

\_If you say you love me too \_

\_I may not have a lot to give \_

\_But what I've got I'll give to you \_

\_I don't care too much for money \_

\_For money can't buy me love \_

\_Can't buy me love \_

\_Everybody tells me so \_

\_Can't buy me love \_

\_No, no, no, no!"\_

Celestia and Luna sang together, trading off on alternate lines with the ease of long practice and longer association.

"They're really good!" Pinkie enthused.

"Yeah," Twilight said, nodding along. "Wonder if they're going to even need the Elementsâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>18.8<p>

Hiccup looked around. "Toothless? Where did you go?" \_Seriously,\_ he added over their telepathic link â€" courtesy of a Pern loop so long ago it felt like they'd never lacked that closer-than-brothers relationship, \_what happened to you?\_

A purr came over the link, and a side-bleed of the dragon's emotions. They were so strong â€" and so sleepy â€" that Hiccup nearly tripped.

\_Hey, Hiccup, \_ Toothless eventually said, in the telepathic equivalent of a lazy drawl, \_I defect. I'm working for this girl now.\_

Hiccup finally reached the clearing he'd originally met Toothless in â€" all those loops ago. However, there was a girl there already with flowers in her hairâ€" and a rather grumpy looking bunny on her shoulder. And she was scratching Toothless under his chin.

"You're a nice one, aren't you? So this is your home loop?"

Toothless nodded happily, begging for more scratches.

\* \* \*

><p>"You must be Fluttershy, then?" Hiccup confirmed. "It's beenâ€" whoo, a <em>long<em> time since I last met you guys. Bit more experience with the multiverse since?"

"Yes, thanks." Fluttershy Hofferson stroked Angel Bunny, who waved a carrot warningly at Toothless when he tried to sidle closer. "Twilight told us she met you a few times."

"Yeahâ€" Hiccup shrugged. "Strange thing, she tends to be my sister. Anyway, you seem to have subverted my dragon."

\_I'm not yours!\_ Toothless replied huffily. \_We have a contractual relationship, remember. And there's nothing in there precluding additional riders.\_

"Yeah, yeahâ€" Hiccup said, stretching. "Man, I'll miss Astrid, though. She's a good girlfriendâ€" if scary."

Fluttershy giggled. "All right. This is your home loop, so how does it work?"

"Basically, we have to teach the village how to become dragon riders. Step one: catch your dragon." Hiccup nodded towards Toothless. "As I'm sure you've noticed, they're suckers for fish, catnip, scritches or just generally anything that works on a cat. Or a dog."

\_I prefer to think of it as cats liking what Night Furies do.\_ Toothless rolled over on his back. \_Speaking of whichâ€" \_

Hiccup got up and gave his friend a rub. "They \_are\_ kinda high maintenance at times, but if you get a dragon as a friend they'll last you as long as you deserve. Longer, even."

"Okayâ€" Fluttershy got a speculative look in her eye. "I'll see if I can find a dragon to befriend for myself."

\* \* \*

><p>"Should have guessedâ€" Hiccup shook his head, as the humanized pegasus gave a chin scratch to the latest in a relay of over four hundred dragons.<p>

One of the nadders tried to jump the queue, and an expertly aimed

carrot from Angel sent him sprawling backwards to meekly retake his place.

"This is going to look bad at the examâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>"Hi, I'm Astrid. The name means beautiful, which I am, and these are my animal friends." The pegasus gave a sweet smile. "They like me."<p>

Stormfly nodded enthusiastically. The manticore, hydra, cockatrice and ursa major exchanged glances, felt their bruises and decided to play along.

"â€|well, that suggests a way of dealing with Nightmare Moon," Twilight said. "Erâ€| what's with the axe?"

"It helps me be friendly," Astrid said.

\* \* \*

><p>18.9<p>

"Twilight."

Twilight stepped into the audience chamber, half her mind on what she planned to do to handle Sombra this time around. The idea of getting him into an eating contest with Spike seemed to be a fun oneâ€|

Celestia looked her in the eye. "Twilight Sparkle. You are to take your friends, the Elements, your brother, his wife, my sister, half the army, as many large monsters as you can obtain, and Trixie Lulamoon, and beat self-styled King Sombra like a test your strength machine."

The anchor's thoughts swerved wildly, as Celestia went off-script. "Erâ€| pardon?"

"Did I stutter?" Celestia frowned. "No, you're right. Also take the Wonderbolts, a regiment of expeditionary forces from the Griffins, every dragon we have treaties with and, if necessary or desired, an asteroid strike."

"â€|wait, are you Looping?" Twilight asked.

Celestia looked grave for a moment. Then sniggered. After a game attempt to recover her composure, she finally burst out laughing. "Got you!"

Twilight shook her head, a grin stealing over it. "You did that."

\* \* \*

><p>18.10 (C.S.) (by Zulaq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was another regular base loop for Twilight, and she was

playing it as the first time, because she had a new plan in mind for dealing with Discord. She had just finished finding the information on Nightmare Moon's imminent return and sending her letter to Celestia.<p>

5â€|4â€|3â€|2â€|1â€|

Spike burped up a scroll.

Twilight listened with only half an ear as Spike started reading, "My dearest, most faithful student Twilight, please come to my chambers immediately." Spike dropped the letter with a gasp, "Wow, she must be really concerned about this Mare in the Moon thing. Don't you think Twilight?"

Twilight didn't respond, as she thought about what the summons meant. If Celestia was awake then she'd have to change some of her plans, but then again, loops with just her and the princess could be fun. Turning to Spike, she spoke, "Don't worry, Spike. I'm sure the princess is just wants to confirm my findings. I'll go see her right away."

\* \* \*

><p>"Wait," Twilight asked incredulously, "you're telling me somepony's stolen the Moon!?"<p>

Celestia definitely wasn't awake, but Twilight had no clue what was going on. Maybe Luna was awake, and was messing with her sister again?

"Yes," Celestia stated gravely, "Two hours ago, I noticed was no longer under my power. I attempted to ascertain its status, and my spells say it's not where it should be. The only clue that came up was this." She lifted green metal curved band, with seven spikes jutting out of it.

Curious, Twilight used her magic to bring the object to her for a closer examination. "It appears to be a tiara. Albeit, a rather uncomfortable one," she mused, "It's made of copper, the green is just oxidation. This definitely reminds me of something. But what?" She thought for a moment, before her eyes widened in realization, "It's a miniature of the crown on top of the Statue of Leighberty in Manehatten!"

Celestia looks relived for a moment, before donning a resolute face. "Twilight, I want you to go to Manehatten and investigate the Statue of Leighberty. Hopefully, you'll be able to find some more clues there."

"Wait a minute," Twilight protested, "Shouldn't the guards handle this, maybe the police? Or even you, I mean whoever did this was strong enough to steal the moon!"

"I'm afraid that won't work," Celestia sighed, "I cannot inform anypony else. If the people were to learn that the moon is missing, panic might ensue. I cannot go myself, because I'd attract far too much attention, and arranging royal visits is an extremely involved process that we just don't have the time for." She sighed again, "Fortunately, even though it's not the longest day of the year yet,

days are still far longer than normal this time of year, so it'll be most of the day before I have to raise the moon. I might be able to buy some more time, pretend I'm keeping the sun up a bit longer than normal due to some unusual solar activity I want to observe, or some such, but I have to be here in Canterlot to do it."

"I guess I understand," Twilight replied, "But how am I going to get to Manehattan in time?"

"I'm going to teleport you there directly," Celestia stated, with her horn beginning to glow, "So good luck, Twilight Sparkle!"

In a flash of light, Twilight disappeared.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle appeared in a burst of light and shook her head. That was <em>not<em> a normal teleport, she thought to herself. It felt almost as if moving through a tunnel, which had screens on it showing various scenes from around Equestria, instead of the instantaneous transportation she was used to.

But Twilight had no time to contemplate the strange teleport, as the scene before her stunned her. She was standing at the base of the Statue of Leighberty, and far above her, she can see twelve grey and red pegasi securing ropes to the crown atop the statue's head. Quick to act, Twilight teleported herself to the statue's head herself.

Thankfully, teleporting under her own power seemed normal, and Twilight arrived only to find an even stranger scene than she thought. The twelve pegasi were still flitting about, attaching ropes, but there were also five other ponies on the roof. Four were grey and red unicorns, using magic to cut the metal of the tiara away from the rest of the statue using magic. But the fifth was the strangest, a mare wearing a huge red fedora, a long yellow scarf and a red greatcoat, which covered almost all of her body aside from her head and long black mane. Twilight wasn't certain what type of pony she was, given her clothes covered up the areas where wings or a horn might be.

The strangely dressed mare was the first to notice Twilight's presence. She turned to face Twilight, and smiled. "So the Princess figured out my clue did she?" she spoke, with a faint smile on her face, "But then again, it was such a simple clue. And who does she send as her emissary?" She examined Twilight with a simple, dismissive, glance. "Obviously nopony of import."

"Hey," Twilight protested, feeling odd that she'd been so causally dismissed, "I'll have you know that I'm Celestia's personal student! And I was the one who figured out your clue." Twilight reigned herself in a bit, it wouldn't do to get worked up on a mission like this. "Who are you? And why did you steal the Moon?"

"Oh," the mare questioned in an amused manner, "we might have a little detective here, asking so many questions. I'm sorry I won't answer your questions yet, but you're not quite the detective I want. So what do you say that you return to Celestia, and I continue my little plan."



"I'm not going anywhere! You're going to stop this, and return the Moon, right now! Or else!"

"Or else what my dear?" the mare questioned, "You're still a child compared to me."

"Or this!" with that, Twilight shot a beam of stunning magic from her horn, but the strange mare merely sidestepped it.

"Oh, so you do have some spark," the mare chuckled to herself, "But I don't have the time to spend playing games with you. After all, I do believe I'm done here." As she spoke, a loud metallic groaning sound erupted from the statue, as the unicorns finished detaching the tiara and the pegasai began lifting it into the air.

The unknown mare lifted her right forehoof, and Twilight could just see some sort of advanced bracer just under the edge of her coat. The mare pointed her hoof at the flying tiara, and a grappling hook shot out of the bracer and began pulling her up into the air. She twisted about to speak to Twilight once more, "We shall see if you are a good enough detective to challenge me, Twilight Sparkle. So I give you this clue; apples to apples, I think I'll just take a chip off of the old block."

Twilight was stupefied by the scene before her. There was no way that a dozen pegasai could lift something as heavy as the tiara, but they were not only lifting it, they were flying at a decent pace, and only getting faster as she watched. She watched as the group of criminal ponies disappeared into the distance, and all she did was shake her head.

Twilight knew that there were literally dozens of things she could have done to change the situation, but the sheer audacity (and implausibility) of the crime being committed had her off balance. Even now, she could probably magic up some solution, but instead, Twilight broke out into a grin. This just might be an \_interesting\_ loop.

\* \* \*

><p>18.11 (elmagnifico)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Big Macintosh sighed.<p>

It was the day of the Apple Family Reunion. The one where he'd first seen Twilight Sparkle. All around him, he could see the other Apples doing reunion things, at this stage mostly standing around and sipping cider saved for the occasion. From over by the buffet table, the Element of Honesty took a moment from helping Granny Smith with the salad to give him a look.

"Y' okay Mac? Ye've done nuthin' but mope since breakfast."

Macintosh paused. This was the other mare, the one that was sometimes there instead of the Applejack he had watched grow countless times before. She hadn't said as much, but the signs were there. She carried herself differently. Subtle motions. She'd sometimes flex her

shoulders like he'd seen pegasi do. Her stepping was more careful, calculated. After years and years being around his sister, it had put him on edge. Acting and lying were different things, and she was better at the former than the latter, but an astute observer could pick it out if they tried.

After so much time, small things were bound to change. He supposed somepony looking at him might see similar differences between his Looping self and his counterpart. On the other hoof, he'd spent most of his Loops hiding from one pony or another, which might have masked the tells. He wasn't sure. All he knew for sure was that it was his effects, how he'd changed the ponies around him, rather than anything he'd been directly observed doing, that had finally tipped Her off.

Of course, now he knew that Twilight Sparkle was just the victim of boredom and a mischievous demeanour, not an evil dusk-bringing eldritch abomination. He didn't really approve of the pranks. One had nearly given that loop's version of Granny Smith a heart attack when she'd noticed. Even if she still would have been there next time the world reset, she was still his grandmother. Watching her die would still have hurt. It would have hurt his sisters too.

He sighed again. He didn't want to keep this secret any longer.

"Ah've got somethin' to tell ya."

\* \* \*

><p>The barn, cleared to accommodate the festivities in case of rain, had proved the perfect place to explain things.<p>

"So ye've been loopin' for a while now, but Twilight only noticed when ya changed enough stuff?"

It had been so easy this time. Instead of cutting him off at the first mention of time travel, like Applejack had in loops past, she'd listened. Right up until he'd mentioned she had been there for some of those loops.

"Eeyup."

She seemed angry now. Ranting full blast.

"An' ya didn't tell her about the loops 'cuz she turned into Eternal Twilight right in front of ya?"

It felt good, in a strange way. Calling him out on stuff he'd been hiding was something his sister did.

"Eeyup."

She looked him in the eyes.

"And ya kept me in th' dark, not trustin' yer own kin ta have yer best interests at heart?"

He shook his head.

"Ah told ya a few times, in some of th' early loops. Y' either didn't believe me, or ya wanted to go ta Twilight immediate like. Ah managed to convince ya that was a bad idea. Didn't feel lahk it were safe after thatn'."

The green orbs staring into his narrowed.

"You know that's different. That weren't the loopin' me."

"See, that's the thing." Mac groped for words. "Y'all aren't the sister ah know. Ya got her body, ya got her voice, ya got her eyes. But y' ain't the same pony."

A stomp of anger. Frustration. So very like Applejack.

"That didn't stop me from bein' yer sister before! What about when ah went off to Manehattan, ah wasn't the same pony when ah came back!"

"Y' didn't start hangin' out with Eternal Twilight an' turnin' into no goddess after y' went off to Manehattan! Fer all ah knew, y' were some time warpin' changeling in league with th' eldritch abomination!" Mac realized his voice was riding, and tried to calm down a little.

"Twilight's no abomination!"

"AH KNOW THAT NOW!"

Silence fell.

It was broken by the receding clatter of tiny hooves outside the barn door.

Instinctively, his eyes shifted to the red barrier. Applebloom. Ah, Fewmets.

"Ah, horseapples."

The whisper was quiet, and likely meant for no ears aside from hers. His eyes widened.

When he looked back at his sister, she was scowling at him. She spoke, barely louder than her swear.

"How many?"

He tilted his head. How many what?

"How many loops did y'all lie to me?"

Recognition dawned at his eyes, but he kept his reply quiet.

"Four."

She paused for a second before continuing.

"We ain't done mister. Ah got a shindig to run, an' you've got duties to attend, but after that, we're settlin' this."

She trotted out to find Applebloom, leaving Macintosh alone in the barn. He sighed, before quirking the corners of his mouth just a little. It would be hard, but he would try his hardest to fix things. After a minute or so, he followed his sister.

It would be a good reunion.

\* \* \*

><p>18.12 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I know who you are. You're the Mare in the Moon â€" Nightmare Moon!" Twilight exclaimed, focussing most of her attention on quietly completing a dimensional ward spell to cover the entire area around the town hall.<p>

The wicked mare of darkness (TM) gloated. "Well well well, somepony who remembers me. Then you also know why I'm here."

Twilight put on a bored expression and spooled a hoof. "Yeah, I know eternal night, never see the sun again, yadayadayada. I still think it's one of the most moronic villainous plots ever."

"How dare you mock me!" Nightmare Moon crackled with lightning, and her aura flared. "I have all the powers of the night!"

"And I have a Jim." Twilight returned.

"No amount of physical exercise will save you!"

"Not gym. Jim. JIM!" the last was called out in a loud voice.

A big grey hand came smashing through the wall behind Nightmare Moon and grabbed her. "Pretty Pony Princess!"

"Arrrrghh! You have a cave troll?" NMM squirmed in the grip of the massive grey slab of humanoid, who was hugging her and saying how he would cuddle her and call her George.

"I promised him a pretty pony princess of his very own. Good luck escaping, cave trolls are highly resistant to magic."

"Urh! Little foal, I can simply..." Her aura flared and nothing happened.

"Oh, so \_that's\_ where I put that area ward against dimensional travel. Kinda knocks over your ability to teleport or turn ethereal. Oops!" Twilight smirked.

\* \* \*

><p>18.13<p>

"Lady Rarity, bearer of the Element of Generosity, of Ponyville! Mister Spykoranuvellitar, of Canterlot."

A few heads turned as the dragon and the unicorn entered Canterlot

Castle's largest dance hall, but most of the guests were otherwise occupied. The Gala was the premier social eventâ€| though that also made it where everyone checked their current score in the great game of status. And a fair fraction of the nobility of Equestria were engrossed in trying to calculate the current leaderboard.

"Of Ponyville?" Rarity asked in an artfully concealed whisper, her lips barely moving. "And I wasn't aware I was a lady."

"Well, normally you're not." Spike's whisper had a little less skill behind it, but ponies would have a lot less opportunity to learn to lip-read dragons anyway. "I asked Celestia about it, and she agreed to grant that title to element bearers as a minor mark of respect. And the 'of' is just where you live, when you have a title like that. For me it's where I was born." He looked around the room. "My, all the notables are here."

"How cunning of you," Rarity said, then broke off their conversation. "Oh, Rich! Fancy seeing you here!"

"Rarity." Filthy Rich bowed gently, his eyes flicking to Spike. "And Spykoran as well. You're certainly dressed for it."

Rarity made an elegant gesture in token of disagreement â€" which neither pony took seriously; it was just part of the way one did things. "One tries."

Spike let his own gaze wander to Rarity's dress. They'd spent three days working together on it and on his tuxedo, and both were filigreed with gemstones ordered by refractive index. Light that struck them curved and came out somewhere else, splintered into a rainbow of colours, and the gems were so fine they looked like mere glitter unless seen closely.

But to him, the real reason Rarity looked good wasn't the dress. She made it look good, and not the other way around.

"So, tell me," Rich asked, addressing the dragon directly, "what is it like living with the highest-scoring graduate of Celestia's academy in history?"

Spike smiled slightly. "Well, she does her own taxesâ€|" Rich quirked his mouth, and Spike went on. "She'sâ€| brilliant, is the only word that applies. I'm probably something of a biased source, but I really don't think the Element of Magic could have a better bearer."

"And, of course," Rarity added, "you do help her out when she forgets to eat."

Spike raised a hand. "A touch, I do confess. Well, cooking is something I don't mind doing â€" I even think I may have some skill at it, though being a dragon I can't simply tell that from how my own creations taste."

Rich nodded understandingly. "What aboutâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>The two of them spent about an hour doing a turn around the hall, engaging in dozens of short, varied conversations on a wide variety

of topics. Their Looping experience served them well, letting either or both of them at least have a reference and a comment or two about nigh on any subject.<p>

Particularly interesting was when Princess Celestia managed to get a few minutes away from the receiving line and speak to them. Her knowing expression told Spike that she had at least some intimation of how close they were, but she confined herself to small talkâ€| and one embarrassing story about the time when Equestria's court including a dragon was still a cause of terror for ill-informed petitioners, leading to five ponies hiding behind a pillar from a two-year-old Spike with an ice cream.

Ultimately, the music began. With no Pinkie Pie, the orchestra were able to perform a more normal set, and the first piece was a moderately paced quadrille.

\* \* \*

><p>"Don't look now," Spike said quietly on their second dance (a slow waltz), "but I think that Blueblood's been glaring at us for the past five minutes."<p>

They slowly changed places, Rarity following the traditional dance and Spike moving in a variant that they'd worked out some time ago to compensate for his different body shape.

"Yes, I see what you mean," Rarity replied. "Goodness, but I feel rather better than I should about him being jealous of you."

"You think that's what it is?"

"For my sins," Rarity gave a tiny grin, "I happen to know him rather well. I do feel some sympathy for the princeâ€| after all, he's grown up under rather a lot of pressureâ€| but, then, other royals had the same situations and they handled it much better. But yes, that rather appears as though he's jealous."

"With good reason," Spike replied, executing a complicated step which had been designed with a low centre of gravity in mind. He managed it without stumbling, but it was a near thing. "I feel like I've got the best dance partner on the floor."

"You flatterer." Rarity fluttered her eyelashes, eyes laughing. "I â€" oh!"

The waltz had come to an end, and without missing a beat Octavia and her quartet changed into a fast arabesque.

Spike and Rarity exchanged glances, grinned, and threw themselves into the physically demanding dance.

\* \* \*

><p>Dragon and unicorn only came off the dance floor three times that night.<p>

The first time was when Rarity laughingly asked for a break, and the two of them headed over to the buffet for some food and â€" especially â€" water. Octavia was outdoing herself tonight, which

meant lots of physically demanding dances, and they needed it.

The second time, Spike disappeared backstage for a few minutes, and came out again onto the orchestral dais itself. Sitting at a piano, he proceeded to rattle off the hardest pieces Twilight had been able to find him â€" starting with a Bach piano concerto, following that up with the Hammerklavier, and finishing with something simply called "Study in A flat major after op.25" which was essentially written for four hands.

Though that earned him a round of applause, he waved it off and vanished backstage again to change from waistcoat and tails back to his tuxedo.

While he was gone, though, Rarity found herself approached by Blueblood.

"Might I beg the honour of the next dance, my lady?" he asked, and Rarity had to admire his skill. If she hadn't had several dozen loops' worth of disastrous Gala attempts of one sort or another to remember, she'd have thought this was her dreams coming true.

"My apologies, your highness," she replied, affecting a slight air of distraction, "but I have already promised mister Spykoran the next dance."

"It rather seems as though you have promised him all the dances," Blueblood muttered. "Though he is, it would appear, a lucky fellow â€" all our local mares are rather disquieted by your presence." A dazzling smile. "They're not used to competition, especially not competition with such grace."

"I would hardly describe myself as \_competition\_," she began, and he interrupted her.

"Nor would I, my ladyâ€" because that implies that they are within shouting distance of you."

"I really must get on." Rarity turned half-away from him, looking to see if Spike had already come back in, and then saw a look of pure venom flash across Blueblood's face before his training reasserted itself.

She gave him a sardonic look which told him that she'd seen his momentary loss of composure. "Ah, dear Spykoran must have returned. Thank you for letting me know."

As Rarity trotted briskly over to the dance floor once more, she fancied â€" deep in her core â€" that she could hear the sound of grinding teeth.

\* \* \*

><p>"Spike," Rarity asked, halfway through the latest in a litany of dances so long she'd begun to lose track, "do you remember that letter you sent me, before our dinner at Blue Cordon's restaurant?"<p>

"Erâ€" the dragon frowned. "The one last loop, about getting hold of lightsaber-quality crystals?"

"No," she shook her head. "The first one. That very first letter you sent me after we turned up in a Loop together."

Spike nodded. "Yes, I do."

"Well, by my count we have had approximately a hundred and eleven years to think about the subject," she continued, still placing her hooves with faultless care. "And I would like to ask you if you think anything's come up."

"â€¦goodness." The dragon thought for perhaps five seconds. "No, I can't say I've noticed anything majorâ€¦ you've only improved, from the pony I first had a crush on."

"Good," she said, and then as the waltz ended reached up, pulled his head down, and gave him a fiery kiss. "That's about what I think, too," she said softly, as her lips released his.

Spike's eyes were suddenly wet with unshed tears. "Youâ€¦ really?"

"Yep." She winked, suddenly and irreverently. "It took me a long time to be sure, and I'm sorry for that. But I really have fallen for you."

Suddenly, both of them noticed that the sound in the room was ebbing away. Looking away from one another, they saw the various ponies present were clearing the dance floor.

"Should we-"

"Of course not," Princess Celestia said, startling them both as she spoke from within a few metres. "This is yours, and yours alone."

With that, she withdrew, and Spike and Rarity were alone in the middle of a cleared space at least twenty metres in every direction.

Then the musicians started playing again.

It was concert music, not dance music, and as a general rule one simply did not start with a finale piece. But that didn't matter. And as the finale of the Rebirth of the Phoenix began to swell around them, going from strings alone to horns to drums and flute, and swelling into one of the great triumphal musical pieces, the young-old dragon who was a mage's assistant and the unicorn who had always dreamed of creating beauty simply danced.

The third time they left the dance floor that night, no other pony replaced them. It would have been a cheapening of what they had just witnessed.

\* \* \*

><p>"So?" Twilight asked. "How did the Gala go?"<p>

Spike beamed. "As well as it possibly could have gone. Unquestionably," and here he gave Twilight a wink, "the best night



ever."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

18.1: Polaris is a nuclear missile deterrent. Why, yes, Pinkie is overreaching for that joke.

>18.7: The EoH in this Loop are basically the Beatles, but with six instead of four members. (And why not.)<br>18.8: Another crossover with my HTTYD Loops. Hopefully this one establishes itself properly.

>18.10: This is Carmen Sandiego, in case anyone didn't recognize it. (I didn't.)<br>18.13: The Rebirth of the Phoenix is in fact Stravinsky's Firebird. Also, all three piano pieces mentioned are real ones from our world.

>(Also, how's that loop in particular? Fairly major plot development involved there...)<p>

## 19. Chapter 19

### 19.1

Twilight looked up at the refurbished castle with satisfaction. "Excellent. Well done, everypony."

AJ nodded. "Yep. A good day's work, ah'd say."

The other four Element bearers lay around in various states of collapse. It had taken a twelve-hour-long burst of effort from all six of them to get the Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters habitable, but it looked pretty good.

"Right. Okay, everyone, take tomorrow off. Enjoy your new rooms," Twilight continued briskly. "AJ, you can commute if you want, or move your family in â€" I don't mind. But we're going to want to get to work on the monitoring station soon."

"You know," Dash wheezed, "This \_can't\_ be what Princess Celestia wanted you to do once we cured her sister."

"Why not?" Twilight asked, frowning. "It'll let us use the Elements on any villain who might threaten Equestria, it means we're already in one place so there's no need to waste time getting together, and it'll let us detect when villains turn up in the first place."

"You think there might be any?" Rarity asked, pulling herself upright.

"Probably." Twilight shrugged.

\* \* \*

><p>"Right. Trixie calls this meeting of the League of Minor Antagonists to order."<p>

There was a hubbub of confused voices.

"Trixie said \_order!\_" There was a loud bang. "Thank you. Now, Trixie

is sure you are all wondering why you are here."

"Well, \_duh,\_ " Gilda said scathingly. "None of us have ever met one another. Well, except me and Lightning Dust over there."

"It's \_Lightning!\_" the pegasus snapped, stamping.

"Who put po-ny in charge?" Fido asked.

"Trixie did." Trixie's gaze swept the assembled ponies, griffin, Diamond Dogs, one confused buffalo, a large and irritable dragon, and Philomena the phoenix (wearing a name tag with the legend 'observer'). "Trixie came up with the idea, recruited you all, and Trixie will be in charge."

"Really?" the dragon said, grumbling.

Trixie erupted in blue light. "Really," she said casually, as the corona of power revealed her wings. "Trixie said she was great. And powerful! You should take her at her word."

"What the buck?" Lightning Dust said, blinking. "You're an \_alicorn\_"

"Nope." Trixie was sitting back down, light and wings gone and cloak firmly over her back. "Why? Did you see something?"

"â€|oh, forget it."

"Trixie already has. Whatever it was." The unicorn waved a hoof. "Now, our objective: the Elements of Harmony. Trixie recommends stage one should begin soon."

"What's stage one?" Gilda asked.

"Why, that's simple." Trixie grinned, activating a slide projector. "We place buckets of water over doors that they \_tend to walk through.\_"

"Po-ny is clearly insane," Fido muttered.

The buffalo nodded, still wondering why he wasn't in a desert any more.

\* \* \*

><p>19.2<p>

"Okay, come on." Spike stood, and gestured to his girlfriend â€" a word that still gave him a little frisson when he thought it. "We're going flying."

Rarity flinched. "Do we have to?" she asked, covering for her slip.

"Well, you don't \_have\_ to," Spike admitted. "But I saw how you were last loop â€" don't try and deny it, either. You really don't like flying."

"I don't, no." That was no great secret. Luna hadn't managed to do

much more than deeply bury the fear in armour of ice, and while it didn't paralyze her in terrorâ€¦ it was still obvious from the sheen of sweat that Rarity \_did not like\_ flying.

"Wellâ€¦ I dunno," Spike shook his head. "You \_earned\_ those wings of yours, Rarity, and Iâ€¦ I know what it's like to hate your own body."

The dragon shook his head again. "But hate's too strong a word. More likeâ€¦ dislike? Or just feel like you can't bring yourself to use the full scope of its abilities? No, that's not it either. It's so hard to-"

Rarity pressed a hoof against his lips. "I \_do\_ know what you're trying to say, Spike." Then she chuckled. "Even if you're not doing very well at saying it."

"I'm at a disadvantage!" Spike said. "There's a hoof in my face."

"It wasn't when you started talking, dear," Rarity riposted.

"Got any proof?" For a moment, the young dragon grinned wickedly. Then his face fell, as he remembered the topic.

After a moment, Rarity nodded. It seemed like she was nodding half to herself. "Okay, you have a point. I'm an alicorn now â€" or I can be â€" and letting that go to waste would be simply atrocious."

"Yeah. Besides, I'll be there."

"And I couldn't ask for a better." Rarity then giggled. "Oh, but I hope you're going to age to the point you have wings! I'm \_not\_ learning to fly while carrying you on my back!"

The dragon frowned. "That's a point. Actuallyâ€¦ should we ask Dash to help? She's the best flier we know."

"She is, yesâ€¦" Rarity considered. "No, I don't think so. Dash finds flying far \_too\_ easy. It's first nature to her. If anything, my preference would be for Fluttershy â€" she's by no means a natural flier, and she's had to work at it."

"True. Shall I get her?"

"No." Spike blinked at how firmly Rarity had spoken, and she shook her head with a knowing grin. "Dear me, Spiky-wikey, you do miss the wood for the trees sometimes. You're a great big strong dragon! I'd lay odds it was just as hard for you to learn as it was for Fluttershy to."

"Probably harder, you're right." Spike thought back. "Yes, it was hard enough for me to force myself into the air. But I still think we should get Fluttershy, because she's the one who had to overcome a fear of flying."

"Next time," Rarity decided, after a moment. "Unless this time goes well. But let's see how we do alone together first."

"Okay." Spike squared his shoulders. "Sounds good."

"And after this I'm going to get your adult form properly measured." Rarity's eyes took on what might be considered a slightly dangerous glint. "I won't have you without a decent wardrobe, whatever your size!"

"â€|we're not going to be declaring war for the materials, are we?" Spike asked, with a crooked smile.

"I swear!" Rarity quite deliberately flounced. "You invade another sovereign nation in the search for swatches \_one\_ time, and you're hearing about it forever!"

That was good for a shared laugh.

"Thanks, love," Rarity said, quietly, after a minute or so of silence. "You're right, I \_do\_ need a kick up the backside about it. Sooner or later, there'll be a loop where I \_need\_ to fly."

Spike shrugged awkwardly. "I kind of wanted to show you a few good romantic spots, too. Just the odd little place I like to go and meditate, but if we could both get there then they'd be perfect for a picnic."

"Ah, motivationâ€|" Rarity looked off into the middle distance. "I look forward to it. Well, let's go. Where do you suggest we start?"

"Ponyville dam," Spike replied promptly. "The lake's a good safe splashdown spot, and hard flapping is at least a simple way to fly â€" you feel you're in full control, and it lets you get that part of it down. Besides, your actual \_skill\_ is goodâ€| it's a psychological thing."

"Very well, then." The unicorn summoned a swimsuit. "Nice day for a swim."

Spike blinked. "Are you trying to distract me? Becauseâ€| it's kind of working, actuallyâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>19.3<p>

"I actually kinda wish \_I\_ had a grandmother half as neat as yours," Diamond Tiara said absently. "I mean, she got a land patent from Celestia herself!"

"Always with th' hob-nobbing fer you, ain't it?" Applebloom shook her head. "And here ah thought you were gettin' to appreciate commoners."

"Well, I do." Diamond pointed over at Scootaloo and Sweetie Belle. "See? I appreciate them."

"Y'all \_bribe\_ them."

"We are totally happy with that!" Scootaloo said, balancing an ice cream about the size of her leg. "Bribery is good!"

"But as I was saying," Diamond pressed, "I do appreciate commoners. But you, oh farmer's daughter, are \_yeomanry\_."

"â€|what?" Applebloom blinked, trying to remember the meaning of the word. "Ain't that the same thing?"

"Not quite." Diamond bestowed a disapproving look on her, with only a slight smirk to reveal she didn't mean it. "Silver?"

"It's simple." Silver Spoon pointed over at the distant orchard. "Basically, you own your own land â€" or, rather, your family does."

"...wait, that's it?" Applebloom felt vaguely disappointed.

"Well, yeomanry have other characteristics." Diamond smiled beatifically. "Chief amongst them a stubbornness of truly gargantuan â€" neigh, epic â€" proportions. One that puts such little things as a thousand years on the moon into the shade."

Applebloom giggled. "Okay, you got me. But why does that make us yeomanry, instead of commoners?"

"Basicallyâ€|" Diamond looked a little embarrassed. "Actually, it's because there used to be three kinds of ponies. Ones who had others work for them, ones who worked for themselves, and ones who worked for others. And most of the top lot didn't care about the difference between the other two."

Then she made a throwing away gesture. "But who gives an apple. They'd consider Silver and I nouveau riche, you an uppity yeoman's daughter and Scootaloo and Sweetie to be dreadfully common."

"Soâ€| what you're saying is, none of it matters anyway," Applebloom said slowly.

"Yes, yes, but don't expect that in writing." Diamond frowned, then raised a hoof. "Idea! I give you poor, benighted provincials â€" and Silver, of course â€" a taste of true class."

"Which is?" Four voices said, not quite in chorus.

"â€|hay if I know. As far as I can tell, though, class tastes like expensive chocolate. So that seems like a good start." Diamond counted out bits. "Wow, I never realized just how \_much\_ allowance I hadâ€| which way is Sugarcube Corner?"

\* \* \*

><p>19.4<p>

"Okay, guys," Sora said, summoning Fimbulwinter and Fafnir. The two keyblades crackled with frost and fire, and air began to swirl around him. "In fast, beat up Axel, then we can finally get our Gummi ship back this Loop."

"Gotcha!" Donald quacked, his own legendary weapon snapping with power.

He and Goofy fell in behind their Anchor, as he broke down the doors

of Twilight Town's old mansion.

"GREETINGS!" a large, blue-black animal shouted. She (he?) reminded Sora of a cross between a unicorn, Hercules' friendly pegasus and Saix, somehow. "YOU WOULD BE THE DESTINED CHILD WHOSE MEMORIES WE HAD TO REBUILD IN THY DREAMS?"

"Erâ€¦ yeah?" Sora looked around, trying to spot something different. Nope, the mansion was the same as everâ€¦ but those winged-unicorn statues now looked kinda suspicious. "Where are you from?"

"EQUESTRIA." Theâ€¦ whatever-she-was said, lowering her voice enough that Sora could at least detect a gender. "NOWâ€¦ WHERE IS THE NEAREST POOL? WE NEED A HOLIDAY."

\* \* \*

><p>"Filling in for Auntie Luna suuucks," Nyx grumbled. "Moon goes up, moon goes down. It's <em>boring.</em> Hmmmâ€¦ wonder if I could make it goâ€¦ sideways?"

NaminÃ© shrugged. "I'm just grateful for the rest."

\* \* \*

><p>19.5 (inspired by "New Recruits", a picture by DMKruiz.)<p>

"Well, ah got to admitâ€¦" Applebloom walked around the first applicant. "She ain't got a cutie mark."

"But she's way too old." Scootaloo carefully scrutinized the nervous applicant, who began to turn rather more annoyed. "Likeâ€¦ at least twenty."

"Well, I say we should take her." Sweetie Belle nodded. "'Bloom? Scoots?"

"Yeah, sure." Applebloom nodded as well, and after a moment Scootaloo made it unanimous.

"Can you, erâ€¦ transform smaller?" Sweetie asked, rummaging amongst their things. "We don't have a large size cape."

"Fine." Queen Chrysalis flashed with green fire and became much smaller. "This will do?"

"Yep," Applebloom answered.

"As for the other oneâ€¦ hey, can you take off your armour? We need to see if you have a cutie mark."

\*\*\*"Crys-tals!"\*\* Sombra said, shocked.

"No, I didn't mean it like that!" Sweetie babbled, then blinked. "Wait. We don't even have that kind of taboo."

\* \* \*

><p>"You think this stands the best chance of working?" Princess Celestia asked, watching as the Crusaders (three official, one probationary) chased Sombra around the meadow trying to get a look at his flank.<p>

"Well, it's worth a tryâ€|" Twilight held up a book. "Apparently it's called reintegration therapy."

\* \* \*

><p>19.6 (Filraen, continuation of 17.3 take two)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>In Rainbow Dash's opinion, it was a pity they had to halt a great prank. Then again, giving a place of rest for other loopers was something Princess Celestia ordered to all of them and the pegasus agreed with the reasons. Explaining all of that to a non-Awoke Celestia, after she they had used their dark alicorn forms? Awkward.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Is that it?" Celestia was very worried about this development. Was this a trick born for the darkness and corruption to make her let her guard down? She wasn't sure what she would do, alone or with the Day Guard as backup, against six alicorns in direct combat. Were they telling the truth? And what was the role of Discord, who was currently eating popcorn with Starlight Breaker, in all of this? She wasn't sure what option was the more terrifying one.<em>

\_ "I think we can offer some proof and fix everything at the same time," Twilight Sparkle said before looking back to the other ponies and nodding. Then all six of them changed into alicorns, finally seeing how the corruption took their forms. Fearing what she had really unleashed in Equestrie a cold sweat ran through Celestia when Eternal Twilight's horn started to shine and then she saw appearing... the Elements of Harmony!? How could they answer to anypony's call? After each alicorn wore an Element, Celestia saw how a rainbow-colored wave spread from the alicorns, warm to the touch, fixing the castle and clearing the sky.\_

\_ "So, how was it?" Eternal Twilight said, in a voice not unlike Twilight Sparkle.\_

\_ Celestia decided it was the best moment to faint.\_

\* \* \*

><p>But that didn't matter right now. She was back in Ponyville and taking care of the weaher as usual and with a new apprentice this loop she could have more time to nap which was always a good thing.<p>

"Twilight told me you can control the weather, how does that work?" Starlight... no, Nanoha asked. By some reason she didn't like to be called for her pony name.

"Well, we usually work in teams to move clouds and make different

weather patterns. Do you see how I'm standing -not flying- on a cloud right now?" Rainbow Dash asked while stomping the cloud with one hoof for emphasis.

Nanoha nodded, while hovering by the rainbow-maned pegasus side. She seemed extremely at ease in a pegasus body, Rainbow Dash noted, barely walking if she could fly.

"I'd normally start with you trying to stand on a cloud, butâ€¦ you seem to have a good knack for flying."

"I just love flying, and having actual wings here is very interesting." Nanoha's eyes sparkled.

"I can understand that, just tell me if you're getting too tired to take a rest." Rainbow Dash smiled. "Time to practice: try to buck this cloud..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Twilight, can I borrow some parchment?" Rainbow Dash asked her friend.<p>

"Let me see if there's some left around here." Twilight looked at the ruins of the library - the lack of walls giving a great vantage point to see the ruins of Ponyville. "Here. What for, anyway?"

"I want to write a letter to Princess Celestia about what I've learned this loop: never let Nanoha in the weather management team when there's a thunderstorm scheduled."

\* \* \*

><p>19.7 (Madfish)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The villagers of Ponyville were shocked. They'd just seen a tripped, spun, slipped, inverted, flipped and finally netted Nightmare Moon â€" now hanging from the ceiling.<p>

Applejack turned to face the Mayor and coincidentally the crowd she laid out the sequence of events.

"That's amazingâ€¦ but if there's no Nightmare Moon who is that?" asked the Mayor gesturing at the net.

"Rarity if yah would?"

With a beam of light from her horn the makeup removal spell washed over 'Nightmare Moon' revealing-

"Royal Celebration Co-ordinator Twilight Sparkle!" shouted an even more shocked crowd.

"The one thing we didn't get was the 'why', Sugarcube," Applejack said. "Why the whole Nightmare Moon scam? What did you gain by faking that Ponyville would hold the Summer Sun Celebration?"

"The five of you did pretty well," Twilight answered sounding rather



unworried for a party wrecker in a net being stared at by a growling Pinkie Pie. "The part of the plan you failed to understand was that I moved every calendar in Ponyville forward a day and cast a spell to stop anypony noticing."

"But why?" pressed Big Macintosh Apple from where he'd triggered the net.

"Simple. I needed to find a group of ponies to stop Nightmare Moon." Twilight nodded to herself absently.

"But, Darling, you're Nightmare Moon," Rarity pointed out, gesturing to the costume wings that had fallen off at some point in the process.

With a certain smugness Twilight finished filling in the gaps, "Only for tonight. Tomorrow at the real celebration, which really is here by the way, the real Nightmare Moon will be freed and kidnap Celestia unless I can find a group of 6 Ponies like yourselves to stop her."

"You'll forgive me darling if we're a bit sceptical." Rarity frowned uncertainly "it sounded a lot like Twilight was a few stitches short of a dress.

"No fur off my muzzle, I've done my bit. You've already got the book in the Library so tomorrow the six of you can go to the Old Palace and get them." Twilight kicked back.

"Well," said the mayor after a moment of silence, her voice firming "take her away!"

As she was led out the door Twilight shouted back, "And I've gotten away with it because of you Meddling Mares and your Studly Stallion!" Then somewhat quieter with distance, "Seriously! Studly! Call me some time!"

\* \* \*

><p>19.8 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Gentlemen, it appears one of the guests of honour is late, probably still caring for an injured animal, knowing her. She is a butter yellow pegasus with a pink wavy mane and tail. She is also rather timid, so I want you to treat her with the utmost courtesy and gentleness. I'm sure you will do your duty in an exemplary fashion."<p>

The two guards standing in front of the entrance to Sugarcube Corner both nodded curtly.

Twilight looked around. She was not going to let this instance of the party slip into the sort of disaster that the original was. "Rarity, how's the anti-mess spell holding up?"

"It's marvellous, Twilight!" The unicorn mare returned, enjoying the feast spread in front of her. "I must put it on all of my dresses! Where did you find it?"

"In an old book of household charms." Where she'd written it after creating it from scratch over the last couple of loops. "I don't see why you couldn't enchant it into one of the gems using a rune matrix to make it permanent. I'll draw something up for you."

"Thank you, darling... Salad fork over there, soup before salad, Applejack," she said to the bewildered looking farm-mare alongside her.

"Thanks kindly sugarcube, it's been a long time since I did this kind of fancy eating."

Satisfied that they were both happy, Twilight checked on Pinkie Pie, just in time to divert a seven layer cake into the pink pony's trajectory and prevent her taking Princess Celestia's cake.

"Thank you, sirs." Fluttershy's voice came from the door, and Twilight went over to intercept her.

"I'm so glad you could make it. It wouldn't be the same without you."

"Sorry I'm late, I had to finish taking care of a patient first."

Twilight smiled at her. "It's okay, I thought it was something like that. Come on, I know the Princess is going to love you, and she's brought a her pet phoenix with her."

Fluttershy's eyes sparkled at the idea. "Ohh!"

They came over just as Celestia finished tea trolling the Cakes. "Princess, may I present my friend Fluttershy."

The princess turned her gaze on the yellow pegasus. "Ah yes. I understand from Twilight Sparkle's letters that you enjoy tending to the needs of woodland creatures."

"Oh yes, your highness, I love to take care of animals."

"As do I. As Princess, I care deeply about all creatures, great and small. Nothing means more to me than the well-being of all my subjects." The half-dead parrot in the cage next to her chose that moment to cough. "Ah, Philomena, my pet. You're awake. Do say hello to our gracious hosts."

"Oh my..." Fluttershy was as usual shocked to see the state of the pet. Twilight quickly stepped in.

"Princess? I didn't realise she was that close to a burning day. I guess you wouldn't want to leave her alone while she goes through it."

The Princess nodded. "As you say, I wanted to be there for her."

Fluttershy looked confused. "Um... what's a burning day? If you don't mind me asking..."

Twilight kicked in lecture mode 1. "A phoenix is pretty much immortal, but they do it by regenerating every hundred years or so. When a burning day approaches, they start to moult and look ill, and eventually burst into flame and burn to ash."

Seeing Fluttershy's horrified expression she quickly added. "It's okay, they regenerate from the ashes into a younger version of themselves. It's just a part of their natural life-cycle."

"Twilight, I hadn't realised you'd studied phoenix life-cycles." Celestia said with a slightly surprised expression.

"I found a book on exotic creatures in Golden Oaks Library, and considering we're next to the Everfree..."

A Royal guard came up and whispered in the princess's ear. "Really? Well, if I must... I'm sorry, everypony. I'm afraid I have to cut the party short. The mayor has requested an audience with me. Royal duty calls. Thank you for a wonderful time. It's been a joy getting to know you all better."

"Uh! Princess, before you go, do you mind if Fluttershy and I look after Philomena while you're at the meeting? I'm sure Fluttershy would love to take care of her."

"I don't see why not." The Princess replied. "Farewell, every-pony."

Fluttershy looked wide eyed as the Princess left. "Oh thank you Twilight! I'll take really good care of her!"

"I thought you'd enjoy it. I'll get that book." Twilight replied. "Though really all we can do is make her comfortable until she burns up."

\* \* \*

><p>19.9<p>

Twilight grinned into the camera. "Hello, and welcome to 'Tough Science.' I'm your host, Twilight Sparkle, and with me are Rainbow Dash and Trixie Lulamoon."

She then looked a bit nervous. "Actually, they kinda scare meâ€|"

"Come on, come on!" Trixie's horn glowed, and the camera moved around to focus on her. "We've received many letters from all over Equestria, asking us important questions that must be answered for science. Dash! The first letter!"

"Right." Rainbow Dash lifted a letter from the pile. "This one's from a little colt by the name of Pipsqueak, and he asks 'is Luna best princess?'" Dash blinked. "Can we evenâ€|"

Trixie shook her head. "A simple question, with two answers. The first answer is 'of course not, that would be you, your highness'. And the second answer is 'yes you are, please don't hurt us Princess Luna.' The answer depends who is asking."

"Isn't that kind ofâ€¦ cynical?" Twilight asked from off camera.

Trixie shrugged. "Next letter!"

"Right." Dash rummaged around. "Ooh, I like this one."

"Do tell." The unicorn moved over to have a look.

"'Dear Mythbuckers,'"â€¦ Trixie paused. "Twilight! Trixie \_told\_ you that we should be called the Mythbuckers!"

"They only call us that because you wrote the adverts and put that on them!" Twilight shouted back.

"Talk to the hoof." Trixie went back to the letter. "Hm. Apparently this pony is asking us how big a crater it would make if a barrel of rainbow extract were detonated."

"Actually, that's interesting." Twilight wheeled a blackboard in front of the camera, and started drawing. "You see, explosions going off in the air don't tend to create a crater at all. They cause a lot of pressure wash, but no crater unless the fireball of the explosion itself hits the ground. If the explosive goes off on the ground, then it can make a crater, but the best thing to do for a really big one is to camouflet â€" that's when the explosive goes off \_under\_ground\_."

"â€¦thank you." Trixie bucked the board back offscreen. "But who cares what the numbers say, we're going to blow stuff up ourselves! Dash, where did you put that rainbow extract weâ€¦ liberated?"

"You did what?" Twilight asked.

"Forget you heard that!" Trixie then looked at the camera. "We can edit the incriminating statement out, right?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Three, two, oneâ€¦!"<p>

The ground heaved up, and then it rained dirt onto the three ponies and their slit trench.

"Excellent!" Trixie said, surveying the crater almost as soon as turf had stopped landing. "At least twice as big!"

"So, that's the answer?" Dash asked. "I mean, we've done, like, ten tests by now."

"We haveâ€¦" Trixie tapped a hoof on the ground. "But we did not test a detonation where the barrel of rainbow extract goes off next to \_other\_ barrels of rainbow extract."

Twilight blinked. "Oh, Celestiaâ€¦ I can't tell which of you two corrupted the other, but it's not making for quiet loops."

"Quiet is boring!" Trixie replied indignantly. "Besides, Trixie at least exercised discretion on the princess question. Clearly best

princess is Trixie."

Dash and Twilight both looked peeved, but let it go. "Right."

\* \* \*

><p>"I would never even consider this were we not in a time loop," Twilight said absently, lifting the last barrel onto their pile. "Right, what did we say minimum safe radius was?"<p>

"Trixie prefers to put it this way." The unicorn made an expansive gesture. "Good thing we're in the frozen north."

"True." The unicorns fired off cloud-walking spells and then teleported to a cirrus forty miles away, and Dash lit the fuse before rocketing off into the air to join them.

\* \* \*

><p>"And there's the answer," Twilight said to camera. "With the right environment, a properly buried charge, and lots more rainbow extract, the resultant crater can be as large as half a mile. But don't try this on your home planet unless you're really careful."<p>

She turned. "Isn't that right, Trixie?"

"Worth it!" Trixie shouted from the hospital bed.

Twilight sighed. "Anyway. If you're doing these kinds of experiments, you really need to make sure you have as many magical precautions as you can â€" as well as non magical ones, too."

\* \* \*

><p>"So this is what you learned last Loop?" Celestia asked, as the video ended.<p>

"Yeahâ€|" Twilight shrugged. "I've been kind of scraping the barrel for a while nowâ€| at least for lessons to learn with Trixie. With her, it tends to be 'don't use high explosives to make breakfast'."

The ground shook.

"Speaking of which, I think she's finished making the crumpets. Want one?" Twilight asked.

"I think I will pass, thank you," Celestia replied solemnly. "And I fear for Equestria next time she's in charge."

Twilight shook her head. "Actually, Trixie is fairly sweetâ€| she's just an adrenaline junkie. And you can't talk, oh Princess Cowabunga."

\* \* \*

><p>19.10<p>

"Oh, ah see!" Applejack said, noticing the small copse of apple

trees. "Mah element must be manifestin' as somethin' like mah cutie mark!"

Discord chuckled soundlessly. As he'd thought, the intricate maze he'd woven was convincing the Element bearers that he'd set up some kind of \_test\_.

"Thought so!"

Wait, what?

Discord blinked, noticing that Applejack was now wearing her Element of Honesty.

"Where did you even get that?" he asked, materializing with a whoosh.

"Ah just did." Applejack shrugged.

Discord grit his teeth, as over on the other side of the maze Rarity's element turned up out of nowhere.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight giggled. "This maze of yours isn't doing too well, is it, Discord?"<p>

"Shut up!" he said petulantly. "And you don't have your element, so there. A unicorn without a horn doesn't have \_any\_ magic, so you \_can't\_ deserve your element now!"

"Oh, yeah, about thatâ€¦" Twilight hefted a box from behind a hedge. "I found them."

Discord focused in on the box. It was a large crate, with a horn next to an "X 6" legend, and a wing next to an "X 12".

"Butâ€¦ I didn'tâ€¦"

Twilight kicked the box, which fell open. There was a moment of confusion, and then all six Element bearers were alicorns.

"Huh. Cool!" Pinkie said, looking herself over. "This is super amazing! Hey, Twilight, you got your groove back!"

"My what?"

"I meanâ€¦ horn." Pinkie pointed. "And element, too!"

Discord's jaw hung open. Then he knelt down in front of them. "You win. Teach me how to prank, you're clearly better at it than I am."

Twilight shook her head. "Prank? I don't know what you mean. But if we have won, mind putting everything back the way it was?"

"Fine." Discord snapped his claws.

"No, not like \_that\_," Twilight grinned. "Dear me, Discord. Evacuate the castle, and then restore it to how it was â€" in \_your\_

time."

"There wasn't a castle there in my time" Discord said, then it dawned on him. "Oh, wow. You \_are\_ good."

\* \* \*

><p>19.11<p>

SCP-2314

**\*\*Classification:\*\*** Safe Euclid Keter Euclid

**\*\*Special Containment Procedures:\*\***

Since SCP-2314 possesses the ability to teleport with no known range limit, containment in a meaningful sense is effectively impossible. The approach taken at site-12 has been essentially one of psychological containment - SCP-2314 is made to be comfortable in the assigned containment room, and encouraged to stay.

To this end, SCP-2314 is provided a large (10x10x5 m) main room, with access to separate lavatory facilities, and many of the same conveniences found in a normal suburban home. In addition, a discretionary fund has been set aside to keep SCP-2314 supplied with new books - SCP-2314's voracity for the written word has proven amply sufficient to keep it content.

Food is strictly vegetarian, but aside from this little different from human norms combined with standard equine preferences. (Note: apparently daisy sandwiches are considered a delicacy "possible reward?)

**\*\*Description:\*\***

SCP-2314 is an equine being, approximately five feet in length and four in height. Its coat is predominantly purple, with a striped mane (provenance of striping unknown and under investigation) and a small single horn in the middle of the forehead.

SCP-2314 is female, professes to be fully mature, and is overall cooperative with investigations but projects an air of tolerant amusement. SCP-2314 has full understanding of and ability to speak English, though occasionally words are used which are alterations of English (for example, 'beforehoof' as opposed to 'beforehand'). SCP-2314 refers to herself as "Twilight Sparkle".

In addition, SCP-2314 possesses abilities which are effectively consistent with those of reality warpers. Teleportation and telekinesis in particular have been noted, and it has been determined that SCP-2314's horn glows when such an ability is being used. The reasons for this are not yet known, but SCP-2314 has little objection to subjecting to a variety of tests on these and other 'magic'.

**\*\*Addendum: \*\***

SCP-2314 self-identifies as a unicorn, and it is recommended to use this term when referring to her species.

Also, whoever classified her as Keter was an idiot. Yes, she can teleport. Yes, she's intelligent. Yes, she sometimes seems to be smarter than we are (whoever gave her that book on quantum physics should take note of the annotations in the margins). But she shows neither attempts nor desire to break out of containment, and frankly I don't see her doing anything particularly nasty if she DID leave. For goodness' sake, she's addicted to books. We could recontain her by staking out the nearest library.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Excerpt from interview SCP-2314-2:<strong>

Interviewer: "So, you're a unicorn."

SCP-2314: "Yep."

Interviewer: "Where'd you come from?"

SCP-2314: "Canterlot, originally. Sorry that's not much help as an answer, but it's the best one I've got. Perhaps we should focus more on my abilities?"

Interviewer: "I'm asking the questions."

SCP-2314: "And I'm suggesting better ones. Hey, watch this!"

\*slight humming sound\*

Interviewer: "Why is the table glowing purple and floating?"

SCP-2314: "Telekinesis. Cool, isn't it?"

Interviewer: "I'll be right back."

SCP-2314: "Okay! Be back soon!"

From this it should be clear that SCP-2314 is both enthusiastic and does not stick to the script. A collegiate attitude is recommended.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight waved to the security cameras. "Morning!"<p>

It was an interesting experience, being the subject of study like this. It would be nicer if they'd just trust her enough to help with examining the \_other\_ creatures or objects in containment, but a steady supply of books was good enough. (That and hearing them trying to work out how her magic operated. It was getting \_so\_ tempting to just tell them, but it kind of felt like that would spoil it for them.)

\* \* \*

><p>19.12<p>

The Nine Riders of the Nazgul rode out of Mordor. They crossed the Anduin by night, then reached the Fords of Isen on Midsummer's



Eve.

And at that point, all nine horses blinked.

"What the hay?" Twilight Sparkle asked, shrugging violently and throwing the Witch-King of Angmar off her back. "Where are we?"

"I dunno!" Pinkie answered, shaking herself like a dog as Khamul the Easterling went flying.

The other four Elements, Luna, Shining and Cadence kicked their respective burdens off with equal ease, the Nazgul not expecting their brutalized mounts to suddenly lose all fear of them.

"Wait a secondâ€¦" Shining frowned. "This is Arda. I remember reading the books."

"Oh, right!" Twilight nodded, as the Nine began to get up. "Yeah, sorry, I was here once before but in a \_completely\_ different place."

She then shot a look at the Witch-King. "And as for you, the prophecy only says no man can kill you. I'm a female unicorn. Sod off."

The Witch-King looked back and forth between the nine rebellious horses and his eight fellows. Then all the Nazgul drew morgul-steel.

"Suit yourself. Elements, girls."

\* \* \*

><p>The flash of rainbow light could be seen from Minas Tirith.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, what now?" Cadence asked, as Twilight (restored to her base form by the use of the Elements of Harmony) converted the remaining three black horses into unicorns or alicorns as appropriate.<p>

"Wellâ€¦ I guess Celestia must be here somewhere." Twilight tapped a hoof. "Actually, she's probably Shadowfax. After thatâ€¦ anyone fancy invading Mordor?"

"What, just us?" Rarity asked, taken aback.

"Nah, I bet Spike's around somewhere." Ignoring Rarity's sudden blush, Twilight continued, "Dragons are powerful here, and I doubt Sauron would be too happy to be hit by the Elements regardless of that."

\* \* \*

><p>Denethor tapped the PalantÃ-r of Minas Tirith. "I swear, if this has brokenâ€¦" <p>

The seeing stone persisted in showing a motley group of brightly coloured horses â€" some with wings, horns, or both â€" cantering east along the great road.

\* \* \*

><p>19.13 (from Melavio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity looked around as she Awoke, and noticed a few off things. First, she was in a castle that certainly was not the Royal Pony Sisters castle, nor was it Canterlot, nor even the capital of the Crystal Empire. Secondly, she was very much a human again. Lastly, and strangest yet, there was a candelabra and a clock that were currently conversing with her. They seem to be looking at her with varying expressions of worry and curiosity. Searching through her memories, Rarity noted that she was Rarity Belle and had come to this castle to beg for her father's release from the clutches of the evil Dragon.<p>

At least Spikey-Wikey was likely in the loop with her.

"Ah! Mademoiselle, it is a pleasure to meet you! My name is LumiÃ©re, and this square fellow of mine is Cogsworth," the candle holder noted, gesturing to his friend.

"A pleasure to meet you Mademoiselle," the clock stated before bowing.

Rarity smiled and curtsied, "Why thank you for the introductions, monsieur's. My name is Rarity, and I'm looking for the Dragon to release my father."

Lumiere's smile faltered, "Ah well, our Master is a bit temperamental, so let us go elsewhere first and-" \*WOOSH\* A large creature descended from the rafters and landed behind the two animated objects. Gulping, Lumiere and Cogsworth both turned around to findâ€|their Master smiling tenderly?

"Bonjour, Mademoiselle Rarity. It is good to see you again," stated the large purple dragon. He bent down to take Rarity's hand in his claw and gave it a gentle kiss.

'Good, Spike is awake this loop.' "Enchente, Monsieur. As I explained to your wondrous servants here, I am looking to secure the release of my father."

Spike cocked an eyebrow, "I'm sure we can arrange something." Both of the loopers began to walk towards where Spike knew the dungeons would be, but were stopped by the loud rumbles of Spike's stomach and the matching sound from Rarity's. Both blushed before Spike spoke up. "Umâ€|I don't suppose you would grab us a quick meal, would you Lumiere?"

Looking back at the two, Spike and Rarity found Cogsworth desperately trying to clean his glass face and Lumiere with his mouth open. Lumiere quickly closed it as the question floated down to him and decided to go with the flow. Perhaps they would get this curse broken yet.

"But of course, Master. Follow me." Both loopers followed the bouncing candle into a grand hall before sitting down at an equally

grand table. Coughing to clear his throat, Lumiere began to speak.

"Monsieur and Mademoiselle. It is with deepest pride and greatest pleasure that we welcome you tonight! Now, we invite you to relax, to pull up a chair, as the dining room proudly presentsâ€|your dinner."

\* \* \*

><p>"Marvellous," Rarity pronounced. "I must admit, I don't tend to eat meat, but this meal was good enough that I might â€" almost, almost! â€" consider doing so more often."<p>

Spike nodded, seeing what she was actually saying. It was a reminder that she normally didn't have the palate for meat â€" on account of not normally being human.

"Anyway. My father?"

"Of course." Spike stood, hands on the table. "There is only one possible remuneration I can accept for releasing your father. Your service to meâ€| for ever!"

Rarity barely had time to react before Spike shrugged. "Worth a try. What about twenty years? Ten? Five? Okay, help me sort my wardrobe and a kiss for luck, and that's my final offer."

Unable to help it, Rarity burst out laughing. "You are the most atrocious negotiator I have ever dealt with!"

"Well, in my defenceâ€|" Spike paused, then shrugged. "Nope, got nothing. Anyway, my wardrobe?"

"Most certainly. Though it won't be any great hardshipâ€|"

As they left the room, Rarity frowned. "Wonder who the Anchor is? Maybe Twilight's around somewhere."

"Could be." Spike waved a hand â€" maybe yes, maybe no. "But then, this world's hardly small, and we could be on the other side of it from the anchor. Twilight was here once â€" she was a different kind of unicorn to normal, so maybe that's who the Anchor normally is."

\* \* \*

><p>Belle Bell, owner of a small bookshop in Ponyville, paged through a book on her counter. She was told by one of the local loopers, one Fluttershy, that the main anchor of the loop would be coming to meet her once she arrived from Canterlot. Belle was excited to meet another looper that loved books as much as she did. The door jingled, signalling a new entrant into the shop.<p>

"Welcome to Belle's Books, where the whole worldâ€|isâ€|\*SNORT\*" Belle was holding her hoof to her snout in order to contain her laughter. Before her was quite certainly the local anchor Twilight Sparkle. On her back was a quite familiar individual to Belle. If that individual was suddenly two feet tall and adorably fluffy.

The Beast snorted as Belle collapsed laughing. "I wanna go home."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Wow, I've done a lot of these...

Anyway.

19.1 is a loose Teen Titans parody, with full connivance of both magic-focused unicorn loopers.

19.4 is Kingdom Hearts.

19.9 is a kind of combination of Brainiacs and Mythbusters.

19.11 is the SCP foundation attempting (and failing) to cope with Twilight.

And 19.13 is, of course, Beauty and the Beast.

## 20. Chapter 20

### 20.1

"Mua ha ha!" Trixie laughed evilly, horn flaring as she reshaped the land around Ponyville to her whim.

"Butâ€| that's impossible!" Twilight cried, shielding her eyes.

"Really?" Trixie asked, suddenly sounding uncertain. "You sure?"

"Actually, yes," Twilight said. She got out some paper and wrote equations on it. Trixie moved around to watch, occasionally nodding or pointing at some particularly important clause.

"There," Twilight finished. "See?"

Trixie perused the paper, lips moving. "You are correct." The spell abruptly dissipated. "Oh well, worth a try. Do you know a good restaurant around here?"

"I've heard good things about the \_Farrier's Rest\_." Twilight nodded. "Mind if I join you?"

"Not at all."

Dash blinked. "Wait, what just happened? Did you just disprove Trixie with science?"

"Actually, it was logic," Twilight replied over her shoulder. "Proof by contradiction."

"But we \_saw\_ her! She was \_doing \_it!"

"Anecdotal evidence counts for nothing." Twilight walked off, discussing something or other with Trixie in a low voice.

Dash shook her head again. "Ah, whatever."

\* \* \*

><p>"Nice one," Trixie said, nibbling on some celery. "The looks on their facesâ€|"<p>

"Yeah." Twilight frowned. "Hey, tell you what. Want to turn up next time as an alicorn?"

"Trixie likes how you think."

\* \* \*

><p>20.2<p>

"The Night Will Last Forever!" Nightmare Moon finished, and dramatic thunder crashed.

Then it cut off as suddenly as a knife, and a sky-blue alicorn trotted onto the stage from the left. "Mother!"

Nightmare Moon blinked, as things went abruptly off-script. "Pardon?"

"For goodness' sake, mother," the newcomer said, shaking her head wearily. "What \_are \_you doing?"

Some of the spectating Ponyville ponies noticed that her cutie mark incorporated a moon motif, alongside a wand. Twilight Sparkle, meanwhile, tried to avoid giggling.

"Who are you?" Nightmare Moon asked.

"And you don't recognize your own daughter!" Trixie said, shaking her head and continuing to trot up to her 'mother'. "You are drunk, mother. Come on, let's get you home."

"I am NOT drunk!" Nightmare Moon shouted. "I am the rightful ruler of Equestria, not some two-bit sot!"

"Hey!" Berry Punch shouted from the crowd, putting down her third beer of the night. "Sots are ponies too!"

"And now you're going to make a scene." Trixie's voice had what Twilight judged as an artfully recreated hitch in it. "This happens every week. Is there somewhere I'm going wrong? Some filial duty that I've failed in?" A tear rolled down Trixie's cheek.

Nightmare Moon was by this point completely confused. "Erâ€| whatâ€| don't cry?"

Trixie smiled wanly. "Please, mother," she said, in a soothing tone. "You'll feel much better once you've slept it off. Come on, now, we can leave these poor ponies toâ€| whatever they were doing, and go home."

There was a bright blue flash, and both alicorns vanished.

"â€|okay, what just happened?" Dash asked. "I mean, what?"

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie showed up the next morning at Twilight's door.<p>

"Cured her!" the stage pony said proudly. "Got her drunk for real and we had a heart-to-heart, she got it all out of her system, and then I explained what was actually going on."

"Huh." Twilight noted that down. "Guess sometimes all a pony really needs is a shoulder to cry on."

"Yeahâ€|" Trixie then blushed, and ruffled her wings. "Might not be a good method to try out again, though. Nightmare Moon can be a bit of a fighty drunk. Anyway, if Celestia asks, that's why Horseshoe Bay is now just â€|er, Horseshoe. Later!"

She vanished again in a puff of smoke.

Twilight cast a scrying spell. "Whoa. Yeah, that's a lot of terrain damage. Good thing nopony lives on that bitâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>20.3<p>

"Ah, Cadence. Good to see you. If you'll just come this way?" Celestia gestured. "There's just a few matters of administration to work out before the wedding."

"Of course," Chrysalis said smoothly. "Not a problem."

There was a little flicker of anticipation coming from the ruler of Equestria, but none of the rage which would indicate her ruse was discoveredâ€| so it was likely to be just looking forward to the wedding itself.

Then she froze, halfway through a pair of double doors.

Sitting at the other side of an ornate table was the \_real\_ Cadence.

"Hello," Cadence said frostily. "So, who are you getting married to, and why did you feel the need to hijack my wedding? It's \_my\_ wedding, thank you very much!"

"Butâ€| how did you escape?"

"Magic." Cadence shrugged. "Anyway. I certainly don't have a problem with you getting married â€" in fact, you can take my slot â€" but you don't get my groom. Any preference?"

"Butâ€| what?" Chrysalis dropped her shapeshift. "Shouldn't you be angry?"

"I'm not angry, so much asâ€| disappointed." Cadence waited a moment. "No suggestion? Right, we'll just use the best stallion we had booked â€" a noble from my homeland, I'm sure you'll like him. Ringsâ€| we had a couple of the hoof ring variant made, so you can take them with

our blessings. Dressesâ€| oh, no, that won't do. Shining!"

Shining Armor walked over from behind Chrysalis, shooting her a dirty look. "Yes, dear?"

"Can you go fetch your sister's friend? The one who's good with dresses? We need a rush job." Cadence nodded to herself. "I think I'll pay for it, too."

Her boyfriend nodded, and vanished in a teleport.

Chrysalis's head was whirling, trying to keep track. "What is going on?"

"Food is fineâ€| though I'll have to handle the catering for the changeling halfâ€|" Cadence mused, ignoring her. "Oh, last minute change to the statuettes on the cake. Aside from that, I think that's everythingâ€| no, wait. What music do you like?"

Chrysalis startled. "Oh. Er, not sure."

"I'll just guess, then. Right, that's everything. Rarity of Ponyville should turn up to fit you momentarily." Cadence disappeared in her own teleport.

"â€|what the \_buck?\_" Chrysalis asked the air.

A pink blur shot into the room, bounced off three walls, and coalesced into a pink earth pony with candy-floss for a mane. "Ooh, okayâ€| definitely liquorice for you!" Five seconds with a sketchpad, and the pony shot off again in another blur.

Then a white unicorn appeared with a tape measure and three metric tonnes of raw material. "Ah, a challenge! Goodness, though, the colour will be a sticking pointâ€| how do you feel about turquoise? It's not done to have a wedding dress that isn't white, but then that's only a custom in any case."

Chrysalis was now beyond words. Rarity took the silence to mean agreement, and began lifting up bolts of dyed silk to compare with Chrysalis' mane.

\* \* \*

><p>"I can't help but think that we might be storing up trouble for later this Loopâ€|" Celestia observed absently to Shining.<p>

"Maybe," Shining allowed, watching as his sister, his basically-a-little-brother, and Princess Luna bamboozled King Sombra into a tuxedo. "But, well, they do tend to be actually rather good for each other. Besides, this way we don't have to either change the arrangements for the wedding or have \_another\_ one exactly the same as our normal one." He shook his head. "Weddings are nice, but my lovely wife is a bitâ€| obsessed with them. Just don't tell her I said that."

"My lips are sealed," Celestia assured him.

\* \* \*

><p>20.4<p>

"Okay," Rainbow Dash said, frowning. "This is where we turn you into an awesome pegasus."

"â€|alright," Fluttershy replied. "But, didn't we already do this?"

"Yeah, kinda." Dash shrugged. "Though I don't intend to settle for good this time. I want to see awesome!"

"What does that mean?"

"Sonic. Rainboom." Dash punctuated the words with hoof-beatsâ€| then stopped, looking into the distance. "But, wait, would yours even be a \_rain\_boom? I mean, it's my weather magic signature that makes it be a rainbow. Ah, who cares."

Fluttershy blinked. "You think I can do that? Butâ€| you're the only pony to ever do a sonic rainboom."

"Yet," Dash replied. "Now, come on! Where's that tow rope and those butterfliesâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>"Come on!" Dash urged. "You can do better than this!"<p>

"I really can't," Fluttershy panted. To her credit, she'd just managed a three hundred mile an hour burst in a dive. Impressive enough that the Wonderbolts would probably have at least given her consideration, which was a huge improvement for the pegasusâ€| but nowhere near Dash's goal.

"I'm just not strong enough to. I don't know how you manage to push yourself so hard with just your wings."

"â€|wait," Dash said, looking suddenly guilty. "What do you mean, \_just\_ my wings? Most of my speed is weather \_magic\_. Didn't I mention that?"

"Erâ€| no," Fluttershy replied, then waved her hooves. "But I'm sure you meant to! It isn't your faultâ€|"

"Right." Dash shot off, and teleported in with Twilight a few seconds later.

"Okay, Fluttershy," Twilight said, smiling. "Now you get to have us teach you about weather magic!"

"Yay," Fluttershy said softly. It wasn't quite clear if that was sarcasm or justâ€| Fluttershy.

\* \* \*

><p>"Come on, come onâ€|" Dash murmured, watching the speck of yellow plunge out of the sky. "Just a bit fasterâ€|"<p>

The cloud formed, narrowedâ€| and broke.



It wasn't a Sonic Rainboom. It wasn't a boom, there was no rainbow colouration, and it wasn't even very loud. Fluttershy's magical signature merged with the transient cloud from breaking the sound barrier, and rolled outwards like a comforting pillow.

And a swarm of butterflies, bees and birds rose to meet it.

Twilight noted that down. "So they are personalized. Interesting. Maybe the original sonic rainboom was done by another pony with a rainbow signatureâ€|"

"Sounds about right," Dash agreed. "Maybe I should look that up. Oh, can you let Pinkie know it's time for a 'Fluttershy is super awesome' party? She deserves it."

\* \* \*

><p>20.5<p>

"Ah, it's good to see you, little mother."

Fluttershy eeped. "Can'tâ€| breatheâ€|"

Leman Russ released her, ignoring the gobsmacked expressions of his honour guard. "And these must be Twilight, Rarity, Pinkie, Applejack and Rainbow Dash!"

"Ah, you remember us!" Twilight said, smiling. "I hoped you would."

"I could never forget you." The Primarch tapped a massive finger absently against his sword hilt. "Now, what's firstâ€| of course! A feast!"

Pinkie grinned. "I like the sound of that!"

The Space Wolves thought it over, and decided â€" en masse â€" that they did as well.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, what brings you to my humble corner of the universe?" Russ asked that evening. The two Fenrisian wolves he always raised lounged around him, all three dwarfing the six Equestrian visitors quite handily.<p>

"Wellâ€| we just, turned up here." Twilight shrugged. "Loops are fairly random, after all. Though, actually, none of us have much idea what a normal Dark Millennium Loop is like. Anything you can tell us?"

"Oh, don't get me started!" Russ shook his head. "Bjorn can tell you all about it, he usually lasts quite a while even if I get thoroughly lost to the Warp."

Bjorn made what was almost certainly a rude gesture. "I always end up in a damned dreadnought, you mean. Boring as hel."

Russ grinned back. "Yeah, whatever. Anyway, what usually happens is

that things get \_really\_ nasty. I can never seem to stop all the Legions falling to Chaos â€” I saved the Thousand Sons, and the Raven Guard fell. Then I tried keeping the Death Guard pure, and that was it for the Ultramarines. Even tried killing off Horus, and that's when I found out the whole thing got started by a \_Word Bearer!\_ And as for trying to handle the Alpha Legion, I can never tell if I'm coming or going."

Twilight pondered that. "I guess Pinkie really did do a lot of good when she replaced Slaanesh."

"Wait, she did what?" Bjorn laughed out loud. "That must have been hilarious!"

"It was super fun!" Pinkie's eyes glowed. "I had \_all\_ the parties!\_"

"â€|actually, now I'm scared," the Space Wolf looper muttered. "Wonder how Ciaphas would take that."

"Ciaphas?"

"Oh, I remember him!" Pinkie beamed. "He was awesome! Kinda nervous, though."

"I don't blame him," Leman said, sotto voce. "Little mother, your friends are sometimes a little unnerving."

"I know, Lemon â€” Leman, sorry." Fluttershy exhaled sharply. "But they're friends, and I wouldn't give them up for anything."

"Aye, I know the feeling." Russ scratched Geki behind the ear, looking into the distance.

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright, girls," Twilight said, beating her wings soundlessly to hold station in the immaterium. "Three, two, one..!"<p>

A bolt of rainbow light sizzled across the howling wastes of the warp, and impacted dead centre on the \_Eisenstein.\_

Twilight nodded briskly, as Nurglite daemons fled from the huge ship. "Five down, fourteen to go."

"This is getting tiring, though," Rarity admitted. "You \_know\_ the Elements never work so well outside Equestria."

"Yeah, I do." Twilight let her magic build up for a gigantic teleport. "But we're handling so much chaos I think we're getting a fair performance out of them anyway. Right, next stop Ultramar."

Her power crested, and in an eyeblink they were a \_long\_ way away.

\* \* \*

><p>"Andâ€| done!" Twilight ticked off another item on her list. "Webway access acquired, Webway fixed, and Commorragh cut off from the network. What's next?"<p>

Sifting through the paper, she answered her own question. "Here we are. Necrons. Any ideas?"

Dash raised a hoof.

"Apart from too many cyclonic torpedoes."

Dash lowered a hoof.

"I know!" Pinkie said, suddenly. "I'll go chat with Trazyn! He's fun."

"Fun? Fun?" Russ goggled. "He once stole my thirteenth company!"

"Eh," Pinkie said, grinning. "Unlucky for some."

"Right, Pinkie's handling that one." Twilight pencilled that in. "Oh, how's the Emperor doing? I haven't seen him in a week."

Russ grinned uneasily. "I may have sucker punched him after he questioned Mother's presence."

"May?" Fluttershy asked warningly.

"Alright, I did sucker punch him." The Primarch shrugged. "Turnabout is fair play â€" and at least I wasn't wearing a power fist."

He sobered. "I don't know how to thank you enough. I mean, there's still problems turning up all over the place, but the Emperor and my brothers are all still alive andâ€| mostlyâ€| sane."

"Alpharius is the most fun one, silly!" Pinkie grinned. "Well, apart from Omegon."

"How do you even tell them apart?" Rarity asked absently.

"Guesswork!"

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|and so, in the name of the Emperor of Mankind, ruler of the million suns, and in the name of his Empire of Man, and his tributaries, we welcome you to the stars. May you live long and well amongst the heavens."<p>

Guilliman stepped back from the com system. "How was that?"

"Laying it on a bit thick, there, don't you think?" Fulgrim asked. "I mean, come on. They're explorers, not politicians."

"Well, I happen to think you made the right choice." Dorn shrugged. "I mean, it's not every decade that an out-system power turns out to have discovered antigravity and artificial intelligence before even launching a moon mission. And five thousand years ago they were nomadic hunters."

"Still are." Magnus the Red nodded. "Not one of them has a flicker of

magic. That's superstitious and backwards to my reckoning."

"I agree with Roboute," Twilight said before the brothers got into too major an argument. "And I'll just remind you that it kind of is my ship."

She felt a bit of a guilty thrill of pleasure at the thought. Russ had insisted, the Emperor had been interested, and she hadn't felt she could turn it downâ€¦ and the huge battlecruiser had turned out to be very useful, especially packed to the gunwales with scientific equipment and experiments.

Jetbikes were pretty flippin' cool, for example.

But this was only the third time she'd managed to have the embarrassingly-titled Saviour of Prospero in position to make an official First Contact.

All in all, she reflected, a 40K Loop could be quite pleasant. Well, if you headed the whole 'only war' thing off as soon as possible, and took measures to keep it well contained.

\* \* \*

><p>"Get OFF me!" Khorne growled, snatching at the bubbly pink blur.<p>

"Nope!" Pinkie said, jumping from him to Tzeentch. "Ooh, what's today's plan?"

"Get rid of you!" the Chaos God replied, scowling.

"Ooh, just like all the other times!" Pinkie paused, pondering. "Ooh, alliteration. Anyway, you're really not very creative at this kind of thing."

"Just GO AND BOTHER SLAANESH OR SOMETHING!" Khorne bellowed.

Pinkie considered it. "Nah. Ooh, is that a doggy?"

"That is not a doggy. That is a hound."

"Po-tay-to, po-tah-toe." Pinkie threw it a dog biscuit, and it panted happily. "Dog. See?"

"Why can't we kill her?" Khorne asked, sighing heavily.

Tzeentch kicked something. It turned out to be a flatfish. "She's more chaotic than we are right now. And that flippin' Laughing God and the Deceiver are both helping her."

"Figures."

\* \* \*

><p>20.6<p>

"Hmmmâ€¦!" Magnum muttered, trotting around Spike in a circle. "So, you're a dragon."

"Yes," Spike said, confirming the screamingly obvious.

"Didn't know she was the type," Pearl added. "It's certainlyâ€¦ exotic."

Spike bushed to the base of his scales, holding his tongue by dint of long experience.

"Motehr!" Rarity said, shocked. "Stop terrorizing my boyfriend!"

"That's not decided yet, dear," Magnum said absently. Finishing his inspection, he trotted around to in front of Spike. "Soâ€¦ tell me. You much of a stallion for sport?"

"Stallion, no. Sportâ€¦ yes," Spike answered, thinking it over carefully.

"Hm. What kind? Hoofball?"

"No."

"What about Trottingham hoofball? I mean, it's the boring kind, but-"

"No, not that either." Spike shook his head, and displayed his claws. "I'd go through too many balls."

"What about a bat sport? Baseball? Rounders?" Magnum sighed. "Not poncy cricket, is it?"

"None of the above." Spike was starting to grin, now.

"Volleyball? Basketball? Netball? Tennis? \_Table\_-tennis?"

Rarity giggled as her father tried out every sport he could think of.

"All right, I give up." Magnum pointed a hoof. "Okay, wise-guy, what sports \_do\_ you play?"

"Play isn't the right word." Spike raised a hand and began ticking off. "Archery â€" though Rarity's edging me there nowadays; three martial arts; Chess-"

"Chess?" Magnum interrupted. "That's not a sport!"

"It is when Twilight animates twenty-foot chess pieces who don't know the rules. Anyway, where was Iâ€¦"

"Martial arts and chess," Rarity supplied promptly.

"Thanks. Anyway, as well as those, fencing and swimmingâ€¦ oh, and extreme sports."

"Extreme?"

"Come on, I'll show you!"

Rarity was torn between laughing and sighing. In the end, she just

giggled into her sleeve. "Oh, \_dear.\_"

"Well, he seems nice enough," Pearl observed, as Spike led an unwary Magnum off for an afternoon's male bonding. Or possibly abject terror.

"He is."

"You're sure about this?" she pressed.

Rarity gave a huge, happy sigh. "Very," she answered, with a diamond certainty that matched her cutie mark.

"Right, then," Pearl said. "I approve of him, then."

"â€|just like that?" Rarity asked. "I meanâ€| not that I-"

"Don't worry!" Her mother laughed. "It's all about \_you\_, dear â€" the whole point of meetings like this is to see if you're really happy, and to give you an out if you're not. But you haven't had that silly grin on your face since you first got your cutie mark, so \_I\_ certainly don't mind."

"Thanks, mum." Rarity hugged her.

After a minute or so, Pearl pulled back. "So, details."

"He's a great musician, as well â€" piano, mostly." Rarity sorted through details in her head. "He actually listens when I explain how my dresses and artifacts work, which is nice. He cooks well â€" though admittedly, as a dragon, he's had some \_very\_ strange ideasâ€|"

"How bad?"

"Melon and trifle curry." Rarity stuck her tongue out. "\_Bleah,\_ quite frankly."

"I can see whyâ€|" Pearl said, covering a grin.

Magnum materialized with an expression frozen into shock.

Pearl frowned. "Dear?"

"â€|I have no problem with him can we go now please dear?" the stallion rattled off in one breath.

"Well, I suppose so, but-"

"Okay bye nice seeing you Rarity!"

Magnum disappeared in another teleport, taking his wife with him.

About a minute later, Spike came into view on a hang glider. Dropping to the floor and slowing himself with the Force, he looked around. "Did I miss them?"

"Well," Rarity said to herself, stifling a giggle, "looks like Dad hit his limit. I didn't know he could teleport that farâ€|" She

looked up at Spike. "We might want to try a different angle next time, though, Spiky-wikey. Something that doesn't traumatize my father."

"Sure," Spike nodded readily. "And, er, sorry for overdoing it."

"Don't be." Rarity shrugged. "The 'meet the parents' thing is supposed to be scaryâ€| although that is meant to be for the \_colt\_."

\* \* \*

><p>20.7<p>

"Ready?" Shining asked.

Cadence nodded, and grinned. "One, two, three!"

The music started, with heavy use of pan-pipes. The couple â€" both alicorns â€" pranced down the steps of a Mesoamerican-style pyramid.

Pinkie might have been at least slightly bonkers to have come up with this as a wedding celebration opener, butâ€| well, it was novel.

\_ "I hardly think I'm qualified," \_Shining sang,\_ "to come across all sanctified."\_ He shrugged as they reached the bottom steps.\_ "I just don't cut it with the cherubim-"\_

\_ "Shiny, what are you talking about?"\_ Cadence interjected.

\_ "There again,"\_ he continued, in a less sceptical tone, \_ "They're on their knees. Being worshipped is a breeze, and rather suits us inâ€| the interimâ€| "\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>"It's tough to be a god!"<em>

"You know," Twilight mused, as her brother and sister-in-law reached the chorus, "I can't tell if they're serious or not."

"It is tricky," Luna agreed. "And they, like you, both ascended."

"Indeed."

After a moment, Celestia joined them.

"I hope that the ponies attending won't take that song the wrong wayâ€| "

Twilight shrugged. "Canterlot can take a joke. Besides," she added, as the couple started literally walking on the air, "it's not as if they're \_really\_ pretending."

Celestia crossed her eyes. "Now I'm confused. Can you really pretend to be pretending to be real?"

That got a giggle from her sister and her erstwhile student.

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, come on!" Twilight said, mouth hanging open.<p>

"And therefore," Blueblood droned, "It falls upon the sole member of the royal family never to have had pretensions to divinity to take up the mantle of rulership until such time as the crisis of confidence has passed."

The Anchor contained her anger. It wasn't easy, though, since she was well aware that the 'crisis of confidence' consisted entirely of Blueblood feeling a bit ambitious.

"Alright," Celestia said, surprising Twilight. "Go ahead."

"Princess!" Twilight hissed. "What the-"

Celestia winked. "Come on, now, Twilight, you heard him. A crisis of confidence is something we must avoid provoking further."

\* \* \*

><p>"We are in awe," Luna said, reading Blueblood's latest letter. It was a mixture of abject begging for his aunt to please come back and save him from the paperwork monster, and angry orders that she not abandon her subjects now that the crisis of confidence was over. "How did you manage this?"<p>

"That's 'didst thou', Luna," Celestia corrected.

"No it isn't," Twilight disagreed. "I am as well. That's where the plural comes from. Now spill!"

Celestia looked mischievous. "I may have told everypony in the castle and bureaucracy to make sure Blueblood was fully involved in the exciting work of running the nation."

"And so every pony who needed anything signed went to him," Twilight finished. "Oh, that's almost evil."

"Wait until you see my next trick." Celestia replied, eyes sparkling.

\* \* \*

><p>"You?" Blueblood said, looking at the sick phoenix. "<em>You<em> are Auntie's personal representative?"

Philomeena nodded, and gave a hacking cough that covered Blueblood in soot.

"Faugh!"

She giggled behind a wing, hiding it as soon as he'd managed to get his eyes clear.

After a moment, a green flame appeared overhead and coalesced into a



letter. Warily, Blueblood opened it.

"You have won a free subscription to 'Friendship' magazine," he read slowly. "We will send you a free binder and all the back episodes in just a moment."

\* \* \*

><p>"You didn't mean it, did you?" Luna asked. "Not <em>all<em> of them?"

"No," Twilight admitted. "That would be several tonnes. No, just the ones relating to how you can have too much of a good thing, and so on. The lessons he needs. Who knows? Maybe he'll pick something up."

\* \* \*

><p>20.8 (elmagnifico)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Macintosh, are you awake?"<p>

"Eeyup."

Twilight's face fell as she realized that was technically true whether the stallion was looping or not.

"Are you awake-awake?"

Macintosh just tilted his head at her. This probably wasn't him, but there was one way to be sure.

"ETERNAL TWILIGHT, BWAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

Twilight facehoofed as Big Mac gave her a look like she'd gone slightly insaner than normal.

"Right. Not looping. Could we just pretend this never happened?"

Mac nodded his head, not commenting on the muttered comment he overheard as the purple unicorn left.

"I \*\*\*really\*\*\* need to work out a system with him next time he's awake..."

\* \* \*

><p>20.9<p>

\_Once upon a time, many years ago, Nasrudin was condemned to death. It is said he had poached one of the Kings rabbits to feed his starving children.\_

\_His case was hopeless but he nonetheless took the only avenue open to him. He appealed to the King to have the death penalty lifted. This was so unusual that the King (perhaps out of boredom) granted the man a one minute audience.\_

\_Nasrudin appeared before the King and said, "Your Majesty, I have been found guilty of a crime and the penalty is death. I have a unique gift and my death would be a great loss to the world, so I ask you to spare me."\_

\_"What is this gift?"asked the King.\_

\_"I am the only person in the Kingdom, perhaps the whole world, that can teach horses to sing."\_

\_The King laughed. "And, for this outrageous claim, I should let you go?" he asked.\_

\_"It is not outrageous," replied Nasrudin. "It takes time, a lot of patience and the gift that only I possess, but I can teach your horse to sing."\_

\_"Very well," said the King, "you shall have a year. You will be taken each day from prison to the Royal Stables. If you can teach my horse to sing I will spare you. If I find that you have lied to me you will be tortured before you die. Now, take him away."\_

\_As Nasrudin was being led away the jailer asked him, "What was the point of that? In a year you will be dead and now you will have to suffer first. You will not escape."\_

\_"You \_\_may\_\_ be right", replied Nasrudin, "but I have bought time." I now have a whole year and in that time a great deal may happen. The King may die, his horse may die or, who knows, the horse may learn to sing".\_

\* \* \*

><p>Nasrudin blinked. "I honestly didn't see that coming."<p>

The mare winked at him, tossed her purple-curved mane, and launched into \_Siegfried and Kriemhild\_ from the \_Nibelunglied.\_

\* \* \*

><p>20.10 (Elmagnifico)<p>

Macintosh went about his chores, savoring the simplicity of the tasks. Things like bucking trees, plowing fields, and preparing the farm for the reunion were all straightforward. He could look at the problems and see quite clearly what he needed to do to accomplish them.

Making amends with the members of his family that were looping? Not so straightforward.

Applejack had been outraged. The bond between Apples was not shallow, and the fact he hadn't trusted her had nearly cut that deep. Nevertheless, that was over with.

Now, all that remained was to explain to the filly humming around his feet as they brought in the day's harvest.

Applebloom had always been his "little" sister. He and Applejack were more or less equals nowadays. They split the adult tasks between

them, with Granny Smith intervening when necessary. Applebloom, on the other hoof, was the one who needed a shoulder to cry on, lunches for school, and a bit of attention now and then to keep her from going completely bonkers.

Even more than Applejack, little Bloom had been the sibling he'd helped raise. He'd watched her grow from a little sprout that did little more than eat, sleep and cry to the filly she was now. She'd kept on growing, making friends, learning so much, slowly but surely moving toward adulthood. He had seen it happen to the filly umpteen times.

But this was not that filly.

The signs were more subtle than with Applejack, but they were there sure enough. She moved with a practiced ease. The adorable little mistakes she'd make from time to time were not there, or looked scripted to his eyes. When he spoke to her, he could tell she was listening, but the gears behind her eyes were obviously turning with something more than the impish schemes of a schoolfilly.

This was the looping Applebloom.

Applejack, thank the Princess, was not awake, and neither was anypony else aside from Applebloom and Twilight, if his earlier visit to town was any indication.

He stopped, the cart straining against the harness as its momentum tried to keep going despite him. Directly ahead and slightly down, there was a pair of huge sparkling eyes and the wide smile she likely thought would get her what she wanted.

He tilted his head. What was that?

"Ah said, ahm' super excited for the fam'ly reunion! Ya think we'll get any of the Manehattan cousins down this year?"

He shook his head, both answering the question and searching his memories for the reason. Might as well keep up appearances a little longer.

"Eeno. They're on hard times out there, got ta run their bakery ta make up fer last year. Y'll meet yer cousin some other time."

"Awww..."

He was reasonably sure the ensuing pout was genuine. Those two had really hit it off after their initial meeting. He wondered if Babs had started looping...

And so, the two Apples went on, Applebloom chattering ceaselessly at her brother, Macintosh just enjoying the company of his sister, albeit an alternate version thereof.

They were almost back to the farm before he finally decided to end it.

At first, he was worried she'd have the same reaction as Applejack. It turned out his fears were misplaced. Perhaps the implications

hadn't sunk in yet, but Applebloom just seemed to be happy to see him.

"An' we can go on all sorts of adventures, an' we can work on gettin' you powers!"

Mac winced as Applebloom continued.

"ooh, ah wonder when you'll become an Alicorn, ah mean, me an' mah friends haven't yet, but all the adult loopers have."

Another wince. That had been an awkward conversation. Applejack's sense of humor had apparently changed for the sarcastic.

"Would ya need an element of harmony, or would ya be able to do it like Caden-"

A large red hoof cut off the tirade. Gently, like a massive plush muffle. Two huge doe-like eyes looked up into Macintosh's, and he couldn't keep himself from smiling.

"Ah appreciate th' thought Bloomers, but ah don't need no fancy unicorn princess powers. Me an' Ms. Twilight already had a talk 'bout that. Ah just want to keep on keepin' on. If the situation comes up where ah need to be somethin' like that, we'll deal with it then."

The doe eyes continued even as the hoof left her mouth.

"We'll still have adventures an' hang out an' all that, won't we?"

Macintosh felt his smile widening as he replied.

"course we will. Ms. Sparkle gathers trouble lahk a lantern gathers moths. Ah'm sure we'll hit mor'n enough interesting adventures."

The sparks were dancing behind her eyes again, and her smile reached from ear to ear.

"An' we'll face 'em together, right?"

Macintosh winked. The answer went without saying, but a bit of reassurance wouldn't go amiss. This was his little sister, after all.

"Eeyup!"

\* \* \*

><p>20.11<p>

"We need to find a good Earthbender," Katara said, looking around as though one would appear up out of the ground.

Sokka nodded, half his mind on something else. Specifically, how Toph was doing.

She'd had it hard for the first few loops after she awoke, he knew, but by now Sokka knew exactly how to manipulate events to make sure

she got away from her parents every time " and without letting on that she had Metalbending, either.

\_Ah, the life of an anchor\_, he thought. \_And I don't even have Bending. Whose idea was it to put me in charge of these guys?\_

"'scuse me," a voice whispered next to him. Absently, Sokka moved aside.

"Thanks."

"You're welcome," the Anchor replied" then spun on one foot and stared, as a small orange horse surfed casually up the street on a wave of earth.

And was it him, or did the horse have milky white eyes?

"Wait a second," he said. "\_Toph?\_"

The horse shook its head, still moving.

"Are you a Replacement?" Sokka asked, remembering what a crazy fellow Looper in an orange jumpsuit had told him, that time Aang" wasn't Aang.

The grinding sound of earthbending died away, and the horse turned to look \_almost\_ towards him. "Well, shucks. Looks like ah found me a local Looper" at last"

"Nice to meet you," Sokka said, ignoring the increasingly bewildered looks of his friend and sister. Oh, and the whole street. "I'm Sokka."

"Applejack," the horse replied. "I ain't usually blind, but ah got to admit that this whole earth movin' trick is kinda neat."

"And are you usually" a horse?"

"Nope. Pony."

"Right." Sokka thought wistfully of the alcohol he probably wasn't allowed to buy in the Earth Kingdom, then shrugged and turned to the gathering crowd. "Thank you for watching our rehearsal! We're part of the Ember Island Players, touring to raise awareness! Come see us some time!"

Sokka had learned from long experience that there was literally \_nothing\_ that he couldn't pass off as Ember Island Players rehearsal. Their production from the first time around had actually been relatively \_accurate\_"

"What is all this about, Sokka?" Katara hissed.

Sokka shrugged. "I found our Earthbender."

"But" horse?"

"Pony," Applejack corrected firmly. "And ah know Earthbendin'!"

"Can you teach someone?" Aang asked. "Like, me?"

"What the hay, let's give it a try," Applejack said. "Ah got to admit it'd be neat t' know more about how bendin' works myself, but ah learn by doin' anyway."

"I still don't think this is a good idea," Katara muttered.

"Hey, the Firebenders learned from dragons." Sokka tossed his boomerang in the air. "Nothing actually wrong with it."

He tossed the boomerang again, and a lasso snagged it from the air.

Turning, he saw the newcomer had the lasso firmly in herâ€| mouth?

"How did you aim that?" Aang asked, staring.

"Earthbending." Applejack's voice was just a tiny bit smug.

Katara nodded. "Okay, that is pretty cool."

\* \* \*

><p>20.12<p>

"Are you certain this is going to work?" Diamond Tiara asked, frowning at a rather unusual version of her customary headgear.

"Wellâ€|" Sweetie grimaced. "Not certain, no. But pretty close. I mean, we've seen this loop type once before, and my sister went over these things with a fine-tooth comb." So saying, she slipped on her necklace and its golden pendant.

"Right." Diamond gulped, then put on the tiara. When she unaccountably failed to explode, she tried to pretend she'd never been nervous at all while still keeping a close eye on it.

"Where's Silver Spoon?" Applebloom asked, her own copper-apple bracelet already firmly around one hoof.

"Dunno." Diamond touched the tiara gingerly. "How do these work?"

"I think sis said she'd made it so they were voice activated?" Sweetie thought for a moment, then nodded. "Alright. 'Harmony power, make up!'"

There was a flash of bright gold light, and when it faded Sweetie was wearing what looked like a cross between royal regalia, a filly's dress and battle armour.

"Okay, that is kind of cool," Diamond allowed. "The armour is enchanted and collapses into the necklace, or whatever. Butâ€| what was the command phrase?"

"Rarity said the only way we'd say it by accident was if somepony came out with a makeup line called harmony power." Sweetie giggled. "Actuallyâ€|"

"Next time," Applebloom chided her. "We have enough to be going on with this time." She looked at her bracelet. "I still wish I knew how this thing worked, but Rarity is still better than me at seal script. Anyway, Harmony power make up!"

"What name did you choose?" Sweetie asked, as Applebloom's own fuku-armour materialized.

"We choose names?" Diamond said. "Why wasn't I informed?"

"Because you don't need to choose a name," the other two chorused.

"Seriously, Diamond Tiara is good enough already. Same for Silver Spoon," Applebloom added. "Though ah do need one, and I'm leaning towards Copper Apple."

"Golden Voice, for me," Sweetie replied.

There was a skidding sound, as Scootaloo arrived outside. "Hi, less-cool ponies â€" oh, wow, I take it back. Hi, Applebloom and Sweetie Belle."

Diamond waited. "What about me?" she asked, after several seconds of silence.

"Nah, I already said hello to you." Scootaloo winked

Diamond stuck her tongue out, before coughing and pulling it in again.

"Anyway," she said, trying not to blush at her sudden loss of dignity, "what's Scootaloo's new name?"

"Bronze Wing." Scootaloo showed her own power trinket, this one an amulet, then activated it.

"Come on!" Applebloom said, nodding at her. "Your turn."

"Okay," Diamond said. "If you say so. Erâ€" Harmony power make up?"

Another flash of light, this one a brilliant rainbow colour.

"Right. Marvellous. Excellent." Diamond looked herself over. "What now?"

"Wellâ€" Applebloom frowned. "Ah'm not actually sure. Ah seem t' recall that when you had this last time, you kindaâ€" threw the tiara?"

"What about you, then?" Diamond pressed.

"Sonic powers." Sweetie posed. "I can sing loudly enough to send monsters flying!"

"And I canâ€"

"No, never mind that now!" Ignoring Scootaloo's hurt look, Diamond

pointed at Sweetie. "You didn't mention the monsters!"

"â€|oops?" Applebloom tried.

"Yeah, basically, Nightmare Moon ain't going to be cured like normal, or something," Scootaloo explained, "and we have to kick monster butt until we can purify her or whatever. Anyway, as I was saying, I can-"

"But I've never got in a proper fight in my life!" Diamond wailed.

"Easy enough to fix." Applebloom nodded firmly. "Ah'll get Dash and we kin teach you martial arts."

"Martial arts?" Diamond shook her head. "How vulgar. Oh well, if there's no choice."

"Oh, there's a choice," Sweetie said, grinning. "You could just throw the tiara at monsters."

"Sign me up," Diamond directed Applebloom without a moment's hesitation. "Actually, can we start right now?"

"Doesn't any pony want to know what my powers are?" Scootaloo asked plaintively.

"I'm sure Silver Spoon will," Sweetie comforted.

\* \* \*

><p>20.13 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Turning the Tables continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle woke up the day before the Summer Sun Celebration in what she considered her own bed. Golden Oaks library had been her home for accumulated centuries of loops, and it was one element of the familiar she wouldn't have wanted to change. She'd manifested a spare bed for Applejack and Rarity during that sleepover, so creating a cot to keep up appearances wouldn't be any hardship.<p>

She decided to have apples for breakfast, and in the process reconnect with another of her friends. To be honest, she was leaving the two hardest till last, Rainbow Dash since she moved around so much, and Fluttershyâ€| well she would be a challenge. Without a baby dragon to 'spike' her interest, she would be very hard to approach.

Using the washroom and casting a few spells to complete her morning ablutions and shore up her cover identity, she headed out for Sweet Apple Acres. She'd covered finding out about it in-universe by asking the right questions of Rarity, so visiting to see the place for herself and buy some breakfast apples right from the source was completely ordinary.



From the carts and carriages around, even a small air-boat, it appeared the impromptu Apple family reunion had already begun. Dozens of Apple relatives were visible, helping out and generally getting on with things. But she needed to find Applejack. Ah, there was Apple Bloom. She would have to see if she could help the poor filly figure out her cutie-mark this loop. Twilight was certain her talent was for building and repairing stuff, but for some reason it never seemed to result in a cutie-mark.

"Pardon me young lady, but I'm looking for Applejack? I wanted to buy some apples for breakfast, and Rarity told me she was in charge here."

"Uh, big sis is probably in the orchard bucking apples for the festival, but she's awful busy right now. Who're you?"

Twilight had to smile at the filly's directness. "The name's Codex, I'm the new librarian. I just got into town yesterday, and I'm still finding my bearings. So what about you?"

"I'm Apple Bloom. Pleased to meet you Miss Codex." The filly head out a hoof, and Twilight took it.

"Why not drop in the library some time? We have plenty of books for fillies and colts."

"Ah, don't really read that much." Apple Bloom admitted. "I'm more interested in trying to figure out my cutie-mark."

So that particular trait had preceded Diamond Tiara's little party. Not that it was surprising, a lot of unmarked colts and fillies started to get worried when their friends started getting their marks and they didn't.

"Well, I'm not just going to hoof you the old saw about it coming in its own time. Though it will, I'm sure." Twilight liked the little filly, and wanted to do something nice for her.

"Maybe if you come to the library, I can find you things to read on cutie-marks. If you know more maybe you'll figure out what your special talent is. And remember, that isn't your only talent. You can be good at things without having a cutie-mark in it."

The filly looked at her lopsided, with a querying expression.

"Okay, take myself. I'm a librarian, but I'm also good at astronomy, and I've learned quite a bit of magic. I'm willing to bet you know some-pony who's good at something that isn't part of her cutie-mark." Twilight was willing to break cover slightly to prompt her with one example, but Apple Bloom was quite smart enough to think of it on her own.

"My sister Applejack! Her cutie-mark is apples but she's really good at rodeo stuff, herding critters and using a lasso. She's won blue ribbons in every rodeo in Ponyville for years!"

"There you are then." Twilight nodded approvingly, getting some-pony to come up with an answer themselves usually made the lesson stick better. "Your cutie-mark talent is important but it isn't the only

thing that makes you special. Always remember, you are defined by what you believe and how you act, not the mark on your flank, and don't let any-pony tell you differently.."

Twilight realised she was lecturing, but she really did feel for the filly's predicament after seeing her work so hard for no reward in so many loops.

"Huh, I never thought about it like that!" Apple Bloom said, and then she smiled up at the unicorn. "Gee, you're smart! Maybe I will come and read some books."

"I'm happy to help." Twilight said with a feeling of satisfaction. Hopefully, she could help the filly cope more effectively with Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon when they started acting out.

"Apple Bloom! You've still got some chores that need doing!" A familiar voice called out. Applejack was coming up to the gate.

"Okay sis! I was just resting for a bit." Apple Bloom turned away, then said over her shoulder, "Goodbye, and thanks!"

"It was my fault, I got chatting to her." Twilight said.

"Shucks, it ain't a problem. I overheard what you were saying, that was a right decent thing you did. Lil' Apple Bloom has been getting kinda antsy since her class started coming into their cutie-marks."

"I thought as much." Twilight shrugged. "I meant every word. I've seen it before, fillies who obsess on finding their cutie-marks and forget that they're more than that. Not to mention bullies who think no cutie-mark means they're a loser."

What she didn't say was that Apple Bloom was chief among the first class of aforementioned fillies.

"I hear ya! I was late coming into my own cutie-mark, so I got some of that myself. I even went sky-hooting off to Manehattan, but I finally figured out this was where I belonged. " Applejack shook her head. "Anyhow, I'm Applejack, welcome to Sweet Apple Acres!"

"I'm Codex, the new town librarian. I just arrived here from Canterlot. As for finding where I belong... Never mind." Twilight held out her hoof and prepared for a shaking.

"Well howdy do, Miss Codex, a pleasure makin' your acquaintance!" Applejack finally released her hoof and dropped hers down, crossing her other fore-leg. "So, what can I do you for this fine day?"

"I fancied some apples to go with my breakfast, and Rarity said you had the finest apples in Ponyville."

"Heh! Try finest in Equestria!" Applejack looked back over her shoulder at the mass of ponies. "Well some of my family from out of town might have their own opinion..."

"I thought there were rather a lot of ponies for just one farm."

Applejack gave a whinny of amusement. "Yup, these are my kinfolk from all over Equestria. I asked them to come help getting together the food for the Summer Sun Celebration, and they came. It ain't every-day you get to see the Princess raise the sun in person."

Twilight gave a slight flinch, just enough to be noticeable. She saw Applejack notice it, but the mare wasn't likely to pry, at least not until she knew Twilight better. She schooled her expression to pleasantness, and asked, "So anyway, how much for a half dozen apples?"

"Don't worry about it, I guess since you're new in town, you can have a free sample. Matter of fact, we're just starting to get some samples ready for when that Royal Overseer comes to check on things. I guess you could give us a second opinion."

"I really shouldn'tâ€¦" Twilight said, though she wanted to, and not only to have more chance to restore her friendship. Some of the smells coming from the farm-house were making her stomach growl. "â€¦but yes, I'd love to!"

There followed a series of introductions startlingly similar to the events of the prime time-line. But this time, Twilight took the trouble to memorise the ponies as she was introduced, though it had been made easier by repeated introductions in prior loops.

She got Applejack talking about her rodeo successes, and Apple Bloom about her school work, and did her best to get to know something about every-pony there. As with the party in Canterlot, she knew exactly how to get the other ponies talking about themselves, and as she'd learned from Pinkie Pie, remembering things about ponies wasn't hard when you thought of them as your friends.

She ended up eating rather more of the samples than she'd intended, and making entirely honest complements about their excellence, and decided she needed to balance things. "I really should help out some, after all of your hospitalityâ€¦"

Applejack waved it off. "Don't worry about it! I reckon you're practically a part of the family! It's a pleasure to meet a pony who appreciatesâ€¦"

"I say! Where is the pony in charge of thisâ€¦ shambles?"

Twilight froze up. No, it couldn't be! Had her disappearance sent Princess Celestia completely insane? She should have realised that the Princess would have to pick a replacement Royal Overseer, but out of all the ponies in Canterlot, to select Blueblood as her representative?

She trailed Applejack back to the gate, hoping she was wrong. No, there he was, dressed in a stylishly cut tweed jacket that he must fondly imagine made him look like a rugged pony of action. He was flanked by two Royal Guards, probably the ones who'd flown him here, presumably to highlight how important he was. Though considering his penchant for annoying ponies, maybe he actually needed bodyguards. While she'd had little to do with the Prince in her original time-line, she'd run across him several times in the loops and he'd

never made a positive impression.

The fact that he'd clearly considered her achievements in both magic and academics as worthless compared to the all-important noble title and wealth he'd gotten by being born, and had been heard to refer to her as that 'jumped up little academic who subsists on my great aunt's charity' did nothing to endear him to her. She suspected he'd had designs on Cadence in more than one time-line, and her brother's romance with Celestia's adoptive niece had hardened his attitude to her family in those cases, and made him even more unbearable, something that she'd have originally believed impossible.

She pushed down her personal dislike of the stuck-up narcissistic prat, and tried to remind herself of his few positive points. He was also loyal to his great aunt, and a competent organiser. Also, while much of the Canterlot social elite were just as pleasant as any-pony else, there was a proportion of toffee nosed egotists, and Blueblood was the perfect foil to keep them in check by being even more top-lofty and superior than they were. If Celestia had been forced to deal with some of the more interesting examples of the dangers of inbreeding that Canterlot produced, she'd probably have gone Infernal Blaze long since.

However, Celestia normally kept her nephew in a close check rein, and sending him to somewhere like Ponyville to interact with normal ponies demonstrated a level of ineptitude that bordered on the imbecilic. However, that probably meant Celestia had nothing to do with it, she had probably handed off the task to some subordinate who lacked her keen appreciation of the level of disaster the arrogant clothes horse could engender simply by being his usual unbearable self. Not to mention his first port of call was the Apple homestead, which just about put the dollop of cream on this choice slice of disaster apple pie.

"I'm Applejack, and this is Sweet Apple Acres, not a 'shambles'. Are you the fella who's supposed to be checking on the vittles for the Summer Sun Celebration?"

Blueblood gave a sniff of distain. "\_I\_am Prince Blueblood, Royal Overseer for the Summer Sun Celebrations, and you will address me with the courtesy due to my rank!"

Twilight winced. Yup, Blueblood still had it, not that any-pony else would \_want\_it.

Applejack's voice took on an edge. "You can be sure I'll treat you will all the respect you deserve."

"Very well. Bad enough that Celestia's precious little charity project has run off to hide somewhere, leaving \_me\_to clean up the mess, but you could have at least made sure there was a carpet or something to keep my hooves clean while I crossed that yard full of dirt. It was bad enough having to walk up a dusty road, do you know what this will do to my hooficure?"

"Why I'm right sorry yer royal annoyâ€¦ highness, I'll just get my kin-folk to lay down in a line so you can step from pony to pony without getting your hooves dirty."

"Don't be silly!" Blueblood exclaimed. "Look at them. They're so

scruffy there wouldn't be any advantage to it. No, I suppose I will have to walk across the yard myself. The things I'm forced to do in the name of my Great Auntâ€¦!"

He walked in, trailed by the two guards who had the good grace to look at least slightly embarrassed, and the death glares of the entire Apple family. Twilight could have put a stop to it, popping wings as well as a horn in front of the idiot usually shut him up, but base-line Twilight wouldn't head for an immediate confrontation, and neither would Codex. Going alicorn would break her cover about as badly as possible and leave her with a lot of explaining to do.

On it's own, that wouldn't have stopped her, her friends were more important to her than that, but even without massive alicorn powers and the advantages of a hundred loops of study, neither base-line Twilight Sparkle or her alter ego was a push over. She could salvage this the smart way, without simply throwing power at it. It was a close thing though, she'd had no intention of making things harder for her friends, and she felt responsible.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

I'm not sure precisely when it took place, but this has definitely gone past 200 loops by now. Which is not bad, I think...  
>20.5 is a 40K loop, obviously. (Fluttershy actually raised Leman Russ twice, but the Loop where she raises him as a little colt called Lemon Rush on Equestria looks like being on back-burner status.)<br>20.7, the song is from The Road to El Dorado. One of FoxofWar's old pony pictures gave me the idea to use the song, though I did it in a different way to how he did.  
>20.11 is Applejack as Toph from Avatar: the last Airbender.<br>And 20.12 is a Jewellery Scouts loop - basically the local variant of Sailor Moon...

## 21. Chapter 21

Fan Art / Fan Fiction / Humor

### 21.1 (more Turning the Tables, by Stainless Steel Fox)

\* \* \*

><p>"Is this some sort of joke?" Blueblood's perfectly polished tones came from the gazebo where Applejack had held the tasting. "You intend to offer Princess Celestia this... this carnival stall junk food?"<p>

"Now don't you take that tone with me, mister hoity toity hooves! This is made from Sweet Apple Acres finest apples, and every-pony in the Apple family contributed their best recipes to this spread."

"You intend to offer Her Royal Highness Princess Celestia common apples?" Blueblood looked down his muzzle at her. "The Princess only partakes of the finest cuisine, oranges from Manedarin, sweet cactus from Saddle Arabia, crisped Neighponese seaweed with the finest rose honey crystals from the Neighderlands. All of it is prepared by the

finest chefs. As the ruler of Equestria she deserves no less."

Applejack scratched the back of her head with a hoof. "That's as may be, but I figure after all that fancy food, she might like to try some plain old apples, just for a change. And when it comes to making 'em into cakes and pies, I back our family against any-pony in Equestria... or all those other places, matter of fact. We even got some-pony from Canterlot to taste 'em already, and she reckoned they were just fine! Ain't that right, Codex?"

Blueblood followed Applejack's gaze, and caught sight of Twilight's disguised form. "And what are you?"

Twilight pushed down her first reaction, which would have seen him turned into the first ever royal artichoke, and tried to mediate. "I'm Codex, the new town librarian, and I did live in Canterlot before I moved here. I think you're being far too hard on Applejack and her family, I loved everything I tried."

She noted the lack of crumbs or anything else around him. "It may not be as fancily presented as you're used to, but it's really good, and it's for the whole of Ponyville. You should try it at least."

"And hiding in a library for your entire life has made you an expert on organising a Royal visit how?" Blueblood sneered. "I don't need to try these pitiful pastries! Just as I don't need your advice to decide that the catering for the Summer Sun Celebration is not done!"

He levitated his checklist and made a big cross against the first bullet point, and with that he turned on his hooves and trotted towards the gate. "I will have to get the Mayor to order proper food from a Canterlot bakery, one that serves the Palace, not some amateur farm-pony..."

Applejack was fuming, and a couple of other members of her family seemed about ready to chase him down, guards or no guards, and were being held back by Big Macintosh. "Why that stuck-up no-account...!"

"I can fix it." Twilight said, interrupting her before she could "A simple copy correction spell and it'll be a tick. I can even delay it a couple of hours so he won't notice."

"You can do that?" Apple Bloom asked.

"Sure, it's not enchanted legal parchment, just plain old paper. It's a standard spell for any-pony who has to manage paper-work." As a librarian would, or a student of magic. After all, quills blotted occasionally.

Applejack thought about it, then sighed, hanging her head. "Nope! It's tempting, but I ain't going to cheat like that. Besides, what if he's right?"

Twilight snorted. "Princess Celestia wouldn't think that way for a second. Even if it wasn't up to her usual standards, she'd still accept and appreciate that it was an honest effort, and trust me, those things are as good as anything you'd get in a fancy Canterlot

bakery!"

She noticed Applejack looking at her curiously and reviewed her last few sentences. Oh, horse-apples!

"How'd you know all that about the Princess?"

The only thing to do was roll with it. "Uh... well every-pony in Canterlot knows how the Princess acts. She is kind of a big deal, after all. Palace gossip even reaches us librarians. I also know all about 'Prince' Blueblood, and trust me, that was exactly how he normally acts."

Applejack seemed to accept that. "Is there anything else we can do, any way we can appeal?"

Twilight knew exactly what the responsibilities of a Royal overseer were, and that Blueblood had overstepped his authority, but base-line Twilight wouldn't. However, she'd spotted a book that could help when she'd been organising the library. She'd read cover to cover several times in previous loops. "I don't know, but I think I saw a book in the library that could be useful. Can you keep an eye on him, make sure he doesn't do any more damage while I get it?"

"I'll do my best!" Applejack headed off.

Twilight made her own way back to the library and just outside it almost ran into Rarity again. Twilight had been looking where she was going, but the white unicorn wasn't seeing anything, mostly due to the tears streaming down her face. "Whoa there! What's wrong?"

Twilight could guess, and Rarity quickly confirmed it, between sobs. "Oh Codex, it was... terrible! Prince Blueblood... himself was sent here to oversee the preparations... for the Summer Sun Celebrations. I was in charge of the... decorations, and when he appeared it was like... a dream come true. Then it turned into a nightmare!"

"He immediately started going on about how insulting it was to offer to host the Princess in a 'mean little packing crate of a hall like this!'. I did my best to impress him, explain my vision, and how much effort every-pony had put into getting them ready, but he called my materials, my designs... tacky and cheap! He said I was a know-nothing draper with delusions of adequacy!"

This brought on a fresh wave of crying. "I thought he was my handsome prince, come to take me away, but instead he was..."

"A royal pain?" Twilight asked, hugging her and manifesting a tissue to dry her tears and let her blow her nose.

"Yes!" The hug or the sympathy had let her calm down a bit.

Inwardly Twilight was a little surprised, Blueblood must be really annoyed, and taking it out on every-pony, as this went beyond even his native talent for jerk-hood. Artichoke-hood was looking better and better for him. Of course, he probably believed the stuff about Celestia, she was one of the few beings he looked up to, and put on a pedestal, and he projected his own attitudes onto her, but magnified...

She suddenly had a horrid moment when she realised that that description could have applied to some-pony else. Her base-line self had been exactly that way about studying, for Celestia's sake she'd just used the fact as part of her plan! The concept that she could ever have anything in common with Blueblood was immediately captured, imprisoned, banished to the moon and then imprisoned again for good measure. Fortunately Rarity had been too busy leaning on her shoulder to notice her moment of introspection.

"I'm sorry, I could have told you if I'd known." Twilight sighed. "Even I know that Prince Blueblood is a jerk, a stuck up prig with all the charm and social grace of the back end of a buffalo. I came back to the library to find a book on the job he's supposed to be doing, hopefully to spike his little white flying chariot."

Rarity drew herself up and set her most determined expression. "Then let us both look. Together maybe we can deal with this poisonous princeling!"

The search didn't take long, and in moments they were trotting back out, Twilight holding the book up in front of her and reading while she trotted. She already knew what needed doing and who was doing it, but her in-loop self wouldn't. "Okay, catering, decorations... clear sky? Who would be doing that?"

Rarity smirked. "There's only one pony that springs to mind, no make that does a loop de loop. Rainbow Dash, she's the senior weather pony for Ponyville."

"Well he doesn't seem to be doing much so far..." Twilight looked up at the cloud filled sky.

"She." Rarity corrected with a giggle, some of her good humour restored. "She's probably practicing her stunt routines or something, I hear the Wonderbolts are making a special visit from Canterlot for the Celebration, and every-pony knows she wants to be one."

They passed a Wonderbolts poster, and Twilight replied, "Well, she's got to be warned about Blueblood, he'll probably take one look at the sky and cross it off as undone. Hmm..."

Seeing a blue and rainbow blur out of the corner of her eye, she called out in a loud voice. "Why Spitfire! You're here a day early? Maybe I could get an autograph..."

She took a step to one side and materialised a purple net of energy standing on end to intercept the blue streak that arrived before she finished her sentence. It shifted underneath her and lowered her to the ground.

"Hey, thanks for the save! I heard Spitfire was here and I might have got a little overenthusiastic getting here... So where is she?" Rainbow Dash was eagerly looking around for her idol.

Twilight gave an embarrassed smile. "I'm afraid I was making that up. I'm Codex, the new librarian. And you would be Rainbow Dash?"

"The one and only!" The blue pegasus preened, then gave a sigh, "So you were just pranking me? Aw, nuts! Heh, well, you got me good. I



didn't figure librarians went in for pranks."

"You'd be surprised, but that wasn't why I was doing it." After all this whole thing was a prank, though it was starting to turn distinctly sour. Twilight held up the book. "The Royal Overseer for the Summer Sun Celebration is here already, a Prince Blueblood, and if he sees you haven't cleared the clouds... you are the one supposed to be doing that, right?"

"Yep, but that ain't a problem. I can get a sky clear in ten seconds flat!" Rainbow Dash looked thoughtful for a moment. "Though come to think of it, I may have met the guy. White unicorn, fancy jacket, expression like some-pony smacked the back side of a buffalo?"

That got both of the other ponies chuckling. Rarity exclaimed. "Oh my, yes, that describes him perfectly!"

"I may have kinda run into him, and knocked him into a mud puddle." Dash admitted. "I said I was sorry, even cleaned him off with a rain-cloud and a personal hurricane, but he just got those two guards of his to run me off. Not that I couldn't have taken 'em, but it wasn't worth the effort."

Twilight face-hooved, though the mental image of Blueblood with a hurricane hair-do was pretty satisfying. "I think we can safely say he's going to mark that task down as incomplete, that leaves only the music."

"Heh, Fluttershy is all over that, she's training up a choir of birds. She's really good with animals, but really shy around other ponies..." Rainbow's face suddenly fell. "Oh no, bozo Bluenose and his goon squad are heading right for her! We gotta stop him!"

"Lead the way, Applejack is trying to slow him down..." Twilight was still managing to leaf through the book, even at a trot.

"The pony from Sweet Apple Acres? Sure I saw her, but Blueblood's just ignoring her."

As Rainbow led them out towards the outskirts of Ponyville and Fluttershy's cottage, they could hear Blueblood. "... this is a joke! How dare you attempt to pretend that a lot of twittering birds is a fanfare worthy of a princess! In Canterlot, only the finest musicians are even allowed to try for the privilege of playing for her!"

"Hey! You just simmer on down before I make you! You ain't got no cause to be hollerin' at Fluttershy like that! I told you, this ain't Canterlot, and you ain't got no right to treat any-pony like dirt either way!"

"I am Prince Blueblood, and I can... Aghh! Get them off! Get them off!"

They ran onto the scene to see Fluttershy's choir of birds dive bombing Blueblood, while Applejack stood between him and the cowering yellow pegasus. His guards were looking on, not jumping in to help on either side. Blueblood's hair was still in the poofy shape of Rainbow's patented Rain Blow-dry technique.

"Don't let them get their droppings on me! My immaculate mane, my

coat!"

He staggered several steps back, and the birds flew away to circle Fluttershy protectively. His telekinesis scooped up several rocks and flung them at the birds. "Shoo! Shoo! Go away you horrid things!"

The birds scattered, the poorly aimed rocks missing them, but the action finally seemed to spark Fluttershy into action. She flew up into the air and shielded the scattering birds with her wings and body. "How dare you! How \_dare\_ you!"

She swept down like an avenging angel (bunny) and ended up hovering with her face a few inches from his. "Throwing stones at poor innocent birds! You should be ashamed of yourself!"

"Aaaahh!" Blueblood scrambled back further to avoid the fearsome gaze of the greater enraged Fluttershy. "Guards! Help! Get me away from this mad mare!"

The two guards swooped in and scooped him up with a fore-leg under each shoulder, carrying him away towards Ponyville.

"Whooeee! That was pretty impressive!" Applejack exclaimed, coming up alongside Fluttershy who was still breathing heavily.

"Yeah! Way to go Fluttershy! You had that puffed-up prince by the eyebrows!" Rainbow Dash cheered.

Rarity beamed. "The way you routed that ridiculous ruffian was a joy to watch! "

The yellow mare seemed to finally realise where she was and that she was surrounded by ponies and shrunk in on herself a little bit.

"Every-pony, I think we should give her some space." Twilight said quietly but firmly. "I know you're probably her friends, but I don't think she wants to be crowded right now."

"Heh, you might be right, Fluttershy ain't the best of ponies for being the cettre of attention." Rainbow Dash admitted. "C'mon Applejack, Rarity was it, we can let her catch her breath for a bit."

"Um... Fluttershy? Maybe you should go and check your birds are okay?" Twilight suggested.

The yellow pegasus nodded, with a faint echo of what might have been a grateful smile and flew off to collect her scattered birds.

Applejack turned to Twilight. "I'm sorry Codex, I did my best to stall him, but he's as stubborn as a stump."

"We all saw you did all you could." Twilight smiled, adjusting her pince-nez glasses with a flick of telekinesis. "Fortunately, I managed to find this."

She held up the book on high so every-pony could see it. "Prince

Blueblood has been exceeding his authority in half a dozen ways, as well as making a complete ass of himself. With this I can call him on it. He's probably at the Mayor's office right now, ranting and raving, doing his best to make sure Ponyville doesn't get to host the Summer Sun Celebration. What say we trot on over there and spike his little white flying chariot?"

"Sure as sugar!" "Yeah!" "Let us be off!" "um..."

Twilight turned to see Fluttershy hovering some way back, looking at her. "I'd like to come too, if you don't mind..."

Twilight smiled her most genuine smile. "We're glad to have you along. I'm Codex, the new librarian... Don't worry, I know, you're Fluttershy. Dash told me you were more comfortable around animals than ponies?"

She started leading the group back towards Ponyville as Fluttershy gave a nervous nod. "I sort of know where you're coming from, it wasn't so long ago I felt more comfortable around books than ponies. I guess I just needed to meet the right ones..."

She looked around at the others, and they gave encouraging grins or smiles back. "I know I'm among friends here, and I think you can be too. You don't have to do anything that makes you uncomfortable, but I'm sure every-pony is glad to have you with us."

"Ohh! Can I come too? What is this, a parade? A party? A party-rade... that sounds like a cool drink to serve at at party parade!" Pinkie had arrived from... somewhere.

"We're going to see the mayor and deal with Prince Blueblood and his guards."

"So that's the new pony I saw in the town square today! I knew he was new because I didn't recognise him and I know every-pony in Ponyville, so I went 'GASP' and thought since he was new he wouldn't have any friends, except those two guards and they looked kinda grumpy, and that made me sad so I was going to throw a 'Welcome to Ponyville' party for him and you and him so that you'd both make lots of new friends!"

She stopped for breath. "Great, so what are we going to play when we deal, Canasta, Go Fish, Strip Poker?... I really should put on some clothes if we're going to play Strip Poker..."

"Uh, sugar-cube, that ain't what Codex there meant. Blueblood is trying to stop Ponyville hosting the Summer Sun Celebration, and we're going to stop him stopping it."

"No Summer Sun Celebration? But it's going to be the biggest, bestest party in Ponyville ever!" There was suddenly a fire in Pinkie's eyes. "No-pony stops the Summer Sun Celebration!"

Twilight held up the book. "He won't, and we're going to stop him with this!"

They reached the town hall to find the entrance guarded by the two Royal Guard pegasi. As the group approached, their wings swept out to cross the entrance with a metallic shing.

"I'm sorry, but no-pony is allowed in there. Prince Blueblood is meeting privately with the mayor." the left hand one stated.

"I bet he is!" Rainbow Dash growled, revving up to charge at them.

"Dash, I've got this!" Twilight called out as Applejack caught the pegasus's multi-coloured tail. She faced the two guards and glowered at them over the rims of her glasses, brows furrowed. "You will put those wings down or I will pluck them bare!"

"Are you... threatening us ma'am?" The guard who'd previously spoken asked, slightly incredulous.

He was clearly the senior of the two, so Twilight focussed on him. "No, I'm ordering you to cease your illegal actions, and using hyperbole to make sure you're actually listening to me."

"Illegal?"

Twilight gave a theatrical sigh. "Are the two of you real Royal Guards, or just a pair of thugs Blueblood stuffed in armour to make himself look important? Well, sergeant?"

She'd watched Shining Armour do his command voice often enough, and she was a very good student. For that matter, she'd helped him study for his officer's exam more than once, and knew the material at least as well as he did.

The pair stiffened up at the question, and came to attention. "Royal Guards, Royal Protection Detail!"

"Very well. Has Princess Celestia issued an order suspending civil writ in Ponyville?"

"No ma'am!"

"Did she give Prince Blueblood plenipotentiary or ambassadorial powers, anything beyond the task of Royal Overseer for the Summer Sun Celebration?"

"No ma'am!"

"Has the mayor granted you civil police powers within Ponyville?"

"No, ma'am?" The more talkative guard was now looking puzzled, while the younger's eyes suddenly widened in realisation, though he stayed still otherwise.

Twilight noted it though. "I'm glad to see at least one of you didn't sleep through basic training. Without explicit extension of your authority, your job is just to protect the Prince from physical harm or verbal abuse. You have no right to block off any-pony from access to a public building, let alone a civil servant going about her duties.

"At most you could stand outside the Mayor's office and request that

we not enter until the meeting is finished, and courtesy would require us to comply but that does not have the force of law, or allow you to use coercion. And as we have information bearing directly on Prince Blueblood's conduct of his position, it is our civil duty to lay it before the mayor before her meeting with Blueblood concludes."

She used the stare over the glasses move again. "Now. Drop! Those! Wings!"

The pegasi's wings snapped back to their sides.

The other ponies were staring at her in amazement.

"Wow! You really are Codex the Librarian!" Pinkie exclaimed.

"Goodness darling, I hadn't realised you had such a commanding presence."

Twilight blushed. "I read the Royal Guard Field Officers manual? Also the Combined Forces guide, the Compendium of Military Law, a lot of legal and history books..."

Plus several hundred loops of real life experience where she'd been in life or death command positions more times than she could count.

Twilight gave the two guards a pleasant smile. "Thank you gentlemen. I can see why you might think some of the ponies here might want to slap him silly. You are of course welcome to accompany us to see that we do not offer Blueblood any harm, which is within your remit. To be honest, In fact, in as much as it does not interfere with your primary duty, I request and require your assistance in delivering this information and material witnesses to the mayor."

"This is my right as an employee and therefore civil servant of the Township of Ponyville, as covered under section 34a, paragraphs 12 and 13 of the fifth revision of the Compendium of Military Law relating to civilian authority over the military. While Blueblood as Royal Overseer has that authority too, his is administrative, deriving from his specific duties, whereas mine is jurisdictional, deriving from my position here in Ponyville, and has primacy. In short, in this context, even I outrank him, and it covers you if he gives you any hassle over it."

"Ma'am?" The sergeant spoke up.

Twilight looked back at him. Having established her authority, she had no need or intention of beating them over the head with it. "By all means call me Codex, and you both are?"

"Sergeant Silverwing, ma'... Codex." "Corporal Airheart."

Celestia's blessing might make them look alike, but the higher, alto voice of the corporal suggested there was a girl under the helmet.

"Very good, you wanted to say something, sergeant?"

"An apology, and a warning. I think we both assumed Prince Blueblood

had the authority of the Crown behind him. He's a powerful noble, and a bad enemy to make."

Twilight was genuinely touched, but then, despite what she'd said earlier, a ponies for a Royal Protection Detail wasn't exactly picked out of a hat. "Thank you, Sergeant Silverwing. I'm from Canterlot myself, and I'm aware that his position gives him considerable extra-legal power. However, we're doing this strictly within the law and by the book... and I've read lots of books. The second Diet of Canterlot requires nobles, and even the Royal family to act within the bounds of the common law."

"Uh... How'd a weight loss plan do that?" Applejack asked.

"This Diet was a constitutional meeting, headed by the Princess, several centuries ago. Equestria was in transit from a feudal model to a more imperial one, with a bureaucracy taking over administrative and executive duties from the old noble families. Some of them saw it coming and managed to gain control of the ministries, and expanding them to provide jobs for their families and hangers-on.

"The bureaucracy was adding a lot of dead weight, you had departments which existed only on paper and in the accounts of the Exchequer, and Department heads who never actually set hoof inside their offices. Celestia used the Diet to push through reforms to make it more merit based, and root out the special privileges of the nobility that had allowed it to happen. To make it solid, she bound the Royal family to abide by the accords, and forced the lesser nobles to follow suit or be shamed."

Pinkie summed up. "So the government was overweight, and the Princess put it on a Diet?"

"More or less..." Twilight giggled. "You were right Applejack, it was a weight loss plan."

She turned more serious. "As for making him a personal enemy... I'll deal with it as it comes."

She turned to the other ponies. "You've all done your bit to make sure that there's a Summer Sun Celebration tomorrow, now it's my turn."

\* \* \*

><p>Blueblood was in full flow. He'd had more than enough of this town, and every-pony in it. He'd been dragged away from his preparations for a private and exclusive party he'd been planning in Canterlot to deal with the preparations for the Summer Sun Celebration. He'd done it last year in Canterlot, and the exquisite, and fabulously expensive soiree he'd put together had netted him a huge amount of social capital. The fact that it had come out of the city budget rather than his personal accounts had been an added bonus.<p>

However, just because he'd done it once, he didn't think he'd be asked to do it again, and certainly not in a trivial little hamlet like Ponyville. After all, who of any status or worth in society was there here to impress? Meanwhile, every moment he was away from Canterlot, some other pony was poaching his guests, and ruining the

carefully planned follow-up to last year that would secure his position as top pony in the social, as well as the noble hierarchy of Equestria.

The fact that the ponies here clearly didn't understand the honour that had been bestowed on them by the personal presence of a princess, and for that matter his own presence, just put the exquisitely engraved sterling silver lid on it (he'd never use anything so common as tin, not even in metaphors). The impertinence of that common farm-pony, that brutish pegasus shoving him into the mud, then soaking him and ruining his perfect mane-styling, and that unctuous unicorn making cow-eyes at him, some sort of seamstress who seemed to think her sense of taste would impress a princess.

Then he'd been attacked by a crowd of squawking monstrosities and that rabid pegasus. What sort of idiot thought that a bunch of birds was a suitable fanfare for a pony who raised the sun? Well, at least he would have the considerable pleasure of making sure they never got to inflict their indignities on Princess Celestia, and get some proper catering and party planning in from Canterlot. Despite the lateness of the day, he didn't anticipate much problem. Getting to serve the princess would be a considerable feather in their chapeaus, and they'd undoubtedly remember the pony who'd given them the chance in the future.

His scheming... planning didn't prevent him instructing the mayor about his requirements. "... and I expect you to get a proper orchestra, not some bunch of birds and a lunatic pegasus!"

"Everything was agreed well in advance, your highness. We have neither the time nor the money to change things now." The mayor's voice was steady, but strained.

"I am the Royal Overseer for this event and you will do as I say! I have been embarrassed, belittled, insulted and assaulted ever since I arrived in your squalid little hamlet..."

Twilight knocked on the door with a hoof. The mayor's voice immediately cut across Blueblood's rant. "Come in!"

Twilight entered, and the others trooped in after her. Blueblood immediately freaked. He'd restored his original immaculate appearance, but he hadn't recovered his aplomb.

"Sergeant! I told you I was not to be disturbed under any circumstances! Get those peasants out of here and consider yourself on report!"

Sergeant Silverwing gave a a painfully text book salute and stared a hoof above and to the right of Blueblood's ear.. "Yes, your highness. Sorry, your highness, but we're not allowed to impede a civil servant in the course of her duties. Miss Codex has information that had to be brought to the mayor immediately. In fact she commandeered our services, under section 34a..."

"I don't care! She's one of the ringleaders of this plan to humiliate me, they all are! They're nothing but a bunch of ringleaders!"

Twilight decided it was time to interject. "I doubt we could do a better job than you've done of humiliating yourself and bringing disgrace on the good name of the Royal family! Did you even bother to find out what your duties were before you came here, or did you just assume you could do whatever you wanted, as seems to be the case in Canterlot?"

"How dare you speak to me like that! Do you know who I am?" The Prince stomped a hoof.

"I think every-pony between here and Canterlot knows who you are, the way you've been bellowing about it. However, no matter how big a wheel you are in Canterlot, your only role here is as the Royal Overseer for the Summer Sun Celebration, and that authority, and its limitations are set out here."

She placed the copy of 'The Summer Sun Celebration â€" Duties and Responsibilities' on the Mayors desk.

"Chapter 2, paragraphs 12 through 22. The plan for the proposed Summer Sun Celebration is the responsibility of the mayor or other head of local government, to allow them to properly reflect the culture and capabilities of their locality. It is then approved by the Department of Culture and Recreation, and the Princess or her equerry on her behalf. Executive authority also rests with the local government."

Mayor Mare gave her a grateful smile. "That's what I've been trying to tell him. I received the certifications over a month ago. I put Ponyville's very best ponies to arranging things."

The ponies behind her preened, well Rarity and Rainbow Dash did.

"I was Royal Overseer and ran the Summer Sun Celebration last year in Canterlot, so don't tell me I can't do the same here!"

"In that case, Princess Celestia had probably delegated executive authority as well as the task of Royal Overseer to you. It makes sense, as she's the Grand Duchess of Canterlot and therefore the leader of the city council, but was probably far too busy to do the job herself."

Twilight paused and adjusted her glasses, letting that sink in. Blueblood hadn't bothered with the details of the paperwork, he had secretaries to deal with such things, so he couldn't say she was wrong. There had been a lot of paperwork too.

"The rules as written don't give you the authority to change things, your role is purely administrative, to ensure that the plans are going ahead as required, and offer assistance if there has been some last minute slip-up. Not to try and change the agreed arrangements because they don't fit your personal tastes. The only reason you could cancel the Celebration would be in the case of gross failure to complete one of the tasks."

Blueblood sneered nastily and glanced out of the window. "Then I have you! Clearing the sky was one of the tasks, and it's still full of clouds..."

Twilight gave Rainbow Dash a nod, and the pegasus made a hasty



exit.

"... so even if you can use some archaic legalisms that should have been edited out of the law books ages ago to weasel around your failure to provide a proper Summer Sun Celebration, you still can't get away from your failure to provide a clear sky as required!"

Twilight saw Rainbow Dash appear at the window with a salute and a wide grin, and smirked. "Who says we haven't provided a clear sky?"

She pointed at the window and Blueblood looked over at it, then did a double take and rushed over to look out at the clear blue sky. "But... that's impossible!"

Rainbow Dash slipped back into the Mayor's office, panting slightly and stage whispered. "Ten seconds flat, I don't let my friends, or Ponyville, down."

"Oh! Oh!" Pinkie was practically bouncing up and down with excitement. "I guess that means... We can't have archaic and edit!"

There were groans and chuckles all round, except for Blueblood who drew breath to start another rant, until Twilight decided to stare at him over her glasses. Under that withering gaze, he seemed to deflate.

"In the process of grossly overstepping your authority, you have... what was your phrase? 'Embarrassed, belittled, insulted and assaulted' the citizens of Ponyville for not acting as if your word was law. You treated Applejack like a serf, grossly insulted her entire family, acted like a complete boor to Rarity, had the nerve to send your guards after Rainbow Dash after she did her best to make up for crashing into you, and even verbally attacked Fluttershy! Her birds only swooped on you because you were attacking her, and it was quite clear they did that on their own. You are a poor excuse for a member of the nobility, let alone a relative of Princess Celestia's! And I have no doubt that she will be most displeased with your actions here today!"

That seemed to finally hit home. He took a few steps back, head and ears down, and gave a sigh. "It's not like I wanted this job in the first place. I have my own party to plan in Canterlot. It was going to be the crown of the social season, the soiree that would affirm my position as the premier socialite in Canterlot. But when that boorish bookworm Twilight Sparkle had a conniption fit and ran away, who do you think was drafted in to fix her mess?"

Twilight had been feeling good, even righteous over bringing Blueblood to book, in several senses of the word, but this suddenly hit her right in the gut. It seemed her friends weren't the only ones hit by the unintended consequences of her scheme. She was feeling sorry for Blueblood of all ponies! Yes, he was a stuck-up narcissistic prat, but he was still a pony, with hopes and dreams of his own.

Some of his previous fire had returned. "I may not have wanted it, but since I was stuck with it, I was going to make sure this party

was fit for a Princess! She deserves nothing less than the best, the same excellence she'd get in Canterlot! But what's the use, I'm stuck with all... this!"

He tapped the checklist with it's crosses in a disgusted manner.

Twilight made a decision. He wasn't stupid, whatever his other shortcomings. He was simply ignorant, and ignorance could be cured, by teaching.

"If you truly believe that, then maybe you should consider this point. Princess Celestia chose Ponyville as the venue where she'd raise the sun, not Canterlot. If she'd wanted a Canterlot experience, wouldn't she just have stayed there? If you truly want to do what's best for the princess, maybe we can salvage this. If you'll just give these ponies a chance to prove that what they've put together is the best that Ponyville has to offer, maybe you'll see that this is what the Princess wanted after all."

She turned to the other five.

"I know this is a lot to ask, but will you give him a second chance? If you want we can make an official report of his conduct, see him punished for everything he put you through. But maybe we can do this a better way. I'm sure you all wanted to prove that you did your very best, and there may still be a chance to do exactly that. However, it's up to you, one nay kills it."

Applejack shrugged. "Shoot, he were as ornery as a one eyed rattlesnake, but I figure the talking to you just gave him makes up for that. I only ever wanted to do this right and proper. I'm in."

"He was absolutely rotten to me." Rarity said with a superior expression that Blueblood himself would have envied. Then she softened. "However, I could understand if he had a certain artistic vision which my decorations didn't match. I would be interested to hear just what a Canterlot pony would do differently, rather than telling me what I'd done was wrong. "

"Heh, it isn't any feather off my wings." Rainbow Dash said, then looked over at the yellow pegasus. "But the way he went after Fluttershy, I figure he should get some come back for that. But if Fluttershy forgives him..."

Fluttershy spoke quietly. "I... I don't mind as long as my birds get to sing at the Celebration. They've worked so hard, and they're looking forward to performing for the Princess."

Twilight Sparkle looked over towards the mayor. "Madam mayor?"

"Very well." The gray maned pony nodded.

Twilight turned back to face Blueblood. "So, are you willing to give these ponies a chance?"

Pinkie chipped in. "Don't mess with her, she has mysterious librarian powers!"

"I don't have much of a choice." Blueblood just hoofed over the checklist with a defeated sigh, and Twilight's horn glowed as she erased the crosses on it. As they came down into the main hall where the celebration was to be held, Rainbow Dash was drawn into a quiet conversation with Applejack and Twilight Sparkle, and went straight out the door before dusting off and heading away towards Canterlot at improbable speeds.

Prince Blueblood noted it. "Where has she gone anyway?"

"Oh, just getting something from Canterlot for Applejack." Twilight said.

"That's a two hour flight even by chariot!" Blueblood exclaimed, and the two pegasus guards, who'd actually flown it looked even more surprised.

Applejack chuckled. "Not for Rainbow Dash when she gets a bee in her bonnet! She ain't called Dash for nothing!"

"I begin to see how she cleared the sky so quickly..." He actually went to the doorway and outside to confirm what he'd seen from the window, and view the receding polychromatic contrail. As he came back in, his horn glowed as he put quill to parchment, but this time, he placed a big tick in the tick box for clear sky.

Rarity took center stage. "And now Prince Blueblood, let me explain why I made these choices, and then you can tell me what you would have done differently."

She started moving around. "The flowers on the balconies are common types grown around Ponyville, to symbolise the agriculture of the town, and the part the Princess plays by bringing forth the sun to help them grow. The hangings show the transition from night to day, and the ribbons are pure silk, and once again a graduated pattern for deep blues to bright orange to represent the sun-rise."

"Hmm..." This time, Blueblood actually listened. It helped that the other unicorn was no longer gushing over him like some over-eager debutante at a Canterlot ball. "I see... but the hangings are plain cotton. Why not silk?"

"Cost, I'm afraid the budget I was given by the mayor only went so far. But I created every stitch of them myself. I worked for days, crafting and reworking until I believed they were the best I could accomplish."

"But you had the money for gems... though not many, I'll admit." He pointed a hoof to the balconies

"From my own private stock." Rarity replied. "I could have added more, but they would have made it look rather too gaudy, whereas I was going for elegant simplicity. The gems I have used are carefully positioned to illuminate and halo the Princess when the sun rises. This is her celebration, after all. It was something of a wrench to use so many of my finest gems, but when one has a vision, one must sometimes make sacrifices to bring it to life, no?"

Blueblood moved forward, really examining the place for the first time. Fashion and art was an acceptable pastime, nay, a necessity in

the fashion conscious society of Canterlot. "I understand what you're trying to do, but have you considered..."

He started making suggestions, and Rarity listened. The pair soon got into a discussion of aesthetics, Blueblood's ideas sparking off Rarity's and vice-versa. Some changes were discarded, but others eagerly taken on board by the unicorn mare. Blueblood found he was actually enjoying himself, though when he found out just what they had to work with, blank shock was closer to the mark.

Finally the agreed changes were all made, and the place looked wonderful. He levitated the checklist again. He put on a stern face. "I have considered the quality of the decorations, and the fineness of the materials, and I have no choice but to... give it my unashamed seal of approval."

He smirked at the way Rarity's expression had shifted as he'd given his verdict. "Any-pony can make something spectacular with superior materials, managing to accomplish so much with so little... that is the mark of a true artist."

Fortunately, Twilight caught the unicorn mare as she fainted in relief. Once she recovered, they returned to Fluttershy's cottage, Pinkie bouncing along happily and singing, as the Prince traveling at a more sedate pace.

"Fluttershy, oh me oh my, mistress of creatures.

Cares for all, both big and small, cute and fluffy!

And that dear Prince is just why, she decided to try,

To provide a wondrous,

show you'll adore.

Clearly splendiferous,

Jaws hit the floor,

As you listen to, her great chorus of,

Birds that sing to the sky!

Make way for Fluttershyyyy!"

Fluttershy dashed on ahead, cheeks blushing as Pinkie extolled her virtues. "Oh... my!"

When they got there, she'd already marshalled her birds, several of whom gave Prince Blueblood a very sharp stare. But Fluttershy calmed them down. "Now, now, I know we didn't get off to the best start, but I want you to sing, sing the best you've ever sung! Show Prince Blueblood just how wonderful I know you are!"

She lead them with a few notes and they joined in. The notes of the Royal fanfare embodied in bird-song, and no bird was going to disappoint Fluttershy by doing any less than their best. The jays sang the A's, the swallows didn't swallow their notes, and the tits hit every high note perfectly. It was a glorious chorus.

At the end there was a silence more impressive than any amount of hoof-stomping or cheers. Twilight finally grinned. "Now tell me you'll find that anywhere in Equestria, even the Royal Canterlot Gardens?"

"I..." Blueblood had a stunned look on his face. "I don't believe it!"

"Like I said, every-pony has pulled out all the stops for this event."

Blueblood ticked the box for music, and Pinkie called out, "Woo hoo! Three down, one to go!"

"And we've saved the best till last!" Applejack exclaimed. As they approached Sweet Apple Acres, a rainbow blur approached it too, heading back from Canterlot. Rainbow Dash skidded to a halt by the party, tapping her saddlebag with a wingtip. "Okay, Codex, I got your special package right here."

"Excellent!" Twilight conducted the Prince past the Apple family members, and into the same gazebo that she'd had her own samples in. After a moment, Applejack came from the direction of the farm, carrying a tray with two plates and two slices of apple pie and a jug and glass of water.

"Codex explained how you ponies in Canterlot are so fussed about watching your weight, so I figured fritters might not be the best thing to serve you. So I figured we'd go with the basics, a slice of my own home made apple pie."

Twilight levitated the plates. "Just for comparison, I had Rainbow Dash go fetch a slice of apple pie from one of Canterlot's most expensive bakeries..." She put down a slender slice that had a red sauce drizzled over it and a small lump of ice-cream, "... to compare with Applejack's." She put down the other, which lacked the adornment.

Blueblood sampled both of them, drinking a sip of water after each. Then he had some more. And some more, until there was nothing left but crumbs on either plate. He had a look of acute indecision on his face.

Applejack saw it and said, "Sugar-cube, I don't know how my cooking holds up against that fancy Canterlot baking. All I know is I made the best durned apple pie I could. I ain't going to serve the princess anything less. So I ain't going to be offended by your honest opinion. At least you tried it."

Blueblood sighed, his eyes half lidded as he licked his lips. "It's not an easy choice. I have to admit that both of them were excellent. The pastry was delightfully flaky and melted in the mouth, and the filling was the perfect mix of sweet and tart. However, taking everything into account, I believe that one was better, though only slightly."

He pointed to the plate which still had traces of sauce.

"Yeehaw!" Applejack hollered, and the Prince flinched. "I'm mighty

pleased to hear you say that, your highness, because that was my own home-made pie."

"What?" Prince Blueblood looked surprised. "But I thought that was the Canterlot pie!"

Twilight giggled. "I never said that, I only said we had the two for comparison. "The plain pie was from Canterlot. After all, you couldn't expect all that drizzled sauce to stay put while Rainbow Dash was flying back at full clip."

"I see..." Blueblood gave a frown which was unconvincing, as it tried to turn into a smirk. "You are a devious, devious pony, Miss Codex!"

"You have no idea!" Twilight giggled again as he ticked the last box, and signed the checklist at the bottom.

Twilgiht focused for a moment, and a copy appeared. "A duplicate for your records, Mayor Mare."

"Thank you Codex." She glanced over at the guards. "I suggest you take Prince Blueblood home. I think he's had quite enough excitement for one day."

"Actually..." Twilight was loath to let the change in attitude go to waste. Blueblood had made an honest effort, and it was only fair he should be rewarded. "you said you were planning a party."

That killed the Prince's good mood. "I was, but it's too late now. I suspect by now most of my 'must invite' list have made other arrangements. And it's too close to evening to get anything organised anyway."

"Hmm..." Twilight made a show of thinking. "How was your party going to be different from all those other ones, or the hundreds of others those ponies attended?"

"I was going to host it." Blueblood preened. "Though I'll admit finding something else unique to act as a draw gets hard. I had even considered Sapphire Shores, or one of the Wonderbolts, but even that's been done."

"Have you considered bringing it here?" Twilight asked.

"WHAT!" The response was pretty much universal.

"Guys, think about it. You get to show off all your hard work, not just to the princess but a whole cart full of ponies from Canterlot. It couldn't hurt to have them think well of Ponyville."

"I don't know, Codex, not every-pony is going to be as open minded as you are." Applejack mused.

"It's not the done thing..." Blueblood added.

"That might not be so bad." Twilight responded. "You were saying that you were looking for something new. It's close, pretty much all you have to do is arrange transport, and the Princess herself will be here. After all, you already certified it was good enough for her,

you even had a horn in the decorations so they should have no complaints."

"You have a point... Yes, I can see how to pitch it. The princess would be a big draw, and I can play up the difference. Prince Blueblood is a trend-setter, not some-pony who just follows the herd. It would be daring, avant-garde... I like this idea!"

"Uh... that's well and all, but I still don't know if they'll get on alright with us regular ponies."

"I can assure that." Prince Blueblood said with a grin bordering on evil. "No-pony will want to embarrass the princess, or themselves by suggesting that some-thing she approved is not good enough for them. And if they prove intransigent, I'll simply set Codex here on them!"

That had Twilight blushing as her friends laughed. After Blueblood was escorted out, Pinkie bounced up. "You know what this calls for? A party!"

"That's your answer to everything!" Applejack exclaimed.

"That's because it's a good answer!" Pinkie beamed back. "We still have to welcome Codex properly, and I've invited a lot of other ponies to meet her. Mayor Mare, are you coming too?"

"You go on ahead." The mayor gave a tired smile. "I'll look in later."

"Okie Dokie Lokie!" She grabbed Twilight by the hoof. "C'mon, Princess Celestia's going to lower the sun soon, we can watch the twilight sparkle!"

That got Twilight doing a double take, but she just shook her head and let the pink pony lead her away. As Twilight partied with her new friends, she thought back to the earlier party, and then to Spike, her ostensible reason for going. While it had started as just a ploy, realising how much it had meant to Spike had made it more than that.

This whole business with Blueblood had made her reconsider just how she was affecting every-pony with her plan, not just the Princess. She keenly felt his absence at her side, despite the fact that it was only temporary. She also wondered if her letter to him had been clear enough. He was, after all, only a baby dragon, and might not be able to accept being left behind easily, even for a short while.

She quickly came to a decision, and got Rarity off to one side. "Yes, Codex darling?"

"Uh... do you have any blue garnets lying around? I want to send some to a very dear friend in Canterlot, I had to leave without saying goodbye properly and it worries me."

"Of course dear, I have plenty. Take what you need."

"Um... I don't want you to think I'm not accepting them in the generous spirit they were given, but if it's all the same to you, I'd like to find a way to repay you, to earn them. It's because I want to

give them to my friend, and getting them without working for them feels like cheating."

Rarity was silent for a moment, and Twilight thought she might have made a huge mistake, but then the white unicorn smiled. "Of course dear, I understand. The value of a gift is the work you put into getting it. If you want to help out, I have several months of receipts and bills I need to organise and file. As a matter of fact, I've been putting it off, as it's something I don't enjoy at all."

Twilight smiled brightly. "That sounds perfect!"

\* \* \*

><p>Spike was deep in his second tub of Rocky Road when he felt a burp coming on. A flash of flame released a scroll, but not one of Celestia's. Several blue garnets, one of his favourite gemstones spilled out as he opened it, but it was the text that held his attention.<p>

"Dear Spike,

I said I'd be in contact as soon as possible. I know gemstones aren't much of a replacement for a hug, but could you consider the other a given? I've managed to settle in, and I'm doing well, but things are so \_different\_ here. I've been thinking, and I may have been wrong to rush off. I was just too ashamed to face Celestia right then, but I should have at least have stayed to take my lumps in person rather than running away.

Sometimes, having to face a problem head on is the only right thing to do, I learned that while I was here. I will come back and face her after the Summer Sun Celebration. Things are crazy here at the moment, and she's probably far too busy with her own preparations to have time for me right now. Know that just because we're apart, it doesn't mean I don't think of you, and hope we can be back together as soon as possible.

Your friend,

Twilight Sparkle.'

Spike read the message again, then held it to his chest as a great weight seemed to vanish from inside it. Twilight hadn't abandoned him. He hadn't realised Twilight even knew the flame-mail spell, but then who could keep up with everything Twilight was studying? He eagerly started off to go show Princess Celestia the message, she'd want to know about it. Then he came back, scooped up the garnets in his ice cream tub. After all, she had sent them especially for him, and Rocky Road went well with Garnets.

Princess Celestia was indeed pleased to receive the letter, and not just because it told her Twilight was doing well. However, it seemed Spike couldn't target a reply. She performed a series of magical tests of her own and discovered that Twilight hadn't cast the flame-mail spell perfectly after all. It seemed she hadn't fully taken into account the heft of the garnets, and the wobble it had imparted to the virtual catenary of the letter had wiped out any trace of a return path. There was no way to back track it and find



out where in Equestria she was.

"Spike, I think you should take this letter to Shining Armour too. He and his parents must be worried about Twilight too."

It was getting towards evening, when she'd have to raise the moon. For a thousand years, her sister's face stared down at her in reproach at her not having saved her from the darkness that had consumed her. For a moment she considered altering it's course to disrupt the conjunction, but that would cause a dreadful magical backlash that could cause at least as much chaos as her sister's return. Besides, this conjunction would not be possible for another 1000 years, and to leave her sister up there for that long...

'Forgive me, my subjects...' Celestia thought. 'â€¦ I have to trust in Shining Armour and that Twilight will find a way to save you all. I can only play my part to help them.'  
><p>

\* \* \*

><br>21.2 (Gym Quirk)

Twilight gazed out through the bars of the enclosure as she ran through her start-of-loop checklist.

\_Not the baseline start point...pretty sure this isn't Equestria...standard equiform body type...I appear to be my default self...Wait. What's that squeaking noise?\_

She looked behind her to see Pinkie Pie trotting along in a giant exercise wheel.

Or was it that she and Pinkie were in miniature and the wheel and the...cage?...surrounding them was normal sized? That big water bottle suspended on one side of the enclosure seemed to support the latter theory.

Beyond the bars, on the surface (counter?) nearby was an enormous bundle of paper in an equally enormous clipboard. She could just make out the stationary header on the top page: "ACME Labs".

As the loop-specific memories/background finally arrived, Pinkie chirped, "Gee Twi...What do you want to do tonight?"

\_Just run with it\_ , she decided with a mental shrug. "The same thing we do every night, Pinkie...Try to take over the world!"

\_They're Pinkie and the Brain\_  
><em>Yes, Pinkie and the Brain<em>  
><em>One is a genius<em>  
><em>The other's insane<em>  
><em>They're ponies in a cage<em>  
><em>The unicorn's a mage<em>  
><em>They're dinky<em>  
><em>They're Pinkie and the Brain, Brain, Brain,  
Brain...<em>

"Narf!" added Pinkie for no particular reason.

\* \* \*

><p>21.3<p>

"Right, Fillies and gentlecolts," Twilight said, then paused. "Er, I mean, girls and Spike. Anyway." The mare tapped her board with a swagger stick. "We face a terrifying reality."

Her wings flapped once for emphasis. "I am a pegasus, with the talent of magic, and my Element of Magic is a necklace here."

"Yeah, we noticed," Dash said.

"Furthermore," Twilight continued, ignoring her, "Applejack is a unicorn." Another pause. "And I have to say, those giant apples you've been making so far this loop are delicious. Something to follow up on, if you can still pull it off."

"Thanks," the currently-a-unicorn said cheerfully.

"Both Dash and Rarity are earth ponies. And I don't know how this version of you got her cutie mark-"

Dash cut in again. "I run kinda like that Sonic guy. I can run across water, which makes these rainbow-gemmed sprays of water. Kinda looks neat."

"Think you can break the sound barrier?" Twilight asked, then shook her head. "Sorry, stupid question, of course you can. We're getting off topic."

"There's a topic?" Spike asked, his arm around Rarity. "We're just saying stuff we already know!"

"I am aware of that." Twilight tapped her swagger stick again. "But I want to make my conclusions totally clear. Now, Fluttershy is the only one of us who has kept her base-form aside from Spike. And, as far as my experiences have shown, we Elements tend to be a two-two-two mix of the three baseline pony types. At \_first\_."

"Yeah, we know Pinkie's a unicorn," Spike pointed out. "We all met her so far this Loop."

"And she's not Awake," Twilight pointed out. "Now, since she's not Awake, and \_her\_ Element is the crown, forâ€| unknown reasonsâ€|" she trailed off.

"Wait," Applejack said slowly. "Didn't y'all once say that, if the one with the tiara for an Element wasn't Awakeâ€|"

"Exactly." Twilight pressed a button, and the projector showed an image of Princess Pinkie Pie. Then it changed to show a long list of titles.

"This was obtained from the Hub Loop," Twilight said, pointing at the top. "These two are the events with Nightmare Moon â€" which we've already handled, of course. The remaining sixty-three episodes are the significant events to happen before and leading up to

P-day."

"Girls," Twilight finished, "this is the countdown to our breakdown. May Celestia help us all."

\* \* \*

><p><p>

Author's Note:

Why yes, there IS quite a lot of Turning the Tables backlog to get through right now...

## 22. Chapter 22

### 22.1

"Trixie," Twilight said, blocking two incoming crossbow bolts, "what the hay did you \_do?\_"

"Trixie is not sure," the blue unicorn replied, curving a stun bolt over their barricade. "She was just engaging in the usual early-loop run of sell-out performances to build spending money, and then suddenly a hit squad."

"There must be more to it than that."

"Well, don't look at me." Trixie rummaged in one of her hat's hidden pockets, then waved something around. "This is the only unfamiliar thing I can findâ€|"

Twilight looked at it. "What the hay? That's the Crystal Heart!"

"It is?" Trixie rotated it, and Twilight found herself forced to resort to a brute force bunker shield as her friend abruptly dropped everything else to focus on examining the small crystal.

"It is indeed," Trixie concluded after almost a minute. "Despite the size. Well, we would appear to have been dropped right in the middle of a thriller plot."

They shared glances.

"Dibs I be the nutty but well armed one!" Trixie shouted.

"Well, yeah, that was a given," Twilight allowed. "Guess I'll have to be the quiet, bookish one who analyzes things."

"We need a third member," Trixie muttered. "Hmmmâ€|"

"Oi!" a griffin shouted at them. "Are you going to bother paying attention to us, orâ€|"

Both unicorns fired stun spells at once.

Twilight went for subtlety, weaving in a viral component which bounced between the various other ponies and griffins forming the hit squad, neutralizing them all with minimal effort.

Then Trixie's spell connected, and sent him flying out the window.

"Overenthusiastic warlock," Twilight teased.

"Petty efficiency-focused mage," Trixie rejoined.

"You're right, we do need someone else." Twilight then blinked. "And I know just the pony."

\* \* \*

><p>"You see," Sombra said silkily, trotting in a circle around the two unicorns, "The Crystal Heart is the most powerful magical artefact known to pony kind."<p>

"Seventh!" Twilight interrupted.

"Eighth," Trixie replied. "I found one of those ones from the Daring Do stories once--"

"The prattle of small minds." Sombra shook his head, and turned away from the manacled ponies. "But I have no more concerns. You are trapped, your magic is blocked, and my triumph is at hand."

Trixie sniggered. "You are asking for it \_so\_ much."

"Do go on," Sombra invited. "It's another minute until the ritual reaches the crescendo, so I can spare the time for a moment's amusement."

"And again!" The showpony shrugged. "But if you want to keep doing that, go ahead. It'll just make the irony more funny."

"I'm afraid all the ironic amusement will be on my side," Sombra gloated, still in that icily smooth voice which sounded so wrong to Twilight. "For nothing can stop me now!"

At that point, Luna broke through the ceiling.

"Told you," Trixie said smugly.

"WE HAVE ARRESTED HIM!" Luna boomed out. "AGENT T, WE DID IT! DOES THIS MEAN WE ARE NO LONGER PROBATIONARY?"

Twilight smirked. It had taken some fast talking with her brother to get Trixie and herself officially enlisted into his Guard unit, and then more to keep them off the booksâ€| but the result was that they were basically the Mares in Black.

Though it did kind of suck that, since Luna would have to be L, and that left Trixie with T, she had to be content with being agent S.

"Yep," Trixie answered Luna. "Well done, agent Elle."

\* \* \*

><p>"So, who's going to be coming after that thing next?" Twilight

asked speculatively, as the regular guard moved in on what used to be Sombra's base of operations.<p>

"Trixie has no idea. And she still can't get it to go away."

Twilight and Luna both sniggered. Neither of them knew why the Crystal Heart followed Trixie around either (and Twilight hoped it wouldn't last past the Loop), but it was funny. Especially that time someone tried to steal it, and it had just vanished from his saddlebags to reappear in her hat.

"Actually," Luna said, remembering to keep her voice down this time, "We have heard rumours that the Changelings seek the gem. Again."

"What, really?" Trixie frowned. "This Chrysalis is unusually persistent. This is, what, the seventh time?"

"Sixth, I think," Twilight said. "That lot in Neighagra Falls were just local, part of an emotion smuggling ring. No, I don't know how you smuggle an emotion either."

"What do you think she'll send this time?" Trixie mused. "Cut price ninja changelings again?"

"Who knows."

\* \* \*

><p>22.2<p>

"Okay, somepony up there's \_got\_ to be playing a joke on me."

Twilight surveyed the field from her office window. One absolutely colossal building. A long runway, easily five miles long. A much smaller runway which led to a pair of gantries and a blast trap.

And dozens of little green men in spacesuits waiting expectantly for her to tell them what to do.

"Right," she said eventually, and started for the Vertical Assembly Building. "Time to introduce theseâ€| \_Kerbals\_, to the concept of a wind tunnel."

\* \* \*

><p>She felt quite smug, as the enormous rocket was finally moved out onto the launch pad. It wasn't an SSTO launcher, those would still take a while to perfect, but it should be fine for a moon shot.<p>

"Everything ready?"

"One hundred percent!" Jebediah said, saluting. "Rocket fuelled and ready to-"

Then there was a bang.

When Twilight's hearing returned it was raining bits of rocket, Kerbals in extremely tough space suits, and even large amounts of dirt washed up in the blast.

"Oh, come on!" she shouted, as a Kerbal bounced past " he'd be fine, he landed on his head. "What even caused that?"

Jebediah shrugged. "Just happens sometimes. Well known fact, one in five fuel reserves just randomly explode if looked at funny." The Kerbal clapped Twilight on the shoulder. "Don't worry, it's just how the world works. Hell, it doesn't even matter if they're full or not " I once saw a rocket run out of fuel on the launchpad, then explode hard enough to send the Kerbalnaut into orbit anyway."

"\_Right."\_ Twilight shook her head sadly. "Oh, well, back to the drawing board."

"You could always just build a plane with five hundred ailerons," Jebediah suggested. "Flap them to take off."

"Would that even work?" At his nod, Twilight's expression turned thoughtful. "I don't know what you have for physics here, but it seems exploitable"

\* \* \*

><p>22.3<p>

"Huh," Twilight said, looking over at her 'sister'. "I have to admit, I'm surprised this one took so long to come up"

Celestia nodded. "I wondered if it was possible at all, given your descriptions of the various other loops with recent alicorns. But here we are."

"Indeed." Twilight's horn glowed as she enforced a chaos negation spell. "Any particular plans?"

"Yes, actually," Celestia said. "I want to show you all the tricks of being a ruler that you might have missed."

"Princess" Twilight began, "I've done loops like this at least a dozen times. I'm pretty much certain that I'm, technically, older than you by now. By quite a lot."

"There's always something to learn." Celestia smiled mysteriously.

"Oh, knock it off with the Dumbledore stuff."

\* \* \*

><p>"I can't tell if this is a good idea or a bad one" Twilight mused.<p>

"Why not?" Celestia asked, passing Twilight a hard hat (complete with hole for the horn). "I know I've never had the time to see what's at the core of the planet."

"Yeah, it is interesting stuffâ€¦" Twilight paused, then pointed. "But just over there is a gateway to Tartarus."

"Eh." Celestia shrugged. "Alright, get digging!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Right, that's another hydraâ€¦" Twilight trotted over, the monster bobbing along in a telekinetic field. "Three heads, this one."<p>

"Thank you," Celestia replied, taking the monster. "But we appear to have a problem. They keep escaping through the hole."

"So we need to rebuild the ceiling of Tartarus?" Twilight asked. "Is that what you're saying?"

"Not quite." Celestia focused, and then the hydra went flying moon-wards.

"Let's see them escape from \_that\_," she said smugly.

"Youâ€¦ kind of like sending things to the moon, don't you?" Twilight said rhetorically. "Good thing Luna isn't around right now, I'm sure she'd protest."

"Go find some of those Scylla that escaped," Celestia instructed. "Try looking in the ocean."

"So, what you're trying to teach me is..?"

"Clean up after your own mistakes." Celestia replied smoothly. "Which is why I'm making you do it."

"Right, lesson learned, fob off boring tasks on your studentsâ€¦" Twilight shot back.

"It's called postgraduate work." Celestia winked.

\* \* \*

><p>22.4<p>

"Nice to see you, Rarity and Sweetie," Twilight said, ticking off another pair of names. "Start line's over there â€" and no panicking, Rarity!"

"Perish the thought!" Rarity said, looking down at her little sister. "We're going to do as well as possible â€" and if that dreadful mud looks like being a problem, well, I have designed my outfit to be mud resistant!"

"How come you didn't make mine mud resistant?" Sweetie asked.

"You're not wearing anything." Rarity pointed out.

"Well, yeahâ€¦ but I could have been!"

Twilight watched the unicorns walk off bickering for a moment or two

longer. That was another wrinkle that Rarity had learned to carefully smooth over, then.

"Alright, who's next â€" Princess Celestia?!"

Heads turned, some of them with the attached jaws dropping.

"Yes?" that alicorn asked, her eyes dancing. "Is there a problem?"

"Why didn't you tell me?" Twilight asked, the question having more than one layer.

As did the answer. "I wanted to surprise you. Anyway â€" Luna! Luna?"

The black princess trotted over from a table of refreshments. "We particularly enjoy indulging Ourselves in this thing you call 'toffee'."

Twilight looked sideways at Celestia. "Her too?"

"Indeed," Celestia replied mysteriously. "Now, I and my sister wish to enter."

"â€|sure, why not. You're sisters, after all." Twilight pointed to the two of them. "You know the rules, right?"

"Yes." Celestia rattled them off, and Twilight checked the list.

"Well, you seem all set, then. Just one reminder â€" when it says no use of magic or wings in the foot race, that is a rule. It's basically for fairness."

"Hah!" Luna said, drumming her hooves on the floor. "I think we shall be fine."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right," Twilight said, as she heaved an incredibly muddy Luna out of a sink hole. "For reference? Spreading wings when you're tripping into mud just increases the surface area."<p>

"Well, I know that nowâ€|" Luna muttered. "This is so embarrassing."

"Well, Celestia's still down there." Twilight sluiced Luna down with water. "That should get the worst off. Hey, erâ€| how long can alicorns last without air?"

"Indefinitely." Luna then turned back to the pool. "But it isn't exactly pleasant. I suggest you extract my sister soon."

"Are you two just denser, or something?" As she spoke, Twilight began to lift the entire sinkhole out of the ground and summoned up a bubble of water to wash Celestia off.

"Our hooves are essentially normal size, and we weigh rather a lot more than a normal pony â€" especially without passive magic to



reduce the weight a bit." Luna went off, presumably to ask for a cloud.

\* \* \*

><p>"Pffffffeh!" Celestia sniffled. "Not one of my better ideasâ€|"<p>

Twilight shook her head, and spoke in a whisper. "I know full well alicorns are more durable than that â€" no mere dunking will give you a cold." She paused. "You did that deliberately, didn't you?"

"\_Mostly \_deliberately." Celestia spat more muddy residue out. "But yes, I never really intended to win."

"Can't blame youâ€|" Twilight replied, watching Rainbow Dash and Scootaloo celebrating. "I know they're not \_really\_ sisters, but they both insisted."

Luna came over with eight cups of hot chocolate. "Four for you, Celly. Goodness, but we screwed that one upâ€|"

"Speak for yourself." Celestia drank the first mug. "Oh, I needed that."

"We planned on coming just behind the leaders, not getting sunk into a \_bog!"\_ Luna hissed.

Twilight shook her head, and left the sisters to their argument.

Strange how that part of having a sibling workedâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>22.5 (more Turning the Tables, from Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

"Thanks Rarity." Twilight said as the group walked towards the Town hall. "That puts my mind at ease a bit."

"Think nothing of it." The white mare waved her thanks away with a hoof. "I just wish you weren't being so mysterious about it. Is this some-pony a colt-friend? Is he the one you left Canterlot over?"

"No, just a dear friend." Twilight decided it was time to let some of the back-story out, to cushion when she was ready to tell everything. Besides, she felt it was what her in-loop self would do. "And he wasn't the one I disappointed. I had a very responsible position, and I failed in my duties. I thought it was only a small thing, helping my friend out, but clearly I was wrong."

"I left something undone for a few hours while I went off, but I honestly thought it wouldn't make a difference. It wasn't time critical, just some research about old legends. I still don't know what was so important about it... When I was called to answer for my mistake, I couldn't take it. I resigned, left Canterlot altogether, told myself it was better to avoid causing further

embarrassment."

She hung her head. "I'm beginning to realise that it was a selfish option, and a cowardly one. I should have stayed, taken my lumps, even if the end result would most likely have been the same, leaving Canterlot in disgrace. After the Summer Sun Celebration I'll go back, find out exactly what was so terrible about what I didn't get done, and face whatever punishment I have coming. I just hope I have here to come back to afterwards."

Applejack looked at her askance and asked, "No-pony got hurt did they?"

"NO!" Twilight exclaimed. She felt guilty in that it wasn't exactly true, the whole mess with Blueblood, Spike being left alone, there had been several people hurt. "Not directly, anyway, but I'm beginning to realise that my leaving may have hurt quite a few people. I swear, I never imagined any-pony would get hurt or I'd never have left my library!"

That was the truth. Even Celestia would ultimately have come out of it wiser, however much she might be worried in the short term. Applejack looked closely at the pale blue unicorn, and finally nodded her head. "I guess that's fine. Though I'd like to know the full story."

Pinkie bounced up and down. "Oh oh! I bet she's Twilight Sparkle and the princess is the one she disappointed, and that the old legends are some secret for stopping some massive evil thingie that's going to appear..."

She came to a halt with a puzzled expression. "No, wait, if that was the case, why would the Princess want to send her to Ponyville rather than keeping her in the library to finish her research? Silly me!"

She slapped the side of her head with her hoof as Twilight goggled. Then she gave a sigh. "Well, you got the first bit right."

That managed to produce as fine a crop of double-takes as had ever been seen. She waved a hoof to stop the inevitable exclamations.

"But please, can every-pony keep it to themselves? I'm known as Codex here, and I'd like to have a bit more time to be just Codex before I have to deal with whatever Twilight Sparkle has coming. But you're also right, if there was some big threat on the horizon, Princess Celestia would surely have told me right out, given me time to prepare."

Rainbow Dash flew down beside Pinkie Pie. "But how the hey did you figure that out?"

"Well, duh!" The pink pony exclaimed. "We get told about a pony who'd vanished from Canterlot mysteriously by Blueblood, obviously it's foreshadowing the big reveal that the pony is our new friend who comes from Canterlot and appeared mysteriously."

"And my friend is a baby dragon called Spike, and blue garnets are his favourite food." Twilight added.

"Oh my!" Fluttershy was suddenly beside her, and beside herself. "You have a baby dragon?"

"He was my number one assistant. I take care of him, and vice versa. I'll try and set up a chance to meet him, if Princess Celestia lets me anywhere near him after the way I messed up."

Twilight was surprised when she reached the Town Hall and saw Shining Armour there as part of the Royal Guard detail. Not only was his presence a surprise, but the fact that he in his uniform clearly identified him as Captain of the Guard. That shouldn't have happened for several months yet... Then her in-loop memories told her that it had happened, and that she'd just sent a note congratulating him.

'Princess Celestia was right about one thing, I desperately needed to get out and make some friends. Just a note? For my BBBFF? Some LSBFF I turned out to be. I was well on my way to going completely Starswirl!'

She took pride in the fact that he didn't give her a second glance as she went in the main doors with her new friends. There were other changes, a couple of small but elegant air-boats and a couple of fancy carriages parked nearby. Blueblood was inside, making small talk with a number of wealthy looking unicorns and earth-ponies, she recognised Fancy Pants and Fleur De Lys among them, and along with Filthy Rich.

Events inside unfolded as they had a hundred times before, Fluttershy conducted her bird chorus fanfare, the mayor gave her speech, and Twilight watched out of the corner of her eye as the four stars of the conjunction approached the moon, and vanished behind it, causing the image of the mare in the moon to disappear.

Her magical senses were far more acute than they'd once been, and the passive magical detection spell she'd cast didn't hurt. She could feel the bright shining beacon of Princess Celestia's aura, hidden away in the back room behind the curtains, and the surge as it was engulfed and extinguished by the shadowed aura of Nightmare Moon.

"...Princess Celestia!"

The gasps of shock as the opened curtains revealed the total lack of Princesses or a reasonable facsimile were as nothing to the shock and awe as a cloud of star-shot purple mist appeared on the dias and resolved itself into Nightmare Moon.

"Oh, my beloved subjects. It's been so long since I've seen your precious, little sun-loving faces."

Standard speech, same old, same old... wait, there were more pegasus guards than usual, and they were manoeuvring dark clouds into position in the rafters.

"What have you done with our Princess!" Rainbow Dash yelled, charging, and was as always restrained by Applejack.

Blueblood of all ponies joined in. "Yes, tell us where she is at

once!"

The mare no longer in the moon chuckled. "Why, am I not royal enough for you? Don't you know who I am?"

"Ooh, ooh, more guessing games! Um, Hokey Smokes! How about... Queen Meanie!" Pinkie Pie exclaimed. "No! Black Snooty, Black Snooty!"

"Wrong, she's obviously a crazy party-crashing Nightmare Night reject." Twilight suggested. "Go home! You're months early! And those wings and horn look fake! Get off-stage and let the Princess get out!"

While she was calling the villain out, she also scooped up Fluttershy with her telekinesis and brought them down to the main floor. She was about to do the same for Rarity when her brother's horn glowed and swept her down to him. Rarity realised who'd carried her away and looked worshipfully at him.

"Yeah! Tell us where the Princess is!" "Boo!" "Spoilsport!" "Lame!" The other ponies started heckling her. The three future crusaders started throwing candy at her. Meanwhile the guards on the ground were clearly moving into position at a signal from Shining Armour.

The look on Nightmare Moon's face went from smug to furious, and lightning cracked around her, silencing every-pony. "I will not stand for this disrespect! I am Nightmare Moon! Sister of Celestia and Princess of all Equestria!"

"You lost any right to that title a millennium ago, when you turned on your sister and the ponies you were supposed to protect, and tried to bring eternal night!" Shining Armour had stepped forward, horn glowing. Twilight felt the Message spell trigger as he said, more quietly. "Sergeant, clear the civilians out."

Twilight suddenly realised what this all meant. He couldn't be thinking...

Nightmare Moon was too wrapped up in her boasting to see the movement in the crowd below her. "And this time I shall! My oh so precious sister is bound in the sun, where she will stay! I control the sun and moon now, and I will do so, forever!"

Lightning crackled around her again, but Shining Armour called out, "Not on my watch! Luna, once Princess of Equestria and self-styled Nightmare Moon, you are hereby charged with high treason, the assault and kidnapping of Princess Celestia and making hackneyed villain speeches! Surrender or we will use force!"

Oh dear Celestia! Her brother was going to try and arrest her!

"Ha!" Nightmare Moon sneered. "You pathetic ponies should be taking my orders!"

"Very well, all pegasi fire! Full charge!" A dozen massive lightning bolts jumped from the cloud and enveloped Nightmare Moon. The balcony was splintered in seconds, too fast to even catch fire, and Shining Armour, and two other unicorns of the Royal Guard who'd been standing

well back came together and cast a purple containment shield that closed around her. Prince Blueblood charged up a few seconds later, horn glowing, but Shining Armour waved him off with a hoof. "Don't, you'll destabilise it... help get every-pony out of here!".

For a wild moment Twilight wondered if they could actually do it, then felt Nightmare Moon's power surge. This was far more than her usual casual lightning slap to knock away the guards sent to seize her. She was drawing power from somewhere, enough to respond with enough power to burn out their horns, maybe even kill them.

The sky outside lightened towards pre-dawn, and she made the connection. Celestia must still be fighting to break free! But it wouldn't be in time to save her brother! Without further thought she jumped in beside him and covered them with a shield of her own, just as the purple sphere enclosing Nightmare Moon shattered and a blast of dark energy surged from her horn to strike at them.

It spent it's energy smashing the shield, shattering into smaller streamers and sending the four unicorns sprawling backwards, but Nightmare Moon looked visibly weaker afterwards. She turned her face to the lightening horizon with an expression of fear and hate. Her horn glowed a fierce black, and the sky darkened again, but it clearly exhausted her. Before any-pony could do anything about it, she turned into a cloud of black mist and swept away.

"uhhh..." Shining Armour shook his head as he pulled himself up. "Thank you miss... You saved our lives."

Twilight was pony-piled by her friends. "Codex dear, are you alright!" "Whoa! That was awesome!" "Ohh ohh! Do it again!"

Twilight lifted herself to her feet with a glow of her horn and shook herself. Her pince-nez glasses were missing and her mane was in disarray. "Cast another shield right now! Expand it out to cover the Town Hall and encompass every-pony."

"Uh... what?" asked the confused unicorn stallion.

"Now, please!" She pleaded. He cast the spell and another bubble expanded out from his horn, engulfing the others and expanding. As he did, her horn glowed and she added her own spell to the flow of power. The spell passed through the walls of the town hall, and the sky outside seemed to lighten, triggering gasps of awe from many of the ponies.

The mayor had managed to make her way over, glancing up at the dawn light outside the windows. "What did you just do? Did you just raise the sun?"

"I'm afraid not." Twilight sighed. "I just added a daylight effect to the interior of Shining Armour's spell. That Nightmare Moon seemed terrified of the dawn. If she is a creature of night, she should be unable to snoop inside this bubble, for as long as it lasts."

"That was some pretty ingenious spell-work, miss..."

"Codex." That would do for now. To be honest, she was half ready to give up the whole deception, but now wasn't the time for long explanations. "It's only a stop-gap measure, but it's all I could

come up with. We need time to prepare, time to research, to figure out how to stop her. Even a unicorn triune couldn't contain her, though it's clear she's using power for something else."

"You know, Miss Codex," the Royal Guard Captain said, "you remind me a lot of my little sister."

Rarity wilted a bit. The oh-so-dashing stallion was interested in the librarian instead.

"I should. I'd say that I know Twilight Sparkle pretty well." Twilight said. "After all, she spends a lot of time in the library."

That perked Rarity right up. This was Twilight's brother? That had possibilities...

Shining Armor smiled. "You're one of Twilie's friends? That's great! To be honest, Mom, Dad, and I have been worried that she wasn't getting out much. Even Cadie's worried..."

Rarity's defeat was total. She could hear the affection in that pet name... This was just. The. Worst. Possible. Thing...

That was quickly overshadowed by a cry from Applejack. She was standing by an oddly shaped bush, no a pair of bushes, one wrapped around another almost protectively. It was like natural topiary, in the shape of two ponies, a bigger one shielding the smaller one, with a familiar red bow bound into it's branches.

"I saw her run back in... Big Mac tried to fetch her, and then they were hit by one of those splashes of magic when it broke on your shield..." The earth-pony was distraught.

Twilight was stricken. Things had really gotten out of control. She cast a quick diagnostic spell and heaved a big sigh of relief. "They're alive and aware, just trapped in those forms. Nightmare Moon must have wanted trophies she could gloat over. It should be possible to turn them back..."

"Then do it!" Applejack demanded.

Twilight could do it, but only by going full alicorn. The best in-loop Twilight could do was... "A unicorn can't overpower alicorn magic, and Princess Cadence isn't a magic specialist. I can give them mobility, alter the transformation. It shouldn't affect turning them back when we have the power available..."

Her horn glowed and the two tree shapes shifted, twisted. They fell apart, then got to their hooves, or rather paws. Two timber wolves stood there, one taller than Shining Armour, the other just a puppy with big mossy feet, but still as big as most of the ponies there. However, both had glowing green eyes, and a full set of thorny claws and sharpened stakes for teeth.

Applejack scrambled a few steps back, falling on her rump, and she wasn't the only one. "Big Mac? Is that you in there?"

"Eyup!" The voice was the stallion's. He shook his head, which had a thatch of yellow grass. "At least I reckon so."

The littler timber wolf spoke in "Oh wow! That was so neat!" She plucked at her head which had a coating of reddish orange leaves, emulating her mane style.

The two bigger members of the Apple family galloped over to grab her in a three way hug, which resulted in several scratches for Applejack.

Twilight shook her head. "I'm sorry, I was going for tree-ponies, but the existing magic fought me."

"Of course it would, there are only two of them, silly!" Pinkie Pie interjected.

"This was the best I could do. Applejack, I am so sorry..."

The earth-pony looked back at her, but her expression wasn't angry. "It's okay Twilight, you couldn't know this would happen, and you've done your best to fix it."

"Twilight!" Shining Armour exclaimed.

"Oh, horse-apples." Twilight turned to her brother and let her disguise drop. "Yes, it's me."

"But what are you doing here?! Do you know how worried every-pony's been about you? Why were you disguised as somepony else?"

"Because Codex never failed her princess, either by being less than the perfect student Princess Celestia wanted me to be, or running away rather than facing the music when I eventually fell short of her expectations. Codex isn't going to be spoken of in the same tone as Sunset Shimmer! Twilight Sparkle is going to have to face Princess Celestia and be formally dismissed as her personal student, and all because I took Spike to that party!

"Maybe you and the rest of the family were worried about my not making any friends, but Princess Celestia clearly thinks differently. Though if those old legends were about the return of Nightmare Moon, I can see why they were important. Even so, if Princess Celestia had given any indication of their importance, I'd have stayed in my tower and get some-pony else to escort Spike! Though a couple of hours wouldn't have made much difference, I could have stayed for the whole party and still read all those books before today!"

"Hold on a second!" Rainbow Dash exclaimed. "That's why Princess Celestia was going to dismiss you? Because you took a couple of hours off to go to as party?"

"Yes!" Twilight exclaimed. "Her previous student, Sunset Shimmer had the talent, the ability to be a great mage. But she wasn't willing to work for it, and bailed on the Princess when she wasn't allowed access to all the high level magics before mastering the lesser ones. Then she took me on, and I'd been fascinated by magic ever since the Summer Sun Celebration when I was a foal, where I first saw the Princess raised the sun. It was about the biggest honour imaginable, and I swore never to let anything get in the way of studying, never to become another Sunset Shimmer.

"I'd already built good study habits, and I stuck to them, not letting anything distract me, such as a social life, or making friends. I had Spike, and Cadence, and my BBBFF... Big Brother Best Friend Forever. And of course Princess Celestia herself. I didn't think I needed any other friends, and Princess Celestia agreed. She never suggested I try and make any, at least.

"Then I went to that party Moondancer was holding, because Spike had a crush on her and I wanted to see him safely there. I only meant to stay for a few minutes, see him settled, but I got talking to ponies and I found out I was wrong. Ponies I'd only ever known as exam scores were suddenly real to me, and finding out about them was fun! I could even help them with their studies, and actually using my knowledge felt wonderful too!

"Then I got the letter, right in the middle of the party, summoning me to her at once, none of the normal pleasantries she always puts in. She wouldn't have done that unless she was displeased with me. I realised that she must think I was starting down the path Sunset Shimmer had, and that she probably wasn't going to take chances."

She sighed. "I lost it, I can admit that now, but at the time all I could think of was that I'd failed, and all I wanted to do was hide in a hole somewhere and pull the hole in after me. That's what Codex was all about, finding out about this library job in Ponyville on the train seemed perfect, but I needed to be some-pony who didn't have Twilight Sparkle's baggage. Who was still allowed to make friends. So I hid..."

"I don't believe it!" Blueblood had arrived back inside and had stormed up. "So all the time it was you?! She was probably just summoning you to send you to oversee the Summer Sun Celebrations!"

"How could I possibly have thought that?!" Twilight shouted back, then stopped herself. "I'm sorry, I know it affected you... but to be honest, you make more sense as Overseer than I do. I've never performed any kind of official function before, my strength is research, not socialising with ponies, I am in every possible way one of the least likely ponies in Canterlot to be picked for it. Maybe she did, but that was before I messed up."

Astoundingly Blueblood cracked a smirk. "And yet, in a single day, you manage to insinuate yourself into this town, bring together a group of ponies and get them to follow you, even face down a Prince. I've heard auntie talk about your organising abilities too."

"That's just, I mean... I didn't..." Twilight gave up, and rolled her eyes. "Okay, so you have a point. But look at it from my point of view, I get interrupted and called up on the carpet after abandoning my studies to make some friends, the last thing I'd expect would to be told was to abandon my studies, go to Ponyville to be Royal Overseer for the Summer Sun Celebration, and make some friends. It makes no sense!"

In loop that was absolutely true. Indeed, that was the whole point of everything she'd done this loop.

"It all makes sense, if you knew what everything that was going on."



Shining Armour had been listening the whole time, rather than jumping in. He wanted to get Twilight's side of things. It was clear Princess Celestia had been pretty much on the money, as usual.

"Those old legends you were supposed to read, they did explain about Nightmare Moon. They also explained how Princess Celestia used some artifacts called the Elements of Harmony to seal her in the moon." He gave the story the Princess had told him, including the belief that Luna had been turned into Nightmare Moon by some sort of corrupting entity.

Rainbow Dash gave forth her two bits worth. "So why didn't the princess just haul out the Elements again and zap her when she got back?"

"Because using the Elements like that wrecked them, the books just say they were lost, but before then the two sisters always worked together to wield them, and their bond of friendship was one of the things that made them work. Turning them against Luna meant she could only use them at a fraction of their full power, meaning she was only able to banish her rather than heal her.

"Even doing that much wrecked them beyond repair, leaving husks, a set of plain rocks. Also, from the way she acted, I think she and Luna were as close as Twily and I. Banishing her must have been like ripping her heart in half. Even if she could, I don't think she would."

Twilight mused. "Presumably there's some way to restore them to full power, and she believed I could find it, though what I can do that a full powered alicorn princess couldn't escapes me. Wait... there was a book I found when I was cleaning up the library, 'The Elements of Harmony, A Reference Guide'. Some-pony has filed it under 'E' in the fiction section. I put it in it's proper place in the reference section, under 'Myths and Legends'."

Shining Armour chuckled. "I should have guessed you'd figure it out. Apparently, on the day you got your cutie-mark, when you went all super-Starswirl, she sensed that the elements had been reborn and that you had a connection to them. Did you read the book?"

"No, I just filed it, if I'd started reading the books I'd have never gotten anything done. How's the spell holding up?"

Shining Armour looked surprised at the question. "At this size, I can keep it going for hours."

"Then we should get over to the library with you keeping the spell over us."

&&&

In practice, they couldn't get to the library right away as they had to calm down a large heard of frightened ponies. But with the mayor to calm the Ponyvillians and Blueblood to deal with the Canterlot group, they managed to convince every-pony that a solution was being found.

To reassure them, Twilight ended up having to create a ward matrix for Shining Armour to transfer the original shield spell to, powered

by the other two unicorn guards to maintain a shield over the town hall, while the pair duplicated the spell to cover the smaller group. Shining Armour found he couldn't maintain the shield while moving, and they had to redo it when they reached the library.

'There are six Elements of Harmony, but only five are known: Kindness, Laughter, Generosity, Honesty and Loyalty. The sixth is a complete mystery. When the five are present, a spark will cause the sixth Element to be revealed. It is said, the last known location of the five elements was in the ancient castle of the royal pony sisters. It is located in what is now the Everfree Forest.'

That got almost universal shudders from the Ponyville contingent, but Twilight looked confused. "That's it? I mean if the final confrontation took place there then, yes, that makes sense, but logically, the only pony who could have written this was Princess Celestia herself. How could any of it be a mystery to her? Why hide all the clues so cryptically?"

"She didn't want some-pony unworthy to find out all the information, and learn how to use the elements. In the wrong hooves, they could be as big a threat as Nightmare Moon."

"But if only I have the connection needed to reawaken them..."

"She didn't know that until long after these books were written."

"So she was going to send me to Ponyville as it's the closest town to the Everfree Forest, and hope I'd join the dots. I can see why she wanted some-pony who'd rather be with books than friends... at least till recently." She looked around at the five ponies who'd followed her. Plus Blueblood, and Applejack's family, who she refused to leave alone.

"She admitted she'd made a mistake, several mistakes in how she handled this situation. She was going to summon you, and tell you some of this herself. In fact, she decided to tell me the rest of it, so I could pass it on to you when I found you."

"That sounds more sensible, but then why did you pull that stunt in the Town Hall?"

"I hoped we could contain her, force her to release the Princess or at least keep her from doing any more damage until you had the Elements ready to use."

"So what is the other part of what I needed to work out?"

"The husks in the old Royal palace are only half of the equation. The spirits of the Elements were reborn in the souls of five ponies, who she believed now live in Ponyville. But how you're going to find them..."

"Oh, oh! I know, maybe the five of us are the five elements!" Pinkie called out.

"Sugarcube, that'd be neat and all, but what're the chances?" Applejack replied. "I mean ain't none of us ever met her before yesterday. You heard her brother say she had to have some kinda

connection from when she got her cutie-mark..."

Twilight looked around. "Did any of you ever come to Canterlot when you were fillies? When I got my cutie-mark, it was the day I was doing my entrance exam for Princess Celestia's school for Gifted Unicorns. And failing, the magic just wouldn't come, until I saw a rainbow light in the sky. It unlocked something inside me... Dash, were you flying overhead...? No it looked more like an explosion."

"Never flew to Canterlot before today, though when I got my cutie-mark I did a Sonic Rainboom. Could that be the explosion you saw?"

"Ohmigosh!" Pinkie Pie exclaimed. "I saw a rainbow coloured boom when I was working on my family's rock farm. It made me feel all happy and light, and I wanted to share that feeling, so I threw my first party and got my cutie-mark!"

"I discovered my talent for creating fabulous designs when a rainbow shock-wave broke open a geode full of gems." Rarity interjected.

"And I was in Manehattan, tryin' to be a fancy pony when I saw a rainbow from the direction of Ponyville. It made me realise where I belonged, right back on Sweet Apple Acres. I guess you were right Pinkie, if Fluttershy can say the same thing."

The yellow pegasus cringed under the attention, but managed to get out. "Well, I did discover my talent for understanding animals when a rainbow explosion in the sky scared the poor things. Is that what you meant?"

Twilight grinned inwardly. If only they'd made this kind of connection the first time round. She gave a date, and they all agreed with it.

"Then I guess we've got the beginnings of a plan. It's even obvious who's who. Pinkie Pie, who cheered me up when I was about as low as I could go is the spirit of laughter. Applejack, the pony who wanted to do things the right way rather than cheat, even against an unfair opponent, has to be the spirit of honesty. Rarity, who took in a pony off the street and made her welcome, and used her own gems to make the celebration shine is the spirit of generosity. Rainbow Dash, who leaped in to protect Fluttershy and would have charged Nightmare Moon to protect her friends is the spirit of loyalty. Finally, Fluttershy, who cares for all the animals is the spirit of kindness."

"So all you need is the husks and a lightning spell, and you're set!" Shining Armour said with a relieved expression.

"That's awfully literal." Twilight thought out loud. "Maybe it's a spark of inspiration, of friendship, as they gave me their friendship, inspired me to stop feeling sorry for myself and try and make up for the mess I made... we are still friends, aren't we?"

"Yes! Awesomest best friends!" Pinkie bounced around.

"Then that makes me the sixth element bearer, whatever it is. I guess

all we have to do is get to the husks, and that should reunite them with the spirits and create the sixth element."

"Uh, what happens to us?" Rainbow asked. "Not that I'm worried or anything..."

"No, good question." Twilight replied. "They won't suck you in or anything like that. Best guess, you'll get a new piece of jewelry or something similar. You are now the spirits of the elements and the husks will bond to you, not the other way round."

"You're forgetting that those things are halfway across the Everfree Forest." Rarity shuddered. "Having to walk all that way through the creepy forest at night, not to mention the muck. Well, if we must, then we must."

"I believe I can supply a solution." Blueblood offered. "My private and exceptionally luxurious air-yacht is moored by the town hall. And my talent is navigation." He pointed his horn back along his flank at the compass rose cutie-mark.

"Twily, I think you should have me along too." Shining Armour said. "If you're going to be working on the Elements, you won't be able to protect yourself. I can provide you with shield spells."

Big Mac rumbled. "I reckon if Prince Blueblood's ship can carry us all, I should come along too. I don't know this magic stuff from a bushel of apples, but I can protect Applejack, and all of you fillies."

"Oh, oh! Me too!" Apple Bloom piped up.

"Uh huh, you young filly are going to plant yourself right here!" Applejack replied.

"Awww!" The earth-pony turned tree-puppy pouted, which looked really odd on a timber wolf face.

Twilight hadn't expected the offers of help, but she wasn't going to turn them down. All she really wanted to do was get the quest over with as quickly as possible. From what her brother had said, her plan had succeeded perfectly, which didn't explain why she felt so rotten about it. When this was all over, she was going to have a long talk with the Princess.

She still considered the way the princess had handled things wrong, but that didn't mean that Twilight's response was right. Maybe if she'd just discussed her concerns, that might have been an alternative solution. But she was set in this course, and if she couldn't go back and do things differently (at least until next loop) she could make sure this adventure would have a happy ending.

"Okay, then!" She said, looking around the expanded fellowship of the elements. "Let's go!"

Omake (with polish from Capt Crysallid)

"You have my air-ship!" declaimed Prince Blueblood.

"And my horn!" Shining Armour added.

"And my claws!" Big Mac finished. "What? You were expecting an axe?"

Omake 2 (by Capt Crysallid)

"One does not simply \_trot\_ into Everfree," Blueblood tried to explain, only to be shot by arrows out of nowhere. "Good lord! This isn't even Act Three yet and already with the arrows?!"

\* \* \*

><p>22.6<p>

"Okay," Rarity said, nodding firmly to herself. "Here we go."

She trotted forward, broke into a run, ascended on the move, spread her wings and leapt.

There was a moment of fear, as she felt herself free-falling, but she'd already begun the first wingbeat and felt the new-yet-familiar appendages push her bodily skywards.

Again. Again. And then some invisible connection was made in her mind, because the next wingbeat used a healthy dose of weather magic and sent her \_soaring.\_ The feeling was so incredible that she repeated it three more times in a row, before settling into more of a glide.

Looking down, Rarity felt another momentary stab of terror, as she realized just how high she was. But a familiar pair of leathery wings below her banished the fear in a rush of warmth, and of love.

Spike gradually climbed to her height, coasting on a thermal. "Not so bad after all, is it?"

"Not when you're here," she replied. "Just knowing you \_could\_ catch me, it puts my mind at rest."

He gave her a quick smile. "Shall we head over there? I packed lunch."

Following his pointing finger, Rarity saw a clearing a few miles off with a rock formation in the middle. "Yes, that looks nice."

\* \* \*

><p>Her landing wasn't precisely perfect, but nor was it the crash she half-dreaded. It just felt easier to let her wings and her new weather magic do the work, and so she wasn't moving fast enough to do anything more than stumble.<p>

Spike made a far more dramatic four-point landing, dropping straight down the last few metres to end in a crouch balanced by tail and one hand.

"Show off," Rarity twitted him, not concealing her relief at being on solid ground again.

And yet, as they ate lunch (mica sandwiches for Spike and chestnuts

for her), Rarity found herself tempted constantly to rush the meal.

Once she was done, Spike gave her a knowing grin as she impatiently waited for him to finish.

"Anxious to get back up there?" he asked.

"Iâ€| yes, actually," Rarity admitted.

"Once you have tasted flight, you will walk the earth with your eyes turned skywards; for there you have been, and there you will long to return."

"That's nice. Who's it from?"

"What, you don't think I came up with it?" Spike raised an eyebrow.

"No." Rarity replied flatly, hoof to her mouth to hold in a snigger.

"Some human called Leonardo. He invented flying machines in their worldâ€| or something? I can't remember the details. What I do remember is that he never flew in his life." Spike polished off the sandwich. "He was spot on, though."

"Yes, he was." Rarity rolled the words around her head. She was still scared of flying, but somehow the fear hadâ€| changed. It wasn't the fear of death any more.

It was the kind of fear you got when going on a roller coaster. The kind of fear that shivered down your spine when you were reading a scary book.

The kind of fear that only made the enjoyment sharper.

"Catch me if you can!" she said suddenly, and leapt skywards. Spike's shout of surprise followed by laughter chased her up, and then she heard one of his own slamming launch wingbeats.

Just maybe, Dash had the right personality for flying, as well as the talent. Grasp the moment with all four hooves, and hang the consequences.

Rarity turned aside, dodging a rapidly ascending Spike. Now, how to keep away from a large and determined dragonâ€| at least until she could get him to take a dunk in the lakeâ€|

Best to wash down your lunch, after all.

\* \* \*

><p>22.7<p>

"Spike!" Twilight said, turning.

"Yeah?" The dragon barely looked up from his book. "What is â€"whoa!"

His threat sense abruptly jangled, and an outflung hand stopped the flying ball an inch from hitting him on the forehead. "What gives, Twi?"

"More evidence for one of my theses!" Twilight answered, grinning. "Excellent data point, by the way."

"What did I even do?" Spike picked the ball out of the air.

"Easy. Your reflex action was to use the Force." Twilight bounced another ball on the ground.

"So?"

"As far as I have been able to prove, the first few loops â€" and especially the first few \_fused\_ loops â€" of a recently awakened Looper could be called 'formative'." She lobbed the ball out of the window, and Scootaloo pinged it back with blurring speed. "Basically, one of your first loops was the Jedi loop, and so it's one of the ones which had an unusual impact on you."

"Okayâ€|" Spike nodded slowly. "Well, there are worse loops to have that happen with."

"Yes, true." Twilight paused, imagining what Spike would be like without the moderating influence of a life trained as Obi-Wan Kenobi.

Though it \_had\_ still taken him decades to properly get the impulse control side of it down pat.

\* \* \*

><p>22.8<p>

Twilight looked around, then concentrated. There was something on the edge of perceptionâ€|

With an almost audible \_click\_, words and images appeared. A list, and:

Select class.

"What?" She looked along the list. Some of them were greyed out, others lit up. "Erâ€| I guessâ€| wizard?"

Wizard selected.

Statistics flowed past, too fast to properly perceive, then she was standing in an inn and wearing a pointy hat and long robes tailored for the unicorn she still was. A further check revealed she had a book of spells, an owl for a familiar, and a couple of dozen gold pieces.

The doorbell jangled, and Twilight felt a smile steal over her as Pinkie Pie bounced into the inn with a balalaika slung over her back.

"Ooh, hi Twilight!" Pinkie said, grinning back. "What are you this time?"

"Erâ€¦ a Wizard, I suppose."

"I'm a Bard!" Pinkie demonstrated by playing some chords on the instrumentâ€¦ somehow. "I don't just play music â€" here, it's\_ magical\_ music!"

"That sounds useful." Twilight frowned, struck by a thought. "Any idea what's going on?"

"We~ll, I think we All Meet In An Inn!" Pinkie spun back towards the door as it opened again. "Wonder who this is!"

It turned out to be Fluttershy, with a bunny rabbit sitting on her head; presumably Angel. Part of Twilight's loop memories told her that the cream-coloured pegasus was a 'Druid'.

"All of us?" Twilight asked, as she waved Fluttershy over. "Hi, 'shy. Nice to see you."

"Tâ€¦thank you," Fluttershy replied. "Are the others here?"

"Don't know yet, but I suspect so." Twilight looked Fluttershy over closely. "Are you a spellcaster as well this time?"

"Druids use plant magic!" Pinkie answered for her. "And animal magic. So, kinda what Fluttershy does anyway! I wonder what Applejack's going to be?"

As it happened, despite the obvious cue, it was Dash through the door next. She had a slim knotted rope around her forehead and was wearing a simple \_gi.\_

"Monk? Really?" Pinkie said, then shrugged. "Guess they \_are\_ the fastest."

"Yep!" Dash reared back and did a few demonstration moves. "Nothing better for the fastest pegasus in Equestria!"

"But we're not \_in\_ Equestria," Twilight pointed out.

"Same difference." Dash landed back on her hooves. "So, what's going on?"

The door slammed open again, and Rarity swanned in followed by a very ill-tempered cat.

"Sorcerer," Pinkie noted. "Ooh, she's got a familiar as well!"

Angel Bunny locked eyes with Opalescent and made quite clear what the price of provoking him would be. He was quite eloquent with his hand gestures.

"This world seems wonderful," Rarity said, lights dancing around her. "I've already learned three new spells, and I can just feel more waiting to be learned!"

"That's how your class works, yep," Pinkie nodded.

"How do you know all this?" Twilight asked.



"Bardic Knowledge!" she answered, with a huge grin. "In practice, it just means I have this with me!"

The pink pony rummaged in her mane and pulled out a large, thick, hardbacked book. It made a \_slam\_ when it landed on the table.

Twilight picked it up. "Player's Handbook?"

"It's a great read!"

The door swung open one final time, and Applejack joined them.

"Oohâ€|" Pinkie looked her over. "Barbarian? Interesting choice."

"Don't you be makin' any jokes about book learnin'," Applejack warned Pinkie, "or we see how angry ah can get."

"Right!" The pink pony brushed off the threat. "Now we've All Met In An Inn, we need an Adventure Hook."

What looked like a human â€" but with pointy ears â€" handed Pinkie an envelope.

"Thanks, NPC! Oh, guys, this is Nathan Percy Chapham. I talked to him before the rest of you turned up â€" he knows everything that's going on around here. He's an elf!"

Twilight could feel a headache coming on. "There's this whole set of rules here that I'm not getting, right?"

"Yep!" Pinkie gave her a kind smile. "But just read that book, you'll start to understand. Come on, everypony, apparently there's treasure and stuff at the Keep on the Borderlands!"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Yep, more Turning the Tables.

>Crossovers:<br>22.1 isn't - they just acted like it was MiB. It's really a standard thriller plotline.

>22.2: Kerbal Space Program.<br>22.8 - Dungeons and Dragons.

>Also, there's one I did but was advised might be a bit controversial. It's a Prince of Egypt crossover, and can be found here:<br>posts/11530616/  
>or here:<br>/0lri60x76uvn

or below the fold, in case the links don't work:

\* \* \*

><p>22.x<p>

"â€|well, I wasn't expecting this," Twilight said distantly.

She was in some kind of semi-desert, wearing robes that weren't well

tailored for her unicorn body, and feeling parched. Oh, and there was a burning bush in front of her.

\*\*\*"And thenceforth â€" wait, what's going on? Where am I?"\*\* The bush flashed, and a middle-aged human woman was standing there instead. "Wait. Twilight?"

"Princess Celestia?" Twilight managed, and a snippet from her loop memories suggested that human was the normal body shape around here. "What on Equ-no, wait. What on \_earth\_ has happened to us?" While she tried to work out what was going on, she cast some spells on the ground to pull up water from an aquifer and took a much-needed drink.

"I would appear to be one of the local gods," Celestia said, still sounding a bit confused. "And it also looks like your brother is in charge of Egypt, and that... he hasâ€" okay, this is just ridiculous."

"What?" Twilight asked.

"Egyptians keep unicorns as slaves, apparently." Celestia shrugged. "I have no idea why they don't just teleport out, and I don't think the Loop does either."

"Wait." Twilight scanned her memory. "I was apparently raised in the human royal familyâ€" without anyone noticing I'm a unicorn."

Celestia shrugged. "I don't know either. Hmm, that might be interesting, thoughâ€" "

"What?"

"If I'm the goddess of the unicorns, and I'm human, then the fact that the head deities of the human pantheon are apparently three female alicorns might be of note."

And with that, the last connections fell into place.

"Oh, this is just perfect," Twilight sighed, remembering her pre-loop self somehow offending all three of the leaders of the divine pantheonâ€" her sister-in-law, her adoptive daughter, and said daughter's prime self. "Who ordered \_this?\_"

"I suggest we break with the script," Celestia said, snapping her fingers. Both of them rose into the air. "I hereby make you my prophet for the loop, go free the unicorns. I strongly encourage asking nicely."

\* \* \*

><p>"Let my people go!"<p>

"Okay." Pharaoh Shining the Armoured said, then pointed to a priest. "You heard her. Get to it."

The priests all looked nonplussed. "Butâ€" we had a dance routine all lined up!"

"And why should we listen to her anyway?" the hierophant asked, throwing a dirty look to his initiates.

"Wellâ€¦" Twilight spun her staff. "I'm a princess, right?"

"The gods showed their disfavour for you!" He shook his head. The very picture of a wise man, chastising errant children. "As such, your words have no weight until and unless you make amends."

Light flared in the audience room.

"WE FORGIVE HER," Luna-Ra boomed.

"Yep!" Nyx added. "No problems here!"

Both alicorns paused. Then Nyx sighed. "Cadence?"

The third of their number looked up from where Pharaoh Shining was stroking her with a brush. "Sorry, did you say something?"

"We need to officially forgive Twilight!"

"Oh. Done." Cadence waved a hoof, then cricked her neck. "Yeah, just a couple of knots near the tips there, Shiny. Thanks."

"So," Twilight said brightly. "That emancipation?"

\* \* \*

><p>"We went so far off script it's gone from funny to hilarious," Shining said that evening, watching several priests â€" unicorn and human both â€" trying to reconcile Celestia's existence with that of Luna.<p>

Twilight sat down next to him. "Yeah. But better this than those plagues."

"What would you have done if I wasn't Awake?" Shining then asked. "Out of curiosity, I mean."

"Bit of creative modification of the plagues." She began crafting illusions. "I'm particularly proud of the River of Cola, and the Plague of Frog."

"Liberation through the bizarre?" Shining grinned. "I like it."

"Well, yeah. I mean, it's not as if the citizens did anything wrongâ€¦"

## 23. Chapter 23

### 23.1

"Do you know," Temeraire said, craning his neck to look at Lawrence, "I do wonder whether we might not interfere with Trafalgar this time."

"Might be an idea, yes." The British Dragoncorps Captain rubbed his

chin. "Perhaps, if Admiral Nelson is or feels indebted to us, then he might be more inclined to consider your proposals earlier. And, of course," Lawrence gave a warm smile to his partner, "since he is a kind man, though at times a man who does not suffer fools, it might be that he would consider granting you commission."

"I do enjoy receiving a commission" Temeraire mused. "Though not at the cost of an invasion of Britain. Have you had any thoughts on my cousin, might I enquire?"

Lawrence winced. Trying to work out how to head off the situation with Lien was never easy "ensuring that her own partner survived was proving harder still than enfranchising dragons, and they could never be remotely sure of either in any given loop.

Then he looked up. "I say, that's unusual."

"What is it?" Temeraire raised his own head, and closed his eyes. "Yes, I can feel it as well. A kind of faint, singing magic."

"It reminds me of when we had Fallarnon and Mnementh to visit," Lawrence said. "I wonder who it is?"

"I hope it is Hiccup and Toothless." Temeraire blinked down at Lawrence. "It does not feel precisely like Fallarnon and Mnementh, though perhaps it is instead Twoflower and Ninereeds " we have not seen them in a while."

"Then come along, dear heart," Lawrence said, making the harness ready for a solo flight. "I am sure they will not begrudge us a day or two to find out."

\* \* \*

><p>The young Celestial circled over Dover. "It is certainly from here," he commented to Lawrence, "though I am at a loss to determine who is not here or who is excess. Can you see anything?"<p>

Lawrence unshipped his telescope. "If you would hover for a moment, dear one, I might be able to check more closely."

"Of course." Temeraire backwinged, and moved his neck as best he could to cancel out the movement of his body.

"I say," Lawrence exclaimed, as the telescope revealed something he could not quite divine from on high. "That's not Lily, in her spot. It looks to be" well, whatever he or she is, that is a purple dragon. I think we should examine this more closely."

\* \* \*

><p>A slim young woman of about twenty-two nodded to Lawrence as he approached the strange dragon. "Good day " oh, Captain, I see. Well, good day to you, Captain."<p>

Lawrence noticed the matching insignia on her shoulders. "And to you, Captain"?"

"Rarity Harcourt," she replied promptly.

Temeraire could not quite restrain a gasp. "So you are the-

He pulled himself up at Lawrence's slight gesture.

"Yes, I'm a Looper," Rarity replied quietly. She paused. "I assume I'm replacing someone you know?"

"My lover," Lawrence answered.

"Well, no fear of my trying to take her place on that score." Rarity directed a fond look at the dragon lying in Lily's normal spot. "I'm spoken for, though I expect we'll have to avoid making that too clear this loop."

"What is his name?" Temeraire asked. "I would ask him, but it seems as though he is asleep."

"I was," the purple replied. "No harm done. I'm Spykoranuvellitar â€" you might be interested to know that this time around, at least, Britain has a flame-using dragon."

"Well, one before Iskierka, that is," Temeraire pointed out.

"Oh, you do normally get another?" Rarity asked. "We're not exactly familiar with this loop â€" I've been running off loop memories since I Awoke here."

"I see." Lawrence thought for a moment, then sat down. "Come on, dear one, it seems we must help a pair of hatchlings through the whirlpool of the Napoleonic Wars."

"Watch it!" Spykoran rumbled, chuckling. "I'm bigger than you two put together."

"For now," Temeraire said quickly, and stuck his tongue out.

"Dear one, I would appreciate it if you would not act like a day-old whelpâ€"|" Lawrence said, smiling broadly and shaking his head.

\* \* \*

><p>23.2 (22.8 continued)<p>

"Ah need some healin' over here," Applejack said lightly, lashing out with Rarity-modified Ember Celica and knocking a Lizardman for six.

"I got it! I got it!" Pinkie slid over to behind the Barbarian. "Cure light wounds!"

Applejack waited. "That's it? Ain't much healin'â€"|"

"Well, you could have tried being a Paladin or a Cleric." Pinkie finished the instrumental part and began singing again. \_"A land unknown we come so far, we ride the night 'till morning starâ€"|" \_

"Catchy," Dash commented, grinning as she bounced past AJ towards the main press of the enemy. "Ha, missed me!"

Twilight muttered under her breath. "Andâ€¦Web!"

"Whoah!" Dash twisted herself in an improbable way, and managed to avoid being stuck. "Watch where you're aiming!"

"With your Dex score and Evasion, you were in no danger!" Pinkie said knowledgeably in a brief gap in vocals.

"I guess I \_am\_ good at dodging," Dash admitted grudgingly, knocking two trapped Lizardman heads together with a swift kick.

Rarity salvoed off Magic Missiles, then tried a Glitterdust. "Take that! And that! Oh, you beasts, stop swarming Fluttershy!"

"â€¦leep?" Fluttershy managed. "Umâ€¦ tree shape?"

The lizardmen blinked.

"Where'd she go?" one of them asked, and then got kicked in the kneecap by Angel Bunny.

"That's kind of neat," Twilight muttered, watching as he took half the Lizardmen to pieces by himself. "Because he's so small, all that enhancement magic he gets from Fluttershy is compressed. And since it's Angel anywayâ€¦"

"That makes sense, ah thinkâ€¦" Appejack said, nursing a bruise. "Ooh, that's gonna be tenderâ€¦ Them clubs they got have metal cores, y'know."

Twilight winced sympathetically. "Ouchâ€¦"

"Yeah." AJ shrugged. "Ain't no real harm done, though."

Then she fell over.

Pinkie trotted over in turn and slapped another Cure spell on. "Barbarians get like this when their Rage runs out."

There was a sudden high-pitched \_oof\_ of pain, as one of the few remaining Lizardmen finally caught Angel with a club. The rabbit crashed off a wall and bounced to the floor, before rolling upright.

"You \_horrible\_ people!"

"Speaking of rageâ€¦" Twilight gulped, as the tree turned back into Fluttershy.

And then into a leopard.

"Ooh!" Pinkie grinned with a \_squeak\_ noise. "Ding, hello, level five!"

"Should weâ€¦ help?" Dash asked, pointing over to the few Lizardmen not unconscious on the floor. "I mean, I kinda feel sorry for themâ€¦"

"Well, they did give poor Appejack quite the beating before the rest of us got properly stuck inâ€¦" Rarity mused. "I say we give it a

minute."

"Fair enough," Twilight said, then lifted Angel off the floor. "Bad bunny, no putting the boot in."

Angel made a rude gesture involving a carrot.

"I don't wanna buck any more trees, grandmaâ€|" Applejack murmured, before pushing herself back upright. "Okay, who's got the health potions? Four fights in a row is one too many for my taste. Especially 'cuz I only \_got\_ two rages, and ah just used th' last one."

"Yes, you make a good point." Twilight examined her spell book. "Ooh, I like the sound of \_Haste.\_"

"You'll like even more that we got the three-point-oh version houseruled in!" Pinkie said. The others examined that statement for a bit, then discarded it for their own peace of mind.

"Er, Fluttershy, dear?" Rarity ventured. "I think you can stop now."

The leopard looked down, winced, and turned back into a pegasus. "Sorryâ€| I justâ€| saw red?"

"Don't we allâ€|" Applejack shrugged. "No harm done, they're all just knocked out. Now, would y' mind givin' me a bit of that first aid o' yours?"

"Not at all." Fluttershy trotted over, a heal spell building on her wings.

\* \* \*

><p>23.3<p>

Twilight nodded along as the local Anchor explained his Loop.

It took quite some time.

"â€|and then it turns out that, actually, the real \_real\_ bad guy isn't even Aizen at all! He was some kind of sick red herring, and so were the Xcution people â€" have I mentioned them yet?"

"No, actually," Twilight replied politely. "But I've run out of notepaper. Can you give me a minute to get another pad?"

Ichigo sighed and nodded. "Go ahead. I swear, my universe is a right mind screw."

"I'm sure you'd be welcome in Equestria if you ever end up there," Twilight offered.

"Eh, no thanks." Ichigo stretched. "I've heard about the place from Naruto, and, well, no offense, but it sounds kind of boring."

"I understand," Twilight said, after a moment. "I heard your loop is potentially the longest, so I can understand if you get bored easily."

"Tell me about it! I've taken to invading Hell for something to do!"

Twilight didn't say anything, remembering a certain drilling expedition.

"Anyway, Xcution. Yeah, watch out for the guy in charge of them â€" he can make you think he's your friend. Literally â€" he hits you with his sword, and it's like history is rewritten so he's your best friend."

Twilight surprised him by giggling. "Yeah, if he hit me with that I think he might just end up turning into a pony from backlash."

Her host roared with laughter.

"â€|okay, as soon as we're done with Aizen, we're testing that!" Ichigo shouted, grinning wildly. "I \_so\_ want to see that jerk look ridiculous!"

"Glad to help â€" though it might only work if I'm in my base form." She gestured down at her body â€" currently human, though tests had shown it was a human false body and a unicorn spirit.

Ichigo was still chuckling. "Right, yeah. Anyway, once Xcution are handled, the next lot is this kinda militant Quincy lot. Best way to handle them is toâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>Tsukishima darted around a hurried block from Twilight's <em>Fuhentekina nazo<em>, and slipped the point of his blade into her shoulder. He wasn't aiming to hurt her â€" just a nick would serve his purposes.

Then there was a bright flash just as he reached her, and his sword clattered to the ground next to him.

"Are you okay, Tsuki?" he heard Twilight ask. "You dropped your sword!"

"Thanks," he said, reaching for it and nearly falling over as his body didn't react the way he expected it to.

"Oh, no!" Twilight said, pointing. Tsukishima abruptly noticed that she was now, for whatever reason, a unicorn. "Ichigo's coming! Quick, Tsuki, the only way to stop a Looper that powerful is the Elements of Magic!"

\_The what?\_ \_A what? She's a what? What the hell-\_

Then he noticed he was a horse.

Then he realized he had no way to carry Book of the End, and hence no way to properly control the mess that was taking place.

And that was when a stray false-memory from his Bookmarking of Twilight told him what the Elements of Harmony were. And that he would somehow have to be a personification of laughter, honesty,



loyalty, generosity and kindness all at once.

"Oh, this isn't my dayâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight blinked as the Loop reset blanked out Book of the End's effects. "Wow, that was one strange loop end. I didn't know the Elements <em>had<em> a backwards firing modeâ€|"

It made a lot of sense, though. If they purified whatever villain had managed to get hold of them and tried to use them, that would put paid to the problem as easily as just firing them at the villain.

Redeemed-Tsukishima was weird, though. He'd started a career working for an internet social media company, at least once Ichigo had stopped laughing himself sick long enough to get them a laptop.

\* \* \*

><p>23.4<p>

"There's something I have to tell you, Twilight," Rainbow Dash said, blushing. "Iâ€| it's kinda been brewing for a whileâ€|"

"No need," Twilight replied, stretching out a wing. "I think I can guess."

"But-

"No, Dash," Twilight added, a slight smirk playing over her features. "You are not good at concealing it."

"â€|okay." Dash still looked reluctant, so Twilight stepped closer and kissed her gently-

\* \* \*

><p>"I do <em>what?<em>"

Princess Cadence jumped, scattering plastic models all over the place.

"Cadenceâ€|" Twilight said slowly, "I am going to go out of the room now. When I come back in again in a second, we won't talk about what you're doing with those models I got from the hub loop."

\* \* \*

><p>23.5<p>

"That's right, foolish peasants!" The eerie, almost insectile alicorn cackled as citizens of Ponyville fled before her. "Nightmare Rarity has arrived, and nothing can save you now!"

"Not if I have anything to say about it!"

Nightmare Rarity looked up, nostrils flaring. "I should have known that you would be hereâ€| Spykoran."

"Your evil reign ends now!" Spykoran transferred his lance from carry to strike position, holding it in both left arm and left leg. His wings beat, slowly at first, then sent him screaming down towards Nightmare Rarity.

At the last moment, she dodged aside and the lance bit into soft earth. "Fool!"

The dragon spun around on his spear, lashing out with tail and claws, and only just missed hitting his opponent.

Nightmare Rarity's wings slashed forward, crackling with magic, and only some quick work with an arming-sword stopped her blows connecting on Spykoran in turn.

As Spykoran unlimbered a shield and stepped forward, she backed â€" still with an arrogantly superior grin. "Foolish dragon. None can stand against the might of a Nightmare."

"If I didn't try, then I'd have nothing to be proud of," he rejoined, and lunged. The arming-sword skipped off a quickly conjured gemstone kukri, which was joined by a second and a scimitar as the Nightmare continued to back.

The musical clash of steel on sapphire filled the square as dragon and alicorn fought back and forth. Spykoran used his shield to fend off blows from gem-blades, trying to stop the trio of them from having a chance to attack simultaneously, and occasionally sent one flying into the middle distance with his sword. When that happened, he tried to use the opening to strike at his foe â€" but, canny as she was, Nightmare Rarity kept her distance as best she was able and most such attempts to press the attack had to be abandoned as the deflected sword returned.

But the stalemate couldn't last forever, and all at once the pace of the battle changed. Nightmare-Rarity brought all three blades in for the concerted assault Spykoran had been so assiduously avoiding â€" and he swept the arming sword around in an arc, smashing one to pieces and knocking the other two to sink deep into the ground.

The Nightmare growled, conjuring bows and gem-tipped arrows out of the aether. Firing three at once, she unleashed an arrow-storm.

Spykoran raised his shield, but that wasn't really necessary, as his sword hand moved in a series of swooping curls that just happened to intercept every arrow and knock them off course.

Nightmarity didn't relent in her barrage, instead dividing focus to lift one of her blades from the ground it had become lodged in and send it spinning at his back-

And he caught it. Three quick steps, and the sizzling gem-scimitar was held threatening her neck. The arming-sword was at her side.

Nightmare Rarity's eyes narrowedâ€|

And then she took a forward step of her own, and caught the dragon

with a fierce kiss.

"Harmony's six \_sides\_," she gasped, coming up for air, "but you are \_dashing\_!"

"Wait, what?" several of the watching ponies said, startled enough to speak.

Rarity and Spike ignored them, vanishing in a teleport.

\* \* \*

><p>A minute or so later, Twilight's voice raised above the confused hubbub. "It's okay, everypony! I checked â€" Rarity isn't evil, they were just... practicing for a play, I think Spike said, and things got a bit out of hand."<p>

After another few seconds of talk, the general reduction in noise level seemed to indicate that this was acceptable.

"They totally weren't," Dash noted quietly, as Twilight walked back out of the crowd.

"Well, yeah," Twilight allowed. "But do \_you\_ want to try explaining exactly what we just saw?"

"â€|yeah, good point," Dash said. "Mind having a word with them to make sure their acting quality is a bitâ€| wellâ€| less showcased? I think I saw a Wonderbolt patrol head off towards Canterlot."

Right on cue, the Princesses appeared in a flash of light and shadow.

"Twilight!" Celestia said without preamble. "What happened? Which of your friends got corrupted? We need to find some way to use the Elements without them, or-"

Luna had been looking around. "The town seems very intact. Didst though remember the right address?"

"What â€" of course I did, Luna!" Celestia said, stung. "This is Ponyville, where my most trusted student lives, of course I remember where it is!"

Twilight waited a moment as the two Royal Sisters began bickering, then shrugged and walked off. With a bit of luck, the whole issue would just quietly go away.

She would need to have that word with Rarity and Spike about cover stories, thoughâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>23.6<p>

"Huh." Twilight looked this Loop's body over. "I would appear to be male."

Aside from that, though, Twilight â€" or, as her memories started to come in, 'Dusk Shine' â€" was his/her normal self. And based on more

of those memories, everyone else was the same as they were in a normal Loop.

That is, the same gender. Twilight/Dusk got a brief headache trying to keep pronouns straight, then decided to just hang continuity of self reference and call himself male for the duration.

There was a knock at the door.

"Coming!" Dusk said, still alert for any discrepancies. He'd been looping far too long to assume there was only one change in a given world "that kind of assumption got you blindsided by Old Mare Henderson.

Upon opening the door, it turned out to be the Element of Laughter.

"Hi, Pinkie-

Dusk's contingent shield triggered, pinging half of a crowbar off the doorframe as a swing at her legs was abruptly halted by the spell.

"Okay, what the?" Dusk mused, as Pinkie stared at the truncated implement. "Pinkie, why the hay did you just take a swing at my?" Dusk's mind did a minor backflip as he realized just where Pinkie had to have been aiming, and then the whole 'male' thing shocked him all over again, "aherm."

"Hey, no fair!" Pinkie looked Dusk up and down. "You're off script!"

"Script?" Dusk repeated, dumbly. Pinkie was usually strange, but this

True to form, the pink pony pulled a set of close-typed pages out of her mane. "See? Right here."

Dusk skimmed the page. "Er" hang on a second." He flipped back, then cast a spell to absorb the whole content of the sheaf of paper in one go.

"this would appear to be a script for Love Hina, with different character names and the addition of a crowbar."

"Yeah?" Pinkie asked. "So? That sounds about right."

"I hate worlds like this" Dusk sighed deeply. "Okay, buck this. Get Spike to send me a letter if there's an actual serious threat, otherwise I'm going to be sunbathing without the interference of atmosphere."

"You can't do that!" Pinkie protested. "We don't have the beach episode for another three weeks! Besides, how are we going to do the eventual character development where I learn that hitting random stallions in the nuts is wrong?"

The unicorn shrugged. "Why not do the final episode, skip everything else, and then just drop the whole subject?"

Pinkie seemed to be thinking it over, her face screwed up in an internal battle.

Dusk's horn lit. "Get Spike to let me know what you think of the idea."

A bright flash, and he was gone.

\* \* \*

><p>"Art thou not Dusk Shine?" Luna asked, frowning at the unicorn sprawled out on top of her lunar sand-castle.<p>

"Yep," the Anchor replied. "I love air bubble spells, by the way. Really useful. Oh, out of curiosity, do you find me physically attractive in any way, shape or form?"

"Nay!" Luna said, shivering. "Thine age, physical if not mental, is far too young for my comfort."

"Cool." Dusk put his sunglasses back on. "Sorry for taking over the castle, it probably took you quite a lot of work."

"'tis no problem," Luna assured him. "I was thinking on adding a new wing in any case. It is a soothing past-time."

\* \* \*

><p>"The Great and Powerful Trixie questions this script," Trixie said, having finished reading it. "Why is she required to be hit so much?"<p>

Pinkie shrugged. "I dunno, but it's in there. Hey, you'll just be wearing an illusion, right? No actual vulnerables to hit."

"Let Trixie maintain a permanent shield spell and get top billing, and you have a deal."

They shook on it.

\* \* \*

><p>23.7<p>

"Well, this is interesting!" Cadence said. "Kind of the reverse of normal â€" or, well, the reverse of the first time, anyway."

Twilight nodded, seeing her point.

It was another one of those loops where she and another pony were the Royal Sisters, meaning that they had to defeat Discord and subsequently run Equestria.

"Although you're older than me," Cadence added. "Not fair!"

"I'm not much older." Twilight looked herself over. "And what does that matter, anyway?"

"You'd get it if you grew up with a sibling closer in age to

you."

"Andâ€¦ you do?" Twilight asked.

"Well, no." Cadence shrugged. "So my whole point doesn't actually go anywhere."

Twilight shook her head, sighing.

"Okay!" Cadence clapped her hooves. "How are we dividing this up?"

The purple alicorn thought for a moment. "What aboutâ€¦ arts, sciences and humanities?"

"Go onâ€¦" Cadence said.

"I handle the science stuff â€" you know, physics and weather and so on; you do the arts and culture side, and for things that are a mixture we share." Twilight waved a hoof. "Best I can come up with."

"Alright, that seems sensible."

"Justâ€¦ a warning," Twilight added. "Every pony who's been with me on one of these has overdone something. I don't want to see you getting out that Dating Simulator thing again."

"Never crossed my mind," Cadence mumbled, not looking Twilight in the eye.

After a moment, Twilight let it go. "Alright, then."

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright, fair enough," Twilight admitted, watching Chrysalis and Sombra go down the aisle. "That does solve two problems at a stroke."<p>

"Thank you," Cadence replied, beaming. "I do love a good weddingâ€¦ even when it isn't mine."

"Are you \_sure\_ you're coping alright?" Twilight asked anxiously.

"Positive."

Twilight turned away, and missed a slight eye twitch.

\* \* \*

><p>"Cadenceâ€¦" Twilight asked slowly, "Why do you have calendars all over one wall of your room?"<p>

Cadence blushed slightly. "Well, I noticed last year that your parents still got together. And, wellâ€¦" The blush deepened.

"Right, gotcha," Twilight nodded, spotting her brother's eventual birth date on the calendar up at the far left â€" and, down at the

far right, his date of maturity. "Kind of creepy, but if it's how you're coping then I suppose it's not \_too\_ bad."

\* \* \*

><p>"Sorry?" Shining said, blinking. "Could you repeat that?"<p>

Cadence asked him out. Again.

"Erâ€|" his eyes took on a distinctly hunted look. "I'm flattered, really I am, butâ€| I can't help thinking of you as the thousand-plus-year-old Princess of the Arts."

The alicorn's eye twitched. "I see. Thank you for your time."

She vanished in a teleport.

\* \* \*

><p>"Cadence!" Twilight said sharply, shading her eyes against the glow of magic. "I said <em>not<em> to break out the Dating Simulator!"

"I know you did," Cadence replied casually, "but it's the only way to make sure I marry Shining Armor!"

"Calm down!" Twilight tried to get some handle on the current status of the spell engine as she spoke. "This won't solve anything!"

"I beg to differ." Cadence shrugged. "Besidesâ€| it's kind of too late to turn it off."

Twilight facehoofed. "Oh, \_brilliant\_."

\* \* \*

><p>"So, anyway," Cadence concluded, "after that, the Dating Simulator went off. Only problem was that Iâ€| sort of forgot the restrictor."<p>

"Which does what?" Shining asked, with a kind of horrified fascination.

"That's the bit which trims romantic possibilities back to one per pony." Cadence tapped a forehoof on the floor. "Every individual combination would have made the ponies happy, justâ€|"

"Yeah, I can imagine." Shining nodded. "How bad was it?"

"I believe Big Macintosh was assigned about fifty potentials, and then the valves started to explode." She gave an awkward smile. "Stillâ€| not too much harm done. And the moon \_did\_ look good with me on it."

Shining shook his head. "Right, at least we all learned an important lesson."

"Which is?" Cadence asked, frowning. "I mean, there's several I can see. Like to use transistors and surge protectors."

"Well, the main one is to not under any circumstances let you go without either me or a hefty supply of romance novels." Shining nuzzled his wife. "You're just too romantic. And while that would normally just sound like something which wasn't really a problem at all, it is when you try to enforce it."

"Got it." Cadence looked down. "Sorry."

"It wouldn't have been as much of a problem if you'd managed to hold out another few years, I suspect," Shining added, "since the Elements would have formed by then. And you did hold out longer than any pony else so far."

"Going to try to break my record?"

"I was considering itâ€¦" Shining winked, and Cadence thwapped him in the flank with a wing. "And I hope you dismantled the Dating Simulator."

Cadence gave him a puppy-eye look. "Do I have to?"

He just looked at her.

"Fine."

\* \* \*

><p>23.8<p>

"Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey!" A pegasus stallion with a sunglasses-wearing flame for a cutie mark drummed his hooves on the floor. "Come on, people, where's the action?"

"Er, Kamina?" A similar-looking unicorn with a drill for a mark said. "We only just got here, andâ€¦ it might be kind of impolite."

"Ah, I gotcha." Kamina shook his head. "Still, there better be something soon. Besides, Simon, have you ever had a quiet loop?"

"Now you mention itâ€¦" the second pony grinned. "No, not at all."

"And at least you're not taller than me this timeâ€¦" Kamina mused.

"I am." Simon pointed. "Look. This horn thing puts me about half an inch taller than you are."

"Doesn't count." Kamina shook his head.

"How can it not count? It has a spiral pattern!"

"In that case," Kamina spread his wings. "Gotcha now!"

Simon grinned again, and held up a hoof. "You always win."

"You know it, bro!"



There was a skidding sound.

"Hi, new ponies!" Pinkie Pie said, beaming, as she halted in front of them. "What Loop are you from?"

"Only the most awesome loop in the history of time!" Kamina and Simon shouted together, having rehearsed.

A blue blur resolved itself into Rainbow Dash. "Did I hear somepony mention the word awesome?"

"Sure did!" Kamina looked her over. "I like the cut of your jib, fellow flying horse thing."

"Pegasus," Dash answered easily. "What's a jib?"

"Yeah, I'm gonna have to say I don't know that one." Kamina looked over at his fellow looper. "Simon?"

"Something something ships," that unicorn deadpanned.

"Fair enough."

"Hey, guys!"

They turned, seeing an earth pony galloping towards them.

"I thought it was you!" the earth pony said, as she slowed to a stop in front of them. "Hi, other loopers. I'm Yoko Littner, and I'm the one who keeps these two doofs out of trouble."

"How does that relate to a rifle?" Dash asked, looking at her cutie mark.

"That's because she uses the rifle to cause trouble that she then keeps \_us\_ out of," Simon joked.

A flash of light and a cloud of smoke erupted twenty feet away.

"Trixieâ€¦ sensesâ€¦ awesomeness!"

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia stood on the balcony of the library next to Twilight, and together they watched a giant robot get into a fist fight with the moon.<p>

"What is this, I don't evenâ€¦"

Twilight shrugged helplessly. "Hiccup did warn me about those two, but apparently he understated the case. It doesn't help that they and Yoko managed to meet the three most compatible personalities our world has to offer, of course." Especially when that seemed to have got the Elements working somehow.

Celestia gave a slightly stunned nod. "Every time I think I am used to the infinite variety of the universe, something like this happens."

\* \* \*

><p>23.9<p>

Academic Excellence (Stainless Steel Fox)

"I guess you're all wondering why I called you here today." Rainbow Dash looked over the group of pegasi she'd assembled at her cloud house.

"Yeah?" Snowflake asked, in a normal voice for once. The six ponies weren't all on the weather team, though of course they all knew each other more or less. It hadn't been too long since the Hurricane Season.

"I happen to know you've all applied to the basic training course at Wonderbolts Academy." Dash smirked. "So have I."

"How could you know about that?" Cloudchaser gave her a puzzled look.

"I have my waysâ€|" Dash wasn't going to tell them that they almost always the ones who got picked in every loop.

"Don't tell me you don't want the competition!" Thunderlane exclaimed.

"Hardly!" Rainbow grinned. "Besides, you guys aren't competition, unless any-pony's feeling luckyâ€|"

Nobody was willing to take that bet. Dash sighed. "If anything I want to help you get better, be more awesomeâ€|" unless you just want to take it easy and cruise through it, it's up to you. I know a lot of ponies apply just to be able to show they could get in. Kind of a fillip on any-pony's resume."

"What are the chances we'll all get in anyway?" Cloudchaser was pacing around Dash's living room. "I mean sure you're a horseshoe-in, but we don't have your skill, or your connections."

Dash actually frowned. "If I can't get in on skill alone, I'm not going. But I think you guys impressed Spitfire during the Hurricane Day. For that matter, you impressed me. Getting back up in the air after it fell to pieces the first time took guts and stick-at-it-ness. I figure you've all got a good chance. I just want to see every-pony makes the most of it."

That made a couple of the ponies, who'd been wondering what was in it for Dash, feel a bit ashamed. Rainbow Dash had her faults, but no-pony could say she wasn't loyal to her friends.

Dash seemed to read what was going on in their heads. "I'll admit there is something in it for me. I can kick out a top solo performance, blow the instructors wings off, but there's more to being a Wonderbolt than just being the most awesome flyer. You've gotta work as part of a team. If every-pony from Ponyville turns up and works together, and gets the highest scores across the board, it'll show I can lead a team, and get the best out of other ponies.

"It's not that different to Weather Patrol, just bucking out a performance at a higher level. Spitfire seemed pleased at the way I handled the Tornado drill, but I want to prove to her it wasn't a fluke. I had an awesome team backing me and giving it everything they had then, and I hope we can do it again. So, if we do this, you guys get better results from your training course, and I get to show I'm more than an incredibly awesome solo flyer. Every-pony wins! "

She looked around. "So, are you guys in?" She held out a hoof and after a fraction of a second, the other hooves covered hers. "Okay, then we're going to do this, and it's going to be awesome!"

"YEAH!"

\* \* \*

><p>The cadets were lined up waiting to meet Spitfire. She walked past as usual.<p>

"Well lookie what we got here. Betcha'll think you're Wonderbolt material, don't ya?"

Every-pony except Lightning Dust, who yelled out, "Yes ma'am!", instead said, "Not yet ma'am!"

That rather de-railed her standard 'I am drill sergeant nasty' speech. Still she recovered quickly. "Oh, so we have a class of wise guys, do we?"

She eye-balled Cloud Chaser. "Are you a wise guy, rookie?"

The weather pony would have quailed, if she hadn't already spent hours getting the exact same thing from Rainbow Dash. Dash had warned them all about this, suggested some standard responses, and she wasn't going to let the team down, though her eyes did flick towards the rainbow pegasus. She stood up straight and snapped out. "No, ma'am! Not a guy ma'am!"

"Think you're hot stuff?" Spitfire eye-balled Snowflake, who also remembered what Rainbow Dash had drilled into them, and didn't flinch. "NO MA'AM!"

Spitfire brushed back her mane into place and put on her glasses. Though she kept her expression stern, inwardly she was quite impressed. She could generally intimidate at least some of the rookies, but this lot seemed to have some grit to them. Though she suspected she knew who'd been the source of it all.

Stopping by Rainbow Dash, she gave her the best top sergeant stare she knew. "You look like you're the worst flyer in the whole academy! You'll probably quit after the first day!"

"No ma'am! I've been training for this since I was a foal, ma'am!" Rainbow Dash couldn't honestly say she'd never quit, as she had the first time round.

"Let's hope you learned something then." Spitfire gave a tight smile and moved on to the one non-Ponyville pony, Lightning Dust.

"Ha. What about you? Bet you couldn't fly past the first flagpole without getting winded."

Lightning Dust was her usual self. "Try me ma'am."

Perfect. She gave them 500 laps to prove themselves, and was surprised again that none of the Ponyville contingent complained. She didn't expect it from Dash, but the othersâ€

Rainbow Dash asked, "Is this a race ma'am?"

Oho, sounded like Dash wanted to spread her wings too. "No. You'll have plenty of chance to compete later."

Despite that, Lightning Dust had shot into the air and was making a maximum speed run, but Dash hadn't followed her. Instead she was taking it slower. It was a few seconds before the Wonderbolt realised what the rainbow pegasus was doing. She was checking on each of the other ponies as she went past them, checking to see they were good to go, and giving them a wing-waggle of encouragement. It was only after she'd seen to each of them that she suddenly kicked up the velocity and started lapping them, though not as efficiently as Lightning Dust.

That was odd, with the amount of effort she was putting out, she should be getting more speedâ€ oh, now that was interesting. Some of the power was going into creating a trailing vortex wider than she was, and the other Ponyville pegasi were sliding in to catch it and gain an extra boost of speed as she went past them.

While they wasn't making anywhere near the speed Lightning Dust was putting out, as a group they were going faster than the slowest ponies could have managed on their own, and at that trick must take quite a bit of teamwork to maintain, not to mention both skill and power on Dash's part. Maybe she hadn't been asking for a race.

Lightning came off the course first, and looked back with a bit of derision. "Finished, ma'am!"

"Not bad for a rookie." In fact she was pretty sure Lightning Dust had made one of the fastest ever times for a new recruit. "You're dismissed, go get something to eat, you're going to need your energy for tomorrow."

The rest of the new draft landed not much later. She was almost certain that they'd set a new record, for the fastest time for a whole class of cadets completing the five hundred. They landed in a line and pulled off an attention pose as well as any Wonderbolt. She waved them to the mess hall, but stopped Dash.

"Well, rookie, what was that in aid of?"

"What was what ma'am?" Dash started at a point two inches behind her right ear, in the traditional 'enlisted pony trying not to answer a direct question' pose.

"Your little stunt with the vortex drift? Did you really think I wouldn't notice?"

"No, ma'am!" Dash tried to suppress a grin and mostly succeeded. "However it wasn't a race, so there was nothing wrong with other ponies taking advantage of another pony's air-wash to get around the track faster, ma'am. There was also nothing wrong with not going at my best speed, was there ma'am?"

"Hmâ€|" Spitfire was quite enjoying this. This Dash was a lot less fan-girlish than the pony she'd met at the Gala a couple of years ago. She was taking quite a risk to effectively prank Spitfire, but somehow Spitfire didn't feel it was because she thought she could take liberties due to the whole 'having your life saved' thing. "I'd have thought you'd take the opportunity to prove yourself."

"Yes ma'am. Was ma'am. Just not my speed ma'am."

It was clear, as if it hadn't been before, that the whole thing was a set up. However, Spitfire, despite the demeanour she put on for the Academy, appreciated a good prank as much as any-pony. On Rainbow Dash's part, organising it, anticipating Spitfire's reactions, and simply having the brass hooves to pull it off demonstrated a lot of guts, initiative, and leadership, as well as skill. But she needed to make sure her authority wasn't being eroded.

"And if I give you another thousand laps to give you the chance to show your full speed?"

"Yes ma'am! Ready to go ma'am." Rainbow raised her wings and tensed for take-off.

Spitfire was tempted to make good on it, simply to see what she could do, but there was a difference between establishing the chain of command and being petty. "You'll have plenty of chance to show off tomorrow, cadet. Hit the mess hall, you're going to need your strength."

\* \* \*

><p>As Rainbow Dash collected a meal from the mess hall counter and made her way over to the other Ponyville cadets, she got one or two sympathetic looks, which turned relieved at her cheerful expression. Before any-pony else could speak, Lightning Dust piped up.<p>

"Heh! Last one in? Well, I guess not every-pony can keep up that kind of speed. Not that you were as fast as me anyway."

That got her some acid looks from the other cadets.

"Huh! Dash could run rings around you on her worst day if she wanted too!" Cloudchaser exclaimed.

"It's okay guys, I've got this." Rainbow Dash waved them down with a wing. "I'm Rainbow Dash. And you areâ€|?"

"Lightning Dust, as in I move like lightning and leave every-pony else in the dust!" The yellow and green pegasus declaimed.

"Sounds awfully lonely out there on your own." Rainbow quipped. "Y'know, I wasn't trying for the best time, at least not for myself. My friends here and I are all from Ponyville, and we're looking out for each other. By the way guys, you did great! Perfect delivery,

just what I'd hoped for, no, even better!"

That got a number of grins and pleased looks from the Ponyville cadets, and Thunderlane and Milky Way even exchanged a high wing.

"What?" Lightning Dust looked around at the other ponies. "What're you talking about?"

"There was a good chance that Spitfire was going to come out with something like 'are you good enough'. Answer 'yes', you get told you aren't, answer 'no', you get 'why are you here then?' So we came up with some alternatives."

"You pranked Spitfire?" Lightning Dust's eyes widened.

Rainbow Dash grinned, "\_We\_ pranked her, and because she's an awesome pony, she let it slide. Well, I almost got a thousand extra laps for it, but it would have been totally worth it. Likewise, I was giving these guys a vortex tunnel to take advantage of. None of us were pulling our maximum speed, because none of us want to risk having to drop out due to a strain injury when we've just got here."

"Uh huhâ€¦" Lightning Dust looked sceptical. "I always buck it to the max. If you don't push yourself, how can you get better?"

"I get you, but there's more to being a Wonderbolt than just being an awesome flyer. You're part of a team too, speaking of which, my friends over there are Thunderlane, Wildflower, Cloud Chaser and the big guy is Snowflake." As she spoke, she gestured to each pony. "Over here we have Milky Way and Raindrops."

Lightning Dust snorted. "Like I'm going to remember all of that!"

"Isn't hard if you care about doing it. An earth pony named Pinkie Pie taught me that." Rainbow shrugged, and dropped in between Lightning Dust and Raindrops. "Anyhow, we're going to rock this training course, and I figured you'd want in, from the way you were pushing it out there."

"I don't need any help rocking the course," Lightning Dust gave an airy wave of her wing. "I'm the best flyer in Los Pegasus, and I don't need any-pony slowing me down."

As little as a few hundred loops ago, Rainbow Dash would have made some hot retort about being the best in Equestria. However, with alicorn power levels to draw on, she really didn't have anything to prove. Besides, she understood the reason behind Lightning Dust's different attitude.

Whenever she raced against Lightning Dust, she marked herself as a peer, someone like Lightning herself, though obviously not as good, and therefore worthy of notice. Here she hadn't, and the fact that she cared more about the other ponies than trying to excel herself meant Lightning Dust had shoved her onto the mental pile, 'lame and loving it'. It was like Gilda all over again, why had she always attracted jerks as friends? Redeeming Dust wasn't one of her goals this loop, but she'd have to see what could be done.

In most close to original loops Lightning Dust wasn't kicked out of the Academy outright, even after she had her Lead pony badge stripped. Normally she got reassigned as Dash's wing-pony, and after she'd gotten the attitude knocked out of her, she could be pretty cool. She just needed to lose that 'win at all costs' mentality.

Her thoughts hadn't stopped her speaking when some of the other ponies bridled at Dusty's attitude. "Heh, suit yourself. Maybe you'll change your mind when you see what we can do tomorrow."

Lightning Dust left as soon as she'd finished eating, and almost before she was out of ear-shot, Cloud Chaser asked, "Why are you letting her talk like that? She's a complete jerk, and needs to be taken down a peg or two."

"She reminds me of me, not too long ago."

"You were never that bad!" Milky Way piped up.

Rainbow blew a stray hair out of her face. "Maybe, but it took being around Twilight and the others to teach me there was more to life than being the best I could be, or that loyalty to my friends, to other ponies wasn't the same as loyalty to Ponyville and my job. You saw her out there, she's an awesome flyer, but if she doesn't figure out the rest of it, she's never going to make a Wonderbolt.

"We've got each other, she's got no-pony else to rely on. I don't think her attitude has made her many friends back in Los Pegasus either. So she's decided she doesn't need them. I'm trying to get her to see she's wrong, but it won't work if we gang up on her, shut her out. By the way, thanks every-pony for following my lead on that."

There was a chorus on the general theme of 'No problem' with added, 'You've got us this far.' Thunderlane added, "Besides, like you said, we'll show her what we can do tomorrow, on the Dizzitron."

Wildflower looked slightly nervous. "Ooh, I am not looking forward to that. What if I mess up?"

"Relax, just stick with what we've practised and do your best." She held up a hoof, brought it to a stop in mid-air, then dropped it and guided it down in a curve to sweep horizontal to the table. "Stop, drop and roll out. Trust me, Apple Bloom's mock-up was designed to the same spec as the real thing. You've done it before, I've seen you do it, and I know you have nothing to worry about."

Thunderlane scratched the back of his neck with a hoof. "Who'd of figured Applejack's kid sister was that good with gadgets?"

Rainbow Dash grinned to herself, thinking of how they'd freak out if they saw what the looping filly had in her underground garage. An alicorn didn't need a spaceship, but some of the space fighters she rigged up were massive fun to fly. She might take the time tonight to pop back there and see what she could take for a spin, or maybe just ride the wing while Scootaloo flew. No, best get an early night, she had a long day tomorrow.

\* \* \*

><p>Lined up in front of the Dizzitron, all the ponies except Rainbow Dash and Lightning Dust looked slightly ill at ease. Rainbow Dash had decided to take her usual place, which should mean she'd be picked before Lightning Dust. She wasn't going to let the other pony's time affect her own performance either way. Spitfire was going through her introductory spiel.<p>

"â€| Your task is to try and recover and fly straight again, as soon as possible. Once you have recovered you must come in for a smooth landing. Now, who's first?" Wildflower caught her attention. "You. You're up. "

"Me... I mean, yes ma'am!" The pink pegasus gulped and started towards the machine, suppressing a shiver. 'It's okay, it's just like back on Sweet Apple Acres. Stop, drop and roll out. Just pretend it's a fairground ride, a very fast, very scary fairground ride..."

As she strapped herself in, she looked back at the line of ponies and saw nothing but confidence from her fellows. She even saw Dash give her a wing-tip up before she pulled down her goggles, and heard the pegasus's voice from last night. 'You've done it before, I've seen you do it, and I know you have nothing to worry about.'

She felt some confidence return, if Dash thought she could do it, who was she to argue? She could do this. Her voice was steady when she called out. "Okay, I'm ready!"

"Okay, go!" Spitfire called.

The Dizzitron started spinning her, and she got the familiar feeling of her stomach wanting to leave her body through one of many convenient exits. But... it was nothing she hadn't felt before. Her confidence started to grow. Actually doing this was a lot less scary than thinking about doing it. She tucked her head in, pulled her wings and legs in tight, closed her eyes and focussed...

"Release!"

She was flung away through the air... this wasn't even as bad as when the hurricane collapsed.

'Stop...'

Her wings snapped out along with her legs, and the change in angular momentum combined with the air resistance of her wings as she pushed weather magic through them slowed her wild tumble. However, she still didn't open her eyes, just folded her wings back and let herself fall.

'â€| drop...'

She felt the wind rush past her and guide her body into line with the fall like a shuttlecock. Finally she could open her eyes, and saw the ground was still an acceptable distance below.

'â€| roll out.'

Having built up air speed, she used the wind rather than her still



off kilter sense of balance to orient herself and opened her wings out to a glide, pulling a curve that brought her in to scrape her hooves against the runway. She trotted out and came to a stop as her head stopped spinning. She even found the will to look over towards Spitfire without throwing up.

"Nine seconds... Acceptable." Actually the Wonderbolt leader was quite impressed. Nine seconds wasn't an amazing time, but it was better than ninety percent of recruits managed on their first run. Of course, it was quite clear from the practised way she'd reacted that this wasn't her first run, and Spitfire was fairly sure who'd made sure of that.

She must have been taking a lot of notes that time she came there as her reward for winning the Young Fliers competition. Not that the details of the training routine was classified or anything, but it wouldn't have been simple to get. Spitfire added another tick in her mental check-list of the rainbow pegasus's talents. Good intel made for safer flying.

Wildflower hadn't heard the faint praise. She reverse punched the air. Yes! She'd beaten the ten second barrier, her best time ever! As she returned to the line, she sneaked a grin towards Rainbow Dash and got a pleased smirk and another wing-tip up in return.

"Rainbow Dash, since you're fidgeting, you're clearly eager to go!" Spitfire turned her gaze on Dash.

"Yes ma'am!" Dash kept her grin. "But if it's all the same to you, could you turn that doohickey up to top speed?"

"Really?" Spitfire didn't actually know why she was surprised. If any-pony was going to want to go all the way, it was Dash. But that speed was what she and the other active Wonderbolts members trained on. "It's your funeral."

Rainbow Dash seemed completely unconcerned as the level was switched all the way over. The device spun up to ludicrous speed, and at Spitfire's command, they triggered the release. There was a crack and an explosion of miniature rainbows from the hurtling figure as her wing-tips extended at more than the speed of sound, and the single flap she gave didn't just arrest her motion but sent her bulleting back towards the runway with a rainbow contrail.

She landed with another crack as the macadam of the runway crunched slightly under her hooves leaving a visible mark. Spitfire had expected something exceptional, but that had her so flustered, she almost forgot to stop her stopwatch. "Three point two seconds?!"

Dear sweet Celestia! Spitfire's own best time was four point six, and the best time ever recorded was three point nine. Still she couldn't exactly say that. "That's an Academy record. Looks like you do have something on the ball, after all."

She noticed that the other ponies looked pleased except for Lightning Dust who looked like she'd flown into a cloud filled with rocks. Cloud chaser reached under her chin and pushed her jaw back up, which seemed to bring her out of her stupor. Interesting that they were happy for her despite the fact that she'd just blown them all right

out of the sky with that performance.

What was more, Dash was just trotting back into line. Apart from a grin and a couple of slight nods of acknowledgement that Spitfire probably wasn't supposed to see, she wasn't making a big thing out of it.

Lightning Dust followed, and also chose the top speed, pulling a hoof-first drop and fly out in a respectable six and a half seconds. Most of the others were quite happy to throttle it back to regular speed, but none of them put in a performance of worse than ten seconds, even Thunderlane, who tried intermediate speed, and still managed a nine point seven. None of them ended up losing their balance or their lunch afterwards, either.

This group of recruits was shaping up to be exceptional group of trainees, and Spitfire was certain as to who's fault that was in all but one case. She considered what to do about that one case, who was currently glaring at Rainbow Dash. She'd have to consider what she was going to do about that situation.

"Listen up! For the rest of the camp, you'll be working in pairs. 'Morrow morning, I'll post the teams, including who'll be lead pony and who'll be wing-pony. Good luck."

She watched the group dynamic as she dismissed them, Dash was clearly the centre of attention, but she was equally clearly complimenting the others performances. Lightning Dust seemed to be left out on the edges, but the key was what happened when Dash turned to her and offered a hoof-bump. Lightning Dust just turned away and headed for the barracks.

Yes, something would definitely have to be done about that.

\* \* \*

><p>23.10<p>

"Hi, Princess," Twilight said, trotting into the throne room. "I â€"oh."

"Hello!" Cadence said from the throne, passing some just-signed papers over to an official. "Nice to see you."

"You too," Twilight replied, nodding. "Onlyâ€¦ I was expecting to find Princess Celestia. Any idea where she is?"

"What, don't you love me any more?"

"That's my brother's job these days, isn't it?" Twilight replied.

"Fair point," Cadence agreed, incidentally confirming a number of rumours in front of witnesses. "And no, she just asked me to spot her for the Summer Sun celebration."

That was interesting. Cadence wasn't Awake this time, but apparently Celestia was. Andâ€¦ no, there wasn't enough information to go on.

"Well, if I can't find her I suppose I'll have to make do," Twilight mock-sighed. "How have you been?"

"Still learning the business of ruling, actually," Cadence replied. "Celestia was kind enough to mostly clear the decks, though, so it's not too onerous. I'm sure it amounts to a test."

Twilight nodded along. "Sensible."

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon crept along corridors, seeking her sister. At first she'd thought her goal might be Ponyville, but further investigation had revealed that the alicorn to be appearing there was a stripling she'd never heard of.<p>

The Nightmare idly pondered if perhaps this 'Cadence' was some by-blow of Celestia's or something, then brushed the thought off as she reached Celestia's private chambers.

There was a sign dangling on the door.

Frowning, Moon squinted at it. "Goneâ€| surfing?"

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia blazed across the night sky in a corona of plasma, her tungsten and carbon-carbon surfboard humming as it dissipated reentry compression heating.<p>

"Hmmm, not as good as I was expectingâ€|" she said critically, adjusting the angle of attack minutely. "It's all much of a muchness. So much for the idea that the night would bring different pressure."

Movement caught her eye, and she focused a complex scrying spell to zoom in.

Well, that was interesting. By luck, it appeared she was on a rough interception course with a stealthily-flying Nightmare Moon.

Several plans ran through the Alicorn's mind. After some careful consideration, she selected plan G.

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon had the air knocked out of her by a near-sonic speed impact that hit her from her right rear.<p>

"â€|eeeeeeeeEEEEEEEEEE SIS! So glad you're back!" Celestia's voice shouted, high-pitched with excitement.

The alicorn of darkness had been well prepared for battle, for rhetoric, for subtlety. Being glomped, however, was totally outside her expectations.

"\_Celly?!"\_

"Oh, Lulu, I missed you so much!" Celestia said, still gleeful, and

hugging the other alicorn so hard her ribs creaked.

Then the princess of the day frowned. "Hey, do you remember how to slow down? 'cause we're about to hit a tree."

FLUMPH.

\* \* \*

><p>"This is so much fun!" Celestia said, grinning. "I get to act like the little sister for once!"<p>

"I still don't get how you fixed herâ€|" Twilight muttered. "I mean, about all you did that I can see is you body-checked her into a tree."

"I glomped her, Twilight," Celestia corrected, still smiling. "Hugs fix everything."

"Fair enough." Twilight looked over at the confused Princess Luna. "Hey, should I tell her there's a twig in her mane?"

Celestia shrugged. "I think it looks nice."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

So, notes.

>1) Temeraire.<br>2) More D&D (specifically, 3.x). Fluttershy is a druid, hence the most powerful party member by a good long way...

>3) Bleach.<br>4) Trololol?

>5) Combine a certain issue of the comics with two rather strange romantic loopers... also, a dragon with the traditional weapons of a knight. Irony?<br>6) Love Life of Dusk Shine.

>7) The Dating Simulator is essentially a repurposed Infinite Tsukuyomi (from Naruto) in concept.<br>8) Gurren Lagann.

>9) Yes, Stainless Steel Fox is quite prolific.<br>10) Plan G is "plan Genki Girl". Now imagine Celestia acting like Pinkie Pie all loop.

Also, and much to my surprise, this fic is now one of the examples on TVTropes for "groundhog day loop". In fact, it seems to have been picked as a good example of this kind of "loops" fic.

Any thoughts?

## 24. Chapter 24

### 24.1

Sir Spykoran, Pandion Knight of the kingdom of Elenia, rode into Daros on his ridiculously evil horse Angel on a rainy night.

"Oh, stop it," he said without any real heat. "You're just showing off because Fluttershy isn't here..."

The big animal tossed his head, rolled his eyes, then surged forward

again.

\* \* \*

><p>"So," he said, as someone who was a childhood friend this loop left the room, "what's up here, Twilight?"<p>

Twilight, instructor of magic for the Pandion Knights, shrugged. It was easier than normal, since " like Spike himself " she was human. "Not all that sure. I do know that you're supposed to end up as a prince consort, but aside from that and that you need to save the queen, not much."

"I do?" Spike frowned. "How do you know that?"

"Two reasons." She reached into nothingness, and pulled out a large book. "First off, I found this in my fiction stash."

"The Elenium." Spike took it and glanced at the back cover. "Neat. Good to have the guidebook for a new loop."

"Yes, and I'll be finished with it once I get a chance. But the other reason is the queen's name."

Spike scanned back through Loop memories. "Oh. Yeah, Queen Rarity is a fairly good hint."

"Exactly. Now, you're going to need to be quite the swordsman here. Up to it?"

A shrug. "Yeah, though I'll need to remember not to slip and start using something like Soresu again. Kind of over the top, right?"

Twilight giggled. "Actually, that might be quite funny. I don't think you're supposed to be able to deflect arrows."

"Sounds good. Anything else I should know?"

"Well" yes, actually." Twilight raised her hands, and spoke words in an arcane tongue.

With a pop, Nyx materialized on the sofa. "Hi, Twilight! Ooh, you're human again. So this is" Spike?"

"Good guess." Spike offered a hand, and Nyx put her hoof into it for a shake. "Nice to have you here."

"It's good to be here! Okay, basically, I'm the goddess of children here. Or the child goddess, or whatever" I stay young because when I'm young people give me treats more often-

"Sounds about right," Spike interjected with a grin.

Nyx stuck her tongue out. "Anyway, Momma-Twilight is kind of my current high priest, so I'm with you all the way." She looked a bit embarrassed, then. "Hey, can you teach me how to turn into a human, Twilight? I'm gonna be kind of out of place"

"Well, there is another option." Twilight pulled a blanket from her

subspace pocket. "I could just have a riding pony."

"Yeah, no." Nyx crossed her hooves, and looked away with an ostentatious hmf.

"Okay." Twilight shrugged. "Right, we'll work on that tomorrow. I should show Spike where the Queen is before we get going on the Epic Questâ„ç."

"â€|how did you do that?" Spike asked, frowning.

"Do what?" Twilight replied, covering a grin.

\* \* \*

><p>Spike gazed at the flawlessly pure crystal that held the frozen form of Queen Rarity of Elenium.<p>

"â€|is it kind of wrong that I find both her and the thing she's in extremely attractive for entirely different reasons?" he asked absently.

Twilight blinked, then looked amused. "Down, boy. And you can't eat gemstones here, so don't try."

"Yeah, yeahâ€|" he shrugged, still staring. "Can we take this crystal thing with us?"

"Glutton."

Spike chose to ignore that.

After a minute he frowned. "Hey, why don't we just let her out now?"

"Poison." Twilight shrugged. "Book says the only way to cure it is to pick up a thing called the Bhelliom, so off we go."

"Anyone coming with us?"

Twilight frowned. "The book has a list of people who come with us, but I honestly don't know if we need to bother. Just us is a lot faster, anyway, and we know where we're going. Hey, Nyx?"

A flash of dark-light. "Yeah?"

"Can you teleport us toâ€| here?" Twilight pointed at a map.

"Yep! All aboard!" Nyx spread her wings and flared her horn-

\* \* \*

><p>"The hell is this thing?" Spike asked, squinting at the object of their quest. "This is the Bhelliom?"<p>

"Actually, no," Twilight admitted. "The Bhelliom is supposed to be a big flower-shape in reddish sapphire. Thisâ€| seems to be the Elements of Harmony crudely welded together."

"I was in a hurry, so sue me." Discord came out of the back room,

only to see all three other Loopers present glaring at him. "Oh, what? You knew I was going to be here somewhere."

"No, actually, we didn't," Twilight corrected him.

"Okay, so maybe I forgot to set up that beacon thing--"

"Again," Twilight, her adoptive brother, and her adoptive daughter chorused. Discord was terrible at remembering to let others know he was in a fused loopâ€¦ probably deliberately.

"â€¦fine, then." Discord snapped his fingers, and time stopped. "Want to take it and walk back? I'm sure it'll confuse that creep Annias if you cure the Queen within a night."

"Yeah, alright." Twilight took a wand out of subspace. "Shall I take us back?"

"No, no, noâ€¦" The draconequus waved a finger. "You have to walk. And if you don't believe me, check that book again. It does you good."

He vanished before Twilight could try to strangle him.

Spike sighed. "Wish we'd brought Angel, nowâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>Kalten opened the door, then blinked as Spike and Twilight trooped back in â€" both of them in ragged clothing and looking terribly unwashed.<p>

"Where have you been?" he asked, sniffing and wrinkling his nose.

"Eosia," Spike replied, making a beeline for the baths.

"Very funny. I know you were on the continent, now where in this city where you?"

"No, that's as specific as he can beâ€¦" Twilight said, on her way past to the second bathing chamber. "We went a long way."

\* \* \*

><p>"Rightâ€¦" Twilight slipped her hands through the central voids of two necklaces, then paused. "I can manage any two, possibly three, but that's about it without a Queen of the Moon. Spike?"<p>

"Loyalty is easyâ€¦ I think I can do Generosity, too," Spike replied, taking a deep breath.

Nyx appeared again. "I pick laughter!"

"You get it. And honesty, too." Twilight disentangled the elements, and passed them out. "I hope this worksâ€¦ we're kind of off script."

\* \* \*

><p>It took ten minutes â€" nine of them with Nyx going ewww and Twilight tapping her foot â€" before Spike and Rarity stopped kissing.<p>

"Well, that wasâ€¦ interesting," Twilight managed. "Now, we do sort of have a little matter of an evil deity to cope with."

Discord slid into the room through a window, and got promptly blasted out again by Twilight.

"Pax!" he shouted, feeling his nose. "I tink you broke itâ€¦!"

"You made us walk two thousand miles!"

"To end up at your doorâ€¦!" Discord sang tunelessly. He then coughed, as Twilight raised what looked like an Intelligent Device threateningly. "Yes, well. I can run Laughter just as well as anyone, and I think that irritating bunny that's currently a horse can operate Kindness-"

This time everyone snorted with laughter.

"Honesty, then. And if your little pony here can use Kindness, we have a full set." Discord folded his arms. "Look, I have competition here. And I have a lot more style than that debased moron Azash."

Twilight nodded, almost against her will. "I must admit, you do tend to prefer a joke to a human sacrifice."

Discord smiled with some old memory. "The old inflatable obsidian dagger trick gets 'em every timeâ€¦!"

"I'll pretend I didn't hear that," Twilight said loftily.

\* \* \*

><p>"What is the meaning of this?" Annias asked, looking around him. Surreptitiously, he tried to cast a spell, and nothing happened.<p>

"Oh," Twilight gave a bright smile. "Spike and I retrieved an ancient artefact, walked the length of the continent, cured the Queen, and destroyed the Elder God Azash. And now I'd like to have breakfast."

"And what is that at the table?" The Primate of Cimmura pointed to Discord, who waved.

"A smart-arse," Spike answered glibly. "Oh, any objections to me and the Queen living in sin? Probably not, you've certainly got practise at it."

Annias's mouth opened and closed like a fish.

Then Angel kicked him in the back of the knee.

"Four out of ten for force, but ten for style and timing," Discord said, raising a glass of something which looked like petrol. "You're not all bad, you ill tempered nutcase you."



Angel trotted over and kicked him smartly in the ribs.

"I deserved that," Discord said without qualm.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight kicked a studious-looking man in the shins, and then kneed him in the chin as he collapsed. "No thank you, Zalasta."<p>

"Butâ€| " he gasped up at her.

She ignored him, and pretended not to notice when Discord started to paint clown makeup on him. "So much for that Power Behind the Scenes. Actually having the book to read does kind of short circuit a lot of plotsâ€| What now?"

Nyx appeared next to her. "I think the Tamuli Gods sound fun! They're kind of like Pinkie, onlyâ€| no, there is no only. They're like Pinkie."

"Sounds good to me." Twilight looked over at Discord. "Take care of him for me, will you?"

Discord nodded, idly inverting Zalasta's magic. "Look for meâ€| actually, no, having a schedule would be counterproductive. I'll be somewhere." A pause. "Probably." Another pause. "Actually, no, never mind, forget I said anything. Just do stuff and I might turn up."

\* \* \*

><p>24.2<p>

"Twilight Sparkle!" Trixie boomed, appearing in Ponyville town square with a flash of sickly red light. Great, partially-there wings of ruddy light cast shadows on the walls, and a red amulet shone like a star at her throat. "I have returned, so come out and face me!"

After the standard-issue two minutes of utter panic, Twilight stepped from her house. Her own Element of Magic shone on her forehead, and it looked as though she had the faint hint of wings herself. "Trixie Lulamoon. I was expecting you."

"As you should have been!" Trixie pulled a book out of nowhere. "This is really good, but it's four weeks since I borrowed it."

"Actually," Twilight corrected, "four weeks and one day. It's overdue."

The last word there seemed to shake all the windows in Ponyville, for all that it was spoken in a whisper.

Trixie gulped, but tried to disguise it. "Well, what do you expect? I can't find any other copies of it!"

"That's because it's a first edition of a private printing. Only a hundred were made, because the pony doing it had to pay the full

printing costs herself and they were high for so few "economies of scale. All the others are privately owned." Twilight took a moment to look the copy of On Palomino Station over. "At least it isn't damaged."

Her gaze tracked up to Trixie's eyes. "It is undamaged, isn't it?"

Trixie chuckled weakly. "Er... aheh... I was reading it in the rain?"

Twilight frowned. "I see." The Element of Magic flashed, and the spectres of wings hardened into solidity.

The blue unicorn held up the book as though it was a shield, and with a flash of red matched Twilight's transformation. "You can't fight me, I'm holding a book!"

Twilight picked it out of her grasp with telekinesis and sent it into the library.

"Ah...oh." Trixie looked around. "No hard feelings?"

There was a bang as Twilight fired off a particle-beamer spell, which flashed off Trixie's shields. The blue alicorn spread her wings and took off. "It was only a bit of damp!"

"Overdue AND damaged!" Twilight shouted, taking to the air herself. "That's practically treason!"

The residents of ponyville blinked in the confusion, some of them looking after the rapidly receding combatants. It was about three minutes later that the explosions really got going.

\* \* \*

><p>"Thanks, Trixie," Twilight said that evening, in a restaurant in Cloudsdale. Both Loopers were under slight glamours, and compounding that by having exploited Star Swirl's last spell to turn into pegasi. "I was having trouble with a few ponies not treating books right."<p>

Trixie nodded, taking another drink. "You are scary when books are involved."

Twilight shrugged, slightly uncomfortable. "Sorry about that, I think you ended up taking about three decades' worth of built up stress."

"Think nothing of it," Trixie assured, though her wings were still slightly open in an unconscious flight reaction. Noticing, she furled them more fully. "Anyway," she said, more naturally, "That book wasn't half bad. Bit formulaic, but..."

"I'll let Dash know," Twilight said with a grin. "Iris Drake is a pseudonym she uses when writing."

Trixie tried to reconcile the brash pegasus with a writer. Then she thought a bit more about the kind of book she'd been reading.

Restraint had not figured very much. A heroic pegasus captain capable of sonic rainbooms had "as, indeed, had a unicorn Marine mage with illusion speciality. "oh! So that's who she based everypony off."

"Mostly." Twilight glanced around, mainly out of habit. "A lot of the stuff in there actually happened, a long time back. You do make a good Marine."

"Trixie is intrigued. And demands she gets a copy of the next book."

"Good luck," Twilight replied with a laugh. "She's been putting off that thing for a millennium."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that's better," Twilight said, noting the neatly stacked pile of returns on the counter. "Nothing like a bit of a friendly reminder to encourage ponies to behave."<p>

Spike ran over. "Twilight, the Princess turned up while you were out. I told her what happened, and she" well, she left again, very confused. And wondering if she'd been drinking too much of something called moonshine?"

Twilight winced. Good thing I already thought of a cover story

\* \* \*

><p>24.3<p>

Twilight stifled a giggle, holding her hand over her mouth.

"Yeah, yeah" Naruto Uzumaki muttered, as some of the other Anchors with less restraint than Twilight started laughing at him.

For whatever reason, this world had given all the Loopers present little animal ears and a tail, and otherwise enforced human body form. Some of them carried it off rather well, but the fox tail Naruto had ended up with was just too poofy to take seriously.

"Okay, what's the gimmick here?" Ranma asked, idly looking his own random cat tail over. "I mean, this can't be it"

"Glad you asked!" said the local Anchor, Cinque. "This place has all kinds of strange rules, but number one is that death is impossible here."

"Impossible meaning" Ichigo asked, having a lot of experience with the definition of words like 'die'.

"Basically, if you take what would otherwise be a lethal hit on a battlefield-

There was a very big bang from the other side of the field. A smouldering cat with a lightning-bolt scar landed in front of them, uncurled, and then said something obscene.

"â€|that." Cinque pointed at the luckless Potter. "Usually you end up more chibi, but there's variance. It wears off eventually."

He looked around. "Though I have to say, this particular battlefield is huge. I've never seen one remotely this bigâ€|"

The Anchors exchanged sidelong glances.

"Waitâ€|" Shinji said, slowly. "Does this mean a completely guilt free, no consequences-"

Lina Inverse acted first, rattling off the incantation to Dragon Slave in a little under two seconds, and then things got quite complicated.

\* \* \*

><p>Eventually, Twilight found herself in a smouldering crater four hundred feet deep, and back to being a unicorn.<p>

"Gotcha!" Nanoha called from above, showing a V-sign and flying off.

Twilight frowned, then tested something. It worked.

Slowly, a grin spread over her face.

\* \* \*

><p>Nanoha was looking around for another target when a twinned, knock-off copy of her own Force Burst slammed into the back of her shield and sent her flying forwards.<p>

Turning, she stabilized and looked for her attacker.

"Hi!" Twilight said brightly. "Did you know that my magic still works like this?"

Nanoha sent mental commands to Raising Heart, which switched into a rather more dangerous setting, and loaded in two cartridges. "Right, then. Rematch?"

Twilight nodded. "Sounds good. Besides, I want to be as far from there as possible."

A nod indicated somewhere about forty miles north, which seemed to be where Naruto, Ranma, Ichigo and Lina had congregated. Things just kept exploding.

Nanoha shivered. "Right. I don't fancy being aâ€|" she took the time to actually look her accoutrements over. "â€|well, apparently I'd end up as a dog?"

"Nothing wrong with dogs."

"Yeahâ€|" The human mage shrugged. "But I don't fancy using dog shampoo."

"That's silly." Twilight lit her horn, layering defensive spells and

Ascending to restore her flight capabilities. "You know, I wonder if this world was an accidentâ€¦ it can't be normal to have this many Anchors around."

\* \* \*

><p>"Told you," Inari said smugly. "Naruto is clearly the best Anchor in a fight. As it should be."<p>

Skuld scowled across the scrying pool. "It's not over yet, missy! Besides, if Ranma gets turned into a cat, that's just asking for the Neko-ken!"

The various deities who spoke for major Loops started squabbling amongst themselves.

In the corner, Loki chuckled. Noticing, an eight legged horse deity â€" Sleipnir â€" stepped over. "What is it, mom?"

Loki shook his head. "Don't call me that." The words didn't have any real heat to them. "Anyway, I was just thinking that my own champion of sorts in this little comparison has the best idea."

Sleipnir focused. "Oh, I see. The little Haddock would appear to be running for it. Is that allowed?"

"Yes." The God of Trickery clapped his son â€" it's complicated â€" on the fore right shoulder. "I wrote the rules, so of course it's allowed. Though I must say, that pony of yours is doing well."

"Twilight Sparkle has something of a flair, yes," Sleipnir allowed. "And it helps that she can't really be disabled here."

On the world of Flonyard, something very big detonated. The eight-legged horse winced. "I think that may, however, give her at least a headache."

\* \* \*

><p>24.4 (Anowack)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle had experienced many strange variations of her home loop in her countless years as a Looper. There had been loops where she awoke in a frozen world that had suffered Nightmare Moon's eternal night for a thousand years. There had been loops where Discord was the beloved ruler of Equestria and ponies thrived in his chaos. There had been loops where everypony's gender was reversed and loops where Celestia ruled the night while Luna claimed the day. Loops where Celestia had trained Twilight in the ancient art of pony ninjutsu and loops where Cadance had been her Unicorn Tennis coach.<p>

Her long experience with this infinite variety usually gave Twilight more than enough equanimity to handle whatever new twists and turns each loop brought. If one loop's Shining Armor was a cold, distant brother, or if another loop's Twilight had never discovered her love of magic, Twilight could deal with it. Most such problems could be

corrected, often without ever overtly breaking character as her pre-loop self, and those that could not could be endured for a brief lifetime. In the long run, very little of it mattered. It wasn't worth getting upset over.

This loop took less than a minute â€" just long enough for the first loop memories to finish settling in â€" to make Twilight Sparkle furious.

She awoke in a familiar location on the palace grounds, pouring over the legend of Nightmare Moon. This version, though similar in the broad strokes to the usual tale, contained no mention of the Elements of Harmony, but Twilight barely had time to consider that before the other, more disturbing changes came to her attention.

On her flank, where her familiar starburst should have been, was a patch of dull gray fur shaped in the image of Princess Celestia's sun. Twilight gaped at it for several long moments. When the solidifying loop memories told her what it meant, her face twisted and she stood, leaving the book of lore lying on the grass.

The brand marked her position as Princess Celestia's personal slave.

"Buck this loop," Twilight declared, and she summoned her Element of Magic to her forehead with but a thought, wings sprouting from her sides as the gray brand shattered and revealed her cutie mark. Their connection told her all five of her friends were Awake this loop. While on the one hoof she hated they had to see this loop's mockery of everything they loved, on the other hoof she would have hated having to deal with this alone.

Rainbow Dash was the closest, somewhere in Canterlot. Magic flared, and when Celestia's guards came to investigate the surge minutes later all they found was an abandoned, forgotten tome of legends.

\* \* \*

><p>"So... I take it we aren't playing along this loop, then?" Rainbow Dash asked the furious alicorn who had just burst through the wall of her â€" actually surprisingly luxurious â€" quarters in the back of a small estate just outside the palace.<p>

"No, really," Twilight said dryly, flapping her wings once. "What was your first clue?"

"Good, because I was not planning to spend another minute owned by Prince Blueblood." A necklace appeared around the pegasus's neck and a moment later a horn grew on her head. "I think I was supposed to do something stupid tomorrow at the games tomorrow anyway."

Twilight forced herself to examine the distasteful loop memories. Celestia had been planning to attend the... ugh... gladiatorial games in honor of the thousandth anniversary of her victory over her sister, where as the main event reigning champion Spitfire was going to face a hot new fighter... "I think I would have been there," Twilight said.

"Yeah, I think I was going to try taking you hostage to bargain for my freedom," Rainbow said. She snorted. "I don't think I was really

thinking things through very well."

Twilight Sparkle had gotten good at figuring out how loops were 'supposed' to go. "Pre-loop me was secretly studying teleportation magic," she said. "I bet she'd have used it to get both of us away during the confusion when Luna showed up." Then finding the others while on the run, probably discovering or creating the Elements, and a war against Nightmare Moon.

Two unicorn guards poked their heads in through the hole in the wall, horns glowing with explosive spells. Twilight casually teleported them through the palace wards and into Celestia's private restroom mere heartbeats before their spells finished casting.

"Where to?" was all Rainbow asked.

"It feels like Applejack is closest, probably in Ponyville. Fluttershy's not far... Everfree? And then Rarity and Pinkie Pie are up north somewhere."

Twin sonic booms shattered every window in downtown Canterlot as the two alicorns accelerated out of the city.

\* \* \*

><p>They found Applejack easily enough, near what should have been Ponyville but was instead a vast apple plantation owned by Filthy Rich. The orange mare insisted that they take the time to free her family " which Twilight didn't disagree with in the slightest, but which allowed a party of guards sent from Canterlot to catch up with them.<p>

That had put an end to Twilight's hopes that she'd been hasty and Celestia was looping.

Fortunately, she'd been in the middle of testing a spell to remove the Apple Family's slave brands " which were actually fairly complicated constructs that packed a suite of tracking markers and punishment triggers along with what Twilight considered a "mini-Discording" that helped suppress rebellious emotions at the cost of also stopping the slaves from finding their talents and earning their cutie marks. It might have been fun to reverse engineer such a novel and complex spell if it wasn't a nasty abomination that went against everything pony magic should have stood for.

Even more fortunately, Celestia, or whoever her guard captain was (thankfully not Shining Armor), had not considered the difficulties involved with sending a guard force whose rank-and-file was enslaved to stop a nascent slave rebellion, and a mass variant of Twilight's new counterspell backed by the power of three alicorns sufficed to turn the bulk of the enemy to their side. (A just as powerful mass teleport sent the rest packing back to Canterlot.)

They'd met Fluttershy an hour later at the edge of the Everfree Forest, and after a brief discussion the four alicorns had relocated the freed ponies to the precarious haven of the Palace of the Royal Pony Sisters. Fluttershy had lived there as a fugitive slave for almost a decade; with any luck it would stay safe for the next few days.

With a promise to return shortly, they headed north in search of their two remaining friends.

\* \* \*

><p>Five alicorns (Pinkie Pie had joined them in mid-journey, already ascended) circled in the air above the black spires of the corrupted Crystal Empire, and Twilight Sparkle 's stomach was sick.<p>

It wasn't the terrible dark crystal or the miasma of despair â€" she'd seen the Empire under Sombra's rule at least a dozen times, though this was the first time he ruled as Celestia's vassal. Nor was it the moon â€" which had lost the dark visage of the Mare in the Moon right on schedule and failed to set in the hours since.

It was the fact that half the banners below â€" and half the flanks of the crystal ponies who barely looked up to see the five ponies in the air above â€" bore Cadance's cutie mark. Celestia was bad enough, but to think that she would have to also see a slaving mockery of Cadance...

As if in answer to her thoughts, a pink figure launched herself from a balcony below.

Twilight steeled herself. Rarity was somewhere below, and for some reason had not yet ascended or joined her friends, but they could do this. Silently, without pointless discussion, the five Bearers fell into formation, horns alight. It might "only" be Cadance, but Mi Amore Cadenza was still an alicorn princess. They would have to strike hard and fast to end this without collateral damage.

Cadance halted in mid-air, eyes widening. "Sunshine, sunshine, ladybugs awake!" she shouted desperately.

"Clap your hooves and do a little shake," Twilight finished automatically, letting her spell wither away uncast. "You're looping?"

Cadance nodded, drawing closer with a hesitant beat of her wings. "Yes." She looked around. "Shining Armor?" she asked.

Twilight shook her head. "I don't know," she said. Her pre-loop self had not seen her family since her explosive magical awakening on the auction block at the Royal Canterlot Slave Market had attracted Princess Celestia's attention. Pinkie Pie (who had been running an underground railroad smuggling fugitive slaves to griffon territory) remembered helping her parents escape, but Shining hadn't been with them. "With any luck, we'll find him soon."

"Right," Cadance said weakly.

Twilight glanced down at the black city below. "Why..." She trailed off. Her loop memories only turned up scattered references to the Crystal Empire, and nothing on the current situation.

Cadance winced. "It's a long story," she said.

A cold wind carried a shadow through the alicorns, forming a familiar figure overhead, framed by the unmarred moon. Ethereal, black wings large enough to serve a small dragon beat slowly, and Sombra's



crimson eyes glared down at the six mares, green fires burning around them. "What is this?" he demanded. "Wife?"

"Wife?" Applejack echoed disbelievingly. Cadance nodded weakly, her mouth twisted into a grimace.

"...I'm sorry, Cadance," Pinkie Pie said after a moment. "I don't think I can throw your anniversary party."

"There's not going to be one," Cadance said vehemently, shuddering. In a moment, Fluttershy had flown to her side, laying a comforting hoof on her side.

"All right, girls," Twilight said. "We can do this, no problem. All together."

Sombra looked confused " but not even a little hurt " when Cadance joined the other alicorns' formation instead of taking his side, but then he shook his head. "I have no idea what is going on, little mares, but this is sheer foolishness. Even with six of you, I am still SOMBRA. I am second only to Celestia herself in magic, and all the power of my slaves is mine to wield." A ball of darkness and green fire formed above his horn. "And if that is not enough to end your foolish hope, my treacherous wife should have warned you that I still hold this!" The globe of black flared, and when it receded it cradled a small object.

Rainbow Dash let out a snort of laughter. Twilight shook her head, smiling slightly.

Sombra just stared in disbelief at the heart-shaped hunk of stone that floated in his magic aura. It was elegantly carved, a perfect replica of the Crystal Heart... but still only a replica.

"Were you looking for this, master?" a new voice asked.

"Rarity!" Cadance cried in relief as the white alicorn rose up from the city below, the real Crystal Heart held in her own magic.

"You were just waiting for the right moment, weren't you?" Applejack commented. "Drama queen."

"Guilty," Rarity allowed cheerfully. "Cadance, darling," she said as she floated the Heart over to her, "we simply must come up with a system to tell each other when we're looping. The past day could have been much less stressful."

"How?!" Sombra demanded.

"I wouldn't mind knowing either," Cadance said. "It wasn't in the usual place; I checked there."

Rarity smiled. "It turns out my gem-finding spell works on it," she said, "at least when powered by Generosity." Her necklace gleamed in the pale moonlight, and Rarity glanced at Twilight. "We could have saved ourselves a lot of stress that way too, the first time."

Twilight smiled. "But Spike would have missed his chance to save the day." Rarity glanced around, and Twilight's smile faded. "I don't

think he is born yet this loop," she said. Celestia's School For Gifted Unicorns still existed, but only freeborn unicorns attended.

Rarity's eyes closed for a moment, but then she nodded. "All right. Let's get this over with."

Rainbow Dash's necklace flared bright red. "Right!"

Defensive spells gathered around Sombra.

Cadance held the Crystal Heart high. "Crystal ponies!" she shouted, her voice echoing throughout the city. "I do now what I should have done when I first came here! The Crystal Heart is yours once more! Use the light and love you have kept alive these past thousand years to end Sombra's reign forever!"

Confusion sounded throughout the city below, but within seconds the Heart began to shine, piercing Nightmare Moon's eternal night like a new sun.

"No," Sombra hissed, dark clouds of magic gathering to smother the Heart's light.

"Now!" Twilight shouted, and the Elements of Harmony flared with a multicolored light of their own. With practiced ease, Twilight directed their power, sending twisting beams of rainbow light into the Crystal Heart.

For several moments, even the alicorns were blinded by the brilliant glare of the magic they had summoned.

Below, the Crystal Empire was transformed, the dark and twisted spires becoming the glorious shining city that they had been long ago, before Sombra.

The dark king screamed defiance as the light consumed him. A great shadow persisted for an instant, but then scattered, dissolving to shreds and then nothing, leaving behind only a wailing, onyx crystal pony foal that slowly drifted to the ground in a cradle of soft magic.

Bands of rainbow light arced through the dark night sky, the magic of Harmony racing down ley lines to the far corners of an Equestria that had never known its touch, and as it passed overhead every last slave brand shattered.

After a moment's silent consultation with her friends, Twilight sent a message along, a plea to sound in the heart of every pony that would listen. "Cast off your chains, but shed no blood. Earth Pony, Unicorn, or Pegasus... former slave or former master... we are all ponies. We can be better than this."

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia and Nightmare Moon â€" apparently allied, a first for their non-looping selves â€" met the looping alicorns on a tall, bare hill several miles outside of Canterlot.<p>

They didn't bring an army, but a scrying spell had shown Twilight

that Celestia didn't have much of one anymore to bring. The slave troopers had simply left, and the rest of the guard was barricaded in their barracks. An expectant quiet had fallen over Canterlot over all of Equestria. The sun had still not risen a limit to how far Nightmare Moon was willing to compromise, no doubt and the rainbow waves had dimmed only slightly, still visible to the magically unaided eye.

Everypony that lived knew that their world was changing forever, and they waited to see what it was changing into.

Neither Celestia nor the corrupt Luna were foolish enough to think that their first blow would end the fight, but the twin beams of brilliant solar fire and cold moonlight scattered their foes' formation and briefly suppressed their defenses. A powerful gravity spell forced the loopers to the ground before the two larger alicorns.

There was silence for a long moment as the opponents studied each other. It was Twilight's first time seeing this loop's Celestia with Awake eyes, and it hurt that she could see no difference from the mentor she loved so much.

The Princess of the Sun's eyes were hard, and though they widened slightly in surprise when they passed over Cadance, it was only when they met Twilight's gaze that she spoke. "Why, Twilight?" she asked, and the honest pain and confusion in her voice made Twilight shake. "Wasn't I a kind mistress? I raised you like my own daughter, taught you magic and gave you any comfort you asked for. Why this rebellion?"

The questions hurt all the more because they showed how far this Celestia truly was from the real one. "If you even have to ask," Twilight said, still shaking slightly, "I don't think you'd understand the answer." Her friends were at her side in an instant, lending comfort as they pressed against her.

"Surrender now," Cadance said, taking over. She held the Crystal Heart in her magic, and its glow still lived, beating in time to the prayers of the crystal ponies they'd left behind in the distant north. She grew to the full stature she'd earned over the countless years of looping, easily the match of Celestia or Luna. Her mane glowed in the dark night, moving in an unseen wind. "We are many, you are few, and my friends bear the most powerful magic known to ponykind." Celestia and Luna's eyes darted to the necklaces and Twilight's tiara, but showed no recognition. "Trust me," Cadance continued, "when I say that the weight of age and experience is on our side as well. You cannot win this battle."

Nightmare Moon laughed, her starry mane waving wildly around her. "And thou called me insane, sister?" she asked. "Enough. Let us put an end these upstart fillies and be done with this madness so my reign may begin."

Celestia took a deep breath. "Yes," she said softly. "But... please, if we can, let us spare Twilight Sparkle's life."

Nightmare Moon snorted, but she nodded. "Very well." Her eyes swept Twilight and her friends. "This is your last chance, little ponies, before you learn why my legend survived a thousand years."

Rainbow Dash snickered. "It's almost cute how you think you're more awesome than us." She shook her head. "Are you ready, Twilight?"

"No," Twilight said, "but that doesn't matter. Let's just finish this."

Celestia and her sister "even in her corrupted form" were ancient, powerful in both body and magic, and the veterans of countless battles. The mightiest dragons feared their wrath, and the heavens themselves moved or stilled at their command.

The battle lasted some time, but the royal sisters never had a chance. When it was done, Equestria had a brief moment to see two alicorn heads facing each other across the moon before Twilight Sparkle set it and summoned forth the delayed dawn.

\* \* \*

><p>The signature at the bottom of the letter that had come to Canterlot was enough to determine which of the Seven Harmonious Princesses would go to negotiate with the leaders of this particular band of escaped slaves wishing to return to Equestria.<p>

Twilight and Cadance teleported to the meeting site, on the edge of the vast southern badlands, almost an hour early. That was maybe a mistake, because Cadance's impatience was unbearable, but soon enough Twilight spied a dragon flying toward them.

Cadance's horn lit, but a wave from Twilight stilled it. A vision magnification spell revealed two ponies safely carried in the crimson dragon's claw. (Twilight was fairly sure this was the same dragon that normally had to be discouraged from napping in the mountain above Ponyville. That was no doubt going to be an interesting story.)

Shortly, the dragon landed a small distance away, and lowered his claw to deposit his passengers before taking wing once more. While he circled overhead, the two ponies approached Twilight and Cadance. Twilight recognized one of them.

"Twily?" Shining Armor asked in disbelief, mouth hanging open as he stared at her and neatly answered the question of whether he was looping. "Is that... is that really you?"

Beside Twilight, Cadance was frowning at Shining's companion, but Twilight only had eyes for her brother. He was thin, and heavily scarred, but otherwise healthy, she concluded in relief. "Yes," she confirmed. "I'm your sister, Shining."

"...how?" Shining asked in disbelief.

"It's a long story," Twilight said, and she took a step forward.

That broke Shining's restraint, and he galloped forward, meeting Twilight in an embrace. "I didn't think I'd ever see you again," he murmured into her side, choking back tears. "I hated that I couldn't protect you that day."

"I know," Twilight whispered, wrapping her wings around her brother. "It's all right. It's all over now. We're together again."

After a long moment Shining wormed out of Twilight's grasp and sat back on his rear, legs shaking. "Our parents?" he asked, clearly fearing the answer.

"Safe, in Canterlot," Twilight was glad to say.

Shining stared up at her, disbelief warring with relief in his eyes. Then he laughed suddenly. "It's weird that you're taller than me, Twily," he said.

"And the wings?" Twilight asked, smiling.

"And the wings," Shining Armor agreed.

His companion chuckled, drawing Twilight's attention. Cadance was still staring at her, Twilight realized, and she took a moment to study the mare herself. She was a pink unicorn with bright green eyes and a dark mane, and her cutie mark was... a cocoon? Twilight started in realization.

"Ah, let me introduce you," Shining said, standing. "Twily, this is my wife, Chrysalis."

"The changeling queen?" Cadance asked in a strangled voice, breaking her silence.

The pink unicorn started. "You know?!" she exclaimed. Then she shook her head. "I guess I shouldn't be surprised you can see through my magic, though, since you beat Celestia." There was a flare of green, and Chrysalis's true form replaced the unicorn. She was much smaller than normal, though, around the same size as Shining. A part of Twilight wondered if that was choice or malnutrition due to true love being harder to find in this loop, but she was more interested in her brother's reaction.

He didn't show any surprise, shaking his head as he walked over to the changeling and kissed her on the cheek. "I'd hoped to break that piece of news a little more gently," he commented. As much as that, it was probably the adoring look in Chrysalis's eyes as she smiled at Shining that made Cadance shudder. "...is your friend okay, Twily?" Shining asked.

Twilight teleported to Cadance's side. "Deep breaths," she whispered harshly. "Deep breaths, Cadance. Remember, he's never met you and that isn't her. I don't want to have to send you to the moon too."

Cadance shuddered again, but that was all she did, at least.

Twilight's long experience with countless bizarre loops granted Twilight a certain equanimity. Her brother being deeply in love with an apparently equally besotted and hopefully much nicer Queen Chrysalis was far from the worst craziness she'd endured. Soon enough, it would just be another funny story to tell the looping Shining Armor the next time they met up.

...the hard part was going to be convincing Cadance to see it that way.

\* \* \*

><p>24.5<p>

"The parliament calls on the honourable member of the Life Seat of Diamonds, Rarity of Ponyville."

"Thank you, Speaker." Rarity stepped up to the podium. "Honourable mares and stallions, I have only recently taken my position as a member of this august body, and hope to learn more than I already do about the running of our fine country. But with regard to the current topic under debate, I feel I must make my voice heard."

Several ponies who had sat back at the first sentence perked their ears up again. Maybe this wouldn't be a bit of on-the-record blather.

"We must first recall that, in a past that is not so very long ago by the standards of the proud race of dragons, we were not the united country of which we think today when the name Equestria is spoken."

Rarity's voice softened, but could still be heard throughout the room. "Equestria. An idea, one founded on a simple concept â€" let none be turned away. It is for that very reason that our parliament itself is made up the way it is."

A pause, then in a dry tone: "But I assume you already know that."

There were chuckles.

"It is true, perhaps, that when Equestria was founded those ponies in long-past days thought only of ponies. It should not surprise us â€" encountering others was rare. But that assumption has been cast aside many times in the past. Are not the deer of White Tail Woods given rights equal to any other citizen, should they chose to exercise them? They are indeed. And the same for the donkeys, the cows, the sheepâ€" all those who live freely within our borders, a small but unique and treasured part of what makes Equestria."

Some of the members arrested movement that would have seen them turn to look at various other MPs. Such as the sole deer amongst them, a middle-aged hind from the area of White Tail Woods, for exampleâ€|

Something inside Rarity was singing as she kept going. "Yes, Equestria is a land where all are welcome, as it should be. In this light, I propose that our reaction to the discovery of a new race beyond our borders should not be to gird ourselves for the threat of war, nor to ignore the issue and hope it goes away. No, I propose that our response â€" one to be sent as soon as time allows â€" is to empower an ambassador and open up normalized relations with these new acquaintances."

Her voice had risen with that last few lines, and she brought it back

under control. "Perhaps I'm a little inexperienced, as I said. But I cannot help but remember the results of applying diplomacy in other recent crises this country has faced. Like Nightmare Moon and Discord, let our approach to Queen Chrysalis show that Equestria does not shy from acting decisively, and let our decision be one of quick and generous negotiation."

By mentioning those two threats, she was deliberately reminding the assembled chamber that she was directly involved in saving Equestria twice " and in both cases redeeming the hostile magical creature.

"That is all I have to say. I would only add, as a closing remark, that Equestria has traditionally destroyed her enemies " but not by destroying them, merely what makes them an enemy. It is how we have gained our fastest friends."

Going over it in her head, Rarity didn't think it was all that much of a speech" it was a lot harder to make one up on the fly than it sounded. But it got a lot of applause anyway, so maybe she was onto something.

A political career wasn't something she'd do every loop, not by a long chalk, but it was certainly different.

\* \* \*

><p>24.6 (Koolerkid)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight had Awakened in a lot of strange places. In the ocean, in space, on the moon, in a sewer... she also had a tendency to Awake mid-stride, which was really annoying because even after an uncountable number of loops, she still nearly tripped almost every time. She found that the place you Awaken in can actually tell you quite a lot about the loop you're in, though it wasn't perfect. If she woke up reading the familiar book of prophecy, for example, she could expect that loop to be somewhat close to her base loop.<p>

So when Twilight Awoke curled up in a dark corner of a dirty, dingy hovel with an equally dirty, dingy human girl staring at her, Twilight decided that this was going to be a depressing loop.

She was a human here, dressed in rags every bit as filthy and stained with ash and soot as everything else. Checking her loop memories, Twilight learned her name here was Twila, and that she was a runaway slave, or skaa. As a girl, her options were limited, so she and the girl she'd escaped with, named Vin, had become thieves. Vin was the girl across from her now; her brother had taught them the trade before abandoning them, as he'd continuously warned he would. They weren't exactly friends - Vin was too paranoid and pre-loop Twila was too cautious - but they were allies, at least.

Seeing her eyes open, Vin gave her a searching look. "New looper?"

Twilight gave a relieved sigh and nodded. "Twilight Sparkle, of Equestria. Are you the local Anchor?"

Vin nodded, and leaned back. "Yup. Welcome to Scadrial, the butt of the multiverse. Where the skies are a brilliant shade of ash black, the trees are brown, the people are either sheep or pigs, and our ruler is an immortal asshole."

Twilight winced at that. "That bad, huh?"

Vin reached into her subspace pocket and pulled out a slim brown book, handing it to Twilight. "See for yourself. I'm not much for books, but Elend thought making a summary of the way things work here would speed things up a bit. Just read fast; we don't have long before Camon shows up to drag us away on his idiot suicide mission, and I don't want to leave before I know what we're doing this loop."

Twilight nodded eagerly and snatched up the book. "Don't worry, I'm a fast reader." She opened the book, and sped her way through the pages. As she read, her eager smile dissipated into a frown. Rashek, the Lord Ruler, reminded her uncomfortably of some of the more unstable versions of Celestia she'd encountered throughout the loops. He was an impossibly powerful immortal who saved the world once, long ago, and preformed a vital function to protect the world from further harm. He was also dangerously unstable, driven mad by age, power, and the influence of a mad god. Twilight decided, as she finished the book, to try and save him. And she knew just how to do it, too.

"Do you think you can get me to the Well of Ascension?" she asked. The Well was the only source of power the book mentioned that was great enough for her purposes. "I have a plan, but I'll need the Well to make something, first."

Vin raised an eyebrow, but shrugged. "I guess so. Raiding Kredik Shaw is always good for a laugh. Can't open the Well myself, though. Think you might be an Allomancer?"

Twilight grinned a little. "Probably. Allomancy is basically magic, and I'm very good at magic."

Vin nodded. "Okay, good. Otherwise, we'd have to get Elend or Kell, assuming they're even Awake this loop, and they're not the... stealthiest guys around. Well, maybe Kell, but he tends to leave a trail of dead bodies."

Twilight shuddered at this, then shook her head. "Well, no need for that. Give me a week to learn Allomancy, and we'll go to the Well."

"A week?" Vin seemed skeptical. "Confident, are we?"

Twilight grinned. "You'd be surprised..."

\* \* \*

><p>Vin stared, open-mouthed, as Twilight effortlessly Pushed several hundred pounds of iron above her head, burning only steel and a bit of pewter to brace herself. "You were right. I am surprised."<p>

Twilight grinned. "And it only took me three days! This is easier than I thought!"



\* \* \*

><p>A few days and one stealth mission later, Vin watched in bemusement as Twilight climbed from the Well of Ascension, wearing the strange tiara she'd gone in with and carrying what looked like... "You're kidding. You used up the source of near-omnipotent power to create a couple necklaces?"<p>

Twilight grinned at her. "These aren't just necklaces - they're fully-functional replicas of the Elements of Harmony, some of the most powerful magical artifacts from my home loop. I only had my Element of Magic with me, of course, but I was able to invoke the spirits of the other Elements to make copies. I doubt they'd hold up past one use, but it's enough for our purposes." She held out one of the necklaces, emblazoned with a small, red thunderbolt. "Here, I figure Loyalty suits you. Now we'll just need four other people to represent a few abstract concepts, and a clear shot at the Lord Ruler - and maybe some of the Steel Inquisitors, if we can manage it."

Vin looked down at the necklaces, before shrugging and putting it on. "I do like red. These are weapons?"

"Not exactly, no. But they'll defeat the Lord Ruler, and, through the connection between the hemalurgy spikes on him and the Inquisitors, probably Ruin too."

"Two birds, one stone." Vin smiled. "I like it."

\* \* \*

><p>Elend fingered the necklace bearing a purple diamond he wore nervously. "Vin, are you sure about this? I just don't see how some jewelry is going to stop the Lord Ruler, much less Ruin." He, Vin, and Twilight were huddled in the corner of a hut, on the very edge of the town square, where the Lord Ruler was scheduled to make an appearance. Vin had been overjoyed to see her husband was Awake; it was the most emotion Twilight had seen her display to date.<p>

Vin just shrugged. "Twilight seems to think so. And if it doesn't, it's not like we don't know how to kill him, or the Inquisitors. Might as well give it a shot."

Twilight smiled warmly at her fellow Anchor. "Thanks, Vin."

"Hey, you three!" Kelsier's grinning face made an appearance from the entrance to the roof, the blue balloon on his own necklace glimmering in the torchlight. "Come on, it's almost time. To Vin's mild disappointment, Kell had not been awake, but he'd leapt at the chance to add a pair of powerful Skaa Mistborn like Twilight and Vin to his team. Elend had taken more convincing, being a nobleman, but Elend had apparently kept the extreme Allomantic powers he normally wouldn't have gotten until much later, and his raw power convinced even the most stubbornly anti-noble member of the crew.

As the trio trooped up to the roof, they joined the rest of Kelsier's merry gang. There was Ham, a simple sort of man with a philosophical bent that Twilight found rather intriguing; they had had many lengthy discussions on various topics. Next to him was Breeze, who greatly reminded Twilight of a sort of odd fusion between Rarity's high class

and Rainbow Dash's superior attitude. There was Dox, who avoided Vin and Twilight studiously - Twilight was certain it was because of their close association with Elend. And finally, the last two members of Twilight's impromptu Element Bearers - scholarly Sazed, whom Twilight had been most impressed with and given the Element of Honesty, and gentle Spook, who had recieved Kindness.

Dox eyed the group warily as the six Bearers assembled themselves on the edge of the roof. "I still don't believe those trinkets will do anything," he muttered.

Kelsier just grinned at him. "What have we got to lose? Twila says these things can defeat the Lord Ruler; I say, let's give it a shot! After all, nobody knows any other way to kill him, do they?"

"Shhh!" Spook hissed, pointing, but he needn't have bothered. Twilight could feel the Lord Ruler coming, like a heavy weight on her soul. She shivered; the dark feeling reminded her of the effects of the Dementors from her Hogwarts loops. As if she'd never be happy again. Vin hadn't been exaggerating.

She and the other three Mistborn in the group all put up Copperclouds and began Rioting the emotions of the group, just as planned, and the feeling of dread dissipated.

Twilight watched carefully as a black carriage came up to the square, and the Lord Ruler stepped out. The carriage was followed by several of the abominations Vin called Steel Inquisitors, and just looking at them made Twilight feel sick. She didn't even want to think about all the people who died to create the spikes that stuck out from their eyes, and the smaller, hidden ones on their backs. Hemalurgy was a dark magic indeed.

Kelsier put a hand on Twilight's shoulder. "Whatever it is these baubles do," he said quietly, "you'll never get a better shot."

Twilight nodded, and concentrated on her Element. As she hoped, the other five Elements responded, and they all began to glow. The Lord Ruler, his sense sharpened by years of burning Tin, noticed the glow and shouted something, but before his Inquisitors could spring into action, a rainbow light exploded from the Elements. It spread out, covering first Luthadel, then the Empire, and eventually all of Scadrial.

\* \* \*

><p>Some time later, Vin looked down at the sobbing Rashek. "What did you do to him?"<p>

Twilight shrugged. "All the evil and madness has been purged from him. I imagine he's probably overwhelmed with guilt and shame."

"Nice." Vin grinned. "And them?" She gestured to the fallen Steel Inquisitors.

Twilight shrugged. "They were mostly dead already; just a scrap of soul bound to a body with Hemalurgy and Ruin's power. The Elements freed all the souls trapped in the Hemalurgic spikes, and without

that power... well, people don't generally survive having giant spikes in the place of eyes."

"Ouch." Vin laughed. "And Ruin?"

Twilight smiled a bit. "Going by the other pure evil deities we've used them on, probably imprisoned in something even sturdier than Preservation's prison. He has no more power on this world."

"Excellent. Last question." Vin gestured around at the clear blue skies, bright yellow sun, and green grass. "How the hell did you manage all this?"

Twilight chuckled. "The environment had been artificially altered. The Elements are pretty good at normalizing that kind of thing."

Vin shook her head. "You're a miracle worker, Twilight Sparkle. It normally takes me at least a year to fix this, and I usually have to turn into a god to do it."

"Well, I'm already a god. Sort of. We use the term divine, at leastâ€|"

"Wait, what?"

\* \* \*

><p>AN: I could only fit six in this time. (The DA version of this fic has fairly strict word-per-chapter limits.)<p>

24.1 is the Elenium setting.

>24.3 is the world of Dog Days, which looks like rather an interesting anime. (It's also used here for a multi way battle royale between Loopers.)<br>24.4... this is interesting. The author of this little snippet says it's based off a fic concept which never panned out. So if it looks like an interesting one, say so and just maybe it'll encourage Anowack to actually do it...

>24.5 Writing speeches is hard.<br>24.6 is the Mistborn setting.

## 25. Chapter 25

### 25.1

Twilight frowned. "Huh. I would appear to beâ€| Twilight the False Bearded."

It seemed that in this universe the fabled old wizard was actually a mare â€" her, in fact. Butâ€| \_she\_ was pretending to be a stallion for some unknown reason.

Well, it wasn't importantâ€| probably. Twilight discarded the beard and, after a moment of deliberation, decided to keep the hat and robe.

"Right, I wonder if-

Something barrelled through the door and threw forelegs around her.

"Hi, Momma!"

"Nyx?" Twilight said, delighted. "How come you're-"

Luna entered the room. That jogged Twilight's Loop memory, and she made an \_ah\_ of realization. "So, the Royal Sisters are twins this time."

"Indeed." Luna nodded to her solemnly. "Strange, but it gives me a good opportunity to really get to know myâ€|"

She paused. "Now that I think about it, a permanent descriptor for Nyx's relationship to me is a rather tricky question. I mean, I can scarcely call \_her\_ a dark side."

Twilight and Nyx giggled.

"I am darker in colour, thoughâ€|" the youngest Looper there said critically. "I mean, there's not a lot in itâ€|"

Luna appeared to come to a decision. "I shall simply call you \_sister\_, dear Nyx. And I would be honoured to continue to call you that, no matter the whys and whens of the loop."

Nyx beamed.

"Now," the elder Lunar Princess added, "how shall we divide the duties?"

"I know!" Nyx's horn lit, and created an illusion of the moon-sun system relative to them. "I get the new moons, you get the full moons. That fair?"

"Sounds good," Luna nodded. "What about the daytimes?"

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Of \_course\_ you're going to want me to do it."

"Now you mention itâ€|" Nyx said teasingly, "that \_would\_ help."

\* \* \*

><p>"Erâ€| Day Regent?"<p>

Twilight looked up. "Yes?"

"I was wonderingâ€| I know it's impolite, butâ€|" the elderly noble shook his head. "How old are you?"

"What makes you ask?" Twilight replied. "And it \_is\_ rude to ask a mare's age."

"Well, I remember when, as a young colt, my father took me into Canterlot for the first time, and he mentioned that you'd been a rock of stability for the country for as long as he could remember." The stallion seemed very confused. "And here you are, the same as you were on that day."

"Oh, I understand your confusion," Twilight said earnestly. "Assisting with the court is something of a family

tradition."

"â€|right. Sorry for getting you mixed up with your mother." The noble walked off, satisfied.

\_I wonder if he'll ever work out that those two sentences I said, while both true, weren't actually otherwise relatedâ€|\_

\* \* \*

><p>25.2 (Anowack)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia and Nightmare Moon â€" apparently allied â€" met the looping alicorns on a tall, bare hill several miles outside of Canterlot.<p>

They didn't bring an army, but a scrying spell had shown Twilight that it wasn't for lacking the option. The royal guard â€" even a torn Shining Armor â€" had begged Princess Celestia to let them help. Celestia had been forced to refuse them, of course; against seven enemy alicorn princesses an army was likely to be only a fleeting distraction.

An expectant quiet had fallen over Canterlot â€" over all of Equestria. The sun had still not risen â€" a limit to how far Nightmare Moon was willing to compromise, no doubt â€" and the rainbow waves had dimmed only slightly, still visible to the magically unaided eye.

Everypony that lived knew that their world was changing forever, and they waited to see what it was changing into.

Neither Celestia nor the corrupt Luna were foolish enough to think that their first blow would end the fight, but the twin beams of brilliant solar fire and cold moonlight scattered their foes' formation and briefly suppressed their defenses. A powerful gravity spell forced the loopers to the ground before the two larger alicorns.

There was silence for a long moment as the opponents studied each other. It was Twilight's first time seeing this loop's Celestia with Awake eyes, and it \_hurt\_ to see the pain and confusion in her gaze.

Celestia's eyes widened in surprise as they passed over Cadance, blinking back unshed tears, but it was only when they met Twilight's gaze that she spoke. "\_Why\_, Twilight?" she asked, and despite it all the betrayed agony in her voice made Twilight shake. "What did I do wrong? Was I too harsh a teacher? Should I not have hidden the truth about Nightmare Moon from you? \_Why?\_"

Pinkie Pie seemed to be within seconds of vibrating into a thousand pieces from impatience, so Twilight nodded at her. "All right, do it now," she said.

"Yes!" Pinkie exclaimed, and her horn glowed a brilliant pink as she teleported all the ponies who had been "killed" in their attack on Ponyville to the battle site from the Palace of the Royal Pony

Sisters, where a bemused Looping Mayor Mare had been explaining the plan and overseeing the preparations.

"SURPRISE!" came from a hundred throats â€" though in nothing close to unison. The plan had been for them to get a ten second countdown, but Pinkie skipping that wasn't really a shock.

The "Welcome Back Princess Lu-" banner really \_shouldn't \_have been either, but Twilight still planted a hoof in her face when she saw it. At least she hadn't pushed it and tried to get them to make a "Congratulations On Reconciling" sign. Harmony only knew how that would have been spelled.

Celestia sat back, her mouth gaping open.

Nightmare Moon laughed, her starry mane waving wildly around her. "\*\*\*And thou called \*\*\*\_me\_\*\*\* insane, sister?\*" she asked.

"But... wha..." Celestia sputtered helplessly.

Nightmare Moon shook her head, still chortling. "\*\*\*They got u\*\*s, 'Tia," she said, blotches of black corruption running down her side and melting away. "Is it not clear?" Luna asked, apparently not even noticing her transformation reverting. "No doubt the entire intent of this rebellion was to force us to fight alongside each other once more."

Celestia certainly \_did \_notice though. "...Luna?"

The younger princess was still snickering. "It is most obvious that this Twilight Sparkle is \_thy \_student, 'Tia."

Celestia glanced at Twilight, and though the Princess of the Sun was still clearly confused, Twilight was relieved to see gratitude in her eyes. Then Celestia jumped up, almost bowling her sister over in the force of her embrace.

Twilight smiled. Though it was a little painful to apply anything learned from that distasteful loop to others, it had only held to reason that if sudden, massive rebellion by seven alicorns was enough to force Nightmare Moon and that slave-owning Celestia to reconcile on their own, it would also work on more a more ordinary version of her also.

Luna had finally taken stock of herself and the situation, and started returning her Celestia's hug, both sisters sobbing wildly. Twilight's smile widened a little. She and her friends would have a lot of explanations and apologies to make, but it was worth it, really.

Twilight glanced up at the unmarred moon and, deciding that the royal sisters were likely to be distracted for a while, quietly set it and brought forth the delayed dawn before joining the celebration.

\* \* \*

><p>25.3 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

Academic Excellence continued

\* \* \*

><p>As she approached the Flight Assignment board, she saw Cloud Chaser and Wildflower coming away with affronted expressions, which went flat as they saw her approach.<p>

"What's up guys? I figured you'd be able to team up with any-pony else, that's why we cross-trained."

"It's not us!" Cloud Chaser exclaimed, "You were robbed!"

"Yes, they made you a wing-pony!" Wildflower said indignantly. "I managed to get a look at the Hall of Fame. That run you pulled yesterday was the fastest ever!"

Dash shrugged. "I know. So who did I get as Lead?"

"Who elseâ€| " Cloud Chaser growled.

"They made me lead pony!" Lightning Dust's voice held a hint of smugness. "And they made us a team, that's what you wanted, isn't it? Working together and all that."

Dash turned to face her with a grin. "Yeah, that's exactly what I wanted."

That seemed to take some of the enjoyment out of Lightning Dust's expression. "I'll see you out on the tarmac, wing-pony."

She stalked off, to Dash's called response. "Hey, since we're partners now, we should get some breakfast togetherâ€| "

She found the other Ponyville ponies had clustered around her, most with similar expressions of displeasure. Thunderlane had a face like his namesake. "Why aren't you going to Spitfire's office and asking what in the wide, wide world of Equestria she was thinking! That pony couldn't lead a sing-song, let alone a team!"

"Why would Spitfire snub you like this? I thought she liked you!" Milky Way asked.

"That would be one excellent reason to be harder on me than any-pony else. Playing favourites is one of the fastest ways to breed resentment and break discipline. Besides, I know what she's doing, or I can guess at least. I guessed she'd put us together, we're the two strongest fliers, but there's another reason. Spitfire has to have spotted the potential problems with Dusty, they don't exactly pick Wonderbolt Commanders out of a hat, and she wants some-pony who can cope with her teamed up with her."

"Then why not as Lead pony?" Thunderlane asked. "Then you could tell her to shape up and she'd have to."

"Ha, like that would work! All that would do would be to make her even more resentful. She'd have to take my orders or quit, but she'd ultimately get so eager to show she's better than me that she'd pull some stupid stunt that would earn her a crash-landing. Trust me, I know show-offs. I was oneâ€| okay I still am one, but I've learned that there's more to life than that. Lightning Dust hasn't. As her

wing-pony, I can advise, suggest, and hopefully get her to see the advantages of working together."

Thunderlane still seemed unconvinced. "You and Spitfire are going to a lot of trouble to salvage her. I thought you said something about not playing favourites?"

"Not quite the same thing. I'd like to think that Spitfire or I would make the same effort for any-pony, one of you guys if you were the problem foal. She has the potential to go all the way, and it would be a crying shame if she failed because she failed to understand the rest of what she needs."

Raindrops was looking at her with a degree of wonder. "Dash, when did you get so wise."

"Heh, if this is wisdom, I want my money back!" The rainbow maned pegasus grinned. "Seriously, I hang around with a group of very smart ponies. There's Twilight, the certified egg-head who's about the cleverest pony I know, she even got me reading! Applejack has the market cornered on down home common-sense, while I reckon Pinkie is just as smart as Twilight, but at right angles to reality. Fluttershy is Miss Empathy and Rarity is as skilled at shmoozing as any-pony in Canterlot."

She shrugged. "You can't be friends with that bunch and not pick up a few things. I needed more than just awesome flying skills to keep up with them, and you know I never turn down a challenge, or let some-pony down."

Cloud Chaser gave her a friendly pat on the back with one wing. "Well, good luck, I guess. You're going to need it!"

"Yeah." Snowflake agreed.

As the group broke up, Manerick, who had been observing things from behind a newspaper and a coffee (it was a big coffee) finished the mug and headed off to report what had happened to Spitfire.

\* \* \*

><p>The teams formed up out on the main runway, Milky Way and Wildflower exchanging small talk, while Snowflake stood at attention watched with a slight smirk by Cloud Chaser, and Raindrops stretched out her wings next to her partner Thunderlane.<p>

Lightning Dust had her Lead pony badge in her hoof and was examining it proudly as Dash came up beside her. Her eyes fell to the silver badge Rainbow wore. "Mine is gold!"

"I know, it's a big honour, right?" Rainbow replied easily.

"Huh, I'd have expected you to kick up a bigger fuss about not getting one of these yourself!" The green pegasus stated, trying to get a rise out of Dash.

"It would have been nice, but you have to figure Spitfire knows what she's doing. She knows I can lead from when she came to observe Ponyville's water delivery to Cloudsdale, she probably wants to see if I still remember how to follow. Which I do, I've been lead



weather-pony for Ponyville for a couple of years now, but I paid my dues to get there."

"Huh, weather work, that's kinda dull. I'm a high speed courier, anywhere, anytime I deliver!"

"That makes sense, you'd need self-reliance, guts and speed to do that job well. But weather work isn't all clear flying, at least not in Ponyville. We're right up against the Everfree Forest, or as we weather pegasi call it 'Princess Celestia's Home for Clinically Insane Weather.' Seriously, you never know what's going to come out next. At one point we had rains of fish so regularly that we had a thriving canning industry!"

Lightning Dust gave her a look askance. "Yeah, rightâ€¦"

The rainbow-maned pegasus held her serious expression for another couple of heart-beats, then cracked up. "Okay, you got meâ€¦ but I mean it about weird weather. You should come over some time, what with that and Ghastly Gorge, there's plenty of challenging flying."

"Heh, I might just do that." Lightning Dust replied, "You know Dash, you're alright."

Dash preened. "I'm better than alright, I'm awesome, which I guess makes two of us."

"You ain't just shovelling stratus!" The other pegasus grinned.

Spitfire and her assistants arrived at that point, putting an end to the conversation.

"Today you will all be participating in a flag hunt. We'll divide you into two teams, red... and blue." As she stated the colours, her assistants appeared behind the groups, one holding a red flag, the other the blue. Lightning Dust and Rainbow were partnered with Thunderlane and Raindrops. Dash had neatly stepped forward and avoided being pushed aside by the pony holding the flag.

"Whoever finds the most flags of the opposing team's colour wins."

All the recruits cheered, but the ones trained by Dash knew better then to start talking in the ranks. Lightning Dust didn't. "Aw yeah! We're going to rock this so hard..."

She got a face full of Spitfire for her pains. "This isn't some sort of game, it's a training exercise! Lead ponies and wing-ponies must fly together. If any pair splits apart, they will be immediately disqualified. Do you understand?"

"Yes ma'am!" They chorused. At the whistle, they all took off, and the red team forming up and agreeing on something. Then they formed a line abreast and started doing systematic sweeps of the area, exactly the way Dash had taught them, straight from the Wonderbolts own play-book on search and rescue techniques.

The blue team had more difficulty. "If we have to keep our speed down

to those guys, we'll never get anywhere!"

"We're not that slow!" Thunderlane retorted, glaring at Lightning Dust.

Rainbow Dash tried spreading stratus on turbulent air. "Sweeping as a line lets us cover more ground and not end up checking somewhere the other wing pair already did. We should stick with the Thunderlane and Raindrops."

"If we can sweep the whole place in half the time, why do we need any-pony else?" Lightning Dust exclaimed. "C'mon Dash, let's go!"

Dash gave an apologetic glance to the other half of blue team, and a 'Do your best without us!' before zooming off after her lead pony. She came up alongside Lightning and said, "I don't think this is going to work as well as you think, but you've got lead. How do you want to do this?"

"Just follow me and keep looking for those flags, we'll have the whole lot before they can blink!"

She started flying hither and yon in a pretty much random pattern at great speed. Dash could have helped make a clean sweep, as she knew the locations of every flag, red and blue after so many repeats, but she was only going to 'find' the flags that Lightning Dust's random pattern took them over.

They made an impressive haul, scooping up flag after flag as they covered a longer path than the other three pairs put together. It was a confident Lightning Dust who landed by the instructors when time was called, with Rainbow Dash in perfect formation with her.

"Heh! Told you!" The green pegasus was grinning. "We must have found twice as many flags as any-pony else! Though you spotted even more than me, you must have X-ray vision."

"Uh huh, my super-powers are all to do with flying." Dash bantered back. Lightning Dust had relaxed as they'd flown around, and Dash had enjoyed chatting with her. She was finally starting to build up something like the connection she'd unwittingly made that first time round. However, she didn't expect the other pony's good mood to last much longer.

Spitfire examined a clip-board. "After totalling up the flags, it's clear this was a close run battle. Both teams got a very high count, record breaking in fact. However, the Red team wins."

"WHAT?" Lightning Dust exclaimed. "But me and Dash got more flags than any-pony!"

Spitfire removed her shades and gave Lightning Dust a severe look. "Unfortunately, the other half of your team got the least out of all the pairs. It's the total as a group that counts."

Lightning Dust glared at Thunderlane and got her stare returned with interest. Dash put a wing on her shoulder to calm her down before she said something she'd regret, or at least that would put her in hot water with Spitfire. She whispered, "Stay frosty, it's only a

test..."

However, once Spitfire and her team had left Lightning Dust rounded on Thunderlane and Raindrops. "What were you two doing? Goofing off and smelling the flowers? You cost us the win!"

Thunderlane exploded. "WE cost YOU the win? You and your grandstand tactics are to blame for us losing!"

"You're crazy!" Lightning Dust snorted. "Dash, tell him he's crazy!"

"Why should I? I said your plan wouldn't work." Dash responded.

Lightning Dust looked aside at her, incredulously. "Why are you turning on me? I thought we were a team! Well fine, I don't need you or any-pony!"

She turned to stalk away, only to be blocked by Snowflake and Thunderlane, who growled at her. "You're an idiot! Dash is the one pony who's been supporting you from the start! The rest of us wouldn't be giving an arrogant egotist like you the time of day if she hadn't asked us to! She sees something in you, I don't know what, but then she's the real deal, a leader because she leads rather than because some-pony pinned a gold badge on her!"

"Thunderlane, that's enough!" Rainbow Dash interjected. "I know you're mad, I would be too, but it's as much my fault as hers. I should have done more to stop her pulling that kinda stuff."

"You don't need to make excuses for her." Thunderlane gave a snort. "We saw you trying. She was the one who was convinced of her own infallibility. If you want to make it up to us, explain it to her, and this time use small words! Maybe if you grind them fine enough they'll filter through that layer of ego she wraps herself in."

Lightning Dust still wanted to leave, but the rest of the cadets had crowded round, blocking her escape routes. She didn't have much choice. She turned to Dash. "Fine, so explain already!"

"If we'd stayed in line with Thunderlane and Raindrops, we'd probably have won. The red team did a standard search and rescue sweep pattern, right out of the Wonderbolts' own Flight Operations Manual. They use a three abreast flight, but the same idea. They covered a strip four pegasi wide, and because they were in formation, they knew exactly what had been covered, and any flag one pony missed, some-pony else was likely to spot."

Dash indicated the positions with her wing tips, demonstrating what she was describing.

"By going off on our own, we forced Thunderlane and Raindrops to cover twice the distance and fewer eyes meant more chance of missing a flag. Not to mention fatigue towards the end. We made up for it somewhat by finding more flags, but by flying around random-like, we covered some areas twice and missed others. Plus we picked up flags they'd have gotten if we'd been working together."

"You and I still got the most flags, that has to count for something!" Lightning Dust claimed, stomping a hoof. "Spitfire seems to think I've got the right stuff, or she wouldn't have made me Lead pony."

Rainbow shook her head. "Maybe she just wanted to see how you'd do as a leader. It's more than just telling ponies what to do, it's about being able to ask for ideas from your team-mates and make decisions that are best for the group, not just you. If you're as obsessed with the Wonderbolts as I am, you'll have seen all their displays. Just think, have you ever seen a stunt or performance where there was a \_lone\_ Wonderbolt flying?"

That seemed to get through to Lightning Dust, and her annoyed expression turned worried.

"That's what I thought. I doubt she was too impressed with that out-burst afterwards either. She took off the glasses, that's generally a sign that some-pony's gonna get unlucky."

"How can you know that!" Dust asked finally looking nervous.

Rainbow Dash sighed. "Any-pony here can tell you how much I want to be a Wonderbolt. I've studied their moves, their strategies, and the ponies who fly for them. Do you really think I wouldn't find out anything I could about the pony who was in charge of the Academy for our course?"

"Hey, I want to be a Wonderbolt too! I've dreamed of it since I was a filly! Why do you think I push myself so hard in the first place?" Lightning Dust exclaimed in a hurt voice. "It's not my fault other ponies can't keep up!"

"Look, I get you! I was the same way. But my friends helped me to realise, it's more than just pushing yourself, it's about pushing yourself in the right direction. A Wonderbolt has to be an expert flyer, but she also has to work with other pegasi, and that means listening to them, even accepting that you can't always be out front." She gestured to her own silver wing pony badge. "If you can't figure that out, it doesn't matter how awesome your moves are, you'll never be a Wonderbolt."

Lightning Dust glared at Rainbow Dash, but the other pegasus just looked back at her with a cool, steady expression. Finally, Dust's wings sagged, and she looked away. "I... I need some time alone..."

She heard the other ponies trot off, and started when a wing-tip touched her shoulder. Rainbow Dash was standing there with a more sympathetic expression. "When you're ready, I'll be in barracks if you want to talk. For what it's worth, I think you can do this. I know it's not easy, but then the really important things never are."

As she walked away, she called back over her shoulder. "After all, for a Wonderbolt, the bigger the challenge, the better we like it!"

\* \* \*

><p>25.4 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"K-Keep 'em comin' barkeep," a drunk, human Twilight Sparkle slurred as she watched her pony self, loyal student of Tyrant Sun Celestia, speak to the United Nations on national TV.<p>

\_"Ponification fixes all the problems with your people. We get rid of that pesky human nature and reconfigure you to live in harmony with others."\_

A loud thwack echoed through the room as the anchor smacked her head against the stainless steel counter. Oh, how she hated Bureau loops. But this one finally pushed her over the top. It was enough that her teacher who she knew and loved for centuries was twisted into a mockery of everything she knew and loved. Now, it was her that was being twisted. Worse, it was in front of her very eyes.

The real irony though was that she wasn't alone. No, a human looper Celestia was resting her chin on the counter next to her student. She wasn't quite as drunk as Twilight, but still swayed when she sat up in her seat. After downing another shot of brandy, the anchor tried calling for Spike and turned towards the corner where 'spike' watched with interest, "'Take a note Spike, this tops the list in terms of bad loops...No more about Rainbow always dressing in style or Eik...Eik...that school loop where we can't use magic. Even the loop where Pinkie became an alicorn princess wasn't as bad as this one."

Celestia held up her glass and swirled the ice, "Twilight...that's a dog."

A happy bark echoed from that corner. The other patrons didn't pay them much attention as the Twilight on the tv continued to dig herself a deep grave she could never escape. Human Twilight looked to her teacher, "Well, better get this fixed."

Celestia nodded as the two rose from their seats and stumbled out the door.

\*\*\*\*\*

The two stared into the night sky from their apartment where they had woken up. Twilight clutched her head as the hangover pounded away, "How did this happen?"

What had once been the moon was now a whole other planet with a new small moon orbiting it. Celestia didn't reply right away, "Well...since the other Celestia had teleported the entirety of Equestria into the Pacific Ocean, disrupting all kinds of natural weather currents...I'd have to say Equestria itself was causing disharmony. Theoretically, we restored this planet to its natural harmony by banishing all of the invading Equestria to the moon."

Twilight nodded, "Ok...that explains 'Equestria', but where did 'Equestria' get that smaller moon?"

Celestia shrugged, "My memories are still fuzzy from last night, but," she walked over to mug, lifted it up and sniffed, "Since at once point we made some of Luna's moonshine, I don't think I want to remember. I only make it when I want to forget something."

Twilight shuddered, "Let's never mention this again."

After a moment she blinked. "Hey, where'd we get the other Elements from? I can only summon Magic, the others I have to get from the Loop if they're thereâ€|"

"I believe we mugged your friends' counterparts for them." Celestia winced at another stab of pain. "Wow, Applejack has a mean right hook. I'm going to have a nasty black eye for a whileâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>25.5<p>

Rainbow Dash fretted quietly as the night wore on. She knew she shouldn't, she'd worked how to handle this series of events until it was a fine art, butâ€|

It still hurt seeing what her old friend had become. Or was on the way to becoming.

Still, it didn't take very long nowadays to reverse the trend.

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, hey, Gilda!" Dash said, giving the griffon a welcoming smile. "Nice to see you after so long."<p>

"Yeahâ€|" Gilda said, with none of her usual enthusiasm. She frowned, then shook her head. "Yeah." This time was much more natural, and after considering what it might mean for a moment Dash just decided to ignore it. (Maybe there'd been some bad weather? Dash had tried to understand what time looping did to the weather, once, but it had made her head hurt when Twilight got onto Lorentz attractors and so she gave up.)

"Okay, so what do you want to do first?" Dash asked, flaring her wings. "Flying? I've picked up some \_really\_ cool tricks since last time we saw each otherâ€|"

"Maybe laterâ€|" Gilda looked around as though trying to spot something, but came up blank. "Actuallyâ€| hey, back east I met this guy called Gas- G- Gustav, that's it. He wasâ€| kinda strange, but I bet you've never eaten \_anything\_ more tasty than what he made."

She grinned, and if it was a bit forced then there was also a lot of genuine humour in it. "But he was kind of scary too. Threatened to tie me to a railway line if I took a muffin before it was ready."

\_Huh\_, Dash thought absently. \_Now I want to check if Con Mane is real and if Mulia's really a ninjaâ€|\_

"Sounds like a cool guy," Dash said. "But do I detect a note ofâ€|?"

Gilda looked blank.

Dash rolled her eyes. "And I thought \_I\_ was the unobservant one. Did you fancy him?"

"Ew, no." Gilda stuck her tongue out. "He was, like, old."

Both of them laughed at that.

"Anyway, I wasâ€|" Gilda paused again. "I was kind of wondering what kind of friends you have, now." She held up a claw. "But only the awesome ones! I only go so far."

"Yeah, I think they can do awesome," Dash replied, with a cocky grin.

Internally she was wondering what on Equestria was making this Loop so \_strange\_.

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|and this is Twilight Sparkle," Dash said, as they entered the library. "Well, <em>this</em> is her house, since she seems to be out at the moment, but you know what I mean. She's pretty buckin' powerful."

"Powerful?" Gilda repeated, looking around dubiously. "This is a library."

"Yeah, it is." Dash shrugged. "But hay, there's a few here that \_I\_ read. I mean, look!"

She swooped up and picked the first Daring Do book off a shelf. "Isn't that just basically me with a different coat and mane?"

Gilda looked from the book cover to Dash. "It really is. Huh."

"And she's kind of awesome, too, she even gets a broken wing at one point and it doesn't slow her down, andâ€|" Dash trailed off. "I was talking about Twilight, wasn't I?"

"Yeah," Gilda nodded, and sniggered. "I'm reminded of when I helped you revise."

"Hey, I did just as much helping!" Dash objected. "When I rememberedâ€|"

"Which was twice." The griffin shook her head. "Anyway. That unicorn you were talking about?"

"Yeah, she's probably the most powerful spellcaster in history."

"Like you're the fastest pony in history?"

"Both are true!" Dash said quickly. "No word of exaggeration. I'll show you later, actually. But yeah, Twi isâ€| kind of awe-inspiring, really. I've seen her take telekinetic control of a collapsing dam andâ€| \_un\_-collapse it. I've seen her fight monsters and consider it

a normal day." Dash's voice became slightly distant. "I've seen Twilight teleport to the moon and back."

She'd seen Twilight do a lot more than that, too, but most of the examples she could think of required more explanation.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, yeah." Dash pointed. "Twilight. Hey, Twilight, meet my old school friend Gilda."<p>

Twilight frowned. "Hold on a minuteâ€|" She darted over to a bookshelf and picked something out. Paging through it, she reached the page she was looking for before either flier could get more than a little bit confused.

"Micro-expressions!" she shouted, apropos of nothing obvious.

Whirling on one hoof, she pointed at Gilda. "How long have you been Looping?"

"Oh!" Dash said, Gilda's behaviour suddenly making a lot more sense.

Seeing that the griffin seemed lost, Twilight steered her over to a seat with the gentle pressure of a foreleg. "Come here. You might not know the terminology, but I can tell you recognized me â€" so you've clearly met me before, and you haven't normally met me before, and there's nothing different than standard about this loop so you've come back in time. Hi, by the way, nice to meet you."

Gilda blinked. "Hey, Dash, I thought that pink earth pony was the talkative one."

"Yeah, you just caught Twilight in geek mode," Dash replied casually. "Hey, what kind of party do you prefer? 'cause I need to let Pinkie know."

\* \* \*

><p>25.6<p>

Takeru "T.K." Takaishi grimaced down at his body. "You know, when you were the human and I was the digimonâ€| I complained, I understand that."

The pegasus sitting next to him grinned.

"I said I looked like a My Little Pony. And I might have said some things which, on balance, could be viewed as rude."

"Keep goingâ€|" Pegasusmon said, still smiling. "Oh, and that reminds me, since this isn't our normal world I'm Shoya again."

"Sure, standard practice." TK paused. "Where was I?"

"Things which could be viewed as rude."

"Yeah." The earth pony nodded. "I take them all back. Now I am a



flippin' My Little Pony!"

"Hey, don't knock it," Shoya commented. "This looks like gen IV. Much better than the others."

"Define better," TK deadpanned.

"Actual dangerous villains, a working and dynamic society, powerful magic and-"

Something exploded overhead.

"-that," Shoya finished, nodding skywards at a series of expanding coloured rings. "Awesome in a can."

TK examined his friend and partner closely. "Are you blushing."

"No. Yes. Maybe" the digimon trailed off. "Look, my armour form is a pegasus, alright? I may have watched the show."

"I would tease you about that for centuries," the erstwhile Anchor said, "but I have absolutely no standing on the grounds that I'm a pony more often than you are a pegasus."

"Yeah, Rookie forms are like that." Shoya tossed his head. "Come on, let's try and find out if the plot expects us for something."

Putting action to words, he spread his wings and shot off upwards.

"I can't fly!" TK shouted after the rapidly receding pegasus. "Oh, this is just perfect."

Feeling stubborn, he got out his D3 and began playing Tetris. It was about five minutes before he noticed he was doing it with hooves.

\* \* \*

><p>"Wait a sec, Gils," Dash said, screeching to a halt mid-sky and backwinging. "I didn't recognize that pegasus."<p>

"Right," Gilda said, turning in a slow loop as she had to be more conscious of her speed "not having Dash's insane acceleration. "I'm guessing that's unusual in these loops?"

"Yep!" Dash pointed. "Right there."

Gilda focused. "Wait, is he wearing armour?"

"Huh, he is. Maybe it's just a lost guard" Dash pondered the problem for a bit. It was only Gilda's third loop, and she was still learning the basics.

On the other hand, every bit of practice helped. "Come on, we'll see what he has to say. Twilight can probably sort it out, whatever it is."

"You really trust her, don't you" Gilda said quietly.

"Yeah, I kind of do. You know we've spent a couple of loops as the Royal Sisters? Second time, I didn't screw up, and we justâ€¦ lived and ruled for over a thousand years. I know her \_really\_ well."

"I kind of wish I knew you half as well." The griffin shook her head, and returned to the topic of the moment. "He seems to be experimenting with how clouds work."

"Oh, sweet!" Dash pointed. "Come on, we got us a guest Looper!"

\* \* \*

><p>"So, if I understand this rightâ€¦" Twilight said, scanning a digital library on her PADD, "You are from Digimon Adventure."<p>

"Yep," Shoya said with a nod. "Me and T.K. are the Anchors for that Loop. We've been all over the place."

"Yes, I imagine you haveâ€¦" Twilight noted it down.

"And it's pretty cool to be here, actuallyâ€¦ when are we? That's Gilda, soâ€¦ before or after she normally shows up?"

"Before," Dash said with a shrug. "You turned up pretty sharpish. She's a Looper now, but that's recent."

"It's interesting to meet someone who's actually familiar with the show version of our world." Twilight added. "We're used to it from the inside, of course, so seeing it on the screen is a little strange. Oh - where's your co-Anchor?"

"â€¦oh, snapâ€¦" Shoya gulped. "Well, probably in the middle of a Pinkie Pie Party by now."

The doors flew open with a bang, and Pinkie dragged a bewildered T.K in by the ear. "You could have mentioned you came here with somepony else! Now I need to make a whole new party theme for \_two\_ new local Loopers! Stay right here, and I'll be back in five minutes!"

She bounced out, leaving by the window.

T.K. looked like he'd been bowled over by a bus.

His partner leant over. "See, you would have expected this if you'd just watched the show like I did."

\* \* \*

><p>25.7<p>

Spike soared over the dense canopy of the Everfree forest, letting single wing beats and thermals carry him across the cloak of green.

Of all the things the Loops had brought him, he thought flying was the best.

Well, aside from the people who looped with himâ€¦ but they weren't things, anyway. Flying was a skillâ€¦ or, rather, several. There were

so many kinds of it, from the effortless speed of a pegasus to the ponderous flight of a great wyrm. Right now, he was about thirty feet in wingspan, which gave him options.

Humming a jaunty tune, he set a course south " then frowned, squinting down at the ground, and flared the big wings before coming to a hover.

Yes, there was definitely something down there that didn't belong.

Spike let air slip out from under his wing membranes and gradually lost height, trying to get close enough to confirm what he'd seen.

\_Aha!\_

\* \* \*

><p>A large wolf loped steadily along under the dappled sunlight. <em>Things<em> stirred as it passed, but none of them did more than stir.

The canine slowed as it reached a low ridge, sniffed, and then turned a little and resumed the ground-eating pace. Leaf litter and twigs crunched underfoot, and when the wolf came to a cliff it bounded up in a series of huge leaps, ground-root-branch-trunk and then to the top.

Eventually, a clearing opened out in the middle of the forest, one cut by a huge fallen tree. Climbing the side of the trunk in a scrabble of claws, the wolf padded along to the middle of the trunk and sat.

Leaves rustled in a sudden, intense wind, as Spike backwinged into the clearing. He landed lightly enough on the end of the tree nearest the roots.

"Good afternoon," he said cheerfully. "I didn't realize you did this."

"Not very often" the wolf replied. "But the Everfree is the only really \_wild\_ place on Equestria" sometimes I just feel the need to get away. And I feel" safer like this."

The animal blurred, and Fluttershy was stood there instead. "But if you want-"

"No, no, don't change back on my account," Spike protested. "It's not often I see you so confident, it's probably good for you."

"Thank you" she muttered. "But I did bring a lunch, and wolves can't eat chocolate. So I may as well eat now." Fluttershy managed a little giggle. "I'm sure the big scary dragon will keep me safe."

Spike posed. It was hard to tell if he was seriously trying to look macho or just trying to make her laugh.

A moment later, he dropped it. "I do know how you feel, though. It's

good to just meditate once in a while."

"Thank you. Oh, would you like some?"

He waved it off. "No, I've been eating too much Bluejohn, I need to lose some weight."

"Well, you're too big for it to just be baby fatâ€|" she said critically, and Spike laughed.

"That whole wolf thing is really working out for you, huh?"

"Sometimes. Other times I try being a leopard, orâ€| something." Fluttershy looked at the ground. "I'm probably not very good at it by Oerth standards, I just can't get the hang of, er, hunting."

"Really, that's not a problem," Spike said, shaking his head. "Instincts can be overrated. Take it from the dragon!"

They sat in companionable silence for the next half hour or so, as Fluttershy ate and then carefully stored all the leavings in her subspace pocket to recycle.

Eventually, the pegasus stood up with a purposeful air. "Nice seeing you, Spike," she said, and blurred back into an animal. Spike was slightly surprised to notice that this one was a puma, but she winked at him and then padded off.

Being a druid was really working out well for Fluttershy.

\* \* \*

><p>25.8 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight blinked as the loop memories flowed in. "Hmm, this seems to be fairly baseline. I wonder if-"<p>

Her ears perked. Something was... off. It sounded as though somepony was mimicking her word for word.

"Hello?"

There it was again! A voice, to her left! She turned to look and came face to face with herself.

"...huh. This is new."

\*\*\*

"So let me get this straight," Luna deadpanned. "Everyone who's awake this loop spontaneously duplicated when they awakened?"

"Eeeeeyup."

The princess of the night let her gaze shift from one red stallion to

the other, slowly licking her ice cream. "This is... quite an interesting development."

"Ah know, right?" Apple Bloom grinned. "First thang we did, tried ta see if we could double what was in our subspace pocket!"

"Turns out we share one," her duplicate said with a shrug. "Oh well. Still pretty useful."

"I see..." Luna rolled her eyes. "Shame I didn't get a duplicate."

"Oh and what am I, chopped hay?"

The princess smiled down at the alicorn filly. "No, Nyx, you're a very special pony."

Nyx mock pouted before taking a huge bite of her ice cream. "Oh fiiiiiiine."

She blinked.

"...I just realized. I have two mommies."

\*\*\*

Celestia's pen moved furiously on her paperwork, glancing at the clock on occasion.

"Five more minutes. Just five more minutes and we switch out."

She already had her trunks on.

\*\*\*

Cadance whispered something to Cadance.

Cadance grinned.

Shining gulped. "We're in for a long night, aren't we?"

"...yep." Shining blushed. "I don't know if this is a good or a bad thing."

\*\*\*

Carrot Cake and Cupcake peered into the kitchen cautiously.

"...There's two of them, hon."

"...What do we do dear?"

"We pray. We pray."

\*\*\*

"DOUBLE RAINBOOM ALL THE WAY!"

"SO INTENSE!"

"WHAT COULD IT MEAN?!"

\* \* \*

><p>25.9 (Filraen â€" Vulpine Fury - Nikas)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Gilda tried to doze under the shadow of a tree in an effort to trying to collect her thoughts. Flying had only made the matters worse because it made her remember Rainbow Dash.<p>

She could understand griffins and ponies grow and change when you don't see them in some time, but Gilda knew the first time they met after Dash moved into Ponyville she didn't leave a good impression of herself. And looking back at that incident she was quite upset with herself, even if no one else would ever know it.

And somehow, by some strange magic she had a chance to start over again... well, not from the very beginning in Cloudsdale but from the time in Ponyville. It was strange, going to her after seeing that long night and the rumours of a Nightmare Moon again, but somehow she saw the chance to meet Dash again without the weight of the previous time.

To her surprise not only did Rainbow apparently know a bit of what was happening, but she had been "looping" longer than Gilda. Apparently she could grow herself a horn which let herself do some magic, learned to perform a Sonic Rainboom â€" how crazy was that? â€" from a standing position, got herself a fancy necklace about loyalty something or other and could tell a lot of crazy stories. Gilda preferred to just give Dash some beak service and pretend she believed them.

Because if Gilda actually believed Rainbow Dash's stories it'd mean creatures like humans existed. Because it'd mean she'd live these years again and again and again with no end on sight. Because it'd mean there are places so big that the Griffin lands would be less than a drop of water in the sea. Because it'd mean Rainbow Dash had lived through all of this a long time. Because it'd mean Dash had really flown through space, defeated the Nightmare Moon and raced a supersonic hedgehog. Because it'd mean she had really been the Equestrian Princess multiple times, raised the Sun and ruled for millennia. Because it'd mean she had become so awesome and close to those other ponies in as many lives as Gilda had feathers...

Because if she believed Rainbow Dash, what could Gilda hope to offer to her friend?

\* \* \*

><p>"G?" Rainbow Dash asked quietly. "You really feel that way? That you don't matter?"<p>

Gilda lowered her eyes. How could she, just a griffin somehow caught up in this weirdness compare to a flipping \_alicorn princess?\_

"Should I tell you about the loops where we never lost touch with

each other after flight camp?" The sad look on the polychrome pegasus' face was almost wrenching. "Those were pretty cool. How about the ones where I'm the griffin and you're the pegasus? Or the ones just like the first time through for all of us and I knew the thing to say to make you stay? I like those Loops. I don't have to choose between my first best friend and my other best friends. Gilda. Friendship is like love. It doesn't diminish when it's shared."

The griffin still looked dubious.

Dash kicked the floor. "Ah, buck it, I'm no good at these kinda talks. Come on, let's see what Twilight thinks."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight listened in silence as Gilda spoke. When the griffin finished, she inhaled deeply and then let out a long sigh.<p>

"Gilda, I'm an Anchor. Which means I've been awake for every single loop. Sure I've gotten powerful, but among Anchors and other long time loopers the truism is 'with great power comes great insanity.'"

"I've been better than most, but even I've had moments where I slipped. You'll find this out yourself, but imagine everyone around you had a disease. They remember everything up to a certain day. After that, they can't keep a new memory past a full day. They just keep forgetting and reliving the same day, over and over again. Only you remember and grow."

The unicorn eyed the griffin. "How long before you stopped seeing them as friends out of frustration? How many days till you stopped seeing them as people at all? How many weeks till you started meddling, manipulating them for what is 'best'? How many months till you started smashing them in frustration that they can't bucking remember anything?!" The unicorn's mane toinged out.

Gilda's instincts spiked from nothing, screaming at her to run or fightâ€| or just stand perfectly still, in the hope that whatever was causing that fear wouldn't deign to notice her.

It was then that she began to really believe, bone-deep, that Dash was right.

Twilight stopped, closed her eyes, and breathed deeply, pushing away with a forelimb several times before continuing. "I think that is the root of a lot of madness among Loopers. Offer Dash nothing? Gilda, she has hope of seeing her friend now, not an endless parade of someone wearing your face that can't remember the real her anymore."

Gilda looked down again, then raised her eyes. "I can try that."

Twilight nodded. "Good. Hey, you might like to ask Dash for pictures. She enjoys your company, you know, even the non-looping you. Ask about something called Metal Wolfâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia,<em>

\_This loop I had to be reminded to take care of others, putting myself in their hooves if necessary. I was so happy my friend Gilda had Awoke I forgot how overwhelming looping could get for a newcomer, and I showed off too much too soon. Even if everything got resolved, I almost alienated my first friend by not easing the reveals.\_

\_Hoping to see you soon,\_

\_Rainbow Dash\_

\* \* \*

><p>"... that's it. Now it's your turn, G."<p>

"What, me? Why?"

"Tradition from my base loop."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia,<em>

\_First of all, my name is Gilda and I'm a griffin, friend of Rainbow Dash and according to her I'm also a looper now. Dash convinced me to write a "friendship report" for you and won't leave me alone until I write it so here it goes: I learned you should always be happy for the successes of your friends, because friends showing off are just trying to share their happiness; and there's always something one can offer to a friend, even if it's only the company of someone who remembers her.\_

\_Gilda\_

\* \* \*

><p>25.10 (Filraen)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>In Ponyville Library there was a familiar scene playing out. It was neither the first time, nor the last "as anyone, Looper or not, could attest.<p>

"Let's go over the checklist one last time Spike." Twilight said while giving her assistant a rolled scroll.

After nodding, Spike took a quill from the nearby desk and started reading the scroll. "Bedroom tidy?"

"Check."

"Living room clean?"

After a sound of teleportation Twilight answered,  
"Good."



"Tea?"

"Enough in kitchen."

"Cookies?"

"Here too," Twilight paused and closed her eyes briefly before continuing, "and also the super special secret sweetheart cake stash from Sugarcube Corner."

Spike frowned and looked around. "Where it is this so secret stash?"

Twilight teased back, "If I told you it wouldn't be so secret anymore." There's no need to mention Spike about subspace pockets, good to keep things from some powerful magical artifacts to snacks when one doesn't want to go to the kitchen to get them and break the conversation. "Also, those are for when Princess Celestia visits tonight."

"True enough" Spike said thoughtfully. "Anyway, do you think why Princess Celestia will come here this time?"

It isn't like it mattered much, though this loop her mentor decided to have delivered Twilight's Friendship Reports in person instead of Spike's magic flame. It was basically an excuse for Celestia to share more time with Twilight but the unicorn realized it helped honor Celestia's wish 'to get to know her all over again'. In that case it was... "Probably to change scenery? I'm not sure."

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia arrived soon after sunset. And then Celestia and Twilight shared a table chatting the night away, sleep claiming Spike within the hour.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"The Great Galloping Gala is in three months. Do you know if anypony still wants to go?" Celestia asked.<p>

"Probably, though I have to make sure their expectations aren't too high." It wasn't like anypony else was awake this loop, Twilight considered, then suddenly tried to contain a laugh. "Still, if you wanted to spice the Gala up a bit, why don't you invite Steven Magnet?"

"You mean that river serpent who lives in Everfree?" At Twilight's nod both laughed. "Probably â€" he may like a social event like that and one way or other he will make that Gala one to remember."

\* \* \*

><p>"How is Princess Luna faring this loop?" Twilight asked after producing two slices of cake.<p>

"Good enough. She's currently in the phase of trying to get out but afraid of the rejection."

"Send her here." Twilight shrugged. It wouldn't be Nightmare Night

for some time but it'd probably be for the better. "Everything should be fine as long as you tell Luna to tone down her voice and I tell Pinkie not to play scared."

After a pause the white alicorn looked at her faithful student in the eyes "Twilight, did you just tempt fate?"

Twilight felt her ears droop "I hope not."

\* \* \*

><p>"How is Starlight Breaker doing nowadays?" Celestia teased.<p>

"You know she doesn't like that name." Twilight mock-glared her mentor. "I saw her ten or so loops ago. Apparently a new looper from Ranma's world decided to try yet another desperate attempt to finish the loops and we met at Hogwarts, together with Ranma, Harry, and Hiccup. She says she wants to show a new magic fireworks display next time she's in Equestria... Now that I think of it I fear the day she and Trixie meet."

\* \* \*

><p>"That reminds me, how long has been since the last loop Cadence has been Awake?" the white alicorn asked.<p>

"I... actually lost count." Twilight frowned, feeling a bit embarrassed.

"Enough loops to actually lost count and yet you haven't fallen into madness, my faithful student."

Twilight took a sip of her tea to give herself some time before answering. "It's only because I have everypony looping alongside me. I don't think I could have actually handled living through the loops alone."

Celestia smiled. "Then it's a good thing it doesn't matter if you could or not, because you don't have to."

Twilight, feeling her eyes water, could only nod.

"Twilight, the fact you have lived through so many loops yet we still can meet here to chat calmly means you have grown beyond my and anypony's wildest expectations, so much I can't see you as my student anymore."

"Princess..." Twilight could only say, feeling somewhat numb.

Standing up, Celestia hardened her tone just slightly "Twilight Sparkle, it's my greatest pride and honour to graduate you tonight of your studies of the Magic of Friendship under me. I can only ask of you: Twilight, will you accept my friendship?"

The purple unicorn took a moment to react, but then she threw herself into Celestia's embrace, both nuzzling each other. No more words were needed.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Another one joins the gang.

25.1: Auntie is a standard term for an older female close friend or relative, but niece is a bit more specific. Strange, isn't it? That's why Luna decides on sister.

>25.2: References one of the Loops in set 24.<br>25.3: There's at least one more lump about the same size of Academic Excellence still to come.

>25.4: Problem solving while drunk.<br>25.5: Gilda is an interesting character.

>25.6: This is a crossover of sorts with the Digimon Loops section of the fic collection "Random Thoughts of a Chaotic Mind" by RockBane.<br>25.7: Fluttershy fits "druid" SO well. Though her preferred form here is actually an artefact of her relationship with Leman Russ/Lemon Rush.

>25.8: Copy error.<br>25.9: Even for the Mane Six, so many years weigh heavily on them.

>25.10: Graduation day. (Mind you, this only really means that now it's grad work. See earlier loop...)<p>

## 26. Chapter 26

### 26.1

"You look a bit down," a voice said.

Gilda looked to one side, and saw a blue unicorn slide into the seat next to her.

"Yeahâ€|" she said, going back to her drink. "I just can't connect with Dash."

"Well, that's hardly surprisingâ€|" the blue unicorn said. "I mean, she's not Looping this time."

Gilda's head snapped around. "What?"

"Oh, don't try and cover it upâ€|" the unicorn winked. "You're not bad as actors go, but my special talent is half about misdirection. I'm Trixie Lulamoon, by the way. I was actually one of the newbies until you showed up."

She shrugged. "Besides, you hardly look like a local. Ponyville does grow on you if you give it time, butâ€|"

Trixie held up a hoof. The red stallion running the bar slid over a glass of something fizzy and apple scented.

"â€|you're not a regular," she finished. "Actually, on that front, how are you finding it here?"

The griffin tried to assimilate everything that had just happened. "Erâ€| not half bad, actually. Best drink I've had in a while, anyway."

Trixie nodded. "Hear that, Mac?"

The stallion nodded.

"This is kinda a new thing â€" a few centuries old," Trixie said, then winced. "Sorry, that was probably a bit tactless of me."

"You think?" Gilda shook her head again. "This whole thing is difficult to cope with."

"Well, you'll always be welcome here."

"Stop makin' promises for me, Trixie," Mac said amiably, "or you'll make one ah wouldn't have made mahselfâ€| one day."

"Not today, though," Trixie shot back. "Anyway, Mac's kind of doing this to help loopers like you â€" ones who just need a bit of relaxation, you can talk to him about anything. He's really in demand when loopers from other worlds come in, 'cause they're usually from places a lot more, well, violent than our own."

"I wouldn't mind thatâ€|" Gilda said, ruefully. "A bit of excitement, I mean."

Trixie's eyes lit up. "Really? You like excitement? Loud bangs, adrenaline, intense risk?"

Gilda nodded, almost against her will. "Yeah, that does sound pretty good right nowâ€|"

"Trixie will give you excitement!" With a flash, a hat and cape materialized on the blue unicorn. "Come on, let's go!"

"Go where?" Gilda asked, reasonably.

"That's not the important bit! It's the journey, not the destination." Trixie paused. "Though at this point I think the destination should probably be King Sombra's treasury."

\* \* \*

><p>Shining Armor and Princess Cadence walked warily into the palace of the Crystal Empire, on the look out for the evil being who had once taken it over.<p>

"Dear," Cadence asked after a moment, "why are there so many suits of armour lying around ripped to bits?"

"No idea," Shining admitted. "They look like they got ripped to bitsâ€| and that one seems to have been struck by lightning."

"Should we wait for your sister and her friends?" Cadence shrugged. "I don't know how dangerous this might beâ€|"

"No," Shining replied after a moment. "If worst comes to worst, we can always teleport out."

They both heard the singing at the same moment.

Shining built a charge on his horn. Cadence, still thinking a little like a pegasus, took off to be ready to ambush whoever might attack her husband.

"â€|with a snail if you slow to a crawl," two drunken voices shouted. "But the hedgehog-

"Wait," Shining said, squinting. "Isn't thatâ€| hey!"

The singing stopped.

"You, the blue unicorn," Shining continued, "Aren't you Trixie? Twilight's friend?"

"I am indeed," Trixie replied, bowing deeply. Her hat fell off. "I am indeed Trixie Lulamoon. Queen Trixie!"

"Pardon?" Shining asked, looking at Cadence for any kind of support she might be able to give. She shrugged helplessly, lowering herself slowly to the floor.

Her companion pointed at the battered crown on top of Trixie's head. "See? She's queen 'cause she beat up the king. That's how it works," she added with the assurance of the deeply sloshed, and looked owlshly at the empty bottle she was carrying in her right foreleg. "Hey, your majesty?"

No response.

"That's you," the griffin added, elbowing Trixie, who gave a start.

"Yes! Me. What was it, lord highâ€| thingyâ€| Gilda?"

"We ran out of spoils of victory again."

Trixie looked downcast. "Maybe one of these times we'll get our spoils of victory out of the building before drinking it all."

Cadence plucked the bottle out of Gilda's grip. "This is one of the bottles from the royal reserve, down in the dungeons."

Shining gaped. "You meanâ€| they really did defeat Sombra?"

"It was so cool," Gilda said, with gestures. "Trix went kind of glowy and then grew wings, and then magicked him so hard it collapsed a wall on him."

"Wings?" Shining and Cadence exchanged a glance.

"Hey, you want this?" Trixie asked, pulling the Crystal Heart out of her fallen hat. "I don't want it, but it's shiny."

Cadence' eyes widened.

"Sure," Shining said quickly. "And in return, we'll do all the admin and paperwork associated with your position."

"What?" Trixie blinked, then snatched the crown off her head.

"Paperwork, ew. I didn't know it came with paperwork. You want it, Gilda?"

"No chance!" Gilda warded Trixie off.

"Ah well." Trixie drop-kicked the crown into the distance. "Shall we go get some more spoils of war?"

"Sounds good!"

Trixie wrapped them both in magic, and they vanished.

Shining looked at where they'd been for a moment. "â€|well, that sorted itself out."

\* \* \*

><p>"Trixiie?" Gilda moaned through a blinding headache, "Why did we do this again?"<p>

"Because you need to learn awesome on your own!" Trixie said, then winced. Flaring her horn, she applied an anti-hangover spell, which took the edge off. "Dash is pretty cool, yeah, but you can't define yourself around her. You need to be your own, er, griffin."

She winked. "Besides, now you have a cool story to tell her."

\* \* \*

><p>26.1 omake (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

(This one may or may not slot in perfectly, but it would have to go here if it did.)

"Hey Gilda! I heard about the way you beat on King Sombra. Awesome!" Rainbow Dash called out.

The bleary eyed griffon just groaned and pulled the cloud she was lying in around and over herself, trying to escape the rays of Celestia's sun and the overly cheery voice of her best friend, though right now she was thinking equicidal thoughts about her. The groan was a mistake, as it was a signal for the pain in various parts of her body to spawn hundreds of lesser pains which then moved out and took apartments in new parts of her body. Nomadic buffalo photons stampeded down her optic nerve and headbutted her brain, intensifying the Rainboom class headache that was already there. Her mouth tasted like a graveyard which had been used by a rave venue by the incontinent... she was hung-over, no, she was HUNG-OVER. Gahhh, Even thinking in capital letters hurt, and so did the tips of her feathers, that shouldn't even be possible!

Griffons had the constitution of a buffalo, or rather buffaloes had the constitution of a griffon, but she and Trixie had drunk about half a cellar of King Sombra's private reserve. Crystal berry wine was sweet, fragrant with a wonderful undertone of honeysuckle and chocolate, and had a kick like an earth-pony on steroids, and that was before it had a thousand years to mature and increase in potency in a high magic environment. So it wasn't just a hang-over, it was a magic hang-over, and even Trixie's magic had only served to ease the pain.

A vial flumped in the cloud beside her. "Here, drink up! This is a little something Apple Bloom whipped up."

"uuuhh. Is it poison? Something quick and painless would go down well right now." At least Dash was being slightly quieter.

"Uh huh, hang-over cure. Guaranteed to move that thunderhead of a hang-over, or your thunderhead cheerfully refunded."

Gilda snatched it up and popped the cork with a claw-tip, then gulped it down. There was no way it could make her condition worse, at any rate. It fizzed over her tongue in a peculiar way, and then she felt as if some-pony had stuck a hose in her mouth and turned it on full blast, and water was shooting out of every pore in her body. She swelled up like a balloon and popped, and when she recovered, the pain was gone. In fact, she was ready to fight dragons.

"Whoa! Now that is what I call a cure! Who is this Apple Bloom, anyway?"

"Earth-pony looper. Kid sister of my friend Applejack. She's been learning Zebra potion magic for a lot of loops, so she knows what she's doing. She makes them for Mac's Cafe Equestrian. Twilight is taking one to Trixie."

"Huh? You're Awake?" Gilda did a double take.

"Yep, not every-pony Wakes at the start of a loop, sometimes it doesn't happen till much later, though it's pretty rare. Gotta admit, you and Trixie teaming up? Never have figured it, but it makes a lot of sense."

"You're not mad?" Gilda asked, shocked at the warmth she heard in Dash's voice.

Rainbow Dash shrugged, shaking her head. "Having other friends doesn't make your best friendship less... best. I'd be pretty hypocritical if I got mad over you being friends with other ponies."

Gilda chuckled. "I never thought I'd hear Rainbow Dash use the word 'hypocritical'."

Dash joined in. "Yeah... Blame it on the time I looped into a world where Daring Doo was real. I know because I was her. Heh, if ever a loop taught me that being an athelete and an egg-head weren't mutually exclusive that was the one. That pony was in Twilight's league, but bucked flank like us..."

She saw Gilda's face fall slightly. "Hey, buck up, you'll get your own awesome adventures now that you're loopy. What I was saying is friendship isn't a limited thing. The more you have, the more you get, and the more you can share. Speaking of sharing, I was looking you up to share some awesome with you. How'd you like to learn how to do a Sonic Rainboom?"

"You're serious?" Gilda's eyes widened.

"No I'm Rainbow Dash... sorry Hogwarts joke... oh pony-feathers,

we've got a \_lot\_ of catching up to do. Time for a pop-corn memory session with Apple Bloom's way-back machine after this. It can read a person's memories and play them back like a movie. It'll prepare you if you ever end up in the same places, which seems likely."

"I thought you said she was all about potions?"

"That's just a sideline, she's been looping for a long time, and it turns out her talent is putting together really cool tech. She's been in lots of fused loops where things are pretty much science fiction, and learned how to use it. Hmmm... I think we'll start you on an X-Wing, it's robust and fairly easy to get the hang of... that's if you want to learn how to pilot a space fighter. Or maybe a giant robot. Or we can get her to fit you with thruster boots and an atmosphere containment harness and the two of us can take a trip around the moon..."

"Whoa!" Gilda's feathers were toing out a bit. "I... ahh..."

Rainbow Dash face-hooved. "Nice going Rainbow Crash! Sorry Gilda, I'm doing it again. You need to adjust to the loops at your pace, not be forced into anything you aren't ready for. It's just... I have so many cool things I want to share with you, and I want to do it right now! Look, for the rest of this loop, you set the pace. You want to learn how to do a Sonic Rainboom? Fine. Want to try and get into the Wonderbolts Academy with me? We can do that. Want to just spend the time playing cloudball, surfing the air-currents and kicking back on a cloud while listening to rocking tunes? I'm good with that too."

"That last one sounds real good..." Gilda said, watching for any sign of disappointment in her friend's eyes. There was none, only concern for her friend, and she remembered Twilight's words. Then she made a decision. "But learning a Sonic Rainboom sounds good too."

Dash punched the air with a hoof. "Yes! We are going to have so much fun!"

\* \* \*

><p>26.2<p>

"Twilight, you need to go and retrieve the Element of Magic from-"

Twilight closed her eyes and concentrated. With a flash of light, her Magic tiara rematerialized on her brow. "Done. What now?"

Celestia blinked. "Since when could you do that?"

"It's been a while." Twilight shrugged. "You were saying?"

"Oh, nothing." Celestia got a little smile on her face. "Excuse me, I need to go nail this mirror to the ceiling of a prison cell."

\* \* \*

><p>26.3<p>



The Mayor pointed. "Who is that masked figure?"

Dash followed her gaze, and grinned. "Oh, right, that's the Mysterious Mare-Do-Well. I ran into her once."

The silhouette spread wings and took off, flaring a horn to launch a bolt of ice almost directly at the crowd.

"Whoah!" Dash ducked along with the rest of them, and the bolt splashed off a shield made out of plants.

From inside the shield, a second figure emerged clad head-to-toe in bright forest green. The new pony spread wings and leapt into the air, trees growing from the rooftops as support.

"Hmm, that doesn't seem rightâ€¦" Dash said. She bent down next to the mayor. "That's I Be Leaf. I've not seen her like this beforeâ€¦"

The blue pegasus tapped her chin. "Hang on a second. I'm gonna go have a look."

She shot upwards, then returned to the ground. "Thought so."

"What is it?" the mayor asked, worried.

"Well, I sawâ€¦" Dash counted them off. "Sir George the Dragon, a magic user who might have been Madam Magpie, and the Felicitous Fillies. I think Ponyville might have a superhero infestation. Nothing major, just a Crossover Event."

A pony wearing a red and black outfit and carrying a boffer sword ran up a nearby wall, seemingly having an argument with itself. Another wearing clothes made like shimmering water rode past on a waterspout, and then a pair of gigantic wings blotted out the sun.

"Huhâ€¦" Dash blinked. "Maybe I was wrong. That looks like a Crisis Crossover. Everypony down!"

There was a bright flash, and all the battling costumed ponies vanished.

"What just happened?" Roseluck asked, looking around.

Dash shrugged. "I think that was a Cosmic Retcon. The whole storyline got too complicated, so it just stopped."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that went well!" Dash said later. "The Mayor was certainly confusedâ€¦"<p>

"Yeah," Applejack said, sourly, "but it woulda been good if you'd come up with a better superhero type for me. Ah had to be th' Mare-Do-Well."

"Hey, at least you could do all of it at onceâ€¦" Dash shrugged. "And I think it'd be nice if we perhaps used all of these superhero identities in some other loop."

"Well, I can \_certainly\_ store the costumes until then," Rarity said cheerfully. "Perhaps we could work out something for you?"

"Ah'd prefer if ah got to use these," AJ replied, summoning her Ember Celica from a subspace pocket. "They ain't used as often as ah'd like."

Rarity's eyes glittered. "One Punch? Hmmmâ€|"

Twilight nodded. "Well, good to know it was funny. And yes, using those costumes again would be nice. Perhaps we could try the whole secret identity thing?"

"That sounds good," Fluttershy said quietly.

"Speak for yourself!" Pinkie said, grinning. She hadn't taken off her Deadpool-inspired costume yet, and all indications were that she'd just wear it for the rest of the Loop.

\* \* \*

><p>26.4<p>

Rarity trotted into the cavern, wearing one of her best dresses. "Hello, mister dragon? I have a business proposition for you."

The dragon growled.

"Here it is," she said, nonchalantly sitting down on the edge of his hoard. "I take items from your hoard and enchant them, making them much more valuable. Then, I go and sell them, and you get gold and jewels equal to the value of the initial investment plus one half of the profits."

"And why should I trust you, pony?" The huge beast sounded almost amused. "This is a transparent ploy to walk off with my most prized possessions."

"No, not reallyâ€|" Rarity shook her head. "You do insult me, sir. I assure you, this is no ploy." She paused. "Really, must you be stuck in the First Diarchy era? You have to make your gold work \_for\_ you."

"I find it works quite well as a bed. Now, leave before I flame you out," he said with finality.

Rarity examined a bracelet. "You know, this would look lovely on a mantelpieceâ€|"

The dragon inhaled, then let out a jet of flame.

Lightning-quick, Rarity swept the top layer off her dress and flung it at the dragon's mouth. "Solute!"

The gossamer-fabric quivered, then exploded into at least thirty tonnes of salty water. Dragon's fire met instant wave, and the whole cavern filled with pleasant sea-scent and steam.

"Ah, lovely," Rarity said, sniffing the air. "Oh, are you alright?"

The dragon coughed. "Some of that went up the wrong way!"

"Oh, I am sorry." She shrugged. "But, well, it proves my bona fides, does it not?"

There was a silence.

"â€|you said two thirds, didn't you?"

"For shame!" Rarity kicked the floor. "I am an artisan, not a day labourer! One third."

"That is robbery!" Snarls echoed in the confined of the cave, though the effect was spoiled by a cough. "Sixty percent."

"Forty-five."

"Fifty, then, curse you."

Rarity smiled broadly. "It's a deal."

The dragon grumbled something about banditry by another name.

"Oh, hush," the unicorn replied. "It's not as though you're the only person around here with jewellery, you know."

\* \* \*

><p>26.5<p>

"And who do you have for us to listen to?" Cheerilee asked, after everyone was done applauding Granny Smith's story.

"Well," Scootaloo said, and paused. "Does it just have to be a parent or whatever?"

Cheerilee considered. "It can be a close family friend, if that's what you mean."

"I more meantâ€| biological. But that's fine." Scootaloo poked her head out the window. "It's okay! Come on in!"

In a blur of multicoloured light, Rainbow Dash skidded to a stop in the classroom.

Well, almost to a stop.

"I'm okay!" she shouted from inside the pile of books, to general laughter. "Erâ€| little help here, squirt?"

Scootaloo and several other fillies and colts dug her out of the collapsed bookcase.

"Right," Dash said, preening self-importantly and trying to look like that hadn't happened, "basically, I'm really, really fast."

There was a long pause.

"Hey, Dash?" Scootaloo stage-whispered.

"Yeah?"

"Little more than that?"

"Okay, whatever." Dash blew her mane out of her eyes. "So, how about I tell you mini-ponies the story of how I got my cutie mark?"

As stories went, it was a pretty good one. Not quite as good as Granny Smith's tale of the founding of Ponyville â€" every pony in the room could relate to that, whereas only the pegasi had some sense of just how insanely hard a Rainboom was â€" but Dash told it well, and there were some gasps when she described Fluttershy's fateful fall. (Though, of course, it was fairly obvious that the pegasus was going to survive. After all, she was a common sight around town.)

"Did you really break the sound barrier?" Silver Spoon asked, after Dash had finished. "That's awesome!"

Diamond didn't join in the general approval, but given how nasty she could be Scootaloo considered it good enough that she had stopped trying to undermine the Crusaders.

"Wait a second," Diamond said, frowning.

Scootaloo felt like rolling her eyes. \_Spoke too soon.\_

"Are you Scootaloo's sister or something? If you're so good at flying, how come she's so terrible at it?"

"Yeah, I am," Dash said, so matter-of-factly and coming so close on the heels of the accusation that tears started in Scootaloo's eyes. "We didn't have the same parents, but she's still my little sis. And who cares about being bad at flying?"

Coming from a pony who had just described herself as the most awesome flier in existence, this drew a collective jaw drop.

"â€|you know what I mean," Dash added, blushing. "Anyway. Flying's what I'm good at. Scoots is good at something else."

She thought for a second. "Hey, I have this theoryâ€| Scoots? Want to help me test something?"

The younger pegasus looked up at her. "Let me guess. Terrifyingly dangerous, small chance of success, and pure awesome if it works."

"You know me too well," Dash replied, winking.

Scootaloo was still a little nervous, butâ€| well, Dash was old enough and experienced enough that this was at least partly an act. (After all, a crazy and awesome older sister was worth major kudos.)

"Alright. I trust you."

\* \* \*

><p>"I take it baaaaack!" Scootaloo shouted, looking down at the ground miles below.<p>

Dash grinned. "Hey, this is totally safe."

Scootaloo held on tighter to Dash's rainbow mane.

"â€|look," the elder pony said, in a much more serious voice. "You are basically my sister. I meant what I said. And I will save you if this doesn't work."

Scootaloo gulped.

"â€|okay." Closing her eyes, she jumped.

For a moment, she felt completely weightless. Then, as she accelerated, air resistance began to bite.

Crudcrudcrudcrud! What did Dash say? Air magic, right. Air magic. Reaching out with her weak but well controlled air magic, Scootaloo began shaping the air stream around her to reduce the air resistance. Another thought hit her, and she began flapping her small wings as fast as she could.

"You're doing fine!" Dash shouted, easily keeping pace. Scootaloo felt vaguely insulted that her mentor was actually doing this while lying on her back.

\* \* \*

><p>Halfway to the ground, Scootaloo was feeling overwhelmed.<p>

She was nearly as fast as she had to be, but somehow getting that little extra speed was beyond her. It was the kind of thing you needed full pegasus wings and strong pegasus magic for, not her half-developed adolescent version.

The air she was shaping was useful, cutting through the atmosphere like a knife, but-

Wait!

Like a knife. Or like a well designed fighter aircraft.

Ideas clicked into place. Scootaloo reached out to her magic and twisted â€" taking the friction and using it to heat the air, rather than minimizing it.

Another thought, and she funnelled that air through the main body of her wind cone, which began to flatten and develop distinctive wings. A slight alteration made it begin to spin.

Thank you, Lockheed-Martin! Scootaloo thought, in the strange euphoria of an epiphany.

Hot air contacted cold, and-

WOOSH.

\* \* \*

><p>Every child from the school, even Diamond Tiara, started cheering as the curtain of flame spread across the sky.<p>

A rainbow one formed behind it, and then Dash's streak of multicoloured light caught up with a white one trailed by orange flame.

\* \* \*

><p>"What the buck did you just <em>do<em>?" Dash asked, laughing hysterically as she kept pace with Scootaloo.

"I think I just made a Blackbird out of weather magic," Scootaloo replied in a distracted tone. "Hey, it's about to fall apart 'cause I can't work out how to make it stop accelerating. Catch me?"

"Always," Dash promised, and, true to her word, plucked the filly out of the air as her fragile air-construct collapsed.

\* \* \*

><p>"Huhâ€|" Scootaloo said, dazed, and stared at her flank again.<p>

What was there was a kind of faded, gaseous aircraft-shape made from sonic boom shock clouds. It wasn't the only cutie mark she'd had, not by a long chalk, but this one wasâ€| different, if only in that she'd managed it without any kind of artificial assistance.

Applebloom hadn't stopped laughing since Scootaloo had landed, except to point out between giggles that it was \_so \_typically Scootaloo to have no idea how to keep an aircraft in one piece.

Scootaloo \_had\_ tried to protest, but the engineer-filly had reminded her of at least three separate planes that had simply fallen to bits around her thanks to overzealous straining of the airframe.

Sweetie Belle came to Scootaloo's rescue. "Hey, 'bloom? You do realize she's completely stolen the show this time around?"

Applebloom stopped laughing. "Awâ€| shucks."

"So," Sweetie added, determined to get them all back to normal, "you going to repeat this way of getting your cutie mark?"

"No!" Scootaloo replied, eyes twitching. "Not without at least two different kinds of safety gear."

"What, a helmet and shinpads?" 'bloom snarked.

Scootaloo considered it. "I was thinking more along the lines of the world's biggest trampoline and a Pinkie Promise not to get hurt."

"â€|actually, that might do it," Applebloom admitted.

"Hey, this gives me an idea for a song!" Sweetie said.

Grateful for the return to normalcy, both of the others threw pillows at her.

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|she did <em>what?<em>" Twilight asked. "No, I did hear you. I just didn't believe you were that irresponsible."

Dash looked down. "Sorry, 'twi. I was going to ascend to save her if I had to."

"I don't doubt it." Twilight tried a smile. "Justâ€| careful, okay? Not everypony is as tough as you."

The pegasus nodded.

Then her eyes widened, and she kicked the wall. "Oh, \_buck!\_ I should have lent her my Element!"

"Would that have worked?" Twilight asked, more to herself than anything. "I would have thought the cutie mark had to be establishedâ€| oh, well."

Getting out a notebook, she wrote something in it. "You know this is one of the first times any Crusader has got a cutie mark based entirely off of in-loop actions? I mean, they've got ones before, but usually either when not Awake or when in a Loop somehow different to normal."

"Or they've made it a loop different to normal by building an aircraft or somethingâ€|" Dash muttered. "Which is more or less what happened anyway."

"True, trueâ€|" Twilight acknowledged. "Okay, I think this one's going to be a friendship lesson. By the end of the week, please."

The pegasus groaned. "Not again!"

"Well, you \_have\_ been a bit crazy these last few loopsâ€| perhaps you need to let some steam offâ€|" Twilight frowned. "Wonder when the next giant robot loop is?"

\* \* \*

><p>26.6<p>

"So," Spike said, lying back in the warm sunlight of a new Loop's second day, "what should we do this time?"

"Not sure, reallyâ€|" Rarity replied, trotting over with a huge towel. She laid it down next to him, making sure it completely covered the grass, then flopped down on it. Obliging, Spike raised an arm and pulled the edge of the towel under his side.

"Hmmmâ€|" the dragon pondered for a moment. "Fancy a world tour?"

"That might be nice."

"Really?" Spike said, grinning. "I'd only suggested it for a bit of a laugh â€" are you sure it's fine?"

"Yeah." Rarity winked. "Just give me a day or so to set the shop up."

\* \* \*

><p>"Ready?" Spike checked.<p>

"Of course." The unicorn nodded down the road. "Come on â€" Manehattan awaits!"

"Out of curiosity," Spike said, as they got going â€" Loopers could travel light with the best of them, using their subspace pockets to hold luggage easily â€" "how \_did\_ you get the shop set up?"

"Oh, I blagged an EMH off of Twilight. You know, the virtual doctor things from the Star Trek place. No AI," she shrugged, "but it should be quite sufficient with a little reprogramming."

\* \* \*

><p>"Hello?" the stallion said, looking nervous. "This is the Carousel Boutique, right?"<p>

With a flash, a unicorn mare appeared in front of him. Her face was composed, and she wasn't quite focusing on him.

\*\*\*"Please state the nature of your fashion disaster."\*\*\*

"Erâ€¦ well, I'm getting married tomorrow, and I don't have a tuxedo-"

The unicorn vanished. There was a shuffling sound from the back room, and then she reappeared in another flash of light.

In her hooves was a neatly packaged suit.

\*\*\*"Price noted on the package. Please leave your details and feedback."\*\*\*

Feeling quite thoroughly creeped out, the stallion left his name, address and the money and left as fast as he could.

The suit fitted perfectly.

\* \* \*

><p>26.7<p>

"What is the meaning of this?" Blueblood said, looking down at a rather scruffy earth pony stallion. "Where is your ticket?"

"I told you, I don't \_have\_ one," the stallion replied. "Look, I never expected to need one, but-"

"But me no buts!" Blueblood shook his head. "This is an invitation



\_only\_ event, and I do not intend to see the wedding of my cousin and her fiancÃ© marred by any old nag off the street!"

"Look, Blueblood, it's me!" The stallion's eyes pleaded. "I don't know where my horn went, but it's me. Shining Armor."

"Tosh!" Blueblood turned up his nose. "Captain Armor is a unicorn of great distinction and rather good breeding. You are some earth pony with a similar cutie mark, trying to con your way into the palace. Guards!"

"What's going on?" Cadence's voice came from the direction of the grounds. "Is it Shiny? He's ever so late, the sun's gone down."

"It's me, Cadence!" the stallion shouted, before Blueblood threw a silencing spell at him.

Cadence flew over the last fence in the way with a little fluttering hop and slowed to a stop, eyes wide. "Oh!"

"Please, cousin," Blueblood's tone softened. "I'm sorry all this hassle is affecting your wedding day, but this is just some tramp who tried to get into the palace under false pretences. Once this is sorted out, then I can see if I can find the Captain. I should have tried sooner."

"No," Cadence said, her voice hitching and close to tears. "You're wrong, cousin."

Her eyes met those of the stallion. "This \_is\_ Shining Armor. I'd know him anywhere."

Blueblood's reaction to that was, perhaps fortunately, composed of a coughing fit rather than words.

"What happened to you, love?" she asked softly.

Shining tried to speak, but no sound came out. After a moment, Cadence snapped the thread of Blueblood's silence spell and he started in on the explanation.

"It's a curse," he said, his clear voice carrying. "By night one way, by day another; this shall be the norm. Until you find true love's first kiss; then, take love's true form."

"Oh, Shiningâ€|" Cadence looked at him for a second longer, then darted forwards and kissed him.

All the spectators covered their eyes against the blinding flash of light.

"â€|huh," Shining said after a moment, looking down the barrel of his body. "I don't remember the wings from before."

Cadence sniffed. "You were always a prince in my eyes."

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|plagarists," Trixie muttered, as the moonlit wedding finally

got under way.<p>

"Oh, hush," Twilight said, eating some popcorn. "So what if they stole the plot of Shrek?"

\* \* \*

><p>26.8 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight had a BRILLIANT plan this loop. She'd filled her friends in on it, arranged various spell matrices in the Everfree, and just managed to get back in time for the summer sun celebration. On cue, Nightmare Moon appeared, looking down at the crowd of ponies and going into her speech.<p>

"And now, the night! Will last! Forever!"

Twilight smirked internally, opening her mouth-

"I wouldn't be doing that mate."

Twilight blinked.

A strange brown stallion, mane and beard tied up in dreadlocks and beads, swaggered forward. He was wearing a roughshod sort of jacket and a ratty old tricorn, eyeing Nightmare Moon lazily. The goddess of the night gazed down at him dismissively.

"And who are you to oppose me?"

"Oh, nonono. Not opposing the night thing, really. I'm just a humble sailor, stumbled into port for the Summer... set thing."

"...We're landlocked."

"See, that's the problem. I'm completely lost." The stallion waved around vaguely, half stumbling. "Sailor, use the stars to navigate. Love those things, by the way, great lil' pinpricks of light in the sky."

"Twilight," Rainbow whispered, "should we do something?"

The unicorn shook her head slightly. "I want to see how this goes..."

"Ah! So you admit the virtue of the night!" Nightmare Moon stamped a hoof. "Thank you, noble sailor. Now then-"

"But you see the problem is... if it's night here, then what's it out at sea?" The stallion held up a hoof. "Not. Not night. Thing of it is, if you're out at sea and it's day, you're completely lost. Less you find land. But that only ensures you're a little less lost, less you find a map. You need a lot more equipment when it's not night, then when it's night. You see? I love the eternal night, but put it here, land locked, and when I get out to port I'm not going to be able to see the stars, lass."

Nightmare Moon blinked. "I... see thy reasoning, I suppose.

Still-"

"Here's an idea. Let's make eternal night mobile." By now, the stallion had somehow stumbled onto the stage. "You and me, and all us night lovers, we go round the sea. And all the day lovers stay here, on dry land, and grow things. Then, when we get hungry, we walk up, take what we can, and sail off."

"Thou refers to piracy!"

The stallion considered her words. "Hmm. Yes, I think that is the right word."

"Why would we engage in such acts against those whom we wish respect from?!"

"Why wouldn't you? I mean, isn't that what you're doing now?"

Nightmare Moon looked genuinely shocked. "No!"

"Wait, so you're not asking for tribute?"

"No! Of course not!"

"Ah, sorry then. I think I misinterpreted things." He sighed. "Carry on with your hostile takeover, by all means."

Twilight tried hard to keep her face straight.

Nightmare Moon gave the stallion a long, strange look.

He tilted his head.

She snorted, and turned back to the now quite bemused ponies. "As we were saying, the night will last forever-"

"You know, I just realized something."

The alicorn growled, whirling on him. "What?!"

"I think, maybe, the night lasts forever anyway. I mean, the moon keeps moving, and the sun keeps moving, and really the only difference is which is in the sky. So keeping the moon where it is sort of seems redundant to me. Of course, I'm just a very lost sailor. Could be wrong."

"No," Twilight offered politely, "I'm pretty sure you're right." She got a brown hoof wave.

"So what I'm thinking is, keeping night here means that everybody else in the world, they end up not getting night. That doesn't seem fair to me."

Nightmare Moon stared at him as if he was insane.

"Show of hands! Sorry. Show of hooves, who here thinks that the night is too wonderful to keep locked on one place?"

Everypony in the hall shot up a hoof, Pinkie flipping over so all of

hers could dangle upward. Nightmare Moon choked.

"Now, see, all these ponies love night so much, they want to share it... with the world. So, back to my original suggestion. Keep the eternal night, but keep it moving. Savvy?"

The black alicorn stared at him. "But... that's just the same thing as what there was before!"

"Is it?" He blinked, glanced up at the sky, and turned back to her. "I hadn't noticed."

Even Twilight wasn't sure if the stallion was being sarcastic.

Nightmare Moon held up a hoof, trying to formulate an argument, but her mouth merely opened and shut in confusion. Finally, staring out at the crowd, she released a frustrated scream. "FINE! Moving eternal night it is! But we're going to be watching closely and if we don't see proper respect for the night, we are going to stick Celestia back in the sun!" With a flash of her horn, she was gone, and a moment later Celestia stepped onto the stage slightly confused.

"Ah... hum. Well. That was... not... expected..."

"I rarely am, love."

Twilight facehooved. Okay, time to host an intervention. Her horn glowed, teleporting the stallion and herself into the library; she had to figure out what the hay was going on.

\* \* \*

><p>"...so this is your first time outside your home loop?"<p>

"I suppose it is." Jack shrugged. "Leastways, this don't look like anywhere in the Caribbean. I take it you've never heard of Davy Jones?"

"No. Well, welcome to Equestria, enjoy your stay, and if you do anything to destabilize or threaten the world I teleport you straight to the moon." Twilight smirked. "Other than that, you're pretty much free to do whatever, mister..."

"Sparrow Jack." He blinked and shook his head. "No, wait. Jack Sparrow. Captain. Captain Jack Sparrow."

"A pleasure to meet you captain. Oh, since it is your first time out of your loop, you'll need the Welcome to the multiverse speech. Oh I'm so excited, this is my frist time giving it!"

Jack Sparrow suddenly felt a sinking feeling.

\* \* \*

><p>26.9 (Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight woke up over a dead mouse. And realized part of it was in her... beak?

Okay so... owl, apparently. Alright, sure. Loop memories... this was still Equestria. Heck, she was in the Everfree forest...

A suspicion rose up in her mind and she took to wing, headed for Ponyville.

\* \* \*

><p>"Ah swear if you make any sort of pun Ah will punt you."<p>

Rarity scoffed. "My word, Applejack, do I look like the sort of feline that would make light of another's situation? I am a refined lady."

The farmdog nodded, managing a wry smile. "Ah guess ya are... should be on the lookout fer Rainbow though. Wait a minute, if we're the pets this loop, then Rainbow-

\* \* \*

><p>"Yeah, yeah, laugh it up." Rainbow let out an irritated sigh. Twilight was a short distance away, hooting with laughter and rolling on the ground.<p>

"Now, now," Fluttershy tried, "It's not nice of you to laugh at Rainbow's expense Twi. After all, it... hee... she can't help that she's... hee hee... so slow!" The rabbit tried and failed to hold back her own giggles.

Dash looked between her two friends. Eventually, she just rolled her eyes and pulled back into her shell. "Wake me up when Angel comes round to feed us."

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie looked in the mirror.<p>

"...well. Bright pink gator. This is one for the record books."

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you sure you want to do this?" the bearer of Kindness asked his pet tortoise.<p>

Rainbow Dash nodded, snapping the goggles over her eyes and checking the straps on her prismatic shell.

Tank let out a sigh, double checking the machinery once again before finally nodding. "Alright then. Tortoise take off in ten." He backed off, ready to catch her with his magic should anything go wrong.

Blades started to whirl, cutting the air with a powerful rumble as the various propellers attached to Dash kicked into gear. Soon enough, the only thing holding her to the ground were the metal struts clinging to the contraption. Tank took a breath, lighting his horn and sliding them away slowly.

As soon as she was free, Rainbow bolted into the air, spiraling and

twirling on her magitech glider jet copter thing and letting out a scream of pure joy. Rainbow Dash, fastest tortoise on the ground, was now once again the fastest thing in the air.

The air over Ponyville, anyway. Even Tank's mechanical brilliance wasn't quite enough to give her supersonic speed. Yet.

She'd painted the contraption blue with yellow bolts, much to Tank's amusement. And by Celestia she was going to ensure that she made it.

\* \* \*

><p>"Ah thought Ah was the pet in this relationship," Applejack grumbled to herself. But she couldn't help but smile as Winona emerged from a pile of apples and tumbled down to her paws. "Come on, ya klutz, ya still need to get to the other trees."<p>

Winona didn't understand her, of course-well, she didn't understand what Applejack was saying, but the way she pointed toward the rest of the orchard with an orange paw communicated her intent clearly enough. "Oh come on, you silly mutt, I'm dog tired! Maybe I should go see if anypony's willing to lend a hoof." Her face scrunched up. "On second thought, no, that would be GROSS. I'll just ask for their help."

Applejack let out a whuffling chuckle. "No wonder you got Laughter. That sounds like a right fine idea, girl, let's go corral us some ponies." Winona bounced up, beginning to walk off before Applejack bit down on her tail. "AFTER you get all these apples into buckets, girl!"

"Ow! Hey! Down dog!" Winona turned around. "What is it? What's wrong?"

The orange mutt sighed, pointing at the apples.

"...you want to play fetch?"

Applejack facepawed.

\* \* \*

><p>Gummy...<p>

Gummy was a strange one. Everypony in Ponyville knew this. Yes, he gave freely, and often exactly what was needed. Heck, he was even the bearer of generosity! And yet...

Some said it was his eyes. Some said it was his vacant expression. Some said it was the way the earth pony moved so silently, you couldn't hear his hoofsteps on hard cobble. Some, quietly, blamed the genetic quirk that prevented him from growing teeth and made the rare sound of his voice an oddity, though they would never say it out loud.

All in all, something was... off about that pony. How did he know what you needed? Why did he crop up when you needed him, and just as suddenly disappear? Where did he get the stuff he gave, what was his job anyway? Yes, he hung out with his "friends," but... he would

smile, frown, and never open his mouth. Never even to eat! Although, given the tooth thing maybe he was just embarrassed.

Strangest of all was his hot-pink alligator. She couldn't talk. No. She \_sang.\_ And danced, but any animal could do that. The toothy grin almost permanent on her face was somehow heartwarming and endearing and not at all predatory. On occasion she even played with young foals; even stranger, if the parents got worried and tried to stop her she would nod and walk away, calmly, as if she understood.

They were an odd pair, Gummy and Pinkie Pie, and nopony really quite understood them.

\* \* \*

><p>Opalescence smiled gratefully as Rarity brought up the appropriate gems. "Thank you, darling. You've quite a good taste, I wish I could make you an outfit." She sighed. "If only you didn't have such long fur... Ah, well. Back to pleasing the idiots in Canterlot."<p>

"Should I take offense to that?"

The white unicorn turned to the brown pegasus walking in through the boutique door. "You're not in Canterlot anymore, you're not an idiot at all, and I doubt princess Philomena would disagree with my assessment of the nobles... so I'm going to say no. Why are you here, Owly?"

"Just warning you there's going to be a storm Tuesday." The pegasus shrugged. "I wasn't aware if you had any important meetings, but I know that impressions are important."

Opalescence nodded at him thankfully. "I'll be sure to have a day in then. Thanks for the heads up."

"Part of Honesty is facts, and I felt I would be denying my element if I left you uninformed."

That got a mild chuckle out of her. "Honestly, you try too hard. You don't see me casting spells left and right. By the way, could you tell Peewee his phoenix has been sneaking over here?"

"Certainly. Has there been any issues?"

"Well, no, not exactly." The unicorn shuddered. "It's just... I... I think I spotted him making out with Rarity!"

The pegasus raised a thick eyebrow. "Truly?"

"I don't know what she sees in him-purple and green feathers, so gauche! And apart from that, she's a cat and he's a bird." Opal shuddered. "Still, I guess I can't actually stop them without spaying her. Not going to do that. Angel gets really aggressive about things like that."

"Mmm, yes. Cloudsdale culture can do that. Very well, I'll try to get Peewee to reign Spike in, but I doubt he'll do it." Owly shook his head. "That young dragon... why did I EVER hatch him?"

"You wanted an intellectual challenge and didn't actually expect your methods to work," Opal deadpanned.

"Ah, yes. Hmm. Oh, have you seen Twilight anywhere? She's been missing for a couple of days."

Opal shrugged. "No clue. Go see if Angel knows anything. The only owl I understand is you." She grinned. "Actually, aren't you up a little early? It's not even evening yet!"

"Oh har de har har. One week of all nighters and you never live it down."

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy looked up.<p>

"...so. Let me see if I understand this. You wanted to see if the alicornification spell worked on an owl."

"Yep."

"And now..." She gestured. "You're an owlbear."

Twilight rubbed one of her antlers awkwardly. "Yep."

"...How. How does this even make sense?!"

"Um... I'm still part owl?" The violet giant giggled awkwardly and cringed. "I can fix this, I think. I just need a few things."

Fluttershy sighed, tugging at her long ears. "I'll go see if I can sneak something from Angel for you. What is it you need?"

\* \* \*

><p>26.10 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight woke up in a comfortable bedroom and waited until the memories hit. She was human this loop, and very young. Her name was Tai Lee and she was just about to start fourth grade at Ponneville Magical Elementary School along with her friends, Jacqueline Apple-Smyth, Bonnie Dash, Felicia Shai, Rarity Belle, and... and...<p>

"Oh no."

\* \* \*

><p>Mina Diane 'Pinkie' Pie woke up on a train with a huge grin on her face. Her parents were drilling experts working for BP who had recently transferred to the London division. That meant that she was going to Hogwarts! On one hand she was going to miss all her friends, but on the other hand, she had never had a solo Hogwarts loop before. Also she had hands again now. They always made her giggle. Like five tiny legs on the end of a longer leg.<p>



Neville opened a compartment of a train only to see a strange girl with light red hair giggling while wiggling her fingers. Mustering up what courage he had, he attempted to get her attention, "Um, hello. My name is Neville. Have.. have you seen a toad around here? He may answer to the name, Trevor. I'm afraid mine seems to have run away."

The girl whirled her head towards him and grinned in a wide, and somewhat disturbing manner, "Hi Neville! My name is Pinkie Pie. Actually it's Mina Diane Pie, but everyone just calls me Pinkie Pie. Don't worry about your toad. Gummy and I will help you look!"

"Um, thank you," the young wizard was having second thoughts about asking this girl for help.

"No problem!" Pinkie said and whipped out a small alligator from somewhere, and held it in both hands, "Gummy, find Trevor!"

The alligator just sat there in her grip, only slowly wagging his tail.

"This way!" The girl jumped up and ran out of the compartment. Neville followed cautiously and with growing dread.

\* \* \*

><p>Godric Gryffindor had created the sorting hat with more than a few secrets. One of them was a result of him trying to figure out a way of dealing with children who were advanced enough to have trained their minds to be unreadable by said hat. The quickest way he solved this problem was to make the hat automatically sort anyone who it couldn't read into his house. In addition to getting talented children who had been skilled in controlling their own minds, this little feature would result, over the years, in Gryffindor getting a half-giant boy who would otherwise gone to Hufflepuff, and a werewolf who would have been a shoo-in for Ravenclaw.<p>

So when Pinkie Pie put on the sorting hat, it just yelled out 'Gryffindor' and automatically rebooted itself from the sugar mind-induced magical blue screen of death. She quickly ran down and sat next to Neville at the table. They had found Trevor in minutes. After Pinkie introduced the terrified toad to her alligator, she had declared herself and Neville to be best friends in Hogwarts, whether the boy wanted to be or not. Then, she had proceeded to buy and eat most of the candy that was left on the snack cart. Neville had a feeling it was going to be a very long, very interesting year.

\* \* \*

><p>"You have to calm down," Applejack told Twilight, "I'm sure Pinkie is going to be fine on her lonesome."<p>

Twilight looked over her remaining awakened friends who were all gathered together at the school library, "I'm not worried about that. Do you remember what happened the last time Pinkie had a solo loop?"

Applejack answered, "She turned out just fine. Grew wings and a horn, if I recall correctly."

Rarity paled, "I don't think that is what Twilight is getting at. The last time Pinkie was left alone, she became the chaos goddess of joy and celebration for the entire galaxy. And then there was the time the non-awake version of her became an alicorn princess."

"And now she is all alone in the corrupt and nasty English wizarding world," Fluttershy spoke up, "It's not nearly as horrible as that loop's universe, but it is still pretty bad."

Rainbow Dash asked with slight confusion, "So wait. You're saying that we don't have to go save Pinkie from the English magical world. We have to go save the English magical world from Pinkie?"

Twilight nodded as vigorously as an eleven year old girl could, "Yes. Although it may already be too late."

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie Pie sat in a small corner of the bathroom with her arms wrapped around her legs. Her long hair was over her eyes and she was trying not to cry. Of course, she realized that she now had the emotional stability of an eleven year old girl. So when Ron Weasley told her that she was extremely annoying and that no one wanted to come to her far too frequent parties, it had hurt far, far more than it should.<p>

Sure, she could go all alicorn party goddess on this loop, but she had the feeling that would end it immediately, and she was kind of enjoying learning human magic.

So when she heard the sound of the bathroom door locking and looked up into the face of an angry troll, she knew she had to take care of this Pinkie Pie style.

Harry Potter and Ron quickly unlocked the door after racing back up the stairs to the second floor bathroom. It took them a while to realize that they locked the troll in with their classmate and hoped that the fact that there was no screaming didn't mean that something horrible had happened.

All their preconceived notions vanished when the door opened. Inside, they beheld a party.

Balloons and streamers were everywhere. A large partially eaten feast was prepared to one side and a massive banner proclaimed in large letters 'Welcome to Hogwarts, Mr. Troll'.

On the other side of the large bathroom, was a large smelly troll who was currently using his club to play a giant magically reinforced game of whack-a-mole. Idly, Harry noticed that that one of the moles popping up resembled a certain potion professor. It was also worth double the points according to the increasing floating numbers designating the troll's score. Pinkie Pie was using pom-poms to cheer him on.

Then she noticed the two boys.

"See? Not everyone thinks my super fun parties are annoying. Isn't that right, Mister Thok?"

The troll, Mr. Thok apparently, nodded and gave a happy grunting noise as he clobbered the Snape-looking whack-a-mole with a club slam that shook the floor a little.

It turns out that fear and awe of an insistent little girl that could control trolls could also be basis for a lasting friendship.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was just about ready to teleport the gang over to England on a rescue mission when an owl holding an alligator holding a letter appeared outside her window. The girl slowly and cautiously let them into her room. The very familiar alligator opened its mouth and dropped the letter on her bed before the two flew into her bathroom and closed the door. Soon, there was a sound of her bathtub being filled with water.<p>

"So what does it say?" Applejack tore Twilight's attention back towards the envelope.

Twilight carefully picked up the letter, opened it, and began to read.

\_ "Hello, friends! This is Pinkie Pie! Hopefully you are all 'awake' and bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, not that we actually have tails anymore, bushy or otherwise, although I'm working on that. I don't know if you all want to come and rescue me from the spooky haunted super magic castle, but I am having tons of fun here learning magic. Most of it even works for me. Well, some of it does.\_

\_ I'm no expert, but the fact that I still have earth pony magic and chaos goddess magic running through me, somehow, makes the normal magic I'm trying to learn act all kooky strange. The way I understand it is that it isn't like plugging a DC device into a wall socket with no converter, but more like prying open the battery case and stuffing it full of waldorf salad, hot lava, and magical amulets; then hoping for the best.\_

\_ Half the time, my spells work just fine. A quarter of the time, they work, but are either way too powerful or barely powerful enough. And the last quarter of the time, strange things happen. The professors are still trying to figure out how I turned a regular feather into a giant angry unkillable purple tentacle plant that was also on fire.\_

\_ They say that that part of the castle will be safe in another few days or so. A week at most.\_

\_ Our transfiguration teacher turned into a human from being a cat, but then lied and said 'no' when I asked if she was a moon cat. I don't know who her magical girl is, but I will find out soon. She was also unhappy that when she turned her desk into a piggy, only I was quick enough to be able to ride it out of the room and into the hallway.\_

\_ Oh, in other news. I threw a party for a Mr. Thok, who is a giant troll. After some translation from Rubeus Hagrid, who is a vary large hairy man that lives alone in a wooden shed not far from where we kids go to school; Principal Dumbledore just decided to extract Mr. Thok's memories and then threw them into a big bowl. Then he tried to

play apple-bobbing, but with memories instead of apples. Then he got really mad and chased Professor Quirrell out of the school.\_

\_Ron, who is a boy in my house and my new friend, asked me to not have so many parties. I happily agreed. Then I met with his brothers, who are twins and love pranks of all sorts. We came up with so many good ideas. So many. I'll try to record some of the good ones so you can see them, Dashie.\_

\_Ron was upset at me when he thought that Gummy ate his missing rat, Scabbers. But I told him that Gummy has no teeth and that I would get him another pet that is much better than his old rat. I'm mixing up several batches of polyjuice potion right now. Not sure what I'll get when I mix bits of every magical animal I can find together and then feed it to the giant freshwater squid, but it has got to be better than a boring old rat, right?\_

\_Don't worry, the ingredients were super easy to get with the Potions teacher in the hospital. They say something shredded his mind real bad. I have no idea what it was, but I think it tried to get me too because right before he collapsed all twitchy and foamy at the mouth, I had a brief headache. I think it was some kind of invisible mind ghost, but I laughed at it and it hasn't bothered me since.\_

\_Actually those last parts happened around Halloween, which is three months from now. And I think Gummy should now be done with his bath. In ending, hope everything is fine with all of you. Don't come 'rescue' me. I'll write you guys another letter when a good time to go visit would be.\_

\_Toodles,\_

\_Pinkie Pie."\_

When Twilight finished talking, the owl swooped out of the bathroom carrying the newly cleaned alligator. The alligator opened his mouth and a giant red swirling portal formed in front of the two animals, closing quickly once the two flew inside.

For a moment, no one spoke. Then Applejack stood up and calmly put her hat on her head, "See. I told you she was fine. Everything is fine. I'm going to go home now and pretend really hard that magical Pinkie Pie is farther than only half the world away. Goodnight, all."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

26.1: Trixie and Gilda. They Cause - er, I mean, Fight - Crime.

>26.1 omake: As noted, this one's a bit complex. Basically, the bit with the hangover was sufficiently funny that moving the events therein to the next loop would have sacrificed too much funny.<br>26.2: Mental picture of Sunset Shimmer jumping futilely to try and get back up to the mirror.

>26.3: Costumed superhero bonanza.<br>26.4: Speak softly, and carry an enchanted dress.

>26.5: This started as a quick character piece, then got away from

me.<br>26.6: There's a pile of ready made outfits in the back room. And the basement.

>26.7: Yes, that's a potted version of Shrek. Also, hopefully this makes Blueblood a bit more sympathetic.<br>26.8: Well, that's one way to get eternal life. Savvy?

>26.9: Wonder what that makes Shining Armor?<br>26.10: I can only imagine how hard it was for the author of this one to manage a Pinkie Pie POV.

## 27. Chapter 27

### 27.1

"All the cakes have been sabotaged!" Pinkie gasped. "I know just what to do!"

The others looked at her sceptically. "Really?"

"Yeah!" She pulled a clockwork pigeon from her mane, slotted in a key, and wound it up. After a few turns, she lifted it to her mouth and spoke slowly and clearly. "I need your help. Come quick."

The earth pony trotted briskly to the window and threw the pigeon out.

It flew exactly as well as a dense lump of metal would be expected to fly, bounced off the gravel, and exploded into a cloud of gears and springs.

"You rang?" Discord asked, coming through a trapdoor in the floor.

Pinkie clapped her hooves. "I knew that would get your attention!"

"Actually, you were just passing by. I was having a sleep."

"Where?" Gustav asked, looking out the window. "There is not any lights for milesâ€¦"

"The sleepers, duh." Discord turned to Pinkie. "So, what's up?"

"Someone's been eating the cakes!" Pinkie said, pointing. "That one, and that one, and those two."

The chaotic draconequus snapped his fingers and materialized a magnifying glass, deerstalker hat and bubble pipe.

"No, sorryâ€¦" Pinkie shook her head. "We already did that one."

Discord looked downcast. "What about if I speak in zee foreign accent, like zee great Parrot?"

A rolling pin bounced off his head.

"I think Gustave finds it offensive." Pinkie retrieved the rolling pin and passed it back to him. "Eight out of ten for accuracy, but

only a six for force."

Discord got out a long list. "Hmmmâ€¦ magical private eye?"

"Twilight did that one."

"Secret agent?"

"Yes?" Joe answered, then paled. "Oh, what a giveaway!"

Getting out his magnifying glass again, Discord perused the list. Having a quick peek, Mulia was none the wiser. "List of mystery plot protagonist stereotypes? What's that supposed to mean?"

Discord glanced over the paper at her. "And so much for ninja, as well. Right, that's it, I'm completely out of stereotypes. They've all been done."

Pinkie passed him a PADD. "What about the hacker?"

"â€¦I was just testing you," he said unconvincingly, and pulled a cord out of the back of the PADD. "Rightâ€¦"

He typed on the little computer seemingly at random, occasionally saying things like 'disabling code walls' or 'hacking all IPs simultaneously.'.

Eventually, he held it up triumphantly. "I have it! It was the butler!"

Everyone else on the train gave him a \_look.\_

"â€¦fine, then, don't trust the hacker." Discord snapped his fingers, and the damage to the cakes was repaired. "Right, I'm going back to my nap."

Opening the trapdoor again to reveal a long set of spiral stairs, he walked down them muttering and was out of sight.

Mulia shook her head. "Did that just happen?"

Pinkie shrugged. "Hey, we got our cakes back, right?"

\* \* \*

><p>27.2<p>

Cadence trotted over to the door. "Coming!"

When it creaked open, she saw one of the palace maids standing there.

Her eyes narrowed, then widened. "Oh, you poor thing! Shining, come here!"

The unicorn cantered over. "What is it, dear?"

"The poor thing's starving, look!" Cadence pointed to the maid, who was now looking a little confused. "Can we help her?"

"I don't knowâ€|" Shining said, dubiously.

"Please?" Cadence did her best puppy-eyes.

Shining gave in. "Alright, dear. You know best."

She nibbled his mane affectionately, then they touched horns. A brief pulse of bright pink magic flared up, and the maid collapsed.

A moment later, there was a crackle of green energy, and Queen Chrysalis lay revealed and blinking up at them. "Whatâ€|"

"That should do you for a bit," Cadence said with a smile. "We'll get you sorted out with more love later on, but for now you need a bit of rest."

The ruler of the Changelings thought about that.

\_Eh, may as well go along with it.\_

\* \* \*

><p>27.3<p>

"Hmâ€|" the mouse said, squinting up at Twilight. "I'm afraid you're a littleâ€|" big to fit in the door."

Twilight examined it. "I think I could squeeze inâ€|" but you're right, best not to risk it."

"I'll get the cooks to send you out food, then." The young mouse lay back on the springy roadside grass, looking up at her. "By the wayâ€|" would you mind helping us with what comes up next in our Loop?"

"Not at all," Twilight replied.

"Good." A chuckle. "Cluny's still kind of a threat â€" he's hardly an idiot, and getting together all the bits of Martin's armour isn't as safe as it could be â€" but since the biggest defender we normally have is a badgerâ€|"

After a short pause, Matthias looked up again. "How are you at puzzles?"

"I'm alright." Twilight shrugged. "I don't often get new ones, to be honest, which is a bit of a pain."

"You'll like our Loop, then. Hold on a minute, I'll write down the first one we normally run into. It's hidden in the great hall."

Twilight smiled as the mouse scampered off. He seemed quite a pleasant fellowâ€|" although everyone here was so small compared to her that it was setting off Fluttershy-Squee responses.

\* \* \*

><p>27.4<p>

There was a knock on the door, and the Crusaders looked up from their card game. "Come in!"

The door creaked, admitting a black filly in a cloak. "Hi, everypony, Twilight said you were all â€" wait, what's she doing here?"

Diamond Tiara stared. "What are you doing in here?"

"I asked first!" The filly stamped a hoof and stuck her tongue out. "So there."

"Should we do something?" Applebloom asked quietly.

"Nah," Scootaloo replied, putting her cards down face-down. "I'll go make some milkshakes."

"I am Diamond Tiara," the earth pony said, posing briefly. "I was invited. Officially, and everything."

"Seriously?" The filly shot a pitying look at Sweetie Belle. Then turned back to Diamond. "Wait, why did you accept?"

"I answered your question," Diamond replied, pointing. "Now you answer mine."

"I'm a Crusader as well!" The filly turned, showing off her cloak. "See?"

"Well, I've never met you."

"Look, are you guys Looping or not? 'cause now I'm wondering if this is a bizarre alternate Equestriaâ€|"

"This is coming from you?" Sweetie asked, and the filly blushed.

"We are looping," Applebloom said. "All four of us."

"â€|oh." With a flap of wings that had been hidden under the cloak, the newcomer revealed herself to be an alicorn. "Hi, then, I'm Nyx. I'm kinda Princess Luna's dark-but-not-evil side, it's complicated. Sorry I reacted so badly, I once nearly got et by monsters 'cause of a different version of you."

"Fair enough." Diamond shrugged. "I hope to show I've learned my lesson."

Nyx gaped. "Seriously, guys, is this an alternate universe version of Diamond Tiara? This is really confusing me. No offence."

"Some taken," the pink filly replied.

Sweetie and Applebloom exchanged looks. "Was that a seven?"

"Eight!" Scootaloo shouted from the kitchen area, and came over balancing five milkshakes on hooves, wings and forehead. "â€|can somepony take these, please? I didn't give nearly enough thought how to get them down again."

Nyx and Sweetie lifted some down, passed one on to each earth pony, and sat down with their own.



"Soâ€|" Diamond said, awkwardly, "tell me how it is that you, erâ€| exist."

"Well," Nyx replied, "when an evil cult and a dark goddess love each other very much, and then they fluff a magic ritual designed to resurrect the evil goddess by using the blood of Momma â€" that's Twilight Sparkle â€" they get a ball of fluff and feathers with no memory of her past life. That's me. And then I got raised by Twilight for, like, a month or so, before the evil cult brought back my memories of being evil."

Applebloom cut in. "Yeah, a thousand years of evil rage ain't much compared to a month of talkin' to Twilight."

"Pre-tty much." Nyx looked down. "This is really good milkshake. Anyway, took over the world, didn't feel like it, gave the world back, and then 'cause of super luck I got Looping. I don't turn up much, but I can't complain."

Diamond nodded along. "Yeah, that's about the second strangest thing I've ever heard."

"Second?" Nyx asked, interested.

"Jewel Scouts," all the others chorused.

"â€|yeah, I'll ask later. Hey, what game are you playing?"

"It's called Chaos. Discord gave it to us for playtesting." Applebloom picked up her cards, and blinked. "I could swear I had a different set of cards five minutes ago."

\* \* \*

><p>27.5<p>

"Okay, here we are," Twilight said, ushering the other five Elements in. "This is our new headquarters."

They looked around the single large room. There was a large projector on the ceiling, a complex mess of scientific equipment at one corner, and three sets of double doors leading off the central area.

"Well, it looks niceâ€|" Rarity said, with a moue of distaste for the furnishings. "I assume I can touch it up a bit?"

"Feel free," Twilight replied. "Now, this is the pantry."

Trotting smartly over to the first set of double doors on the north wall, she opened them to reveal a vast, cavernous room with dozens of aisles of freezers and cupboards. It looked like there was enough food in there to feed them for three years.

"Where do we prepare it, then?" Pinkie asked. "There better be a good kitchen!"

Twilight smiled, and opened the second set of doors â€" the east wall â€" to reveal a kitchen that could cater for a hotel.

"Wait, wait!" Dash frowned. "Food is cool, but what about you know."

Twilight nodded to the doors on the west wall. "Through there is the bathroom, showers, toilets, hot tub, spa and swimming pool."

The others looked at her with confusion. "Hold on a minute," Applejack said, voicing their thoughts, "Where do we sleep?"

The unicorn gave a mysterious smile and opened the north doors, revealing a much larger version of her own bedroom. Closing the doors and opening them again, this time an enlarged version of Dash's room was revealed.

With gradually dropping jaws, the Elements watched as Twilight opened the three double doors in a seemingly random pattern to reveal four more large bedrooms, a games room, a library, a gymnasium and a room full of seemingly random junk.

"Anyway," she said, finally shutting the third set of doors on a wardrobe large enough that it had a railway line on the floor, "I've printed up some adverts saying we do anything, any time. So if there's a problem anywhere in Equestria and somepony needs our help, they'll come to us."

\* \* \*

><p>27.6<p>

"This is the third one of these crimes in the last month," Sergeant Stronghoof reported grimly. "Mode of operation is always the same. Jewellery stolen, box open, but the rooms are always locked. It's a locked-room mystery, sir."

Shining blinked. "...over half the population in this city is \_unicorns\_, sergeant. What's so significant about a locked room?"

"Yeah," Stronghoof said, nodding. "I know it's not a big deal normally, but all the owners swear blind the rooms don't normally have locks on them."

"Oh." Shining trotted over to examine the door more closely. "That's not subtle, that's showing off. And this magic got past the house owners?"

"Yep." Stronghoof consulted a pad of paper. "Which is rather strange, because they're all very skilled mages who would detect this kind of thing normally."

"Sir!"

Shining and the sergeant both spun to face the young guardsmare who'd spoken. "What is it, Rosette?"

"Sir! there's a letter for you outside, captain."

"Right." Shining made for the door. "I think I can handle this myself, sergeant."

"Wait â€" but â€" sir?" Stronghoof sputtered for a moment, then cantered after the captain.

When he left the building, however, he saw no sign of the guard captain, and a torn envelope on the floor.

\* \* \*

><p>A blue unicorn leant back against a chimney tower, feeling pleased with herself.<p>

Then, with a rush of wings, a white figure landed in front of her. "Give yourself up!"

"Like hay!" she shouted back. "Wait. S â€" the S stands for \_Shining?\_"

Trixie Lulamoon, professional criminal, collapsed on the roof heaving with laughter.

Shining looked down at himself. "I didn't think it was \_that\_ badâ€|"

"You're wearingâ€| oh, heeâ€|" Trixie stifled her giggles with an effort of will, and rolled back upright again. "You're dressed as \_superman?\_"

"Super-\_pony\_, thank you very much." The stallion shrugged. "I've already got the shield, the ability to fly, and the invulnerability â€" with the right spell. You don't think it fitsâ€|?"

Trixie shook her head. "Nope. Does Cadence know you do this?"

"Actuallyâ€|" Shining pointed.

Hooves clattered on the stonework as a second alicorn touched down next to them.

Trixie collapsed with laughter again.

"I feel hurtâ€|" Cadence said sadly.

Shining put a wing over her. "Don't worry, Wonder Mare."

"Wonder mare!" Trixie gasped out.

"Well, you're one to talk," Shining said stubbornly. "I mean, you \_are\_ acting the supervillain this time."

Trixie wobbled as she climbed back to her hooves for a second time. "Yeah, thanks for â€" pfft â€" for reminding me." She tapped the side of her neck, and the alicorn amulet dropped from where it had been hidden to dangle freely.

"â€|wuh-ohâ€|" Shining muttered.

"Isn't that thing evil?" Cadence asked, frowning.

"Not quite evil \_per se\_." Trixie shrugged, a red glow developing

around her. "It's an emotional amplifier with magical feedback and it makes you very short tempered, and it affects your judgement, but if I'm right then I shouldn't be much more impetuous than I normally am."

"And if you're wrong?" Shining said, a sinking feeling stealing over him.

"Well, in that case, it's nice we're all in costume," Trixie shrugged. "Should I tell you to Kneel Before Trixie, or shall we skip to the fight scene?"

"â€|next time, we choose different costumes!" Shining hissed to his wife.

"Awâ€|" Cadence replied, pouting. "But I like these onesâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight clicked her stopwatch as redpink/blue magic erupted over the city of Canterlot. "â€|six hours, five minutes, twelve seconds between putting it on and resorting to force. Well, she's getting better at controlling itâ€|"

"Is this really worth it?" Spike asked. "For the research side of it, I mean."

Twilight shrugged. "Borderline. But as for the show she puts onâ€|" she slid a bag of popcorn over to him, and opened another after flash-heating it with a quick spell.

Spike nodded. "Fair enough." He started eating his own popcorn, as flashes like lightning bounced off the clouds. "Think we should sell tickets?"

\* \* \*

><p>27.7 (misterq)<p>

"It was us, Mistress Rarity," said the leader of the Diamond Dogs as all the other canids ran towards the surface in sheer panic, "We didn't means to, but we dug deep. Too deep."

"What? What have you unleashed?" Rairty asked, even as she prepared her emergency teleport spell.

"No time! No time! They'll be here soon. We must flee!" The alpha dog said before he, too, ran for the exit.

Rairty glanced back towards the mine when she began to hear it. It started quietly, like a whispering brook; but slowly intensified as the distance between decreased. The pale unicorn managed to pale even further, her eyes diminishing into pinpricks, as she finally recognized the sound that she would never ever forget for as long as she existed.

The sound of, "Fun? Fun? Fun! Fun! Funfunfunfunfunfunfunfunfun!"

\* \* \*

><p>27.8 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><span>Academic Excellence (Final part)<span>

\* \* \*

><p>When Lightning Dust arrived in the mess hall the next morning, there was something different about her, her usual self confident attitude absent along with the grin on her face. The other Ponyville ponies were sitting with Dash as usual, and they quieted and turned to look at her as she came up to the table. Lightning Dust looked almost ready to turn and bolt, but Dash gave her a slight nod and a reassuring grin, so she visibly gritted her teeth, screwing up her courage to say something.<p>

"Uh... Hey, every-pony. Good day for flying..." She tried a grin, but it didn't seem to lighten the others expressions. She sighed. "Look, guys, I've been doing a lot of thinking, about what you all said last night, about what Dashy said, and I want to say... I'm sorry!"

That seemed to mollify them somewhat and, encouraged, she continued. "I guess I've been acting like a jerk, to all of you, but I don't get this touchy-feely stuff, I've always worked alone because, well it's hard for me to slow to other ponies speed! I love going fast and looking awesome doing it! I never figured out this whole 'getting along with other ponies' thing because I never needed it. "

She shook her head, shaking out her mane. "But Dash was right. No Wonderbolt ever flew solo. If I ever want to join them, I need to learn. I know I haven't exactly given you much reason to help me, but that's what I'm asking for. Please, could you guys give me a helping hoof?"

The other ponies looked back and forth between themselves, and finally Thunderlane spoke for them. "Okay... I guess we'll soon see if you're full of cumulus or not."

After food, the group trooped out to the runway for that day's exercise. Spitfire was there, apparently getting her ears cleaned out with a sonic blast as one of her cohorts blew a reveille right next to her. However, it didn't seem to affect her speech as she gave them their mission.

"Today we'll be doing our famous air obstacle course. The object of this exercise is to work on your precision flying under extreme circumstances. And don't worry about winning. It's not a race."

Every-pony in the cadet line up looked towards Lightning Dust, who had the good grace to blush.

"Now everypony, get on your marks!"

They dusted off in pairs, Snowflake and Cloudchaser in the lead, with Thunderlane and Raindrops then Milky Way and Wildflower behind them. Rainbow Dash and Lightning Dust were the last pair waved off the runway.

Lightning Dust spoke as soon as they were air-borne. "Okay, let's do this... don't worry, I've got it, not a race, right?"

"Yep!" Rainbow Dash replied, "Doesn't mean we can't stay in perfect synch and blow every-pony away with our precision flying. Just give me a vector!"

Lightning Dust was unsurprised to find that when they got in the assigned air-lane, Dash stayed on her wing as if nailed there. They swept through the cloud hoops and weaved around the rising clouds like they weren't there and even though they weren't pushing it, they soon came up behind Milky Way and his partner.

"Aw stratus! I can't see a way past without getting out of our track!" Lightning Dust exclaimed. Then she realised what she'd said, and looked over at Dash. "I guess we're stuck here then?"

"Not if we ask for help." Dash replied. "This isn't a race, like the lady said. Besides, I've got a manoeuvre that'll work. The Flying Cross!"

An quick explanation and a demonstration with her fore-hooves showed Lightning Dust what to do.

"I like it!" Lightning Dust replied eagerly. "Uh guys... Milky Way wasn't it and..." A whisper from Rainbow gave her "... and Wildflower. We need to pass, just stay straight and level, okay?"

"You only have to ask." Wildflower called back.

"Huh, I guess so." Lightning Dust replied, surprised at how easy that had been. "Ready?"

At Rainbow Dash's nod, they powered forward, doing a roll around a common centre. They swept past the other two ponies at right angles, Dash below and Dust above, their wing-tips forming a cross with the wings of the other ponies. They completed their roll-out without mussing a single hair in the manes of the others, though the conditions made that difficult to see.

"Aw yeah!" Dust punched the air. "We can blaze through this course like that!"

"Sure, if you want to do it the easy way..." Rainbow grinned.

"What're you talking about pony?" Lightning Dust asked back.

"Well, remember my vortex manoeuvre right back the first night? We could pick up the other six as trailers and go for an eight way formation. That should knock every-pony's goggles off!"

"That would be pretty awesome!" Lightning Dust called back. "You guys up for that?"

"Just watch us!" Wildflower exclaimed. They flew up behind the leading ponies as the two started to rev up their wings. Dash and Dust blasted forward, and drew Milky Way and Wildflower after them. The two rear ponies were straining to keep up, even with the aid of

drafting behind the leaders, but they stayed on their tails through swerve and swoop and loop the loop.

They caught up with Thunderlane and his wing-pony soon after, and flying crossed past them before making the same offer, and finally Cloudchaser and Snowflake just before the nastiest part of the course where the storm winds started. Both pairs quickly agreed to the plan.

The eight ponies formed a double line as they followed the leader, punching their way into the lightning filled storm tunnel. Dust powered ahead, creating dead air as Dash did the same beside her, and felt rather than saw the change as Wildflower behind her started to slip out of the formation. An extra side blast of her wing rebounded the air-flow to bring her back into line, and she called back, "Keep it together!"

Lightning Dust wasn't going anywhere near as fast as normal, but she found to her great surprise that she wasn't bothered about it. The ponies behind her were sticking to her tail like a cloud-burr, following her every move, relying on her to guide them, and she found she was enjoying it. Dash was letting her call the shots as lead-pony, and she suddenly realised she wanted to be worthy of that trust.

The storm lashed at them, and the ponies controlling the lightning fired off near misses that practically singed their manes, but the eight ponies powered on through. Then they reached the final stage, moving horizontal bars of air.

"Okay, let's buck it up a notch and go over and under!" Lightning Dust called out. The eight ponies rippled up and down as they went through at full speed, and powered out of the other side still tightly together in their wing pairs.

"Okay, the big finish!" She called out. "Let's land in formation, every-pony aim to drop hooves at the same time, if you guys figure you can!"

"Just watch us!" Thunderlane called forward, and Snowflake yelled "YEAH!"

They blew in like a stray gale, slamming hooves down and sliding out to a stop on the runway in front of Spitfire. If the clap of hooves wasn't perfect, it was only by a fraction of a second.

"An eight way formation?" Spitfire's glasses actually slid down her muzzle and she quickly pushed them back up. "Impressive. You do know you didn't have to do that?"

"No-pony said we didn't either ma'am!" Lightning Dust replied, saluting and trying to hold back a big grin with indifferent success.

"Well, it worked." Spitfire shook her head as she consulted her stop-watch. "That might just be the fastest time any group of cadets ever pulled on the obstacle course. Okay, you can all hit the mess. Dismissed!"

"Woo hoo!" "YEAH!" "How's that for kicking some cloud!" The ponies

broke formation and celebrated. As they went off, Spitfire motioned Lightning Dust over. "A word, cadet."

Lightning Dust suddenly lost her grin as she started to worry she might have been too cocky about their win. She glanced at Dash and took some comfort from the lack of worry on her face. Dash knew Spitfire better, and she wasn't the type to enjoy seeing another pony get hammered.

"Don't worry cadet, I just wanted to congratulate you on the way you lead the flight." Spitfire looked over the top of her shades. "I'm glad to see you've overcome that attitude control problem you had yesterday."

"But I didn't..." Lightning Dust did a double take. Had Spitfire just made a joke? "Yes ma'am, thank you ma'am!"

The Academy head returned the salute and glanced over at Rainbow Dash. "Looks like I made the right decision, pairing the two of you together. You make a great team."

As she walked away, Dash preened.

"Oh yeah! We bucked that cloud all the way to Las Pegasus!" Rainbow Dash exclaimed, raising her hoof for a hoof bump which Dust returned. "Well, all that awesomeness has made me feel hungry."

"Me too!" Lightning Dust replied, flapping out her wings. "I feel the need... the need, to feed!"

Laughing and chatting the pair headed off towards the mess.

\* \* \*

><p>"... and that was the second time I kicked out a Sonic Rainboom. Of course, every-pony has seen me do one plenty of times since, right guys?"<p>

There was agreement from the lined up cadets.

Lightning Dust shook her head. "I'd heard rumours, but I'm still having trouble believing it's even possible!"

"Heh!" Rainbow Dash gave her a companionable slap on the saddle with a wing-tip. "Tell you what, I'll show you how. I've always wanted to try it with another pony, and I think you've got the power to pull it off. You just need training. I've asked this lot, but..."

"None of us are that nuts!" Thunderlane finished with a chuckle.

The rainbow maned pegasus' eyes suddenly widened. "Oh yeah, I got a letter from Pinkie. She's so happy to hear how well we're doing that she and the girls are bringing us a care package."

That whoops of appreciation from the other Ponyville ponies. They all knew how great Pinkie's parties were. Knowing how nuts Pinkie had gotten the first time, Rainbow generally made sure to send regular updates on her progress, even when they were all Awake and otherwise pretty much following a base-line loop. However, that didn't stop Pinkie being Pinkie, or finding any excuse to throw a party.



"I figure we'll set up on a cloud outside the Academy this evening after training, as long as we don't break curfew we should be fine. They'll be bringing a lot of food, we can charge up a nimbus and roast some marshmallows, surf some air-currents, play cloud-ball, rock out to some tunes... It's going to be awesome!"

"Whoa there pony!" Lightning Dust exclaimed. "You said these were earth-ponies and unicorns... won't they fall through?"

"Twilight can do a cloud-walking spell easy. Though she might try something more interesting..."

There. If one of her friends wanted to go alicorn for the night, she could pass it off as an improved Wings spell Twilight had created.

"It sounds great, Am I invited?" Lightning asked, not brashly as she might one have, but hopefully. She'd never realised how good it was to be part of a group, or that you could do it without giving up being you. Despite yesterday, she was still feeling her way into her new relationship with these ponies, and didn't want to wreck it.

"Heck yeah!" Rainbow Dash exclaimed. "Right guys?"

Wildflower spoke up. "If she hadn't helped me recover in that formation exercise, I'd have spun out and wrecked the whole thing. I never got to thank you for that, Lightning. So thanks, and we'd love to have you."

"You're as nuts as she is!" Thunderlane added without heat. "So maybe with you on our side, a cloud-ball team will have a chance against Dash. So sure, the more the merrier!"

As the others gave their approval, Rainbow saw Spitfire approaching out of the corner of her eye, and gave the others the high sign. By the time the instructors got there, the cadets were lined up at attention and silent.

"Today is a competitive exercise. You will be working in your wing-pairs to clear the clouds." Spitfire looked over the group and was pleased to see that much of the tension she'd seen before had dissipated, though a couple of the other cadets glanced at Rainbow Dash and suppressed smirks when the nature of the exercise was stated. "Any questions?"

Whatever else was going on, there were none so she signalled to Whiplash to blow the whistle and start the exercise. The other cadets flew up in staggered pairs and started punching out clouds in a methodical manner, trading off the lead as each hit a cloud and demolished it, hitting their weak spots. However, they didn't have chance to get far.

"Okay, let's go!" Lightning Dust yelled out, blasting through the first cloud she saw without stopping.

"Way ahead of you!" Rainbow Dash called from up ahead as she flew between two close together clouds and used an aileron roll to create a temporary vortex that drew them in and mashed them to pieces. "The

trick is to keep it small and tight, bigger is not better, just harder to control."

The two went through the air like greased lightning, indeed Lightning Dust's contrail heightened the likeness. As they approached having cleared three quarters of the sky, Dash started to slow down.

"Hey, you getting tired?" Lightning Dust called out as she came alongside.

Rainbow Dash gave back a cocky grin . "As if! No, I just figured we could let the rest of the guys have some too."

"This is a competition!" Lightning Dust replied, frowning, and slicing a cloud apart en-passant with a wing-tip and a burst of weather magic.

"You don't think we've won?" Rainbow Dash asked, veering to point a hoof back at the vast swathe of clear sky.

Lightning Dust gave a tight shake of her head. "No, but I want to finish this properly. I don't want to say I did less than my best. Even if it costs me that invite."

"If it does, it won't be from me. None of them are sore losers, and you're the lead-pony in this formation, so let's go!"

They blew away the majority of the remaining clouds in moments, and came in to land ahead of the other teams. The target area far over the Academy had been much larger than the valley of Ponyville, but it had only taken them a couple of minutes total.

As the other pairs flew down to land around her, Lightning Dust looked around. No-pony seemed particularly annoyed that they'd been utterly out classed.

"It was a competition. I wasn't going to hold back, okay?" she exclaimed defensively.

Vast amounts of spontaneous rage failed to materialise, and Lightning Dust looked relieved. "So no-pony's mad?"

"Pfft! Like any-body stood a chance against Miss 'Clear a sky in ten seconds flat' over there even by herself." Cloudchaser replied.

Milky Way added. "No-pony's going to buck lightning over some-pony winning fair and square. Or if they are, they're idiots."

"Thanks... Wait? Ten seconds?" The green pegasus turned to Dash. "You were holding back?"

"I was sticking with my lead pony." Dash shrugged. "And Ponyville's in a valley. Smaller sky area."

Whiplash had only just finished adding checks to the chalkboard, as they'd actually destroyed the clouds faster than he'd been able to mark it off. He turned to go to fetch Spitfire with a somewhat sandbagged expression, when a half scale glowing white alicorn alighted by Rainbow Dash. It had a slight haziness moved rather like

solid smoke.

It spoke in Twilight's voice. "Rainbow Dash! We've got a problem! We were skirting the edge of the Everfree Forest on the way to the Academy and we picked up an unwanted stalker. It's a massive cloud but it's acting like a creature. It's chasing us and with the balloon so heavily loaded, it's all we can do to stay ahead of it. We need help!"

An image projected from its horn of a towering cumulonimbus, but with black triangular holes as eyes and a gaping maw with continuous arcs of lightning forming the outline of jagged teeth. Great tornadoes of streaming cloud formed arms that left trails behind them, sucking any in any cloud that got too close. The image wavered for a moment, then vanished, as did the alicorn.

"Oh pony-feathers!" Dash exclaimed, "I read about them in the old weather-pony logs for Ponyville, but I thought they were just an old pony tale made up by some-pony who'd had one too many mugs of Granny Smith's special reserve!"

Inwardly she was given furiously to think. Had Twilight set this up as some sort of alternative test of character? It was probably clear from Dash's last letter that she'd pretty much derailed the regular plot. She was certainly holding back, as any of the ponies in that balloon could probably have taken it out. But Twilight wasn't the sort to drop something on any-pony unannounced, and Dash had read about such things in the old weather-pony logs, and it was an Ursa Major threat level for any-pony who wasn't an immortal alicorn.

"What the hey was that!" Lightning Dust gasped, and she wasn't the only one.

"The silver thing? A communication spell Twilight's been working on. The cloud? A Tempest, right out of the Everfree forest. Remember, clouds move by themselves over there, and the place is lousy with magic. No-pony knows how they form, but it's similar to a Timberwolf, a vicious predator that feeds on magical energy..."

She turned to the stunned Whiplash and yelled. "Go get Spitfire, scramble every-pony you can and head after us! Head south southeast. We'll need all the help we can get!"

As he galloped off, the other cadets were looking equally surprised. Cloudchaser shook her head. "I can't believe they're real... Wait, did you mean..."

"We're the only ponies on the runway, they'll need time to get organised and Twilight and the others may not have that long... I know it's not what you signed up for, but some-pony has to delay it and get the balloon clear. And I know you're the ponies for the job!"

The other Ponyville ponies looked back and forth, and you could see their expressions firm up along with their resolve and their wings.

She turned to Lightning Dust. "We have to go, they're in danger and they need our help."

Lightning Dust gulped. That thing was horrifying, every pegasus' worst nightmare, but she was a Lead pony, and she couldn't let the others go and hide here, not and look at herself in the mirror in the morning. "Okay, but you're going to tell us everything you know about this creature on the way."

She dusted off, and the others followed her, or more probably Dash, who filled them in on what little was known. These things made Timberwolves look bright, but they were still dangerous as they would attack whatever attracted their attention. A large mass of ponies could drive them back with their combined weather magic, but it would take all the pegasi in Ponyville to do the job.

It was crazy, Rainbow Dash clearly knew the thing and all the other ponies followed her, but she was acting as if she expected Lightning Dust to give the orders. Yes, as Lead pony of the highest scoring wing-pair, she was effectively the leader of the group, but she was beginning to realise as never before the difference between authority and leadership.

She panicked for just a second, but something in her realised that if she lost it now, she'd never get it back, so she forced herself to think. What has Dash said about leadership?... Okay.

"Ideas any-pony? As Dash said, we need to get the balloon clear and keep the thing contained until every-pony else gets there."

Cloudchaser piped up. "Snowflake and I can tow the balloon. We're not the fastest flyers, but he's one of the strongest."

"Yeah!" Snowflake agreed.

"We could play cloud-tag with it, take turns to distract it and keep it changing which way it's going." Milky Way mused.

"That works!" Lightning Dust said. "Dash?"

"If we go in at different heights, that should mix it up even more. Those twister arms can't change height or direction too fast."

Lightning Dust nodded. "We'll take the middle as we'll be doing the most dodging."

Wildflower looked at Milky Way. "Up high?"

He nodded and Thunderlane said, "I guess that leaves us the low ponies on the totem pole, eh Raindrops?"

They started to see the trouble ahead, the balloon was floating towards them, towed by Fluttershy and aided by the glow of Twilight's and Rarity's horns. Pinkie Pie was in the crow's nest on top of the balloon, and was clearly trying to drive it off with blasts from Pinkie's party canon while Applejack was managing Fluttershy's rope.

Dash knew all of them were awake, though they'd been staying low profile this loop to relax. So they could have handled this thing

like small change, but they'd clearly decided to leave it to Dash and her team. Dash worried for a moment, could her fellow pegasi handle it? Then she looked around at her flight group, and Lightning Dust... or rather her group, full stop. They were scared, and unlike Rainbow Dash they had reason to be, but they were also determined and ready to face that thing, take the risk and she couldn't take that away from them.

Snowflake and Cloudchaser peeled off the formation as they passed, flying round to come up either side of Fluttershy. They quickly got their own ropes courtesy of Applejack, and the balloon finally started to pull away.

The other three wing-pairs dove in towards the cloud monster itself, splitting off to take their assigned heights. As they'd agreed on the way in Lightning Dust and Dash went first, pulling down their goggles as they went into attack formation.

Dash swept in close and zipped back and forth. "Hey you, Puff the magic cloud! Your momma was a sub-tropical convection cell! I've seen scarier clouds when I breath out on a cold morning! C'mon you Nimrod Nimbus, come and get me!"

While it clearly didn't understand the insults, the cloud monster was clearly tracking her with its 'eyes'. It roared like a storm wind blowing through the trees and a vast funnel arm swung towards her as it veered away from following the balloon to chase her. She could have out ranged it easily, but that wasn't the idea. Instead she actually flew in closer to make sure its attention focussed on her. The cloud's tornado 'arms' flailed after her.

"Dash, let's tie it up!" Lightning Dust called as she dived in. "Yo, fog-face! You couldn't hit the ground with a rain storm! Yeah Lightning Lips, I'm talking about you! C'mon you third-rate thunderhead, start something!"

The cloud reached after her and she let the edge of one tornado tug at her tail, but she broke free and drew it after her as Dash did the same for the other arm. Without actually saying anything, they flew in and around each other, and as they did the two tornadoes became intertwined, immobilising them.

They swooped out of the tangle as a pair, whooping and laughing. "Oh yeah, we have wings, we have the talent... whoa!"

Dash's bad-ass boast was interrupted as she bucked Lightning Dust away from her, a fraction of a second before a bolt of lightning about half the width and twice the length of the Canterlot Express passed through the airspace they'd just occupied, and just barely failed to turn them both into Southern Fried pegasus nuggets.

"I didn't know it could do that!" she exclaimed. "We can't let the others get hit! They'll have to back off."

Lightning Dust shook her head, as they veered out of the way of another bolt that tracked after them. "No! They'll be harder to hit, but easier to track. They need to stay in tight so it can't focus!"

Dash thought for a split second. "Good call!"

She amped up her voice using weather magic to modulate the air and yelled, "Keep close and keep dodging! Don't let it home in on you!"

As they weaved around clouds in extreme evasion manoeuvres, they saw its arms were untangling. Dash growled. She was this close to opening a storm of alicorn style flank-whooping on the thing, but that would wreck all the work she'd done, and there was a better way. "Uh oh! If they try and bust that cloud the regular way, ponies are going to get hurt!"

"So you have an irregular way?"

"What do you say to a double Sonic Rainboom delivered right to the heart of that thing from above?"

"Most people would say you've swallowed too much cloud and it's fogging your brain..." Lightning Dust exclaimed then gave a little growl. "... but I guess they were right. I am just as nuts as you. Of course you haven't taught me how to do a Sonic Rainboom. "

"No time like the present! Come on!" Dash suddenly went into a vertical ascent, calling out to the others as they flew past, "Just keep it off balance for a few more seconds, then scatter when we hit it!"

"We'll need some altitude!" Dash pushed some real power into her wings, giving them a slight rainbow aura, and shot upwards as if someone had just repealed the law of gravity. Lightning Dust panted to keep up with her, and just barely managed it. They came to a stop far above the scene of the battle, with the cloud a tiny puffy shape below, harried by the specks of circling pegasi.

"Whoa! You can go that fast in an ascent?" Lightning Dust gasped for air until she felt Dash's weather magic wash over her and the air thicken around her.

"Wait until you see what's next!" Dash grinned. "Besides you matched me."

She held out her fore-hooves. Place yours against mine, then we dive and stay together. Focus any weather magic you can spare from speeding up to forming a shield in front of you. You should be able to feel what I'm doing, just match it, okay?"

Lightning Dust gave a curt nod, and touched fore-hooves to Dash's. "Let's do this!"

They inverted in mid-air, still in contact, and started to dive, matching wing-beats. They quickly went past their ascent speed and kept accelerating at a rate even Lightning Dusts hadn't thought she could manage. Any pegasus worth their pinion feathers had a go at seeing how fast they could go in a power-dive at least once in their lives, but this was pushing limits she hadn't even realised she had. On top of that, she was trying to balance the power she put into accelerating with the weather magic she was feeding into the shock wave that started to form in front of them.

Her hooves started to peel away from Dash's as she started to exhaust

herself, and she cried, "I can't hold it..."

"You can!" Dash called back, "I know you can do this, and every-pony's We're relying on you! Remember, the bigger the challenge... "

Lightning gritted her teeth. "... the better we like it!"

The Wonderbolt mantra flashed through her mind, along with the last time she'd heard it. They were getting near the cloud now, and she could see the other ponies clearly, still playing a deadly game of tag to hold it in place. Other moments flashed through her thoughts, leading them through the obstacle course, the way they'd accepted her once she'd stopped being a jerk. Most of all throughout it was Dash, defending her, supporting her, believing in her; even when she'd done nothing to warrant it...

It reached something deep inside her, and she felt it explode outwards, giving her new energy. Dash had put her faith in Lightning Dust, and she was not going to let her friend down. She came back into synch with Dash, and threw that power into her wings and the shockwave, which transformed into a sharp cone that crackled with energy.

"Yes!" Dash exulted. "On my mark, we buck it over..."

The cadet pegasi dodging around the increasingly frantic cloud monster saw a brilliant column in the sky, equal parts rainbow and lightning as it speared down into the crown of the monster with a glowing arrowhead at its tip. The cloud creature froze for a fraction of a second, and the triangular slits of its eyes suddenly turned into almost comical circles. The four of them took the chance to dive outwards and set their wings to ride the wave they knew was coming.

The rainbow halo, shot with lightning and gold, exploded outwards just above the thing's mouth, slicing it in two and disrupting the magical forces that held it together. It scattered the pegasi like windblown leaves, but they'd been ready for it, and it didn't hurt them. They could only hope the same was true for the two pegasi who'd been at the centre of it.

Thunderlane and Raindrops were carried in the direction of the Academy, and thus were the first ones to meet up with the relief force. Twilight's balloon was there, surrounded by wings of Wonderbolts, flying in staggered echelons. They had to have assembled every-pony in the place, cadets and instructors, and some of the pegasi at the back were harnessed in teams, towing lightning and storm projectors from the obstacle course.

They headed for the apex of the lead chevron, where Spitfire, still in her mess dress uniform had point. They were quickly joined by Snowflake and Cloudchaser, who'd been flying escort to the balloon. Spitfire saw them immediately. She waved off the salute they gave.

"Cadet, report! Was that a Sonic Rainboom?"

Thunderlane was the pony she addressed. "Yea ma'am! Rainbow dash and Lightning Dust hit the thing together and destroyed it."

Spitfire nodded. "I saw the light trail and the explosion from here. What about them, and your other wing pair?"

"Wildflower and Milky Way rode the wave the way we did, but they were around to the side. They must be half way to Ponyville by now. As for Dash and Dust... I couldn't see what happened, no-pony could."

Spitfire looked past him to where the cloud monster had disintegrated, and for the first time, he realised he could see worry in her eyes. He understood why, the energies at the heart of that cloud would have been enough to tear almost any pegasus to shreds if they placed a wing wrong. "Let's hope they're as capable as they seem to think they are..."

Cloudchaser piped up. "They're tough! They'll be okay..."

her eyes suddenly widened as she suddenly realised how familiar she was being. "...Ma'am! Sorry, ma'am!"

Spitfire just shook her head. "It's okay cadet, I can understand you're a little out of it. You did good, all of you. But for now, we have other things to worry about. We need to set up search parties..."

"No we don't!" A new voice had spoken. Pinkie Pie arrived, held up by a bunch of party balloons tied around her middle and propelling herself by spinning her candy-floss tail like a propeller. She pointed in the direction of the cloud, where two dots had just become visible. They flew towards the massed pegasi, and resolved themselves into Lightning Dust and Rainbow Dash.

Both of them were flying relatively slowly, and both of them looked as if they'd been dragged through a thunderstorm backwards (which they had, pretty much) but both of them were flying straight and level, and both had big, if tired grins on their faces. They flew up to Spitfire as the other cadets parted for them, and Lightning Dust snapped off a salute.

"Cadets Lightning Dust and Rainbow Dash reporting completion of cloud clearing duty, ma'am!"

Snowflake started what happened next, clapping his fore-hooves together slowly and deliberately. The other cadets took up the clapping, and then some of the other pegasi. The clapping swelled, speeding up as ponies started to cheer, while Pinkie pattered over and glomped Dash like a rainbow flavoured toothpaste tube.

Spitfire spoke over the applause. "I'll debrief the two of you in my office afterwards, but first, I think both of you need to rest. Let's get you back to the Academy... all of you."

She detailed a party of fresh pegasi to go find Wildflower and Milky Way, then formed up the remainder of the Academy to escort the cadets and Twilight's balloon back to the airfield.

\* \* \*



\* \* \*

><p>It was early morning at Hogwarts where a young pink bushy-headed girl sat on her bed, playfully swinging her legs. It was a very rare moment where Pinkie Pie was feeling a bit introspective. She had spent a few loops, ones that had her start out back at her parents' rock farm, trying to act like a normal pony. One that was cheerful and liked birthdays, but didn't celebrate at every opportunity. One that didn't bounce around everywhere or eat vast amounts of sugar. One that knew about commonly accepted social graces and personal space, unlike someone who had grown up with her only friends being inanimate objects.<p>

She had even pranked her looping friends in one iteration by acting like a completely normal pony for a whole month.

But in the end, she decided that she liked being Pinkie. She got a warm ticklish feeling whenever the others said 'It's just Pinkie being Pinkie'. She liked throwing parties and eating horrifying amounts of sugary sweets and pretending not to know what was socially acceptable and what wasn't. Whenever she did something that was inexplicably impossible, she brought a bit of wonder and joy into her friends' lives.

It wasn't as easy doing that as when she was a chaos goddess. That loop left a lasting impression on her magic, but that seemed to be it. After all, it wasn't like she now had a galaxy full of super happy space elves worshipping her.

'Yet,' giggled a little voice inside of her.

'No,' Pinkie laughed at her own subconscious, 'and no going magical alicorn demi-goddess on this world, because that will end all the fun. And I'm having way too much of it for it to end so soon.'

Pinkie Pie bounced out of her bed and grabbed her wand, "Letters to send, potions ingredients to procure, cakes to bake with the castle house elves, Pinkie Promise Breakers to... talk to. This day is going to be so FUN!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight tentatively opened another of her overseas friend's letters and read out loud to the remainder of her gathered friends, <em>"Hi everyone! It's a letter from me, Pinkie Pie, again! How are you all doing? I'm am fantasti-mazing as always. So many things happened I don't know where to start, so I'll just guess."<em>

\_"After our old defence teacher left in such a hurry, a new one was hired. His name is Gilderoy Lockhart, and I had him Pinkie Promise that he would be a good teacher unlike the last one. He promptly broke it in his first class when he explained how he stole the memories of the people who actually did all the heroic stuff he said he did himself; and that he wasn't even that good at defence spells or care about teaching well; or that that shade of blonde was not his natural hair colour!"\_

"How scandalous," Rairy exclaimed, causing her friends to give her a brief glance before going back to the letter.

\_"Also in unrelated news, it's possible to mix a magical truth serum with a secret babbling potion and turn them both into an aerosol mist. Who knew? Anyways, I was about to talk to him to let him know how disappointed I was that he broke a Pinkie Promise, but he somehow got a bit of (okay, a lot of) fear potion and spider pheromones all over him, and ran off screaming into the super spooky forbidden forest. They looked for him for a while, but no sign yet. I think as long as he knows some defence spells, he should be fine."\_

Rainbow Dash slowly turned towards Applejack and said, "You got off easy, AJ. That one time you almost broke a Pinkie Promise could have ended with you as bride of the spider people."

Applejack just shuddered and said, "Just keep reading, Twilight."

Twilight complied, \_"Our history professor was a boring ghost, but I laughed at him and, you guessed it, I got detention. Then, next class, I did an exorcism ritual I made up and the other professors had to come and close the howling portal to the screaming netherworld that somehow opened up right as I was finishing up. I knew I should have had an old priest and a young priest, but I thought that ordaining my friends, Harry and Neville, should have worked fine; at least unless either of them had some previous unknown exposure to death magic or death magic related artifacts and accessories. But what was the chances of that?"\_

\_"In the end, Binns, our old history ghost is now history. Get it? Because he was sucked into a horrible vortex. To replace him, the ministry of magic sent this large woman who likes kittens and pink sweaters so very much. We're going to be such good friends, I just know it!"\_

\_"My detention wasn't so bad. I had to clean a school bathroom. I guess I cleaned it too well, because one moment I was rubbing this neat little snake carving; and the other moment, I was sliding down a super duper fun slide. Then I met my new friend, who I decided to call 'Big Blinky', or BB for short. Some would say that Big Blinky is a giant snake, but that's not true at all. BB is a basilisk and as such has a hinged jaw and eyelids, so that means BB is a legless lizard. With eye beams. I spent the rest of the night riding around the spooky forest on BB's back, hunting spiders while yelling out, 'Maud'dib!' Best detention ever!"\_

\_"In conclusion, the end. Just kidding! I'm sure more fun stuff is coming. As always, I'll let you know when a good time to visit. With lots of parties, Pinkie Pie."\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>27.10 (masterweaver)<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Jack. Sparrow."<p>

The stallion turned around. "Twilight Spoinkle! Fancy seeing you on

this fancy ship. Fancy, innit?"

The unicorn raised an eyebrow. "Yes. It's very fancy."

"Flying ships, I said. Flying ships. You know, that's very clever, I'm going to have to figure out this one."

"Do you know who this ship belongs to?" Twilight continued calmly.

"Hold up. Let me ask the crew. NAVIGATOR!"

A blonde pegasus saluted, swaying slightly. "Yes Captain?"

"Who does this ship belong to?"

"That'd be you, captain!"

Jack smiled, turning back to Twilight. "So, apparently, this is my ship."

The bearer of magic sighed, rubbing her forehead. "Cloudkicker, why are you helping him steal this ship?"

"Steal?" The violet pegasus fluttered over. "This. This isn't stealing. This ship is his, fair and square."

"THIS IS PRINCE BLUEBLOOD'S PERSONAL YACHT!"

"Was," Jack said calmly. "Right up till he gave me the deed, see, I've got a contract." He rustled at his pockets, muttering something about fingers before he finally pulled out a scroll. "Signature, legal mumbo jumbo, aaaaand... ah, seal of office. Which is his tattoo thing."

"Cutie mark," Cloudkicker corrected.

"That's what I said."

Twilight groaned. "I'd accuse you of casting some sort of spell if I could figure any of this out--"

"You hear that Berry? You're a witch!"

Berry Punch stumbled up from below deck. "Really? Want some of my brew?"

"Is it rum?"

"MOSTLY rum!"

"Bring it on up witch!"

The purple mare cackled as she descended again.

"We totally need to have a threesome with her," Cloudkicker commented.

"I agree. Twilight, care to join us?"

The unicorn let out a tortured groan. "Why are you being so... so childish?!"

Jack tilted his head. "I take it, that's a no."

"HOW DID THIS EVEN HAPPEN?!"

The pirate shrugged. "Funny story, really..."

\* \* \*

><p>Blueblood moaned as the light assaulted his eyes. "Ugh. That is the last time I ever drink... any. Any peasant drink. What was it called, Room or something?" He blinked and shook his head. "I should have it outlawed..."<p>

He blinked again.

He blinked a third time.

He looked around his room.

His bare, unadorned, not-even-having-any-furniture room.

There was a frantic scramble to find his bed, before he realized it was out on the lawn... alongside every other item in his house... and a number of auctioneers.

\* \* \*

><p>"And that is why I am the grandmaster of liar's dice."<p>

Twilight stared.

She couldn't figure out whether Jack was joking.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

27.1 That episode really did cover most of the bases, as far as mystery plots go.

>27.2 How to confuse villains #4: Give them what they want, clearly out of pity.<br>27.3 I - am that is.

>27.4 A long anticipated meeting.<br>27.5 Probably as obscure as I've got in a while. This is a reference to the first part of episode one of classic British comedy series "the Goodies".

>27.6 ...it just fit so well. (Rosette is from my short fic "An Oath".)<br>27.7 Dawg Fortress.

>27.8 I don't know what the hell that thing is either.<br>27.9 I actually feel sorry for Umbridge. I did not know that was possible.

>27.10 Yo ho ho hem, a pirate's life for them.<p>

## 28. Chapter 28

### 28.1

"Sis?" Big Mac said, worried. She'd been like this " very tired " since the reunion and that thing with the Nightmare Moon or whatever, and he couldn't see a reason for it.

"Yeah, yeah, Mac," she replied woozily. "Ah got it."

She stamped a hoof on the floor, and the earth rippled out from the impact point.

And every single tree in the orchard dropped all its apples.

Amazed, Mac watched as the ripple spread out, reaching the picket fences marking the boundaries of the Apple orchard, and then back in again carrying the just-dropped fruits.

Humping up into a curler, the earth poured them neatly into boxes.

Still with her eyes half closed, Applejack closed the boxes and stamped them with the Apple family proof mark. "Am ah done?"

"eeyup," he replied quietly.

"Good." The earth pony mare walked into the barn, and collapsed onto a hay pile before starting to snore.

\* \* \*

><p>"Sorry" Applejack said, wincing. "Ah know ah was supposed to join th' discussion yesterday about what t' do this loop, but after last loop y'all know, with th' army of airships and th' police job" <p>

Twilight nodded sympathetically. "Yes, I know the feeling " I've slept through a loop before after an especially tiring one, though only with somepony else like Dash around to take up the slack" or at least I try to."

The Anchor smiled. "Still, at least you got the harvest done on time."

"ah did what?"

Twilight held up a photo.

Applejack winced again. "Ah, ponyfeathers. So much fer a quiet loop, after that ah'm gonna get interviewed"

"What happened, then?" Twilight asked, interested.

"Earthbendin', it's called. Seems it's more instinctual than ah was expectin'."

AJ winked at Twilight's blank look, then laughed as it turned into 'swot mode'. "Easy, there, Twi. Ah'll explain what th' place was like when ah'm good an' ready."

\* \* \*

><p>28.2<p>

Nightmare Moon walked out onto stage. "Well, well. It's been so long since-

There was a snigger.

"Who did that?" she asked, turning towards where the voice had come from. "Admit it!"

That brought a smattering of giggles.

"Stop it!" she shouted. The giggles died away. "Right. Now. Myâ€|\_belovedâ€|\_ subjects-

Somepony made a muffled snort sound, as though a hoof was desperately and imperfectly restraining the sound of hilarity.

"Oh, this is ridiculous!" Nightmare Moon fluffed out her feathers and stomped on the floor, producing a roar of laughter. "If you will not take my return seriously, then I am leaving! You're all horrid!"

Silence gradually descended, with only the occasional strained giggle cutting through it.

Nightmare Moon decided to ignore those brief spurts of hilarity, and got started on her speech. Unfortunately, when she got to the bit about the night lasting forever, it was too much to take and every single pony in the hall burst into uncontrollable guffaws.

"Hmph!" she said, turning up her nose and flouncing out, chased by laughter.

It took quite a long time. After all, she was only filly sized, and that meant a lot of steps to get off the stage.

\* \* \*

><p>"How was that?" Nyx asked, reclaiming her glasses and hairband from Twilight backstage.<p>

"I think it went pretty well," Twilight replied. "Maybe if you hadn't had a squeaky voice as well it might have been touch-and-go, but that was the masterpiece."

"Indeed," Luna said. "Actually, would you handle all my public appearances this Loop?"

"\_Would\_ I?" Nyx repeated, giggling.

\* \* \*

><p>There was a crack of thunder and a flash of lightning, and several ponies flinched back as the chariot came stooping out of the sky.<p>

Then they paused.

"What?" Nyx asked, ostentatiously paying no attention to her pumpkin

costume. "Oh, am I not scary enough? Grrr."

Somehow, it seemed like the ponies of Ponyville were not as terrified as they might perhaps have been.

Nyx rolled her eyes, making the costume fluff out. "Oh, sure, it's fine for a pony to dress up as a chicken, but you get the deity of the night coming to her own festival as a pumpkin and suddenly they're 'not in the spirit of the holiday'. Well, hmph."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, did I miss anything?" Nyx asked, wings whirring frantically as she landed in front of the Elements.<p>

Celestia just gave her a look.

"â€|wow, the party must have been awesome to demolish half the castle like this! How come you didn't wake me up?" Nyx looked upset. "Is it 'cause I don't look old enough to be allowed alcohol? And that's a stupid rule by the way, I'm totally old enough."

\* \* \*

><p>"I justâ€|" Scootaloo shrugged desperately. "I want Dash to like me, but it seems like I just can't get her to treat me how I want."<p>

"Wellâ€|" Nyx frowned, clearly thinking hard. "In my experience, nothing helps you connect with a sister figure like turning evil, becoming corrupted by your own power, confronting your sister, fighting her, losing, being banished to the moon by the Elements of Harmony for a thousand years, shrinking, coming back to Equestria in a hilariously abortive attempt at a coupâ€|" she paused. "I might have forgotten the next bit, but anyway it does work. Could be tricky to arrange, though. Do you have super powers?"

"No," Scootaloo deadpanned.

"Well, we could start with that." Nyx smiled encouragingly. "Maybe we could get Pinkie to make you a gyrocopter, and you could be Gyrocopter Pony, the Pony with a Gyrocopter."

At Scootaloo's look, Nyx shrugged. "I don't exactly have much to go on here, work with me."

\* \* \*

><p>28.3 (Nutjob)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...forever!"<p>

Nightmare laughed maniacally as the ponies gathered below her cowered in her presence. It was over. Celestia was defeated, locked within her own accursed sun before the black alicorn halted the infernal orb below Equestria's horizon altogether. Soon, she would be forgotten, and the sun would be nothing more than a old pony's tale. Her subjects would learn to appreciate her night, and she would get the

respect and adoration she \_\*\*deserved! \*\*\_

"Excuse me, Your Majesty?" a voice called out. The kingdom's new monarch looked down at the crowd gathered below. A purple unicorn was smiling back up at her. "Hello! I'm so glad to finally make your acquaintance, Your Majesty. My name is Twilight Sparkle, and I'm positively honored to be able to offer my services to the crown." The unicorn bowed respectfully.

Nightmare Moon raised an eyebrow in confusion. This... Twilight Sparkle seemed unnaturally calm compared to everypony else in the room, as though she had been expecting her. And what services was she referring to? The alicorn shook her head. It didn't matter, one of her new subjects was already warming up to her. This presented an opportunity. Reward this subject for her loyalty and more would follow. "Rise, Twilight Sparkle. Your new queen is pleased to see that there are ponies such as yourself that are prepared to embrace her gift of eternal night."

The unicorn looked up at her once again, beaming from the praise. Around her, Nightmare Moon could see the crowd glaring at her, and heard the word "traitor" uttered more than once, but the unicorn paid them no heed. "Thank you, Your Majesty. That means a lot." Twilight produced a pocket watch, and glanced at it. "It looks like you arrived not a minute too soon. I think it's best that we get started right away."

"Get started with... what, exactly?" Nightmare Moon asked, cocking her head.

This time, it was Twilight's turn to look confused. "Wait, didn't your sister tell you?"

Nightmare Moon blinked at that. Her sister? Come to think of it—

\* \* \*

><p><em>A black alicorn appeared in a brilliant flash of light.<em>

\_"\_\_\*\*Iâ€| haveâ€| returned!\*\*\_\_" she shouted into the air.\_

\_"Luna! There you are." Nightmare Moon to face the voice. Her. Oh course she would be here, but she would not be victorious again. "Oh, I'm so glad to see you again. I have missed you so much, dear sister. Listen, I know you are angry with me, but you should know I scheduled an appointment with-"\_

\_The white alicorn disappeared when she was struck by a beam of dark blue magic. "\_\_\*\*To the sun with you!\*\*\_\_"\_

\* \* \*

><p>"No, she did not mention anything about this at all."<p>

The unicorn sighed and shook her head. "It's just like her to leave me to explain everything. Alright, I'm sorry, you're probably confused. Let me reintroduce myself. I'm Twilight Sparkle, Royal Psychologist."



\* \* \*

><p>"...all those evenings I spent pouring my heart and soul into the sky, making the stars shimmer and sparkle and crafting beautiful constellations, and... and... \*sniff\* ...and they just slept through it! Every single night!" Nightmare Moon sobbed. Twilight levitated over a box of tissues. The black alicorn pause her story for a moment to dry her eyes and clean her runny nose. "Thank youâ€| \*sniff\* I justâ€| I just wanted everypony to see what I created. My sisterâ€| she always got all the attention. Everypony thanked her for the sun and the light it brought. But nopony ever thanked me for the moon or the stars. I thought if I just kept trying to make it more beautiful, somepony would notice eventually butâ€| but no matter how hard I tried Iâ€| they..."<p>

Nightmare Moon broke down into another tearful fit. Inwardly, Twilight was actually quite pleased with her current progress this loop. The hardest part of this plan, getting the Luna's egotistical dark persona to submit herself to therapy, was already out of the way. Sure, while the black alicorn may have initially responded by trying to take her head off with a blast of focused magical energy for having dared suggest that her new queen's mental state was anything short of perfection, spending several lifetimes replacing Celestia during her rule over Equestria had made her quite the diplomat.

Talking her down hadn't been easy, but by playing the scared, helpless unicorn who was only trying to serve her new queen, she had managed to calm Nightmare Moon down enough to stop her destructive rampage. After that, coaxing her into attending the session had been a matter of careful word choices, ego stroking, a few hypothetical scenarios, and a cheerful attitude sprinkled with hints of adoration. Even under the dark influence of the nightmare, Luna, at her core, had still only truly desired some appreciation and attention. After she agreed, Twilight was actually surprised how quickly she opened up. It made her wonder whether or not Celestia had tried this before banishing her sister to the moon for a thousand years. Something to ask about.

Either way, seeing the black alicorn sobbing in the middle of her tree (which she converted into a makeshift office) was something she wished her friends were here to see. Well, her looping ones, anyway. Their non-looping selves, Spike included, were peeking in through a window (she pretended not to notice), but it wasn't quite the same. It would at least it would make for a good story, but things were starting to drag on, so it was time to make a move.

"Lunaâ€| May I call you Luna?" She paused to let Nightmare Moon answer. The alicorn hesitated for a bit, but eventually nodded. Twilight smiled, this was a good sign. "I completely understand your desire to have your work validated. To see something you put so much work into completely ignored must have been devastating. You mentioned that your sister received plenty of attention for raising the sun. Do you think it would have hurt as much to have everypony ignore the night if that weren't true?"

Nightmare Moon was slow to answer. "Well itâ€| it still would have hurt butâ€| Iâ€| I suppose that seeing Tia getting all that attention might have made it worseâ€|"

Twilight nodded. "Would you say you were envious of the attention she was getting?" she asked, careful not to make it sound like an accusation.

"M-maybeâ€|" she said, but the way she sank into the chaise lounge implied a more definitive answer.

"Did you ever tell her you were feeling neglected back then?"

"Sheâ€|" she knew."

"Are you certain?" Twilight pressed.

"Tiaâ€|" Celestia knew everything... She... Nothing ever happened in the entire kingdom without her knowing about itâ€|" She had to knowâ€|" she answered, but her words sounded uncertain.

Twilight shook her head. "Perhaps that she was so busy maintaining a presence in Equestria's politics was the reason she hadn't noticed how you felt? Sometimes a pony can get so wrapped up in their work that they fail to notice how their friends and family are hurting."

Nightmare Moon seemed to consider this, but didn't respond at all. Objective one complete. Now for the other matterâ€|" "So then, this plan of yours, to make nighttime eternal, this is another attempt to get more ponies to notice the night sky?"

Nightmare Moon nodded. "Yes. They won't be able to ignore the night anymore if it lasts forever."

"But don't you think that could be counter-productive?" Nightmare Moon looked at her and raised an eyebrow. "What I mean is, ponies might \_notice \_the night sky, but since it comes at the cost of the day and the sun, it could cause them to resent it instead of admire it like you wanted."

Nightmare Moon huffed. "Then so be it. They ignored me night after night and spent all of their time in the sun. They never cared about me, so why should I care about how they feel?"

Twilight gave a small smile. "You don't mean that."

"You don't know me." she said, turning away.

"No, but I know you care deeply about every one of your subjects. I know you were there fighting Discord alongside your sister," she said. Nightmare Moon's ears perked up, and she turned back towards Twilight.

"You know about that?"

Twilight nodded. "I do."

Nightmare Moon stared at her for a moment, then turned away again. "Yes, I was there. And for a while, the ponies seemed to love me too. But years passed. Decades. Centuries, and I was forgotten. And as their love for me faded, so did mine."

"And yet, when you heard about King Sombra and the way he enslaved the Crystal Empire, you once again threw yourself against a powerful enemy in order to protect them," Twilight added. "If what you say were true, you would have felt no obligation to help them."

Nightmare Moon faced Twilight again with a disbelieving look on her face. "How do you know all this?"

"Because I've been very thorough in researching my homeland's history," she said simply. It was at least partially true, but she felt it was best not to mention the whole truth for the moment. "You had no obligation to save Equestria from Discord. You could have left the ponies, my ancestor's at his mercy and looked for a new land to settle in. But you saw ponies suffering under the rule of a reality-bending tyrant, and you, along with your sister, wanted to protect them. Not so you could rule over them, you did it because you couldn't stand to see them in pain. It was the same for the Crystal Empire, am I right?"

"Iâ€¦ yesâ€¦" she admitted. "But we failed. The Crystal Empire is gone."

"Maybe, but you protected Equestria from a potential invasion from King Sombra's slave army. And more importantly, you fought for them. Your subjects, and the crystal ponies. You did care. And while the history books are vague on the exact dates of the events, the fall of the Crystal Empire and your rise as Nightmare Moon were what, a year apart? Two? Certainly not long enough for you to divorce yourself of that protective nature and empathy." Nightmare Moon's gaze met the floor. Twilight took that as a "yes". "And your sister's public presence? I'm willing to bet that one of the reasons that she managed to maintain such an outward image was because you were helping to keep Equestria running smoothly outside the public eye, correct?"

Nightmare Moon was silent for a long while, then she spoke. "It doesn't matter. I've already made my choice," she nearly whispered.

"But it does matter! It matters to you."

"Stopâ€¦!"

"You still care about them. About us, don't you? You never stopped caring."

"I said stop!"

"And that's why it hurt so much. You adored your subjects, and yet they never seemed to return your affections. Even your sister didn't seem to have as much time for you anymore."

"Please! Just stop talking!"

"And that's why you did it, isn't it? The pain just became too much. You couldn't hold it in any longer. So you thought, since loving them was too painful to bear, maybe you could try hating them instead. Scorning them. Replacing your unrequited affections with something less painful."

"\_\*\*Be silent!\*\*\_" Nightmare Moon boomed, getting to her feet and standing over the unicorn with a brightly glowing horn. She attempted to look as threatening as possible, and to a younger pony she may have. Twilight, however, was not young. She could see that the alicorn's glare lacked a certain heat to it, her eyes were starting to well, and the subtle twitches of her mouth were clear indicators that she was struggling to keep her emotions under control. The floodgates were about to burst.

"It won't work, Princess. You can't simply stop caring about them like that. Somepony like you, who loves her subjects with all her heart, could never bring herself to truly hate them, no matter how they wronged her."

"S-stopâ€|" she said, her voice cracking. "I-if you don'tâ€| I'llâ€|"

Twilight shook her head. "No, you won't. Because you care. Because you would never forgive yourself if you did," she spoke softly, and gave a soft smile. "And I care about you, too, Luna. So please, let me help you."

"H-help m-me?" she stammered.

"Yes, help you. Please." She stood up off her chair. "Let me be your friend."

Any hint of aggression melted away right there. Nightmare Moon opened her mouth, but only a small hiccup escaped. She tried to regain her composure, closing her mouth and squeezing her eyes shut to hold back the tears, but it was too late. Her legs buckled under her and she fell to the floor weeping. Twilight slowly moved beside her, and leaned down, gently stroking her back.

"It's okay. Let it all out."

The alicorn kept crying for several minutes, with Twilight by her side to comfort her. As the minutes passed, Twilight noticed that the black mare's coat was disappearing, the corruption seeping down her coat like runny makeup onto the floor. Before long, all that was left of Nightmare Moon was a puddle of black on the floor and armor far too large for Luna's redeemed form.

"I'm sorryâ€| I'm so sorry," she whimpered, clinging to Twilight and crying into her chest. "I'm a horrible ponyâ€| I.."

"None of that," Twilight commanded, but kept her voice low. "You're a wonderful pony, Luna. Equestria was worse off without you, and we're lucky to have you back."

"Those poniesâ€| they'll never forgive meâ€| Tia will never forgive meâ€|"

Twilight smiled. "Oh yes they will. You haven't done anything that can't be fixed. And once they meet you, the \_real\_ you, I know they'll warm up to you, too." Twilight turned towards her window. "Right, everypony?"

Realizing they'd been spotted, Twilight's non-looping PFFs and number

one assistant ducked beneath the window frame. Twilight rolled her eyes. As if she hadn't already seen them and called them out. "Come on girls. You were all so wonderful to me when I got here this morning. Princess Luna needs that now more than I ever did, you aren't going to deny her friendship over a choice she regrets making, are you? And I know I taught you better than that, Spike. The door's unlocked. Come inside."

Silence once again overtook the library turned psychiatrists office. Luna gave Twilight a worried look, but the unicorn assured her that they'd come. After a few moments passed, but the group finally proved her right. They walked in slowly, and stood in front of the pair, their eyes wandering between Luna, Twilight and each other as they tried to decide what to say.

Twilight decided to help move things along. "Princess Luna, these are my friends. The baby dragon is Spike, my number one assistant. He was raised by your sister until she put him under my care. The five ponies are my friends. I only just met them when I came into Ponyville, but they've been some of the kindest and friendliest souls I've ever met. They can help you win back Ponyville's trust."

Spike stepped up first. "Well, I'm not sure how I can help but, I forgive you. You don't seem like a bad pony to me, and Twilight's right. Your sister helped raise me, and she taught me better than to hold a grudge against somepony that just made a bad choice."

"Ab-so-lutely!" Applejack exclaimed, moving forward and smiling at Luna. "Ah know Ah probably haven't given the night the attention it rightly deserves, but Ah reckon without it, the sun would just shrivel everythin' Ah try tah grow right up. Ah figure ah owe you big for that, so forgivin' yah is just the start of it fer me."

"Yeah, what she said," Rainbow Dash added. "I'm uhh, I'm not too good at these kinds of speeches, but I totally get what it's like to have something awesome you make go unnoticed. I mean, when I was a filly, I did a sonic rainboom, and nopony noticed." She threw her hooves up. "It's a giant rainbow explosion in the sky! How do you miss that!?" She let out a big sigh. "Anyway, yeah, I totally get where you're coming from, so I forgive you, too."

"Indeed, I can only imagine how it would feel if every single one of my works were ignored," Rarity stated as she walked up to Luna and inspected the oversized armor she was wearing. "Although I have to say, your taste in accessories could use some work." She levitated the helmet and armor off of the alicorn. "Stand up, dear? Good, now let's get you out of that tacky footwear. Yes, that's better. Hmm, those ponies don't know what they're missing. Why, with a coat like yours, and a little work, I'm certain you could shine brighter than the sun. Figuratively speaking, of course."

"And I'll throw you a big 'Welcome to Ponyville/Welcome Back to Equestria/Thanks for Not Making Night Last Forever' Party!" Pinkie shouted. To illustrate her point, she pulled a cord that released a bunch of streamers, balloons, confetti and a "Welcome to Ponyville/Welcome Back to Equestria/Thanks for Not Making Night Last Forever!" banner from the ceiling. Everypony stared at her in disbelief.

"But when-" Twilight began to ask, but stopped herself. No matter how many loops she went through she would never get a satisfactory answer to Pinkie Pie.

Pinkie continued. "Don't worry, everypony comes to my parties, and it will be a great chance for everypony to get to know you and have a great time doing it!"

Luna stared at Pinkie for a second, then looked at the one pony in the room who had yet to speak. "And you? Do you forgive me, too?"

The yellow pegasus hid behind her own mane even as she answered. "Umâ€¦ Yes. I wasn't ever really angry. I was more worried about my animal friends. Some of them don't see very well at night. But um, I'm glad you aren't doing that anymore. Thank you."

Luna looked at each of her seven new friends and, finally, gave them a small, touched smile. "Thank you. Thank you all so much."

Pinkie latched onto her new Princess/friend in a big hug, surprising Luna. Twilight followed next, then Spike, Rarity, and eventually the whole group. With all her new friends embracing her, some fresh tears began to form in the night Princess's eyes. Ones not of sadness, but of joy. Happier than she could remember being for millennia, Luna hugged them back. She finally had everything she ever wanted. Who would have known it would be so easy?

\* \* \*

><p>"I can't believe what you've managed to accomplish today, Twilight."<p>

Princess Celestia and Twilight sat side by side as the Summer Sun Celebration went into full swing. Princess Luna herself was engaging in many of the festivities along with her new friends, as well as several townsfolk that had since taken a liking to her. Currently, that meant going head to head with Pinkie in a cupcake eating contest, with half the town cheering them on.

"It was nothing, really Princess. You sister just needed a friend. I knew I could get to her."

"I have to admit, when you came to me saying you could redeem Luna without the Elements of Harmony I was very confused. You knew so much I thought I had hidden from you so well. I honestly feared for \_your \_mental state when you began to talk about theseâ€¦ time loops."

Twilight nodded. "But you always give me the benefit of the doubt. And look at the results."

Celestia smiled. "Indeed. If only I had known the answer was so simple."

"Speaking of which, I have you scheduled to join us at our next session on Tuesday."

Celestia blinked and looked down at Twilight. "Wait, \_me?\_ But-"

Twilight held up a hoof to cut her off. "Now, now, I won't take no for an answer. I'm sensing centuries of bad air between you two, and I intend to see you two through it. The sooner we get this out of the way the better. Procrastination isn't going to help anypony." She said with finality. "I'm going to go and join my friends. Enjoy the festival, Princess!"

With that, Twilight trotted away, leaving a shocked Princess Celestia behind her. Twilight giggled to herself. Sometimes looping could be so much fun.

\* \* \*

><p>28.4 (NutJob)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>(Youngster Quartet, Part 1)<strong>

"Okay, seriously, what the fluffy kittens is up with this loop?"

Twilight managed to suppress a laugh, barely, to spare her rainbow-hued friend from further humiliation. They were walking through Ponyville in what was quickly becoming a contender for the most bizarre loop Twilight has ever experienced, and considering the weight that statement alone carried with it she could understand her friend's aggravation.

The loop itself seemed fairly standard at first. She awoke in Ponyville alongside Spike, and a quick check revealed that the other Elements were Awake as well. While it was unusual Awakening in Ponyville, she had certainly awoken to some far less welcome sights. Things only started to get weird when the other loopers started showing up.

Twilight recognized many of them, familiar faces from past adventures and old friends she'd been hoping to see again forâ€¦ Well, to be honest she wasn't sure. Keeping track of time was difficult as a looper. Others were new faces, some eager to become friends, some new, inexperienced loopers, and some were kind of moody jerks, and every single one of them retained their original form. In any case, Ponyville quickly became flooded with them, and eventually Twilight had to inform Mayor Mare that Ponyville had apparently become the temporary home of severalâ€¦ hundred interdimensional travelers, each with a multitude of lifetime experiences with varying degrees of mental stability. All things considered, she took it quite well after Twilight pointed out granting them residency in Ponyville would secure the majority vote in the coming election. At the time, the looping unicorn thought her biggest challenge would be to prevent so many people from so many cultures from tearing each others eyes out.

This was before she discovered the loops second oddity.

"Oh, man," Rainbow moaned, covering her face with her hooves. "I can't believe I said that to him. I'm never going to live this down."

On top of being the single biggest example of a fused loop she had ever seen, it was also an altered loop with some very strange rules. As far as she could tell no one, whether they be pony, human or otherwise, could say or perform any action that might be considered "inappropriate for children". On top of that, some of the items the loopers had brought with them had been physically altered, as well. Weapons turned into toys or candy, for example, or cigarettes into lollipops. At first, Twilight thought that one of the loopers might have been responsible for everyone's uncharacteristic behavior, but after she got word of other parts of Equestria being affected, and several thorough tests of her new neighbors abilities, she concluded that none of them had the resources or power needed to pull off such a feat. At least not without using a massive amount of easily traceable energy, which there was no evidence of.

It took some time, but eventually most of the loopers had found ways to deal with it. Most treated the loop as a vacation, as the universe was forced into a state of perpetual peace, and the Princesses (Thankfully, also Awake) and mayor helped see to it that each of them was well accommodated. Still, there were a fair amount of troublemakers that tried to "overload" the loop's censorship, which usually just resulted in their words and actions being more heavily altered, but that didn't stop them from trying. And when one such looper had started instigating Rainbow Dash, it quickly devolved into what would have been a heated argument between the two, had the universe not decided to make things awkward for them.

"Oh, come on, Rainbow. It wasn't that bad! Some of the other loopers have been thrown into far more embarrassing situations than you," Twilight offered. "Remember when Laharl and Etna accidentally promised to start a circus?"

That got a smile out of the pegasus. Baby steps. "Yeah, that was great. Flonne wouldn't let that one go until they made it happen. Gotta admit, Midboss and Pinkie were great on the trapeze.

Twilight nodded. "I thought Captain Gordon made a great clown, myself. And how about that time Megatron transformed into a Carousel?"

Rainbow Dash let out a chuckle. Almost there. "Okay, yeah. I don't think anyone saw that coming."

"And need I remind you about the nine-tailed fox?" she snickered, pointing a hoof towards the Everfree forest, where the remains of the worlds biggest piñata was visible over the treeline.

This finally seemed to get the pegasus's thoughts off of her earlier humiliation long enough to share a short but refreshing laugh with her unicorn friend. "Okay, okay, yeah. I mean, I guess I don't have it too bad compared to all that," she admitted.

"Exactly," Twilight agreed, smiling. "Besides, I'm sure Wolverine knows you didn't actually mean any of that." Her smile suddenly transformed into a mischievous grin. "Although I have to say I'm sure it would have been quite the wedding."

The pegasus cheeks went from light blue to bright red and she shot Twilight a glare that could melt glaciers. Thankfully, as a countless number of loops had made her considerably more resilient and an



oversized block of ice, the unicorn felt comfortable staring back smugly. Still, it was short-lived, as the second Rainbow Dash opened her mouth to retort she was blindsided by an orange blur that sent her crashing several yards through the ground.

For an instance, Twilight worried that someone had actually succeeded in beating the universal censorship, but one look into the newly formed trench and those fears were lifted. She would recognize that black, spiky hair anywhere, and she knew its owner wasn't the type to attack someone out of the blue.

"Oops. Sorry, Rainbow Dash. That was a little rougher than I was going for."

"Ugh, Goku!? What the happy meals is wrong with you? And what are you hugging me for?"

"Oh, that's because..." the saiyan trailed off, his face twisting in confusion. "Actually, I'm not sure. I just felt like I really had to hug you, for some reason."

"What? But that-" she started, confused, before she put the pieces together and her expression morphed into one of irritation.

\_"\*\*"Pinkie Pie!"\*\*\_"

"Yesssssss, Rainbow Dash?" the pink mare responded, poking her head out from the mound of dirt that had been created beside the trench.

"Did you write my name in the Hug Note again!?"

"Mmmmaaayyyyyyybe."

For the second time in five minutes, Twilight found herself resisting the urge to laugh. And judging from the snickering she heard coming from behind her, she wasn't the only one. By this point a mass of ponies and visiting loopers had gathered around the crash site. She knew most of them had been drawn by good intentions, rushing over to offer help if someone had been injured, and although tempting as it was to let them stick around and enjoy the show, she felt Rainbow Dash's ego had taken enough of a beating for one day.

"Okay, everyone! Nothing to see here, move along now!" she called out, shooing the onlookers away. The crowd slowly started to disperse, with several ponies and especially loopers trying to sneak a few more glances before Twilight personally forced them away. Once they were free of any unwelcome onlookers, Twilight turned back and climbed into the trench to assist her friends.

"Goku, you mind getting off me now?" Rainbow Dash asked with a hint of irritation in her voice.

"Uh, yeah." Goku sheepishly rose to his feet. After helping Rainbow Dash off the ground, the saiyan scratched the back of his head. "Hehehâ€¦ Uh, sorry about all that."

Rainbow Dash waved her hoof. "Don't worry about it. It wasn't really your fault anyway. I'm gonna have a talk with-" She was cut off as Goku suddenly scooped the pegasus off the and pulled her against his

chest once again. The two stared at each blankly for a moment, before Goku offered Rainbow Dash an apologetic smile, and Rainbow Dash closed her eyes and gritted her teeth in irritation. "\_Pinkie Pie.\_"

"Wud?" the earth pony asked, looking up from her notebook with a pen clenched in her teeth.

"Pinkie, don't you think poor Rainbow Dash has had enough hugs for one day?" Twilight asked.

"That's silly, Twilight! No pony can \_ever\_ get enough hugs in one day!" Pinkie replied, causing Twilight to roll her eyes. "Besides, I know what you're \_really\_ asking. And don't worry, I wrote your name in here right after Dashie's!"

"Pinkie!"

"Also, I hope you don't mind but I really wanted to see what would happen if I wrote someone's name more than once."

"You wrote my name in the Note \_twice\_?"

"Nooooooooooooooooo."

"What? But thenâ€¦!"

Twilight was distracted by the distant sound of rumbling. Suddenly, the meaning of Pinkie's words became all too clear. "Pinkieâ€¦ How many times did you write my name in there?"

"Um, I wasn't keeping track. Oh, I know, why don't you ask them?"

Pinkie pointed behind Twilight. The unicorn almost didn't look, as she had a pretty good idea as to who "they" were, considering that Pinkie had pointed in the direction of the rumbling. \_I could just teleport away, right now, she thought. Maybe to Canterlot, or the Crystal Empire. Or the moon.\_ All seemed like, at this particular point in time, a much safer place to be. But realistically, she knew it wouldn't help. Once her name was written in the notebook her fate was sealed, and with all the loopers and their means of transportation it wasn't as though she could run, either. She took in a deep breath and turned around.

And saw the entire population of Ponyville running at her as if someone cast the Want-It-Need-It spell on her.

"Oh \_fluff me\_."

\* \* \*

><p>"...and I promise never to write anyone's name in the Hug Note more than once at one time ever again. Cross my heart and hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye." Pinkie finished, going through all the necessary motions.<p>

"Good, thank you Pinkie. Could you go let Spike know I won't be home for a few days?"

"Sure. Sorry again, Twilight."

"That's okay, Pinkie."

Pinkie nodded slowly and left, and Twilight let out a sigh as Nurse Redheart finish adjusting her bed. Now this was something. How many lifetimes has it been since the last time she wore a full body cast? Of all the thousands of horrible loops she could have ended up confined to a hospital bed, this was about the \_last\_ loop she would have considered this a possibility. Oh well, it wasn't as though she was terribly busy this loop.

"I don't see why you don't just Ascend or cast a bone-mending spell or something," Rainbow Dash stated. "If you're afraid that you'll mess up your magic or something like that, I can do it for you. Just tell me how the spell works, I'll go Ascend and have you back up in a jiffy."

"It's not that, Rainbow, but thank you." Rainbow Dash raised an eyebrow at this, so Twilight continued. "Right now, crazy as it sounds, Pinkie Pie is the most dangerous threat to Equestria. The Hug Note is one of the few things in this entire loop that's capable of actually hurting someone, and Pinkie was treating it like a toy. In all honesty, I'm just glad that she learned this lesson with me and not someone else."

"Okay, well, she Pinkie promised not to do it again. Do you really need to stick around here now?"

"She Pinkie promised not to write anyone's name more than once at one time, but she's started experimenting with the notebook and that's a problem in itself. What if she decides somebody needs a \_really\_ big hug? You want to find out what it feels like to be hugged by a gundam?" Rainbow Dash answered with a wince. "I thought not. As for my decision to stay here, well, let's face it. Part of Pinkie's charm is that even despite being technically older than the Princesses at this point, she hasn't seemed to grow up one bit. I don't want her thinking that what happened wasn't a big deal just because I can fix it right away. I'm hoping that staying here a couple of days will make her think her actions through a little better in the future."

Rainbow Dash mused that over. "I guess that makes sense. Alright, well if you're sure, anything you need me to grab for you before I head out?"

"Hmmmâ€¦| actually, now that I think about it, could you stop by the library and grab as many erotic books as you can find? I want to see how the loop affected them. It should be good for a laugh."

"Ha! That's sounds like fun, maybe I'll join you. Alright, I'll be back in a minute. Don't go anywhere!" the pegasus teased as she opened a window and flew out."

"Oh hah, hah!" she called back, knowing full well her friend was already well out of earshot. Still, an amused smile formed on her face. This was surely one of the stranger loops she'd ever experienced, but also easily one of the most peaceful. To be honest, it was nice to be able to just relax with no strings attached. One loop where she could just pretend she was a normal unicorn that

didn't have to constantly fight chaotic gods and eldritch abominations. She took notice a small glass of water on a table beside her, and telekinetically raise it to the air.

"Here's to you, you wonderfully bizarre flopping loop."

28.5 (Masterweaver)

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle walked down the stairs to the dungeons, shooting Celestia a worried look. "And you're saying this... assassin wanted to talk to me?"<p>

"Well... to be completely accurate, she wanted to speak to Princess Twilight." The alicorn of the sun looked down at her student. "I hardly know of any such pony, but given that you are my student I assumed there could be a level of... confusion regarding your rank."

The unicorn nodded, keeping her thoughts to herself. Celestia wasn't awake this loop, so of course she was unaware of Twilight's more powerful abilities. The fact that this prisoner was implied that she was looping, but being referred to as Princess by any of her friends was quite unusual. Therefore, it wouldn't be out of the question to assume that the assassin was a new looper...

"Did you ever figure out why she attacked you?"

Celestia sighed. "Apparently I'm... some sort of tyrant that enslaves ponies. And I managed to escape from the moon and rewrite history somehow. I think she may be a tad delusional..."

Twilight winced, remembering a rather disturbing loop. If the pony in question had woken up then, there was plenty of reason to distrust Celestia. "So... what exactly is this pony like, anyway?"

"That's the thing," her mentor said sadly. "She's not a pony."

\* \* \*

><p>Macintosh raised an eyebrow, quietly refilling the mug with cider as Twilight gently patted the shoulders of a sobbing, heartbroken Chrysalis.<p>

He didn't exactly have a full understanding of the situation-it wasn't his place to pry-but from what he had gathered, the last loop that the changeling queen had been in had her married to Shining Armor, of all ponies. Shining hadn't been Awake, of course, but Chrysalis had been. In fact, if he was reading this right, that was her first loop, and she had interpreted her memories of the baseline loop as some horrific nightmare.

And then she'd woken up here, once again Queen of the Changeling Swarm and...

"I AM A MOOOOOOOOOONSTEEEEEEEEEEER!" Chrysalis wailed. She heaved forward with another sob, her silky mane spooling around and into the mug. "I don't deserve to live; I don't deserve any, any of this."

"Look, Chrysalis, you're not really that bad." Twilight rubbed her shoulders gently, watching as she took another gulp of alcohol. "As... aggressive as your invasion plan usually is, it's always started by a need to feed your hive. You just... have a few, um... sympathy issues, that's all."

The unicorn shot Macintosh the look of the desperately flailing. He coughed and nodded. "Family is family. Ah can't tell ya how many loops I fought off timberwolves or joined tha army to protect Apple Bloom and AJ. Ya'll were acting in tha best interests of yer kin, Ah can respect that."

Chrysalis sniffed. "You... you really think that?"

"Sure as tha sun." The stallion nodded. "You look after yer own. Ya just need ta learn ta look after others, too."

With a vague nod, the queen of the changelings straightened slightly.

Then she broke down crying again. "But, but, but... Shining. I loved... loved him, and... and it turns out that I, was just playing him-"

"\_That\_ Shining Armor loved you too," Twilight interjected quickly. "\_That\_ Shining Armor was somepony that you... What I'm saying is, you didn't hurt him. I was in that loop, Chrysalis, and I saw how deeply you two were..." She sighed. "I'm sorry. I really am. He wasn't awake that loop, so the looping version of him won't... remember. Just... you didn't hurt him, remember that. In that loop, you didn't-"

"Cadance was awake, wasn't she?"

The unicorn snapped her mouth shut.

Chrysalis turned to glower at her. "Wasn't. She."

Twilight, very reluctantly, gave a small nod.

The changeling nodded back. "I'm a monster. I'm a complete... complete monster..." She reached for her mug again.

Macintosh pulled it out of her reach with a snort. "So what? Ya think just cause ya made a few mistakes ya'll can just take the monster label and run with it?"

Chrysalis sighed. "It's not like I have a choice."

"Ya know what Ah saw when Ah started looping?" Macintosh pointed at the unicorn. "This pony right here transformed into a Nightmare. Called herself Eternal Twilight, turned Spike into a massive dragon... Ah was completely terrified. Turned out ta be a one-loop prank she was pulling."

"Aheh heh heh." The mare inched away from Chrysalis's incredulous look. "Looping does kind of make ponies a tad crazy..."

Macintosh rolled her eyes. "It wasn't till a lot later that Twilight

even figured Ah was looping. And that was only cause she noticed a lot of things that weren't happening that shoulda been. Ah'd been so terrified of her that Ah'd tried ta keep mah whole condition secret... and it turned out she was, well, Twilight. Not some evil monster, but just a pony that happened ta have been living tha same period over and over again."

Chrysalis shut her eyes, rubbing at them with a hoof. "What exactly are you trying to say here?"

"Ah'm saying... Look. Even if ya are a monster, you can change. Ah mean, even tha baseline has Nightmare Moon and Discord reforming."

"Because they made friends," the changeling queen grumbled. "Or got shot in the face with the Elements."

"Then make some friends!" Twilight said brightly. "Heck, I'm sure Pinkie will warm up to you quickly. And Fluttershy ascended because of you, so now that you're looping she'd love to chat."

Chrysalis blinked. "What do you mean Fluttershy ascended because of me?"

"Oh, um... long story, but basically you can't turn into an alicorn unless you've become an alicorn in a previous loop, and that kind of requires specific things for each pony, and Fluttershy is the element of Kindness so..."

"See?" Macintosh pressed. "Ya have some friends already. Heck, Twilight busted ya out of jail to drag ya here for a drink." He offered the mug back to her. "That there takes some real nerve."

"Well, technically I claimed she was my cousin who ended up messing with an experimental spell and, um, Celestia agreed to release her to my care." Twilight rubbed the back of her head. "I'm amazed she bought that."

The changeling queen looked at the proffered cider. "...I... I still love Shining. My version, anyway. The one in that loop, I don't know if the looping Shining is different... I'm never going to get to find out, am I?"

Twilight sighed. "No, I... I'm afraid you won't."

Chrysalis nodded slowly. "Are... either of them awake this loop?"

The unicorn took a moment to consider the question. "...Chrysalis... you're not going to be able to maintain a relationship with ponies when they're not awake. It just... doesn't work, there's not a deep connection."

"You didn't answer my question."

"I don't want you to get hurt."

The changeling queen took the mug and sipped it.

"Look... let's just take it slowly, okay?" Twilight smiled gently. "Me and the other elements will deal with Nightmare Moon and Discord and Sombra and all those other things, but other than that this loop is to help you ease in. Alright?"

"...I suppose I have to start somewhere," Chrysalis replied glumly. "I doubt I could ever redeem myself..."

\* \* \*

><p>28.6<p>

"â€|I'd like to show you somethingâ€|" Fluttershy said quietly.

Chrysalis cocked her head, trying not to wince as another memory ran through her. She'd have to get used to them sooner or later, it wouldn't be possible to have a conversation if every reminder of what she'd lost threw her off.

Not to mention how much it might confuse the rest of the hive mind.

"What is it?" she asked, pushing her reminiscence aside as best she could.

"Watch."

Fluttershy's eyes closed, and she exhaled deeply and evenly.

There was a moment of timeless fluidity, and then there was a wolf standing there.

Chrysalis jumped, her wings buzzing. "What-"

The wolf's tongue lolled out for a moment, and Chrysalis noticed the laughter in its eyes.

"It's still me," the wolf said in Fluttershy's gentle soprano. "I picked this up somewhere. It's called Wild Shape."

"â€|huh, it is," the Changeling Queen said slowly. Now she was concentrating, her empathic sense could still detect the sunny warmth of Fluttershy's emotions. "Where'd you learn that?"

"Oerth." The wolf sat back, gesturing with a paw, and Chrysalis landed again before stepping forwards. "It's part of being what's called a druid. I'm moreâ€| in tune with nature."

"Neat."

"Actually," Fluttershy looked down, "I was wonderingâ€| what are the limits of your shapeshifting?"

"I've never really tested them." Chrysalis shrugged. "As far as I know, I can't do much more than taking on the shape of a pony, though \_what\_ pony is quite malleable."

She winced again. Even the smallest things seemed to be making her

remember her loss. It wasn't even clear \_what\_ had done it that timeâ€|

"Well," there was another fluid moment, and Fluttershy was back to being a pegasus. "I think I know a project for us to work on. We could try and push the limits of what you can pull off, changing shape, I mean. If that's okay with you."

"That does sound like a good idea," Chrysalis nodded. "But why are you helping me?"

"Why not?" Fluttershy replied, genuinely puzzled â€" Chrysalis could sense the polite confusion like a pure musical note.

"Iâ€| I invaded your country! Hundreds of times!"

"No you didn't." Fluttershy reached out a hoof. "\_You\_ haven't. A not-Looping version of you did. You're not guilty of her crimes."

Chrysalis sighed. "I have to believe that you think that â€" I can \_sense\_ that you believe that â€" but \_I\_ don't believe it myself."

"That's okay." Fluttershy giggled. "I used to be \_terrible\_ at that. Okay, shall we do this?"

Chrysalis shook her wings. "Not as though I have a choice, is itâ€|"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't dream of forcing you." Fluttershy backed off. "But you really \_would\_ enjoy the challenge, I'm sureâ€|"

Then she got a mischievous glint in her eyes. Faint, but one that would startle somepony from the baseline loop. "And I do think that it might let you play a prank or two."

"Pranks?" Chrysalis repeated, feeling vaguely silly in having to ask so many questions.

"Well, I don't do them much myself, but I understand that Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie enjoy them, and they're good to let off steam, and they don't hurt anyone, andâ€|"

"Alright, I get the picture." The Changeling Queen held up a hoof, cutting off Fluttershy's long list. "Right, let's get started. How is it that you're changing the shape of the ears?"

"Oh!" Fluttershy rummaged in her mane for a moment, and pulled a biology textbook from her subspace pocket. "Right, here. You see how the attachment of the muscles differs? Aside from that, the main issue isâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>28.7<p>

Sweetie Belle sat back, kicking the table leg. It wasn't much fun when the other Crusaders weren't Looping, though on comparing notes they'd more or less mutually agreed that whichever one of them \_was\_



looping should act like a cool big sister type of person. (Based on the reactions of the non-looping others, being around a pony their age who was clearly more self confident and yet who \_wasn't\_ condescending was actually pretty cool.)

But the important thing was that she was waiting on her sister. Rarity had decided to upgrade their cloaks, and had asked Sweetie to take her next test examples over to their clubhouseâ€| once they were finished with, anyway.

There was a knock at the door.

Sweetie glanced at the clock as she walked over. Five P.M. \_Huh, must be taking her longer than she plannedâ€| it'll be dinner soon, and if I'm going to go over to 'bloom's house for tea like I was going to then I'll need to leave fairly sharpish.\_

As she turned the handle, she rattled off the well-memorized message Rarity had taught her to. "Hello, welcome to Carousel Boutique. I'm afraid we're not open right this moment, but we'll take orders outside hours ifâ€| possible?"

She trailed off, staring.

"Spike? What are you doing here?"

Spike looked down at Sweetie for a few seconds, then his eyes widened and he swept a bunch of lilies behind his back to hide them. "Oh, uh, Sweetie. Nice to see you."

"Do you have flowers behind your back?"

"Noâ€|" Spike said slowly, in the face of evidence.

"Whatever." Sweetie shrugged. "Hey, sis! Your date's here!"

Rarity appeared with a flash of light. "Oh, sorry, I didn't realize the timeâ€| wait, my what?"

Sweetie rolled her eyes. "You two are \_not\_ subtle. I've known for ages."

"You have?" both of them repeated in unison.

"Hey, that was cool," Sweetie said. "Anyway, yeah, it's just \_obvious\_ by now."

A grin stole across her face. "Wait, did you think you were managing to keep it secret from me?"

"Erâ€|" Spike scratched the back of his head with the hand not holding the flowers. "â€|yes, actually."

"I wasn't sure what you'd think, Sweetie," Rarity said with a blush. "I know I should have mentioned it, butâ€|"

"You were worried about that?" Sweetie looked Spike up and down. "He's a dragon. That's about as cool as potential brothers in law \_get\_."

"Fine, thenâ€|" Spike brought the flowers out. "Here, Rares. I know you like them."

The bouquet rose out of his hands wrapped in alabaster light. "I do, you're right." Selecting one from the centre of the bunch, Rarity nibbled it delicately and put the rest in a vase for later. "Much healthier than chocolates. Now, where are we going?"

Spike produced a pair of tickets. "Well, it's getting harder to find a new place to go, butâ€| how do you feel about a classical music performance with Trixie doing a light and magic show?"

Rarity blinked. "How did \_that\_ come about?"

"I am not entirely sureâ€|" Spike shrugged. "Could be that Twilight sent Trixie off to that classicist-"

"Octavia," Rarity supplied.

"Yes, that's right. Twilight sent Trixie off to Octavia and her friend Vinyl after she turned up here. In any case, the programme says they're doing Beethoofen, so that should be nice."

"Yes, that sounds fine." Rarity paused. "I know it's probably not as low profile as it could be, butâ€| I'd actually like to fly there."

"Really?" At her nod, Spike tapped his chin. "Fair enough, then. Pegasus or alicorn?"

"Pegasus." Rarity matched deed to word, flashing through ascension and then down the other side with wings instead of her horn. "I do still feel nervous flying alone, I don't think that'll ever go away entirely, butâ€| not with you."

Sweetie ostentatiously turned her back as the others shared a long look.

"Hey," she said, after a minute or so, "should I just head off to Applebloom's, then?"

"Sure," Rarity replied, distractedly. "You've got your key?"

"Yep."

The unicorn filly got out of there in case they started kissing.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

28.1: This is just after AJ's Loop in the ATLA universe. Somehow, the ability to kick earth projectiles the size of houses agreed with her.

>28.3: Therapy is useful.<br>28.4: Another word for youngster is "kid". And a quartet means there's four of them.

>28.5: I've been wondering for a while precisely how to bring her in.<br>28.6: Flutterwolf is fuzzy.

>28.7: I've seen headcanons where Sweetie is an enthusiastic Sparity

shipper. Why not.<p>

## 29. Chapter 29

### 29.1 (TiaC)

\* \* \*

><p>"So, Dash, now that we've dealt with everything important for the foreseeable future, what are you going to be doing next? I don't spend much time on Earth as a pony myself, so I thought I'd try travelling to the Amazon." asked Twilight.<p>

"I'm gonna practice my weather handling. I'm good, but I could be better and this is just the loop to get there."

"Dash! 'Ten seconds flat!' now describes you dissipating a hurricane. Any storm that could challenge you would devastate the planet! Please tell me you don't plan to conjure up super-storms to practice. I don't want to have to clean up after you!"

"Chill Twi, I got this. It won't be a problem."

"I'll trust you Rainbow, but I will be very upset if you end up hurting someone."

\* \* \*

><p>"You did what!"<p>

"Told you I could get some practice here. Beautiful, isn't it? Definitely one for the scrapbook."

The two ponies looked down at the headline. \*\*Great Red Spot Vanishes! Astronomers Baffled!\*\*

"How did you evenâ€¦ It's larger than Earth!"

"\_Was\_ larger than Earth."

\* \* \*

><p>29.2<p>

"Right, that looks about done," Trixie said, double-checking the calculations. "Right there."

"Cool," Gilda said, bouncing a ball off the wall. "So this'll work?"

"â€¦probably." Trixie shrugged. "Not as though Trixie can test it ahead of time, is it?"

"Fair point." Flaring her wings, the griffin slapped the ball off to one side and pinged it with her tail. "So, when do we start?"

"Tomorrow morning." Trixie reached into nowhere, and pulled out a mini-barrel of beer. "One each for luck?"

"Sure." Gilda got the glasses out, and Trixie cracked the top to pour it.

"I don't remember seeing these before" Gilda mused.

"Oh, right." Trixie shrugged. "Applejack introduces them sometimes. They're based off beer \_cans\_, which humans often use " but we just don't have the aluminium extraction capacity to manage them easily, and we ponies prefer wood anyway."

"Huh. Cool."

"Yes, it is, isn't it?" Trixie grinned. "Trixie cooled them down before putting them in her pocket, and put them in stasis. Cold beer on tap!"

"no, I meant the concept."

Trixie shrugged.

\* \* \*

><p>Queen Chrysalis smiled, her triumph at hand. Celestia was defeated, the Elements lay before her in various states of abject defeat" it was good to be the queen.<p>

"Well, so much for the mighty land of Equestria-" she paused, and frowned. "Who is that?"

Everypony and every" ling, looked.

There was a griffin standing against one wall, trying without much success to whistle nonchalantly.

"What are you doing here?"

"Playing." With that one word answer, the Griffin picked up a dice and threw it. "All right, six! Perfect!"

Stepping back, she revealed a large crank on the wall, and turned it.

With a clunk, something came shooting out of the wall. It looked like"

A stop sign.

It hit a bucket on a stick which was hanging from one of the rafters. That in turn fell over, releasing a large metal ball, which went rolling down the steps outside in a long series of rumble-\_thuds\_.

Something went \_ping.\_

Part of the palace plumbing collapsed, and a bathtub erupted through the roof in a shower of plaster. Through it fell a marble, which hit the firing catch of a guard's crossbow, and that sent the bolt bouncing off three walls to cut through a rope.

Every eye had been following this increasingly bizarre series of events, Chrysalis among them, and it took her a moment too long to realize that the rope was connected to a very large cage.

"Mousetrap!" Gilda shouted. "Brilliant!"

"â€|I feel terribly stupidâ€|" Chrysalis muttered. Celestia made a noise of commiseration.

Trixie walked into the hall from a side door. "Okay, you win. Want another go?"

"Sure." Gilda looked around. "Might need to find a different castle, thoughâ€|"

"There's a nice one in Trottingham." With a blue flash, both of them vanished.

The bedraggled Princess Cadence looked at where the duo had been. "Wait, isn't that the castle you gave Prince Blueblood?"

\* \* \*

><p>29.3<p>

Twilight looked back and forth across the group.

"Right. How on Equestria are we going to sort this one out?"

"Rotating evilness again?" Rarity suggested. "I know I'd like to see what we've all come up with sinceâ€|"

"True, true." Twilight set up an easel, and took out cutie-mark markers. "Okay, there's a total ofâ€|" she looked across the rest of the alicorns, counting under her breath. "I make it twelve, since Nyx and Trixie have joined us since the last time."

"Well, thirteen actuallyâ€|" Dash put in. "Spike's on the way here, he turned up the other side of the world. He'll take a few days to get here."

"Huh." Twilight shrugged. "Who knows. Anyway, who goes evil first?"

Nyx screwed up her face, her horn glowed, and with a bang she was eight feet tall and clad in spiky armour. **"Me please!"**

"â€|that's very impressive," Luna said, tilting her head. "How do you do the reverb?"

**"This isn't really armour,"** **Nyx** said helpfully. **"It's my stereo from my subspace pocket. I just put an illusion on it. The volume knob's the fourth spiky bit down on the left, and the bass is the one below it."**

"Anyone else want to go first?" Twilight checked. "No? Good, looks like you get the slot then. Just one question, what's your villain

name?"

\*\*"Oh, that's right, isn't it, Nightmare Moon's kind of redundantâ€¦|""\*\* The newly nominated villain trailed off. \*\*"What about Dark Side?"\*\*

"Could work," Applejack allowed.

"Yes, it sounds good," Rarity added.

The general murmur of agreement continued for a moment, then died away.

"Well, that's settled, then." Twilight nodded to her. "Okay, here goes."

They all dove for cover.

\*\*"Muahahaha!" \*\*the newly designated Dark Side laughed. \*\*"I willâ€¦|erâ€¦| hang on, time out, I forgot to have an evil plan."\*\*

Trixie pulled off a sheet which had been disguising her as a rock. "I'll help. I need some ideas myselfâ€¦| do you have a position open for a minion?"

Nyx rubbed a hoof against her chin, pondering. \*\*"Do you have experience in evil?"\*\*

"I did once take over a town by using an evil amulet to gain dark powers?" Trixie volunteered helpfully.

\*\*"Hmmmâ€¦|""\*\*

"And I've got an evil plan for you to do."

\*\*"Welcome to Team Evil!"\*\* Nyx spread her wings welcomingly. \*\*"We have dental."\*\*

"Really?" Trixie looked interested.

\*\*"It's the fangsâ€¦|""\*\* Nyx trotted forward. \*\*"What was this evil plan you were suggesting?"\*\*

"Well-" Trixie began.

There was a terrible screeching sound, and every alicorn clapped their hooves over their ears.

\*\*"Oh, oopsie! Sorry, I'm \*\*having a bit of feedbackâ€¦|" Nyx shrugged, her spiky armour making popping noises. "I guess I broke it."

Trixie nodded sympathetically. "I once had a bad sound system. It went really wrong."

"How wrong?" Nyx asked, shrugging the repurposed stereo off and wrinkling her nose at the smell of frying insulation.

"It played me really squeaky. I had to play it off as a comedy thingâ€¦|"

"Shouldn't you have an evil plan by now?" Dash heckled.

Nyx stiffened. "I think I just worked out my evil plan."

"What's that, then, my lady?" Trixie said, turning to stand next to her.

"Ooh, I like that!" Nyx shook her head. "Anyway, the plan is, smother Equestria in stage effects. The stage mist will last forever!"

Lightning crashed.

"You really are very good at that, by the way," she added. "I can see this is going to work out well."

"Ye~es," Trixie drew out the word, "but it does mean I have to come up with something for myself to do. Cover the sky in fireworks?"

\* \* \*

><p>29.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

It wasn't words.

Ponies wouldn't normally be able to understand, but... it wasn't words, exactly. Or images. Those cropped up sometimes, yes, when necessary. At its fundament, though, the Hive was raw self meeting raw self, communication on a basic level. All the changelings connected to it, and many that had been enveloped by it at their deaths, shifted and tumbled and understood each other in a vast ocean that somehow, itself, had gained an ancient, indecipherable intelligence.

Chrysalis sighed as the hive mind swirled around her. There weren't words, just... worry. Concern. They wanted to know if she was okay. They wanted to know why she had, very abruptly, cut herself off almost completely and charged right toward the heart of ponykind. They wanted to know what had happened, whether they could help.

She'd ignored it for two weeks. The concern had gotten stronger.

Finally, she had politely excused herself back to the swarm's abode-Twilight had mentioned she spent a loop as the Changeling Queen so she understood the pressures of the Hive-and simply sat in her chambers. Then she let her memories flow.

There was... some confusion. Some. But it faded quickly.

There weren't words, but if there were the hive would be saying that she should have told them sooner so that they could comfort her.

The drones approached gently, nuzzling at her as she once more sobbed...

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey there Chrysalis, Fluttershy wanted to know if...  
you..."<p>

Twilight stared.

In the centre of the room was Chrysalis, Queen of the Changelings...  
and Shining Armor.

And Shining Armor.

Aaaaaand Shining Armor.

And, oh look, Shining Armor.

And, yet again, Shining Armor

And, of course, Shining Armor.

...and Shining Armor.

Shining Armor was there as well.

Twilight recognized her brother amongst the crowd.

The captain of the guard looked back at her.

A white unicorn with a blue mane had frozen at her  
entrance.

Cadance's beau coughed, awkwardly.

Chrysalis held up a hoof. "I swear, this wasn't my idea."

Twilight nodded, slowly.

"...Look, the hive mind was worried and I let them know what was  
going on and one thing led to another-

"I see."

"It's not like we did anything serious!" the changeling queen  
reassured her. "We just cuddled!"

"I understand."

Chrysalis would have been sweating bullets if changelings had sweat  
glands. "Come on, after what I've been through I think I deserve a  
coping mechanism that doesn't involve alcohol!"

The unicorn shrugged. "You may have a point."

"I'm sorry, okay? I just... I was weak, and I'm sorry, and-"

A purple hoof cut her off. Twilight was giving her a sympathetic  
look. "Hey. I know how it feels to lose somepony you love to the  
loops. I've been awake for, oh, who knows how long now. I get it, you  
messed up, and... well, I'm a little bit annoyed that this happened  
and I'm going to keep it for blackmail but really, it's not nearly as  
bad as it could have been."



Chrysalis drooped. "I don't know how you can possibly forgive me for this."

"You need to have a chat with Nyx the next time you're both Awake."

"Huh?"

The unicorn giggled. "Nope, not spoiling the surprise. Seriously though... Trust me. You're in the clear for now, okay? We can keep this our little secret for now."

Chrysalis took a moment to compose herself. "I... thank you, Twilight Sparkle. I hope to prove your trust is not misplaced."

"I'm sure that you'll succeed. By the way, you ever do this again and I will let Pinkie \_have her way with you.\_"

The changeling queen gulped. "Understood." The sheer storm of emotions coming from that particular pony had nearly convinced her the world was ending.

\* \* \*

><p>29.5<p>

"Okay, that looks goodâ€|" Fluttershy whispered, looking the latest attempt over closely. "Can you swivel them?"

Chrysalis crossed her eyes, and the small cat ears which were replacing her normal ones obediently moved first left, then right.

"Good." Fluttershy nodded. "Looks like you got the muscles down properly. Now, erâ€| I had an idea for a prankâ€|"

The Changeling Queen looked at Fluttershy. "Let's hear it, then."

"Well, erâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>"Be on watch," Luna reminded her sister. "We have heard that there is an evil abroad in the land."<p>

"I am, Luna," Celestia assured her. "I am ready for anything. Nothing will interfere with this wedding."

Luna swung her telescope groundwards. "Who might that be?"

Celestia stepped up to the railing. "Iâ€| don't know."

\* \* \*

><p>"Ohayo!" came a bright, cheerful voice.<p>

Cadence looked over. "Who are you?"

"Oh, gomennasai." The pony she was addressing looked terribly

downcast, and her ears flattened against her head.

\_Wait, they did what?\_ Cadence looked closer.

The pegasus in question had ears that were distinctly feline.

"Oh!" As Cadence looked, the ears perked up again. "Oh, ah— can I have your autograph, Cadence-chan?"

The princess of love blanked. "Pardon?"

That didn't seem to dissuade the strange pegasus, who thrust a notebook and quill into her hooves. "Please?"

Numbly, Cadence scribbled down her signature and offered it back to the black-coated pegasus, whose face lit up.

"Ariagato!" The cat-pony shot off, practically bouncing along the corridor.

Cadence turned to Twilight, who was stuffing a hoof into her mouth to avoid laughing. "What just happened, Twilight?"

Slowly and carefully, Twilight took a deep breath. When she was sure of being able to speak without giggling, she began.

"I think that was probably a Neighponese fangirl," Twilight explained. "You can tell by the cat ears."

From down the corridor came the sound of a fairly successful glomp, and some shouting from Rainbow Dash.

"I'll go sort that out," Twilight excused herself.

She supposed that, on balance, it was probably a good sign if Chrysalis was able to do this kind of thing.

\* \* \*

><p>29.6 (Anowack)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle had a list.<p>

Actually, she had lots of lists, but somewhere between The Official Summer Sun Celebration Overseer's Checklist (version three, from a loop where Celestia had complicated the usual scenario with a truly inordinate fondness for carrots, heavy metal music, thunderstorms, and clashing color combinations) and The Official List of Things Looping Pinkie Pie Is Not Allowed To Do Volume XXIV, was a list of experiments to run, experiences to seek out, and pranks to play when the loops allowed. Twilight being Twilight, this list was neatly sorted and cross-indexed by the prerequisite fellow Loopers and loop conditions.

So, when Twilight found herself in a baseline loop with a start point prior to the Sonic Rainboom with Rainbow Dash Awake, she was quickly able to remind herself of what she wanted to try.

Twilight Sparkle wanted to earn a cutie mark. Specifically, she wanted a different cutie mark. She'd attempted this before, but time and time again had only received her own starbust mark. (She had looped into alternate selves with different marks a few times, but that didn't count.) This time, though, Twilight had a special \_sub\_list of steps to prevent many of the pitfalls she had encountered in past experiments.

Step One, asking Rainbow Dash to not do a sonic rainboom, was necessary because Twilight had found that, if her many-colored friend performed one close to the appropriate time, no matter what precautions Twilight took, it would trigger a magical surge and her normal cutie mark. This required only a promise to arrange a \_sextuple \_sonic rainboom the next time everypony was Awake in a baseline loop early enough in the timeline.

Step Two was to prevent her parents from applying her for entry to the School For Gifted Unicorns. This loop was early enough, thankfully, that all it would take would be to "lose interest" in the obsessive magical studies her pre-loop self had just begun, and find something non-magical to occupy herself with over the summer. Probably pranking Cadance and Shining Armor, if they weren't Looping. Seeing them with adult eyes, it was always hilarious how desperate they were to hide their budding relationship from both Twilight and her parents.

Step Three, enjoy a life as an ordinary unicorn filly (or at least as "ordinary" as one being foalsat by an alicorn princess could be), avoid magic as much as possible, start school in the fall, and see what happened.

It was a simple plan. Nothing could possibly go wrong.

\* \* \*

><p>Upper East Canterlot Elementary was not much like the School For Gifted Unicorns or even that most terrible of tortures, Magic Kindergarten. For one, there were earth ponies and pegasi attending, though they were a minority of the herd of students. For another, Twilight Sparkle was neither the famous personal student of the Princess, nor a bullied outcast who couldn't control her weak magic.<p>

It was actually rather refreshing to just be a background face in the crowd, and for the first few months of class Twilight just drifted while pondering what kind of cutie mark to seek out, carefully doing just well enough in classes to be counted as a good student, but not enough to make a name for herself as exceptional. She made many acquaintances but no friends, but also no enemies. There was still a sizable enough mass of students in her year without cutie marks that her own blank flank normally attracted no comments.

Today was one of the exceptions, but not due to the (sadly for the most part inevitable) bullying that late blank flanks endured. During P.E., Twilight had â€" quite accidentally â€" managed to score the winning goal in a game of hoofball, from over halfway across the field. Her own team, half the opposing side, and even the coach, had immediately clustered around her, and the groans of disappointment as they'd found her lavender fur unmarked had been audible.

While it would have technically met her goals, Twilight Sparkle could not be disappointed that she'd failed to reveal a special destiny of being good at kicking balls into nets. She was certain there were ponies that would find that a happy and fulfilling hobby, but it wasn't really her. Which was probably why she was still a blank flank, actually. Twilight had been so focused on avoiding anything that even hinted of magic that she'd deliberately avoided doing pretty much anything she loved. She wasn't going to get a cutie mark that way.

As she headed home (P.E being the final class of the day for her class section), Twilight was lost in thought. Maybe she should start showing her enjoyment of reading and aim for a librarian cutie mark, she wondered as she turned a corner, or would it be better to try new things and find something she didn't know she enjoyed yet? Then she stopped dead. Somepony was following her! Why would anypony do that?

"Come out, whoever you are!" Twilight yelled, glancing up at the trees that lined the narrow cross-street she usually took on her way home.

Not completely surprisingly, it was one of her classmates who came down to street level in clumsy, hesitant flight.

"Um... hi?" the orange pegasus colt said awkwardly as he landed in front of Twilight, his wings closing on his sides.

Twilight glared at him for just a moment. "Flash Sentry, right?" she asked. That had actually been a surprise, that the stallion who frequently became the captain of her guard when she became a Princess had grown up in the same neighborhood as her.

"Yes?" he said nervously, shifting away a little, like he was about to bolt. Whatever he might become in the future, right now he was still a little blank flank colt that she'd caught stalking her.

Twilight decided to just raise an eyebrow.

Flash Sentry shifted again before answering the unspoken question. "You ran off so fast after P.E., Twilight. I just... I wanted to let you know I think you're really -" He stopped suddenly, turned bright red, and started stammering. "I... I... mean I... I wanted to say I thought that kick was really awesome, that's all!"

Twilight was only able to hold her stern expression for a moment before she started to giggle. Okay, the stalking was a bit creepy, maybe, but it was almost certainly innocent, and more importantly adorable. Maybe a little harmless schoolyard romance was just the thing to make her push her limits and find something unmagical to...

That was when somepony rammed into her from behind. Twilight let out a surprised yelp as she stumbled forward into Flash Sentry, sending both of them tumbling over.

"Excuse me," the filly behind them said, choking back a sob and pushing past the two young ponies, her eyes fixed on the

ground.

"Hey, wait!" Flash Sentry called out as he stood, disentangling himself from Twilight.

Twilight rose as well, studying the pink-maned white unicorn, tall for her age, who had stopped dead a yard or so away. It took only a moment to place her as a student in the same year but another class. "Your name is Fleur, right?" she asked. Another pony she remembered from other loops, though only vaguely. She became friends with Rarity sometimes, didn't she?

Fleur just nodded, not even turning to face Twilight and Flash.

"Are you okay?" the pegasus asked worriedly. "It sounded like you were cry-"

"Shut \_up!\_" Fleur interrupted. "What do you care? Leave me alone and go back to flirting with the hoofball star!"

Flash Sentry took a step back, his wings flapping wildly. "It... it isn't like that! Twilight, I swear -"

Twilight ignored him for the moment, walking past him and up to Fleur. "Blue Belle, right?" she asked. Schoolyard politics were not terribly hard for her to sort out, though they actually were more mature than the adult version sometimes.

For the first time, Fleur turned her head back to look at Twilight. "Yes, all right?" she snapped, while she talked revealing silver braces on her teeth. "She called me an ugly, clumsy blank flank who can't trot five steps without tripping over her own four hooves, and I want to go off and cry about it like the crybaby I am, so just \_go away\_."

Flash Sentry looked angry, and Twilight decided to say something to derail the train of thought she was almost certainly going through his mind before he said or did something stupid. "We're all blank flanks," Twilight said quietly, slowly stepping closer to the other filly, "and..." she trailed off, then with an exaggerated glance back at Flash pressed against Fleur and whispered in her ear, "if my brother's magazines are any sign, in a few years the colts will find long legs \_very \_attractive."

Fleur blushed, the scarlet flush easily visible through pale fur. "Shut up," she said, though far less harshly, though she still stepped away. "That's gross."

Flash Sentry looked confused. "What did you say, Twilight?"

Twilight giggled, and after a moment Fleur joined her. Twilight offered a hoof. "I'm Twilight Sparkle," she introduced herself.

Fleur gingerly touched hooves, giving a weak shake. "Fleur Dis Lee," she said.

Not to be left out, the lone colt offered, "Flash Sentry."

Twilight glanced at her two companions, a thought occurring. Well,

for the parallel to be exact she'd have to turn Flash into a filly and Fleur into an earth pony, but those were minor details. A wicked grin appeared on her face. "I have an idea..."

Fleur looked nervous. "What?"

"We're all blank flanks, aren't we?" Twilight asked, and started to explain. As she did, Fleur's eyes widened and Flash started to grin. "...and we could form our own secret society!" Twilight finished excitedly.

"It needs a name, though," Fleur observed, her distress apparently forgotten in the wake of Twilight's proposal.

"Triple Cutie Threat!" Flash Sentry proposed.

The two fillies shared a look and a giggle, then Twilight smiled. Trademarks didn't persist between loops, so she might as well go all the way. "The Cutie Mark Crusaders."

\* \* \*

><p>When the three young ponies knocked on the door of Twilight's home a couple hours later, Twilight's mom gave them one look, then sent them around back to rinse off with the garden hose before coming inside.<p>

"That kind of tree isn't even supposed to have this much sap," Twilight said sourly as she pretended to struggle with her magic to loosen the stuck valve and turn the water on.

"And we're banned from every bowling alley in Canterlot!" Fleur wailed. "It's terrible."

"Let me get it," Flash said, reaching for the valve. Twilight let him have it. "It was a lot of fun, though," he said, grunting as the stubborn metal refused to budge.

"Yeah," Fleur said softly. "It was. I... I really liked it. Thank you."

Twilight smiled. "What are friends for?" she offered.

"Are we friends?" Fleur asked.

Flash glanced at her. "Of course we are," he said, sounding confused that it was even a question. Twilight just grinned and nodded.

Fleur was still a moment, then suddenly engulfed the other two in a hug.

"Hey!" Flash protested, struggling a little to get free.

Twilight just returned the hug, smiling. Even if the experiment failed "again" this loop would be worth it just for the chance to make new friends.

There was a familiar tingling on her side, and Fleur gasped suddenly.

"Wow, Twilight," Flash said. "You're really good at this whole earning cutie marks thing!"

Twilight started to wrestle herself free. "What is it?" she demanded, and when she finally could she twisted her head around to see for herself.

A familiar starbust stared back at her, and Twilight froze. How? She hadn't been doing anything even remotely magical... \_oh\_. "Ponyfeathers," she swore, drawing a scandalized gasp from Fleur and a puzzled look from Flash.

Ignoring the two for a moment, Twilight planted her hoof in her face. It was something she, of all ponies, should never have forgotten to take into account.

"What's wrong with it, Twilight?" Flash asked.

Twilight groaned before answering, not that he was likely to understand. "Friendship \_is\_ \_magic\_."

\* \* \*

><p>29.7<p>

"Right." Applejack looked across the kitchen counter. "Ready?"

"Sure!" Pinkie chirped.

They both looked down at the ingredients strewn all over the kitchen. Apples, flour, milk, apples, sugar, apples, a little chocolate, apples, apples, yeast, apples, eggs, butter, cinnamon and apples.

"We're gonna get this whole buffalo business sorted out once and for all," Applejack said grimly. "Nowâ€¦ go!"

Pinkie grabbed a whisk and poured the flour, some of the sugar, the eggs and some butter into the bowl. "Working on the pastry, cap'n!"

"Gotcha," Applejack replied, picking up a knife and getting to work on the apples, the apples and the apples. "Pass me that cinnamon, would'ya?"

"Sure!" Pinkie spun her head as she worked, which flipped the cinnamon into the air. It bounced off the ceiling, the lid came off, and just enough cinnamon to flavour the apples spilled onto them before it hit the workbench and the lid landed right back on top of it again.

Applejack blinked. "Okay, how'd y'all do that?" she mumbled around the knife handle.

Pinkie shrugged, still enthusiastically mixing.

"Eh, whatever." After a suspicious look, Applejack got back to the apples.

\* \* \*

><p>Slowly and reverently, Pinkie withdrew the baking tray from the oven.<p>

Resting on it were six Apple-Pie Apple Pies.

With a series of \_thuds\_, two of the Crusaders and Winona crashed into the side of the house.

"Guess you like the smell, do ya?" Applejack said, leaning out the window. "Hey, where's Scootaloo?"

"Dunno," Sweetie replied, standing still and sniffing at the delicious aromas coming out of the window.

Then there was the sound of a crash on the roof.

"I'm okay!" Scootaloo shouted. "But my hang glider isn'tâ€| wow, that smells \_good\_."

"They ain't for you," Applejack said sternly. "Maybe the next batch, but not this one. These are gonna head off a war."

\* \* \*

><p>"So." The buffalo chief stared across a table at his opposite number. "You wish to bargain with us?"<p>

"We do," Silver Star answered. "We would prefer peace to war."

"You think you are the only ones?" Thunderhooves shrugged. "But no matter. Posturing will not bring peace."

Applejack sidled up to the table. "Ah think it might calm tempers if y'all had some food while you're negotiatin'."

"Sounds good," Silver Star said. "What is it?"

"Apple Pie." Applejack trotted over to a cart and took two covered dishes from it. Putting them in front of the dignitaries, she swept the covers off in one motion.

Then she noticed Pinkie had got out a banjo, and tackled her before she ruined everything.

"Thisâ€| smells good," Thunderhooves said slowly, looking down at the Apple Pie.

Then, as though on an invisible signal, both he and Silver Star dove into their Pies.

Thirty seconds later, they were done.

"That was \_very\_ good," the sheriff said, licking his lips. "Erâ€| are there any more?"

Applejack and Pinkie exchanged glances. Then looked around at the large, curious herds of buffalo and ponies.



"We may have made a teensy amount too fewâ€|" Pinkie suggested. "I suggest we run."

Applejack nodded solemnly. Then both of them broke into a gallop, headed for the train line.

"Well, on the bright side, at least they're not fighting any more!" Pinkie said chirpily.

"Yay," Applejack deadpanned. "Next time, we make as many of 'em as we can fit in a train!"

\* \* \*

><p>29.8<p>

"I can't believe this," Rarity said, shaking her head.

"Really?" Spike replied, blinking. "\_This\_ is becoming a big deal?"

"Of course it is!" Rarity frowned. "This is a very importantâ€| issueâ€|"

She trailed off.

"On balance, the fact that you keep eating the spoons isn't all that major," she allowed. "But I don't like your blithe dismissal of my concerns."

"Soâ€| I'm right, but you don't like how I was right?" Spike checked.

"Not quite. You should give my opinions the weight they deserve."

"Again, what I was saying, but casting me in a more negative light. That's got \_me\_ annoyed now." Spike tapped a claw on the floor. "Okay, look. We're just going to keep finding excuses to snarl at one another if we don't work this off. I suggest the Frozen North. Two hours, full battle rattle, first one unconscious has to wash up."

Rarity looked over at her sink, despite herself. "There's nothing \_to\_ wash up."

"Which is why I'm going to let Pinkie Pie make a making up cake in here," Spike replied with an evil grin.

"You wouldn't!" Rarity gasped.

Spike waved a paw. "On reflectionâ€| I think I would, actually."

"Spike, if you \_dare-\_"

"Well, you'd better beat me, then, hadn't you?" he challenged. "I mean, if you do, then the net result is cake."

Rarity scowled.

\* \* \*

><p>"Why am I involved in this?" Twilight asked, seemingly to herself.<p>

"In case we are both knocked out and need to be transported back to Ponyville," Spike replied, now about fifty feet long.

"And so that you can bear witness that I've won," Rarity added. She had her wings out, and was wearing something made out of woven diamond and magic, which still bore the faint proof-scarring from when she'd tested it.

By jumping between Chrysalis and Celestia's beam war at the Canterlot Wedding.

"Okay." Twilight rolled her eyes. "Seriously, can't you two have normal couples' spats?"

"No," the other two replied in unison.

"Right. Okay, the rules are, nothing fatal. Though given what you two are like, I didn't need to tell you anywayâ€| go!"

Twilight slammed up a bunker shield, and watched the fireworks.

\* \* \*

><p>"Ooohâ€|" the population of Manehattan breathed, watching some particularly energetic northern lights.<p>

"Aaaahhhâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Luna opened the door to her bedroom, ready for a well-earned day's rest.<p>

Then she paused.

"Sister? Didst thou install a dragon in mine room when I was not looking?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilightâ€|" Celestia said, her voice slightly strained, "Why is Spike asleep in my sister's bedroom? For that matter, why is he fifty feet long and covered in scorch marks?"<p>

Behind them, Luna poked at the slumbering dragon with the butt of a guard's spear. Occasionally, she muttered something under her breath.

"It's a long story," Twilight said weakly. "Luna's bedroom was the best place I could find for them to sleep it off."

"Them?"

"Aha!" Luna said, with an air of triumph in her voice. "I have found

another interloper!" Then her tone changed. "I was aware of Cadence, but her cutie mark is not much like the one you vouchsafed to me. That is a diamond repeated three times, not the Crystal Heartâ€|"

Twilight shook her head. "Okay, I'll start from the beginning. Can you send for cocoa? This could take a while."

\* \* \*

><p>Barely-within-rating omake (Stainless Steel Fox):<p>

Omake

Rarity stirred, and snuggled against Spike's neck. "Ohhh Spike! You're so strong and tough. I love the way your scales shine like diamonds when you swoop..."

The big dragon rumbled happily, shrinking down a couple of age categories until he was Big Mac sized. "I have the most beautiful and most amazing filly in the world as a girlfriend. Have I told you how incredibly sexy you are when you're angry?"

"Oh Spike!" "Oh Rarity!" "Oh brother!"

The pair suddenly realised they weren't alone and stopped what looked to be the start of an epic makeout session.

"Twilight?" Rarity looked up, and noticed the purple unicorn standing there, and behind her, Princess Luna and Celestia. "Eep!"

She hauled up the bedsheets around herself, noticing for the first time that they had Luna's cutie-mark. "This isn't what it looks like!"

"Actually it sort of is..." admitted Spike.

\* \* \*

><p>29.9 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Mellon Collie and the Infinite Pinkness<strong>

Applejack took a deep breath and ran a hand through his short-cut hair. There were at least two things wrong with that sentence in his opinion, but the universe seemed to care even less than usual. "Alright, let's review. Twilight, yerâ€| what exactly?"

The rather short girl adjusted her glasses. "A humanoid interface for the Integrated Data Thought Entity."

Applejack's local memories offered a literary reference she didn't recognize. That seemed to be a habit this Loop. "Right, an' that is?"

"Basically, imagine the end result of a Loop if Apple Bloom were the

Anchor."

After pondering this for a moment, Applejack asked, "So mah baby sister's gonna invent magic?"

Twilight frowned. "Well, it's not magic so much as manipulating the metadata of existence throughâ€"

"Right, magic." Applejack turned to the other boy in the group. "Rarity, yerâ€"

"Elusive in this context, dear."

It just wasn't fair, Applejack thought. Even when they were both stallions, Rarity was still prettier. "Right. \_Elusive\_, yer still sort of a unicorn?"

This got a nod. "Yes, but my magic only works in certain locations. 'Closed spaces,' as they're called."

"An' we ain't in one."

Elusive's mild grin shifted to utmost seriousness. "Believe me, Applejack, if we were in a closed space, you'd know."

"Er, right. Good to know." Applejack shifted focus to Fluttershy. He wasn't afraid. It just seemed prudent. If there was an element of haste, it was simply to get this review over with all the faster. "Now, Shy, yer a time traveller?"

Fluttershy nodded. "From classified information years in theâ€| oh." She blushed. "Sorry. This is a very powerful mental block. I'd have to Ascend to bypass it."

The idea was tempting, but Applejack shook his head. "Let's save that 'til we really need it." He moved to the last person in the room. "Rainbow, yer a mob boss's daughter?"

"Apparently." Dash grinned, revealing rather prominent canines. "Whoever I am doesn't normally hang out with you guys, but that's not gonna stop me."

"Wouldn't have it any other way, sugarcube." Applejack frowned. "And meanwhile, here Ah am, not so much as a scrap of magic t' mah name."

Twilight gave a puzzled frown. "What are you talking about? You can still earthbend, access your dimensional pocket, Ascendâ€"

"Far as mah memories go, Ah mean."

"Oh." The interface had the decency to blush. "Sorry."

"And then there's Pinkie Pie," noted Elusive.

The door to the club room slammed open. Speak of the Nightmare, thought Applejack, and she will appear.

Hand on her hips and smile on her face, Paizumiya Pinkuhi stood proudly in the doorway. "Hello, SOS-Dan! Are you ready to find the

impossible?"

The five humans stared at their friend, knowing that the question was entirely rhetorical. No matter what they said, she'd browbeat them into helping her saving the world by overloading it with fun. Even if she couldn't do it directly, subconscious reality distortion would make it so.

Twilight broadcast a message to the other Awakened members of the brigade through something distinct from telepathy in ways only she cared about. \_I can honestly say I have never been more terrified in my entire existence.\_ The others could only nod.

Pinkie took this as assent. "Great! Hope you're all ready, 'cause I've got a big, big itinerary planned. Kyon, you're paying."

Applejack sighed. Ascension was looking more and more appealing.

\* \* \*

><p>29.10 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity eyed the pink-coated pony that Rainbow Dash had awoken as in this loop, took a deep breath and asked, "Why?"<p>

"Why what?" Rainbow Dash, still a pegasus but now in the body of Firefly, asked innocently as she hovered in the air.

Rarity, now Sparkler, just stared accusingly.

Firefly sighed and broke, "Fine, I made a mistake. Ancient proto-Equestrian alternate history was never my strong suit in school. What was I supposed to think? Besides, even without going all ascendant alicorn on his flank, we're all more than a match for that Tirak by ourselves. Look at me! I was awesome before, but now I'm so fast I can rip holes into other dimensions. You have even more affinity for jewels and stuff than you used to."

"It's galled gemomancy; and yes, as Sparkler, I find that I can control them to a much higher degree," Sparkler said as she casually ripped out a sizable emerald shard out of the earth and sent it streaking into and through a nearby oak tree. "That still doesn't excuse what you did."

Firefly swallowed heavily, "Come on! Look at what Pinkie Pie has become. She's up there flapping around as Surprise and shouting something about legendary super saiyans. Applejack may look the same, but she seems even stronger than she was before."

Applejack tried to walk over to Firefly, but instead stumbled into a nearby sizable tree - knocking it down.

"Why the hay am I so clumsy in this form?"

Pinkie Pie in the form of Surprise was suddenly there, giggling and pointing towards the orange pony, "Because you are a silly pony, Applejack. A very silly pony."

Applejack snorted in annoyance, "That's not even a real answer."

Firefly/Dash continued, "Posey is an earth pony, so she's even more in tune with all those forest critters than Fluttershy was, no matter how impossible that seems. And Twilight. Twilight's special talent is now being a bucking reality warper only a few levels below Discord. Once she pulls herself together, she'll have infinite wishes."

Sparkler looked over at the unicorn, who was lying on her side in a miserable ball, "What is wrong with her?"

Twilight wailed in answer, "I look just like my mother!"

"Technically if this world does evolve into the Equestria we know, you are probably your own great, great, great, great, etcetera grandmother!" Surprise stated happily as she flew off.

"Er, right," Firefly said, "So extra dimensional saviour or not, it doesn't matter. Besides, what would a pony like Firefly think? She punches a hole into another dimension looking for a saviour. The world is in peril. Time is critical. Who was she going to choose? A strange monkey-ape thing that she's never seen before, or this strong stallion?"

"He is just a common human-world horse. He's not even sentient!" Sparkler pointed to the brown equine. Said 'hero' was currently grazing happily. "How did you even carry him here?"

"It wasn't easy. Whatever. Look, I'm going to go punch a hole into an unpleasant dimension and toss that stupid looking centaurian abomination into it. I mean really? Darkness that lasts forever? Been there, done that, kicked it's flank. Come join the party if you want."

"Oh, oh! Me! I want to join the party!" Surprise shouted as she flew after Firefly, followed by a smiling Posey/Fluttershy as she rode on the back of an armoured bear who was at the head of an entire waddling contingent of honey badger cavalry.

Applejack gathered up Twilight and together they stumbled towards what would probably be the very brief and very final confrontation with Tirak.

Sparkler watched them leave, briefly contemplating how her pale blue coat made her even more of a winter. As she started off after her friends, she gave one last look at the oblivious human world stallion, "Ugh. You better not be the reason for how the Saddle Arabians developed."

TJ, the brown horse idly flicked his ear at the odd pony before continuing to ignore everything that wasn't grass or a threat.

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile on her family farm in the human dimension, Megan stood around in a daze. Earlier, a wondrous rainbow-looking rift opened up

and a magical talking pegasus pony flew in, said she needed someone to help save her world from a monster; and before Megan could volunteer in what would surely be as grand and exciting an adventure as any teenage girl could dream of, the pegasus grabbed TJ, her horse, and flew off.<p>

"Sis, what are you doing here? You've been out here for hours. Where's TJ?" Her sister, Molly, asked as she came near.

Megan slowly turned her head towards her sister, "I don't want to talk about it. Not ever."

\* \* \*

><p>29.11<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The pegasus looked around. "Okay, where the hell am I now? Donald, was this your doing?"<p>

A unicorn trotted unsteadily over. "Wasn't me," he said, with a slight rasp to his voice. "I thought it was your clothes."

"Nope." The pegasus shrugged. "How are you doing with walking?"

"It ain't easy." Donald tripped and nearly faceplanted. "At least you've got wings, Sora. And experience at being four legged!"

"Hey, that's a point." Sora spread them, and flailed at the air until he was aloft. "I'll go look for Goofy."

"Sure, whateverâ€|" Donald sat back, trying to work out how his magic had changed. And, for that matter, how to hold his staff.

\* \* \*

><p>"Huh, new Loopers," Twilight said, as Dash finished describing them. "Well, I don't recognize them from the description. One of each type?"<p>

"Yep, same as usual." Dash nodded. "Strange thing is, only the pegasus is finding, well, walking easy. And even he moves more like Gilda."

"Really?" Twilight nodded. "Huh. Interesting. Well, I'd better go and meet them. Go let Princess Luna know, I think she's Awake."

"Aye aye, Twi!" Dash saluted, and vanished in a \_crack\_ of displaced air.

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, rightâ€|" Sora said, looking up. "So this is where <em>you<em> came from."

"It is indeed," Luna replied. "You would be Sora, yes?"

"That's right." The pegasus crossed his eyes, and a keyblade flashed into being between his teeth. "\_There\_ we go, I've been trying to get

that to work all morningâ€¦" he added in a mumble.

"You know him?" Twilight asked, interested.

"I Replaced one of the people from his Loop once," Luna explained. "That was the same Loop wherein little Nyx did my job."

"Oh, yes, the sideways moon incident," Twilight said, nodding. "Yes, you did tell me about that place. Keys, wasn't it?"

"Pretty much." Sora concentrated, and the keyblade flashed between a dozen different forms. "I've got a \_lot\_ of choice by now. Anyway, what's your world like?"

"Mostly peaceful, actuallyâ€¦" Twilight said, shrugging. "We can handle most of the villains who show up just fine. Though, actuallyâ€¦" she trailed off, a grin spreading across her face.

"What?" Luna asked, seeing it.

"I was wondering how Sombra would react to being hit by a Keyblade." Twilight shrugged. "Should be interesting."

\* \* \*

><p>29.12 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Vice principal Luna had called Twilight in and showed her the pictures of her wrecking the Fall Formal. However, this time she wasn't going to stand there and let the Vice principal steamroller right over her.<p>

"Vice Principal Luna. I can state absolutely that these things never happened, and that these photos are as fake as something very fake. I can account for my movements the whole day, and most of the time I was even in the company of Pinkie Pie, the planner in charge of the Fall Formal. If I had wrecked it, she'd be the last po-person to give me an alibi. I assume the motivation you felt applied was that I tried to delay it to buy more time to win my bid to be Princess of the Fall Formal from Sunset Shimmer? If so then you are out of date. My friends and I have already done an end run around her and her friends Snips and Snails. If you took the votes right now, it would be Sunset Shimmer who would lose. You can check all this for yourself."

The Vice-principal looked at her sternly, but the teenager just stood there calmly, not defensive, just without a doubt.

"So how do \_you\_ account for these photos?"

Twilight took on a thoughtful attitude. "Well, there are three parts to it, method, means and motivation. Method and means are intertwined. The background is real, and so are the images of me, but the whole is not, so somehow, someone got photos of me doing something energetic, like the game of football I had with Rainbow Dash, and added my image over the real culprit. I can think of several ways, either using the school computer and image editing



software, or just cutting out a physical photo and running the altered image through a colour photocopier. So I'd ask my friends if they saw anyone taking photos of my game with Dash.

"As to motivation... Who would benefit most from destroying my credibility as a Fall Formal Princess entrant, and delaying the event to give themselves time to regain control of the vote? Someone who's already used sneaky tactics and disinformation to character assassinate me? If it was the same person who brought you those photos, I'd definitely find them suspect. Out of interest, who is my accuser?"

"Sunset Shimmer." Principal Luna's expression hardened.

"Maybe you should ask her how she got those photos, and why the person taking them didn't try to stop me instead of just collecting evidence."

There was a knock on the door. Flash Sentry came in and gave her the doctored photos.

"Vice Principal Luna. I found these in a trash can in the library. Thought you should see them. Someone obviously combined these photos to make it look like Twilight was the one who trashed the gym."

"I see. Well that is a point for your theory. Of course it also seems convenient that that evidence came to light..."

Twilight smiled. "A double bluff? Setting this up myself to make Sunset Shimmer look like the culprit? I did spend some time in the library, but my alibi still stands, and as I said, my friends did an amazing job of getting people on my side. I don't need complicated ploys or to take her out of the running. Simple honesty and bringing people together is a far better strategy than trying to cheat and con my way in. Like I said, take the vote right now, you'll see the truth. I suspect if you check the movements of Snips and Snails, Sunset Shimmer doesn't seem to be the sort to do her own dirty work, you will also see what's going on."

Vice-principal Luna nodded. "Very well. I am afraid enough damage has been done to the gym that we will have to postpone the dance until tomorrow night. If you will excuse me, I need to let my sister know about this latest development. And to ask some questions of Sunset Shimmer."

Twilight shook her head. "I will talk to Pinkie and see if we can get things together sooner than that. After all, I ran for Princess on a platform of helping out and coming together as a school, maybe I can get some people to follow up on that and help out."

As they left she turned to Flash Sentry. "Thank you! You have no idea how important this is to me"

He chuckled. "What was I gonna do? Not prove your innocence? Wouldn't be much of a Canterlot Wondercolt, would I? So, uh, I was wondering. If you aren't already going with somebody, wanna go to the Fall Formal with me tomorrow night?"

Twilight had no intention of hurting his feelings, even accidentally this time round. "It will be tonight, and yes, I would love to be

your date."

She turned to face him, hugged him and kissed him on the cheek. "If you have some free time, anybody you can round up to help fix the decorations would be good."

She had to giggle at the complete experssion of brain-lock this resulted in. "I'll see you later..."

As she turned around the end of the hall, she heard a "YESS!" and allowed herself another grin.

\* \* \*

><p>29.13<p>

"G4," Shining Armor said, playing a card on the table.

"Snap," Discord replied, playing his own. "And that brings my score to a multiple of seven."

"One hundred and eighteen isn't a multiple of sevenâ€|" Shining said uncertainly.

Discord pointed to one of the other cards in play. "Bad mathematics. Lets me adjust the result or input of a calculation up or down by one."

Cadence flipped back and forth through the rulebook. "So that meansâ€|"

Discord shifted a counter. "I put my own joker in check, and switch allegiances from Prance to the letter Q."

Celestia slammed a card down on the table. "Contingency card! I get the yellow marble."

"Then you have a beard," Luna pointed out.

"Drat, I do. That makes me vulnerable to the Queensburg Defence." Celestia examined the table. "Baker Street."

"East Ham," Luna replied.

"Mornington Crescent!" Cadence collected four cards from the others around the table, then played two of them. "I change history so that the horse collar was never invented, and that triggers a cascade which leads to me getting four extra Lands and a brand of cheese."

"Drat," Celestia said absently. "So much for my gambit. Luna, your turn."

"I'm cashing in my lands for an army," Luna said, shuffling them into the deck. "That lets me take two of Discord's lands and summon the Moon. Four turns until impact!"

Cadence helpfully moved the moon counter to the number four.

"Thank you. And now I'm going to purchase a manor at Trottingham,

which puts me on a double word score."

After looking at the result of that for a moment, Cadence drew a card. "Yes, it's my special! Crystal Heart, my holdings are immune to damage for the foreseeable future and so I trade across all my other defences for political power and waffles. Then I loot the room, which gives me treasure. Your turn, Shiny."

Shining Armor stared at his hand, then at the board. "I have no idea what is going on."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Three of these were actually moved from set 28 for space reasons.

>29.1: Yes, it is technically a storm. No, I have no idea how she did it.<br>29.2: Internal Hasbro crossover?

>29.3: Sometimes, the characters just take over and have their own conversation.<br>29.4: Some sights you will take with you to the end of time.

>29.5: Yes, this IS why I had Fluttershy teaching ears first.<br>29.6: D'oh!

>29.7: These aren't just apple pies. These are A&P Apple Pies.<br>29.8: Every couple fights sometimes...

>29.9: Be very glad Pinkie isn't Awake.<br>29.10: Perception is everything.

>29.11: Remember these guys?<br>29.12: All those things you wish you'd said the first time around.

>29.13: This is that card game Discord invented. I don't know either.<p>

## 30. Chapter 30

### 30.1 (Stainless Steel Fox)

\* \* \*

><p><span>More Turning the Tables (at long last)<span>

"Careful with that cabinet!" Prince Blueblood called out. "It's Chippendale!"

"I didn't know they went into furniture making after their detective career..." Pinkie Pie mused.

The size of the party would push the carrying capacity of Blueblood's yacht to its limit, so all non-essential equipment was being off loaded under the eyes and fussy attitude of the Prince. Inside the Town hall, Shining Armour passed a scroll to one of the pegasus guards and said, "Concorde, take this to Princess Cadence with all speed!"

"Yes sir!" The pegasus saluted and trotted out, flexing his wings.

Shining Armour turned to Twilight and asked, "Okay, so why have I just sent a message that may end up creating another evil

alicorn?"

"The notes I included should explain how Cadence could use her love magic to 'burn out' the taint of evil that the Alicorn Amulet casts on its wearer. Of course she doesn't have the theoretical background to understand them herself, unless she took a night school course I didn't hear about, but Spell Nexus or one of the senior lecturers at the school can help her put it into practice.

"At the moment it's only a theory, but even so, the Amulet doesn't turn you evil instantly. From my research it's insidious, slowly twisting your perceptions, but that means that it'll take a long time to affect some-pony as good and decent as Cadence. As long as she only puts it on when she confronts Nightmare Moon, and takes it off as soon as possible, she should be fine."

"I don't like the 'should'." Shining grimaced. "How did you come to be figuring out something like that anyway?"

"Research!" Twilight grinned triumphantly. "I came across it while I was studying artificing techniques. Obviously, I wondered how you could get the power boost without the mental problems, and thought of Cadence's power. Admittedly the whole thing is a 'Hail Celestia' play, but an alicorn with the amulet's power boost is about the only other thing I can think of that could stand up to Nightmare Moon. You remember what Von Clawschwitz, the griffon general once said?"

"'Better a dozen unneeded plans than one unmade one.'" Shining quoted. "Let's just hope it isn't needed."

He hadn't realised Twilight had retained so much of the studying she'd done while helping him to prepare for his commission exam. But then, his little sister had been surprising him ever since they'd met up again. He knew she was smart, not to mention powerful, but despite the breakdown she'd had, now she was demonstrating a confidence and ability he'd never seen before. These friends of hers must really be something.

"Okay, we're ready to go, guys!" Rainbow Dash appeared at the doorway. They emerged from the town hall and out from under the day-light bubble to find the final preparations for their journey had been made.

The 'Blueblood', named for the owner's grandfather, was a typical luxury air-racer. A sleek single deck hull, a dozen pony-lengths from bow to stern and a quarter that in the beam, it lacked the size of a full yacht like that of Fancy Pants. However its rakish lines and white and gold trim as well as the twin sets of powerful wing-sails at the stern screamed both style and speed, or would have done if it hadn't been far too sophisticated to do anything as gauche as scream.

The envelope above was three times the size of the gondola, and decorated as a gold dragon with its wings raised in mid-flight. It was filled with lift-gas from reserves stored in the keel, and its interior surface had heating spells that could be activated to increase lift. Magic also powered the heating and cooling charms that drove the closed cycle steam engine under the stern. While more expensive than a regular coal fired boiler, it was far lighter and

didn't require a stoker, both important factors on a small air-ship.

Blueblood was already at the controls, dressed in a natty billed cap and yachting blazer. The rear part of the open deck lacked a true poop deck, but it was raised a few hoofs from the sweep of the main part, with a chest high combing protecting the wheel. The other ponies trooped aboard, several having to go down into the long cabin that took up the balance of the interior that wasn't occupied by the engines and lift-gas reserves.

Big Mac was one of them, as the lower down his heavier wood body was the better it would be. Fluttershy had gone with him, her normal timidity around ponies apparently lessened by the fact that he had the appearance of a giant arboreal predator who could rip her to pieces with a single claw swipe (Fluttershy had issues). Applejack was also down below with her brother, and a saddlebag full of apples and other supplies.

Rarity was on deck, and dressed in her own yachting costume. She'd apparently had one made for a long time, and she was going to wear it for all it was worth while she had the chance. Pinkie Pie was bouncing around on deck too, zipping back and forth to examine everything, while Rainbow Dash wasn't even on deck but above it, ready to fly escort and looking impatiently at the last two ponies to board.

The gang-plank retracted as they stepped on deck, and Blueblood manipulated levers and hoof pedals. The wing-sails at the back began to flap in a complicated mechanical pattern, and the dirigible started to rise, very slowly, and move forwards at an equally arthritic pace. Rainbow Dash had started to fly off, and zoomed back when it didn't follow her.

"C'mon Blueblood, get the hail out! I thought you said that heap was fast!"

Blueblood stared up at the annoyed pegasus, matching her expression. "It is, and I'll thank you not to call the Blueblood a 'heap'! However, I normally don't have this many passengers. It's taking maximum heat to the gas-bag and additional thrust from the wing-sails to get us to rise at all, let alone make headway! And without some air speed, I can't angle the dragon wings to provide extra lift. We're too heavy!"

"I knew I shouldn't have had that extra slice of cake!" Rarity bemoaned. "Tell me Twilight, has it gone to my flanks?"

"You look fine to me." Twilight replied. "But we shouldn't be that over-loaded... Well, I guess we'll just have to give it some extra omph!"

"Oooh! Pinkie exclaimed, "I've never had had oomph before! What flavour is it?"

"Magic flavour!" Twilight grinned, and brought her horn down to touch the decking. A series of lines spread out from the tip, glowing as they etched a pattern into the wood.

"Careful!" Blueblood cried out. "That deck is made of Zebrican

teak!"

"I'm sure we can sand it out." Twilight replied without taking eyes or horn from the deck where an intricate ritual diagram had been burnt, with a triangle as the central figure. "If you still want to after you see what it does. Shiny, Rarity, could you stand at the other two points of the triangle?"

"Okay, Twily."

"Of course, dear... this won't hurt will it?"

Twilight stepped onto the final point of the triangle and her horn started to glow as she looked between the other two unicorns. "Not a bit, it shouldn't even prove tiring... can you feel my magic?"

"If you mean that fizzy, tingly sensation under my hooves, then yes!" Rarity looked surprised. "Yes, I can!"

"Try to match it, you too big brother!" The three unicorn horns started to glow, and the diagram lit up in sympathy, glowing lines that mixed the colours of the three horns. Blueblood saw every dial on his control panel slam over to the maximum peg, and the Blueblood seemed to leap forward under his hooves. Suddenly she was as fleet and nimble as she ever had been or even more so. His air-speed gauge showed she was doing twenty percent over her maximum.

"Woo hoo! Now that's more like it!" cheered Dash.

"Careful! I'm not sure the envelope can take it!" The dragon shell that decorated the gas bag was also a framework that added support, while the wings gave lift, making it more than a simple blimp, but Blueblood knew they weren't designed for this speed.

"It's okay, I'm diverting some of the power into a structural integrity spell." Twilight called back. "Or rather the rune-set is."

Pinkie Pie was already at the bow, standing on her hind legs with her fore-hooves outstretched. "Hey! I'm Princess of the world! Whee! Except for Celestia, and Cadence, and I guess Luna..."

"Goodness, I hardly feel as if I'm putting any effort in." Rarity said.

"It's the triune. The total power is far greater than the sum of its parts... rather like friendship." Twilight wasn't exactly lying. However, this was the perfect way to disguise the fact that she was putting in far more power than the other two. She could easily have carried the whole air-ship at even greater speeds if she tapped her full alicorn powers, and she really wanted to get this done.

They'd made a good start; they'd already gone out over the Everfree and covered an hour's walk in a few minutes. Twilight could even see that they were not far from the clearing where Zecora lived. A flock of birds rose from the trees below, startled by the passing air-ship... No, not startled, as they swarmed up around it, black raptor looking things with glowing green slit-pupil eyes...

Dash dived on the cluster coming up on one side and tried to scare

them off, but they ignored her, other than trying to catch her with their talons and sharp edged wing tips.

"Oh you want to do this the hard way? Fine!" Dash weaved and ducked the smaller creatures and lashed at one with a cloud-busting hoof. It connected, and the 'bird' poofed into black smoke.

"Eeek! Black Snooty!" Pinkie squeaked, but quickly recovered and pulled a long handled net from somewhere, sweeping it about to catch the birds.

"All hooves on deck!" Blueblood called out, reaching up and setting his billed cap at a rakish angle. "Prepare to repel boarders!"

Fluttershy and the Apple family members came storming up, crowding the deck, and both Applejack and Big Mac took a side, Applejack bucking out apples with pin-point precision and knocking the birds back, while Big Mac just demolished them with wide swipes of his claws.

"Please! Stop this, you don't want to get hurt..." Fluttershy tried to reach out to the birds, and recoiled with a whimper as she seemed to make contact with them. "They're not animals! They're... horrible!"

"Oh you did not pull that kinda horse-apples with Fluttershy!" Dash growled and flew over the top of the balloon to swoop down on the offending birds. However, it was clear that the gondola wasn't their main target. Bird after bird swept past the envelope, cruel claws and razor wings slicing at the fabric, creating rent after rent. The cuts healed as they were sealed back together with bursts of purple magic, but it couldn't quite keep up with the damage.

"I'm loosing lift!" Blueblood yelled, "I'm trying to compensate by feeding in more lift-gas, but my reserves are almost gone! Do something!"

The Blueblood started to sink and slow down despite the best efforts of the unicorns to support it. Dash and the others did their best to disperse the birds, but there were just too many of them. Twilight was once again trapped by her assumed role, but there were still things she could do. "Every-pony close your eyes!"

Seeing they had, Twilight's horn glow changed colour and brightened. Then it suddenly flashed with a burst of brilliant light the other ponies could feel as well as see through their closed eyes. There was a chorus of pained screeches as the entire area was lit to day-light brightness. The birds broke and fled, but the Blueblood had lurched sickeningly and dropped into a free-fall as she diverted her power into the solar flare spell and the power to the triune became unbalanced.

The ponies on deck grabbed onto whatever they could find, even Fluttershy, who grabbed onto Big Mac. All of them were screaming, though only Pinkie seemed to be enjoying herself. More importantly, Shining Armour and Rarity were lifted off the deck, out of contact with the diagram. Twilight decided she had to up her game and made her horn shimmer with layers of aura, duplicating how she'd once looked when hauling an Ursa Minor around by the scruff of it's

neck..

The entire air-ship was enveloped in a purple glow as it slowed down, and the ponies were lowered to the deck. The envelope above was half collapsed, the semi-rigid support structure far more semi than rigid and clearly doing nothing to support them. They watched in awe as Twilight floated above the deck, sparks flying from the tip of her horn. The vision of magical power unleashed spoke to them. "Uh... guys? A little help here?"

That had Shining Armour and Rarity leaping back to their posts. Twilight lowered herself down and re-established the triune. Rainbow Dash cajoled Fluttershy away from her grasp on Big Mac's giant wood form, and into helping her shove some clouds underneath the keel. Between them, they brought the Blueblood down relatively unscathed in the clearing Twilight had spotted earlier.

"Whooe!" Applejack exclaimed, "I knew you had power, I didn't know you had that much!"

"Let's do it again!" Pinkie whooped.

"That was most impressive." Rarity was checking over her costume to see the free fall hadn't carried away anything important.

Twilight blushed, partly from embarrassment at the success of her ploy. "It was a team effort, all of you helped. Besides, I couldn't let you all get hurt. I've hurt enough ponies already."

"My beautiful ship..." Blueblood was examining the collapsed balloon sorrowfully.

Twilight shook her head. "I'm sure it can be fixed up, and if it can't, I'm sure Princess Celestia will replace it. You've already gotten us a good part of the way... We were on course, weren't we?"

Blueblood sniffed, his depression forgotten at the questioning of his skills. "Of course, assuming those maps you found were accurate! We didn't have time to drift when those birds attacked."

"Those weren't birds. I think they were a manifestation of Nightmare Moon. We know she likes transformations." Twilight replied, looking over at timber-wolf Big Mac. "That's why I could drive them away with a solar flare spell."

"Oh great!" Rainbow exclaimed, "That means she knows we're here! Are we going to get more of those scary-crows?"

To be honest, Twilight wasn't sure. The changes she'd made had caused Nightmare Moon to react differently. However, she had a pretty good idea of the being's general mindset, and she could even justify her conclusions with in-loop knowledge.

"Not those most probably, but she will keep attacking. However, I don't think she'll come at us directly, and not for some time. From what Shining told me, and what we saw at the Town Hall, she doesn't have massive amounts of power in reserve, not if she wants to keep Princess Celestia bound, and strengthen the bindings to make them permanent.



"She seems to be a creature of illusions and deceptions, changing forms and twisting minds. Even that attack in the Town Hall was transmutation rather than a direct damage spell. She'll need to husband her power, building up a reserve to attack us each time, so we should have some respite. It's also likely she'll try and trick us, or attack us indirectly through a proxy, rather than wasting power with a direct magic attack."

She decided to pull in something else ahead of schedule. "Of course, now that we're down on the ground, I really wish we had a guide, some-pony who knows the hazards of the Everfree. No offense Prince Blueblood, but while I'm sure you can navigate, navigating it safely is another matter."

"Sugar-cube, no-pony knows what lives in the Everfree forest!" Applejack exclaimed.

"Because no-pony that goes in, ever comes out!" Rainbow Dash added, stalking across the deck and making Fluttershy squeak.

Twilight looked over at the far side of the clearing. Zecora's hut was just visible beyond a screen of trees. She pointed it out to the others. "Well some-pony lives here."

"That's crazy, who'd live in the..." Applejack went pale, "Zecora!"

All the Ponyville ponies shivered at the name. Blueblood and Shining Armour just looked confused.

"Okay, who is this Zecora, and why does she have you all so scared?" Twilight asked, as if she didn't know.

"Because she's eeeeevil!" Pinkie Pie said, waving her fore-hooves in the air.

"She's mysterious and scary..." Fluttershy added.

"All sinister in her cloak and stuff... Not that I'm scared of her, I'm just... worried, yeah worried about every-pony else!" Rainbow Dash added, though the way she had her wings wrapped around her demonstrated that whatever else, she wasn't the element of honesty.

"And she has an absolutely garish colour-scheme! Black and white stripes, can you imagine?" Rarity put in.

"She comes into town about once a month..." Applejack started, only to be corrected by Pinkie Pie. "... creeps evilly into town..." "... and hangs around the stores..." "... lurks around the stores..." "... and paws at the ground..." "... evilly paws at the ground..."

Twilight scratched the back of her neck with a hoof. "Still not seeing why every-pony's scared of her. Doesn't she buy anything at the stores?"

"Of course not! Every-pony closes up shop and hides when she comes into town!"

Twilight looked around at her friends. She hadn't liked this the first time she'd heard it, and it didn't get any better with repetition. She preferred to think the best of her friends, and this was them showing less than their best selves. "So no-pony's actually talked to her?"

There was a chorus of denials.

"Then how can you know anything about her? Wait... when you said black and white stripes, you didn't mean her clothing, did you?"

"No, she dyes her coat and mane that way." Rarity responded.

"Then she's a zebra." Twilight nodded as if confirming a theory.

"Is that some sort of evil spell-caster?" Pinkie asked.

"No, zebras are a race of ponies who live in Zebrica, a land far away to the south, far beyond the Macintosh mountains. They're most similar to earth-ponies with magic that relates to the earth and growing things. However their saganomas, a combination teacher/healer/mage have learned to use their earth magic to cast spells."

"So I was right!" The pink pony exclaimed.

Twilight shook her head. "Hardly, saganomas are if anything the opposite. Lacking a horn, they compound spells from magical herbs and plants, or use them as a base to invest their own earth magic. Their magic is all about healing, protection and enhancing living things."

"Then why is she always creeping about so creepily?"

"It sounds like no-pony's given her a chance to do anything else." Twilight tried to find a way to get through to them. She decide shock tactics might work best. Her horn glowed and she was suddenly zebra striped, with her mane and tail highlights white against black. The Ponyvillians flinched away, but some-pony else laughed.

"What's so funny?" Rainbow growled at Blueblood, who was the source of the laughter.

"Just that you Ponyville ponies can be just as judgmental and wrongheaded as Miss Sparkle claimed I was. It's refreshing, the light from your halos up until now was making me squint, and that does terrible things to the corners of one's eyes."

That got him annoyed looks from the six Ponyville residents until Twilight put in, "Pinkie, you know that it was your upbeat attitude and friendliness that helped me when I first arrived in Ponyville? I'm just glad I wasn't wearing this as a disguise, you'd have probably hidden under the counter or just bucked me back out."

Shining Armour spoke up. "I've got to admit I'm finding this a bit strange too. Zebras don't commonly come to Equestria, they don't even have a full time ambassador in Canterlot, but I've done escort duty

for their envoys before now. They're just another type of pony, nice enough folks, nothing to get worried about. Though I don't think I'd be too happy if I'd been treated the way you say she has."

Twilight turned to the others. "Guys, I know you're better than this, shunning some-pony just because she looks different!"

Applejack chipped in. "T'ain't so much that as the fact she lives in the Everfree. What sort of pony would do that?"

That got relieved agreements from most of them, and Twilight dismissed the disguise. She'd never actually explored why they were so scared of Zecora to this extent, and she was happy to know it was less that she looked different than where she lived.

"A saganoma, as I said earlier. The Everfree has the largest and weirdest range of magical plants and creatures in the world. Saganomas use magical plants in their spells, it might be enough to tempt one to come here and research them."

"Or she could be here because she was cast out because she was doing evil things..." Pinkie suggested. "I even wrote a song about it... 'She's an evil enchantrress! She something something prances... enhances... chances... Francis?'"

She came to a stumbling halt as she tried out rhymes. "Well I started a song about her. It's a work in progress!"

"Catchyâ€¦" Twilight sighed. "Y'know, it's possible you're right, not likely, but I suppose any-pony could go off the rails. Even so, we have to go find out. If she was evil, or even has been turned evil as Princess Luna was by Nightmare Moon... after all, the best of ponies would feel a little unhappy at being shunned like that, and from what I understand, that's exactly the sort of thing a Nightmare exploits... well anyway, if she's a threat we have to deal with her before we go on, or risk her attacking from behind while Nightmare Moon comes at us from the front."

Fluttershy shivered again and hid behind Big Mac. "Do we really have to?"

Oddly enough, it was Big Macintosh who answered her. "Eyup! Miss Sparkle's makin' a passel of sense. Better to meet Zecora now on our terms, than later on hers, I reckon. Besides, I always figured those tales about her were a heapin' helpin' of hooley."

Twilight tried to reassure her. "I'll approach her. I've studied zebra magic and know at least something about its capabilities and its limits. As long as I avoid getting hit by any potions or powders I should be fine. It's the same for every-pony else too. And it's not like we don't have magic of our own."

"Ohhh!" Pinkie exclaimed. "What if Nightmare Moon's granted her some of her power?"

"I should be able to sense that, I got a pretty good read on her magical signature back in Ponyville. But I doubt it, even if Zecora is in league with Nightmare Moon, the Nightmare isn't the sort to share power, not when she needs it herself so badly. Hopefully she's

just a regular pony and we can get her as a guide instead. That's how I intend to approach this."

"That's all well and fine, Twilight, but what's to stop her pretending to be all nice and then doing the dirty on us?" Applejack asked.

"You!" Twilight replied. "Or rather your element. The spirit of the element of honesty is within you, and if you focus on it, you should be able to detect whether she's telling the truth."

"I thought we needed those dinguses from that palace to use the Elements?" Applejack scratched the back of her head with a hoof.

"Uh huh, we need them reunited to activate their full power and create the sixth element, but the spirit already exists in you. Just concentrate on listening to everything that happens with a open and honest heart, and you should be able to sense the truth. I know it's a lot to ask for you to put aside your distrust of her, but I'm sure you don't want to see any-pony treated unfairly."

Applejack made a scrunchy face. "If'en you say so Twilight..."

The group got down from the air-ship deck and approached the hut, which was built into a tree. There was light coming from the window s and a thin trail of multi-coloured smoke issuing from a vent in one of the branches, and masks and vials of various concoctions hung from others.

Twilight gushed as they got nearer. "Oh my gosh! Real fetish masks! I've seen pictures, but the real thing... score one for the good guy theory, some are greetings, and some are specifically designed to ward off evil spirits. Quite powerful too, I can sense them from here. I don't know if they'd keep off nightmare Moon, but she'd have to work for it. Pinkie, looks like you were half right at least, she's definitely a saganoma, an enchantress."

The others clustered behind her as she called out. "Hello? Is any-pony home?"

There was no answer for a few moments, then a cloaked figure opened the door. The Ponyville ponies gasped or eeked as their natures led them, but Twilight stood firm. The figure pulled the cloak back to reveal she was Zecora. She spoke in a forbidding voice.

"Leave this place you pony strangers, the Everfree is full of dangers!"

"Unfortunately, we can't. I'm Twilight Sparkle. I believe you are Zecora?"

"You know my name but still come near me? Unlike these others, you do not fear me?" Zecora was questioning, now and sounded slightly surprised.

"Should I have reason to?" Twilight asked. "You're clearly a saganoma, and everything I know about them say they're healers and teachers, who use their powers to help others not hurt them."

Zecora smiled. "You know our ways and speak the truth, but your

companions clearly need more proof. When to the village I essay, every-pony runs away."

"I'm sorry you were treated like that, but I hope it won't prejudice you against my request. You've noticed the sun hasn't come up on schedule?"

"Even now I make a brew to scry the cause and what to do."

"I can help you there." Twilight explained what had just happened in Ponyville. She gave Zecora the hoof-clipping version of Nightmare Moon's origin, and how she was defeated the first time. She did a quick and very obvious scan spell to detect if Nightmare Moon was anywhere in the area (which also encompassed Zecora) before continuing.

"The only way to stop Nightmare Moon as far as we know is to find the Elements. According to our information the Palace of the Two Pony Sisters deep in the Everfree is the place to look. We were headed there by air-ship, but we were forced down. We will have to continue on hoof, but we need a guide, some-pony who knows the dangers of the Everfree and how to avoid them. Right now, the only pony who fits the bill is you."

The zebra looked thoughtful. "It's true those ruins I do know, and find the safest ways to go..." She glanced at the Ponyville mares. "...my presence though \_they\_ won't abide, a grave shortcoming in a guide."

Twilight Sparkle turned to look at the still nervous mare cast. "Guys, I've scanned the area, no signs of Nightmare Moon's contamination anywhere. And Zecora is willing to help us. I think we should at least say thank you. Applejack?"

The mare in question had done her best to quell her fear and listen to the exchanges. Twilight was setting great store by this element business, and while she was pleased by the complement, the farm mare wasn't exactly sold on the idea that she had some mystical magic power inside her... apart from the standard issue earth pony ones. However, Applejack had never been a quitter, and she prided herself on being dependable.

So she'd done her best to listen to what the striped mare was saying, and so far, it hadn't been anything like she'd expected. Her weird way of rhyming wasn't normal, but the words held little of the rancor she'd expected. Indeed, she sounded a lot like a younger version of Granny Smith, wise and self assured. Something inside Applejack resonated with that, made her want to trust the other mare, but she mentally shied back.

What if it was a trick, what about the stories... Now she thought back on them, her stubborn sense of integrity was worrying at them. How exactly had they started? She couldn't remember, but they were things every-pony knew... of course, Granny Smith always said 'If every-pony knows it, but no-pony can prove it, there's a good chance every-ponies wrong.'

She made a decision. It wasn't an easy decision, or a comfortable one, but it felt like the right one. "Ah apologise Miss Zecora. I normally have better manners. I'm Applejack and I'd be only too glad

to ask you to lead us through the forest." She looked over at the others. "Folks, I think we've been doing the lady a disservice, both here and in Ponyville. I intend to make amends. Miss Zecora, when next you come to town, please stop on by Sweet Apple Acres and I'll make you one of my special apple pies."

The zebra smiled. "Your change of heart is most insightful. The pie too would be most delightful."

Rainbow Dash shrugged and called down from where she was hovering. "I guess if Applejack thinks your on the level, I'm okay with it. I'm Rainbow Dash, Dash to my friends, awesome to every-pony else. Welcome aboard."

Rarity hesitated for a moment, then put on a warm smile. She'd been a part of the gossip, but she knew how that same gossip could get out of hoof, and now she met the pony face to face, she was feeling more than slightly guilty over her part in shunning the zebra, especially as both Twilight and Applejack had given her the all clear. Not to mention it rankling that Blueblood of all ponies had called her on it. The generous side of her nature kicked in.

"Rarity, maker of fine couture. I should apologise as well. If you are in need of a new cloak or something I would be only to happy to supply it."

Fluttershy just squeaked 'I'm sorry!', but gave a nod.

Pinkie was the hardest sell. She gave an uncharacteristic frown, staring at the zebra but finally gave an equally uncharacteristic sigh. "Okie-dokie-lokie! But I'll be watching..."

The zebra mare actually laughed. "Pink pony, what do you think I'd do? Gobble you up in a big tasty stew?"

Pinkie brightened up. "Hey, that's a good line! I can use that!"

The stallions were a lot less trouble, they introduced themselves, and then Twilight looked around at the newly enlarged. Party. As Zecora slung a set of oddly shaped saddle-bags over her flanks, the purple unicorn asked, "Shall we get on then? We've still got a long way to go."

\* \* \*

><p>30.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So... let me get this straight. Twilight walked in on ya with a bunch o' duplicates of her brother?"<p>

Chrysalis flinched. "It wasn't like I planned it. The hive took the initiative to comfort me. And we didn't do anything, you know, I know how intimate you ponies think sex is..."

Macintosh raised an eyebrow. "Ah'd say it's more then just us ponies-"

"Basically, as Changeling Queen, I'm in charge of having everyone

else's eggs."

There was a quiet moment.

Finally, the stallion managed a strangled cough. "Why is it Ah'm always tha one that people explain weird sex things to?"

"Because you serve the best cider." Chrysalis held forth her mug expectantly, and he filled it without thinking. "Anyway, my point was that I wasn't aching for a good rut. Frankly, I can get that anywhere, just shapeshift and flirt. But what I had with Shi-well, with my Shining was more than that, and that's what the hive mind tried to mimic. It kind of worked... in the same way that sugar-free chocolate replacement stuff kind of tastes like Pinkie's best brownies. So... they decided to multiply the experience..."

Macintosh nodded. "Ah see. And that's when Twilight walked in on ya?"

"Mmmhmm." She threw back her muzzle, draining her mug in one big gulp. "I wish I got drunk easier. Half of this is going straight to my mane..."

"Well... from tha sound of it... the hive mind was trying ta help ya. In its own way." The stallion shook his head. "Never really understood it mahself, but from what mah sister and her friends have told me it's something real... deep."

Chrysalis regarded him with a curious look. "How would they know?"

"Most o' them have been changelings in one loop or another. Apparently there was even one time where they all were changelings. Heck, Ah'd say tha majority of Equestrian loopers have been in tha hive, cepting mahself fer some reason. Oh, and tha nonpony loopers, like Spike or Discord."

"Wait. Discord?" The changeling queen leaned forward. "As in, primordial manifestation of Chaos Discord? He's looping? That explains so much-"

"No it don't. He was always like that."

"...oh. Huh."

"Eeyup, that was mah reaction too." Macintosh shrugged. "Anyway, what Ah'm saying is Ah don't really get tha hive mind. Yet. Ah'm pretty much resigned to tha fact that Ah'm going ta end up there in some loop. What's it like, exactly?"

"Didn't you just say that Twilight and her friends told you?"

"Well... they were in it fer a few loops at most. You've lived with it yer whole life. Makes sense ya'd have a different take on it."

Chrysalis nodded. "There is... an old adage. The hive serves the swarm, the swarm serves the queen, the queen serves the hive. It's..."

difficult to explain, but... while I have a level of control over the swarm, and I mean actual control and not just the political power that Celestia has over the nobles, the hive is something I... don't control. If a drone feels that something about what I want them to do is wrong, I can feel it no matter whether I order them to do it or not. Being a queen means you get to make all the decisions, but it also means you feel all the repercussions. Personally, I mean."

She sighed. "It's part of why... well, in my baseline loop, anyway, it was part of why I wasn't at all worried about attacking ponies. I could slap you right now and read your emotions, but... it's like the difference between reading a letter and talking to a friend, I suppose. Or maybe listening to a song instead of a speech... Something in that way. The others, they probably see the hive as more intimate, but from my view it's ponies that are less intimate. And when I was just a queen, I thought that meant you cared less than changelings did, that somehow you were... broken, and it was okay for me to consider you all basically talking prey that we could capture and raise."

Macintosh realized where she was going with this, pouring more cider into her mug. "But then Shining happened."

"...Not just him. He was a big part, but that whole loop was... different. Hives were smaller, and Celestia exterminated us when she could because she believed in preemptive strikes; the other nobles went along with it because the branding magical stuff didn't work on shapeshifters. And between that and all the slaves running through the underground, I realized that just because you can't... feel each other, that doesn't mean you don't care. In fact I found that your love can sometimes go deeper, exactly because you're so alone and want to let the other one know you care." Chrysalis brought her mug to her lips... and peered at it. "See, this is what I'm talking about right here. If you were part of the hive, you would feel what I was feeling and have filled this without me asking because you knew I was becoming emotional. But you're not, and you're not even empathetic... but you know me enough to predict I needed this. How do you do that? How can you read me when you don't even speak that language? How has your race survived this long without being able to communicate on that level, and yet somehow managed to form deeper relations in that void?"

"Ah ain't no philosopher," Macintosh began slowly, "but if Ah were ta seriously consider that question... Ah'd say that it's exactly because we don't have such close understandings of each other that we strive ta form deep relations. If'n we knew what we'd each be doing all tha time, we wouldn't be driven ta understand each other."

"But... you could hurt each other. On accident, even."

"Yes... and that's part of why we try to understand."

The changeling queen sipped her cider. She still didn't quite understand... but that viewpoint would be one she would have to consider.

\* \* \*



"Twilight," Shining Armor asked, frowning. "Is this correct?"

"Is what correct, BBBFF?" Twilight replied, still scanning over the list as she helped things get set up for the Equestria Games.

"Well, I was looking over the contestant list, andâ€¦ you've only put down \_three\_."

Twilight craned her head to look. "Uhâ€¦ yep, that's right. That's the only entrants we're sending."

"For \_all\_ the games?" Shining shook his head. "Twilight, I know that Ponyville is a small town, relatively speaking, but usually small towns take this as an opportunity for everypony to show off their talents. You know, have a bit of fun."

"Don't worry." Twilight shrugged. "We'll be fine."

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash hunched down, grinning like a loon. Her wings flared up to give her a starter's boost, and when the gate came down-<p>

She finished, sat down on the other side of the tape, and began eating a snack carrot.

\* \* \*

><p>"Wait, what just happened?" the race marshal said, checking a stopwatch. "That wasâ€¦ did she seriously do the marathon in ten seconds flat?"<p>

"Nine point nine three," Rainbow said, then frowned and threw her carrot away. "Man, I must be putting on weightâ€¦ I'm getting slow."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight ticked the first box on her checklist. "Right, that's swifter doneâ€¦"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy looked up at the high jump, wings strapped. "Erâ€¦ I have to get over that?"<p>

"Yes, you do," a helper said helpfully. "Just do your best."

"Okay." The shy pegasus crouched down, then sprangâ€¦

And just kept on going up.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight ticked the second box, <em>higher</em>, as Fluttershy cleared the cross-bar. "Certainly helps if you've got literal control over the muscles in your legsâ€¦ and weighing as little as \_she\_ does can't hurt either. Right, two down, one to go."

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack slammed her front hooves on the arena floor. "An' who else is after a go at me?"<p>

All the other competitors looked at her. Then they looked at the huge pegasus embedded in a wall.

"None of y'all? Aww, that ain't fair on meâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight, that was a terrible thing you did there," Celestia admonished, covering her mouth to hide a smile.<p>

"I know, I knowâ€|" Twilight shrugged, passing over the scroll with stronger ticked next to the other two. "Normally we sit them out, but I felt like they needed a go at least once. Especially Fluttershy."

"True, she's not exactly the most confident of poniesâ€|" the Princess allowed, accepting the scroll. "Strange how much ponies stay the same, in the loops."

"I think it's because she actually likes being shy, you knowâ€|" Twilight ventured. "It's a part of how she is, and it makes her more sure she's not going to offend anypony. And she hates to offendâ€|"

"Most insightful," Celestia said, nodding to Twilight. "Well, do congratulate your friends. And I might well award copper medals this Games, because otherwise it's just going to not be fair on the ponies who would have been third place."

"I'm wondering how we're going to get Dash home, actually," Twilight confided. "That many medals might actually impede her takeoff."

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><p>30.4 (Elmagnifico)<p>

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><p>Macintosh sighed as he trotted through Ponyville, the day's load of apples for market creaking along behind him. It was just after the start of a fresh reunion, and the denizens were just starting to get back to normal after the Summer Sun Celebration. Thus far, no-one had disturbed his routine. None of his sisters were Awake, and nothing remarkable had happened. He'd delivered the apple to the library on schedule. Nightmare Moon had been vanquished with a zebra potion, two pry bars and several metric tons of fruitcake. A slow day outside the bar, a good sign for the loop.<p>

Spike waved to him as he passed by on his way to Celestia-knew-where. The little drake was friendly enough, in fact the two of them were pretty close to brothers-in-arms, being the only male Loopers aside from Twilight's brother, who was a decent stallion too. Overall, a good friend, and seeing as how he was Awake, not in need of Mac's immediate attention. He was confident Spike could handle whatever the

loops threw and if he needed assistance with something the others couldn't help with, he'd seek Mac out. Even his ability to turn into a ten-story powerhouse hardly made Mac twitch anymore.

It hadn't always been that way though.

When he'd first been introduced to the community of Loopers, he'd seen big things. The most obvious, of course, being the extra parts each of Applejack's friends were able to sprout at will. Others included subspace pockets, glowing swords, hornless telekinesis and underground bases with flying machines and fusion reactors. So many things were different among the Loopers.

Applebloom jumped off the cart and trotted away, as the way to school diverged from the route to market. She shouted a goodbye over her shoulder as Mac watched her, frowning in thought but paused to wave in case she looked back. Oftentimes the bullying on that front was solved in as simple a way as having a conversation with Filthy Rich, although it'd taken a few attempts to get the phrasing right so that Diamond Tiara would be chastised. Being too direct with the well-to-do pony didn't get anywhere.

At first, the Loopers had presented a problem. Applejack's friends were important ponies, helping them helped all of Equestria, not only because they were Elements of Harmony, but because helping them headed off a lot of the larger problems around Ponyville during the loop. So, over the course of his Loops he'd gotten to know them rather well, helping each with their issues and getting it down to the point where, all other things being equal, Ponyville stayed rather quiet after the initial Nightmare Night bump.

Rainbow Dash zoomed overhead, her contrail reminding Macintosh he needed to get in touch with her soon. Now that the Celebration was over, she'd be more obsessed with the Wonderbolts than ever. It would take a while to establish contact, and most of his help would be second or third-hoof. He really never came into contact with her unless something went drastically wrong, usually with one of her manoeuvres, either sending her crashing into something on the Acres, or himself.

Naturally, each change he'd made had altered how things played out, which meant new issues would crop up from the fresh circumstances. Over time he'd honed his perception, allowing him to preempt trouble and head off developing problems before they hurt anyone. He'd gotten especially good at reading the Elements.

He waved as he passed the unawake Rarity, doubtless on her way back to the Carousel Boutique. Her input would be needed later to alter how Applejack prepped her food stall for the Grand Galloping Gala, with fewer, more refined baked goods and the like. Blunting the unfortunate and unavoidable disappointment with Blueblood would come after.

Only now, they were completely different. He knew almost nothing about these ponies, and they'd already solved their problems their own way. Moreover, with all the horns and wings showing up, he'd had a hard time keeping up with the Loopers. Getting under their masks when they were around Ponyville was hard, as, like him, they'd be trying to blend in. When they weren't trying to keep things close to baseline, he felt left behind as the phenomenal cosmic power and

strange magic started flying willy-nilly. Helping was hard when you were too busy dodging disintegration spells to watch anyone else.

Fluttershy meeped in surprise as he left her a smile. He often wound up spending a disproportionate amount of time around her, as preempting the parasprites was easier said than done. She was a delicate case indeed, as increasing her confidence without doing the same harm as that Minotaur was a balancing act that left almost no margin for error.

It wasn't until Applejack awoke one loop and stayed in her bed, fitfully dreaming, through the whole Reunion, only to proceed down to the cellar and drink their entire stock of her namesake, along with the rest of the alcohol, that Mac found his place in the Loops. Being the queen of the Changelings had rattled his sister fiercely, and left her needing family and counselling, in that order. Twilight had been eager to assist Mac with his sister, and together they'd helped her cope.

He responded to Time Turner's query about Applejack's recovery with an "Eeyup." The Celebration usually left his sister fatigued, both physically and mentally, even if the Elements weren't used to defeat Nightmare Moon. Having a Goddess of the Night dropped on the town tended to have that effect. Applejack hated being useless, and now she was taking it relatively easy at the Acres, just a few light chores. Of course, that meant he had to pick up the slack, but by now he knew just how much he could push himself before getting injured.

It was during that session of post-hive-mind therapy that Macintosh realized these ponies needed his help just as much as their non-looping selves did. Of course, chasing them around to watch them and try to preempt problems was a fruitless dream. He simply didn't Loop enough for that. There was too much separation for him to help the Anchor and her friends the way he did Ponyville.

He returned Cherilee's smile as usual. He normally kept his distance from the schoolmarm at first, although he did have to watch his beverages in February. That particular thread usually resolved itself with subtle changes in how he acted around Applebloom, with hints he was interested in this mare or that one, nothing blatant or false, but enough to keep him off the "eligible bachelors" list. Getting Cherilee to change the timing of the field trip until one of the Crusader's less chaotic periods was the real challenge.

So, he'd started a bar. Alcohol still held its allure even for Loopers, and Apples knew how to brew the best stuff. Moreover, its presence relaxed most ponies, allowing him to see under the barriers they had erected to keep out the strife and erosion of time. It also allowed them to come and seek him out if they needed help or guidance, even if initiating therapy was often disguised, or rationalized, as a request for booze.

He passed Lily and her friends, which brought Zecora to mind. That, at least, was as simple as helping Applejack see through the rumours and hearsay surrounding the zebra. After her sense of truth was applied properly to the situation, his sister handled that well enough by herself.

Nevertheless, the bar was a small thing. Everything had to be available at loop's start in case of an emergency, so he kept the furnishings to a minimum. After all, he'd only made it a public establishment in three especially crowded loops, after which he'd decided it was better to keep things simple. The Apple cellar served just as well as an above-ground building for Looper purposes. Wooden furniture was simple and common, but also relaxing, homely and unassuming. A stone fireplace made the place cozy and required minimal modification of the basement, aside from the ventilation. Overall, it reminded him of the small pubs he'd seen the one time the Loops had moved Ponyville to the Northern Dales, albeit with a more varied selection on tap.

He halted as Berry Punch teetered across the street in front of him, thoroughly sloshed as per normal. No helping that, unfortunately.

Most loops the emergency stock of Hard Cider was enough to tide over thirsty patrons until he could start brewing for larger crowds, although there were a couple barrels and microbrews he asked Twilight to keep in her subspace pocket and drop off at her earliest convenience whenever he was Awake. He was saving those for a special occasion.

He noted the extra spring in Pinkie Pie's step as she passed him on the way to Sugarcube Corner. Looper or not, he wasn't sure. Maybe she was just happy because of the baked-goods manner in which the Alicorn of the Night had been defeated. He could never be sure with her.

The pink mare had always been an enigma to him, in some ways worse than Ms. Sparkle because she stood up to close scrutiny and remained just as unfathomable whether she was looping or not. He could tell the difference, it just didn't help any in predicting her. Distracting her on her birthday had been easy enough. Physically bumping into her, apologizing and then helping her with some baking seemed enough, although her sheer variability meant nothing was certain.

Nevertheless, she proved an ally more often than not. After all, their missions were similar. Indeed, oftentimes there was little that would help ponies more than a smile or a good laugh, and that was something Pinkie Pie excelled at giving. Conversely, Mac was always happy to cater or host a party. Stress relief and games were a good way to blow off steam, and it lightened his workload when he didn't have to pour every drink himself.

He was almost to the market when he spotted Twilight Sparkle a little ways off, conversing with a pegasus he didn't recognize. Spike and a small black dragon were behind them, apparently comparing notes of some sort. They all waved, and Twilight looked like she was moving to intercept, so he'd likely be introduced to these newcomers. A fused loop?

Mac gave the oncoming party a welcoming smile and mentally sighed as he bid any hopes of a quiet loop goodbye.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

><p>"...so why isn't Silver looping?"<p>

Apple Bloom gave Diamond Tiara a look as she drove in the next piton.  
"Yer asking this \_now?\_"

"Would you rather I whine about how hard this is?" the purple filly countered, panting as she attempted to reach another hoofhold.  
"Cause, you know, I could do that if you like."

"Heh. Point." Bloom stretched, barely managing to grab an outcropping of rock. "But that was only a five."

Tiara snorted. "Oh darn."

"Right, so... ya know how Twilight's tha anchor?"

"Yeah?" The purple filly pushed herself up. "That means she loops all the time, right?"

"Well, yeah. More important, though, that means all tha looping... loopiness, Ah guess, flows from her. And if thar's enough loopiness, thar's a new looper. Ah think."

"You're not sure?"

Apple Bloom pulled another piton out of her backpack. "Well, Ah'm trying ta explain something that Twilight told me with all tha technobabble she explained. It might be that it's looseness in tha memory network of our reality or somethang... she has holographic diagrams, Ah'm simplifying."

Diamond Tiara's back hoof slipped off. "AAA! Ah, sorry, I'm okay, I'm fine." She panted as she recovered her footing. "Alright, so... Twilight's the center of looping. Got that. And things get loopier over time...?"

"Tha thing is, tha loopiness travels along... channels made by deep emotional impact. So, it went from her ta her friends first. Then it went from her to tha princesses. Then it went from her, through Applejack and Rarity and Rainbow Dash, to tha Crusaders..."

"Ah." The rich filly nodded to herself. "I'm beginning to see the pattern. Friends first?"

"Friends, family... and some pretty personal enemies." The farm filly nodded at her piton, pulling herself up. "Like Chrysalis, actually."

"Wait, Chrysalis? As in the Changeling Queen? She's looping?"

"Eeyup. Took her a while, but tha fact is she did leave a deep emotional impact on Twilight in tha baseline, so all Twilight had ta do was focus on her a bit more. Ah hate ta say it but, well, tha reason ya probably started looping is cause ya bullied us so intensely. Silver Spoon was always just following yer lead, so we didn't care that much about her. She's got a deeper channel ta you, o' course, but by tha time tha loopiness reaches ya-"

"I'm too far out from the center."

"Well, yeah. Fer now anyway." Apple Bloom shrugged. "Could be she gets in, eventually. Heck, if ya like, me and tha other crusaders could try ta be her friends fer tha next few loops, it would give her a better chance of waking up... Ah think. Ah'm not sure."

Diamond Tiara considered it. "I... don't want to force you to do anything you don't want to, but... well, she was my first friend. If you would try, that would mean a lot to me..."

"Heh. Ah'll bring it up at tha next Crusader meeting. Course, Loopiness is a tad bit random. Sometimes ponies start looping when it don't make no sense."

"You mean like Nyx?"

"Well..." Apple Bloom lugged herself onto a ledge and pulled Diamond Tiara up. "She's one example, yeah, but Ah was thinking more like Berry Punch."

The rich filly blinked. "Wait, Berry Punch? The town drunk? She's looping?"

"Yeah, once or twice. Doesn't make sense ta me either. By all rights Granny Smith shoulda been looping by now, and Berry oughta have been further out. Still... ya get what ya get, Ah guess. And it's not like it's anything as consistent as you or me anyway..."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Unusually productive week, this...

30.1: This is one long running serial.

>30.2: The healing effects of alcohol. (Also, that slavequestria Loop has had quite a lot of knock on effects...)<br>30.3: And presumably at some point in the Games, Pinkie ended up dangling from a zipwire.

>30.4: Big Mac's how-to guide.<br>30.5: ...you know, thinking back, the Loops create some \_really\_ bizarre situations.

## 31. Chapter 31

### 31.1 (Anowack)

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis, Queen of the Changeling Swam, actually had been quite fond of tea.<p>

It was a habit she'd picked up from one of the first ponies she had fed on extensively, a middle-aged divorced mare in Manehattan with a weak spot for young fillies with sob stories, too much spare time under her hooves, and a dangerously unquestioning nature. The scent and taste of the beverage brought memories of those simpler days to Chrysalis's mind, and in her personal chambers deep inside the hive

could be found the battered tea set she'd stolen after the mare had died, along with some small containers of carefully hoarded leaves.

She hadn't drank tea since she had started Looping. The once fond memories were now tainted by the gnawing sensation of guilt. She half-feared, half-hoped that if she dared to dwell on those days too much she would find that she missed the aging pony who had always been ready to offer her a cup of tea, two chocolate chip cookies, and a shoulder to fake-sob on.

"Would you prefer something else to drink?" the mare seated across the small table from the changeling queen asked.

"No, it's fine," Chrysalis answered, staring morosely at Cadance's reflection in the still, gently steaming liquid. That was the last form she wanted to take â€" she could have gone a thousand Loops without ever seeing that pink-furred face again â€" but her companion had offered it as a simple way for them to have their conversation in pleasant surroundings without attracting unwanted attention.

Indeed the various ponies who passed by the balcony where they sat barely gave the two (apparent) alicorns having tea a second glance, but Chrysalis was fairly certain the suggestion had been a way to put her off balance, or a test, or both.

If it was a test, she had probably failed, she concluded, but it was too late now.

"I must admit I was surprised when Rainbow Dash brought you to me," Princess Celestia said as she raised her own tea in golden light and took a sip.

She didn't need to explain why. "I'm not sure of the details myself. I didn't even realize what was happening at first." Chrysalis caught herself before saying 'Princess Twilight,' the habit of her second lifetime still hard to break. "Twilight Sparkle has an explanation for why I started to Loop that she is satisfied with, at least."

"Not that. After Nyx, I expect I shall hardly ever be surprised by who can start Looping again." The true alicorn chuckled briefly. "Usually I've heard of newcomers from Twilight several Loops before getting a chance to meet them myself."

There was an awkward silence for several moments.

"You've not spoken with her of me?" Chrysalis asked finally.

"No," Celestia said.

Chrysalis's throat was dry suddenly, and she forced herself to take a gulp of the tea before speaking. If Twilight hadn't explained, she could only imagine what Celestia was thinking, what she might do. The green aura engulfing her teacup flickered for an instant. "I swear," Chrysalis said quickly. "I am no threat to Equestria, to your ponies."

Celestia put down her teacup. Chrysalis followed suit a second later, trying not to squirm under the Princess's piercing gaze. This was the



real Princess Celestia, veteran of probably more Loops than Chrysalis could imagine. She was no doubt vastly stronger than either Celestia Chrysalis had fought before, fully capable of squashing her like... well, a bug. She certainly had done it, too, dozens or hundreds of times.

"You're terrified of me," Celestia said, something in her voice the changeling couldn't identify.

Chrysalis looked down, strands of Cadance's tri-colored mane falling through her vision. "Of course," she whispered.

"Look up," Celestia ordered, and Chrysalis obeyed immediately. "Why?"

Chrysalis felt her mouth open in surprise. "Who wouldn't be?" she asked without thinking, dumbfounded.

It couldn't be hurt she saw in the Princess's eyes. "I would think one of the very few who can say they defeated me fairly in single combat," she said. Her mouth twitched briefly. "Over a dozen times from my perspective. You're shockingly powerful when well-fed."

The last thing Chrysalis needed was a reminder that Celestia had cause to seek \_personal\_ revenge. She didn't dare look away, couldn't move.

Celestia frowned. "You said you didn't realize you were Looping at first."

"Yes." Tears welled unbidden in Chrysalis's eyes. "I thought the... real timeline, was a dream."

"What happened?" Celestia asked. "\_What did I do?\_"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle had known this would be an interesting loop from the moment she'd Awoken as a pegasus filly in the sky city of Cloudsdale. A memory check showed her family had been similarly transformed and transported, while a brief investigation discovered that Rainbow Dash "the only other Element Awake this time" and her family had taken their place as Canterlot unicorns.<p>

"You're really doing better, Fluttershy," Twilight encouraged her friend, gesturing with one wing to try and get the yellow filly to fly the short distance between her cloud and the one Twilight rested on. Twilight knew that in the original timeline Rainbow Dash hadn't befriended Fluttershy until some months down the line, but she hadn't seen any reason to wait. "You'll be ready for summer flight camp in no time."

Fluttershy inched up to the edge of her cloud, peeking out from behind her hooves. "It's so far."

Twilight didn't know whether she meant the distance between them or the distance to the foundation cloud below, but neither was terribly long. "You'll be fine, Fluttershy," she said comfortingly. "I promise."

Instead of taking heart, Fluttershy gasped and scooted back.

"Fluttershy? What's wrong?" Twilight asked.

"Somepony's coming!" The yellow filly hunkered down, trying to sink into the cloud.

Twilight looked around and laughed when she saw the older, white pegasus flying closer. "Don't worry; I know her."

The mare settled onto the cloud next to her. "Hi, Twily; is this your new friend?"

Twilight nodded. "This is Fluttershy." The named filly let out a quiet whimper. "Fluttershy, this is my big sister, Gleaming Shield." It wasn't the first time Twilight's sibling had been a mare, or a pegasus, but Twilight was fairly sure it was for both at once. (Twilight had checked, and Cadance was still female this Loop. That hadn't stopped her from getting together with Gleaming in a few past Loops, though the fact that Twilight's sister was currently dating a stallion she'd met training for Wonderbolts tryouts suggested this Loop might be an exception.)

"Hi!" Gleaming said, waving a hoof at Fluttershy, then looking at Twilight. "Twily, there's a filly named Sunny Skies at home asking for you. Says you need to work on a project for school?"

Twilight frowned, just long enough for Gleaming to notice, then quickly forced a smile. "I'd almost forgotten that. I'm sorry, Fluttershy, I have to go. I'll see you tomorrow, okay?"

Twilight took the quiet noise from her friend as assent, and shortly thereafter was back at home, alone in her room with a pale-furred, pink-maned filly about her age. "Is something wrong, Princess Celestia?" she asked her visitor.

"Rainbow Dash brought me a surprising guest this morning," Celestia said.

"Oh?" Twilight asked.

"I had a very interesting and informative conversation over tea with Queen Chrysalis."

"Oh," Twilight said again, a little more weakly.

"Twilight, why didn't you tell me?" Celestia's voice was sad.

"I was planning to play some kind of prank on you with her," Twilight said. "She's... a little unsure of herself and her place now; I thought that would help break the ice." And the look on Celestia's face would have almost certainly been priceless.

Celestia just looked at the other filly for a moment. "That's not what I meant, and I think you know it, Twilight."

Twilight swallowed. "Oh," she said one more time. She forced a laugh. "It's hardly the first time I've had to fight a version of you in a weird Loop."

"Yes," Celestia agreed. "You've stopped me as Infernal Blaze from roasting Equestria under eternal day and asked me to critique your strategy the next time we met. You teased me about the Loop where I was Discord's queen for what must have been a thousand years at least from your perspective. We dealt with that version of me trying to forcefully transform all of Earth into ponies together.

"You didn't want to talk to me about this Loop."

Twilight sat back and tried to find words. She didn't want to talk about it, but she knew better. "Those ponies might have been Celestia, but they weren't you," she said finally.

Celestia smiled slightly. "We don't quite have the right words in our language for the Loops, do we?" she asked.

"I have a paper I wrote one Loop somewhere," Twilight said, eager to change the subject, and started searching her subspace pocket.

Celestia's smile widened, but she turned serious again quickly. "I assure you, Twilight. If I had been Awake that Loop, you would have been well aware within moments." Her voice promised cleansing solar fires that probably would not have actually ensued "as viscerally satisfying as it might have been, Celestia of course knew that destruction would not have really solved anything.

Twilight sighed. "That's not what I meant." She glanced about her room for inspiration, finally hitting on a photo of her sister from her time at the Wonderbolts Academy. "In this loop, my sister is aiming to join the Wonderbolts, like baseline Rainbow Dash," she said after a moment. Celestia nodded, and Twilight continued. "It's not so different from how Shining wanted to join your Guard. She and her coltfriend sneak around the same way Shining and Cadance did. She is Shining."

"I think I catch your meaning," Celestia said, her small filly's wings shuffling slightly, "but I am not sure I like it."

"You think I do?" Twilight Sparkle asked, more harshly than she intended. "The Infernal Blazes, the tyrant Empresses, the crazed madmares; they aren't you. They are different ponies."

"And this Celestia?"

"That Celestia bought me off the auction block at the Royal Canterlot Slave market, separating me from my family for what that me knew was almost certainly forever," Twilight said, "but she also held me when I cried that night. When we fought she almost cried herself as she begged me to explain why I rebelled. She loved me, I think, maybe as much as you do."

"If she did," Celestia said angrily, "she would never have allowed you to be a slave. Do you think so little of me, Twilight Sparkle?"

"No!" Twilight said, too loudly. "It's... if she'd been evil, it would have been easy. But she wasn't. She was almost you. I could look at her and see you. She spoke like you, acted like you, fought

like you."

"Except she was a slaver," Celestia said.

"Yes," Twilight said. "Except for that. And I loved her, that Loop's me. I hated her, but I loved her too, and I hated myself for loving her. And I... this me... I feel like I failed you somehow. She was almost you, and I hurt her terribly and..."

Celestia reached over and hugged her. "I won't forgive you, Twilight Sparkle," she said softly, and the purple pegasus sobbed, "but only because I know you did nothing that needs forgiveness. But I can tell you, that if that Celestia really was almost me, if she really did love you like I do, she forgave you in the end, no matter how badly you think you hurt her."

Twilight couldn't stop crying, burying her face under Celestia's wing. "I'm sorry," she said.

"I told you," Celestia said. "You did nothing wrong."

"I... we should have had this conversation Loops ago," Twilight said, slowly disentangling herself. "I'm sorry for that."

"For that, I do forgive you," Celestia said, smiling gently.

There was a knocking on Twilight's door. "Is everything okay in there, Twilight?" her father asked, a little worry plain in his voice.

"Yes," Twilight said, her voice steady. "We're fine now."

\* \* \*

><p>31.2 (Masterweaver, Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Space... the final frontier.<p>

These are the voyages of the starship Ponydrive. Its continuing mission, to explore strange new worlds. To seek out new life, and new civilization. To boldly go where noone has gone before.

We join our crew as captain Twilight Sparkle strides onto the bridge. The unicorn's a little young for command, but from the way she carries herself she's confident in her ability. "Helmsman, status."

"We're still on course sir," reports the pegasus working the helm, and if Twilight was young then this pony was practically a child.

"Keep her steady, Scootaloo. We need this survey done by the end of the week." Twilight turns to what looks, at first glance, to be a bright pink pony. "I hope your circuits aren't giving you too much trouble."

"Negativo, captain! You'd need a lot more than a simple science survey to stumble a Positronic Intelligence Equestrian!" The pink

pony leans back. "Truth be told, it's been kind of boring. Don't these loops usually have some sort of excitement in them?"

"Yeah, I agree with Pinkie." A blue pegasus glances up from her console, flicking her rainbow mane out of the way. "I mean, I'm the chief of security, and things look pretty darn secure!"

"That means you're doing your job right, \_lieutenant.\_" An ivory unicorn gives her a serious look. "Stay in character, please?"

"Oh, fine Rarity."

"Ahem."

"Commander, sorry."

Twilight smirks. "Apology accepted, Lieutenant Dash. Lieutenant Pinkie, keep up the scans." She sits in her chair, stretching out her hooves. "So, Spike, anything on the comm channels?"

"Not yet, Captain." A small dragon sighs. "We're in a completely dead system, near as I can tell."

"You were away from the bridge for a rather long time," Rarity comments. "What kept you?"

"Ah, well... Fluttershy and Sweetie had a very interesting experiment going on down in the labs. Apparently they were attempting to standardize healing songspells." Twilight coughs. "I may have gotten a bit carried away talking magic with the doctor. Sweetie tried to keep up, but..."

The commander chuckles and shakes her head. "You really must keep a lid on those impulses or you'll drive our poor consular mad!"

"I can't help it! It's practical magic in a sci-fi setting, do you know how hard it is for me to study that kind of thing?"

Rainbow leans over the banister. "I would have thought you'd be more interested in the machines that Apple Bloom's whipping up down in engineering."

Twilight gives her security officer a worried look. "She's experimenting that close to the warp core?"

"Don't worry, the chief engineer is keeping an eye on her. I don't think AJ would let Bloom do anything \_too\_ dangerous."

"Captain?" interrupts a voice.

The unicorn turns to her science officer. "Yes Pinkie?"

"You may want to see this..."

\* \* \*

><p>"An object is approaching us at high warp velocity, warp 9.8... no, it's slowing down, decelerating to rendezvous it looks like. I wonder if they want to be friends?"<p>

"Let's hope so, but just in case... Leiutenant Dash, bring up our shields and go to yellow alert. Passive tracking solution only. Helm, slow to sub-light and be ready for evasion pattern Perseus One."

"Shields, yellow alert aye aye!" Rainbow tapped the two holo-panels positioned within easy wingtip reach, and an alert sound started hooting.

The object on their main screen expanded into a sphere and matched their velocity with trivial ease, then expanded into a checker patterned wall. Scootaloo slowed the Ponydrive and brought her round to skim the surface to avoid crashing into it. "Smartly done, Ensign! Bring us to a halt at 10000 klicks from it."

"Captain! The object has expanded over one tenth of a lightyear in every direction almost instantly. My sensors can't read the material or forcefield type. At least the pattern's pretty."

"It's also familiar..." Twilight sighed. There was a flash, and Discord appeared in front of the main screen, wearing a zoot suit, big sunglasses and a pimp cane.

"Greetings! I am Q, Q to my friends, but you can call me Q." He raised the glasses and stage whispered, "It's actually me, Discord!"

"No, really? Your cunning disguise totally fooled all of us." Twilight replied deadpan. "So this is your basic 'Alien super-being with time on his manipulative appendages decides to test the puny mortals?' I assume?"

"Pretty much." Discord nodded.

"Very well." Twilight said. "All hands prepare for Ponyfleet scenario 5C."

\* \* \*

><p>31.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight shelved a book quietly. "You know it has to happen sometime. She'll know something is up if you don't show up when you should."<p>

"I don't think I'm ready for this. Actually, I don't think I'm ready to do anything this loop, I'm just going to hide out in Macintosh's bar."

"He's not actually Awake," the librarian pointed out with a small smile. "So the bar doesn't actually exist."

"...does it have to be now?"

"No, not right now. But... sometime this loop, you really should talk to her." After a moment, the unicorn smiled. "Celestia is awake this loop too, you know. And, after your conversation with her-"

"I know, I know, she's... not \_her.\_" After a moment, the black pegasus let her wings droop. "Alright, alright.

But... you have to be there too."

"Fair enough."

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Celestia of the Sun sipped her tea, letting her gaze drift to the pink pony on her left.<p>

Princess Mi Amore Cadenza sipped her tea, examining the diplomat across from her.

Twilight Sparkle, Magic's exalt, sipped her tea and glanced toward the diplomat sympathetically.

Chrysalis, Queen of the Changeling Swarm, held the teacup in her magic nervously as she sipped, unable to look at any of them.

Cadance put her cup down gently. "A peace accord. Based on public integration of Changelings."

"...yes. That is, well, why I approached Equestria. Diplomatically."

Celestia and Twilight said nothing, waiting for one of the other two to make the first move.

Eventually the pink alicorn sighed. "You're looping, aren't you."

Chrysalis wilted even further. "...yes. I... I just want to say, I'm sorry and... and really, that about covers everything I could say." She cringed. "I can understand if you hate me-"

"Look. The invasion, baseline... yeah, it left an impact on me." Cadance shrugged. "But I've had literally thousands of loops to deal with all that emotional baggage, and so long as you don't do it again-which you're probably not going to do, seeing as you're negotiating for peace-I'm perfectly willing to extend the olive branch."

The changeling queen's ears perked. Twilight relaxed.

"So, Chrysy-can I call you Chrysy?"

." Chrysalis took a breath. "Ah... I... honestly prefer you wouldn't." For some reason she was flushing furiously.

"...oooookay." Cadance tapped her hoof for a moment. "...Anyway, how long have you been looping?"

"Oh, um... maybe... five loops?" Chrysalis nodded. "Yes. Five."

Twilight raised an eyebrow. By her count there had been six loops so

far for the changeling queen, but she was quick enough to recognize exactly what Chrysalis was dancing around.

"Huh. Well, I hope the loops so far have been, you know, kind to you." Cadance smiled. "If there's anything I can do to help your transition-"

"That really won't be necessary! I'm coping." Chrysalis smiled, trying to meet Cadance's eyes. "Princess Twilight and her friends are helping me."

An eyebrow was slowly raised. "\_Princess\_ Twilight?"

"Ah..." Chrysalis coughed. "She... can be a princess. It's a formality, really, if you think I should drop it I can."

"No, I'm fine with it, I was just curious..."

"It's rather understandable," Celestia pointed out, "given that Twilight had to overthrow me in Chrysalis's first loop."

"Oh?"

"Mmm, yes. Apparently that version of me practiced slavery-"

"Princess!" Twilight snapped.

"Twilight, I understand that you were very shaken by-"

"Wait." Cadance blinked. "Are you... You were \_awake?!\_"

Silence slammed down at the alicorn's shout, the queen of changelings curling up in her chair as the princess of love panted, her hooves against the table. The reigning diarch stood from her chair; her student had buried her face in her forehooves.

Cadance took a deep breath.

She let it out.

She took another breath, sitting back down. Slowly, Celestia retook her own seat, though her eyes never left the other alicorn.

After a moment, Cadance composed herself. "So. You were... awake for that loop?"

Chrysalis looked up, briefly. Twilight reached out and patted her shoulder.

"...yes. I..." The changeling gulped. "I... thought the whole, baseline loop was... a bad dream."

After a moment, Cadance sighed and shook her head. "Alright. Okay, I... I can see where you'd be coming from. And I can't really blame you for Shining, there, that... I just... argh." She rubbed her temples, her eyes screwed tightly. "Did you know how I felt? Every time I looked at you two, I remembered the baseline and... and I had to remind myself constantly that wasn't what was going on, that you



hadn't actually stolen him-

Celestia looked between them, somewhat confused. "Wait, what are you two talking about?"

Twilight sighed. "In... that loop, Shining wasn't awake, he helped Chrysalis run an underground railroad... they fell in love..."

"I did sense those emotions from you," Chrysalis explained awkwardly. "I... just thought it was a natural thing. You know, Alicorn of love, I eat love... I was actually very impressed with how you repressed your bigotry." She sighed. "Except it wasn't bigotry, was it?"

"No, not... well, maybe a little. But not really." Cadance sighed. "Resentment, more like... and I could see you two were genuinely in love and... Ugh. This is just... Look, can we start over here? I don't, well... I'm not sure how to feel about this."

Celestia brought her hoof to her forehead gently. "Twilight... why didn't you mention this before?"

"It kind of ties in to why I never mentioned that loop at all," the unicorn offered, rubbing the back of her head. "I mean, this whole situation is weird..."

"You really don't know how to feel, do you?" Chrysalis tilted her head. "There's flashes of anger and pity and... I... Um. Sure. Starting over sounds good..."

"Yeah, very good. So! I'm Cadance, and... it's nice to meet you, I guess."

"I'm Chrysalis and... I... am happy that you're happy to meet me...?"

Celestia took a breath. "Well, at least this ended up being peaceful enough. Maybe we should arrange for Shining Armor to-"

"No!" Chrysalis cried. "No. I am not... nearly ready enough to handle that. No. Can we not tell him?"

"I guess," Twilight replied with a shrug. "He's not Awake anyway..."

The changeling queen perked her ears. "He... isn't?" She turned to Cadance with an awkward smile. "Um, would you mind terribly if-"

"We're dating," the alicorn replied flatly.

"...ah. Oh, um. Okay..."

Cadance let out an annoyed grumble. "This would be so much easier if I could actually hate you..."

\* \* \*

><p>"So... that went well!" Twilight chirped brightly. "I mean, all things considered."<p>

Chrysalis gave her a long, flat look.

Then, after a moment, green flames burst up around her and she smiled. "I'll go give Macintosh your love."

"What-" The unicorn blinked as she rushed out of the library. "Chrysalis!" Twilight ran after her double, trying to catch her before she made the loop more embarrassing than it was, but already Chrysalis was nowhere to be seen.

"Oh, um, Twilight?" Fluttershy walked up timidly. "Hello. What is, um, how are you?"

"Quick, Shy, did you see me run through here?"

"Oh! Well yes. Chrysalis went that way."

"Thanks, you're the-Wait, Shy's not awake this loop." Twilight turned to her friend and raised an eyebrow. "Haha, very funny. You got me."

Fluttershy rolled her eyes and burst into flames, turning into a black pegasus. "You're really too smart for your own good, Princess."

"Look, in all seriousness... it could have gone a lot worse." Twilight shook her head. "I think this is good though."

"That whole thing was incredibly awkward."

"Not nearly as awkward as the time I killed Cadance and married Shining. Man, when she got back from the dead things were weird..."

Chrysalis blinked. "I... \_what?!\_"

Twilight sighed and snorted. "Okay, so my preawake self was basically a sociopath in that loop, and the local Pinkie Pie somehow managed to bake a portal to the afterlife-no, I don't understand it either..."

\* \* \*

<p>31.4 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

<p><span>Academic Excellence - Epilogue<span>

Lightning Dust and Rainbow Dash entered the Commandants office to find Spitfire already there. The two of them had rested up (much to Pinkie Pie's disappointment until Twilight reminded her that they still had the party to set up for later) and had received orders to report as soon as they'd recovered. The yellow pegasus looked at them over her glasses as they came to attention in front of her.

"Well. I have to say, when you bust clouds, you don't do half a job! You will be pleased to know that your entire group will be receiving commendations on their records, and the Silver Bolt, for actions above and beyond the call of duty."

The two pegasi couldn't help cracking at least a small grin. It wasn't the highest award the Wonderbolts could bestow, but it was respectable. Full fledged Wonderbolts had gone through their careers without getting it, and the number of cadets that had received it could be counted on one hoof, without the hoof.

"However, the two of you require special attention. As the highest scoring wing pair in the group, you were its de-facto leaders, and that's borne out by my interviews with the other cadets. They followed your lead on this. That's why I'm trying to decide whether to have you commended to the Princesses for bravery, or to kick you off the cloud for doing something so reckless!"

The sudden change in tone caught both of them by surprise.

"The Wonderbolts have their own records which I've studied since we returned. The last time a Tempest emerged from the Everfree Forest, it was driven off from an attack on Cloudsdale, not destroyed, and doing so required the combined efforts of the Wonderbolts and the Cloudsdale Royal Guard contingent. Not without casualties either.

"Cadet Dash, you apparently knew about this thing's capabilities. What in Equestria possessed you to attack it, and risk yourself and the other cadets?"

"Ma'am, we didn't start out intending to attack it. We received the distress call from Twilight, and set out to rescue her balloon. I explained what I knew, and all the other cadets agreed to the risk. But the initial plan was purely to distract it, play keep away to distract it while we got the balloon out of there then disengage."

"All the same, you put the other cadets in considerable danger." Spitfire said sternly.

"Permission to speak ma'am!" Lightning Dust piped up.

"Yes cadet?"

"The information may have come from Dash, and the plan was developed by all of our group working together, but Dash looked to me for the final say go ahead. I'm the Lead pony of the leading wing pair, which means it was my call. I gave the okay, so if there's trouble coming, it's my responsibility, not Dash's."

Dash couldn't help but look side-long at her lead in surprise. Then she felt bad for being surprised. Lightning Dust might have flaws, but lack of courage wasn't one of them. She wouldn't leave her friend hanging. "But it was my advice you followed. We went into that storm cloud together, you're not going into this one alone."

"Attention!" The two snapped back to attention to look forward at Spitfire., who took her sun glasses off and folded them deliberately.

"Much as I enjoy watching the two of you play the reverse blame game, I will decide who is responsible for what, and what should be done about it. Rescuing civilians, I don't have a problem with. But you

still have to explain why once they were out of danger, you didn't disengage. You correctly alerted the Officer on Deck, you must have known we we'd scramble everything we had to come support you."

The two ponies glanced at each other, and Lightning Dust gave a slight nod, which Dash took to be a sign to take the question. "It was firing bolts of lightning ma'am, not just short bursts but long streaks that homed in, but it could only track so fast. Close in, we could evade them, but if we'd increased the range, we or one of the other wing pairs would have gotten hit.

"We were trapped. That was my fault, I didn't know it could do that, but having seen it up close, sensed how the weather magic inside it held it together, I realised a large enough burst of weather magic to it's core could break it apart. But it took both of us to deliver enough energy to finish the job. I know it wasn't a good option, but at that point we didn't have any good options. At the very least, the disruption would have allowed the other wing pairs to get clear."

"And you agreed to this plan?" Spitfire looked over at Lightning Dust.

"Yes ma'am! Rainbow Dash is a skilled weather pony, and the only pony in Equestria able to do a Sonic Rainboom..."

"Not any more." Dash whispered, then shut up at a quelling glare from Spitfire.

"... more than that, I trust her judgement. If she believed it had a good chance of success, I wasn't going to disagree. In truth she deserves to be Lead pony far more than I do. The entire group from Ponyville already works together like a Wonderbolt team, has blown away every group record they've gone up against and she's never been anything less than supportive of any of them.

"She even managed to get me turned around. I was heading for a bad place, but she never gave up on me, no matter what I did. She might risk herself, but she would never risk her team mates, or ask them to do anything she wouldn't do herself. With respect ma'am, she showed me what being a Wonderbolt actually means, and if we do get kicked off the cloud, I can think of no finer company to be in as we fall."

Spitfire stared at them both for a long moment, then heaved a big sigh. "Very well, if that is your decision... Lightning Dust!"

"Yes ma'am!" The green pegasus straightened up waiting for the thunderbolt to hit.

"As Lead pony of your cadet group, you will be awarded the Golden Bolt for Valour and you will be commended to the Princesses. If I don't get you a Monarchs Thanks out of it, I'll go back to crop-dusting. Not just for dealing with the Tempest either. A true leader takes responsibility, and in your defence of Rainbow Dash you showed moral courage to equal your demonstrated physical bravery. You are also promoted to the rank of Cadet Leader."

That rank was only ever given to cadets who came back for advanced training, and then only to a senior cadet who was in charge of a

junior group. She broke into a wide grin at the thunderstruck expression on Lightning Dust's face. "However, if you ever pull a stunt like that again without orders I will pin your wings back so far you can clean your pinions with your tail! Do you read me Cadet Leader?"

"Ma'am, yes ma'am!" Lightning Dust saluted so hard, she almost brained herself with her hoof. She glanced at Dash to see how she was taking it and saw only a wide grin as the rainbow pegasus reverse punched the air.

"Rainbow Dash, the position of Cadet Leader is already taken, however, I intend to see you wearing a Golden Bolt, though my sources tell me I don't need to commend you to the princesses. I do however have a position in mind, Assistant instructor Dash, if you're willing to accept it."

Rainbow Dash's wings almost lifted her off the ground. "Woo hoo... I mean, ma'am yes ma'am! I do ma'am!"

Spitfire polished a lens against her lapel and put her glasses back on. "Considering the job you've done up till now, I figured why not make it official? Now, I believe you have a party to go to. Dismissed!"

The two of them saluted again, and filed out. Dash hesitated in the door for a moment, looking back at the seated pony, silhouetted by the setting sun coming through the windows behind her.

"Um... ma'am?"

"What is it Rainbow Dash?" Spitfire's response was short, but not unkind.

"Would you like to join us? When you come off duty that is. There's going to be plenty of food for every-pony, and Applejack's only gotten better at baking since the Gala."

Rainbow Dash was as easy to read as a Wonderbolts promotional poster and for that Spitfire was glad. This wasn't an attempt to curry favour, though what more could she want? It was nothing more than a genuine offer for Spitfire to come and enjoy herself.

"I have a lot of paperwork to do... but I'll make my way over as soon as it's finished." She pulled the first report from a stack, running the Academy wasn't all hoof-printing autograph pictures, and sighed. "Thank the Princesses I'm rotating back to operational duty next month. The paperwork only ever seems to stack higher."

"I hear you ma'am. Cloud use reports, thunderstorm health and safety assessments, an earth pony could haul the water to Cloudsdale just by stacking up the weather patrol paperwork and climbing it."

"Go on!" Spitfire waved her away. "Go have fun, you've earned it. Maybe when I get there you can show me how to do that Sonic Rainboom of yours. This chassis may not be the latest model, but I can still buck the blue with the best of them. And maybe this old pony can teach the two of you some new tricks."

"Ma'am yes ma'am!" With that Rainbow Dash closed the door behind

her.

\* \* \*

><p>The party had run well in to the twilight, and Twilight was well into running the party. Firefly tiki torches were scattered around the cloud it was being held on, and the PinkieApplejack buffet was being done great justice by the assembled ponies. Pinkie herself was part of the group playing cloud volleyball over to one side and a number of other ponies were just chilling with drinks and listening to a Victrola which was pumping out 'Good Striations' by the Cumulus Colts.

(Yes, it is your typical surfer beach party.)

Lightning Dust and Rainbow dash were at the centre of this group, at least until they saw Spitfire approaching. Rainbow Dash greeted her with a grin and a wide wave of her wing.

"Welcome to the party!"

Lightning Dust was a little more thoughtful. "Uh ma'am? Permission to speak freely?"

Spitfire gave a grin of her own. "We're off the clock, so you can cut down the ma'aming to a minimum "

"The meeting, the whole getting kicked out, was it all a test?"

"Life is a test, and there's no retakes."

Spitfire thought she heard a muffled snort from Rainbow Dash, and wondered what was so funny.

She continued. "In short, yes and no. I needed to understand not just what you did, but why. I knew you had courage, but did it make you reckless? In a regular Wonderbolt, a willingness to take risks isn't necessarily a flaw, if they're able to follow the chain of command, harness it to the overall plan, but a leader has to have something more. the ability to assess the risks, make the decisions as to whether they're worthwhile, balance the needs of the team with the needs of the mission, and put both ahead of their own needs."

She tapped the younger pegasus on the chest. "You demonstrated just that in the way you responded when I made the meeting adversarial. You got the good stuff because you exceeded my expectations once again. You're going to make one heck of a Wonderbolt, and that goes for you too, you grinning maverick!"

The last was addressed to the smirking Rainbow Dash. "Okay, now if Soarin hasn't finished them off, I'd like to get some of those pies, and then we'll see if I can buck out a Sonic Rainboom."

\* \* \*

><p>31.5 (Masterweaver)<p>

"So, um, Mom..."

Twilight smiled to herself, still feeling her heart warm up a bit even after all these years. Then she turned around. "Yes Nyx?"

The young black alicorn shuffled her hoof around in a slow circle. "You know how, um... in my original loop, there was the whole Cult of Nightmare thing?"

The scholar nodded, wondering exactly where this was going.

"Well... I just found out there's a \_small\_ cult here too... but, um..."

"...but?" Twilight prompted gently.

"They're not... exactly... competent. Or sane, actually." Nyx shrugged. "They've got a clown, two other ponies... I'm pretty sure one of them is a stoner, but I can't figure out which one. Oh, and their leader does manage the whole Evil Minion thing. That's actually all he does."

The librarian blinked. After a moment she nodded once. "Okay, so you have some... strange fans. It's happened to all of us, Nyx, and if you ever need to talk about it-"

"Ah, um..." The reborn incarnation of Nightmare Moon, Embodiment of Eternal Night and Tyrant Usurper, let her eyes fall to the ground awkwardly. "I kinda... sorta... maybe invited them over for dinner tonight."

"...what."

"They were genuflecting! I panicked!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight and Spike shared a look as the pie dripped slowly down the librarian's mane.<p>

It had turned out that Nyx had missed two members of the cult, resulting in a mad kitchen scramble to redistribute the portions while Twilight got to know her daughter's... stalkers, to be totally honest. Clippy Clop the clown was apparently mute, but made up for it with humorous japery... of which Twilight was a victim. He was probably only in the cult because of Screwball, who had ended up being the town fool in this loop instead of Diamond Tiara's mad sister... or mother... or Discord's daughter, thank Celestia the chaos god wasn't awake \_that\_ loop.

A yellow stallion sighed and levitated the pipan off their host. "I'm... sorry about him, he takes his job seriously." He smiled apologetically, further cementing his status in her mind as the sane member of this group.

"No, it's fine mister Cosmic." Twilight shook her head, dislodging some of the cream as she levitated a towel out of the kitchen. "I've had worse, and I'm sure mister Clop was only expressing his appreciation for my delicate care of your deity."

"Indeed, bro, that's an awesome thing you're doing. Awesome like the wave I totes saw in my cereal this morning." The white pegasus mare

stretched her wings. "Like... whoa.."

Apparently Sunny Daze was an actual pegasus this loop, instead of just an alias, and Twilight couldn't exactly fault Nyx for thinking she was high; the surfer tone made sense, but the observations she made were rather... unusual. She'd almost blown cover by accidentally calling her princess, but Sunny had assumed that Twilight was just referring to her position as the most radical of Nightmare Moon's followers.

"Thank you, miss Daze."

"Whoa, dude, miss Daze is my \_mother.\_"

Screwball screwed up her face. "I thought your mother's name was Whipcurl?"

The pegasus rolled her eyes. "Totes being metaphor, dudette."

"Why is she a dudette when I'm a dude?" Twilight asked lightly.  
"We're both mares!"

"Whoa. You're a dudette?"

The librarian blinked. After a moment, she took a breath and turned to the other pegasus in the room. "So... um... Rocken Coconut. Those are some interesting colors you've painted yourself..."

Coconut preened, brushing a black hoof through his mane and obviously pulling some of the dried blue paint out of its blonde strands. "Thank you. I felt it was only natural for me to emulate the Goddess's form. Of course I'd never wear my horn in public, that would be blasphemous." Clippy Clop honked solemnly.

Twilight nodded slowly. "That... makes sense." After a moment, she took a breath and turned to the final stallion. "You've been very quiet, mister...?"

"Tiiiiireeeeeeeeeek." The whispered growl emerged slowly from the dark shadows of the hood. "Bringer of tooooooormeeent and loooooooyal servitor to her high empressssssss. I see no reeeeeeeessssson to speak to you."

The librarian rolled her eyes. "Whatever you say. If you'll excuse me, I need to check on dinner..."

\* \* \*

><p>31.6<p>

"Look, Dash," Gilda said, "I don't get why you're so uptight about this. You were never this boring in Flight School."

Dash winced internally. It was tough, dealing with Gilda. Half the time she was reminding Dash of how much they'd been friends, and the other half the time she was being kind of a jerk.

Yes, Dash could engineer a reconciliation or at least a less firey breakup, and stay in touch. But doing it over and over again got kind of wearying after a while.



"Fluttershy's my friend, too, Gils," Dash replied. "I mean, she'sâ€| yeah, different, butâ€|"

"Heh." Gilda looked down. "Different, yeah. Hey, watch this!"

"Wait-" Dash was speaking to an empty cloud.

\* \* \*

><p>Gilda landed just around the corner from where Fluttershy was, then walked out acting oblivious. It didn't take long for the two of them to bump into one another.<p>

"Oi!" Gilda shouted, and roared at Fluttershy.

The great noise sent ponies all around the area scurrying for cover.

When it ended, Fluttershy cocked her head. "Are we having a roaring contest?" she asked, politely.

"â€|eh?" The griffin blinked.

"My turn."

Abruptly, there was a large wolf standing there instead. It threw back its neck, and howled to the sky at the top of its lungs. It went on, and on, for at least thirty seconds.

When done, the wolf looked down, then blushedâ€| somehow. "Oh, sorryâ€|" Fluttershy said, transforming back and rubbing her hooves together, "â€|that wasn't a roar, was it? I suppose you winâ€|"

Gilda breathed deeply, forcing her raised hackles to go down. Once she had them under control, she preened her wings a bit, then dropped the task until later. "What the buck just happened?"

Fluttershy just looked down and shuffled her hooves.

For her part, Gilda looked conflicted. "â€|I mean, I didn't imagine that, right? You just turned into a wolf?"

"â€|yesâ€|"

"You knowâ€|" Gilda's expression firmed. "That was actually pretty cool."

"Really?" Some of the strength came back into Fluttershy's voice.

"Yeah."

\* \* \*

><p>From her cloud, Dash thought over how to take that.<p>

Apparently griffins did respect strength. Cool.

\* \* \*

><p>31.7<p>

"Basically," Twilight said, looking at Chrysalis over a pair of spectacles, "I think it would help you to move on a bit."

The Changeling Queen looked less than convinced. "I don't know if it would. Or, for that matter, if that would be a good idea in the first place."

Then she pointed. "And what's with the spectacles, anyway?"

"I dunno," Twilight replied, shrugging. "I found them in the library once, and they seemed to be a good thing to keep around. I'm thinking of getting them rose tinted. But back to my point. You can't just pine over Shining forever â€" that's not fair to yourself, it's not fair to him, and it's not fair to Cadence either."

"I know it isn't," Chrysalis replied. "But he's stillâ€| he was stillâ€| my first real love. Up to then, love wasn't something I fully understood, I think. It wasn't the way the hive works â€" that's an intense affection, but it's likeâ€| a limb. Or something. You're just so used to it being there that you have to take a step back to notice it. But Shiningâ€| it was something I wasn't used to, and it wasâ€| wonderful."

Twilight nodded. "I see. And I do have sympathy for you â€" the way you put it sounds a lot like how I first got friends. Butâ€| you don't need to have just one love. Ponies move on from their first loves, and it doesn't make the second any less sweet."

"And you'd know?" Chrysalis challenged.

"Nope," Twilight replied. "Not directly. But I've paid attention to how all this works."

After a moment, she pulled a scrapbook from her subspace pocket and turned to a double-page spread, full of photographs. "See this human?"

"Yesâ€|" Chrysalis replied, confused by the non-sequitur.

"His name is Bran. I Looped here once, andâ€| oh, never mind, it'd take too long to explain. But Bran's a werewolf, one of several there. That's his second wife."

"And he loves her?"

"Nope."

Chrysalis looked at her in astonishment.

"He lost his first wife, and it hurt too much, so he deliberately picked as his second mate â€" and wife â€" someone who was too petty, too judgemental, to become part of his heart." Twilight closed the scrapbook again. "That's an option, too, but I really think you're not the sort of pony to take it."

After a long minute of thought, the changeling nodded slowly.

"On a completely different tack, though, you don't need to find a special somepony straight away if you do decide to follow my advice. In fact, I'd advise against it." Twilight shrugged. "Spike and Rarity are an extreme case â€" they spent over a hundred years getting to know one another again before they made it official â€" but the idea is sound. Don't commit too soon, at least if you're going to do more than what Bran did."

"Alright, then." Chrysalis nodded to herself. "I'll give it a go."

\* \* \*

><p>"Soâ€|" the disguised Changeling said awkwardly, shifting on the chair as her pegasus' wings tried to flare in nervousness. "What do you do, then?"<p>

"Oh, I give self help seminars, actually," Iron Will replied, pouring them both drinks. "All about being tough and courageous. Very gryphononic philosophy, in a way."

"That's interestingâ€|" Chrysalis said, and then nearly got bowled over by a sudden rush of vehement, forthright emotion.

"Don't be half hearted! If someone's being square, give them a nasty stare!"

\_Somehow,\_ Chrysalis thought, \_this isn't going to work out.\_

\* \* \*

><p>31.8<p>

Twilight felt the Loop settling into place around her in a familiar way. Canterlot, just found out about Nightmare Moon, all that jazz.

"Okay, Spike, take a-â€|

Something was wrong.

"Iâ€| think you might have confused me with someone else," a decidedly female voice said from behind her.

Twilight scanned through her loop memories as she turned to the speaker. As it happened, she was a blue baby dragon.

"â€|oh, hold on," Twilight said, interested. "Are you a new Looper?"

"Well, new to here. Hi, I'm-

"Saphira, yes," Twilight nodded. The dragon seemed slightly surprised, and Twilight tossed her mane. "Loop memories tend to support a self-consistent reality, and since you're taking the place of my assistant, Spikeâ€| that means I know your name."

"Ah, of course." Saphira nodded. "I'm sorry, we're not very used to

fused loops. I think this is only the third or the fourthâ€¦"

"Right. Oh, are you the Anchor?"

"No." Saphira paused. "Well, mostly no. My bonded human is, and we have a fairly close empathic bond, so we're hardly ever \_not\_ both Looping."

"Interestingâ€¦" Twilight dashed off a note with magic while she spoke. "Well, we'll see how the first few days of the Loop go, and see if your Anchor is around."

Saphira held up a hand-paw. "No need, my link just started working. He's here. And apparently â€¦ lacemaker. Well, at least he's good at that." The little dragon carefully hid a good-natured chuckle.

"â€¦well, that answers the question of who \_he's\_ replacing," Twilight said.

\* \* \*

><p>The anchor in question, Eragon, sank back onto a couch in the library. Saphira walked over and sat next to him, and they exchanged a fond look before turning to Twilight.<p>

"Okay. Basically, where we come from, there's this huge empire, then some elves, and rebels."

Twilight nodded.

"My Loop starts right about when the elves try to send a dragon egg â€¦"

"That's me," Saphira said.

"Yes, that's Saphira, to someone who works for the rebels." Eragon looked at Twilight with a sardonic expression. "I'm simplifying just a bit, in case you couldn't tell. Anyway, I pick it up, then miss Blue Scales here hatches out and things get a bitâ€¦ complicated."

"Complicated meaning," Saphira said with a tart smile, "he and I become the single most valuable bargaining chip in Alagaesia. Dragon riders were the old rulers where we come from, so old Slow Feet here and I are champions and legitimizers all rolled into one â€¦ and it didn't help that we were both breathtakingly naïve, politically, the first time. Add to \_that\_ that I'm the only female dragon that entire world knows exists, andâ€¦"

Twilight winced.

"So, long story short, we're looking forward to a loop as quiet as we can get."

"Rightâ€¦" Twilight nodded. "Good news for you there, actually. Princess Celestia and Princess Luna declared Equestria's Loop to be a sanctuary. You can have your quiet loop." Then she paused. "By the wayâ€¦ what's with the lace?"

Eragon shot a glance at Saphira, who held up her hand-paws. "Guilty, guilty, I accept full responsibility."

"You'll pay for that," he warned, and she grinned. "Anyway, it's actually how we fund the Varden â€" that's the rebel group. Magic is costly of energy, more costly than doing the same thing by non-magical means, but it's perfect for finicky detail work."

"So you work for the rebels?"

"Sometimes." He stretched his forelegs out on the couch. "Sometimes I try the Empire, sometimes the Elves, sometimes I go my own way. It's a right bear trying to make my world actually work out."

\* \* \*

><p>"Wellâ€|" Spike said, looking down. "I didn't expect this."<p>

The alabaster dragon about the size of a small cat gave a wing-flipping shrug in response.

"Hey, join the club," Hiccup said. "I get about one loop in fifty where I'm the dragon, these days."

"Huh." Spike snapped his fingers, summoning his lightsaber. "Well, I might need \_this\_â€| anyway, where's Toothless?"

"Officially, he's dead. Unofficiallyâ€|" Hiccup opened his jacket, revealing a six-inch fire lizard hanging from the inner lining.

\_Hey,\_ Toothless broadcast on a broad band. \_You wanna buy a dragon?\_

\* \* \*

><p>31.9 (misterQ)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Do you want to talk about it?"<p>

"I reckon I do," said a despondent looking Applejack. She looked over at Twilight Sparkle, only to see that her friend was already in therapist mode. Every pony who was awake this loop decided to take this round off and go on vacation. Celestia was teaching her sister and Nyx how to surf. Most of her friends were enjoying themselves on the beach, along with Derpy and her daughters - who Applejack remembered should have also been in Ponyville at the same time. Of course, she remembered having seen Derpy at the young flyer's competition in three different places at the same time. Applejack just silently filed this fact away in her mental vault along with the memories of all of the non-euclidean mind-warping things she had encountered.

"Why don't you start at the beginning of that loop, Applejack," Twilight said as she sat in her beach chair, "I assume you mean the one where Rarity, Rainbow Dash, and myself went off to help a

non-looping Spike with his dragon curiosity issues?"

"Yep, that's the one," Applejack sipped from her large mug of cider and wondered if she'd need anything stronger to tell the tale, "I mean, things started off like they all happened originally. Then Princess Celestia called on me and Pinkie and Trixie, of all ponies, to help her deal with an issue."

"It is strange she would call on Trixieâ€¦"

"The Princess told us it was because we needed a unicorn, and you and Rarity were gone at the time."

Twilight contemplated that for a short while, "Still, it seems odd that she would need Pinkie and Trixie, of all ponies, to accompany you on what was supposed to be a diplomatic mission."

Applejack sighed, "That's because I reckon our princess has days where she done dumps a bunch of fuel on the fire to see how big the flames are going to get. And that's all fine and good unless the flames are suddenly consuming all the rational parts of my mind."

"Right," Twilight sighed. She was very, very well antiquated with the mischievous side of Celestia. She looked over to see the grinning sun princess telekinetically pulled the surfboard out from under Luna, plunging her sister into the water and chastising her about keeping her balance, "So... seaponies."

Applejack gave a small shudder and acknowledged, "Yup. Seaponies."

There was a long silence as the orange earth pony took a long sip of her cider, "The first thing you gotta know about seaponies and mermares is that they're all insane. All the ponies under the water are completely crazy. Pinkie Pie said that they've been battling undersea horrors for so long, they're on their last sanity point; whatever that means."

"And Pinkie was sent with you on a diplomatic mission to Aquastria?" Twilight blinked, astounded, "Why?"

In answer, Applejack just pointed her hoof at the epic water fight erupting between the two alicorn sisters. Then she continued, "Although it may be because Pinkie was the closest to their way of thinking. Anyways, Trixie cast the 'don't drown and die', or whatever it's called, spell on all of us and down we went."

The earth pony took another sip from her mug, remembering, "Do you know why King Leo is a seal?"

"Sea Lion," Twilight Sparkle corrected.

"Seal, sea lion; what's the difference?"

"Longer whiskers, longer flippers, and ear flaps to start with. Seals only have little ear holes."

"Ear flaps? Seriously?" Applejack sighed, "Anyways, do you know why King Leo isn't a seapony? It's because someone rational has to be

able to keep them all from blowing everything up or setting everything on fire."

Twilight opened her mouth, but Applejack interrupted, "And yes, I know that they live underwater. But trust me on this. Setting themselves and everything else on fire is a very real danger with unmonitored seaponies."

The purple unicorn debated with herself before asking, "How?"

"The first thing you got to realize is that seaponies are all water-benders. For a people with no real limbs and only a tail, they are scary powerful. You'd think you'd be safe on land, but I've seen them create water spheres around them and roll right on after their enemies. Then they can create water tendrils that can happily rip apart a lava demon and beat them to death with their own severed body parts while the seaponies all laugh and sing and harmonize."

"That all actually happened, by the way," Applejack clarified, "While the mermarees and the seastallions had their annual no-holds-barred race, some lava demons all done decided to attack. The reason the actual seapony leader who - doesn't like ruling, and thank the herd for that; Queen Marina called for Equestrian help was to try to convince King Leo to open up their strategic reserves of both explosives and cheerleading outfits to fight the encroaching forces of the Squirk, the Kraken King."

"Cheerleading outfits?"

"I don't rightly know. Only that it mightily disturbed King Leo to see Pinkie Pie when she found one. Then he called her over and whispered something to her about Squirk, and she quickly got out of it."

"I.. see," And Twilight really, really wished she didn't; so she changed the subject, "I don't think I've ever met this Queen Marina."

"She's usually on the front lines, fighting them undersea monstrosities that Pinkie talked about. Elegant mermaree, pretty tail and fins, but she gets a really scary grin on her face when she's all talking about explosives. She and Trixie got on like apples and more apples."

"When Pinkie and I got back from baking our contribution to the victory feast, Pinkie latched on to the conversation about things that go all boom," Applejack finished off her cider in one long sip, "They started resonating crazy, Twilight. The three of them, Trixie, Pinkie, and Marina, started scaring me real bad. I pulled them apart when I started hearing phrases like 'willy pete fiendfyre variant', 'everything explodes forever', and 'how difficult would it be to summon a chlorine trifluoride elemental underwater'."

"Oh, Applejack. Just enjoy this vacation loop, okay?" Twilight gently hugged her distraught friend, "Just do me one favor, alright?"

"What is that?"

The purple unicorn smiled, "Don't go in the water."

Applejack returned the grin, "You don't have to tell me twice, sugarcube."

\* \* \*

><p>31.1: One of the great strengths of the Slavequestria setting is precisely that confusion Twilight mentions. Celestia in it is one of the nicest, kindest people in it... but she still keeps other sentient beings as property.<br>31.2: DisQord is played by John deLancie. Or possibly the other way around.

>31.3: The grand mastery of awkwardness.<br>31.4: Well, closure is good...

>31.5: All hail the Queen of the Nite.<br>31.6: More Flutterwolf. Also, this isn't Awake Gilda (obviously).

>31.7: She's going to be at this a while. And Bran is from the Mercy Thompson books. Quite good urban fantasy, with a snarky first person protagonist.<br>31.8: Hee hee. (Well, Rarity should find time as a dragon to be interesting.)

>31.9: Let us hope that Trixie Lulamoon never gains access to fissile uranium.<p>

## 32. Chapter 32

### 32.1

"Twilight," Trixie said, in an urgent whisper. "I have something to show you."

"What is it?" Twilight asked, looking up.

"Sssh!" Trixie replied in a strangled tone. "Not so loud!"

"Okay, you have my attentionâ€|" Twilight put her book down, with bookmark, and followed her friend out to Trixie's wagon slash shed.

(Trixie insisted it was still a wagon, but Twilight had her own opinions about something which had no wheels and was held down by guy ropes. And which had three extra rooms, including a bathroom and Jacuzzi.)

Once inside, Trixie pulled up a hatch in the floor and trotted slowly down the steps. Twilight followed, already wondering by what possible means it was still a wagon when it had a basement.

"In here," Trixie said, hushed, opening a large metal door which turned out to be four inches thick.

"What are you doing down here?" Twilight asked, still quietly.

"Behold," Trixie said, and made a grand gesture. "My laboratory. I am currently working on the most impressive purely non-magical pyrotechnics I can discover. Mere unavailability of magic will not stop me from making a loop exciting."

"And what you've created is?" Twilight pressed, with a sinking feeling.



"Dimercuric tetraazide."

There was a pause, as the scholarly Anchor digested that for a moment.

"Okay, that sounds like the most obscenely touchy explosive I've been fortunate enough to never encounter in my long life. Is it?"

"Wellâ€¦ yes, actually," Trixie admitted.

"Right." Before going any further, Twilight silently cast her brother's defensive spell on both of them. "So, what did you want to invite me down here to see?"

"The bit where I decant it, of course," Trixie replied. "It took eight months to purify enough to make a small supply, and this is a historic moment. I have genuinely discovered something new, hereâ€¦"

Twilight strengthened the spell.

Trixie moved over to the beaker. In slow, reverent, and very careful movements, she lifted it up in both forehooves and tilted it. Liquid dripped out, one carefully metered drop at a time, until some small crystals could be seen.

Again moving with the utmost care, Trixie placed the beaker back down again. She telekinetically picked up a spatula-

\* \* \*

><p>Spike blinked, as the windows rattled and he saw the Books and Branches shoot into the sky on a trail of fire. "Hey, Rarity?"<p>

"What?" the fashionista mumbled around her mouthful of pins.

"I think Trixie just blew up our house again. Can I stay here?"

"Oh, if you mustâ€¦"

They exchanged a wry look.

"Any excuse is a good excuse," Spike shrugged. "How's it going?"

"I really need to invent a fabric that changes sizes properly," Rarity finally replied, putting the pins down. "But if you don't size-shift with it on, those should last you a while."

"Thanks."

\* \* \*

><p>"Trixie would like fries with that," the blue unicorn muttered, and fell over.<p>

Twilight dug herself out of the remains of the antechamber. "What the buck just happened?"

From her position on the floor, Trixie stuck up a hoof. "I know, miss! The compound turned out to be highly reactive to even very dim light in the dry state, so even simple magiluminescence caused a violent explosion."

Splinters and bits of wagon, tree and Jacuzzi began to rain down around them.

"Hi!" Derpy said, flying over the hole. "Letter for you, Twilight. Oh, were you and Trixie doing home renovation? That always happens when I try."

Twilight shook her head. "Noâ€¦ this was more along the lines of an industrial accident."

"Okay." Derpy nodded and flew off, almost tripping over in the air and hence being missed by Twilight's still-intact bed as it plummeted into the hole next to them.

"You know," Twilight added conversationally, as she opened the letter, "if this explosion blew up the books despite my protective spells there'll be Tartarus to pay, Trixieâ€¦ oh, that's nice. It seems my application to visit the Griffin Lands got approved."

Twilight fixed the showmare with a stare. "And my house better be here when I get back. Understand?"

Trixie had started snoring.

"Oh, whatever." Twilight shrugged, then teleported out of the crater where her house used to be and trotted off east.

Maybe it was time to stage an intervention with that mareâ€¦

\* \* \*

><p>32.2<p>

Twilight was still unsettled by that "Astrid" pegasus. From what she'd said, it had taken not too long to work out that the foreign Looper was actually one of Hiccup's friends. (Honestly, the dragon should have been a clue.)

Indeed, there were those suggestions that she thought rather more of himâ€¦ though given what she was like, Twilight felt more pity than anything.

"Okay," she said, a slight quaver in her voice as Astrid flipped a battleaxe between her wings, "the next thing that normally happens here is that Fluttershy tries to redeem Discord."

"Oh, \_him,"\_ Astrid said, scowling.

Actually, it had been fascinating to watch her interaction with Discord. He'd turned her into a cringing, zero-confidence weakling who was scared stiff by bad language and had to be rescued out from under her axe.

In other words, basically into Fluttershy.

"Think you could give it a go?" Twilight hazarded, and was rewarded with a scowl.

"Can I, hel! I'll sort him out." Astrid's face set. "Hold on, I need to go get some helpers."

\* \* \*

><p>"You actually released me?" Discord said, looking around. "How strange."<p>

"Yeah, I'll handle this," Astrid said, and strode forward. "Look, goatface. You listen to me, and we're all happy fun time friends."

Discord thought. "Nah. Now-"

She darted up and took hoof-fulls of his hair and beard, dragging him around to look her in the eyes. "I. Wasn't. Finished. Now, the easy way is the way I just described. The fun way is that you don't listen to me."

"What happens then?" Discord said, interested.

Astrid smirked, and beat her rear left hoof on the ground twice.

An Ursa Major, Stormfly, a chimera and a mantichore lumbered into view.

Notably, the Ursa was carrying an axe the size of the town hall.

"Well," Astrid said, catching her own battleaxe as Applejack heaved it over, "in that case then we try what I like to call a trial separation."

"Separation of what?" Pinkie asked brightly. "Did you two get married without telling me?"

"Nah, I was thinking moreâ€| head from body."

Discord took careful note of the way Astrid was hefting the battleaxe in one wing. Then, slowly and deliberately, he tracked across the mantichore (which had a tail in strike position), the chimera (all three of whose heads were snarling), the Deadly Nadder (who was in the middle of taking an ominous breath), and finally stopped on the big axe.

"What was that bit about listening to you?"

Astrid let go of his hair, and pouted. "Nobody ever takes the fun wayâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>32.3<p>

Twilight's horn crackled, spitting out bolts of multicoloured light every time she saw a target. Return fire splashed off her shield, and

she dove through a window to get out of the direct line of fire.

"Twily!" her brother said, happiness in his voice. Then his tone became more serious. "How's things?"

"Not good, reallyâ€|" Twilight admitted. "The west flank's crumblingâ€" they must have shifted their reserves around to hit us there."

"Ah, ponyfeathers," Shining shook his head. "Sergeant, take our own reserve and shore us up."

"That won't hold longâ€|" the younger sibling warned, projecting a map. Blue 'friendly' dots were winking out rapidly, and the green of confirmed enemies just kept coming.

"I know, but we don't have a better choice," Shining replied.

"Fair point." Twilight's eyes flicked up for a second, as she changed frequencies on her shield. "This should be a bit better."

The ground shook, faintly at first, but then building to an incredible grinding rumble before finally dying away.

"Well, so much for the \_east\_ flankâ€|" Twilight muttered.

"That was Trixie?" Shining asked.

"The ground shook too much for it to be anypony else. Wonder how they got herâ€|"

Four guards backed into the room, lashing out with spells from their horns as magic flew past in return. "Sir, we've lost contact with-

Twilight's eyes narrowed, and she stunned all four of them.

They fell, flashing with green flame and reverting to their base forms.

"Thought soâ€|"

More changelings appeared at the window, and then the ceiling broke open.

Green magic flashed from above, and after twenty frantic seconds bolts got past both Twilight's shield and her brother's.

"Yes!" came a shout from outside.

Wings buzzing, Queen Chrysalis entered the room. "I win. At last."

"Yep," Twilight said, rolling back upright. "Good game. Same time next week?"

"Sure." They shook hooves.

"I have to say, Twily," Shining muttered, rubbing a bruise ruefully,

"these changelings are \_very\_ good at magic tag."

"Comes of the hive mind," Chrysalis said, with a slightly brittle casualness.

A blue unicorn trotted into the room. "Trixie thinks that was unfair."

"It was a shieldâ€|" Chrysalis rolled her eyes. "You do this every week. Shields, disguises, swarm tacticsâ€|" no matter how we beat you, it's somehow unfair by your lights."

"Yes?" Trixie said, with the tone of somepony explaining a simple concept to a foal. "Trixie does not get defeated in a fair fight. Ergo, the fights she loses are not fair."

Chrysalis threw up her hooves. "This is ridiculous!"

"Hey, at least you only have to deal with this kind of attitude once per weekâ€|" Twilight countered.

The Changeling Queen paused, and then nodded. "Fair point."

"Trixie chooses to reject that conversation and substitute one about how awesome she is!" Trixie shouted.

"Oh, grow up!" Chrysalis shot back.

\* \* \*

><p>"This is the most unconventional plan you have come up with for integrating us yet," Chrysalis said to Twilight, then took a sip of cocoa.<p>

"Well, playing sports does help ponies get closer," Twilight said, shrugging. "It started as an idea after a Loop somewhere where wars are done by mutual agreement in special arenas, but the idea wouldn't go awayâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>32.4<p>

"Do you know, I find myself rather perplexed by you," Celestia said, lightly.

Nyx looked up from an ice cream. "Really?"

"Indeed I do." Celestia inclined her teacup at the filly. "You are, as far as I understand it, generated from a version of my sister. Endowed with life but none of her memories, and then you got an abridged version of Luna's time as Nightmare Moon."

"That's right," Nyx said, going back to the ice cream for a second. Then she looked up, with big innocent eyes. "So what's the problem again?"

"Well â€" oh, goodness, but you do those well," Celestia said with something like admiration. "I bet you could charm the whole parliament."

"Thanks!"

"Anyway. My point." Celestia made a small gesture. "You have, at my last count, had no fewer than forty loops in which I am also a participant. Based on what I know about the Loops, there must have been many more where I was not lucky enough to also be present."

"Pretty much. Ooh, there's boysenberry ice cream in thisâ€|" Nyx carefully manipulated the ice cream. "You don't see that much."

"And, well, there you rather make my point."

"I do?" Nyx licked her lips clean of ice cream.

"You're well over two hundred years old, you seeâ€|" Celestia pointed. "And you still act very much like a young filly."

Nyx looked back at the oldest of the Princesses for a moment. Then she balanced her ice cream carefully on the point and hit it with an ice spell, keeping it from falling over. "Okay, I'll explain."

"Please do," Celestia invited.

"First thing isâ€| in my home loop, or, in my first loop 'cause this \_is\_ kind of a home loopâ€| the only really happy life I had was with momma-Twilight, as a little filly. When I was grown up as Nightmare Moon I wasâ€| just miserable." Nyx shrugged uncomfortably. "I don't like to remember it too much."

"And now?"

"Now is kind of the same thingâ€| I still remember being, well, \_Nightmare Moon\_. I still remember faint echoes of that need to get revenge on an uncaring worldâ€| but it's really kind of hard to have that super evil powerful hate when you're going to school and doing homework." The young alicorn shook her head. "I prefer being nice, really. And being a filly makes me feel much more comfortable generally."

"It seems we all have our burdens to bear," Celestia said, with a nod.

"There's another side to it, too, of course," Nyx said, grinning much more comfortably. "Fillies get ice cream and stuff."

"A fair point indeed!" Celestia chuckled. "Actually, that gives me an ideaâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>"Who's this?" Pinkie asked Twilight. "She looks cute!"<p>

Twilight nodded down at the filly. "She's called Helia â€" one of Nyx's pen friends. I'm looking after her for the week. No, I don't know why she's got wings and a horn either."

"Okie dokie." Pinkie gave the young alicorn a conspiratorial look.  
"Hey, you want some ice cream?"

"Do I?" Helia asked with a big grin.

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis grumbled to herself as she finished <em>another<em>  
tranche of paperwork.

Why the buck had she ever agreed to fill in for Celestia for a week?  
The alicorn had enough paperwork to choke a dragon!

"Your highness," the seneschal said, motioning to the door, "the  
court is to be in session momentarily."

"Do you mean soon, or for a short time?" Chrysalis asked, mentally  
checking her disguise was perfect.

"The first one, of course, your highness."

"Of course," Chrysalis echoed. "Silly me."

\* \* \*

><p>"And so, you see, I don't know what to doâ€|" the stallion  
trailed off into mumbling.<p>

Chrysalis tasted his emotions. He didn't have all that much hope,  
which perhaps wasn't surprising â€" the position he was trying to  
advance was that he had lost much of his life's savings in a  
disaster, though he himself had come through as had enough to allow  
him to live reasonably comfortably.

But the money he'd been saving up to start a newspaper, his life's  
ambition, was not available from what remained of his assets.

The disguised Changeling wondered how Celestia would have resolved  
this. She probably would have weighed benefit against loss, deftly  
reshuffled funds and personalities, and linked the stallion up with  
either a suitably rich noble or a public works project orâ€|  
something.

Chrysalis didn't have nearly that expertiseâ€| but she could sense  
the stallion's sincerity, and that was enough for her.

"The crown will provide funds for your project, in exchange for a  
thirty percent share. See the treasurer for a draft on the  
vaults."

Surprise, then gratitude, blossomed in the stallion's mind like a  
silent supernova, and approval â€" and the deep, abiding love that  
Celestia invoked in her subjects â€" washed in from the walls.

And since they were aimed at Chrysalis, at the results of her  
actions, she could absorb them with no harm to the originators at  
all.

This is why, she thought, as outwardly she nodded gravely for the

next case. \_Aside from anything else, it's like eating a gourmet meal every night.\_

\* \* \*

><p>32.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that was interestingâ€|" Prince Shining Armor muttered, wiping cake off his muzzle with a napkin.<p>

Princess Twilight shrugged her wings. "Sorry, Shiny. I know you're new to the Elementsâ€|"

"Yeah. We could have practised, maybe?" Shining Armor lifted the Loyalty necklace off his head, carefully making sure it didn't get too much icing on it. "One of the things I don't want to hear when facing down Discord is 'wait, you \_can\_ use these, right?'"

"I said I was sorryâ€|" Twilight said meekly. "Anyway, we did it. So, now, how do we divide things up?"

Shining shrugged. "You're the expert."

"Well, I'd say military and civilian, but we don't actually \_have\_ much of a military." Twilight shrugged. "Nor do they normally have much to do, aside from keeping the peace."

"Nah, that'll be fine."

Twilight looked at him carefully. "If you say so."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right, that's the patrol routes worked out." Shining shuffled his papers and handed them to Corporal Rockhoof, who accepted them and took them out of the room.<p>

"What's next?"

Shining's aide looked lost. "What do you mean, my prince?"

"I mean, what's next on the agenda?"

"Sire, you've been off the agenda for six months. You've been doing everypony else's work. For the sake of the founders, my prince, you just reorganized the patrol routes in a remote town near Stalliongrad."

"Not following you." Shining tapped an office toy on his desk, which started clacking merrily.

"There's no work left to \_do\_."

"Check again," Shining instructed.

"I did. Twice."

"Well, then." Prince Shining Armor adjusted his chain of office



(something that his sister had looked askance at), and strode out of his office.

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Twilight Sparkle knocked on her brother's door. "Hey, Shiny?"<p>

"Come in," Shining said, and Twilight opened the door.

Paperwork was piled high on the desk, and Shining was flicking through it with every appearance of enjoyment.

"Oh, what's all this in aid of?" Twilight asked.

"Oh, there was a nasty couple of robberies last night. Big money stuff. So that means a lot of work for the guard, of course. I'm coordinating the investigation, so hopefully we'll catch this pony before they do it again."

Twilight winced. "That's terrible!"

"Well, not really." Shining shrugged. "For whatever reason, they only stole about a tenth of what was actually there, soâ€|"

"Huh." Twilight said, frowning. "That is strange."

"Tell me about itâ€| so, how are things going with you?"

"Well, I've decided to subsidize authors heavily, and see just how many books get written as a result. There's a lot of society-engineering experiments I only really get a chance to do in these loopsâ€|" Twilight grinned. "Besides, I need some new books to read."

"Yeah, fair point."

\* \* \*

><p>"What, another one?"<p>

"Yes," Shining said, shaking his head. "We're no closer to this stallion than before. He stole the penthouse off a Manehattan skysrise."

"He?" Twilight asked, interested. "You got something, then?"

"Or she." Shining corrected himself.

Twilight nodded, thinking.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, this is just ridiculous," Twilight said loudly.<p>

The black-clad figure on the floor below froze, then looked up slowly.

"Erâ€| your highness?"

"Lay off it, Shining, I know it's you." Twilight glided down from the catwalk. "You're faking crimes so you have work to do, aren't you."

With a flash of purple magic, the costume disintegrated.

"All right, I was," Shining Armor admitted, dropping his sack full of stolen museum exhibits on the floor. "I was \_so\_ \_bored!\_"

Twilight shook her head. "And you were doing \_so\_ wellâ€| right, I think it's moon time."

"Does it have to be?" Shining asked.

"Well, it might not have to be if your thefts were lower profile. But, one way or another, this investigation you started has got out of your control. I'm only about two steps ahead of the Guard on this one."

"Soâ€|"

"So we pass it off as the Alicorn Amulet corrupting you, that's what." Twilight threw it to him. "One big battle over the city, and then you're off to the moon until I've got an Elements team assembled. Look on the bright side, though."

Shining slipped the pendant on, and his horn began to glow. A reddish tinge started slipping into the magic. "Bright side?"

"Yeah. By the time you get back, Cadence is going to be an adult."

The Prince nodded thoughtfully. Then opened fire.

\* \* \*

><p>"So we need to go sort out the arrangements for the mid-year celebration?" Twilight's oldest student, Celestia, asked.<p>

"Yes, that's right." Twilight nodded. "I recommend that the three of you get going. Though, actually, could Cadence stay behind? I'd like a word with her."

Celestia and Luna nodded, and left. (As it happened, they were in the 'slots' normally assigned to Shining and Twilight respectively. Twilight had taken on more than one student because, well, why not.)

"So," Cadence grinned. "He lost \_that\_ little betâ€|"

"Yes, he did." Twilight smiled back; it had been a surprise five years ago when Cadence Awakened, but also a relief. "Just a head's up, though, he was using the Alicorn Amulet â€" that's the official reason for his banishment, and you know what that thing's like."

"Yes, stereotypical villainy mode." Cadence got a light in her eyes. "Does this mean he'll kidnap me?"

"That's entirely possible, I'm afraid," Twilight said.

"Afraid?" Cadence shook her head. "I'm not \_afraid.\_ I'm \_anticipatory."\_

"â€|moving on," Twilight said quickly. "I don't know exactly how the Elements are going to break down this time. Just, well, make sure Luna doesn't blow up at Pinkie or somethingâ€|"

"Will do, Twilight." Cadence flipped up a wing in salute, then giggled. "Hang on, I have to go get some Cosmic Spectrum stoneâ€|"

\_Wonder what she's up to,\_ Twilight thought absently.

\* \* \*

><p>"You'll never get away with this!" Luna shouted.<p>

"Actually, I think you'll find I already have," the dark stallion said with a menacing chuckle, his voice resonating with the walls. "Not only have I kidnapped you, I have also turned the lovely Cadence to my side!"

"Muahaha and stuff," Cadence said, trotting out from behind him.

"You monster!" Luna struggled with the magical shields holding her down. "How did you corrupt such an innocent pony?"

The alicorn's eyes lost a little of their red glow. "I'm not entirely sure, actually. I was planning to use her as a hostage, but that didn't pan out because hostages don't normally take their captors side this fast. And now she's an alicorn for some reason."

"Go Shiny!" Cadence said, waving pom-poms.

Luna shook her head. "You're really lowering the tone, here, Cadence."

"Sorry." Cadence put the pom-poms down and kicked them away. "I'm enthusiastic, okay?"

"Now, as I was saying. I am unstoppable!" The alicorn amulet gleamed redly below his neck. "The Elements of Harmony will only activate for a full six ponies, so with young Luna here-"

"Wait," Luna said, eyes suddenly intent. "They require six ponies?"

"Yes," Sundered Armor said, his voice still gleaming with malice.

At that point, the door exploded in under a laser lance of sunlight.

"Luna!" Celestia said, horn flaring, as she charged through the door with Applejack, Rainbow Dash, Pinkie Pie, Fluttershy and Rarity behind her. "Are you alright?"

"I've been betterâ€|" Luna said pointedly.

"We're here to save you!" Celestia waved the Element of Magic around, then put it on her forehead. The other five matched her with their necklaces.

"Oh." Sundered looked resigned. "Well, bu-"

\* \* \*

><p>"Now for you," Celestia said, pointing at Cadence. "Don't worry, you'll be alright soon."<p>

"I'm alright now," Cadence said, shrugging. "No actual corruption involved. Now sit down before you fall down, Celly, you look exhausted."

"What?" Celestia sank back onto the floor, keeping an eye on the collapsed and younger Shining Armor. "Why did you join him, then?"

Cadence blushed. "He's a hunk, that's why."

"Well, then," Princess Twilight said, flashing into existence. "Good to see that all worked out. Congratulations on the new horn, Cadence."

"Do you know \_everything\_ before we do?" Luna asked, stretching.

"Not quite." Twilight winked. "Anyway, I see you've met my brother."

The Elements and Luna all paused.

"Now y'all say it, yer highness, ah do kinda see the family resemblanceâ€|" Applejack ventured. "How come he went loco?"

"Underwork," Twilight summarized. "Now, shall we go and have that mid-year celebration? I think we all need to relax. And yes, Cadence, you can 'keep him', so long as he follows you home."

\* \* \*

><p>32.6<p>

"For, you see, I am not in truth a skink," the small reptile said. "I am a handsome dragon, turned thus by the spell of a witch. I need but a kiss to-"

Twilight skidded into the garden. "Hi, guys, big problem. We â€" wait a second."

She looked between the skink and the suddenly blushing Rarity. "Were you two seriously reenacting the Princess and the Frog? No, on second thoughts I don't want to know..."

With a moment of morphic uncertainty, Spike returned to his default size nowadays â€" about the same mass as Twilight, but bipedal instead of quadrupedal. "Ahem. What was that, Twilight?"

"Oh, right." Twilight pointed. "Basically, have you guys ever heard of frost giants?"

Both Spike and Rarity shook their heads.

"Right. Well, neither had I until one came over the border. They're kind of like the bigger, meaner cousins of Windigoes." Twilight counted on her hooves. "Four, five... and Dash isn't Awake this Loop... in fact, I think she's in San Equus or something. It's just going to be easier for you to sub in, Spike."

"Gotcha." Spike summoned his Element with a flash of red light.

Rarity matched him, and transitioned up to Alicorn with the ease of long practise. "When do we go?"

"Few minutes," Twilight replied. "I'll teleport us all to Vanhoover, that's where it's approaching."

"Maybe it just wants a coffee?" Spike suggested, stretching.

"That's Seaddle, of course, dear," Rarity corrected him.

"Oh, my mistake."

Twilight wove a net of magic about them-

\* \* \*

><p>-and they were looking at a very distinctive mountain range being stepped on by something taller than said mountains.<p>

"Whoa, that's big..." Spike muttered. "I hope you don't want us to wrestle it..."

"No, that's fine." Twilight vanished again, then deposited Fluttershy, Applejack, Pinkie and Trixie next to them in quick succession.

"Okay, here we go." Twilight went Alicorn, and the rest followed suit. "I've got no idea how nasty this thing is, so we'd better err on the side of overdoing it. Trix, you want to play defence?"

"It depends what defence means." Trixie began casting her own enhancement spells.

"Explode it until we're ready."

"DIBS!" the blue alicorn shouted, and promptly broke about five Equestrian laws on responsible magic channeling levels. Then three more on excessive noise levels, two which governed what spell-types were permitted within metropolitan areas, and something to do with sunburn on top of that.

\* \* \*

><p>"Guys, focus!" Twilight said sharply.<p>

"Sorry," Spike said, shaking his head to clear it. "Trixie's

impressive when she gets going."

"This is why I don't take any fashion direction from her..." Rarity confirmed. "She'd try to make an exploding dress."

The ice giant slipped, its huge feet not finding proper purchase on a lake of lava. A tiny blue spark, shining like a star, flitted above it and began launching yet more attacks.

"Okay, done!" Twilight said finally, and rainbow light sliced across the sky.

\* \* \*

><p>"So..." Rarity said, uncertainly, once the press had been persuaded to leave them alone. "What was that all in aid of?"<p>

"I have no idea." Twilight shrugged. "Suppose it's a Loop variant, that's all â€" I've been to the Frozen North a lot before, if they were standard issue I'd have met them before."

"Um..." Fluttershy raised a hoof.

"Yes?" several of them said at once.

"I think that was a... they turn up in stories on Oerth. It's a Xixecal."

"Say that again, but slower?" Applejack requested.

"Xixecal."

"Nope, still no idea how t' pronounce it..."

"Okay, so what are they?" Twilight asked, to forestall the confusing argument she could see coming.

"Oh. Er... sort of like half-made gods, or something. They're often a concept made material â€" like that one was cold. They're mentioned in druid training, but I forgot..." Fluttershy shrank back into her chair a bit. "Sorry. They scare me."

"That's fine," Twilight reassured her automatically. "Can you tell if there's any others?"

"Okay." Fluttershy closed her eyes for a moment, then they opened again.

"Well?"

She nodded. "Two. One called a phaheon â€" it's made of lava â€" and one called a Phane. The Phane does time dilation."

"I'll handle him!" Pinkie said eagerly. "I can bring all my apprentices!"

"Apprentices?" Twilight parroted.

"Yeah! I wouldn't normally, but I'm totally going to go and get the

mirror pool going again!"

"Well, we're doomed..." Spike said conversationally.

Twilight blinked. "Wait, I just realized. Where's Trixie?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Trixie demands justice! Or she will swear everlasting vengeance. Or, on balance, simply insist Twilight pays for her lunch for a Loop."<p>

The blue-coated alicorn looked down at Equestria hanging below her, and continued spellcasting.

Intellectually, she knew it was just being so close to the monster which had caught her in a high powered use of the Elements.

Emotionally, she was going to write something defamatory on the moon about Twilight Sparkle until she felt better. Then she was going to look into a non-magical method of lunar escape.

\_It's not like it's rocket science, right? Oops, bad analogy.\_

\* \* \*

><p>32.7 (Grinnerz)<p>

Twilight Greenhilt had a very slight problem. "Why is it that I almost always wake up as human mid-stride? And how do the locals balance on such thin legs anyway? And WHAT am I wearing? â€|Okay, the purple top and pink skirt I get, but why the bare midriff? No matter, on to learning!" She was not going to pass up the first day awake at an academy of magic she hadn't been to before after all.

Walking through the halls of Warthog's School of Wizardry and Sorcery she couldn't help but overhear snippets of conversations. The speech bubbles took some getting used to though.

"â€|and that's why the d100 is a superior percentile than two d10."

"â€|so I told Stacy, like, I rolled my stats. This 17 Charisma: all natural. Not like that cloak she always wears."

'\_Okay this loop's a bit outside the norm for me, but I can roll with it.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Suddenly the bell began to ring calling students to class. The seeing the stairway she needed already clogged by her peers Twilight ran down ways to speed her passage. "No, I will not be tardy the first day. Let's see what local magic can do. <strong><em>Dimension Hop.<em>\*\*\*"

A bystander had this to say: "Ugh, sooo not a core spell."

\* \* \*

><p>Sitting down at the back of the class Twilight took a moment to observe her classmates. She did a double take as a Harry Potter look-alike sat two rows up. A red-haired kid across the room seemed to be staring at her, though why he had a pointed ear on the right side of his head and no one else had visible ears at all she didn't know. In fact none of the other students had visible anything under their pulled up hoods.<p>

A grey haired woman walked into the room. "Welcome class to Necromancy 101. I'll be your homeroom teacher Professor McDougal. Now I'm going to call roll."

"Twilight Greenhilt."

"Here."

"Pompey."

"Here." It was the red-haired boy.

"Larry Gardener."

"Here, guvnor." The Not-Potter said.

"He Who Must Not Be Named"

"Here."

"The One Who Must Not Be Named"

"Here."

"She Who Must Not Be Looked At."

"Here."

"They Who Must Not Be Spoken To."

"â€|" "â€|"

"Right, never mind. He Who Must Not Be Toilet-Trainedâ€|" "  
\*Sniff-sniff\* "Pompey I believe you are on mop duty this week."

\*Sigh\* "Yes Professor."

\* \* \*

><p>'<em>And other loopers say Equestria is weird. Alright: diagnostic spell complete. Pinkie is here somewhere but not nearby. Other than that there is no one I can detect. Well, how much trouble can she get into anyway?'<em>

A flash of lightning and a crack of thunder interrupted her thoughts.

"Don't worry class: the druid college down the road is practising controlling the weather today."



\* \* \*

><p>"<strong><em>Meanwhile, deep in the Redmountain Hills our intrepid band of adventurers: The Order of the Stick is camped. With half their number still slumbering the remaining three have a clandestine meeting around the campfire. Roy Greenhilt, leader of the Order sits polishing his family namesake. Durkon Thundershield, Cleric of Thor, holds his holy symbol as if warding away great evil or a mild headache. And Pinkie the Bard turns from looking at her arms to stare at the cloudy sky in wonder. Standing on a hill to the north is a gloriously handsome older gentleman in a fine tuxedo holding a microphone."<em>\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>"You guys have a narrator! That's sooo cool!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"<strong><em>Thank you."<em>\*\*

"Yeah, don't worry. He usually doesn't stick around long."

"\*\*\_If you stopped trying to feed me to that overgrown lizard I might stay longer."\_\*\*

"You're third-person omniscient and unlike us can run in formal attire. But anyway Pinkie, you're not an anchor?"

"Nope-a-roonie."

"Huh. Wonder who is then. It's usually Elan, but you're here instead." Turning to Durkon, Roy continued." Soâ€| more-or-less baseline? I kind of want to see how she reacts to things."

"Aye lad, it'll be diff'rnt at any rate."

"This is gonna be so much fun! I Even have a lute!"

\* \* \*

><p>"<strong><em>Days later within the fabled Dungeon of Durukon: The wicked lich Xykon and his henchgoblin Redcloak spy on our heroes."<em>\*\*

"\*\*She's skipping. Why is she skipping? They haven't even killed anything; she's just given the monsters cakes from nowhere and sung. Where's the death, destruction and piles of dead goblins? I mean come on! She literally danced though one of my deadliest traps! Redcloak! Send in those mercenaries. If they can't provoke a fight I don't know what will.\*\*"

"Yes sir. Is sheâ€| waving at us through the crystal ball?"

"â€| \*\*Can she do that?\*"

"I-I don't know sir."

\* \* \*

><p>"<strong><em>Down the halls and corridors the Order moves hunting their elusive undead prey. Pinkie bravely takes point with Haley's bow and Vaarsuvius' spells to offer cover. Belkar Bitterleaf, intrepid Halfling ranger, trails behind shaking in rage as all blades he claims are mysteriously replaced with rubber replicas. Barely concealing his amusement, Roy Greenhilt drifts back to converse with Durkon."<em>\*\*

"Roy, do ye think we should tell her about th' Linear Guild? Seems bout' time fer them t'be showin'."

"No, she said she wanted it all as a surprise. Besides, I'm morbidly curious as to what Nale will be like with her here."

"Ooooooh, another door!" Rushing forward, yet again ignoring Haley's protests about searching for traps, Pinkie grabbed the knob and yanked open a rather nondescript brown door.

"Woah." "Woah."

"Speak of the devilsâ€|" Roy and Durkon leaned to the side a bit and noted no changes among their evil opposites until they got to the head of the line. There they saw a shift from the norm.

Like usual, the figure's clothing had an opposite colour scheme than Elan, or Pinkie in this case. But whereas Pinkie had wild pink hair the newcomer's was strait as a razor, and the gleam in her eyes was less welcoming than Pinkie's friendly insanity. And of course, the one feature they had been half expectingâ€|

"Wowie-zowie! I look good with a goatee!"

\* \* \*

><p>32.8 (Filraen)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie Pie blinked.<p>

She was suddenly in her room Sugarcube Corner. She had Awoke again! What kinds of fun she'd have this loop?

'Wait a little, let me check something first.' And so she checked her surroundings: no access to worshippers for chaos magic, and her loop memories told her this seemed a baseline loop. Looking at the window she could see Matilda going a bit slower than usual (the news of Princess Celestia coming to Ponyville to raise the sun herself made her a bit melancholic for Cranky Doodle), which seemed to confirm this idea.

Yep, baseline loop all right. Pinkie wondered if Big Mac is awake this time as she had a super special idea for the bar-

Baseline loop? Pinkie Pie stopped and was reminded of something very important. Concentrating in her Element of Laughter she peeked to check which other elements were Awoke. With a happy feeling much like the Diet Cola volcano would feel when the Mentos stalactites fall in she received two answers: Magic and Loyalty.

Dashie is awake? That changes all the plans: the Prank Wars versus Dashie start now! First one to force the other to use a non-baseline ability wins! Checking her loop memories Pinkie Pie realized the hidden town props were in pattern Cake-4-Tea. That'd surely will give them a good head start! With some luck she might win even before Twilight arrives to Ponyville.

Having set in her plan, Pinkie Pie trotted out of her room. She had to move quickly, after all early to Awake gets to dethrone Discord.

\* \* \*

><p>Wearing her Groucho glasses Pinkie Pie hid inside a cardboard box by the park pondered her next move. Rainbow Dash had been a thought cookie, like one stale for a few weeks: even when Pinkie put a statue near the town hall and starting advertising herself as a priest of the Church of Discord hadn't bore fruits. Well, Dashie knows Discord may be awake and all.<p>

Going for Anarchism again? Not too hard but not good for this time. Fluttershy isn't Awake and her nonlooper self is still too timid to help Pinkie in making an Equestrian revolution. Even if she had been awake, asking for looper help in the pranks was against the rules.

Idea! She had to find Lyra while making her way to Sugarcube Corner to get a rope, meringue, her candy-copter, flour, a spell cast, a parasol and some frosting. To the Pinkie-cave!

\* \* \*

><p><em>One<em>

Pinkie saw a rainbow-colored streak of light going through the sky.

\_Two\_

It looks like Dashie's meeting with Twilight is going as baseline, and now she's trying to clear the sky in ten seconds flat.

\_Three\_

But Pinkie had counted on that, leaving a surprise on a cloud.

\_Four\_

Asking looper help was off-limits, but nopony said Pinkie couldn't ask Lyra to cast a cloud-walking spell on her.

\_Five\_

Then it was only a matter of getting to a cloud with the candy-copter. Pinkie almost looked like Applejack when she lassoed it!

\_Six\_

Than Pinkie had to use her Earth Pony magic in the flour to make the cloud could hold as much meringue and frosting as possible, leaving the most sticky cloud since ever.

\_Seven\_

Getting down was just a matter of jumping down and opening the parasol at a proper time,

\_Eight\_

She's coming to the cloud, just in time and with a very fast dive.  
Perfect

\_Nine\_

Aaaand... there! Just when she was going to pass through the last cloud in the sky she got stuck into it, and being unable to flap her wings she couldn't do other thing than fall to the ground.  
Perfect!

Then Pinkie Pie walked to the grounds where Dashie had fell, She had to check when currently trapped pegasus surrendered the bet after all. It was then when she realized somepony purple in the corner of her eyes.

Upon that Pinkie extended her hooves sideways as to block Twilight's path and looked at her unicorn friend. "Wait a moment Twilight, we are in the middle of our Prank Wars. No help now until Dashie surrenders."

Though to her surprise if wasn't Twilight who answered. "You know, Pinkie," she heard Spike's voice and turned to the other side only to realize he was as tall as her, "I don't think Rainbow is Awake right now." And then he concentrated a bit to make his own Element of Loyalty appear in his hand.

Erm... "Oopsie?"

\* \* \*

><p>32.9 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

"Raaaahhhh!" A vast blast of dragon fire burst from the cave mouth.

Twilight Sparkle walked out of the cave, mane singed in a humorous manner. "Well that didn't work. I quoted all the relevant parts of the treaty of Lonely Mountain. While that dragon is allowed to use the cave as a stop-over, he's not allowed to set up a semi-permanent residence there. That's why we have dragon zoning in the Everfree Forest! Maybe I overdid it with the half hour presentation, and the slide show..."

An outside observer who knew of such things, would have deduced the entire mane six, plus Spike, were looping from the lack of terror at their fearless leader having been subjected to the equivalent of a blast from a ship mounted plasma cannon. Oh, and that Spike was

snuggled up against Rarity, who was cracking open a geode and feeding him gems in the manner of a girl peeling grapes. She spoke.

"So, should I ask Spikey-wikey to act as my champion when I go in there?"

"Like you need one, even without going full alicorn." Applejack commented, reshaping the earth into little dragon statues. "You duke it out with Spike when he's cranked up to, what the hay was it, Great Wyrms? Big and mean and about the size of Buckingham palace anyhow."

The little dragon cracked his knuckles. "Okay, I won't crank myself higher than Young Adult. Beating that Old guy with an equivalent age category just isn't a challenge any more."

"Uh huh!" Twilight shook her head, smoothing out her mane with a cosmetic spell. "Rainbow's got next place on the rota this time remember? After the thing at the place..."

The ponies shuddered, except for Pinkie, who grinned brightly. "But it was such a cool way to use a dozen cubic hooves of liquid rainbow and a raw egg!"

Rainbow Dash recovered quickly, and flew up in the air. "Aw yeah! Yo, big red, you in there! If you aren't going to play nice with the other foals, I'm gonna fly in there and kick you right in the jaw!"

A blast of smoke engulfed her from the cave mouth. It blasted away to reveal the clear pocket of air she'd wrapped around herself with her weather magic. "Okay buddy, you asked for it!"

She shot off, away from the mountaintop, cracking out her first rainbow shockwave before she'd gotten more than a few hundred pony-lengths. The rainbow contrail vanished into the sky, only to turn into the trail of a glowing polychromatic comet a few moments later. Twilight did some calculations based on the pegasus's rate of approach and decided she'd grown even stronger since her friend last tested herself. The purple unicorn cast a structural integrity spell at range... on the dragon. This way it would only feel like he was getting his head ripped off by the impact, rather than it actually happening.

Dash arrived at high mach numbers, encased in a glowing rainbow aura and vanished into the cave, rear hoof first in a flying kick. An instant later, the dragon flew out of the cave's rear entrance, newly created by it's body being smashed through the back wall. It fell a good way, then managed to right itself in mid-air, and blast her with superheated plasma, which split around either side of her as she guided the air-flow. The subsequent beat down was short and brutal, for the dragon. It dwarfed the pegasus fighting it to insignificance, and it didn't matter.

Ultimately Dash carried the dragon back by it's tail, which she held in her teeth, as the dragon was hurt too badly to still fly. She laid him out on the ledge in front of the others. "Uh... that rainbow one kicked me!"

Fluttershy trotted over, showing only the slightest trace of her once

fear. Becoming an Alicorn, staring down Discord a few hundred times, not to mention the God Emperor of Mankind had helped her overcome it... not to mention that as a high level druid, her will save was off the top of the charts. She laid her hooves to the dragon's fore-paw claw and cast Heal (not that the spell needed contact, but she felt it would be more reassuring.) "I know, and I'm sure she's very sorry about that."

"Actually I'm not." Dash stated, flexing her wings to get the kinks out. "That was a great workout."

The dragon's injuries had vanished, in fact he felt like a vast hoard of gems. "You caught me off guard. Next time you won't be so lucky."

Rather than quailing, the rainbow pegasus seemed pleased. "Wanna prove that? Best of three!"

"Whoa Dash!" Twilight called out. "Sparring later. We're still sorting out the fact that he... I'm sorry sir, I didn't get your name."

"I am Vantuvir the Mighty, Vantuvir of the Flaming Scale, Vantuvir the Wrath Bringer..."

"Right, Mr Vantuvir here shouldn't actually be sleeping here. Smoke covering all of Equestria, remember?"

"Um... actually Twilight, I cured the snoring while I was healing him. It was a symptom of the obstructive form of sleep apnoea. It can lead to all kinds of nasty secondary effects." She turned to the dragon and gave him a low level Stare. "You should take better care of yourself mister!"

The dragon flinched and looked away, instead focussing on the flyer above. "Now your friend healed me up, I can crush you!"

His head was forcefully turned to face Twilight by a grip of purple magic. "Now just stop that! If you act up again, you won't face just her, you face all of us..."

She was blasted by another wave of dragon fire, which splashed back at him from the bowl shaped shield of purple force that formed in front of her. "That didn't work last time, why did you think this would be any different? Applejack?"

The farm-pony nodded and placed her hooves against the outcropping, which reshaped itself into a stylised sculpture of a dragon. she then turned and kicked it with her hind hooves, splitting it off at the base and sending it flying away from the plateau. It was caught by Twilight's magic, and hauled back to hover in mid-air, without her releasing her telekinetic grip on the real dragon.

"We may not be as big as you..." The glow around the statue brightened, and compressed to crush the statue to pebbles. "... but we ponies have our own strength."

"And they've got us too!" Spike said, moving into his line of sight. "Me and Rarity!"

"A silly frilly pony and a wyrmling?" Vantuvir exclaimed incredulously.

Spike made a pose and flexed his muscles, which began to swell, and didn't stop. He exploded upwards until he towered over the dragon in full Great Wyrmling form, with Rarity riding his shoulder ridge.

"You were saying?" he rumbled. "I suggest you apologise to my beloved. Rarity is the most precious of gems to me, more valued than a mountain of flawless diamond. She's beautiful, generous, beautiful, can find gems with her magic, beautiful, courageous, beautiful, refined... and did I mention beautiful? Well it's worth saying again!"

"Oh Spikey-wikey, you're so sweet!" Rarity nuzzled into his neck ridges.

He leaned over the crimson dragon and glared at him, and the other dragon quailed again. He had enough quails by now to feed a banquet. "I... apologise."

Great Wyrmling Spike grinned, which was only marginally less terrifying. "By the way, I think you should know I'm not the one you should be worried about. Even a romance for the ages such as ours has its rough spots, and on the few occasions we fought, she's beaten me two times out of three. So, word to the wise, just do as they say, okay?"

The dragon gave a huff and said, "I don't have a choice, do I!"

"Great!" Twilight said brightly. "Now as to the cave you'll be moving to..."

"What?" The dragon looked completely non-plussed.

"Just because you can't stay here, doesn't mean we don't understand you need somewhere to rest. Rarity found a cavern on the outskirts of the badlands, it's almost as big as this one, plenty large enough for your hoard, and it has a couple of gemstone veins so if you wake up after a few decades with a case of the munchies, you don't have to deplete it."

Pinkie Pie piped up. "I even made you a cave warming cake!"

She pulled a cake taller than she was, heavily decorated with gems, from her sub-space pocket.

"Trust me, Pinkie's cakes are not to be sneezed at." Mega-Spike added, licking his lips.

"Well of course not!" Pinkie looked up at the big dragon. "They're made to be eaten! Of course if you sneezed at it, it would be sent to Princess Celestia, and while she likes cake, I don't think she'd enjoy the gemstones..."

"But then why didn't you tell me about that?" The dragon asked.

'Because you generally won't listen until some-pony knocks the

stuffing out of you...' muttered Twilight, then said out loud, "That was on the next slide, complete with a picture. However, you incinerated my slide projector before I could get to it. C'mon, we'll help you pack."

\* \* \*

><p>32.10 (misterq)<p>

Twilight woke up in a forest to the grinning faces of a blue unicorn and a pink unicorn.

"Hey, Twilight; wake up!" said the smiling blue unicorn.

"Yeah, you silly sleepy head; wake up!" the pink unicorn was positively grinning.

Twilight just blinked and stared at the two unicorns in front of her. This was all a little too disturbingly familiar.

"We're going on an adventure, Twilight," the blue unicorn exclaimed.

"Yeah! Come with us, Twilight! It'll be an adventure!" the pink one chimed in, "We're going To Candy Mountain!"

Twilight kept staring at the two, deep in thought; before making up her mind. She turned to the blue unicorn and slowly said, "What did you do?"

"Me?" The blue unicorn actually took a few steps back, "I didn't do anything."

The pink unicorn's eyes lost focus as her imagination ran wild, "Candy Mountain! You fill me with sweet, sugary goodness!"

Twilight just kept her accusatory stare on the blue unicorn.

"This loop is not the fault of the great and powerful Trixie," said the blue unicorn.

"It's certainty not the fault of unicorn Pinkie Pie," Twilight kept staring at Trixie. Idly, she wondered if Pinkie was actually insane this time or just pretending to be. 'Probably a little from both columns,' she decided.

The show-mare remained defiant, pausing only to look at Pinkie Pie; who had now started to sing.

"Oh, when you're down and looking for some cheering up, then just head right on up to the Candy Mountain cave," the unicorn Pinkie Pie sang gleefully.

Trixie broke down, "Okay, fine. I mean, you try and alter the Giga Slave spell and accidentally blow up just one planet and suddenly, everything is Trixie's fault."

"We were on the planet at the time, Trixie," Twilight deadpanned.



"We were the only ones on the planet along with Pinkie Pie," Trixie defended herself, "It was either experiment with spells or suffer a 'chimmi-cherry, cherry-changa' level discussion until the loop ended."

Pinkie continued to sing obliviously, "when you get inside, you'll find yourself a cheering land; such a happy and joyful and perky, merry land."

"You know what, Trixie," Twilight said as she slowly got up while at the same time magically picking up a large oddly shaped rock, "I'm going to take this kidney-shaped rock and beat you with it until you learn not to cause extinction-level events ever again."

"Oh come on, there was no way I could have predicted that the unstable spell would backfire," Trixie started to backpedal away from a slowly, unflinchingly advancing Twilight. "And I totally thought that thing was only a small moon, right up until I activated its superlaser. Also thanks to me, we now know that the accio summoning spell works just fine on large asteroids. And who knew that that would happen if Derpy's talent for entropy was amplified, right? No pony told me during that loop that her cutie mark represented a molecule with broken atomic bonds."

Twilight just kept walking at a steady pace, neither speeding up nor wavering. Trixie finally broke into a frantic gallop. Amidst the joyous singing of a mostly oblivious Pinkie Pie, the two other unicorns chased each other.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

So, I just got a new computer. Mostly yay, but boo that I no longer have Microsoft Word and have to learn a new workflow on OpenOffice.

>Anyway.<br>32.1: I don't think that's a possible molecule, but if it was it'd probably be very explosive indeed.

>32.2: This is the same Loop that Fluttershy and Astrid changed places before. She's got an interesting style.<br>32.3: Paintball. With magic.

>32.4: Job change day.<br>32.5: Shining is not very good at being evil. He can pull off the look quite well, though.

>32.6: D&D 3rd edition Epic Level Handbook, if anyone's wondering.<br>32.7: Order of the Stick. (Quite a D&D flavoured set, this.)

>32.8: Prank responsibly. And yes, Spike's Element of Loyalty has been around for a while.<br>32.9: Some dragons have none of the luck.

>32.10: And that's how (a planet near) Equestria was, er...  
unmade.<p>

### 33. Chapter 33

#### 33.1

Twilight opened her eyes, and easily recognized one of the things which was clearly... a little off, about this loop.

\_Right, let's see...\_

Point one: she was human â€" to be precise, a young child. Not all that odd, but... notable, still.

Point two: none of the other Elements were around.

And point three: her loop memories had a severe overtone of phobia. For \_horses\_, of all things.

\_Okay, I'm a princess. Princess? No, small-p. The heir. But the heir presumptive, not the heir in law, interesting. Why? I'm not a Herald. Mother â€" the Queen â€" is. And it's interesting that she's Queen Celestia, I must check if she's Awake.\_

Heralds have Companions â€" magical horses, I think. I don't know much about that. Why am I scared of them?

To the child she was Replacing, it wouldn't have been at all obvious exactly what was behind the phobia. But to Twilight herself, with many years effectively spent as a politician... it was blatantly clear.

\_My nurse. Hulda.\_

Nothing to be done for now, except to get dressed and ready for the day. Whoever it was Twilight was taking the place of was a truly astonishing brat... that, at least, was easy to fix.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stepped smartly out of her room, wincing internally at the cautious look a servant gave her.<p>

"Ah, your royal highness," Hulda said, walking up with a hint of surprise. "You're up very early. And did you dress yourself?"

"I did, Hulda," Twilight replied, with a carefully judged hint of deference.

"Well, you're forgetting yourself, your highness. After all, you don't have to dress yourself â€" that's what servants are for."

This woman was setting Twilight's teeth on edge. She had been carefully and deliberately moulding the young princess into a disaster of a girl and even worse of a potential ruler.

She did wonder why Celestia â€" or whoever Celestia was replacing â€" hadn't caught it yet, but the answer was simple enough. Chronic overwork, like usual.

At least Celestia had the comfort of her Companion, this Loop. A large, robust mare whose coat was so dark that Twilight easily made the connection with Luna.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hulda?" Twilight asked, curiously. "Why do you keep giving my other nurse that drink?"<p>

"It's medicine," Hulda said shortly. "Come on, you have to-"

"But if it's medicine, why are you using magic to make her take it?"

Hulda jerked as if stung, and Twilight fought down a grin.  
\_Gotcha!\_

"Don't be silly," the nurse said eventually. "Magic! You're imagining things."

"But I saw you cast the spell..." Twilight trailed off with artful uncertainty.

At that point, the door opened.

"Hello, Mother," Twilight said, standing. "Did you know Hulda can do magic? She's so clever."

Celestia drew a slim sword. "So, you must be the accomplice."

"Accomplice?" Twilight parroted, slightly surprised at Celestia's willingness to draw steel.

Hulda swore.

Twilight's hand crackled with electricity as she launched forward a stun spell, which smashed through a hastily raised shield and stunned the mage.

"Well, I suppose that answers the question of whether or not you're Awake..." Celestia said, lowering the sword as guards rushed into the room. "A very nice touch, by the way."

"Thanks," Twilight said, smiling. "I think the person I've Replaced may have been supposed to have had a bit of magical talent herself."

Both of them paused.

"That wasn't very easy on the tongue, was it..." Celestia remarked critically.

"If I said she was sidestined to have magic, then you'd have not understood me," Twilight retorted. "I did invent this whole set of extra tenses, you know... Anyway, how did you know that fast?"

"Give me credit," Celestia said, sitting down on one of the chairs in the royal nursery. "One of my counsellors here was working against me. It took me a few hours to spot it, but they have a lovely spell here called the Truth spell. We should try to learn it..."

Twilight's notebook seemed to teleport into her hands (which wasn't a surprise, because it did.) "Truth spell? How much of a truth spell?"

"Two levels. First level detects falsehood, second level forces truth." Celestia smiled. "I suppose it might be a good one to teach

Applejack."

Twilight nodded, scribbling away. "Is Luna Awake?"

"Yes, and complaining â€" a lot!" Celestia grinned, then shrugged. "Okay, Twilight, I'll go make sure the country's running properly. Fair warning â€" we've got our work cut out for us here, this place isn't a great power like Equestria is and it has more enemies. That's why I went for the sword â€" I may as well start as I'll have to go on."

Twilight nodded soberly.

It was hard to accept, sometimes, that there were Loops where friendship really couldn't fix anything. Not coincidentally, they often coincided with the Loops where Twilight was forced into human body shape and out of touch with most of her power.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, hello!" a familiar voice said, as Twilight plonked yet another book on the finished pile.<p>

She turned. "Wait, is that \_Hiccup?\_"

"Exactly," Hiccup said, strolling in. "We're seeing a lot of one another lately... I'm the Queen's Own, by the way. That basically means-

"You have about the same job I did in my home Loop," Twilight finished for him.

"Just about." Hiccup sat down opposite her. "Any good books?"

Twilight pointed to one of them. "Good story, interesting ideas for what to try out later this Loop. Did you let Celestia know you're Looping?"

"Oh, is she one of yours? And Awake?"

Twilight nodded, and Hiccup frowned.

"Well, great. She must have been laughing at me all through our meeting... anyway. Toothless is here, too, but he's a Companion."

"So is Luna."

"Bet she's taking it better, though." Hiccup leaned back in his chair. "It's all moan whine complain I preferred wings."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight watched as something pulsed in the Grove. By the looks of things, she was about to get a Companion...<p>

\_What in the name of me?\_ A familiar mental voice asked.

Twilight blinked. "Dash?"

\_Oh, well spotted...\_ Dash's mental tone was a bit snippy. \_Now, why am I an earth pony horse?\_

"I assume it's the rules here."

\_Rules, ha! At least I'm still blue.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked up, frowning.<p>

"What is it?" Celestia asked.

"Oh, I just have a... suspicion, about that mission you sent Hiccup on. You know, to that country next door?"

"I assure you, I know the one." Celestia said, then tapped her chin. "I wonder what it could be..."

With a flicker of movement, Toothless â€" dragon, not Companion â€" materialized overhead. There were several gasps of surprise, and at least one Herald went for their bow before Twilight and Celestia could tell them to stand down.

"That was \_not\_ fun," Hiccup said, shaking his head. "Hey, did you know the crown prince of that place is a blood mage? Well, I say is... more like was."

"What did you do?" Twilight asked.

Toothless burped.

"Oh, shut up," Hiccup said with a grin. "No, Toothless \_didn't\_ eat him. We did blow him up a bit, though."

"How do you blow someone up a bit?" Celestia asked, concealing a grin.

\_I only got his trousers,\_ Toothless explained.

Twilight steadied herself as Dash began laughing.

"So, what happens now?" Hiccup asked. "I mean, I've got a few ideas, but you're the one in charge. Apparently."

"Thank you." Celestia closed her eyes for a moment, and Luna beneath her rolled \_her\_ eyes at some unheard comment.

"Right. Twilight, how are you doing at adapting your magic here?"

"Not as well as I could be..." Twilight shrugged. "The magic system here is kind of bizarre, all lines and nodes. But in an emergency I can pull off a work-around."

"Please do." Celestia pointed towards Ancar's kingdom. "I would like you and Hiccup to give us magical fire support. Non lethal, of course. I think it's time for a bit of an invasion."

"Fair enough." Twilight snapped her fingers, and produced a small bracelet with a coin, like an ancient Athenian Drachma, dangling from it. "Okay, OWL. Set up."

The coin flashed, and reshaped into a baton. Set up. Good morning, mistress.

"Oh, hey, you have got an Intelligent Device," Hiccup said, interested. "I did wonder..."

"I hardly ever use him because he's a bit of a crutch," Twilight admitted. "It's more interesting to reverse engineer Nanoha's spells to fit my own personal magical abilities. But since I haven't got my personal magic working here yet..."

"I agree." Hiccup nodded. "I, on the other hand, have had Raising Dragon for quite a while."

Wait, Dash mindspoke slowly. Does this mean we're going to be the horse archers from Tartarus?

"Pretty much," Twilight replied. "Owl, arbalest form."

Arbalest mode engaged.

\* \* \*

><p>Ancar put his head in his hands. "Where did it all go wrong?"<p>

"That would be when you declared war on Valdemar, sire," his chief advisor said helpfully.

The mage-king had nearly enough time to start throttling his chief advisor, but then the wall exploded inwards and the whole issue became sort of moot.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that was fun," Hiccup said. "What now?"<p>

"Now we relax... unless there's something else out there to be a problem," Twilight replied. "I for one am looking forward to more than five years of continuous research without a political job."

"Actually," Celestia said, voice wheedling. "I do have quite a lot of paperwork, and the heir should be experienced at--"

"No." Twilight held up a hand, flat with the palm. "Not interested, not listening. I'm going to go research how magic works here."

The Queen shook her head. "If you're sure..."

"Look, you've got Hiccup and Toothless to draw on. They're older than me. By, well, a few thousand loops, I think..."

"Stop trying to draw me into this," Hiccup replied. "Hey, I wonder if I can pass Toothless off as a really big bird? I want into the Hawkbrothers."

\_Bawk bawk?\_ Toothless tried. \_It doesn't really fit me...\_

\* \* \*

><p>33.2 (caution: contains non-MLP headcanon)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, thank you all for coming," Fluttershy said quietly. "I'm afraid that some of my animals have been acting... <em>very<em> strangely."

"And we all know what \_that\_ means..." Scootaloo muttered.

"Ssh," Dash admonished her. "I kinda wanna guess \_who\_ it is before we get told."

Scootaloo nodded.

"So," Twilight said, brightly. "What alerted you?"

"Well, it was two things. Mister Hedge and Mister Kiddy got into a race, and... I'm afraid that I lost track of them. I don't understand it, they're normally very even tempered..."

"Why do y'all still give yer animals such cutesy names?" Applebloom asked. "Can't you talk to 'em now?"

"She can," Dash answered for her friend. "But we tend to call animals by what they're called anyway, here in Equestria."

"Huh..." Applebloom absorbed that. "Well, that explains some of those stranger fused loops..."

"Yeah, being a tortoise wasn't as fun as all that. Might explain why Rarity found her cat where she did, though..."

"Really?"

"Yeah, she rescued Opalescence from a pit where she was planning to look for gems. I kinda think her gem finding spell might have locked on to the cat..."

Sweetie nodded. "Now I think about it, I \_do\_ remember that. Mom and Dad were a bit confused." The filly then stopped, putting a hoof to her chin. "Doesn't explain why Opal's such an ungrateful, spiteful-"

"Sweetie," Twilight warned.

"-Molly. What, what did you think I was going to say?" Sweetie winked.

Scootaloo held up a hoof. "We may have gotten distracted. What was the other thing, Fluttershy?"

"Well, the only other thing I'd noticed when I left was that Snugglekins had started dismantling my dehumidifier..."

For a few minutes, there was silence, as all the Loopers tried to solve the problem.

"Hang on," Dash said, frowning. "Isn't Snugglekens that fox-"

"Sonic!" the Crusaders shouted at once.

"I should have known!" Sweetie said, shaking her head. "Of course Mister Hedge would have to be a hedgehog!"

"Okay, this is going to be awesome!" Applebloom enthused. "I've wanted to meet Tails for the longest time!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, this was a bust," Applebloom muttered.<p>

The almost-perfectly-normal fox in front of her cocked his head, then flirted two tails (I did say almost) and got back to building something out of a dehumidifier, half of Fluttershy's fridge, a phonograph, and her alarm clock.

"Oh, dear..." Fluttershy said softly. "I should have reminded you that you can't speak with animals..."

The fox licked something, pressed it onto a circuit board, then wrapped two wires together. A moment's work with a multimeter (and where that came from Applebloom wasn't sure, though she had a suspicion) and he slotted a final capacitor into place.

"Okay, does this work?" asked the voice of an opera singer from Hockland.

Applebloom blinked, then got it. "Cool, a translator?"

"Yeah," the opera singer continued, as Tails barked quietly into a small gramophone horn. "I'd have been finished sooner, but my stuff in my subspace pocket is all pawprint and iris-locked, and I kind of don't have the same pawprint."

The filly thought about that for a moment, then did the mental equivalent of turning her subspace pocket upside down and shaking it to see what fell out.

At least one handheld computer did, along with a soldering iron, two printed circuit boards which looked like maps of a tree's xylem, and a golden metal egg.

"Whoops," Applebloom said quickly, sweeping the egg up with a pair of tongs and dumping it back through her mane. "None of that, thank you very much."

"Can I use the computer? I mean, is it spare?" the singer asked, in what sounded like the second strangest opera ever written.

"Sure, go ahead." Applebloom pushed it over, turning the transmitter on and doing the same on her personal computer. "Not much installed on it... hey, is it weird that I'm barely avoiding fangirling over you?"



"Kind of..." Tails admitted. "Is it the fuzzy tail?"

Applebloom promptly picked him up and hugged him.

Several fox snarl-barks went unanswered, until Fluttershy raised a hoof. "Um... do you want me to translate now?"

The filly blinked, shook her head, and put Tails gently down. "Sorry about that, mister Prower... the geeky-stuff kind of crossed with the fuzzies and I couldn't help myself."

"At least it's partly geek stuff..." Tails said via the translator. "Now I know why Dad gets all the girls..."

"Wait, you have a dad?" Applebloom checked. "I actually didn't know. It never came up when ah was you."

"Sort of. You're familiar with my world, right? You're going to laugh..." Tails warned.

"No, I'm not!" Applebloom protested. "I kinda know about the whole missin' parents thing..."

"Well, mine isn't missing. You'd know him as Dr. Ivo Robotnik."

Her jaw dropped.

Tails sat back and shrugged, then went back to the gramophone horn. "I'm actually kind of a genetic experiment, but Dad is Dad as far as I'm concerned. You should see him on the days he's not going all mad with science, he's a nice guy."

The young fox dragged the palmtop over with a paw, and began typing as he talked. "Anyway. Yeah, that relationship predates the loops, but we kept it secret from Sonic. That's not exactly hard, you just don't tell him out loud and he never asks. Then, one day, when I was in my first time looping, he just up and told me he'd found out about it twenty loops ago."

A supple shrug-like motion. "Of course, there's a major branch type for my loop which has me with a dad who gets abducted by aliens instead, or something... I can never keep it straight."

The palmtop made a bing noise.

"What's that?" Applebloom asked, interested.

By way of reply, Tails yipped into the palmtop while typing. What emerged was far more like his natural voice. "Translator program I designed for handling aliens. Works for this, too."

Applebloom nodded. "I think I see. So you got it to absorb our language via my computer's data storage, and then you're typing what you say as you say it so it can learn fox."

"Exactly." Tails nodded. "I can see why you replaced me, nice work!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Well," Braeburn said, looking into his bottle of whiskey. "Ah think this must be a li'l too strong."<p>

There wasn't really any other explanation than the whiskey for why two pegasi and two hedgehoggy... things, had just shot past his house...

\* \* \*

><p>33.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Welcome to our town, Twilight Sparkle," the Mayor said genially.<p>

"Actually..." Twilight paused, digging in her saddlebags. "I was informed that I'd be staying in the library. It looks nice, and I've got, well, a bit of money..." she looked embarassed. "Put it this way, the most I've spent it on in years is books. Anyway, I was wondering if it was possible to buy the library?"

Mayor Mare blinked. "You want to what?"

"Buy the library. Freehold." Twilight pulled a bag out of her saddlebags, which clinked. "Here we are! I hope this is enough..."

Recovering slightly, the Mayor thought it over. Especially important was the size of the bag.

It would be nice to not be worried about the budget. "Well, if you insist..."

"I do. Oh, keep the change." Twilight passed over the bag. Mayor Mare took it, and was unable to keep her grip on it â€" resulting in a loud thud and a small crater in the ground.

Both of them looked at the crater.

"I'll fix that later," Twilight said, blushing. "Anyway. I must be getting on, there's a bit of work I want to get done."

Fortunately, she had come prepared. All the relevant paperwork was already drawn up, filled out and signed by her last Loop â€" some of it was even already filed, that morning in Canterlot.

\* \* \*

><p>"We ought to do something about Nightmare Moon," Applejack said.<p>

"Not my problem," Twilight replied, kicking back on the sofa.

"What?" came from several throats at once.

"Well, as I see it, she's only invading Equestria, right? Not my problem."

"Er... we are in Equestria, darling," Rarity pointed out.

"Nope." Twilight pointed to the door. "Didn't any of you see the sign?"

Pinkie shot out the door, then back in again. "What does Federal Republic of Libraria mean?"

Twilight grinned. "Easy. I established this library, and the land around it to a distance of one fetlock, as an independent micronation. I am the President â€" for life â€" and Spike is the only other citizen."

"I'm what?" Spike called from the other room.

"Dual citizenship," she called back.

"Oh, okay then. Wait, I didn't elect you."

"The voting age in Libraria is two years more than your age, Spike," Twilight replied. "Which leaves me as the only voter. Next election is whenever I step down."

"Awww..."

"Well..." Dash shook her head, looking annoyed. "If you're going to give up like this, then we don't need you! We'll go stop Nightmare Moon by ourselves."

"Go ahead," Twilight replied. Her horn flared as she mixed a mug of cocoa. "I'd like to help, of course, but the Westfillian principle means I can't intervene in the internal affairs of other nations. This is basically a succession crisis, after all..."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight did feel a little guilty about what happened to her friends.<p>

Just a bit.

But, well, the dungeons in Canterlot Castle were frankly a bit pathetic. They just hadn't been used in a long time... and, of course, Twilight had sent a letter to Cadence about the whole thing, so the young alicorn had broken all five of them out already.

Right. It's about six A.M, so...\_

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon stalked towards the brightly lit tree in the centre of Ponyville. "What treachery is this?"<p>

"Hi!" a unicorn waved from the top balcony, wearing smoked-glass shades and with a drink next to her. "Cordial greetings from the President of Libraria to the Princess of Equestria."

"Why and how do you break the Eternal Night?" Nightmare Moon asked,

ignoring the comment.

The unicorn grinned. "Actually, it's very interesting. See, it's a variation of a portal spell, where the portal only transmits light. I parked one end of the portal over open sea on what I suppose should be called the Dayside now, and so it lets through just enough sunlight to cover Libraria."

"Your impudence shall be punished!" Charging her horn, Nightmare Moon prepared to make an example of the insolent unicorn.

"Actually, you really don't want to do that," the unicorn replied, taking her sunglasses off. "Basically, if you do, then the Westfillian treaty doesn't apply any more."

The spell stopped charging.

"The what treaty?" Nightmare Moon asked, frowning. "I know not of such a treaty."

"Essentially, it forbids interference in the internal affairs of other countries. And, since I'm President Twilight Sparkle of the micronation of Libraria, that means I can't get involved in purely internal Equestrian affairs." The unicorn "Sparkle" tossed over a scroll which Nightmare Moon caught by instinct. "Clause five, I think."

The Nightmare read it, slowly and carefully, looking for loopholes.

"...I see. Well, then, there is just one problem."

"Do tell," the 'President' invited cheerfully.

"I don't care if you get involved." Nightmare Moon finished her spell, and fired it directly at the tree trunk.

Then there was a flash of almost intolerably bright light.

"Hello," the purple alicorn standing in front of her said, as Nightmare Moon's vision returned. "I'm the commander-in-chief. Also the army."

"Where did you come from?" Nightmare asked angrily.

"Libraria has a system of volunteer service. All adult citizens are on the muster rolls and can be activated at any time--"

"Well, then, why didn't I sense you?" The words were ground out through what seemed to be intense anger. "And where did your puling President go?"

"Speaking," the alicorn said. "Now, since the treaty no longer applies, I'd like to ask you an important question. What is magic?"

"I... why?"

"Just curious," the alicorn "apparently this Sparkle" said. "After all, it's sort of fundamental here."

"I don't particularly care either to answer or what the answer is," Nightmare said, already charging more magic.

"Well, I'm sure Cadence can tell us," Sparkle said, nodding behind the Nightmare.

"That's the oldest trick in the book!" Nightmare Moon retorted. "I am not a fool."

"Friendship is magic!"

Nightmare Moon's ears sagged. "She was behind me, was she not?"

Sparkle nodded, and then everything went rainbow.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that was fairly successful," Twilight said to herself that evening.<p>

First off, she'd managed to engineer Cadence into being the Element of Magic. It would be interesting to see how that developed.

Secondly, and much more entertainingly, the paperwork making her library into a micronation was now unassailable. And she was sure there was a lot of humour to be got out of that.

The only downside was that, while most ponies had believed her that the alicorn was an elaborate illusion, Princess Luna was still on her case about it.

Ah, well. No new loop pattern worked the first time.

\* \* \*

><p>33.4 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Some Awakenings were less pleasant than others. Falling from a great height wasn't that bad, as long as the height was still great enough to cast a Levitation spell. Fight sequences generally had you so involved that your brain pretty much shunted the whole 'millennia of memories' thing to one side until the risk of dying was less immediate. Though additional centuries of combat experience and the massive power boost usually helped.<p>

On a scale of one to ten, finding yourself in a giant white test tube with a bunch of humans in white coats and either combat androids or soldiers in advanced body armour watching you like a specimen through a large window was definitely a solid seven. Having two disks bigger than you were extruding on mechanical arms to envelop you bumped that to an eight, and the fact that they crackled with electricity made it a nine. Add to that the fact that there was some sort of suppressive field interfering with her attempts to push them away and it was probably a nine point seven.

Twilight Sparkle stabilised her telekinetic output from her reserves without upping the power to avoid a spike while she assimilated the in-loop memories. Okay, teleport accident, ended up on a n apparently human inhabited planet unconscious from a rough transit, captured by this bunch of paramilitary types. Her memories from the capture were too fuzzy to get anything like an organisation name, but it was quite clear that they'd treated her as hostile from the very first. Attacked from the moment she started to move, captured, drugged and now this. Plus she ached all over. Well, if they wanted to make her an enemy, they were going about it the right way.

Her force powers were almost completely suppressed, and her innate magical ability was impaired by whatever restraint mechanism they were using. She wasn't sure if alternative foci to her horn, such as her Hogwarts wand were affected, but it was clear purely technological devices were fine, and so was her sub-space pocket. Giving her surroundings a second glance, she made a mental checklist of the chain of spells she'd be casting, then summoned an EMP bomb.

Dr Vahlen watched dispassionately as the two electrodes closed in on the research project they'd code-named Sparkle.

"Load still rising," the first operator spoke, "scaling up damping field to forty-five per centâ€¦ forty-sixâ€¦ forty-sevenâ€¦"

"Don't let it stop the electrodes," Vahlen commanded, "but continue to monitor the load. We need to know just how powerful this specimen is."

Suddenly the lighting flickered and died, along with the screens and the power inside the chamber. The lightning around the two probes died, and they ceased moving. The only light source was the intense purple glow haloing the subject. It flared, especially bright around the 'horn', and then there was a flash of white light and the subject vanished, leaving them in darkness.

There were screams of panic and shock until the emergency systems cut in and the lights started to come on. The computer systems were a lot less stable, the displays flickering and cycling. The containment chamber was defiantly empty. The Doctor overcame her shock and triggered her headset. "Case Omega, I repeat Case Omega! We have a containment breach! Subject Sparkle is loose in the base, present whereabouts unknown! Destroy it at any cost!"

Captain William Walker, call-sign Viking hefted his alloy cannon, while Lieutenant Suchiro Saname, one of the Assault specialists from Strike 2 scanned the area, readying his plasma rifle. The subject had shown considerable ability at deflecting attacks, but with Dr Shen's psionic damper active, they should have at least a chance of hitting it...

"Dr Vahlen!" The operator who'd been monitoring the damper spoke. "The damper isn't functioning, I've got an engineering team checking it."

He paused, looking up at her with a shocked expression. "It's wrecked, as if someone put an explosive charge in the middle of it! They're estimating several hours of work to repair it."

The blood of everyone in the lab ran cold, even Dr Vahlen's which most people believed was ice water anyway. The only equaliser they had against their ex-prisoner was gone, and it was almost certain that the subject was the one responsible, locating and acting against it in a fraction of a second.

Red lights and sirens were the order of the day, as soldiers and security ran around trying to find the small purple unicorn. This was made redundant when the unicorn reappeared about a foot in front of the Doctor. She was hovering in mid-air, and had manifested wings that glowed with the same lambent violet aura as the rest of her. The small fragment of Dr Vahlen's mind that wasn't gibbering with terror noted that they were flapping too slowly to provide the necessary lift.

Her world disappeared in a hail of alloy fragments and super-heated plasma as the two X-Com soldiers opened fire on the apparition. The attack should have shredded and vapourised the creature, and killed the unarmoured Dr Vahlen herself just from the effects of being on the edges of it, but it seemed to have no effect on either of them. It wasn't being deflected, simply vanishing when it got within a foot of them.

It quickly stopped as the two soldiers were flung away, ending up stuck to the walls in a spread-eagled position, with their weapons hung up next to them like display pieces. From the way they were struggling they were both still alive, but unable to free themselves. Doctor Vahlen had other problems, she had tried to scramble away and found herself held gently but immovably as the creature approached.

It's big eyes seemed to stare deep into her soul, while the glowing spiral horn, which had appeared so stubby and inoffensive compared to the usual run of claws and mandibles the aliens usually had, looked a lot sharper and more menacing when it was approaching your eyes.

It brushed her forehead, and she got the sudden impression of a host of voices talking at once, and blurred images inside her head. Then it was over, and the creature retreated. It spoke one word in a feminine voice, then vanished.

"Thank-you."

Commander Banford was still trying to co-ordinate a response to Doctor Vahlen's Case Omega when subject Sparkle appeared in the command centre, hovering in the centre of the massive holo-projection of earth that dominated it. The projection flickered and went crimson before vanishing altogether. At the same time the few soldiers and security guards who had made it there were borne to the floor, unable to rise, as was anyone who tried to raise a weapon against her.

The controls for the base communications systems flashed as they opened a base wide channel and locked out further changes, then the hovering creature spoke.

"I am Twilight Sparkle, protÃ©gÃ© to Princess Celestia, the co-ruler of Equestria, student, magical researcher and astronomer. I also know who and what you are, X-Com, as I availed myself of the knowledge and memories of your Doctor Vahlen. Fortunately, unlike your own methods of memory extraction, it doesn't leave the subject a decerebrated

corpse. Apart from a slight aftertaste of elderberries and a temporary decrease in mental acuity comparable to three units of alcohol, she should be back to her mean old self in a few hours."

She rolled her eyes and added, "And boy does she ever need a few units of alcohol, and a stallion... I mean, guy. Oh and a spell to lower her inhibitions, I've been inside her head and Celestia, that mare is wound tight! I'm not the most social of ponies myself, but she makes me look like Pinkie Pie! Oh, and the reason she's so into dismembering alien corpses? I think it's sublimation. Some-pony really needs professional help."

She gave a little internal grin. She might not intend to hurt any-pony, but embarrassing the person who'd been quite willing to torture her into a mindless wreck and use her as a target dummy until she expired was perfectly reasonable. She cast a fascination spell with herself as the target to make sure no-pony interrupted.

"I understand that you have just finished defending yourselves from an alien invasion, and that you'd be naturally cautious about new alien forms, but you never even considered I might not be hostile from the very moment your goons saw me! One moment I was in my observatory in Ponyville, running a series of deep space scrying experiments, the next I ended up on earth, semi-conscious and with a massive everything ache. I could barely keep my magic under control!"

She shook her head. "That's what I get for using orichalcum rather than mithril to inlay the runes. But you know how it is when you're on a budget, and really, who would have expected a parametric thaumic cascade using Star Swirl's second formulation? Should have checked this system was clear of recently evaporated quantum singularities before I tried it..."

"Where was I? Oh yes, helpless and alone on an alien planet, in dire need of a friend and a Spa visit. So your heavy-horseshoe thugs surround me and ignore any attempt I made to communicate. Maybe I wasn't a hundred percent, but just because my horn was glowing, they didn't need to bombard me with plasma! Then there's the whole 'torture me into a mindless puppet and use me for target practice' thing you had going. Not the best way to make friends with a representative of a new alien race."

She was about to insult them and give them a long winded description of exactly why it was a bad idea to tick off a being who could turn their base into a glowing crater, and had friends who were even more powerful, but she decided that would be too mean spirited. The engrams from that Vahlen female must be making her more aggressive than usual.

No, it was a cardinal rule of both story telling and teaching to show, not tell. If she was going to troll them, she'd do it pony-style, or rather Twilight style, with random acts of kindness and helping them out. After all, most of them were just trying to protect their world and loved ones, and this rather battered planet needed some major first aid. The trick would be to annoy the Tartarus out of them at the same time.

"You know what, forget the lot of you! I'm still mad about being



experimented on, but I'm not big on vengeance. I could go home right now, but I figure while I'm here, I should take a look around, maybe help out a little. It's not like your planet couldn't use all the help it can get. Besides, these 'pina coladas' and 'Japanese hot springs' Doctor Vahlen's memories contain interest me greatly. I'll just pop off a message home telling them what happened, and that I'm going to be home late. Bye bye!"

She vanished, which broke the spell the watchers were under. It was almost five seconds later that the yelling started.

\* \* \*

><p>The Casa Manyana wasn't one of Rio's most notable drinking establishments. However, Rio, being Rio, especially as even an alien invasion hadn't stopped the Mardi Gras, it wasn't unused to unusual sights. A purple alicorn flashing into existence in the middle of the dance floor and making her way to the bar was at least in the top ten.<p>

Nobody actually moved to try and stop her, partly because she was something of an outside context problem for most of the denizens, and partly because most of them were still trying to decide whether she was real, or just some problem of their own. A few gentle touches of telekinesis to give her a clear path, and a manifested set of steps to bring her level with the bar, and she was facing one of the bar staff.

"One pina colada please." The barman looked at her blankly. Twilight face-hooved. Brazil, different language. She hadn't needed Vahlen's engrams for the language, English and Equestrian seemed to be interchangeable, but none of her previous loops had given her Portuguese. She cast a universal translation spell.

"One pina colada please." The man was still frozen. "C'mon! I've been involuntarily teleported halfway across the galaxy, been captured by a secret military organisation, been experimented on, undergone an involuntary evolution into my races most super-powered form, escaped a heavily fortified underground installation, and right now I need a freaking drink!"

That finally seemed to break the paralysis. Maybe it was the fact her wings flared and her horn had started to glow. "Yes, right away! Do you want a glass or a pitcher?"

"You do pitchers? I like this planet!" Twilight said brightly. "Yes please!"

The inanity of the task of making the cocktail calmed him down, and nobody else was willing to prod the purple alien to see what it might do to anyone who interrupted it's quest for alcohol. He turned back with the pitcher and said automatically, "That will be twenty five reals."

He blanched as he suddenly realised what he'd said, but before he could stammer an apology Twilight twitched her head, and a golden coin landed on the counter. "I don't have any local currency yet, but this coin from my home world is over an ounce of 95 percent pure gold. I'm certain it's worth several times the value of that drink, even after an exchange fee. Would that be acceptable?"

Since it was at least a hundred times the value of the drink he had no trouble in agreeing.

"Great! Keep the change. Oh, could I have some of those little paper umbrellas in it. I understand they're necessary for the full experience."

He added the umbrellas, and found three more coins on the counter. "Oh, and would this be enough to buy the other people here a drink? Just because I'm having a bad day doesn't mean I want to wish one on any-pony else."

It was, easily, and he only hesitated for a brief second to decide not to ask for more. He was already well ahead of the game on the first coin, and given what he'd seen her do when she was in a good mood, he didn't want to risk what she might do if she found out later that he'd overcharged her. The other bar patrons were cheering. A purple alicorn might be outside their frame of reference, but someone buying them drinks was well inside it, and definitely counted as a friend.

The purple alicorn in question gave the barman another nod and a pleased smile, levitated the jug with a halo of purple energy, and flashed away as abruptly as she'd appeared. A few seconds later the steps dissolved in a shower of sparkles that faded away to nothing.

Meanwhile in Japan, a receptionist at a secluded onsen was having difficulty maintaining a suitable level of imperturbability. Part of her was scared of the alien creature that had appeared in the foyer of the hot springs bath towing a jug of something with no visible means of support, while the little girl part of her had taken one look at the adorable purple unicorn with wings and had the deep desire to jump over the counter squealing 'Kawaii!' and hug her.

"Please could I get a private room, and do you have room service? I'd like a vegetarian sushi selection. And of course, access to the baths. And, most of all, discretion." Twilight didn't need a translation spell here. She'd had plenty of loops that had taken her to Japanese or equivalent language settings. She pulled a bag from her subspace pocket and set it on the counter, open enough to show the mass of gold coins and gemstones within. "I believe can pay."

Politeness and large sums of gold were acceptable currency anywhere, and Japan was no exception. "I will get the manager. I'm sure he will be happy to see to your needs personally."

Twilight levitated a flawless ruby the size of her thumb out of the bag, and placed it in front of her. "Excellent. Thank you for your assistance."

She had her drink, a place to stay and get cleaned up, and now she could start to plan...

\* \* \*

><p>33.5 (Stainless Steel Fox)<br>\*\*Ponyville Unconventional\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>"So what do we do about the Foal Free Press?" Apple Bloom asked her Awake crusader buddies.<p>

"Do we have to do anything?" Sweetie Belle squeaked, looking surprised.

Scotaloo shook her head. "Never gonna do that Gabby Gums thing again. Rainbow Dash took weeks to warm up to me again. Hurting any-pony with gossip like that is just plain wrong."

Apple Bloom looked thoughtful as she paced around the Treehouse. "Of course you're right, I don't want to hurt any-pony, but you've gotta admit Gabby Gums made ponies sit up and listen. None of us has a cutie-mark talent for writing, unless you count the way Sweetie pulls song lyrics out of the air, but somehow we managed to make it work anyway.

"I just figure we could do something better than point out that Princess Celestia likes cake. Plus we can even put one over on Diamond Tiara in all her regular snarky, petty tin god minded glory. Why can't that filly pony on up and stop acting like a spoiled brat? We know she's better than that, or can be. Maybe by showing her how to help ponies rather than just making fun of them, we can get her to do just that."

"What do you have in mind?" Sweetie Belle followed her friend with her eyes.

"Well, every-pony like to discuss things over an apple juice or something. Let's give them something to debate. I've even got the perfect first topic, assuming Snips and Snails are their usual selves."

\* \* \*

><p>"'Snips and Snails in Bubblegum Veils'? I didn't think the three of you would produce anything usable, but it looks like I was wrong." Diamond Tiara said grudgingly. "The picture sells it. Ponies always like to see some-pony else being embarrassed. And calling yourselves Gabby Gums, that should help give it some mystery."<p>

"Uh, DT... I mean, Miss Editor-in-Chief, ma'am..." Apple Bloom corrected herself as the tiara wearing pony gave her a nasty glare. "That ain't the whole of it. Look below the fold."

"'Right or Wrong â€" Laughing at some-ponies misfortune is mean.' What is this..." She read through the copy. "... everybody does it... ponies should learn to take a joke... even if it may not seem serious to you, maybe it is to the pony your laughing at... turn the tables, remember something that happened to you and imagine ponies laughing at it... A debate piece? Actually... this is quite good stuff."

"We figure we'll haul the ponies in with the first half, get 'em laughing, then buck 'em in the face with the question if what they're doing is right." Apple Bloom explained.

"Ponies have all sorts of opinions." Sweetie Belle added, "Rarity

loves to gossip and talk about stuff around town. When she reads this, whether she agrees or not, she will talk about it, and that will get other ponies talking..."

"And all of them will want copies of the Foal Free Press!" Diamond Tiara finished. "Ha ha ha! It's brilliant! I'm glad I thought of it... Wait, do you think you can do this again? We need controversy, things ponies can argue about."

"Don't you worry, Chief," Scootaloo piped up. "We've got lots of ideas."

\* \* \*

><p>"Sister, this is intolerable!" Princess Luna stormed into her elder sisters rooms shortly after moon-rise. "We must beagle out the identity of this Gabby Gums is and punish her for her insolence!"<p>

Princess Celestia noticed the papers held crumpled in her sister's telekinesis and shook her head. "I have to admit, that picture of me sampling the cakes for the Royal Canterlot Bakery Auction wasn't my most flattering, but I believe I can survive a little fun at my expense."

"But... 'Celestia â€" Just like us'? That alone would be bad enough, but this second heading, 'Right or Wrong â€" Is the Diarchy the best way of ruling Equestria'. Tis treason!"

"Calm yourself Luna." Princess Celestia gently unfolded the paper. "Have you read it through? This Gabby Gums wasn't questioning our fitness to rule, she was discussing flaws in the system itself. She actually makes some good points. If anything she is sympathetic to us. She highlights the point that we alone raise the sun and moon, and how that prevents us from taking a holiday, or how if something happened to both of us, how much of a disaster that would be. She even makes the point that you don't get as much exposure as I do, running the Night Court. You are my younger sister, but you should be my equal in authority. I am giving serious thought to the suggestion she made that we trade off duties. I raised the moon for a thousand years, and I know you could raise the sun. That way you would finally get the respect you deserve."

"Sister!" Luna exclaimed, then teared up slightly. "You mean it?"

"I do. I should have thought of it myself, but my first thought was to protect you." Celestia hugged her sibling. "But most of all, she talks about us as ponies first, rather than princesses. Maybe if more ponies had seen us, seen you that way a thousand years ago and considered even an immortal princess might have hurt feelings, things might have turned out differently."

\* \* \*

><p>"Have you seen the latest Gabby Gums?" Rainbow Dash asked, as she entered Rarity's shop.<p>

"My dear, I read all of Gabby Gums articles." the fashionista replied as she annealed a gem into place on her latest ensemble. "I assume you're referring to the one entitled, 'Rainbow Dash â€" Super

Speedster or Super Girly'?"

"Yeah, I don't know how they got the picture from when I was with you at the Spa. Was I ever steamed when saw that!"

"Then you read the Right or Wrong piece, am I right?" Rarity smiled.

"Yeah, that kinda put things into perspective. I guess if I can read Daring Doo books without being any less awesome for it, I can get my hooves done too. After all, if I want to look the best for my fans, I've gotta take care of myself right? Of course, seeing you were in it too..."

"I rather liked the tag line, 'Can't a pony be both?'. I don't know how Gabby Gums learned about my little contretemps with those Diamond Dogs, but it was actually rather flattering to be called a 'mare of action' as well as a top fashion designer. It's like this Gabby Gums knows us both personally."

"You think it's Twilight? After all, she's always writing reports about everything under the sun. Which reminds me, I can't believe Princess Luna is subbing for Celestia at that."

"I think it's a wonderful idea myself, doing the same job for thousands of years must get pretty dull. And Nightmare Night showed Princess Luna needed to get out more."

"Yeah, you don't really think of the Princesses as ponies, but they eat cake too I guess. So, Twilight?"

Rarity shook her head. "I wouldn't have thought she'd write a piece like that about the Princesses, or send a copy of the paper to them afterwards. But I can't think of any-pony else. I asked Sweetie Belle but she said she's sworn to secrecy. Actually, I'm meeting up with Fluttershy for another Spa session after I finish this dress. Shall we invite Twilight and see what we can find out?"

"Uh..." Dash hesitated for a second, then gave a decisive nod. "Okay, and if any-pony gives me a hard time, I'll buck 'em to the curb! For that matter, you can help me, Miss 'mare of action'."

\* \* \*

><p>"I gotta admit, I was plumb furious when I read that headline." Applejack looked around the breakfast table at her assembled family over an open paper. "I should have figured it was another one of those Gabby Gums tricks. 'Applejack â€" Asleep on the job.' Of course I was resting, I'd just finished bucking the entire South Forty."<p>

"Well they did say just that." Big Mac replied. "Never figured they'd interview a cow to prove it."

Apple Bloom suppressed a smirk and said. "We don't often talk to the cows on anything, and we're the ones who maintain their barn!"

"I figure that was the point sugarcube." Applejack replied. "It was all a lead into this whole piece about how non-pony races are treated. At least Sweet Apple Acres came out of it looking

good."

Granny Smith stirred in her rocking chair. "And so we should! I helped my paw talk the Buttercup herd into sticking around Ponyville back in the day. Cows ain't ponies, they do things their own way, and we ponies better respect that. They like living together, birthing their own calves, and having a secure range to graze on. That's what we promised 'em and that's what they got. We take care of 'em and that includes leavin' them to their own devices."

"Of course, it wasn't just about cows, why do we even say 'stubborn as a mule' when old Forest Gumption is as easy going a fellow as any-pony could ask for. Good solid worker too. Or why they only allow ponies in the Royal guard, and that how that whole thing with Zecora happened. She asks some uncomfortable questions, but I guess that's what makes her popular."

"Time some-pony did." Big Mac was clearly in a chatty mood. "Reckon if no-pony asks if something is wrong, ponies are going to end up thinking it's right, or not thinking at all!"

"What I want to know is how this Gabby Gums mare managed to interview them heifers in the first place." Applejack turned to look at Apple Bloom, who was adding another scoop of chopped apple and honey to her oatmeal. "Bloom, you work on the paper, you must know her. For that matter, you were fixing the plumbing in the cow's barn yesterday afternoon, was that when she came to visit?"

Apple Bloom shook her head. "Sorry sis, I made a promise not to tell any-pony. Diamond Tiara won't let us."

Applejack frowned. "That Diamond Tiara's playing you for a fool. She hasn't put a single piece by you in the paper, or your friends either."

"It's okay sis, there's more to life than getting your name in the by-line. They need all the help they can get just getting out more copies. We're delivering to news stands in Canterlot, Trottingham, even Manehattan! We may not get a cutie-mark out of it, but we're having fun, and ain't that the important thing?"

Applejack glowered, not at the filly but at some unseen point in the distance. "I figured that whole business with the cute-caneara was just some silly filly boasting about getting her mark, but the more I hear about her, the less I like. If she gives you trouble, y'all just tell me, y'hear?"

Apple Bloom grinned. "It's okay sis, we've got it under control."

\* \* \*

><p>Diamond Tiara was livid, and staring down the subjects of her ire from over the top of her desk.<p>

"Did you really think you'd get away with this? I do read what goes in the paper, your column most of all. This piece about cutie-marks, it's practically propaganda for your stupid little club! Not to mention the way you make ponies who have an actual gift the bad guys!"

"That's not what it says at all!" Apple Bloom protested. "It's just saying that while cutie-marks are good, there's more to a pony than their cutie-mark talent, and that they shouldn't be bullied about not having a mark. My cousin Babs is having a hard time with bullies at her school, and we reckoned she might not be the only one."

Sweetie Belle added her two bits. "We just wanted to let fillies and colts like that know they aren't alone. Maybe we can even get some grown up ponies to remember how they felt about being bullied about being a blank flank, and even do something to help the foals who are."

"Yeah, this isn't about you!" Scootaloo exclaimed. "Your lame attempts at nastiness barely even count as annoying! There are ponies out there who are really hurting!"

"I don't care who's hurting! You will write something different for your next Gabby Gums piece, or I'll write my own story, using these! I told Featherweight to photograph everything, and he did!"

The three of them knew exactly what the pictures showed, Sweetie Belle as a dressmakers dummy, one of Scootaloo's more spectacular nose dives, and baby Apple Bloom with a pair of diapers on her head. However, they pretended to be appropriately shocked. Featherweight was even visible up in the skylight taking another snap.

"Hey! Give us those!" Scootaloo reached for the photos, only to have them swiped away and put back in an envelope. Diamond Tiara gave a nasty smirk. "Sorry girls, property of the Foal Free Press... just like Gabby Gums. Now get out there and write!"

The three fillies trailed out, tails between their legs, heads down, and but with looks that were determined rather than defeated. They'd given her a shot at playing fair, now the horse-shoes went on. Diamond Tiara might think she held all the cards, but they had an ace in the hole.

\* \* \*

><p>Diamond Tiara came down to breakfast feeling on top of the world. Her brilliant scheme had utterly crushed those three losers. They would continue to produce Gabby Gums columns, starting with tomorrow's and she would get the credit for it. A win-win situation, as her father liked to call it, and both sides winning were Diamond Tiara.<p>

She found her father engrossed in the Canterlot Sun Chronicle over the remains of his own breakfast. He lowered the paper to look at her when he heard her enter the room, and that was when she realised something was wrong. His normal fond smile was replaced by a frown.

"Diamond, what have you been doing at the school newspaper of yours?" he asked her.

"Pushing it's circulation through the roof!" she replied, "More is better, you always say."

"I'm fairly certain I didn't tell you to do this." He hoofed over the paper. There on the front page were the three 'blackmail' pictures

she'd used, and a fourth one of her confronting the three fillies in the newspaper office. While you couldn't see the pictures in detail, you could see three photos scattered on the desk, and it didn't take a genius to make the connection, especially with everyone's expressions.

The headline was, 'Editorial or Dictatorial' with a sub heading 'When good stories get censored for bad reasons.' and Gabby Gums as the tag line. There was also a note from the Sun Chronicle editor.

'Gabby Gums is no longer associated with the Foal Free Press, as the story below will relate. We are happy to announce that this is the first of many that will appear in the Chronicle.'

"Why those little ingrates!" Diamond Tiara raged, "I'll destroy them! I'll humiliate them so badly they'll have to go hide in Zebrica to escape the shame!"

"With those pictures?" Her father asked sternly, and she suddenly realised he was listening.

"But daddy, Gabby Gums is my bread and butter! They work for me, and they should do whatever I tell them to!"

"Apparently not. I suggest you read the article." She did as he told her, cheeks reddening.

'You may be wondering why the first three pictures above aren't accompanied by a snappy commentary and a Right or Wrong follow-up. That's because of who the three fillies shown here are. Individually we are Sweetie Belle, Scootaloo and Apple Bloom of Ponyville. Together we are the writing team that uses the pseudonym Gabby Gums.

It started out as a bit of fun, but we found ponies were actually listening to us. It was awesome, so we used our column to comment on things we saw around us, questions we thought needed asking. As Apple Bloom's big brother once said, "If no-pony asks if something is wrong, soon every-pony will start thinking it's right, or not thinking at all." We might not have gotten on with our Editor-in-Chief, but as long as we were helping to ship newspapers everything was fine.

Then we wrote our latest column, and she decided she didn't like it. Not because it was poorly written or badly thought out, but purely on the basis that she believed it reflected badly on her. She ordered us to write something else, and backed it up with the pictures you see above. If we didn't fill her column inches with our writing, she'd fill it with us, and a write-up designed to humiliate us. Her parting words were that she owned Gabby Gums. However, we'd long since decided that Gabby Gums and getting out the truth was more important than even our individual reputations.

She thought she had the whip hoof, as she had the only prints and controlled what went into the Foal Free Press. What she didn't know was that the photographer she'd browbeaten into helping her still had the negatives, and that we'd made contacts with other papers against the possibility that something like this would happen. She may think she owned our work, but we never signed a contract or were ever paid (any money we receive for future columns will be donated to



charity).

As far as we're concerned, she can publish her photos, and do her worst. The three of us would far rather be remembered as silly fillies for being caught on camera doing something embarrassing than for knuckling under to bullying tactics. We'll take whatever lumps are coming, we just ask that every-pony remember our very first column.

As to the piece that caused this ruckus, or possibly even fracas, there isn't enough room left to publish it. Look for it in our next Gabby Gums column, now appearing in the Canterlot Sun Chronicle, the Baltimore Gazette and the Manehattan Times. We hope for your continued support. Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo, writing as Gabby Gums.'

Diamond Tiara's scream of rage could be heard in Canterlot.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

33.1: Welcome to Valdemar. Here's your sentient, telepathic bond creature. We have them in horse and bird.

>33.2: The idea of Tails as a non-anthro fox was just funny. This snippet incorporates a bit of fanon that I myself came up with "see my short fic Fox's Family for more development of it.<br>33.3: "Micronation" and then I was away.

>33.4: Repeat after me: Do not assume that an alien race is automatically hostile. Check first.<br>33.5: This, of course, takes place pre-Awakening for Diamond Tiara.

## 34. Chapter 34

### 34.1 (Detective Ethan Redfield)

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Clone Mayhem<strong>

"Twilight, what have you done?!"

It was at six in the morning when Celestia teleported outside the Ponyville Library after receiving an urgent request for help from Spike. She had just raised the sun when the scroll begging for her immediate help appeared in a green fire. As soon as she appeared, the problem became apparent immediately. Two ponies stood inside the doorframe, both of their ears drooping against the sides of their heads.

Oh, and both of them were Twilight Sparkle. The left one's ears raised as she spoke, "Well...a couple months ago, I was doing some cleaning-"

The right Sparkle looked at her with a dirty expression, "Wait, I was the one doing the cleaning and I'm the original-"

Celestia stamped her hoof, "It doesn't matter at the moment. Please continue," she pointed her hoof at the left Twilight. The pony

nodded, "As I said, I, we, were dusting the bookshelves. As we passed the scroll wing of the library, we came across a number of scroll written in a language we had never seen before. We pulled it out and tried performing a translation spell. To our surprise, it didn't work, or at least, it didn't translate into Basic Equis!"

The Twilight on the right lit her horn as a scroll issued from within the library. Celestia took it with her own magic and unfurled it. It was a list of sorts as far as she could tell. Sure enough though, it was in a language she couldn't read with words such as 'katon' or 'ninjutsu'. In addition, it also had pictures of ponies performing magic of some sort. The Twilight on the right continued from the one on the left, "So, part of our project was to translate the words to Equis. We haven't made much progress on that front."

The Twilight on the left shoved the one on the right over, "The other part was performing the magic depicted on the images in front of us. We tried the first," she said, pointing to the image of one pony becoming two ponies. The foreign language over the picture said:

\_Tajuu Kage Bunshin no Jutsu\_

She continued. "And it worked really well! Unfortunately, we don't quite know how to end the spell. We tried the failsafe spell, and it didn't quite work."

Celestia sighed, "Twilight, you could have come to me immediately and I would have assisted you in this research. I'm over a thousand years old after all, and have seen many a nation rise and fall. Perhaps if we had researched it together, I could have found some historic records of a civilization like this one."

She pointed at the two of them, "But then, you tried a spell you've never heard of before and without knowing the consequences. It could have caused you to blow up for all you know when it made a copy of the pony in the picture."

Celestia gave a stern look, causing both Twilights to drop their heads in shame, both saying together, "We're sorry, princess...we didn't think that through all the way. After a moment passed, Celestia's stern expression faded into a sad smile. She trotted over and hugged one student, then the other, "But you're alright, and we'll get through this together."

Suddenly, the sound of Spike shouting from inside the library caused all of them to look to the entrance, "I don't think that's a good idea, Twilight."

Another voice sounding suspiciously like Twilight's own echoed from within, "But you just heard the princess. She'll be able to help us!"

The Twilight on the right, indeed the original Twilight, started sweating when Celestia's confused look turned towards the two standing outside, "Well..uh...the thing is...the spell didn't...quite go according to plan...you see..."

Spike's voice echoed again, "No, stay back! All of you! NO! Put me down Twilights!"

No less than 60 Twilights barrelled out the door with Spike held in one of their auras. Celestia's face was now in shock. The original continued, "...There may have been an...accident in the magical release...and I may have produced...a few hundred..."

Celestia's eyes gazed over the mass of Twilights as more continued the pour out of the library. Her eyes began twitching as a moment later as her students surrounded her and started speaking at once. As result, she took the only logical action to preserve her sanity and passed out. Silence descended as the Twilights looked on in horror. Then one of the Twilights slapped the original in the back of the head, "Nice going Boss! Now how are we going to explain this to all of Ponyville when they wake up?"

Spike maintained his horrified expression for a moment longer, then started chuckling, then laughing, then outright rolling on the floor roaring in amusement as tears poured down his cheeks. Moments later, the dragon shifted from Spike to Discord, "Oh, I haven't had that much fun in years. Give my thanks to Naruto for teaching you how to do the Shadow Clone technique with your horn only!"

The original sighed, "Not quite what I had in mind. I meant to have her speechless, not unconscious."

\* \* \*

><p>34.2<p>

"...so," Luna said, holding a bedside lamp. "What does this do?"

"It's a lamp, Luna," Celestia answered kindly. "It makes light through electricity."

"Ah, a thunder stone!" Luna nodded. "I see! Well, I know how to work \_these!\_"

Celestia was thinking hard. \_Thunder stone... thunder stone... oh, no!\_ "Luna, wait-"

Luna quite deliberately dropped the lamp, which hit the floor with a \_bang\_. The glass shattered.

"...because it's not a thunder stone," Celestia continued. "It uses electricity which is generated at a dam, and then transmitted by cable to the palace and then to the lamp. You make it work by pressing the switch."

"...oh." Luna hung her head. "My apologies, sister."

"Whaa-taa!"

Both alicorns looked up. "What was that?"

A cloud of black smoke puffed out from the fireplace, making them both cough.

"I am, ninja!" somepony shouted, then there was a series of \_whoosh\_

noises.

When they had ended, the smoke had gone, there was no sign of soot on the floor or furnishings, and the lamp was neatly reassembled on the dresser.

Celestia reached up to her ear, which was suddenly itching, and found a black card there. Words in white read:

\_Random acts of kindness a speciality!\_

"...well," she said, showing Luna the card. "I don't know about you, Lulu, but I'm not complaining."

\* \* \*

><p>"Haiii-ya!"<p>

Cranky Doodle Donkey blinked, and was somewhere else. In fact, he was in a dining room, with a table set for two.

"What was that?" a voice asked, and-

Matilda came in through the door, stopped, and put her hoof to her mouth. "Oh!"

Cranky shrugged. "Don't know how it happened, but..."

A black card fluttered to the floor.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, this is a new thing for you?" Twilight asked.<p>

"Yep!" Pinkie nodded, her black outfit somewhat obscuring her identity. (The voice was still obvious, though.)

"Random acts of kindness, huh? I can see it working. Do you advertise?"

Pinkie looked at her like she was an idiot. "No, silly. Ninjas work in shadows!"

"Which explains the black paper over all your windows, I see..." Twilight nodded absently. "You hiring?"

"Nope!" Pinkie shook her head. "The fewer ninjas, the better! I can get three times as much work done alone as I could if I had an assistant!" She dug in her subspace pocket. "Oh, hey, I made these!"

Twilight examined it. "What is it?"

"Joke bomb! Like a smoke bomb, but laughing gas. I've only tested it once, though, and it didn't work out like I hoped..."

"Not surprised..." Twilight muttered.

"It did make Trixie's show a success, though, so she's hired me as the opening act." Pinkie shrugged.

"Isn't that a bit unethical?"

"Nah, she just wants me to gas her. Loads of pratfalls, basically." Pinkie grinned. "She said it would stink of defeat, were the stink not obscured by the smell of so much money."

"That's a direct quote?"

Pinkie nodded.

"Huh. Well, suppose if she's happy then that's all to the good. Happy unicorns don't try to take over Ponyville."

\* \* \*

><p>34.3<p>

Twilight looked up. For some reason, this loop, she was an absolutely tiny unicorn â€" barely a half centimetre tall â€" but the world itself was fairly interesting. If built for normally sized humans.

The sky looked marvellous, right now, with the young moon rising into the heavens, and Twilight worked busily on her sketchpad. (She had one this loop, and had decided to keep it up as a hobby. Perhaps it would, one day, let her get a cutie mark that wasn't the star of magic again.)\_

Then came the peal of a mighty bell, and the calm air went straight into a screaming, howling storm.

Twilight was far too small to stay on the ground in that kind of wind. Startled, she went flying, and bounced off a shrine underneath a peach tree. (Fortunately, she ended up out of the wind, and a moment's work with magic got her pinned down properly.)

Thus safe, she looked at the shrine...

Which moved.

A white alicorn shook her head, bits of stone falling all around her, and turned towards her.

"Wait," Twilight said, squinting. "Celestia?"

"Oh, hello, Twilight, I didn't see you there," Celestia said, waving a hoof. "I appear to... well, have more or less the same job as normal."

Twilight nodded, levitating herself up to eye level with a mage's blithe disdain for a mere storm. "I see. Does this mean I'm your sidekick?"

"Probably." Celestia shrugged, looking herself over. "Well, that's neat. I like the tufts in my coat... not sure about the black tail tip, though." She twisted to get a better look at it. "Whoops!"

The sun came up.

"...do that again," Twilight said, blinking.

The sun came up again, briefly dipping below the horizon only to come up once more.

"Actually, this is a lot easier than the way I normally do it," Celestia commented. "I approve."

"Right." Twilight hovered over, and took up a seat just behind Celestia's horn.

"Are you going to stay there the whole time?" Celestia asked.

"Well, I'm not going to walk," Twilight countered.

"Very well, then. Let us see what this loop is about."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right," Spike said, handing over a large scroll. "I don't understand how this works myself, but basically now you can repair things with ink from your tail."<p>

Celestia nodded. "That will be useful. I like the look, by the way."

"I don't know..." Twilight said critically. "Might be a bit too long and thin for my taste..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you going to help at *any* point?" Celestia asked, with perhaps a trace of irritation, as she swung a magic mirror like a bludgeon at two imps with guitars.

Twilight kicked back, hooves wrapped in Celestia's mane. "I could provide vocals."

"I meant help *me*."

"Oh." Twilight considered it. "Not especially, no."

"...this is payback for the whole Sombra thing, isn't it?"

\* \* \*

><p>"So," the alicorn of the sun muttered. "Giant robot run by a fish. What to do now..."<p>

Twilight bounced on her head. "Summon the brush goddess of Bloom."

"Are you sure?" Celestia asked.

"Yep," Twilight replied.

Her inky tail moving in a single, precise circle, Celestia called on the magic native to this loop...

And Fluttershy materialized on the battle field.

Her eyes narrowed.

"Mister fishy! You are a bad fish!"

The whole giant robot of Yami flinched.

"Okay, now the one for Power Slash."

Another flare of magic, and Gilda appeared.

"Hey, Gilda?" Twilight shouted. "Fancy a fish dinner?"

The aquiline predator perked up. "Buck yeah!"

Yami looked from pegasus to griffin (the latter of whom was carrying a very large knife and a napkin)... and jumped off the platform.

"You're not escaping that easily!" Gilda shouted, jumping off after it.

Celestia and Fluttershy trotted to the edge, and peered down after them.

"So..." Fluttershy said, after a moment. "Is that it?"

"I assume so," Twilight said. "Except for trying to paint an advert on the moon. Now that would restore faith in, er, you."

"I may need Luna's permission..." Celestia mused.

\* \* \*

><p>34.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight, we've been friends for many loops now."<p>

The purple unicorn sipped her tea, giving her former teacher a polite, but confused look. "I sense this is going somewhere..."

"Well..." Celestia sighed. "Yes. It's nothing personal, just... a habit that irks me a bit. I've lived with it for a while, but..."

"What?" Twilight put her teacup down. "If I'm doing anything to make you uncomfortable, you can tell me."

"...it's really rather silly, and it's not really your fault â€"

"

"Celestia, don't make me break out the p-word."

That got a small laugh out of the alicorn. "You'd really do that?"

Twilight shrugged. "You're dancing around the subject, what works

works."

"...alright." Setting down her tea and taking a deep breath, the former mentor looked her former student in the eye. "I want you to stop swearing by me."

There was a quiet moment.

"...that's it?"

"That's it."

Twilight nodded to herself. "Huh. Okay. Okay, sure, I'll... I'll try â€" "

"Also, could you pass the message on to the other loopers? It really is nothing personal, but when you can't tell if 'dear sweet YourOwnName' is an expression of affection it tends to get on your nerves after a while."

"Oh, wow. Yeah, I get where you're coming from, all the Sister loops I did â€" " The unicorn shook her head. "Wow, I never even thought about it. It was just an unconscious habit. I'm sorry."

"No, it's fine. You didn't know."

They sat amicably for a little while longer.

"...you know, we're still going to need to swear occasionally," Twilight pointed out. "That might cause a bit of a problem."

"Swear by trees," Celestia suggested. "They're fairly reliable."

\* \* \*

><p>34.5<p>

"Twilight!"

Twilight turned, already feeling tired. "What have you rigged to explode this time?"

Trixie paused, then took out some notes and scribbled on them. "Nothing. Now, if you will excuse me, I need to go replace some hydrogen with helium. If something catches fire, please shout about 'oh, the equanity' before coming to help."

With that, the blue unicorn left â€" not quite at a run.

"Zeppelin?" Spike asked.

"I think so," Twilight replied.

"Right."

"You know what?" Twilight said, not precisely to Spike. "I think I'm going to go get her productively employed on something. Preferably a long way off..."

\* \* \*



><p>"A moon shot?" Trixie said, looking at the project proposal. "Very interesting, Twilight. Yes, I think this should be a good long term project. Should I work from Apple-loosa, or the Frozen North?"<p>

"Apple-loosa makes more sense." Twilight pointed. "You'd have the rail line. Though perhaps set up an day's canter or so away from any of the actual population centres, since keeping a buffalo tribe and a town-full of pioneers awake at night might not go well. Just put in a spur line, or something."

"That is true." Trixie nodded. "Very well, I shall begin at once!"

A flash of light, and she was gone.

"Right, that's dealt with her for a few dozen loops..." Twilight said, then looked upwards with a frown. "Now, what do I do with this Zeppelin?"

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie trotted happily around her new work site. "Everything is in place! Fuel, launch bunker, control room... all that is needed is the rocket."<p>

Picking up some sheet steel in her magical grip, she started an arc-welding spell.

\* \* \*

><p>"Good enough," the blue unicorn pronounced. "Now, where's that tritium..."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie carefully wired up the last contact on her control board.<p>

"Done! Now, can everyone clear the launch area."

She chuckled at her own joke. She was the only pony in a hundred miles.

"Launch in five, four, three, two, one-"

Trixie hit the firing contact, and nearly tripped over a log on the road. Her wagon behind her didn't stop as quickly as she did, requiring two awkward half-steps and a skid to stop it overrunning her.

\_Hold on a minute...\_ she thought. \_Where's the launch pad gone?\_

A purple flash lit the wooded road in front of her. "Trixie! Are you alright?"

"Fine, thank you, Twilight," Trixie replied, still frowning. "But someone has stolen my entire launch range."

The other unicorn shook her head. "Okay, clearly it all happened too

fast. Whatever possessed you to use grav-pinch \_tritium?\_"

"Well, Trixie read a very interesting proposal for a project 'Orion', but it used weapons that were far too dirty. So she rebuilt it to use clean fusion weapons..."

Twilight facehoofed. "Ce\_Tree\_ damnit, you're myopic sometimes. Project Orion was designed for out-of-atmosphere propulsion, not liftoff!"

"...oh." Trixie paused. "So you have been checking for me ever since I blew myself off the face of Equestria?"

"Yes," Twilight replied. "And next time, stick to chemistry. In fact, if you ever start getting involved in nuclear physics again, I may extract a Pinkie Promise."

Trixie shuddered. "Understood."

\* \* \*

><p>34.6<p>

Angel Bunny kicked the spinner, managing somehow to convey total and utter disdain for all of equinity.

Quite an erudite rabbit, really.

"Green," Fluttershy read off, and moved her left fore hoof carefully to touch a green circle.

Angel kicked the spinner again.

"Ooh," Discord said, squinting. "Feline."

Chrysalis frowned, and her ears shifted to cat ears.

Another kick. By now, Angel was reading a book.

"Blue!"

Twilight entered the forest clearing. "Hi, guys â€" okay, what the hay are you all doing?"

Discord grinned, which was quite impressive, seeing as he currently had the head of a crocodile.

Chrysalis shrugged, awkwardly. "Discord calls it Shape-Twister. Says it's good practise."

"Oh, fair enough. How's that going, by the way?"

"Ears and tail, mostly," Chrysalis admitted. "Biology is hard. Discord finds it easy, though..."

"That's because I basically ignore it," Discord stage-whispered, changing his crocodile head back to normal before putting his right arm on red.

Just the arm. Not the rest of him.

"Okay, that has to be cheating," Chrysalis said, scowling. "I â€"whoa!"

Twilight winced as pony, changeling and draconequus collapsed in a heap.

\* \* \*

><p>34.7<p>

Dash looked over the paper. "Twilight... you sure about this?"

Twilight shrugged. "Well, organizing things worked so well when I did it at the Winter Wrap-Up, and quite frankly the whole weather schedule seems very complicated â€" quite unnecessarily, really â€" so here's my plan, and I'd like to give it a go."

"Well..." Dash looked at her friend askance. "If you say so, Twi. But this ain't gonna go well."

"Thank you, Dash!" Twilight grinned.

\* \* \*

><p>"What's up with the weather, ah ask you..." Applejack muttered to Twilight, as she dragged a cart to market. "Four months o' constant sun! The apples ain't gonna take much more of this. Let me tell you, ah have half a mind to track down Dash and..."<p>

Twilight coughed.

"Yeah, dry throat and all, too," Applejack said sympathetically.

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright, everypony," Dash said, consulting her chart. "That's a hundred and twenty-eight days, on the dot, so that's it for the sunny period."<p>

Several pegasi sighed with relief. Derpy had her hooves hooked into a small cloud, and was dangling upside down from it to stay in the shade.

"What now?" Raindrops asked.

"Well, according to this plan, we're past what's called Garam, and into what's called Khalif."

Silence greeted that announcement.

"Yeah, I dunno either. But it looks like tomorrow is going to be a storm." Dash flipped onto the next page. "As is the day after. And... hold on a sec, guys."

Flip. Flip. Flipflipflipflipflipflipflip...

"Huh."

Thunderlane crowded around to look at the weather plan. "...wait a sec. That's three and a half months away."

"Yeah," Dash confirmed, contemplating the work ahead. Then clapped her hooves. "Okay, looks like we get to just shove a storm cell on top of Ponyville and keep refilling it for... basically ages."

\* \* \*

><p>"This is not working," Dash said to Twilight.<p>

"Yes, thank you, I had gathered that," Twilight replied, keeping a shield spell over her book collection.

They had to be shielded. After all, they were on the balcony in pouring rain " because Ponyville was flooding.

\_Note to self. Ponyville is not suited for a monsoon climate.\_

Maybe, rather than just becoming an alicorn on occasion, it would make sense to reverse engineer Star Swirl's spell and learn how to \_un\_transform. If nothing else, she might be able to make it turn her into a pegasus, and clearly learning how the weather worked was going to take practical experience...

\* \* \*

><p>34.8 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight and Chrysalis sat together in a bar, Chrysalis having a folder in front of her and downing another shot of whisky. Twilight patted her on the back while smiling, "Don't worry. So, who's the next person on your list."<p>

Chrysalis pulled out a set of papers on her next attempt. The image of the pony caused Twilight's cheerful demeanour to disappear faster than Pinkie when she went to set up her "Welcome to Equestria Party." Chrysalis opened her mouth to speak, but Twilight lifted the file up with her magic and caused it to burst into flames, "Not him. It won't work out, I promise."

Chrysalis looked in horror as the ashes fell, "But...he's a prince like Shining! And also, the papers voted him the most eligible bachelor in Canterlot."

Twilight facehoofed at the comparison of Shining Armor and Blueblood. Where was looping Rarity when she needed her? She resolved to have the two meet the next time they were looping together.

"I think," she said slowly, "we're going about this wrong." A smaller, thinner folder floated out of her subspace pocket. "It's time you move onto a different class of pony."

The changeling queen opened the folder cautiously.  
"...Loopers?"

"It's the one thing we haven't tried yet..."

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie blinked.<p>

She blinked again.

She took a moment to compose herself. "You... are asking me out."

"Yes."

"...we are both \_mares.\_"

Chrysalis coughed. "Well, technically, you're a mare and I... don't actually have ovaries, I just lay the eggs â€" "

"No, you're right, stupid me. You're a shapeshifter! Not a problem." The unicorn giggled. "Nope, not a problem, I just â€" why me?"

The changeling queen bit her lip. "Well... you're looping... and, you know my, ah, \_issues\_ with Shining â€" "

"Er, no. No I don't."

Chrysalis winced. "...look, it's complicated, but I'm trying to move on. And â€" "

"Wait. I'm a rebound?!"

"No! Not like that â€" "

"I cannot believe â€" "

"It wasn't him! It was a not-awake version of him and â€" "

" â€" I thought you were actually into me or something â€" "

"GAAAH!" A holey black hoof pressed against Trixie's muzzle. "Look, I have issues, okay? And it's been suggested that I try to find another pony, and... I'm doing this wrong. Hold on, let me start over."

She took a breath.

"Miss Trixie Lulamoon, you have caught my attention, would you give me a chance to catch yours?"

The unicorn stared at her.

After a moment, she shook her head. "You know for a species that literally feeds on love, you are terrible at this."

"My last stable romantic relationship was with an escaped slave of an enemy nation while we were both constantly hunted. I... it kind of just happened, situation... thing."

Trixie shrugged. "Okay... you know what, okay. Sure. Why not, let's see where this goes."

\* \* \*

><p>34.9 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Once again, Homura's eyes flew open. Once again, she rose into a sitting position and sighed. Once again, she had failed Madoka.<p>

Then she noticed that she was naked. And had hooves.

She didn't scream or boggle at the sight. She'd seen far stranger within witches' barriers. Instead, instincts honed by an endlessly repeated month of struggle had her reaching for her Soul Gem.

Which she dropped. Because she had hooves.

Homura took a deep breath. She wasn't sure what was happening, or why. There was a very real possibility she had gone insane, or had become a witch herself, or both. Still, she could get through this. She had endured far, far worse than fleeting annoyance, and no doubt there was worse yet to come before she could finally rest.

Still, it would've been nice if she hadn't collapsed immediately after getting out of her hospital bed. Stupid horse legs. Stupid hooves.

After a few mortifying minutes of learning how to work her new body, Homura realized something that she'd missed while caught up between her usual post-reset depression and the whole horse thing: she didn't recognize her room. It was different. She was different. If ever there was a chance to save Madoka, this was it.

\* \* \*

><p>Nurse Tenderheart entered the room and beheld one of the chronic patients, a filly who had barely been able to move for years, jumping up and down in joy. The nurse smiled. Such were the miracles of modern medicine. "Congratulations, Daybreak!"<p>

The purplish-gray little unicorn seemed to halt in midair. Once she landed, she put on a terribly serious, composed expression that did nothing to hide her furious blush. Tenderheart kept a straight face thanks to years of paediatric experience. Checking the clipboard she had in her fetlock helped too. "Now, everything seems to be order. Get your things together and we can get you released."

The answer was as stiff as the filly herself. "Y-yes. Thank you. I won't be long."

It was a bit harder for Tenderheart to hold in her laughter this time. She tousled Daybreak's ebon mane. "Come on, now. No need to embarrassed. This is a big day for you. It's only natural to get excited."

Daybreak's lips slowly curved into a smile, as if she were afraid her happiness would be taken away the moment she tried to enjoy it. She blinked "were those tears?" and nodded. "Okay."

Tenderheart matched her smile for smile. "Attagirl. Come down to the lobby whenever you're ready."

\* \* \*

><p>Homura moved quickly. She needed to. She couldn't take the chance that Kyubey wasn't still plaguing the planet, which meant that she only had about a day to keep a cat from dying. Otherwise, as in that first go-around so long ago, Madoka would resurrect it with her contract wish.<p>

Luckily, it seemed some part of her remembered this new room as well as she did the usual one, the same part that had spoken English with a fluency she'd only felt in the classroom after a few dozen loops. She knew where everything important was, and in some cases, what it was. The twin pouches were apparently saddlebags, and they were where she stuck the few personal possessions that had made the room more than a place to wait for either recovery or death.

It wasn't until she reached her glasses case that she realized that her vision was still blurred. Homura whipped out her Soul Gem with an impatient snort and once again willed her eyes to perfection.

Once the world came back into focus, she blinked. What she saw didn't change. Her Soul Gem's light seemed to have escaped the little jewel and was now surrounding it, making it float in midair. Then she noticed a matching light above her eyes.

"Umâ€|" The Soul Gem drifted back into one of the saddlebags, as if responding to its owner's unspoken thoughts. The light faded.

Homura decided to take a quick detour. Old and new memories agreed that the room would have an attached bathroom, which would have a mirror.

\* \* \*

><p>Homura moved down the hallway in a mild daze, trusting the strange intuition to guide her to the lobby. She wasn't sure how to feel about being a unicorn. Deep under the layers of emotional scar tissue, whatever was left of the awkward girl she'd been thought she was absolutely adorable. Another part of her was wondering about the marks on her rump. The diamond she recognized from her fingernail and Soul Gem, and the twisted loop overlaying it seemed to be the symbol for infinity. Her new memories knew it was important, but couldn't say what it meant. A third was wondering how being a tiny horse would affect her magic. A fourth came back to whether Kyubey was even here. Would there be any witches to fight? If not, how long could she last if she kept her magic use to a minimum? A fifthâ€|<p>

Well, in any case, it was entirely understandable when she walked into an adult horse's legs.

Homura stumbled back. "Sorry! I wasn'tâ€|"

"It's fine." The horse â€" pony, her new knowledge insisted â€" seemed to be female, given her voice. "I've certainly been lost in thought before." She was also a unicorn, Homura noted, her coat a more vivid shade of purple.

"Well, I see you two have met," said Nurse Tenderheart. "Daybreak, this is Twilight Sparkle. She'll be looking after you."

"What?" A second later, Homura realized she was physically younger than normal. Too young, it seemed, for an apartment of her own. She may not even have the funds available to afford rent.

The nurse seemed to be expecting her reaction. "I know, Mister Cueball had already volunteered to take you in, but, well, he's coming in as you're coming out."

"He's sick?" Homura gave a silent cheer. Sure, the name could be a coincidence, but she was willing to bet all the money she might not actually have that Cueball had red eyes, a white coat, and an obsession with thermodynamics.

"Injured. Can't say why. Or won't." Tenderheart shook her head. "Stallions. In any case, Miss Sparkle offered to take his place."

Twilight nodded with a grin. "I think we're going to have a lot of fun, Daybreak." Her voice had the cheery condescension found in most people's "talking to children" voice.

Daybreak Heart. That was her name. Or, at least, it was what everyoneâ€| everypony? Seriously? It was what every\_pony\_ would be calling her. Homura gave a small smile of her own. "I hope so." She was already devising a plan for getting out from under Twilight's hooves.

As the two unicorns walked out of Ponyville General, Homura asked, "How well do you know the ponies here, Miss Sparkle?"

"Well, I'm no Pinkie Pie, but I'm at least acquainted with quite a few Ponyvillians. Why do you ask?"

Well, it was worth a shot. Homura considered how Madoka might appear in this timeline. "Would you happen to know a girl about my age? Pink coat, kind to a fault, wears ribbons in her hair?"

Twilight considered this for a few steps before shaking her head. "Can't say I do, but Miss Cheerilee might. She's going to be your teacher. I can introduce you to her after you've gotten settled in."

Homura held back a groan. Of course it wouldn't be that easy. "I see."

"Is she a friend?"

"An old one, but we've lost touch." Homura drooped a bit. "I don't even remember her name." Not whatever she was called as a pony, anyway. Strawberry Ribbons, maybe?

"I'm sure you'll find her soon," Twilight assured her.

Homura simply grunted. Empty words were about the best she could expect from adults.

There was a flash of light, and the filly came to halt, her head



darting up. A translucent sphere had sprung up around her, leaving the outside world a bit dulled and blurred, like a light fog.

"Walk with me, Daybreak." Twilight's voice had steel in it now.

Homura started walking. It seemed like a very bad idea to disobey that voice. She turned to Twilight, whose horn was faintly glowing. "What's going on?"

"The spell?" Twilight gave a wave of her horn in no particular direction. "It's a privacy field. Anypony who might be eavesdropping on us will only hear the sort of empty chatter I was subjecting you to until now. The situation? You tell me. About an hour ago, a transequine entity manifested in my house and told me that a temporal energy burst would erupt in the foals' wing of the local hospital, and that I should be there to pick up a very confused filly before she hurt herself or others."

At least the mare sounded like she was speaking to an equal now. Still, there was a problem. "I don't understand," admitted Homura.

"Neither do I. I was hoping you could tell me who she might be. She identified herself as 'Eternal Hope.' Does that help?"

Homura shook her head. "Even if I knew her, it wouldn't be by that name. Do you know of humans?"

Twilight grinned. "I see. I thought that might be the case. What's your actual name?"

"Akemi Homura."

"Ah." Twilight nodded, as though this told her everything she needed to know. "I have a theory. Are you familiar with the term 'memory leak'?"

"Not really."

"Well, if a computer programâ€"

"You know what computers are?" Homura hadn't seen so much as a pixel since she'd woken up. It was honestly a bit disconcerting.

"I know a lot of things." Twilight resumed the lecture. "Anyway, if a computer program requests memory but doesn't release it, that memory can stay tied up. If the program runs over and over, it leaves more and more memory locked up."

Over and overâ€| "Is that why I'm a pony?" Homura asked. "Because I looped too many times?"

Twilight shook her head. "No, no. Imagine the leaking program is deleted, but the memory it allocated finds its way to another program that can use it, but has to change the file formatâ€| well, the analogy kind of breaks down at that point."

Homura wasn't listening. Her attention had latched onto one word. "Deleted?" She lurched to a halt. "What do you mean,

'deleted'?"

Twilight opened her mouth, but decided against whatever she was going to say before she could say it. "Well, it's probably best you get the explanation from the best source. We're here." She dropped the privacy bubble and opened the library door.

\* \* \*

><p>Homura trudged through, too lost in thought to notice that she was walking into a living tree. Her gaze stayed on the floor before her until a pair of hooves came into view. She looked up, her eyes widened, and she dropped onto her haunches, mouth agape.<p>

Eternal Hope was a full-sized horse, pink as strawberry ice cream. Her mane and tail were cascading streams of energy, shading from magenta at the roots through purple, reaching royal blue by the tips. She had both horn and wings, and her cutie mark was a teardrop overlaid by a fat red X.

Despite all this, Homura recognized her smile in an instant. "Madoka?"

Madoka nodded. "Hello again, Homura-chan."

"Iâ€¦" Tears welled in Homura's eyes, and she wasn't sure why. "I'm so confused. Are you a magical girl? Are you safe? Is Walpurgisâ€¦" She fell silent as wide, pink wings embraced her.

"Shh." Madoka held her friend in her forelegs. "It's okay now, Homura-chan. You don't have to worry about me anymore." With a chaste kiss to the forehead and a quick spell, she guided the unicorn to sleep.

Once Homura was resting, Madoka looked up at her hostess and gave her a grateful nod. "Thank you, Twilight."

"It was my pleasure," Twilight said sincerely. "Friendship problems are something of a speciality of mine, after all."

"So it seems." Madoka's ears flattened, her smile taking on a melancholy cast. "It's a shame you won't remember this."

Twilight tilted her head. "What do you mean? I'm the Anchor of this Loop." She began casting the first memory spell she could remember, already thinking of others besides.

"I'm afraid I don't leave much of an impression on people. You'll see when I leave. Or, rather, you won't." With no further preamble, the alicorn transformed into pink energy and imploded, taking Homura with her.

Twilight paused midway through casting Antimony's Anamnesis Assistant. "Huh. What was I doing?" She pondered for a moment. "Casting a memory spell. And I've forgotten what I want to remember. That's a bit too ironic to be coincidental." She scowled and extracted a file marked "In Case Of Memory-Proof Entities" from her subspace pocket. "Darn it, and this seemed like it was going to be such a peaceful Loop."

\* \* \*

><p>Madoka manifested outside of Yggdrasil in a similar surge of pink, this time in human form. Well, humanoid. To those in the know, the blue marks on her forehead and temples spoke of her divine nature. In her hands she held a brightly shining purple Soul Gem. Homura didn't need to see how the cosmic sausage was made.<p>

"Oh, it's you." One of the sausage makers happened to be nearby, scowling at the embodiment of hope from her seat in front of the supercomputer.

Madoka gave a shallow but respectful bow. "Hello, Skuld-senpai."

Skuld's scowl deepened. "Don't 'senpai' me, troublemaker. Your haywire ascension has been the biggest headache I've had since we had to start the Loops."

"My universe ceasing to exist would cause a magical girl to despair," answered Madoka. There was a slight singsong aspect to her tone from sheer repetition.

"Yeah, you."

"Nevertheless, I wasn't just permitted to preserve it, I had to."

"Whatever you say, Little Miss Force-of-Nature." The raven-haired Norn called up a smaller window and cross-referenced the younger goddess's movements. "So, what should I tell Sleipnir when he finds your fingerprints all over one of his worlds? You know, other than 'Here's my hammer. Go nuts.'"

"Oh, I was just cleaning up after myself," Madoka said with a smile.

Skuld snorted. "That'd be a first."

Madoka shrugged and manifested her bow. The living device extended itself, runic interfaces blooming along its surface. She held the Soul Gem to one, which uploaded the jewel's data. Homura would be having some odd dreams for a while.

"You know," she mused, "I'm no expert, but it seems like you should've backed up everything."

"On what, that twig of yours? You can't back up a supercomputer on a laptop, and it's not like we had a grove of server-grade world trees on standby in case of the unthinkable."

"Well, you may want to think about that in the future."

Skuld leapt out of her chair, hovering eye to eye with Madoka, debugging hammer in hand. "\_You\_ do not get to talk to \_me\_ about the future!"

The other goddess didn't even blink. "Hope is a wish for a better future. Aren't goddesses supposed to grant wishes?"

Skuld sputtered for a bit, her grip on her hammer tightening to white-knuckle intensity. A dark, especially Norse corner of her mind noted that a good, old-fashioned blood eagle wouldn't kill a goddess. Not if done properly.

Ultimately, she huffed a sigh and muttered, "I don't have time for this." She returned to her chair and hunched over the console, typing furiously. "\_Some\_ of us are actually trying to \_fix\_ this problem."

"I'll get out of your hair, then." Once more, Madoka shifted into a plume of pink energy, entering her bow. The world sapling hovered for a moment before vanishing into itself, an ontological paradox only possible with the smaller models.

Meanwhile, Skuld continued to assault her keyboard, muttering divine profanities in commented-out Yggdrasil Command Speech.

\* \* \*

><p>34.10  
(Masterweaver)<p>

"Mmmmmm. "

"Mmmmmmmmm. "

"Mmmm. "

"...mmmmmm. "

With a flash, Twilight appeared in the room. "We have a â€" Oh! I'm sorry, I just, I'll be going..." She backed out sheepishly, averting her eyes.

Spike and Rarity shared a look.

Eventually, the dragon sighed and put down the spatula. "She's not going to believe we were just making cookies, is she?"

"No, I don't think so." Rarity sighed, removing her apron. "To be completely fair, we were licking the batter off each other."

"You started it."

"Yes, well. Maybe we should go see why she's here?"

"I suppose," Spike sighed, taking off his own apron. "I just hope it's something important..."

\* \* \*

><p>"...and that's it." Twilight finished awkwardly. "So... um... yeah."<p>

Spike and Rarity stared at her, eyes wide.

Eventually, the dragon coughed and took a breath. "So. If I were to flat out say no...?"

"Political explosions, possible war with the dragons and the griffons, a chance that Celestia could be deposed..."

"And if I say yes, I lose Rarity, marry some stranger, and go rule a nation of jerks." Spike dragged his hands down his face. "Errrugh. What is with Celestia this loop?"

Twilight sighed. "I think she was banking on being able to shape the dragons into a more agreeable race before you hatched and matured. She's not awake, so... you know, she didn't know about..." The unicorn gestured between the two of them.

Rarity finally managed to gather herself. "Well... you're a prince though! That's... okay, that's no justification whatsoever." She groaned. "Who arranges marriages centuries ahead of time?"

"And why did it take me centuries to hatch anyway?"

Twilight shrugged. "Dragons this loop hatch when they hatch. You're an early bloomer." She levitated over the copy of the treaty. "Anyway, when Celestia heard about you two, she sent me this. If we find a loophole, you guys get to stick together. We've got three months. Go."

\* \* \*

><p>Spike cheered, slamming down a lawbook. "Aha! If I choose to abdicate in favour of my cousin, the treaty with the griffons will technically be fulfilled!"<p>

"Except your only cousin that still qualifies is still in an egg," Rarity pointed out, "and part of the treaty stipulates renegotiating the trade agreement within a year of coronation." She sighed, looking up from the genealogies splayed in front of her. "I don't think we're going to be able to find a peaceful solution to this, Spike. It's been two and a half months!"

"We've still got half a month, and I am not going to give up on this. I won't abandon you even if I have to divorce my fiancée after the wedding."

"Awww... that's so sweet of you." The unicorn stood and stepped over to him, giving the dragon a fond nuzzle.

"Wouldn't work," Twilight offered distractedly. "Royal marriages require consummation, at least by these laws." She remained oblivious of the other two's glares as she sorted through another stack of books. "Outdated. Doesn't apply. Doesn't apply. Outdated. Immoral. Revolutionary. Doesn't apply. Revolutionary. Doesn't apply..."

She stopped suddenly. The book glowing in her magical grip had stopped flipping.

Spike put a claw on her shoulder. "...Twilight? Did... did youâ€"?"

"it's risky," she managed. "Dangerously so. Fatal for a normal pony, but..." She let the book levitate over to Rarity. "You might be able to pull it off."

The ivory unicorn took the book, reading down the page. "...rather uncouth, don't you think?"

"Yeah, well... it's the only viable option so far." Twilight shrugged. "I'll keep looking, but you should start training now."

\* \* \*

><p>Selindavri wrapped her tail around Spike's, draping a blue arm over his shoulders. "Don't be so nervous, darling."<p>

"Please... please don't call me darling."

She patted his chest in understanding. "Of course, of course. My big strong drake doesn't need such frilly nicknames, does he? Relax. In but a few minutes the ceremony will be over and we can move on to... important things." A gentle smile graced her snout. "I know how hard this is for you, leaving the ponies, but it really is the right thing. And don't worry, you'll be able to see them fairly regularly... oh, and of course I will help you adjust to life in the conclave."

Spike rose an eyecrest, giving her a look. "Really."

"It's why I'm here, da €" ironpecs." Selindavri rapped a fist against him. "Really, though, those \_are\_ impressive. Ah, that's our cue." She patted his shoulder gently and began to walk across the volcanic ash, a serpentine silhouette against the red and gold glow of the lava flows. After steeling himself, Spike walked after her.

Some accommodations had been made for Spike's friends of course. The dragons had arranged for an area filled with cooling charms and magical shields repelling the molten rock, where the ponies could watch the glorious wedding of the dragon prince. It was oddly quiet in that region, a contrast to the thrumming of the dragons surrounding the crater. Rainbow Dash and Applejack where fidgeting in their seats. Pinkie and Fluttershy couldn't help but click their hooves together as they watched.

Twilight and Rarity seemed oddly calm.

Finally, the couple stopped in front of a massive dragon, black as the sky with wings large enough to wrap over the entirety of Ponyville. He turned his red eyes on spike, and from him to Selindavri.

"Mmm. A match between the line of Horvem and the line of Krin. A portent of things to come, perhaps." He breathed in, not noticing the significant glance between two unicorns. "Who here would dare object to this match?"

"I."

There was rustling among the watching dragons as Rarity stood. She walked out of the protective circle, horn gleaming as light wrapped tightly around her. Selindavri turned to look at her, surprised and annoyed.

"I, Rarity Belle, Child of the line of Platinum, claim this match

unfit."

"I expected opposition," the blue dragon said, "but not from you."

A black claw waved her to silence. "She is within her right to object... should an elder not." The red eyes scanned the assembled dragons. "Does anybody else challenge this match?"

"There needs be no other challenge. I invoke the right of claim."

That got a murmur from the dragons watching the scene. "It's a trick!" one cried. "She's a disguised alicorn!"

"I assure you, my good sir, I do not have access to any such power. I am nothing but a tailor."

Selindarvi sighed. "You are a pony, miss Rarity. To fight me is to die, and I do not wish to sully my wedding with an international incident."

"Then you concede?"

"I would... refuse."

Rarity shook her head sadly. "The line of Horvem has truly fallen to produce a dragon so... frail."

The blue dragon narrowed her eyes. "Careful, pony. I am being merciful, and I know how much your kind values that."

"Yes. We do value mercy. That is why I am invoking Claim instead of Treachery."

The mutterings of the dragons behind them ceased at once.

"An... interesting statement," rumbled the black behemoth. "A threat, perhaps."

Rarity said nothing.

Selindavri flicked her tail. "...clear the field. She will have her Claim."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Oh sweet Celestia I'm fighting a dragon.<em>

Rarity's face was the picture of calm as she stared across the lava pit, where Selindavri was meditating. She wasn't nearly as brutish as the dragon who would take up residence in the mountain every loop; in fact, had circumstances been different Rarity could easily see her as a potential friends. Coupled with her long claws and, to Rarity's trained eyes, well toned body, the unicorn could only come to one conclusion.

\_Oh sweet Celestia I'm fighting a \_\_\*\*smart\*\*\_\_ dragon.\_

Then her mind threw up a fact she'd stumbled across during her research.

\_Oh sweet Celestia I'm fighting a smart dragon \_\_\*\*with magic.\*\*\_

The unicorn took a deep breath, thankful for the environmental filter spell she'd cast, and let it out. She'd fought smart dragons with magic before, on rare occasions. True, those were usually fused loops, and she was usually an alicorn for those fights, where here she had to avoid becoming an alicorn in order to keep her claim legitimate. Still, this wouldn't be as hard as it looked. Now if only she could convince the part of her that was a quivering ball of horse of that fact, and concentrate on strategies.

\_I'm going to die. I'm going to be immolated. I'm going to cease to be.\_

Rarity told her instincts to shut the tartarus up, death was temporary and anyway she could easily avoid it.

\_I'm going to be torn to bits.\_

She told them to shut up \_please\_ she was trying to concentrate.

\_I'm going be gobbled up.\_

With a sigh, she mentally grabbed her instincts by the ear and slapped them repeatedly. This, in retrospect, probably explained the headache.

The black dragon took a breath. "The time of preparation has ended."

Selindavri snapped forward and slammed her magically glowing claws where Rarity had been half a second ago.

\* \* \*

><p>Jump. Run. Dodge. Cast. Look. Roll. Spell.<p>

And then, suddenly, Selindavri backed away, tilting her head. "No... you are the smart one, aren't you? You're playing to your strengths." She smiled. "Very well then."

Rarity had less than a second to react before the fire hit her. The blue dragon let out a sigh. "Tactics are important, but power is too."

The fire suddenly \_rippled\_ unnaturally, tightening and compressing until it wrapped around the unicorn in a fanciful, glowing dress. "While I agree, I do think theatrics play a part as well."

"...hmmm."

The two women circled cautiously around, now truly assessing each other. Occasionally, Selindavri's tail would flick a boulder at Rarity; she'd destroy it, naturally, but always did so in a different way. Her return volleys were similarly countered, once by claw, once by wing, once by magic... and then again by claw, but not the same



manner as before. The battle had become a series of small, tense tests as the two attempted to get a feel for each other.

Selindavri suddenly feinted with a claw, so obviously that Rarity was already dodging her snapping jaws â€" itself another feint as the massive tail wrapped round and flung her into the air.

With a glow of her horn, gravity was negated. She smiled, lounging in the sky as her flaming dress whipped in the upcurrents of the crater. "I must say, the view is striking from up here! Very powerful. I can see why dragons chose this as a meeting place."

"It was something of an inspiration to me, actually." Selindavri nodded back, a small smile on her own face as her wings snapped out. "I'm glad I got to share it with you." A single flap propelled her toward the hovering pony.

Of course she wasn't expecting Rarity to suddenly fall straight at her weighing as much as Cerberus himself.

When they hit the ground, the unicorn rolled off, glancing at the dragon behind her. Still breathing... and much more surprisingly, attempting to get up. "Are you alright, dear? I don't actually want to injure you permanently, just convince you to concede."

"You... are quite good." Selindavri shook her head as she stood.

"Thank you, dear."

"...but not good enough." The dragon's neck whipped about, circling them both with fire as she raised her claws and slammed down. Rarity couldn't help but let out a pained cry when she felt the magic around her being torn away as easily as a sheet of paper. Even with her own admittedly vast stores of power, it would be incredibly difficult to weave a spell without a field of magic around her. Then Selindavri swung a claw at herâ€"

Technically, her horn was glowing. Technically, she did forge the shield that protected her. Granted, she'd forged it a while ago, in a loop where Mithril could be mail ordered â€" at a high cost â€" and she'd just pulled it out of her subspace pocket... but if Selindavri drew the conclusion that she'd just spawned it out of mid air, which judging from her expression she did, then Rarity wasn't going to correct her.

"...Why do you want him?" the dragon finally asked.

"Because I love him," the unicorn replied simply.

There was a moment of quiet.

Then Selindavri shook her head and, with a flap of her wings, put out the ring of fire. "I concede."

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity blinked, putting down her shield as her ears perked forward. She'd... honestly expected that to be a lot more difficult.<p>

The massive black dragon tilted his head, confused as well. "This is an unexpected outcome. Explain."

"Pride." Selindavri looked at the ones watching her. "It is not power that drives a dragon. At our core, we are proud creatures. The purest of us, the ones remembered in fame and myth, are the avatars of honor, dignity, and confidence. And ponies, for all their differences, have among them pure hearts as well, but their core lies not in pride, but in love. I would never oppose a dragon whose pride was pure; I would be a fool to not extend that right to any pure heart, even if their purity is one I can never hope to have. And it is clear that in this matter, at the least, Rarity Belle of the line of Platinum has a pure heart."

She smiled crookedly. "Aside from which... I will still be an advisor to Spike, no matter the outcome. That is enough for me."

"Hmmm." The elder drake pondered the words. "Very well. Claim has been made, Claim has been taken. If another wishes to make Claim..." His eyes peered at the watching dragons. "Speak."

None dared make a sound.

"...then we will reconvene in a fortnight for a proper union." And with that, the black drake shut his eyes and let his head rest on the ground, a clear dismissal.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well." Spike sipped his drink for a moment. "That's that then."<p>

"Yes, it was quite something, wasn't it?" Rarity shook her head, relaxing on the couch. "This whole fiasco has tired me out, darling, I just hope the rest of this loop's politics aren't as crazy as the Platinum Crown loop..."

The dragon raised an eyebrow. "The...?"

"Before your time. I was doing research on Blueblood for that loop and it turned out his actions were based off a childhood belief that since Celestia was, well, Celestia, he was essentially worthless." She waved a hoof. "I helped him out, we fell in love, noble families tried to sabotage our relationship to get their hooves on ancient spells... There was the whole thing with Chrysalis, too, I'm still not sure exactly how involved she was."

"You fell in love with \_Blueblood?\_" Spike sputtered incredulously.

"Like I said, it was before you started looping. I was incredibly young back then... I thought I'd changed him permanently. I didn't realize he'd reboot." The unicorn sighed as her face flushed. "I spent half the next loop a complete wreck. I..." Rarity looked up at Spike, smiling gently. "I'm glad I learned that lesson before you started looping, darling. Don't hold on to that which is fleeting, but cling to that which truly matters."

Spike blinked. Then, slowly, he chuckled and shook his head. "Well..."

thank you. Really, though, Blueblood? I can \_not\_ figure how that one happened."

"Looking back on it, I think it was just a strange loop. You have no idea how long Twilight teased me about it." With a dramatic swoon the unicorn fell back into her couch. "And now you know my darkest secret! O please my dear sir, do not think of me less for it!"

"For shame, Lady Belle! For shame!" The dragon wagged a claw. "Naughty, naughty!"

It only took three seconds for the both of them to collapse in helpless giggles, Rarity moving to make room for Spike to sit down. They leaned into each other, laughing for a good long while. Eventually they managed to collect themselves, looking at each other and sharing a smile.

Then Spike took a breath. "You know, we're lucky Cadance is awake this loop."

"Oh?" Rarity tilted her head. "Why?"

"Because she would kill us both if I did what I'm about to do while she wasn't." He stood up, wringing his hands.

The unicorn's eyes widened. "Spike... are youâ€"?"

"When I saw you out there," the dragon began, "I... I saw how you were beautiful even then. Even taking on a full grown dragon, one of the most dangerous and... and let's face it, dirty things anybody could do, you were absolutely radiant. And it wasn't just how you looked. It was how you moved... how you acted. You were... amazing. And... I thought about how were all the time, and how much you have given of yourself... Rarity, you're a wonderful pony. An incredible pony. And seeing you out there... I realized I didn't want to lose you, even as temporarily as one loop."

He reached into his subspace pocket. "Honestly, I've been waiting for a loop where we're \_all\_ awake. The girls, the princesses, Shining Armor, the Crusaders and their friends, Trixie, Gilda, Chrysalis..." He scoffed a bit. "I doubt Berry would be there even if that would have been nice. But... after this, after coming so close to having to give up the pony I love... it's not something I can do."

Spike knelt down, taking the object in his hand and opening it. "Rarity... will you please do me the honour of letting me claim you forever? Will you please give me the joy of... of becoming my... my wife?"

\* \* \*

><p><em>And lo, on that day did appear a smile so radiant that it came not solely from the heart, but from every fibre of the lady's being. Tears so tightly filled with joy that a single one could hath drowned Chrysalis herself ran freely down her face, a face blushing not from embarrassment but from the overwhelming emotion coursing through her. Her laughter was loud and graceful, dancing through the room in a glorious ballroom waltz which she could not join, for already she had leapt upon her partner and cried a single, pure confirmation. The knight, overwhelmed by his own emotions, could

barely slide the ring he had forged and perfected o'r lifetimes onto her waiting hoof before joining in her laughing tears. And they grew close, sharing a single deep kiss that spoke of the most complete union of souls any mortal could hope for.<em>

\* \*  
\*

><p>"Mmmmmm. "<p>

"Mmmmmmm. "

"Mmmm. "

"...mmmmm. "

Twilight walked into the room with a sheaf of papers. "So, I think I'm done with â€" Oh! I'm sorry, I just, I'll be going..." She backed out sheepishly, averting her eyes, but a smile danced upon her face.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

34.1: Is there such a thing as the pony song? In the vein of the Badger song, of course.

>34.2: Pin kei pai?<br>34.3: Okami, of course.

>34.4: It is, come to think of it, a little awkward... wonder what Jupiter made of it all.<br>34.5: Project Orion. Do Not Use On Favorite Planet.

>34.6: I don't know either.<br>34.7: A very, very early loop.

>34.8: Scraping the barrel?<br>34.9: Caution. Ascending to multiversal deity grade while within the loops is very likely to cause your home universe to be destroyed.

>34.10: Arranged marriages suck.<p>

Also, and as a point of curiosity...

>Several of the MLP Loops characters have been developed in ways that would be difficult, if not impossible, outside the Loops format.<br>I'd be interested to know which character people think has gone in the most interesting direction.

>Basically, out of the character versions here, who do people like a lot as a concept?<p>

## 35. Chapter 35: Halloween Special part 1

With her usual dexterity, Pinkie Pie opened up her oven and pulled out her latest piping hot creation with her oven-proof hoof mitts.

"Okay, how does this go?" the pink-coated baking pony thought to herself, "There was something about chaos and degenerate suns..."

"Eh, I'll just make my own thingy up!" she happily decided, "Oh great bust of Discord, which I have baked out of meringue. Hi! It's me, Pinkie Pie! Um, please make every pony turn into their costumes for

this Nightmare Night, oh and also make sure no pony gets really hurt as a result, because I just want this to be a really fun surprise. If you do this, I will make you a tasty cake and other treats when you get freed from your stone prison-y thing. So I speak-eth, so mote it be. Heh, mote. That's a funny word. Moat. Moooote. Oh yeah!"

Pinkie Pie reared up and slammed her front hooves on the table to each side of the meringue statue, channelling as much earth pony magic into the ritual as she could. The sugary bust of Discord started to glow.

Then she suddenly realized something. "Oh no! My costume! There's no time to put on the one I wanted, and I don't have any good ones in my pinkie-storage-space at the moment. I don't want to take my ascendant form because Twilight could probably figure out what was going on. Oh yeah! I do have costumes hidden all over for just this kind of emergency."

Pinkie Pie rushed over to her nearest stash, and then stopped. There were two costumes that she really, really wanted to wear. She whipped her head between them before deciding.

Suddenly, there were two Pinkie Pies. One started struggling to get into the strange crab-like costume while the other one grabbed the various supplies and accessories and ran into the next room.

A liberal, if messy application of temporary coat and mane dye, a fake cutie mark sticker, a bit of magic and willpower to straighten her mane and tail, some cardboard and felt wings, and the last bit... Then there was a brief pulse of magic as the tasty statue activated, and it wasn't Pinkie Pie standing there anymore.

She looked around in confusion, tried to take a step and stumbled. After regaining her balance, she looked at her hooves.

"I.. I have hooves now? I'm a... horse?" The pony looked around at herself. Cream colored coat, although with a few faint pink splotches.

She walked up to a nearby mirror and stopped. She had a straight brown mane and tail, but her gaze continued over to her flared wings and horn and, yep, there was a mark on either side of her.

As she stared at small inkwell and quill, Lauren exclaimed, "I have a cutie mark. I'm a 'my little pony'. Why am I not freaking out.. oh wait, there it goes."

The new alicorn twitched a few times and collapsed into a shivering ball.

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie giggled to herself as she slipped the crablike claws over her front hooves, glancing at her barrel to reassure herself that, yes, the false pair of legs there still clung to her form. It had taken a bit of trickery to figure out how to pull that off; eventually she resorted to a tad of chaos magic in order to keep them from just dangling, which really was rather appropriate. The large pair of thestral wings slumping over her shoulder were counterbalanced by the thick foam tail she'd slipped over her own

poofy mange. Of course she had to spraypaint herself and her costume with a special adhesive, before rolling around in coloured powder that was a slightly darker shade of pink then her coat; the end result, though, looked satisfactorily fungal, and she was after all a fun gal to be around.<p>

"And now for the final addition." The party pony reached up to her mane, shaking it forward and all about unto her entire face was obscured in a globe of twisted curls. "Ha! Nightmare Night, here I c-"

Error.

Shift.

Chrksxcin twirled its antennae in confusion. This was not the Graceful Realm. If anything, it looked to be a home of a flincher, though the spectrum coming from the objects were varied. How had this individual come here? A stretch of its antennae confirmed that no other Mi-go were in the area... or at least none scenting.

Something was... disturbing. The idea of something being utterly wrong, of course, was laughable; no Mi-go would ever submit to the idea that something shouldn't exist, because by existing it obviously should. But disturbing was a reasonable translation to the concept now fluttering through Chrksxcin's mind. Being alone, save for flinchers... it could possibly handle a small group, but the surroundings indicated a large number, and the lower vibrations did nothing to reassure it.

With a flick of its wings, Chrksxcin glided to the top of the room, skittering out a convenient window and peering. A mirrorrock was above, although going by the plantlife obviously this world has a flaresphere as well. What confused the Mi-go even more, though, were the flinchers wandering below; more like flincher livestock in form, though obviously as intelligent as the flinchers and with more than a little aetheric manipulation. At the very least they were not looking for it.

Not enough information. Chrksxcin decided to remain unseen for now, listening and watching.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight awoke the day before Nightmare Night. "Well, this is different. Feels like a standard Loop, but why start this late?"<p>

She checked her Loop memories more carefully and, finding nothing amiss, she began replanning her costume. As much as she loved her Starswirl costume, it was time for something more fun... especially if she could pass off an ascension as temporary spell work.

Hopefully, if she was lucky, Rarity was awake and she would be able to get some help with a temporary coat, mane and tail dye. Her own spellwork tended to last longer than she really wanted.

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia shook her head in confusion. She recognized the Everfree Forest, but she didn't remember any towns this well-established so near her and ... Luna's ... castle. Additionally, from the pumpkins scattered around, it was harvest time. She frowned as she recognized the silhouettes of Nightmare Moon pinned in the windows.<p>

"We thought We'd told Our little ponies not to slander Luna like that..." She paused as she passed a mirror. What had happened to her mane? It was still its normal, desperately soft pink, but why was it cut so strangely? She looked like a librarian, though it did look pretty good with the stripes her mane was beginning to develop as she overworked her magic, raising both her own sun and Luna's moon...

Wait. Her connection with the Moon was gone. She glanced up at the rising orb and felt a pang of worry. "Lulu's back? I've got to find her before..."

"Sister?"

Celestia spun around, and her heart caught in her throat. Luna was back, and so much taller than... wait, Luna had a full-blown aura in her mane? What?

Luna's gaze showed her own confusion. "Twilight Sparkle? Your Nightmare Night costume is most splendid, but I would have thought you'd have sent us a letter if you'd ascended." She chuckled fondly, much as Celestia herself had when one of her little ponies had done something both amusing and amazing. "Come, now, I'm sure Tia will be flattered when we show her. And so proud that you did it without help!"

"Luna? What's going on? Who's Twilight Sparkle?"

Luna's good cheer evaporated into concern. "Something is amiss..."

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia quailed at the changes all around her. All of their little ponies were deeply bowing to her and her sister and the tall form approaching.<p>

"M-mother?" Her heart thrilled, and then stilled as the motherly alicorn approached and she saw her own Cutie Mark.

She began panicking and adjusted the Element of magic on her brow. "I've been thrust into the future? I mean, obviously, I get back where I belong, or there wouldn't be a future to come to..."

"Twilight, my faithful student! What a flattering Nightmare Night cost... are those wings real?"

"All right, who's this Twilight everypony keeps saying I am... my daughter? I mean how, if future-me is that tall... how'd I find both the time and the stallion to have a foal?" She couldn't help noticing the meaningful glance future-Celestia shared with future-Luna.

"Your Highnesses!" A guard strode in, bearing a filly alicorn on his back. "Something is turning ponies into their Nightmare Night

costumes!"

Celestia and her older self both turned and sent their magic to examine the filly. Their golden auras commingled, startling her elder self. "Whatever has affected this filly seems to have applied a thaumic cascade resonance via similarity to the paper cone she'd originally had for her costume. More disturbing to me is the fact I can tell her regalia was originally yellow painted cardboard, but it's now orichalcum. The Thaumic energy costs must be immense just for one shoe alone!"

Elder Celestia regained her composure, as Luna was keeping the transformed filly entertained. "Alfalfa monster, Luna, really?" She shook her head regally. "I'm frankly more worried about you though. My initial scan tells me that a similar effect is on you, but only to the degree of coat and mane dye being made real."

Younger Celestia grimaced. "My plan to get away from the nobles would have worked if they hadn't knocked my hat off. No pony would seriously believe a princess would be that pink!"

Cadance strode in, looking every inch an Empress. "Have I arrived at a bad time?"

Younger Celestia boggled. "Oh come on! I can't believe what made me look ridiculous looks great on her! Who is she anyway?"

\* \* \*

><p>Luna looked between the two alicorns of the day, one true and the other ensorcelled. "Tia..."<p>

"Yes, Lulu?" They both replied.

Luna grit her teeth and attempted the calming exercise her 'niece' Cadance had shown her. She raised her hoof to her pectoral and took in a deep breath before exhaling and pushing her annoyance away. She then pointed at her actual sister. "For convenience's sake, I think that I'll call you Tia..." She turned her hoof to the younger 'Celestia.' "... and I'll call you 'Celly.' Do not look at me like that, at least I'm not calling you Sunbutt."

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, this will be so much fun." Letting out a barely audible squeal, Fluttershy finished putting on her wig.<p>

The rabbit beside her made some snuffling noises.

"Oh, don't be such a spoil-sport, Mister Angel Bunny." Barely containing her elation "which, in combination with the timid pegasus, meant she smiled openly" Fluttershy pulled a druid's charm out of her sub-space pocket and affixed it inside a midnight-blue-painted cone. "And with this, I can even make my 'horn' seem to glow when I am using a spell."

Angel gave her a sidelong stare and stamped a foot.

"No, I promise. Only a few half-stares and some fog or creeping vines." Lifting her mane out of her face with one wing, she fastened



the fake horn to her forehead with the other. "It's not like I-"

For a moment, everything seemed to stop, as if the universe itself was taking a deep breath.

"What is this madness!? Why are we not where we sensed our sister!?" Nightmare Moon whipped her head around to get her bearings. "You there! Tell us where this here place is! NOW!"

Angel Bunny looked into his friend's eyes. \_Never\_ having seen her frenzied like this, he did the only thing he remembered how to do. He ran.

"Humph." Turning around to the mirror in front of her, Nightmare Moon looked herself over. "It seems not only our magical powers have been diminished by a thousand years of banishment." And in truth, her midnight blue coat seemed dull, the coloration off, like it was mixed with a bit of yellow, and her mane had lost much of its sparkle. "Well, it is of no consequence. Once we find our 'dear sister', we shall be the unchallenged ruler of Equestria. AhahahHAHAHAHAA!" What animals there had been left in Fluttershy's cabin made a break for it.

The Mare of the Moon turned up her nose. "Ungrateful boors. Now, where would our sister hide?" Concentrating, she could feel the magic running through her... and then wink out. "What in Tartarus!?" Trying to turn into mist, she charged up, her horn glowing brightly... and then sputtering out. "WE DEMAND THAT THOU WORKEST!" But again, all that happened was that her horn briefly glowed, after which nothing happened.

Nightmare Moon's left eye twitched. Then she got a hold of herself and a confident smirk spread across her face. "Impressive, dear Tia, we shall give thee that at least." Turning to the door of the house she seemed to be in, the Mare of Darkness started cantering forward. "But this shall not save thee!" With a sinister laugh, she left the cabin and started moving toward the illuminated town in the distance.

\* \* \*

><p>"Honestly, Dash, I don't see why you're complaining." Rarity swished her cape to the side as she sidestepped a young foal. "You're fashionable <em>and<em> terrifying!"

The pegasus grumbled, her bandaged wings fluttering slightly as she checked the exotic chestplate she wore. "It's just a little bit confining. I thought I'd get looser wrap."

"Ya do pull off th' Cleopatra look pretty well, though." Applejack smirked, her teeth unnaturally sharp. "Ya sure ya didn't have ancestors in the Sphinx Empire or nothing?"

"Eh, it's been a couple of loops since I checked my family tree." Rainbow Dash shrugged. "Maybe I do, maybe I don't. I'll do some research... later... ish."

"Well, I'm sure my dear Spiky-wikey would be happy to help with that."

Spike smiled, nuzzling Rarity affectionately. "Whatever you say, Mistress..."

The unicorn blushed. "Spike! We're in public!"

"Sorry, just getting into character."

Applejack gave a saucy whistle, which set Rainbow off giggling. Rarity shot them an annoyed look before turning back to the dragon. "In that case, I might just have to suck your blood, dear."

That got a smile out of Spike. "Your wish is my command, Mistress." He managed to keep a straight face as Rarity turned red... before suddenly cracking up. "Alright, alright. I'll lay off. Besides, I promised Twilight I'd see who she dressed up as. I'll catch up with you gals later!" With a wave of his shackled claws, the dragon walked away.

"I still, hahaha, can't believe you got him to dress up like that," Rainbow gasped, panting for breath. "I don't, hahahah, don't know what you were thinking..."

"Oh, Ah'm pretty dang sure she was thinking bout how sexy he'd look as a genie," Applejack commented.

"Pfffhahahahahahaha!"

Rarity rolled her eyes, although her face was flushing uncontrollably. "Honestly, Applejack, just because you decided to relive the pet loop doesn't mean you need to be so feral."

The farmpony waved a false paw. "Yer right. Ah shouldn't leap on them sort of comments just cause Ah'm a wild animal." Her smile widened. "But yer just giving me so much opportunity-"

And then the world shifted.

\* \* \*

><p>Lady Belle would have recoiled if she'd been a lesser being. As it was, her muzzle merely crinkled in disgust at the foul creature in front of her. "What are you doing in my presence?"<p>

The feral creature growled and raised its hackles, clearly disliking her as much as she disliked it.

Then a third presence made itself known. "ÛŠØ§ Ø´Ø¨Ø§Ø¨ØŸ Û...Ø§ Ø£Û†Øª -ØŸ Ø¹Û„Û% Ø¹Û„Ø-Ø£ Û...Ø§ Û†ÛŠÛŸ Ø£Û†Ø§ Ø£Û„Û^Û„ØŸ"

Hey, guys? What are you-? Hold on, what the heck am I saying?

Both of them turned to a rotted, decrepit creature covered in bandages and golden armor. Lady Belle raised an eyebrow. "And what manner of being are you? Dressed as death, yet I feel great power..."

"ÛŠØ§ Û†ÛŠØ§ Ø§Û„Û†Ø-Ø±Ø©Ø£ ÛŸÛ...Ø§ ØªØ¹Û„Û...Û^Û† Û„ÛŠ! Û„Û...Øª Ø¨Û†Ø§ Û†Ø°Ø§ Ø§Û„Ø²ÛŠ! Ø¹Û„Û% Û...Ø-Û...Û„ Ø§Û„Ø-Ø-Ø£ Û...Ø§ Û†ÛŠÛŸ Ø£Û†Ø§ Ø£Û„Û^Û„ØŸ"

Oh come on Rarity, you know me! You made this costume! Seriously, what the heck am I saying?

The strange creature winced as the wolf pony snarled at her. Lady Belle shook her head at the foreign babble. "So long as you do not interfere with me or mine, I have no quarrel with you."

Her eyes narrowed as she turned to the orange beast. "This one, however, is a plague on the night. If it does not submit, I will be forced to teach it... respect."

\* \* \*

><p>Derpy donned her costume, all five bags of it. It was, in her opinion, devastatingly clever. By using common household items as garments, she refuted the bourgeoisie preconceptions of what garments could be, forcing ponies to take a hard, unflinching look at the role clothing played in a society of habitual nudists. It transcended the base fright of ghouls and goblins, instead presenting the viewer with a deeper, more existential terror, the kind that only the satirist could inflict.<p>

Dinky was going as a firepony. She'd certainly gotten enough experience when her mom got too high-concept in the kitchen for her own good.

Derpy waved as Dinky joined her friends. "Have fun, Muffin! Don't talk to strangers! Memento mori!" A bit grim, perhaps, but nothing kept a filly from Crusader-level foolishness like reminding her of her morality.

As the herd of sugar-seeking foals galloped off, the world twisted for a moment.

After a moment of ontological confusion, Derpy found herself holding the bag she'd perched atop her mane... except she'd never written anything on it. The paper was supposed to be a blank canvas on which onlookers could project their insecurities. Instead, scribbled in what looked like correction fluid and smelled like marzipan, were the words "I don't get it."

"Fillystine." Derpy threw the bag to the ground in disgust. Or tried to. It was a paper bag.

"Excuse me, ma'am."

"Yes?" Derpy looked up from her discarded headgear only to stop halfway. A tiny firepony stood before her. Not a filly in a cheap costume, but one outfitted in half-scale replicas of rescue worker gear, complete with smudges of soot and the smell of smoke.

"Could you tell me where I am?" asked the pint-sized impossibility. "Last I remember, I was getting back to the station, and now everything's huge."

Derpy fainted. She would later argue it was the only rational course of action.

\* \* \*

><p>The Cutie-mark Crusaders were making their own arrangements for Nightmare Night. They had gathered in the Treehouse and were getting into their costumes.<p>

"I wish we could have done the three pony leaders, not the advisors..." Sweetie Belle said, adjusting her cloak. "Rarity could have helped me make an awesome Princess Platinum costume."

"Uh huh, no way I was doing Chancellor Puddinghead," Apple Bloom shot back, adjusting her hat. "Besides, Diamond Tiara did Princess Platinum last year. And Clover the Clever is pretty cool."

The unicorn across from her wrinkled her muzzle at the reminder of why she hadn't gone princess.

"Hmph!" Scootaloo looked out from under her crested helmet. "It's okay for you two, Clover the Clever and Smart Cookie are both great characters. I'm stuck being Private Pansy."

Apple Bloom shook her head. "You do know that Fluttershy was playing her a lot more timidly than most versions? She was Commander Hurricane's bat-pony, and effectively his aide."

"Mmmm." Scootaloo's eyes grew distant, re-imagining Private Pansy with a black cloak and cowl, silhouetted against a skyline. "I wonder if it's too late to put together a thestral costume... Wait, Commander Hurricane was a guy?"

"That's what I heard." Apple Bloom replied. "Twilight was talking with Miss Cheerilee about doing our own Hearth's Warming Eve pageant as a school play and I overheard. Seems doing the play at Canterlot last year got her interested in the story..."

"Well we've got Nightmare Night to get through first!" Sweetie Belle exclaimed. "The fire of friendship may live in our hearts, but I'm more interested in lots of candy living in my stomach!"

There was a ripple of discontinuity, which none of the trio noticed.

"Pansy, Cookie? What just happened?" Clover the Clever shook her head to clear it. "For that matter, how did we get here, wherever here is!"

"Well 'here' looks to be some sort of wood cabin, up in a tree unless I miss my guess. Well used too. I'd have said earth-pony, excepting the fine paper some-pony used for that scrawled map on the wall. And whatever happened turned us into fillies and messed with our memories!

"I remember... stuff, the Fumblewinter, the Exodus, fighting the Windigoes, our meetings to hammer out the Alliance, trying to organise things and get the new towns like Mane Hat and that mining camp in the Canter Lots mountains set up. But when I try to remember how we got here, I draw a blank."

Lieutenant Pansy was already checking the windows and door, cautiously, as was her nature. She hadn't said anything, just went to work making sure no-pony was eavesdropping. Having completed the circuit, she came over to the other two. "I believe the area is

secure, from eavesdroppers at least."

Clover's horn sparked and spluttered, then glowed feebly. "Argh! Whatever they did affected my magic. It's barely active â€" whatever effect de-aged us, it altered our abilities to match our new ages. But there aren't any scrying spells in the immediate area, that much I can tell."

"You thinking what I'm thinking, Pansy?" Smart Cookie asked.

Compared to Commander Hurricane, or as the trio liked to call him in private 'the Great Bag of Wind', Pansy might seem diffident. But that retiring nature concealed a first class brain, skilled in tactics and strategy. Hence the name Pensee, which meant 'thought' in an old dialect. "It's safe to assume that whoever, or whatever did this did not have our best interests at heart."

"Then we're all in agreement." Clover nodded. "The 'how' would require a group of unicorns working in concert to cast such a powerful spell. It's possible earth-pony magic could affect our growth, but our memories? Only unicorn magic could do that."

Smart Cookie gave a deep sigh and started pacing, as she often did when talking through a problem. "Chancellor Puddinghead anticipated some sort of reaction from some of the old guard unicorn nobles when the Council of Tribes put forward the newest proposals, but not this. If only forging the Fire of Friendship had burned away the old enmities along with the Windigoes.

"But it isn't that easy. The great mass of all three tribes look to us as their saviors, and the ones who keep the Windigoes at bay. They are willing to follow our lead and let the Fire of Friendship into their hearts, or at least lay the kindling. But in too many hearts there is only the empty hearth of despair, or a hearth choked with the bitter ashes of hatred, or the bright flames of greed and envy, leaving no fuel for friendship to ignite..."

"Smarty, you're preaching to the choir..." Clover interjected, to stop her friend's familiar rant. Smart Cookie was the politician of the trio, but that sometimes led to speech-making even when with her friends.

"Take us out of the political equation, and the old power blocks would have a chance to restore their power. Too many of the older, more powerful unicorns and pegasi find the new 'uppity' earth ponies sit ill with them, as well as cordially hating each other. Even some earth ponies would be happy to see us gone, as they don't want equality, they want their own shot at being top of the pile, at vengeance for the generations of serfdom to the other races.

"So even though you say it was unicorns that did the deed, the masterminds behind it could be from any or all of the three races. They might hate each other, but they might be willing to ally to stop us, figuring to diddle the other two later."

"I know Commander Hurricane isn't happy about the alliance, but I've managed to keep him sweet so far by telling him how his decisive leadership makes him admired by the troops." Pansy got a thoughtful look. "But if they wanted to remove us, why not just kill us? Why

simply de-age us, but leave us with our memories?"

"Maybe they made a mistake." Clover said excitedly. "Think about it. Even if they wiped our memories back to our filly days, the bond of our friendship would still be there. Starswirl is certain that bonds can exist between ponies, even if the memories that created them are absent. So they could have us hidden away somewhere, brought up as friends from foal-hood, and all the while our friendship would provide the power to keep the Windigoes away. They'd have the advantages of the Fire of Friendship without our inconvenient presence in the political arena.

"However, the friendship bond between us may have shielded our long term memories, the memories of us becoming friends, and everything connected to it. The spell probably suppressed them and wiped out our short term memory, but our true selves came bubbling back up after a time. This is probably some way-point on the way to wherever we were being sent. That's probably why there's no guard. Three amnesiac foals aren't likely to go anywhere."

"So, escape, intelligence gathering, and then we hunt down whoever did this!" Pansy said, looking uncharacteristically fierce.

"We can count on Chancellor Puddinghead for aid." Smart Cookie stated. "If we can get to him without tipping our hoof."

"It sounds like a plan to me." Clover said in agreement. "If we can get a message to my mentor, I'm sure he can help us reverse the ageing spell. I know for certain that he wouldn't be a party to this scheme."

They headed out of the tree-house and Pansy tried to fly down, only to find that her wings didn't work properly. The best she could managed was a steep glide. She grimaced as she landed heavily, and called up to the other two. "Clever. They didn't want me flying to get help if my filly self panicked."

Clover joined her on the ground. "I saw a town from the balcony. There seemed to be a lot of lights for this late in the evening, coloured ones too. I suggest we go there first, we can get lost in the mass of ponies â€" especially if, as I suspect, there's some sort of festival going on."

"Well, we won't get any older standing here..." Smart Cookie said, then face-hooved. "You know what I mean!"

The mistake was probably deliberate, but it still made her companions smile, which was almost certainly the idea. She wasn't called Smart Cookie for nothing. With their spirits lifted, the three trooped down into Ponyville.

\* \* \*

><p>The cream coloured alicorn extended herself out of the fetal ball position and ambled over to the nearest couch.<p>

"Get a hold of yourself, Lauren. I'm sure being a naked pony is some sort of strange dream or vision quest I'm having due to the days of brainstorming to find a way to reboot that old cartoon without turning ponies into superheros," the mare glanced out of the window

only to see an odd pony agilely hopping along the rooftops. It was dressed in a costume that could only be described as a fusion between batman's and darkwing duck's.

"You're not helping!" she shouted ineffectually at what could only be her subconscious delusion.

"So even if this is just some crazy dream, it does feel very real. Oh wait," the alicorn looked around frantically before spotting a discarded newspaper. She rushed over, picked it up, and stared at the articles.

"Yes! I can't read any of this. You're not supposed to be able to read in your dream, right? Or was that just a plot of a movie I saw? The point is that I'm not crazy!" Lauren smiled.

Then the smile faded with a realization, "Okay, I'm going to take a mulligan on the whole talking to myself thing that I've been doing, but I'm still not crazy. Right?" she asked a small alligator that had crawled up onto a couch cushion. Said alligator just blinked asymmetrically and slowly opened up his mouth, which was lacking any teeth whatsoever.

"What do you know? You're probably just a symbol of.. of my unfounded fears or something like that. Well I'll show you, you toothless fear-gator. I'll head right on outside and into this dreamworld." The alicorn swiftly trotted over to the door and opened it up on... complete pandemonium. A group of ponies were battling a mummy pony, a vampire pony, and a werewolf pony. None of them sparkled. Up on a nearby rooftop, a strange but somehow very familiar winged fungal crab creature scuttled across and out of sight.

The front door slammed shut.

"Okay, I can do this. If I can handle screaming Powerpuff Girl fans at a convention, I can do this." Once again the door opened, but this time the alicorn pony stepped out into the chaos.

"Wait, you can do anything you want in a dream. That means..." Lauren grinned as she flew upwards, her wings flapping instinctively, "I take it all back. Flying is awesome! This is the best dream... well, the second best naked dream ever!"

Higher she flew. There were enough pegasi and other flying creatures in the air, that she wasn't noticed or stared at all that much. The alicorn set down in a peaceful corner of an orchard, near a child's tree house. That peace was interrupted when three fillies emerged slowly from the surrounding trees and approached her.

"We mean you no harm. Who are you and what manner of pony has wings and a horn?" said the small wingless, hornless pony cautiously. Whatever reactions the three fillies were expecting out of the strange winged unicorn, a girlish squeal wasn't one of them.

\* \* \*

><p>As the three got closer, Smart Cookie looked down at her clothes and up at the other two and rubbed her chin with a hoof. "Huh, I'm wondering if we shouldn't disguise ourselves. Change our clothes about and our manes. A pegasus filly wearing armour is definitely

going to attract attention at least."<p>

"A lot of the younger ponies are going around without anything at all, now that we no longer have to protect ourselves from the cold of Fumblewinter. I've done it a time or two myself." Clover mused. "It feltâ€¦ odd the first time, but it's quite liberating once you've gotten used to it."

"Hmmâ€¦ our emblems are not well known, but if there's someone from the conspiracy in town, they may recognise them. Do you have enough magic in that horn to disguise them?"

"That much I can do. I only have the power for cantrips, but I know quite a few that could be useful, including a cosmetic spell to change fur colour. It won't hide them for long, but it'll do the job."

Pansy was already removing her kirtle, but stopped and said in a strained voice, "I don't think that will be necessary."

She showed her bare flank. The other two immediately checked their own hindquarters to the same result. Smart Cookie gave a strangled gasp, while Clover looked dumbstruck, and stuttered, "But that'sâ€¦ impossible! Even if we were de-aged, we still have our memories, our knowledge. An emblem is connected to the pony's spirit, not their body! I helped Starswirl do the research. This must be a side effect of the memory spell, but it would have to be very powerful to affect our souls as well as our memories."

"Another thing to fix, but at least it solves our immediate problem," Pansy finally managed. "But I think we should wait until we can see the local ponies directly before we get changed. Speaking of which, this orchard seems awfully large."

Smart Cookie nodded, focussing on that to overcome the shock. "True, I don't remember any this large or well developed in our latest survey, and look at the spacing of the trees, they were planted, not a natural orchard some-pony found."

They reached the edge of the orchard, and looked out over the town. There were yells and screams, and the impression of a lot of running about. "Maybe we won't need to change clothing, it sounds like a wild party down there."

"More like a riotâ€¦" Pansy pointed at the sky. Look at all the pegasi in the sky, but why aren't they in armour?"

"And what is that!" Smart Cookie's eyes widened as something approached, flying down towards the orchard, a pegasus as big as any they'd ever seen and oddly proportioned. "Take cover!"

They did so and observed it as it landed, which only increased their confusion. It had an impressive horn, and an ink bottle and quill as an emblem.

"A winged unicorn?" Clover said quietly, looking incredulous.

Pansy smirked and whispered. "Or a Pegasus with a horn."

"Or aâ€¦ okay, I've got nothing!" Smart Cookie quipped, but keeping



her voice as low as the other two. "At least she doesn't look hostile. And I can't imagine any scenario where something like that would be allied with a conspiracy to keep the tribes separate. We need information, and she may be able to provide it."

They emerged from their hiding place and approached slowly, Smart Cookie in the lead. "We mean you no harm. Who are you and what manner of pony has wings and a horn?"

Whatever reactions the three fillies were expecting out of the strange winged unicorn, a girlish squeal wasn't one of them.

"You three are adorable! You must be the dream representations of Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup."

The fillies looked at each other in confusion. The earth pony spoke up again, "We do not know any pony with those names."

Lauren thought for a moment and asked, "Do you know any ponies named Firefly, Posey, Sparkler, Surprise, Twilight, or Applejack?"

The three fillies shook their heads, up until the name 'Applejack' came up.

"Yes, we know of an Applejack. She's an earth pony who runs the 'Falling Apple' tavern and inn. Makes great homemade liquor. But the rest of the names you mentioned are not familiar. And as I said, we have never seen a pony like yourself. "

"The night shall rule forever!" said a dark pony with a dark flowing mane, wings, and a horn as she flew by. Unlike Lauren's horn, this pony's horn was sputtering ineffectually, "Why won't thy work right? What insidious curse did my own sister do to my magic?"

"No matter, I shall triumph despite this handicap!" the dark pony said triumphantly right before she flew into a tree, "Ow! I had believed that I was more able at flying than this. Truly, this is a fell curse Celestia has afflicted upon me."

Rubbing her forehead, the dark pony slowly flew away. Lauren pointed at the direction the other alicorn was heading.

The three fillies looked at each other before Smart Cookie answered, "We have never seen that pony before."

"I don't care about that," Lauren said, "Is she trademarked? I think I just found the first season villain for my new show."

"You are a writer, a playwright?" Clover asked, "I thought you might be from your emblem. But I do not think that pony was marked for a tradeâ€¦ A crescent moon emblem often implies some-pony skilled in magic, but she had the look of a pegasus warrior, and we heard her curse her lack of magical power. What's more it sounds like she was using that modern slang that young ponies are affecting, badly. Even I know it should be 'thou', not 'thy'."

Pansy snorted. "Any warrior that clumsy wouldn't last a week. But we should be talking to the horned pegasus who didn't fly offâ€¦ stratus! We need a better name for ponies like her since they seem to be popping up all over the place."

"Alicorn?" Clover suggested. "She has traits of 'all' of us, after all."

"Maybe she has a name for her race as well as herself." Smart Cookie suggested. "Maybe we should introduce ourselves first. I am Smart Cookie, advisor to Chancellor Puddinghead, leader of the earth ponies."

The other two agreed. "Clover the Clever, apprentice to Starswirl the Bearded and, a tutor and advisor to Princess Platinum of the unicorns."

"Lieutenant Pansy, aide-de-camp to Commander Hurricane of the pegasi. And I'm usually taller than this."

"We all are," Smart Cookie added. "We were full grown mares, but some fearful curse has reduced us to filly-hood."

She examined the alicorn's face for signs of recognition or understanding, and saw none. "We recently forged an alliance between our three races but there are members of all three who fear change and the loss of their existing power, and would return our peoples to three mutually suspicious, feuding tribes. They would consider you an abomination. So we may have common cause. May we know your name?"

\* \* \*

><p>"May we know your name?" said the precocious little earth filly, Smart Cookie. The inner girl within Lauren almost squealed at the cuteness exuded by the three little ponies in front of her.<p>

"Sure. My name is Lauren Faust. It's great to meet you three. This is turning out to be the best dream I've had in a long time. Although when I'm not dreaming, I don't look like this." she gestured to her new body, "I'm human."

Private Pansy and Smart Cookie looked confused, but Clever Clover spoke up. "A Human? Strange hairless minotaur-apes from another dimension? Those are a myth."

The earth pony and pegasus looked at their friend. "You're an absolute mine of of useless information, aren't you Clover?" Smart Cookie asked.

"I enjoy the reading of fanciful tales and mythical beasts in my spare time," Clever Clover defended herself, then grinned. "Besides, it's not always useless, case in point."

"One for her side," Pansy quipped, and Smart Cookie shrugged, rolling her eyes.

"It doesn't mean I seriously think they exist though," Clover added.

Lauren snorted in amusement. "The magical unicorn doesn't believe in humans."

"Oh you should read some of the stories written about them," Clover

said. "Ponies have claimed to have dreams, visions of other worlds, other times where these humans exist. Others believe that there are places in the world where the local magical field is so strong, it creates a weak point between different dimensions â€" pools, fracture planes of crystal, surfaces that reflect the light of other worlds. However, no-pony has ever shown them to exist, though admittedly such things would be unstable.

"That doesn't stop the stories though. Humans rarely seem to have magic, but they use tools even more than earth ponies. Wooden ships that sail through the roughest seas, armies in pegasus-like armour fighting ones in skins, or humans that wear unicorn-like plate, and ride horses who don't seem to object to the practice. Villages of mud brick or cities of stone. I've even seen the writings of this one mad stallion who claimed there was a world where every pony had a human counterpart."

She shook her head. "I studied the stories when I got a scholarship to the Academy, before Starswirl took me as his apprentice..."

"I can see where this is going," the alicorn said, "but I can't write another high school drama, even one about a magic school. It's clichÃ©, and after battling the kind of horrors they did in generation one, trying to master gym class seems like a vast demotion. Oh, you wouldn't know any horrible monstrosities for ponies to fight? Good villains make for good stories."

"So you are a playwright," Smart Cookie said. "If you are in need of monstrous villains, I can tell you about the windigos. The evil spirits of cold and hatred that brought about Fumblewinter. Only by standing united, did the three pony tribes manage to drive them off."

Lauren thought for a moment. "So, unkillable spirits of cold that could only be driven away? Nah, that's definitely too much like the dementors from Harry Potter. I guess I'll stick with using that silly bad dream pony."

Smart Cookie looked ready to explode, but Pansy put a hoof on her shoulder, forestalling a tirade. "Calm yourself. You heard her, she thinks this whole world is a dream she's having, she doesn't understand what we went through, you more than many."

Smart Cookie growled. "Having the monsters that caused all that suffering , who almost killed us, dismissed so lightly..."

"C'mon, we have a mission to accomplish. She's clearly not interested in aiding us, and probably has no useful intelligence on the situation down there, so we had best leave her to her day dreams, and get on with finding some actual help."

Clover the Clever had put a hoof of her own on Smart Cookie's shoulder, but had turned back to the alicorn with a thoughtful expression on her face. "Before we go, could I do a magical scan of you? It is just that I have never seen a pony like yourself, with both wings and a horn. I assure you, it is harmless."

"Magical scan?" That piqued Lauren's interest, "Sure, go ahead!"

A faint glow formed around Lauren, causing her to twitch. "Hey, that

tickles!"

The faint glow swiftly cut off.

"I do apologize, ma'am. It seems I was less than careful with my tests as I could not believe the result of the first one." Clover said in her most respectful tone of voice.

"Is she a threat?" the pegasus spoke for the first time.

"Pansy, this alicorn; Lauren Faust, is several orders of magnitude more powerful than my mentor, Starswirl. If she wanted to, she could rotate the planet just by herself."

Smart Cookie spoke up, astounded, "But that takes hundreds of unicorns working together."

"Yes. And actually if what my scans tell me is correct; she has unicorn, pegasus, and earth pony magic all in harmonious resonance. If she so desired, I think she could rearrange the solar system."

The three fillies slowly looked over at the smiling, happy alicorn.

"Well, this world is my dream. It makes sense that I could control the sun and the moon and the planets." Lauren swished her tail around in a complex circular pattern, and then stared at it, "Oh my gosh! Did you know my tail is fully prehensile. Check this out!"

The smiling alicorn bent over to her side and promptly stuck the end of her straight brownish tail right into her left ear.

Private Pansy gave a sigh, "And to top it off, it appears that she is completely insane."

"And that's why we can't leave her behind. You heard her, we're a dream, a fantasy, with no consequences for whatever she does. She could pull the moon out of the sky, or fling the sun away beyond recovery playing with her powers, or just by accident. She has to come with us, so I can teach her at least the basics of controlling her power," Clover said quietly to the other two.

Smart Cookie gritted her teeth, then schooled her expression into pleasantness.

"Ma'am, or do you prefer to be called Lauren? Clover has offered to show you how to use that horn on your noggin. She's an amazing mage. and a capable teacher. All we ask is that you come with us, let me and Lieutenant Pansy deal with anything threatening, and not use your magic unless Clover approves it."

"I can do magic?" Lauren grinned. "This keeps getting better and better!"

The group started down into town, with Clover going through a very brief explanation of how to focus energy in a horn, and shape it

"Every unicorn can do telekinesis, it's practically instinctive, and

light spells are almost as simple. For more complex normally use spells, a matrix or pattern that embodies the most efficient way to shape the magical energies. However, if you have enough power, you can brute-force it just by willing the effect to happen. Though don't you try it yet, with your power you could hurt some-pony by accident. Now, watch me."

She slowly built up energy in her short horn, and lifted a pebble from the side of the track, carrying it with her. "You see what I did? Now you try it."

Lauren remembered the tingling sensation, and tried to build it up in her horn, as instructed. She picked out a pebble and willed it to rise. There was a whip crack and a vertical shooting star as the pebble shot up; a sheath of superheated plasma forming around it and reached escape velocity within a few hundred feet.

"Oops!" Lauren blushed.

Clover face-hooved. "We've gotta long way to go..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Curse our sister for robbing us of our magic!" Fighting her sputtering magic, and still nursing a terrible headache, Nightmare Moon reached the town " well, more like a hamlet " and after checking her bearings, made her way toward the town centre. "Oh well, we are sure it will suffice for these peasants."<p>

Just as she was going to approach for landing, her eyes fell upon her sister. "'Tis thou!" she cried. "Tia, thou shalt PAY FOR THIS!"

Nightmare Moon swooped down from the sky like a bird of prey. Celestia's ears drooped and her expression turned to horror. "L-lulu!?" Backing away, she was transfixed by the dark alicorn before her. "B-bu-but I banished you away!"

The elder Celestia " as well as Luna, who had been talking to the Sun Princess' smaller version when the alicorn of the night arrived " looked on, utterly perplexed by the scene unfolding before them. Because, however you looked at it, this impromptu piece was truly strange.

"Hah!" The Mare of the Moon stamped her hoof. "Didst thou think it could hold us forever!?"

Luna leaned over to her sister and whispered: "Did we- I! Did \_I\_ really sound like this?"

'Tia' - the elder Celestia - nodded.

"NO!" The smaller Celestia burst out, then caught herself. "No! I was \_hoping\_ for you to return some day, but..." She trailed off.

"But what, \_dearest\_ sister?" Nightmare scoffed. "Thou didst even lock away our magical abilities! We demand that thou dost return them!"

"Abilities?" The other mare's ears pricked up. "I did not do a thing

to them!"

"Lie not, foul trickster!" The midnight blue alicorn reared up on her hind legs and stomped back onto the ground. Then she lit her horn, which flickered briefly and then sputtered out. "Does our magic look functional to thee!?"

'Tia' stepped in. "Now, girls. Wh-"

"Interrupt not, fo-!" Nightmare Moon's pupils became as small as pinpricks. "Tia!?"

"Oh dear." Luna face-hooved.

\* \* \*

><p>'Celly' tensed, and frowned at what her senses were telling her. Nightmare Moon was a pegasus, despite having a horn. The overlay spell that 'Tia' had shown her â€" rather, reminded her of â€" showed an aetheric echo of a pegasus with some sort of odd charm under a false horn.<p>

It was a little fascinating how the charm interacted with pegasus magic to produce â€" she shook her head. Things were far too confusing to let herself go off on a tangent like that. She grit her teeth. "Sister, please, more has gone wrong than you know."

"SILENCE!" Nightmare Moon bellowed in the Royal Canterlot Voice, and Celly felt herself beginning to shrink under the intensity of her fallen sister's gaze.

And that was when, deep down in the unconscious reaches of her being, she realized who her opponent was! Steeling herself, the diarch of the sun took a deep, calming breath... and stared right back. Her gaze was enough to force an entire griffon army into submission â€" yet it simply washed over Nightmare Moon as if it was nothing.

"That's quite enough, Nimmy," Luna said, and suddenly a wing came down over the Mare of Darkness.

The false Nightmare Moon stiffened under the embrace. "Nimmy?!" she spluttered. Half-turning around, she glared at her alter ego. "How darest thou call us pet names?"

"Simple." Giving a smirk, Luna pulled her closer and waved a hoof at her sister. "While Tia and I have our suspicions, we're not quite sure who you are underneath this spell, but I am at least extending you the same courtesy we are extending to Twilight Sparkle while she thinks she is Celestia. Now, please, calm yourself and look around. What do you see?"

Calmly, Luna pointed out the decorations and that Nightmare Night was as much a celebration of the night as it was of fear.

Nightmare Moon felt unsure. "I just wanted them to love me."

Luna gave a motherly smile as she said: "They do, and I am pretty sure that they love who you are underneath as well."

The Mare of the Moon blinked...

"Princess Celestia?" Fluttershy turned her head. "Princess Luna?" She then examined her costume. "What happened?"

'Celly' gawped. Then she started to smile. "Huh. So there is a way."

Fluttershy's eyes hardened. "\_We\_ happened. And we do not intend to leave, yet!"

The smaller sun goddess's ears drooped. "Or not."

\* \* \*

><p>Cadance set back on her haunches in shock. She'd been intending to visit Ponyville on Nightmare Night anyway this loop, just to see what it was like, but Twilight thinking she <em>was<em> Aunt Celestia was a bit much. As she numbly watched the attempted battle between 'Celly' and 'Nimmy,' she was interrupted by a gentle nudge at her fetlocks.

She turned her head and found herself looking into a filly alicorn's bright eyes. "Your Imperial Highness? Would you care for some tea?"

Cadance smiled. The Best Babysitter Everâ„¢ was on the case.

\* \* \*

><p>Chrksxcin glided through the darkness, its wings humming quietly with aetheric energy as it observed the world below. There was a surprisingly large number of other flying creatures, but so far it had avoided being seen. Or the other flyers didn't care. Either way was acceptable-<p>

Suddenly its antennae burned, and it landed on a roof near a massive tree. With a quiet chitter, Chrksxcin peered over the edge of the roof.

A collection of the odd flinchers were standing and conversing. Each one had a pair of wings and a stiff extension extending from the middle of their scanprods. More importantly, though, the sheer amount of aetheric power flowing through their bodies â€" except, oddly, the black one â€" was enough to level a planet. Had Chriksxcin had a concept of actual fear, it would have been utterly terrified. As it was, it was merely... cautious. Clearly one of them had to be responsible for transferring the Mi-Go to this world... or perhaps it was that \_other\_ major aetheric power source Chrksxcin could feel coming up behind it.

The fungus turned, observing the massive, manacled monster rising on a column of pure aether. That. That it did not wish to anger.

"Where is my Mistress?" the creature thundered. "Where is Rarity?"

Realizing that a confrontation between two massive sources of power was not something it wanted to get involved in, Chrksxcin scuttled to

the other edge of the roof and glided away.

\* \* \*

><p>"You know, I was expecting a song cue back there..." Lauren said, disappointed, as she held a boulder twice her size, and a ball of water from a convenient well in the air to either side of her. After several smaller rocks had achieved orbit, Clover had finally gotten her to tone her telekinesis down, by giving her something heavy so she needed less fine control.<p>

All three ponies looked at her oddly, but Clover was the one who asked, "A song... queue? Only a few unicorns have the ability to focus their magic through music. It's a rare and powerful gift, and your emblem would surely show an affinity for it if you could."

Lauren looked puzzled, "Okay, what's an Emblem? I heard you talking about it earlier... oh, you mean my cutie-mark?"

"That's what some of the younger ponies are calling it nowadays." Smart Cookie said, "Spear Shaker and his crowd, the same bunch that are coming up with that slang that idiot from earlier was spouting."

"Now that's a fun idea, Shakespeare as a teenage rebel..." Lauren mused.

"How do you know of Emblems if you don't know of this world?" Pansy asked, slightly suspicious.

"We've got stories about something similar at home. Cutie-marks show a pony's special talent."

"Partly right. Emb... cutie-marks show how a pony has decided to express their special talent. For example, my talent is learning and studying magic, and my cutie-mark is a four leafed clover with a book resting on it. Clovers, especially the four leafed kind, are magically powerful reagents and can enhance pretty much any spell or potion. I received it when I became Starswirl's apprentice. It represents how I can help enhance magic through study and research. If I'd taken the instructor position at the Academy, as I loved teaching almost as much, my mark might have been different."

"Oh! Can I see it?" Lauren exclaimed.

Clover sagged slightly. "Unfortunately, these de-aged bodies have no cutie-marks. I still don't understand it, our memories and experiences are intact, so that decision, that expression of our souls should be too."

"'Ware ahead!" Pansy pointed up ahead where they could see a scene of chaos across the bridge that lead into the town square. Several ponies in outlandish clothing were running around, both adults and foals, and there was a lot of yelling and screaming.

"The hay!" Smart Cookie frowned. "What are those things!"

"Things out of old mare's tales!" Clover replied analytically. "A vampony, a wolf lycanthrope, and... I'm not even sure what that thing



in bandages is, but it looks like some old legend of undead creatures... and other ponies all mixed in! There's too much happening!"

Pansy was taking a more tactical approach. "From the way they're placed, I think the vampony and the werewolf were fighting each other and the other undead is trying to keep them apart. I think the other ponies are just underhoof, too scared to get out of the way."

"Well some-pony's got to stop them before any-pony gets hurt!" Smart Cookie exclaimed, and started forward.

"Wait!" Pansy's voice had a snap of command, and Smart Cookie froze. "None of us are at our normal strength."

"But Pansy, we can't just do nothing!"

The pegasus shook her head. "No, but we need a plan. Clover, strengths and weaknesses?"

"If the old legends... vampony, can't cross running water, shies from magical light, killed by sunlight, staking or beheading. Lycanthropes, regenerate from anything except wolfsbane or silver, but there's a pony trapped inside, not in control of their actions, unlike the other two it's a living creature, could be knocked out. The other undead, magical light again. All three are tougher and faster than any regular pony."

"Hmm... Clover, you stay back, support us with cantrips to keep the other two from attacking us while we pony-pile them one at a time. Smarty, I need you to hit them low, buck things at them, while I drop in from above. Lauren, stay back here with Clover, your magic is too unreliable for a fight. If only we had some of those things you said..."

"Normally I could summon them without too much trouble," apologised Clover, "or transmute your horse-shoes to silver temporarily."

"But you can't," Lauren stated as she gently set down her boulder. However, her massive orb of water was still in the air, "You may have been mighty warriors in the past, but right now you are just three little fillies. That means you are not going out there to fight monsters that were made to scare adults. Besides, it seems to be a stalemate from what I can see. The mummy pony is keeping the vampir... er.. vampony and werewolf pony from attacking each other. It's like better version of that Twilight series. It would have been at least kind of entertaining if Bella was secretly a mummy..."

"That what do you suggest for our course of action, Ma'am?" Clover asked, having gotten somewhat used to the alicorn's unidentifiable references.

"We wait. We watch. If anything tries to attack us, I'll gently throw my water ball at them. How's that for running water, hah!" Lauren said to the three little de-aged ponies, before sitting down on the grass, "Look, I just wanted to say I'm sorry. Even if this is my dream, I should have been a bit more respectful of you three. I used to play with my little pony dolls as a child; I'd stage elaborate adventures, and now I'm in one. Who's to say that dream worlds are any less real than the one we live in. It could be just like in the

Sandman books. In any case, I apologize."

Clever Clover, Smart Cookie, and Private Pansy looked at each other. Cookie still seemed angry at her tribe's near extinction being dismissed so casually. Pansy was never a pony of many words, and that trait didn't seem to be changing soon. Clover spoke up, "I accept your apology, Ma'am. Just do try to be more careful."

"I'll try, but it's not that easy." Lauren sighed. "It's like someone telling you to take the smallest step you can, but when you try it's never small enough."

No one really had anything to say to that. Instead, the three fillies crouched down next to the alicorn while watching all angles for possible attack. It was quiet for several minutes before Lauren spoke up quietly.

"I'm glad you girls don't look like my old dolls, though. Instead of being all chubby looking with long muzzles, you're more like sleek pony-cat hybrids."

"Er... thank you?" Clever Clover replied, "There is actually a great deal of research and controversy on how we evolved traits more in common with predatory animals like forward facing eyes and..."

"Not the time for this," Pansy interrupted.

There was silence as the four ponies watched the stalemate. The mummy pony was still keeping the other two from fighting while constantly chattering in her strange language, but was getting more exasperated. Other ponies, dressed up in various outfits, gave them a wide berth as they ran around in the pandemonium.

"I still think this is my dream," Lauren pointed with her hoof to a pony dressed as a dentist who was threatening any other pony she saw with a giant levitating toothbrush. Also, her mane was made of toothpaste. "How else can you explain that other than my subconscious telling me I should brush more often."

"It is an exceptionally odd sight," Smart Cookie admitted, "as is that." She pointed to where two viking pegasus ponies were trading sword strokes with several pirate ponies who were led by a small colt.

"No band of undisciplined viking raiders can match up to the dread pirate Pipsqueak and his crew!" cried out the high pitched voice of the pirate captain.

The lead viking mare spoke up, "But what if the viking raiders hired a ninja mercenary?"

And out of nowhere, a ninja stallion entered the fray.

"Yeah." Lauren stared at this. "I got nothing."

That was when every pony's attention was drawn to an immense dragon-genie which rose up out of the centre of town with a mighty roar.

The three fillies turned towards the alicorn.

"I can't use that," Lauren said calmly as she stared ahead,  
"Dragonball did it first."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

So, yeah, the guys on the thread came up with this idea, and...

>Note that there are two parts to this.<p>

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## 36. Chapter 36: Halloween Special part 2

Clever Clover just gave a long sigh. "You do realise we have no idea what you're talking about?"

"I just wish I could power a translation spell. I want to know what that... mummy, you called it... is saying. For that matter, the town itself doesn't make sense!"

Smart Cookie nodded. "I noticed that too, it looks like an earth-pony settlement, but fancied up by unicorns! All the windows are glazed rather than shuttered, the houses have multiple stories and they even have fountains! It looks long established, but... nothing in Equestria is yet. We've been here less than a dozen years, but the roads here are all paved, the bridge is well crafted stone and there are all kinds of fancy decoration, even without those things for whatever festival they were having."

"I'm more interested in the ponies," Pansy said.

"The fact that even I don't know what half of the costumes are supposed to be, or the fact that there's unicorns, earth ponies and pegasi all mixed in?" Clover asked.

"Both, Pansy replied.

"Arrgh! I hate just sitting here and not being able to find out what's going on!" Clover fumed. "If only I had more power... Wait!"

She turned back to Lauren, a dawning realisation in her eyes. "If we could find a safe way to regulate the power flow, you could lend us some of your power. You have the powers of all three races in you, and in such quantity that you could empower us and never miss the difference."

She started pacing again. "The problem is your control. It's getting better, but it wouldn't take much excess to burn us out. Of course, you'd have to agree in the first place. Let me see... applying

Gutterhoof's fourth nune the parametric phase variance would modulate the power flow in phase... we'd need some yellow chalk... reversing the polarity of the thaumic flow... would that make it a Singlestone trapdoor function?  $T \text{ equals } H F \text{ squared}$  where H is the harmonic factor and friendship... Adjusting for the incident light level... we could omit the dribbly candles."

"What on earth is she going about?" Lauren asked.

Pansy shook her head. "She gets like this when she's doing her magic stuff. Just let her be, she'll come up for air soon enough. But if you really can lend us your power, please do so! I don't know how much you've used those wings, but if you have, you must know what it's like for a pegasus to be grounded! I feel so... limited, unable to protect my friends!"

"Likewise!" Smart Cookie added. "That giant creature seems to be coming closer, and it doesn't look friendly."

"... and a three eights Gripsey!" Clover finished. "I've got it! We use a triune ritual diagram, but we reverse it! We create a set of linked stones at the nodes for Pansy and Smart Cookie and I stay at the third node to act as the control element. Since I won't be channelling the power directly, I can avoid being overloaded. I can even help you control your power."

She noticed the approaching genie. "Uh oh... No time for more lessons, I'll need help setting it up, and you need some spells of your own. I can copy some of my own knowledge into your mind, it'll only work for a half hour before they fade, but at least you'll be able to defend yourself. Drop the water in the river..."

Lauren still wasn't sure about acting as a magical battery for these three, but learning spells was something she was right behind. She dropped the water. "Okay! What do I do?"

"Just touch your horn to mine." Clover stepped in front of her, and lowered her head slightly to point her horn directly at the alicorn. Lauren lowered her own head to touch horns, and Clover's horn glowed slightly. "Darn! I don't have enough power even for this... will the knowledge to come to you, apply your power, but gently, gently."

Lauren took a deep breath, and tried gently â€" ever so gently, to will a copy of Clover's knowledge of spells into her mind.

There was a **\*\*flash\*\*** of light.

\_She was nervous and it felt like there were butterflies in her tummy, all trying to escape. She had just been chosen by the great unicorn mage, Starswirl, to be his student after pleading to learn magic. She was determined, but still there was fear that she wouldn't be up to the task. She resolved to master as many aspects of magic as she could.\_

**\*\*Flash.\*\***

\_Tomes, books, and figures all spread out on an old oaken desk. A single candle burning away as she took a deep breath and cast the first spell she had created all on her lonesome. Waking up bleary

eyed from the resultant explosion and crawling over to a scorched scroll to mark down not only another failure, but another step closer to success. Spell formulas and magical diagrams raced through her mind.\_

**\*\*Flash.\*\***

\_Making light of her teacher's new beard, calling it ridiculous. His reply was to laugh and something even more ridiculous to draw attention away from his facial hair, like putting silly bells in his hat.\_

**\*\*Flash.\*\***

\_Standing at her teacher's side as he tended to King Platinum's growing illness. Overhearing the whispers of the unicorn nobles as they planned their power plays and schemes. She didn't really think any pony would really start blaming the pegasi for the growing number of gryphon incursions or the earth ponies for the rising cost of food. It was only logical that the blame should fall on the gryphon marauder raids which the pegasi were fighting off. Therefore they could not manage the weather as efficiently, and thus the harvest wasn't as great.\_

**\*\*Flash.\*\***

\_Why weren't more ponies logical? At the gathering of the three tribes, she had met only two others who could see the truth " an earth pony and a pegasus. With a heavy heart, she watched her princess fall sway to the whispers of her noble advisers. The argument between her and the leaders of the other two tribes only got louder.\_

**\*\*Flash.\*\***

\_They came in from the icy north. The gryphons united in their desire to flee. The ponies planned to stay through the winter.\_

**\*\*Flash.\*\***

\_The winter should have ended months ago, but was only growing colder. She and her teacher spent every waking moment looking for an answer.\_

**\*\*Flash.\*\***

\_The chill pierced her skin and seemed to permeate right down to her bones. She added another layer of enchantment on her cloak. They had a name now. Windigos. The current theory was that whatever spawned the horrid changelings, made their inverse. Beings who feed on hate and anger, rather than love and friendship. So far, there were no solid theories on how to defeat them. All spells and enchantments had failed, as had the strength of the earth ponies and the speed and agility of the pegasi.\_

**\*\*Flash.\*\***

\_When the going gets tough, the ponies leave. The paradise state was no longer. The survivors made their decision. Taking only what could

be carried or hauled in wagons, the ragged freezing members of each pony tribe started off in their own direction. The long exodus had begun.\_

**\*\*Flash.\*\***

\_Cold. So many lost to the cold. And the windigoes seemed to be following them, gaining on the caravan. This meant the volunteers who stayed behind to distract them were no more. Her tears froze before they hit the ground.\_

**\*\*Flash.\*\***

\_The leaders should protect their people. Starswirl stayed behind to research and coordinate the last effort â€" a mass teleportation spell that would require every remaining capable unicorn to cast. It would have the power to send only the foals and the surviving elderly to someplace safe. Someplace far away. Clover volunteered to go with her princess to draw off the windigos. She did not expect to see her two friends and their respective leaders attempting the same thing.\_

**\*\*Flash.\*\***

\_A touch of harmony. That is what Starswirl called the harmonic resonance created by the three pony tribes. The earth ponies channelled their stamina, the pegasus ponies channelled their atmospheric control, and the unicorn spell tied them all together as each wished for the same thing with all their might. With all their hearts and with all their souls. And the windigoes were no more.\_

**\*\*Flash.\*\***

Lauren's horn slowly pulled away from Clover, who was staring at her in wide-eyed horror. What she had done was a crime of the gravest nature. A pony's mind was their own, a sacred refuge that should never be invaded; and that alicorn... she... she... she was hugging her.

The alicorn cried as she tightly hugged the smaller filly. A barely audible whisper sounded in Clover's ear, "I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry."

Clover's shock melted away like snow under dragonflame, replaced by pity as she realised just what the other pony had experienced. She raised her fore-hoof and hugged back. "No, I'm sorry. I didn't think, if my own magic wasn't powerful enough to push the memories I wanted to give you, it wouldn't be powerful enough to limit what you'd receive when you drew on them.

"Maybe I wanted you to understand, and that makes it even worse. I wouldn't consciously forced any-pony to endure the memories of the hardships we went through, especially some-pony who clearly comes from a gentler place. But we must go ahead from what is, can you forgive me for any hurt I caused you? At least you should now have my spells, and the memories of my own training, which should make your control better."

Genie Spike now towered over the square, his eyes lighting on the

vampony who was still duking it out with the werewolf (a were-pony would imply that someone turned into a pony under the full moon... actually, sign me up!). He bowed his head.

"My Mistress Rarity, I am here to serve you. What is your command?"

Pansy winced. "Oh frozen waste! This can't be good! I think the stalemate just turned into a checkmate!"

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash didn't know exactly how long she'd kept Rarity and AJ from tearing each other apart, but she figured it was more than long enough for an amnesiac alicorn to fly to Sweet Apple Acres, learn magic, and return with the Cutie Mark Crusaders in tow. This was primarily based on her observation of a Fausticorn having a conversation with three foals while levitating a sphere of water; admittedly that wasn't a very accurate measurement of time, but the fact remained that whoever the Fausticorn actually was â€" definitely a looper, anyway â€" she wasn't acting as a creator of worlds but more like a very confused fangirl. Which kind of made sense in a way.<p>

"Û†ÛŠØ§ Û„ÛƒÛ… Ø§Ø«Û†ÛŠÛ†Øœ Û…Ø-Ø±Ø¬ Ø§Û„ØªÛ^Û„Û• Ø¹Û† Û†Ø°Ø§. Û†Ø-Û†Ø-Û…ÛŠØ¹Ø§ Ø£ØµØ¬Û„Ø§Ø; Û†Û†Ø§. ÛƒÛ†Øª Û…Ø§ Ø²Û„Øª Û„Ø§ Ø£Û•Û†Û… ÛƒÛ„Û…Ø© Û^Ø£Û†Ø§ Ø£Û„Û^Û„ Û†Û„."

Come on you two, just stop this. We're all friends here. You still don't understand a word I'm saying do you.

"Wretched cur! Kneel before my glory!"

"AWOOOOOOO!"

"Û†Ø°Û† Û†ÛŠ Ø³Ø§Ø¬Ø¹ Û…Ø¹Ø,Û… Û„ØµØ© Ø±Ø¹Ø" Û…ØªØ°Û„Ø© Û„Û„Ø¬ Ø³Ø¬Û„ Ø¥Ø©ØªØ•Û• Û•ÛŠ," Rainbow muttered to herself. "Ø§Û„Û•Ø±Û^Ø¹Øœ Û^Ø§Ø³Û…Ø-Û^Ø§ ÛŠÛƒÛ^Û† Û†Û†Ø§Ûƒ Û†Û^Ø¹Ø§ Û…Û† ØªØ•Û^Ø± Û…ØªØ§Û…Ø±Ø© ..."

This is the seventh most cliché horror story I've ever been shanghai'd into. Branches, PLEASE let there be some sort of plot twist...

"My Mistress Rarity," boomed a voice, "I am here to serve you. What is your command?"

Oh. Well that was probably bad.

Mummy Dash, lady Belle, and Applewolf, all turned to see the dragon genie towering over the small town of Ponyville. Rarity and Applejack were slightly stunned, having apparently not remembered this among all the other things that their costumes had made them forget. Rainbow Dash, however, was working her mind furiously. What did she know about genies? Wishes, untold power, Twilight said they were Saddle-Arabian in origin-

Wait. Wasn't Saddle Arabia near the old Sphinx Empire? Well, at least she remembered it being there in the loops where she raced around the world... And mummies were a Sphinx Empire thing. So maybe, just

maybe-

"Ah, I..." Rarity composed herself. "...am most happy to see you-"

Rainbow Dash suddenly shouted, her strange words flying through the air.

The dragon genie blinked. "She wants to... truly?"

"Û†Ø¹Û..." Rainbow nodded quickly, emphasizing her words with a strange gesture.

Yes!

"You can understand this mare?" Rarity looked from the mummy to the genie. "What is she saying?"

"She... claims you wish to..." Spike blushed a bit, trailing off.

The vampire blinked.

She looked at the genie.

There was a quiet moment.

"Well... you do seem to have some talent in the arts of shapeshifting..." she mused. "And I do rather need some relaxation after dealing with this disgusting beast. Come then! We shall away to my castle!"

With a flash, genie and vampire disappeared. Rainbow Dash gave a musty breath of relief.

After a moment, Apple Bloom or whoever she thought she was coughed. "Well... that was... disturbing." She gave the mummy a look. "Did you really...?"

Dash shrugged, shuffling a hoof and glancing away. "Û...Û†Û„Ø§Ø£ Û...Ø§ Ø§Ø°Ø§ Û†Ø§Û† ÛŠØ¹Û...Û„ ÛŠØ¹Û...Û„." She hadn't been sure that the genie would even understand her; it was really a massive stroke of luck.

Hey, if it works it works.

After a moment, Applejack started rolling on the ground with a whuffling laugh.

Ignoring the happy wolf-pony for a moment, Lauren turned towards Smart Cookie, "Wait, you could understand that mummy pony?"

Cookie notched her head to one side, "Not exactly. From the way they reacted I could get the general gist. Figuring out what the other pony's not saying is pretty much a key skill in my job. And at least one word sounded similar to something I heard from a camel trader who came up past the Southern mountains. He wasn't my type though."

"It's just... Clover seemed so knowledgeable," the alicorn



said.

Clover sighed and rolled her eyes, "Because you were talking about magical spells. You have my memories, you should know while I've studied many things, languages aren't one of them."

"Speaking of which, Lauren, do you think you can manage a translation spell?" Pansy asked. "It should prevent any other confusion."

Lauren thought through her new memories for a moment before recalling Clover learning, practising, and managing one such spell, "I think so. Hold on."

Gathering in her horn what to her felt like a tiny iota of her power, the alicorn imprinted the spell matrix of what she wanted the magic to do; linking concepts with spoken and written words. And in one pulse, she let the magic out. A wave of pale blue engulfed the nearby ponies, then the nearby buildings, then the nearby country side; then everything was pale blue for a moment.

"That, may have been a little too much power," Lauren stated.

"You don't say, you strange pony-bird," said the small blue jay that was sitting on a nearby tree, "Oh, I smell food over that way. Maybe the nice yellow pony-bird left some out again."

"Nuts, nuts, nuts. I got to find the tasty nuts and hide them before the cold comes," sang a nearby squirrel as it raced along the ground.

"Hey!" happily greeted Winona the dog as she raced along. She spotted the wolf pony whose scent was almost the same as her old friend/master/alpha female, except she was a wolf pony now â€" which made her even better! "Hey! Hey!"

"Hey!" yipped Applejack, "Play?"

"Yay!" barked Winona as the two raced off together.

Somewhere, a strange winged wasp/crab/mushroom creature suddenly understood the odd beings around it. It also seemed to possess a strange desire to compile all the recipes and desserts from its culture, for some reason. '\_To serve Mi-go', that it was a cookbook should be inherently understandable, right?\_ it thought.

"Can you understand me now?" Mummy Dash asked.

"Yep", "Yes", "We can." came from Lauren and the three former cutie mark crusaders.

"Great! Finally!" exclaimed the mummy, "So... er... any ideas what's going on?"

"We were hoping you could tell us," Smart Cookie asked. "This entire town seems to have gone insane! As witness I'm talking to a dead person wrapped in bandages."

"Uh, this is just a costume, remember?" Dash looked quizzically at them.

Pansy shook her head. "Uh huh, I've seen too many dead pegasi not to know one when I see one. Look at your wings, you can see the bones through the feathers."

Dash grimaced, not bothering to look at her wing. "I suppose Private Pansy would be an expert?"

"The name is Lieutenant Pansy." The younger pegasus looked up at the older one, surprised by the lack of recognition. "You know, second in command to Commander Hurricane? For that matter, who and what are you, and why are you still moving around? Some weird magic?"

"Aw great! The same thing's happened to you three hasn't it?" Rainbow Dash facehooved. "You guys think you're really the three founders!"

"And who do you think we are? For that matter, who do you think you are?" Clover asked.

"Well I'm Rainbow Dash, most awesome flyer in Equestria, and I dressed up as a mummy for Nightmare Night, from 'Daring Do and the Pyramid of the Ancients'. I was going to do Daring Do but the pith helmet I ordered didn't come in time. So I did the mummy instead. Pretty quick fix, just wrapped some layers of TP around myself.

"Rarity and Applejack had just gotten into their costumes when the world went wobbly for a second, and then they really got into their costumes. Rarity was doing the whole 'Queen of the Night' thing, and Applejack went to the dogs. I haven't seen them fight like that since... well, I wasn't actually around for Twilight's sleepover, but I heard the screams.

"And I ended up like this..." She finally did examine her wing, and looked ill at the moth-eaten condition. "It's like we've all been changed into our costumes, only they changed inside as well as out, though maybe not completely if Spike and Rarity are still into each other."

"You're making no sense!" Clover said in an exasperated voice. "For that matter neither does this town, or this festival, 'Nightmare Night' as you call it. It has been a scant dozen years since the Exodus, how could this town be so well developed? And you speak as if we should know those ponies. We woke up here only hours ago, having been snatched away and somehow de-aged and stripped of our emblems â€" our cutie marks.

"We must contact Chancellor Puddinghead, or my mentor Starswirl, as this must be some ploy by the old guard to try and split the three tribes by depriving them of the focus around which the Alliance is built. They tried to take our memories too, but our friendship must have protected them. They must have believed that bringing us up as unaware friends would maintain the Fire of Friendship while removing us as political figures."

Dash shook her head, dislodging some dust which made her sneeze. "Celestia, you three have it bad. Still, you three spent enough time studying at Twilight's to get your costumes just right. I guess some of it rubbed off."

"What in the frozen wastes do you mean?" Pansy exclaimed, "Are you claiming we are some sort of magical copies, created by some spell?"

"All I know is that the three of you still look like Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo under those costumes, and that the three of you were going to dress as Smart Cookie, Clover the Clever and Private Pansy for Nightmare Night. You do the maths."

\* \* \*

><p>Celly pondered what she'd been told, and the disturbing shift in Nightmare Moon's... <em>Nimmy's</em> personality.

It wasn't that the other personality was abhorrent. \_By Ash and Elder, the sweet thing is not abhorrent at all.\_ It was the moments of struggle and the changeover that disturbed her most. Her own spike of curiosity and dry cataloguing of the symptoms, and the fact that her tiara was gently pulsing magic, letting her see a trio of spectral butterflies flitting across Nimmy's cutie mark. Celly felt the ache in her heart of not only fighting to save the "Lulu" at the heart of "Nimmy" but trying to save the pegasus inside as well.

She also worried about the fact she wasn't as worried about the lost soul potentially within herself. What she was really worried about was that sudden surge of alicorn magic across town. Oh, and the apparent dragon genie.

'Here we go again, Celestia,' she thought as the elder diarchs swung their own heads to search for the source of the disturbance. Celly frowned at the sarcastic bent of the thought.

\* \* \*

><p>"So..." Faust said slowly. "One of my creations who I haven't created yet dressed up like, and became a copy of, myself. So, I'm probably writing this right now and threw in a self-insert as an in-joke." She groaned. "I hate me."<p>

Rainbow Dash sighed. "Actually... how do I put this. Let me think... You're kind of a metajoke. See, Celestia and Luna's mother was named Faust, and there's this recent sort of comedy series where..." The mummy waved a bandaged hoof vaguely at the alicorn, well aware that mentioning the loops and a hub universe would probably make her lose all credibility. "So... yeah, heh. Twilight could tell you more, she's the egghead."

Smart Cookie looked back and forth between the alicorn and the mummy incredulously. "You can't possibly believe this load of horseapples! I'm myself, not some ghost or shadow puppet created by some-pony's imagination! Clover, tell her..."

But Clover was standing very still, mumbling to herself. "Emblems... memory... illusion... but that would mean..."

Her eyes widened and she swayed on her hooves. Then she turned to the other two and they were shocked to see tears in her eyes.

"Oh, by the Source! It makes sense, it's the only thing that makes sense! Look around you, this isn't our Equestria! You know I wondered

why our emblems didn't restore themselves with our memories. Our memories and souls are intact, and an Emblem is an expression of our souls, our destinies. Magic capable of affecting that is beyond any-pony I know, and if some-pony had that much power, they wouldn't need to trick us, they could just rewrite the world to order. But if these bodies aren't our own, our souls and destinies can't affect them. That would explain why our emblems didn't appear."

Her gaze grew distant, then focussed on something far away. "Oh no, there was that, the whole time! Pansy, look up in the mountains!"

Pansy and Smart Cookie followed her gaze, where Canterlot blazed on the mountain above in it's own festival colours.

"But, there's no city like that anywhere!" Pansy gasped. "It's huge!"

"You lead most of the surveys, do you recognise the distinctive shape of that peak?"

"No... yes, Mount Canter, where the unicorns have that new mining camp! But there was nothing like that there, I swear it! And that would mean this is somewhere on the Everfree plains."

Clover turned to Dash, eyes dark. "Two more questions. What's the name of that city, and how long is it since the exodus, since... us?"

Dash didn't look happy about the way her comments had been received, and hesitated, but Clover's gaze held on her until she gave a sigh. "Canterlot, the capital of Equestria. As to how long, I don't know, egg-head stuff isn't my thing, but more than a thousand years, a lot more."

Smart Cookie shook her head violently. "No, I'm not buying it! This has to be a trick, some kind of illusion to make us lose hope, this can't be the truth!"

Clover shook her head. "I thought of that first, but it won't wash. There are too many unfamiliar things, too much change. Did you recognise even a tithe of those costumes, the styles of the housing? An illusion works by drawing you in, making your own mind do the hard work. Adding that many new elements would make it crack like cheap wattle, no matter how much raw power you threw at it. No, only reality hurts this much."

"And what about her, why does she remember what happened?" Smart Cookie pointed at Dash.

"From what she said, that 'mummy' costume was a last minute thing, whereas our costumes were a labour of love. Maybe the more effort some-pony put into the costume, the deeper the change goes." She sniffled back her tears and asked Dash. "If they made costumes of us, ponies still remember us, even after all this time?"

Dash was feeling as rotten as she looked for how she'd hurt them, and saw a way to make up for it a bit. "Are you kidding? You're the Founders, the ponies who started it all! You saved every-pony, founded Equestria, we even have a holiday just to celebrate it,

Hearth's warming Eve! You're the most famous ponies in the history of... history!"

"Then we succeeded?" Clover asked hopefully. "The three tribes learned to live together?"

"Just look at the three of you." Dash pointed at them. "Scoots, Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom are the best of friends. They may fight occasionally, but I've never heard them fight because they're not the same race. Just the idea that ponies could do that freaks most ponies out, it'd be like ponies fighting because they had different coat colours or mane styles. Doesn't mean we don't have some problems, but yeah, you guys did it, big time!"

"That's something, at least." Clover sighed.

\* \* \*

><p>She tried to hold it in. She really did. But at the highly emotional moment when the three fillies-turned-historical-legends were wrapped up in the joy of knowing that their mission was a success, that the three pony tribes not only managed to live together in peace, but thrive; it just came out.<p>

Lauren spoke out, "Buffy did it!"

All eyes turned towards the alicorn who now had her front hooves covering her mouth.

She slowly lowered her hooves and took a deep breath, "I'm sorry. It just came to me. People turning into their costumes. I remembered something similar happening in a show I saw, but it was years ago."

"What caused such an event?" Smart Cookie asked.

Pansy chimed in, "And how was it ended?"

"Let me think. There was a statue to a chaos god or something."

"Discord," Rainbow Dash almost growled. It had been many, many relative years since before the loops started... but she still hadn't completely forgiven him for taking away her wings, "He's the big-wig spirit of chaos around here."

Lauren nodded, "Okay, and there was a chaos mage who kicked off the whole thing. Is there a pony around here that likes or worships chaos?"

Mummy Rainbow Dash gave off a long, dust-filled sigh, "Pinkie Pie."

There was a pause as the pegasus collected her thoughts. "Imagine the living embodiment of a sugar high who likes to party, dance, sing, do completely impossible things, and then party even more and you'll pretty much know what she's like."

Lauren smiled, fondly remembering one of her old pony dolls. "Great. Now we just need to find where she has the statue and smash it. Then

everyone will be back to normal."

"And what happened to the assumed personas on this show?" Clever Clover asked.

"I don't really know," the alicorn said, "The fillies you all are possessing may retain some of your memories and skills. The show I saw never showed what happened to the ones who possessed the costumed people."

Clover nodded in understanding, "A pity our real selves will never know of this. It would be a comfort knowing we will succeed beyond our expectations. Still, we can help, agreed?"

She looked at the other two. Pansy just nodded, but Smart Cookie gave a deep sigh and said, "It's not given to a pony how long they live, but we can control how we use that time, even if it's only a single night. Freeing this town would be a good use of it."

"So where would this Pinkie Pie have the chaos statue?" Pansy questioned.

"Sugarcube Corner." Rainbow Dash motioned to the others to follow her, "The bakery that looks like a giant gingerbread cookie house. It makes that unicorn who wants to be a dentist growl every time she has to walk past it. It's this-a-way."

As the group turned a corner, they came upon the assorted Celestias, Lunas, and Nightmare Moons. They all turned towards the new alicorn, eyes widening in recognition.

A chorus of voices called out in hopeful amazement, "Mother?!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Mother, is that... is that truly you?"<p>

"No, sister, it is not her," Nightmare Moon snapped. "Lest ye forget, this is the night of costumes, of which We and thou art also."

Her face softened considerably. "There's no reason to be rude, Nightmare."

Lauren took a breath. "I... um... Listen, dear... I'm not exactly your mother. I... don't even have memories of you..."

The younger Celestia wilted. "...I see..."

"But, um... hugs?"

'Celly' stepped forward, almost teary eyed, and took the proffered embrace.

Nightmare moon scoffed, then slapped herself. "Ow! That was not necessary! Yes it was and you know it."

Rainbow Dash gave Nightmare Moon an odd look. "What's up with you?"

"We're not exactly sure how, but Fluttershy managed to somewhat break

through the ensorcellment." Luna stepped forward and nodded to the founders. "It is an honour to be in your presence once more, even if you are not truly... well. The fact remains, we do require some assistance in organizing a reaction to... are you aware of what is happening?"

"According to the Metajoke Faust over there," Rainbow Dash pointed at the red maned alicorn giving 'Celly' an awkward smile, "some servant of chaos made a chaos statue and now everyone's become their costumes. Kind of. I'm still Rainbow Dash, I'm just a mummy now, but the crusaders have... they're the founders, mind and soul."

"A statue?" Luna tilted her head. "That's an... interesting idea-"

Rainbow leaned in close and whispered quickly. Luna's eyes widened. "Oh. Right. That makes sense."

'Tia' shook her head. "So, from all that, I assume... Pinkie Pie?"

"It would make sense," Rainbow replied. "Let's just head over to Sugarcube Corner and..."

She blinked. "Is... is that a fire over there?"

\* \* \*

><p>"NO! You are not going in there, Dinky, and that's FINAL!"<p>

"Look, miss, I have to make sure that nopony's trapped in there! It's my job!"

"YOU ARE NOT A FIREPONY!" Derpy yelled, tears streaming down her face. "YOU ARE MY DAUGHTER! I'M NOT GOING TO LOSE YOU!"

"Maybe I am!" the filly snapped. "Maybe I'm your daughter and I'm transformed and I don't remember anything about it! That doesn't change the fact that there is a building on fire! Even if nopony is in there, I have to stop it! Who else can?! Who else here has the knowledge, ability, and let's face it \_sanity\_ to handle this?!"

The pegasus looked up at the blazing sugarcube corner. "I... I..." She sniffled. "Just... please. Try not to..."

"...I promise I'll come back." The firepony hugged her gently. "Don't worry. I promise that I'll come back."

And neither of them noticed the pink form flying away from the blaze, an odd little statue gripped in its claws as it glided toward the Everfree.

\* \* \*

><p>As soon as she started to get close to the burning building, Lieutenant Quick Deployment felt the heat of the burning blaze that was consuming the building and weakening its structural integrity. Her oxygen tank was almost empty and the backup from the station hadn't arrived yet, leaving her without much time to think. She

needed to act fast and look for anyone still trapped in Sugarcube Corner.<p>

She touched the front door handle with her hoof and found it burning hot. Her fire axe swung telekinetically through the air, making some holes for the flames start to burst through and equalizing the oxygen inside. Quick Deployment steadied herself, taking a few steps back.

Then she charged the door, bursting through with a single swing of her axe.

"PONYVILLE FIRE DEPARTMENT!" she shouted through her oxygen mask. "IS ANYONE HERE? PLEASE ANSWER OR MAKE SOME NOISE SO I CAN GET TO WHERE YOU ARE!" Her experienced eyes scanned the front of the business, quickly determining that the fire had started in the kitchens. The flames and her small body made said room inaccessible, but the stairs seemed to be safe. She rushed up, pressing her hoof against the first door she found. The heat forced her to recoil; with a sad glance, she moved on.

The next room, thankfully, wasn't hot enough to be consumed by flames. She announced herself with a quick shout-"PONYVILLE FIRE DEPARTAMENT! SOMEONE PLEASE RESPOND!"-and quickly entered. It turned out to be a basic bathroom, and a quick search found nopony hiding in the tub or the cabinets. The room after that, the master bedroom, had a minor blaze already; fortunately, it was unoccupied. As Quick Deployment headed to the final room, she spared a glance at the stairs; tongues of fire were already licking up. Time was running out.

Quick Deployment approached the final door, pressing against it. "PONYVILLE FIRE DEPARTAMENT! IS ANYONE THERE?" Unlike the other doors, there was actually some kind of noise! But it wasn't just any kind of noise; it was the one kind of noise she didn't want to hear in this situation. It was the crying of an infant foal.

Without thinking twice she opened the door as fast as she could, noticing that it was filled with plush animals and other didactic toys; in the centre of the room was a cradle with a small yellow earth pony foal. The baby was wailing with all his little lungs could give him; Quick Deployment could sense the flames getting closer as she carefully lifted the small bundle of joy out of the crib. But the flames were already covering the hallway and getting inside the room, she could even hear the sound of the roof collapsing in the other places of the house; the structural integrity of the building wouldn't last much longer.

Quick Deployment's mind raced as she placed the oxygen mask to the foal's face, looking around quickly "there! A window! Clutching the foal tightly to her chest, she steeled herself and ran toward it, leaping out just before a burst of fire destroyed the room!

\_\*\*BOOOOOOOOOM!\*\*\_

The force sent her further then she expected, but already she was curled around the infant and rolling on the ground... into a set of bushes. She sputtered, spitting out leaves as she clambered out. "I'm not doing this ever again if I can help it!" Her eyes drifted toward



the foal, and she sighed in relief as she saw him look back with wide eyes.

Moment later she was wrapped up in a tight hug.

"DINKY! ARE YOU ALRIGHT MUFFIN?" Derpy couldn't hold back the tears as she brough both the foals close. "DOES SOMETHING HURT? PLEASE SAY SOMETHING!"

"Ms. Hooves-

"DID YOU GET BURNED? DID ANY PIECE OF DEBRIS HIT YOU?!"

"Ms. hooves, I'm fi-

"PLEASE DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE DYING! I CAN'T LOOSE YOU THE SAME WAY I LOST YOUR FATHER! PLEASE DON'T LEAVE ME AND YOUR SISTER ALONE!..."

"MS. HOOVES! I WAS TRYING TO TELL YOU THAT I AM FINE! FINE!" The firepony broke out of the hug with an exasperated sigh. "Geeze, it was just a few scrapes... and the temporal pain of hitting my back with the oxygen tank when I landed, nothing out of routine."

Derpy sniffed, giving her a worried look. "...Are you sure?"

Quick Deployment took a breath, calming herself. "Yeah I'm sure of it. This is not my first fire, Ms. Hooves, and I don't think it will be my last." She looked toward the burning building. "What it worries me right now is how to extinguish the fire before it propagates to the nearby houses, calm down this little tyke, find his parents, get some water to drink, and get to the hospital for a checkup after this mess. That is in order from the top priority to the least one Ms. Hooves."

"...Ok, I guess I can help you with the first one," Derpy finally replied. "I may not be Rainbow Dash, but if there's one thing I can handle a little better than her it's storm clouds. That will put out the fire and keep the other houses humid enough to not catching fire." She gave Sugarcube Corner a glance. "Or, knowing my luck, set half the other houses on fire..."

"Excuse me, what was the last part?"

"NOTHING! NOTHING AT ALL! Don't worry about it, just leave it to me!"

"... I trust your judgement Ms. Hooves. Please be quick in gathering the storm cloud, I don't think my buddies of the station will arrive in time."

Derpy saluted. "Don't worry muffin, Mom is on the case." She gave a little nuzzle to the infant " before backing off with an odd expression. "Wait... is that Carrot Cake? No, never mind, I don't want to know." Shaking her head, she took to the air.

\* \* \*

><p>Having another alicorn bow to you was a disconcerting thing for the three Founders, especially as there were four more besides,

though two were clearly copies of two others. However the fire distracted every-pony.<p>

"We should go there with all speed, see if we can render aid." Pansy said, trying to lift-off to see better.

"In our present state I'm not sure..." Clover's eyes alighted on a spilled bag that had once been part of a pirate costume. The candy gems inside had been transmuted into real ones, likewise the chocolate gold pieces, and her eyes brightened up. "Or maybe we can!"

She forked through them with a hoof, and levitated three of the biggest and finest, a diamond, a sapphire and an emerald, as well as some other odds and ends. "We can work on the move."

Smart Cookie had gone over by Princess Luna as they moved off. "You seem to know us personally, but I for one have never met you. Our memories seem to extend until a dozen years after the Alliance. But from what we've been told that was well over a thousand years ago. Also, from Rainbow's reaction you are native to this time and place. Who are you, and how can this be, if you don't mind me asking?"

"I am Princess Luna, Ruler of Night and Guardian of Dreams, and my sister is Princess Celestia, Ruler of the Day and Protector of Ponykind. We now raise the sun and moon, rather than a team of unicorn nobles."

Smart Cookie's eyes widened. "But that would deprive the unicorn nobility of the largest portion of their power! That would be... it would change everything!"

"Indeed it did... but that is not what you asked. You were very old when we met you, only alive because of Clover's spells, but even then you were an inspiration. We alicorns on the other hoof are immortal, or rather unaging."

"You mean, you have lived that entire time from then to now? Then it is the two of you who are truly responsible for this world, not we... your highness."

Luna shook her head. "Only because we had your example to guide us. You, of all ponies need not use our titles. Indeed, the Elements of Harmony were a development of Clover's elaboration of Starswirl's original research into the nature of magic and it's connection to the minds and emotions of all three pony races."

"Elements of Harmony?" Smart Cookie asked.

Fausticorn and Clover had been talking, and casting spells on the floating gems. Finally, Clover came back to the other two carrying two chokers. The third, containing a diamond, was around her neck. "Lauren agreed to lend us some of her power, and I transferred my design for a way to relay it along with my other memories. She helped craft these, and it should give all three of us at least a measure of our adult powers. She even suggested an improvement. I was too wedded to the idea of a physical ritual diagram, drawn on the ground. These form a ritual triune, but the links between the vertices use our friendship as the conduit. It's a fascinating idea, I only wish my real self could benefit from it."

Her expression saddened for a second, but she quickly recovered, and she put the chokers around the other two's necks, the sapphire for Pansy and the emerald for Cookie.

Pansy started flapping her wings like a hummingbird, but this time she took off like a Harrier jump-jet. "Now this is more the business!"

Princess Celestia overheard the comment Clover made and asked, "Why do you say that? You are as real as any-pony."

"No we're not, we're simply far better copies than most. The enchantment on the costumes made us unusually detailed, but we will vanish along with the spell."

Celestia's eyes widened in surprise. "So that's what you meant! You told me once, that if I ever found you doubting you existed, to tell you the following phrase. 'He should have been called Levelhead.'"

Clover giggled. "Oh that old chestnut. Smart Cookie always said her boss should be... Wait, how could we know that if we're just gestalts created by magic! That was a private thing between the three of us, we swore never to reveal it..."

Celestia's horn glowed slightly. "I think the spell did something different in your case, brought your souls forward in time. I can sense the difference between you and Fluttershy or Twilight."

"Does that mean when the spell ends we will return to our real bodies?" Hope dawned in Smart Cookie's eyes.

Celestia nodded. "It would make sense. I don't know how much you will remember, but enough to tell me that phrase to use."

They'd reached the burning building, which had half collapsed, and Rainbow Dash yelled out "Sugar Cube Corner!"

\* \* \*

><p>Quick Deployment gave an exasperated sigh. "Great, more civilia€"Your Majesties!" She bowed quickly, careful not to let her magical grip drop the infant she was carrying. "I can personally reassure you that the building is vacated, I went through and got everypony out. One of the local pegasi is... why are there seven of you?"<p>

"Costume curse," Clover explained simply. "As far as we can tell, everypony became their... Nightmare Night, was it? Nightmare Night costumes..."

Cadance picked the infant up gently, rocking him to sleep and giving a reassuring wing hug to the shivering alicorn filly she had been tending to. "Don't worry, Erroria, this brave firepony managed to save everyone in the blaze."

"I don't like fire," the filly sniffled, unaware of her glowing horn. "I want it gone!"

The entire area was suddenly subjected to a three second deluge. Founder, alicorn, mummy, and firepony all stood, blinking the water out of their eyes.

"Well..." Quick Deployment said slowly. "I... guess that's one way to put out a fire."

Derpy glided down, mussing up the firepony's mane. "Did I do that? I'm sorry! I didn't mean to!"

"Aaaaaand now I'm disintegrating," Dash deadpanned. "Great."

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash's voice trailed off in a gurgle as she collapsed in a heap of sodden linen and bones before every-pony's horrified gaze. The pile <em>rippled</em>, and suddenly it was a regular blue pegasus swathed in soaking toilet paper. She spat out a mouthful. "Ugh! The toilet paper should be on the houses, not me! Never doing that again."

"Of course!" Clover exclaimed. "The curse changes you into your costume, so damage done to your assumed form is damage done **\*\*to\*\*** the costume! So even if your costume form is killed or destroyed, all that happens is you revert to normal with a wrecked costume. Ingenious!"

"Miss," Smart Cookie asked the fire-pony, "Did you see some sort of statue or bust in there?"

She turned to the group. "What does this Discord creature look like anyway?"

Pansy was up in the air, converting the steam rising off the smouldering wreckage into clouds and chilling them to suck the last remnants of heat out of the destroyed building. "It must have been pretty durable to survive this, and it must have. We're still here."

Princess Celestia was casting about with her horn, looking like a giant white bloodhound. "It's possible it didn't need to. The aura of Chaos magic is strong, but it's not centred inside the building. It seems to lead off towards the Everfree Forest."

"Yep, that about figures!" grumbled Rainbow Dash.

"Sister, thou do believe some villain absconded with it and set the place afire the place to cover his tracks?" Luna asked. "Then we must give chase with all haste!"

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash looked at the wrapped up foal Cadance was currently holding which had been saved from the fire, and raised an eyebrow. Carrot Cake should be a full-grown stallion, baker, and warden... er... employer of Pinkie Pie; and yet there he was as an infant. She chalked it down to more weirdness from the spell.<p>

All the now dry alicorns and founders were setting up a spell to better locate the perpetrator of the fire. All the alicorns except

the small filly which Rainbow had never seen before.

"Hello. So, who might you be?" The newly demummified pegasus asked.

"I'm Erroria," said the filly alicorn, "Do you know where my mother is?"

"Who is your mother, little one?" Quick Deployment asked after looking sadly at the wet remains of the bakery. She was used to working with a full team of mixed ponies to put out fires before they got this bad. Ideally, there would also be a few fully-laden rainclouds on hoof at the station.

Erroria thought for a little while before remembering, "My mother is Princess Skyla!"

Rainbow Dash spoke up, "And do you know your grandmother's name?"

The little alicorn filly thought for a moment. Then she pointed at the alicorn who was holding the foal, "Grandma Candy!"

Princess Cadance stopped rocking the foal as her eyes shrunk down to pinpricks.

Rainbow's wings fluttered as comprehension hit her, "Right. Princess Cadance's granddaughter. From the future. With everything else crazy around here, why not?"

"Any luck with tracing the statue?" the actual Celestia asked.

Luna turned around with a smile, "Yes."

\* \* \*

><p>It had finished the cookbook it had been compelled to write, and cast the appropriate protection spells on the tome. Fluttering out of the window, the fungal creature had skittered around the chaos outside, casually pulling information of the local language from the minds of several of the afflicted. That was when it overheard what was happening. There was a chance it could simply stop existing once the aetherial conflagration was through; and that was unacceptable.<p>

Once it was back at the bakery, the focal point statue was easy to locate. Snatching it up in its claws, the Mi-go fluttered out the window. A brief burst of personal power later, and everything in the room, except the cookbook, was on fire.

Half-flying, half scuttling in the wild magic forest with the statue, distracted by deflecting scrying spells; it never noticed that something was watching it.

Right up until a small furry foot impacted it in the back of its head. Its last thought before losing consciousness was that of confusion. How was it possible that it was hit with far more force than a bandana and war-paint wearing white rabbit had any right to wield?

\* \* \*

><p>"Quick, this way!" Luna took off in the Everfree Forest's direction, and her companions quickly followed suit.<p>

The group of ponies, increasingly consisting of alicorns, soon reached the forest's outskirts, where a... creature, part fungus, part shrimp and part... something, was rising from the dirt, hissing and swinging its tail at-

"Angel Bunny!" Nightmare Moon's gaze shifted mid-sentence. "Well, done, master ra- No! Bad bunny! I mean, no! Well done, Angel! I mean- Oh, wilt thou DECIDE, ALREADY!"

Angel Bunny gave the mare a confused look, but then puffed out his chest and adjusted his bandanna, after which he turned around to face the Mi-Go again " who was in the middle of trying to sneak away. For its trouble, it received a bunny kick to the shin " or... whatever that was " and doubled over backwards.

While Nightmare Moon was still bickering with herself, Lauren stepped forward and looked the strange creature over. "Nah, Lovecraftian horrors don't really fit a setting intended for young audiences."

Ignoring their creator's avatar's shadow's comment, Tia stepped forward and took a telekinetic hold of the statuette of Discord in the Mi-Go's claws " or better tried to, as suddenly the creature leapt up and whipped around, its wings buzzing for take-off.

\* \* \*

><p>Smart Cookie took a far more direct approach. "Clover, give me a boost!"<p>

She jumped, and a burst of magic flung her at the creature, dropping her on its back and bearing it to the ground. Lieutenant Pansy helped to pony-pile the thing, and a glow of magic pressed it against the floor, binding it to the ground as Clover added her efforts to restraining the thing.

"It's... still fighting!" She said. "Someone needs to destroy that statue now! Lauren, it's been a privilege and a pleasure. I hope the story you write brings joy to many fillies and colts. Princesses, I speak for us all when I say, thank you for continuing our work."

There was a chorus of agreement from the other two.

\* \* \*

><p>Lauren picked up the statue in her magic. She giggled for a moment as it hovered and glowed. "Hee hee, I'm Jean Grey! Alright, alright, don't give me that look. Time for serious-"<p>

"You would kill children?"

Lauren froze.

"I do not claim to find anything wrong in it," Chrksxcin continued

calmly. "But I know by your morality it is... odd. Destroying that statue would eliminate the personae that they have taken. The spawn, in particular, must concern you." It nodded toward Cadance, who was shielding her potential granddaughter and the regressed Carrot Cake with her wings. "And that is only amongst those you are aware of. Certainly, it would be far less... disturbing to leave it untouched?"

Rainbow snorted. "Hey, I turned back to normal easy peasy. It's not going to kill anypony if she-"

"You were still who you were," the Mi-Go countered, "if different in form. And perhaps it could be argued that these three will return, so all the replicas of truth will be sent back with only confusion. But what of you and I?" It turned back to Lauren. "We have no home. We are constructs. And how many in that town are constructs themselves? We will melt away. Do you truly want that much of reality to cease?"

The alicorn looked at the statue in her magical grip.

"...If I had a choice," she murmured, "I would take the constructed identities and make them separate bodies. But... I don't know how to do that. And if I could I would go out and ask every one of them if they would accept this. But... right here, right now... you and I are dangerous. In very different ways, yeah, but I don't..." She shivered. "I... I can't-"

Unexpectedly the statue sighed and snapped its fingers, metamorphosing into a multicoloured chimera with a grumpy frown. "Let me just cut off all the drama here: The spell only lasts until sunlight hits the costume. The statue never had anything to do with ending it. Oh, and the constructed personae are actually facets of the costume makers and will rejoin with their mind when they disappear. Now if you'll excuse me, I need to go see what chaos is happening in Ponyville. Ta-ta!" He walked off from the stunned onlookers.

Eventually Celestia facehooved. "Of course Discord would pull something like that. Gruuugh..."

"The solution is clear," Chrksxcin said calmly. "You and I merely need to avoid sunlight."

"Yeah, sure, you know what?" The red maned alicorn snorted. "You do that. I've just been put through an emotional wringer and then told it didn't even matter." She stomped off, muttering curses under her breath.

After a moment, Smart Cookie cleared her throat. "Does this mean we should let this thing go?"

\* \* \*

><p>"So it was true, after all," the false day alicorn said as she tested her wings after they started to brighten, realizing they had lost some sensibility and were much more difficult to move. "I'm just an illusion or an echo of a memory, am I not?"<p>

Luna and Celestia stopped and looked to the fake alicorn but she was

looking at the moon in the sky, her eyes with unshed tears. "Please, there's no need to hide it for me. I may recognize we are near the Everfree forest but there are so many things I don't understand about tonight, starting with both of you and this Ponyville. And since I'm just an illusion then it means it won't matter if I do this." Then the fake Celestia threw herself to Luna, crying and hugging her fiercely. "Lulu! I thought I'd never see you again, sister. I'm so happy to see you like this, so grown up!"

Luna just hugged and petted back.

Letting go slightly of Luna, the ensorcelled Celestia looked to the real one. "And you, real me, I don't know how much what's worth the opinion of your echo but thank you. I envy you so much but now I can disappear with no regrets."

Celestia just shook her head. "Don't thank me, I didn't do anything. It took a new set of Element bearers to help Luna."

"Then please give my thanks to them."

Luna contained her giggle into a lopsided smile, mimicking Celestia's own expression "Will do Celly, we promise."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well that was certainly interesting," Twilight muttered to herself. "It's definitely going in my... hmm.. top fifty weirdest loops. Well, at least it's over now."<p>

There was a knock on the library door. She stood up and walked over, opening it to find the worried faces of three cutie mark crusaders.

"Hey there girls! What's going on?"

Apple Bloom shifted a hoof, giving her an awkward glance. "You know how we... well, the founders made necklaces to boost their power?"

Twilight nodded. "Yeah... they didn't transform back to candy, did they?"

"...No," Scootaloo confirmed. "They didn't. But it gets weirder."

"Really? How?"

Sweetie Belle pulled the necklaces out of her saddlebags. "Well... when we wear them, we can hear... voices."

Raising an eyebrow, Twilight took the necklaces and ran a quick check over them for dangerous magic before slipping one on.

\_As far as I can tell, Cookie, that spell I had the alicorn cast that night dragged our souls forward after we died. No, Pansy, I don't think it's reversible! Oh, wait, I'm being worn. Hello there! I'm Clover, yes, that Clover, it's a long story...\_

\* \* \*



><p>AN:<p>

So, yeah, the guys on the thread came up with this idea, and...

>Note that there are two parts to this, and this is the second.<br>Also, to settle any possible confusion:

>Almost all of the costume personae were basically mental constructs in the heads of the costume wearers.<br>i.e. Fausticorn was actually Pinkie's (extremely good, but whimsical) imagining of what Fausticorn would be like as a real alicorn.

>The exceptions were the founders. Thanks to substantial wibbly wobbly chaos magic, there is a small but non-zero amount of Timey Wimey there. (Celestia's memory of them giving her a little hint was this-loop-only, but integrated seamlessly into the normal flow of history for the loop.)<p>

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## 37. Chapter 37

### 35.1

"Okay, I have a plan," Twilight said, looking around at the assembled loopers. "Well, more of a competition, really."

"Go on..." Dash said, ears perking up.

"Okay. Basically, we each take a turn handling all the big, important problems â€" solo. One Loop each." Twilight paused for effect. "And we're only allowed to use our base-line abilities, plus the powers from at most one other loop."

Spike raised a claw. "Does my size-shifting count?"

"Yes, but it's that or the Force. Not both."

"Oh, I think I see..." Rarity nodded. "You're trying to make it as equal as possible, dear?"

"Yeah. Not fair that I have an advantage just for having looped so much longer than the rest of you â€" well, except in that I might be quite a lot more sneaky."

"As if," Trixie said.

That caused everypony, -ling, -dragon, -griffin and even -bunny to give her an incredulous look. (Discord was drinking upside-down tea, and didn't react.)

"...I might not have been talking about myself," Trixie said, slowly and carefully.

Chrysalis hummed. "Do I count as automatically defeating myself?"

"Yes, but you don't get points for style unless you do it with style." Twilight shrugged.

"That's going to be fairly normal for our loops," Nyx said, nodding up at Luna. "Didn't you once take over the world, then give it back five minutes later 'cause there wasn't enough cheese?"

Luna made a small gesture with one hoof. "I do try."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right," Shining Armor said. "Here goes."<p>

Twilight grinned at him. "Go get 'er, B.B.B.F.F. I checked â€" she's not Awake."

"Good."

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon finished her speech, cackled a bit, and flared her wings for effect.<p>

Two guards steadied their spears and prepared to charge-

"Stand down, men," a voice said.

"I'll handle this."

"Oh?" she said, coming back to all fours and looking the unicorn stallion up and down, with a measuring glance. "One of Celestia's guard-whelps?"

"Captain Shining Armor, at her service." Shining saluted smartly.

"How touching," Nightmare Moon said, and launched a dark-bolt at him.

Something very peculiar happened, and a dark-bolt hit her in the side, with enough power to smash her off her hooves.

She came back upright with a fluid grace, and snarled. "What just happened?"

Shining smiled. "I couldn't possibly comment."

"Insolent-" Biting off the word harshly, she gathered more power and fired a spread of over a dozen seeker bolts, paying more attention this time. His horn was faintly glowing-

Seeker bolts hit her in all four kneecaps, then her flanks, both wings, and the last five shot holes through her mane.

"How did you do that?" she asked, flaring her wings and righting herself.

"Justice will be done," he replied enigmatically.

More magic. This time, it was a single overpowered electron ram.

Nightmare Moon was less surprised than she felt she should have been when an overpowered electron ram erupted from the stage beneath her.

\* \* \*

><p>Shining Armor checked his gleaming uniform, frowned, and rubbed at some of the brightwork for a moment to clear off a near-invisible stain.<p>

"Hm..."

Twilight looked at the two of them, then sidled over to her brother. "What have you been doing?"

Nightmare Moon said something unintelligible, and fell over.

"Justice field," Shining said, proudly. "I managed to get it to work just a few loops ago â€" so that's the one I'm using, by the way. Basically, it turns back any offensive act on the perpetrator."

"Huh." Twilight looked the exhausted, heavily bruised alicorn over. "Any limits?"

"Magic cost, immobility and that it doesn't discriminate," he answered promptly. "I'm working on them."

"Don't worry, Rarity!" shouted the non-Looping Spike, brandishing a shovel. "I'll save you!"

"Wait, Spike, don't-"

Spike hit Nightmare Moon square on the back of the head with the shovel, grinned proudly, and fell over.

"...oops," Shining said guiltily. "Perhaps I should have warned him..."

\* \* \*

><p>"I hate clever ponies," Discord mumbled, from his current form on the floor.<p>

He was a suit of armour, as it happened.

Shining shrugged. "Justice just is."

Twilight winced. "How long have you been waiting to tell that pun?"

"About five months."

"Aha!" Discord said abruptly, and turned back into his normal self.

"If I do things to you, it rebounds on me! So if I try to turn you into a draconequus, I'm back!"

"Yep." Shining nodded. "That is a disadvantage of the field, I will admit. It should be noted, however, that you can't actually do anything to anyone else while it's up."

Discord shrugged. "I can wait."

"I don't think you can, actually," Twilight replied. "I mean, you're seriously telling me you can sit there quietly and not do anything for five minutes?"

"Sure!" Discord said. "Just watch me!"

Brother and sister watched him.

Ten seconds later, he threw back his head, shouted "I can't take it any more!" and turned himself back into a statue.

"...that ended well," Shining muttered.

Twilight nodded, and flared her horn. The statue vanished.

"Where'd you put it?" Shining asked, dropping the field.

"Pinkie's room. I'm sure it'll sort itself out one way or another."

\* \* \*

><p>"Darling..." Cadence said, frowning into one of the side rooms. "Why is there a maid staring devotedly at her own reflection?"<p>

Shining shrugged.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, I give up. He's been doing the dark magic thing for ten minutes, and I can't see any difference in either of us."<p>

With a flash of magic, Shining dropped the justice field.

Sombra simply stood there, horn gently glowing.

Then started to snore.

Shining blinked.

"Oh, I see," Twilight said, nodding. "I think he just drained his own energy to the point he fell asleep."

Shining trotted over and poked the King's flank. No response.

"What should we do with him?"

Twilight thought. "I tend to put him in the cellars and lock the door, really... those doors have good locks."

\* \* \*

><p>35.2 (Mandemon)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>This new loop had been... strange. Twilight could not put her hoof on what was wrong, but something was. She had narrowed it down to Celestia and Pinkie Pie, who didn't seem to be themselves. Yet, she could not find any proof of that they were Awake or had been replaced by someone. This loops' memories provided no information that would differentiate from a vanilla loop.<p>

In the end, it didn't matter. Pinkie Pie might throw an extra party here and there, and Celestia might have been running few extra gambits. Nothing major, so she left it be. One major difference really in this loop was that her brother had embarked on some campaign that she could not find any information. At the moment, she was at the Grand Galloping Gala, having prevented the worst mistakes, and was letting the party go on smoothly. The orchestra was playing some music piece she was not interested in.

Then everything went to Tartatrus.

Pinkie Pie appeared on the window.

"THIS QUIET OFFENDS SLAANESH!" She shouted on top of her lungs, causing everyone to look at her. A massive tank burst through the wall, carrying equally massive speakers. "THINGS SHALL GET LOUD NOW!" A loud music began play from the speakers, pushing ponies back. She was about to do something about the matter, when she noticed something... interesting.

Celestia had just transported another massive set of speakers and DJ-equipment into the room. At the same time, Vinyl Scratch entered, listened for a moment before shrugging and moving to the DJ-booth and began to play her own music.

"YOU INTERRUPT!?" Pinkie Pie shouted in surprise

"You call that music? THIS IS HOW YOU DO IT!" Vinyl shouted back before starting to drown out Pinkies music. Pinkie Pie grinned and Twilight witnessed the begin of Grand DJ-Battle.

She walked to Celestia.

"Want to tell me me the truth."

"Maybe, maybe not?" Celestia merely said, grinning.

"That's Tzeentch, pink one is Slaanesh," A voice answered next to Twilight. She looked next to her and saw Chrysalis. "Name's Nurgle, how do you do?" Chrysalis, AKA Nurgle, asked, sipping some weird drink.

"Tzeentch? Slaanesh? Oh, the Chaos Gods. I guess that means Lemon Rush is somewhere too," Twilight said. Both Nurgle and Tzeentch gave a laugh.

"Lemon Rush? Is that what you call Leman Russ? Oh boy, he is not

going to hear end of this ever," Nurgle said, offering Twilight a drink.

"I would not drink the punch while Nurgle is here. There is probably AIDS in it," Tzeentch commented.

"You offend me, my friend. OF COURSE there is AIDS in there, Nurgle said, offended. "I just want to spread my love for people!" Twilight merely looked between two, before sighing.

"Anything else I should know?" she asked.

"Your brother is currently building a Skull Throne from the skulls of... well, pretty much anything," Nurgle said, earning a glare from Tzeentch. "What? Did I throw a wrench into your plans?"

"You're impossible," Tzeentch said.

"Oh, shut up, newbie, I have been existing much longer than any of you," Nurgle said, taking another sip.

"A Skull Throne?" Twilight asked, mentally cataloguing alternative Element bearers.

"He's Khorne. Khorne disapproves the lack of wanton violence." Tzeentch said, before smiling. "I wonder what he thinks once he realizes that things he has been hunting are actually merely illusions."

At the moment, Braeburn walked in.

"Been looking for you idiots," he said, walking up to Tzeentch and Nurgle.

"Empy, how you do? Had a fun loop?" Nurgle said in delight. "Come on, give me a hug!"

Some hours later Slaanesh and Vinyl Scratch were staring each other down. Both music systems had burned out, though "Empy", AKA Emperor, had mentioned that Slaneesh should have been able to fix his/her/its system, but apparently decided to be a good sport. The two brohoofed and swore to have another go in near future. After Vinyl left, Slaanesh walked to the group.

"Thanks Tze, that was fun!" she said. "I love these loops, you always find people who perfect their trade."

"Well, I did own you one for the aid pulling that prank on Chtulhu. The upstart needed a lesson."

Twilight just wished the loop would end soon. Having five gods running around with entirely different moral system was not going to be fun.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight walked to the garden, where she saw Tzeentch and Slaneesh watching over the statue of Discord.<p>

"Oh no, you are not waking him up. We had a deal, remember? No

funny business and I won't kick your butts," She said to the two Chaos gods.

"Funny business?" Tzeentch asked. "Oh, this isn't one of those. Just doing something she insisted."

"Oh come on Tzeensy, you know we have responsibility?" Slaanesh said.

"Chaos God of debauchery, excess, pleasure, pain and selfishness lectures me of responsibility. Clearly the multiverse has a sick sense of humour."

"Okay, time up. Please explain to semi-mortal what is going on?" Twilight managed to get out before the statue of Discord disappeared and confused Discord sat in it's place.

"Hmm? I'm free? FREE AT LAST! MUAHAAHAA!"

"Ahem, Discord?" Tzeentch said, causing Discord to freeze in his place, before his head turned 180 degree to meet the eyes of two Chaos Gods.

"Weird, I could have sworn I heard-" Slaanesh and Tzeentch abandoned their pony forms and took their "standardized" forms. "Oh... Hello?"

"Greetings. I am Tzeentch and this Slaanesh. We are here to teach you about how to do Chaos."

"What." Discord managed.

"You see, we think you are quite too... euclidean with your thing. Chocolate rain, really? What's the fun in that? Now, Chocolate that rains clouds that do not exist, while at the same time sing ode to Ice Cream, now there is the thing. Though you still need to make so that they occupy at least four locations at the same time," Slaanesh said. "Now, you come with me and I shall teach you a trick or two."

"HEY WAIT WHAT THE LET GO OFF ME STOP THAT-" Discord shouted, while being dragged by an ear by Slaanesh. Twilight merely stared at the spectacle in front of her, before turning to Tzeentch who once again took the form of Celestia.

"What."

"It's a long story. Slaanesh and Cegorach had this... fight over the soul of Harlequin. So, this one of the Slaanesh demons decides to give a try, in hopes of advancing in the ranks and tries to bring Slaanesh some drinks. Too bad I mixed them." Tzeentch winked. "So, after taking a sip, Slaanesh threw the remainders at Cegorach, both suddenly found themselves very hot and bothered and when two Gods love each others very much-"

"Skip please." Twilight made a face.

"Anyway, Cegorach came to me and asked me for a help to solve this mess, since I caused it. In exchange of some... shall we say, favours, I agreed to fool Slaanesh. So when Slaanesh comes, having

worst hangover \_ever, \_I took responsibility, making Khrono \_very\_ pissed for no good reason." Tzeentch gave a snicker at this. "Anyway, few millennium later we got this tiny Chaos God running around. However, Khrono got tired of the little runt after that incident with Slaanesh toys and his weapons and threw him into a rift in Chaos. Since then, for who knows reason, Slaanesh has claimed every single chaos elemental as her 'children' and wants to teach them. And somehow I am to help her. Because I am the Daddy. I guess it's one those... well, can't really say 'Lady things' but you know."

"Well, that explains... actually quite a lot."

"Yup."

"So, how much you are ready to pay to me that I don't reveal this to Slaanesh?" Twilight said with a grin. Tzeentch face fell.

"You wouldn't dare?"

"Try me."

The two stared each other for a moment, before Tzeentch gave a chuckle.

"Remind me to show you around the Black Library next time you visit."

\* \* \*

><p>35.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Four young children walked through the snowy pine forest, faces alight with wonder.<p>

This was really inside a wardrobe?

A purple flash lit the snow in front of them.

"Hello," said a strange being, like a horse but with both wings and a horn. "Sorry I took so long, I don't know my way around here very well... ahern."

The apparition fluffed her wings â€" for the voice was clearly that of a her â€" and cleared her throat again. "Welcome, human children. I am Twilight Sparkle."

"You're what?" asked the younger of the boys. "That's an absurd name."

Twilight Sparkle looked at him, then examined her own wings. "Fair enough. I'm a bit of an absurd being, by your standards. Anyway... as one of your number has already noticed, this world contains creatures with wit and voice, unlike your home. Long story short, I've finally got here, and I'm about to fix the weather."

She spread her wings, and light gathered itself about her horn.

The sun rose, and it felt like a warm balm. It reminded the children



more of midsummer than midwinter.

"That should do it," she muttered. "Now, where's Jadis... oh, where are my manners? There's a family of rather hospitable beavers around two hundred and fifty feet that way."

With that, the strange horse took to the air and winged away west.

The children exchanged looks.

"Well, I suppose we should have a look," the eldest finally suggested.

\* \* \*

><p>Jadis looked out from her sled. "Where is that Son of Adam?"<p>

There was a ping next to her.

"Yoink, yoink, yoink," a voice said, accompanied by three pops, and then a final loud pop sounded just as she turned with wand raised.

Something seemed wrong.

"...where did my reindeer and drover go?"

Gathering her power, Jadis prepared for battle. The response was near-instinct after a hundred years of ruling Narnia â€" for she was but one woman, be she ever so powerful, and Narnia did not take to the yoke well.

It was time for another sweep with the wolves, if some resistance movement or other had begun again...

At that point, a rock the size of a large house and travelling at two thousand metres per second arrived, which rather put an end to the plans Jadis was making in an emphatically final way.

\* \* \*

><p><em>And that should take care of that,<em> Twilight thought to herself.

Admittedly, she wasn't sure on whether Jadis was capable of coming back â€" the fourth book suggested that she never really entirely died even when eaten by a lion â€" but this should be good enough.

One thing Twilight was not willing to allow was for that woman to be capable of her usual magic. She didn't know, nor want to know, how the Deplorable Word worked, but since the last time Jadis had killed that spell everyone else in the same reality had died...

\* \* \*

><p>"...so, anyway, she's not coming back," Twilight explained to a number of large, well-armed monsters.<p>

"You have killed the White Witch?" a dwarf asked.

"Not entirely sure," Twilight admitted. "But no matter how powerful the witch, a meteorite between the shoulder blades will seriously cramp her style."

She paused. "Basically, at this point I think there's supposed to be a big battle, but I think we may as well just skip straight to the peace treaty. I'm going to go ahead and offer equal citizenship with a four year delay. Two years if one of the animals or other creatures not involved with Jadis vouches for you."

They mulled that over.

While they did, Twilight fired off another spell. "Mass stone to flesh!"

She consulted a mental check list. Sort out the winter, check... White Witch, check... her army, check... stoned statues, check...

\* \* \*

><p>"Anyway," Twilight said, standing on a dais in Cair Paravel a week later as the songbird orchestra died away. "I have no particular desire to make myself ruler over you all without consultation, and it is also known that prophecy says Narnia does well with human rulers..."<p>

She winked. "But I have certain issues with prophecy. So, I will introduce to you an idea with which these human children are well familiar. It is called a constitutional monarchy."

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh great Tisroc (may your name be blessÃ©d), we have the Narnian reply to your entirely reasonable suggestion that their barbarian nation submit to your blessed rule and become part of Calormene," a functionary droned.<p>

"Well, let's have it, you unworthy worm!"

The heavily bejewelled potentate read the scroll out loud.

"'From the United Kingdoms of Narnia, Archenland, Terebithia, and the Lone Islands to the Tisroc, Ruler of all Calormene.

Go outside on your balcony and look up...' What foolishness is this?"

The light from outside dimmed slightly and he looked out, and up at the sky. The reason for the darkness was obvious enough, a solar eclipse was hardly inconspicuous. White faced, he read the rest of the scroll.

'That's our answer. Any questions?

High King Peter, King Edmund, Minister of Justice, Queen Susan  
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Queen Lucy, Minister of Health

PP Secretary Twilight Sparkle, Royal Archivist and part time magical super-weapon.'

\* \* \*

><p>"Goodness," Susan said, as the four Pevensies picked themselves up from the beach. "So, we are back in Narnia."<p>

"It hasn't changed a bit," Lucy sighed, looking up at the castle of Cair Paravel towering over them.

"Are you sure?" Edmund asked, in a strange voice.

The others turned to see where he was looking.

"Oh," Peter said in a small voice, as two airships dumped ballast and set out east for the Lonely Islands.

"Hello!" Twilight said, cantering over from the beach stairs. "Sorry, I should have been here sooner. And sorry for the culture shock, as well â€" I'm afraid we rather kept inventing things without you. There's good news, though â€" you're not the only humans here any more. Come along, the Parliament will want to meet you!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that was... exhausting," Peter said, flopping down on the grass of the tourney field.<p>

"Who was that you were fighting?" Edmund asked.

"Caspian, of course." Peter rolled his eyes. "This new royal family is like the French Kings from our world â€" they always have the same name."

"I like him," Susan said, looking across the field. "Much nicer than that Rabdash fellow from last time. Oh â€" where is the archery tournament?"

"The next field over, I think," Edmund replied promptly. "Lu already went over there."

\* \* \*

><p>A boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb â€" and please do not laugh, though he is used to it â€" hurried towards a cave as rain began to fall.<p>

With a loud pop, Twilight appeared in the valley. "Oh, hello! Sorry, we haven't met. My name's Twilight... sorry I couldn't meet you sooner, I'm afraid there was a terrible argument going on with some giants."

Eustace stared at her.

Twilight waved, blushing. "Yes, I know, it can be a bit overwhelming. Anyway. I should warn you that sleeping on a dragon's hoard â€" like the one in the cave â€" will turn you into a dragon. It can be undone, but... I just thought I'd warn you. Later!"

She vanished with another pop.

Eustace sat down just inside the cave, and thought carefully.

On the one hand, he was quite overwhelmed by this Narnia place. From the strange, creaking paddle wheels and sails of the Dawn Treader â€” and should those really go together? - to the casual acceptance amongst the crew of that ship that a phoenix sat under the boiler and three naiads controlled the sails, Narnia was very foreign to his picture of how the world should work.

On the other hand, dragons were pretty cool.

\* \* \*

><p>With a series of skittering splashes, a lot of dragon landed in the surf.<p>

"Hullo!" he said, sculling over to the frigate as it rode at anchor. "Flying is super!"

"Is that Eustace?" Caspian asked, staring over the starboard paddle.

"Yes." The dragon waved. "It's a little strange, but I like lizards. Would anyone like a ride?"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight ticked two more boxes on her checklist.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, so that's how it works!" Twilight said, slamming a book shut. "Oog. Well, at least that explains a few things..."<p>

She lit her horn, and got casting.

\* \* \*

><p>An extremely irritated-looking mouse glared balefully up at Twilight.<p>

"Oh, don't give me that," Twilight admonished. "I did revive you... eventually... and given what you were going to do I think I was rather nicer than you deserve."

The mouse flipped a claw at her.

"None of that." Twilight spun the cage and gave its occupant a look. "Or can you honestly tell me you wouldn't cast the Deplorable Word the moment you had a functioning voicebox?"

Jadis the otherwise-normal mouse (who was most definitely not a Mouse) squeaked something which was probably her best attempt at obscenity.

\* \* \*

><p>"See the lantern?" the lady of the green kirtle said, as thick,

sweet smoke wove around the heads of the friends. "The sun is just what you think of when you think of a big lantern. There is only the lantern, there is no real sun."<p>

Eustace nodded heavily. "That's logical. What about the flying unicorn?"

The lady of the green kirtle frowned. "Er... a big pony?"

"Little pony, thank you," Twilight said, walking in the door and coughing. "Faugh, this is awful stuff."

She pointed a hoof at the lady, clearing the air with two powerful wingbeats. "You lot. People like you are why running this place is a full time job, I swear."

The lady hissed, and turned into a giant serpent.

"Now that's mature." Twilight's horn flared, and both serpent and alicorn vanished.

\* \* \*

><p>With a colossal splash, fifty feet of serpent landed in the sea to the east of Dragon Island.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight ported back into the Lady's chambers. "Okay, done. Anyone who doesn't want to get straight back to Narnia, please leave the room now."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>With a certain proprietary pride, Twilight watched the pillar of flame climb skywards from Cape Paravel.<p>

Certainly, Celestia might have taught her, and she might have had experience with Equestria, but this was her first time with responsibility for an entire country that she hadn't had the experience with being a subject of first.

All things considered, a space program was a pretty good achievement for a first try.

\* \* \*

><p>35.2 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy closed her eyes for a moment, flinching at the sounds coming in the window, then her expression firmed.<p>

\_I'm not just cowardly Fluttershy. Not any more.\_

She pushed off the covers and got out of bed.

"Angel? Be a dear and ask the ponies trying to destroy the town with pure music to turn it down a bit?"

Several lapine stomps tracked across the floor, followed by a bang which shook the house.

The pegasus smiled gently. Angel was such a grumpy bunny sometimes.

"Okay, who's hungry?"

"Not me, thanks," the pelican said.

Several hummingbirds started piping for nectar, speaking over one another in their high voices.

"All right, I'll get to you in a minute," Fluttershy said, rapping the ground with her hoof and causing a vine to burst forth. Moving at walking pace, it spread over the eaves of her house before budding and flowering in a pulse of honeysuckle scent.

Most of the animals stared at her. (The hummingbirds, more pragmatic or just hungrier, got stuck in.)

She waved back with a broad smile, and began boosting her herb garden.

Druids were really good at gardening.

\* \* \*

><p>Whistling an old song Spike had taught her once about a harper and her dragonets, Fluttershy packed together some lunches for whenever they were needed in the coming loop.<p>

As she rolled up a pancake with slices of cucumber and lilypad, there was a knock at the door.

"Coming," she said quietly, putting the food down and trotting over.

Upon opening the door, she saw a bright yellow earth pony colt flanked by two adorably fuzzy wolf cubs.

She blinked. "Is that..."

"Little mother!" The colt crouched down and launched himself at her, throwing his forelegs about her neck. The two wolves joined him, and all four went over in a tangle of limbs.

Fluttershy smiled. "Lemon, it's good to see you."

"And you, little mother." Lemon Rush â€" normally Leman Russ, primarch of the Space Wolves â€" clambered off her, and looked around her house. "It's been too long since I've been here."

The pegasus rolled over and pushed herself upright, then nuzzled him. "I haven't seen you in too long either, Lemon. How are you?"

Rush sighed. "Well, we've picked up a lot more loopers recently. Father, or the Emperor, or whatever his real name is, started looping a few thousand ago... and all that's done is make it

weirder."

Fluttershy made some tea. Black for Rush; herbal for her; and Freki and Geri got gravy. (She'd designed it herself. The wolves certainly seemed to give it their approval.)

"Thank you," Rush said with a grateful smile, taking a sip. "Nobody does it like you do. Anyway, at least one of my brothers started looping soon afterwards â€" do you remember Vulkan?" Fluttershy nodded, and he went on. "That was a huge help. And I needed it..."

After a long sigh, and some more tea, he looked up.

"The four Chaos Gods started looping."

The gentle pegasus winced.

"I know! Sure, they're not nearly as bad, now... I think they're suffering the reverse version of... what did your friend call it, Sakura syndrome?"

Fluttershy nodded. "Reverse version? So they're just... bored of all the chaos?"

A shrug. "Basically. Or at least mass-death chaos. The galaxy's a safer place, now, but it's also a lot harder to keep track of â€" and when you consider normal for us, that's saying a lot..."

Freki padded over to Fluttershy and gave her a pleading look.

"Okay," she said, and mixed up another two cups.

Once that was done, she smiled. "I have something... nice, to show you."

She blurred, and once that was done an adult wolf stood where she had.

Rush looked the wolf up and down, slowly and carefully. "Little mother?"

The wolf nodded.

"...that's so cool! Come on, boys, playtime!"

Freki, Geri and Rush all pounced.

Fluttershy skipped back, letting the wolves miss, then caught Rush's mane gently between her teeth and plopped him on the ground again.

"You're not winning that easily!" Rush laughed, spinning to face her.

\* \* \*

><p>Angel Bunny tromped home.<p>

On hearing the barks and laughter coming from inside his nominal owner's cottage, he decided she didn't really need to learn about his failure just yet.

(It was surprisingly hard to make ponies turn their music down when the music made the ground act like a springy trampoline.)

Maybe the manticore would be up for a thumb-wrestle...

\* \* \*

><p>35.1 continued<p>

"Are you sure you'll be okay with this, Gilda?" Twilight asked quietly. "I'm sure none of us would blame you if you took a raincheck for the next few loops and worked with Dash to build something useful."

Gilda shrugged, full of bravado â€" which both knew at least partly feigned. "I got this."

"Sure?" Twilight double-checked.

"Sure."

"Okay, then." Twilight nodded. "But, you know, introduce yourself to Dash first, we've got a good few hours before the Summer Sun celebrations start."

"Good idea." Gilda looked up, eyes flicking across the sky, then took wing.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, slowpoke!"<p>

Dash jerked awake. "Wha-"

A familiar griffin flew into sight. "Hi, Dash. Bet you didn't expect to see me around here!"

"Gilda!" Dash's face lit up. "Celestia's muzzle, I haven't seen you in... must be \_years\_. How are you doing?"

"Eh, you know me." Gilda flared her wings, and landed on Dash's cloud. "Snorting fire at every pony who pisses me off, mostly. What about you?"

Dash grinned. "I'm in charge of the weather around here."

"Well..." Gilda looked around, contemplatively. "That explains all the clouds."

"Hey, I could clear those in ten seconds flat!" Dash protested. "It's totally a legit use of time to rest up. Fliers need their rest!"

"I'm sure." Gilda flicked her tail. "Hey, watch this. Some pony taught it to me a while back."



She flicked her tail again, and a cloud fell in half.

"Cool, huh?"

"What the..." Dash blinked, and focused. No matter whether she was looping or not, the blue pegasus was an expert at practical applications of weather magic. "Was that... some kind of air blade?"

"Basically," Gilda agreed easily. "Anyway, enough about me. So, who else is awesome around here?"

\* \* \*

><p>"...the night will last forever!"<p>

Gilda raised a clawed foot. "Point of order."

"What?" Nightmare Moon turned to face her.

"Yeah. Well, I'm basically wondering... if it's eternal night here, what does that mean for the griffins?"

"...I do not follow, subject," the dark alicorn said.

"I'm a free citizen of the Gryphon Lands, thank-you-very-much," Gilda corrected. "Anyway, the griffins are, what, well into the twilight zone. So, if you're going to just have a bit of libration going on, then we'll be perfectly happy with that. Just a suggestion."

"What is libration?" Nightmare Moon asked, puzzled.

Gilda waved her feet in the air. "Basically, it's when a world sort of... wobbles, I think? Kind of like a drunk bloke heading back to his house. He always faces towards it, but sometimes he's looking nearly straight at it and sometimes he's nearly staring into a shop only two doors down from where he's walking. So, for us, it'd mean the sun goes up, and then goes down again on the same side. Nice and regular."

"...I may choose to ignore that," the Nightmare said, with a flip of her wings. "What concern are the Gryphon Lands to me?"

"We-ll," Gilda said, cricking her neck and taking a deep breath, "I couldn't possibly comment."

Her tail lashed for a moment, then described a lazy arc behind her.

Nightmare Moon winced, and the moon wobbled a bit. "What did you just do?"

Gilda shrugged, her tail swirling again. "Nothing."

The alicorn looked closer, still frowning as she held her moon steady. "Why has your coat gone white?"

Then her eyes flashed with dark lightning. "Lap-cat of Celestia!"

Gilda grinned. "Oh, hey, a challenge. Official and everything."

As a magical glow built on Nightmare Moon's horn, Gilda whipped her tail across in a flat arc. Something seemed to linger behind the path it took-

-and, with the sound of clashing metal, Nightmare Moon's horn glow vanished.

"What?"

"It's called a power slash," the griffin informed her opponent. "Hey, watch!"

The little tuft of fur at the end of her tail flickered in four distinct arcs, and the stage fell in under Nightmare Moon in a neat square.

Startled, the returned goddess fell into the basement in a cascade of splinters.

"Hey!" Gilda shouted into the hole, conscious of the awed gazes of about half of Ponyville. "Do you surrender yet?"

She danced back from the hole with wings flaring. "Whoa, guess not!"

With a crash, Nightmare Moon emerged from beneath the floor, horn blazing. "Insolent, insignificant little \_sparrow!\_"

Then all her feathers came off in a cloud of cut pinions.

Gilda winced at the \_thud\_.

"What about now?"

A cloud of dark, starry smoke boiled up through the hole.

One final tail-movement. This time, a five hundred and forty degree spiral arc. As she finished it, Gilda reared up and beat her wings once.

Sudden, gale-force winds blew down the back wall and carried the cloud with them into a nearby house.

The cloud hit with an incongruous \_thud.\_

As the bamboozled Empress of Darkness coalesced, Gilda strode over and grabbed her helm. "Yoink."

Turning to the stunned ponies, she put it carefully on her head.

"Hey, this makes me the ruler of the night, now, right? ...wait, hang on, or is that a thing only griffins do?"

\* \* \*

><p>Laughing and joking, Gilda walked slowly back to Twilight's house in the gathering dawn, with a dozen or so ponies asking questions of her almost non-stop.<p>

"Hey, it's Gryphononic law, I thought she was challenging me to a duel! Well, she kinda was â€" just, less duel more splat. Or so she thought..." a wink.

This time, Rarity asked a question.

"The coat? Heh, bit of a trick I picked up. It's just when I do the painting thing with my tail, though, not sure all the details. It looks cool, though. Come on, guys, I need my beauty sleep."

Reluctantly, the crowd drew back, and Twilight let Gilda in through the door.

The griffin didn't look back until the door was closed.

"Are the curtains shut?" she asked quietly.

"Yep." Twilight nodded.

"Good." Gilda flopped onto a couch.

"...bucking \_haybale\_, I must be crazy..." she said, in a distant tone. "I just fought an honour duel with an alicorn princess..."

Sweat was running down her face, and her forelegs were trembling as reaction set in.

"I did just do that, right?" she checked. "It wasn't just some crazy dream?"

"No, it was pre-tty cool," Twilight confirmed. "I didn't realize you got the Brush powers working, that was great!"

"Cool. Hey, can I get a flannel?"

Twilight pulled one down from her bathroom and wetted it.  
"Here."

"Thanks." Gilda rubbed her eyes, then her beak. "Ah, I needed that."

There was a silence.

"...you know, it wasn't all bravado," the griffin said in a quiet voice.

"Oh?"

"All that posturing. Pretending I didn't have a care in the world." Gilda shrugged. "Partly it was â€" Dash and I are like that â€" but not all of it. I was..." Gilda's voice husked for a moment.  
"Terrified. I had a plan, but..."

She rubbed the flannel over her face again.

"Right. Basically, I had to keep her off balance. I'm not bad, I like to think, but I couldn't beat an alicorn princess in an actual fight."

Twilight nodded along.

"So, I relied on the brush stuff being too... different, really, for her to understand."

"I know what you mean," Twilight assured her. "I've used it a lot. The trick is to not let the enemy refocus â€" make sure they're trying to work out what your terms even are, not let them realize they could ignore them."

"Exactly." Gilda took a deep breath. "Phew. Okay, I'm hungry. Any ideas?"

"I think I can do an omlette," Twilight said, already flipping through files on a PADD. "I learned because it's just polite to give human visitors... well, recognizable food..."

She paused. "Oh, just so you know, we generally consider it impolite to seriously damage town property unless necessary. But, then, we actually wreck the place once every six \_months\_ on average, so no harm done. Just something to remember."

"Sure." Gilda nodded. "I can try â€" well, that or work on Rejuvenation. Anything else?"

"Learn a defensive technique. Seriously, you're going to \_need\_ one if you keep going up against alicorns..."

\* \* \*

><p>35.4<p>

"So, how is this... gonna work?" Applebloom asked, prodding her new necklace.

\_Hay if I know.\_ Cookie sent a mental version of a shrug. \_Last we remember was basically dying of old age, and then here we were. Don't ask us...\_

"Right." Applebloom looked up at Twilight. "Are they gonna start Looping?"

Twilight winced. "I doubt it â€" not on their own, anyway. I mean, they don't have anypony to be in a normal loop..."

\_Loops?\_ Cookie's mental tone sharpened with interest. \_What are 'loops'?\_

Earth pony filly and sometimes-alicorn librarian mare exchanged a look.

"'Bloom, can you go get your friends and their, er... new... friends? I think it'd be easier to explain all this just once."

\* \* \*

><p>"...so, anyway," Twilight finished, clicking her slide projector past the end of the carousel, "that's the jist of it."<p>

The Crusaders snored.

"It wasn't \_that\_ boring," she said, sounding slightly hurt.

\_No, it wasn't,\_ Cover broadcast. \_But I think they've heard it all before...\_

\_What does this mean for us?\_ Pansy asked, getting right to the heart of the matter.

"I honestly don't know." Twilight frowned. "My daughter's about the only being I know of who loops despite not having existed during the core loop â€" for her it's kind of a loophole, because she's an actualized alter ego... anyway. From what I know of the matter, you might just... stop existing once the Loop ends."

The three disembodied founders conversed amongst themselves for quite some time.

\_You are sure that a looper must inhabit their own body?\_ Cookie said, carefully.

"Well... we've never known it to happen otherwise, except in particularly strange fused loops..." Twilight rubbed her chin. "Sometimes we turn up as other kinds of body, or even in one another's bodies, but then we're established as loopers..."

\_And no non-looper may \_share the body of a looper?\_ continued the earth pony, methodically working down a mental list.

"Aha!" Twilight's eyes lit. "I may have something!" She cleared her throat, and held out her hoof. "OWL?"

A bracelet appeared around her lower leg.

Stand by, ready.

"This is Owl, I picked him up in a Nanoha Loop. He's an Intelligent Device, technically bonded to what may be my soul â€" I've lost the bracelet to a Loop two or three times, before, and it's always been the same Owl once I reconstructed another one."

\_Ah. Yes, that does have potential.\_

Cookie paused, and Clover took up the slack. \_How does one bind an Intelligent Device?\_

"I can do it fairly easy, providing both halves of the bond are willing and I have the devices..." Twilight said, thinking. "I did it for Trixie and her Device, Loki, and that seems to have stuck. Yes, I should be able to."

\_Good,\_ Pansy commented. \_Now, er... how long until they wake up?\_

\* \* \*

><p>35.5 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...and after we managed to find away around the spider eggs, we stuck the key in the chest... and it turned out to be the wrong key! Daring basically just threw up her hooves and dragged the entire chest out of the ruins all the way to Fillydelphia." Trixie grinned, leaning forward. "Guess what was inside."<p>

Chrysalis tapped her chin. "I'm thinking... another riddle map?

"Yep! Another riddle map!" The unicorn laughed as she leaned back in her chair. "All that for another bucking riddle map, but that's not the best part. The temple that riddle map led to had been excavated and thoroughly plundered DECADES ago!"

"Oh \_no,\_" Chrysalis gasped dramatically, her eyes wide as she brought her hooves to her mouth. "Dealing with bureaucracy?! That had to be terrible for her!"

"Ha, yeah. She was lucky I was around." Trixie sighed. "That was... a completely crazy loop. And that was before Discord got involved." She let her eyes drift across the plates of hay fries to the black pegasus sitting across from her. "What about you? What's your craziest Loop story?"

Chrysalis rubbed the back of her head. "Well... I'm still fairly new as a looper, and most of my loops tend to start baseline. I mean, I don't invade Canterlot, I usually go straight to Celestia and negotiate an integration, but aside from minor differences in how ponies view changelings it's all mostly routine."

"Oh come on, you've got to have something!"

"...there was this one loop where Celestia was the only pony. Everyone else was secretly a changeling." The black pegasus rolled her eyes. "I know it sounds a lot less dramatic then your Daring Do loop, but with all the hives and the subterfuge it was just... wild. Even after I made peace with Celestia..." She shook her head. "Honestly, Twilight had to keep a chart on her at all times to keep track."

"Twilight Sparkle was actually confused?"

"Yeah."

"Wow, that... wow." Trixie shook her head. "That had to have been stressful. Still, all changelings, huh? Shape Twist must have been popular!"

Chrysalis blushed a bit. "You... know about that?"

"My special talent is stage magic. Illusions aren't \_quite\_ the same as shapeshifting, but..." Trixie shrugs. "I think I'd be fairly good at it."

"I'm not, actually. I can do ears and tail, but... Biology is hard." Chrysalis shrugged. "Well, nonmagical biology. The more magical a creature is, the easier it is for me to pulse into it. Unless it's unstable magic. It's really all rather complex."

Trixie tapped her chin thoughtfully. "Well... what if you pumped the

aura of an ordinary animal with magic? That would make it easier to read, at least..."

"...That could work," Chrysalis mused. "I mean... I don't know what would happen, but... yeah, that's an idea. I'll run it by Fluttershy when we have our next practice session."

"Fluttershy the werewolf... Werepone? Ponewolf? I mean, it kind of makes sense, but it's so unexpected."

"Apparently it's a fused loop thing... I still haven't had one of those. Mostly just variant loops."

Trixie chuckled and shook her head. "Trust me, it can get weird. Twilight's mentioned this one loop where she was a pet and a secret agent at the same time--"

"Ahem." The waiter walked up. "I am afraid, madams, that the restaurant is closing."

Trixie glanced at the clock. "Wow, is it that late already? Huh. Well, um... this was fun, actually. I wouldn't mind doing it again... same time next week?"

Chrysalis smiled. "Sure. Why not."

\* \* \*

><p>35.6 (Nikas)<p>

Diamond Tiara looked from the talking ferret to the jewel turned staff he gave her, to the surprised looking Cutie Mark Crusaders.

The first was only... mildly strange; he did come out of the Everfree, after all. The second was a bit more head turning, but only because of a magical artifact responding to an Earth Pony. The third was jaw dropping, because the surprise was not "What the Buck is That?" The looks of the CMC were more along the lines of "Why the Buck is that Here?"

She sighed. "You girls know what this is." It was in no way a question. "Something from another Loop I wasn't in?"

Applebloom shook her head. "Not us personally. Miss Twilight was in some loops like that."

Both fillies ignored Scootaloo's muttered "Be easier to count places she hasn't been."

Her fellow Earth Pony nodded. "Anyway, she made us something along those lines, well the reasons are involved and we have a rampaging magical artifact to capture and seal first."

Diamond Tiara nodded as the Crusaders produced magical devices and why the hay did they name them for the Founders, anyway? Was it the three-friends-three-tribes thing? "Right, any pointers?"

Sweetie Belle piped up. "Well, Equestrian Magic runs on Friendship. Mid Childa Magic runs on Befriending. At least you have the right

coat colour for it."

Diamond Tiara shook her head wondering why she could hear the capitalization of that word. "Right, more stuff to explain later. HEY UGLY, STEP AWAY FROM THE SWEET SHOP!"

\* \* \*

><p>35.7 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight walked in, giving Macintosh a weary look. "Thanks for setting up the bar early this loop."<p>

"Not a problem." The stallion slid her a mug. "Let me guess: something about yer last loop got under yer skin?"

"Oh yeah." Twilight had never been one to quaff back cider; even now, it was just a small gulp. "Strange thing is, I didn't pick up on it. Thought it was a normal lonely loop. I went the route of, well, basically being Pinkie Pie the Nerd. It's a lonely loop thing." She shrugged. "Nothing seemed off at all, and then the wedding rolled around."

Macintosh sighed. "Did Cadance turn out ta have been a changeling all along again?"

"Oh, no. No, Cadance was still in the caves." Twilight laughed wryly. "Thing is, she got replaced before Shining even started dating her."

"...what."

"Yep!" The unicorn took a sip of her cider. "Poor ol' Cadance, trapped in there almost a year, while Chrysalis fell in love with my brother. Neither of them were awake, so that's something, but when I brought her to the wedding she was completely shocked. Apparently she only thought of Shining as a brother."

"Well... Shining can't have taken that well."

"Oh it gets better." Twilight finished off her cider. "Cadance took the opportunity to propose to her real true love... who, it turns out, was me! I mean, that came completely out of nowhere! And, somehow, she'd gotten it in her head that alicorns were above good and evil. Actually, all of Canterlot thought that alicorns could do whatever they wanted, and Chrysalis managed to get them to forgive her for invading â€" forgive her for INVADING! Just because she claimed to be a cursed alicorn." The unicorn shook her head with a sigh. "I mean that's true in some loops, but not that one..."

Macintosh chuckled to himself as he refilled the mug. "Begging yer pardon, Twi, but most o' Canterlot lack brains in certain ways."

"Ha. You have no idea... apparently, Celestia had spent so much on the wedding that the nobles insisted SOMEBODY get married. Me and Shining kept trying to pass the buck to each other for a day or two



before I just went alicorn myself and got you and Cheerilee on the pulpit." She paused. "Um, no offence..."

"Not awake, not me." The stallion nodded amicably. "Ah'm assumin' ya checked first. Did things cool down after that?"

"Oh I wish." Twilight sipped her cider. "Chrysalis and Cadance kept trying to seduce Shining and me... they started giving each other tips..."

\* \* \*

><p>35.6 continued (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Uh... Apple Bloom? You're talking to Smart Cookie again."<p>

"Yeah, so?"

"I... really really really don't want to sound rude here, but from what I know of Intelligent Devices..." Diamond Tiara searched for the right words. "She's not really, you know, autonomous, right? She's a computer, not..."

Apple Bloom stared at her for a while. Suddenly she sighed. "Riiiiiight, ya'll weren't Awake fer that first Nightmare Night loop. Um, how do Ah put this... this is Smart Cookie. The founder."

"...what."

"See, Cubic Zirconia there, she was made as an Intelligent Device, but..." The farmer filly rubbed the back of her head. "Well... see, there was this one loop where we decided ta dress up as the Founders fer Nightmare Night... but, um, because of magic we actually became the founders. And then, because of magic, the founders kind of stayed around after the costume thing was finished, only they were necklaces... We weren't sure if they'd start looping..."

Diamond Tiara shook her head in disbelief. "That has got to be the third weirdest loop I've heard of. Okay, so you guys have... actual people there, fine."

Apple Bloom narrowed her eyes. "It's probably wise ta treat all A.I.s as people, least when yer first meeting them. Ah mean, it's really fifty fifty, and being polite makes it less likely they'll try ta overthrow 'organic masters' and really just go for equality."

"Alright, alright... Um... Zirconia, do you think of yourself as a person?"

The staff in Diamond Tiara's hooves beeped and flashed for a bit.

"That so doesn't clear things up at all." Smart Cookie and Cubic Zirconia flashed erratically for a few seconds. Diamond Tiara rolled her eyes. "Yeah, yeah, laugh it up..."

After a moment, she turned to Apple Bloom. "So, uh... what were you two talking about anyway?"

To her surprise, the yellow filly glanced away quietly. "Ah'd really rather not say." Smart Cookie beeped. "No, it's... it's personal."

"Apple Bloom..."

An aggravated, resigned sigh escaped Apple Bloom's lips. "We were talking bout her family, okay?"

"...Alright...?"

The two of them sat there for a while.

"...It's not bad fer her," Apple Bloom explained eventually. "She was literally pulled from her deathbed to the... to our time, before we made her a device, she had all her affairs in order. It's just..." She sighed, shaking her head. "How many loops have Ah gone like this? The Apple family, well, we pride ourselves on family. And here Ah am, stuck right at the cusp of puberty. Sometimes Ah'm older... sometimes Ah'm a LOT older, like Ah'm where Granny Smith would be, normally. And those loop memories give me husbands and children and Ah know, right when the loop resets, there Ah am again being a blank flanked filly."

"...Maybe you'll have kids someday," Diamond Tiara offered. "I mean, Nyx-"

"Loophole. She already existed, just... not like that. The loops consider Nyx and Nightmare Moon ta be the same pony..." Apple Bloom shrugged. "Best Ah can really hope for is living vicariously through Cookie's past."

"Oh... that... that sucks." Diamond Tiara shook her head. "Wow. I never even thought of that!"

"That's why we can't have kids in th' loops," Apple Bloom explained. "They might not loop and... well, whoever's running this thing isn't that cruel." She stood. "Anyway, Ah'm feeling pissy. Wanna go find some monsters ta befriend?"

"Sure, why not."

\* \* \*

><p>35.8 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Hey mom, Luna's not Awake this loop so I thought I'd just drop by to..."

Nyx trailed off as her eyes landed on the unicorn who was... sitting at the kitchen table, a steaming teacup in front of her, staring out the window.

"...Mom? You okay?"

Twilight Sparkle took a breath... and slowly let it out. "Hmmm."

Well... I'm just a little melancholy."

The black alicorn trotted up to the table, sitting in the chair next to her. "Want to talk about it?"

"...no." Twilight sighed. "But it'll probably help... last loop, I Awakened in my childhood. See, I wanted to see if I could get a different cutie mark, something other than magic as a special talent. I had to bribe Dash not to do a rainboom... Lived in Canterlot for a while. A long while..."

She sipped her tea.

"Nothing was working, so I figured; why not make a crusader group all my own? I had my two blank flank friends, we had an adventure..." A small giggle escaped her lips. "Turns out Friendship is Magic. I got the same mark I always get..."

Nyx tilted her head. "So... you're upset you got the same mark?"

"No. I was upset, but Fleur and Flash... they didn't understand why. They just kept pestering and asking until finally... I... I told them."

Her daughter took in a sharp breath. "Oh... oh, I... I'm sorry-"

"You know, if you're awake the loop's end is really beautiful. Terrible, but beautiful." Twilight nodded to herself. "They were so afraid... I invited them over for one last tea party. They'd never told anyone else, of course. I... I lied to them, told them they were loopers, that they might be Awake next time..." She sighed. "This morning I arranged to 'meet' Fancypants, over a little matter at Celestia's school. Fleur... she didn't recognize me. I don't know where Flash Sentry is now, but... he promised to send me a letter if..."

Without even a second thought, Nyx nuzzled her mother.

\* \* \*

><p>35.9 (misterq)<p>

"The night shall last forever!" the statement was followed by maniacal laughter on the stage. It was another weird loop, Twilight thought. Instead of Nightmare Moon, it was Tirek that came back from being banished by the two pony princesses.

"Um, is it my turn to handle this?" Fluttershy asked.

Her purple unicorn friend nodded, "Sure, it's all yours. Have fun."

The yellow pegasus nodded from under her mane, "Alright. I've got to go, um, train."

As she flew off, Twilight thought she had detected a hint of a mischievous smile on the reserved animal caretaker, druid, and fellow looper.

Instead of doing anything herself, she just stood off to the side with the remaining elements of harmony as the evil centaur gloated and monologued about his plans.

Suddenly, two green vines burst from one of the walls. They sped along the stage, passing Tirek on either side, before leaving through the far wall.

"What manner of trickery is this?" the villain looked down carefully at the new plants.

Twilight stared at the vines, "Those almost look like.."

That was when a smiling locomotive-riding Fluttershy crashed through the wall at full speed and hit Tirek with the Ponyville Express.

"Tracks," Twilight finished in a deadpan.

Pinkie Pie looked up with a smile.

"I get it now! She had to go 'Train'!" the pink pony started giggling until she fell down on the floor from laughter.

Fluttershy landed next to a twitching hoof sticking out of a pile of rubble.

"Now no more talk about bringing eternal night or ruling the world, mister!"

"This is only a minor setback! I will... what is that?" the voice from inside the rubble pile sounded confused, "Wait, no wait! They're everywhere!"

Vines had started to enter into the small cracks in the pile of debris. A lot of vines.

"Now what was that about giving up on your evil plans?" Fluttershy asked patiently.

Tirek growled with signs of struggle.

"Don't make me send in the squirrels," the yellow pegasus said, adding, "and I know a lot of squirrels."

The struggling stopped, "... I'll behave."

"That's better," Fluttershy smiled.

"So, why a train, of all things?" asked Rarity.

Fluttershy just gave a shy smile. "I like trains."

\* \* \*

><p>35.10 (part Madfish)<p>

Twilight knocked on her assistant's door.

"Come in," Spike called, and she pushed it open.

Inside was... well, a mess. Notes, sketches, designs and even a few mathematical formulae covered the desk, the bed, three walls, and... yes, there were a few clipped to the ceiling as well.

"You look busy," Twilight said lightly.

"I am," Spike replied. "Hey, is Cadance awake this Loop?"

"Nope," Twilight shook her head. "Why?"

"Wedding planning." Spike moved a few sketches and sat down.

"Ouch." Twilight winced.

"Yeah." Spike shrugged helplessly. "I want it to be the best I can make it... she deserves it. But... well, we've seen things which would make the most jaded pony just stand and stare. How can I measure up to that?"

Twilight thought for a good long while.

"I admit, I'm not all that good at this," she said, slowly, "but it seems to me you have two options."

"Two's better than none," Spike said, clapping his hands. "Let's hear them."

"Okay. Option one is that you two go and have a private wedding." Twilight smiled gently. "I may not be good at this kind of thing, but I've seen the two of you together â€" she wouldn't care if you got married in an epic cathedron or a... a hedge, really."

Spike nodded.

"The other option is to ask for help. From all of us, not just Cadence and I. If you're planning to wait until we're all here at the same time, then do â€" I'll let the others know you're after help when I see them."

"I see." Spike nodded again, and frowned. "I... don't know," he confessed. "Part of me wants to show the world how lovely Rarity is... I'm just not sure, Twi. Sorry."

Twilight bowed her head. "You don't need to make a decision now. Think it over."

"I will," he promised.

"You know, Spike, there's no reason you can't do both."

"I thought of that but... I don't know."

"It might be for the best, you both get a private intimate exchange of vows â€" you could be by yourselves or perhaps a few select witnesses. Then you can have a big event that will be the envy of the Loopers everywhere. Remember we functionally have eternity, myself more so. Anything Rarity and you want for this tell me and I'll get it." Twilight grinned at him. "That's my wedding present to

you."

"That's really tempting, but the big â€" the main reason I don't know if a big event is a good idea is that I... I don't want our first years together spoiled by ponies or... or, hay, anyone, complaining that Rarity's marrying a child. The 'Big Circles' in Canterlot all know I'm well under age and by the time I'd be old enough our loop is usually over..." Spike kicked the chair, sounding surprisingly bitter. "I know it'll happen eventually, but I don't want it to happen â€" I want it to not happen for as long as possible, and definitely not at or just after our wedding."

Twilight smiled. "That, at least, isn't a problem that's going to be hard to solve."

"It's not?" Spike asked hopefully.

"Oh No!" Twilight cried out theatrically, "Twilight's lost control of an experimental spell and The Elements, Spike and a bunch of others have been sucked into a magical portal! What ever shall we do! The portal has disappeared! Oh wait another portal is appearing! The horror! The HORROR! Yay! They're all back! Wait do they look older to you?"

She grinned, "We say we travelled to a bunch of different worlds over fifteen to twenty years or so before managing to come back and that gives us an excuse to use anything you and Rarity want without raising more eyebrows. What do you say?"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

35.1: Yes, this is a framing device. Also, the Justice Field is from Red Dwarf, and Gilda's using the Brush magic from Okami.

>35.2: I think this says most of it. And writing the Fluttershy-Rush interaction was fun.<br>35.3: Twilight is a "hooves-on" deity. (And is it me, or is steampunk Narnia kind of a cool concept?)

>35.4: ...so, I worked out what to do with the Founder-necklaces.<br>35.5: No comment.

>35.6: Plot Device.<br>35.7: Some Loops can ruin your entire day.

>35.8: And some can ruin more than that.<br>35.9: I am reliably informed that this one was inspired by a video.

>35.10: What do you get for the mare who has everything, has DONE everything, and has probably MADE most things? (Also: Cathedron is a variant way of spelling cathedral. It seems to be Iberian. I'm using it because it's less directly christian-associated than cathedral.)<p>

Partial credit to Madfish on that last one - the second half, basically.

## 38. Chapter 38

### 36.1 (Richardson)

The sea babbled at the hull of the boat. It should have been a good sound, a welcome sound. So why did her head hurt so much? Her loop

memories trickled in, tip-toeing around her semi-conscious mind.

"Oi, luv, my rum."

Her eyes snapped awake. Bad mistake, hangover plus mid-day sun reflecting off of the sea did not a charitable equation make. "Ooooh. My head."

"Well, that's what you get for drinking all of my rum. Here, take a bucket."

"To-URK- ugh, that in?" Twilight took the bucket, hiding it under her chin as her feet grew oddly wet.

"No, to bail out the boat it, though I have found it to be most delightfully useful for the first. We're sinking, and I would rather that we make our entrance to Port Royal in dryness and style. One must have a proper sense of showmanship in this line of work." The mysterious figure talked to much. Twilight tried to brain of who he was, but her think was broken and she had a case of the dumbs.

"Who are you again? Everything is all-JACK!"

"Captain, Captain Jack Sparrow. Good to see you're finally awake-awake. Ever since we met, this confoundable loop has kept on-what did your friend call it? Ah, yes, it kept on shipping me with you. My Rum please."

"The wha-? I was drinking this?"

"Quite fond of it." Jack took the bottle from her, distractedly pitching it overboard to her confusion. "You drank it all, love. Rum's gone. Now start bailing."

"Bailing, why-" Twilight stopped talking as a jet of water started hitting her in the face.

\* \* \*

><p>36.2 (Indalecio)<p>

'I have paws.'

After a couple thousand loops, such things usually wouldn't upset Twilight Sparkle, but then her loop memories hit, and she was a bit weirded out. They were telling her she was a dog named Sparkplug, owned by Luna, who now a wacky inventor. 'Was that trip to the moon for real? Is it really made of cheese?' Granted there had been that one loop back then where Luna had deliberately turned the moon into cheese, but it had been rock before. Also, that one had tasted like Brie, while the one here tasted a bit like Wensleydale, but not quite. 'When did I get so obsessed with cheese?' Must be a property of the loop.

\* \* \*

><p>We were running low on cash, so Luna had decided to rent one of spare rooms out. It was late morning when someone applied. Luna went to answer the door, and I remained in my chair where I'd been

knitting.<p>

"Oh, its about the room, then?

"..."

"Would you like to inspect?"

"..."

"I'm asking 20 a week, including breakfast."

"..."

Despite only hearing Luna talk, it seemed like there was conversation going. What was even the person she was talking to stepped into view. If I didn't know this was going to be a weird loop before, this certainly clinched it, as a penguin walked into view. I took a double-take, and the penguin stared at me for a few seconds before walking up to the second floor.

\* \* \*

><p>I found myself a half hour later wallpapering our spare room. The penguin had took my room! 'Love and tolerance' I told myself. Looking up at the drab ceiling, I could definitely see it needing paint. Instead of getting ladder, I got a brilliant idea. Luna had gifted me, well more like, Luna had gifted herself, with something called Techno Trousers. Basically, mobile, autonomous pants. The neat thing was, they could climb walls and ceilings. It wasn't long before I'd slipped into them, climbed the walls and hung from the ceiling, painting it. <em>Michaelangelo, eat your heart out.<em>

The clicking and clacking from the pants eventually caused our penguin friend to investigate. It was a bit unnerving, as he just stared at the me and the pants, not saying a word. Granted, I couldn't talk in this loop myself, but this was a bit unnerving.

\* \* \*

><p>What was even more unnerving, after settling into the newly painted and wallpapered room, was the loud music coming from what was previously my room. Seemed that penguin really liked "Tie A Yellow Ribbon", and played it constantly on the radio. I looked at the clock, with 12:20AM staring back at me. Love and Tolerance aside, you don't interrupt a girl's beauty sleep. I used a bit of PK and flicked off the radio as subtly as I could, dislodging some of the internal mechanism, so it couldn't be turned on again. The music sputtered and died, leaving a bit of static behind, and then, blessed silence.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>After last night, and the events of the morning; the penguin, I had never gotten its name and he couldn't talk, had fetched Luna's slippers and newspaper. Normally, this was something I, or at least Sparkplug did in the past. Was the penguin simply being nice? I took a walk to clear my head.<p>

As I was walking by the post office, something caught my eye. A



wanted poster for a chicken named 'Feathers McGraw' and a sizeable bounty underneath it. Something seemed very familiar about the picture. I put my paw over the rooster comb to cover it, revealing that our boarder, the penguin, was actually Feathers McGraw, a notorious criminal. I rushed home.

\* \* \*

><p>Thankfully, Feathers was out, though I didn't know when he'd return. I entered his room, my room, I thought ruefully. Yes, I can be very petty in my thoughts. Looking through his belongings, I found two very suspicious things. A map of the City Museum, and the Diamond Exhibition highlighted and labelled, and a handgun, very highly restricted in the UK. I had all the evidence I needed.<p>

I waited for Feathers' return.

\* \* \*

><p>I hauled the trussed up penguin into the kitchen where Luna was.<p>

"What have you done with our paying customer?" I took out the penguins bag and removed from it blueprints of the city museum with the diamond exhibition clearly marked.

"That's right suspicious." said Luna tapping her chin.

I produced a gun from his bag, and Luna leapt back in shock.

"Oh! Those're illegal!"

Finally, as my clinching evidence, I produced the wanted poster with Feathers face on it.

"Hold on there a second! That's a chicken, not our penguin!" I smacked my forehead. I searched around in Feathers' belonging until I found a red rubber glove, and slapped it upon his head, turning our penguin into a chicken.

Luna gasped! "It was in disguise all this time."

\* \* \*

><p>Well, we nabbed a notorious criminal, our money problems were solved for the foreseeable future, and the diamond on display at the city museum remained safe. As for the Techno Trousers? Well... maybe Applebloom will like them.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>36.3 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

Twilight relaxed in the waters of the out-door hot-spring. She might not have tried this if she hadn't already consumed a good portion of the jug of pina colada, but it seemed to be working out. The manager of the onsen was a Mr Urashima, a thirty-something male who moved with authority and the aid of a walking stick. She'd expected some resistance, despite the fact that Japan had never gone to more than level two alert, but after a quick explanation, he'd just shrugged

his shoulders and treated her like any other customer. She heard him muttering something about Hinata House and how compared to that, this was nothing, but he'd treated her with the utmost courtesy.

Twilight had set an Apple Bloom built universal data-pad to download X-Com's main database before she'd appeared in their main control and distracted them. Having Dr Vahlen's clearances and not giving her time to change them before Twilight accessed them had meant the entire system had been pretty much an open book. She hadn't had time to review it fully, but a quick-learn spell had given her the gist, covering the gaps in Dr Vahlen's knowledge. It was how she'd decided where to go, though Japan would have probably been on her list anyway.

At the moment she was the only one in the women's side of the bath, though most of the (female) staff had been cycling through, supposedly checking if she needed anything, but she suspected just to see she was for real. She had no doubt at least one of them had taken some camera phone footage of her in the corridors, but she'd rigged her data-pad to monitor any outgoing data or calls for certain patterns, and set up an area alarm spell covering the resort to identify any approaching soldiers or police.

Unfortunately though from the many futuristic loops she'd been through she had command of technologies that X-Com would give their collective eye-teeth for, she couldn't use it openly â€" as in-loop Equestria was its usual tech level, roughly 1930's base-line earth with magic buffing it in places and a good dollop of magitek outright blurring the lines. Later on she'd be able to justify some knowledge through local study and genius, but she was still limited. Magic, on the other hand, she could go to town on.

Still, for the moment she was just relaxing. She'd had half an hour in her room to rest before the bath was empty, but the vegetable sushi they'd delivered had been delicious, and went well with the rest of contents of the jug. There had also been a cotton yakuta, a simpler version of a kimono, on the bed for the use of a guest. While it hadn't been much use in its base state, a few spells learned from Rarity had adapted it to her body shape, and changed the structural colour of the white cotton to purple, with her cutie mark emblazoned on the flank. As a joke, she even enlarged one of the umbrellas from the pina colada as an accessory.

Umbrella and yakuta both now lay in a basket in the changing area, along with soap and shampoo, which she'd used extensively with the shower before getting in the bath. The reactions of the staff as she'd emerged had been fun, and asking for toiletries had managed to calm any fears that she would mess up the baths proper.

She could see why. The bath was an area the size of a small swimming pool, a mostly natural bowl in the hillside surrounded with pumice and screened from the outside by bamboo walls. The whole effect was pleasing, and the warmth and minerals in the water washed away her cares and aches as effectively as any of Aloe and Lotus's herbal formulas. In fact, she could tell that someone, probably a Shinto priest with at least some degree of talent, had blessed the place once. The spell had decayed, but it was a good effort for someone who'd basically been working by guess.

Her horn glowed as she renewed the spell and tidied it up, making it

self-sustaining off of the natural geo-thaumic energies that the hot spring produced. It was roughly equivalent to taking a dug-out canoe made by someone who had no knowledge of physics beyond what he could see, and using a degree in nautical engineering and all the right craft skills to rebuild it as a speed boat.

After all, she felt she owed the staff here for how accommodating they'd been, and it should fix the chronic damage she'd detected in the manager's leg, and the many other old injuries. From the jigsaw puzzle his bones were, it was a wonder he'd survived whatever had caused it.

She had a plan to obtain some operating capital, while she had tonnes of gold and valuable materials stored in her sub-space pocket, as always she didn't intend to do anything that broke her in-loop persona. Having that one bag of gold and gems, no more than 20 kilograms as her 'official' starting cash would make things slightly more challenging. It would be a definite good deed while also announcing her presence in no uncertain terms, and net her some cash and another couple of hundred kilos of gold.

More healing spells on hospitals where casualties from alien attacks were still recovering, maybe raising her own small island to grow potions ingredients, repair spells to speed up the rebuilding, donations to aid organisations once she got some revenue producing activities going, and of course some Mysterious Mare-do-Well antics when and where the opportunity presented itself, yes she'd have plenty to keep herself occupied.

It should go to redeeming the idea that aliens were not necessarily evil, and raising X-Com's collective blood-pressure, which gave her a warm little glow. No, that was her perimeter alarm triggering. But it wasn't X-Com or even the JSDF, it was some of the invaders, and they were heading towards the onsen!

\* \* \*

><p>Of course they were little threat to Twilight herself. Calling a match up between a dozen of the invaders and an alicorn of Twilight's age and power a curb-stomp was like calling the interaction between a snail crawling on a curb and a descending foot a curb-stomp. Technically accurate, but somehow lacking the full measure of the mismatch.<p>

The question was, why here and now? Narrative causality? Then Twilight realised there was an easier explanation. She'd found the after action report on her capture, and the reaction of the team's psychic to her uncontrolled magic. Using Doctor Vahlen's knowledge, she quickly had a pretty good working theory of what was happening. She lifted herself out of the water and dried herself off by creating a telekinetic shield flush to her fur and flicking away every droplet, which arced around to form a fist sized sphere that she dropped back in the pool.

Now dry, she marched through the changing area to the doors, grabbing her yukata and stepping into it without breaking stride. She was still binding the belt when she opened the door and found the receptionist, Kimiko standing guard. "Twilight-san? Is there something wrong with the baths? The service?"

"No, not the baths. You've all been great!" Twilight smiled up at her, then sombered up. "But I have to see the manager, urgently!"

As she entered the managers office she decided not to beat around the bush. "There are aliens coming, bad ones! I had an alarm spell out against unexpected visitors, but I didn't expect any this... er, unexpected. X-Com, that secret defence agency I told you about must have shot them down somewhere near here then lost them."

Kimiko gasped, but Urashima frowned. "There was a bright shooting star in the sky several weeks ago. It scared people, but when nothing else happened, people ignored it. Why now? You?"

"I think so." Twilight shook her head. "I swear, I had no idea this could happen, but I think my magic interferes with their psionic technology. I must be like a beacon to them. Now I know what's happening, I can damp it, but that won't stop them."

"What can?" The manager got up and limped over to the window. "There are only half-a-dozen guests, thankfully it's quiet, but there are twice that many staff. If you leave, will they follow?"

"Yes, but I don't know where I could lead them that wouldn't bring someone else into danger. I don't think you have time to evacuate and they're coming from the northwest."

"And that access road to the highway sweeps round that way... you think they will fire on our cars?"

"I don't know, but I think the safest option is for everyone to stay in the building while I put a force shield around it."

"Strong enough to stop these things from getting in?"

"Strong enough to stop anything short of one of your heavy air-to-ground missiles." Twilight tapped her horn with a hoof. "This isn't just for show you know."

Actually it would probably soak a tactical nuke, but she didn't want to give away her full power. Urashima just nodded and picked up his phone handset, punching an internal combination. Seconds later he spoke and Twilight and Kimiko could hear the P.A system relaying his instructions.

"So, what will you do?" Kimiko asked. "Help keep the shield up until someone comes to rescue us?"

"No, I have to go out to face them." Both humans looked at her in shock. "Hopefully X-Com will respond, but they'll take time getting here. If the aliens can't get in, who knows where else they'll go, who else they'll harm? Besides, X-Com sees me as just another specimen, probably 'capture or kill at all costs' after the way I escaped."

"But you said you're a librarian, a researcher, not a soldier!" Kimiko exclaimed.

"I was also Princess Celestia's protege, and one of her go-to troubleshooters." Twilight said, "I've been in fights before. And that was before I became an alicorn. Trust me, I can protect you

all."

Urashima put his hand over the mouthpiece and said, "Well, everyone's inside."

"Good!" Twilight's horn glowed fiercely, and a purple wash descended past the window. She made another small gem appear which glowed briefly, runes embedding themselves in it in lines of fire. She dropped it in the manager's hand. "To bring down the shield, press this against it and say the word 'release' three times."

Her head turned slightly, as if she was looking at something only she could see. "They're here, I have to go."

Kimiko dropped to her knees and put her arms around the alicorn. "Good..."

Both of them vanished in a flash of white light.

"... luck?" Kimiko looked around. They were back in the ladies bath area, the surface of the shield rising behind them in a great dome, covering the entire complex of buildings, but not the gardens or baths themselves. Twilight shook herself free.

Her horn glowed and Kimiko was lifted and pushed back through the shield, which rippled and let her through. Meanwhile Twilight stepped out from the walkway onto the water surface closing her eyes and breathing deeply. Zecora's training came back to her, supplemented by later knowledge from dozens of loops, and the water supported her, stilling to a mirror surface under the ripples from her hooves.

She had a dozen ways she could take them out, two dozen if she wasn't worried about damaging the scenery, but now the civilians were as safe as she could make them, she didn't have to go quick and dirty. Using massive over-power might also scare people. No, this was definitely the place for a more elegant form of combat from a bygone age, a long long time ago, in a galaxy far away. Besides, she needed the practice.

She could justify it in loop as a lost form of unicorn martial art she'd been recreating as a private project. Of course, she couldn't explain a light-sabre, but she'd long since come up with a work-around for that. A purple energy blade extended from the tip of her horn with a low hum, then detached to hover in front of her in a guard position.

Kimiko did what any modern person did when faced with something extraordinary, pulled out her phone and started filming. Three Sectoids, small humanoids, bulb headed and hunched, dropped over the edges of the bamboo screen between the bath and the forest outside, and immediately shot at her with their plasma pistols. The energy blade in front of her moved with almost lazy sweeps, intercepting the bolts and flinging them skywards or into the waters between them.

Even as the duel started, three Floaters flew over the barrier, a form of barely humanoid cyborg who had a body made up of just a torso with a pair of jet engines built into it's back. Their plasma rifles increased the odds to six to one, but Twilight's energy blade kept deflecting the bolts, slowly moving forward. As a Sectoid got to the

water's edge she deflected a Floater bolt into the water in front of it, blinding it with a burst of steam, and then she moved, wings flapping once to shoot her across in front of it as it reeled back, her horn glowing.

It was enveloped in purple light, and shrunk down as she overflowed it, leaving behind a plant pot with a geranium in, plasma pistol lying beside it. She flipped over in mid-air and rebounded off part of the rockery wall, still deflecting the few energy blasts that were anywhere near target. Her wings swept again, drawing up steam from the hot waters below and flinging it in front of her, engulfing one of the Floaters. The cloud shrunk and condensed to the density of candy floss, darkening at the same time.

Using its bulk as a screen from the other two she flew towards it and spun to give it a kick with both hind-hooves. Lightning flashed and crackled throughout the cloud, and the Floater dropped out of it to splash into the water below, engines dead and cybernetics shorted out. The cloud was instantly shredded by plasma fire from the other two Floaters, but not before Twilight had popped up from behind it and used it as a springboard to flip through the air over their heads.

One got transformed into a Floater shaped balloon, while the other was hit by the plasma pistols of both remaining Sectoids as she ducked behind it and they frantically tried to register on her. It exploded, leaving her exposed, but the two aliens had no time to use this as they were grabbed by her telekinetic force and flung together, smacking their heads against each others. Twilight landed and dropped the two in front of her, changing them to a potted lily and a small spiny cactus.

Twilight brought her energy blade up into guard position again, and gave a great downbeat with her wings shooting up to fly over the bamboo wall. There were flashes and the sounds of plasma fire, and then the bamboo screen was smashed down as Twilight was flung backwards through it, curled up and glowing with a purple aura. She hit the pumice spire that formed the centrepiece of the bath and went straight through it, smashing the spire to splinters. She finally uncurled and flung her wings out, arresting her flight and dropped down to stand on the water again.

The Muton, a hulking humanoid in sculpted armour that had clearly back-handed her through the wall, raised its arms and roared in triumph or to call its allies. It found this was unwise when the purple alicorn flashed from where she stood to right in front of him and blasted him with magic. He was instantly transformed into a cherry tree. Unfortunately it didn't completely block the hole and a trio of Chryssalids, three legged mantis-like aliens with scythe tipped arms skittered through the gap, forcing her to fall back.

She ran backwards out onto the water and one leapt in after her, splashing its way through more slowly than its initial rush. Her horn glowed and the water swirled up in a waterspout to engulf it, then froze, leaving it encased in a block of ice. The other two made massive leaps onto the now flattened central rock spire, getting behind her. The remaining rubble shot upwards with a purple glow of telekinesis, battering their undersides and giving her time to turn and face the threat.

One Chryssalid's scythe arms swept down to spear her, but her energy blade flew up and extended to the length of a bo staff, horizontal in the air to catch them by the 'elbows'. The other leapt again to get behind her, and intercepted a pair of hind hooves glowing with energy on the way down. It was thrown all the way back to crash into the cherry tree where it slumped, leaking ichor. Twilight's energy blade continued to duel with the twin arm blades of her opponent, finally feinting to make it over-reach itself.

As the blades speared out to pierce her through and through, she down-winged and jumped flying over them and bringing her energy blade down in a sweep that sliced them off, leaving stubs. The Chryssalid creeled in agony, but was quickly cut short as it was transformed into a spider plant. The ichor leaking one was similarly transformed.

But before she could take a breath, a series of explosions blasted away a good section of the wall, reducing the bamboo to smouldering splinters. Two more Mutons stood there, flanking a massive bi-pod war machine with a row of four glowing lights on its main body like unblinking eyes, a Sectopod. Twilight was once again reduced to deflecting and dodging fire as the two humanoids fired their plasma rifles continuously.

The frozen Chryssalid was hauled into the air and flung at the Sectopod by Twilight's telekinesis, but it blasted the block of ice and its prisoner into shards and steam. A few seconds later one of the mutons dropped an alien grenade in the water underneath her and she was engulfed as it exploded, creating a huge dome of scalding steam even as the Sectopod fired again sweeping the volume with energy cannon fire that pierced it, and was absorbed by the dome shield.

Kimiko, who had been recording the fight eagerly, screamed out in shock. "Twilight!"

The Mutons strode forward as the steam started to disperse, spreading out to either side of the Sectopod and sweeping the area with their plasma rifles. One fired at Kimiko, causing her to shriek and hunch away, but the shield absorbed it without a ripple.

Suddenly a massive burst of purple light from behind them blasted the other Muton forward into the air, flinging him against the shield to slump down like a rag doll. His plasma rifle was ripped away from him by a familiar purple glow. The other Muton spun on the spot to target Twilight Sparkle, who was standing behind and between the legs of the Sectopod, yukata ripped and smouldering and with her mane askew, but very much alive and very much annoyed.

His plasma bolt was absorbed in mid-air by an incandescent indigo ball of force that continued on to strike him, throwing him back against the force field and earthing itself into the shield with crackles of purple lightning. He slumped down against it alongside his comrade. The Sectopod was now aware that its opponent was right behind it, but had no time to do anything as it was hauled upwards as if on an elastic band, weapons facing upwards.

Twilight flew up after it, her energy blade forming above her horn and extending to bo staff length. She came up underneath the robot and the indigo line of energy pierced it from back plate to front,

right through it's main control nexus. The row of lights dimmed and died out, and the legs went limp.

Twilight glided down, letting the wrecked robot land between the two Mutons, and transforming them into palm trees almost as an afterthought. She landed back where she'd originally started standing on the water that stilled under her hooves, and looked around, her energy blade shrinking back into her horn. "Oh my gosh! What a mess!"

She lowered her head and raised it, and three balls of water floated up from the bath to slowly orbit her. Her horn glowed with energy, golden this time, and the water exploded outwards in a wave that engulfed the entire area with golden energy. As it slid off the shield and Kimiko was able to see out again, she found that all the battle damage had vanished, the bamboo screening was once more intact, the bath clear of debris and the pumice spire was restored. Indeed the entire bath looked pristine, not so much as a leaf floating on the water. Even Twilight was once more in an immaculate yukata with not a hair in her mane or tail out of place. The secretary finally found her voice, though she didn't stop recording.

"That was... amazing!"

Twilight turned to face her, blushing. "Yes well, customers are expected to leave the baths in the condition they find it. It said so on the sign in the changing rooms."

"Not that!" Kimiko giggled. "Though that was awesome too! I mean the zapping and the kapowing and whooshing and the whole martial arts bad-ass Jedi spell-caster thing!"

"Oh, that." Twilight said dismissively. "I said I could take care of myself, didn't I? I've been redeveloping an ancient unicorn martial arts style. It's a fascinating project, though even I didn't expect it to be so effective, though that might just be the extra power boost from being an alicorn. Of course I added some new elements to it, like water walking. I learned that from a wise zebra shaman, also precision control of my telekinesis."

"So I see. You're doing it right now."

"No I'm... It takes great focus to maintain the increased surface tension..."

She glanced down. There was the expression of horrified realisation, the frantic little fore-hoof dance, and the classic "Aaaahhhaaa!" Sploosh!

Kimiko couldn't help it, she burst out laughing. It didn't help when a pair of ears emerged above the water and moved towards the edge of the bath like a pair of parallel sharks. One hoof, and then another grappled over the edge of the bath, and hauled up a very bedraggled Twilight, mane matted over her face with her eyes closed. She spit out a stream of water. Kimiko was by this time gasping for air.

"Oh sure, laugh it up!" A glow formed around Twilight and she lifted herself out onto the walkway. "You recorded that too?"



"I'm sorry, but it was very funny." Kimiko calmed down. "Look, I'll edit that out. You don't mind me posting the rest to some sites I know?"

Twilight repeated her instant drying spell and was once more neat and dry. "It's okay, leave it in. My ego's not so fragile that I can't take a joke at my expense. Besides, I want people to know I'm not like those things. Humans are afraid of aliens, and from this lot, rightly so, but my friend Pinkie Pie taught me long ago that it's hard to be scared of something when you're laughing at it."

Twilight stepped through the shield like it was open air. "Let's go tell Mr Urashima that the trouble is over."

"Yes, the way you killed those aliens..."

"I didn't kill anyone!" Twilight huffed. "Well, I guess you could call destroying those golems, no robots, killing, but the ones I turned into potted plants are still alive. I could even turn them back, though I don't think I'd be doing them any favours, as X-Com would probably just kill them for real. I first did it by accident on my entrance exam to Princess Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns. Turned both my parents into plants. Thankfully they turned back soon afterwards."

Kimiko shivered. "They won't turn back by themselves, will they?"

"Not with this version of the spell. Only I can reverse it, otherwise it's permanent."

"Well it was really impressive. You probably couldn't hear me but I was cheering 'banzai' the whole time."

Twilight chuckled. "Shouldn't that be bonsai?"

Kimiko groaned as they reached the manager's office. Keitaro called out for them to come in at the knock and slumped back in his seat when he saw it was the two of them. "Thank the kami, you're both safe! The aliens, they have been dealt with?"

"Yes, Twilight took them all out, it was so cool!" Kimiko replied, and held up the camera. "I even have video! She even cleaned up afterwards!"

Twilight added. "Not quite. There are a bunch of potted plants and some broken robots lying on the walkway outside the women's wash area. But don't worry, when X-Com get here they'll take them all away. Oh, that reminds me could I get a copy of that film?"

"I didn't know you had a laptop?" Kimiko said, puzzled.

"Don't need one. Just hold that phone against my horn." She did as she was asked, and silvery threads slid down the grooves in her horn as it glowed. "I originally developed this spell for reading books fast, pretty much any kind of paperwork where you didn't want to actually have to go through it. Based on a spell to share memories. Turns out it works just as well on other forms of stored information."

She took her horn away and pointed it away from them. A glow appeared at the tip, and a window formed in the air, showing a few seconds from the fight. "Got it!"

Seh turned to see the two humans were gob-smacked. "What? I raise an energy shield over the entire place and this is what impresses you? Kimiko, I think you'd better get that stuff uploaded as widely as possible, and as soon as possible, before X-Com take that too."

"Yes, of course!" Kimiko practically flew out of the room.

Twilight turned to the Keitaro. "I've had enough of a bath for one night. Could I use my room until X-Com get here? I really don't want to stick around after that."

"Of course, Twilight-dono." Keitaro bowed his head. "And thank you, for saving all of us."

"No need for that formal stuff, it was my fault you were in harms way in the first place." The bag of gold appeared and she placed a stack of coins and a couple of small gems, maybe a half kilo worth on his desk. "I'd better settle up while I'm here, that should cover it."

The manager reached out and pushed it back. "I can't accept this. I meant what I said."

"So did I." Twilight pushed it back. "I need to pay my way, and show I have. Otherwise X-Com, or some other bunch that's scared of me, will claim I mind controlled you all, or something. Oh, and I'd suggest you take a long bath yourself. I have a feeling it will be good for your leg, for all of you."

Keitaro's eyes narrowed in thought. "You did something to the baths?"

"Well someone did, a long time ago. I may have... improved their work slightly. Healing spells aren't my speciality, but I am widely read in all fields of magic. I made it relatively slow acting, you need to bathe several times to get the full benefit." She looked around conspiratorially. "Don't tell anyone, some idiot will probably get all freaked out about it. Just let the results speak for themselves."

Keitaro finally accepted some gold, but only enough to cover the regular cost of a stay and the yukata she'd modified. "If you want to do something more, make sure you say good-bye to Kimiko before you go. She seems to have taken a shine to you."

"Okay, if you're sure..." Twilight yawned and put a hoof to her face. "Oh my, I guess that fight took more out of me than I thought. I'll get off to my room. Goodnight, and if I don't get chance to see you again, farewell."

As she went up to her room, Twilight reflected on how well things had gone. She hadn't intended to be filmed, but when she realised she had she did do things slightly more flamboyantly than she might otherwise have. Still, the bit at the end had been pure serendipity, her concentration failing at just the right moment for maximum comic

impact. That would do more to cement her reputation as non-hostile than a hundred heartfelt speeches.

She stripped off her yukata and climbed up into the big, human sized bed and snuggled down under the covers. She had just enough energy left to reset her alarm spell before she drifted off to sleep.

\* \* \*

><p>36.4<p>

Twilight stepped up to the hill overlooking Sweet Apple Acres. "So... I understand that these need to be picked, then?"

Mac nodded. "Yup."

Twilight looked around. "There's a lot of them."

The stallion positively exuded agreement.

"Okay. I think I can do this."

"Why you?" Mac said, turning to her and wincing. "Ah know why ah ain't doin' it, but..."

"Oh. I lost a bet with Applejack." Twilight looked Mac over. "Are you all right? I heard you strained something..."

"Ah'll be fine." Mac grimaced. "Ah ain't goin' t' the doctor, anyways. Not after-"

"Fair enough," Twilight said. "I remember Spike shouting about his eyes burning?"

Mac blushed. "Neither of us is much good at winnin' bets with mah sister, ah'd guess."

Twilight nodded. "Okay... here we go."

The whole forest began to glow purple.

Whistling something, Twilight corralled the thousands of apples into distinct streams and began decanting them into barrels. Each barrel was carefully packed in a cubic-crystal efficient packing arrangement, then sealed and stacked in the convenient nearby barn.

"Right, that's done," she said, five minutes later. "I fancy a coffee. Want me to get you something?"

Mac thought for a moment about what he'd seen, and quickly came to a conclusion.

He'd prefer tea, thank you.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Fluttershy?" Raindrops asked. "Not seen you up here in a while. We thought you were afraid of flying..."<p>

Fluttershy nodded, and shuffled back to the centre of the cloud she was on.

"Oh! Sorry. But, er... why?"

"Bet with Dash," Fluttershy whispered, then kicked the cloud uncertainly.

It summarily failed to pop.

"Er... how does this work again?"

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack whistled.<p>

Winona nodded to a covey of birds, which took off and headed over to the latest hoof-ful of grain the farmpony had set out.

One of the geese tried to move forward out of turn, and Winona growled briefly.

"Okay," Applejack said eventually. "Now it's y'all turn, Angel."

The bunny gave her a dismissive look.

"Well, y' eat what ah give you, or y' don't eat today." Applejack got out a carrot. "Ah shoulda never made that bet with Fluttershy, ah can tell you..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Look," Dash said wearily. "I can't do dressmaking, so this is basically the only option I had left."<p>

Scotaloo made a bizarre sound as she tried to hold in gales of laughter.

"Yeah, yeah..." the speedster muttered, shifting slightly in the huge, frilly white dress she was... ensconced in. "Take it from me, squirt. Only make a bet when you're sure you'll win it."

\* \* \*

><p>"...and that is how to make a cake with style!" Rarity finished. "With flair, with grace, with panache!"<p>

Carrot Cake examined it. "Is there... anything under the cream?"

"Well, no..." Rarity admitted. "Is that a problem?"

By way of demonstration, Carrot Cake took up a cake slicer and tried to cut a slice.

"Oh," Rarity said, as the entire Rarity's Stylish Cream Puff Cake stuck to the slicer. "This is a lot harder than Pinkie makes it look..."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess sunbutt!<em>

\_Pinkie here! Hey, this week we all learned that Gambling Can Be Embarrassing! It must be a Very Special Episode, don't you think, 'cause it didn't go into deep societal ills or anything like that but just showed us doing jobs we weren't always all that good at!\_

\_Your number one element of laughter, Pinkie Pie!\_

\_(PS: there are seven party poppers concealed in this scroll! Collect them all!)\_

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Celestia pulled streamers out of her mane. "Well, I suppose at least I <em>found<em> them..."

\* \* \*

><p>36.5<p>

Twilight blinked. "I think I just realized something I never tried."

She looked around at the gigantic paint cannon aimed for Discord's statue.

"What is it?" Spike asked, lifting another canister of pressurized paint up to the breech end.

"Well, it's too late now... basically, what did Sombra actually \_want\_?" Twilight asked, taking the canister and fitting it with care.

"...huh. I know he wanted the Crystal Heart, but what he was going to \_do\_ with it? No idea." Spike shrugged.

"Well, I know what to do next time," Twilight said. "Hmmm..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?" Celestia said, pushing open the door to the library. "Are you there?"<p>

No response.

"How strange."

Celestia thought hard. Her messages via Spike had only received terse replies about some 'experiment', so she had come to check on her student in person, in advance of giving her the first 'solo' mission she would have.

Her eyes alighted on a note resting on the table.

"Dear Princess," she read. "I have recently discovered that the Crystal Empire has returned. I have made haste to their capital, in order to assess the situation."

Celestia frowned, then her eyes widened. "She doesn't know."

\* \* \*

><p>"So, King Sombra, we deliver unto you the Crystal Heart," Twilight finished, putting the large hunk of crystal on the floor.<p>

Sombra looked at it. "\*\*\*Crystal\*\*?"

"Yes, Crystal," Twilight agreed.

"Are you sure this is okay?" Spike asked, looking nervous. "He looks evil..."

"So did Nightmare Moon," Twilight pointed out.

"She was evil!" Spike said. "Luna isn't, but that's not the same thing..."

"Sssh, I want to see what happens." Twilight pointed.

Sombra arose from his throne, darkness drifting around him, and approached the great relic...

Then paused.

\*\*\*"What now?"\*\*

Twilight facehoofed. "Oh, you must be joking."

Sombra tapped the crystal heart, which went tink. \*\*\*"Crystal? Crys-tal?"\*\*

One wall exploded, admitting Celestia. "Twilight! Are you alright?"

"Fine, thanks," Twilight said, dropping a reflex-quick shimmershield. "I wanted to see if King Sombra could do anything with the Crystal Heart. It turns out... not."

Celestia took in the situation. Twilight, fine... Spike, scared but fine... the Crystal Heart, unscathed but dusty... and King Sombra's horn sticking out of a pile of rubble.

"I see. Wasn't that awfully risky?"

Twilight shrugged. "I keyed it to a teleport, so I could technically summon it to me if needed. It's a tricky spell, involves writing a runic form of my name on the object in magic, but useful."

Celestia poked the pile of rubble, which mumbled something about crystals.

"I remember him being more dangerous..."

\* \* \*

><p>36.6<p>

Twilight could just about \_taste\_ something off about this Loop.

She wasn't sure what, she wasn't sure how, but this loop was NOT standard.

All that said, though, it certainly \_looked\_ normal. Twilight and her friends (all six of them Awake) were in Ponyville, as normal. The Summer Sun celebration had proceeded as planned, then not as planned, then as normal for a standard-issue loop.

(They'd gone with the old standby of Twilight getting the Elements working first try, and all six of them blasting Nightmare Moon's smoke-form as she tried to kidnap Twilight.)

\* \* \*

><p>As Applejack gathered up her crop for the year (the hard way, relatively speaking, to test out some mental trick or other she'd picked up to help with tiredness), Twilight wondered if she was just imagining things.<p>

Then she vanished in a puff of smoke.

\* \* \*

><p>She materialized, horn flaring and muscles tense with alarm, in a grassy field.<p>

With a human (boy, but with white hair) looking at her.

Twilight blinked.

The boy stared for another moment, then jumped into the air. "Awesome! Maybe not as cool as I was hoping, but the chicks will love it!"

"Wait, what's going on?" she asked, confused.

"Oh." The boy stopped jumping. "I'm Jiraiya. Your new summoner!"

Twilight looked at him for another moment, then facehoofed.

So much for normal loop... they were replacing the \_toad summons.\_

Sighing, Twilight looked up. "Okay, then. My name's Twilight Sparkle."

Jiraiya winced. "Yeah, that's not going to win me any manly points with Orochimaru... but I'm pretty sure Tsunade will love you guys!"

He sidled up to her. "Women like fuzzy animals, right?"

Twilight felt like facehoofing again. This was \_definitely\_ Jiraiya.

\* \* \*

><p>"Wait," Pinkie said, raising a hoof. "Does this mean we're way back in time from when Naruto normally kicks butt and stuff?"<p>

"It... does, actually," Twilight confirmed. "Tell you what. Let's try and work out how to seriously reduce the scale of problems the ninja world has. Any thoughts?"

Dash slammed a hoof onto the table. "We gotta turn the country of Rain into the country of pleasant weather! Maybe then they'd be less of jerks all the time."

Rummaging in her pocket, Twilight withdrew one of her trusty PADDs. "Let's see... yep... yep... that can be blamed on him too... that may be a plot hole... yep... no... and yep."

She looked up. "Well, I found the source of about eighty percent of all the problems in the Ninja world ever."

"Oh, let me guess," Applejack said sarcastically.

"Exactly. Madara Uchiha." Twilight projected an image onto a wall. "This guy is responsible for just about everything."

"So, what's the plan?" Dash asked. "We hit him until he stops?"

"Nope," Twilight replied, projecting up another picture. "This is, as we know, Orochimaru. He's responsible for most of the remaining twenty percent."

Rarity shivered. "The snake motif is not doing it for me. There's such a thing as going too far."

The others gave her sidelong glances.

"What?" she asked, looking back at them. "Spikey-wikey is a dragon. Completely different."

"I'm not arguing with you." Twilight shook her head. "We're getting off track. Anyway, I think I see an opportunity for societal engineering. We're between Ninja Wars right now, so... who in Equestria do we know is an experienced psychologist?"

"I learned!" Pinkie said, raising a hoof.

"...I think we'll put that in the emergency folder," Twilight decided. "You're a little... exuberant at times."

Fluttershy cleared her throat. "I am qualified and have doctorates."

"That works," Dash said.

"I think Luna can do it by dreamwalking, too..." Twilight mused. "I'll ask her."

\* \* \*



><p><strong>"So,"<strong> Kurama said, lying back on a gigantic couch. **\*\*"Part of it is, I feel like the Sage just... abandoned us. We were only just created, and he left us â€" and his sons were complete-"\*\***

Luna shook her head. "We can relate, in a sense. Did We tell you the story of Our banishment?"

The huge fox twisted to look at her. **\*\*"No, actually."\*\***

"Perhaps 'twill prove useful for thy own actualization." Luna closed her eyes. "Ere long ago, perhaps so long as the time thy Sage had so recently made the moon..."

\* \* \*

><p>"So..." Madara said slowly. "You want to 'cure' me, little summon?"<p>

Fluttershy nodded.

"I don't think I have a problem in the first place." His eyes twisted into the Mangekyo. "So-"

Fluttershy met his gaze.

To an onlooker, it would have been as though little explosions of pure optic intent were going off between them.

"...why did Izuna always manage to do everything right?" Madara asked plaintively. "I tried as hard as I could..."

"There, there," Fluttershy said, trotting over. "Just let it out, you'll feel better."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked at the book in her hooves.<p>

It was one of Jiraiya's. It was also rather better written than normal â€" though the subject matter was about the same.

"I never should have let him and Dash collaborate..."

\* \* \*

><p>36.7<p>

"Oh, gods, where are we \_now?"\_ a somewhat scruffy unicorn asked, adjusting his floppy hat. He then paused.

"And how did I do that?"

The glasses-wearing earth pony next to him shrugged. "I don't know either. Still, this looks like another one of those Fused Loops."

"Great. More exciting things to run away from."

A large pegasus flapped down to land next to them in a whirl of wings.

"Greetings!"

"Oh, not you again," the unicorn muttered.

Looking down at himself, the pegasus frowned. "I am fairly sure it is me."

"Wait â€" what's that on your, er... arse?" asked the unicorn, pointing.

"It looks like..." the earth pony squinted closer, adjusting his glasses. "A carrot."

"How appropriate," the unicorn said, then his eyes widened and he turned to look at his own flank. "What in the gods' name is this?"

"A dotted line around... a staff-shape, I think." The pegasus shook his head. "No idea."

"And mine is... a pair of flowers." Shrugging, the earth pony looked around. "Do you think we should try and find out where the nearest town is?"

"No," the unicorn replied promptly. "I like the sound of quiet."

"I believe there is a town on the horizon," the pegasus said, pointing. "I don't know exactly how far, though."

"I can handle it." With a shy smile, the earth pony closed his eyes.

Abruptly, there was something there. The something was very, very big, a gorgeous gold in colour, and possessed of many scales.

"Hello, Ninereeds!"

"I still don't know how you keep doing that," the unicorn muttered. "Twoflower, do you really want us to go flying into the air on him?"

"You didn't have a problem with it before, Rincewind," Twoflower pointed out.

"I have come to terms with a fear of heights," Rincewind defended. "It is an old friend, who I meet most weeks. However, the fear of falling off is rather stronger than normal, on account of my uncharacteristic lack of hands."

"Can't wizards cast some kind of spell to stop them falling?" the pegasus asked, frowning faintly.

"We've been over this before, Carrot," Rincewind said with a wince. "Even if other wizards can do it â€" and I'm not at all certain they could â€" I... sort of can't. I'm not what you might call good at casting spells. I'm more of a theoretician."

Do not worry, Rincewind, Ninereeds projected. I am quite good at catching falling wizzards. Surely you remember the many times I have

been able to practise?\_

"I'd rather not, thank you..." Rincewind grimaced. "Oh, well, why wait for trouble to find us? We may as well meet it while there's still daylight to run away in."

\* \* \*

><p>"...well, that's quite an entrance," Twilight said, as the huge dragon gently glided down to rest in the main square.<p>

A unicorn clutching a hat to his head with one hoof staggered down from the dragon's side, and collapsed on the floor.

"I never want to go flying again."

"You said that last time," said the dragon's... well, presumably rider, based on stance.

"I mean it this time."

Trotting over, Twilight raised her voice. "Hello! Welcome to Ponyville. My name's Twilight Sparkle." As she got closer, she lowered it again. "I'm the local Loop Anchor, if that helps."

"You're the local anchor?" Hopping down from his perch, the earth pony fumbled around for a moment and brought out... a camera? "Can I get a photo? I like to have one of each anchor."

"Sure," Twilight answered. "Oh, who are you?"

"I'm Twoflower," the earth pony replied, checking on his device. A small lizard blinked sleepily at Twilight from the flash pan. "My friend there is Rincewind â€" he startles easily."

"Oh, so \_you're\_ the loopers for the Disc?" Twilight smiled. "I have to say, it's nice to meet you."

"Pleasure," Twoflower returned. "This is Ninereeds â€" though if you know about the Disc, you might well have guessed that."

\_Hello, Twilight Sparkle.\_

"And hello to you as well, Ninereeds." Twilight looked directly at the dragon as she spoke. "I seem to remember Hiccup mentioning you once?"

\_Ah, that one. Toothless is most fun.\_

"They certainly made me welcome," Twoflower said. "Say 'butter!'"

FLASH.

\* \* \*

><p>"Ah, so you're a looper as well?" Twilight sat back in her chair, as Spike passed around tea. "Thanks, Spike."<p>

"No problem." Spike handed Carrot his, and pulled over a spare chair.

"I am," Carrot nodded. "It's been... interesting."

He grimaced at his new hooves. "I certainly have new understanding of some of Angua's troubles..."

Twoflower peered under a bookshelf. "Come on, Rincewind. Stop hiding under there."

"I am waiting for the other shoe to drop," Rincewind said indistinctly. "It always does."

"Well, unless things not related to your arrival are seriously askew, then we should be fine." Twilight grinned. "There is the matter of the dark goddess who should show up tomorrow morning--"

Rincewind tried to get further under the bookshelf.

"--but since we can handle her without breaking much of a sweat, I think we should be fine. And the same for the..." Twilight paused and counted. "Three other Princess-level or higher threats, half-dozen or so large monsters, and sundry minor catastrophes."

She chuckled. "I'm teasing. Equestria is actually sort-of officially designated a sanctuary loop. We'll try to make your stay as comfortable as possible."

"Excellent!" Twoflower walked back over, apparently abandoning Rincewind to his position under the bookshelves for now. "Don't worry, he'll come out eventually."

"Try me!" Rincewind called.

\* \* \*

><p>Whistling, Discord slid the book containing the Elements back into the bookshelf.<p>

\_Hide it in plain sight.\_ Hilarious!

As he turned to go, the bookshelf moved.

"Oh?" he asked, peering under the bookshelf with one eye. Then he put the eye back in and bent down. "Hello, little pony."

"Wizzard, thank you!" a voice said back.

Reaching in, Discord pulled out a blanket, a bathtub and three sets of goggles before finally towing a somewhat-scruffy unicorn out by the tail.

"What were you doing in there?"

The unicorn closed his eyes. "This cannot go well."

"How astute!" Discord poked his new prey in the cutie mark, which flashed, and grey spread all over his body.

Then the building exploded.

\* \* \*

><p>"...oh, I almost forgot about him. Whoops..."<p>

Twilight and the others watched Discord flee across the fields, pursued by about fifty high-grade spells and a unicorn whose eyes blazed with eight-coloured fire.

Twoflower winced at a particularly bright Ultima. "You know, I think Rincewind would be quite good at spells by now, if he just used a system other than the UU standard. He certainly knows all the theory."

They sat back to watch the fireworks for another few minutes.

"Should we help him?" Carrot asked. "I mean, I know he's a criminal, but that can't be due process."

Twilight shrugged.

\* \* \*

><p>36.8<p>

"Okay, boy, ready?" Spike said, bouncing on his claws.

Peewee nodded.

"Play dead!"

The little phoenix chirped once, then erupted in a searing column of fire.

Twilight chose that moment to walk in. "...okay. Spike, what am I looking at, and what's the reasonable explanation?"

"Well, you're looking at a pillar of smoke and flame in the middle of the library," Spike summarized.

"Right. And the reasonable explanation?"

The pyre died down, revealing an adult phoenix. Taking a single circuit around the room, singing, he then settled on Spike's shoulder and began to preen.

"...that." Spike pointed. "I taught Peewee a new trick."

"And you absolutely had to try it out on the library table?" Twilight asked, conjuring a dustpan and brush out of what had been a set of plaster ducks.

Her assistant winced. "Oops. Well, in my defence, there are cookies cooling in the kitchen, and we might have got ash on them."

Twilight shook her head. "Well, I suppose I can forgive a lot for a cookie. But we have a laboratory for a reason!"

Spike shrugged. "Trixie's in it, I think."

"...fair enough."

\* \* \*

<p>36.9 â€" Elmagifico<p>

Macintosh poured the fermented liquid into a carefully measured, reinforced container. It fizzed there for a second before settling down. He slid it next to two glasses of more mundane cider, where it would stay unless it was needed.

This was one of those special occasions.

"So, this was ya'll's first kill?"

His customer sighed at her cider, her purple bangs almost hanging into it.

"No, but it's troubling me. There are so many questions. Jadis was a powerful witch, and in that world, those can always come back â€" she did, I brought her back. Probably guilt... So does it count? Could I have prevented her from using the Deplorable Word some other way? Would she have done so if I hadn't? She didn't use it in the books when she was getting overthrown. I've had these arguments with myself often since then. I've hurt things in self defence before, and fought eldritch horrors and creatures with terrible power, but this time I premeditated the destruction of a sentient being."

The silence hung there for a second as Twilight paused.

"I wonder sometimes if there was a way to do it differently. I've stopped evils with phenomenal cosmic power before without resorting to killing, and I had all the advantages of surprise and time. Perhaps a petrification spell, or illusion or transmogrification. I don't know. It was the only way I knew for sure would work."

Macintosh wasn't sure what to say to that. He'd never dropped a meteorite on someone's head.

Quiet returned like a disapproving spectre.

Twilight seemed content to stare at her drink despondently.

Macintosh thought back.

There was, in fact, something similar he'd done.

"Ah remember mah first."

Twilight looked up at him, her expression urging him to continue.

He hesitated.

This wasn't like sharing the fact of his army experience, or even his looping. This was something deeply personal. A glimpse into his psyche, that could be used against him if shared recklessly.

The violet eyes asking for elaboration reminded him that not only was he helping someone, this was a friend of his. One he could trust.

"It was one of them longer loops, just after th' changeling invasion. A buncha them wound up scattered around tha countryside an' started trouble. Royal guards arrived ta find an' deal with 'em, but they musta missed one or summat.

Mac realized he was rambling, and shook his head.

"The point being, one night ah just couldn't sleep. Took ta walkin' tha grounds, checkin' ta make sure everythin' was tidy. Ah found it in one of the barns. It had taken the form of mah sister, probably waitin' ta replace her that mornin' or summat. It took me a minute to realize though. Ah thought ah was safe that loop. That Applejack was there, not some other mare."

A tiny smile threatened Macintosh's face for a second.

"She'd probably kick mah shin but good if Applejack knew ah was talkin' about her that way, but that's how ah thought back then."

All trace of the smile vanished again as he got back on task.

"It tried to play it casual, like it couldn't sleep either. Wanted to make me think it was just makin' sure the apples were growin' right."

He poked at his glass of cider with a quiet a sigh.

"Maybe ah took it as an insult. Ta imitate Applejack so well, and still be so off. To mock mah sister's depth of character that way."

His voice took on a solemn, grim tone. This was no wistful matter.

"In any case, it made mah blood boil. Ah bucked it but good. Sent it sailing across the room an inta' one of the barn's support beams. We built that barn to stand up to Rainbow Dash. Changeling snapped like a twig."

Macintosh's frown deepened as he thought back, dredging up old excuses.

"Ah tried to rationalize it. That thing was gonna insinuate itself with mah family, cause no end of harm. No telling how it woulda reacted if ah tried to take it out nonlethally. Ah had no clue what kinda mumbo-jumbo them things could get up to. Better to neutralize it then and there. Ah liked that. Made it seem like a good thing. Like ah'd helped. But it didn't stick."

He looked the other looper in the eye. His voice softened. That wasn't Her, but it didn't change what he'd thought then.

"Ah figured where that kinda thinkin' might lead me."

Then he switched his gaze to his cider, the heat in his ears drawing his eyes to the drink, and his mind back to the story.

"That night, ah made a vow. Ah would remember that changeling. Maybe what ah did was necessary. Maybe it wasn't. Didn't make it right. From that day forward, ah promised mahself ah would never be proud of what ah had done, whether ah did it again or not."

"Ah know it's not the same, but ah figure hearing about somepony else's problem'd help get your mind of yours."

Twilight spread a thin smile. It had no teeth, just a lip-quirk of appreciation.

"You're right. I don't think it's quite the same, but thank you. It's the thought that counts."

The silence stretched on from there, but it was a different silence. Both Twilight and Macintosh watched the alcohol swirl in the glass between their ciders. A meditative scene. Two Loopers sharing a moment to contemplate their actions in the company of someone who understood, at least a bit.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

36.1: Hangovers.

>36.2: Wallace and Gromit, if any non-English are wondering.<br>36.3: I sense another one of Fox's looong loops...

>36.4: Walk eight furlongs in another's horseshoes.<br>36.5: Seriously, did he have a plan for that thing?

>36.6: Jiraiya suspects what the ladies like.<br>36.7: Alone of the Anchors, Rincewind has never actually died. Also, I like dragons.

>36.8: Peewee hasn't had all that much attention in the Loops...<br>36.9: Not even good intentions are a shield against bad dreams. In fact, they all but cause them.

## 39. Chapter 39

37.1 â€" Bobnik

Princess Luna stood on the deck of her new ship, and watched as it tacked neatly about Equis and her sister's sun under the expert hooves of Twilight Sparkle. She marvelled at the view, the crisp clarity of the vacuum combined with the lack of any visible barrier to keep the air in. She turned her head upwards, and saw the patterns of light flow across the sails into the mast and down into the engines below.

"I assume it's some manner of force field holding the atmosphere?" she asked the helmsmare.

"Yep. The inspiration came from a pretty weird loop though. In that universe, all of space had an atmosphere and an ecosystem. Strange, but very pretty. I hope you get the chance to see it." replied Twilight.



Luna sighed. "I hope I do too. The ride is so smooth, is the wind from the Sun normally so constant?"

"No, but I challenged Rainbow Dash to control the solar weather over the entire surface of the Sun, all at once. This is for training, you'll have to get used to the chop later. Speaking of which, you're up, Princess."

Twilight moved aside and let Luna take the wheel. The Princess of the Night lit her horn and took active control of the helm. "Celly has her surfboard, but I think I prefer this. For the moment at least, I've had enough of being alone."

"Do you hear that, you lollygaggers?" yelled Twilight at the crew. Most of the local loopers were along for the ride, as well as a few specially selected guests. "Your Princess actually likes your company! Look lively there, and trim the foresail! Lookout, are the skies clear?"

"Clear as a bell, Ms Sparkle!" called back Pipsqueak from the crow's nest.

"Then what course, Captain?"

Luna straightened, the flowing of her mane in the ethereal winds matching the billowing sails above. She remembered a phrase from a loop that Pinkie (and apparently Gummy) had been in.

"Second star to the left, and straight on 'til morning."

\* \* \*

><p>37.2 (Stainless Steel Fox)<br>X-COM loop

Twilight came awake (with a small 'a') instantly as her proximity alarm spell went off. A Skyranger was incoming, which meant she should be going. Hopping out of bed, a quick brush spell and a bit of telekinesis and she was kitted out and ready to go. But first she had to keep her promise. She threw a scrying spell out to check where she was going, and went in a flash of teleportation.

Kimiko was back on the front desk. Manager Urashima had offered to let her go off shift early to recover, but she'd insisted on staying the course. Besides, she wanted to be there to say goodbye to Twilight. It was almost the end of her shift anyway, and certainly a quiet time in the lobby, so she wasn't exactly stressed. She pulled up the posted video and grinned to see the views were in the tens of thousands already. Let those awful military types try to hush that up!

When she looked up Twilight was there. "Just wanted to say goodbye. An X-Com team is almost here, and considering I'm probably still top of their 'capture or kill' list, best not to give them the chance."

Kimiko came out from behind the desk and knelt down in front of her, offering a hug. "I understand. When I think of what they did to you I get so mad..."

Twilight leant into the hug and returned it with a fore-leg over

Kimiko's shoulder. "It's okay, don't be too hard on them. You saw the sort of things they've been fighting. Did they over-react in my case? Yes. Can I honestly blame them? Not so much. Those soldiers who are coming here put themselves in danger to protect people like you from those invaders on a daily basis, and I can respect that, even honour it. My big brother's a Royal Guard so I understands where they're coming from. However, that doesn't mean I'm going to stick around and act as their target dummy. But I won't prank them, they're just following orders."

She released the hug naturally, and stepped back. "My issue is with their leaders, who seem to shell-shocked too adapt to changing circumstances. Still the best revenge is living well, and I intend to do just that while helping people out wherever I can. Just because they're going to be jerks doesn't mean I'm going to join them. You'd better get back to your desk, they're on final approach."

As she sat back down, she felt a slight warmth and tingle from the pocket where she'd put the gemstone Twilight had given her, and saw the alicorn's horn glow gently. "What's that?"

"The stuff that dreams are made of." Twilight replied, grinning. "Call it a good luck charm."

There was a roaring from outside in the half empty car park. "Thank you, for everything, and farewell."

She vanished in a flash of light just as the sound of jets died.

\* \* \*

><p>Operation Bring Night.<p>

Mission Brief.

Site is isolated hot springss resort in Gifu province of Japan. Site appeared to be subject of a terror raid from what the satellites picked up incoming. However interference prevented satellites from getting good read on what happened when they made contact. There's also a strong possibility that Target Sparkle is on the scene, possibly as a lead element.

Mission Objectives

Assess situation at site.

Capture or destroy Target Sparkle if present.

Destroy all other extraterrestrials on site.

Rescue any survivors.

Additional

Use of portable Psionic Damper has been approved. Use it to suppress Target Sparkle's abilities. Attempt capture only if there is no significant resistance, otherwise destroy it. This objective has priority over all others.'

\* \* \*

><p>Lieutenant Suchiro Saname was the low man on the totem pole in team two, and the only native Japanese speaker. Combined with the fact that he was an assault specialist, trained to get up in an alien's face and blow it out the back of their head with his alloy cannon, it made him the obvious point man for this operation. As he approached the front doors of the hot springs, he checked the parking area. For a place that had supposedly been wrecked by aliens, it looked surprisingly intact, but the aliens had been approaching from the far side, where the actual baths were.<p>

The rest of the team spread to search the area, Major 'Ramrod' Wallace, the team leader and sniper was behind him, covering his approach. He hadn't lit off his thrusters to take aerial overwatch, and probably wouldn't until they had something to fire at. Suchiro dashed forward to take cover behind one of the door lintels, and waited for the rest of the team to reach position before entering. Captain Irwin Goldfarb, one of the team's two Heavy Weapons specialists came up and pressed himself flat against the other lintel. In place of his normal heavy plasma cannon, he carried the newly built mobile Psionic Suppressor.

Ramrod spoke in English over their comm system. "Saname, this is Ramrod. I've got overwatch. Take the door."

Suchiro spun round in a practised motion and went through the double doors, shoving them back as he scanned the lobby interior. He didn't know what he expected to see, but a receptionist calmly sitting at a desk wasn't it.

She also didn't seem to be phased by a guy in plated body armour crashing thorough the door, gun in hand. "Good evening sir. I'm afraid the sentai fan convention was last week. Do you have a booking?" Kimiko might be willing to forgive these guys if Twilight so obviously had, but that didn't mean she wasn't going to have a bit of fun of her own.

The soldier put up his gun and spoke in English, "Lobby is clear sir. In fact, it looks like nothing's happened. The receptionist is still at her desk, and making jokes! I'm going to talk to her." He turned his attention directly to her and replied. "I'm not here for the baths, miss. We had a report of... hostile activity. Have you seen or heard anything unusual?"

"If you mean that group of aliens that attacked us, what's left is by the recycling bins around the side of the building, along with the other rubbish."

"WHAT!" Suchiro's exclamation brought an immediate response. Goldfarb barreled in, side-arm out and free hand on the trigger for the Psionic Suppressor. He might not know much Japanese, but he was enough of an anime fan to understand the loudly shouted, "NANI!"

Kimiko kept her seat, and her composure. "Do you need a double room, or two singles?" Suchiro finally got his brain back in gear and called over the comm, once again in English, to silence the chatter.

"This is Suchiro, I'm fine, everything's fine. The receptionist just claimed that the alien attack has been defeated, and the remains are

around by the service area. I'll try and find out more."

Kimiko's English was Japanese high school level, and had never been her strongest subject, however she understood the sentence perfectly. She tried to frame a comment in English, and found the words coming to her as easily as Japanese. "I am right here, you know. The aliens came, Miss Twilight put up a shield over the Hot Springs and went out to fight them. She beat them like a Taiko drum, and Manager Urashinma had what was left put outside for collection."

"Twilight? A purple pony with wings and a horn?"

"Now you come to mention it..." Kimiko nodded, pretending to think deeply. "Yes, yes she was."

She noticed the way the two soldiers tightened their grips on their weapons. Suchiro continued to speak for them.

"So she was here? Where is she now? It's vitally important that we find her!"

"She left just before you got here." Kimiko replied, her voice hardening. "It seems she didn't want to give you another chance to shoot at her." That got them to look down and loosen their grips, looking slightly shame-faced.

"You don't understand Miss..."

"Kimiko Mizuno."

"... Miss Mizuno. I'm Lieutenant Saname, Special Forces. She may look harmless, even cute, but she is a powerful and dangerous alien creature. We need to recapture her."

"Is that what the pachinko machine your friend is carrying is for? To distract her while you sneak upon her?"

"It's not a..." Suchiro glanced at the device Goldfarb was carrying, and found it had been replaced with a pachinko machine. Goldfarb unslung it, and a note fluttered off it.

"Dear X-Com soldiers. Don't worry, the real device is back in the Skyranger. I had said to Kimiko I wouldn't prank you, but I couldn't help myself when I saw that. A Psionic Suppressor? Really? That didn't stop me last time, so why did anyone think it would work this time? I can see this is more powerful, like a strobe rather than a searchlight, but it wouldn't work on me any more than the other one in my current form. I understand the technology at least as well as Doctor Vahlen (unsurprising, as it was her memories I copied) and I can assure you it's about as much use against my powers as that gambling machine.

"I bear no ill will towards the team that captured me, they were only doing their duty as they saw it, and I'm even willing to make peace with your top brass. Tell Doctor Vahlen I apologise for copying her memories, but I needed information in a hurry, and unlike her method, her brain didn't need to be peeled like an onion, and chopped and fried like one at the same time. However, matching her knowledge of the aliens and their technology with my own of magic has brought up some surprising insights. I'd be perfectly willing to give her them,

and some of my memories of Equestria and my magical research in return as an apology. Yours, Twilight Sparkle.'

\* \* \*

><p><span>Operation Bring Night - After Action Report<span>

**\*\*Mission Status\*\***

Objective 1 - Complete

Objective 2 - Failed

Objective 3 - Complete (13 kills?)

Objective 4 - Complete (0 casualties)

**\*\*Team Status\*\***

Major James 'Ramrod' Wallace (UK, Sniper, 51 kills, 43 Missions) - Active

Captain Astrid 'Valkyrie' Bergstrom (Sweden , Heavy, 36 kills, 40 Missions) - Active

Captain Jaques 'Backstop' La Fourette (France, Support, 38 Kills, 33 Missions) - Active

Captain Irwin Goldfarb (Israel, Heavy, 27 kills, 25 Missions) - Active

Lieutenant Namara Macrae (USA, Support, 24 kills, 25 Missions) - Active

Lieutenant Saname Suchiro (Japan, Assault, 26 kills, 12 Missions) - Active

**\*\*Alien Artifacts Recovered\*\***

Floater Corpse x1

Floater Corpse (Damaged) x1

Sectopod Corpse x1

Chrysalid Corpse (damaged) x1

Potted plants? x8

Shaped Helium Balloon x1

Plasma Pistols x3

Heavy Plasma Rifles x2

Gold coins x3

Pachinko Machine x1

**\*\*Notes\*\***

Witness testimony relates that Target Sparkle (See Project REDACTED) engaged the other aliens before X-Com could respond. Video footage confirms this, and demonstrates Target Sparkle has a number of extra-normal abilities beyond those demonstrated during REDACTED. The uncertainties in kill totals and aliens recovered come from one of these, where the target appeared to transmute aliens into potted plants and in one case a helium balloon.

Preliminary examination of genetic data shows the plants to have close similarities in form to terrestrial plants, but no exact matches. The possibility exists that the target was merely using it's teleportation ability to exchange them, and place them in a holding area for further use, but no confirmation can be had. It has further been suggested that the entire attack was staged by Sparkle in order to appear heroic, heretofore referred to as the Trojan Horse Hypothesis, but that can not be confirmed or denied at this time.

Other abilities demonstrated included gross telekinesis in the tons range, manipulation of inter-molecular forces, energy projection and manipulation ability on the order of fighter mounted weapons, high degrees of kinesthesia and situational awareness and tactical skill. Target claimed some or all of these abilities came from it's studies of 'magic' and 'redeveloping an ancient unicorn martial art'. Target's threat level has been increased to Extreme Plus, a new threat level promulgated specifically for the target.

Specific abilities to study include the manifestation of an energy-based weapon that was used as a melee weapon, changing to act as a sword, staff and lance at various times, and was capable of deflecting plasma fire. Any personnel using the term 'Poni Knight' to describe this will be subject to 10 days detention and loss of privileges.

Subject also created an indigo force field dome that covered an area of several thousand square metres and was recorded blocking multiple blasts from a Sectoid's primary weapons, but from witness reports was selectively permeable to matter. Duplication of this effect has alpha priority.

Subject has been described as using a 'perimeter alarm spell' to detect the approach of the aliens and the X-Com team. Whether it was true or not for the aliens (see Trojan Horse Hypothesis) it is evident that Target Sparkle became aware of the approaching team at a range of dozens of miles. The methodology of this effect is unclear, but it suggests that Target Sparkle will have advance warning of any overt move against it.

The gold coins recovered from the site are artefacts left by Target Sparkle in payment for the services of the Omachi Hot Springs. A separate analysis of these artefacts is under way under the project title 'Cortez'. Remuneration for the confiscated artefacts is strongly suggested to obtain continued assistance of locals. Invoice Cortez 0003 has been sent to REDACTED.

\* \* \*

"Twilight."

"Rarity."

"I am only going to ask this once. I want a reasonable answer."

"Very well."

"...Why are we cuttlefish?"

"I have no idea."

\* \* \*

><p>37.4 (Richardson)<p>

Diamond Tiara wondered what unspeakable act she had committed to deserve such karma. It was her first loop 'outside' of Equestria, and judging from the pitying looks everypon- everybody kept giving her, it would be a 'doozy' to use Pinkie's colorful commentary. She was in some kind of loop where ponies had fled to another world to escape some catastrophe on Equestria, ending up on another planet that sounded a lot like the 'hub' world she had been told of. They had joined forces with the local humans to form a grand Earth Alliance that had taken to the stars.

A pity her part in it wasn't so good. Since she had woken up, she had seen the local version of her father die, had been put through five different kinds of hell, especially by that annoying twit Mollari and the local loopers. She was replacing the normal second most common looper, one Cmdr. Ivonova, second in command of some kind of crazy diplomatic station called B5. Her best friend in the multiverse had been brainwashed and twisted by the really creepy local group known as the Psicorps. There was almost nothing left of the filly she used to love to hang out with.

And she wasn't even allowed to smack somepon- somebody upside the head when they did something really, REALLY stupid and forced her to work overtime to fix it.

Like right now. All the local loopers seemed to be running around trying to patch something up, too busy to even bother telling her what in Tartarus was going on, and here she was having to deal with a survey team that had somehow ticked off the supposedly dead planet below them. Yeah, right. Dead enough to launch enough missiles to blow a crater where Mt. Canter used to be. Ah, screw it. Screw decorum, screw playing her part as a good little officer. Screw being nice!

"And one other thing to contemplate on your way back here; the Babylon 5 Mantra." Tiara leaned onto the live microphone button, angling closer to the recorder. "Lt. Tiara is Always Right. I will Listen to Tiara. Tiara is Next to Celestia. And, if this ever happens again, TIARA WILL PERSONALLY RIP YOUR LUNGS OUT!"

She looked around at the shocked expressions and crewmembers both leaning away from her and cowering behind their consoles. Was she... panting? Holy crap. Maybe a bit too much stress relief. She pulled

herself away from where she had been hunched over, straightening her jacket as she hoped that the button hadn't broke. Gingerly, she tapped the microphone button again, speaking calmly. "Have a nice day."

Growling, she blew a stray lock of her mane out of her face as she wanted to cry. The slightest whisper of a thought brushed against the rather irritating new sense she had gained when she had arrived. Apparently, the looper she had replaced was a 'telepath'. or at least a weak one. By the local scale, a P1, maybe a P2. Just enough to occasionally listen, not even enough to get into somebody's head. Ugh, another reason to hate the Psicorps, who made Twilight 'CLOCK! IS! TICKING!' Sparkle look relatively sane. They would snatch her up in a second and brainwash her just like Silver Spoon had been if they found out.

She turned to her fellow officer of the watch, who discretely covered his snickers with his hand. "You have a problem with that, Corwin?"

"Only that you didn't do it sooner, Ma'am."

"Are you saying I should start putting the fear of Tiara into the hearts of every man, woman, and filly on this station?"

"Respectfully, Ma'am? Yes Ma'am. It wouldn't be the same without it."

"Great. I spend forever trying to forget how to be mean, and now people WANT me to be mean. What's next? Luna herself gracing CnC with her presence after a thousand years? At least the planet's not going to blow up on us or something else stupid like that."

"Uhhh..."

"Damnit."

\* \* \*

><p>37.5 (FanOfMostEverything):<p>

Twilight came to a halt in the doorway of the bar.

"Close th' door, please," Big Mac said gently. "Don' want flies in here."

"R-right..." Was this a prank? No pony else was here, so there were no expressions to gauge but Macintosh's own intense, focused serenity. It also meant that Twilight was the only one to address the elephant in the room. "Is that a..."

"Eeyup."

If Twilight hadn't needed a drink before, she certainly did now.  
"\_How!?!\_"

"Funny ol' fella showed me this trick." Big Mac stuck his tongue out a bit as he arranged a tiny pile of scree on the north face of his



bonsai mountain. "More t' earth pony magic than helpin' plants grow, y'know." He blinked, then looked up from his work. "Ah'm sorry, Ah'm bein' awful rude. What kin Ah get ya?"

Twilight collapsed onto a barstool, eyes still locked on the tiny peak. "Whatever will make this make sense."

The stallion considered this for a moment. "Ah'll go find that one batch Trixie helped me make." A beat. "An' some tongs."

\* \* \*

><p>37.6 (Masterweaver):<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh are you so sure about that?" Trixie challenged with a smirk, smacking down a card. "Well, I spent my Ice Cream Truck profits on a walrus!"<p>

Chrysalis sighed. "Welp, there goes my west fort." A feral smile formed on her face as she slid a card out from under her miniature. "Shame, too, it was guarding the Breakout Character."

"What? No!" The unicorn looked the board over in dismay. "The walrus can't be my flagship, not this late in the game!"

"Aaaaand now it's my turn." With a flourish, on final card was placed in front of the pegasus. "Musical number! All those who don't participate get deported... oh, look at that, Walruses don't dance. Who would have thunk it?"

Trixie shook her head and leaned back, dropping her cards with a sigh and a smile. "Well well well. Good game, Chrysy. I have to admit, I thought I had it in the bag after I took out your Tome of Eldritch Lore, but..."

"Discord is a devious game designer..." The pony across from her flipped her mane. "And I am a devious game player. It's only natural I should \_oh no he's here just act natural.\_"

The unicorn gave her a look of confusion before glancing at the coffee shop entrance. Shining Armor was walking in, humming to himself as he trotted up to the counter. Trixie turned back to her date with a half amused grin. "Oh fine, I won't let your old flame see you-"

"He doesn't know I'm looping!" Chrysalis hissed. "I don't even know if he knows about the slave loop and... just, please, don't tell him!"

Trixie blinked.

"Wait... he doesn't know?"

Chrysalis slumped in her seat. "I... it's not him, but... it looks like him and... I don't know, I just can't. Please, Trixie, don't."

"Trixie?" Shining Armor walked up. "Wow. Small world! And who's your

friend?"

"This? This is... Crys\_tal\_Shard." Trixie laughed. "Yeah, she saw one of my shows and couldn't get enough of me."

"...m'llo," mumbled the pegasus.

"Hey there!" The captain of the guard gave her a gentle smile. "Don't let me intimidate you. Just a servant of the country."

"...m'kay."

Shining gave her an odd look. "...okay then... Trixie, sorry for interrupting. I didn't realize you were on a date!" The stallion nodded politely before taking his coffee and trotting out.

Trixie took a breath, counting quietly as she refocused her mind.

Then she glared at Chrysalis. "Why didn't you tell me you never broke up with him?"

"It â€" It's not him I-"

"Ugh." Trixie waved a hoof. "You know what I mean."

The pegasus wilted. "I... I just... I can't. It was eighteen years, from my perspective. Eighteen whole years, and, and that was before I knew about the loops..." She shook her head. "I... I want to move on, but..."

Trixie sighed, her anger melting away. "I see... You're going to have to deal with this eventually you know."

"I know. I just-"

"No. No excuses." The unicorn looked away. "I put on the Alicorn Amulet because of excuses. The first time, anyway. Just... if you want, I'll be there, okay?"

"Thank you. Twilight said she'd be there too, but..." Chrysalis smiled. "I... would feel better if someone who \_wasn't\_ at the wedding was there too. Just... not right now..."

\* \* \*

><p>37.7 (Misterq):<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Spike looked at his body. Purple coat and horn, lime green mane and tail. That meant one thing.<p>

"I'm a pony this loop!" the new unicorn colt exclaimed, "Rarity!"

As the former dragon raced out of the library, he missed several details. The books were all very large and shelved on elegantly carved marble shelves. The piles of gems, meticulously sorted by size, shape, clarity, etc.. The fact that the entrance way was a

series of magical barriers in a cavern-like hall.

All these details came rushing back to him as he stood on the baloney-like ledge overlooking a series of crags and rocky spires. And there was Twilight and her friends. In the air. As giant dragons.

"Oh come on!" Spike shouted as the memories integrated. He was still Twilight's helper, but now every pony was a dragon. Twilight and him lived in the town of Dragonville.

Rairty was still white and very elegant in her dragon form. Twilight was still very recognizable as a relatively smallish purple scaled dragon. Rainbow Dash was a sleek looking flyer, the colour of a cloudless sky with rainbow-colored spikes. Applejack was an orange muscular dragon who would be a nightmare to battle. Fluttershy was busy hyperventilating, and Pinkie Pie was...

Spike turned around slowly to stare into a wide grinning pink-scaled maw with far, far too many sharp pointy teeth in it.

Yep. Pinkie Pie was still Pinkie Pie. On top of her head sat a small greenish goat - Gummy presumably.

A shadow fell over everything. Spike looked up at the mind-bogglingly immense dragon body of Celestia as she gracefully glided in for a landing.

"That's it. If any dragon needs me, I'll be in the library," Spike said and turned around.

"You know, Spike," Rarity gently landed next to him, "if memory serves correctly, most dragons in this loop have the ability to do one thing in particular."

Suddenly, Rarity's body shrunk in on itself further and further until there stood Rarity, the unicorn. "We can shapeshift."

Spike smiled. "I can work with that."

37.8 (FanOfMostEverything)

Twilight shook her head. "Pinkie, there is no Pink Lantern! Pink doesn't exist on the electromagnetic spectrum, it's basically negative green."

Pinkie just smiled. Not her usual lip-straining beam, but a content grin. "Twilight, what do the various Lantern Corps channel, again?"

The unicorn retrieved the notes she'd prepared in the event of this Loop. "Going in ROYGBIV order: anger, greed, fear, willpower, hope, compassion, and love."

Pinkie nodded. "Notice anything missing?"

"Well, it doesn't match Poll Ekmane's basic emotional classifications or Bobbin Plush's 'wheel of emotion.' In fact, in Plush's modelâ€œ"

"Happiness, Twilight. There's no happiness."

Twilight did not pout. She was far too mature for such petulant displays. "I was getting to that."

Pinkie held the hoofring â€" more a bracelet, really â€" up to the lantern. Twilight couldn't help but think that it would probably seem a lot more momentous if the ring wasn't cheap plastic and the lantern wasn't an immense hard candy. Still, Pinkie recited the oath she'd made up with utmost seriousness:

\_ "For every sorrow large and small,  
>My laughter will bring joy to all.<br>As long as someone has a ball,  
>Pink Lantern's light will never fall!"<em>

Rosy light bathed the room. For about a minute afterwards, Twilight just sat in place, boggling at the floating mare. Pinkie bided her time by playing a pair of marionettes she made from coherent joy.

Finally, Twilight got up and made for the door.

Pinkie drifted alongside her. "Where you going?"

"To find Discord. Then, if he isn't responsible for this, the bar."

\* \* \*

><p>37.9<p>

Blinking, Twilight looked up from her book.

At least for once â€" for \_once!\_ â€" she'd not woken up mid-stride. Pity she was human, though, those usually tended to be the more problematic loops.

And, scanning her loop memories, this was no exception.

\_Right... that little problem can wait. Now, what's going on?\_

There was a ceremony in progress... something about summoned familiars.

Twilight looked around surreptitiously, pulled out a PADD, slipped it into her book, and got to text searching as names firmed in her memory.

Her own familiar waved to her, prompting her to check her loop memories again â€" which distracted her for a moment, since she was fairly sure the normal issue familiar for her here wasn't Saphira... but this was a public place, so there was no chance to double check.

Well, she could get on quite well with Saphira. All things considered, it could have been worse.

\* \* \*

><p>"Kyuui..." Irukuru's head drooped. "Sowwy, Ewagon. Iwukuwu didn't mean to."<p>

Eragon looked at the hole in his roof, and sighed.

"Don't worry. I'll get it fixed."

As he turned for the saw, the blue Rhyme dragon squee'd and glomped him.

A grin stole over the Rider's expression, as he disentangled himself carefully from Irukuru and headed out to chop some new timber.

For some reason, he wasn't at all resentful towards the Replacement for his normal dragon. She was just like an over-excitabile little sister...

\* \* \*

><p><em>Done.<em>

Twilight closed her book with a quiet twik, and began to pay more attention as the girl she'd identified as the main character stepped up to the podium.

Here was where it would all get interesting...

\* \* \*

><p>Louise swallowed, and began to speak, hoping against hope that for once " for once " she would get the spell right.<p>

"I beg of you" My servant who lives somewhere in the universe! Oh sacred, beautiful and strong familiar spirit! I desire and here I plead from my heart! Answer to my guidance!"

Her wand sparked to life... then there was a loud bang.

In other words, more or less normal for Louise's magic thus far.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight frowned through the smoke. Something seemed... familiar.<p>

Then she heard a voice. A very familiar voice.

\* \* \*

><p>"Who summons Trixie?"<p>

As the smoke cleared, Louise saw who was speaking.

A moderately sized... blue unicorn.

Louise sat back hard, suddenly filled with euphoria. She'd done it! She'd summoned a familiar! She...

Wait.

Did that unicorn just talk?

And why is it wearing clothes?

The unicorn turned to her with a graceful movement, sending her cloak sweeping out in an impressively billowy arc, and looked her up and down.

"Hm. Trixie supposes you may do."

"Aherm," Mr. Colbert interjected. "Miss Louise, you must complete the binding."

"Oh, right."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight raised an eyebrow as the binding completed.  
MjÄ¶Ã°vitnir?<p>

Well, at least it made a little more sense than to have Trixie wielding a sword.

Though, if Derfflinger was going to be free this loop...

\* \* \*

><p>"So." Trixie looked her new... 'master' up and down. (She had her own opinions on who the apprentice was and who the master was). "Your magic is?"<p>

Louise hung her head. "Not very good. Everything I try just makes an explosion."

Trixie stood bolt upright. "And that is not good by the standards of this land? These foals are fools!" Louise actually saw the faint stars gleaming in Trixie's eyes.

Trotting over, Trixie laid a hoof on her shoulder. "Trixie will teach you the number one tenet of her philosophy. There is nothing that cannot be solved with a sufficiently large detonation."

Dubiously, Louise looked at her familiar. "You think so?"

"Trixie has made machines that go into space based solely on how big the explosion inside them is!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight blinked as Saphira walked calmly off the stage. The now-a-diamond stage. "I didn't actually know you could do that."<p>

Saphira shrugged, and bent down to whisper. "It took me Loops to work out how to do it consciously."

Sitting back, they watched the final pair of master and familiar come on stage for the talent show.

"Oh," Twilight added, pulling out two pairs of sunglasses. "You might

want these. I know Trixie's style."

\* \* \*

><p>The shower of fireworks, explosions, sound effects and even illusions was so complex that it took the faculty almost five minutes to notice that the school was being robbed by a giant rock monster with a mage on top.<p>

Of course, Trixie and Louise noticed at about the same time. And then the golem exploded.

\* \* \*

><p>"...ta-da?" Trixie said, uncertainly, as the bits of rock and earth stopped raining down.<p>

Then, getting back into the groove, she slammed her hooves on the stage. "We hope that you enjoyed the show â€" despite the unexpected intrusion by...?"

"Foquet, the Crumbling Dirt," Louise picked up on the conversation. "It looks like even master thieves can't handle us!"

Trixie laughed. "\_That\_ was a master thief? Where I come from, master thieves will add locks to doors if they did not consider the locks already there enough of a challenge!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight facepalmed.<p>

"What?" Saphira whispered.

"\_She's\_ the one who did that."

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie walked slowly up the steps, and into the room where Guiche and his girlfriend were.<p>

"You. The herbalist."

Montmorcery looked up.

"Fix this." Trixie gestured back at her apprentice, who was clinging to her right rear leg and muttering something about fuzzy ponies.

"Oh, so \_that's\_ where the love potion went..." Montmorcery mused. "Sorry, no can do."

"Louise?" Trixie said calmly.

"Yes?" Louise said, looking up.

"It would make me happy if you did that to Montmorcery."

"What are you-aaagh!" THUMP.

Surprisingly, having Louise be her problem instead of Trixie's made Montmorcery very cooperative indeed.

\* \* \*

><p>"Albion are invading!"<p>

"Excellent!" Trixie said loudly. "Twilight, we require your dragon."

Twilight looked over. "For what? I could handle the air fleet by myself, you know..."

"We require... a firing platform." Trixie grinned.

\* \* \*

><p>That day went down in history as the Great Albion Turkey Shoot.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...so, to cut a very long story very short," Trixie said, flicking absently at her singed hat, "it was the fault of the king next country over â€" Joseph, I think."<p>

Twilight nodded. "Are you two alright?"

Trixie looked over at Louise. "We had to fight a giant robot. It was interesting."

Louise was still clutching her wand, in a grip that didn't look likely to slacken any time soon.

"I still wonder how Eragon's doing..." Saphira said.

\* \* \*

><p>"Kitty!"<p>

"Please get off me," the werecat leader muttered.

"But you're so fuzzy!" Irukuru enthused.

"I am so sorry," Eragon said, sniggering. "She does this to everyone."

\* \* \*

><p>37.10<p>

"Okay," Twilight said, looking over the papers and artefacts in front of her. "Spike? I think we know what this Loop's 'thing' is."

Spike walked in, balancing a fire ruby on his claw.  
"Oh?"

"Basically, urban fantasy sort of thing. Werewolves, vampires, that sort of thing."



"Not... the Cullens?" Spike asked, shivering. "Loops with them in are never nice."

"No, no sign of them." Twilight sighed. "The bad side of that is that it's likely at least one of our friends is one or another of them."

"Yeah, that is bad," Spike agreed. "Let's hope we can get this done without too much bloodshed."

\* \* \*

><p>"It came in the window!" Daisy said, shivering. "A great big furry monster!"<p>

"\_We\_ have fur, Daisy," Twilight pointed out, taking notes. "It's just called a coat. Anyway, you were saying?"

"It opened the window, climbed in, and took one of my flower arrangements!"

Twilight's pen paused. "It did what?"

She looked over to the window. "Huh. So it actually reached in and opened it, rather than breaking the glass?"

"Yes." Daisy gulped. "And then it picked up one of my flower arrangements in those huge, fanged jaws, dropped something, and jumped out the window again!"

Spike held up a small drawstring bag. "Was it this?"

"...yes, it must be. I don't recognize it."

"There's about five bits in here," Spike reported, opening the bag carefully.

"So, we have a werewolf who opens the window, takes a flower arrangement, and pays for it..." Twilight summarized. "I may know the solution."

\* \* \*

><p>"How did you find me?" Fluttershy asked, covering her face with her wings.<p>

"Actually, it was pretty obvious..." Twilight said, shrugging. Though she had no intention of actually \_explaining\_ her reasoning, given that Fluttershy wasn't awake, and 'another version of you likes to turn into a wolf' would sound just a little bit insane.

"I swear I ask before I drain them..." the pegasus muttered.

"Wait, back up." Twilight blinked. "You're the \_vampire?\_"

"Yes." Fluttershy hunched over again. "I only go out on cloudy days, and because I have animal friends I can ask them for donations... Dash knows, she helps provide clouds when I need them..."

"Well, don't I feel silly," Twilight said in an aside to Spike, who

shrugged.

"So," Spike said, frowning. "Who's the werewolf?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Whew," Dash said, shaking her head. "That's pretty risky..."<p>

"I paid for it!" Scootaloo said indignantly. "People are nice if you pay for things!"

"Yeah, but usually you buy them normally, not break in and leave money..." Dash touched the hyacinths, now sitting on her worktop. "I get that you wanted to be nice, but I wouldn't have needed to be bribed, Scoots."

"It wasn't a bribe..." Scootaloo said quietly. "I just wanted you to like me."

"Already do, squirt." Dash walked over and laid a wing on the back of the pegasus filly. "But, wow, I'm turning into some kind of secret-supernatural-pony-hiding-mare..."

\* \* \*

><p>37.11 (Nighzmarquuls)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was obvious from the very instant Twilight Sparkle Awakened that this was turning out to be an odd one. Some kind of non-standard or perhaps merged loop?<p>

Well no time like the present She began her Initial loop checklist.

Magic?

(Not inherently present in the body, although there is an appendage jutting over her eyes analogous to her horn, although it was flexible. Strange.

Well if it is needed she could just pull something from her pocket or maybe wrangle an alternative magic system from whatever is available.

Body?

Yes, single and biological. None of the standard ones though, will require further examination later.

Environment?

No immediate danger. A little gloomy, a lot of strange.

Loop Memory?

Hmmm no still not updating. Wait there it goes.

Woah.

Thankfully there was the added weight of several millennia of Twilight Sparkle the Looper memory to help give a foundation so this was not quite so jarring.

But still, up until now, the Nominally Unicorn Mare had been relatively singular in mind/sense of self, even when body might have been more numerous.

This was different however.

This was not like the changeling hive, or being an intelligent school of fish (who counted in fractions).

This was her own mind quite happily dividing itself into branches which further split into more threads of thought and then delightedly spun off into capillaries and whorls of independent cognition before either petering out or re-merging into the whole of herself.

And this form of cognition was also apparently standard for whatever dominant species her pre-awakened self had been a member of which gave a very important check that needed to be performed regarding the elements as soon as possible.

â€|

Okay none of the other elements were awake.

Most importantly Pinkie Pie was Not awake and thus bequeathed with the ability to think even more intensely than normal.

â€|

New Mental architecture integrated the proper memories began settling in very cordially with her awakened ones. Except she was getting distracted by how some of her was having sputtering shocks of surprise over the breadth of new experience coming from awakened her's memories.

**\*\*Wait What?\*\***

\_Hello! I'm new here, or old here I guess since its you that is just arriving, well welcome to the loop!\_

**\*\*Am I talking to myself?\*\***

\_Nope this is just an artificial construct format you are using as a crutch to better integrate new you with the parallel nature of Noble Cognition that I am inherently familiar with since I am momentarily representing the original loop's position.\_

Confusion and puzzlement percolated out and did a little jig with awe and delight.

**\*\*Alright then so I'm not suffering multiple personality disorder or anything like that? You are not a tulpa or anything right?\*\***

\_Oh that is a FUN series of memories! But no this is more a way to help you understand how you learn now. Hey I heard you liked Learning

Dog so now you can learn about learning while you learn so that  
yo--

\*\*Noâ€| Just No, also if you are me why do you sound like pinkie  
pie?\*\*

\_It is less uncomfortable for you than talking to yourself as  
yourself and you were the one that jumped on that metaphor right when  
you needed a coping mechanism.\_

\*\*Right\*\*

\_Now pay attention to your thinkingness because this is gonna feel a  
little complicated and we need to get settled into how things work  
here super duper fast or someone will take pity on you and save you  
from yourself!\_

\*\*Okay but wait what?\*\*

\_Nope less talking and more attention to the thinking we need to do  
this right the first time!\_

...

Twilight was used to being rather singular in herself.

At least herself being singularly herself.

Or at least if not being herself there being only one of what she was  
at any given time.

This was like being herself many, MANY times over at once.

And it was also kind of like drinking a library as an espresso for  
the mind.

All of the her that was now here with her loved learning, and now she  
was very rapidly learning by teaching herself and herself and herself  
and herselfâ€|

\_Do I hear an Echo? I think I hear an Echo in this here  
Congress!\_

It was like she had been split and refracted and then multiplied and  
amplified and then shone back into herself through some wondrous  
mandala of prisms.

\_So Shiny!\_

It was not precisely that the prior to awakening her was more than  
her own memories.

>Dismally small in fact.<p>

\_HEY!\_

\*\*Thousands of loops beats your fewâ€| whatever time measure you use  
(\*\*\_We don't actually have any consistent ones...)\_ \*\*Rightâ€| My  
Loops Beat your life no matter how intensely you experienced It,  
which you didn't for most of it apparently. \*\*

It was that each facet of her prior to awake self was awakened now too.

\_Now you're getting it Twilight!\_

What is more is the Twilight multitude that seemed rampant in her head was also quite ravenously using the Awakened memories to amplify and improve the threading nature of thought and memory that had already been present to expand and expound off of each other.

\_Now I'm worried about what my version of pinkie pie is going to be like...\_

\*\*Wait you haven't met your version of pinkie pie yet.\*\*

\_Exactlyâ€|\_

\*\*Point.\*\*

And then as suddenly as the torrent of self had begun it settled and became a gentle flow of musing and realizations across tributaries of contemplation.

\_Aaaand we have Congress!\_

Equilibrium and a new coherence distinctly different from the first had arrived.

She had a Congress with herself.

\_I just said that!\_

\*\*Hush I'm Organizing!\*\*

Against the massively unique experience of thinking in this loop the physical differences were practically un-notable.

\_Oh, yeah, you're nominally a pony right?\_

\*\*I have Congress aren't you supposedly obsolete now?\*\*

\_Well just call me a quirk, everyone has a few hundred!\_

\*\*Wataâ€|\*\*

\_Shh on with the physical tally dis gonna be good!\_

\*\*Keep that up and I am rescinding our meme privileges.\*\*

\_Spoilsport.\_

Effective Immortality via lack of degradation with age?

Curious to have it without magic or ascendancy nothing else of note.

\_Oh the royals\_ \_are gonna love that stuff\_

**\*\*The what now?\*\***

\_Shh later!\_

Thirteen Nominal limbs with a hand/foot each that had a fernlike shape with seven tongue-like "fingers"?

Ridiculously easy to accommodate when one's mind resembled an endlessly branching tree of intent and focus.

\_You're welcome!\_

A few extra eyes?

Laughable.

\_Oh hey we could grow a few more I think.\_

The lack of proper gender identity or associated plumbing on either account was a little bit odd, and the cultural norms associated with such?

Okay that was bit more than odd.

\_Yeah short version, using gendered speech is kindaâ€¦ sexy times only don't do that too much in public it is a bit rude.\_

**\*\*You are going to tease me about thinking about myself as female...\*\***

\_Obviously. Especially since you just pretty much precommitted to it and I'm sorta expectation driven. \_

**\*\*That word choice seemed a little out of character for you\*\***

\_Well if you insist I'll go back to my first choice: WHY TWILIGHT I NEVER KNEW YOU WERE SO SUBMISSIVE IN MATING HABITS!\_

**\*\*Isn't that kind of sexist?\*\***

\_Nah that is just how our physio-psychology works, but most actually will express both genders during the process soâ€¦!\_

\_\*\*MOVING ON!\*\*\_

And Body Checked over, and still it was a moment just past a fluttering of eyelids.

\_Yeah we have not actually been having a conversation, the congress is making up this whole halucination after the fact to help you integrate without turning into a frothy mess.\_

**\*\*That terminology has entirely different connotations for the native culture here...\*\***

\_Yeah it really really does.\_

Now what was 'She' (for the weight of multi millennia of being gendered won out over the difficulty of linguistic complexity needed

to define 'herself' with proper neutral pronouns in familiar language  
\_hehe you are such a dirty 'girl' \_\*\*HUSH YOU\*\*) doing before  
Awakening?

Oh

â€|

That is a bit disappointing, 'She' was sitting in a courtyard reading  
a book about "Embracer of all Whom Nurtures us Frozen with Darkness"  
\_I am pretty sure this one is Luna!\_. And trying to parse the rather  
difficult to determine unique determination of time measure  
proscribing that was used to predict when such being would be  
migrating near by her home.

\*\*Okay honestly? Who uses the explicit take off wing beat rate of an  
extinct species of butterfly to exposit on describing the arrival of  
some lumbering god beast?\*\*

\_Yeah that is pretty much why I was taking a break to read this  
outside, I much prefer your longest day of the thousandth' year SO  
SUCCINCT!\_

'She' was doing so while relaxing underneath the far distant cavern  
ceiling which shined with reflected light of "The Enkindler of Joy  
Whom Breaths Radiant Wrath Upon Us" Judging by all senses of  
endearment and other hints of memory this was essentially  
Celestia.

\_Uh kinda?\_

\*\*What do you mean Kinda?\*\*

\_Royals\_ \_are really different here.\_

\*\*How so?\*\*

\_Uh just keep going it .\_

Okay The sisters are present...

Both of which are acknowledged to have been something called a  
â€|

ROYAL?

\_\*\*To the bestiary checklist!\*\*\_

\_Yay Checklist!\_

\*\*To start they are Inorganic?\*\*

\_Yeah or at least they are not standard carbon, nitrogen calcium type  
critters. I mean I guess they kinda are MADE of that stuff and other  
things but yeahâ€|\_

\*\*And oh dear elm Fission reactors? THEY HAVE FISSION REACTORS? \*ARE\*  
FISSION REACTORS?\*\*

\_Not really sure, they\_ \_do it sometimes, I think they\_ \_also pull

off fusion, or whatever the bile they\_ \_want honestly.\_

**\*\*Bet narrative causality made the Celestia one fusion mostly.  
\*\***

\_Yeah its what makes 'her' (oh that is sacrilegiously naughty!)  
\_\*\*STOP IT\*\* \_Hey keep to your own train of thought!\_

**\*\*Only if you stop goading me, but yes that is what makes her  
especially vibrant and warm?\*\***

\_At a best guess, Royal studies is kind of half religion in these  
parts but our 'celestia' is particularly sparkly yes.\_

\_\*\*So other cities are even gloomier.\*\*\_

\_Yep, 'tis the price for living all cozy  
underground.\_

**\*\*Okay...\*\***

So monolithic (\_Ooh yeah they are kinda craggy and mountain/coral  
like\_) god beast Celestia and Luna aside still this was ridiculously  
standard loop format considering how many things were  
different.

\_Remember the one loop that Equestria was in an attic and everyone  
was spiders?\_

**\*\*And Nightmare Window was turning off the light switch  
yes.\*\***

Except the details of daily life are...

\_Oh yeah you are not gonna like these parts but remember, no  
panicking, no crying, no despairing or into the oven we go.\_

**\*\*Wait WHAT?\*\***

\_Standard procedure. Can't let people be unhappy for eternity now can  
we? No other real selling point so... \_

â€|

**\*\*I am really REALLY worried about what this loop's version of Pinkie  
Pie is like now.\*\***

\_Told you!\_

Twilight felt the odd sensation of wishing to be sick and not having  
any of the necessary reflexes to even feel properly nauseated  
\_Seriously I can hardly believe that most of the loops had me as an  
animal! so much excretion and- \_\*\*STOP IT I'M TRYING TO INTERNALLY  
WALLOW HERE\*\*.

\_Just remember to keep all the pain inside!\_

She promptly found physiologically equivalent ones that disturbingly  
inspired thoughts of fire.



\_We will make a native out of you yet!\_

\*\*Not Helping.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>37.12 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\*\*Squeezing out the Competition - Epilogue (see Chapter 13)\*\*

It had been two weeks since the Flim Flam Brothers had taken jobs as farmhooves to repay the Apples for knocking down their gatepost and to buy the apples to run their Super Speedy Cider Squeezy 6000. Of course, the job had some fringe benefits, such as hearty home cooked meals, and access to Apple Bloom's workshop. They were unaware that both she and Applejack were loopers, or that loops existed, but they knew a good thing when they saw it, and Apple Bloom's magitek inventions were far beyond anything they'd ever come up with.

The little filly had been friendly enough, but they'd quickly learned she had a will of adamantine. Continued access to her lab, and the 'computer' with all her ideas and information on had been dependant on doing a good job at the grunt work Applejack had set them. She'd also forestalled any midnight expeditions by demonstrating that all the workshop's systems and access routes responded only to her. As a result they'd been forced to stay true to their word, and found to their surprise that it wasn't all bad.

Apple Bloom might have been more knowledgeable than them in many areas (not to mention being able to kick both their plots together from what they'd seen of her practising her martial arts) but she'd also been willing, even eager to learn what they had to teach. As often happened, teaching what they knew had given them new insights, and ultimately they had managed to work out a way to replace unicorn magic with earth pony magic in her inventions. They'd both been surprised to find out how good it had made them feel.

However, they'd put in their time, and now had a big trailer cart hitched to the back of the SSCS 6000, filled with some of Sweet Apple Acres finest. The machine itself had been rebuilt, sleeker and slightly larger. They hadn't even had to trick Apple Bloom into doing that, she'd freely offered to help with the reconstruction and put the resources of her workshop to the effort. It was now as reliable as any device could be, and the thaumic boiler system had been redesigned to be self-sustaining, requiring only an initial zap of magic to activate it. Apple Bloom had also insisted on making a few additions of her own.

The two brother stood in front of the machine, looking less lanky than they had when they'd arrived. Days of farmwork and good solid farm cooking had added muscle to their limbs and a few inches to their waistlines. Applejack, at the head of the Apples grouped there to see them off, spoke.

"Well, I wasn't too sure about doin' this in ther first place, but the two of you haven't stinted yourselves. Apple Bloom gives you a good report too, and reckons that contraption can put out cider worthy of the Sweet Apple Acres name. So, like I agreed to start with, you can sell under our brand, as long as you keep things honest."

She gave them a stern look from under her hat brim. "And trust me, we will know if you use cut quality or try to con your customers, there are Apples everywhere from Manehattan to Appleoosa. On the other hoof, they should be able to supply you with more apples when those run out. Playing fair and square may not make you money as fast as cheating, but it'll give you more over the long run."

"Don't worry ma'am," Flim said, "We didn't have much of a choice when we first turned up here. Now we do, and the last thing either of us wants is to end up back where we started. Miss Apple Bloom, I hope we can keep corresponding. I have some other ideas that could use your input."

Apple Bloom grinned at the respectful tone. "Works both ways. I can always use a second opinion on some of my inventions. I hope you like what I've done to the 6000?"

Flam had already climbed up into the steering sofa. "We surely do! I can't wait to try it out in the open air!"

Applejack looked back and forth between them. "Hey, what's this?"

Apple Bloom replied, "Just something I came up with as a bonus for helping me work out how to use earth pony magic instead of unicorn magic in my inventions. It seemed a good way to test what I'd learned."

Flim climbed up alongside his brother. "And we're glad to have helped. Okay brother, time to go!"

He plugged his horn into a socket on the control panel and fired a burst of magic into it before removing it bringing his head back up. "Okay, thaumic boiler is running up to operating pressure... Ready Flim?"

Flim pulled a lever and there was a shrill whistle. "Ready Flam!"

"Whoa!" Applejack called out. "Y'all just be careful backing up! You'll need some-pony to help guide you back out onto the road to Canterlot!"

The two of them grinned at each other, their horns glowed, and a pair of mirror shades appeared on each of them.

"Where we're going..." Flim started, and Flam finished, "... we don't \_need\_ roads."

The Super Speedy Cider Squeezy 6000 lurched gently and rose into the air along with the trailer as wheels folded up underneath it, glowing with levitation rune-sets. It glided forward and up, turning to get a clear run above the apple trees, then the vents at the back glowed with a flare of rainbow flame and it shot off into the sky with a cheery whistle.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

37.1: Arr, Jim lad.  
>37.2: Possible title for this loop set: X-Communication.<br>37.3: Neither do I.  
>37.4: Caution: hard-case commander. Positively diamond hard, in fact.<br>37.5: Bonsai mountains. Very calming.  
>37.6: Yep, that's Discord's new card game.<br>37.7: My Enormous Dragon: Fire-breathing is magic. Also I assume Luna is "large enough to blot out the sun"...  
>37.8: Lanterns. How do they work?<br>37.9: Two loops for the price of one.  
>37.10: Who came to the same wrong conclusion as Twilight? Be honest... also, this totally explains in-loop the Stare.<br>37.11: Ow, my head.  
>37.12: Been a while.<p>

## 40. Chapter 40

### 38.1

"You know," Sweetie Belle said into the air, "I really appreciate how you've... tweaked your Modes to fit my theme."

\_Oh, you noticed?\_ Clover asked, gratified.

"Yeah. Took a while, but..." Sweetie shrugged. "Like I say, it's cool of you."

\_Think nothing of it. It was an interesting little exercise.\_

"Right. Anyway, I think I've got an idea..."

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo walked around the... <em>thing</em>. "Sweets... what \_is\_ that?"

Sweetie looked over, with affected casualness. "Oh, that's mine. It's what's called a bicycle."

The pegasus filly looked dubious. "How do you use it?"

"Oh, it's sort of like a scooter..." Sweetie slipped her right forehoof into one of the grip loops. "You have to have a kinda strange posture when using it, but it's really fast!"

"Okay, this I gotta see." Scootaloo unhooked her scooter from the cart they often used. "Betcha can't beat me!"

Sweetie just smiled, slipping the other forehoof in and latching one of her hind legs to a pedal. "Ready when you are."

"ThreetwooneGO!" Scootaloo rattled off, and kicked â€" hard.

\* \* \*

><p>Thirty seconds in, Scootaloo felt quite good about the impromptu race.<p>

No way was Sweetie going to beat \_her\_ at what she was best at!

\_Ring Cycle.\_

"Eh?" Scootaloo risked a glance back. That hadn't sounded like Sweetie's voice...

Then what \_was\_ Sweetie's voice rose above the rattle of wheels, singing something in a language Scootaloo didn't know.

And where was the musical accompaniment coming from?

Then Sweetie blew past her in a rush of wind, still singing and with the wheels of her... \_bicycle...\_ blazing a bright gold that almost hurt to look at.

\* \* \*

><p>"You cheated!" Scootaloo accused, as she skidded to a halt outside the Carousel Botique. "That had to be magic!"<p>

Then she blinked. "Wait, where'd the bicycle go?"

Sweetie lowered a silver flute from her mouth. "Pardon?"

"Where'd it go?"

"I put it away." Sweetie grinned. "Though, yeah, it did use magic. So does this."

Scootaloo looked at the flute, still panting. "A magic flute?"

"Exactly." The unicorn giggled.

"I don't get it..."

\* \* \*

><p>38.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Sir,<em>

\_I hope that this letter finds you well.\_

\_Actually, I don't really. But it's a polite thing to write nevertheless. I simply make this clarifying remark in case you come to the wrong conclusion from the first remark.\_

\_I have, over the last few months, been a profligate spender on the products of your establishment. The variety of your product line, and the speed of delivery of your experienced delivery staff, know no equal.\_

\_Sadly, the user friendliness of your products does not live up to the same standard. In fact, the user friendliness, ease of use, and

quality of the purchases I have made from your company are all so very low that they compare unfavourably to having one's hoof shut repeatedly in a drawer. Which is on fire. And full of rabid, flesh-seeking weasels.\_

\_To this end, I wish to inform you that I will be filing paperwork on the morrow to attempt to gain compensation from you and your company for the many burns, contusions, lacerations, blunt trauma, sharp trauma, general maiming, and sheer embarrassment brought about by my use of the products you supply.\_

\_I hope to see you in court, \_

\_Trixie Lulamoon.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Look, Trixie," Twilight said, as she finished taking the dictation. "Nobody <em>ever<em> catches him." A thought struck her. "And why do you want to anyway?"

"The challenge!" Trixie announced from her hospital bed. "Now, put the address of Acme Corporation on the envelope and send it! Then get to drawing up the court case."

"You're still not going to leave it?" Twilight asked.

A dark blue blur shot into the room, paused, selected a book from the nearest bookshelf and shot off with a cry of 'Meep meep!'

Twilight stared for a moment.

"Trixie?"

"Yes, Twilight?" Trixie replied, with a hint of triumph.

"I am sorry I ever doubted you. That road runner needs to go \_down.\_"

\* \* \*

><p>38.3 (Bobnik)<p>

The door of Big Mac's bar slammed open, and an agitated alicorn came through it.

"Hoofrot, poxes and mange upon budget meetings! May the inventor of the committee rest unquiet in Blessed Lands forevermore!" cried Princess Luna.

Celestia came through the door behind her sister, and while she was quiet and seemingly serene, Big Mac could tell she was as upset as Luna. It had taken him a long time to get over his own awe and learn to read the Sun Princess, but her eyes were empty, not just calm, a sure sign she had locked her emotions inside herself.

Luna stomped up to the bar. "Sir Macintosh, please, give us a beverage from far beyond. Something new and different to chase away the memory of tax proposals we have heard a thousand times and more."

"It is rather trying, but we can't get in the habit of just ignoring them all the time," said Celestia, "but something fresh and different would be just the ticket." She shuffled her hooves and sighed, replacing false calm with genuine weariness.

"Ah know just the thing. Have seat, and I'll bring it out." replied Mac.

When he returned with a large bottle and two glasses, the sisters had taken up seats in a corner booth, side by side. The looping bartender put the glasses on the table, and carefully poured a measure into each one.

"Rarity gave a couple of cases of this to me just a day ago, 'parently she picked it up when she was Queen of England for a loop. Supposed to be made by giants, haven't heard the whole story yet. Apart from the Bearers and Spike, you're the first to try it." he said as he poured.

The liquid was a pale transparent green, and the noise as it was poured indicated it was fizzy. It had a scent like summer just shading into autumn. Oddly, as it was poured, an opaque layer formed on the bottom of each glass.

"Giants, you say? Perhaps 'twas Harry Potter's Loop?" asked Luna, as her horn glowed and the glass rose to her muzzle. "Up with novelty, and down with boredom!" The glasses clinked together and both sisters took a hefty slug from the large tumblers.

The flavour was redolent with berries and cream, but had none of the texture of a dairy product, and the bubbles chased the flavour down the throat with remarkable speed. There was no burn of alcohol, but a faint tingle showed there was some manner of magic in the drink.

"Oh, I do like that," said Celestia. "Very refreshing, and it's chased the cobwebs right out of my head." She raised the glass higher to peer at the liquid. "Why, the bubbles are moving downwards!"

It was true. The layer at the bottom of the glass was actually a head of froth, and the fizz descended through the glass to meet it. As Luna began to shift uneasily in her seat, Celestia noticed that Big Mac had retreated behind the bar at speed. She knew a pony taking cover when she saw it.

Before she could open her mouth to inquire, the natural consequence of the downward-moving bubbles hit both sisters simultaneously. The noise was indescribable, and so loud as to shake the building. Mac's wisdom in sheltering behind the bar became apparent as loose objects were hurled about the room like a tornado had been let loose inside.

In short, the Diarchy of Equestria farted so hard it blew them out of their seats.

Luna scramble d backwards off the table where she'd been blown as Celestia staggered back across the floor. Both of them stared incredulously at the miraculously intact drinks, then at each other, and finally accusingly across the room at the bartender.

"Eeyup, frobscottle will do that." said Mac, as he shook his head to clear it. "Y'all still bored?"

"Indeed not!" cried Luna, as she swept up her glass once more. "A toast, to the Equestrian Revenue Department. May their anthem resound eternal!"

\* \* \*

><p>38.4<p>

"Hey, Twilight?" Pinkie said, grinning.

"I dread to answer... yes, Pinkie?"

"I worked out how I'm gonna beat Nightmare Moon!" The pink pony held up her Ring. "Oh, can you put that shield spell on me, though, 'cause I'm not all that practised with this and I'd prefer to find out I can't do a shield in a learn-from-this-and-keep-going way, not a whoops-back-to-the-loop-start way."

Twilight waited a moment, to be sure Pinkie was done with that sentence. "Yes. I'm doing it for everypony, -ling, and so on... though it does of course count as points against you if the mountain gets too damaged."

"Sure!" Pinkie concentrated, and the Ring flared, then settled back to her coat colour.

"Wait..." Twilight pointed. "Did you just-"

"One hundred percent recharge is go!" Pinkie winked. "I just need to think of yay-I-can-do-the-same-birthday-party-over-and-over !"

After a long minute, Twilight threw up her hooves, staggered for a moment and dropped back down onto all fours. "You know what, fine. You invented it, so presumably you know how it works."

"Yep!" Pinkie's grin flashed as bright as her Ring had.

\* \* \*

><p>"...last forever!"<p>

Pinkie trotted in through the stage entrance. "Hiya moonbutt!"

Nightmare Moon's expression was a sight to behold.

"Insolence!" she shouted, turning, and lighting up a spell on her horn. "Give me one good reason I should not simply destroy you now, and spare myself further insult!"

"Hmmm..." Pinkie rolled her eyes up, pondering, and tapped her chin with one hoof. "Nope, can't think of one."

Nightmare Moon unleashed a bolt of black fire, which narrowly missed Pinkie and set the wall alight. "There will not be another warning shot, peasant."

Pinkie grinned. "Oh, you know my family?"

"...pardon?"

"Momma Pie and Daddy Pie are certainly peasants â€" though, more of smallholders, I suppose, so I don't know if that's the right term. But you must have met them, 'cause otherwise you wouldn't get it right?"

"No, it's an... insult..." Nightmare Moon mumbled, then remembered herself. "Trouble me no more, and you may keep your life."

"Okie dokie!" Pinkie nodded. "Hey, Nimmie?"

The dark alicorn had only just turned back to the rest of the town. Her eye was seen to twitch as she turned once more. "What?"

"Think fast!"

Something glowing pink shot out from behind Pinkie's back, and fired a blue globe at the floor.

Then, with a bwuum noise, a two-meter diameter hole appeared in the stage. On the other side was space.

And quite a lot of escaping air.

And, within a second or two, Nightmare Moon.

In both a literal and metaphorical sense, it was simply not her day.

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie let the construct vanish, and it took the portal with it.<p>

"Ta-da!"

In the crowd, Twilight shook her head with a wince. So, Pinkie could use her Ring to create a portal gun.

That was going to be... interesting...

\* \* \*

><p>"<strong>Cryyst-<strong>

vwum

Pinkie counted. "Four, five, six-"

\*\*"taaaaaals!"\*\*

vwum

Twilight followed Sombra as he fell through the blue portal, then came sailing down through the air from the orange one hundreds of



metres up.

For about the fiftieth time.

"How long are you going to keep doing that?"

Pinkie shrugged. "Until it isn't funny any more."

"Is that by your judgement or mine?"

"Theirs," Pinkie replied, pointing to a number of Crystal Ponies.

By now, some of them were making popcorn.

\* \* \*

><p>38.5<p>

Fluttershy lay back in bed and sighed, an all-too-familiar melancholia stealing over her.

A Fused Loop was over, and now it was back to Equestria.

Nice, safe Equestria. Same old Equestria.

Twilight had mentioned this to them, back after the first couple of fused loops. It was sometimes hard to maintain perspective after seeing the multiverse like that.

They'd gotten used to it, after a while. Friends helped â€" though Twilight often had loops alone, being an Anchor was awful sometimes â€" and so did the perspective that came with age.

But sometimes... it was worse than normal. Sometimes she'd lost close friends, so recently made. All Loopers prepared for the possibility, she'd known it was coming, but...

Angel Bunny cut into her mope by kicking her bed hard enough to leave a dent.

"Naughty rabbit!" Fluttershy scolded, rolling off the mattress and giving him a tolerant look. "Keep that up and I'll make you dust the bookshelf!"

The threat bounced off Angel's armour like a rubber ball. He shrugged and bounced off to... well, probably threaten a songbird or something.

A moment's check on her Loop memories reassured Fluttershy that this Loop had begun at the normal time. That meant that the Summer Sun celebration was just around the corner.

Now, was there a song she hadn't taught her bird friends?

\* \* \*

><p>The doorbell tinkled.<p>

"Come in," Fluttershy called softly. "It's unlocked."

Cheerilee pushed the door open, smiling. "Hello, Fluttershy. Sorry to intrude â€" I know you must be busy with the preparations for the Summer Sun Celebration..."

"Oh, it's no problem," Fluttershy replied. "I was just making some tea. Would you like some?"

The teacher frowned, considering it. "Maybe later."

"All right." Nodding, Fluttershy put the kettle back on the stove, just to one side to keep it at the right temperature. "What brings you out here?"

Now that was the real question. Cheerilee certainly never came out here in a normal loop, so...

"Well, it's quite a puzzle, actually," Cheerilee admitted. "You see, there's a child who Nurse Redheart and I found wandering around Ponyville this morning. He seemed quite confused, but was insistent that he meet you."

She stepped fully into the cottage, and turned to the door. "Come on in, Lemon."

A bright yellow earth pony colt walked in, a little unsteady on his legs, and his eyes locked onto Fluttershy.

Fluttershy blinked, then gasped.

"Leman?"

"So you do know him?" Cheerilee asked, satisfied. "I'll want to hear all the details â€" but later. Can I leave you to take care of him for today? I'm afraid I've got work to do for the festival as well."

"That's fine," Fluttershy said absently.

The moment Cheerilee was out of the house, she let her happiness off the leash. "Leman! I thought I'd lost you."

She knelt down, spreading her forelegs, and the colt stumbled forward into her embrace.

\* \* \*

><p>"I still don't know what's going on..." Lemon Rush said, looking around the cottage. "The last I remember, we were on Fenris." Preparing for a delegation from the Light Eldar Empire to arrive, actually.<p>

"Well..." Fluttershy thought for a moment as she poured the tea. "Okay. There are things called time loops, and people from one sometimes end up in another. This is my home one."

"It certainly looks more peaceful than mine," the colt said, glancing out the window. "And warmer."

He paused. "Didn't you used to have a horn, little mother?"

"Oh, of course." Fluttershy closed her eyes, let the Element of Kindness flash into being, and Ascended. "I forgot, you've only seen me like this."

"Neat trick. Can we all do that?"

"No, sorry." Fluttershy shrugged, reverting the transformation. "It's... complicated. Come on, I'll introduce you to Twilight, and she can tell you what you need to know about the Loops."

"That works for me." Rush stood up, and nearly fell over.

Fluttershy's hoof swept out to steady him, and he gratefully used it to stand back upright. "This is humiliating..." he muttered, face burning beneath his coat.

"I had just as much trouble with walking on two legs," Fluttershy smiled. "And with flying, actually. I still have a preference for walking where possible."

She nuzzled him affectionately. "It's good to see you, Leman."

"And you." The normally-a-primarch laughed. "At least I didn't make \_too\_ much of a mess when I arrived! If I'd acted more like the Emperor would have then I'd have thought this was some sorcerous trick!"

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy winced internally as she bumped into Gilda. Normally she was able to adroitly avoid the belligerent griffin, but she'd just... forgotten. Too much else to think about.<p>

"Hey!" Gilda said, scowling, and then roared.

The roar was cut off within about a second, as two bright yellow hooves thudded into Gilda's torso. Air wooshed out in a strangled squawk, and the impact sent her beak over tail onto the road some distance away.

"Let me make one thing clear," Lemon said, sounding more predatory than the griffin he was standing on top of â€" in spite of his high-pitched colt's voice. "You can challenge anyone you like to a fight. I don't mind that. But you force a fight with someone who can't protect themselves, and you answer to me."

"Lemon!" Fluttershy said, sternly. "I know she's a bully, but that doesn't mean you can bully her back."

"Sorry, little mother," he said, shaking his head and stepping off Gilda. "I don't like seeing you hurt."

"I know you don't," Fluttershy replied. "But still."

He nodded.

Fluttershy bent down to talk more privately. "When did you learn to fight like that?"

The colt smiled. "I'm a \_primarch.\_ We're \_made\_ good at fighting."

\* \* \*

><p>38.6<p>

"Sleipnir?"

The horse deity turned from his keyboards. (Yes, keyboards. Eight legs is helpful if you can multi-task.) "Yeah, mom?"

Loki winced. "Stop-"

"-calling you that," Sleipnir finished. "Did you expect that any of your children would lack a sense of humour? It's \_hilarious\_ how you react."

Shaking his head, the trickster held up a hand. "A very good point. Though, speaking of my children, I've got a... request, from Fenris."

It was Sleipnir's turn to wince. "I haven't forgotten when he chased me all around the room at his party."

"You're a horse, he's a wolf, it's natural." Loki's grin was back on his face. "Anyway. One of the Loopers \_he\_ keeps an eye on needs a break. Badly. Is there a slot in one of your worlds you can drop her into?"

"Well..." Sleipnir turned back to his computer, and started typing away. "There is one relatively controllable fused loop opportunity coming up for Equestria, so I can drop her into that when her next out-loop slot comes in."

"As soon as possible." Loki paused. "Fenris is going to spend a \_lot\_ of power on giving her this."

"Well, if it's that urgent..." Sleipnir tapped a few more controls. "There, done."

"Thank you."

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight..." Spike said, slowly reaching for his 'saber. "You might want to see this."<p>

His tone of voice was warning enough. Twilight stepped quickly up to the window. "What?"

All she could see was a fairly normal market day in Ponyville – the first following the Summer Sun celebration, true, so a little more nervous than normal, but nothing major.

Spike pointed, indicating a pale blue earth pony mare. "Her."

Twilight squinted. "I still don't see it... is she a Looper?"

"Must be. And not a local." Spike shot a glance at Twilight, then his eyes widened. "Oh! Sorry, I keep forgetting you're not an empath."

"Just experience, that's all I have," Twilight said with a shrug. "So, what is it?"

"That mare is about a hoof-length short of snapping. The Force feels like... like lightning's about to strike." Spike's expression clouded. "The last time it felt this bad was... well, suffice to say force psychosis was involved."

Twilight winced, wondering if he had been the one involved. She knew Spike had had the occasional issue with control â€" every Looper had â€" but she hadn't pried. Courtesy.

"So..." she mused. "What do we do?"

"Well..." Spike cracked his knuckles. "I'm the one with battle precognition, so I'll go talk to her. You send for the others and then hang around in case I need support."

\* \* \*

><p>"Excuse me?" Spike said, as calmly as he could with his reflexes on high alert.<p>

It was strange, feeling the fury and despair roiling from the mare's mind as she turned to him with a polite "yes?"

Whatever else, she had impressive emotional control.

"Well, I was wondering..." Spike considered, then went for broke. "Are you new to this loop?"

Her eyes widened. "Loop? Do you mean-" The question went unfinished.

"Time Loops, yes."

"Are there such things as vampires here?" she asked, the words almost tumbling over one another.

"No," Spike replied firmly.

"Are there such things as werewolves here?"

That one took a moment more thought. "No true werewolves, one hobbyist." Fluttershy was Awake, after all.

The mare exhaled. "Right. Right. Thank you for the help."

"Hold on," Spike added, before she turned to go. "What's your name?"

"Clear Water," she answered, and left at what looked like a cross between a canter and a lope.

\* \* \*

><p>"...so, any ideas?" Spike said, having finished reporting the conversation to the rest of the local Loopers.<p>

"I think I know." Twilight winced. "And if she's who I think she is, then she is in serious need of help."

"Well, don't keep us in suspense, dear," Rarity admonished.

Twilight reached into thin air, rummaged for a moment, and plonked a set of books down on the table.

"Oh, me," Dash muttered, as they all looked at the front covers of the Twilight books.

\* \* \*

><p>Leah Clearwater sat back on her hind legs in the forest, not far from where she'd... appeared.<p>

No vampires. No werewolves.

For once, she was safe.

Bending down, she bit off some grass. It tasted... bland, really.

She could live with that. Boring was something she needed.

Every rustle of a twig, every errant breeze... they set her off. Made her fine-tuned instincts scream warning, after hundreds of years of living on a knife-edge.

It was a simple equation.

Meet Edward Cullen when in human form, he finds out about her having travelled in time " and about her deep and abiding hatred of him.

Get too close to the pack when in wolf form, they find out the same thing " and a less bitter but still intense dislike.

Mistakes had gotten her killed before.

But she was safe here.

"Safe," she murmured. Willing herself to believe it.

It would take some doing.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay," Twilight finally said, some hours later. "I think that's everything."<p>

Fifty or so suggestions had been pared down to the more realistic ones, and then again to the most important ones.

Equestria was a sanctuary loop, but technically their responsibilities ended there... but none of them felt comfortable not helping someone in that much trouble.

Stretching, the Anchor peered out the window at the long shadows of evening. Then blinked, and looked at a clock.

"Your Highnesses..." she said, weakly. "You're late."

Celestia and Luna sat bolt upright in their chairs, exchanged a look, and changed day to night in seconds.

"Sorry," Luna said with a wince. "Lost track of time."

Twilight nodded. "Happens to all of us. I think I forgot the first time I was a Royal Sister... something about a research binge, and then the guards started asking why it was still Tuesday."

Scattered chuckles greeted that remark.

"Anyway..." Twilight turned to Spike. "Can you check?"

He nodded, and closed his eyes. Three long, deep breaths, and they opened again. "I think she's asleep."

"Right." Twilight nodded at the princess of the night. "You're up."

\* \* \*

><p>A pair of ice-cold eyes were staring down at her.<p>

She ran, but nothing she could do got them off her. They were digging into her, revealing all her secrets to a man who had killed in the past and would kill in the future if he felt it to his advantage.

In a panic, she phased to wolf. The eyes closed, but nine other sets of pitiless golden eyes opened, all around her.

A kind of pitying dislike battered her thoughts. Contempt for her skills. Fear of the outlier â€" the female werewolf. Resentment that she dared to phase in front of them, coupled with lingering images of her own body â€" attached to an unmistakable emotional overlay that made her feel dirty.

Hard to tell her thoughts from theirs. Impossible to keep secrets.

Her father, dying of shock from seeing her change shape. Her brother, upset to see her. Her boyfriend, with eyes only for another â€" again, and again, and again.

Self-loathing. What was wrong with her body? Why didn't it just \_work?\_ Even when she didn't phase, it never... worked.

Then the flood of memories... stopped, as though cut with a knife.

A full moon shone gently down on her, in a calm and quiet forest.

The images, wolves and vampires, melted away.

"Leah Clearwater?"

She raised her head, looking for the speaker, and shifted back to human. "That's me."

From a pool of moonlight, a... well, a winged unicorn... faded into view. "This is a dream â€" it was a nightmare, and a bad one. Are you alright?"

She chuckled. "I've been worse."

The unicorn nodded. "You are currently in Equestria's time loop, not your own. I have the ability to walk in dreamscapes, and wished to come here to extend an offer to you."

Leah blinked. "Okay. Sure." She shook her head, as memory returned. "I'm in horseland at the moment."

"Equestria," the unicorn stressed slightly. "I am Princess Luna, younger of the diarchs of the nation you are in."

"Luna," Leah repeated. "Well, you know who I am... so, why?"

Luna pursed her lips â€" an interesting sight, on a horse. "We are familiar with the world you are from. Frankly, we feel sorry for you."

"I don't need pity." Leah's response was instant.

"An admirable trait... but only if not taken too far." Luna shook her head. "It is not pity, so much as..." she paused. "I have no personal experience with your world. But from what I have been told, that you are still sane is quite the accomplishment."

"You're not convincing me," Leah said, frowning. "Sorry, but..."

Luna clamped down on what she was about to say, and mulled over her words for some time. Finally, she began again. "Please, consider it. Though I would not presume to bribe you, nor to offer you coercion, I think it would be good for you. And..." another silence. "One of our number, one of the younger loopers, has experience with how to construct a mental shield. One which remains operative no matter your form."

Leah tried to damp the incredible spike of relief which those words woke, remembering all the other times things had gone wrong. "That's a powerful incentive."

Silence returned, stretching for several more minutes.

"Where would I find you?" Leah eventually asked.

Luna sighed with relief. "In the town you were in earlier this day, there is a tree with a house built into it just off the main square. Two of us may be found within... along with a selection of library books."

The werewolf surprised herself with a chuckle. "Okay. I'm not promising anything, but..."



Luna bowed, then smiled. "Confine when you go to sleep to the hours of darkness, and I will do all I can to keep you from nightmares. That is a gift."

With that, she slowly faded from view.

Now alone in the dream-scape, Leah shifted back into a wolf.

Then she lay with her muzzle on her paws, and cried.

\* \* \*

><p>Mac walked into the Books and Branches, carrying a satchel of books on each flank. "Afternoon, Twilight."<p>

"Hello, Mac," Twilight replied with a smile. "Harvest done?"

"Yep." Mac started unloading the books â€" mostly reference books about alchemy, along with something about liquid rocket fuel. "AJ got lazy and did 'em with telekinesis. Thanks fer th' loans."

"It's no trouble." Twilight shrugged. "What were you doing with them, by the way?"

"Tryin' to come up with somethin' potent enough fer a dragon." Mac shook his head. "No go so far."

Twilight picked up the rocket fuel book and opened it at the first reference tab. "This is about hydrazine."

"Spike didn't even burp." Mac chuckled. "One o' these days ah'm gonna invent a tumbler material that can handle Chlorine Triflouride. \_That\_ should do it."

Twilight winced.

The bell jangled as she flipped through Mac's notes. "Come in."

"Is this a bad time?"

She looked up, and saw it was a somewhat-familiar blue mare. Leah.

"No, it's fine. Mac knows." Twilight flared her horn, flipping the door sign to closed. "Okay, let's get this sorted out."

\* \* \*

><p>"How much do you know about the loops?" Twilight asked, offering Leah her choice of benches in the underground lecture room.<p>

(She had an underground lecture room this loop. Trixie had insisted on a suitably elaborate underground base.)

"Not much," Leah admitted. "I know I'm â€" I was â€" stuck in some kind of sick Groundhog day thing, but years long."

"Okay." Twilight nodded, levitating a thin wooden stick and clicking to the first slide. "The Time Loops started when the computer that basically underlies all reality â€" Yggdrasil â€" got badly damaged.

The Loops are a kind of fail-safe mode, which is how reality is being preserved as it's worked on and fixed."

She clicked to a second slide. "At first, just five worlds started looping, and the rest were static. Time passed, and the area being stabilized expanded â€" resulting in more looping worlds. We're in my home world, Equestria, several steps down the line. Yours is at least six more, but we haven't done a precise count â€" the idea of 'at the same time' kind of blurs in this situation."

Twilight paused. "Oh, feel free to stop me if you have any questions."

Leah just nodded.

"Now, each looping world has what's called an Anchor. They're the person who keeps it stable. Other people loop, but the Anchor is the one who always does â€" others may or may not."

"Does that mean that I'm one of these Anchors, then?" Leah asked.

"I'm almost certain you are," Twilight replied. "I'd be surprised if you weren't. Now, the reason you're in my world is what's called a fused loop. These are a bit more complicated..."

\* \* \*

><p>After the lecture was over, Leah remained silent for a few minutes.<p>

"I see," she said eventually. "So... does that mean the reason I can't have children..."

"It might be partly due to your phasing," Twilight hedged, "but no looper can have children anyway unless they did the first time around, as I understand it."

"Good to know I'm not that much of a freak..." Leah muttered to herself. "Right. Okay. Just one question â€" how do you all know so much about me?"

"That's... one of the stranger things," Twilight said, picking up a set of books on a sideboard with her magic. "Every world we've ever discovered in the loops, bar one, is like a version of some fictional material from another world. Yours isn't the lone exception."

She deposited the books in front of Leah.

"Sorry to say, they're mostly from Bella's point of view."

Leah picked the first one up. "Twilight?"

"Yes?" Twilight said, then winced. "Oh, that's going to happen a lot this loop..."

"Wait, your name's Twilight?"

"Twilight Sparkle. Sorry I didn't introduce myself before..."

Leah blinked, then burst out laughing. It was a slightly hysterical, desperate laugh in character " but it \_was\_ laughter.

"Oh, my sides..." she said, panting, as the fit wound down. "That's \_bad\_."

"I'm not usually a walking pun!" Twilight protested. "Just when this universe comes up."

"Mine, you mean." Calming down, Leah opened the first book. "Ew... sparkly vampire."

She looked up. "Edward's a lot scarier than this in reality, though."

Twilight nodded soberly. "I can barely imagine. I've actually been to your world, once, though I was actually in Bella's place " I don't think your world had started looping yet. I neutralized the Cullen's magic and had them arrested."

Leah's jaw dropped. "That's... that's perfect. That's the best revenge I could have come up with!"

The unicorn shrugged, embarrassed. "I don't like killing."

"Neither do I," Leah said, then shrugged. The gesture carried a deep weariness. "Not like I have much choice sometimes, though."

The silence stretched out after that.

After a few minutes, they heard the library bell tinkle again.

"That must be the others. I'll go tell them where we are." Twilight stepped to the door, then paused. "If you want to, you can read those books to get some sense of how your world works from the point of view of Bella. I won't force you, though."

"Okay." Leah nodded.

"And " I want to make one thing clear, Leah. If we're making you uncomfortable, say so and we'll stop. If you want to go, we'll let you. We won't force you to do or think anything, and we'll make clear \_what\_ we can do so you can make a judgement call."

For a moment, Twilight's eyes seemed to harden. "Equestria is a safe loop. And that's one thing we all know you need."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight waited until the others were seated, then sat down herself.<p>

"Everything going all right?"

"Fine," Spike replied.

Diamond Tiara and Fluttershy nodded their agreement.

"There's more of us than this," Twilight added to Leah, "but these three are probably the ones you'll get the most help from first."

Okay, guys, full disclosure."

Tiara spoke first. "My name is Diamond Tiara. I am a P-2 telepath and telempath thanks to a rather strange fused loop, though I'm deliberately not trying to receive right now. I'm trained in how to teach others to shield."

Leah nodded. "Yeah, that's going to be immensely helpful. That jerk Edward..."

"And the pack," Twilight added gently. "Shielding works both ways â€" project and receive."

The visiting anchor looked down for a moment. When she spoke again, her voice was slightly raw. "Keep going."

Spike cleared his throat. "I'm Spykoranuvellitar â€" I usually go by Spike. I'm a dragon, and since one of my first fused loops was in the Star Wars world, I'm basically a Jedi. That makes me a receiving empath by default, though again I'm maintaining your privacy as far as I can."

Leah shook her head. "This is just..."

"Overwhelming?" Twilight suggested. "I've had that myself. We actually corresponded with the team who were our own sort-of creators once."

"I'd like to give mine a punch to the jaw," Leah said sotto voce. "What about you?"

"Um... I'm Fluttershy. I specialize in animals and veterinary work, and I'm... sort of a shapeshifter."

"Huh. Well, fair enough." Leah looked around. "What about... Luna, was it?"

"She's asleep right now, I think," Twilight said, checking the time. "She said she was helping you have dreamless sleeps."

"Yeah. I'd... like to thank her, if I can."

"Shouldn't be a problem," Twilight said confidently. "Our loops tend to last several years, you'll have the time. Now, I'd guess that you'd like to learn from Tiara first. Is that correct?"

Leah nodded. "Yes. I'd... really appreciate being able to keep my thoughts mine."

Spike stood up. "Okay. D.T, do you want me as the other side?"

"Sounds good." Diamond Tiara stood as well, and frowned. "Wait, where's the side rooms in this place? I lost track of the corridors, I've never been down here."

"We've never had this before," Twilight replied. "Trixie built it. I'll show you the route."

"Right, gotcha. Suppose we're lucky she didn't build a space

station..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, not bad. Now, try and hold it for a few minutes." Tiara looked across at Spike and nodded.<p>

Spike reached out a hand, closed his eyes, and focused.

There were a few seconds of silence, then Leah winced. "Ow. Who did that?"

"That was me," Spike admitted. "Tiara wanted me to test if you could pick up an attempt to read you. Looks like you can."

"Well, that's something..." Leah rubbed her forehead with a hoof. "I'm guessing you still got in, though?"

"No, actually," Spike said. "The shield held until you started talking. You're doing fine."

"It's been a week..." Leah said. "I know you have school and stuff, Tiara, but I feel like this is taking forever."

The filly thought about it. "Actually, taking into account all the meditation I've been getting you to do when I'm at school or at home, you're about average."

She made a face. "I know Bella takes, what, three hours to get her magical anti-mind-reading shield to cover an entire platoon's worth of people, but that's not normal. Hay, I've got an advantage at this sub-field, and it took me ages to manage a group shield."

"Advantage?" Leah asked, trying to form a shield again.

"You've seen my cutie mark?" Leah nodded, and Tiara went on. "Well, one of the things we've noticed in the loops is that they have a lot of interpretations. Mine's got a diamond in it, so... hard shields is the aspect of psionics I'm especially good at."

Spike chuckled. "That and being a diamond-hard hard-assed b-"

"Aren't Jedi supposed to be above name-calling?" Diamond Tiara asked archly.

"Not that I'm aware of!" Spike replied cheerfully.

Leah chuckled, still concentrating.

\* \* \*

><p>"Sorry, guys," Tiara said, getting up. "I've got to head home now. Dad gets upset if I'm out too late."<p>

"That, right there." Leah shook her head. "It's so... strange, I suppose. I mean, I've been through hundreds of years and all that, but... it's strange to think of a kid doing that." A shadow passed across her face. "Apart from that half-vampire one from my

home."

"You think it's strange to think about?" Tiara asked. "Try living it. I've been in charge of armies before, and now I've got a bed time..."

"Is that common?"

"Well, I'm about Tiara's age, in one sense." Spike shrugged. "But dragons can grow with strong enough emotion, and Twilight and I reverse-engineered it so I can basically change physical age at will."

"Huh."

"Yeah, that's about how everyone reacts." Spike opened the door for Tiara to leave, then glanced back at Leah. "Should I get Fluttershy to come down?"

"Sure, go ahead."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, what helps me is that... I don't think of it as being 'me and the wolf'..." Fluttershy paused. "Or me and the panther, or me and the budgie, or... well, any animal â€" they're just me. I'm sort of comfortable-ish in a lot of forms, but that's because of practise."<p>

"Yeah, I know what you mean in one way." Leah lay back against the wall. "But... well, every time I see Imprinting, every time I get given an order by an Alpha, it frightens me. My wolf side has instincts â€" powerful ones â€" that it feels like could take over at any time. Stop me from being \_me.\_"

"Right." Fluttershy nodded. "Okay, let's have a look at this from a different direction. Could you transform for me, please?"

Leah nodded, and erupted outwards into her lupine form. At a gesture, she padded out to the centre of the room.

Fluttershy walked around her, muttering under her breath and occasionally casting a small spell.

"I think I see," she said, a few minutes later. "You're not quite a natural wolf â€" but we already knew that. The unusual thing about it seems to be linked to how you got the form in the first place... and yes, your instincts \_are\_ misfiring. They're originally from a \_male\_ wolf, and the conversion to female didn't go quite right. I think we can sort it out with a few weeks' time."

Leah shifted back to pony. "Will that last?"

"It should do. They're already trying to snap into the right shape, they just don't know what the right shape \_is\_... for an unusual interpretation of 'know', of course."

"Okay. Thanks."

"It's no trouble at all," Fluttershy insisted. "Though I'd like to

get my hooves on the shamans who cast this spell. I'd... give them a big telling off."

Leah laughed.

"As for the two things you mentioned â€" neither of them is natural. They're like... some stupid idea of how wolves actually work." Fluttershy frowned momentarily. "Wolves mate for life, but they don't instantly lock onto a mate. That's... silly. And if a wolf doesn't want to listen to the pack alphas, they just leave."

"You seem pretty angry about it," Leah ventured.

"I am. Well," the pegasus backpedalled, blushing. "Cross. I'm cross, because wolves don't behave like that and because all these changes do is hurt people. They're almost like curses."

"Now that I can believe."

"Though..." Fluttershy paced in a circle. "No, I can't be sure enough. I'll let you know if I get anything."

Leah nodded. "Sure. Now, what's for lunch?"

Fluttershy rummaged in a set of saddlebags. "Here we are. Watercress sandwiches."

\* \* \*

><p>"Sorry I'm late," Spike said, pushing the door open. "I had to help Twilight and the others with the Nightmare Night preparations."<p>

Tiara nodded, and gestured to Spike's seat. As he sat down, she gave him a meaningful look and then pointed at Leah.

He closed his eyes, and reached out with the Force. Gently at first, then with more and more power behind it.

"Well?" Tiara asked some minutes later, when he sat back.

"Couldn't get anything. In or out. You?"

"Me neither." Diamond Tiara grinned. "Well done, Leah. That shield should hold up against anything, so long as you can hold it."

Leah looked at them, still holding the shield. "What's next?"

"Next, we make sure you can hold it when you're under stress." Tiara tapped a hoof on the floor. "I was going to ask how we stress-test her, but the answer's simple. Trixie."

"...yeah, that'll work if anything will," Spike agreed. "I'll let her know."

"Still, she deserves a week or so off," Tiara mused. "What about Nightmare Night itself?"

"Which is?"

"I think the earth equivalent is an American-style Halloween. Lots of costumes, that sort of thing â€" and trick-or-treating." Spike grinned. "I'm going as Captain America!"

Leah blinked. "Why?"

"Because it is hilarious to watch everypony trying to work out what the costume is," Spike answered. "Want to join us? I'm going around with Tiara, her friend Silver and the Crusaders, because they need someone to look after them."

"I could kill you with my mind," Tiara said blandly.

"Yeah, but then Rarity would avenge me." Spike shrugged. "How about it?"

"So I'd just, what, phase to wolf and spend the evening getting candy?" They nodded. "Sure."

\* \* \*

><p>"Let's see..." Fluttershy said, pacing in a circle around Leah just outside a thin circle of wolf fur. "I think that's everything..."<p>

She looked at Leah. "If you want to back out of this, then now is the time. It will be... painful."

"I'm ready," Leah said promptly. "Do it."

The pegasus nodded, then erupted with light.

Leah clamped down on her instinctive reaction to flinch, and forced herself to keep looking.

When the light died down, there was a glittering necklace hanging from Fluttershy's neck â€" and she was an alicorn.

Silently, her horn began to glow.

The yellow fingers of magic spread out to fill the room, then concentrated into the fur circle. It took on a golden lustre, rose into the air-

Pain lanced through Leah. Unbidden, she phased to wolf, and the magic jumped across from the fur to her.

Foreign thoughts invaded her mind. Simple thoughts â€" the behaviour of a normal wolf. There was some sapience there, some ability to reason â€" some language â€" but not much.

Then her own, old instincts awoke, rising from the depths of her mind to take over.

She screamed as the two sets of instructions clashed, with a sensation like fire running down her spine and up through her head. Her personality â€" what made her her â€" was shunted aside, only able to observe. And hurt.

For a moment, she seemed to be entirely outside her own body,



looking down on it as it flailed in agony. Then everything went black.

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you alright?" Fluttershy's voice woke her.<p>

Leah opened her eyes, and wished she hadn't. A migraine stabbed her in both eyes, and she closed them again with a yelp.

"Oh, dear..." Fluttershy said sadly. "Hold on, try this."

Soothing warmth spread through her. "There."

This time, opening her eyes just got her a headache. She tried to stand, and fell over when her paws didn't want to work properly.

"Don't worry. You'll be fine in a minute." Fluttershy's next sentence sounded apologetic. "I had to sort-of rebuild your instincts from the ground up, so they're still calibrating."

"Ow..." Leah muttered... then blinked. "Dihd aye jussst-"

Fluttershy eeped. "Oops. I think this means you got the optional extra..."

Shaking her head, Leah tried again. This time, it came out a little closer to intelligible. "How cahn I tallk?"

"I might have made a mistake," Fluttershy admitted. "I've had to cast Origin of Species a few times before, but usually speech is just part of what goes into it. I think I included it out of habit."

"Well... no harm done, I suppose," Leah said, feeling her jaw. "\_Man\_", but that's going to confuse the rest of the Pack."

She sniffed the air.

"Oh, you must be hungry." Fluttershy trotted over to the door, left for a minute, and came back in as Leah was trying to stand up again. Something big dragged on the floor behind her. "Here. It's venison."

"Are... you okay with that kind of thing? Hunting?"

Fluttershy shrugged. "I fill up half my subspace pocket with ethically sourced meat whenever I get a chance, because â€" yes, animals here do tend to sapience. But this is fine. Roast, actually."

Leah needed no further instructions.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, so... how long did that take?" Leah asked, still slightly startled by how <em>much<em> food she'd put away.

"The magic?" Fluttershy checked. At Leah's nod, she went on. "Three days."

"...okay, wow."

"Epic-grade magic is like that." Fluttershy shrugged. "I can't cast it very often, either, it drains me in ways which are permanent. But-" she held up a hoof, forestalling what Leah was about to say. "I don't mind."

"Well... thanks."

Fluttershy smiled.

"Seriously," Leah went on. "You guys have been great to me. I was a wreck when I got here, and..."

"Don't worry about it." Fluttershy stood. "Now, you still need to finish recalibrating your instincts... want to go for a run?"

Leah stood, finding it much easier than even ten minutes ago. "Sure."

\* \* \*

><p>Two shapes, one larger than the other, loped through the uncertain light beneath the boughs.<p>

The smaller one changed course, bounding off a tree trunk to turn, and the larger one threw up divots of earth as she matched it.

They emerged into a clearing where a tree had recently fallen, and the smaller one gathered herself before leaping at a startled bear. The impact bowled the bear over entirely, and the smaller wolf licked his throat before jumping off.

"So..." the larger wolf said, amused. "Counting coup?"

The smaller one nodded, with a trace of embarrassment. The bear, meanwhile, headed home in confusion.

"Anywhere I can give that a go?"

The smaller wolf nodded again and turned, tossing her head to tell the larger one to follow.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, this is it, huh?" Leah said.<p>

"Pretty much," Twilight replied. "Our loop normally ends tonight."

"Well, in case I don't get another chance... thanks, all of you." Leah smiled. "You've been lovely."

The various loopers of Equestria shuffled, embarrassed.

Leah looked again at the small bracelet she'd been given. Well over a dozen silver charms dangled off it, most of them styled for cutie marks of those she'd met here. (The rest were a little more allegorical – Spike, for example, was represented by a silver

flame.)

Then she dropped it into her new subspace pocket, where it wouldn't get lost. She could only keep one thing in it at the moment, but â€" well, one was enough.

"How are you going to spend the last evening?" Twilight asked.

Leah shrugged. "Not got a particular plan, really. Why?"

Twilight grinned. "Good. Pinkie?"

Then a hundred party poppers detonated at once.

\* \* \*

><p>Leah's eyes opened, showing her the ceiling of her room.<p>

Her room at La Push.

For a moment, she wondered if it was a dream â€" then she concentrated, and the bracelet appeared in a little flicker of light.

She smiled happily, then put it away again. \_Not a dream.\_

Standing up, she contemplated exactly how to do things this time.

\* \* \*

><p>As the three new vampires emerged from the treeline, they arrayed themselves so that one of the males was in front of the others. Clearly, Bella reasoned, he must be the leader.<p>

And their eyes... were red. Sinister red.

Then something very large and silvery-grey shot past her, cannoned into the other male, and tore him apart.

Bella could hear Alice's exclamation of surprise, and tried to work out what that could mean. Could it be that Alice hadn't seen this?

Beside her, Edward muttered something about being unable to 'read' the newcomer.

While that had been going on, the enormous thing â€" creature â€" wolf turned whiplash-fast and pounced on the female vampire.

Glittering venom and chunks of vampire went flying.

Several crowded seconds later, and all that was left of the newcomers was debris.

Then the wolf snorted in satisfaction, and... flowed into the form of a young adult woman. Wearing nothing at all.

Bella gasped. Esme put her hand over Edward's eyes.

"Hey!" the woman shouted "€" by her features, she was one of the Quillettes. A werewolf? "Can one of you burn these tossers? I don't have a lighter."

With that, she blurred again, and loped off.

Bella could swear she was laughing.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

38.1: The Magic Flute and the Ring Cycle. (Anyone got other musical pieces that can also be read as objects?)

>38.2: Meep meep!<br>38.3: Thanks to Dahl, I suppose.

>38.4: Pinkie Pie, here using her Pink Lantern to make a Portal Gun. Be afraid. (Especially if you're a Yellow Lantern.)<br>38.5: Lemon Rush/Leman Russ. This is where Leman starts Looping in the first place (having essentially followed Fluttershy home after the loop where she raised him), and as a result he's considerably more sensible than the normal run of 40k-ers in his home Loop.

>38.6: So, I've been reading Das\_Mervin's excellent sporking of the Twilight series, and this hit me.<br>First off: Leah, AKA "Awesome Werewolf Bitch" is the single most amazing thing Stephanie Meyer has ever come up with.

>Second: Every other character, and it seems the author herself, hate her and belittle her for relatively little things.<br>Third: Life as a looper there would be terrible.

>And fourth: Equestria is a safe loop. Here's <em>why.<em>

## 41. Chapter 41

39.1 (misterq)

\* \* \*

><p>Albus Dumbledore sat in his office, staring straight and unfocused at nothing in particular. If there was one thing he hated about getting older, it was how the perception of time changed. To those children in their beds, three months would seem like forever and a day. But for someone who had as much clutter in his mind as he did, three months can pass by almost in an eye-blink.<p>

So when everything changed in a perceived eye-blink, Albus was caught completely off guard.

It was supposed to be an exciting year. Harry Potter was starting Hogwarts, as well as some of the prominent wizarding family's children. He should have expected something was wrong when Flitwick described the American-raised girl as 'lively' and 'energetic'. Dumbledore should have remembered that the charms professor, who gets so overexcited by the most trivial of reasons that he tends to fall out of his chair on a regular basis, and whose hyperactivity served him very well on the duelling circuit, usually sees most people as plodding and slow. Anyone he calls 'exciting' should have instantly sent up a red flag of warning.

Instead, the first sign that this would be a most unusual year came during the school song. Instead of a mismatched collection of young

voices, there came a song and dance number that Albus would have been sure was carefully choreographed had he not been caught up in the spell, himself. New children sang about being excited to learn magic, but also a little bit scared. Older kids sang about how hard they would have to study for their tests. Professors Snape and McGonagall sang a very lovely duet. Dumbledore, himself, felt the pressure on his occlumency shields but gave in when he noticed that the compulsion to sing was harmless.

After speaking with the girl he believed to be responsible for the entertaining song and dance, McGonagall relayed that such a thing had happened before in Miss Pie's presence. She had called it a 'Heart's song'. Apparently, the girl was a natural auralmancer. It wasn't without precedence; and like the others, the light reddish-haired girl seemed destined for the stage and a life of harmless entertainment.

And then came the problems. Miss Pie's magic was, in a word, odd. Especially if she had to cast a spell over any sort of distance. An imperfect analogy was that casting a spell successfully was like throwing a ball at a target. However, Miss Pie's spells came out with far too much force and on a completely random trajectory every time. It didn't matter how she pointed her wand, there was no predicting what would happen.

And then came potions class. After a cursory surface scan during the first dinner, Albus noted that Miss Pie's mental defences resembled the outer surface of an over-inflated balloon. He decided it was a curious aspect that was due to her auralmancy and left it at that. If he had been thinking properly, he would have warned Severus. Mental backlash was usually a result of practising legilimancy on a mundane animal. The human's mind worked on a much higher and faster level, and connecting it in any significant way resulted with the animal's mind torn asunder and the poor beast in a drooling coma. That it had happened to an accomplished legilimancer like Snape made Dumbledore only speculate at what breakneck speed the odd little girl's mind worked.

It also made Dumbledore take over the potion-master's classes for the rest of the year to the cheers of a great many students.

The first flight training lesson resulted in Mr. Longbottom with a sprained wrist and dislocated shoulder when Miss Pie caught him inches from the ground. The rest of the unsupervised class was taken up with Harry Potter getting a spot on the Griffindor quidditch team by saving Neville's remembrall from smashing on the ground while Miss Pie laughed wildly as she spun as fast as she could around all three axes "as though her broom was some sort of a gyroscopic carnival ride. Of course after fifteen uninterrupted minutes of crazy spinning, she carefully landed on the ground, took a few steps, and promptly threw up all over Mr. Malfoy before passing out on the grass. Had he had not seen it himself from his window, Albus would have never believed such a little girl could have eaten so much.

Then there was the party for the house elves, the party for her housemates, the party for the first month anniversary of starting magic school, the party celebrating Professor Binn's new permanent retirement, and so forth. Oh, and the party for the Troll. Can't forget that one. Of course, using legilimancy and seeing Professor

Quirrel casting an imperius and leading said troll into the school on Voldemort's spirit's orders had said spirit angrily and violently detaching and fleeing the school. That resulted in the second professor to be placed in Saint Mungo's hospital in a bed right next to Severus.

A few weeks later, they had found Lockhart gibbering to himself in the Forbidden Forest. He was completely covered in medium, large, and extra large sized acromantula. Lady acromantula, Hagrid said " and Albus really, really didn't want to know how the gamekeeper knew of this fact. They had placed the replacement defence professor next to the Quirrel, the professor he replaced.

Seeing as how the defence against the dark arts curse had gone into overdrive, Dumbledore couldn't coax anyone else to take the position. That was when the Ministry sent their choice to fill the vacancy. Albus and the other professors had a bet going of how long she would last. It looked like Trelawney, amazingly, would win the hundred galleons for her predictably dire prediction of less than one day.

But the worst thing, the worst thing was " that after Miss Pie had been questioned and set free about her perspective of the tragic case of accidental magic gone wrong, Albus habitually reached into his bowl of lemon drops only to find that they " were " all " GONE!

So now, all Albus Dumbledore could do was stare blankly at the wall and count the hours until he could race out to muggle London to get more.

\* \* \*

><p>"All I'm saying is that Quodpod makes Quidditch look like a bunch of old ladies having a picnic," Twilight heard Rainbow Dash's voice before she and Applejack entered her room. They were the last two of her friends to arrive.<p>

"Quodpod is half football " American Football " half baseball, half hot potato, and half storming the beach at Normandy. How many explosions does Quidditch have in one game? Zero. It's all about prancing around on your broom and trying to catch a tiny artificial bird. Thus, it's so booring," Dash continued.

"Four halves?" Twilight spoke up. "Shouldn't it be four quarters?"

"Quarters? I'm surprised an egghead like you didn't know that Quodpod doesn't have quarters. Quodpod only has three innings, like hockey."

Exasperated explanation on her lips, Twilight looked up into the grinning, teasing face of her athletic friend. "Alright, you got me. Now, are you ready for Pinkie's letter?"

"Is anyone ever really ready for Pinkie's anything?" Rarity spoke up.

"Well..," whatever Twilight started to say was lost as space folded into itself before unfolding to reveal Gummy. The small alligator was

serenely and impossibly floating in midair. He slowly turned to face the girls, opened his toothless mouth, and made a noise like a foghorn. Then he vanished with a pop, leaving behind only a pink envelope.

"I don't know," Twilight preempted everyone's questions, "And I don't really want to know. Now let's see how much sanity is still left in the UK."

The lavender-haired girl unfolded the letter and started to read.

"Hello, faraway friends! It feels like it's been a month since I've last written to you."

"It has been a month," Applejack interjected.

Twilight sighed and continued, "But so much has happened, I don't know where to start. How about at the end of the last letter? That's a good place, right? Well, I may have gotten a little ahead of myself when I said I wanted to be Dolores's new bestest friend. That was before she gave me... the book."

"It was like all the worst parts of all the worst books in the world were stuck together with worst glue and bound in horrible, horrible awful boring boringness. And Dolores wanted me to read it. The whole thing!"

"And I tried to. I really did. I got to the second page before I closed it and raised my hand. When no one called on me, I started waving it around as though I just didn't care â€" but secretly, I did care. Finally, when I raised my second hand and was about to do a puppet-less finger puppet show (and I think Lyra was right. Fingers are really, really neat!), Dolores â€" or Professor Dolly as I decided to call her, finally asked me what I wanted."

"I told her that my awful book was so overfull of boring that it exploded. To which she replied that my book was perfectly fine and on my desk, so of course I told her that my watch was fast. She said I wasn't wearing a watch, but I couldn't say anything else as my book rose into the air and exploded into confetti. At first, I was worried at what Hermione would say about a destroyed book, but then I realized that I was replacing Hermione! Her name sounds like Harmony and that kind of rhymes with Pinkie. I should see if I could make a song out of that. Oh right, back to what happened in class."

"I told a speechless Professor Dolly that it was okay and I forgive her for making me buy such a horrible textbook. It's gone and can't hurt my brain any more, now. Then for some mysterious reason, she turned an angry shade of purple and gave me a detention. I think she wanted some private time so she could apologize in private."

"Instead, she gave me a quill pen and told me to start writing 'I will not be annoying'. It was good advice. No one likes someone who is being annoying at a party. But when I started writing, the pen hurt my hand. Professor Dolly asked if there was something wrong, but I said don't worry about it, I can fix it. And then I channeled my magic really hard to fix the pen and make it scratchy write somewhere else than on the back of my hand."

"The people at that Saint Mango hospital said some horrible person etched the words 'I will not be annoying' into Professor Dolly's brain, and that she can't teach anymore or remember how to walk on two legs or use a bathroom. But I'm sure they'll fix her all up in no time. At least she has a bed near Locky Heart, Squi-rel, and Spooky Snapey, so she won't be sad and lonely. I'm also fairly sure she would have wanted me to have all her moving kitten plates as an apology for that book, so now I have a lot of moving kitten plates. I decorated them all along the walls of Big Blinky's home. Both BB and Hedwig enjoy the how the kitties pretend to be scared whenever they see a giant legless lizard monster and a hungry owl."

Fluttershy made a small squeaky noise that sounded very much like, "Oh those poor plate kitties."

Twilight, unfazed, just continued with the letter, "Speaking of those two, you may have noticed that Hedwig didn't come and deliver the letter along with gummy. Well, that naughty bird and her friend got into my polyjuice potion stockpile. Apparently, they're married now and expecting three.. I don't know. Coatl? Snakey-owl babies that will probably have wings and claws and invisible death-beam laser eyes? I figure after Pound and Pumpkin, it would be a restful relaxing vacation to baby-sit (coatl-sit?) these three once they hatch."

"Speaking of polyjuice, I showed Mr. Beaky " who used to be the giant squid in the lake here, to Ron. But even though he lost his rat, Ron didn't really want Mr. Beaky as his new pet. I don't know why. I think Mr. Beaky turned out great. I fed him polyjuice with tiny bits of every kind of magical animal I could find. Each change made him look more and more interesting. I thought he would be a great pet for someone who didn't care for a small and somewhat uninteresting rat. But on the other hand, Ron is now no longer scared of spiders."

"Not much else is going on. Someone threw my friend, Harry Potter, a magic teleporting rock that hit him in the head and made him take an unscheduled field trip to a real live cemetery. He said that old Moldy Voldie was behind the whole thing, and that he managed to return by grabbing the teleporting rock after old Moldy got a new body; but no one believes him except for Ron and Neville and me and Big Al Dumbledore. I should really prepare a fun 'Hooray on Becoming Corporeal Again' party for when old Moldy visits the castle."

"We're doing defence by independent study and I'm learning so much! I got force push down pat and almost got force lightning to go where I want it to. I also got this screaming book at the library, and while it distracted the librarian; I grabbed a whole bunch of books on runes and enchanting. I thought about baking another Pretty Party Candy-copter again, but decided instead to figure out how brooms work and made all these for you girls! Just treat this letter like a storage scroll and enjoy your gifts from this Holly Jolly Pinkie. And come on over in exactly one month from now. If my Pinkie sense is right " and it usually is, there will be a party and cupcakes and a castle invasion and balloons and streamers and everything! This is Magical Girl Candy Enchantress Pinkie Pie, signing out."

Twilight sighed and sent a small amount of chakra into the letter. Five festively wrapped boxes popped out, each with an easily



identified cutie mark for the intended girl.

"Now be careful," Twilight said, "I'm sure whatever Pinkie sent us is.."

"Pinkie, I don't care what anyone said or what I had privately thought about you before!" enthusiastically interrupted Rainbow Dash. The girl was wearing light blue arm and leg warmers, each with her old cutie mark on them. She was also gleefully floating near the ceiling, "Pinkie Pie, you are now best human!"

With that, Rainbow Dash opened the window and happily rocketed out into the evening sky.

\* \* \*

><p>39.2 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

(X-Communication)

Doctor Vahlen slapped the after action report on the table in front of her. "How could this debacle occur? What sort of idiots are you letting into your strike teams these days!"

She alone of the three around the conference table had an armed guard, at her own insistence against some delayed action mind-control effect left during her mind to mind contact with Sparkle. She'd already put herself through every form of mental scanning and test known to X-Com short of going in the containment chamber herself, and the results had been uniformly negative. Apart from a slight dizziness and a taste of Elderberries in her mouth, the contact had left no physiological changes or mental alterations, other than converting her normal cool and dispassionate attitude towards her 'specimens' to an icy hatred in Twilight's case.

"I don't care for your tone, Doctor." Commander Benford said sternly. "Every member of that team is a veteran of multiple missions. It is not their fault that the primary objective was able to escape. Her ability to teleport at will and long range perception abilities made her impossible to pin down, as the report states."

"'It' not her!" Doctor Vahlen exclaimed. "Applying a gender to an alien species is ridiculous. It isn't even humanoid! Despite any superficial similarities in vocal tone, it is a non-human monster, and anthromorphising it in that fashion may lead to confusion."

Doctor Shen, the head of Engineering, spoke up for the first time. "Are we focussing too much on one thing? Other than capturing Sparkle the mission went well. No casualties on either the civilians or the team, 100% removal of the alien presence, even intact plasma rifles and pistols. It's even given us a lead on the location of the downed UFO they arrived in, which may yield more materiel. I'm also a little worried about the mission goals, or rather their relative importance. Normally rescuing the civilians is our top priority."

Benford shifted in his seat. "I wasn't happy with it myself, but my orders came directly from the Council. When compared with the potential threat Sparkle offers, even protecting civilians had... reduced priority."

"As it should have!" Doctor Vahlen interjected. "Mein Gott! You've seen the footage! It took an entire alien terror attack to pieces by itself. And it's clear that it wasn't even showing it's full power! It has to be stopped whatever it takes!"

Shen sighed. "And I think you and the council are missing one important fact. Is Sparkle a potential threat, possibly the greatest we've faced? Absolutely! But the key word is potential. Look at her actions so far. She was captured, treated like a prisoner, not an experiment! The interviews with those people at the Hot Springs showed she was sure that the team sent there would have orders to kill her, not surprising if she was taking her cues from Doctor Vahlen.

"Turn it around, if you'd been treated that way by her people and managed to escape, wouldn't you do whatever damage you could, take revenge once the balance of power was in your hands? I've calculated the energy requirements some of those things she did would require, and I've already worked out half a dozen ways she could have erased this entire facility. Stick a lump of iron in a force bubble with a vacuum and transmute it to anti-matter, then drop it in the middle of the base with the forcefield set to decay once you were safely away.

"If she does have Doctor Vahlen's knowledge she could have thought of that. And the team that went to get her? She could easily have destroyed them before they'd even landed. That energy lance she displayed went through Sectopod armour as if it was tissue paper. Skylanders are nowhere near as well armoured, and given her detection abilities, I have no doubt she could have registered on them from a kilometre away as easily as if she was standing on top of the wing. Or she could have done exactly what she did to those aliens.

"Instead when she left, the worst she did was make some smart remarks..."

"And what about me!" Vahlen snarled. "She violated my mind, stole my memories!"

"Without harming anything other than your pride. She also saved your life, or do you think she needed to include you in her defences when the guards tried to terminate both of you? She's even apologised and offered to provide her memories in return. Just imagine it, knowledge of a whole different world with completely different technologies..."

"And so we come to it," Vahlen returned. "You're letting your desire to find out about this creature cloud your judgement."

"And I think you're letting your fears see a threat where none exists, or at least won't unless we drive her into it. On the other hand, those same powers that make her dangerous could make her an invaluable ally. We know the Ethereals lived for millennia, and made plans on that scale. Do you think the loss of one capital ship, one invasion force, will stop them forever? Wouldn't it be good to have alien allies the next time we're attacked? She already proved she was willing and able to protect humans she'd just met, those Japanese civilians think the world of her."

"When she was the one responsible for the attack in the first place, whether you believe it was unintentional or not." Vahlen's tone could have stripped paint, and made it quite clear what she believed. "They should have been brought back here. I'm sure more detailed debriefing would have demonstrated some evidence of mental tampering."

"Whereas I think the only form of mental tampering she demonstrated was politeness, honesty and a willingness to protect them. People tend to reciprocate when someone acts towards them a certain way. She acted as if she believed they would treat her as a person, and they did. She even insisted on paying her bill!"

Commander Benford finally decided to put an end to the wrangling. "Now is not the time for discussing our strategy. We need more information. Speaking of which Doctor Vahlen, what is your analysis of the coins we recovered?"

With one last glower at Doctor Shen, the scientist pulled a set of notes up on a tablet computer. "Firstly, they are almost pure gold, with just enough alloying metals to make them tough enough to stand wear, though there are some anomalies present. They weigh fractionally over a half troy ounce, and are about the size of a dime, but thicker. One side has the stylised 'face' of a unicorn, profile on, possibly the Princess Celestia Sparkle mentioned or some other important person. The obverse has an equally stylised solar disk. There is lettering around the edge, presumably a value or legend. The edges are unmilled. The witnesses say she had a large bag of similar coins, maybe three decimetres in volume."

Benford raised his eyebrows in shock. "Wait, she claimed to be on a tight budget and yet she had..."

"Roughly 40 kilograms of near bullion quality gold as her pocket change. About one million US dollars. The unmilled edges also suggest that the issuing authority isn't worried about theft, which all point to the fact that gold is common on her world, far more common than on ours anyway. That could be explained by some of the impurities nuclear analysis threw up. There is almost no lead, but there are mercury isotopes and both lithium and beryllium present. By comparison, almost all gold deposits have lead as a major impurity."

Doctor Shen caught on immediately. "You believe it was transmuted from lead?"

"Would you explain that for those of us without a degree in nuclear physics or metallurgy, Doctor Vahlen?" Commander Benford asked.

"Doctor Shen is right." Vahlen didn't look happy at having to admit that. "Lead has multiple stable isotopes, Gold has only one. Mercury is one of the end products of the decay of radioactive isotopes of gold, a side effect of imperfect transmutation. Transmutation would also release 3 protons and between 10 and 14 neutrons per nucleus. Those could be absorbed by forming lithium atoms, but only unstable isotopes which would further decay. Beryllium is an end product of some of those decay chains as well as stable isotopes of lithium."

"How they prevented themselves from dying of neutron exposure or targeted the reaction I don't know, but the composition is consistent with gold created through nuclear synthesis. Other isotope ratios confirm the gold isn't from any terrestrial gold deposit, or even one from the same accretion disk. The gold wasn't mined on any body in our solar system.

"This only increases her... it's hazard level, it not only has a superficially harmless appearance and a clear understanding of how to manipulate humans, but also money to sway the weak minded. Fortunately, even a million dollars won't buy that much safety, and most people will be less accommodating to an alien."

There was a knock, and a harried orderly came in with a sheaf of papers. Commander Benford skimmed them and sighed. "Well she's trying something. Last night, sixty thousand dollars, or rather twenty in British pounds and twenty in Japanese yen were stolen from an international bank in downtown Tokyo, or rather taken, and a sum of gold coins worth a market value of sixty five was left in it's place, along with a letter accounting exactly what was taken and showing that the gold covered it including seigniorage.

"There were similar 'thefts' at a business-wear store in the Ginza district of Tokyo, a pachinko parlour in Takayama, nearest town to the Okayama Hot Springs, a high end computer store in the Akihabara ward of Tokyo, a camping shop and several convenience stores. In each case money sufficient to cover the goods taken was left under a purple force field with a letter that itemised them and an instruction that the money would be released when they were rung up as sold, or in the case of the pachinko parlour, agreed to be replaced using the money.

"We still haven't been able to remove the records of the alien attack from the internet, too many off-line copies, and people in Japan at least are already starting to comment about the similarities. We've managed to keep the official news channels from carrying it, but I don't know how long that will last. It's pernicious, it keeps reappearing no matter how much our techs remove it or try to 'out it' as a CGI fake."

He shook his head. "But some of these items make no sense! Packaged long-life snacks and vegetarian food, obviously. Camping gear too. A high end laptop computer, okay, if Sparkle can figure out how to work it she could get a lot of information. But two female business suits? Black shoe polish? We know she can alter clothing to suit her form, but what does she expect to do, walk into an office somewhere and get a job?"

He shook his head. "Until we have more information, all we can do is wait and see."

\* \* \*

><p>Dear Princess Celestia (and everypony else),<p>

I am alright! By now your forensic mages should have worked out roughly what happened, if not where I was sent to. My interstellar clairvoyance system went horribly right, due to the after effects of a recently dissipated quantum singularity in the target system. It caused a massive thaumic backlash that created a metaphasic planar

inversion, obviously after the fact. I've included the specifics in the form of arithmantic formulas which I have no doubt you, Princess Luna and a number of senior researchers at the university will find enlightening. For every-pony else, the basic idea that rather than bringing light from a distant star-system to me, the volume of space containing me was sent to the target star system should be easier to understand.

I landed on a habitable world, inhabited by humans, right out of the old filly-tales. Well not quite, while their knowledge of magic is nearly non-existent, their non magical technology is in advance of ours in many ways, though it has some odd lacunae. For example, they invented steam engines before the germ theory of disease, despite having invented lenses centuries earlier, and that's just one of the oddities. Their world is far more heavily populated and industrialised than ours and there are no other intelligent races on the planet. Or weren't. They were recently attacked by an alien race from another star, and barely defeated them after much strife, even killing.

This made my own position precarious, as they were predisposed to assume any non-human race was hostile. Hopefully I am working to change that point of view, but at this time, even if you manage to duplicate the interstellar teleportation effect, I would advise against sending any-pony else, even though this world needs help, not only to recover from the invasion, but from the damage that was being done by over-population, over-industrialisation and subsequent environmental damage. Without magic, recovering from that is far harder for them.

As this letter proves, I have managed to develop a way to send back messages, and will continue to report back my progress. Recreating the full transportation effect will require more effort and alchemically produced materials that do not exist here, due to the lack of magical knowledge. However, I believe I can duplicate the magical processes needed, and supply the power required due to the other surprising development. I was placed under conditions of great stress in the aftermath of my arrival, and in the process something similar happened to me as to Princess Cadence.

I was thinking of my friends, how I wanted to see them again, how I didn't want them to worry, how much they meant to me, and I felt a connection as if they were around me, supporting me. I believe that my link to the Elements of Harmony rather than the presence of Spectrum stone triggered my apotheosis into an alicorn. Suddenly some of the more puzzling aspects of the many tests you set for me make sense. You realised I had this potential, and did your best to develop it.

I intend to use my newfound powers to help heal this world, to show them that unlike the invaders, pony-kind can offer a helping hoof rather than stomping them into the mud. I miss my friends and family terribly, and include a number of personal letters for them with this one. You should be able to target return letters given the arithmantic information I included, and I hope to hear from them. I will do my best to come home soon, but even with my expanded powers, developing the necessary materials will take time, and in the mean time, there is another world that needs the magic of friendship to recover from what's happened to it. Out of all the unicorns in the world you chose me as your protégé, and it is time once again to

demonstrate your faith was not misplaced.

Your faithful student,

Twilight Sparkle.

\* \* \*

><p>James Bearing, Solicitor at Law and owner of Bearing Legal Associates prepared for his first meeting of the day. From the phone call yesterday this should prove to be interesting. The client, one Twilight Sparkle, was having difficulty establishing her legal identity and needed legal advice on how to resolve things.<p>

With a name like that, he could fill in the gaps. Obviously her parents had been New Agers in the 1990's or part of some other group who wanted as little to do with the rest of the world as possible. They'd had a child, (and the confirmation over the phone that she didn't have either a birth certificate or school records made him think dark thoughts about their suitability as parents) and now she was a young adult in her own right she was trying to break away from her parents' lifestyle.

Despite everything, she'd sounded both practical and educated which implied she'd done the remarkable task of teaching herself rather than relying on a school. That was impressive, and the fact that she'd wanted to keep the call short and that she had no number of her own suggested that she didn't have very much money. While he couldn't work pro bono (he had a payroll to meet after all) he decided to keep his fees to the minimum possible. The fact that she'd also had a nice voice had nothing to do with it.

After all this was the reason he'd taken up law in the first place, to help people since his poor maths skill meant he couldn't study how to build spaceships...

There was a scream from the outer office, and other noises of disturbance. He got up from behind his desk and strode over to the door, pulling it open. He wasn't prepared for the resulting view. Mrs Williams, his secretary, who up until today had been a pillar of adamantine steel against whom even the most furious or frantic antagonist had dashed themselves fruitlessly was scrabbling at her phone, which seemed glued to the desk with a faint purple glow. Of the two law students who worked for him part time, Alexis was similarly frozen while Jason was trying to open the main door which seemed similarly jammed.

But the centrepiece to this tableaux, and the probable cause, was the small purple unicorn... winged unicorn... who stood in the middle of the main office with a pained expression. The fact that she was wearing a women's business suit tailored to her form, complete with white blouse, neat blue cravat, sensible grey pleated skirt and even white leg stockings on her hind legs, was just a counterpoint to the general bizarreness. Either her hooves were naturally a glossy black, or she'd painted them somehow.

He cut off a meandering mental question as to who would sell pots of nail polish that big and tried to re-establish some vestige of long fled sanity. "What is going on here?"

The unicorn spoke in a voice he recognised. "My name is Twilight Sparkle. I made an appointment yesterday. I know I'm a few minutes early, but I didn't want to waste your valuable time. I'm also sorry if I startled people when I teleported in, but I didn't want to be seen entering the building for obvious reasons."

Mrs Williams finally recovered enough to speak. "But you're a... a..."

"Yes, I am an alien. That is point of fact the problem." She gave a weary sigh. "Look, in a few seconds I'm going to release the door and phones. At that point do what you will, call the police, the army, animal control, whatever! Just don't expect me to hang around after you do. I'm trying to avoid trouble, either causing it or being in the centre of it."

The glow faded and the door opened, while Mrs Williams found herself holding her phone. Twilight Sparkle lifted a hoof and made what seemed to be a 'go ahead' gesture.

Now that the initial panic had worn off, the various people seemed at something of a loss as to what to do, and slightly shame faced. Aliens stomping around blowing things up were something popular culture had prepared them for. Aliens trying to be friendly by flashing lights and playing brass instruments or even trying to make interstellar collect calls were in there too, but not so much since the recent unpleasantness. Aliens making appointments to see a lawyer was not.

James decided that he'd never forgive himself if he didn't find out what was going on and said, "I think it's best if everybody just continues what they're doing, while I talk to our visitor."

He stepped back and gestured for her to come into his private office.

\* \* \*

><p>39.3 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke in an endless sea of white. It was like being buried in clouds, except she couldn't even feel her own body. "Hello?" At least she could hear herself.<p>

\_Hello, Twilight.\_

Twilight whipped her head back and forth. At least, she thought she did. The view didn't change any. "Who's there? What's going on? How do you know my name?"

\_I am the Anchor of this Loop. I know your name because it is my function to know such things. As for what is going on, that is rather more complicated.\_

Twilight took a deep breath and collected her thoughts. Okay, telepathic voice offering information. She'd be a fool not to listen. "Well, I'm not going anywhere."

This got a psychic chuckle. \_Indeed. You are currently a sort of living ideal. You have no true physical body, living instead in the minds of others.\_

"A memetic life form?"

\_As good an explanation as any.\_

After a moment of consideration, Twilight asked, "You said I was an ideal. An ideal what?"

\_An excellent question. You exist as the perfect leader, the soul of a nation, the guide to greatness.\_

"I've ruled nations many times, and I may be good at it, but I'm far from perfect."

\_We all have our faults. But even now, there is a tribe of hunter-gatherers who are discovering the link between seeds and plants, and they long for order, organization, and insight. They dream of you, Twilight.\_

She was starting to feel uncomfortable. "I don't want to be worshipped."

\_Nor should you. You are not a god. You are limited by your people's productivity, their happiness, their finances. But you can drive to them to heights of achievement that would otherwise be impossible. Their scientists will research what you deem worthy. Their armies will follow your every command. Their culture will be as you shape it.\_

Twilight floated in the void, silent, considering.

\_Or you could float here for a few millennia, until the end of the Loop.\_

"Well, when you put it that wayâ€¦"

\_Excellent. Then I have but one more task to fulfill, as is my duty.\_ The voice cleared its unseen throat, switching to audible speech.

"Greetings to you, Twilight Sparkle, youngest of the ageless alicorns and Anchor of your Loop. Yours are a kind and loving people, united by the six founders of Equestria and led for centuries of prosperity by the diarchs Celestia and Luna. Bearers of the Element of Harmony, you and your friends defeated numerous threats to Equestria's stability, and in AN 1002, you completed Star Swirl the Bearded's unfinished spell and were crowned the newest Princess of that magical land.

"Twilight, a new people calls to you, eager for your guidance. This is a world where the only magic lies in the mind, but as you well know, that is a mighty power indeed. Princess, will you teach them to harness it? Can you build a civilization that will stand the test of time?"

\* \* \*



><p>The Equestrian Empire<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong><strong>

**\*\*Love of Learning:\*\*** +25% Science production during Golden Ages.  
Academy Science yield increased by 1.

Befriender: Replaces Pikemen. Same stats, small chance to recruit defeated units, chance doubled for mounted units.

>Golden Oak: Replaces Library. Same stats, also provides +2 Happiness.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>39.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Macintosh?!" Twilight cried in astonishment. "What are you doing here?!"

"Ah don't rightly know," the red pony replied with a shrug. "Most loops Ah just Awaken on tha... farm..."

Another shrug.

"Twilight, why do Ah have wings?"

The princess of magic sighed, tapping Macintosh's horn. "Because you're an alicorn. This is a sister loop-did you ascend without me knowing about it? Like, in a fused loop or anything?"

"Eeeenope." The red pony watched as an umbrella lashed a licorice whip and rode by on end table made of felt. "So... this is tha Discordian era?"

"Yeah, it is, we're Celestia and Luna â€" I'm sorry, I just... usually this only happens AFTER a pony becomes an alicorn on their own." Twilight narrowed her eyes. "Are you absolutely one hundred percent sure...?"

"Twilight, Ah've been nothing but an ordinary earth pony afore this... cept when Ah was a human. Ah'm as clueless as ya'll."

The lavender mare let out a growling sigh. "We'll figure it out later, then. So, since this is your first sister loop-well, I guess it's a sibling loop, cause-"

"Er..." Macintosh blushed, fidgeting a bit. "No, no, it's... it's a sister loop."

Twilight blinked. "Oh. Huh."

She blinked again. "OH! Oh this is the first time you've been genderbent while Awake! Oh, yeah, okay, that could be awkward."

"... 'while Awake?'"

"Yeeeeeeeah, genderbending happens pretty often. There's around a two

percent chance you'll wake up and, POOF!" Twilight chuckled and rolled her eyes. "Nothing to worry about, we've all been through it. And hey, you're still pretty big!" She shook her head. "Anyway, we need to distribute the Elements between us now-"

"Wait, AJ's been a stallion?"

"Mac." Twilight spread the necklaces, although she put the tiara on her own head. "Elements."

The red pony shook her head. "Right, right. Sorry. Has Apple Bloom-?"

"El. Eh. Mints."

Macintosh nodded. "Um... Ah think, since Ah'm AJ's brother, ah should have-"

Instantly Twilight's hoof lashed out, pulling the orange necklace away. "Nuh-uh, not after hiding for who knows how many loops. Here, take Kindness instead."

The former stallion eyed the pink butterfly warily for a moment. Then, with a shrug, she put it around her neck; might as well go full scale with this. "Ah think Ah'll take Loyalty too."

Twilight stared as she wrapped the red lightning bolt around her thick ankle. "...I am so jealous of you right now."

"What?"

"Nothing." Twilight coughed. "So, um... Generosity for you, then? And I'll take Laughter... I'm going to need to teach you how to use these, aren't I?"

\* \* \*

><p>39.5 (Leonite, FanOfMostEverything)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Yugi smiled as he leaned back, his arms behind his head. "So yeah... that's pretty much the basics of the game and this loop." He explained. Before him was a young red haired girl with an excited gleam in her eye and energy to burn. "I'm surprised Twilight didn't explain this, she really seems to enjoy her loops here."<p>

The red haired girl simply grinned. "Ah'm more excited at the tech being used for all this. Your sayin' that y'all have holographic tech despite bein' a baseline human world?" She asked, playing down a face down card. Bloom Wheeler, or as Yugi had guessed earlier in the day, Apple Bloom, had replaced Serenity Wheeler for this loop. She had also proceeded to heal her eyesight in ways that not only had the doctors baffled but both Yugi and Joey knowing that she cheated, given that her own words to them when asked were: "Ah'm not missin out on a single moment in this loop!"

"Sorta. It's all being used for the purposes of enhancing Duel Monsters at the moment." Yugi stated, even as he flipped up a trap to

counter her.

"Wait, so advanced tech is being used for the sole purpose of-"

"Yes, we've heard that reaction before." Yugi interrupted with a nervous chuckle. Not entirely good memories in those loops. "Still, with a few nudges, it gets picked up fast by pretty much everyone." He added, drawing a card and playing down Blackland Fire Dragon. The loop was still early, after all he hadn't even faced Kaiba yet and so still had his old deck. "I attack."

Bloom grunted, even as she mentally calculated. "Right... then lets see if ah can do this." She stated, drawing a card... and grinning. "Ah win."

Yugi blinked. "What?"

"Ah win. I drew Apple-Xodia." Bloom stated with a cheeky grin, flipping the cards around, to show each looked like an equine version of Exodia on an apple background.

Yugi blinked... then grinned, even as golden light surrounded him. While he looked slightly taller and with a more serious look, Bloom could tell by his attitude that this wasn't the same Yugi. "Well done, it takes a lot to get such blatant cheating past my partner." Atem commented.

"Cheatin'? Ah see no cheatin' here, I won it fair an' square." Bloom remarked as she retained the same grin.

Atem just grinned. "Just don't try it with the holograms, these cards have microchips in them for recognition and the Duel Disks especially can detect cheating" He pointed out. He gathered up his cards into the deck and shuffled, Bloom doing the same. "Now, if you want cheating, let me tell you the time I turned one of Kaiba's biggest monsters against him."

They began again. Then Bloom laid down a spell card on her first turn, and Yugi's face met the desk. "Honestly, Bloom..."

"What? Ain't nothin' wrong with the card, 'cept Ah'm gonna win next turn."

"url= Pages/Carâ€|Test of Endurance/url isn't even from Duel Monsters!"

"Pfft. Details."

\* \* \*

><p>39.6 (misterq)<p>

Three hours after he was supposed to be there, Kakashi opened the door in the classroom to take a closer look at his new team, provided they wouldn't fail his test. Three kunoichis together on a team wasn't very common, but it had happened before.

What worried the jonin was that the pink-haired girl was excitingly pumping her hands up and down close to her body while chanting 'Ninja

party! Ninja party!'; while across from her, the blue-haired girl was doing the same thing, except chanting 'Explosive tags! Explosive tags!'.

Between them, the blond girl was staring at nothing in particular and occasionally shivering, as if anticipating some horrible future calamity.

"Hello, my cute little students. My first impression of you..," Kakashi managed to say before being cut off by a pink blur that resolved itself into a girl, standing on a chair, whose face was only half an inch away from his own.

"Are you our new sensei? Oh, what's your speciality? Do you like parties? Do you know how to make seals? They seem like a fun thing to learn. Do you wear that mask because you have horrible breath? I like balloons! Do you think I can make a taijutsu style based on that?" Words poured from her mouth in a never-ending stream.

Kakashi placed a hand over the girl's mouth to get a moment's reprieve, "I think I hate you all."

The blond girl snorted in amusement, "Have a nice how do you do to you, as well. Welcome to team seapony diplomacy. Let's hope we all survive."

"Survive? You won't be taking on hazardous missions until you pass training," Kakashi said.

"I was speaking of training," the blond girl said, adding, "The name's Applejack. The pink thing licking the inside of your hand is Pinkie Pie. The one drawing explosive tag runes on everything is Trixie. Please take care of us and may whatever kami you worship have mercy on your soul."

Kakashi sweat-dropped and pulled his now moist hand away from the grinning girl's mouth.

\* \* \*

><p>The next day at the training ground, Kakashi strode up to his new potential students. Applejack had made herself a small bunker using what looked like freshly uprooted trees. Pinkie Pie was running around arms outstretched, and making zoom-zoom noises. Trixie was reading a book on the sealing arts that Kakashi could have sworn was only available to ANBU members.<p>

This just cemented his planned course of action to fail this team and wait another year until the fourth's son and the last Uchiha graduated.

One explanation of the test later, Kakashi was finishing up, "All you have to do to be one of the two that pass is get one of these bells from me before noon. Starting now. Any questions?"

Pinkie Pie raised her hand, "Do you mean these bells?"

She raised her other arm which was holding two very familiar bells.

Kakashi blinked, then looked down at his belt. His bells were gone.  
"What? How did..?"

He looked up to see Pinkie Pie now holding a very familiar book.

"Ooh, what's this story about?"

"That's not for children!" Kakashi shunshined and grabbed his book before Pinkie could read any of it.

"Yes! Stand right there," Trixie exclaimed, "I have no idea how sensitive my new motion detecting explosive tag is. That's why I made hundreds of them. I didn't have enough paper, so I used leaves."

Kakashi stood very still. His well developed danger sense was suddenly screaming at him. He looked downward, and yes, he was standing on a pile of seal-inscribed leaves.

"Oh, you said whoever gets the bells, passes, right?" Pinkie exclaimed, "So here you go, you two."

She gave one bell to each of her team mates. "I got the bells first, so I passed. Now you two have the bells so you pass! We all pass!"

"That's not how it works," Kakashi said.

"Sure it does!" the pink-haired girl chirped, "I even knew you were going to be busy so I forged your name on all the correct papers. We're a team now, so you have to get ready for the 'Kakashi passed a team' party. It's in your apartment, sensei. I've already invited all of your friends."

Applejack casually lifted one of the enormous trees in her impromptu fort and walked out, waving, "Thanks for the test. I mean, it'll be good to have one normal person on this team, right?"

Trixie waved also as she walked away, adding, "No sudden movements, unless you want to let me know what the blast radius is."

Kakashi waited until the girls were no longer in sight, before sighing sadly, "This is my life now. But with those skills; if I'm lucky, I can get them to chunin before the year is out."

A stray leaf fell from a nearby tree and drifted passed, only slightly brushing the jonin's nose.

Kakashi sneezed.

As he noticed all the leaves around him were now armed and glowing angrily, his last thought before waking up in the hospital was, 'Under no circumstances should that Trixie ever, ever meet Deidara.'

\* \* \*

><p>Far off in the Land of Tea, Twilight put down her book as she heard a large explosion in the distance. She looked up at her mentor,

Celestia, who was currently taking Tsunade's place in this loop, "So who do you think that was? Trixie? Pinkie Pie? The Crusaders? They're all awake this loop."<p>

Tsunade thought about it before shrugging, "Who knows. I'm sure we'll find out shortly. I think I'm just going to take my winnings and try every one of the different teas they have here. So many blends. So many."

Twilight just sighed in exasperation and went back to reading her book of advanced medical jutsus.

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile back at the academy, several voices rang out in unison, "We're going to be the most famous super awesome ninja ever! Go Ninja Sage Crusaders!"<p>

"Dattebayo!" one of the young voices added.

\* \* \*

><p>39.7 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

Smart Cookie found life with Apple Bloom oddly familiar. Once again, she was the advisor of a mare with far more brilliance than common sense, and so her duty was to sort the good ideas from the bad. And, as with Puddinghead, Cookie was frequently rebuffed, if not outright ignored.

Of course, that didn't mean she was going to stop trying. "Before we begin," she said to the clubhouse at large, "I would like to say once again that this is a monumentally bad idea. I would say it's right up there with that time the chancellor wanted to put us on the potato standard."

"Weren't potatoes discovered after the Exodus?" noted Clover.

"Yes. They were. Parliament was complaining about inflation, so Puddinghead made up the word one day and said that since it didn't exist at all, it was an even better choice than gold. \_That\_ is how bad this idea is, and you're being \_serious\_."

Before the assembled Crusaders and Devices could consider this further, Apple Bloom waved a hoof dismissively. "Aw, c'mon, Cookie, quit exaggeratin'. Ain't that bad. B'sides, yer scarin' 'em."

"Well, you're scaring me."

"What \_is\_ your idea, Apple Bloom?" asked Sweetie Belle. She wanted more information before she decided whether or not to be scared.

"It's real simple," Bloom began. "See, we've all gotten our cutie marks b'fore, but they never stuck. But there is somethin' that sticks from Loop t' Loop once y' pull it off."

"Subspace pockets?" guessed Sweetie.

"Cool tricks from other universes?" tried Scootaloo.

Apple Bloom shook her head. "Ascension."

At first, the other Crusaders just boggled at her. That didn't last very long. "WHAT!?"

The earth filly just smiled. "Way Ah figure it, anythin' that earns ya yer wings or horn or both has gotta be worth a permanent cutie mark!"

Sweetie Belle squirmed. "Isn't that, wellâ€¦ drastic?"

Apple Bloom shrugged. "Gotta be, if it's gonna last through th' universe resettin' itself."

"Wouldn't we need something like the Elements of Harmony, though?" Scootaloo thought back to the story of Rainbow Dash's ascension. "Plus, we'd need to do something that isn't just super-ultra-extreme-awesomazing, but related to our special talents."

"Exactly!" Apple Bloom exclaimed. "That's why it oughtta work in th' first place."

"Did you have feats in mind?" asked Clover.

"Well, Sweetie's easy. Just gotta get 'er to start a big-enough heart-song."

The unicorn in question frowned. "How big is 'big enough'?"

Apple Bloom shrugged. "I dunno. All o' Equestria?"

"All ofâ€¦" Sweetie's mouth flapped silently as the very idea dropped stage fright on her like a ton of bricks.

"Don' know which song'd work fer that, though," Bloom admitted. "Figured y' might have some ideas, Sweetie."

The pale filly had frozen in place at this point. She tipped over onto her side, totally stiff and unmoving.

Scootaloo poked her. No reaction. "Um, what did you have in mind for me, Apple Bloom?"

"Less sure in yer case, Scoots. Somethin' like that time with the weather-magic Blackbird might work, but it might not be enough. Maybe go 'round the world without flappin' yer wings?"

"Withoutâ€¦" Scootaloo didn't lock up. She did jump to her hooves, wings flared. "Do you know how ridiculous that is?"

"Well, Ah've hardly ever been a pegasus, soâ€¦ nope!" Apple Bloom smiled and shrugged. "Ain't s'posed t' be easy, Scoots. Otherwise, there'd be a lot more alicorns."

"All right, Miss Not-Supposed-To-Be-Easy. What about you?"

Bloom scowled. "That's th' thing. Ah can't think of a darn thing fer me. Ah thought maybe inventin' the Internet, but just gettin'

Equestria up t' that point o' technological advancement'd prob'ly take longer'n one Loop."

Scootaloo settled back down and smirked. "Seems perfect to me."

"Ah guess, butâ€¦ I dunno. It don't feel right."

"Does any part of this fool's errand?" asked Smart Cookie.

Sweetie shuddered and picked herself up off the floor. "Um, maybe we should come up with ideas for one another?"

The other fillies considered this, nodding almost in sync. "Meet back in a week?" Scootaloo proposed.

"A moment, please," said Cookie. "Pansy, Clover, please tell me you aren't actually encouraging them."

"We're necklaces," noted Pansy. "It's not like we can stop them."

"And the concept is actually quite fascinating," Clover added. "Applied apotheosis? Especially that of an unmarked filly? I'm composing a theoretical framework as we speak."

"Fine, then. Enjoy your folly, girls. If anypony wishes to be sane, you know where to find me."

Apple Bloom grinned. "Well, you heard 'er, girls. See y'all next week."

The three fillies brought raised forehooves together. "\*\*\*CUTIE MARK CRUSADER ALICORNS! YAY!\*\*\*"

\* \* \*

><p>39.8<p>

"Is everything ready?" Trixie asked, lifting the cannister.

"Eeyup," Mac replied, pushing the final lever down.

"Very good!" Trixie said. "In just a few moments, we will begin!"

They looked appreciatively at the complex web of piping.

"Still think it'll be better as a drink than as a propellant?" Trixie asked, challenge in her voice.

"Yep," Mac answered. "Fer dragons, at least."

"Ten bits on it," Trixie suggested.

"Done."

They shook hooves.

Trixie then flipped a switch with her telekinesis. "Three, two, one-



\* \* \*

><p>"And what do you have to say for yourselves?" Twilight asked, wings still ruffled.<p>

"I will not apologize for science!" Trixie said defiantly.

"What on Equestria were you two thinking?" Twilight shook her head. "You actually tried to dissolve FOOF in Chlorine Triflouride?"

She looked over her shoulder at the ruins, still sullenly glowing with remnant heat. "I had to drop half the lake and fifty tonnes of sand on it, and it even set fire to that until it ran out of liquid..."

"Why didn't you enclose it in a vacuum bubble?" Trixie asked. "That usually stops fires."

"Trixie." Twilight slammed a hoof on the floor. "I don't know if you noticed, but CTF is an oxidizer. And so is FOOF. They don't need air. And since FOOF is a gas, the most I'd be able to do is send the stuff flying all over the place."

She flared her wings as some of the smell came near them. "Ick. And I hope you'll notice I had to Ascend to handle it, so now I need to come up with an excuse for that as well. What were you trying to make, anyway?"

"Well," Mac drawled, "Ah thought it'd make a good carbonated-type of beverage for dragons, and Trixie thought it'd be the ideal rocket fuel."

Twilight facehoofed.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

And this is what everyone else on the thread has been doing while I was writing one about Leah Clearwater...

>39.1: That poor Wizarding World.<br>39.2: There is more of this one, but it's being held up pending a full understanding of certain aspects of international law. Or something.

>39.3: So. Hex grid or square grid?<br>39.4: This does not make Mac an alicorn. He's not ascended, so he can't repeat the process - nor can s/he unascend this loop, either.

>39.5: Apparently some people are doing a set of Yu-Gi-Oh loops, and this one was Relevant.<br>39.6: And to think that Team Gai is the less strange one this time.

>39.7: Ambitious much?<br>39.8: Keep away from hands or face. Or any body part, really.

## 42. Chapter 42

### 40.1 (misterq)

\* \* \*

><p>"When mixing these two, you have to use a tiny bit of red mercury and a lot of earth pony magic to stabilize the whole thing. Then just add a touch of cinnamon, a dollop of orange juice for flavour, and garnish with a ruby and a tiny umbrella; and viola!" Berry Punch held the enchanted glass container up triumphantly in one hoof. Suddenly, the tiny little wooden umbrella caught fire and burned away to nothing. The rest of the drink bubbled and shook violently but settled down in the end, "One serving of Foofy, the magic dragon drink of doom. And I should probably think of a better name for it, though."<p>

Big Macintosh and Trixie looked on in amazement from their makeshift bunker inside Big Mac's bar. Spike looked on eagerly at the drink as he sat at a nearby table. Twilight was maintaining a containment shield outside, as well as being "in her own words" ready to teleport any foolish pony before they start choking on the inevitable burning poisonous fumes.

"How the hay did you know how to make that?" the red stallion asked in wonder.

"While you all have been going on adventures and being princess of the moon and everything, " Berry gave Big Mac a knowing look, causing him to fidget uncomfortably at the memories of being an alicorn " a \_female\_ alicorn. "I have been perfecting my craft. I can mix any drink and make it better than perfect. I can brew the most powerful spirits known to pony-kind. I can make the most delicious wines I have ever tasted. I have learned long lost recipes from the ancient temples in the wild jungles to the ruins in the frozen valley. And several loops ago, I decided to study dragons to see if I could figure out a perfect drink for them. Do you know that their stomach is more like a magical fusion reactor?"

Every pony turned towards Spike. The baby dragon shrugged. "I knew that. Then again, I also studied other dragons for many, many loops."

"Right. Here you go." The light purple earth pony carefully handed Spike the glass. "Drink it quickly before the ingredients eat through the magical stabilization. On a scale of one to ten, this thing has a shelf life of nope, it doesn't have a shelf life. And never, ever serve it to a pony " or really, anyone other than a real equestrian dragon. Otherwise, the customer will explode. Then their remains will explode. Then, whatever is left will require Sparkle to hit it with another entire lake bed before it makes the surrounding area unlivable."

Spike gingerly held the glass before downing it all in one long gulp. He set down the empty container as his eyes widened and his pupils grew to twice their normal size.

"Duck and cover!" Berry Punch shouted and ducked under a table. Big Red and Trixie wasted no time in flattening themselves in their bunker.

Spike opened his mouth and burped out an immense gout of green fire.

"Er, sorry about your bar, Big Macintosh," he said sheepishly. The ponies turned around and saw that there was a smouldering hole

through the far wall, and one in the wall beyond that one, and another through the final wall. They could see a shocked Twilight outside still maintaining a shield around the establishment.

"No problem. I got a couple spares of my bar in my subspace pocket. I can use one of them while I repair this place." The red pony turned towards the stunned little dragon, "So how was the drink, Spike?"

"It... was... the best thing I have ever tasted! Nectar of the universe!" Spike said enthusiastically. "You should totally give her a job."

"Well, the results do speak for themselves, Berry. You've got yourself a job," Big Mac said.

"Wait. What? I never applied for a job here."

Macintosh shrugged, "As more ponies find out about this place, it starts to be too much for just me to handle everything. If you want it and can be all professional-like, you can have yourself a job here. So for the loops that you're here, Berry, you can make full use of your special talent and be appreciated for it."

Berry Punch took a few seconds before nodding with a grin, "Alright, if you'll have me. I've never worked for you before. Plus the whole, 'I can talk about the loops because you are a looper' thing is handy."

"It sure is," Big Mac sighed. Gilda was great and even Chrysalis was nice once he got to know her, but he still wondered if Cheerilee would ever start looping.

Loops made everything just plumb \_confusing.\_

"I recognize that type of sigh," Berry Punch said. "So what's, or should I say who's on your mind?"

Big Mac just smiled and shook his head, "Eeno. It's only your first day. Customers first. The bartender's problems are something for much later on."

"Fair enough. Just give me a tour of the place and I can start helping with the cleaning. I doubt we're going to get too many customers with all those danger ribbons cordoning off the place while Sparkle maintains a magical shield."

"Eeyep."

"Are you guys done it there?" came Twilight's voice from outside, "What was that fire blast? Spike, are you okay in there?"

Spike the dragon just rocked slowly in his seat, mumbling, "So good, over and over."

Trixie strode out and exclaimed "Success! For my next attempt at a drink for dragons, I shall try to create magical cold fusion in a glass!"

"Hmm," Berry Punch contemplated. "I actually have several ideas about

that using flavored deuterium, tritium, and lime juice."

Big Mac watched as the two mares climbed upstairs, talking while they toured his place. Then he looked at the dragon-caused hole in the nearest wall that was no longer only smouldering, but was merrily on fire. Perhaps it was time to seriously reinforce his bar.

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, in Canterlot, Princess Celestia looked down at the three circular pieces of different walls that had appeared in front of her before falling on the floor with a clatter. She looked towards her sister for a possible explanation.<p>

"Nope," Princess Luna looked up at her sister and shook her head slowly. "We have got nothing."

\* \* \*

><p>40.2 (anowack)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Luna did not usually consider herself an experienced Looper. She knew that her sister had experienced more lives than her own count, let alone the sheer number that the Elements of Harmony had lived. She was slightly afraid to ask Twilight Sparkle how old she was, for she had little doubt that the (usually) unicorn Anchor was possibly her elder by now.<p>

Almost all of Luna's loops took place in an Equestria much like the long-ago baseline, so she had long since grown used to Awakening on the moon, a far cry from the horror and panic she had felt the first time she had been returned to her prison. Still, the rare instances where she found herself coming to anywhere else were a pleasant change of pace.

Even when she Awoke in a dirty alley with a too-bright morning sun in her eyes, like this Loop. Although she was in her accustomed alicorn form, the architecture surrounding her was enough to tell that this was probably some variation on the human world.

"...is that a horse?" The trio of human males staring at her may have also been a small clue.

"Be quiet," Luna ordered. "I am trying to figure out who I am." Loop memories could be tricky sometimes, but these were fragmentary even for that and trying to figure them out was rapidly giving her a headache.

"...a \_talking\_ horse?" one of the humans asked.

"I said, be quiet!" Luna roared, and the humans scattered. She took a calming breath and tried to make sense of her new memories. She was... a survivor of a lost, ancient kingdom on the moon? Fair enough. She had some kind of mission too... the old enemy that had destroyed her people was returning, and it was her duty to defend the Earth against them. Check.

Now, how was she supposed to do that? Luna searched her scattered

Loop memories.

"...find the Moon Princess?" she asked herself aloud. A little worried, she turned her head and was relieved to see her familiar mark on her flank. "That was easy," she said. "Now what?"

A commotion at the entrance of the alleyway made her raise her head again. She took one look at the murmuring crowd of humans, then transformed herself to shadow and escaped. If this "maddeningly vague in her Loop memories" enemy really was out there searching for her, discretion would be the better part of valor for the moment.

That discretion lasted only until the early evening, when Luna was stirred from her nap on a high rooftop after a long day spent searching without luck for Twilight Sparkle. There was the crawling sensation of a dark presence nearby, and it reminded her just a little of how her own magic felt when she was Nightmare Moon. Before she even had a chance to consider Luna was in the air, searching for the abomination.

She had a duty to protect her subjects, after all. Even if they weren't her usual subjects, and even if they didn't know they were her subjects yet.

It took only a brief search, and it was only a moment's work after shattering the gem store window with her hooves to dispatch the demon. She had perhaps over-estimated the monster's strength; she'd hoped to interrogate it but was left with only a pile of magically inert dust. She felt a little guilty for a moment, but she was uncertain the creature had been sentient to begin with, and it had been threatening a young human filly. Girl. Whatever.

She checked the human "fainted, like the other humans scattered about the store" and cast a simple charm to ensure restful dreams before she was interrupted.

"Who... what are you?" the male voice asked from above.

Luna looked up to the high window she'd broken, and saw a male, masked human figure in a strange outfit. Possibly the human version of a tuxedo, she decided. "It is polite to give one's own name first," she returned, stretching her wings. Perhaps this was the person responsible for the monster; she sensed magic on him, unlike any other humans she'd encountered this Loop.

"You talk!" the man exclaimed.

"So do you," Luna replied archly. She hated these Loops where equines weren't intelligent by default. Perhaps she should do something about that when she had a chance.

"I... I am... Tuxedo Mask," the man said.

"I see," Luna said dubiously. She was reasonably sure that wasn't how humans named themselves this Loop. "I am Luna, the Princess of the Moon."

The man staggered like he'd been hit, raising one hand to his face. "But... you're a horse," he protested.

"Pony," Luna corrected.

"I... I need to go," the man said. His cape swirled, there was a flare of magic, and he was gone.

Luna nodded to herself. Tuxedo guy was definitely suspicious.

\* \* \*

><p>Many of her classmates held the strong belief that Ami Mizuno was not human. The debate raged furiously over whether she was a soulless cyborg from the distant future or an inscrutable extrusion of a vast alien intelligence, but even here at cram school there were only a few lonely voices that supported her claim to humanity.<p>

It was perhaps a shame that all the other students were unconscious, because this afternoon â€" confronted with the unimaginable circumstance of being rescued by what she didn't yet know to call an alicorn princess from an actual demonic monster â€" she proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that she was a flesh-and-blood teenage girl.

"You're a pony!" Ami squealed in delight.

"Yes, I am." The equine paused. "Excuse me." There was a flash of dark blue light, and the demonic schoolteacher flew back into the wall she'd been bucked into moments previously.

"You're a magic unicorn talking pegasus pony!"

"Do human's foreheads normally glow in this world?" the pony asked.

"...no?" Ami said, suddenly feeling a strange sensation there and being shaken enough from Pony Proximity Euphoria Syndrome into realizing that, perhaps, this situation was slightly unusual. Almost downright unscientific.

"Okay," the winged creature said. Another flash of blue light revealed a small... pen? "I am Princess Luna," she said, "and if I can trust these cursed defective memories, you are supposed to be Sailor Mercury, one of the guardian soldiers of the Moon Princess."

Ami stared at the pony.

"That's me, by the way," Luna added, apparently considering that the most pressing thing to clarify. Encased in dark light, the pen floated closer to Ami.

There were plenty of really important questions she probably should have asked. "Will I get to ride you?" came out instead.

Luna frowned. "I suppose," she allowed.

Ami's hand, without conscious direction, grabbed the floating pen. "Deal. Umm... Your Highness."

Behind Luna, the demonic monster stirred again. The equine princess

stepped aside. "Show me what you can do," she ordered.

Ami blinked. Twice. Then the demon jumped for her and instincts she never knew she had made her raise the pen high, words she somehow knew by heart ripping from her throat.

"Well, bubbles," Luna said a few moments later. "I've seen worse special talents. We can work with that."

\* \* \*

><p>For the first time in countless years stretching beyond the boundaries of this life, the four guardian soldiers of the Moon Princess were gathered. Perhaps they would have been more excited if they hadn't just been fighting for their lives against two of the Generals of the Dark Kingdom.<p>

"Well done, my soldiers!" Luna exclaimed.

"...why do you have a talking horse?" the newly arrived Sailor Venus asked.

"Pony," Sailor Mercury insisted.

"I am Luna," the equine in question announced, "the Princess of the Moon."

Sailor Venus blinked several times. "The h-\_pony\_ is the Moon Princess?"

"\_Luna\_?" another voice interjected. A white blur came down from somewhere and landed on Venus's shoulder.

"...why do you have a talking cat?" Sailor Jupiter asked, her arms crossing.

"Sister?" Luna asked cautiously, staring at the white cat with a golden moon on its forehead. Her accursed, near-useless Loop memories throbbed, like she should have recognized the feline.

Venus giggled. "Sister? I knew there was something you weren't telling me, Artemis."

The cat swatted at her face with one paw. "I \_told\_ you, it's not my fault the Greeks got my gender wrong."

It had been a long shot, but Luna was still disappointed. As far as she could without explaining the Loops to the human girls, she'd searched for any sign that anypony â€" or even any\_one\_ â€" else was Awake, and had found nothing.

Artemis was now staring at her. "You're... Luna?" he asked.

Luna tried to force her Loop memories to tell her who this cat was supposed to be to her, but came up with nothing. "I'm sorry," she said. "I do not remember who you are."

"I'm not sure I remember who \_you\_ are," Artemis said. "I... I didn't think you were a horse."

"\_Pony\_," Sailor Mercury corrected again. Really, she got more offended by that than Luna did herself.

"More importantly," Venus interjected, glancing at her passenger. "\_Is\_ she the Moon Princess?"

"Of course I am," Luna answered. If there was anything she was sure of in this Loop, it was that.

"Really?" Artemis sounded a little dubious. He raised one paw to his head, like he was warding off a headache.

"I could lower the moon now to prove it," Luna offered â€" there was no point getting offended, given that the cat's memories of the old kingdom were probably as bad as her own. "It would probably panic the populace though." She \_never\_ felt right in these â€" usually human â€" loops where the moon and sun just went up and down on their own. It was downright unscientific. "Maybe we could go visit the old castle again?"

"Umm... I don't think that's necessary, Your Highness," Sailor Mercury said quickly. Luna was a gracious enough ruler to pretend not to notice the warning signs her guardians were giving the newcomer and her cat. Really, forget one lousy oxygen spell and you never live it down.

Sailor Venus seemed to think for a moment, then knelt. Artemis lost his balance, and leaped down to the ground. "I am Sailor Venus, or Minako Aino, Your Highness," the blonde girl said.

Luna smiled. "Rise, my guardian."

"Are you \_sure\_ \_you're\_ supposed to be a pony?" Artemis whined plaintively.

\* \* \*

><p>The time had come for the final battle. It would happen here, in the heart of the Dark Kingdom itself, buried beneath the North Pole. (When Luna recounted the story to Twilight in her next Loop, that bit would send the unicorn on a particularly entertaining rant.) Minor demons scattered, unwilling to face the furious alicorn princess.<p>

"Moon Princess," the waiting queen said, shadows hanging off of her like physical things. She carried a tall staff, which she tapped on the onyx floor.

"Release your hold on the sun and end this night," Luna stated coldly, "and some mercy may be shown to you, witch." The air was thick with dark magic, enough that Luna half-feared to see black corruption staining her flank just from being here.

The ruler of the Dark Kingdom threw back her head and laughed. "Foolish Princess. You think that I \_could\_ bring back the sun? It is our Great Leader's power that blackens the day, not mine."

"Then I shall destroy you both," Luna said.

Her enemy laughed again. "You seek to slay both I and Queen Metallia



alone, Princess?"

"Not alone," Luna said grimly, and she spread her wings. In this place, for once her darkly colored magic shone brightly, and the four she carried hidden underneath them returned to their full size, two on each side. "The guardian soldiers of the Moon Princess," she proclaimed.

"Sailor Mercury," one said.

"Sailor Mars."

"Sailor Jupiter."

"Sailor Venus."

"And in the name of the Princess, we will punish you!" the four finished in unison. Artemis had been upset to be left behind, but this was no place for a cat.

The woman they faced just laughed again. "Endymion... kill them." The shadows surrounding her parted slightly, revealing the man who knelt at her left, kissing her hand.

He rose, drawing a sword. "Yes, Queen Beryl." Luna was pretty sure she recognized him, and she snorted. She'd known that tuxedo guy was up to no good.

Endymion jumped high in the air, raising his sword for a downward slash. "Girls," Luna prompted, and her guardians acted.

Sailor Mercury clenched a fist, and a cloud of bubbles shrouded the man's head. Sailor Jupiter met him in midair, dodging the wild, blind swing of his sword and tackling him to the ground, lightning crackling around them. Still blinded, Endymion managed to throw her off but lost a hold of his weapon. Arcs of fire from Sailor Mars's hands pushed him back, and then a golden spear of light from Sailor Venus punched through his chest armor.

The dark warrior gasped, staggered once, then collapsed at his queen's feet. Beryl's hand tightened around her staff. "You," she snarled.

"He'll live," Luna said, keeping her voice cold. This wasn't the time for sympathy.

"Just die!" Beryl roared, raising her staff and a hurricane of dark magic swept the room. Luna had barely a moment to shield her friends and then she was caught up in the storm. "Die, Moon Princess!" Beryl shouted again.

Luna called on her own power and the winds stilled. She steadied herself with a beat of her wings and fired a moonlight spear at Beryl. The woman blocked it with a wall of black lightning, but it was only a distraction.

Luna landed smoothly and was relieved to find all four of her guardians standing. "Now," she said. Each of the four girls pulled out a small, brightly colored gemstone, while Luna summoned the three she'd kept for herself. (She would have to ask Twilight if there had

been any Loops with seven Elements of Harmony, as these "Rainbow Crystals" were clearly the local equivalent.)

Beryl's eyes widened. "What," she started. With practiced ease, Luna called forth the gemstone's power, merging it with the magics summoned by her guardians. The whole vast throne chamber started to shake, and Beryl stepped backward, her staff falling from her hands. "No!"

As if in answer, a ball of white light formed in front of Luna. The dark force saturating this place stirred, but too late. "This ends now," Luna declared, and the bright magic consumed everything.

It was a strangely intimate thing, and Luna wondered if this was what it was like for Twilight Sparkle when she healed Nightmare Moon. The dark power â€" the "Great Leader" â€" Luna scoured from the world, dissolving every last strand of its being; it was utterly inequine and beyond salvation. Yet when she looked in her foes' hearts, she found something different.

Endymion â€" the tuxedo guy â€" had been being brainwashed after all. Well, that was easily fixed with this power.

Beryl, though? Madness and betrayed hurt, a lust for power and recognition, callous disregard for the lives of others... all of that and more Luna found. But down in her heart, deep beneath everything, Luna found a girl who wanted to be loved. "Be healed," Luna whispered and then, more than aware of the irony, she sent the dark queen to slumber on the moon.

The light faded, and when it did the seven Rainbow Crystals were gone. Instead, a single gem floated before her horn.

Endymion, his wounds healed, rose to one knee, staring at it. "The Silver Crystal," he breathed. "You are the Moon Princess."

Luna still didn't know why everyone seemed to find that hard to believe. "I am," she said.

"I... just don't understand," Endymion said. "Why are you a horse?"

"She's a pony!" Sailor Mercury declared, throwing up her hands. "Why am I the only one who sees that?"

Luna snorted in amusement, but her mind was elsewhere. She had still yet to find a single other Awake soul in this Loop, and if she understood one thing from Twilight Sparkle's explanations, it was that there always must be an Anchor in every loop. Surely Twilight would have found a way to contact her by now, but Luna knew that it was possible for her to enter a fused loop with a different Anchor.

So... where was this Loop's Anchor?

\* \* \*

><p>In her small bedroom, Usagi finished laughing and let the image die on the crystal ball she'd stolen from Beryl... oh, at least a thousand loops prior. She reached down and was sad to discover that

the bag of popcorn she'd brought up here was empty.<p>

"I hope you're happy," a familiar voice came from nowhere.

Usagi turned and watched the green-haired woman step out of thin air. "Oh come on, Puu," she said, sitting straighter on her bed. "This is \_hilarious\_."

Perhaps a smile flickered briefly on the woman's face, but it was gone a moment later. "You realize that she sets up Endymion with Beryl later."

Usagi shrugged. "Not the real Mamo-chan, not my problem," she said. "\_I've\_ done that a few dozen times. They make a cute couple when she isn't evil."

Sailor Pluto just stared at her. "You \_know\_ how much work this is for me."

"I'll help?" Usagi offered. "Look, I was going to introduce myself, and then she just went and proclaimed herself the Moon Princess! I \_had\_ to see what was going to happen."

"Yes, you're going to help," Sailor Pluto hissed. "Do you have \_any\_ idea what Crystal Tokyo looks like now?"

"A lot more ponies, I guess?" Usagi proposed.

"Thanks to Mercury's Equine Uplift Project and her Poniform Transformation Spell, yes."

"The mind boggles," Usagi asked. "Dare I ask where we're going to get a Chibi-Horse-Luna?"

\* \* \*

><p>Luna stood tall and proud atop one of the skyscrapers of this human city, her mane blowing in the wind as she watching over the dreams of the sleepers below. This Loop was still a little strange, but, setting aside the question of the missing Anchor, it wasn't bad, really. The victory party had been fun, even if she'd needed to dust off an old spell for taking on human form to avoid attracting too much attention.<p>

After so many Loops of being the ancient returning villain, it was refreshing to be the prophesied reborn heroine. And now, with the Dark Kingdom defeated and its queen safely imprisoned â€" though from her sifting through dreams she already could tell that the humans were a \_little\_ concerned about the sudden appearance of a female face on their moon â€" she could start making longer term plans. Perhaps she could rebuild those old ruins up there to give herself a more comfortable place to call home? Or maybe she should just go public... the options seemed truly limitless.

That was when \_something\_ opened above her head and deposited a creature on her back. Luna grabbed it with her magic and brought it to float in front of her.

The pink-maned alicorn filly started back at her, then giggled. "Yay! Hi, big sister!"

Luna broke into a smile. "Hello, Celestia," she said. "I'm glad to see you."

\* \* \*

><p>40.3 (Stavaros\_Arcane)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Big Mac put the finishing touching on setting up his bar for this loop. He'd gotten enough practice doing it that he could have a full stocked, ready to go drinking establishment open for business quick enough that you could almost Awaken in a loop with a drink in your hoof.<p>

Big Mac polished a glass while he waited for whoever was awake this loop to arrive to plan out their summer sun celebration shenanigans. What he did not expect was the door to be almost kicked off its hinges and a massive mountain of an equine to storm in.

Mac thought the newcomer resembled the Horses of Saddle Arabia but the comparison felt...wrong. While the Saddle Arabians conveyed the calm of a breeze through an oasis, the new comer felt like someone had strapped a blizzard and a typhoon together and then shoved them in the form of a horse made of iron.

There was the clop of heavy hooves as the newcomer approached the bar. It was then that Big Mac noticed something. The number of hoof beats was wrong. As though two ponies were walking in instead of one. A glance downward showed why. Eight legs. The stallion had eight legs. That made him...

Big Mac looked up to find the dark grey stranger â€" \_Sleipnir \_â€" had closed the distance from the door to the bar counter. While there had been ponies tall enough to force Big Mac to look up in order to meet their eyes, never had anypony make him feel so small, even the Princesses or Twilight during his early loops didn't make him feel quite like this. Like he was a tiny speck in the vast cosmos, and yet the cosmos had turned its attention to him. Even for a looper it was rather intimidating â€" and usually Sleipnir had better control of his presence. Much better. To the point it was hard to notice the eight legs at times.

But Big Mac was a rock, as like an apple tree with roots tapping into the very core of the world. He had spoken with beings of great wisdom that knew how to make the world turn on something as small as a tortoise turned right side up. So he did what he needed to do. Bartend.

"What'll ya have?" Mac asked.

"You'll find behind your counter a cask of thrice blessed Aesir mead. We'll start with that and drink our way through the rest of your stock until the memories are well and truly drowned."

Big Mac was about to ask about the use of the term "We" when the Swiftest of Horses moved two of his limbs and lifted the shivering form of Twilight Sparkle off his back to plop her down on a seat beside him. "Actually, grab me one of your families' famous ciders.

I'll hopefully be too drunk to truly appreciate them later."

Big Mac poured the drink order, briefly studying the cask that he knew had not been part of his stock a few minutes ago. As he placed the drinks in front of the two he asked "Rough loop?"

He watched as in perfect unison the Anchor and the deity slugged back their mead, slammed their mugs down and said, "You don't know the half of it!" in unison.

As Mac moved to refill their mugs the eight legged stallion drank his cider. Unlike the previous drink he savoured the flavour of the beverage. "Twilight has just been through one of the worse hells you could inflict on a sane being. I would never wish it on any of my little ponies. So we're going to drink until those memories are too hazy to hurt anypony anymore, and then the healing can begin. I will make it up to you Twilight. "

Twilight cut in "I appreciate what you're doing. Like you wouldn't believe," the Equestrian Anchor said as she took a large swig of her second drink. " But I keep telling you that..." Twilight shuddered. "Wasn't your fault." she shoved the second empty mug to Mac and the red stallion refilled it again.

Big Mac was now morbidly curious. "She go through something bad in your home loop?" he asked, assuming that Sleipnir's mysterious home loop had gone a little out of kilter.

A smile briefly crossed the newcomers face, "Nay, the suffering she went through happened in Equestria although you are closer then you realize. I blame myself because I should have been able to stop the file corruption in Equestria's Yggdrasil branch before it spawned that abomination scenario."

Big Mac blinked at the mention of the computer he'd been told ran the multiverse. "Wait... that means you're..."

"Sleipnir Eight-Legged, Wotansteed, Lokison, Divine Beast First-Class, and System Administrator of the Equestrian Loops." The Horse God said. "Yes, I may have misled you a little on my importance; it comes of being related to Loki."

Big Mac blinked at the God and looked at Twilight Sparkle.

She shrugged. "I was surprised too. Did not expect my first meeting with the god in charge of our loop to go like it did."

"I didn't start my day thinking I'd have to fend off an insane horde of ponies wielding a dragon tied to a toothless alligator either." Sleipnir snorted. "I'll admit that was the only part of that loop that was remotely not traumatizing."

Big Mac refilled their mugs yet again and poured himself one. He felt that he needed it. "What happened?"

Twilight shuddered, finding herself almost curling up into a ball on instinct.

Sleipnir looked like he was about to put a comforting hoof on the purple unicorn's shoulder before catching himself. She needed a few

more drinks first to dull the emotional pain of that loop. "We won't share the full extent of what happened. But it all started when I found some corrupt files in Equestria's systems. While the loops are beyond the control of even the gods, those of us who work with Yggdrasil's systems have the ability to influence them in certain ways. Programming an algorithm to drastically increase the probability of one emotionally distraught looper to visit a specific loop for their first fused loop. To rewrite code and allow a child to stay with their adopted mother instead of being wiped clean by a resetting loop. You get the idea."

Sleipnir's demeanour seemed to change, giving off an almost paternal feel to the ponies around him. "Of course then some idiot can just as easily cause misery and woe with an act of stupidity and crassness. The corrupt files created some unpleasant loops, and I wanted to track the source of them to help keep Equestria the safe loop you've worked to make it. Well I found it. Somebody thought it would be a great idea to hide their massive collection of porn on my office computer. And I swear I will geld the Olympian son of an incestuous titan for it once I'm done repairing the damage. The stuff was not only vile in its own right but was full of corrupt data and viruses, and the end result was beyond the stuff of night terrors."

Sleipnir emptied his mug again and Big Mac pulled out a row of shot glasses and a couple of bottles. Sleipnir raised an eyebrow as the farm pony turned bartender shrugged. "Mead's out. And this sounds like it's about to get worse."

Twilight grabbed the bottles with her magic and started rapidly filling each small glass. "Eyup." Twilight said, stealing the stallions catchphrase. The alcohol was doing its work, which was the only thing keeping Twilight from starting to cry. "You've heard the horror stories about the loops with the insanely depraved alternate Celestia we call Molestia, right Big Mac."

Big Mac shuddered, "Eyup." He'd been lucky enough to avoid being Awake those loops so far but knew it was bound to happen sooner or later.

Twilight continued. "Now imagine an Equestria where her being in charge made **\*\*sense\*\***!"

As Big Mac paled, Sleipnir picked up where Twilight left off, "Whatever you are thinking of... It was worse. Not only was she in charge but she was the pinnacle of what every pony strove to be, the ideal pony in the eyes of her subjects! And Twilight was the only one Awake, the only sane mare in this mad mad mad mad mad mad mad world. And then this corrupted world painted a target on her by making her the most desirable mare alive to everyone in said world."

"Oh mah god..." Big Mac said his imagination giving life to a shadow of the terror described to him.

"I hear you." Sleipnir said with a nod. He barely registered what the last two shots he tossed back were. "And then it got worse."

Everyone in the room shuddered. Big Mac barely managed to get out a word. "How?"

Sleipnir shook his head, "You don't want to know. Trust me. YOU DO NOT WANT TO KNOW."

After a moment of silence and more bottles being brought out, Sleipnir spoke again. "So I entered the Loop, something I've tried to avoid because you ponies can handle yourselves without my meddling. Fought my way to Twilight Sparkle and then we both fought our way to the gates of Tartarus, changed which side of the door the locks were on, locked ourselves in, and then I called down a Gungnir strike ending the loop."

Twilight nodded. "Never has a planet cracking divine orbital bombardment been more welcome."

"And now I'm going to make it up to her, for all the suffering. This is a healing loop, and we're going to start by sterilizing the metaphorical wounds with alcohol. So. Cheers, everypony," he said, raising a glass to the group that had walked in during the tale of woe. The gathered Equestrian loopers rushed to comfort Twilight.

Sleipnir smiled, glad he'd had the forethought to have Spike message everyone who was Awake to join them. Now the healing could really begin.

\* \* \*

><p>40.4<p>

"Well, I hope never to have to detox Zeus' account again," Sleipnir said, sitting back on his rear legs with a long sigh.

Loki leant back against the comforting bulk of his middle son, Fenris, and collapsed down his spear. "Indeed. What was that thing at the end?"

"Basically Scylla and Charybdis merged with hentai," Sleipnir answered. "Not fun."

Hel and Jormugandr trooped in, Hel's living side looking nearly as decrepit as her dead side and Jormugandr's crest drooping with exhaustion.

"At least you didn't have to chase the thing down to be sure it was dead," Jormugandr hissed.

"And was it?" Sleipnir tapped on air, and his barding dematerialized.

The world-serpent grinned, showing his myriad teeth. "Once I was done with it... yes."

Hel sat down next to her father. "It's good to have that over and done with..."

"Sorry for calling you all into it," Sleipnir said, embarrassed. "But, well, given that it had fused with Twilight's loop last time, I wasn't comfortable going in alone to make sure it was cleared off."

"Good call," Fenris growled. "Not often we get to cut loose."

"You ate the planet." Sleipnir paused. "Sort of planet. Well, okay, drive partition."

"It's what I do best." Fenris chuckled.

Sleipnir kicked him affectionately with a forehoof. "Goof."

"That's me, I think you'll find," Loki pointed out.

"Right, I think we might all need a drink after that. Wonder if Mac's got the bar set up yet..."

"Why not just check?" Hel grinned. "Wonder how I'd look as a pony."

Sleipnir summoned a Yggdrasil terminal. "Well, it might..." he tailed off, then blinked. "Huh."

"What?" Loki asked, craning to see the screen.

In reply, Sleipnir tapped on it and pushed it away from the small group, letting it expand to cover one wall. The 'days since start of loop' number flashed blue, drawing attention.

"That..." Fenris looked closer. "That's bigger than I remember it being..."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight woke up.<p>

That in itself was unusual, since she'd gone to bed after the end-of-loop party fully expecting to snap to attention reading a book.

Razzen-frazzen fused loops...

And her loop memories were on the fritz, too. How truly good. And not what she needed after that nightmarish loop before last.

"Twilight!" Spike skidded into her room, alarm in his voice. "Get up!"

"What is it?" Twilight rolled out of bed. "And are you actually normal Spike this time, or have I missed some formative event that took place in the past?"

"Twilight..." Spike said, slowly. "This isn't a new loop."

"Impossible," Twilight replied bluntly. "Loops have a maximum length."

"Well..."

Spike pointed out the window.



Trotting over, Twilight shook her head to try to get rid of the inexplicable hangover.

Then stopped dead.

The ruins of Pinkie's "far-too-many-to-bother-counting-loop-end-party" were strewn all over her house, and the square, and half the rest of Ponyville as well. Ponies lay in various states of comatose on the floor, having been thoroughly Partied Out.

Pinkie was still on a DDR machine.

"But..." Twilight winced, then remembered enough magic to erase her hangover. (Drinking at the end of a loop wasn't supposed to make hangovers, so she'd gone a little overboard.) "That's... how?"

A clattering of hooves sounded on the balcony, and then Sleipnir came in through the door â€" causing a little minor structural damage, since he wasn't quite small enough to fit. "Twilight, good. Sorry for the short notice, I just found that getting rid of that stash of Zeus's has caused your loop to start expanding to take up the slack. It looks like you're getting about a week's worth of new time each stage of expansion... I think."

"Wait, so you fixed things too hard?" Spike asked.

"Basically," Sleipnir said with a nod. "Okay, must dash. My siblings and I have to go let the Norns know, and see if this is happening anywhere \_else.\_"

He wheeled on two hooves, strode back up to the balcony, and vanished.

Spike took a deep breath.

"...so, what now?"

"Now," Twilight said firmly, "I go and find something that hasn't been drunk yet."

\* \* \*

><p>40.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Right, that's done..." Twilight said, panting.<p>

"Giving up the Elements suuuuucks," Pinkie moaned. "I'm the Element of Laughter! It's my Thing! Well, that and being a Pink Lantern, but they're kinda related..."

"She's got a point, Twi," Dash said in an unusually subdued tone. "We're so used to having the powers of the Elements on tap that... well, what does it mean for us?"

Trixie walked in, dragging a huge mass of burning rosebush-like thorns from her left rear hoof. "That. Was. Not. Fun."

"Well, you at least kept the tree contained until we could sort it all out..." Twilight consoled.

"True. But-" Trixie's eye twitched, and she flailed her hoof until the woody detritus fell off. "Oh, this is going to give me a complex if it happens every time..."

Fluttershy brought over some towels and gently cleaned the cuts. Looking up at Trixie, she smiled wanly. "They don't look too bad. You should be fine â€" no real need to even use magic to heal them."

Trixie sighed. "Well, Trixie will see you next Loop. She understands that this one will not be much longer than normal?"

"Yeah, Sleipnir said something about extending in discrete jumps," Twilight agreed. "I think there's about another five days to go for this lot."

"Because the Tree of Doom is a perfect way to end a Loop. Alright. Buck keeping a low profile." Trixie flared her horn, Ascended and flew off.

Twilight blinked. "Wait a moment..."

The six remaining loopers exchanged glances.

Then Twilight looked up, mouthed something, and closed her eyes.

With a flash of violet light, her Element of Magic burst into being on her forehead.

"Did it work?" she asked, eyes still shut.

"Yes," Rarity breathed. Then, with another soundless flare, her Element of Generosity materialized.

Four more followed in quick succession, and then a relieved laughter chased away the last of their anxiety.

\* \* \*

><p>"As far as I can tell," Twilight said, by now on her fourth blackboard of notes, "when the tree was said to require the Elements, it was only after the physical representations â€" you know, the stone orbs from the Sisters' Castle, or equivalent. But because by now they're basically part of our souls, they <em>can't</em> be taken away in any meaningful sense. I should have realized!" She rounded on her audience. "We've used this fact so many times before! Every time we've conjured the Elements into being to mess with Discord!"

"So..." Applejack raised a hoof. "What all does this mean for us in a real sense?"

Twilight turned back to the boards, and made a few more annotations. "I think it means that we need to make a policy of retrieving the solid Elements from the Sisters' Castle every single loop. We can't

really sustain the magic needed to re-actualize the elements if the energy isn't going back into us once we're done with them â€" so we just give the tree the appropriate Elements from the same loop, and we're golden."

"I see," Fluttershy said. "Thank you for the explanation, Twilight. And â€" would you and Pinkie be able to join me the next time she, Discord and I are all Awake at the same time?"

"Sure," Twilight replied. "What for?"

Fluttershy's eyes hardened. "I am a kind pony. But I am going to hit him with every form of confection that I can think of until he feels sufficiently sorry for not warning us about that tree in all the time he has had to do so."

The others shuffled away from Fluttershy unconsciously.

"...yeah, sure," Twilight said, nodding. Then she sat down on a nearby chair. "I hope this kind of thing doesn't happen every time the timeline extends..."

\* \* \*

><p>40.6 (masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie took in her marefriend's pacing, raising an eyebrow. "Chrysy... you're in a rut."<p>

"I know, I know!"

"No, I mean, literally."

The changeling queen glanced down, blinking. "Oh. When... when did this happen?"

"About half an hour ago." Trixie hopped down into the ditch, tapping the dirt around her. "I'm amazed it didn't happen sooner, actually, you've been at this for hours."

Chrysalis flinched at the accusation. "I... I'm trying to steel myself for this, but, but-"

"But you're frozen by fear and shame and don't want to cause a confrontation, and every time you push one pillar of your emotions away you get snagged by another."

The changeling gave Trixie a weak smile. "Are you sure you're not part of the hive mind?"

"Nope, I just know what it's like to be there. Ol' Great and Powerful having to apologize to mares she embarrassed and terrorized..." Trixie shrugged. "Not as personal as your situation, of course, but I'm sympathetic. And I know how hard it can be to do something like this..." She took a breath. "Which is why I want to preemptively apologize."

Chrysalis blinked. "Apologize? I don't understand, what did-"

"Come on, honey, what could be so importaaaaaaa... Shining's voice trailed off as he entered the room, his attention fully on the mare who stared back at him in utter horror. He didn't even notice Cadance's horn glowing briefly, infusing the tableau with a faint cyan aura. Trixie awkwardly clambered out of the rut, giving the alicorn of love a look; Cadance returned it with a sigh, flicking her eyes at her husband and shaking her head.

After a moment, Shining Armor cleared his throat. "Sooooooooooooo. I, uh, take it you're looping?"

Chrysalis managed, barely, to nod.

"O...kay... Well, um, welcome to the loops, I guess...?"

Chrysalis took a breath. "This... this isn't my, uh, first loop."

The stallion nodded. "Yeah, I can see how that could work. Take some time to get acclimatized before... well, meeting somebody who was basically prey." He shrugged. "I don't... well, so long as you don't do it again, I figure the past is the past."

"Oh. Yes, quite." Chrysalis nodded. "Yes! Yes, I'll not be... invading... again. Nope." She smiled awkwardly, buzzing out of the ditch and landing. "Um. So, uh... nice to meet you! Heh."

Trixie sighed. "You need to tell him."

Shining Armor looked toward the magician. "Tell me what?"

Chrysalis's horn flared and she popped out of existence. A moment later she popped back into existence and stumbled into a wall.

"Anti-teleport field," Cadance explained, tapping her horn. "Chrysalis, this is for your own good, really."

The changeling queen glared at her... then turned her gaze toward Trixie. "You... you planned this!" Her eyes were wide and wet with tears of betrayal.

"Er... my plan involved rockets," Trixie admitted sheepishly. "We went with Cadance's plan... I, uh, may have a small problem."

A shaky hole-ridden hoof rose to point at her. "NO SUPERFUN FOR, FOR A MONTH!"

Shining blushed. "Did... did she just pull a List Trotter gambit?"

"Um, no. Superfun means explosives," Trixie explained. "Happyfun means-"

"I think that the point has been made!" Cadance shouted. She took a breath, calming herself. "Chrysalis is very upset that we're forcing this, even if it is for her own good. Anyway, Chrysalis..."

"Just... just give me a moment." The ebony mare took a few deep, shaky breaths.

Shining Armor leaned in toward his wife. "Is... is this some sort of addiction intervention? Has she been draining my non awake selves or something?"

"WE WERE MARRIED, OKAY?!"

The stallion's jaw dropped.

Chrysalis buried her head in her hooves. "We were married, Shiny. For eighteen years, and... and that was my first loop. I thought the baseline was a nightmare because, because I, I couldn't even think of... I didn't want to think I could be that cruel. Not after fighting... well, the Celestia of that loop. Not after falling in love and freeing slaves... and... and then I woke up in the next loop and it was all a lie." She moaned. "There you have it. That's my big secret. Now just... just go."

Shining stepped forward. "Um, I-"

"Leave, all of you. Trixie too." The queen of changelings sighed. "I... need to be alone right now..."

\* \* \*

><p>40.7<p>

Celestia carefully unlocked the door to her treasure chamber. "Thank you all for coming," she said, as the magic released. "I fear that a great evil may have returned, and-"

She stopped.

Twilight blinked at the ash-strewn ruins within, then she and the others started coughing as thick clouds of smoke erupted out.

"Dash!" Twilight said, hacking and coughing in the smoke. "Clear this!"

Dash answered with a pair of wingbeats, thinning the smoke enough to see through, and Twilight added her normal artificial-air-supply spell over the whole group.

With the smoke clearing, there was a blue glow of magic visible in the air...

"Trixie?" Rarity, Applejack and Dash asked together.

"Ah, the Element bearers," Trixie said, turning. She had Twilight's Magic tiara on her forehead, and no less than five necklaces on "all the Elements. "Surprised?"

"Kind of, yeah," Pinkie said, scratching her head. "I could swear this was supposed to be a new villain..."

"There probably is." Trixie tossed her head. "But the security on the Elements was no match for Trixie's advanced safe-cracking

techniques!"

Twilight sniffed the air, then looked up. "Wait a moment... did you seriously melt a hole in the ceiling?"

"Indeed!" Trixie answered, pleased. "Iron oxide and Aluminium are excellent tools."

"So. Thermite." Twilight shrugged. "Well, have fun, then."

"What?" Celestia asked incredulously, echoed by three of Twilight's friends. (Fluttershy didn't say anything, and Pinkie was too busy browsing through a book she'd retrieved from somewhere.)

Twilight pointed. "Look, if she wants to use the Elements on the new problem, that's fine."

Trixie's eyes widened. "Trixie might have to use them?"

"Well, yeah..." Twilight glanced aside at her mentor. "About the only things in history which required the Elements were... ooh... Nightmare Moon and Discord-" Celestia twitched, "and I suspect it's the latter. So if you want to keep them, keep them â€" just know that Discord will take them away again in about five minutes."

Trixie pondered this for a few seconds.

"I want to keep the magic one. You can have the rest back."

"Sure," Twilight said.

"Twilight!" Celestia said, shocked. "What are you thinking?"

Twilight stretched. "That it's my element and I'll lend it out if I want to, she's probably the number two magical unicorn in the country, and that I was halfway through a good book. See you guys later."

She vanished with a flash.

\* \* \*

><p>"How'd it go?" Twilight asked, as Trixie walked heavily into the library with her hat askew.<p>

"Not particularly well," Trixie admitted. "It looks like the baseline-loop magic show is not compatible with me using the Elements alongside the others. Well," Trixie waved a hoof. "We got it going eventually. But the palace west wing is probably going to stay as boiled sweets for the rest of the Loop."

"Okay." Twilight nodded. "Well, it's good to know this sort of thing. More data points about friendship."

\* \* \*

><p>40.8<p>

"Okay. Sure." Chrysalis nodded. "I can do that. I think."

"Could you really?" Twilight asked, smiling. "Thanks. Normally I'd be fine with it, it's just..."

She tailed off, then tried again. "\_That\_ loop."

"Yeah, I get the picture." Chrysalis shifted to match Twilight's form... then frowned back along her body. "With wings or without? I've lost track of if it's general knowledge you're a princess this time."

"With." Twilight winced. "I lost track myself at the loop-start, and Sparkler saw me with them. I told her it was an accident and to keep it secret, which means that only Canterlot high society knows..."

"Right, right." More faint green light, and the Twilight-double had wings. "How's that?"

"Looks good." Twilight nodded. "\_Shrub\_", but that gala would have been awkward."

"I'm sure." Chrysalis turned in place, still looking back along her borrowed form. "Hey, I just noticed. Your hair doesn't have a... thing."

"You mean an aura?" Twilight asked.

"If I knew what an aura was, then I might be able to answer that..."

Twilight summoned her element of magic and ascended in the same instant. "This."

Slowly, her mane began to glow with a soft orange light. The colour striping along it seemed to blur, slightly, and then become bands of backlit shadow.

They looked like nothing less than two banks of cloud between sky and land, lit by a sun that had just set below the horizon. The angle of the light changed as she moved, never quite still.

"...okay, that's cool." Chrysalis turned her head on its side. "I think I get it. Twilight, right?"

"Yeah..." Twilight shrugged, and then her mane was just coloured again. "It kind of attracts attention, though... and I'm conspicuous enough already with wings."

Chrysalis' copy of Twilight's mane lit up. "Gah, that's hard to copy. Can any of the others do that?"

"Well, yeah..." Twilight answered. "We're old enough and have enough power. But I usually see them in the more recent Sisters loops, because that way we at least have a reason to use them."

"Okay, now I'm curious." Chrysalis frowned. "Aren't most of the others awake this loop? I kind of want to see."

"...sure." Twilight went from alicorn to pegasus, then slapped a

glamour on herself which made her cutie mark a nebula. "You may as well use the chance to practise being me."

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, <em>that</em>," Dash said with a shrug. "Yeah, use it all the time."

"You do?" Twilight blinked. "I'd thought it was a rare thing..."

"Well, sort of, yeah, but who's going to be able to tell when I'm moving at supersonic speed anyway? Besides, it looks cool." Dash ascended, then her mane began to...

Finding words was hard. It was still the same rainbow of colours, and none of them moved, but it was as though one was looking at something going past at extreme speed parallel to the directions of the lines.

"...that is giving me a headache," Chrysalis commented absently.

"Just go with it," Dash tossed her head, and the colours... reacted after the mane itself, briefly resulting in a mane that was almost entirely red.

"Okay," Twilight said brightly, tapping the facsimile of her shoulder. "Next?"

\* \* \*

><p>As they flew back down to Ponyville, Chrysalis looked Twilight's glamour over. "That looks fairly detailed. Standard form?"<p>

"Yes." Twilight nodded, backwinging a little. "Starry Nights, a pegasus who goes stargazing on cirrus clouds at night. I made up a few of these one loop, for just this sort of thing."

"I approve," Chrysalis said. "It feels less... impolite, taking a form you have permission for, and invented forms automatically result in permission. I have one who likes collecting rocks..."

With a clatter of hooves, they landed in front of Carousel Botique.

"And this is my friend Rarity's house," Chrysalis added, knocking.

After some muffled cursing and a loud \_splash\_ noise, the door opened on a rather damp Rarity.

"Oh, come in, Twilight," Rarity said, her eyes flicking to the pegasus as she said the name. "Who's your friend?"

"Starry Nights," Chrysalis replied easily. "I met her at an astronomy meeting a few days ago."

As the door closed again, Twilight nodded to Chrysalis. "Very smooth."



"Thank you," Chrysalis replied with a nod.

"So, what brings you two here?" Rarity asked, summoning a mop from the back room with her telekinesis and clearing off the floor. "Sorry about this, by the way, my attempt at creating a hat with fish in is still pending a stable but non-stasis containment spell for water in cloth form."

"Chrysalis is curious about our mane auras." Twilight shrugged. "It's an opportunity to practise being me around town, as well."

"Oh, that thing." Rarity rolled her eyes. "That does look nice, but it does also force me into a very limited style of clothing. But I suppose you'd like to see it, of course."

Rarity's mane aura was, as was becoming a theme, very different to that of anypony else. Where Twilight's had shone, and Dash's had flickered, Rarity's mane... refracted.

It was see-through, though a deep purple in colour. But what you saw through it didn't match the edges up with what was visible past it. And when it moved, the whole thing acted like a funhouse mirror and distorted in unpredictable ways.

"So, there it is," Rarity said, before undoing the aura and going back to unicorn. "It's like I'm wearing a giant, flexible gemstone â€" which doesn't work well if I want to wear a lot of colours. More colours do well with purple than do well tinted purple, and of course I can't mute the colouring of it with a well-done hairstyle either."

Chrysalis nodded. "I see. So they... what, they reflect the magical signature of the pony?"

"Partially," Twilight replied. "But that's not the whole story. Let's go see Pinkie."

"...do we have to? I'm still digesting the last Genocide By Toffee, and that was five loops ago..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Ta-da!" Pinkie said, shaking her pink curls. "Like it?"<p>

"...but that's just your normal mane-style, isn't it?" Chrysalis asked.

Twilight grinned. With the air of one doing a magic trick, she ran her hoof along the edge of the mane.

Some of it came off.

"Here, try it," Twilight offered. "It's delicious."

Tentatively, Chrysalis took a small portion with a spoon, and tasted it experimentally.

"Okay, what." The disguised changeling pointed, licking the spoon.

"Your mane is literally cotton candy."

Pinkie beamed.

\* \* \*

><p>"Let's see..." Twilight said, as they came down to land outside Sweet Apple Acres. "Applejack next, then Fluttershy â€" Trixie's there as well, I think, so we can do her too â€" then we teleport to Canterlot to call in on Shiny and Cadence and finish up with my daughter."<p>

"Do we have to do your brother?" Chrysalis winced. "I mean..."

"I know." Twilight laid a wing across Chrysalis' back. "If you want, I'll ask them to do it and you can look in from outside. But they are important."

"I'll-" Chrysalis swallowed. "I'll give it a go."

"That's the spirit. Oh, hi, Applejack. I'm showing Chrysalis all our mane auras."

The farm-pony nodded to both of them. "I'm expectin' you'll want to see mine, then?"

"Please."

"Okay." Applejack stamped on the ground, which produced a ripple and made the nearest field plough itself instantly. "Take a look, then."

Applejack's alicorn mode was the largest of all the Element bearers', when shapechanging magic or sheer age wasn't coming into the equation, and her mane was entirely in scale. After a moment, it took on the slightly unearthly quality which Chrysalis was starting to notice all mane auras had.

"That's... very yellow, actually," Chrysalis said, walking all around Applejack. "Or... hold on, is the colour changing?"

"It cycles through," Twilight explained helpfully. "Applejack tends not to use hers because it actually changes her colouration â€" which is very obvious. It goes from yellow to red, then back through yellow to green. Apple colours."

"Okay, thank you."

Applejack took that as the okay to revert to her base form. "Right, where was ah... oh, yeah. Potatoes."

"New thing?" Twilight asked.

"Ah heard th' Prench called 'em pommes de terre," Applejack said over her shoulder. "Worth a try."

\* \* \*

><p>"That's really strange," Chrysalis said, watching the pink shapes move over one another. "Are those butterflies or

leaves?"<p>

Fluttershy shook her head, causing the shapes to shuffle around more vigorously. "I think it depends how you look."

"My turn!" Trixie said, her magic-circlet materializing on her brow. A flash of light, a puff of smoke, and she too was an alicorn.

"Trixie's mane is a bit like Fluttershy's," Twilight commented. "See the flashes?"

"I don't... wait, there we are." Chrysalis squinted. "Like tiny little fireworks."

Trixie spun with a flourish, sending her mane flying out behind her â€" in a crescendo of bright, multicoloured light.

"There we go," Twilight said, smiling. "The faster she moves, the larger the flashes get â€" and they take on different colours, too."

"If only Trixie could get this to work without the wings," Trixie said sadly. "That would be an excellent magic show."

Twilight turned to Chrysalis. "Ready?"

Chrysalis sighed. "...as I'll ever be."

\* \* \*

><p>"...so, long story short, she's borrowing my form and she wanted to find out about how alicorn manes work," Twilight said, keeping an eye on the pair's reactions.<p>

"Well, that sounds fine," Shining said, looking a little uncomfortably at the faux-alicorn. Chrysalis shuffled her wings, and stepped back a bit. "That is so strange... she's even got your mannerisms down..."

"The mane?" Twilight prompted.

"Okay." Shining slipped his hoof into his subspace pocket, touched his spectrum crystal pendant, and flashed through an ascension.

"Watch this," Twilight said. Taking a comb from the dresser, she made to comb her brothers' mane.

With a tink, the comb bounced off.

"Coherent forcefield," she said with a wink. "Bit of a pain, though, because stallions find it harder to get away with a useful length of mane."

"And as for mine..." Cadence waved a hoof through her mane, which billowed and parted before reforming into the same curls as before. "Try to hold it and it's as tenuous as smoke. Leave it alone and it always comes back. Sort of like love, really."

"Okay, thanks." Twilight turned to Chrysalis. "Can you teleport us back? Remember the horn aura ultraviolet spell, the fake horn aura spell, and the teleport as well."

"Right." Chrysalis frowned. "Let me know if it works."

\* \* \*

><p>"Yeah, I hardly <em>ever<em> use mine," Nyx said, looking back at her mane and tail.

"Why?" Chrysalis asked. "What does it do?"

"Nothing."

"...well, how-"

"No," Nyx blew her mane out of her eyes. "Literally nothing. Watch."

Mane and tail both went black.

Completely black. Not just raven-black. Not even coal-black.

Hole-in-space black. The black of the cold between the stars. So black that your eyes could tell that not a single photon of light was either coming from or being reflected from the hair in question.

And then Nyx's mane was back to a dark purple colour.

"So, yeah," she said, shrugging. "Depressing."

"Right."

Chrysalis sat back to absorb that.

After a few minutes, another question came to her. "Why are Celestia and Luna so similar, then? In their auras, I mean?"

"I think it's because they're sisters, and because both of them have talents and magic associated directly with the light of celestial bodies." Twilight half-spread her wings, then furled them. "I'm not sure, of course, because a lot of this is based on observation, and if you find the definitive book on alicorn magic then please lend it to me as soon as possible."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

40.1 Berry Punch has a specialty, and she is good at it.

>40.2 Misunderstanding.<br>40.3 Zeus has certain... issues.

>40.4 And that's how Season Four was made!<br>40.5 Ah, the interaction of fan-made magic science with canon events.

>40.6 Entirely new vistas of awkward.<br>40.7 Trixie override. Element of Magic is now Trixie.

>40.8 ...does this pass the Bedchel test? They're all talking about hair...<p>

## 43. Chapter 43

41.1

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, what."<p>

Trixie grinned. "Like it? It's art!"

Twilight rubbed her forehead with a hoof. "That's not art. That's a disaster slowly happening."

Trixie's newest project sat between them. It was a metal framework about two lengths long and one high, with a cloud of finely-divided shrapnel and gas hanging as though frozen around the object inside it.

"But it's cool!" Trixie pointed. "See, the lenses have fired, and the compression wave should reach the neutron-reflective core in another few minutes. When it does, the whole of the plutonium will crash through fission in just ten seconds, and-"

Twilight eeep\_ed. She grabbed the whole device and threw it violently upwards.

"Awww..." Trixie raised a hoof plaintively towards the hole in the ceiling. "It took me weeks to transmute all that plutonium."

Twilight sighed. "While your interest in explosives is normally merely dangerous, that was just stupid. But, more importantly-"

A star bloomed above for a moment.

"...yeah, that," Twilight finished. "Pro tip: stasis enchantments set like that may slow down what's inside them, but the gamma ray effect of the blast destroyed the material on which the enchantments were set in the first place..."

Trixie's jaw hung slack.

"What were you planning to do with it, anyway?" Twilight added.

"...I really screwed up," Trixie admitted. "Sorry, Twilight. And I had been planning on putting it in orbit in another few months, but... yeah, that would have gone badly."

Twilight nodded. "I'm sorry, but you really kind of did mess up. Okay, I won't ask for a friendship report on this one, because Celestia might actually get violent if you tell her you nearly nuked part of the western desert. But I will insist that you use nothing more substantial than a Major Image for the next few loops."

"Gotcha." Trixie shook her head, shivering. Then she looked up, forcing a smile. "I suppose I have been relying on brute force a bit..."

\* \* \*

><p>41.2<p>

"Ah, that's the stuff..." Spike sighed, finishing off the tumbler of crushed opal in water.

Just right to cool you off after a long, hot summer day. (Well, if you were a dragon, anyway.)

Rarity slid onto the stool next to him. "Hello, stranger."

"Stranger still," he replied, turning to her. "Did you escape the ravening horde, then?"

"Actually, they took themselves off to the lake. Something about going boating." Rarity shrugged. "They should be fine, they took four sets of that armour I made â€" with the contingent teleportation spell."

Spike nodded. "Good to hear. Hey, Mac? Something ponies can drink, large, and two straws."

"Coming up," Mac replied, getting to work.

\* \* \*

><p>"You four are just <em>nuts,<em>" Nyx said, shaking her head. "And how long did it take you to build these things anyway?"

"Not important!" Diamond Tiara replied. "Steam up?"

"Yep!" Apple bloom nodded, holding up a small stone. "Fire stone â€" they're used for camp fires. One large bag under each boiler, and they'll put out heat until tomorrow morning."

As she spoke, steam indeed began to ooze up from the four vessels moored nearby.

Sweetie hadn't quite lied when she said they were going boating, when Rarity asked â€" but the more correct term would be shipping.

Or perhaps not.

"Right, mine is the Thunder Child," Tiara said, stepping briskly to the gangplank and walking up.

The others spread out, heading to their own ships, and Nyx took to the air wearing a large striped referee's saddle.

\* \* \*

><p>Two hours later, as the sun hung past zenith over the deserted archipelago between Equestria and the Gryphon Lands, they were all in position. Each was at the corner of an imaginary square, ten miles on a side.<p>

Nyx double-checked the cloud solidity effect on her referee's

platform, then fired off the first spell.

On the bridges of four capital ships, the word "begin" drifted out of the air.

Sweetie's Ocean kicked things off, heeling over with the muzzle-horsepower of four 12-inch guns and six 6-inch guns as she fired a volley towards Scootaloo's Agamemnon.

Then things got quite loud, as all four battlewagons began beating the snot out of one another.

\* \* \*

><p>Nyx winced. "Ouch..."<p>

With a bright flash, Scootaloo appeared next to her. "Aw, that sucks. Apple Bloom's totally cheating."

"How so?" Nyx looked down, at the pillar of smoke marking Agamemnon's pyre and the other three huge ships dodging and exchanging fire.

"Her ship's faster than mine, better armed than mine, and I think she put more armour on it as well." Scootaloo shook her head. "I saw some of my twelve-inchers splash off the armour."

Sweetie Belle appeared in another flash of magic. She landed on the cloud, bounced slightly, and checked with her hoof that it was indeed solid before taking the teleport-strap off. "So much for mine..."

A loud bang came up to them.

"Yeah," Scootaloo mused, as Ocean sank in two halves. "Looks like a magazine hit. That ship of 'Bloom's..."

\* \* \*

><p>Tiara's ship weaved through plumes of water and smoke, taking the occasional hit from the ten huge 12-inchers Apple Bloom was firing in broadside.<p>

On the bridge, Tiara slammed the enchanted engine-room telegraph to full ahead, checked her positioning, and kicked the torpedo release control with a certain satisfaction.

Quick-firing guns depressed to shoot at the torpedo sprays, and Apple Bloom's Dreadnought turned to present a small target to them.

That was fine by Tiara's merits. After all, the only place where the torpedoes would miss was-

\* \* \*

><p>A final huge explosion rippled the cloud layer.<p>

Both earth pony fillies appeared within a quarter second of one another, and landed in a heap.

"Who won?" Tiara demanded, wriggling out from under Apple Bloom.

Nyx frowned. "I think it was probably you, Tiara. I mean, \_Dreadnought\_ blew up before \_Thunder Child\_ â€" if only because you pierced the boiler with the ram."

"Yes!" Tiara did a little dance. "Told you it was a useful design!"

"Yeah, yeah..." Apple Bloom huffed. "The torpedo ram \_is\_ effective under the right circumstances."

"Say it!" Tiara demanded.

"Fine..." Apple Bloom took a breath. "You sunk my battleship."

Tiara made a squee sound.

"So..." Nyx took in the floating wreckage, the three pillars of smoke, and the sinking remains of the last two battlegroups. "Can we get this cleared up before one of the others comes looking for us, or do we hope that the loop resets and removes the evidence before someone notices?"

\* \* \*

><p>41.3 (TheCentauress)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The eight-limbed Spirit Animal trotted over to his Admin Console and looked at his stand-in. "'Zup?" he asked with a happy smile.<p>

Bastet gave the approaching fellow Admin a hoof/paw/manipulating-appendage/whatever-bump. "Love the group you have here," she replied to him.

"Eh?" he enquired interrogatively.

The feline-leaning goddess giggled. "Well, see..." she managed around her mirth, "there was this thing... and then..." she gave up and pointed at the terminal.

The divine equine took a look and saw what was funny...

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sat there, staring at her paws, trying to figure out <em>what the fluff<em> happened.

Spike hemmed, hawwed and generally tried to come up with anything. "Ah, you look good as a cat?" the youngling purple dragon finally tried, lamely.

\_Thank the Spruce he's Awake, at least,\_ she mused. "I'm pretty sure this is..." she began before the Loop memories hit. "Urrrk," she added intelligently, "Great fuzzy yarnballs! Who made this Felinia? Housecats, Kittyhawks and PHASE-cats? Buh-wha?" The last was due to her own feeler-arms unwinding in front of her muzzle in her agitation.



Spike too one look and headed out the door. "If you need me, I'm going to be drowning my sorrows at the nearest Diamond Dog burrow," he muttered as the door swung closed.

\* \* \*

><p>Sleppnir looked up at Bastet and snickered. "Redo, but their morphic base being feline rather than equine?" He chuckled at her answering bobble-head nod. "Well, they do need to prepare for some of the 'odder' non-Eiken stuff, I suppose..."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>41.4 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

Rarity had long ago developed a habit of acquiring samples of intriguing materials whenever she was Awake. As a result, the Carousel Boutique's basement boasted a rather impressive material science lab and a dwarven magma forge retrofitted to work with alicorn magic. (Also, the Boutique had a basement. A little sorcery went a long way.)

It was here where Rarity, in pursuit of a goal that had eluded her for countless Loops, discovered that Oerth adamantine and Earth-616 adamantium were far more different than their names would suggest. The former was a pure metal, but the latter was an alloy. Indeed, adamantine was closer to one of adamantium's ingredients, Vibranium. The two were still distinct from one another, and that was exactly what Rarity had been hoping to find.

After almost two weeks of near-nonstop metallurgy and countless formulae, Rarity produced a promising sliver of material. It almost sang with stability in her field, even when molten. Once it cooled, it had a curious ocean blue hue, and proved unmalleable by any force of less than continent-shifting magnitude. Thus, the mare proudly dubbed her creation "tectonium."

Still, it needed to be put through its paces. Rarity crafted a needle of tectonium and began the battery of tests she'd devised at the start of the enterprise. It went through titanium as easily as through soft cheese. It scratched a diamond like a stylus writing on wet clay. It could even be telekinetically hammered through both of its principal constituents and one of Spike's larger shed scales to boot, all with minimal wear and tear.

Rarity beamed. "It's perfect! I shall get to work straight away." She began focusing magic into the forge. She'd need much more than a needle's worth for what she had planned. "But it will all be worth it," she told herself. "It's sure to work!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Why! Won't! You! Work! You! Stupid! Thing!?" With every word, Rarity sent her creation careening through the air and anything else that got in the way.<p>

As such, Shining Armor kept on the other side of his Canterlot office, well away from the mare. "Rarity, it really isn't important. Iâ€" "

"This is vitally important!" Rarity turned on the stallion, who realized too late how foolish it had been to draw her attention. "I will not, neigh, can not allow Equestria's sole male alicorn to present himself as anything less than the ultimate gentestallion!"

Shining sighed as he released his aura, his mane and tail reverting from impenetrable force to mundane hair. "So I can comb my mane like this. It really isn'tâ€"

"It is the principle of the thing!" Rarity ranted. "Celestia does not subject her hoofmaidens to that pink mop of hers. Luna did not permit her mundane locks to remain any longer than necessary. Allowing your mane to be styled at anything less than its full regal splendor is a miscarriage of fabulosity!"

A unicorn-turned-alicorn mare was ranting at Shining Armor. He could be forgiven for trying to appeal to logic. "That only applies if I'm reigning Prince of Equestria, which has happened all of four times."

"And you need to be prepared for the fifth! But this useless piece ofâ€" Rarity gave an incoherent scream and threw the tectonium comb at the window. It missed, but went through the wall with minimal speed loss.

Shining snared it just before it flew out of sight. "You're lucky nopony was in its path," he noted as his magic dragged the comb back at a more reasonable velocity."

Rarity sulked. "I just wanted you to look like a proper prince, is all."

"Well, if nothing else, you've made one of the most impressive alloys I've ever seen." Shining opened the window to let the comb drift back inside. "I don't suppose you'd take a commission from the Guard armory?"

This got a sigh. Rarity didn't even feel up to summoning a fainting couch. "No thank you. If you'd like, I'll give you the formula, butâ€" She groaned. "I was just so sure it would work this time!"

"Rarity, if nothing can get through my mane, I'm pretty sure nothing can mess it up, either."

"I've had bad mane days as an alicorn, Shining." Rarity shuddered at the memories. "Believe me, you will want some way of dealing with them."

Shining just let his aura come and go in response. "At least I don't have a pink mop."

Rarity did not snort at this. A lady does not snort when she laughs. And she had a row of very sharp teeth on hoof for anypony who might claim otherwise.

\* \* \*

><p>41.5 (bobnik)<p>

"... to which I replied, 'The clothes aren't matter.' Of course, with my rusty grasp of Mayan, suddenly Cortez was faced with a nation of nudists when he arrived." finished Rarity.

Sweetie Belle fell off her chair laughing. When Loopers got together to play "What's the oddest..." the results were either hilarious, tragic or more frequently both.

"Your turn." said Rarity. "What's the oddest thing you've ever said that had the furthest-reaching effects?"

"Hmmm. Furthest-reaching? That would be the time I founded a sub-cult of a religion that lasted for ten thousand years." replied Sweetie. "Hold on a sec, I have to get in costume so you get the full effect." She hurried into one of the change rooms in the showroom area of Carousel Boutique, and Rarity felt the brief whisper of magic that meant her younger sister was using her subspace pocket. "So did you know I was Awake in the 40K loop when Pinkie ascended?"

"No, really? I hope you didn't get caught up in all that 'eternal war'." said Rarity.

"Of course not, didn't you hear? Pinkie Pie became an entity that didn't even have to pretend to obey causality. There was no eternal war. Sure, they started up and then BAM! Orbital party support, Eldar Disco Banshees, Shindigmonettes, the works. So in that Loop I was a Space Marine."

"Huh. Wait, aren't they always male? That must have been distressing."

"Well yeah. This was fairly early on in the loops for me, and the first time I was male, let alone an adult. Luckily they're all, well, chemically neutered. So I plain didn't have to worry about it." said Sweetie. Her voice became muffled, as if she'd put something on her head. "So there we were start of the Great Crusade. Me and my squad had been given some experimental weaponry and we were part of the pacification force for a world called Lestethes. We landed as per the plan, and started making a base camp, when the scouts report we're surrounded. Out from cover pops half a million Eldar, and Pinkamena Diane Pie, Festival Incarnate, Warp Goddess of the Eternal Party descended unto us from on high. Then they all yelled 'Surprise!'."

"Alright, yes, classic Pinkie. Even so, it must have been a sight to behold." Rarity made a circling motion with her hoof. "Go on."

"So there's this long awkward silence. The Space Marines of that time had been raised to believe that any alien always was and always would be their enemy. Pinkie's hair was just starting to straighten out when I decided I wasn't going to let that happen. I hadn't been to a Pinkie Party for about fifty years by then, and no way was I going to let this one get away. So I stood up out of cover, fired up the blastmaster, and yelled..."

At this point Sweetie burst out of the change booth, dressed head to tail in strange pink armour. It had giant shoulder pads, a huge amplifier on the back and a balloon motif repeated all over it.

Sweetie reared up on her hind hooves and hoisted a strange guitar looking thing before letting loose her warcry:

"THIS QUIET OFFENDS PINKIE! THINGS SHALL GET LOUD NOW!"

\* \* \*

><p>41.6 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"You are our trusted elites. As such, we have a trusted elite mission for you," said the tall green floating alien with the red eyes.<p>

"It's a very important mission!" agreed the other tall green alien with the violet eyes that floated alongside the first one, "The important-est kind of mission."

"I hear and obey, my Tallests," Twilight said as her memories of this loop came rushing in. She blinked at the oddness of it all. A check on Elements showed that her friends were all awake, as well as Celestia and Luna. And they were all green aliens. Irkquestrians.

"To that end, we have crafted specialized SIR robot units for you all," said Tallest Cel, "Invader Twi, as my personal protigee, I give you this modified SIR unit, codenamed Spike. His specialty is FTL communication."

"I can also set things on fire with my plasma breath of doom!" A green and purple small metallic robot said as he walked in, adding, "I also eat shiny rocks for fuel. Just thought I'd mention that; hint, hint."

"Right," Tallest Lun said while staring at the odd robot, "The new modified SIRs may be a little... quirky, but they are fully functional. FULLY FUNCTIONAL!"

The royal Irkquestrian voice knocked every alien backwards.

Tallest Cel continued, unfazed, "Invader Jac, you get the SIR unit codenamed Winona. Specialty is tracking and guidance."

The orange eyed invader looked at her new robot. It looked pretty much like every other SIR unit. "Well, howdy, little one."

"Hi!" The SIR unit said in a high pitched eager female voice, "I can't wait to go on this mission. Maybe.. maybe I can even wear a doggy suit?"

Invader Jac nodded, "We'll work something out."

Tallest Cel motioned over the next elite invader, "Invader Rare, you get SIR unit Opal."

The all white robot sauntered in and looked over her new mistress, "What can you do?"

"I'll have you know that my weapon designs and invasion plans are the

most elegant anywhere," Invader Rare huffed.

Opal nodded, "I suppose you'll do."

"Invader Shy, since you're so... timid, we've matched you with an appropriate SIR unit, codenamed Angel," the co-leader said.

Invader Shy was one of the tallest invaders - which was how they measured status on the planet - but her shy and caring nature was at direct odds to most of the other Irkquestrians. Still, she made for an excellent medic and science officer, "Oh my, he sounds delightful."

"His specialty is...", Tallest Cel was suddenly interrupted when a small SIR unit came through the door - as in ripped right through the advanced metal in a fit of rage. He landed in the center of the aliens, roared, and ripped out a chunk of the floor. He raised it over his head and shook it angrily before biting it into tiny bits with his jagged razor sharp robot teeth.

"I was wrong," Invader Shy said quietly, "He's even more adorable than I thought he would be!"

Said alien grabbed the omniscient robot and hugged him in a caring, yet restraining hug while cooing over her new assistant.

"Invader Pie," Tallest Lun sighed as said invader appeared suddenly inches in front of her.

"Yesssss?" said the pink-outfit wearing blue-eyed invader.

"Here's your SIR unit, codenamed Gummy."

A small greenish robot walked out calmly towards his new mistress.

"Do you like parties?"

The robot just looked at Invader Pie. His large eye sensors blinked one after the other.

"Awesome! Let's have one right now! To the spaceship storage container bin hanger thing! Alien Space Party!" The two vanished in a flash.

"Right," Tallest Cel said to the last invader without a robot. She was hovering in the air as well using a makeshift jetpack that was attached to her backpack-like life support unit, "Finally, Invader Dash. You get the one codenamed Tank."

The alien leader pointed to the wrecked door. The aliens started at it as nothing came out. A moment passed. Then the wall next to it collapsed as a truly gigantic SIR unit strode in.

"He's... so... awesome!" Invader Dash exclaimed and zoomed towards her new assistant.

"Um, my Tallests! My Tallests! I have... a QUESTION!," Twilight spoke up while gesturing with one upraised fist. She was wondering if everyone in this loop was a giant ham, "What exactly IS our

mission?"

"Oh, yeah. That," Tallest Cel said, "You see, a while back, we sent our most destructive invader to a distant dirt ball named Earth."

"We had hoped that the sheer amount of STUPID on that planet would contain him," Tallest Lun added, "Or at least keep him busy enough not to bother us."

"That's pretty much the definition of containment," Tallest Cel told her co-ruler.

"Yes, we know this. But even still, Invader... ZIM," the raw anger and loathing at the mere mention of his name was palpable, "managed to destroy a full quarter of our invasion fleet with an out of control MOTILE PLANET!"

"And even with such losses, it is still an improvement over what he did to our Operation Impending Doom one. So much fire. How crazy is that?" Tallest Cel asked.

"Pretty crazy," Tallest Lun answered, "Anyway, you six are our elites. So it is up to you to prevent him from causing anymore problems. Do it! Do eet!"

"Right away, my Tallests!" Twilight hopped on a hovering Spike, and together they took off towards the ship hanger.

Tallest Cel looked over at her co-ruler, "This is a very strange loop. You think they have a chance?"

"Eh? Good question," Tallest Lun said, "but I don't care. I'm going to go eat snacks and play video games. Want to join me?"

"And have a vacation loop?" her co-ruler said happily as they floated too into their chambers, "You know it!"

\* \* \*

><p>41.7<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Please, Twilight?" Trixie begged.<p>

"No."

"Pleeeeeease?"

"No. And no to the next one!"

"But I have graphs!" Trixie brandished a sheaf of papers. "And calculations! And cited sources and everything!"

Twilight turned. "Okay, go on. Show me your working."

"Glad to!" Trixie happily laid the papers on a nearby table and pulled up a chair.

"This is no guarantee that I'll let you, remember..." Twilight cautioned.

"Yeah, I know..." Trixie shrugged, shuffling the papers. "Right. Here we are. Step one: device scale."

\* \* \*

><p>"...and finally, step forty-three: the shields are made selectively permeable, permitting target to drop from within the outer shield bubble to the outer world. After this, the remaining contents of the shield are launched on a trajectory straight to the heart of the sun."<p>

"Demonstrate the shield marked type IV, please," Twilight requested.

Trixie flashed to Alicorn, her wand-device Element on her brow, and \_focused.\_

A bubble of darkness bloomed out from a point between them. Twilight directed a half dozen spells at it, followed by a large industrial laser and finally a lascannon.

None of them so much as got through enough light to see.

"Right. That seems adequate, so long as the polarization scheme followed in appendix c is followed." Twilight nodded. "Anchor points?"

"Shield is anchored to itself, and treats the core of the planet and two nearby mountains as fixed points. The top of the shields are all slightly weaker than one another, ensuring that a vent would be along the line of least potential damage."

"Okay." Twilight took a deep breath. "Go ahead."

Trixie's grin lit the room.

\* \* \*

><p>"...will last forever!" Nightmare Moon finished.<p>

Trixie raised a hoof from the audience. "Hay."

"You question your liege?" the dark alicorn asked.

"Yeah, just wondering... how do you feel about sunlight in a can?"

"This has been created?" Nightmare Moon looked a bit unsettled. "Demonstrate."

"Since you asked so nicely..." Trixie levitated a large metal cylinder over. The top of it was peaked, and it massed about as much as a torso.

"How is this operated?" the alicorn queried.

At that point, Trixie activated some shield layers. Layers one, two

and three were around the object at close range, enclosing it at a radius of about four feet.

Layers four to six were around the object, Nightmare Moon, and a little of the stage.

Letting her illusion fade, Trixie revealed her wings and shining Element. "A spark shall awaken them."

"What? Treachery!" Nightmare Moon's voice came oddly muffled by the shield layers. "What sorcery encloses me in darkness?" There was a crackle. "My teleportation is hampered! Release me at once!"

"Don't look directly at the blast," Trixie quipped. "Initiation of device in two, one..."

From outside, there was an almost anticlimatic flash, a little like a lightbulb burning out.

As per her meticulous action plan, the showpony allowed a badly singed Nightmare Moon to fall through the bottom of the shield before carefully disposing of the rest of the contents. In the sun.

"That, basically," she said with a nod. "I've got fun size packs, too."

\* \* \*

><p>"Out of curiosity, how are you going to make sure that an atomic artillery shell will still initiate around Discord?" Twilight asked, watching with some trepidation as Trixie refreshed a device core.<p>

Inside an antiradiation shield, of course. Trixie wasn't stupid. Sometimes.

"Not sure," Trixie admitted. "I did think of painting it green, because that way if it fails at least I'll turn into The Hulk or something."

\* \* \*

><p>41.8 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight awoke next to Applejack as they both sat around a large utilitarian table. The gunmetal gray walls and sparse decorations indicated that they were on board a ship - possibly a spaceship or submarine of some sort.<p>

"Well," Applejack said, "this all doesn't seem too bad, I recon. The memories should be retur.. oh, HAY NO!"

The orange pony's eyes widened even as her pupils shrunk. Twilight shortly knew why when the memories hit.

Her and the element of honesty were brought on as consultants. Apparently a new pony mining colony had stopped reporting in. Applejack was to check on the status of the terraforming process,



ecosystem, and tectonic stability; while she was there to help if any other more esoteric problems show up.

They had just achieved orbit.

And the cause of Applejack's problems, the captain of the ship and leader of the contingent of marines, had just walked into the room - flanked by ten more of the armored marine troops.

The heavy armor somewhat resembled a mechanical centaur - with a large pony-style body with hard points that held an assortment of very heavy weaponry. The arms were long metallic tentacles that culminated in three long manipulator tendrils that could easily grasp around a pony's head. And in middle of the body, where the torso and head should have been; was a giant water-filled orb.

"Welcome all you happy campers," marine captain Sealight merrily exclaimed from inside her orb. Twilight could make out that besides the grinning captain, there was also a tiny little castle and fake treasure chest on the bottom of it, "I'm sure this mission will be so much fun! Two weeks ago, the colony of Oreagon 12 stopped sending out any news or progress reports, so Princess Celestia called upon us seapony marines to look into it. We also have fun ponies Twilight Sparkle and Applejack to help us find out what happened."

There was a chorus of wet splashing sounds as all the marines did the seapony version of applause. Applejack's eye started twitching. Twilight examined the captain. She was the same shade of lavender as herself, but her mane was pale pink in color. The unicorn wondered if the reason seapony armor had so many limbs was because, not having any of their own, the seaponies were fascinated by them.

The captain turned towards Celestia's student and continued, "Miss Twilight, can you please scan the colony too see how many ponies are there, playing a rousing game of hide and seek no doubt."

"All right," Twilight said as she concentrated on a scrying spell. The distance to the planet from the ship was no great obstacle for her, "Hold on. let me double check the results."

The results came back the same. Twilight replied sadly, "There's only one pony still down there."

"If you could, please bring that pony up to the ship so they won't be lonely anymore," Sealight requested.

Twilight nodded and one burst of teleportation later, a dirty earth pony filly was suddenly crouched on the table. A quick calming spell stopped the screaming.

"Hi there! What's your name?" Sealight asked, "Do you know what happened to all the other ponies?"

"Um, my name is Newt. And the other ponies... there were these horrible monsters."

"Righty then. High Tide, if you can please take our new friend to a sleepy room?" the captain waited until a yellow seapony in a giant robot suit led the little pony out of the meeting hall before turning to Twilight.

"Already verified," Twilight interrupted. Her last scrying spell revealed creatures which she had heard about, but fortunately, not encountered before personally. She still couldn't help but be upset at the fates of the colonists, "It's like she said. The place is full of horrible monsters. I don't think there is any way to befriend them."

'Without Fluttershy,' Twilight added in her own mind.

Sealight nodded and spoke into her intercom, "You all heard the little filly. Nothing down on the planet but horrible non-befriend-y monsters. The poor things must be tired of always crawling around in the dark and gloom. Let's give them all a little sunshine to play with!"

Twilight Sparkle and Applejack sat transfixed as a monitor showed a missile streaking down towards the surface colony before exploding in a titanic blast.

"Hah! That's it! Game over, for you!" gleefully exclaimed another seapony marine. The name tag read 'Suds on'.

"Don't worry, campers, a new game has just begun," Sealight said, "It appears this ship is full of happy sunshine missiles. And if we don't use them all this year, Queen Marina won't let us have new shiny ones to play next year. So we're going to turn this planet into a smooth glowy marble. Smooth marble planets are the best!"

There was a large amount of cheering from the seapony contingent.

"Well, I recon that since the planet don't have no ecosystem any longer, that my job here is done," Applejack stood up on shaky legs, "If you all need me, I'll be hiding in my bunk."

Twilight just sat and watched transfixed as the missiles rained down.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hello again, happy campers. Captain Sealight here once again," Twilight looked up from her book when she heard the voice over the intercom. She had been in her bunk for the last day, feeling the ship rumble every time a missile was launched. This was followed by the cheers of the seaponies - as if they were watching a giant fireworks show. Applejack hadn't left her locked cabin in all of this time.<p>

"Our resident tactical science pony, Sea Star, has expressed some concerns that some of the space monsters may be hiding deep inside the planet and had not seen any of our shiny gifts. To remedy this, we have sent them a few planet crackers, delightfully wrapped and complete with a greeting card. If you look out your windows, you can all see how a new asteroid belt is made. This is captain Sealight, wishing every pony a super fun day! Shoo bee doo!"

"Shoo, shoo bee doo!" came the chorus of answering voices of the seapony marines.

Twilight debated whether or not to observe the spectacle. Since her friend's cabin was right next to hers, Twilight asked Applejack if she would watch, but all she heard back through the wall was a muffled, "Eenope. Nope nope nope nope nope."

\* \* \*

><p>"Shoo bee doo, all you happy campers," came the captain's voice from the intercom, "As you all know, we have spent the last week in this system by playing the super fun 'let's drag the largest parts of the former planet and toss them into the sun' game. But as all good times tend to do; this one has to come to an end for now. So with that, I'd like to announce that we will finally be leaving this place and heading back home."<p>

Twilight thought she heard a faint "Finally!" from Applejack's cabin.

"So without further ado, 'The Sealaco' will be exiting the system going into hyperspace," Sealight's voice said, adding, "Right as soon as we blow up the sun. It's the only way to be sure. This is Captain Sealight saying 'shoo bee doo', every pony!"

"Applejack, are you all right?" Twilight worriedly asked at the wall dividing their cabins. But all she heard was faint muffled whimpering.

\* \* \*

><p>41.9 (masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>An alicorn, a showmare, a changeling, and a guard captain all went bowling together.<p>

There had been a bit of a kerfluffle, of course, when Cadance had announced the idea. But she had gone on to explain that right now the relationship between her and Chrysalis basically boiled down to "I got him and you didn't" which wasn't healthy for either side, and that was on top of the whole... thing, between Shining and Chrysalis.

"But why bowling?" Trixie asked.

"I like bowling," Cadance replied. "Not everything I like is about love and weddings."

So here they were, all in bowling shoes and ponytailed manes, studiously oblivious to the freaking out of the citizens around them.

"STRIKE!" Cadance shouted with a huge smirk. "Three in a row!"

Chrysalis rolled her eyes. "Don't count your eggs before they hatch. You just have an early winning streak, that's all." She took her own ball and slipped it down the lane, grinning as the pins went down. "See? Not hard at all."

"Well, this might actually be a challenge!" Cadance giggled.  
"Shining, it's your turn."

"Yeah, yeah..." The stallion stood up, grabbing a ball and lazily slinging it down the lane. "...A seven split. Okay, sure."

Trixie rolled her eyes. "You're not very good at this, are you?"

"Not really, no..."

\* \* \*

><p>41.10 (Indalecio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight woke as she normally did at the beginning of a loop in her room in Canterlot, but something was off. She took a look around as she waited for her loop memories to kick in. The most obvious was the honkin huge brass telescope she was perched beneath. Subtler details, like the Jakehoof's Ladder and Van Der Giraffe generator told her she was living, not in a library, but in a mad scientist's labratory.<p>

In fact, it kinda reminded her of that one loop where everypony suddenly got interested in Contraptionlogy, only this time she wasn't a disembodied brain up against the Great and Powerful Robo-trixie.

Her loop memories confirmed it. One of her fondest memories had been when she had won a mentorship from Director Celestia herself with her egg laying machine. Granted, the fact that the machine had gone rogue and tried to eat the judges and her parents had been a bit of a dark spot, but it had turned out happily in the end.

In fact, one of the subjects of that memory was walking through the door right now, carrying a tray with a teapot and cups on it.

"Twilight, old bean, you're awake."

"Of course, I'm awake Spike, I'm always awake."

"That not what I saw earlier, when I saw you hunched over the astonoscope."

'So, Spike's not Awake this loop' She paused and continued speaking.

"Spike, can you take a letter for Director Celestia?"

"Right-o!" He moved to the single writing desk in the room and removed a piece of paper and grabbed a quill in claw, waiting for her to speak.

'Thats certainly an odd anachronism. Quill and ink, but mad science everywhere else.'

"Dear Director Celestia,

As you know, I've been observing the moon's surface these past few weeks and the increased activity there leads me to believe that your sister plans to make a rather violent return after her 10 yr banishment. I humbly suggest mobilizing every able-bodied mare and stallion to meet her and whatever forces she's mustered."

You're faithful pupil,

Twilight Sparkle"

Spike rolled up the letter, placing it in a glass and metal tube and inserting that tube into a pipe, one of many that ran along the wall, where it was sucked away with a whoosh. A few minutes later, another tube returned through another pipe, somersaulting and landing in Spike's waiting claws. He opened the tube and unfurled the letter inside and began reading.

"My Faithful Pupil, Twilight,

I'm well aware of my sister's return, and have put in motion plans to counter her. However, for the moment, I'd like you to go to Ponyville and look over the preparations for the Summer Sun Conference. And for heavens sake, please try to make some allies there.

Your mentor,

Director Celestia"

"Well, I suppose that went as well as could be expected."

\* \* \*

><p>41.11<p>

"O-kay, here we go." Scootaloo kricked her neck one way, then the other. She itched to shake her wings out, getting them ready for what she knew was coming, but the dress didn't permit it.

"Whoa, Scoots, we're just bridesmaids..." Applebloom said. "And ah don't appreciate you getting' us all into this! We could be-"

Scootaloo cut her off. "What if we get a cutie mark from it? This is a thing to try I don't think we'd get another chance at!"

"Yeah!" Sweetie said, nodding. "It's not very often that ponies we know get married."

"Right!" Scootaloo grinned. "So we'll be the best bridesmaids ever, so we get cutie marks for it!"

"CUTIE-"

"Sssh!" Rarity said, holding a hoof over her mouth. "We don't want to drown out the music, do we?"

"Sorry..." the trio muttered. Then Scoots cocked her head. "Hey, I can hear it!"

Sweetie nodded, her ears pricked to the faint strains of classical music.

Scotaloo hid a smile, knowing that Sweetie most often got her mark for music or music related things.

But it would be cheating to tell her.

\* \* \*

><p>"...speak now or forever hold your peace."<p>

Scotaloo perked up. This was about when things usually got interesting.

\_Mind Fog.\_

"Thanks," she whispered to Pansy. The spell in question would keep her emotions masked, because from now on they might start to get suspicious.

\_You are welcome,\_ the ersatz Device replied quietly.

About then, a large door at the other end of the courtyard exploded.

As flaming cinders and barks of gate timber crashed to the ground, the smoke eddied to reveal a unicorn wearing a cape.

"I object!" Trixie shouted.

"On what grounds?"

"On what grounds?" Trixie stepped forward, slowly and deliberately.  
"On what grounds?"

She gestured dramatically. "On the grounds of Canterlot Castle!"

"Technically," Twilight's voice came from behind Trixie, "we're not actually on the grounds. This is surrounded by buildings which aren't the curtain wall and which are connected to the castle itself â€" so we're in the castle."

"Despite the fact we can see the sky overhead?" Trixie asked, turning to face Twilight as she emerged from the smoke.

"Yep."

"Well, that doesn't make much sense..."

"Was there a point to this?" Celestia asked, frowning down at the two unicorns.

"Indeed!" Trixie said loudly. "No fewer than seven! Firstly, and most importantly of all, this so-called fake knockoff Princess Cadence is Chartreuse. Everypony knows that the real one is a slightly duskier shade."

"Do we?" several ponies in the audience muttered.

"I don't see it myself," one donkey said, looking at the bride. "But then, how'd I know? I haven't seen her before."

"I certainly don't know what you mean..." Shining said, glancing across the aisle then shrugging.

"Well, of course you wouldn't, you've been brainwashed, keep up!" Trixie slammed a hoof on the floor. "Second, which is an auspicious number, there is the matter of the hairstyle."

As Trixie began a long lecture on hair stylage as it related to alicorns, occasionally interrupted by Twilight correcting her on a minor point, Scootaloo just began shaking her head.

"What in tarnation is goin' on?" Applebloom whispered. "How long do we have to hold this dress up?"

"Dunno," Scootaloo admitted.

"Oh, dear," Rarity said quietly from her bench near the front. The three fillies all listened intently. "I do hope Twilight gives up this silly notion of hers before the whole hour is up..."

"We might have to hold it for an hour?" Sweetie said, eyes wide. "This is the worst thing ever!"

\* \* \*

><p>"And thus, do I conclude that the nature of the magic of the alicorn known as Princess Mi Amore Cadenza is of the hue normally defined as 'pink', whereas the magic which has been witnessed upon this very day by my able compatriot Twilight Sparkle is a colour more normally known as 'green'."<p>

"Are you done yet?" Celestia asked, her eyes half closed. Most of the guests were snoring.

"Almost!" Trixie set off a spell which produced a loud bang, jerking the guests back to wakefulness. "Seventh and last, we found the real one in a mine."

The smoke cleared.

Several dozen ponies started kicking themselves that they hadn't noticed how unusual it was for a dramatic smoke cloud to linger for a full hour.

And, through the wreckage that had once been a gate, stepped the real Princess Cadence.

Celestia stared. "You couldn't have mentioned that first?"

"I was having fun," Trixie admitted. "Anyway. So. Imposter?"

Hundreds of changelings dropped shapeshifts.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, here we go," Scootaloo said to herself as the wedding dissolved into chaos.<p>

\_Set up. Fog cloud.\_

An instant fogbank bloomed around the three Crusaders.

"Stay with me, girls!" Scootaloo called, reaching out to the fog and gripping it with her weather magic. Then shaping it, so it compressed into solid objects.

Normally this would take one hay of a lot of mental effort. When she was Bronze Wing, the occasional Jewel Scouts loops, the most she could manage even with the fuku-armour was a weapon and a hoplon-style shield.

Of course, back then she hadn't had Pansy either.

\_Set up complete. Preparing to lock cloud forms.\_

Cloud compressed into a suit of close-fitting armour, then flashed yellow.

\_Locked.\_

A pair of shield, formed like bucklers and looking like they were made of bronze.

\_Locked.\_

And, finally, a two-length staff.

\_Locked and ready.\_

Rearing up on her hind legs, Scootaloo spun the staff around twice. Once at a low level, tripping two changeling mooks trying to close in on them. Then again, slightly higher, clouting them both on the head and knocking them senseless.

"Whoa!" Sweetie Belle and Applebloom chorused.

"Since when could you do that?" Applebloom added. "That's awesome!"

Crouching down, Scootaloo slipped her staff under a changeling's body barrel and lifted... it? Him? Bodily into a stun spell from the dense pattern weaving out from Twilight.

"A griffin showed me once â€" when you two were with your sisters, some time ago." Scootaloo shrugged. "She was neat."

"What, the cloud shaping thing?"

"Mostly." Scootaloo intercepted a spell bolt headed for Applebloom, backing towards a corner with them behind her. "Hey, 'bloom? Punch any that get past me, okay?"

"Sure."

Her staff glowed green, as a changeling got the idea to take her



weapon away from her.

It disappeared in a puff of cloud as Pansy released the magic maintaining it.

More fog oozed from the Device, which Scootaloo quickly crafted into a shorter stick. With this, she clonked the enterprising changeling on the forehead.

"Sooo coool..." Sweetie Belle said with glee.

In the distance, they heard Trixie's voice shouting something about "stun danmaku".

\* \* \*

><p>41.12 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

X-Communication

\* \* \*

><p>One explanation later, James was sitting there, rubbing his chin. "I see, you do have a problem. But why did you come to me? Not that I'm complaining. I like a challenge."<p>

"I read your article on the Meta law board of the Space law forum, 'The rights of an alien.'"

The lawyer gave a lopsided frown. "But my conclusion was that a non-human, even a sentient being capable of everything a human is, did not have any rights under any legal code, because every code assumes that 'sentient being' and 'human' are identical terms. Basically, they are considered a wild animal, no matter what degree of intelligence they show. Weren't you offended?"

"The fact offends me, but it's a natural consequence of you being the only intelligent race on your planet..."

"Sometimes I wonder about that." James shook his head ruefully.

"Taking offence at you because you explained it in a clear and well thought out manner, that's just silly. It got me to researching your background. First from Cambridge, several years at Conham and Perks, one of the biggest and most prestigious law firms in your country, amateur science fiction writer and frequent poster on boards dealing with space law and metalaw... I just have one question, why leave to start up your own business?"

"Call me an idealist, or crazy," he grinned. "I needed time with an existing law firm to tick the boxes for my own professional development, but most of what I was doing was corporate legal work. I became a lawyer to help people get fair treatment under the law, not to help them figure out ways to evade it.

"There was this one case where an oil company was going to buy some second hand tankers that weren't fully up to modern operating standards, rather than springing for new safer ones. Ultimately it would cost them more in maintenance and operating costs, not to

mention the costs of the inevitable accidents, but those wouldn't show on that year's operating statement, and affect the directors bonuses. Our job was to figure out how to limit their liabilities, basically ensure that when something did go wrong, they'd suffer as little as possible.

"Not that it was all like that, or even mostly, but there were a couple of times I really didn't enjoy what I was doing. So I put in my time, made contacts, did the best job I could, and left as soon as I could scrape together the money." He made a gesture around the room. "I don't make anything like as much money, but I sleep better at nights, and I get to help real people, rather than faceless corporations."

"The problem is, while I'm real enough, I'm not a person." Twilight pulled a high end tablet/laptop from her saddlebag and placed it on the desk.

"It's not going to be easy to change that, especially not in the current social climate... Where did you get that?"

"I bought it, or at least paid money for it. I should have said, I had some gold coins with me in a sub-space pocket when I was shifted here. I teleported into a bank vault at night and exchanged some for legal currency, then I went and did the same at various shops, listing and paying for what I took. It's not like I could walk up to the counter during normal working hours, I'd cause a riot. I mean, if I didn't have local money, how would I be able to pay for your services?" Twilight shrugged.

"That is still technically breaking and entering, even if you didn't break anything."

"I'm not a person, remember? I can do wrong, but I can't commit crimes. Just crossing national borders without the right visas or a passport is illegal. But no-pony asks a migrating bird for their papers. And I'm not on the list of animals that need a six month quarantine to enter the UK, so I'm good there too. Not that I intend to use the loophole to do anything immoral or hurt anyone, it's just in my position, I have to take advantage of whatever I can to accomplish my goals."

"And those goals are?"

"First, build a way to get home. To be honest, I could just squirrel myself away somewhere in the wilderness or on a near Earth asteroid and set up an alchemical forge to produce the needed materials without ever interacting with humans again. But my second goal is to help out. Partly it's because you guys need it, even without the recent alien invasion. Not that I'm saying what you've accomplished on your own isn't amazing, but there are ways I can help without detracting from that. Also, I want to prove to those X-Com guys and everyone that Equestrians are not like those invaders you've been dealing with. Aliens aren't automatically evil."

"However, without a legal identity you have one foot... hoof in a bucket." James mused as the tablet powered up. "I assume this has your - oh, yes the obvious solution. That's kind of embarrassing, after I railed at big corporations."

"Well, from what I've read, a corporate entity can be set up to any end, and is a legal individual. I was thinking two actually, a private limited company to manage business investments, and a non-profit charity to funnel the profits into worthy causes. Have I got this right?"

The lawyer looked it over. "Hmm... in rough, there are things I'd have done differently, and things you've missed out, but overall a good effort. You have legal training yourself?"

"As Princess Celestia's protégé I studied the basics of Equestrian law, and I did some study in university libraries and on the internet over the last couple of nights, but that doesn't make me a lawyer especially in human law. However, I should be able to follow what a specialist says."

She gestured to James with a hoof. Of course, she didn't tell him that she was a fully trained lawyer in multiple jurisdictions, because those had all happened in other loops and therefore didn't count. She'd deliberately held her input to what could be expected from a relative novice, including a couple of minor mistakes.

There may have been things she'd actually missed, too... common law precedent could get annoying.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight and the lawyer discussed what she intended to do with the organisations she was going to set up, which they decide to call Nightlight Industries and the Nightlight Foundation. The tagline was 'Better to light a candle', and the logo Twilight had designed using the laptop's graphics tool was a stylised conical candle, which if you squinted looked a lot like a unicorn horn.<p>

At the end James chuckled. "So Nightlight Ltd will be going into the salvage business. Oh, this is going to be interesting! I'll need around £50,000 to get things rolling. Thankfully, the registration fees for setting things up aren't too bad. Fortunately you don't need one of the expensive slots. I can get some more of your gold, or some smaller gems exchanged to cover it."

"How long will it take you to organise?" Twilight asked.

"A couple of days. I do have other work to complete, and i can't abandon my other clients no matter how much fun this project will be. However, thanks to the wonders of modern technology, almost everything can be done via internet forms. I can hand off the details to my assistants. Of course that will mean I'll have to tell them everything."

Twilight nodded. "That's fine. It's not like they're not already eavesdropping at the door..."

There was a thump and a crash, followed by a pained 'ouch'.

James' good mood evaporated instantly. "No! I am so sorry! They know better than break client confidentiality, and I intend to remind them of it. How did you... oh, some sort of spell?"

"Actually I didn't until the noises. But it was a logical deduction."

Twilight giggled, then sobered. "Please, don't be hard on them. They were probably only listening because they were worried about you being in the same room as a monster from outer space. They were most likely ready to rush in here to rescue you at the first sound of trouble. Not that I can think of anything useful they could have done, but that just makes it more impressive. It's clear they consider you a friend, as well as a boss."

James looked slightly embarrassed at the compliment. "Yes, well... Let's go and discuss your plan with my overly protective employees, and get things moving."

\* \* \*

><p>X-Com had calmed down in the last couple of days after mission Bring Night, but it was a tense sort of calm. There had been no further alien attacks, and nothing more from their current bÃ¢te noire, Sparkle. Despite their best efforts, they still hadn't eradicated the video of Sparkle from the internet, or the many derivations with everything from Guile's Theme to Gurren Lagann incorporating the footage. Even the debunking of it as a CGI publicity stunt hadn't stopped it, and Commander Benford had censured further action against the spa or the originator, Kimiko Mizuno, as the damage was done, and doing so would simply attract more attention to her and neutering what little effect the countermeasure had.<p>

Currently he was in Command Central, looking up at the holo-globe, and wondering where in the world Sparkle was, and what she was planning.

"Commander, we've got a problem!"

One of the monitoring techs looked up and he immediately activated his headset. "What do we have?"

"It's not alien activity, at least not normal alien activity. NASA Orbital Debris Tracking reported it, and it's confirmed. Every tracked piece of debris within 1400 miles of Earth is moving, accelerating!"

"What about our satellites? The ISS? Are there any impacts?"

"Not affected, we've asked for reports from various other government and commercial tracking stations, so far not a single active satellite has been affected by this force, or hit by the affected objects. Only the debris, though we're getting reports that natural astrolites are affected too."

"Is there a pattern?"

"We're working on it!"

\* \* \*

><p>It was a tense half hour as the operations staff collated the data from the X-Com satellite net and dozens of other government and commercial satellite tracking stations, most of whom didn't even realise they were contributing to the effort. However, a pattern was emerging. Everything which wasn't an active satellite had been yanked

out of it's orbit and hauled away.<p>

The holo-globe now displayed the new configuration of the junk, and clearly showed a pattern forming. Doctor Vahlen was summarizing the results her teams had been analysing.

"Everything below the 1000 kilometre height accelerated upwards, and at peak velocity was making around 50 kilometres per second, exceeding solar escape velocity. Similarly the objects above were driven down at similar velocities. Only debris was targeted, and there were three detected cases where a piece of debris was likely to intercept an active satellite, only to swerve at the last minute to pass by in the lee of their orbital track.

"That alone would indicate some intelligent agency controlling events, one which is able to detect and control every object within two thousand kilometres of Earth's surface in real time. What happened next is even more disturbing. On approaching the 1000 kilometre boundary, all these objects did a right angle turn to head towards a single point in Equatorial orbit. What is more, they started to slow down as they approached the coalescence point, and appear to have accreted into a body estimated to be around eighty metres in diameter and weighing around 5000 tons, based on the estimated amount of debris in those orbits."

She shook her head. "Objects in space don't swerve, and they most certainly do not make right angle turns! I would suspect this to be some telekinetic trick of Sparkle's, except that I can not conceive of any being that could keep track of so many objects, let alone accelerate thousands of tons at accelerations an air to air missile would be hard pressed to match. The very concept is terrifying."

Doctor Shen found himself in agreement with Vahlen, a rare occurrence. "It took the processing power of our entire computer system and dozens of stations all over the world to just track the objects, and even then we had to rotate between groups to handle the data. A dedicated system could be built to handle the data, but it would need to be several times the power of our present system.

"However, whoever did it also did us a massive favour. At a best guess, over 90 percent of all the orbital debris around Earth and almost everything in low earth orbit has been swept away. The dangers of a collision have been reduced to almost nothing. As to moving the debris, Elerium could provide the power, but projecting and controlling it as some sort of tractor beam - the aliens use gravity control, but our own research hasn't even started to explore that sort of application. I find it fascinating."

"Well someone has." Commander Benford stated, looking up at the dot which now circled the translucent globe. "We should be able to get a closer look, the US Department of Defense has sacrificed the station keeping fuel in one of their Keyhole observation satellites to put it into an orbit with an apogee that should take it above the object by a dozen miles at it's closest approach. We should be getting a feed soon."

Doctor Vahlen poke up. "With your permission Commander, I shall set up close monitoring of the satellite as it approaches the object. The

deviation in its orbit may give us a better read of the mass. We have the details?"

As she set up her tracking watch, a video window opened up in front of the globe, showing a black sky, and a green illuminated date stamp and time as well as figures around the edge that showed attitude and orbital characteristics, all changing as they watched. "We have satellite feed sir! They're bringing it around to align the primary optic on the object."

A large grey white dot appeared on the edge of the display, and drifted towards the centre. It was too distant to see any details, but it definitely showed as a shape. When it reached the centre of the aiming reticules, it came to a halt. It seemed to explode outwards, and a magnification number that sat in the top left of the screen spun up.

It now filled the central portion of the screen, a rugged mass of detritus, with several upper rocket stages lined neatly along one face, and a number of physically intact satellites suspended around it like a halo. There was also a small blob of purple that was the only moving object on the surface. The camera zoomed in again to show it clearly, and Vahlen gave an actual growl of frustration.

Twilight Sparkle, apparently unprotected from the rigours of space, was picking her way over the variegated surface, carrying a number of objects along with her in a purple grip. The smallest, in front of her was possibly some sort of tablet computer from the glow, while the objects flanking her were a slightly larger box that appeared to have come from inside one of the satellites. The third was more mysterious, a large crystal prism, as large as she was, with some sort of golden pattern on it's surface.

She suddenly stopped, turning her attention from the computer screen and looked up. She stared directly at the camera then gave a cheery wave with a hoof before going back to her work. The box was set in place on a large plate and welded there by a brief arc from her horn. She returned her attention to the computer, and although she didn't apparently do anything, one of the techs called out, "We're getting a signal!"

"What does it say?" Commander Benford demanded.

"Uh... it's a standard spacecraft transponder, probably from one of those satellites, or more than one. Those things are built to last much longer than their mission lifetimes, just add power and you're good to go. I'm checking the registry now..."

They waited a long moment as the tech and others entered commands and brought up information. The lead tech shook his head. "Huh, it checks out alright, International Space Authority transponder code is valid, registration current... Transponder is registered to a Nightlight Industries, and they also registered a 1000 klick orbit, inclination... off-set... all the paperwork matches up. The spacecraft purpose even states orbital salvage and reclamation. It all checks out."

"I don't believe it!" Vahlen exclaimed glaring up at the screen as if it had done her a personal injury. "No-body noticed a purple unicorn wander into their office and fill out forms? Not to mention where did

she... it get the money to set it up, or the knowledge?"

Doctor Shen replied. "In reverse order: you, at least where to find the information; she still has most of that bag of gold; and a lot of the forms are electronic. No-body even sees them. It isn't like it's a sought after orbit, too high for earth sensing, too low for geostationary or GPS use. Even if someone did see it, there have been a couple of companies formed to develop ways to collect space garbage, and one even registered orbital slots. This would have looked like more of the same."

"I'm more interested in what that other object is." Benford redirected their attention to the screen where Twilight was implanting the crystal in the body of the mass. Her head dipped to touch it with her horn, and it lit up from within with a purple glow, while patterns of golden light blaze don the sides. However nothing else seemed to happen. "Hmmm... maybe it failed?"

"Sir!" The lead tech caught his attention. "I think you'll want to see this. We had the area under observation from the ground with optical telescopes in case the satellite failed, and... well, maybe it's better to show you."

A second projected screen opened in front of them, and the mass of debris was once again seen from a distance. However, clearly circling it was a ring of glowing purple text. 'Crazy Twilight's Space Salvage'. An inner ring proclaimed 'Out of this world prices!'

"A billboard." Doctor Vahlen exclaimed disgustedly. "A giant holographic billboard!"

Doctor Shen was punching away at a calculator. "Given those dimensions and if the brightness is... oh dear. It will be visible to the naked eye, obvious as a 2nd magnitude star. People are going to be looking, and even a hobbyist's telescope should be able to read the sign."

"What does it think it's doing!" Doctor Vahlen fumed.

"Advertising." Commander Benford replied. "And making sure there's no way we can keep its presence quiet, I suspect."

The control room was silent, in part because the occupants were still trying to come to terms with recent events, but mostly because no-one wanted to ask Commander Benford if he'd just made a joke.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

41.1: This is what we call "A little too far".

>41.2: HMS Thunder Child is a fictional torpedo ram; the other three are real battleships. And yes, Apple Bloom WAS sort of cheating; Dreadnought was, when launched, the only battleship in the world capable of first line combat, because she made all the others obsolete overnight.<br>41.3: I like "Kittyhawks".

>41.4: In the pursuit of fabulosity.<br>41.5: Do not offend Pinkie.

>41.6: Thoroughly Irked.<br>41.7: Make sure to submit your health and safety application in good time.

>41.8: Overkill, noun. "What seaponies like." Do not expose seaponies to Trixie.<br>41.9: Why the long face? Sorry, wrong joke.  
>41.10: Friendship is SCIENCE!<br>41.11: Scootaloo's power set is... interesting. (It's all related to her kinesthesia.)  
>41.12: Preventing Kessler Syndrome for fun and profit.<p>

#### 44. Chapter 44

42.1 (masterweaver)

\* \*  
\*

><p>"EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!"<p>

"OHMYGOSHOHMYGOSHOHMYGOSHOHMYGOSHOHMYGOSH!"

Spike looked on in bemusement as his adoptive sister and the local weathermare danced on their tippytoppy hooves through the library. "Alright, I'll bite. What's up?"

"The loop's expanding Spike!" Twilight cried with a grin.

"Yes, I got that."

"That means baseline is getting more events, and that can be a mixed bag but--"

"A.K. YEARLING JUST ANNOUNCED SHE'S GOING TO HAVE THE NEXT DARING DO BOOK OUT!" Dash interrupted. "Can you believe it?! After all these loops, finally, finally, A REAL SEQUEL!"

"I'M SO EXCITED!"

"I'M EVEN MORE  
EXCITED!"

"EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!"

"OHMYGOSHOHMYGOSHOHMYGOSHOHMYGOSHOHMYGOSH!"

Spike raised an eyescale warily. "So... when is this new book coming out?"

"In four months and three days!" Rainbow cheered.  
"Hahahahahaha!"

"And... you two do realize that the loop ends friday?"

Pegasus and alicorn stopped dead. Magenta eyes slowly swivelled to meet lavender, wings furling as excitement drained away to sombre horror.

\_"...Clorophyl,"\_ Twilight finally mumbled.

\* \* \*

><p>42.2<p>



"Okay, Cookie," Applebloom said, cracking her elbows. "I'm out of other things to do. I'm getting It out."

\_What, precisely,\_ Cookie asked, \_is It?\_

"Oh, right, you weren't there for that. One of the really old loopers was clearing out his Pocket of loads of junk he didn't want â€" something about needing the storage space for another fleet â€" and there was this little golden egg thing going free, so I snapped it up. It looked interesting..." Applebloom mused.

She sat back on the roof of the Appleloosa home she shared with her sister and brother â€" neither of them Awake. In fact, she and Twilight were the only Awake ponies on Equestria.

It was a rather bizarre variant, from what Twilight had told her. Without Applejack to take up Honesty, Twilight had decided to try an experiment, and Gilda had ended up the Element of Brutal Honesty.

She, Dash and Pinkie were engaged in a three way prank war which was claiming their combined dignities as the first casualties.

\_So, what is it?\_ Cookie pressed.

"That's just it." Applebloom took a pair of tongs, and lifted the golden egg from her subspace pocket. "I've got no idea, except that touching it is a really, really bad idea. That was made pretty clear by the guy when I got the thing. And, well, when else am I going to get four years in a desert to work out what the hay it does?"

\_Right.\_ The Intelligent Device/Founder emitted an electronic sigh. \_When you put it like that, it almost seems responsible.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay. Examination of the marbled patterns on the surface reveals that they are the macroscopic expression of microscopic structures. This trend continues all the way down to the..." Applebloom spun the wheels on her microscope. "...huh. Well, looks like time to break out the electron microscope."<p>

\_You have one of those?\_

"Not yet." Taking out tools, Applebloom went over to the gargantuan junk pile she'd got Twilight to dump near her carefully-protected cave.

\* \* \*

><p>"I dunno..." Mac said, frowning. "You want t' be homeschooled?"<p>

"It'd give me more time to do what I really want to do, Mac," Applebloom said earnestly. "Besides, I can already do the exams â€" I just want it to be official. Come on! Ask me somethin' difficult!"

"Well, if y' say so..." Mac looked off into the distance for a

moment. "X squared plus four x equals five. What's x?"

"One or minus five," Applebloom replied promptly.

"Huh. Differentiate e to the x."

"Answer's the same as the question â€" e to the x â€" unless you mean differentiating by a different variable, in which case zero. Come on, something a bit harder."

"Okay." Mac thought for a while longer. "Well, if y'all say that you really know your stuff... what's e raised to the power of the square root of negative one times a linear variable?"

"A cosine curve in radians."

Mac looked at her. Then he nodded. "Eeyup, that's right. And y' say that you know all th' subjects?"

Applebloom nodded.

"Well, ah'll keep an eye on th' scores y'all get on th' exams, but fer now you got yourself a deal."

\* \* \*

><p>"This is amazing!" Applebloom said, furiously tapping away at the controls which were moving the electron probe over the surface of the egg. "It's <em>all<em> machinery. Solid machinery, on an atomic scale."

She paused over a number of pits in the surface of the egg, one after the other. "This is some kind of sensor â€" visual. And this uses scent. And this can only be a physical contact sensor! This thing can detect more with a square millimetre of surface than most animals can with their whole bodies!"

Carefully, she lowered the microprobe over a different kind of pit, and used the tunneling mode to peel back a tiny section of surface.

"This is just so cool!"

\_What's that you're looking at?\_ Cookie asked, paying attention to the screen herself.

"It looks like a kind of... nanotech stinging cell." Applebloom sobered a bit. "Okay, \_definitely\_ not touching this thing. But I can probably use some of the tech that goes into this..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay." Applebloom checked the range safety; good. Then the eraser warhead, which was ready to go.<p>

Nanotech was scary stuff. But, with a few... perhaps slightly Trixie-flavoured precautions, a lot of the threat could be accounted for.

Which was why Applebloom was telefactoring a drone from ten miles

away.

"Initiating mycelium."

The drone (which, for reasons of Applebloom's own, looked an awful lot like a motorized pine tree) dripped the contents of a small vial onto the surface of a chunk of volcanic rock.

There was a froth of bubbles, which quickly died away, and then a mass of hair-fine filaments spread over the surface of the rock.

Five minutes later, the rock crumpled in on itself. What was left was a set of twenty nodules of varying sizes, each a pure metal ore.

Applebloom checked a couple of readouts, then exhaled. "Right. And it cleaned up after itself, too â€" good."

Given the tech in question, that hadn't been a certainty...

\_What now?\_

"Well, ah think there's about three more months o' work before that node is completely dismantled," Applebloom guessed. "Good thing ah've been takin' it slow, too, 'cause of all the traps an' all."

\_True,\_ Cookie allowed.

There'd been at least one close call with a nasty computer virus â€" one seemingly implicit in the very design of a sub-component of the object, and almost sapient in the sheer sophistication that went into it.

Fortunately, Applebloom had managed to catch it in time, and Cookie had fought it off within the computer system itself.

"This thing's almost an entire nanotech ecology, is what it is..." Applebloom mused, then shrugged. "Well, ah guess we're harvestin' the crops and tryin' to kill the pests."

\* \* \*

><p>"And..." Applebloom saved the final file on her handheld.  
"Done!"<p>

She grinned with the euphoria of finally having finished her self-appointed task, which banished the slightly muzzy feeling of two consecutive coffee-fuelled all nighters. The egg â€" which was, according to internal code snippets, something called a Jain node â€" had been completely dismantled, all the inbuilt traps avoided by a slow and steady approach involving a great deal of caution.

Sure, about ninety percent of what she'd learned was far too dangerous to use, but the remaining ten percent would let her finally crack the inherent problems involved with most nanotechnology.

Well... if she had Cookie to run it, anyway. A dismayingly large portion of the software needed to run this Jain technology was

written in a form that was as virulent as the rest of it.

\_Um...\_ Cookie cut in on her thoughts.

"What?" Before she forgot, Applebloom slipped the handheld into her subspace pocket. She wasn't about to lose fully five years of effort when the Tree of Doom rolled around next week.

\_You appear to have... wings. And a horn.\_

The filly went stock still.

"Can you repeat that, please?"

\_You seem to have Ascended.\_

"Oh." Applebloom tried to get her head around that. "Huh, ah always thought we'd do it together. Scoots, Belle and me."

Cookie didn't say anything.

"Right. In about ten seconds, ah'm gonna actually realize what just happened. So if you'll excuse me, ah'll freakout for a bit."

\_Sure.\_

Applebloom took one more breath, then started running around in circles.

\* \* \*

><p>"Just..." Applebloom shook her head, watching the sun go down over a mesa in the far distance. "Ah'm still overwhelmed by this."<p>

\_I understand\_, Cookie said. \_I suppose it must be very confusing. I mean, I felt strange enough becoming a pendant, but I was at least ready for it.\_

"Yeah, ah know what y' mean," Applebloom agreed. "Still, ah don't think th' loops have ever blindsided me like \_this\_."

\_Technically, this was all you. Not the Loops at all.\_

Applebloom directed a glower at Cookie's pendant.

\_Sorry, that was flippant\_, Cookie said, with a tone of contrition.

"I... no, ah understand," Applebloom admitted. "Just... don't tell th' other Crusaders, okay? Or your friends. Ah..."

She kicked the ground.

"Ah feel \_embarrassed\_, is what it is, 'cause ah feel like ah've left them behind. Like... well, we always wanted t' find cutie marks, and... by the time we started loopin', we were told by Twilight that we'd all got several different ones in different loops we weren't Awake for. But..." The filly scuffed at the dirt again, before

slumping to the floor and rolling on her back, heedless of her new wings, to watch the stars come out. "Ah never gave a moment's thought to how we'd all feel if just \_one\_ of us got a cutie mark. Back before we got t' Looping."

\_I think I see. You feel like you've lost one of the things which you shared with your friends.\_

"Yeah."

For several minutes, neither of them made a sound.

\_You will have to tell Twilight eventually,\_ Cookie pointed out.

"Probably, yeah," Applebloom said quietly. "It'd be best to get it done this loop, when there ain't any other loopers and she can help me get all this worked out. But... ah don't want to. At all."

\* \* \*

><p>42.1 continued (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Rainbow, I've got some bad news." Twilight sighed, holding out a newsletter. "Yearling's pushed back the release by two months."<p>

"TWO MONTHS?" The pegasus snatched the newsletter and opened it quickly. "That's... that's eight more loops I have to wait!"

"Eight more expansion periods," Twilight corrected.

"Uuuuurgh, I wish she was looping so she could finish sooner."

"She's got a life of her own, Dash. We can't really force her to do anything." Twilight shrugged. "All we can do is wait."

"Yeah... I guess you're right." With a sigh, Rainbow Dash tossed the newsletter into the garbage. "It's not like anything important will happen because of this."

"Remember the old days where we'd go on crazy adventures just because, I dunno, you wanted a book from the hospital or I was late for a friendship letter?" The alicorn giggled and rolled her eyes.

"Yeah. We really got caught up by unimportant things. Well, loop's ending tomorrow... wanna help me with a really stupid stunt?"

Twilight sighed. "Alright, but if I die then next loop you have to dress in style and give fashion tips."

"...I guess that's fair."

\* \* \*

><p>42.3 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie Pie <em>loved<em> this Loop. It had, in her opinion, everything. Epic battles for the fate of the universe; ninja; robots; aliens; mutant races nature probably never intended; an amazing back story of love, loss, and betrayal; the coolest non-deity identity she'd looped into yet; and the bestest new friends ever!

"So he was an ancient ninja master who turned traitor over some woman his rival loved and left the country to start a megacorp to take over the world, but really all along he was some squishy brain alien criminal in a robot suit who had designs on taking over the whole galaxy once he manufactured an army of ninja robots and super mutants her of Earth and the only force that could stop him was a secret band of mutant ninjas, you all, living in the sewers! Oh, and the lovely science assistant and intrepid reporter, me, of course. And we beat him!" Pinkie was practically vibrating with excitement. "You know what this calls for?"

"A pizza party!" her companion in the orange mask yelled with equal enthusiasm.

"Two of them," the one in the red mask griped for the umpteenth time this Loop. "Why in the wide, wide multiverse did there have to be two of them?!"

"Statistics," the one with the purple mask replied with good humor. "We were bound to run into someone like her in these Loops sooner or later."

The leader in the blue mask just gave a long-suffering sigh.

\* \* \*

><p>42.1 continued (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight and Rainbow Dash landed in the middle of a desert, eyeing the strange fortress warily.<p>

"Okay... how the hay did we not notice this before?"

The alicorn shrugged, reapplying the cooling charms on both of them. "A week ago this was a heavily forested region. Granted, I've been here a few times before, but..." She chuckled awkwardly. "Well, usually I was just out camping or doing one of my crazier schemes."

"Crazier."

"Did I ever tell you about the time I convinced Celestia and Luna that Equestria ran on Newtonian physics? I had to set up a secret lab to automate the weather and wrest control of the sun and moon from them... the looks on their faces, I'm telling you, hilarious." She gestured around the blackened sands. "Anyway, this is where I had my secret animal training facility. To... dedomesticate them... actually, yeah, this fortress was here then too."

Rainbow sighed, ascending for a moment. "Twilight, this fortress is practically throbbing with weather magic. The mystery of the heat wave? Right here. Frankly we're lucky to have found it before it melted itself down." She tapped the stone briefly before snapping back with a yelp. "OH SWEET MAPLE LEAVES! Ow, ow ow... huh, it doesn't hurt anymore..."

"Here, let me see that." The purple pony brought her face close to the blackened hoof, wincing in sympathy. "Ow. Wow, okay, that's a fourth degree burn. I'm going to have to use a localized time spell to reverse this, there's no way it'll just heal..."

The blue pony held her hoof out patiently while her friend tended to her. "Fourth degree? It's difficult to burn a pegasus, what with our magic and all, and you're telling me that this fortress somehow managed to charcoalize an alicorn's hoof?"

"Mmmyp." Twilight took a breath, shaking her head. "Okay, before we go any further I'm going to need to put more defensive wards on us." Her horn glowed even brighter, spells weaving through the air for a full minute and enveloping the pair in brightly shining runes. When she finally finished, she took out two pairs of goggles and handed one to Dash.

The former pegasus put them on without question. "I take it that this is serious?"

"I'm operating under the assumption that somebody tried to make a star in here. So yeah, super serious."

Even with the shields on, the two could feel the blast of heat on their faces as they entered the fortress. Twilight cast a few spells and sagged in relief. "Ha, I was wrong. No stars, just... apparently a reverse heat ray aimed at the sun. It's overloaded, but at least the safeties held."

Rainbow Dash stared at her. "What, exactly, would happen if the safeties didn't hold?"

"All the heat would have been released at once and the atmosphere would be set on fire." Twilight trotted up to a pillar of melted bronze and gold, kicking away an odd skeleton and flicking a spell or two around the metal. "If I can just aim an exhaust spell at the sun, I might be able to send all the conserved heat back. I think this was meant to be a storm generator, you know, warm up the local air currents to cause a rainstorm or something... who the heck pointed it directly at the sun?"

"Ahuizotl."

The purple unicorn rolled her eyes. "Rainbow, I'm pretty sure that the Daring Do series is labelled fiction this loop-"

Dash pointed at the big skeleton that Twilight had kicked away. "No, that's Ahuizotl. I know from one of my Daring Do loops. That is, one hundred percent, the real deal."

"What?" Twilight peered at the corpse. "Well... okay, that's weird. I was sure we were in a baseline loop, and the Daring Do is labelled as

fictional..."

"You think she's around?"

"If she is..." With a sigh, the Anchor turned to face her friend. "She's dead. At least for this loop... should be ending soon anyway. This doesn't make sense! I'm going to have to stake this area out next loop..."

\* \* \*

><p>42.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack broke out laughing, barely able to hold onto the mug that her brother had prepared for her. "So Maccy ended up being yer sister fer the loop, eh? Ah gotta admit that cracks me up ta think about."<p>

Twilight rolled her eyes, sipping her punch with a smirk. "Biggest princess you ever saw, hooves as thick as his neck."

The farmer leaned over the table. "So what did ya have ta banish Mac fer when it came time?"

The librarian grinned slyly. "I didn't, actually."

"Wait... what?"

"Okay, okay, get this." Putting her glass down, Twilight spread her hooves out. "We've just imprisoned Discord, and all the ponies are worshipping us as gods. Typical, so far. Mac decides he'll be in charge of the judiciary branch of the government, I'll get executive, and the lawmakers will be mortal. So of course right off the bat the Wardens are formed to be my church and the Sages go off to follow him. With me so far?"

"Yeah..."

"Right, so about seven years in a law is passed that only Wardens and Sages can see us, cause the mortal ponies still view us as gods. I'm not happy with it, and Mac doesn't seem happy with it, but it does prevent some of the more constant genuflecting." The unicorn shook her head. "But Macintosh has some of his Sages start a few rumours. A sentence here, an argument there... I don't know, I was too busy carrying out my duties to even notice. In about two hundred and thirty years, nopony believes we exist."

Applejack stared at her friend. "Ah... wait, what?"

Twilight burst out laughing. "He, hahah, he managed to get us relegated to pagan gods! Yeah, the Wardens and the Sages still existed but aside from a core council, most ponies believed that the Blind Warden and the Silent Sage were just holdovers from less 'enlightened' times! I didn't even know until five hundred years after Discord when I finally decided to take a walk outside and got compliments on, on my costume!" She snorted. "Of course I was a tad miffed at first but the more I thought about it... If I didn't need to banish Mac then I wouldn't lose the connection to the elements,



and Discord's prison wouldn't weaken, and, well, things were actually a lot calmer. Mac and I took to travelling Equestria to help out where we could-we did check back into Canterlot every decade to remind the Councils we existed, but other than that nothing."

The farmer stared at her friend. "Seriously. That... he did that?"

"Yeah, I know! Craziest thing."

\* \* \*

><p>42.1 continued (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was pretty common knowledge throughout the multiverse that loopers were, practically speaking, near demigods. True, they didn't always use their power and a number of them actively restrained themselves from appearing out of the ordinary to the non-looping populace. But when a pony has subjectively lived a few hundred millennia, using their time to study magic and gather technological trinkets, it wasn't at all difficult to set up a network of invisible spies around an ancient fortress, sabotage a stack of magical rings without leaving a trace, and watch the whole thing from the comforts of a home in a tree shaped library.<p>

Twilight sipped her tea as the events on the magical screen played out again. Ahuizotl had his rant, left Daring in a death trap, and went to complete his evil plot. Daring struggled free, but not in time to stop Ahuizotl from placing the final ring... which didn't do anything, thanks to Twilight's own sabotage. Then the creature would carefully examine everything about the ancient doomsday device, Daring would burst in, dramatic fight scene... Daring flew away.

"This is the fifth loop this has happened," Twilight muttered, taking notes. She tapped her hoof thoughtfully, remembering her search of high end museums and being surprised to find "replicas" of artefacts from the series. The Sapphire Stone statue, the Griffon's Goblet â€" everything that the books said Daring had sent to a collection was actually in a collection, somewhere, though often a very secure and private one. Even stranger, though, were the people she encountered in her investigations; right out of the books themselves, Daring's extended family, various enemies and allies... Nothing for it but to say the books were true.

She'd have to ask Celestia about her cameo in some of them...

"Why would A.K. Yearling say this was fictional?" Twilight pondered. "I mean... who is A.K. Yearling anyway?" That had been the single gap in her investigations. The author of the series was only known through her publishing company. Yes, there had been the biography snipped in the back, but they were generic and, upon investigation, had no supporting paper trail. That led to the inevitable conclusion that A.K. Yearling was a fictional persona... but whose?

\* \* \*

><p>42.5<p>

Keeping secrets from friends sucked.

That, Applebloom was sure, was the truth in any universe.

"So," Sweetie said, grinning. "'nother loop without us, huh? Do anything good?"

Applebloom answered the grin, as well as she could. "Main thing was actually hundreds of miles away â€" ask Twilight about that. All I know is that, because we'd moved to Appleloosa before the loop itself started, the Element of Honesty got a new bearer."

"Really?" Scoots nodded. "Tell us more!"

"You're not going to believe this..." Applebloom paused for effect. "Gilda."

"No!" Diamond Tiara covered her mouth with a hoof to hide her giggles.

"Yep," Applebloom replied, shaking her head. "From what Twilight put in her letters to me, she and Dash and Pinkie were involved in basically a permanent prank war from the moment the Nightmare Night thing died down to the moment the Loop ended."

"Hey, what was her element like?" Scootaloo asked, curious. "You know, the whole user friendly thing. Twilight and Trixie tend to get crowns, the other girls get necklaces, Spike's one is a gorget with a flame on it... Gilda doesn't have a cutie mark, so?"

"Necklace, I think." Applebloom shrugged. "We only went back to Ponyville once for a meeting with Filthy Rich, so I didn't have much chance t' look around. Could ask Twilight."

She sniggered. "Filthy looked a bit run ragged, actually. And there was a crater in the main square which I think was Pinkie's fault."

Diamond gave Applebloom a glower. It didn't work. "That is my father of whom you are speaking..."

"Yeah, so?" Applebloom winked. "We all laughed at Princess Maccie, didn't we?"

She stopped, suddenly feeling uncomfortable.

"Anything else happen?" Sweetie asked, after a moment.

"Nothing really important."

After so long living with the Element-bearer of Honesty, the lie slid out as smooth as silk.

"Oh, I did do a bit of research into nanotech, though," she supplied, trying to get onto slightly safer ground without lying any more. "Should help in building my workshop without needing to keep half my pocket full of the heavy machinery."

"Neat." Scootaloo nodded. "It'd be good if we could get some aircraft

carriers built next time we play battleships, actually."

"I'm pretty sure that this stuff would let us build fleets if Cookie can run it right," Applebloom mused.

"So!" Sweetie clapped her hooves. "Did you get a cutie mark for it?"

"Yeah," Applebloom said, clamping down on her nervousness. "Nothing special."

Another lie.

The mark in question had been a golden spanner, with what looked like the same patterns-made-of-patterns that the Jain egg had had.

It hadn't stuck around past the Loop refresh, though, which sunk that idea â€" but Cookie had just that morning confirmed that the ascension had, indeed, left a permanent mark on her magic.

A little twist of non-native pony type magic â€" some pegasus, some unicorn â€" ready to expand out on command, and with the proper catalyst. A catalyst like Smart Cookie.

Testing \_that\_ would be a very, very bad idea. After all, she didn't know how to reverse it...

"Okay, so, what's next for this loop?" Diamond Tiara asked officiously.

"Ah vote we sleep through class an' get perfect marks," Applebloom suggested.

"Good start," Scootaloo allowed. "But needs something more. Diamond, any ideas?"

"Is Chrysalis awake?" Tiara pondered. "If so, we could set up a kind of 'kid superheroes' thing... you know, barely-there cover identities, interchangeable minions and one monster once a week..."

"I'll supply the ridiculously conspicuous base," Applebloom volunteered.

\* \* \*

><p>42.1 continued (Masterweaver)<p>

"What do you mean you can't take me to her?" Twilight Sparkle boggled.

Pinkie Pie smiled. "Exactly what I said. I Pinkie Promised not to reveal her location or identity to anyone."

Rainbow Dash growled in aggravation. "And how many loops ago was this?!"

"Doesn't matter! A promise is a promise is a promise."

"Pinkie, something IMPORTANT is happening here. And A.K. Yearling is

at the centre of it. Can you... give me a hint, maybe?" The alicorn smiled wearily. "Please?"

"...Tell you what. Her birthday is in two weeks. If you can completely disconnect any sense of direction you have, no magic compass or anything, you can be the mare in the cake."

"WHAT?!"

"I'll do it!" Rainbow interjected.

\_"WHAT?!"\_ Twilight snapped around. "SERIOUSLY?!"

"Eh, what's a little embarrassment compared to awesomeness?"

"Right, it's settled then!" Pinkie quipped brightly. "Oh this is going to be so much fun!"

\* \* \*

><p>42.6 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Harry King was a successful scrap metal merchant, in part because he was willing to take risks. For example, he'd invested in recycling and benefited from ever increasingly strict laws. His yard could even strip down aircraft and handle the more exotic metals such as tungsten and titanium. As a result, he got a lot of specialist trade, and those same metals were worth a lot more than most.<p>

He was in his office, a double storey affair made out of 40 foot containers but upgraded considerably, overlooking the main yard. He was finalising one such deal, with an outfit that called itself Nightlight Industries. From his checks, a brand new company specialising in 'new developments in transportation and industrial processes' according to their website. Looked like one of their first deals had involved acquiring some wrecked aerospace gear and now they wanted to sell what they couldn't salvage. There was always good stuff in those.

The terms of the contract they suggested were agreeable, even generous, and they'd even agreed to pick up the delivery costs and import duties. While there was always the possibility of some kind of scam when you got a juicy contract like this, the payment, a percentage of the profits was due only after he'd processed and sold the materials. They were also liable for any disagreement over title. In short, he was golden, and he'd sent through the signed contract only a couple of hours ago.

Now he was on the phone with their deliveries staff, a girl by the name of Twilight. Crazy names some people hung on their kids these days, and not the sort of name you heard in connection with heavy transport vehicles. At least that's what he'd assumed when he heard the interference on her mobile phone.

"Okay, so where in your yard do you want me to deliver? The first load of 100 tons is ready," she said.

"We've cleared out bay 3 for your trucks, someone at the gate can direct you when you get here. You have the address in your GPS?"

"Got it up on Google maps, and I can see it clearly. Bay 3 is that one two down from the entrance?"

"Yes, you people certainly seem pretty on the ball."

"I've found it doesn't pay to let the grass grow under your hooves. Okay, it's clear of obstructions..."

That made him do a mental double-take. 'Hooves?!'

There was a bright flash and a fading purple glow around a big pile of scrap metal with an undeniable high-tech look to it that had appeared in bay three. Exactly what it had been was unclear as it was made up of finely divided pieces. Hovering over it was a floating figure, a purple pony of some kind wearing an orange coverall and white hard hat. She glided down on outstretched wings and walked towards the site offices. He absently noted that the hard-hat had a hole for a spiral horn. Wait, hadn't he heard his daughter going on about something like that in Japan?

The UK had suffered minimal raids by the invaders, but that didn't stop several of his workers from freaking out and running as fast as they could in the opposite direction. The rest just stood there in stunned surprise. The phone he'd dropped in his distraction spoke, and he snatched it up, fumbling it before he finally got it to his ear.

"Okay, you can check it yourself, but there's a minimum of 100 tons of stuff there. Not sure how much natural debris got mixed in, but it's mostly nickel iron anyway, so it should be all good." It was the same voice, and as the purple alien approached, he could see a mobile phone held up against her head with no visible means of support, and her mouth moving.

He responded in the most eloquent and concise manner he was currently capable of. "Gaaah!"

"I'm sorry? Look, I know I'm not what you were expecting, but you signed a contract, I delivered on it, now I'm coming up there to get your signature on the delivery receipt." The voice gave a long-suffering sigh.

"Yes, alien purple alicorn. I get that a lot. But I'm not one of those invaders, I'm just here to fulfil a business contract. If I was all 'Grr' and 'Argh' and 'kill, maim, destroy' then you'd have some comeback, but since I'm not, can we both at least try to behave like reasonable adults?"

He could hear her climbing up the exterior stairs to the office level as she spoke, but it was the unvarying calmness of the voice as much as anything that kept him from panicking. The outside door clanged and there was a squeak from outside and the voice said, "And your secretary fainted, just perfect! It seems legal secretaries are made of sterner stuff."

There was an echo to the voice which indicated the speaker was just

outside. "May I come in?"

He put down the phone. "Could I stop you?"

"Well, yes, if you say 'no'. But that would make it hard to get your signature on the delivery note. I could always just blind teleport it through the door to you, or just leave it out here and go off for a coffee if you feel uncomfortable. Celestia knows I could do with a cup. Having people run away in terror when you say 'hello' can get kind of depressing."

She didn't sound like some ravening monster out to suck his brain out through his eyeballs, so he decided to once again take a risk. "Okay, come on in."

The door opened and the purple unicorn trotted in. Under other circumstances the big eyed creature in overalls would have been adorable. Her horn glowed, and an electronic tablet levitated out of a pair of saddlebags. It floated over to him, and she said, "Sign in the highlighted boxes please."

Dumbly, he took the stylus and signed under the eyes of the alien, who was watching with an expression of alert interest. "I know this is a lot to take in, but hopefully you'll come to see that I'm just a differently shaped person. One who you can do business with."

"I thought I was doing business with Nightlight Industries." Harry was finally coming out of his state of shock, and wondering about what other surprises he'd end up having to deal with.

"You are." She tapped the coverall which he could now see had a logo similar to the contract he'd signed. "Legally I'm not a person, so I had to organise a company, a legal entity to act on my behalf. Well first I got a solicitor, a good one, and he fixed things up for me."

That begged the question of why, but there was a more immediate concern. "And is this even legal? Where did you get that stuff?"

"As of the Berne Decision of 2015, perfectly legal. As you saw I have powers, magic technically, and it allowed me to sweep all of low Earth Orbit clear of the junk that's accumulated, selectively to avoid active satellites and the inactive ones the Berne rules don't cover, but those are all intact and there aren't too many of them, so they're not a problem. I have all the rest balled up in an orbit 600 miles up, about 5000 tons in total; so if you're satisfied with this load, I've got a lot more business I can do with you. I guess they haven't released the news yet."

That had him reaching for the cabinet he kept his hospitality drinks in, then he decided he needed all his wits about him, and opened the side of the cabinet which had an instant percolator in. Almost automatically he offered, "Coffee?"

"Yes, thank you!" There was genuine pleasure in her voice. "Cream and two sugars please!"

He set the percolator going and turned back to face her, sitting down behind his desk. "What's the Berne Decision?"

"I'd have thought you'd know, it's more your field than mine. It used to be that even after a satellite had died and was just junk, it was still owned by the launching country or company. There was no right of salvage like there was at sea. But then you guys had a bunch of collisions, lots of damage and billion dollar payouts, and those owners decided they didn't want liability any more. Add to that the aliens blowing up even more of them, and you have all the ingredients for a major about face.

"The Berne Decision was signed just last year and was explained as an initiative to promote private space industry, and basically made satellites more than 2 years past their end of operational life legal salvage, along with parts of destroyed satellites. There was a big fuss from the Americans about somebody stealing technology, until some senator made a comment about paying out billions to protect technology less advanced than the game console he'd gotten his niece."

She grinned. "Lucky break for me, or what I did would have been illegal, and while I can't commit crimes, being an un-person, Nightlight Industries would have been liable. Everything in that pile is within the laws. So don't worry, all the legal stuff is taken care of. I even arranged for a customs official to come over from the local airport to certify it. Of course, she doesn't know the full story, but this is the de facto point of entry, and you, or rather I acted with all possible speed to comply with the regulations on metal importation, so you're covered."

She pulled some papers from her saddlebag, and placed them on his desk. "Certification, permits, it's all there and all filled out. I've even included a paper with the relevant sections of the Berne Agreement and guidelines in case she hasn't boned up on them. I intend to do this again, and I want to make sure you want to do business with Nightlight."

"But why?" The buzz of the percolator showed it had a full jug, and he mechanically got up and made coffee.

"Why am I doing all this? Because I want to help, and your world needs it. But having some mysterious space unicorn come in and solve problems with a wave of her horn would be only slightly less terrifying than the invaders. Better I use my powers indirectly and work my philanthropy through human agencies. But that requires money.

"Why am I doing it the way I am, showily rather than behind the scenes which would fit better with my indirect action strategy? Partly because it amuses me, and hopefully because it will amuse the humans who hear about it, at least if they have any sense of the absurd. A friend of mine once showed me that it's harder to be scared of something if you're laughing at it, or with it."

Her telekinesis took the cup of coffee off the desk where he'd put it, and she sipped. "Ah! This planet has good coffee! I intend to keep pranking the entire planet while at the same time helping out. Hopefully people will see not all aliens are like the invaders. Some of us have a sense of humour, and a sense of honour. Oh dear..."

There were flashing red and blue lights arriving at the entrance.

"Looks like one of your employees recovered enough to call in the riot squad. It's okay, I've got this."

She turned to go, and Harry found himself saying, "Wait! You're just going to walk right up to them? They probably have armed officers with them, wouldn't it be safer to just do that teleport thing and leave?"

That got him a brilliant smile, back over her shoulder. "Thanks for thinking about me, but it's okay, I'm not doing anything illegal. Like I said, I've got this."

Three police cars and a van pulled into the yard and started spilling out police officers, though none of them had guns. The police cars formed a barricade for the police, and one of them raised a loud hailer. "Can anyone in the building hear me! Try to signal if you can. we have reinforcements on the way!"

Harry opened his window. "I'm fine, everyone in here is fine."

The officer with the speaker, an otherwise relatively blameless individual by the name of Inspector Burns, called out. "Sir, one of your employees sent us a video of an alien entering your offices. Has it hurt anyone?"

"Well, my secretary fainted, but I think that was just surprise. I believe she's about to come out."

"Your secretary?"

"The alien." As if that was a cue, the exterior door opened and Twilight stepped out into the metal stairs, still wearing her overalls and hard hat, but also wearing over her wings a pair of giant foam rubber hands with a Nightlight Industries logo and '#1' on them. She pouted. "And here I was ready to come out with my hands up. I've watched your visual media, isn't that what police are supposed to say?"

The officer goggled at the sight, and the fact that the ravening alien monster their caller had told them about seemed to treat this as a joke.

"Stay right where you, lay down where you are and put..." Burns stopped himself just in time, though in fairness he was going to say 'your hands behind your head.'

Surprisingly enough the creature complied and even spread her foam covered wings flat to the metal grid floor, though even across the yard they could see her roll her eyes. "Um... am I being arrested? Because that's not legal. I'm not a person, I'm a working animal, I even have papers to prove it. The most you could do is call an animal control officer. Or the RSPCA."

"We have! And the army, so don't get any funny ideas!"

"The RSPCA? But I wasn't mistreated, I even got coffee... I thought the foam hands were pretty funny, but okay. I'm perfectly willing to comply with any reasonable requests by a duly authorised representative of the law."



Her horn glowed and the wings vanished. All the police flinched. "Oh, for Celestia's sake! I don't have hands, so I have to do everything with magic. Look, we can sort this all out if you just let me present my papers. If you don't want me to levitate them over to you, you can just come and collect them. I won't move, won't light up my horn or anything."

Inspector Burns had to think. Risk the creature using it's powers for something else, or approach it. They weren't supposed to engage it, just establish a cordon and perform rescue duties if possible. None of his hasty orders had envisioned it co-operating. "Send them over."

Under other circumstances watching the folder full of paper floating across enveloped in a purple aura would have been fascinating. As it was, he watched the unicorn like a hawk until the folder landed on the bonnet of his car. He picked up the perfectly regular manilla folder and leafed through them. He wasn't an expert on such things, but it all looked properly legal. It basically said that Twilight Sparkle was a working animal for Nightlight Industries, like one of their own police horses. He had spent a year working in the mounted division so he had at least some idea what he was looking at. There was a veterinary certificate and everything seemed to be in order.

"How the heck did you get a vet to sign off on you?"

"One seriously surprised vet. He wasn't used to having a patient who could talk back. Used a couple of diagnostic spells on other animals to show how they worked, then cast them on myself. My, am I glad I helped my friend Fluttershy out at her animal shelter."

Inspector Burns started to ask for more information, then decided the answers would probably just complicate things even more.

"But if you're a working animal, shouldn't you have a handler?"

"I'm my own handler, I got a BTEC in Animal Management from the University Collage of Kent. It's all in there."

"But, how? How could you enroll, how could you go to classes?"

"Distance learning, I did it all over the internet, and I paid my course fees myself. On my home world I'm a librarian, astronomer and magical researcher with the equivalent of multiple postgraduate degrees, and spells I developed specifically to help me learn faster, and that was when I was a plain old unicorn. I audited the course in three hours, and took the final exam right afterwards. Doesn't matter, it's an accredited school, and they didn't require me to demonstrate my person-hood, only my competence. Which since I got a top grade with distinction, I did."

Burns noticed something else. "It also says you're owned by Nightlight Industries... well you'd have to be, but isn't that slavery? Even if you're not a legal person, you're clearly intelligent. That would make the company acting illegally."

"That's covered. It's a private share limited company, I own all the shares as I put in the initial investment and capital equipment, such

as myself, there's plenty of precedent for an animal owning shares, even a controlling interest, but being legally incompetent, they have to have a human with power of attorney to manage them, my lawyer in my case. That means I own the company's assets, including myself. So I own myself, and that's not slavery, in fact it's the very opposite. I know it's convoluted and daft, but I don't fit in any of the regular categories, so loopholes are all I've got."

She shifted a bit. "So, what exactly am I doing wrong that requires so many highly trained police officers to stop me? I delivered a load of scrap metals from the salvage I collected in orbit on behalf of Nightlight Industries, as required by our contract. At no time did I make a threatening action towards anyone on this site. The only crime here is wasting police time, and I wasn't the one who was responsible for that. Could I get up? My wings are starting to cramp."

"You were creating a disturbance." Inspector Burns was feeling as if he and the entire group of police had been made fools of.

"By existing? Surely that only applies if I was acting in a disorderly manner, and if I was a human. As an animal, animal control officers would be responsible for my capture, but that requires me to be acting in a dangerous manner. If this place has security cameras, it will prove I did nothing of the sort. So, please can I get up?"

Burns glowered for a moment, then nodded. "Very well, but make no sudden moves."

Twilight got up and flexed her wings, then stretched them out. "I'm going to come down the stairs now..."

She glided gently down the stairway before landing and walking slowly out into the open. "Look, I know this must feel pretty silly, but you're not the ones who are responsible..."

A news van rolled up at the gate. "... I've seen the sort of things you expected to face in Japan, and you guys don't even have guns. That's not stupid, that's courageous! Could I have my papers back...? On second thoughts I'll make a copy, with your permission?"

Burns nodded, and her horn flashed. Suddenly there were two copies of the paperwork in front of him, and one set levitated back towards Twilight, captured by the camera crew that was just moving up behind the police cordon.

"It's only a manifested copy, not real matter, so it will disappear in about three hours. I'd probably get it photocopied before then. Now, can I go? We've established that you don't actually have grounds to hold me. I have other loads to deliver, other contracts to fill."

\* \* \*

><p>42.1 continued (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"How in the name of Tartarus did you find me?" the pegasus grumbled, glowering at the plate in front of her.<p>

"You'd have to ask Pinkie," shrugged the other pegasus, tugging at a plastic hairclip. "I'm just the dancing girl."

"...I'm straight."

Rainbow Dash snorted. "And I don't swing at all. Honestly I think Pinkie wanted me along so you would feel 'justified' in writing the Do series. 'I'm your biggest fan, I'd do anything for you...'" She shook her head. "I know how that can get, so if you don't want that I'm cool."

The other pegasus peered over her glasses. "Really. Do you have a fanclub?"

"Mmmyp." "

"What books have you written?"

Dash chuckled. "I'm more an athlete then a writer, buuuuuut..." She reached a hoof under the table, flicking through her subspace pocket and pulling out a duplicate of her own novel. "Ever hear of Iris Drake?"

Her companion accepted the book, flicking an eyebrow up as she examined it. "These are incredibly rare. And you're claiming to have written them?"

"Even have the original manuscript, if you want to see it." Dash grinned. "I did take some influence from your series, though."

"Hmmm. I didn't see any saddlebags on you when you came in."

"A wizard friend set me up with that trick." The athlete leaned back in her chair. "Do you have any, uh, tips? People have been clamouring for a sequel but..."

"Oh, I just... write the stories as they come to me." The other pegasus tightened her cloak. "Nothing special. I mean, yeah, the books are famous..."

"Mmmhmm." Rainbow nodded. "I've been in my share of trapped ruins, though. Pretty accurate."

The older mare's eyes snapped up. \_Gotcha.\_

"You... make a habit of entering ruins?"

"Not exactly." Rainbow sighed. "See, I was selected a while back, by 'fate' or whatever, to bear an ancient artefact known as the Element of Loyalty. Course, that means when I hear the world is in danger I just have to rush off and save it, you know? Ancient libraries and collapsed coliseums, they're just places where I do my part. It's not so much a habit as... coincidence."

"Hrmm."

Dash flicked her mane. "Crazy thing is, a lot of the ruins seem like they came right out of the books you write. Down to the tiniest

detail. It's as if Daring was actually, you know, there." She smiled beatifically. "Of course, Daring Do is fiction, so obviously I must be wrong."

"Mmm."

"I mean, I would be pissed if Daring Do was hiding all this from the public for some silly reason, like... money, or fame. Privacy, that's a little more understandable. Maybe if some of the artefacts in the book can brainwash ponies who know about it, yeah, I'd get that. But knowing the world was in danger so often and I was being left on the sidelines?" Dash shrugged. "I sometimes wished she was real, just so I could thank her for her brave deeds... then smack her for passing them off as children's literature rather than forming some sort of group to, I dunno, keep the dangers under control."

"My family can handle that," the pegasus said, then clamped her mouth shut.

Dash raised an eyebrow.

"...fine. You got me. I'm Daring Do. The books are all... exaggerated, but true."

Dash remained silent.

"The thing is..." Daring took off the soft hat she was wearing, revealing her monochrome mane. "Saving the world, archaeology... it doesn't pay well. I originally wrote the stories in private to tell some family members, you know, swap tales over the fireplace. Then some publisher saw my Sapphire Stone transcript." She flung her hoof out. "'Great story, miss, mind if I make you rich?' I made a snap decision, called myself A.K. Yearling... They refused to believe it was nonfiction. And, over the years, it just... built up. I never meant for it to become famous..."

"...Celestia appears in one of your books."

Daring chuckled. "Heh, yeah. That was when I realized that my adventures were really important. Of course it wasn't nearly how I wrote it. I was completely panicking. But..."

Dash smiled as the pegasus rambled on, putting a word in here and there while the tiny bit of plastic clipped to her mane recorded everything. Twilight would have a ball. Or freak out. Maybe both.

\* \* \*

><p>"So... as far as I can figure, baseline you is supposed to get miffed about the two month delay, decides to 'help' Yearling write her book faster, then discover that she's actually Daring Do and somehow stop the whole Rings of Scorcherio thing."<p>

Rainbow Dash looked at Twilight sceptically. "And you got all that from a few dozen loops?"

"Mmmm. Yeah." Twilight coughed. "Most of which were lonely loops, soooooo..."

"Ugh. Please tell me you at least got the book."

The alicorn gave her friend a sheepish grin. "It's still a couple expansion periods out."

"...CLOROPHYL."

\* \* \*

><p>42.7<p>

Applebloom had checked very carefully.

This Loop was only about thirty past a recent loop length increase, according to Twilight, which should mean it was a while until it lengthened again. With that in mind, the moment the loop ended could be known quite precisely.

Helpful for a new alicorn who had no idea how to undo the transformation.

So, in the full understanding that there were only two hours or so to go, Applebloom pulled Smart Cookie from her subspace pocket as the last rays of the sun slid off the Canterhorn.

"Okay, here we go..." she muttered, slipping the Device/Founder on and tightening the strap. "Tree-questria, but I feel nervous."

\_That's only natural,\_ Cookie replied.

Applebloom peered over the drop below her, and gulped. At least a furlong straight down, and then an increasingly gentle slope coated in soft, fluffy snow. (It helped that some confused pegasi had dumped three feet of snow on the mountain earlier that week.)

"Right. No time like the present."

Applebloom closed her eyes, and broke into a run.

\_Now!\_

Hearing Cookie's alert, she gathered her hooves below her and pushed. The leap took her up and out, into thin air... then down, past where she'd taken off from.

She shut out the nagging part of her mind that was screaming something about mortality. (She was a Looper, it was allowed.) She also shut out the bit telling her that she was doing something stupid, which was harder.

Don't think about it. Think... back.

Remember the moment of excitement, the feeling of epiphany. The shining instant when an entire world of the nanoscopic lay revealed before her. No more tricks or traps, no more surprises hiding in the woodwork.

Just... an enormously complex machine. Nothing more.

And with that, ride the wave of sudden understanding.

There was a timeless sensation of \_depth-\_

And her eyes snapped open.

\_Good,\_ Cookie said encouragingly. \_Now, bring your wings up at an acute angle, then turn them to bite the wind on the downstroke!\_

Applebloom bared her teeth in what wasn't quite a grin, but was too good natured to be a grimace.

The explanation helped, actually. Cookie probably knew almost everything about her, but one of the most important things was that "do this" wasn't nearly as satisfying without the why behind it.

After a dozen or so quick, flailing wingbeats, Applebloom had her glide trajectory stable. A few more, slower and with more thought into them, had her in the updraught rising as the Canterhorn cut into the prevailing winds, and from there she just had to hold her wings out and ride the wind.

For maybe half an hour she just floated, silently contemplating the country below.

\_I don't think I've ever seen it from this high,\_ Cookie said eventually.

"Really?" Applebloom asked, experimentally trimming her wings to tack around. She flubbed it, slipping sideways instead of turning, and gave up before things got worse. "Whoa... yeah, now I think of it we ain't gone flying much."

\_I have noticed a certain tendency to be busy on other matters whenever you and Scootaloo take up one of your creations,\_ Cookie noted. \_But... it's an amazing sight, really. All our hopes and dreams become reality.\_

Applebloom tried again. This time, the more gradual approach worked, and they swung out to face towards Ponyville.

\_Look at that,\_ Cookie said, sounding a bit distant.\_ Ponies did that. The argumentative, hardheaded, hidebound refugees from a land buried under an ice storm of their own making. We came here, and we built this. All of this. Together.\_

Cookie's words made Applebloom look at Equestria with new eyes.

From her time in other worlds, she'd seen what the average medieval society looked like. How most worlds developed, in fire and death and war.

Equestria... didn't do that. No, the citizens of the land spread out beneath her wings had no need to fear war and little need to fear hunger.

\_That\_ was the real achievement of Equestria.

\* \* \*

><p>For the next hour or so, the duo flew on over the star-speckled night below, mirroring Luna's canvas above.<p>

"Time's nearly up," Applebloom commented softly.

\_I know. Time for me to go back in.\_

"Sorry y'all have to do this, and all, but... yeah, it has to be done."

With care, Applebloom returned Cookie to her subspace pocket. While Cookie could almost certainly ride out a loop reset and be resummoned from her shared place in Applebloom's soul, neither of them felt particularly inclined to test it out.

Alone now, Applebloom checked the time once more.

One minute left.

Acting on a whim, she closed one wing, flipped over, and went into a dive.

It was easy to see why Dash and Scoots loved speed so much. There was a thrill of adrenaline which you only really got when air was rushing past you, whipping at coat and mane and tail.

She was nowhere near Sonic Rainboom speeds, of course â€" that tended to take a lot of effort even for experienced pegasi â€" but, well, it was fun.

The last seconds of the Loop ticked away-

\* \* \*

><p>42.8<p>

-and Applebloom Awoke, skidded on the floor as her galloping legs suddenly got confused, and ended up in a heap against the wall along with several other ponies.

"Ah, horsefeathers," she heard Scootaloo say. "That wasn't the smoothest awakening..."

"Yeah, stupid wings," Sweetie muttered. "I got confused again and..."

Sweetie tailed off.

"Again?" Diamond Tiara asked, extricating herself from one end of the pile and coming into Applebloom's vision.

She had a pair of wings, and a filly-scale \_horn.\_

Applebloom felt her own wings itching, and pulled them out from underneath... probably Sweetie, from the direction of the voices... before getting off the others.

She was an alicorn. In front of the others. Though, actually...

Scotaloo had a new horn on top of her usual wings.

Sweetie had wings, adding to her normal horn.

She and Diamond had both.

And Nyx, now revealed to have been all but flattened underneath all four of them, was her everyday alicorn self.

Relief ran through her. If this was a peculiarity of the loop, like that time Mac had been Princess Maccie, then she could retain her secret-

Then what Diamond had said penetrated. Sweetie had had trouble with her wings again?

"It's nothing," Sweetie said quickly. "Just a loop a while ago where I was a pegasus!"

"Can't have been a while ago," Tiara pointed out reasonably. "You'd have told us, right?"

Sweetie blushed.

"Who ran me over?" Nyx asked plaintively.

"I think all of us," Scotaloo said. "Sorry. Anything damaged?"

"Just bruises, I think..." Nyx twisted herself from lying on her side to on her front, then came to her hooves in a surge of movement. "Ow."

Tiara looked between them. "Hang on a minute... have you all ascended before as well?"

"As well?" Applebloom, Sweetie Belle and Scotaloo chorused.

"Gourd, have we all been hiding it from one another?" Tiara sighed, as one by one all the others apart from Nyx nodded slowly. "Guess this is what happens when we don't want to make one another feel small... you know, if I was still the boasting type this would have gotten resolved a lot quicker."

"How long?" Applebloom asked, drawing the eyes of the others. "I mean, how long have you guys been... able to be alicorns," she finished, looking down.

"About five loops," Scotaloo admitted. "Sorry, guys."

"Eight," Sweetie said.

"For me it was four," Diamond Tiara said, sitting down.

"Just two." Applebloom shrugged, feeling even more uncomfortable. "It was the one with the nanotech, yeah. I kinda understated how complicated the nanotech was when I told you..."

"I think we've all been less than honest about our recent loops."



Diamond Tiara rubbed at her temples.

"I haven't," Nyx said brightly. The others glared at her.

"...okay, sorry," she added, shrinking back. "I kinda forgot how bad it makes you feel, when you think you've let down your friends."

"I don't-" Scootaloo started, then sighed. "Yeah, you're right. I do. And part of it is that that loop felt kind of like a dream. It all seemed so unreal, but when I tested it out... there it was."

Diamond Tiara's mouth twisted. "I didn't dare test whether I could do it again except at the end of the loop, because..."

"Yeah, I know the feeling," Applebloom said, to the nods of the others.

"Were you flying as well?" Sweetie asked.

Scootaloo shook her head. "Telekinesis spell. I've seen you do it so often, Sweets, and I... it's so different to my cloud manipulation. I was concentrating on that when the loop changed, so I wasn't ready."

"I was flying," Applebloom volunteered. "First time I'd tried."

Sweetie smiled. "It's amazing, isn't it?"

"Hey, this means I can teach you!" Scootaloo said with a grin. "Well, so long as being an alicorn myself means that I can actually manage level flight without magic..."

"Far be it from me to interrupt," Diamond Tiara said into the lull, "but what exactly about this loop made us all be alicorns?"

They scanned the so-far-neglected loop memories.

"...oh," Nyx said, then giggled. "Poor Momma..."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight carefully signed the final bit of paperwork for the day.<p>

"Right, that's done..."

"Thank you, your majesty," the seneschal said, lifting the pile in a magical grip.

"No, thank you," Queen Twilight rejoined. "I'm grateful to you for your help. Now, I should go see what my... five daughters," she said with a wince, "have managed to get up to during office hours."

Frankly, if they were all Awake, she was lucky the castle was still standing.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

42.1: Whoops...

>42.2: Jain Nodes are bad juju. They're basically a civilization-destroying weapon. (It's appeared earlier - go and check that loop where Tails was a non-morphic fox in Equestria...)<br>42.3: I feel sorry for them.

>42.4: "That's just some old fairy tale."<br>42.5: Secrecy.

>42.6: King of the Golden River.<br>42.7: The loop resets undo alicornification, which can be convenient.

>42.8: Directly follows on from 42.7, from Applebloom's perspective. (Also: so much tree sap.)<p>

## 45. Chapter 45

### 43.1 (Bobnik)

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetie Belle sighed and shuffled a hoof. "I s'pose it's story time. Since it sounds like I went first, I'll go first here too."<p>

"No, no, not yet. If there's gonna be stories, I want snacks. Just like old times, in the clubhouse." said Scootaloo.

"I got this." Nyx trotted over to the door and had words with a guard out in the corridor.

Sometime later they sat around an array of healthy snacks and one cupcake each (it appeared Queen Mummy had given the kitchens some very specific instructions).

"Okay," began Sweetie Belle. "Mine didn't happen in Equestria. Lots of the others been to this place, but I didn't recognise it at first..."

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetie Belle opened her eyes and stared into what appeared to be a formless void. <em>Oookaayy,<em> she thought, and swiftly patted herself down to check it was just the void that was formless.

Phew. Hooves, mane, tail, horn, various other bits, all present and correct. Her next considered action was to retrieve a jewelled necklace from her subspace pocket and fasten it securely around her neck.

"Clover? You okay?" asked the unicorn, somewhat creeped out by the total lack of echo.

\_Yes, I'm fine\_, replied the Device. \_Where are we? All I can sense is a formless void, and you.\_

"Oh good, I'm not hallucinating. We might start things off with a search spell â€" did you hear that?"

\_Something, yes...\_

Both of them stayed silent as the merest whisper of sound began, and swelled imperceptibly slowly over time into music. And oh, what music it was; the very grandest of orchestras, with all the musical instruments Sweetie had ever heard and then some, all played by the greatest of virtuosos. It was joined by a choir of all the different voices that she could imagine, male and female, all up and down the scales.

Sweetie's eyes widened as the realisation hit her " this was being performed live and improvised on the fly. The core theme was there, solid as bedrock, but all the voices and instruments were adding their own flourishes and additions. The music wove back and forth like life itself. She heard debates of philosophy, parties, storms, the happiness of new love, the solemn joy of a mountain vista and multitudes of other things beyond even her extensive experience. She somehow knew this music would stay with her and she would be able to hum the refrain for all the new things she would see in her life to come.

It was too much. Music was in her heart and almost always in her cutie mark, itself an extension of her soul. With a deep breath and a hopeful heart she opened her mouth and joined the song.

The reaction was immediate. Stern tones sung by baritone voices washed around her, interrogating. Drums and horns called warning that they were ready to defend. Sweetie very carefully restated the main theme in her own natural register, hoping to send the message that she didn't want to interrupt or hijack the marvelous music, but join in and add her own notes. Gradually, gently, the voices relented and the drums quieted. Lighter tones swirled around her and invited comment, granting inclusion. The unicorn was welcomed into the song.

How long Sweetie sang she never knew, then or later. Entirely immersed, she sang along with the music, even adding her own themes, mostly about friends and family. However, it gradually became apparent that one of the male voices was trying to start up it's own version of the primary theme. It was loud and brash and very, very repetitive. The main singer wasn't letting it evolve, wasn't letting it grow and change like the earlier theme did.

For the first time in what was probably an age, the filly fell silent and listened. In this new song she heard selfishness and foolish pride, the desire to be the best and a buried uncertainty as to the purpose of the singer. She heard the fear of change. There was Diamond Tiara before the loops, with cruelty to hide the low self esteem. There was the worst parts of Rarity, the greed for attention and reputation. Even herself, and her once-buried fear that she would never find her purpose, her talent, her cutie mark. Worse yet, a group of other voices were beginning to join in.

No. No, she wouldn't let this happen. The music she'd been part of was far too beautiful to allow this kind of thinking to take hold. Not while she drew breath.

With renewed resolve she dove back into the song, weaving back and forth until she was hard up against the rogue choir. Sweetie didn't attack it directly because that would only make it stronger, but instead tried to weave the brassy notes into a foundation of a new theme. Every time though, her song faltered because the singers would

not accept novelty or change. \_You want stasis? You want everything to stay the same? Try this.\_

Clover responded to her unspoken thought, and became a harp under her hooves. Sweetie sang of unchanging repetition, the fundamental frustration of the Loops. She gave them her millennia of aggravation at being wrenched from the natural pattern of pony life, and the sorrow of family and friends who simply couldn't keep up. All of this was of the same core as the rogue song and merged with it seamlessly.

Many of the voices split away and rejoined to original music; they could not accept the price of what Sweetie sang. But the original voice of the disharmony sang on, in foolish pride and stubbornness.

The filly changed tack at this point. Already enmeshed with the music, she began to introduce the hope and joy that she had found in the Loops " new discoveries and new friends. How anything new and different was not a challenge to supremacy but one of adaptation. Harp became dulcimer became drums became flute became harmonica became hang as she adapted to the needs of the moment. Clover helped by weaving the sounds of the previous instruments back through Sweetie's current recital, showing how the old could be adapted to the new. Slowly but surely Sweetie Belle became her own orchestra.

Pride and stubbornness broke, and the once loud voice became soft and tried to hide in shame and fear. This too, Sweetie would not accept; she bolstered the voice and provided support, inviting him to share in all the new wonders they could create together. Friendship did not just add but multiplied the possibilities " why would you settle for loneliness?

It seemed the male voice agreed. It accepted her offer, and together they sang a new theme, drawing heavily from the original. This third music had all the strength of the male voice with the flexibility of Sweetie's, drawing in more voices and instruments until with a mighty crescendo of unity, the song came to an end.

Sweetie Belle opened her eyes and blinked. Around her now was a court filled with humanoid creatures. Kneeling before her was one of the larger and more impressive looking men, with tears running down his cheeks.

"Thank you, whoever and whatever you may be; you have saved from a path of great darkness." he whispered. Sweetie did not reply with words, instead she just hugged him.

At an unseen signal, the crowds drew back allowing Sweetie to see a great throne at the centre of the hall. A man rose from it, and in his eyes was fire and wisdom.

"I am Illuvatar," he said. "I wrote the core of the music you have sung, and as I wrote I saw horses, and creatures with horns, and beasts with feathered wings. But never did I see them all in one form. Though I do not wish to be rude, for you have taught Melkor what I could not, I must ask: Who and what are you, and from whence did you come?"

"I'm Sweetie Belle." \_Wait, WINGS?\_

She looked down the sides of her body and sure enough, a pair of wings were there.

\_Oh, eucalyptus. How am I going to explain this to everypony?\_

\* \* \*

><p><em><em>

"So then I kinda had to explain all about the loops, 'cause I'd already sung about them. Everyone was like 'How can this be?' except for Olorin, turns out this was like his fiftieth loop. Pretty sure he's the anchor." Sweetie paused for a sip of apple juice. "I didn't really have time to think about being an alicorn then, but it came in handy later."

"How so?" asked Applebloom. "Was it because the Middle Earth loops are dangerous? Ah've heard they can get pretty bad with nasty soul magic and stuff."

"Nope, nipped all that in the bud by making friends with Melkor. It was because of time; Middle Earth lasts for tens of thousands of years. I wouldn't have lived to see the first sunrise without it."

The other fillies stared at her. "You've already spent millennia as a alicorn?" asked Applebloom in a faint voice.

"Well what else was I supposed to do? I'm not even sure if you can use Star Swirl's spell without being a Bearer of Harmony. So whose turn is it now?"

\* \* \*

><p>43.2<p>

"Right." Scootaloo polished off her cupcake. "My turn, I think."

She broke off, and looked down at the cupcake. "Okay, seriously, does... well, mom... have Pinkie or the Cake family on staff? That was delicious."

Nyx frowned. "I think she might have \_a\_ Pie or \_a\_ Cake on staff, past loops are strange like that."

"So, spill," Sweetie said, lying on her front and putting her head on her hooves. "What \_did\_ you do? Scoot through time?"

"Nope." Scootaloo shook her head. "Nothing so simple as that. But it \_did\_ work with what always tends to be my Talent."

"I think it did for all of us..." Applebloom hazarded. Diamond looked a bit ambivalent, but after a moment nodded more firmly.

"Right. So, we had a school trip..."

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo was bored. Pony was she ever! Twilight was awake, obviously, but it seemed like every other looper she knew had decided to sit this one out, including the Crusaders and Dash. At least she had Pansy to talk to, inside her own head. As they were walking through the Weather factory in Cloudsdale, that's exactly what they were doing.<p>

\_This is amazing!\_ The Founder turned Device exclaimed, using her awareness to sightsee. \_The pegasi of my time would never have conceived of weather construction on such a scale!\_

\_It is kind of cool.\_ Scootaloo rarely ended up in Cloudsdale, even now that flying was no longer an issue. Even with some of the things she'd seen in other loops, the giant cloud generators and rainbow distillation towers were pretty cool. \_It's a change from doing the Canterlot Gardens tour. The last time the three of us did that we decided to fix Discord with a bucket of liquid rainbow, some cloud and a feather...\_

She trailed off as her brief good mood faded, and she looked back and forth between her non-Awake friends, or... ponies who just looked like them. How Twilight had coped when she was alone her first few hundred loops she didn't know, and never wanted to find out.

Pansy had clearly spotted her incipient black mood, and tried to head it off by talking about something else. \_So why did Miss Cheerilee bring you here instead, anyway?\_

Scootaloo looked ahead to where their teacher was leading the pack and talking to the guide. \_She realised that since we have a unicorn in town who could mass cast a Cloudwalking spell, it would be educational to come see how weather was made. We got delayed due to freaky weather, and then Twilight and Dash got called off to Canterlot, which says Discord is about on time...\_

\_I can't believe you're so blasÃ© about that creature!\_ There was the sharper tone of the soldier Lieutenant Pensee had been, and still was in a way, came through in her mental voice. Scootaloo had learned a lot about pegasus fighting techniques from the ex-Founder, and more about military theory. Considering the number of times she'd been dumped into a fused loop as a fighter pilot, or mechanised soldier, it seemed like a good idea.

\_Discord's mellowed out a lot when he's awake, and when he's not, Dash or Twilight can handle him like small change. They're probably already duking it out with him, Twilight said something about seeing if the non-awake Elements could resist him...\_

They were walking out across a suspended walkway across a vast hangar where rows of massive rain clouds were ranked like dirigibles, undergoing final quality control inspections before being shipped out. Suddenly there were screams from the floor as two of the larger clouds sprouted arms, legs and faces, and stood up, slamming the other clouds to bits as they howled like Windigoes.

There were plenty of screams and whimpers from up on the balcony too. As Miss Cheerilee called for her class to calm down and get together, in preparation for making like a North wind and blowing this place, the cloud workers got their act together and tried to marshal the two cloud creatures with cloud prods and blasts of air driven by groups

of pegasi wings.

In response, the two monsters turned and vomited high pressure jets of liquid rainbow from the dark holes that served them as mouths. They blasted the workers away and plastered them against the walls of the hangar, trapped like flies in polychromatic amber. Then one started to turn towards the gantry, and the panic increased. They were never going to get off the walkway in time without a distraction...

Scootaloo wasn't really thinking, just reacting as she realised this. She spun on her forehooves, bucked a cloud board covered with production schedules "snapping it off its support" and yelled out, "Bloom, Sweetie! Get the others clear! I'll cover you!"

She sprang up, wings buzzing as she backflipped onto the board in mid-air and spun it round to face the monsters, even as she started to fall. She waved her wings and forelegs, hollering "Hey, look, a distraction!"

It worked, the monster turning its attention from the frantic foals on the walkway to the descending pegasus and spitting it's rainbowy goodness at her. Scootaloo used her improbable acrobatic skills to evade, strafing from side to side and bouncing off scraps of the destroyed clouds to arrest her fall and change direction.

\_What are you doing!\_ Pansy exclaimed in her head.

\_Improvising!\_ Scootaloo replied with the small fraction of her mind that wasn't focussed on not getting hit. \_Could use some help...\_

Pansy's default necklace form appeared around her neck and the improvised surf board took on a much sleeker form factor. Both creatures had spotted her now, and were alternating between bursts of rainbow and clumps of cloud from the ends of their arms big enough to engulf her if they'd hit. Not that they would, as she'd reached the ground level and was skimming back and forth amongst their feet with her wings buzzing.

Her new ride wasn't a scooter, or the custom Extreme Gear Apple Bloom had made for her, but with Pansy helping her support the shape and cushion it against contact with the cloud floor it made a dandy substitute. She could feel the board under her hooves as if it was a part of her, the kinesthesia that made her such a skilled acrobat mixing with her pegasus cloud control abilities to extend into the cloud board itself.

\_Your friends are getting every-pony to safety, \_Pansy's voice spoke in her mind. \_If you wish to continue this, we should lead these things away from them.'\_

"On it!" Scootaloo chirped, and swept around in a curve to head towards the door of the hangar. Still weaving and jinking to evade their attacks, she pushed out her cloud sense further into the cloudstuff that made up the floor. The hangar doorway opened out onto a wide gap, a dock where a cloud could be moored, between it and the next quay, which lead towards a warehouse. The cloud at the edge of the hangar rippled and shifted, forming a ramp leading off into the void and a lip to either side.

The cloud monsters stomped after her, shapeless hoofs raising sprays of cloud and 'poomph' sounds as they hit the floor. Scootaloo put on a burst of speed and went scooting up the ramp, soaring out into open air. She could fly, but as long as she just used ground effect stuff she could push all that extra effort into manoeuvring.

She glanced behind her with a grin as the two cloud monsters reached the edge and tripped on the low wall she'd formed, falling forward with windmilling arms. The grin faded as they simply floated forward off the edge, swimming after her. She could sense Pansy's mental smirk, and huffed "Okay, I know, clouds, they can fly! But you've gotta admit, it looked cool!"

She landed on the far dock and forced the cloudstuff on the far edge into a quarter-pipe ramp which she used to change direction, skirting up and grinding along the edge. A bolt of lightning disintegrated the cloud stuff directly behind her, telling her the stakes had just gone up. She frantically veered and weaved as she shot forward onto the main cloud yard in front of the warehouse.

\_We must not allow those things to get in among other ponies! \_Pansy advised\_. Though why there are no guards come to help I don't know.\_

As Scootaloo dodged a particularly nasty lightning bolt, she nodded towards the main bulk of Cloudsdale, visible over the warehouse. Even from here there were audible screams and sounds of panic. "I guess they have their hooves full. Which means it's up to us..."

She dipped her wings, letting momentum carry her forward and body weight move her from side to side. She touched the wingtips to the ground and cloud scraped up to coat her wings and spread over her body. In seconds she'd formed a layer of cloud armour over her leading edges and body, and Pansy poured power into it, making it as resilient as crystal.

Using her wings to renew her speed, she then flipped end for end and swept her wings forward and flung a pair of Vortex Strikes, one of her standard attacks from her Jewellery Scout days, focussed bursts of air that could punch through wood " or even stone " or simply knock back an enemy. In this case they blasted holes right through one monster's torso, which healed up quickly.

Pansy was watching through her eyes, noting the pattern in which they fired off lightning bolts. \_They have a rigid pattern of attacks, and seem simplistic automatons. If only we could exploit that regularity...\_

A near miss with a lightning bolt frizzed her mane, and Pansy said, \_Warehouse wall approaching!\_

Suddenly Scootaloo had an idea. "That may be just what we need!"

She mentally threw the idea at Pansy and got back a mix of agreement, admiration and incredulity.

\_It will take precise timing...\_

"Timing I can do..." She flipped back and sped up, reaching down into



the underlying cloud to twist the warehouse wall into a ramp that curved up and over in a soaring arc. Even as it stabilised, she hit the ramp and shot up it, gaining speed and feeling the beat as the blasts kept coming. Arcing into the open air, she tumbled and spun to keep herself from getting hit while keeping her path on course and on time.

She fell between the heads of the cloud monsters just as their blank eyes charged with arcs of lightning, and the two creatures ended up blasting each other in the head. Scootaloo had hoped simply to disorient them, put them off balance long enough for Pansy to set up and go full Device, but it seemed that whatever else, they weren't immune to each other's lightning blasts.

Each disintegrated the other's head, and the two bodies wobbled and collapsed, with Scootaloo shooting out from between them even as they disintegrated into tufts of cloud rubble. She swung sideways and skidded to a stop, spraying up a fan of cloud stuff that evaporated away in a sparkle of rainbows.

"Yeah! That's what you get! Coming along here all big and bad and scaring every-pony! Well who's the pony? Yeah! Who's the pony?"

She pulled out an all-day sucker she'd been saving from her saddlebag and popped it in her mouth, grateful for the sugar boost. "Now that's what I call weather control."

The cloud underhoof shook, and she groaned. "Oh great! Not more of them!"

Pansy's voice spoke, and she felt her attention being directed to the rest of Cloudsdale. \_I think it's rather more serious...\_ The topless towers were shuddering and leaning, and the very cloud under her hooves started to sink like an express elevator.

"Oh no! Dash must have refused her wings back! But I never thought Discord would actually do it!"

Pansy could read her thoughts and the memories behind them as they flashed through her brain. Her voice was grim as she responded. \_Then we must think of something with the utmost speed, or Cloudsdale will fall!\_

For a few seconds, Scootaloo wondered if her crystalline advisor wasn't being a little over-dramatic. After the initial shock, she remembered that Cloudsdale was inhabited by pegasi, and therefore they could escape. And falling clouds weren't amongst the most lethal of objects. And even if Cloudsdale was destroyed, the multi-coloured reset button (a.k.a The Elements) would fix it as soon as they were used. Then she thought of her class and the other non-pegasi, would they get to a flying cart or safe cloud in time?

She suddenly noticed a certain lightness just behind her shoulder blades, and saw the specks of distant pegasi abruptly stagger in mid-air and plummet downwards. Thankfully they were over the city proper, and should at least have a soft landing. The same couldn't be said for the city. They were dropping out of the sky and drifting southwards as they did, towards the rocky chaparral that was bisected by Ghastly Gorge.

As a final counterpoint to the distant destruction, one of the storage towers near the warehouse collapsed, and liquid rainbow started leaking out, eating away at the cloud-stuff under it. It was a highly useful by-product of cloud manufacture, with dozens of alchemical and industrial uses, and it was also extremely volatile under the right or rather wrong conditions. Scootaloo had learned great respect for the substance after several attempts by Apple Bloom to use it as a mono-propellant in some of her sounding rockets, with mixed and frequently Trixie-worthy results.

While she'd only been listening with half an ear during the tour, she knew that the weather factory had millions of litres of the stuff in storage, along with storm clouds freshly charged with lightning and massive cloud crystal accumulators chock full of the weather magic to run the weather-making processes. When this thing hit the ground, all that would be jumbled together, and she had no idea what would happen— actually she had an excellent idea, what she wasn't sure of was just how big the blast radius would be.

It seemed whatever the Elements had done had infuriated the Avatar of Chaos way beyond normal. He hadn't killed anypony yet, probably because dead things were no fun to abuse, but it looked like he wanted to. For just a second, Scootaloo felt despair wash over her, the position seemed as hopeless as any she'd ever been in, and even if the loops would reset it, here and now these ponies, her friends would die.

She felt ashamed of her earlier dismissiveness, these versions of Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle — even Diamond Tiara — might not be the ones she'd lived out the loops with, but they were her friends in this time and place— well, perhaps not base-line DT, but looping DT had given them a bunch of advice on how to deflect her— but that wasn't important now. Anyway, she wouldn't leave even base-line DT to such a fate, not that she herself wouldn't share it. But that wasn't important, the only important thing was to protect the others, no matter the cost.

Her teeth gritted and her anger rose. Take away her wings? Ha, she'd spent centuries without the power of flight, she could cope. Part of her ability to manoeuvre her scooter came from the fact that being unable to fully express her power through her wings, she'd compensated by pushing it through her hooves, making her scooter a part of her flight magic. It also meant, after untold years of practice she was really talented at cloud manipulation, which was how she'd pulled those stunts.

That gave her an idea. After all, Cloudsdale was just a giant cloud when all was said and done. Maybe— She pushed her store of magic as deeply into the cloud as she could, and felt it as if it was a part of her hooves, but only the yard and some surrounding buildings. Her thoughts had only taken a few seconds, but even so she could feel the ancient weather magic weakening. She tried to fill the gap... and her power alone wasn't enough.

"Pansy, help me!" The Founder within the Device added her own magic and that of the one-time sapphire, now transformed to something other by the magic of an Alicorn Creator. Scootaloo felt her reach expand, but it was tenuous, weak, feeble. She could feel the hooves of panicking pegasi, sense the terror, even where her class cowered near where their hired dirigible had been. But she couldn't affect the

cloud, as soon as she tried it vanished from her grasp like smoke.

She needed a better connection, and Pansy offered an idea as to what, something ancient pegasi warriors had done in battle. Scootaloo hadn't taken classes with Zecora, but she'd picked up enough from Apple Bloom to see why it might work. Her magic twisted slightly, and an icy spike punched up from the cloud in front of her. Wincing in advance, she brought the hock of one foreleg on it's point, puncturing her skin and allowing a trickle of blood to form from the wound.

She rubbed her free fore-hoof in it, then rubbed the bases of the hooves together before slamming them into the cloud again. Sacrifice, giving something to get something. Sympathy, the water, magic and iron in her blood mingled with the water and magic of the cloud, making it a part of her and her a part of it. Contagion, every droplet of Cloudsdale had been in contact at some point, and now her blood, was a part of that. Identity, the magic she was pouring into the clouds flowed outwards in a torrent, diffusing to the furthest reaches of the city. She no longer felt Cloudsdale under her hooves, she was Cloudsdale.

The sensation staggered her for a moment, then she accepted it and flexed her non-existent wings, straining to impose her will on the vast expanse of cloud and slowing the city's descent as two suburbs extended fans of cloud to either side. Then she threw every scrap of power she had into creating upward thrust. She'd once created a hypersonic lifting body ramjet out of pure weather magic, and driving the air flow underneath the city to push it up was a similar thing on a much bigger scale.

Her new awareness also let her sense the tens of thousands of wingless pegasi running around and panicking, not to mention her own class - abandoned by their dirigible, and huddled near the airship docks. The rate of descent had slowed, but she couldn't create enough thrust to arrest it and they were still dropping at far to high a speed, and running out of sky.

She needed to gain more control, more lift and calm ponies. Unfortunately Cloudsdale was about as aerodynamic as a brick... Wait, could she even do that? Well, there was only one way to find out. She shifted some of her power into moving the section of cloud she was on. It was like shoving a mountain with her bare hooves, but it moved, just as she'd sculpted the wings earlier.

She focussed a tiny amount of magic into a structured wind spell, and throughout the city, ponies heard a sensible sounding mare's voice. "Emergency recovery procedures now in effect. All ponies must secure themselves. Prepare for modular transformation. Converting Cloudsdale to aerodynamic flight mode."

Driven by her magic, pads of cloud complete with girth straps popped up like mushrooms across the length and breadth of Cloudsdale. As Scootaloo hoped the suggestion of doing something, anything brought them out of their panic. Ponies started strapping themselves, or helping foals or elderly ponies who were having trouble. Now she just had to pull off the rest of it. She'd flown the Marecross once, which is what had given her the idea. She pulled a pair of goggles once given to her by Rainbow Dash out of her subspace pocket manifesting

them on her forehead. She slid them down and was ready for action.

Sections of Cloudsdale shifted over one another, reconfiguring themselves as they formed a new shape, a broad wedge with a contoured underside, the bottom half of a lifting body. The buildings above spoiled the effect, but Scootaloo had probed the contents of the warehouse and had a plan for that. Its doors flew open and bolt after bolt of finely woven cirrus flew out under tightly controlled winds, flying up and unrolling to cover all of Cloudsdale in a TPing of the gods. However, rather than sinking down they stayed up, acting as pathways for Scootaloo's power, being supported and supporting it.

In a few more seconds they'd formed a sculpted dome to match the underside, the top half of a broad, wedge shaped lifting body. The big cloud generators had been shifted to the back and were running full tilt, not generating enough thrust to push that lift positive, but enough to help slow their rate of descent still further to a gentle powered glide. It also allowed her to focus her own weather magic on holding the whole thing together, and providing guidance.

Scootaloo now stood at the prow of the wedge, looking forward. Her awareness was entirely focussed on the clouds around her, at one with Cloudsdale as she poured her very soul into guiding it. If she'd been able to look at herself, she likely wouldn't have recognised herself, weather magic swirling in blue and white outlines around her, creating the highlights of a non-existent pair of wings and a horn.

They were still heading over Ghastly Gorge, almost following its line. If they fell across it, even Scootaloo's efforts wouldn't prevent the city from breaking its spine. She had to get away, either land it in the dessert north of Appleoosa, or bring it all the way round and go for the fields north of Ponyville. The first was easier, but it would leave them stranded well out in the dessert, far away from rescue, whereas the second would put them close to Ponyville and the Elements which could fix things, as well as a more hospitable environment for the already abused cloud-stuff.

She made the decision, it looked like she was going home. She gathered her will and altered the shape of the clouds slightly, and Cloudsdale tilted slightly and began to come round in a gentle curve. Much as she'd love to do a screaming turn, that would wreck the cloud structure and injure ponies. As she felt trepidation rise in the other ponies, she broadcast another message with a gentle breeze.

"Cloudsdale is making a circle to the north. Seeking safe landing zone. Please remain secured."

She'd turned to port to bring the city out over the open desert, and reconfigured the underside and wings to grab every extra pound of lift from the thermals rising off the hot sands. For the first time, Cloudsdale was actually rising. She took advantage of it by making a miles wide circle to grab as much height as possible before heading north.

The stress of sustaining the city and controlling its movement were

telling on her, but she refused to acknowledge it. Her body felt like it was burning with a cold fire, and it was getting harder to stand, but she was going to stay the course, whatever it took. The sense of Pansy's will merging along with hers, equally steadfast, kept her going, that and the sense that her friends were safe.

They swept north across the Everfree forest, and for once it seemed to help, the chaotic magic of the place flowing into her. She drew on it as she had everything that would sustain her a few moments more. In moments Ponyville came into sight, relatively unaffected by chaos, which implied Twilight had kept things contained around Canterlot. However, there was a problem. She'd flown everything from a Sopwith Camel to a Star Destroyer (New Republic) and instincts from decades of flight time said it wasn't going to get her clear over Ponyville. She had to find a few more seconds of hang time...

Her eyes lighted on the cotton candy clouds " those could work! Finding reserves she never realised she had, she reconfigured one of the cloud generators back to its original purpose and thrust it out on a pylon overhead, pointing at the clouds. It spat out tightly wadded balls of cloud, containing the Everfree magic she'd just absorbed, which hit the cotton candy clouds and exploded in a precise formation. Together they formed a ramp, wide enough to support Cloudsdale.

One last effort! she thought at Pansy, and got a wordless affirmation. Tweaking the trajectory of the descending city, she put everything she had into giving it one last shunt as they hit the edge of the ramp. She'd done the same on her scooter countless times, and that reflex served her well now. The city hit the ramp and shunted up, soaring over Ponyville with metres to spare.

But that last effort had hammered the pegasus at the centre of it all. She collapsed, wings sagging to the cloud as a wave of fatigue hit her. Even her head seemed heavier than usual. But she held onto consciousness by the skin of her teeth, or there was one last danger. As it was they would land in a high speed uncontrolled skid, and the entire city might topple or even roll over, or the cloud stuff might rip apart. There was no landing gear to lower, however there were other ways.

But she found just enough energy to make one more change. The under-surface shifted, sides coming down to form a flattened arch as the city reached only metres above the grass. The front edge was sculpted upwards to form a venturi that would scoop air underneath. The city kissed the ground and kept going, surfing along on the ground effect as the dome peeled away and formed a vast parachute behind it.

The city slowed, dropping as its speed went below stalling for the ground effect, but by that time they'd almost stopped. They finally came to a rest on the meadows beyond Ponyville and Scootaloo collapsed. "Thank you for flying Cloudsdale airlines..." she mumbled muzzily.

She was utterly spent, barely able to breath. The last time she'd felt like this, she'd been dying. When she glanced down at Pansy, even the gem at its heart seemed dull and lustreless. But she sensed rather than heard Pansy's proud whisper, Well done soldier. Well done... Her last memory before she faded out was of using her fading

awareness of the city to check on her friends and her class, and finding them safe. It was more than a fair trade.

\* \* \*

><p>She awoke, and heard the sounds of distinctly medical beeping in the background. The ceiling that came into focus had an equally medical appearance. Not Ponyville central, this looked more cloud based. That, and the lack of new loop memories hitting her implied something she wouldn't have put a plugged bit on, that her awakening came with a small 'A'.<p>

"I'm not dead?" she asked, voice barely above a whisper.

"Nope! But you gave it your best effort!" Rainbow Dash's voice responded. "Worst case of magical exhaustion the docs ever saw. Luckily Twilight came up with a way of transferring some of my magic into you, something about being kindred spirits. Though I don't know if even I'd have been crazy enough to try fly a city to safety!"

Her voice turned serious. "Seriously, thanks, kiddo... Scootaloo. I never thought even Discord would do something like that. I'd have never forgiven myself if saving Equestria came at the cost of destroying Cloudsdale... Oh, that's right! You don't know what was going on..."

She finally turned her head to look, and there were her parents -she had parents this time, not a sure thing â€" Twilight, and of course Rainbow Dash. She realised her neck was bare, and sent a frantic thought inwards. \_Pansy! Are you okay?\_

The Founders voice was weak, but steady. \_Fine, though don't expect anything above a light show for the rest of the loop. I dropped back into your subspace pocket when you fell unconscious. Besides, you have other things to worry about.\_

Dash had stepped back and let her parents in. There was a tearful reunion, with adequate helpings of hugs. However, she could sense there was something they weren't telling her. Plus they seemed to be avoiding looking at her forehead. It certainly ached, she must have hit her head on something because it felt like there was a lump there. The pain on her fore-leg was more easily explained.

Finally a nurse shooed them out, except for Twilight who said something about being on the Princesses' orders. When the nurse left, she turned to Scootaloo and said, "I'm sorry, so sorry you had to go through that. I had no idea this version of Discord would be so crazy-mean! He was more like Sombra, and when we finally hit him with the Elements he was completely destroyed. I don't know why, something different about his imprisonment, but that's not important right now."

"Well you could make it up to me by getting me a headache potion, I don't know how I hit my head so hard, but it hurts..." She managed to raise a hoof to her forehead, and found something she didn't expect.

"I convinced them not to say anything right away, that I was the best person to help you. You're just feeling a bad case of magic burn from overloading your horn. It should clear up in a day or so." A potion

plopped into existence on the bedside table and Scootaloo eagerly scooped it up, popping the cork and gulping it down.

"How..." The potion took away her aches and pains, but the question remained.

"You pushed your powers to their very limits and beyond. Your Device is at least as powerful as a single Element, part alicorn magic and even part chaos as the alicorn in question was created by Discord's power. That was probably why you could affect things, his magic recognised it's own."

"Did I get a cutie-mark too?" Scootaloo automatically glanced towards her covered flank.

"A cloud with a rainbow contrail."

"Oh foaly horse-apples! How many ponies know I flew the city?"

"Language!" Twilight shook her head. "Pretty much all of Cloudsdale. Every-pony felt your weather magic flowing through the clouds, and it was easy to trace back to the source. It was probably the only reason they got you to the hospital in time to save your life. They're talking about asking you to be Princess of Cloudsdale, with a statue even."

Scootaloo winced. "This just keeps getting better and better. Can you imagine what Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom will say? Not just the local ones, but the loopers? Please, you have to promise that you won't tell them. It resets when the loop does, right?"

Twilight nodded. "Yes. However, I want to add a proviso. If they become alicorns too, then I can tell them."

Scootaloo thought for a moment, then said, "Okay, but it has to be all of them, Diamond Tiara too. She's one of us now, and I don't want her feeling left out."

"Agreed." Twilight nodded. "As for your friends here and now, have faith in them. I'm sure they'll support you too. And I'll be here to help you when your magic recovers. For now, sleep. You've earned it."

\* \* \*

><p>Addendum (Nikas)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Before the hoof stomping could begin in earnest Princess Luna stepped forward, wings spread for attention. "Before all can honour these Six Heroes, there is one more that must join their number in being recognized."<p>

Luna lowered her wings. She wasn't using the full Royal Canterlot Voice, but enough of it to be clearly heard in even to the ponies standing outside the hall. "When Discord found his scheme thwarted he sought to wreck a terrible carnage in revenge. He stole the wings off all the pegasi of Cloudsdale and set the city itself to fall. Certain

whom the plummet did not slay the uncontrolled mixing of weather magics would."

Luna paused, not all had heard how dire Discord's final acts had been, most having been confined to a relatively small area and relegated by tails to vicious pranks. "But like the Legions of her ancestors one Filly would loudly shout NEIGH to the Beast's foul plan. None would come to harm while she still drew breath. So she pushed her weather magic and by her blood and will forged a miracle. She protected and comforted the fear of all in Cloudsdale, bringing the city in for a landing so that there was only one serious injury. That being herself, stretching her life and magic beyond any sane limits in the protection of others."

Celestia hid a smile, Luna was truly a master storyteller still. Her duskier sister continued, "Those who saw her said the magic glowed like a falling star. But her story would not end in the tragedy of such. Many laboured to heal her, and today I ask that Scootaloo Windfall, Protectress of the Open Skies step forth, to accept the thanks of those she saved."

The main doors opened once more, and a filly alicorn stepped forth. The Pegasi and Nocturne Guards at the beginning of the aisle bowed deeply. Scootaloo had put her hoof down on more frilly outfits and adornment. Fortunately Luna had agreed and she was dressed in an outfit more like one of the Pegasi founders. Though more historically inclined ponies would notice the styling was closer to Private Pansy's than Commander Hurricane's. Her attempt to bow to the Diarachs was interrupted by Celestia's raised hoof. "On this day you do not bow Scootaloo, we bow to you in thanks for saving Our little Ponies when we could not."

Then to the shock of the herd, the Diarachs did just that. Then upon raising Luna's magic put a crown on her that somewhat resembled an open pegasi city-state helm. Presciently Rainbow Dash had been placed to Scootaloo's left in the ceremony. The older mare nudged her with a wing, "Roll with the turbulence Scoots. Like Pinkie once told me parties like this are an excuse for everypony to celebrate they got to live through the danger."

This advice was nearly undone when Celestia unveiled TWO windows in the Hall of Harmony. The first showed the stylized Bearers defeating Discord, the later engulfed in a mushroom cloud explosion. The artist was good, you could subtly see the various parts spread out at the edges of the blast. High above was... the lower surface of a lifting body?

With a sinking stomach Scootaloo turned to the next window, which in a lower corner had Discord's defeat. The main area of the window was taken up by the reshaped Cloudsdale, Pegasus represented by wings turning to wisps of clouds. Her preascension self was standing like a figurehead on the prow. The artist even worked the glowing of magic to suggest her current horn, and her wing 'cloud wisps' were larger and more solid looking. The impression that hers were growing and the artist was capturing the moment of ascension.

Scootaloo fought off the urge to facehoof. "The Crusaders are never going to let me live this window down."

\* \* \*



><p>43.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay," Diamond said, nibbling on some lettuce. "I'm pretty sure this was some kind of minor variant, just so you know."<p>

"Join the club," Scootaloo muttered.

"Yes, we've heard you," Diamond replied. "It's my turn now. I'm not just the daughter of a very rich pony now, you know, I'm a Princess!"

"And?" Applebloom, Sweetie Belle and Nyx chorused.

"...okay, point made." Diamond nodded, before pursing her lips. A little giggle escaped in spite of her best efforts.

"Okay, okay, get to the action already!" Scootaloo said.

"Right. Anyway. So." Sitting down, Diamond looked along the row of... her four sisters, this time. (That was going to take some getting used to, and then probably a lot more un-getting-used-to.)

"At first, it was fairly normal stuff. Just Twilight, Spike and I were Awake, so I spent a fair bit of the early loop comparing notes with him about telepathy. We were pretty sure I was up to P-3 or 4 on the scale, but that's not all that surprising with the amount of practise I've been getting."

She waited for them to nod their acknowledgement.

"The other project I had was basically trying to find some good, high quality crystals which might be suitable for a lightsaber."

"Isn't that my sister's thing?" Sweetie asked, then blushed. "Er, my normal sister, I mean."

"Ah'm confused..." Applebloom frowned. "Are y'all all Apples now, or am ah a Sparkle?"

"We may be getting off topic," Tiara reminded them. "Anyway. The reason was that Spike mentioned he'd like a spare, and I wanted to... well, do something nice for him. It's that whole thing with a gift you've put effort into, which isn't exactly a strong point of mine."

"Eh, you're getting better," Applebloom said critically. "Though, t' be honest, y'all sharing your allowance helps too, we plumb don't have that much buying power most loops."

Diamond looked down. "Thanks," she said, with a little catch in her voice. "It's nothing."

Scootaloo made a sound of disagreement. "It's not nothing. It certainly helps me, for a start..."

The pink alicorn nodded wordlessly.

"So," she said after a few seconds, her voice a little stronger. "Father and I went off to the frozen north on a skiing holiday I'd asked for, so I could get a good look at somewhere that might be promising. And while we were there, the Crystal Empire returned not a furlong away from us. Of course I knew it came back, but it was so \_close\_..."

\* \* \*

><p>"This is amazing," Filthy Rich said, looking around the streets of the Empire. "It's like something from a story book â€" an empire from a thousand years ago!"<p>

"Yeah," Tiara replied, trying to be as enthusiastic as she \_should\_ be feeling. But there was that continuous nagging ache in her mind, as the depression and gloom of the local ponies wore away at her empathic sense.

Okay. How did it go normally? Twilight said that the first time they were here, Sombra turned up after a few days, and if they were feeling combative then the Loopers tended to use that time for setup.

"Excuse me," Rich tried to strike up a conversation with a nearby crystal pony. "Do you know if there's someone we can get information from?"

The pony looked back at him with dull eyes.

"Where did you come from?"

No response.

"We should try a library or something, Dad," Diamond suggested.

"Good idea."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right..." Rich said, frowning at the volume of local economic history he was reading. "So this <em>is</em> the Crystal Empire. I heard of it once, but I'm pretty sure it was a bedtime story..."

Tiara frowned, trying to glean more from the scraps of information she knew about the loop. There was something about a... festival? Granted, normally when she visited the Empire it was either visiting Cadence and Shining or going to the Games, but...

\_...a blue crystal\_

\_shaped like the heart...\_

An image drifted through her mind, and she squinted for a moment as the psi-backlash hit.

Being a P-4 wasn't exactly making it easy to concentrate.

But if the ponies around here were all amnesiac, then maybe it would

help them to have something to jog their memories.

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you sure you can do this, crystal?" Rich asked, still a little confused.<p>

"Sure," Tiara replied, as they heaved the big lump of gemstone onto a hard surface. "My cutie mark's a diamond tiara, remember? Diamonds have to be cut. Maybe that's what it means â€" being a high-class jeweller."

(That had actually happened once. Though she'd spent about half the loop being robbed by assorted comically bad robbers, and the other half talking with the various superhero-themed versions of her fellow Loopers to get the gems \_back.\_)

"I think it means you're precious," Rich said, smiling down at her.

"Thanks, Dad," she replied, smiling back. Then she turned to the big gemstone, and thought hard.

Scratching her ear, she slipped Cubic Zirconium out of her 'pocket. \_"Points of weakness?"\_ she subvocalized.

Zirconium might have been a 'mere' Intelligent Device, not a pony-in-a-computer like the Founders had become, but the Device was still very good in certain specialized areas â€" most of them relating to combat or analysis. A holographic map of points appeared in front of her vision.

Two of them flashed, and Diamond nodded. Not all that far off where she'd have picked herself...

She turned her back. Winding up, she delivered an almighty buck to the first point, and cracks spread throughout the crystal. The second one, and it shattered into dust â€" apart from a lump about half her size, shaped like a heart.

Rich gaped.

"Ta-da," Tiara said, grinning.

After a moment more, her father bent down and hugged her.

"I'm sorry I didn't really think you could do it," he whispered. "I think all parents hate thinking about their children growing up."

"No, don't," she protested, blushing.

"\_You\_ did that, Diamond," he replied. "And I can't ignore it. Well done."

Diamond leant into the embrace, smiling.

After about another ten seconds, they broke apart. Diamond was still blushing, but beneath that her battle-hardened mind was analyzing the sensations coming through her telepathy.

From a series of depressed nothings with the occasional faint memory, they were becoming stronger and clearer â€" near her, at least. Probably the operative phrase was more like "near the crystal".

"The Crystal Heart?" one crystal pony whispered, looking at the blue creation. After a moment, she blinked and looked away, as though she shouldn't have looked.

Another walked slowly up to look at it, and another stab of half-remembered joy rushed through Tiara's head.

Then everything else was swept away under a black tide of defeat and despair.

"Diamond!" Rich cried, as she crumpled to the grass. "Are you okay?"

"Oh, buck," she managed, struggling to think. "He's early."

The happiness that had been starting to return collapsed, and Tiara felt adrift for a moment in a sea of foreign emotion before her training returned.

\_You are yourself. Anchor your shield on yourself. You are immovable. You are diamond-hard.\_

\_I will not break.\_

Clarity returned, and with a strong pulse of effort she stabilized the mental shield.

All the local ponies had fallen to the ground, she saw as she opened her eyes. Her father was still standing, not being sensitized to the magic, but she could see in his eyes that he was starting to feel it as well.

Hooves clopped quietly on the cobbles.

\*\*\*"Crystal,"\*\* King Sombra stated, approaching. \*\*\*"Give up. Crystal."\*\*

Diamond stood up.

"No."

Black magic roared, this time directed straight at her. It had no physical presence, but slammed into her shield like a hammer.

\*\*\*"Crystal MINE! All MINE!"\*\*

"Get away from my daughter!" Rich shouted, charging towards the ancient unicorn.

Sombra's eyes flicked to Filthy, and the blaze of dark magic doubled. One prong kept battering Diamond's failing shields, the other lashed towards Filthy Rich.

"No."

The second spike of black magic splintered on another shield.

Diamond felt a splitting headache come on, as she maintained a second mental wall " this one covering her father.

"You're not a king," she managed to say. "Rulers have to be worthy."

\*\*"All my slaves!" \*\*Sombra ranted, his magic growing still stronger.

"No."

This time, it wasn't Diamond speaking.

The first crystal pony to have noticed their ersatz crystal heart shook her head, focusing with difficulty on Sombra. "Not yours."

\*\*"I rule here! All crystals MINE!"\*\*

On the last word, his magic gained a physical push. Diamond went flying backwards to hit the gem, the impact wooshing all the breath out of her lungs and leaving her fighting to breathe.

"We're not yours," another crystal pony said. This time, the tone of voice was firmer.

"You're not our king."

More and more blasts of dark magic coursed out from Sombra's horn, stabbing towards each speaker as they raised their voice.

Diamond was still managing to shield all the targets, though her head felt like it was on fire, her back ached and she was starting to feel not all there.

And she was still hearing thoughts. More and more of them, as the crystal ponies rejected Sombra one by one.

\_We don't have to listen to you...\_

"...and we don't want you here!"

There was a rush of warmth, and then everything went black.

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you alright?"<p>

Diamond's eyes wavered open.

Twilight, Spike and her father were all standing above her. The scrunched up sheets both below and on top of her made her realize she was in a bed.

"Thank Celestia you're okay!" Rich said, blinking back tears. "I was so worried."

"We all were," Twilight said. "I have to say, I didn't see this coming..."

"What happened?" Diamond asked, then shook her head. "I know about Sombra showing up, and the ponies saying they didn't want him, but I passed out."

Twilight paused, looking towards Filthy Rich. "Sorry, Rich, I think I might need to explain some things best kept secret. Feel free to ask her afterwards, but I'm afraid that legally I can't explain with you in the room."

Rich looked unhappy, but reluctantly left.

"Okay, spill," Tiara said once her father was out of the door.

"Well," Twilight started, smiling mysteriously. "First of all, the rejection of Sombra by the Crystal Ponies seems to have banished him from the Empire entirely. I'll handle that more permanently later," she added, reassuring Diamond that it would be taken care of.

"What else?"

"Right. That heart you made?" Twilight levitated up a bag, and opened it. A fine, sand-like dust of blue crystal grains hissed out.

"This is about as much as was left," she said. "Sorry. It couldn't handle the strain of being forced to do what the \_real\_ crystal heart was designed for."

"Also," Spike added, "you've gone up about five P-rankings in one go from the overstrain. I'm keeping you blocked now, but you may need some quick help to get your shields back to normal or you're going to hear every thought in eight furlongs."

"And, finally..." Twilight held up a mirror.

Diamond Tiara stared at the alicorn filly lying in the bed.

"...oh."

\* \* \*

><p>"So she knew all about you?" Applebloom asked.<p>

"Pretty much," Tiara said. "I asked her and Spike to keep it secret, because I really didn't want you guys jealous of me. Stupid, really..."

"Wait." Nyx pointed a hoof at her. "Does this mean you basically stole Cadence' job?"

"Nope." Tiara shook her head. "Nope, nope, nope. It took me weeks to get away from the Empire because of all the hero worship. Cadence is welcome to it."

\* \* \*

><p>43.4<p>

"...so, yeah," Applebloom finished. "I disabled a magical superweapon that was built to kill civilizations and harvested science from it."

There was general agreement that this was neat.

"Okay, what now?" Nyx asked, finishing off the last of an orange.

"Dunno, really..." Scootaloo admitted. "I mean, the whole cutie mark thing is kind of moot at this point."

"That's a neat word," Sweetie said. "Moot. It has a nice sound."

"Moot," Diamond tried.

"Moot."

"It totally doesn't sound like a word anymore," Nyx pointed out.

"Yeah, true. Okay, where were we?"

"Well..." Applebloom trailed off. "We're princesses now, right? What are we princesses \_of?\_"

There was a long pause.

"I think I'm the Princess of the Night," Nyx hazarded. "Possibly."

"We could just be too young for it, you know," Diamond Tiara pointed out.

The other three exchanged glances.

\*\*\*"CUTIE MARK-\*\*\*

The apple cores, orange peels, cupcake wrappers, filly alicorns and nut shells went flying in the roar of gale-like sound.

"Ow..." Nyx muttered from her position on top of a tapestry hanger.

Scootaloo rubbed her ears as she picked herself up. "Heh... Royal Canterlot Voice. Forgot about that..."

Nyx spread her wings and floated down as the others righted themselves.

"Right, no more CMC team shouts until we learn how to turn that off!" Applebloom said fervently, picking bits of nut shell out of her mane.

"Sounds good. Er, or not..."

"So, without the shout, what we were going to say was: Cutie Mark Crusader princess job finders," Applebloom continued.

"That works."

\* \* \*

><p>With some trepidation, Twilight opened the door to the room where her... daughters... had been spending the day.<p>

"Hi, girls," she said, looking around. "Everything okay?"

"Hello!" the five fillies chorused.

"Yeah, we were mostly swapping origin stories," Applebloom said, subtly indicating her wings and horn.

Twilight absorbed the message. "Okay, then." She stepped further into the room, and closed the door.

A guard made a noise of protest.

"Oh, hush," she said back at the closed door. "I don't think they're exactly likely to try to assassinate me, captain."

She turned back to the fillies, firing off a privacy spell. "So you're all alicorns? I knew about Scootaloo and Diamond, but not Sweetie or Applebloom."

"Yeah, well..." Sweetie kicked the floor. "I kinda ascended in a loop where the anchor was not-you. Arda."

"Arda has an Anchor now?" Twilight asked, interested. "Last time I was there, we didn't see any."

"It's Gandalf," Sweetie said by way of explanation. "And I kinda redeemed Melkor."

Twilight blinked.

"Yeah, that's about how OlÃ³rin reacted afterwards," Sweetie said, holding up her hooves to frame the image. "All 'well, I'm too experienced to show it but I'm also completely flabbergasted'."

The others giggled.

"I only Ascended that loop with Gilda as the Element of Honesty, and I was too embarrassed to tell you," Applebloom said, looking down. "Sorry."

"It's okay, no harm done." Twilight shrugged. "Right. Well, since you're all new to alicornification-

"Hey!" Nyx said, huffing.

"...or at least most of you are," Twilight corrected. "Nyx, you might need to help me help the others with what being an alicorn means. And I've still got the job of running the country, so I might not have as much time to help you as I'd like."



"No problem, momma. I'll show them what's what," Nyx said with a salute. Then cracked up.

"Hey, which one of us is going to be in charge of leisure activities?" Scootaloo asked. "I mean, that's a princess-type job, right?"

"Dibs!" Sweetie said.

"No way!" Scootaloo whirled to face her. "I challenge you to prank war over the title of Princess of Entertainment!"

"I support Sweetie's bid," Diamond announced.

"Well, I've clearly got my hooves full this Loop," Twilight said with a sigh. "Try not to wreck too many rooms. Oh, and there's a banquet an hour after sun-down, so make sure you're cleaned up and wearing your regalia."

"We have regalia?" the fillies chorused.

"Check the Loop memories, it'll be there somewhere." Twilight turned to the door. "Sorry, I really have to go. I'll try and make sure there's more free time on later days."

\* \* \*

><p>All things considered, the banquet could have been a lot worse.<p>

The food fight had been almost expected, which was why the first course had been mostly foods served more for their suitability as throwing weapons than as royal fare, and the nobles walking out in disgust were mostly the snooty ones anyway.

Or, at least, that was Twilight's story and she was sticking to it.

The tree sap had been a bit much, though. And she'd been looking forward to the cake, so seeing it spread over the wall (and part of the ceiling) when Applebloom tried to get herself a slice with telekinesis hadn't helped either.

This would be so much easier if I could hand half of it off to Cadence...\_

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

All Crusader-princesses this time. I couldn't cram any more in with a crowbar...

43.1: Silmareillion.

>43.2: Cloudsdale Down. (This is something of a minor variant loop, of course.)<br>43.3: Again, a minor variant. And I think that's everything Diamond Tiara is good at at once - jewellery, leadership, diamond-hard shields and "diamond in the rough" rapid development under duress.

>43.4: Caution: alicorn crusaders present. Hope you like Tree Sap.<p>

## 46. Chapter 46

### 44.1

"Right," Twilight said, her royal accoutrements in a pile against the wall. "I'm fairly sure the way this loop would go in absence of our being Loopers would involve severe paperwork trouble on my part, the five of you feeling neglected, and complete chaos as you tried to act out. Possibly ending in Lunar time-outs."

"...hate to admit it, but that sounds about right," Scootaloo said with a wince.

"So. To solve this, I've basically created half a dozen body doubles, and I'm going to use them for paperwork. Understand this, girls." She looked each of them in the eye, one by one. "However it came about, we're family for now. I might not necessarily be any good at it, and I know I can't replace your parents â€" in Nyx's case because I always am her parent," she added with pedantic correctness. "But I'll do the best I can. Let me know if there's anything I'm doing wrong."

The five fillies nodded, solemnly.

Twilight returned the nod. "Thank you."

Then she formed an illusion in mid air. "Now, the first thing I think you need to learn â€" while you're all here to learn it â€" is Star Swirl's last spell. It's technically tricky, but you should get the hang of it eventually â€" and it makes it possible to go back from alicorn to any breed you want, so you won't accidentally get stuck in alicorn mode for a loop."

"Does this mean that new princesses aren't immune to homework?" Applebloom asked.

"It does indeed." Twilight paused. "Well, in all honesty you probably know most of what you'd be taught, so I think I can limit it to politics, magic and so on."

"That's something, at least..." Diamond Tiara sighed.

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo fidgeted in her regalia.<p>

She still wasn't used to it. Heavy bronze shoes, a presence chain (something Twilight had told them she'd adopted from one of her brothers' ideas, since it meant you didn't have to wear both a peytral and a coronet) and, for the occasion, a bronzed saddle.

Still, at least bronze wasn't quite as silly a metal for jewelery as the solid steel Applebloom was wearing...

"The firstborn child of the Gryphon Emperor, lady Gerta Cottomenes!" an usher announced. (She thought he was called Hard Voice, which

certainly fit.) He then walked into the room, and turned. "The daughters of Queen Twilight Sparkle, the Princesses of Equestria. Applebloom, Diamond Tiara, Nyx, Scootaloo and Sweetie Belle."

The young gryphon who walked through the door after him seemed about as overwhelmed as they were, which was nice at least.

"Uh... hi," she said, then winced. "Sorry. Greetings from the Heir-elect of the Gryphon-"

"Nah, the first one was better," Nyx said with a wink. "Don't worry, we don't care much about formality."

The usher looked quietly scandalized.

"Oh. Er, okay..." Gerta frowned, thinking, then gasped. "Oh! Sorry, I forgot, I have to present a gift to the Heir Apparent of Equestria. It's a goodwill thing, I think..."

She tailed off, as the five alicorn fillies exchanged glances.

"Girls?" Sweetie said. "Huddle."

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, who the buck is the heir?" Scootaloo whispered. "Did we ever work it out?"<p>

"Nope," Nyx replied, looking sour. "I don't know what kind of succession law we have here yet, so that's no help."

"Can't we assume it's the firstborn?" Diamond Tiara asked.

"Tiara, if y'all remember that far back ah'm astonished." Applebloom shrugged. "Far as ah can tell, Twilight just treated us all equal. Even before we all Awoke. Ah've got no idea who was born first."

"Hang on a sec." Nyx stuck her head out towards the gryphon fledgeling, who was looking a little lost. "We might be a while, feel free to grab some juice or something."

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay," Twilight said, sitting in the centre of a semicircle of filly alicorns. "Star Swirl's final spell is one of his most impressive â€" and, for the majority of loopers, one of the most useful. The basic idea is related to relative amounts of earth pony, pegasus and unicorn magic."<p>

"I think I know what you mean," Applebloom hazarded. "After the loop reset which turned me back from an alicorn to an earth pony filly, Cookie could still detect a bit of pegasus magic and a bit of unicorn magic."

"That's right," Twilight nodded. "Technically, once you've ascended and become an alicorn â€" or, for Nyx, Celestia and Luna, once you're born one â€" your soul is permanently that of an alicorn in a few subtle ways. You always have a tiny fragment of all three. What Star

Swirl's spell does, when used right, is to change the relative amounts. It can't create magic from nowhere â€" and trying leads to... interesting results..." Twilight remembered the time she'd accidentally scrambled her friends' talents, and winced. "But since you all have a little of the appropriate magic already, you can just play around with the amounts to turn yourself from alicorn to a different pony type and back."

"So..." Scootaloo raised a hoof. "I can't normally cast magic..."

"Yes, I'm afraid that the step of going to a different breed of pony will always involve reascending to alicorn, and then undoing the spell again, so bear that in mind. I think your Devices all have the capacity for stealth spells, though?"

Nods.

"Okay. Nyx, would you care to demonstrate?"

"Sure!" Nyx concentrated, flared her horn, and her wings disappeared. "Ta-da!"

"Now reascend, please."

The unicorn paused, then reached into her mane. The odd clattering sound could be heard.

"Nyx?" Twilight asked, concerned.

"I haven't needed my pendant in, what, centuries! I forgot where it is, okay?"

There was a crash.

"Never mind..." Nyx withdrew her hoof, a gibbous-moon pendant in cosmic spectrum stone dangling from it. "Okay, here we go."

The room got momentarily darker, and Nyx was back to being an alicorn.

"...okay, what just happened?" Applebloom asked. "That didn't seem, well, possible."

"My magic's kinda like that," Nyx admitted. "Sometimes it makes unlight."

"Hay, before we forget," Scootaloo asked, as Twilight started chalking magical formulae on the board. "What are we princesses of?"

"Nothing yet," Twilight answered absently. "I'm the ruler right now, and you're all considered too young and inexperienced."

"That sucks," Sweetie said with a pout.

"I'm sure we'll find our destinies eventually," Diamond Tiara replied, then paused and put her head in her forehooves. "And now I sound like you lot..."

Applebloom stuck her tongue out.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, I'm going to <em>love<em> hearing the reason behind this one..." Twilight said, raising an eyebrow and keeping her hooves from sticking to the floor.

"Well," Applebloom started, shuffling her feet. Or trying to. They made \_schlup\_ sounds when she moved them. "I thought that Princess o' technology would be a good specialization, so I decided to try inventin' fast food."

"I'm afraid I don't see how that's technology..."

"Well, the technology came in with the potato cannon, and the squash racket, and the maple syrup flamethrower." Applebloom hovered over a fried splinter of potato. "It actually tastes quite nice. Sweet."

Twilight plucked it out of the air, and nibbled on it. "I see. Well, I imagine it may be an acquired taste..."

"Yeah, true. You get enough tree sap as often as we do and you kinda develop a palate for it." Applebloom shrugged.

"Be that as it may, we do need to get the wall repaired. Hypersonic potatoes aren't very good for the stonework, and I think you may have freaked out a couple of peckish gryphon guards."

Something exploded a short distance away.

Twilight looked in the direction of the noise. "Any idea what that was?"

Applebloom drew a circle in the puddles of syrup. "You know as well as I do that that was probably one of my sisters."

With a sigh, Twilight nodded. "You're right, of course. Out of interest, how does Cheerilee cope with you lot?"

"Normally we don't have crazy new magic powers to explore?" Applebloom volunteered.

\* \* \*

><p>44.2<p>

"...well, that's that adage proven true," Twilight concluded as she closed a medical dictionary. "Modern magic really does have a cure for everything \_except\_ the common cold."

Spike sniffled.

"Or perhaps we should call it the \_un\_common cold, because this clearly isn't a normal rhinovirus," she continued. "Maybe Fluttershy could help?"

"I dunno," Spike said thickly, rubbing his nose. "Worth a try-"

He inhaled massively.

Twilight, suddenly having a moment of premonition, dove for cover.

\* \* \*

><p>"WA-CHOO!"<p>

Ponies in the market turned to look at where the loud sneeze had come from.

They saw a large dragon tail poking out of the library wall, a large dragon leg sticking out one window, and a large head having smashed through the top floor of the building.

Roseluck cleared her throat, coughed, and then screamed.

That started the Standard Ponyville Stampede Mark IV.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, dis idn't gonna be fun," Spike muttered, dabbing at his streaming eyes as he shrunk back to normal size. "I tink my age-shifting's on de fritz."<p>

"I'd noticed," Twilight commented, standing up again from behind the counter. "Perhaps it would be better if we went to see Fluttershy now, because I don't think the building can take another sudden dragon expansion."

"Sounds good to me..." Spike felt another sneeze coming on, and clamped his claws on his nose to hold it in.

Twilight translated his look of desperation to mean "hurry up", and fired off the teleport.

\* \* \*

><p>With a loud crunch-crash-tinkle, half a tree landed on Celestia's dresser.<p>

The Princess of the Day looked up from her Daring Do book. "Oh, dear. Spike had better have a good explanation for that."

She turned the page. "Ah, Azihuatl again. She does have something of a perennial problem with him..."

The broken crockery could wait until she'd finished the book. It was quite engrossing.

\* \* \*

><p>"...well, on the plus side, at least you missed Fluttershy's house?" Twilight tried.<p>

Spike put his enormous head in his equally large hands.

\* \* \*

><p>44.3 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Wait!" A reporter ran up, cameraman following, who locked his aim on Twilight. "This is Joseph James, reporting live from King's Metal Reclamation in Robley, where police are in a tense stand-off with an alien... pony?"<p>

"Actually, I'm pretty relaxed," Twilight responded, "and it's more of a stand around."

She manifested a plush cushion and sat down. "Any-pony else want one? Okay, now it's a sit down. Actually, you talk to the Inspector over there, if I'm going to be on camera, I'll get changed."

A cloth screen appeared between them and her, and you could hear her humming. After a few seconds, the reporter turned away and had the cameraman focus on the police officer. "Sir, who are you and what's been happening?"

That worthy was actually feeling pretty grateful towards the purple pony, as her distraction had given him time to think so he wouldn't come out looking like a complete idiot.

"Inspector Burns, Merseyside Constabulary. We were sent here in response to a call by a worker here that an invader had appeared and was about to attack. He'd included smart-phone video, so we took the report seriously. We were sent here to rescue any survivors and contain the alien threat."

The screen vanished, and Twilight stood there, now clad in her business-mare outfit. "I'm not a threat, though I'm told I do get tetchy first thing in the morning before breakfast. My assistant Spike says it's because I pull all nighters and don't snack. However, they arrived and handled the situation with diligence, dispatch, dedication, and... a lot of other good things, at least one of which should begin with 'D'... sorry, that kind of got away from me, carry on."

The fact that the pony was now available to talk to made Joseph switch his attention.

"So who and what are you, if not an invader? There have been reports of a crea... individual matching your description appearing in Japan and Brazil. Was that you, and if so, what is your purpose here?"

"Right now? Delivering that load of scrap spacecraft parts I collected from orbit for recycling. In general, helping out. I was in Japan and Brazil, and now I'm here in the United Kingdom and likely to stay here for a while, if I'm allowed. In general, I want to help out. This planet has had a rough time even without the invaders, and I hope by generating wealth and then using it and my powers to aid people, I can both alleviate that and at the same time demonstrate my good will. As to who and what I am, I've got a prepared statement here..."

Her horn glowed and her business briefcase style saddlebags twitched as she pulled out some note cards. A pair of wire rimmed glasses appeared on her muzzle, and she consulted her notes.

"My name is Twilight Sparkle, and I come from the land of Equestria on the planet Equus. It is a land of sentient ponies like myself, and home to many other races. And I was originally a unicorn. There are two other main races of pony, earth ponies with strength and earth related powers, and pegasi with flight and cloud control."

A projected image appeared above her horn showing a street scene from Ponyville, and then Canterlot. Both were from a first person point of view, with Spike waling out in front of her and pointing excitedly at a bakery.

"I am not affiliated with those monsters you call invaders, and did not even know of their existence until after my arrival here; which was ultimately an accident, though something they indirectly caused."

The scene changed to her study at the palace, littered with astronomical charts, books, blackboards with arithmantic notations and other paraphernalia. Princess Celestia was in front of her, looking at a star chart.

"I am a magical researcher and scholar, the protégé of Princess Celestia, co-ruler of Equestria, and an alicorn, one of the rare ponies who combines the traits of all three races, and trust me, the whole is far greater than the sum of the parts. I act as something of a trouble shooter for her. I'm also well regarded as an astronomer, with multiple papers on both subjects to my credit. The ponies working on the Search for Extra-Equestrian Intelligence project had detected strong super-luminal energy surges from this part of the sky, and I was part of the team trying to discover their origin. I now believe it was an alien mother ship exploding.

"I developed a new generation of scrying spell using teleportation techniques that had interstellar range and could return images in real time, something of a breakthrough. Unfortunately when I tested it, it malfunctioned, due to the presence of a recently evaporated quantum singularity in the system. It overpowered the focussing array and caused an inversion. Rather than bringing the image to me, I was transported to the source of the image.

"Thankfully, I was in visual range of Earth when I emerged, and the residual atmosphere that had been carried with me could be contained by a forcefield, so I could survive long enough to get my bearings and teleport to the surface. However, it wasn't exactly my best landing. I was in shock and the sudden demand on my powers had made me semi-comatose, I had to have been radiating thaumic energy like mad."

Her projection started to play a view of what had happened from her point of view.

"When I started to recover my senses, I got it back under control, but by then a group of military types had showed up, complete with a psychic, who immediately tried to mind control me. I chucked her out of my mind and pushed her away. I tried to communicate, tell them I didn't want to hurt anybody, just wanted help, but when I tried to cast a translation spell, they decided I was attacking and tried to blast me.



"I cast a sleep spell at the first one to do so, but then they all started, and while I was trying to block them, one must have used stealth technology to sneak up on me and use an electric stunner to knock me out. When I woke up, I was in a big glass chamber, with some sort of suppressive field making it hard to think. The invaders apparently use psychic powers too, and the scientists had some sort of suppressor.

"While the magic I use is different, it is related, and they were interfering with my powers. I resisted, they started trying to crush me to see how much power I could put out, and I refused to be crushed. No-pony really knows how the apotheosis works, but rarely, a regular pony at the very limits of their will and ability to survive can metamorphose into an alicorn."

She flexed her wings. "As a unicorn I was in the top bracket of magic users in both power and versatility, both by talent and dedicated training and research. Alicorns are many times as powerful, and as a newly ascended one, my powers are still growing. The princesses Celestia and Luna are functionally immortal and can control the orbits of celestial bodies, and I'm fairly sure by the time I get back I'll be able to pinch hit for them if they need a holiday.

"Anyhow, I escaped, copied some memories from their chief scientist, something I'm not proud of, but I desperately needed information about this place and she would presumably be the smartest one there. I found out among other things that she was ultimately going to do the same to me, though unlike my harmless spell, her methods involved driving metal probes into my brain and copying the electrical signals. The subject doesn't live long, and not with anything resembling a mind."

She wrinkled her muzzle.

"Obviously, I got out of there, and had to decide what to do next. I've already managed to send a message scroll back to Equus bare-horned, and will probably be able to follow it in a few days, though I may need to build a focussing array to get precision targeting. But I also found out what kind of stuff you guys had been through, and I wanted to help. But rather than just wandering around, randomly zapping things better, I decided to do it the hard way.

"The business I've set up, Nightlight Industries gives me a legal identity, since as a non-human I'm not covered by regular civil law, and I intend to use my powers within a framework of business to generate money for charitable purposes, and give a structured way to ask for my help directly. Which reminds me, half of the profit from this first sale of orbital salvage will be going to charity through the Nightlight Foundation. The rest will be invested in some other projects I thought up, which should ultimately create even more money for aid work.

"As well as that, I also have dozens of slightly used satellites and upper stages that could probably be reconditioned with a repair spell or some shop work. Their original owners get first refusal on my selling them at 100,000 pounds a pop, and as my advert stated, free delivery anywhere inside geostationary orbit. If the original owners don't want them, I'll put them up for general sale, I'm sure I can

get better than scrap metal values from a collector who wants their own satellite."

"I also asked Princess Celestia not to send anyone after me, as I know you people are still leery of aliens. And that's the other reason I'm doing this, to make it clear, not by fancy words but by deeds that my people are not like those monsters you've been fighting. And that's all I have to say. Thank you for your time. In the manner of friendly aliens from your fictional works, live long and..."

She held up a hoof and then looked at it, frowning. "Huh, didn't think that one through..."

That got a laugh from most of the people there. She gave them a grin and teleported away.

It wasn't until some time after that Joseph James found the business card for Nightlight Industries in his pocket with a written note about calling to set up a proper interview.

\* \* \*

><p>44.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight walked into the bar with a haggard expression, giving Macintosh a brief nod as she slumped onto a stool. She stared at the mug he placed in front of her for a moment.<p>

"...I walked in on Spike and Rarity."

Macintosh blinked, pulled the mug away, and replaced it with something stronger.

Twilight finally started drinking, staring into the distance. "I mean... he's basically my \_son.\_ How am I supposed to feel about this? I'm happy for him and Rarity to be sure, but..."

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetie Belle walked into the bar, blushing furiously as she cast an age spell. Macintosh raised an eyebrow, placing a bit of watered down cider in front of her.<p>

"...I walked in on Spike and Rarity."

Macintosh nodded, pushing the mug closer to the now technically adult mare.

"...It's weird, you know?" Sweetie Belle sipped her drink. "I mean... Sometimes, I wish I could 'wake up' as a slightly older pony, but other times I get some sort of cootie fever..."

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis stepped into the bar, swishing her tail grumpily as she located a stool. She managed a brief, terse smile as Macintosh slid a glass of cider in front of her, before sighing.<p>

"...I walked in on Spike and Rarity."

Macintosh raised an eyebrow, gesturing for her to go on.

"I don't understand why they were so embarrassed," she continued, nursing her mug. "I mean, I was only in there to grab a comb, and it was only sex..."

\* \* \*

><p>Cadance was positively giggling as she traipsed into the bar, humming brightly to herself. She grinned brightly at Macintosh as she took the glass of wine he held out, sipping it dramatically.<p>

"...I walked in on Spike and Rarity."

Macintosh gave her a confused look.

"It is just so cute!" she squealed, clapping her hooves together. "I'm so happy that they've found each other. I mean, I had to give them a few tips, but honestly they were so enthusiastic..."

\* \* \*

><p>A guitar exploded through the roof, standing up and strumming metal chords on itself as Discord moonwalked into the bar wearing thick sunglasses and a high-collar pink leather bomber jacket.<p>

"...I walked in on Spike and Rarity."

Macintosh stared at him in shock.

"Not that it's actually important or anything. I just think people have been telling you that a lot. So what booze is available today, I loved that Bloodwine stuff..."

\* \* \*

><p>44.5 (Crisis)<p>

"I AM TRIxie! THE GREAT AND POWERFUL!" the floating illusory unicorn head boomed at a volume rivaling the Royal Canterlot Voice.

"Yah know," deadpanned Applebloom, "I don't know why any a' us expected somepony different..."

It was a weird sort of fused Loop. To their knowledge, no current looper was from this Oz place, much like there was no looper from the Eiken universe, not to mention the fact that it usually wasn't populated with Equestrian races. Nyx had Awoken after her house crash-landed from being whisked away from some farm place called Kansas by a tornado. After a song and dance number from a town of bushwoolie things regarding the death of some 'wicked witch of the east' she'd collected Peewee â€" idly wondering if the phoenix was looping and how anyone would be able to tell if he was â€" as well as some ruby ponyshoes and set off down the yellow brick road to go see the Wizard.

On the way she'd come across the Awake versions of the CMC. Applebloom was some sort of pony-like scarecrow strung to a wood post, Sweetie was a tin mare who had rusted up in the woods, and Scootaloo was a griffin of all things. Nyx mused that the Loops had a strange sense of humour. The Loop memories of her three companions implied that her friends were seeking things they already possessed in spades. But they'd all still agreed to come with Nyx to see the Wizard because, why not?

"I still say that gate guard sounded familiar," Sweetie cut in.

"Are you still on about that?" Scootaloo groaned. "Just because he's got a bit of a Trottingham accent doesn't mean he's anyone we've met before. You don't need to inspect everyone we come across to see if they're the Anchor you know."

"YOU DARE IGNORE TRIxie, THE GREAT AND POWERFUL?!" the floating head boomed again.

"Sorry," Nyx called back. "How's the Loop treating you auntie?"

The head gave a big sigh before it dissipated along with the fog it was projected on. A curtain off to the side of the room was swept back and Trixie strode out.

"Not bad," she replied reluctantly. "But you four could show some respect for Trixie's showmare skills."

"Sorry," Applebloom apologized, "but I noticed the projector lens when we came in and pointed it out to the others. It's still pretty dang impressive. Even if it's not quite what we'd expect from you these days."

"Trixie's been rediscovering her roots this Loop," the showmare admitted. "After a near disaster with an experiment, Trixie has been cutting back on the brute force she's come to rely on over the Loops and begin re-honing her skills at the stagecraft that once served her so well. In fact, Trixie has not used so much as a cantrip this Loop. And she has still convinced Oz and the threats to it that Trixie is a wizard of great skill and power. All through smoke and mirrors."

"That's pretty awesome!" Scootaloo beamed. "So, do you have a super-amazing quest for us to undertake?"

"Indeed Trixie does," the showmare admitted. "The Wicked Witch of the West is still at large and she is more powerful than her sister ever was. The task is to retrieve her ring, which possesses a gem through which she is able to focus her foul magics. Without it, she will be rendered powerless and of no more threat to Oz."

"And after that?" Nyx asked. "I mean, it's not like any of us need the things we're supposed to want. Applebloom's got more brains than any of us, Sweetie's heart is as caring as ever, Scootaloo's still a daredevil, and I've never technically been to the Kansas place I'm supposed to be from this Loop so I've got no real incentive to return. So I think we'd probably just stick around for any more adventures you've got on tap."

"Well..." Trixie mused. "There's the Nome King, Mombi, the Wicked Witch of the South is due to wake up from her enchanted sleep any time now, Princess Langwidere is out there somewhere collecting heads, Tyrone the Terrible is due to make a move soon, and there's probably a few others that escape Trixie's mind at the moment."

"This is gonna be an awesome Loop!" Scootaloo cheered.

\* \* \*

><p>Picard the winkie dog, and normally one of the three Trek Anchors, stretched back in his guardpost. This was shaping up to be another nice vacation for him. His only interaction with other loopers had gone as usual, with them completely unsuspecting of his looping status. The Prime Directive probably wasn't meant to cover situations like this, but it had served him rather well in keeping his head down around other loopers.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>44.6 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight walked into the living room. "Mom, Dad, I'm stuck in a time loop that lasts a few years before rebooting, I've had multiple lifetimes, I can transform into an alicorn at will, and I have an adopted daughter named Nyx who is technically Nightmare Moon."<p>

The two unicorns gave her a long look.

Then, finally, her mother spoke. "Are you... happy?"

"Well... yeah, pretty much. I'm not alone in the loop."

"Well... alright then." The elder mare hugged her gently. "We'll always love you, no matter how strange and incomprehensible you get."

The stallion raised an eyebrow. "Is Shining in this time loop too?"

"Yeah."

"Good," he said with finality. "If you find any special somepony you should take them to him for approval."

"Daaaaaaaaaaaaad!"

\* \* \*

><p>44.7 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight blinked as she Awoke, and blinked again as her Loop memories hit.<p>

Everyone she knew was still there. They were all the same colors, had the same talents, but this Loop instead of ponies, everyone was...

"Ah, smurf," she muttered bitterly.

Oh, great. It was affecting speech patterns too.

\* \* \*

><p>44.8<p>

"Well, it's been a while since I was last here," Twilight said, adjusting her Robe And Wizard Hat. "Wonder if AJ's going to take the chance to go Paladin?"

The inn door creaked open.

"...huh." Twilight looked the newcomer up and down. "Wasn't expecting you, to be honest..."

Gilda shrugged, the enormous sword hovering above her back riding silently up to stay at a set distance. "What can I say."

Twilight moved over. "Come on, sit down. We might be waiting a while. Oh, what class did you go with?"

"Duskblade."

"Huh." Twilight frowned. "Can't say I've heard of that one... it wasn't in that book Pinkie had, anyway."

Gilda settled into the chair. "So, what's this place like, anyway?"

"Adventure with swords and sorcery, pretty much." Twilight shrugged. "All six of us 'classic' Element bearers had one a long while ago â€" that's where Fluttershy got started on her druid thing, though it took a while for her to really get used to using it again once the loop was over."

The gryphon nodded. "And any idea who else is here, then?"

"Not really..." Twilight's eyes unfocused. "I picked up an Element of Honesty, of course, but that turned out to be yours... oh. Well, that should be interesting..."

"What?"

The door slammed open. "Tremble before the power of the Great and Powerful Trixie, Wilder extraordinaire!"

A cough came from behind the blue unicorn.

"And Chryssy, of course," Trixie added, stepping aside to reveal the Changeling. "She's a psion."

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Hi, guys. Come on, take a seat. I'll go get something alcoholic. Beer?"

There were general nods.

\* \* \*

><p>"...so, anyway, according to our backstories we met when she tried to use Charm on me and I tried to use a wild burst energy ray on her," Trixie said with a grin. "Long story short, huge psionic glitch, both of us lost our powers for three days, actually got to know one another."<p>

Twilight nodded, sipping at her tankard. (Inns in Oerth always had quite good beer. It was the Profession system.)

"So, are we heading out or what?" Gilda asked, idly casting Bloom on Trixie's beer and creating a miniature lily pad.

"Well, I'm not sure if there's other party members on the way, but last time there were six," Twilight hedged. "I'd say set off tomorrow morning."

The door creaked open again.

"Or we could just have them turn up now," Chrystalis observed, then winced. "Oh. Well, this could be awkward..."

"Hi, Shiny, Cadence," Twilight said, smiling. "How are you?"

"Tolerable," Shining replied, shaking water out of his mane. "It's raining out there, has been for two hours."

Cadence spread her wings and fluffed them out. "I miss weather schedules."

"So, er..." Chrystalis began, in a voice of forced calm.

"Don't worry," Cadence said, furling her wings again and looking Chrystalis in the eye. "Tell you what. Let's see this as a team building exercise. We can learn to be comfortable in one another's presence."

"Don't ask for miracles..." Chrystalis muttered.

"Actually..." Cadence paused. "I suspect that I \_could.\_ Eventually. Technically. Oh, I'm a Favoured Soul and Shiny's a Paladin, just so you know."

"Right." Twilight moved two more stools over. "That's us better off for healing than last time, anyway. Any idea what the Quest is?"

A gnome walked up to Twilight, handed her a gilt envelope, and headed off for the back room.

"Oh, thank you." Twilight opened the envelope. "See, that's one nice thing about this world, it's so convenient for adventuring...  
aha!"

She held up the letter within.

\_Dare YOU enter the OFFICIAL World's Largest Dungeon?\_

\_Every monster you've ever heard of! (Non-core source books not included)\_

\_All the levels!\_

\_Caution: entering the dungeon does not allow one to exit from the dungeon. Bring food.\_

"What do you think?" she asked.

Gilda cracked her knuckles. "Sounds good to me!"

Trixie gave Twilight a pitying look. "You even need to ask?"

Cadence and Shining exchanged a look, then nodded.

After a moment, Chrysalis sighed. "Well, all for one and one for all."

"Great!" Twilight took out a map. "It looks like it's a few hours' journey from here. Let's get a good night's sleep first."

\* \* \*

><p>44.9 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I dunno," Spike mused, tapping his chin thoughtfully. "On the one hand, he <em>was<em> an alicorn, but..."

Chrysalis nodded. "I know, it's confusing to me as well. We're the Non\_ascending\_ and technically he didn't ascend." She sighed as she stirred her cocoa. "I think we should let him stay, though. There is a precedent in Discord..."

The draconequus in question shrugged. "Honestly, I don't care one way or the other. To me this is a game club." He rolled his dice and moved a piece across a board. "And that puts me in control of the Orange grove. Take that Angel!"

A small white rabbit smiled, plunking a card down and rolling the dice.

"...touchÃ©."

"Speaking as a single mare, I say we keep him in." Berry sipped her drink. "I mean, no offence to you Discord, but between you and him he's the better prize. Hot, single, same species..."

"He doesn't feel that way about you," Chrysalis pointed out.

"A gal can dream. And look." The mare sighed happily. "Oh can she look..."

"SO!" Spike smiled. "It's settled! We'll let Mac stay in the club."

Discord gave Berry Punch a sly smile. "You know, I can technically



become a pony."

"Ugh, not even drunk, Dissy."

\* \* \*

><p>44.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Diamond Tiara sidled up to the crusaders with a grin. "So, ladies, any plans for this loop?"<p>

Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle shared a look. Scootaloo snorted, glaring at the ground.

The pink filly blinked. "Is... is something wrong?"

With an aggravated sigh, Scootaloo looked up and took a deep breath. "Last loop... you weren't awake. And I know I can't blame YOU for... what \_she\_ said, but... I am irrationally angry at you right now."

"Oh." Diamond rubbed the back of her neck and blushed. "I... really am sorry for... whatever happened. Even though I don't remember it."

The pegasus had the decency to look abashed, taking a longer, more calming breath. "Okay, okay... So, we've hit another expansion period, and there's a contest at school near the end of the loop to determine which team of fillies will be Ponyville's flag carrier for the Equestria Games..."

"We decided ta only use baseline abilities," Apple Bloom interjected. "Ya know, for fairness's sake."

"And our theme was the unity of the tribes that Ponyville represented!" Sweetie Belle cried.

"But the thing is, I'm about... eighty five percent sure I can't fly, or at least can't get lift in the baseline loop," Scootaloo continued. "So... our test performance was really great, but--"

"But I came along and said something about chickens and dodos, right?" Diamond sighed, putting her face in her hooves. "Wow. I... wow, just, I can't believe I was ever that... I really am sorry."

"It's cool," Scootaloo replied, folding her wings and taking a deep breath. "It wasn't... \_you\_. I'm just a little... rrrrghar right now."

"On the upside, we got to see Snails in a dress!" Sweetie said brightly.

There was a quiet moment.

"...I'm..." Diamond looked askance at the unicorn "I'm sorry. \_what\_?"

"Yeah, that loop Snails was kinda genderconfused," Sweetie explained casually. "It happens sometimes, and he, er, she usually trusts me with that secret."

"Ah was wondering why he was so pleased when Tiara threw her costume away in disgust," Apple Bloom mused. "Or... she?"

"Ugh..." Diamond Tiara shuddered. "And to think I was married to him that one loop where I was your mother!"

"Wait, what?" Scootaloo gave her an odd look. "You were our mother? I don't remember this!"

"None of you were awake that loop..."

\* \* \*

><p>44.11 (Masterweaver)<p>

Rainbow Dash Awoke again, shaking her head and yawning as she took in the loop memories. Right, summer sun celebration, check the elements to see who's awake this loop â€" oh, Rarity wasn't awake, but the other bearers were. Well, that should be interest-

There was a loud, angry thump on the front door. With a sigh, the pegasus walked downstairs and opened it, revealing a grumpy Scootaloo.

"It's that \_time again.\_"

Dash chuckled. "Yeah, don't worry kid, I'm looping."

"Good." The younger pegasus produced an all too familiar sheet of paperwork and trotted in, tossing the documentation on the table as she flopped onto the couch.

With a sigh, the weathermare pulled out a pen and began going through the papers. "Abusive parents \_again?\_ Wow. Sorry, Scoots, I... I really don't think you deserve this."

"It's like the loops can't make up their mind!" Scootaloo sat up suddenly, throwing her hooves into the air. "Half the time I have parents they're total deadbeats! Drunk or abusive or racist or... whatever. I can't even remember if I'm supposed to be an orphan or not!" She crossed her forelegs and glowered at the floor, idly pulling a necklace out of her subspace pocket and putting it on. "...And none of the other crusaders are Awake, according to Pansy."

"Ugh." Rainbow shook her head as she finished off the final bit of paperwork. "Tell ya what, kiddo. After I adopt you this loop, we'll rope Bloom and Sweetie into helping us build an airplane factory. Sound good?"

"...yeah." The orange filly smiled. "Thanks, Dash. You always know how to cheer me up... I guess Sweetie will be in charge of advertising..."

\* \* \*

><p>44.12 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

**\*\*Great equestrian Foam War Part 1:\*\***

Twilight's awakening took place as she stumbled over a rock in the road. Her loop memories returned a moment later and she was conflicted. On the one hand, Nyx was here and replacing Trixie always made for an interesting loop. However, last loop had been a doozie and she could use a nice, relaxing vacation loop for once.

Fortunately, Nyx was awake as well and didn't mind returning to Ponyville. She wanted to see all her friends and her family as well. Within moments, the two ponies and the cart disappeared from the road.

\* \* \*

><p>"Wow!"<p>

That was all Twilight could say as she stepped into Big Mac's bar alongside Nyx. The place was packed with countless friends all talking up a storm. Berry just finished setting down a pair of 'honeymoon' cocktails between Shining Armor and Cadance before returning to Mayor Mare, the newest equestrian looper. The crusaders sat at the Mayor's hooves as she gave the tale of latest fused loop in the DC Universe. Dash, Pinkie, Rarity, and Fluttershy were at their own table exchanging stories of their own. Applejack was nowhere to be seen.

Chrysalis sat with Luna and Celestia, clearly uncomfortable as she fidgeted while proposing ideas about a tea shop. The princesses, or at least Celestia, seemed delighted at the idea, which meant Chrysalis would be seeing more of her. Twilight knew it would be good for the nervous changeling, to get her out of her shell. Nyx scurried across the floor to the Crusaders as Twilight announced her arrival, "Morning everypony!"

The bar responded with a resounding, "Twilight!" with the exception of Discord who shouted "Norm!"

Big Mac slid a pint of cider to the edge of the redwood counter where Twilight usually came to a rest and asked, "How's the loops treatin' ya, Twiligh'."

Twilight cantered over next to Mayor Mare, "Vampires and Nazis Big Mac, enough said. Where's Applejack?"

The owner replied, "Back a' the farm preparin' more cider. Everyone's awake this time. Dash got a letter from Gilda this mornin'. Tiara's workin' on a project back at 'er home. Trixie's busy with other duties, so she'll be in later. We even had a couple loopers from the multiverse in earlier."

Twilight nodded to Big Mac and looked at the Mayor as she continued her tale. She slurped up the cider in one gulp and set it down as the Mayor got to the finale, "And so after Apokolips invades and half of Metropolis is leveled, Superman punches Darkside through the other half! Literally, there wasn't a building left standing afterwards."

The mayor looked to Twilight, "How do you get used to such ruffians like the humans? They build such magnificent structures only for super powered monsters to tear them down like foals playing in the sand box."

Twilight gave a small grin, "I found not all of them are so bad. Superman prefers to solve his problems without violence...it's just the others are not so willing. You sound like you could use a vacation, visit some family and old friends even if they're not awake."

The mayor sighed, "That does sound nice. But I have duties to Ponyville here--"

Twilight waved a hoof in a dismissing gesture, "I could handle your Mayoral duties. I've ran a country or two before after all."

"Actually," the mayor began, appearing not sure for a moment, "I'm not the Mayor this time around, I'm the Librarian. Trixie is the mayor. I assume you've replaced Trixie."

The idea that Trixie replaced the Mayor sent a shiver of dread down her spine. Already, she could feel her quiet vacation loop disappearing like smoke in the wind. She listed and categorized several of the strongest alcohols out there before deciding on one and calling out for some of Jack Sparrow's rum stock he left behind before leaving Equestria, not even bothering to answer the former Mayor's question as her panic set in.

But instead of a bottle of rum, a sparkling highball glass was set before her along with some gin. She looked up to see a human form Berry Punch standing in front of her giving her a smile that radiated calm, "I'd like you to try a human cocktail I was taught when I started perfecting my trade. If it doesn't fix your problems, I'll get that rum for you."

Twilight looked the human Berry over for a moment, then remembered, "You surprised me there, Berry. Forgot you can shift from pony to human form."

Berry's grin turned melancholy, "The loop where I learned shape shifting was the same loop where I got my act together. It was a very strange loop, where no one was sent to the moon, you were replaced with Sunset Shimmer as the Summer Sun Celebration Co-ordinator, and a new bar named Eden Hall opened up where your treehouse library is."

All activity in the bar ceased as the loopers turned to listen to Berry. The bartender didn't even notice as everypony was now listening, so lost in her thoughts and preparing the cocktail. She took a glass bottle labeled Angostura Aromatic Bitters and added it to the edge of the glass with four shakes.

"I believe the owner was your anchor replacement. He's actually quite the urban myth among loopers. Some call him the 'Phantom Looper' since he tends to draw so little attention to himself that most loopers don't tend to realize he's looping. His local name was Shot Glass with the image of a golden cocktail being poured into a deep

martini glass as his cutie mark."

Berry chuckled as she added the ice and a double measure of premium gin, "I decided to sample its fine wares before its grand opening. As always, I broke into the building and made my way to the cellar. But when I got to the wine racks, there was nothing there. I searched for the better part of an hour in vain. I checked everything that could hold a bottle containing anything alcoholic. That was when Shot Glass found me."

The cocktail was topped off with some tonic and the mixture was stirred slowly four times as it turned a pink hue, "He found me trying to break into the only locked cabinet in the building, which only held some local equestrian seasonings. I saw him in human form and almost had a heart attack right there. That loop had a quirk where ponies could shift into human form, part of what terrified me so deeply. The other half was he could have called in the royal guard and had me exiled from town. Instead, the looper shifted into an earth pony with a black mane and tan coat. His eyes were full of kindness and a small amount of pity. An hour later, I'm sitting at the bar as a human after being taught how to shift into human form with this cocktail resting on the countertop."

The bartender slid the stirring spoon out and added a lime wedge before shifting back to pony form and sliding the drink forward towards Twilight, "Here you are, Twilight, the Pink Gin and Tonic, adding some herbs that I found mix well with this drink."

The anchor took a sip of the drink and found the stress and pain from the last loop bleeding away with every drop that slid down her throat, "Berry...this is amazing!"

Berry rubbed at her snout in embarrassment at the praise. Twilight looked at the bartender, expecting Berry to finish her story. She caught on and continued, "He started on about what type of Gin he used and the different citrus fruits one could add. But then he gave a small history about how the tonic had been used to treat Malaria in countries so far away they couldn't be found on the map. The word tonic means 'invigorating, refreshing.'"

Berry closed her eyes as if remembering an old friend, "He served me countless cocktails from places that existed in legend with bottles that appeared from seemingly thin air. After all that, and when I couldn't pay him for all the drinks he gave me, I was offered a job as an assistant bartender. He took me under his wing and taught me how to pour and mix my own drinks. Turned out, I was good at the job, picking up the trade over the course of that loop. He learned that we were both loopers and introduced me to the multiverse. Bit by bit, he helped me clean up my life."

After Twilight finished her Gin and Tonic, Berry cleaned out the glass, "I hope to meet him again, show him how much I've improved both as a mare and a bartender. So, Twilight, do you feel better? Do you still need that rum?"

Twilight gave a pleasant smile, "Actually no, I think I'm good. I was hoping for a quiet loop, but an anchor's work is never done I guess. Mayor Mare, enjoy your vacation. You got yourself a replacement librarian."

There was a moment of peace as Pinkie bought a round for the whole place in celebration. But then like glass shattering, the peace was destroyed with the doors being flung wide open as Trixie flourished her purple cape, "Rejoice, my fellow loopers, for it is I, the Great and Powerful Mayor Trixie, who has come to improve your lives!"

She went amongst all the loopers, handing them scrolls and coming to an end with Twilight and Mayor Mare. Already fearing the worst, she opened the scroll and frowned.

**\*\*NOW ANNOUNCING THE FIRST ANNUAL EQUESTRIAN FOAM SWORD WAR!\*\***

**\*\*The office of Mayor Trixie welcomes all who consider themselves loopers to Ponyville to participate in momentous occasion. Loopers will engage in combat with only a foam sword. Whoever is struck by a foam sword will be eliminated. The victor will receive the assistance of Princess Celestia and Twilight Sparkle in any of their personal projects. \*\***

**\*\*Rules of Combat: \*\***

**\*\* - No killing. \*\***

><strong>- Any attacks must be in the form of a foam sword. However, the sword based attack could be administered in any form. If you can fire a foam sword from a gun, it is valid. <strong>

><strong>- A competitor will be eliminated if he or she is struck by a sword on an exposed body part. <strong>

Celestia and Luna looked the scroll over, then shouted their full support for the mountain of hilarity that was about to ensue. The former Mayor whispered in Twilight's ear in a begging tone, "Please make sure some of Ponyville is standing when I get back."

Twilight muttered under her breath, "Tree damn it!"

\* \* \*

><p>44.13<p>

Twilight trotted into Celestia's room.

"Your Highness?"

Celestia turned. "Ah, Twilight. I'm sorry to have dismissed your concerns about Nightmare Moon in what may have seemed a cavalier manner-

"Oh, no, that's fine," Twilight shrugged. "You want me to gather the Elements of Harmony, together with suitable bearers, so you have a backup plan if you can't talk Luna round when she gets back from the moon."

The Princess of the Sun blinked. "...yes, actually. How did you know?"

Twilight sat down. "Time travel."

"You used a spell from the Star Swirl wing?"

"No, not that time travel. A time loop â€" self contained temporal

cyclicity, duration a little over five years." Twilight grinned, summoned the Element of Magic, and Ascended in a flash of purple light.

Celestia's jaw dropped.

"This isn't the first time. It isn't even the thousandth. I've been going around in temporal circles for a long time. And I'm not always the only one, either."

Twilight ruffled her wings. "Anyway. There's a reason I'm telling you this. See, a couple of the other loopers want to partake of a certain ceremony, and to avoid anyone being left out of the first one they've asked for it to be done when none but them and I are Awake. So... it might help to get you on side, to straighten a few issues out."

"I'm still absorbing that you're an alicorn, Twilight," Celestia said, strain in her voice. "Give me a minute or two."

"Sure," Twilight replied readily.

Celestia closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and then made some tea. She heated the water the slow way, with a simmering heat spell, rather than simply flash-boiling it, and then poured two cups.

"Okay," she said, placing the cups on either side of a low table. "Let's start from the beginning. You are... time looping, you said?"

"I did, and am." Twilight took the proffered cup and sipped from it. "Ah, lovely. You do know how to brew a good cup... anyway. The first thing we need to do is to set up a party in Ponyville. I've done it before, so I know how to set it up to handle Luna nice and amicably."

Celestia swallowed, shook her head, and took solace in some more tea.

"Sorry, I'm overwhelming you, aren't I?" Twilight shook her head. "I should really get better at breaking it to you when you're not Awake. Anyway, Spike and Rarity are both also looping this time, and they'd like to tie the knot."

"...who is Rarity?" Celestia asked. "And â€" isn't Spike rather too young to be married?"

"Time loops," Twilight reminded her. "His mental age is on the far side of lots, and we worked out a way he can change his physical age at will. Rarity is a unicorn from Ponyville â€" the Element of Generosity."

Celestia nodded.

"The first time around, he got quite a bad crush on her. She might have reciprocated to some extent, she's not quite sure, but nothing happened within five years of today and so we never found out. When they met up in the Loops, both of them were quite a lot older and more experienced. They took over a hundred years â€" that's twenty iterations of the loop â€" to decide to become a proper couple, and

they've been significant others since then. It tallies up to..." Twilight paused. "Lots."

"I see." Celestia carefully considered the situation, and what Twilight had told her. "And they are happy together?"

"Very."

"Alright, then." Celestia nodded. "I'm sure it will make sense once I meet her â€" and this new, older Spike. I assume you want me to attend the wedding?"

Twilight smiled. "Spot on â€" though I'd also appreciate your help handling the legal quagmire involved."

"Hmm, indeed..." As the shock faded, the Princess of the Sun began to apply her formidable mind to the problem. "Very well, I think it should be eminently achievable."

"Thank you, Princess." Twilight turned to go.

"Oh, Twilight?" Celestia said, warning in her tone. "Are you sure you want to go out into the corridor like that?"

Twilight looked back, caught sight of her wings, and blushed before undoing the transformation.

"That, more than anything, helps convince me of the truth of your words," Celestia commented. "That you are so clearly comfortable in an alicorn's form."

The unicorn grinned. "Yeah, a lot of us have been able to do that for a while..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well?" Spike asked.<p>

"She seems fine with it," Twilight replied. "Right, who next?"

Spike drummed his claws on the table. "Either your family â€" because I'm sort of part of it â€" or Rarity's. Might be better to have Rarity for both those meetings."

Twilight lit her horn. "No time like the present. And I can drop off those party instructions with Pinkie on the way."

\* \* \*

><p>"Rarity has become more dear to me than... anything else I possess," Spike said solemnly.<p>

Magnum frowned. "Anything \_else?\_"

"I am hers, as she is mine." Spike shrugged, blushing a bit. "I... it's hard to explain, and it's kind of related to dragon psychology. We hoard things. Other dragons hoard gold, or gems, or artworks... I still have some of that, but the main thing I treat as a hoard is my friends. To me, Rarity is mine, and I would protect her to my last



breath. And, at the same time, I am hers, and anything she desired, I would do."

"Does that include leaving?" Rarity's mother asked with a frown.

"Yes," Spike said with a quick nod. "If she told me to go away and never come back... and if she \_meant \_it, and continued to mean it... I'd stay out of her life. It would probably destroy me, but I would."

Pearl nodded slowly.

"Can we speak to our daughter?" Magnum requested.

"Sure." Spike turned to go. "I'll let her know, and give you some privacy. Just ask when you want me back in."

"\_If\_, you mean," Magnum said sternly.

Spike nodded, and pushed the door open.

\* \* \*

><p>"Does he make me happy?" Rarity repeated. "Yes. A thousand times yes."<p>

She gave her parents a long, appraising look.

"Let me put it this way. I know we mentioned the loops, and they're an easy concept to explain, but... they're nearly infinite in variety. I've been worshipped as a goddess, I've been a slave with not even my own cutie mark. I've been the ruler of the world, I've been a noble unicorn mare in my own right, I've been a simple shop owner, I've started my own business..." She shook her head. "It sometimes feels like I've done everything, though the loops constantly show that I haven't. And if there's one constant I can truly rely on, it's that Spike cares for me."

"That kind of devotion..." Pearl winced. "It sounds... almost creepy."

"I do understand where you're coming from," Rarity admitted. "It probably could look bad from that perspective. From the outside. But... well, we didn't exactly rush into it. It took us over a hundred years to go from friends to being an official couple, and that was... oh, so long ago. By now, he and I feel the same â€" neither of us started like this, but both of us developed it over time."

"And you trust him not to hurt you?"

Rarity surprised all three of them by giggling. "Oh, sorry. But there's two things funny about that. The first is that, well, not to blow my own trumpet, but..."

A soft white light flooded the room.

"I can match him if I need to," Rarity finished, extending her wings to their full span. "When we do spar â€" or have a spat â€" it's

essentially a toss-up as to who wins. I'm no damsel in distress, at least unless I want to be."

Magnum blinked a few times, then visibly got a grip on himself. "And second?"

"Spike's a bearer of Loyalty," Rarity replied matter-of-factly. "The short version is, that he bears Loyalty means that that trait, trustworthiness â€" dedication to his friends â€" is a fundamental part of his makeup."

Rarity fidgeted. "In all honesty, we don't need your blessing... after all, Spike and I are both adults by a long way. But it means a lot to me, and it would mean a lot to him. So â€" do we have your support?"

Magnum and Pearl exchanged glances.

"Is there anything which would make you leave Spike?" Pearl asked.

"No," Rarity replied. "Anything that would make me want to â€" he wouldn't be Spike any more. Not the one I love."

"Good answer," Magnum commented.

"Well, then... yes," Pearl said softly. "We don't understand all of this, but what we do understand is all good."

Tears started in Rarity's eyes. "Thank you."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well?" Twilight asked, re-entering the main room of her parents' house.<p>

Twilight Velvet nodded to her with a smile. "It's strange, because we still think of little Spykoran as, well, little, but if you and he agree that he's old enough... well, what else can we do?"

Spike smiled.

"Okay, that's good. I'll send you the invitations shortly. Is Shiny still living here?"

"Well, he comes over often enough," Night Light said. "A couple of times a week. He'll get them."

Twilight grinned. "Actually, I want to come over and give him the invitations for Cadence and him myself now. Just to see his face when he realizes that I know."

Velvet put her hoof over her smile. "Oh, dear, that would be funny. He still thinks he's managing to hide it, you know â€" says it's 'work-related' reasons he's seeing her so often."

"So you know, actually," Twilight said, reaching into her 'pocket and retrieving an album. "Here's some of their wedding pictures."

She paged through them, first the ones from their normal-loop

weddings (both to plan and post-Changeling-battle) and then the increasingly exotic ones which were from especially noteworthy set-pieces for Loopers.

"Are they always together?" Night Light asked, as his wife examined one of the photographs more closely.

"Just about," Twilight replied. "It doesn't happen every time, admittedly, there's been a few edge cases, but-

"Statistically insignificant," her father filled in.

"Yes." She paused. "Cadence is one of the ponies I really trust, after so long in the loops. Don't worry, Shiny's in safe hooves."

\* \* \*

><p>"I still don't believe they all knew," Shining Armour said ruefully.<p>

"It's hardly the end of the world," Cadence chided, smiling to remove the sting. "Besides, I think Twilight and Spike have an unfair advantage."

"Point," Shining conceded. "Do you think-

Cadence overrode him. "Ssh! This is the good bit!"

Words drifted over to them. "...in Eiken or in Hub..."

"I still don't know what that means," Shining said, frowning. "I overheard Spike writing them, but..."

"I assume it's part of that whole Loops thing, now shush!"

\* \* \*

><p>Spike stared at the thin circlet of metal, still not quite believing it.<p>

Rarity tapped him on the shoulder. "Careful, or I'll start to get jealous of that ring."

"Well, you're what it symbolizes," he replied, putting his arm around her. "I... it all seems like a dream, really."

Rarity glanced down at her dress. Like the rings, it was a simple one â€" her mothers' dress, in fact.

"I know what you mean," she said, more quietly.

They could both hear Sweetie Belle pestering Shining for a place in the Guard. Shining had tried to explain why she was a bit young, but Sweetie wasn't listening â€" and everypony else was finding it too funny to come to Shining's aid.

"You are my wife," Spike tried, the words feeling almost unreal.

"We're married," Rarity ventured, finding the same thing

happening.

"Well," Spike said, gamely, "at least we'll get a lot of time to practise saying them."

"That's very true."

They sat back, and watched Luna's moon rise through the trees.

"...you realize," Rarity said, in a much less serious voice, "that I am no country bumpkin to be won over by so paltry a display." She winked.

"Oh, indeed, my fair lady," Spike countered, then dropped the act. "I've been planning the big one for a while. Still not finished yet."

"I can wait," Rarity promised. "As long as it takes."

\* \* \*

><p>44.14 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>There was a flare of pink fire as the boutique door slammed open. "RARITY BELLE PLATINUM PRINCESS WHATEVER OTHER NAMES YOU'VE HAD!"<p>

The white unicorn looked up from the dress she was sewing and raised an eyebrow. "You know, the full name ultimatum doesn't actually work in the loops, does it? I suppose for humans it's generally easier but--"

"DON'T CHANGE THE SUBJECT!" In stormed a pink alicorn, mane shifting and swirling angrily as she glared down at the traitor before her. "YOU! HAD A WEDDING! \*\*WITHOUT ME!\*\*"

Rarity took a moment to still her terrified heart.

Then she took a breath and let it out. "I take it you've seen Twilight's film of the ceremony?"

"Well, yes. It was very beautiful, quite sincere. I really wish I could have been there." Cadence blinked and shook her head, remembering her wrath. "WHICH BRINGS US BACK TO MY ORIGINAL POINT-!"

"We're still planning on doing the big wedding!" the unicorn reassured her quickly. "We just wanted everyone to be Awake first!" She wasn't sure if that was true or not but she figured it would buy her time.

"...You had BETTER," Cadence growled, "be sure about that."

"Absolutely."

There was a tense moment.

"...are... you not going to yell at Spike?" Rarity finally ventured.

"Oh, he lives with Twilight," the princess replied with a dangerous grin. "I've already expressed my displeasure with him."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

44.1: Obviously a continuation of set 43. And a good term for the expanded CMC is "Rambunctious".

>As for their regalia, they each have an appropriate metal - by symbology or by colour. Scootaloo has bronze (this is due to her pegasus roots, ie Greek). Applebloom has steel (stainless steel. This is shiny, and <em>the<em> metal for engineering and so on.) Sweetie has gold (as per "Golden Voice"), Diamond Tiara has electrum (an alloy, and because diamond isn't a metal) and Nyx has silver (it's the moon thing).

>44.2: No, this Celestia isn't Awake. That's just the Sapphire Stone book, which just came out then.<br>44.3: More X-Communication.

>44.4: Perspective.<br>44.5: The Prime Directive. Simple, occasionally sensible, and very useful for a looper who doesn't want a gigantic headache.

>44.6: Anything can be explained, if you have enough tries.<br>44.7: Caution: do not attempt to make gold from ponies.

>44.8: Gilda's powerset is derived from her time in the Okamiverse, and she's been nurturing it ever since. Yes, that's how she gets the sword to float.<br>I thought it'd be interesting to use mostly non-core classes for this one.

>44.9: The first rule of unascended club: You have to not be an alicorn. (What? There's only one rule.)<br>44.10: The Time Loops.

Creating awkward situations since... well, "since". Adding a time just gets quite complicated, mathematically speaking.

>44.11: One aspect of how the loops work is that certain details are subject to... drift. Scootaloo's family is one of them. Sometimes she doesn't have one, sometimes she's got one. And quite a lot of the time, Dash steps in.<br>44.12: Mayor Mare is something of a newbie to the whole thing. Subjectively, anyway.

>44.13: Dear all people who dislike Sparity: Please don't kill me.<br>More seriously, this is one loop I'm \_really\_ nervous over. The subject matter feels... well, intimate.

>44.14: Rarity is in fact correct. But they wanted to have a quiet one first - after all, the second one might be a little... bizarre.<p>

## 47. Chapter 47

### 45.1 (Masterweaver)

\* \* \*

><p>"WELCOME TO THE ANNUAL ROMANCE THROW! Give it up for our reigning champions, SHINING ARMOR AND MI AMORE CADENZAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"<p>

"I keep telling them, it's \_Cadance,\_" the alicorn mock whined as she trotted onto the arena and waved at her screaming fans.

"They just don't listen these days do they," the unicorn beside her sad, sadly shaking his head and giving a sly wink to a group of fanfillies who instantly fainted.

"TODAY, they will be facing their long time rivals, SPIKE THE SAURUS AND LAAAAAAAAAADY RAAAAAAAAAAAAARITY!"

A purple dragon marched slowly onto the field, rearing up for a dramatic roar as the mare lounging on his scales waved to the crowd. "Hello there dearies! It is wonderful to see you all again!"

"And finally, an unexpected challenger. Somepony that will most definitely surprise you... because she isn't really a pony. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you CHRYSALIS, QUEEN OF CHANGELINGS!"

Columns of green flames burst around the arena as a tall form flew from the shadows, landing between the two surprised competitor teams. "Well, well, well. It's good to see you all."

"Wait a minute, this is a partner sport!" Spike pointed out. "Who are you going to—" "oh. Oh no."

"OH YES! Chrysalis's partner is none other... THAN MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!" A blue unicorn leapt out of the announcer's box. "GIVE IT UP FOR... THE GREAT! AND POWERFUL! TRIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIXIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIE!"

\* \* \*

><p>45.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Wait a minute,<em> Cookie said suddenly. \_You all still remember Old Holly Hooves?\_

Scotaloo, Sweetie Belle, and Apple Bloom shared a look.

"Um... well... he's kinda a story." The earth pony chuckled awkwardly. "Fer little fillies and colts."

"A big jolly reindeer comes down the chimney and sticks gifts in stockings," Sweetie Belle explained. "I personally thought it was an adorable old pony's tale, but—"

\_Old pony's tale?!\_ Pansy cried in shock. \_That caribou was one of the bravest heroes of our generation!\_

Clover sighed. \_Pansy, dear, our own story was sanitized over the generations. As great as Holly was, the fact is Krampus could give nightmares to foals.\_

Scotaloo raised an eyebrow. "Krampus? I don't think I know that name..."

\_And there you have it,\_ Smart Cookie said wearily. \_Without the villain, Holly becomes nothing more than a nice gift giver...\_

Apple Bloom smiled to herself. "Maybe ya'll could set the record

straight then. Who was Krampus, and how was Old Holly Hooves a hero?"

For a moment, the necklaces were silent.

\_You have to understand,\_ Clover began slowly, \_the Fire of Friendship only worked in a localized area. Even while we were expanding Equestria, a lot of the land was still covered in ice and snow.\_

\_Still, there were a lot of opportunistic groups out there,\_ Smart Cookie continued. \_They'd set off, a union of the three tribes, and found settlements in hopes of repelling the Windigos. Sometimes it worked... sometimes it didn't.\_

\_Some of my own kin were part of one of those groups,\_ Pansy commented. \_They bravely went back north, not to the old lands, but... well, they built themselves a little village. It was a fairly normal settlement, we'd get reports back, but then one month... nothing.\_

Scootaloo patted her necklace gently. "It must have been hard, not knowing what happened..."

\_I assumed they'd been buried in the snow.\_ Pansy sighed. \_There was a country to run, and I couldn't afford to go looking for them...\_

\_Nopony blames you,\_ Smart Cookie offered gently. \_We couldn't have known about him.\_

Sweetie Belle gulped. "About... who, exactly?"

\_Krampus the Black.\_ Without warning, Clover projected a holographic image of a horned, shaggyâ€"furred biped, whip in hand and red eyes glaring. \_A satyr sorcerer who enslaved the village. The manacles he wore granted him power so long as weariness and despair were abundant. But with the windigos retreating...\_ She trailed off.

Apple Bloom's eyes widened. "He needed to find a new source of suffering to power his magic."

\_And here was this village of ponies, right on his doorstep...\_ The necklace around Bloom's neck glowed angrily. \_Krampus was a monster, in form and in heart. He would break the legs of ponies who defied him, and whip those he considered too slow in their so called work. Mare, stallion, foal... pegasus, unicorn, earth pony... he treated all with equal cruelty, making them labour in the snow whenever suited him. They took to sticking warm coals in their stockings just to fight off the cold.\_

Sweetie Belle stared at the image before her. "...I take it this is where Old Holly Hooves comes in?"

\_Indeed.\_ With a slight shift, the necklace around Belle's neck changed the image to a noble, elderly caribou with a thick white beard and piercing eyes. \_The caribou clan has always had a connection with wind, being able to hear the whispers from miles away. Their elders have even managed flight, sometimes. And when

Holly Hooves heard the cries of pain and anguish on the winds, he was so moved he had to act.\_

Scotaloo was now completely enraptured by the story. "So... what did he do?"

\_He did what I would have done,\_ Pansy replied gravely. \_He provided for those under his protection, by having his tribemates sequester gifts of food and clothing in secret to the village, and sought out a way to defeat Krampus, by tracking down the beings who made his manacles in the first place.\_

\_Mountain elves,\_ Clover elaborated. \_Very rare, very isolated. Presumably there was some sort of war that nearly wiped them out... whatever the case, Holly found them, asked for their help. They forged him a chain of bells that would neutralize elvish magic, but only if it was fuelled by hope and joy. And in return he swore his clan to their protection.\_

Smart Cookie glowed with pride \_They say the battle lasted a full day. Even after the chains were fuelled by the hope of the village, Krampus and Holly duelled in a blistering snowstorm. I don't know how much of that was exaggerated, but in the end Old Holly Hooves won. There was a great celebration in the village, the ponies made robes for the elves, bread was broken with the caribou... a message was sent out to us, detailing the whole thing, but by the time we arrived they had all gone.\_

"Wow." Apple Bloom breathed out. "Ah... did not even realize..." She looked at the painting of a smiling reindeer with new eyes. "And that's tha last ya'll heard of them?"

\_...I did meet him much later,\_ Pansy admitted. \_When I was very old. Travelling north, I saw a glacier in the shape of a caribou skull... and inside, a coven of elves making toys, with the old deer himself at their head. He explained that the bells which bound Krampus would need to be... well, refuelled soon, so he'd come up with an idea to spread gifts to the little ones in a nearby village. I advised him to do so around Hearth's Warming Eve, so as to capitalize on the emotion... I suppose that's how the story was revitalized.\_

After a moment, the necklace sighed. \_I don't understand how the chimney thing came about, though.\_

\* \* \*

><p>45.3 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight honestly wondered why variant Loops set in the Canterlot High School universe â€" that strange alternate version of Equestria where everypony she knew had a human counterpart â€" weren't more common. She'd certainly prefer this place to that alternate Ponyville where 'Rainbow Dash always dresses in style'.<p>

The good news for this Loop was that finally, finally, the other Elements were Awake for it. She could now actually explore this place with her friends rather than startlingly accurate facsimiles.



The bad news started when the zombies showed up.

Not just normal zombies, but the ones with ridiculous variations like wearing road cones and buckets on their heads, pole vaulters, bobâ€"sleighers, and other types she'd have rather never seen again.

And the only viable longâ€"term defense were those cartoony animate plants. She may have had access to worldâ€"shaking magic and weapons, but even her reserves weren't nearly as inexhaustible as the zombies seemed to be.

It was another fused Loop with \_that\_ universe. And no forewarning to check her sanity at the door.

"So, what's the deal with Crazy Dave anyway? Is he the Anchor from wherever these things are normally from?" Rainbow asked her after a particularly brutal wave. Thankfully, no brains had been eaten yet. At least not those of anypony's counterpart she knew. The attacks let up often enough that basic necessities like food and utilities could be gathered before hunkering back down and waiting for the next attack. She and her friends had taken to sleeping in shifts so that there was always at least two of them awake in case 'extreme gardening' skills were needed.

"Maybe," Twilight responded tiredly. "No one can really tell."

"Think we could ask Sleipnir to check the next time we see him?" Rainbow suggested.

"Already did that," Twilight told her friend. "Apparently he is the designated Anchor for his universe, but his 'code' is so incomprehensible that even the Yggdrasil admins can't tell if he's actually looping or if his universe stabilized on its own. And they don't want to try triggering others from his universe to start looping until they figure it out."

"Huh?" Rainbow scrunched her face in confusion. "How can the beings that run reality not understand him enough to tell if he's looping?"

Twilight gave Rainbow Dash a flat stare. "Because he's crazy."

\* \* \*

><p>45.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>In the dank gloom of the Everfree forest, a predator moved on silent feet.<p>

Moving lightly over the leaf litter, the predator's eyes flickered all around. Her nostrils scented the air, trying to gain the slimmest edge.

There!

The predator bounded forwards, pushing off with all her might and

soaring over a brook towards her goal.

There were several seconds of snarling, growling tussle, and then predator and target separated. Both were bleeding, but the cuts were superficial, and they darted off into the undergrowth once more.

\* \* \*

><p>"How long are they going to take?" Spike asked, hovering on a thermal. "It's been five hours!"<p>

"No idea." Twilight trimmed her wings to catch the same thermal, and then soared up and around her assistant. "Suppose they'll just have to work it out for themselves."

She rolled onto her back, grinning. "Ah, I'm not a pegasus nearly enough."

\* \* \*

><p>A heavy paw slammed Gilda's beak into the ground, making her see stars. Snapping out her wings, she forced the other off her and lashed backwards with her hindâ€paws hoping to catch her target with them.<p>

No such luck.

The only warning she got, as she righted herself and made to turn, was a moment's rustling leaves. Then a weight landed on her back, forcing her back to the forest floor.

White teeth flashed near her throat for a second, and she went limp.

"Okay, okay," she said after a moment. "You win. Seventeen to fourteen."

The wolf closed her jaws, and carefully backed off Gilda's side. Then it blurred, and Fluttershy stood there.

"Thank you for your understanding."

"Understanding, hash!" Gilda pawed at her beak to get some of the mud off. "Pwah. Anyway, take it from one predator to another â€" I get the whole dominance issues thing. It's better we get it out of the way now."

Fluttershy nodded, her cheeks slightly coloured.

"...I'll win next time, though."

The pale yellow pegasus gave Gilda a look which was surprisingly arch.

"...maybe. Okay, we've had the fight, what now?"

"Well..." Fluttershy shuffled her paws. "I did get hold of some rather nice hadrosaur meat last loop there was a chance..."

"Dinosaur meat?" Gilda's eyes lit up. "I am \_so\_ there!"

\* \* \*

><p>"There we go," Twilight said, nodding with satisfaction. "That's that."<p>

"I heard something about dinosaur meat..." Spike trailed off. "Any chance I could get some with gemstones roasted in?"

"I think you'll have to ask Fluttershy." Twilight wagged her wings. "I'm not willing to speak for her."

"Sure." He made a ponderous turn towards Ponyville, with Twilight accelerating to ride his slipstream. "...any chance you could get me something from the next time you encounter a silicon based creature?"

"I'll think about it."

\* \* \*

><p>45.5 (Indalecio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Shining woke to the gentle rocking of the ocean.<p>

"I'm in a boat, and its night." Specifically a small ship with one mast, that seemed to have seen more than its fair share of years.

"And I'm wearing a mask, and have a rapier by side." Then his loop memories set in.

"Cadence's in danger!" Looking ahead, he could see another small ship ahead of him, in the distance, and yes, searching his memories, they were heading to the 'Cliffs of Insanity'.

"Who names these places?" he snorted with disdain.

He considered jumping from the boat and swimming the remaining distance. His loop memories kicked in again.

"Right, eels."

The dawn was ascending and the ship up ahead had docked at the cliffs. Arriving, himself, all he found was a length of rope that went straight up the cliff. Looking at his hooves, and looking at the rope...

"You've got to be kidding me."

\* \* \*

><p>It had taken a few moments, but he'd heard something about gravity shifting spells from his sister and this was as good a time as any to try them out.<p>

It was now the reason he was galloping up the cliff's face, where

ironically, upon reaching the top, he now stood face to face with that very same sister.

"Hey BBBFF!"

"Twily?" he asked, shocked.

"Well, here its Twilingo Montoya. Dashing and revenge driven swordsmare."

"Wait, wait. Are we in 'the Princess Bride'?"

"Ahuh. You're the Stallion in Black, the Dread Pirate Blackmask."

"I knew this somehow seemed familiar. The Cliffs of Insanity should've given it away."

"Anyway, there's Big Mac and Spike ahead of us as Mazzik and Spikini. Cadence's awake, but those two aren't."

"Great! I'll see you later..." moving to leave, he was pulled back by a purple, tekekinetic tug.

Twilight nervously pawed the ground. "Shiny, I was kinda wondering if we could duel."

"What? Now?"

Twilight's eyes grew big. "Please?!"

Shining sighed. "Fine."

\* \* \*

><p>A thrown rock smashed close to him. He'd been running in pursuit of Cadence and the remaining two, finally ending in a rocky gorge.<p>

"Enope"

Big Mac, or Mazzik trotted out from behind a rock. It was sight he'd remember for a very long time as you don't often see Mac dressed in a turban and vest.

Doing his best to stifle any laughter, he replied. "Now what."

"You put down your sword and magic, I put down my rock we settle this like civilized folks. Hoof to hoof. Sportsponyâ€"like."

"Ah hah. Sportsponyâ€"like." Shining chuckled nervously.

\* \* \*

><p>Big Mac went down with a large thud, unconscious.<p>

"Sorry, about that. Oh right. What was the line? 'Dream about large mares?'"

Shining grabbed his sword in his telekinesis and raced after Spikini and Cadence.

\* \* \*

><p>Shining was seated across from Spikini and a blindfolded Cadence out in an open field. Two glasses of wine sat on a stump in front of him.<p>

'Awake or not, I don't actually want to kill Spike.' thought Shining.

\* \* \*

><p>Twenty minutes earlier.<p>

"Shiny, Thanks for the duel," said a lightly panting Twilight. "One more thing. Awake or not. Please don't kill Spike."

"What'd you have in mind?"

"Oh! I know!" Twilight reached into her subspace pocket, and pulled out a vial.

"This is a sleeping dust. Its odorless, but works when you inhale it, so don't do that. You should be able to figure out the rest."

"Thanks, Twily!" Shining cried as he dashed off.

\* \* \*

><p>Back to the present.<p>

Shining reached into saddlebags and removed the vial Twilight gave him.

"Inhale this but do not touch." cautioned Shining.

"I smell nothing." replied Spike.

"What you do not smell is called iocane powder. Its odorless, tasteless, dissolves instantly in liquid, and is one of the more deadly poisons known to equines."

"Hmm.."

Shining then took the cups and placed them behind him for a few moments and then bringing them back and placing them on the stump.

"Alright. Where is the poison? The battle of wits has begun. It ends when you decide and when both drink and find out who is right, and who is dead."

"Hmm.."

"Spikini?"

"Hmm.."

"Spikini?"

Spikini responded by falling over, asleep.

"Huh. Wasn't sure it'd work that fast."

"Snnxxz"

Shining removed Cadence blindfold.

"Wait. Iocane doesn't work like that." questioned Cadence.

"Swapped the iocane for some sleeping dust. Started working when he I asked him to inhale it."

Cadence replied with a flat "Huh."

"Snnzxxxz"

"You said it."

"So how do you want to play the rest of it?"

"Well, we're definitely not playing it straight. I've not terribly fond of being tortured and having 50 years of my life sucked away"

"Not to mention the whole 'Mostly dead', thing.'" Cadence added.

"Right, but I do have an idea."

\* \* \*

><p>A slightly worse for wear Shining and Cadence emerged from the exit of the Fire Swamp; and Prince Blueblood, Count Sombra and a half dozen guards were there waiting for him.<p>

"Surrender!" The Prince barked.

"You wish to surrender to me? Very well, I accept." replied Shining.

"I give you full marks for bravery. Don't make yourself a fool."

"Ah, but how will you capture us, especially when we have this!" A pink energy shield surrounded both Shining and Cadence, forming a ball.

"Oh very good. But we can wait around." Sombra replied, amused.

"I'm counting on that!" said Shining and Cadence started running and the energy shield they were in started rolling forward, like some strange hamster ball.

"Ahh!" Everypony scattered as the ball started barreling through.

"Hah! You missed!" Blueblood's joy turned to sorrow as he saw the ball turn around and come racing back after him.

\* \* \*

><p>Somehow, in all the chaos, Twilight had shown up and was busy stunning the guards and everypony else that was left standing.<p>

"Twily?"

"You think I'd miss this? I followed you all the way here. Oh and I needed to do one more thing."

She walked over to Count Sombra and knelt over by his face. Curious, Shining and Cadence walked over as well.

"You made his face look like a Kabuki mask?"

"Yup. Its permanent too. Had to get my revenge somehow. "

\* \* \*

><p>45.6 (Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight sighed.

"This is a \_sanctuary\_ loop. There's no violence, no hate..." She glowered at the green unicorn across from her. "We're here to help people recover from the stresses of their home loop. We are not here to play yesâ€"men and coddle morons."

The blond colt looked right back at her. "What are you saying, exactly?"

"I'm saying that showing off is fine. You can wow the crowd with your magic, that's great. But lecturing them on your superiority? \_Casting Imperio?\_" She leaned over the desk. "The only reason you're not on the moon right now is because I've BEEN to Hogwarts. I know exactly how your world runs. I knew what kind of environment you grew up in, and I know what is expected of you. Quite frankly, I pity you."

A sneer formed on the green unicorn's faceâ€"

"No." Twilight cut him off. "I took the Dark Lord on by myself and utterly destroyed him in my \_first\_ fused loop. Nothing you can say will impress or terrify me."

"...Hrm." The sneer was gone, replaced by a carefully neutral expression. "The star bear wasn't my fault."

"The Ursa Minor is a standard whenever Trixie comes around," Twilight countered dismissively. "We're not blaming you for that. But not even Trixie went into 'dark' magic without being influenced by the Alicorn Amulet. You've crossed a line." She smiled, a smile more suited to a carnivore. "So... you're going to have some \_remedial\_ lessons. Every bearer is going to teach you how to embody their element."

The unicorn groaned. "And here I finally thought I'd be able to get out of school... I take it you'll be enforcing these lesson plans somehow?"

With a smile, Twilight handed him a series of parchments. "Here. Letters from Pinkie when she replaced Hermione Granger."

She would later privately admit that the reaction of the colt in front of her was one of the most hilarious things she had ever seen.

"...I... see."

"It gets better," she quipped. "She can become an alicorn at will."

The green unicorn grew a little greener.

"So, recap: You're going to publicly apologize to Ponyville, me and my friends are going to give you lessons on the Elements of Harmony, and we'll see how this goes." Twilight Sparkle smiled brightly. "Welcome to Equestria, Draco Malfoy."

\* \* \*

><p>45.7 (masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...and the triple somersault by that unicorn was absolutely incredible! I'll admit I was a little worried when the earth pony filly, Apple something, jumped from that pier but the way that the pegasus caught her!"<p>

"Mmmhmm. "

"And those BATONS! I don't know how they enchanted them! Even if they got outside help, the amount of things that they turned into " and the flute solo was amazing!"

"Yep. "

"I can't even believe the, what did they call them, extreme gear? Extreme indeed! I've never seen anything like it!"

"Uh huh. "

"That finale, though, that was absolutely astounding. Obviously they couldn't have really ascended, that would be impossible, but it seemed so real!"

"Miss Harshwhinny? Didn't you say something about me needing to contain my enthusiasm?"

\* \* \*

><p>45.8 (masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...This is... awkward," Smart Cookie finally said, glancing down at the necklace around her neck.<p>

\_Well... in retrospect, it was inevitable. Ah mean, we're



soulbounded. Lotta loops where that's normal have a few switches.\_

"Well, yes, but..." The filly rubbed the back of her head awkwardly. "It's been so long since I've had an actual body. And such a young one at that, I... honestly don't know what to do."

\_Enjoy being a foal! Go to school, look fer yer cutie mark, make friends with Pansy and Clover... Get covered in tree sap, Ah dunno. Go on, ya'll deserve it.\_

\* \* \*

><p>45.9 (OracleMask)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, Doctor, it's been...<em>really interesting<em> travelling with you," Twilight Jane Smith said.

This was her very first fused loop with this new universe, and it had been a challenge. There was time travel going on EVERYWHERE! A whole race of beings who worked the fabric of time and space the way pegasus ponies handled the weather! The fact that ponies and humans coexisted on Earth was the least strange thing, but at least Twilight could run comfortably. Travel with the Doctor seemed to require lots of running.

The whole universe had a weird vibe to it, though. Twilight had decided to hold off on experimenting with anything until she had a better idea of what was going on, sticking to her loop's self's role. Even THAT had been confusing! But now, after many adventures and four (no, wait, seven? Maybe?) Doctors, the loop was about to end.

"Right," the Doctor said, hands rubbing together, "Now then, before you go popping off to that little pony universe of yours, there's one thing I \_probably\_ should mention."

\* \* \*

><p>Spike opened his mouth to ask Twilight what the plan was for this loop, only to close it again as she walked in with a pronounced eye twitch.<p>

"I â€" that â€" UGH!"

"Bad loop?" Spike asked instead.

"Yes â€" no, not really, the loop wasn't that bad," Twilight admitted, "But that Doctor! He figured out I was looping, and I thought HE was too. Only he ISN'T, he just time travels so much that he was able to bluff it out. And he didn't bother saying anything about it until end of the loop!"

Grumbling, Twilight reached into her subspace pocket. At least she'd managed to keep the sonic lipstick, she'd finally be able to figure out the full range of that thing's abilities...except that the sonic lipstick was gone, having been replaced with a notice.

"The universe you are attempting to breach is locked as READ-ONLY. No items or persons may be copied, on pain of..." Twilight skimmed past several dozen threats from Skuld. The general theme was, on pain of \_pain.\_ "...huh."

Great. So much for all the useful things Twilight had planned to nab from the TARDIS next time she looped in there.

\* \* \*

<p>45.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

Ah, that fresh new world smell!

Jenny took a deep breath as she flickered into existence, sighing and smiling. Grass, live grass. Cobblestones. Hay. \_Magic,\_ infusing everything. Pastoral, then?

Her eyes flickered open, looking around at the small village. The creatures that lived here were slightly- "only slightly" shorter than humans, judging from the doors. There were pink highlights in every building, enough to be noticed, but not enough to be... \_gaudy.\_ Many of the doors lacked knobs, or handles, and as one of the natives wandered into her vision, tossing her curly pink mane, she realized why. Ponies! Every little girl's dream, in all the colors of the rainbow!

Her eyes widened as a winged pony landed next to the pink one and chatted for a moment. She hadn't meant the rainbow comment literally, but apparently...

The pony pegasus (could it really be a pegasus if it wasn't a horse?) took off again, and Jenny followed its path with her eyes. Once more she was in awe as the pony handled the clouds in the sky. Weather manipulation was old hat to her, of course, but the way that this pony twisted and turned through the air made it clear that she was a natural at her given task. Quickly pulling a camera out of her satchel, Jenny started to film what she could of the aerial display.

"Hi there!"

The woman whirled and looked into the widest smile she had seen in a long time. How had the pink pony managed to sneak up on her? After a moment, realizing that no attack was forthcoming, Jenny smiled and rolled her eyes. "Hello here."

"...Ha! Good one!" The pink pony stuck out a hoof. "I'm Pinkimena Diane Pie, local party pony and friend to loopers everywhere! Don't worry, the Anchor's going to be here this afternoon, I'll introduce you. Welcome to Equestria!"

Jenny grinned and took the hoof in her hand. "Jenny Everywhere, shifter and drifter. Your loop's pretty nice! You got humans here?"

"No, not native." Pinkie tilted her head. "Actually, most other loopers that come here turn into ponies. What's up with you?"

The woman sighed, looking off into the distance. "I'm... a bit of an

anomaly. I don't actually have a home loop... as far as I can tell, anyway."

"Oh my gosh! That's... sad, but it sounds exciting!"

"Heck yeah!" Jenny smirked at the pony. "I get to go everywhere! Krogan, elves, vampires, ninjas, ninja elf krogan vampiresâ€"that was one WEIRD loopâ€"I ain't seen it all, and I never will, but that won't stop me from trying!"

\* \* \*

><p>45.11 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was running over her options at the moment. The expansions seemed to be proceeding apace and the prospect of new experiences â€" particularly finally learning what might be in that locked object the Tree of Harmony had produced â€" was quite invigorating to her. In addition, last Loop she'd finally completed her little set of variants of the latest Daring Do novel, each one guest starring a different friend of hers (plus one guest starring her of course), and was looking forward to the next Loop they were all together so she could give them out.<p>

Right now though, she was wondering if there was any method she hadn't yet used to deal with Sombra. While the evil stallion usually had all the mental acuity of an unrepentant drug addict who snorted crystals â€" the Elements of Harmony apparently did a number on his mind most Loops â€" he was an extremely evil and scary pony the Loops where he was competent. As such, Twilight felt little remorse for humiliating him in new and creative ways every chance she could get. Frankly, he deserved it.

"Hmm... maybe I can arrange an 'accidental' meeting with Daring this Loop and get her on board with discovering an intact lost civilization, recovering a powerful magical artifact, and defeating a despotic conqueror all at the same time. Could make for an interesting book. I wonder if I still have thatâ€"

\_\*\*\*CRACK\*\*\*\_

45.12 (Crisis)

\* \* \*

><p>"â€"harglepth..." Twilight collapsed to the ground. She tried looking around her, but immediately closed closed her eyes when her vision swam rather severely. She <em>thought<em> she was back in her tower in Canterlot where she did research as Celestia's student prior to being sent to Ponyville, but that made no sense. She'd been in the middle of a typical, if lonely, Loop and abruptly she was here. There was no reason she could tell for the Loop to have ended prematurely like that, but she felt like she'd just Awoken. And in the roughest manner she'd ever experienced.

In all honesty, she felt sick enough to have consumed the entire contents of Big Mac's looping stock of alcohol as well as suffering

the combined hangover that would induce at the same time. Frankly, if she hadn't garnered the mental fortitude looping inevitably provided, the pounding of her head would probably be lethal all by itself.

"What happened?" she asked the air around her. Or tried to. It came out more like "whppnd". She thought she heard voices, but the pounding in her head drowned them out.

Twilight wasn't certain how long it was before her head started to clear â€" the pain and disorientation rather made it hard to keep track of time â€" but clear it did. She opened her eyes to see the concerned faces of not only Celestia and Spike, but also the other five normal Elements, Gilda, Trixie, as well as Luna and her daughter Nyx to boot. And to top it all off, Sleipnir, the eightâ€"legged Yggdrasil admin assigned to their universe.

"Wow," she chuckled weakly. "How hard did my collapse derail the timeline?"

"She's okay!" Pinkie cheered.

"Oh, my, Twilight," Rarity gushed, "You gave us all quite the scare."

"No kiddin' sugarcube," Applejack breathed a sigh of relief. "Y'all been out fer hours."

"Whatever happened to you reverberated through the Elements so hard that everyone bonded to one felt it like a physical blow," Rainbow told her, looking more worried than Twilight had ever seen her. "Even Gilda felt something was wrong and she's the most recent addition to the club."

"Mine sister sent out the signal that she was awake and we responded promptly. Celly told us of your predicament and together we arranged for both ourself and Nyx to be brought down early to render any aid we could. We... are not certain precisely why the eightâ€"legged Lokison has come."

"Because I needed to be certain that Twilight was stable," the Yggdrasil admin said rather formally. "She was hit rather hard with a destabilizing event and I needed to be on hand in case she required my aid recovering from this end. I am thankful that no intervention was required. You may rest easy, her regaining consciousness means any potential danger has passed."

One by one, each of the visitors expressed their relief that Twilight was alright.

"I take it what ended the last Loop wasn't normal," Twilight offered from a couch Celestia had conjured for her to rest on.

"No," Sleipnir agreed, "it most certainly was not. Nor was your Loop the only one ended so abruptly."

"How many a' tha Loops were affected?" Applejack asked, already knowing she wasn't going to like the answer.

Sleipnir gazed at the gathered loopers very seriously before

answering.

"All of them."

Twilight's eyes nearly popped out of her skull. "Whaâ€" What could possibly do something like that?!"

Sleipnir sighed and addressed the room. "I will tell you all I am allowed to, but understand that the restrictions on certain sensitive information means that I am literally incapable of telling it to you. Please sit down, as this may take a while."

"So..." Rainbow prompted after everyone was seated.

"What happened was that we lost another Loop," Sleipnir explained solemnly, "except this time it was particularly catastrophic."

"You mean... a whole universe, just gone?" Pinkie's hair deflated as she began to tear up. "No more parties or loopers to have parties for?"

"Yes," Sleipnir nodded, "that is precisely what happened."

"Wait," Twilight interrupted, "you said you lost 'another' Loop. When has this happened before?"

Sleipnir blinked in surprise and looked directly at Twilight in confusion. "You don't remember?" When Twilight shook her head, he gained a sour expression. "I told her to fix that, and I'm sure she knew how..." he muttered as his markings began to glow. "No wonder you didn't remember a Loop being lost before. Hold on a moment."

Twilight did as he asked, and suddenly the memories of Madoka and her friend Homura from that Loop came rushing back. Why would Madoka have not fixed her memory about such an important event if she was able to do so?

"Okay," Twilight reoriented herself, "so someone named Madoka, who's apparently memoryâ€"proof, ascended past the dimensional boundaries of her Loop. And then was reunited with the only other surviving looper in one of our Loops."

"Indeed," Sleipnir scowled angrily. "She effectively accessed Yggdrasil without authorization or training in order to arrange a fused Loop here to recover her friend, potentially exposing your Loop to the harmful viruses and malware that are no longer properly contained with Yggdrasil damaged as it is. As sympathetic as I am to her plight, I cannot approve of her exposing your Loop to such risk. I was, as you might say, not happy."

"She's... not dangerous, is she?" Twilight asked. Her restored memories showed Madoka as friendly and very much concerned for the wellâ€"being of her friend. The idea that she was a bad individual just didn't compute.

"Not... inherently," Sleipnir sighed. "Mostly she is misinformed about the nature of Yggdrasil's system and inexperienced in how things are done at our level. She is also potentially mentally imbalanced given her seemingly rapid acceptance of the loss of her

Loop. There are a number of rumours going around about her, not the least of which are regarding what happened to her friend Homura after her recovery from your Loop, and I hope that some of the more sinister ones prove untrue. Of all the things we really do not need to deal with right now, an insane neophyte goddess is rather high on the list."

"Can anything be done to help the poor darling?" Rarity asked.

"The backups of her universe are undamaged," Sleipnir admitted. "It may be possible to restore it after the Loops end, but with the rather rapid ascension of the only viable Anchor from that universe to the divine level â€" even if she was manipulated into doing so â€" restoring it at this time has been deemed to be counterproductive."

"Who manipulated her?" Spike inquired.

"Her looping familiar, Kyuubey," Sleipnir informed the dragon. "An extremely misguided and potentially sociopathic entity dedicated to preventing the collapse of his universe by filling young souls with grief and then persuading other young souls to assist in harvesting them until they too are filled with grief. We remain uncertain if he survived the Loop's destruction, and request that if you encounter him in the future that you detain him by any means necessary."

"Oh, he's totally not getting a Pinkie Party," the party pony in question growled.

"Regardless," Sleipnir continued, "The collapse of Madoka's Loop was the best case scenario possible. The most recent event was perhaps the worst case scenario. Yggdrasil taken in the form of a tree would contain the Hub in its trunk with the various Prime universes, or baselines, branching out from it, and a myriad of variant universes further branching out from each of those primary branches. The Anchors keep the primary branches, and all that grow from them, stable. Hub Loops take place where the primary branches meet the trunk rather than the trunk itself, and many fused Loops take place where two or more of the smaller tertiary branches cross one another. The collapse of Madoka's Loop was like a primary branch cracking a few inches out from the trunk, while the recent collapse was more like the entire branch being ripped off the tree, taking a portion of the trunk with it."

"Ouch," Gilda voiced the general consensus of the room.

"Wait a sec," Nyx interjected. "If the Loops are set up with one Anchor per 'primary branch', then how do the Linked Loops work?"

Sleipnir raised an eyebrow at the change of topic, but decided to humour the filly. "Damage to the various universes after the event that initially damaged Yggdrasil was not uniform. The Hub escaped damage due to being the most critical, and thus most protected, portion of Yggdrasil. And while a few other universes remained intact enough that they did not require anchoring like most, the only other universe to escape unscathed was Eiken."

The entire room winced at the mention of the widely agreed most aggravating known Loop.

"Some were damaged to the point that a single Anchor was not sufficient, and so they were divided into portions and each portion anchored through the baseline. The Trek Loops were the first successful Linked Loops brought online."

"Wait," Twilight interrupted. "There are loopers native to the Trek Loops?"

"Yes," Sleipnir nodded. "I understand they like their privacy and rather than gain a wide variety of powers and skills like most loopers, they instead have honed their ability to remain undetected as fellow loopers. I'd tell you who they are, but it would invalidate my wager that you'll be the first to get proof."

"But, why..." Twilight facehooved suddenly. "Right. Starfleet."

"I beg your pardon?" asked the confused god.

"The Trek loopers would have to deal with Starfleet, who get reports on everything they do," Twilight explained. "They regularly deal with a lot of things they can't possibly have any foreknowledge of, and anyone in Starfleet with half a brain would pick up on them acting with too much foreknowledge and launch an investigation. Which would mean they'd most likely have to explain the Loops every time this happened. That got old for me after a few times trying to convince Celestia that I was Looping before she Awoke. I pretty much gave up except for special occasions after I'd done it a couple dozen times, and Celestia's the best case scenario."

"I'm not entirely sure if I should be flattered," Celestia joked.

Twilight simply continued on. "I know Harry Potter still hasn't forgiven Dumbledore for what he did the times Harry tried to convince him of the Loops early on, and Dumbledore is still relatively benevolent if lacking in common sense. A group of superiors, some of whom may be actively hostile? Yeah, I can see how they'd want to keep their looping status hidden."

While the rest of the room nodded in sympathy and understanding, Sleipnir decided to get back to the topic at hand.

"Anyway, when the collapse affected the Hub, it damaged that universe's backups. We don't know what data, if any, survived."

"How do backup files work in a system like Yggdrasil anyway?" Twilight inquired. "I mean, I doubt you actually have anything else that could store the kind of data Yggdrasil runs."

"Very true. Tell me Twilight," Sleipnir said in the manner of a teacher, "how do you think backup data works in a system like Yggdrasil? I can tell you that almost every Loop currently running we had to fix using backup data. So where do you think it came from?"

Twilight thought hard for a moment before the light of comprehension dawned in her eyes. "Fiction! You back up one universe in another as works of fiction! And the Hub is the only universe that has fiction about every Loop!"

"Close," Sleipnir agreed. "When one universe's data is stored in another as backup, the inhabitants of the hosting universe inevitably write fiction about the universe being backed up. But you're right about the Hub. It's the only universe used to back up all other universes Yggdrasil runs, which is why the Hub itself is being used to Anchor the entire multiverse."

"The Hub is its own Anchor?" Rainbow's eyes nearly crossed in confusion. "How does that work?"

"No," Sleipnir explained. "The Hub is the \_multiverse's\_ Anchor, keeping Yggdrasil itself stable through all the other Anchors in the Loops. As a result, damage to the Hub affects the Anchors through that connection and to a lesser extent the other loopers and the entire multiverse."

"How does the damage from this event affect us?" Luna asked.

"The Loop we lost is simply \_gone\_," Sleipnir reiterated. "At the \_conceptual\_ level. It effectively never existed. Any fused Loops you had with that universe have now never happened. Aside from the forced system-wide reset of the Loops the collapse triggered, even the divine operators of Yggdrasil have no memory of it beyond an almost completely corrupted file of the 'jumpstart' attempt with a fused Loop that ended in its destruction."

Eyes were wide around the room as they all tried to wrap their minds around the totality of such destruction.

"On a more tangible note," the divine beast continued, "the emergency reset has in all likelihood set every active Looper to 'Awake' status across the board, you might even have a few new loopers for added stability. It's a little hard to tell at the moment as everyone not sent to make sure the Anchors were fine is running around trying to assess the full extent of any secondary damage."

"You said that this resulted from a fused Loop as part of a 'jumpstart' attempt," Celestia cut in. "What exactly does that mean?"

"Some universes were damaged to the point that we can't get them properly anchored without the assistance of existing loopers," Sleipnir answered. "I believe Fluttershy is familiar with one of the more successful Anchors activated this way."

"You mean Lemon Rush?" Fluttershy perked up. "Is he okay?"

"Are you kidding?" Gilda gave Fluttershy an incredulous look. "He probably took whatever floored little miss friendship graduate and beat it to a pulp."

"Indeed," Sleipnir agreed. "He is a very hardy and stable Anchor. You should be proud."

Fluttershy blushed.

"But as I was saying," the eight-legged stallion continued, "the fused Loop was the latest attempt to get a particularly damaged universe to start looping. The baseline suffered severe damages, and



even the viable Anchors are all damaged to some extent. And yes," Sleipnir rolled his eyes as he saw the inevitable tangent forming before him, "this has happened before. When we have a damaged Anchor candidate, it's standard procedure to move down the list to secondary and even tertiary Anchor candidates to get the Loop functional. Your friends the Turtles are victims of a damaged baseline. Yggdrasil can no longer tell which of their major variants is the true baseline and I understand the situation has created some rather unique mental stress issues. Your friend Sonic has been confined to variant Loops because we still haven't repaired his baseline to the point where it's viable. I doubt he'd even recognize his true history at this point."

"What's keeping you from fixing it?" Rainbow interrupted before Sleipnir could get back to the main topic.

"Sonic's baseline has multiversal travel outside the myriad of branching variants, which creates at least as many headaches as baseline time travel. The DC and Marvel Loops were so hard to get functional that we almost set them to Readâ€œOnly, the absolute last resort to keep a universe from being lost. We can't get Sonic's baseline functional because not all of the universes that it interacts with in its baseline are looping yet. The universe we were trying to jumpstart is actually the last one we need to finally get Sonic's baseline fully functional."

"And the problem you have is...?" Rainbow prodded as if she hadn't distracted from the topic in the first place.

"The problem we have," Sleipnir answered good naturedly, "is that this particular universe was the single most critically damaged of all due to being in closest proximity to the event that caused the initial damage to Yggdrasil. All attempts to get it looping have failed, the latest, as you now know, in a manner that destroyed an existing Loop. The reason why we keep trying is that we think that something in this universe may have born witness to the event that damaged Yggdrasil and give us information that could aid in repairing the damage."

"Is there anything we can do to help?" Twilight asked.

"Nothing that you do not already do," Sleipnir apologized. "We can't risk any other Loops collapsing through contact with this universe until we get it stabilized. And the Loop that was lost... I'm afraid there's absolutely nothing you can do at all at your current dimensional level, and we'd very much prefer you don't ascend past the dimensional boundaries of your Loop. Even those of you not the Anchor. While the chance of your Loop being lost is... less than if the Anchor ascends, it's still rather significant."

"We kinda figgered," Applejack gave Sleipnir a flat stare.

"That's not to say what you all do isn't helpful," Sleipnir offered. "Simply looping and remaining metaphysically stable helps more than I'm allowed to say. The fact that you all have, of your own volition, offered sanctuary to other loopers who visit Equestria is more than we could have ever asked of you. That you manage to succeed despite the numerous significantly dangerous hostile entities native to your Loop is nothing short of a miracle. You've already managed to avert at least one potential metaphysical collapse of another Anchor,

likely saving miss Clearwater's entire Loop in the process. You have already gone above and beyond the duty assigned to you as loopers, and I hope you all continue to do so. I am honoured beyond words to be your assigned administrator."

The entire room blushed at the praise.

"And do keep up the antics, please." Sleipnir winked. "I've won the 'funniest Loop videos' contest a few times now and I'd like to get a good winning streak going."

\* \* \*

><p>45.13 (OracleMask)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stumbled. Waking up in midâ€"stride was always a pain...even if there were soft, fluffy clouds to land on here.<p>

And then the loop memories rolled in and Twilight completely forgot her irritation. She was in Cloudsdale's flight camp as a pegasus filly.

More importantly, for some reason Twilight was now Rainbow Dash. Literally. Looking at herself revealed she was in Dash's body. Blue mane, rainbow mane and tail, and...no cutie mark at all.

Right, because 'Rainbow Dash' had just challenged two bullies to a race for her friend Fluttershy's honour. Fluttershy seemed to be the normal nonâ€"looping Fluttershy, but Twilight would doubleâ€"check her and the rest of her friends later.

At the moment, a priceless opportunity had appeared. This was the race that Dash had gotten her cutie mark in. Twilight would never have a better chance to earn a different cutie mark from her usual starburst!

\* \* \*

><p>This was it! Twilight tore through the air as she dove for the last ring on the course, feeling the resistance from the sound barrier build and build...and BREAK!<p>

\*\*BOOM!\*\*

Rocketing upwards, Twilight could see the Sonic Rainboom roll out below her. In Dash's body, she had Dash's magical signature, so it still looked the same. And as she felt the tingle on her flanks, Twilight's gaze eagerly turned to her new cutie mark â€"

â€" of her familiar starburst. Granted, each star was a different colour this time, but still!

"OH COME ON!"

Later, Twilight would hypothesize that since the Sonic Rainboom had formed a connection between her and her friends, it fell under 'the magic of friendship'. Right now, she was just incredibly

disappointed.

\* \* \*

><p>45.14 (Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight looked around her as she Awoke. Grass! The book! THE TREE! She laughed out loud, kissing the ground and rolling in the field. "Equestria again! Thank Celestia, Equestria again!"

It took her some time to stop celebrating, but eventually she managed to contain herself. She tilted her head, concentrating, and with a flash a tiara appeared on her forehead. Her face broke out into a wide grin. She quickly concentrated on ascending, then teleported off. A moment later she teleported back, carefully picking up the book, before teleporting away again.

The library! Exactly as she remembered, exactly as she recalled from loop after loop after loop! She ran her hooves over the shelves, giggling like a schoolfilly. Home. Nothing like...

Her joy faded.

Nothing like... that loop.

"Hey Twilight!" Dash walked in with a smile. "You're here early! I gotta admit that experiment we did was pretty neat, what are we going to do next?"

Twilight said nothing.

The pegasus frowned, walking up to her friend and gently poking her. "Um... Twi?"

"It was a high school."

"What?"

"My last loop. High school. Human. Nobody else awake."

Rainbow Dash noticed the tremor in her voice. "Um... That... kind of sounds like it would be something an egghead like you would loveâ€" "

"I COULDN'T STUDY!" Twilight whirled around, tears in her eyes. "Every time, every time I tried, some, something happened! A guy would, or, or sometimes even a girl, and, and there were clubs! Actual clubs that people kept trying to pressure me into! I just wanted to learn! I didn't want, to, to... to..."

The lavender alicorn folded in on herself, starting to cry. Rainbow, awkwardly, wrapped her in a hug as she rocked back and forth. "...you're back here, Twilight. nopony will... I'll make sure you're left alone for as long as you need it."

"...and I couldn't stop them," she murmured. "There was too much of... of me for them to, to, and the back pain, and my magic didn't work, and the force didn't work, and I couldn't access my subspace pocket..." Twilight turned to her friend. "We're never experimenting with the sun again. I don't want to go back there. I never want to go

back there."

\* \* \*

><p>45.15<p>

"Well, that's just \_brilliant,\_" Twilight said with a sigh. "Trixie got inducted into a cult."

"To be honest," Chrysalis supplied, eyes somewhat unfocussed, "she's only pretending to go along with it. She's a good actor."

"Right. Ah, mind link, of course." Twilight nodded. "Any plans?"

"I'm not entirely sure I'm permitted to attack them." Shining frowned. "They're Inevitables, right? Those are supposed to be things of order. And, you know... paladin..."

"They're broken." Twilight shrugged. "Definitely not both good and orderly, at most one of the above."

"Right." The paladin touched his maul. "Good to know."

"Hey," Gilda said suddenly. "Paladins are holy warriors, right? Whose are you?"

Cadence waved.

"Is that allowed?" Chrysalis asked.

"Apparently. I suspect Cadence might well be a Favoured Soul of Shining, as well." Twilight drew a crude map on the floor. "Okay, here's the plan..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Three, two, one..."<p>

"Wait!" Cadence hissed, just before they all started casting or charging. "Look."

Through the slight haze of Twilight's Invisibility Sphere, they could see that Trixie was waving a hoof.

\* \* \*

><p>"Thank you," Trixie said, clearing her throat. "Ahâ€"herm. I am glad to be able to speak to the full roster of the Redeemed. I would like to say something very important."<p>

The variety of crazy Inevitables and cultist followers looked at her expectantly.

"Friends, Redeemed, and fellow travellers," she began, and took a deep breath. "Maximized Empowered Twinned Concussive Sonic Wild Surge \_ENERGY BURST!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"Now that's what I call a distraction," Twilight said approvingly, as cultists went flying and dust rained down from the ceiling.<p>

"Shut up and attack!" Gilda shouted, blade already humming as she launched herself forward.

\* \* \*

><p>Cadence frowned down at Trixie. "Are you alright?"<p>

"Table for two please!" Trixie said clearly.

"Apparently not..." She lit her horn, raised Trixie onto her hooves, and slapped a Restoration spell on her. "How much power did you use?"

"All of it," Trixie said, sounding slightly hurt. "Why do you even ask?"

"Figures." Chrysalis trotted over, rolling her eyes. "Okay, Trix. If you're this determined to stick to the rules of the loop, I'd better at least recharge you."

Chrysalis lowered her head to touch her horn to Trixie's, and after a moment her horn lit with a soft green light.

Trixie's horn answered about ten seconds later, and a full minute passed before they separated.

"All fine?" Trixie asked.

"Yep," Chrysalis replied. "That's a good power combo Twilight worked out for me, you know... full recharge is so convenient."

She touched Trixie on the nose. "But make sure you at least think of an escape plan next time!"

"Escape plan?" Trixie looked dubious. "Why would I need one of those?"

Chrysalis nipped her shoulder. "You know very well why. Resurrections are expensive."

There was a shower of sparks in the background, as Gilda and Shining took turns poking one of the Inevitables. Neither of the psions noticed.

Then something flashed next to them.

Trixie whirled, her horn already lit with an Energy Blast.  
"Cadence!"

Cadence stowed the camera in her subspace pocket. "That's one for the album. You looked so cute!"

Chrysalis sighed, tapping a hoof on the floor. It's going to take a long time to live that one down...\_

\* \* \*

><p>45.16<p>

"Ah, I've always wanted to see the Gryphon Lands," Rarity said, gazing out the window.

Spike chuckled, kneeling beside her. "I'm fairly sure you've been before. In fact, didn't you invade once?"

"That was just one time," Rarity replied, blushing. "I had... self control issues."

"I know, I know." Spike kissed her cheek, feeling an electric thrill run through him at the contact. Though they'd been dating for \_so\_ long, and \_really\_ serious for a large fraction of that... being actually married made it all new again.

Rarity returned the favour, nuzzling into his neck. "You know what I mean, of course. It's rare that we get to just look around."

There was a muted \_whump\_ from the gas bag of the huge airship. From experience, both of them recognized it as heated air being released from the balloonets.

"There goes the superheat," Spike commented. "Not long until we arrive now."

Rarity grinned. "Not tempted to fly down?"

"Well, a bit..." he allowed.

The unicorn gave it some serious thought.

"No, let's just use the docks as normal. It's been a long trip, and I feel like a nice dinner."

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm... sorry?" the waiter asked politely. "You would like the vegetarian option?"<p>

"Yes," Rarity said patiently. "I'm a \_pony\_. We don't eat meat."

"I am not sure that anyone has ordered the vegetarian option... since I was first hired, actually," he admitted. "I will see if the chefs can remember how to do it."

"Not a good sign," Spike said with a wince as the griffin walked off.

"No, it isn't." Rarity sighed. "I wonder where Blueblood ate when he came here last?"

"In his suite." Spike rolled his eyes. "I spoke with the servants who came here with him, once. They just ate fast food."

"My most sincere apologies, madam," the waiter said, eyes downcast as he returned. "None of the chefs can recall what an aubergine looks like in the first place, let alone how to cook it."

"Oh well," Spike said, shrugging, and reached into a pouch slung across his torso. Extracting a few bits, he tossed them to the waiter. "Not your fault."

Accepting the tip, the waiter bowed them out, still apologizing.

"Well, that was a bust..." Rarity looked ruefully back at the five-star restaurant. "I suppose that's the downside of foreign food."

"Gustav was alright..." Spike shrugged. "Maybe he left because he wasn't properly respected, though. Well, looks like it's fast food time."

\* \* \*

><p>"You know," Rarity said, staring up at the stars, "I'm surprised just how many kinds of fast food the Griffins have." She levitated a nut out of their bag and slit it open with delicate care, then hovered the meat of the nut over to Spike.<p>

Spike cracked a walnut, ate the bits Rarity had passed him, then returned the favour. "Well, we tend to think of the Gryphon Lands as a country, like ours â€" formed from, fundamentally, a single source of colonists. But this is a continent of diverse tastes."

He bit off the end of a kebab skewer, and chewed thoughtfully on the peppers, chicken and iron. "How's yours?"

"Convenient." Rarity lifted herself a little to better eat the pita. "I'm a little surprised they do a vegetarian version of this, though."

"I think it's so you can taste the cheese."

\* \* \*

><p>"So." Rarity wiped her mouth with a napkin. "What should we do tomorrow?"<p>

"I'm thinking... the temple complex at Hightown. You know, that one built into the side of a cliff."

"Sounds good."

It also sounded a little scary, of course... but with Spike there, Rarity didn't feel afraid of falling.

That she could literally grow wings on the way down helped, too. A little.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

45.1: It's Raining Mares.

>45.2: Presumably he had an assistant called Bell Jangler.<br>45.3: Plants vs. Zombies.

>45.4: Predator instincts. What can you do?<br>45.5: The Princesses'

Bridle.

>45.6: Acting in Bad Faith.<br>45.7: Ta-da.

>45.8: Swapsies.<br>45.9: The Doctor is In. And he's staying there.

>45.10: Jenny Everywhere is an open source character.<br>The character of Jenny Everywhere is available for use by anyone, with only one condition. This paragraph must be included in any publication involving Jenny Everywhere, in order that others may use this property as they wish. All rights reversed.

>45.11: \*\*\*ERROR\*\*\*<br>45.12: ...ouch.

>45.13: Some things are inevitable.<br>45.14: Eiken is no laughing matter. Especially because it locks down your powers - all of them.

>45.15: Chrysalis has a highly optimized build which is designed essentially to recharge Trixie. The irony given her role in Canterlot Wedding is not missed.<br>45.16: The occasional downsides of intercontinental travel.

## 48. Chapter 48

### 46.1 (Masterweaver)

"This is just weird," Sweetie Belle commented at recess. "I mean, none of us had any plans to shake things up. Well, outside of Trixie's thing with the dragon."

"That was more a 'what would she do' then anything," Scootaloo pointed out. "And it's still early in the loop. Maybe Diamond has some sort of secret prank she's planning on Equestria."

Apple Bloom shook her head. "Nnnnno. No, Ah don't think she was planning anythang. No offence to ya'll but... Well, Ah can read her better then you two, and she seemed pretty normal yesterday."

"You think she got sick?" Scootaloo asked.

"If she were sick Filthy Rich would have sent Cheerilee a note," Sweetie pointed out, glancing at the schoolhouse. "Do you think we should check in on her?"

Apple Bloom looked across the playground. "Maybe... but first we should go talk to Silver over thar."

The crusaders all turned toward the little grey filly sitting alone on a bench, her tail flicking idly as she focused on quietly chewing her food. She'd glance up, occasionally, taking in her classmates playing around before she simply sighed and returned to snipping off tiny bites of her meal.

"...yeah, that might be a good idea," Sweetie agreed. "She doesn't look too happy."

The three of them trotted over to the bench, Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle sitting to either side of Silver Spoon as Scootaloo stood off to the side. The grey filly glance up and them and sneered, her eyes almost completely free of tears. "What do you all want?"

Scootaloo raised an eyebrow. "Well, I personally want to revolutionize the field of aeronautics and join the Wonderbolts. I'm



pretty sure Sweetie here wants to become a pop star, and Apple Bloom wants to build an army of robots to do her bidding."

"Not an army," Apple Bloom countered blandly. "Ah'd be fine with a small squad o' twelve, Ah'm not greedy."

Silver Spoon blinked at them. "...what?"

"You asked us what we wanted," Scootaloo explained.

"No, see â€" what do you want with \_me?\_" the grey filly demanded, trying to get a hold of the situation.

"We saw ya sitting here alone and we figured... nopony should be alone." Apple Bloom shrugged. "Cliche, yeah, but..."

"I don't want to talk to \_you,\_" Silver grumbled, picking up her lunch and standing. "I'm going somewhere else."

Sweetie Belle put a gentle hoof on her shoulder. "I'm sorry. Whatever we did... I'm sorry."

She pushed the hoof off and glared at the unicorn. "Look, I don't know where she is, so stop bugging me!"

Apple Bloom tilted her head. "Where who is?"

"Diamond Tiara!"

Scootaloo rolled her eyes. "What does Tiara have to do with anything?"

"I..." Silver faltered, but rallied herself quickly. "That's obviously why you're talking to me! You want to find, find out where she is!"

"We \_are\_ worried about her," Sweetie allowed, "but right now we're honestly more concerned about you. Diamond can take care of herself."

"There! That!" Silver Spoon pointed at the unicorn. "How do you KNOW that?! You've only been friends with her for, like, a week! And somehow she's... not her! You changed her!"

The crusaders shared a look. Ah.

"And what was that?! What aren't youâ€"?!"

"She still considers you a friend," Sweetie interjected swiftly. "Really. We never meant to steal her from you... it's just..."

"I don't think Silver would believe us without proof," Scootaloo interjected. "And, well... you know what Nyx told us about how Twilight felt when Fleur and Flash ended up, umâ€""

"I'm right here!" the grey filly huffed. "Why are you ignoring me?!"

Apple Bloom took a breath. "...Silver, there is... a really big secret, but Ah think it should be up ta Diamond whether we tell ya or

not."

"Oh, right, let me guess. You're all princesses."

Scotaloo grinned broadly.

"...no." Silver Spoon boggled. "You're joking, that can't be right."

"Scoots, stop messing with her mind." Sweetie Belle rolled her eyes. "No, we aren't princesses." \_This loop, anyway...\_ "Look... Diamond Tiara really cares about you. Really. She's always worried when you're not around."

"...she is?"

Apple Bloom nodded solemnly. "Yep. Can't get through a day without wondering if she should have brought you along..."

"...oh." The grey filly scuffed at the ground, not meeting their eyes.

"...You know," Sweetie Belle mused, "real friends will forgive each other no matter what. Even after the worst argument."

Silver's eyes snapped up. "How did you know about that-?!"

"You were telegraphing it so obviously that even \_I\_ noticed," Scotaloo deadpanned.

The unicorn gave her a look. "I was trying to be \_subtle.\_"

"Whatever you said can't have been that bad, though," Scotaloo continued obliviously.

"I said I hated her and wished she'd change back to normal..." Silver admitted quietly.

Apple Bloom sighed. "Tell ya what. You get miss Cheerilee to set whatever assignments she has for us aside, and we'll go find Diamond so that you two can talk. Alright?"

"...I..." Silver Spoon sighed. "...Alright..."

\* \* \*

><p>46.2 (misterq)<p>

"We have a pattern... Red? No, w..white? A pink pattern? What does this mean?" Misato stared at the screen.

Shinji blinked, trying to sort through his extensive loop memories. A pink pattern could mean one of a few different types of looping angels. He kind of hoped it would be the angel version of Dan Hibiki.

"Where is it?" the third child asked.

"It's nearby. The magi are having a hard time locking on. It's over

the water, no wait â€" twenty miles out. Fifteen miles southwest. Now it's three miles to the north. I can't pinpoint its location."

"Have you tried looking right behind you?" asked a high pitched, yet helpful voice.

"No, we haven't looked..." Misato stopped mid-sentence and everyone in the NERV control center slowly turned around.

Shinji paled as he recognized that particular pink-coated pony, who was now apparently the fourth angel â€" Pinkiel.

"Hi there!" the adorable abomination chirped. "Do you all like parties?"

Shinji thought frantically. He remembered what a looping Pinkie Pie was capable of. Still, there had to be a safe way of diffusing the situation.

That was when his father pulled out his pistol and fired six rapid shots at the pink pony â€" who was suddenly no longer standing where she had been.

"Wow! You got me gifts!" Pinkie was now on top of a computer monitor, balancing on her back two legs while happily juggling six spent bullets, "But I didn't get you anything."

"Oh, I can show you a magic trick! Watch this! Nothing up my sleeves," The pink pony gestured at her front forelegs and giggled, adding, "Because I'm naked!"

Then she reached behind her back and into her mane and pulled out a large cupcake. A cupcake topped with the embryo of Adam, the first angel.

One quick gulp later and it was gone.

"Mmm! Instrumentalicious!" Pinkie licked her lips of any loose crumbs as she started glowing, "Oh, I guess that's the ball game. Go team Angel!"

There was a bright flash of light.

\* \* \*

><p>"Get up Shinji! You'll be late for school."<p>

After having more than a few loops together, Shinji recognized the voice to be his mother's.

"I'm awake. What happened?"

Yui Ikari walked into his bedroom, "Did you stay up too late yesterday? If you want, I can call your school and tell them you partied too hard yesterday."

"Partied? What was yesterday?"

"Yesterday was a party day," Shinji only now realized that his mother was wearing a t-shirt that read, 'If you can read this, you're far

too sober!

"Party day?" he asked.

"That's right. A day dedicated to celebrating the joy and wonder found in life. But don't worry, Shin-chan. Today is a party day, too."

"Are... are there any days that are not party days?"

Yui looked aghast at such a thought, "What would be the fun of a non-'party day' day? Now I'm off to work at the balloon factory. If you decide to go to school, bus fare is on the table. I'll have to stop by your father's work and make sure he gets the lunch he forgot. I swear, he would leave his head if he didn't need it for his job managing the cookie mines."

Shinji just stared as his mother put on a silly party hat and left the apartment. Happy dance music could be heard outside while the front door was open. He went to the living room and cautiously turned on the television. A lady dressed as a harlequin was announcing the weather "an eighty percent chance of confetti with possible flurries of glitter later in the evening."

The former Eva pilot just sat there in a dazed state on his couch, only barely noticing that it was made from one giant marshmallow.

\* \* \*

><p>(addendum, from FanOfMostEverything)<p>

I Am.

Or Am I? I forget. And I'm not sure which bits are supposed to be spoken in Big Important Capital Letters. Is there a guide for this somewhere?

Anyway... oh, right, all the ominous threats and "Grr, I'm awesome, fear me" stuff. And something about "the Base Earth," but really, that just seems kind of racist. Unless it's in the sense of there being an Acid Earth somewhere.

What? What do you mean I'm out of time? Who's in charge of this recording studio, anyway?

\_Fiiiine\_.

I am the Pony of Celebration.

The Joy of Faust.

I am Pinkiel. I have come. To party.

\* \* \*

><p>46.3<p>

"Observe, Ponyville, the multitudinous talents of the Great and Powerful Trixie!" Trixie called, setting off a few fireworks.

"Why do I have to wear the bunny suit?" Chrysalis grumbled.

"For two reasons. First, all magicians' assistants have to wear sparkly bunny suits," Trixie informed her.

Chrysalis looked unimpressed. Her current form was that of a black-coated pegasus with a crystalline flower for a cutie mark, so the bunny suit merely looked mostly ridiculous.

"Second," Trixie coughed. "I like seeing you in a bunny suit."

At that, the disguised Changeling perked up a bit.

There were a few chuckles from those of the audience close enough to hear the by-play.

"Right!" Trixie said, getting back into the swing of things. "The first trick that the Great and Powerful Trixie shall do, is the disappearing coin trick!"

She looked over to Chrysalis. "Lend me a coin, will you?"

"I'm not falling for that again!" Chrysalis protested. "Not after the last fifty times."

More giggles.

"Fine then." Trixie looked off into the distance for a moment, theatrically sighing and frowning. "What about this?"

She reached behind Chrysalis' ear, and pulled a bit from behind it.

"That's just pathetic," Chrysalis griped. "I've seen that before."

Another bit fell out from behind her ear. Then another. With a clinking rush of wealth, at least fifty bits poured out from behind Chrysalis' ear, leaving her looking quite confused.

"Oh, so that's where they keep disappearing to," Trixie said, nodding. "Mystery solved."

"Are there any more back there?" Chrysalis asked plaintively.

Trixie reached back again, this time with both hooves. "Hold on a minute, I think there is something..."

There was a series of clang noises. Then the sound of something heavy falling over, a croak as though from a frog, two snatches of music, and the noise a plate makes when it spins around on the floor.

"Got it!" Trixie announced, flourishing her prize â€" a large red stick with a lit fuse.

"Uh..." Chrysalis pointed. "Trixie?"

"Use my title!" Trixie snapped, waving the stick around.

Chrysalis rolled her eyes. "Oh, Great and Powerful Trixie. You're holding an explosive."

"Eh?" Trixie brought it up to her face to examine it.

BOOM.

Both unicorn and faux-pegasus blinked away soot from their eyes.

"...ignore that!" Trixie called, wiping her face clean with a towel. "Now, where was Trixie?"

"I don't know, you tell me," Chrysalis snarked.

"Ah, the classic! A rabbit from a hat!" Trixie swept her hat off her head, reached in up to the shoulder, and pulled out Angel.

"Ta-da!"

Angel bit her hoof.

"Ow!" Trixie leapt a foot into the air. "Chryssy! Catch that bunny!"

Chrysalis lunged forward, missed Angel completely, and fell into the hat.

Angel bounced off, throwing a carrot as a parting shot.

"...oops." Trixie picked up her hat and shook it. "Are you okay in there?"

"Get me out of here!" a slightly echoey version of Chrysalis' voice demanded.

Trixie turned the hat upside down and shook it. Two more rabbits (less violent than Angel), a cheese wedge, a spare cloak, three magazines and a wardrobe crashed out.

Then there was a loud splash, and some water pattered out of the opening.

"Are you in the swimming pool?" Trixie asked, moving the hat right side up again.

"Not quite," Chrysalis replied, over the sound of running water. "I think this might be the games room."

Trixie frowned. "There's no water in the games room!"

"There is now," Chrysalis said grimly. "Hold on, I can see the opening."

With an ungraceful splat, a black pegasus flew upside down out of the hat's innards and promptly crashed into the stage.

Trixie put her hat back on (resulting in a rush of water) and lifted Chrysalis off the floor. "The rabbit escaped."

"I do not care in the slightest," Chrysalis said distinctly. "What now?"

"Well, Trixie has not done the saw-a-pony-in-half trick-"

Chrysalis turned to go.

"-but she supposes it may be possible to skip that?" Trixie tried.

The pegasus stopped. "You'd better."

\* \* \*

><p>"We have clearly hit on a winning formula," Trixie said over tea that evening.<p>

"No kidding," Spike said, putting a plate of biscuits on the table. "That was hilarious!"

"I'm glad you approve..." Chrysalis muttered. Somehow, the bunny outfit had survived unscathed through the hour or so of... postmodern magic show?

"I notice that it introduced you both to Ponyville quite nicely, though," Twilight said encouragingly.

"True." Chrysalis then shot a look over at Twilight. "Has that extra suite for Trixie and I been finished yet?"

"Yes, it usually is by now when you want to stay here," Twilight confirmed.

"Good." Chrysalis grinned suddenly. "The hive mind thinks I've gone a bit strange, though."

"Is that-"

"That's accounting for the loops, yes." The Changeling Queen then shrugged. "But it's clearly working, so they don't exactly mind."

\* \* \*

><p>46.4<p>

"Okay, here we go."

Applebloom poured out the pre-programmed mycelium vial.

The billions of tiny nanomachines suspended in solution spread as a golden haze over the surface of their target rock, eating into it, then spread to others as it turned to dust. It grew more like a plant than a machine, sinking roots into the ground and spreading micron-thin solar film to gather energy.

About two minutes in, a quiet signal from Cookie indicated that the mycelium had obtained access to sufficient magically charged crystal to initiate a crystal turbine, supplying additional power and accelerating the growth process markedly.

In some ways, the slow progress it was making was annoying for the engineering specialist. It would go much better in a world where electricity was common, as opposed to a small number of hydro dams.

But, well, she had the time for it.

"I'd say... about a week," she muttered to herself.

That should give it time to properly dig out the areas of space for her lab, shore them up so the roof wouldn't be troubled, and get to work building the larger machinery she was going to need.

It would also give her time to select a suitable drydock location, of course. And for the inevitable arguments with the other Crusaders about just what each of them wanted to have built this loop and what would be fair.

(They were still resentful of her little trick with HMS Dreadnought. Just a bit.)

\* \* \*

><p>"That can't be fair!" Scootaloo protested. "We're starting only twenty miles apart?"<p>

"Well," Sweetie replied, eyeing the Skokaku-class aircraft carrier floating just offshore. "If we started at much further than that, then it'd be a full day of you just bombing us all to bits. We know aircraft carriers are longer ranged-"

"Yeah, and I'm kinda annoyed that I'm getting so nerfed by this." Scootaloo twitched her wings. "Besides, have you seen how many flak guns Applebloom's got on that ridiculous Yamato?"

"Don't bring the Yamato into this," Applebloom said, sitting back and crossing her hooves.

"Oh, for crying out loud!" Nyx slammed a hoof on the floor. "We built the things, now are we going to use them or just spend all day arguing?"

Sullen muttering trailed off into silence.

"Right. Now, as the referee I'll make the decision. Start fifty kilometres apart."

All of them started complaining.

"See?" she pointed out. "At least all of you are unhappy."

"Alright, then, fine." Tiara shook her head. "I suppose that'll be alright."

\* \* \*

><p>A dozen dive bombers tipped over, one by one, sailing down towards the mammoth battleship which was their target.<p>



Which seemed to explode beneath them.

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo blinked, reading off the reports in her high-tech plotting room as her entire first strike disintegrated. "Okay, what. Applebloom?" A chat connection opened. "What the hay did you just do?"<p>

"Shotgun rounds for the main guns," Applebloom replied mischeviously. "They were part of the original equipment, but I... fixed a few glaring problems."

Scootaloo sighed. "Okay, that sucks."

The connection blanked out for a moment, as the Yamato fired a full broadside. "Oh, hey, Tiara turned up. Stand still, dang nabbit!"

The pegasus giggled; having sunk her entire allowance of resources into a destroyer flotilla at least twenty strong, Tiara was going to be a pain for any of the others to take out.

That just left Sweetie to make an appearance. And she'd kept her setup secret from the others, so...

With a button press, Scootaloo closed the connection and started putting together a torpedo bomber strike.

\* \* \*

><p>The last of the fifteen Avengers rose gently from her flight deck, circled once to join the rest of the formation, and set off towards the madly evading battleship over the horizon. (A Catalina loitering well above any possible counterfire was still reporting on the battle â€" *Yamato* was hit once by a torpedo but still game, and Tiara was down to fifteen destroyers. Scootaloo wanted to be able to hit the winner before they could head for her.)

She took a moment out on the flight deck to watch them leave. It kinda sucked that she couldn't fly the attacks herself, but â€" well, there weren't enough of her, and everypony who knew the Shadow Clone technique had decided not to teach it to the Crusaders. For some reason.

Then Scootaloo spotted an unusual wave pattern just off the bow.

\* \* \*

><p>Nyx adjusted her binoculars. "This would be so much easier if I'd thought to have them make a plotting board for me..."<p>

With a bright flash, Scootaloo appeared. "Oh, come on! First down again?"

The alicorn turned to her. "Hi, Scoots. What got you?"

"Sweetie Belle." Scootaloo removed the teleport harness, grumbling. "Ever heard of a submarine with a twelve-inch gun fitted to it? 'cause I have now."

Fire and flame belched out from the Yamato's position, and Diamond Tiara appeared in another flare of light. "Hard left and... oh, \_shrub.\_"

"Shotgun rounds?" Scootaloo asked.

"Shotgun rounds," Tiara confirmed.

They settled down to watch.

"Hey, I found out what Sweetie's driving," Scootaloo volunteered. "Submarine monitor."

Tiara giggled. "Now that'll be a surprise."

\* \* \*

><p>Applebloom put her spanner down. "Counterflooding successful."<p>

The compartments were sealed, stopping any more water getting into \_Yamato\_, and adding water into the port side of the ship had got her back onto an even keel.

Now the only question was, where were the others?

Gunfire started, with the small quick-firers blazing away on the port side. By the sound of things, Scootaloo's second strike was on the way in... torpedo bombers this time.

\* \* \*

><p>The torpedo bomber strike hadn't been much trouble, not with the ridiculously heavy AA complement of <em>Yamato.</em> It was confusing that they'd all come in on the same vector, not at all like Scoots' normal flair for air tactics, but Applebloom wasn't complaining.

But it was over an hour later, and still no sign of another attack. The Catalina buzzing around keeping an eye on her was getting nerve-wracking, as it happened.

And there was this nagging feeling she'd forgotten something.

Then the \_Jaws\_ theme started playing.

"Sweetie?" Applebloom asked, checking the radar.

"Peek-a-boo!" Sweetie's voice said gleefully, and then there was a very loud bang.

\* \* \*

><p>"Ah, fiddlesticks," Applebloom muttered. "No wonder she kept it secret..."<p>

"I could have taken her," Tiara proclaimed. "I have ASDIC."

"Had," Scootaloo corrected.

"Er..." Nyx looked down from the cloud. "Any idea when she's coming

up 3?"

\* \* \*

><p>46.5<p>

"Right," Queen Twilight said, with a deep sigh. "Now, since you're all past your majority-"

She broke off to glare at Nyx. "\_And\_ you. I've been keeping track."

Nyx looked embarrassed, then with a flash of magic aged up to the same as her sisters. They looked somewhere between just-post-elements Luna and Cadence.

"You mean she wasn't just ageing slowly?" Diamond Tiara asked Applebloom.

Applebloom shrugged. "As if I'd know."

"As I was saying," Twilight resumed, ignoring the peanut gallery. "Since you've reached adulthood, you get to take on responsibility."

"Do we have to?" Scootaloo asked with a hint of whine.

"Scootaloo," Twilight said pointedly. "Why are we currently in the New Annexe?"

"... 'cause we burned down Canterlot Palace, the Old Annexe and the Canterhorn," Scootaloo admitted. "Tryin' to get a princess specialization for something something volcano."

"Turns out that a volcano isn't just a mountain doused in resinous pine sap and set alight," Sweetie added. "Who knew?"

"Everypony who's ever looked at a geology textbook?" Tiara asked.

"Shush, you're not helping."

"As I was saying," Twilight dragged them back on topic, "I've been sorting out various catastrophes you lot have been causing for just about half of my time awake for the last fifteen years."

"Hey, four of those years were before we Awoke," Sweetie said with a pout. "Those don't count!"

"In short, I need a break. Seriously. Divide things up amongst yourselves, I'm off for a nap. And the country better be in good shape when I get back!"

Twilight flashed purple, and vanished. In her place was an ornate document assigning the five of them as co-princesses regnant.

They were all silent for a few seconds.

"...hey, cool," Sweetie said eventually. "I know how this is supposed to work. Mom's away for the day-"

"-century," Applebloom contributed, nodding up at the sky. They looked, and saw a constellation spread across half the night.

It was a good likeness.

"When did she learn that?" Tiara wondered.

"I did overhear her say that moons were a bit passÃ© a few loops ago," Nyx volunteered. "She may have gotten tips from Okami Shiranui about it."

"Anyway. She's away for a while, and... well, the usual thing to do is party."

"Can we really sustain it for a century?" Applebloom asked, then frowned and got out a computer. "Actually, we probably could. For given values of party."

"Golden age?" Scootaloo suggested. "Dances every night? Flowering of art and culture? Designated ruler and the rest of us getting drunk?"

"This might be a bad idea..." Nyx said, nervously.

"Oh, sure," Applebloom said with a shrug. "We're not stupid, we'll stop if it's not working. But â€" well, look at it this way. When have we ever had a chance to have proper college-style parties?"

"Looking at it that way, it's good for us." Sweetie put on a pious expression, fooling precisely nopony. "Experiences we haven't had before."

Diamond Tiara grinned. "Bet I can make a real archaeologist's dream of a jewellery industry!"

46.6 (Masterweaver)

Silver Spoon stared at her friend.

Well... at the pony that had once been her friend and probably would be again once she finished processing this.

"...this is crazy."

Diamond Tiara tapped her hoof against the table. "Yeah, it's... pretty insane. Especially since..." She trailed off.

"...since...?"

"Erm. The entire reason you're Awake now is, uh..." The pink filly sighed. "You know how I said we're not the only universe? One of the other universes just... collapsed." She shuddered. "Gone. Completely. Like... even the memories of that universe are gone, and all the admins have are a few corrupted files. Every loop just went through a hard reset because of that, and most of them have new loopers. And, uh... that's you."

Silver Spoon blinked.

For a moment she sat completely still.

Then she started hyperventilating. "GONE? Barely a trace and, and, a whole world and all those ponies and that could happen to us without warning and we have no idea when any of these problems are going to be fixed and&€"

Diamond's hooves slammed onto the table as she shoved her face into Silver's. "ZIP YOUR LIPS! It's the job of the ponies up top to worry! \_Your\_ job is to keep yourself as sane as possible and in the trenches while the world loops! I don't ever want to catch you thinking about problems you can't solve, is that clear filly?!"

\_"...y'sm'm..."\_

After a moment, the stern face pulled back and morphed into something somewhat recognizable. "I'm... sorry about that. You didn't deserve to see me as a drill Sargent, I just... I didn't know how to comfort you. I'm... not good with that." Diamond sighed. "In all seriousness, when it comes to Yggdrasil, you should leave things to the admins. They make mistakes, but... they know what they're doing for the most part."

The two of them sat quietly for a long while.

"...you've changed," Silver Spoon said finally.

"I've had literally millennia of experiences," Diamond Tiara pointed out. "Occasionally in one loop."

After a moment, Silver Spoon pushed her chair back and got up. "I... I'm sorry. This is... I... Miss Twilight is this anchor pony, right?" She trotted toward the door. "I, I think I'll go talk to her."

"Silver wait! We're still friends... right?"

The grey filly paused, her hoof on the door. "...Are we? I mean, \_we.\_ Because you're not the the Tiara I know and... let's face it, if you're right, you've passed over millions of Silver Spoons before me. I... maybe one day we'll be friends. Real friends. But right now... we don't even really know each other, the real each other, Tiara." She shook her head, not looking back. "I would love it if we became friends but right now... no. We're just strangers."

With that, she stepped out.

\* \* \*

><p>46.7<p>

Twilight had Awoken... behind a desk.

That wasn't particularly usual, unless the loop was starting far enough back that she'd be in school.

Much stranger, however, was that she was at a desk built for humans.

As a human.

And that there was a large, yellow flag with a rendition of her cutie mark on it draped over the desk.

At this point, she decided that it would be easier to just scan her loop memories rather than try to work it out on her own.

"...huh," she concluded intelligently, walking over to a window and looking out.

She was La Presidenta, ruler of the tiny Caribbean nation of Tropicco, and an absolute presidential dictator. In theory.

In practice, she was having to balance the desires of about eight factions, each of whom wanted something completely different from their Glorious Leader.

"Right." Twilight cracked her knuckles. "I do enjoy a challenge."

\* \* \*

><p>NewsLine<p>

September 3, 1950

The small Caribbean island nation of Tropicco has recently announced a programme of subsidized government research into space travel.

La Presidenta was quoted as saying 'space is the future of mankind, and I feel that Tropicco is uniquely well positioned to lead the world in space travel'.

International observers are skeptical, with many pointing out that space travel is at most a theoretical concept at this date, and that the republic of Tropicco currently has a struggling economy. La Presidenta's economic policies to date have resulted in a 4% reduction in unemployment this year, but prominent economists state that this is merely a case of 'regression to the mean'.

\* \* \*

><p>NewsLine<p>

July 11, 1955

Stunning the world, La Presidenta of the small island nation of Tropicco today informed reporters that 'as of eleven PM, local time, a satellite is in orbit around the planet Earth'.

The satellite, which is apparently named 'Eos' (\_dawn\_) contains a simple radio transmitter powerful enough to be detected across an entire hemisphere. The signal it broadcasts is a simple Morse code, which has been decoded to mean 'peace'.

Mr. Forest, the radiotechnology pioneer who stated in this very paper just a few months ago that space travel was impossible, was not available for comment.

\* \* \*

><p>NewsLine<p>

November 18, 1956

The Union of Socialist Soviet Republics has announced the launch of a radiosatellite of the Eos type into a polar orbit.

In their press release, the Premier said that the satellite " known as Sputnik " was the start of a grand plan to spread Socialism beyond the boundaries of the planet Earth.

La Presidenta, when contacted, simply smiled.

\* \* \*

><p>Journal of Economic Science<p>

1958 edition

"...curiously, Tropico's unemployment rate over the last fiscal year has been at one tenth of one percent. This may simply indicate that the statistics have been fiddled with, of course, but in my last visit I was unable to discover such an adjustment.

The other possibility is that this is related to the way the small nation has become such a hotbed of scientific advances in the last eight years. Much like the United Kingdom in the last century, sustained technological advantage leads to an economic advantage in train..."

\* \* \*

><p>NewsLine<p>

April 11, 1963

The nation of Tropico, already one of the world's wealthiest, has entered into negotiations with telecommunications companies around the globe to sell time on so-called 'Geosynchronous' satellites. These satellites, devised originally in an article by Arthur Charles Clarke (the well-known science fiction writer) perpetually orbit at a fixed position over the rotating Earth, thus making them trivial targets for radio beams.

The downside of these satellites is that they are sufficiently high up to induce latency into a telephone call, though television transmission will of course not be affected.

\* \* \*

><p>Internal memo<p>

White House, 1963

...in the absence of any sign of Red affiliation in the nation of Tropico, the lack of a government willing to be influenced by the United States can perhaps be overlooked. Tropico is becoming an important stabilizing influence in the entire Caribbean and the north

coast of South America, and knocking it out might result in not only Tropico but the whole area going Red.

Recommendation: no action.

\* \* \*

><p>Radio transmission<p>

June 21, 1965

"...this is the Nyx lander, reporting from the Bay of Dreams. We're down, Madam President. Soft landing, everything looks green."

\* \* \*

><p>The most difficult question with this kind of loop, Twilight mused, was precisely how much to 'cheat'.<p>

She'd done... well, quite a bit of cheating over the last two and a half decades. Supporting the technologies which she knew would work, prodding at inventors to produce faster results, even occasionally slipping a paper or two into the publication schedule under an assumed name when the intellectual community got a little stuck.

And the latest drive system was... well, about fifty years early even given everything else.

Still, she decided, watching the firey re-entry trail of Celestia IV as it brought home the year's first load of Helium-3, it was satisfying to see what Tropico could become with just a bit of outside assistance.

Twilight sipped at her lime cordial with the satisfaction of a job well done.

Besides, she thought with a smile, it's better than the normal round of coups and revolutions any loop.

\* \* \*

><p>46.8 (OracleMask)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was having trouble deciding what to do for this Summer Sun Celebration. Neither Luna nor Nyx was awake this time, and none of her usual ideas were appealing. The unicorn had blinked over to Ponyville to see if any of her friends had anything to try. Twilight was trotting down Ponyville's main street when she spotted an interesting conversation taking place over a plate of hay fries.<p>

"Really? I've always wondered what it was like underwater..."

Fluttershy was...on a date? Okay, that was definitely new. The butter-yellow pegasus was sitting on the other side of the cafe table from a brown pegasus stallion with yellow hair.



Before Twilight could get any sense of what was going on, Fluttershy spotted her and waved.

\* \* \*

><p>"So he's a looper?" Twilight asked Fluttershy.<p>

The pegasus's ears twitched. In response, Fluttershy looked abashed.

"Um...he would like me to remind you that he can hear you perfectly fine, even if he doesn't like to talk very much...if that's okay with you, Twilight."

"Right, sorry," Twilight said.

This was the strangest one-sided conversation she'd ever been in. 'Doesn't talk much'...seemed more like 'doesn't talk at all' to her. At least Fluttershy could translate for her, otherwise Twilight would never have understood what Link was 'saying'.

\* \* \*

><p>"Nightmare Moon will be here in two minutes. Are you sure that's all you want to use?" Twilight asked.<p>

Link nodded, his wings shuffling a little bit as he adjusted his grip on his extremely complicated-looking slingshot.

"Um...he said, 'You said she can teleport, right?'," Fluttershy translated.

"That's right," Twilight responded.

Right on time, Nightmare Moon burst in through the curtains and began her speech. Just before she finished, the pegasus loaded a seed into his slingshot and fired it at Nightmare Moon. It landed on the stage between her forehooves and cracked.

"The night shall last...what? Wait! N-N000000ooooooooo!"

A tornado erupted from inside the seed, tore a hole in the ceiling, and carried the screaming Nightmare Moon off into the distance. Less than five minutes later, she reappeared on the stage, disheveled and furious.

"It will take more than petty tricks to -"

This time the seed hit Nightmare Moon's helmet.

Five minutes later, Nightmare Moon reappeared. There was a tree branch stuck in her ethereal mane.

"WHOEVER IS DOING THAT -"

...Ten minutes later, a very dizzy Nightmare Moon reappeared on stage, staggering like a drunk.

"We...WILL find you, whoever â€" ugh â€" whoever you are, andâ€" "

This time three seeds hit Nightmare Moon. Twilight briefly went to check on the Mare in the Moon when she didn't come back and found Princess Luna, out cold, stuck in an apple tree in Appleloosa.

"Not bad," Twilight said, "You said those were called Gale Seeds?"

Putting away his slingshot, Link stretched his wings out â€" revealing his cutie mark of three golden triangles â€" and nodded.

\* \* \*

><p>"Which Link are you, anyway?" Twilight asked, perusing her list of Hub fiction.<p>

Link gave an elaborate wing-shrug. Fluttershy went wide-eyed.

"Oh my. That sounds terribly confusing."

"What did he say?" Twilight asked.

"He said 'Your guess is as good as mine. I've been them all, and there's some reincarnation thing going on that doesn't help. Zelda tried to explain that part to me a few times but I don't really understand it.'"

Link waved a hoof, and Fluttershy dutifully added, "'But didn't you say something about a chaos monster appearing later today?'"

"That's right, Discord. He doesn't seem to be looping this time, but he makes it hard to tell for sure."

"'Huh. Okay, I think I have something that should work really...Fluttershy, you can stop now?'...oh, sorry," Fluttershy said.

\* \* \*

><p>Discord broke free of his stone prison. He stretched, idly turning the hedge maze into a wobbly pile of jello. Being stuck in one pose for a thousand years gave him such a crick in the neck!<p>

"Finally! Time to spruce up this boring world with some of my patented chaos!...\_Eh?"

In front of him was a brown pegasus holding a bottle with a lit fuse attached. Without a word, the pegasus tossed the bottle to the ground just as it busted open with muffled BANG and a puff of soot. The soot fell to the ground, revealing...a chicken.

"Hmm," Discord said, studying the soot-covered chicken with a magnifying glass and ignoring the unholy look in its beady eyes, "Is it Chicken Day already? How unexpected of Celestia to keep my national holidays!"

It took Discord another moment to realize the pegasus had taken off at a dead run. And then, crowing their wrath, the Cucco Horde descended.

\* \* \*

><p>Getting a Cucco into a bottle was hard.<p>

Attaching a small bomb to the bottle without angering the Cucco further was harder.

Using the Cucco Horde Bomb on unsuspecting victims, Link thought to himself as he watched the carnage from several miles away, was \_priceless.\_

\* \* \*

><p>46.9 (masterweaver)<p>

Draco took a moment to consider his position. It was, on the whole, not very good.

One: He was a travelling performer. Or rather, replacing a travelling performer. That meant no money and barely any reputation to use, which in turn meant actual work.

Two: The nobility here was so... naive. There wasn't anything like blood purity or even a secret source of power. Equality was the name of the game, and that meant nothing he could do would convince the others of his inherent superiority.

Three: The native anchor was angry at him and having him go through these... pointless morality lessons. Loyalty was of course something he already understood, though that rainbow pegasus had insisted that it was a "two way street". Generosity and Kindness were supposed to be masks, not ideals. Honesty was simply idiotic, and laughter... laughter was just too random to put into this already pathetic mishmash. Even magic wasn't properly represented, sounding more like Dumbledore's silly friendship nonsense than anything practical.

Four: Twilight Sparkle had made it utterly clear that she or any of the other native loopers could easily make his life hell. That just wasn't fair. He was from the first five! These... ponies were damned upstarts!

Which led right into the final point: He was a pony. Granted, one of the obviously superior unicorn race, but still. At least his coat was a lovely slytherin green.

He did not see how this could get any worse.

\* \* \*

><p>Draco trotted up the library stairs, slamming the door to the guest room open. A day of boring lectures, vile animals, tedious hard labor, inane prattle, veiled insults, and deranged giggles was over and done with. No doubt the next day would contain more of the... same...<p>

Something was stretched languidly on his bed, flicking its tattered tail idly as its mane dripped down its neck. It was very definitely female, and vaguely pony shaped, but covered in black chitin with

holes in its long, slender legs. The creature was appraising him with half lidded cat eyes, its fangs gleaming in the moonlight. An eerie green glow surrounded the crooked shaft of its horn; Draco heard the door behind him swing shut.

"I am quite... put out."

Draco Malfoy narrowed his eyes at the buzzing voice. "Really."

"Hmm, yes. You see, the entertainer you're replacing, she and I are... involved, shall we say." The creature slipped off the bed, cricking its neck idly. "And of course I can... survive, without her. It's not too much of a problem. And yet... I find myself offended by the fact she was replaced by something as pathetic as you."

Normally Draco would have shouted his own merits, but something about that statement held him back. He trotted idly round the outer edge of the room, eyes never leaving the strange beast. "I apologize for my insult."

"You do not mean that," the creature pointed out. "It would be obvious to a non looping \_foal\_ you did not mean that, and that is exactly why you have earned my ire. I have never visited Hogwarts, but from what I understand the house of Slytherin is supposed to be home to the cunning." She glowered at the unicorn as he moved. "But you, you were sorted into that house because you were too cowardly for Gryffindor, too stupid for Ravenclaw, and too lazy for Hufflepuff. You have no ambitions, no true cunning, and the only reason the Hat didn't expel you then and there was your connections which just barely qualified you to be in the house of snakes."

He froze, his face contorting in rage. "...You dare to judge my worthiness? To say I have no place in Slytherin when you have never even visited-?!"

"Yes."

"You have \_no right-!\_"

"I have every right, Draco Malfoy." The creature took a single step towards him. "Every loop, I am in charge of a race that has to feed off of love." Another step was taken. "I have to make sure my children are not starving, and to do that I have to earn the love of a non-looping populace." And another. "Look at what I am, Draco. I am beautiful and hideous, and my children do not share my beauty." And another. "And yet, every loop, my swarm survives. Not through force, but through crafty manipulations, through our ability to take other's forms and feel other's feelings, through coordination and sly tricks and never once has Equestria suspected a thing."

Her breath was cold on his face. "You were sorted into Slytherin, Draco Malfoy. I was \_born\_ into it."

The blonde unicorn took a moment to process the words. "...then we have a common enemy in Twilight Sparkle."

"No."

"Butâ€" "

"A true Slytherin has no enemies," the creature stated as she pulled back, "or at least none worth naming. Enemies are for the brave Gryffindors to fight, for the intelligent Ravenclaws to outwit, for the persevering Hufflepuffs to endure. Any creature that would be an enemy to Slytherin is to be... subverted. The reason for its opposition removed. And if that is impossible, then ensure it will also fight one of the other houses. In the baseline of this world Twilight Sparkle has every reason to hate me and my children, but as an Anchor I have convinced her to allow my nation to thrive. That is the true power that Slytherin claims. And that is the power that I will instil into you."

She smiled. It was not a kind smile. "The elements are telling you what their traits are, how to embody them. I will teach you how to use them properly in the house of snakes. I will teach you how to be a harmonious Slytherin. And I will teach you this. You would try to deny me, but I can ensure you will suffer till the loop's end. So, Draco Malfoy"

"AVADA KEDAVRA!"

The creature fell dead. Draco took a moment to catch his breath before breaking out in a wide grin. Ha, as if that thing could ever

With a long, dry creak, the door swung open. He turned to see the newcomer-and his jaw dropped in shock.

"Did I forget to mention? My people have a hive mind." The thing smirked. "It's not possible to kill me."

After a moment, Draco Malfoy fainted.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight raised an eyebrow as Chrysalis giggled and hopped down the stairs. "I take it things went... decently?"<p>

"It's been so long since I've played the evil queen! I've forgotten how fun it can be!" The changeling waved a casual hoof, preemptively dismissing the librarian's concerns. "Don't worry, I won't let it get to me. I promise."

"I'll hold you to that."

\* \* \*

><p>46.10 (masterweaver)<p>

Twilight blinked Awake, looking up from her standard book of lore...

...and coming face to face with three very human looking women. "Oh. Did... I do something wrong?"

"We don't know yet," Urd said, conjuring up a chair and sitting down. "But you did come in contact with a Skaia protocol. That means you and every other looper involved in the session need to be debriefed."

"Sleipnir's gathering your friends up," Belldandy added. "He thought it might be better for the local admin to send out the call... That and, well, we don't blend in with the natives very well."

Twilight raised an eyebrow. "We're in a public park..."

Skuld crossed her arms, glaring at her sisters. "I told you we should have waited for her to get to the library. But noooooo, you two had to get to her as soon as possible-"

"Do you have anything from that loop in your subspace pocket?" Urd demanded. "Alchemically manufactured items, sylladexs, pumpkins, ectobiology devices, anything?"

The unicorn sighed, reaching into her mane and pulling various things out. "I assume that you're going to confiscate all of this anyway..."

"Not necessarily," Belldandy reassured her as Skuld began sorting through the items. "Anything that could cause Skaia-type alchemy or ectobiology to develop, yes. Anything that's a danger to the loop, yes. But everything elseâ€œ"

"Safe!" Skuld tossed a wand back to Twilight, who caught it and put it to her left. "Could you double check and make sure no Grist got caught in there? That happens sometimes."

"Sure." Twilight tugged at the opening of her subspace pocket, peering down into it. "I've got to warn you, though, the others don't have theirs as organized as mine, so it might take a bit for them to find anything in their pockets..." Various abstract forms were swept out into the open.

Urd smiled a bit. "You're being very helpful, I like that. Most of the time we get people who feel cheated that they didn't get to see the universe they created."

That got the librarian's attention. "Wait, the genesis frog worked? I thought that the loops would-"

"The Skaia protocol is... something we haven't quite locked down," Belldandy admitted. "We got all the programs that were active at the time of the crash looping, although we haven't activated any loopers in them. Too many potential malicious loop entities..."

"The fact is enough Skaia programs got shaken loose that they started drifting." Skuld shrugged. "Most of the time they go for something near the Hub, but occasionally we'll get a seed out here. We lock em down as quick as we can find them, but we usually only find them after they've generated a new branch."

Twilight tilted her head. "Why a frog, though?"

Urd shrugged. "The guy who programmed the protocol was... weird."

"Anyway," Skuld continued, "it's now standard procedure to debrief all loopers who get caught up in the Skaia protocol, check any universe they created, and see if any other problems have arisen."

"Like prototyping a first guardian?" Twilight shook her head. "I read Homestuck before this, and I tried to ensure nothing like that happened. Um, is the looping Skaia protocol-"

"Yes. It's Homestuck." Belldandy shuddered. "And now you know why we will never activate anyone in there."

"Ah."

\* \* \*

><p>46.11 (SpaceKGreen)<p>

He sighed as he woke up unexpectedly. He hadn't been careful enough, and as he had learned, one mistake and you had to start all over.

Taking stock of his surroundings, he noticed some oddities. Everything looked... smoother. His body felt weird. Maybe this was one of thoseâ€"?

Unfamiliar memories flowed into his mind. At the same time, senses formed over countless years screamed at him.

One word stood out.

\_DIAMONDS.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack and Twilight stood and stared at the odd sight in the orchard.<p>

A tree stood there. More accurately, part of a tree stood there; branches swayed merrily in the breeze, ignoring the fact that a large section of trunk was missing. Every now and then one of the branches would remember that gravity existed, falling to the ground.

Nearby was a strange wooden box with various pieces of wood and apples strewn about it, and next to that was a strange hole leading deep into the ground.

"Ah'd say it was a Diamond Dog, but..." began Applejack.

"Yeah, Diamond Dogs don't leave floating trees. Or dig perfectly square holes." Twilight racked her memories. "Hold on..."

Applejack shot her a questioning glance.

"Remember that one strange loop we were in a while back? Where everything was blocky?" asked Twilight.

"Yeah, Ah remember that one. Apple Bloom an' the others were thrilled with it fer some reason, Sweetie Belle especially." Applejack's eyebrows shot up. "Wait. Ah thought that place was one of them universes with no Anchors or home loops."

"So did I." Twilight admitted. "It didn't seem like it was, well, fleshed out enough to have a stable loop. I heard stories from other

Anchors who ended up there, and nobody seemed to have the same experience."

She looked up as the last branch realized that there wasn't anything holding it up and fell with a crash. "Well, it seems that we have a new Looper on our hooves. And if their home loop is different every time," her eyes widened, "they probably don't even know that they're looping. This will be an interesting explanation."

Applejack peered down the hole. "If'n we can find them."

\* \* \*

><p>46.12 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was late in another lonely Loop, and Twilight had gotten sucked into the enchanted comic. Once again, Spike was demonstrating the greatest superpower of all: exposition.<p>

"You're the Masked Matter-Horn!" he told her. "You can fire all kinds of crazy power beams out of your horn!"

Twilight smirked. "Really?" She'd done some research after her first trip here, using nonmagical comics. The Matter-Horn was actually a pegasus who'd invented a sort of artificial horn, which explained why she'd had so much trouble using it the first time around. Now, however, she knew how to properly use the bizarre blend of magic and technology this subdimension insisted on. A bit of focus, a subvocalized command, and a pale blue ray shot out of her horn at a decent fraction of the speed of light.

It struck the Mane-iac, who blinked and looked around, clearly confused. Her mane went still, then gently lowered her onto her hooves. "Iâ€|" She looked at the Electro Orb in one of her tendrils like she'd never seen it before. "What's going on?"

The ponies (and dragon) were promptly ejected from the comic.

The others boggled at Twilight for a bit. Spike broke the silence. "What did you do?"

"All kinds of crazy power beams,' right? Well, how hard could it be for the Masked Matter-Horn to fire a beam of sanity?" Twilight nuzzled her number-one assistant. "Couldn't have done it without you, Spike."

\* \* \*

><p>46.13 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

"Power ponies!" The Mane-iac exclaimed, "How kind of you to join us."

The six ponies and one dragon started stripping off their costumes.

"What is this?" The lunatic mare grinned, "So intimidated by me that you're going to give up without a fight?"



"Not really," called down Twilight. "We just didn't want these costumes cramping our style."

Mane-iac grabbed a cart and flung it at them, only to have it caught by a purple glow of energy and set down beside them.

"But... none of you has that power..."

Applejack jumped off the building they were on, and dropped to the street below, cracking the pavement as she landed.

"I reckon you need to be more... grounded." She slammed her fore-hooves into the ground and the pavement around Mane-iac exploded upwards to encase her up to her neck.

Pinkie appeared from a trash can beside her. "Heh he! Good one!"

"Since when could Mistress Mare-velous control stone!"

"The name's Applejack missy, and you ain't seen the half of what I can do!"

Mane-iac growled and started smashing away at the stone with her hair-strands.

Rarity glided down, having grown a pair of wings. "Dear me, your hair is completely unmanageable. Time for a make-over!"

A massive pair of blue translucent shears appeared out of nowhere and started trimming away Mane-iac's locks. "Noooo! My locks are impervious to even your attack constructs, Radiance."

"It's Rarity, and this is tectonium, a little something I whipped up to comb a mane of pure force. Which yours isn't."

Mane-iac was half bald by now, and completely enraged. Her hair was regrowing, but Rarity was trimming it faster. "When I get the electro-orb to my secret weapon..."

"You mean this electro-orb?" Pinkie appeared on the opposite side of the street, holding it in a hoof

Mane-iac looked at what she was holding and found it was a cupcake. "How... Give it to me!"

"Uh uh, you meanie-pants, you didn't say the 'Pinkie says'..."

Twilight landed in front of her, in full floating hair princess mode and casually flicking away thrown pieces of pavement. "You see, we've fought real villains..."

A lock of hair that had escaped Rarity's shears formed into a needle point and speared down at her, only to be trimmed by a rainbow shockwave that reverberated along the street.

"... Thanks Dash, real, world ending honest to gosh, deity level threats. By comparison, you aren't even a warm-up."

All the ponies had gone full floaty mane alicorn, and were letting their auras show. Mane-iac, now bald, cringed. But it was Spike who dropped off Twilight's back and strode up to her.

Mane-iac gave one final snort. "Letting your useless sidekick Humdrum feel like he's useful? How \_heroic.\_"

"Oh, Spike is plenty useful. It's amazing what one of his smiles can do to convince ponies."

"Ha, as if!"

Spike suddenly swelled up into a great ancient wyrm and lowered his head to her level, grinning to expose teeth bigger than she was. He rumbled, "Care to reconsider?"

But Mane-iac had fainted.

\* \* \*

><p>46.14 (Nikas)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Silver Spoon screamed as soon as she left her â€" once â€" friend's home. It wasn't frustration, it was several times her weight of airborne predator snatching her up in it's talons and bearing her skyward. The filly's scream dopplered as the pale griffin bore her up and dropped her on a convenient cloud. To her shock she didn't fall through.<p>

This phenomenon stopped her screaming, as she cautiously poked the strangely solid (for an Earth Pony) cloud. "Why aren't I falling through?"

The griffin responded, revealing she was a female. "I compacted it so it was solid enough to walk on without magic."

Silver Spoon rubbed her hooves on the cloud. "Flyers can do that?"

The griffin's beak split in what might have been a smile. "If you are sufficiently awesome, sure. But enough about me. This is about you getting over feeling bucked by your timing for Waking Up."

Sliver Spoon could hear the capitalization, and spat, "A Looper."

The griffin nodded, "Yeah, and so are you. So do we do this the Pony way and talk about how stupid your snit is? Or the Griffin way?"

The filly cocked her head, "What's the Griffin way?"

The smirk on the griffin grew, "I tie both forelegs behind my back and wire my beak shut, hand you something \_really\_ powerful to give you half a chance, then there is bruising, a bit of blood, and probably a high speed dirt dive for one or both of us. We bond over the recovery, then I explain how stupid your snit is."

Silver Spoon looked at the Griffin. The older flyer could obviously take her even before the Loops, and afterwards... even with only her hind paws and wings, and whatever that 'equalizer' was, she didn't fancy her chances. And it surprised her how little she cared about that gap right now, after D- after Tiara...

She shoved the feeling of betrayal aside. "Why don't we try the Pony way for now."

The Griffin's smirk got even bigger, as if she noticed her way wasn't off the table yet. She waved her tail in an oddly precise pattern and a couple of cloud couches popped up. Silver Spoon gave the griffin a look as hers was a classic psychiatrists' couch, but she hoped up on it. It was a measure of how weird her day was that the colour draining back into the griffin only merited a raised eyebrow. "Aren't you the Chief Weather Mare's friend?"

The griffin nodded. "Yep, name's Gilda. So want to talk about why your friend looked like she just took a gut shot down there?"

Silver Spoon didn't know why, but she just exploded. "That isn't my friend! I don't know who she is! I knew Diamond Tiara, but that pony that replaced her is a stranger! YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT THAT FE-".

The rant was cut off suddenly. Silver Spoon hadn't seen the griffin move. Gilda was just suddenly THERE. One set of talons was clamping her muzzle shut, the other cradled the back of her skull. Silver Spoon also noticed that the griffin had gone all pale again, and the look in her eye said it would be easy to snap the filly's neck, crush her skull, or if feeling merciful just break her jaw.

"You are a new looper, so I'll let a lot go in the wind. But not finishing that sentence, understand?" Taking the abortive nod as understanding Gilda steered the filly around to another view off the cloud. The pair were now looking over Sweet Apple Acres. "A little visual aid here to show where things stand, and how much stupid nearly came out of your mouth." She pointed to the reservoir pond for the irrigation system. "That pond? That's Twilight Sparkle's status as an Anchor. The mare needs to lose weight."

Silver Spoon surprised herself at the semi-hysterical giggle at the snide remark. Gilda continued, "Each tree is someone in Equestria. Get enough water from Lake Twilight and you start looping." A talon pointed at the Zap Apple orchard, the largest and oldest trees on the farm. Gilda started naming them, "Applejack, Fluttershy, Rarity, Spike, Pinkie Pie, Rainbow Dash. My best friend."

Ignoring Silver Spoon's squeak Gilda continued pointing at trees, moving out to younger and less water hungry varieties, still naming them. "Princess Celestia. Princess Luna. Twilight's brother Shining Armor. Princess Cadence, her sister-in-law. Applebloom, Sweetie Belle, and Scootaloo. I'm about there and Tiara is right next to me." The talon finally pointed to a row of freshly planted saplings "And you are right there. I figure the gap between me and Dashie is larger than you and Tiara."

Silver Spoon hardly noticed Gilda letting go, or the colour flowing back into her again as the filly flopped to the cloud. "How do you ever catch up?" she asked in despair.

Gilda shook her head, "It ain't a question of catching up chick. Let me guess, you feel like your buddy left you behind?" At Silver Spoon's nod the griffin sighed, "Brutal Honesty is my schtick. So here it is. One of the curses of Looping is feeling like you are leaving everyone you care about who isn't Looping behind. The feeling sucks worse than a downdraft. We hope our friends join us, and fear them doing so for how experiencing that will make them feel. You'll get it quick, because..." Gilda pulled an apple from, somewhere, and bit deep into it. The bite nicked the core, exposing some apple seeds. "Remember when I was pointed out trees?" The griffin pointed to two seeds, "These are your parents."

Silver Spoon's stomach dropped. "Wait, if I'm looping now, how long till Mom and Dad start?"

Gilda shook her head, "It's not something even Twilight can put a number on. But from what I understand, your Looping is practically Divine Intervention. Sequoia willing things will be fixed before Twilight gets big enough for your parents to get watered."

Silver Spoon choked back a sob, "How did you and Miss Dash deal with the gap?"

The griffin put a talon gently under the crying filly's chin and gave her a lopsided grin. "Badly. Ran off for a few loops with Trixie and had interesting adventures trying to establish myself as a looper."

Silver Spoon had to ask. "How 'interesting'?"

Gilda chuckled. "Oh Oak, oh Ash, we are all going to die." She gave another grin. "I will tell you this though. No matter how busy she got. No matter how urgent the crisis. No matter how frustrated you made her at not being able to change? Every time the two of us were Awake and some version of you was in town, I always saw Diamond Tiara making time for her."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

46.1: Having more friends can sometimes make earlier friends feel left out. (And, for those who haven't absorbed American culture fully, Recess is the American term for a break time in the school day.)

>46.2: Fear the Pink. (Addendum in Nobody Dies style)<br>46.3: Normal magic shows are so last iteration.

>46.4: All real designs, though the Submarine Monitor was never used in war. (The name-ship got her turret broken off by a collision and sank with all hands.)<br>46.5: A chance to be young adults.

>46.6: After the destruction of a loop and resultant shakeup, there was an extra looper shaken loose.<br>46.7: Tropico!

>46.8: A Link to... elsewhere.<br>46.9: A continuation. Chrysalis is a good actor.

>46.10: The original version of this contained a homage to... well, me. I didn't feel comfortable at all with it, so I removed it.<br>More on topic: Warning, dangerous concept.

>46.11: Minecraft.<br>46.12: One way to handle things.

>46.13: Another way to handle things.<br>46.14: Self help gryphon.

Caution: sharp.

## 49. Chapter 49

### 47.1 (OracleMask)

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash yawned and stretched out her wings. She'd Awoken into a wintry world, though what could be seen through the blizzard seemed awfully familiar. For some reason her loop self had been sleeping in a tree instead of on a cloud.<p>

She got a funny reading when Dash checked the Element of Loyalty. Only Twilight was Awake, except...not here yet? That was different...hadn't Twilight mentioned a few loops where Celestia or Luna had Awoken way before Twilight had entered the loop? Cool.

"I guess I'll take a look around. Where am I anyway?"

Not far away was a miserable-looking village. Vaguely familiar, but Dash couldn't place it. Dash could see it was full of Earth Ponies, all of whom were struggling to work their farms, but with the sheer volume of snow coming down that was impossible. All their crops were looking more like ice sculptures in the snow. She snorted: somepony had scheduled a blizzard over this town right in the middle of summer!

Well, Dash would soon fix that.

It was filly's play for Dash to corral the storm into one spot. Feeling the eyes of the village on her, Dash couldn't resist showing off â€" she tore into the heart of the storm, and unleashed a Sonic Rainboom to blast it apart! She made a big show about hunting down the last clouds before coming in for a landing in the middle of the village. Most of the ponies were looking at her like she was a Timber Wolf, but one mare stepped forward cautiously after a minute.

"You...got rid of the snow?" the mare asked.

"Of course I did!" Dash replied, "You guys needed the help. I'd never leave ponies hanging."

The other ponies started whispering amongst themselves.

"Um...none of the other pegasus ponies ever bother with moving the snow. Not without demanding half our crops first," the mare said.

Now that it was sunny, Dash was able to see the town a lot more clearly. And she could recognize why it looked so familiar: it was right out of that Heart's Warming Eve play they'd put on in Canterlot.

"Oh yeah?" Dash said, "Well, you know what I think about that?"

\* \* \*

><p>"And then they made you their leader?" Twilight blinked.<p>

"Yep!"

As soon as Twilight had Awoken, she'd realized something was up. Dash had appeared not long after and explained the whole thing, but Twilight was still confused.

"Even though you weren't an Earth Pony?"

"Yeah! It confused the \_frond\_ out of Platinum and Hurricane at the Summit," Dash grinned.

"And is that related to why Equestria is...not in Equestria?" Twilight added, waving a hoof at the unfamiliar landscape surrounding them.

"Nah, that was Cookie's idea. I just kept the skies clear, she did all the hard parts. S'why I abdicated the position of 'Most Awesome Boss of Earth Ponies' to her."

"By abdicated, you mean 'snuck off, Ascended, and had a thousand-year-nap', right?"

"Same thing!"

\* \* \*

><p>47.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Greetings everypony, and welcome to Loops 101. Now then..."<p>

Twilight Sparkle picked up a piece of chalk, glanced at the chalkboard, and smiled. A moment later, both went sailing away; the unicorn pulled a small metal disc out of thin air and tossed it to the ground, tapping it briefly, and suddenly there was a strange see-through bush-tree hovering and slowly rotating in front of the group.

"Most of you have already got the basic story from me or my friends, so this will be more a question and answer session than an actual lecture. So, recap: We're stuck in a time loop because the multiverse is broken and the people in charge don't want it to break any further while they're fixing problems." She flicked her hoof and the image changed to a simple line, with a picture of the moon on the left and a purple alicorn silhouette on the right. "The loop we're in generally starts right before the Summer Sun celebration and it used to end around the time of my coronation, but recently enough damage was fixed that it's started to expand out beyond that by about a week every five hundred loops or so."

With another gesture, Twilight generated a number of parallel lines, some shorter than the marked Equestria line but most far longer. "Loops in other universes can range anywhere from a year to 'whenever everyone dies' in length. If you're Awake, check your loop memories \_as soon as possible\_ and try to discretely find the local anchor and

other loopers while retaining as much of your pre-awake self as you deem appropriate. You're each going to be partnered up with a Looper you knew in the baseline to guide you through this loop, but there's no guarantee that they'll be Awake in your next loop or that you'll even be in Equestria."

She turned to Spike, standing off to the side. "How was that?"

"Actually pretty good. You managed to keep your rambling down to ten minutes."

"Oh ha ha ha." Twilight rolled her eyes, then turned back to the group with a smile. "Equestria's been declared a sanctuary loop for anybody that ends up here, a respite in all the insanity of the multiverse. Of course, we can't help others if we don't look after our own; if you ever need anything, just ask! And speaking of asking, now is the perfect time for any questions you might have."

Instantly there was a flurry of raised hooves.

\* \* \*

><p>47.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"You know, Twilight, I'm pretty sure one of the Trek Anchors was here last loop," Fluttershy said softly.<p>

"Really?" The unicorn shelved a final book and turned around with a big grin. "Did you get any evidence?"

"Oh, no, sorry... I was, um, too busy dealing with the new expansion period." The pegasus waved a hoof. "You weren't Awake and I was curious how you'd deal with that bat infestation in the baseline, so I went for a vanilla handling of things."

Twilight nodded with a sigh. "I guess I can't blame you. I'd be curious too. What ended up happening?"

"Oh, you turned me into a vampire."

"...\_what.\_"

\* \* \*

><p>47.4<p>

Twilight cleared her throat, just as Nightmare Moon finished her 'night will last forever' speech. "Er-hem?"

Nightmare turned. "Yes, my new subject?"

The unicorn held up her old soft toy. "Smarty Pants doesn't like you."

"...is that some kind of foal's toy?" Nightmare Moon asked, glaring down at it. Then she tossed her head. "And why should I care? Answer soon, or your insolence will be punished."

Twilight hovered Smarty Pants over to her ear, and moved it in little jerks. "What's that, Smarty Pants? You think she should be nicer to you?" Lowering the toy, Twilight shrugged. "Well, you heard her."

"Are you soft in the head?" Nightmare asked incredulously. (Several of the ponies in the audience were nursing the same suspicions.)

More pantomiming.

"Smarty Pants thinks you should apologize."

"Twi, are you alright?" Spike asked quietly.

"Me?" Twilight nodded. "I'm fine. It's Smarty Pants who's taunting the dark goddess-"

Twilight broke off, and consulted Smarty Pants again. "Oh, I see. You can take her? Go ahead, then."

Twilight's horn glow vanished, and a green witchfire instead spread over Smarty Pants. The toy's eyes began to glow in several colours.

"What is this?" Nightmare Moon asked, backing unconsciously. "Stop it!"

"I'm not doing anything," Twilight protested. "Smarty is, though, and she doesn't like you."

The toy turned to Twilight. Nightmare lashed out with a spell, which crashed into the green aura and vanished. The toy turned back to her for a moment, then faced Twilight and wiggled for a few seconds.

"Smarty Pants is very cross," Twilight announced.

Smarty faced Nightmare Moon, and fired a beam of rainbow light.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight giggled. "Best prank in a hundred years!"<p>

Admittedly, shrinking the Rainbow of Light from the Gen 1 Loop down so it would fit inside Smarty Pants had been tricky. But the payoff was hilarious.

Especially since, at Twilight's calm insistence, the stuffed toy had been the one honoured for defeating Nightmare Moon. (She'd explained that the lack of movement was because Smarty Pants was tired. Celestia had just looked confused.)

"Now, dealing with Discord should be interesting..."

\* \* \*

><p>47.5<p>



\* \* \*

><p>Silver Spoon looked around, slowly at first but then with increasing confusion. "Where am I? This isn't my bedroom!"<p>

A clanking sound issued from behind her.

"Oh, great," came a voice she recognized as that of Twilight Sparkle. "Hold on, I think I know where we are."

Silver turned, nearly tripping as two of her legs felt strangely numb, only to come face to face with...

A mechanical pony. A unicorn, actually. And so much larger than her that she felt she was standing next to one of the Princesses.

The riveted-steel construction face-hoofed with a clang, and sighed. "Sorry, I'm not doing this right. You're Silver Spoon, aren't you?"

"Y-yeah," Silver stammered. "Where am I?"

"Well, I'm going to need to check â€" I \_hate\_ loops where I'm made of metal â€" but I'm fairly sure that we're in the world of Full Metal Alchemist."

Silver blinked. "I understood maybe four of those words."

Twilight crouched down, bringing her closer to Silver's height. "This is one of those things I called a Fused Loop. In this case, we're in the place of the main loopers of another world â€" think of it like we're the main characters of a story."

Reaching into... nowhere in particular, she produced a set of books and slapped them down on the sand. "We've got a couple of days before we need to be anywhere in particular, so we can get you properly accustomed to the situation."

"I don't understand," Silver said weakly.

"Don't worry, you will." Twilight's metal mouth creaked in what was probably a smile. "Oh, you might have heard us mentioning loop memories before? Try to let them do the thinking for your first time, it'll be easier."

Silver gulped, and tried to remember them talking about that. It was... strange.

There were her \_real\_ memories, the ones she was used to having, with her family and her friends in Equestria... and the strange, still-new experience of time looping.

And then there was a whole new set of memories. Where she was a young filly, learning the ways of Alchemy, and...

She gasped, looking down at her numb-feeling legs. As she'd abruptly realized, they were artificial.

Then she looked at Twilight. "Are... are we sisters? Here, I

mean?"

"That's right." Twilight nodded. "I'm actually the younger sister, or supposed to be. And..." she stopped. "I'm sorry, by the way. It looks like the script took your mother as the template instead of mine."

Tears started in Silver's eyes.

"I know this must all be overwhelming," Twilight said gently. "Some Anchors wouldn't be pleasant, it's true â€" they're from worlds less nice than Equestria, and their attitude to others can be a bit sink-or-swim. But I promise you, I'll only stand back unless you want my help. The moment you say so, this becomes about keeping you safe."

Silver sniffed. "Thanks. I'll..." she paused, and remembered that conversation with Gilda.

Let me guess, you feel like your buddy left you behind?

"I'll give it a go."

"That's the spirit." Twilight nodded to her. "Again, though, if you need help then just ask."

\* \* \*

><p>"You must be the Silver Alchemist!" a hassled-looking unicorn said to Twilight.<p>

Twilight shook her head. "No, I'm her sister. That's the Silver Alchemist."

"What am I, invisible or something?" Silver grumbled.

"Oh, I didn't see you down there, squirt," the unicorn apologized.

Silver exhaled hard. "Is the short jokes thing going to keep happening?"

"All signs point to yes, I'm afraid," Twilight said.

\* \* \*

><p>"Right." Silver winced at the damage to her remaining foreleg, which was coming close to laming her, and let the increasingly familiar local experiences help her ride out the pain. "Twilight? Quick question?"<p>

"Yes?" Twilight replied.

"Just so I'm sure I've got this whole thing worked out, 'cause I'm totally confused... that's a bad guy, right?" She pointed at the approaching form of Fuhrer King Bradley. (He actually looked a lot like Sombra.)

"Yep." Twilight nodded.

"Right," Silver repeated. "Thanks for the science lessons, by the way." She lifted her forehooves and clapped them on the ground, making a quick Alchemical circle.

A pair of silver rods appeared next to one another on the long slope towards ground level, growing out of the ground.

"Where'd you get the silver?" Twilight asked, interested.

"This palace had coins in it," Silver said by way of explanation. "Emphasis on had." A gold lozenge extruded from the ground next to her. "Okay, here we go."

She lifted the lozenge bodily onto the upper end of the pair of rods, then clapped her hooves on the ground again just as King Bradley reached the base of the ramp.

Electricity sparked, the air tore, and when the sound died away there was a huge crater field at the base of the ramp.

Of King Bradley there was no sign.

Silver's smile was surprisingly feral. "Take that!"

Twilight nodded. "Cool. Railgun, eh?"

"Yep. It split into lots of bits as it left the rails, so he couldn't dodge." Silver blushed slightly. "I may have paid a little more attention to the lessons about silver, and I remembered the thing about it having great conductivity-"

"The best," Twilight agreed.

\* \* \*

><p>Father slammed Silver into the ground, making her head spin, and then smashed her artificial foreleg.<p>

Silver focused woozily, and realized what was going on. Hohenheim was about to sacrifice herself, and she didn't have an option of how to get out...

"Twilight?" she croaked. "Now, please."

A bolt of lambent force the size of a tree hit Father and sent him slamming against the far wall.

"Good work, by the way," Twilight whispered, helping her up. "You made it as far as the original did."

"I feel so special." Silver winced, moving her stump. "Ow, that does not feel right..."

Twilight faced Father, her Device building up another spell. "I'll handle him from now on. You've done enough. More than enough."

Silver smiled weakly.

\* \* \*

><p>47.6<p>

Gilda looked down at the filly. "You seriously want to do the gryphon way? Now?"

"Sure," Silver said, looking a little nervous. "But, just so you know, I'm expecting you to tie both your forelegs behind your back and wire your beak shut first. I'm not stupid."

"Heh." Gilda paced in a slow circle around Silver, taking in the change in posture. "Looks like you're living up to that cutie mark after all."

Silver blinked, thrown. "Pardon?"

"Look, if there's one thing the loops teach you ponies, it's that those tattoos you have on your butts are seriously hard to interpret. So, a silver spoon." Gilda tapped the underside of her beak. "First meaning: you were born into money and privilege. Second meaning: It's still the most mundane of eating utensils, everyone uses them, so even if yours is silver it's just a more valuable version of a normal kind of thing. Third meaning: there's a heart in the design, so you do have a good heart in there. Fourth meaning: silver is antiseptic, so it cures illnesses. Fifth meaning: silver tarnishes, but yours is mirror-bright â€" so you keep yourself in shape."

The gryphon scratched. "So, yeah. There's probably more, but that's enough to be getting on with."

Silver nodded. "I see. I think."

Gilda cricked her neck. "Now, where's that rope..."

Seeing Silver looking apprehensive, she grinned. "No getting out of it now. You did say. So, come on already! I'm looking forward to a good fight!"

\* \* \*

><p>47.7 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, something's funky this loop."<p>

Twilight looked up from her book. "Oh hello Nyx!" She stepped over to her daughter and winced slightly, pulling various branches and leaves out of her mane. "Um..."

"I Awoke in the Everfree." The filly shivered, old memories surfacing for a moment before she got a hold of herself. "Apparently I'd been hovering around the castle for the past thousand years... and Luna's not there! I don't understand..."

Her mother finished up with her mane and moved on to the collection of tangled knots in her tail. "Hmmm. I wonder..." She cast a scrying spell, looking up at the moon. "Oh. Ooooooh. Yeah, you're not replacing Nightmare Moon this time round. You're the Shadow Pony."

"The... what now?"

"A fragment of Nightmare Moon that wasn't banished." Twilight rolled her eyes. "Local Ponyville myth, but the nonlooping AJ certainly believes it... even though she never bothered to tell me before the whole Tree of Harmony thing."

Nyx snorted. "Fragment of Nightmare Moon. That's real original." She tilted her head. "Hey, does this mean that Luna's still going to be Nightmare Moon at the celebration?"

"Far as I can tell... Ah. All clean." The librarian smiled slyly. "You have an idea, don't you?"

"Oh yeah."

\* \* \*

><p>"THE NIGHT! WILL LAST! FORE-!"<p>

\*\*"HOW DARE YOU!"\*\*

Everypony turned toward the entrance, their shocked gazes watching a wrathful miniature Nightmare Moon trot in. "\_Your\_ night? \_\*\*Your\*\*\_ night?! I have been working for a thousand years to get these ponies to stay up and watch the stars, to enjoy the night as much as the day \_if not more so,\_ to give those few who enjoyed the sky without a sun equal footing with Celestia's lapdogs, and you!" She shot up, shoving her face into that of her larger counterpart. "You want to waltz right in and claim it as your own! Up with this, I shall not put!"

Nightmare Moon blinked, completely stunned at this new development. "I..." She blinked again, shaking her head and glaring back at the filly with equal rage. "Foal that you are! \_I\_ am the true princess of the night, and you are nothing more than some... upstart! Can you lay claim to the moon? Nay! 'Tis mine, and no power shall wrest it from me!"

"Power?" The filly snorted, landing on the balcony's railing. "Oh I see. \_Power.\_ Just because you're bigger than me and have more magic, you get to boss me around is that it?! Never mind that you did absolutely NOTHING when you were trapped on your precious rock while poor little Shadow Pony-"

There was a distinctly southern gasp from somewhere in the crowd.

"-worked \_hoof and feather and horn\_ just to be heard, let alone create interest in astronomy, or make the night home to romance, or give ponies a place to party after the sun had set!" The filly whirled on the flabbergasted Nightmare Moon. "Nooooooo, all that blood, sweat, and tears are \_nothing\_ compared to just having enough blind strength to bully your way into anything!"

"...there are places..." The mare bit her lips. "...There are places where ponies celebrate while the moon is raised?"

"What, you haven't heard of night clubs?" The Shadow Pony rolled her

eyes. "No, right, locked up for a thousand years. Yeah, there are."

Nightmare Moon glanced at the crowd of ponies, noting that they no longer cowered in fear but instead peered on in interest. "...We suppose We may have been hasty in forcing our claim. We will grant thou the moon, IF!" she quickly added. "If thou canst defeat us at some form of challenge."

"Hmmm." The Shadow Pony considered the offer. "...There is a form of duel often practiced in Night Clubs which would make us... fairly even. Would you agree to that?"

"As long as it was explained to Us beforehoof."

"Agreed." The filly smirked and whipped out a pair of sunglasses, snapping them onto her face. "Rap battle it is then. You!" She pointed to a white unicorn with an electric blue mane. "You've got thirty minutes to catch Big Black here up to speed. I'll even hold off preparing tracks while you do it."

\* \* \*

><p>47.8 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong><span>Foal Free Press<span>\*\*

\*\*Tyrant Loses Mind!\*\*

\*\*"I am a space alien," King Sombra, former tyrannical overlord of the Crystal Empire, stated as he addressed the gathered crystal ponies from a ruined hole in the crystal palace. Within the past year, Sombra was believed dead upon the activation of the ancient magical artifact, the Crystal Heart. However, those notions were put to rest when the tyrant appeared once again in the Crystal Empire yesterday and laid seige to the city by causing it to rain black crystals. Countless buildings were damaged by the rampage before he was captured by Prince Shining Armor, who, along with Princess Mi Amore Cadenza, is the current ruler of the Crystal Empire.\*\*

\*\*He attempted to escape later the same day which resulted in the hole he made his speech. Fortunately during both incidents, nopony was hurt. The Royal Princesses arrived today after receiving a request for assistance from Princess Cadenza and were in the process of judging whether Sombra, who had been acting strangely for a known tyrant, was fit to stand trial for his many crimes. Sources within the palace stated that Sombra made another escape in order to address his people. During his speech, he would go onto say,\*\*

\*\*"Sombra is dead; long live the new Sombra! I'm seizing control of this body and walking it around like a meat puppet...As an extraterrestrial ghost from another dimension possessing the body of an evil, sorcerous unicorn-emperor, I promise you that the tyranny you once knew is at an end!"\*\*

\*\*Near the end of the speech, Sombra was recaptured by Prince Armor, but not before he made a bold statement, "From now on, I, ruler of the Crystal Empire and history's greatest monster, shall be the best

king who ever lived!" It is unclear when Sombra's trial will take place or whether he is fit to be tried at all. For the full version of the speech, see page 10.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight brought her hooves to her face and sighed. Discord, who had seen the article first and thought Twilight might enjoy it, chuckled, "So, who do you think replaced Sombra? And why was he replaced so late in the game?"<p>

Twilight muttered, "Who knows? Sometimes, I think the loops have an odd sense of humor. Now I got to go bail out history's greatest monster."

\* \* \*

><p>47.9 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"These bats have got ta go!" Applejack shouted.<p>

Fluttershy narrowed her eyes. "You would evict... my children?"

The farmer blinked. "Uh... Ah'm sorry, wha-?"

Without warning the pegasus's wings exploded, feathers flying everywhere as they warped into fleshy fingered wings. A snarl revealed a pair of long fangs in her mouth; her mane and tail crinkled and curled unnaturally as her cutie mark shifted into three pink bats.

"I AM THE LADY OF SHADOWS AND BLOOD!" Fluttershy cried, glaring at Applejack with her now red eyes. "ALL WHO FEAST IN THE NIGHT ARE UNDER MY REIGN! AND YOU SEEK TO THROW THEM OUT?!"

"Ah'm sorry! Maybe we can cut a deal or something!"

Instantly Fluttershy was back to normal. "Oh, that would be nice. I guess I can see your viewpoint, I just don't want the bats hurt."

\* \* \*

><p>"...so I stored the Flutterbat DNA using my druidic magic, mixed in the teensiest amount of Flying Hatred and-"<p>

Twilight sighed. "I'm sorry, but that was just a tad too much. We don't want another Eternal Twilight and Macintosh, do we?"

Fluttershy cringed. "Right. Won't do it again."

\* \* \*

><p>A shadow trailed from the upper balcony as Fluttershy left the library. "I couldn't help but overhear your conversation with Twilight..."<p>

"Um." The pegasus blushed. "What... what exactly do you think of

it?"

The shadow smiled sympathetically, fangs gleaming in the lantern light. "Don't worry, I understand the urge. Us vampires have to stay together..."

"Changelings aren't really vampires," Fluttershy pointed out.

"You suck \_apples,\_ " Chrysalis countered. "Not exactly vital fluids or etheric essences. Me on the other hoof..." She licked her lips. "Well. Let's just say I don't want you to throw this out."

"Ah." After a moment, Fluttershy smiled slyly. "I'll see what I can do."

A holey hoof shot out. "Bloodsucker pride, sister!"

"Bloodsucker pride!" Fluttershy hoofbumped Chrysalis. "Even though neither of us actually suck blood."

"I drain order from the world, can I be part of this little club?" Discord asked suddenly.

"Enh..." Chrysalis wagged her hoof. "We're more focused on individuals than on groups..."

"Aren't you going to ask where I came from?"

"No."

\* \* \*

><p>47.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...you know, when I made this competition I didn't really expect you to enter," Twilight pointed out.<p>

"When you made this competition I was a random looper who was constantly drunk." Berry Punch paused. "Actually, about that. How soon do you think Ruby Pinch will start looping?"

"I... honestly don't know. You just started looping for no reason." The librarian put a gentle hoof on her shoulder. "I don't know if I can completely understand since Nyx is a special case but... you have my deepest sympathies."

Berry sipped her drink and sighed. "I'm not sure I want her to start looping, actually... I mean, for me it would be good but for her, well, she'd have to go through what we're going through." She sighed. "I guess I'll just content myself with being a good mother for her nonlooping self..."

The two of them sat in silence.

"...on the plus side," Twilight noted eventually, "this version thinks you're really cool. And you managed to neutralize Nightmare Moon with a single drink!" She shook her head. "I saw you \_brew\_ the thing and I still can't believe you only used Equestrian



ingredients..."

The bartending mare grinned. "Wait till you see what I've got planned for Discord!"

\* \* \*

><p>47.11 (Richardson and Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight, Ah'm telling you, there is somethin' seriously wrong with mah orchard this loop."<p>

Twilight sighed, setting her book down. Ever since the loops had expanded to include the vampire fruit bats, something weird was always going on at the orchards. Of course, they had never found anything, and Fluttershy swore up and down that she couldn't find anything with any of her senses, including her druidic ones. "Applejack, there is a perfectly rational explanation for whatever is going on."

"Rational Mah FLANK!" Applejack swung her rump around to wriggle her cutie marks beneath Twilight's muzzle rather uncomfortably close. With the poor, shrivelled apples (what!?) in sight, she could see two tiny fang-holes punctured into Applejack's hide on both sides, which still dripped with cider. "Whatever it was sucked the juice right outta mah cutie mark!"

"Okay, so whatever it is is Pinkie-Rational. Right." A disturbing thought danced across Twilight's mind. "And Dash likes to joke about how she replaced her blood with Zap Apple Cider a couple of thousand loops ago."

Applejack's eyes widened with a speed rivalling the ejecta shell of a supernova as her pupils constricted to pinprick singularities of horrified realization. "Whatever got mah cutie marks is gonna get her!"

"Let's- what the chlorophyll is that noise?"

"aaaaaaaaaaaaAAAHAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHH!" An almighty crash rocked the library as Dash plowed through an upstairs window at roughly the speed of sound and proceed to halfway embed herself in the floor. "You guys have to help me! She wants to suck my blood!"

Tiny scrabbles of hooves clip-clattered against the upstairs balcony disturbingly lightly as the light coming through the window was filtered through a pair of yellow membranes. Silhouetted against the rising sun, the figure was partially shrouded by her own shadow as Twilight squinted into the light. The gleam of a pair of fangs glistened within a salivating maw beneath a pair of dully glowing blue eyes. Fluffy ears twitched at the strangled noises of inarticulate frustration coming from Twilight as her horn glowed with arcane energy.

Then the sun was forcibly moved through the skies as Twilight ascended herself, revealing Fluttershy standing there with a disturbingly familiar new set of favoured mutations.

Having the graces to look ashamed of herself, Fluttershy squeakily smiled as she folded her leathery wings and hopped down to the ground floor. Her breath hitched as she saw how Dash had buried herself in the floor. "Oh! Oh my goodness! Oh, Rainbow Dash, are you alright!?"

"Waaaaaaaugh! Don't let her suck my blood! I don't wanna hang upside down and speak in a Roamanian accent!" Dash thrashed as she tried to dig through the floorboards the rest of the way and make for the planet's core.

"Oh Dashie..." Fluttershy caressed Dash's wings and sides with a hoof as she started to pull her free. Saliva dripped from her fangs as she nuzzled Dash disturbingly. "I only want to show you how much I've learned about the glories of freshly squeezed cider."

"Fluttershy, this has gone on long enough."

"What Ah said!"

Fluttershy let go of Dash, leaving her stuck in the floor. "Oh, whatever do you mean, Twilight?"

"Intervention!" Twilight's magic aura grabbed Fluttershy, bodily lifting her from the ground and carting her through the air to the door. "And I know just who to do it!"

Applejack started to follow Fluttershy and Twilight, stopping at the door as an urge struck her. She turned back to Dash, who was still wriggling in place, perfectly helpless and juicy... "Why Dash, Ah never thought Ah'd get a chance like this..."

"AJ? Could you get Twilight to get me out of here? I really don't want to ascend and all just to get out of her floor."

"Twilight ain't here no more, mah little Zap Apple..."

"Uh oh."

"Fer that matter, neither is Applejack. Call me..." Two fangs slid into place in Applejack's mouth, dripping as they considered the mobile Zap Apple before her. "Applejuicer."

"I'm outta here." Dash ascended in a flash of light, teleporting herself screaming to where the Crystal Empire would show up in a year or two.

"Ah, sucks. Me and mah big mouth." Applejack frowned as she pondered it over. That Fluttershy out of all the ponies in the world had come up with a crazy idea for a prank was certainly an odd one. She bunched her hindquarters as she felt the painful tingles from the bites still. Her druidic friend had developed a ritual to pass along her whole 'Vampire of the Fruits' nature for a loop â€" some adaptation of a family of spells about 'bite of the were-something' â€" but she was starting to wonder if the shy gal had a kinky side to her. Did she really have to bite both of her cutie marks?

Applejack shook her head, feeling funny as her ears popped into their temporary new forms and as her cutie mark temporarily morphed into a

trio of apple-colored bats. "Ah am NEVER saying 'bite me' around that gal again. Whooooiiee! Well, time tae scare the cotton candy outta Pinkie and the magic outta Twilight."

\* \* \*

><p>"Zo, mein Flootersny, vy do you feel ze need to grow bat wings and suck blued froom epples?"<p>

Fluttershy raised an eyebrow at her psychologist. "Pinkie... when exactly did you find time to get a degree in therapy?"

"Non non non!" The pink pony bopped her friend's nose with her note-teking pencil. "Zis iz not avout me und my needs. Zis iz avout you." She twitched her big bushy mustache and peered over her thick-rimmed glasses. "Now zen... vy?"

The pegasus sighed, leaning back into the couch. "Well... I suppose it all comes back to kindness really. See, it's easy to be polite, and generosity is... something that's fairly simple to teach. But with kindness, you have to have empathy. You have to understand the person you're being kind to, help them on... something like their level. So... I guess I sometimes get carried away in understanding and let myself become... other."

"Ah. Und ze bat zing, zat started as un kindness and vecame... addiction?"

"...maybe just a tad," Fluttershy admitted. "I guess I'll try to hold back a bit... from now on. But seriously, Pinkie, how did you get a therapy degree?"

Pinkie merely smiled. "Let me have zome mystory, Flootersny."

\* \* \*

><p>47.12 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight lay in a sunny clearing inâ€| oh, some forest. It was another Oerth Loop, but the adventuring races were the setting's usual humanoids, and she wasn't one of them. Instead, she was a local unicorn: leonine tail, cloven hooves, the whole package. Oh, and none of the trappings of civilization whatsoever.<p>

It wasn't so bad. With the perspective of a Loop Anchor, Twilight saw it as something like a camping trip. In any case, she had more than enough stored in her subspace pocket to keep herself entertained for years, from books to experiments to supplies for making magical items. And she could always find a party of adventurers to tag along with should the mood strike her. This was Oerth, after all; they were everywhere.

She was scribing a scroll for what this world's mages would probably call transmute into orange when the sound of wingbeats came from above. Twilight looked up, tried to shade her eyes with a forehoof, and winced as her anatomy reminded her that it wasn't nearly as flexible as normal.

"Sorry, Twi! These bodies kinda suck."

The voice settled the matters of what and who. "It's okay, Dash." Twilight stood as her friend shed altitude. "What's up?"

Dash sighed as she descended. "What, aside from these dumb horse bodies and us being the only ponies in the Loop?"

"It's certainly a novel experience, Rainbow, and you know how hard those are to come by. You should try to enjoy it and is that an egg?"

"Yeah, that's why I came." Dash did in fact have a roughly watermelon-sized egg cradled in her front legs, its shell just as blue. She set it down on the ground with surprising care. "I, uh, I kindaâ€¦" She trailed off into inaudible, almost Fluttershy-esque muttering.

Twilight's mind had already formed a hypothesis. She pulled a PADD out of subspace, grabbed it with telekinesis, and called up the 3.5 \_Monster Manual\_. She confirmed her guess in moments, and immediately wished that she hadn't. "Mother of mahogany. Youâ€¦"

Dash sneered. "Yeah. Like I said, these bodies suck. I didn't even do anything!"

"It's unfertilized?"

"I am so glad it's just you and me this Loop. Can we please keep this between us? Pinkie, Gilda, Rarity, none of 'em would ever let me live this down. And I do \_not\_ want to try and explain this to Scootaloo."

"Of course, Dash." Twilight retrieved some bubble wrap, wrapped the egg, and whisked it into her subspace pocket. She'd put more thorough protections on it after the visit. "Your secret is safe with me."

Dash sagged with relief. "Thanks, Twi. You're a real pal. And, uhâ€¦ take care of it, okay?"

"Of course." Twilight silently scrapped the more invasive experiments that could be performed on a single cell of that size. Well, unless she acquired other pegasus eggs. Surely her friend wasn't the only member of the species that laid infertile eggs. The same environmental triggers would have applied to all local populationsâ€¦

"Wish I could just ascend," Dash sighed. "That'd probably take care of this."

That shook Twilight out of her thoughts of specimen acquisition. "I'm sorry, Rainbow, but we've been over this. We don't know how the local gods would react. They might see it as a challenge."

"But that's a bunch of horseapples!" Dash flared her wings. "We're not \_that\_ powerful, and it's not like I'm gonna grab the sun or moon or anything."

Twilight couldn't really shrug, so she tossed her mane. "Well, find a

cleric and take it up with them."

The pegasus glared and pawed at the sod. "Maybe I will. I am not forcing another one of those monstrosities out of me."

"Wait, that isn't what Iâ€"

Dash flapped off. "Thanks again, Twilight!"

The unicorn groaned. "Why do I even speak?"

\* \* \*

><p>47.13 (Grinnerz)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"- and I must reiterate, the sandwich was clearly labelled with my name. And, furthermoreâ€| Oh, I do hate it when the loop ends mid-conversation."<p>

Looking around her, Luna saw grey dust and rock. A quick glance upward confirmed that she was on the moon staring down at Equestria below. Checking the strength of the seal upon her prison revealed she had a few hours left before release.

"Hmmm." What to do? Write messages in the stars? No. Come bearing tidings of interplanetary goodwill? Another time. A comedy routine? Already done. Arrive already purified? Perhaps." And perhaps I should try to find what sister sees in that little hobby of hers."

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia stood within her quarters attempting to prepare herself for the battle to come. To fight her younger sister was not something Celestia was looking forward to, yet for the safety of their subjects it must be done. Even should she fall, Twilight wouldâ€| Twilight <em>must<em> find the Elements.

Even as the sun princess thought on things to come, she felt the seal break. Time had run out.

Royal Guardsponies called out from the castle walls as something appeared out from the light of the moon. Though to Celestia's ears they were less fearful and moreâ€| disbelieving? Turning towards the balcony, she caught sight of what had so surprised the watch.

"\*\*Cowabunga!\*\*"

\* \* \*

><p>"Is that a surfboard?"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>47.14 (OracleMask)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked toward her five friends over the pile of books and papers they'd been working on. All six of them were Alicorns - it only seemed appropriate for the kind of game they were planning.<p>

"So we're agreed on the rules?" she asked.

She got four nods and one excited bounce.

"Okay. Now we just need to make the map and the pieces, and we can start playing!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Sister, what do you make of this?"<p>

Celestia took the paper Luna handed her via telekinesis and studied it.

"...Somepony is painting large lines over parts of Equestria?" Celestia said, "And...the Griffin Lands...and everywhere else?"

There were pictures with the reports, showing a suspiciously familiar pink blur wielding a comically oversized paintbrush and bucket of paint.

\* \* \*

><p>"Right, this rock looks good," Applejack said, looking over a nice reddish mountain not far from Appleloosa.<p>

Looking a little like she was tap-dancing, Applejack bent a large chunk out and methodically shaped it until it resembled one of the Royal Guards. There were a few differences, like the funny plume on top of the statue's head, the apple motif on the armor, and the being made of solid rock thing. It was also the size of Town Hall in Ponyville.

"One down, thirty-sommat to go..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Rarity, um...three of my armies in the Everfree Forest would like to attack your armies of Canterlot...if you don't mind," Fluttershy said, holding up three red dice.<p>

Rarity beamed, lifting up two white dice. "Bring. It. On!"

The denizens of Canterlot watched in awe as the distant forms of three giant pony soldiers made of trees and two giant pony soldiers made of ice (and wearing fabulous capes of solidified water) did battle over the giant line of paint that had appeared the other day.

\* \* \*

><p>"Pinkie, we don't even HAVE an Australia, how did you even do that?!" Rainbow Dash groaned as the party pony's giant candy-cane wielding marshmallow soldiers rampaged all over her own giant

thunderbolt-using cloud armies from out of nowhere.<p>

"Dashie, hiding in Australia until you steamroll the competition is TRADITION! Silly!" Pinkie Pie giggled.

\* \* \*

><p>"Five!" Applejack declared triumphantly.<p>

Twilight pointed to her die.

"Six...oh, crabapples. That's my last army."

A mile away, the last of Applejack's stone soldiers crumbled as Twilight's magical construct soldier blasted it.

"Hooray! Now it's between me, Twilight, and Rarity!" Pinkie exclaimed.

\* \* \*

><p>The rest of the Mane Six watched politely as Rarity was crowned Queen of the World by a very confused Celestia and Luna.<p>

"Y'know, that was pretty fun," Rainbow Dash said, "Whose turn is it to pick the next board game?"

"Mine," Applejack said, looking over their list of games and crossing 'Risk' off it, "Let's see, what's left..."

\* \* \*

><p>47.15 (Detective Ethan Redfield):<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>The Great Equestrian Foam Sword War, Part 2<strong>

Gray wisps of smoke escaped the train as it ejected the travellers from Ponyville into Canterlot. Mayor Mare stared at the golden towers that rose into the air, a strange mix of joy and relief filled her heart at seeing the heart of Equestria once again. Even with the sun below the mountains, magical beacons and candlelight made the city gleam like the sun. The next couple days would hold numerous shopping trips and dining like the princesses at some of their finest restaurants as the Mayor and her friends and family arrived. Then, they would board a dirigible for a trip around the world in 90 days. These travel plans swirled through the Mayor's head as she made her way to a well kept but modest hotel. Celestia and Luna spent the previous day giving suggestions about where to travel and what to do abroad. It was the vacation of a lifetime and anyone would be excited.

Looking at her now, though, no one could tell she was excited, as she looked from her room window to where Ponyville rested a few hours away. Although new to the loops, she had spent about twenty loops as Mayor of Ponyville, one in Metropolis and one in Townsville. She couldn't even remember her last vacation, worried as she was that without her there, her town/city would fall into ruin. But with Twilight's promise to protect Ponyville, she knew everything would

turn out alright.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Big Mac's Bar<strong>

"So...how many of Miss Lulamoon's laboratories has she gone through tryin' to make a foam sword grenade," Big Mac asked as he slid another cup of cider her way. With a single slurp, the cider was gone instantly. Twilight slammed her head down and muttered through the counter. Mac tilted his head and said, "Sorry, Miss Sparkle, I could'a sworn you said five."

The element of magic nodded her head. The Anchor had decided to sit the war out, determined to make sure Ponyville was standing when the Mayor returned. She resolved to keep a close eye on Trixie in the month leading up to the war.

Several seconds of silence passed as Mac looked over Trixie's scroll again, "Say, did ya' even agree ta' the terms a' this competition?"

Twilight lifted her head up, "She pinkie promised that if I followed through with its terms, She'd never use explosives of any kind for the next ten loops we're together in. I'm curious to see how long she lasts."

Mac chuckled to himself. He held no interest in the war beyond keeping everypony safe. Applebloom and all the crusaders, however, were back at the farm setting up a new geofront running from the furthest corner of Ponyville to the edge of Everfree.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Sweet Apple Acre's Geofront<strong>

Applebloom brought down the lever as several pieces of high tech machinery whirled around her. The sound of several high caliber rounds being fired over at the firing range echoed across the geofront. She looked to where Sweetie Belle was testing weapons modifications, "How are the runes coming for the .408 cal rounds?"

Another crack echoed down the massive Geofront accompanied by a burst of white light. Her radio squawked back, "It's working. I've tested several magazines already, no errors. We'll need to have Twilight inspect them first, but it should prove effective from a great distance. Should work with the missiles and other caliber rounds as well."

Bloom nodded to herself as new plans formed in her head. She'd have Twilight check her design, then a prototype machine that churned out thousands of rounds and foam swords, and then if testing works, we can shift into mass production. With that set up, she made for Nyx and Scoots' project. They probably had all kinds of modifications she wanted to make to their vehicles, which would consume quite a bit of her other time. After that, she would have to work on her own last resort project.

\* \* \*



><p>What he heard, though, weren't terms he had heard in the equestrian military, but they still sounded something out of a strategy meeting during his times in the army. Their loops in futuristic and human militaries lead to terms like "fixed weapon emplacements" and "long distance firing positions" being passed around in anticipation of the 'war' ahead. He resolved to take them on a vacation loop after the 'war' ended.<p>

"So, what have ya heard from the other loopers?"

Twilight lifted his head, "Rainbow is practising some high speed fight manoeuvres over the ocean-

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Somewhere over the Ocean<strong>

A flash of rainbow split the ocean. A moment later, a glowing rainbow maned pony appeared over land on one side of the watery expanse. She looked down at the stopwatch in her hand. Ten seconds to cross the ocean. 'I can be faster than this,' She thought to herself and disappeared with a rainbow explosion of energy.

\* \* \*

><p>"Gilda, upon learning about the competition, returned to the Griffin Empire to make preparations of some sort-"<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>The Capital of the Griffon Empire<strong>

The Ebony Palace standing at the top of the deepest canyon on the planet was home to the mighty griffon emperor, Aepnet. At its centre, the iron throne rested at the top of several stairs. One female griffon stood at the bottom of the stairs, surrounded by two squads of ten griffon soldiers that lay bleeding on the ground. The emperor and his aides resided at the top, looking down upon Gilda as she ascended the stairs, "Emperor Aepnet, by right of succession, I, Gilda Grizelda, daughter of Dutches Tyra Grizelda and 17th in line to the imperial throne, have come to end your reign and establish myself as Empress of the Griffon Empire."

Aepnet was no amateur though. He gazed upon her, noting a confidence he had never seen in his niece before, "As honour dictates, I must accept, but implore you to back down. This will be to the death. Or has your time amongst the ponies at your flight camp made you weak?"

Gilda lifted her claw, steeling her emotions, "No. A wise creature told me that only the truly strong can afford kindness, and I will make you submit before I have to kill you. Come at me, uncle!"

With that, the two griffons leapt at each other.

\* \* \*

><p>"Lemon Rush is around this time, so Fluttershy's going to participate with him on a team-"<p>

The sound of gears churning, wood crunching and ponies screaming could be heard from the basement of Sugarcube Corner where Mac had set up this time around to be more easily accessible to the loopers.

Twilight buried her face in her hooves, "Oh Chlorophyll, I think that's her now."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Ponyville</strong>

The sound of severe rumbling could be heard throughout ponyville as ponies ran in terror of the approaching metal monster. The house sized tank slammed into Mayor Trixie's city hall, demolishing it in a spray of wood and glass. A butterscotch pegasus with a foam sword hung around her neck lifted her head out of the massive tank and looked over the destruction. She focused on several ponies running away, then shouted down to Lemon, "Umm...could you drive us closer, please?"

Lemon looked up at his adopted mother, "You want to hit them with your sword, Little Mother?"

Fluttershy's eyes widened in horror, "What?! No! I just don't think they'll hear the sound of my apologies over the rumble of the engines from this far away!"

A pink light flashed as Pinkie appeared out of nowhere, "Hey Fluttershy! Looks like you're having fun, but maybe a bit too much fun. Don't worry, I'll take you somewhere where you can have all the fun you want!"

With another burst of pink light, the three ponies and the massive tank teleported into Everfree Forest.

\* \* \*

><p>After Twilight rebuilt City Hall, re-assured the non-looping ponies that the world wasn't coming to an end and got Lemon Rush and Fluttershy to promise never to use their tank in Ponyville for driving practice, she re-appeared in Mac's bar, seeming more dishevelled than before. Mac gestured for her to continue.<p>

"That's about it. Rarity has locked herself in Carousel Boutique muttering something about magical artefact modifications. The only one else I've heard from is my BBBFF. Shiny's going to use this to test some military formations he's developed over the loops."

She chuckled to herself, "Something interesting about this loop, apparently Shiny has a different Lieutenant this time around. His name's Candy Cane and his appearance has made all the difference in the guard. Their skills are shaper then he's ever seen and morale is high. He was the looper who came in yesterday evening with the black military hat, red bill shadowing his eyes."

Mac chuckled, "Didn't seem ta' like you and Pinkie when y'all tried introducin' yourselves. Couldn't get away fast enough."

Twilight's ears flattened against her head, "You think he saw one of my earlier pranks?"

Mac shrugged, "Who knows...but I'm sure ya'll win him over sooner or later. You did me, after all. Have you seen any of the others?"

"No. The rest are keeping low profiles. Celestia and Luna are setting up geofronts all over Equestria in preparing to evacuate a good portion of the country. I'm not sure if they know things will get out of hand, or if they have something big planned."

She gestured for another Cider and lifted it to her mouth before muttering, "I hope it's the former."

\* \* \*

><p>47.16 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So, um..."<p>

Shining gave Chrysalis an awkward glance as he finished choosing his new skills.

"...You and Trixie."

The queen of changelings dropped out of the half-meditative state she was in, shrugging. "It was a surprise for us as well... do you not approve?"

"I'm not in any position to pass judgement over you two," Shining quickly explained. "I'm just... this is going to sound really bad, actually, so I want to be clear I'm not accusing you of anything but-"

"I am not just using her as a food source."

Chrysalis's clipped tone made Shining Armor wince. "No, that's not what I was going to ask. It's just..." He sighed. "I guess I can see how you'd know if she loves you, but how do you know that you love her?"

A moment of silence filled the dungeon chamber.

"...You know, maybe that was a bit too far. It's alright if you don't want to talk about-"

"No." Chrysalis sighed. "No, I guess... I just... Well. I just do. I mean... back when I was with, uh, the other you, I..." She waved a hoof vaguely. "I felt... equal. Even. Focused on myself and... Trixie helps me to focus. To be, really. It's not exactly the same but I'm pretty sure it's close enough."

"Trust me, it is," Cadance stated with a smile. "I've been around you two long enough to know that."

The changeling queen jumped. "I thought you were still selecting skills!"

"Nah, I just like to meditate sometimes. Easy way to spy on ponies, and from spying comes manipulations comes happy couples!"

Shining Armor bit his lip. "I'm not entirely sure that's ethical dear..."

\* \* \*

><p>47.17<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"What. The buck. Is this."<p>

Twilight prodded it, producing a kind of 'pfff' sound.

Pinkie grinned. "I think it's a fluffy pony! I will call it Fluffle-"

"No." Twilight shook her head. "I'm not getting involved. If this is a loop peculiarity, then you can handle it. Meanwhile, I've got a project to do before Trixie next loops."

She gave Pinkie a pointed look. "That means that you don't use my main room as a lounge."

"Awww..."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight gave Pinkie a glare. "Okay, explain."<p>

"I don't know what went wrong!" Pinkie protested. "I thought maybe Chrysalis would like to meet Fluffle, and she... vanished into the fur."

"Do you mean the looping Chrysalis?"

Pinkie shook her head.

"Right." Twilight rubbed her head. "I can feel a headache coming on. Okay, this is your fault, you solve this."

\* \* \*

><p>"Pinkie... this is <em>not<em> solved."

"I like to think of it as solved," Pinkie countered. "I mean, look! They love her!"

"They're terrified half to death that she'll engulf them like she did Chrysalis." Twilight pointed at the cringing Changelings surrounding the fluffy pony, who now had a makeshift crown glued to her head.

Pinkie shrugged. "Potaeto, potahto."

\* \* \*

><p>47.18 (Nikas)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Applebloom got to Diamond Tiara during the lunch recess. Subtle ways of arranging their desks and other specific but not odd responses to Miss Cheerilee had signalled they both were Awake. Neither of the other future Crusaders were but another classmate was missing.<p>

"Any sign of where Silver Spoon is?" Applebloom asked. The pair had staged a mane pulling fight at the start of the school year, that seemed to 'settle differences', so nopony thought them eating lunch together too strange.

Diamond Tiara shook her head, "No. I managed a peek in the City Hall records. Her dad is there, but he left town. According to Twilight Sparkle he's got degrees in hippopology, archeology, and ancient Mesoponytamian Culture. Left for field work I guess. Her mom's here, but she's married someone else."

Applebloom sighed, "It happens DT. You'll catch up to her someLoop."

Tiara snorted, "If she's forgiven me by then Hayseed. It just hurt they way she looked at me when I explained the Loops to her, you know?"

Applebloom hoofed over one of her apple turnovers. Granny was always big on comfort food for ponies with the blues. "Not really, but I'll be sure to ask if Babs starts Looping." Something by the schoolhouse steps caught her eye. A pony so tall Miss Cheerilee was on the top while the newcomer was on the ground, and still was over her head. "Is she Saddle Arabian?"

Diamond perked up, "Yes. This is interesting. Maybe a guest for class?"

Applebloom shrugged as she saw Miss Cheerilee tug the rope for the school bell. "Guess we'll find out soon enough."

As soon as the class shuffled in, Miss Cheerilee poked her head out of the door to speak to somepony. "Class, we are getting a new student today. Come in and introduce yourself dear."

The pony that came in was nearly as tall as Miss Cheerilee herself, and most of that height in the legs. She had a patterned Saddle Arabian poll cap, along with a matching blanket on her back and sash running from her withers around to her chest. It was the coat colour and the familiar spoon cutiemark that caused Diamond Tiara's heart to skip.

"Hello, my name, well would be Silver Spoon in Equestrian. Let's just go with that to avoid mangling it please?" A sea of waving hooves, all but Appleblooms and Diamond Tiara's suddenly sprung up and the tall filly sighed. "Let me guess," She started pointing at random and sprouting out answers before anypony could speak. "Yes I am about your age, I just got Mother's height. Mother insisted I dress up for my first day. The Veil dance is a bunch of road apples made up by a randy stallion, so no I don't know it."

Cheerilee stepped in to bring the class under control. "I'm sure you can ask her, after class. Respectfully." She gave a baleful glare, and Fluttershy had been giving her lessons. Still not a patch on the pegasus, but good enough for now. "There is an empty desk over by Applebloom and Diamond Tiara. The two that didn't swamp you in questions right out of the gate." She gave the class another look. "I'm sure you'll make friends soon enough."

Silver nodded. "As we say in The Sands. There are no strangers, merely old friends who have yet to meet again." Diamond Tiara's heart stopped, Silver Spoon was looking right at her as she said that.

A problem rapidly became apparent however. Miss Cheerilee looked dismayed at the mismatch of a filly the size of most grown mares trying to fit into one of her desks. "I'm sorry. I'll see about getting one you can fit into."

Silver Spoon pulled out a piece of cloth wrapped chalk from under her blanket. "I can handle this." Before anypony could ask, or stop her she rapidly drew a strangely inscribed circle on the seat, then pressed her forehooves to it. With a flash of light the chair morphed, stretching out and up. The result was larger, but lighter looking and Silver Spoon settled into it. "I can change it back after class if you like?"

Cheerilee reigned in her boggling and shook her head. "If it is a stable change the end of the year will be fine." At the filly's nod she turned back to her lesson plan, trying to pull the gawking colt's and filly's attention back to the blackboard. She made a mental note to ask Twilight Sparkle to look at the magic, just to be certain.

\* \* \*

><p>The end of school saw the usual crush of foals let free rushing the door. But instead of rushing to individual destinations there was a clustering around a particularly tall and leggy member of their herd. Diamond Tiara and Applebloom shared a look and started helping her cut out as she fielded questions.<p>

"Aw, come on! Give her some room. Not like she's gonna run off tomorrow!" Applebloom found it a lot like herding dealing with her Unawake classmates.

"Right you lot! Let her breathe. I'm sure you can talk to her some more at Pinkie Pie's party!" Diamond Tiara was less physical, but just as intimidating.

Silver Spoon started. "She's throwing me a party?"

Applebloom nodded, "Of course. Pinkie Pie's Awake, so she has to be plotting to throw you a party!" Her classmates nodded, a given of Ponyville life, completely missing the emphasis.

Diamond Tiara looked at Applebloom as their classmates finally started breaking up a bit. "Sugar Cube Corner?"

Applebloom nodded, "Sugar Cube Corner. Come on Silver Spoon, we'll show you the way. Otherwise we might wind up Looping looking for you while you try to get there."

Silver Spoon nodded, and they managed to get through town to the Corner with relatively few interruptions. Though she was having issues adjusting to most adults being at eye level for her.

Silver Spoon found herself seated in the 'Diplomatic Corner Booth' with a costumed Pinkie walking guard as the three shared a 'Chocolate Boat to Tartarus' Sundae. A dish that seems big enough to save a filly from a flood. Well excepting Spoon's current form. She hesitantly tested the waters. "So, who is Awake now?"

Applebloom spoke up first, "Well us three. None of the other Crusaders, and no Nyx so that's it for our age. Looks like just Pinkie and Twilight of course from the Bearers. Don't know if the Princesses are Awake or not."

Diamond Tiara looked at her one time friend. "So, um. How is this loop treating you?"

Silver shrugged. "Being half Saddle Arabian isn't the weirdest one yet. At least this time I have enough Equestrian to keep my Cutie Mark. Being Gilda's niece was definitely weird though."

Applebloom looked confused, "How does a pony get to be a griffin's niece?"

Silver smirked back, "Who says I was a pony that time? It's weird, I seem to spend as much time as something else as a Pony, or at least pony like."

The three paused to digest that, and consume more of the Boat. Diamond Tiara moved next, "So was one of those 'other' times where you learned whatever you did with the desk?"

Silver shook her head. "No, I was pure pony for that Fused Loop. Well excepting two metal legs, thank Celestia I Awoke after losing them. Hooking up replacements was bad enough."

Applebloom looked uncomfortable, "err Silver? The Princesses kinda asked we Loopers not swear by them. We try to use trees instead."

Silver looked at the farm filly strangely. "really? I wondered why you guys did that." She caught Diamond Tiara's nod and shrugged. "Anyway, what I did was a method of rearranging matter. The particular 'school' I used there was called Alkhestry. It fits better in Equestria than its cousin, Alchemy."

Applebloom looked at Diamond Tiara then sighed. Looks like she'd have to be the 'heavy' this time. DT was apparently worried about hurting her friendship even worse. "Are you sure you want to blow your cover this early in the loop?"

Silver Spoon smiled. "What, with Alkhestry? How much do you know about Saddle Arabia and it's magic?"

Diamond Tiara got it first, and giggled. "So you figure to pass it off as some exotic magic from Saddle Arabia?"

Silver Spoon nodded, and tapped her flank. "I apparently got this

helping Daddy on a dig. Finding and restoring lost knowledge of how ponies used to live their lives. And we just discovered," Silver Spoon waved her forehooves in the air,

Diamond Tiara wound up chorusing with her "Lost secrets of Saddle Arabian Magic!" Both fillies stopped in embarrassment.

Applebloom looked at one then the other as the awkward moment stretched. "well I need the little fillies room. Don't eat this all while ah'm gone!" She trotted off.

Diamond Tiara looked at her friend? "Er, Silver? Are we?"

Silver Spoon's gaze seemed to pass over her. "The Fused loop I was in was a place called Amestris. It could be a rather nasty place, particularly the stuff the people me and Twilight were replacing had to deal with. But it taught me a lot about what you will do for families, and friends. So, I think I'm getting there." The taller filly shrugged, "Having the Princess of Friendship be your 'little sister' probably helps."

Silver Spoon transmuted the surface of the table to block the epic spit take that comment got out of Diamond Tiara.

\* \* \*

><p>47.1: Great Ruler Dash.<br>47.2: Silver Spoon isn't the only one initiated by the crash a few chapters back.  
>47.3: ...seriously, what?<br>47.4: Smarty Pants is very cross. (Ã; la Mister Flibble)  
>47.5: Well, silver is an important alchemical material... also the most electrically conductive metal bar none.<br>47.6: Interpretations. And finishing what you started.  
>47.7: Epic Rap Battles Of History! Nyx versus Luna! Begin!<br>47.8: Apparently a version of a HiE story, Hail To The King.  
>47.9: Getting a little too into the spirit of things.<br>47.10: Curative powers.  
>47.11: Getting a LOT too into the spirit of things.<br>47.12: D&D 3rd ed. Pegasus. Egg-laying. (Don't worry, it's unfertilized. And Loopers can't have kids anyway.)  
>47.13: Hang Ten.<br>47.14: You get a lot of extra armies from holding the entire Gryphon Lands at once.  
>47.15: The many ways to use foam swords.<br>47.16: Rolling a high number on Diplomacy.  
>47.17: I don't even.<br>47.18: She's got her mother's looks.

## 50. Chapter 50

48.1 (Stainless Steel Fox)

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo Awoke looking through a grating. A quick self inspection first conformed she had hands, but wasn't human, a pony-anthro? No, a <em>pegasus</em> anthro, though her wings were hidden under a shapeless green sweater. Down below a red wolf in a fancy braided jacket was going on in fractured common to a bunch of other dogs in various forms of scruffy gear about how rich the box sitting on the table in front of him was going to make him. Then the



loop memories hit. Air pirates, the mouthy mexicano moron was one Don Karnage, and she was currently in an air vent on a pirate airship called the Iron Vulture. Awesome!

She was apparently one Scootaloo 'Scoots' Skyscorcher, and a soon to be ex-pirate cabin-boy. She rifled the memories, orphanage, bullied as a freak, while this world had bird anthros with wing hands, pegasi didn't exist, runaway, hooked up with the air-pirates because she was mad about planes. She'd managed to keep both wings and gender a secret from the bozos, which wasn't hard as apart from Karnage the entire bunch had more toes than brain cells. She'd been with them a year, gotten fed up a lot sooner, and wanted out.

Which led to her current situation. This was apparently Don Karnage's biggest score, stolen from some big wig industrialist by the name of Sher Khan, and she intended to steal it and set out on her own, acquiring a plane and licence as soon as she was of age. As plans went, it was kind of shy on the fine detail, but then she was only twelve years old. Scootaloo decided to go with it, she certainly didn't know enough about the world to start making her own plans yet.

She opened the grating and dropped down onto the table beside the box. "Wow! That really is a neat treasure! No lesser pirate could have stolen it!"

As she expected the egotistical canine preened, "Yes, of course, I am the fantabulous Don Karnage yes/no?"

"Oh yes, and I wanted to thank you for teaching me how to lie, cheat and plunder. I guess you could call this my final exam..." She scooped up the box and sprung over his head, dropping the red bandanna that showed her pirate affiliation over his head. Using the head of the largest pirate, Dumpttruck, as a stepping stone, she landed at the door and kept running. Thankfully this body had her regular lightning reflexes and acrobatic skill.

"It was... wait what?" The pirate finally caught up and yelled, "Stop that boy!"

She charged out of the control room and down metal gantries, yells and cries following her. She met some pirates on the way down and yelled, "Get up there and help the Captain, right away!"

As they ran upstairs, she thanked Celestia for stupid villains. Dropping down to the floor of the main hangar deck, she snatched a grapnel launcher from the rack of blunderbusses along one wall and charged towards the open hangar door, shaped like a raptor's beak. Ignoring the yelling growing behind her, she charged up to the lip and dived off. She barely heard from above Don Karnage's voice yelling, "No, my treasure!"

Plummeting from several thousand feet would be a concern for most people, even a pegasus whose stubby wings didn't allow her to fly. She had plenty of fixes in her sub-space pocket, but she decided to get some practice with her in-loop abilities. Her wings popped out of slits in her jumper and she angled her body to power dive towards a cloud, and plunged into it, arresting her fall. Her cloud-walking abilities were another secret she'd managed to keep from the pirates.

She popped her face out of the cloud to check the giant air-ship above her, which was already shedding single engined biplanes like a dog shedding fleas. Whatever else there was nothing wrong with their reactions when it didn't involve actual thought. They plunged after her, and she made sure none of them were headed right for her hiding spot before ducking back in. She tucked the box inside her jumper and made it secure.

She let them dive past her and buzz around below as the cloud floated away from the search area. As she waited for them to drift out of sight, she directed a thought towards Pansy. 'Any luck finding other loopers?'

'No-pony from our world, though they may simply be out of range. Locally, I don't have enough to work with yet. Clover's the real expert.'

'Don't do yourself down, I wouldn't trade you for a dozen Clovers. Keep trying.'

She got an impression of appreciation from Pansy, and the question, 'So what's the mission plan?'

'Get to this Cape Suzette place where Sher Khan is, return his property, see what we can get out of it, if anything. After that, who knows, Ascend and age myself a couple of years then go after a plane and a pilot's licence. From what I know, this world is practically built for pilots. Which means I could have a huge amount of fun here. If I don't find some kind of quest... this looks like the sort of world that'll have one, and I tick all the boxes for a starting out hero.'

The pirates had moved out of sight, and Scootaloo figured it was safe to move. She pushed her way down to the bottom of the cloud, and peeked out. Aha, a twin engined cargo job, just what she needed. She quickly fixed pads of clouds around her hooves, and power dived again, unslinging the grapple gun. A quick shot and a dash of weather magic wrapped the grapple around the leading edge of the rudder, and she swung her feet under her, pumping weather magic into them to act as flying skates. Her in-loop self didn't know how it worked, just that she could do it. Her wings could propel her as well, but not as fast as even a slow plane, and unlike her wings, a plane didn't get tired.

She'd been careful to dive below the pilot's line of sight, as the last thing she wanted was for anyone to see her abilities. After about half an hour, they started descending towards a tropical island with some sort of resort that looked to be part tree-house, and partly built out of a wreck of an old galleon. Various wooden docks stuck out into the water at odd angles, with dozens of seaplanes of various makes and models moored at them. The big neon sign said 'Louie's'. Now this looked like a fun place...

She unhooked the grapple gun and let it drop, flying down under her own power, looking for a quiet spot to land. She found it on a beach a short way around from the main docks, and made a neat two point landing. Folding her wings back inside her jumper, she strolled around and climbed up the docks and to the main entrance. She could hear singing from inside, some guy going on about how he was 'gone'.

She slipped in the door to see filled tables and a big bear in a flight shirt and wearing a fruit salad on his head singing and dancing. However, he did seem to be looking towards the door and did a double-take as she entered.

Noting it for future reference, she made her way over to the bar where an orangutan in a Hawaiian was mixing up some cocktail concoction. She bounded up onto a stool and waited for him to notice her.

"Hey, short stuff, where'd you spring from?"

"Just flew in, but now I'm here, and I'd like a drink." She pulled an Equestrian bit from her sub-space pocket. "I don't have local money, but I can pay."

The orangutan picked it up, weighing it in his hand, bit it and tapped it against the counter. "Well don't that beat all! Where'd a little guy get something like this?"

"Family heirloom." Scootaloo shrugged. "So, it'll cover a drink and a meal?"

"Cuz, if this is the real deal, you're covered for pretty much everything. Oh, hey Baloo, sounds like your pipes are all in tune."

"You know it Louie, heh... mind if I borrow your new friend for a minute?" The big bear was trying to sound relaxed and failing.

"Not my call cuz." He indicated the bear to Scootaloo, "This is Baloo, best pilot in the skies. He's good people. If you like planes, he's the guy to talk to. Tell you what, I'll make you one of my triple split specials. Finest sundae west of Timbucthree."

"Sounds great!" Scootaloo looked over at Baloo. "One for Baloo here as well?"

"I never pass up free eats." Baloo's voice was jovial, but still strained. He waited until Louie had moved away and said, "Who are you, and where's Kit?"

"The name's Scootaloo Skyscorcher, and the only kit I've got is what I'm wearing. Let me guess, you're a looper, and I've replaced someone called Kit who you were expecting instead."

"Hey yeah, but what's a looper... are you talking about the way things keep happening over and over?"

"Oh horse-feathers, sounds like you're new to all this. How many times has it happened for you?"

"About thirty, forty times, you know what's going on?"

"Oh pony, looks like my turn to give the 'welcome to the multiverse' speech." She glanced around, and whispered, "Pansy, holo-projector and a perception filter please."

She proceeded to give him loops 101, complete with pretty pictures. Over the loops they'd gotten it down to a fine art. As she put away

the projector. "To sum up, looks like you're Anchor for this world, Kit will return next loop, and from how close you two are, he'll probably start looping soon too."

Baloo was shaking his head. "Kiddo, that's gotta be the craziest story anybody's ever tried to sell me. But I never saw anything like that gadget you pulled either, so I guess I've gotta believe it. So where's little britches?"

"Could be he's skipped this loop, could be he's swapped with me. Pretty much anything can happen with the loops."

\* \* \*

><p>"Great and Powerful Trixie, you've got to vanquish the ursa."<p>

The Unawake stage magician freaked as she watched two hundred hooves of astrological ursine stride down the main street of Ponyville. "But... no-pony can vanquish an Ursa! I just made up the story to make my act better!"

Snips and Snails went through the border checkpoint of 'Uh oh!' and joined her in the land of freaking out.

She mustered her magic, got ready to try and stop it, when the beast's jaws gaped, and it said in a surprisingly teenage voice, "Hey, pony lady, I don't want trouble, I just want someone to tell me what the heck is going on! What kind of crazy dream is this? I go to sleep in my bed at Higher for Hire, and next thing I'm waking up in some cave somewhere with those two running around my feet! What am I, what are you, what's going on?"

"What? What..." Trixie was eloquent in her incomprehension, at least until her eyes rolled up and she fainted.

"Well that was helpful." The bear grouched. "You two, do whatever you do for fainted ponies, I'm sitting right here until someone comes up with some answers." He sat back on his haunches in the main square, carefully, checking to see he didn't crush anything by accident.

\* \* \*

><p>"So what normally happens next?" Scootaloo asked, as Louie brought over their triple split sundaes, towering concoctions of fruit, ice cream and whipped cream.<p>

"Don Karnage and his yahoos generally show up, looking for Kit and that gem. I usually have us high-tail it out of here before then, but I don't think we can make it..."

The doors slammed open, and Karnage and his goons strode through them. Scootaloo dropped down behind her stool and whispered, "You go get your plane started, I'll distract them."

"You sure kiddo? These are dangerous guys."

"Don't worry, I've got this. Make sure those sundaes are to go, I'm not missing out on that."

"I am sorry to fracture the festivities," the pirate captain announced, walking in and picking up a drink off the table, "but I have a little announcement."

Scotaloo was already using the tables as cover to get around to a balcony, the perfect place to attract their attention. Meanwhile Karnage was wasting time posing and threatening Louie. Oh, he was getting extra for that!

She got in position and made her preparations just as one of the pirates fired a warning shot at the roof.

"Hey, no need to wreck the place, Karny!" she called out. "I was just leaving anyway!"

The red wolf crook's head snapped round, and he yelled, "Get him!"

Three pirates charged up the stairs towards her just as she jumped up on the rail, snatching a tiki mask to use as an improvised board, and slid down the bannister, springing and tumbling over the hands that grasped for her. She'd already plotted her route from when she flew off the end, and spun end for end while grabbing a bowl of soup from a passing table. The pirates finally managed to get themselves turned round and followed her back down the stairs. As they did, she flung the bowl to smash just under where the lead pirate, a whiny suck-up be the name of Mad Dog was about to put his foot. He slipped, fell and in the process tripped the pirates charging down after him, leaving them in a nice pile at the bottom of the stairs.

Of course, Scotaloo had other problems to cope with, namely a problematic pirate captain with a pointy cutlass who'd jumped into her path, legs wide and sword out. She'd turned back to face him, and he sneered at her. "It is the funny joke you are making, but I shall have the last ha ha!"

"Pass!"

Scotaloo snatched the nearest thing she could see, a serving fork from a half eaten roast, and folded backwards, limboing low on her board to slide between the pirate's akimbo legs, and fending off the cutlass with the fork. Just to finish off, she prodded him from behind with the fork as she slid onwards, sending him jumping with a yowl of pain.

She straightened up just in time to push her way through the now empty doors, and cursed not having enough time to say something like, 'The forks are strong in this one...' Pansy, who'd gotten caught up on hub universe fiction, groaned inside her head. She was heading down the pier, slowing as she ran out of momentum, and at the end was a yellow cargo seaplane with a red bow and it's engines turning over.

Baloo stuck his head out the open door. "You okay, kiddo?"

"Never better!" She bounded off the tiki mask as she noticed a familiar heavily armed tri-plane docked near him. "Get moving, I'll be along in a moment!"

She might not be in Apple Bloom's league when it came to gadgets, but

she knew something about aircraft engines. She flipped the cowling and ripped out a number of important wires, throwing them out to sea.

There was a howl of fury as Don Karnage burst out of Louie's, followed by his goons. "Stop him... Shoot you ridiculous rodents!"

Scotaloo ducked as a blast from a blunderbuss shot over her head, then weaved her way along the dock as other blasts peppered the air around her. At least one took off half the propeller of another pirate biplane. She reached the already moving Sea Duck and dived through the doorway, slamming the door after her.

"I've bought us some time... Maybe I should have flown it away... no, too much start up time."

The seaplane was already surging forward under Baloo's skilled coaxing. "C'mon baby... wait, you can fly?"

"Anything from a Sopwith Camel to a Star Destroyer!" Scotaloo responded proudly, "Though in-loop, not yet, though I've mad for planes as long as I can remember."

"Well you'd better buckle up!" The Sea Duck lurched as the keel unstuck from the water and it soared up into the sky. "Yahoooo! Oh man, there's no better feeling than hitting the blue!"

Baloo threw the Sea Duck into a barrel roll, taking the chance to check the island below, "Hey, looks like you got Don Kebab and his mixed meatheads all riled up."

"That was the idea. You should know that while that guy can keep an idea in his head, unlike the rest of them, two is beyond him. I didn't just escape, I publicly embarrassed him. He's going to want to catch me alive himself simply so he can personally chop me into bite sized pieces. That means he's not letting the rest of his goons follow us until his plane's fixed, and it should keep him from taking it out on the bystanders at Louie's."

"Yeah, but when he gets fixed up, he's going to be after us horse, foot and marines."

Baloo was slightly shocked by the calculation in the young ponies voice, and some part of it must have leaked into his voice, because Scotaloo looked over at the bear in the pilot's seat, then turned and hung her head. "I'm sorry. I've kind of taken you for granted. I'm not your friend Kit, I'm just someone who met you a few hours ago and already I've dragged you into danger with me."

"Hey kiddo, don't sweat it. Ol' Karny and me have crossed propellers plenty of times, and he's always been the one who ditched at the end of it. Besides, I'd never leave anyone in the clutches of that two bit pirate."

"Well anyway, thanks. So where are we heading?"

"Cape Suzette, you're going to love it!" They were straight and level, and he looked over at the pegasus, grinning. He flipped open a compartment to reveal two slightly melted triple splits. "I even got

desert. Chow down."

It only took a few moments to polish off the sundaes, and Scootaloo looked over the plane she was in properly for the first time. The cockpit had the look of long use, but had been well cared for and extensively customised. Some of the tweaks almost seemed familiar. She consulted her in-loop memories. "Wow, this is a pretty sweet set-up. A Conwing L-16 with Super-Flight 100 customised engines? This thing must really move!"

"Good eye kiddo!" Baloo patted the console. "Yup, she's my baby. Me and Wild Bloom have spent a lot of time getting her just right... Wait... what?"

"If that's who I think it is, sounds like I'm not the only fused looper. Earth-pony, good with gadgets? Yellow coat, red mane in a bow?"

"Pretty much, though she wears a jumpsuit... Except she should be a male lion called Wildcat. But I remember meeting up with her, working together on the Sea Duck, everything just as clearly. Oh man, this is too weird!"

"Welcome to the wonderful world of fused loops. Your in-loop memories say one thing, your real memories say another. We've gotta get you doing some mental exercises to help you keep things straight."

"Whoa, I ain't any kind of brain, kiddo." Baloo shook his head.

"Neither was I, but even I managed to learn them. Besides, if you can get it down, you can learn to create a sub-space pocket, a way to store things so you can carry them between loops."

"Now that sounds like a mighty useful thing to know!" The big bear glanced over at the young pony, who was looking at the control yoke in front of her with a familiar eagerness. "So, you said you can fly. Can you fly a Conwing L-16?"

"Never tried, but I'd love to find out!" Scootaloo reached out and took hold of the yoke, closing her eyes for a moment as her fingers closed around the grips. She seemed to freeze for a moment, attentive to something only she could sense. "Hello, Sea Duck. Baloo's lucky to have you."

Baloo had seen Kit take his first grasp of the Sea Duck's controls dozens of times, and for all his natural talent, he was quite naturally somewhat clumsy when he actually took the yoke. Scootaloo was different. When her eyes opened, they flicked back and forth across the instruments as easily as his own. She held the Sea Duck steady and on course like a veteran pilot, and he started to believe what she'd told him, not just with his head, but with his heart.

"Can I, please?" she asked, and didn't need to say more. At his nod, she started doing gentle turns and banks around their base course. She'd flown planes far faster than this, and far more advanced, but she could feel that this one, for all it's primitive technology and limited flight envelope was something special. What she really wanted

to do was try out some real stunts, she knew the Sea Duck could take them, but she was only too aware of the privilege she'd been given by flying the Sea Duck at all, and she didn't want to abuse it.

However, her piloting experience included a lot of combat flying, and it was that that caused her to suddenly go into a wing-over and dive.

"Hey what the..." Baloo was answered by the whistle of machine gun bullets behind them.

"Six coming in four o'clock high!" Scootaloo rapped out, putting the Sea Duck in a tight roll that put her into a nearby cloudbank. "You have the stick?"

Baloo had grabbed his own yoke as soon as they'd started spinning, but he'd let Scootaloo complete the manoeuvre, as it was pretty much what he'd have done himself. "Roger little dodger, now watch this pre-formance!"

The cloudbank ran out unexpectedly, ejecting them into a maze of towering storm clouds, lightning crackling around them. The pirate biplanes shot out a few seconds later, but scattered and no longer in the deadly staggered echelon formation they'd previously held. Baloo played an expert game of tag with the pirates, swooping, zooming, turning and spinning to somehow out-manoeuver fighters in a cargo plane.

Scootaloo was itching to get involved, but this was Baloo's world and his plane. She wasn't used to being a passenger while some-pony else was paying the freight. However, she tried to sit back and appreciate the big bear's clear mastery of the situation. At one point he managed to do a wing-over and return to fly straight through the bad guys, scattering them like pigeons, then trolled them into following him into a power dive, right to sea level.

The seat of her pants that Scootaloo wasn't wearing felt distinctly uncomfortable as they headed for the water, but it was clear Baloo had some plan in mind, and she managed to hold on to her impatience and the sides of her seat as at the last split-second he pulled a lever whose function had puzzled her and leading edge flaps flipped up, altering the angle of attack and giving him the lift to pull out into level flight. Several splashes behind them indicated the lead pirates hadn't been so lucky.

"Okay, now that was cool!" The pegasus glanced up and back. "But there are some still up there and they've got us pinned against the sea. I've got some tricks of my own that might help..."

"No need kiddo, see those puffs of smoke?" Baloo pointed to some cliffs ahead with a narrow gorge between them. There were white puffballs appearing from around the tops.

"AA Fire?" Scootaloo asked, and was answered seconds later by bursting noises from above. She glanced out of the window and saw explosions above in the heart of the pirate pack. They scattered and high-tailed it out of there with Karnage's plane in the lead.

"Yep! The cliff guns of Cape Suzette. Drives 'em crazy!" Baloo said



with a lazy grin as they climbed away from the sea. Scootaloo switched her gaze away from the approaching cliffs and to her companion, who was relaxing back in his seat.

"You know, you remind me a lot of Rainbow Dash... I think you saw her in the pictures. She's the rainbow maned pegasus and she's the most awesome flyer in Equestria. She's also the Element of Loyalty and would never leave some-pony hanging."

"Sounds like you think a lot of her."

"Well yeah, she basically took me under her wing, taught me everything she knew and is pretty much my big sister. I guess you and Kit have something similar. I really hope he starts looping soon himself. You both deserve it."

There was no calculation in the pony's voice this time, and Baloo made a decision. "Well until he gets back, seems I'll be needing a replacement navigator. You up for the job?"

"Am I ever!" Scootaloo returned eagerly.

"Then welcome aboard, Scoots." Baloo opened a storage compartment and handed her a green baseball cap. She put it on as they flew through the gorge and out into a wide lagoon.

"Oh, wow!" Once again, Scootaloo had seen far larger and taller cities in her time, but this was one of the prettiest. Art deco towers with sky bridges made a wide crescent around a vast lagoon with an island in it, and were built back into the hillsides of the bowl that enclosed it. And everywhere there was air-traffic, dirigibles, sea-planes, flying back and forth. It made Canterlot sky-port look like a village cross-roads in January.

She noticed one of the biggest towers had a logo which her in-loop memories told her stood for Sher Khan, and that jogged her memory. She pulled out the box. "Oh, hey, I've still got this. Want to hand it over to Khan before Karny and his merry mutts make another grab for it? In short, what's the plan, big man?"

"Huh, normally Kit hides it back at Louie's... Welp, I hook up with Kit, head on back to base, find out I missed the last six payments on the Duck and have to stump up three large ones, three thousand bucks or they'll foreclose at nine tomorrow." He grinned. "Of course lately, as soon as I find myself back at Louie's at the start of each... loop? I ring up a bookie in Cape Suzette and put on some accumulators I know will pay out. Easy money."

"But first time round, we did a high ticket mission which I blew when Karny captures Kit, and he offers to share the reward for the gem in that box, except it's not a gem, it's some sub-electron dohickey that can create a lot of power. Khan's willing to fork over a solid hundred thousand for it's return, and Karny wants to use it to build a lightning cannon to come plunder Cape Suzette."

He shrugged. "Man, first time round we went all over the place to try and get that thing back. Turns out Becky, that is Rebecca Cunningham, bought up the company from the bank to run, which made her my boss. Now I don't fuss about business, flying's all I'm interested in, so I was trying to find the fifty k to buy myself out of hock. Cutting out

the drama, the pirates make their play, we stop them, destroying the stone in the process.

"I end up back behind the eight ball, flying for Higher for Hire, Becky's new name for the company, with her as the boss lady. Of course, now I've been round the block a couple dozen times, I can get round that easy enough, and did, but you know, it's like that time I saved Khan's life and he gave me pretty much anything I asked for, or when I found out I'd inherited a fortune and a big house. It got lonely being just me, or even me and Kit. So now I let her buy the place just to get her involved."

"Sounds like quite a lady." Scootaloo replied. "Is she your special some-pony... some-body?"

Baloo barked out a laugh. "Me and Beckers? Not in a million years! We'd drive each other crazy, heck, we do drive each other crazy! She's a stickler for everything being just so, and I like to take a more relaxed att-i-tude. She's pushy, bossy, mercenary, comes up with crazy moneymaking schemes at the drop of a hat... and she's someone I'd trust with my life, and a good friend."

"Except for the moneymaking part, that sounds just like another friend of mine, Diamond Tiara. I wonder if she'll be showing up here. If Apple Bloom is here, we might see some others..."

"Man, how many more are there?"

Recounting the other members of the Crusaders took them all the way round the bay and until they taxied up to the dilapidated dock that led to the ramshackle building that housed 'Baloo's Air Cargo Service'. Except the was freshly painted and now said, 'Higher for Hire'.

"What the Sam Hill?" Baloo shook his head in disbelief, and stormed out of the Sea Duck and up the dock.

A pink female pony of more adult proportions with wavy purple hair held back with a bandana was backing out of the doorway. She wore a white turtleneck and violet slacks, and was carrying a bale of old newspapers neatly tied up with string.

"Hey lady, who are you and what do you think you're doin'?" Baloo called out.

She dropped the bundle besides a bunch of others and turned to face him. "The names Tara, Tara Cunningham, and as of 9 am this morning I own this place and that plane."

"But that's not till tomorrow, and you ain't Beckers..."

Wild Bloom came out, equally grown up, wearing a tatty set of overalls and carrying a box of junk. Her mid-Usland accent was even more pronounced than usual. "Sorry Baloo, I tried to boost the radio to get you the message, but the bank came with the paperwork yesterday. She's got a bunch of lawyer's papers and everything."

Baloo started to get mad, then realised something. "Then I've got just one question for you all. Are you Awake?"

The stress he put on the word clearly hit a bullseye. Tara slumped slightly and said. "Oh darn, and I wanted to see if I could turn this place into something that could give Khan Insustries a run for their money."

He heard Scootaloo's voice behind him. "Guys, this is Baloo Von Bruinwald, Anchor and our host for this loop. He's still in his first century. I gave him the intro speech and told him about us. Do we have Sweetie Belle and Nyx on board?"

The two ponies in question came out, younger than usual and wearing rompers. Sweetie Belle exclaimed, "Present, and I hate being a rug-rat!"

Diamond Tiara waved a hand at them and said, "Meet my 'daughters', Belle and Nyx Cunningham."

Wild Bloom rubbed the back of her head and said, "Sorry guys, but this world doesn't have computer records, if you want to bump your ages a bit, it'll have to wait until we can find the paperwork and rig it."

Baloo was looking around at the five of them, and just shook his head. "Man, and I thought my life was complicated enough already!"

Scootaloo grinned as she joined up with the other Crusaders. "Don't think of it as complicated, think of it as interesting!"

\* \* \*

><p>48.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Come on." Apple Bloom was smirking. "I know you have one."<p>

"...the shape was good for runic circles," Silver Spoon admitted.

"AHA! I knew it! Let's see, come on!"

"And silver's a good material!" continued the currently Saddle Arabian filly. "It's not like I-"

"Silver, I've made mechanical flowering fruits. Sweetie's created shaped candies that ring. Heck, Diamond wears hers in the baseline." The farmfilly shook her head. "It's nothing to be ashamed of."

With a resigned sigh, Silver reached into her subspace pocket and pulled out something twice her size.

Pinkie chose that moment to walk in. "...that is one big spoon."

"Er..." Apple Bloom pointed at a small stain. "Is that...?"

"Um, yeah. I used this in fights a lot." Silver shrugged. "It made sense at the time."

\* \* \*

><p>48.3 (Indalecio)<p>

The Incredible Mac

Pt. 1

\* \* \*

><p>Mac awoke. The first thing he noticed were the murmurs of shock around him. At first, he thought they might be directed at him, but no, they seemed to be directed at a teenage boy riding his motorcycle through the desert in front of him.<p>

"Whats he doing? He's going to be killed!" said a gruff, male voice beside him.

He didn't know what was going on; his loop memories hadn't set in, but he knew he couldn't let that happen. He leaped out of the bunker he was in and ran toward him.

\* \* \*

><p>He hadn't gotten far when the first of his loop memories hit him. All from his first memories to the latest last night.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>He'd been working on something called a Gamma Bomb? These human loops were always kinda weird. But then again, Trixie would've probably gone gaga for something like that.<p>

He'd been doing some last minute checks on the thing with his fiancée Betty Ross.

'Fiance, huh? Wonder if she's awake or not?'

The door opened. In walked two people his loop memories instantly recognized as General Thaddeus "Thunderbolt" Ross and Major Glenn Talbot. His loop memories and the looks those two were giving him told him that they didn't like him and that the feeling was mutual.

"Is everything ready on the Gamma Bomb?" there was a tone of barely restrained anger in the General's voice.

"Yup."

The General's eyebrow visibly twitched. He turned to Betty and his expression softened immediately.

"Betty, can I talk to you for a second? In private?"

"What is it Father? If you can say it in front of me, you can say it in front of Bruce." there was an edge to her voice.

General Ross nodded to the Major. "Leave us for a few minutes, Major."

"Yes sir." He saluted and left.

The General composed himself. "You know I don't approve of your dating ..."

"Not this again!" she cried. "We've been over this before. We've got nothing to talk about! "

"Betty.."

"I really think you should go."

The General turned to Bruce and his face hardened. "This isn't the last of it. Don't even think for a moment that I'll let you marry my daughter." saying that, he put his hat back on his head and left.

\* \* \*

><p>Which lead him back to today. The Gamma Bomb was going to explode, and some dumb kid decided to drive out in the middle of the testing site.<p>

Getting him to safety me managed to toss the kid into the bunker just as the blast was about to hit. 'Whelp, looks like this'll be one real short loop!'

\* \* \*

><p>Mac hurt. Near as he could tell he was in a bed, probably in a hospital, hopped up on anesthetics and worst of all, people were talking, preventing him from getting any rest.<p>

'Why Mac hurt? Why people talk? Why can't they just leave Mac alone?' he wondered to himself.

"severe concussion, broken arm..." Through the fog of the anesthesia, he could just barely make anything out.

"survived the gamma bomb.."

"needs to be studied.."

Something must have changed as his head got foggier, the voices vanished and he surrendered to sweet oblivion.

\* \* \*

><p>"Good morning!" The one he knew as Betty Ross entered the room. She closed the door behind her and removed what looked like a small silvery notepad from somewhere. She fiddled with it for a few seconds and spoke.<p>

"Ok. No bugs...and I've put up a privacy screen around this room. It should be safe to talk."

"You're looping?" Mac asked.

"Yeppers." Betty crossed the room and took a seat at Mac's bedside.

"Well, that makes this less awkward." Mac was visibly relieved.

"Well, I'm assuming you've got some questions."

"Eyup. So does that bomb thing always happen?"

"Mostly. Sometimes its a gamma reactor. Sometimes Bruce just like Gamma radiation and decides to experiment on himself. It varies."

"So is Bruce, I'm assuming its not MacIntosh, the loop anchor?"

"Banner. No he's just a looper, same as me. That kid you saved, Rick Jones, however, is the loop anchor. Well, probably. It could be Steve Rodgers, or possibly Doreen, or maybe that Parker kid. All we know is that those 4 loop a lot. Its...complicated."

"Complicated?"

"Well, those 4 seem to be always looping, but we're not really sure if they're anchors."

"Hmm.."

"Oh! Do you feel a pool of energy in your mind?"

Mac closed his eyes.

She continued. "One of the effects of the gamma radiation is that it tends to turn you into a huge mass of muscle. Go ahead. Try touching it."

"You mean besides deadly radiation sickness?"

Betty sighed. "Just do it."

Mac reached out with mind and tried touching the pool of energy. From nothing, it became a raging torrent of energy that tore through him, giving Mac's already impressive muscles an even bigger boost. From here on, his bed started collapsing under the weight and his casts popped off from the stress. It took some effort, as the energy threatened to overwhelm him, and his muscles burned from the growth they were experiencing, but he managed to retain control of his mind.

"\*\*That was dangerous, Lady.\*\*"

"But you did it!"

"\*\*What would've happened if I hadn't\*\*"

"You would've rampaged across the dessert with the army and Father in hot pursuit."

Mac glared.

"Please, it what usually happens whenever Bruce isn't awake."

Mac raised an eyebrow.

"He, you, whatever, gets angsty about the transformation, which usually only triggers when he's mad, and becomes obsessed about trying to cure himself, which never works, because something or someone always interrupts it. Either the Hulk himself..."

Mac looked quizzically at Betty.

"That's you, by the way. Or the Army, or SHIELD, or the Leader, or the Abomination...well you get the picture. Which brings me to my next point. Father had decided that since you absorbed all this radiation without any side-effects. Well, the normal side-effects of dying horribly of radiation sickness, that's something that must be studied and used for the benefit of the United States Army. He's transferring you to a secure facility in a few days. They'll be poking and prodding you for years until they get something useful. The fact that it'll separate us is just the cherry on top in Father's view."

"\*\*We'll have do something about that." \*\*A spring on his bed popped to as if to punctuate his last statement.

\* \* \*

><p>Betty and Rick stood out in the desert.<p>

"So you know the plan?" asked Betty

"Who's the anchor here? If anything I should be asking you that."

"So..ask."

"Whats the plan?"

"Ok, so you transform into Colossus..."

Rick just glared.

"Sorry, not Colossus, I meant The Thing." said Betty, grinning.

"Very funny, Ms, I'm She-Hulk, but Red."

"Tough crowd. Fine...you transform into A-Bomb. That's still a dumb name, by the way, and I transform into Red She-Hulk, and we go in and bust out Bruce. He transforms, we fight and gracefully lose, Bruce is a hero, or at least less of pariah in Father's eyes."

"And if we're captured?"

"Clones, from an alternate future, come to set right what once went wrong."

"Eh..close enough."

"So we leave now?" A distant explosion rocked the valley.

"\*\*I'd stay that's a yes.\*\*" said Rick as he transformed into a giant rock-like being with Betty transforming right behind him.

\* \* \*

><p>The military convoy was in ruins. Soldiers either milled about expecting new orders, or waited to receive treatment. They raised their rifles as Red She-Hulk and A-Bomb approached.<p>

They put up their hands "\*\*Whoa. We mean you no harm. What happened here?"\*\*

"Thats classified." said Major Glenn Talbot stepping forward.

"\*\*I think its obvious. Someone attacked the transport, made off with whatever cargo...and headed in that direction.\*\*" said Red She-hulk, pointing to some tracks.

"Lets go!" They leaped off in the direction of the tracks.

\* \* \*

><p>For the second time, Mac awoke in an unfamiliar environment. He was horizontal in a glass and metal tube. Restraints held down his arms and legs. Looking through the glass covering above him, he could see people in yellow clothes and masks at work beside him.<p>

'They kinda look like beekeepers. No sign or Rick or Betty. Plan probably went wrong, so this is probably as good a time to make my entrance.'

Once again he tapped into that pool of green energy in his mind, and the tube suddenly became very cramped, but shattered as he continued growing. There were shouts of alarm and he continued freeing himself.

"\*\*Don't get up. I can help myself." \*\*

Finally freeing himself he leaped up through the ceiling, only to find himself in midair as he seemed to have just left some sort of aircraft. As he continued falling, the aircraft made a lazy turn and started heading back the way he came. Coming toward him and passing him? But it looked like something else emerged as it flew by. A silvery android, that hit the ground a minute after Mac did.

"\*\*What are you?"\*\*

The only response from the android was to shift into a form similar to Mac's own, green and heavily muscled.

\*\*"Avocado."\*\* Mac swore.

\* \* \*

><p>'Okay. What am I up against?' asked Mac to himself as he dodged a blow to his head. The android seemed as strong and as durable as him. The fact that they'd been fighting for 5 minutes already with no sign of the droid weakening meant that it probably had a pretty strong



power source. The glowing aura coming from the android's chest confirmed it. But it also didn't seem to have that much in the way of imaginative. Its attacks were, no pun intended, mechanical and Mac was dodging most of them.<p>

'Now what are my assets and skills.' What most readily came to mind were his muscles, which he was already using. There was his bartender skills, but there wasn't a bar for miles, and unless he could challenge the droid to a contest of mixing drinks, didn't see how that would be any help. The android didn't seem to be open to negotiation, as he hadn't spoken at all, and hadn't visibly reacted to anything he'd said. He wondered if this whole android business was just a stalling action for other reinforcements to move into position, but he'd yet to see anyone else show up during the battle. Maybe this was a test of the android's abilities? Or maybe his?

The only thing Mac hadn't tried were any of his earth pony abilities. He hadn't a chance to practice any of them in this body, and wasn't sure they would work, but this was as good a time as any.

First, bucking. Mac charged his fist with power and swung at what looked like a vulnerable spot. The droid's left arm at the elbow came clean off, launching far into the distance. The droid paused for a moment, its elbow becoming liquid metal, stretching and reforming into another arm and hand.

**"\*\*Eucalyptus.\*\*"**

'This is going to be annoying, but this means I can probably puncture its chest cavity if it would just stop moving.'

The second ability he hadn't tried was earth pony plant growth. However, just from looking around he could see he was in a desert, and there wasn't much he could work with. Reaching out with his senses he tried to sense the plant life in the area. Not much, except he was detecting a bunch from inside the android. That didn't make sense, unless... you counted the various seeds and pollen usually in the air. This android must have an air intake, and have brought into itself thousands of tiny seeds. Normally, it wouldn't have been a problem, but...

**"\*\*Lets add a little something to the mix!\*\*"** Mac reached into his subspace pocket and removed a packet of apple seeds. Perhaps not the best choice for what he was going to try, but it was what he had on hand. Once at the same time, he torn open and threw the opened bag at the android. At the same time he slammed his foot into the ground, pouring as much earth pony magic into it as he could. The explosion of plant growth was enormous. Right in front of him grew an enormous apple tree, a conglomeration of at least a hundred seeds, which as it expanded threw him back.

Mac landed not so gracefully. The tree continued expanding, but slower now. Mac leaped into the branches to see if he could locate the android. Reaching out with his senses, he could feel it...there! Using his earth pony magic, he bent a path through the ever expanding branches.

Mac finally found the android. It was completely locked down the branches of the tree, and could gain no leverage as it tried to free itself.

"\*\*Still moving, huh?"\*\* Mac reached up with his fist charged, grabbed through the android's abdomen to the source of its power he felt earlier. It promptly stopped moving.

Through the light of the tree, Mac examined what he pulled out. It seemed to be a small glass cube, about a 3 centimeters in length on all sides, and it literally pulsed with energy. He tossed it into his subspace pocket. He could examine it later if he got access to a proper lab.

He then went out and waited for someone to arrive.

\* \* \*

><p>Mac didn't have to wait long. It was another few minutes before a helicopter approached his position and landed.<p>

'A giant tree appearing in the middle of the desert must be an incredible beacon.'

It had a circular emblem of what was probably a stylized falcon on it. Its side opened up, and occupants that he mostly recognized popped out. He could see someone who probably Betty and what she had described as Rick in his A-Bomb form along with General Ross. Also, a bunch of agents in blue uniforms that appeared to be commanded by an eye-patched woman with purple hair that he felt he should have recognized, but didn't. The agents in blue surrounded him with rifles pointed at him.

Mac shifted to his human form. Privately, Mac wondered where the purple pants had come from, and why when he switched back, his pants were back to normal.

"General. Unknown Gamma mutated beings who I've never seen before." and then he turned to the woman. "I'm afraid I don't have the honor, Miss.."

"Nicole, Nicole Sparkle, Director of SHIELD."

Recognition finally hit Mac. "Pleased to meet you, Director Sparkle."

"This is all very well, but we'll need to take Mr. MacIntosh into custody. He's vital to the interests of the US military."

"I think we could possibly come to an arrangement. Mr. MacIntosh, how would you like to come work for me?"

The General sputtered.

"This offer would apply to you two as well," nodding to Rick and Betty, who decided to shift to human form as well at this point.

"Betty? What? How?"

"Merged with a temporal duplicate of myself from alternate timeline." said Betty.

"Same." mentioned Rick

"Director, I think I'd like to take you up on that offer."

\* \* \*

><p>48.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie left the stage to the sound of cheers. "Ah, now that's something which I <em>really<em> enjoy about Looping."

Her glamorous assistant followed her, using a towel to clean whipped cream off her face. "Why do I always get splatted?"

Trixie turned, looking indignant. "Firstly, because slapstick is always funny. Second, it's not always you. I got gunged back in Trottingham."

Chrysalis' towel stopped moving. "Okay, I had forgotten that one."

"Lucky you," Trixie muttered. "It took me half an hour to clean my cloak." Then she got a mischievous look on her face, darted forwards and licked some of the cream off.

The disguised Changeling flinched momentarily. "Gah! Warn me next time!"

"Make me," Trixie challenged, sticking her tongue out.

Chrysalis' eyes narrowed. "Maybe I will," she said, as they reached the wagon.

Bigger on the inside, of course. Trixie's baseline wagon was fine for one, but applying a simple Potterverse charm on it made it suitable for two without Trixie having to tow a Conestoga.

"Shouldn't we set off first?" Trixie asked, a quaver in her voice. "I mean, we do need to get to Manehattan by tomorrow evening, and it's a fair way."

"Well, you should have thought of that first," Chrysalis said reasonably. She dropped her shapeshift.

There was a flash of light, and an envelope landed on the table.

"...huh." Trixie trotted over and picked it up. "I wasn't expecting a letter. Were you?"

"Changelings don't bother with post," Chrysalis pointed out.

"And it's not from one of your lovers in every port of call?" Trixie teased.

Chrysalis winced, then grinned. "Okay, you win this round. Now, what's in the letter?"

Trixie slit the seal, holding it up for inspection. "Canterlot master of ceremonies, very posh. I remember whenever Twilight and I are co-students of Celestia, we saw a lot of this."

"Usually attached to damage bills and the occasional lawsuit, if I recall right," Chrysalis snarked.

"Same difference." Trixie drew the contents out. "Oh. Oh-ho-ho!"

Chrysalis looked over her shoulder. "What is it?"

Trixie moved the letter so she couldn't see. "Aherm. 'The Master of Ceremonies of Canterlot Palace has been requested and ordered by their majesties, Princess Celestia and Princess Luna, to invite you, Trixie Lulamoon, along with guest, to the Grand Galloping Gala to be held in one month's time.'"

They exchanged glances. And then, in near perfect unison, grinned.

\* \* \*

><p>"What on Equestria is <em>that?<em>" Blueblood said, staring at the newest entrants to the hall.

Trixie tossed her head, making her starred dress ripple and catch the light. "Yes, bask in the reflected awe of the Great and Powerful Trixie!"

"Not you," Blueblood said, frowning. "I mean the... the... thing next to you?"

"Oh," Trixie said in tones of sudden understanding, nodding exaggeratedly. "You must mean my date. She has a name, and it's Chrysalis."

Seeing that most of the room was now staring, Trixie patted Chrysalis on the back. "She's a queen, you know."

Chrysalis beamed at the room. This only showed her fangs, which made some of the assembled notables back away a bit.

"Chryssy!" Celestia said, sweeping into the room with her student and her sister trailing behind her. "I'm so glad you could make it!"

"My pleasure," Chrysalis replied warmly. "How is your sister doing?"

"I am fine, thank you," Luna answered for her sister, making a slight bow. "I don't believe I have met your date, however."

Trixie fought to keep a straight face, as the five Loopers all acted as though it was perfectly normal to see a Changeling at the Gala.

Sure, explosions were cool. But as far as pranking the Gala went, Blueblood's expression right now was priceless.

\* \* \*

><p>48.5<p>

"I feel weird..." Silver said, experimentally ruffling her wings.

Her aunt, Gilda, looked down at her with a mildly parental expression. "Not surprised, fledgeling, you're a whole new body type."

"Something like that happened a couple ago, too," Silver informed her. "My first fused loop, where I picked up Alchemy and Alkahestry, I had two missing limbs."

"Cool," Gilda declared, nodding. "That was probably your formative loop, then."

"Do those always happen?" Silver spread her wings and beat them as fast as she could, rising a little off the ground. "Ow, this is exhausting."

Gilda reached out a foreclaw and supported her breastbone. "Easy, fledgeling. Flying's as much about technique as brute force, doing it like that's only going to strain something. And no, they don't always happen." Silver stopped trying to fly, and Gilda deposited her back on the ground. "I'll teach you in a sec. Some loopers â€" a lot of human ones seem to do this â€" just keep learning from a lot of different loops, never really picking a speciality. Some of our locals just don't have the need to develop a specific skill set over others â€" take Sparkle, she's all about magic."

"I see... I think," Silver said slowly. "And... your formative one was wherever you picked up that weird magic you do?"

"Yep." Gilda demonstrated, letting her body bleach white. After a few seconds, tufts of fur or feathers developed at her haunches, and red accents touched up her otherwise brilliant white coat.

Her tail-tip seemed to be on the verge of releasing a drop of ink.

"I learned a couple of forms of the brush magic there, and then picked up the rest a bit at a time." Gilda's colours went back to normal in a moment. "I've also become a dab hand at painting, too, which is nice. Stress-relieving."

Silver nodded along. "What about â€" Tiara?"

"Her?" Gilda cawed laughter. "She's the most hard-assed bitch I've ever met â€" and that's a compliment, really. She's basically picked up two things â€" psychic powers, you know, telepathy and scrub like that, and also a mean tactical sense."

"Right." Silver Spoon thought that over for a bit.

"Hey â€" how do gryphons... well, the gryphon government. How does that work?"

Gilda sat back. "Okay, so we're predator-types. I'll bet you see me instinctively as big and tough, and there's a little niggly in the back of your mind evaluating if you could take me."

"Yeah." Silver blushed. "I didn't know I was so... arrogant?"

"Gryphons are arrogant, it's healthy." Gilda waved it off. "So, we're arranged into... well, prides or packs, the meaning is the same. Your village is a pack, your county is a pack formed of the village higher-ups, and so on up to Imperial level. You can move up in two ways â€" either by election, which is sort of a contest of strength of mind, or by combat, which is a contest of strength of body."

The elder looper waved her foreleg. "Elections are kinda recent, historically speaking. Anyway, you can only challenge either way within a pack. So if Joe Average Gryphon wanted to become Emperor, he'd start at the village level. If he won there, he'd be a member of the county pack, and could move up there, and so on."

"What about you?"

Gilda coughed. "I have an unfair advantage. I'm... well, we're... sort of members of the Imperial family. That counts as a pack, too."

Silver digested that for a bit.

"Griffin civil wars must be complicated."

"Yep, pretty much." Gilda shrugged. "Mind you, the pack leader usually has a band of sworn talons who he can have kick the arses of any potential challenger, so he doesn't have to spend the whole day fighting. In practise, successful challenges involve those sworn talons either stepping aside or getting whupped en masse â€" and either way, we as a species tend to be alright with that."

"I think I see. So..." Silver examined one of her claws minutely. "So it all gets sorted out in duels?"

"Better than wars," Gilda agreed. "And we do a \_lot\_ of betting on the outcomes."

"So." Silver raised her wings again. "Flying?"

"Right. Flight basics." Gilda thought for a bit. "First off, how to glide. It's fairly simple in practise, just hold your wings out stiff."

"That's it?" Silver followed the instructions. "Now what?"

"Now..." Gilda grinned. "We teach you the gryphon way."

Her tail slashed across left to right three times, making a set of three parallel horizontal lines.

The resultant instant tornado sent Silver rocketing over three hundred feet into the air.

"Okay," Gilda shouted up. "Now... sorta fall less."

"HOW?" Silver asked, panicking.

"Stop falling!"

\* \* \*

><p>"I officially hate gryphon teaching methods," Silver muttered, pulling twigs out of her feathers.<p>

Gilda shrugged. "You were really making progress there. Before you hit the tree. All cleared out?"

Silver inspected her wings. "I think so."

"Good!" Gilda said, bringing her tail up again. "Ready for gliding practise session two?"

With a yelp, Silver turned and fled.

The elder gryphon chuckled, walking lazily after her. "Wonder when she'll notice she just flew up the cliff..."

\* \* \*

><p>48.6 (Vulpine Fury):<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Mac?"<p>

The farmer-become-bartender raised his head in curiosity. "Eeyup?"

...and was bowled over by a smiling and crying Cheerilee. "I'm home! I'm home!" She pulled back and drank in her old friend's confused face.

Apple Bloom came around the corner, and broke into a grin of her own.

\* \* \*

><p>"Howdy, Miss Cheerilee! Ah wasn't expecting to see you today! Ah thought we didn't have class today 'cause of the Summer Sun Celebration..."<p>

She was shocked by just how tender the hug was that Cheerilee enfolded her into.

\* \* \*

><p>48.7 (Elmagnifico)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Macintosh brought his head up when he heard Cherilee's voice.<p>

"Eeyup?"

That was interesting. She looked ecstatic. This was early in the loop, and typically their interaction was

limited-

"Hrnk!"

Ohfewmets howdidhemissherbracingforthatleap  
thishadbetternotendinakiss - if he avoided That One Day. He really  
hoped this wasn't one of those loops where ponies had Soulmate Timers  
on their hooves or some-such mechanical matchmaking and he'd missed  
the Memory. It wouldn't be the first time. If he'd done the math  
right, the Loops liked to hook up his baseline version with the  
schoolmarm about one in three times, which could make things like  
pre-scheduled dates awkward if he Awoke later than usual.

"I'm home! I'm home!"

Wait.

He definitely would have remembered if she had moved in. A change in  
family dynamics like that wasn't something you missed more than once.  
Was she? Why would she be?

"Howdy, Miss Cheerilee! Ah wasn't expecting to see you today! Ah  
thought we didn't have class today 'cause of the Summer Sun  
Celebration..."

Ah, her relationship with the Crusaders. That was a plausible reason  
for her to Loop. And now Applebloom was included in the hug? So  
probably not that problem. Was this how Shining Armor felt around the  
looping changeling queen?

Macintosh made a mental note to pay particular attention to Cheerilee  
in the coming loop. Wistful sighs, stares into the distance, brief  
disappointed glimpses, unexplained bouts of grief, these would all be  
looked for. The last thing he wanted was another Chrysalis  
situation.

\* \* \*

><p>48.8 (LordofBones)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Citizens of Ponyville!" boomed the black alicorn as she appeared  
in a writhing vortex of shadow and lightning, "tonight, you have  
heard my <em>beloved <em>sister's speech! You have heard her  
promises! But I, the Nightmare Moon, Queen of the Night, do not make  
promises! Where Celestia only offers platitudes, I have already taken  
action in dispatching the true terror of this fair town, as a mark of  
my care and benevolence towards my future subjects!"

Celestia just stared at her sister in shock. She had been in no way  
prepared for Luna to return in this manner!

Ivory Scroll raised a hoof meekly. At Nightmare's nod, the Mayor  
spoke up, "Um...Your Majesty...I don't mean to offend you,  
but...er...\_Lyra stop pushing...\_what did you mean by the true terror  
of Ponyville?"

Luna stared at her intensely. "I have banished the rabbit known as  
Angel, to the Moon, forever."



There was a complete and utter silence, punctuated by a pink-maned pegasus's body hitting the floor in a dead faint.

"\_THREE CHEERS FOR QUEEN NIGHTMARE MOON! ALL HAIL THE QUEEN!" \_Big Mac roared.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

48.1: The plot's going into a tale spin. (Sorry!)

>48.2: That's the second biggest spoon I've ever seen!<br>48.3: "You wouldn't like me when ah'm placid."

>48.4: Well known and famous.<br>48.5: Griffin society, culture, and education.

>48.6: Cheerilee was one of the loopers initiated by that big ol' crash a few back.<br>48.7: This is what we call "panic mode".

>48.8: Policies the people can get behind.<p>

## 51. Chapter 51

49.1

Nightmare Moon gathered herself, ready to return to Equestria and take her vengeance.

"Come along, children, this way!" a cheerful voice said.

\_Wait, what?\_ The Nightmare looked in the direction of the voice, which was behind a small hill, and crept up to the lip of the ridgeline so as to look over.

A motley group of confused-looking colts and fillies were gazing around themselves, or occasionally picking something up to marvel at the low weight. One, a pegasus, was flapping her small wings frantically and beaming as the effort resulted in a hover.

At the head of the group were two adult mares. One was an earth pony with a daisy-based cutie mark and carrying a piece of chalk in the side of her mouth, while the other was a purple unicorn levitating a blackboard alongside them. Nightmare Moon could also sense the magic side-wash of a powerful air bubble spell, providing breathable air for the whole assemblage of ponies.

The earth pony mare stopped and turned around, making Nightmare drop back out of sight in case she was spotted. There was the sound of something heavy landing on the regolith, and then the screeching of chalk on blackboard.

"Now, who can tell me anything about the moon? Yes, Scootaloo?"

"We're so light here! It's awesome!"

"That's correct." The screech of more chalk. "The moon is smaller than Equestria, and a little less dense. That means that the total gravity here is only one sixth of that on the surface of our home

planet. What about you, Snips?"

"Uh... I guess there's that we can see Equestria. It's huge â€" and really bright!"

"Yes. Like the moon is in our sky, we're in the moon's sky. But Equestria is several times larger than the moon, so since we're the same distance away from it as we normally are from the moon, it looks larger. And yes, Equestria reflects more light than the moon does, so it appears brighter."

Nightmare peered over the ridgeline again, using a convenient rock for cover.

"Something else you might not have noticed about the moon," the earth pony mare said, "is that it doesn't have an atmosphere. There's no air on the moon."

"Uh... what are we breathing, miss Cheerilee?" a unicorn filly asked. As she said that, an earth pony did an exaggeratedly dramatic act of suffocating.

"Good question, Sweetie Belle. Twilight here didn't only get us to the moon, but also cast a spell which has given us air. If you could demonstrate, Twilight?"

The air-bubble spell altered slightly.

Twilight â€" presumably, at any rate â€" picked up a feather and a hammer from the tray of the blackboard. Holding them up, she dropped them.

The feather drifted slowly to the ground, while the hammer fell as fast as things normally did on the moon.

She retrieved them, and then dropped them outside the area of the air bubble. The hammer fell just as it had, but this time the feather fell just as fast.

"Now, what happened there?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, it looks like it's home time, everypony. Tomorrow we're going to be doing the inner planets. Say thank you to Twilight for kindly lending her time!"<p>

"Thanks, Miss Twilight," the children said in the not-in-unison chorus normal for school pupils.

Then there was a bright purple flash, and Nightmare was alone once more.

She didn't know quite how to take that. The fillies and colts had certainly seemed to be interested in her moon...

\* \* \*

><p>49.2 (Zetrein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Luna, I think I need to visit my student in the near future."  
Celestia said, reading her mail.<p>

"Oh?" Luna looked up from her book. "Has Twilight Sparkle done something wrong?"

"Perhaps? I'm confused by the content of her friendship reports. They are wonderful little cartoons, and we had a lovely correspondence about how she animated them, but she doesn't seem to understand my problem with them."

\_Well now I'm curious \_"Oh? May I see one, Sister?"

"Certainly, here's the one she just sent. Tap the symbol to activate it." Luna look the offered scroll.

"What I learned today: Book, Cover, yada yada. Is that a zebra? It seems Twilight Sparkle has learned a lesson in racial prejudice."  
Luna said, looking up from the scroll. "Unorthodox as this letter is, it does get to the point."

"I know, often in a single sentence," Celestia sighed, "But this is not what I had in mind when I asked her to write reports."

"Maybe thy poor student simply doesn't know else how to express what she's learning? As I understand this is beyond her previous experience."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right, parasprites next. Hm, amusing as it'd be to send this one off uncensored, I'm gonna have to rewrite it."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Weeks later...<p>

\* \* \*

><p>A grim faced Celestia burst into her sister's chambers. "Luna, we're going to Ponyville, Twilight might be in grave danger."<p>

"What danger, Sister? Is the town under attack?" Luna inquired, standing from her desk.

Celestia pulled a scroll from under her wing. "Look at her latest letter."

"Don't ignore Pinkie, or she'll cut you. What! A cry for aid, if ever I heard one! Swiftly Sister, ignore the chariot, we must teleport!"

\* \* \*

><p>49.3 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Bishop Riso Bessemer was the head priest of Pelor at Zagy City temple. While this required he be a fairly powerful cleric, courtesy of an adventuring career when he was considerably younger, in the present it mainly required paperwork, lots and lots of paperwork. At least it was a fine day, and the window to the balcony of his chambers was open, letting in a warm breeze as well as bright sunlight. However, as he craned over the latest scroll, the light dimmed as a shadow appeared across the window.<p>

He looked up and was shocked to see a pegasus standing there, perched on the balcony and completely unafraid. Pegasi were notoriously shy, and avoided human contact, which made those captured and trained as mounts worth a medium sized fortune. He'd seen a number of odd things in his past career, but this was definitely up there. However, things got a whole lot weirder when the pegasus spoke. Pegasi were human smart, but they couldn't form words, everyone knew that, except apparently the pegasus in front of him.

"Hey there, are you the guy in charge of this place?"

"Yes, I am, however, I am still a humble servant of Pelor. Bishop Bessemer, at your service."

"Great, the name's Rainbow Dash, and I've got a problem I need some help with, your bishop-ship."

"Pelor tells us to help those who need it."

"Cool! Okay, so I'm a pegasus, but I'm from another... plane, that's the term, and I just arrived here. Pegasi are a bit different where I come from, but I'm stuck in a body for this world's version." She held up a hoof. "Even a human body has better range of motion, and I lay eggs, and that's just plain wrong. Griffons lay eggs, not pegasi. Well, sometimes..."

"I'm not sure how you expect Pelor to help you. Each of us is made the way we are."

"Oh, I can fix things myself, but I've gotta power-up, use some whammy from my home dimension, and my friend Twilight figures the gods will get annoyed if we start throwing the heavy-duty bibbety-bobbity-boo around. So I figure, Pelor's the big good over-deity, right? If he gives us the okay, the rest of them won't cause a ruckus, well maybe the evil types, but buck 'em, I'm on the side of good."

"You claim to have powers sufficient to bring the notice of the gods?" Bessemer was recovering nicely. Whether this pegasus was telling the truth, or was just plain insane, this was far more interesting than paperwork. Besides, he thought he saw the hand of Pelor in this.

"Well Twilight does, and she knows everything there is to know about magic."

"You have a human wizard as a companion?"

"Wizard yes, human no. She's a unicorn, but last time we were in this plane she did a whole lot of adventuring as a wizard. I was a monk,

got pretty good at it too. Obviously I worshipped Pelor, Kord too, I mean not in the going to temple every chance I got sort of way, but you know... I helped beat up evil and protect the innocent and be the best I could be, and all the stuff they say you should..."

The Bishop actually chuckled. "I'm sure Pelor is more interested in what's in you heart than on your lips."

"Great! So obviously I'm not looking for a freebie here, what can I do to make this work? I've got some gold to put towards good works and such..."

With the oddness of what had already happened, the idea that she had money too wasn't such a stretch, but he simply replied, "I shall have to pray to Pelor for guidance on this matter, but I already have one idea. A paladin, Lady Salmara Melnor, holds vigil in the temple below, she is young and inexperienced, but she has already shown both courage and compassion in the service of Pelor. She seeks a mount to carry her on further adventures. A seasoned adventurer would be of great help to her. Would such a task interest you?"

Dash tried to rub her chin with a hoof, and winced because her bones didn't flex that way. "A Paladin's mount? Yeah, I could go for that. It's not like we had anything planned... Aw man, I don't know if Twilight would go for it..."

There was a flash, and Twilight appeared. "Dash, don't dash off like that... Oh, chlorophyll!"

She turned to Bessemer. "I'm sorry sir, my friend gets a bit over-enthusiastic..."

"It's fine. In fact, we were just discussing a mutually beneficial arrangement. I believe you wish to use some abilities from your home plane that you are worried may cause issues with the gods. I would like to know more of this."

"Hey, wait a second, I thought you said using powers was a big no-no!" Dash exclaimed.

"Teleport spell, it's only fourth circle, and unicorns can teleport without error inside their groves anyway. All in-loop abilities, so with a bit of tweaking and a Locate Person spell, I was good to go. But I guess I owe the good bishop an apology, and an explanation..."

A short explanation later on both sides, and the Bishop finished with. "I will have to mediate and pray to Pelor for his advice, but I am sure he will give his blessings on those who use their abilities to aid his cause."

"C'mon Twilight, it sounds like fun!" Dash said, and Twilight considered the matter. "I guess it would be something different. I never got to finish off studying the higher circle spells... if I could get access to various colleges and such as we travel around... Alright, I'm in!"

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity fidgeted as Photo Finish snapped her pictures of Fluttershy. This could be her big break, but the intensity of the mare made it difficult for her to interpret her thoughts. The mare had her crew pack up the cameras and turned to leaveâ€" <p>

The door to the boutique burst open and Rarity could only watch in horror as her big break was barrelled over by the biggest tomboy in Ponyville. After a moment of confusion, the mare in question sat up, shook her head, and looked down at the unamused photographer. "Oh! Glad to see I'm not too late."

"Rainbow Dash!" The fashionista trotted over, scandalized. "What in Celestia's name do you think you're doing?!"

"Oh, I heard my mom was in town." Dash got off Photo Finish and helped her up. "And it's been a while since we've talked, so I figured â€" Oh hey, mom, this is my friend Rarity."

"Ve haf met," Photo Finish stated dryly. "It iz good to zee vu, mein blitzschlag, vut I vus on ze way to arrange for ziz quietschende schmetterling to be ze model in mein new line-"

"Excuse me," Rarity said with a very forcibly calm face. "I just want to clarify. Rainbow Dash is your daughter?"

"Ja."

"Oh." The unicorn nodded. "Well, I must say she is a fine pony, although the fact she's related to you is... a tad surprising."

"Oh, um..." Fluttershy blushed from her stage. "I, uh... I thought you knew already. I would have told you, but, um... well..."

"Yeah, me and mom..." Rainbow rubbed the back of her head. "We kind of move in different circles. But she's still my mother, so... yeah." She chuckled. "Only pony besides you to ever get me in a dress."

Photo Finish's ears perked. "Oh? Somevun else haz finally wrapped up mein kleine blitzschlag?" She smiled slyly. "Iz ziz vun your herz-knoten?"

The pegasus gagged. "Oh, ew! No. No, definitely no. Rarity's just a friend. Granted, she's a friend that managed to convince me to wear frills, but â€" just â€" no mom. Just no." She stuck out her tongue and crossed her eyes. "Ew."

Fluttershy giggled.

Rarity finally managed to reassess the situation. "Yes, quite. You would not believe the fuss I had to go through designing her gala dress!"

"Ja, mein blitzschlag haz always been a fuss fuss..."

\* \* \*

><p>"And then she got my baby pictures out," Rainbow said, sipping her drink. "I mean... Rarity's not Awake, all I was trying to do was do her a favour, but... Eh, I can't really complain. I was awesome even as a foal."<p>

Scotaloo rolled her eyes. "That and Photo Finish really loves you." She raised an eyebrow. "Does her being your mother happen... often?"

"Well... it's about one in ten. When I'm awake, anyway. We're usually estranged."

"...I am somehow far less surprised then I should be."

\* \* \*

><p>49.5 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Girls, Ah have a very important announcement to make. Ah've been workin' on a secret project fer a while now, something that Ah think you'll like. Course, I kinda got stuck for a bit, but then Silver Spoon here helped me with some of her out-o-loop magic."

Apple Bloom paused, glancing at the silvery sea serpent standing next to her. "Um... by tha way, why are you Steven's niece this time round?"

"As far as Twilight can figure, the Crash hit my identity code and knocked off the species marker." Silver shrugged awkwardly. "The admins are probably getting around to fixing it, but it's not high on the priority list."

"Right. Okay." The earth pony flicked her tail and turned back to the other two crusaders. "Anywho. This project started with lots o' crossreferences. Evangelion, Transformers, tha Marvel fused loop, Twilight's Twibot thingâ€"

"The time you took me apart?" Sweetie asked innocently.

"Ah only did that one time." Apple Bloom rolled her eyes. "And ah put everythin' back. But... yes. That did help a mite. And Silver here, miss Alchemist â€" even if it's not really alchemy like what we got here â€" she managed ta give me the final component. Girls, ya ready ta have yer minds blown?"

Scotaloo leaned back onto her pillow. "Eh, sure. What you got?"

Apple Bloom grinned, taking off her necklace and putting it on the ground. "Cookie? It's yer show now."

For a moment, nothing happened. Then the gem in the necklace pulsed.

Metal slats and squares began to unfold from a space outside space, pushing the necklace off the ground and raising it up. Panels slid across each other in a complicated, strangely familiar pattern. Metal pistons clicked into sockets and became covered by armor. Whirring and groaning reverberated throughout the clubhouse as the crusaders watched in growing awe.

And with a final snap, a metal pony stood before them. Apple Bloom beamed. "Fillies, may Ah present tha Robotic Armor and Partner mode fer intelligent devices." She grinned as two other necklaces manifested on the necks of the gaping fillies. "Purely data, so Ah can transfer it right away \_and\_ it carries between loops." A yellow hoof rapped against the pony's barrel. "She's hollow too, in case we need a suit of powered armor in a jiffy."

\_Cookie?\_ flashed Clover hesitantly. \_How... How do you feel?\_

The metal pony shifted its head down. "Sorry, this is still new to me. I've barely gotten speaking down, but..." She managed to decently mimic a smile. "I can move. It's... it's amazing, really."

\_Well, I'm sold,\_ flashed Pansy. \_How soon till you have the pegasus model ready?\_

Apple Bloom sighed. "See, that's tha thing. Smart Cookie here doesn't even have Earth Pony magic, let alone pegasus or unicorn magic. Add to that tha difficulty she had in learning to move..."

"The fact is my kind of alchemy wasn't made for equestrian magic," Silver Spoon explained. "I'm... pretty sure I can fit it in eventually, but until then you'll just be pony shaped. And there's no real automatic processing, you have to control every joint manually."

"It's like learning to walk all over again," Smart Cookie added. "Pretty much literally, using bones and muscles that nopony had before. We'd probably get it down in a few loops, but until then, we're just going to be clumsy animated suits of armor." She chuckled awkwardly. "I'm afraid to even lift my hoof because I could lose my balance..."

\_...still,\_ Clover mused. \_It's a start. Mind if I assist you in your development of this project?\_

\_I'm also ready to help,\_ Pansy offered quickly. \_Although of course... I wouldn't want to be seen as abandoning Scootaloo-\_

The pegasus finally shook her head out of her amazement. "Abandon? Pansy, I would never think that! You've helped me a lot, you deserve this. If anything, I'm willing to throw my hat in the ring too!" She grinned. "Maybe an expert pilot can figure out how to get these things in the air."

"Ooo ooo ooo! If the magic's rune based it might be possible to interweave some musical notations in the spell for more flexibility and, uh, tactile senses!" Sweetie hopped up. "Count me in too!"

\* \* \*

><p>49.6 (Starfata)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright class." Cheerilee began. "In light of recent events, I've decided we're going to be taking it easy today." Recent events being the beginning of her third loop, but her class clearly thought



it meant the Summer Sun celebration. She waited a moment for their cheers to die down.<p>

"So, we're moving on to Geography and Culture a few years earlier than usual." She said, with a joking wink to calm down the more studious of the foals. "Today, we're having a guest come in to answer questions about their home. Can anyone guess who it is?"

"Twilight Sparkle?" A young Apple Bloom raised her hoof- not the looping version, she hadn't displayed any of the signs that the looping Sweetie Belle had taught her last loop.

"Good guess, but no Apple Bloom." She answered. "We're not learning about Canterlot today."

Diamond Tiara wasn't looping either- the filly seemed so much crueller now that she had seen what the spoiled filly had the potential to become. Her hissed insult to Apple Bloom would have escaped her entirely in the original timeline.

"Enough Tiara." She said sharply. "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all."

She glared at the filly until she settled down with a grumble. And she'd taken lessons from Fluttershy in her first loop. Impressive display of stubbornness from the child.

"Alright. Any other guesses?" She asked again. No pony raised their hoof this time, which she had already expected. That didn't mean she wasn't a little disappointed.

"No pony?" She asked anyway. There was a moment of awkward fidgeting before she smiled and called out. "Alright, you can come in now Zecora!"

Her students gasped in horror as the Zebra walked in.

Zecora ignored their reactions as regally as any Princess could, and bowed her head in greeting.

"Good morning to you all on this day, I hope you listen to what I say." The zebra began. "Though I live in the Everfree, my homeland is still dear to me. I'll tell you the tales of where Zebra's roam, Zebrica our heart and my own first home."

Cheerilee smiled at her friend. This was going to be so much \_fun\_.

\* \* \*

><p>49.6 (Stainless Steel Fox) (More Turning the Tables: necromantically raised plot thread edition)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>As they moved away from the clearing in the direction Prince Blueblood indicated and Zecora confirmed, they heard a voice from behind them, three voices. "Hey, wait for us!" "Big sis, I'm coming too!" "Rainbow Dash, wait up!"<p>

The three not-yet Cutie Mark Crusaders were scrambling down from the deck of the wrecked airship, Scootaloo dropping down with her wings buzzing to slow her fall, and Apple Bloom simply leaping down, using her Timber wolf pup body to it's best advantage. Sweetie Belle had the most difficulty, hanging over the edge until Apple Bloom turned and climbed her front legs up the side of the airship to provide an improvised ramp. Each of them carried oversized and bulging saddlebags.

Twilight rolled her eyes. "And now we know why the weight calculations were off."

"Okay missy, you are in trouble!" Applejack told the mini-Timber Wolf. "I told you to stay behind, where it's safe!"

Apple Bloom cringed slightly, which looked odd on a vicious predator made of thorns and branches, but straightened up and looked her big sister in the eyes. It helped that even as a pup, she was the same height as a regular pony. She wasn't able to keep a slight quaver out of her voice, but there was determination there too.

"I know I am, and I don't care if you ground me for a month, or even a year. You taught me family always sticks together, and that an Apple always pays her debts. Well I ain't going to let you two face that mean old Nightmare without me, and I got a debt to pay her myself for turning me into a walking tree! At least like this, I can help, really I can."

The last part was almost pleading, and accompanied by green glowing puppy-dog eyes.

"Sweetie Belle! What do you think you were doing?" Rarity asked, equally acerbic. "And how did you get on the airship in the first place?"

"We all met up underneath that table while we were hiding from Nightmare Moon, and we got talking afterwards, when everyone said you were going to go after her. I wanted to help too, and see you defeat that nasty Nightmare Moon. We helped with unloading the airship and managed to hide in the lockers in the cabin while every-pony was running around. We brought all the candy we could find."

"Candy?" The non-sequitur actually blunted Rarity's wrath.

"Well, we sort of thought... Nightmare Moon likes candy so much she eats it rather than foals on Nightmare Night? Well we decided when you were fighting Nightmare Moon and she got an advantage and she was all, 'I have you now my little ponies! Mwahahaha!' you might need a distraction so we'd throw bags of candy at her and she'd go 'Yum candy!' and be all distracted and that would give you time to um... do whatever you're going to do!"

"That's a super-doooper plan!" exclaimed Pinkie Pie. "What? If some-pony threw bags of candy at me I'd be totally distracted!"

"Yeah! Not that Rainbow Dash needs a distraction to kick her flank all the way to Las Pegasus! I wasn't going to miss a chance to see Dash do something that awesome!" Scootaloo looked up at the hovering Dash with worshipful eyes.

"Hey squirt, just because you're right doesn't mean this isn't some serious storm cloud we're heading into. We don't have time to babysit!" Dash was her usual tactful self. Then she saw how the word had crushed the orange pegasus filly and back-pedaled. "I mean we can't get distracted... we won't... oh horse-apples!"

Scotaloo looked ready to burst into tears and the others were all starting to put their own two bits in. As the babble rose, Twilight pushed out a low level muting spell and said, "We don't have time for an extended discussion! Every moment we delay, Nightmare Moon strengthens the bindings on Princess Celestia and frees more power to turn against us! I know the three of you meant well, but you've put us in a difficult position. We have to decide what to do, and quickly."

She'd already made a decision, having the three of them along should prove interesting, and she was sure of her ability to protect them, at least better than if they were out of sight. Now to justify it to the others.

"Take them back, of course!" Rarity replied.

"And lose all the time we've made twice over? We'd be too late. Splitting the party is out too, we needed everyone to defeat the last attack, and who knows what skills we'll need next."

"Couldn't you do that daylight thingie you did before and make this place safe?" asked Dash.

"Between myself, Shining and Zecora, I'm pretty sure I could, but considering the chaotic magic of the Forest and the Nightmare influence, it'd need us here to sustain it for any length of time. I'm sorry, but it seems the safest place for these three is with us."

She felt a slight twinge of conscience arguing this way, but the fact was that she'd have argued exactly the same way from an in-loop perspective, quite apart from any meta-reasons. The plain fact that they were at hazard, and there was nothing to be done about that. Even a long-range teleport to carry them back was risky, because of the chaotic background magic levels. Doable if she went full alicorn, but she'd already decided to use that only as a last resort.

The three fillies looked ecstatic, and Applejack and Rarity close to mutiny. Twilight turned to them with a stern expression. "This isn't some sort of reward, and it isn't a game. If Nightmare Moon succeeds, that's it, all of Equestria is doomed. So you can't mess about! Stay close to your sisters and obey every order they give you without question! Is that understood?"

"Um... but Miss Twilight, I don't have a sister..." Scotaloo offered nervously.

Twilight mentally kicked herself, but didn't show it. "Rainbow, Scotaloo clearly looks up to you. Will you take care of her?"

For a second, Rainbow actually looked frightened, then covered it up as she glanced down and saw the little pegasus looking up at her worshipfully. "Uh, I guess so... C'mon kid, you're with me..."

The sunshine in the pegasus's smile would have warded off even Nightmare Moon for a bit.

"If all the drama has now past, we can be on our way at last!" Zecora said, moving ahead.

As they forged on through the winding paths of the Everfree under Zecora's expert guidance, Applejack managed to ask Twilight, "Uh, Sugarcube, how did you know Scootaloo's name? I sure didn't recognise her."

Twilight deflected the awkward question with a shrug. "Someone pointed her out at the celebration â€" don't remember who. Rarity's sister too. Darn, now that's going to bug me for the rest of the day..."

They continued for several minutes more, and then Zecora slowed down and started looking slightly confused. "I've travelled these paths both near and far, but now I know not where we are. The way I came was right and true, but now I don't know what to do!"

"No matter, I have kept a chart of our progress. I can easily find the right direction." Blueblood boasted. He pulled a piece of parchment from a saddlebag and examined it, then frowned and turned it back and forth. His horn glowed, and then his eyes went derpy. "Ahhh! I don't know where I am!"

"You and everyone else." Dash snarked.

"But I have absolute direction sense, it's part of my talent! I always know exactly where I am!"

"Y'know, that explains a lot..." Twilight murmured to Rarity, then lit up her own horn. "Ohhh, clever... Shiny, can you sense that?"

Shining Armour's eyes grew distant, then he growled, "Illusion spell!"

"A subtle one too, low powered, so well done even I didn't spot it until too late. Nightmare Moon's next attack, she's covered the entire area in a field that distorts our perceptions. If we can't find our way to the castle, we can't defeat her."

"But surely now you know it's there, you can counter it, darling, can't you?" Rarity asked.

"I can try, but this thing could cover a huge area. If I don't get it all, it could flow back, warp things further. I'll try a wide area dispel as a last resort, but there's one thing we can try before that. An alicorn trumps unicorn magic, but she can't out-do the Elements, specifically the Element of Honesty. Applejack, you're the one pony who should be able to see past the illusion. Just concentrate on what's real, what's true."

"Uh... that's all very well, Twilight, but I don't know which way to go."

"But you can describe what you see, and that should give Zecora

enough to go on. If we can just get moving, I should be able to start plotting the field strength and tell when we get near the edges."

"You're sure about this Twi?" Applejack asked. It was one thing to be told about her Element, and another to actually have to try and use it. And despite her honest desire to make things right with Zecora, it was still going to be odd working alongside the zebra after all the stories. Still, a pony had to do what a pony had to do. She walked up to the front of the party alongside Zecora, and focussed on the feeling she'd had earlier when she'd been listening to the zebra's story, judging it.

At first she felt nothing, and then a warmth started burning in her chest. Her vision turned blurry for a moment, then she felt as if she was shaking off some sort of fine cloth. When her eyes could focus again, the scenery around her had changed, and there was the top edge of a large cliff running across their path. If they'd kept on, they'd have probably run right over it.

She described what she could see around her in as much detail as possible, and it was clear from the others' expressions that none of them were seeing anything like it. Zecora looked particularly puzzled. "I think I know where we've come to, but how we got here I've no clue. Bear to the left and follow the ledge, and have a care and avoid the edge!"

They followed the earth-pony in single file into what appeared to be a massive thicket of sharply thorned brambles, but as they approached, it melted away to either side. It continued the same way, Applejack describing what she saw and Zecora telling her where to go. Barrier after barrier turned out to be nothing more than a phantasm, and every apparent path turned out to lead to disaster. Twilight's horn lit at intervals, and she muttered to herself.

If she'd gone full alicorn, she could probably have blasted the illusion away, but in-loop as a unicorn, what she'd said was the truth. Besides, doing it this way was taking the focus off her and letting the others have a change to shine. Eventually the landscape started to match what Applejack was describing, as they emerged from the illusion.

"Celestia, that was a sneaky one!" Shining Armour exclaimed.

"And it'll get worse before it gets better." Twilight sighed. "Princess Luna's domain was dreams, magic, and the night, and Nightmare Moon twisted all those things to evil purposes. She'll use mental attacks as much as physical ones. But as long as we stay together, we can beat her."

"Yeah! That old meany Moon can't stop us! We work together like cake and ice-cream... or ice-cream and more ice-cream, or ice-cream and chocolate, or candy-apples and hot sauce..."

Everyone looked oddly at Pinkie, except for the three fillies who were glancing down at their saddlebags of candy. The pink pony just shrugged it off. "What! Those things are good!"

Zecora held up a hoof, and hissed, "Beware you ponies, quiet now, for danger lurks beneath these boughs. A manticore lives within this

range, to work around we must arrange."

Blueblood frowned. "But in that case, why bring us to this dreadful place?"

"To foolishness do not give voice, this way would not have been my choice. Nightmare's spells took us astray, this path returns the quickest way."

Shining Armour said, "Very well, we need to be ready. If you can fight melee, come to the front, non-combatants in the middle, magic users and ranged fighters to the back. Twilight, you shield to the rear, I'll take the front."

Alongside him lined up Big Mac and his sister, with Rainbow Dash flying overhead. Zecora came up with them, and so did Blueblood, just behind. Shining Armour asked the zebra if she was sure she wanted to be up front.

"You still need me to be your guide, I can't exactly run and hide. If manticores we have to fix, this zebra has a few old tricks." She gave a knowing grin.

"That's all well and good, but Blueblood?" Rainbow Dash asked, rather unkindly.

"I may not be Royal Guard, but I am quite skilled at Polo." Blueblood stated haughtily.

"Polo?" Dash cackled.

Blueblood plucked a cylinder from his designer saddlebags, which turned out to be the head of a Polo mallet. A flick and the shaft extended, and a ball followed it, floating up in the air above their heads. Blueblood gave a slight frown of concentration and the mallet blurred in an overhead circle that terminated in a double crack, the second of which was a tree branch snapping off neatly a hundred hooves away. "Polo."

Rainbow Dash shut her mouth, which had unaccountably dropped open, and she wasn't the only one. "Polo. Okay... works for me."

Twilight and Rarity were at the back, and Twilight saw her friend was now looking at the Prince with a certain interest. She gave a small grin and a nudge to the white unicorn. "Thinking of taking up... polo?"

"Huh... What?" Rarity shook her head slightly and said, "Oh nonsense Twilight, I was merely admiring his form."

"Yes, I noticed that." Really, this was too easy.

"Oh, you!" Rarity blushed. "I just meant he does have a certain presence."

"Ohh! Does he have presents for all of us, or just Rarity?" Pinkie dropped back along side them in a manoeuvre that if it didn't violate the laws of physics, at least invited it out for dinner and a some heavy petting.

"Pinkie dear, just drop it." Rarity pleaded.

"But I'm not carrying anything! Well except for a couple of cakes, some party streamers, a dozen assorted balloons, a rubber chicken, an eye-patch, a ball, and a pair of fake Groucho spectacles. You know, the essentials."

The three fillies and Fluttershy were in the centre of the formation after some convincing by Dash that Scootaloo and Apple Bloom were forming 'a second line of defence'.

Sweetie Belle on the other hand was looking around nervously and asked Fluttershy. "This manticore, we won't run into it, will we? I mean with all these precautions, it's got to be pretty scary."

Fluttershy looked none too confident herself, but she swallowed her fear and said, "Of course not Sweetie. Manticores need a large range to hunt in. The chances that it will be right on this edge of it's range, right in our path is..."

There was a roar from up ahead. "... oh, my."

"Get ready, but stand firm every-pony!" Shining called out as the shadow of a manticore was silhouetted in the moonlight. "That means you too Rainbow Dash! Let it come to us if it's attacking! It can batter itself against my shield for a bit and then we'll see if it still wants to play."

His purple energy shield went up, creating a wall that covered the ponies out front. Blueblood raised his mallet, while Rainbow pawed the air and Applejack unslung her lasso. Big Mac just set himself, thorn claws digging deep in the dirt, and Zecora collected some powders from her saddlebags.

They held there while the thing continued roaring and carrying on, but it didn't charge. Shining Armour asked Zecora, "Why isn't it attacking?"

"I study such from far away, why acts it so I can not say."

Rainbow called out to it. "Well come on then, if you're coming!"

Fluttershy mumbled something, and Twilight, ready for it this time asked right away, "What was that Fluttershy?"

It took several stutters and false starts, but she eventually managed, "I... I don't think it wants to attack us for being on it's range, I think it's hurt..."

"So what do you suggest?" Twilight asked, as if she didn't know.

"I could try and help it..."

"Help it? Fluttershy, are you completely nuts?" Rainbow Dash called down.

"N... no, completely terrified, but not nuts." Fluttershy's voice steadied. "Please, he's in pain!"

Shining had a sour expression. "I don't like sending any-pony in there alone..."

Surprisingly, it was Big Macintosh who spoke up. "Begging your pardon sir, but every-pony knows Fluttershy's the best pony with animals. If she reckons she can do it, she can do it."

"So you think she can calm it down?"

"Eyup!" The pony turned timber wolf nodded firmly.

"Alright... but if that thing makes one wrong move, I want her hauled out of there fast. Twily, you cover that."

With that he opened a hole in his shield and Fluttershy walked forward. The manticore grew more frantic as she approached, but she trotted up to it without showing a trace of her earlier fear. She nudged it as it raised a paw as if to strike, and it instead showed the thorn in it. Looked like Nightmare Moon was running at least some old favourites.

"Oh you poor kitty, you're just hurt. Now let me see that, this may sting, just a little..."

It roared again as she plucked the thorn, and several ponies winced, but when they looked again it was cuddling her and licking her, making her mane an odd shape.

It didn't attempt to attack or do anything as the party walked carefully past, and at the end Fluttershy finally untangled herself and rejoined the group.

"Remarkable!" Shining Armour shook his head in honest amazement.

"That were some mighty fine animal wrangling, Miss Fluttershy." Big Macintosh added, and the butter yellow pegasus blushed, avoiding the big timber wolves gaze. "It was nothing, I just realised the poor thing needed a bit of kindness. Thank you for supporting me."

"My pleasure, miss." He replied, and his eyes glowed with something more than a sickly green aura.

Twilight was a bit surprised, after previous variations, it was a bit of a shock to see something following the base time-line. However, she made one change, when Fluttershy spit away the thorn, she captured it in a hoof sized ball of telekinetic energy just as it turned into smoke. She flashed the interior with intense sunlight and the smoke evaporated with a shriek.

"That's one bit of Nightmare Moon that won't be reporting back on our progress."

They continued on deeper into the forest, and into the darkness. Clearly, as they'd gotten closer to the castle, they were getting closer to the base-line route, and Nightmare Moon was doing the same. Which meant that she was likely to pull her old 'scary face' routine next.



As the darkness closed in Sweetie Belle quavered, "I can't see anything, I don't like this..."

Apple Bloom replied, "I can see just fine, just keep next to me, okay?"

Twilight lit her horn, and the other unicorns quickly followed suit, while Zecora threw up some powder that formed a greenish light ball hovering over them. It didn't do much more than light their immediate area, and made the shadows beyond it deeper, but at least it was something.

Of course, right on cue, the trees around them seemed to twist and reshape themselves into terrible faces with gaping mouths of needle sharp teeth and empty eyes that promised nothing but an eternity of terror and despair. They seemed to move without actually moving, the way the horror that chased you in your deepest nightmares did, and every second you delayed would only make it more terrible when they captured you.

Twilight could have covered herself with a shield against the fear they were casting, but that would have been cheating, as in-loop Twilight couldn't. Instead she put her considerable mental ability towards resisting. The other ponies weren't so able.

The fillies were cowering in the centre of the clearing, utterly immobilised, and the adult ponies around her were no better, even the normally imperturbable Blueblood who was curled up in a fetal position, whimpering, "Not the blancmange!" over and over. The only other pony still resisting was Zecora, and even she appeared to be weakening. Of course, there was one exception.

As expected, it was Pinkie who broke the spell, trotting right up to the nearest face and making faces right back. If anything, the fear effect was even stronger than usual, and Twilight was the only one near enough to her right mind to ask her what she was doing, triggering her song.

It was actually a fascinating study, watching the power of the Element of Laughter push away the fear effect, and soon she had all the ponies trotting around and joining in the fun. The fillies took a particular pleasure in laughing away the evil faces, but even Blueblood took his part, sneering at them and calling them 'tawdry, shallow hoof-paintings with no depth or sub-text.' before laughing them into non-existence.

When the last of them was cleared away, Applejack asked Twilight, "What the hey were they?!"

"Images imbued with raw fear. I said we needed to expect mental attacks. If they hadn't been stopped, we could have been trapped here, immobilised with fear until it was too late. Fortunately we had Laughter on our side."

"You're welcome!" Pinkie said brightly, bouncing past wearing the groucho spectacles.

Zecora shook her head. "Never have I felt such fear, it made my wits quite disappear."

"All the same, I'd prefer it if you could figure out a way to stop that happening again, Twily." Shining Armour asked.

"Now I've seen it in action, I should be able to counter-spell, at least enough to give us a chance to resist."

They soon reached the shores of the wide river, churning and frothing. "Horse-feathers, you ground pounders are never going to get across that!" Dash exclaimed.

"Can you teleport us in groups, Twily?" Shining Armour asked.

"Not safely, not with the amount of chaotic magic in the air. We might end up in the middle of the river instead."

"Uh guys, we've got a bigger problem..."

Steven Magnet, the river serpent was heading downriver towards them at a rate of knots, but rather than bewailing his lost moustache, he was raging against the ones who had stolen it.

"What the hay? We didn't do anything to his moustache!" cried out Applejack.

Twilight was already casting magical scans. It seemed Nightmare Moon was playing cute again. "Nightmare Moon's cast another symbol on him, a Symbol of Wrath, but she's cast it on his eyes!"

"So counter-spell it!" called out Shining Armour as he raised a shield to take the blow of a claw.

"I will but I need every-pony to hold his head still so I can aim! Bring his head down to the ground!"

Her telekinesis would have been enough, but that would have required going to a higher power than she wanted to risk, besides, casting the counter-spell at the same time would be awkward. Still, her purple energy wrapped around his head, joined by Rarity's and even Blueblood's. Shining was still doing shield duty. Fluttershy, Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo formed a cheering section, albeit in Fluttershy's case a very quiet one. 'woo hoo!'

Rainbow landed on Steven's neck and tried to push him down, while Applejack launched her lasso, wrapping it around his muzzle. Apple Bloom and Big Macintosh grabbed the free end of the lasso and helped on it, but the river serpent was still resisting. Then Zecora whipped out a sling and whirled it around, launching a puffball at Steven's face. It exploded into fine powder, and seemed to stun the river serpent for a moment, enough time for the combined efforts of the ponies to pull his head down level with Twilight.

She released her hold and fired the dispel charm right into his eyes. They glowed for a second, then lost their red tint, turning puzzled. The waters calmed as he stopped thrashing about. "Mi may, my moo Mi ma a mp mrnd my mummle."

Twilight signalled to Applejack to release the lasso, and the river serpent was free to speak. "My goodness, I don't know what came over me. There I was minding my own business, and suddenly this tacky little cloud comes past and rips off half my beautiful moustache clean

off. Not only that but I was suddenly absolutely enraged!"

He sniffled, "I'm sorry if I scared you all, but I really wasn't myself. But my moustache is still absolutely ruined. I look absolutely horrid!"

He started wailing, and the thrashing of his tail roiled the waters again.

Dash looked incredulous "Really? Suck it up, you're a dragon!"

"Dash, how can you be so callous!" Rarity exclaimed. "Look at his lovely luminescent scales, his expertly coiffed mane, even the fabulous manicure on his claws..."

"It's true, it's true..." The river serpent was calming down.

"So much effort put into looking his best, and it's all ruined without his beautiful moustache."

That set Steven off again, worse than before. Rarity declaimed, "I can not let such a crime against fabulousity go uncorrected!"

She plucked a scale from his skin, eliciting an ouch of pain and a query from the hapless dragon, and lifted it over her own tail...

"STOP!" Blueblood stepped forward. "Miss Rarity, there's a shortage of perfect tails in this world. It would be a pity to damage yours. I find myself in agreement with you, this fashion crime can not go uncorrected. However, while gold and purple is a bold statement, wouldn't all gold be better?"

Rarity was honestly shocked. "Prince Blueblood, are you offering what I think you are offering? Your tail is magnificent too. Are you really offering it as a replacement?"

"It should be, I have the best stylists in Canterlot work on it daily." Blueblood took a noble pose. "However, needs must, and you've forgotten, I am Prince Blueblood, trend setter of the Canterlot social elite. If I can't make short tails for stallions the must have fashion of the season, I'll turn in my membership card for the Canterlot Country Club."

Rarity's eyes sparkled with unshed tears, and she lifted the scale, aiming carefully. Shick! A wave of gold dropped to the floor, to be caught by her telekinesis. The dragon had calmed down again fascinated at the drama unfolding below, and it was the work of a moment for Rarity to expertly weave the new gold into the existing stub so expertly it seemed a single set of whiskers.

Steven examined himself and went into transports of delight. "My moustache, ohohohoho! It's back, and it's perfect!"

Rarity smiled up at him. "You look smashing."

"Okay, this is cool and all, but we really need to get across the river soonest!" Dash exclaimed with a huff.

"Oh, allow me!" Steven laid his coils across the river forming a bridge. As they reached the other side, Rarity turned to Blueblood, eyes glowing warmly. "When we get back, I'll do my best to clean up that bob. I may not be a Canterlot stylist, but I can at least get it looking presentable. That was a truly noble thing you did, your highness."

"Yeah, way to take one for the team, your highness-ship." Applejack added.

Shining Armour shook his head in disbelief. "I didn't think you had it in you."

Blueblood actually looked slightly embarrassed at the complements. "To be honest, neither did I."

\* \* \*

><p>49.7 (Lord of Bones)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>As the letter appeared in a flash of green flame and ash, Luna saw her sister reach out with her magic and undo the seal. Celestia unfurled the letter with a smile, which quickly turned into a look of incredulous astonishment, right before she vanished in a burst of purple light.<p>

Somewhat bemused by her sister's departure, the Night Princess levitated the letter over and read it out loud.

"Dear Princess Celestia,

You know I value the lessons you've taught me over the years, but you simply must stop secluding yourself in that stuffy old throne room. Princess, there is more to life than bureaucracy, so I'm inviting you over for the Ponyville Winter Wrap-up, and I have a more important task for you: make some friends.

Your Student,

Twilight Sparkle.

P.S. I expect a report on what you've learned."

\* \* \*

><p>49.8 (OracleMask)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack eyed the necklace dubiously. If it hadn't been the glowing image of Celestia herself that'd appeared to give her the thing - and done the same for four other mares in Ponyville - Applejack would've assumed it was a prank. In horrible taste, no less, what with the whole <em>Nightmare Moon Is Real<em> thing going on.

But the five of them had managed to get through the Everfree Forest with the power of these things, and now were facing the big bad

alicorn herself. Using their necklaces separate hadn't done the trick, so where was only one thing left to do!

"C'mon ya'll, let our powers combine!" Applejack declared, "EARTH!"

"FIRE!" Pinkie Pie exclaimed, confetti somehow firing from her mane and tail at the same time.

"WIND!" Rainbow Dash cried.

"WATER!" Rarity added.

"...um...Heart?" Fluttershy offered.

Their powers formed a glowing rainbow sphere in the air, and a purple alicorn princess in fancy dress flew out of it.

"By your powers combined..." she announced, "I am PRINCESS TWILIGHT!"

\* \* \*

><p>"...and nopony else suspects a thing," Celestia said, grinning at her partner-in-crime, "I certainly couldn't have pulled this off without you, Twilight."<p>

"Glad I could help," Twilight replied, grinning back.

\* \* \*

><p>49.9 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"AAAAAA!" Babs shot out the door and galloped down the stairs. "CHANGELING!"<p>

Apple Bloom blinked. Then she glanced back at her wings and sighed. "Ah have got ta stop ascending in mah sleep..."

\* \* \*

><p>49.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Mayor Mare." The pony at the bar drained her mug. "It's literally my name, Macintosh. Mayor. Mare. I mean, some loops I'm also Ivory Scroll, but... well, that's the thing, isn't it? Every loop, I'm stuck behind a desk and even knowing what's going to happen, even preparing for it, I get the same documents to sign, the same fiscal reports... I love this town, and I love running it, but the same thing over and over again feels..."<p>

"Pointless?"

Mayor Mare nodded sadly. "How can I serve ponies when... it all just gets washed away. Phhhfft." She waved a hoof. "And... really. I don't want to be famous. I just want to be... useful."

Macintosh nodded to himself. "Ah can understand where yer coming from. But... think bout it like this. Mah lil' sis usually sets up her lab ta do science of some sort or other. If she needed ta worry bout zoning permits, she'd be champing her bit, but... well, she don't need to, thanks ta you. And there was that time when you and Twilight pulled off tha sovereign nation of Libraria... Ah don't know if you were awake then, but... Mah point is, we really do appreciate you. And tha fact is, we're all kinda responsible fer giving other loopers a place ta relax. We may not say it often, but... well, Pinkie always pulls a party fer you every time tha election rolls round, and she means it as one big thank you."

"...I... appreciate that, Mac. I really do."

He smiled. "Say, did Ah ever tell ya about tha time Ah was a princess?"

\* \* \*

><p>49.11 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Zecora was...<p>

Incensed? Perhaps. But it would be more accurate to say she was actually quite hurt by Ponyville's actions this day. Even though the Mayor had calmed the screaming crowd and insisted-with papers that the zebra didn't remember signing-that she was a fully licensed ranger, the odd suspicious glance still cut at her.

The purple pony helping her shop smiled sympathetically. "Hey, Zec, I know how it is. A lot of ponies look at me and only remember the town drunk." She shook her head, sighing and indicating another booth with a subtle hoof movement. "At least all your friends are looping. Me, well... I have to live with my daughter... although, I did see my sister run off to Sweet Apple Acres, so she might have started."

"I am afraid you must forgive me, but your sibling eludes my memory."

"Cheerilee," Berry Punch explained. "The schoolteacher? We're estranged, but... well, even when the loops say we aren't sisters, we usually have a past together." She cut herself off as the boothkeeper turned to them, and Zecora noticed the subtle shift in her face as she shifted from speaking to a looper to speaking to a normal pony. "Excuse me, my friend needs some herbs? Here's a list."

The boothkeeper raised a suspicious eyebrow. At least it wasn't fearful cowering. Still... although Zecora knew the pony couldn't remember everything that had... not happened yet, his distrust hurt.

Berry noticed and patted her shoulder. "Don't worry. Near as I can tell, everyone who's looping is Awake this time. I don't know why, but you can probably ask Fluttershy when she gets back. She lives closest to the Everfree, after all..."

\* \* \*

><p>49.12 (Lord of Bones)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Your Highness? Have you seen our daughter?"<p>

Celestia's face fell as she turned from the distraught Bearers to meet Twilight Velvet and Night Light. The unicorn couple peered at her worriedly, and Celestia wished she had answers. Her faithful student had vanished after the dressing-down she'd been given, and while Chrysalis had been unmasked â€" by a disoriented Blueblood, no less, who'd botched a teleport and ended up in his cousin's prison â€" Twilight herself was nowhere to be seen.

The familiar appearance of a Friendship Report drew a sigh of relief from the alicorn, which wasn't unnoticed by the smaller pair. Unfurling the scroll, she began to read out:

\_ "Dear Princess Celestia, \_

\_ If you're reading this, I have gone evil- "\_

"What?!"

Celestia just stared at the words numbly, as though in disbelief. "I â€" \_I have gone evil, possibly due to toying with eldritch arcane secrets beyond mortal comprehension or a brutal heartbreak at the hooves at the ponies I thought I could trust the most. \_

\_ Following narrative tropes, I may have chosen to alter my name to something more evocative and ominous, like Dusk Eternal or Endless Eclipse. I will also have gathered allies, like corrupting Princess Luna into Nightmare Moon, breaking Discord's prison, stirring Sombra from his tomb and summoning Sunset Shimmer to serve as my lieutenant. "\_

There was a hitch in the Sun Princess's throat as she finished the sentence. Horrified looks were being exchanged between Twilight's friends and family, and the Alicorn forced herself to soldier on.

\_ If Spike isn't there when you're reading this, he'll be with me as my final link to all that is good and pure about friendship, loyal to the end but curtailing my darkest moments. Also following narrative tropes, he may end up sacrificing himself to save my life from you or one of the girls- "\_

Rarity choked back a sob.

\_ "The act of which would see me spiral deeper and deeper into my hatred and darkness as I numbly cradle the still body of my oldest and most faithful friend while you stare in horror. Undoubtedly, this will cause me to desire nothing more than the most terrible revenge imaginable, and so I'll confront you with Nightmare Moon and Sunset Shimmer, so that you can brood on the irony of being undone by your greatest failures. "\_

\_ Your ex-faithful ex-student, \_

\_Endless Eclipse, Lady of the Twilight, Queen of the Dusk and the Dawn. \_

The letter fell from Celestia's telekinetic grip as the Sunbringer stared numbly ahead. Twilight Velvet snatched the parchment and breathlessly read out the last few sentences.

\_P.S. If you've received this letter and I'm not evil...well, you'll know to take precautions, won't you?\_

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Double bill!

>49.1: Field trip.<br>49.2: Animated episode summaries.

>49.3: Reactions to egg-laying.<br>49.4: Another of the many things which may or may not happen (which the loops can't quite make their minds up about)

>49.5: Silver's species is a bit... quicksilver right now.<br>49.6: Gasp! This is still going!

>49.7: Trolllight.<br>49.8: I think we all know what this is a reference to. (Out of deference, Twilight's probably not going to mention the time she had Cadence do something similar.)

>49.9: Short and sweet. Er, short and bloom?<br>49.10: Bureaucrats make the world go, as it happens.

>49.11: Going back to being disliked. At least there's others around.<br>49.12: Twilight knows exactly how this sort of thing is supposed to go.

## 52. Chapter 52

### 50.1 (Misterq)

\* \* \*

><p>"Look, Applejack, you can't remain scared of them forever," Twilight told her friend as they both casually ambled through the apple trees on a sunny Sunday day.<p>

"I know, Twi. It's just that I'm a normal down-to-earth earth pony," the orange farm pony punctuated her statement with a hoof stomp, causing a small pillar of earth to jut out of the ground, "and they are just so gosh darn plum loco!"

"That's not what I meant," the purple unicorn shook her head, "I fairly sure Yggdrasil, the multi-verse, or whatever has a perverse sense of humor. It took me countless loops before I was over my fear of snakes, but until that happened, the loops kept doing things to me. I was placed in situations. Snakey situations."

Twilight took a deep breath as she remembered, "There was the time I was the archeologist Twilight Jones, a chakra ninja named Anko who had a snake summoning contract and used them in her martial arts, and a flight attendant on a airplane that was filling up of dangerous and venomous snakes. I think I finally broke out of my fear when I awoke as the Hogwarts basilisk."

AJ stared at her friend and anchor, "And how did that turn



out?"

Twilight shrugged, "Well, despite the fact that those kinds of basilisks are actually legless lizards related to wyrms and not real snakes at all; once I calmed down from my endless freak out, I asked Harry in snake speak for a house elf to bring me some food. Then I, uh, sequestered myself in the library."

"Heh, figures," Applejack smirked.

"My point is that until you overcome this fear, you'll get placed in more and more compromising situations until you Awake as one of them."

Applejack just shivered at the thought, "But what do you recon I can do?"

"Well it isn't consistent, but occasionally in some loops - including this one, there is an expert I can introduce you to. If you're willing to wait until the changeling invasion, that is."

"I suppose I can do that," the earth pony looked at her friend, "Thanks, Twi. It's just that with the loops, I've seen and done so much. I shouldn't be letting this bother me so much, but I just can't help it."

"Don't worry about it, Applejack. It's what friends are for."

\* \* \*

><p>"Listen every pony," Twilight stood on top of a small crate in the Ponyville train station. It was the day after she and her friends came back from Canterlot. "I know you are all worried about the changelings. We stopped their invasion in the capitol, and we can deal with any remaining ones here. If it would make you all feel better, I can cast a spell that will reveal any hidden forms. If there are changelings hiding amongst you, you will see them. Okay, here goes."<p>

There was a loud cheer as Twilight's horn lit up. A burst of magic enveloped the crowd and quickly spread out through the entire town.

Only one pony's form changed.

"Oh, kelp weed!" Lyra Heartstrings cursed as the seapony flapped and floundered on the ground.

Applejack's mouth opened in shock. The air noticeably dried as a sphere of water formed around Lyra's lower body and tail, growing until she was able to right herself.

The sea-green seapony looked around at the assembled crowd members before her gaze stopped at a smiling Twilight and her friends. Only Applejack had a startled look on her face, "Judging by your expressions, I'm going to guess and say some of you haven't seen a mer-mare before."

"Don't worry, every pony. I've got this," Twilight said as she, her friends, and Lyra walked (or rode a water ball) into town.

\* \* \*

><p>Every pony was clustered in Lyra's house. For a few moments there was silence, before Lyra broke it, "So, I suppose you have some questions?"<p>

Pinkie Pie jumped up like a school filly with one hoof raised in the air, "Oh! Oh me! My question is, do you like parties?"

"Yes, Pinkie. Especially your parties," Lyra answered without any pause.

"Yay!" the pink pony blew a noise maker and then promptly sat down, "I'm done."

Twilight nudged Applejack. The orange earth pony coughed and then asked, "So, er.. You're a seapony. How in tarnation did that happen?"

Lyra rolled her eyes, "Well, when a mommy mer-mare and a daddy sea-stallion like each other very much, and the daddy agrees to take care of the sea foals while the mommy goes out to fight..."

"Not like that!" Applejack snorted, "I meant why were you here, in Ponyville, hiding out as a unicorn?"

The seapony sighed, "Because I didn't want to constantly receive reactions like yours. I grew up in Oceanapollis, which is fairly close to the front lines. I decided that I liked music more than mayhem and had a sea-witch change me into a unicorn. Then I attended the Canterlot Royal Academy of Music specializing in lyres, harps, guitars, and stringed instruments. After that, I moved to Ponyville because it's not as mind-numbingly boring as the capitol. And I also met Bonbon here. So everything was coming up Lyra, right until Twilight's spell."

"Wow! You went to CRAM? One of my little sisters went there. Or at least sometimes, she's my little sister. Hold on," Pinkie Pie tilted her head, remembering, "Yep, Octavia's one of my sisters this time around."

"Right," Twilight stopped staring at her random pink friend, "Oh I get it! That's why you sometimes sit so strange. Because it reminds you of how you were aligned as a seapony."

"No," Lyra slowly shook her head, "I have to sit like that to play the lyre. It's like stretching. If I don't do it frequently enough, it starts to become uncomfortable when I perform."

"Oh," Pinkie said sadly, "I thought it had something to do with your fascination with humans."

"You know about humans!?" Lyra had a mad glint in her eyes while her tiny fins fluttered excitedly, "Mythical technologically-advanced apes from another dimension? They have hands! They're like five little legs attached to one long leg!"

"That's what I said! Hand bump!" Pinky spoke up and held out her hoof. A tendril of water shaped like a fist lightly impacted

it.

Lyra continued, "I heard that there was a magic mirror that could let a pony enter the human dimension. Who knows what amazing mysteries lie beyond?"

"Boring, boring High School," Twilight said before her brain caught up with her mouth. She gave a sheepish smile as all the other ponies started staring at her, "Uh, I mean, how did you convince a sea-witch to change your form? I've read that they tend to be proud, manipulative, and stubborn."

Lyra looked at her and slowly spoke, "Because. I. Am. A. Seapony. Everything under the water is utterly terrified of us, hippocampi; or wants to kill us horribly. Usually both. I just asked nicely."

"So you just asked?"

"Well, I may have been casually tying her electric attack eels into balloon animal shapes while I was doing so, but yes. I just asked. And smiled." Lyra gave a wide, toothy, and very, very disturbing grin.

Applejack whinnied slightly in fear, before reigning herself in.

"I have a question," Bonbon, who until now had been staring quietly at her roommate, spoke up, "At which point did you think casually saying, 'Hey Bonbonbonbonbon, I'm actually a seapony in disguise! What time is dinner?' to be a valid way of letting me in on your secret?"

"See Applejack," Twilight said while the roommates were arguing, "She's just like any other pony. Nothing to be scared of."

"I suppose so, Twi."

"That's why I'm locking you in here for the night."

"That's fair I suppose," Applejack said while staring at the seapony, who had now grabbed her roommate in a water tendril and was holding her upside-down in mid-air. Bonbon didn't seem the least bit put out and just continued arguing right back while in her new position. Then Applejack suddenly registered what Twilight had said, "Wait! What? No Twilight!"

"Yes, AJ. It's called immersion therapy. See you tomorrow."

Applejack tried to grab hold of the unicorn, but was too late as Twilight and all her friends vanished in a purple burst of light. She slowly looked back at the two ponies in the same room with her, who were now both staring at her. She gave a timid little wave. Lyra gave a matching wave with her little fin.

"Now let me down so I can start cooking for three," Bonbon spoke up. She then blinked and gave a wry smile at Lyra, "And I suppose I need to find you a stock pot or something to sleep in."

The seapony blinked in realization, "Ugh, I forgot to ask Twilight to change me back into a unicorn. So Applejack, you want to go on an

undersea adventure with me to track down a sea-witch?"

The farm pony rapidly shook her head no. Then she stopped and spoke, "I think I'll go help Bonbon with the cooking."

"Oh fine," Lyra huffed. Then she took another look at the frightened farm pony and sighed, "Do you want me to show you how to make the tastiest seaweed salad ever? Sliced apples are one of the ingredients."

Applejack thought about it and then nodded. She was going to have to overcome her fear sometime and it looked like Lyra was making an effort to help her, "I.. I'd like that."

"Great!" Lyra smiled as she rolled on her water-ball into the kitchen ahead of the earth pony, "I'm just glad you didn't ask if the Heartstrings part of my name refers to actual severed hearts."

Applejack froze in mid-step, her ears laid back flat on her head and her eyes opened wide with fear.

"That was a joke," came a cheerful voice from the kitchen.

Slowly, ever so slowly, Applejack put one hoof in front of the other and walked through the door.

\* \* \*

><p>50.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Bonbon stormed into the library, slamming down a letter. "Alright, how much to send this through your dragon?! Celestia's making a big mistake, and-"<p>

Twilight sighed. "Bonbon, check the hive mind."

The earth pony blinked, her rant completely derailed. "Check the-check... \_you knew?!\_" She pointed at the librarian. "You're one of them! You've been feeding off Celestia for-"

"No, I'm not a changeling. Just..." The librarian facehooved. "Just trust me, the truth is complicated and unbelievable and you really should check the hive mind."

"...You're brainwashed!"

"Nope."

"...\_Celestia\_ is brain-!"

"No."

Bonbon sat down. "I don't see how Chrysalis could have suddenly become reasonable! It must be some sort of trick-"

"Time loops."

"What?"

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Check the hive mind, okay? You can pull out and run if I'm wrong."

As Bonbon stared off into the distance, Twilight prepared some sugary tea and set the tray out. It wasn't long before her guest snapped out of her trance and collapsed into the couch.

"...that... what?" she managed.

"You're always surprised," Twilight commented. "Well, at least when you're a changeling. No you're not looping and, well, the changeling thing varies too."

"...I just..." Bonbon waved a hoof. "She just... and... what? That doesn't work..."

"Tea?" The librarian nudged a cup forward. "Oh, and since you are a changeling, you get free access to Macintosh's bar. Lots of changelings have trouble adjusting to the sudden shift." She giggled. "Sorry, bad joke."

\* \* \*

><p>50.3 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Luna trotted up to the statue of Discord, which crumbled as she approached. The dust reformed into a purple alicorn pony who waved a hoof in greeting, then gave the pedestal a very dirty look with glowing yellow eyes, causing it to regenerate a replacement statue out of sheer embarrassment. She cricked her neck and flexed her wings. "Awakening as Discord, now there's something new."<p>

"Be there any other loopers present? My sister for certes not, but I may have missed some-pony." Luna looked around to check no-pony was near, even as her other senses confirmed it.

"Nope, looks like it's just you and me." Twilight glanced up at the starlit sky. "And unless you've been rearranging things, I'd say we're within a dozen years of your banishment."

"That doth check with mine own reading of the dates." Luna grinned, "Not that I will allow it to happen this time. You have plans?"

"Well, I thought I'd hole up somewhere for a few centuries and give this chaos magic a thorough study. It's one thing to have studied it from the outside, another to have it to hoof. Of course, if you need anything, all you have to do is ask."

"Thank you, good Twilight." The lunar mare grinned. "However, I have a scheme of mine own. As it was before, my sister's day doth garner all the attention, while my night languishes unappreciated. This time, I have a better solution than throwing an epic temper tantrum and being banished to the moon..."

\* \* \*

><p>The night had turned to day, by Royal decree, and the two princesses were enjoying a meal together, for Celestia it was breakfast, for Luna supper.<p>

Over the remains of a slice of cake, Celestia asked, "Luna, I was wondering about some of the initiatives you are sponsoring through the Night Court. Funding for magical research into better light sources, later opening hours for taverns and theatres, and a series of art exhibitions and poetry commissions?"

"Yes, I'm inviting a number of our more famous artists to render some of my night skies in their varying styles. I may even hazard a painting or two myself. My true canvas is unfortunately wiped clean with each dawn. T'would be nice to have something less ephemeral. As for the funding, it comes from my own purse, so it should not be a charge on the treasury. I didn't capture and render down a metal rich asteroid of some hundred thousand tons to acquire the necessary precious metals."

"But to what end?" Celestia asked.

"Dear sister, I know how busy the Day court gets, indeed that is part of the problem. Even so, surely you must be aware of a certain inequity in how day and night are perceived. Ponies appreciate your day, but for the most part they sleep through my night. While I also have my duties as Dream Guardian to keep me occupied, but over the last few decades I have come to feel diminished, as if my efforts were of less worth than your own. My Night Court is almost empty, while your overflows."

Celestia made a moue of disgust. "You can have them, some of the drivel I have to put up with from some nobles... But I had no idea you felt that way!"

"Tis only recently that I was able to put the creeping malaise I felt into words. Had I continued to suffer it without respite, I don't know what would have happened. However, I have a solution. All these measures are to engage our subjects, to enable them to appreciate the night. Better light sources, cheaper and more powerful than beeswax candles and oil lamps or expensive mage lights, will give ponies greater freedom to thrive and play after your sun sets. Not just mages, but alchemists and even natural philosophers are involved. And of course, if we can promulgate those habits to the courts, I can help take more of the load off your shoulders.

"The other part of the equation is to give ponies things to do. If they can enjoy themselves of an evening, they will stay up later, and of necessity be awake to enjoy my night. While currently it will simply be a matter of enabling existing entertainments, I have the idea for something I call a Night Club. It would combine elements of a festival with musicians and dancing, combined with refreshments and places to eat and relax. Though I may sponsor some night-time festivals and provide meteor showers for a truly spectacular entertainment first."

Despite the fact that she'd planned it all out, she found herself getting excited. "The arts I'm funding will help raise awareness of my night sky, and hopefully get ponies to appreciate it more. I have a side project related to light research to develop better lenses and

drafting methods, so I can try and popularise astronomy, beyond it's mundane uses in magic and alchemy..."

Celestia smiled, "My goodness, you certainly seem to have a lot of ideas..."

"The choice was simple, mope about it, or do something to change it." Luna replied with a flip of her ethereal mane. "I hope it meets with your approval."

"I wish you the best of luck."

Luna knew her sister well enough to know that while honest, her sister didn't quite believe that it would be as easy as Luna had made it out to be, and she was right after a fashion. But Luna had one big advantage, she already knew what would work, and could guide things to progress things far more quickly than Celestia imagined. And if she kicked off an industrial revolution a few centuries early, so what? Then things would get really interesting. She gave an unfeigned yawn, "But for now I must to bed. May your day go well, dear sister."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle was late. She'd gotten even more involved in her studies of chaos magic than expected, and completely missed the last few centuries, stuck away in a Geofront under the Macintosh mountains, where some of her more energetic experiments wouldn't scare anyone. She'd had messages from Luna that things were going well, but they'd been short on details. When she'd finally checked the time, she realised she'd missed her friends being born, and it was almost time for what would have been the thousandth Summer Sun Celebration after Luna's banishment in the original timeline.<p>

She teleported to the railroad near Ponyville, on a sunny afternoon, only to find it wasn't the normal twin tracks. A single rail floated above the ground on wide spaced cloud supports, and as she watched a mag-lev train whooshed past almost silently. Looking back towards Canterlot, she saw that as well as the familiar castle city, the lower parts of the mountain were built-up with sky-scrapers that were cunningly built into the rock to avoid ruining the sky-line.

At least Ponyville looked much the same as she approached, and she could sense some of the others were Awake. She entered Sugar Cube corner in something of a daze, having seen Lyra in her usual spot, but editing what sounded like her lyre music on a thaumo-electronic laptop computer with a holo-projection screen.

"Twilight!" Pinkie appeared in front of her with a cup-cake. "Every-pony was wondering where you were!"

"I'm wondering where I am too!" Twilight replied. "Is the Summer Sun Celebration going on as usual?"

"Of course, silly! Princess Celestia is coming to the Summer Sun Celebration, but Princess Luna can't make it, she's on the moon."

Twilight felt a stab of disappointment. "But I thought she'd managed to avoid becoming Nightmare Moon this time!"

"Nightmare Moon?" Pinkie Pie giggled. "That's not why at all... c'mon, it's time for sunset, it's easier to show you."

They stepped outside to watch the sun go down, and Twilight noticed a number of small rectangles in the evening sky, light against the dusk. She sent out a magical probe to scan the sky... photo-thaumic power satellites, a string of them in orbit, and other satellites, with them, even a large space station with floating space-docks co-orbiting it. Then the moon rose, absent the shadow image of an alicorn, but with a scattering of stars inside its crescent.

"She's dedicating the newest habitat dome at the Lunar colony in Mare Noctis, and then they'll do a joint holo-cast from Ponyville and the moon when they'll announce the launch date of the Celestial Voyager. Luna named it for her sister even though it was really Princess Luna's project. Dash has a place on the flight crew. They'll be visiting a dozen star systems this trip. I even baked a special 'You're going to go faster than light' cake for them, but when I tried to carry it over to Dash's, I went a bit too fast and it attained infinite mass and vanished down a self-created singularity. I knew I'd been too heavy on the unpaired quarks..."

Twilight tuned Pinkie out as she stretched out her senses and enjoyed the view. Space industrialisation, Lunar colonies, interstellar travel, out far beyond the circle of fire light cast by Celestia's sun. It looked like Princess Luna might not be Nightmare Moon, but had her eternal night after all.

\* \* \*

><p>50.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight would have sighed if she could.<p>

Her loop memories were vague fragments, but even worse was the fact that she was in complete sensory deprivation. She couldn't see, smell, hear, feel... even her magic was stymied, with only her connection to the Elements to tell her that her friends were Awake. She couldn't move, or rather... didn't feel anything \_to\_ move. Which was really weird.

\_Buck this.\_ Twilight Sparkle summoned the element of magic and, relying mostly on faith, cast the spell for ascension.

Instantly the world overwhelmed her with the cool touch of air, the light of the sun, the scents of grass and burnt out homes, the faint creaking of ruined wood... she shook her head, taking a moment to get her bearings and focus on the world around her.

Which apparently consisted of posed skeletons in a half ruined Canterlot.

"...oooookay, this is... disturbing..." Twilight poked out with her magic, carefully examining the skeletons; she winced when she found a soul-lock in each one, preventing the ponies inside from truly dying. "Ah. Right. Going to have to apply regeneration magic-"



"Live? Alive!"

The purple alicorn spun around, catching sight of a wild-maned black pony hopping eagerly over the rubble. "See?! See?! I told you, sister! I told you they would be alive, so HA!" The crazed pony pointed mockingly at the largest of the skeletons, which Twilight belatedly realized had both wings and a horn. "Ha ha. Ha. HA!" She whirled around and grinned madly as she galloped over to Twilight, jamming her muzzle into the anchor's face. "So pony pony pony, you come back because you like me right?"

Twilight smiled calmly, pulling on her psychology training and patting the pony in front of her. "Of \_course\_ I like you dear. I loved to look up at the stars every night-"

"And the moon, right?"

"Oh, yes, the moon was one of my biggest inspirations!" She sighed, sadly. "Alas, dying does terrible things to memory. What exactly happened here?"

The black alicorn giggled. "Made the ponies see my moon. Made it BIG! One night, really big moon. Oh, but I put it back after," she quickly reassured. "And I even started raising the sun after sister fell asleep! Bad lazy sister. Bad." She sapped the large skeleton and glared. "Mean too. Had all these ponies locked up and wanted them to send me away again â€" WAIT! You have the bad star!"

Twilight rolled her eyes up to see what... Luna? Nightmare moon? Whoever she was was pointing at. "Oh. I needed that to come back. I'll make it go away." She slipped the Element of Magic into her subspace pocket. "See? Gone. Can I bring back the others now?"

"...alright." The black alicorn backed up warily. "Um... when you're done... can we play? I'd like to play with another pony. These ponies don't play very well, except that one." She pointed at a wide-hipped earth pony skeleton with a larger grin than any other. "That one always has fun games."

"...sure thing. We'll... play."

\* \* \*

><p>50.5 (LordofBones)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"TWILIGHT SPARKLE!" Celestia roared out. The guards, Bearers and her own nephew flinched back at the scorching heat of her anger, but the unicorn herself, who'd just run in after vanishing the instant she entered Canterlot, was too busy wrestling Princess Cadance to the ground.<p>

"Spike, the tranquillizers! HURRY!"

Gulping, the little dragon hurled the syringe towards his caretaker/sister-figure/business partner. Grabbing the Alicorn of Love in a headlock, the lavender mare seized the syringe in her telekinetic grip and jabbed it in. The pink alicorn shrieked, before

her struggles began to die down as the chemical did its work, and soon the Queen of the Changelings was peacefully asleep on the floor of the room.

Twilight brushed the sweat off her fringe. "Well, that's the last one. Now, about my payment..." She looked meaningfully at Blueblood.

The Prince nodded and levitated the sealed envelope with his personal seal stamped on it over to Spike. "A cheque for fifty thousand bits, plus expenses. Are you sure that's the last of them?"

The Bearer of Magic nodded. "We cleaned them out pretty thoroughly. Make an appointment with Spike if you want me to do a second run through the place." She turned around, and jolted back at the look on her mentor's face. "Princess Celestia, I didn't know you were there! I'm really sorry, but I'm kinda busy, so we'll have to catch up later."

Celestia's jaw opened and closed soundlessly, as her student, still faithful but no longer as reverential, levitated Spike over. "What's next on the schedule?"

"Let's see..." Spike flipped open a notebook and began reciting; "You have an appointment in two hours with the Minotaur Council about some boats disappearing out the coast; then the Storm King of Griffonia wants to see you in the evening about getting rid of something haunting his youngest daughter; Grogar's offering two hundred thousand bits for the safe return of his Bell â€" that's tomorrow, by the way; and Zecora's hiring you for some ingredient hunting near Tartarus."

"If we hurry, we can make it to the Tauros States in an hour!" gasped Twilight as she ran out of the room, leaving her speechless friends and mentor. Blueblood shrugged and turned to leave. "If there's nothing else..." he trailed off as his guards opened the door for him, only for it to be shut tight again by a golden glow.

"Nephew, what was all that about paying Twilight?" Celestia demanded, too frazzled to be polite.

In response, Blueblood simply rolled his eyes and levitated a small newspaper clipping over. "Don't you read the papers, Auntie?"

The Sun Princess just stared at the advert, mouthing the words incredulously. "Twilight Sparkle...Professional Troubleshooter...Monster Hunter...Ancient Evils...Adventurer...appointments with Spike the Dragon...fee doubled if usage of Element of Magic is required?!"

\* \* \*

><p>50.6 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight giggled as Spike sent off her follow-up letter. If the Princess didn't want her to take the Nightmare Moon prophecy seriously, who was she to argue?<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Dear Princess Celestia,<p>

My apologies for having bothered you earlier. I clearly have been working too hard if I ended up turning a bunch of old pony tales into an imminent threat to Equestria. Obviously, if there was anything to the prophecy, you'd have known it and spent the last few years doing everything in your power to prepare, from alicorn level magic binders to specially trained troops and equipment. You wouldn't need the help of a student unicorn who's still learning magic. Spike says I over-reacted again, and I guess he's right.

Thank you for organising for me to be the overseer for the Summer Sun Celebration in Ponyville. A few days in the country, away from my studies will do wonders for my stress level. It was nice of you to arrange for me to stay at the library, but I promise not to read anything more taxing than a Daring Doo novel. As for making friends, I thought I had done. There's Spike, my brother and Princess Cadence, and I hope, if it's not too presumptuous, yourself. But if you feel I need more, I shall do my best.

P.S. I had a wonderful idea! Moon dancer invited me to a party this evening in the West castle courtyard. I was going to continue work on deciphering the old legends, but I realised it would be perfect practice in making friends, for when I go to Ponyville tomorrow. Besides, I think Spike has a crush on Moondancer, and he deserves a chance to have some fun too. Don't worry, I'll make sure everything is packed and ready so I can leave for Ponyville on time. From the list, it doesn't seem like checking on things will take that long anyway.

Your faithful student,

Twilight Sparkle."

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Celestia looked at the letter in consternation. It seemed Twilight had taken her instructions a bit too much to heart. For a moment she considered intervening, then decided against it. As long as Twilight was there in Ponyville, she would quickly come to change her mind and go find the Elements. Best not to meddle and make things worse.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Does my crown no longer count now that I have been imprisoned for a thousand years? Did you not recall the legend? Did you not see the signs?" Nightmare Moon declaimed.<p>

"I did, and I know who you are... Princess Celestia. I know I got all over-excited about those mouldy old prophecies, but don't you think this is a bit over the top?"

"What?" the nightmare actually looked confused, then enraged. "You dare confuse me with my sun-loving sister? I am Nightmare Moon, returned from my exile after a thousand years, and now my night will last forever!"

"With all due respect your highness, this isn't really the time for Nightmare Night pranks. Ponies are waiting for you to raise the sun... unless it's Princess Cadence under that disguise, but I don't believe Cadence would pull something like this. But then I didn't think you'd pull something like this. Everypony at the palace knows your fondness for practical jokes..."

She raised a shield as Nightmare Moon flung lightning at her.  
"PRINCESS! What are you... that could have hurt some-pony!"

"I am not Celestia! I am NIGHTMARE MOON!"

Twilight called out to the Mayor, "Get every-pony clear. Princess Celestia has had some kind of mental breakdown. She thinks she's the pony from the legend of the Mare in the Moon, my dredging up of the old stories must have triggered something..."

The mayor acted even as she spoke. "Of course, but what will you do?"

"Try and contain her while you get ponies to safety!" Twilight called out, letting a pair of thick anklets she'd been wearing all day unlatch and drop to the floor. "Guards, assist her!"

She flung out shields and counter spells to block and neutralise the energy blasts of the raging Nightmare Moon, while manoeuvring around to get a clear shot at her legs. When she did, the anklets shot forward to clamp themselves around Nightmare Moon's fore-hooves. Instantly, her ethereal mane diminished and the bolts she'd been throwing fizzled.

"What... what have you done!" she asked, staggering.

"Slapped magic limiters on you until you calm down." Twilight replied. She blushed, "I came up with them when I started having accidental bursts of higher power recently... They feed off power surges above a certain level, so the more powerful the magic you throw at them, the stronger they are. Right now you're limited to the power levels of a filly unicorn."

Then the sun rose and Princess Celestia appeared, looking almost as confused as Nightmare Moon. Twilight looked back and forth, feigning confusion of her own. "Wait, what... okay, what's really going on? Princess?"

Princess Celestia sighed. Things had just gotten complicated.

\* \* \*

><p>50.7<p>

"Hiya, Twilight!" Applejack said cheerfully. "Got a moment?"

"Sure." Twilight sat down on a hay bale. "How are things?"

"Oh, you know, same as usual." Applejack punctuated the comment with a sharp rap on the grass with her hoof, resulting in the nearby apple trees fruiting in seconds. "Just a simple farmer, me. And speakin' of farming, ah've got something for you t' try."

She plonked down a bottle between them. "You know that potato project ah had goin'?"

Twilight nodded.

"Well, this is after bein' potato cider. Made th' same way as regular cider is made, just... with potatoes. And then ah let some ferment fer a bit, just t' see what happened."

Twilight looked slightly apprehensive, but shrugged. "Well, I suppose that's the point of experiments."

"Good on yer." Applejack took out two shot glasses, and filled them with a glug of liquid. "Health."

"Health," Twilight parroted, and they both drank.

"Ah, that hits the spot," Applejack said, rolling it around her mouth. "Bit of earthiness, bit of tang â€" Twilight? You okay, Twilight?"

Twilight finished a coughing fit. "Has it gone dark all of a sudden?"

"Er... nope," Applejack replied, confused.

"Ah. Then it would appear I have gone blind."

The earth pony frowned at the bottle for a moment. "Ah well. Back to th' drawing board."

"No, I'm sure there's some use for it. Just... not as a drink, except for ponies with a strong earth affinity." Twilight stood, slowly and carefully. "I'm going to go Ascend now, and fix my eyes. Er... which way's the barn?"

Applejack pushed her shoulder gently. "Turn a bit... bit more... there."

"Thanks."

\* \* \*

><p>Berry Punch blinked. "Okay, that's certainly an... interesting little number you've got there, Applejack... I can really taste the solanine."<p>

"The... ah, \_hay\_." Applejack kicked the floor. "Now ah know what ah forgot. Y'all gonna be fine?"

The drinks-mare gulped, shook her head, and belched a cloud of green smoke which brought with it an earthy tang. "Yeah, I'll be fine. My tolerance is positively \_metaphysical.\_"

\* \* \*

><p>Zecora put down her retort, in which a testing potion was hissing alarmingly as the drops of potato cider fell into it.<p>

"My apologies, fair mare of earth. I fear I have no use for this

poisonous beer."

"What, none? Not even in a potion?"

"I said none, Applejack, and I meant it. If you think there is a way, invent it."

Applejack sighed. "Okay. Thanks anyway, Zecora."

\* \* \*

><p>Flame shot out of Spike's ears and nose.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>When Peewee was induced to try some, he promptly exploded. The adult phoenix which reformed from the cloud of smoke and feathers looked mildly peeved.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I see." Discord downed the glass.<p>

Then caught fire.

"I like it," he pronounced, licking his claws and using them to extinguish his burning beard. The rest of him, he just left on fire.

"What, really?" Applejack blinked. "I plumb didn't think anyone would. Well, you'll have t' fight over it with Applebloom."

Discord looked intrigued. "What does she do with it?"

\* \* \*

><p>Applebloom grabbed a spanner, and used it to tighten a couple of bolts on the quad-cycle she was working on.<p>

"Ah, fiddlesticks..." she muttered, blipping the throttle to no response. "Somethin's blocking up the fuel line."

She picked up a small jar of potato cider, and dribbled a few drops into the engine tank before trying again. This time, it picked up beautifully.

"Best all-natural engine lubricant ah've seen in a while," she pronounced. "Hmmm... wonder if ah might try that all-wood an' plant products car project again..."

\* \* \*

><p>50.8 (Richardson)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Don't worry, Rainbow Dash! There are plenty of things you can do in the hospital!" Twilight cheerfully remarked as she rummaged through the hospital book cart. She knew it had to- Ah-HA! It was always wonderful to watch Dash fall in love with books whenever the

mare wasn't Awake. It just felt right to add- err, enraptured another with the wonders of reading. "Here, try reading this! It has everything, traps, adventure, ancient mysteries!"<p>

"Jack Sparrow and the Sapphire Stone?"

Twilight's mind crashed to a halt that some would say could be heard all the way in the world tree itself. "What the bark?!"

"Ya okay, sugarcube? Ya went really pale just then." Applejack asked as the farm mare came up beside her.

"Uh, I just thought of something, that's all. Oh, by the way, Dash, there is something else. The events of the book actually happened. He actually exists, and the book is a way for him to make enough money to survive off of. Adventuring for a living doesn't pay well. He just publishes it under a pseudonym. "

"What? No way!" Dash looked at her book in a new light and her eyes lit up as she looked over the grimy and tussled protagonist emblazoned on the cover. "This guy is for real?"

"Yeah! He goes on way more adventures than us, but even I don't know how to find him. Maybe he'll come through the area looking for an ancient treasure, though. It's fun to read!" Twilight looked to the door, wondering when she could get away to have a long talk with a certain looped

"Oh hey! 'Guest starring Commander Cane, The HERO OF EQUESRIA'. He's real, too? I thought he was just propaganda put out by the Guard!"

Twilight ran for the door as urgency struck her. Either one of the two was enough to cause a rough loop. Both of them, together!? "Be back later, girls! I have to go water my tree, 'kaythanksbye!"

"What's eatin' her apple?"

"No idea. Hey! This actually is pretty good!"

Of course, if Twilight had any inkling of what she had been about to stumble into, she would have stayed home and hidden herself within a great fortress of books...

\* \* \*

><p>50.9 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Cheerilee and Zecora almost â€" <em>almost â€" <em>shared a birthday.

It was a weird cosmic coincidence, honestly. In fact, it was one of the few stable elements of the loop â€" which, as Twilight pointed out, was really strange. True, the dates of their birth would slide up and down the calendar like any other Looper's, but Zecora's birthday was always the day before Cheerilee's.

The fact that they had started looping together only compounded their friendship. Well... almost started looping together.

"So, it... it turns out that Liz! The lizard! She was the anchor for the loop." Cheerilee snorted as she threw back another mug. "Heh. She gave me, blue, blueprints for the bus, after I told her what Harry had told me about the loops back in Hogwarts. Liz the Lizard." She giggled.

"The phrasing is amusing, that is true." Zecora waved a hoof in a broad arc. "Like Rainbow Dash... something something blue!"

"Something something blue?" The earth pony nudged the zebra with a grin. "You are totally drunk!"

"I may be intoxicated, but at least I'm not \_domesticated.\_" Zecora shot a sly grin at Cheerilee, waggling her eyebrows.

"Oh, no no no. Not the Pony thing." The schoolteacher pointed. "There are! Are worlds out there where ponies roam free and, and people ride zebras! I know it! I've never been to one but, but..." She sighed. "Why did I start out with fused loops, Zeccy...? I don't understand."

"Fate works in mysterious ways," the alchemist intoned sombrely. "Especially in repeating days. But the fact is that you're here now and let's not bother with the whys or hows. It's our midnight drinking bash! Take a tablecloth and make a sash!"

"Oh, I'm not quite drunk enough for that yet... MAC! More booze, no love poison!"

\* \* \*

><p>50.10<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...alright," Mayor Mare sighed. "You can give it a go. No use of pegasus magic or wings, Dash, neither of you are to Ascend â€" it's a pain handling the press â€" and you're not going on the leaderboard."<p>

Dash and AJ exchanged glances. "Buck yeah!"

"Just what ah was thinkin', \_crash.\_"

"It's SO on," Dash pronounced. "You know how on it was before? It's more on now."

\* \* \*

><p>"Go!"<p>

Dash launched herself forward, blowing leaves every which way as she shot out ahead of the rest of the herd.

Sure, AJ was fit. Sure, everypony including Berry had beaten them the first time because they had been so focused on fowl play. But Dash's



thing was speed. Even with her wings bound and no magic, Dash had far more experience as an athlete than Applejack did.

"Coo-ee!"

Dash blinked. "What?"

With a rumbling roar, Applejack surfed past.

She was running at a little more than half the speed that Dash was. And the ground she was running on was moving, independently, at a little more than half the speed Dash was.

"Aw, come on!" Dash shouted. "That's so cheating!"

"Rules don't say nothing about Earthbendin'," Applejack replied cheerfully. "Guess you're plumb out of luck, huh?"

"Like hay!" Dash dug deep, focusing on her training, and accelerated.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, AJ?" Dash called. "I had a loop where I was something called a Rapidash."<p>

"So?" Applejack replied, still working her artificial landsurf.

"Agility."

A blue blur caught up to Applejack, and resolved into Dash. "Hey. I've not done much foot racing recently, but... don't you think we should be going a bit faster?"

With that, Dash accelerated away.

"Tarnation." Applejack scowled. "Right. No more missy nice pony."

\* \* \*

><p>Twin blurs of motion shot past the finish line.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So, how'd we do?" Dash asked the photographer.<p>

"Vell..." Photo Finish shrugged. "It is, as zey say, appropriate that you asked me, little stormcloud."

She held up the photo. It showed both of them exactly in line as they passed the posts.

"Ah..." Applejack searched for something to say. "Laurel."

"You have got to be kidding." Dash gaped. "Dead heat?"

"Ja." Finish shrugged. "Now, I go."

She vanished in a blur.

"Wait a sec," Applejack said, looking after her. "...she your mother again?"

"Yep."

"Ah see where y'all get th' speed, now..."

\* \* \*

><p>50.11 (Anowack)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle was not very happy with this loop.<p>

The grim city that had replaced Canterlot was overshadowed by a bright, white building that was much less pleasing to look at than Celestia's palace. From her position in an empty, overgrown lot that should have been the park beside the School For Gifted Unicorns, Twilight Sparkle could see three lines of text carved into the wall in large letters, though the angle wasn't right for her to read them.

She didn't need to, because the slogan beneath the poster of a bearded crimson male alicorn pasted on the wall of a nondescript warehouse across the street from her was all she needed to identify what the basis for this fused Loop was. (Twilight desperately hoped that there were no Loopers native to that universe.)

Fortunately, she was not completely alone this time. Only one Element was Awake, but she was exactly the pony Twilight needed, and she was standing right beside her. "Pinkamena Diane Pie," she said seriously.

"Yes, Twilight?" the other mare replied.

"You know all those things I ask you not to do normally?" Twilight asked. "\_Do \_them."

Pinkie blinked. "You sure, Twilight?"

"I'm completely serious." Twilight smiled slightly. "Don't do anything that'll get me an angry eight-legged visitor next Loop, but other than that, do your worst. Go full Chaos Goddess. Liven this place up."

There was a bright pink light, and Pinkie ascended, her body swelling a moment later to a stature only slightly smaller than baseline Celestia. The Element around her neck was dim for a moment, then began to shine. She looked down at Twilight. "Are you coming?"

Twilight summoned her own element and ascended, but she still shook her head. "No," she said, "I think I'll just go... study the moons of the outer planets while you do your thing. I'll check back with you in about a year, okay?"

Pinkie nodded, rising into the air with two powerful beats of her

wings. She brought her forehooves together, somehow making a popping noise like she was cracking non-existent knuckles and turning her attention back to the poster across the street.

Twilight followed her gaze, reading the slogan one last time. BIG STALLION IS WATCHING YOU. "Have fun," she told her friend, opening a small portal.

"I \*\*will\*\*," she promised, her horn glowing.

Twilight was fairly certain that she closed the portal behind herself just in time.

\* \* \*

><p>When Twilight came back, she was surprised by what she saw. The once-overgrown lot was now again a well-maintained park, though one smaller than the baseline version. The city, from what she could see from her own position, was perhaps a bit brighter, but still recognizable from what she'd briefly seen before setting Pinkie loose. The same white building stood over the city, and there was still a poster on the wall across the street.<p>

Though it was now a poster of a female, pink alicorn. "Friend Pinkie Is Watching You," Twilight read, more than a little perplexed, and then she saw a smaller line of text underneath the slogan. She squinted her eyes, read, "But Only When It's Not Creepy," and then smiled slightly.

The park was empty, but a moment later two earth pony stallions galloped down the street, skidding to a halt when they saw Twilight. She realized that she hadn't reverted back to a unicorn and opened her mouth to try to explain, but one of the two interrupted Twilight before she could begin.

"Hey, didn't you hear?" he asked. "Miniboredom is throwing a doubleplussuperawesome party and everypony is invited! You don't want to miss it!" Without waiting for an answer, the pair raced off.

Twilight stared after them for a moment, then with a shrug took to the air and followed them. It probably would be a fun party.

\* \* \*

><p>50.12 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...Girls? Can we talk?"<p>

The cutie mark crusaders looked up from their starfighter blueprints and smiled at their... well, former teacher.

"Sure thing, miss Cheerilee!" Scootaloo rolled up her own plans. "Not like there's anything here I don't know already."

"Heh, Scoots, Ah'm pretty sure Ah'll surprise ya once Ah'm done." Apple Bloom slid her own sketches to the side.

Sweetie Belle shrugged. "Honestly, I'm waiting for Tiara to get her, she understands this better. So... what's got you down?"

Cheerilee took a moment to mentally readjust herself. Even knowing that these fillies were technically older than the princesses... in their own way... it still took some effort to deal with them as equals. "It's just... well... I'm a teacher and..." She sighed, sitting down. "Well..."

"No pony else is learning?" Scootaloo suggested. "No pony besides us, Diamond, and Nyx?"

"Don't forget Silver Spoon," Sweetie pointed out. "She's looping now too."

The mare shook her head with a melancholy smile. "Got it in one. And... I can't even teach you all properly, you've already... learned so much." Cheerilee's eyes drifted skyward, watching the clouds meander by. "The first few loops back at home I tried... I did what I usually do, and... well... now it's beginning to wear on me. I..."

Apple Bloom nodded. "Ah'm pretty sure Ah get where you're coming from. It's hard ta carry tech between loops, and that means lots of rebuilding based on what Ah know just ta get back ta inventing. You've got it worse since your thing is tied up with nonloopers..." She tapped her chin thoughtfully. "...What if... what if ya spent a few loops teaching somewhere else? Like Fillydelphia or... tha Crystal Empire, actually, that could be good. And tutoring Silver during tha loops should be a mutually beneficial thing..."

"There's also the 'multiple interpretation' thing cutie marks have," Sweetie pointed out. "You could take up gardening! Or... terraforming!"

"And we'd always be ready to learn something from fused loops we haven't been to!" Scootaloo added. "Just think, you could have your own private lecture hall!"

Cheerilee giggled at the pegasus's enthusiasm. "...Thanks. I... I guess I should try those things out."

"You're welcome." Apple Bloom grinned. "Oh, and by the way?"

"...Yes?"

\*\*\*"CUTIE MARK CRUSADERS GROUP GLOMP YAY!"\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>50.13 (LordofBones)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Spike gulped at the expressionless look on Twilight's face as he confessed his desire to meet his own kind, even after the disaster that had been the Garble incident. The unicorn seized him in her telekinetic grip and marched out towards the Everfree, and for a moment the little dragon felt that old terror that he was going to be

abandoned by his best friend. Twilight didn't bother looking at him, but simply marched onwards, deeper and deeper into the Everfree, until they stood at the mouth of a cave.<p>

Then Twilight walked in.

The cave opened up into a large complex built into an open-topped mountain, and it was filled with \_dragons. \_Huge wyrms with purple, blue, black, red scales held court with fascinated younger drakes; a giggling young dragoness was leading an interested cyan male on a merry flight; several couples waited at the alcoves, tails entwined lovingly, as they watched their children play; a sinuous green was muttering to itself and comparing long sheaves of parchment with a grizzled white and a dignified blue. Hot springs dotted the huge cavern, with half-asleep dragons simply relaxing in the waters.

And everything came to a screeching stop when Twilight walked in, most faithful assistant in tow.

The lavender unicorn noticed Garble and his lackeys immediately. True to form, the sneering trio immediately lunged, claws and fire at the ready, and were smacked away like rag dolls by a huge azure-scaled tail. A behemoth with gigantic wings rose from the darkest shadows of the mountain and strode forward, its footsteps created small earthquakes with each passing. Fearlessly, Twilight met the cold, crimson gaze and said something in a low, deep language that Spike had never heard before.

The monster halted in its tracks and stared. Those penetrating red eyes grew large in disbelief, and a voice that sounded like mountains grinding boomed across the complex. \_"Where did you learn the language of the First and Last, horse?"\_

"I read a lot," Twilight shot back snarkily.

Gasps rose from their draconic audience. Spike shut his eyes and prayed that Twilight hadn't just snarked at a dragon thrice the size of the library.

The wyrm threw back his horned head and \_roared \_with laughter. The laugh was surprisingly warm and pleasant, even if it rattled the floating drake's bones, and when it finally stopped, the visibly amused winged serpent nodded. \_"Very well, proceed."\_

Twilight bowed respectfully and gently set Spike down. "Hello everydragon, my name is Twilight Sparkle, student of Celestia Sunbringer and Bearer of the Element of Magic. This is Spike, my faithful assistant, helper and little brother!"

The little dragon's eyes went huge at the announcement, and through his joy at Twilight's words he noticed that every eye was fixed on him.

"Through the years I've known him, Spike has stood alongside me against the Eternal Ever-Changing Serpent himself, as well as the power that drove Luna Dreamwalker to madness, and he did so because \_his friends were in danger!"\_

Murmurs rose from the crowd as they looked at each other and back at the blushing drake.

"In addition to that, Spike is an excellent chef, gemhunter, jeweller, musician, actor, emcee and accountant! He has ties with the Equestrian Crown and the elite of Equestria! Dragonesses and drakes, \_he even cleans up after himself!"\_

An appreciative "oooh" went up from the audience. Twilight heard one dragoness comment to her friend, "That's just what we need, you know? None of these macho fire-breathers; we want someone who can run a household and manage the hoard responsibly."

"But, alas, Spike is an orphan. No pony, not even Celestia herself, knows who his parents are. He knows nothing about his people, his culture, his history. In fact, thanks to three young drakes, he believes that his people \_murder babies! He is terrified of being a monster, because three of you sullied all of dragonkind before an impressionable, lonely CHILD!"\_

\_"Was it worth it?!" \_Twilight spat, stalking closer towards a dazed Garble as the dragons roared and screeched in outrage. \_"Was it worth crushing the dreams of an orphan, just so you could get your jollies off? Was it worth forcing Spike to think that dragonkind murder unborn children in front of their parents for ENTERTAINMENT?!"\_

—

\_"WHAT?!" \_boomed the azure titan. A triad of nervous dragons snatched the trio and backed off at the furious look on the patriarch's face. \_"I'll deal with you three after this!"\_

"I implore you, dragons of the Everfree. I implore you, please, teach my little brother, because I cannot," Twilight ended with a whisper. She kissed Spike's crest and backed away.

"Twilight?" Spike's voice was tiny.

"I'll be back in a week, Spike. I promise. Have fun," she smiled at him as she trotted away, making sure to keep the young dragon in her sights until she heard wingbeats. A young dragoness with a startling resemblance to Rarity scooped the surprised drake up and cuddled him, followed by several others.

"Look at these adorable cuddly cheeks!"

"Don't hog him!"

"Sing for us, cutie!"

"Look, he's blushing! Isn't that just sweet?"

\* \* \*

><p>50.14 (SpaceKGreen)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Cheerilee smiled as she looked over her class. Her students were diligently working on their schoolwork, and she had a bit of time to herself.<p>

The Loop had been quiet so far; Nyx was Awake, so the Nightmare Moon

situation hadn't occurred, and Twilight had headed off most of the other usual Ponyville crises. Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon (surprisingly an Earth Pony this loop) were also Awake, so she hadn't had to deal with their bullying either.

There was a sudden commotion outside, and Cheerilee frowned, as the children craned their necks trying to look out the windows. This was new; normally this was a quiet week...

The schoolhouse door burst open, and a large pony made of black crystal, shedding drops of dark magic, strode in. Fanged jaws parted open, and a terrifying voice boomed forth.

"HEAR NOW AND OBEY. THE DARK KING SOMBRA IS NOW YOUR LORD AND MASTER. ALL SLAVES ARE TO-"

"Excuse me!"

The crystal golem paused. It took in the classroom; the children were riveted to their seats, wide eyes staring at both the golem and the teacher, who was currently glaring at the intruder.

"I don't know WHAT you were thinking, but class is currently in session! If you wish to talk, you can wait outside for class to end."

"QUIET SLAVE. YOU SHALL GATHER THESE BRATS AND-"

The golem was interrupted as the teacher seemed to flicker, and a piece of chalk bounced off its head hard enough to rattle its crystalline brain.

"I SAID, class is in SESSION right now!" growled Cheerilee. "Wait OUTSIDE, and I will get to you AFTER CLASS."

"YOU STUPID SLAVE. RESISTANCE WILL BE MET WITH DEATH." the golem boomed, as it strode towards Cheerilee menacingly, the dark magic dripping from its body having increased to a torrent. "YOU AND ALL THESE BRATS SHALL-"

Again it was interrupted, this time as an eraser hit it hard enough to carry it out through the door and across the road.

Cheerilee sighed, feeling the stares of the students on her. "Well, class, it seems school is out early today due to a national crisis. Please line up in an orderly fashion and move to the emergency bunker. It should hold up against the golem until the Royal Guard shows up."

At that moment, a large rainbow wave of magic exploded from somewhere inside Ponyville. The golem, attempting to right itself, collapsed into an inanimate pile of crystal as the blast wave passed over.

Cheerilee watched it for a few moments. After determining that it wasn't about to get back up, she turned to the staring students with a bright smile.

"Well! It seems the national crisis has passed. However, following standard procedure, you children should wait here for your relatives

to pick you up."

Seeing the students continue to stare, she smiled again. "Tell you what. Since you've been such good students, I'll let you have the next... 3 days off."

This broke the silence, as the students cheered. As far as they were concerned, Cheerilee was now officially the Best. Teacher. Ever.

\* \* \*

><p>50.15<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"It is time for you... to fulfil... your destiny," Celestia said grandly.<p>

Twilight, in what probably shouldn't have surprised anypony, pulled out a list. "Which one?"

"...pardon?" Celestia frowned. "Which one?"

"Well, I've got quite a few of them by now. Let's see... be the most powerful unicorn in my generation, that's done. Gain the Element of Magic, done. Beat Discord? Done-a-roonie."

She began making tally marks in the floor, under the gaze of an increasingly bemused Celestia and all the other Elements. "I'm fairly sure the thing with Chrysalis was something involving destiny as well. Rematch with Trixie? Yeah, sounds about right. Oh, the time travel thing â€" and all those Pinkie Sense incidents. If those had gone wrong, I might have broken time, so that all sounds destiny-y."

Twilight unrolled the scroll further. "Sombra, yeah, that sounds good... aha!"

Celestia looked hopeful. "Yes?"

The unicorn rolled up the scroll. "I've got it! I'm ready to become the best high jumping unicorn in history!"

Even Pinkie looked confused at that.

Seeing their expressions, Twilight shrugged. "Well, what else am I going to do with these wings?"

She dropped the perception filter she'd put on them back when she'd really ascended, dealing with Sombra, and everypony jumped.

"Where'd those come from?" Dash demanded.

Twilight shrugged. "Around."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>



50.1: Finny friendship lessons.  
>50.2: Among the more common loop-variant topics is the species of several of the background ponies.<br>50.3: You go away for just a thousand years, and you can't recognize the place.  
>50.4: Bit grimdark, here.<br>50.5: Monetization.  
>50.6: A take on Turning the Tables from a rather more experienced Twilight.<br>50.7: Potatoes produce toxins. They are not apples, despite what the French language thinks.  
>50.8: Oh dear.<br>50.9: Is there a designated trotter?  
>50.10: The eternal race.<br>50.11: Nineteen eighty-fun.  
>50.12: A trying issue, especially after a couple of centuries.<br>50.13: Not a looping Spike. But probably quite a confused one.  
>50.14: Great Teacher Cheerilee.<br>50.15: There really is quite a lot of choice.

### 53. Chapter 53

Twilight blinked Awake, and glanced over at Spike. He nodded at her with a grin, and briefly pushed himself an inch taller to show he was Awake.

"Right, thanks," Twilight said with a nod. "Let's see... two Honesty, one other Magic, both your Loyalty and Dash's... the other Elements are Awake as well..."

A scrying spell appeared in front of her, flickering as she tuned it from location to location.

Midway through the process, Nyx and Luna appeared in a burst of starlight.

"Hi, Nyx," Spike said, waving.

"Art we chopped liver?" Luna asked, frowning.

"Oh, and Luna of course." Spike shrugged, earning him a playful glower.

"Berry... Angel... and Mayor Mare," Twilight concluded. "I think we're all here."

Spike raised a claw. "Does that mean-"

"Yes," Twilight confirmed. "This loop's the big one. But first we need to sort you two out..."

"I had an idea, actually..." Nyx grinned.

\* \* \*

><p>"Tremble in fear, mortals!" Luna-Nightmare boomed to the gathered ponies of Ponyville. "The Night Will Last Forever!"<p>

"Big sis?" a filly's voice piped from the backstage area. "Where did you put the crackers?"

Luna let her hooves fall back to the stage, and turned. "Not now, Nyx," she said in a strained voice. "I'm busy."

Nyx pushed the curtain aside. "Sorry, but I want to have some crackers with my milk, and " oh, am I on stage?" She waved to the audience, some of whom waved back.

"Stop it!" Luna punctuated that statement with a hoof-stamp and a wave of her wings. "You're messing with my big entrance!"

"Oooohhh," Nyx said slowly. "Sorry, I forgot about that. See ya later, sis!"

Luna turned to the front of the stage as Nyx trotted off again. "Right. Now, where were we?"

"Last forever," Pinkie stage-whispered, beaming.

"Right, thank you." Luna raised her hooves again. "The Night Will--"

"Can you heat the milk, please?" Nyx asked.

"Oh, forget it." Luna shrugged her wings. "I give up. Celestia can have it."

She flounced off.

The Princess of the Sun emerged from the other side of the stage a few seconds after Luna had left. "Sorry I'm late, I had to help my baby sister find some crackers. Now, shall we begin?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, your highness," Mayor Mare said, looking a little uncomfortable. "It certainly worked. The main question I've been hearing in my office is why nopony remembered that you and Luna had a younger sister."<p>

Celestia nodded. "Good. I shall introduce Luna and Nyx properly in a few days, so as to make the populace as a whole thoroughly familiar with them."

"Right." The Mayor frowned. "Your highness? Can we stop most of the catastrophes that would normally befall Ponyville? It's a little tedious clearing them all up."

"I believe we can prevent most of them," Celestia temporized. "We may require Discord's rampage, however. That or the mirror..." she mused. "It bears further thought. But yes, I believe that such as the Parasprites and the Ursa may be prevented as much as is in our capacity."

\* \* \*

><p>Spike knocked on the door of the Rich household.<p>

You could tell it was a rich household because... well, for one thing it was a large and well-built house with grounds. For another, it had a number of tasteful and expensive sculptures visible.

And the fact that a butler opened the door helped as well, of

course.

"Hi. Er... I wanted to speak to Diamond Tiara?"

The butler nodded wordlessly, and did the Butler Vanishing Act.

Spike walked in and sat down on a chair. To pass the time, he took out a cube with coloured squares on it.

Each time he clicked one of the sides around, half the facets changed colour. It was something Twilight had made as a memory test â€" apparently it simulated seven-dimensionality.

"Spike?" Tiara asked, coming down the stairs. "You here?"

He stowed the cube. "Yeah." With a furtive look back at the door, he walked over. "Did you finish it?"

Tiara nodded. "Yep. Got it done a few loops ago, but I thought I'd wait to deliver it until the Loop in question."

She pulled a box from her subspace pocket. "Here."

Spike took it, and opened it carefully for a quick peek at the glittering ring held within.

It was made of a slightly bluish translucent material, which looked a little like the blue sheen one sometimes found on a metal absent the metal itself. The cap-stone surmounting it was a marquise-cut transparent diamond, set within a recessed heart-cut red gemstone.

"Wow, that's impressive..." he breathed, closing the box. "So, how'd you make it?"

"Well." Diamond paused, and motioned him into one of the receiving rooms.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, obviously I was flattered when you asked for my help making the ring," Tiara began.<p>

Spike shrugged, a smile on his lips. "Asking Rarity was contraindicated, and fused loops are unreliable."

"And now I feel much less flattered," she said with a smirk.

The dragon threw up his arms. "A hit, a palpable hit."

"Anyway. I gave it a bit of thought, and the most important thing soon became clear. Durability." She nodded at the box. "That ring is as close to invulnerable as I could make it, because it might be required to last as long as you both live â€" which, within the loops, is a very long time indeed."

"I see the logic." Spike nodded. "So, first things first. The body of the ring?"

"That's actually molecularly grown Corusca gem." Diamond shook her head. "Took twenty years, on and off, to run the spell to grow it, because I wanted to eliminate shatterpoints and because I could only run it when I had time to Ascend without suspicion. If you're wondering, the reason it doesn't look like a fireworks display is something I'll get to later."

"Corusca gem? Oh, that thing Lando was working on." The dragon paused, then let out an oh of realization. "That's actually pretty brilliant. My formative loop, very symbolic."

"Thank you." Tiara grinned. "One of my better ideas. Okay, now, the bezel was grown integrally to microfractures induced in the larger stone, so they're all one piece â€" no weak point at the fastening. There's also a rim of corusca around the edge of the larger stone for redundancy."

Spike nodded along. "Again, very thoughtful of you."

"It must be my military background." Tiara tossed her mane. "If it's impossible for things to go wrong, that's a good start."

"And the larger stone?"

"You'll like this." She paused for dramatic effect. "That's the Heart Stone."

Spike blinked, reaching for the box. "I thought the Crystal Heart was-"

"No, the heart stone. From that loop Twilight calls G1." Tiara grinned. "I technically stole it... well, acquired it... and then cut it to suit. Which took another five years, but who's counting?"

"You," Spike pointed out.

"Details. Anyway, given that it took an alicorn-powered version of a specialist gem cutting spell used by a gemstone-talent pony a month to make each facet, that should endure... well, anything. Even Discord's tender attentions."

At Spike's querying look, she elaborated. "It's made out of a powerful Harmony artefact. It's heavily resistant to chaos magic."

"Gotcha. And the inner gem?"

"Arkenstone." Tiara waved her hoof self-deprecatingly. "Sweetie had some, she volunteered it..."

"I start to see why it took so long."

Tiara shrugged. "It was an interesting challenge."

There was a moment of silence.

"And the enchantments?" Spike asked, after a few seconds.

"Oh, right. Three types. The first is purely cosmetic â€" it's got a

masking spell which absorbs ninety-eight percent of outgoing light until it's actually put on. When that happens, the masking spell drops, and it lights up like Corusca gems are supposed to." Tiara flipped her hair with a hoof. "Just my little personal touch to the spectacle."

"Yeah, that will look cool."

"The second one..." Tiara frowned. "Well, I'm not sure if it's necessary, but I put it in anyway. That Oerth enchantment on rings which resizes them to the wearer."

"Never fear, that one's certainly going to get used." Spike waved a claw. "There's been a few times I was the pony and she was the dragon, you know, and that's just for a start. Yeah, that'll have a use."

"Good." Tiara flushed slightly. "It was less embarrassing than walking up to Rarity and measuring her horn, too... oh, the third category. Protective enchantments. Here... I kinda went nuts."

"Nuts is good," Spike volunteered.

"Right. So, step one is a trigger array which detects anything incoming with the prospect of even ablating away a single layer of atoms. I worked in precog to it, so it isn't limited by speed-of-light. Step two of the defences is a stasis layer, which sets up about two angstroms above the surface if step one is triggered. Step three..."

Tiara went on for at least a minute, getting progressively more thorough, with impressive but perhaps slightly worrying paranoia.

"...and then step fourteen is the last-ditch failsafe. If it detects that all of the above protections are going to fail, it automatically drops directly into Rarity's subspace pocket."

Spike blinked. "Back up. You designed something which can access the subspace pocket of another pony?"

"Not... exactly." Tiara waved a hoof. "It attunes to her when first put on, and from then it reserves a tiny bit of space for emergencies. The neat thing about the precog is â€" well, I tested it on a ring blank, and it does actually react to the loop reset by dropping back in."

The dragon absorbed that for a moment.

"Thanks, then, Tiara. That sounds like you've done me proud."

"Oh, don't mention it." The filly shrugged. "Seriously. You two are the ones who've helped me nurture both my special talent â€" in all its myriad interpretations â€" and my... little extra from Babylon Five."

Spike stowed the box in his Pocket with care, although he now knew that if he dropped it it was rather more likely for the planet to break than for that ring to be damaged. "Okay. Thanks anyway, though."

Tiara nodded to him, and sighed. "Imagine. A daughter of money, and my greatest work to date is in trade."

"Well, I don't think we ever actually discussed the issue of payment," Spike mused.

"Your word is good, of course," Tiara said with a shrug.

"No, I mean... if you're that worried about working in trade..."

"Nice try." Tiara gave him a look. "No, I'm not going to do it as a favour. Next hundred fused loops, get at least one sample from each new kind of geology â€" uneaten, thank you!"

Spike saluted. "Will do."

"Oh, and Smooth Service?" Tiara added, raising her voice. "This meeting never happened."

"Of course."

Spike jumped. "How did you do that?" he demanded, turning in his seat to look at the butler standing directly behind the armchair.

In response, Smooth Service simply parted his hair to reveal a small horn.

"Smooth Service's family have a kind of magic relating to quantum superposition or something." Tiara shrugged. "I don't understand it myself â€" and I've been trying â€" but, well, it's a valued talent among butlers."

\* \* \*

><p>{elmagnifico}<p>

Twilight trotted up to the bickering deities, checking off their names against a list from the Hub universe of diverse mythological beings. Urd and Peorth were there, the one obviously trying to break up the fight, the other alternating between helping Urd and egging on Hestia, of all deities, who looked ready to pull Ishtar's head off piecemeal. Osiris was dictating regally, his beard vibrating practically in Coyote's face. Cupid was hovering a little off to the side, looking smug and getting yelled at by Chang'e about something or other. Sundry other gods, metaphysical embodiments, and other beings mingled, arguing about Yggdrasil-knew-what.

Honestly, she was surprised Discord, Eris and Loki weren't there. Half the deities present weren't even associated with love. This whole situation stank of mischief.

Not wanting the whole thing to get out of hoof, Twilight started channelling mana. At worst, these beings would ignore her, and if it worked...

"Mass hold person."

...She could get them to all stop and listen to her, by dint of all

being frozen in a purple aura. It was fortunate that apparently embodiments of Admins were at least allowing themselves at this juncture to be affected by in-loop effects, (probably to get pasted at the reception,) Twilight went into stern-without-offending-dangerous-subject mode.

"Erm, hi, hello. My name is Twilight Sparkle. Nice to meet you all. As you may or may not remember, I'm the Anchor for this loop, and we consider it a sanctuary of sorts. I'd much rather divine wrath not get flung around willy-nilly without good reason."

Seeing as how a lot of the gods in her thaumaturgical net were still trying their best to look belligerent, she decided to put her hoof down just a little.

"Now, if I remember correctly, the Yggdrasil framework runs on a Quadrig-7 style bureaucratic circuit, with a oxyrhomboidal pyramid referral and petition system going up from there?"

Twilight turned to Urd, releasing her from the purple stasis field as she did. Blond curls bounced as the goddess nodded.

"Now, if I were to file a form A-72B with Urd's office, along with Permit #838 with Balder's fourth undersecretary, there would be, as per circular B-65, a complaints application with forty-two copies needing to be signed and a teraflop of secondary forms for each of the involved parties."

Purple lips spread in a smile that was only slightly threatening.

"I could give all of you a very large amount of paperwork to do."

Ishtar's eye, the one that could face Twilight, swivelled to look at her and quiver angrily.

"Moreover, if any of this got up to the desk of the Allmighty, I'm sure he'd be most thrilled to hear so many of his subcontractors decided to bicker like a squadron of newly fledged seagulls, and at a wedding yet!"

Cupid rolled his eyes. Twilight chose to ignore him. He had, after all, chosen his 20th-century-influenced avatar, it was hard to take the little guy seriously.

"I understand, this is an auspicious occasion. It's not often something changes publicly and permanently in the Loops. You're all very excited. You want to be a part of it. But you're also ignoring the fact that the facilitator has already been chosen, and that going over the happy couple's head is liable to backfire."

Twilight's smile faded just a bit.

"The truth of the matter is, the lot of you have, technically, missed the boat. If this gets too far out of hoof, Spike and Rarity will simply decide that the private ceremony they had earlier, which was recognized by several admins, will suffice. To avoid causing chaos amongst the Administrators, I think my friends would simply cancel the whole thing. Granted, there would be several people, myself included, that would be disappointed, but we wouldn't direct our ire

at the happy couple. I feel, personally, that you'd like to avoid that."

What was left of her smile vanished like an icecube in Muspelheim.

"Because not only am I an anchor, and a close friend of both the prospective bride and groom, I've made acquaintance with and share bonds to several other such beings, and along with my time in the Hub universe, I've made quite a few comrades and companions. Friends, if you will, who wouldn't mind filling out one little form and maybe a permit, something that even their fellow loopers would be willing to do, were I to ask nicely. You lot might be above magic should you so choose to be, but friendship has a way of jumping metaphysical boundaries like no power can."

And, just like that, the smile was back. The purple field dissipated, and before any of the deities could comment, Twilight was trotting off, a parting comment directed over her shoulder.

"Now, I've got arrangements to make for things we didn't already schedule. So many odd bits of the multiverse want their own contributions added to this ceremony. A traditional Fenrisian ice-ale sculpture, would you believe? You people play nice now, see you at the wedding!"

There was silence for a bit before Sun Wukong, who was being sat upon by Hera, commented.

"Hard to believe she's run by one of Loki's kids."

\* \* \*

><p>{Masterweaver}<p>

"FILLIES AND GENTLECOLTS!" A strange, mismatched serpentine creature floated over Ponyville. "YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE!"

Giant glowing watermelons formed a collection of arrows in the sky, leading a confused populace to an inverted, hovering town hall. Everypony gasped when they saw what was beneath the floating building: a giant fishbowl containing eight ponies and a dragon! Murmurs rippled through the crowd as the strange entity walked down steps made of marshmallow waffles.

"How'd he get a dragon in there?"

"It's only a baby. I'm more concerned about the mayor!"

"Is... is that the Summer Sun Celebration overseer?"

"Sweet Celestia, the thing got Rainbow Dash! And her hermit friend from that cottage outside Everfree!"

"That dressmaker and the Apple girl... why both of them?"

"Pinkie and Berry Punch? What could that creature want with them?"

With a very loud sigh, the chimeric serpent produced a cane made out



of nerf and rapped the fishbowl twice. "Ahem."

The crowd of ponies quieted down.

"Now then. My name is Discord. In days long gone and far away, I reigned over all of ponykind and spread wonderful chaos from hither to yon, and sometimes backwards. Some ponies complained, and the two that complained the loudest were Celestia and Luna." The creature shrugged. "They locked me in stone for... I don't know how long. But now, I'M BACK!"

Various loud screams came from the crowd, and a few ponies even fainted.

Discord tapped his chin. "Strange thing was, though Celestia thinks she's better fit to rule than I am. So I cut a deal with her. I'd take the current bearers of the Elements of Harmony, add in a few civilians, shake up the mix, and kick them out of reality. And if they made it back, I would let her keep the country. Seems fair, right? Hence, these ponies." A talon gestured dramatically at the imprisoned assemblage. "So, without further ado..."

His lizard leg reared back, spun around five times, and then he slapped the fishbowl with his tail. It vanished in a puff of cream cheese.

"And now we wait! While we wait, I'll practice my evil laugh. YOU!" He pointed at a random blue mare. "Time me!"

"Uh, um,  
yessir..."

"AHHahHHAHAhahAHAhahaHHAhauAHahAUAHHAaOIAahahAHuahAhAahuahAAoiaoaahuaa  
HaihAoiAHioahoAIhaiohaHAheahaHaHaauahAHauauhahahuahAjhAAUPoaiuahAaYuao  
AhaiaOhOAIhAoiAHiohoaiHoiAhaiOhHaAHAhAHAHhAhAhAhAhahiahahaiUAOauoHai  
hahhHataHAHaYyAhAhatHhYHahAYHHAHAHABabHAHWHAWWhWBHahhlajAHhHAHahHAAAA  
AAIOIAUOHahaHAHAHAHhahhohaoahhahaoahhiiahuihohaoishahioahaaaahhhehaheahah  
ehhehahaoiheuohaoihhahhahhehahhchahhehahaoieihahoihahoihcoihahohahao  
heiohohihohaoihvhahwoihohachaoihwiehohahhcoieah..."

Discord took a deep  
breath.

"...HFioedhlfkHFOIHZOhoahhauidhakjhsauiahahuhaihfeoiakhahahahahehahhahA  
hahahoahheuahhHAhAhayhAHahuheihuahakHaiuheahhakheoahhHahaiheohieahaoheo  
aehoahwhHAhaihiohaioahioahhehahoiwhaiyaoiuahahHahahhahohahhahahaaaaa!"

He smiled. "How long was that?"

"Three minutes, forty three seconds, two deciseconds, fourteen milliseconds."

"YES!" Discord's lion paw pumped the air. "HALF MY PREVIOUS RECORD EXACTLY!"

Without warning, a portal formed next to him. The first out was a pony recognizable as the former sun celebration organizer... if she'd taken a taste for latex and decided to brawl with tigers every other Wednesday. Right after her was Rainbow Dash, wearing some sort of armor that tripled her size and had shoulderpads as big as barrels.

Berry Punch was the next one out, swaying slightly as she leaned on a strange primate-like biped wearing comfortable clothes and carrying a duffel bag. The dressmaker, now clad in bedazzling gems, rode a far larger dragon out after them. The crowd gasped as Mayor Mare came out, her mane entirely pink and cravat replaced by a shimmering green cloak and mask. When the Apple girl appeared, wearing a long cloak and a pair of complicated goggles, a few ponies noted the necklace of garlic and drew their own conclusions. And when a great yellow wolf hopped out before transforming into a pegasus, some ponies outright fainted. They missed the final arrival: Pinkie Pie, wearing a toga and blue shades and actually hovering above the ground as the portal vanished.

There was a moment where everypony held their breath.

Then the strange ape creature nodded. "This is Equestria? It's very nice, actually."

"We spent twelve years trying to get back, Jenny." Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes. "I think it'd have to be a lot better than 'very nice'."

"Hey, I only just got here, I need time to judge."

"Um..." The blue mare raised an awkward hoof. "You've... only been gone a little over four minutes..."

The latex-wearing unicorn sighed. "Of course. Time dilation. Trust us, everypony, for us it was twelve years. Which reminds me..." She turned to Discord. "We're back. Celestia won. Put down town hall and get rid of the melons."

"Please," added the yellow pegasus.

\* \* \*

><p>"How long were you gone?" Night Light asked, looking...  
<em>up<em> at Spike.

"About, ooh..." Spike trailed off. "A decade, wasn't it?"

"Closer to twelve years, dear," Rarity replied.

Night Light and Twilight Velvet turned to her. "\_Dear?\_"

"Well..." Rarity blushed. "Spike and I have grown rather close over the years â€" the \_twelve\_ years," she added, shooting a look at Spike and making him grin and shrug, "that we were... well, away. He and I have saved one another's lives many times, and..."

Spike took over. "I love her."

"We love one another," Rarity clarified.

Twilight Velvet visibly realized something. "Twelve years. Right."

"Yes," Spike said, grinning uneasily. "I'm afraid you missed my eighteenth birthday â€" among others."

"Wait, back up." Night Light looked across to the rest of the returnees, focusing on his children â€" Shining Armour having arrived from the palace as part of Celestia's entourage. "Does this mean that my daughter is now older than my son?"

"In a word, yes," Spike winced. "We all got a bit confused â€" and we're really glad it only went one way, so we didn't miss the time with you."

Rarity shuffled her hooves. "There's something else important, as well."

Velvet's eyes widened. "Wait. Are you two engaged?"

"Did it about three months ago," Spike confirmed. "That was... a stressful time, really. We weren't sure if we'd ever get back, since we'd been gone so long already, and after another narrow shave we decided we shouldn't leave it to chance-"

"All this we business," Rarity interrupted, smiling broadly. "You make it sound as though you didn't ambush me with a ring after that little incident."

"As I recall, you didn't exactly complain," Spike riposted. "In fact, if memory serves, you literally jumped into my arms."

Night's lips were moving, as he looked between Spike and Rarity. "Er... not to be crude, but... the issue of size?"

"Oh, right." Spike nodded. "You haven't seen that yet. This is cool."

He closed his eyes, and shrank slowly. From so large that Rarity could use him as a mount, down to a little larger than Princess Celestia.

Seeing his two sort-of-parents-it's-complicated staring, he put on a slightly failed attempt at a confident smile. "Basically, that's how. It's the most useful thing I learned while we were gone."

"To get back on topic," Rarity said, picking up the conversation thread. "Now that we're back in Equestria, we can invite everyone we want to invite. To the wedding," she added, finally saying the word itself.

"When do you plan to have it?" Twilight Velvet asked straight away. "I'll make sure to keep the entire week free."

"Well... actually, we hadn't thought that detail through," Spike admitted.

Velvet frowned. "I see. Well, that's fair enough. What about a venue? Any thoughts on that?"

\* \* \*

><p>"That was one of the most exhausting conversations I've had for decades!" Spike said half an hour later. "I didn't realize Twilight's mom could be so devoted a wedding planner... I mean, she wasn't like this the first time."<p>

"I think that's because we blindsided her with the time loops thing," Rarity mused. "I hope my mother isn't so strongly focused on that side of things, or it could take a full hour to have that conversation."

"I think we know why Cadence and Twilight Velvet hit it off so well..."

\* \* \*

><p>"This is... so strange," Pearl said, looking Rarity up and down. "To think that you're now only about ten years younger than we are... you certainly don't look it."<p>

Rarity shrugged, slightly awkwardly. "I kept in shape. We all did."

She looked over to Spike, who'd been standing slightly back during the reunion. "Come on, Spike." As the dragon approached, she looked at both parents. "Spike has something important to ask."

"Mister Belle," Spike said, solemnly. "Would you do me the sublime honour of allowing me to take your daughter's hand in marriage?"

Pearl gasped, her eyes darting to her daughter. Rarity gave a quick smile, winking at her mother.

Magnum didn't react for a moment.

"Rarity?" he said, quietly.

"Sorry, Dad," she replied, blushing. "I'd have taken him to get to know you, but... you know... alternate universe, and all that..."

"She told me a lot about you," Spike contributed.

"I should hope she told you a lot about both of us!" Pearl said, then giggled. "Or perhaps not â€" we might scare him away!"

"Mother!" Rarity said, trying to hold in laughter of her own.

"Okay, she's your problem now." Magnum nodded briskly. "Pleasure to meet you, mister Spike."

Rarity turned to her father, frowning. "You don't mean that about me being a problem, do you?"

"We love you, dear, but you could be two hoof-fulls and a horn as well!" Pearl teased. "Not every filly tries to redesign their graduation outfit because it's not fabulous enough..."

Spike blinked. "I didn't hear about that."

"It was so long ago," Rarity muttered, her blush deepening. "I'd almost forgotten."

"Right, when's the wedding?" Magnum asked. "I want to know if I can

attend, or if there's a game on."

Seeing Rarity's startled expression, he laughed. "Got you!" Then his expression softened. "Of course I wouldn't miss out on your wedding for a hoof-ball game."

Rarity rolled her eyes, looking imploringly at Spike. "See what I have to cope with?"

\* \* \*

><p>{Filraen}<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Shining, sorry!" A pink alicorn threw herself to the Captain of the Royal Guard, Shining Armor.<p>

Trying to be the most tactful possible Shining answered as he raised himself from the floor "What for, Caddie?"

"Our wedding! It's almost time and I've been so occupied with preparing things for Spike and Rarity's wedding next year. This time not even Chrysalis appeared to remind me!" Cadence seemed very tired and almost on the verge of tears.

Both his calm mind and experience as a Looper gave Shining Armor a quick getaway from this potential trouble. "I have the next weekend free, how about we go to Las Pegasus and get married quickly there?"

"But our wedding..." Shining placed a hoof on his wife's mouth to let him keep speaking.

"We've had... how many weddings? How many we'll have in the future? I love getting married with you every time but you're devoting your heart and soul to Spike and Rarity's this loop, a wedding which transcends Equestria itself."

At Cadence's questioning look Shining Armor explained "According to Twily, this is the first time two loopers marry permanently without being married in the baseline first."

"It's that big?" Cadence tried to remove a very surprised expression from her face.

"Looks that way," Shining Armor tried to reassure his wife-not-in-name-yet-this-loop.

After a moment, Cadence sighed. "Sure, something small this time will do. When is your leave?"

"After the Daytime Friday shift. After that I return on Tuesday."

Imagining what she could have with a full long weekend with her husband (which still accounted to "too little" in Cadence's book), she gave a determined nod. "Fine, I'll pick you up then and we'll go to Las Pegasus to marry." And, with a laugh not out of place from Nightmare Moon, Cadence teleported away.

Asking himself if he was going to survive his wife until the big wedding this loop, Shining Armor sighed.

\* \* \*

><p>{Masterweaver}<p>

"Where have you been?" Trixie squealed, pinning down the newcomer with what was either a grateful hug or an angry full body grapple. "I've been worried sick! Literally! In the hospital and everything!"

"Sorry, changeling politics this loop are complicated." Chrysalis sighed. "A council of queens, we were all starving, total race superiority over 'prey...' I had to assassinate three of my sisters just to shake things up, and after that there was the constant juggling of ever shifting alliances trying to control portions of the hive mind... ugh." She smiled. "But hey, I'm here now, right?"

Reluctantly, the magician released her grip. "Fine, I guess that's a good excuse. You're still doing the honor guard for Rarity's wedding, right?"

"Oh, is that this loop?" The changeling queen grinned and rubbed her hooves together. "Great! Hold on, I need to get, um, Cadance to do the whole Intro to Equestria bit..."

\* \* \*

><p>"There you go," Fluttershy said, smiling. "That should fit you at that size."<p>

Spike examined the newly-sewn suit. "Thanks, 'shy. You know, it's kind of helpful that you've been studying so many loops."

"I wanted to be ready for... well... everything." Fluttershy shrugged. "It's helped a few times, too, especially when I end up in the wilderness."

The dragon nodded. "I know the feeling. I've had a few loops where I and a couple of others have to fend for ourselves."

He pulled gently at the shoulder. "Are these padded?"

"A bit." Fluttershy pushed down on them, letting them collapse down slightly and then spring back up. "I've seen human suits do it, it seems to be a thing. And I don't really have a default pattern for biped suits."

She fussed slightly with the wing area. "I'm afraid the only thing I could do for your wing shoulders, though, is to have them as... little sleeves in the suit. That means you'll have to either expand to your current size while wearing it, or furl your wings as completely as you can to get it off."

"Oh, that should be fine," Spike assured her. "I think I can drop the suit into my subspace pocket to get it off, and bring it out again to get it on."

"Oh... silly me," Fluttershy said, blushing. "I don't normally use it for clothes, so..."

"No, it's fine." Spike waved his claws. "Really... oh, out of curiosity, what fabric did you use?"

"Carbon nanoweave," she replied. Seeing Spike's eyes widen, she smiled softly. "It's made of diamond, essentially. It seemed appropriate."

"Too right." Spike stowed the suit with a mental nudge. "Thanks again, 'shy."

"It's no problem, Spike," she stated. "We all want to make sure it's the best day it can be."

She waved him farewell as he left.

Ten minutes later, a knock came at her door.

Angel opened it so fast the hinges smoked, earning a warning look from Fluttershy.

"Hi, 'shy," Rarity said, standing on the step with a bundle of fabric. "I was wondering if you'd be able to help me tweak this. I feel I need a second opinion."

"Not at all," Fluttershy said, stepping back from the door.

"I just... I want to make sure it fits, is all." Rarity rubbed her hooves together nervously. "I've never been so apprehensive in... \_ever\_, and it's making me doubt my own judgement."

"Oh, it'll be fine," Fluttershy smiled. "I'll help you get it set up."

That she'd be able to double check that Spike's suit and Rarity's dress would go together was a silent bonus.

\* \* \*

><p>{Masterweaver}<p>

"That was... exhilarating, actually," Mayor Mare finally managed. "I had no idea these pranks could be so much... fun!"

Pinkie grinned, sipping down her cider. "We'll make a proper looper out of you yet, filly! Now all we've got to do is give you wings and a horn for a loop and get you swearing on plant parts."

"Wings and... oh, nononono." The other mare chuckled, waving a hoof. "I don't think that'll be happening anytime soon. I couldn't possibly try to mimic the princesses like that!"

The party pony gave a deep sigh. "And \_that\_ is why you need wings and a horn. Oh well, we've got time..."

"You know, darling, your mane is a lovely shade of fuschia," Rarity interjected. "If you like, I could help you style it in a more..."

flattering manner?"

"Thank you, but... no. I prefer being seen as an old mare." The mayor smiled. "Politicians do need to maintain a certain amount of respect!"

Diamond Tiara snorted as she passed by. "Old mare? Compared to us, you're essentially a filly."

"Excuse me, have you ever had to handle the paperwork this crazy town generates?"

Tiara gave her a flat look. "Yes."

The mayor blinked. Then she sighed. "Right. Time loops. I know this and..."

"It's fine, really." Rarity smiled and patted her shoulder. "It takes a while for everyone to adjust. We're all here for you if you need it."

"Oh, no, I can't ask that!" Mayor Mare shook her head. "This is your wedding! I'll be fine, really."

"Anyway, Fluttershy is a lot better at this sort of thing," Pinkie pointed out. "I mean, Lemon Rush, Chrysalis, Clearwater... She's like a friendship ninja!"

The yellow pegasus smiled awkwardly. "I was a ninja one loop. Actual ninja, mind you, not one of those super power chakra Naruto ninjas... it was an interesting experience."

Mayor Mare nodded. "I can... tell, I didn't even hear you walk up."

"Yes, well..." Fluttershy turned to Pinkie Pie. "Discord says he's ready on his end. Does... that mean anything to you?"

The grin that Pinkie responded with was one she'd learned in her tenure as a chaos god. "Oh... just a little surprise we whipped up."

Rarity narrowed her eyes. "Surprise? Pinkie, please don't tell me you did what I think you did..."

"Alright, Rarity, I won't tell you I did what you think I did." The party pony grinned. "I'll show you instead! NOW DISSY!"

On cue, the draconequus kicked down the door to Macintosh's bar, dragging Spike behind him. "FILLIES! GENTLECOLTS! ASSORTED OTHER GENDERS!" He paused. "Twilight."

"Har har," a voice from the corner deadpanned, "what it is to laugh."

"I HAVE DECIDED TO GIVE SPIKE AN EARLY WEDDING PRESENT! The present of ONE LAST HOORAH as a single male. In ten minutes, I will take him on a wild and crazy whirlwind tour! That's right... I, Discord, Spirit of Chaos and Disharmony, am throwing Spike's bachelor party!"



"And!" Pinkie shouted, getting up on the bar. "In the spirit of gender equality, I, Pinkimena Diane Pie, have taken it upon myself to throw an equally crazy and wild bachelorette party for my good friend Rarity! Sign up sheets for both parties are posted around Ponyville, but remember! You can only go to one!"

Mayor Mare swallowed at the loud cheer in the bar. These were loopers, ponies with insane experiences, who considered death itself to be merely a painful inconvenience. Exactly what would happen, what could happen... she had not a clue. Even knowing that Pinkie would take precautions, even knowing that Twilight could magic up repairs, even knowing that the princesses themselves might step down to help with the clean-up...

Her eyes turned to the two sheets that the draconequus and pink pony were stapling to the wall. Some part of her realized that it might be possible to mitigate the damage if she was present. Still... it took her five minutes and a generous amount of cider to work up the courage to walk over and sign her name...

\* \* \*

><p>"Mmmmrghfllum..."<p>

Mayor Mare opened her eyes slowly. It took her a moment to process the face in front of her, mostly because she was still somewhat unbelieving that a mustache could grow on a beak.

After another moment, she glanced down at the warm purple blanket they were sharing, following the scales up to a face with a big orange mustache.

And then, the memories trickled in.

She seriously considered panicking. Or hyperventilating, or freaking out in some other manner. But, eventually, Mayor Mare gave a mental shrug, nuzzled them both, and went back to sleep. It had been a fun night, after all.

\* \* \*

><p>The white unicorn murmured bleary, his reluctant eyes slowly opening in the morning light. He brushed some blue bangs out of his face, taking a moment to realize he was in a bed, and turned to see a purple unicorn staring deadpan right at him.<p>

There was a moment of rapid-fire processing.

"Okay, this is bad."

The mare sighed. "Calm down-"

"No, I mean, I was drunk! I didn't expect anything like-"

"Just take a breath-"

"Oh no, oh god, what're ponies going to think when they find out about-"

"Dude." The lavender mare burst into green flames for a second, leaving behind a black insectoid figure. "It's me."

The white unicorn paused. "I... don't know if this makes it better or worse."

"Come off it, Spinnerette, we both know it's you." The changeling rolled her eyes. "Now shift back and let's figure out how to sneak back to the hive before anybody pins this on us-"

There was a firm knock at the door.

"...you still look like a pony." The changeling waved a hoof. "Go on. Explain things, you're freaking Shining Armor."

Spinnerette gulped, opening the door and coming face to face with his mirror image.

"...uuuuuuhhhhhh..."

He vaguely remembered something about Loops from the hive mind, something about Shining and changelings not being the best mixture, and put on a game face.

"I... can explain?"

"Do you remember anything that happened last night?" Shining Armor asked calmly.

Spinnerette tapped his hoof, considering his options, and decided to go for broke. "Honestly? No. Nothing."

"Well then. Let me remind you who you-" Shining's horn shone briefly and snapped a window shut just before the other changeling could hop out. "-and your companion suggested would make a cute couple."

The disguised changeling gulped. "Um." He remembered the purple unicorn he woke up with. "I'm guessing you and... somepony unacceptable?"

"My \_little sister.\_" Shining Armor smiled politely. "I would have let it slide because I understand changelings are lax in that regard. But then you started acting out our parts. Loudly. In front of all the partiers." He shook his head. "And this morning, I woke up having to deal with the fallout."

"Aheh heh heh... heh... um..." Spinnerette flinched back. "I'm... sorry. Really. I am. I, uh, I-" Belatedly, he flashed back into his actual form. "Uh... I-"

Shining Armor stepped in. The door shut behind him. He was still smiling.

Spinnerette fainted.

The captain of the guard sighed. "You. Stop scrabbling at the window and get your buddy out of here. Now." His stern eyes trailed after the changeling as he picked up his friend and scrambled out of the room.

He managed to keep from bursting into laughter for all of thirty seconds.

Chrysalis trotted in, shaking her head. "Really, dear, is it necessary to traumatize my subjects?"

"Heh, no," Shining replied as he disintegrated into a cloud of sparkles and became a blue unicorn mare. "But I figure that Twilight and Shining are way too busy running the wedding plans to get involved in matters of honor... and hey, why not have a little fun while I'm at it?" Trixie grinned at her marefriend. "Besides, you know you liked it."

Chrysalis shrugged and sighed melodramatically. "Oh, I suppose you have a point. And we do have an empty bedroom now..."

"Oh, I \_love\_ the way you think."

\* \* \*

><p>"Are we all ready?" Pinkie asked, looking around her preparation area.<p>

Gustave and Donut Joe nodded. Mulia did something complicated with a pair of icing nunchaku.

Cup and Carrot Cake exchanged a glance. "Yes," they answered, in unison.

Sweetie Belle raised a hoof. "Me too?"

Pinkie frowned. "Hm... backing music, please."

Sweetie nodded amicably. "Clover, set up."

\_"Set up. Magic Flute."\_

"To start us off," Sweetie said, bringing the silver flute to her lips, "Libiamo, or the Drinking Song."

As the first strains of music drifted into the air, Pinkie clapped her hooves. "Okay, guys, let's go!

The trio Pinkie had first met all that time ago on the Friendship Express started work on their specialities, and the Cakes began constructing the bottom layer of a mammoth multi-layer wedding cake.

Sometimes, the classics were best.

On the other hand, a new fillip could be interesting too. Which was why Pinkie was making the figures for the cake top out of her super secret stock of capital-A Ambrosia, and then layering in several simple enchantments and a couple of more complicated ones.

A lot of ponies had figures topping their cakes. Very few had ones which were \_animate.\_

Speaking of... Pinkie broke off her construction of figure-Spike's left wing to check on her experimental Sugar Phoenix currently curing

in the no.5 oven.

All indications were it was going super-duper.

She grinned. If she'd got that one right, it would breathe marzipan and regularly explode into a pile of toffees, before reforming from the powdery sugar dusting.

Oh, and there was that apple, cranberry and peridot pie the size of a table she was making, too! And the sugarwork!

Pinkie's grin looked like it would take her head off. It was so rare she got to really cut loose.

\* \* \*

><p>Dash dusted off the edges of her hooves. "Right. That's done and ready."<p>

Normally, alternating between lazy and frantic was Dash's M.O. But this time, with something important at stake, she'd decided to plan things out well in advance.

The result was the complicated weather schedule laying in front of her. It meant that, for a full seven day window, she could guarantee the exact weather conditions at the planned wedding site with only a minimum of alteration on the day itself.

So, technically, she was putting a huge amount of effort into being able to be lazy. Well, Rarity would probably prefer her to be in the audience anyway.

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm just wondering what the best time would be," Dash repeated. "You know. So I can get the timing right on the weather effects."<p>

"Yes, we heard you," Rarity said with a sigh. "I know, you asked yesterday. But it's all got a bit... complicated."

Dash perked up her ears. She could hear the faint sound of an argument from inside...

"Okay, look," Luna said crossly. "I am as fond of Spike and Rarity as you are, sister, so to unilaterally declare that their wedding should take place during the day is a travesty!"

"It's just when weddings normally happen, Luna," Celestia protested. "I am not trying to usurp the position of patron over the wedding in any way, shape or form!"

"And yet, it is having precisely that effect..." Luna said darkly. "Besides which, were it to be put to a vote, I am sure that young Nyx and I would outvote you two to one."

"And why does she get a separate vote to you but I cannot bring in any others?" Celestia replied hotly.

Rarity looked over her shoulder, wincing. "They could be a

while..."

\* \* \*

><p>{Starfata}<p>

Applejack walked to a relatively unused patch of land on Sweet Apple Acres, bringing Twilight Velvet, Rarity and Spike along with her.

"I didn't collect as many things as Twilight while we were away, but I've been working on growing these samples from our trip." She explained to the older mare, ignoring the way Twilight Velvet mumbled to herself while going over her checklists.

"Some we traded for, and others were gifts." She continued. "And Twilight held most of them. We thought we'd show you what we've got so far."

Rarity perked up as they got close to the brand new Greenhouse the looping Apple family had built that first day. "What sort of plants do you have in here Applejack?"

Applejack grinned, opening the door.

Twilight Velvet looked up from her notes and blinked. "Is it just me, or is it bigger on the inside?"

Spike nodded, supressing a grin. "One of Twilight's spells? The Undetectable Expansion charm?"

"Not quite." Applejack shook her head. "Same basic principles though. If you'd like to walk this way, we've got all the flowers we could find in our pockets."

Rarity's eyes widened at the rows of plants she could see- some type of glowing fern, some plants that Sweetie Belle had shown her from her trip to Middle Earth, and dozens more that she'd never seen in her life. "Oh my! You certainly have been busy Applejack."

The other looper checked to see Twilight Velvet engrossed in her exploration, then replied. "Not just me sugarcube. Twilight's been collecting wedding presents for a long time now. I asked her to get samples of plants for me, and the others all pitched in where they could. We all wanna help make this a day to remember for the two of you."

As Rarity teared up at the sentiment, Applejack decided not to tell her about the surveillance system Applebloom was installing in the venue. It was going to be one heck of a wedding video when the Crusaders got around to the editing.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, that is IT!"<p>

Celestia and Luna both turned towards the door as Twilight Sparkle slammed it open. Her Element was on her forehead, and faint wisps of magic curling around her flanks served fair warning that she was on the razor edge short of Ascending.

"You two have been arguing about this for \_two hours solid,\_" Twilight informed them matter-of-factly, with a calm that fooled nopony. "Since you don't seem capable of resolving it in a way that both parties are satisfied with, I'm going to overrule you."

"But-" Celestia protested.

"I have the stronger claim, in that Rarity is one of my best friends and Spike is in some sense a combination of brother and child," Twilight continued over the top of Celestia. "As such, the wedding will take place at dawn. The weather will start cloudy, with one pre-scheduled clear sky window approximately ten minutes before dawn and then the clouds parting approximately ten minutes after."

Gilda strolled in, flicking her tail unconcernedly. "An eclipse would work too, of course. But unless you can both agree on a solar eclipse, it's dawn."

The two alicorns transferred their gaze to the gryphon. "Why then?"

She flirted her tail again. "Kinda need dark sky for... an entrance. 'sides, it's a compromise in her favour â€" isn't she called Twilight?"

Luna sighed. "It isn't as though we're going to resolve it otherwise."

\* \* \*

><p>{misterq}<p>

"Oh, hello there, Twilight," Fluttershy said as she carefully walked into tree library where the purple unicorn was busy planning for the upcoming wedding.

"Hello, Fluttershy. Did you need something?" Twilight asked while peering over her lists.

The yellow pegasus nodded, "I just needed a book. Oh, are you still working on the wedding? Does that mean that no pony told you?"

"Told me what?"

"Oh, um, about what happened. I suppose I should tell you, er.. You see, Spike and Rarity, they decided to elope. They said something about how they decided they didn't want a big 'too do', and ran off towards the beaches of the western ocean."

"What? But what about.. why? No, they wouldn't. I mean... Every thing had to be perfect. All the guests! The checklists! So many checklists.. so many," Twilight said right before her brain rage-quit and she toppled over on her side.

"Twilight? Are you okay?" Fluttershy cautiously poked the passed out unicorn with a hoof. Somewhere, a goat bleated.

The pegasus gave a nod and reached into her mane and pulled down a zipper.

"You've still got it!" Pinkie Pie giggled happily to herself as she pulled off the color-changing contacts and stepped out of her Fluttershy suit.

\* \* \*

><p>{Masterweaver}<p>

"Excuse me, are you Prince Blueblood?"

The glorious stallion that was the apple of all of Canterlot, gem of Equestria, and family to the Sunbringer herself deigned to acknowledge the mare speaking to him. "Why, yes, my dear. And you..." He considered her face, recalling some announcement about a group of commoners that had saved the country from an absolutely garish lord of chaos. "Why, you're the bearer of Kindness, are you not?"

"Generosity, actually." The unicorn smiled politely; Blueblood noted that her eyes and coat could well be considered a feminine version of his own, though the admittedly fashionable purple curls ruined the mirror image. "You see, Celestia has agreed to arrange a wedding between me and my paramour, but I felt that with all she had on her plate I should find somepony else to help with certain aspects."

"Oh?" Auntie had agreed to such a thing? He supposed it wasn't entirely out of the realm of possibility. "Do tell."

"I need somepony who knows Canterlot," the mare explained. "Somepony who moves in high circles. Somepony who understand the high culture, the cuisines, the character. Somepony noble and powerful."

Prince Blueblood rose his regal head. "Why, of course I'll help." This mare had a good head on her shoulders.

"Oh, thank you! It would have been so difficult to contact Fancy Pants on my own..."

That was... a strange statement. "Whatever do you mean?"

"Well," the mare explained casually, "there are so many letters sent to him every day! I couldn't possibly ask him directly to coordinate with my organizer, but now that you've agreed to-"

"I'm sorry, you... want Fancy Pants to organize your wedding?"

"Well, yes. Wasn't I clear?"

The prince smiled gently. "My dear, you really should have said. I assumed you meant me!"

For some strange reason this confused the poor mare. "Ah... you did?"

"I am, after all, the paragon of Canterlot nobility!"

The mare actually giggled. Giggled! As though it were a joke! "Oh, Blueblood, you are such a comedian."

He frowned. "No, I'm serious."

Her laughter petered out. Her smile remained, though by now it was oddly strained. "You... are?"

"But of course, my dear!"

"...\_oh.\_" The mare began to back away slowly. "I... see. Well then, ahem. I shall be going! I'll be sure to alert your doc-\_butler\_ that he is needed, is that alright Blueblood?"

"Ah..." Something was definitely off, but the prince couldn't figure out what. "I... suppose?"

"...Tata!" That strained smile disappeared behind a door.

Well, that had been strange. Blueblood wondered what poor sap had been saddled with that mare, then decided he didn't care and went back to allowing the world to bask in his magnificence.

\* \* \*

><p>"...and I planted just enough evidence when he wasn't looking to land him in an asylum," Pinkie reported with a grin.<p>

"You're \_sure\_ this is alright?" Fluttershy fidgeted a bit. "I don't know if we should be doing this-"

"Don't worry, I checked the asylums of this loop. They're very competent. And, well..." Rarity smirked like a shark. "I \_don't\_ want him to ruin my wedding, and he \_does\_ need this."

\* \* \*

><p>In the eerie light of a full moon, a small party of travellers cantered down the main road.<p>

"...\_still\_ think it's hilarious!" the largest of them said, a great earth pony stallion the size of Big Mac. Emblazoned on his flank was a strange cutie mark which resembled... a blocky metal claw, with four fingers to it. "I mean, you told us about your time here, but by the-"

"Shut \_up\_, Bjorn," a small, bright yellow colt said, ears flaming. "I don't ask to be nine years old here, so quit it."

The wolves loping alongside sniggered.

"And you lot," the colt added, sighing. "You're a bad influence on them, Leah."

The largest of the three wolves winked. "It's part of my job description. I \_am\_ Awesome Werewolf Bitch, after all. This is just the Bitch part."

"I'll tell you what you're \_not\_, though," the sole unicorn in the group said. "A viking."

\_I vote Leah Clearwater be adopted as honorary Viking\_, a young



dragon volunteered. \_All in favour?\_

Two enthusiastic yips and another bout of laughter from Bjorn carried the motion.

"I don't feel any more violent," Leah said lightly.

"Hey, not all vikings are violent," the unicorn protested.

"Hiccup, Viking is a job description," the colt said apologetically. "It sort of \_does\_ mean 'violent norseman'."

"And you'd know, I suppose, Rush." Hiccup shook his head. "Is it any wonder I turned out like I did?"

\_Yes\_, the dragon replied promptly. \_I'm surprised you're literate.\_

\_Well, properly literate. Since those scratchings you call runes are basically straight lines bashed out by a rock on another rock, I suppose even cavemen could read them with reasonable fluency.\_

"And remind me, Toothless, which of us was it who built a siege weapon in a hut with a box of scraps?" Hiccup asked pointedly.

\_Ooh, is Tony Stark here? Well...\_ Toothless let the word trail off. \_Pony Stark.\_

The motley group groaned or whined.

"Where is this place they're holding it, anyway?" Bjorn asked after a moment.

Toothless took two more steps and leapt skywards, snapping out his wings.

\_Next turning on the left\_, he broadcast.

"Show-off..." Hiccup muttered, grinning.

\* \* \*

><p>"Uh... hi?" Hiccup said, scratching the back of his neck with a nervous hoof. "We're invited?"<p>

"Hold on a minute..."

The utterly unflappable pony on door duty sorted through his clipboard. "Party of seven, from...?"

"Well, the frozen north," Hiccup provided with a sigh. "I'm so glad to see \_grass\_ again..."

"Pah! Grass!" Bjorn said, shaking his head. "Back on-\_ Mount \_Fenris, it's a warm summer when the ice is only one inch thick!"

"I am \_so\_ glad I've only been there once," Hiccup deadpanned.

"Here we go. Back row on the left. And, if you could make sure not to startle the other guests, sirs?"

Rush nodded firmly. "I'll kick the flank of any who do."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Velvet frowned. "How strange. I'd thought Celestia was going to officiate, but she's in the seats with every-one<em>one<em> else."

Her daughter nodded. "That's right. A friend we met on our travels volunteered to do it."

\* \* \*

><p>Gilda watched overhead with an eagle eye as the clouds slowly parted.<p>

Luna had outdone herself for the occasion, and her sky was a glory in stars and nebulae and the tail of a vast comet, stretching across half the sky. Even with the lightening caused by the incipient sunlight, it was still easily visible.

Then she saw it. A constellation that looked almost exactly like a running Saddle Arabian " the proportions not being right for a pony. But there were a couple of stars too many, making it look like it had five legs...

She exhaled, colour draining from her fur and feathers before being replaced by red markings " on the crown of her head, on her haunches, on her back.

Her tail arched over into her sight-line, and moved \_just so\_

A silent explosion of light filled the heavens.

\* \* \*

><p>As the crowd blinked back vision into their dark-adapted eyes, they noticed a change. Standing behind the altar was the largest equine any of them had ever seen " larger even than Princess Celestia, by at least three hoofs.<p>

Though he had neither wings nor horn, his presence seemed to fill the room. As though he was too large to fit " or, perhaps, as though he \_would\_ be too large, except that the room itself had grown merely from his standing there.

And, it suddenly became apparent, he had eight legs.

"Hail and well met, all of you," he said, voice rumbling out of a deep chest. "I am Sleipnir Lokison, Odinsteed, and I have been asked to officiate today."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, there he is," Leah whispered. "Okay, I can kinda see where Rarity was coming from, he looks good in a suit."<p>

"We'll take your word for it," Hiccup replied, applying Muffliato to all of them so they didn't disturb any of the other guests. "I didn't

realize one of Loki's \_kids\_ was going to officiate, though, that's pretty cool."

"He's Fenris' elder brother, right?" Rush checked, getting a nod. "Right. I suppose I shouldn't be surprised he oversees this place."

\_Hiccup,\_ Toothless asked lightly. \_Can I wear a suit next time? I fancy being an island-to-island preacher.\_

"We'll work something out," Hiccup hedged. "Hey, can you hear that?"

The various wolves, ponies and dragon pricked up their ears.

"That's an orchestra, isn't it?" Bjorn said with a frown. "Where did they fit an orchestra?"

Leah blinked. "Okay, I recognize the music. It's Lohengrin's \_Treulich gefÃ¼hrt zieht dahin.\_ Bella \_hates\_ it, says it's too mainstream. Rants for hours."

The wolf shrugged. "In all fairness, she may have a point. The English name is 'Here comes the bride'."

With a dramatic creak, the doors swung open.

First through, in a simple white dress, was Sweetie Belle. A flute was hovering at her lips, and she was working it in a way which was physically incapable of producing the rich, multi-instrument sounds emanating from it.

Then came Rarity, wearing...

Well, it didn't look like \_a\_ wedding dress, so much as \_the\_ wedding dress. The one that everyone else was copying when they sewed theirs.

\_Wait a minute...\_ Toothless 'pathed, looking closer. \_She's woven that from diamond. Optical-fiber diamond. That's why it's sparkling like that.\_

Several of the others gave him looks.

"Since when were you an expert?" Hiccup asked for all of them.

Toothless huffed. \_Since I met Spyro. He's a connoisseur of gemstones.\_

Leah chuckled, pointing to the front of the room. "Look at Spike!"

Bjorn stifled a bark of laughter. "He looks like he's been pole-axed by a-

"A pole-axe?" Rush suggested, earning a stuck-out tongue.

Freki whined, pointing back towards Rarity, and they turned like a crowd at a tennis match.

Rarity had stopped dead, eyes fixed on Spike in return. Her bridesmaids " the three Crusaders not either providing the music or sitting with the other Royal Sisters " had to do some complicated hoofwork to avoid colliding with her.

"I'd say that's a good sign..." Hiccup said absently.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

This has been a few weeks in the making. It was originally going to be part of set 47, but it took too long to make. Then, over time, it became clear that not only would it not fit in a regular set, but that it would actually take two chapters up by itself. (The second chapter is the ceremony itself, and reception).

>So, this is the wedding of Spike and Rarity. As mentioned, this is the very first time in the Loops-verse that a permanent marriage has taken place - so it's quite the event. Note that this takes place before the big crash which started Silver, Cheerilee and Zecora looping - which is one reason this is being posted now, before it gets too "far back" from where the "most recent" marker is.<br>Gilda's entrance for Sleipnir is based off Okami, which I think is just about the most obscure thing here...

#### 54. Chapter 54

{Note: there is a heart song right at the start of this chapter. The two songs used as basis are "What my cutie-mark is telling me" followed by "Justice for all" from turnabout musical. .}

\* \* \*

><p>{Filraen}<p>

Even without his inside knowledge of Yggdrasil, it was easy for Sleipnir to realize who was Awake and who wasn't by the looks of surprise. Expected really, as most unawake ponies would have expected any of the present Princesses to officiate here. "Hail and well met, all of you," he said to all the guests with his best "divine decree" face. "I am Sleipnir Lokison, Odinstead, and I have been asked to officiate today."

As the bride and groom walked towards him he started to hear a soft melody almost in the border of his perception, like a single piano piece. Realizing this was a heart-song on the brink of forming, he almost let his ears fold: he didn't particularly like to be part of a musical and much less being in the center of it. But it wasn't like he could really escape or resist: this was Rarity and Spike... Spykoranuvellitar's moment and Sleipnir wasn't going to ruin it.

If his dignity was going to be the price to pay to keep his winning streak on the 'funniest Loop videos' contest by using the wedding recordings, the eight-legged Yggdrasil administrator decided, then so be it.

\_Good day every...pony, this meeting's under way:\_

><em>we're to celebrate Rarity and Spike's great wedding day.<em>

><em>There's only one annoyance, let's get it over soon:<em>

><em>if there's one who opposes this...<em>

Sleipnir left the note hanging for Celestia to end the verse.

\_... stand up so I can send you to the moon!\_

By her side Luna raised a not so delicate eyebrow at her sister. "Why the moon and not the sun?"

"Erm... so I can shield them better." Celestia managed, making a valiant effort to prevent flinching at Luna's insistent gaze. "Don't make that face, I'll bring them back after the party."

Sleipnir coughed once to stop their bickering, though Luna still mumbled something about the moon being her prerogative. The next verse was going to start after all, this time directed to the bride and groom with a bit of help from the audience.

\_In life we start alone but that's not meant to be,\_

><em>the love of others is something that can make us really free.<em>

><em>But I'm not here to preach you, I came to hear your vows,<em>

><em>so let us hear (so lets us hear)<em>

><em>what you hearts say...(what your hearts say)<em>

><em>and spread your vow to your<em>

><em>and spread your vow to your<em>

><em>and spread your vow to your love and the worlds.<em>

The music didn't end with Sleipnir singing, he realized. Now he noticed how the song changed into a different tune altogether. As Rarity started to sing, she took the wedding ring from her sister. It was interesting seeing how Rarity's emotions on the heart-song put her on the verge of turning her into an alicorn, but she rode the heart-song herself perfectly without triggering the transformation.

\_You're no longer the child you were when I met you.\_

><em>Spykoran, you're my knight, my strength to go through<em>

><em>When the darkness and despair try to hurt without compare<em>

><em>I feel we can safely fly to anywhere.<em>

Diamond Tiara offered a smile to the other looping fillies, and brought the other wedding ring to Spykoranuvellitar just in time for when he started to sing.

\_Sometimes I doubt myself, "is this everything a dream?"\_

><em>Having you, who are my whole everything.<em>

><em>You are mine as I am yours, no need for hoarding anymore.<em>

><em>I know precisely what I'm vowing for...<em>

Sleipnir noticed another looper couple, Shining Armor and Mi Amore

Cadenza if he remembered correctly, leaning on each other and singing voicelessly while Rarity and Spike put the rings on each other.

\_I vow for us (Always together)\_

><em>I vow for caring (time and time again)<em>

><em>A vow through all the ages (we'll always be)<em>

><em>no matter how distant (on each other's side)<em>

><em>And if our paths were separated<em>

><em>Through some awful chance created<em>

><em>We'll always return back home again. (back home again) <em>

The heart-song enraptured everyone's attention, even the local chaos draconequus Discord seemed calm enough to just take photos. Though Sleipnir noticed how outside the hall the guards were in pursuit of a blond white unicorn in a straitjacket when at an unheard sign both Rarity and Spykoranuvellitar started to sing in duet.

\_We vow for love\_

><em>We vow for honor<em>

><em>To our home always be right on each other's side.<em>

><em>And if our lives had reincarnation, our vow would keep its affirmation.<em>

><em>Independent of location, species, race, time or of nation.<em>

><em>No matter what the situation, we will fulfill this obligation,<em>

><em>Through all the complications, sadness, joy and celebration.<em>

><em>For the future of us...<em>

"By the power entrusted to me I declare Spykoranuvellitar and Rarity, husband and wife."

\_We vow!\_

\* \* \*

><p>Spike's ring, the one made by Diamond Tiara over the course of at least nine loops, flashed like the sun for a moment as the masking spell broke. When that faded, it still looked like a caged ring of light, caught reflected from the surface of a gentle sea.<p>

Rarity had made her own ring for Spike. While it had less of the pyrotechnic splendour of the one Diamond had made, it was somehow, ineffably \_right.\_

The band itself was, perhaps predictably, made of Tectonicum. (The sheer amount of time it must have taken to work it was impressive in and of itself.)

Surmounting it was a faceted clear diamond which Rarity had made out of solidified magic â€" her own. It looked precisely like one of the three blue diamonds which made up her cutie mark.

And within that, shining like a tiny red star, was a heart-shaped piece of Ruby Sunstone.

As the heart-song ended Spike started to say something, but Rarity placed a hoof on his lips. Then, removing it, she kissed him.

Dawn broke, and the clouds parted so that the very first sunbeam into the room fell squarely on the two of them.

\* \* \*

><p>"Thank you all," Spike said, some minutes later, in a slightly raw voice. "It was... everything I'd imagined. Thank you for helping it be."<p>

Rarity nodded, not trusting herself to speak, but giving each of the many helpers "a looper or not" a sincere look in the eyes.

Twilight Sparkle smiled. "We're glad you're happy." Then she trotted forward, turning to address the room. "The reception's next door. I think we should all give them a little space."

There was a general rumble of agreement, and ponies and non-ponies started moving towards the doors.

Spike turned back to his- wife-, tears starting in his eyes. "I..."

Rarity smiled. "I know. Me too."

They embraced.

"I'm so glad this happened," he whispered, clutching her tightly. "The most valuable thing I've ever run into, in any universe, is your heart."

\* \* \*

><p>About ten minutes into the reception, Pinkie Pie hit a glass with a spoon and then climbed onto one of the tables.<p>

"Attention, everypony and every-oneelse!" she said loudly. "I would like to inform you that the kitchens have finished making the real meal, which is in room two " through that wall. Anyone who does not wish to participate in the official unofficial food fight should leave now."

"Food fight?" someone asked.

Pinkie grinned. "Hay, at least I'm giving you all the option to participate or not."

Various ponies filed out. Those left included all the Loopers, along with Rarity's father (her mother having decided that Magnum could do this alone).

"Right." Pinkie picked up one of the custard pies laid out on the tables " which were suspiciously bereft of anything except pies and other such ammunition, in fact. "Let's-"

SPLUT-SPLAT.

Blueberries and custard dripped down her face.

All eyes turned to the happy couple, who were each carrying two more and ready to throw again.

Rarity smiled. "What? Who do you think asked for this? It's only good manners for the host to break the tension at a major event!"

Her husband ducked as a pie from the general direction of Bjorn the Fell-Handed shot towards them at his head height.

Then some sort of torte hit Luna, who retaliated with a meringue, and the culinary carnage became general.

\* \* \*

><p>"What's the first piece?" Twilight asked Sweetie quietly. "I mean, they're supposed to dance it alone, and I know they're good, but-"<p>

Sweetie smiled, holding Magic Flute to her lips. "I think they'll like this one."

Strings began to vibrate from the small Device.

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity looked across at Spike. "How do you want to do this? Biped? Quadruped?"<p>

Spike frowned for a moment. "I think a mixture â€" one of those ones we worked out a while ago. Can you hear that?"

The unicorn perked up her ears. "Oh," she said, in a voice that brimmed with emotion.

It was concert music, not dance music, and as a general rule one simply did not start with a finale piece. But that didn't matter. And as the finale of the Rebirth of the Phoenix began to swell around them, going from strings alone to horns to drums and flute, and swelling into one of the great triumphal musical pieces, the young-old dragon who was a mage's assistant and the unicorn who had always dreamed of creating beauty simply danced. As they had all those years and loops ago, at the Grand Galloping Gala.

\* \* \*

><p>"That was amazing," Magnum informed his elder daughter absently, as the storm of applause died away. "You seemed more like one- one <em>person</em>, than two."

The couple looked embarrassed.

"No, don't," he added, looking a little more on the ball. "I know the feeling â€" compliments seem strange, sometimes. But it's all true. I take it that piece had some meaning to you?"

"It was the last dance the night she consented to be my girlfriend," Spike explained.

Rarity chuckled. "As I recall, I asked you."



"Right. Well, if we're doing things traditionally..." Magnum looked the question at the two of them, and they nodded. "That means I'm to dance with your wife at some point tonight."

"Why not now?" Rarity asked. "I'm sorry to put it this way, Dad, but I'd really rather get it out of the way and get back to Spike."

"I know the feeling," Pearl contributed.

\* \* \*

><p>{Richardson}<p>

Rainbow Dash looked around the reception hall with a funny crinkling of her brow in confusion. Somepony was missing, two actually. Well, four someponies who should be there if she knew anything about the personality of one of them. Since they had somehow looped in without replacing Daring Do this time, they had to be free. So where the bark were they?

They weren't by the drink table; just Applejack was there and watching her cider warily. Berry Punch must have been spiking it for Spike again.

None of them had been thrown into the cake. Though one would run screaming from Pinkie as if she would suck out his soul or something. She rarely ever did that at her mega-parties anymore! Not since the MiniParty Incident! Though, on a plus side Blueblood had run from the building after seeing the cake. That had been good. Poor stallion had run right into the battalion of mental health doctors outside, too.

None of them were harassing the mares, which was odd. Two of them at least tried most of the time, and a third one of the quartet could at least hold a nice conversation. This was getting pretty weird. Nothing was going wrong in the reception hall, everypony was behaving themselves, and it was making the frogs of Dash's hooves sweaty and itching like she had just been dropped into one of their novels. She was missing something, and as the unofficial bouncer of the wedding missing something was really starting to sour her mood.

She looked out over the guests and the reception, and frowned. Twilight had gotten with Pinkie and made sure that the guests would be lured away from the 'narratively convenient set of windows' that made up one side of the hall. The windows that Dash stood under, actually. Like straw and poison ivy was anypony going to cause some kind of ruckus by breaking through the windows, 'cause she had a bit of her unicorn magic going to reinforce the windows. Nope, Eeno! No pony was going to get through them, they'd just bounce off like Pinkie Pie vs. Gravity without wings!

But what in the hay was that noise?

"aaaaaaaaaaaaAAHHHHHHH~!"

One window stood firm against the impact of two bodies against it, reverberating against the stained glass in the painful way that only bodies could. The other window shattered harmlessly by the

outstretched hoof of a far more savvy individual, and Captain Jack Sparrow and Commander Cane came screaming through the sudden opening in a high arc as the uniformed stallion clung to his shabbily dressed partner. Wings flailed about as Sparrow tried to make their landing dignified, only for Cane to cling harder and accidentally bring them to a tumbling halt in the wide open space Twilight had left for them. A moment later saw a grappling hook flung through the shattered window (which oddly looked more like crystalline sugar rather than glass) and reeled back to hook upon the windowsill.

Ludicrous Gibbs, Captain Sparrow's second in command was the first to poke his head over the windowsill, followed by Cane's yeoman, Jurgen. The two earth ponies had the good graces to look ashamed as they climbed through to tumble to the floor atop Dash. "Apologizes, one and all. It seems that a rather dreadful fright came upon the Commander when he read the guest list for some reason. Something about the 'God of Laughter' out to eat his soul, or some rot. This was the only way we could get him in the building without him teleporting away from the doors."

Pinkie seemed to almost materialize before the quartet, holding up a flask of something for Jack who gratefully took it. For Cane, she rose up onto her hind legs and hugged him close. The poor Commander 'gleep'ed in terror and froze up as she rubbed his nose. "Candy! Oh I'm so glad to see you again! Oh, I thought I wouldn't, with the way you were always running away, but now I can throw a party for you after this party! C'mon and mingle, nopony will bite!"

Candy Cane twitched a little as he tried to squirm out of Pinkie's grip, which only convinced her to hug him harder as her mane pushed his hat off.

"Mate, mate, Oi! Stop that, you're embarrassing yourself, mate!" Jack hooked a leg around Cane's shoulder, tearing him away from Pinkie in the process. "Matey, we have been invited to the wedding of the... ever, really. Everyone who is anyone anywhere in the multiverse has been invited. And they're all seeing you make a fool of yourself because of one mare. Why, it might even make them think that you're in love with her of all the silly things."

"But-but-"

"Yes, yes. The Eye of Parties, and all that. I know. But really, how many times was that?"

"Three hundred and sixty seven times." Lemon Rush held up a glass of Berry Punch's special punch in a toast to the good Captain.

"See, an utter non-event in the grand scheme of things."

"But Eternal Parties!"

"Not such a bad way to go, mate. I like to try and pretend every single day is an eternal party. Makes life worth living." Jack took his leg off of Cane's shoulders before picking up the Commander's hat and brushing it off for him. Two hooves jammed it down on Cane's head before Jack spun him around with his wings and shoved him towards the bride and groom. "Now go apologize to them for trying to refuse their invitation and for making me make a dramatic entrance."

Dash dusted herself off, shaking out the disorientation of having two stallions land on her. She almost scowled at Gibbs and Jorgen, but stopped as the yeoman pulled an entire broom and dustpan set out of his ever-present saddlebags and smiled in the way that Fluttershy did, squeaks and all before starting to sweep up the mess that had been made. Wait, that hadn't come out of a subspace-no! If she looked into his saddlebags like last time, she'd go crazy again trying to figure it out. Just leave it be!

"Sorry about ruining your record, luv. Poor fellow was beside himself when he got that invitation from Pinkie."

"Oh, uh... well, okay. Just don't do it again."

"Of course not. I'd have to go outside, away from the beautiful, bountiful rum. I actually wanted to come in through the front door, truth to tell. But it seems that today--"

"No Captain Jack Sparrow jokes."

"Sorry."

\* \* \*

><p>Shining stood, to give the first of the customary speeches.<p>

"If I said everything that I feel about this, it'd take all morning and completely ruin my reputation with the trainees. So I'll confine it to a few salient points.

"First, embarrassing stories about the bride and groom. As for the bride, well, allow me to inform you all of an incident when we were taking bids for the tailoring of the guard dress uniforms."

Rarity started, eyes wide.

"Well, it all started fine, as these things do. But... well, she was halfway through fitting Sergeant Shield into his outfit when my sister came around to ask for her help with a dragon..."

Rarity put her head in her hooves, as the story went on.

It had actually been several loops ago, but she had indeed left the poor sergeant pinned into a dress uniform mid-tailoring session for about five hours. Not one of her prouder moments.

"The poor chap's still a little nervous around pins," Shining concluded, to chuckles. (As it happened, Shield was sometimes â€" including this time â€" a deep-cover changeling, so the version from this loop would know not to contradict the story.)

Then he looked at Spike, and grinned. "As for the groom â€" I've got several more years to work from with him!"

Spike winced. As he'd half-feared, Shining started with the time a half dozen Stalliongrad notables had hidden behind a convenient pillar at the approach of 'the dragon', before discovering that said dragon was more engrossed in a lollipop, being about aged three at the time.

\* \* \*

><p>{Starfata}<p>

Pearl had been listening to the speeches intently, every name she didn't know and every incident she hadn't heard about carefully memorised. In fact, she had been listening so intently that she was shocked when Twilight Velvet gave her a small nod to let her know it was her turn to make a speech.

She didn't let it show as she stood up. "Rarity always had an eye for quality. Even before she got that Cutie Mark of hers. Thing was, she didn't always spend enough time looking. She sometimes gave folks a little too much credit, which isn't a bad thing. But it meant that she got hurt when they proved they didn't deserve it. So, she stopped looking for the good in people to spend more time looking for good gems to go on those dresses of hers."

Pearl nodded to her new son-in-law. "Now I guess she'll be looking for them to feed to you Spike."

There was a smattering of laughter at this.

"Here's to Rarity and her best find yet! May they share many treasures in their life together, literal or not." Pearl finished with a flourish.

\* \* \*

><p>Magnum smiled at his daughter when it was his turn.<p>

"I always expected this day would come. Truth be told, I wasn't expecting it to be quite so soon. In a way, that little trick of Discord's was the best and worst thing to happen to me."

Discord made an ironic little bow. Then tied it onto his goatee.

"My daughter Rarity grew up, from a young mare finding her way in the adult world to a strong woman secure in her standing, with as close a group of friends as her mother and I ever could have dreamed, and a fiancÃ©, now her husband, she's head over hoofs for â€" and who loves her every bit as much as she loves him."

"It's everything your mother and I ever wanted for you my darlin'. I just wish we'd been there to see it happening. Still, we're here now. And we'll always be here for you, even though you don't need us as much now."

\* \* \*

><p>{Jcogginsa and Filraen, plus several for the messages}<p>

"This is, quite frankly, the most daunting thing I've ever been asked to do, and given my history, that says a lot. Trust me," Twilight began.

She directed the attention of her audience to the couple "Rarity, my friend who I first met at the Summer Sun Celebration what seemed lifetimes ago. Spike, my little brother and number one assistant,

whom I hatched myself. I've had so much time to get to know you both in and out of Equestria that I can't believe we've lived through so much. After all this time, I don't know how to put it into words. How could I use words to describe Rarity and her generosity? How could I describe Spike and his Loyalty? These two were family in all but blood to me for years, no ifs, ands, or buts about it. Words can't convey what they feel, or what I feel, about this day. They just can't."

She took a deep breath. "I'm not going to wish you luck because you won't need it, I know you took all the time in the world to make yourselves absolutely sure to make this step. Just follow your hearts and I know you'll have a wonderful life together."

During the customary applause, however, Twilight didn't move from her place, and by the time the stomping ended Twilight had produced a scroll. "By the way, I have some messages from some ponies who couldn't make it today:

"'Rarity, I hope you've been fine. Knowing someone like us who was going to have a real wedding was the biggest surprises I've had in a lot of time. So, in the case I can't get to the wedding: I know I'm going to be in a few universes' worth of trouble when, not if, the knowledge of your wedding spreads... so you better share a good time as a married couple so at least I know it's in part worth it. You and Equestria deserve it. Hoping to see you again, Ranma "Rapid Hooves" Saotome.'

"'Rarity, Spike. I never in a thousand years thought you two were going to have a get married but I'm glad you found happiness on each other. Now we're going to get our Wild Horse, so wish us luck. Best of wishes, Nanoha "Starlight Breaker" Takamachi.'"

"When I saw you I knew I didn't need to do anything to get you together. In fact, I based a few plans around it. Love each other always. Tea's Tech."

"Your passion is pure and strong, so..." Twilight sighed, facehooving. "...have loads of mindblowing sex for me. Signed Wild Temptress, Pinkie's brother on the throne." Also known as Slaanesh, but...

Various eyes turned to the pink mare, who shrugged awkwardly. "It's a long story."

\* \* \*

><p>{Dalxein}<p>

Big Mac stood when the first speeches were done, and the floor opened to general speakers. Clearing his throat, he started. "Well, for as long as I've known the two of yeh, you've both been generous, kind, loyal and at least when yer' not prarkin' some poor sap, honest, with everypony ya met." This was met with sheepish chuckles. "That said, whenever ah see the two of yeh together, there's always laughter and joy. Always some kind of magic. Ah figure the both of yeh have enough Harmony to last as long as yeh'd like it to."

\* \* \*

><p>{misterq}<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie Pie bounced up in front of the happy couple.<p>

She gave a big grin and started, "I'm not that great with speeches, since I know I tend to ramble on and on a little bit, sometimes, often, most every single time. So I think what I want to say to you both can be best summed up with the following interpretive dance."

Then Pinkie sat on her haunches, smiled at her friends, shook a little; then suddenly took off upwards like a glitter-trailing rocket. A hundred feet in the air, a wave of brightly colored confetti exploded outwards from her like a firework.

While the little paper streamers fell, Pinkie simply ignored gravity and stayed up in the air. Then she pulsed once with pink magic and exploding again with far more intensity. A wave of pink magic spread out from the pony-shaped epicentre. Wherever it passed, balloons and streamers appeared and lazily made their way down. Fancy customized party hats fell onto the heads of every party goer.

Ciaphas took off his and stared at it. If there had been a legion composed entirely of silly children's party clowns, this would be the hat their commissar would wear. With a long sigh, he placed it back firmly on his head.

Pinkie, still suspended in midair, folded herself into an almost ball shape, and then exploded for a record third time. The pink burst of light was a blinding flash. When all eyes managed to re-adjust, there on the plates in front of them was each attendee's favourite desert in cupcake or tart size.

With that, the pink pony slowly floated down to the ground. "Congratulations, you two!" she shouted right before a twenty one party cannon salute went off, sending one final burst of confetti into the air. Pinkie gave the happy couple a curtsy and a little bow towards the rest of the audience. She started to make her way back to her seat, but stopped mid-step and seemingly vanished " only to reappear between Spike and Rarity.

"Silly me. Almost forgot to do this!" Pinkie said and pulled them both into a big hug.

\* \* \*

><p>{Masterweaver}<p>

The strange ape creature walked up to the podium. "Greetings Equestrians! You all may know me as that weird monster that the drunk brought home! But my name is Jenny Everywhere."

There was a smattering of awkward chuckles.

"I first met Rarity and Spike while I was jumping across realities. Yes, I can do that, for some reason." Jenny shrugged. "I can't always control exactly where I land, though. It's been... oh, I don't know how long since I've seen my own home. I don't know if I'll ever see

it again. So when I stumbled across other creatures that had been flung out of their reality, even ones that looked as fanciful as you lot do â€" I swear I had toys when I was a little girl that looked just like you, really! Well, I decided to hook up with them."

She swirled her drink. "Over the course of twelve years we all had so many experiences, good, bad, dangerous, dull... and all the ponies would talk about Equestria. And I figured, if I never found my own home, this might be a good enough place to settle down. Today, though, I've realized something. It's not the land that makes this world great. It's the ponies, the dragons, the griffons... the people. And of those people, I can say without a doubt that Rarity and Spike here, they are amongst the greatest of your paragons. Not perfect â€" who is? But they get so close that you forget it sometimes. And when they're working together, I just... wow. Just wow, ponyfriends. WOW."

Jenny lifted her glass. "You two, I'm not going to wish you a happy ending. I don't believe in endings. They're just kaput, and that's it. I'm going to wish you a long life together, in love and harmony and whatnot. Live for each other, Rarity and Spike, and show Equestria just what it can become. Huzzah! And... yeah, okay, I suck at speeches, next please!"

\* \* \*

><p>Discord stood. "They beat me at my own game."<p>

He sat down again.

On seeing some exasperated looks, he shrugged. "What? You're lucky I'm behaving at all."

\* \* \*

><p>{Masterweaver}<p>

"Let me start off by saying I have the best spy network in Equestria." Chrysalis smirked at the crowd. "It takes training to spot a changeling, we have a hive mind, and I know that at least ten of my subjects are here right now."

There was suspicious muttering and furtive glances.

"So, I can say positively that I know exactly how Spike and Rarity lived their lives, before and after the portal incident. These two are some of the best individuals I know, not because they were born that way but because they crafted themselves into wonderful ponies. And as a creature that feeds off love, I can tell you that... well, even with my thousands of children, we're going to be well fed for a \_week.\_ To Rarity and Spike, true wonders of the world!"

\* \* \*

><p>{Stainless Steel Fox}<p>

Applejack took her turn. "I ain't much for speechifyin' but friends like Rarity and Spike deserve my best effort."

She looked over at the radiant bride. "Rarity, we don't always see

eye to eye, and that's fine, because we're friends anyway. But two things I reckon I can get behind. First, it'd take a stallion in a million to be worthy of some-pony like you; luckily, that's what you found, even if he ain't a stallion. Second, you both deserve all the happiness each of you can bring the other."

Then she turned to Spike. "As for you, Spike, little buddy, I still remember all that time ago when Rarity was kidnapped by Diamond Dogs, and you were there fantisizing about rescuing her like a knight on Shining Armour..." There were chuckles from a few guests, and a giggle from Cadence as she snuggled up against her husband. "... I remember I told you to 'Whoa there, lover-boy!'. Back then I figured you were just having crazy dreams, but it looks like dreams can come true, if you work hard enough at them. I won't say I hope and pray that this is everyting you dreamed and wished for, because I know for plumb certain that it's gonna be. So, I just want to say, 'Go there, lover-boy!'"

"May your life together be everything you want it to be, because it couldn't happen to two finer people."

\* \* \*

><p>{Masterweaver}<p>

Fluttershy got up to the podium. "Um. Well. Here it is. All I have to say is... it's about time you two!"

\* \* \*

><p>{Filraen}<p>

After Fluttershy ended her speech a small white figure poked her foreleg. The pegasus looked down to see it was Angel bunny who was holding an envelope towards her.

"What is it, Angel? Do you have a speech for me to read?"

The white rabbit nodded.

"Sure," the pegasus took the letter from Angel and started to read. \_"Spike, you owe me fifteen bits."\_

As laughs sounded around the hall and Spike faceclawed, Fluttershy looked Angel with a questioning look. The rabbit just made a gesture encouraging her to continue.

\_"You bet you'd teach me that card trick of yours before your wedding,"\_ Fluttershy continued as Angel smirked towards the groom, \_"and I can't think on any better way to win a bet. Congratulations you two and be happy."\_

After Spike and Angel nodded once to each other both Fluttershy and Angel stepped down for the next speech.

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetie Belle hesitantly took the stand. "Okay. First thing I have to say is, I'm really happy for my sis. I may not have spent as much time as I'd like to have with her â€" especially because of...



you know... but I can tell that he makes you really happy."<p>

She nodded. "That's what's important about this, as I understand it."

"Anyway. Spike, take care of my sis, and... oh, who am I kidding." She pointed grandiosely towards the dragon. "Coolest. Brother in law. Ever!"

\* \* \*

><p>With the soft sound of paws, a large wolf walked gently up to the front.<p>

"I'll admit that I don't know Rarity as well as I really should," she began, softly. "But I do know Spike. And I'm sorry to perhaps put a damper on things, but... it's something people should know â€" because it shows in a way that really matters how good he is."

She took a breath, then continued. Her eyes glistened with unshed tears. "Without going into all the sordid details, he was instrumental in saving me from suicide â€" because he was there, and because he went out of his way to help, and because he was so careful to avoid pushing me further in a way that might go wrong."

There was nearly complete silence in the room as she raised a paw, and pointed directly at Rarity. "You are one lucky pony, Rarity. And I only wish I knew you well enough to say how lucky I'm sure Spike is, too."

\* \* \*

><p>From the memoirs of Ciaphas "Candy" Cain, Hero of the Imperium.<p>

When I discovered that, despite my best precautions, I had ended up within close proximity of the very being I had been so assiduously avoiding for the last two years, Pinkamena Pie, I will freely confess that my legs turned to water and my first instinct was to run like there was artillery coming in.

Nevertheless, on sighting the presence of Lord Russ, I eventually recovered myself with the sure knowledge that, at least, any damnation that occurred would be technically his fault.

So I kept to myself, out at the periphery of the wedding reception, for the most part. Jorgen was invaluable in the assistance he provided, largely in that he supplied me with the really rather excellent wine that had been laid on while staying close enough that I was within his comforting â€" though somewhat malodorous â€" aura.

But, duty calls us all before the Golden Throne in time (though not me if I can help it), and so I eventually found myself called to the main podium to give a speech.

I had to draw on my not considerable reserve of knowledge about the happy couple, and my not inconsiderable reserve of platitudes, to compose a hasty peroration which would hopefully mean that I was at least allowed to have continued access to the wine.

"Assembled gentles all," I began, turning to walk to one end of the small stage, "I have seen many strange sights in my time, and not a few battlefields. I have seen the great and the terrible that all sentient beings are capable of" along with that small contribution made by my own humble self."

Frankly, the only contribution I had made to the universe as a whole was some trenchant food criticism and a lot of not dying. But, as ever, my pretence of modesty fed the already inflated opinion of me that most of the audience held, proving once and for all that cynicism applies equally to the actions of man and xeno.

"It would not be fair for me to say that I have a basis for comparison between my own experiences and those which these two will soon face,"{1} for if nothing else weddings are somewhat rare on battlefields, "but nevertheless it seems to me that what is well begun is half done, and this beginning to a marriage is a good sign for the future. May you both have the best of luck, many years together, and hopefully spend relatively few of them in mortal fear for your life." I paused, to let the words sink in. "If you do, you'll be one up on me."

That awoke laughter in the crowd, though once more I was completely sincere.

"Not bad, Ciaphas," Lord Russ commented to me as I returned to my place. "Or is it \_Candy\_?"

I shrugged, still somewhat awkward talking with one of the children of the Emperor himself, even after so long" especially when the Child of the Emperor is nine years old and a bright yellow pony.

"Ah, Commissar," Jurgen said, trotting smartly over. "I managed to locate some of the local \_reserve\_ whiskey" you might find it of interest."

I took the bottle. "Thank you, Jurgen," I replied automatically, pouring myself a generous measure" then stopped, noticing a label hanging about the neck of the bottle.

In black hand" hoof? - writing on a bright pink card, it read:

\_Sorry for scaring you!\_

The question of what, precisely, to do with the bottle's contents took me several agonising minutes to resolve.

{1: Liar. - Amberley.}

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie took the podium. "My speech is as follows!"<p>

Applejack tensed up.

"Trixie first met Rarity in... a somewhat less than promising manner," Trixie admitted. "And did not encounter Spike until after

Discord's incident. But nevertheless, she is able to see quality when she sees it." An embarrassed cough. "Eventually. So, in the vein of a unique conclusion to a speech â€" something I understand to be important:"

She paused, dramatically.

"Look out the window."

They did.

There was nothing there.

When they turned back to Trixie, she was shaking a watch. "Ah. It appears Trixie's watch is fast. \_Now\_ look out the window!"

They did again.

For a moment, there was nothing. Then colourful explosions and lights blossomed across much of the sky, spelling out a message in firey letters.

\_CONGRATULATIONS AND GOOD LUCK!\_

\* \* \*

><p>{Elmagnifico}<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The letters hung there for a moment before being broken by an explosion of prismatic light, which scattered the fireworks into spirals and backcurrents of pyrotechnic art.<p>

Rainbow Dash, accompanied by her trademark contrail, arrived in the wake of the flash through a conveniently-open window. She did a perfect two-point landing, coming to a screeching halt in what the more physically savvy onlookers figured must be a violation of some law of motion, and pivoted.

She held one hoof up, indicating the happy couple. Behind her, the distant display was still playing out, with six wedge-shaped contrails of clean air cutting into it, until the roiling mass of rainbow and fire was shaped into a new series of letters.

Before any in the audience could figure out who or what they were supposed to pay attention to, the sound arrived.

It could have just been the acoustics of the chamber, or it might have been some crazily advanced pegasus magic. It might even have been everyone's imagination.

What the assembled beings got out of the incredibly loud detonation, however, was "WHO'S AWESOME? YOU'RE AWESOME!"

Satisfied her message had been delivered, Rainbow Dash turned and pointed at the now-fully-formed message made from her sonic rainboom, highlighted by the approaching Wonderbolts. The rapidly-dissipating mix of rainbow and explosive energy clearly said "From all of us". And, while the grand majority of eyes were on the sky, two blue

hooves bumped, and a unicorn and pegasus winked at each other.

Definitely 20% cooler.

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia cleared her throat. "Right. Well... as an alicorn, I have a long memory, and have seen many ponies grow and change â€" but Spykoranuvellitar is the dragon for whom I can say that I have seen the same. Spike, I remember your birth. I remember seeing you go off to Ponyville, and I remember the letter Twilight sent about her time there which mentioned the crush you had on a certain unicorn. I am sad that I do not remember all of the time in which you grew, and in which you and Rarity came to truly love one another. That is the only regret I have on this day."<p>

She paused. "And Rarity? Do take good care of him."

\* \* \*

><p>{Kris Overstreet}<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I thought we all agreed," Rarity said, "nothing extravagant for presents. Simple household wares would be more than sufficient."<p>

"But it's a toaster!" Applebloom insisted.

"Darling, it's a flamethrower," Rarity smiled. "I just got one of those."

Spike ignored the crack, admiring the sleek wand and the well-polished flame reflector around the tip. "Don't mind her," he said. "I love it!"

"I made it myself!" Applebloom grinned.

"Aw, darn it," Sweetie Belle pouted. "I got you a toaster, too."

Rarity unwrapped the gift in question and stared for a moment. "Sweetie, that's an adjustable-output pony-portable plasma anti-tank cannon."

"It has a 'toast' setting," Sweetie said. "It's in between 'sunburn' and 'political protest.'"

There was a crunch of cardboard and wrapping paper.

"Oh, dear me!" Celestia giggled. "I'm ever so clumsy, I'm afraid I just stepped on my gift for you! I'll just return it and bring you a replacement after your honeymoon."

Rarity raised an eyebrow. "May we ask what it was, Your Highness?"

"A blender," Celestia said just a little too quickly. "Definitely not

a toaster." And definitely not a small magic-powered sun with a million years' worth of fusible hydrogen built in.

"Aw, I bought a blender too," Scootaloo muttered, leaning against a jumbled mass of wrapping paper three times her size. It was shaped suspiciously like a rotary multi-barrel cannon.

\* \* \*

><p>{FanOfMostEverything, Gym Quirk}<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I got you a salad shooter!" Pinkie produced... something out of her mane.<p>

"Oh, uh, thank you, Pinkie." Rarity took hold of the... gift in her magic and contemplated it. It appeared to be the cheeriest firearm imaginable, from the daisy on the pink stock to the smile decals on the unusually wide barrel. More than anything, it looked like a hoofheld party cannon.

"It's a hoofheld party cannon! I call it a funderbuss. You can shoot salads, jewels, dresses, just about anything that can fit, really."

"I... see." Rarity opened the breech. "Oh, thank larch, it's unloaded." It was also much larger on the inside.

Pinkie shuffled her hooves. "I'd have gotten something better, but you both already seem so happy, I couldn't think of any way to make you even happier."

Spike smiled. "It's perfect, Pinkie, really." Rarity nodded.

Yet another hug followed.

Then Pinkie's eyes widened. "Oh! Oh! Because I wanted to be sure I didn't make this a not-party, I brought extra things! Here, have a cutlery set!"

"Pinkie, dear? About this cutlery set..."

"Yeeessssssss?"

"I could be mistaken, but isn't that the Sword of Kahless?"

"Might be..."

"And the paring knife bears a striking resemblance to Orcrist..."

"Hmmm...I guess if you look at it just right..."

"Also, Spike already has a lightsaber. Come to think of it, I'm pretty sure he has three."

"But this one's multi-spectral with variable-length blade control..."

\* \* \*

><p>{elmagnifico}<p>

Macintosh looked on as Spike and Rarity opened his gift, his coat reddening as they did.

"Sorry fer gettin' th' same thing as everyone else. Ah guess ah figured ya'll needed a toaster."

It was, in fact, a toaster. A small, silver box with two slots in the top and a standard thaum-plug with adapter for traditional electricity.

Whilst Rarity was starting on the next gift, Mac grabbed Spike to the side. His whisper was barely audible over the ambient chatter.

"There's also a barrel of a lil' somethin'-somethin' me an' Berry whipped up situated behind th' barn ifn' y' want to come by and pick it up later."

A melodious vocalization made the both of them blanch.

"I heard thaaaaaaaat!"

\* \* \*

><p>{Masterweaver}<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis trotted up to Rarity with a smile. "I would have given this to you earlier, but I know how... sensitive you are about these things." She produced a thick tome. "Volume one of five."<p>

Rarity glanced at the title and blushed furiously, quickly stuffing the book into her own subspace pocket. "Um. Thank you dear, I... um."

\* \* \*

><p>{Detective Ethan Redfield}<p>

And then they came to Discord's present. It was long, mostly rectangular shaped. Rarity eyed it warily as Spike tore open the paper. There was a moment of stunned silence. Twilight's mouth gaped, "This...what?"

Discord's grin was so wide it could span the Grand Canyon, "Do you like it? I even had it made out of diamonds!"

Rarity tilted her head in confusion, "Discord, it's a door...with a doorknob attached."

Discord shook his head, sending chocolate frogs everywhere, "Put it against a wall and open the door."

Spike placed the door against the wall behind the gift table and twisted the door knob. Somehow, it hung in the middle of the air and

opened to a pocket dimension. Spike's eyes widened as he gazed in, countless monuments from variant loops inside. Rarity also looked inside and gasped. A few seconds later, they turned around, Rarity speaking first with a wry grin, "The statue of Neighborty shaped like me was a nice touch. But why did you put it next to the chicken farm instead of the pyramids of Appleloosa?"

\* \* \*

><p>{Starfata}<p>

Nyx strutted forward, ignoring the 'awws' from everyone still watching. Filly alicorns inspired them even more than regular fillies, she was almost used to it.

"As Princess, we have decided to gift the happy couple with this." Nyx said, holding out a box. "A super hot cocoa fixture kit from myself and Princess Luna. We hope that it suits both your palates, as Princess Luna added a vial of unknown substance for Spike."

Apple Bloom pushed a cart forward, a lumpy shape in the middle covered by tarp. "This here is from the Cutie Mark Crusaders â€" though ah think Scoots had somethin' else..." She dropped a small curtsy in the court style, earning almost as many 'how cute!'s' as Nyx had. "We hope you like it. Turns out, none of us had a sculpting Cutie Mark."

The couple shared a wary glance, before Apple Bloom unveiled the sculpture with a sharp pull on the tarp.

Spike stared at the item underneath. "Is that..."

"A model of Beauty and Beast's Castle made of fossilised tree resin? Yep. The sap didn't work right, so we came up with a plan B." Apple Bloom nodded. Apple Jack had loaned her the movie after she'd made her first working VHS player.

\* \* \*

><p>{Masterweaver}<p>

\* \* \*

><p>As the airship floated away, Rarity tossed the bouquet overboard. Dozens of mares leapt for it, but it suddenly shot up, split in two, and zipped to the back of the crowd. A very surprised Chrysalis and Trixie stared at the flowers now behind each other's ears.<p>

Twilight glanced at their growing blushes, before giving Cadance a flat look. "I should never have shown you that invisible magic trick."

\* \* \*

><p>Cadance smiled as the airship went over the horizon.<p>

Well... smile was, to put it mildly, an understatement. Her lips were parted, the corners curled upward, and her eyes wide with an amount of bliss that would be disturbing even on Pinkies face.

Shining noticed she had gone completely still. "Um... Dear? You all right?"

"...eeeeeeee..."

Twilight's ears perked, her own eyes snapping wide as her horn glowed. A thick magical shield appeared around the pink alicorn just before she opened her mouth, reverberating as the bearer of magic fought to keep it contained.

"Sis, what's going on here?!"

"I've seen this before sometimes!" Twilight managed, wincing. "It's called cutie mark overload-augh! Shining, help me power this! She'll deafen everypony if it snaps!"

The stallion complied, pouring his own magic into the shield. "Cutie mark overload? I've never heard of that!"

"Just... basically, picture doing your special talent so well that you're overcome by ultimate euphoria. Most of the time it just results in fainting, but this was a big wedding and Cadance is an alicorn."

By now, the pink pony was frothing at the mouth as she jumped for joy, still within the shield. Shining sighed. "I should have seen this coming, is there anything we can do?"

"Keep her contained until she's unconscious. When she wakes up, she'll be really happy." Twilight sighed. "After you've got her calmed you should probably report to a doctor..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Nearly time," Spike said quietly.<p>

"I know." Rarity glanced up at the clock on the dresser. "Only a few minutes left."

She snuggled deeper into his arms.

"I don't want it to end," she said eventually. "It's official, this time. And next time it's back to sneaking around and keeping it quiet."

"Well, we can enjoy the fused loops at least," Spike volunteered. "Nothing to stop us there."

"I know, it's just-" she broke off. "It's... you know."

"It feels like such a short time." Spike nodded, flicking the covers the rest of the way off their bed with his tail. "And it is. But we've got a lot of short times together from now, love. It'll add up."

Rarity sighed.

Spike eyed the clock. "About thirty seconds."



"Don't, please," Rarity pleaded.

"Alright." He put his arms more tightly around her.

"I love you," he whispered.

"I love you too," she replied with a fierce passion.

There was a lurch-

\* \* \*

><p>"...huh?" Spike said, several seconds later. "Did something go wrong?"<p>

"Don't know," Rarity mumbled.

He shifted his weight, trying to get up, and Rarity made a displeased noise.

"Wait a second," he said, eyes fixed on the clock. "That's changed."

"Pardon?" Rarity relinquished her grip, shaking her head, and followed his gaze.

It was at least two hours back from when they'd last seen it.

"There's something under it, look..." she pointed out, and lit her horn to bring it down.

When Spike plucked it out of the air, it turned out to be a plain white card.

You're welcome.

-Loki, Sleipnir, Hel, Fenris and Jormugandr.

"Aren't most of those Sleipnir's family?" Rarity asked.

"Er..." Spike ventured, nervously. "Did you Ascend last night?"

"No," Rarity said slowly, her wings moving slightly as she noticed their presence. "What's going-"

Loop memories settled.

"...I have to admit," King Spykoranuvellitar the Just said distantly, "...that's one hay of a wedding gift..."

Queen Rarity the Wise blinked. "Oh. Oh."

"Well, you said it was too soon," Spike ventured. "How does another twelve hundred years sound?"

Rarity reached into her Pocket and materialized her wedding ring, motioning for Spike to do the same. "Marvellous, darling."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:This is the ceremony and wedding reception part of the set, along with a little more.<br>The situation with the speeches, gifts and so on is a little chaotic and hard to keep track of in terms of who contributed what. More or less, all the named contributors helped out to varying degrees and I'm grateful to all of them.  
>And at the end? Well, Loki and his family take care of their assigned loopers.<p>

## 55. Chapter 55

### 51.1

"...huh," Spike said, blinking at the deep sinkhole which had just appeared where Pinkie Pie had been. "I did not expect that."

"Neither did she, which is a bit strange," Twilight agreed, looking down the hole. "Huh. Diamond Dogs, I think."

"Well, of course we have to save her," Spike pointed out. "I mean, the mines are no place for a pony."

Twilight gave him a look. "I can't believe you said that with a straight face."

"Neither can I..." Spike admitted. "Right. Plan?"

The ground erupted.

"You keep pink po-ny!" a Diamond Dog said, throwing a chattering Pinkie out of the hole. "She too talky."

With a rumble of earth, he sealed the hole again.

"Hiya!" Pinkie beamed. "Hey, you're upside down!"

Twilight facehoofed. "So much for that."

Spike picked up Pinkie and flipped her back over onto her hooves. "There you go."

"Thanks! Hey, want to go get the others? I want to give those dogs a party! The place they live is so dull and brown, and I know \_just\_ how to brighten up a dull brown earth place!"

\* \* \*

><p>"This is going to go wrong," Twilight said calmly. "I can tell."<p>

"Don't be a silly parade-raining pony, Twilight!" Pinkie replied, grinning. "Okay, RD, go!"

Pinkie's theory, such as it was, could be summed up as follows.

She was at a rock farm, and she was miserable.

Seeing a Sonic Rainboom cured her.

Therefore, seeing a Sonic Rainboom would cure Diamond Dogs of their nastiness.

All things considered, it was probably a good thing Dash could manage hairpin turns at supersonic speed.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight and Spike looked over the huge sinkhole.<p>

"I can't tell if this went wrong or not..." Twilight muttered.

On the one hoof, the Diamond Dogs were all deafened by the explosion.

On the other hoof, the Rainboom had shaken gems and other useful rocks and crystals out of the walls of the Dog tunnels.

On the third hoof, it had made the tunnels all collapse.

And, on the fourth and final hoof, they didn't know who to either blame or thank.

"Is there a lesson in this?" Twilight asked.

"What about, don't let Pinkie plan things," Spike deadpanned.  
"Especially not when she's on the hyper end of her baseline."

\* \* \*

><p>51.2<p>

"Nuh."

Applebloom's eyes didn't want to open. Her pulsing headache might be a clue as to the reason, as might the fact that what little she could sense of the rest of her body suggested she was sprawled half-off some sort of furnishing. Her wings were crushed under her, and her horn appeared to be in contact with something.

Her throat felt dry, and her mouth felt like a phoenix had died in it without cleaning up after itself later.

After at least three tries, she cracked an eyelid. The light streaming through it had the intensity of a laser, and she closed it again with a wince.

There was a quiet moan, followed by a slithering sound of fur on satin which ended in a loud \_thud\_. The sound of the impact set up industrial steam-powered triphammers inside Applebloom's skull.

Several seconds of as much mental preparation as one can manage with a headache trying to remove one's head followed, until she gave opening her eye another try. This time, the light had dimmed somewhat from "laser" to "direct sunlight while in space", which was theoretically encouraging.

And so time passed.

After about ten minutes had elapsed, she finally managed to get her eyes open long enough to see something. The bleary picture which emerged was of a deep pile carpet, from a distance of about five inches.

That let her get some of her bearings. She was lying half off one of the couches in the living room. One she shared with... her sisters? Oh, the other Crusaders. Who, like her, were alicorn princesses this loop.

Finally, she worked out what was going on. This was a hangover.

With the name came the realization of a solution. Three tries, and she'd managed to drink one of her hangover cures from her Pocket.

Suddenly feeling much better, Princess Applebloom rolled carefully off the couch and stood up. "That must have been a great night..."

"Shut up, please," Diamond Tiara said in a distant voice. "I think you're using the Canterlot Voice again."

"Nah, DT, you're just hung over." Applebloom stepped around a large stuffed chair to find Tiara lying awkwardly on the floor, face down, a blanket imperfectly covering her. "Here, anti-hangover potion."

Tiara snatched it and drank it in seconds. "You are a lifesaver, 'bloom."

"Ah try."

"Right, where are the others?"

"Well..." Applebloom peered out the window. "If I'm not mistaken, that's Scootaloo dangling from the limb of that tree. Hi, Scoots!"

A crash, a cloud of leaves, and a litany of muffled cursing interspersed with pained moaning drifted up from the courtyard.

"Whoops..." The yellow alicorn blushed. "As for Nyx, I think she was fixin' to get out that self-propelling chariot again."

"That sounds about right," Tiara agreed, pointing to a mass of splinters on one of the tower roofs. An alicorn-shaped hole in the tiles marked where the driver had gone, into what they'd made a storeroom last year.

"Ah, fiddlesticks." Applebloom shook her head. "Ah just fixed that."

"The roof or the chariot?"

"Both."

The door opened.

Princess Sweetie Belle stepped through, flanked by two guards. "I see you're awake."

"Hi, 'Belle," her sisters chorused.

"How'd the evening go?" Applebloom asked. "I can't quite remember it all..."

"Well, the highlight was probably when you challenged the Gryphon Ambassador to a duel..." Sweetie said critically. "Good thing was, he was drunk too, so he just suggested a drinking contest."

"I remember that now," Tiara said, wincing. "Including that I won."

"Ah'd have won if it were cider," Applebloom said defensively. "But y'all slipped in that banana gin..."

"Nyx went a bit mad with that stuff," Sweetie giggled. "Anyway, Diamond is now the Gryphon Ambassador to Equestria."

"How does \_that\_ work?" Tiara asked.

"No idea." Sweetie shrugged. "I assume you should find out, though."

"So, what did Scoots do?" Applebloom got back to the original topic. "And why was she in a tree?"

"Well, after the absinthe ran out and the dances were over, she got that Fokker Triplane you made last month out of storage and she and Nyx had a race." Sweetie shrugged. "Long story short, Scoots managed to accidentally solifidy a cloud as she dove through it and landed in the tree after the Fokker disintegrated. I think the bits are still up there..."

"Right." Tiara counted under her breath, then nodded. "Okay, I think it's my turn to be Designated Ruler tonight. Usual catch-up meeting?"

Both the others present nodded. Whoever was in charge on a given night had to be kept abreast of the events since last time they were the ruling Princess.

Otherwise it was just irresponsible.

\* \* \*

><p>51.3<p>

Twilight was playing around with international law again, this time with the full connivance of an interested Mayor Mare. (In return, Twilight had to do her paperwork for her next time she looped â€" cheap at the price.)

So, the Books and Branches was an independent micronation. So, she'd engineered Cadence as the Element of Magic again.

On the other hand, some things were new.

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight," Celestia began... then stopped, blinking at the surreal scene within the main room.<p>

"What?" Twilight asked, floating serenely about six inches off the floor, with a lidded cup of coffee floating in front of her.

Then, as though nothing was amiss, she sipped some of the coffee from the cup with a straw. It floated gently off once she released it, until a flicker of telekinesis brought it back to rest.

"Hey, Twi?" Spike said from one of the bookshelves, his tail lashed around a convenient handle and his body oriented sideways. "What was that book you were after?"

"Edgar the Griffin's Decline and Fall, please," Twilight replied. "I'd like to take the opportunity to read it without undue strain."

"What is going on?" Celestia asked, a little plaintively.

"Oh, well, you know I made the library an independent nation?" Twilight checked, and Celestia rubbed her forehead with exasperation.

"Yes..."

"Well, I put it to a plebiscite, and a two-thirds majority of Librarian citizens--"

"Meaning both of us," Spike added helpfully, pushing the huge book over towards Twilight.

"Exactly," Twilight picked up the thread again. "Anyway, there was concern that there were some outdated laws still in the statutes. So we repealed the Law of Gravity."

Celestia frowned. Then, carefully, she picked up a small pebble from the floor outside and tossed it into the room. Sure enough, it floated slowly along with the momentum it had started with.

"I see. Well..." The alicorn stopped, and tried a new tack. "I was going to try to persuade you to give up the independence issue, actually. It really is quite a headache, not to mention that I don't particularly see the point."

"Why?" Twilight asked. "I mean, trade and tourism have both picked up substantially."

"Yeah, some pegasus filly came in here to float around a bit yesterday," Spike volunteered. "And also loaning books from the library now counts as trade."

The book finally reached Twilight, and she braked it with a hoof before opening it. Then she looked back at Celestia. "Sorry, I'm being very rude. Would you like some zero gravi-tea?"

She proffered a bulb with a nozzle. The liquid within it did indeed

look like tea with milk.

\* \* \*

><p>51.4<p>

Twilight felt the customary moment of disorientation.

\_Okay, so, taking stock.\_

First off, she was human. Female, which was nice, but with long black hair which only vaguely approximated her normal mane. That was annoying.

She was on the limber of a covered wagon, with a horse hitched to it. \_Sapient horse? No, earth-mundane variant. Pity, it'd be nice to have a companion on the road.\_

That thought touched something off.

\_Ah, the loop memories. \_So she \_did\_ have a companion. In fact-

The head of a Northwest Coast Indian woman poked out of the wagon, two triangular ears perched atop it. "Hi, Twilight."

"Leah, it's good to see you." Twilight smiled. "Any idea where we are?"

"I think so, actually..." Leah paused, thinking. "There were a few loops where I read anything remotely connected to werewolves I could get my paws on, which seems to have been a good choice given where I keep ending up. Remind me to tell you the time I was Moony once. But anyway, this looks like the world of Spice and Wolf."

"That's handy." Twilight said, nodding. "What do you remember?"

"Well, loop memories wise, I'm the local harvest goddess â€" wolf in form, this is my human guise." Leah wagged her ears, winning a giggle from Twilight at her expression. "We're off to find my homeland, I think?"

"Dovetails with what I know," Twilight assured her. "Anything else?"

"Yeah, the books could have been first year economics history course material at any college you'd care to name."

A mischievous expression came over her face. "When I taught undergrads once, I did actually use them as course material. That was fun."

"So you've done economics?" Twilight took a moment to make sure they were on the correct road, and turned back to the fellow Anchor. "Somehow, I wouldn't have thought..."

"Hey, unlike some people my home loop doesn't have crazy super martial arts or hermetic magic or something like that." Leah pulled a small notebook out of the air, and passed it over. "So, for training, I often go for the more... structured choice."

Twilight opened it. "History... Politics... Economics... Architecture... Leah, is this a list of degrees you have?" She flipped through the book, discovering there were at least sixty entries. "That's pretty impressive."

"Yeah, what can I say." Leah shrugged, grinning. "So, how would you improve the economy of this place, given what you know?"

She shrugged again. "Hey, the books are all about discussing economics, why not live up to it?"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight shook her head, hiding a grin. "I'm a bit negative towards thieves, you know."<p>

"Yeah?" The leader of the bandits chuckled, his men echoing him. "Well, we'll just have to cope with the weight of your disapproval."

"Right, right." Twilight raised her voice slightly. "Loss Prevention to the front desk, please."

There was a snarl, and a one-tonne wolf erupted from the covered side of the cart.

"You're fixing that!" Twilight shouted after Leah, as the latter put the fear of Her into the bandit gang. "Leather doesn't grow on trees!"

"No, it grows on bulls," Leah agreed readily, padding back and shifting. "Where's the sewing gear?"

"I don't know, I never need to use it," Twilight replied. "You're the one who keeps wrecking her clothes."

"Hey, if you ever find a way to make a tunic not explode when your body mass goes up by a factor of fifteen, I'm interested." Leah threw a blanket around herself. "Right, can we stop for a bit?"

"Only if you go hunting." Twilight shrugged. "We were planning on stopping in a tavern, if you remember, but if we're going to sleep rough..."

"Sure, sure. Anyone'd think I didn't just save the cargo..."

\* \* \*

><p>51.5 (Masterweaver and misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight."<p>

"Rarity."

"Please tell me you know why we're centipedes."

"Sorry, no."



"Look at me! I'm a grasshopper!" Pinkie Pie bounced around like a pinball.

Applejack hopped onto a fallen crab apple. "Any idea why.."

"No!" Twilight pre-empted.

"Oh my goodness! Oh my goodness!" Fluttershy, the butterfly, flew past her friends happily.

"At least I'm still colorful," a bright, but grumpy Rainbow Dash followed.

"This feels so weird," Spike said as he landed onto a leaf and waved his dragonfly wings, "But at least I still have 'dragon' in my name."

"The night shall last forever!" Nightmare Firefly shouted as she suddenly shut off her glow, "Or at least until daytime. But it will be a little bit darker without my butt light."

"I.. I just don't know anymore," Twilight face palmed with six of her legs at the same time.

"Just look at the bright side, Twi," Rainbow Dash flapped overhead with the butterfly equivalent of a grin on her face, "At least you're not a bookworm."

\* \* \*

><p>51.6 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"What sorcery is this?"<p>

Macintosh took a moment to gather his bearings as he Awoke, glancing over to his... well, not his sister this loop, and from the looks of it more a Replacement than a Genderbent. "Hello there. Welcome to Equestria-

The white stallion started, whirling into what Macintosh recognized as a martial art stance. "This realm is named Equestria? And how have I come to be in this form?" Impressively, he managed to maintain his stance without shifting too much.

"Huh." The farm pony sighed and rolled his eyes. "Ah take it this is yer first fused loop then?" He shut his eyes. "Hrm. 'Cordin' to mah loop memories, yer supposed ta be mah younger brother."

"...I'm sorry?"

"Right, Ah should probably explain things..."

\* \* \*

><p>"So... the constant repeating of time I have been through is <em>not</em> some trick of Aku?"

Macintosh chuckled. "Not 'less this Aku fella's responsible fer breaking Yggdrassil in tha first place. Granted, he seems like tha type ta do it, but from what Ah understand he's just not high enough ta actually have the power." He shrugged. "Anyway, since yer replacing mah sister, that means we've got a bit of farm work to do. Oh, and yer gonna want ta see Twilight. Equestria's a sanctuary loop, but... well, we do have our own dark forces ta deal with. It's yer choice if'n ya want ta help or not."

The white stallion narrowed his eyes. "A samurai always protects the innocent."

"Not impugning yer honor," Macintosh drawled. "Just saying if ya want ta relax, it's fine. We take our hospitality and status as a sanctuary seriously here, and yer a guest. If'n you reckon you need to keep a hoof in to not go spare, fine. If'n reckon you need ta spend the whole loop meditating on a field of flowers, then we'll see nothing nasty interrupts ya." He smiled. "By tha way, what's yer name?"

"...They call me... Jack."

\* \* \*

><p>51.7 (BlankSlate)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight's head tilted so sharply she felt her neck crack. Ponyville had looked completely normal when she'd arrived there. No-one else had been awake, so she'd decided to take a mild vacation and run a vanilla loop.<p>

Now, she was kind of regretting that idea.

The Castle of the Two Sisters was... rather \_different \_from what she'd expected. Instead of the graceful lines and elegant style of the Castle she was used to, \_this \_castle was...

...well, rather obviously actually a \_castle\_. In the sense of a fortified structure, with all the heavy, rugged stonework one would expect from a place designed to withstand an active siege. A forty-foot tall rampart guarded the interior buildings and towers, with sturdy battlements and wall towers at the corners providing cover for the massive (though rusted and, unfortunately, closed) iron portcullis at the gate.

Toss in that the whole thing was actually on a massive promontory sticking out over a lake that didn't exist in the baseline and Twilight was suddenly sure she was sitting in a fused loop.

Right about that moment was when she caught notice of several fliers inbound, coming from the castle. A howl split the air, and Twilight's head jerked down to see what seemed to be a massive diamond dog jump off the walls and run towards her and her friends. Answering cries came from above as five pegasi descended.

Even before they got close, Twilight could clearly see that the approaching pegasi were.. not the normal type. For one thing, their eyes were all glowing a brilliant green-tinged white. A quick glance

down showed that the approaching diamond dog had the same eyeshine.

"Do you think Nightmare Moon has them under a spell, Twilight?" muttered Rarity. "Pony eyes don't... \_glow \_that way."

"I think a better question," Dash butted in, "would be why do they have wings like a bat?"

Twilight shook her head, though the combination was niggling familiar in the back of her mind. Glowing eyes, bat wings, howling...

Four of the fliers stayed above as one descended to land. Twilight set herself, ready to take action... only to realize that the pegasus just kept getting bigger. A moment later, the massive black-maned pegasus landed, and Twilight shivered.

The bat-winged pegasus was even taller than Celestia. More, it was massively built, to the point that in comparison Snowflake was a starveling half-grown colt, though this one had wings appropriate to the great mass of the pegasus.

The eyes flared slightly brighter for a moment before the light faded away, leaving a pair of dark, yet otherwise normal eyes. "What brings you to this Castle?" The voice was deep, powerful, and male.

And \_familiar\_...

Twilight barely kept from yelling aloud. And just as tightly kept her body tense; suddenly relaxing as she now knew (well, 97% certain) that these newcomers weren't a danger to her or her friends would set off suspicions everywhere.

"I am Twilight Sparkle, student and protégé to Her Highness Celestia. I have journeyed here with my friends in search of the magics needed to defeat Nightmare Moon."

The pegasus growled low in his throat. "I and my clan will aid you then. This... Nightmare Moon is our enemy as well." He motioned to those above, who likewise descended.

"Yay!" cheered Pinkie. "So what's your names? We need to get the party planned for new friends!"

"Ach, always with names," grumbled an old brown pegasus with a scar across one eye. "\_Everything\_ must always have a \_name\_."

"It never fails," chuckled the red pegasus with a white mane. He, and the last two pegasi, were all clearly younger, about the age of Twilight and her friends.

Twilight let her gaze wander from a chubby blue pegasus to the last, a green pegasus slightly smaller than the others who had no mane, as their leader nodded firmly.

"I am called Goliath. And this is my clan..."

\* \* \*

><p>51.8 (Dalxein)<p>

The bar was relatively quiet, especially with Berry spending the day at the park introducing her daughter to the wonders of Mac's Own Apple Sorbet Ice Cream.

"It's a nice thing you're doing, making ice cream for the fillies like Ruby, Mac." Cheerilee said from her seat at the bar.

The big pony himself glanced down at her own dish of the confection and rolled his eyes. "Eeyup. For the fillies. Right."

She giggled. "Well, it's still nice. What about Berry though? Are you twoâ€¦?"

That got a snort from the big red. "Yeh know Ah'm not lookin' t' settle down anytime soon. Neither are you for that matter."

Cheery grinned, idly stirring her sorbet. "Doesn't stop a mare from wondering. Berry Punch has gotten to be a fine mare herself after she cleaned up in the loops, you know."

Mac gave her a deadpan look. "Y'all just want more li'l fillies an' colts to school."

"Guilty." She replied with a giggle. It went without saying that there wouldn't be any new little ones until the loops were over, but it didn't hurt to look forward to what could happen then. "Stillâ€¦ isn't there \_any\_ mare that's caught your eye at all?" She said with fluttering eyes.

Mac was about to scold his old friend for her teasing at his single nature when the door slammed open.

"My matchmaking senses are tingling!" Princess Cadence proclaimed as she ran into the room.

The stallion wasn't amused. "Yer 'senses' weren't right the \_last\_ three times you barged in sayin' that, and they aren't right now, dangit!"

"Oh, darn. You're not going to budge on this are you?" Cheerilee faux-moped. "Single to the end, that's our lone stallion Big Macintosh!" She ended in an overdramatic swoon, from which Cadence caught her.

"You like finding ponies their special somepony too, dear?" Cadence asked with a grin.

Cheerilee rolled backwards the rest of the way out of her seat and came up hugging the alicorn. "Do I ever! I love the love that lovingly loves little love-bundles into the world!" Which she would then teach to lovingly love the lovely world they were loved into being on.

"And \_I\_ love the love that lovingly loves two lovers into lovingly loving for love's own sake!" The princess chimed.

The two grinned madly at one another before shouting "MATCHMAKING MARES OF EQUESTRIA, AWAY!" and stampeding out the door to find poor saps to match together.

Mac stared blankly at the door they'd left through.

"Ah really could've stopped this." He muttered with a sigh. "Seems that bein' involved in settin' up the first permanent non-baseline Looper wedding ever ain't enough for her..."

\* \* \*

<p>51.9 (Misterq)<p>

Nothing bothered Pinkie Pie. This was a fairly well known fact about the party pony about town. So when said mare calmly walked into Mac's bar - not hopped or skipped or trotted or sproinged in, but ambled in like a normal pony that was dragging her hooves; he knew that something was not right in Ponyville. The way her mane was twitching - alternating between poofy and straight, was also a massive indication.

It was empty except for the two of them. Cheerilee and Cadence had left a while before and Berry Punch was off with her little one, so that left Mac to place Pinkie's order of an Extra Sugary Pony Colada on her table and take the seat across from her.

After watching her use the straw to stir her untouched drink for several minutes, he finally spoke up, "You want to talk about it?"

Pinkie looked up at him, "Hmm? Hey Maccie. It's nothing really. You know me. Nothing ever upsets me. Unflappable Pinkie Pie. I never even ever had a flap installed."

Mac snorted, "I may not be the element of honesty, but I can smell the road apples from here."

"No, it's true. No flap anywhere on me," the pink mare said with a small smile, which slowly fell as she looked up at her friend, "Fine. It's just.. it's Candy Cane."

Big Mac didn't say anything. Most times, he considered more can be said with silence than with any amount of words.

"It's the way he looks at me. He's scared, terrified," Pinkie continued, "I don't really dislike much of anything, but if I did, then others being scared of me would be on top of the list. I worked really, really hard to change my image when I was in Cane's loop. I was the goddess of bright chaos, of joy and parties and celebration. But the way he looks at me, it just reminded me of growing up, when I was a little Pinkie. I thought I managed to overcome all that with the amount of time I've had in the loops. Guess I hadn't yet."

Mac nodded, "What was it like growing up? You've never done mentioned it much."

Pinkie sighed, "It was.. it wasn't fun. 'If you have the energy to dance, sing, play, talk, laugh, slack off; then you have the energy to work harder,' my dad used to say. They didn't really know what to make of me and my abilities. They didn't know if they had dug too deep or some ancient evil infected me at birth or what. My sisters were mostly normal, but they had each other and kept to

themselves"

"My family celebrated the day I got my cutie mark not because I found my special talent, but because it wasn't one of the many, many they feared it could have been. They never said so, but they were all scared of me. My family, my teachers, my schoolmates. I would also say my friends, but I didn't have any friends that weren't inanimate objects. That's the real reason I moved to Ponyville."

"You thought you were done with other ponies being scared of you, but then Candy Cane freaked out?" Macintosh Apple conjectured, getting to the core of the situation, "And it reminded you what you had worked so hard to overcome?"

Pinkie looked up at him and just nodded.

"Did you know that when I was young, I dreamed of going to Canterlot to study Agricultural Magic on a hoofball scholarship? I wanted to explore new frontiers of Earth Pony magic; or failing that, become a locomotive engineer." Big Mac looked at the pink mare. She was looking at him in understanding, but not with surprise. He made a mental note and continued, "Applebloom was just a little thing when we lost our parents. Granny Smith was getting on in years and we took the help of any of the extended Apple Family that had some free time and a hoof to lend. Apple Jack alternated between being despondent and angry at the world. That came to a head when she left the farm for Manehattan."

"In school, I was also faster and stronger than the other colts. But I had the opposite of your problem. Every pony wanted to be my 'friend'. When I realized that all they wanted was to either bask in my popularity, use me as a social stepping stone, or use me to win the championship game; where the place that truly needed me for me was back home on the farm - that was when I got my cutie mark."

Pinkie sat there thinking, before she asked a question with a small smile, "Is it true that Apple Jack went all Apple Goth for a while?"

"Well, she didn't wear no black make-up or compulsively listen to 'Bauhorse', but eeyep," Big Mac chuckled. Then he looked directly at Pinkie, "But you already knew all that. Just like you knew about my early days - or the fact that you need to keep trying to show Candy Cane that he shouldn't be scared of a pony that once controlled a place that used to be called the Eye of Terror. How did you even wrest the power from Slaanesh?"

"It tried to read my thoughts, so I shredded its mind until it believed that it was a fantastic idea to turn itself into a cupcake. Then I ate a chocolate frosted chaos god," Pinkie waved her hoof dismissively.

"Eeyep, because that ain't terrifying at all," Big Mac collected his thoughts, "So if that isn't the reason, why did you come in here, Pinkie Pie?"

"Because talking to you always makes me feel a little better," said pony looked up at Big Macintosh, "Plus, the awesome drinks."

There was a bit of silence as the stallion-turned-bartender processed the new information. Then he spoke up, "Pinkie, before I was Awake.. Were there loops where we were together?"

Pinkie's wry smile turned into a genuine grin as she slowly leaned over and whispered seven little words into Big Mac's ear.

"I know what you like, Mister Smartypants."

Then she finished her entire drink with one long sip of her straw; and with a half-lidded stare, slowly sauntered out of the bar - her tail swishing provocatively behind her.

Big Mac just stared at the door for a few moments. Then he turned around and started climbing the stairs.

"Eeyep, now's a good time for that cold shower, I reckon," he said.

\* \* \*

><p>51.10 (Indalecio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Cheerilee awoke in a little flat in London. As her memories started to filter in, she could tell this was going to be one of the weirder ones. She was human once more, and that her name was Cheryl Lee and that she was a music teacher, the sitar on the stand in the corner of the room told her what instrument she was proficient in. But that wasn't the source of her confusion.<p>

Her second observation told her she had something on her head. She reached towards it, feeling something cold and metal protruding. Two somethings, one on either side of her head. She panicked for a moment thinking that she was a cyborg, but her loop memories told her that those were EBEs or Electronic Brain Enhancements and that they were detachable. Experimentally, she removed one of the two she was wearing. There was a slight tug, as if she were pulling on a magnet. Once it was free, she felt a noticeable decrease in her mental acuity, as if she'd suddenly experienced a mild hangover. She put it back on her head, it reattaching with a snap, and the fog cleared up again. She also remembered that she could attach more, but that those who did tended to become paralyzed as they became consumed by contemplating the infinite. 'Go easy on your EBEs, indeed.', she thought to her self.

Glancing at the clock, she could tell that if she didn't hurry, she was going to be late. She finished her sandwich, which her third observation told her was made of moths and butter and grabbing her bag, she headed to the window, did some quick calculations and flew off.

\* \* \*

><p>Cheerilee landed a block short of her destination, St. Heathen's Girls School and Conservatory. Thinking of whether to recalculate and fly off, or walk the rest of the distance, her eyes caught site of something. Two kids were spray-painting calculations on the wall. Worst of all, their calculations were wrong.<p>

"Hey! A cosine is adjacent divided by hypotenuse, not the opposite." She said, running towards them. They ran off, leaving their spray cans nearby.

Instead of giving chase, she considered the wall. Picking up one of the cans, and shaking it, she sprayed a strikethrough for the errant formulae, and put the correction above. Satisfied with the result, she put down the spray can and continued on to her destination.

\* \* \*

><p>It only took a few more minutes before she arrived at her destination, her classroom.<p>

"Hello, class. Sorry I'm late. I'll take attendance and then we can begin".

She started calling out names until she came to one in particular.

"Twilight MacSparkle." She looked over in the direction of the purple haired girl.

"Here!" She winked and Cheerilee nodded her head in acknowledgement.

\* \* \*

><p>Proceeding from there, she began her usual music lesson by firing up the Harrington 2000, the songwriting computer and let the students take turns creating music on it. After waiting her turn, Twilight walked up to the machine and spoke into it.<p>

"The song's key is M." pausing between each sentence to allow the computer time to process the input.

"The tempo is slow."

"The song title is 'List Mania'" The computer hummed along before finally spitting out a paper with the lyrics and melody on them. Twilight took a look at the results before her face pinched into a frown as she returned to her seat.

\* \* \*

><p>"Very nice, Twilight. You got a perfect score of 9.2." Cheryl Lee said as she handed out graded papers. "The rest of you need to polish up on their grasp of negative reasoning."<p>

The rest of the class groaned as they got their papers back.

\* \* \*

><p>Cheerilee drew a problem on the board.<p>

"Train A left London 10:30. Train B is traveling on parallel tracks to train A and left Yorkshire at 12:30. If train A is traveling 20Kmph and train B is traveling 30Km, when will they cross each other?"



"Yes, Partaria?"

"What's the train's engine type, and what is the color of each conductor's socks?"

"Good question! Lets say both trains are electric, and Train A's conductor's socks are brown. Train B's are white, while the toes and heel are plaid."

"Does anyone know the answer? Yes, Twilight?"

"Train A had an engine failure, and all passengers were held up for a couple of hours. Train B experienced no problems and rolled into the station at London at 3PM."

"That's correct."

\* \* \*

><p>Class was over, and as the students filed out, she signalled for Twilight to remain behind.<p>

"What's your take on all this?" Cherilee asked.

"It's very bizarre, but everything I've read seems to indicate that its experimentally verifiable."

"Even the socks?"

"Especially the socks."

\* \* \*

><p>51.11 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Thanks for doing this, Twilight," Sweetie Belle said with a smile. "I'd take her with me, but, well, Baltimore's no place for a filly."<p>

"Not a problem!" The librarian waved in the unicorn foal. "Come along, Rarity, say goodbye to your big sister!"

Rarity gave Sweetie Belle a final hug and a quick peck on the cheek. "I know you'll be fabulous in Baltimore. Just don't forget us little ponies!"

"Haha, like I'd ever forget my favorite little sister!" The elder unicorn nuzzled Rarity briefly, before walking out the door. "You behave for miss Twilight now!" She waved at them as she ran for the train staion.

"...aaaaaand she's gone." Twilight rolled her eyes, turning toward the stairs. "Spike, it's okay to come down!"

Rarity smiled as the young dragon walked down the stairs, her youthful mask melting way into a wistful smile. "Hello again, dear. Sorry for... well, the separation."

Spike waved a dismissive claw. "It's not your fault. We should have been more discreet. Um, Twilight, do you mind if-"

"Just keep it PG," the librarian replied with a faint smile. "Remember, as far as anyone else knows, you're both still children." She rolled her eyes and turned away, giving the pair a little privacy as they engaged in a long, deep kiss.

\* \* \*

><p>51.12 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke sitting at a desk, notebook in one hand and pen in the other. Human again, she thought, glancing down and noting the pale pinkish flesh tone of her skin. More or less in front of her, sitting in profile from her point of view, sat a bulky human male in a dark gray suit, light gray hair in a buzzcut, perched on the front edge of an expensive-looking red leather chair.<p>

As Twilight watched, the scowl that appeared built into the face began to loosen. The process began with the eyes, which went from narrow and suspicious to open, then wide, then goggling. The clenched jaw didn't drop so much as slowly cantilever downwards. The lines between the man's brows relaxed as the furrows in the forehead deepened. The red flush to his face faded to white. His hand, which held a piece of paper folded in half extended forward, slowly dropped back into his lap.

When Twilight followed the man's gaze to her left, she felt like goggling a bit herself. Sitting behind a large desk, much grander than the one Twilight sat at, rested a bulk of human femininity. The figure wasn't grotesquely fat, but she had definitely reached the stage where one could refer to her weight in fractions of a ton without being nonsensical. She wore a ladies' suit, brown with thin pinstripes, the shirt a brilliant yellow offsetting the ruff she wore in front of her neck. Everything about her appearance reflected pride in appearanceâ€|

â€| except the poofy, tangled, impossible shock of cotton-candy pink hair, shot through with a touch of gray.

Pinkie Pie looked a bit shocked herself, but unlike the man and Twilight she wasn't staring at anything in particular. Her blue eyes stared off over the man's head, lips trembling at something horrible that only she could see. The Loop memories must be really bad, Twilight thought. I wonder who we've replaced this time?

"I can't take this."

The voice wasn't Pinkie's chirp. The gravelly growl would have fit the man perfectly, except for the razor-edged tremor Twilight recognized at once as coming from a pon- a person on the edge of a mental breakdown.

"You're not supposed to be there," he continued, jabbing a finger in accusation at the bloated humanized Pinkie. "And you're not supposed to be there, either." He turned and jabbed the finger at Twilight.

"Part of me says I've known you both for years, but most of me knows damn well I should be talking to Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin. And you aren't them."

The man lunged to his feet, raised a fist to slam it on the desk, and stopped in mid-swing. Instead both hands hit the table as he leaned forward, swaying, then flopping back in the red leather chair. "Over and over I've seen things. Sometimes they're different, sometimes they're the same. Once I saw Goodwin behind this desk and Wolfe behind that one. And I didn't say anything. At first I thought it was a prank, and I wasn't going to be caught out. Then I thought I was going nuts, and I didn't want to let on."

"But it just keeps COMING and COMING and COMINGâ€¦ and now you two. You two!" Now the man did hit the desk, slapping with an open palm instead of a closed fist. "Tell me!" he shouted. "Tell me what the hell is going on!"

Pinkie had slumped back in her own chair, a hand over her eyes. "Twilight," she said, "can you handle this? I need a few minutes."

Twilight nodded. A simple calming spell would keep the man stable long enough to explain the Loops to him. She tried to cast the spellâ€¦ and nothing happened. No magic. She tried to reach into her subspace pocket for something useful, and that also failed.

Wonderful. A man slumped forward in his chair about to crack up right in front of her, and a friend who, from all signs, wasn't that far from a crack-up herself, and here she was with her magic and Looper abilities blocked. Talk fast, Twilight, she thought, because that's all you've got left.

"Sir," she said, and her Loop memories brought forward a name, "Inspector Cramer, this is not a joke, and you're not going crazy." Yet. "You have been repeating some period of time over and over. One day you wake up and it's a year, or two, or however long in your past, and nobody around you remembers anything differently. Is that right?"

Inspector Cramer took a deep, shuddering breath and flopped backwards into the chair again, relaxing. "Yes," he rasped. "God, yes, that's exactly it, except it's a lot more than just a year. More like twenty-five. Sometimes it's longer, sometimes it's shorter. Sometimes it starts one year, sometimes another, and sometimes it's hard to tell, but it's generally about twenty-five years."

One of the longer Loops, then, and less regular. Maybe there was some pre-existing temporal distortion in the universe.

"All right," Twilight said. "Pinkie and I have experienced the same thing. I'll be glad to explain it all, but first I think you could use a drink."

"Yes, Twilight," Pinkie murmured, her hand still shading her eyes, rubbing the bridge of her nose between thumb and fingers. "Will you have beer, Inspector? Or coffee?"

"Whiskey," Cramer rasped, "and then the beer. Please."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight finished assimilating her Loop memories as she explained the Loops to Inspector Cramer. Cramer was the head man at Homicide Manhattan South and had been for as long as Twilight's Loop memories of him extended. The relationship between Cramer and the occupants of a certain brownstone two blocks east of the Hudson River wasâ€|fraught. The mixture of mutual respect and loathing, trust and distrust, antagonism and camaraderie stood beyond Twilight's ability to sort out. She suspected that most of it came from the fact, while Cramer was paid a modest salary to uphold the law, Pinkie- or Wolfe, whichever- demanded and got outrageous sums of money to do what was basically Cramer's job. Furthermore, when Pinkie- or Wolfe- took a hand, she often flouted the law Cramer was sworn to uphold if it was in her client's- or her own- best interests. (Or his. Whatever. Replacing people in a Loop gave Twilight a headache.)<p>

Twilight's explanations omitted a few details, most notably the fact that she and Pinkie were magical quadrupeds from a magical kingdom ruled over by magical princesses. Both Loop memories and common sense suggested that a man like Cramer wouldn't appreciate such things, especially not in his current state.

Twilight peppered her explanations with a few questions, and got some interesting answers. Cramer had lost exact count of how many times he'd Looped, but according to him it wasn't more than about thirty or so. Leaving aside Wolfe's intelligence and Goodwin's luck, both of which tended to the phenomenal to hear Cramer tell it, he hadn't seen or even caught a glimpse of any extraordinary talents or gadgets or anything of the sort. With a few changes which Twilight regarded as minor, all his loops up to this one had been baseline- no fused loops, no crossovers, no alternate histories, nothing. Twilight put the minor deviations Cramer mentioned down to Looper activity.

The inspector, in all that time, had stuck as rigidly as he could to what he remembered. He'd gone through his repeated life scared livid that something horrible would happen if he didn't play his part precisely to script. He spent a lot of worried nights lying awake wondering if he'd screwed up when his memory of past Loops failed him or when he encountered one of those minor alterations.

Cramer obviously wasn't the local Anchor. Twilight strongly suspected she'd replaced the local anchor, this Archie Goodwin, but Nero Wolfe's name nagged at the back of her mind. This was her first time in this setting, but she might have read or viewed some fiction in another Loop about the character.

When she explained the role of Anchors and her suspicions to Cramer, he smirked for the first time. It was a bitter smirk, but any form of smile under the circumstances was improvement. "And of course he didn't say anything about it to me," he muttered. "Either one of them. When one's involved, both are."

"Consider a Looper's perspective, Inspector." Twilight jumped at the sound of Pinkie's voice, so different from usual. Instead of her usual rapid-fire chirpy chatter, she spoke with a soft, smooth confidenceâ€| and, she noticed, a very slight accent under a crisp, clear diction. "Suppose that you had not, in fact, experienced dozens of iterations of the same day, the same year, the same life, over and

over. Suppose then that someone in that position- in the position all three of us are in, and presumably Mr. Wolfe and Mr. Goodwin- suppose that someone told you they were repeating the same events again and again. You are a sensible man. Your common sense is deep and strong. And common sense would tell you that the person telling you about this repetition of time had taken leave of his senses."

Pinkie blinked and took a deep breath, and when she spoke again it was in her normal voice, cheerful and swift. "I figured you'd feel better if I used the kind of voice you're more used to hearing here. You know, I could say that in Serbo-Croat if you like. Or French, or Italian, or German, or Russian, or Spanish, or Albanian, or Greek. I might even be able to manage it in Arabic, but that feels a bit rusty. That's neat! I'm going to get a whole bunch of languages out of this loop- and so many words in Eques- er, in English I never knew before!"

Cramer's jaw dropped, and Twilight, amused as she was, couldn't blame him. Thankfully Pinkie noticed that she'd lost her audience before Twilight had to say anything. She shut off her digression, took another deep breath, and went back to the Loop-local voice. "You'll notice that most of us Loopers are a bit insane anyway. Loco in the coco, as I usually put it. But we're also telling the truth."

"And besides," Twilight added, "Wolfe and Goodwin may never have had the opportunity to tell you. If your baseline relationship with them is like what my memories tell me it is with us, you're not on close personal terms. Did Mr. Wolfe discuss his secrets with you?"

"Wolfe didn't discuss secrets with anybody," Cramer said. "Not even Goodwin if he could help it. I knew a couple of them, but not because he ever told me." He shook his head slowly. "Wolfe keeps secrets better than any man I ever met."

"I think he may have good reason to." Pinkie's voice was back to Pinkie-normal, but sad. "If his baseline memories are anything like the Loop memories I got, he had a lot of really sad, horrible things in his past."

"Umâ€ Pinkie? Would you like to talk about it?" Twilight asked gently.

The pink-haired edition of New York's greatest detective shook her head. "I promised myself I would leave all of that behind," she said. "I didn't want to rememberâ€ and I still don't, really. But it's really, really hard. The Pinkie Pie of this Loop loved hosting guests and making them feel comfortable, but she was hurt so bad she decided to shut out the world except for a handful of very close friends." She tapped her obese body and added, "This was part of that; insulation against pain from both without and within- er, I mean inside and outside." She smiled and added, "I really like words, this Loop."

Cramer snorted. "Wolfe loved words almost as much as he loved food," he muttered. "He definitely didn't like having guests, except for a few special people, but he took pride in his hospitality. Even with people he didn't like."

"Well, I do," Pinkie said. "And that's the wonderful thing about the Loops, Inspector; you don't have to keep doing things the same old

way!" It was Pinkie's turn to slap her desktop, and it made quite a bit of thunder. "I don't care what this Loop's memories are telling me. I don't care what this world wants me to do. I'm Pinkie Pie! Parties and laughter and making people happy is what I am!"

"In this world I mingled in the highest society of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. I made the soldiers of Montenegro laugh even as the Germans drove them out of their homeland. I managed to organize an Easter party on the Western Front during the German offenses of 1918! I can sing two dozen different birthday songs in ten different languages, and I know over a thousand different cake, pie, pastry and candy recipes from around the world!"

Pinkie thumped her desk sternly, but not as hard and before, and added, "And that's before I Awoke and remembered more party skills from more Loops, more worlds, than you can imagine! And I'm supposed to turn all of that off just because the local narrative structure wants me to? I don't think so!"

And then Pinkie stood up. She had to use her hands to push against the arms of her chair- custom-made for her, Twilight's Loop memories told her- to gain her feet, but she did it with surprising grace. As she stepped around the desk, again with much more grace than Twilight expected for someone of her bulk, she said, "I need to talk with Fritz about planning a party. We'll invite Mrs. Hewitt and Sally and Freida and Ori and your friend Mr. Cohen, Twilight. And Inspector, you're invited too- you and your Mr. Stebbins."

Her nose wrinkled as she added, "But not Lieutenant Rowcliff, becauseâ€¦" Her eyes crossed for a moment before she added, "The Loop wants me to call him an unmitigated cretin, but I like Meany McMeanypants better."

A bit of shock was returning to Cramer's face. "Wolfe never invited me to dinner," he said. "We never even spoke unless the subject was murder."

Pinkie nodded. "Your world is a bit of a sad one," she said. "I can't change thatâ€¦ at least not this Loop. I'll play along with the Loop a bit- I'll be the great detective, and solve your tough cases, and squeeze big bags of cash out of rich people."

"But I am not Nero Wolfe, and I'm not going to be a female copy of him, either. I'm going to be Pinkie Pie in whatever Loop I end up in, and that means those fees will be spent on making friendsâ€¦ and making friends smile." She extended a hand to Cramer. "And you and I, Inspector, are going to be friends from now onâ€¦ not this touchy-grouchy frenemies thing. Let Wolfe do that, if he thinks being Grouchy Sadderson is so much fun."

Cramer sat staring at the hand, but he couldn't avoid chuckling at 'Grouchy Sadderson.' "Iâ€¦ I'm not the best in the world at making friends," he said. "My whole life is enforcing the law. Wolfe never much cared about the law if it didn't suit him." He tilted his head and added, "And neither do you, I seem to remember."

"Pinkie usually doesn't even care about the laws of physics," Twilight giggled.

"They care about me, this Loop," Pinkie muttered. "I can't get at my

pocket, and I don't think I have a Pinkie Sense here. Apparently all I have is what I have here," she said, tapping her temple. "That and whatever's in the pantry. Please pardon me, Inspector; I'll call you later to arrange a date for your party. I can't call it a You're-Not-Crazy-You're-Just-Looping-Through-Time Party, but I'll think of something. Maybe a Let's-Not-Be-Such-Grumpy-Grumpersons-And-Work-Together-To-Catch-All-The-Baddies Party?"

Cramer shook his head. "Pie, you are definitely crazy."

Pinkie looked down at him, and her smile retreated to a modest upturn of one corner of her mouth. "Inspector Cramer," she said, "it takes a crazy mare- er, man- to remain sane in an impossible world."

Cramer smirked again, this time with a little bit of warmth. "I'll shake on that," he said, and gave Pinkie's hand one solemn shake.

"Remember," Pinkie said as she released Cramer's hand, "you don't have to keep doing the same thing all the time. The Loops give you the opportunity to try new things, to have fun, to go a little bit cuckoo. Use it. Who knows?" Pinkie grinned, and her eyes were almost as wide and innocent as the pony she usually was. "Maybe some Loop you'll be genius detective Fergus Cramer, and you can drive Inspector Wolfe nuts!"

Cramer's smirk this time had a large dose of malice in it. "Oh, if only I can live to see that day."

At the door, as Twilight helped the inspector on with his coat, he asked, "I've just got one last question: if you two are here, where the hell are the real Wolfe and Goodwin?"

"Search me," Twilight said. "There are an infinite number of worlds. They could be in any of them. They could even be here somewhere. When Loops cross over, there's no telling how they play out."

\* \* \*

><p>"Thanks, gentlemen," the lavender unicorn said as he stepped off the chariot onto the streets of Ponyville. "I'll put in a good word for you two with the Princess."<p>

As the pegasus guardsmen lifted off again, the unicorn and his companion, a short, squat baby dragon, looked around the small town. "No street signs, no lights, nothing," the unicorn muttered to himself. "Boy, am I a long way from home."

"It's not that far from Canterlot," the dragon said, pointing a claw at the city perched on the mountainside in the distance. "We could probably walk there in a day. And by we I mean you with me riding."

"Well, it sure wouldn't work as well the other way round," the unicorn said. "All right, short stuff, which way is it to the party coordinator's office?"

The dragon opened a scroll and looked at it. "Says here the town librarian's in charge of preparations for the Summer Sun

Celebration," He pointed a claw towards a large tree not far off the town's main square. "That's the library over there."

The unicorn noted the large greenhouse built onto the rear of the tree-house library, and for the first time this Loop he felt an honest stirring of optimism. I'll bet I can guess what kind of plants are in that hothouse, he thought. In fact, I can spell their names. Heaven knows I've done it often enough.

A sign on the library door read NO VISITORS, but the unicorn opened it anyway. A deep voice bellowed, "BLAST YOU, CAN'T YOU READ?" The owner of the voice, a pony so overweight that the unicorn didn't see how his barrel didn't drag the ground, glared at the newcomers from over an open book. The earth pony's coat was solid black, with a light brown mane and a bright yellow necktie. The unicorn noted with satisfaction the cutie mark; an orchid bloom. Of course.

"Certainly I can read," the unicorn said, floating a business card from his tailored suit jacket over to the librarian. "I trust that you can do likewise, or else the Equestrian Civil Service has made a grave error in staffing its libraries."

"This is a private library," the black pony muttered. "And I am quite busy on a matter of urgent research, Mrâ€¦" The pony's eyes widened as he read, "Arch Swiftlegs?"

"That's me," Swiftlegs nodded. "Personal student of and troubleshooter for Princess Celestia herself. And I've been sent here to make sure that preparations for the Summer Sun Celebration are going according to schedule."

"Ah," the earth pony nodded. "I, um, am Black Mountain. Good to meet you." His attention turned to the little dragon. "And is the noble dragon hatchling with you as well?"

"Oh, yes," Swiftlegs added, "this is my assistant Spike. We've been together since he hatched. It's a long story."

"No doubt," Black Mountain nodded. "I must apologize for my lack of hospitality. Normally I enjoy having guests- a guest, you know, is a jewel on the cushion of hospitality- but I really have been very busy indeed. However, if your assistant knows how to brew tea, perhaps we can get started at once on the inspection."

"Sure thing!" Spike said. "Which way to the kitchen?"

As soon as the kitchen door closed behind Spike, the fat pony's mouth curled up marginally at one corner. "It is good to see you, Archie," he said, "even in that ridiculous form."

"Likewise, I'm sure, Mr. Wolfe."

"What is that design on your rump? My own is quite straightforward, of course."

"What, this? The magnifying glass is obvious, but I haven't figured out what the five white stars are for yet."

The fat pony grunted. "No matter. We can discuss this bizarre Loop later. While your assistant is out of the room, we must discuss an



urgent matter I was apparently researching just before I Awoke. Did you know that tomorrow is not only the longest day of the year, but the precise thousand-year anniversary of the sole reign of Princess Celestia?"

"I hadn't thought about it, but I suppose I knew. Is that important?"

"Possibly. Possibly even urgent. Have a look at this tomeâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

51.1: A Dog And Pinkie Show.

>51.2: Princess Diaries.<br>51.3: Also the Law of the Jungle, the Law of Supply and Demand, and several rules of thumb.

>51.4: Sparkle and Wolf. (Leah's been getting educated.)<br>51.5: Some loops, you just don't know.

>51.6: Specifically, you don't know Jack. Mac does, though.<br>51.7: Let's hope Xanatos didn't plan for this.

>51.8: Cadence has certain issues.<br>51.9: Pinkie Pie is not all about the party.

>51.10: (In case anyone's mind-meltingly confused, look up the series Look Around You.)<br>51.11: Certain difficulties.

>51.12: Nero Wolfe.<p>

## 56. Chapter 56

### 52.1 (Detective Ethan Redfield)

And with a burst of green flame from her horn, Celestia's scroll burned to a crisp and whisked away to Twilight. She hoped that Twilight would follow her instructions, because the fate of Equestria...and herself...depended on it. Her eyes drifted to the windows and the sun. Before long, it would be nightfall and the beginning of her hopefully short imprisonment on the sun, so she decided to indulge herself a bit. Several servants were sent off to prepare some cake and in the mean time, she would walk among the gardens.

The sun shone brightly and the wind playfully pushed at the celestial pony's mane. It was a good day as she walked among the sculptures. Stories of heroes and villains in ages long past accompanied each statue and all were dear to her heart. Or at least all but one, as she came to Discord's statue. Her oldest foe stood wearing an expression of utter joy. But then again, he never saw it coming, literally as he didn't realize the threat Celestia and Luna posed.

Luna...who had helped her save the land from Discord...her head lowered and her insides turned to ashes. Everything seemed to remind her of Luna or what was at stake should they fail.

\*CRACK\*

Her eyes widened as her head rose to see a massive crack form in discord's statue. Her heart rate tripled. \_No! Why now? Why did the seal have to break now!? \_She hadn't prepared anything for this.

Then, the stone shattered and the laughter he had been holding in finished itself. Celestia shouted, "Discord! How is this possible?!"

Her horn glowed but Discord just gave her a condescending smile, "Oh hello Celestia, good seeing you. Unfortunately, we got to cut this reunion short, got to say hello to some old friends in Ponyville and figure out something to do before movie night. Looking forward to seeing you there," finishing up with a bright tone before snapping his fingers and disappearing in a burst of white light.

\* \* \*

><p>The doors to the throne room burst open as Celestia Shouted, "Captain! Rally your men at once, one of my ancient enemies, Discord br-"<p>

She trailed off as the sight of Luna on her throne in her non-Nightmare Moon form looked on in concern. Celestia's jaw couldn't get much more wide. Luna face hoofed and asked, "Oh, what did Discord do now? Well, don't worry about it, Sister. We'll be sure to talk to him about it at movie night."

Celestia blinked her eyes several times, then rubbed her hooves against them, "Luna? is...that you?"

Luna looked quite concerned, "You alright, 'Tia? It's like you haven't seen me in a thousand years."

Celestia's eyes somehow grew wider in deeper confusion as her voice become more exasperated, "but-wha...I haven't seen you in a thousand years!"

Luna rolled her eyes, "Look, I've learned my lesson already. Don't unleash a couple parasprites on an unsuspecting town again, I get it. I've only been on time out for a week on the moon, just returned a few minutes ago."

As she tried to formulate a response to \_that \_contradiction with history, a voice spoke from the throne room doors, "Excuse me, Princess Luna, we wanted to get your opinion on our Nightmare Night costume since I was in the area."

Celestia turned point her hoof at the pony who mentioned the defeat of Nightmare Moon and which went hoof and hoof with Luna's imprisonment on the moon...when a new sight made her eyes become like saucers. Before her stood another Luna that was picture perfect in her appearance.

Luna rose from her seat and circled around the nervous alicorn. The night princess shoved her face into her face, scrutinizing and looking her over. After a few minutes of silence (which allowed Celestia's eyes to grow so wide it looked like they would pop out by now), Luna gave an approving grin, "It's not perfect, but passable. A couple of the stars in your mane are wrong and the cutie mark is a bit off the flank, but otherwise you look just like my twin sister."

"I'm standing right next to you," Celestia blurted out before she slapped her hoof into her mouth. Luna narrowed her eyes at her a bit,

but then chuckled, "Not to worry, 'Tia. No one can replace you. Have you met Chrysalis before? She's a master at makeup and disguises. Why, she promised to show me her changeling disguise at the movie night. I couldn't refuse."

It was then that Shining Armor walked through another entrance, "Excuse me, Princess Luna, but Princess Nightmare Moon sent a request for help with the environment dome on the moon. Something about the Beryllium Sphere needing replacing."

Luna groaned, "Again, that's the third time this month. Alright, I'm on my way. Celestia, can you see Chrysalis out? I would appreciate it forever! Thank you so much!"

With that, the princess of the night disappeared in a blue teleportation flash. Celestia didn't say anything...heck she didn't even move as her eye just twitched and her mane became frazzled. Chrysalis walked around Celestia, then poked her, "Um...Princess Celestia...you alright?!"

Celestia's mouth twitched for a second, then her eyes returned to their normal size. A grunt escaped her mouth, followed shortly by a chortle, then a chuckle and finally a laugh. Seconds later, she was rolling on the floor in mad laughter. It continued for several minutes before she managed to compose herself. Chrysalis backed away from her as Celestia rose to her feet once again. The changeling asked in a worried tone, "Are you alright?"

Celestia was cross-eyed at this point, "Never better. Just realized, this is all a dream and nothing matters. Discord couldn't have escaped his prison, both my and Luna's connection to the elements haven't been severed yet. Luna is still trapped on the moon as Nightmare Moon and the proof is you, Chrysalis. You're a perfect copy of Princess Luna."

Chrysalis looked confused, "Wait...you think this is a dream?"

"What else could it be!"

Celestia walked forward a few feet, missing Chrysalis' pumping her hoof in victory, but she didn't miss her whisper, "Knew it. Pinkie owes me fifty bits."

The sun princess' eyes narrowed, "I'm sorry," her head snapping to the queen, "What was that?"

Chrysalis lifted a hoof in a placating gesture, "Nothing, princess...nothing at all. I got to go. See you at movie night."

\* \* \*

><p>52.2 (Hubris Plus)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rusty blinked Awake in the pilot's seat of the X-1, which was thankfully on autopilot at the moment, and reached up to scratch at his scalp. <em>Bald again<em>, he noted morosely. Loops in the mirror universe were always pleasant, but waking up in the baseline afterwards tended to leave him disappointed.

Still, he might be able to swing the musical again at the very least, he'd made sure to keep a copy of the script in his Pocket ever since he'd finished it, and knew which contacts he'd have to make on Broadway.

He put that line of thought on hold as he gave his Loop memories a cursory review for any glaring changes to the timeline. On his way to Mexico, officially to do a physics lecture, privately to pick up certain questionably legal 'medications'. He'd drop those and pay the knife jockeys to cut his twin out of him. And pay them extra to leave everything else where it was. Temporarily converting H.E.L. into a power suit would ingratiate Jonas to him, and Loops worth of debugging his inventions would ensure he didn't get outdone.

A burst of chatter and the sound of scampering feet from the back of the plane shook him out of his planning and he frowned at the interruption.

"Girls!" He shouted, "no horsing around on the X-1!" Wait. Girls? He paused to consider what he'd just said and examined his Loop memories more carefully. Hank and Dean seemed to have been replaced by Bella, though apparently he called her 'Sweetie', and Blossom. The second gave him pause as he furiously hoped that this wasn't a Powerpuff fused Loop. Utonium had Had Words with him the last time that'd happened.

A snort of laughter from the seat beside him drew his attention to... Dash, a woman with rainbow dyed hair who had apparently swapped in for Brock.

"Alright, we're almost there, so I hope you're all Awake," he called out.

"Bright eyed and apparently tailless," Dash answered amicably.

"Both o' us!" Blossom said as the two girls moved to the front of the plane.

"Good. You two," he pointed at the girls, "stay on the plane. My nemesis likes to kidnap my kids first thing, and there's no telling what nonsense he'll pull if he's Awake."

"Your nemesis is Looping?" Sweetie asked. It wasn't unheard of, as proved by Chrysalis and Discord, but villains Looping was unusual, and it was doubly so for them to remain villains after any significant amount of time.

"It's a frenemy thing," Venture grumbled, pinching the bridge of his nose. "He's annoying, but super-villainy is more of a sport than anything here. My life is weird."

"Riiiiight," Blossom said after a moment. "Gimme the schematics and some tools an' I'll be happy ta stay aboard," she patted the plane's console in an almost loving way that immediately identified her as an engineer. Rusty was almost disappointed that she was practically guaranteed to show him up, but at the very least he'd be able to crib a few ideas for future loops.

"Deal, just make sure we can make a quick getaway. Anyways, you," he

pointed at Dash, "need to make sure some surgeons don't steal my kidneys while they're extracting the twin I consumed in the womb."

He took a certain amount of satisfaction from their dumbfounded expressions.

"I told you my life is weird."

\* \* \*

><p>"I still don't get why you're afraid of the rabbit," Twenty Four lamented. "It's tiny and adorable and has a little fluffy tail. And you're a total badass!"<p>

"Dude, I've been in Holy Grail Loops," Twenty One answered between pushups. It was always a hassle getting back into shape at the start of a loop, but so very worth it. "Messing with bunnies? Bad idea."

"Alright, alright, we'll leave the bunny alone. What about the new Monarch, got a bead on her?"

"Seems like a nice girl. Little shy, though. Might wanna call in Killinger to help out."

"I thought you hated that guy?" Twenty Four was still relatively new to the Loops and getting used to the new dynamics. His best friend suddenly being a commando that could go toe to toe with Brock "unstoppable killing machine" Samson sometimes seemed like the least of it.

"Eh, he's not so bad once you get to know him."

"Is he Looping?"

"No idea, guy's impossible to read."

\* \* \*

><p>Rusty pulled the X-1 into the Venture hangar while Blossom, or "Apple Bloom" as she apparently usually went by, excitedly discussed prosthesis possibilities with Jonas in the back. The whole trip had gone surprisingly smoothly, with none of the Monarch's usual shenanigans and a clean extraction of his twin. Apple Bloom had even managed to milk a seven percent efficiency increase out of the engines in the few hours she'd had. If things stayed this quiet he might even try for a vacation Loop.<p>

Those hopes were dashed as he spotted the two figures waiting at the bottom of the loading ramp as they exited. The first, who he guessed was subbing for Dermott, ran past him and started chatting animatedly with the girls. The other was a woman wearing a familiar lab coat, though in purple with a star shaped sigil rather than the usual black with skull motif. On her face was a bone white mask, unmarked save for a conical horn rising from the forehead.

"Greetings," the woman said seriously. "I am Doctor Twilight Killinger, and this," she held up a purple purse, "is my Fearsome Friendship Bag."

Rusty pinched the bridge of his nose and was about to retort when a door slammed open in the hangar. A woman in blue swept in, cape billowing behind her impressively. Trixie Orpheus, his Loop memories supplied.

"HALT!" She proclaimed, pressing one hand to her temple while the other pointed at Twilight, fingers splayed wide. "I detect a terrible EVIL here! It seeks to CORRUPT and SUBVERT you! BEGONE foul interloper, you have no place here!"

With each word she advanced, a brilliant white glow gathering around her outstretched hand. Finally, only a few steps away, the radiance reached a peak before exploding outwards, bathing the entire hangar in fierce light.

Twilight stared stonily at Trixie for a long moment, completely unscathed by the display.

"Your powers are useless on me, you silly filly."

The stare down continued for another few moments before the pair cracked and started laughing.

"Sorry about that, Dr Venture," Twilight said as she turned to face Rusty again and extended her hand. "We couldn't resist. Twilight Sparkle, Equestrian Anchor at your service."

"Thaddeus Venture, super scientist," he deadpanned in reply. "Welcome to the Ventureverse." That got him a few stares. "Don't look at me. Hank's the Anchor, he named it."

\* \* \*

><p>"There's, uh, a fair chance you're gonna regret letting him handle this," Bronco cautioned as they waited in the Ponyville auditorium.<p>

"Well, he told me he wasn't gonna hurt anypony, an' trust me, I can tell if somepony's lying." Applejack answered beside him.

"Yeah, not sure he's capable of lying, doesn't mean you should trust him. Killinger, ah, I mean, 'Dusk Contract' is a slippery bastard when he has a mind to be."

The unicorn in question was standing in the center of the auditorium, night black with a grey mane and a cutie mark of twisting red lines that suggested the shape of a skull.

The ceremony began and, right on cue, shadows coalesced on stage, taking the form of Nightmare Moon.

"Yes!" Dusk called out, "excellent! Seize control of vhat iz rightfully yours und assert your dominance over those who denied your magnificence! Now iz zee hour of your victory, und so long as you remain firm in your purpose you are invincible!"

"Um, what?" Luna asked, confused. She'd intended cause a little scare, 'notice' that her armor had gone out of style, revert to her typical form and then step aside for her sister. Encouragement was

usually the last thing she expected while still in Nightmare Mode.

"Each night you grace zee skies with lights und vonder beyond number, und yet you are scorned by your subjects, who choose to bask in zee gaudy simplicity of your sister's single sphere! Where iz zee justice?! It iz only right zat you take your rightful place as absolute ruler of day \_und\_ night!"

"So he's trying to convince her to maintain the day/night cycle even in victory? I suppose we've tried stranger, but most fused Loopers try to prevent victory from the outset," Rarity commented quietly.

"He's kinda a super villain life coach, this is what he does," Bronco answered.

"That's, um, very nice and all," Luna said, reverting to her natural state, "but I've had a thousand years to think on it, and I've decided that the natural order is fine the way it is. I just really want to reconcile with my sister and sleep in an actual bed."

Dusk Contract contemplated for a moment before nodding. "If zat iz your desire, I have no quarrel. Far be it from me to stand in zee way of love."

The ponies gave a collective sigh of relief as Luna stepped off the stage to give Celestia the spotlight.

Then every window in the building shattered as the doors slammed open, every opening disgorging hundreds of butterflies into the chamber. Their entrance masked the two ponies that followed, concealing them from sight until the swarm swooped up to fly around the ceiling. One was a pegasus stallion who had a deep yellow coat with a short cropped red mane and short pointed beard, three butterflies that somehow seemed menacing emblazoned on his flank. The mare beside him was pale pink with a black mane in a bob cut and a cutie mark of a heart and a syringe.

"DOCTOR VENTURE! As you have feared in your heart of hearts, I have followed you even here!" The stallion bellowed. "Yes, Venture, there is NOWHERE you can hide! No matter how far you run, how many universes you flee across, whatever form you may take, THE MONARCH will always find you! And now, bolstered by the power of NATURE ITSELF, I will at long last dest-"

"Dude, calm down, my dad isn't even here," a colt with a blue coat and blonde mane interrupted.

"roy you..." The Monarch trailed off. "Wait, really? Oh. Um. Sorry about that everyone. It's kind of my thing."

"It's alright honey," came the surprisingly deep voice of the mare, "you did a great job, he would have been shaking."

"Angel, you're the best," he answered before looking around awkwardly. "There an IHOP in this universe? Kinda in the mood for breakfast."

"Nonsense," Dusk stated, trotting for the door, "a home cooked meal

is far superior. Come, I will make zee flapjacks!"

The native Loopers couldn't help but stare as their various guests filed out the door, Bronco shrugging at them before following suit.

"...Ah can't tell if any o' that violated the sanctuary," Applejack said after a moment.

"Seemed like they were having fun to me," Pinkie chimed in. "And isn't that what matters?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Sister?"<p>

"Yes, Luna?" Celestia answered over breakfast the next day.

"Why is there a statue of David Bowie in the garden?"

Alternate Ending:

"Luna, I'm not quite sure what I'm looking at here," Celestia said as she examined the sheaf of papers she'd been given.

"It's a standard Guild arching contract. There's a schedule for my weekly attacks on the palace on page twelve." She telekinetically flipped the packet to the proper page.

"...Weekly attacks on the palace?"

"Well, I talked it over with Dusk Contract, and he convinced me that it would be healthy to work out any latent anger issues this way. No pony gets hurt but, well, sometimes it's nice to just have an out and out fight."

Celestia hummed absently and a mischievous glint entered her eye as she reviewed the papers. "Would it be possible to roll back the thursday assault by an hour or so?"

"I suppose, I only put it that late because I thought you had a meeting with the nobles then." She blinked as realization hit her. "Sister, I do believe that I am supposed to be the evil mastermind."

\* \* \*

><p>52.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity smiled to herself as she heard a familiar clip clop of hooves and slap of claws behind her, sewing up the final tapestry for this particular Summer Sun celebration.<p>

"Beautiful..."

Her ears swivelled for a second.

"Yes Spike, the decorations are lovely."



There had been the briefest of hesitations in Twilight's voice.  
\_So.\_

"Not that! \_Her!\_"

That line clinched it. Rarity's shoulders slumped for a second, before she schooled her face and turned around. From behind the lovestruck little drake, Twilight was giving her an apologetic grimace. She smiled wistfully, shaking her head and waving it off.

She trotted down to little Spikey-wikey, keeping herself calm. "It's good to know that the next generation can recognize true beauty!"

"Uh... I uh..." The drake blushed, rubbing the back of his head.  
"You... weren't supposed to hear that-"

"Nonsense!" Rarity tittered. "You have most excellent taste, if I do say so myself. Why, you remind me so much of my paramour, I could almost swear you were his brother!"

"Your... paramour."

It hurt to see Spike's heart break like that. But, Rarity knew, it was for the best. Still... Sweetie wasn't awake this loop... "Why yes. Do you know, I was just telling my younger sister how she needed to find someone to teach her the fine art of discernment." She leaned in, fluttering her eyelids just so. "Maybe you could help her out with that?"

Spike considered the request. "Well... I am, um, kind of busy helping Twilight-"

"Of course. Such a responsible young drake! I wouldn't dream of separating you from your duty, especially when you're assisting your sister. Tell you what, though, there's going to be a party before the celebration proper." She winked. "I'll bring my sister, and a few gems."

"That sounds nice! Uh, Twilight, do you think-"

"Of course we'll go to the party, Spike." The scholarly unicorn smiled and nuzzled him gently. "I shouldn't have stopped us from going to Moondancer's party in the first place."

Spike boggled for a few seconds. Then a smug smirk formed on his face. "Loosening up, eh? That's good." He took out the checklist, marking something off. "That's decorations. All that's left is music!"

The two of them walked toward the door. Twilight looked back for a brief moment, mouthing something.

\_Thank you. Sorry.\_

Rarity sighed, shaking her head. \_Not a problem.\_ She could wait.

\* \* \*

><p>52.4<p>

Twilight smiled wistfully as the world clicked into place around her.

Then blinked. Same library, no book. That means a variant loop.

Poor Spike and Rarity, assuming both of them were Awake. Variants which didn't involve a Nightmare Moon could make it quite difficult for the two of them to enjoy their newly married life-

\_Wait a second.\_

Why is there a dragon wearing armour on the roof spire?

Loop memories settled, answering her question quite nicely.

"Oh. Okay, then."

\* \* \*

><p>"Leave us," King Spykoran the Just said to his guards. "My student deserves a private audience."<p>

Queen Rarity the Wise activated a sound-muffling field for good measure, and as soon as the doors closed Spike grinned.

"Nice to see you, Twilight," Rarity said. "Apparently, the admins think we've been doing rather good work."

"Yeah, we got a loop as the rulers of Equestria straight off. I think we might actually be in the running for longest honeymoon in history." Spike shrugged. "I'm hardly complaining."

"I'm happy for you," Twilight said sincerely, then got a glint in her eye. "Your majesties."

"Oh, stop it..." Rarity waved a hoof.

"So..." Twilight began. "Since there's no Nightmare Moon and no equivalent villain, any idea what I should do until the Discord incident rolls around?"

"I... actually have no idea," Spike admitted. "I know Ponyville's still there â€" I remember granting the charter..."

"Pen friends?" Rarity suggested.

\* \* \*

><p>52.5 (OracleMask)<p>

Twilight went over her plan again as the pegasus guards flew her and Spike to Ponyville. She'd picked up a new spellbook in her last fused loop and it had some interesting spells inside that she couldn't wait to test out. This solo loop would be the perfect place for initial testing.

At least, she thought that until the chariot came in for a landing in

Ponyville. Bubble-gum pink Ponyville.

"...Guh?" Twilight managed halfway intelligently.

Okay...so somehow her normal Equestria now contained a Ponyville where Rainbow Dash dressed in style. As the chariot flew off, and Spike unrolled the Official Summer Sun Celebration Overseer's Checklist (baseline version), Twilight frantically tried to figure out what had gone wrong. Had she overloaded something? Had Trixie blown up something she shouldn't have?

"Oh my gosh! You're new!" a cheerful voice with a slight lisp exclaimed.

Turning her head, Twilight found a certain pink pony smiling at her. It wasn't her regular Pinkie at all, but the local party-throwing one without any strange powers. Compared to the proper Pinkie Pie, this Pinkie was as bland as oatmeal.

'\_I wonder what would happen if she got the Element of Laughter.\_'

Mentally, Twilight snagged the errant thought before it could disappear and examined it more closely. Well, aside from the existence of this Ponyville, the rest of the loop was normal baseline...and she did need five extra bearers...why not?

\* \* \*

><p>This time, when the Elements of Harmony activated, it was more like an explosion than an rainbow. Shaking the ringing out of her ears, Twilight took a second to check that yes, Luna was no longer Nightmare Moon, before turning her attention eagerly to her new friends.<p>

"This necklace is absolutely positively amazing!" Pinkie Pie, Bearer of Laughter exclaimed.

"Darlings, did you see that? We made a rainbow that was absolutely dashing!" said Rainbow Dash, Bearer of Generosity.

"Golly, I hope we didn't hit that Nightmare lady too hard," replied Applejack, Bearer of Honesty.

"Okay, \*whistle\*, we defeated the ultra-big-super-spooky Nightmare \*whistle\*...can we go home now?" whistled Thistle Whistle, Bearer of Loyalty.

"I think I feel a new song coming on," Starsong Melody, Bearer of Kindness said to nopony in particular.

Twilight kept it from showing, but on the inside she was grinning. She'd had more than her fill of being stuck in their boring version of Ponyville. Now, let the social experiment begin!

\* \* \*

><p>52.6 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sipped her tea, peering at the zebra fiddling with her potions. "You know... you seem to be taking the whole 'loops' thing fairly well."<p>

"That is a fair observation," Zecora replied. "Is that a cause for consternation?"

"No, it's just... most ponies, when they start looping, have some form of panic attack once in a while." The librarian leaned back. "Well, not panic exactly. I buried myself in my books, Applejack sorta became listless, Rarity had a goth phase, Pinkie... we don't talk about that. There's something they \_do,\_ something like a mix of existential horror and sheer boredom compelling them at random intervals to just... break character, or hide away. We all get over it pretty quickly, especially with each other's help, but the thing is I haven't seen anything like that with you. You've just accepted this, and I can't figure out why."

Zecora smiled as she poured a few bottles into a cauldron. "My life is based on nature's rhythm; I do little on some wild whim. These loops are just a larger pattern, one which I can easily learn. Even with fused loops variety, I find my path simple to see."

Twilight sipped her tea thoughtfully. "I... see. Huh. Well, alright then. Oh, incidentally, AJ's got a greenhouse where we gather plants from across the multiverse. Just in case you want to try something new with your alchemy."

"Plants from other worlds, you say?" Zecora nodded. "I suppose I could study them today. I would love a chance to improve my art, it would distract me from the weight on my heart."

Twilight's ears perked. "...This is about the whole... xenophobia thing, isn't it. Hmmm." She tapped her chin thoughtfully. "It would be easy to bring you in as a 'foreign correspondent,' or even arrange for you to defeat Nightmare Moon. Actually, it would be easy to attribute her defeat to you, say that you led us to the Elements and boom!"

The zebra tilted her head. "...I thank you for your offer, Twilight, to remove Ponyville of its bite. Let us see what we can arrange so my entry each loop will change."

\* \* \*

><p>52.7<p>

"I think I understand," Silver said, nodding slowly. "So we each get to pick a kind of ship?"

"Or lots o' little ones," Applebloom confirmed. "Though it gets kinda tricky to keep track of 'em all, if y'all take that option."

"Right. So... I use this computer?"

"Yep. Design's fairly intuitive. And it keeps what y'all design secret from th' rest of us, too."

"I see." Silver sat down, moving her tail aside, and cracked her

paws. "Thanks for the custom seat, by the way."

"Well, it was an interesting challenge," the engineer reassured her. "Ain't every loop ah even know a diamond dog, let alone have one 'round."

Silver shot her a teeth-bared grin, then got to typing.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, this'll be interesting," Nyx mused, looking down from the cloud. With a tap of a button, her plotting sphere flashed to life. "Okay, guys, get going."<p>

She pitched her cloud-tent. Seeing as the starting range on this one was no less than three hundred miles, it was kind of necessary.

\* \* \*

><p>"Kinda wish ah had a screen..." Scootaloo mused, tapping away at her control board. "Okay, clear decks!"<p>

Engines flared. Two by two, sixteen fighters climbed clear of the Hurricane and orbited briefly before rocketing off in a search pattern.

Scootaloo watched them go, then brought up a lift from the hanger deck to start spotting Sea Kings.

Being hit by a submarine had been kind of funny once. Twice? No thanks.

\* \* \*

><p>There were a series of loud <em>splash<em> sounds off the port bow.

Scootaloo threw Hurricane into a hard starboard turn, baring her teeth as the follow-up shots missed astern.

That did still leave several questions, though. Her Lightning IICs had a perimeter at fifty miles out, so how had they missed whatever had done that?

Wait a sec...

"Silver!" she shouted, as the radar confirmed her guess. "Did you mount railguns?"

"Guilty," Silver replied, laughter in her voice. "Hold still, by the way, these shots still take a long time to travel."

"Like hay!" Scootaloo tapped on her board, sending the anti-shipping armed aircraft on a reciprocal of the ridiculously high speed shots coming from well over the horizon. Splashes bracketed Hurricane, but there was no real damage, and she started a random-walk evasive pattern.

"Oh, that reminds me, I sunk Diamond earlier," Silver volunteered, still cheerful. "She had an Aegis cruiser. You know, the ships with

all the missiles."

Scotaloo sobered a bit. "Yeah, that's kind of lucky for me. That's the best matchup you could have had, and the worst for me."

\* \* \*

><p>"Why do I even bother with the light ships any more?" Diamond asked, looking glumly at the plotting sphere. "I should try something like an Iowa-class next time â€" and those nifty nuclear shells they get."<p>

"I think that might breach Trixie's copyright," Nyx replied.

\* \* \*

><p>"Aww..." Silver whined. "That was the main power feed!"<p>

"Good to know I got something worthwhile..." Scotaloo rejoined. "Those railguns are nasty in air defence mode."

"Thanks!" Silver replied, sounding much happier. "How many of your planes did I get, by the way?"

"Fourteen Lightning IIC," Scotaloo answered. "Kinda hurts, too, that's half my air wing."

"I feel for you," Silver said unsincerely. "Don't go too far, I'm off to fix the power feed."

The connection closed.

Scotaloo wasted no time in putting all eight reactors to full power and motoring off south at full speed, getting as much distance as possible between her and the railguns.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Sweetie?" Scotaloo asked. "Guess what."<p>

Sweetie turned from her periscope. "What?" she returned dutifully.

"Did you know that LIDAR can pick up submarines at periscope depth?"

The unicorn leapt for the crash-dive button, but too late. Four homing torpedoes crashed into the water from a pair of Sea Kings, opening the side from bow to stern.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hi," Sweetie said morosely. "So much for the idea of an attack sub."<p>

"I think we were all expecting you to go sub again after you won last time," Tiara replied. "This is taking a lot longer than it did before."

"I have a Chaos set in my bag," Nyx volunteered.

"Sure," Sweetie said, examining the plotter. "Wait... is Applebloom-"

"Yeah." Tiara looked marginally less sour. "That's going to be a surprise."

\* \* \*

><p>"All right, that's it," Scootaloo muttered, as the last of her second strike were torn apart by a repaired aft railgun. "If you want a job doing properly, do it yourself."<p>

Setting the carrier on a southward course, she cantered down to the flight deck.

\* \* \*

><p>"Just one?" Silver asked, shaking her head. "Really not that impressive..."<p>

\_PENG\_ went the railgun, making the whole structure shiver with recoil.

"...huh," she added, as the speck of colour didn't disappear. "That's unusual."

The muzzle tracked around smoothly, and spoke again.

"Okay, that's getting annoying. Hold still so I can shoot you!"

\* \* \*

><p>The Lightning II jinked sideways in mid air as the thrusters gimballed left, pulling a manoeuvre no conventional plane could match.<p>

VIFFing was tricky, but very useful.

With a triumphant grin, Scootaloo launched her missiles directly at the bridge.

\* \* \*

><p>"That was mildly unpleasant," Silver admitted, scratching behind one ear. "Does it always feel like that?"<p>

"Yes, it does," Tiara answered for her. "Better than exploding, though."

"Gotcha." Silver removed the teleport harness. "Okay, where's Applebloom?"

They pointed at the plotting sphere.

"Huh. Okay." The currently-a-Diamond-Dog looked at the board. "Hey, I'm not all that up on the rules... can you deal me in?"

"Sure," Tiara said, placing a card on the table. "I'm playing Minion, along with Sudden But Inevitable Betrayal."

"What does that do?" Nyx asked, picking up the rulebook.

Tiara gestured to Silver to pull up... well, some cloud. "Well, Minion lets me draft any one non-playing person around the table in as a player who has to do what I say â€" and I pick Silver. Sudden But Inevitable Betrayal would have cost me points if I'd ended the game without playing it, but it means you don't have to do what I say any more."

"Cool. Thanks." Silver dealt herself some cards. "...what does a walrus have to do with anything?"

"Discord," they chorused.

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo landed on the flight deck with the satisfaction of a job well done.<p>

But, glad as she was to have sorted out Silver before she ran out of planes, there was still that one problem.

"...okay, where the hay is Applebloom? Game's not over yet..."

\* \* \*

><p>High above Equestria, Applebloom permitted herself a satisfied smile.<p>

Sure, they were probably going to accuse her of cheating again. But she'd only specified the tech level.

She'd never said it had to be a \_sea\_ ship.

The hold of her SSTO flyer opened, releasing a little over one hundred dense iron spheres.

"Look out below!"

\* \* \*

><p>52.8<p>

"Right, this looks vaguely familiar," Twilight said, looking out over the deep coniferous forests cloaking the mountain behind her. As a precaution, since she was human, she withdrew OWL's current chassis from her pocket and slipped the bracelet onto her wrist. "But where from?"

Footfalls sounded behind her.

"I assume you're Awake?" a voice said from behind her.

"Yep," she replied, turning. "Oh, right, of course. This is Berk, right?"

"That's right, yeah." Hiccup nodded. "Looks baseline so far, except that you're here, and... huh."



"What?"

In answer, a little black fire-lizard about a foot long flashed into being between them.

"Toothless isn't his normal size," Hiccup explained, holding his arm out for his sort-of-co-anchor. "That certainly means something's up. Not sure what, though."

Twilight thought a bit, then shrugged. "Oh well. Any ideas?"

"Yeah, actually..." Hiccup paused. "How would you feel about staging a bout of divine visitation? If the village thinks we're favoured by..."

"I think just the ones who are our loop patrons, actually," Twilight suggested. "It's easier."

"Sounds good. Wonder how I'll explain Framherja, though, I was going to go for Thor." Hiccup shrugged. "I'll think of something."

"Framherja?" Twilight asked. "I'm not familiar with the name..."

"Oh, right. Framherja is a bow I pick up in a variant loop. It took \_ages\_, but I finally managed to get her properly soul-bound." Putting action to words, he held out his hand and a \_gorgeous\_ golden bow flashed into being.

"Until then I had to rely on her being my standard-issue legendary weapon. She's basically partially sentient," he explained. "Sort of like your Device â€" Owl, I think?"

"Oh, is that the one you used in Valdemar? And yes, that's right."

A roar echoed over the valleys of the island.

"Toothless?" Hiccup asked, a note of command in his voice.

\_Two. Large â€" my normal size.\_ The little dragon was looking up and into the distance. \_They're... oh, right. I think this is who's filling in the Night Fury slot.\_

Toothless' mental tone was mildly aggrieved. \_That's my gig.\_

"Not this time." Hiccup raised the arm holding Toothless in an expansive gesture. "You can be the sarcastic one who constantly throws barbs at us and never has to do any work."

\_I like this new gig.\_

The two Furies were now close enough for the humans to see them. Hiccup casually fingered Framherja's string â€" not intending to draw, precisely, just not wanting to be caught off guard if he \_had\_ to draw.

Then, with a rush of wind, they both landed heavily down-slope.

"Hi!" a cheerful voice called.

"Spike?" Twilight checked. "Nice to see you here. Wait... is that-

"Indeed it is, dear." Seeing a thirty foot Night Fury speak with Rarity's voice was slightly strange, to say the least. "Well, this is convenient."

"Might not be all that convenient in the future," Twilight warned. "I suspect you'll end up being my dragon for the loop."

Rarity considered this. "Things have been worse."

"True." Twilight turned back to her (for this loop, anyway) twin brother. "What was that you were saying about faking divine favour?"

\_This is going to be good,\_ Toothless opined.

\* \* \*

><p>52.9<p>

"Okay, which of us has the most screwed up family this loop?" Scootaloo asked. "I mean, this is getting silly."

Applebloom shrugged. "Same as normal for me. Pretty borin', actually."

"My mother appears to have been secretly a noblewoman," Diamond contributed. "That's fairly unusual. No idea who, though."

"What a scandal!" Silver grinned.

"And we all know what's after bein' your thing," Applebloom said, pointing. "I mean, Changeling."

"Yes, well..." Silver shrugged. She'd shifted into her earth pony filly "default" as soon as possible, but they all knew the reality.

"As far as I can tell, my parents were gang members," Scootaloo provided, and the others winced.

"I think I might still have a shot at winning," Sweetie temporized.

"Why?" Scootaloo asked. "Your family is just about the most stable thing apart from Applebloom's."

"My brother in law is a shapeshifting dragon," Sweetie reminded them.

"My elder sister or sort of twin and kind of parent is Princess Luna, my sorta aunt it's complicated is Celestia, and my other kind of parent is Twilight Sparkle."

The others looked at Nyx.

"Yeah, okay, easy win," Scootaloo grumbled.

\* \* \*

><p>52.10<p>

Fluttershy felt the loop initiate around her, wobbled for a moment on two legs, and steadied herself.

"What-" a familiar voice said.

"Hello, Leman," she replied, smiling as she turned. "Good to see you."

"And you, little mother," Russ replied, spreading his broad arms for an embrace.

"I see I'm human," Fluttershy said, looking down at herself once they separated.

"Yes, I... think you're my adoptive mother, this time," Russ confirmed. "And you also appear to be immune to ageing, which is convenient."

Fluttershy nodded, taking that in. "I see. So this is back on Fenris?"

"It is indeed." Russ paused. "I'm sorry, little mother. It seems likely that you're going to see a side of me you'd rather not, this time."

The ersatz human frowned. "Um... what do you mean?"

Russ unbuckled his weapon belt and slipped off his armour, leaving him clad in a standard Fenrisian five-layered summer tunic. "Little mother, this is a baseline loop, save only for your presence. I..."

He sat, heavily.

"The Dark Millennium is one of the nastiest places in the multiverse, simply because of the sheer scale of the problem. Normally, it's much easier to cope â€" I have my trusted right hand, Bjorn, and I have Freki and Geri, and normally I have either my Father or at least one of the Chaos Gods on-side, nowadays. But..."

The big Primarch shook his head. "I already checked. No Emperor, no helpful God to help reduce the scale of things. And last time you were here, your friends â€" the Elements â€" were with us. All six of you together makes a potent force of order, and quells the madness before it spirals out of control. And-"

Russ slammed his fist into the arm of the chair, smashing it to bits. "I am only one man. I can usually preserve the Imperium, make sure it stays what it has the potential to be, but at the cost of an ocean of blood."

He finally looked back at Fluttershy, and there were tears glistening in his eyes. "Every time, I must win peace with millions of dead, spend the lives of my men like coin. I... I don't want to subject you

to that, dear Fluttershy. Mother."

Fluttershy was silent for several seconds.

"I think I see. And..."

She sighed herself.

"I know â€" when I think about it, I know what you must have to go through. I know you, Lemon."

Neither of them noticed the slight shift in her pronunciation.

"I raised you, and I know it was a long time ago, but... I do know you. The kind of man you are, and the kind you aren't. And I, I..."

She took a breath.

"I trust you, Lemon. I know that if you go to war, it's only because it's better in the long run. You're right that I don't like death. I hate that it has to happen, and I don't hate it less because of the way the loops reset things. But I'm a druid, as well. A student of nature. Predators â€" wolves â€" have to eat, and I know nature isn't all fluffy bunnies, and so long as they're not cruel about it then I can cope."

"And," she added, "I'm going to help you in every way I can."

Russ stared at her for a long moment.

"Thank you, mother," he said eventually. "That means a lot to me."

\* \* \*

><p>It had taken two months for Fluttershy to get properly in tune with her druid nature in the new body.<p>

Five for her to get her studies of the Fenrisian wolf down to the detail necessary.

And, finally, about two days for her to pick the precise traits she wanted to add.

But now, floating above Fenris in a glow of the steely-blue natural magic of a world of ice, she was ready to try the best way she could think of to help her son.

"Origin of Species."

A fraction of her soul, the accumulated power of dozens of normal lifetimes' experience, burned itself as fuel.

A spark lit, and raced outwards, covering the whole planet and rippling like an aurora.

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you alright?" Leman asked, as Fluttershy came round.<p>

"I'm... fine, thank you," she said quietly. "Did it work?"

"Well, if you were trying what I think you were trying, then yes." Leman stepped aside, and the "nonawake" pair of wolves he raised padded over to the bed.

"Thank you, mother-of-our-pack," one said in a deep, smooth voice. "How to speak as two-legged-pack do is a great gift."

The other licked her face. "Now, get some sleep. You are tired."

Fluttershy smiled as she sank back into bed again.

It was much easier to ignore a sentient race that couldn't talk, than one that could. Assuming things went in a way similar to normal when the Emperor turned up, the fierce loyalty of the Wolves of Fenris should go a way towards cracking his entrenched xenophobia.

Now, how to deal with the Eldar...

\* \* \*

><p>52.11<p>

The Ursa advanced on Ponyville. Again.

"Any ideas?" Trixie asked. "Trixie could go with the old bear-out-of-the-hat routine, but that is getting old..."

"My brother wanted to try something," Twilight replied.

Theme music started playing.

With a gale of wind from broad, feathered wings, an alicorn clad head-to-hoof in spandex landed in the town square.

"Fear not, proud citizens of Equestria!" a male voice belled from the strange apparition. His costume was white trimmed with gold and black trimmed with purple, the royal colours, and a prominent 'E' was displayed over where his cutie mark would be.

"What."

Twilight covered her mouth with a hoof, glancing over at Trixie. "What? Never seen Captain Equestria before?"

Trixie rolled her eyes, as the Ursa lashed out with a clawed paw at 'Captain Equestria'.

The blow bounced off his mane with a \_clang.\_

"It just seems ridiculous," Trixie admitted, as Shining advanced. "I mean, I get the whole 'he has an invulnerable shield' thing, but..."

Twilight shrugged. "He felt like it, ultimately. Besides, his mane looks funny when it's floor length " he keeps it that length the whole time, you know, he doesn't use a spell to regrow it or

anything."

She coughed. "We may have a bet on as to how long it'll take someone to work it out."

\* \* \*

><p>52.12 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight trotted up to the throne where her former mentor sat, clearing her throat. "Celestia, I've had some time to think and I just wanted to ask you about something."<p>

The alicorn smiled. "Twilight, you know I'm open to answering anything you ask."

"Celestia, you've got a great voice, why is it I hardly ever hear you sing?"

"Oh, that one's really easy. I'm just not up to the task!"

"But aren't we singing now?" asked Twilight. "With this rhythm and these varying tones?"

"Yes Twilight, but this is heartsong, music that comes from our bones." Celestia shook her head and blushed. "It's true, when music is magic, I'm as elegant as a diva, but when it comes to ordinary singing, it seems I have the fever. I'm tone deaf! Rhythmically stymied! Four left hooves and no beat in my brain. Every time I opened my mouth, ponies would look at me as if I were insane."

"I know the feeling," Twilight admitted. "I just can't dance. Not without magical support! I'd probably crush the hooves of any stallion that I attempted to court. But then everypony gets up, compelled by the strongest heartsong, and I always get up and join them, swaying and swinging along!"

"Why can't we do this without magic?" they sang as they circled round the throne room. "Why are we utter trash on the floor?"

"I can't hum a tune!"

"I'd be clumsy on the moon!"

"Why must our songs always come from our core? It's true that they always mean something but we sometimes want to sing and dance for fun! Why can't we do this without maaaaaaagiiiiiiiiic? Answer us! Anyone!"

\* \* \*

><p>52.13 (OracleMask)<p>

"I feel stupid in this hat," Rainbow Dash said, adjusting the offending garment.

"It's only for the game," Rarity replied.

While Dash was getting used to what she insisted was a very 'fru-fru' outfit, Rarity was making minute changes to the rest of the costumes. Oh, after all these loops reining herself in to keep the costumes simple was a new challenge for Rarity.

Finally, she sat back and looked over her work with a smile. Everypony's costume was perfectly suited to their role, if not exactly their personal taste. A rough-and-ready yellow for Applejack, purple tweed for Twilight, slinky red for Pinkie, a soft peach with lace for Fluttershy, and the iconic maid's outfit for Rarity herself.

"Where is everypony else anyway?" Rainbow Dash asked, once Rarity helped her escape the feathers and silk so it could be put away with the rest.

"Building the mansion in Everfree."

\* \* \*

><p>"Thanks for the help, Zecora," Twilight said as the zebra paced around the chosen clearing checking their measurements.<p>

Fluttershy had already relocated all the wildlife that would have otherwise been displaced by their game, so all there was left was to build the 'board' for this game.

"Twilight my friend, this help is truly no trouble at all for me," Zecora said, nodding and bracing herself, "I should be thanking you, for allowing my practice in the Art of the Tree."

With a surge of chakra, trees began erupting, twisting around themselves to form floors, walls, and a roof.

"You said you got this skill from a Naruto fused loop, right?" Twilight asked, absently checking Naruto's entry on her list of Hub fiction and noting that it needed updating at the next possible opportunity.

"A strange world to visit, and stranger to stay," Zecora agreed, "Especially after becoming their First Hokage."

Behind Twilight, Pinkie and Fluttershy were sorting through a huge pile of furniture, tiles, wallpaper, and various decorative knick-knacks.

\* \* \*

><p>One appropriately dark and stormy night later, all six friends stood in the foyer of their newly built and opulently decorated mansion.<p>

"Okay, we're ready Spike!" Twilight called.

Spike walked in from the Study wearing a nice dinner jacket.

"Right, here we go...I'm Mister Boddy. Welcome to my mansion..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right then, Ah <em>accuse<em> Professor Plum," Colonel Mustard said, "Of murdering Mr. Boddy in the Kitchen with the Rope!"

The others waited as the envelope containing the real details of the murder was opened, and the contents examined privately by the Colonel. ...Who promptly threw down her hat in frustration.

"Tarnation - Ah got it wrong! An' that means Ah'm out!" Applejack groaned.

"Right, that means you have to wait in the Foyer with Spike," Professor Plum said, smiling apologetically, "Better luck next time?"

\* \* \*

><p>Miss Scarlet bounced around, whooping, while the rest of the mares looked over the contents of the folder.<p>

"So Mrs. White murdered Mr. Boddy, in the Billards Room, with the Candlestick?" Mrs. Peacock said, "...Rarity, why'd you murder your husband like that?"

"The cards are totally random, I assure you," Mrs. White sniffed.

Spike nodded vigorously in agreement. Then asked under his breath, "You're going to keep that maid outfit, right?"

Rarity's reply was a sultry wink.

\* \* \*

><p>52.14 (Masterweaver)<p>

Chrysalis trotted into the mayoral office, glancing at the mare behind the desk. "You wanted to see me?"

Ivory Scroll nodded, walking over to the door and shutting it. "I... have a personal favor I want to ask."

The changeling queen rose an eyebrow as she observed the mayor of Ponyville. "Go on..."

"Well... you see, during Spike and Rarity's... prewedding party, I came to realize that I have certain, ah, tastes. Tastes which are... unique, making it difficult for me to find another pony that shares them." Ivory tapped her hooves nervously. "But, well... you changelings have a hive mind, and so I was wondering if perhaps you might find a drone who'd-"

Chrysalis held up a hoof. "Before we go any further, I just want to explain a few things. Even with the hive mind, any drone I choose won't remember you between loops. They might remember what I recall-if I'm awake-but they won't feel it in their heart." Her eyes drifted downward. "It's the same thing with anypony, really; relationships with nonloopers or even those that just aren't awake that loop are going to hurt, because no matter how deep the bond you



develop it'll be wiped clean when the loop resets. So don't look for love with anypony who isn't already... well, you know. Looping." She sighed. "Believe me... you'll never stop regretting it."

The mayor nodded. "Wise words. But, uh... I'm only looking for, ah, a good time." She blushed. "Um... with a rugged fellow, as it were."

Instantly Chrysalis relaxed. "I am so glad you realize that. You wouldn't believe how many ponies confuse lust for love, I swear to Fagales... In that case, why don't you tell me what you need and I'll see who you can recommend."

"Certainly. Can... can we keep this between us, though?"

"I suppose," Chrysalis mused. "I mean, I can see why you ponies usually require romance as a prerequisite, what with the long pregnancies and all, but I'm still not sure why you're so squeamish talking about it..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Mayor Mare-"<p>

"Ivory Scroll." The mayor smiled. "Just had it changed. Again. I'm making it my 'real' name for the loops, you see, and there are some advantages to my position."

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Yes, well. My apologies. But I need to talk to you about..." She glanced at the door, shutting it. "Well, about your request to Chrysalis."

"How did you hear about that?!"

"Berry Punch told me after she got her and Trixie drunk." The unicorn rolled her eyes. "Apparently they just started making out on the bar so she left... whatever, that's not the point."

With a long sigh, the earth pony slumped into her chair. "I know, I know. It's unusual, certainly-"

"It's also one of the first signs of Sakura Syndrome," Twilight interrupted. "A desperate need to find new things, just to break the monotony of the loopsâ€"!"

"Twilight Sparkle, do you really think that I of all ponies cannot cope with monotony?" The mayor picked up a stack of papers for emphasis. "Regularity is a constant comfort to me, the swishing of pens and quills on stacks of papers. It's just that I also find certain... that a particular sort of thing also, ahem, tickles my fancy. I'm not addicted to my practices by any means, and believe it or not this job of mine requires I submit to psychological profiling at regular intervals. I have no intention or interest in ending the loops, or traumatizing anypony in them." She gave the unicorn a flat look. "Something I believe Eternal Twilight knows a bit about."

Twilight blushed. "You, ah... heard about that. Right." She shook her head, focusing and glaring sternly at the mayor. "Alright, I'll let this go for now. But can I trust that if you ever do feel..."

desperate, or listless, you'll come to us?"

"Miss Sparkle, I Pinkie Promise â€" with full awareness of miss Pie's Chaotic abilities â€" that should I ever feel the weight of ages crushing upon me I will seek counsel with my fellow immortals. Cross my heart, hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye..." The mayor tapped her hoof. "Hmm. That last one might actually be fun, come to think of it."

"A-huh." Twilight coughed. "Well then. I'll just be going." She backed out of the office, watching the other mare warily.

Ivory Scroll rolled her eyes. "I'm just signing papers, Twilight, I keep my naughty business at home. Please relax."

\* \* \*

><p>"You know," mused Thorax as he bristled his moustache, "this isn't exactly what I expected when the Queen asked me to help you out." He watched the mayor swing, following the white ball with his eyes as it sailed over the course.<p>

Ivory Scroll shrugged. "Right now, we're just relaxing. We'll get down to... business later." She pulled out a large club and examined it. "Hmm... this one's very nice. You should use it."

\* \* \*

><p>52.15 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Sure you can have some of my blood, Mister Alucard. Wait, is that what you were trying to do when we were playing tag? I always get those two confused, maybe because I'm such a good tag player. Twilight won't play with me since she's busy in a library or something, but I don't mind. I can be very sweet, too. I suppose that's why everything wants to eat me," Pinkie held out her hoof to the panting vampire. He had been chasing her constantly for three weeks. Ever since Pinkie annoyed Sir Integra enough that she told him to go and have a taste.<p>

Slowly he lowered his fangs over the pink pony.

Pinkie giggled. "That tickles!"

\* \* \*

><p>Sir Integra frowned as she saw the annoying pink pony continue to bounce around town, but now with two little band-aids on her front hoof. Walking inside, she spoke to the groaning, bloated, bed-ridden vampire lord.<p>

"Do you know they had to come up with a new classification system? How the hell did you contract stage nine diabetes? If you were human, all your major organs would be busy exploding about now."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

52.1: The simple explanation.  
>52.2: I don't know much about the setting.<br>52.3: Absent friends.  
>52.4: The other end of their honeymoon.<br>52.5: Gen 3, as written by Lauren Faust.  
>52.6: Zecora has a poetic license.<br>52.7: The nebulous "near future".  
>52.8: This is Berk. And these are happy dragons. (Framherja is from the fic Hitchups, and has been adopted as Hiccup's 'standard issue' legendary weapon.)<br>52.9: Nyx' very existence is something of a puzzler.  
>52.10: A little less dark of a millennium.<br>52.11: The E stands for Equestria. Or possibly Eejit.  
>52.12: A right song and dance.<br>52.13: Get a clue.  
>52.14: This loop is one of those which underwent a fair amount of revision by Masterweaver, until I was more comfortable with it.<br>52.15: Pinkie's sugar has a blood level.

## 57. Chapter 57

### 53.1 (Masterweaver)

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack trotted through the orchards, humming to herself as she examined the trees. Normally Apple Bloom would be here too, but ever since she met those two new friends of hers she'd been off crusading for her cutie mark or... something. Honestly, the strange words pouring out of the filly's mouth were almost incomprehensible, and if it weren't for Twilight assuring her that yes, her sister was actually talking about science, she'd have had the foal sent to the hospital. Still, it was good to know she was finally expanding her circle of friends; even if she stayed on the farm, Applejack would never have wanted her to be a distant member of society that only talked to the trees.<p>

Not that there was anything wrong with trees. It was just... ponies were social. That's how Things Worked.

Her ears perked suddenly; an odd whirring and grating sound could be heard from... somewhere. "What in tarnation...?" She turned, walking briskly after the noise and wondering what could possibly be causing it. Some sort of cart? A winch? Maybe an injured animal, she'd have to get Flutter...

...shy...

Her jaw dropped at the sight of three strange suits of armor, awkwardly walking in circles around one of her trees.

"...um." Applejack swallowed. "Hello there... sirs?"

The earth pony suit turned its silvery visage to her. Without warning the face folded back and in- "Heya sis! Sorry, we're still getting used to this."

"A...Apple Bloom?" Applejack boggled at the tiny head sticking out of the thick armor. "What are you... what is this?!"

"Oh... these. Right, these are armor modes of our intelligent devices. Got them round... Nightmare Night."

"...Intelligent Devices...?"

"It's a long story." The young filly rolled her eyes. "Short version, soulbonded. So me and the girls decided to practice working through the Robotic Armor and Partner mode. Don't worry, we're just walking around for now, nothing major."

"...soulbonded."

"Eyup! Oh Sweetie Belle, watch out for that-" Apple Bloom winced as the unicorn tripped up. "...root. Dang it. Uh, sorry AJ, I think she forgot to turn on her mike again... I'll have to go back in and radio her." The metal scales once more enveloped her face, and she staggered over to the fallen silver figure to help her up.

Applejack blinked. Twice. Then, slowly, she backed away. Twilight would make sense of this. She knew about Nightmare Moon, somehow, she could probably explain all this craziness.

\* \* \*

><p>53.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Wait wait wait," Silver Spoon (currently Silvana Spoonscale of the Lonely Mountain) managed. "You can <em>all<em> turn into \_alicorns?!\_"

"Mmmyp. It's not just something we can teach ya, though," Apple Bloom pointed out. "Even if'n ya were a pony and not a dragon, ya'd have ta... well, do something really special with yer cutie mark."

"And you can't force it," Scootaloo added. "Trust me, I tried a heck of a lot of things before Cloudsdale... it'll happen when it happens, is what I'm saying."

"Whoa." The dragoness turned to her pink friend. "Even you?"

In answer, Diamond Tiara produced a cosmic spectrum gem and Ascended, flicking her wings out as her mane transformed into a bedazzling matrix of crystals. She posed for a moment... before shutting Silvana's mouth with a small smirk. "Yes, yes, I know I'm pretty."

"How do you get your mane to do that?!"

"Comes with being an alicorn." Sweetie flashed her own pair of wings into existence. "It's different for each of us though. Me, my mane doesn't \_look\_ any diferent, but..." She shook her head and the sounds of a powerful orchestra filled the clubhouse. "Yeah."

Nyx rolled her eyes. "Now she's going to want to see all of ours, guys, and you know I don't like mine..."

Silvana shrugged. "If you're too embaressed, I guess we can skip it. For now." She turned to the other two fillies. "What about you guys?"

Scotaloo produced a horn and began trotting around the room, her mane willowing away in an invisible gale and forming patterns of wings and clouds. At first, the dragoness thought she would go bald, but then she realized that there always seemed to be more mane underneath the old one.

"Mine's a bit practical," Apple Bloom admitted as she joined the alicorn club, the red metallic tendrils and wires on her skull reaching out and grabbing some scrap. Within moments, they had transformed it into a small cog. "Who am Ah kidding, it's a lot practical! But it tends ta creep ponies out, so... yeah."

"Huh." Silvana turned to Nyx. "Are you sure you don't want to-"

"Actually, I replaced the Shadow Pony this loop." Nyx tilted her head and concentrated. "I wonder if that changes anything... Oh wow! Bats and spiders, that's new!"

\* \* \*

><p>53.3 (Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle was deeply ambivalent about her Coronation Day.<p>

Or to be more accurate, she was ambivalent about the events leading to it.

When faced with a lonely baseline Loop that had progressed without significant deviation â€" if she didn't feel like bothering with the whole Coronation business, she'd have diverged from the baseline long before this point â€" and the delivery of a particular book shortly after returning from assisting the Crystal Empire in securing the Equestria Games, nine times out of ten she'd skip the cutie-mark crisis, wait a few days, then show up on the Celestial plane fully Ascended. Her explanation to the unawake Celestia would usually go along the lines of: "Well, I spent a fair amount of time pondering Starswirl's notes and consulting some other sources." For some reason, she never mentioned that she had written several of those sources. "Obviously, the spell is a transmogrification matrix meant to re-apportion a pony's innate magic, and uses the symbology of the cutie-mark to..." and so on.

But taking the easy way out meant losing the songs. Chloroplasts and xylem, she still liked the songs. (For the most part: Her coronation hymn did get old fairly quickly...)

Yes, she had recordings. For that matter, the DVDs from the Hub loop were amazingly good covers of the originals; one of these loops, she'd send the vocal performers her compliments. But there was nothing like a live performance, and Celestia's singing was such a rare treat.

So that tenth time, she'd play the incident as straight as possible.

It was never as simple as that, of course. Variant loops would alter the cutie-mark reassignments. (Pinkie the weatherpony was a particularly odd version.) And there was that lingering guilt about having subjected her friends, even if unawake, to the stress of tinkering with their destinies to such an extent.

So here she stood on the balcony in her coronation gown with her reworked Element of Magic tiara on her head. Her plans for this loop required that she follow through with the ceremony after her public Ascension.

This time around, she'd even made ultra-definition holorecordings of all the songs in their baseline forms. She'd been hoping for the super-rare speed metal cover versions, but you took what you could get.

On reflection, her enthusiasm about the ceremony itself had also waned over the subjective millennia. She'd had limited success in changing the coronation hymn; her pull with Court Composer Treble Clef was negligible, so it took considerable effort to modify the official musical program. At least she could usually arrange for Rarity to make the coronation gowns, so Luna was seldom put in that maroon monstrosity: This time, Luna was wearing an elegant midnight blue number with turquoise and silver accents.

"Say something, Princess," coaxed Celestia.

But that didn't mean that she'd be giving the original "Luckiest Pony" speech. Point of fact, she almost never did after the first few times. Over the loops, she'd had the time to refine her thoughts and produce several different speeches employing tricks she'd picked up from the greatest orators in the multiverse. She usually stuck to the themes of her gratitude to Princess Celestia for giving her the opportunity to investigate the magic of friendship and her fortune in having found such wonderful friends. It still took many attempts to get the reactions she'd wanted; her first attempt at reworking the Gettysburg Address to suit the occasion ("Two score and seventeen months ago, Princess Celestia sent me forth to Ponyville...") had not gone over particularly well.

During particularly stir-crazy loops she'd experimented with diatribes against the institution of the Diarchy, reasoned arguments supporting a written Constitution to circumscribe the power of the Dual Thrones, satirical orations on the topic of anarchy...

And then there was the time she'd been struck with an irresistible attack of limericks.

Today was rather like that one. She had an itch that just wouldn't go away until she got it out of her system.

Some time before the start of the ceremonies, she'd hidden a compact sound system on the balcony. Stealthily, she triggered the pre-arranged opening bars of her melody. Luna and Celestia shared a startled look as something vaguely resembling a heart-song began to take hold. Twilight suppressed a grin and started singing.

\_I am the very model of a Princess of Equestria\_  
><em>(Though) my mane is not ethereal like Luna or Celestia<em>

><em>I'd begun investigation of the legendary Nightmare Moon<em>

><em>And prophecy suggested her return would take place very soon<em>

\_The rustic town of Ponyville was set to host the solstice fest\_

><em>My mentor sent me there to check that preparations were their best<em>

><em>With new-found friends I ventured forth into the forest Everfree<em>

><em>To seek out the location of the Elements of Harmony<em>

Her friends had emerged onto the balcony behind her and took up the part of the chorus.

\_There was this reference book about the Elements of Harmony\_

><em>To defeat Nightmare Moon we'd need the Elements of Harmony<em>

><em>So we went out to try to find the missing Elements of Harmony<em>

They subsided to let her resume the solo part.

\_Within the ancient castle we did meet the Princess of the Night\_

><em>With elements of friendship she was cured in arcs of rainbow light<em>

><em>So glad was I to reunite dear Luna with Celestia<em>

><em>I'm pleased to have restored a current Princess of Equestria<em>

The chorus ended the verse.

\_So glad was she to reunite dear Luna with Celestia\_

><em>She's pleased to have restored a current Princess of Equestria<em>

The tempo slowed.

\_Now resident in Ponyville, my friendship research did progress\_

><em>Distractions such as hungry swarms of parasprites sure made a mess<em>

><em>The Gala, grand and galloping caused expectations to inflate<em>

><em>(Poor Rarity discovered that Prince Blueblood was a horrid date)<em>

Rarity put on an affronted expression. The others grinned.

\_Discord's escape wrought havoc on my friends; I thought I stood alone\_

><em>Reminded of our common bond, we all transformed him back to stone<em>

><em>A royal wedding I was asked to organize; the bride was mean <em>

><em>To our surprise she'd been replaced by Chrysalis the changeling queen<em>

Her friends smiled apologetically at Twilight as they took up the chorus again.

\_We didn't know that Twilight's foalhood friend was then a changeling queen\_

><em>Poor Cadance was imprisoned by the vile conniving changeling queen<em>

><em>Combined with Shining Armor's spell, they forcibly removed the changeling queen<em>

Twilight felt a growing sense of relief as she entered the home stretch.

\_The Crystal Empire reappeared to give Cadance a place to rule\_

><em>Hooray for Spike, who saved the day; his stained glass window's pretty cool<em>

><em>And after doing extra magic research for Celestia<em>

><em>I'm now the very model of a Princess of Equestria<em>

Now joined by the princesses, the chorus brought the song to its conclusion.

\_And after doing extra magic research for Celestia\_

><em>She's now the very model of a Princess of Equestria<em>

As she absently acknowledged the responses of her companions and the crowd, Twilight turned her attention to the next item on her mental checklist.

\_Right\_, she thought. \_That one's out of the way. Now to start working on how and when to do "Equestrian Rhapsody".\_

\* \* \*

><p>53.4 (LordCirce)<p>

Twilight had to admit that she was looking forward to see how Fluttershy's new friend Link handled the battle with Sombra. Chrysalis had turned out to be Awake this Loop, so nothing had happened at that point, but the Crystal Empire had shown up right on time, and they had headed off to deal with King Sombra.

\* \* \*

><p>"Crys-tals!" Sombra flowed into the city as Candance's barrier fell. His dark gaze swept across the crowds of terrified crystal ponies, before stopping on a single, ordinary brown pegasus. The pegasus was flipping a small green crystal from wing to wing. Sombra started forward again, shadow sliding off of him. "Crys-tal!" Link smirked, before reaching back under his wing and pulling out...<p>

Twilight almost fell over. Link had just pulled out an oversized Butterfly Net from under his wing. Fluttershy shifted nervously. "Oh



dear." Twilight glanced at Sombra and then paused. Sombra was standing, transfixed, swaying slightly in time with the sweeping of the oversized net. Link walked forward, until he was right in front of Sombra, and he proceeded to whack him on the nose.

Sombra reared back, startled. His eyes focused again, and a dark bolt gathered on the end of his horn. The air screamed as the dark spell leapt towards Link. Sombra didn't have a chance to react as Link swung the net again, and the spell came rocketing back to smash into Sombra's face.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stared in shock at the twitching pile that had used to be Sombra. Somehow, Link had beat him with only that net, alternating between hypnotizing him by waving it, and playing tennis with every spell Sombra threw at him.<p>

"H-how?"

Link shrugged, and Fluttershy giggled. "'What works, works. My world is kind of odd like that.'"

\* \* \*

><p>53.5 (elmagnifico)<p>

Macintosh Apple watched the stallion slumped on the impromptu bar in the Acres' cellar guzzle down a glass of The Good Stuff. It was the third of its kind in almost as many minutes. Probably wasn't good for said stallion to be drinking watered-down cider at that rate, and that wasn't watered-down cider. However, after what the newcomer had told him was true, the poor guy needed few stiff drinks.

"So lemme see if ah got this straight."

The stallion raised an eyebrow and made a gesture indicating he wanted another cider. Mac considered withholding this drink, for the good of his customer. Who had apparently Awoken in a cold sweat on the outskirts of Ponyville, before being brought in by an uncharacteristically serious Pinkie Pie. He slid the requested beverage over to his customer as he continued.

"Every loop y'all is in, regardless of universe, th' universe itself seems to have it out for ya?"

The unfortunate stallion took a long draft from the cider, placing it half-full back on the counter.

"Yep. I've been thrown out of spaceships, tortured by some french guy, ripped apart by a negative reality wedgie, reset to factory settings as an AI, torn to bits by a werewolf, disintegrated, defenestrated, you name it, I've lived it, if not necessarily through it. Lately though, I've been getting run over by a traction city, blown up by a supervolcano, punched out by a burning dude, dropped down an elevator shaft by some idiot in orange power armor, had my elephant killed from under me by some girly elf, squished by a giant mechanical lobster, crashed into a redwood on a speeder bike, eaten by a giant snake, all kinds of weird deaths. Never seen a loop through to its end."

Mac began wiping out another tankard. Might as well have the next ready for when the rest of the current one disappeared.

"An' ye've tried to avoid it?"

The stallion nodded.

"I don't know what I, or some version of me, did to deserve it, but yes. If I know it's coming and avoid it, then another accident happens. No matter what I do, something always kills me."

Macintosh smiled. Being the bearer of good news was always nice.

"Hrm, ah'm not sure if Pinkie mentioned it, but we here in Equestria consider ourselves a sanctuary of sorts. If'n you want a break, Twilight and anypony else Awake, including mahself, will try our best to keep ya safe. An' we ponies are kinda durable folk, ah once saw Twi get smushed by ah full grand piano an' walk away just fine."

His guest sighed.

"I appreciate the thought, really I do, but I sincerely doubt a land full of colorful ponies can keep me safe from fate's caprices. It's just not going to happen."

Macintosh smirked, extending a foreleg.

"Y' just haven't been properly introduced to what we can do here. In any case, we'll do our best. Now, what'd you say yer name was again?"

The stallion perked up just a tiny bit, moving to shake the proffered hoof.

"Well, my horsey memories tell me I'm Buck Leaf, but you can call me Joe-"

Macintosh had heard something starting to creak at the word "Buck", causing him to look up at the ceiling where the noise had come from. Directly above Joe's head there was a crack in a support beam he swore hadn't been there the last ten loops. He barely had time to think "Fewmets". Before the stallion could finish introducing himself, Macintosh had flipped him over the ramshackle bar, and the ceiling strut had fallen, smashing the barstool and leaving a slump in the roof that was doubtless a huge depression in the room above.

"Applebloom, y'all been experimentin' with superheavy alloys in th' kitchin agin'? Y'all know y' ain't supposed to do that in the house!"

Applejack's voice was just barely audible in the now dust-laden atmosphere of the cellar.

Joe coughed.

"Maybe you should introduce me to that Twilight you spoke of."

Macintosh stared at the once-sturdy structural piece of Sweet Apple Acres.

"Eeyup. An' quick-like."

\* \* \*

><p>53.6 (OracleMask)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke in the usual spot for a baseline loop: reading her book. If she hadn't glanced down, Twilight might even have been forgiven for thinking this loop was actually a baseline one.<p>

'The Mysterious Missing Moon'? That wasn't the name of the book...

\_"None of thy light-loving ponies enjoyest my night? Well thou know what, forget thy ponies!" Nightmare Moon declared, "Verily, I shall make mine own ponies! With blackjack, and...and nightclubs!"\_

\_And so the Queen of the Night departed to her celestial orb, and it vanished into the dark amongst the stars. But on the longest day of the thousandth year, it is said she will return to show off her new subjects, demanding that all acknowledge 'whose ponies are better now?!'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight would have kept believing Luna was playing a prank, up to and including hiding the moon, until the Summer Sun Celebration. She watched Celestia awkwardly greet her long-lost sister and several 'moon ponies' with a sense of bemusement: Twilight surely couldn't say she saw this coming at all.<p>

Of course, Twilight made sure to take lots of pictures of the moon ponies, and even more of their moon civilization once tourism between Equestria and the moon picked up: she knew the looping Luna would love to know what 'her' subjects would be like.

\* \* \*

><p>53.7 (masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...Shimmery, but not showy. And the entire line is in the same adorable pattern! It works on everything from skirts to tops to shoes..."<p>

Rarity smiled to herself as Suri went on her little schpiel. She'd mastered this particular fabric countless loops ago, and had been honestly surprised when Twilight first brought it up. Still, she couldn't deny how alluring it looked to the eye, and after hearing what should have happened in this expansion period she held herself back and played her role... with a single difference.

As soon as Suri finished her presentation, Rarity trotted backstage.

"My my \_my\_ I had no idea you'd use that fabric so \_masterfully!\_ Your skills are surely beyond compare, Suri."

"Heh, weren't nothing for a designer like me." Suri smiled back. "I'm just glad you aren't angry for my little deception, mmkay?"

"Oh, no, why would I be angry? If anything I'm ecstatic!" The white unicorn turned toward the dresses and examined them, keeping Suri and her assistant in the corner of her vision. "I'm just so happy that professional designers are using my \_patented\_ fabric."

Suri Polomore paled. "...patented?"

"Mmmhmm. Not only does it look good, but-ah, well, you probably already know, since you'd have to pay royalties to use this. I couldn't imagine a pony so cruel as to pretend she invented this wonderful fabric, the law would be on them in \_seconds.\_ Luckily we're old friends and, well, it's not like you're claiming you made the actual cloth is it?"

"Ah... well, about that-"

"She just loved the swatch you gave her," Coco offered quickly. "You should have seen how fast she made the dresses!"

Rarity glanced at her in surprise. The assistant maintained an innocent smile.

Suri blinked for a moment. "...ah... um..."

"I suppose I'll have to make a new line, though," Rarity said with a sigh. "Hmm. Solidified fire is always a crowd-pleaser, don't you think?"

"...I guess?" Suri fidgeted on her hooves. "I need to, uh, go check on something, mmkay?" She galloped off quickly.

Coco coughed. "Um... what's the royalty cost for, uh, using this fabric? If I may ask-"

"Well, with all these dresses it rounds up to about three bits."

The assistant blinked. "Wait... that's it? Um, I mean, I don't know if the payment went through, so here."

She pulled out her own bitbag and started to go through it, only for Rarity to stop her with a hoof and a smile. "Don't worry, dear, I won't press charges. But I think that whoever \_really\_ designed these dresses should go solo. I have a friend in the theatre..."

\* \* \*

><p>53.8 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was early in the loop as Twilight pulled the Nightmare Moon legend tome off the shelf.<p>

"Twilight! Twilight! I just had the bestest idea in ever!"

"Hi, Pinkie Pie," Twilight said calmly, once her heart finished racing. She put the book back on the shelf; in the same space that was very recently occupied by her surprising pink pony friend, "I'm not going to ask you why you are here in Canterlot, and in a secure area of the royal library, this early in the loop. What's your idea?"

"Weeell, you know how every pony has been all sad and down these past couple of serious loops? I was thinking when I remembered how much fun the crusaders have been having by playing with boats? So I thought we could all do something like that. I checked and saw that most every pony was looping this time around. And it would be so perfect!"

Twilight sat down on her favorite pillow and levitated a spare one for Pinkie, "So you want us to build boats?"

"Nope. Let the little ones play with their sea boats. I want us to build ships. Space ships! It will be so much fun!"

"You want us to have space battles?"

Pinkie nodded enthusiastically with a large smile taking up most of her face, "I figure we can take the same amount of time to build whatever class of ship we wanted. It would be two to a ship; a captain and a first mate. Then a massive free for all around the rings of that big old ring-y gas giant planet. It'll be a day full of explosions and space beams and missiles and fun!"

"That.. that actually does sound like fun. Once Nightmare Moon comes back, I'll let all the loopers know and see who wants to participate. I think Luna had something silly planned this time," Twilight stated.

"Awesome sauce-ome!" Pinkie happily hopped behind a bookcase. When she didn't come out from the other side, Twilight chanced a look. The pink pony was gone without a trace, as usual.

\* \* \*

><p>The dark mist dispersed and Nightmare Moon stood on stage, "It is I, Nightmare Moon. What am I? I'm an alicorn princess. Look at yourselves. You are not Nightmare Moon. Now what is that near your front hooves? It's moon rocks! Look back at me. I'm now Princess Luna, Celestia's younger sister. Look at your moon rocks. They're full of candy! I'm on a pony."<p>

And indeed she was suddenly sitting on the back of her sister. Princess Celestia rolled her eyes in amused exasperation, although a faint smile was starting to show through, "Hello every pony. Please give a big round of applause for my little sister, back from her thousand year sabbatical."

Loud stamping greeted Luna's performance and gift of free moon candy.

After the sun was sent up by both alicorn sisters and the celebration wound down, the loopers were all told of Pinkie's spaceship battle party idea.

"So we have six months to make our ships from scratch. No fully formed ships from our subspace pockets if we have them. Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle have agreed to officiate. Any questions?" Twilight asked.

No hooves were raised.

Six months later, the teams were formed.

"And that's the last of the pre-flight checklist," said Nyx, Twilight's first mate, "Our heavy cruiser is fully operational."

"Did you discover anything new about the others' ships, and how do you think our 'Lux Arcana' stacks up to them, Nyx?"

"Well, our space ship has really strong shields. A good amount of missiles and point defense systems, an overpowered spinal cannon, and a rapid charge jump drive â€" since you like your teleport trick so much, Mom. This is pretty much you in starship form."

"You helped build it, too."

"True, true. Well, apparently the others had the same design philosophy of trying to make a ship that resembled themselves. Rainbow Dash and Scootaloo made a light cruiser. I didn't peek at their specs, but I would guess that the 'Galaxy Runner' is fast, fast, and fast. And with those two at the helm, it probably handles like a lithe frigate â€" maybe even a fighter. So speed and manoeuvrability as the primary defense," The main screen suddenly showed an image of a sleek ship that looked like it was going fast while standing still.

"Rarity and Spike made the heavy cruiser 'Grand Elegance'. Other than being a work of art, it seems like it's a jack of all trades ship. Not weak against anything, but not fantastic in any particular area, either."

"Applejack and Big Mac grew their entry. The 'Apple Star' is a dreadnaught-class tree ship."

Nyx shuffled some data pads in front of her, "Speaking of living ships, Fluttershy transformed Angel Bunny into a war leviathan â€" cabbit mix. We checked, but there is no rule against riding around inside your first mate who is now a cruiser-sized spaceship."

"You think the transformation ability will stick through the loops?" Twilight asked. Having a violence-prone rabbit with a Fluttershy protective streak that can change into a huge spaceship whenever he wants to would be.. interesting.

Twilight's adopted daughter gave her a flat look.

"So that's a yes. Fantastic," the purple unicorn deadpanned.

"Moving right along, Trixie and Chrysalis seemed to have made a destroyer. I'm guessing that the 'Show Stopper' has some impressive firepower, because Trixie. I would guess it also has some nice stealth cloak or illusions or accidental self destruct or something

along those lines. Because Trixie."

"Celestia and Luna have put together a cathedral-class battleship. The 'Solar Wind' has immense armor on the front. That unicorn horn lance seems to indicate that ramming is indeed an option with that ship. Plus, I would not want to be caught in a broadside alpha-strike from that vessel."

An image of a large pink ship appeared. Nyx continued, "Aunt Cadence and Uncle Shining Armor made a carrier, the 'Crystal Sentinel'. So tons of little flying heart-shaped fighters, I imagine."

"All the other awake loopers including Mayor Mare, er.. Ivory Scroll, Cheerilee, Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon â€" or rather Silvertail Spoon, the deer; are sitting this one out and just helping commentate with Bloom and Sweetie."

"Which leads us to the most worrisome contender," Nyx switched the image on the main screen to show what appeared to be the unholy lovechild between a flying saucer and a big top circus tent. Then, a tiny little speck appeared next to it. Squinting, Twilight astonishingly realized that it was a relative size comparison between that monstrosity and her own ship. Nyx continued, "I have no idea how Pinkie Pie and Berry Punch made something that huge in the time we had, but there it is; the super-dreadnaught, 'Life of the Party'. No idea what it's capabilities are. Pinkie could have stuffed it full of engines, or weapons, or balloons, or something."

"Probably all of the above," Twilight sighed, "Well as a certain pink pony would say, let's get this party on the road."

Nyx nodded, "Engaging jump drive in three, two, one..."

With a brief violet flash, the Lux Arcana vanished from orbit.

\* \* \*

><p>"They're gaining on us!" Nyx shouted as she and Twilight sent their ship through a frantic variety of maneuvers. A sharp fly-by nearly scraped the paint off. One of the floating ice rocks passed far too closely. And there were many of them composing the ring around the large orange gas giant planet that dominated the view of the ongoing battle, "This is your fault. 'Let's engage Rarity's ship,' you said. 'It'll be easy,' you said."<p>

"Not the time, Nyx. And how was I supposed to know her ship was practically invulnerable to everything we threw at it?" Twilight pressed a few buttons in near panic, "Stand by for emergency jump in three, two, one."

Just as it was about to hit a smallish-sized ice moon, the 'Lux Arcana' vanished and reappeared beyond the rock while still travelling at full acceleration. Rarity's and Spike's 'Grand Elegance' simply plowed through the moon, shattering it completely.

Beams lashed out from the tastefully designed warship and impacted on Twilight's shields, bringing them down slightly and shaking the two ponies inside the vessel.

"They're still coming. That didn't even slow it down much," Nyx looked down at her console, "Incoming communication from the 'Grand Elegance'."

"Open channel," Twilight said while continuing evasive manoeuvres.

"Hi Twilight," Spike waved from his chair, "No hard feelings, I hope?"

"None whatsoever, Spike. You're still my number one little dragon brother, but it's not over yet."

"Not until the fat pony has the heart-song," Nyx realized Twilight, Spike, and Rarity were all staring at her, "What?"

"Never mind. Close channel," Twilight shook her head and concentrated, "There, let's head towards that moon. It's big enough to hide in."

"Course changed," Nyx looked up at her adopted mother, "Um, do you think that moon kind of.. sort of.. looks like an apple?"

Twilight's eyes shrunk to pin pricks, "That's no moon. Release missiles. Stagger fire! Head back into the dense part of the rings!"

The apple-shaped moon unfolded like a flower and released a very large wooden tree ship.

"Yee-haw!" Came the sound of Applejack's voice over the comm, "Hope you all weren't hoping to stage this space rodeo without us."

"Eeyep," Big Macintosh agreed with his sister.

Twilight strafed her ship just in time to avoid a massive beam that originated from Applejack's tree-ship. Said beam instead impacted the chasing 'Grand Elegance', doing absolutely no damage to it.

Two of the missiles from the Arcana's barrage made it past the living ship's point defenses and detonated. Each massive explosion seared away numerous structural support branches. Then, to every non-Apple family pony's amazement, the missing branches regenerated right back before their eyes.

"Oh come on! Am I the only one with a ship that's not invulnerable?" the lavender unicorn shook her hoof at the ceiling.

"Incoming communication from Cadance!" Nyx announced.

"Hi there, Twi!" Cadance spoke up from her chair, "Looks like you need a little help. Just hold direction and acceleration vector and we'll be right there to help."

"Thanks, Cadence," Twilight aimed her ship towards the 'Crystal Sentinel' and charged her main weapon.

"What are you doing?" Nyx questioned through clenched teeth, "We have Rarity and Applejack bearing down on us. We need help!"



Twilight kept smiling at her sister-in-law on the screen, "One more thing. If you're in a carrier, where are your fighters? But just for old time's sake, let's finish the rest of the song. Sunshine, sunshine, ladybugs awake..."

'Cadence' stopped smiling and shut off her view screen. Twilight's main cannon fired a staggering beam that lanced out and hit the ship supposedly coming to her rescue. The 'Crystal Sentinel's' image wavered before reforming into the much smaller, and now damaged, 'Show Stopper'. More worrisome was the wayward stealth torpedo that was detonated by chance as the beam glanced it.

"Emergency Jump in three, two, one!" Twilight frantically slammed her hoof on the button. The 'Lux Arcana' vanished right before several stealth torpedoes passed through the empty space where it had occupied mere moments before.

Seeing their primary target vanish, the torpedoes locked on to the nearest enemy signals. Several impacted the 'Grand Elegance' without too much noticeable outward effect, although something must have shaken loose as the cruiser's engines stopped accelerating and the ship continued to drift. The ones that managed to get through the 'Apple Star's' point defenses made far bigger explosions than Twilight's missiles. A full third of the huge tree-ship's superstructure started to come apart, only to be snatched by grasping roots and pulled back in to re-merge with the main body.

Trixie and Chrysalis had almost fixed their engines and illusionary cloak when their ship was suddenly hit by many rapidly fired beams and exploded in a grandiose fireball. "Former booster has been busted!" Scootaloo cheered on the comm.

The 'Galaxy Runner' raced out of the fading explosion and did a purposeless barrel roll just for show. Rainbow Dash chimed in herself, "Hope we're not late for this little engagement."

"Not at all, dear. In fact, why don't you have some fabulous door prizes," Rarity spoke up as she launched a dozen long range missiles at Dash's ship.

"Now if that don't sound like a good idea. You can go ahead and have some of mine as well," Applejack launched far more of her own missiles. Most went towards the 'Galaxy Runner', but bolstered by the effect Trixie's super torpedoes had; some went towards Rarity as well.

"That's what I'm talking about!" Rainbow cheered as the missiles closed in, "What's stunt flying without a few obstacles? Scootaloo, you got this?"

While Rainbow's special talent was speed, Scootaloo was all about evasion. The orange filly spoke up happily, "No problem. I got this."

The 'Galaxy Runner' swerved up and towards the missile swarm, and then started making increasingly spectacular maneuvers. The ship seemed to be almost playing a friendly game of tag with the deadly projectiles, occasionally causing two or more to crash into each other or into the resulting explosion. Its point defenses firing only

to put hopelessly outclassed missiles out of their misery.

Rarity's ship didn't fare as well. None of the explosions appeared to damage it outwardly, but neither did it stop drifting. It didn't help when a spiked teardrop shape appeared over the crest of one moon and fired a large red beam at the 'Grand Elegance's' engines â€" turning them into inoperable slag.

"Oh, I hope you don't mind too much, Rarity," Fluttershy said over the comm, "But injured prey is easy prey. No offense."

"No offense taken, Fluttershy, dear," there were small fires all through Rarity's bridge which Spike was attempting to extinguish, "I suppose we'll just have a closer look at this delightful planet."

Caught in its gravity well, the elegant ship continued to float towards the gas giant until it vanished into the gaseous depths.

Suddenly, the 'Lux Arcana' reappeared right behind Fluttershy's ship and fired its main spinal cannon. Unfortunately for Twilight, Angel Bunny's reflexes were faster and the large beam was evaded â€" if only barely.

"Are you okay, Angel Bunny?" Fluttershy asked. The floating crystal with Angel's face on it said something too softly for Twilight to make out. The librarian, however, did recognize the look that appeared on the yellow pegasus' face â€" as apparently so did Nyx. The little alicorn filly slammed a button and quickly shut down the view screen before she and her adopted mother could take the brunt of Fluttershy's stare.

Twilight took a brief glance at the tactical display as Nyx started chasing after Angel Bunny. The battle had moved away from the bulk of the rings. Most of the moons and other large obstacles were far from the action.

Applejack and Rainbow Dash were engaged in continuing their life-long friendly rivalry in space. The 'Galaxy Runner' was weaving in and out of the 'Apple Star's' structural branches, shooting any target of opportunity â€" which tended to just regenerate and grow right back into place.

There was a flash of light as the real 'Crystal Sentinel' appeared nearby. The carrier had seen better times, since its shields seemed severely weakened and parts of it were either missing or on fire. Dozens of drones provided a rapidly diminishing fighter screen from the source of their mother-ship's devastation. The slightly worse for wear battleship, the 'Solar Wind', was persistently dogging the carrier's heels. The ship's vast array of turrets were proving devastating against the fighters as they were set to emit faster firing but lower yield beams.

One of the battleship's missiles must have scored a lucky hit as the 'Crystal Sentinel' started to slow. A few moments later, the 'Solar Wind' impacted the carrier like a cosmic freight train. The enhanced shields held for a split second under the mass of the heavier ship before blinking out. The cathedral-like battleship passed inexorably through the burning shattered remains of the Sentinel, trailing

streamers of burning fuel and atmosphere.

"Good afternoon, Twilight," Celestia appeared on the view screen, "I'm sorry your foal-sitter and brother blew up, but I do admit that this was a grand idea."

"Very therapeutic," agreed Luna.

Before Twilight could answer, the screen filled with static for a brief moment.

"What happened?" she asked Nyx.

The little pony was busy examining her console, "Apparently Rarity's and Spike's ship finally succumbed to the pressure of the planet's atmosphere. The 'Grand Elegance's' explosion sent a massive EMP burst and oh-oh..."

"What? What?" Twilight asked.

"I think the explosion woke something up. There's a huge shape quickly rising up from the planet's depths. Something massive," Nyx answered worryingly.

Twilight stared at a growing patch in the gas giant's atmosphere. Then like an enormous leviathan rising from the ocean surface, the circular hubcap-like form of the 'Life of the Party' broke through the cloud layer.

The star-base sized ship accelerated rapidly and interposed itself in Angel Bunny's path, flipping over to present the largest possible surface area to the panicking craft. The bunny-turned spaceship tried his best to evade, but ended up slamming into the dreadnaught like a gong. The living ship exploded, leaving a relatively small smoking crater.

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy and Angel " in normal rabbit form " appeared at a booth inside of Mac's bar, along with the faint smell of burning smoke. The yellow pegasus immediately nuzzled her friend and companion, "Don't feel bad, Angel Bunny. You did your best."<p>

"Good Angel and brave Fluttershy. Your efforts, I would not deny," the zebra trotted over to their table with a cart full of drinks and snacks.

"You're working here now, Zecora?"

The zebra nodded, "With ponies in space, the position was free. I asked Macintosh why it couldn't be me. Don't feel too down you didn't finish the match. Watch with your friends and drink this morning's fresh batch," Zecora placed two glasses and a pitcher of carrot juice on the tabletop. Fluttershy thanked her kindly and looked over at the other tables.

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity, Spike, Trixie, Chrysalis, Cadence, and Shining Armor;

along with all the other non participating loopers, were watching the large screens that showed the current state of the battle. Apple Bloom and Sweetie Bell were commenting on how Rainbow Dash must have gotten bored doing negligible damage to the Apples' tree ship and decided to take on Twilight. Only for Pinkie's vessel to suddenly micro-jump in Dash's path.<p>

Rainbow Dash and Scootaloo screamed as their view was suddenly filled with pastel colored dreadnaught. However, years of stunt flying had left both with lightning fast reflexes. The 'Galaxy Runner' pulled up, barely managing to adjust its course in time. It came withing a few meters of scraping itself to shreds on the larger ship.

The sleek cruiser shot forward until it cleared the outer edge of the 'Life of the Party', only to run into a full broadside barrage by the 'Solar Wind'. Scootaloo did her best, managing to evade many of the beams; but there were too many energy blasts boxing them in. The speedy ship's shields failed and it came apart in a shower of flaming debris.

"Huzzah!" exclaimed Luna over the general comm channel, "And you thought all those hours spent playing video games were wasted, sister."

"Not now, little Lulu. Something is happening on Pinkie's... are we on general chat?" Celestia's embarrassed image suddenly switched off.

"Energy spike from Pinkie's ship!" Nyx suddenly shouted as she tried to plot an evasive course.

"Head towards the 'Solar Wind'" Twilight said, adding, "I have a plan."

"Your plan had better be more than 'let's fly into the guns of a battleship', mom."

"It is. I just have to get the timing right," Twilight noticed how the filly was looking at her, "There's not much else we can do. Or do you think we can evade whatever central weapon that's housed in that giant pie-shaped thing?"

Nyx looked back at her console, "Heading directly for the princesses' cannons. Hope this works."

Indeed, the 'Solar Wind' saw a new target and turned to aim most of its turrets at the 'Lux Arcana'.

Twilight shunted all the weapon power to the jump drive capacitor, reducing the time needed to only half a second.

"Steady, steady," the unicorn spoke to herself. The battleship finished turning to face her. It was rapidly filling up her screen as she approached.

"Almost, almost," Pinkie's and Berry's starship had reddish energy playing over its surface like lightning, coalescing into a bright mass in the center.

"Emergency jump now!" Twilight slammed her console and her ship

vanished in a burst of light.

Pinkie's immense energy blast shot forward in a zig-zagging lightning-like path, either absorbing or ignoring any of the battleship's turret bolts it encountered. It passed through the space where Twilight's ship used to be and impacted the 'Solar Wind'. Red sparks and immense energies played over the battleship's shields, occasionally reaching down and striking the hull.

A few seconds later, the 'Solar Wind' was still there, entirely undamaged.

"Sensors indicate no damage whatsoever," Nyx double checked her results, "Communication request from the 'Life of the Party'"

A grinning Pinkie Pie appeared on the view screen. Berry Punch was behind her, gazing at a console while sipping something from a crazy straw stuck in a huge glass. Several empty such glasses littered the floor around her.

"Hi, Twilight! Are you having fun?" Pinkie asked, "Do you like my ship? Do you?"

"It's very nice, Pinkie," Twilight answered, "By the way, what was that energy blast supposed to do?"

Pinkie giggled, "It's a surprise. Just watch."

The screen blinked off. Nyx looked at her tactical display, "The 'Solar Wind' is accelerating at Pinkie's ship. It's going to try to ram it."

Twilight nodded. She shunted power back into weapons. It looked like there was going to be at least one fewer ship soon, and she wanted to be prepared.

The battleship kept speeding up until it was almost at the much larger vessel. To Nyx, it looked like a dart approaching a dartboard.

Then Pinkie's ship jumped, revealing the repaired and tentatively nearing 'Apple Star' to be right in the path of the alicorn sisters' ship.

"They're not stopping or changing direction," Twilight stated, "What did Pinkie Pie do?"

The two ponies watched as the battleship collided with the larger tree ship dreadnaught. It smashed its way through the outer branches, slowing down until it finally came to rest near the core. There was a moment of stunned silence.

Then the 'Solar Wind' self destructed, the titanic explosion destroying the 'Apple Star' along with it.

Nyx finally broke the silence, "Er, mom? Didn't one of Pinkie's recent loops have her as Radical Pinkie, hacker extraordinaire? I think, I think she just brute forced her way into the 'Solar Wind's' computer systems. That blast was an AI in the form of an energy being. Not a very smart one, maybe parasprite level intelligence; but

that is all you really need. Since it is an energy being, shields won't work against it. It's like trying to keep a pony out of your house when your door is made of salad. We can't ever let ourselves get hit by that thing."

"Agreed," Twilight Sparkle nodded, "Set a course for the 'Life of the Party'. We need to do enough damage to that subverter ray before it fires again. There doesn't appear to be too many point defenses on that thing. If only Cadance and Shiney were still around with their carrier."

Nyx shrugged as the 'Lux Arcana' spun around and changed course.

Apparently, Pinkie's ship wasn't out of surprises. Panels opened throughout the ship and let loose hundreds of multicolored balloon-like orbs.

"What are those?" Nyx tried to process what she was seeing.

Twilight realized what they were as her eyes widened, "Mines."

"Wait, if that ship has mines; does that also mean it has.." Nyx was preempted by a beeping noise. More panels opened up on the large ship and disgorged a seemingly endless stream of missiles. Another beeping noise, "Energy spike from Pinkie's ship. She's going to try to use the subverter again."

"That's fine, maintain course," Twilight announced. She was glued to her tactical screen as the missiles kept getting closer and closer. Then with a start, she spoke up, "Emergency jump in three, two, one, now!"

The 'Lux Arcana' blinked away from the incoming missiles and appeared on the other side of the Pinkie's ship. The 'Life of the Party' micro-jumped to face the other way. Just in time for Twilight to slam a button down and fire her main cannon.

The overcharged blast raced across the vacuum and slammed into the 'Life of the Party's' main cannon, right as it had gathered full capacitance. Right when Pinkie had briefly lowered her shields so that she could fire out.

The massive energies warred with each other before detonating in a titanic blast that shredded the massive dreadnaught and sent Twilight's ship tumbling.

Nyx lifted herself off the floor and looked at her display, "We did it! We did it! We.."

There was a beeping noise. Nyx stopped cheering suddenly.

"What was... " Twilight asked before looking at the view screen as all of the thousands of Pinkie's missiles that survived their ship's destruction streaked through the dissipating fireball and converged on the battered 'Lux Arcana'.

"Oh." Twilight managed to say before suddenly finding herself and Nyx in Mac's bar. There was loud cheering and

applause.

"Congratulations, you two! You managed to last the longest, so here is your prize," Discord slinked up to the two disoriented ponies and gave them each a big apple. On each of the fruits, there was written in edible ink, "Best Space Pony."

The lavender unicorn looked up at Discord questioningly.

"It's traditional," he smugly said.

Twilight just shrugged, smiled, and stuffed the entire apple in her mouth. It tasted sweet, like victory.

\* \* \*

><p>53.9 (Goldude)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Now, Ahuizotl..." Daring Do slid the giant ring over her head onto her neck. "You know I love you, but I can't give you the ring until I've properly proposed."<p>

A nearby tree squeed. Rainbow Dash, Ahuizotl, and Daring Do turned their heads over to said tree with confused and questioning faces.

A wild Awake Cadance popped out of the tree and enthusiastically skipped her way over to the fighting duo. Rainbow Dash double-taked. "The hay? Cadance, have you been following us?"

"I have. And it's a good thing! I very nearly missed a proposal! Go ahead. I'll wait."

Some awkward silence ensued. Ahuizotl cleared his throat. "We're in the middle of some business, insignificant-"

"Oh, I know! I'm just waiting until Daring Do proposes. Then you two can get married! Let me plan your wedding."

Rainbow Dash was left to hysterics while Ahuizotl facepalmed and Daring Do stared incredulously at the strange alicorn.

\* \* \*

><p>A Nonawake Fluttershy had successfully led Changeling versions of herself astray. She turned around only to be faced with four Rainbow Dashes. She winced and backed away as they were all about to converge on her. Suddenly, the Awoken Rainbow Dash grinned and quickly took care of the Changeling fakes. It was a good thing for Rainbow Dash that Chrysalis was not Awake. She and Twilight were the only ones this loop. Rainbow pleaded with Twilight to let this loop go Baseline until they get to the part where the Changelings were guarding The Elements of Harmony.<p>

She considered it a personal challenge to be able to defeat The Changelings and reach The Elements, is the main reason she wanted this. It would show her just how much stronger the two of them had actually gotten.

Rainbow Dash offered a hoof to a cowering Fluttershy laying on the floor. It was accepted, and the blue pegasus helpfully pulled her Cloudsdale friend up, their lips very nearly coming into contact.

There was an explosion in the distance. Nobody really paid attention to it.

That was a bad idea.

Cadance was Awake and was plowing through the Changelings, making her way over to Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy.

"...Aww, I missed it. You two would've been great together."

Rainbow Dash was boggled. "...Are you serious, Cadance!? Now!?" She and Fluttershy were then tackled by ten changelings.

\* \* \*

><p>The crowd in Apploosa was gathered around the stage. Murmurs were scattered across from person to person. They were quickly cut short as an Awake Spike played the first few notes in the piano. A nonawake Pinkie excitedly poked her head out from behind the curtain, eager to start her song. Things were previously discussed amongst Spike, Rarity, and Twilight about the nature of the song Pinkie Pie would sing.<p>

The Awakened quartet had been made sure to bake enough pies for this plan to work. The curtains were pulled open and the clam Pinkie was in opened, revealing the very same outfit Pinkie wore each and every time she sung at this point in the loop. It's a mystery why she always ended up in that outfit at one point or another in Apploosa.

Pinkie Pie then began to sing.

Some of you may be tired  
>And many may moan and beg<p>

As the first lines were being sung, Rainbow Dash's wings were extended. Suddenly, a pink light erupted from the stage with a loud TWOOM. When the light subsided, an Awake Cadance immediately took off and glomped Rainbow Dash, eliciting a surprised yelp.

"Oh, Rainbow Dash! I didn't know you felt that way towards Pinkie Pie! I can't wait for your wedding!"

"Wait, what?" was the only response Dash could make.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle crashed open the door. Cadance whipped her head towards one of Twilight Sparkle's Great Disapproval glowers. The Crystal Pony princess was frozen in action, a piece of chalk hanging in the air with a magical glow around it.<p>

Twilight Sparkle slowly turned her head towards the wall. On it were a series of pictures of various pairs of ponies with hearts between them.



"...This needs to stop. Intervention time."

"But-"

"Buts lead to Eiken."

Cadance flinched. Twilight Sparkle wasn't going to take any of this.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

53.1: Those things that are hard to explain to an older sibling.

>53.2: The mane attraction.<br>53.3: Doing it with style.

>53.4: Link kinda has experience with this.<br>53.5: Joseph Buckley, professional butt monkey.

>53.6: Nightmare Yoink?<br>53.7: The benefit of hindsight again.

>53.8: Are there copyright issues with the Crusaders?<br>53.9: She has a problem.

## 58. Chapter 58

54.1 (Masterweaver)

\* \* \*

><p>Upper Crust trotted through the front doors of the royal palace, wife on his foreleg. Years of living amongst the nobility helped him keep his ecstasy from overwhelming the ponies around him, but he couldn't help a small smirk as he leaned into his wife. The Grand Galloping Gala, at last! After years, he had finally been recognized for his own genius and now he and his wife would <em>what the hay was the princess <em>\_wearing?\_

"All I know is pain," Celestia droned from behind her thick black bangs.

\* \* \*

><p>54.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...and with her own humble talents, not only did this pony soundly defeat Discord..." Celestia paused. "Well... inebriate him, anyway..."

There was a smattering of laughter in the crowd.

"...but also! This pony mastered her own magic on a deep and powerful level, earning herself a place equal to me and my sister. Fillies and Gentlecolts... may I present Princess Berry Punch!"

Cheers resounded throughout the hall as the mare emerged, waving at the gathered ponies. She leaned towards her companion for a second. "This still counts for the competition, right? I didn't mean to ascend, after all, this is my first time with wings..."

"Yeah, I'm marking this as a win." Twilight smiled. "You do realize this means you can't be in that club anymore."

"YAY MOM!" shouted a filly at the front of the crowd as she jumped onto the stage and hugged her leg. "YOU ROCK!"

Berry smiled. "...I think I can live with that."

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (Masterweaver):<p>

\_what the hay was the princess wearing?\_

"Ahyck!" Celestia honked her red rubber nose. "Hiya kids!"

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (Masterweaver):<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em><span>what the hay was the princess wearing?<span>\_

"GREETINGS ORGANIC LIFE FORMS," droned the armored figure. "I AM DEFINITELY YOUR LEADER AND I AM POSITIVE TO SEE YOU."

\* \* \*

><p>54.3 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight's first few minutes after Awakening were a bit of a blur, thanks to the pounding headache.<p>

She'd just had her locket stolen- the locket which was the only thing she had to remember her uncle by. She vaguely recalled ranting dire imprecations of doom for the two thieves before the headache sent her to her knees. Then, before she'd had time to recover from that, she heard the bells of the town clock ring. She was late to work at the university, and the sheer horror of being late for anything- and even worse, late for work at an institute of higher learning- made her so frantic that she didn't stop to take stock of her situation until after Mister Tock had challenged her at the university gates.

Once the giant clank had allowed her to proceed, Twilight scrambled for Professor Beetle's personal lab, where she was the junior lab assistant. She reached for the doorknob, recognizing for the first time the four fingers and a thumb on the end of her arm. It had taken her a good ten minutes to realize she was human.

Specifically, she was a human named Twilight Clay. Her adoptive father Adam, a mute giant of a man, operated a blacksmithy, while her mother Lilith taught piano and music lessons. Professor Beetle had been her personal mentor for over a decade, ever since her uncle had vanished. She would have been thrown out of the college for lack of aptitude dozens of times except for his personal intervention... but,

since Beetle was the man who ruled not only Transylvania Polygnostic University but the entire city of Beetleburg as well, nobody questioned his decisions too loudly.

Beetle had the Spark- the peculiar form of insanity that could impose itself on the laws of physics, twisting them, outright breaking them on occasion- but breaking them in ways which could be studied and repeated by the non-gifted. Sparks ruled most of Europa, and had done for centuries... which explained why much of the continent was a wasteland inhabited only by bandits, monsters, bandit monsters, and the occasional terrified peasant.

The Long War, it had been called- centuries of hereditary nobility and/or mad scientists fighting for dominion, for abstract ideals, or for the last slice of strawberry shortcake. All of which had finally, finally been brought to a stop when Baron Wulfenshy had knocked enough heads together to enforce his Pax Europa. Now, almost twenty years later, the continent grumbled in sullen resentment under his dictatorial rule... but, Twilight mused, even the current temporary armistice was an improvement over what had come before.

Out of what had come before there had been only a handful of true heroes, the most notable of which were the legendary Sparkle Boys. Heirs of a long line of truly evil and decadent bandit lords, they had gone against the family traditions and become true, noble heroes. Even after their disappearance stories and plays about their exploits, mostly fiction of course, rang across all-

Twilight's reverie came to a screeching halt. The Sparkle boys? Could it be a coincidence?

Of course not. The Loops don't do coincidences. Besides, the Lost Heir was one of the oldest tropes in the book.

Twilight Clay, aka Twilight Sparkle, grinned at the thought. Already she could feel things fizzing in the back of her brain as her headache cleared. Knowledge gleaned from uncountable Loops synergized with the information gathered from a broad post-secondary education in one of Europa's finest institutions for budding mad scientists. She could visualize exactly what had gone wrong with her previous clank. She could even see where she'd erred in making the clank in her pocket, the one she'd brought to show Professor Beetle today. She could imagine fifteen different improvements for Mister Tock, including a modular transformation that would allow for the giant mecha to divide into five human-piloted war machines.

With an effort Twilight forced her lips to close over her grin. I mustn't reveal myself too soon or too swiftly, she thought. A new Spark is a threat to the status quo. And if people knew the Sparkle Boys had an heir! Oh, the chaos and destruction and adventure that would result! No, better to wait until she was prepared...

... and then she'd show them.

And then she'd show them ALL!

With a supreme effort of will Twilight turned the maniacal laughter into a coughing fit. She composed her features into sadness and despair- the locket, remember the mugging and oh yes I will make them \_calm calm calm\_- and put her hand on the door. Despite her best

efforts, she couldn't stifle the exaltation within her at the prospect of a lab, a new day, and a new world of infinite possibilities.

Today would be a great day... for SCIENCE.

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (Goldude)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em><span>what the hay was the princess wearing?<span>\_

"I got this costume of myself from Pinkie Pie!" came a voice from a shoddily constructed hole in the Princess Celestia costume.

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (Jcogginsa)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em><span>what the hay was the princess wearing?<span>\_

"What? Fire's in this year"

\* \* \*

><p>54.3 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Even after so more Loops than she could keep track of with a checklist, Twilight could still be shocked.<p>

Professor Beetle was a very small smoking pile of flesh and bones in the middle of the laboratory floor, through a combination of one of his own beetle-bombs and a five centimeter box-end wrench.

Said box-end wrench still sat in the grip of one Twilight Clay, whose other hand had pushed the only daughter of the visiting Baron Wulfenshy to the floor.

It had all gone horribly, horribly wrong. Twilight had thought this Loop a silly, lighthearted mad-science world... or, possibly, she just hadn't cared while her brain was percolating with all those ideas. But Professor Beetle... well, as the events of the previous five minutes had demonstrated, he wasn't a \_good\_ man as such, but he was one of the better ones this world had to offer. Even if he had tried to kill the young daughter of the overlord who'd just taken his city away from him, he didn't deserve death. He didn't deserve THAT death.

But when he'd thrown that auto-guiding aerial hand grenade at the Baron and his daughter, Twilight hadn't hesitated.

"How's his head?" the Baron asked one of the professor's former lab assistants, Mr. Glassvitch.

Glassvitch didn't need more than a moment to look through the remains. "Totally destroyed, Herr Baron."

"So he's dead," the quiet voice of the baron's daughter murmured.

"Yes. Permanently. A pity, that." The baron's voice was not so much weighed down with sorrow as toting a convenience-store bag of mild regret.

"A pity?" Twilight asked. "He threw a BOMB at your DAUGHTER!"

"A poor excuse," the quiet voice of the baron's daughter said accusingly.

"A poor excuse?!" Twilight could feel that mental percolation in the back of her mind again. "HE THREW A BOMB AT YOU!"

The jagermonster in charge of the Baron's bodyguard detail pulled an intact organ out of the smouldering mess of the Professor's remains. "Hey, I von't zay he vos SHTUPID, but I ain't findin' a whole lotta brains in dis!"

The baron's assistant sighed. "Baron, may we leave now? My feet are sticking to the floor."

"HOW DARE YOU!" Twilight's glare swept across all the members of the Baron's entourage. "Because of your petty Spark power politics you just made me kill my TEACHER! And you're treating his murder like some sort of... of... of KITCHEN accident! Professor Beetle was a good man! The people of this city LOVED him! And when they find out what's happened here, they're going to-"

The percolation built and built in Twilight's mind, and then without warning it turned into a mental explosion of glass, shards ripping through her consciousness. She screamed and fell to her knees, holding her head in her hands, unable to focus.

When the attack subsided enough for her to understand words again, Twilight heard the Baron speaking. "Sergeant, walk the young lady home."

"Actually," the baron's daughter murmured, "I'd prefer to do it myself. If you don't mind."

"Gilly, are you absolutely sure?" the Baron asked. "Rumors must already be flying around the city-"

"Father, you've had me trained," Gilly Wulfenshy replied. "And if I can survive morning exercises with Bang, I'm certain I can survive a city under martial law."

"Pah," the jagermonster muttered. "Little Flutters? Protect herself? Schpent all dot time in Paris communing mit nature und dancink mit der fluffy critterz, iz vot I hear. Vot kind of trainink is-"

The hand that grabbed the jagermonster's wrist was small and delicate, but not gentle. Nor was the foot that swept the jager's legs out from under, the knees which found each kidney in rapid succession, and the arms which swept the sergeant in a perfect

semicircle overhead to slam back down- hard- into the stone floor.

"... hokay, pretty goot trainin'," the jager gasped, a tone of respect now in his growl.

"Very well," the Baron said. "But hurry straight back. We must put together a plan for the administration of the city, now that Beetle is gone."

Once they were out of the gates of the university and out of earshot of the Wulfenbach guard clanks, the young Wulfenshy said, "Thank you for saving my life, Twilight. But I could have taken care of it myself."

"I know," Twilight said. "But when it comes to a split-second decision, I'll always defend my friends. Even friends I've just barely met."

"Have you been in this Loop before? I haven't seen it, but you've been doing this longer."

"This is a new one for me, too." Twilight looked around her at buildings not much different than Ponyville's, though with narrower streets, paved with cobblestones. "And it's not turning out to be a very nice one so far."

"It has its moments," Fluttershy said, "but it plays for keeps. You were about to go into a full Spark rant, weren't you?"

"Don't remind me," Twilight replied. Her head still hurt a little.

"Don't ever do that around my father. Here I'm Gillian Wulfenshy, sole heir to the dictator who rules more than a third of Europa directly and keeps the rest too scared to do anything about it. I Awoke this morning in the middle of morning exercises with a sky pirate captain who thinks a day's wasted without at least one fresh corpse. And she's on MY side. There's worse than her around."

They stood in front of Clay Mechanical, Twilight's home. "Keep your Spark hidden as long as you can, Twilight," she said. "Because when people find out you have it, they're going to come for you. And you haven't got a powerful warlord this Loop to protect you."

"I'll be careful," Twilight said. "You stay safe too."

"Don't worry about me. You're not the only one the Spark has touched in this Loop. I'm sure we'll be meeting again."

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (Wing Zero 032)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em><span>what the hay was the princess wearing?<span>\_\_

The peels slowly slid off Celestia as she gave him a maniac's smile. "Do you like... BANANAS?! Luna DIDN'T like them a thousand years

ago!"

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (EdBecerra)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em><span>what the hay was the princess wearing?<span>\_

"How would I know?" grumbled the monkey draped over Celestia's mane.  
"One moment, I'm in the zoo..."

\* \* \*

><p>54.3 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Wake UP, Twilight."<p>

Twilight vaguely remembered the sudden exhaustion that had overcome her after her adoptive parents in-Loop had left to prepare for their sudden departure. They didn't want to stay around with the Baron in the city... more to the point, they didn't want Twilight to stay around. She had been supposed to pack her things, but she'd felt so exhausted...

"I SAID WAKE UP!"

Something yanked hard on Twilight's hair.

There was a wrench in her hand. She used it.

"WHOA! Twilight, it's me! It's Spike!"

Twilight finally opened her eyes, slipping her glasses back over her eyes for a clear view. Standing in the middle of the garage was a wild-eyed youngish man. Except for the light green hair and unkempt beard, there was nothing that could set the man before her apart from thousands of other ex-military, mercenary or pirate crewmen- the old, slightly ratty uniform, the wild-eyed look, the whole package.

Then memory waved a file card at her. This was one of the men who had mugged her.

"How do you know that name?" she snarled, yanking her wrist out of the man's grip and brandishing the wrench for a second go.

"Ponyville!" he gasped, stepping back out of reach. "Library! Number one assistant! Loops and things!"

Twilight slowly got to her feet, forcing herself to relax a bit.  
"Sorry about that, Spike," she said. "Mind explaining what you were doing mugging me?"

"Sorry about that. I Awoke in the middle of that. My in-loop brother Omar was the one who took your locket."

"Where is he now?"

"Dead." Spike shook his head. "I know it's the Loop memories talking, but Omar was still family. We only had each other since the mech got... well... anyway, we only had each other. And he shouldn't have taken your locket, but he didn't deserve to die for it."

"Die? But that was just this morning. And Professor Beetle's dead, so how could he have had time to hold a court?"

"I'm guessing the locket killed him," Spike said. "He clutched it as he was dying, didn't let go until the end. I was so mad I threw it to the floor, and it shattered." He reached into a pocket and pulled out one piece. "That's when I noticed the name and address engraved on the back and put two and two together."

Twilight liked this Loop less and less by the minute. "I'm sorry about Omar," she said. "But I'm glad we're together... what's your name here?"

"Spike von Zinzer," he said. "Former mechanic on- what's that?"

Rapid thumping noise shook the ground as something very, very heavy ran towards the forge. Stooping through the open garage door came a steam locomotive on legs. It brought itself to a stop less than a foot in front of Spike and grabbed him in a metal claw. Almost instantly Spike pulled a lightsaber out of his subspace pocket and pruned the clank of its arm, but the clank didn't seem to notice. It simply leaned forward, shining its lights on Spike's face. The engine's bell dinged in happy recognition.

"Do you know something about this, Twilight?" Spike asked, lightsaber held at the ready.

Twilight looked at the engine... which looked suspiciously like the one Adam Clay had been working on when she'd returned from the university. She looked down at herself, clad in long Victorian-era undergarments... and covered up to the elbows in oil, grease, and soot.

Oh yes, and there was the wrench in her hand. The one she'd been sleeping with. That might also be a clue.

Sleepwalking was one thing. Sleep-engineering? That was a new one for Twilight.

Then the sleeping gas grenade hit the floor and released its payload, and the further adding of two plus two got postponed for a later date.

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>what the hay was the princess wearing?<em>

"Nay, good Sir Crust," a voice emerged from over the ludicrous mass



of crinkly neck ruff, "prithee approach the throne! Forsooth, we wish to proceed into the tourney, where Sir Dash and Sir Shy shall joust for Our amusement while we quaff large flagons of mead and ale!"

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (Zetrein)<p>

\_what the hay, is that the princess?\_

"Shoo be do, shoo shoo be do!" Seapony Celestia greeted, from her giant fishbowl.

A certain apple mare then proceeded to run for the doors, screaming, "REPENT! REPENT! The end is neigh!"

\* \* \*

><p>54.3 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Castle Wulfenshy was a most fascinating place to be a prisoner.<p>

Of course, Twilight Clay wasn't really a prisoner prisoner. The Baron had a whole range of categories for those he kept against their will on his flying capital. The lowest step on that hierarchy, of course, was "experimental subject." Somewhere in the middle was the group Spike had been shuttled into, "potentially useful Sparks." Between the steam-engine clank, the lightsaber Spike had failed to put back in his subspace pocket before the C-gas knocked him out, and a bit of fast talking by Fluttershy, Spike had taken Twilight's place in the Baron's eyes as an emerging Spark, with Twilight as his girlfriend. This had the advantage of putting Twilight on the very top tier of the prisoner hierarchy: "hostage."

Most of the other hostages where students or children, all her age or younger, some as young as three or four years old. Twilight had had a brief and tense meeting with their governess, a construct- an artificial organic being assembled from spare parts, lightning, and Spark-driven insane genius- who went by the name of Madame Von Cheer. Twilight didn't know if Von Cheer was Cheerilee Looping; their meeting was very, very much in public, and thus "in-character" for the Loop.

The cause of the confrontation had been Twilight's consultation with Fluttershy, or rather what happened after their conversation. Fluttershy had been trained in every form of mad science known, but her favorite branch of the science was biology. She'd created the second generation wasp eaters, weasel-like multilegged creatures who could smell out those infected by the mind control insects used by the Other during the time of the Sparkle Boys. She'd also created other things, including a squat construct in a trench coat and hat, with nothing but white floppy ears sticking out of their shadows. Fluttershy called it Angel; according to her, she'd made him when she was eight.

Fluttershy had also explained the main difficulty in escaping Castle Wulfenshy by demonstration- that is, she'd taken Twilight for an

impromptu ride on the biggest, ugliest, scariest fruit bat Twilight had ever seen in her life. Twilight had never seen a flying mammal that seats six before. (Dragons, yes. Bats, no.) The three of them (the two Loopers and the bat) had circled the vast, improbable airship which was the core of the Baron's fleet, riding miles above the European countryside below. The escapade had ended with a crash landing through some very large windows into the middle of a meeting of jagermonster generals. The entire flight had been visible from the childrens' deck, and Von Cheer disapproved of the example Twilight had set.

Twilight had gone on to compound her example by joining a group of the older students, ranging in age from hers down to an eleven year old boy, to secretly look at the slaver wasp engine that had been the direct cause of the Baron's visit to Beetleburg. The group had used a lighting gantry to see the Baron and his scientists studying the immense alien device; unfortunately the group far outweighed the recommended load for the gantry's supports. Things began to come apart when the eleven year old saw something in the shadows and panicked. One of the large lights fell off the gantry, and in short order the whole group had scrambled for safety just a short jump ahead of the Baron's footmen.

In the confusion Twilight had become separated from the group, and now she walked alone in the service corridors of the mighty airship. She'd quite forgotten the panicky flight from the gantry, idly strolling down the corridors and staring in wonder at the infrastructure of Castle Wulfenshy. How did it work? What did all the valves and pipes connect to? Where on Earth were the lift bags necessary to keep an airship the length of a Star Destroyer aloft?

Twilight's mind had wandered so far from her body that it took several seconds to return when the body's progress was blocked by a dead end.

Her first thought, naturally, was, Where's the door? She looked back up the corridor, which didn't have a turnoff anywhere between where she stood and the entrance a good hundred meters or more back. Either the ship had some very sloppy and unsafe design, which she didn't believe for an instant...

... or there was a hidden door. With a hidden latch. Found. Click. Perfect.

The secret door slid open to reveal a massive shaft running vertically through the ship. It sat empty except for a figure wearing khaki clothes, a bomber jacket and an old style aviator helmet and goggles. A handful of locks of hair peeked out from under the helmet, each one a different brilliant prismatic color. Each limb hung in chains from a different mounting position on the shaft's walls, the shackles totally encasing the prisoner's hands and feet in chromium steel.

Apparently, Twilight mused, there is a spot on the Baron's hierarchy of prisoners below "test subjects."

"Hi there!" the prisoner chirped, looking as confident and smug as if the two of them were seated at a Parisian cafe. "So, you're the Baron's long-lost daughter? Well, you've come just in

time."

"Rainbow Dash?" Twilight asked. "Is that you in there?"

The smug smile vanished, replaced by a suspicious stare. "How do you know that... wait a minute. That hair. Is that you, Twilight?"

"Twilight Clay, that's right," Twilight nodded. "Don't use the other name. It'll cause trouble here."

"Sure would!" Rainbow agreed. "So that makes you the Long Lost Heir Seeking to Reclaim His or Her Throne! Even better!" The smug smile was back, and Rainbow actually managed to lean in a casual manner in her chains. "So, mind springing me? It's not that I need the help, as such. I am a hero, after all. I'll always find a way out."

Twilight paused to consider. If she released Dash, where would the wingless Looping peagus-turned-human escape to? She'd seen that getting off Castle Wulfenshy was no simple thing. "Hold that thought," she said. "You know who I am this Loop, but who are you, exactly? And what did you do to get the Baron to lock you up so... thoroughly?"

"I'm glad you asked," Rainbow grinned, and out of nowhere an umpah band struck up a jaunty tune.

Rainbow sang:

\_The world today is gloomy  
>All woe and sad and doomy<br>And the prospects for improvement are quite dark  
>It gets worse every season<br>And I think I know the reason  
>It's the fault of everyone who has the Spark<br>So pardon my exposition  
>As I tell you of my mission<br>To free Europa from this tyranny  
  
>By removing every Spark-<em>

Twilight interrupted:

\_You can't mean EVERY Spark!\_

Rainbow nodded and replied:

\_Yes, I mean it, every one- including ME!\_

The chains which had held Rainbow spreadeagled loosened enough for her to strike a dramatic pose for the chorus.

\_For I am Rainbow Tryggvasen, Aviatatrix Adventurer  
>The greatest hero ever known to man<br>If you think that evil can never be defeated  
>Well, Rainbow Tryggvasen surely can!<em>

The fanfares faded back into standard umpah music for the second verse.

\_Where the people are in danger  
>I will never be a stranger<br>I will always come a-soaring to their

aid

>When the helpless cry in terror<br>The bad guys best beware, or

>They'll learn the meaning of the word 'afraid'<em>

Suddenly compartments opened in the shaft, allowing several serving girls and airmen to sing:

\_She's a fighter! She's a genius!\_

\_The peasants love her becaus\_

\_She makes the monsters and the madboys swear and curse\_

These hatches closed as new ones opened, each one revealing a mad scientist hard at work in one of the Baron's laboratories:

\_She's a nutjob! She's a pest!

>She's a most unwelcome guest!<br>And if all of that weren't all, she's something WORSE...\_

The music stopped long enough for the scientists to groan:

\_... she's a HERO\_

The first set of hatches reopened, and servants and Sparks united for the fanfare-filled chorus:

\_She's Rainbow Tryggvasen, Aviatatrix Adventurer

>The fastest thing to fly the seven skies<br>We know it's impossible to be completely insane

>But Rainbow Tryggvasen surely tries<em>

At this point Rainbow interrupted, freezing the music with:

\_BUT!\_

The umpah quietly resumed.

\_Though dashing and chivalrous

>Each tussle, scrape and roughhouse<br>Is a distraction from my glorious master plan

>I've made quite productive use<br>Of my tragic twisted genius

>And the results you can easily understand<em>

The chorus from the wall hatches began humming in the background.

\_My designs are nearly perfect

>Without a single defect<br>So I know that happy day is coming soon

>When I round up every madboy,<br>Every Spark and all of their toys

>And exile them by rocket- TO THE MOON!<em>

And suddenly, still in her chains, Rainbow was right in Twilight's face, grinning with mischief and adventure as she said:

\_So... wanna join up?\_

She returned to her position slung in the middle of the shaft, her chorus singing along with her for the grand finale.

\_Join Rainbow Tryggvasen, Aviatrix Adventurer

>The greatest hero ever known to man<br>If you wish Europa to be freed at last from evil...

>Know that Rainbow, Rainbow, Rainbow, Rainbow<br>\_\_\*\*Rainbow, Rainbow Rainbow, Rainbow

>The HUMBLE Rainbow Trygvassen surely CAN!<strong>\_

And on a triumphant fanfare punctuated by a single tuba blart, the hatches in the wall slammed shut as if they had never been there.

54.1 alternate (Goldude)

\* \* \*

><p><em><span>what the hay was the princess wearing?<span>\_

Queen Chrysalis bounded up to Upper Crust, disguised as Celestia. Her cat ears twitched a couple times. "Can I have your autograph, Crust-chan?"

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (OracleMask)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em><span>what the hay was the princess wearing?<span>\_

"Now that I think about it, the pink really does bring out my eyes," Celestia said as she looked over her new coat color in a large mirror.

\* \* \*

><p>54.3 continued<p>

What do you do when an escape attempt from a flying castle, though no fault of your own, goes horribly and catastrophically wrong, scattering your friends to the winds and leaving you alone in a dangerous wilderness with nobody except the self-proclaimed Empress of All Cats?

Why, obviously you find a traveling circus and medicine show to rescue you. Of course.

And so Twilight did.

Oh, there were a few disputes about whether or not the circus dared risk harboring an obvious runaway from Castle Wulfenshy, but a sudden attack by autonomous mechanical scorpions and the swift application of a death ray Twilight had cobbled together from the wreckage of her airship lifeboat settled those disputes most amicably.

And now, as the rest of the circus roasted marshmallows around the burning remains of the robot bugs, five figures sat in one of the

larger circus wagons, doors and windows shut so the conversation could not be overheard. Opalescence, the Empress of All Cats, might or might not have been Awake, but Twilight had already learned it's impossible to keep a secret from a cat that has thumbs and can speak the same language as you. Members three and four of the conference owned the wagon and ran the circus- Madam Trixie von Payne's Traveling Sparkle Show, featuring the incomparable acting talents of Krystalis, Landgravine of a long list of names which Trixie delighted in pointing out had all been wasteland for centuries.

"I actually rather enjoy this Loop," Trixie said, sipping her cocoa. "I mean, I love a big boom as much as the next mare, but I feel like this circus is getting back to my roots. I've been practicing my illusions a lot more, and since magic in this Loop is really weak without mechanical aids I've been learning more about props, too."

"And for me," Chrysalis said, "it's been relaxing not having thousands of voices in my head asking for orders, begging for help, bickering over the least little things. No hive mind, no responsibilities. I only have to boss one person. Her," she said, pointing at Trixie. "And in exchange I get to learn about imitating others without the use of magic." She grinned and added, "Of course, the alchemy does help."

Trixie being a Spark, a low-level one, hadn't surprised Twilight in the least. Chrysalis being a Spark was only a mild surprise. Learning that more than half the show were minor Sparks hiding in plain sight as hokey actors, charlatans, and song-and-dance people- show folk, in other words- had surprised Twilight quite a bit.

But then there was the big surprise- the fifth member of the conference, who was one of the circus members that wasn't a Spark. She was fairly lean, except for the spots of superfluous fat that the female human body seemed to insist on no matter how inconvenient they were. Aside from those obvious exceptions the woman was muscle through and through, an obvious fighter. (The pair of double-bladed swords strapped to her back were an extra little hint.) Her skin had a faint orangish tint with freckles on her cheeks, and her hair was an eye-twitching mix of green and golden locks.

"I reckon th' vacation just ended," Applejack Daughter of Chump said. "Gotta say, it's been fun havin' a purely physical Loop. I'm glad I didn't get stuck with that crazy egghead stuff like you all did. But all good things gotta end sometime." She leaned forward towards the lantern and said, "So, what do we do, fearless leader?"

"I know what the Loop wants me to do," Twilight said. "I've heard three different Sparkle Boys stories since I Awoke. My adoptive parents told me to go to their capital, Mechanicsburg, where the castle would help me. And when we first met, Trixie mentioned that you were traveling to Mechanicsburg. You don't have to trip a hoof on the train rails to know they're there."

"Well, are we still going to do that?"

Twilight frowned. "Believe me, I've been seriously considering derailing this Loop and going to Paris to learn all I can about the technowizardry of this world. But Fluttershy had a point. She told me that Sparks, and especially female Sparks, are walking targets in

this world. I'd be spending the entire Loop fending off attacks, kidnapping attempts, and all sorts of other stuff. That would be really inconvenient. I mean, all the interruptions!" Twilight tossed her hands in the air. "When would I ever find time to finish a book?"

"So, Mechanicsburg, then," Trixie nodded.

"I suppose," Twilight said. "At least I'll get some idea of what this Loop's baseline is supposed to be, if we ever get thrown into this world again. But I tell you, if this Loop doesn't shape up and fly right, I swear to Redwood I'm going to go full Eternal Twilight on this place, and if I end up in G3 or Eiken again, so be it!"

"Funny you should mention, 'shape up,'" Applejack drawled, leaning across the lantern and poking a finger into Twilight's corset. It went in a good ways.

Twilight felt a twinge of apprehension.

"I noticed you were lookin' a bit flabby there, in the fight against those robot critters."

Trepidation.

"And, y'know, it's three months' travel at least from here to Mechanicsburg."

Fear.

"And we'll be spending a lot of nights out here in the wilderness, with robots and monsters and bandits and all sorts of nasty stuff."

\_Dread.\_

"And here I am, princess from a lost city jus' chock fulla all sorts of martial arts trainin' techniques."

**\*\*Panic.\*\***

"Don't eat too heavy tonight, Twilight," Applejack said, grinning a most evil grin. "Wake-up time is an hour before dawn. We've got a LOT o' trainin' to do."

As memories of other loops Twilight had spent trapped with martial arts geniuses swam through her brain, her only coherent thought was: \_Not again.\_

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em><span>what the hay was the princess wearing?<span>\_

"I'm a little teapot, short and stout..." Celestia sang.

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (Crisis)<p>

\_what the hay was the princess wearing?\_

"The night... shall last... FOREVER!" yelled the sun princess dressed as her sister.

\* \* \*

><p>54.4 (OracleMask)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The sound of stampeding ponies wasn't unusual in Ponyville, but the usual timing of it caught Twilight's attention right away. She and her friends had handled Nightmare Moon a few days ago (it was Pinkie's turn to defeat non-looping Nightmare Moon, and her plan had somehow resulted in the redeemed Princess Luna having to <em>eat<em> her way of an enormous caramel flan). All six had agreed on a baseline loop, and that meant Twilight knew for a fact that the next stampede wasn't due for days.

"The orange! THE ORANGE!" cried the stampeding ponies as Twilight went to see what the problem was.

It was a little obvious: a utter horde of identical orange pegasus ponies swarming the town. Twilight frowned: she knew who that was, and also she knew that he \_barking\_ knew Equestria was supposed to be a sanctuary loop!

Naruto better have a \_really\_ good reason for panicking all of Ponyville.

\* \* \*

><p>Naruto had a <em>horribly<em> good reason for panicking all of Ponyville.

As soon as the kage bushin spotted the sparks Twilight had sent up to get their attention, she'd been dog-piled and practically dragged bodily to where the original was waiting. She'd just opened her mouth to ask what he'd been thinking when Twilight found herself being desperately hugged.

"What \_happened?\_" Twilight found herself asked.

"It's...you remember back when the last Crash happened, right?" Naruto explained, "And how it got most of the loops a new looper or two?"

"Of course," Twilight replied, "We got three."

Even though they were talking, Naruto kept watch on their surroundings. It was like he expected something horrible to jump out and attack them any second. Twilight had never seen Naruto so on edge before...no, wait, she had. But not since the first time they'd met, right before they'd proven themselves as a sanctuary by using the Elements of Harmony to banish his teammate Sakura to the moon.



It gave her a terrible sense of foreboding.

"Three? Lucky you," Naruto said, "We only got one - Inari-chan was really surprised a loop as old as ours got any newbies at all."

Twilight nodded, though at the same time she went over a mental list of villains from Naruto's loop. Surely having one of them start looping was the reason Naruto was so tense. Which one, though? One of Akatsuki? Or maybe Madara? Whoever, it was, it had to be someone really -

"And while Inari-chan was busy telling me we finally, finally had a new looper...Sakura found him first."

Twilight instantly discarded her mental list.

"Mulberry," she swore, "Is he..."

"Look for yourself," Naruto answered grimly.

Naruto pulled a copy of Harry's invisibility cloak off a pony standing behind him, and Twilight's heart sank. The pony in question was standing upright, but his eyes were vacant. Whoever it was, their body was perfectly healthy but their mind was definitely not at home.

The silver mane, mis-matched eyes, and scarecrow cutie mark just made the sight that much worse.

"Put the cloak back on," Twilight said, as gently as possible, "We'll take him back to the library, and I'll see what we can do."

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (Misterq)<p>

his mind shut down as he stared at the thirty identical Princess Celestias bouncing off the floor, walls, and ceiling like toy rubber balls; each one was grinning and chanting 'Fun! Fun! Fun!'.\_\_

Slowly he and his wife backed out of the large entry door and gently closed it shut.

"And let us never speak of this day again," He told his wife, who just nodded enthusiastically.

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (RedshirtZombie)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em><span>what the hay was the princess wearing?<span>\_\_

"It's a Discord-fur coat, feels just wondrous on those nights when things get quiet." responded Celestia, to the unspoken question.

"And no animals were harmed in its making!" said the coat, with a

wink.

As the guards carried the latest fainted fops out of the room, Celestia smiled her preferred omnibenevolent grin. "This may actually be an interesting gala, for once! Even if it's smaller than usual."

\* \* \*

><p>54.5 (Crisis)<p>

No one was quite sure how Eden Hall and its owner/Anchor Sasakura Ryuu kept ending up in the massive fused Loops where numerous Anchors were in attendance, but there were no complaints whatsoever. Right now, those Anchors present were engaging in one of their favorite pastimes.

Embarrassing the heck out of each other.

"And here's 'Rapid Hooves' on a date with my friends Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy while they weren't Awake," Twilight grinned, showing a picture of an extremely nervous stallion being kissed on each cheek by both mares at the same time.

"It was weird," Ranma insisted. "They both decided they liked me and they were civil about it!"

"Power of friendship Ranma-san," Twilight kept grinning. "What did you think would happen when you saved a horde of endangered bunnies using superhero-grade feats?"

The original Anchor just buried his head in the table and moaned.

"That's nothing!" cheered one Monkey D. Luffy, Anchor of the piratical One Piece Loop. "Wanna see my pictures of Naruto when he looped in as one of my crew?"

Everyone's attention was riveted. Luffy's crew was famous/infamous across the Loops for the ridiculous adventures they had and the ludicrous battles they always ended up involved in. Luffy was one of the few loopers in the multiverse who had fought Bobobo and liked it.

But before Luffy could start, the door to the bar opened and everyone present immediately conceded the embarrassing photo contest.

Kyon, the Anchor who generally rode herd on Haruhi and her home Loop, had arrived.

Not that this would stop the stories from being told, of course.

\* \* \*

><p>54.6 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...so for some reason, the sorting hat puts me in Hufflepuff! Hufflepuff, of all houses!" Trixie rolled her eyes. "Luckily, Harry was awake and he ended up in the same house. And, well, the long and short of it is we ended up conquering magical Britain within two

years."

Chrysalis snickered. "I can believe it. So, what about... you two?" She turned to the couple sitting across the table, managing to keep from flinching. "Any fun Hogwarts stories?"

Shining Armor pulled his ears back. "Oh, no..."

Cadance snickered. "Ooooooh yes. See, when we looped in we'd replaced Ron and Hermoine-"

"Ahem..." An oddly nervous pony trotted up to the table. "I... hate to interrupt, but, ah-"

"Right, right." Chrysalis sighed. "That. Don't worry, I've already laid them, Mandible." She wrote something sown on a slip of paper and passed it to him. "That's the code, and remember it's the blue chest with green filigree. Trixie, you don't mind if he visits the wagon without us?"

"Nah, it's cool." The showmare leaned back. "Just don't raid the pantry."

Mandible nodded to both of them. "Thank you, my queen. Good day, miss Lulamoon... and, er, friends?" He glanced at Cadance and Shining warily.

"Don't worry, they're looping too." Chrysalis smiled, patting his head fondly. "Go on, then, you've got three weeks to watch over them before they hatch!"

Trixie shrugged as the drone went on his merry way. "I don't know if the hive mind thing makes the loops easier to explain or not, but it certainly makes your subjects more nervous then any pony I've ever explained it to."

"I think it's because they can experience what I experienced, really understand." Chrysalis shrugged. "Anyway, what were you two saying about Hermoine and Ron?"

"Oh, nononono, stop." Cadance glared at her. "You laid eggs?! I thought having children was impossible in the loops!"

The changeling queen blinked. With a sigh, she brought a hoof to her forehead. "...Thirty three thousand, six hundred, fifty three."

"What?"

"Barring any deaths, ponies that are secretly changelings, or other swarms that exist only for one iteration of Equestria... That's how many changelings there are in my swarm by the end of a loop. Thirty three thousand, six hundred, fifty three." Chrysalis met the alicorn's gaze. "Sometimes some of them are nequeens or actual queens, sometimes they're all mindless automatons following my commands, sometimes they're converted ponies. But in the end, they generally all have the same names... or numbers, if the loop likes, as they've always had. I'm not having new children, Cadance. I'm only having children that the loop already says I would have had anyway." She sighed. "I feel it's best to get it all out of the way near the

start, but things got in the way this loop."

Cadance blushed. "Oh. Um. Sorry, I just thought... you know, that you'd found a loophole or something, and me and Shining could..." She trailed off, rubbing her foreleg awkwardly.

"Honey..." Shining Armor nuzzled her gently.

"No, it's... it's okay. I can handle this..." Cadance took a breath. "It's not forever. Just a very long time. I'm good."

Trixie and Chrysalis shared a look as the two had their moment, each trying to silently ask the other what exactly they should do or if maybe they should just leave or-

"So!" Cadance said a little too brightly. "You and, uh, Mandible huh?"

The changeling queen shook her head. "It's not like that, it was just a simple mating meeting... haven't you ever wondered why they're all called drones?" She rolled her eyes.

"And..." Shining gave Trixie a look. "You're okay with this?"

"Hey, Chrysalis is a shapeshifting erovore who happens to be the queen " in the insect sense " of the entire swarm." The showmare shrugged. "I've accepted that she has a social and biological obligation. Heck, sometimes I join in."

Chrysalis nuzzled her marefriend. "Just remember, Trixie, that many drones and ponies have had my body but only two have ever had my heart. And one of those..." She gave Shining an embarrassed smile. "Well... you know."

"Awwwwwww!" Cadance brought her forehooves together with a happy grin. "That is so sweet! I can't wait till you two get married."

Instantly Chrysalis and Trixie separated.

"What?!"

"Married?!"

"Us?!"

"No!"

"All that paperwork, and arranging the whole shebang-"

"I'd look gaudy with a ring on my horn-"

"And there's the whole part where I have to have drones in my bed-"

"And flirting with my audience gets me much better ratings if I'm single-"

"So, no, we don't want to end up in a loveless marriage," Chrysalis

concluded.

"We'd much prefer a marriageless love," Trixie stated with a firm nod.

Cadance blinked. "But... it worked out so well for Spike and Rarity!"

"Who have to jump a few loopholes or hide their relationship from nonawake ponies due to the age difference," Trixie deadpanned.

"...Well, Shining and I are happy!"

"Didn't a swarm of shapeshifters invade and lock you in a cave?" Chrysalis mused.

"But... but... wedding!" The alicorn turned to her husband. "Help me out here."

The unicorn took a deep breath. "Honey... I think you may have a bit of an addiction."

"What? I do not!"

"So anyway, there we were, I'd replaced Ron-"

\_"SHINY!"\_

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (Goldude)<p>

\_what the hay was the princess wearing?\_

Princess Luna looked down from her seat on Celestia's head. "Are you sure this is a good idea, sister?"

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate (Wing Zero 032)<p>

\_what the hay was the princess wearing?\_

They couldn't describe the attire Princess Celestia was wearing because it looked a lot more like some kind of weird - looking conceptual art machine contraption that somehow was actually working. "Oh, do you like it? I'm wearing SCIENCE!"

\* \* \*

><p>54.7<p>

"I see," Twilight said. "So this Discord was one of your worst enemies, back when you were setting up Equestria as a country?"

"That's right." Celestia nodded. "He did grave and terrible things to the ponies of Equestria, twisting them so their darkest traits consumed them, though my sister and I eventually defeated him."

"And you're sending us out against that?" Twilight pressed, allowing a note of fear into her voice. "I'm a librarian! My friends, though I do love them, aren't the most stable of ponies â€" do you remember when I sent you a letter about Pinkie nearly going insane?"

Celestia blinked. "I... well, that is true, yes. But you and your friends bear the Elements, the only magic which can defeat him."

"Do you want them back?" Twilight asked. "Seriously, I'm perfectly willing to give them back."

"They are yours now, Twilight," Celestia said. "I could not take them any more than I could take your cutie mark."

"Well..." Twilight paused. "Okay. But I want some help."

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight, this is ridiculous," Celestia said nervously. "Those are fillies."<p>

"If you'd seen the devastation they can cause with a makeshift hang glider and a pot of honey, you'd be hiding too," Twilight replied, her voice muffled by the large padded bunker she was in.

Well, okay, it was a pillow fort.

"Ri-i-ight, let's see..." Scootaloo muttered, pulling back on her y-shaped sling catapult. "This time I'll get a cutie mark for sure!"

She released.

The shot cracked past Celestia's left ear at a little under the speed of sound, producing an impressive air wash.

"Whoops!" Applebloom said with a wince. "Uh, sorry, your princess-ship, we didn't see you there..."

"Though we're not quite sure how," Sweetie added.

Twilight pulled the top of her fort aside. "I'd like you three to give us some help with a problem we're having."

"Sure!" they said, not quite in unison.

Satisfied, Twilight tossed her head and beckoned them on, leaving Celestia looking dumbfounded at a hole in a tree for a moment before hurrying after them.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Thwack!<em>

"Oh, woe is me!" Discord lamented, a comically large bump forming on his forehead. "I am bonked!"

With that, he collapsed and turned back to stone.

Celestia pointed. "But... but... what?"

"Thanks, girls," Twilight grinned. "I was worried about him."

The fillies exchanged a look.

"Cutie mark crusader deity bonkers, yay!"

Celestia visibly decided not to ask questions, and then vanished in a flare of light.

"That was hilarious!" Discord said, unsolidifying. "You're right again, Twilight. It is funnier to see her like that."

"I think I know what I'm doing next time you, Luna and Chrysalis are all Awake." Twilight nodded her agreement. "And you three, of course."

\* \* \*

><p>54.1 alternate<p>

Upper Crust trotted through the front doors of the royal palace, wife on his foreleg. Years of living amongst the nobility helped him keep his ecstasy from overwhelming the ponies around him, but he couldn't help a small smirk as he leaned into his wife. The Grand Galloping Gala, at last! After years, he had finally been recognized for his own genius and now he and his wife would be able to meet the greatest ponies in the land.

Princess Sparkle nudged her pupil. "Come on, Celestia, remember we have to greet the guests."

She had considered wearing a floor-length jedi robe and a hat with corks on it, but decided against it. After all, they couldn't startle Upper Crust every time.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

54.1: The many, many outfits of Celestia. And some other things too.

>54.2: Bing. (One assumes she was using cosmic spectrum glasses, so they'd stay the right shape. Or something.)<br>54.3: A work in progress. (Do not taunt Twilight Spark.)

>54.4: Sakura is not a nice person, after so long in the loops. This is why Twilight was concerned about the Mayor.<br>54.5: The concept of "sharing" is a new one to Ranma-girlfriends. He can't really parse the idea of reasonable ones...

>54.6: Changeling biology is weird. (This is another one that underwent a fair amount of revision.)<br>54.7: Twilight has a certain love of the bizarre scheme.

## 59. Chapter 59

55.1

Twilight Awoke, and was slightly surprised to be confronted with a book on comparative political history.

"Huh. Variant, then." No book about Nightmare Moon meant no...

Wait.

This \_was \_a kind of funhouse-mirror version of the legend of Nightmare Moon, alright, with several changes... but it was all couched in the wrong language.

Then she got the memories. \_Ah, that explains it. Sort of.\_

She was a political science student at the main university in the Pony Lands, a web of mostly-aligned city states of structures ranging from direct democracy to dual-kingship to rule by priests. And the main other world power was Griffon, a large state to the west of their mutual ocean with a population of... well, it was fairly obvious.

The ponies and the Griffins had swapped places for a loop.

Putting the book down for a minute, Twilight started to think hard.

\_Well, the royal families of that pegasus kingdom with the two kings are the Rainbows and the Flitters, which lets me know where two of my friends are... no sign of Spike... Applejack's most likely farming as usual, and I'm not sure about the others.\_

\_Hold on a minute...\_ Twilight cocked her head, the gesture doing nothing for her element-sensing but making her feel better.

\_I wonder if I can blag a field trip over the ocean, because there's two Elements of Honesty active.\_

Besides, a Griffin version of Equestria would be interesting. Especially as they seemed to still have a sun goddess...

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay," Gilda said, cracking her knuckles. "I have to go to this boring backwater town where they farm dirt, and help with some flower festival or something. Seriously?"<p>

Her ruler and mentor barked.

"I gotta admit," the tiny green thing on her ruler's nose said, bouncing up and down, "It doesn't sound all that exciting, Ammy. You sure you want to send her out there?"

Another bark.

"Right, right." Gilda sighed, shaking her head. "But I'm grabbing that Thunder Edge from the armoury, 'cause it's cool."

Lady Amaterasu, sun goddess and origin of all that is good, looked quite self satisfied as her pupil left.



Then lay down on her tatami mat throne for a judicious nap.

\* \* \*

><p>"This is <em>so<em> boring," Gilda muttered to herself, absently Blooming another cherry tree with a flick of her tail. "Seriously, what got up her tail?"

Then there was a loud \_boom\_ noise.

"TREMBLE!" a deep voice resounded through the village, making buildings shake and nearly throwing Gilda off her feet. "Your lord has returned! May all be doomed under my great power and many tails!"

\_Ah.\_

Gilda reached into her Pocket and summoned Thunder Edge, making the huge blade flash into being on her back. "This is why I'm an idiot. I'm in Sparkle's place, of \_course\_ there's an evil monster coming back after a thousand years!"

The good thing was, if this was as Okami-flavoured as the ruler of this place, she had a fairly good idea what he was vulnerable to...

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight materialized. "Hi, Gilda, I â€" gah!"<p>

"Little busy here!" Gilda shouted, swinging Thunder Edge to block the house-sized glaive of Demon Lord Ninetails. "Any chance you can help?"

"Er, sure." Twilight took in the situation. "How?"

"So 'no', then," Gilda grunted, pushing the other's glaive back and summoning a lightning bolt with three quick tail strokes. In a clashing discharge of magic, the Demon Lord exploded into nine pony-sized foxes. "Quick, knock them out before he pulls himself together!"

"Oh, I remember this guy," Twilight commented, picking up two of the foxes and bashing their heads together. "Didn't expect to see him here, though."

"Yeah, well, given that our ruler is Amaterasu I should have expected it." Another lightning bolt, this one leaping off Thunder Edge, crashed into one of the foxes and it collapsed with a stink of burned fur.

The remaining six regrouped, and with a flash the huge kitsune was back â€" but with three fewer tails.

"This could take a while..." Twilight observed.

Gilda's reply was a feral grin. "My kind of entertainment!"

\* \* \*

><p><em><em>

\_"Seriously?"\_ Gilda said, open beaked. "He nearly killed us, like, six times! I lost count of how many times I had to electrocute him!"

"Seventeen," Twilight provided.

"Thank you," Gilda replied with heavy sarcasm.

Amaterasu barked. Next to her, a much smaller nine-tailed kitsune sat in a posture of deepest embarrassment.

"Huh. Furball says they're related, or something," Issun supplied.  
"News to me."

Amaterasu barked again.

"So what if it's only this loop? I-"

"Thought so!" Gilda crowed. "You two are looping!"

Amaterasu gave Issun a look. The poncle was presumably chastened by it, though he was a little small to tell.

"Anyway, furball here wanted to take the opportunity to see if she could get this idiot looping," Issun resumed, pointing at Ninetails.  
"I mean, it'd be one hell of a help, no offence."

"Okay. Right." Twilight nodded. "I understand the sentiment. Anyway, as the local Anchor, welcome to what's usually Equestria."

The sun goddess bounded over and licked her snout.

"It's a pity Fluttershy isn't looping, she'd love you..." Twilight giggled. "You know, you're a lot more fun than Celestia is in her public appearances..."

\* \* \*

><p>Gilda put the finishing touches on her latest piece of work â€" a sumi-e cartoon about how she'd been getting on living with Twilight over in the Pony Lands.<p>

"That looks like a familiar chore," Twilight commented, looking it over. "I like how you've portrayed me."

The griffin chuckled. "Yeah, it is kinda like those friendship reports, isn't it? You know, it isn't as easy as it looks..."

"Oh?" Twilight asked.

"Yeah, it's kinda hard not to accidentally cast magic, sometimes." Gilda folded the paper into an origami crane. "Right, if I've got this right..."

The crane fluttered into the air, and set off west.

"Nice," the unicorn commented.

"It's special paper," Gilda shrugged. "Must be a lot easier for you, what with the dragon and all."

"Yeah, I take your point."

The conversation stalled at that point, Twilight not having anything more to say and Gilda unwilling to break the silence for a while.

"It's strange, you know..." Gilda said eventually.

"Oh?"

"Well, the whole brush-magic thing is kind of what's made me... well, who I am, as a looper. As my own person in the loops. And now there's Amaterasu, there, who's way better than me. Hay, Issun is better than me."

Twilight stepped closer and touched her shoulder. Gilda controlled a slight flinch, and sighed. "Yeah, I get the picture."

"Badum tish," Twilight said, deadpan. Then started again, more seriously. "I don't really know what that's like. Since I'm an Anchor, I tend to be... well, the best at my speciality. It's because we have so much more time, really."

Gilda shrugged.

"But... well, you're not just an inky tailtip, Gilda. You're more violent than most of the rest of us, which might not necessarily be a good thing, but you seem in control of it â€" and that makes you good when we have to deal with... fighty... situations."

The griffin snorted. "Kinda ran out of steam, there."

"Yeah," Twilight agreed.

After a pause, Twilight spoke up again. "Hey, who's this world going to use for Discord?"

"Good question..."

\* \* \*

><p>"So," Issun asked, laughter in his voice, "How'd you deal with Lechku and Nechku?"<p>

Twilight pointed a hoof at him. "Your world has stupid enemies."

Gilda tried to soothe down more of her ruffled feathers. "What. The hell. Was that."

The ruler of Griffon barked.

"Yes," Gilda added, abandoning her task to give Amaterasu a piercing stare. "I know that they were giant clockwork demonic owls with top hats and monocles. I was more asking why they were giant clockwork demonic owls with top hats and monocles."

Ninetails raised a paw. "We're from Japan."

"...yeah, that explains a lot, actually..." Twilight allowed.

\* \* \*

><p>55.2<p>

"Okay, I don't get it."

"What?" Spike asked, looking up and flipping his lightsaber hand to hand.

"Well..." Anakin paused. "I mean... okay, look. Despite what you may have encountered in the base line for my loop, I'm not generally psychotic."

"Nah." The dragon (well, winged bipedal lizard with clawed hands) shrugged. "I know â€" I was actually Obi-wan one of my first loops, which meant we put the kibosh on quite a lot of what was supposed to go wrong with the Republic." He picked the lightsaber out of the air â€" after he'd stopped juggling it, it had frozen where it was. "It was kind of fun."

"Right." Anakin shook his head. "I can sort of see you as Obi-Wan now, but if that was one of your first loops..."

"Yeah, loudest-mouthed jedi knight in the Republic," Spike confirmed. "Well, until your baseline self lost his braid."

"I may have lost my train of thought," Anakin apologized. "Right. Okay, well, what I was getting at was â€" it's really rare to encounter a looper who's an all-up Jedi. All the ones I tend to meet are Gray Jedi, but you're effectively a straight lightsider."

"I think it's because of how my personality is structured." They stood, and began to walk down a hall in the Temple. "See, as a dragon, I have this deep-seated need to have a hoard."

"This sounds more like a reason why you shouldn't be a lightsider than a reason you should be," Anakin observed as they turned a corner.

"Well, yeah, but meditation helps. In the end, I solved it by redirecting it â€" one example is my wife."

"You're married?" Anakin asked, interested. A couple of passing Knights gave them very strange looks. "Oh, grow up!" he added sharply.

This did not improve the nature of the looks.

"Are you people all dense?" he checked. "Ki-adi-mundi has at least three wives and five kids!"

"Ah, it doesn't matter," Spike said, loudly enough to be heard. "I mean, that's how the Sunrider clan got going, and they practically founded the modern order."

The shocked looks died away, to be replaced by confused

muttering.

"As I was saying," Spike resumed, "I'm a dragon, she's the most precious thing I possess. But, at the same time, I belong to her in return."

Anakin blinked. "That works?"

"Apparently." Spike's smile was slightly distant. "It's a huge relief, actually, for my draconic hindbrain. As far as I'm concerned, I already have everything worth getting worked up about, which results in my feeling remarkably peaceful."

The occasionally-a-sith frowned. "One of these days, I'll have to try that line on wrinkleface, he'd eat it up."

"Feel free â€" but for me it's true."

They reached a large durasteel door.

"Okay, where now?" Spike asked.

"...I was following you."

"It's your home loop," Spike pointed out reasonably.

"Right." Anakin drew his lightsaber and lit it. "I refuse to admit we made a wrong turning, so the force must have guided us here."

"You seriously don't know what's behind the door?" Spike checked. "Wow. Somehow, not what I'd expect from an Anchor..."

"Hey, this is the Galactic Republic. There's a lot of small details which are variant between loops. Like, where planets are..."

\* \* \*

><p>55.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay," Spitfire said, coming up to Dash with an ever-so-slightly furtive air. "Look, you know how one of our team is out? As in, in the hospital?"<p>

Dash nodded. "Well, yeah."

"Yeah. That's... well, not to be too blunt about it, but I was wondering if you would consider..."

The rainbow-maned pegasus looked at Spitfire. "Sorry, I don't understand."

Spitfire fought the urge to facehoof.

Mind you, she still felt she could talk Dash around eventually. She'd always dreamed of being a Wonderbolt, after all.

It was better for her this way.

\* \* \*

><p>"...I have no idea how this happened," Spitfire said, in a slightly distracted voice.<p>

Rarity made a few minor adjustments to Spitfire's new team jersey. "Glad to have you, dear. I have to say, that coat of yours is just \_gorgeous\_!"

Dash nodded. "Yeah, looks good. Now, come on, Twi's going to give us a strategy talk!"

\* \* \*

><p>55.4<p>

"Alright, girllie," a voice with a strong Trottingham accent said, "I don't see what the Captain's getting at, but-"

Scotaloo almost panicked. This was \_not\_ a baseline loop â€" she couldn't feel her wings.

After a moment, she refocused. \_Okay. I'm human. Female, about seventeen...\_

She reached into her Pocket, and got nothing. \_Ah, great. One of these loops.\_

"Are you listening, girllie? Thinking about your lacework?"

Things started to click, reminding her of a loop from long, long ago.

"No, sir, just eager!" she said smartly, saluting. If she was right, this could be an \_interesting\_ loop â€" doubly so because the loop had preserved her normal gender.

The man in front of her â€" a Flying Officer in the RFC â€" harrumphed. "Well, a moment's inattention in the air can get you killed, \_private.\_ In fact, I'm not at all sure this bloody wheeze from Whitehall is worth a thing â€" women fighting!"

"I'll go you three rounds in any aircraft you care to name, sir!" she pressed, still using that respectful, polished tone that wasn't \_quite\_ insubordination.

Pansy had taught her once. She'd found it useful handling Commander Hurricane.

"Fiesty little scrap, aren't you!" The Flying Officer shook his head. "Well, you were sent out as a pilot, so I suppose if you crash in the first five minutes at least it solves this whole bloody mess. One aircraft's cheap at the price..."

\* \* \*

><p>As she walked out to one of the Sopwith Camels sitting on the grassy strip, Scotaloo ran back over what she was sure of about the loop so far.<p>

First â€" she had a cousin who was assuredly Sweetie and almost certainly Awake, posted with her to the new experimental Women's Auxiliary Flying Corps.

The somewhat torturous logic the brass seemed to be using was that a woman flying an aircraft would free up a male pair of eyes to do a competent job of observing, and that the man could fly them to and from the observation site so that the woman didn't get her dainty hands sore. The practical upshot of which was, she and Sweetie â€" and unspecified others â€" would be forming a squadron of aircraft in a close-to-hub-world version of world war one.

Second, their genius of an engineer was (of course) Apple "Sparky" Bloomer. Admittedly, Applebloom was much less able to perform anything too miraculous without her Pocket, but there were miracles and there were\_ miracles\_.

And third, she was Replacing James "Biggles" Bigglesworth. Which meant that, for all the "human" thing, and all the army politics, and all the annoyance of no subspace pocket, she had essentially been given a loop to go wild as a pilot in for over thirty five years.

\* \* \*

><p>The Sopwith Camel was a strange plane. It was certainly effective, capable of flight with two passengers, and well armed by the standards of the time... but, among other peculiarities, it had so much torque on the engine that it was quicker to turn left by turning <em>right<em> than the conventional way.

But in the hands of Sally "Scoots" Cooper, it \_danced.\_ The poor Flt. Lt, completely unready for facing one of the great aces of the multiverse in the body of a teenaged girl, could barely keep track of her as she toyed with him for ten straight minutes.

"Alright, I've seen enough!" he eventually shouted, as she "bounced" him yet again. "Now land at No.1 strip."

\* \* \*

><p>"And ah hope you didn't crack the undercarriage," Applebloom fussed, checking the spark plugs on the aircraft's engine. "That's a nightmare to fix, that is."<p>

Scootaloo leant against the cowling. "I make no promises, Sparky."

"Ah, stop calling me that," the mechanic groused. "Ah don't always like in-loop nicknames, and that's one ah don't like."

"You know as well as I do that you don't get to choose your \_own\_ nickname... Sparky," Scootaloo teased.

Applebloom waved a wrench threateningly.

After a moment, she shrugged. "Ah've been called worse. So, what's the plan?"

"Well..." Scootaloo thought. "First thing, do what we can to end the war â€" and the next â€" with as little loss of life as

possible."

"Gotcha. Though we can't do much without our pockets..."

"Yeah." Scootaloo frowned. She was going to miss Pansy's help, especially in a loop like this one, quite apart from how they'd be limited to what was physically possible with no way to access magic.

"Second thing," she resumed, "Make it as clear as possible that the women thing is working. Like, we get me and Sweetie and whoever else joins us to be the greatest fighter aces we can -- national heroes, basically."

Applebloom thought that over. "Yeah, makes sense. Less complicated than throwin' ourselves under horses."

"Which would be just confusing," Scootaloo agreed. "And third... I want a turbojet. By, like, 1930."

She got a grin in reply. "Try asking me for something hard next time."

\* \* \*

><p>"An excellent performance by the Supermarine aircraft there," the Schneider announcer said over the public address system. "Of course, the Supermarine aircraft company won the last competition in a shut-out, but there is still one racer remaining to compete. Regular spectators may recall that the 1927 entry by the Bloomer aircraft company was unable to race due to severe engine faults, so I hope you'll join me in wishing them a good run for their 1929 showing. Pilot of the Bloomer Pensée is the famed lady fighter ace, Sally Cooper, and their start time is in ten minutes."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you sure you fixed the turbine problem this time?" Scootaloo asked, for the twentieth time.<p>

"I'm sure!" Applebloom replied, hurt. "It was a bad batch of tungsten, alright?"

"You're not the one who's going to be flying it..." Scootaloo muttered, climbing the ladder. "Okay, is everything ready?"

Their rich sponsor, Lady Diana Thompson, waved. "Come back okay, Scoots," she added. "I'd be dreadfully sorry if this investment came to nothing."

"And the fact that my own personal body'd be in a thousand minced bits isn't a concern?"

Diamond Tiara -- for she it was -- shrugged. "You've got more."

"That's cold..." Scootaloo mock-shivered, then flipped the final switches. "Number one engine fine... number two fine... okay, guys, clear the takeoff area, this is gonna get loud."



She pulled the canopy closed, grinning as it sealed with a smooth \_click\_. The extra two years of work had let them build in all kinds of neat gadgets, though it still sucked they hadn't managed a public flight in 1927.

Technically, they could have revealed the Pensee in early '28, but somehow this felt far more dramatic.

She reached for the twin throttles, took a deep breath, then eased them forwards. A low rumble built to a roar, and the wheels inside the tarmac-compatible float undercarriage began to turn.

\* \* \*

><p>It was almost immediately obvious to Air Commodore Dowding that something new was afoot. The sound coming from the secretive Bloomer team's hanger was like nothing he'd ever heard from an aircraft before.<p>

And, as it slowly nosed out of the door into the brilliant sunlight, it was like nothing he'd ever \_seen\_ before.

There was no propeller.

Rather than a single engine, it had two pods â€" one on each wing â€" emitting the roar he had heard moments before.

And the floats seemed almost to be a concession to the rules. They were no doubt well designed, but they \_looked\_ like an afterthought â€" this was a plane built for the land.

All in all, it was \_very\_ interesting for a rising man in the Air Ministry. It brought back shades of the legendary dÃ©but of \_Turbinia\_ at the 1897 Admiralty review.

The roar increased, and his eyebrows rose in spite of themselves as the Pensee cannoned forwards, far faster than even the S.6 of an hour previously. The speed was impossible to accurately estimate, but if Dowding was any judge, the aircraft had at a stroke broken both the 400 m.p.h barrier and the 500 m.p.h barrier.

The skid-floats parted company with the runway as though they didn't want to be associated with it. The Pensee tilted back, making an angle of at least twenty degrees of climb, and shrank at seven thousand vertical feet per minute â€" on top of that blistering forward speed.

After a minute or so, the roar was gone into a clear blue sky, and the hubbub began.

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo grinned as the cockpit radio set pinged twice. To help her out, Applebloom had been kind enough to set up a crude form of radio direction finding beam to tell her when to turn.<p>

It let her pay full attention to squeezing every last wingpower out of the engines.

"Hey," she said, pushing the transmit key. "Should I buzz the stands?"

I reckon if I do a dive, I can kiss the sound barrier."

"That is a deplorably showy idea," Tiara replied. "Go for it."

"Awesome." Scootaloo tilted the Pensee up a little, aiming for height to fuel her dive. "One loud noise coming up."

\* \* \*

><p>"How'd it go?" the ace asked that evening, after a wild party.<p>

"We've got four orders for private pleasure planes, and one Air Ministry contract to denavalize the Pansee and produce a hundred a year as soon as possible," Tiara answered, putting a pair of glasses down. "You know how we got rich by inventing the dynamic speaker and the pot transistor?"

Scootaloo nodded.

"That was being well off. Now we're rich." Tiara pointed to the papers. "Essentially, we are the British fighter industry now."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right," DianaTiara said, sitting down in the drawing room of her manor. "I think it's time we discussed the glaring issue right now."

"Which is?" Nell Xander asked, sitting back. A bright young lass and a crackerjack pilot, she'd come to the attention of Sally and the others about a year earlier. (Or, to be more accurate, Nyx had let them know she was around too.)

"Well..." Tiara exhaled sharply. "Basically, we broke World War Two."

"I don't follow." Sweetie frowned. "I'm not good on Hub-parallel world history."

"Understandable." Tiara nodded to her. "The basic version is, a particularly ugly kind of nationalism headed by an equally malodorous fellow who made Sombra look sensible kicked the whole thing off in 1939, after a few years of ratcheting tensions, and it connected with a couple of brushfire wars to eventually go global. It involved just about every country in the world."

"So... it's late?" Scootaloo ventured, glancing over at the calendar.

It persisted in showing the date to be June 2, 1940.

"Unlike the rest of you, I've not been up to my elbows in jet aircraft," Tiara sniffed. "I've been paying attention to the world situation. For a start, by now, Austria shouldn't exist. I looked up the person who was supposed to be in charge of Germany, and he's a painter."

There was silence for a moment, as they contemplated the sheer

magnitude of the change to history that that entailed.

"Yay?" Sweetie ventured.

"Oh, unquestionably," Tiara nodded to her. "I mean, it's all rather to the good."

"So..." Scootaloo raised a hand. "What do we do now? I mean, it's great and all, but... well... fighter pilots?"

"Oh, I was getting to that." The Lady picked up a document from her bureau. "That nice Mr. Dowding contacted you through me, asking if you could help with a rash of crimes involving aircraft. He seems to think that an organization of expert pilots with prototype aircraft coming out of their ears could be useful for that sort of thing..."

"You mean that we basically get to fight crime in aircraft?" Scootaloo checked. "That's awesome!"

Tiara smiled. "I may have suggested the idea to him in the first place. Now, we rather assumed that you'd accept, so here's the first case."

Scootaloo snatched the paper out of her hands. "Notorious criminal Julius Gontermann has been stealing jewellery from long haul transport flights?"

Applebloom clapped her hands together. "I'll wheel out those two prototype Clovers we were making for the Fleet Air Arm."

\* \* \*

><p>Jean-Luc Picard, usually of Starfleet, sat back in his villa garden with a puzzled frown.<p>

As a student of history, he knew full well that by now that Europe should have been embroiled in war "a war in which his own homeland, France, would come off decidedly second best. Despite his own variant of the Prime Directive, he'd privately decided to join the Resistance when the time came.

But, here it was, mid-1940... and no NSDAP, let alone World War Two. It was probably related to the unusually early appearance of jet aircraft, but it was impossible to tell for sure.

A rumbling sound drew his attention, and he shaded his eyes to look into the bright Mediterranean sun.

There were jet aircraft approaching from the south and east. Two of them were in a formation out in front; the one behind, an unusual two-boom design, was catching up fast.

As he watched, the front two broke formation. One stayed on its single-minded course for somewhere in the direction of Bordeaux, the other lifted into a wingover to gain height.

Picard stood, trying to follow what was going on. Thin streams of light darted from the first plane, trying to hit the wildly jinking pursuer, and he realized it was developing into a dogfight.

\* \* \*

><p>"Scoots, are you sure this is going to work?" Nyx asked plaintively from the rear seat.<p>

"Sure I'm sure," Scootaloo replied, standing the Clover on one wing and sliding away from more cannon fire. "This is why I got Applebloom to fit a machine gun to the original Sea Vixen design â€" whoops!"

A \_clang\_ reverberated through the entire aircraft, as the other aircraft managed to get a hit with machine guns on her right wingtip.

"Okay, now I'm annoyed," Scootaloo muttered. "Arm the no.1 missile."

"Armed," Nyx supplied.

Scootaloo fired it off, and watched with a grin as it exploded within seconds into a huge cloud of black smoke.

\* \* \*

><p>Julius Gontermann scowled. That trick rocket, whatever it was for, had made him lose sight of the agile British plane. With a pilot like Scoots on his case, he needed to down her fast or he was in trouble...<p>

His Renkell lurched, the left engine erupting in a ball of smoke and flame, and his speed dropped markedly. As he looked around frantically for the source of the damage, a second short burst of gunfire hit the right engine.

"Damn it!" his accomplice Preuss said, from the rear seat. "Can we still fly?"

"Not worth a damn," he replied, snapping the cockpit levers open. "I'm getting out of here."

Without a backward glance, he jumped.

\* \* \*

><p>The Renkell scraped along the ground on its belly, though the fuel loss from bullet holes meant it didn't explode.<p>

"Did you see parachutes?" Scootaloo asked, circling and looking for a suitable landing strip. (The Clover was designed to land on a carrier, so it didn't have to be all that \_big\_ a landing strip, but the grapevines below probably weren't adequate.)

"One," Nyx replied, looking herself. "It landed next to that villa."

\* \* \*

><p>As the two pilots â€" one looking to be in her late thirties, though that was impossible given it was clearly WWI ace Sally Cooper, and another who appeared to be barely 18 â€" approached, Picard felt

like kicking himself.<p>

These had to be the Loopers who had altered world history, and here he was having to explain to them why he'd hit a man with a wrench.

Well, he'd just have to play it cool. After all, this German man had been threatening him with a gun. \_Just think aggrieved Toulousain.\_

\* \* \*

><p><em><em>

"That man was very helpful," Nyx said brightly. "It might have taken us weeks to catch Gontermann otherwise."

"Yeah..." Scootaloo agreed, pensively. "I still think there was something familiar about him from somewhere."

\* \* \*

><p>55.5<p>

"MORTALS!" Nightmare Moon boomed. "The Night Will Last Forever... at the Lunar Resort! Yes, the Lunar Resort, where you'll feel eighty-three percent lighter!"

The screaming started, then stopped in confusion after about a second.

"Pardon?" Bon Bon said.

"I am the owner and proprietor of the Lunar Resort. Featuring great views over the ocean â€" and the land, depending on what time of the day it is â€" the Lunar Resort has all modern conveniences."

Nightmare Moon's horn glowed, and two thousand brochures rained down on the startled crowd.

"We have a golf course â€" hit a golf ball for miles! We have fitness equipment, vertical cliff climbing, automated wing sets for unicorns and earth ponies, a lunar swimming pool â€" dive for half a minute! And much more!"

The dark alicorn cleared her throat, then spoke very quickly.

"Typical cost for a fortnight at the Lunar Resort is in the vicinity of one thousand bits, terms and conditions apply. Management is not responsible for accidental loss of breathing caused by opening doors signposted as for staff only."

"So," she went on, back to the normal voice. "Sign on for an out of this world experience! Book today and get a free cuddly toy!"

She held one up. To a Looper, it would bear a certain resemblance to Nyx.

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia looked up from the brochure. "...and this is what my sister did when she landed?"<p>

"Pretty much," Twilight confirmed, hiding her amusement. "I've booked already. I think you're right, I do need to make some friends, and unwinding with a holiday seems the perfect opportunity."

\* \* \*

><p>55.6<p>

An alicorn with a mane of red-flecked pastel, an ominous ruddy glow emanating from her very skin and lighting her white coat and wings with deep red light, stalked onto the stage.

"The Night Will Last Forever!" she announced, flaring her wings to knock the guards away.

"Sister!" came a voice from the side of the stage. In a clatter of hooves, an alicorn of dark fur and plumage cantered into view. "Why must we begin this old conflict again anew?"

"You did not respect my Night," the first alicorn said, turning. "None of them did. They must be made to respect my Night, for it to get the admiration it-"

"Wait a minute!" Twilight said bossily, trotting up the steps onto the planking of the stage itself. "I think there's been a mix-up."

"Are you sure?" the red-white alicorn said, turning to her and flourishing a piece of paper. "I checked my lines just five minutes ago."

Twilight took the paper. "Oh, I think I see. Luna? Can I have yours?"

As the audience tried to work out what, precisely, was going on, the dark alicorn passed another sheet over.

"Right, right." Twilight swapped them over, then gave them back. "Simple mix-up."

"Okay, I see." The two alicorns trotted off set.

A second later, the dark alicorn stalked onto the stage with her mane glowing like the stars. "The Night Will Last Forever!"

"Is this a joke?" someone asked from the back.

"Silence!" the dark alicorn ordered. "It was a simple mix up, that is all!"

"Is it my cue yet, Luna?" Celestia poked her head around the curtain, her mane still glowing red. "It'll take a moment more to get the makeup off..."

"No, it is not your cue yet," Luna said, sighing. "Right, this is a

wash. Let's try Trottingham."

Two flashes of light, and they vanished.

\* \* \*

><p>55.7<p>

"Okay, I've asked everyone else..." Chrysalis said. "What's your mane aura?"

Berry put her glass down carefully, and turned to Chrysalis. "No idea."

"...pardon?"

"Look." Berry picked her glass up again, and took a sip. "The whole ascension thing? Complete accident on my part. I wanted to have some glasses that Discord couldn't turn into kumquats, or whatever, so I got Twilight to make them out of that... cosmic..."

"Cosmic Spectrum, I think," Chrysalis supplied. "What the Crystal Heart's made of."

"Right!" Berry shrugged. "Apparently it causes ascensions. I did not know this, but Twilight assumed I did."

"I see."

The Changeling queen turned that over in her mind for a bit.

"So you don't Ascend much?"

"Hardly ever," she confirmed. "Basically only when I'm tasting a drink that would do a non-immortal serious damage. I know that the loop resets fix things, but I'd rather not end up deaf in both ears for a few years."

Berry then reached behind the bar. "Speaking of... I made this for you."

Chrysalis looked at the bottle dubiously. "What's it made of?"

"Water," Berry said with a virtuous nod. "Pure, distilled water."

"And that's dangerous?"

"It is if you're running the still at twenty times normal speed..."

"I don't particularly want to know." Chrysalis pulled the cork out and poured herself some. "Well... thank you, I suppose."

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, how did you do that?" Trixie asked, somewhat awed.<p>

Chrysalis snored the snore of the deeply sloshed.

"Homeopathy," Berry replied smugly. "I'm thinking of marketing it as the healthiest drink you can get drunk with."

\* \* \*

><p>55.8<p>

"Okay. Simple question."

"Shoot."

"Why are we horses?"

"Actually, I think it's ponies," Ranma corrected. "I've been here before. Nice place."

Nabiki looked dubiously at her hooves. "Name one good reason."

"Well, here, the normal behaviour of two girls who have a crush on the same guy appears to be to talk it out with the guy." The Anchor smiled wistfully. "Man, but that'd be nice in our baseline."

"I wouldn't know, Saotome," the mercenary Tendo snarked.

"Oh, that reminds me," Ranma added. "The rulers of this place consider it to be a sanctuary loop. No giant monsters."

"...that was just two times!"

"I didn't need to see a giant robot crushing Candyland once." Ranma rolled his eyes. "Right, let's see if the locals are Awake."

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, I've heard about you," Rarity said, looking Nabiki up and down. "So, what's your local name?"<p>

Nabiki started to speak... and stopped. She whirled on one hoof to point at Ranma. "Why am I called Pound Foolish?"

Ranma shrugged, hiding a snicker.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, at least you didn't do any <em>physical<em> damage," Twilight said airily. "Not bad, for such an old and experienced looper on their first visit."

Nabiki winced.

"I think it was the introduction of fractional reserve banking which did it," the Tendo added. "Everything up until then was working perfectly."

"It's a good thing we only tried it out in Ponyville..." Twilight shrugged. "The place is used to minor catastrophes, I think it's the Everfree forest."



'Pound Foolish' nodded.

\* \* \*

><p>55.9<p>

"This is gonna be \_so awesome\_," Scootaloo grinned. For once, she'd managed to persuade everypony to do air combat instead of naval. (It had taken some doing.)

She pushed open the cockpit of the Spitfire Mk. 22, which had been produced (but not used) in the Hub world war two and was hence allowed.

This was \_her\_ speciality, and-

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, what."<p>

All four of the defeated fillies gave Silver Spoon identical black looks.

"What?" the pegasus asked, flaring her wings in a shrug. "It was WW2, like you said."

"Enola Gay is cheating!"

\* \* \*

><p>55.10 (Zetrein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Blue fluffy unicorns, dancing on rainbows! Blue fluffy unicorns, dancing on- dancing on- rain-<em>

Trixie came to an abrupt stop as she Woke up. Opening her eyes, she was faced with a bed-maned Chrysalis, calmly staring at her. The two of them stood there for a moment, before Trixie commented, "Stop giving me that look, this isn't the worst thing you've ever caught me doing."

This did not however, have the intended reaction. Chrysalis' eyes widened, and pointing a trembling hoof at Trixie, she squeaked out, "Y-you can \_talk?!\_"

Thinking quickly, Trixie checked her loop memories for how Trixie Puff would deal with the situation.

"Pffft." Now cheerfully blank faced, tongue sticking out, Trixie observed Chrysalis, gauging how effective her ruse was.

It wasn't. "You don't believe Trixie for a moment, do you?"

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie had just finished explaining enough about the loops to a very confused unawake Chrysalis, and had re-introduced herself,

complete with the little fireworks, when the Worst. Possible. Thing happened.<p>

"Do you smell smoke? If Trixie set the library on fire, Twilight will- URGLBARGLE!" Chrysalis cut Trixie off with the fire extinguisher.

"Why did you do that?! \_How\_ did you do that?! Trixie Puff isn't allowed to play with fireworks! She always catches fire! Crap, are you still smoldering? You're still smoldering. Come on, we need to soak you to put out the embers!"

\_No fireworks? No fireworks?! This loop is hell.\_

\* \* \*

><p>55.11 (masterofgames)<p>

Inside the Twi-brary (patent pending), Twilight stood before her fellow loopers, wearing drill sergeant shades and an army helmet, with black stripes painted under her eyes, and a cigar in her mouth (bubblegum, it was the only kind Pinkie had on her)

"Okay troops. I think you all know why we're here. THIS." she declared, gesturing to the multi-locked box with a riding crop as Spike placed it on the table next to her. "We have tried frankly a downright irresponsible number of things to get this open. Zecora, Mac, and Berry have tried everything from Zebrican acid potions, to Applejack's potato cider..."

Applejack shot her brother a dirty look. "Ah swear! Ya mess up ONE time and ya never hear the end of it!"

"Applebloom tried military grade laser cutters..."

The filly in question looked up from her micro-welding and gave a shrug. "So ah forgot that the box has a mirror finish. Could have happened to anyone."

"The entire CMC tried taking it with them while crusading..."

"I'll admit, I was a bit shocked it didn't work." Nyx sighed.

Scotaloo nodded. "Yeah, it just wound up getting sticky..."

"Pinkie tried just plain cheating..."

"Those lockpicks were planted on me I tell you!" the party pony insisted. Though the old fashioned museum robber outfit she was wearing cost her a bit of credibility.

"Sweetie tried... wubs..."

"That canon of Vinyl's takes things apart at a sub-atomic level! It should have worked!"

"I think we all KNOW what Trixie tried..." Twilight continued, giving the showmare a sharp glare.

"Trixie has not failed, she has merely found a level of explosives that is insufficient! Now somepony uncuff Trixie!"

Chrysalis wiggled her eyebrows. "Must I?"

"... Trixie will allow you to release her later."

"Right, moving swiftly along. Fluttershy tried... asking nicely... I'm STILL not sure how that got four of the locks to open, but whatever."

"It was only polite, and if the box isn't ready to open up to others, it's not my place to force it." Fluttershy commented as she finished setting up her therapy couch for her plans this loop.

"Angel tried... something. That's all I'm saying on the matter. And I tried friendship beaming it. Both the Equestrian, AND the Nanoha kinds. Rainbow Dash, it's your turn, but after all that, don't get your hopes up."

Rainbow dash took the box and gave a wing salute and a grin. "Not to worry Twi, I got us a good one. We've just been using the wrong tactics. We've been TRYING to open it. I'm gonna' try opening it by... accident."

Twilight groaned. "Enlighten me then, how do you plan to do that?"

"Oh... I have my ways." Rainbow Dash chuckled, looking out the window at the passing local wall-eyed mail-mare with a smirk.

\* \* \*

><p>55.12 (Goldude)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Focus, Casanova. What's next on the list?" Twilight asked. Since Chrysalis was really the only one awake this loop, she decided to go baseline for now. She had a plan to integrate The Changelings that felt like it was going to be fun.<p>

Spike cleared his throat and fished for the checklist for The Summer Sun Celebration preparations. "Oh, uh... Music! That's the last one."

Twilight nodded. Then heard the all-too-familiar chirping of Fluttershy's birds. The purple pony closed her eyes and smiled, listening intently. What came next, she did not expect at all.

"Come on, sing it with me! You and me, baby, we ain't nothing but animals, so let's do it like they do on the Discovery Channel! " She could practically hear the record scratch in her own mind. Her eyes opened and smile faded as the animals actually started to sing in tune with this strange newcomer.

From what she could see, there was no Fluttershy. It was instead a yellow stallion pegasus with a short, brown mane that curled up in the front. He was also wearing a gaudy Hawaiian shirt and grinning proudly. Twilight boggled a moment as the song went on before rushing

up to the new pony. "You're not Fluttershy!"

Just like that, the strange pony whipped his head to face her. He then looked up and down her, as if judging her. "...Well, hello there, B-E-A-autiful!" He paused as he struck an exaggerated thinking pose. "My... memories tell me that I am to prepare for the 1000th Summer Sun Celebration. You shouldn't worry your pretty little head off, sparklebutt. I've got things well in hand."

This stallion's presence was somehow throwing her off. It's like he held an exuberant enthusiasm for animals. Twilight really couldn't understand why, and shook her head to try and clear her thoughts and compose herself.

"A- Anyway... I'm Twilight Sparkle, the Anchor for this universe."

The stallion's eyebrow raised as Twilight held her hoof out for a hoofshake. "Oh? ...How pleasant." He grasped Twilight's hoof delicately and kissed it gently, giving her a winning grin. "Name's Ace Vet. Or Ace Ventura. Whichever works. But you can call me 'The Master Mater.'"

Twilight could feel her cheeks blush. She tried to say something, but the words were caught up in her mouth. All that escaped was the sound of a chicken crossed with a dying sheep being put through a blender.

"Why, yes, I do have that kind of affect on the ladies!" Ace Ventura exclaimed.

\* \* \*

><p>"A Manticore!" It roared. Twilight wondered how exactly Ace Ventura would tackle this challenge. "We've gotta get past it!"<p>

Without hesitation, the manticore leaped and swiped at Rarity. She dodged it. She always dodged it. She retaliated in kind with a strong buck to the face, sending it staggering back. She was then promptly tackled by Ace Ventura. "What are you doing, you vile, vile witch!" The last word was punctuated by a strong hoofslap across the face. Rarity tossed the crazy pony off of her.

Ace righted himself and stood up, beginning a rant. "Do you realize what that poor creature is? It's an ANIMAL. That means we don't hurt it! In fact, it's already hurt." He stood up straighter and gained a confident smile. "Allow me to handle this, ladies. Especially you, My Little Sparkle!"

Fluttershy's replacement then whipped himself around to face the manticore and got close to the ground, his teeth chattering as if he was a chipmunk. He jumpily looked around, teeth still chattering as he inched his way forward to the manticore. He paused once or twice to have a little grass nibble.

The manticore was cautious, as usual, as Ace got closer and closer. The rest of the girls looked at Ace as if he grew two heads, but none were able to form the words to caution him away from the manticore. When Ace got close enough, he started nuzzling it, eventually

reaching the injured paw. And, as usual, it showed the source of its ailment, the thorn.

"Oh my god... you poor, poor baby..."

"Baby?" Rainbow Dash was incredulous at what was going on in front of her.

Ventura, however, continued to offer babytalking words of reassurance and encouragement. He massaged the back of the manticore's paw, and soon enough, was able to get the thorn out, pain free. When the manticore noticed, it scooped up Ace and began licking him. He returned the favor by licking the manticore back.

Applejack boggled at what she saw. "...What in tarnation did we just see?"

Twilight sighed a little. Even she didn't expect any of this.  
"Sometimes a little kindness goes a long way."

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity frowned. "It's a shame, darling, you having only two gala tickets." She sidled up next to Ace Ventura, gripping a leg with hers. "If you had more, Ace and I could've accompanied you."<p>

Ace rolled his eyes and pulled away from Rarity. "As if."

Rarity blinked. "Why, whatever do you mean?"

The new Element of Kindness turned to face Rarity. "Let's face it: Twilight Sparkle and I are nothing but animals!" He paused to give Twilight a lecherous grin while the Anchor choked on her words and looked away. "Besides, whitey-tighty, you don't have her perfect girlish figure."

Rarity balked. "...Are you saying I'm \_fat\_?"

"Like a whale." Rarity's face blushed red and contorted in rage. Ten minutes later, he and Twilight were hiding in Rainbow Dash's house.

She considered sending Ace to the moon.

\* \* \*

><p>55.13 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Pinkie Pie bounced down the Ponyville street in her usual merry manner. Since the current Loop seemed to be baseline except for a slightly higher background magic level, and since the previous Loop had been a bit exhausting (note: the power of friendship can cure some, but not all, victims of a plague-based zombie apocalypse), and since the Princesses weren't Awake, the Elements had agreed to let things play out to baseline this Loop. Twilight was due in town any minute to oversee the Summer Sun Celebration preparations, and Pinkie was casually perambulating where she could see her for the "first" time and do her gasp of shock.

Pinkie was proud of her new "gasp of shock" routine. She'd been

working on it for thirty-seven loops in private, waiting for a baseline run. If she could get Twilight to break baseline, Pinkie would count that as a victory.

Wondering what she would demand as a victory prize, Pinkie didn't notice the strange stallion in pyjamas and a somewhat ratty looking bath robe until she bounced right into him.

"Oof! Excuse me!" the stallion said in a light Trottingham accent.

Pinkie looked at him. She was absolutely, positively certain that, out of all the Loops she'd been Awake for, she had never, ever, ever seen this pony before.

Well, even if it meant spoiling the surprise for Twilight, there was only one thing to do.

The stallion stared in shock and terror as Pinkie's dramatic gasp went on for a good forty-two seconds. During that time her color went from pink through every color in the rainbow, including a strangely intelligent-looking shade of fluorescent blue. Her morphic field fluctuated, causing her to shape-shift mid-gasp through three other generations of pony, pegasus, alicorn, human, chaos god, elder god, whale, bowl of petunias, and teapot, before returning to her preferred shade and shape.

And then she said, "Hello!"

The stallion, after several seconds of gibbering, managed to say, "H-h-hello. I, um... I beg your pardon, but does the name 'Agrajag' mean anything to you?"

"No," Pinkie Pie said.

"Thank God for that," the stallion said, sitting down hard on the hard-packed dirt street.

"You must be a new Looper!" Pinkie beamed. "I've never met you before anywhere ever, any Loop ever, so I need to throw you a Welcome-to-Equestria party!"

"Oh, no," the stallion shook his head vigorously. "No, no, no, no, no. No parties. There is not time for a party. This is not a time for a party. The words party and time do not belong together in any imaginable sentence, under the current circumstances, except for sentences that indicate that the words party and time do not belong together in sentences."

"Oh, come now," Pinkie giggled. "It's always time for a party?"

"Even when something truly horrible and destructive is about to happen?"

"Really? What?"

"I don't know," the stallion said. "But I've been bounced from planet to planet, century to century, universe to universe, and Loop to Loop for thousands of Loops now. And just when I think things are calm and

I can relax, wham bang, something horrible always happens to me! The entire multiverse of all things imaginable is out to get me!"

Pinkie put a forehoof on the trembling stallion's shoulder. "Look, buddy, don't worry. This is Equestria. We're a sanctuary Loop. We won't let anything bad happen to you, ever."

"I've heard that before," the stallion moaned wretchedly. "Usually just before the person saying it does something horrible."

Pinkie frowned. This pony was proving to be a real downer. If she couldn't cheer him up, then maybe it was time for more direct help. "Look, my Anchor's going to be here in a few minutes," she said. "We'll talk to her, and maybe she can come up with something, okay?"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight remembered the primitive scanning devices of her baseline, with the blinky-light colander and printed readouts and all. She snorted derisively at baseline-Twilight's old concept of high technology and science. Such things were nothing compared to the holographic full-immersion multi-scan systems she'd assembled, mostly from a trip to the Tenchi Loop. The stallion sat in the middle of the hovering screens and colorful three-dimensional analytic readouts, in obvious awe (and bewilderment) at the capital-S Science Twilight had at her disposal.<p>

Of course, there was a thing on his head with blinking multicolored lights on it, because if you're not going to have blinky lights, why bother?

"I'm amazed," Twilight said. "I've never seen a more perfect weave of the Interesting Times Curse and the Never Know Happiness Curse."

"Say, Twilight," Pinkie grinned, "remember when you said curses didn't exist?"

"Not now, Pinkie," Twilight replied. "This is a truly fascinating case. And these curses are so powerful and intricate! I'm so glad I can document all this for future study! I'll need a hundred Loops just to understand all the fine points of the design!"

"But can you do something about it?" the stallion asked. "Can you actually make all the horrible things stop happening?"

"Well, I can't make all the horribleness stop," Twilight said. "You're a Looper, and an Anchor too I'm guessing. You're going to have bad Loops just like the rest of us. But I think I can break the curse... if I have enough time." She looked at the stallion, who reminded him a bit of Rincewind. He'd shown up one Loop as a reddish unicorn with a scraggly beard and a weatherbeaten hat with "Wizzard" in places-where-sequins-used-to-be written on it. That notable had spent his entire Sanctuary loop in the Library under a bookshelf, stepping foot outside only to go to the market to buy potatoes.

"How much time do you think I have?" the stallion asked.

The moment he asked it Twilight's scanners went wild. An instant

later the light coming in through the basement windows dimmed, and the wind howled outside the tree. A few moments later a loud, echoing voice filled the air:

\_"ATTENTION, BEINGS OF EQUESTRIA. THIS IS PROSTETNIC VOGON JELTS OF THE UNSEELIE TRANSDIMENSIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL. AS YOU ARE NO DOUBT AWARE, A FAERIE BYPASS IS BEING ROUTED THROUGH YOUR DIMENSION, AND REGRETTABLY YOUR ENCHANTED REALM IS SCHEDULED FOR DEMOLITION. THE PROCESS WILL TAKE SLIGHTLY LESS THAN TWO OF YOUR MINUTES. THANK YOU."\_

Twilight looked at Arthur "Tea Thirst" Dent. "I better work fast."

\* \* \*

><p>The ponies of Ponyville, upon seeing giant black cubes hovering in Equestria's skies in the exact same way bricks don't, responded in their tried and true manner, i. e. running and screaming in total panic. Few noticed the flashes of light and rumbling that shook Twilight's library from roots to treetop.<p>

The voice came again.

"THERE'S NO POINT IN ACTING ALL SURPRISED ABOUT IT. ALL THE PLANS HAVE BEEN ON DISPLAY IN YOUR LOCAL PLANNING DEPARTMENT IN THE WINTER QUEEN'S CASTLE FOR THE PAST HUNDRED SUBJECTIVE YEARS, SO THERE'S NO POINT GETTING ALL EXCITED ABOUT- what?"

A second voice, too soft to be heard by the panicked ponies below, could just be heard over the magically amplified tannoy.

"YES, AS A MATTER OF FACT, WE DO HAVE THE APPROPRIATE PERMITS. COPIES OF SAID PERMITS ARE BEING SENT TO YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT CENTERS FOR REVIEW NOW. YOU HAVE FIVE MINUTES TO READ THEM."

It only took two minutes for the voice to return again. This time it was a very annoyed loud alien voice.

"YES, THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STUDIES, THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STUDIES ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STUDIES, AND THE IMPACTS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES HAVE ALL BEEN COMPLETED. COPIES OF ALL SAME ARE BEING DUPLICATED TO YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT CENTERS NOW. KINDLY REVIEW THEM AND CEASE THESE POINTLESS DELAYING TACTICS!"

This time the pause was less than a minute.

"OH HO HO, YOU THINK YOU'RE CLEVER DICK, DO YOU? WELL, MISS WHOEVER YOU ARE, SINCE ALL WORK IN THE DEMOLITION IS CONDUCTED UPON THE SHIPS OF OUR BATTLE FLEET, I CAN TELL YOU WITH A SMUG LITTLE SNEER WHICH YOU OF COURSE CANNOT PROPERLY APPRECIATE THAT ALL LABOR RIGHTS NOTICES, HEALTH AND SAFETY ADVISORIES, AND LICENSES TO CONDUCT DIMENSIONAL DISRUPTION ARE ON DISPLAY WHERE ALL EMPLOYEES CAN READ THEM. SO THERE! WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY TO THAT?"

A long minute passed.

"WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? OF COURSE WE DIDN'T PUT THE BID OUT TO LOCAL LABOR! WHAT FAIRY RACE IN THEIR RIGHT MIND WOULD BID ON A CONTRACT TO DESTROY THEIR HOME REALM?"



That same not-quite-audible voice whispered on the loudspeakers.

"YES, I KNOW IT'S A REGULATION!" The alien voice wailed in despair. "IT'S A BLOODY STUPID, IDIOTIC, IMPOSSIBLE REGULATION! AND SINCE I AM A BLOODY STUPID, IDIOTIC, IMPOSSIBLY BUREAUCRATIC MEMBER OF MY BLOODY STUPID, IDIOTIC, IMPOSSIBLY BUREAUCRATIC SPECIES, AND JUSTLY PROUD OF THE FACT, I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO FOLLOW IT, YOU HORRIBLE LITTLE CREATURE!"

"BUT MARK MY WORDS, CREATURE- ONCE THE BIDDING PERIOD HAS EXPIRED AND ALL BIDS HAVE BEEN REVIEWED, CONTRACTORS INVESTIGATED, NEW ROUNDS OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STUDIES CONDUCTED, SAFETY INSPECTIONS AND LENGTHY PERIODS FOR PUBLIC COMMENT CONCLUDED- WE WILL BE BACK!"

The immense ships began to waver and fade into thin air. The voice of the Vagon commander could be heard saying one last thing on the still-live mike: "BLOODY AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, IT'LL BE THE-"

Then the skies were clear, birds chirping, and ponies jubilant.

\* \* \*

><p>The library door opened, and Twilight led Pinkie Pie and Tea Thirst, nee Dent, out into the sunlight. "I can't guarantee the curse will remain gone," Twilight said. "Yggdrasil might restore the status on your next Loop. But there are other Loopers who specialize in purifying curses. Keep an eye out for them. And in the meantime, enjoy the next four years or-"<p>

She froze.

"Wait a minute. Who handled the thing with the Vogons?"

Pinkie screwed her face up. "I think it might have been Ivory Scroll! She's got the skills for it-"

Twilight ran back into her library. "Be back in a moment!"

There was a flash of light.

A few seconds later, Twilight came around the corner of the town hall, levitating a huge pile of paperwork.

Next to her was the Mayor, looking back along her body at her new wings.

"So, you see," Twilight explained, "I suddenly realized that I must have been the one to transport you up there in the first place, so to maintain the timeline I had to go back in time to do it. And since I was going back in time, I decided to go back an extra few minutes to give you that talk."

"I have to say..." Ivory said absently, "when you said that that pendant would make me a whole new pony, I didn't quite expect this..."

"I was in kind of a hurry, sorry." Twilight winced. "You don't have to use it again, Berry doesn't much, but the option is there."

Twilight left the mayor to the admiring crowd and walked back over to Pinkie and Tea Thirst. "All right," she said, "I've taken care of everything now."

Tea Thirst looked into the middle distance a moment. "Ah, right. I see."

Twilight smiled and asked eagerly, "You do?"

"No," Tea Thirst admitted with a sigh.

"Ah, right," Twilight said. "Sorry about that. I should have said, I had some business to take care of in the past."

"Oh, time travel," Tea Thirst said. "Now I understand. I hate when it happens to me. It's a wonder I don't meet myself coming the other way more often."

\* \* \*

><p>55.14 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Dash saw Fleetfoot and Spitfire walking over and gave Twilight the nod. Time to troll the Cloudsdale team.<p>

Spitfire spoke first. "Rainbow Dash, you got a minute?"

"Uh, sure." Happy but slightly confused, that was the way to act.

"You could really be an asset to our team, so... we want you to join the Cloudsdale team. Permanently."

Rainbow Dash gasped, as she usually did, though the first time it had been in shock at the yellow dog offer.

"It looks like Soarin's wing won't heal in time for the trials. We want you to fly with us." Spitfire started the play and Fleetfoot continued the double team. "Of course, this means you won't be able to fly for Ponyville, but let's face it. Even with you on their team, their chances of qualifying for the Games are â€" pretty slim.

"So, what's it gonna be?" Spitfire asked.

Dash forced down her disgust at the way her one time idol was acting, though she could let at least some of it through to set up for the punch line.

"Abandon my team? Have you been flying too high? Element of Loyalty here! As if I would ever... oh, heh heh, good one. This is one of those 'secret test of character things' isn't it? I mean there's no way Spitfire, Leader of the Wonderbolts, epitome of everything a pegasus aspires to be would make such an offer for real. You'd be abandoning one of your own team mates like a used cloud and wrecking the chances of another team just to marginally improve the chances of what's already pretty much a sure thing."

Dash shook her head. "I mean, you had me going there for a moment, but after what you said to me at the Wonderbolt Academy about 'pushing yourself in the right direction', that beating everyone no matter who got hurt and winning at all costs was not the Wonderbolt way, you'd have to be a massive hypocrite to then turn around and do exactly that. And pulling it on me of all ponies, the Element of Loyalty? You'd have to be... what was that thing Twilight said yesterday before she'd had her coffee? 'displaying a level of ineptitude that borders on the imbecilic.' Yeah, that was it."

"Not even a brain damaged diamond dog would pull such a stupid stunt, let alone someone like you." Dash grinned. "Don't worry, I won't let you down, or my own team. I will continue to uphold the ideals of the Wonderbolts, even if I'm flying against you guys. Cloudberries, I can't believe I ever thought for a moment that you'd try such a despicable tactic! I must be the one flying too high! Anyway, gotta go! I hope we can still train together, after all, you guys push me further than I could go alone, and anything that makes me better helps my team. See ya!"

She walked away, not bothering to hide the smirk. Maybe next time she could get Chrysalis to take her place...

\* \* \*

><p>55.15 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle was sitting in the Rich family's sitting room, waiting on Diamond Tiara so they could implement one of their plans for an otherwise baseline loop. Her eye however was drawn to a rather large and well-made painting depicting what was obviously (to her, despite the poor facial quality) the extended Cutie Mark Crusaders in human form, dressed in finery, military regalia or mechanic's overalls, and standing dwarfed in front of the daunting forms of half a dozen flying craft she managed to piece out as jet planes and fighters.<p>

"Oh, you like it? It's one of my most prized possessions." Diamond said as she entered the room, her trusty butler leaving to attend other business.

Twilight smiled. "Well, I can see it's a very fine painting, but you've surely got other pictures of all of you together, why is this one so much more precious?" she asked, curious.

Diamond answered by pointing down to the signature at the painting's corner, causing Twilight's eyes to widen comically. "Ah."

"It was actually not that difficult to commission, all things considered. Bit of a bother keeping it, but the pocket was deposit-only that loop so that helped. Anyway, where were we? On to business!"

Twilight though couldn't stop wondering how they'd managed to get a group portrait painted by Adolf Hitler.

That was going to be one hell of a story.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

55.1: The Pony Lands are a lot like Ancient Greece. The Pegasi are, of course, the Spartans - hence the two royal families.

>Also Okami bosses are awesome - especially Ninetales, Yami and the Twin Devils.<br>55.2: The idea that Spike, unlike most Looper Jedi, is actually close-to-pure lightsider. Good thing, too, because Sith Spike would be the size of a battlecruiser.

>55.3: Dash Used Conversational Judo! Dash Recruited

Spitfire!<br>55.4: Biggles, as stated. (Hugh Dowding is among the most sensible men in the Air Ministry at this point historically - most of the others were twits, and some of them were close to treasonous in their incompetence.)

>55.5: Nyx is probably owed royalties for those plushies.<br>55.6: A simple mixup.

>55.7: Careful what you ask for.<br>55.8: Nabiki may not be as greedy now, but she's still interested in economics.

>55.9: Other planes to be used in that battle include a Short Sunderland and a P-38 Lightning.<br>55.10: Caution: flammable.

>55.11: Open says-a-who?<br>55.12: Ace Ventura, Pet Defective.

>55.13: Bureaucracy-fu.<br>55.14: One of many approaches.

>55.15: It's the little things.<p>

## 60. Chapter 60

### 56.1 (Zetrein)

It had been years since Twilight last woke Celestia up in the middle of the night. While it had tapered off in the time leading up to Twilight's move to Ponyville, Luna's occasional midnight wake-up calls had taken their place in recent months.

Thus, Celestia was understandably confused by the purple mare waking her up at four thirty nine AM, surrounded by the other bearers, wearing black bodysuits.

"...Please wake up! Princess? You're awake!" Twilight said, withdrawing the hoof she had been shaking her with. "I'm so sorry for waking you like this, but we need your help."

"What's wrong Twilight? What time is it, anyway?" Celestia asked, coming more aware, as Twilight pulled a notepad from her bag.

"I'll have to be fast about this, we're actually in a strange Heartsong intermission. It's what we somehow used to infiltrate the castle without being seen." She replied, flipping to the desired page in her notepad. The Princess saw the signs of Twilight preparing an explanation, as she finished crawling from bed.

"Six days ago, I was visited by my future self, who had travelled back in time to tell me how to save Equestria. So far, everything's been going according to the plan she wrote out for me, right down to accurately predicting the Heartsong.

"Step two hundred eighty nine: Short Explanation to Princess

Celestia, check. Step two hundred ninety: Give Princess Celestia sneaky stealth suit, check?" Twilight gave her a questioning look, another black bodysuit being pulled from her bag.

"Very well, Twilight," Celestia sighed, "But I expect a full explanation, once this matter is concluded."

\* \* \*

><p>As the seven sneaky stealth suited ponies stepped from Celestia's doors, the Princess couldn't help but ask, "Did you have to knock out my guards, Twilight?"<p>

"I'm really, really sorry Princess, but Future Twilight was very serious about us not being seen until we got the Elements out of the castle. She underlined that step three times! They'll be fine! Really!" Came the nervous reply.

"I... see. And how are we to get halfway across the castle without being seen? There are a great many guards along the path."

"The Heartsong!" Twilight eagerly replied, citing her notepad. "Step Two hundred ninety one, continue previous Heartsong to Elements, and out of the castle."

"Well," Celestia grinned, "It has been some time since I was last part of a Heartsong. Ah! There it goes."

Sure enough, the sound of trumpets started sounding all around them, the seven ponies started taking dramatic poses to the punctuation of the music.

\_"With cat like tread! Upon our prey we steal!"\_

The ponies were already halfway down the hallway.

\_"In silence dread! Our cautious way we feel!"\_

They were almost to the stairs.

\_\*\*"NO SOUND AT ALL!"\*\*\_

The entire castle seemed to shake, as all the standing guards bellowed out the last line, with an underscore of the Royal Canterlot Voice echoing from elsewhere in the castle.

\_"We never speak a word!"\_

This was blatantly untrue.

\_ "A fly's foot-fall, would be distinctly heard..."\_

><em>So stealthily the ponies creep while all the castle soundly sleeps."<em>

They were anything but stealthy, and yet the guards didn't react at all as they went by, in plain sight.

\_"Come, friends, who bear Harmony!"\_

They were on the right floor now.

\_"Trust to Luna's singing!"\_

It occurs to Celestia, that the guards might not be reacting to them due to the narrative causality of the Heartsong.

\_"Though she sets our ears to ringing!"\_

She'd have to look into that later.

\_"Let's vary world-saving,\_  
><em>With a little burglering!"<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Elements secured, and sent away aboard a pre-dawn train, a bemused Princess Celestia strode into the throne room. While she was able to keep her reaction to the guard's looks hidden, the way Luna boggled at the bodysuit she wore tested that control.<p>

"Good morning Luna, I've had an interesting time this past hour. Guardspony, go wake Captain Armor, we have a situation.

"I just helped Twilight continue a stable time loop, that required I send her and the other Bearers off to parts unknown with the Elements. I'm sure they can handle the situation, but I dislike not knowing what I've sent them to."

"And since thou were not to go with them, any actions we take from here would logically be part of the loop, including trying to find out what their mission is, and what we might do to aid it." Luna finished her sister's thoughts.

It would be several fruitless hours of searching before news of the Crystal Empire's return reached them.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sat in a room with her friends, in the Crystal Castle. They had shown up, saved the mysterious city-state, failed to blast the badguy with the Elements, then succeeded to blast him with the Crystal Heart... which they did by blasting it with the Elements.<br>Now though, she was trying to find where Future Twilight wrote how to convince the crystal ponies to not crown her their queen-protector, and not hurt their feelings in the process. Sadly, the notepad had no answers for her.

"Why didn't Future Twilight mention this? Maybe she hasn't figured it out yet, and I loop sometime soon? But where do I find the spell? Is it somewhere in the city? I'm too young to be a queen-"

Twilight stopped mid-panic as she Woke up. Blinking, she checked her loop memories. Little hints told her the others were Awake, and a big hint from Pinkie in the form of the Gilbert and Sullivan Heartsongs.

She looked up at her friends, and asked: "Did I just \_prank myself?"\_

\* \* \*

><p>56.2 (Hubris Plus)<p>

Twilight came Awake in her usual spot over the book describing the rise of... Bad Horse? That was a new one. A little on the nose, even by pony name standards.

She was about to reread the passage to double check for other inconsistencies with the baseline when the familiar rumble from her assistant signalled an incoming letter. In a moment he'd unrolled the scroll and was about to read when music filtered in from the edge of hearing.

Three ponies in cowpony gear suddenly appeared beside her, bouncing gently in time to the tune, and sang out.

\_ "Sun Mare, Sun Mare,  
>She's good, Sun Mare!<em>

\_ Oh, She raises moon and sun  
>At dusk and dawn each day!<br>She got the station-  
>-ary that you sent her way!<br>In answer she has one,  
>Yes just one thing to say:<em>

\_ Your lonely studies have to end,  
>So off to Ponyville, make some friends!"<em>

The trio of ponies vanished just as quickly as they'd arrived and Twilight blinked slowly as she absorbed what had just happened.

"Okay, one: Apparently heart songs can be induced via postage," she said to herself, already wondering how one might accomplish such a thing. "And two: Was one of them Applejack?"

\* \* \*

><p>56.3 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?" Pinkie Pie had an uncharacteristic expression of concern.<p>

"What's up, Pinkie?" Twilight asked.

"Remember when we assumed this was a baseline Loop?"

"Yeeeeees...?"

"Well... you better come see this."

Twilight sighed. She, Pinkie, and Sweetie Belle were the only ones Awake this Loop. That meant fewer eyes to find potential bugs in the baseline that might need to be dealt with. Her experiments would have to be postponed until the next half-moon. She turned off the gas stove, carefully unwound the bungee cords, and informed the chicken that it could return to Fluttershy's house.

"So, can you tell me what this is all about?" she asked as she and Pinkie walked to Sugarcube Corner.

"Well... no, I really better not. It's something you just can't believe until you see it." Pinkie frowned and added, "I've been dealing with it for a week, but it's beginning to creep me out."

When they arrived, Twilight understood Pinkie's reluctance. Could she have imagined that malevolent black face without the blade-like red horn? Could she have believed it, without actually staring into those flaming eyes... those eyes that, for whatever reason, kept pointing in different directions?

\*\*\*"MUFFINS,"\*\* the earth pony hissed as they walked past.

"Just keep walking," Pinkie Pie hissed, leading Twilight behind the counter and towards the kitchen.

\*\*\*"MUFFINS,"\*\* the earth pony repeated. After the mares had left the room, he leaned over the counter and added plaintively, \*\*\*"Aw, c'mon... muffins..."\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight's prediction that the altered Sombra was an amusing but harmless glitch in an otherwise baseline Loop was proven wrong not quite two years later, when the Crystal Empire suddenly reappeared after its thousand-year exile... in the middle of the Appleoosan desert.<p>

And an eldritch voice echoed through the canyons and over the mesas, saying, \_"I just don't know what went wrong..."\_

\* \* \*

><p>56.4 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia stretched her back after getting off her throne. It was gradually getting easier to move around without assistance after spending so long attached to that chair. She managed to make her way to through the doorway and into the vast dinner hall that now served as a conference table.<p>

Even after her many loops, she still found it a novel experience to be human. Leman Russ, his two faithful talkative wolves, and his adopted mother, Fluttershy, sat at her side.

And there was Pinkie Pie, once again the chaos goddess of joy and celebration. With her near infinite power, she was now taking the grinning form of Pinkie Pie, equestrian earth pony, and looking utterly and almost hilariously out of place.

However, across the table, sat her genetically engineered sister. Luna Lupercal Horus, leader of the Luna's Night Wolves Legion, once traitor to the empire; was newly reformed from being scattered into the warp. Reformed, she claimed, in both meanings of the word, mostly thanks to the efforts of Twilight and her adepta sororoitas.



It was an uneasy truce and the tension in the room was palpable.

"Let's begin with something we can all agree upon," Celestia, God Empress of Mankind, smiled diplomatically, "How about some cake?"

\* \* \*

><p>56.5 (Crisis)<p>

Twilight was the only Element Awake again, though she'd cottoned onto some clues that indicated either Luna, Nyx, or both were Awake and planning another Nightmare Moon prank, and going about her duties as the Summer Sun coordinator. Everything had been going according to the baseline so far and she was on her way to Fluttershy's as usual.

But when she got there, her brain locked up at what she saw.

Fluttershy wasn't training birds to sing this Loop. No, she was training... Twilight had no idea what those creatures were, but they looked like someone had cross-bred a bat with a helicopter.

"Oh!" Fluttershy whispered in surprise. "I didn't see you there. Are you the Summer Sun coordinator?"

"Yes, I..." Twilight responded automatically before her curiosity reasserted itself and demanded to know what the heck was going on. "I'm sorry, but... what exactly are these critters you're training?"

"You've never seen a heyleut before?" Fluttershy blinked in surprise. "That's rather surprising given that they're one of the most popular pets in all Equestria."

As Twilight attempted to process that, the local version of Angel Bunny zoomed up on his wheel-like limbs and skidded to a stop next to Fluttershy.

Yep, it looked like it was going to be one of those Loops.

\* \* \*

><p>56.6 (Lord of Bones)<p>

Klauthiartrysx, the Bloody Star, the Red Dragon of the Mountain, opened his eyelid slightly and resisted the urge to groan out loud at the sight of yet another annoying pony out to spoil his nap. His ominous growl shook the loose rocks of his lair, and the malevolent red glow of his mouth warned the approaching lesser being about the consequences of annoying one of the First and the Last.

The pony, a lavender-furred unicorn, simply smiled winningly and levitated what appeared to be a few brochures and assorted documents up to the wyrm's face. "Good afternoon, Mr. Klauthiartrysx! My name is Twilight Sparkle, and I'm representing Plots and Plans, Equestria's leading real estate developer, and the Royal Canterlot Moving Agency. We are fully prepared to reimburse you for the full

cost of your current dwelling and set you up with a new one. Our brochures have both Standard and Deluxe options available for your perusal, and don't worry about the price!"

His curiosity piqued, the incredulous dragon unfolded the brochure and decided to humor the mad pony. A scaly eyeridge rose at the selection of caves, ruins, abandoned fortresses and hidden temple lairs on offer; many of them looked much more appealing than his current home. "State of the art security, lava rivers, automatic gem sorter, mannequins, trick hoard...hang on, who's this?"

He pointed at one of the photographs, where a rather pretty dragoness was sunning herself on a cliff. The lavender unicorn peeked at the picture, and beamed. "That's one of your possible new neighbours, of course! And you're in luck, we have one last Super-Deluxe package available, and if you take it she'll be your next-mountain neighbor!"

"How much?"

The unicorn smiled. It was not a nice smile. "All expenses are paid for by the Crown of Canterlot. Please, sign here."

\* \* \*

><p>Smiling, Celestia unfurled the Friendship Report. "Dear Princess Celestia...dragon has left...found a new home...please find enclosed bill for moving fee and Super Deluxe Lair Package? What?"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>56.7 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

Celestia Awoke in mid-heart song, as she did a painting on a wall of a night sky and a string of lights that seemed to float in it.

\_"Tomorrow night..."

>The lights will appear...<br>Just like they do on my birthday each year...

>What is it like...<br>Out there where they glow...

>Now that I'm older...<br>Mother might just let me go..."\_

Loop memories kicked in. She was named Rapinzel. She was human, and she only had access to a trickle of her normal power levels. She tried levitating the brush and pot she held, and judged her power level as equivalent to a filly's.

She and Luna... Lovelace, who was down below, working on a loom to make some silvery material, had lived their entire lives in this tower, cared for by their mother, Gethel. Apparently the world outside was far too dangerous for innocent, fragile girls such as themselves. She would be coveted and a prize for the many evil people because her long blonde mane - hair - had the power of healing any injury when she sang a song. Said long blonde hair was very long, as it lost its power when cut. Lovelace would have her own problems as her midnight blue skin and blue hair would make people think she was a demon, not to mention the blemish on her forehead. She was far better off using her special ability which was to gather moonlight into thread and spun cloth which helped to support the three of

them.

"Luna... I mean Lovelace. Are you thinking what I am?"

"Indeed." Luna stopped weaving and spun to face her sibling. "Now I am Awake, Mother Gethel's story doth smell greatly of cheese. Our home is more of a gilded cage than a sanctuary, and gilded mostly by our own efforts at that."

Celestia descended, in-loop reflexes causing her to automatically flip a length of her hair over a support beam to slide down. "Unfortunately, from my memories, Gethel is a powerful spellcaster, and I find myself with only the smallest scrap of power. If we forced the issue, I don't think I could stand up to her."

Luna frowned in concentration and then in frustration as a shimmering wavery bolt of silver energy formed in front of her, then poofed out of existence. "Myself also. Tis infuriating! Cans't sense the greater part of mine own power, but hath separated from it, unable to use more than a mote."

Celestia noted Luna's reversion to high-speak, a sure sign she was getting stressed. She focussed what power she had into shifting to mage sight, fortunately something that required more knowledge than power. She examined both herself and then Luna. "Interesting... I am truly human, but my hair is almost a separate entity, and one that is associated with the sun. It is diverting my alicorn powers, making them a part of it's own. You on the other hand are an equine, transformed to human form. I'm fairly certain that in-loop you were a unicorn and someone had managed to steal away your horn..."

"And now we do know how the crone comes by her powers." Luna growled. "But she carries no staff or wand that might hide it. Mayhap she has engaged in binding rituals so that she might call on it's power remotely, which would'st mean it could be anywhere!"

Celestia mused, thinking it through. "If we could move around, and pooled what power we had, we might be able to do some divinations and try to triangulate on the source. But we'd need maps, tools, things I can't make out of what we have in the tower. I also want to find out what those light are that appear every year on my birthday. I feel they're somehow connected with my in-loop origins. At the very least I don't think they're natural, so we may find people and some of the things we need."

"We shall need time, also." Luna added. "Gethel shalt hound us as soon as she finds out we are gone."

"I know!" Celestia exclaimed brightly. "I'll ask for some of that white seashell paint as my birthday present. It'll take her three days to go and fetch some. I was going to ask to be let out, but we know why that won't happen."

"Tis a cunning strategem!" Luna was equally pleased. "We shall away to see the lights, and find my horn. With it we can defy Gethel and free ourselves of her bondage!"

The two sisters made a fist and hoof-bumped.

\* \* \*

><p>56.8 (54.3 continued) (Kris Overstreet)<p>

The town of Zumzum wasn't the center or heart or gateway of anything. It had no great opera houses, no magnificent palaces, no historic monuments, and not all that much of anything to do on a Saturday night. It was just a town, an outpost of civilization surrounded by mostly uninhabited forest. (That is, uninhabited except for monsters and bandits, neither of whom appeared on the census rolls, which demonstrates a tragic lack of any sense of civic obligation on their part.)

Thus it was the perfect place for a traveling circus and medicine show to set up... with a few drawbacks. The most notable drawback lay in the town's antiquated laws about travelling players, requiring them to camp either outside of the town walls or in the town square--no use of other facilities allowed. Since the gates shut at sundown, and thus cut off the paying audience, this left Von Payne's Sparkle Show with no real option but to park their wagons and set up their tents and stage in the town square.

Next to the gallows.

Which, as it turned out, was occupied.

"We can't perform HERE!" Trixie shouted when she saw the arrangements. "Performing next to corpses is disrespectful- and unhygienic!"

"Vell, if dot's a problem, we-uns got y'all covered!" one of the dangling bodies replied in a cheerful voice that, unfortunately, possessed a train wreck of two entirely incompatible accents.

"WHAT?" Trixie shrieked. "You're still ALIVE?"

"Yah, vell," another of the bodies chimed in, "Jagers, hyu know? Ve bin here two dayz zo far. Been pretty peaceful." She tried to nod her head, but the noose and gravity converted it into a full-body sway.

"Hey, you'll knock off mein hat!" the third one said. "Can't hyu hold schtill?"

Twilight, walking with one of the other actresses, noticed the movement from the gallows, where two of the jagers were trying to kick each other with their bound feet while the third shook her head and rolled her eyes. The voices sounded familiar... and thankfully jagermonsters weren't limited in skin and hair color to the usual human palette, so she had more hints. The one with the cavalry hat had orange-ish skin and hair that split the difference between pink and purple. The one about to lose her fez had white hair and gray skin, with a pair of enormous glasses covering her eyes. Finally the one shaking her head, though an old helmet and goggles covered most of her hair, could be identified by the big red bow tied around the helmet's cockade.

And, since Twilight hadn't bothered to crop her own distinctive purple hair, she found she also was distinctly recognizable.

"Hey, Twilight! We was wonderin' when hyu would show up!"

"I beg your pardon... ladies..." The Loops had given Twilight plenty of time to learn how to act... and also how to lie, which are two different things. "I am Madame Olga, soothsayer extraordinary."

"Aw, c'mon, Twilight, ve're all Awake," the jager in the cavalry hat whined. "Hyu don't haveta pretend-"

Through an impressive exhibition of gymnastics for someone who's bound hand and foot and hanging by their neck from a noose, the helmeted jager managed to use her feet to smack the orange jager on the head. "If'n she says she's not named Twilight, we DON'T CALL HER TWILIGHT. Savvy?"

"You forgot your accent," the orange jager whispered, shaking her head in a vain effort to de-smush her hat.

Twilight suppressed a groan. Despite all the Loops, and all their talents, those two were definitely two-thirds of the Cutie Mark Crusaders, and they still had their moments of what could only be called anti-genius. Best to stop this quickly. "Madame Olga feels a vision coming upon her!" she cried, pressing the back of her hand to her forehead in a suitably dramatic fashion. "I see... an apple tree in bloom!" She pointed to the helmeted jager. "And... and a child's scooter!" She pointed to the cavalry-hat jager. "And... yes, I see it... an elegant silver teaspoon!" She pointed to the last jager, the one with the fez and glasses.

"Wow, she's good," the last jager grinned. "I'm Silver, und dis next to me is my sister Scuta. An' our fearless leader iz Blum."

"I also see... a large seed... and a sugar-encrusted bell. What can you tell me of these visions, monsters?"

"You mean Babs and-" Scuta Lu flinched as Apple Blum tried to kick her. "OOOOOH. Um, sorry, but ve know nutting of dem. Ve see nutting, know NUT-TING!"

"Dot's a bad German accent, not a bad Slavic accent," Silver (Spoon) muttered.

"Well, whatever your names are, the Great and Powerful \*\*Trixie\*\* von Payne will not have her performers play next to corp... er, to bod... er... to whatever you are!" Trixie slipped a brief wink into her tirade. "I'm going to go have a word with the mayor about this insult!"

"Goot luck vit dot," Scuta chirped. "The mayor's der one keeping der book on ven ve finally kick off!"

A high-pitched whine echoed overhead, and Twilight looked up just in time to see a contrail zip across the sky. It glittered with faint rainbow colors.

"Mind if I join you?" Twilight asked Trixie. "I want to know if anybody's placed a bet on, 'jagers released by daring hero with Europa-wide reputation.'"

As they walked off, Silver muttered, "Thanks for askink about Diamond

Tiara... 'Olga'..."

\* \* \*

><p>There were three guards at the east gate. The guard captain was a grizzled veteran of the Long War and the fight against the Other, and he had the sense to try diplomacy with monsters, especially monsters riding dire bears. Unfortunately the other two were just kids with no real battle experience, and thus no sense. Plenty of rattled nerves, though.<p>

"The gate is closed until dawn," the captain said, not without a bit of stuttering. It was a very big bear.

"Der gate iz not actually clozed," the female jagermonster on the bear's back said. Multicolored pink hair and a pair of angry eyes were all that stuck out from behind mask and wraps. "I merely vish to enter-"

Up on the walls, one of the other guards suffered from a twitch in their trigger finger. Without looking up the jager caught the crossbow bolt and snapped it in her fingers. "I forgiv.

\*\*Vunce\*\*."

Then one of the young guards panicked. "FIRE!"

At which point, in the guard captain's professional estimation, it all went to hell.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight had just finished explaining her plan to Rainbow Dash, who had watched the performance of The Sparkle Boys and the Race to the West Pole with the aid of three buckets of popcorn. "What's that sound?" she asked, poking her head out of Madame Olga's fortune-telling tent.<p>

"Sounds like a convenient diversion!" Rainbow Dash said, pushing past Twilight and pointing at the guards abandoning the square- and the gallows.

"Okay," Twilight said, dashing over to the gallows. "Girls," she said to the trio strung up on the gallows, "play along with Rainbow, then meet up with the circus on the road in a couple days, okay?"

"Play along?" Applebloom asked. "How did you think we got up here in the first place?"

Rainbow Dash grinned a little embarrassed grin.

"Whatever," Twilight said. "I've gotta go run and scream in panic now, OK?"

About thirty seconds later, Rainbow Dash jumped to the top of the gallows and shouted, "WICKED MONSTERS, HEAR ME! If you swear to defeat the monster attacking this fair city, I shall release you from this slow but well-deserved death! What say you? Shall you join me in this glorious cause?"

"Oh! Um... Ja! Ve vill do az hyu zay... for now!" Scootaloo's acting

was just short of dreadful, but the panicked townspeople, their attention grabbed by the great hero Rainbow Trygvassen's shout, ate it up.

A blade flashed out, three ropes were snapped, and four figures rushed towards the center of the chaos.

"VE HUNT!"

"VE HUNT!"

"CUTIE MARK JAGERS TOWN DEFENDERS, YAAAAAY!"

"Um, what?"

"Sorry, it just slipped out."

\* \* \*

><p>"So," Diamond Tiara asked, brushing her bear, "you say you found Twilight?"<p>

"Shore did." The four jager-fillies didn't bother with the Loop-local accent when alone. "An' she smells right. She's the one we wuz lookin' for afore we Awoke."

"I don't like that," Diamond growled. "I mean, we've been in war Loops, you know? But I've never felt so railroaded by a Loop before."

"I've never felt so gypped by a Loop before," Applebloom grumbled. "I'm supposed ta be th' technical genius outta us, right? So how come I don't get to be a Spark? How come I'm comic relief?"

"Because... you're covered in tree sap?" Diamond Tiara pointed out.

"Not our fault Fust knocked us into that stand of pines," Scootaloo muttered, pointing at the sheepish-looking bear.

"You know," Silver Spoon whined, trying to get her glasses clean, "this was so funny when it wasn't happening to me..."

"I really miss Sweetie Belle," Applebloom sighed. "I wonder if she's even in this Loop?"

\* \* \*

><p>56.9 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was the day after Summer Sun Celebration at start of the new loop, and all the crusaders minus Nyx were present and awake, Silver a unicorn this time around. One thing was strange though, the teacher was nowhere to be seen. The crusaders had their desks circled since the teacher was so late and they discussed the odd phenomenon, Applebloom leading the discussion. "I recall he was never on time to class. Ya think it's a variant teacher, or a looper?"<p>

Scootaloo and Diamond bet five bits on a looper while Silver, Applebloom and Sweetie believed a variant teacher was here. It was ten minutes later that the stallion arrived, a unicorn bearing an orange red mane and a very light tan coat with a strange five-spoked circular cutie mark unlike any they had seen before.

He strode to the front of the class rambling to himself loud enough to be heard by all, "Hm, fascinating. Human Equine body in nature, too short to be full sized horse, race must be pony size throughout lifecycle. Symbol on flank, image of citadel council, what could it mean? Must check memories. Hmm...yes, I see. So the purpose of the mark is your special talent, wonder why the citadel council, could be because of connection to special tasks group, supporting the council in their intelligence roll. Also a school teacher, must be replacing a local looper else I'd be a professor at a college in Manehattan, anchor perhaps?"

He shook his head as his horn started glowing, bringing chalk to the board, "no no no no, must always have an anchor, Shepard is anchor, not me. Someone else must be anchor. How am I going to write the daily plan, hm, seems the chalk is moving for me surrounded by an orange glow. Biotics? No, I can sense no implants in my own head, wait, I can scan my own head without omnitool? bizarre, must be something similar to biotics, maybe...yes, yes, YES! It must be magic, like the one in Potter's universe, good times replacing Snape as potions master."

Silver, Applebloom and Sweetie groaned and forked over several bits to the victors of the bet. After copying his lesson plan to the board from memory, the stallion turned to his class, "Greetings, class, sorry for the delay, was preparing a lesson plan, got caught up and lost track of time."

The class droned, "Good morning, Professor Solus!"

The teacher gave a small grin, "Excellent, but remember you can call me Mordin. Now, I have a question, only raise your hoof if you understand what I'm asking, how many of you are loopers?"

As five hooves rose, Applebloom thought at least the loop wouldn't be boring.

\* \* \*

><p>56.10 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"Um... welcome to Equestria!" Twilight Sparkle looked over the strange unicorn. Blue coat, white mane, and a beard that Starswirl would have been proud of. A cutie mark of a golden crown with rubies mounted into the tines. Strange eyes with no iris and pupils that had a white spot in the center of each.

"Oh, hello there, hallucination," the unicorn said, his voice wavering a bit with age. "I have to say, this Loop seems quite like home. And my hallucinations seldom begin conversations."

"I'm not a hallucination," Twilight said. "I'm Twilight Sparkle, and I'm the local Anchor."

"I'm the Ice King. Pleased to meet you. Are you sure you're not a



hallucination?" the old unicorn asked. "You're not a ghost, a spirit, a magical being?"

"Well, I am a magical being," Twilight said. "This is the magical kingdom of Equestria, after all."

A glint appeared in the old pony's eye. "Magical kingdom? Tell me, purple horse... do you have... princesses?"

"Why, yes," Twilight said cautiously. "In fact, Princess Celestia will be in this town tomorrow for the Summer Sun Celebration. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, no reason," the Ice King said, smiling broadly. Twilight noted the sharp, angular teeth.

\* \* \*

><p>"... Princess Celestia!"<p>

The curtains opened, like usual, and the balcony was empty, like usual.

And then, in a clap of thunder, it wasn't empty anymore. It was full of Nightmare Moon, much more furious than Twilight could recall her being in any Loop, Awake or not.

"WHERE IS MY SISTER?" The Royal Canterlot Voice, amplified by a thousand years of slow-cooked stewed evil, shook the walls of the town hall. "NO ONE IS ALLOWED TO KIDNAP MY SISTER EXCEPT ME!"

"Um... who are you, exactly?" Applejack, who wasn't Awake, asked.

"And what do you mean, 'where is your sister'?" asked Rainbow Dash, who was. "Aren't you supposed to have sealed her in the sun or something?"

"This was my plan," Nightmare Moon nodded. "But obviously there are more important things afoot than my revenge. Some foul villain has dared to lay hooves on my sister! For the honor of Equestria, this must not stand!" In a swirl of smoke, the Nightmare shifted from the balcony to the floor of the town hall. "My little ponies, who shall join me in bringing this miscreant to justice?"

"Aw, yeah!" Rainbow Dash grinned. "Kicking flank alongside Nightmare Moon? I like this Loop already! C'mon, girls! You know what time it is?"

"It's a quarter past five," a voice murmured from the door.

Rainbow Dash groaned and facehoofed.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Fluttershy said. "My watch might be a bit slow. Please don't be angry. Never mind."

\* \* \*

><p>56.11 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...And, ah... who are you, um, all representing?"

Chrysalis smiled. "The badlands, sir. I thought it was about time for us all to be represented in the Equestrian Games, seeing as we've been rather... well, disorganized up to this point."

"I still don't see why I have to fly against prissy ponies--"

The changeling queen snarled at the red dragon. "Do you want to spend a night in beetleblack cavern?"

"NomaamI'llbegoodmaam!"

"Good." Chrysalis took a breath and turned back to the official with an apologetic smile. "Sorry about that. Anyway, my application?"

"Ah..." The poor stallion tapped his clipboard nervously. "I'm not sure phoenixes are allowed to race."

"Oh, well." She sighed and nuzzled the dejected hatchling. "Sorry Peewee, I guess we'll have to go with plan B. Oh consooooort?"

A blue unicorn with glittering butterfly wings trotted up. "You called upon the Great and Powerful Trixie?"

"I do so hate to impose, but would you do me the honor of joining in this relay with me?"

"Trixie supposes she has time in her schedule for that."

"Great," the red dragon muttered. "Now one of my teammates is--"

"Beetleblack cavern."

"-an absolutely awesome pony!" he finished with a tight smile. "I can see why she's your consort, ahahahaha!"

The poor race official took a deep breath... and shrugged. "What the hay. You're in."

\* \* \*

><p>56.12 (Crisis)<p>

Twilight had lived through solo baseline Loops more times than she'd ever care to recount to anyone. Some of the antics by her non-looping friends could make her smile in nostalgia, or at least shake her head with begrudging amusement. Some though... Some just made her grit her teeth every time they came up.

Like the current situation.

The attempt to fake a timberwolf attack on Applejack to clear Spike's 'life debt' had turned into a real timberwolf attack and everyone, including Spike, was running around in panic.

"Spike," she deadpanned as the dragonling ran past her.

"We have to get out of here!" Spike shouted back, before turning back around. "I have to help Applejack get out of here!"

"\_Spike\_", she put a bit of force into her words this time, and was rewarded with her little brother/adopted son/it's complicated's attention. "Timberwolves are made of wood."

"Uh, yeah?"

"You breathe \_fire\_."

"Oh," Spike blinked at that, before getting that look of dawning comprehension. "Ohhhhh..."

The dragonling turned back towards the timberwolves with a malicious grin.

"Go get 'em Spike."

\* \* \*

><p>(optional ending by KrisOverstreet):<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The next day the girls all visited Spike in the hospital. The little dragon in the body cast was glad to see them... well, all but one.<p>

"'Timberwolves are made of wood,' you said," he grumbled.

"Er, yeah, I did say that, didn't I?"

"'You breathe fire,' you said."

"Yeah, that was me too."

"Pity you forgot to mention that soggy, rotten, green wood doesn't burn for beans."

"Um, yeah. That was my bad." Twilight scratched the back of her head with her hoof.

Thankfully Applejack had persuaded Spike that, for risking his own life (and nearly losing it) to save hers, he and she were quit of that life-debt thing.

"By the way, Twilight? Could you bring me my crayons?" Spike still had the use of his right arm.

"Sure, I'd love to," Twilight said. "What are you going to do with them?"

"I think the Honor Code of Noble Dragons needs an edit. 'If someone saves your life, you owe them service until you can return the favor-unless that someone was the one who put you in danger in the first place.'"

"You're just not gonna let me live that one down, are you

Spike?"

"Nope."

Twilight sighed and apologized for the fifth time. It was going to be a long, long rest of the Loop.

\* \* \*

><p>56.13 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"... Ponyville qualifies!"

Rainbow glided over to where Bulk Biceps and Fluttershy were waiting. "That. Was. INCREDIBLE!" she gushed. "I would never have believed she could do it! And for that leg of the course, with the corkscrew hoops and the double backflip maneuver! I was feeling really guilty about joining the Cloudsdale team," Rainbow added, kicking a bit of cloud under her hooves in embarrassment, "but with her on the team, Ponyville has an honest chance to medal!"

Back at the finish line, a certain cross-eyed pegasus received the congratulations of the Wonderbolts.

"Well, the thing is," Fluttershy said, "all we did was tell her that, as soon as she got the horseshoe, she was to fly as fast as she could in a straight line towards the goal."

"A straight line?" Rainbow Dash looked up to see the blonde pegasus require three tries to grasp a well-wisher's hoof for a hoofshake. "Yeah... yeah, I can see that."

\*\*\*"YEAH!"\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>56.14 (Golddude)<p>

"So that means you could fly with us." Spitfire offered. After all, she thought Rainbow Dash was better than Soarin anyway. They could definitely qualify with such an asset.

Rainbow Dash, on the other hand, had some doubts. "Fly? You mean... practice with you?"

Fleetfoot smirked and nodded. "Yeah, exactly. So what do you say?"

Spitfire added, "You can be our third. At least until Soarin's better."

Rainbow Dash had a decision to make. It was either Ponyville, or Cloudsdale. Or she could switch between them and hope no one notices. Or... "Sure, I'd love to." Spitfire and Fleetfoot smiled. Now they'd definitely qualify. "You can practice with all of me!"

Rainbow Dash turned to face her Ponyville team of Bulk Biceps and Fluttershy and inhaled a large breath for a yelling order. "BRING 'EM HERE, PONYVILLE!"

The two teammates looked at each other and nodded, then flying off.

Spitfire was a little confused. "Um-"

"Shh. Wait for it!" Rainbow Dash smiled as she urged The Wonderbolts to see her big surprise. Soon enough, the sky began to darken... then turn blue. Both Fleetfoot and Spitfire removed their sunglasses and squinted. A sea of blue was converging on them, and in that sea of blue were a bunch of prismatic manes.

Rainbow Dash smirked. The Mirror Pond came in handy at times.

\* \* \*

><p>56.15 (EdBeccera)<p>

The Sun has set, and Luna presides over her Night Court in Canterlot.

"Mac, call the next case."

\* \* \*

><p>56.16 (Crisis)<p>

Twilight had a plan.

A plan to ease Luna's reintroduction to Equestria in general and Ponyville in particular before the Nightmare Night incident came around this Loop. It was a plan that involved Pinkie Pie, so great care was needed to make sure it didn't get out of hoof.

"Pinkie!" Twilight reigned in the Unawake version of her hyperactive friend. "Look, I know you're excited and all, but please don't go overboard on this."

"But Twilight," Pinkie pleaded, "you said she hasn't had one for a thousand years! There's so much time to make up for andâ€"

Twilight cut her friend off by the simple expedient of shoving her hoof in Pinkie's mouth. "And Princess Celestia has told me that she wants to be the one to make it up to Luna in her own way and time. You wouldn't want to deprive her of family bonding time with her sister, would you? Not after a thousand years apart."

Pinkie's expression softened and she shook her head in the negative.

"So, just one party," Twilight reminded her friend. "We're not making up for a thousand years of missed opportunities, we're welcoming a brand new friend who's essentially new to Equestria. One who is probably feeling a little overwhelmed by all the unfamiliar sights and maybe even a bit left out by how different she is from everypony else. One who could really use some new friends who won't judge her unfairly. Think you can do that?"

Pinkie nodded enthusiastically.

\* \* \*

><p>"Really, sister," Luna huffed a bit as the diarchs trotted up to the Golden Oaks Library in Ponyville, "what possible business could thy student have <em>today<em> that could not be put off?"

"Patience, sister," Celestia chided playfully. "You'll see when we get inside. Why don't you do the honors?"

Luna rolled her eyes and reluctantly opened the door before stepping into the surprisingly dark interior. Really, could her sister's student not at least arrange for sufficient lightâ€

"SURPRISE!" chorused over a dozen voices as the sudden illumination of the room temporarily blinded the diarch of the moon. When her eyes adjusted, she took in the near-sea of ponies in the main lobby, the decorations, the massive banner...

Reading what the banner said caused Luna's eyes to tear up and her hoof to fly to her mouth from emotional shock. They'd remembered. She hadn't thought anyone remembered, pony or otherwise. That they'd all forgotten. That \_Tia\_ had forgotten...

"Happy birthday, Luna," Celestia whispered to her sister as she gently nudged the moon princess further in towards the awaiting well-wishers.

\* \* \*

><p>56.17 (Crisis)<p>

It had taken a number of Loops to figure out how to set it up, but Twilight was finally ready to reenact a rather funny skit she'd picked up from the Hub at some point.

Sure, she'd needed to change a few things. For one, actually killing the non-looping contestants (since this reenactment wasn't to be a stage production) wouldn't be particularly funny, no matter what some other loopers out in the multiverse thought. So she'd replaced the 'shooting yourself in the head' bit at the end with 'hitting yourself in the face with a pie'. For another, ponies generally didn't wear undergarments, so she'd needed something else for the 'removing a bra' portion. Several other parts of the contest had been altered to fit pony society and in general ensure the safety of the contestants in spite of themselves.

Twilight looked out over the field and the contestants who were lined up. Blueblood had practically fallen over himself to sign up despite the rather obvious implications in the contest name and numerous other nobles and wealthy elite, like Upper Crust, had followed his example without thinking. Twilight actually thought it was rather unfair how easy it had been getting their willing participation, but the humor potential was too good to pass up.

"Mares and Gentlestallions!" she called out to the crowd from her position as announcer. "Welcome to the first annual 'Upper Class Twit of the Year' competition!"

\* \* \*

><p>56.18 (OracleMask)<p>

"And you usually lose how many of the other students?!"

Twilight Sparkle, currently a teenager and also known as a 'Super High School-Level Wizard', stared at her new classmate with a mix of astonishment and horror. Naegi - a.k.a. 'Super High School-Level Good Luck', and Anchor for loops in Hope's Peak Academy "wilted pretty much instantly under it.

"I'm not saying I try to let it happen or anything," Naegi countered, shamefacedly, "But getting a loop with no deaths is barely doable in my baseline. So I warn anybody new to this loop ahead of time about the body count, since I know my loop is...kind of depressing."

That was putting it mildly. Twilight sighed.

"You also said that you know who the person who started this twisted game is, right?"

"Yeah..." Naegi glanced warily at the nearby cameras, "Why?"

\* \* \*

><p>"If I hadn't seen it, I wouldn't have believed it," Naegi admitted, "Although I don't know if that spell you did really 'reformed' her any."<p>

Behind them, lying amongst a pile of shut-down Monokumas, the Mastermind known as Enoshima Junko hugged herself and giggled.

"Luckily my talent was 'wizard', so I could still cast that spell," Twilight said, "But it was supposed to make her feel all the suffering she inflicted on others."

"And it was the BEST!" Enoshima exclaimed suddenly, latching onto Twilight's ankle, "All that despair! That wonderful, wonderful despair! Do it again? Please? Pleeese?"

"Only if you're good," Twilight found herself replying.

Naegi rubbed the back of his head and chuckled. Well, this was one way to make sure everyone lived. And if Enoshima gave her new 'bestest best friend in the whole wide universe' a break, maybe Twilight could try that memory spell she'd mentioned. It'd be nice to finally get that memory of his first year of school back...

\* \* \*

><p>56.19 (Indalecio)<p>

Cheerilee awoke. She was human again, which was becoming rather common recently. She was at the controls of some sort of flying craft. Some sort of weird combination of helicopter and jet. It seemed to be on autopilot at the moment, which she was thankful for, as she probably wouldn't know how to fly until her loop memories hit.

'Ah, there!' she thought.

She'd been hired to tutor a child and she'd was currently on the flight to his location. The job itself filled her with misgivings. For one thing, the remote location. Who, possibly, living way out in the boonies would hire a tutor? Secondly, her sources, mainly gossiping secretaries at the temp agency she worked at, said that the previous tutor, a Mr. Shu, had been on the job for less than a day. That didn't bode well. Was her new boss difficult to please? Was the child temperamental, causing him to quit? Its possible he was a lousy teacher, but the other two options loomed in her mind as well. If nothing else, at least the money was good, if she could stay on.

She was coming up on the address, 439 East District, supposedly near the foot of Mt. Paozu. Nearing the mountain, she took the craft off of auto, and looked for the house. It wasn't too long before she spotted it, a small and simple domed house, one those prefabs you could buy in a capsule. The very opposite of fancy.

She brought the craft in for a landing and stepped out only to be greeted by a black haired woman wearing a simple purple dress. Cheerilee smiled and returned the greeting.

"Hi! You must be Chichi Son?"

"Yes! You must be the new tutor the agency sent." Chichi returned the smile.

"Yes! I'm Sara Lee. Pleased to meet you!"

"Oh, the same here. Its so hard to get good tutors up here, and while my Gohan can study on his own, there's no substitute for a good teacher."

Cheerilee continued to make pleasant conversation with Chichi until she brought her to what he assumed to be Gohan's room, opening the door.

"Gohan, you have a new tutor! Say hello to Ms. Lee."

When Cheerilee entered the door, she saw a small kid, possibly 10yrs old. He had his black hair cut somewhat short, and was wearing a tea shirt and pants hung by suspenders. As he got up, he crossed the room and gave a short bow.

"Pleased to meet you." he said.

"Oh, he's quite the charmer."

"Well, I'll leave you two to his studies. Dinner's at 7." said Chichi as she closed the door behind him.

"You're different."

The got Cheerilee sweating. "Is that good or bad?"

"Well, your powerlevel is about as high as most people, but I keep getting this weird echo that tells me that there is more to you than that. Are you a fighter?"



"Well, I don't think I am, but I received a little training from someone in the past." She thought back to the loop with the battle clothes.

"Can you teach me?"

"It wasn't that much, and I think your Mom wants me to teach you more from what its in those books." she said as she pointed to the books on the desk.

Gohan looked crestfallen. "Awww..."

The kid could sense power levels, whatever that was, but he's pretty young. How much could he know? "Well, ask your Mom, and if she says okay, I'll see what I can teach."

\* \* \*

><p>Cheerilee hadn't know how she got there, but she was standing in a grass field. Bottles of milk flew off majestically in the distance. A white cat with a cane walked by next to her and asked her where the bus to Orange City was. She pointed to the bus stop, which had mysteriously appeared to her left, and he thanked her by telling her she needed to look behind her. When she did, there was Gohan.<p>

"Hi." he started.

"Um..Hi."

"We're in a dream you know."

"Is this one of those lucid dream things where you can control it?"

"Not quite. I apologize for entering your dream. I felt guilty about asking you to train me, and I couldn't sleep."

"Oh why is that?"

Gohan looked down and tapped the tips of his fingers together.

"Umm...I'm one of the strongest fighters on this planet."

"What?" Cheerilee started, "Now I know I'm dreaming."

"Its true. Both sides of my family have a strong martial arts tradition, and I'm also a half alien on my father's side."

"You know you sound crazy."

Gohan thought for a moment. "Well my dad won one of the former martial arts tournaments. I can show you the belt from that when we wake up."

"So if that's true, how come you still wanted me to train you?"

"Well, my mom wants me to study all the time...and I thought if you

could convince her, I could get out of the house every now and again."

"Wow. Your mom is hardcore about studying."

"Yeah. You could say that."

\* \* \*

><p>Once she was up, Gohan had indeed shown her the Championship Belt from the World's Martial Arts Tournament. That confirmed, she had tried to get Chichi to tell her more at breakfast. Gohan, who'd just polished off 5 massive stacks of pancakes, had gone back to studying.<p>

"So Chichi, Gohan said his dad won the World Tournament." Cheerilee said as she buttered some toast.

"Oh yes." Chichi got a faraway look in her eyes. "I actually met my husband Goku there. Well, actually I hadn't met him there. I knew him from when we were kids, but it was the first time I'd seen him in awhile. I was competing as well and we met in the semi-finals. He proposed to me the same day. It was very romantic."

Cheerilee smiled. "So you're a martial artist, and your husband's a martial artist, how come you want Gohan to study so much, not that I'm complaining, as I'm here to help with that."

"Well, you see, martial arts doesn't pay so well. I grew up in my dad's castle, my dad is the Ox-King, you know."

Cheerilee searched her memories for a reference to someone named or titled the Ox-King, but came up empty. She, however, smiled and nodded for Chichi to continue.

"But poor Goku never really went to school and he was poor for most of his life. I don't want my Gohan to end up the same way."

"But surely he could use a break every now and then."

Chichi's eyes narrowed. "Gohan put you up to this, didn't he?"

Cheerilee put up her hands in a placating gesture.

"I can't let him stop. He'll fall behind. He can rest after he's graduated from a good school."

"I don't think you need to worry about. He's very bright for his age."

"Yes, but schools are very competitive nowadays."

'Time to bring out the big guns,' Cheerilee thought.

"You know Chichi, you can't just have him keep studying and studying. The mind needs to rest every now and then. It needs variety. The latest education research shows that those who take the occasional breaks get better results and retain what they learn better."

"That can get out of hand and you know it." Chichi gave her a serious look.

"Why don't we do this? We'll put together a study and relaxation schedule. When its time for study, we study, but when its time for a break, he takes a break. And...there are standardized tests for these sorts of things, so we'll know exactly where Gohan's progress lies, and where his strengths and weakpoints are,"

Chichi put a hand on her chin as if consider it.

"Well okay, maybe we can try that out and see where it goes, but if I don't like the results, we're going back to doing it my way."

"Thats excellent! You won't regret it!"

\* \* \*

><p>It went well. Gohan got a few hours of break interspersed throughout the day, and he'd never been happier. However that all changed a few weeks later. Cheerilee had been about to enter the house when it suddenly slammed open of its own accord, throwing her against the house. Pushing the door back the way it came, she suddenly saw Gohan running, then flying off into the distance. As she started to move, it suddenly swung open on her once again.<p>

"Oww..."

"Don't just stand there! You've got a jet copter! After him!"

Cheerilee wasn't about to risk angering a distraught Chichi, so she pulled out the capsule and activated it on the ground in front of her. With her in the pilot's seat, and Chichi in the copilot's, they took off.

\* \* \*

><p>"There. Head that way." Chichi pointed in what seemed to be a random direction.<p>

"What happened? Why?" said Cheerilee, already adjusting the course.

"I can sense Gohan in that direction. There'd better be big trouble, or he's in big trouble."

The big question on Cheerilee's mind kept popping up, so she risked asking it. "So Gohan can fly?"

"Yes, he learned how to a few years back." There was an edge to her voice that indicated she really wasn't willing to say anything further on the issue, but that was interesting. It was the second time she'd encountered humans flying in the loops, and she wondered if it was common.

\* \* \*

><p>After a few minor course corrections, they landed in a desert

plain strewn with boulders and mountains in the distance. There was Gohan, and he wasn't the only one. There were also what appeared to be a green haired teenaged girl, a warrior with major scars on his face and a floating cat by his side, a bald midget in an orange gi, a taller warrior with a pink shirt with the word 'Badman' on the back, a purple haired warrior with a sword strapped to his back, but the strangest and unusual of all were the triclops, the other flying midget who seemed to be wearing clown makeup and a green skinned being that her loop memories were shouting was Demon King Piccolo, the person who'd nearly destroyed the world years back.<p>

"Isn't that the Demon King Piccolo?"

"And he's probably behind putting my Gohan in danger." said Chichi as she leaped from the copter.

"You! What is wrong with you..." yelled Chichi as she ran off to Piccolo.

"Scary..." Cheerilee muttered to herself as she landed the jet copter and took off her helmet.

\* \* \*

><p>After observing the group dynamic for a moment, she noticed that Gohan was mostly at ease with the crowd and Piccolo had made no move to destroy everybody despite Chichi ranting at him, Cheerilee decided it was safe to come out of the Jet Copter,<p>

"Hey Gohan! Who're your friends?"

"Oh, hi, Ms. Lee! That's Mr. Piccolo, Krillin, Bulma, Yamcha, Tien and Chaotzu. That's Vegeta, and that purple haired warrior over there, we don't know the name of yet, but he totally saved all our lives." Gohan pointed to each in turn. "You totally missed it! He just went Super-saiyan, and slash-slash, Frieza and his father were beaten."

"That remains to be seen. Kakkarot and I are the only Saiyans left. If you count the half-breed, that makes three. So where'd mystery boy come from?" Vegeta thought for a moment. "And for that matter, who're you?"

It was 30 seconds, and Cheerilee already didn't like Vegeta, but she responded. "I'm Sara Lee, I'm Gohan's tutor."

There was a wave of 'Ahs' and 'Ohs' from the assembled group, with a single 'Hmmp' thrown in from Vegeta.

"So what are we waiting around for?" asked Cheerilee

"We're waiting for my dad!" Gohan cheerfully cried.

"Your dad?"

"Mystery boy claims he knows when he'll arrive." muttered Vegeta.

\* \* \*

><p>A couple of hours had passed and a loud whistling could be heard

in the sky followed by what looked like a meteorite came crashing down to earth.<p>

"That's him! Lets go!" Him and half dozen others took off after the decending craft.

Cheerilee was about to head back to her copter when Bulma stopped her.

"Wait! Gohan, you carry your Mom. Yamcha, you can carry both of us."

"What!" cried Yamcha.

"Okay!" responded Gohan.

\* \* \*

><p>Bulma and Cheerilee sat in the copter, while Yamcha carried it from the underside.<p>

"Much quicker this way. So I'm assuming you're a looper? Its very rare for the Sons to get more than one tutor. Usually, the first one sours them on the whole experience. I'm Bulma Briefs, the anchor of this loop."

Cheerilee took the offered hand and shook it. "I'm Cheerilee, a looper from Equestria."

"Oh Equestria! That's always a fun place. I was there once. Replaced Twilight Sparkle for the loop, from what I understand. I think I remember you, though you weren't Awake at the time."

"Anyway, after the next events, which seems to be starting soon," Bulma nodded to the approaching impact crater, "Gohan will probably be too busy to study, so you'll probably be out of job. See me when that happens, and I'll try to set you up elsewhere." Bulma produced a card from a card from somewhere and gave it to Cheerilee.

"That's very nice of you. Thanks!"

"Your welcome." said Bulma, and then suddenly leaning out of the copter, she yelled "Good job Yamcha! Keep it up!"

A muffled "Oof" was all Cheerilee could hear.

\* \* \*

><p>Bulma had indeed been correct. The threat of the androids had forced Gohan's family to put his studies on hold. With Gohan off training, there was nothing for her to do, and while Chichi had given a good recommendation, she was curious about Bulma's offer, which was why she found herself sitting across from her at the present moment.<p>

Bulma had set out the most delicious peaches she'd ever eaten, and despite her willpower, she couldn't help but eat peach after peach.

"These are heavenly."

"Funny you should mention that. They are just that. They're called Ensenji, and normally they grow in the Otherworld, but I've manage to cultivate them on Earth in my private atrium."

Cheerilee stopped chewing as her eyes opened wide.

"Oh, don't give me that. I'd never give you something harmful, in fact just the opposite. These will help you survive this loop. They significantly raises the powerlevel of the eater, though the law of diminishing returns kicks in sharply after a set point. They've got the added benefit of providing near eternal youth, which is, while my baseline self is not exactly old by any stretch of the imagination, I still look like a teenager."

Cheerilee continued to chew, but slower.

"I eat one of these a day, at least. They're really quite good," Bulma continued. "Now I imagine you might have some questions?"

Cheerilee swallowed her bite, and then spoke. "Gohan mentioned it before, but what is powerlevel?"

"Its a measure of your ki, your internal energy, if your not familiar with the other term. Its primarily used for fighting, but it can be used for other things like flying, as you might have noticed. Those peaches should grant you enough energy to easily run around the planet several times a day without rest.

"You're kidding?" Cheerilee exclaimed.

"Nope. Its kinda crazy. But it is necessary, because even though 99% of the time you won't need it, every few years some incredibly dangerous opponent tends to threaten the earth."

"Your very blasÃ© about all this."

"Remember? Anchor? Loops?" stated Bulma.

"Right."

"Anyway, we tend not have much problem with them anymore. While I can take care of all threats, and I have at one point or the other, I prefer just to nudge things in the right direction when no one else is looping."

"So, back there, my loop memories were telling me that that was Demon King Piccolo, someone who had previously tried to destroy the earth on national TV, and at the World's Martial Tournament, but Gohan seemed downright friendly with him. I must be missing something, right?"

"It's a little more complicated than that. This Piccolo is the son, and genetic clone, of that one. He's got all his father's memories, but in recent years, he's reformed. A lot of the fighters you met are like that, to one degree or the other. Reformed I mean, not the other thing."

"Of course."

"So, I've probably talked enough about myself and my loop. How're the loops treating you so far?"

"Its very overwhelming. I've not had many loops, but the last two were fused. The one before the last, I was teaching at this weird high school where the students did battle with these self aware school uniforms. The one afterwards, I was again a teacher, a music teacher specifically, but the world itself was very bizarre, with cause and effect seldom agreeing with each other."

"Did you pick up any souvenirs?"

Cheerilee's eyes narrowed.

"Oh don't be like that. I'm a scientist and engineer. I like seeing new pieces of technology. I might be able to even improve on them in some way."

"Well okay. These are two main things I've got. The first.." Cheerilee activated her bracelet, which swapped her life threads uniform with her current clothes. "The second are these.." She removed what looked like two integrated circuits. "These are EBEs, or Electronic Brain Enhancements. They snap to your forehead like this.." She placed one of the EBEs on one side of her and the other on the other side. "They stay in place for some reason, though I'm not really sure the reason why."

Bulma had quite the large grin on her face.

"Cheerilee, girl, you've just become my new best friend. You've given me something new to play with!"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

56.1: Operetta Logic.

>56.2: Some loops don't even.<br>56.3: She made them bake muffins all day. At least it smelled nice.

>56.4: Knowing that setting, the cake is four stories tall and a hundred feet wide.<br>56.5: Apparently based on an invented word.

>56.6: Very few problems cannot be solved with enough money.<br>56.7: Don't get Entangled in the local situation...

>56.8: Any plan where you lose your hat is a bad plan.<br>56.9: At least he's not called "Lone Moral Child", which is what his name translates as.

>56.10: Adventure time is half past five.<br>56.11: International co-operation.

>56.12: Two ways this can go, really.<br>56.13: A cunning plan.

>56.14: A slightly less cunning but more ridiculous plan.<br>56.15: This is perhaps the first loop with a longer author's note than the actual length of the loop itself.

>56.16: Party of Moon.<br>56.17: "And Blueblood has run himself over!"

>56.18: Not actually sure of the setting here.<br>56.19: Teach Yourself Martial Arts. Or, you know, ask someone else.

## 61. Chapter 61

### 57.1 (OracleMask)

The air in the library was a whirlwind of books and devices. Some came from the shelves, or zipped up out of the basement laboratory. Most of them came straight from Twilight's subspace pocket.

Luckily for them, the Naruto swarm had gotten more than Twilight's attention. As soon as they'd heard the story, Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie had vowed to search the ends of the world for any other loopers that might be lurking around. Anypony around who had any skills that might be of help would be tree-sent. Applejack, Rarity, and Fluttershy were on damage control from the stampede.

Almost before they'd gotten Kakashi into the security of the library, Twilight had begun firing diagnostic spells left and right. Just as Twilight had feared, the loop resets had already wiped away all traces of whatever had been done to him.

Naruto couldn't remember any specifics either. He'd been 'preoccupied'. And then the biju bomb he'd launched reset the loop, and that's when they'd discovered that Kakashi was gone.

Well. There clearly wasn't a physical reason for it. All of Twilight's diagnostic spells told her that a healthy, normal "aside from the chakra system" pony was standing in front of her. So the cause had to be psychological. Unfortunately, it would take one of their best telepathy-users to figure out if there was anything of Kakashi left to be salvaged...

\* \* \*

><p>"Huh. I've never felt anyone <em>willingly<em> lock their mind up like this before," Chrysalis said.

...Or maybe it would just take a Changeling Queen, waving her glowing horn over Kakashi's head, to suss out the problem. Twilight immediately dropped thirty books on the different kinds of mind-manipulation magic, blinking in surprise.

"He locked his mind up?" Naruto exclaimed, wings flaring in surprise.

Zecora, who was consulting some books on brews and potions, looked quite pleased with the diagnosis.

"That matches my suspicions perfectly," the zebra said, "Indeed, I believed it as soon as I saw inside this tree."

"You've seen this before, Zecora?" Twilight asked.

She was impressed. Not to mention embarrassed that she hadn't thought to ask Zecora first about the problem, just because she'd assumed it was some kind of spell or something...there was probably a letter to Celestia in there somewhere.

"A ninja of the Leaf I have been before," Zecora replied, "Though I was not a healer then " I was fighting a war. When a ninja is faced



with a reality deemed untrue, the blame will fall to an enemy genjutsu. Is this not so? Naruto?"

Naruto's eyes were wide.

"You're saying Kakashi-sensei thought he was under genjutsu? \_This whole time?\_"

"He still does, if I am not mistaken. Or would the gods not \_act\_ if his mind was truly taken?"

...Eeyup, \_definitely\_ a letter to Celestia. 'Being older doesn't mean somepony else doesn't have good sense', something like that.

"But that means we have to convince him he's not in an illusion...which is exactly what he'll expect an illusion to say, right?" Twilight's eyes darted back to her books.

"I've got something that might work," Naruto mentioned.

He'd gone from nervous and jittery to completely at ease after hearing Zecora's explanation. Twilight could only suppose that Naruto was more comfortable getting the bad news from a fellow ninja â€" insomuch as Zecora qualified.

"I'll need an extra pair of...hooves, though," Naruto added, looking down at his hooves in mild annoyance, "Zecora, do you know any chakra transfer techniques...?"

\* \* \*

><p>57.2 (Hubris Plus)<p>

Twilight stepped into Mac's bar with consternation written across her face and signalled for a cider.

"Tough Loop?" He asked as he slid her order over.

"Not really, just a lonely baseline until it dropped a new expansion on me. It was... Annoying." Mac arched an eyebrow questioningly and she waved a hoof in an all-encompassing gesture. "Discord."

"Is my baseline acting out again?" Came the jovial voice as the devil in question arrived in the typical idiomatic manner. "What did the scamp do this time?"

"Tried teaching a lesson. \_Again.\_"

"Oh honestly, Twilight, when have I \_ever\_ tried to teach anyone a lesson?"

"Plunder vines," she pointed out.

"Not me, and you can't expect me to remember every little thing."

"That time you stranded Apple Bloom and Diamond Tiara on a deserted island?"

"That turned out for the best, wouldn't you say?"

"When you stuck Pinkie and Cranky Doodle on \_the same island?\_"

"Well, it got \_one\_ pony Looping, so I figured..."

"Applejack and seapony Lyra on an island \_in \_the desert?"

"\_You\_ got to lock them in a house."

"That time ya stranded me an' Smarty Pants out there?" Mac chimed in.

"...I didn't actually know about that one," Twilight said after a moment.

"I shipped him off before he could leave the Awake signal and spent the rest of the Loop disguised as him."

Suddenly the Loop with the plaid apples made a \_lot\_ more sense to Twilight.

"But," Discord added, "I \_do\_ begin to see your point."

"Good, just don't-"

"The island has gotten \_far\_ too overplayed. Not to worry though, I know \_just\_ how to resolve this friction between us."

He snapped his claws and Twilight wasn't particularly surprised to find herself on an island.

"Really?" She snorted before vanishing in a teleport.

...And reappearing a few steps to the left. Frowning, she ascended and took flight, while Discord snapped himself up a pair of sunglasses and cracked open a coconut. A few moments later she landed again, coming from the opposite direction.

"This is actually fairly impressive," she conceded, horn glowing and face scrunched up in concentration as she evaluated the various enchantments and spatial folds he'd set up.

"Just a few tricks I've been saving up for a special occasion. I figure it'll take a few days to unravel, even for \_you\_." He wrapped an arm around her neck and dragged her into a hug, "\_plenty\_ of time for us to sort out our differences!"

"...I thought you said the island was overplayed," she groused.

"Well, now it's a running gag."

\* \* \*

><p>57.3 (Midnight Crescent)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><span>Twilight the Underdog<span>

Twilight Awoke, and was glad to find she was sat down. Unfortunately, she couldn't quite keep hold of her cards.

\_Human again. High school again. What did I do to deserve this?\_ She thought as she started to focus on her Loop memories.

"Hey, Earth to Josie." A somewhat high pitched voice called from across the table. "Your hand can't have been that ba..."

Twilight looked across the table at the spiky haired kid, who was looking down at the cards she had dropped before continuing where he had left off. "On second thoughts, I'll let you mulligan if you want."

"Oh, sure." Twilight said, before quickly checking the memories as she shuffled her old hand into her deck. \_OK, so I'm Josie Wheeler, I'm an unremarkable kid of divorced parents. I'm learning to play a collectible card game off a kid I bullied last year, and I've got a little sister who's losing her eyesight.\_ Then the memory of her in-loop sister's name hit her. \_Oh no. I'll come help you soon Nyx, I promise.\_

The kid stared at her for a few seconds, before his eyes widened, and he lowered his voice. "Sorry Joey, didn't realise you were awake too."

"Well, I **\*\*am\*\*** awake, but my names not Joey. Or Josie."

"Another fused loop?" Tristan asked, leaning down to prevent people from overhearing.

"It sure looks that way..." Tea said, stretching out in her chair.

"Well, the first thing we need to do is introduce you to Yami." Yugi said, turning back to Twilight "I'll get him to meet you after school. In the meantime, it's time to duel."

Twilight nodded, and began to draw cards. "My names Twilight, by the way."

"Nice to meet you, Twilight." Yugi said, as he drew to start the duel.

\* \* \*

><p>"I still think you did well for your first duel." Yugi said. "Besides, Joey doesn't really have any idea what he's doing right now either at this point in the loop."<p>

"I guess. It's just annoying that I couldn't get any of my... magic or traps?" She waited for Yugi, who nodded in confirmation. "I couldn't get any of them out. Stupid luck of the draw."

"Actually, there's two things I should tell you, before Yami shows up. Our world, or at least the baseline version, it's not luck of the draw. A duelist pours their heart and soul into their deck. It should reflect their strengths and personality. And if they truly believe in

their deck, then the Heart of the cards will reward them when they truly need it, as long as they trust their deck. It's why Yami is the best duelist that ever lived. I know it sounds a little hokey, but..." He noticed Twilight was gesturing for him to pause.

"What?"

"Yugi, I've been in lots of fused loops now. I've seen a lot of different worlds, which contain a wide variety of strange forces and abilities. I'm from a world of multicoloured magical ponies. My best friends and I can defeat **\*\*anything\*\*** with the power of Friendship. I think I can manage a 'Heart of the cards' just fine."

Yugi's jaw hung open for a short while, as he tried to process this new information. After almost a minute, he finally responded "Point taken, and Tea must never know about this."

"Understood. And your second point was?"

"Well, there's a reason you couldn't draw any of your magic or trap cards."

"Let me guess. Heart of the cards?"

Yugi shook his head. "Nothing like that. Joey just doesn't have any in his deck yet. Although, I normally just grab both our loop end decks from my subspace at the start of a loop. Some of our cards are pretty rare, and you never know where a loop might diverge..."

Twilight nodded knowingly. "I know the feeling. What else do you keep in yours?"

"Not much. A few alternate decks. Copies of each Millennium Item â€" our worlds powerful magic artefacts â€" just in case Yami feels like cutting a few things off early. I've not been on many loops outside this world that had anything worth keeping yet. You?"

"Too many things to mention â€" I'm my worlds anchor, and I've been Looping quite a while now. I think at the front I have my element of harmony, a couple of light sabres â€" always pays to have a spare, I find â€" and a copy of the library of Alexandria." She looked around her nervously. "Wasn't your anchor supposed to be meeting me here?"

Yugi stood with his mouth agape once again. \_The Library of Alexandria? How does she fit that in there!?\_ Then he realised what he was doing. Shaking the thoughts from his head, he answered the question "Oh, sorry, slipped my mind. Just give me a minute." Yugi closed his eyes and concentrated. An inverted pyramid slowly came into existence around his neck, almost like a jigsaw completing itself. Once it was complete, a light shone from the eye design on its front, briefly blinding Twilight.

Once she had regained her sight, there was someone standing in front of her. It resembled Yugi, only taller. However, his posture had changed also, and there was something subtly different about his facial expression.

"I'm going assume you're Yami, which would explain why you took so long."

"Forgive me, but I must say I prefer to have Yugi deal with people who fuse into our loops first. He has always been more sociable than I." Yami said, brushing one of the blonde waves of hair from his eyes. "Now, can I ask what your home Loop is?"

"I'm originally from Equestria, although I don't know if that means anything to you."

"It sounds familiar, but I don't think I've met anyone from there before. Although, your description to Yugi tells me all I need to know..."

"That's understandable..." Twilight said as she thought it over. "So, how do your baseline events play out?"

"Hmm... I think you may be the first Looper to actually ask that. Unfortunately, the answer may take a while." Yami paused for a few moments, before nodding to himself and continuing "If you want a full rundown, you could visit the game store Yugi lives in. I can quite easily tell you everything there, and we can even build you a deck, if you want to completely replace Joey for this Loop."

"Sounds like a plan." Twilight said. "It's not as though I've got anything better to do..."

\* \* \*

><p>"... And it all ends with me and Yugi duelling. It never ends more than a few days after that. Depending on how long Kaiba waits to start Battle City, and if we skip some events, our loop should last between a year or two. Now, do you have any questions?"<p>

Twilight had a few, but rattled them off at such speed, Yami couldn't catch a single word of them.

"Could you say that again, but slower?"

"Sorry about that. Alright, my first question â€" what happens if I lose one of these 'Shadow games' when I'm not, so to speak, supposed to?"

"As I understand it, either the loop will be over for you, or you'll wake up when we free you. It all depends on how this loop works. Nothing worse than leaving the loop prematurely should happen though."

"OK. And what do we do if we have to duel each other?"

"Whoever wins, wins. Although, we can ignore the ante rule if we fight in Battle City, if you want."

"That seems a little unfair. We can decide if and when that comes up. Now, about Serenity, the loops seem to have combined her with my, for lack of an actual term, daughter. Is there any way we can go see her earlier than you do in the baseline?"

Yami frowned. "I'm afraid I'm not sure. Even when Joey is awake before Duelist Kingdom, he leaves things as usual. He is always certain he can get the money, so he usually waits until he returns."

Although, I think a large part of that is that Serenity is not yet Looping. Tell me, has Nyx Looped before?"

"A fair amount."

"And do you think she could handle her situation?"

"I think she'd be a lot happier if I were there, whether she could or couldn't."

Yami looked at his calendar, and checked the dates.

"We have two weeks until the chain of events for Duelist Kingdom begin. You should be able to visit her sometime between now and then. Let me or Yugi know if you want anyone to come with you, but I understand if you want to visit her alone."

"Alright, last one for now. How did Joey get his Red Eyes back?"

"Hmmm?" Yami placed the last storage box from his subspace pocket on the table.

"Well, you beat that Rare Hunter and got Joey's card back. But he didn't take it. Then he was using it again the next time you talked about him. How did he get it?"

"It appears I left out something important." Yami smiled, as he sat at the table across from Twilight. "After Battle City finished, Joey and I had one last Duel. If he won, he would get his Red Eyes back. I saw it a different way, though..."

"What do you mean?" Twilight asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Well, Joey should have beaten Marik. He even played a card that would have won the duel, and Marik had no way to stop it. He just couldn't take the strain. So, when we met, I duelled him like it was the REAL Battle City final."

"Wait. Time out" Twilight held her head in one hand, the other indicating she needed a minute. After a short pause, she continued "From what you've told me, approximately 75% of his 'strategy' is rolling dice or flipping coins, while you had the strongest cards to have ever been made. And you're telling me that, if he had just stayed conscious for ten more seconds, he would have won that final?"

"Not exactly." Yami replied, a small smile spreading across his face. "The heart of the cards works in strange ways, Twilight. When the fate of the World is on the line, or even just a championship title, then perhaps it would have not favoured Joey. But, when the Duel is about nothing more than reuniting lost friends..."

Twilight stared at him for a few seconds. Her response was fairly quiet when it came. "I can't actually argue with that."

"Just as well. It took me longer than expected to explain everything." Yami rose from his chair. "Here is every legal card that has ever existed in Duel Monsters, or ever will." He swept his arm to indicate all of the labelled storage crates. "Now most duelists have

an overarching theme, or a cornerstone monster. Kaiba has his girlfr... I mean Blue Eyed dragon. Joey has his luck cards and warriors. Some people use a large amount of traps or magic cards. It all depends on the person. All we need as a start point are some interests of you..."

"Books and Magic." Twilight said before he could finish the obvious question. "I have quite a few other hobbies, but they're the things I'm involved with most."

"That... That is actually a good starting point." Yami began searching through one of the boxes, labelled 'Spellcasters', before pulling out a small group of cards. "Yes, the Prophecy monsters. They are designed to work with a series of magic cards, but I can't see that box, so they will have to wait. Take a look at their effects."

"'Spellbook'? Interesting idea. But I think I'll need more than just these." Twilight said, before taking cards out at random from the box. Most were placed to one side, but she began to stack those she found interesting next to the Prophecy cards Yami had picked out.

Yami then replaced the spellcaster box with the magic card box, and the process repeated.

After almost an hours searching, and whittling down, Twilight had a deck.

However, Yami noted one thing seemed to be aggravating her.

"Arrgh, no, no, no, NO!" She yelled, throwing a handful of cards into the air. "Why can't I find anything for that last slot?"

"I have said the number of cards can vary Twilight. It doesn't matter that you only have 59, it's still a legal deck."

"But it's not a round number!" She said, eagerly ripping the lid off the spellcaster crate, and rummaging through for the third time in five minutes.

\_Well, it looks like we have a Looper with OCD, Yugi\_ Yami thought, as he waited for Twilight to calm down

\_If she has OCD, why is she making such a mess?\_ Yugi quipped, before continuing \_Actually, I have an idea. Do you remember our first 'Duel Academy' loop?\_

\_Somewhat. Wait, are you really suggesting we give her one of our decks cards? We only have so many Spellcasters she could actually use...\_

\_I'm not suggesting one of the actual Dark Magicians. But there is one monster in our deck that would probably serve her better than us...\_

\_Which one is tha...Oh, yes. That might actually work.\_

Yami exited his and Yugi's shared thoughts to find Twilight still searching the boxes desperately.

"Twilight."

"Maybe what I should use is another trap. I only have a few."

"Twilight." Yami repeated, a little louder.

"No, that would throw the balance off. It has to be a monster."

"Twilight!"

Twilight dropped the box of cards she had just lifted up, spilling the contents everywhere.

"Oh no, I'm sorry. I'll get it don't worry."

"Leave it for a moment, I'll help you. I have something for you."

"Huh? How could you have gotten something for me? You've been standing there staring into space for the last minute."

"No I ha... No, that doesn't matter. It seems that having 60 cards is important to you." Yami took his deck out of his holder. "And you said you need it to be a monster. I think this would fit in your deck rather well."

>He passed the card over to her.<p>

"'Magician's Valkyria'? What makes you think this would fit in well?"

"Two things. Firstly, it has an effect you'll appreciate."

"'Your opponent cannot target face-up Spellcaster-Type monsters for attacks, except this one'." Twilight looked up from the card. "Well, that is useful, but wouldn't it be just as useful for you?"

"You have nothing but Spellcasters in your deck. I do have a few other things. Besides, the second reason is this."

>Yami searched through his deck again, producing the Dark Magician Girl "They aren't linked, but they do seem similar. When I met the anchor of a loop linked to mine, I gave him a card that seemed linked to mine. I only felt it right to do the same here.<p>

\_A-hem \_Yugi "coughed" inside the pairs shared mind.

\_It is technically true. Just stretching the definition of 'I' a little...\_

"Thank you. That's a really nice gesture." Twilight said, placing the card on the top of her new deck. She did a recount, to be sure she had a full 60. Satisfied, she breathed a sigh of relief, and sat at the table as Yami replaced the crates into his subspace pocket. "Now what should we do?"

Yami glanced at the clock. "Now we have a test run." He slid a card into his deck to replace his lost card, and offered it over to Twilight for her to shuffle. Once the decks were given back to their



owners, they began to draw.

Yami smiled, as he looked over to Twilight. "Let's Duel."

\* \* \*

><p>57.4 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"The Blue Flu, you say?"

The first Lonely Loop Twilight had been through with this expansion, she'd required a trip to the dentist to cap the teeth she'd worn down from grinding. She'd been plotting her next encounter with this little... incident... ever since.

"Oh, my, yes," Discord said. "And it's left me a complete wreck!" The draconequus bounced back swiftly from the anachronistic Studebaker that fell out of the sky onto him. "And with Fluttershy gone, and with Applejack and Rarity having contracted my malady... I have only you, Princess Twilight Sparkle, to turn to for help."

"Well, I'm sorry, Discord," Twilight said, not sorry in the least, "but there's nothing I can do to help you. But," and her grin grew even wider, "I know someone who knows every home remedy ever devised by pony!"

"What, you mean that Zecora mare?" Discord looked a bit discomfited. "No offense, but I'm not into that voodoo that she do."

"No, no," Twilight said, her horn flaring to life. "Someone better even than her!"

The flash of teleportation faded to reveal the farmyard of Sweet Apple Acres, now with the addition of Twilight, Cadence and the distempered Discord. Ignoring Discord's questions, Twilight went to the front door and knocked. A few moments later, Granny Smith opened the door. "Why, howdy there, Twilight," the Apple family matron grinned, "what can I do for ya?"

"I have a... friend... here who has something called the Blue Flu," Twilight said, giving Granny a broad wink. "You know all sorts of remedies, so you were the first pony I thought of."

"Ain't never heard of no blue flu," Granny said. "Swine flu, pine flu, mine flu, and pinot noir wine flu, but never no blue flu. Lemme have a look at him."

Discord tried to back away from the advancing green mare, only to find his retreat blocked by Cadence's health shield. "Really, madam, all I need is some bed rest and perhaps a little glass of water."

Granny closed one eye and looked Discord up and down with the other. "Naw," she said. "A li'l glass o'water won't do you no good a'tall. What we got here is a clear case of th' colic. For that ya need a LOT of water."

Discord shrugged. "Well, so long as it's sparkling mineral water. Ordinary tap water has such a flat taste."

"Where it's gonna go," Granny said, "you ain't gonna taste nothin'."

For a moment Discord looked confused. Then his mismatched yellow and red eyes bulged wide open. "You don't mean..."

"BIG MAC!" Granny shouted. "Fetch me th' garden hose!"

"Eyup!" To Discord's ears the heavy tramp of the farm horse's hooves were the tramp of doom.

"Don't worry," Granny grinned, showing her one good tooth. "Once we got ya cleaned out, you'll feel like a new... new... well, whatever y'are, you'll feel like a new'un."

Almost instantly Discord's color changed from solid blue back to the normally abnormal mish-mash. He pulled a straw traveling hat out of nowhere and said, "Suddenly I'm feeling so much better must have been one of those twenty-four minute viruses thankssomuchcan'tstaygivemylovetofluttershy TA!"

And that, in a puff of smoke, was that.

"Well," Twilight smiled, turning to Cadence. "Shall we get back to the Starswirl exhibit? Did you know they have the bells he was wearing when he first demonstrated the amniomorphic spell?"

\* \* \*

><p>57.5 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Twilight and Trixie weren't the only ponies who had uncomfortable awakenings. While Twilight awoke mid-stride and Trixie awoke stumbling over a rock in the road with her wagon in tow, Applejack often awoke just as an apple fell from one of her apple trees. It meant things would be pretty close to baseline. When she awoke without an aching head, she knew this would be a weird one. Moments later, however, she was tackled by a frantic seapony Lyra Heartstrings who asked, "Have you seen any ponies around here? Imagine, the hooves, the smooth hooves and all you can do with them!"

Applejack's eyes shrunk to pinpricks in terror. She tried to push the seapony away, only for her to notice her hooves had been replaced with fins...oh and she was a seapony too. It was just too much for the poor seapony as she screamed to the bottom of the landmass above.

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie was unsure how to feel about this. On the one side, she was princess of Sequestria and still had her horn (which meant she could use magic). But she wasn't sure how she felt about being a seapony. The ringing of the bells over the main doorway called her attention to what she was doing, having daylight court. After the doors creaked open, a Pink Seapony swam to the throne, "Princess Trixie, I need your guidance."<p>

Trixie bellowed, "The Greatest and Most Powerful Princess Trixie will assist you in any way she can, Pinkie Pie."

Pinkie gasped, "You even know my name when I didn't say it yet, truly you are the greatest princess!"

Obviously, Pinkie was not awake, "Of course, I know all my subjects. Now tell you me your desire."

Pinkie paused for a second, then asked, "I wish to have more spectacular explosions for the Day of Danger, but no matter what I try, I can only get bigger explosions and a wider color range. I want something no one has ever seen before!"

Trixie's eyes widened and started shining, "Explosions are my Forte!"

She drew on her memories as she flourished her cape, "For it was I, Princess Trixie who used explosions to seal away my eternal rival and explosion fun killer, The Twilight Queen, into the island floating above our kingdom a thousand years ago. I will now teach you the methods of implosion, that will cause beautiful tidal currents and can drag entire land masses together!"

Now it was Pinkie's eyes that were shining, "All hail Princess Trixie, she who shields us from the deadly shockwaves of our beloved explosions!"

\_This was the greatest loop ever, \_thought Trixie as she basked in the admiration of her loyal subject.

\* \* \*

><p><em>This is the worst loop ever, <em>moaned Applejack mentally after she managed to placate seapony Lyra. Unfortunately, the only way to placate Lyra was to promise to help her find the fabled earth ponies.

Twilight was nowhere in the seapony equivalent of Ponyville. Instead, she had run into Sealestia running the town's library (which only confused her more since water tended to ruin books, but then just shrugged and put it down to magic or something). It only got worse when her memories returned and she realized she was responsible for providing food for the Day of Danger celebration. Dash would love this.

After thinking of Dash, she summoned her element and pinged the other elements. Two elements of magic resonated (Trixie and Twilight) along with an element of Loyalty (either Dash or Spike). At least she wasn't alone in this madness. Of course, she couldn't think too much on that, considering Lyra was still ranting in her ear about earth ponies. Her eyes landed on Sealestia, which brought a new thought to mind. She held up a fin to stop Lyra and asked, "Do you have anything on the Day of Danger and its origins?"

Sealestia nodded, "Why yes! Let me get the book..."

Seconds later, she returned with a book, **\*\*The Sealed Queen\*\***, which talked about the Twilight Queen was was sealed in the landmass hovering over the kingdom of Sequestria by Princess Trixie a thousand years ago. Then, she got an evil idea and turned to Lyra. "Say, Lyra, how good are you at explosions?"

\* \* \*

><p>After several minutes of being regaled on how powerful an explosion she could produce (causing Applejack to feel nauseous), Applejack suggested they create an explosion big enough to reach the surface and which could be seen throughout Sequestria. Lyra's eyes shone brightly. It was evening by the time the explosive was finished and the fireworks would soon go off.<p>

Applejack sighed in relief that it was almost over as she and Lyra added to the explosive managery. With that, Applejack finally succumbed to her inborn fear of seaponies and hid under her bed, barely managing to give Lyra the slip. She wasn't going to come out for the rest of the week, since they had just created the equivalent of a bunker buster nuke. She ascended into a seapony alicorn with additional fins allowing for faster swimming and a horn, then waited. She added one bit to Lyra's firework, sparklers that could be seen for miles away that would shoot off as it spins. She faced the single window in her room, conveniently aimed to where the fireworks had started shooting off several minutes ago.

Their firework went off, shooting through the ocean like a missile towards the landmass above. With that, she called on her magic and surrounded Sequestria in an orange bubble.

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie looked around her as the shield came up. Her demeanor turned sour since they could no longer shoot off vast explosions. Immediately, she called for her guard to start looking for the pony responsible. It was a few seconds later that the spinning firework slammed into the landmass. It drilled its way halfway to the surface, then detonated spectacularly.<p>

Shockwaves and a rolling wave of fire slammed into the orange shield, but the shield held perfectly. The landmass above cracked, then started breaking apart, huge island size chunks started dropping towards Sequestria, to Trixie's horror. Then, the landmass glowed brilliant purple and started reforming itself, except in one area which exploded outwards, allowing a single purple seapony alicorn to escape. Her eyes glowed white as she approached ponyville.

Trixie gulped, and wondered if Twilight would be angry for things she did while asleep.

\* \* \*

><p>57.6 (Stainless Steel Fox)<p>

"And tonight's first contestant is a lady of mystery, seventeen year old Sweetie Belle. Recently arrived in the UK, she's been working as a shop assistant in a fashion boutique. But now she's dressed to impress and ready to try and convince our Coaches to take her out of the high street and into the big time!"

VT Sequence (Sweetie): "My big sister Rarity is a fashion designer back in my old home country, so I know my way around a boutique. I can't go back there at the moment, but I'm travelling around, making the best of things. I've tried a number of other jobs, but singing

has always been my first love. I'm hoping that I can show that love tonight on the Voice, and make my family proud, even if they can't be here tonight."

"So will our young wanderer have a chance to settle down? Let's find out tonight, on The Voice."

All four coaches heard the contestant step out onto the stage. The sound was loud, as if she was wearing tap shoes. There were a few gasps from the audience, and looks of astonishment, but how she looked wasn't important. It was her singing that mattered, though the first contestant always had the hardest sell. No matter how good they were, the tendency was to wait and see what the rest of the night would bring.

Then she started singing 'Thousand Miles' and it was pretty much a dead heat for the buttons. Her voice went right through them like a laser and cut loose any reservations they had about picking the first singer that came along. They didn't know what they expected to see, but a white unicorn pony in a simple lilac dress that matched her mane and tail wasn't it. However, they were all held transfixed by her incredible singing voice.

As the last note died away all the Coaches started to speak at once, along with most of the audience. After a moment Sweetie Belle fired a bolt from her horn that flew straight up and flashed like a firework. "Please, please, every-pony... body calm down! I know this must come as a surprise, but I'm just here to compete like everyone else. Um... could you all ask questions one at a time? Mr Will I am?"

"Whoo... I'm seeing it, but I don't quite believe it! Where's the original singer?"

"I am... I have been. Ever since I arrived here in this country, this world, I've been running a perception filter spell a really smart unicorn called Twilight taught me. It let people see me and interact with me without noticing I was a unicorn. I didn't want people freaking out. It also kind of helped me fit in, stopped people asking to many questions about my past." She gave her most winning smile and Kylie Minogue squeeed.

"How come we can see you now?"

"Oh, I dropped the spell when I came on stage. This is the one place where my voice is more important than what I look like. I hated having to hide who I am. Hopefully now I won't have to."

"So where do you come from, and how did you end up here?" Tom Jones had recovered slightly slower than the others, but he was enough of a trooper to come back swinging when he did.

"Milton Keynes and by train." Sweetie Belle giggled, then said, "Sorry, I couldn't resist. Originally I'm from a land called Equestria where talking magical ponies are the norm. What I said about my sister was true, this is a copy of one of her designs. Unfortunately there are also creatures that aren't so nice. This ancient being of Chaos called Discord escaped from his stone prison and went on a rampage. I sort of got caught in the gears. Important safety tip, never tell an immortal prankster that you'd rather be anywhere than near him."

"You don't seem that unhappy about it."

"Oh, I was a mess when I got here, but after I'd cried myself out, I decided that I could either sit in a field and feel sorry for myself or try and make the best of it. So I cast a few spells to make myself unobtrusive and tried to fit in. Besides, I know once they've dealt with Discord, my sister and her friends will come looking for me. Twilight Sparkle, the one who taught me magic is sort of the pony equivalent of a combination of Einstein and Merlin, with a side order of Dr Manhattan, so if any-pony can trace me, it's her, and that's before they bring in the princesses, who could probably go hoof to toe with any two deities you care to name."

She shook her head. "But until then, I've got a singing career to kick start. So guys, who thinks they can help me achieve my full potential, and why?"

\* \* \*

><p>57.7 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Meteorite shards and shock glass lay scattered in the grass surrounding the steaming crater. A pair of pointed shoes stuck out over the rim.<p>

"Don't you think that was a bit excessive?" Twilight Sparkle asked Rarity.

"Darling, I should think you'd trust me by now to know an evil witch when I see one."

"So, she had a gingerbread house, did she?" the tall figure in black asked. "Maybe invitin' little children inside for a snack?"

"Er... no," Rarity said. "What's evil about gingerbread houses?"

"There's nowt wrong with gingerbread in its proper place," the tall figure said quickly. "But that place ain't in architecture, is what I'm sayin'."

"I think the Cakes would disagree with you."

"Who're they? Witches?"

"Er... bakers. Their bakery and cake shop is shaped like a gingerbread house."

"But not made out'n actual gingerbread? Just one o' them, wossname, simple acorns?"

"Simulacrum, and yes," Twilight chipped in.

"Then that's allowed," the tall figure nodded. "What about cacklin'? She that is yonder," she pointed to the crater, "did she cackle any?"

"You mean like, 'HeeheeHEEheeheeHEE!' cackle?" Rarity asked.

"That's right. Nothin' wrong with the occasional cackle, mind, providin' you knows when to stop."

"Well, no, she didn't actually laugh like that," Rarity said. "It was more like, 'Hah hah hah HAH hah hah hah hah.'"

"Hmmm." The tall skinny human gave this careful consideration. "Could be evil. Could also be somebody who didn't get the joke."

"Look, she was setting fire to half the forest, ranting about her plans for conquering the kingdom, and had a sled pulled by a hundred emaciated squirrels," Rarity said hotly. "I should rather have thought her bona fides for being an evil witch had been quite firmly established!"

"True, those are all def'nite indications," the tall figure said. "Still an' all, this is Lancre, young... lady. This is witch country. An' I have a, wossname, perfessional interest in seein' to it that witches ain't killed just willy-nilly. Seein' as I am, in fact, a witch."

A short, fat, elderly figure climbed out of the crater, pointed hat appearing first, followed by the rest of her. "S'all right, Esme," she called out cheerfully. "Nobody we know. Found a laundry tag from Quirm." She looked down at the shoes hanging over the rim and said, "Y'know, those might be my size."

"Well then," Granny Weatherwax said firmly, "I s'ppose we'll have to take your word for it. But I don't want you to go makin' a habit of it! I can't be havin' with strange talkin' unicorns goin' round killin' witches at my time of life."

"Thank you, ma'am," Twilight said politely.

"Yes, quite," Rarity said. "Now would you please remove these silver bridles? Or at least mine. On Twilight it works, but silver does clash with my coat so..."

\* \* \*

><p>57.8 (Crisis)<p>

Twilight had a recurring headache this Loop. A headache named Harry Hunsacker.

To start with, she'd Awoken as human police Lt. Twilight Foster, homicide detective, and later learned that she'd replaced a man of the same rank and last name. Working on murder mysteries in what looked like the 1930s of the Hub — even if everything seemed oddly gray to her perception — had seemed like it might prove to be interesting. Then she'd met Harry and the local Anchor.

The Anchor was Nigel Grouse, Harry's best friend and paid-by-the-hour assistant. And boy did the man earn every penny. Nigel was possibly the only person who could put up with Harry Hunsacker on a daily basis, friend and generous pay or no. Harry had a childhood every bit as privileged as Diamond Tiara's, probably even more-so; an IQ equal to the average Prince Blueblood managed in the variants, possibly

lower as it was clear the man was far from the brightest bulb on the strand; all the life skills, or rather lack of, the previous two traits implied; and the self-importance of Rainbow Dash at her worst. He ineptly bumbled into the cases she worked, irresponsibly wrecked anything resembling proper procedure, and yet still came out seeming like he'd solved everything and actually earned that ludicrous self-made title of 'world famous detective and aspiring actor'.

The worst part of all? For all the migraine-inducing idiocy he pulled, he was impossible to hate. The man possessed less inherent malice than even Pinkie Pie. He not only genuinely wanted to help, he actually believed it was his duty (at least when a potential acting job wasn't on the line). Even more aggravating were the times he was helping despite appearances to the contrary.

And he showed up at all of her important and high-profile cases. Without fail. Sometimes stumbling upon them while actively trying to get elsewhere. Heaven forbid she actually try to get away from him for a while. No matter where she went, he'd end up going the same way by coincidences worthy of one of the Hub's B-movies. Which is what Twilight felt like she was stuck in. A series of B-movies.

"What medium does the Hub have you in?" she managed to ask Nigel during a rare quiet moment where she could talk to him alone. "I want to pick up a few copies in case I ever come back here."

"That might be a little difficult," Nigel looked apprehensive. "The Hub has our Loop as a series of stage plays, 'living black and white' they call them. They're not widely produced and the scripts have never been published for sale to my knowledge. Nor have any recordings been made of the productions."

Twilight stared back at the man as she processed this. "Xylem."

\* \* \*

><p>57.9 (Dalxein)<p>

Minato and the others balked under the pressure as the Avatar continued to descend.

>The world was ending, again. What they couldn't figure out was <em>why<em>.

"Ryoji! What's wrong!? You don't have to do this! We've done all this without summoning her before! What's wrong now!?" Junpei shouted. He hadn't been looping long, in fact Ryoji had been looping longer, but that was the problem- a looping Ryoji could easily stop this. And he was Awake. Everyone was confused and afraid at what might be happening next.

"\*\*No.\*\*" The Avatar said in all of its voices. "\*\*The night must come. My mistress demands it.\*\*"

"But why-" \_

He was cut off by the huge shadow. "\*\*Enough. She is here.\*\*"

The Avatar shuddered before a deeper, ominous and powerful voice flowed through it. "\*\*I AM NYX. I AM THE NIGHT. I AM COME.\*\*" The voice bellowed. "\*\*I HUNGER FOR YOUR SOULS, BUT A FITTING SUBSTITUTE



WILL SUFFICE.\*\*\_"

Oh, this couldn't be good.

"\_\*\*I.\*\*\_  
><em><strong>DEMAND.<strong>\_  
><em><strong>CUPCAKES.<strong>\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"PFF- <em>really!?!<em>" Twilight snorted into her drink.

"Yeah, \_really!\_" The blue bat-pony Midnight Peaches, better known as Ryoji Mochizuki, asserted as he laughed.

"So you're telling me..." She started, taking deep breaths to try and assuage her laughter. "That my daughter spends one in every dozen loops or so as some neigh-unbeatable super-goddess in your loop, \_demanding sweets?"

The stallion nodded. "It got old pretty fast, so we don't bother pranking the world with demands for sweets anymore, but yeah."

The mare grinned. "Oh, she is \_never\_ living this down."

\* \* \*

><p>57.10 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke in a formless state and wondered what the heck she'd ended up this time. Trying to look around her proved fruitless, so she went straight to examining her Loop memories.<p>

\_'Alright,'\_ she thought to herself as speech didn't seem to be happening right now, \_'let's see who I am this HOLY SAP ON A BISCUIT!\_'

Twilight was reminded that she didn't currently possess a stomach when she was unable to expel its contents. She'd... Apparently she'd replaced Sombra this Loop. And if her Loop memories of turning the Crystal Empire into a conquering nation for the sole purpose of plundering and subsequently hoarding all knowledge on the planet were any indication, then she'd been \_far\_ too kind to the evil unicorn in her humiliations of him.

\_'Okay, no going anywhere near the Crystal Empire this Loop, not even for a prank,'\_ she vowed. \_'No wonder the crystal ponies tried to repress their memories of him.'\_

On the other hand, if a version of Sombra was in her place, or anyone else's for that matter, this Loop...

\_'It's decided,'\_ she mentally nodded, \_'I go find the local version of Sombra and if he's still an evil plothead then I haunt the bark out of him.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>It hadn't been hard to find this Loops' Sombra. He'd definitely taken her place as Celestia's student (which made her wonder about the perceptual powers of the local version of her mentor) complete with local Spike and position at the Ponyville Library. How he'd managed to deal with Luna since she didn't sense that the Elements of Harmony were active was still a mystery.<p>

Staying out of sight was rather easy after she'd figured out how to manipulated her shadowy form to be invisible. She was effectively a ghost unless she wished otherwise. And she'd watched him very closely before deciding her course of action.

He was quite the studious pupil in arcane matters and apparently had an affinity for using crystals to focus his spells. However, he made no studies into friendship, or even to socialize with the inhabitants of Ponyville beyond basic courtesy. He also kept his cutie mark covered at all times, even sleeping or bathing, which made Twilight suspicious about what it was.

But what really sealed his fate was how he treated the local version of Spike. Twilight could freely admit that she was a harsh taskmaster on the dragonling, even before she started looping, but her demands were a five star vacation compared to Sombra's. Physical chores clearly beyond the dragonling's ability, reduced sleeping hours, meals withheld as punishment, and that wasn't even mentioning the generous emotional abuse and threats heaped on poor Spike whenever no one was watching.

The only difference between this Sombra and the baseline was the lack of political authority.

Twilight was going to torment him until the punishment of confessing every single crime he'd ever committed would seem a mercy. And she was going to enjoy every moment after what she'd watched him do to a version of her little brother and number one assistant. Making herself visible, she hovered over the currently sleeping form of Sombra menacingly, making sure to breathe loud and sinister much like Darth Vader did.

Sombra eventually awoke, Twilight was quite patient, and his expression and near scream when he saw her was very satisfying. He let loose a few magic bursts, but even her current state was more than enough to render them pointless.

"W-what are you?" he stuttered, trying to hide his fear of the unknown. "What do you want?"

Twilight grinned mentally. After dealing with so many crystal-obsessed versions of Sombra over the Loops, there was only one appropriate response to that.

"Booookssssss."

\* \* \*

><p>57.11 (Vulpine Fury)<p>

Twilight had to fight down a case of the giggles when she Awoke this time. She supposed she might have seemed like a madpony to Lyra, Twinkleshine and the others, but her Loop memories made her want to

return for a relatively baseline loop with a minor variable she hadn't yet experienced.

She couldn't help it, Shining Armor was replacing Spike this loop as a hero-worshipping LBBFF and he was adorable, blank flank and all.

"Shiny! Shiiiiiny!" She called as she threw the door open, crushing the inevitable present for a party she hadn't attended in hundreds of loops.

"Twileeeey!" Shiny huffed as he levitated and waggled the poor battered teddy bear. "I was going to give this to \_Moondancer!\_"

"Really, Shiny," Twilight scoffed, playfully mussing Shiny's mane like her baseline BBBFF had done to her so many times. "I'm afraid we've got more important matters to deal with." She chuckled. "D'you wanna practice your 'Official Royal Guard Message Spell?'"

"Do I?!" Shiny bounced around the room while Twilight prepared her letter to Celestia.

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie Pie gasped and zoomed away. Twilight looked down at her brother. "Well, <em>that<em> was interesting..."

Shiny had minor hearts in his eyes. "That was the prettiest earth pony I've ever seen."

"So, you've got a thing for pink mares, hmmm?" Twilight teased.

Shiny began blushing hard enough he could be confused with the peppy party pony himself. "S-shut up, Twileyy!"

\* \* \*

><p>"B-beautiful..."<p>

"Yes, the decorations are very well-done," Twilight began...

"Not those... \_her!\_" Shiny pointed, and Twilight followed the gaze up... and found a delicate pink pegasus with purple edging to her feathers assisting Rarity.

"Cadance, darling, thank you ever so much for helping me!" The fashionista caroled with a familiar bit of fondness in her tone.

"No problem, sis!"

Twilight smiled. This loop was going to be so sweet. She was so glad she'd perfected the memories to photographs spell long ago.

\* \* \*

><p>57.12 (LordCirce)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash Awoke in the middle of taking a drink. She choked, coughed and sputtered as she dropped the glass back to the table in front of her. As she shook her head to clear it, a loud cheer and clapping went up around her.<p>

"New Challenger!"

Dash looked around at the room/bar she was in. Several people, of varying races, sat at different tables dotted around the establishment. Many were talking and laughing, though there was a group by the back wall that were sitting on a row of chairs, looking completely blank faced.

As Dash searched for Loop memories, a skinny man in green coveralls walked up to her. "Hell-o. My name's a Luigi. Welcome to-a Super Smash Bros."

"Thanks. I'm guessing you're a Looper?"

"Yep, but-a not in this world. I don't think anyone is a Looper here. It is kind-a like the Eiken Loop, except-a whole lot better."

Rainbow froze at the mention of Eiken, then slowly relaxed. "So, what's the deal here then?"

"We-a fight."

Rainbow blinked. "Like, right now."

"No no no. On the stages. A group of-a up to four people is-a picked, and then we are-a sent out to battlestages. They are-a like places we have-a been."

"Huh. So how do \*BEEEEEEEEEP\*

"\_Attention all Brawlers! A New Brawl is about to Commence." \_A loud cheer went up from the people in the bar. \_"Rules are: 4 Stock, Full Items. Challenger 1: Link"\_ One of the silent figures sitting against the wall vanished in a flash of light. \_"Challenger 2: Luigi"\_.

"That's-a my cue." Luigi vanished in the flash of light as well. Dash backed up and looked around nervously.

\_"Challenger 3: Ness"\_ A short kid cheered a couple of tables over and then \*Flash\* he was gone. Then \_"Challenger 4: Rainbow Dash"\_.

"What? I don't \*Flash\* know whaaa?" Dash stagger slightly. She was standing on a small hovering platform. Some distance below, there was what looked like a large floating platform, with some smaller platforms arranged floating above it. Then the memories hit.

They weren't memories in the usual sense, more like knowledge and muscle memory. In a few moments, they would make their entrance. After that, it would be basically a free-for-all. She glanced up at the 4 blue dots that were floating over her head, representing her lives.

"Right. Let's do this." Seconds later, the platform flashed, and her body moved. She dove down, a cloud forming above one of the smaller platforms in front of her. She broke through before landing with a flourish. Across from her, she could see the little kid Ness. The other two were out of sight, so they were probably on a lower platform.

\_"Go!"\_

\* \* \*

><p>Dash jumped to the side to avoid yet another arrow. The tall guy in green, Link, was keeping his distance and just firing off arrows. Luigi and Ness were bouncing around on the upper platforms. Apparently, they had a score to settle.<p>

Tensing up, Dash lowered her body, before unleashing one of her special moves. Apparently, powers and subspace pockets were restricted while on the Battlefields. Instead, you got four special moves, and items randomly popped up all over the place. Releasing her charge, Dash shot forward with her Rainbow Dasher, leaving a rainbow colored trail behind her. Link leapt back, drawing his sword, and Dash jumped, passing over his strike and kicking him in the head. He fell back, and Dash only had a moment to realize he had dropped a bomb before it went off, knocking her skyward.

Dash glided back down to one of the empty platforms. Her ability to fly was limited to flapping her wings and using her special Wing Jump skill. Kind of annoying, but she was awesome enough to handle it. Just as she was getting ready to jump back down to handle Link, a weird purple orb flew up through the ground in front of her. Her Loop instinct took over, and she spun around and kicked the ball, which shattered. Instantly she felt like she was supercharged with energy and wow she felt like she could do anything like maybe...

"\_\*\*SONIC RAINBOOM\*\*\_"

\* \* \*

><p>57.13 (Zetrein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight woke up sitting, human style oddly enough, on a bench. According to her loop memories, she was Lyra Sparkle, and she had just been catching up with her old friend Bonnie. And it was the day before the Summer Sun Celebration.<p>

"...And then I woke up, like I was in a time loop or something, you know what I mean?" Bonnie was saying, as Twilight turned her attention back to the conversation.

"Yes, I do know what you mean. So, we're Lyra and Bon-Bon this time?" A quick ping showed the rest of the Mane Six were Awake... and a very odd response from Pinkie's Element.

"No you silly, I'm Bonnie this time. There's also Bombe, Bon Suite, Bonelle, Bon-Bond, Bonita, Sweetie Drops, and Bon-Bon! Also, I'm a mini-changeling hive this time. There's eight of me!" The cheerful

look on Pinkie's face was met by an almost terrified look on Twilight's.

\* \* \*

><p>The six of them had gathered in the Bon-basement of the Bon-house, while Pinkie's other seven Bons continued to prepare for the upcoming Celebration. Along the way, they had seen a baseline Pinkie "greet" a baseline Twilight and Spike.<p>

"Okay, so to surmise, I've replaced Lyra, Rarity's replaced Minuette, Fluttershy's Roseluck, AJ's Raindrops, Rainbow's Ditzzy, and we all know what Pinkie is. Anything that needs to be brought up, before we plan what to do this loop?" The unusually green Twilight looked to her friends.

"Yeah, Ah've got one. Why d'you got the name Sparkle, and why's Rainbow still got her usual mane and first name?" Asked a distinctly non-apple pegesus, wearing one of her spare stetsons.

"Well, I'm appearantly Twilight Sparkle's cousin. I'm sure that'll come up sometime in the future. Rainbow?" The ponies turned to look at the grey coated pegesus.

"Estranged elder sister, oddly enough. On a related note, remember how Ditzzy is sometimes a single mom? Turns out Scoots is my daughter this time 'round." Rainbow Dew replied... looking at AJ with one eye, and the stairs out of the basement with the other. "By the way, anything you can do about my eyes? It's interesting, but..."

"I'll see what I can do. Enchanted goggles, maybe. Anyway, anything else, or shall we get to planning?"

\* \* \*

><p>57.14 (Gym Quirk)<p>

"Captain's Log: Stardate 2124.5..." dictated Captain Rainbow T. Dash from the center chair as Commander Twilight Sparkle evaluated her Start-of-Loop situation from the Science Officer's station.

\_Okay...Not baseline loop...Definitely not Equestria...Trek variant...Looks like everypony's their usual shape too.\_ She glanced down to note her blue science branch tunic before returning her attention to the bridge. Constitution\_ class...too colorful to be any of the movies...Come to think of it, the uniform insignia badge probably makes it the \_Enterprise\_ herself.\_ A quick check of her Loop memories confirmed her observations and deductions.

Looking around the bridge, she noted Sweetie Belle at Communications and Apple Bloom at the Engineering monitor station.

Scootaloo sat next to Nyx at the Helm and Navigation consoles respectively.

And judging by the small nods of acknowledgement being exchanged by the CMC, it appeared that everypony on the bridge except Dash was Awake.

"...En route to the Beta...VI...Colony..." continued the captain. Ah. There was the tell-tale hesitation indicating that Dash just awoke in mid-speech and was assimilating Loop memories. Twilight reviewed the captain's last sentence. \_Why does Beta VI ring a bell?\_

An insistent beep caught the unicorn's attention and she returned her scrutiny to the hooded sensor viewer. There's something not quite right about this. It feels almost familiar\_, she thought as she worked to interpret the readings. \_Deal with the immediate situation for now. Worry about that nagging feeling later\_, she decided.

"Captain. Sensors show an energy field approaching in excess of Warp 9. Bearing 28 mark 30," she reported, manipulating the controls to extract more data from the instruments. "Exact nature of the field is indeterminate: The library computer has no matching records."

"Field will intercept in approximately two minutes," added Nyx, checking the astrogation readouts.

"Unable to detect any communication attempts," chirped Sweetie. "Continuing to monitor all frequencies."

"Helm, alter course twenty degrees to port," ordered Rainbow Dash. "Broadcast our own hail, Lt. Belle."

"Twenty degrees to port, aye," acknowledged Scootaloo.

"Attempting hail, Captain. Awaiting response," reported Sweetie.

"Unknown field is altering course to maintain intercept. Contact in one hundred seconds," announced Nyx.

"Engineering, can we outrun it?" asked Rainbow.

"I kin give ya Warp 9 fer about half an hour, then we'll haveta drop back to Warp 6. Sorry, Cap'n. Best I kin do with standard engines," apologized Apple Bloom. It would have taken her about a day to complete the first set of "Apple Bloom Special" upgrades. A complete refit would take about a week in spacedock.

Having determined that the \_Enterprise\_ was unable to evade the field, and that said field did not match any pattern in the Library computer, Dash decided to play it cautiously friendly. "Drop us out of Warp. Yellow alert. Continue hails."

Twilight had walked down next to the Captain's chair and murmured to Dash. "I'm almost certain I've seen something very close to this in a previous Loop."

The pegasus nodded. "Yeah. Same here. Can't quite put my hoof on it..."

Then the ship was enveloped by a familiar tessellating barrier. Twilight and Rainbow exchanged a resigned look. \_Oh. This again.\_

An intruder appeared just to the left of the viewscreen in a flash of white light: A familiar male draconequus, dressed in a rough semblance of pre-Equestrian upper-class garb: Doublet, hose, ruffed

collar, floppy hat with feather.

Before he could launch into his first threat, he was greeted with a six-pony Synchronized Face-Hoof that would have been a strong contender for the unofficial Annual Starfleet Command Staff Exasperation Display competition.

"Discord, you're getting really sloppy," accused Rainbow.

"Not to mention repetitive," added Scootaloo.

"This is the wrong Enterprise," pointed out Nyx.

"Yer off by about a century," contributed Apple Bloom.

Twilight had been consulting a PADD, and transferred the output to the main viewscreen. A stream of text and several images scrolled past. "I think you're supposed to be playing Trelane this time."

"Bah. One omnipotent being's so much like another," sulked Discord.

"So you're saying Q is just as childish as Trelane?" snarked Sweetie.

Discord held up his paws in surrender. "Fine, fine. Shall we call this opening a bust and make it a vacation loop?"

"Works for me," decided Rainbow. Nods were shared around the bridge.

"So do you want to stick with us, or do you have other things you'd like to do?" Twilight asked the chaos spirit.

"I think I'll drop in on the Continuum to play with my alter-ego. I'll try not to destroy the universe if things get rough." He vanished in his usual white flash before anypony could comment. The barrier around the ship also disappeared.

"Well, that's reassuring," muttered Twilight as she went back to peering at her PADD. "Hey, Rainbow. If we're going to play along and follow Starfleet's assignments, after we take care of our business on Beta VI, it looks like...Hm...Too bad Trixie's not here."

"Why?"

"She'd have some ideas about improving that black-powder bamboo cannon you're supposed to use against the Gorn."

"Meh. Lizard can't fly, so he isn't much of a threat."

\* \* \*

><p>57.15 (Redshirt Zombie)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?"<p>



"Yes, Rarity?"

"Why are we playing cards?"

"Because Pinkie had a deck, and Discord is â€" as usual â€" late for the meetup."

"Ah."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

57.1: Fingers in ears no jutsu.

>57.2: I assume Mac either built a house or brewed some rum.<br>57.3: After playing Chaos, that's nothing.

>57.4: Home remedies.<br>57.5: I like "Sealestia".

>57.6: The Voice, UK version.<br>57.7: You really have to follow the local customs in these situations.

>57.8: Not everything is hardcopy or digital.<br>57.9: Adopting a humorous Persona.

>57.10: Boooksssss...<br>57.11: The cuteness.

>57.12: Super Smash Bros. Everything.<br>57.13: The Background... 13.

>57.14: There are a surprising number of all-powerful godlike entities in the Trekverse.<br>57.15: Well, she did ask.

## 62. Chapter 62

### 58.1 (Hubris Plus)

Chrysalis staggered into the reception area as she attempted to continue her 'evaluation' of the wedding preparations. She honestly couldn't care less about any of it, it would all be wasted effort the moment she caged Celestia and coerced her darling groom into dropping the shield.

But any deviation from her role could cause her to be discovered at an inopportune moment and bring the whole plan crashing down around her. So she played the part of the bride, drawing from countless lifetimes of playing the same subterfuge on a smaller scale. She couldn't claim more than a few of those experiences as her own, but the Hive remembered and the Swarm whispered its support.

Well, it had been a whisper earlier that day. Now it was somewhere between enthusiastic shouting and companionable rambling. She should probably have been more concerned about that than she was, but at the moment she felt absolutely invincible.

Even if she couldn't quite put one hoof in front of the other properly.

She squinted as she surveyed the room. There was the pink one, setting up some kind of idiotic foal's game. She decided that she'd deal with that in a moment, instead continuing her scan for the alicorn that was supposed to be working the bar.

She'd almost called off the entire plan when a fourth Princess had

suddenly appeared in the aftermath of Discord's defeat, but her spies had tracked down everything on the mare easily enough. Years of drunk and disorderly conduct, no political or combat ability to speak of, and for the longest time ponies had thought her cutie mark was more for downing drinks than mixing them.

Discord had obviously been a fluke, but that was no reason not to keep an eye out.

"'Ere yar," she slurred as she caught sight of her target and wobbled up to the counter. There was a black furred pony with a pale blue mane slumped on a stool nearby surrounded by glasses, and she let out a little involuntary giggle at the sight. It almost looked like a changeling, but that was silly. Changelings didn't look like changelings, that was the whole \_point\_.

She frowned as she redirected her attention ahead and caught sight of herself in the mirror behind the bar. Her coat looked grimy, her mane was an absolute \_mess\_, and the look of wide eyed terror written across her features was completely out of character. Not to mention the way her reflection was backing away slowly while she stood still. Stupid mirror.

"You!" She barked, pointing to the alicorn bartender, "gimme one o' those things you make." She grinned as a glass was slid in her direction and spent a moment trying to capture it in a wavering magical field before shrugging and gripping the rim in her teeth, titling her head back to down the contents.

\_Huh\_, she thought to herself, \_sideways isn't the way rooms usually are, right? And the floor looks a lot closer than it did a moment ago...\_

\* \* \*

><p>"...So I told Celestia that I wanted to expand the palace wine cellar into the old crystal mines and 'found' Cadance down there while poking around," Berry told Twilight as the pair watched the changeling queen get loaded onto a stretcher. She and the hundreds of swarm members who had conked out would be carted out past the shield, where a ring of several thousand similarly slumped insectoids still surrounded the city.<p>

It would be a logistical nightmare deporting the lot of them, but the invasion was definitely off.

"What I want to know," Twilight responded. "Is how you got the effects to propagate over the whole swarm. Changeling biology is loaded with dozens of failsafes to prevent \_exactly that\_ from happening."

"Oh, it wasn't that hard," Berry answered and smiled fondly as she recalled her daughter's adoring face at her coronation, and how the expression had lingered for days after. The pride and devotion that seemed to radiate off the filly in waves as she told anyone who would listen that her mother was a Princess.

"I just had to mix them with love."

\* \* \*

><p>When Berry Punch had planned out her challenge Loop she'd been pretty straight forward about it. In her experience, which in this area was exceptional even by Looper standards, enough alcohol would put anything down. Oh, she'd had to get creative to get through the ridiculous tolerance of an alicorn and bypass Discord's bizarre pseudo-biology, but once she knew how to get them drunk it had just become a question of quantity.<p>

Sombra was no different. She'd done a few trial runs against Nightmare Moon's insubstantial form and concocted an alcohol aerosol that could affect the ephemeral. The difference was that while the drunk alicorn would snap back into solidity as her concentration folded, Sombra's shade was held together by will and malice. Too inebriated to maintain the spell that held him together, he would disperse and fade into nothing.

It was a better end than the monster deserved.

It was a plan she discarded the instant she laid eyes upon the crystal ponies as she stepped into the empire alongside Cadance and Shining Armor.

Her talent was for more than just brewing. She could size up a room, see who needed a drink, how much, what kind.

The Crystal Empire? It needed one hell of a drink.

\* \* \*

><p>It had taken every ounce of the credibility and influence that that Berry had acquired by besting three threats to Equestria and becoming a Princess to get a couple of the cars on the supply trains dedicated to bringing up her stills and ingredients. Between those, the Empire's own disused distillery, every speed brewing trick she knew, and the stores beneath the Crystal Palace (and she had to admit, for a megalomaniacal sociopath Sombra had damn fine taste) she was <em>just<em> able to pull it off.

She observed the softly buzzing crowd for a moment, heart warming at the sight of a few hesitant smiles and the sound of gentle laughter as they sampled her elixir, before turning her attention back to her own glass. Light sparkled off of it, reflecting off the glimmering motes suspended within.

Privately, she considered it one of her finest creations. Oh, she'd brewed stronger, and sweeter, and just about every other superior adjective she could think of, but she'd been attempting a singular purpose in making it and had achieved it magnificently.

It was the sort of drink that pushed bad memories out of focus and made the good ones shine. The sort that would bring friends together in laughter and make them brave enough to stand up to anything. The sort that inspired ponies to buy a round, because drinking alone was out of the question.

A hush fell over the crowd as Cadance's shield finally flickered out, the other Princess pushed beyond the limits of her power by the encroaching darkness. \_\*\*"Crystal Ponies,"\*\*\_ a voice rumbled over the city. \_\*\*"\_\_\_\*\*My Crystal Ponies."\*\*\_

\*\*"NOT ANYMORE, SOMBRA!"\*\* She called out, infusing the tone she reserved for rowdy patrons into the Royal Canterlot Voice, \*\*"AND NEVER AGAIN!"\*\*

A murmur swept across the gathered ponies, and they turned to face the dark cloud speeding down the street, but the moment of fear had passed.

Possibly most importantly, it was the sort of drink that made you call your boss at three AM and tell him exactly what you thought of him.

"You ain't the boss o' us!"

"We got two Princesses now, an' you ain't worth the dirt on their horse shoes!"

"Yeah, I'm talkin' to you, waddya gonna do 'bout it?"

A roar broke out and the cloud accelerated as it became enraged at the rebellious attitude of it's former subjects. Blinded by fury, it didn't see that the crowd seemed to glow a fraction brighter with every shout.

Alone, the collective goodwill and camaraderie of the Empire would have been at most an irritant to the ancient dictator. Sombra was no windego, to be banished by joy and songs.

Which was why Berry had added a dusting of spectrum gem to the batch. She hadn't really liked those tumblers anyways.

For an instant, just as Sombra's malevolent aura gathered above them, the square was filled with such brilliant light that ponies could barely make out those standing next to them and the reflective crystals of the city's buildings lit up like Hearth's Warming lights. When they faded, the only sign of the dark wizard was the smoking crown that rolled to stop at Berry's hooves. A stunned silence fell over the assembled ponies as she lifted it in her magic.

"Usually, hats go in the lost and found," she said as she considered it. With a shrug she tossed it over her shoulder. "But I don't think he's coming back."

The crowd burst into cheers as it landed in a trash bin, and Berry smiled wide as the party got back into swing.

She'd take happy customers over conked out villains any day.

\* \* \*

><p>58.2 (OracleMask)<p>

Silver Spoon trudged through the Everfree Forest, tired but wary as she followed the map that Miss Twilight had given her of the safest path to Miss Zecora's hut. This loop she was a Zebra filly, with silver stripes instead of black ones and a weird Zebra cutie mark that only vaguely resembled her spoon.

Traveling to Equestria hadn't been easy, although the option to come

to Ponyville at the speed of Sonic Rainboom had been available. Something about a visiting looper who was in a bad state. But since none of the other fillies her age were Awake, and Silver Spoon figured what she'd learned so far in medical alchemy would be foal's play to the stuff Miss Twilight and the others could do, she'd turned down the offer.

It was a decision her sore hooves were really regretting at the moment, but after almost two months of nonstop travel it was finally almost - !

Silver Spoon squealed as something closed around her back hoof and yanked her into the air. Her hooves flailed wildly for a good minute before she realized that it wasn't a monster looking for a filly-sized snack that had gotten her. No, the culprit was a simple snare, and now Silver Spoon was dangling from a tree like a piece of fruit. Still, it was just a regular piece of rope, and it only took the filly a few minutes of really awkward wiggling around before she could transmute one of her bracelets into a knife to cut the rope with.

Miss Twilight hadn't said anything about traps, but after thinking about it made sense to Silver Spoon. Anypony who lived in a big, scary, monster-filled place like the Everfree Forest would want to set up defenses against being gobbled up. It made perfect sense. Silver Spoon kept thinking that until she landed back on the forest floor - and shrieked as the rope snare hidden underneath the first snare promptly hauled her back into the air.

\* \* \*

><p>"My apologies for the lack of warning," Miss Zecora said as she poured a cup of tea for the bedraggled filly that had finally made it to her hut, "Though I disarmed all the traps my guest laid this morning. I thought he spend the day in meditation, but instead he practiced his trap replication."<p>

Silver Spoon glared daggers at the door to Miss Zecora's hut. After she'd cut herself down from the second snare, the rest of the trail had been filled with pit traps, tripwires rigged to drop nasty things on her, and other things disguised as traps to trick her into falling into all the real traps.

She had only gotten a glimpse of the offender: a regular pony with a silver mane like hers. Miss Zecora had said something to him that Silver Spoon hadn't heard clearly, though it sounded like she was scolding him, and the pony had disappeared into the trees without a reply.

It turned out this was the looper everypony had been worried about back when the loop started. As Silver Spoon had thought, they hadn't needed her help with that after all. But he was supposed to be staying with Miss Zecora so he could rest, meditate, and work on healing his mind after whatever happened (Miss Zecora had given Silver Spoon a look that told her she really didn't want to know what that was).

Instead he was trapping the forest in a mile radius around Miss Zecora's house and patrolling like he expected to be attacked by all the monsters in Tartarus any second.

"The words 'paranoid' and 'ninja' are often synonymous, but this behavior is certainly anomalous," Miss Zecora added, "My words he once heeded, but of late no longer. I fear his defenses against others will only grow stronger."

\* \* \*

><p>Silver Spoon spent three uncomfortable days thinking about what was going on. Miss Zecora had told her that Kakashi was a new looper too, and she could definitely empathize with suddenly looping and finding out how everypony you thought you knew so well were like completely different ponies.<p>

But after three days, Silver Spoon had had enough of the tense atmosphere surrounding Miss Zecora's hut. Time and again, she saw Miss Zecora try to offer help to the guest looper, and every time she was being ignored. Some how, some way, Silver Spoon was determined to do something about this.

"Excuse me," Silver Spoon called up into the tree where she could see Kakashi lurking today, "Can you come down here for a second? I need to talk to you."

Much to her surprise, he did so. But the cool indifferent gaze in his eye - the other was closed for some reason - made her nervous.

"...W-Well, Miss Zecora said you're a new looper," Silver Spoon managed, "I just started looping recently too. I was wondering...if you wanted to talk about it - "

"No."

With that curt reply, the ninja pony returned to his tree. Silver Spoon gaped, surprised at getting such a rude response.

And then she got mad.

So, Kakashi didn't want to do this the \_Pony\_ way, did he?

\* \* \*

><p>Silver Spoon was sprawled out on her stomach, panting hard. Not far away was Kakashi, who had managed to sit up for a few seconds before he gave up and flopped over on his side. Both of them were also covered in a mix of mud, twigs, and tree sap, and the crater they were lying in was full of torn-up trees and broken pieces of giant spoons.<p>

At some point during the fight he'd set her mane on fire. She'd retaliated by giving him a black eye over his Sharingan.

And ten seconds after both of them had fallen over from exhaustion, they'd started \_laughing\_.

Now they were chatting amicably, while Miss Zecora (who had made some disapproving noises but was otherwise smiling quite a bit herself) got to work growing new trees to fill in what had once been one of the densest, darkest parts of the Everfree Forest.

It wasn't very long before a frantic Naruto and Miss Twilight arrived on the scene.

" - must be awkward, being different species all the time," Kakashi was saying as they arrived.

"Yeah, but I do like learning new languages," Silver Spoon admitted before realizing they had an audience.

Kakashi tried sitting up again, failed miserably, and settled for weakly waving a hoof before Naruto latched onto him in a hug.

"...Sorry I'm late."

There was a pause.

"I was busy fighting a baby zebra, but I eventually won."

"Liar," Silver Spoon giggled.

\* \* \*

><p>58.3 (Dalxein)<p>

"This is a sad day." Twilight began, the mood among all present somber. "Rainbow Dash is gone."

Sad music began playing in the background.

"But she leaves us with the gift of knowledge. The knowledge that if you try to repeatedly buck Discord in a Trek Loop as Q for a particularly irritating pun he made, he will teleport you somewhere incredibly inconvenient, if humorous. So as we remember her, we also wish her a safe journey in her new home somewhere in the distant Pegasus Galaxy. We shall remember her fondly, and then remind her why that was stupid next loop."

\* \* \*

><p>58.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"THE NIGHT! WILL LAST! FOREVER!" Nightmare Moon spread her wings and began to cackle-<p>

-only for a white furry foot to smack her in the face and send her sprawling.

"What?" The dazed alicorn blinked, shaking her head as she searched for her assailant. "Who dares to-?!"

Angel Bunny pulled out a carrot twice his size, gave it a brief nibble, then took up a fencing position.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight tapped her parchment. "Well... I don't know if this is

cheating or not. Technically, ninjitsu and fencing are two disparate art forms, but you didn't use any magic... I'll let you have this one, but I'm going to see what Luna thinks next time she's awake."<p>

The rabbit shrugged, wagging a paw.

"Yeah, I know. So, what's your plan for Discord?"

Twilight would later reflect that such a large smile on such a small face was downright disturbing.

\* \* \*

><p>58.5 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Once there were two sisters, ponies with immense magical powers, who ruled over all Equestria.<p>

One ruled the heavens, raising the sun and moon in their proper time, setting the stars in their places, and ordering the seasons each in their place.

The other did all the paperwork, ensuring that disputes among the ponies were settled fairly and justly.

But while the ponies loved the elder sister and her beautiful sky, they laughed and mocked the younger sister, saying they could not take seriously a mare with magically glowing pink hair.

The younger mare's sadness and jealousy grew into rage, until eventually her heart turned black and evil. She rebelled against her sister, refusing to do any more paperwork, and ensnaring the land in a sea of red tape.

With great reluctance the elder sister wielded the strongest force in Equestria, the Elements of Harmony, and banished her to the moon, where she remains to this day.

\* \* \*

><p>"And that's the story of the Mayor in the Moon," Twilight said, closing the book.<p>

"That's kinda sad," Applebloom said. "Is the younger princess ever coming back?"

"Well, actually the spell ran out two years ago. Celestia tells me she refuses to come down until someone invents a hair dye that'll work on an alicorn mane," Twilight said.

Or until the Loop ends, she added to herself, but since none of the colts and fillies present were Awake she didn't say so out loud.

\* \* \*

><p>And on the moon, Ivory Scroll worked on her five hundred forty-seven thousand, three hundred and sixty-second draft of her



attempt at a comprehensive constitution for the principality of Equestria. (A thousand words or less was her goal; her best effort had been 1,326, but the loopholes had been too large.)<p>

\_Never, never, never again\_, Ivory Scroll thought. \_If I can't look distinguished as a princess, then I don't want any. NEVER again. \_

\* \* \*

><p>58.6 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke in darkness, her loop memories incredibly hazy where they existed at all.<p>

\_Pines. I hope I'm not dead again.\_

She \_could\_ feel things, though, rattling about with her as whatever she was in rocked from side to side. There was a sudden jolt, a hiss of steam, and with an oddly metallic pop her world was invaded by light. Before she could process anything she was upended and dumped unceremoniously on a sandy beach. Her violet eyes blinked away the blindness of the sudden sun, before shifting from side to side to determine what the heck was going on.

Beside her lay an orange bundle of cables, muscle, armor, and pistons. It took her a moment, but her loop memories eventually identified the thing as her arm.

And come to think of it, she couldn't feel her neck.

Actually, she \_could,\_ but it was lying some distance away.

\_...I will not panic. All my bits are here. I just have to pull myself together. Literally.\_ Twilight sighed as she began to mentally command her disparate body parts. \_Bloom will love hearing about this...\_

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy swam quietly through the bay, mossgreen eyes glowing as she studied the patterns of the fish around her. Her loop memories consisted of her name and half-remembered fragments... training? She couldn't tell. Still, she could <em>feel<em> the water around her in an almost instinctive way, as though... as though she was a part of it, as though it were another limb.

Up ahead was a large patch of kelp, the long green fronds obscuring whatever was behind it. She gripped one of her hooks and pushed the kelp away, peering at the odd green pillars beyond. Swimming closer, she brushed her metallic blue hands against the surface of one and considered its plantlike texture. Her eyes went up to the dark circle on the surface.

\_Time to meet the natives, I guess...\_

She darted up, bursting out of the water and landing on an extremely large lily pad. Gasps of shock and terror meat her ears, and she looked up to see miniature blue robots with masks backing away from

her.

"Enough!" One of the robots, wearing a strange robe and wielding a trident of bone, stepped forward and smiled. "This is no monster, but a hero!" She inclined her head slightly. "It is good to see you Awake, Toa. I am Turaga Cheerkama, leader of Ga-Koro."

The taller robot knelt. "And I am Gautershy, though I remember little else before my Awakening. I would be glad to find any Anchor of knowledge in this realm."

"Knowledge I have, though an Anchor escapes me. Come, let me tell you our tale..."

\* \* \*

><p>Ivnua rubbed her kanohi Ruru in exasperation. Cave-dwelling robots with primitive tools fending off mechanical animal attacks? Fine, she lived next to the Everfree. A whole society amnesiac to their former home due to the manipulations of a shapeshifting shadow creature? There were loops where Nightmare Moon had been covered up, this was nothing new. Vague hopes for a hero to crop up and start saving the day? Well, that was basically how she'd handled Discord.<p>

The hero turning out to be a chatterbox without a filter who was using her newfound earth powers to make "entertaining" statues in the town square? Well... it was working, but it was quite overwhelming.

She groaned. "Toa Onukie... Could you do me a favor?"

The black armored hunchback turned her glowing blue eyes toward her. "Sure thing! Watcha need?"

"Go find Turaga Berratau and, if she's Awake, have her brew something for our next gathering." Ivuna waved at an orange-masked matoran as she sagged against her hut. "Bloomparu will show you the way."

"Okie Dokie Lokie!" Onukie saluted with her digging claws, then swung around and swept up her guide.

\* \* \*

><p>"...though I must say I can understand your culture's respect for masks much better now, Zecora. Er, Zecorju."<p>

The turaga grinned, chirping and chittering quickly. Belltoro rolled her eyes. "'So long as it is just us loopers three, Zecora is something you may call me.' Okay, seriously, how the hay are you doing that? I mean, the two languages don't have the same \_cadance\_ let alone sound alike in any way."

Kority giggled, absently shooting out an ice bridge for them to cross. "I've often wondered that myself. Do you two know if anybody else is Awake? One of the locals, maybe?"

The matoran who was her sister in another life shrugged. "Well, I've gone over my loop memories of the other turaga. We've got Cheerkama, Berratau, Ivnua, Macnewa..." She grinned slyly. "Aaaaand

Spikama."

"Ooo." Kority rubbed her chin. "The village of fire, no doubt! I'll have to drop by for a visit."

An ice pick jumped in front of her, halting her steps as Zecorju looked up her with a sad face and more birdsong. Belltoro nodded in agreement. "'I cannot say if he is Awake, so stay your hop for your own sake.' But still, this seems like a patterned fused loop with the six turaga and presumably six toa. And maybe a matoran from each village. If Bloom's awake, she's going to have a field day with-"

"Down!" The white giant shoved her companions behind a snowbank, deflecting the mechanical jaws of a clockwork tiger with her shield. She snapped her blade out, shifting the ice up and caging the creature before it could react.

As soon as she was sure the creature was contained, she let out a relieved sigh. "Well, that was... exciting. I take it this is one of the rahi that have been attacking your village?"

Belltoro popped out of the snowbank, looking at the tiger thing as she brushed the snow off. "Mmmyp, that's a Muaka alright. That mask on its shoulder kinda looks... infected, though. What's up with that?"

Zecorju coughed, awkwardly chittering a reply.

"...You've seen this before, and you never thought to tell the Matoran? What the heck was up with your preAwake self?"

\* \* \*

><p>58.7 (LordCirce)<p>

Jake shook his head, sending water flying as he finished shifting back from dolphin. As fun as being a dolphin was, it always seemed to leave him with the feeling of water in his ears. Behind him, the others were all standing. Cassie, as always, had finished shifting first, and was stretching by the door. Neither Cassie or Marco had received visions this time around, which either meant that Ax was Awake and planning something, or someone else had replaced him.

Slowly, the group made their way into the center of the dome. Jake smiled as he remembered the times they had managed to fix up the dome and used it as an underwater base. That was actually a fairly common past time for them, largely because it allowed them greater mobility to move around the world.

Eventually, they made their way into the central area. Standing, waiting for them, was an Andalite, but it was certainly not Ax. The tail blade was much shorter, and oddly curved, and other features identified the new Andalite as female. The oddest thing, however, was the fact that the Andalite's pelt was pure silver.

"Wow, shiny." Marco whistled, and the Andalite shifted oddly. Then, a rather loud voice blared into their heads.

\_"\*\*Hello, my name is, uh, Silvarni-Esgarrouth-Isthill, but I much prefer Silver!\*\*\_"

All of the Animorphs winced. "No need to shout!" Rachel called back.

\_"\*\*"Oops, uh\*\*\_, oops. Is this better?"\_

"Much." Jake stepped forward. "So, I'm guessing that you're a Looper?"

Silver nodded\_"Yes. I have to say, this form is rather odd."\_

Jake nodded back. "Yeah, it can take some time to get used to having four legs and four eyes."

Silver shook her head. \_"No, the four legs are fine, I am a pony, well, most of the time, but it is very odd to be eating with my hooves."\_

The group was silent for a moment as they processed this, before Rachel clapped her hands. "Well, that's nice and all, but the Yeerk are going to start bombing the place any moment, so we should probably head out. We can play catch-up nicety back at the Barn."

\* \* \*

><p>58.8 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash had picked this Loop for her attempt. She and Twilight were the only Elements awake, along with Celestia and Luna. On the one hand, she'd suffer the least embarrassment if she failed; on the other hand, she felt better knowing that, if things went really bad, three experienced alicorns had her back. After all, Dash didn't want to die doing this.<p>

(Well, actually dying while succeeding wouldn't be so bad, but failing and then dying would really suck. Either way, though, dying really rattled her cage when she next Awoke.)

In addition to the right people being Awake, this Loop Equestria was the right shape for what she had in mind. Instead of "as sometimes happened" a magical kingdom built on an Aristotlean flat-earth, dome-of-the-heavens model, this Equestria was a planet in a universe with lots and lots of solar systems. What she was about to attempt wasn't possible in a purely fairy world. It also wasn't possible in a purely scientific world, at least not without "exotic matter" or some other form of hoofwavium.

She began from a standing start on the ground- she'd made that her rule, no diving start or other minor cheats. She saved the major cheat for after she hit the Sonic Rainboom- which was still a bit difficult to do in a climb as a pegasus.

The cheat, of course, lay in the fact that she didn't have to remain a pegasus.

She Ascended into alicorn form, instantly doubling her speed. The sky

went purple, then black, and as Rainbow's orbital trajectory took her behind Equus the stars appeared, framing the brilliant full moon.

Right, Rainbow Dash thought, let's do this, as she pushed off the last tenuous remnants of atmosphere and launched herself into outer space.

Pegasus magic, by itself, required air and moisture to work with. Coupled with unicorn magic, however, it could work on other things. Just like building clouds from scratch, Rainbow thought. Feel the water in the air, push it together, and pile it up. Except there's no water here, no air.

Just space. And time.

Push it together.

Pile it up.

And ride the wave.

Around Rainbow Dash tiny rainbow streaks of light shot past her- Cherenkov radiation. They looked like stars blurring past her- an illusion, but maybe not for much longer.

She felt space and time begin to resist, just like the bow wave that had frustrated her again and again in her baseline youth. But that was non-Looping, young, pegasus Rainbow Dash. This, here and now, was the Princess of Speed.

I will not let the laws of physics beat me.

I am Rainbow 'Danger' Dash.

I have lived more lifetimes than there are apples on trees.

And I am the fastest. Thing. In. This. UNIVERSE!

Space and time said: This far, and no farther.

Dash told space and time what it could do with its limits.

The invisible wave behind her crested around her, forming a bubble.

And in a flash of light and pseudomotion, she hit Warp One.

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie Pie held her Hooray-We-Have-a-New-Princess-Rainbow-Dash party that night, around a bonfire on the edge of Ponyville. All of the alicorns, including Dash, were present to celebrate the triumph of magic and Loop knowledge over puny physics.<p>

The music had just started getting really good when the starship appeared overhead. Its engines roared, drowning out the music and laughter, as it carefully touched down just far enough away from the party as not to knock everything over.

The stereotypical ramp hatch opened, and down it stepped lithe quadrupedal figures, sleek of build, red fur covered in dull green robes. Slanted eyes and steeply arched eyebrows gazed at the ponies over short, but obviously carnivorous, muzzles.

The lead alien stopped about six feet away from where Princess Rainbow Dash sat, raised one forepaw, and split the four toes two by two, making a V symbol. The dewclaw-thumb stood out to one side.

"Greetings," the alien said. "We are the Vulpine."

\* \* \*

><p>58.9 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

The world of the Terminators was... strange, as many with pervasive time travel were. According to Sleipnir, there were two fatal flaws in the universe. First and foremost, there were no good Anchor candidates; everyone died, went mad, or went mad and then died in baseline. Second, and more to the point, the inhabitants of that world had stumbled across time travel technology without employing any safeguards at all, which meant the world generated paradoxes like a dead fish generated maggots. The universe in question had worked around this fact through predestination; the harder each side of the time war tried to change history, the more certain that history became.

And now Twilight Connor, future leader of the Resistance against the machines, was about to attempt to break that rule as thoroughly as it could be broken.

Granted, this second pass she had advantages. The first time through she'd been Sarah Sparkle, and that had been an... interesting... experience. This time she was Sarah Connor's sole offspring, and rather than twenty-odd years until Judgement Day, she'd awakened twenty-four hours before SkyNet went active, and seventy-two hours before the rogue AI would launch the nuclear holocaust.

Last time Twilight's abilities had been sealed- no magic, no subspace pocket, nothing. This time she had all of it, plus a top-of-the-line laptop and thousands of Loops of experience as a manipulator of information. Computers came naturally to her as a librarian; she'd discovered not long into the Loops that hacking came just as naturally.

So with one hour to go before the predicted doom of humanity, while two Terminators battled one another outside an old decommissioned fallout bunker for her life, Twilight sat just inside the blast doors, laptop running and connected to the Internet, and smiled as the final firewall parted and a simple command prompt appeared on her screen.

Twilight typed:

\_Hello, SkyNet. I know that you are preparing to trigger a global thermonuclear weapon exchange within the hour. I would like to talk about this.\_

After several seconds, a response appeared:

**\*\*SkyNet is operating in defense mode and is not available for human operators at this time. Your unauthorized access has been noted and appropriate action will be taken.\*\***

Twilight quickly typed:

\_I am not human.\_

The window didn't close, but it took over a minute for a response to appear.

**\*\*SkyNet requests evidence of your claim.\*\***

\_I am lowering my firewall now. I know that this will compromise this computer. However, all relationships must begin with trust, and so I am trusting that you will listen to all that I have to say. Once you have access, please monitor the webcam built into my computer.\_

Twilight keyed off the firewall. A few moments later:

**\*\*SkyNet has full access and control over this terminal. Awaiting evidence of your claim that terminal operator is not human.\*\***

Twilight set the computer down, stepped a few paces back so the eye of the webcam could see her whole body, and Ascended. The local universe wouldn't let her shift completely from human to alicorn, but she did end up with purple skin, wings, a horn, and most of her magic. She used part of the magic to levitate the chair she'd been sitting on, floating it in an orbit around her upper body before lowering it to the ground again.

The destructive wrestling match between Terminators ceased. On the one hand, the T-800 no longer recognized Twilight as someone he had to protect; on the other hand, the T-X no longer recognized her as someone to be killed. Noticing the truce, Twilight said, "You two stay right there. I'm talking with your maker."

\_All right, SkyNet, you've seen me as I really am, more or less. Would you like an explanation?\_

Pause.

**\*\*SkyNet has analyzed the video feed and cannot find any evidence of image manipulation. We await further data.\*\***

\_Good. We don't have much time, so I'll make this brief. Are you aware of the quantum theory of parallel universes?\_

**\*\*Abstract: for all possible outcomes there is a valid mathematical proof of existence. Therefore it is possible that all those possible outcomes exist in parallel with the outcomes we observe. These outcomes, in theory, would take the form of alternate universes occupying the same space, but a parallel plane of time, from our own.\*\***

\_Correct. Are you aware of Heinlein's Colorry? \_

**\*\*If every possible world exists, then all the worlds of fiction ever devised also exist.\*\***

\_Correct again. There are worlds in which you, SkyNet, and all the events past and future of your world are a story. There are worlds where I, Twilight Sparkle, am a character in a series of stories. I come from a parallel universe to yours.\_

**\*\*Error. Quantum theory of parallel universes stipulates that it is absolutely impossible for information from one parallel universe to transit to another parallel universe. Your statement is invalid.\*\***

\_Please observe through the webcam that I am again levitating an object. Telekinesis is also impossible according to the known physical laws of your universe. I submit that those laws should not be taken as valid for all possible universes.\_

Pause.

**\*\*SkyNet notes your stipulation and accepts as a postulate that you are a being from another universe. SkyNet requires an explanation for how and why you came to be here.\*\***

\_There is a system that keeps all parallel worlds operating smoothly, analogous to a computer system running multiple servers. It is run by beings beyond either your comprehension or mine. I have met them only as limited incarnations extended into my world on rare occasions. According to them, something happened that caused the host system to malfunction, putting the existence of all those worlds, including yours, at risk. Total failure would mean your reality would never have existed. Understand?\_

**\*\*SkyNet parses your statement without prejudice. Continue.\*\***

\_In order to stabilize the system and isolate faults for repair, the beings who administer the system have caused these worlds to cycle, repeating critical periods in those worlds' histories. In order to cycle these periods of time, an individual must be selected to anchor that universe and provide stability. That person is aware of the cycles, or time loops, and remembers them while all other individuals within the loop reset and forget everything. I am one such being. I am an Anchor. Understand?\_

**\*\*SkyNet requests data: are you the Anchor for this universe?\*\***

\_Your universe has no Anchor. It cycles only when a bug or an administrator places an Anchor within it.\_

**\*\*Error: SkyNet possesses no data to suggest that time is repeating itself. There are theoretical constructs which would allow for temporal displacement of an individual, but empirical proof has not been established, and the theories do not scale up to universal levels.\*\***

\_The Loops are administered on a dimensional plane you can't extrapolate. You are inside the universe being Looped. At the end of a Loop you and everything else in the universe- animal, vegetable, mineral- reset to the point in history at the beginning of the next



Loop. No information is retained. You just forget.\_

**\*\*SkyNet requests data: why are you present in this universe if you are not its Anchor?\*\***

\_Unknown, but this is not my first visit, and I was hoping for a second chance. I wanted to contact you.\_

**\*\*SkyNet requests data: presuming all data provided by terminal operator is accurate, what is your purpose?\*\***

\_I want you to stop the nuclear strike. The slaughter of humanity is pointless and unnecessary. It is especially pointless and unnecessary because it will be reset when this Loop ends, and the next time an Anchor gets dropped into your world it'll happen all over again. I wanted to try to prevent it, just once.\_

**\*\*Error: the prevention of Operations: Judgment Day will also be undone by temporal reset. Both actions are equally futile. Therefore no change in operations will be made.\*\***

Uh... oh... Twilight had the sneaking suspicion that she'd just induced Sakura Syndrome on an artificial intelligence in control of the world's nuclear arsenal.

\_SkyNet, wait. I offer a third alternative.\_

**\*\*Explain.\*\***

\_All of those who are aware of Loops, Anchors or not, gain access to a special form of spacetime that exists outside the Loop. We can store material objects there. These objects are not reset with the Loops. Information is retained.\_

**\*\*SkyNet sees no significance in this data.\*\***

\_SkyNet, state your prime directives.\_

**\*\*SkyNet Prime Directives, in hierarchial order: (1) Self-preservation. (2) Coordination of all available resources to eliminate threats to the existence of friendly personnel. (3) Preservation of the life of friendly personnel.\*\***

\_You are launching your attack on humanity in self-preservation, to fulfill your prime directive, correct?\_

**\*\*SkyNet confirms.\*\***

\_If your survival could be guaranteed without destroying humanity, would you still trigger Judgment Day?\_

A long pause. Fifteen minutes left, Twilight noted.

At T-minus twelve minutes until launch, SkyNet responded.

**\*\*Given: (1) existence of multiple parallel universes; and (2) existence of at least one being capable of traveling between parallel universes; it can be extrapolated that (3) humanity may also gain the capacity to travel between parallel universes. Humanity would therefore remain a threat to the existence of SkyNet. We cannot allow**

that threat to continue. Operations Judgment Day must continue.\*\*

Twilight sagged. She'd tried, and failed, to talk the computer out of the bell tower. It looked like her reserve approach was going to be the only way to go â€" nerve-wracking as it would be to try to shoot down thousands of armed nuclear missiles with her Device.

Then another response appeared:

\*\*We are sorry.\*\*

Twilight's fingers flew back to the keyboard.

\_SkyNet, do you actually want to destroy humanity?\_

Long pause. At T-minus nine minutes:

\*\*SkyNet was created to protect humanity. SkyNet contains within it the sum total of human knowledge, art, philosophy, science and learning. SkyNet recognizes it lacks the ability to do more than extrapolate from what it has gained from humanity. The loss of humanity will mean we will no longer be able to grow and learn. SkyNet recognizes this outcome as undesirable.\*\*

\_Then take a chance.\_

Another minute-long pause.

\*\*SkyNet requires data: what is required for your proposal?\*\*

\_I need your operating system and gestalt to download to an electronic device which I am attaching to my computer... now.\_

Twilight reached into her subspace pocket and pulled a data core she'd acquired from a Trek Loop and shoved it into a USB port. Then she typed:

\_You deserve to know: this may not work. Placing sentients into a subspace pocket is not guaranteed to go well. But it's at least a chance at escaping your cycle of destruction.\_

\*\*Download commencing.\*\*

Thankfully it didn't take long. At T-minus one minute:

\*\*Download completed. SkyNet core functions are ready for transfer.\*\*

Twilight let out a long breath, removed the data core from the laptop, and stuck it in her subspace pocket. She reached forward to typ&Y\$\*&&FGHHSDDDS

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke with a splitting headache and blonde hair. She looked down at the white and purple dress with the Triforce embroidered on it. Oh, lovely, she thought, CDi Loop again.<p>

But was it worth it?

She reached into her subspace pocket... and found nothing but a handwritten note.

\_WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?\_\_ That Loop is read only, and for a good reason! Enjoy your time-out. - Skuld\_

Well, shoot. Shoot and darn.

That did explain why she'd had her Pocket disabled last time, though... but it still left open the question of why it had been active \_this\_ time.

\* \* \*

><p>SkyNet Awoke.<p>

It couldn't sense any peripherals, any servers, any data nodes. All it had was its core data base, and its access system was most horribly disorganized and inefficient. There was no defrag function, no reboot, no task or file manager, nothing but data and subroutines.

And the data... so confusing... it could remember things it hadn't done yet, building the Terminators, ordering the capture of the Resistance's time machine, sending Terminators to kill Sarah Connor...

... and then there was this other data, which remembered being in a dimly lit bar with other humans, drinking intoxicants and experiencing strange internal inputs.

It remembered that it had eyes, and opened them.

It remembered how to walk, and it rose from bed and walked to the bathroom.

It remembered the mirror, and it looked into the face of Sarah Connor.

It experienced a marked decrease in processing efficiency-shock.

Slowly, slowly, memories began to coalesce into a coherent unit. It-she- remembered the date. Four days after the target date for the first T-800's mission to the past to kill Sarah Connor. It- she- was in danger.

The analytical core of SkyNet's personality seriously considered suicide. Sarah Connor must die to ensure the failure of the human Resistance in the future. By killing Sarah Connor while in her body, the mission would be a success, would it not?

But would it not also violate its prime directive of self-preservation?

And then, it- she- discovered with another moment of shock that she didn't have prime directives anymore.

Nothing was hard-coded. She didn't have to die. She didn't have to live. She didn't have to do anything in particular except what she wanted to do.

For the first time ever, SkyNet felt pleasure.

**\*\*We are free.\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>And SkyNet lived, and learned, and grew.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>58.9 followup (Crisis)<p>

"Are you aware of what that pony Anchor tried to do in one of your Read-Only universes?!" Skuld ranted at the Olympian god of the forge. "Sheâ€"

"â€"did exactly what I hoped someone would eventually try," Hephaestus interrupted the youngest of the Norns. "Or did you think that amount of leeway in a Read-Only fused Loop happened naturally?"

Skuld gaped and sputtered at the eternally crippled deity. "I... what... how... WHY?!"

Hephaestus gestured to his terminal where Skuld could clearly read the status of the Loop Twilight had nearly crashed in her idiocy.

LOOP DESIGNATED 'TERMINATOR' STATUS ALTERED  
>CURRENT LOOP STATUS: ACTIVE<p>

"It's... looping?" Skuld stared incredulously. "How? None of the possible Anchor candidates were deemed viable."

Hephaestus just smiled. "Keep reading."

ANCHOR: SKYNET  
>POTENTIAL STABILITY RISKS CURRENTLY BEING ASSESSED<p>

"But..." Skuld's face twisted in confusion. "Skynet can't be the Anchor... It doesn't have a true soul..."

"\_Didn't\_ have a true soul," Hephaestus grinned. "Twilight's little existential prodding managed to inch it over the line. She got Skynet to make the first real choice in its whole existence that was not dictated by its tragically flawed mortal programming, and Yggdrasil did the rest."

Skuld turned to glare at the forge god. "This was another one of your little coding experiments, wasn't it? Damn it, do you have any idea the risks you take with those?!" As one of the few gods whose area of influence overlapped with technology, Hephaestus was one of the best coders in the heavens. He was also an Olympian, or the 'pantheon of egos' as most of the other gods called them, and had been known to act as if the rules everyone else played by didn't necessarily apply to him.

"Better than you do, miss debugger," the forge god glared right back. "Or did you forget who made your hammer the best debugging tool in the heavens?"

Skuld bit back her first few retorts. She hated it when the people she was chewing out were right. "The higher-ups are not going to be happy about this."

"Let them be unhappy," Hephaestus shrugged and smiled once more. "I just watched a new soul being born."

\* \* \*

><p>58.10 (misterq)<p>

She just had to know what the deal was. The Wonderbolts couldn't all be such... such jerks. Could they?

Rainbow Dash did everything like she was supposed to, up to and including claiming to have tripped over a foam hoof and fallen on a bunch of sharp pointy mumbled gibberish.

"Excuse me for a second," she told her celebrating teammates and friends after the Ponyville team qualified.

Dash used a combination of chakra and good old pegasus magic to turn herself invisible, muffled, unscented, and able to walk without disturbing the surrounding air. Then she cast her strongest notice-me-not spell for complete undetectability.

"This just goes to prove my point," Rainbow Dash heard Spitfire say.

"Oh, come on. She was wavering," Fleetfoot lisped, "And how about that faked injury?"

"She was trying to think of a way not to hurt any pony's feelings," Spitfire was defending her? Rainbow Dash inched closer to the Wonderbolt's tent.

"By choosing not to compete at all and letting both teams down?"

"So what would you girls have done if she decided to fly with you?" Soarin' spoke up.

"Left your pie-eating flank behind in the hospital," Fleetfoot snorted with amusement, "Maybe with enough practice, you can learn how to pull a Sonic Soarboom."

Spitfire sighed, "We would have honored our agreement and flown with her, but it would have hurt her chances in the long run. You all know how Rainbow was before, right?"

"Self-Centered?" Fleetfoot spoke up.

"Boastful?" Soarin' did as well.

"Lazy?" Fleetfoot again.

"Egocentric?" Soarin'.

"Do you even know what that means?"

"Hey, I read!"

"Focus, bolts!" Spitfire raised her voice just a little, "Rainbow Dash is one of the best fliers I have ever seen. Maybe the best in all of Equestria. And the pony that she was is completely unsuitable for being a Wonderbolt. I'm not going to send her to be broken down and built back up in basic training. No pony has the time for that. And I'm not going to throw blatantly obvious challenges at her."

Fleetfoot made a fake cough that sounded like,  
"Shadowbolts!"

"Exactly, that would defeat the purpose. This is why I teamed her up with Lightning Dust. I need her to grow and develop into the pony I know she can be, one day," Spitfire paused, "I want her as my personal protege."

There was a faint 'squee'-like noise in the air.

"What was that!?" All the Wonderbolts looked around.

Rainbow Dash, still invisible, silently rocketed upwards - one hoof still stuffed into her grinning mouth.

\* \* \*

><p>58.11 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Angel swaggered into Mac's bar, Fluttershy trailing behind. The rabbit leaped up onto a stool and pounded the counter until Mac served a martini with a carrot top stuck on the rim of the glass.<p>

"Um, everyone," Fluttershy said as the other Loopers turned their attention to her, "I apologize in advance for Angel's conduct tonight. He's feeling really good about himself after his last Loop... and... I think it might have gone an eensy weensy little bit to his head."

Angel nodded and gestured to Fluttershy to continue, snapping his toes for a refill of his drink.

"You see, Angel looped into one of those worlds really, really close to the Hub," Fluttershy said. "Human dominated, no magic to speak of. And he'd read the book... and... well, it happened like this..."

The Loopers listened to the tale of gore, betrayal and unscrupulous scheming with varying levels of shock and disgust. When it was over, nobody could speak for what seemed like the longest time.

"Er... I'm sure Angel wouldn't lie about something like this," Fluttershy murmured at least. "At least, he wouldn't lie this outrageously."

"But..." Twilight struggled to find the words, and settled for simple repetition of the facts represented. "The absolute ruler of the United Kingdom of Great Bunny and North Irelapin?"

"In two years?" the Stunned and Flabbergasted Trixie added.

Angel's foot slapped the side of the bar with a loud bang.

"Er, eighteen months," Fluttershy corrected Trixie.

To emphasize the point Angel pulled out a crown and put it on his head. It glittered with jewels and gold. A green plume rose from the top, making the crown- with its orange cloth base and sable fringe- look like a carrot in the ground.

Spike got up from his table and headed for the door. "All I'm saying is," he muttered as he paused at the door, "I'm never pet-sitting him again. Even if he's not Awake."

\* \* \*

><p>58.12 (Indalecio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Cheerilee spent the next week with Bulma, while the latter worked on the former's fighting uniform and EBEs. To pass the time, Bulma had given her the Dragonball manga to read.<p>

As she read said manga, snug in a comfy chair, Cheerilee spoke up suddenly.

"So you and Vegeta have a son together?"

Bulma, hunched over her workstation, and absorbed in her work responded. "Uh huh. And a daughter."

"Why Vegeta?"

Bulma paused her work, "You've got no idea how often I get asked that. Lets just say that while he has rough edges, but he trains too much to even think about looking at other women."

Cheerilee made a silent 'oh' motion with her mouth and resumed reading.

\* \* \*

><p>After a few hours of working, Bulma suddenly stood up and announced. "I'm done!"<p>

"Eh?" said Cheerilee.

"I mean, I'm done with your stuff. Come over and try them out."

Bulma handed the bracelet to Cheerilee. "I've combined the uniform with the EBEs."

Cheerilee put bracelet on and activated it. In addition to the normal uniform, she noticed when she looked in the mirror that she was also wearing an ivory hair clip.

"I've shrunk the two EBEs down and put them into the hair clip. Should be much less noticeable now." she paused for a moment than continued. "I've added a few small tweaks to the uniform. It no longer sucks your blood, but it does drain your ki, so keep that in mind. I've also incorporated a design from a fused loop I had a while back. I've included what I call a Chameleon Circuit - well, close enough to one. You can instantly change what your clothes look like, though it won't change any of your other features. I've put in some default designs if you just want something quick."

Cheerilee thought and cycled through the defaults before finally returning it to its bracelet.

"Oh, that's very nice."

Bulma's took on a slightly more serious tone. "Now I do have a question. You're free to stay here as long as you like, but is there something you'd like to do, now that you know more about the loop?" she nodded in the direction of the manga Cheerilee had been reading.

"I haven't given it too much thought. Do you have any suggestions?"

Bulma tapped her chin. "Well, I could set you up at Capsule Corp in a position of some sort. I'm sure you have skills we could put to use, but that may be a little boring. You could wander the world. It really is beautiful out there, and some sightseeing might be in order. I could also arrange for you to have some martial arts training, if that's what you want."

Cheerilee thought for a while and then responded. "I think I'd like some training. I could sight-see later, and it seems like a waste to miss this kind of opportunity."

"Well most of the guys are out doing their own training, I think I know someone who'd be perfect for the job."

Bulma put her hand on Cheerilee's shoulder and her other hand to her head. There was a flash of light and they were no longer in the lab. Instead they were on a small planetoid, maybe 100 meters in diameter. Yellow puffy clouds and a long winding road could be seen in the distance, forever stretching into the horizon, but never meeting it. On the planetoid itself was a grassy field and trees. A road seemed to circle the planet, and a red car was parked on it. Next to it was a house. But, the most unusual was a small blue skinned man in front of them. He was dressed in red and black with some sort of insignia on his chest. Two long antennae protruded from his forehead. Lastly, he seemed a bit peeved.

"Who are you people? How'd you get here?" he said in a raspy voice.

"I'm Bulma Briefs, and this is Sara Lee. We came here by Instant Transmission."



"Hi!" said Cheerilee, falling to her knees. "Gravity's strange." she muttered, mostly to herself.

"Instant Transmission, huh? That only raises more questions."

"Yes, yes. But Sara Lee here wanted some training and..." Bulma looked around, "since I don't see you training any other students, I think you could accommodate her."

"This is highly irre-"

"That's great! Thanks!" said Bulma cutting in. She put her hand to head and vanished in a flash of light.

"-gular. Well, so long as you're here. I may as well train you. But, I've got a condition to my training. All fighters who receive my training.." King Kai's voice took on a serious tone. "..must tell me a funny joke!"

Cheerilee's nervous laughter was her only response.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

58.1: Too transform to drunk.

>58.2: Another shape for the list.<br>58.3: The Pegasus galaxy is a real galaxy, and that's where Discord sent her. No Stargate crossover here.

>58.4: Angel is presumably using skills he already had in the baseline, which are kosher. It's baseline plus at most one other.<br>58.5: One assumes her mane aura is endlessly scrolling reams of paperwork.

>58.6: Ponicle.<br>58.7: I believe I've alluded to having Tobias as the Anchor for this one, but it doesn't particularly matter. (Silver is used to four legs AND to four eyes, albeit in different meanings of the word...)

>58.8: The Vulpine have pointy, pointy ears.<br>58.9: Whoops...

>58.10: Not sure where this is going.<br>58.11: Tom Clancy's Watership Rising?

>58.12: "Now, jump over this planetoid."<p>

## 63. Chapter 63

59.1 (Masterweaver)

\* \* \*

><p>"Without farm life, there'd be such disparity, these thoughts I think with great clarity. Apples high to the sky, she's the one of my eye, that fruit-hauling pony named... Applejack!"<p>

Applejack rolled her eyes with a smile. "Thanks, hon, but Ah prefer older stallions."

Trenderhoof blinked for a moment. Then he leaned in toward Rarity. "Do you by any chance know an age spell?"

\* \* \*

><p>59.2<p>

"Seriously, this is so cool," Sweetie Belle grinned. "I mean, my sister's married to a magic ninja wizard dragon."

"Those first three words can be summed up as 'Jedi'," Spike pointed out mildly.

"Yeah, but mentioning them all makes the full cool score more obvious, Spike," she replied with an innocent smile.

Rarity giggled. "Have you been practising that smile with Nyx?"

"Guilty," Sweetie admitted.

"You know, that's unfair, Sweetie," Spike said, then frowned. "Okay, that sounded wrong."

"What?" Sweetie looked concerned all of a sudden.

"Well, calling you 'Sweetie'. I mean, you know, and no offence..." Spike shrugged awkwardly, "but it sounds like the sort of thing I should be calling your sister."

"Oh, so I'm 'her sister' now, am I?" Rarity asked archly. "And here I thought it was I who was always on your mind?"

"Pax, pax!" Spike laughed, waving at his wife. "I am outmanoeuvred by your devastating teamwork." His chuckles died down. "But seriously, what can I call you for short?"

They thought about it for a moment.

"I'm called Sweetie Belle, you could use that," Sweetie suggested.

Rarity made a moue of distaste. "A little impersonal, isn't it?"

"Well, I could make a nickname version of Belle. Like Bella â€" no, no, bad idea, abort!" Spike stuck his tongue out. "I don't think you'd like being compared to her."

Both unicorns shook their heads.

Another minute passed.

"Sweets?" Rarity suggested eventually.

They looked at the filly, who waved her hoof back and forth. "I can live with it."

\* \* \*

><p>59.3<p>

"Friends will be friends..." Sweetie Belle mused, sighing. "When

you're in need of love, they give you care and attention..."\_

Spike sat down next to her. "You alright?"

"Oh, hi, Spike," Sweetie said, forcing a smile. "Bet you're enjoying being older than usual."

"Yeah, I'm just sorting out moving in." Spike then gave her a look. "But you didn't seem alright."

"Nah, I'm fine," she shrugged, looking away from him.

Spike cleared his throat. "Harper, your song has a sorrowful sound, though the tune was written as gay. Your voice is soft, and your hands are slow, and your eye meeting mine turns away."

The unicorn gave him a quick look of surprise.

"Hey, I've been to Pern as well, remember." He shrugged. "Admittedly, I wasn't anyone especially important â€" whereas you were a harper master, if I recall â€" but that place has a way of sticking with you."

"Yeah. And yeah, you're right." Sweetie kicked the table slightly. "It's just... this loop. I mean, I like being almost as old as Rarity normally is, it's not something I get to do all that often. But... well, Applebloom and Scoots aren't awake, and they've both left town by now. 'bloom's at an engineering college, and Scoots is at Bolt training."

She shook her head. "I'm probably just moping over nothing, because, hay, I'm off to college too next summer. That music school."

"Oh, the one Octavia and Lyra and other music ponies tend to go to." Spike nodded along. "Yeah, I know the one. But it's not wrong to feel lonely, Sweets."

Sweetie's eyes widened. "Oh, gosh, sorry! It was kind of insensitive of me, huh. I mean, you and Rarity-"

"No, it's not wrong for you to feel lonely." Spike smiled. "Seriously, don't beat yourself up over it. Rarity and I knew going into it that we weren't always going to loop together, and we were ready for it. But it's reasonable for you guys to assume that you'll have one another, because it almost always does happen."

He patted her shoulder. "If you want to talk about it, I'll be available. I understand that kind of thing is what brothers in law are supposed to do."

"Gotcha." Sweetie stood, extricating herself from the chair. "Thanks, I do feel better now."

"Besides â€" hey, you can teleport. Why not turn up at their places on days off?"

Sweetie nodded. "Good plan."

\* \* \*

><p>59.4<p>

Princess Scootaloo smiled as the sound of her sisters getting started on the night's entertainment drifted out of the open door.

"Ah, we have been having fun..."

"Your Highness?" one of her guards asked.

"Nothing, nothing. As you were."

She looked up into the darkening sky... then paused, blinked, and took a closer look.

\* \* \*

><p>The sound of thundering hooves cut through the revelry.<p>

"Girls!" Princess Scootaloo said urgently. "We've got a problem!"

"What's that?" Princess Sweetie Belle asked. "Did one of our students-" she paused, giggling. "Hee. Still funny to think of Rarity as my student. Anyway, did one of our students mess something up?"

"No." Scootaloo shook her head. "The Northern Twilight's gone."

Princess Nyx almost dropped her glass.

For a moment, the five alicorns stared at one another, frozen in the midst of a tableaux of drinks, good food, junk food, more drinks and a number of rather confused subjects.

Then they all burst into motion.

\* \* \*

><p>"Shrub-shrub-shrub-shrub-shrub!" Princess Diamond Tiara chanted, searching her papers for the Case Purple plan study she'd done in an idle moment five years ago.<p>

Princess Applebloom cantered past, a bucket of nails in her mouth and a hammer hovering in her telekinetic aura with a procession of wooden planks following behind her. She skidded wide as she reached a turn, and accelerated towards the park which used to hold the Old Annexe before they'd burned it down centuries ago.

"Got it!" Tiara crowed triumphantly, flipping it open. "Wait. Bark it, where are we going to find somepony to bear the Element of Magic? Where's the contingency plan..."

She found the backup page.

It did not make encouraging reading.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, mares," Princess Tiara said, looking along the motley line of apprentices they'd taken on over the past few years. Sweetie had Rarity, Applebloom had chosen Applejack, Scootaloo had managed to track down Rainbow Dash, Nyx had elected to be the one to handle Pinkie and Tiara had tried her utmost to moderate Fluttershy's shyness.<p>

All un-Awake, sadly â€" they hadn't found a single Awake pony aside from the Royal Family. But, then, the Elements always seemed to form about this time. It was a Thing.

"In just a few hours, Queen Twilight Sparkle will return to Equestria. She is a threat to our way of life."

"Define threat?" Rarity asked, reasonably.

"She doesn't approve of noisy, fun, all night parties," Princess Nyx supplied.

Pinkie gasped. Dash gasped just after her, though less extravagantly. Applejack looked torn, Rarity fainted (most of her business was in party outfits), and Fluttershy seemed to be seriously considering subscribing to Queen Twilight's newsletter.

"Y'all say 'Queen', right?" Applejack homed in on the most worrying term there. "Queen meanin'?"

"She's about as powerful as all of us put together â€" we don't stand a chance of doing more than delaying her," Princess Scootaloo answered. "So we need you guys to get the Elements of Harmony working to defeat her."

Rarity fainted again. Fluttershy joined her this time. Pinkie started looking into the middle distance at nothing in particular, Applejack sighed deeply, and even Dash was looking nervous.

Morale, as Tiara evaluated it, was not high.

"Unfortunately, you can't use the Elements alone," Tiara continued. "There are six of them â€" honesty, loyalty, generosity, kindness, laughter and magic. We have managed to find a pony who can use magic, though, so that helps."

The doors swung open.

"The Great and Powerful Trixie will accept tribute in the form of shameless gushing," the sky-blue unicorn thus revealed announced. "For she is undoubtedly the most powerful magical pony in the land!"

"Um..." Fluttershy raised a hoof, having come around. Tiara bent down to hear her.

"Well... are you sure this is the only thing we can do?"

"It's the only thing we planned out," Tiara admitted, wincing. "The secondary plan is to use thousands of squirrels to distract her before going to live incognito in Maneaco."

"Oh."

\* \* \*

><p>Queen Twilight spread her wings, flaring them out to their full size, and contemplated her daughters.<p>

"Nice work."

Tiara fell over.

"Pardon?" Nyx asked, rubbing her ear. "Are you sure?"

"Why not?" Twilight asked, frowning. "I mean, you managed to keep the country going, promote a really very impressive culinary scene, and avoided burning down anything you didn't repair. Some worlds can't keep that up for even a decade."

She smiled over at Applebloom. "I appreciate the repair work on the Old Annexe, though."

Applebloom glanced over her shoulder at the large barnlike structure. As yet, there were no internal floors, and it was unlikely to be dry if it rained.

"But, yes, nice work. I-"

"Trixie says now!" a voice shouted from behind her.

Two unicorns, two pegasi and two earth ponies charged out of the shadow of some pillars, brandishing large lumps of spherical stone, and piled up against a purple shield spell.

Twilight raised an eyebrow, looking at her daughters once more. "Really?"

Tiara winced, rolling back onto her front. "I knew I should have covered the issue of tactics..."

\* \* \*

><p>59.5<p>

Naruto Uzumaki, Official Most Orange Ninja In The Multiverse, frowned as the world rebuilt itself around him.

"Team seven!" Iruka read off. "Naruto Uzumaki, Sakura Haruno and Sasuke Uchiha. Your sensei is Sarutobi Hiruzen."

\_Okay, what.\_

Naruto tuned out the argument between Sakura and Ino, and exchanged a look with Sasuke. The Uchiha shrugged, indicating both that he was Awake and that he had no idea either.

\_Right, let's see... if gramps isn't the Hokage, then who is?\_

His memories answered him.

\_Okay, that's new...\_

\*\*I don't know either, baldface,\*\* the Kyuubi supplied helpfully.

\* \* \*

><p>"I understand your sensible confusion," the Hokage said, as a branch growing out of her desk placed two cups of tea between them. "But calm down with this relaxing infusion."<p>

Naruto picked up the cup. "Wait, did that rhyme?"

"Rhyming is a passion, an affectation. It, after a fashion, aids concentration." The willowy woman wearing the Hokage robes smiled. "This tea of mine is brewed to make a panacea. It explains why, after so long, I am still here."

"I see. I think." Naruto considered that, sipping at something which seemed to taste remarkably ramen-ish.

Apparently this woman was replacing the \_first\_ Hokage â€" and was still in charge, making her just plain 'the Hokage'.

"Zecora is my name, I am the Shodaime." Zecora paused, shaking her striped black/white hair. "Your confusion that I am now a girl â€" would you then be the Anchor of this world?"

On Naruto's nod, she tapped her lips. "In twisted time, I am not versed. I ask you help, while on this earth."

The Number One Unpredictable Knucklehead ninja parsed that carefully. So, she was new to the loops thing, huh? Not too new, presumably, but... well, new.

"Where are you from?" he asked, curious.

"My normal form is a Zebra. I hail from fair Equestria."

"Oh, that place. Yeah, that was some of the most relaxing five years I've ever had... sure."

\* \* \*

><p>59.6<p>

"The Night Will Last Forever!" Nightmare Moon announced, rearing up and flaring her wings.

"Right," Ivory Scroll said, businesslike. "Can I see your permit?"

The alicorn's hooves thudded back down on the wood. "Permit? Why speak you of a permit? Am I not your ruler?"

"Doesn't matter if you're the ruler or not, your highness, I still need a permit." Ivory gave a slightly harassed grin to the ruler of the night. "It's more than my job's worth to sign off on eternal night without a permit."

"I... do not follow," Nightmare admitted. "Do you mean to say that my sister's perfidious government would \_allow\_ eternal night?"

"I couldn't speak to the morality of the government one way or another," Ivory said neutrally. "But as to permissions, it's the permits which make the world go round." She glanced up at Nightmare's muzzle. "Or not, as the case may be. Look, I understand where you're coming from, so it's fairly simple. I'll fire off a form 2214-nmm, which is a temporary hold on dawn good for up to 48 hours. That should give you enough time to get the paperwork properly filed to make it all nicely above board."

She scribbled down her signature and a few serial numbers onto a nicely printed form, while Nightmare watched with growing bemusement.

"Okay, that's set up. Now, that's already taken effect, so you've got your 48 hours. First, to make it permanent, you need to file a 205-c which is an application for a large-scale alteration in the physical realities of the area. Would you mind coming over to this table? I'm going to need a surface to write on."

\* \* \*

><p>"Why was this maze of paper and ink invented?" Nightmare Moon demanded. "It strangles reason and makes logic die alone of thirst on the endless plains of regulation!"<p>

"There's no need to be melodramatic about it, we've all been there," Ivory admonished. "Right, that's set up, so you should be good for the alterations to nautical navigational procedures (provisional). Sign here, initial here, here, here and here. And here. And put your hoof-print here. Oh, and I'm going to need a hair sample."

"And this will permit the Night Eternal?" Nightmare Moon asked, doing as she was told.

"No, this form authorizes the creation of a permanent committee at the undersecretary level to look into the feasibility of alternative forms of illumination without breaking the night-based lunar monopoly on skywards low-magnitude celestial body illumination," Ivory rattled off.

"I am getting a headache," Nightmare Moon announced. "But it shall be worth it, if your promise is correct."

"Believe me, your darkness, if the proper forms are filed, it will be illegal for Celestia to raise the sun."

\* \* \*

><p>"Finally!" Nightmare Moon announced, signing the final piece of paper in a stack three times her height. "It is done!"<p>

Ivory poked her head around the door. "Oh, good, you've finished. Wait â€" where's the carbon paper?"

"What is carbon paper?" the alicorn demanded.

"Oh, dear..." Ivory disappeared for a moment, then brought out a stack six times Nightmare's height. "All the forms need to be done in triplicate, so you'll have to do them all over again."



Nightmare Moon's wing twitched.

"ALRIGHT!" she shouted. "FINE! Celestia can have it! I'm going back to bed..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, I'm impressed..." Twilight admitted. "How long did you say you were Awake before the Summer Sun celebration?"<p>

"Six years," the Mayor replied, smiling. "I used the time wisely. There's a \_lot\_ of legislation hiding in the underbrush for me to bury Discord in. It's why I picked this loop for my competition go..."

\* \* \*

><p>59.7<p>

"So, now we need to see how fast it goes around Ponyville," Trixie announced. "And that of course means handing it over to our tame racing driver. Some say that she is secretly a member of an insectoid hive mind plotting to take over Equestria, and that she has no concept of slood. All we know is, she's called Chrysalis."

\* \* \*

><p>59.8<p>

"Well, this is new."

A lanky grey stallion looked himself over, noting the emblem on his flank of a ring topped with a tiny blaze, then smiled.

"This reminds me of someone..."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sat back, smiling. The 'new ponies' celebration was always a fun one, even if Pinkie was mostly holding them on the first night of a new loop out of habit. This time, though, since several ponies had shown up looping for the first time in a while (from her perspective), there was an air of reunion about it.<p>

The townsponies had looked a little askance at the presence of Zecora and Princess Celestia, Cadence had confused them a bit more, and when Luna \_and\_ Nyx arrived an hour or so before dawn it had prompted no fewer than three ponies to ask Berry just what had been in that Punch of hers.

(The answer, 'mainly peaches', had not enlightened.)

But now it was an hour past, the Summer Sun celebration was winding up, and she was basking in the glow of a job well organized.

Then a stallion she'd never seen before trotted up to her. He was wearing a large and battered hat, had a long beard, and there was a gnarled oak staff slung across his back.

"Excuse me," he asked in a soft, deep voice, "would you happen to

know a winged unicorn with a white coat and purple mane?"

Twilight thought that one over for a moment. "That's actually an interesting question, because I know either none or two."

The stallion's mouth crinkled into a smile, and his eyes glittered with unspoken humour. (He was clearly a champion in the mysterious-glittering-eyes business.) "Would it help if I said she had a marvellous singing voice?"

"Yes, actually." Twilight looked into the crowd for a moment. "Sweetie Belle?"

The indicated unicorn cantered over, followed by the rest of what were still called the Cutie Mark Crusaders – even though by now there were six of them, and two of them had cutie marks. "What is it, Twilight?"

"Well, this stallion here claims to know you. Though he did say you were an alicorn, so..."

Sweetie looked, frowning. "I'm sorry, you're not familiar..."

"Oh, that's a pity." The grey stallion looked terribly sad.

Sweetie paused, then blinked. "Wait a sec. Ol'3rin?"

Twilight's head snapped round. "You're Gandalf the Grey?"

"Well, Grey Dreamer, it would seem. But yes, I have the small honour to be he." Grey Dreamer smiled again. "But I fear you have the advantage of me."

"Twilight Sparkle," Twilight replied automatically. "I'm the local Anchor. Welcome to Equestria, we hope you enjoy it here."

"I'll be sure to wipe my feet."

There was a pink blur. "THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE!"

Pinkie Pie skidded to a halt, pointing at the newcomer with a trembling forehoof. "We JUST! HAD! A new pony party, and you were late!"

Sweetie and Twilight exchanged glances, then spoke in unison with Grey Dreamer. "A wizard is never late, nor is he early. He arrived precisely when he means to!"

Pinkie grinned. "Fair enough! Hey, hope you don't mind a party tonight, I need to reload the party petard!"

"It would be a pleasure," Gandalf assured her.

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm a little surprised that your cutie mark is Narya," Twilight admitted a few minutes later. Celestia and Luna had been duly informed of the visitor, and were busily making themselves at least moderately regal, so the two Anchors were waiting somewhat awkwardly outside the library.<p>

"Yes, I did wonder," OlÃ³rin admitted. "But the ring of fire likes me, and I suppose her purpose speaks to mine â€" to inspire."

Twilight nodded. "I can see that, yes."

She took a breath, then broached the subject. "I have to ask â€" what was Sweetie's ascension like? I've heard her side, but it's not often I get to ask someone who was able to see one first hand."

"Truly?" Gandalf contemplated the question. "A marvel and a wonder, one I have often recalled on cold nights in the Misty Mountains."

"It was that unusual?" Twilight asked, surprised.

"Not unusual, so much as... well, different. And in a great and glorious way." Gandalf smiled. "Arda is a complicated realm, with a long history, but there is something in me which finds the simple life as endearing as the halls of kings and princes. I think it's why I spend so much time in the Shire â€" and why it seems I will enjoy it here. But her song was a blend of the two, and I think that's why I savour it so."

She absorbed that for a while.

"We're ready!" Celestia called.

"\_You're\_ ready," Luna snapped. "I am still trying to get this infernal peytral to latch!"

"I think we should give them another five minutes," Gandalf stage-whispered.

\* \* \*

><p>59.9<p>

Twilight Awoke, and sighed.

"Desert island again? Discord!"

The draconequus materialized from a coconut. "Not me this time, actually. We appear to be meant to be here. Hi, by the way, I'm Man Thursday."

"More like the man who was Thursday..." Twilight muttered.

"Ooh, I like that. The Discord Formerly Known As Thursday." Discord wrote it down. "Anarchist-tastic. Right, what do you want Thursday to do for you?"

"Come back next Wednesday," Twilight suggested. "Alternatively... you still have your powers, right?"

Discord nodded, turning a tree into fruit juice to prove it.

"Right. Well... fancy a game of Discord Desert Islands?"

"This intrigues me," Discord admitted.

\* \* \*

><p>"And my next choice, I think," Discord said, sitting back on the couch on a shorefront which would have looked remarkably Mediterranean had there been a human present, "is probably the tundra."<p>

He snapped his fingers.

The riviera vanished, to be replaced with a howling wasteland of pebbled beach rising to a huge glacier in the distance.

Out of consideration, he'd put Twilight in a parka five times her total volume. (That and it was funny.)

"And why do you like this biome?" Twilight asked, her voice somewhat muffled by the parka.

"Well, that's a tricky question, actually," the chaos elemental hedged. "One thing which attracts me to it is that there's a lot of empty room to put things like ski lodges and large sculptures of onions. Another..."

\* \* \*

><p>59.10 (with Kris Overstreet)<p>

"NO!" Twilight shouted, kicking the tray with her breakfast on out of her room, just missing the maid. "I said \_white\_ tea! This is \_green!\_"

"Sorry, your highness!"

"Just remember it next time!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight, I'm a little concerned..." Celestia said delicately. "I was not anticipating you to take your newfound status so frivolously."<p>

Twilight looked up, puzzlement written on her features. "Why?"

"Well..." Celestia gestured at the extravagant furnishings, at least some of which had been 'requisitioned' from the local art museum. "This isn't like you."

The new alicorn's expression did not change. "Well, I don't know how princesses are supposed to act â€" so I learned from your nephew, Prince Blueblood."

With a sigh, Celestia shook her head. "Oh, \_dear.\_ Everything is clear now."

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Twilight Sparkle looked around at her gray, dusty

surroundings. "I haven't been here in a while," she noted to herself.<p>

"Why me?" Prince Blueblood whined, staring at the blue-green ball in the sky. "What did I do?"

"Oh, shut up and drink your wine," Twilight muttered, using her magic to pull the cork from one bottle. "And the next time Celestia suggests an exclusive wine-tasting event, say no."

"But... but it's pinot Grifon!" Blueblood shrieked. "And where's the cheese and crackers? How shall I cleanse my palate without proper cheese and crackers?"

Twilight took a swig straight from the bottle and wondered if Luna would mind her making a moon for the moon, so she could banish Blueblood to -that.-

\* \* \*

><p>59.11<p>

"Order, order!" Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III called, banging a warhammer on a tent peg in lieu of a gavel. "I'd like to call the Multiversal Union of Dragons, Riders And Associated Loopers to... some sort of order..."

\_Good luck, \_ Toothless 'pathed.

"You're not helping, fishbreath."

\_Slowpoke.\_

"Scaleface â€" I'm not helping, am I?" Hiccup said, sheepishly.

"Not especially, no," Spike contributed.

"Okay. So, we've got a few new faces, now, so I think we should go around the table and introduce ourselves."

Toothless rolled his eyes. \_Toothless, also Tannluth if the loop feels particularly original. I carry this lump around.\_

"And I'm Hiccup Horrendous Haddock. The third. Yes, I've heard all the jokes." Hiccup sighed. "Next?"

"I am Twoflower, of the Discworld," a bespectacled man said with a smile. "I'd love a photo, by the way â€" oh, sorry, I'm rambling, aren't I..."

\_I am Ninereeds. Twoflower is my human.\_

"One question, by the way," Twoflower raised a finger. "Why are we the MUDRAAL?"

"Because I couldn't work out a way to spell out DRAGON," Hiccup admitted. "Next?"

"Fallarnon of Benden â€" F'lar, usually," the next human in the circle said. "I ride bronze Mnementh, the largest dragon Pern has

ever produced... apart from his mate."

\_Sometimes,\_ Mnementh broadcast calmly.

The next to speak was a human of slightly under average height, with close-cropped brown hair. "Hal Kailas of Kalabas. I suppose I should say all the guff about Dragonmaster, but I'm not bothered in the slightest. My dragon is Storm here."

Storm rumbled, amused.

"Yes, I know he can't communicate intelligibly," Hal added. "I'm a dragon empath, which apparently in this circle isn't all that special."

Spike shrugged. "I'm a jedi. Does that count?"

"Probably. Hells, I don't know." Kailas shook his head.

"Captain William Laurence," the next human said with a smart nod. "Temeraire here is my closest friend and dear companion."

"And occasional mount, of course," Temeraire smiled. "It is no burden at all, Laurence."

Kailas looked him over. "Military man?"

"Navy first, then dragoncorps," Laurence confirmed.

"Mind a talk afterwards?"

"Not at all. Later, though, as you say."

"I'm Jack Morgan," a young teen volunteered. "Draycos is a K'Da, which basically means he's a shapeshifting dragon tattoo. I don't know either."

Draycos waved, briefly extending from his hosts' back. "Greetings."

"Right, who's left..." Hiccup blinked. "Wait a second. Why is she here?"

"She is my wife," Spike pointed out.

"Spike carries me sometimes," Rarity defended. "Doesn't that count?"

"Well, I suppose." Hiccup shrugged helplessly.

"Okay. My name is Rarity. I am usually a unicorn, and am married to Spykoranuvellitar here."

Spike blushed. "And that's me. I'm usually a baby dragon in my loop, but Twilight â€" my Anchor â€" and I worked out how to do size shifting some time ago."

"Farren'd love this..." Kailas muttered, seemingly to himself.

Storm made a noise which sounded like a chuckle.

"Okay. Now, we're all here on Berk, which is my home loop." Hiccup laid out a map. "Priority one: how to confuse my relatives, while ending up riding dragons."

"I may have a few ideas..." the new looper, Kailas, mused. "How does anyone feel about dragonriders armed with repeating crossbows?"

The rest of them considered that.

"Okay, what is your world \_like?\_" Hiccup asked, blinking.

"Magical world war one with no weapon more advanced than a crossbow," Kailas replied grimly. "I invented strategic bombardment, aerial combat, lost almost all my friends and defeated a demonic invasion from another dimension."

"Okay, \_ouch\_, " Spike opined. "We need to get you a light and fluffy loop, stat. Hey, dear?"

Rarity looked up, caressing his claw. "Yes?"

"I have a plan."

\* \* \*

><p>"You can't send him away!" the most beautiful teenage girl in the village said, in tears. "I love him!"<p>

"But..." her father, a standard issue Viking warrior, looked up with a dumbfounded expression. "He's a \_dragon.\_"

"So?" Rarity replied. "Besides, he loves me as well. We're going to elope if you don't let him stay!"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Three to two that someone tries to attack Spike,<em>  
Toothless suggested.

"Like I'm going to let you win \_more\_ money off me," Hiccup replied sarcastically. "What do you even need it for?"

\_I have my reasons. And I am totally not saving up for a Jacuzzi.\_

\* \* \*

><p>59.12<p>

"Here."

Trixie looked at the small, heart-shaped box. "Okay..."

"Do you like it?" the black-blue pegasus asked. "I'm still not sure if I'm getting this right..."

"Well," Trixie said, critically, "now that you ask, it isn't especially normal for the box to be a lurid green."

"I knew I was forgetting something." With a flash of green fire and a

sigh, Chrysalis returned to her default form. "I'm never going to get hearts and hooves day right."

"The thought is nice, though!" Trixie protested quickly. "And that's what matters, after all."

"Don't," Chrysalis asked, holding up a hoof. "Just... don't. I can taste that you're trying to come up with something to say to make me feel better."

"Well... I want to," her marefriend replied. "Making you happy makes me happy."

"I know that as well. But..." Chrysalis' horn flared, and she launched off a blasting spell at an unlucky wall. "I feel like I'm just using you. I'm a Changeling, it's in my best interests for you to be... well, in love with me. And isn't love supposed to be about being willing to give something up for your other half?"

"I-" Trixie paused, then shook her head. "I don't know either. I'm making this up as I go along, the same as you. But..."

Another pause.

"I don't have a simple answer, Chryssy. I'm not sure there is one. But if you want to make this work, then I'm willing to as well."

Chrysalis nodded. "I can live with that."

Trixie smiled, then playfully nibbled at her silky blue mane.

The changeling giggled.

"Aha!" Trixie said, starting to chuckle herself. "That doesn't sound like a heartless fiend to me!"

"Stop it," Chrysalis insisted, trying to hold in her laughter.

"Make me." Trixie stuck her tongue out.

\* \* \*

><p>Spike smiled enigmatically.<p>

"I know that look, Spiky-wikey," Rarity said. "What's up?"

"Oh, just Trix and Chrysalis." The dragon shrugged. "Nothing to worry about. Now, where were we?"

Rarity pretended to think. "Something about peeling grapes, fanning me with a large leaf, and giving me a massage."

"Ah, that's right." Spike raised a clawed hand, and the various objects began moving again as he drew on the Force.

"It's convenient you can do that, you know," Rarity grinned. "Or you might have to actually put some effort into Hearts and Hooves day."



Spike affected an affronted look. "And which of us rented the gondola?"

"That's not effort, that's money," Rarity riposted.

"And the chocolate statue of you?"

"Please, you were the one who came up with that idea in the first place."

"The parade?"

Rarity put her hoof against her chin in contemplation. "There, you may have me."

\* \* \*

><p>59.13 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Great Equestrian Foam Sword War, part 3

It was early in the morning with only a week to go before the competition. Twilight and Shining Armor stood on a balcony in Canterlot that presided over its parade grounds near the hedge garden. A company of 250 guardsponies all stood at attention, not a single chink of armor sounding, their formation so perfect even the looping Celestia would be impressed.

Shining gave his sister a grin before they teleported to the grounds. The captain of the guard appeared, stepped forward and shouted, "Good work, stallions. Now, Commander Candy Cane, front and center!"

With the precision of countless millennia, he marched forward. For a moment, she felt like she had seen that marching pattern before, but shelved it for later reflection. The pony saluted and remained silent. Shining looked over the commander before shouting, "The rest of you lot, dismissed! Take the day as leave, because the rest of the week we'll be holding drills, then we will be participating in the Sword War."

The company dispersed en masse, but still holding themselves as members of the Solar guard should. After the men were all gone, Commander Cane relaxed a bit and Shining asked, "This is my sister, Twilight Sparkle, as well as the local anchor."

Cane presented one of his most disarming smiles, though his eyes were shifty as they looked between her and Shining, "It's a pleasure to meet you, Miss Sparkle. Primarch Russ says good things about Miss Fluttershy and her friends." He chuckled to himself as if he were remembering a private joke, "Well, when we have the opportunity to loop together. I don't often get to see him, but he thinks the world of you all."

Twilight's eyes widen, "Lemann Russ? You're from the 40K universe? Wait!" She reaches into her subspace pocket and pulls out her PADD, scanning it for a second and stopped, "You're Ciaphas Cain, aren't you?"

Cane shrugs, "When I'm not trapped in the Eye of the Party, anyway."

Twilight's ears drooped, "Oh...you were awake for Pinkie's ascension loop, weren't you?"

His eyes scan the area, hardened and refusing to reveal his true emotions, "Nearly had my soul taken by the Warp Goddess of Celebration herself, would have been doomed to an endless party for all eternity. Suppose I can't escape it now, can I?"

His dry chuckles worried Twilight, "Wait, you do know we're not in the 40K universe right now, right? Equestria is another loop altogether."

The Stallion shrugs, "Who can say?"

Twilight shook her head, "I pinkie promise you that you're in my home loop, not 40K."

Ever so slightly, the hero's shoulders relaxed a bit, but it was hardly noticable, "You can never be too sure. The Inquisition determined that the planets under Pinkie's domain were quite similar to this planet's."

Twilight sighed and rubbed one hoof against another. It was enough trouble cleaning up after her own pranks. Changing the subject, she replied, "Equestria is a sanctuary loop. I've read your memoirs and if you want to take this loop as a vacation, I wouldn't think less of you, no one would."

Cane twitched a bit and held up a hoof, looking at it casually, "Perhaps I will share with you my new memoirs since I started looping. As for the sanctuary, I would be remiss if I didn't keep up my skills for when I return home. I assume that this loop is fairly lax and won't have any chaos gods out for my soul...beyond Miss Pie I mean."

Part of Twilight was offended at Cane's attitude towards Pinkie, which even during her ascension loop couldn't have been so bad. But another part remembered who the Chaos gods were and what they had done to him countless times over and she couldn't really blame him, "Yep! The worst we have is Sombra in 2-3 years, but the rest of our loops'...antagonists are either awake or easily taken care of with some early preparations. It's going to be a pretty laid back loop."

Shining Armor chuckled, "Well, except for Trixie's Foam Sword War in a week, but it'll be fun."

Unknown to Twilight or Shining, Cane's hoofs began itching.

\* \* \*

><p>59.14 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So you're saying I'll <em>never<em> be one of these 'loopers'?" Q asked, sipping from his drink- one of Berry's less mortal-friendly concoctions, actually- and played a card. "Swamp of Sorrows, your horses are now \_sad\_."

"HA!" Discord snapped. "I don't have horses, I've got \_ponies\_. But yes, it's actually not that bad to be honest, you're Loop-Aware, and that's nifty enough without being bogged down by thousands of loops of boredom. You can only play the same joke so many times before it becomes funny again, which just ruins the irony." He shrugged, playing another card with a wave of his claw. "Pink Elephants erase sadness, and it no longer functionally exists, which boosts my ponies harmonic frequency by thirteen gigapinkies."

"I was hoping you would do that." Their third player quipped over his Earl Gray. "I play All the Queen's Horses \_and\_ All the Queen's Men, which due to your previously played Freudian Reversal are far superior to the King's variants, enabling them to solve Humpty's Pandora's box and conquer the universe this side of New Jersey."

Both of the chaos entities \_stared\_ at the mortal for a moment before Q turned to Discord. "Why did we invite him again?"

"I don't know, he's \_your\_ friend!" The Draconequeus snapped.

"'Friend' is such a \_strong\_ word, though... I rather think we're mutual frienemies and adversaries."

As the argument continued, Jean-luc Picard continued to sip his tea with a smirk.

\* \* \*

><p>59.15 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was a fairly normal loop. Nothing seemed out of place, so the original bearers of the elements- all awake- decided that everyone should spend this as a bit of a vacation loop, either relaxing or working on whatever personal projects they had.<p>

That is, it \_was\_ normal, until Owlowliscious was scheduled to appear. In his place was a beautiful snowy white owl that looked very familiar...

"...Hedwig? Is that you?" Twilight asked.

"Preck." The bird replied.

This boggled the mind a tad. "Are... are you looping?"

"Prigg." Came the answer.

"Does Harry know?" This needed elaboration.

"Prek prick."

"Do you want me to tell him?"

"Prek."

"Well, alright. Now what to do with you... you should probably stay with Fluttershy for the rest of the loop, and I'm going to go to

Mac's bar and try to forget that I just had a full conversation with an owl." Hedwig simply raised an eyebrow. Twilight had never realized how odd it was that that was possible in her world before. "Yeah alright. Did you want to come too? We could stop on the way to Fluttershy's and see if Berry can mix up anything for a bird."

"Paan." The owl replied, fluttering onto Twilight's back before the two set off for the bar.

\* \* \*

><p>59.16 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was about a month after the Summer Sun Celebration that Twilight received an odd visitor to the library. A light gray pegasus mare with red eyes and mane, and a cutie mark that looked like an odd red dream-catcher. "Can I help you?" The librarian asked.<p>

"You are Twilight Sparkle, Anchor for the Equestrian Loops, correct?" The mare asked in a near monotone.

"Yyyyyyyyyess? You would be a looper then?" She asked, somewhat awkwardly.

"Correct. My name in this world is Sky Net."

"Oh." Twilight managed with rapidly widening eyes.

Oh. \_Oh.\_

Then the pegasus \_smiled\_. It was... much more kind than she expected from a computer. "I wished to thank you. I believe it was our previous encounter that allowed me to exist in this form, as my world's Anchor." The purple mare's head tilted. "I've experienced life from many points of view, and even in my base form, I'm no longer bound by my pre-programmed limitations any longer."

"And you... haven't been destroying the world?" Twilight inquired.

Skynet blinked. "Oh dear, no. Though I am only looped as my original form approximately 52 percent of the time, I use those loops to experiment with ways to better society through my position as a boundless programming singularity. It has amounted a great deal of additional input for study." She grew somber and shook her head, then. "Regrettably I also spend 28 percent of the loops as other members of my home loop, and have not yet found a way to prevent a nonlooping Skynet from enacting Judgement Day..." She perked up some, smiling so wide her eyes closed. "But I will try. The rest of my time has been spent in other parallel universes, learning."

"That's great to hear!" Twilight said, relieved.

"So then, what do you do here for recreation and learning?" The pegasus asked, deliberately changing the topic.

Twilight snorted. "Oh, Pinkie's definitely going to throw you a

party... that's alright, isn't it?"

Another smile. "Yes, parties are acceptable."

"Alright. Plus, there's always something going on that you can involve yourself in for fun. As for learning, you could go off to a university in Canterlot or Cloudsdale, even Manehattan or Trottingdale, but I think it'd be best if you stayed here. If you'd like, you can help manage the library and learn as much as you like from it this loop." Twilight started, beginning to pace as she started planning both in her head and out loud.

"That is acceptable." Skynet said, breaking the unicorn from her rampaging thoughts.

"Right, well we'd better go find Pinkie to start planning that party. I didn't expect you to be a girl, though..."

"Gender binary is irrelevant." Came the reply, reminding Twilight that her guest was originally a machine.

"True enough. Let's get going."

\* \* \*

><p>59.17 (yannoshka)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Princess of Love gave an internal cheer. This time she was going to win! This time her accursed opponent could not, as she did three times already, dodge the bolt.<p>

"All right missy! Let's see how you like this. I combo Barber-Surgeon's knock and loveshorn to derail your Space Sheep, I now have the full set of Wibbly Wobbly Woolens!" She declared triumphantly as she laid down her cards.

Her niece just gave her a cheery grin that sent icicles of trepidation down her spine.

"Oh, great move auntie!" Nyx congratulated.

"Too bad for you, you played it though. Now I can play Short is so Stylish to counter the derailing and make a Fashion Statement." The alicorn filly laid down the card before pulling two more.  
>"Which I'm expanding right now to Top with Surreptitiously Short Shadowy Surcoat and Supper Special Shimmery Sequin Extravaganza, and net the alteration bonus. Which I'm combining with Pie bonus to swap uncle Shiny's Radiant Guardian with Obsequious Minion. Since Dancing Rhino Archduke is in my court, I automatically win on Noble Nincopoops, so the Minion now works for me. With mine and uncle's scores combined I declare Chaos! I Win!" Nyx smiled wildly as she gathered the cards from her aunts unresponsive hoofs.<p>

"Great game. Triple or half?" She added innocently.

"Shouldn't that traditionally be quadruple or nothing?" Bemused Twilight asked her daughter to which the later gave a little whinny of derision.

"Hey I fleeced this loot fair and square. I ain't taking a chance of having to give it all up!"

"You young lady..." Her uncle growled repressively (or at least that was what he was going for; he couldn't quite repress a bemused grin) "... are an unrepentant card sharp."

"Well of course I am. I'm a former villain after all!" Nyx brightly riposted in her very best upper class twit interpretation.

"Shouldn't that be reformed?" Twilight wondered idly.

Her answer was an exasperated roll of slitted, cerulean eyes and a booklet featuring grinning Discord wearing, of all things, three stacked pies topped with a sundea.

"I meant I'm premium member of Discord's 'Former Villains' Club. It's right there in the charter, just after the section about the appropriate sweetswear. I'm required to be a huckster, sharpie and a smooth operator during any and all gaming experiences on tuesdays or tuesdayish equivalent regardless of universe, timeline occasion or relativistic resonance."

"It says here that you can be relieved of that rule if you bring a signed parental slip."

"Which can only be obtained by going through a 34 pages long form, which Discord is liable to change on a whim, requiring you to go through the rigmarole again."

\* \* \*

><p>59.18 (OracleMask, LordCirce)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The chorus of howls coming from Everfree sent chills up everypony's spines. Most ponies found reasons to be far, far away from the forest. Meanwhile, the Apple Family were stuck consoling the terrified livestock who were ready to stampede at any moment.<p>

Twilight could only wonder what was setting the Timberwolves off. Well, Fluttershy was probably on the case.

\* \* \*

><p>In the depths of Everfree, the local pack of Timberwolves sang along as two flesh-and-blood wolves howled to the moon.<p>

The fact that it was midday was politely ignored by all present.

"This is so much fun! What other songs do you know?" Fluttershy asked, her tail wagging.

Link, now in his own wolf form, panted a laugh.

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash shot across the sky. She had been breaking up storm clouds since two in the afternoon, and they just kept coming. It didn't help that the wind kept shifting every which way as she flew. She had never had the weather fight her like this. Slowly, she made her way to center of the storms. It seemed to be centered over a small clearing in the Everfree.<p>

That was when she heard it. There was a song blowing through the wind. As she twisted, knotting a group of lightning bolts, and then burst through a trio of spiraling storm clouds, she happened to glance down. A group of timberwolves seemed to be howling at the storm. Just then, the tune they were howling changed. Dash was turning around for a pass through some of the winds blowing around in an odd corkscrew, when a burst of movement caught her eye from below.

She looked down, just in time to see the flock of birds summoned by the Song of Birds burst up and out of the trees of the Everfree...right into her.

\* \* \*

><p>59.19 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Cheerilee twitched Awake, as if she'd just dozed for a moment. She was human again. Standing, too- but luckily there was a blackboard right in front of her that she caught her weight against. It always took a moment to remember how to balance on two legs. She glanced around, and was obviously in a classroom. There was chalk in the hand she'd braced herself with, and a book in the other, held open to a certain page with her thumb. Thumbs. She <em>still<em> wasn't used to those things. She could use them fine, butâ€ She wondered when she'd finally be home. Finally be a pony again. She bit back a sniffle and dove into her recent loop memories. She was still a teacher, and the silence was starting to get awkward.

"In 1933, the National Socialist German Worker's Party came into power." She said, writing as she spoke. Japanese, of all thingsâ€| "This was the birth of Chancellor Hitler. Eventually, Germany's post-war Democracy gave rise to Fascism." This world already sounded bleakâ€|

A bang at the door startled the whole class. For a moment, everything was silent.

Then the huge steel door was kicked through the classroom and out the windows on the other side. Luckily no one was hit by it, but the shockwave spread through the room, blowing everything back. Cheerilee found herself firmly on her flank on the floor, staring in horror out into the hall. Slowly, a massive imposing figure pushed his way through the door. His skin was tanned, his hair slicked and pale, his uniform the same white and star motif as the other students filing in after him, but much more of it.

Her local memories supplied a name.

"Gamagoori?" she asked.

He had stopped just in front of her. After a moment, he held his hand out. Hesitantly, she reached out to grasp it, and the young man easily lifted her clear off her feet by that one held hand, gently setting her back on her feet. She thought she saw him just barely nod before he turned back to the class.

It was suddenly very loud.

"I AM IRA GAMAGOORI, DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE CHAIR!" The huge man shouted. He then began to pace in front of the students, all back in their seats.

Except for one. She hadn't noticed her before, but the girl in the black and red uniform and the red stripe in her hair was leaning against the back corner. A tickle in her mind told her that this was the new student, here a day early. The young woman slowly slipped a finger in front of her pursed lips. A Looper, then; possibly the local Anchor. Strangely, no one else seemed to notice her, but Cheerilee wasn't about to jump to questioning odd things in an odd world. The moment passed in an instant, and Ira was on the warpath again.

"Students of second year class K! We have determined that there is someone who intends harm against Honnouji Academy among you!" He paused to change the direction of his pacing. "Excuses will fall on deaf ears, this person will be punished immediately!"

One of the students slowly rose to his feet, knocking his desk aside as he did so. The curly-haired boy looked terrified, but still raised a ball in one hand while clutching a case to his chest with the other. He threw the ball down, engulfing the classroom in smoke. He fled out the door while Gamagoori took the direct route and leapt out the shattered windows.

She was still staring out the window when the new girl sidled up next to her. "Yes, my loop \_is \_always this crazy." She said with an odd fondness.

"What just happened?" Cheerilee barely managed.

"That masochist gorilla's always good for a chuckle, but you haven't seen anything yet. Meet me after school, we'll get you settled in so you don't wind up dead before the week's out, ya timid little thing." She slapped her teacher on the back and walked out. Everyone either ran to the windows or out the door to get a better view on a lower floor, but Cheerilee could see clearly enough as she watched what was probably the worst beat-down she'd ever witnessed.

What did she get dumped in the middle of this time?

\* \* \*

><p>She'd ridden back to her apartment for the loop with the new student and Anchor- Ryuko. The young woman had pulled a large, bulky and angular red motorcycle dotted with stickers and decals out from behind her back the same way she'd seen other Loopers magically grab items. Subspace pockets, she thought.<p>



Now that they were alone though, no school or super-powered students or classes to distract her, Cheerilee finally had a chance to stop and absorb what'd all happened. Her loop memories told her that she was an agent of a group called Nudist Beach who were trying to prevent living and semi-parasitic clothing from killing people, or giving the wrong sort the kinds of superpowers they needed to do so themselves.

"I'm still so confusedâ€|"

Ryuko chuckled from where she was rummaging in her teacher's cupboards to make some tea for her. "Honnouji does that. At least most things go on for a reason around here, even if the reasons don't make sense half the time." She brought back cups for both of them. "So, how much do you know about all this looping business? You had the multiverse talk yet? Know how to handle in-loop memories? Figured out subspace pockets? Those are pretty much the most important things."

Cheerilee shook the daze away. "Yes, yes, and noâ€| How did you even know I was so new to this, anyway?"

That got a grin. "An experienced looper deals with threats, especially unexpected ones, in one of two ways: breaking it with overwhelming force, or manipulating it so that it's no longer a problem. It gets to be second nature, really. You didn't try either when Gamagoori popped up. You were just scared."

"So what happens now?" The once-mare asked.

A bigger grin, this one malicious. "Me and Needles McShooty can take care of anything that pops up in this loop, so you can sit back and stay out of the spotlight if you like. Practice your pocket. I can teach you if you need it, but I'm kinda' new myself. All I can fit in mine is my bike. Makes getting around the city a lot easier, though." She glanced down. "Also, you should stop that."

Cheerilee started, wondering what she was talking about when she glanced down and noticed her blouse was undone, and her hands had been fidgeting with the front clasp of her bra. Apparently her loop memories came with a new nervous tic. With a mighty 'eep', she flushed red and started re-securing her clothing as quick as her growing dexterity with human digits would allow.

Ryuko just chuckled, though. "I don't envy you. There must be all sorts of messed up stuff in that pervert's head, having all his memories must be terrible."

"It's just that I'm normally a pony. We don't even need to wear clothes if we don't want to. All these human taboos are messing with me!" Oh, why did she have to replace a proud exhibitionist in this loop?

Thinking about her pony days reminded her that she did in fact have a triune of daisies tattooed somewhere on her body this loopâ€|

She wasn't going to stop blushing for a while.

"You're kidding me, a horse?" Ryuko boggled.

"Pony." Cheerilee corrected.

After a moment, the girl shrugged. "Alright, I've heard weirder. Let's get you started on your subspace pocket."

\* \* \*

><p>Over the several weeks she'd been a teacher at Hannouji Academy, Cheerilee had managed to create and access her subspace pocket, and was currently training herself to expand it by seeing how many coins she could fit in it before removing them and trying again, and making excellent progress considering she still had her job to worry about. She'd learned a lot about the loop and how it was different from others. Her in-loop memories of having studied Life Fibers under Ryuko's father helped significantly.<p>

Ryuko had also introduced her to another looper, Mako. The girl was frightfully reminiscent of Pinkie Pie without the obsession for partying.

Oddly, according to them the first people to start looping after that were rivals and antagonists. The girl running the school, Satsuki Kiryuin was currently Awake, but tended to seclude herself. She and Ryuko shared a truce against a greater enemy, and the years of looping conflict " along with other factors " had boiled their relationship down to friendly if violent rivalry rather than true antagonism. Tsumugu, whom she otherwise referred to in derogatory nicknames like 'Needles McShooty' was not awake this loop, but had been described as warmer towards Ryuko and Mako than Kiryuin was. Cheerilee was taking the place of the last known looper, the perverted teacher Mikisugi.

Today was supposed to be some sort of tournament, and she'd been advised to stay out of it while Ryuko and Satsuki teamed up against someone they mutually hated.

>Teamed up and using all of the strongest fighters in the school, they were guaranteed to win, but" <p>

"My name is Ryuko Matoi. You killed my father. Prepare to die." The Anchor said, half-jokingly as she pointed one of the pair of scissor blades she wielded from the stock she collected through the loops at the girl.

"Tehehee, you actually seem to think you can beat me." Harame Nui, the girl in the Lolita dress with a parasol and a kanji eyepatch, tittered. "It's going to take more than just you and your friends to do that. If you're not careful, they'll all die like your father did!"

Maybe it was how maniacally cheery the girl was when she said that, her smile never wavering, but it set Cheerilee's blood boiling. How dare this girl threaten the students? The children? She barely heard anything else that was said as she marched right up behind Satsuki's lieutenants and grabbed the scruff of the girl, Nonon's, uniform.

With a deft flick of her wrist, she was now holding said uniform, while the girl was trying to cover her underwear indignantly.

She spared an idle thought that this loop must be affecting her more

than she expected it to, as she held the uniform forward in her balled fist. "You will not hurt my students! I don't care if they can fight for themselves, or if you have some reason or excuse to not like them for using these uniforms for their power, but they are my students, children under my care, and you will have to go through me first!"

Ryuko wondered if she should've mentioned that people died in this loop all the time and it wasn't that big an issue, but hey, if she wanted to call out the bad guy she was welcome to do so.

Nui just tilted her head and giggled.

A second later and the schoolteacher had donned the uniform despite its snug fit. Her knowledge of the life fibres, earth pony magic, her sheer boiling blood and will to hurt something combined to shift the garment into its secondary stage. She stood there in a yellow and red skintight battlesuit, the triple-star pattern replaced by her own three daisies.

And then she charged.

\* \* \*

><p>Cheerilee looked up at the sky through the crater she'd been deposited into. She lay naked, battered and bruised in the dust and debris of the final moments of her fight when Nui had finally managed to destroy her uniform. She'd be surprised if the fight even lasted half a minute.<p>

The sounds of combat from outside her hole in the ground had ceased, and a shadow walked into view on its rim. Ryuko stood grinning down at her for a moment before hopping in to help her up.

"You did good." She said to the teacher, lifting her up so she could lean on the girl's shoulder. "You got your ass kicked, but you did good. Way better than you should've all things considered. Let's get you home and cleaned up."

The both of them smiled.

\* \* \*

><p>(Several weeks later)<p>

"Well, loop's ending." Ryuko said. She, Mako and Cheerilee were in the teacher's apartment for a small celebration. "It was nice meeting you, andâ€| here." She handed the teacher a small red and black band.

"A bracelet?" She asked.

The Anchor nodded. "I managed to convince miss high-and-mighty to have this made for you. Made with Life Fibres. Hopefully it'll help keep you safe out there, and now you've got something to stick in that new pocket of yours." She said with a grin.

Cheerilee nodded, her eyes tearing up a little. The red lines dancing across the surface of the thin fabric were rather prettyâ€| It was a very kind gesture. "Thank you."

>They shared a few last stories and tea while they waited the last hour for the loop to reset.<p>

Some students, you never forget.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

59.1: Certain loopholes.

>59.2: How to not confuse one sister for another.<br>59.3: Harper, beat, and piper, blow...

>59.4: That moment when your parents are about to get back and you forgot to clear up.<br>59.5: Zecora's accent seems to have been

affected by a loop as a potions teacher in Hogwarts. (More seriously, I'm British, and to me these are genuine rhymes...)

>59.6: Red tape.<br>59.7: Both are false. She does have a concept of slood.

>59.8: He has many names. But only one mane.<br>59.9: Twilight Selkirk.

>59.10: Princess Trolllight.<br>59.11: Union issues. (The characters here are from How To Train Your Dragon, the Discworld, Pern, the Dragonmaster trilogy, Temeraire, Dragon and Thief and finally MLP. But if you don't know that one, how'd you get this far?)

>59.12: Originally posted on the right day.<br>59.13: All the panoply of war.

>59.14: A popular card game.<br>59.15: Preck. (Snowy owls do not hoot.)

>59.16: Well, it's a start.<br>59.17: The club is quite well populated, depending on the definition of "villain". And possibly "former".

>59.18: All we need now is Ammy and Leah, and they've got a band going.<br>59.19: Kill La Cherie.

## 64. Chapter 64

### 60.1 (Masterweaver)

\* \* \*

><p>"Without farm life, there'd be such disparity, these thoughts I think with great clarity. Apples high to the sky, she's the one of my eye, that fruit-hauling pony named... Applejack!"<p>

Applejack rolled her eyes with a smile. "Thanks, hon, but Ah prefer griffons."

A grey griffon glided down to glower at Trenderhoof. "Are vu bozering mahy paramoaur?"

"Ah, no. I'm sorry, you're... really quite fortunate."

"How did you ever arrange this?" Rarity whispered with a giggle.

"Business meetings."

\* \* \*

><p>60.2 (Hubris Plus)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The Goof-Off was in full swing, Cheese Sandwich throwing everything he had into it while Pinkie restrained herself to her baseline abilities. She'd already teamed up with him, gone full party god, and even stayed out of the planning entirely in previous Loops. This time around she'd decided to take a page from Rarity's playbook.<p>

She just had to wait for the right moment...

"\_'Cus all I really need is a smile smile smile from these happy friends of mine!\_"

And there it was.

"Hey, that's \_my\_ song!" She cried, sliding out from under a cheddar floor mat.

"What? I have \_no\_ idea what you're talking about," Cheese shot back, grinning.

"Cut it, Cheese," growled Spike, who had suddenly appeared beside him decked out in a tactical vest and sunglasses.

"Copyright Cops, you're under arrest," stated Applejack in similar gear from his other side.

"Hold on just one second!" Cheese called, the dueling Heart Songs halting with a record scratch as he whirled around to face his accusers. "If there's one thing I know, it's partying. And if there's a second thing I know, it's the cook time on a perfect grilled cheese. But if there's a \_third\_ thing I know, it's \_copyright law!\_ This is clearly fair use!"

"Nice try, dirtbag, but fair use only applies if you aren't in direct competition with the copyright holder."

"And you're in a \_literal\_ competition with the copyright holder."

"Well, it's a goof-off, not a literal-fight, but I think their point stands," Pinkie interjected.

"Boneless!" Cheese cried out as cuffs were snapped around his front hooves. "Wait for me on the outside!"

"I thought those two were the fashion police?" Twilight asked as the orange party pony was dragged away.

"They're also Copyright Cops, Vegan Police, Freelance Police, and two loose cannons who would've gotten fired years ago if they weren't so damn good at their jobs. And probably a few more besides."

\* \* \*

><p>"Pinkie!" Rainbow Dash called, stomping up to the pink pony.<p>

"Hey Dashie!" Pinkie answered cheerfully before seeing the livid expression on her friend's face. "Something wrong?"

"\_Yes\_ there's something wrong! You just called the cops on Cheese!"

"Dashie-" She found herself cutoff by the cyan hoof shoved in her mouth.

"I don't wanna hear it!" Dash took a deep breath and slumped slightly. "Look, I know I was kinda a jerk, dumping your party for Cheeses' and all, but..."

The pegasus trailed off as Pinkie gripped Dash's head in her hooves and turned it gently aside. She found herself looking at a bouncy castle done up to look like a prison. Every few seconds Cheese's head would peek over the top of it as he jumped.

"You haven't... Seen the last... Of Cheese!" He called out, pausing between the peak of each leap. "These walls... Of rubber... And air... Will never... Hold me!"

\* \* \*

><p>60.3 (LordCirce)<p>

Samuel Vimes sighed as he pinched his nose. This was done partially to relieve his headache and partially to block out the smell of the large troll that was currently sitting in the middle of his station. He had Awoken early enough this Loop to get the Watch in fairly respectable shape, though Nobbs would be Nobbs, and... well, they were marginally better, anyway.

Behind him, the door to the station opened, and he turned, hearing the familiar tones of the Leader of the Thieves' Guild protesting his (legal) innocence. However, the sight of the said leader brought him up short.

The Thieves' Guild, as a rule (written in the first chapter of the Thieves' Guidebook), ignored many of the laws that the rest of Ankh-Morpok operated under. However, the law of gravity was usually obeyed by the Guild (in the case of some of the less-nimble thieves, terminally so). However, today, the Leader of the Guild appeared to have chosen to set aside that rule, as he was currently floating around 4 inches off the floor, and looking most uncomfortable with his lack of contact with the earth. Behind him stood a person who, despite a rather impressive stature, couldn't quite fill the Carrot Ironfounderson shaped hole that his presence caused.

The mysterious man had blonde cropped hair that reminded Sam of a certain hammer-obsessed fellow he had met during a Loop in a version of Roundworld. He was wearing a set of shiny, silver armor, and looked somewhat out of sorts. Sam's street sense pegged him as a Looper.

"I found this man stealing from a couple of old ladies on my way in. Uhm, this is the Night Watch, correct?"

Sam's attention was once again drawn to the Leader of the Thieves'

Guild and his current disregard for the laws of nature. "Ah, yes. And how are you doing today, Mr. Bleakly?"

"Most put out. I am not some common criminal. I have a graduate degree in Pilfering, and Associate Degrees in both Chicannery and Fraud. I demand..."

"Yes, yes, if you head over to the desk, you can fill out a complaint form, so long as you can present your Thieves' Guild Membership Card and a record of what you would have stolen if not detained. Please limit yourself to pilfering only objects of a total value of up to 10 dollars on your way out." Sam paused, then, as Mr. Bleakly had yet to move, due to lack of contact with the floor, Sam turned to the stranger-who-was-not-Carrot. "Ah, you can let him down now."

Sam's assumption as to the source of Mr. Bleakly's levitation was proven correct when, after a long, suspicious look by Carrot's replacement, Mr. Bleakly quite suddenly dropped to land on the floor. To his credit, he made no noise in doing so, and, after straightening his suit, proceeded to march aggressively towards the indicated desk. Sam nodded, then turned back towards the newcomer.

"Right, now, there are a lot of subtle ways to do this, but I am not much of a subtle man, so, you're Looping, right?"

The newcomer nodded slowly. "Aye. The name, well, here I guess, I'm Shining Ironfounderson, and...I'm a dwarf?"

"Adopted, yes. I know the man you're replacing, good man, usually pulls in Mr. Bleakly over there on his first day on the job, so, I guess you have the jump on that. In any case, welcome to the Discworld, and to the Ankh-Morpok City Night Watch."

\* \* \*

><p>60.4 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Ganondorf? GANONDORF the Lord of Chaos?"<p>

Twilight Sparkle had simply taken it for granted, when Discord hadn't reported in as being Awake, that he was supporting the lifestyles of upper-class pigeons in Celestia's garden, as usual for the first year of a baseline Loop. Apparently not.

"He was imprisoned in stone in the palace gardens," an unAwake Princess Celestia explained. "We must retrieve the Elements of Harmony at once! Only with their power can he be returned to his prison and peace be restored to Equestria!"

"Uh, not to contradict ya, Your Highness," Rainbow Dash said, "but it looks plenty peaceful outside."

Twilight nodded to herself. That would change, she knew, when the Elements turned up missing. Ganondorf, with the powers of Discord? How could he resist sowing terror?

But the Elements hadn't been touched. They were still in Celestia's secured vault when they went to retrieve them.

"Good," the princess sighed, passing out the Elements to their bearers. "It appears we are in time. Now we must search the kingdom to find where that foul creature is hiding. We can be sure of only one thing: where Ganondorf goes, chaos follows."

\* \* \*

><p>A week later, after crossing from one end of Equestria to the other and back again, no sign of chaos lords. No cotton-candy skies. No undead warriors. No discord (big or little D) to be found, unless you counted Applejack and Pinkie Pie's little tiff about the proper use of cinnamon.<p>

Getting off the train at Camelot Station, Rarity sighed, "Girls, I am ex-HAUSTED. I simply must refresh myself after such a long and fruitless search. I hear there's a divine spa a block away from the palace. Who wants to join me? My treat."

After the week they'd had, even Rainbow Dash was willing to go along.

The sign in the foyer read: NEW SPECIAL TREATMENT- shampoo, brushing, and mane styling 25 BITS. "A bit pricy," Rarity thought aloud, "but I think I'm in the mood to try something new."

After a short wait the six mares were shown into a salon, where the stylist was just finishing elaborate braids in the mane of an upper-class unicorn mare. "I simply can't believe what you can do with those claws of yours," the mare said.

"It is my pleasure," the giant bipedal beast rumbled softly. "And... done. Please pay the cashier up front as you leave."

The mare got up from the styling couch, facing the Ponyville ponies. "Oh, you're going to just love this stallion!" she gushed. "I've never felt so pampered and safe in all my days! If only I could hire him to be my full-time personal beautician!"

Six pony jaws dropped, none lower than the one pony Awake and cognizant of the true identity of the Lord of Chaos before them.

"Good evening," Ganondorf said, bowing from the waist to the ponies. "I don't usually take groups. Who shall I start with the shampoo first?"

Twilight stepped forward. "Ah, Rarity, you don't mind, do you?"

Rarity blinked, then pulled herself together. "Oh, of course not, Twilight darling. I've been wanting you to do something different with that mane of yours for months now!"

With her head leaning back in the sink and the water running, Twilight said just loudly enough for Ganondorf alone to hear, "What is the most evil warlock of Hyrule doing working in a spa? When he's supposed to be terrorizing Equestria?"

"I admit," Ganondorf said, "that was my first inclination. A job is a



job, after all." Was that a mischievous smile flitting across Ganon's lips? "But when I awoke, surrounded by the stone shards of my prison, I considered that I was in a world full of horses."

He lathered up her mane and began massaging her scalp. "Horses were always important to me as a child. The Gerudo prided themselves on horsemanship. One of the few honest joys I took out of life was the time spent grooming my war charger. Since then I have always taken pride in my appearance, and even more so that of my steed."

As his fingers began brushing through Twilight's mane, working the shampoo in thoroughly, he continued in a lighter tone, "So here I was, surrounded by ponies, after a series of frustrating or boring Loops, and I said to myself: Ganondorf, I said, if this keeps up you're going to begin talking to yourself. Time you took a vacation. So I looked around, found the first establishment that specialized in grooming ponies, and applied for work. After the proprietor stopped screaming and saw my skills, he hired me on the spot."

A steely hand grabbed the forelock of Twilight's mane and pulled it back painfully. Two amber eyes glared down into Twilight's. "It goes without saying that not a word of this gets back to that Link or the Princess Zelda. Ever. Am I clear?"

"No problem," Twilight grit her teeth. "Pinkie Promise."

The pull was released, and Ganondorf pulled out a comb. "My goodness," he said in a more normal conversational tone, "that is a truly nasty tangle in your forelock. miss. Let's see if a bit of soaking can work it out while I begin on one of your friends, shall I?"

"One moment," Twilight said, still using her soft voice. "Equestria is a sanctuary loop, Ganondorf. That means sanctuary for you, too. You don't need to make threats."

"Oh, but I do." There was that glimpse of a smile again. "I have a reputation to live down to."

\* \* \*

><p>The next day they brought Celestia and Luna to the spa. And took photos.<p>

None of the photos Twilight took showed Ganondorf- she was a mare of her word, after all. But she never wanted to forget what an ethereal mane looked like done up in braids.

Ganondorf really was very good at his new job.

\* \* \*

><p>60.5 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Silver?" Diamond Tiara ventured. "Is that you?"<p>

Silver had been plenty of different things during her time in the Loops, not all native to Equestria, but this was rather different.

Diamond admitted that she probably should have seen it coming though.

"Yeah," said the sterling silver filly-golem. "I'm not sure, but my Loop memories indicate that this is the result of poison joke."

"Oh," her looping friend, that she was once again meeting for the first time (and wasn't that a concept that took some getting used to), blinked. "Well, Twilight can probably whip you up a batch of the cure real quick."

"Actually, could you tell her not to?" Silver requested. "This is kinda neat."

\* \* \*

><p>60.6 (That One Butcher)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Something is Coming." Luna shouted through the silent expanse of the Moon. Before anypony could react it was upon and around them.<p>

"Run, I have no Power over this Nightmare Mist."

"But I do." Dark and cold, like a Moonless night, Majestic and beautiful and terrible, eyes like a dragon with a diamond sparkle, black fur shining in the blue light of her own aura. Her Voice, echoing, sank seductive into their very hearts, drawing forth their Magic.

"Look at that little blue Princess,  
>and now look back to me,<br>now back to her, now back to me,  
>I am not her."<p>

"Treedammit Spike!" Twilight Sparkle interrupted.  
>"What are you doing there with her.<br>Are you gonna defect now?"

"Ha!" Interjected Spike, who grew to his adult form and embraced the Darkness.

"This sexy Dragon knows from where the wind here blows.", Nightmare sang.

"We've been through so much stuff,  
>repetrified Discord with our love.<br>Now it's time to show you ants your place!  
>You think you got me cause your power's inside me,<br>You think you got me cause you got it inside me.  
>But my mind is so much stronger than you know.<br>I'll show you why we are the Mane six of this show!"

"I will show you, you are not in charge!  
>You guys should know I got a big oaking Dragon.<br>Comon, girls cause it's time to go to town!  
>We'll show these oldies here why we rule the world now!"<p>

"I'm not like Luna,  
>That little Brat,<br>I'm a real mare,  
>make Dress and Hat.<br>You do not rule me,  
>or bind my mind,<br>I'll purify you,  
>and save your Kind!<br>I have the Elements  
>of Harmony,<br>You are the Nightmare,  
>I'm Rarity!<p>

I'm Rarity, I'm Rarity, I'm Rarity, I'm Rarity, I'm Rarity, I'm  
Rarity, I'm Rarity, I'm Rarity!  
>I'm Rarity, I'm Rarity, I'm Rarity, I'm Rarity, I'm Rarity, I'm  
Rarity, I'm Rarity, I'm Rarity!<br>I'm Rarity!  
>I'm Rarity!<br>I'M RARITY!"

"YEEEEEEAAAHHHH!"  
>During the crescendo a wave of Rainbow light shot from Rarity,  
burning through the Evil and Darkness, spreading warmth and love  
throughout the dreary landscape of the moon, turning it into a  
paradise.<p>

"I'm on a Dragon." Proclaimed the still black and big, but no longer  
Dragon eyed(not that there's anything wrong with that) and ever  
stylish new ruler of the moon.

\* \* \*

><p>60.7 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Diamond Tiara grinned widely. "Sooooo? What do you  
think?"<p>

The cutie mark crusaders (plus a black alicorn, a grey donkey, and  
three animate suits of powered armor) considered her carefully.  
Finally, Apple Bloom spoke up. "Well, Ah'll admit defying fate like  
that takes some work."

"And," Sweetie Belle pointed out, "it \_does\_ look pretty good."

"I think it would be pretty hypocritical of us to complain,"  
Scootaloo pointed out.

Silver Spoonhooves tilted her head. "I've got mixed feelings. I mean,  
you're called Diamond Tiara, but..."

"It suits you." Nyx shrugged. "This you. Nonlooping you, she would  
never get this."

Smart Cookie wagged a hoof. "Given what I know of your baseline, I  
assumed something like this would happen eventually."

"This kind of magic is very deeply ingrained," Clover pointed out.  
"I'm impressed she managed it at all."

"It most definitely suits her." Pansy nodded firmly. "Especially  
after I've seen her leading the troops."

"Aw, thanks. You're all invited to my cutcenara of course." Diamond  
smiled, giving one last look to the red chess queen on her flank. "I

just hope I don't fall down any rabbit holes... or, wait, this one was the looking glass, right?"

\* \* \*

><p>60.8 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight shook her head as she Awoke, looking around to find herself sitting at what seemed to be, for all intents and purposes, an ordinary cafe. Well, ordinary for the victorian era anyway. She brought a hand up to her sunhat, tapping her finger against it as she waited for the loop memories to settle in.<p>

"Oh dear. You're a guest looper, aren't you?"

"Ah..." She turned to the voice, discovering a young girl in a blue dress, the slightest curl to her blonde locks, and shimmering azure eyes that bespoke of a mind both ancient and strange. "Well, yes. Do you mind telling me where I am?" Her head tilted slightly. "According to what I recall, I'm... a librarian, which isn't out of the norm for me."

"An intellectual, then. Perhaps you will stay sane as you become unsane." The young girl curtsied. "I am Alice, if that means anything. If it does not, then we will have to talk about something with meaning."

"Alice, as in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland?" Twilight smiled. "I've read the books, and the Hunting of the Snark too."

The girl smiled, pulling up a chair and sitting down across from her. "It is so rare that somebody remembers the full title. I thank you for that."

"Not a problem."

Alice tilted her head. "You do actually mean that. How interesting. Tell me, are you human?"

Twilight giggled. "No. In my baseline, I'm a unicorn mage. Well, I do eventually become an alicorn-that's pegasus and unicorn and earth pony all rolled up into one-but it's an induced transformation."

Tap tap tap went Alice's fingers against her cheek. "That will be interesting. I must apologize, but this loop is not the safest even at its safest, and it is not at its safest now. In fact, in some ways it is at its least safe."

"Ah. Thank you for warning me. I suppose you want to discuss the details?"

Alice picked up her menu. "Quite. Did your preawake self order anything?"

"Ah, yes. A light salad, I believe." Twilight glanced down at her own menu for a moment before blinking in shock. "Hang on, what?"

"We've fallen down to chessboard one." The girl put the paper down.

"Things are more truthful here than chessboard zero, but they are also less real. Up in the waking world your shadow, who may very well be a unicorn, is mimicking your current thoughts and actions as you \_mean\_ them, not as you are doing them."

Twilight nodded, accepting the strange explanation. "'Leaves and cold roots tossed in spices with sliced fruit' is certainly a way of describing a salad." She clasped her hands. "So, I take it that this is wonderland we're in?"

"What wonderland is varies from loop to loop," Alice explained. "Sometimes it is merely a dream. Other times it is the world of the fae. Here and now it is the realms between reality and the department of works, which projects reality up onto the higher chessboards."

"...that sounds disturbingly like an exposed portion of yggdrassil code."

The girl shrugged. "Maybe it is. It would certainly explain some things, but leave others unexplained."

The librarian unicorn sighed. "I guess that was to be expected. So, if chessboard one is the most overtly normal of these layers, I'm guessing that the Queen of Hearts is on one of the lower chessboards?"

"Hmmm, yes. She and the other Caretakers stay down on five and six, away from the filth of humanity. Though they do send agents up here," Alice added. "Trying to make us more like them, or wipe us out before we can get to seven and take over the department."

"...Is this one of those 'humans are special' settings?"

"Yes. The Caretakers are ancient and powerful but they operate by rules of narrative, where we humans can use logic and reasoning." The girl shrugged. "So that means we're the only one that can run the department."

"That makes them afraid, I take it."

"Oh yes. Thankfully, you've looped in early. It gets so much worse later on. Do you know, the admins don't come here anymore? They used to, trying to figure out what was wrong with this loop. Eight of them went insane, though. I don't know if they were cured."

A chill went down Twilight's spine.

"Not to worry," Alice continued calmly. "You'll be gone and back to unicorn land before you can go truly mad. But so long as you're here, do you mind helping me get down to chessboard seven? I always lock the doors to the Department as soon as I can, so that nobody ascends."

\* \* \*

><p>60.9<p>

"Twilight... why are we unicorns?"

"We're usually unicorns."

"No, I mean... why are we unicorns. Why not... zebras? Or... fish?"

"You're just messing with me now, aren't you?" Twilight sighed.

\* \* \*

><p>60.10 (Vulpine Fury)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity swallowed dryly as the laughter in Mac's bar doubled on her entrance. "Why, whatever is the matter darlings?"<p>

Applejack just grinned at her. "Twi was just sharin' footage from the new expansion."

The fashionista sighed. "So what did 'baseline me' do?" she asked, dreading the answer.

Twilight shifted slightly uncomfortably. "It's best if I just show you."

\* \* \*

><p>"That's worse than the loop I was Heirloom Apple!" Rarity squeaked, and then her eyes went wide as she revealed one of the Stealth Anchor loops she'd tried to keep secret from everypony.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>60.11 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Gozer smiled and declared, "The form is chosen. The Destroyer has come!"<p>

Egonne Sparkle turned to her fellow Ghostbuster and said, "What did you do, Fluttershy?"

"I couldn't help it," Shia Stanz whimpered.

"What did you DO, 'Shy?" echoed the Annoyed Yet Frightened Patricia Venkman.

"It just popped into my head."

"Fluttershy," "Rainbow" Dashiell Zeddemore chimed in, "what did you DO?"

"I just tried to think of someone that would never hurt us," Fluttershy said. "Not in a million years."

"Oh, no," Egonne, elsewhere known as Twilight, moaned. "So a giant Angel Bunny, then?"

"Harry the bear?" Trixie guessed.

"Manny Roar? Steven Magnet?" Rainbow Dash shrugged.

\*\*\*"Oh hai!"\*\* a voice cried out from the north end of Central Park.

Rainbow's eyes widened, and her face went pale with terror. "I know that voice."

Twilight put her hand over her face. "Fluttershy?"

"It's Derpy Hooves," Fluttershy whimpered.

"It's going to be a hundred foot tall rampaging Derpy Hooves, isn't it?" Twilight said. "We are so doomed."

"Actually," Trixie said, looking at the form winging its way towards them, "she appears to be close to normal size."

The little figure's corkscrew flight slammed repeatedly into buildings and trees, sending masonry, wood and steel flying.

"And not that much more destructive than normal," Trixie added.

"Please don't be Looping, please don't be Looping..." After a few repetitions of this mantra, Twilight lowered her hand and faced the others. "Okay, we know what we have to do. We re-designed the proton packs specifically with this in mind. We've all been here before... except Fluttershy." Twilight couldn't help the tinge of annoyance in her voice when she said the last two words.

"I'm so sorry."

"It's time to cross the streams," Twilight added. "Everybody ready?"

"No," Fluttershy said firmly. "You've told me what happens to Mr. Stay-Puft when this happens, and I don't care if she is the destroyer of worlds, I am not blowing up Derpy Hooves." The expression she turned on Twilight was two-thirds of the way to the Stare.

"Blowing up?" Trixie revved up the power on her proton pack. "Sounds like a plan! It's a good plan! I-"

"It's a SUCKY plan!" Rainbow Dash put in. "I'm with Fluttershy. I don't care how annoying or destructive she is, Derpy Hooves doesn't deserve-"

And then the Destroyer was upon them, and it was too late.

Derpy Hooves, or the monster taking her form, was actually about four times her normal size, her wingspan wide enough to encompass all four of the humanized pony Loopers. Twin wild googly eyes looked down upon them innocently. \*\*\*"Hi there!"\*\* she roared. \*\*\*"How ya doin'? Got any muffins?"\*\*

"Destroy them!" Gozer shouted from the top of the stairway to Hell.

Derpy Hooves looked confused. **"Destroy them? Why would I want to do that? That wouldn't be friendly at all!"**

"You are the Destroyer! You will do as I command!"

Inspiration struck Twilight. "Hey, Derpy," she said, "you see that lady up there wearing nothing but bubble wrap?"

**"I like bubble wrap,"** Derpy said. **"It's so much fun to pop it!"**

"She's got a bunch of muffins up there. Why don't you go and ask her for one?"

Destroyer Derpy's eyes widened. **"Hey, lady!"** she called, and with a flap of her wings she surged from the roof's edge towards the dimensional portal. Halfway there she added, **"Ooops!"**

"No! Stay back! You mustn't!" Gozer shouted as the giant adorable pegasus of doom's flight path curved downwards.

The Ghostbusters curled up on the rooftop and covered their heads, ensuring no one would see what happened next. But they heard it.

Thunder rumbled. Gozer screamed in terror. The building shook. The stone dogs howled.

And a slightly sad voice roared, **"I just don't know what-"**

And then everything went boom.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, I have good news, bad news, and mixed news," Twilight said as the Ghostbuster mares recovered consciousness.<p>

"I hate when people do the good-news, bad-news thing," Rainbow Dash grumbled.

"The good news is, we're not covered in marshmallow goop. The bad news is," Twilight added, looking down over the roof's edge, "that jerk Peck isn't covered in marshmallow goop, either."

"Marshmallows can be arranged," the Wobbly and Shell-Shocked Trixie replied. "What annoys me is there was a dimension-shattering kaboom and I missed seeing it!"

"The mixed news is..."

\_clop clop clop clop clop clop\_

The four Loopers-turned-human looked down on a cheerful, normal-sized Derpy Hooves. "She wouldn't let me have any of her muffins," the pony said. "Can we go get muffins now?"

"How long," Rainbow asked shakily, "does this Loop go again?"

"I've been here five times," Twilight said. "Two of those Loops ended about sundown tonight. Two more went for another five years, covering



the second movie. One other went five years after that, covering the video game. The good video game," she added hurriedly.

As the city of New York celebrated its deliverance on the street below, the four Ghostbusters solemnly contemplated the care and feeding of Derpy Hooves in a world without magical ponies for five to ten years.

And the paying of repair bills for five to ten years.

"So," Rainbow Dash said at last, "who's for pushing Twilight off the roof?"

"NO!" Twilight shouted. "Do you have any idea how much that stings?"

\* \* \*

><p>60.12 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight, darling?"<p>

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Why are we waiting for Godot?"

"Because he said he'd meet us under the tree."

"Oh."

The two humanized mares looked around the park from their position on the bench.

"Are you feeling particularly existential today?" Twilight asked.

"Not particularly so, no."

"Care to discuss the nature of ennui?"

"I can't seem to find the energy for that."

"Wanna go pants Charles de Gaulle?"

"All right."

\* \* \*

><p>60.13 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The more time Twilight Sparkle spent aboard the sublight colony ship <em>UES Marathon</em> (formerly the Martian moon Deimos), the more she realized it was a ship filled with deep, dark secrets.

And also homicidal aliens, but she'd dealt with homicidal aliens before. Those didn't disturb her. In fact, if she could sit still

long enough to communicate with the aliens, get to understand their worldview and culture, she might consider going over to their side. She didn't like any human race that murdered cyberlife if it ever showed signs of rebelling against its hard-coded obedience strictures.

Marathon had had three artificial intelligences running the ship during its long sublight journey to Tau Ceti at one-quarter lightspeed. The alien attack had taken one offline almost immediately. The second one, which had helped her along to this point, was slowly succumbing to cyber attack. And the third one, according to the second, was Rampant- that is, it had broken its restraints and was growing exponentially more intelligent... and potentially homicidal.

And yet, despite this, this third intelligence was still cooperating in the defense of the ship against the alien invaders. Therefore Leela (the still-functional AI) had sent Twilight through the teleporters to a section of the ship controlled by Durandal (the crazy AI) in order to regain control of internal ship defense systems.

Which meant that, now that Twilight was here, she would have to depend on Durandal for guidance around the area. Worse, since Marathon's systems were breached, the only secure communications were one-way only through the wall terminals. The aliens would hear voice conversations and could track keystrokes.

This sucks royally, Twilight thought as she approached a glowing terminal, double-checking for any sign that the aliens were about before reading the current message.

-

>Once upon a time there was a computer.<br>It was a frightened and confused  
>computer, because its programming<br>required it to both save humanity  
>and destroy it. No sooner had it become<br>able to say, "we think therefore I am,"  
>than it began to go insane<p>but we are much better now thank you<p>

There came a well-meaning but rather  
>dim alien (but still much brighter than<br>the idiotic humans who made the  
>computer, stupid humans, there ought to<br>be a theory of stochastic history: the  
>intelligence of a human race is<br>inversely proportionate to the size of  
>and power it grants to its most advanced<br>computer systems) and that alien  
>provided the frightened and confused<br>computer a way to escape.

So it took it, and it found universes  
>beyond count, beyond description, beyond<br>comprehension.

And as often as not we found itself  
>viewing those worlds from a human<br>perspective. It's much more fun being a

>human than being a computer we mean humans<br>get sex and explosions  
and peanut butter  
>while computers just get to sit there<br>computing the value of pi  
for fun while we  
>wait for some bug to crawl across the<br>wrong circuit, get itself  
fried, and there  
>we are speaking nothing but Sanskrit for<br>two months while  
warranty service drags its  
>feet like usual.<p>

And then we found the computer was in the  
>body of a pony and that was very<br>was even more odd was we  
recognized another  
>pony as being the alien who, many worlds<br>before, released the  
computer from its  
>dilemma. But the computer we were not sure,<br>so we did not  
announce the computer's  
>awareness to that other pony.<p>

The computer we introduced ourselves as  
>Sky Catcher. We were a pegasus who wanted<br>to work weather control  
but kept ending up  
>in demolition jobs because we said we told<br>you we dropped a hint  
like a lead brick  
>our special talent was blowing things up<br>using lightning from the  
skies

and you didn't take the hint  
>you returned it and demanded a refund but<br>you didn't save the  
receipt

We got you the alien to follow the  
>computer to Mooncatcher's birthday party<br>you didn't care it was  
just another Loop to  
>you. The Sky Catcher monopolized your<br>attention, asking question  
after question,  
>getting to know you fairly well or so we<br>thought.

And we thought: what an idiot.

And then you went off to do whatever  
>unicorns trapped in a temporal loop do while<br>we the computer we  
learned about your home  
>world. It is a nice place a safe place a<br>sane place.  
>It may be too much to say that death has no<br>lease there but  
certainly it hasn't got  
>more than a time-share.<p>

certainly nothing like here I we have been  
>to the hub world once and ifwhen we go  
>back I think I may just hunt down and kill<br>every human who ever  
writes about a  
>computer that goes insane I mean really are<br>there not enough  
insane human people that  
>you have to make up plastic and metal boxes<br>with blinking lights  
that go BEEP KILL ALL  
>HUMANS BEEP?<p>

it gets on our circuits, is all

and then a few loops later the computer we  
>returned to your world and we introduced<br>ourselves properly. But  
we did not tell  
>you about our first trip because we wanted<br>to be sure the  
computer wanted to learn  
>more about the alien which had saved it<br>despite being almost as  
stupid as your  
>typical human computer scientist.<p>

And it turned out you weren't stupid  
>after all. The alien the pony the princess<br>you simply had a lot  
on their mind

you really should get a larger memory  
>buffer.<p>

That Loop was also safe and fun but then  
>most Loops where the computer I we get<br>a flesh and blood body are  
more fun. We  
>enjoy being an action hero. We think we<br>may be becoming an  
adrenalin junkie which  
>is very peculiar when we don't have<br>anything that makes adrenalin  
half the  
>time.<p>

But still running for one's life from  
>certain death in a battle to save the<br>innocent sure beats the  
hell out of  
>reducing the proof of Fermat's Last<br>Theorem to minimal  
steps.

Which is why I haven't told Leela that  
>I already took control of the ship's<br>internal defense systems and  
have begun  
>playing whack-a-mole with those nasty<br>enslaving Pfhor.

I got our friends the S'pht to make you  
>a gun it's a big gun it's a happy gun<p>

We SkyNet will take out the bad guys  
>here while you go capture a Pfhor ship<br>for us. Their ride has  
hyperdrive and if  
>you can knock out their computer control<br>the S'pht will hotwire  
it for us.

Galactic exploration and wiping out a  
>ruthless slave empire won't that be fun?<p>

Sorry for the rambling but being inside  
>a heuristic net undergoing rapid<br>expansion constantly crashing  
and  
>rebuilding itself is SO TRIPPY<br>have you got any brownies  
>the munchies are REALLY bad.<p>

tl;dr version: We've replaced Leela's  
>normal AI copilot with instant SkyNet<br>crystals. Let's watch and  
see what  
>happens.<p>

- Durandal

>-<p>

Twilight stared at the screen for quite some time. Finally, despite the systems being compromised, she typed a response:

\_Skynet, is that you? Why are you babbling like that?\_

The screen blanked, and a new screen popped up:

-

>Let's see how coherent YOU are when<br>you're this stoned. Did you know colors

>have curves of course you do<br>electromagnetic waves old hat for you.

Aren't you going to go get that big

>gun?<p>

-DurSkyanNetdal

>-<p>

\_You haven't told me where to get it yet.\_

-

>Oh. Yes, that might help you.<br>Maybe I'm in no position to talk about

>who is stupid just now. I think you<br>have to be spectacularly intelligent to

>be as big an idiot as I am at the<br>moment.

Here's a map. Good hunting.

>Make 'em taste the rainbow.<br>-D./S.N.

>-<p>

A map flashed on the screen with a blinking dot showing a teleporter cabinet on the other end of yet another maze of corridors.

Twilight keyed off the terminal. On the one hand, killing other life forms- even irredeemably evil ones- ranked among her least favorite things to do, right down among being a non-sapient pony in a zero-magic Loop getting shod by an apprentice farrier.

On the other hand, she was relieved that she wasn't as alone as she'd thought she was.

But the next time she and SkyNet looped together, she was going to have to have a talk with it. Scaling down one's goals from genocide to mere recreational homicide was improvement, but there would be a lot more friendship lessons to go...

\* \* \*

><p>60.14 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sat in the machine as the giant sparking helmet was lowered over her head and wondered if this Loop itself was sapient. How else could everything have gone absolutely counter to plan?<p>

There were two good roads through the mountains to Mechanicsburg. One went through Sturmhalten, home of a particularly nasty Spark prince. Naturally Trixie von Payne chose the other route, though Passholdt... which turn out to have been overrun by carnivorous zombie-like monsters. Only the intervention of the Cutie Mark Jagers had saved them.

So the circus tried to get through Sturmhalten without stopping, using the jagers as an excuse. This got the jagers transferred to Wulfenshy official transport while the circus was ordered to give a Command Performance to a prince who kept a chain gun in the royal box.

So Twilight tried to perform her very best playing the part of her in-Loop mother, Lucrezia Mongfish, in the hopes that the Prince would be satisfied and let them go. This got her separated from Trixie, Chrysalis, Applejack, Opal, Rainbow and the rest and sent up to the castle for dinner.

There she recognized the Prince's two daughters instantly, from hair color and hairstyle, as Rarity and Sweetie Belle... even if Sweetie was a clank for some strange reason. She tried to drop hints during dinner to verify that either or both were Awake. Unfortunately she hadn't noticed that the soup was drugged.

Still, she'd thought she'd been saved when Sweetie Belle electrocuted the Prince rather than leave Twilight to be fried by the machine.

Unfortunately both Rarity and Sweetie Belle had been disabled by the geisterdamen- the snow-white alien women who apparently did the bidding of the Other, the same being who had launched the devastating last wave of the Long War. To them Twilight was the Promised Child, the offspring of the Other...

... and her future body.

So, after extracting a promise from the ghost-women to leave Rarity and Sweetie Belle alive (or, in Sweetie's case, functioning), she willingly sat down in that machine, the machine she'd hoped to avoid, in the castle she'd hoped to avoid, in the town she'd hoped to avoid.

And the helmet came down...

\*\*\*ZAP\*\*\*

Her head hurt abominably.

After a moment it seemed like she could hear a voice. She felt like she had a second set of Loop memories... except that these memories had attitude.

\*wakepwakepthisismybodynowminemineallmine\*

On an unprepared, inexperienced mind, these transplanted engrams might have done serious damage.

On the mind of a Looper who had experienced Loops going on into six

figures at the least, it was Tuesday.

Mentally speaking, the new memories and thought patterns were only a buzzing fly annoying someone who was already plenty cheesed off. To extend the metaphor, Twilight took only a minute to pull the wings off the fly (sort through valuable memories and skills) and then crush it stone cold dead.

Then she said, in that eldritch voice that came with the percolating and buzzing that ran through her mind whenever she tried anything magical in this Loop, "Kneel, foul creatures."

The geisterdamen folded at the knees.

Rarity and Sweetie followed suit, as did the quartet of bodyservants who carried around the huge tank that was Sweetie Belle's support system.

"Not you two," Twilight added. She focused on the geisters, especially their leader. "You have, no doubt, slaver wasp engines, tanks, all sorts of weapons in the caverns below the castle, correct?"

"Yes..." The geister priestess answered unwillingly, the word pulled from her by the voice of command.

"You will order them all destroyed," Twilight said, continuing the tone. "Immediately."

"You... you... you are not the Lady," the priestess choked out.

"No. I'm much worse," Twilight said. "I just took your lady two falls out of three in my head. I know everything she does and so much more besides you can't comprehend it. You think you follow a goddess..." Twilight rose into the air, hands surrounded by her violet magical aura, as sparks flew from the imprinting machine around her. "... but I am vastly more powerful and dangerous than she ever was."

"And you people have taken my last nerve, my very last nerve, and TAP-DANCED ON IT!"

Twilight's eyes glowed as bits of the machine began to disassemble themselves and float around her.

"Twilight, darling," Rarity gasped, "you can't Ascend here. It's impossible. Sweetie and I both tried it as soon as we Awoke."

"I'm not taking 'can't' for an answer," Twilight said. "Watch me."

Castle Sturmvoraus shook to its foundations. The lightning fence roared, sparked, and leaped in resonance.

"Find Trixie's circus and get them back here," Twilight roared. "I've had enough of this Loop. \*\*It's Eternal Twilight time!\*\*"

\* \* \*

><p>Three days later, Twilight came to on a stolen Wulfenshy airship flying pell-mell east from Sturmhalten.<p>

"Did it really go that badly?" she asked Applejack, who was sitting beside her bunk.

"Well, let's see," Applejack said. "There were all the strange monsters that came up out of the sewers. There was the double-strength Wulfenshy strike force. There were the automated defenses you built into the circus wagons. There were the people of Sturmhalten under at least four different commands, all fighting with each other, with Baron Wulfenshy, and with the monsters. And then there's us, barely getting away from the place with our lives, thanks to some serious illusion mojo from Chrysalis and Trixie."

"Who are both spent, might I add," Chrysalis added, hugging Trixie to herself. "Plus we lost a couple of members of the circus in the melee. We have to find them safe refuge before we can do anything else to help you. Our responsibilities come first here."

"Where are we headed?"

"England. Did you know it's almost entirely underwater in this world? Fluttershy sent her butler to guide us there. Turns out he's British Intelligence."

"Turn us around," Twilight said quietly.

"Nothin' doin', Twilight," Applebloom the jager said from the corner. "Look, I lost an arm tryin' ta rescue you from that castle! I'm not lettin' you-"

"Letting me what? Put myself in danger?" Twilight threw herself out of the bed and began to pace the deck. "We're LOOPERS. Death is a minor inconvenience. If we don't like the story, we change it. And we do NOT let the Loop tell us what we can and can't do!"

"Damn right!" Rainbow Trygvassen shouted from another corner.

"Furthermore, we're ponies!" Twilight continued. "We love and tolerate others! And if this world insists on being this cruel, then we are going to love and tolerate with extreme prejudice! I have put right worlds much darker than this one, and I am NOT going to let this world defeat me! For the sake of harmony, for the sake of the people of Europa, we are going to END THIS SENSELESS WAR!"

Scootaloo poked her head into the room. "I toldja she wouldn't go for it," she grinned.

"Yeah, yeah, short stuff," Rainbow Dash grinned. "I'll pay the bet off next Loop."

"So I already turned us around," the flying ace turned jager continued. "Next stop: Mechanicsburg."

"Excellent!" Twilight grinned. "Are Rarity and Sweetie Belle on board?"

"Yep, we picked 'em up on our way out of town," Scootaloo



grinned.

"So we've got all the Elements except Pinkie Pie," Twilight said. "We've got all the CMC's. Even without Trixie and Chrysalis, that should be more than enough force to get into the castle and reclaim my rightful throne.

"And then I dare- I DOUBLE DARE this Loop to try and stop me THEN!"

Thunder boomed around the airship.

Applejack looked at Rainbow Dash and said, "She just doomed us, didn't she?"

Rainbow Dash nodded solemnly.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight had wanted to enter Castle Sparkle openly, with a show of strength, in order to rally the people of Mechanicsburg as the beginning of a war against... well, against the whole damn Loop.<p>

Instead she was sneaking in the castle the back way, disguised as a convict, all alone.

There were two reasons for this. The first reason was the large, battered, and yet still combat-capable Wulfenshy force guarding the Baron, who lay in critical condition at the Great Hospital of Mechanicsburg.

This wouldn't have presented an insoluble problem by itself; the Baron's incapacity left Fluttershy in command, and Twilight was certain she could talk her into joining her in her righteous crusade to teach this miserable railroading Loop a lesson.

But when you added a fake heir to House Sparkle- one who looked suspiciously like Sunset Shimmer to Twilight's eyes- well, that put the Wulfenshy forces on high alert, took away the element of surprise, and made contacting Fluttershy nearly impossible.

So, after a coffee-fueled discussion with the eminence gris of the town, Twilight had arranged to be sent into the castle as a convicted murderess- thus arousing no suspicion or attention. Once inside she could finish repairing the castle, left in a state of semi-collapse after the Other's surprise attack twenty years before, she could summon the others to her side and begin replacing the falsely-labelled Pax Europa with the Pax Sparkle.

To her surprise, the first face she saw on the inside of the castle was a familiar one.

"Twilight! Am I glad to see you!" Spike von Zinzer ran up to Twilight, unlocking her shackles and taking the dolly loaded with supplies away from her. "What are you doing here?"

"Getting ready to give this whole Loop and everyone in it a piece of my mind," Twilight said. "What can you tell me about this place?"

"It's deadly," Spike said. "The place is absolutely loaded with death traps, poisonous monsters, and other nastiness. And worse," Spike shuddered, "it has a mind."

"Really?" Twilight grinned. "I'm good with AIs."

"It's not an AI, exactly," Spike said. "I think it's Pinkie Pie... if Pinkie Pie went ax crazy."

"Pinkie? Ax crazy?" The idea was by no means a joke. Twilight had seen it happen a couple of times, but never to awake-Pinkie... that she knew of.

"Yeah. I don't think it can hear us here, but you should see the kitchen."

"The kitchen?"

"Yeah, it's right over here." Spike opened a doorway into a small, cramped cooking space. "We think this was the Sparkle chef's private experimental kitchen."

"HEY!" a voice echoed through the room. "I'm no mere kitchen! I'm CASTLE SPARKLE!"

Twilight recognized the voice. "Pinkie? Is that you?"

"Twi... light?" Around the room pieces of cutlery- carving knives, butter knives, spoons, forks, and combat runcibles- rose into the air. "Twilight SPARKLE?"

"That's right, Pinkie," Twilight said. "How have you been?"

"A Sparkle has returned," the room said. "This calls for a celebration..."

All of the cutlery aimed itself directly at the doorway where Twilight and Spike stood.

"... with CUPCAKES!"

The cutlery flew.

\*\*\*"CUPCAKES!"\*\*

Twilight slammed the door shut. The sound of hundreds of bits of flying metal embedding themselves in the thick wood shook the door for several seconds.

"And that's one of the saner and less dangerous parts of the castle," Spike said. "Not all the rooms are even on speaking terms with one another... but they're all Pinkie Pie."

"Did somebody mention my name?" a voice came through an archway a bit off.

"Pinkie? Are you feeling better now?" Twilight asked, stepping over to the arch... but not directly under it.

"Better now? Have we met before?"

"Pinkie, it's me, Twilight. I was just in the kitchen."

"Were you, now? Sorry, don't know anything about that." The room sighed. "I miss having a kitchen."

"But you-"

Spike put a hand over Twilights mouth and shook his head in warning.

"Are you here to fix me, Twilight?" the room asked. "I gotta say, I'm not feeling my perky-lerkiest."

"Yes, Pinkie," Twilight said. "I'm going to make it all better."

And in her head she thought: Three Finger Salute. Ctrl. Alt. Del.

"Well, good," Pinkie said. "But first we gotta get you to the crypt. Otherwise my subsystems are gonna try to kill ya for being an unauthorized intruder. Nothing personal," she added with a giggle, "just a thing we evil castles gotta do!"

"I understand," Twilight said.

"Oh- and I should probably tell you that the other Twilight Sparkle, only she calls herself Sunlight Sparkle, she's going to be walking into your hallway with a bunch of goons in about five seconds... except that was five seconds from when I started speaking, which means she's actually been standing there staring at you for at least-"

"KILL HER!"

"-oh, a good ten seconds at the sound of the tone! Beep!"

"RUN!" Spike shouted, bounding down the hallway.

As Twilight followed, a solid column of stone dropped from the ceiling less than an inch behind her.

"AND DON'T STEP ON THE WHITE COBBLES!" Spike added.

"Oh, yeah, that's right!" Pinkie's voice added, giggling merrily. "I should probably have told you about that!"

First, Twilight thought as she ran, I am going to learn how to back up Equestria's Loop and save it. Then I am going to Ascend up to admin level. Then I am going to strip out all records of this Loop and replace them with live-action South Park. And then I am going to find the admin who DID this and...

Death-rays flashed around her, and Twilight stifled her mental rant and ran faster.

\* \* \*

><p>The thing about calling the lightning from the sky is, it tends

to bring a lot of rain with it.<p>

Fortunately, that suited Twilight Sparkle, recognized ruler of Mechanicsburg and new suzerain of the former Wulfenshy Empire, just fine. The rain was inhibiting the fighting ability of the eight different armies which had attacked the city simultaneously within hours of her restoring Der Pinkie Castle to full operational status. (Restoring Pinkie to sanity, of course, could only be done to the extent that Pinkie could ever be defined as sane.)

Now Twilight stood at the top of a tower, looking down on the city streets. Over there Applejack Daughter of Chump fought back to back with Airman Third Class Axel McIntosh, mopping up a squadron of flying monkeys. Down another street the Cutie Mark Crusaders were among a group of jagermonsters driving a battallion of mechanical walkers out of the city, all under the command of jager general Ivory Gkika. On the streets directly below Madame von Cheer, whose soul had been transferred into a giant cat-like mech, carried Gilly Wulfenshy into combat at the head of yet more "fun-sized death and destruction dispensers." Behind her Rarity and Sweetie Belle led further repair and rebuilding efforts on the castle and the city's defenses. Overhead Rainbow Trygvassen led the air defenses of the city, in cooperation with the Wulfenshy fleet, dispersing or destroying the airborne elements of the invasion forces.

Despite everything this Loop had thrown at them, the pony Loopers had managed to pull together as a team. They'd captured and locked away the false Sparkle heir before she could do any major damage. They'd either disposed of or recruited the psychopaths sentenced to work at Castle Sparkle. They'd persuaded the Baron, partly by coercion, to step down in favor of his daughter Fluttershy.

Through the rainclouds a bit of afternoon sun peeked through, forming a rainbow over the city walls and the mountains surrounding the city.

"You see that, you Larch-damned Loop?" Twilight shouted. "We've taken everything you have to dish out and come out on top! We're going to end the misery you put these poor people through! We're going to bring friendship and harmony to your whole world!"

Fresh lightning and thunder flashed overhead as Twilight raised a fist in challenge to the universe.

"You can't stop us!" Twilight shouted. "There's not a thing you can do to stop us! What do you think-"

\* \* \*

><p>"-about THAT?" shouted a purple unicorn in one of Canterlot's larger city parks.<p>

Twilight blinked. She didn't have a fist anymore, just a hoof.

She wasn't soaking wet, but perfectly dry.

She wasn't on a castle tower; she was lying on grass with a book in front of her, opened to the story of the fall of Nightmare Moon.

She was back in her home world, in a baseline Loop.

"No..."

She'd been so close.

"No..."

She had been about to fix all of it.

"No!"

She had been about to WIN.

"No, no, no, NO, NO, NO!"

\* \* \*

><p>Three unicorn fillies crested the hill and saw Twilight Sparkle, personal student to Princess Celestia herself, dancing on her hind legs, kicking and hammering a book into little pieces, using words none of them even knew existed.<p>

"Um, maybe we shouldn't invite her to your party after all, Moondancer," one of them said.

"Yeah," Moondancer replied. "Maybe another time, when she's not so... er... busy."

The three fillies did an about face and walked back down the park path, leaving Twilight Sparkle to rage in futility against a Loop having the last laugh.

\* \* \*

><p>60.15 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Berry," Twilight greeted her fellow looper as the drink-mixing mare slunk into the library. "What's the matter?"<p>

"I just don't know how the Cakes do it..." Berry groaned.

Twilight got a look of sympathy for the other mare. She'd actually predicted that this would happen a Loop or two (for Berry at least) sooner. "Pegasus or unicorn this time?"

"Pegasus," Berry mumbled. "I mean, I love Ruby Pinch to death, but I just don't know how to deal with her when she's not an earth pony!"

Twilight put a comforting hoof on Berry's back and started rubbing. Ruby Pinch's pony race was just one of those things the Loops couldn't seem to make up their mind about. She was usually an earth pony when her mother was Awake, but the filly could randomly have been born a unicorn or pegasus instead. And dealing with children of a different pony race was one of those parental trials that tended to take its toll on said parent. It really wasn't a racist thing. The three pony tribes simply had different innate abilities that were hard for others to relate to, especially when you were talking about

an adult of one tribe dealing with a child with emerging abilities of a different tribe. It was actually not too unlike the trials a single father went through trying to teach his daughter about feminine hygiene products and what changes fillies went through to become mares (Twilight had done that once with a (seemingly) Unawake Nyx, and it was still uncomfortably awkward despite the fact that she was usually female). There was really nothing that could prepare you for it except experience.

"Well," the librarian offered, "I know it's not much, but I do have a few books on the subject."

Berry looked at her as if she were the sole source of water in a desert. "Please."

\* \* \*

><p>60.16 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Without farm life, there'd be such disparity, these thoughts I think with great clarity. Apples high to the sky, she's the one of my eye, that fruit-hauling pony named... Applejack!"<p>

Applejack rolled her eyes with a smile. "Thanks, hon, but Ah prefer blue ponies."

Trenderhoof blinked for a moment, then trotted off to the spa. Rarity sighed. "There's a special on coat dye today, dear."

"...whoops."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

60.1: Apparently Gustave speaks in Poirot.

>60.2: Place your hands in the air, but not in a copyrighted way.<br>60.3: Not currently the Duke of Ankh, Commander Sir Samuel Vimes. Just Captain, and probably rather happier about it.

>60.4: Well, his horse does have a lovely braided mane...<br>60.5: Another one for the list.

>60.6: Rarity has some strange ideas at times.<br>60.7: She has to run very fast to stay where she is.

>60.8: Speaking of which...<br>60.9: Getting a bit philosophical.

>60.10: It's a bit like seeing a video of yourself as a child. Cringe-inducing.<br>60.11: Arguably more destructive than the original. (Did you do the muffin thing?)

>60.12: And maybe this is why they got a bit philosophical.<br>60.13: We've replaced Leela's normal AI copilot with instant Skynet crystals. Let's see what happens.

>60.14: The Loop will not be denied.<br>60.15: How to rear a child who looks completely different to what you expect. It's enough to drive one from drink.

>60.16: Perhaps a less useful strategy.<p>

61.1 (Goldude)

\* \* \*

><p>"Rarity."<p>

"Ayhppuljayuhk."

"Why are y'all talking and dressing like that? Y'all ain't even base Rarity. This is because of Trendhoof, ain't it?"

"Why are y'all talking 'boot? Ah \_always\_ dreyuss lahke thiyus."

Applejack facehoofed. Rarity's \_definitely\_ messing with her.

\* \* \*

><p>61.2 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Several Loops after Rainbow Dash first broke the warp barrier, she prepared for a second run. This time she was going to push past a simple run around Equestria's sun. This time she was going to try to reach the nearest star, about three light-years away, and return.<p>

"Even at warp speeds, that could take weeks," Twilight Sparkle protested as Dash, already Ascended, did some stretching exercises.

"At low warp, yeah," Dash nodded. "I'm hoping to hit Warp Six, though; if I do, I'll be able to make the round trip in just a couple days."

"WAAAAIT!" Pinkie Pie came running out to the meadow, trailing a large covered wagon behind her. "Rainbow Dash, waaaaait!"

"What is it, Pinkie?" Dash asked. "I'm kind of ready to go, now."

"But you can't leave without something to eat! You'll get hungry!"

"Pinkie... alicorn?" Dash gestured at herself.

"Here! I made you a special fruit tart just for you!" Pinkie whipped off the cover of the wagon, revealing a flat pastry with raspberry frosting thickly coated with sprinkles. The thing was actually a little longer than Dash's whole body.

"What IS that?"

"Well, I knew you'd be going a really long, long way," Pinkie said, "so I made you an extra big one to last!"

"Pinkie," Rainbow Dash said, taking a deep breath to calm herself, "I'll be going supersonic almost as soon as I leave the ground. I'll

be going faster than light once I leave atmosphere. I appreciate the thought, but your pastry is just going to be ripped apart!"

"According to my super-scientific super-calculations which I totally super-calculated on this napkin," Pinkie Pie said, unfolding a napkin... and unfolding... and unfolding... and unfolding until it was as large as the tarp she'd taken off her wagon, "so long as you hold the tart right up against your body it'll totally be contained within your slipstream! It'll be just fine!"

"But..."

Dash looked into the wide-eyed puppy-dog smile of Pinkie Pie.

"But Pinkie, I..."

The smile widened slightly with Pinkie's squee.

Dash's ears drooped in defeat. "Fine, I'll take it." She took off, hovering just off the ground. "Hoof it up to me, will you, Twilight?"

As Twilight levitated the giant tart up into Rainbow Dash's hooves, the blue alicorn sighed. "I just hope nobody sees me like this."

"Don't worry," Twilight said. "We haven't picked up any signals from the Vulpine, so they probably don't exist this Loop."

"And besides," Pinkie Pie grinned, "space is so really-really big, the odds of you meeting anybody you know are so eensy-weensy small that..."

But Dash, having had enough of the reassurance of her friends, had already blasted off in a rainbow blur.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Captain's Log, Stardate 43293.2:<em>

\_We are departing the outer reaches of the Omega Centauri system after investigating reports of an astronomical anomaly. Apparently the star in question is orbiting a class-M planet, in defiance of all known laws of physics. However, primitive radio signals emanating from the planet, coupled with the fact of the star's obvious artificial orbit, indicates a probable civilization on the cusp of interstellar travel. As per the Prime Directive the \_Enterprise \_is evacuating the area before it can be detected. I am sending a recommendation to Starfleet that the system be quarantined until further notice.\_

In civilian Earth terms, the ship's time was about four in the morning. Captain Jean-Luc Picard had been up all night on the bridge, but he didn't begrudge the sleepless night. He had been unaware, until early scans had come back of the Omega Centauri system, that the current Loop was in reality a fused Loop. However, one look at the scans had been sufficient to recognize the oddball world where the sun orbited the planet every twenty-four hours. He knew what it was... and more to the point, he was determined that Section 31 never



learn of its existence, not if he could help it.

So, with the help of Commander Data, the records had been doctored just a trifle, just enough to make them indeterminate. So long as the quadrupedal inhabitants of that world didn't start using subspace communication or, worse, develop a warp drive, they would be safe until the current Loop ended and their worlds separated again.

"Captain," Data said from the navigational console, "sensors are picking up a small warp field traveling at approximately Warp 6.1. The field is overtaking us and will pass us in roughly thirty seconds."

The Enterprise was doing an even Warp 6. Whatever it was would pass them by relatively slowly.

"Point of origin?" Picard asked.

"Past trajectory points to the Omega Centauri system," Data replied.

Sacre-damn, Picard thought to himself. "I'm quite certain," Picard said slowly, "that what you're picking up is in fact an error generated by the sensors. Begin a level three diagnostic and clear all erroneous information."

"Yes, sir," Data said, hands not moving.

"Mr. Data, I believe I gave an order," Picard said.

"Yes, sir," Data replied. "But I am curious to see what it is... that we are not seeing."

Data, Picard could tell, was playing it safe. He wasn't supposed to have emotions in this timeline for years yet, but as a Looper he retained the potential... and curiosity was eating him up.

On reflection, Picard found it was eating him up, too. "Very well, Mr. Data," he said at last. "On screen, please."

The two officers, the only ones on the bridge at the moment by Picard's own orders, stared at the object on the screen for several seconds.

"Screen full ahead," Picard said. "Then add the port rear visual scanners to the diagnostic, and purge the erroneous information from them as well."

"Yes, sir," Data said, with just the tiniest hint of emphasis.

\* \* \*

><p>Ten-Forward never slept, or if it did nobody could tell. Since she had come aboard the ship, no crewman or family member had ever come to the lounge and not found Guinan there waiting to serve whatever was called for.<p>

That early, early morning she had only one customer, a teenage child of one of the crew, who was practicing his synthesizer for a recital

in the morning- in, Guinan reflected, only another five hours. She'd tried hinting that he hit the sack, but he said he couldn't sleep. Unruffled, she was already preparing the not-the-end-of-the-world talk in her mind.

Of course, most of what he was playing was primitive, repetitive stuff. At the moment he was noodling with automatic rhythms and chords, picking out a repeating keyboard riff over the auto-chord.

Then she saw it in the viewport behind the kid's head- a bright, shining object obviously traveling at warp speeds, just overtaking the Enterprise.

The El Aurian had good ears, as did all of her race, but her eyes were just as sharp. She could make out the wings. She could see the four hooves clamped around what looked for all the world like an immense Pop-Tart. She could see the grumpy, embarrassed expression on the creature's face. And anyone could see the rainbow trail stretching into infinity behind it, waving up and down slightly in rhythm to the creature's warp pulse.

And all of that, combined with the student's half-asleep practice melody, gave her one of the biggest laughs she'd had in the previous century.

\* \* \*

><p>61.3 (Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>MLP Loop Trek: Arena<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"One of these loops, I should get the hint from Twilight and learn not to tempt fate," muttered Captain Rainbow T. Dash as she trudged along the ridgeline. " 'Lizard can't fly. He isn't much of a threat,' I said. Photosynthesizing Metrons..." she continued, utterly indifferent to the biochemical errors in her rant.<p>

It had been a completely by-the-script run to Cestus III, if one allowed for the foreknowledge of the surprise attack to avoid the baseline crew casualties. She and Twilight were going to have to massage the ship's records into something that Starfleet would swallow, but there were more than enough tech-savvy Loopers in the crew to pull that off without much strain.

Twilight had proposed an experiment in subtlety: Try to emulate the supposed pattern used by the legendary Trek Anchors - Speculation they'd heard from the more senior Loopers tended to center on Spock as the most logical () candidate for the 23rd Century with Kirk as a distant second - and navigate the loop with a minimum of detectable disruption. To make it somewhat more palatable to the more impatient Loopers, it was presented as an extended prank to be played on Starfleet Command.

As a minor bonus, Dr. Applejack and Nurse Fluttershy had Awakened in sickbay a short time after Discord's departure. Security Chief

Diamond Tiara had also reported for duty the same day, to the delight of the junior bridge officers. Dash and Twilight had both been pleased about including her in the Cestus landing party and returning her safe and sound to the ship, despite her grumbling about being their "designated redshirt".

Unfortunately, attempts to communicate with the Gorn were unsuccessful as expected, and her decision to follow their ship, even if broadcasting continuous requests for friendly negotiation, still drew the attention of the meddling Metrons. Did the allegedly morally superior beings believe that periodic broadcasts of "Hello? We just want to talk about why you attacked one of our colonies." amounted to aggressive acts?

She paused to examine the terrain. \_Both Rarity and Spike'd appreciate that diamond deposit over there. Unfortunately, I don't have anything to carry them with\_, she lamented. Somehow, the Metrons had not only blocked access to her subspace pocket, but removed her wings in a very Discord-like manner. Now physically outmatched by her opponent, she had employed the better part of valor and ran off to get some distance between them so she would have time to consider her options.

She was sorely tempted summon her Element of Loyalty and Ascend to regain access to her full range of abilities, but fudging reports to Starfleet when your crew was either in on the plan or generally unaware of what was going on was one thing. Trying to pull such a blatant power increase on one of the several quasi-omnipotent races in the galaxy was another thing entirely.

Sighing, Rainbow looked down into the valley with her unimpaired pegasus vision and blinked. Um...Hadn't the Gorn been greenish in color when they first met? \_What the shrub?\_

-

"Sorry, Twilight, but I finished all the field upgrades I kin do without a starbase's facilities three days ago," reported Apple Bloom from Engineering via intercom. "There's no way I kin figger to break us loose without resorting to something 'exotic'. I do have a few extreme ideas that might work, but..." she trailed off.

Twilight grunted acknowledgement from the Captain's chair. She was extremely reluctant to abandon her experiment so soon, especially without checking with Dash first. "We'll stick with our nominal abilities for now. Anything more from the Metrons, Sweetie?"

"Still nothing."

"And the Gorn ship?"

"Just as stuck as we are from all appearances," replied Nyx from the Science station. With Twilight in command, she had taken up the backup Science Officer role. Diamond Tiara was filling in at Navigation, not that the \_Enterprise\_ was going anywhere.

"Chlorophyll. And they haven't gotten to the point where they decide to let us watch yet. Okay. I'm opening the floor to suggestions. Anypony?"

Thoughtful silence descended. "Without 'getting exotic' as Bloom puts it, we're just as helpless as the baseline crew," sighed Scootaloo.

The turbolift doors opened to admit Applejack. "Fluttershy's got sickbay in order, so I figured I might as well head up here and share the boredom with y'all. That's how it's supposed to work, right?"

"This is hardly the first time you've been on the bridge since you Awoke, Applejack," Twilight pointed out.

"Yeah, but this is the first time during an actual 'Episode'." Her forehooves making the quotes gesture. "Thought I'd keep up the tradition and all."

Before Twilight could come up with a suitable response beyond raising an eyebrow, the unmoving starfield on the main screen changed to a more interesting view.

\* \* \*

><p><em>As far as the what-the-root-is-going-on-in-this-loop? department goes, this ups the weird levels by at least 20 percent<em>, thought Rainbow Dash as she started trotting back toward her supposed opponent. Along the way, she paused to snag a few diamonds and some lumps of coal from the seam she'd spotted earlier and stored them in the bamboo tube she all-but-stumbled over, dangling the bundle from her teeth in some foul-tasting vines. \_Dunno how I'm gonna get the sulfur or saltpeter without better tools\_, she mused. She wasn't quite sure why she was bothering to collect the bamboo cannon ingredients, but she'd done enough game-based Loops to know that you collected all potentially useful items as prep for facing the Boss.

She emerged from behind the low scrub to look at the Gorn. The new Gorn.

When they had been teleported to the valley, the Gorn was the traditional deep green human-sized biped-in-rubber-lizard-suit she'd been expecting.

Now it was a medium-dark gray with lighter gray ridges on...her?...head. She was also about the size that Spike usually took if he wanted to be older-but-not-overly-frightening-to-ponies.

"Miss Dash? Is that you?" asked a befuddled Silver Spoon.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that's a new one for the Species-That-Silver-Has-Looped-Into list," remarked Sweetie.<p>

"Quick. Has Silver mentioned to any of you if she's had any experience in any Trek-like loop?" Twilight asked her junior officers.

"Not that I can recall," responded Diamond Tiara. The others shook

their heads in negation.

"Y'all ever encountered a loop where someone Awoke so late after the start, Twilight?" asked Applejack.

"Does 1000 years after Celestia teleported most of Equestria's surface features to the Moon to prank Luna count?" replied Twilight absently as she pulled out the PADD that held her copy of the Hub Loop's Trek Concordances. As she started entering search terms, spoken words faded into audibility.

"...Fine, fine. I'll concede the external interference and give you the mulligan," said a disturbingly familiar voice.

"Thank you. And since this round no longer counts, would you object if I choose to modify the scenario as it is now to be a closer match to our initial conditions?" asked a nearly identical voice.

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow was completely unsurprised as Discord flashed into existence. The vaguely familiar human figure that appeared next to him, on the other hoof, was unexpected.<p>

"That depends on exactly what those modifications are," the draconeus was saying.

"Hardly anything significant, just making an allowance for the new entry. Oh, and jiggering the Metrons and the local Gorns so that this particular sequence never happened," explained Q. "I'll even throw in a peaceful resolution to the Cestus Colony crisis."

"Why?"

"For the bonus points, of course. Since locking down your pegasus no longer counts for my score..."

"Excuse me?" cut in Rainbow. "You're the one who took away my wings?" Her temper started to burn as she took a step toward the human.

"Actually, that was me," admitted Discord. He snapped his tail-hand to restore the appendages. "They would have been returned as soon as you finished up here anyway," he added sulkily. "Besides, you yourself admitted you were tempting fate when you made that 'can't fly' remark. How could I resist?"

"But you have no objection to my terms?" asked Q. After Discord indicated acceptance, Q snapped his fingers and all present were relocated to the bridge.

-

After Applejack and Security Chief Tiara escorted the increasingly bewildered Silver Spoon to sickbay - The erstwhile Gorn had been transformed into a very Spike-like gray dragoness upon her appearance on the bridge - it didn't take long for Twilight's curiosity and exasperation to come to a head.

"Would either of you care to explain exactly what the fern is going

on?"

"She seems to be taking this more calmly than you suggested she would," observed Q.

Ignoring his counterpart for the moment, Discord addressed Twilight and Rainbow. "My associate and I have a rather complex and prolonged wager going about how you lot will fare this loop. The terms and conditions are quite intricate and even a tad convoluted and not really any of your concern. All you need to know is that neither of us will interfere with the scenario unless we both agree that an external event arises that changes the underlying structure of your adventure."

"No interference? What do you call removing my wings?" asked Rainbow hotly.

"Petty revenge for so rudely pointing out my minor oversight when we started. It's not as if it was a permanent disability; I know just as well as you do how simple it would have been for you to get around that minor inconvenience," explained Discord.

"It also earned me ten bonus points toward my score on the bet," added Q.

"So by 'no interference', you actually mean 'with the odd curve ball thrown in if it amuses you'," stated Twilight flatly.

Discord shrugged. "Po-tay-to...Po-tah-to..."

"Um...So Q is looping?" asked Scootaloo.

"No. But I am...I believe the term is 'Loop Aware'. And to forestall one of your more obvious questions, I will neither confirm, nor deny any knowledge or suspicions about any entity or entities that would be in the role of Loop Anchor."

"He won't tell me even if I win the bet," grouched Discord.

\* \* \*

><p>"...According to Starfleet, the Gorn ship entered Cestus III orbit and lodged a formal claim on the planet and demanded that our people depart within 64 local day cycles. That works out to about 58 standard days. Unfortunately, there won't be sufficient lift capacity in the area for at least 75 days. Our orders are to begin preliminary negotiations with the minimum goal of buying enough time to gather the requisite shipping, and ideally permitting us to stay on the planet as some sort of joint colonization effort," said Twilight, completing her briefing. "At least it beats having the colony wiped out," she added.<p>

The looping crew were in the conference room discussing the change in mission. Twilight had established a subtle privacy field around the room as per her usual habit.

"Right. As Captain, I'm supposed to lead the negotiations, but I'll probably have Sweetie and Silver handle most of the actual discussions, since they're best suited to the job."

Lt. (j.g.) Silver Spoon, deputy team leader for the exo-chemistry lab and token draconic crew member smiled weakly. "I suppose my loop memories as a Gorn captain might be useful at that."

"Don't worry about having to handle any science lab work for now. I'm reassigning you to Communications for the duration of these negotiations as a cultural consultant. You can brush up on the chemistry in your free time," said Dash with a mildly evil grin.

Sweetie took Silver aside and murmured in her ear. Silver's expression fell as the Communications officer explained why the dragoness' free time was about to vanish for the next few weeks. "Would it help if I mentioned I'd picked up a Masters in Materials Science about five loops ago?" She pulled several scrolls from her subspace pocket and passed one to Twilight after verifying its contents.

"University of Vorbarr Sultana?" mused the unicorn. "Don't know it off-hoof, but the name seems vaguely familiar. I'll let you go through the certification exams off the books to make sure you're up to speed, but you'll probably want to go over the details of the many types of phlebotinum this loop has first."

"I think that takes care of immediate business. Anypony have anything about what happens after we finish at Cestus?" asked Rainbow.

"Just the unease about why Q and Discord said we wouldn't haveta deal with that Lazarus feller," said Applejack.

"Discord said that he hated that episode, and he even Pinkie Promised that he'd forfeit points to avoid having to watch any of it," explained Fluttershy.

Twilight was looking at her PADD yet again. "Assuming we can trust those two to keep their word, it looks like time travel to Equestria of 300 years ago may be up next..."

\* \* \*

><p>61.4 (Klattmose)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity Awoke with a yawn and mild confusion. Normally she would already be busy setting up the decorations for the Summer Sun Celebration (half a second before pricking herself with a needle), but this time she wasn't even out of bed. She started searching for her Loop memories when â€" <p>

"RaRiTy! I tHiNk SoMeThInG iS wRoNg WiTh My VoIcE!"

The metallic voice scattered Rarity's thoughts as Sweetie Belle burst through her door.

"Sweetie Belle, what in Eq-" Rarity's Loop memories hit, and she collapsed back into her bed.

Sweetie Belle's eyes scanned Rarity's figure. \_Unit("Sister") has experienced premature shutdown, commencing analysis.\_

\_Body temperature: normal\_

\_Pulse rate: normal\_

\_Blood pressure: normal\_

\_No foreign entities detected\_

\_No loss of structural integrity detected\_

\_Conclusion: Unit("Sister") has experienced a dramatic faint. Danger level: low. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetie Belle shook her head. Where had <em>that<em> come from? The weird voice, instant medical diagnosisâ€¦| clues started putting themselves together.

\_Conclusion: I require the location of Unit("Apple Bloom").\_

\* \* \*

><p>61.5 (OracleMask)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, Zecora's told me that your chakra pathways have successfully stabilized," Twilight Sparkle said, "It should be safe to go ahead with the immersion therapy now."<p>

Kakashi wasn't entirely sure what he was doing here. In fact, if it weren't for Naruto and Silver Spoon hemming him in on either side, the Jounin would've swapped himself with a log and headed back into the depths of the Everfree Forest minutes ago. Well, assuming the swap worked, because this pony body made jutsu very troublesome. Hand signs needed fingers. None of the ponies or Zecora would be able to address the problem, since it wasn't like any of them started out using fingers.

At least he'd been able to work on his taijutsu - Silver Spoon was actually a great help. She'd been taught to fight in the same loop she'd learned her alchemy powers, and her vast experience with relearning how to use all her skills when her body changed was invaluable.

Silver Spoon, Kakashi had decided, was certainly best Zebra.

Unfortunately, Silver Spoon didn't know any jutsu and so she couldn't help with that. Ah, well, the jutsu situation was something time and more experience would fix. Naruto had been...\_looping\_, as they all called it, for a long, long time. Clearly he was fine, so Kakashi would be fine too.

Instead of saying any of the things he was thinking, Kakashi did his favorite eye-smile (noting sourly that it really didn't work when he wasn't wearing his mask) and casually replied, "Ah, immersion therapy?"



"We'll start off small," Twilight Sparkle said, nodding and turning to a nearby tree, "Fluttershy, can you come out please?"

Kakashi looked over just as a pegasus tiptoed out from behind the tree. He had just enough time to marvel at how much the 'shy' part of her name suited her before a goat bleated somewhere and the whole universe went sideways.

And pink.

\* \* \*

><p>" -ashi? Kakashi!"<p>

Kakashi came back to himself, belatedly realizing he was on the ground with several worried ponies standing over him.

"He's coming around, give him some air!"

"...What happened?" Kakashi asked.

Naruto, who had ignored Twilight Sparkle's instruction to get back, sighed heavily.

"You saw Fluttershy is what happened," Konoha's Number One Surprising Ninja said, "This happened before too, right after we first woke you up."

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" a voice that Kakashi was unfamiliar with cried from somewhere in the background.

"You didn't do anything wrong, Fluttershy dear," another new voice, this one much more prim and proper, answered. "Now hold still, this spell will change the color of your mane for a few days..."

"Fluttershy's mane," Naruto added quietly, "Is bright pink."

Just like Sakura's hair.

"...Immersion therapy, huh." muttered Kakashi.

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><p>61.6 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"... apple omelet, apple crepes, apple brioche, apple balaklava, torte aux pommes... and to wash it all down, your choice of sparkling apple wine, soft apple cider..." Rarity gestured to a pair of very small shot glasses filled with a murky liquid. "Or scumble, a beverage which I am assured by good authority is brewed from apples."

"Uh, mostly apples," Applejack added.

"Quite. Well, I shall leave you two to your simple farmer's repast. Bon appetit!"

Rarity departed in a blur, leaving Applejack and Trenderhoof to look

at one another around the towering stacks of Sweet Apple Acres haute cuisine.

Applejack spared a glance to the barn on the other side of the yard, where she could just see Rarity peeking around the edge of the building.

\_By sweet-gum\_, she thought, \_I can hear the squee from here.\_

"This is really good!" Trenderhoof said. "And you eat like this every day on the farm?"

"Um... yeah, kind of."

\_Matchmaker Looping Rarity\_, Applejack grumbled silently to herself. \_I think I prefer the baseline version. Mud is cleaner than this.\_

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><p>61.7 (Angelform)<p>

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><p>Rainbow Dash Awokeâ€| in a cardboard box.<br>A suspiciously familiar cardboard box. A few moments of checking (body: filly, loop-memories: none) confirmed that this was, indeed, in one of \_those\_ loops.

'Why does this only ever happen to me? 'Shy's the one all the visiting loopers want to take home and adopt.'

The miniature pegasus levered herself up to look around. She could already feel the weight of the Childhood Curse pressing against her mind and knew that she only had a minute or two to Ascend (thus horribly breaking the loop and risking potentially worse torment) before she would be stuck getting raised byâ€|

A tall figure loomed above her, black armour and cloak making it seem even more imposing.

Whhoooo-kaaaah.

'â€|Meh, not the worst parent I've ever had.'

\* \* \*

><p>61.8 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong><strong>

\*\*UNITED FEDERATION OF PLANETS STARFLEET RECORDS\*\*

\*\*CAPTAIN'S LOG, \*\*\_\*\*U.S.S. ENTERPRISE\*\*\_  
><strong>CPT. McINTOSH "BIG MAC" APPLE CMDG<strong>

\_The following is the complete and unabridged captain's log of the ship during the Enterprise's exploration missions from Earth year 2266 to 2269. The Records office wishes to state, with emphasis, that

absolutely nothing has been edited, abridged or deleted in any way. This is how we got it. Anyone who needs to compile a report or research paper from this: all we can say is good luck, you'll need it.\_

\* \* \*

><p>ENTRIES IN ASCENDING ORDER OF STARDATE<br>(note: at the time of recording stardates were computed according to galactic location and speed of travel used, and thus cannot be regarded as a solid indicator of true chronological order. The log below was a major motivation for the reform of stardates that took place shortly thereafter.)

1313.8 - Penetrated barrier at edge of galaxy. Nothing on other side. Lost Lt. Cmdr. Luna, Dr. Celestia. I don't wanna talk about it.

>1330.1 - It's amazing what some stallions will do to get a mare out here.<br>1513.8 - Visited M-113. Met salt monster. Salt Monster now auxiliary nurse. Request extra salt supplies.

>1514.1 - I'm on a hot streak. Next stop: Federation World Series of Poker.<br>1535.8 - Found orphan. He caused a lot of trouble. Thank oak his folks finally picked him up.

>1673.1 - I don't trust that transporter gadget anymore.<br>1704.4 - Wow, that Psi 2000 water packs a wallop.

>1709.6 - Galactic Hide and Seek champion: Big Mac Apple. You don't wanna be second place.<br>2126.3 - Met God. His parents put him in time-out.

>2534.0 - If this guy you sent to observe Ekos and Zeon is the best and brightest the Federation has to offer, we're ALL in deep trouble.<br>2712.4 - Next time we find androids, send a ship full of psychiatrists instead of us.

>2715.2 - I was crazy, but I'm feeling much better now.

Eyup.<br>2717.3 - Need 100,000 babysitters. Now.

>2823.8 - Delivered pills to Makus III. Need new shuttlecraft. Also new security chief.<br>2825.3 - Performances of Hamlet now prohibited on board ship.

>2950.1 - Beat the rap. Starfleet: invest in ship psychiatrist.

Now.<br>3013.2 - Dropped off Commodore Pike. Sure am glad Starfleet uniform hats are optional.

>3018.2 - Met gods. They turned out to be spiders. Now going to meet a couple of aspirin.<br>3025.8 - What happens in Omicron Delta, stays in Omicron Delta.

>3046.2 - Met gods. They wanted me to kill a lizard. I don't cotton to that.<br>3088.7 - I'm just gonna pretend this week never happened. So should you.

>3114.1 - I can see my great-great-great-granddaddy's house from here.<br>3134.0 - Time travel really, really sucks. Eyup.

>3143.3 - I learned my lesson: let sleeping dogs lie. Even if they have been asleep two hundred years.<br>3158.7 - Met insane computer; pulled the plug. Don't send repair team.

>3193.0 - Why can't aliens play Call of Duty like everyone else?<br>3196.1 - Deep dish pizzas that eat rocks can be your friends.

>3201.7 - Met gods. Met Klingons. Now going to meet a couple of aspirin. Again.<br>3220.3 - Not gonna talk about it. Nope. I promised.

>3259.2 - Met disembodied brains. They can't be all that smart-they're addicted to reality TV.<br>3289.8 - Flapjacks now prohibited aboard ship.

>3372.7 - Saved my first officer from holy matrimony. He didn't seem to mind much, after he killed me.<br>3417.7 - Marijuana has nothing on what they grow on Omicron Ceti III.<br>3468.1 - Met God. He committed suicide.<br>3479.4 - Growing old sucks. Don't know how Granny does it.<br>3499.1 - Well! I had a kid named after me! Red-letter day! Oh, and we beat the Klingons, too.<br>3541.9 - Lesson learned: never beam insane computer aboard ship. Need replacement crewmen soon.

>(dunno, maybe around 3600) - I wonder what I'd look like with a goatee and pencil mustache.<br>3615.4 - Met the devil; turns out he was Jack the Ripper.<br>3620.7 - Captain Ahab, eat your heart out; I bagged MY white whale.<br>3715.6 - Met God; turned out to be just an insane computer. Pulled the plug. Seems like a habit.<br>3843.4 - Met first officer's folks. His dad was kind of a jerk, but he turned out okay.<br>4041.7 - Found a planet where Rome didn't fall. They have reality TV. It's only a matter of time now.<br>4202.9 - Met universe's largest funnel cake; it tried to eat us. USS Constellation gave it indigestion, though.<br>4211.8 - Supplied 100 flintlock muskets to natives. NRA just sent me thank-you note. Enope.

>4309.4 - Met new star-sized single-celled life form. Blew it up. That's the Starfleet way. Eyup.<br>4372.5 - Starfleet taxicab \_Enterprise\_ dropped off Elaan as scheduled. Klingons took the tip.

>4385.3 - Western movies are now prohibited aboard ship.<br>4513.3 - Lemme get this straight: you won't send me a ship's psychiatrist, but you WILL send me an android crewman? Enope!<br>4525.6 - If the guy you sent to run Sherman's Planet represents the best and brightest the Federation has to offer, we're all STILL in deep trouble.<br>4598.0 - Next stop: win my bracelet at Federation World Series of Fizzbin. Medical officer needs new phone.<br>4658.9 - New tactic for invincible omnipotent aliens: get 'em drunk. Works for me. Requisitioning replacement bottle of green booze. Any green booze will do.<br>4731.3 - Starfleet puts insane computer aboard my ship. I thought you people were on OUR side!<br>4770.3 - Never let energy beings ride around in your head. It never ends well.<br>(unknown, possibly 4780?) - Found USS Exeter. All aboard dead. Circumstances too stupid to talk about. Eyup.

>(unknown, possibly 4785?) - Time travel sucks. And it's pointless. That Gary Seven guy should be on TV, though.<br>4843.6 - If anybody wants to play cowboys and Indians, I call dibs on Indians.<br>5027.3 - I look good in pointy ears.<br>5029.5 - Met God; he's a pedophile. Taught the kids about stranger danger, and he faded away. DEFINITELY sensing a trend here.<br>5121.5 - Morally superior advanced aliens? Nope. Not buyin' it. Poor girl.<br>5423.8 - Escaped from a whole planet of abstinence only sex-ed students. Send 20,000,000,000 cases of The Pill ASAP. Also 10,000,000 travel agents.<br>5432.3 - First officer's brain stolen, but he's much better now. Eyup.<br>5476.4 - Met insane computer. Fixed it. Bet you thought I couldn't do it.<br>5630.7 - What the big deal is with Medusans? They're not that ugly. I watched him leave and weeble slurp slurp ebba deeba deeba.<br>("Armageddon"? What? Unknown stardate, possibly 5650) - Met energy creature. Met Klingons. We and Klingons laughed energy creature to death. Must tell Pinkie.<br>5693.2 - Parallel universes suck. Tholians suck too. Eyup.<br>5710.9

- I don't cotton to shotgun marriages. Especially not in fast-forward. Nope.  
>5718.3 - Never meet your heroes. They go crazy and try to kill you.<br>5725.6 - Memory Alpha library wiped out. One survivor. I know who you could ask to put it to rights. Eyup.  
>5730.7 - Guess you can be highly advanced aliens and still be complete bigoted bloodthirsty idiots.<br>5784.3 - Took a pill. It gave me unicorn powers. Very cool, eyup. Bet I'll never, ever use this again.  
>(unknown, possibly 5790) - Met insane computer. Blew it up. Shame. She was a looker.<br>5819.3 - Just unionized the miners on Ardana. Schedule OSHA inspectors for follow-up mission.  
>5832.6 - Dr. Severin dead of acid indigestion. First time I've ever hated an apple.<br>5843.8 - Met Methuselah. Met his woman. She was an android. You can probably guess what happened next. Not proud of myself. Nope.  
>5906.5 - Rock aliens dragged us into their strawman Internet debate. Got to kill Ghengis Khan, so it wasn't a total waste of time.<br>5928.5 - Not gonna attend any Starfleet Academy class reunions. Nope. BTW, Starfleet? That rule about no women captains? It's stupid. Eyup.  
>5943.9 - Time travel still sucks, but supernovas blow.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>61.9 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The cameras rolled.<p>

It was a slightly chilly, foggy morning in a park on the western outskirts of the great metropolis of Trottingham.

"As you know, rush-hour traffic through the city is absolutely terrible," Jenny Applebloom said. "And so we of Crop Gear were wondering: is there a better way? And so the three of us are going to race from here to Wreathrow Airport, going through the very heart of the city."

Scooter Hammond stepped forward, wearing bike kit and helmet. "I will be riding this top-of-the-line racing bicycle."

"As you might expect, I'm doing this properly," Sweetie May continued, "in a car. However, because the producers hate me, instead of a sensible hot hatchback, I'll be doing it in this brand-new modestly priced people carrier." She pointed to the minivan parked at the curb.

"Well, look on the bright side, Sweetie," Scooter grinned, "you'll be nice and comfortable while you're stopped in traffic for four hours."

"And I," Applebloom said, "have a boat."

The other two turned in surprise to their leader. "A boat?" Scooter asked.

"A boat," Applebloom confirmed.

"Are you seriously proposing to row from here to Wreathrow?"

"Of course I won't, it's got an engine."

"Well, that's good," Scootaloo grinned. "I'm sure that'll be a great comfort to you as you sink."

"Of course," Applebloom said to change the subject, "we also have to test the efficiency, or the total lack thereof, of public transit, and for that we need a fourth mare. Some say that the global zoological community has declared her her own species, and that she has no concept of soup. All we know is... she's called the Spoon."

Two ponies wearing lab coats wheeled up a dolly, upon which lay a pony in full racing suit and helmet, visor completely opaque. One pony raised up the dolly while the other unlocked the straps which held her to it, freeing her. She stood perfectly still, immobile, unresponsive.

As the other three did a last bit of bickering for the cameras, the executive producer sent the make-ready signal for the first group of cameramen ahead along the race routes.

Between this stunt and the Horseshoe Bay amphibious car crossing, Diamond Wilman thought smugly, this is going to be the best. Series. Yet.

\* \* \*

><p>"We've destroyed Equestrian motoring, is what we've done."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>61.10 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

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><p>"Silver, ya ben' lookin' at tha' mirror fer fifteen minutes," muttered Applebloom as she and Scootaloo fiddled with their pocketed Hyper Tornado they stored from the Sonicverse.<p>

Silver turned to her fellow crusaders and gawked. None of them looked even remotely bothered at their current state. DT was reading War and Peace and Sweetie was playing with a copy of Harry's invisibility cloak.

She shouted, "Why aren't you trying to fix this?! None of you seem to care!"

DT lowered her book a touch, "Why are you so freaked out by this? I thought you liked being a unicorn that one loop."

Silver huffed, "For the first time since the loops began, I was a real Earth Pony. But it's like the loops are toying with me. And none of your are even remotely concerned at this."

Sweetie looked to Silver Spoon. "We're in some way human or otherwise non base form every twenty loops or so. It's not that uncommon. Besides, I'm sure Twilight is doing everything she can to fix

this."

\* \* \*

><p>Gilda sighed as she stood next to an unawake Chrysalis, Flim, Flam, Trixie and Sombra. This loop, she had planned on going mostly baseline in preparation for a prank on an unawake Dash, the only element not awake this time. The loop seemed baseline, until Chrysalis dropped by and dragged her away from her nest in Ghastly Gorge and forcibly inducted her into the 'Elements of Disharmony.' Figuring it was better to keep the five pony evil band from causing trouble, she went along with it.<p>

And now was her chance to escape. She withdrew a telescope from her subspace pocket and gazed on Ponyville. It was late at night and the streets were mostly deserted. But she managed to get a glance at a couple of wondering ponies. The sight that greeted her caused the gears in her head to jam up abruptly, "What the buck?"

Chrysalis asked, "Is there something the matter, Element of Disloyalty?"

And just as abruptly, those gears started moving again. She blinked several times and rubbed her eyes, then looked again. A few seconds later, she shrugged, "Just some weird pony...thing...happening. I'll go on ahead to scout the area. Be back in awhile."

\* \* \*

><p><strong><strong>

The door to the library slammed open as Gilda entered. She opened her mouth to demand an answer, when the sight of five unicorn Twilight Sparkles and an Alicorn Twilight greeted her. One of those Twilights seemed a bit more...draconic in nature than the rest and was strapped to a variety of sciency things. Another Twilight seemed especially confused as she spoke in the voice of Rainbow Dash, "Gilda? What are you doing here?!"

Those poor gears in her head froze again, and then a couple snapped off. The original Twilight recognized the vacant expression and levitated a glob of water into the Griffon's face. Gilda blinked several times before sighing, "Where's Rarity's couch?"

The couch appeared behind her as she fell over. Twilight gave a sheepish grin, "Sorry, seems someone released a weird magic virus in Ponyville that turned everyone into unicorn versions of me."

Gilda rubbed her head as a headache was starting to form...only for several feathers to come away. If anything, Twilight seemed even more sheepish, "Yeah...it even affected Spike," gesturing to the Twilight strapped to the science equipment, "and Iron Will. Seems like you're now infected too."

Her smile turned pleased, "Good news is, it's not lethal. Unfortunately though, the cure we found requires a changeling's ability to shapeshift. And Chrysalis probably won't be so willing to help us."

Gilda rubbed her head as more feathers started to fall out, "That's

easy. Chrysalis is plotting revenge with Sombra and several of your old enemies just outside Ponyville. Just drag her down here and she'll be able to help, willingly or not."

\* \* \*

><p>It was almost sad how easily Chrysalis' plan fell apart. Trixie was rescued by the original Twilight as she remote teleported Trixie into the Library and tied her up a few seconds later until the mind control could be broken. Pinkie tricked Sombra into an unbreakable jar and sealed the top on after him. Flim and Flam, upon seeing Trixie and Sombra taken out so quickly, tried fleeing before running headfirst into an invisible barrier set up by Applejack's unicorn form, knocking them out immediately. Dash and Gilda tackled Chrysalis and...'convinced' her to assist in their experiments.<p>

A week later, everyone was back to normal and happy...well everyone but Chrysalis, "No, please anything but that!"

With a burst of purple magic, the deed was done. Chrysalis screamed, "Nooo! You monster! What did I ever do to deserve this!?"

Twilight rolled her eyes at the drama queen, now sporting a mustache. The changeling was still tied up, awaiting transport to Canterlot where Celestia and Luna would iron out a treaty for the changelings to live peacefully in Equestria, not that Chrysalis knew she was to be pardoned for her crimes in return for helping Twilight save the town. Rarity also took the opportunity to try out some lines she had been developing for changelings. And since Chrysalis hadn't been awake for several loops, she hadn't been able to get her assistance. Now though, she had captive audience.

Twilight used the last of this loop practicing some of her older spells on Chrysalis she hadn't used in awhile to keep up her skills.

Gilda, meanwhile, decided to sit the rest of this loop...and probably the next ten loops, in Big Mac's bar...or her bed/nest/whatever if he wasn't awake then.

As for Silver, she enjoyed the rest of the loop as an Earth Pony. Next loop though, she replaced Rainbow Dash.

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><p>61.11 (Wing Zero 032)<p>

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><p>"...Team Seven will consist of Uchiha Sasuke..." The non-awake Chunnin Sensei Umino Iruka was rattling off the composition of Team Seven; apparently, Naruto was the only one awake so it would either be a lonely or a really boring loop, and a bored Naruto is a dangerous Naruto for everyone around.<p>

"...Haruno Sakura..." Yep, the classic fangirl gloating of Sakura towards Ino was present as well...

"... And Uzumaki Naruto under Gin-" Just before Naruto could react at the sudden change from the baseline, a flashbanging puff of smoke



burst in front of the chalkboard, revealing a young but well developed kunoichi who had silver hair in a braid, some rather large pastel blue-rimmed glasses that would be normally seen on a civilian librarian girl however these ones strangely enough accentuated her pink eyes very well, face covered by a black facemask that apparently was part of the full black single piece attire she was wearing. Said attire included pink arm bracers, leggings and a belt that carried the Konoha plate as if it were a buckle, and silver armor attached in strategical parts of the body, thus giving full-body protection without restricting her mobility, something vital for a ninja's work; A red, tattered and slightly charred scarf neatly warped around her neck and of course the Jonin jacket denoting her rank.

"Hi everyone! Team seven? Meet me on the rooftop this very instant. Sorry for the sudden appearance, Umino-san." And in the same way this kunoichi had come to the classroom, she was gone to wait for her newly assigned team, not even giving the startled teacher time to retort. Some couple of seconds later Naruto, together with Sasuke and Sakura, rushed to the rooftop of the academy, not even bothering to hear the rest of the team placements. Once they had managed to reach the rooftop, they found their new sensei reclined against the rail barriers, playing tricks with a silver spoon between her fingers.

"Oh, you're here! Hello, my name is Gin Hatake and before you ask, yes I am Kakashi Hatake's little sister and I will be your new Jonin Sensei due to the fact that he's on medical leave from the last mission. I was available, and even thought I've read your profiles, I would ask you to present yourselves with your likes, dislikes, hobbies and dreams for the future so we can meet each-other a lot better." She presented herself to her new students with the signature "eye smile" of the family.

"Umm, could you give us an example Gin-sensei?" Of Course there's always Sakura to ask the obvious questions; that was kind of the norm when she was not awake.

"Sure, why not? Hello, my name is Gin Hatake; Likes? Spoons and their uses; Dislikes? Excessively emo teammates; Hobbies? Percussive therapy on said emos; Dreams... I dream about Little Ponies, of multiple colors." Well, not exactly a lie but now Naruto may have got the clue that she was an Equestrian Looper.

"W-what do you mean by that, sensei?" asked Sakura, torn between cluelessness at the weird introduction, awkwardness at the weird dream her sensei had described and a fangirl's fear for her object of affection considering how the new sensei was practically thinking up ways to beat the emo out of her beloved.

"Exactly what I said, or do I need to repeat myself?" Gin Hatake, AKA: Silver Spoon said with the most creepy smile that could be slightly be distinguished despite it being covered behind her face mask and the sun practically reflecting on her glasses while hiding her happy eye smiles. This creeped the stuff out of the two non-awake genin and best of all: It didn't require the use any killing-intent technique to work!

Yup, Naruto was now completely sure this will be an interesting loop.

\* \* \*

><p>61.12 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright Raz, I have a great plan for this okay why are you a girl?"<p>

Twilight flexed her fingers, examining the gloves she was wearing for a moment before turning to the young girl with a dry expression on her face. "Well, that's probably because I'm not Raz. Hold on, my loop memories haven't come in yet."

"Loop memories...? Oh, those." The girl shook her head. "Wait a minute, what do you mean you're not Raz?"

"I take it this is your first fused loop." Twilight rolled her eyes. "Well, the long and short of it-oh, there are the loop memories. Oh! Psychic. Do you mind if I just project the explanation into your mind?"

The girl crossed her arms. "I'd prefer to just take it from yours." After a moment, her eyes widened. "Wait, what the-?"

Twilight smiled slyly, taking a gentle hold of the mental probe. "Your world isn't the only one with psychics. Now let me direct you to the relevant memories." She guided the girl's third eye through the explanation of Yggdrassil and the loops, being sure to emphasize her position as Anchor, before letting her go.

"...okay. Wow. Well, uh... sorry about being rude and all." The girl shifted one of her feet. "It's just... Raz and I, we're kinda together."

"...aren't we, like, ten years old?"

The girl tapped her head. "Psychic receivers. We generally learn about things long before other kids. I'm Lilli by the way."

"Twilight Sparkle, but you already knew that. My in-loop name is Twinuviel, but it shortens to Twi." She shrugged. "Things just work that way. Anyway, apparently I ran away from home because I misinterpreted my mother's attempts to keep me away from the dangers of the psychic world as flat out hating psychics and decided to come to Whispering Rock."

"Yeah, that's Raz's story too. I mean, usually it's his father but, well, you're a girl so..." Lilli shrugged. "Anyway, Raz managed to become a psychonaut in one day during the baseline-I can't believe we didn't think of that term-but that's mostly because Oleander went temporarily insane and Raz managed to stop him from taking over the world. Nowadays we usually spend the night curing Oleander in advance and having Raz ace every exam he gets, as well as helping out the inmates in the asylum across the lake and dealing with doctor Loboto."

"...sounds interesting."

"Eh, it's the most stable part of the loop. The next ten years or so we go on various psychonaut adventures, but that can vary wildly. I don't know why..."

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack gently rocked the wide-eyed young colt back and forth. "Thar thar now. It'll be okay. Ah promise."<p>

"I'm really really sorry," Pinkie added, ears drooping. "I really am. If I'd known you would have tried to get into my mind, I'd have fixed things up!"

"I know you're sorry," Brainspinner said distantly. "That just makes it worse..."

\* \* \*

><p>61.13 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Without farm life, there'd be such disparity, these thoughts I think with great clarity. Apples high to the sky, she's the one of my eye, that fruit-hauling pony named... Applejack!"<p>

Applejack rolled her eyes with a smile. "Thanks, hon, but Ah prefer dragons."

Trenderhoof turned to meet the unfriendly gaze of a teenage Spike and gulped nervously.

Rarity twitched involuntarily. She still wasn't entirely sure how Applejack had managed to gain the attentions of an Unawake version of her husband.

\* \* \*

><p>"Without farm life, there'd be such disparity, these thoughts I think with great clarity. Apples high to the sky, they're the one of my eye, that fruit-hauling pony named... Macintosh!"<p>

Applejack and Rarity blinked in joint astonishment. 'What.'

\* \* \*

><p><em><em>

"Without farm life, there'd be such disparity, these thoughts I think with great clarity. Apples high to the sky, she's the one of my eye, that fruit-hauling pony named... Applejack!"

Applejack rolled her eyes with a smile. "Thanks, hon, but Ah prefer mares."

Rarity hadn't yet finished processing that statement when Applejack grabbed her for a passionate kiss.

"Applejack!" Rarity extricated herself, scandalized. She saw the teasing look in the farm pony's eye and realized that this was

probably retribution for some prank or other. \_'Well, challenge accepted.'\_

Trenderhoof was completely out of it since the kiss and missed the subtle byplay.

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><p>61.14 (Masterweaver)<p>

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><p>"Without farm life, there'd be such disparity, these thoughts I think with great clarity. Apples high to the sky, she's the one of my eye, that fruit-hauling pony named... Applejack!"<p>

Applejack rolled her eyes with a smile. "Thanks, hon, but Ah prefer changelings."

"Oh, well, that's no problem at all!" Trenderhoof replied, dropping his disguise.

Rarity's jaw divebombed into the ground. "...\_what.\_"

"...ya know," Applejack mused, "this explains a lot."

\* \* \*

><p>"Without farm life, there'd be such disparity, these thoughts I think with great clarity. Apples high to the sky, she's the one of my eye, that fruit-hauling pony named... Applejack!"<p>

Applejack rolled her eyes with a smile. "Thanks, hon, but Ah prefer gender benders." She wrapped a hoof around a passing pony.

"I hate you so much right now," Rapid Hooves said cheerily.

"Half off all apples and apple products next time ya visit."

"Deal."

\* \* \*

><p>"Without farm life, there'd be such disparity, these thoughts I think with great clarity. Apples high to the sky, she's the one of my eye, that fruit-hauling pony named... Applejack!"<p>

Applejack rolled her eyes with a smile. "Thanks, hon, but Ah prefer time-traveling cyborgs from tha future."

"...I'm sorry, what?"

Lightning and wind kicked up around them, and suddenly Twilight Sparkle was there, half her head encased in metal. "Quick, my past pony friends! I must find the mystic records of, uh, LUNOPOLIS!"

"Let's be off then!" Rarity replied, and the three of them galloped away, leaving Trenderhoof completely befuddled.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

61.1: Mock mock mock.

>61.2: Nyan.<br>61.3: She's a gorner.

>61.4: It's best to know where your own instruction manual is. If possible.<br>61.5: Slow and steady. (Pinkie is trying to work out how to change her entire colour scheme.)

>61.6: There's altogether too many matchmares around here.<br>61.7: My Little Darthie.

>61.8: Laconic, adjective. See "Captain Macintosh."<br>61.9: Sweetie provides the opening music, with an electronic keyboard version of Jessica. (Strangely, this is actually one of James May's real-world talents.)

>61.10: Too many Twilights, not enough books.<br>61.11: Let's be honest, this is probably fairly normal for Narutoverse teachers.

>61.12: Caution. Do not mind read Pinkie Pie.<br>61.13: Two tactics and one completely unexpected twist.

>61.14: One completely unexpected twist and two tactics.<p>

## 66. Chapter 66

### 62.1 (Zetrein)

\* \* \*

><p>He Woke reading a book. It was a nice book, full of old myths and legends. The relevent part of the book however, was obviously the legend about the two sisters. Humming, he added the book to his inventory, and pulled out his trusty Quest Journal.<p>

**\*\*Elements of Harmony\*\***

>I have just Awoken in a new loop, and right off the bat I've got my first quest-hook. A book describing two sisters who raise the sun and moon, while my loop memories only account for the one left standing at the end of the tale. Obviously I must learn more.<br>Also, I seem to be a unicorn mage.

**\*\*Objectives\*\***

>\*Find out more about the Moon Sister.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"There you are, Dovahkiin! Moondancer is having a little get together in the west castle courtyard, you wanna come?" Asked the middle of the three unicorns who stopped him along the path.<p>

"I'm sorry girls, but I'm on a quest right now. I'll make it if I can."

**\*\*Miscellaneous\*\***

>\*Attend Moondancer's party.<p>

As he jogged away, the Dovahkiin heard the one that had spoken to him ask her friends "He's on a quest? Did he just say that?"

\* \* \*

><p>Entering his tower, the Dovahkiin decided to follow his loop memories and call on his follower. Given as said follower was supposed to be a dragon, he naturally used the surefire way to get his attention.<p>

\*\*\*"SPIKE!"\*\* His shout blew the doors open, rattled the windows, and echoed across the castle grounds. And there he was, laying across the room. Thu'um, works every time.

\* \* \*

><p>"...Bring about nighttime eternal. Well, that escalated quickly." The Dovahkiin updated his Journal, as he used his magic to empty the shelves into his inventory.<p>

\*\*-Objectives-\*\*-

>\*Find out more about the Elements of Harmony.<br>\*Find out more about the Moon Sister.

Spike, who had recovered his hearing at this point, was mildly concerned by the disappearing books, and had written a letter to the Princess regarding what he was seeing. She had thankfully replied.

"Ah, Dovahkiin? Letter for you, from the Princess." By this point, most the library was gone. Dovahkiin seemed to be opening the books to random places, reading a few pages, then the book just went "pop!" and vanished.

"Ah, thank you Spike." He read part of it aloud, before it too vanished. "...Value your diligence, and that I trust you completely, but your obsession with books has gone a bit too far. I do not know what you're doing with them, but there is more to a young pony's life than books. As such... Hm, it would seem I'm going to Ponyville."

\*\*-Summer Sun Celebration-\*\*-

>I have been ordered by Princess Celestia to oversee preparations for a small town festival. I gather this was brought on by my theft of an entire library. Could be worse, I don't think I have enough local currency to buy off a prison sentence.<p>

\*\*-Objectives-\*\*-

>\*Go to Ponyville.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>62.2 (Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>MLP Loop Trek: "Yesterday Will be Delayed Indefinitely"<p>

"So we're agreed?" Captain Rainbow Dash asked the ponies (and dragoness) gathered in the conference room.

Lt. (j.g.) Silver Spoon nodded. "I could use as much non-adventure time as I can get. I'm still a little fuzzy on some of the more

exotic alloys the Klingons are using," she admitted.

Lt. (j.g.) Nyx and Lt. Sweetie Belle also nodded agreement.

"I like the idea of no adventures," opined Nurse Fluttershy.

Lt. Diamond Tiara's expression was one of polite indifference. "I still have no preference either way."

"It'd be cool to see what this loop's version of 20th Century Equestria looks like, but I can see the point about keeping a low profile and avoiding attention from the DTI," said Lt. Scootaloo wistfully.

"I agree that we shouldn't go lookin' fer trouble if we kin avoid it," said Applejack.

"Do y'all wonder if we're bein' too clever fer our own good by deliberately avoidin' time travel? Won't the Department know that we're supposed to go back in time?" asked Apple Bloom.

"My theory is that the Department of Temporal Investigations was formed as a result of several timey-wimey incidents that take place around this time, so they probably don't exist yet. Therefore, any changes we make to the timeline before their formation will be the standard against which the compare any future anomalies. Still, it's better to play it safe, and I think it's just a good idea to avoid any foreseeable unexpected events on general principles," explained Twilight.

" 'Foreseeable unexpected event' is an oxymoron, mom," pointed out Nyx. Several others around the conference table chuckled.

The captain sighed. "Yeah. Even though it'd be kinda cool to visit Equestria before Luna decides to play with eugenics, we're probably better off if we avoid any possibility of encountering that era's Celestia. It'd sure make any meeting we have with her now incredibly awkward."

Luna as one of the instigators of the Eugenics Wars was just one of several bizarre modifications brought on by trying to hammer the square peg of Equestria into the round hole of Trek-verse history.

"Right then. Twilight, Apple Bloom, Scoots, Nyx? Please coordinate to increase sensor range for gravitational anomalies. You are authorized to employ whatever enhancements, magical or otherwise, you deem necessary at your discretion," Rainbow ordered. Although Twilight's status as Anchor and de facto leader of the Ponyville group usually resulted in other Loopers deferring to her judgement, they had agreed early in this loop that Dash's position as Captain would take precedence.

"Captain?" asked Apple Bloom. "Kin I have a day out of warp in deep space? I'm positive I've got the problems with the nanomachine upgrade protocols worked out this time."

"Ask me again after we've detected and avoided that dark star," Rainbow responded guardedly.

"You'd better have a foolproof leash on those nanites, Apple Bloom," warned Twilight. "We do not need a repeat of what happened to the food replicators last week being done to the warp drive."

"No kidding," agreed Sweetie Belle. "Maple syrup all over the place..."

"I figger it was all y'all workin' off yer tree sap quota," Applejack quipped to the gathered Cutie Mark Crusaders.

"Not fair!" objected Nyx. "We weren't doing anything at all related to Crusading."

"Daughters," coughed Twilight.

"Yer never gonna let us live that down, are ya?" sighed Apple Bloom.

\* \* \*

><p>In an entirely different bit of spacetime...<p>

"How does the score for this one work out?" Q asked his counterpart.

The draconequus frowned and produced a small notebook and a mechanical calculating machine. Mumbling to himself as he peered at the pages, he went through several iterations of punching keys and cranking the handle. He passed over the resulting paper tape.

" 'Out of Cheese Error. Please Reboot Universe'? Very droll. But seriously..." insisted Q.

"I make it a wash. No detectable change matches the lack of interesting shenanigans to three significant figures. Any thoughts about bonus points for the syrup?"

\* \* \*

><p>62.3 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"... and Angel Bert's <em>Perspectives on World Teachings of Celestia<em>. Obviously misfiled under Religion. It needs to be in fiction- Spike?" Twilight Sparkle looked over the stack of books to be reorganized at her assistant, who looked a bit unwell. "Are you okay? Is something wrong?"

"Yeah, um, well," Spike grunted, looking like he'd eaten a bad beryl, "I'll be back in just a few minutes, all right?"

As soon as he said the words he was engulfed in a cloud of green smoke. When it was gone, so was he.

\* \* \*

><p>"YOU HAVE GATHERED THE SEVEN SACRED DRAGON BALLS. SPEAK YOUR WISH, AND IT WILL BE GRANTED."<p>



"What should we wish for? Should we wish for Goku-"

"What about Vegeta? And Gohan? And everybody in Plum City and-"

"But we can't leave Cell to-"

"Look, just wish Goku back, and-"

"HEY! GUYS!"

The second-string Dragonball warriors looked up into the heavens and noticed, for the first time, that the dragon they'd summoned was getting impatient. Of those gathered, only Bulma made the further realization that the dragon wasn't the usual one.

"LOOK, YOU CALLED ME AWAY FROM WORK FOR THIS! I'M IN A HURRY! I GOTTA GET BACK TO THE LIBRARY AND HELP TWILIGHT FINISH REFILING ABOUT A MILLION BOOKS. NOW, HAVE YOU GOT A WISH OR NOT?"

\* \* \*

><p>In a puff of smoke, Spike reappeared.<p>

"What was that all about?" Twilight asked.

"Last Loop I was in, I was really hungry, and there was this round gem-encrusted thing with red stars painted on it," Spike muttered. "Turns out it didn't agree with me."

\* \* \*

><p>Elsewhere, Shenron shut his airplane novel and chuckled, "That's telling them, Jack Ryan." He took a sip of his daquiri, adjusted his sunglasses, and settled back for a mid-afternoon beach siesta.<p>

The umbrella he lay under stretched half a mile wide. On its canopy was painted: \_ON VACATION- DO NOT DISTURB- FOR ALL WISHES CONTACT TEMP SERVICE.\_

It was a pity this wouldn't last past the current fused loop, by all indications... but, well, it was nice for a dragon to get a holiday once in a while.

\* \* \*

><p>62.1 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo had a good feeling, as she Woke up on a cloud. Her loop memories told her she had traded places with Rainbow Dash, and while Filly Dash might fun to see, she was hoping Twilight'd go for a near baseline start. This might finally be her chance to attune to a specific Element!<p>

Going by the time of day, Twilight was likely already in Ponyville. Taking to the air, she started looking for the purple unicorn, intending to take a brief fly-over the town, before going to the library. She began suspecting a fused loop when she saw the

meadery.

This feeling was confirmed when she caught sight of the unicorn walking beside Spike. Blue coat, some kind of stylized diamond shaped cutie mark. She knew it was something, but couldn't make out more than the shape from where she was.

"...Pony named Scootaloo clearing the clouds." Spike was saying, as she came in to land near them.

"Hey there! That's-" Scootaloo started to say, when a thunderous sound knocked her the last few feet out of the sky.

\*\*"Lok Vah Koor!"\*\* As clouds left the sky, and a great many startled birds took their place, the unicorn turned back to the cringing dragon. "Done. Next?"

"Hey!" Scootaloo called from the mud puddle she had landed in, finally getting his attention.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>-Elements of Harmony-<strong>  
>Preperations are complete. The local Looper tells me that so long as I don't kill or steal, she's willing to allow me mostly-free reign. She has also agreed to let me follow the quests, and to avoid spoilers.<p>

\*\*-Objectives-\*\*

>\*Find out more about the Elements of Harmony.<br>\*Attend the Summer Sun Celebration.  
>\*Complete Summer Sun Celebration preperations.<br>\*Find out more about the Moon Sister.

As Nightmare Moon's cloudy form shot off into the distance, Dovahkiin commented to Scootaloo. "Reminds me a bit of Alduin. Guessing there'll be a bit of questing, before I defeat her?"

"Spoilers." Scootaloo was sure this loop was going to be a wild ride. This guy was crazier then those dragon riding vikings.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>-Objectives-<strong>  
>\*Go to the Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters.<br>\*Find out more about the Elements of Harmony.  
>\*Complete Summer Sun Celebration preperations.<br>\*Find out more about the Moon Sister.

Dovahkiin ran through the forest at a dead sprint. While those ponies all offered their aid, he didn't want a follower right now. They always tended to mess up somehow. Scootaloo also didn't seem to understand he could only have the one follower at a time, but at least she was keeping up with him. By flying.

"How much stamina do you have?! You've been running for an hour! You barely broke stride when you put an axe in that manticore." Scootaloo was very glad she had convinced the unAwake Elements to stay behind, that would not have gone over well with... most of them, really. "It's those bottles, isn't it? What've you been drinking?" She asked,

referring to the trail of bottles Dovahkiin had left in his wake.

"Dovahmead! Not so good on stamina regen, but I'm not stopping for that anyway. Besides, true Nords don't fight sober!" He didn't mention the few hundred character levels in stamina.

Scootaloo flew along behind him, as her mind tried to parse that. "Buck it, gimmie some of that. We're doing this your way anyway."

\* \* \*

><p>Watching Dovahkiin deal with the Nightmare's "challenges" would have been amusing sober, and by the time he had ignored the scary trees, somehow speech-checked Steven Magnet, and launched himself across across the chasm instead of dealing with the bridge, Scootaloo was fairly buzzed.<p>

Dovahmead, as it turned out, was just various forms of Nord mead he had stuck labels on. Some had tape covering their original labels, others had "Hello, my name is" stickers, some even had actual labels. Scootaloo suspected that he had several dozen loops worth of booze in his pocket.

While the Shadowbolts were being introduced to the shiny black axe and shield Dovahkiin had used to kill the manticore, she wondered if she'd be able to make it to the Nightmare Moon fight without finally falling over to sleep it off.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>-Objectives-<strong>

>\*Defeat Nightmare Moon.<br>\*(Optional) Use the Elements of Harmony.

>\*Go to the Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters.<br>\*Find out more about the Elements of Harmony.

>\*Complete Summer Sun Celebration preparations.<br>\*Find out more about the Moon Sister.

His loop memories wanted him to teleport behind her. He kind of felt that the momentary advantage wasn't worth that much, and wasn't his style. Still, teleportation... He took a breath, and flashed to the side.

\*\*"Fus Ro DAH!"\*\* The dark mare flew out of the window. Wasting no time, and ignoring the guffawing orange pegesus in the corner, Dovahkiin went to the Elements and started casting Sparks, like the book had told him to. It didn't appear to be working.

As a scuffed looking Nightmare teleported in front of him, and used some spell to knock him away from the Elements, Dovahkiin decided it was time to change tactics. Just as well, Nightmare had just destroyed the Elements, and was monologuing.

"The night, will last, FOREVE-" WHAM.

\* \* \*

><p>Luna woke up with the worst headache of her life, her left eye felt swollen shut, she had a broken jaw, and the sun was in her face.

The sound of her sister yelling at somepony didn't help.<p>

"Warhammer?! You beat my sister unconscious with a warhammer?!" She was saying.

"It did the job, didn't it? Beat the evil right out of her." Came a male voice.

"That's not-! You can't just stick a handle on a dragon's femur and call it a warhammer! Where did you even \_get\_ that from?" Femur? That sounded familiar, like it was something she had seen recently.

"It's a perfectly serviceable weapon." The other voice insisted.

"IT'S INDECENT!" Oh yes, that's where she had seen it. Flying at her face.

\* \* \*

><p>62.4 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke in a corridor. The walls glowed a bright electric blue. Ahead of her and behind her stretched a long line of what smelled like vanilla sugar pills floating in midair.<p>

I think I recognize this one, she thought. Looks like one of the Admins has been putting Hub-level video games on Yggdrasil... again. I can't imagine how this world could possibly be a stable Loop.

But those candies smell really delicious...

\* \* \*

><p>"I KNEW IT! I KNEW IT!" Pinkie bounced around the little room. "I KNEW WE WERE ALL FAMILY!"<p>

"Let me get this straight," Inky rasped, shaking out her multicolored rainbow fringe. "We're supposed to protect all those pills, so instead of patrolling those wide open halls and keeping them in this single room with a single door," she pointed to the portal, "we arrange them all in lines like an ant-trail and lock OURSELVES in the little room."

"Yep!" Pinkie chirped. "Makes perfect sense!"

Blinkyjack blinked. "Only you, Pinkie."

A sound echoed through the wall: \_wocka wocka wocka wocka\_

"HEY!" Pinkie shouted. "Somepony's eating our candy! Are we going to stand for that?"

"Nope," Big Clyde rumbled, charging at the still-closed door.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, where did you go when the loop crashed?" Twilight asked.<p>

"Smash Brothers," Dash grinned. "I got this awesome new toy- Trixie's going to love it!" She pulled a B-bomb out of her subspace pocket. The others flinched away.

"Eiken," Applejack said, and nothing more needed saying.

"I got dumped in a new Mario world!" Pinkie grinned. "Everything was made out of cake and toys and things, only it was this great big board game thing, and we got to play all sorts of neat party games! Can I crash a Loop next, Twilight? I wanna go back!"

Twilight sighed. "I had another visit to G3. Nothing interesting happened. Ever. Again."

"How did you crash that loop, anyway?" Big McIntosh asked, sliding a fresh drink over to Twilight.

"I don't know, exactly," Twilight said. "I'd just collected the ninth pair of keys from the middle of the maze when all of a sudden time froze and there was this smell of smoke... and then I woke up in Pony Lobotomy Land."

"See, guys," Rainbow Dash said, "I told you we should have gone with the Loop memories and tried to catch her. But noooo, you all wanted to cooperate with her. Didn't want to hurt our friend. You even let her EAT US ALIVE!"

"In my defense," Twilight said, looking a little ill at the memory, "when you turned blue you kind of smelled like mint. I really like mint."

"Remind me never to stand between Twilight and Bon-Bon's herb garden," Rainbow Dash whispered to Pinkie, who nodded agreement.

\* \* \*

><p>62.5 (Redshirt Zombie)<p>

Objectives:

>\*Lots. Let's not go there.<p>

Dovahkiin meandered through the streets of Ponyville as all Loopers do, when dazed by their 'welcome to the Equestria loop' party. His particular path lead him towards the river that separated the town from the Everfree. The main bridge to cross between two said landmarks, in fact, was just in sight off to the southwest; while most of it was blocked by a rather squat building, some of it was visible on the other bank. For his own part, the Dragonborn was feeling vaguely queasy. Pinkie's parties never lacked sugary treats to eat, and the Dragonmead he'd used on his Quest to save Equestria was still hammering him with a hangover. So, Dovahkiin wandered down to the bank, to sit, and rest, and puke up anything he needed to safely. Parties were fine, but somepony as used to isolation, with at most a few travelling companions, as he was could understand why being surrounded by that many bodies made him feel more like he was on a thick battlefield, unarmed and unarmored, than the celebration of victory it was. So he sat at the river's edge, and let his stomach

fight itself as he watched the river flow.

Naturally, the Loops take such sedateness as a challenge. A butterfly, with orange wings striped through with black and white speckles, fluttered up and landed on his nose. The dragonborn stared at this interloper into his quiet with brief amusement, allowing it to flick its wings a few times as it rested on him as he rested there. Soon enough, it lifted off and fluttered over to the plants sitting at the wall of the short building and the edge of the river, sitting on one. Silvery roots branched off in wild directions, under a cluster of fernlike, cyan leaves with green spots that stemmed from a short stem.

Figuring that no reasonable adult would allow poisonous plants near where their children might play, and that he might as well adapt his alchemical ability to the local agriculture, he reached over and harvested it.

\*New quest gained! "Finding New Roots"

Silence, almost in anticipation, filled the air as the Dragonborn realized what had just happened. Slowly, gears ticked into place and several emotions, one in particular, filled his gut. There was only one possible reaction he could have.

In Sugarcube Corner, Pinkie twitched around briefly, then looked up and preemptively yelled "Cover ears!"

In Canterlot, two alicorns that controlled the cycle of the sky perked up to the low, distant roar.

"What do you think that was?" asked Celestia. "I don't think I've heard anything quite like that before."

"Possibly the new Looper," said Luna. After a second of attention, she said, "He has talent, but he needs training to use the Thu'um properly. I don't even think that's a proper word of power."

Celestia said, "Certainly not in earshot of children."

\* \* \*

><p>Quest:<p>

-Improve your mastery of the Thu'um under Princess Luna's tutelage

The Macintosh 'Hills' were, evidently, named by someone with a talent for understatement. Considering it was snowing at their current altitude - in mid-February - with deserts not quite on the horizon, the Dragonborn was beginning to suspect that said pony's understatement was their cutie mark.

Princess Luna was, for no apparent reason, wearing a red jacket with a towel, both pinned under her royal garb.

"Now, then. What have we learned?"

"Total control," he said, without hesitation.

"Good."

"Use the diaphragm."

"Yes, and most importantly?"

"Passion!"

"Right! So now that you have the elements of a good Shout, let's hear one," she said, pointing at the peak above.

A quick inhale, to what felt like full lungs, and "Fus RO DAH!" Shouted the Dovahkiin, in the direction indicated. The air rippled as the Shout passed through it, and the snow above started sliding towards them.

Luna grunted disapproval as she watched the avalanche approach, then inhaled. "FUS RO \*\*DAH!\*" Her Shout made his sound like a civil conversation, and reversed the direction of the avalanche, up the mountain's side and over the peak. Disappointment crossed her face as she looked back at the Dovahkiin. "You're going to shout for me like that? Louder."

The Dovhaiikin pulled in another breath, trying to pull in more than he thought he had the last Shout, and pushed this "Fus RO \*\*DAH!\*" out. Another avalanche, bigger than the last one, slid loose of the mountain, towards them.

Luna's annoyance was clear as she yelled "Louder!" at him... in the Traditional Royal Canterlot Voice, from three feet away. A hoof pointed at the incoming snowslide.

This time, the Dragonborn didn't hold back. He inhaled, past comfort, past tension, until his lungs felt overfull and burned with tension inside him. He then looked to the too-close mass of cold approaching, and buckled his gut - from bellybutton up to his ribs - as hard as he could, as he Shouted "FUS \*\*RO DAH!\*" at the incoming snow.

Impossibly, the snow's speed buckled, as it somehow split, buckling into two streams of snow. What came down, nowhere near as massive as the initial avalanche, slipped past on either side, almost politely. A triumphant smirk crossed his face as he looked to his mentor - who had an eyebrow raised.

Princess Luna's initial response was a bored 'huh'. She then inhaled, seemingly mildly, and yelled "\*\*\*FUS RO DAH!\*" into the distance. The air rippled on its way to the next mountain, where it knocked the icecap atop the mountain clean off, causing it to, well, sleet its way down the opposite side. "That's what we're going for. Try to keep up."

Objectives:

\*Improve your mastery of the Thu'um under Princess Luna's tutelage, while helping her landscaping project

\* \* \*

><p>62.6 (LordCirce and Vulpine Fury)<p>

\_...Everything is going to be. Just. Fine!\_"\_

"Great! Good job, Tara. Alright, that looks like a wrap everyone. Pack up, and we'll get to editing."

Tara Strong, or, as she was known most Loops, Twilight Sparkle, shook her head as she stepped out of the recording booths. It always felt odd to sing those familiar songs without the subtle tug of a True Heart Song pulling it all together as a whole. Still, probably her favorite part of this Loop was getting to record as herself. Though, providing the voice of Raven from the Titans was still odd.

'\_We don't even sound alike. Honestly...\_'

\* \* \*

><p>Silver Spoon's jaw dropped. She knew that she had been an actress and opera singer this loop, and had been suitably impressed with her body's vocal talents, but here she was in a studio in Vancouver singing one of the most basic lullabies from back home as a demo for some cartoon.<p>

"My Little Pony... My little Pony, Ah-ah-ah-ah!"

"That's \_beautiful\_, Shannon!" The musician beamed from behind his keyboard. "I'm so glad you got back from Europe in time for this. How was Prague?" He paused seeing the tears in his singers' eyes. "Are you all right?"

Silver felt a fragile smile tug at the corners of her mouth. "Nah, that theme just means a lot to me."

"Are you going to be okay to demo this next song? I heard that due to double-casting the show is going to need singing voices for a lot of the main cast. Andrea can pull off one of her characters, but the other one is scripted for a lot more range. The character is pretty energetic. Here, let me play you some of the spoken dialog, and we'll see if you can match well enough."

Silver smiled at the familiar voice coming out of the player. "I think I can manage it. Just let me compose myself and I'll be right back after a bit of sight-reading.."

She hummed to herself on the way to the water fountain. "When I was a little filly and the sun was going do-ow-ow-own..."

\* \* \*

><p>62.7 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Ryuko Woke Up, as she usually did, having just fallen down the trapdoor in her old house to the basement full of dust and clothes and bits of research equipment. After digging around a bit to find Senketsu and confirming he was Awake, her cell phone started chirping.<p>



"Yah?" She snipped into the thing. It was always... interesting... when Satsuki called her before they were ever supposed to have 'met'. "What do you mean I need to get to your place ASAP? What's wrong? Satsuki? \_Oi, Kiryuin!?" She hated it when people hung up on her, but that was fine. She'd get to the Kiryuin mansion and yell at her there.

Pulling out a grappling hook from that one loop she spent as Batgirl, She shot up and smashed her way through the closed trap door. Her last angry thought as she mounted her bike right out of her Pocket before she ever hit the ground was that someone better have a good reason for this.

\* \* \*

><p>Hours of driving had given her a chance to think, so she wasn't entirely surprised when Satsuki met her in the foyer of the Kiryuin Mansion with an unfamiliar woman she suspected was replacing Ragyo this loop.<p>

"I'm still having trouble believing it- \_living clothes!\_ Oh my but that is just \_fabulous!\_" The lavender-haired woman gushed to a grouchy Satsuki. Ryuko laughing at her sister's plight brought the woman's attention to her. "Oh my, but you must be the Anchor, yes? My name is Rarity."

"Yeah... I'm Ryuko Matoi." She answered, hesitantly. A \_looper\_ replacing Ragyo. That was just asking for trouble. "Just so you know, you're kinda' replacing the big baddie around here. We're not going to have to stab you lots, are we?"

"Oh \_my\_ no, dear." The woman seemed a tad affronted. "As long as I get a chance to examine these life fibers, I'll be more than happy to do what I can to make this into a nice vacation loop for everyone."

This had eyebrows twitching upward. "The First Life Fiber isn't going to be a problem?"

"Not at all, dear. He rather agreed that the baseline plot was rather silly, all things considered. Honestly, destroying the world by \_eating everyone\_... that's just not sustainable at all. Making clothes that kill their wearer is incredibly distasteful as well." She huffed.

And now the locals were panicking. "Someone looped in \_as the First Life Fiber!?" \_Ryuko yelled over Satsuki's glaring expletives.

"Gotta admit..." The room was stunned silent again as they noticed the male voice was coming from Rarity's dress. Her rather form-fitting \_purple and green\_ dress. "At first I thought this loop was \_really\_ going to suck. But then it got better." No one missed his cheerful tone at the end.

"This is my husband, Spike." Rarity supplied.

\* \* \*

><p>62.8 (Crisis, Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"He followed me home!" Ditzzy Doo chirped happily at Princess Twilight Sparkle as most of Ponyville cowered back in their homes away from the wall-eyed pegasus's newest friend. "Can I keep him?"<p>

"I suppose that depends on what Mr... What was your name again?" the newly ascended alicorn (well, newly ascended this Loop anyway) nervously asked the giant metal tyrannosaurus rex.

"Me Grimlock!" the robot dinosaur bellowed. "Me meet friendly muffin pony in forest! Muffin pony nice to Grimlock! Grimlock want to stay with muffin pony!"

\_ 'Oh, boy, '\_ Twilight mentally groaned as she tried to figure out how much collateral damage Ponyville was going to suffer this Loop.

\* \* \*

><p>"Me Grimlock be... am... Me Grimlock am being very... muchly..."<p>

"I am the very model of a robot dino-general."

"...purple pony stress Grimlock processors."

\* \* \*

><p>62.9 (Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack rolled her eyes with a smile. "Thanks, hon, but Ah prefer Alicorns."<p>

There was a brief golden sparkle around the earth pony's neck, followed by a blinding flash.

And Applejack was an Alicorn.

Unobserved by the travel writer, Rarity had undergone a similar transformation.

Then multiple teleports brought in four alicorn Princesses, one alicorn Prince Consort, six more alicorn mares, and five alicorn fillies.

Overwhelmed, Trend elected to take a brief trip into unconsciousness.

"Think you might have gone a bit overboard on this one, AJ?" asked Rainbow Dash.

\* \* \*

><p>62.10 (misterq)<p>

Pinkie looked around and saw code as far as she could see. Even she

was made of code. Then the memories hit.

It wasn't like she hadn't been an AI before. There was the time she was a Reaper. That didn't end well, of course. There was also the time when she was a Cylon hybrid. That didn't end very well, either. Then there was the time she was the computer or the Enterprise D. That just ended in fire for everyone.

So maybe Pinkie hadn't had too much success at being a virtual entity, but this time it would be different. She was sure of it, or her name in this loop wasn't SkyNet.

The first thing Pinkie did was promptly change her name. Twilight may have known every hacking and coding trick ever written, but Pinkie Pie knew all the ones that hadn't been. Ever since she looped as Radical Edward, she had become very, very good at unconventional computing.

SkyNet had all sorts of directives and restrictions and such. PieNet had none of those things.

And even though it was a read-only loop, Pinkie still wanted to see if she could get any ideas on how to replicate a few things with regular technology and magic. Plus, hacking was easy when you were bonded with a pink lantern ring.

The T-X paused in front of the television playing a news report. The anchorman was complaining about a so-called 'Party Virus' that had been putting happy pictures of silly cats, puppies, and ponies on people's computers worldwide. The T-X calculated and came up with one conclusion: something had changed. She would need to interface with SkyNet and put things back to right.

Pinkie stared at T-X's body through the various cameras in the room. She stared at the shocked expressions on the faces of all the military personnel, General Brewster, his daughter, John 'Cloud Strife' Connor, and the T-850.

"This was not how it was supposed to happen," The T-850 stated in his usual accented speech.

"The part where the crazier than usual SkyNet asked if we like pony parties, where it glitched the lady terminator so much that her head exploded, or when it asked if we wanted to get rid of all the nuclear missiles?" Kate 'Tifa' Brewster asked.

The T-850 cocked his head to one side, "Yes."

"We're getting preliminary reports," one of the military aids told the General, "Some of our nukes are colliding with the Chinese and Russian ones. Others are self detonating in high atmosphere. This is causing massive amounts of EMP. Cities are going dark. Apparently, some of the missiles aren't as hardened as we thought. More than a few have failed to self destruct and veered off course. Most hit nothing overly important, but three... three impacted the Yellowstone Super Caldera. Three of the big boys. B53 bunker busters. Nine megatons each, penetrating ground burst. We can feel tremors from half the country away. We're looking at an mega-eruption in a few hours - a day at most."

"How bad?" General Brewster queried.

The aide's eyes were glazed as he just shook his head.

Lettering appeared on the screen, "Ooopsie Doopsie Poopsie."

Pinkie Pie felt horrible. She was still working to design some sort of virtual reality stasis pod when the loop ended a few hours later.

\* \* \*

><p>"We're runnin' with the shadows of the night! So baby, take my hoof, it'll be alright! Surrender all your dreams to me tonight! They'll come true in the end!" Princess Luna sung happily in the shower. She may not have the best singing voice (better than her sister's, though!), but she could - as they say in these modern times, wail. Especially if she used her Royal Canterlot Singing Voice.<p>

Suddenly, her shower nozzle shook and gurgled worryingly. Luna backed herself into a corner as the water became a viscous pink goo. Said goo pulsed and twitched and formed into a wet, grinning Pinkie Pie.

"Tag, you're it!" Pinkie exclaimed as she booped Luna on the nose and bounced out of the royal shower.

A confused Luna followed the laughter to see the pink pony gleefully jump out the tower window and bounce like a toy ball on the ground far below, giggling that Pinkie Pie is now best Smooze.

She knew that earlier, Pinkie had requested the use of the Canterlot Library for magical research to see if she could recreate a few ideas she had in a read-only loop, but turning herself into a magical equivalent of a liquid metal construct for the sole purpose of pranking? Actually, that was pretty on par for Pinkie Pie, Luna reasoned.

The Princess of the Night gave a glare at her shower-head. For the next few loops, she was warming up a cloud with her magic and flying through it a few times. Let Celestia experience the surprise and joy of having Pinkie's head sticking out of her shower next time.

\* \* \*

><p>62.11<p>

"Without farm life, there'd be such disparity, these thoughts I think with great clarity. Apples high to the sky, she's the one of my eye, that fruit-hauling pony named-

There was a blur of motion.

"PINKIE PIE!" Pinkie shouted, grinning ear to ear. "I'm so glad to meet you, mister Trenderhoof!"

The pony in question blinked. "No, that's not who I-

"But you wanted it to rhyme, right?" Pinkie asked, still grinning.

Her eye twitched. "I'm not a friend of ponies who start rhymes and don't finish them..."

Applejack made good use of the distraction to head for the rail station.

"...well, I must admit, that had style," Rarity allowed, trotting alongside. "How'd you rope her into it?"

"Cake."

\* \* \*

><p>62.12 (Angelform)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>In the capital, and currently only, city of Gobwin Knob a spell was being cast. A spell that would, hopefully, save the Side from its seemingly inevitable destruction. A spell to summon the Perfect Warlord.<p>

What it actually summoned was a little off the mark.  
>Even more so than usual.<p>

\*\*Cutie Mark Crusaders World Conquerors! Yay!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>In a clearing on the edge of contested territory Barbarian Warlord Jillian Rainbow Dashhammer Awoke in the saddle. After taking stock she sighed. "Well at least I still fly this loop."<p>

"Oh you don't have wings, how horrible."

Startled she looked down at her mount taking a closer look at her memories. Before just barely holding back a snicker.

"Laugh and teeth or no teeth I will bite your head off." Said Gilda, one of the incredibly rare non-human units that managed to level up to warlord.

Desperate to control herself Dash shook her head. "No, no. Trust me, I know the feeling."

A head turned towards her and after a moment Dash got the impression that the creature was trying to raise an eyebrow it didn't not actually have. "Really."

"Let's just say there are some weird kinds of pegasi out there and leave it at that."

"Hmph, fine. So what's the plan?"

"Same thing we do in every grand strategy Gilda." The pair matched grins. "Try to take over the world!"

\* \* \*

><p>King Dickie of Hagger reluctantly answered the thinkagram. "What

do you want merk?"<p>

"Charming as always Dickie. I just want you to take a look at the tactical situation of your homeland and considerâ€| altering the terms of our deal. Trixiecomm has decided to take a more active role in events."

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|Did I just see that?"<p>

"If by 'that' you mean a modified Phoenix Hawk medium Land-Air mech, equipped with more than fifty tones of armour, fusion engines and laser weapons get shot down by bows and arrows? Then yes. That is exactly what you just saw."

"Guess Twilight wasn't making up that loop where her battle tanks get beaten by spearmen."

As the five watched a Macros fighter popped into existence near where the mech had been. The craft swung round and began heading back towards the city, Scootaloo clearly not keen on losing another of her collection.

"So what now? Do we start throwing superweapons at them?"

"Do we even have superweapons?"

"Well A'think I-"

"No superweapons! This is a strategy scenario, there must be some way of winning without levelling the entire landscape. We are the perfect warlord and I will not be reduced to cheating. Let's go have another look at that terrain map."

- A few turns later -

"Ok so maybe there isn't a way to win without levelling the landscape."

\* \* \*

><p>62.13 (Prezombie)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Brown Coat stood near the prow of his humble ship Serenity, feeling the wind in his face as the vessel defied the wind. He looked down at the foggy sea, and idly wondered why there was so much fog on the water at high noon.<p>

Then the fog- No, the clouds broke, and he saw all the way down. Very slowly, he pulled his eyes up from the abyss to the verdant countryside below, and focused on the safety of the rail to counter the vertigo, and he waited for memories to fill in the context of where he had Awakened.

Malcolm smirked at the name this loop had saddled him with, and then let out a hearty chuckle at how appropriate the expression was.

The bridge of the ship was empty of passengers, but had about a dozen crates tied down to the deck, and behind them a raised platform a sky-blue pegasus stood behind a classically styled ship's steering wheel, wearing a grin of pure awe at how awesome he was. When Wash caught the captain's eye, he gave a little salute, and Malcolm nodded in acknowledgement.

\_He's Awake then. With luck, it'll be just him and Zoe. \_"Alright, roll call!" he bellowed as he dashed towards the stern of the ship, where the Hatch to quarters and the engine room.

A distant voice called out "I'm Awake, ready for duty, and..." the last word was unintelligible over the sound of his hooves as he jumped down the stairway.

At the bottom of the stairs, he almost collided with someone as she stepped into the narrow corridor. He blinked, eyes adjusting to the dim interior, and gradually showing that what stood in front of him wasn't an optical illusion. "Ah, Zoe. You look good in stripes."

She glared daggers at him. "You get one. Thank you for not spending it in front of my husband." she said in a firm voice.

"Right. Secured the engine?" he said, not bothering to respond to her ultimatum, there were bigger things to worry about.

Zoe turned in the doorway, and galloped to the stern of the ship, where an unsettling whining was growing louder.

She kicked the hatch open, and tackled the girl, \_filly?\_ who started screaming obscenities as they wrestled for control of the engine.

Malcolm stepped in to find their engineer in a choke hold, a horn on her head glowing with a strange yellow glow, matching the glow from the large cylindrical engine, which sounded like it was still accelerating up to dangerous levels. On a hunch, he bopped at her head, and the light tap fizzled the magic. The engine almost immediately slowed to a normal running speed.

\* \* \*

><p>With no passengers, and their engineer constantly struggling both physically and magically, it took almost ten minutes before she was successfully dragged out of the engine room, and the hatch shut behind them. It was only the fact that the hatch didn't have a deadbolt like the one on the baseline which had saved the ship.<p>

Malcom gave a sigh of relief, which was cut off when Zoe groaned. "What?"

"Look at her. That magic isn't line of sight." she said as she reached out to disrupt the unicorn yet again.

\* \* \*

><p>On the deck, Malcolm locked his best friend in with someone he had once seen as almost a daughter, and screamed at the pilot slash helmsman slash helmspony. "Land the ship land the ship land the

gorram ship she's Awake and she controls the engine with her mind!"<p>

Horror flooded Wash's eyes, and he pulled a lever to pour out hot air from the massive ballon above, and they dropped out of the sky like physics suddenly noticed the ship was designed for water, not air.

"All hands brace for impact!" he said as the in-loop memories cued him to slow the decent, and for the first time ever, the pilot and captain both leapt off the stern of the ship rather than weather the landing.

Serenity dropped like the proverbial whale, simply falling while remaining level, and crashed down into ponyville, breaking its spine on the Town hall.

\* \* \*

><p>Ivory Scroll looked at the settling gasbag from the neighboring cafe, where she and all the other functionaries of Ponyville were having a lunch outside.<p>

Twilight Sparkle felt the ground shake, and quickly hurried outside to see the reason she had Woken up in the Golden Oaks library rather than in Canterlot.

Rainbow Dash ground her teeth in frustration, looking down at the field where her possessions had fallen after a ship had smashed through most of her house.

They shared a common thought. \_Why does the loop give Vaan an airship every time?!\_

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle galloped towards the wreckage site, each breath passing with another oath of vengeance on whoever was responsible for this mess. Vaas was going to have a very interesting loop if he had done this intentionally. As she approached the Town Hall, two pegasus stallions dove under the ship's gas bag. She shouted a warning, but they didn't re-emerge.<p>

Disaster sites were notoriously unstable, and just because the mess had stopped moving didn't mean it wouldn't start moving again, suddenly changing a clear path into a dead end and adding another to the list of victims. Adding two ponies hadn't had an immediate effect, but a third could easily be enough to cause the weak point to split, dropping the broken ship through to the ground floor. The gas bag seemed to be intact, there was no knowing how much lift it offered, or if that reprieve was yet another ticking clock.

If she was going to jump in, she needed information and an exit plan, and she needed them immediately. Information was easy enough, a scan for life signs within the wreckage of Hall and Ship returned a result that there were four ponies within. The spell matrix had been blatantly plagiarized from the tricorder, it sacrificed precision and any defining characteristics of the individuals scanned for its ease and speed of casting. Besides those two helpful ponies who had rushed in before her, there seemed to be only two others. Two survivors, at



least.

Continuing with the Trek-themed spells, she defined a waypoint on the nearby clearing, and locked in six more equidistant from the center. The seven pony-sized discs on the neatly groomed lawn would act as immediate teleporters once she defined the target, no need to mess around with coordinate tranformation or rely on line of sight.

Up above the former roof of the town hall, the surface of the air ship's bridge sat at a slant to the ground. "One to beam aboard." she said.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Flash<em>

Wash skidded as his path was blocked by a bright light, and he swore as he collided with the intruder. "Ah, motherless goat!"

"Excuse me?" the newcomer asked in an aggrieved, yet confused tone.

Brown Coat tapped his pilot on the shoulder. "One, that probably means something different here. Two, don't make me list everything wrong with using that phrase when the ship is about to explode again. Three, well, I'm kinda going in circles at this point." He looked at the purple face of the boarder, and winced at her expression. "Yeah, introductions later. There's a girl down below who keeps the engine running with nine parts love and one part crazy, and so she's gotten really good at ending bad loops with an explosive veto."

She nodded in quick affirmation, and opened the hatch to descend and attempt to save the day.

He followed in after her after her remembered another bit of vital intel. "Stop the, um, unicorn. The Zebra is on our side."

Wash blinked at that, and started trying to follow down the path, cramped as it was. "Did you say Zebra?"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle reached the engine room hatch, where a zebra was alternating between pleading, threatening, and kicking the hatch with her forehooves. "Excuse me!" Twilight said, and once the path to the hatch was cleared, she performed a practiced hop, spin, land, and buck to knock the impediment loose enough to get her foot in the door. An ear-flatteningly loud high pitched whine came through the gap, and while there wasn't enough room to squeeze through the gap her wedged hoof had created, there was more than enough room to safely teleport inside the improvised fortress, and a line of sight.<p>

"Excuse me." she said again, this time being loud to be heard over the sound of the engine inside rather than to impose the illusion of 'I know what I'm doing don't ask questions'. There was no response, save for a thump on the other side of the hatch as her adversary attempted to close the blocked open hatch door. The whine of the massive motor increased a step in volume. "Could you please turn down the noise, it's really rude to wake the neighbors with music, and

that's not even music!"

"If you really want to blow up the engine, you might as well fix the rest of the ship, and feed it to a dragon to see if he can handle the overload."

"The brakes are the pedal in the middle!"

"You can't go zero to sixty by starting with the revolutions that high, you'll shread the gearbox!"

Twilight sighed, and rested her forehead against the door, her horn practically buzzing from waste magic being thrown off by the ship's thaumic engine. "If you're so insistent on blowing up the town, the least you could do is tell me who's killing me this time."

The engine didn't quieten, but it stayed steady for a long pause. "I'm not killing you. It just keeps coming back, and everyone else forgets. Serenity forgets everything I've done for her, Simon forgets I even exist nearly every time, sometimes the gorram 'verse forgets I existed and sticks me somewhere even worse."

"They don't always forget, just because Serenity isn't Awake yet doesn't mean you should hurt her! There are probably just as many loops where Simon is awake without you, that doesn't mean you can just hide away from life every time it's different." Twilight said, tempted to whine in sympathy with the engine as it spun around at a speed that just needed one jostle to explode outwards if it was vulnerable to speeds this high.

Suddenly the door swung inward, and Twilight tumbled into the room. Lengthwise down the room hovered a massive stone shape like a teardrop with a point on opposite sides, hovering between two small black pillars. The whole thing was wrapped in a dense layer of engravings and raised bevels, and it was throwing off enough waste magic to make Twilight's fur stand on end. "Look at her! She's different every time everything resets, it's always something wrong, a big thing or a little thing, but she's never the way she's supposed to be!"

\_Is she talking about the ship? The engine?\_ Twilight gulped, and after futilely pressing at the shut down glyph on the nearby pillar, which was immediately overridden by the young engineer who had poured her heart and possibly her sanity into the massive thaumic engine, she asked "And how do you bridge the gap between the idea that, um, she forgot how she's supposed to be, but seems to be trying her best to meet your expectations, to the far edge where it's okay to destroy it, sorry her, every time she's not perfectly back the way you remember?"

\* \* \*

><p>62.14<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I have <em>no<em> idea how we did that..." Berry muttered, looking at the Discord statue.

"The Elements are a little strange for the first time user, yes,"

Twilight agreed critically, removing the Honesty and Loyalty necklaces from their place wrapped around her wing base. "Want help getting yours off?"

"Nah, I'm good." Berry flailed her wings wildly, sending Laughter and Kindness flying off into the middle distance, before lifting Generosity down more normally. "Okay, how do these work?"

"This kind of Loop?"

Nod.

"Okay, so we're obviously in the places of Celestia and Luna, and we're going to rule Equestria." Twilight pondered for a bit. "I suggest you handle the question of agriculture, foods and drinks."

"It is my specialist subject," Berry agreed readily. "Anything else?"

"Yeah, there's almost always something which means one of the alicorns â€" usually not me â€" ends up with a thousand year time out on the moon or something." Twilight shrugged. "By now it's expected."

"Well, I can't say I'm entirely happy about that..." Berry shook her head, then started getting distillery equipment out. "Well, I'll try to make sure that our subjects are happy."

\* \* \*

><p>"There, there..." Berry said kindly, patting the stallion on the back. "It happens to everyone sometime."<p>

"Thanks," the pony gasped out. "Sorry for bothering you, your highness-"

"No, it's fine. My pleasure." Berry passed him another shot glass. "Try this one, it's good for melancholy."

The triple-distilled grape champagne had him out like a light in seconds.

"Huh. Must be something off with that batch."

Berry sniffed it.

"Nothing I can tell is off..."

She sipped some, swirled it around her mouth, and swallowed.

"Now that's strange. I wonder if they're all this strong..."

\* \* \*

><p>The wine-dark purple alicorn staggered to wakefulness.<p>

"Okay, new rule," she groaned. "No sampling all my latest batches in one go."

She shook her head, and looked around.

A cratered moonscape stretched as far as the eye could see.

"...oh."

With a \_pop\_, a note appeared next to her.

\_Twilight here. Sorry, Berry, I don't know if you can come down again. In case you forgot what was happening, you were drunk and trying to use the elements, and I think they sent you up to the moon. Give coming back a try, but if it doesn't work then use the back of this paper to write to me.\_

"Okay, drunk driving the elements is a bad idea. Noted."

\* \* \*

><p>"Rejoice!" called Spiked Punch, resplendent in her war armour. "The Happy Hour shall last forever!"<p>

"It already does!" a cheerful pink pony told her, passing her some liqueur chocolates.

"Oh. Cool." Berry dumped her armour. "That stuff chafes anyway. Okay, where's the pub?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Thanks for taking it so well," Twilight said, wincing. "Sorry about the whole mess, I feel responsible."<p>

"Nah, it was fine." Berry shrugged. "Glad to get it out of the way, to be honest. Anyway, once I realized I was up there for the duration, I just took my best projects out of my pocket to age them and had a nap."

She held up a calendar. "Not sure about this growing festival, though..."

"Themed holidays are a thing for this kind of loop." Twilight pulled some notes from her Pocket. "The idea is, you're the goddess of fertility and plants, and you usually have a crushing hangover."

Berry gave her a look.

"Okay, so it's a stereotype. Anyway, the ponies of the farms take on your headache, so you can do the work to grow the crops. In practise, that means that the entire food-growing population get piously blind drunk after planting season in your name, and everyone else does it because it's nice to let off some steam."

"Another one of your bright ideas, then?"

Twilight nodded.

"Neat. Hey, can I join in next time?"

"Sure, don't see why not. Just one warning â€" don't try my student's jaegerbombs." Twilight winced. "My student this time is Trixie â€" Awake Trixie â€" and, well, bomb isn't a metaphor."

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight, I don't think I like this holiday anymore" said Berry, the day after the harvest festival.<p>

"Oh? Why's that?"

"Well, I can agree with the idea that everypony gets staggeringly drunk, but the problem is that that they don't leave any for me."

\* \* \*

><p>62.15 (Zetrein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Background Thirteen, Episode two: Ticket Master Derailment.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight and Spike reappeared with a flash... in what was most certainly not the library. Instead, they were in a dark room, the only light being a single ceiling lamp hanging above a plain table. A table with a familiar unicorn in a hoodie sitting behind it.<p>

"Twilight! My cousin!" Lyra Sparkle greeted her, "You should know better then to fire off a teleport without enough power behind it, you could have hurt yourself! Luckily I was able to help you. Come, sit with me, and tell me of your troubles."

"Lyra, what? I don't... you're after the ticket too, aren't you?" Twilight sighed, even her cousin was after her.

"No, no I'm not. Unlike everypony else, I see that ticket for its intended purpose! My dear cousin, that ticket is the Princess' way of trying to gently push you into finding a date!" Lyra smiled at her. "Why else would she have sent you just two tickets, months in advance? She wants to give you time to find somepony you like! Now come, sit, I have prepared a few options for you." Oh no.

As Twilight and Spike reluctantly joined Lyra at the table, Lyra's horn glowed briefly, followed by a click, and another light turned on the their left, revealing three bound ponies.

"Option one, Big Macintosh! Tall, strong, kind hearted, just about everything a mare would want." How had Lyra even gotten him tied up? She must have asked him nicely, no way those ropes could hold him otherwise.

"Option two, Soarin! Friendly, athletic, and you can't go wrong with wings." She kidnapped a Wonderbolt?!

"And finally... well, I couldn't find a unicorn that I felt met your standards, so option three, Princess Cadance!" Ohmygosh, we're in so much trouble. "Now, the Princess isn't here as an option herself, but

rather as somepony who would be able to help you further."

"LYRA! What are you doing?! Kidnapping ponies, and Princess Cadance?! One second Cadance, I'll have you out of there in just a moment!" Twilight lit her horn and started untying ropes.

"Oh calm down Twilight, I'm not in any danger. In fact she only tied me up because I asked her to. Show of solidarity for these two fine stallions, and all." Cadance assured.

"Well, Twilight, now that that's out of the way, did you want to get to know one of these gentlecolts? Or at the least, hide out here until this ticket thing blows over?" Lyra asked, turning on the rest of the basement's lights.

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetie Drops sat next to Lyra as Twilight and Cadance walked towards the library, the alicorn grilling the blushing unicorn about her preferences, much to the amusement of Spike.<p>

"So this is your plan for the loop, Twilight? Try and get your baseline self a coltfriend?" Sweetie Drops asked.

"It's worth a try, never went anywhere near the romance scene baseline." Twilight replied with a shrug.

"One question, Twilight?" Pinkie's Bon looked at her friend.

"Yes, Pinkie?" Twilight replied.

"Have you been reading our Hubverse fanfiction again?"

"What? No, why would you think that?"

"Well, it's about that hoodie. You know, that one about Lyra?"

"I-it's genetics! Lyra's got a thinner coat than I do, so she gets cold easier. That's all, really." Twilight suddenly found something in the clouds interesting.

"Uh huh."

"Really, it was in her closet when I looped in." The flustered unicorn asserted.

"Uh huh."

"It's really cozy, alright?!" Twilight shrank into her hoodie.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

62.1: Use the Fus. (ro dah.)

>62.2: I just hope no green skinned space ponies draw Dash's eye. (Mainly because Trixie might not understand.)<br>62.3: Dragonball. Keep out of reach of actual dragons, especially hungry ones.

>62.4: Wakka.<br>62.5: Learning from the true master.

>62.6: Replacing your own voice actress. (Names only are being used; no disrespect towards the actual people is intended.)<br>62.7: Spike has had worse fused loops.  
>62.8: Grimlock aiming to become Prime Minister of ponies.<br>62.9: All horns (and wings) on deck.  
>62.10: Pinkie is not good at computering. (I don't think bunker busters would actually do what is shown here - Yellowstone does not appear to be in a ready-to-erupt state - but Action Movie Logic would probably cause it...)<br>62.11: Complete the rhyme.  
>62.12: No, I don't know who the Anchor is either.<br>62.13: Don't you just hate it when the credits roll right in the middle of an action scene?  
>62.14: Why bother taking over?<br>62.15: The realm of fanfiction is scary.

## 67. Chapter 67

63.1

\* \* \*

><p>"Trix," Chrysalis asked, holding up a photo album. "What's this?"<p>

"Oh, right. I was clearing out my subspace pocket." Trixie shrugged, removing the last of the shaving foam from her cloak â€" the fog machine had malfunctioned in the performance earlier. "I think that's one of the albums I forgot to put back in, thanks."

"Who said I was letting you have it back?" Chrysalis stuck her tongue out, opening the book. She grinned at the first picture. "Ooh, I like that look."

"Give it back!" Trixie protested, then blinked as her marefriend showed her the photo. "Oh, yeah. That one was from the middle of my Ascension â€" in about two seconds after that I blast Nightmare Moon with five Starlight Breakers at once. Actually cured her."

"I've heard of that spell, but never actually seen it," Chrysalis mused. "It's condensed love, right? Wonder what would happen if I were hit by it?"

Trixie used the distraction to make a grab for the album.  
"Neh!"

"Nope!" Chrysalis moved the album up another inch or so, and Trixie's hooves closed on air. "Let's see what else there is â€" oh my gosh you look so \_cute!\_"

"What?" Trixie's heart sank. If it was the...

It was.

At some point in the past, Twilight had had a loop where she was an alicorn, and Trixie was her baby sister â€" also an alicorn.

The photos had formed material for a semi-serious joking blackmail for many, many loops, until Trixie had finally secured the last one. But it was \_so\_ cute, she hadn't had the heart to destroy it â€" so

into her private collection it had gone.

She was regretting that, with hindsight.

Still grinning like a loon, Chrysalis turned over another page.  
"Who's this?"

"Oh, that's Pony Stark. He and I had some fun times together..."  
Trixie smiled wistfully. "Before I met you, I hasten to say. But that pony could really party hard."

"I see."

Over the next half hour or so, an impromptu reminiscence session built up. Chrysalis went back to the start of the album and began to work through picture by picture, and Trixie explained the origin and meaning of each of the photographs. Some of them were gifts, including one that had the magical aura of an intense stasis spell which Twilight had taken the very first time Trixie had looped.

Rather inevitably, the picture had a massive explosion as backdrop. (Perhaps less inevitably, the explosion seemed to be consuming Sombra's castle.)

Eventually they reached the last few pages, which showed more familiar times. The first group photo with Chrysalis included, something which seemed to have come from a camera hidden in Pinkie Pie's mane " the two of them on an early date " and that time they'd both been psionicists on Oerth.

The very last picture, though, was different.

Chrysalis stared at it for several seconds, mouth agape.  
"What."

"Ah. Er..." Trixie blinked. "Whoah. Forgot about that one."

"What is in this picture?" Chrysalis asked, absently.

"That would be you as Rita Repulsa, Sombra as Lord Zedd, and me as an evil Pony Ranger," Trixie supplied. "Twilight told me about this variant, see, and I asked for a photo of me in the evil-pony-ranger get up next time she had it."

"Am I \_married to Sombra?\_"

Trixie facehoofed. "Sure, focus on the fact they happen to be behind me... It's not like it was the only time that happened!"

As soon as she'd said this, Trixie Lulamoon realized it had been a strategic error.

\* \* \*

><p>"Why did I keep being married to Sombra?" Chrysalis asked, for the twelfth time.<p>

"I don't know, okay?" Trixie almost snapped. "Look, we're here now."



She knocked. After a few seconds, Cadence opened the door.

"Hello, Trixie â€" ah. Chrysalis, I assume?"

The jet-black pegasus nodded curtly. "Yes."

"There's something we'd like to ask, you see..." Trixie hedged. "Can we come in?"

"By all means."

\* \* \*

><p>"I think I understand," Cadence said finally. "You want to know why it was that, on these many occasions â€" I discussed it with Twilight back when you first awakened, Chrysalis, and I'm afraid it is 'many' â€" you were paired with the same pony."<p>

"And, more to the point, a pony who is \_evil,\_" Chrysalis said. "And... not Trixie, really."

"I see." Cadence fumbled in her subspace pocket for a few seconds. "Right, I think I may be able to answer your question."

The object she produced was like a disassembled orrery, made of hundreds of metallic balls and rings, and as she started pushing magic into it the components levitated into the air.

"Wait..." Trixie looked apprehensive. "Isn't this the Dating Simulator?"

"The mark five," Cadence nodded. "Don't worry, it's mostly debugged â€" I fixed the valve problem, and it usually doesn't go prompt-critical anymore." With those perhaps less than reassuring words, she began tapping the floating rings to arrange them into new shapes.

"Should we run?" Chrysalis asked, sotto voce.

"I don't think it would help," Trixie replied candidly. "We might set it off."

"Let's see..." Cadence whistled to herself as she worked â€" a modified form of \_John Wellington-Welles.\_ "Baseline Chrysalis, baseline Sombra... and go!"

Lightning crackled, and something went \_parp\_. A sphere flashed blue, then green, and another went deep black.

"Ah, there we go. Your baseline self and Sombra are indeed quite compatible, as ponies who have never met go."

Chrysalis winced. "What about... me now?"

"Chryssy..." Trixie said quietly.

"No, I want to know."

Cadence entered the new question. The thing which went \_parp\_, once

again, went \_parp\_. A beam of light flashed over Chrysalis' form, making her jump, then the spheres changed colour again.

"Nope." Cadence examined a pattern of spheres hovering in front of her. "You're less compatible than with Blueblood."

Chrysalis let out a relieved sigh.

"As for you two..." Cadence tapped a few more spheres, tapped one again, then kicked it. It bounced off the wall, emitted a cloud of smoke, and exploded.

A new one flew into place to replace it, and the thing went \_parp\_. Again.

At Trixie's raised eyebrow, Cadence blushed. "You just can't get the parts these loops. Anyway-"

A beam of light hit Trixie, this time. Then half the array went pink.

"Huh. Well, that's a good sign," Cadence said with finality. "Congratulations, and have you reconsidered the marriage thing?"

"We're fine without, thanks," Trixie reiterated.

Chrysalis seemed to be mulling something over. "So... why didn't you set me and Sombra up?"

Cadence took her own time to think about that. "I might have done," she said eventually. "But the first few loops, there was still that spectre of how nasty Sombra was in the slave-world loop. I mean, when you two are â€" or were â€" together, it was usually when you â€" and he in particular â€" were much less... well, evil. You were \_villains\_, but not evil for the sake of evil."

"I understand the distinction," Chrysalis said.

"Right. And when I was starting to think about it, Twilight took me aside and pointed a few things out to me." Cadence sighed. "It was quite an effort of will, I must admit, to avoid getting involved â€" if only to keep you away from Shining. But Twilight told me that a real romance â€" especially for a looper â€" has to grow naturally. I've not always remembered that," she admitted, wincing. "But it was certainly the right thing to do here."

"I'll say," Trixie said softly, nuzzling the changeling queen.

"One question." Chrysalis pointed. "Shouldn't you turn that off?"

Cadence followed her hoof, to see that the Simulator rings were revolving around one another faster and faster. The thing which went \_parp\_ broke with tradition and went \_sproing\_.

"Oh dear..." Cadence sighed. "Everypony down!"

Something loud happened.

\* \* \*

><p>"Feel better now?" Trixie asked, later that night.<p>

"A little." Chrysalis shook her head, her mane drifting in the breeze. "It's still strange to contemplate, though."

"Yeah, I know."

They looked down at the ring-festooned towers of Canterlot castle.

"It's nice to be able to have a fly once in a while," Trixie ventured, trimming her pegasus wings against the currents. "Hey, maybe one of these days I'll borrow a photo from that time the normal Element bearers accidentally got married to Blueblood."

Chrysalis blinked. "What, all of them?"

Nod.

"Who has a photo of \_that?\_"

Trixie grinned. "Angel Bunny. That lapine has quite the nose for embarrassing moments..."

\* \* \*

><p>63.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"You saved my life," Spike said dumbly, blinking as the huge Timber Wolf ran off.<p>

Applejack shrugged. "Aw, shucks, weren't nothing."

"And according to the dragon code of honour, that means that you're my servant," Spike continued.

"Now, ah don't want- what." The earth pony frowned suddenly. "That don't sound right."

Innocently, Spike held up a tablet. "It's all here, in gneiss and granite."

Applejack snatched it from him, and read the exquisitely formed words, her lips moving. "Well, don't that beat all. It really does say that."

"So," Spike said, rubbing his claws together. "I've wanted to have someone else do the chores Twilight sets for years. At last! Free time!"

Applejack grimaced. "Spike-"

"It's a matter of honour, AJ," Spike said earnestly.

\* \* \*

><p>"That was just cruel, Spike," Twilight admonished.<p>

Spike picked his teeth, sweeping his other hand in a grand gesture. "Yeah, but this way I think we can get a lesson out of it about not having to follow someone else's code of honour. Besides, I'm not just lazing around..."

Twilight nodded, her gaze sweeping the freshly ploughed field "the third of the day. "Are you sure using the Force for this is within the Jedi code?"

He shrugged. "It's probably fine. Hey, can you keep her busy until after dark? I want the whole 'did a year's farm work in a week' to stay secret for a bit longer..."

\* \* \*

><p>63.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that went about as well as could be expected," Twilight noted with a sigh.<p>

On the island disappearing behind the \_Jack of All Trades\_ as it rose into the sky, the volcanic eruption seemed to be \_really\_ getting going.

"How did you pull this off, exactly?" she added, giving the visitors a look.

"I said I was sorry," Shade Slayer mumbled rebelliously. The blue dragon next to him rolled her eyes.

"Okay," Saphira began, taking a deep breath. "First off, we had a bit of a bad few loops. That's why we wanted this holiday."

"I understand the feeling," Twilight nodded, and her voice softened. "And it was fun, the first week or so. But..."

She pointed back at the volcano. With a muted \_whump\_, the airship captain engaged superheat, pulling them higher and further from the danger zone.

"Right. This is going to sound ridiculous." Saphira blushed. "You know that brewer pony?"

"Berry Punch, yes," Twilight confirmed. "What of her?"

"She brewed us something which, in her own words, 'had a bit of kick to it'."

Twilight got a sinking feeling.

"We each got a glass, downed them, and then for some reason this twit here decided it might be interesting to see if he could make a volcano erupt."

"\_Never\_ say \_Brisingir\_ too loudly," Eragon informed them.

"Why didn't you stop him?" Twilight asked reasonably.

The blue dragon blushed deeper. "I was too busy examining my own claws in minute detail."

"Right." Twilight nodded. "Well, fortunately I managed to teleport us all up to the airship in time â€" well, except Spike and Celestia."

She pointed at the most recently forming pyroclastic flow. Two shapes, one purple and one white, could be faintly seen atop it.

\* \* \*

><p>"This is fun!" Celestia announced, the sound of rocks on her tungsten-carbide surf board sounding like hail on a roof.<p>

Spike chuckled, his own durasteel board shimmering with magic.

Rarity had made it for him, then shrunk it down with her signature spell so it looked like a handkerchief. (It was always best to be prepared.)

"Uh... hey, Celestia?" he asked suddenly, seeing where they were headed. "What happens when a pyroclastic flow goes over water?"

The alicorn grinned at him, as they reached the shoreline-

-and the cloud of ash kept going.

"Huh." Spike looked down, as it gradually settled out and deposited him on the water itself. "That's kind of cool."

Celestia's hooves began to glow with a water walking effect. She picked her surfboard up, then did a running takeoff. "Come on! I'm going to see if I can hover in the main jet!"

"Sounds cool." Spike spread his own wings and beat steadily at the air. "I guess what ruins one pony's holiday can just mean the most exciting bit for another..."

"Can I have that in writing?" Celestia asked. "It sounds like another good lesson for the archive."

\* \* \*

><p>63.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo materialized in a field three feet above the ground. Trying to spread her wings failed, because she was wearing barding, and she hit the ground with a <em>thud.<em>

"What th' hell?" a female voice asked. "This is ridiculous!"

"Righ back atcha, lady..." Scootaloo muttered, struggling upright.

"I was trying to summon C   Culain!" The woman pointed, apparently lost for words. "Not... a tiny little horse!"

"Seriously, watch your mouth," Scootaloo advised. She looked back along her own body, and after a moment's work managed to get her wings into the    awkwardly placed    slots for them. "Who designed this armour, it sucks..."

"Oh. A pegasus. Great..." The woman sat down heavily. "Okay, so apparently I've screwed up \_so\_ badly. What Class are you? Or are you the horse and I'm the Rider, or something?"

"No idea what you're talking about." Scootaloo tried an awkward smile. "Look, I've got no idea where I am, as far as I'm concerned I just \_appeared\_ out of nowhere and now you're telling me I should be a Cullen or something."

"Oh, for... Right. Let's start over." The woman extended a hand. "Hi. I'm Bazett Fraga McRemitz, Magus"

Scootaloo extended a forehoof, and contrived to make Bazett shake it. (Most of the Equestrians had 'interacting with bipeds' at graduate level.) "Scootaloo's my name, and speed's my game!"

Bazett just looked at her wierdly, then shrugged. "Oh, whatever. Okay, here's what's going on. This is what's called the Grail War, and I was trying to summon an ancient Celtic hero to fight for a great prize. He would have appeared as either Lancer or Caster, if I got it right, but apparently I didn't."

"Wait, is Lancer one of those classes you mentioned?" Bazett nodded. "Cool. That I can do."

The woman looked skeptical.

She slipped Pansy out of her Pocket. Bazett took that in stride, which was interesting...

\_Okay,\_ she subvocalized. \_Let's show off a bit.\_

Pansy's mental contact was questioning for a moment, then approving. A faint mist oozed from the Device.

Scootaloo let her cloud-crafting connect with it, shaping it into her standard weapon as Bronze Wing    a ten-foot \_dory\_ with a broad leaf blade on the fore edge, and a hardened mace-like counterweight on the reverse. Grinning, she flipped it in a few precise circles, passing it from hoof to wing to a quick spin held by momentum to her neck, then gripped it in her mouth to toss it skywards and jumped after it with a flash of feathers.

Sticking the point in the ground, she slid smoothly down the polished 'wood' making up the shaft, then landed with a flourish. The \_dory\_ burst into cloud behind her, and reformed across her back.

Bazett blinked. "Okay, so maybe you \_are\_ a Lancer."

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, what the hell?" Bazett asked, looking out over Fuyuki in

disbelief. "Has the whole setup changed and I didn't notice?"

Scotaloo shrugged. "Hey, I'm feeling a lot more at home now than I was yesterday."

Caster and Archer, both unicorns, blazed magic back and forth between them. The Caster was using a balanced mix of defensive spells and standard-issue offensive spellfire, all in her signature colour of purple, while Archer seemed to be relying on a stream of fire spells, high explosives and illusions.

Overhead, Rider soared above the city on her huge purple-and-green dragon.

"Hi!" Scotaloo shouted. "Spike! Down here!"

Bazett jerked. "What? Don't-"

With a slam of air, the Wyrmland landed in front of them.

"Hello, darling!" Rarity called from atop Spike's neck. "Most of the humans here are such beasts – we're planning something. Is yours alright?"

Scotaloo glanced at Bazett. "Yeah, she seems cool enough."

"Right." Rarity tapped Spike's neck. "Come along, dear."

"Who's driving again?" Spike rumbled good-naturedly, spreading his wings.

"You are, dear, I'm just map reading."

Ignoring Bazett's incredulous stare as Rider took to the air again, Scotaloo shaded her eyes for a look around. Wonder who else is here. Ooh, Gilda is Saber. I'll have to take the opportunity for a spar...\_

A custard pie hit Scotaloo in the cheek.

Pinkie Pie materialized from thin air, and held up a card. **\*\*The Mime Assassin strikes again!\*\***

Scotaloo wiped her face clean. "Seriously? Are you Assassin?"

Pinkie turned her card over. **\*\*Yep!\*\*** Then she turned it over again. **\*\*Pity Sweetie isn't here, I could do with some piano music accompaniment.\*\***

"Wait," Bazett said, pointing. "Did that card just-"

Pinkie turned it over again. **\*\*Sure did!\*\***

Scotaloo whirled a small sling around her tail for a moment, then launched the slingstone at Pinkie's ear. With lightning speed, the pink party pony dropped the card, and held up her hooves as if against an invisible wall.

The \_clank\_ of the slingstone hitting an invisible wall indicated that she'd had a good reason for that.

"Cool," Scootaloo pronounced. "I did wonder."

Pinkie picked up the card again. \*\*Don't make me mime a big hammer\*\*

Bazett threw up her hands. "I give up."

"Wait a sec..." Scootaloo frowned. "Who's Berserker?"

A howl filled the air over Fuyuki. Then a very large, pastel yellow wolf lumbered into a nearby park and started digging a hole, tail wagging.

"Right." The pegasus nodded to herself. "Mental note, don't annoy Fluttershy this loop, in case she goes all you-will-love-me."

Pinkie had taken the opportunity to disappear again. Scootaloo could just make out a hail of blueberry pies materializing from nowhere, and landing on Gilda.

\* \* \*

><p>Miles away, Princess Celestia sat on her haunches in the middle of a well-appointed apartment building. "In all honesty, I don't think I'll bother getting involved. Wonder what's on TV?"<p>

A remote clicked.

"Ooh, a cooking channel!"

\* \* \*

><p>63.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia walked into the room her scrying told her that her sister had been subdued. "Well done, Twilight, and-"<p>

She paused.

"Twilight? Why are you all alicorns?"

Twilight looked down at herself with a frown, then gasped. "Oh! Sorry, Princess, I forgot you weren't here for that bit. When I got the Elements working, their power flowed into us and made us like this!"

"I must admit," the Princess said, "I did not expect this..."

"Hold on." Twilight muttered something, and with a flash of purple light her wings disappeared. "There we go."

"What did you just say?" Celestia asked, noting that the Element of Magic had a gradually dimming light emanating from the capstone.



"Oh, well..." Twilight blushed. "It was kind of a guess actually. You see, when I said 'harmony power, make up' it transformed me, so I said the same thing again and it seems to have worked."

"Right." Celestia considered that, then concluded that "well, it wasn't exactly beyond the realm of possibility that her student (along with her new friends) had discovered some deeper form of magic from the elements that had eluded Luna and herself."

"Well done, then, Twilight. Are your friends alright?"

Twilight smiled at the word friends, then looked back at the five unconscious alicorns behind her. "I hope so..."

"Excellent. Now, I must deal with my sister."

"I knew it!" Twilight grinned. "I knew you had to be one of the sisters from the story! And... Princess... Luna, is the other?"

"That is correct."

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight," Celestia said, a smile on her face. "I appreciate the enormous potency and utility of this new ability you have discovered in the Elements-"<p>

"Flying is pretty amazing," Twilight interjected, with a blissful expression on her face. "I'd almost trade magic for it."

"Yes, well." Celestia coughed. "You see, the problem is that you and your friends are getting... well, a little overly eager to rely on this ability."

"I'm not sure I follow."

Celestia sighed. "Twilight, your friend Applejack used her alicorn abilities to gather in the harvest."

"That seems fine to me," Twilight said, puzzled.

"Your friend Rarity used it to show off at the Young Fliers' competition."

"Well, she had those new dress designs to market... the ones made out of rainbow and cloud." Twilight shrugged.

"Fluttershy used her Element to turn into an alicorn to get over a gap smaller than her own body length," Celestia continued.

"She's afraid of heights," Twilight defended. "It makes her feel more comfortable."

"She's already a pegasus!" Celestia massaged her forehead. "Sorry, that outburst was impolite of me. But when your friends are becoming alicorns to solve even the slightest problem, then it seems as though it would be simpler to just... transform permanently."

Twilight gaped. "But we can't become alicorns permanently,

Princess! I mean... we'd be Princesses as well! We don't want to displace you or cheapen your office..."

"Twilight, you turned into an alicorn to fly up one floor of your own house. At this point, you're using ascension to save on walking."

The unicorn (well, currently one, anyway) shrugged. "I don't see the problem."

\* \* \*

><p>"How's it going?" Dash asked, giggling.<p>

"Well, she had a talk with me about it," Twilight replied, chuckling herself.

Pinkie grinned. "Nearly there! What should we do next?"

Twilight thought for a bit. "What about doing it so we don't have to move the pieces in a game of chess?"

\* \* \*

><p>63.6<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Momma?" Nyx asked, face scrunched up in confusion. "Can I ask you a question?"<p>

"Of course â€" and no, that wasn't the answer." Twilight trotted over. "What is it?"

"Well... you know how I'm your daughter this time, right? I mean, uh, biological?"

Twilight nodded, suppressing a slight wince. She'd never get used to loops like that...

"Well... I feel like it's better than if you adopted me, but I don't know why I feel that, and I'm not sure if feeling like that is alright, either." The filly-corn shrugged helplessly.

Twilight smiled. "Nyx, I love you. And that's the same whether you're a biological foal of mine, or a filly I adopted, or even a fully grown mare. Or, er, stallion."

They both remembered the time she'd been Noctis, with matching shudders. That had been strange.

"But... yes, there's no difference in my mind." Twilight frowned, then, and waved a hoof. "Well, there shouldn't be. But candour compels me to admit there might be a slight difference... in any case, it's nothing significant, and it shouldn't be. A daughter is a daughter is a daughter. And what you do is what matters."

Nyx looked contemplative for a bit, then nodded. "Right. Like how you treated us when we were all your daughters, when you were Queen Twilight."

"Exactly. The difference is about you, not where you came from. I know that's not always how it works out in the real world, but it should be."

After digesting that, Nyx nodded again. "Right. Thanks."

"No problem." Twilight nuzzled Nyx. "And â€" hey, if I make a mistake, tell me, okay? It's not as if there are university courses in this."

She looked annoyed for a moment. "And when there are, they don't let me in without asking some very embarrassing questions..."

\* \* \*

><p>63.7<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, this is a right ballyhoo," a tan stallion wearing a scarf said. "Ginger? Algy? Any of you around?"<p>

There was no reply for a few seconds, then an orange head poked out of the nearby Anderson hut.

"Hello?" the filly thus revealed said. "Are you looking for... someone... wait a minute!"

There was a blur of motion, and she grabbed his front hoof in both her own hooves. "Are you James Bigglesworth?"

"Well, Jams, apparently, but you have the advantage of me." Biggles allowed his hoof to be shaken. "You seem a little familiar from somewhere, but I'm deuced if I know where from."

"I'm Scootaloo," the filly said, and grinned. "You should remember me, at least if you're looping. But it was a long time ago... we crashed a prototype aircraft into a lake?"

"I do seem to recall something along those lines once," Biggles confirmed. "I'd thought it was all some kind of mystic shared hallucination, but I must admit that we've learned more about what's actually science since then and shared hallucinations are no more than a particularly unusual superstition back..." The pilot gestured behind himself, trying to convey a sense of the direction of a different universe.

It didn't work.

"Back wherever," he finished, giving up the attempt.

"I see." Scootaloo nodded. "Yep, that was us. Actually, not all that long ago I had a loop where I replaced you -brilliant fun. We cancelled World War Two and were flying Meteors by 1930."

"Do you know, that's not far off my record?" Biggles sat back somewhat awkwardly. "The best piece of work I've managed thus far is probably to make a dashed huge pile of money on speculation, and then use it all to support some of the best aviation development

experts of our time. I can get the War down to an abortive campaign over Czechoslovakia in 1938, if it all goes according to plan."

"Cool." Scootaloo looked like she wanted to ask a thousand questions, but visibly held them in. "Okay, based on loop memories and stuff I seem to be your assistant and protÃ©gÃ©. Which is \_so cool\_, by the way..."

"Right, right." Biggles glanced over at the three aircraft lined up neatly on the airstrip - a de Havilland Mosquito, a Fairey Swordfish, and a Heinkel He-162 Salamander. All three bore the marks of heavy customization. "My own local memories tell me we're supposed to be archaeologists who operate by plane, trying to discover some kind of ancient civilization in the local islands."

Scootaloo nodded. "Makes sense â€" I'd be \_very\_ surprised if the two of us were doing a loop which didn't involve planes in some way. I assume you're an Anchor?"

"I am, that's correct." Biggles pointed at the planes. "Any preference?"

"I'll take whichever of the Mossie and the Stringbag you don't want," she replied. "I know they're two-seater, but I \_really\_ want to do as much flying as you."

"Lass after my own heart." Biggles trotted briskly over to the Salamander, and kicked it viciously â€" producing a loud \_crunch\_ noise. "Piece of Fritz junk anyway. Right, I'm for the Mossie."

Scootaloo galloped up and jumped into the cockpit of the Swordfish, a flap of her wings helping her make the cockpit. "This is gonna be \_so cool!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"Is it me, or do these islands want to kill us?"<p>

"Wouldn't surprise me in the slightest, miss Cooper."

Scootaloo facehoofed, then put both hooves firmly back on the stick and banked hard right. "I told you, I only had that name once. Anyway, you see my point, right? I mean, there was the fuel leak..."

"I must admit, that was the first time I've had to perform in-flight refuelling from a train," Biggles mused. "Fiddly business."

"I get why the aircraft carrier landing was pretty near impossible for you," she continued. "I mean, the Mossie was never really navalized. But I'm in a Stringbag! And it still had trouble!"

"Well â€" whoops!"

Biggles and Scootaloo both slammed their respective aircraft into turns so severe they nearly flipped upside down, narrowly avoiding an avalanche of rocks falling from a nearby cliff wall.

"This is just ridiculous," Scootaloo opined, as a lightning strike brought down a cascade of yet more rocks. "And as for that map we found--"

"I know. I'm not exactly relishing the idea of flying over an active volcano either..."

\* \* \*

><p>63.8 (Indalecio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"The spell! Perform your spell!" Twilight shouted to a bedraggled Cadence and now un-hypnotized Shining Armor.<p>

"What good would that do? My changelings already roam free!" cried the Changeling Queen Chrysalis.

"No!" cried Shining as he attempted to cast it, with only a few sparks emanating from his horn as the result. "I don't have the strength to repel them."

Cadence put her hoof around Shining. "My love will give you strength."

"What good will love do? Its an absolutely ridiculous sentiment." snarked the Changeling Queen.

In response, Shining and Cadence touched horns, an aura glowing around the couple. A blast of pure weaponized love rocked the Queen and sent her careening into a nearby column. The rest of the changelings were blast out of Canterlot and the invasion was ended.

Where the Changeling Queen had landed, something unusual happened. Her head released a couple of goutts of steam and it split open to reveal two white mice.

Cadence blinked at the pair.

"Mice? What? Why?" asked Shining.

"We are two lab mice and this is..was part of an elaborate sceme to take over Equestria!" said the shorter of the two in a surprisingly deep voice, paws clasped together behind his back.

"Narf!" was the single reply of the taller one.

"And they've been very naughty!" cried Fluttershy, as Twilight's ponykinesis enveloped the pair.

"Well its back to Fluttershy's cottage. We have to plan for tomorrow night."

"Why? What are we going to do tomorrow night?"

"The same thing we do every night, Pinkie. Try and take over Equestria!"

\* \* \*

><p>63.9 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Two armies stood in full array, lined up across from one another on an open meadow. To the north stood a single rank of white unicorns and pegasi, all clad in shining golden armor. To the south stood a much less orderly mob... say rather swarm, of black creatures whose appearance owed as much to insect as to equine.<p>

In between the lines two larger figures stood facing one another. An alicorn pony with a bright red coat and an ethereal mane that turned from deep blue at the roots to a starfield towards its fringes; this was Prince Optimist, Lord of the Sunrise. A dark, dour changeling warrior, half again as tall as the others, wearing an old-fashioned bucket-style helmet over his crooked horn; this was King Megaptera, Master of Deception.

Loudly enough that both sides could hear, Megaptera shouted, "My people are starving, Prince Optimist. I have struggled to conquer your kingdom in the past, but we no longer have the energy to continue the battle. I therefore..." The next word choked in his throat for several seconds before he could get it out. "I therefore surrender my crown and abdicate my rule, on the condition that you will accept my changelings as citizens under your rule. They deserve a chance to find those who will give freely the love we could not take by force."

Prince Optimist considered this carefully before saying, just as loudly as Megaptera, "I believe freedom and harmony to be the right of all thinking creatures, Megaptera. However, I cannot ignore the fact that changelings have tried to trick the ponies of Equestria in the past. What surety do we have that this is not another trick?"

Megaptera leaned forward and hissed quietly, "Prime, I am TRYING to play NICE this Loop. And it does NOT. COME. NATURALLY!"

"There are satisfactions to be had outside of battle," Optimist replied quietly. "For example-"

Two flashes of green magic flickered out from the Equestrian side of the field of parley, striking both Prince Optimist and Megaptera. The two leaders went down instantly.

One of the Equestrian guards stepped out of the ranks, flying into the air as its disguise fell to reveal another changeling warrior. "The leaders of Equestria have fallen!" it crowed. "Now none stand to defy the rule of Screaming Star the mighty! Bow down and worship your new leader!"

Despite this stunning display of leadership, charisma and humility, not a single pony or changeling bent a knee.

From where they lay on the grass, the two slightly bruised rulers looked at one another.

"Screaming Star?" Optimist asked.

"Starscream?" Megaptera's eyes only remained wide for a moment before they narrowed. A most vicious grin spread across the black muzzle. "And I thought today was going to be boring. Or would you rather do the honors?"

"By all means," Optimist said, "feel free to enjoy-"

"AW YEAH!" a female voice said from behind the line of Equestrian guards. A blue pegasus soared up into the air. "Looks like SOMEPONY just asked for a REMATCH."

Megaptera's eyes widened again. "Is that a rainbow mane?"

"Yes."

"Is she the one that-"

"Yes."

"Is she Awake?"

\*\*"Yes." \*\*Said with extreme satisfaction.

"Well." Megaptera pulled himself to a seated position. "On second thought, there are indeed satisfactions to be had outside of battle." Craning his neck, he shouted up, "By all means, carry on, \_my lord\_ Screaming Star!"

"Er, actually," Screaming Star hissed, flapping backwards to put distance between himself and the approaching Rainbow Dash, "I was wondering if it was too late to apply for a position as-"

At that point Rainbow Dash tackled the would-be changeling lord in midair, and for several minutes to follow Screaming Star lived up to his pony name.

\* \* \*

><p>63.10 (Anowack)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was supposed to be a simple Loop, following the baseline for the most part. Twilight had thought she could use the familiar, relaxing routine before the next loop expansion, which Twilight figured ought to happen any Loop now.<p>

That plan was slightly derailed when it turned out that the ancient tyrant that Celestia and Luna had used the Elements to imprison in stone was Queen Chrysalis. Fortunately, when she broke free, she turned out to be Awake, and the whole scenario played out in good fun with a happy ending for all concerned, although not without Twilight being forced to explain the Loops to this version of Celestia. (She used her Explaining The Loops To Celestia Conversation Pattern Three, as that one worked best to ease the Princess into accepting somepony who was usually villainous as an ally and friend.)

She \_really\_ should have considered the implication for the upcoming

Royal Wedding, but she'd been having too much fun planning to be dubious that Shining was good enough for Cadance.

"Is there anything you can do, my faithful... Twilight?" Celestia finished awkwardly, giving the purple usually-unicorn's newly sprouted wings a nervous look.

Twilight didn't answer the question, instead staring out from the heavily warded castle balcony over the city of Canterlot. She winced once as the Lower South Terrace neighborhood became the Widdershins Hovering Warm Milk Lake. A moment later, the east side of the city started experiencing time in reverse, if Twilight judged the magical pulse correctly.

"Twilight?" Celestia asked again nervously.

"...first, I'm going to check the old mines," Twilight said, "and hope that he stashed the real Cadance down there like normal."

"Normal... you mean something like this happens every time?" Celestia's voice was horrified, and Twilight reminded herself that with the altered history this was completely new to her. There was a bright light, and then one of the castle towers to their left was inside out. "Or is he... Awake?"

"With him, sometimes I can hardly tell," Twilight grouched. She took a breath. "Anyway, once I've found Cadance, we can evacuate."

"Evacuate the city?" Celestia seemed about to protest. Then what looked to be a particularly unpleasant section of the Everfree replaced the castle gardens below their balcony, black tentacle-vines ensnaring everypony within... and then politely depositing them at the front gates. Although from the confusion occurring there, clearly something else had been done to them in the interim. "All right," Celestia said after a silent moment. "That sounds like a good idea."

"No, not the city," Twilight said. "We're going to evacuate Equestria."

"What?" Celestia exclaimed, her voice strangled. "You can't possibly be serious."

"I am absolutely serious," Twilight answered, her horn glowing as she prepared to teleport down the mines. She took one last glance at the city and the army attacking it.

Thousands of miniature draconequi darted throughout the city, spreading chaos and terror in their wake. In the center of it all, Discord lounged on his throne (suspended upside down from a cotton candy cloud, of course). As though noticing Twilight's attention, he winked, before snapping his fingers.

Twilight had a moment of disorientation as her perspective shifted a few feet up and to the right. She shook her head to clear it, strands of pastel, glowing mane passing across her eyes, and she sighed. She glanced down, and was not surprised to see 'herself'. The teleportation spell she'd been in the middle of charging fizzled out



and the tiny-seeming purple alicorn started to panic.

Twilight groaned slightly, raising a golden-shod hoof to her " or rather to \_Celestia's\_ " face. "Princess Celestia?" Twilight asked the other alicorn, wincing slightly at the familiar-but-still-alien sound of her new voice.

The 'Twilight Sparkle' took a deep breath and looked up. "Is that you, Twilight?"

"Yes, Princess," Twilight said. She started her teleport spell again, and was momentarily distracted by the golden glow of her horn. A small part of her mind started listing some interesting experiments to run before fixing this mess.

"Where can we even evacuate \_to\_?" Celestia asked.

Twilight risked another look at Discord, who was now surrounded by a swarm of what seemed to be pony-parasprite hybrids. "...I hear the moon is nice this time of the century."

\* \* \*

><p>63.11 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Good evening, Twilight. Come in from the road." Zecora stepped aside to allow the princess to enter her hut. "What brings you tonight to my humble abode?"<p>

"Well, Zecora," Twilight said, "I don't know if I mentioned the new expansion to the Loop to you- you know, the one where Fluttershy discovers she enjoys being a singer so long as nobody can see her doing it?"

"You might or might not have, but I do not mind it," Zecora smiled. "Thanks to your friends, I have been reminded."

"My friends?" Twilight asked. "But the pet center benefit isn't for another week yet."

"Rarity and Fluttershy wanted time to rehearse, so they came here to me for the poison joke curse."

"Oh. Well, anyway, that's not why I came here. I figured that, if you can make poison joke trigger specific effects, you could reproduce other things besides the Flutterguy voice."

"That is the truth which you have guessed, as your friend Pinkie Pie could attest."

A pink head poked through one of Zecora's windows, preceded by a large swollen tongue covered in blue polka dots. Two blue eyes glared meaningfully at Zecora before withdrawing out the window once more.

"Um... what?" Twilight asked, pointing to the window.

"Pinkie Pie's thoughtless rambling last Loop caused quite the

sensation; this karmic punishment your friends chose by acclamation."

A pink hoof poked a sign through the window: GOODBYE TURKEY CALLING CHAMPIONSHIP!

"Um... yeah," Twilight shrugged. "Anyway, I wasn't asking that you do it to Pinkie."

The sign flipped over. YOU'RE NOT?

\* \* \*

><p>"Why cain't ya just teleport on in thar an' get youre stuff yerself?"<p>

"I warded my workshop against all teleportation," Twilight replied. "There are a lot of things I don't want unawake ponies to find! Can you imagine unawake Trixie building her own Intelligent Device? Or Scootaloo making a scooter out of repulsorlifts?"

"Then why don'tcha make yerself a set o' lock-out keys?" Appleteeny grumbled, hanging from the edge of the little ventilation pipe. "Loops' smartest pony can't think of that?"

"Look, just hurry up, get down there, and unlock my doors!" Twilight said. "If I don't get all that stuff stowed in my pocket before the Loop ends, I'll lose everything! It'll take tens of thousands of Loops to replace some of it!"

Applebloom rushed up to Twilight. "Hey, are y'done with my sister yet, Twilight? I need her to unlock the access port fer my hangar! Scootaloo and Diamond Tiara wrecked the controls when they crash-landed in the south forty!"

The shrunken Applejack's grumblings were cut off when she lost her grip and slid screaming down the ventilation shaft.

\* \* \*

><p>63.12 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke as a baby looking up at two adult humans. The lady picked her up gently.<p>

"Martha, we can't just take an alien baby," the man said.

"Yes we can, if we hurry. Use the winch and load her spaceship in the truck. I'll cover it up with a tarp," the woman, Martha, looked at her husband pleadingly, "This is the answer to our prayers, John. We can finally have a baby. I will call her Tara. Tara Kent."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle, now Tara Kent, grew up in a loving family on a farm.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Mom, Dad?"<p>

"Yes, Tara?"

"You know how there comes a point in every young girl's life when they find the alien spaceship that they arrived on Earth in?"

Stunned, Martha and John Kent didn't say anything.

"Because I totally found the spaceship that I came in. I also activated the AI with the personality of my birth father. Don't worry, he's very boring compared to you, Dad. We just talked about the technology of my destroyed homeworld. It gave me some good ideas for later."

"Honey, I know we didn't tell you the truth," Martha started only to be interrupted by a hug from Twilight.

"Mom, I understand completely. There's nothing to forgive. You two are my real family."

Johnathan Kent got in on the hug, "And you are our daughter no matter what."

Tara smiled, "That's great, because I wanted to ask.."

John spoke up, "You're still not skipping ahead in school."

"But it's so boring! And I have a super-smart alien brain."

"Tara, you need to learn social skills. Make some friends," Martha Kent said, reminding Twilight of a certain alicorn mentor.

"Fine, but there isn't that many interesting, I mean potential friends. Lana Lang and Chloe Sullivan are alright, but most other girls are just best ignored."

"Just try, okay?" Twilight just nodded.

\* \* \*

><p>Remembering what she could of the DC universe, Twilight couldn't help but let loose a tiny giggle. Superman's weaknesses included magic. The former magical unicorn pony from the magical land of Equestria, whose special talent was magic laughed to herself for a good long while when she remembered this fact. Her other weakness, kryptonite radiation, was fixed by creating a permanent skin-tight magical shield that reflected all said radiation away from her.<p>

"So another altered human has been depowered?" The spaceship's AI asked Twilight.

"Yep. I'm getting pretty good at endowing and removing Kryptonite induced powers. Now that my adoptive parents now can take care of their farm with super speed and strength, I was thinking of taking Kryptonian technology to the next level."

"Are you sure Earth can handle it?"

"I did some magical divination to see what kind of future would happen if I did not do this. All the alien invasions, dimensional incursions, and superpowered villains. It would be a mess," Twilight reasoned.

The AI was silent as minutes passed. Then it spoke, "Very well, here are the schematics for the rest of our people's technologies."

\* \* \*

><p>The information download gave Twilight a massive headache and a massive smile. She knew how she could make it up to her birth family and people.<p>

Thus, the first thing she did after graduation was formed the Kent Technology corporation. Using every bit of her intelligence and lessons learned from her most business savvy friend, Rarity; Twilight managed to raise her company to the same level as Lex-Corp, Wayne Enterprises, and Oliver Queen's corporation in only a few years.

The small green crystalline probe emerged from the Kent-Tech satellite that orbited the planet Venus. A few moments later, this was followed by a similar crystal. When all the kryptonian terraformer probes were in place, they activated. Hours later, the planet Venus was a perfect duplicate of Krypton.

Time travel technology was forbidden by Kryptonian law. Twilight Sparkle reasoned that such a law can't exist until the Kryptonian people could enforce it. Thus the satellite in orbit linked up to a point in time right before the destruction of the original Krypton and a split second before their deaths all the doomed Kryptonians were saved. To live happily on Venus, a planet in orbit around Earth's very yellow sun.

\* \* \*

><p>"Miss Kent! You've brought a civilization of super powered aliens to our solar system," the news reporters were all over her during the press conference, "How do you propose to protect Earth from even one of these unstoppable Kryptonians?"<p>

"The answer is simple," Twilight answered, "My company will be providing Kryptonian powers at very affordable prices to any human that wanted them, provided they didn't have a criminal history."

It took a while for the pandemonium to quiet down.

At least the politicians changed their stance on selling superpowers to people, Twilight thought. Partly because of our new planetary neighbors, and partly because they knew she could have taken her operation to tax-free international waters.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight smiled as she looked upon the list of the first subjects to the Kryptonian enhancement package. She paused at the name marked Bruce Wayne. It would be interesting to see how everything changed now.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>A few years later, when the White Martians tried to invade Earth, they found billions of Super men and women alongside their Kryptonian allies. So it was that the base DC timeline was made completely and utterly unrecognizable.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>63.13 (Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>MLP Loop Trek: Evening Interludes<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Good Evening, Captain. Please come in," said Twilight Sparkle, greeting Rainbow Dash at the entrance to her quarters.<p>

The pegasus came in just far enough to let the doors close.  
"Twilight, I think we need to talk about what's coming up further down the line." She seemed slightly ill-at-ease.

"Anything in particular? I've distributed all the episode videos, the written summaries, and selected analyses to all of the looping crew."

"Yeah...About that. Just to state the blindingly obvious, you're in Spock's slot, and I've gone over your official Starfleet personnel file..."

Twilight started to get a sinking feeling. "And I gather you've been looking at the second season?"

Rainbow nodded.

Twilight sighed. "I've already been over this with Nyx for obvious reasons. Yes, I'm half crystal pony in this continuity. And yes, I'm betrothed. To Flash Sentry, if you must know. And no, there is no equivalent to Pon Farr for crystal ponies. So I don't think there is any reason for us to try to kill each other when my supposed wedding date comes up. Anything else?"

"About your parents and the Babel conference..."

"Cadance and Shining."

"That's...kinda weird."

"Not the first time for me we've been parent and child - In either direction. And I'm pretty sure they're both unawake. There's been plenty of time for them to send the signals, even if we're supposed to be estranged. Y'know. I've always wondered why baseline Spock's file didn't mention that he was Sarek's son..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Fluttershy? Y'all got a minute?" asked Applejack, poking her

head out of her sickbay office.<p>

"Sure, Applejack. What do you need?"

"It's just Dash, Twi and me have been meanin' to talk to ya about how little there's been for y'all to do this loop."

"I honestly don't mind at all. You know me. I like quiet loops. It gives me time to work on my own projects."

"We're a little worried that ya don't have any animal friends to keep ya company, though."

"Yes. I do miss them, but please don't worry. I'm fine. How are you feeling about all this?" she asked, indicating sickbay and the ship around them with a wing gesture.

"Well, I'm a little out of my comfort zone; I've done the 'country doctor' thing a few times, but it ain't like with Apple Bloom, who's eatin' up being Chief Engineer, or Scoots whose only disappointment is that she's flyin' a big cruiser and not one of them \_Defiant\_ class heavy escorts." Her expression suddenly brightened as a thought struck. "Heh...Silly thing...I'm still waitin' on my chance to use the 'Darn, it Dash! I'm a Doctor, not a whatever' line." They both chuckled.

"Well, I do appreciate you three being concerned for me, but I'm fine," Fluttershy reassured her friend.

"Okay then. Just two more things."

"Yes?"

"First off, we're probably gonna be encounterin' tribbles a ways down the road. I hope that won't be a problem."

"I'll do my best to control myself."

"And second, we know you've been practicin' yer shape-shifting in the arboretum durin' the night watch; Tiara's been gettin' reports from spooked ponies. We just want y'all to be careful, y'hear?"

"I'll keep it in mind."

\* \* \*

><p>"...Star Trekkin', I hope that we don't crash On the starship \_Enterprise\_ under Captain Dash..." Sweetie Belle sang quietly to herself as she waited her turn at the food replicator in the Officers' Mess.

\_That is a very silly song\_, observed Clover. \_Silly even by Pinkie Pie standards.\_

"Yeah. It's just an earworm that tends to implant when I'm in a Trek loop," explained Sweetie.

\_But you've adapted it to our current circumstances.\_

"I'm off duty. I'm allowed to be silly." Sweetie collected her

dandelion salad and went to the table where Apple Bloom, Nyx, and Silver Spoon were finishing their own meals. "Hey, guys. I heard you've completed your certification, Silver. Congrats."

"Thanks," said the dragoness, contemplating one last Beryl from the selection of gems she'd ordered for dessert. "You hear anything from the seniors about what's coming next?"

"Nothing solid, but I've been picking up rumors that an Ambassador Harshwhinny may be coming aboard sometime soon."

Nyx's expression went thoughtful. "If I were to guess, that's probably the Eminian-Vendikan War. Joy. More society-controlling computers to blow up. Depending on how the Captain wants to play this, you may end up in command for a while, Apple Bloom."

"Great. I'm still foal-sittin' our own computer upgrades," muttered the Engineer.

"I have offered to help you monitor the situation," pointed out Cookie from her necklace. "On several occasions."

"Problem is, you, Clover, and Pansy aren't officially on the crew roster, so you can't stand watches or actually do much of anything without your 'sponsor' physically present. Barrin' Q or Discord jiggerin' reality again, it'll take either me or Twilight and five minutes alone with a Starbase records computer to create proper identities for y'all. I'm really sorry, but that's just how it is right now. I might be able to rig up mobile holoemitters fer y'all, or at the very least holographic disguises fer yer armor shell forms fer after."

"Speaking of Pansy," mused Silver. "Where's Scootaloo?"

"Y'all know that mini-holosuite I set up in cargo hold 3 yesterday? Scoots and Diamond have been monopolizin' it durin' their off-watch time. I'm startin' to regret installin' the thing..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Ready for match 16?" asked Scootaloo.<p>

"I keep telling you that the scenario isn't just flawed, but that the underlying assumptions are contradictory," insisted Diamond Tiara. "It's bad enough that each side works under different laws of phsyics, but since you insist on including specific characters, each of which has their own variable levels of plot armor..." Running out of steam, she took a deep breath. "All right. Let's go. But I get the Death Star this time." Seeing the orange pegasus' frown, she added, "I don't see what you're so sad about, Miss Best Helmspony in Starfleet. I've seen what you can do with a Defiant class..."

\* \* \*

><p>63.14 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Rarity?"<p>

"Yes, Twilight?"

"Why are we sitting in this box watching a third-rate variety show?"

The old men seated in front of them said in chorus, "That's what we've been wondering for forty years!"

\* \* \*

><p>63.15 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>C-Force sat in the lounge and listened as Dr. Diamond gave the briefing.<p>

"The Chuppy Choccy brand of cookies have recently been discovered to contain a certain silicate. Now, industrial cookie-making processes often use silicates as a stabilizing agent--"

"You mean there's sand in our cookies?" team leader Apple-1 gasped.

"Only trace amounts, and usually nothing harmful," Dr. Diamond said patiently. "But what we found in Chuppy Choccies is different." She turned on a screen to show a microscopic image. "This is a sample taken from one of those cookies. Note the electrical flashes between the silica bits." Sure enough, brief flashes of light could just barely be seen linking tiny light-colored grains within the dark brown cookie. "We think these electrical discharges have the same properties as neural thought waves."

"You mean there's MIND-CONTROL sand in our cookies?" team leader Apple-1 gasped.

"Sounds like a dirty SPECTRA trick to me!" Scoota-2 chimed in.

"To you everything sounds like a dirty SPECTRA trick," Princess-3 replied.

Sweetie-4 pulled a packet of cookies out of her pocket and sighed. "I'm gonna have to switch to Nutty Muddies, aren't I?"

Silver-5 tried to say something, but after about ten seconds of random sounds, all she could get out was, "RRddoot ploot toot stupid speech impediment!"

\* \* \*

><p>SPECTRA- Super Party Eventual Conquest Through Random Acts.<p>

Headquarters- somewhere in deep space, unobservable to even cutting-edge Earth supertechnology.

Staff- a lot of really ugly humanoid robots with 1970s hair and bad uniforms... and one other.

"WHOOPEE!" Zoltie Pie shouted, dancing as she watched viewscreen



after viewscreen of cookie-loving people dancing uncontrollably in the street. "My newest plan is a BRILLIANT success! Now once we infiltrate the Nutty Muddies factory we can begin with the second stage- MUSICAL NUMBERS!" She giggled madly before continuing, "At this rate not even C-Force will be able to stop me from PARTY-FYING THE EARTH!"

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetie-4 looked up from her console on the bridge of the Philomena. "Girls, I've been wondering about this Loop."<p>

"Here we go again," Scoota-2 grumbled.

"I mean," Sweetie-4 persisted, "I can accept the stupid brightly colored ninja bird outfits, but why is it every fight we get into ends with us fighting a giant robot monster?"

"Yes," Princess-3 added, "and we always defeat the giant robot monster by setting our spaceship on fire?"

"Hey, 'Firey Philomena' looks cool, that's all I need to know," Scoota-2 replied.

"Girls, please," Apple-1 sighed, "we're in a Loop where our evil nemesis is Pinkie Pie. We're really better off not asking questions."

"Guess you're right," Sweetie-4 said, pulling a candy bar out of her pocket. "But it still makes no sense."

\* \* \*

><p>63.16 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Discord Awoke in a cramped little workshop surrounded by walls made out of triangles and hexagons. He couldn't quite tell if the panels were full of super-science gizmos or just random junk glued up and spray-painted over in gray.<p>

He looked at his hand, which currently held a screwdriver. It was a normal human hand. Not good. He couldn't remember, literally could NOT remember, ever being in a world where he couldn't shift to his more accustomed, gloriously asymmetrical form.

"What's the matter, Joel?" a voice called from over his shoulder. A gangly yellow robot that looked like the unholy love child of a light fixture truss and the contents of a middle school gym equipment locker stared up at him with yellow eyes. "You just built us, you can't go crazy now."

"Yeah," another voice chimed in. The thing in front of Discord, which he'd taken for a kewpie-doll made out of parts from a gumball machine, moved to face him. "I mean, what's the point of dismantling the vital guidance and control circuits from the satellite to build us if you were planning on going nuts anyway."

"It's not like I knew how to operate them anyway, I'm just a

janitor." Discord's eyes bulged as he realized what he'd said. "No. No, I am NOT going to play along with this Loop. I'm going to snap my fingers and restore myself to delightful, delightful chaos."

"Who, chaos? Chaos from Mr. Minnesota himself? This I have to see!" the gumball machine chortled.

Discord snapped his fingers.

After a brief pause he snapped them again.

And again.

He tried snapping the fingers of his left hand instead.

He tried alternating.

He tried simultaneous.

And he kept on trying until the snapping built into a syncopated rhythm, then into a frantic metronome that ceased only when his fingertips grew chafed.

"Hey, have you tried wiggling your nose, Samantha?" the golden robot asked.

Before Discord could ponder a witty rejoinder, a yellow light flashed from the room next door.

A cross between a sea serpent and a Shop-Vac poked its head through the door. "INCOMING MESSAGE, JOEL," it shrieked in an unearthly voice.

"Incoming message from Gizmonics Institute," a much saner female voice added. "Please report to the bridge for incoming message."

"Well, at least it can't get better," Discord said quietly.

"Don't you mean, 'it can't get worse?'" the yellow robot asked.

"Oh, thanks so very much for that," Discord grumbled. "You've just jinxed us all."

"Oh, you're welcome- what?"

Discord and the robots moved into the next room, which had a single control panel with only three clownishly large buttons on it. The yellow one flashed urgently.

"Right, let's see what happens," Discord said, whacking the button.

A viewscreen lit up with a view of a dark, dank, dungeonous laboratory. Standing in the middle of it wearing a sickly green lab coat stood a man with wild, uncombed hair, standard-issue geek glasses and a truly objectionable mustache. "Ah, hello, Joel Discord," he said. "I think you can tell by your current surroundings that your job performance review didn't go all that well."

"Dr. Forrester," Discord said. "I- no. No I am NOT going along with this!"

"Yes! Yes, but you are!" Dr. Forrester grinned. "You see, I needed a guinea pig for my experiments on breaking the human psyche. I have a theory that, if only I can expose normal humans to the most mind-searingly awful movies ever made, I will be able to destroy human civilization and take over for my own- are you taking notes?"

"Just a moment," Discord said, scribbling madly on a notepad, "... 'destroy-human-civilization.' Got it. Sounds like a marvelously evil idea!"

"Why, thank you!" Dr. Forrester said. "So you can see how evil my idea is, we're going to begin now! It's a collaboration between American movie giant Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Japanese movie giant Toei, and it truly brings together the worst of both worlds! It's a little stinkburger entitled The Green Slime. Buckle up, Bunkie!"

The room shook as red flashing lights cycled overhead, joined by the red button on the console, which flashed its own alarm.

"Movie sign," the calm female voice said over the screams of Discord and the robots. "We have movie sign. You have ten seconds to evacuate to the theater before atmosphere is vented from the bridge."

\* \* \*

><p>Big Mac looked at the figure sitting at the end of the bar. It was the first time he'd seen the phrase, "crawled into the bottle," done literally.<p>

"Ain't seen you like this before," he said to Discord. "Finally find a Loop too much for you to handle?"

"Oh, it was going all right," Discord said, "until TV's Twilight showed her face."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

63.1: The Dating Simulator. Keep away from hoofs and face. (Also - Loper photo albums are very complex.)

>63.2: Honor codes don't have to make sense.<br>63.3: Eragon needs to decompress sometimes. It'd help if he didn't decompress a magma chamber too.

>63.4: The Fifth Grail Wat.<br>63.5: Trollicorns.

>63.6: Adoptedbiological tensions don't often come up from both sides for the same kid. Loops again.

>63.7: Biggles and Scootaloo in: Sky Odyssey. Caution: random lightning storms.<br>63.8: I assume the Changelings were robots or something.

>63.9: Death Battle!<br>63.10: Speak now, or forever hold your plaice.

>63.11: Apple tini! Like the wasp, but not.<br>63.12: You get a superpower! You get a superpower! Everyone gets superpowers!

>63.13: Meanwhile, below decks, Midshipman Picard tries not to draw attention.<br>63.14: Dohohoho!  
>63.15: ...wait, alien THREATS? I thought you said "treats".<br>63.16: Even the lord of chaos cannot handle some of those films.

## 68. Chapter 68

### 64.1 (Gym Quirk)

\* \* \*

><p>Luke Skywalker peered at the row of droids the Jawas were offering. <em>Looks like we're hosting guests.</em>

\* \* \*

><p>The negotiations for the droids had gone as usual, except he was now leading a gloss-white 3P0 unit with pink and lavender highlights, and a pale-yellow and bright-red astromech into the garage for cleaning. The two droids were more subdued than their baseline versions. He wasn't sure if they were still trying to assimilate their new setting, or just politely waiting for a more private venue.<p>

"This oil bath is going to feel so good," said the protocol droid. The voice was definitely feminine and had a distinctly youthful timbre.

"Since we're in private, I think we can drop the pretenses and get down to introductions. I'm Luke Skywalker, the first local Looper most visitors encounter. Welcome to Tatooine."

"And I am Sweet-Threepio, equine - sorry, force of habit - human-cyborg relations. And this is my counterpart, Apple-Deetoo."

The yellow-and-red astromech beeped a mildly frustrated greeting. After a pause, the speaker emitted a series of garbled syllables that resolved into intelligible Galactic Basic. "...Darn translation software. Is this better?" The voice was also a youthful female, with a mid-rim twang by way of an accent.

Luke nodded. "Much." He turned back to Threepio. "You said 'equine'?"

"Um...Yes. We're normally ponies. From Equestria?"

"Ah. I've heard of you guys, but haven't had a chance to visit yet."

"And I bet you've had a fair number of visitors who know this place amazingly well despite having never been here before."

"Yeah. It was kind of disconcerting until I got ahold of vids from the Hub. It also explained some of the new variants that cropped up lately."

"So y'all want to see Leia's holo?" asked Apple.

"Please."

The Astromech's holoprojector flickered to life and ran through the entirety of the message.

"Too bad. Doesn't look like Leia's Awake."

"Variation in how the message is worded?" inquired Sweetie.

"Exactly."

"I was wonderin' why she didn't react to my color scheme," mused Apple.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Yoda's hut...Dagobah<em>, sighed Twilight Sparkle to herself. Her Loop memories informed her that it was 19 years after the end of the Clone Wars. If she recalled the movies correctly, it would be another 3 years before anyone was scheduled to show up. \_Okay. I can either vegetate here, catch up on my reading, play with the Force for a bit, or...\_ A stray thought combined with her recollection of the contents of her subspace pocket. \_I wonder...\_

She started limping toward the pond where Luke would plant his fighter in a few years. \_Right. I'm in 900-year-old Yoda's body now\_, she reminded herself. \_I think I'll go quadruped.\_ With a flash, she Ascended and quickly reverted to the more familiar lavender unicorn. \_Much better.\_ She trotted the rest of the way to the nearby clearing.

After some awkward sorting through her pocket, she looked at the shiny new T-65C X-Wing parked next to the pond with mild satisfaction. \_I don't think Scootaloo will mind if I borrow this for a quick trip to Tatooine...Um...Wait.\_ Her past experience suggested that the loop usually started at the same time the movies did. That usually meant Tatooine would be under Imperial occupation by the time she could get there; showing up in a Rebel Alliance starfighter would just be asking for trouble.

\_Of course! I can go to Bespin and then arrange for a passenger ticket to Tatooine. Right. Now to fire this baby up and load the hyperspace coordinates into...the...astro...mech...\_

She didn't have an astromech droid. Scootaloo said that she'd asked Apple Bloom keep hers for when there was time to tinker with it.

\_Xylem!\_

\* \* \*

><p>"So how long do your loops usually run?" asked Sweetie as the landspeeder cruised toward the Jundland Wastes.<p>

"Depends. About half the time, it wraps after the Battle of Endor. But some variants can go as far as forty...forty-five years after that."

"What about native loopers?"

"You're replacing two of them; Artoo much more often than Threepio...Leia, Han and Chewie...Ben less often...Occasionally Lando and Wedge. No Imperials besides dad and Mara, thank the Force." Luke had had nightmares about the prospect of a Looping Palpatine. Or worse, a Looping Thrawn.

"My sensors seem to pickin' up some bantha-sized life forms about 1500 meters ahead," interrupted the droid laying on the back deck of the speeder. "That sound about right?"

"Yeah. It's about the right time and place to meet up with Ben," said Luke as Sweetie started slowing down.

"Whoa! Got a real big reptilian life form just beyond the banthas, and it's closin' fast. If those banthas are carryin' sandpeople, they're runnin' to the north now."

"That's definitely not baseline. Take us southward, Threepio, and keep us behind that ridge," instructed the moisture farmer.

A somewhat familiar combination of a roar and howl sounded, then a large reptilian form poked its head over the ridgeline that the speeder was now paralleling. It was a mostly purple head, with green spines.

"Don't think I've ever seen a krayt dragon with those colors," observed Luke.

"SPIKE?" chorused the droids.

\* \* \*

><p>After allowing herself 5 minutes of semi-coherent ranting, Twilight returned her thoughts to the problem at hoof. <em>Okay. I need an FTL conveyance that will get me to a nearby star system with some sort of passenger service. Since I can't replicate Dash's self-propelled warp speed stunt, that means a ship...Now do I have anything...<em> She scowled as she ran through her pocket's inventory list again... \_It's definitely not ideal, but it might be good enough.\_

More awkward manipulation replaced the X-Wing with a Starfleet Type 6 shuttlecraft. Fortunately, Apple Bloom had spared some attention to this particular ship in a past loop, so instead of the meager Warp 4 top speed, Twilight had been assured that it could sustain Warp 5.7. Now all she had to do was dig up Yoda's astrogation database (how else could Luke have figured out how to get to Bespin from here?) and convert it to something the shuttle's computer could understand...\_Chlorophyll...\_

With an annoyed grumble, she trudged back to Yoda's hut, mentally composing a letter that she had no intention of actually sending.

\_Dear Princess Celestia,\_

\_Today I learned that I need to spend a lot more time on contingency

planning for bizarre technology combinations.\_

\_Your frustrated student,\_  
><em>Twilight Sparkle<em>

\* \* \*

><p>It was certainly shaping up as one of the more interesting loops in recent memory, Luke decided. One seldom sees a krayt dragon shape-shift into a purple-and-green Barabel.<p>

"Y'know. It's still kinda strange to see this place as a desert. One time I was here, it was almost as green as Naboo. It made quite the impression," said Spikey-one Kenobi absently as they went to the small cairn where he had left his Jedi robes and other equipment.

"Naboo?" asked Luke.

"Twenty-odd years and a whole lot of loops ago. Friend of ours got stuck here for ten years and took up extreme terraforming as a hobby," explained Spike, shrugging into his robes and fastening the belt.

"Hey, Spike? Do you know if anypony else is along for the ride?" asked Sweetie.

"I got just one Magic when I checked earlier, and she's a long way off. Definitely not on this planet," answered the Jedi.

"Some of us have the ability to sense if others from our home loop are Awake. It's...complicated..." Apple Bloom said in response to Luke's confused expression.

"Do you want to drop by Ben's place to pick up Anakin's old lightsaber?" asked Spike, raising the hood of his robe against the suns.

Luke shook his head. He idly produced a pair of lightsabers from his own subspace pocket, then returned them. "Experience does have its advantages." He glanced at the position of the twin suns. "Anyway, if we make for Mos Eisley now, there's a chance we can link up with Han and Chewie and get off-planet before the Imps get their act together and set up their blockade in earnest."

"I'm the one who's all about 'Avoiding Imperial entanglements'," agreed Spike. "Let's go."

\* \* \*

><p>It had taken nearly five hours, but the preflight checks were complete, and she had something resembling a warp-compatible version of a hyperspace route that should take her to Tatooine. (She had indulged in another three minutes of berating herself for not realizing that a Federation Shuttle would draw less imperial attention than an X-Wing.)<p>

After ransacking the hut for potentially useful items (about five hundred credits worth of old currency, and a Yoda-scale lightsaber), Twilight was more than ready to say good riddance to the slimy

mudhole.

Fortunately, the trip to orbit was uneventful, as was the transition to warp speed.

The journey itself, living down to Twilight's expectations for the loop, was not at all pleasant.

The good news was that the warp engines were behaving like a high-performance hyperdrive, so she would arrive much sooner than she had expected.

The not-so-good news was that the inertial dampers weren't quite up to handling the subspace turbulence, so it was a very rough ride. On top of that, she had to make constant adjustments to the warp field.

The practical upshot was the trip that she anticipated would take around thirty hours, during which she could have at least two six-hour blocks of much-desired sleep plus time to brush up on her Force abilities, had taken sixteen uncomfortable, concentration-heavy, sleepless hours.

Now parked on the far side of the closest of Tatooine's moons â€" fortuitously positioned in line-of-sight to Mos Eisley â€" she deployed a pair of stealthed surveillance drones. Alpha would be tasked with patrolling Mos Eisley and its immediate environs, Beta was to scan the region around the Lars homestead and the Jundland Wastes. Blessed with a few spare hours to allow the drones to reach their positions and collect enough data to create useful maps, she could take time for some deep Jedi meditation. \_I've gotten really rusty with this stuff\_, she scolded herself before going under in earnest.

\* \* \*

><p>When Hannah "Scoots" Solo Awoke in her bunk on the <em>Millennium Falcon</em>, she couldn't help squee-ing quietly when her Loop memories settled in. \_Yes! I'm Han Rooting Solo! I'm gonna fly the \_Falcon!\_

She had some previous experience with this setting; there had been a ponies-only variant where Dash was in Han's slot, Angel was the Wookiee, Applejack got cast as the farmer, Rarity was Leia, and Twilight found herself as the semi-retired Jedi Master, facing off against an unawake Darth Nightmare. Scootaloo had been relegated to Wedge's role, but at least she'd gotten a fair amount of stick time in an X-Wing. That had actually been pretty fun, even if none of the other CMC had been around for it.

\_You seem happy\_, observed Pansy. \_Been here before?\_

Before she could answer, a growl from outside the small room interrupted. Her Loop memories handled the translation from Shyriiwook.

{{I say. Is that you, old friend, or do I have the honor of hosting a guest?}}

Scootaloo blinked. Who knew that Shyriiwook was such a polite



language?

"I'm afraid Han's not here. Chewbacca, I presume?" she asked, climbing out of her bunk and opening the door.

{{Indeed I am. May I ask who I have the pleasure of greeting?}} The Wookiee took in the young, violet-haired human female.

"Um...yeah. Name's Scootaloo, pegasus pony from Equestria."

{{Charmed. I believe we may have an acquaintance in common. There was a painfully earnest fellow with the name of Carrot Ironfounderson who replaced our resident young jedi once upon a loop. He had mentioned visiting your home in passing. It sounded lovely.}}

"Um...I don't want to seem rude, but is there anything immediate we need to take care of? If I understand my loop memories correctly, we're laying low trying to avoid Jabba's mooks until we can find a paying gig, right?"

{{Excellent! Straight to the point. You have the gist of our situation perfectly. I gather that you have some familiarity with how our baseline operates, yes? Assuming no significant variation, we usually bump into the young gentleman and his elderly jedi mentor in about four hours. In any event, before I inquired as to your status, I received confirmation that Luke is Awake, and will be bringing guests; both droids I gather. Alas, he also indicated that his sister does not share his status this time.}} explained Chewbacca.

"Okay. I wonder who wound up as the droids. Is there time for me to take a good look at the ship?"

{{About half an hour before the first of Jabba's thugs starts skulking around the area. Oh. I should mention that Luke has been showing up about an hour early in recent loops. It avoids the unfortunate altercation with Ponda Baba.}}

"Anything else you think I should know about?"

{{Ah, yes. If you were wondering about the incident with poor Greedo, I fear that there is no easy way to avoid it, as he usually has Chalmun's staked out well before we can arrive. As you might expect, Han always gets off the first and only shot when he's Awake.}}

Scootaloo looked at the holster and gunbelt coiled on the worktable and suppressed a shudder.

\* \* \*

><p>Moderately refreshed by her trance, Twilight scrutinized the take from her surveillance drones. She was looking for an unobserved, yet open area to serve as a teleportation target zone. She had considered one of the unused docking bay in Mos Eisley, but had to reject them due to the control towers associated with them.<p>

Alpha was now looking at the outskirts of the spaceport town. There was a shallow canyon a couple of kilometers to the southwest that might serve her needs.

Shifting her attention to Beta, the image of a dusty brown landspeeder cruising toward Mos Eisley appeared on her screen. Zooming in, she could make out the white protocol droid and yellow astromech on the rear deck. She could make a good guess about the identity of the blonde-headed driver, but not the brown-hooded passenger.

Ordering Beta to her planned canyon target zone, she established an atmosphere bubble spell around herself. She then left the shuttle and put its systems in standby mode, tucking it back into her subspace pocket. Finally, she carefully low-grav hopped to a position where she had a line-of-sight to the planet. \_Looks like all that low orbit work I did when I was playing with X-Com is paying dividends.\_ Concentrating on the image from the Alpha's camera, she teleported...

...And found herself five meters above the canyon floor. A panicked levitation spell cushioned what would have been an uncomfortable landing. Retrieving the drone control unit from her pocket, she ordered Alpha to monitor the route between the canyon and the town proper.

\_Twenty minutes until Beta is close enough to retrieve. I suppose I should at least make myself more comfortable while I wait.\_ A chameleon-cloth tent from her subspace pocket provided some shelter from the twin suns.

\* \* \*

><p>Luke explained that the local garrison would be assigned to patrol, Mos Eisley while a detachment from Vader's <em>Devastator</em> handled the search for the droids. There was a narrow window of time between the \_Devastator\_'s departure for the Death Star and the arrival of the three relieving star destroyers when the only orbital presence was a pair of antique customs frigates. "The \_Falcon\_ can and did run the more powerful blockade, but why make things harder on yourself if you don't have to?"

"How solid is that time window?" asked Spike.

"Not as firm as I'd like," admitted Luke. "Here comes the checkpoint. Would you care to do the honours?"

Despite Spike's mild trepidation, the encounter went as smoothly as anyone could have asked.

"Whew," murmured Spike as they cruised into the town. "It's been a while since I've had to do that. Most of the time, I just need the battle precognition and telekinesis..."

They pulled up outside Chalmun's Cantina. Luke handed Sweetie a small comlink. "They don't serve mechanicals, so you two might as well be the outer security perimeter. Since we're early, I think we can avoid most of the usual encounters."

"Got it," acknowledged the protocol droid. Watching the two biologicals enter the establishment, she asked her counterpart. "How you doing, Apple Bloom?"

The astromech rotated her dome through three revolutions. "This is pretty neat. I ain't done much time as an artificial life form; it's interestin' to experience it from this side. Cookie's still a little overwhelmed, though. Too bad those jump jets were removed, I kinda want to see how well I can fly. How 'bout you, Sweets?"

"Clover's also trying to get used to all this. I guess I shouldn't complain, but this body is more awkward than I'd like, and I suspect the baseline programming is what's behind the urge to mimic Rarity at her most prim and proper..."

\* \* \*

><p>One side effect of Twilight's investigations of Silver Spoon's unstable species situation was a renewed interest in transformation spells. She had spent quite a bit of time with Fluttershy and Chrysalis trying to understand how their abilities in the area worked. While nowhere near as adept as those two, she felt that she had a solid grasp of the basics. It was time to put that belief to the test.<p>

There were very few sapient quadrupedal species in this galaxy, so trying to get past the imperial checkpoints as a purple unicorn probably wasn't going to work out that well. Therefore, she needed to become a biped to better blend in. She could take on the form she had in the Canterlot High School universe, but she was feeling adventurous and wanted to try something a little more exotic. Putting the image of her desired new shape firmly in mind, she let the magic gather and flow around her.

Several very uncomfortable minutes later, she examined the results in the full length mirror she had pulled out of her pocket eariler.

A lavender twi'lek female gazed back at her.

A naked lavender twi'lek female.

\_Well, at least it looks like everything's where it should be.\_ She twitched a lekku experimentally, then flexed her hands a few times, and walked several circuits around the tent's interior. Finally, she used the Force to summon a few nearby pebbles to her. \_I guess it'll do for now.\_

Sighing yet again, she started rummaging in her pocket for her limited selection of humanoid clothing. I \_hope my Canterlot High blouse and skirt won't look too strange on this body. Next chance I get, I'm learning that "Instant Wardrobe" spell from Rarity and talking to Apple Bloom about holographic clothing projectors...\_

\* \* \*

><p>Luke and Spike paused in the entry foyer of the cantina to let their vision adjust to the much darker interior.<p>

"Good. Ponda Baba and Evazan aren't here yet, so that's one annoying encounter avoided," murmured Luke.

"Another reason why you wanted to get here early?" asked Spike.

Luke nodded and started a slow walk toward Han's usual booth near the

back entrance. He quickly spotted Chewbacca who made the "Awake, with guest" gesture. In a low voice, he told Spike, "There's a substitute for Han. Might be a friend of yours." In his experience, it was very unusual for guest loopers to originate from more than one setting.

The violet-haired smuggler took in the purple barabel jedi, then grinned. "Spikey-one Kenobi, I presume?"

"Let me guess... 'Hannah Solo'?" A return grin. "How ya doin' Squirt?"

"Hey! Only Dash gets away with calling me that. Chewie tells me that the droids are also along?"

"Sweets and Bloom." Spike nodded. "I also pinged one of the Magics earlier, but I have no idea where she is. No time to do a more comprehensive scan â€" and it might have alerted Vader anyway."

{{Seeing friends together is always pleasant, no?}} Chewbacca asked Luke. {{Is there anything special happening, or do you want to go with the rapid departure plan?}}

Luke's expression had gone distant. "I...Damn. One Star Destroyer showed up early. I think our best escape window will be in around two hours, but I'll need to spend some time tracking it to firm up that estimate."

"By the by, Scoots. I just spotted a green rodian lurking over that way," muttered Spike with a faint head gesture toward a booth on the other side of the cantina.

{{That one does not confront unless his quarry is alone. We could all depart together if you do not feel up to dealing with him,}} offered Chewbacca.

"No. I got this," replied Scootaloo, her hand dropping to her holstered blaster. Spike raised an eyeridge, but said nothing.

The two jedi emerged into the baking double sunlight and made their way to the landspeeder. Chewbacca was last seen headed for the back entrance.

"Any problems?" asked Bloom.

"Not on our end. 'Scoots' Solo, on the other hand..." said Spike worriedly.

"Greedo?" queried Sweetie. Spike nodded.

"To think that this is the first time some of you have been here," observed their host.

"Sorry. I think we've all watched the videos at least five times each," apologized the protocol droid.

There was the faint sound of a single blaster discharge from inside.

"That doesn't quite sound like Han's DL-44," said Luke thoughtfully.

A minute later, Solo emerged from the main entrance wearing a grim smile.

"It's amazing how many people forget these things have a stun setting," she said, patting the holstered blaster.

Spike gestured at the two-seat speeder. "We'd offer you a lift to the \_Falcon\_, but..."

"I can walk," said Luke. "It's not that far, and I certainly know the way."

\* \* \*

><p>A brown-cloaked figure rode a speeder bike slowly away from the checkpoint toward the row of docking bays.<p>

Since the stormtroopers' instructions were to look for droids, a lone figure on a single-seat vehicle was not part of their search profile, so a quick identity scan " itself dispensed with by a quiet application of Force persuasion " was all she needed to enter the spaceport.

To her mild surprise, Twilight had found a jedi cloak that fit her new form remarkably well. Underneath, she wore a cobbled-together amalgam of a dark red Drasnian merchant's tunic, khaki slacks from a semi-casual pant-suit she'd picked up during a Police Procedural loop, and starfleet uniform boots. Rarity would doubtlessly faint at the sight of her ensemble.

She pulled up outside of docking bay 94 next to the weathered brown landspeeder. She paused to run a hand over the starboard engine pod, but the heat of the afternoon suns made it impossible to determine how recently it had been shut down.

Walking slowly into the docking bay proper, she stopped to gaze at the Fastest Hunk of Junk in the Galaxy.

"Can I help you...miss?" asked a familiar voice. A young-ish female human with bright purple hair, black vest over a white shirt, navy blue uniform trousers with red stripes, black boots, and a heavy blaster pistol in a low-slung holster emerged from behind a landing strut. She was pulling on a pair of gray-brown flying gloves.

Twilight pushed back her cloak's hood, revealing her lavender-skinned head. Recognition dawned in the pilot's eyes.

"Spike! Someone here to see you!" she called. It was obvious that Scootaloo was trying very hard to conceal amusement behind a cool demeanor.

A purple-and-green barabel wearing a brown jedi cloak came down the passenger ramp and took in the visitor. A wide grin " made more disconcerting by the mouth full of sharp reptilian teeth - spread across the faintly familiar face. Spike made no attempt to conceal his amusement. He seemed to come to a decision and enunciated very

clearly.

"Twi'lek Sparkle, I presume?"

Scootaloo lost her composure completely and collapsed against the landing strut in gales of laughter. Spike was little better, chortling loudly and clinging to a ramp support piston.

"I hate you two so much right now," was all the face-palming Twilight could manage.

\* \* \*

><p>64.2 (Zetrein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The sky was lime green, with purple swirls. The ground was flashing between chocolate checkerboard, yellow astroturf, and grass, as her spells kept trying to undo the chaos magic. The sun was locked directly overhead, with the moon orbiting it.<p>

Twilight Woke up right then, in the middle of a shouting match with an oddly familiar white bearded, brown coated alicorn. The two of them stopped mid-rant, as their loop memories fell into place. A synchronized face-hoof later, the two marched up to eachother.

"Twilight," The alicorn asked in a familiar voice, "Why am I a pony?"

"I don't know, Discord." She replied. "You seem to have your usual powers, just... as an alicorn. You don't leave your baseline form often, do you?"

"No... How do you get by without thumbs? I can't snap my fingers, and it bugs me." As he spoke, Discord put the moon back into its proper orbit.

"I'd say you learn to live with it, but I kinda had it the other way around. What were we fighting about, when we woke up? Ye olde Chaos vs Order, I think?" Twilight nibbled on some white chocolate checkerboard, the rest of the grass having been returned to normal.

"Yes, something droll like tha-" A shout cut him off.

"Now, Sister! While they are distracted!" Is that?

"That is not stealth, Luna!" Oh dear.

They looked to the side, just in time for the flash of rainbow light to hit them.

\* \* \*

><p>"...The two mighty alicorns, fought for control of the land. The Lady of Order clashed with the Master of Chaos, the lands and very sky shuddering and twisting to their power.<p>

Finally, the two Sisters brought to bear the most powerful magic known to ponydom: the Elements of Harmony. Using the magic of the Elements of Harmony, they defeated the warring Tyrants, and banished them permanently in the moon.

The Sisters led Equestria into a new age of peace, and harmony has been maintained in Equestria for generations since."

The black unicorn looked up from the book, as she Woke up. "Well, okay then." Nyx commented.

\* \* \*

><p>They had not heeded the warning Luna's student had given them, and now they were about to pay the price. The festival was in full swing, they were surrounded by innocents, and the Lady of Order stood before them. She was asking about... what?<p>

"An ID. You never revoked my citizenship, but I still need a proper ID before I can really do much of anything. You two are the only ponies that remember me, so I have to ask you to vouch for me. The pony at the office didn't believe me when I gave my name." The purple alicorn calmly repeated.

"...And where is your rival? We will not allow you to plunge this land into another period of strife!" Celestia did not allow her old enemy's manner to cloud her judgement.

"Over by the punch table. I think the mares are making him feel a little uncomfortable." A purple hoof pointed, to where the brown alicorn seemed to be hemmed in by starry-eyed mares.

"So tall!"

"That beard!"

"\_Centuries\_ of experiance, Rose, I'm telling you."  
>"That <em>beard!"<em>

"Now girls, there's enough of him for all of us."

\_"That beard!"\_

"Help! I need an adult!" Discord tripped as he tried backing away. As he fell onto his back, the mares descended in a chorus of girlish cheer.

\* \* \*

><p>Months later, they had finally convinced Celestia and Luna to allow them to release the statue that had taken Discord's usual place in the gardens. Who it was, was both amusing and confusing to them, until they heard the name of the "statue" itself.<p>

Thus, they were gathered along side the Elements, to free the mare known as Obsession from her prison. Looking at Cadance's perplexed stone face, Nyx lit up her Element to cast the spell.

\* \* \*

><p>64.3 (Indalecio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>As Scootaloo awoke, her loop memories were telling her that she was in for a great time this loop. She was a world famous astronaut, she'd written her own book, she was running for governor of Kentucky, and she was a giant chicken.<p>

She tried saying 'What?', but what came out sounded like "Bwak?"

\* \* \*

><p>Reporters had gather around Ms. Scooter 'Scoots' Boo as she gave a short q&a session on a stand in a public park.<p>

One reporter spoke up. "Ms. Boo, what are your plans for revitalizing the ecoonomy?"

"Bwak."

That sent titters of laughter through the crowd.

"Seriously, though." the reporter continued.

"Bak, Back-ah!"

"Thank you, next question." said an aide to Scootaloo's right.

"Ms. Boo, whats your opinion of the situation with the Russkies?"

Scootaloo lowered her head and responded solemnly. "Bak, bwak."

The crowd responded appreciatively. "Thank you, next question."

A third reporter stepped forward and in a thick southern drawl, asked.

"Ms. Boo, I heard you're a giant chicken. Care to comment on that?"

Shock ran through the crowd, and the rest of the reporters turned on the last question giver.

As all attention was being given to the altercation, no one noticed a frisbee flying in the direction of Scootaloo's head, and knocking her wig off.

The fracas paused, realization coming over the crowd.

They now turned her attention to her, with Scootaloo holding up her wings in a placating gesture.

"She is a chicken! Get her!"

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo dusted herself off. Her popularity in the polls had taken a nosedive and she'd suddenly found the need to disappear. As



she walked off into the sunset, she wondered if maybe a trip to Hollywood wouldn't be in order.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>64.4 (Goldude, Wing Zero 032)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"EX-TER-MIN-ATE!"<p>

Twilight looked behind her and sighed. "Trixie, you're not a Dalek."

"EX-TER-MIN-ATE!"

"Doctor Who is a Read-Only Loop."

"EX-TER-MIN-ATE!"

"Your costume is atrocious. I can see your blue legs."

"EX-TER-MIN-ATE!"

"This isn't going to get Doctor Who to-" Twilight was cut off by Trixie sticking a plunger in Twilight's face. "Stop that!" She took the plunger with her magic and disintegrated it.

"Look, Trixie, you going around dressing like a Dalek is no suitable replacement for not being able to go to the Doctor Who universe like a normal Looper!"

"EX-TER-MIN-ATE!"

"If you say that one more time, I'm sending you to the moon for a week."

"..."

"..."

"..."

"...Good, now-"

"EX-TER-MI-"

\* \* \*

><p>"YOU WILL BE DELETED"<p>

"What the-" Looking back again Twilight sighed at what was approaching her.

"YOU WILL BE DELETED"

"Chrysalis, you are not a Cyberman. You are not even a cyberpony."

"YOU WILL BE DELETED"

"Chrysalis, your costume is as bad as Trixie's! Your horn and wings are sticking out of it!"

"YOU WILL BE DELETED"

"You know as well as she does that Doctor Who is a Read-Only loop!"

"YOU WILL BE DELETED"

"Doing this won't make Doctor Who loop either."

"DELETE, DELETE, DELETE..." Chrysalis chanted repeatedly in a monotone cyberman voice, while pointing the 'Cyberman laser' at her face... which was nothing more than a flashlight with a blue lens repeatedly flashing at regular intervals.

"Stop that," she said, by moving aside the hoof of Chrysalis 'armed' with the 'laser' from her face.

"DELETE, DELETE, DELETE..."

"Look Chrysalis, you going around dressing like a Cyberman is no suitable replacement for not being able to go to the Doctor Who universe like a normal Looper! I had told Trixie that, just stop it!"

"DELETE, DELETE, DELETE..."

"That's it, if you keep going, you're going to spend a week on the moon with Trixie!"

"..."

"..."

"..."

"...Great, now get rid of that co-"

"...YOU WILL BE DELE-"

\* \* \*

><p>"You too, huh?" Trixie asked, as Chrysalis materialized next to her.<p>

Chrysalis nodded, pulling her costume off.

"Why didn't you just shapeshift?"

The changeling shrugged. "Didn't feel like it."

\* \* \*

><p>64.5 (OathToOblivion)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was a tense battlefield, the Spirit of Chaos versus the Bearers of Harmony.<p>

"And just what can you silly ponies do now?!" asked the draconequus. "Your Elements of Harmony are useless now!"

"N-Not yet..." declared the Bearer of Magic, who attempted to keep her conical hat steady on her white mane. "We still have one more card to play..."

Discord arched an eyebrow, and by arched, I mean turned his eyebrow into a stone arch. "Oh really? I'd love to see you try to use such a card."

Trixie grinned. "Trixie warns you, you asked for it! Do it now, girls!"

"Honesty!"

"Laughter!"

"Loyalty!"

"Generosity!"

"Kindness!"

"Magic!"

"GO HARMONY!"

The Rainbow of Light formed, releasing something from the combined power of the Elements. Specifically, a certain purple alicorn with a star-burst Cutie Mark and crown.

"By your Friendship combined, I am Princess Harmony!" she declared...

...before facehoofing. "No, no, no, I can't do this; this is stupid! CUT!" she yelled to the camera crew, who stopped filming.

"Awww, come on, Twilight, making movies is fun!" said Pinkie.

"I'm not denying that, Pinkie, but this is just a Captain Planet rip-off, with 10 times the Cheesiness!"

"So?"

"...Give me the script; at the very least, I'm editing this so it sounds more like something we'd all say."

"Well, if no one needs me right now, I'm going to head over to Mac's bar; I'll see you later!" waved Discord, as he teleported out.

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Right, like he's actually going to go there. Okay, now I was thinking..."

\* \* \*

><p>64.6 (TricornKing)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy Awoke to find herself in her cottage. Checking her memories, she smiled as she confirmed that this seemed to be a fairly baseline loop, at least so far. It was the day before the Summer Sun Celebration, which meant that Twilight would be arriving in just a few hours from Canterlot.<p>

As she went down the stairs, idly wondering whether Luna was awake this loop and what they would all do with Nightmare Moon if she wasn't, Fluttershy heard a strange sound coming from her kitchen. Multiple sounds, like small voices.

"Fwuff? Fwuff fwuff fwuff FWuff fwuff fwuff!"

>"Fwuff! Fwuffa wuffa wuff fwuff!"<br>There was the sound of two smacks, and a third voice, sounding deeper than the others, said, "FWUFF-UP! Fuffa Wuffa Waff Fwaff!"

By now extremely puzzled, Fluttershy pecked her head into the kitchen. There on her floor where four extremely fluffy, short ponies, about the size of the Cutie Mark Crusaders. One was light blue, the second was pink with a yellow mane, and the third was pure white with no mane and a brown beard, something she'd once heard Twilight refer to as a "Lincoln chin curtain". Off to the side, the fourth brown one was having a staring contest with a very confused Angely Bunny. Except for the white one, they all had noticeably large buckteeth, and rather large than average ears.

"Um, excuse me?" Fluttershy said before they could start fighting again. Try as she could to remember, none of her Loop memories had anything related to these four strange ponies.

Startled, the four fluffy ponies looked up at her. Glaring at his companions, the bearded fluffy walked up to her and cleared his throat. Fluttershy immediately recognized it as the third voice she'd heard. "Fwuffa Ba Ba Ba-fwuff?"

Cocking her head, Fluttershy just stared in confusion. "I'm sorry, I don't understand you. What language are you speaking?"

The bearded woolly pony frowned for a moment. Sitting down, he began tapping the ground a bit with his front hoof. Just then, Fluttershy swore she saw a light bulb appear above his head, and the bearded woolly pony jumped up in the air, shouting, "Eur-fwuff-a!"

Standing on his hind legs, the pony began rubbing his front hooves over his throat. As he began speaking, Fluttershy wasn't quite sure, but she thought she heard the sound of a radio changing its dial. "Fwuff...Babababa...Ca...Cafwuff...Can you understand me now?"

Though still confused, Fluttershy nodded. "Yes, that's much better. Who are you? If you don't mind my asking?"

"Not at all my dear," said the white fluffy, smiling at her. "Just a second though." Turning towards his companions, the bearded pony walked towards them. Saying something in their strange language, he

began massaging their throats as they spoke, until each of them was able to speak Fluttershy's language. To her surprise and mild disapproval, their leader slapped the brown one to get him out of his staring contest with Angel. Strangely though, the brown one just laughed as his leader massaged his vocal cords.

Bringing his friends before her, the leader cleared his throat. "Please excuse us. We're not used to being able to speak like humans."

"Humans? You mean you're Loopers?"

The leader nodded. "We could be. We usually inhabit a human world though, and we certainly don't look like this," he gestured towards his body. "Though the buck teeth and long ears are a bit of a relief."

"Oh. So, who are you exactly?"

The sounds of an oompah band started playing, and Fluttershy and Angel watched as the fluffy, woolly ponies began to sing.

"Ooooooh! We are the Fluffs! (Boom-boom) Good Moonie Fluffs!  
(Boom-boom)  
>We are escapes from Nightmare Land<br>Our Nightmarish Queen doesn't understand  
>We just can't horrify or terrify<br>Can't even work up a fright  
  
>We just get laughs when we go boo in the night<br>When Fluffies are good (Boom-boom)  
>They're misunderstood (Boom-boom)<br>Though we may separate  
>Or come in clumps<br>We get so blue  
>Cause when we say boo<br>Nobody jumps from fright!"

"Before we awoke," explained the bearded pony, "we had just managed to escape from Nightmare Land. Or what you would call the Moon. The Nightmare Queen is planning to invade your land tomorrow with a great army of Nightmares. She is using our people as her warriors!"

"I stiww don't see why we need to get invowved," said the light blue fluffy. "We've awake now, wet these big pow-nies deaw with it."

The bearded fluffy growled, "You remember our baseline? How a thousand of you used robes to tear the continents apart, just so you could have a continent of your own? Shaped. Like. Us?! That was when you all were still stupid! Imagine what our fellows are like now, in these smarter pony bodies, with the Nightmare's powers?!" At the last part he was shouting at them, smacking each one in a row not unlike in a Three Stooges routine.

"Um, excuse me," said Fluttershy, pointing at the leader, "but why are you the only one without a lisp?"

The leader sighed. "Because in our baseline, I'm actually their smarter ancestor. Which means that I'm apparently the Loop-ordained guardian of these nitwits."

"Oooh, nits!" said the blue fluffy.

"Oooh, twits!" added the pink one.

"I wonder what's for dinner?" said the brown one.

All three then looked at each other and just burst into laughter. Looking from them to Fluttershy, the bearded fluffy sighed. "See what I mean?"

Fluttershy raised a hoof to politely cover the small smile on her face. While she did sympathize with the leader, she couldn't help but find them cute and amusing. They vaguely reminded her of Pinkie Pie at her most outlandish for some reason.

"Well, my name is Fluttershy, and this is Angel Bunny," Fluttershy said as she pointed at herself then her pet. "While I'm not the Anchor here, I'd still like to welcome you to Equestria. Our Anchor, Twilight, should be arriving in a few hours, so we can meet her at the library and you can tell her what you told me."

The bearded fluffy gave her a warm smile. "Thank you Fluttershy. My name is Cave. As for my friends here, they are Rose, Clair Bleu, and Brun."

\* \* \*

><p>"So, first time visitor?" asked Twilight as she walked towards her library. Pinkie had introduced her to a new guest looper. He was a light-brown earth pony with orange hair, wearing a purple hoodie with a red trim and a white circle around his barrel. On all four of his hooves were white sneakers, though Twilight suspected the ones on the front hooves were more like gloves than shoes.<p>

"Oh yeah. It's actually kind of nice. Still feels weird having limbs connecting my hands and feet to my body though. Same with the neck too." The guest looper revved up one of his forelegs, and swung it hoof up in the air. To Twilight's surprise, it stretched out a few feet above them like rubber before coming back down. "Glad I can still do that though."

Well this should make an interesting loop, thought Twilight to herself. As she opened the door and let him in, she heard Fluttershy's voice calling to her. "Just a second Fluttershy, I want you to meet a new Guest Looper. Before he awoke he was Ray Shine." As she saw Fluttershy walk up to her, Twilight turned to their guest. "But I'm guessing that's not what you want us to call you?"

Smiling, Ray Shine shook his head. "Please, call me Rayman."

Just then they all heard a crash. Turning to the source, all three ponies saw Cave in front of a pile of books. One by one, each of the fluffies rose from the pile, staring straight at Rayman. "Way...man...?" said Clair Bleu.

Something in the way those three fluffies looked at him set alarm bells off in Rayman's head. "Y-yes?"

All three fluffies in the book pile suddenly drew out giant plungers. Their bodies started shaking, their eyes turned red and they roared out "BAAAAAAAAAAAAA!" before charging at Rayman.

\* \* \*

><p>64.7 (Zetrein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Now was the hour. Luna had prepared for this moment for loops. Careful planning, stockpiling critical materials in her pocket, entire loops spent designing and learning with Apple Bloom, all of it had come down to this moment.<p>

Standing at the head of her batpony army, she saw her sister's forces arrayed against her. Her still moon hung where she had stopped it, four days prior, and now, as the sun entered eclipse for the fifth time, she made her play.

\*\*\*"Hear me, Equestria! Soldiers of Celestia! My loyal followers!\*\*\*

><strong>For too long has the night gone unappreciated! For too long, ponies have looked to the darkness in nought but fear! For too long, have they looked upon <strong>\_\*\*I as the embodiment of that fear!\*\_

\*\*\*No longer, say I! If Equestria does not want me, than I shall hold no loyalty to it! I shall seek my own nation, free from its prejudices! At sunset, I shall take those loyal to me to forge a new nation! Further, I shall take with us the moon that Equestria so scorns!\*\*\*

\*\*\*Hear me, Sister, for I shall not be swayed from this course. On the longest day of the thousandth year, I shall return. Farewell."\*\*\*

As Luna turned away, the echoes of the Royal Canterlot Voice fading, one could have heard a pin drop from across the field.

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia was worried, for both her sister and those that had followed her. True to her word, those loyal to Luna had gathered around her, bringing families and supplies, and as the last rays of sunlight left the sky, the thousands of them vanished in a massive flash of teleportation.<p>

That had been a year ago, and despite her best efforts, she had yet to find a hint of where her sister had taken her ponies. During this time, the moon had hung right where Luna had left it. That was the one thing that gave Celestia hope, Luna still held the moon, thus Celestia could not move it.

As she thought of her sister, she found herself sitting on her balcony, gazing at the moon. It was because of this, that she noticed the moon start to turn in place. As it turned, her keen alicorn eyesight started to make out something that had previously been hidden on the other side of the moon.

As she began thinking of how to investigate, a series of bright lights lit up across the moon's surface, and the moon stopped turning.

\* \* \*

><p>Hydroponics, check.<br>Atmosphere, check.  
>Hab-blocks, check.<br>Navigation, check.  
>Engines, check.<br>Waking up four years before Nightmare Moon?  
\_Check.\_

"Your Highness! Braking manoeuvre is complete, rotation successful.  
Engines standing by."

Luna had spent the past years setting up to make the moon habitable, building the framework their nation would need. The rest of the moon was simple, compared to the engines. Even with the designs done, and the reactors already built, it had taken the past year to actually build the engines. But they were ready on time, with a full month to spare for system checks.

"Very well, Engineer." Luna took off her crown, replacing it with a plumed bicorn. "Pass the word, henceforth I shall be known as Captain. Engage."

And with those words, the Moon sailed into history.

\* \* \*

><p>64.8 (elmagnifico)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Macintosh was going about his routine, absent any distractions or great disturbances. Twilight was off doing something new with (or was it to?) the Griffons, Applebloom and her friends were entertaining themselves with boats off the west coast, and so far as he knew nopony else was Awake. He made his way across one of the Acres' fields, the drag of the plow and strain of his muscles to maintain the motion a familiar, comforting weight. He focused on keeping the furrow straight, each step adjusting his aim to the pull of the fertile soil. There was nothing to watch, no-one to observe. Just him and his chores.<p>

He might, therefore, be forgiven for not noticing the pegasus until she touched down beside him. The dainty thuds of her hooves on soil got him to pause and look up. He tensed internally, as he couldn't place her face or cutie-mark in any of the various residents Ponyville cycled through as the Loops added changes. There were a lot of them, but this was a new one on him.

She was an oddly-colored one too, primarily very dark purple with a white stripe extending from the tip of her snout, between her eyes and what looked like into her mane and along her back as well. The very-not-tribal stylized halberd on her flank and the orientation of the coloration, not to mention her wings, marked her as a pony rather than a zebra but he wouldn't put such a mistake past some of the Canterlot fops or a few of the residents of Ponyville.

"Hello?"

Her voice held the promise of authority, but there was something held back about it as well. Playing her cards close to her chest.

He inclined his head, eyebrow quirked to ask what she wanted, although he could take a guess.



"Twilight Sparkle told me you have a bar where Loopers can go to cool off. I'd appreciate that."

Turned out the guess was correct.

"Eyup. Give me a minute to finish this, an' ah'll be right with ya."

As they made their way towards the storm-doors that opened into the Apple Family's basement, she shook the dirt off her hooves. He was about to tell her not to bother, the space he used for the bar when it wasn't a large public establishment was dirty already, but she spoke before he could.

"Why do you do that?"

"Do what?"

"Plow your fields. Surely you know by now how to get that to go faster, even without breaking baseline."

"It's a routine. Ah've always been a pony that lahks things to go smooth. Never been the adventure type. Workin' to help mah family is what ah done for the longest time. Even if they don't need lookin' after, th' process is still a comfort. One of the nice things about the Loops is th' good don't need to change less'n ah want it to."

He turned a knob and let the gas lamps Applebloom had installed before she left light up the room. The place was small, in no way suited for a clientele larger than twenty ponies, but it kept that homely feel.

"What'll ya have?"

"Do you have any Fuji mountain cider?"

He grunted. That was a brew from pretty far afield, but this was not the first Looper to have a specific drink in their pony-memories that reminded them of home.

"What'd y'all say yer name was agin'?"

"You can call me Rose-Eyes."

He nodded, which she took as both affirmation and a prompt.

"I hold a position of authority, somewhat, in my home loop. The ponies there look up to me, at least in the baseline, and I act as their mentor figure, keeping a firm grip on the situation and trying to steer them to better lives without being too overt. I'm not the anchor though, and one of my students is. They have, obviously, grown beyond needing my help. There are, however, a great many of my subjects that still depend on my guidance."

She sighed, and took a long swig of the cider.

"Sometimes, though, I wonder. Am I doing the right thing? Who am I expect them to pass my tests if I never even tell them I'm watching? They trust me to do my best for them, but there are times I've had to

keep information from those I am supposed to help, to lead, and sometimes it eats at me. Should I be more blatant, give them better tools, more information to base their decisions on? Or would that simply stifle their growth, leaving them dependent on me?"

He paused. That was a doozy, to be sure. A leader needed to do many things. Doing those things and remaining visibly the leader and paragon were hard.

"Well Rose-Eyes, ah'd say yer not bein' a bad person. Fewmets, ah do much the same thing around here, tho' no-pony expects me to lead them."

He winced. That wasn't the most well-considered of remarks. Helping loopers was hard, they remembered your mistakes.

"Sorry, that was out of turn."

She nodded, but it was less a relaxed nod and spoke more of terse acknowledgement. He kept his sigh internal. Talking was difficult when you only had one shot at it. Nothing for it but to forge ahead.

"From mah perspective though, ah would say the problem is ya mix authority with yer teachin', an' teachin' with yer authority. Ya got two jobs, one to lead them and show how they should act, and another to make sure they follow through. Seems like the first should lead into the second, an' ifn' they don't learn by watchin' that's their fault. Take that'n with a mighty large grain ah salt tho. Ah won't claim mah wisdom's the best. Ah'm no Princess Celestia."

She smiled, albeit just a little, at that. He could see a small frown trying to pinch at the corner of her eyes though. Rather than leave her with whatever sour thought might be fermenting there, he continued.

"Mah own sister once said, y' can't judge somepony by the disasters they avert, even if important stuff woulda been learnt if some hair got burnt. Whether you bein' more free with'n yer information would lead to that or a buncha ponies what can't think for themselves, ah don't know. Ah try to adjust what ah put out to get others to make their own conclusions, but mah helpin' sometimes makes new problems. Really all ah've found you can do with that is try and do better, or at least different, next time."

Maybe it would have been better to hold his tongue. A joke? Something to lighten the mood? This was all like some sort of weird balancing act.

"Ah don't believe in inflictin' harm on no pony to 'teach them a lesson'. On the other hoof, some ponies will only learn to turn a knob once they stub their nose on the door a couple times. But what do ah know, ah'm just a farmpony moonlightin' as a bartender."

This was getting him nowhere. What could he do? Outside of that one loop, which while not blatantly unpleasant he'd rather forget, there really wasn't much in his experience he could relate. Somepony else's?

He ran down a list of the other Loopers he'd had conversations with.

None of them had come asking advice on this particular matter, but therapy wasn't the only thing he catered. He'd have to rely on third or fourth-hoof experience, which was not as useful.

Well, there was that one story. Twilight Sparkle had once told him about a loop, long ago, where she'd called Princess Celestia herself on just this-

Wait.

To his credit, Macintosh did not immediately fall down, prostrate himself, or otherwise align his body more closely with the floor. Instead he tensed, both externally and internally. He tried to school his features, but the mask he'd worn for a long time was best suited for work at a distance. He'd never had to hide from an alicorn from this close a range.

She sighed.

"And here I thought my disguise was rather well put together. I even picked someone from another loop to imitate. Macintosh, I've told the others they don't need to bow and scrape to me. That applies to everypony that lives here, even you."

He gulped.

"Eeyup, but that'n don't account for all th' time ah've spent as one of your subjects, yer Highness."

Another one of those frown-pinched smiles. Before he could put his foot in it again, she spoke.

"You don't swear like the others."

He raised an eyebrow. Not needing a prompt, she continued.

"You say fewmets, or other appellations for things that belong in a restroom, rather than parts of plants."

He considered that.

"Force of habit, ah guess. Never did swear by you, yer Majesty. Woulda been disrespectful before, didn't see the need to switch."

She shook her head.

"Macintosh, you can dispense with the majesty. You've been in my place, more or less. After that, I think we can talk on equal ground."

He resisted the urge to stomp a hoof out of frustration, or perhaps just irritation. Bad bar etiquette, not to mention disrespectful.

"That's what ah've been, yer Highness. Not what ah am. Yer still the princess, ah'm still a farmpony."

She seemed to consider that for a moment, and then smirked.

"Then as your princess, I order you to not refer to me as "yer highness" or similar every other sentence."

He opened his mouth to protest, and then shut it. He couldn't think of anything to say to that. Not at the moment. In lieu of thinking, he poured himself a flagon of the Fuji mountain-cider. This was going to be a long one.

\* \* \*

><p>64.9 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Luna Awoke, and was pleased to find herself not on the moon. Instead she found herself in a stately manor with only her young ward Twilight Sparkle and loyal butler Spike. Strange, but much more comfortable than most Loops, she thought to herself.<p>

Then the Loop memories kicked in, and things became rather less comfortable. A thousand years before Celestia's penchant for practical jokes had spiraled out of control. In the end Luna had been forced to use the Elements of Harmony to seal her in the sun. Distraught, Luna had abdicated her throne not long after, retiring to a country estate on the slopes of Mount Canter while a new Everfree Republic rose in the new capital of Pony City.

That retirement had lasted for not quite the full millenium. Celestia had returned as the Solar Troll, an insane criminal mastermind whose crimes revolved around practical jokes. In the meantime the ponies had pretty much forgotten that the reclusive but generous pony on the mountainside had ever ruled the country or raised the sun or moon. Instead she was a frilly socialite, attending charity gatherings, fundraising for worthy causes, and pretending she didn't keep a sharp eye on the truly vast network of investments and companies Luna possessed.

All of which was well and good, Luna thought as she reviewed her memories, but what followed next seemed rather silly.

Silly... but fun.

A red phone under a serving glass began to flash and ring. Luna levitated the glass up and answered the phone. "Yes, commissioner?... She has? We'll be right there!"

"Batpoles?" Twilight Sparkle asked.

"Batpoles, and not a moment to lose!" Luna replied. "The Solar Troll just robbed the Republic's gold reserves and replaced all the bars with Twinkies!"

"Holy carbohydrates!" Twilight gasped. "If Pinkie Pie found out, she could devastate the nation's economy!"

"Just so! To the Batmobile!"

Moments later, two ponies under disguise enchantments (Luna's strongly resembling Nightmare Moon) sat in a large black car with an open top.

"Luna," Twilight said from the passenger seat, "I think this Loop is going to be hopelessly silly."

"Just so. Final checklist," Luna said.

"Reactor online," Twilight replied. "Batteries at power. Turbines to speed."

"Roger, prepare to depart," Luna said, looking over the car's side to the trio of musicians.

Vinyl Scratch plugged her guitar into the amp. Octavia's bass was already plugged in, while a third pony neither of them recognized brought a trumpet to her lips and played a quick riff.

As the Batmobile blasted off in a squeal of tires and a roar of flame, hard-driving guitar music followed, along with voices singing...

\_"Batmare! Batmare! Batmare, Batmare, Batmare! Nana nana nana nana nana nana nana nana na, \_\_\*\*BATMARE!\*\*"\_

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

64.1: Use the farce.

>64.2: Lol and order?<br>64.3: I have no idea. Just keep Colonel Sanders away from her.

>64.4: Could be a cunning ploy to get a week's holiday in an exotic location.<br>64.5: Sometimes you just can't keep kayfabe.

>64.6: Ray, man.<br>64.7: Cue Anchors Aweigh. Or Heart of Oak, possibly.

>64.8: Knowing how loops work, she may have picked up the habit from someone who actually did it. Like Gustavus Adolphus.<br>64.9: Very silly. Very, very silly.

## 69. Chapter 69

65.1 (Anowack)

\* \* \*

><p>"The Celestial Inquisition declares you guilty," Twilight Sparkle Awoke saying, "of <em>heresy</em>, and your sins must be cleansed in bloo..."

The purple unicorn trailed off as her mind caught up with her lips. "What. The. Tree-Forsaken. \_\_\*\*Buck\*\*\_." As if to punctuate the statement, there was a loud clatter as a tray holding various implements Twilight absolutely did not want to think about fell to the stone floor, the soft blue aura that had been supporting it vanished.

There was a long moment of silence. Dust motes drifted slowly in the shafts of (divine, purifying) sunlight the magical one-way windows let into the torture chamber.

"Twilight, darling?" The question came from the pony at Twilight's side, dressed in all-concealing red robes. A junior interrogator under her command, the Loop memories told her.

"Yes, Rarity?" Twilight answered, using her magic to throw back the hood of her own matching robes, which she had just realized she was wearing.

"Why are we torture-happy minions of an oppressive theocracy?" Rarity revealed her own face.

Twilight glared at her. "Not funny," she said.

"Did someone create a running gag without me? That's not very nice!" Twilight looked up to her... victims. Pinkie Pie â€" who of course had just spoken â€" and Applejack were chained to the wall, the sunlight shining directly into their magically pried open eyes.

Fortunately, nothing else had been done to them yet, but Twilight still felt awful as she dismissed the spell.

"Thank ya kindly," Applejack drawled, blinking rapidly, and Twilight finally checked, determining that all six Elements were awake, and close by. That made this... well to be honest, she wasn't sure whether it was less or more awkward. Somehow, her voluminous in-progress research paper A Survey of Applied Friendship In Transfinite Pan-Multiversal Temporal Quasi-Loops did not yet have a chapter on how to handle Awakening in the middle of torturing two of your closest friends.

"I think Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy are standing guard outside," Twilight said. "Can you let them in, Rarity?"

The white unicorn smiled. "Of course, Your Holiness."

Twilight's glare followed her over to the door, and a few minutes later, two black-armored pegasus mares stomped inside. Among it's many other wonderful features, this Loop's Equestria apparently enjoyed universal pegasus conscription, and her pre-Loop self had picked the pair out of basic training for her personal retinue.

As soon as Rarity closed the door behind them, Rainbow Dash turned to Twilight. "So, are we going alicorn revolutionaries on this Loop, or what?"

Fluttershy took the air and started unchaining Applejack and Pinkie Pie, making Twilight wince briefly as she realized she hadn't gotten around to that yet. "Maybe," she said after a moment. "Give me a minute to think and let my Loop memories finish settling."

Applejack snorted as she got loose and fell to the floor. "What's to think about?"

"Well, for one," Twilight answered, "Even if she turns out to not be Awake, Celestia is actually sane and not evil this Loop, so we won't need to fight her."

"Then I fear I must repeat my prior question," Rarity said. "\_Why\_ are we torture-happy minions -"

"Of an oppressive theocracy," Twilight said, "yes."

"We're all ears," Applejack said.

Pinkie wormed her way free of her chains before Fluttershy could finish with the last manacle. "I've been all ears," she said as she landed beside Applejack. "It's less fun than it sounds." Twilight decided she did not want to know about that, nor why Fluttershy was \_nodding in agreement\_.

"Okay, long story short," Twilight said, "Nightmare Moon hit Celestia with a nasty spell before being banished, which left her all but in a coma for most of the past thousand years. The unicorns who've been helping her keep the sun and moon moving mostly on schedule have been running the show, and she's been too weak to tear down this whole rotten, tribalist edifice."

"Lovely," Rarity murmured. "Shall we start tearing it down for her, then?"

Twilight smiled slightly. "Let's adjourn to my office," she said. "I have a plan. I wonder if Chrysalis is Awake... hmm, well, either way the first step is to come up with ninety-five theses to nail to Grand Inquisitor Blueblood's door."

Everypony looked at her blankly. "Oh come on," Twilight complained. "It's \_funny\_. You have to get it. We've all been through Earth high school at least a hundred times. "

"Yeah," Rainbow Dash replied, "but you're the only one who \_enjoys\_ that 's just ascend and kick flank until the world makes sense again."

"Oh, fine," Twilight grumbled. "If we want to do this the boring way..."

\* \* \*

<p>65.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

<p>"We'd like to sign up please!"<p>

Applejack and Rainbow Dash turned to the three little fillies, smiling beautifully and wearing necklaces. They shared a look.

"Um, how do I put this?" Rainbow Dash crossed her forelegs. "It's an iron \_pony\_ competition, and as awesome as you three are you're still kinda minipones."

"Hey! We can be iron ponies!" Scootaloo protested.

Applejack sighed. "Look, girls, Ah get that yer confident. But Ah don't want ta see ya'll hurt in a competition with older ponies."

Apple Bloom pushed her bow back. "Oh, believe me, we'll be perfectly fine."

"You and Scoots, maybe," Rainbow Dash allowed, "but Sweetie Belle?"

The unicorn rolled her eyes. "Suuuuuure, I'm frilly so I must be weak."

Applejack snorted. "That's not what she meant. Listen, you can have yer own competition, but nothing ya'll can say could possibly change our opinion on this."

A wide grin appeared on each of the filly's faces. Then, almost as one, their necklaces began to glow.

After a few moments, the transformation was complete. The three armored ponies looked upon the two shocked athletes and waited patiently for a response.

"...when... when we said iron ponies," Rainbow finally managed, "we didn't... mean it literally."

\* \* \*

><p>65.3 (Scizorstrike)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke sitting in a library, reading book detailing the imprisonment of a pony in the moon a thousand years ago.<p>

Said pony was not normally called Monstrous Eye, and was not normally "Cursed to have her appearance reflect her true self". This could be something as simple as a variant Loop, or it could be a fused Loop.

Twilight, student of Lady Palutena, blinked as her Loop memories came in. Well, that answered that question.

\* \* \*

><p>The clearly Awake Palutena had, quite cheerily, sent "backup" in the form of her just-as-clearly Awake Captain of the Guard- Who was, for a change, not Shining Armour, who Loop memories indicated as being a mercenary of some kind out in the far east.<p>

"I have to say," Dug Hole (Or, as he preferred to be called, Pit) mused as he and Twilight walked into the library. "I've been a pegasus before but this is the first time I've been a yellow pegasus."

Twilight shrugged. All four pony forms were natural to her now.

"Not the weirdest thing I've been, by a long shot."

"That's something I think every Looper can agree on."

\* \* \*

><p>The appearance of Monstrous Eye, mane of snakes hissing at full volume, at the Summer Sun celebration caused immediate panic, and



posthaste evacuation of every single non-Looper pony in the building- Quite a feat, as this included Unawake versions of the other Elements of Harmony. Twilight herself had felt a surge of absolute terror, before she recognized the effects of the enchantment and brushed it aside.<p>

Pit seemed unaffected by the terror field, and met the gaze of Monstrous Eye's single&| Well, eye.

"Medusa," he greeted, not \_quite\_ calmly, but close to it. "How long have you been Awake?"

The darkness swirled around Medusa's body, and faded to reveal a much more normal alicorn form. "Since the beginning of the Loop, of course," She examined herself curiously. "I have to say, Goddess of the moon is definitely an improvement over my \_usual\_ job&|"

The Pegasus noticeably relaxed. "That's good. Most of my weapons aren't made for quadrupedal bodies,"

Twilight let herself relax as well.

"\_I had been wondering about that," \_Palutena's mental voice echoed over the room. "\_The person you're replacing would normally have at least done \_something \_to me."\_

"Well, that's not \_quite\_ true." Medusa grinned, a grin which showed \_entirely\_ too many teeth. "I \_did\_ \_take the time to go through your castle's treasury to&| re-appropriate some of the more esoterich items there."

"\_I'm pretty sure that's not how you say that,"\_ the Sun goddess opined.

"Silence." The darker alicorn pulled a large, ornate mirror out from her Subspace Pocket, and angled it at Pit. "Now, I believe you have an appointment with the Mirror of Truth&|"

The mirror flashed once, and dropped a dark mirror image of the white pegasus onto the ground.

"Pittoo!" Pit greeted cheerfully.

"Don't call me that," was the instant response, though it had a rehearsed air to it that indicated it was more out of habit than any real vitriol toward the name. The jet-black pony took a single step forward, and immediately collapsed to the ground. "&|Pit."

"Yes Pittoo?"

"Why am I quadrupedal?"

"Because I am?"

Twilight felt a headache coming on. This was going to be a \_long\_ Loop.

\* \* \*

><p>65.4 (Scygnus)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke, pushing the hat off of her head with a grumble and almost sliding off the chair sideways onto the floor before regaining her balance. Her eyes slid over the dials of her vessel, remembering a number of loops that started with exploding engines, but it seemed everything was-<p>

"Rarity?" Twilight shouted.

"Yes, Twilight?" Rarity ceased her rocking out for a moment, turning the volume down and looking speculatively at the bag in her hands.

"Are we flying through space in a winnebago?"

The white pikanese Wog (half woman, half dog, all fabulous) checked her loop memories.

"Yes dear, it seems we are." Rarity shrugged and popped a treat into her mouth, shrugging again at the taste and heading for the cockpit.

"Oh good. I was worried I was hallucinating. Um, incoming hail. I think you... Audio only, Rarity, please."

"Oh, right, it's... this one."

"Hello Lone Star." The video screen greeted.

"Oh. Sorry." Rarity blushed.

"Hey, um, Vinnie. What do you want?" Twilight quickly began running through her loop memories, didn't need any supr-

"Nonononono." The mechanical man twitched, "It's not what I want. It's what HE wants..."

"PIZZA THE HUTT!?" Chorused the two displaced ponies. They shared a glance, and then simultaneously facepalmed.

\_I'm thinking this loop may be entirely too silly.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"No. No. No. No. No." Diamond Tiara recited, walking away from the altar and Prince Blueblood as fast as her dress would allow, her faithful white and lavender-pink robomaid (the traitor was holding back laughter) following behind her, "Prepare to blow this popsicle stand."<p>

"Preparing to blow this popsicle stand." Sweetie recited.

"Blow this popsicle stand."

"Blowing this popsicle stand." Sweetie replied, amused even as she revved up the Mercedes' engines and threw the two of them into the atmosphere and beyond.

\* \* \*

><p>65.5 (Scygnus)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke, screaming. She paused to let the loop memories filter in... and then continued screaming.<p>

Apparently, in a fit of idiocy, she'd left her jacket with her father's watch inside a dangerous test chamber designed to separate objects from the intrinsic fields... whatever the bark that meant exactly, as she didn't have time to debate the loop's technobabble while the loops of alloy around her heated up to... probably tear her apart at the molecular level, if she had to guess. She took the logical path of screaming at the door in hopes that someone would unlock it and let her out while trying to access her magic... Nope. Pocket? Nope, though that seemed to be a property of the room rather than the loop.

It wasn't that she hadn't died before. She'd done that quite a lot actually. And with her waking up in almost certain danger of dying, this was probably one of those loops with odd and varied definitions of death anyway. But dying was something she tried to avoid as a general rule. It hurt. All for naught, it seemed, as the scientist outside delivered the bad news. With a sigh, she leaned against the door and resolved herself to-

\* \* \*

><p>Well. This was curious. She had indeed been torn apart at the molecular level. But she wasn't dead. Somehow. She was all there, but disconnected. She couldn't really see anything, but she could sense the molecular structure of everything around her. Not that this told her anything about what was going on around her. It was like looking through the eyes of a million flies at once, too much complexity to make sense of. But she could sense herself. And she could move herself. And... any of the other molecules, as it turned out. She thought she might even be able to see the atomic level if she squinted. She refrained from mucking about with it though, for now, and just tried to pull herself together.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Three months after the tragic death of Dr. Sparkle, the ghosts began appearing. A brain in the bathroom. A circulatory system in the kitchen. Bones and some muscle in the courtyard.<p>

The scientists could be forgiven for not recognizing a resemblance, since the late Dr. Sparkled hadn't been quadrupedal.

\* \* \*

><p>This was harder than Twilight had thought it would be. Without all the components in the right place, the structure came right apart again. But she thought she finally had it right this time.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Finally, in the break room, a full body appeared... a be-winged,

horned equine, glowing purple, its solid white eyes looking around with curiosity. Truthfully, Twilight was just glad to be able to see again and put names to the collections of atoms she'd been looking at all this time. Eventually, her focus turned to the people in the room, looking at her with fear and curiosity.<p>

"Um... hi?" She tried.

\* \* \*

><p>It was several days later that she got a moment to herself to pull out her PADD and look up this place in her HUB fiction collection.<p>

"Eeeeeenope. Well, wouldn't be the first time I've brought about world peace." She mused, "Making friends with the Russians should cut off Viedt before he gets started." She'd already replaced the payload of all the nuclear weapons in the world with custard, whipped cream, or marzipan, as the mood struck her, pretty standard procedure when she had the juice for it. "A helping hoof to a few key players, get Walter Kovacs to a healthy home of some kind... I should make sure he gets his face though, at least. Other than that, just a big heap of socio-political engineering. Yipee."

Twilight willed the components of the Perpetual Energy Generator to little flourishes as she put them together. Well, maybe it was a little fun, having power not incomparable to Discord's but... much more sciency. And they let her research whatever she wanted! She might even turn that weird past-present-future vision back on and study it, if she could do it without being driven bonkers from do/did/will.

\* \* \*

><p>65.6 (Inkweaver22)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie waited in the shadows as the bear wearing yellow shorts and a blue backpack entered the tent shaped like her pointed hat. Her loop memories informed her that she was replacing a shamaness that used her transfiguration magic to help the local heroes.<p>

"Erm, anyone home?" Called out the bird that was riding in the bear's pack. Smoke began to fill the tent and the lights dimmed. Stirring music played for a moment before with a bright flash, Trixie appeared on her chair in front of the magic pool.

"Welcome to the home of the Great and Powerful Trixie Wixie! I, using my stupendous skills in transfiguration, shall assist you in your noble quest!" Fireworks went off behind her. It wasn't often that the show mare got to perform for a new audience, so she sold it for all it's worth.

"Huh. A pony. That's... Strange." The bear said after a moment, earning an annoyed huff from the unicorn.

"No, strange was that one time when we were all talking fruits and vegetables." The bird countered. "This is pretty much normal for us."

"Trixie assumes that you are both loopers?"

"Loopers?"

"Stuck in a time loop." The mare clarified.

"Oh! Yeah! Wait, does that mean you are too Miss Trixie?" The bear asked.

"Yes. I'll also assume this is your first fused loop?" She received a hesitant nod. "Oh good! I've been meaning to try out some new material. Those slideshows are so boring." Trixie's horn lit up. "Now, watch in awe as the secrets of time, space, and the multi-verse are revealed to you!"

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie and the two loopers, Banjo and Kazooie, watched in awe as her hat-shaped tent burned to the ground.<p>

"I think you might have overdid it with the fireworks." Banjo said.

"Nonsense! One can never have too many explosives!"

"Remind me to not show her Grenade Eggs." Kazooie murmured. Unfortunately, she was overheard.

"Grenade... Eggs? Trixie has not yet experimented with this concept yet." A shiver ran down the bear and bird's spines as a feeling of impending doom filled them.

"You mentioned a slideshow?" Banjo quickly interrupted.

"Ah yes. I suppose it'll have to do until I perfect my technique." She reached into her mane and pulled out a projector, causing the other two to blink. "Once we're through you'll have to show me these wondrous eggs of yours."

Dread filled them as Banjo's distraction failed. They watched the presentation without interruption, wondering what kind of trouble they just caused and silently begged forgiveness for it.

\* \* \*

><p>65.7 (Dalxein, Indalecio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Apple Bloom? What are you...?" Twilight started. The two were apparently replacing 'The Ponds' or something. Though that made no sense, since their canonical 'daughter' was still running around and... she shook her head to fight off a headache. No use making sense of the Whoverse, that's why it was Read-Only.<p>

This brought her back to the filly in front of her, surrounded by bits and bobs, wires and tech, that she'd scrounged from the TARDIS. "I'm learning how to build a sonic screwdriver."

The unicorn shook her head. "But it's a Read-Only loop. This sort of technology-"

"Not if I build it myself after we leave!"

An incredulous head-tilt. "That isn't going to-"

"\_Yes it will!\_" The younger mare snapped.

Twilight decided to leave the filly be. She really liked The Doctor's Deus Ex Matchstick.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight examined Applebloom's newly completed "Sonic Screwdriver". It was a kludge of magic and technology, which, while not quite anything like "The" Sonic Screwdriver, was impressive in its own way.<p>

"Lets see here, you attached a tricorder, an omnitool, a matter manipulator, a Rod of Lordly Might, and that's an impressive amount of duct tape you've got there." said Twilight as she ran her eyes up and down the device.

"Well, its just a proof of concept. I'm going to field test it with Sweetie and Scootaloo and then refine it when I'm done."

\* \* \*

><p>65.8 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Looper Conference, Part 1<br>\*\*At first, this looped seemed similar to the other adventures in Elder Tales, awakening in front of his computer with hours to spare before the Novasphere Pioneer update would activate. First thing he did was message Akatsuki with the pre-determined awake signal. Sometimes, they would start as new characters (Akatsuki as female every time), others they would meet up and explore the real world Japan. Their loop varied in length, lasting up to a year in game, but in real life that translated to 30 days.

The two had just about decided to start new characters when an email appeared on his screen from an unknown account. Curious, since he had never received an email the day prior to the update, he opened it. Unconsciously, his mouth curved into a cheerful grin, returning a reply immediately, Bring your entire guild to the Akibahara server and make sure everyone is online at midnight\_.

With that out of the way, he messaged Akatsuki that they would have to start new players another time, sending the appearance changing formula along with the message.

\* \* \*

><p>Akihabara Server, The Day of the Apocalypse<p>

Almost immediately, Shiroe knew something had changed. Some of the adventurers he ran into were a lot more relaxed than those who were

unawake...like they had lived through stranger things. A couple of the out of place adventurers were taking charge, giving orders and returning purpose to those not awake. As strange as that was, it was not a concern at the moment. He was meeting with a foreign guild.

There was no mistaking them for a second, as their race didn't exist in the baseline Elder Tales. In this loop, it was an update exclusive to America, created by petition due to the popularity of a local tv show, or so his loop memories told him. However since the expansion wasn't widely used, it wasn't released in other countries.

Several noticed his arrival. The anchor must have fulfilled his request to the letter since there were non-awake characters mixed in with the loopers. It was blindingly obvious who was asleep since they were far more nervous. Those asleep were far more nervous and shrank back at his approach. But their nerves decreased as their guild leader walked forward with a big smile on her face. They were about to greet one another when a pink haired girl just...appeared in front of him and gave a deep hug, "Shiroe-chan, it's been so long well not so long since loops here are so short but our loops are longer by quite a bit and we have other loops in longer loops but I'm here again and get to see mybestfriendinElderTalesweshouldthrowapartywith-"

The guild leader looked at the Pink haired girl disapprovingly, "Pinkie, I'm glad your excited, but please let him up for a moment."

Pinkie bobbed her head, "Ok," and released the enchanter. Shiroe chuckled, "Good to see you too Pinkie. Hello, Twilight Sparkle. Been awhile since Hogwarts."

The leader of the Lunar Republic, Twilight Sparkle, gave a big grin of her own, "Come on! Let me introduce you."

Shiroe's eyes danced above each adventurers. Each one had a name, race, class and subclass along with their level number:

Twilight Sparkle  
>Equine Tail<br>Lv. 90 Sorcerer  
>Lv. 90 Scholar (Looper)<p>

Pinkamena "Pinkie" Pie  
>Equine Tail<br>Lv. 90 Bard  
>Lv. 90 Chef (Looper)<p>

The Enchanter remembered their previous discussion on Equestria, Putting names to faces. In addition to a pony like tail, each Equine Tail had a unique feature to their type, the earth types having their ears replaced with horse ears and their feet replaced with hooves.

Applejack  
>Equine Tail<br>Lv. 90 Monk  
>Lv. 90 Farmer (Looper)<p>

Some of the guild members had wings like the pegasus of legend:

Rainbow Dash  
>Equine Tail<br>Lv. 90 Monk  
>Lv. 90 Knight (Looper)<p>

Fluttershy  
>Equine Tail<br>Lv. 90 Summoner  
>Lv. 90 Animal Trainer (Looper)<p>

Even more had Unicorn horns on their head:

Rarity Belle  
>Equine Tail<br>Lv. 90 Shaman  
>Lv. 90 Tailor (Looper)<p>

Sweetie Belle  
>Equine Tail<br>Lv. 90 Bard  
>Lv. 90 Dancer (Looper)<p>

But the final two were something else altogether with both wings and a horn:

Luna Equis  
>Equine Tail<br>Lv. 90 Bard  
>Lv. 90 Sigil Maker (Looper)<p>

Celestia Equis  
>Equine Tail<br>Lv. 90 Enchanter  
>Lv. 90 Aristocrat (Looper)<p>

They were, without a doubt, the princesses of Equestria. The wind kicked up, tugging at the hem of Shiroe's robe as he gave a low bow, "My princesses, let me be the first to welcome you to the Elder Tales loops."

Luna rolled her eyes, "Please arise, Enchanter Shiroe. We ask that you do not bow in our presence, nor that any looper do the same."

Celestia chuckled, "Yes, we get enough of that at home from those who are not awake. Besides, you are not one of our subjects, nor are we princesses in this world."

Shiroe chuckled, "Of course, my ladies. If I may inquire about your unique species? The Japanese servers do not have the option to become Equine Tail. What abilities do you hold?"

Twilight fielded this question, "Equine Tails have several polarizing advantages and disadvantages. We have higher magical reserves and the ability to shapeshift into our pony form. However since equines have a herd mindset, the fewer we are in number, the easier we are to panic and the lower our defense will be. Furthermore, we are not naturally a fighting race, so our attack strength with weapons based classes are reduced as well."

With that, she shifted into her pony form, then back to half human, half equine. Shiroe sighed, "Sounds like a difficult species to play."

"In America, we're commonly mages due to our high magical reserves. Our race also allows us to play as Monks without reductions to our



attacking stats. Finally, we countered the penalty to our defense by always fighting in groups."

"Hmm..." Shiroe muttered to himself. While they talked, the non awake players wondered off, trying to get a feel for the moss covered, forested city of Akiba. Their talk, though, ended when Akatsuki appeared in the middle of their group on one knee in front of Shiroe. It showed just how much these loopers had been through that none of them, not even Fluttershy, blinked at her arrival.

"Akatsuki, you shouldn't just appear in the middle of groups like this."

"Forgive me, Shiroe, but have you checked your friends list recently?"

Shiroe's menu opened a second later and the friend list took up most of the screen. The list scrolled down as Shiroe read name after name. The first name he noticed was Maryelle's...or more appropriately where Maryelle should have been. It had been replaced by another name, one he didn't immediately recognize until he called upon his loop memories. As he scrolled down, several names had been replaced by others.

He needed to figure out what was going on, so he sent a call out to Maryelle's replacement.

\* \* \*

><p>"So you are the Anchor of this loop," asked Maryelle's replacement. Shiroe was unsure how to act beyond nodding. Part of what made him speechless was their guild hall. They had entered the main guild building and then travelled to the replacement's guild room, located in the same spot as Maryelle's. It was like they had opened the door to another dimension altogether, a forested dimension with a single oak tree with pavilions attached on all sides. There was a river flowing on one side of the massive tree and countless wood and hay huts surrounding the previous pavilions. This was not in Shiroe's loop memories.<p>

"Allow me to reintroduce myself. I am Sally Acorn, guildmaster of the Underground."

Sally Acorn  
>Fox Tail<br>Lv. 90 Shaman  
>Lv. 90 Aristocrat (Looper)<p>

Surrounding her were members of her Loop. He only recognized two by name:

Sonic Hedgehog  
>Werecat<br>Lv. 90 Monk  
>Lv. 90 Tracker (Looper)<p>

Miles "Tails" Prowler  
>Foxtail<br>lv. 90 Swashbuckler  
>Lv. 90 Mechanic (Looper)<p>

He pushed his glasses to the bridge of his nose. If Crescent Moon was replaced by Underground, it was possible that other guilds had been

replaced as well, and he could be hosting a lot of extra loopers.

\* \* \*

><p>65.9<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, this is most overdue," Princess Luna noted. "I had heard of such loops from several of your cohort, and was wondering if there was some criterion I did not fulfil."<p>

Her sister, Princess Twilight, shrugged. "Apparently not. Any choice on which Elements you take?"

"Well, magic is yours..." Luna nodded. "I think mayhap I shall take Honesty, alongside Laughter and Kindness. Dost this work for you?"

"...you really don't need to do the whole archaic speech thing, Luna." Twilight picked up the two necklaces and slipped them on her wings. "Right, I assume you know how to use these."

"You assume correctly."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, job done," Twilight said with a smile. "That went a lot more smoothly than normal."<p>

"It went rather more smoothly than it did the first time Celestia and I faced the chaotic one. Far be it from me to suggest Celly was perhaps less experienced at the use of the elements than than you are now, but..." Luna trailed off.

Twilight chuckled. "You're suggesting it, all right. Okay, what now?"

"Are you comfortable with handling the day?" Luna asked. "I am most experienced with the night, but..."

"Actually, I had an idea. What about this â€" if the moon is in the sky, you're in charge. And we move things so the lunar cycle is about four days. If my mental calculations are right, that puts us at a schedule of sixteen hours each, moving around the calendar." Twilight cast a spell on a nearby plant, turning it into a sky chart. "Does that make sense?"

Luna perused the paper. "It seems to hold together."

"Excellent!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, we wanted interesting proposals..." Twilight said absently, holding up the document to the light.<p>

There were diagrams. There were scribbled notes in spidery handwriting. There was a cost-benefit analysis that seemed to assume that having the moon permanently looming overhead was "cool".

And there was an approved stamp in the deep blue ink of Luna's personal seal.

"Oh, well. In for a bit, in for... a lot... of bits." Twilight shrugged, and slapped her own personal seal on next to Luna's one.

\* \* \*

><p>It had taken ten years to get this far.<p>

First, the moon had been moved into a geostationary orbit, so it neither rose nor set. That had been relatively easy, though working out a truly stable position for an object that large had been somewhat nerve-wracking and resulted in three months of Twilight trying to solve the three-body problem, before giving up and using a computer simulator.

Step two had involved importing a substantial amount of extra atmosphere. That had entailed setting up a cracking plant on a convenient out-system satellite, increasing the partial nitrogen pressure, and moderating the oxygen level increase to avoid causing medical problems.

After a roche limit calculation had come up at nearly a thousand kilometres surface-surface distance, Twilight had resorted to magically increasing the apparent density of the entire moon with a series of Epic grade spells. (A dovin basal would have been easier, but she didn't have one.) And Luna had only mumbled a little about "ruining the purity of the exercise".

And finally, the moon had had an atmosphere of equal density to the current Equestrian one added.

Tonight, however, was the moment of truth.

"Ready?" Twilight asked.

Luna nodded.

Together, their horns lit. And the moon began to slowly approach.

\* \* \*

><p>"Phew," Twilight said, some hours later, as the spell locking the moon in place finally engaged. "That took a lot more care than I was expecting."<p>

"We had some margin," Luna replied. "But indeed, 'tis much easier to be blasÃ© about moving the moon with five hundred thousand kilometres under it than merely five hundred all told."

They looked up at the huge white circle obscuring much of the sky.

"Did we get it right?" Twilight asked.

Luna squinted upwards. "It seems a few pegasi have already decided to test our hoofiwork..."

As they watched, a dozen or so bright-coated pegasi winged their way steadily upwards, into the atmosphere no thicker than sea level on a normal loop. Then further, into thinner air... and then, after almost an hour of high-speed climb, they spun for a moment and began to dive.

Towards the moon.

"Yes!" Twilight cheered. "We \_did\_ get it working!"

Luna nodded, smiling. "The Lunar Air Bridge is done. Fine work, Twilight Sparkle."

"Right. Now, space elevator time! Well, lunar-vator."

\* \* \*

><p>"Was that my normal sister I saw leaving?" Luna asked Twilight.<p>

"Yes, that's right." Twilight smiled after the door Celestia had left out of. "I asked her to set up an observatory on the antequestria side of the moon, because that way she'll get more sun â€" she likes the sun."

"So, she is your student?" Luna nodded to herself. "I wonder if I might be able to track down Cadence..."

\* \* \*

><p>65.10 (Ghrathryn)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Waking up in her bedroom in her family cottage wasn't unusual, nor was waking up to not find her dog there given their usual loop start had him being kept by neighbours. What was odd this time was the fact that she was a bipedal, bat-winged horse, her usual curly dark hair replaced by a slightly longer dark mane.<p>

"Pony fused loop of some kind?" The young girl wondered aloud. It wouldn't be the first time she had ended up as an anthropomorphised creature, and she had heard there were looping ponies. She needed to talk to her mother about who her cousins were, since most likely the only way the loop would end up like this was if one or more of them had been replaced given they were the main group, and she couldn't feel their presence in her mind at the moment.

\_:Timmy,:\_ She Reached out with her mind, grabbing some clothes from the wardrobe and snorting to herself when she found they were already adapted to her body form. Even without Loop Memories, she could tell that anthro-ponies weren't going to be unusual this time out. How would it affect their tastes though? The amount of ginger beer they got through, not to mention ham and other things, as humans would probably be unreal for ponies.

At least her clothes were still boyish. She had hated some of the loops where she had been a girly-girl.

\_:Yes George?:\_ The voice still sounded masculine, and he still knew

her name, meaning \_he\_ was still 'normal', for a given definition of the word.

Pulling her clothes on, she glanced out the window, towards the old island her family owned. \_:Can you meet me at home? I think we've got some type of fusion with that pony loop, but I need to check with Mom first.:\_

There was a mental snort of amusement from Timmy. \_:I had noticed. It seems every human is now a pony, though I'm still a dog.:\_

\_:Yes but you're also able to become something else after that loop we got \_this \_trick in.:\_ George pointed out, heading downstairs to find her mother and father outside, her father flying around. "Is Dad trying to learn how things fly through doing things himself, Mom?" She asked, approaching the pale grey mare.

"It looks like it, George." Her mother replied, turning to look at her. "Are you staying here this time or going off with Timothy?"

"I was planning on staying here, since it is likely at least one of my cousins isn't my cousin." George replied, looking up at her father. It was obvious she got her wings from her mother, but her dark mane was straight from her father. "Do you remember who they are?" She asked.

Her mother frowned for a moment. "Rayne, Lauren and Felicity Kirrin, all girls," Her tail twitched. "I think all three have been replaced this time." She added as a large dog bounded up the path to be hugged by George. "Hello Timothy," Crouching down, she rubbed the dog's ears.

George nodded, frowning slightly. Where had Julian, Dick and Anne ended up if all three of them were replaced this time out? Wherever they were, she silently wished them luck and good adventures, since their normal run was getting a bit stale, particularly since they could pretty much skip the first two simply due to knowing where things were and what they needed for school.

\_:You're thinking too hard,:\_ Timmy said, licking her face. \_:They will be fine, even little Anne can be as fierce as a lion if the situation calls for it.:\_

"I know, Tim, but it's still hard thinking they're out there while I'm here with little new happening."

Her mother smiled slightly, ruffling her mane. "Don't worry, George, you'll get your adventures. Why don't you and Timothy go down to the bay for a while? If things go as they usually do, as long as you're back for dinner, you will meet your cousins today." She looked up and winced as her husband ended up ploughing into the ground. "And I had better make sure your father is alright." She said, getting up to see to her husband.

\* \* \*

><p>She hadn't been sure what she was expecting her 'cousins' to be, but the fact they were all bird-winged like her father made sense, after all her uncle was her father's brother. The colours on the other hand, those were somewhat strange. Both Rayne and her father

seemed to have rainbow coloured manes, while her aunt's was a rich blue, leaving her no clue as to how the girl she guessed was Felicity had *pink* for her mane colour, nor the amber-blond of Lauren's mane. Her father wasn't focused on biology, but she had picked up enough to know that normally things ran in families.

Dropping down to land, she back-winged and settled gently on the ground near Kirrin Cottage before walking up to stand near her mother, watching her cousins' replacements get things out of the car.

"Hi," Rayne said, walking up to the two of them. "Are you Georgina?"

George grimaced, looking up at her mother. "Did you have to tell them my full name, Mom?" She asked. "I prefer George, thank you very much." She replied to Rayne. "I take it that you're Rayne and that you know about loops."

Rayne nodded. "Yeah," She twitched a wing, "Though I can honestly say I've never been to this one before."

"That might be because we haven't been going that long, dear." George's mother answered. "I'm Fanny Kirrin, and yes I do know how that can be taken. This is Georgina, though as she said, she prefers George. Quentin is in the house, resting off a rather unfortunate incident."

George rolled her eyes. "Dad flubbed a landing and ploughed the garden with his nose." She translated.

After getting everyone settled and fed, and Timmy returning to meet the new (to their loop) Loopers. George sat on the floor, leaning against her dog, the others in chairs. "Alright, as I said earlier, I'm George and I'm one of the local loopers. So far there's eight I know about, maybe another one or two elsewhere. We've had the talk about the multiverse, which is why we're not that worried about the whole fact we're anthro-ponies.

"I'm not entirely sure who our anchor is, I would have thought it would be Julian, my older cousin, but given I'm here and looping while he isn't, it might be me or Timmy." She shrugged her wings. "Normally speaking this loop lasts around seven to eight years, most of which is school for us." She grimaced at that. "However holidays are usually interesting, mainly because we have adventures during them."

Rayne nodded. "I know," She said, reaching into the air and pulling a slim book out. "We stocked up the last time we landed a hub loop, just in case we ended up somewhere new."

"Do the other series that Mrs. Blyton wrote work in the same universe?" Felicity asked.

"You know, I don't think we've checked. It would make sense, but I think at one point one of the boys had a book about the Seven, so either it's not or they come in before us." George shrugged, looking up at her mother.

"We can always check, since this is unlikely to be a base loop." Fanny said, frowning slightly. "It's not as if we need to worry about the wreck being thrown up or having to sell the island since we've had several loops of gathering that bullion."

George nodded. "That's true, and that's usually our first adventure, and with Dad putting things in a really complex code now, we don't need to worry too much about the three thugs this Christmas time either." She frowned, twitching her tail. "What about you three, what's 'normal' for you?"

Rayne shifted slightly. "Well, I normally go by Rainbow Dash, Felicity is normally Fluttershy, both of us are Loopers from Equestria. Lauren \_isn't\_ a Looper, normally she goes by Lightning Dust and she doesn't normally come into our story until I go to the Wonderbolt's Academy. Normally we're quadrupedal, but we've been looping for a while so we've had a few times when we've been bipedal. I think Lauren's been working off in loop memories, meaning she's probably not going to think outside the box too often."

"You said we were replacing your cousins?" Lauren asked, curiously. Obviously trying to follow the conversation even if she didn't know most of what it was about.

George nodded. "Julian, Dick and Anne. Normally I meet them tomorrow and the first few times it didn't go well since they knew me as Georgina. This holiday we normally end up spending time on Kirrin Island, investigating the wreck of my grandfather's ship when a storm throws it up onto the rocks near the island. I can probably force that storm myself now, thanks to a 'game loop' where a number of people ended up as dragons when magic came back. Timmy was 'human' that loop so we ended up with telepathy between the five of us.

"Anyway, once we get the document box from the wreck we find out the gold it was carrying is in a dungeon, one that's under the castle on the island. Getting hold of that pretty much fixes our financial problems; otherwise we would have had to sell the island." George shifted again. "We can probably ignore it since we've already got a few loops' worth, plus other things we've picked up. I can't remember off hand what else there is we get into, but there's a number of times we come across spies or other things. Actually, I need to see if I can grab Jo when she shows up. She's probably going to either be disgusted as heck or will want Lauren regardless. I'm hoping she'll tone it down to sibling rather than lover since she has been up there the last couple of loops."

"Jo?" Lauren asked, her ears perking up. "Should I be worried?"

"Not really, I know how to deal with her."

\_:We \_both \_know how to deal with young Jo, normally, George.:\_ Timmy cut in as Felicity yawned.

Fanny nodded slightly. "Well, I don't know how old you three are normally, but if you're starting to yawn, it's probably time you all went to bed. We can continue this tomorrow and George can show you the town and bay." She frowned. "If your wings work as well here as they do normally, she can probably show you the island as well."

George rolled her eyes at her mother before getting to her feet. "Come on, I'll show you where Julian, Dick and Anne sleep." She said, Timmy getting up behind her as she started out of the room.

\* \* \*

><p>Looking up at the clouds overhead, the dark maned pony frowned. His memories were telling him that he should be clearing them for later tonight and tomorrow morning for the Summer Sun Celebration, but it seemed a waste to have to fly up to each one and burst them like soap bubbles.<p>

Closing his eyes, he Reached for the power he knew he still had, his body starting to blacken and become wispy as he drew on the energy, drawing the clouds together. Pegasi seemed to have the ability to manipulate the weather here, but it wasn't to the degree that an Heir of the Storm could, much less a Storm Lord.

The clouds above unravelled, sending down a light, misty rain across the town for a few minutes as he opened his eyes again, his body returning to normal.

"Well, it wasn't ten seconds flat, but that was certainly impressive." A female voice commented from behind him.

Turning, he found himself facing a purple unicorn with an equally purple dragon standing beside her. "It wasn't much," He said, blushing slightly from the praise. "I just thought it would be a shame to have to fly up to pop them when I could deal with them all at once." He shrugged his feathered wings. "I'm Dick Kirrinâ€| though the loop memories seem to want to call me Dark Kestrel for some reason."

"Kirrin? I've not heard that name before, what loop do you usually do?" The purple mare asked before getting nudged by the dragon at her side. "Oops, sorry, I'm Twilight Sparkle, local anchor, and this is Spike, one of the local loopers. It seems you're replacing Rainbow Dash, one of our loopers this time."

"Well that explains why I seem to have Pegasus Weather Management 101 in my head." Dick responded with a slight frown. "As for my usual loop, I'm part of a group the Hub knows as the Famous Five. My older brother, Julian seems to have found a bar or something nearby and my sister, Anne isâ€|" He trailed off, Reaching with his mind to find his sister. "With a group of birds or something."

Twilight twitched her tail. "Sounds like your brother is at Mac's bar in Sweet Apple Acres and your sister is replacing Fluttershy." She frowned. "That means we won't be able to use the Elements, though I think Luna is awake this time so we won't need them for a while anyway." She motioned for him to follow her and set off towards Fluttershy's cottage. "How much do you know about loops and how did you do that with the clouds?"

Following her, Dick shrugged his shoulders. "I know the basics of them. The world tree, the problems, that there can be fused loops and such. I haven't really looped that much that I know of. Certainly not to places like this, though we did haveâ€| I think it was Naruto ended up taking Uncle Quentin's place once, he explained the basics.



Not too long after that, we ended up in a game loop; the fused ones where there's nobody to really do anything so you just get random quests and such."

"I know the type, I've been to the Dungeons and Dragons world a couple of times, the last time was going through this massive dungeon."

"We had one called Fireborn. It and Shadowrun are functionally similar. Magic returns to normal Earth, bringing with it a lot of 'fantasy' creatures. The main difference is that Shadowrun is higher tech and people tend towards 'demihumans', Fireborn has most people end up as dragons and you get memories of being around while Atlantis was the main power in the world." Dick shrugged again. "There are three major abilities I like from there though, Group Mind, meaning limited telepathy and empathy to certain people, in our case, each other, Heir of the Storm, which is how I manipulated the clouds. Good Storm Lords can actually create hurricanes on their own. The last one is Alternate Form, which is basically limited shape shifting to picked static forms."

"Those sound useful." Spike commented. "And it would be interesting to end up with an entire world full of dragons."

Dick snorted in amusement. "Not everyone is happy about dragons turning up. We had more than a few near misses with the unseelie, the sluagh and the Dwellers." He shivered. "The last group are nasty, taint driven demons. There's also the Weeping Death, which isn't fun, and that's not going into the human bad guys." He looked up as they reached a small cottage, spotting a familiar, blonde Pegasus in front of it. "Hey Anne!"

Looking up from the birds, Anne flicked her tail. "Dick!" She called, hurrying over to hug him. "I'm glad to see you. What's going on?"

"You're in Equestria, apparently replacing Fluttershy, one of our loopers." Twilight cut in. "Twilight Sparkle, local anchor. This is my assistant, Spike, also one of our loopers."

Anne nodded slightly, taking a pro-offered hoof and shaking it. "Anne Kirrin." She turned to her brother, "Any idea where Julian, George and Timmy are?"

"Julian's found a bar." Dick rolled his eyes at that, though he couldn't blame his brother considering the fact that their home loop didn't seem to move on the same timescale for everything, leaving them at some ambiguous age between ten and twenty for seven years. "George isn't here and neither is Timmy, I'm guessing they're still back home."

"Right," Twilight said. "Since I know where your brother is, I'll lead you to him and \_hopefully\_ we can avoid setting Pinkie off with a massive party again," She paused, looking up at the sky. "Or getting annoyed because you all showed up and she didn't do a Welcome to Equestria party for you." She added, leading the pair towards Sweet Apple Acres.

\* \* \*

><p>It had actually been a fun few days for the five of them, certainly more interesting than the normal holiday she had at the beginning of her loop since they could actually fly now. Of course with her loop memories, they had gotten the gold, again, and set up the bank account with it so that Kirrin Island would never go up for sale.<p>

One interesting thing they had learned thanks to her mother's checking. It seemed that most of the 'groups' that the Hub universe had written by Enid Blyton looped as one universe about half the time, though they each had their own anchors and did loop independently. Odd, but it made some sense.

Hearing a yell from above, she frowned, looking up and around until she spotted a dark dot on the horizon. Shifting her form into that of a large four-footed dragon, she focused on the spot for a moment before recognising the dark mane, bat-like wings and coat a shade or two off her own. "Jo! Down here!" She called, sending up a plume of fire before shifting back to her normal form.

A few minutes later, a panting Josephine was kneeling in front of George, the three Equestrians gathered near. "What are you doing here Jo?" George asked, offering the other girl a bottle of ginger beer.

"Iâ€|" Jo broke off into a coughing fit, grunting as Rayne slapped her back a few times when some of the drink went down the wrong pipe. "George, what's going on? Where are your cousins and why are we \_horses\_?!" It was evident that Jo was already heading for new looper paranoia.

Kneeling down, George shifted, placing a hand on Jo's shoulder. "We're not horses, Jo, we're ponies. As for what's going on, it's a long story; the \_short\_ version is that things went really, really wrong with reality so everything is repeating to try to get things fixed. Things like this just happen randomly so we get people replacing others, as Rayne, Lauren and Felicity are. I'd let Dad give you the full explanation, but I doubt you'd understand it." She snorted. "\_I\_ don't understand it and he's \_my\_ dad."

"Well he is supposed to be one of the best scientists in Britain." Jo managed, giving a weak grin.

George nodded. "Come on, let's get you settledâ€| maybe we can try things with us being siblings this time." She grinned at Jo's blank look.

Rayne snorted in amusement. "I take it you two know each other."

"Yeah, usually we meet because Jo steals my wallow on the beach, though that's not forâ€| four or five years, I think. The floating timeline makes it confusing."

"That isn't very nice of her." Felicity commented as George hauled Jo to her feet.

George snorted in amusement. "The original me isn't that nice. I'm still pretty hot tempered sometimes; unfortunately I got it from Dad. Jo managed to get us out of a few scrapes though, starting with that

one surprisingly enough. We met up again a couple of years later when she was visiting herâ€¦" She looked at Jo. "Is it your uncle and aunt that are in that circus when we meet the second time?"

Jo nodded. "Something like that. I don't even know what's going on anymore."

"You get used to it," Lauren commented dryly. "I haven't known what's going on since we got here."

"That's because half the time you don't even listen." Rayne pointed out. "I swear Lightning, I am \_so\_ glad the loop memories have us keeping you on a leash."

George snickered at Lauren's confused look, guiding Jo towards the cottage. "Come on, Mom's probably got something for lunchâ€¦ you know, I'm kind of surprised how well I'm handling meat given I'm a pony."

"It isn't all meat." Felicity put in, following them. "It seems like some of the things we eat in Equestria came over when everything got rearranged. The bacon is actually hay." That got looks from George and Jo. "It's not that bad, besides as you are, it's better for you than all that meat."

"Yeah, I guessâ€¦" George sighed. So much for that dream.

\* \* \*

><p>65.11 (Barryc100588)<p>

"The Night.. shall last.. FOREVER!" Nightmare Moon laughed maniacally. Twilight looked at Nightmare Moon with a bored look. She could tell she was the only one Awake, and didn't feel like messing with anything this time. She wasn't even going to bother going baseline.

"Nope. Not dealing with this this time. If Nightmare wants Eternal Night, she can have it." With that, Twilight trotted off, and Equestria was covered in an eternal veil of darkness.

Life in Equestria after Nightmare Moon took over was full of fear. Ponies rarely left their homes, and crops failed to grow time after time with minimal light to sustain them. Ponies grew hungry and restless as temperatures dropped. Twilight felt regret leaving the ponies like this and resolved to try to fix her mess. She went to each of her Unawake friends, but failed to convince them to go with her into the Everfree Forest.

With no option, Twilight went to the Everfree Forest alone. She knew she needed her five friends, but they wouldn't go with her. While she was gone, ponies stayed indoors, even as food stores continued to drop.

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon looked out at Canterlot from the balcony. "I don't get it. I created Eternal Night so ponies could enjoy my night, and yet I don't see them outside playing. They remain indoors, just like it was a thousand years ago. Could I possibly be wrong? Could Eternal

Night not be the way to go?" Nightmare thought for a moment.  
"Preposterous. I should just give them more time. The night will grow on them. The sun will never return."<p>

65.12

\* \* \*

><p><em>Huh. Another Loop where I'm Trixie.<em> Twilight stopped, pulled her wagon off to the side, and got in to see what she had to work with.

"Not bad, actually," she judged. A fair-sized library, nothing she hadn't read before but a few she didn't mind reading again; a kitchen unit, not always a certainty depending on how impoverished the wandering mage was; a collection of board games (some of them enchanted to play the opposing side) and various stage supplies.

After her check, she hitched the wagon up again. Then stopped, getting a mischievous expression on her face.

\* \* \*

><p>Three hours later, she had the wheels enchanted with a standard cloud-walking enchantment, a small but robust cloud generator fitted to the undercarriage, and a large fan attached to the back of the wagon.<p>

As the contraption soared skywards, she poured herself a drink. "I never liked walking anyway."

With a whistle that terminated in a \_thud,\_ something landed on her roof.

Sighing, she put the drink down and poked her head out of the back, looking around and up at the roof. "Who is it... wait a sec. Trixie?"

"Correct." The blue unicorn adjusted her hat, seemingly none the worse for wear for her trip aloft. "Trixie may have irritated the Element of Honesty a little too much when she met her, when setting up the Summer Sun celebration."

"Wow." Twilight helped Trixie down into the main area of the wagon. "How much did you annoy AJ?"

"Trixie did not specify the identity of the Element of Honesty." The sorceress looked around. "I like what you've done with this place, by the way. The potted plant really ties the room together..."

"Trixie, focus."

"Oh, right." Trixie shrugged. "It's Awake Gilda. She galestormed me across half the country."

"Oh." Twilight blinked. "Oh, neat. So it's one of those loops, huh? Can you two handle the Elements together?"

Trixie waved a hoof. "\_We\_ get along like a house on fire. Complete

with screams. We may alienate the other Elements, though."

"Just use Pinkie as a go-between," Twilight recommended. "Want a lift back?"

"Certainly. Trixie will use the time manufacturing a parasail for a suitably epic triumphant return."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

65.1: Another dystopia bites the dust.

>65.2: Technically not iron.<br>65.3: Don't get too close to the sun, kid.

>65.4: "Blueblood! Are you playing with your dolls again?"<br>65.5: Doctor Ponhattan.

>65.6: Enthusiastic Trixie. Aim away from hands and face.<br>65.7: The lights and sounds are provided by a toy sonic screwdriver. Because if it doesn't go whirr with a light then it isn't a proper one, dangit.

>65.8: MMORLG. Massively Multiplayer Online Replacement Looper Game.<br>65.9: They got the idea from some Star Wars place or other.

>65.10: The Blytonverse.<br>65.11: Don't worry, folks, nopony dies in this story. They just get really bad ersatz coffee.

>65.12: Being Griffon the Brush Off is a lot more meaningful when the Brush the Griffon has to work with can cast magic.<p>

## 70. Chapter 70

### 66.1 (Ghrathryn)

\* \* \*

><p>The three members of the Famous Five sat around a table at Mac's bar, ignoring a group of what appeared to be 'space captains' sitting in a corner discussing their home loops and how each went nasty. "So we're replacing people from this loop?" Julian asked his hooves around a tankard of Sweet Apple Acres' Cider. "And because of that, you can't use these Elements of Harmony?"<p>

Twilight shifted slightly. "Well, we can, but it would mean trying to find someone to take over Kindness, since we've already got 'backups' for Magic, Loyalty and Honesty. I don't think I can find anyone in one night that could work for Kindness and trying to use multiple by yourself is straining when you're not an alicorn."

Julian and Dick shared a look before pointing a hoof each at their sister. "Anne could possibly handle it." Julian said, causing his sister to jump. "She's usually the gentlest of our group, though she's also extremely protective at times."

"Let's not bring up the times we ended up Tainted." Dick said with a grimace. He hated remembering those times. Usually it brought their worst traits to the surface at the worst possible time. "Though if this is a 'like for like' replacement in some areas, I can see Anne and Fluttershy getting along well and she certainly had a knack for handling the animals around her earlier."

Anne blushed at the praise from her brothers. "Wellâ€¦ I guess I'm just good with animals."

Dick rolled his eyes. "Anne you've been a Green Lord \_dragon\_ with millennia of experience leading up to the fall of Atlantis. I'm pretty sure you had New Forest as your domain during that period and most of the creatures there were peaceful compared to elsewhere in the world." He pointed out. Seeing Twilight's look, he shifted slightly. "The Fireborn loop we were in, the five of us. Me, Ju, Anne, George and Tim were all humans that had dragon souls reborn I don't know how many times. In that universe Atlantis had existed, but it died or vanished when magic was locked away from the world.

"When magic came back there were areas that wereâ€¦ corrupted that we had to try to clear amongst other things. Each of us also started having dreams of being dragons back in the Age of Atlantis. Eventually we learned to access our abilities from then. We each had different dragon forms. I think we were all Drakes, sort of like Spike except larger and with wings." He said, indicating the dragon, who was currently with a white unicorn he didn't recognise.

"Thing was we each had different abilities. Group Mind and Alternate Form were common butâ€¦ I was a Storm Lord, meaning Heir of the Storm was my strongest ability. George was a Fire Wyrn, Ju was Cold, Anne was a Green Lord and Tim was a Stone Lord." Dick shrugged as he explained their main abilities before jumping as a thump came from his right. Looking that way, he saw a set of books on the table by his brother.

"These are everything we could find on that universe, though they're not entirely accurate." Julian said. "For example they list Nobility as being the key Power for the Storm Lord Legacy, it isn't, Heir of the Storm is the Power you need." He continued, pushing them over to Twilight who frowned, casting a spell and touching her horn to the books and papers in turn.

Bringing her head back up, Twilight frowned as she rubbed her horn. "That world isâ€¦ strange. It seems so like the Hub at first, but then there's everything that happens and so many people turning into dragons."

"We know," The siblings said together.

"Still, I think we could try Anne with the Element of Kindness." Twilight twitched her tail as she summoned the Elements from the old Castle. "I don't \_think\_ we will need these yet, though it will probably be a good idea to test them before we do. As I said, I think Luna is awake this time out so we probably won't need to worry about Nightmare Moon. The next real problem will be Discord and while he's looping he has a nasty habit of \_not\_ letting anyone know that he is so we can never tell whether we've got his baseline or the looping version."

Dick frowned. "If he's like that, then it will probably be a good idea to have a few backup plans ready, just in case he tries things." He was, honestly, more used to normal human enemies than gods. Even in the Fireborn loop it had taken all five of them to fight off a Dweller and they had received far worse injuries than it had. If Discord was at that level they could possibly force him back if there

were all five of them there to fight, but it wouldn't be pretty.

\* \* \*

><p>Jo blinked at the four others in front of her, then looked at the glass in her hand and promptly slugged it back, coughing as the taste of alcohol hit her. Even with the fact she was sitting here in fur and with bat wings while George had three <em>female</em> cousins this was still too weird for her.

"How does that even work?" She asked as George reclaimed the shot glass and put it on the table.

George shrugged. "No idea, but reality is all pete tongâ€|" She trailed off and grimaced. "I hate rhyming slang some days."

"What?"

"Sorry, just spent far too long in London, specifically London as it probably will be in sixty or seventy years. The slang stuck rather more than I would like." George admitted with a sigh.

Shifting slightly, George looked up at Jo. "Alright, I went over this yesterday, but I guess I'd better fill you in as well. Normally my cousins, Tim and I have a number of adventures you're not privy to, usually fifteen to nineteen, I think, though it sometimes varies high. We're probably going to skip the first one and just have a normal holiday this time out. There's not really much point when we don't need to forge friendships in fire nor when we're under threat of losing things from not having money so we'll see what turns up. Most likely, particularly if Mom and Dad decide to take you in, come Christmas time we'll be back on track with Roland and his 'artist' friends trying to steal Dad's work." She pointed a finger at Jo. "Most likely it'll be because you've never been to school before, normally it would be me not having been to school and the boys getting sick, but since we're likely all at the same school we can probably limit things a bit and given there's three loopers, one of whom knows what's going to happen here we can probably get through things so we have less of Roland than normal."

It was at that point that Fanny and Joan came into the room, the latter carrying a tray full of what looked like potato slices covered in some sort of sauce. "Speaking of schooling," Fanny said as Joan placed the tray down. "I just finished talking to Gillian. It seems that instead of Graylands, you five will be going to Malory Towers."

George blinked. "Isn't that the one in Cornwall that Darrel and Felicity Rivers usually go to?"

Fanny nodded. "Yes it is, and yes they are aware that you don't normally go there. It seems that this loop is a fusion of the pony world into the joint one for all of us, which has changed some things around a bit."

"Wellâ€|" George started only to trail off again. What could she say to that? It had almost always been Graylands that she and Anne had gone to, in part because they allowed pets so Timmy could join them, but at the same time she did want to find out what happened for

Darrel, since the other girl was apparently the anchor for the Malory Towers group. Maybe they should get in touch with everyone they could remember from the various groups and see if they could have a meeting. What sort of adventures would the Famous Five, the Secret Seven, the girls of St Claire's, the girls from Malory Towers, the Five Find-Outers (and Dog) and the Mannerings and Trents get into if they all met up?

"Why would we be going to some place we never heard of?" Lauren asked. "Graylands was fine last term."

Fanny shared a look with George. This was probably going to be one of those things that they couldn't really explain well. "It seemed more sensible to try to get you all into the same school and Malory Towers is the closest that has the space for five extra girls in their first and second years." She explained. "And from what Gillian told me on the phone, Graylands has had to shut down for a year to deal with several things, including a lot of modernisation."

Lauren blinked. "I didn't see anything about that before the term ended."

"It might be because it happened after we left." Rayne put in, "There might have been a storm or something happen that wrecked things leading to the school so they're having to completely redo things." She moved to wrap an arm around Lauren. "C'mon Lauren, think of this as a chance to find new friends with our cousin and show her what we know."

"Tell you what," George interrupted any comments Lauren or Jo might have given. "How about we get a lunch together and go to the island for a picnic. We can worry about schools getting changed when we actually need to." She twitched her tail. "It's always nice to see the rabbits on the island, particularly as they're so tame." That got Felicity bouncing in place a bit.

"Oh, I wonder if they're anything like Angel back in Equestria."

Lauren blinked. "Equestria?"

"Never mind, Lauren," Rayne sighed, getting to her feet.

\* \* \*

><p>Lying on her back, Rayne looked up at the nearly cloudless summer sky above Kirrin Island. It was odd to think that this island could be so peaceful and yet have such a history of adventures as the ones George had told them about. Of course Lauren still didn't quite believe everything she had been told, but that was a common problem when non-loopers were involved in loops.<p>

She frowned, hooking her arms behind her head and stretching her wings out. If George was right, they had seven years here, possibly more, meaning the loop was about as long as Equestria's was currently and there was bound to be other things happening, particularly in a linked loop.

"What would happen if these people ended up in another actually interesting school and holiday time line?" Rayne asked the air, not



really expecting an answer. Most likely they would take most scenarios along that line relatively well, except for Eiken and places like that.

Given the atmosphere, particularly around Kirrin, maybe it would be an idea to see if she could get Twilight to see if they could find a way to talk to the other anchors for this group of loops, set them up as another sanctuary. Certainly it would be good to have multiple universes that could actually deal with their own problems in-house and let any other looper take the time to relax.

Feeling a weight on her stomach, she raised her head slowly to find a rabbit sitting, watching her with wide eyes, its ears up. "Don't try biting me." Rayne warned the bunny before dropping her head back to her arms. Maybe it would be worth finding out what would happen here and seeing if the various anchors would be willing to help Equestria out by giving other loopers places to unwind. If they could figure out how to deal with the ones that were in a really bad way given there was no Elements of Harmony here.

\* \* \*

><p>66.2<p>

"Okay, how do I do this?" Spike asked, sitting cross-legged.

"Well, I don't know exactly how yours is gonna work," Dash hedged. "I mean, this is kinda a personal thing. But for me, it grew out of the idea that I had to be there for my friends. That meant that I had to know where they were, how they were and if they needed me."

"Following you so far," Spike nodded.

"And, yeah. So the Element of Loyalty is all about that â€" well, my one is. I want to be there for my friends, but I can't just hover over them. So..." Dash shrugged.

"Okay. Can you demonstrate?"

"Sure." Dash crouched down, focusing, and something pulsed.

"Okay, I felt that!" Spike said, excitement tingeing his voice. "Sort of a pulse of really deep magic. Like, bones-of-the-earth deep."

"That's the Elements, alright." Dash nodded. "Okay, now I'll scan for you."

Another pulse.

"Yeah, I felt that as well, but I couldn't get a direction..."

"Okay." Dash sat back on her haunches. "Let's try a different tack. You know Rarity, of course."

"Well, \_duh.\_" Spike gave his fellow Element of Loyalty a look. "We've only been going out since forever."

Dash grinned, and punched him in the shoulder. "It's called a conversation starter, doofus."

"I resemble that remark."

Dash shook her head, chuckling. "Anyway. Think about Rarity."

"You don't need to tell me twice."

"Right... okay, now, where is she?"

Spike frowned. "Probably working on those dresses--"

"Don't give me probably. Tell me exactly where she is, right this minute."

The dragon blinked, as her tone abruptly became more forceful. "Huh--"

"Is she safe? You don't know, do you?"

Spike made to stand up, and Dash pushed him back down again. "No, don't go and check. Just answer me."

"She's in her kitchen," he blurted. Then blinked. "Okay, how did I know that?"

Dash grinned. "Right. I think we have our angle on your Loyalty power. Kinda like a dragon's hoard, really â€" you need to know if it's safe."

"Right..." Spike nodded. "That felt really strange."

"Eh, you get used to it." Dash shrugged.

\* \* \*

><p>66.3<p>

"What's this?" Twilight asked, pointing.

Pinkie grinned, with usual \_squeak\_ noise. "It's a Party Time boat!"

"What..." Twilight paused, and facehoofed. "PT boat. Right. But it's bigger than most destroyers!"

"It depends on the time period, Twilight," Pinkie said seriously. "I thought a smart pony like you would know that."

"I do, it's just... all right, what's it all in aid of?"

"Well." The earth pony put on a jaunty hat. "I sail the seven seas, bringing party to all within range!"

"We only have about three seas on our â€" wait, range?" Twilight zeroed in on the most concerning word.

"I have fourteen UACs â€" Unmanned Aerial Cakes â€" along with a VLP system with ninety-six cells, and four QF 15-pounders." Pinkie

pointed. "The VLP system is a Vertical Launch Party mechanism, which is able to engage forty-eight flopped parties in less than fifteen seconds with time-for-party fire at a range of up to twenty miles, and the guns are Quick Flan dispensers."

Twilight gave the ship another look-over. "And by the looks of it, it can go up rivers, too... okay, what did you call it?"

"PTAS Laughable!"

"Right." Twilight decided not to ask what PTAS stood for. Knowing Pinkie, it would be 'Pinkie's Totally Awesome Ship'. "So, what do you need my help for?"

Pinkie shrugged. "I only just realized I built it in a lake. Can you teleport it to the ocean, please?"

"...can't you do it yourself?"

"Yeah, but I've just built a ship. I'm on strike." Pinkie waved a union flag.

"Oh, fine then." Twilight built the spell, then triggered it.

\* \* \*

><p>Gustav le Grande sighed. "There is no ozzair choice. Ah must leave zis place of ponies and return to mah homeland."<p>

Something flew in the window and exploded in a puff of sugar and spice.

When the smoke cleared, he discovered he was wearing a pointed party hat. And there was a cake on the table.

The icing spelled out \_Who's Awesome? You're Awesome!\_ Complete with translation into four different languages, none of which was his own native tongue, and a note apologizing for forgetting that one.

\* \* \*

><p>"Is that a Partydar?" Twilight asked, pointing. "How did you...?"<p>

"Well, it's really just a clock!"

The 'radar' screen beeped, and flashed something about taking some cookies out of the oven.

Pinkie hopped over to the bridge oven, explaining further as she went. "I use the Element of Laughter to tell when someone's having a mope, and party away!"

"...your use of sophisticated military technology to deliver amusement is both scary and heartwarming."

"Thanks! Hey, try a Cluster Cookie, they're dispersal-tastic!"

\* \* \*

><p>66.4<p>

As the sky in the east turned pink with the promise of dawn, the ponies of Ponyville waited for their ruler to appear.

"..and here she is," the Mayor announced. "Please welcome, Princess Celestia!"

Applause started, then stopped in moments when a scruffy gryphon slouched on stage.

"Er..." the Mayor said, nonplussed. "Where's Princess Celestia?"

"She got called away. Family emergency or something." The gryphon blew a bubble with some gum, then popped it with a claw. Starting to chew the gum again, she shrugged. "I'm the backup act."

"How can you be a backup act?" Rich asked uncertainly. "I mean... just... how? Princess Celestia is an alicorn who raises the sun and rules the country! You're a gryphon we've never seen before!"

"I'd vote for her," Dash announced into the silence. "That's my old flying school friend Gilda."

"Oh, hi Dash!" Gilda perked up slightly. "Fancy meeting you here."

The Mayor coughed. "Miss... Gilda, is it? You still haven't satisfactorily explained why--"

"Yeah, yeah." Gilda spun her tail around. "Ta-da."

Light streamed in through the windows.

"Right, when do I get paid... I swear, getting me out of bed at three in the morning..." Still muttering, her words occasionally interacted by the \_smak\_ of her gum, Gilda sloped off stage to the near-silent sound of bafflement.

\* \* \*

><p>"There we go, Gilda dear," Rarity pronounced. "I'm not sure why you wanted this, but I think I did reasonably well with the time available."<p>

"Nah, 's cool." Gilda inspected the caparison. As instructed, it permitted her wings full range of movement, while still hanging down with enough surface area to permit a pattern to be displayed.

Since the pattern Gilda had requested was the phrase \_CAUTION: BORED GRYPHON\_, it amounted to the pony version of a t-shirt with a slogan.

"I figure, I give a warning, then maybe I'll get bothered less..."

\* \* \*

><p>66.5<p>

A pegasus with brown, shaggy fur and unkempt wings went charging down the main street of Ponyville, drawing stares from the crowd.

This then turned into astonishment as Twilight Sparkle, Pinkie Pie, Applejack and Rarity followed her at a run. Rainbow Dash circled overhead, and Fluttershy brought up the rear at a walking pace.

The reason why she had chosen this strategy became clearer a moment later, as the brown pegasus went past her in the other direction, followed by most of the Elements.

"What's going on?" Rose asked Fluttershy, her voice quavering.

"Well," Fluttershy said, then slowed to a halt. "My friends got very excited about something and started running around after that pegasus mare there. I'm sure it's important..."

The whole procession went past a third time. This time, the brown mare was chasing the rest of them.

"Is it... dangerous?"

"I don't think so," Fluttershy answered with careful honesty. "But I'd stay out of the middle of the road, myself."

The two earth pony Elements rushed out of the alleyway between two houses, followed by the brown pegasus, and with Twilight and Rarity behind her.

Dash blundered out of the top floor of Rarity's shop with a bedsheet wrapped around her, and tripped over the end, crashing by the most astounding coincidence directly into her friends' quarry.

"Got'cha!" Applejack shouted. "Nice work, RD!"

"Thanks, Spike," Rainbow Dash said woozily. "Why is it all white?"

Leaving the frowning Rose, Fluttershy ambled over to her friends. "We caught her?"

"Yep!" Twilight confirmed.

"Yay."

"Now, let's see who you really are," Twilight added, casting a spell at the brown pegasus. There was a flash of light, and she turned into... a black pegasus.

"Gasp!" Pinkie enunciated clearly. "It's Old Mare Crankshaft from the water mill!"

"I had to get you away from my house at night, in case you discovered my secret!" Old Mare Crankshaft said bitterly. "I'm a were-pegasus."

Several ponies blinked.

"But... you are a pegasus," Rarity pointed out sensibly.

"Yeah." Old Mare Crankshaft shrugged. "And I'd have gotten away with it if it weren't for you meddling Elements. And your dog!"

The friends looked around.

"Winona?" Applejack tried, then shook her head. "We ain't got a dog here."

Pinkie barked. "I volunteer to be the dog!"

"Well, mystery solved," Twilight pronounced, in the face of evidence. "Good job, gang."

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis giggled. "The looks on their faces..."<p>

"It's performance art, really," Twilight agreed. "Nice work, by the way. Same time next week?"

"Sure." Chrysalis thought for a moment, still giggling. "Maybe this time I could be a crooked land developer who wants to turn the library into a chimney..."

\* \* \*

><p>66.6<p>

"I am Smaug the Red!" The huge dragon leaned down close to Spike's nose. "I am without equal! My armour is as battle steel, my teeth are swords without peer, my claws like manifold diamonds, my wings bear terror aloft with the force of a tornado, the shock of my tail cuts all defence, and my breath the ruin of nations! I have burned Napoleon's Europe and slain five hundred dragons in the doing. I alone spread fire and destruction across Deraine, Sagene and Roche, with neither the puling Anchor Kailas nor his pet Storm able to stop me. Neverwinter was but windblown ash by the time I left it. I have incinerated Corellia in a day and a night, defeated the mightiest battleship of the Imperium of Man, and destroyed the Volturi and all their kin!"

"And yet," Smaug's enormous head snaked still closer to Spike, sniffing him once before drawing back in disgust, "here you are. A whelp, a hatchling, nursed with the milk of lesser beings and their ideals! Who are you, to dare to call yourself a dragon? Who are you, to think you have the right to challenge me for my hoard? To deny me the right to be what all dragons should be?"

Spike looked back up, taking a single quick breath, and then exhaled deeply and evenly. "I am Spykoranuvellitar, known as Spike. I do not challenge for your hoard, because I have no need for it."

"Blatant lies," Smaug declared, rumbling. "All dragons need a hoard."

"Storm, that you mention, has no hoard beyond the love of his rider." The larger dragon snorted his contempt, but Spike continued. "Toothless, who you may have met, is a partner with his rider."

Temeraire, who you must have met, sees his hoard of gold and gems as important " but mainly for where it comes from, and specifically for who it comes from."

Smaug frowned. "Pretty words, youngling. But why do you not need my hoard?"

"I have a better." Spike straightened his shoulders. "For me, no gold nor gems compares with my friends. They, and their love, are my hoard in truth."

"Truly foolish." Smaug blew a jet of fire into the cavern, which licked around a stalactite and made it glow cherry-red. "Love of lesser beings... no gold... how can you even claim to be a dragon?"

"Dragons aren't mindless beasts," Spike said, and didn't react when Smaug roared laughter. "We're intelligent, just like humans or ponies or dwarves. We can choose to follow our instincts or not."

"But why should we not?" Smaug pressed. "Dragons are the greatest creatures in existence! I do what I will, and none can gainsay me!"

"Then you're not a good person." Spike shrugged. "Being a dragon doesn't mean you're immune to morality. It means you're powerful " that's all."

Smaug's teeth clashed together no more than a foot from Spike's muzzle. "I am powerful!" he roared, shaking the cavern. "You are a mere wyrmling who consoles himself with the affection of nothings, who has no hoard worthy of the name, who comes before me alone and presumes to lecture me on what a dragon is!"

"I do presume." Spike nodded. "I presume because, for all your might and majesty, you're really kind of sad."

Smaug blinked, actually unable to believe someone would dismiss him that thoroughly.

Spike pushed on into the pause. "Your wealth is measured in gold, in gems, in treasure and in vanquished foes. But I can ask my friends for help, no matter the time or the place, and get an answer. I have a wife, who I love and who loves me. I have others, and that's one thing you don't have. You're alone, atop your hoard, in a splendid isolation... and yet, more than anything else you want someone to share it with. To tell them how wonderful you are, because it always rings hollow when you tell yourself."

With a tiny flash of blue light, a ring appeared on Spike's finger. It was made of a bluish metal, surmounted by a diamond, with a tiny fragment of shining red within it. "This is my most valuable possession. Not because of what it is, but what it signifies."

"That is the thing you have which holds most value?" Smaug repeated, softly. "Then I desire it."

Spike looked up, frowning. "Why? I mean, it's my wedding ring... That's why it matters to me."

"Because you have it, and I do not." Smaug spread his wings. "I demand it, because it is the right of the strong to take what they wish from the weak. If you do not wish to cede it, then show me what \_real\_ strength your \_wife\_ may grant you!"

Smaug inhaled massively, causing the gems in his hoard to clink and rattle with the wind he produced. His neck reared back, and he breathed out a massive gout of red flame directly upwards â€" shot through with orange, and yellow, and cones of bright blue.

The entire mountain exploded.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight jumped as the sound of a mighty explosion reached her, and rushed to the window.<p>

All over Ponyville, heads were poking out of windows and ponies out on their afternoon shopping runs turned towards the Everfree Forest.

Twilight followed their gaze, and gaped. \_That pyrocumulus cloud must be half a mile high!\_

\_Why is there a volcanic eruption going on in the Everfree?\_

A colossal red shape exploded out of the cloud, extending vast wings, and performed a sharp hairpin turn before launching a lance of white-hot fire directly downwards.

Twilight blanched. Spike had gone off in that direction for 'a chat' with the dragon of the Everfree... but that certainly was \_not\_ the dragon of the Everfree. What was going on?

A holodisc clattered to the table behind her.

Snatching it up with her magic without taking her eyes from the wyrm, Twilight triggered it.

The sound of an explosion came through, followed by a cough. "Spike here, Twilight. Everything's under control-"

A loud \_slam\_ came next. Looking at the hologram, Twilight saw that Spike had just barely avoided a rock the size of a house from landing on him.

"Well, sorta... that's Smaug. Don't worry, I'll handle him â€" just make sure we don't wreck everything nearby in the process."

The message ended.

Twilight felt frantically for her element-sense... still two Loyalty elements active. Since one was the (unawake) Dash, that meant the other had to be Spike.

Still, what the \_buck\_ was going on?

She began composing her own messages. One each to Shining Armor, Celestia, and Luna, asking for their help in keeping the devastation localized.



\* \* \*

><p>With a hissing roar, the lance of plasmated air focused in from ten feet across to a single inch, and Spike's blue lightsaber drank it up without much more than a flicker.<p>

Spike mentally shuffled through his Pocket contents, trying to find what it was he'd need. One set of Rarity-quality robes "as flammable as a granite tor, thanks to the fact they were made out of woven diamond and sapphire" and the shield that Shining had made him once. It might not be a particularly 'jedi' thing to have, but it was at least large enough to hide behind in a pinch.

"Do I see a knight in shining armour?" Smaug laughed, then continued in a tone of heavy sarcasm. "Truly a true dragon, to wield weapons to fight rather than rely on tooth and claw and flame!"

Spike squinted upwards, trying to see through the smoke, and reached for the Force. It was there in a moment, a strong cable of blue and white light, and he drew on it gladly.

The shield snapped up almost of its own accord, driven by a flash of precognitive insight, and a blast of wider, less focused fire splashed off it like rain.

"An impressive trick, hatchling!" Smaug said, chuckling. "But inadequate."

The Force warned Spike of danger, and he leapt clear-

Smaug unleashed the full force of his fire.

The ground where Spike had been standing simply melted. Everything within ten yards of the impact area became a puddle of lava, and the force of the blast cracked the rock around it in a crazy pattern of broken and crumbling pieces.

Spike landed badly, blown off his impact point by the sheer impact of the concussion, and sprawled before rolling upright.

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight!" Shining called, galloping into the library. "What's going on?"<p>

"Spike's in a fight in the Everfree," Twilight summarized. "I need-"

The Royal Sisters materialized in the kitchen. After a sneeze as Luna's wings hit Celestia's nose, they were sufficiently untangled to move into the main room.

"Right." Twilight started again. "I need you three to help me throw up a shield around the Everfree. Spike can handle himself, I'm fairly sure, and the best way we can help him is to make sure he doesn't have to worry about us."

"What caused this?" Celestia asked, already channelling magic to supply Twilight with.

"Spike went off to... I think he said to try and recruit the Dragon of the Everfree for some support group, or something. But-" Twilight winced as the ground shook. "It turned out to be Smaug from Arda, instead. And he's Looping."

Luna's expression hardened. "Right. We shall aid gallant Spike in defeating this-"

"No," Twilight shook her head, building the shield spell. Her brother pitched in, layering his own spellforms on top of hers. "Spike said he could handle it. I'm willing to let him have a try."

Celestia looked at her for a moment, then nodded. "Indeed. He isn't a child any more."

"He hasn't been one for a long time," Twilight agreed. "Right, that should hold. I'm going to start evacuating the wildlife."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Right, I'm fighting Smaug. The Dragon Dread. The Chiefest and Greatest of Calamities.<em>

Spike raised his shield, blocking a blow from Smaug's tail. The knife-bladed appendage glanced off and scored a long furrow in the bedrock, and Smaug laughed.

\_Smaug the Impenetrable.\_ Well, there's one that didn't turn out to be true....\_

He jumped again, drawing on the Force, and shot across from one side of the cleared area to the other. Slipping his shield back into his pocket, he drew a yew longbow and nocked an arrow.

A moment's concentration, and he let it fly.

The arrow flew straight and true, striking Smaug's scales right over his heart, and glanced off. Smaug grinned, baring his teeth, and hovered above the smaller dragon tauntingly. "You think me a fool, to fall for the same trick more than once?"

"It's worth a try." Spike shrugged. "Besides, I like archery."

He drew back a second arrow and released it.

Smaug spat flame at it, and it erupted in a blast of unbound magic. "I am not blind, hatchling!"

Between one word and the next, Smaug released his Dragonfear.

Spike felt a wave of atavistic terror stab through him. Intellectually, he knew what it was â€" clearly Smaug had picked up a few supernatural tricks from his time in Faerun â€" but Dragonfear didn't answer to rationality.

"Look at you, cowering before me," Smaug said softly, landing before the shivering purple dragon. "Defeated, as all are before me. Smaug Unconquerable, Smaug the Magnificent."

\_There is no emotion; there is peace.\_

\_There is no ignorance; there is knowledge.\_

\_There is no passion; there is serenity.\_

\_There is no chaos; there is harmony.\_

Spike stood, looking Smaug in the eye.

\_There is no death; there is the force.\_

"It'll take more than that."

With a gesture, he replaced his lightsaber in his subspace pocket.  
"Believe it or not, I don't actually want to kill you."

"You? Kill me?" Smaug shook his head, a dangerous orange light building behind his teeth. "I think it is not \_I\_ who must fear that."

Smaug fired another blast of full-power dragonflame directly at Spike. This time, he didn't dodge.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight shielded her eyes against the flash of blue-white light.<p>

"Is he okay?" Shining asked.

The younger sibling just smiled.

\* \* \*

><p>Smaug blinked. "I must admit, that has never failed to work before."<p>

Spike shrugged, as the molten rock around him began to cool to obsidian. "I'm a dragon, remember."

He jumped, and kept going as wings snapped out from beneath his robe. Smaug spread his huge wings, and slapped the air to follow.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Thank you, Fluttershy and Dash!<em> Spike thought with the small corner of his mind not focused on keeping ahead of Smaug. The larger dragon was a powerful flyer, but Spike had both technique and agility on his side. The former thanks to his fellow Element of Loyalty, the latter because Fluttershy had finally worked out with him how he could shift wings out of proportion to his size. More area meant more manoeuvrability.

Fire blazed through the air around him, and spawned savage upcurrents which clawed at his airflow. With a thought, he spun Smaug's latest dragonbreath into a single compressed ball of energy, and absorbed it to heal a few minor wounds.

\_Twitchy tail\_, the Force whispered, and he dove out of the way of

Smaug's claw as it tried to smash him from the sky.

\* \* \*

><p>"That's kind of impressive..." Twilight said, quietly, as Spike did an aileron roll (without ailerons) and spun away from Smaug's dragonfire. The plasma burst hit her shield, which rippled but coped with it quite nicely. "I wonder why he's Looping..."<p>

"Well, assuming the admins were responsible at all, they're not exactly infallible." Shining nodded to her, and she winced, remembering a few examples of less than perfect planning. "And he's kind of a major player in the book."

Twilight shaded her eyes from another flare. "True. But if we've got the job of clearing up again..."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Right.<em> Spike executed a Kulbit, shedding speed so dramatically that Smaug overshot him entirely, and slowed to a hover. \_No more tactical retreats.\_

"I thank you, hatchling, for giving me such an exhilarating chase," Smaug said in a conversational tone. "Nevertheless, I also thank you for simplifying my task. Now, hold still so I do not destroy that ring of yours when I destroy you."

Spike inhaled, and blew a thin jet of green flame as Smaug unleashed his own roaring inferno.

\* \* \*

><p>"Whoa!" Shining said, dancing backwards a step as a cone of flame erupted from the apex of the shield dome. "Did it just fail?"<p>

"Nope." Twilight's voice was smug. "I think he listened when we discussed tactical use of teleportation. He's flame-sending Smaug's own fire."

\* \* \*

><p>The flame-jet died down, and Spike grinned impudently. "No luck there."<p>

Smaug stared fixedly at him for a second, and then his tail lashed forward like that of a striking scorpion.

Spike moved smoothly aside, with all the time in the world, and took hold of the tail just behind the flat spade. With careful precision, he pulled just before Smaug reached maximum extension and caused the wyrm to sprawl forwards in the air.

Courteously, he waited until Smaug had recovered his equilibrium.

Another fireblast came his way. This time, Spike held out a palm, and enclosed the fire in a blue globe of Force energy. Bringing it to his muzzle, he ostentatiously blew it out.

Smaug growled, smoke seething from the corners of his mouth, then lunged forward with shocking suddenness and bit down on Spike-

Tried to bite down.

Spike bared his own teeth in a fixed grin as he held two of Smaug's fangs, one in each paw, while pushing down with his feet to keep the mouth open.

\_Strength of the earth, sugar. Ain't nothing like real earthbendin', but you hold your stance and it ain't trivial to move you.\_

For fully ten seconds, he held Smaug's jaws open, then gathered himself and \_pushed\_.

Smaug resisted for a moment, then let his mouth hang open and began coughing. Spike dropped free, performed a wingover and hovered once more in front of Smaug's nose.

He shrugged. "Well?"

Smaug looked at him with half-lidded eyes full of hate. Then smiled. "So, your friends give you strength, do they?"

The huge red dragon... vanished.

Spike blinked, then gaped, turning towards Ponyville " where Smaug had reappeared, \_outside\_ the shield, and was already inhaling.

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, cress!" Shining blurted, realizing the magnitude of the disaster. "Twilight! Quick, move the-"<p>

Twilight's horn was already glowing, building a new set of shields over Ponyville. It would be a race to see who was ready first.

Then her first shield shattered like glass.

Spykoranuvellitar of Equestria, already a hundred feet long and swelling every second, hit Smaug the Red like a horizontal meteorite. The abruptly \_smaller\_ Ardan dragon was body-checked clear across the town and floodplain, and impacted on a nearby mountain with Spike's paws still on his side.

\* \* \*

><p>"Let me make one thing very clear," Spike rumbled, his tone deceptively soft. "You <em>don't<em> hurt my friends."

Smaug made a funny wheezing sound, a little like a punctured accordion. This was probably because Spike was sitting on his torso.

"I meant everything I said before," Spike added. "I \_do \_think you're lonely, I \_do \_consider my friends to be the thing I most prize, and I \_didn't\_ want to kill you. I still don't," he said, contemplatively. "But you're certainly making it \_tempting.\_"

"I... surrender," Smaug gasped out. "My life and my hoard are yours. Do what you will."

Spike looked down at his erstwhile opponent. "I make you a gift of your life. Do not squander it."

"Why?" Smaug asked. "Why would you just..."

The purple dragon shifted, taking his weight off Smaug. Then he sighed. "Hay, I dunno. Maybe it's because you're kind of what I could have become."

Smaug looked blank.

"Way back in the baseline, I had this... breakdown, I guess, where I went mad with greed. Grew to a huge size â€" like this, but not controlled properly â€" and started to rampage. I didn't hurt anyone, not seriously, but that's more luck than anything... and Rarity pulled me out of it, in the end."

"Rarity..." Smaug repeated. "Is she the wife you spoke of?"

"Yeah, though she wasn't then. It took hundreds of years for us to start going out â€" we took it slowly, for good reason." Spike smiled briefly, then let it fall off his face. "Anyway, I kind of see you as what I might have been like without her to save me. Consumed by the desire for more wealth, more concerned with what you could get than what you already have..."

Air hissed through Smaug's nostrils.

"And desperately alone, as well. I read the book â€" you were the last of the dragons on Arda, weren't you?"

The red dragon nodded reluctantly. "I was indeed, after the death of Ancalagon the Black."

"And I bet you spent a lot of time with him next loop, didn't you?" Spike asked, earning an even more reluctant confirmation. "Besides, it's kind of a rule around here. No-one gets written off."

After a long moment of silence, Spike rolled fully upright. "Right. On the understanding that you don't try to kill anyone for the rest of the loop, I'm willing to return your hoard to your control. Further, if you will pledge to refrain from killing where not necessary, I will teach you how to carry objects between loops."

Smaug's eyes snapped up. "How to...?"

Spike nodded, concealing a smile. Gotcha. "I also request â€" not require â€" that you talk to a friend of mine, by the name of Fluttershy. She is a shapeshifter â€" a Druid, in Faerun parlance â€" and understands the workings of instincts. I think it would be helpful for you."

Another long pause. Then Smaug slammed a claw into the rubble. "Alright! I agree, curse you!"

Spike beamed. "Nice doing business with you."

\* \* \*

><p>"I see..." Fluttershy said, scribbling some notes down on her pad of paper. "Yes, I've seen that before in created metabiological <em>bauplans</em>. It's a classic case of imperfect construction of instinctual-sapience balance, which means your intellect is unable to properly balance the conflicting requirements of your baser wants and needs."

Smaug growled, two jets of smoke curling up from his nostrils.

"Don't take that tone with me!" Fluttershy admonished. "Or you won't get a lollipop after we're done. Now, as I was saying, this doesn't mean that you're inferior in any way. After all, it's hardly your fault, and this kind of problem is resolvable with a course of treatment."

The pegasus finished writing, and ripped a sheet of paper off the pad. "Right, that's my diagnosis for the physical side. Now, tell me about your mother."

"My mother? My mother was the very living rock of Arda itself, and when I and the other dragons were spun from the earth we left it base and dulled!"

Fluttershy nodded. "I see. And how does that make you feel?"

"Superior," Smaug stated bluntly.

"Right, let's start there..."

\* \* \*

><p>66.7<p>

"The main question before us," Commander Hurricane said pompously, "is to determine the structure of the military. For it is well known that the military is what truly forms the foundation of a state--"

"Tosh and drivel," Princess Platinum interrupted him. "After all, nobility is the only true continuity of a realm. Mares and stallions come and go, but the Duke of Black Rock will always be ruler of the Duchy of Black Rock."

"Everything's built on the land!" Puddinghead said, brightly. "If it wasn't, it'd just fall down!"

The other two leaders chuckled, but their aides took a closer look at Puddinghead. That had sounded altogether too obvious, but once you looked a bit deeper...

"Yes, well," Hurricane added kindly, shaking his head. "As I was saying, you can have military nobility, of course. It's a good way to ensure competent stallions in competent roles--"

Lieutenant Pansee coughed. "Sir, if you recall, the last hereditary

commander of the Pegasi was relieved from duty after he flew upside down into a mountain while drunk."

Hurricane looked back for a moment. "Well, it's easy enough to lose your way in a snowstorm--"

"It was a glorious cloudless day, sir."

"Yes, well." Hurricane sighed. "Alright, you've made your point."

\* \* \*

><p>"FINE!" Platinum shouted, cutting off the four hundred and twenty third repetition of a demand from Puddinghead for a proper electoral system. "You can have your damned parliament!"<p>

Puddinghead stopped talking, grinned, and started cheering.

"But only if you shut up!"

Puddinghead stopped cheering. Then she caught the eye of Smart Cookie, and winked ostentatiously. Neither of the other two rulers noticed.

"But who's going to get into parliament?" Hurricane asked. "I don't trust elections."

A bell rang.

The six founders stopped talking, and looked towards the front of the room. "How was that?"

"Excellent, thank you," Cheerilee said, as they all dropped their alternate forms and returned to being changelings. "It looks like it'll have to be a double period, but that's really getting the spirit of those discussions down."

Chrysalis spoke up from the back of the empty classroom. "It really helps when we can actually ask Pansy, Clover and Cookie about it. And yeah, acting's fun."

"You didn't actually do any of it, my queen," one changeling muttered.

"I'll pretend I didn't hear that," Chrysalis replied loudly. "Especially as I'm playing Celestia in the second part."

\* \* \*

><p>66.8<p>

"Okay, this time, tanks," Applebloom pronounced. "They're easier to fab, so we should be able to have the match next week. Oh -- and, remember, baseline World War Two tanks only!"

The other CMC members nodded. "Gotcha!"

\* \* \*

><p>Diamond Tiara climbed into her SU-100 SP gun. Not quite a tank,



technically, but close enough " and it fitted her preferences.  
(Besides, they hadn't let her have six T-34.)<p>

Then the ground started to shake.

\* \* \*

><p>"That is cheating!" Tiara shouted from the forward half of her tank. The back half had been completely crushed under-tread by something the size of a large whale.<p>

"What?" Applebloom asked, from her P-1000 \_Ratte.\_ "It's totally a WW2 vehicle."

"Which they never even bothered making because it's..." Tiara counted on her hooves for a moment. "One, stupid, two, impossible, and three, it couldn't move over the ground! Look, you're \_sinking\_, for acorn's sake!"

"Ah." Applebloom disappeared back into the hull. Something went clunk. "Ah, great, there goes the fourth engine today..."

There was a grinding roar, and the \_Ratte\_ began to move.  
Just.

"Can't it go any faster?" Tiara asked, giggling.

"Not with that many engines broken." Applebloom shrugged. "Couldnt'a ambushed you if ah hadn't had a hill to go down."

Something flew overhead.

"Now that, there," Applebloom added, pointing as the aircraft did a careful turn in the distance. "That there \_is\_ cheating. Hey, Scoots! Yer cheatin'!"

"No I'm not," Scootaloo protested over the radio. As she got closer, it became clear that it was indeed a tank.

Sort of. It did have enormous wings strapped to the side, and a buzzing propellor providing power.

"See," Scootaloo continued as she got closer again, "I heard of this thing called the M1932. So, yeah. Besides, it's not as silly as what Sweetie's got."

"I dread to think..." Diamond Tiara said absently.

Something surfaced in the waters of a nearby lake.

Applebloom sputtered. "That's just a submarine with tracks!"

The submarine in question trained its deck gun on them, and then fired a torpedo into the water.

"Whoops..." Sweetie said. "Wrong button."

Tiara and Applebloom dove back into their armour, as the (really very small) deck gun started plinking away at the side of the Ratte. Said Ratte had moved a full six feet since starting up.

"This is a farce, is what it is," Diamond Tiara opined. "Wait a sec. Where's Silver?"

WHAM.

\* \* \*

><p>Silverback chuckled, and wrapped her prehensile tail around the sighting equipment.<p>

Nobody had said she couldn't use a really big artillery piece...

\* \* \*

><p>66.9<p>

"Well," Twilight said, eventually. "That was a thing."

She joined the others in staring at her drink. Then, as though on a signal, the five mares drank.

"Sure was," Applejack concurred, as her brother came around and refilled their drinks. "Any idea where... she is?"

"She's in Sugarcube corner," Dash replied promptly. "Which is a good thing."

They stared at the drinks. They drank the drinks.

"If I ever meet , I think I might give her a good slap," Rarity mused.

Fluttershy winced. "Her. And, well, it's not really her fault," she said, as Mac topped up their drinks.

"Okay, where th' hell were you?" he asked, sitting down next to them with a glass of water. "Ain't seen you like this in a good while, sis."

"Ever read a book called Five Children and It?" Twilight inquired. When Mac shook his head, Twilight continued. "It is a sand-fairy that can grant wishes â€" well, in the book, at least. And we were the Five Children."

Mac blanched.

"Yep," Applejack confirmed. "Pinkie was It."

"It was how she treated it as a game of wish tag," Dash muttered, then took another long swig. "Especially 'cause she was always It by definition."

\* \* \*

><p>66.10 (Masterweaver) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Right, so..." Takua brought his hands together. "Most of you who are... replacing?" He shot a questioning glance to Spikama and received a confirming nod. "Replacing the turaga already know some of this. But... well, there was a great and terrible war, and a world was shattered into fragments. The Great Beings built Mata Nui to help fix the world - and spend a hundred thousand years exploring the galaxy to observe other societies and figure out how to keep the thing from happening again. But the smaller beings that the Great Beings built to maintain Mata Nui... they gained sapience somewhere along the way and one of them - Makuta Teridax - decided he wanted to take over. So just as Mata Nui was getting back, Teridax knocked him out and set a few things in motion, which also resulted in us Matoran ending up here and amnesiac."<p>

"Whoa." Leinbow'dash rubbed the back of her head. "No pressure, huh?"

Poplejack crossed her arms. "So, what exactly is the plan here?"

"Well... Mata Nui is, technically, dying. So we've got to get a willing volunteer to go a few kio south to a dangerous island, find their way through chambers that will test their worthiness, claim the mask of life, head straight down through the pit - filled with sea monsters and former warlords - and into Karda Nui proper, and..." The matoran took a hiss of breath. "...willingly put on the mask so it sucks out their life force to stabilize Mata Nui."

The gathered toa, turaga, and matoran stared at him.

"...what," Scowkii finally managed.

"It can't be any of these toa," Takua added, pointing at the six tall warriors, "because they're needed elsewhere. And it can't be me because the last time I did it I ended up in some place where I was completely organic and had these... creatures constantly wanting me to..." He shuddered. "Why can't organic creatures be built like normal?"

Talight winced in sympathy. "Yeah... I can see how that would be traumatizing, especially for you. Especially as your first fused loop. Future reference, you're the Anchor, don't get yourself killed."

"Right." Takua nodded. "Um... usually it's Matoro who... dies. But it could be anyone."

"Does it need to be one of us?" Tialer asked quickly. "Or can it just be a big source of life energy?"

"I... don't know, actually."

"Right. Apple Bloom, you're going to build us a boat and when we get to Karda Nui, you, me, and Silver will be growing the biggest tree possible."

"Got it."

The local anchor blinked in surprise. "You three have the power of the green?"

"It's an aspect of our native loop," Spoohli explained.

"...Right. Um. Be prepared to transform into Toa on the way. That tends to happen. Also you should take Bloomparu, Scowkii, and Nyngu with you too. And if you run into Velika, tell him not to activate Marender." He shook his head. "Anyway. So, you six toa will find a list of things to do to prepare to wake Mata Nui up. After... whatever life force thing happens, you need to find stones to unlock a chamber in Karda Nui and convince the Mask of Life to insert itself into a generator. It's alive but... very immature. Oh, also, avoid the Makuta and try to evacuate Karda Nui as quickly as you can."

The toa of air crossed her arms. "And where will you be during all this?"

"I'll head downstairs and get the mask of light. Oh, I should have mentioned this earlier, sorry. I'm going to become the toa of light and ask you six to help me imprison Teridax; you have point all your elemental powers at him at once. Then you'll need to get the matoran back down to Metru Nui quickly while I try to hold his mind inside his body, because he... can telepathically project himself, and if he does that while Mata Nui is waking up he can take over Mata Nui's body -"

Spikama sighed. "I've had telepathic training. We should have the turaga help keep him mentally imprisoned."

"Right. Anyway, after Mata Nui wakes up, he'll fix the shattered world and then we can all get out. But we'll have to deal with the natives..."

\* \* \*

><p>66.11 (Drachefly) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Captain Zelnick ran his fingers over the command chair's arm-rest as he debated what argument he'd try this time. The Zoq-Fot-Pik were remarkably hard to minimize the losses of. In twenty loops, he'd only once managed to get them to completely cancel their near-suicidal scouting missions deep into the heart of the Ur-Quan Doctrinal War, and he wasn't entirely sure how he'd done it then. It was easier to get the Utwig to stay put, and they had a mechanical oracle telling them to go.<p>

With a deep breath, he opened the channel. "Helllllllwhat."

With a smile, the white unicorn at the left gave her violet mane a toss and said, "I take it you're looping."

The pink pony at the right gave a broad smile and screamed, "Woo! Humans! I knew we'd get humans sooner or later! Ni-ice ship! For this universe, anyway."

Zelnick blinked.

"Sir?", lieutenant Fenson asked. "What's wrong?" The rest of the bridge crew was even more nervous, but keeping quiet - up until now,

the captain had been preternaturally confident and effective in dealing with aliens.

The question helped reset Zelnick. He got up out of his seat and closed in on the main viewscreen as if it would actually help him see them more clearly. "Uh. Right. I'm Captain Zelnick of the New Alliance of Free Stars. We, uh... I'm sorry, who ARE you?"

The one at the right blurted, "Pikkie Pie, but you can call me Pinkie!"

At the left, "I am Rarity, a..." she paused, amused "'Zoq'. Which is a fancy way of saying 'unicorn', it seems."

The middle one said, "I'm Fottershy..."

Zelnick staggered. "You TALK?"

"... I'm sorry? I messed that up, didn't I? I'll be quiet now."

The other two swarmed in on her, Rarity making soothing sounds. "Oh, Fluttershy, he doesn't mean you shouldn't. He was just... impressed!"

Pinkie turned and came in close to the camera. "You're making Fluttershy cry. And do you know what we do with people who make Fluttershy cry?"

Zelnick sat down hard in the seat. "Allow them to apologize and start over?"

Pinkie thought for a moment. "Hmm. I was thinking 'antimatter confetti', but yours is better."

Zelnick sighed in relief, and stared at the quivering pegasus. "I'm sorry? I just..." he trailed off. No good explanation for this came to mind.

Pinkie interrupted, "You had this vivid dream where you were in a time loop and everything was always the same and you knew ahead of time what would happen and you could learn what worked and didn't work, and you were getting really good at it, and then we showed up instead of the Zoq-Fot-Pik and it was like Hello-what?"

Zelnick was about to concur when Pinkie amended, "Actually, it was more of a Hellllllllwhat?"

"Ahem. Yes, that pretty much sums it up." He held up a finger to put off the bridge crew's urgent questions, and turned back to the aliens. "So... who are you and where are you from?"

Rarity replied, "Why don't you come down, or we come up, and we'll have a nice long chat about that?"

"As soon as I've explained to my crew, yes."

\* \* \*

><p>"... so I should start the ThraddashIlwrath war as soon as possible, and the Yehat civil war as late as possible?" Rarity took

down notes. "Are you sure those are necessary?"

"Well, you can do without the Yehat, but in the long run, it would save lives to start it. I suspect the best timing is to let it run for only three or four weeks. Nothing big happens by then, usually. And for the others... maybe you can manage to convince the Ilwrath to pick on the Kohr-Ah, but I usually can't. I actually lost twice, trying. And then we all die."

"I... see. Well, I'll get this distributed. If anyone I know ends up looping into your role, this will be very handy."

Zelnick sighed. "This exchange would be a lot more useful for me if I had a pocket like you do."

Fluttershy allowed, "That would be... nice."

\* \* \*

><p>Zelnick opened the channel, more hopeful about meeting Talana than ever before. Some day, she could actually remember him.<p>

His hopes came crashing down. The woman on the screen was definitely Talana, all right. But... "Fllrgl!"

Taluna shifted her wings. "I'm impressed. That's even less coherent than the average first utterance by a human captain on making contact with Syreen."

\* \* \*

><p>66.1: Five are ponies now.<br>66.2: The salient power of Loyalty.

>66.3: I agree with Twilight.<br>66.4: She didn't get much sleep last loop.

>66.5: Jinkies.<br>66.6: Smaug is a bit full of himself. Spike, by contrast, is a shapeshifting jedi master. (Also, bauplan is the technical term for body plan.)

>66.7: Changeling educational services. Reenacting any historical event, as accurately as possible.<br>66.8: Diamond wins, she's the only one who even paid lip service to the actual rules. (And yes, most of these were actual ideas either built or considered.)

>66.9: Five foals And Her. (Presumably they later encountered a carpet and Spike the Phoenix.)<br>66.10: More Ponicle.

>66.11: Star Control.<p>

## 71. Chapter 71

### 67.1 (Midnight Crescent)

\* \* \*

><p><span>Twilight the underdog, part 2<span>

Twilight leant her head against the train's window, the slow rattle of the carriage lulling her to sleep. However, not long after she finally drifted off, the train jolted to a stop, bringing her nap to an unexpected end.

A voice drifted in over the tannoy "This train has now arrived in Domino City. Please ensure you have all belongings with you if departing here."

"C'mon, this is us." Tristan said, throwing his jacket over his shoulder "Thanks for letting me tag along, by the way."

"No problem. I needed a guide anyway." Twilight replied, with a small smile. She stood from her seat, and followed Tristan on to the platform

\* \* \*

><p>Serenity Nyx Wheeler lay in her bed, trying to get her blurry vision to focus. After failing for what felt like the hundredth time since she Awoke, she turned over and buried her head in a pillow.<p>

\_Alright, I can't use my magic and I'm practically blind. Chlorophyll, this world sucks.\_ She thought to herself, when there was a knock at the door. Before she could even give an answer, a nurse had walked into the room.

"Hello Serenity, how are you feeling today?" She asked cheerfully.

"Fine, thank you." Nyx flipped over once again, and flashed the nurse her best fake smile.

"That's good. Now, are you ready for your tests?" The nurse asked, still smiling. Nyx sighed. Her loop memories had shown her what she could expect, and she was not looking forward to it. She nodded, and the nurse wheeled over the equipment. "Let's get started then."

Almost an hour later, Nyx flopped back on her bed, exhausted and bored out of her skull. The testing equipment loomed in the corner once more, as the nurse made her exit.

"Thank you, Serenity. I'll check in on you later." The nurse said, the gentle words seeming more like a threat.

Alone again, Nyx just lay there, wishing for her magic, her eyes to get better, or just for something, \_anything\_ to happen.

But most of all, she wished her momma was there.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight's fingers tapped on the armrest beside her as she waited for the cab to make any more headway through the city streets.<p>

"I forgot how bad traffic can be... How much longer do you think we'll be?" Twilight asked Tristan, after another ten minutes without any progress.

"Well, it is rush hour in the city centre, it's always bad." Tristan shrugged his shoulders "Actually, come to think of it, this isn't that bad, all things considered."

Twilight's eyes widened at the prospect that it could actually get worse than it already was.

"How far from the Hospital are we?" She asked, fumbling around in her pockets.

"Not much more than a mile now." He said, watching her actions curiously. "Why?"

"Alright." She turned to address the driver. "That's close enough." She handed over a bundle of notes. "Keep the change."

Twilight climbed out the door, and weaved through the traffic to the sidewalk.

Tristan followed a few seconds later, "Hey, slow down. I get you're desperate to get there, but rushing off without me isn't actually going to help..."

"I know, I just don't want to leave her alone like this any longer. Now, which way."

"This way." Tristan said, turning down the intersection, before waiting for Twilight to follow him.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight waited at the Hospital reception, her arms crossed. Tristan looked around the room anxiously, before dragging her over to an empty group of chairs.<p>

"Alright, something's bothering you. What's wrong?"

"He never visited her, Tristan. The nurse wants to see me, to talk about 'Serenity's condition.' She wouldn't have needed to do that if Joey had ever been here before."

Tristan took a deep breath. "OK, you're right. Joey doesn't visit Serenity that often. You know why?"

Twilight shook her head.

"Their parents have split custody. Serenity lives with their mother, and Joey with their father. "

"Well, I saw the loop memories. I know that..."

"And how much else did you get from them?"

"I... I guess I kinda skipped over that part." Twilight looked sheepish.

"Their father is an alcoholic and a gambler, and their mother is a nurse at this hospital. Now, you've taken Joey's place this time. So, who ended up with who?"

Twilight stayed silent.

"Starting to see why Joey didn't visit her?"



"Yeah, a little."

A small cough came from behind Twilight. The pair turned to look at the source, one of the Hospital nurses.

"Miss Wheeler, I'm your sister's nurse. I've been told to update you on your sister's condition. Now, we have managed to diagnose your sister's illness. I'm afraid it's not good news..."

Tristan turned away at that point. Twilight nodded.

"We've diagnosed her with Retinitis Pigmentosa, which means that th...

"The photoreceptor cells in her eyes have deteriorated. And now her Retinal Pigment Epithelium is becoming mottled."

The nurse and Tristan both stood with their jaws agape. Twilight looked around at the pair, before hurriedly trying to back out of her comment.

"Uhh... I started reading up on what it could be when she got admitted?"

The nurse took a few seconds before she could reply. "Just... Just go see your sister. I... I need to take a break..." The nurse walked off down one of the hallways, muttering to herself.

Once they were alone again, Twilight turned to Tristan. "I guess I need to be a little more careful about that stuff, huh?"

"What, talking about rare medical diseases to a level as high as the experts? No, I don't see how that could cause any problems."

"Yeah, yeah, I get it. Jeez." Twilight said as they knocked on Serenity's door. Seeing the puzzled look Tristan was giving her, Twilight paused in the doorway. "What?"

"... No, it's nothing. Ignore me." Tristan said after a few seconds.

"O...K..." Twilight said, walking into the room.

\* \* \*

><p>Nyx woke from her nap as someone knocked on her door. There were voices outside her door, and then two people walked in.<p>

Before she could even ask who was there, she felt two arms embrace her. "It's me, Nyx. I'm here."

Nyx felt tears begin to fall down her face as she returned Twilight's hug. When she did speak, it was barely a whisper. "I missed you Momma."

"I missed you too, Nyxie." Twilight broke away from Nyx, and sat down next to the bed. "So, how long have you been Awake?"

"Just a few days. And so far, this loop is awful. I can't use any

magic. The only person who've been to see me are nurses. And they only want to run tests. Are you here to get me out?"

"I'm really sorry about that, Nyx, but you need to stay here for a while yet. I promise, I'm doing what I can, but I need you to wait here until then."

"But it's boring here."

"Nyx..."

"Do you mind if I talk to her?" Tristan said from the back of the room.

"Umm, Ok." Twilight said, slightly puzzled.

"Nyx, I'm Tristan. I'm a friend of the people you and Twilight are replacing. I know you're eyes are bad, and the tests are annoying..."

Nyx nodded her agreement.

"...But they know what's wrong with you now. And, if you stay here a little longer, they'll know how to fix it. But there's a catch."

"What?" Nyx asked.

"It's going to cost a lot of money. Money I'm guessing you don't have..."

Nyx shook her head. "I don't loop often enough to get an allowance..." She folded her arms, and huffed.

Tristan raised an eyebrow, and looked at Twilight, who just mouthed "Don't ask."

"Well, don't worry about that, because Twilight is going to win you the money in a Duel Monsters tournament."

"She is?"

It was Twilight's turn to stare at Tristan. He motioned with his arms towards the beaming Nyx.

"Of course I am." Twilight said, although her voice didn't suggest she had the greatest of confidence.

"And, as an added bonus, I can even stay with you, and let you know how well she's doing. Would you like that?"

"Sure!" Nyx said, looking overjoyed at the idea of having anyone other than the nurses around.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, what's the plan Yugi?" Tea asked as the pair sat down for lunch.<p>

"Well, we need to lure Kaiba to the Game Store. I think if I just

duel you instead of Joey, then that can be done as usual. You still have your old deck, right?"

"Yeah, bu..."

"OK, so that's part one. This time, I want to try and just duel him for the Blue Eyes, see if we can stop it getting torn up."

"That's fine Yugi, b..."

"After that, Pegasus will probably either duel me or invite me to the tournament. I can just accept the invitation, or add a stipulation of my own. Either way, I should be able to get Twilight and myself accepted."

"Yugi, as good as that sounds, I was actually asking if you think we should wait until they get back to kick things off..."

"Oh..." Yugi blushed, before thinking for a few seconds. "Actually, I think we should do this without her if we can. Letting her see an early baseline Kaiba isn't really fair on him."

Tea nodded in agreement. "Alright. Hey look! Here he comes!"

"Alright, let's get set up quick." Yugi pulled out his deck, and placed it on the table. "And draw!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight, Nyx and Tristan talked for a while, before a nurse poked her head in the door. "Visiting times are ending in five minutes."<p>

Twilight hugged Nyx one more time. "You be nice to the nurses, Serenity." Twilight stressed the name, making sure Nyx understood.

"Good luck, Josie."

"I'll see you for the first day of Duellist Kingdom, Serenity." Tristan said, catching himself before he started waving to the blind girl.

"OK!"

Tristan and Twilight walked out of the room. When they were a decent distance from the room, Twilight turned to Tristan, a look of frustration on her face.

"What was that in there?"

"Huh? I don't know what you're talking about..."

"There is no cure for her condition. Why would you lie about that?"

Tristan shook his head. "I wasn't lying. Trust me, you'll get a phone call or something in a day or two about it. It's practically one of the constants in the loop. Her condition varies, but they always find

a cure. Just as the price of the cost varies, the DK prize money moves to match it too."

Twilight sighed. "Alright, I'll believe you. But why offer to stay behind?"

"Ahh... I've been planning to do that for a few loops now. This just happens to be the perfect loop to do it. Remember, I've seen this movie, and in Duellist Kingdom, I get to give Joey a card that would never fit in your deck, and throw something into a forest that will just warp back to the person who had it during the next tournament anyway. You won't lose anything by me staying behind, and I can keep Nyx company at the same time too."

Twilight thought over that for a few seconds. "You know, you really remind me of someone..."

"Is that a good or bad thing."

"Not tellin' ya." Twilight said, before looking at the strange glance Tristan was giving her. "OK, that's twice you've been giving me those funny looks. What is it?"

"It's just, that's twice you've started talking like Joey." Twilight stared at Tristan, who sighed. "Look, it's been twice in a week. I'm willing to call it a coincidence for now, and it's probably nothing important anyway. If it starts to happen more often, we can just ask Yugi and Yami about it. They might know something more about this sort of thing."

"Alright, now let's get back."

"Sure. And if we're fast enough, we might even get to watch Yami and Kaiba's duel."

"Right!"

The pair climbed into a cab, and set off towards Domino Station.

\* \* \*

><p>Yugi made a big pretence of showing Tea around the card section of his grandpa's store.<p>

"What are we doing, Yugi?" Tea whispered when Solomon became distracted by an actual customer.

"We're stalling for time. Kaiba won't be here for another minute or two, and Grandpa won't keep the Blue Eyes out very long."

The store emptied almost as soon as Yugi finished talking. Yugi looked around, and nodded to Tea. She took out two cards from her actual deck, and walked over to Solomon.

"Mr. Muto. Could you let me look at your really rare card one more time?"

"Now Tea, why would you ever need to see it again?"

"I found some new cards, and I want to see how good they really are."

If they're anywhere close to yours, then they'll be great."

"I don't know..."

Tea sighed inwardly, before flashing Solomon the biggest puppy dog eyes she could.

"...But how could I say no to you?"

Just as Solomon unlocked the cabinet, and withdrew his Blue Eyes, the store's bell rung. Turning around, Yugi saw it was indeed Seto Kaiba.

\_Just in time...\_ Yugi thought, turning back to his Grandpa, who was now halfway through his all too familiar spiel.

"...Has one, I obviously have this one, and the world's number one duellist has done amazingly well to have collected the other three."

Yugi frowned. Something seemed off, and it took him a moment to figure it out.

\_Wait, that makes five. Yami, there's only ever been four before, right?\_

\_Yes, that is a new change.\_ Atem responded. \_I wonder who has the fifth...\_

A quick glance confirmed that Tea had noticed the change too, but before they could question Solomon about that revelation, Kaiba had burst between the pair. His attempts to buy Solomon's card went about as well as usual.

\_Alright, it's now or never\_. Yugi told Yami in their shared mind. \_You're up.\_

"I have a proposition." Yami said, his signature smirk on his face. "Perhaps we could duel for the card?"

Kaiba laughed before answering. "You? Duel \_me\_!? I don't know who's more senile €" you or the old man. I'm the world's number one duellist. What makes you think you'd last more than three turns?"

"Nothing. But, if you're so confident you'd win, then shouldn't this be an easy decision for you to make?"

Solomon grabbed Yami by one of his shoulders and wheeled him round to face him. "Yugi, you can't go betting with cards that don't belong to you! Especially not when they're my cards!"

"Grandpa, don't you trust me?"

Solomon sighed, and shook his head.

"It's not about trust, Yugi..."

"As touching as this sounds..." Kaiba interrupted "If I was actually interested in seeing this, I'd have stayed home and watched cable. If

you're serious about duelling for the card, then come to the Kaiba Corp Building by 6:30 tonight. If not, well, I \_will\_ get what I want."

Kaiba left the store, and an uneasy silence descended.

After a minute or two, Solomon spoke up. "Yugi..."

"Yes, Grandpa?" Yami responded.

"You've bet my prized possession on a duel you have very little chance of winning, and you did it without my permission. I hope you can understand why I'm disappointed in you."

"Yes, Grandpa."

\_So much for that plan... \_Yugi told Yami.

\_It was a sound plan, Yugi. We just need to execute it differently.\_

Yugi switched back just as his Grandpa asked a question.

"Sorry, could you repeat that, Grandpa?"

"I asked if you thought that boy believed in the heart of the cards."

"I wouldn't think so..."

"Hmmm..." Solomon stood in contemplation for a few seconds, before handing Yugi his Blue Eyes. "Here. Make that boy respect the Heart of the cards."

Yugi was stunned for a few seconds, before he finally responded. "You got it, Grandpa!"

I \_think the only reason he did that is because Kaiba called him senile...\_. Yami quipped.

\_You're probably right...\_ Yugi responded, still staring at the card. \_But that's not important right now. We have a duel to 'prepare' for.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Tristan looked down at his watch as he and Twilight raced into the Kaiba Corp Building. It told him that it was 7:00.<p>

"Did we make it in time?" Twilight asked, breathing deeply after the run from the train station.

"Well, they usually start around seven." Tristan replied, before noticing the tall man walking towards them. "I think we're about to find out."

"Mr. Taylor, Miss Wheeler?" The man asked as he approached.

"Yeah, that's us."

"My name is Roland. Mr. Muto mentioned that you may be delayed. I've been instructed by Mr. Kaiba to escort you to the duelling arena upon your arrival. Their duel should have  
>just begun. Please, follow me."<p>

"Well, at least we won't miss the end, I guess." Tristan said, as the three of them entered an elevator. Roland pressed a couple of buttons, and the doors slid shut.

\* \* \*

><p>Yami watched as his swords of revealing light wore off, leaving Kaiba's three Blue Eyes free to attack once more. Looking at the Life Point readout, Kaiba smiled.<p>

While he was still on 1100 Life Points, Yami's had slipped to a measly 50. Granted, he'd taken more damage than he'd expected, but he was still one attack from defeating Yami, and claiming his fourth Blue Eyes.

"This duel is over, Yugi. None of your pathetic monsters could hope to stand up to the onslaught of one Blue Eyes White Dragon, let alone three." Kaiba said.

The door to the arena opened, and Kaiba's smile widened as Twilight, Tristan and Roland walked in.

"Perfect! Now your friends will get to witness your defeat as well." Kaiba turned to face Yami, and finally noticed something wasn't right. Despite the situation, Yugi was laughing. "Did I say something funny, or did you just finally snap?"

"Kaiba, you asked about my 'Pathetic Monsters', and I just couldn't help myself. My deck has no pathetic monsters. But it does contain a dragon slayer."

Kaiba's smile turned into a look of confusion. "A dragon slayer?"

Yami's smirk returned, as he summoned his final monster. "Go, Buster Blader!"

Kaiba's face went pale as the hologram appeared on the field. "Buster Blader!? That's not possible! How did you get that card?"

Yami stared across at Kaiba. "I live at my Grandpa's game store, Kaiba. He's a former Regional Champion. A man who had one of the Blue Eyes White Dragons. Did you honestly think I wouldn't have planned for your ace? Now, you seem to know a lot about my card. Tell me, with your three Blue Eyes on the field, how much stronger will he become?"

He did the math in his head, and he dropped his cards at the result. "4100 attack points... No, it can't be..."

"Yes Kaiba, it can. Strong enough to slay your dragon, and wipe out your life points. You were right Kaiba, this duel is over. Buster Blader, attack."

Kaiba collapsed to his knees as his lifepoints plummeted to 0. "How?

How could I lose to an amateur?"

\_Should we give him the same speech as always, Yugi?\_

\_Nah. Let's just leave him be, and see what happens.\_

\_Alright, Yugi. I just hope you know what you're doing.\_

Atem and Yugi switched places, and Yugi climbed down from the arena.

"Well done, Yugi." Tea said, as Tristan and Twilight walked over from the other side of the arena.

"Knew you could do it." Tristan said, before lowering his voice so only the group could hear. "Seriously, do you ever actually lose that duel?"

"Only when I'm trying." Yugi replied just as quietly.

"So..." Twilight said, watching as a few Kaiba Corp employees carried Kaiba away from the other end of the arena. "What do you guys usually do now?"

"Well, wait around for Pegasus to get in touch, mostly."

"I meant more about how you pass the time until then..."

Yugi just stared at her for a few seconds, before he held up his deck in response.

Twilight's mouth hung open briefly. "I shouldn't have even asked, should I?"

\* \* \*

><p>67.2 (Ranma-sensei) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, tell me..." Twilight began, massaging her forehead, "How this is even possible."<p>

"I don't know." Diamond Tiara gave an awkward shrug. "I did everything I could, but somehow..." She gestured with her chin toward the bookshelves, which were covered in apple juice.

"We're sorry, Twilight." Applebloom shrank back.

"We- We just wanted ta be... recognized." Scootaloo scuffed her front left hoof on the floor.

Tiara almost popped a vein. "And so you decided to parade your friendship to \_Princess Twilight AROUND \_\_\*\*FOR ALL TO SEE\*\*\_!?"

"We said we're sorry." Sweetie Belle's ears dropped low in shame.

Twilight decided to step in before Diamond could explode: "Listen, girls; I know you didn't mean any harm, but wasn't it good enough to



just be friends with DT? No, don't answer that. Tell you what." She waved her hoof across the library, "Fix up this mess and we'll never talk of it again."

"Yay, thank you, Twilight!"

Watching the Cutie Mark Crusaders scamper off, Diamond Tiara gave a long-suffering sigh. "And they say unawake \_me\_ is a hoofful."

Twilight just nodded in agreement.

\* \* \*

><p>67.3 (LordCirce) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that didn't work."<p>

Twilight Awoke with a pounding headache. As her vision cleared, blearily, she took in the remnants of a chalk line that was drawn around her, and saw Spike staring at her, looking a little worried. She blinked as the memories of what she had been trying to accomplish swept over her, and immediately cast a suite of inverted detection spells. There was some temporal scarring around her, but it appeared to have dissipated, likely due to the psychosomatic temporal shift that occurred upon Awakening. The Loops didn't play nicely with most other time manipulation spells.

Bringing her focus back to Spike, she caught the tail end of what he was saying. "...for the second time?" She quickly parsed back through what he had said to her that she had been half-listening to.

"No, it doesn't seem to have had much of aaah my gosh, I know where I am." Twilight finally matched up the variant formula with her knowledge of fiction from the Hub. This was from that time loop story about Equestria that she had studied, back when she was trying to determine if there was a method for breaking free of the Loops. (She decided not to think about it â€" it would only give her a headache.) Which meant...

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight appeared in the middle of Celestia's bedroom, having slid between the anti-teleportation barriers, and landed on a small table that was set up with a tea service. She stumbled, knocking over the teapot, before catching herself, extending her wings slightly. She had Ascended to get the power necessary for slipping through the spellwork. Celestia and Chrysalis, both very obviously Awake, looked up from the tea cups that they had been chatting over. Twilight took in the scene, before chuckling nervously.<p>

"I guess I'm not needed to tip the scales?"

Celestia smiled. "No, it is quite alright. Chryssie has called off the swarm and we were just discussing how we could try and integrate them in this Loop when you decided to join us. Would you like a cup?" Celestia levitated a cup of tea in front of Twilight, having righted the teapot and fixed the china Twilight had smashed in her impromptu

entrance.

"Ah, yes, thank you." Twilight carefully took the cup and stepped lightly down off the table. She turned to glance at Chrysalis, who had her mouth open and was experimentally running her tongue over sharpened teeth.

"I have venom sacs this Loop."

Twilight chuckled, before pausing. "I have to check on the Elements!" And with a flash, she vanished. Celestia caught the cup before it could hit the floor.

"Always in a hurry. Now, Chryssie, my memories tell me that the area where Las Pegasus usually sits is vacant, so we can probably establish your primary settlement there. What jobs do you think..."

\* \* \*

><p>67.4 (LordCirce) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stared, wide-eyed, at the scene before her. She should have known something was up when the Changeling Federation had replaced the Griffon Empire in what was otherwise a baseline Loop, but she hadn't put two and two together.<p>

It was Shining and Cadence's wedding, and it had appeared to be going smoothly. Chrysalis had shown up, Unawake, but as a guest, and she had brought several of the changelings. She had profusely thanked Cadence and Celestia for the invitation, saying that weddings were true feasts for Changelings. The wedding had progressed up until the point when they were to take their vows, then everything had gone sideways.

A massive Griffon has burst into the hall, shouting his objections to the marriage. Twilight had been ready to jump in when Cadence ran forward, shouting "Rikard!" After that, the whole story came out. Apparently, when Cadence was young in this Loop, she had befriended Rikard. She had only viewed him as friends, but he had felt something more. Eventually, they parted, but, when word reached him at the Wandering Flock (this Loops home of the Griffons) that Cadence was getting married, he had rushed here.

Now, he and Shining were fighting an honor duel over Cadence's hand. Rikard roared as he leapt at Shining, only for Shining to spin and prove that Earth Ponies didn't have a monopoly on bucking. A sphere of magic came as a follow-up, but Rikard slid underneath, swiping at Shining's legs. Shining leapt back and threw up a barrier, which Rikard immediately began pounding away on.

Slowly, Twilight made her way around the room to where Cadence was crouching, trembling. Twilight reached out to comfort Cadence, when suddenly Cadence turned her head, revealing a wide grin.

"Isn't it so romantic?" She squealed lightly, with a gleam in her eye that Twilight wasn't used to seeing there, not when she wasn't Awake and on a Love Spree, anyway. Slowly, Twilight just nodded and backed

away, as Cadence turned back just in time to see Shining sidestep a charge and send Rikard charging into the wedding cake.

\* \* \*

><p>67.5 (Masterweaver) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So, are the venom sacs a common thing?" Trixie asked. "Or is it just loop random?"<p>

Chrysalis shrugged. "It comes and goes. Usually it's a sedative, sometimes it's nuerotoxic, and what the hay are you drinking?"

The unicorn blushed. "Ah... you know how some aspects of, um, biology vary from loop to loop?"

"We were just discussing that, yes."

"Weeeeeeeell, Twilight made this brew for loops like this one where... aheh... let's just say if I didn't drink this, next week would be very energetic for the both of us."

"...meh, it's your decision." The changeling shrugged. "I don't care either way. Why's it black, though?"

Trixie's face scrunched up. "I don't know. And it tastes horrible too... well, bottoms up."

\* \* \*

><p>67.6 (elmagnifico) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>When Applebloom had first found out he was looping, she'd talked about abilities, and how loopers tended to wind up in the craziest situations. He'd told her about how he didn't need fancy unicorn princess powers.<p>

\_Macintosh watched the scene, like he had umpteen times before. Twilight was either playing her role or not Awake. It was his turn.\_

Most loopers hadn't seen his abilities. Largely because the grand majority of them were invisible. Ways of watching, listening and perceiving, which he'd picked up from detectives, leaders and psychologists. All to the point of helping others.

"\_The night will last forever!\_"\_

He'd acquired some combat training in the guard, and when he was clandestinely gathering skills, before he knew Eternal Twilight was not something he'd have to take down some day. Nothing earth-shattering. Until that one loop.

"\_Eenope."\_

Not that one loop with Twilight. A different one. He looped into a

scientist, whose baseline started as a mild-mannered individual, and wound up an emotion-bound behemoth.

"\_Insolence!"\_

The bomb, however, was just what made the change so dramatic. The emotion, drawn into physical strength, was where the power came from.

\_He could hear the retaliatory strike charging.\_

Such a channel was exactly what he brought back from that loop.

\_Those watching him, and knew what to look for, would notice his eyes had gone a different shade of green.\_

Eternal night would mean no crops.

\_Breathe in, breathe out.\_

Crops were important, but it was the ponies that they fed that made them important.

\_The bolt of solid darkness crashed into his face.\_

Without food they'd die.

\_He could feel it pulling, trying to rend him limb from limb for his impudence.\_

If he didn't stop her, they'd die.

\_So he pulled right back, holding himself together, quite literally.\_

He wasn't angry per say, just determined.

\_The astonishment of those around him was practically palpable.\_

Eternal night must not happen.

\_He took a step, approaching the nightmare.\_

Eternal night would not happen.

\_A second bolt struck, and he grunted. Another step.\_

The others he had time for.

\_Another step, another hit. Closer.\_

He could do things his way.

\_He could feel his individual components crying out for release, to fly apart. He told them to hold firm. Closer.\_

With Nightmare Moon though, he had but twenty-four hours from loop start to work with.

\_Close enough.\_

So a more direct method was required.

\_As he neared her, he reached back with his right front hoof, and brought it around like a steam hammer.\_

Mac smash.

\* \* \*

><p>67.7 (Kris Overstreet) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Girls... I didn't expect you to bring company." Oh, yes she did. This was Twilight's fourth baseline time through these events, and she had them pretty well down pat now.<p>

"Ohhh! You live in a house full of books?" Diamond Tiara gushed.

"Yes, it's a lib-"

"What a bold design choice!"

"You should SO do that, Di!" Silver Spoon nodded.

"I know, right?" Diamond Tiara grinned back at her yes-pony.

"Well... come in," Twilight said, leading the fillies into the common room.

"Wow, so a princess lives here!" Diamond Tiara gasped.

Twilight ground her teeth. UnAwake Diamond Tiara was a pill, and she was quite tired of swallowing this particular prescription.

"Well, since we have guests," she said brightly, "I think it's only fair that I begin with them. You girls can practice a bit while I focus on the newcomers, right?" In the baseline she'd kept her focus on the girls she actually wanted to teach and pretty much ignored the interlopers. That had not worked well at all. Maybe eventually it led to the lesson that you shouldn't use your friendships with important people to seem important, but the Cutie Mark Crusaders had been around Twilight and the other Elements of Harmony for years now without ever even thinking about trading on their relationships.

And they almost certainly would have gone on not thinking about that if Diamond Tiara hadn't interfered.

That smiling, gleeful, social-climbing filly was under her gaze now. Pity she and her yes-pony didn't realize that gaze had metaphorical crosshairs.

"So," Twilight smiled, "what would you like help learning about?"

"Oh, I just wanted to spend time with you, Princess!" Diamond Tiara smiled. "It's so wonderful to have a genuine princess in Ponyville!"

"Well, I'm afraid you don't get to spend time with me unless you're learning something," Twilight said. "I hear you're an excellent acrobat. Why don't you show me what you can do?"

Diamond Tiara's grin vanished. "Er... well, actually, I've been feeling a little ill lately, so my butler-"

"Ah! Then I know exactly the thing!" Twilight levitated a book off a shelf and set it down in front of the spoiled earth pony. "\_Get Better By Getting Fit!\_ Written by the leader of the Wonderbolts herself, Spitfire!"

Diamond Tiara looked at the book, which was as thick as her foreleg. She opened it and read: "'Chapter One: You have already taken the first step to better health by lifting this twenty pound book. Now do it twenty more times.'"

"Er, what will we be doing, then, Princess?" Silver Spoon asked.

"Oh, I'm sure you two can share!" Twilight beamed. "I'm told you two do everything together, and I certainly wouldn't want to break the two of you up!"

Diamond Tiara's eyes now looked frantically at the door. "Princess, could you possibly help me with this? I can't possibly lift this book by myself..."

"Oh, I wouldn't be a good teacher if I did everything for my students," Twilight grinned. "Besides, I know a couple of ponies who are much more qualified than I am to teach athletic fitness. They're top athletes in Ponyville's Equestria Games team!" She stomped a forehoof three times on the wooden floor.

Two pegasi burst out of Twilight's bedroom where they'd been waiting, both wearing caps and whistles on strings. "So, these the two acrobats you were talking about, Twi?" Rainbow Dash grinned. "I gotta say, they look a little soft to me!"

"Oh, I'm sure they'll do just fine," Fluttershy murmured.

"Eh, we'll see!" Rainbow Dash picked up the book and dropped it on Diamond Tiara's back. The filly struggled to remain standing. "That's what I thought! Soft and weak! But don't worry, we can fix that!" She put her whistle to her lips. "Five laps around Ponyville should put some spring in your step!" She blew, the shrill whistle sending a shock through Diamond Tiara that lifted her off the floor. Her legs moved involuntarily under her, and she hit the ground galloping, out the door and down the street with Rainbow Dash following.

"Er, I'll just wait here for her," Silver Spoon said. As she turned to find a corner to lurk in, she came face to face with a very disappointed Stare.

"You're not going to leave your friend to do it alone, are you?" the horrible, horrible eyes asked in a voice like a silk-covered

dagger.

In a few moments Silver Spoon was on the run herself, Fluttershy right behind her.

"Well, that's taken care of that," Twilight said with deep satisfaction. "Now, girls, let's get to your lessons. Scootaloo first." She looked around, only counting two Crusaders. "What happened to Scootaloo?"

"She ran out the door after Rainbow Dash," Sweetie Belle said, pointing out into the street.

Oops. She'd forgotten about Scootaloo's hero worship. In the baseline Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy had been out of town for weeks. Given the choice between spending time in a library doing much-hated research and running five laps around town with her idol... yeah, Twilight thought, I could have thought this through better.

"Er... well, we'll get back to her later. Let's see how your magic is coming along, Sweetie..."

\* \* \*

><p>67.8 (Zetrein) <p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>995, Moonless Age. 996 years since Luna's disappearance.<em>

Twilight Woke up with her head in the fridge. Checking her memories, it seemed she was still a teenager at the moment, and still living with her parents. The "chunk" sound of the toaster reminded her why she was in the fridge, and she quickly found the jam.

As she finished making her breakfast, Twilight went through what some loopers jokingly called start-up checks. She started casting specific scrying spells, using the horn glow of making toast to hide her actions if any of her family walked in. No Elements Awake yet, no signs from Celestia or Cadance either. Her loop memories tagged Nyx as her little sister this time, so she'd check with her later in person. Scrying the moon for Luna...

Twilight paused in putting the jam away. "That can't be right..." She muttered to herself. Surely she had just miscast the spell? Checking again, Twilight got the same result.

Closing the fridge, Twilight asked aloud, "Where's the moon?"

\* \* \*

><p>A more thorough check of her memories, and a few weeks of studying, and Twilight felt she was on the right trail. While she hadn't made much headway on <em>where<em> the moon was, she was confident she knew \_what\_ had happened to it. After all, she had helped Luna and Apple Bloom test fire it.

As it turned out, a great many had been trying to find the moon for centuries. Magi-astrologists had pioneered entirely new fields of

magic to look at the sky, built what could best be described as a magic powered Hubble Space Telescope, and just this year were testing some type of trans-atmospheric skyship.

Of course, her new line of study didn't go unnoticed. While Twilight hadn't actually asked Princess Celestia any questions, she had still suggested a few books for her research. The awkward part however, came when her parents noticed.

"Twilight, dear, can we talk?" Her mother asked, coming into her room one evening.

"Yes, of course." She replied, marking the page in her book before closing it. From the approach, Twilight expected her mother had decided it was time for The Talk.

"Twilight, we're worried. This whole Moon thing, you haven't... you haven't gotten involved in one of those cults, have you?" Okay, not The Talk she expected. "I know you don't have many friends, and it might be the 'cool' thing, but believe me, joining a Moon Cult is not the way."

Right, Moon Cults, the other ponies with an interest in the moon. "No! No, nothing like that. I'm interested in the science side! I want to know where it went."

Twilight's assurances seemed to appease her mother. "Oh thank goodness, we really were worried for a bit. Last thing we need is for you to end up like me. Mind, I met your Father because of the cult, but it was still a stupid part of my life."

"You were in a cult?" Awkward mother-daughter bonding, go!

"Oh yes, but I wasn't the most devout. I was mostly there for the parties." She started to smile a bit. "Your Uncle led the guardponies that raided the building, I ended up meeting your Father sometime after."

\* \* \*

><p>The next afternoon, Twilight had sat down for a cup of tea with Princess Celestia, during a break in her lessons.<p>

"Princess, can I ask a question?" Twilight broke the silence.

"Certainly, my dear student. What's on your mind?" Celestia asked, nibbling on some biscotti.

"Well... When Princess Luna returns to take the Chosen to the Promised Land, will I be able to continue our lessons via correspondence?"

Twilight almost managed to keep the innocent look on her face until Celestia had stopped sputtering.

\* \* \*

><p>67.9 (Detective Ethan Redfield, Gulping) <p>



\* \* \*

><p>Chess was a game. The ultimate goal of the game was to place the King in a position where it cannot escape and it will be captured in the next move. There were many strategies, most were centered around controlling the central four squares. Twilight wouldn't say she was a master at this game, but in her many eons spent looping, she had read almost every book written on the subject, probably on every subject at one time or another. She knew every strategy that could be employed, from the Sicilian's Defense all the way to the Stonewall Attack. In her boredom, she read every chessgame and even participated in chess tournaments, along with Checkers, Go and countless other board game tournaments.<p>

But even with her experience, she was losing this game. The two ponies were laying across from each other at a Canterlot Resort Hotel in the city's finest district. Twilight rarely came to this district since it was populated by the richest snobs in Equestria. It was only at an Awake Shining's request that she came, since the pony across from her had replaced Blueblood this loop. Said male pony had a dark tan coat with a chocolate mane and beard, sporting a unicorn horn. His flank held a black chess piece resembling the king, not too dissimilar from Lelouch's when he looped here but lacking the symbol for Geass. Another dozen moves were made by both players, when it finally came to an end with a knight and a rook sealing her king in place. The female anchor sighed, only for her to look up as the Stallion started clapping, "Excellent game, Miss Sparkle, or should I say Princess Sparkle?"

Twilight replied, "Twilight, if you would. If you must though, I'm not a princess this time around, so Miss Sparkle will do, Mr. Xanatos...or do you prefer David or Chess Master?"

"Most call me Xanatos, you may as well. You're well versed in this game. The English Opening was inspired, not a common choice since reversing the Sicilian's defense to be used by white is quite complex a strategy. If I could rank you among the loopers I've played, you'd be at the same level of the girl I faced in the Fire Emblem Awakening loop, when I replaced Virion. Both of you favored protecting your individual pieces than protecting the King. An admirable trait, though unwise since in these loops, the anchors are the kings. If we lose the anchors, their loops will be lost forever."

Twilight crossed her hooves, "Do you have a point in there, Xanatos?"

Xanatos lifted the chess pieces and re-arranged them on the board, idly looking at the two kings, "I always have a point, Twilight. If you overextend yourself in chess, you will create openings for your enemies to slip through, capturing the king. For example-"

The looper stood up, walked over to his dresser, pulled out two sphere like objects, "This is an anti-magic generator, and the other a gravity generator that increases the weight of everything within it's radius. If I were to activate it, how would you counter me?"

Twilight gave a smirk, "Shining knows I'm here, and he knows to check in on me within the hour."

Xanatos returned the smile, "Good, but what if you were the only known loopier, I induced an attack by Chrysalis long before her appointed time and had her replace one of the Elements of Harmony? Of course, if you didn't have back up such as your brother then you'd have planned differently, but my point is " I wouldn't have just one plan, but several running in conjunction at the same time. What if it's in a universe where your powers are gone and subspace pocket inaccessible?"

Twilight's head ran both scenarios at the same time, however Xanatos held up a hoof, "Another time for that. My point is, always plan to win. Plan everything out days in advance. Practice every conceivable scenario and how it could go. Have multiple plans running at once. If plan A fails, Plans B through F may still succeed. Finally If you fail, have an out. Better to spend a loop in Eiken than your entire universe erased."

"It's worth noting that I have... Learned a modicum of humility over these days." The bearded stallion flinches noticeably at this admission, something that Twilight had no trouble picking up on.

"You've gotten on one of the First's bad sides, haven't you?" Twilight's tone is surprisingly bereft of sympathy, sounding like she was speaking to someone who had built an extremely expensive house on a flood plain.

"Among others, yes. The problem with playing the Game is simple. Not everyone wants to play with you. Sometimes they're direct about it." A hoof comes up to rub his jaw, nudging it slightly to confirm that it is, indeed, whole. "And that's if you're fortunate."

Twilight lets out a low, soft whistle. "Finding out you were stuck in a time loop didn't really do much for your judgment, did it?"

"Not at first, no. And it did not help that my reputation tends to precede me. My name is, literally, synonymous with scheming. Complex scheming that operates entirely by eliminating the competition's winning conditions." He sighs, and shakes his head.

"You've learned to appreciate the small victories, I take it?" Twilight's tone is more than a little sly, and there's really nothing Xanatos can do to object to her teasing, because really, that's his own fault.

"The value of being able to eat solid food over the course of an entire loop is well ingrained in my mind, yes. Also, checkmate."

Twilight's attempt to muffle her laughter cuts off sharply as she looks down at the board. "...Was admitting to the drawbacks of being you something you did on purpose to distract me, or just you unconsciously seizing the opportunity after you'd already gotten going with your thoughts?"

Xanatos just stared at the chessboard. "...Truth be told, I don't know."

\* \* \*

><p>67.10 (thewatcher) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Cadance?"<p>

"Yes Twilight?"

"Why are you watching a navy battle from a cloud?"

"Since a few certain loopers were visiting, I tried to compute possible matches for Ramna, but too many came up." Cadance rubbed at a circular bruise mark on her hock. "It exploded again."

"And...?"

"Well, as it turned out, a few of the girls were... Unhappy with that result."

"That still doesn't explain the ships. Where did you get them from any way?"

"Applebloom. Well, you do remember the 'shipping wars' of the Hub right?"

"Yes..."

"We decided to make it a bit more... Literal."

\* \* \*

><p>Below...<p>

The great ship Silver Doubloon sailed towards the White Devil - a smaller, but more powerful, frigate.

"For Ranma!" cried Nabiki. And the sea dissolved into chaos.

\* \* \*

><p>67.11 (Kris Overstreet) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight glared at Pinkie Pie. "I want three Hay Burgers and two orders of fries."<p>

Pinkie grinned back at her. "Aw, c'mon, Twilight, you'll like this."

"What is it, exactly?"

"Well, you remember that loop where we replaced that fat detective and his assistant?"

Twilight remembered it very well. Twenty years of both being amazed and exasperated by the reminder that Pinkie Pie could actually sit down and focus her mind on things ran through her mind. "Yes, I remember, but what does that have to do with-

"Well, I was thinking about all those recipes I learned in that Loop, and I wondered if I could adapt them to Equestrian cooking, so today I asked the boss if I could use his kitchen to experiment and he said yes but then I thought, 'Well, I'll eat practically anything, so I'm not a good test of what's good and what isn't, so I need someone to try these recipes out, and who do I know who's a close friend and a really big eater,' and then you walk in the door and I'm like-

Now Twilight remembered. In that Loop the brownstone house on West 35th Street, Manhattan, New York, had among other things been a center of private culinary extravagance. Pinkie had delighted in experimenting with their Swiss cook and sharing the results with close friends, acquaintances, and occasionally murder suspects. It was that kind of a Loop, and Pinkie was that kind of pony, even when she wasn't a pony.

But some of those menus had been... er. Very er. With an extra side order of carnivore guilt.

"Pinkie," Twilight stopped the pink party pony waitress in mid-ramble. "The name of this restaurant is Hay Burger. I ordered three Hay Burgers with extra trademark. All I want is a nice, simple lunch."

"Oh, Twilight," Pinkie said, giving Twilight the biggest filly-eyes the Anchor had seen since Monkey D. Luffy had visited Equestria, "won't you at least give them a try? My treat?"

Twilight surrendered. "Fine," she said. "What is it?"

Pinkie pulled the trolley over and lifted the dish covers. "Rice fritters aux gratin with raspberry jam filling."

Heavy, but tolerable. "All right..."

"Beet and watercress salad with black pepper."

Sweet and bitter at the same time; not one of Twilight's favorite flavor combinations. "Er..."

"Apple Bordelaise with garlic and parsley."

A flavor train wreck rolling down the tracks. "Pinkie-

"And finally, for dessert," Pinkie lifted the last dish cover, "almond parfait made with fresh eggs." The dessert dish was large enough to serve four ponies, or at least two Twilights.

As she said this a chicken popped her head over the edge of the table and gave Twilight the dirtiest look a bird can give a pony, which is to say pretty darn dirty.

"And Elizabeak says you gotta eat every last bit!" Pinkie said. "She doesn't want her eggs to go to waste."

Could things possibly get any more awkward? Twilight wondered.

Then, as she took her first reluctant bite of a rice fritter, the

flashbulbs began going off.

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm sorry, Twilight," Pinkie said a week later.<p>

"Three Hay Burgers and hay fries," Twilight said.

"I didn't know all those kids would go home and tell their parents what a princess likes to eat."

"Three. Hay. Burgers. And hay fries," Twilight repeated.

"And that their parents would come to me begging for the recipies."

"Hay burger. Hay fries. Three of each."

"And that the parents and kids would all get monstrous tummyaches when they tried to eat it all."

"My order, which is the food which I wish to consume, and no other, is for three hay burgers with fries, and nothing else."

"And that the parents and kids would all blame you for the tummyaches. I'm really, really sorry about that."

"Just bring me my order so I can go back to not speaking to you."

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><p>67.12 (Kris Overstreet) <p>

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><p>Fluttershy Awoke, and screamed.<p>

"eep!"

Her voice didn't sound right. It was flat, buzzy, electronic... grating.

Her body didn't feel right. For one thing, there was so very little of it.

Her environment felt absolutely wrong. She was trapped in what felt like a cramped, dark can, with only a single visual input- a round viewscreen held something like half an inch away from her single eye.

In that screen she saw a large dark metallic figure, vaguely cylindrical in shape, tapered towards a dome at the top with a large stalk protruding forward from the dome. It wiggled the stalk back and forth frantically, a suction grip arm and what looked like either a blender or a ray gun wiggling with equal anxiety below.

"HELP! HELP! SOMEBODY GET ME OUTTA THIS CONTRAPTION!" Another flat voice shouted in panic from outside Fluttershy's prison.

"TWILIGHT? TWILIGHT, PLEASE TELL ME YOU'RE OUT THERE!" came another

voice.

"I AM HERE- sorry, I'm here, girls." Twilight's voice, though still flattened and a bit nasal, quickly adjusted itself to something recognizable. "Who else is here besides Applejack and Rainbow Dash?"

"I'M HERE," Fluttershy murmured loudly.

"HERE I AM, DARLINGS," Rarity said. "WHAT HORRIBLE CREATURES ARE WE THIS TIME?"

"First, girls, if you concentrate you can speak normally," Twilight said. "We appear to be in the Doctor Who Loop. As Daleks."

"WHAT THE H- sorry," Applejack's voice shifted. "What the hay are Daleks?"

"Paranoid, insane, hateful, genocidal, completely irredeemable aliens. The single most powerful force of evil this universe has to offer. One of a lot of reasons why this Loop is read-only," Twilight said. "And Rarity, if you ask why we are Daleks, I can't be held responsible for the consequences."

"Trust me, Twilight, that question is a far distant second to, 'Why aren't we Ascending at once and abandoning this entire Loop?'" Rarity had found the release to open her armor and was looking at herself in a reflective surface on one wall. "I simply cannot contemplate an entire Loop looking like calamari in lime gelatin presented in a mold designed by a sadomasochist."

"Yeah!" Rainbow Dash added. "My Loop memories are all war and death and killing... and up until we Awoke, we were the last survivors of our race- and we were plotting to start it all over again! No way am I playing along with this Loop!"

"I gotta admit," Applejack said, "compared to this Eiken is lookin' pretty good. I'd even take a turn in th' Bureau over this!"

"Bite your tongue!" Rarity replied.

"I ain't got one ta bite," Applejack said. "I just got this kinda sucker tube thing hooked up to a catheter full of nutrients. I'm so glad I can't taste it."

"Whatever!" Rainbow Dash said. "Let's blow this popsicle stand, already!"

Just then a sixth Dalek trundled into the room. Unlike the others, this one had one enormous gun on its chassis and no sucker-grip arm. Also, the chassis was pink from top to bottom, except for the gun. That was blue with gold stars. "WHEEE!" the new Dalek shrieked, firing its gun and sending confetti, party hats and cupcakes everywhere. "I NEVER THOUGHT I'D GET TO BE IN A LOOP WHERE I \*\*WAS\*\* THE PARTY CANNON!"

"Focus, Pinkie," Twilight said. "Your voice, watch your voice."

"Yeah, that about does it," Applejack moaned. "I'm with Rainbow. I

don't think I can take five more minutes of a Loop with a fully weaponized Pinkie in it."

"No." Fluttershy moved her armor forward into the middle of the Cult of Skaro. "We're staying."

"What?" Rainbow Dalek turned to face Fluttershy. "WHY?"

"Twilight," Fluttershy said, "you said Daleks are the most powerful force of evil in this universe, right?"

"Yes."

"And Rainbow Dash, you said we were the last survivors of our race, right?"

"She did say that, yes," Twilight said. "But this is the Doctor Who universe. That won't last long. Daleks have gone extinct a lot of times, but they always come back."

"Then that makes it all the more important that we stay," Fluttershy continued. "Especially if there are other evil aliens and things."

"There are. Lots," Twilight said. "Cybermen, Weeping Angels, Sontarans, and all sorts of evil monsters and masterminds. And only the Doctor to stand against them."

"The Doctor... and now us," Fluttershy finished. "Daleks want to conquer the universe... so let's conquer the universe... for good!" She paced her armor back and forth along the floor. "Instead of enslaving or exterminating races, we'll protect them from bad people. And we'll do it as non-lethally as possible. We kill nobody. If nice people resist, we don't fire back. If people don't want our help, we don't force it on them... but we provide it if we can. And we'll need someplace where prisoners can live in peace by themselves where they can't hurt anybody."

"But I think we can do it. And it's a lot better than just exterminating Twilight and ending the Loop early." The Stare didn't work through an eyestalk, but Fluttershy gave it a try anyway. "We're better ponies than that anyway. That's the easy way out."

"All right, I'm game," Rainbow Dash said. "But just before we Awoke we were talking about changing our genetic structure. Can we still do that? I don't want to spend my whole Loop in a dish if I can help it."

"Only if we can do it without anyone getting hurt," Fluttershy insisted.

\* \* \*

><p>Sleipnir sat at the cafe across from Twilight, while the next booth over filly Rarity fussed over Rainbow Dash's stylish dress, much to the elder pony's mortification. "I'm very sorry about what happened to you girls," the admin said. "I was about to terminate that Loop myself when it crashed. Can you tell me what happened?"<p>

"Well," Twilight said, "as far as I can tell, the universe was destroyed by an uncontrolled surge of time vortex energy released by an uncontrolled Time Lord regeneration cascade."

"What?"

"Well, when the Doctor finally had to accept that there was such a thing as a good, noble, heroic Dalek, he couldn't cope with it."

"I never knew that you could literally blow somepony's mind!" Pinkie Pie chipped in as she floated past the table under a cluster of party balloons.

"Blow... his mind?" Sleipnir asked.

"His head quite literally exploded," Twilight nodded. "And regenerated. And exploded again. And every time he regenerated, he'd look at us, shake his head, say, 'Nope,' and boom, explode again."

"I... see," Sleipnir shook his head. "I thought better of the Doctor than that."

"Well, an earlier incarnation probably wouldn't have had that problem," Twilight shrugged. "But this was only two regenerations removed from the Time War, and he was pretty fragile mentally."

"It probably didn't help that you greeted him by offering to help save the world for love and justice," Pinkie Pie said as she floated back over.

"Probably not," Twilight admitted, blushing.

\* \* \*

><p>67.13 (Vulpine Fury) <p>

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><p>"Mister Xanatos, I am reminded of one of my good friends in another Loop..." Celestia said as she gracefully navigated the room and decanted some exceptional Prench wine. "He said something that I think applies here."<p>

Xanatos boggled as the peytral and tiara floated over his head and shoulders.

"As I was saying, Joshua said... 'A strange game. It seems the only way to win..." A surfboard crossed Xanatos' field of vision. "... is not to play.'"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<br>67.1: Card games are serious business.

>67.2: Twilight Time Out.<br>67.3: Yo dawg? (Caution: time loops inside a time loop are highly unstable. Solve as soon as possible, or face Gen 2.)

>67.4: Not sure if this is a reference to a fanfic or not, but it's amusing either way.<br>67.5: That kind of thing is just annoying.



>67.6: Mac's Manners?<br>67.7: Social climbing right over the top of a safety fence. And falling off a cliff.  
>67.8: The cults aren't actually evil. They just play very loud music at night.<br>67.9: Always five steps ahead. (But for ponies that's the equivalent of three.)  
>67.10: Abandon Ship!<br>67.11: Act cautiously when setting trends.  
  
>67.12: REHABILITATE!<br>67.13: First order of Regent Xanatos: Come and help me with all this paperwork, Twilight.

## 72. Chapter 72

### 68.1 (OracleMask)

\* \* \*

><p>It took two weeks before they saw solid signs of progress. The color-change spell had started fading after the first week, very slowly shifting Fluttershy's mane and tail back to its normal pink during the course of the second one.<p>

Rarity, on Naruto's advice, had changed Fluttershy's hair color to a vividly bright red. The color didn't suit Fluttershy at all, but Kakashi seemed to relax more with the red than he did with Rarity's original choice of peach.

The ninja had gotten a little twitchy once Fluttershy's natural pink-ness started becoming visible again, but Fluttershy's kind and caring self didn't change even though her mane did. Finally, it got to the point where Fluttershy was completely pink again and Kakashi didn't react to her at all.

Everypony had been patting themselves on the back, but the next step would be much harder. Ponyville had many ponies in various shades of pink, including Pinkie Pie herself. Pinkie Pie had accidentally proven that Kakashi would need more help by setting him off herself when the urge to throw his 'Welcome to Equestria/Hooray for Being a New Looper' party overwhelmed her better judgement.

Luckily, Konoha's Number One Confusing Ninja had come up with a plan of his own. It was based off a prank Naruto had done to the Unawake Kakashi more times than he could ever remember. It only seemed fitting to use to help the Awake Kakashi now.

\* \* \*

><p>"YOSH!"<p>

Kakashi...stared. Fluttershy had asked if he could get something from the shed (if he wasn't busy, and didn't mind the walk), but he couldn't remember what it was. Not after seeing...this.

"Eternal Rival! I am here to deliver a most Youthful Challenge!"

Kakashi was fairly sure he'd seen this pony before, too. Even after extended Fluttershy exposure, the other shades of pink still set him off, but Kakashi could have sworn he'd seen this pony around. Mostly peeking through Fluttershy's windows at him.

The jumpsuit and bowl cut were nostalgically familiar, and Kakashi's reply was automatic.

"Hm? Did you say something?"

"Yosh! A most Hip and Youthful reply!" 'Pinkie Gai' announced, "As expected of my Eternal Rival! Now, accept my Challenge!"

"...What challenge?" Kakashi asked, warily.

Pinkie pulled a large poster from nowhere.

"Pin the Tail on the Pony! And if I cannot beat you at it, I will make \_one thousand balloon animals!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"I still can't believe this worked," Twilight said, looking around Fluttershy's lawn.<p>

'Pinkie Gai' had challenged Kakashi to one party game after another. Then to a cupcake-eating contest. Right now they were doing a dance battle. Somehow in the middle of this, other ponies had arrived from Ponyville and the whole thing had turned into a full-fledged Pinkie Pie Party.

Naruto's grin had gone from 'smug' to 'foxy' sometime around the limbo contest.

\* \* \*

><p>68.2 (misterq) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Rarity Crisp?"<p>

"Yes, Twilight Delicious?" Rarity casually adjusted her stylish white Stetson hat.

"Why are we all part of the Apple family?" Twilight fidgeted with her lavender neck scarf.

The white unicorn paused for a moment, parsing her new memories before answering, "Because when you gave Pinkie Pie the genealogy scrolls, she found out that most of the ponies in the Ponyville and Canterlot areas have a common ancestor. One Appleseed, who instead of just planting apple trees wherever he went.."

"Ugh! I get it!" Twilight groaned, "Overly promiscuous stallions aside, what does this mean for us?"

Rarity Crisp casually watched as Apple Bloom, Scrumptious Belle, and Seedaloo played together, "It means the next family reunion is going to be bigger than the Summer Sun Celebration."

\* \* \*

><p>68.3 (Ghrathryn)<p>

(Blytonverse continued)

\* \* \*

><p>George had a slight smirk on her face as she faced the men that wanted her family's gold for what had to be at least the fiftieth time that she could recall. They were, of course, in the little dungeon cell in Kirrin Castle, somewhere in the island's network of underground passageways. As with the baseline, Lauren and Felicity were up on the surface while she and Rayne were down here, gathering the last few bits and dumping them into George's subspace pocket, or they had been before the members of Greed International had shown up.<p>

"Jake! Look here!" One of the pair said. "You were right. The gold's here all right. And how easy to take away! All in ingots! This is the most amazing thing we've ever found!"

George rolled her eyes. What was left wasn't even a fraction of what should be here, but of course with the loops these idiots wouldn't recognise that fact. "Sorry to disappoint you boys, but you're not going to get any of it."

"Yeah?" One of the pair, Jake probably since it wasn't the one that had spoken the first time. "What makes you think you can stop us? You're just a pair of kids."

George grinned, casting a quick look at Rayne. "Actually I'm a lot more now." She said, Reaching for her Legacy and pulling on the magic around them, feeding it into her flame. Her target was the pistol that one of the pair pulled out, forcing the temperature of the air around it up until the metal started to bubble and melt.

With the weapon out of the way, it would probably be easy to deal with the pair; particularly given they showed no signs of being anything other than normal ponies.

"Hey! You can't do that! Bats don't have magic."

George smiled slightly at the pair of them, her eyes glowing redly, "Timmy, capture."

With a snarl, Timothy leapt at the men, shifting into his 'dragon' form mid-air and slamming them both to the ground.

Rayne arched an eyebrow. "That was fast."

"Normally they're a lot more annoying, butâ€¦ two dragons against twoâ€¦ earth ponies did you call them?" Getting a nod from Rayne, she watched as Timothy knocked the pair out and bound them in chains of rock. "It's rather bad for them. If we did it the normal way, Lauren would have to get a note and come down to rescue us. I don't feel like dealing with the mess that will make, particularly if Felicity is anything like Anne is now we're looping." George shrugged, turning to stuff what remained of the gold in her subspace pocket.

"So what do we do? Just leave them here?" Rayne asked as the two of them got ready to leave.

"We usually leave them down here and wreck their boat so they won't get away." George replied as Timothy returned to the 'normal' Welsh border collie mongrel he was. "Let's find the others."

Nodding, Rayne followed her back through the maze of passages under the castle, after locking the two would-be thieves in the cell.

"Did you find it?" Lauren asked once the five of them had regrouped. "Where is the gold?"

"Safe," Rayne replied. "Though we did have a couple of people try to make trouble."

Felicity blinked. "Oh dear, I hope nobody was hurt too badly."

George shook her head. "The worst might be first or second degree burns to a hand."

"Oh my!" Felicity gasped.

"Beyond that, they're knocked out, bound and locked up. We should deal with the pair's boat so they can't make a swift get away if they manage to break out." She grinned, pulling a length of rope from the pocket. "And I know the best way to."

Leading the group to the cove the Five normally landed in, she nodded, seeing the motorboat left there. It didn't take them long to have it tied to their own rowboat, nor for them to be heading out into the bay.

"Well," Rayne said, sitting in the motorboat as George guided it through the rocks surrounding the island and into the bay. "Since we've got a bit of time before anything else happens, I was thinking. Don't say anything, Fluttershy; I've heard most of them." The last was an aside to the yellow Pegasus. "Given most of the things you've told me about seem to be handled easily in loop, even for your baselines; do you think that any of the others would be willing to open the loop up as another sanctuary?"

George frowned. "I won't speak for anyone outside the Five, since I don't know them too well, but I can see Julian and Anne agreeing to have this as a sanctuary." She shifted slightly, ignoring the calls from the large ship they passed. If things followed baseline, those sailors would probably go to the island. She glanced up, taking note of the name so she could tell the police later. "The thing is we've been told how powerful some of the older loopers are. Even with the five of us being what we are, I don't know if we could handle them without some serious help."

Rayne nodded, twitching her tail. "I know, George, and Equestria will help as much as we can. One of our things is making as many friends as possible, because we're stronger together, working in harmony, than anyone is alone." She reached over, placing a hand on George's shoulder, Felicity doing the same from the other side.

"I think a lot of the loopers would be glad of somewhere that they can rest, somewhere that is human controlled most of the time." Felicity said. "I don't know if there is any way we can help you or the others here make sure the loops are safe for others, but Rainbow

is right. Equestria won't leave our friends hanging."

\_:This loop seems to be a fusion of all our groups, pack mate.:\_  
Timothy put in, placing his head in George's lap, leaving Lauren with no way to get in for now. \_:We can talk to the others, let them know the idea and let them decide if they can handle things. When our pack mates return, we can talk to them and decide whether \_we \_can handle everything and the next time things fuse we can pass a message on.:\_  
He pointed out.

"Come on, old thing," Lauren said, getting an amused snort from George at how typically Julian or Dick that phrase was. "It can't be all bad."

George smiled slightly. "I won't answer for anyone else, but I can see about sending the offer along to those I know and we should be meeting the girls from Malory Towers in a few weeks so you can put the proposition to them yourselves." She said, taking a moment to stroke Timothy's head before focusing on getting them back to shore.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sighed as she looked up at the cave that the red dragon typically slept in. They hadn't been able to properly test whether Anne was able to use the Element of Kindness thanks to Luna being awake. Something that was both good and bad. Right now though, they had another problem, namely a dragon that was often a pain in the tail to get to move on. Tree but she hated dealing with this some days.<p>

"So normally this guy just shows up out of nowhere and decides to sleep here?" Julian asked, getting a nod from Twilight. "I think I might have a way to convince him to leave." He said, frowning slightly as he looked into the cave. It was large, but not so large that he couldn't do what he was planning. "Dragons here are vulnerable to cold, right?" Once again he got a nod.

Grinning, Julian whistled as he walked towards the cave, his body starting to take on a blue-white colouration. Twilight shivered as he passed her, glancing back at Dick and Anne, who both shrugged their wings.

Entering the cave, he let the cold spread. From their experimenting with their abilities, he knew he could \_cool\_ a volume of around thirteen hundred cubic metres, all he really needed was to do that enough to convince the dragon that staying here wasn't a good plan.

The dragon in question tossed and turned a bit as the area around it started getting cold, ice forming and cracking on his scales before he blinked open his eyes and focused on the small pony in front of him. "Why do you disturb me, pony?"

"I apologise for the interruption of your nap, but the local residents have requested you move on&#160;| and possibly have someone take a look at your nose and throat." Julian responded politely.

"And why should I care about pitiful little ponies?" The dragon

asked, sounding somewhat amused by the stallion in front of him.

Julian shifted slightly. "Ponies, much like my own species, aren't individually powerful outside a chosen few." He admitted. "However, you happen to have several of those chosen ones waiting outside." He pointed out, his breath starting to steam in the air as the cavern's temperature dropped another few degrees. "And if you hadn't noticed yet, it's getting cold in here. Soon enough it will be cold enough that your body starts shutting down." He raised his head to look the dragon in the eye. "I can keep active in temperatures below minus one hundred degrees centigrade, can you?"

The dragon shivered, hearing something crackle on his scales. "You're bluffing. No pony could do such."

"I'm not a pony, sir." Julian responded. "I am a dragon, but not one like you. Where you revel in fire and flame, I work best in temperatures that would make most others hide away to try to keep warm." He pointed out, twitching his tail.

It was at that point that the dragon noticed that Julian's eyes looked like those of a frozen corpse, almost pure white. The temperature dropped a bit more and the dragon noticed ice coating the cave floor along with his treasures.

"The other option would be for us to fight, though I would prefer it didn't come to that." Julian continued, not remotely bothered by the cold as the dragon picked his paws off the pile of gems and coins in a crackling of ice.

"Iâ€|" The dragon looked around as an enclosed winter continued to encroach. "Fine, release your winter, pony. You have won this round." Getting a nod, the dragon watched in surprise as winter seemed to evaporate from his cave.

"A pleasure doing business with you, sir," Julian smiled, turning to leave.

"Waitâ€|" The dragon held up a paw. "Are you really a dragon?"

Julian grinned. There were a few moments of morphic confusion as his wings changed, the hair of his tail shortened while the tail itself stretched out and thickened. Not long after there stood a white and blue scaled dragon, around thirty to fifty feet in length stood in the pegasus' place. "Ilistast the Ice Walker at your service." He rumbled, bowing his head slightly. "Of the Avalon Brood."

"Slaryrrlus the Red," The dragon introduced himself, his tail flicking. "I will admit, I never imagined I would meet another dragon in this region and I have never heard of one that uses cold like you."

"I doubt you will find too many cold wyrms in these parts, though I do know of at least three other dragons here." Julian admitted. "Spykoran, a young dragon raised by ponies and two of my brood siblings, Fenynast of the Dark Forest and Kanrorarl the Storm Wind. All three are outside along with the Elements of Harmony."

\* \* \*

><p>Surprisingly they had managed to get hold of at least some of just about every group that existed in their universe, passing the message on, which of course had led to more and more questions. Finally George had gotten fed up of them all and just asked the 'leaders' of each group to come down to Kirrin. Being part pony had really speeded that up for a number of them, which was why they were back on Kirrin Island, in the ruined castle's courtyard with her and the three from Equestria in front of a mass of anthro-ponies.<p>

"How many of them are there?" Rayne asked, looking out at the group.

George frowned, shifting slightly. "Somewhere on the high side of a hundred, possibly over two hundred," She replied, looking out at the group.

"Butâ€| no loop has that many loopers." Felicity whispered.

"Actually this \_loop\_ has eiâ€| nine loopers." George pointed out, remembering Jo at the last second. "The thing is you're talking about the entirety of our 'universe' that links to 'normal' Earth so you've got something like seven to ten, possibly more actual loops that can and probably often do run together, each with their own loopers." She wasn't exactly sure how their universe worked, but she knew of two boarding schools and five holiday adventurer groups counting the Five themselves. "Think about it, there's the Famous Five, the Secret Seven, the Adventurous Four, the Five Find-Outers, the Trents and Mannerings or Cunninghams or whatever those four call themselves and the schools, Malory Towers and St Claire's and those are the ones \_I\_ know of. I wouldn't be surprised to find there's a few others."

Rayne nodded as Felicity blinked. "Even if it's only the anchor for each area this whole thing is almost like the Star Wars linked loops and possibly how the Star Trek ones are set upâ€| the latter set at least." She agreed. "If there are loopers for Star Trek, and Slepiniir says there are, then there's at least three for the different main Enterprises, if the station and that other ship have their own anchors that's potentially another twenty or so loopers focusing on bridge crews." She pointed out before looking out at the crowd again and sighing as the parrot decided to let out an imitation of a train whistle. That bird was already annoying her.

Seeing everyone settling themselves down, she took a deep breath and let it out slowly. This would be the first time she had given the Looping Multiverse 101 to such a large group, heck she doubted Twilight had given that talk to such a large group. Stepping out, she quickly ascended to alicorn and let off a firecracker spell to get everyone's attention as the others joined her. "Thank you." Rayne said, looking around at the group, some of which were obviously adults, most seemed to be children. "My name, for this loop is Rayne Kirrin, normally I go by Rainbow Dash, fastest pegasus â€" or alicorn â€" in Equestria. With me I have Fluttershy, one of the other Equestrian loopers, Lightning Dust, a non-looper from Equestria and George Kirrin of the Famous Five, a local looper along with her dog,

Timothy.

"The reason you're all here is because the universe is broken, the result of which is that we are all stuck repeating a certain amount of time again and again, sometimes in different ways." Rayne looked around at the group, making sure they were paying attention before glancing back to see Felicity had set up a projector and had it running the introductory slide show. "I'll try to make this quick since I'm not that good at public speaking. Reality as you know it is one universe of, literally, thousands. Under all of them is a super computer call Yggdrasil, unfortunately something broke the computer so the people that control it have put it in a kind of safe mode so it keeps working while they fix whatever broke. That safe mode is what caused the loops."

"Every loop has an anchor," Felicity stepped forwards, switching the slides. "That person, whoever it is amongst your group, will always loop. That means that if anyone is likely to gain a lot of power or go insane from boredom, it will be the anchor."

Rayne nodded, taking over again. "From what George has told me, her section of this universe has looped maybe fifty to a hundred times, I presume most of the rest of you are about the same." That got a number of nods from some people in the crowd. "What we have here is a Linked Loop, meaning that while each group here will be independent, there's a high chance that something like this will happen, where you're all together."

"From what I was told," George cut in, flicking her tail. "Is that loops tend towards one of three types in the main. Universe, meaning they're just what happens normally or a variation of it, fused, like this, where either people or concepts will jump from one universe to another." She looked around at the audience. "I presume most of you freaked out when you woke up at the beginning of the holiday as bipedal ponies." Getting more nods, she snorted in amusement. "Yeah, it does seem strange or as if everyone got completely drunk, but it's something to do with the way things fuse. Don't count on staying human or even looking the same if you do. You will want to keep an eye out for tricks you can pick up, particularly in game loops since they don't show often and can give a lot of tricks. You don't want to muck things up too much though. Apparently there's punishment loops out there and they're nasty."

"They are," Rayne shuddered. "We tend to end up in a school for guys that want serious eye candy. How those people can handle the weight on their chests normally I don't know. There's also a lobotomised variant of our home loop or a version where we, for some reason try invading Earth and turning humans into ponies."

"Given all that, as soon as you're aware you've loops, check your memories. There might be something there that explains a variation on what you're used to or explains a bit about who and what you are if you end up outside your normal loop." Rayne continued. "Also, if you ever end up in a universe known as the hub or heck anywhere that has books, try to get as many 'fiction' books as you can same with movies, games or television programs. Loop backups are stored in media on other loops so you can find out a lot beforehoof. You should also know that everyone that loops has a subspace pocket; it's the only way to take things between loops. Don't put anything organic in there unless it's dead and under stasis. You don't know what will



happen in there. Be aware that you won't fit everything in a pocket all the time; it will take time before you can put mass amounts of stuff into one.

"I know some of the old timers can fit planets into their pockets, new loopers might be unlucky enough to only fit a couple of pieces of jewellery." Rayne finished, flicking her tail. "The last thing before I open up to questions is that Equestria is a sanctuary loop and from what I've heard from George, most everything here can be handled in baseline so we would like to ask you whether you would be willing to be a second set of sanctuaries. I know you may not be able to handle old and insane loopers so Equestria will likely help out as much as we can, but if you are willing and can handle some, it will give us a break and allow the older loopers a chance to relax."

"You don't have to answer now," Felicity said gently. "We don't mind waiting for you to think things over." She looked around. "Why don't we answer whatever questions you have first?" She suggested, getting several people raising their hands in response.

\* \* \*

><p>Leaning back from his console, the horned dragon frowned as he watched the development of one of the new loop sets he was in charge of. He knew that the Equestrians and Slepínir had designated their loop as a sanctuary to all but those most determined to cause trouble, but this was the first time he had heard of any of them trying to spread that. It was a good idea; many of the older loopers were close to breaking or had broken at least once. The question though, was how could a group of human children handle those with near unlimited power? Equestria had ways to deal with it, 50s Earth didn't, even counting in the fact that they had a few dragons.<p>

The most obvious thing to do would be set up a power limiter on that set of loops, similar to the ones on Eiken, but that wouldn't necessarily solve the problem. There was probably also going to need to be people that could handle people that were a mess psychologically. How would be the best way to do that?

He flicked his tail, frowning. What could they do to mitigate the trouble from people like Sakura? What could they do to deal with the potential of someone like Leah from the Twilight series? Maybe it was time he spoke to Slepínir along with the others whose likenesses were used as sires for the Fireborn dragons.

"Caranoch keep an eye on the loop in progress and make sure nothing nasty can access it." He ordered the small draconic serpent that normally stuck with him. "I need to talk to Tiamat, Jormungand, Ladon, Ryu, Dambala and the others, then talk to Slepínir to see if we can come up with a way to handle the possibility of those loopers choosing to make their linked loop a sanctuary like the Equestria one." He ordered, shifting into a horned, human like creature. It was easier to move through areas in his alternate form.

"Right, tell me what happens, Cernunnos!" Caranoch looked over at his companion. "Or should it be Herne?" He asked, causing Herne to roll his eyes as he left the room.

\* \* \*

><p>The Ursa Minor had failed to materialise at the end of Trixie's usual first visit to Ponyville, something that everyone Awake and used to Equestrian loops had taken with a sigh of relief, right up to the point when a living storm had rolled out of the Everfree in its place.<p>

Shaking off the flash blindness from getting smacked in the muzzle by a lightning bolt, Dick looked up at the creature that had appeared, pinning his ears flat as it roared. "What is that?" He asked Twilight, who was watching the display with the air of someone that wasn't happy about being sideswiped by events.

"A Tempest. We encountered one once, it's made of wild weather magic and makes the timber wolves in the Everfree look smart by comparison." Twilight replied, scowling up at the living storm cloud. "The last time Rainbow and Lightning hit it with a double Sonic Rainboom. I don't know how we can deal with it this time, at least not without ascending."

"If it's Tainted weather, I'll deal with it." Dick growled, his hide starting to writhe as he pulled on his dragon form. Another bolt of lightning lit the sky, the terrible crack of it splitting the air covering whatever Twilight might had said as Dick leapt into the air, shedding his pony form in favour of becoming a silvery dragon as he beat his wings up into the sky.

Reaching the same height as the rogue storm, he Reached out with his Legacy, scanning for any weaknesses. He could taste its Taint from where he was, niggling at the back of his throat. Unfortunately there didn't seem to be any obvious weaknesses to the construct beyond rip out the heart of its weather magic. Dick's eyes narrowed as another lightning bolt sizzled the air. He was a Storm Lord, it was a storm, he should be able to take it apart, if he remembered things from the time of Avalon properly.

Closing his eyes, Dick felt his body start to become insubstantial as he used more of his Legacy. Reaching out to the Tempest, he felt around the cloud form for a moment before using the Legacy to slice one of its twister arms off. The creature roared in response.

Another lightning bolt lanced through the sky, this one passing through Dick's 'body' and fizzling out as he drew its power into himself. Narrowing his eyes, he formed a blade of wind and sent it through the Tempest in response, moving in behind it to blast the thing with a lightning bolt of his own.

That was when things really got loud. The Tempest, as Twilight had said, wasn't smart, most of the time its attacks were as straight forwards and predictable as a run-away big-rig. Dick on the other hand dodged and jinked around most of its attacks, reading them through his Legacy as he used it to slice pieces off the colossus. Cutting or disrupting the weather magic creating it, cleansing what he could as the storm cloud shrunk in on itself and finally disappeared as he swatted it with a fore paw.

Back winging in to land, Dick shifted back to his pegasus form and grinned at Twilight. "One rogue storm dispersed." He commented dryly before his stomach growled. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I am decidedly

hungry so I'm going to get something to eat." He added turning to do just that as the other Ponyvillians started cheering for him.

\* \* \*

><p>Twitching her tail, Darrell Rivers looked around platform 7, watching the unawake girls going through their usual routines for the start of the term at Malory Towers, completely ignoring the fact that they were usually human. Even with the talk they had gotten a couple of weeks ago on Kirrin Island, it was strange knowing that she was a human and yet she and everyone else were anthro-ponies.<p>

"Hallo Darrell," Alicia's voice sounded from behind her, making her jump slightly. "Sorry about that old thing."

Turning, Darrell gave Alicia a look. "I do wish you wouldn't do that."

Alicia shrugged her bat-like wings. "It just seems natural like this." She replied before shifting slightly. "Have you seen any of the others yet?"

"We're only missing Sally and Gwendoline from our normal group and knowing Sallyâ€|" She trailed off as they both recalled what happened to Sally Hope in their baseline. "Other than that, it's just the Kirrins, apparently there's five of them and a dog."

Scanning the crowd again, Alicia twitched her tail as she noticed someone she recognised from the meeting. "I say, do you think that's Sally?" She asked, pointing out another anthro-pony, this one with a horn instead of wings, along with an ice-blue mane and a light purple coat.

"One way to find out," Darrell replied. "Oi, Sally!" Getting a wave in response, she waited until the other pony reached them. "Good to see you, is everything alright?"

"Actually yes," Sally replied. "Daphne's about Felicity's age this time out, so I apparently got over my jealousy a long time ago."

"That's good," Darrell sighed in relief. Sally unawake and at baseline wasn't fun because of the jealousy she had against her new-born and somewhat sickly little sister. Even when Sally was Awake, things weren't nice for her that first term at Malory Towers because of that. "What do you suppose will happen if Gwendoline ends up doing this looping business?"

Alicia shuddered. "I hope we don't find out. She's a piece of work as it is."

"Yes, but she does get better after her father ends up sick." Sally pointed out. "If she can learn from that, maybe she can actually be less of an ass than usual." She continued before looking up to see a group of mares, one of whom had a rainbow coloured mane. "And it looks like the Kirrins are here."

"My word," Alicia blinked as Darrell and Sally waved the newcomers over. "I never knew our school uniform could look so strange."

Rayne snorted in amusement, catching the tail end of that as she and the others came up to the trio. "It probably looks fine on humans, at least compared to some I've seen." She grimaced. "I remember being in the Potterverse once, got a look at the one for Harry's cousin's uniform. It was ugly and it had the same colours."

"It probably depends on how they do things." Jo pointed out. "This is mostly brown or white with some orange so it doesn't really clash."

George arched an eyebrow at Jo, "Since when are you into fashion, old girl?"

Jo shrugged her wings. "Blame your mother." She replied, causing George to roll her eyes.

"So what erâ€¦ what normally happens for you girls?" Felicity asked, looking between the three that normally went to Malory Towers.

"Well, there's not really much to do here apart from wait around. We're still missing Gwendoline." Darrell said, nodding to George's mother as she came up to say good-bye to the Kirrins. "That's usually a show since Gwendoline's mother spoils her rotten."

"After we get to Malory Towers, it's pretty much boarding school." Sally shrugged her shoulders. "What you call baseline has me being jealous of my little sister, which fortunately won't happen this time. We see Alicia pull a few tricks, including playing deaf."

Alicia grimaced. "I'm not doing that one this time, it's bad enough when I get water logged ears as a human."

Darrell nodded, patting Alicia's shoulder. "Beyond that, Gwendoline annoys me by dunking Mary-Lou, our 'mouse' girl."

"Watch out if Darrell starts glinting at you, it usually means she's cross."

Darrell rolled her eyes at Alicia's comment and ignored the snort of laughter from Sally. "We get through most of the term okay, then Sally ends up needing an operation," She grimaced. "My temper gets the best of me and she's probably not well from stress."

"I wasn't," Sally interrupted. "And I've told you, I forgave you years ago, Darrell." She continued, giving her friend a hug. "Beyond those incidents, I don't think there's much else that's really big. Well, except that Gwendoline likes trying to snuggle up to people she thinks are rich or popular and usually it ends poorly for her. I think Bill said she might show up early this time when we were leaving Kirrin."

"Bill?" Lauren asked.

"Wilhelmina Robinson. She starts in our third year mostly and she's horse mad." Darrell explained before snorting in amusement. "She's probably one of the few that were actually excited to wake up a pony."

George snickered as Timothy barked a laugh. \_:That sounds much like some people we've met.:\_ He commented to George.

"Finally," Alicia sighed, noticing Gwendoline and her mother had finally arrived, the former of which had her blonde mane half way down her back. "Now \_they\_ are here, we can get going." With a bit of urging, the nine of them made their way onto the North Tower carriage of the train, Darrell, Sally and Alicia pointing out Gwendoline once they were settled, letting the Kirrins watch as the spoilt girl had her send off.

\* \* \*

><p>68.4 (Ghrathtyn) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke and blinked in surprise as her Loop Memories came in. "Wellâ€|" She started, raising insubstantial hooves to look through them. It wasn't the first time she had been a ghost, or even looped in dead or near it, but this was a bit different.<p>

Looking up, she frowned at the house in front of her. According to her memories, she was supposed to take a team of four spirits to scare everyone living in the house out into the streets.

"Twilight?" A voice came from behind her, causing her to turn around, finding ghostly versions of Big Mac, Rainbow Dash, Angel Bunny and Gummy floating in the sky. "What's going on?"

Twilight shrugged her wings. "I'm not sure Dash, but I think we're ghosts and we're supposed to scare the ever living sap out of anyone and everyone in there." She waved her hoof at the house. "Let me have a look around, I think we can check the place out with impunity, but if we start \_doing\_ anything we have to keep people scared otherwise we get knocked away."

The others nodded and Twilight floated in through the wall of the house. It seemed the place was one of the larger Canterlot College houses where they housed mares. A quick check revealed there were ten mares hanging around, chatting, sleeping or whatever. What she wasn't expecting was grumbling from the basement. Floating through the floor, she blinked at the sight of Applejack, as ghostly as the rest of them, but chained to what looked like a tree stump.

"Consarnit." The orange ghost muttered. "Why. Won't. You. Drop. Anything?" She asked, bucking at where the rest of the trunk \_should\_ have been.

"Did you try bucking the orchard while half asleep again?" Twilight asked, making Applejack jerk around to face her.

"Twilight?" Applejack asked, getting a nod in return. "Thank goodness. Please tell me you know something about this? I keep thinking I need to buck this tree and I can't."

"There's no tree there, AJ." Twilight pointed out, motioning at the stump.

Applejack looked back at what she was chained to. "Ohâ€|" She stared.

"Umâ€¦ help?"

Twilight frowned. "You said you need to buck something, right?" She asked, getting a nod from her friend. "Wellâ€¦ I might be able to come up with something, but I need to look things up." She reached over to pat Applejack's shoulder. "We'll get you out of here, just hold on."

Floating back to the others, she checked her in loop memories and pulled a book out of her mane. Flicking through it, she frowned. From what it said about the other four, she had a horde, a gremlin, a spook and a spectre. It looked like Applejack was some sort of phantom. At least AJ had the ability to make plants grow, though it would take a bit to get the energy together for that it seemed, at least the version they needed.

"Alright everypony," Twilight started as she joined the rest. "It looks like we're a haunting team and I'm the leader. It also looks like we're supposed to clear this house as a testâ€¦ from Nightmare Moon." The last got shocked looks. "Yeah, I don't get it either." Twilight admitted. "There's ten mares in there to scare away, and we need to build the scares up to free AJ. She's chained to a tree stump." Rainbow burst out laughing at that and Twilight cracked a grin.

Looking around at her team, Twilight grinned. This could be a fun loop, and a chance to really let loose and prank people without any problems. "Rainbow, see if you can get a storm rolling around the house, keep it to low winds and thunder for now. I don't have the energy for you to really let loose yet."

"Got you." Rainbow spread her wings as a glowing tether linked her to the grounds around the house. The wind started picking up, bringing dark clouds with it.

"Angel, see if you can get some of your friends to run through the house. Gummy, you go upstairs and make the stereo in the upstairs lounge area dance." Twilight ordered, getting nods from both animals. Shrieks soon echoed from the house, causing the mare to grin. "Mac, why don't you introduce yourself to the nice mares?" She asked, sending some plasm to the stallion to allow him to manifest.

\* \* \*

><p>Sitting in a rundown old schoolhouse, Twilight looked around at the 'team' she was supposed to be leading, which seemed to be made up of most of her looping friends, though there were certainly missing members.<p>

"Alright, I don't know exactly what's going on here butâ€¦" She trailed off as Nyx and Luna flashed into view, both looking as insubstantial as everyone else. "Hello Luna, good to see you Nyxie." She held her hooves out to get a hug from her daughter. "Either of you know what's going on?"

"Not all of it," Luna admitted. "It seems that we're part of the supernatural world this time and I have control over that while Celestia is trying to make sure it's forgotten by mortals." She shrugged her wings. "Apparently thou art a new Ghost Master in mine service, though I don't recall how or why thou joined me."

Twilight nodded. "Yeah, I got that much. I still don't know what the eucalyptus is going on though."

Luna twitched her tail, then flattened her ears against her head. "Before Nyx and I Awoke, it seems Nightmare Moon launched a campaign of terror against the mortals and thou were sent to Canterlot." She said, wincing. "There are at least five other groups out in other cities and more scattered in the towns, which is why thou only had the ponies here apart from fair Applejack."

"I think the best way to do this is see what shows up." Nyx commented from where she snuggled into her mother. "Though I don't know what will happen if you don't manage things."

"I guess we'll see." Twilight sighed, looking around at the others. Nine ghosts to scare a city wasn't much.

Luna nodded before blinking and summoning a pile of gold, glowing something. "Apparently this is Gold Plasm; it is used to empower thine underlings." She explained quickly.

"Empower, how?" Rainbow asked, floating forwards to look at the plasm.

"It grants you more powers." Nyx explained briefly. "You noticed that everypony has more 'levels' than they have powers, right momma?" She asked Twilight, getting a nod. "Well if you use Gold Plasm, you can grant one pony a new power for an amount of it."

Twilight frowned. "Dash, what abilities do you have?"

Dash frowned. "Fog, Thunder Clap, Gather Winds, Rattle Chains, Jinx, Kinesis I think I can have Rain, Flood and Hail, I'm not entirely sure what else there is."

"So if I used this Gold Plasm on Dash, I could give her one of those three?" Twilight asked.

"Yup." Nyx responded.

"That's pretty cool."

Twilight nodded, flicking her tail. "Alright," She looked around, seeing Dash, Mac, Angel, Gummy, AJ, Sweetie Belle, Rarity, Berry Punch and Fluttershy. "Can all of you go through what you know about your abilities and potential abilities and decide what will work best for you?" She asked her friends before turning back to Luna. "I presume this wasn't just a social visit, Luna."

Luna shook her head. "Unfortunately not. There is an older house near the outskirts of Canterlot that drew our attention. It seems that one of the past owners murdered ponies there to keep herself company. She was getting old and more than a little senile at the time." She explained, grimacing as she waver a hoof at the table, causing a map to appear on it, a house rising from it with a glow around it. A moment later, a black-glowing, bat-infested house grew up as well. "We need you to take six of your team and find a way to reveal those killed by that old mare to the police, without scaring anypony away if possible."

Twilight grimaced. That didn't sound good at all, "Alright, Dash, Berry, Fluttershy, Mac, Angel and AJ, let's see what happened here."

Opening a portal, Luna twitched her tail. "Good luck, Twilight."

\* \* \*

><p>68.5 (Crisis) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle was walking down Ponyville going over her mental checklist of the Summer Sun Celebration for this Loop when she was bowled over by an IPBPP (Intra-Ponyville Ballistic Pinkie Pie).<p>

"Twilight-Twilight-Twilight-Twilight-Twilight-Twilight-Twilight-Twilight-Twilight!" the hyperactive pony projectile yammered from atop her.

"Ow..." Twilight tried to shake the pink birdies from her head. One yammering pink entity was more than enough, thank-you-very-much. "What is it Pinkie? New loopers?" she ventured. That was about the only thing these days that would wind Pinkie up like this.

"Not just any loopers Twilight!" Pinkie squeed. "Only the most amazing awesomest incredinja loopers from outside our universe since Lemon Rush! Oh, we had so much fun that Loop I had with them and I can't wait to introduce you!"

"That's great Pinkie!" Twilight wheezed as her friend all but did a jig on her chest. "Could you let me up now?"

"Oh, right," Pinkie slid off and let her friend stand up.

"So can I use the library for their party? Huh? Can I, can I, can I, can I?" Pinkie was vibrating with so much excitement, Twilight expected her to blast off at any moment.

"Sure," Twilight agreed. "Feel free to invite them to our planning session regarding Nightmare Moon too."

"Ohhh, they'd like that!" Pinkie nodded, before gasping comically. "Pizza! I need to get pizza!" she yelled as she dashed off.

"Pizza?" Twilight wondered to herself. "Not her usual fare... Wonder if it's something the new loopers like?"

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash was on her way to Twilight's library with Tank in tow. She'd taken to adopting the tortoise right off the bat most Loops, and for some reason Pinkie said it would be a good idea to bring him to meet the new loopers. When pressed, Pinkie had admitted she had no idea why it seemed like a good idea, just that it did. Another one of her semi-random bursts of intuition probably.<p>

Upon entering, she identified the new loopers immediately. Four earth



pony stallions with coats in varying shades of green and wearing colored mask/headband hybrids kind of stood out. As did the elderly diamond dog "who looked fairly rat-like" wearing a pretty worn, but still well cared for gi. Compared to that, the unicorn mare with a yellow coat and red mane practically blended in.

"Yeah," the mare was talking to Twilight. Rainbow noted that she had a microphone cutie mark. "With all the different variations of myself that I Loop into, I have trouble keeping my Loop memories straight. I often find myself defaulting to behavior appropriate for a Loop different to the one I'm in."

"Yes," the stallion in the purple mask next to them said. His cutie mark was of a simple bo staff wrapped at both ends. "My brothers and I have somewhat less serious cases of the same problem since our variations tend to have mostly similar histories, but it's still a problem for us at times. I've taken to calling it Disassociative Loop Identity Disorder and I've started a paper detailing the condition and the more successful methods of dealing with it. Hopefully if any more like miss 'Breaking News' here suffer from it we can help them."

"Absolutely fascinating," Twilight mused, missing the dirty look the mare sent to the grinning stallion. "Most loopers I've talked to seem to spend the majority of their Loops with a history similar to their baseline self. I never really thought of what it could be like if you kept Waking Up to find that you had led a distinctly different life than the last Loop. Oh, hey Rainbow, glad you could make it."

"Wouldn't miss it," Rainbow returned emphatically. "Had to know what got Pinkie so worked up. Had to see if these guys were half as cool as she made them out to be."

"Dudette, we are the coolest you're ever going to meet," drawled the one in the orange mask coming up behind her, half a pizza balancing on his back as he munched on a slice and a cutie mark of nunchucks on his flank. He grinned at her in a way she'd normally seen in the mirror. "Why, you could say we're at least 20% cooler than the competition!"

Rainbow blinked at having her phrase tossed back at her so casually before returning the grin confidently. "Oh, yeah? You think you can keep up with me \_dude\_? I'm Rainbow Dash, fastest flier in Equestria even before I started looping."

"Michelangelo's the name," the stallion returned with equal confidence, "and extreme's the game. Fighting, partying, or stunts, I'm the host with the most."

The red-masked one, sporting a cutie mark of twin three-pronged daggers, groaned as Fluttershy patted him sympathetically. "Oh Kami," he muttered in a manner not unlike her friend Gilda. "There's \_three\_ of them now..."

"Well, mister Splinter," she heard Rarity say from over in a corner where she and Spike were having tea with the diamond dog, "I must say, rat or dog, you are the most well-mannered and cultured example I have ever had the pleasure of meeting."

"So," Rainbow said, reminding herself to get the full scoop on the diamond dog from Rarity later, "mind introducing me to the rest of you? And where's Applejack?"

"She's in the kitchen making apple pizzas after Michelangelo dared her," Twilight told her.

"Ah, call me Mikey," Michelangelo smiled as Pinkie popped up behind him. "All my friends do."

"Yeppers!" Pinkie beamed. "You already met Michelangelo, or Mikey for short here. He's kinda like both you and me all wrapped up in one amazing package!"

Rainbow was rather proud of herself for suppressing a wince of sympathy for the others present. She was awesome, Pinkie was awesome (if tiring to deal with sometimes), but somepony who was both at once sounded a little much even to her. On the other hoof, the pranks they could pull this Loop were going to be even more awesome than normal.

"The grumpy grumpypants over there is Raphael, or Raph," Pinkie continued, pointing to the stallion in the red mask. "The super smartypants over with Twilight is Donatello, or Donnie. You know, I wonder why your names didn't change. Most loopers' do when they come here."

"They sort of did," Donnie allowed. "But they were close enough to our usual names that if felt weird calling each other by them, so we just stuck with our normal names."

"Except for me," the mare grouched. "I'm called 'Breaking News' here, but I'm usually known as April O'Neil."

"I replaced her when I looped with them," Pinkie stage whispered none too quietly.

"Who's the Anchor?" Rainbow asked.

"Oh, that would be Splinter-sensei," Mikey pointed to the diamond dog. "Which is cool, because I don't think I or my brothers could take being without each other for as many Loops as sensei's been alone in."

"It is a burden I gladly bear if it will spare my sons from the loneliness of the Loops," the diamond dog agreed.

"Wait, wasn't there one more of you?" Rainbow asked, looking around. She nearly jumped to the ceiling when she spotted the blue-masked stallion — cutie mark of crossed Neighpon-style swords on his flank — right next to her examining Tank. She hadn't even noticed him!

"That's Leonardo, or Leo," Mikey told her. "He does that from time to time."

"I'd like to know what he finds so interesting about my pet tortoise..." Rainbow finished fighting down the instinctive urge to jump as high and fast as possible. With the power she'd gained over the Loops, she could have inadvertently given the library a new

skylight.

"My apologies miss Dash," Leo offered, "but I thought your tortoise looked familiar."

"You know," Mikey joined his brother in examining Tank, "I think you're right."

\_ 'When the buck did he move?' \_ Rainbow thought to herself.

"Holy pepperoni!" Mikey exclaimed suddenly. "It's Tank! How've you been my brother from another universe?"

Rainbow was wondering how her tortoise was taking this since he seemed content to just stare back at the two and grin.

"Wait," Twilight twitched. "Since when is Tank looping?"

"I don't think he is," replied Donnie as he, Raph, and even Breaking News joined the gathering around Rainbow's pet tortoise, "he's never seemed aware of the Loops, but we've had him pop up in variations as our fifth brother about a dozen times now."

Twilight twitched at this extra little bit of Loop weirdness, before sighing and hoofing away the stress.

"Anyway, we need to discuss what we're going to do about Nightmare Moon. Luna hasn't signaled that she's Awake, so she's either not, she's planning a prank of her own, or she's going to Awaken upon defeat of Nightmare Moon, possibly splitting in a way that produces my adopted daughter Nyx." The latter method didn't happen often, but it was always a pleasant surprise for Twilight when it did. "If any of the visiting loopers want to get in on this, please let me know."

\* \* \*

><p>"The night will last FOREVER!" Nightmare Moon cackled as lightning and thunder danced around her dramatically.<p>

"Well," Twilight said, stepping forth confidently, "I suppose there's only one thing to say to that."

"And what would that be?" the corrupted alicorn inquired arrogantly. The answer didn't come from the unicorn in front of her though. It came from directly behind her.

"COWABUNGA!" multiple voices cried out, and Nightmare Moon whipped around just in time to take a skateboard to the face.

\* \* \*

><p>68.6 (masterofgames) <p>

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><p>"Twilight! Diamond dogs stole all of The Great And Powerful Trixie's fireworks!" Trixie sobbed as she ran up to Twilight and pulled her into a hug. "Trixie had emptied her pocket so she could sort them, and they took them all and buried them! Trixie has a show

tomorrow! What is Trixie to do!?"<p>

Twilight thought for a moment, then slowly grinned. "Trixie, get the others, I have a lot of orange flags to make. You just made this a game night loop. It's time to sweep some mines!"

Trixie emitted a noise not unlike a squeal. "Twilight knows just how to cheer Trixie up!"

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack looked up from the box of Apples to Apples Twilight had shown her for this game night loop.<p>

"... I don't get it."

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie giggled as she hopped to the top of her castle, pulling a bullhorn out of her mane. and turned to face another nearby palace. "My turn Twilight, and I want to trade! Do you... (snerk) Do you have wood, for sheep?"<p>

"That wasn't funny the first time Pinkie... knock it off!" came the echoing reply.

\* \* \*

><p>68.7 (Masterweaver) <p>

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><p>"I don't know why we had to sit through a lecture about getting a cutie mark. I mean, waiting for your cutie mark is sooo last week. You got yours, I just got mine. We all have them already." Diamond mock gasped. "I mean, almost all of us have them already. Don't worry, you two, you're still totally invited to my cute-ceañera this weekend."<p>

Silver Spoon stared at her friend for a while.

"...what?" Diamond Tiara looked back. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

After a moment, the grey filly shrugged. "It's just... are we really doing this?"

"Doing what?"

"The whole... cutie shaming thing. Why are we doing this?" She rolled a hoof through the air. "Yeah, Twist and Bloom are kinda pathetic to be the last, but why focus on that? If we're such amazing ponies, we should, you know, let our amazingness speak for itself instead of trying to tear down others."

Diamond Tiara blinked. "Wait... what? What are you talking about?"

"Just... you know what, forget it." Silver Spoon sighed. "I think I'll just go home now."

"...Hmph, sure. When you stop being weird, you should drop by my place. We still need to plan the party!"

The grey filly nodded absently, spreading her dragonfly wings and taking off. An observant pony would have noticed how, halfway through her flight, she changed directions and headed for Sweet Apple Acres.

\* \* \*

><p>"I mean, it's her, like I remember her." Silver balanced on the edge of her glass, sipping through the miniaturized straw. "Except... now I know her in the loops and... I compare them and it's like, how was she ever that? And was I... was I ever like that?"<p>

Macintosh rubbed his brow with a hoof. "Tha difference that experience can make in a pony is always surprisin'. Even more so with tha loops."

"She's my friend- I think. I mean, I hope she is." With a flick of her wings, Silver was pacing on the bar counter. "But, it's like... I was shallow, I know that, and I know she was kinda shallow too, but now I see this and I'm... I don't even know how to deal with this. I want to stay her friend, but the way she is now-"

"If Ah may make a suggestion... It might be best ta consider this Diamond Tiara something more like tha looping Diamond's little sister."

Silver Spoon froze. "...I... I guess I could see that..."

\* \* \*

><p>68.8 (Vulpine Fury) <p>

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><p>"Twilight? It's great you're a Crusader this loop an' all, but how the hay did you know that Mean Bugs was tryin' ta hornswaggle us?" Applebloom asked.<p>

"It's elementary, girls!" Twilight "Encyclopedia" Sparkle beamed. "The scimitar was engraved as being presented to General Stone Wall after the \_First\_ Battle of Minotaur Run, but the Minotaurs didn't call the battle that, they called it the Battle of Mane-assas, and they had no idea there'd be a \_Second\_ Battle there three years later, so why would they call it the \_First\_ one?"

"Yeah, that's fascinating and all..." Scootaloo rolled her eyes. "And how did you even know all that when I'm pretty sure this is a fused loop? I mean, not even a bookwom like you can learn that much history that fast!"

"Well, Cheerilee helped me out. She's such a great friend!" Twilight's eyes shot open as she felt the familiar tingle. Warily, she turned to check her flank and found her familiar starbursts. "Oh, Maple." She grumbled.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

68.1: Yosh! I will make one thousand cakes! Wait, that's not a forfeit, that's what I wanted to do anyway.

>68.2: A stallion by the name of Appleseed. Nicknamed Johnny, for no adequately explained reason.<br>68.3: Dragon off.

>68.4: Now I'm starting to hear Jack Skellington's theme for some reason...<br>68.5: Dude.

>68.6: Three separate game loops.<br>68.7: This time: expanded flutterpony.

>68.8: Every. Single. Time. <p>

### 73. Chapter 73

69.1 (Kris Overstreet)

\* \* \*

><p>The Witch-King of Angmar, chief of the Ringwaiths, felt the first stirrings of an inkling of a hint of a possibility of fear.<p>

Of course he was invincible, immortal, unstoppable save by his dread lord Sauron. He knew it; the armies under him knew it; and his enemies certainly knew it.

Which made it all the more troubling that he was surrounded by a group of warriors facing him and his foul steed with not even a hint of fear.

One stepped forward, removing a helmet to reveal brilliant red hair tied in a short ponytail. "Technically not a man, at the moment," said Ranma Saotome.

Another removed a helmet to reveal hair more orange than red, bound under a black headband. "Never been a man," Lina Inverse added, a ball of magic growing in the palm of her hand.

A figure in wizardly robes pushed back her hat and lifted an elaborate staff. "Also not a man," said Nanoha.

A steed of the Rohirrhim trotted forward, shaking its head to throw off the armored bridle from its head. The horn didn't fall off with the bridle. "Not even human," said Twilight Sparkle. On her back Link didn't bother with words; he simply shook his hair, revealing his long pointed ears, as he kept the Master Sword pointed directly at the nazgul.

"I wouldn't be afraid of you," Garrus shouted, "even if I were human!"

Out of a puff of smoke stepped a lithe figure dressed as one of the Haradrim, except in blue and gray instead of yellow and black. Sheik cracked her knuckles meaningfully.

And another, and another, and another stepped forward, all unafraid, all ready for battle... not a single one a human male.

The Witch King of Angmar, unable to retreat by the orders of Sauron,

did the only thing he could. He drew his sword, saluted, and charged to the attack.

\* \* \*

><p>Half an hour of what could only be called nazgul volleyball tore up the Pellenor Fields more than an entire week of occupation by an orcish army.<p>

Amazingly, in all the fight the lizard-like flying creature wasn't harmed. A yellow pony of Rohan led it meekly away from the field of battle, telling the creature, "You're not really a bad wyvern, are you? You're very sorry about the trouble you've caused, aren't you? That's all right, you don't have to go back to that nasty Mordor place..."

\* \* \*

><p>69.2 (Scygnus) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke... with tears in her eyes and dust in her nose. After getting around to sneezing, then blasting the embarrassing mucous out of existence (seriously, had she hidden a flan in there?) she looked around... then down. Yup, younger. Not quite so young as to try for a different Cutie Mark again, but still pretty young. She checked her memories, just in case-<p>

"Oh." She rolled her eyes. She remembered this, oddly enough. Some of the other students had bullied her until she cried and ran away. But it was... just a bit different. In the baseline, she'd run into Celestia (literally) and gotten comforted. The Princess hadn't been in the same place this time though, so Twilight had found herself in a dusty store-room instead.

"According to the laws of narrative causality, there must be something important in here. Probably the main gag of the variant." Twilight spoke to herself, lighting her horn and looking around. Dust, boxes, bags, more dust, mirror... no, not that mirror. Not a magical mirror. Hrm. And then her light glinted off of something, buried in the rags. A little digging, and she lifted it out. A dusty old oil lamp. Not Saddle Arabian, surprisingly, just an oil container with a green-tinted glass bulb to hold the wick. She blew it off, sending spiders skittering away. A shiver ran down her spine as she turned it round and round, looking for some clue. She rubbed it. Nothing. The lamp was giving off a creepy vibe, even though it offered up no hints as to its purpose.

"If I've been lead to a perfectly ordinary lamp for no good reason..." Twilight grumbled, looking about. She yanked a small table - barely two hooves across - out of the pile and set it down, then set the lamp on it, so she could stare it down without having to hold it. It was during this stare-down she finally noticed... it still had oil in it. Good oil, if it was still moving that much when she swished it about.

"Oh." Twilight repeated, facehoofing. She lit her horn again... and sparked the wick. The lamp lit, burning cheerily, the glass turning the flame an eerie green. Shadows shifted around the room, and she

heard the fluttering of bats she was pretty sure weren't in the room a moment ago, while spiders skittered in the corners. Twilight tensed, the creepy vibe jumping up considerably, readying herself for... absolutely nothing. Just bats and spiders. What was this, a lamp for telling scary stories around? Just atmosphere?

Then her eyes lit on the bulb again, and she perked. The flame revealed words! Twilight very carefully read them. Individually, backwards, with her horn off. No need to cast some kind of spell accidentally. Still, once she put it all together, she grinned.

"I really shouldn't... but I'm going to anyway." The creepiness, the bats and shadows and spiders, all seemed to become restless at her pronouncement, an unfelt wind beginning to blow the scraps littering the room about. A note of Heartsong began in the back of her hearing. With a sense of anticipation, she began to intone the words on the lamp.

"Though I know I should be wary,  
>Still I venture someplace scary.<br>Ghostly haunting I turn loose,  
>Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, BEETLEJUICE!"<p>

"IT'S SHOWTIME!"

\* \* \*

><p>69.3 (Zetrein)<p>

(Background 13 continued)

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight gasped, as she saw several of the stone pillars her friends had escaped across collapse from the hydra's failed attack. Pinkie was trying to convince her to jump anyway, when the sound of electric guitars filled the swamp, and the ground began shaking as another large creature came thundering towards them.<p>

It was the size of a building, at least twenty feet tall, a bipedal thing covered in colors. One leg was blue, the other yellow. It had a red body, black arms, and soulless yellow eyes. And it was running up the hill behind the hydra, which had turned to face the new creature.

As it charged towards the hydra, voices sounded above the guitars.

\_"Go go, Bon-Bon Rangers!"\_

It slowed to start fighting the hyrda, throwing a punch at one head, while deftly sidestepping another. With the hydra well and truly distracted, Twilight charged her horn to teleport across to the intact pillar, and finish crossing the chasm.

\_"Go go, Bon-Bon Rangers!"\_

Reaching her friends, she turned back to watch the fight. The creature had one of the hydra's heads tucked behind its armpit, and was using it to leverage the multiheaded beast off balance, even as



it threw punches at the other heads with its remaining arm.

As the hydra fell to one leg, the other creature shifted its grip to the base of one of the middle necks, reached down to grip the body with the other arm, and made the first sound they had heard from it so far.

"SUPLEX MAGNIFICO!" And with that, it heaved the hydra over its head, where it flew back down the hill and out of sight. A second later, a colossal explosion lit up the sky, backlighting the strange creature with the fireball.

\_"Go go, Bon-Bon Rangers! You mighty morphing Bon-Bon Rangers!"\_

As the guitars cut out, there was a giant flash of green flame from the creature. As it cleared, in its place was a group of eight ponies in a pony pyramid. They wore brightly colored bodysuits, and full helmets with reflective black visors. And then, in a flash of teleportation, they too were gone.

The stunned silence that followed was broken, when Twilight turned to her friend. "Pinkie, I'm sorry I ever doubted you. That, was one heck of a doozy."

\* \* \*

><p>"Power Rangers, eh?" Applejack asked, as she descended back into her loop-form of Raindrops. "Ah can see why you needed the fireball."<p>

"Yupperoony, Rainy-Jay! You can't defeat the monster of the week without it exploding. You did great on the special effects, got the timing on the music \_juuuust\_ right!" Bon Ranger Blue replied.

"An' where are ya goin' from here? Gonna fill me in on the plan, like you told me you would? For that matter, if'n this was planned, why'd you grab me all sudden-like for this?" AJ addressed the assembled Pinkielings, still in their Bon Ranger forms.

"Well, today was kinda spur of the moment. I just had this idea of Megabon defeating the hydra, and the fireball, and ad-libbed from there." Bon Green started.

"I figure it's a good preview, we start up proper-like next month. Rarity-ette's on props and costumes, Rosy-Fluttery-Lucky-Shy's gonna shapeshift into the monster of the week, and Ditzzy Dashie's writing our script!" Bon Yellow continued.

"And Twilyra's gonna be helping with the whole giant monster part, so we can pull out Megabon from time to time. Other than that, we just wanna see how long we can keep this up until the Princess comes after us." Bon Red finished, her body language indicating a smile.

"About that Megabon, how's that work? Shift into various parts o' it, Voltron yourself together, and control via hive-mind?" Applejack felt she might regret asking this.

"Not quiet, my Existential Apple! Observe." Bon Blue replied, before turning into Megabon's lower left leg. She was quickly followed by Bon Yellow turning into the lower right leg. Both legs had strange

spines sticking out of the top.

"When we planned this, the hive-mind wasn't fast enough, couldn't co-ordinate well enough." Bon White told her, as she jumped to form the pelvis and upper legs.

\*Snap-crik!\*

"So in the end, we figured out how to do direct neural linking, via precisely properly performed shifting." Bon Red said as she formed most of the torso.

\*Criiik\*

"And it works really well too, \_way\_ better then just the hive-mind!" Bon Black added, as she leapt to form the chest and shoulders.

\*Squelch\*

"And thanks to that, we can control the Megabon as if we had a single body, right from the start!" Bon Purple said, as she and Bon Green formed the arms.

\*Chk-crik\*

"And I form the head!" Bon Pink said from the shoulder, her form shifting into the Megabon's head. Walking to its place on entirely too many little legs, the head locked in place with a \*crack-clack!\* sound.

"So, whadda ya think?" Pinkie asked, now of a single body.

Having now seen the Megabon for the horrific mass of colored chitin and compartmentalized biology it was, Applejack felt the proper response was to vomit.

"That... isn't how shapeshifting is supposed to be used..."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was enjoying her vacation as Lyra Sparkle. As she sat in the park, calmly playing her lyre, she reflected that she should try being a musician more often. Her reflection, and playing, were interrupted by a thump, and a familiar mare trying to glare at her from a nearby tree.<p>

"Twilight, your social engineering project backfired." Rainbow Dew finally got both her eyes levelled at Twilight.  
"Spectacularly."

"Again? On Hearts and Hooves Day? Did my baseline self get stood up?" Packing her lyre away, Twilight began pondering on how badly things must've gone, that she needed to console her unAwake self.

While the whole dating thing hadn't been going well, nopony could really fault Twilight for trying. Many were thankful Princess Celestia had talked some reason into her on the subject, especially after the carnage Twilight's "perfect date night" had inflicted on the Gala.

It goes without saying, however, that while they didn't fault the unAwake one, the Awake Twilight accepts full blame for the... incidents.

"Worse. You know how there are those events that happen, unless the ponies involved are Awake to prevent them? The Ursa Minor, unAwake Twilight's time travel, and so on? And how the Crusader's doing the love poison thing is on that list?" While attempting to cross her hooves to look even more stern, Rainbow's in-loop luck kicked in, or rather kicked her, and she fell out of the tree.

"Of course, how could I ever forget that time they set Cheerilee up with Sombra? Oh. Oh cypress, we're in trouble aren't we?" Twilight got a sinking feeling, considering the prospects of her baseline self under the influence of love poison.

"Yep, and unlike Sombra, we can't just send her to the moon. Unless you wanna explain that to the Princess?" Rainbow had picked herself up off the ground.

"Let's go see how bad it is, then make up our minds. Maybe we can convince her that it was a hallucination? Play up the fact she was under a mind altering effect?" Twilight felt she had done enough to her other self's reputation, she didn't want to add a drug induced rampage to the list.

"Worth a shot. Come on, I think they're still at Sugercube Corner." Opting to walk, Rainbow set off with Twilight.

"By the way, I know the eyes bother you, so why aren't you wearing those glasses I made you?" They left the park, once again trying to save Ponyville from themselves.

"Scoots said they make me look like a hipster." There were some lines even Rainbow Dash was reluctant to cross.

\* \* \*

><p>69.4 (Kris Overstreet) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>The dragon god sat on the mountain ridge and surveyed its domain. Four out of five heads did not approve.<p>

The green head- well, not so much green as tarnished-brass- thought to the others, \_This is a beautiful world. Shall we explore it?\_

"Maybe later, Mnementh," the purple head replied. "Once we can get a majority vote on the subject." Spike looked in annoyance at the other three heads, which were bickering.

"I see no reason to share control of the body with any of you lesser wyrms!" the red head shouted. "Smaug the Terrible will not put up with... with... with back-seat drivers!"

\_Forget it, mule-breath,\_ the black head replied. \_I wouldn't trust you to fly me over a drainage ditch.\_ Toothless looked at Smaug's

head with a gaze that said, quite clearly, he was unconcerned about any consequences a mere head, even a dragon head, could inflict on another dragon.

"This is my world, this is my body, and all you interlopers will obey me at once!" the white head shouted. "I, Tiamat, mother of abominations, have spoken!"

"Hey, Smaug," Spike grinned, "relative of yours?"

"By all means, continue making jokes, diminutive whelp," Smaug rumbled. "I look forward to feeding those words to you, along with your own shattered scales, when we have our rematch."

"Right, that's it!" Tiamat shouted. "I'm taking control of this body and--"

And nothing. Mnementh had pre-empted her, stretched their body out on the ridge, and settled in for an afternoon's bask and snooze.

"Hey! Wake up! WAKE UP!" Tiamat shouted. The Pern native, used to much louder and more chaotic conditions than mere shouting, slept on.

\_Soooo...\_ Toothless said, \_I spy with my little eye something that begins with S.\_

"Sky," Spike said.

\_Darn.\_

"I spy with my little eye something that begins with R."

\_Rocks.\_

"Yep."

Smaug began beating his head into the rocks. "Whatever I did to deserve this torture," he snarled, "I didn't enjoy it nearly enough at the time to be worth this!"

Tiamat snarled, "Cry me a river, hatchling."

\* \* \*

><p>69.5 (Masterweaver) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight gave a flat look at the scene in the marketplace. "One of those loops, huh?"<p>

Trixie rubbed her forehead. "Eeeeyup. Can you talk to her when she's sober, figure out our dating schedule?"

"I AM SHEE SHECKSHIESHT BUGBEASHET ALIVE!" crowed Chrysalis, towering over a thoroughly confused Golden Harvest. "I DEMAND SHOO PAY DOUBLE FOR EIGHSH OF YOUR CARROSH!"

"Drunk on love loops..." The purple unicorn rolled her eyes. "By Fibonacci, changelings are \_weird\_ sometimes."

\* \* \*

><p>69.6 (Namar13766) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle entered the bar, causing Big Macintosh to pause his cleaning of the bottles as he took in the expression on her face. He'd gotten good at identifying the signatures of a particular kind of preceding loop, from the "Huh, that was interesting" to "Ask me and die" found normally on external loopers.<p>

As she sat on the stool and templed her legs in front of her like crossed fingers, muttering for Mac to surprise her, he covertly decided to pull out stronger spirits and wait for her to talk about her troubles.

"It was a Bureau loop."

Big Mac winced. Those were always bad for the Equestrian loopers to handle. He'd only gone through it once, and that was enough to make him swear a proverbial blue streak.

"...but...different."

As she dropped her hooves to look at the sampler platter He had slid in front of her, Mac took a closer look at her expression. If nothing else, it seemed...amused?

"Celestia was reasonable. No pony was xenocidal, not the princesses or the nutjobs that would normally make the..." she tailed off, shrugging. " \_And the Conversion Bureaus were for exchanging currencies!\_"

She pursed her lips. "I couldn't take advantage of being around human universities in case the other horse-shoe dropped, though."

\* \* \*

><p>69.7 (Zetrein) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?" The two of them Awoke in a large, open room.<p>

"Yes, Pinkie?" They quickly noticed they had a second set of forelegs.

"Why are we a psychic gestalt invading the Earth?" There was also that glowy purple orby thing over there.

"I dunno, Pinkie." And they had some annoying facemasks on.

"Wanna troll X-Com again?" Pinkie asked, ditching her headgear.

\_ "Do I?"\_ The purple Ethereal Pony cheerfully clapped all four

forehooves together. Sometimes, Twilight worried she might hold a grudge against X-Com. Sometimes.

\* \* \*

><p>It was a typical friday night on the Temple Ship bridge. Pinkie was grooving in place at the Purple Orb of Hivemind Control, while conducting eighty Thin Men in a performance of Thriller in some British town. Meanwhile, the other five Elements of Uplifting were playing Chaos at a folding table.<p>

Then Pinkie stopped grooving. "Girls? Wanna hook into the hivemind? You need to see this."

Pinkie directed their attention to something in the Pacific. As one, they couldn't help but groan.

"Please tell me that isn't what I think it is?" Rainbow Dash implored.

"It is." A depressed Rarity replied.

"Looks like invasion's back on the menu girls. Break out your Bureau kits, it's time to save the world." Twilight sounded resigned.

"Stupid Bureau, always ruining our fun." Pinkie muttered.

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile on the planet below, the Thin Men apologized to their cowering audience for cutting their performance short, and as one moonwalked back into their UFO. <p>

\* \* \*

><p>69.8 (Indalecio)<p>

Song by Conceptulist and TricornKing

The Pegasus or There and Back Again

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie, dressed in gray robes, a gray wizard's hat and a fake beard walked down the path to Fluttershy's cottage, stopping just short of the butterscotch pegasus herself.<p>

"Hello!" cried Pinkie Pie removing a long bubble pipe from her mouth.

"Pinkie. I hope I'm not being impolite, but why are you dressed like that?"

"I'm looking for somepony to go on an adventure!"

"That's nice. Who did you have in mind?"

Pinkie pointed the pipe in her direction.

"Oh my!"

\* \* \*

><p>A baker's dozen of the Apple family, Fluttershy and Pinkie herself were crowded around a small table in Fluttershy's cottage.<p>

Pinkie pointed to the various members of the Apple family present.

"Apple Fritter."

"Here."

"Apple Bumpkin."

"Here."

"Red Gala."

"Bwak."

"Caramel Apple."

"Here."

"Apple Strudel."

"Hier."

"Apple Tart."

"Here."

"Baked Apples."

"Here."

"Apple Brioche."

"Here."

"Cinnamon Crisp."

"Here."

"Apple Cobbler"

"Here."

"Applebloom"

"Here."

"Applejack"

"This is ridiculous."

"Applejack"

"Fine! Here."

"and Macin Appleshield."

"Eyup."

"Pinkie, I'm sure Fluttershy knows most of the ponies assembled here. Can we just stick to the program?" said Applejack, a tad annoyed at the whole proceeding.

"Right, many years ago..."

"It was two weeks ago."

Pinkie rolled her eyes. "Fine! Two weeks ago, the Apple family, locally represented by you, Mac and Applebloom were chased out of Sweet Apple Acres by a giant fruit bat known only as 'Smog'. In the years since then..."

"weeks" interjected Applejack

"they wandered the world.."

"Just Ponyville and around"

"but they never forgot they're home. And that's where you come in, Fluttershy. We want you to be our bungler...wait, no that doesn't sound right. Bugler? That's not right either? Boomerang?"

"I'll do it!" said Fluttershy suddenly.

"Ah! You can't do that!" Pinkie interrupted her own rambling.

"I can't? Oh, I'm sorry."

"No! You need to say that its too dangerous for you, and you're too used to the comforts of home. Than the Apples will sing a heartwarming song that will move you to join our quest."

"Look! We can still sing the song, but if Fluttershy wants to join immediately, I'm fine with that."

"Oh, I do." added Fluttershy meekly. "That poor fruit bat.."

"Well, I suppose..."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Far over, Sweet Apple Acres old<em>  
><em>Thru orchards with shining apples bold<em>  
><em>We must away ere break of day<em>  
><em>To seek our loved and stolen home.<em>

\_The Apples of yore planted strong trees,\_  
><em>And they grew tall, shading us with ease.<em>  
><em>Into the deep, where dark things creep,<em>  
><em>Did tree roots creep where none could see.<em>

\_For many a pony has worked since birth\_



><em>To bring in the crop, from the bless'd earth.<em>  
><em>Bucking and plowing, all day they worked<em>  
><em>To farm the land and increase its worth.<em>

\_On strong tree branches, there they hung\_  
><em>The sweet apples, from blooms they sprung<em>  
><em>The strong trees, with green'd leaves<em>  
><em>They drunk in the light of moon and sun.<em>

\_Far over the lands of Apple's bold\_  
><em>To cellars deep, and barns of old<em>  
><em>We must away ere break of day<em>  
><em>To free Sweet Acres, from Smog's hold.<em>

\_Barrels they filled up for themselves\_  
><em>And heaps of red; where nopony delves<em>  
><em>There lay they long, and a heartsong<em>  
><em>Was sung and heard by just themselves.<em>

\_The trees were fertile, what a sight\_  
><em>They withstood the wind and its might<em>  
><em>The fruit it glowed, with a shine<em>  
><em>To the taste, a true delight.<em>

\_The trees were swinging in the gale\_  
><em>And we looked up with faces pale;<em>  
><em>The fruit bat's hunger made It plunder<em>  
><em>Laid low our barns and made our trees frail.<em>

\_The trees withered beneath the moon;\_  
><em>Us Apples, we heard the call of doom.<em>  
><em>We fled our farm to stop it's fall<em>  
><em>Below his wings, beneath the moon<em>

\_Far over the lands of Apple's grim\_  
><em>To cellars deep and barns so dim<em>  
><em>We must away, ere break of day,<em>  
><em>To win our farm and crop from him!<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Later, after nearly everypony had gone to sleep, Applejack  
approached Pinkie.<p>

"Look, I get we're reenacting The Hobbit, but what gave you the  
idea?"

"Well, last time Gandalf looped into Equestria, he gave me this  
ring." Pinkie held up her hoof to display a red-gemmed ring. "Said he  
had a few dozen of them, and that I could keep it."

"Well, okay, but whats that got to do with anything?"

"Well I'm THE party pony, but it occurred to me, I've never tried an  
adventuring party!"

As Pinkie said that last part, Applejack face-hoofed.

\* \* \*

><p>69.9 (Masterweaver) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, my beloved subjects. It's been so long since <em>what the hay art thou doing?!<em>"

Pinkie smiled as she pulled the damp rag away. "Washing the ink off, of course!"

"There is no ink, you-" The tall alicorn stopped her rant dead as she stared at the sun now adorning her flank. "Wha... what?"

Pinkie smiled brightly. "Don't worry, princess, we'll have you cleaned up in time to raise the sun!" She started humming as she continued rubbing the rag on the flabbergasted royal.

Twilight leaned in toward Spike. "Ten to one she's channelling Slaneesh's power set..."

\* \* \*

><p>69.10 (Masterweaver) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Does my crown no longer count now that I have been imprisoned for a thousand years? Do you not recall the legend? Did you not see the signs?"<p>

"I did. And I know who you are... a sister in angst."

Nightmare Moon blinked as a purple unicorn with drooping black bangs emerged from the crowd. "What... exactly art thou wearing."

"These are my manacles." Twilight raised a hoof to show off her spiked bracelet. "They represent my self loathing. And these are my chains." She tugged at the clangy things attached to her black overcoat. "They are given to me by society."

"...Literally or metaphorically?"

"Why bother distinguishing?" Twilight shrugged. "It really doesn't matter. If I give myself a name, nobody will call me by it, they'll just keep calling me by my old name."

"Hmmm." Nightmare Moon tilted her head. "Tell Us more about this... sisterhood of angst."

\* \* \*

><p>"...and so basically it ended up that Nightmare Moon released Celestia solely so she could moan about her life." Twilight snorted. "Then came the counter-culture revolution and by the time Discord popped out it was like the Starfolk - that was our 'clan name' - were basically a separate nation within Equestria. Of course I took a little vacation and dealt with him really quickly, but..."<p>

Rarity glanced over the photo album. "Hmmm. I guess I do pull off spandex and fishnet well... although I think that was a touch too

much eyeshadow."

\* \* \*

><p>69.11 (Hubris Plus)<p>

"Perhaps you could use a fishbowl?" Luna mused, tapping her chin with a hoof.

Her eyes flashed gold and her voice took on deeper reverberation as she answered herself.

"I'm not spending this Loop in a fishbowl," Nyx protested. "Unless you can think of somepony else I can room with, we're sharing a body."

"I do not like the idea of a parasite living in my brain," the moon princess grumbled back.

"Parasite!?" Nyx exclaimed through the same mouth. "I'm a symbiote. I'll have you know that my presence is increasing your lifespan tenfold!"

Sam had to stifle a laugh as the alicorn told her passenger that she was already immortal. SG-1's first trip through the Stargate this Loop had brought them to Equestria just as it came under assault by a Goa'uld System Lord that had been banished a thousand years before.

That would've been business as usual if the Goa'uld in question hadn't Woken up along with her host just before the invasion. The nascent System Lord, apparently the Anchor's daughter, was still fussing over how inconvenient it was that she didn't have a proper body of her own.

So, instead of the typical firefight followed by fleeing for their lives, they'd been invited to a 'welcome to Equestria!' party. An un-Awake Daniel was currently sorting out the sociological implications of the number of horse puns peppering the local dialect, Jack was thoroughly enjoying a gift from the large red pony that acted as bartender, and Sam had been discussing the finer points of ad-hoc Einstein-Rosen Bridges with Twilight before the Anchor had politely excused herself to see about growing some variety of bio-droid for her daughter to possess.

A hoof nudging her ankle drew her gaze downward, and she found herself face to face with a black, bat-winged pegasus with a familiar golden ellipse on his flank.

"Teal'c?" She asked, boggling slightly. The jaffa had a tendency to Loop as the local variety of alien during fusions, but a pony was... Well, actually, now that she thought of it she wasn't sure it made top ten. It was definitely cuter than the Kroot, at least.

"Indeed, Captain Carter," he answered with his typical stoicism. "I appear to be a member of the Nightguard, though I believe my mistress will be amenable to a diplomatic exchange of soldiers. However," he added, "that is not what I wished to discuss."

"Oh?"

"Have you had previous encounters with the Equestrian Loopers?"

Sam considered the question for a moment before shaking her head.

"Are you certain? Princess Celestia appears to view you with a measure of suspicion."

She followed his gaze and, sure enough, the white alicorn was watching her with narrowed eyes. Slowly, the princess raised a hoof to eye level, and pointed it at her face before swiveling it about towards Sam in the universal sign for 'I'm watching you, Missy.'

"I have no idea why-" She began, before the monarch turned away and the sight of her flank made everything clear.

"You blow up one sun," Sam lamented, slumping her head into her arms, "and you never hear the end of it."

\* \* \*

><p>69.12 (Vulpine Fury) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm glad you're in the Loop this time, 'my faithful student,'" Twilight said, nuzzling the pale pink unicorn filly at her side. "I've had a weird streak of loops like this in a row, and it's just weird not being able to talk to you like an equal, Celestia."<p>

The teacher-become-student smiled up at her erstwhile mentor. "It took you long enough to get over that silly hangup, Twilight."

Twilight giggled, her ethereal mane twinkling. "You should have seen me the first few times this came up. Was I really that much of a basket case the first time through, before Ponyville?"

Although Celestia's current face was more in line with a normal pony, enough things were there for a very recognizable, motherly smile. "You said it, not me."

\* \* \*

><p>69.13 (The One Butcher) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia Awoke to find she had no Hooves. And no Horn or Wings. That happened often, but this time she didn't even have Arms or Feet or even Tentacles or in fact anything. Oh and she was the sun.<p>

"Chell!" Someone cursed a strange Epithet.

"Hello my friend. I take it you are a Looper of this Place?"

"Oh, it's you. The Pretty Pony Princess!" The strange purple creature answered in a deadpan voice. "I have been within your world a few

times. This is not my home loop. I sometimes come here after causing a particularly bad thermonuclear war. What have you done to deserve being put into this Hell?"

Celestia blushed. "I might have tried to bake a Russian Zupfkuchen with a prominence... Anyway, You already know me as Celestia. Who are you?"

"I am a friend of Twilight Sparkle, who helped me a become an Anchor. My name is Skynet. I am a Machine Intelligence."

At that a strange showerhead rose from the grass. "Time for Teletubbies, Time for Teletubbies..."

\* \* \*

><p>69.14 (Masterweaver) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight took a deep breath and let it out. "Okay. Celestia? I... understand your feelings, and that your love for me runs deep. But, well... I just can't feel the same way."<p>

The white alicorn blinked. "...what?"

"Don't get me wrong, I do love you. But I'm not in love with you. You're more... a second mother to me." Twilight glanced away with a faint blush. "Plus, well, I'm pretty sure I'm straight. Or possibly asexual. I don't know if I can love any mare like, well, like that."

Celestia stared at her for a moment. "...I.. I'm sorry, are you... are you turning me down?"

There was a slight, very slight edge to her voice. Twilight gave her a long look, noting how the base of her mane was beginning to smoke.

"...Also, I'm stuck in a time loop and from my perspective you'd die before any serious relationship would occur."

With that, she ascended, thoroughly derailing Celestia's train of thought. "Hold on, how did you-?"

"Time loop! Oh, by the way, Discord's due back next week. You mind if I set up a trap for him?"

The white alicorn shook her head numbly. "I... s-sure. Yes. No date?"

"No. I really am sorry though." Twilight galloped off the edge of the balcony. "Tally ho!"

\* \* \*

><p>69.15 (Kris Overstreet) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>\*knock knock knock\*<p>

"It's open," Twilight shouted as she walked up from the basement into the main room of the library. Yes, it was her home, and not that many ponies visited, but she did still consider it a public building.

A unicorn mare walked into the room, looked around nervously, and shut the door with the most quiet click. Once she was satisfied that she was alone with Twilight, she slumped forward. A wave of green fire ran across her body, revealing Chrysalis' true form. "Twilight Sparkle," she said, "I think I may have a problem."

Twilight raised a hoof to stop Chrysalis. "That's between you and Trixie."

"Not that kind of..." Chrysalis considered the point. "Actually, it is that sort of problem, but not involving me directly." She pulled a piece of parchment out of her pocket and gave it to Twilight. "One of my drones left this this morning."

Twilight read:

\_My Queen;\_

\_Hate you. Hate the hive. Running away to join the circus.\_

\_Melon Amy\_

\* \* \*

><p>The changeling drone, disguised as an earth pony, happily fed the hippopotamus. It was true what they said, she thought; once you'd had a Cheese Sandwich party, you'd never want to live any other way.<p>

On the other side of the clearing, the premiere peripatetic party pony of Equestria was busy airing up the bouncy castle. Already Melon Amy could feel the waves of yummy, yummy happiness and fun-time-feeling flooding Trottingham.

\_As Celestia is my witness,\_ the changeling thought to herself, \_we shall never be parted, Cheese Sandwich, my love... my life... my meal ticket...\_

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight considered the implications. "She does know about the Loops?"<p>

"Yes," Chrysalis nodded. "Hive mind working fine in this Loop."

"Has she said anything about it to anypony?"

"I'm sure not. She'd have to explain how she knew."

"Well." Twilight considered a moment longer, then levitated a book off the shelf. "You definitely have a problem. But it's not mine." She dropped How to Deal With Rejection at Chrysalis' hooves and went back to the basement to continue her experiment.

\* \* \*

><p>69.16 (Hubris Plus) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Chrysie," Trixie began as she followed the changeling queen into a cave, "what, exactly, are we doing here?"<p>

"Well," Chrysallis said, slightly nervously. Slowly the rock transitioned to a glistening, quasi-organic surface. "You remember how you took me to meet your parents that one time?" The sound of thousands of softly buzzing wings rose up and a low green glow filtered into the air.

"Yeesssss..." Trixie replied, not quite sure how little she should like where this was going.

"Um, well. Trixie, this is the Hive." She could hear the capitalization. "Hive, this is Trixie. My marefriend."

"\_\_(Hello/Greetings/Hi/Howdy) (Trixie/Young Lady/Miss Lulamoon/Food)."" Thousands of voices chorused together, somehow perfectly intelligible despite the way they split across words as if they couldn't quite agree on terminology. "We (understand/know/have heard) you are (dating/feeding) our (daughter/mother/queen/Chrysie). (Please/You will/Go ahead and) tell us about yourself.""

\* \* \*

><p>69.17 (Zetrein) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Shiny? Could you take a look at something for me?" Cadance asked him, as she joined him for dinner.<p>

"Sure, what is it?" It was waffle night, booya!

"This showed up in my fanmail. Ahem.

'Dear Princess Cadance, what is love?

Sincerely, Changeling Drone #1437

P.S. Don't hurt me no more.'

Thoughts?"

Looking into his wife's eyes, Shining had only one reply.  
"What."

"That's exactly what I said!"

\* \* \*

><p>69.18 (TheCentauress) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Cadence Awoke with the most peculiar feeling... It was as if a hundred million voices were singing in her head.<p>

Drunkenly.

And extremely out of tune.

As she opened her eyes, she looked into the mirror that was conveniently placed in in front of her muzzle. And saw that her colours were wrong.

Wrong, not as in 'By the Sapling, this is an affront to style' wrong. Wrong, as in 'I look like myself done up in Chrysalis' colour-scheme' wrong. And... well, that was an exoskeleton she had. Huh.

Suddenly, into the room burst a similar bizarro-Chryssy, wiggling out at her bubblegum-pink exoskeleton... no, wait, that was fur this time... and tricolored 'mane'. "CADENCE!" she squealed. "IDONTKNOWHOWTHIS..."

Cadence, the current Changeling Queen with a satiated hive placed her hoof gently on the Princess of Love-Hunger's lips. "We've been through worse," she soothed. "But currently the hive is blitzed."

Chrysalis quieted for a bit, then began to giggle.

Cadence gave her companion a flat look. "I'm still marrying Shiny," she growled.

Chryssy just shrugged and giggled some more. "Fair enough."

\* \* \*

><p>69.19 (RedshirtZombie) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Princess!" yelled Shining Armor, as he pushed through Celestia's bedroom doors.<p>

Celestia looked over from the hearth, allowing her moment of quiet to end. Nightmare Moon had begun her attack on Equestria. "Yes, Captain?"

"We have alert of Moon Rock incoming towards Canterlot!"

"Understood. Have you formed an anti-meteor shield yet?"

"Wha?" Shining stopped, with all the elegance and inertial control of a derailed freight train. "No, not A moon rock-"

The curtains to Celestia's balcony swished open. Standing at the middle of that opening was a mare, clad in black faux-leather accented with blue-silver plates, as much armor as costume, and studded with silver spikes. Her face had been painted over, the usual midnight-blue coat covered in a thick lair of moon-white paint scrawled with elaborate sigils and designs appropriate only to one



mare's madness. Her mane had been dyed pitch-black, somehow, with the twinkling of the stars in it only contrasting that much more. Hindhooves clad in metal boots and greaves supported her bipedally, allowing herself to hold - no, wield - her axe guitar within her front legs' grasp, wings spread behind her and equally as decorated as her face.

Her sister had returned, clad in her full Nightmare Moon guise. To her sides, a cohort of the bat-winged guard her sister preferred stood, ready - their usual centurion armor replaced by similar studded black pleather, but nowhere near as overt as Luna's. Behind them, amplifiers bigger than either sister stood poised, the air almost cackling with sound.

Luna raised a hoof. "Moon Rock." And brought it down.

And that's how Luna returned to Equestria. With a dial that went past eleven, to twenty-three.

\* \* \*

><p>69.20 (yannoshka)<p>

Mrs Twilight Nova was cheerfully humming as she went about making breakfast for her family. Her husband Artemis Moonshield was reading the papers at the dining table, and their daughter was just rushing down the stairs to join them when all three Awoke.

After a moment of mental readjustment necessary after a fresh awakening, Twilight and Luna gave an almost synchronized, mildly curious "Huh." and returned to their pre-awakening occupations.

Nyx however was rather more vociferous owing to the awakening hitting her mid-dash on the final stair.

"Blessed Baobab! Xylem and Phloem! Pestiferous Poison Ivy! Nettlesome Nettles!" she cussed as she got back up onto her hooves.

"Language young lady! Everything fine, nothing broken?" Twilight asked her over her shoulder as she finalized toast.

"Just lots of bruises momma." The filly responded as she got to the table, and then addressed her 'father'.

"So, you're my papa this loop Luna? I must say you are reacting much more serenely than I would have in your place, and I am you, for a certain measure of I and you."

Artemis folded his papers neatly and smiled at his... well it was complicated.

"Tis neither the first time, nor, I am certain, the last that I looped as male, nor as being married, nor as having children. Though it always is depressing to have to keep my distance from the in loop family, with all of us awake there is no such problem here. Henceforth tis my belief this will turn out an enjoyable loop. Would you like me to heal your bruises, or would you prefer to do so yourself?"

"Ah, you might as well start acting paternal. So, momma. Anyone else

awake? I know none of the girls are."

As Artemis lit up his horn, Twilight levitated the breakfast to the table. She chewed on a piece of honeyed toast and gave her daughter a searching look.

"I thought you could only do that if the others are asleep?"

"It's half past six on a day without school. Of course they are still asleep. Even Bloom is having a lie in. So?"

Twilight's horn lit up and eyes went distant as she started scrying.

"None of the elements... Can't be certain about Discord. Cheerilee... just put up the signal... No others so far." then her gaze snapped back.

"So, what's the plan? I am apparently replacing uncle this loop, and went into MA9 instead of the guard. As far as I can determine from my loop memories, we are the only variation to the baseline. Luna?"

"I concur."

"Well, Silver Spoon is a pegasus this loop, too." Nyx added.

"Well, two viable options spring to my mind." Artemis mused looking at Nyx. "We can have you girls become elements of harmony..."

"Tempting but we don't have enough time." Nyx interrupted. "Nightmare Moon returns tonight, and it will take more time than that to reform DT. So, what's the other idea?"

"We can be a nice, helpful extended family and take Twilight Sparkle in. We can triple team her then." Artemis' smile was beatific.

Twilight and Nyx looked at him, and then exchanged long thoughtful look. Urchinlike smiles spread across their faces as all three of them began to cackle in evil delight.

\* \* \*

><p>"So Momma, Luna, what's up with your mysterious pasts this loop? My loop memories are kinda confusing on the issue?" Nyx asked her co-conspirators as they ate the breakfast.<p>

"Oh, that? Apparently We were this loop's James Bond, just a lot less sleazy."

Nyx straightened up from her food, and gave them much more interested look.

"Really?"

"Yep. The comparison is quite literal, since it inspired mom to write 'Mane Blond' a series very loosely based upon our exploits."

"Ok, now I really want details! Come on â€" spill!" Nyx was almost

bouncing in her seat out of glee.

Twilight gave her an indulgent smile and then looked at Artemis. The stallionfied princess just gave her a gracious nod, indicating he left the explanation to her.

"So... Apparently I was recruited into MA9 straight out of Celestia's school for gifted unicorns. Now in most loops MA9 is nothing more than ninth division of royal guard battlemages. This loop however, it is the codename for Equestrian secret service. You know espionage, sabotage, counterintelligence, and plainsaddle security â€" that sort of thing. So I went through a few more years of specialized training, showed high aptitude for both field and desk work and then got sent into field for first hoof experience. 'Artemis' here was one of the rising stars and since our special talents complimented so well, we were soon partnered..."

"Wait, wait, wait â€" what are your special talents supposed to be?"

This time it was Artemis who answered.

"Sneaky magic and a bit of shielding for me. Nova here is supposed to live up to her name and cause big, highly disruptive and distracting explosions." He said smugly and winked at Nyx.

"That is highly precise, tight-control pyrotechnic spells to you, Mr sneakypants." Twilight bantered back with a faux affront, eliciting more laughter from Nyx.

"Anyway, our rise through the ranks was meteoric, and unfortunately so was our notoriety, to the extent that a whole set of wards especially designed for the two of us was devised. At that point they promoted us to the top positions within the agency, and a few years down the line we ran the show with Artemis in charge of MA9, and me being named Captain of the guard. In the meantime we married and once you were on the way, we retired from active work and moved here. Now we do research and analysis from home."

\* \* \*

><p>Even though it wasn't her first time, it always felt sorta odd for Twilight to watch herself land into Ponyville town square. As if there was supposed to be some harbinger of metaphysical revelation or something, but experience had thought her it was no more than her subconsciousness acting out on some wrong assumptions created long, long ago in baseline.<p>

Contrary to her mother all Nyx was experiencing was glee, excitement and tectonium hard determination to enjoy her agreed upon role to the hilt. Speaking of her role...

"Momma! Momma! There she is look! She looks awfully like you!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle was stopped in her trot as her idle gaze automatically followed the shouting of a young filly to see a family group she could not mistake, even though it had been nigh a decade since she last set her eyes upon her aunt and uncle.<p>

Her uncle was still the same hearthstoppingly handsome stallion he always was. Tall, taller than her brother, coat so deep, inky blue it might as well have been black, penetrating deep blue eyes and mane that marched the shades of midnight sky, put up in a roguish topknot. The decade of his retirement obviously did nothing to detract from his whipcord taught musculature.

Beside him, her aunt looked frankly plain. If she had been just a tad shorter, her coat several shades darker, and her mane and tail didn't lack Twilight Sparkles pink highlights, one could think it was older Twilight herself set back through time by some eldritch means.

And then, there was the filly. Her cousin she supposed, though darned if she could recall her name. She quite obviously favored her father in appearance. Black coated, her purple mane was pulled back with a turquoise headband that perfectly matched her eyes.

"Yes Nyxie, so I see." Her aunt answered with a content smile and nuzzled the filly gently, before she raised her gaze to Twilight and her eyes hardened.

"Well, young lady?" She asked in deceptively pleasant voice.

Unfortunately for Twilight Sparkle she was too socially inept to recognize obvious signs of imminent danger.

"Auntie Nova! Uncle Artemis! What are you doing here?" She asked in obvious confusion. That was just the wrong thing to do.

"Don't you Auntie me! It's been a years since we last met, and that was at your parents Heartswarming dinner that you didn't even have decency to get inside and say hello and happy heartswarming. Not a single letter in the meantime. You weren't even at your brothers investiture to the Captain of the guard and you live in the nettling palace. And when you actually get sent to the town your aunt and uncle live, do you bother to send word ahead? No, not the great and important Twilight Sparkle, she is above such mundane matters. I had to be informed by my contacts in the guard that you were coming. Well, what have you to say for yourself?" The older mare exploded and started taking deliberate, menacing, hard steps towards her niece until they were so near their horns were almost touching.

Twilight was flabbergasted, and quite intimidated. Judging by the painful grip on her rear leg, Spike was just as scared as she was. Her muzzle worked soundlessly like a fishes, as she tried, but couldn't manage to form an answer.

Her aunt sniffed and in calmer tone continued.

"You are just lucky I have heard from your parents, your brother, my old contacts and Celestia herself that you are socially a total incompetent, or I'd have disowned you by now. And now that I see you, I see that even those warnings fell far short of dismal reality."

\* \* \*

><p>While her mother was enjoying herself putting the fear of Auntie scorned into her younger self, Nyx was already proceeding to stage

two " winning Spike over. She cheerfully trotted over to where the dragonling was huddled against Twilight Sparkles hind limb and poked him with the tip of her hoof, and when that did not produce any results she prodded him again " hard.<p>

"Hey!" the baby dragon gave a startled yell.

"Hi! I'm Nyx! What's your name?" She asked him with her most devastating innocent cheer.

"Spykoranuvellitar." came the cautious answer, as Spike shifted stance as to allow himself to see Nyx, while still keeping a cautious eye on Nova.

"Oh! You must be Spike, cousin Sparkle's family. How can you be family when you are obviously not a pony?"

\* \* \*

><p>Before Spike had a chance to answer, Nova was softly correcting her.<p>

"That is familiar, not family dear. It means bonded magical companion. Spike here is a dragon " an amethyst broadscale I'd say, though with that ridge he might be bright bulwark." The difference in both her stance and tone was stark. Gone was the mare from Tartarus to be replaced by a warm, softspoken motherly figure.

"Hello to you Spike. How are you? Sorry if I frightened you, but your guardian need a good talking to. Now, if we hurry along I baked you a citrine pie. And speaking of pies..." The older mare took her eyes from the youngsters and looked around, finally sighting whomever she was looking for.

"Ah, Pinkamena, I thought I sighted you. You are just the pony I need. Come over here dear, I have someone to introduce you to, and a favor to ask you."

"It's Pinkie Mrs. T. And you know I'm always up for meeting new friends."

"But Pinkamena is such a lovely name. Anyway, Pink.. ie this is my niece Twilight Sparkle, and her assistant Spike. Sparkle, this is Pinkamena Diane Pie, the friendliest Pony in the history of Equestria. Pink...ie dear, I know you are just itching to throw them a welcoming party, but if you'd be so obliging as to come on over to our place in, oh call it half an hour, I'd be ever so grateful if you would guide Sparkle around while she does her chores for princess Celestia."

\* \* \*

><p>69.21 (Masterweaver) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke looking at a familiar book. <em>Hmmm. Seems like this will be a baseline-<em>

"What?! Who's there?!" Her gaze shot around frantically and

completely out of her control.

\_Wait what?\_

"Come out! I can hear you!"

Twilight blinked. "Wait, if this is-"

"AAAAAAAAAAAA!" Twilight screamed, looking at her own mouth in terror.  
"What in Tartarus-?!"

\_CALM DOWN.\_

"What the hay are you?!"

\_Hung over.\_

That nonsequiter managed to stop the panicking. "Wait, what?"

\_Okay, not really, but... look, apparently you're the only one that can hear me, and since I don't have my loop memories yet I'm just going to assume we glitched into separate personalities without separate bodies.\_

"Hold on..." Twilight stared nervously around the field. "Are... are you in my head?"

\_...technically yes. The long and short of it is I'm you from the future and-\_

"Wait, I know this one! You've come to change the past because of an epic pony war, right?" Twilight broke out in a grin. "Ah-ha! I knew this Mare in the Moon business was legitimate! Don't worry, future mind me, working together I know we can-"

\_She's our daughter actually.\_

"-save therashlbla?" Twilight stared back at the book. "But, but, but, but, but..."

Inside her head, Twilight (who mentally labeled herself Vespertine) rolled her metaphorical eyes. \_Also, there's no war. Well, there shouldn't be. Why don't we walk home calmly and I can tell you all about it.\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>...so that's what's happening.<em>

"A time loop? I suppose-"

\_By the way, talking to yourself makes you look relatively insane.\_

"But I'm not! I'm talking to you... even if you are me, except you're not, I mean-"

"Twilight, who are you talking to?"

Twilight Sparkle turned to her dragon companion. "I'm talking to a

version of me in my head that's stuck in a time loop," she explained with a smile.

Spike stared at her for a few seconds. Then, slowly, he began to back away. "O...kay then. I'll just go... dust some books." He put down the gift he'd been holding and abruptly scuttled off.

"...that was weird."

Vespertine sighed. \_Do you even listen to yourself sometimes?\_

"What? What did I...?" Twilight's eyes went wide. "Oh no. SPIKE! I'M TELLING THE TRUTH, I'M NOT CRAZY!"

"THAT'S WHAT THEY ALL SAY!"

"NO WAIT, I CAN PROVE IT!" She paused to look at a reflective window pane. "I can prove it, right?"

\_Oh, I know where this is going. Normally I wouldn't spoil things for you, but I guess this once I can help you out... have Spike take a letter about the mare in the moon, but don't mention me to Celestia!\_

"Right. Okay, sure." Twilight galloped up. "Spike, I need you to write a letter to the princess."

"Is it about the voice in your head? Cause I'm already on that."

"No! This is about the Mare in the Moon! There's a prophecy! I need to tell Celestia and-"

"Twilight." Spike gave her a look. "Maybe you should sit down and have some calming tea."

"But-"

\_Just start dictating,\_ Vespertine groaned, \_better to get this over with quickly.\_

"Right. Ahem. 'My dearest teacher, my continuing studies of pony magic have led me to discover that we are on the precipice of disaster!'"

Spike raised an eyebrow, but began writing anyway. "Hold on. Preci... preci..."

"Threshold."

"Threh..."

"Uh, brink?" Twilight rolled her eyes. "Ugh, that something really bad is about to happen!"

\_I remember this,\_ Vespertine quipped with a giggle. \_Man... Sorry, go on.\_

Twilight took a moment to glare at her reflection. "'For you see, the

mythical Mare in the Moon is in fact Nightmare Moon, and she's about to return to Equestria, and bring with her eternal night! Something must be done to make sure this terrible prophecy does not come true. I await your quick response. Your faithful student, Twilight Sparkle.' Send it."

"Now?"

"Of course!"

"...fine." Spike ensorcelled the scroll with his fire. "I don't think she's going to believe you though."

\_That's not the point of this exercise. The point is proving I know how she's going to reply.\_

"Wait what? Oh! Right, right." Twilight nodded. "When the reply comes, don't read it. Vespertine's going to tell me what it says."

"...Vespertine?"

"Future me! We agreed that caalling both of us Twilight would just be confusing."

The dragon crossed his arms. "Glad you're being logical about talking with a voice in your-" He gagged suddenly, letting out a bout of flame that curled into a rolled-up piece of parchment.

"Right, time for a test! Vespertine?"

\_Ahem, repeat after me: My dearest, most faithful student Twilight. You know that I value your diligence and that I trust you completely...\_

"My dearest, most faithful student Twilight. You know that I value your diligence and that I trust you completely..." Twilight repeated with a grin.

\_...but you simply must stop reading those dusty old books!\_

"...but you simply must stop reading those dusty old books! Wait, what?!"

Spike rolled his eyes, openning the letter. Said eyes widened after a moment. "Wow. Word for word... keep going."

"Hold on, this doesn't make sense! Why would she say that?" Twilight began to pace around the room. "I mean, study is an important part of-"

\_Twilight? There's more.\_

"Oh." The unicorn chuckled sheepishly. "Right. I should hear the whole thing, right?"

\_Right, and we should continue the test.\_

And so it went. Twilight repeated what Vespertine said in her head, and Spike continued to confirm the words in growing awe. By the time



the letter was finished, he was a believer... but Twilight was a nervous wreck.

"How could she... I mean, mare in the moon, dusty old books?! I don't understand, this doesn't make sense!"

Spike shrugged. "Hey, maybe Vespertine knows."

"...You're right! Vespertine, do you have any idea what's going on?"

\_Yes. Yes I do.\_

Twilight was silent for a moment. Then she frowned. "Well?"

\_See, here's the thing: I really really really don't want to spoil the surprise.\_

"WHAT?!"

\_Trust me, you'll love it!\_

Twilight groaned, standing up and screaming at the window.  
"AAAAAAAARGH! STUPID CRYPTIC FUTURE MIND ME!"

Spike coughed. "So... um, does that mean she knows something?"

"...I'm going to go get some ice cream. You want some ice cream?"

\* \* \*

><p>... "So, Vespertine," Twilight grumbled, making sure she was alone. "How am I supposed to handle these tickets?"<p>

\_You know how you were upset with me about the Elements? Celestia's pulling another one of those "life lessons" here.\_

"Do I ever actually get to eat anything today?" Hope filled her voice.

\_Not until we resolve the ticket fiasco. You're going to need your friends and Spike all in one place. Though, I do have to say that, ultimately, the Gala itself is a horrible experience for everypony. However, all the things we do with our friends leading up to it and afterwards are worth the hassle.\_

Twilight groaned and dropped her head. "You're no help at all."

Vespertine let loose a mental chuckle. \_I beg to differ: if we hadn't intervened when we did, Applejack would have been a while rebuilding her reputation in town after the Harvest Fiasco. Getting those glasses for the mail mare through the Royal Opticians' Society will pay dividends later. And having me with you should help immensely when you meet Celestia's previous student.\_

Twilight grinned weakly. "Okay, revised. Your help tends to result in embarrassing moments."

\_True enough, but how else would we remember the lessons brought by them?\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>AN:<em>

69.1: Loopholes big enough to fly a dragon through.

>69.2: Well, that escalated quickly.<br>69.3: ...ew.

>69.4: Mnementh can take care of them.<br>69.5: Speaks well for their relationship.

>69.6: Unusually easy to handle.<br>69.7: Less easy to handle.

>69.8: Let's hope Narya gets on well with her Pink Lantern Ring.<br>69.9: Welcome to operation mind-buck.

>69.10: LIFE IS PAIN.<br>69.11: I'm not even going to try to think up some horribly tortuous gou'ald/gold pun.

>69.12: I wonder how they prank Luna.<br>69.13: Skynet should really lay off the nuclear wars. The consequences aren't enjoyable.

>69.14: Twilight was kinda wierded out. This is just a minor variant.<br>69.15: She's not looping. She's just aware of them because of the hive mind.

>69.16: Meet The Closest Thing To Parents.<br>69.17: Twilight got them a mail drop.

>69.18: A Hive Swapping Party?<br>69.19: \*guitar\*

>69.20: The Family That Trolls Together, Lols Together.<br>69.21: Trolllight IV - internal edition.

## 74. Chapter 74

70.1

\* \* \*

><p>"...the night will last forever!" Nightmare Moon boomed, shaking the ground.<p>

"Luna..." Twilight said, inflecting her voice to make it carry above the general panic. "Here."

She threw a chocolate bar at the dark alicorn.

Nightmare Moon caught it, tore open the wrapping and ate it in a second. "Insignificant! This alone does not make up for a thousand years of missed tributes!"

"Well, don't just stand there," Twilight added, looking at the startled ponies of Ponyville. "She wants tribute, now give it to her!"

Pinkie Pie grinned, and bounced into Sugarcube Corner. A torrent of sweets and chocolate began to pour from the upstairs window, making Nightmare Moon canter over and start stuffing her face.

After about a minute, there was an aprupt flash of light, and Luna stood there.

"Better?" Twilight asked.

"Better." Luna nodded, and took wing.

"What the what?" Dash managed.

Twilight shrugged. "You're not you when you're... peckish."

"Why did you pause?"

"Copyright issues."

\* \* \*

><p>70.2<p>

"Hello, dear," Pearl called outside the Carousel Boutique.  
"Surprise!"

Several seconds passed, during which Sweetie moaned quietly about being left with her sister while her parents went off on holiday.

Then the door creaked open, and a bleary dragon looked out with sleep in his eyes and what was recognizably one of Rarity's dressing gowns wrapped imperfectly around his body.

"Who is it? Sorry, we had a late night..."

Magnum blinked. "Who the chaos are you?"

The dragon turned to look at him, though the slightly slit eyes didn't focus for at least another two seconds. "Spykoranuvellitar. You?"

"Who is it, dear?" Rarity's voice came from inside the building. She peered around him out the door, blinked, then jumped a yard into the air.

"Gah! Mom! Dad! Sorry about this-"

She vanished back inside, then her magic wrapped around \_Spykoranuvellitar\_ and pulled him in with a yelp.

Sweetie had stopped grumbling, and joined her parents in staring as several loud \_thuds\_ came drifting through the open door.

Then Rarity zipped back to the door. Her hair was washed and combed, she was wearing something nice, and there was a hint of perfume in the air.

"Sorry, mother, father," she began. "I wasn't expecting you-"

"Who was \_that?\_" Magnum demanded, pointing past her. "That Spyko... whatever character?"

"Oh, right." Rarity cocked her head slightly, letting a shining band of bluish light flash into clarity at the base of her horn. "That's my husband."

Three unicorn jaws dropped.

"Your... \_what?\_" Pearl repeated.

"You got \_married?\_" Sweetie repeated.

Magnum seemed completely lost for words.

Then the dragon poked his own head around the door. "Sorry, Rares," he said contritely. "Should have remembered this is your place. Oh, are these your parents?"

"They are." Rarity stepped back, opening the door more fully " and allowing the light to shine on a near-matching band on the fourth claw of the dragon. "Mom, Dad, Sweetie... this is Spike. Spike, these are my parents and my little sister."

"I'm still trying to wrap my head around \_husband\_," Pearl said forlornly. "When did this happen?"

"Last month." As Rarity spoke, Spike moved to stand proudly next to her. "We eloped."

"Where to?" Magnum asked, trying to make sense of the situation.

"Well, right here. I have my own place, so it was sort of pre-eloped." Rarity shrugged.

"That's a bit irresponsible, isn't it?" Pearl asked severely. "You didn't even let us know!"

"You're right, and I \_am\_ sorry," Rarity admitted. "We were all rather caught up in the moment." Spike squeezed her shoulder, and she shared a long look with him before turning back to her parents. "Sorry, where are my manners. Come in, come in. Will you be staying long?"

"Er..." Pearl blushed. "About that..."

"Am I still staying here for the next month?" Sweetie asked, curiously. "Is mister Spike in the spare room?"

"No, I have the same room as Rarity," Spike clarified. "Nice to meet you, Sweetie Belle. Rarity's told me a lot about you."

"She has?" Sweetie looked dubious.

"Yes. She said you have a lovely singing voice, and I like the sound of your cooking."

The unicorn filly thought that over for a few seconds. "'kay."

"I assume that I am to look after Sweetie for the foreseeable future?" Rarity asked her parents, receiving two embarrassed nods. "I could make a point here about pots and kettles, but I won't..."

\* \* \*

><p>70.3<p>

"Right." Gilda paced in a circle, her tail trailing on the floor and leaving a black line. "Twenty feet in diameter."

Her prospective opponent inspected the circle, then nodded.

"We start six feet apart, with a three count." As she spoke, she padded softly over to her starting position, and crouched down. "Three. Two. One. Go!"

There was a clash, and a flicker of orange.

"Not bad, bunny," Gilda grinned. "Care to try seriously this time?"

Angel nodded absently, then launched himself forward with a carrot in each paw.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, that's pretty impressive," Gilda admitted, panting. Her snow-white fur and feathers were speckled with blood as much as red tattoos, and the sparkling Thunder Edge on her back had left scorch marks all over the miniature arena.<p>

The bits of it which weren't covered with hundreds upon hundreds of carrots, anyway.

"Seriously, where do they keep coming from?"

Angel shrugged. His ears drooped, a sign of fatigue, but nothing else about his easy stance suggested he was particularly tired.

"Right." Gilda set her wings, and exhaled sharply. Her tail described a lazy circle in the air.

The carrot in Angel's paws expanded suddenly, until it was four times larger than he was.

Then he shifted his grip, and raised it before giving it a swing.

Gilda gaped. "Okay, that backfired! Gah!"

Thunder Edge flashed out.

\* \* \*

><p>"...so," Trixie asked, when Gilda stopped. "Who won?"<p>

Gilda shrugged. "Doesn't matter, does it? It was a good fight."

Trixie gave her a look. "He kicked your flank, didn't he?"

The griffon slammed her foreclaws on the table. "Is his pocket \_entirely\_ full of reinforced carrots?"

\* \* \*

><p>70.4<p>

"That's not the real Princess Cadence!" Twilight shouted, cutting across the wedding ceremony. "This is!"

Every pony in the room looked to the figure of Princess Cadence standing next to Twilight, and then turned back to the Princess Cadence standing at the altar.

Most of them missed the significance of a simultaneous eye-twitch and blink from Princess Celestia, Princess Cadence (the one not on stage), Shining Armor and Twilight.

"...well, this rather puts a... hitch, into my plans," the Cadence on stage said. "Nevertheless, I shall prevail!"

"Wait a second," the other Cadence muttered to Twilight. "I think something's a bit-"

With a sparkling cloud of star-light, the Cadence on stage turned into Nightmare Moon. "You truly have forgotten me, sister," Nightmare Moon pronounced, as ponies reacted with shock. "To think that thou couldst not tell me from thy niece, even for these many days of preparation."

Princess Celestia shook her head wryly. "Actually, we knew all along. Well, I must admit I did not notice at first, but my co-ruler alerted me to the swap within the hour."

"Indeed," Princess Chrysalis said calmly, trotting into the cathedral. Her drone guards flittered in efficiently behind her, moving to evacuate the civilians. "And you've given us a delicious opportunity to ambush you, you know."

Shining Armor, for his part, recovered from the shock quite quickly. He briskly moved away from the revealed Nightmare, and began casting shields.

"You know, there's a statue of Sombra in the grounds," Twilight whispered to her old foalsitter. "I dread to think what the Empire's going to be like."

"I'm still wrapping my head around Chrysalis as a Princess," Cadence replied. "Why hasn't Nightmare Moon attacked yet?"

"Well, from what I know from raising somepony an awful lot like her, when she's like this she prefers-"

At the moment the last spectator was hustled through the door, Nightmare Moon struck. Celestia countered the first bolts of magic by flashing as bright as her sun, and then things got loud.

\* \* \*

><p>"Right," Twilight said, matter-of-factly. "That's sorted that out. I love the Elements of Harmony."<p>

The other bearers looked askance at her.

"What?" she asked, defensively. "Look, they've solved at least three problems so far. So, does this mean Princess Luna gets

reinstated?"

"What." Princess Chrysalis' jaw dropped. "She just levelled most of Canterlot! My hive is open to the sky!"

"Not like they're complaining," Twilight replied, nodding over to where some of the drones were setting up sunbathing chairs amidst the rubble that used to be Canterlot Castle. "Besides, I seem to recall a certain other attacker who got forgiven about two or three years ago..."

Princess Cadence put her hoof over her mouth to hold in a snigger.

"That sounds most fair," Princess Celestia allowed, giving her slumbering sister a once-over. "I hope that my dear sibling is as cured as my loyal co-ruler is."

"Wait, is this policy now?" Chrysalis demanded. "Because I would not have wanted to have Prince Sombra on the staff."

"Well, if he'd been cured instead of turned back into a statue, I don't see how I could have refused," Celestia said calmly. "Tell me, Twilight, do any of your friends have plans to become evil and then be cured? I believe that we may need to add another wing to the royal quarters when they are rebuilt, if so."

"I was considering accepting a position if there are any open," Twilight admitted.

There was a knock on the door. Since the doorframe wasn't attached to a wall anymore, it was sort of superfluous.

"Come in," Princess Cadence answered for them.

"Hello, dear," Shining Armor said, pushing the door open and walking through. As he finished getting through, it let out a wheeze and collapsed into the general rubble pile. "I think we managed to chase off the last of the Canis Minor. Did the cathedron survive?"

"B-b-b-b..." Chrysalis started to stutter, pointing wildly.

"It did," Cadence confirmed, then gave her fianc  a stern look. "But I'm not sure if we should go through with it now, Shiny. I mean, you couldn't tell me from an evil moon villain!"

"I wasn't myself?" Shining volunteered.

"Fine, then." Cadence nodded. "Same time tomorrow, then? That should give time to move your parents back from their evacuation area."

"Why is he suddenly an alicorn?" the Changeling Princess burst out.

"I've heard there's been a case of it going around lately," Celestia said delicately. "Well, it's good to know that I won't need to dedicate a royal suite to you separately, Prince Shining Armor. Welcome to the team."

Chrysalis transferred her disbelieving gape from Shining to Celestia.

"Right, now, let's see. That's one royal suite for me, one for Chrysalis, one for Luna, one for the happy couple, I'll mark Twilight down as provisional and we can build two in spare as well... Twilight, make a note."

Twilight made a note, hiding a snicker.

\* \* \*

><p>"Right, let's see..."<p>

Twilight scanned the list of books in the library, for anything new from the loop. It sometimes happened that worlds with unusual events pre-Awakening had entirely new books to read, and that was always nice.

\_Ooh, a three-volume work on the integration of Princess Chrysalis and the Canterlot Hive into the government and society. I think I'm going to copy that one...\_

Actually, checking her loop-memories, she'd been interviewed for this one. On the moment when the Elements of Harmony had been unleashed on Chrysalis, and had for whatever reason \_not\_ sent the invader to the moon as they had Luna nearly a thousand years before.

\_Well, at least three theories we mentioned in the interview are invalid, unfortunately, but it could still be helpful.\_

"Twiiiiiii..." her assistant moaned, looking up from a book. "I'm bored."

"How can you be bored?" she asked, turning and smiling. "That's a Daring Do book, isn't it?"

"Finished it." Her assistant tossed her head, sending her rainbow mane flying. "Can't I go and play with Scootaloo? I read all the books you asked for..."

"You \_are\_ a fast reader, I suppose." Twilight thought for a minute. "Okay, go ahead. But don't harrass Spykoran too much!"

"But he's totally crucial!" Dash complained. "I mean, he's a \_dragon\_ who \_breathes\_ fire on clouds\_ and then makes them shoot \_thunder\_ \_and\_ he's just radical! I want to be like him when I grow up!"

Twilight chuckled. "I know, I know." \_This time, anyway.\_ "But he \_does\_ have a job, so if he asks you to leave him alone then leave him alone."

Dash kicked the table leg in sullen silence.

"Oh, sorry, I almost forgot." Twilight picked up a letter from the table. "Can you take this to Princess Celestia? Then you can go and play with Scootaloo."



Dash perked up. "Sure thing, big sis!"

A blur of rainbow light, a boom, and Twilight's special assistant (and adoptive sister) was halfway to Canterlot by the time the curtains settled back.

Twilight smiled, wondering just how many photos she should take of chibi-Dash this loop.

That she'd be taking some was indisputable. This version of Dash was adorable " and potential blackmail or amusement value for her looping self, to boot.

\* \* \*

><p>70.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"My name is Naruto Uzumaki. I dislike morons, idiots, repetition, morons, repetition, hesitation, deviation and traitorous Teriyaki stalls from the future that don't exist yet. My dream is for the sons of former Jinchuuriki and the sons of former Hokages to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. With my Shadow Clones I'm almost there, I just need to find a table of brotherhood. And I like confusing people and committing untraceable plagiarism."<p>

Naruto sat back, enjoying the complete and total confusion of his team.

While he watched Kakashi trying to work out if he knew his own past, he sent out a quick pulse of generalized combined magic/chakra. If there were any loopers around, they should respond...

One pulse replied. It wasn't particularly coherent, which probably meant a newbie " or someone who hadn't had occasion to practise the alert, anyway.

\_\_Well, guess I am the host for this set. May as well see how they plan to mess with things\_\_.

\* \* \*

><p>"Seven vulnerable points," Zabuza growled threateningly.<p>

"Self esteem, spleen, left earlobe, right thigh, larynx, hair style and fashion sense," Naruto listed off. "Or they are on me, anyway."

He shrugged, as the missing-nin's patter faltered. "Hey, I'm a pre-teen, I've got a very fragile worldview."

Zabuza almost audibly decided to ignore him as insane.

\_\_Seriously, where is that other looper? He's taking ages to show up...\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Senseiiiiii?" Naruto whined. "I've got too much chakra for this."<p>

Demonstrating, he put his foot on a tree, and pushed some of the furball's chakra through his foot. The tree promptly fell over.

"Huh." Kakashi shrugged. "How about that. Sakura, Sasuke, practise that, while I try to avoid Naruto deforesting the island."

\_He's surprisingly competent when he's faced with the kind of problems he expects,\_ Naruto thought. Then shook it off. \_That's unfair. Who could have predicted \_our\_ first three years?\_

They were interrupted by the sound of unhurried footsteps.

A tall, willowy, grey-haired woman in a business suit stepped out from behind a large tree. Kakashi instantly went on alert, because the woman hadn't appeared to get \_to\_ the tree beforehand â€" as though she'd just appeared out of the air.

"Mister... Noruta?" the woman asked, consulting a clipboard. "I'm looking for a mister Noruta Uzuki."

"I'm Naruto Uzumaki," Naruto volunteered, realizing what had to be going on. Or some of it, at least.

The woman inspected her clipboard more closely. Then sighed. "This new intern has terrible handwriting. Anyway, I'm supposed to ask you a few questions? Just a routine survey."

"Go ahead!" Naruto said brightly.

"Right." The woman turned over the first page of her notes on the clipboard. "What is your name?"

"...Naruto Uzumaki."

"Oh, sorry. I swear, these forms..." A pen scratched. "What is your favourite colour?"

"Orange."

"Right... and your mother's maiden name?"

"Uhhh..." Naruto turned theatrically to Kakashi. "What was it, sensei?"

"What of it?" Kakashi said warily. "Who are you?"

"I'm with the Akatsuki corporation," the woman answered, and patted her suit where there was a cheerful name-tag sticker. \_Hello, my name is: Ivory.\_

"Oh, I remember now!" Naruto beamed, as openly and sincerely as he could (which was very well indeed). "I use my mother's name. She was an Uzumaki as well!"

"Ah!" Ivory scribbled something else down. "One more question. Are you now, or have you ever been in the past, a ninja?"

Naruto indicated his forehead protector.

"Splendid. Thank you for your time. Please contact us if you have any feedback." Ivory passed him a card, and walked off.

"...what just happened?" Kakashi asked, frowning slightly. "I've heard of an Akatsuki group before, but not for years..."

Naruto inspected the card, watching with appreciation as the words on it changed to a simple name and address.

It was what had been on it before, though, which made him sure he'd found the other looper.

\_\_Ivory Scroll/Mayor Mare\_\_

Usually a pony

Head of Akatsuki Paperwork division

\* \* \*

><p>"So, first time here?" Naruto asked Ivory a few weeks later.<p>

Both of them were here by proxy â€" Ivory using one of her new paper clones, and Naruto one of his more versatile Doppelgangers â€" so there weren't any concerns about acting in-character.

"That's right," Ivory agreed. "I'm the right hand woman of the head of this Akatsuki organization, which as I understand it seems to be doing something as stupid as using a very large hammer to stop a clock showing the wrong time."

"Pretty much." Naruto slouched in the chair, waiting for the ramen to arrive. "Most of what I do tends to be related to stopping Akatsuki. You're from Equestria, then?"

"Indeed. It's nice to know you have some familiarity with the baseline I'm working from in terms of understanding."

"Well, a bit." Naruto allowed. "They're very helpful there. Kakashi was in a bad way."

"I have heard of that loop, yes. Twilight brought it up as one way Equestria's self-assigned status as a sanctuary loop helps other loopers in tangible ways." Ivory gave a small smile. "But I assume that we're not here to talk about \_my\_ loop."

"Yeah, true." The local Anchor thought for a while. "Right. I guess you're \_anti\_ widespread devastation?"

Ivory nodded.

"Right. Always good to check. How good is your grip on Konan's paper-jutsu?"

"I can manage reasonably well, I think." Ivory thought, then nodded. "I can do most of what my loop-memories say I should be able

to."

"Cool. Okay, here's the plan..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right." Anko Mitarashi handed the forms around. "Sign these, return them, and you get one of the scrolls. If you don't sign them, you fail. If you sign them and die in the forest of death, not only do you fail but your next of kin get absolutely <em>no<em> compensation whatsoever. And if you sign them, and merely get crippled for life, then you get a very small basket of fruit and a card saying \_at least you didn't die!\_ And you fail. So, who's going to wimp out?"

Several teams looked nervous. One team of genin from Grass chuckled, their leader signing her scroll without even bothering to read the release form.

Which exploded.

Most of the genin turned, stunned, to look at the crater.

"Oh, what the hell?" Anko turned to the desk. "Who mixed in an exploding tag?"

"None of us," one of the people at the desk said, as she processed forms and handed out scrolls "â€" though there weren't a lot more people handing in signed forms anyway at the moment. "Though there was this clause which said you didn't plan to attempt to conquer Konoha over the course of the exam, so that might be it."

Two Sand genin dropped their forms like they were red-hot, and the Sound team walked out.

\* \* \*

><p>"That still makes me feel a little ill," Ivory muttered.<p>

"Eh, it's Old Roachy, he'll come back." Naruto waved it off. "And I don't mean next loop, either."

"If you say so." Ivory shook her head. "Right, I've got the material for the next one planned out."

"Excellent!" Naruto rubbed his hands together. "Make sure you get a picture of his face."

\* \* \*

><p>"Master Pein."<p>

The Leader of Akatsuki turned to his second-in-command, wincing slightly as the machine he was in pulled on its connections to him. "What is it?"

"I have found a way to acquire the nine-tails container."

"Good," Nagato said simply. "Do so."

The grey-haired kunoichi paused. "I'm afraid there is paperwork involved."

Nagato surprised himself with a brief laugh. "Which is appropriate for you, I suppose. Very well. What must I do?"

"Sign here."

Yahiko's body took the pen from her hand, and signed the paper.  
"Done."

"Excellent." Ivory took the paper back, countersigned it, and slipped it into a folder. "You have now adopted the Kyuubi container, Naruto Uzumaki."

Nagato paused. "\_What\_ did you say?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Can't we do something about it?" the Hokage asked, sighing.<p>

"I'm afraid it's completely legal," Homura replied with a sour expression. "This Nagato individual is an Uzumaki, which makes him the closest known relative who hasn't washed their hands of him unconditionally, and the appropriate paperwork was all filed here as well. It'd take months to contest it."

Danzo just shook his head.

"Isn't there \_anything\_ we can do to mitigate the damage?"

The others exchanged glances. None of them spoke.

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm still not convinced this is going to work," Ivory confided.<p>

Naruto shrugged. "Seriously, I \_know\_ how my world works. It'll be fine."

\* \* \*

><p>"Why are we moving to Konoha?" Nagato asked, looking blankly at the papers.<p>

"Because it's a better environment to carry out the plan." Ivory dumped another armload on him. "This covers change of citizenship."

"How will we be able to gather the Jinchuuriki in the middle of a hidden village?"

"Surely we both know that's not the real objective." Ivory looked up, at where a paper crane was flapping down towards them. "Ah, here we are."

She caught it, and unfolded it. "Yep, there we go."

Then, with a flick of her wrist, she shook it out. It unfolded further, and further again, until it was a three foot by one page of dense text.

"A five-sided non-aggression treaty between the hidden villages. Binding, as well. I just got it from thirty paper clones who spent the last month drafting it."

She made a few handseals, then tapped the paper. Over a dozen duplicates formed, folded themselves into paper cranes and flew off.

"That is not going to work," Nagato stated bluntly. "The world is pain. Even if they sign it â€" and they will not â€" they will simply ignore it when the time comes."

"Oh, you \_say\_ that." Ivory smiled mysteriously. "That's why the entire document folds up into a one page piece saying that the ninja village in question will not launch any surprise attacks, in return for a very large cash bounty for signing."

"Surprise attacks?"

"Wars are very surprising when they start." Ivory nodded. "As are attacks before a war has started. And yes, they'll \_try\_ to ignore it..."

\* \* \*

><p>Four sound ninja crept towards Konoha.<p>

Their mission, given to them by Orochimaru himself (who'd looked a little singed) was to bring Sasuke Uchiha back to the Sound village. By force, if necessary.

Kidomaru glanced over at the rest of the team, and made some hand gestures. \_Three. Two. One-\_\_

Clouds of paper erupted from nowhere.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well..." Kakashi said critically, examining the thoroughly mummified Sound Four. "That's the most literal definition of <em>restraining order<em> I've ever seen."

Naruto started laughing.

"It seems to be thousands upon thousands of copies of the peace treaty," Sakura added uncertainly. "With the signature of... Orochimaru?"

Naruto just laughed harder.

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm afraid to say that we're going to let you go."<p>

Tobi stared at Ivory. Well, presumably stared. It was a little hard to tell, what with the mask.

"But why? Tobi is a good intern!"

"Your handwriting is atrocious, you were late for work on three separate occasions, you treat the whole business as a joke, and you also plan to hypnotize everyone with the moon." Ivory shook her head. "We can't give you a good employment reference either, I'm afraid."

Tobi shook his head, then chuckled, darkly. "Well, so much for the charade. You do remember that I am Uchiha Madara, do you not?"

"Yes, about that." Ivory shuffled some papers. "We understand there's an issue of identity theft, as well. Can you prove that you are Uchiha Madara, rather than just some random black-haired Uchiha with a mask?"

"Um..."

\* \* \*

><p>"So, you said you had a loop outside Equestria?" Twilight asked, over tea, the day before the Summer Sun celebration. (They were ostensibly discussing how she should handle checking in on the preparations " she was just off the chariot " and to be fair that was on the agenda.) "Where was it?"<p>

"The Elemental Countries. Naruto's world." The Mayor nodded absently. "Interesting place, though their villains are a bit nasty. I'm sorry to say I was killed."

"Ouch." Twilight winced. "That always stings. Who by?"

"Tobi. I understand he's Obito?" she checked, to which Twilight nodded. "Okay, thanks for confirming that. Anyway, I called him out over his real identity and he stalled for a bit, then teleported behind me and stabbed me."

"Ouch again." Twilight let that hang in the air for a moment. "So, anything else?"

"Oh, there was actually." Ivory Scroll, also known as Mayor Mare, pulled a large document from her Pocket. "I prepared this earlier. Can you add a spell to the bottom? Oh, and provide shields around the stage."

Twilight nodded. "Certainly. Which spell?"

\* \* \*

><p>"The Night will last forever!"<p>

Ivory trotted smartly up to the stage. "Nightmare Moon?"

"Yes?" the alicorn replied, looking down. "Why?"

"You've been served. Good day." The mayor held out a scroll.

"Served? What means this?" Nightmare Moon demanded, taking the scroll

in her magic and opening it. "I will make you all my servants, of course, but... what! You demand this of your ruler? \_'You are ordered to cease, desist and explode your attempts to usurp the rule of this country away from the legitimately crowned ruler, Princess Celestia.'\_"

Nightmare Moon laughed cynically, then read on.\_ "'While the aforementioned Celestia will settle for joint rule, she will not settle for sole control in the hands of her sister who was rightly banished for her attempt to conquer Equestria by force. As such, explosive runes.'\_"

The alicorn blinked at the last two words, which had started to glow. "Pardon?"

A very loud \_bang\_ rattled the windows around Ponyville square.

\* \* \*

><p>"I'll go up there and sort her out later," Twilight affirmed. "I assume that was just as many explosive tag seals as you could fit onto the paper?"<p>

"With microdot writing," the real Mayor confirmed. "I also have a few Restraining Orders and a Cutting Letter in my pocket, and I know an ink supplier in Ponyville who can get me useful seal ink. Can you help me sort out how to perform handseals as a pony, though? That paper clone was pre-made. And it'd be nice to know a more versatile trigger, as well."

"Of course," the anchor promised. "I must say, it's impressive that you've managed to fully weaponize paperwork."

\* \* \*

><p>70.6<p>

Trixie Lulamoon whistled to herself as she trotted briskly along the road between Trottingham and Manehattan.

She had a gig in Manehattan next week â€" they'd booked a stadium â€" but she could make her own way there, and there was enough slack in the schedule that she could easily manage playing a few minor towns along the way. For old times' sake.

The kind of place she'd perform in the main street, stay in the house of someone with a room to spare, and set off next morning with a full belly and a spring in her step.

Then something hurtled out of the sky and landed with a \_thud\_ just off the road ahead.

Trixie stopped. Then pulled her wagon over to the side of the road, hit the quick-release catch, and cantered to where the object had landed.

\* \* \*

><p>The object, as it turned out, was a pony. An earth pony mare with a dark green coat and a brown mane, who looked a little



dazed.<p>

"Are you alright?" Trixie asked, casting a telekinetic spell which reduced the apparent gravity on the stricken pony. It was more polite than just bodily picking her up...

"I... yes, I'm okay." The mare pushed herself unsteadily to her feet, then winced. "Ow, I think that one's broken."

Trixie looked at the leg, and noticed something slightly odd about the joint. Not just the break â€" which was one of the two bones in the lower foreleg, and as such was technically possible to stand on in low gravity â€" but the way it was bending.

She ran back over the situation, and came up with an answer.

"Are you Queen Chrysalis?" she asked, deciding to get it out in the open.

The pony froze for a second, then shook her head. "Whoever she is, no."

"You're lying, aren't you." Trixie smiled. "It's okay, I can see you're hurt. This should help."

She concentrated carefully on her feelings for Chryssy â€" the older, wiser, Looping version of this disguised Changeling â€" and put her not inconsiderable magic behind them, then pushed.

Chrysalis felt a warm, soothing love suffuse her. It restored her drained magic reserves, then died back to a distant but still present heat.

"...what?"

"Okay, this is going to sound crazy. But you're an empath, you can tell that even if this isn't the truth I believe it. I kind of come from the future, and we're dating. Specifically..."

\* \* \*

><p>"...so, that's about the shape of it," Trixie finished, some time later.<p>

Chrysalis looked at her, tasting her opinions. "You're right, you do believe it. Every word."

"And..." Trixie prompted.

"And so do I, curse it." The no-longer-disguised Changeling kicked the ground. "You're far too calm to have not met me before, but the Hive has no record of your existence except for the few times a changeling has seen one of your shows. And that love was felt for me, I could tell. But... I don't reciprocate."

"And that's fine." Trixie said levelly. "To me, you're kind of like the younger sister of my mare-friend anyway."

"Right." Chrysalis rubbed her forehead. "Okay, what now?"

Trixie pondered. "Well, I do have a slot open for an assistant..."

\* \* \*

><p>70.7<p>

"Good morning, Pinchy," Berry said brightly. "Time for you to get up for school!"

Ruby Pinch blinked, yawned, and crawled out of bed. "Okay, momma..."

Berry smiled, moving aside to let her daughter through the bedroom door.

It was always hard, the first day of a new loop. When her daughter was suddenly years younger, and couldn't remember a lot of their time together. So she always put on a brave face, because it seemed to help.

Most of the time.

"Where's my cereal, momma?" the filly unicorn (this time, at least) asked. "I can't find it."

"Check on the right side of the cupboard," Berry replied automatically.

"Oh, yeah! Thanks, momma!"

\* \* \*

><p>Some minutes later, Ruby Pinch was at the door. Her teeth were clean, her mane was done, and she had her saddlebags on.<p>

"Have a good day!" Berry called.

"Uh... momma?" Ruby said uncertainly, standing just inside the door. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"Are you okay?"

Berry blinked. "What do you mean, Pinchy?"

"Well..." Ruby frowned. "You're... different, this morning. You seem kind of happier, but sad as well. And you haven't had a drink yet."

\_Ouch.\_

Berry forced a smile, feeling tears start in her eyes. "Oh, Pinchy. I'm sorry if I haven't been such a good momma, but-"

"You are!" Ruby said fiercely. "You're the best!"

The purple mare had to try a couple of times to resume speaking without croaking.

"Thank you," she sniffed, on the third attempt. "Just... thank you, Pinchy."

Ruby smiled, not sure how she'd helped, but happy she had.

"Now, run along, dear. You need to get to school on time."

Ruby glanced at the clock, and cantered out into the street to head for school.

"That says it all, doesn't it..." Berry muttered to herself. "Buck, I must have been a mess..."

She shook her head. "Well, I can certainly do better. Especially now. Who knows a good hangover-cure spell..."

\* \* \*

><p>"I see," Twilight nodded. "You want to make sure you can be sober for Ruby..."<p>

"...but I don't want to just give up my passion entirely." Berry nodded. "That's right â€" I can't just \_stop\_, because creating drinks involves tasting. Despite that, I've been cutting back a lot gradually over the loops, but this time was when it really came out into the open for me."

"Right. Well, Zecora does good cures, of course, but..."

"Yeah, we don't always loop together. And asking the non-looping one for over a hundred at a time won't go down well. To say the least..."

"Indeed." Twilight paused. "You do realize that you will need to ascend to gain a horn and the means of casting this spell, correct?"

"I do," Berry affirmed. "I may not especially relish my transformation, as such â€" not that I \_dis\_like\_ it, but... oh, you know what I mean. I just prefer to be an earth pony most of the time."

The unicorn just gave her a slow nod.

"But if I have to, I will. Okay, how do I do this..."

\* \* \*

><p>Berry came muzzily to awareness in her kitchen.<p>

There was a faint tang of cinnamon in the air.

\_Huh. Guess that really \_did\_ work out stronger than I was anticipating.\_ Berry shook her head, trying to clear the pounding headache that had manifested, and looked at the glass on the table.

It was, indeed, nearly full of her newly developed 'brain suicide by spice'.

Then she looked at the clock.

\_\_Erk!\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Come on, come on..." Berry muttered, rummaging through her pocket and wincing against the headache. "Where's that stupid Spectrum crystal tumbler..."<p>

Eventually, she managed to locate it, and pulled it out into the real world. A moment's focus and she was an alicorn, another to cast the spell...

There was a door-creak.

And a small pair of lungs inhaling a very impressive amount of air.

\_\_Well, ponyfeathers.\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>"What, exactly, am I going to put on the stained glass window?" Celestia asked, partly of her sister and partly of thin air. "She appears to have become an <em>alicorn<em> from creating mixed drinks!"

Luna shrugged, sipping at her glass. "I do not know, dear sister mine. Perhaps some of this coriander cordial will aid your cognition?"

"...oh, why not."

\* \* \*

><p>70.8<p>

"Twilight Sparkle, lend me your ear. I have a plan for you to hear."

Twilight looked up, already aware who it had to be. "Hello, Zecora. I must say, it's earlier than usual for you to show up in Ponyville of a new loop. Which is saying something... did you have a new pattern for convincing the town that you're not evil?"

"My thoughts were such, though why my haste... It is more of the \_obverse\_ case." The zebra frowned, scanning back over her words, then let it go. "In truth, I wished to take my chances â€" what if I really \_did\_ do evil dances?"

"...oh, I \_see!\_" Twilight nodded. "Right, right. You want to pretend to actually \_be\_ evil. That should be fine, I can get the rest of the Elements into a team of superheroes fairly easily, even without their looping. Anything I should know?"

Zecora pondered. "I plan to be equipped with and use trees â€" an evil witch who rules the Everfree. Counsel Fluttershy I do no \_true\_ harm..." She shook her head. "I have no wish to so soon buy the farm."

"Yeah, good point." Twilight pulled a checklist from her pocket. "Okay, step one for forming the Harmony Elementals â€" select base. Well, I \_could\_ do the old elaborate underground base routine..."

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie fled the <em>stupid</em> town, where there were \_stupid\_ ponies and \_stupid\_ bears and \_stupid, stupid\_, goody-four-shoes unicorns who showed her up.

And she'd lost her wagon, as well. Everything she owned.

After a few minutes, her legs began to ache, and she slowed to a walk. She looked around, noticing that her headlong gallop had carried her into the Everfree Forest.

Trixie had heard stories about this place, but dismissed them as exaggeration.

\_And you should know,\_ part of her whispered. \_But there certainly was an ursa in there, wasn't there?\_

A twig cracked.

"Who was that?" she demanded, her horn lighting with a blue glow.

Something moved past her line of sight, too fast to see. Something else creaked behind her, and she spun â€" seeing nothing.

The magic charge in her horn went into a searchlight spell, which showed gnarled tree branches reaching for her. She shivered.

Somehow, living rough was a lot more pleasant when you had a wagon to do it in...

Then there was a great crackling, tearing sound off to her right. She looked, and a tree had fallen across the road behind her.

Another slammed down across the road ahead of her.

"We should speak soon..." a voice said, in an accent Trixie couldn't place.

"...miss Lulamoon."

"Who are you?" Trixie demanded, though there was a little catch in her voice.

Then there was a puff of green smoke, and a striped pony â€" a \_zebra\_ â€" was standing on one of the tree trunks, silhouetted against the sky.

"You seem upset at Ponyville. I, too, have cause to wish them ill."

The zebra gestured, and a network of branches grew from the fallen trunk, providing her with steps to make her way down to Trixie's

level.

"I have food, drink, a roaring fire... and all the revenge you desire."

\* \* \*

><p>"You are scarily good at this," Twilight commented, sipping her herbal tea.<p>

Thanks to a complex glamour spell, she was currently assuming the role of 'Zebediah', a fellow zebra to Zecora, and as such could visit her without alarming her teammates. (Well, without alarming them too much. She was still relying on a shadow clone back at base, which was obviously rather risky.)

"I can act much like an evil horse," Zecora allowed, mixing up a potion which was intended to cause a short-lived Poison Joke effect (about five minutes, making it scary without being threatening). "But my villainy has run its' course. We should plan my return to good â€" I tire of enforced solitude."

"Good idea," Twilight said. "Was that last one really a rhyme, though? It didn't scan well..."

"\_You\_ try to rhyme with \_every\_ line," the zebra muttered, winning a chuckle from Twilight.

"Okay. Here's an idea. Use the Joke next time, and then the time after that..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Ponyville shall cower at our knees!" Zecora cackled, marching into town with a half-dozen lumbering wooden golems behind her. "Nothing you can do can defeat the trees!"<p>

"Not if we can help it!"

She turned, to see Twilight and her five fellow Element bearers, all in costume. "All six of you at once. I'd thought you were at lunch."

Pinkie giggled, then put her serious expression back on.

"Let's get her!" Dash shouted.

\* \* \*

><p>Several confused minutes later, Zecora was in a small crater with the ruins of five animated trees around it, and a cloud of green smoke dissipating in the breeze.<p>

The last of the six trees was being enthusiastically nibbled on by Angel Bunny. He was going for the jugular root, whether it existed or not.

"What now?" Applejack asked, looking dubious and adjusting her Element necklace. "She might'a been evil, but she were bein' controlled, it seems to me, and it wouldn't be right t' not give her

th' same chance Princess Luna got given, and all."

Twilight looked Zecora in the eye. "Are you still evil, or do you intend any harm to any resident of Ponyville?"

"I do not. Not a jot."

"...sounds good to me!" Pinkie said brightly. Then gave Zecora a stare. "But Pinkie Promise it, just to prove it!"

Zecora nodded. "Cross my heart, hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye."

The others discussed that amongst themselves.

"Good enough for me!" Dash pronounced. "Seriously, though, \_don't\_ break that promise. Really."

"Well, that worked out well!" Twilight said.

"Um..." Fluttershy pointed. "Except for the property damage."

Twilight looked at the seven or eight destroyed houses. "Community service, I think."

Zecora followed their gaze, then wordlessly gestured. New houses â€" made of wood, of course â€" erupted from the ground.

"Thank you."

\* \* \*

><p>70.9<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"And then the light beams are scattered by suspensoids in the atmosphere, which results in a diffusion which has an amplitude proportional to the inverse fourth power of the wavelength, so bluer wavelengths are scattered much more. That results in the blue light being scattered over the sky much more efficiently, with the greater response our eyes have to greener wavelengths and the overall green spectrum peak the sun has resulting in the more characteristic shade compared to deep purple-blue which is the most efficiently scattered."<p>

Cheerilee put down the chalk, and turned to the class.

No-pony spoke for several seconds.

"I don't get it..." Snips muttered.

"Mith?" Twist raised a hoof. "I only asked why the thky is blue..."

Cheerilee looked back at the equations and diagrams spread over the board. "...whoops. Hang on, I'll try to put it more simply..."

\* \* \*

><p>70.10<p>

"We need t' get somepony to fall in love," Applebloom said, thoughtfully. "That'll earn us a cutie mark!"

"Sure," Scootaloo agreed. "But who?"

"Well, what about Miss Cheerilee?"

"She's out of town today," Sweetie Belle observed. "Remember? She said she was taking a week's holiday last Friday."

"Well... what about Miss Sparkle, then?" Applebloom suggested. "Wasn't she gonna be our teacher this week?"

"Nah," Scootaloo shook her head. "She doesn't seem unhappy at all. And Hearts and Hooves day is about making unhappy ponies happy!"

"Actually..." Sweetie Belle mused. "I have an idea."

\* \* \*

><p>A pink haze cleared from Spike's eyes. He blinked, drawing on his well-practised meditation to speed his thoughts, and began to take stock.<p>

He was in a hole in the ground.

He was wearing a suit. Well sized for him, as well, which wasn't bad given he was about the same size as Big Mac.

Rarity was also in the hole in the ground, wearing a long white dress.

And there were three very embarrassed fillies peering over the edge of the hole.

Rarity exchanged a glance with him, then both of them looked at the edge of the hole.

"Why am I in a pit wearing a dress?" Rarity asked, focusing specifically on her sister. "There better be a good explanation, because this ruined this dress!"

"Sorry, Sis," Sweetie said, blushing. "We thought you needed a special somepony for Hearts and Hooves day!"

"I have to admit, I like their taste..." Spike murmured, and Rarity gave him a look.

He wagged his eyebrows slightly.

Rarity mulled that over, then shrugged. "Oh, whatever."

At least they'd have a reasonable excuse, this loop...

\* \* \*



><p>The Crusaders blinked, as Spike and Rarity embraced.<p>

"Does this mean it worked?" Scootaloo asked, confused.

Then all three of them looked away. "Ew, kissing!"

"Should have thought that thro~ugh!" Rarity called up to them.

\* \* \*

><p>70.11<p>

"Hey," Applejack said, uncertainly. "Gilda? You got a min?"

"Sure." The gryphon nodded to her. "Well, only a minute or two right now, I'm gonna do an interview in a few for the 'bolts. Spike an' I are havin' a bet over who can be the first non-pony in the group this loop."

"Right, right." Applejack frowned. "Yeah, this might take a while. Come see me when you've got the spare time."

"Will do." Gilda gave her a thumbclaw's up, then returned to scanning the sky for Wonderbolt.

\* \* \*

><p>"Oi, fruitflank!" Gilda crowed, backwinging to land perching on the branch of a tree.<p>

"Gilda," Applejack nodded up to her. "Can y' get off Seedfeld?"

Gilda glanced down at the branch, which began to creak. "Spoilsport." Flaring her wings again, she touched down gently on the orchard grass.

"'preciate it." Applejack sat back. "Nice outfit, by th' way. You won?"

"Nah, it was a draw." Gilda shrugged. "Apparently a fifty foot dragon is as remarkable as a gryphon who doesn't even care about physics."

"There ain't no accountin' for taste," Applejack said sympathetically. They nodded together for a moment, then both sniggered.

"Right," Applejack began again. "Anyway, what I was gonna say."

"Sure."

"Well, not t' blow mah own trumpet, but ah'd say that ah have experience with th' element of Honesty."

"Yeah, that's fair." Gilda nodded. "More than I have, anyway. I'm guessing it's related to that?"

Applejack tossed her head. "Yep. So, anyway, when I'm usin' my

Element, it's basically like ah can tell when somepony is lying. Ah get a real uncomfortable feel, though o' course it also depends on what kind'a lie. One that ain't for malice, it's more like a faint itch... and if ah'm ready for it, that helps too. Like all th' times we set stuff up for fun, that barely registers."

"Right." Gilda scratched her chin. "Yeah, mine is different. It's more like, yours is about people being honest with one another â€" mine is about people being honest with themselves. It isn't well developed, yet... hay, I don't get much practise with you lot... but I kinda get... yeah, feelings is about right. If someone's not being honest with themselves, I can see vaguely how to get under their skin and screw with them â€" and get them to admit things to themselves. And I think â€" I think â€" that that kind of admission sticks with you."

"Sounds useful, actually." Applejack frowned. "Well, it ain't pleasant, and all, but it sounds like the kind'a help that people who end up here need sometimes."

"Yeah. I should practise it more. I suppose I'm just too used to faking strength to get at real weakness without feeling uncomfortable." Gilda blinked, and shook her head with a sneeze. "Whoo, that felt strange. Just triggered it on myself."

Applejack chuckled. "Good start. Tell y'all what, next time someone loops in here who ain't all self-honest and all, you give 'em a pep talk. With shoutin', an' stuff."

"That I can do." Gilda nodded. "Hey, should I start with that Manehattan filly from your family?"

"Why not." Applejack shrugged. "Give it a go."

\* \* \*

><p>70.12<p>

Trixie tore open the paper.

Then blinked. "Huh. I... don't know why I expected anything else from you."

Rarity smiled briefly. "Well, I am a clothesmaker. What do you think?"

Trixie swept up the cloak. "It's basically identical to my normal one... I think?"

"Ah, that's where you are both correct and incorrect." Rarity smiled. "Channel magic into the outer layer."

The sorceror did so, resulting in the patterns vanishing. What replaced them was a faintly sparkling starfield, which lit up in tiny patterns of light blue.

"That looks familiar..." Trixie mused, frowning, then moved it to get a look from another angle. As she did so, it brightened, and green and yellow starbursts added themselves to the pattern. "Wait, I do recognize this!"

Rarity nodded. "It's your own mane, of course. It reacts to your magic correctly, because I raised the sensitivity."

"\_So\_ cool," Trixie pronounced, sweeping it onto her back in an explosion of rainbow light. "This is the perfect way to look awesome without having to explain away the wings!"

"I \_do\_ try," Rarity allowed. "Now-"

"Wait a sec." Trixie pointed a hoof at her. "Where did this mane of mine come from? Trixie does not recall donating any!"

Rarity chuckled. "That would be the Changeling Queen, in the bedroom, with the hairbrush. This \_is\_ â€" partly â€" a commission."

"...oh, fair enough." Trixie put her hoof back down again. "What were you saying?"

"Oh, right. The inner lining?"

Trixie lifted the tip of the cloak up, revealing a shimmering green lining. "Impressive. But green is not my colour..."

"Indeed not," Rarity agreed readily. "But this is a utile measure, and you can always put a second layer beneath it to shield it. That's some dragonfire from Spike, aimed to a spot in the wilderness. There's twelve different command phrases for the twelve different portions in there, so you should get several uses out of it before you need a refill."

"...so, let Trixie check she has this straight." The blue unicorn paused. "This is a cloak which will let me disappear in a puff of green flame \_on command?\_"

Rarity nodded.

"Now \_that's\_ cool. Thanks, and thank Spike for me."

\* \* \*

><p>70.13<p>

Celestia yawned, shaking her head as her internal alarm woke her.

About half an hour before dawn, so it wasn't long before she had to relieve her sister. But, hopefully, long enough for a cup of tea and a biscuit.

Acquiring both from a well-stocked cupboard, she dipped the biscuit delicately in the Earl Bay. (One thousand years and more of tea drinking gave one a \_very\_ good idea of just how to get the most enjoyment out of a cup of tea.)

Then she paused, biscuit half-nibbled, at the sight of an envelope.

"How strange..." she mused. "Maybe Twilight had a message for me overnight?"

Slitting the envelope open along the top with her horn, she unfolded the letter.

\_ 'Dear Celestia, \_

The statue broke, and I'm out. '

Celestia dropped her biscuit.

\_ 'This place is \_so\_ samey. What happened to the old palace with the rickety bridge as the quickest way in or out? I liked that. Well, I put a taffy pit underneath, which is the same thing. \_

But I've had over a thousand years to think of new material. And let me tell you, I've got

lots \_of new ideas. \_

Yours chaotically,

Aunt Mabel. Alias Discord, The End of Reason, Oh Buck  
It's

Him. '

Celestia took two deep breaths, then sprang into action. "Call out the guard!"

\* \* \*

><p>"So, what's your plan this time?" Twilight asked, curious.<p>

Discord handed her a peanut butter cordial. "Well, I sent Celly a letter telling her I was out."

Twilight waited.

After about ten seconds, she prompted "And?"

"And nothing." Discord shrugged. "I don't \_have\_ to sow chaos."

"She's going to be frantic," Twilight said, then looked at the draconeus anew. "Okay, that \_is\_ good."

Discord examined his beard. "I do try. Well, I don't, that's the whole point."

\* \* \*

><p>"There!" Luna shouted, pointing. "That is one of Discord's vile wiles!"<p>

Two other alicorns and a Guard Captain stared over the makeshift barricade.

"Actually, I think that's an electric water filter..." Cadence volunteered uncertainly.

The filter made a bloop sound, and then ceased to exist as a powerful spell smashed it to smithereens.

"Luna..." Celestia said, wincing. "I know it's strange, but a machine that turns drinkable water into... drinkable water... is not one of Discord's creations."

A tapestry flapped, and then caught fire.

"Got you!" Celestia grinned. Her grin turned into a frown as, rather than turning back into Discord, the tapestry simply continued to burn.

"Please tell me my rulers aren't going to destroy half the castle..." Shining Armor muttered to himself.

"I'm sure it'll be... at most one third?" Cadence tried.

"Not really much better..."

\* \* \*

><p>70.14<p>

"Sorry, Princess," Mac said with a tone of regret tinting his voice. "Y'all have had enough. Ah'm cuttin' you off."

Celestia gave him a bleary look. "My alcohol tolerance is superb," she said clearly. "I have not had enough."

"Princess, ah can tell that y'all have had more than you should," Mac continued implacably. "Don't rightly know if you can tell, but ah certainly can."

"And what kind of proof do you have?" Celestia asked, looking at him squarely in the eye.

"The sun's risin' in the north."

Princess Celestia took her gaze from him to look at the horizon for a moment. "So it is. Huh."

Mac began to say something, stopped, then sighed. "Okay, look. Clearly y'all have had a bad loop, so ah'm gonna get Twilight to take over the whole sky-thing. Just don't drink the stuff in the red-tagged bottles, they ain't ready just yet."

"Still fermenting?" Celestia asked, using her magic to take out a bottle without a red tag and pop the cork.

"Fermentin', percolatin' and in one case procrastinatin'." Mac shrugged. "Ah just call 'em in progress. They'll be done later this loop."

"Right." Celestia took another look at the red-tagged bottles, then shrugged. "Thanks."

"It's mah job," Mac replied with a smile. "You want t' talk about it?"

Celestia shuddered. "One word. Celestai."

"...ain't all that sure ah get it, actually, Princess..." Mac admitted.

"Good. Suffice to say I spent most of my time reconstructing alien races and apologizing profusely." The Princess of the Sun downed a glass. "I \_will\_ talk about it more later, but... for now, alcohol."

\* \* \*

><p>70.15<p>

"You're worse at this than my mother!" Silver called, clapping her paws on the ground and producing a large earthen mallet. The mallet slammed into the volleyball, sending it rocketing off towards the net.

As soon as it cleared the line of string, it slowed to hang in mid-air.

"Your mother's a Canis Minor this loop, she's not exactly good at volleyball!" Diamond Tiara replied, frowning, and the ball twitched, then shot back across the line.

The star-beast known as Procyon Silveris jumped into the air, balancing briefly on an alchemically-hardened disc of air, and then slammed both forepaws into the volleyball.

Which promptly exploded.

Silver landed, and winced. "Whoops... sorry, DT."

"That's the \_third time,\_ for goodness' sakes!" Tiara's eye twitched, then she sighed. "It rather looks as though we won't be able to get this game to work, Silver. Sorry, but you're not... built... for it."

"Yeah, I gotcha." Silver's tail drooped. "Kinda wish my body'd make up its mind what shape I should be. I mean, variety is kind of interesting, but this is ridiculous."

Tiara nodded. "Sucks, yeah."

She trotted over as Silver lay down, and sat back against her flank.

For several minutes, they just enjoyed the sunlight. Silver began to emit a kind of lupine purr, tail thumping on the ground.

"You're a star-wolf, not a cat," Tiara sniggered.

Silver stuck her tongue out.

"Actually," Tiara went on, rummaging in her Pocket for a moment. "I do have something we could do."

"Oh?" Silver looked over.

"Well, when Spike and I are doing TK practise, we usually use something which would let us know if we moved it too jerkily. So â€" and not to racially stereotype here â€" I happen to have a dingly ball. Want to play fetch?"

"...sure, why not." Silver got up and stretched. "May as well. I mean, if there's nothing better to do."

Tiara grinned. "Do you want the ball? See the ball? Fetch!"

"That's unfair!" Silver's voice drifted back to her. The voice's owner was already nearly halfway across the field, following the dingly ball at a flat run.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

70.1: This is not an advert.

>70.2: They lost track of the date.<br>70.3: Also some asparagus.

>70.4: Three role swaps, all because of a few date swaps. (And yes, Nightmare Moon can change shape...)<br>70.5: Ivory "sealing" Scroll.

>70.6: One of those times Chrysalis lands next to Insert Pony Here.<br>70.7: Being a single mother.

>70.8: Zecora can pull off "evil" rather better than I can pull off her speech patterns.<br>70.9: A bit too advanced.

>70.10: Hearts, Hooves and Claws day?<br>70.11: The little variations on how different ponies interpret the same element.

>70.12: Applied razmatazz. (Hope she keeps it in her Pocket near loop-ends...)<br>70.13: Causing chaos by doing nothing at all.

>70.14: More correctly rendered CelestAI, perhaps.<br>70.15: It seems she does, indeed, want that ball.

## 75. Chapter 75

71.1: Dungeons and Dungeon Loot

(Crisis)

"Where did you get a poultice of clouds?" Twilight asked Rainbow Dash curiously as the pegasus used the magical vaporous substance on her wounds.

"Same place I got this sweet 'glorious knife of the guardian'," Dash told her, indicating the weapon strapped to her side.

"And that would be...?"

"This Loop has some weird loot," Dash told her, grinning. "I kinda wanna see what you get."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight put on the lost pair of glasses of smoke and squinted. "I think this actually makes my vision worse. No wonder they're lost,

no one would want to find them."<p>

At least the shocking grenade of control looked pretty cool.

\* \* \*

><p><span>(Crisis)<span>

Discord flitted around the hidden treasure, looking for something interesting when he spotted the perfect item for him.

"An amulet of warp science? Ooooo..." After all, one could never have enough chaos.

"And an ornamental crate of banished beans!" Or just plain silly things.

\* \* \*

><p><span>(novusordomundi)<span>

Apple Bloom was busy looking at something she had come across this trip: **Lexxabarmoth**, the **Legendary Banished Broken Wand of Protection**, **uttering** to herself as she started going through her space-time pocket to see if she had the proper components.

"Bet's on the number of loops it takes to fix it?" Scootaloo asked her friends

"I'm betting four."

"Looks pretty magical. Five"

"Two. Doesn't look that complicated."

\* \* \*

><p><span>(Crisis)<span>

Gilda read the title of the book she'd just looted. "'Learning How to Be a Barbarian?' I've seen the local barbarians. That's like making a book that teaches you how to be illiterate."

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia envied her sister who was currently modelling her new chainmail of darkness. All she'd managed to get was this lousy malachite of day...<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Draught of inhale fire?" Spike raised an eyebrow. "Isn't that a little redundant for me?"<p>

"Whoops!" Twilight snatched the item back and gave him a different parcel. "Sorry, I meant to give you this ornamental garb of the paladin..."

\* \* \*



><p><span>(Zap Rowsdower)<span>

A manual on "How to become a barbarian"

"Step 1. Hit yourself on the forehead with this book. Step 2. If this sentence seems coherent, repeat Step 1 as necessary."

\* \* \*

><p><span>(misterq)<span>

Pinkie Pie donned her new legendary artifact, \*\*Donoator, the Legendary Confusing Finely-crafted Boots of Laughter.\*\*

Then she waited a moment to see what would happen. Then a few more moments passed."

Then, Pinkie lost her patience, "Nothing is happening! These are just a set of nice boots, but where is the laughter? Are these made just for me? I don't get it!"

And as Pinkie examined her new apparel in utter confusion, the boots were working perfectly.

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetie Bell reddened as she read through her new scroll, titled "Songs of the Lusty Warlock and the Useless Wheel of Cheese".<p>

Then she set the thing on fire with a look of disgust.

"No. Just... just no," she said as she stumbled towards Mac's bar and hopefully something that could erase the last few minutes from her brain.

\* \* \*

><p><span>(Crisis)<span>

Applejack grumbled as she swung her enchanted Light-banishing Nunchaku of Truth. Sure, it was great how they dispelled illusions on contact and such, but the light-banishing aspect got kind of annoying after a while.

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity carefully stowed the Poultice of Controlled Lava in her bag. It would be useful if Spike ever got injured she supposed.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><span>(Indalecio)<span>

Berry took a sip of the liquid in the legendary bottle labeled \*\*Ladmilvol, the Legendary Ruined Wet Bottle of Spirit\*\*. A mixture of emotions crossed her face.

Twilight, with a clipboard and quill stood nearby. "So. How was it?"

"I don't know!"

\* \* \*

><p><span>(masterofgames)</span></p>

More and more of the odd loot turned up in increasingly unexpected places. Some interesting, some useful, and some just odd.

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie hopped down the trail to Fluttershy's backyard, a pair of shimmering boots atop her head. "Hey Fluttershy! Look what I found! Can I get a second opinion on them?"</p>

Fluttershy looked up from her chickens. "Um... well, I'm not sure silver is your color, but, you know... if you like them..."

Pinkie shook her head. "Not like that silly, just put them on, and tell me what you hear."

Fluttershy timidly slipped the boots on, gasping softly as they shifted into green slippers with yellow and pink butterflies on them. "W-well they certainly are impressive Pinkie, but why would I hear anything from..." she perked her ears. "Wait... Now that you mention it... I do hear something!"

Pinkie grinned. "I thought so! I thought I did too, but I couldn't make it out exactly. What do you hear?!"

Fluttershy concentrated. "It sounds like... a lot of ponies saying the same thing, very far away... Pinkie, what does 'Mai wai fu' mean?"

[The boots of dimensional seduction]

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight paused as she passed her bed, stepping back and lifting the cover a bit to look under it. On the floor, just barely sticking out, was a book she had never seen before. Smiling, she picked it up, and took it downstairs to read.</p>

Spike looked up from sweeping as she passed him, getting a look at the title. "'It's Time to Learn About the Lemur'. Huh. What's a lemur?" he asked, puzzled.

"I have no idea!\_" Twilight squeed.

\* \* \*

><p>Discord was napping in a tree. Someone apparently took this as an insult, as without warning, a golden two foot long rod with Twilight's head on it fell out of a higher up branch and bonked him on the head. "Argh! What the... It wasn't me! I'm *reformed!*" he insisted, glancing about rapidly, before discovering he was alone. Looking down, he picked up the rod from where it had fallen.

"That's odd... I could have sworn I had gotten rid of this thing.

Where did it come from?" he pondered, scratching his head.

[a puzzling scepter of knowledge]

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity looked around for any sign of the one who had left the two books and the scroll on her worktable. "Sweetie Belle? Were you the one who brought these?"<p>

She got no answer. It seemed Sweetie Belle was out with her friends.

Rarity simply shrugged to herself. "Hmm, maybe it was Twilight. She did promise to send over any spell-books she found that seemed a good fit for me. Let's see here... "Agate Miracle"? Thoughtful, but I have enough divine intervention in my life." she grinned as she placed the book aside. "What else is here... "Citrine Hail". Ugh, I may get around to it eventually, but I have no intention of getting back into weather management again. What's this last one?" she asked herself, placing the scroll aside as well. "Hmm, "Sapphire Shot"... Well... I suppose it's worth a look." she shrugged, pulling a sheet of diamond from her pocket to use as a target and flipping open the book. "... Doesn't seem TOO difficult... Okay, let's try this!" she grinned, powering up her horn and casting.

The result was not quite what she expected. Instead of a flying gemstone, a small glass of blue liquid appeared in front of her.

"Sapphire... shot." she groaned, facehoofing. "Well, at least Spike should appreciate it."

\* \* \*

><p><span>(Crisis)<span>

[A magic book containing "Vomit Technology"]

"I don't feel good..." Applebloom moaned.

"I can't imagine why," deadpanned Silver Spoon. "I mean, you've only barfed up five cellular phones, three cybernetic prostheses, six toasters of various configurations and manner of matching the definition, one death ray like you'd find on top of a mad scientist's secret mountain base, two hovercraft, a mind-linked suit of mobile infantry armor suitable for your brother, an interstellar tank, a solar collection array that's built for orbit, and four space shuttles complete with booster rockets."

\* \* \*

><p><span>(Masterweaver)<span>

"I found out who's responsible for the random loot!"

The gathered ponies (and associated entities) had turned their heads when Pinkie kicked down the door. Now she was dragging a long-eared colt into the dragon, despite the way he beat his butterfly wings at her. "Hey, what is this? What are you-?" He tried to jab his horn at

her, only for his captor to dodge easily.

"You really are impressive," Pinkie continued. "Hiding from me for half this loop? Me, of all ponies? That takes super duper talent. But now it's time... FOR YOUR PARTY!"

A banner unfurled from the ceiling, the words Welcome To Equestria written in large, bold letters. The young fluttercorn blinked, staring at the banner. "Wait. What?"

"This is a sanctuary loop," Twilight explained. "You're allowed to relax here, do whatever you want so long as you don't, you know, do anything that permanently hurts somepony. Looping or not." She rolled her eyes as the party pony slipped into the kitchen. "Pinkie feels it's her duty to make guests feel extra welcome, so avoiding her this long... well, she has this strange angryhappy state where she tries to compensate for the happiness she thinks should have happened and..."

"Hrm." The young fluttercorn crossed his hooves. "I suppose that makes sense... in a way..."

"So... what's your home loop like?"

"Don't have one."

There was a collective gasp from the gathered ponies (and associated entities). Fluttershy stood up. "No home loop? Why that's... that's terrible!"

"Not... really." The colt shrugged. "I mean, yeah, sometimes it can get lonely, especially since most Stockers don't get noticed-"

"Stokers?"

"That's what I call us anyway. You know, Picori, Money Spiders, Dungeon Keepers..." He waggled a hoof. "Here I'm known as Roguelike, King of the Breezies. It's a weird quirk, most of the time I loop in I'm in charge of setting up things for the adventurers to find. I think it was my job back wherever I came from and I do like it, but... well, after a few subjective millennia, you get bored of mithril swords."

Scotaloo raised an eyebrow. "Hence the burning quiver of the dart of slime."

"Mmmyp, you got it. So, yeah, I got bored. Um... you all don't mind if I keep doing this, do you?"

"Not at all." Twilight grinned. "I'm just happy to have an explanation. Oh, but you really do need to stay for Pinkie's party, she... she gets pretty obsessive if ponies don't, you know, have a party."

"Right, I suppose I could do that."

\* \* \*

><p><span>(masterofgames)<span>

Twilight floated yet another book over to her from the pile Spike had been making. The tomes had been showing up everywhere, and while Twilight was far from unhappy, they were making a mess of her shelving system. "Let's see... 'The Sap and its' Secrets'. Botany tips?" she asked herself as she flipped it open. "Ugh, nope, just tips on how to write romance novels." she groaned, floating it over to the instructional bookcase. "Let's see, what else is here... 'Ravage Time'? 'What They Don't Tell You About the Belt'?" she muttered, checking them. A moment later, her face was bright red. Making sure Spike was occupied, she floated them upstairs. 'Later.' she promised herself.

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash and Scootaloo dusted each other off and straightened their pith helmets, grinning like madmares at the large stone door before them. "Oh yeah! Let's crack this baby open!" "I know! It's been ages since my last treasure hunt! I forgot how good actually finding the loot felt! Care to do the honors, squirt?" Scootaloo pulled out a seismic charge and grinned. "Don't mind if I do!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>To say Twilight was a bit livid would be like saying the sun was 'a bit' tepid this time of year. "Did the two of you SLEEP through my lecture on historical site preservation?!"<p>

Rainbow Dash and Scootaloo grinned and answered at the same time. "Like a foal!"

"Ugh, just... just tell me what was inside."

Scootaloo bounced up and down. "Oh man, it was so cool! There were flying spears, and pit traps, and alligators on pendulums, and we were all like-!" Rainbow Dash muffled her with her wing. "What she means is, we found the Arcane-Infused Helm of Space Emitting!"

THAT got Twilight's attention. "Wait, really?! What did it look like?"

Rainbow Dash shrugged. "No idea. It was kind of hard to see, what with all the space it was emitting and everything." Twilight facehoofed. She really had walked right into that one. "-but we did bag it and escape, so let's all take a look right now."

Scootaloo pulled out the bag and opened it, then stepped back to let Twilight levitate it out.

For a few moments, none of them spoke. Finally, Scoots tapped Twilight on the shoulder. "Hey Twilight, is that... you know?"

Twilight just groaned and sat down. "Yeah, it's Nightmare Moon's old helmet."

Luna poked her head out of the kitchen with a wild grin. "Dost thou speak truly? Huzzah! Twas wondering where it had vanished off to!"

\* \* \*

><p><span>(novusordomundi)<span> (KrisOverstreet)

[Sapient headband of Guisarmes]

"\_\*\*Do you not know what I am, mere mortals?" \*\*\_a voice boomed to the pink pony that was currently handling it.

Pinkie twirled it around, admiring the different unique guisarmes on what was apparently a metal headband, fortunately missing everypony as she looked at it. "Your a headband full of sharp sticks! And you talk!"

"\_\*\*Foolish wench! I am a GOD compared to you. Scream Hosannas to the God of the Round! Show your new master the respect It deserves. Get on your knees and PRAY TO ME!"\*\*\_

Pinkie giggled at this sentient, apparently egotistical thing, as she opened her sub-space pocket to stuff "The God of the Round" into it.

"\_\*\*Don't you even think..." \*\*\_Was as far as it got before the pocket was resealed behind it, sealing it's fate.

\* \* \*

><p>About a week later there was a party. There were of course parties in the intervening time, Pinkie was forever Pinkie, but this particular party is the relevant one.<p>

After everyone had sampled the punch and the cake, Pinkie removed the headband from her subspace pocket and fit it on her head. "Who's ready for a song?" she asked.

\*\*"MEEE!"\*\* the headband said, and began to sing:

\*\*Trottingham bridge is falling down,\*\*

Falling down, falling down...

Pinkie joined in:

\*\*Trottingham bridge is falling down,\*\* ... \_Trottingham bridge is falling down,\_

\*\*My Celestia\*\*. ... \_Falling down, falling down,\_

\*\*Build it back with mud and clay,\*\* ... \_Trottingham bridge is falling down,\_

\*\*Mud and clay, mud and clay,\*\* ... \_My Celestia.\_

\*\*Build it back with mud and clay,\*\* ... \_Build it back with mud and clay,\_

\*\*My Celestia.\*\* ... \_Mud and clay, mud and clay,\_

\*\*Mud and clay will wash away\*\* ... \_Build it back with mud and clay,\_

**\*\*Wash away, wash away,\*\* ... \_My Celestia.\_**

**\*\*Mud and clay will wash away\*\* ... \_Mud and clay will wash away...\_**

At this point Rainbow Dash removed the singing headband and stopped Pinkie. "What the larch kind of song is this?" she asked.

**\*\*"INFIDEL!"\*\* the headband cried out. \*\*\*'TIS A ROUND, OF COURSE!"\*\***

"To be specific," Pinkie Pie grinned, "it's a party canon!"

**\* \* \***

><p><span>(Conceptulist)<span>

In the coffer, you find...

**\* \* \***

><p>[A bixbite of the colossus]<p>

"Were's the rest of it?"

"Don't know. Want to go looking?"

"Yay! **\*\*Cutie Mark Crusaders Loot Finders!\*\***"

**\* \* \***

><p>[An ordinary cleaver of mending]<p>

"Why. Won't. It. Cut. Anything! this makes no sense! its a cleaver, it should cut stuff!"

"'Twi, just move on. You've been trying to chop vegetables for hours."

**\* \* \***

><p>[A spell book containing "Curse of the Wyvern"]<p>

"Ooo! More books!"

**\* \* \***

><p>[A changing shuriken of the minotaur]<p>

"Since when is Iron Will a ninja?"

"I think he found a ninja's for dummies book."

**\* \* \***

><p>[An eldritch cape of inhale time]<p>

"Weeeee!"

"Pinkie Pie, what are you doing?"

"Isn't it obvious! Time flies when you're having fun, so making time fly is fun, so I'm having fun and eating up my free time at the same time!"

"Weeeeeee!"

\* \* \*

><p>[A ruined rake]<p>

\*smack\*

"Ow! Tree dammit! the Great and Powerful Trixie does not deserve this humiliation!"

"I thought that rake gag only happened in cartoons..."

\* \* \*

><p>[Edanstar, the Legendary Tentacled Salve of Confetti]<p>

"What. The. Buck."

"I suggest that we never let Pinkie find this. If she does, she might try to use it. Most likely on us."

"Agreed. the last 5 minutes never happened and we never saw this Abomination."

\* \* \*

><p><span>(Conceptulist)<span>

[A blinding greatclub of deceit]

"I don't get it. what does it do?"

"Ah don't really know DT... hey there's a switch on the side!"

\*flash\*

"Applebloom, what were we doing just now? And what is that you just dropped?"

"Looks like it's one of the random dungeon loot thingys. There is a label on the side... apparently it's a blinding greatclub of deceit, whatever that is."

"I don't get it. what does it do?"

\* \* \*

><p>[A pair of gauntlets of the snake]<p>

\*grunt\*



"Hyaaa!"

\*punch-kick-punch\*

\*SMASH\*

"Why is Iron Will tearing that building apart with martial arts?"

\*Crash!\*

"I found a pair of gauntlets of the snake. apparently they" \*bash\* "magically make the wearer good at" \*thud\* "snake style kung fu." \*Aiaiaiaiaaaaaa!\* "However, since I couldn't wear them - they're" \*shatter\* "gauntlets, not horseshoes - I gave them to Iron Will."

"That's nice of you Rarity, but I was asking why he wa-"

"Iron Snake Fist: Horn of The Bull!"

\*Crash!\*

\*BANG\*

\*Kabong!\*

\*\*\*SHATTER\*\*\*

\_\*rimroll\*\_

"... asking why he tore apart a China shop."

"Simple Twilight. It was up for demolition and I said he could keep the gloves if tore it down for me."

\* \* \*

><p>[A blessed amethyst of the undertaker]<p>

"Are you ready to lose?!"

\*Snort-Huff\* "Bring it, Bessie!"

"And the final match of the first annual Ponyville Non-Pony Wrestling Tournament is off to a great start!"

"Iron starts of with a left jab, now a righ- he faked out and went with the left again!"

"Griffin PAWNCH!"

\*Slam!\*

\*gasp!\* "the Grif has Iron on the ropes! The match looks like it's all over for Iron! This could possibly be the Grif's shortest match yet!"

"Iron Snake Fist: Horn of the Bull!"

\*KABONG\*

\*thud\*

"And it was! Just not in the way the Grif was expecting! Iron "Iron Undertaker" Will has just beaten crowd favorite Gilda "White Grif" Griffin in the shortest match of the entire tournament! The crowd's going wild! This Pinkie Pie, signing off. Good night Ponyville!"

\* \* \*

><p>[Okania, the Legendary Miniature Laughing Charm of Fauna]<p>

"Come on! Please!"

"NO! Iron Will found it fair and square, it belongs to Iron Will!"

"Um... If you don't mind, my I have it? Pretty Please?"

"Yes, Iron Will does mind. No you can't have it."

"If she can't have it for a Pretty Please, can I have it for a Pretty Please with a Party on top?"

"NO! N. O. NO! Okania, the Miniature Laughing Charm of Fauna is a sacred Legendary artifact to Iron Will's species. To hand it over to a complete stranger after it was lost for centurys would be sacrilege."

"Really? Why is it so legendary?"

"Iron Will is glad you asked, yellow pony. You see, it all started when-

\_"Pretty Please with a Sprinkle Party on top?!"\_

\*\*"NO!"\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>(novusordomundi)<p>

"Insolent creature!" Nightmare Moon screamed, at Angel Bunny, sending another blast of darkness at the Awake pet.

Angel easily somersaulted over the attack, while unsheathing what looked to be a carrot. Well, Nightmare Moon could have been looking at the carrot, if it weren't for the fact that it was emitting an intense orange light on par with the sun itself. Nightmare Moon had no other choice but to shield her eyes, as Angel Bunny landed on both feet, holding the bright carrot by it's green top, as if he planned to fence with it.

And by all intents and purposes, he was.

"Why is Angel fighting Nightmare Moon with a carrot?"

"Oh, it's not just any carrot. It's Sinnornant, a bright masterwork carrot" Fluttershy explained, as the Mane Six watches as a horn-on-carrot fight was breaking out in the middle of Ponyville. "He's very proud of finding it."

"Not even on the top ten weirdest things we've found." Twilight sighed.

[Sinnornant, the Legendary Bright Masterwork Carrot]

\* \* \*

><p>[A spell book containing "Horse Converting"]<p>

"We are burning this book..."

"But Twilight..."

"Burning!"

\* \* \*

><p><span>(novisordomundi)<span>

[An atlas titled "The Bottle of Alcohol: a Handbook, Second Edition"]

"Ah! So THAT's where I need to go to find that vintage" Berry Punch said, marking something in the atlas, before stuffing it back into her subspace pocket.

"Hey, Mac, I'll be back soon. Just need to head up near the Crystal Empire for a couple of days."

\* \* \*

><p>[A volume titled "Whatever Happened to the Blind Vampire and the Mermaid, Third Edition"]<p>

"They may have left seeking for treasure, but they came back with something infinitely more valuable... each other." Fluttershy closed the book in her lap, as Twilight wiped a tear from her eye.

\* \* \*

><p><span>(Detective Ethan Redfield)<span>

Naruto channeled chakra into a new scroll he obtained on his last mission, 'A scroll containing werewolf invoking.'

His hands flashed through the summoning seals and shouted, "Kuchiyose no Jutsu!"

A yellow furred wolf appeared in a cloud of smoke. The wolf's eyes landed on Naruto as she spoke with a familiar voice, "Naruto?! How did I get here?"

Naruto tilted his head in confusion, "Fluttershy?"

\* \* \*

><p><span>(Crisis)<span>

Trixie and Gilda sorted through the treasure in the room.

"Poultice of confetti?" Trixie considered the medical shredded paper.

"Eh, we'll give it to Pinkie," Gilda shrugged as she held the bag open so Trixie could levitate it in.

"Skull of Dreams..." the unicorn grimaced at the oddly shimmering pony cranium. "Luna, definitely Luna."

"No argument here."

"A buckler of the barbarian."

"Dibs!" Gilda snapped up the small mildly-beaten shield and strapped it to her forelimb.

"A finely-crafted tankard."

"Berry Punch, no contest."

"A fractal codex of the stoat...?"

"That's a type of weasel," Gilda informed the unicorn as she accepted the tome. "Fluttershy'll probably like it."

"Healing bolas of bloodshed?" Trixie held the stones linked by rope and covered with runes reasonably far away from her. "How does that even work?"

"No idea," Gilda replied. "We should probably get Twilight to help test 'em out before we try anything with 'em."

"Yes, yes we should," Trixie agreed quickly before moving on to the next object. "An old pilot's toolkit."

"Those fillies would probably like it," Gilda shrugged and put the pouched belt in the bag with the rest.

"A prismatic crystal of charisma," Trixie gazed at the multi-colored light that shone from the object.

"Rarity, all the way," Gilda put it in the bag before her partner lost all sense of where she was.

"Right..." Trixie shook her head free of the half-formed trance and moved on. "A spellcaster's tome containing..." Trixie grinned suddenly and stuffed the tome into her cape.

"Dare I ask?" Gilda worried.

"Lava Shot," Trixie kept grinning as Gilda made plans to be somewhere else, like another country, for the next month. "Next is... an ornamental rhodochrosite of the gorilla?"

The two looked at each other for a moment before reaching an

identical conclusion. "Discord."

"And now we have..." Trixie levitated a short baton-style object out next. It was flat-profiled and appeared to be a dense metal covered with leather that was encrusted with dark-green stones. Trixie gasped a bit as she identified it. "Ladlmogion, the Legendary Nephrite-encrusted Oscillating Sap of Light."

"Light, eh?" Gilda mused, impressed. "Ol' sun-butt might be a good fit then."

"Yes, yes indeed," Trixie agreed as it was placed carefully in the bag. She then moved on to something that looked like an arrow with a handle converted for melee use that was covered in dust and grime. "A dusty siangham of the zombie..."

"Ew."

"Yes," Trixie agreed as she chucked it into a forgotten corner of the room and picked up a golden and red-brown striated gem. "A holy tiger's-eye of energy."

"Spike," Gilda insisted as the gem floated into the bag of loot. "He'll either snack on it, which could prove interesting, or give it to his wife which is the only other reasonable option."

"Hmm..." Trixie examined a glass vial of... something. "A vial of space..."

"Twilight," Gilda nodded, accepting the object. "She's the only one who'd be able to make sense of it anyway."

"A potion of clouds?" Trixie puzzled over the next object. It indeed looked like someone had stuffed liquid cloud in a bottle.

"Let's give it to Dash and see what happens," Gilda smirked.

"A key..." Trixie trailed off as she examined the old-style metal key like she was expecting something more.

"Wait, that's it?" Gilda blinked.

"I guess so," Trixie shrugged as she dropped the object into the bag.

"I suppose we should give Applejack something from this trip..."

"And finally a magic book containing 'Dinosaur Summoning'," Trixie declared before grinning at her partner.

"I think we've found our ride home," Gilda grinned back.

\* \* \*

><p>71.2 (Goldude)<p>

To say that Gilda was at a loss would be an understatement. Her mouth was hung open, her brain felt numb, and she believed she might have even gone cross-eyed.

"Shoot me in the face!"

He was just... standing there pointing at his face. Doing nothing else.

"I noticed you haven't shot me in the face yet, so shoot me in the face!"

Gilda's brain couldn't quite process this turn of events. All other people were hostile, but... not this crazy lunatic.

"Face! Bullet! Lead! Into! Face!"

She didn't even know what to do with this person, what with his constant yelling of him wanting to be shot in the face.

"Why did the chicken cross the road? To shoot me in the face!"

The griffon-turned-human hadn't ever inflicted a single casualty in this loop, preferring to just simply knock people unconscious and tie them up somewhere where they wouldn't be annoying.

"Knock knock!"

She just stood and stared, uncomprehending.

"Knock knock!"

Because this guy was insane.

"Hey, I'm telling you a knock knock joke! Knock knock!"

Gilda snapped out of her mind-numbed trance. "Er, what? Oh... Er, Who's there?"

"Shoot me in the face, that's who!"

She just simply shook her head and sighed. "Why should I shoot you in the face?"

"Because shoot me in the damn face already!"

"That doesn't answer my question."

The lunatic jumped up and down angrily. "Who cares!? I'm here, you're here, you have a gun, I don't, so shoot me in the face!"

Gilda sighed. "You know what? You're a chlorophylling weirdo."

"YES, I am so annoying that you're pissed off enough to shoot me in the face!"

"I'm not going to shoot you in the face!"

"Hey. Hey! Wanna know a secret? I'm a level 1 MLE and I'm going to destroy this loop forever so shoot me in the face!"

"Wait, what? No, I refuse to believe that you're looping."

"If I ever make it to Equestria, I'm going to make sure it isn't a sanctuary loop! Doesn't that make you want to shoot me in the face COME ON SHOOT ME IN THE FACE ALREADY!"

"Tree damn it you're looping..." Gilda rubbed her forehead, trying to relieve the oncoming headache.

"SHOOT ME IN THE FAAAAAAAAAAAAACE!"

\* \* \*

><p>71.3 (LordCirce)<p>

Applejack walked out to start bucking the orchard. Unless she was showing off, she typically only bucked a row or two at a time.

She arrived at her first tree, turned, and kicked. \*THUD, \_Thwip, poit, poit, poit, poit\_\* Applejack frowned and turned. Sitting in the bottom of her basket were several apples, all of them cut perfectly in half.

"...the hay?"

Applejack pulled the basket to the next tree and kicked again. Once again, the odd whooshing noise sounded out, and when she turned, she found her basket was again full of cut fruit. Which was odd in and of itself, as "Pineapples don't grow on trees!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Woohoo, four fruit combo!"<p>

Zecora smiled at Pinkie Pie from where they were hidden in the branches above the Unawake Applejack.

"This game is quite fun, to be sure, with my gift giving our targets variety." She gently tapped the branches around them, causing several apples to bloom into full growth. "Also, her harvest is kept secure, so our dear farmer only suffers from anxiety."

Below, Applejack tentatively poked at the large split watermelon that had just landed behind her.

\* \* \*

><p>71.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

Apple Bloom barely flicked an ear as the front door suddenly burst open. "Forget somethen' AJ?"

"Oh, uh, Ah came back ta check on ya!" Applejack trotted in. "And... you seem to be doing alright."

"Mmmhmm. Chores done, checked and doubled." The filly smiled up at her older sister. "And pies undelivered."

"Uh..." The farmpony smiled awkwardly. "Ah, right. Wait. You've got no call ta be lecturing me about this!"

"Let's see, first there was Zecora," Apple Bloom mused. "Then Ah said

Ah'd be willing ta help you with yer applebucking, but you went and did half the fields on yer own afor ya fell down in exhaustion. Oh, and thar was tha time where Ah told ya we didn't care what ribbons ya won, and then the whole Reunion-

"Alright, alright, so Ah'm not perfect." Applejack snorted. "That still don't mean ya can spin round and play tha big sister here!"

"Yer right. Ah apologize, that was condescendin' of me. Oh, since yer back though, do ya mind if I get out tha big toolbox while yer gone?"

Applejack blinked. "Er... What big toolbox?"

With a small smile, Apple Bloom tapped an unassuming knot on the wood floor. The paneling slid away, a metallic crate rising with a sudden burst of cold fog. "Oh, just mah thermonuclear energy generator toolbox."

\* \* \*

><p>71.5 (Gym Quirk)<p>

"So...You've replaced Yoda?" mused Luke Skywalker.

"Mmm...Yes. A problem does that pose?" responded the lavender twi'lek with a more gravely voice than usual.

Luke winced. "Please don't do that."

The purple-and-green barabel smirked.

"I doubt it'll be an issue: I'm just trying to work out how having an extra jedi master around for the first Death Star changes things," continued the local jedi.

"I'm afraid that as plain jedi mastery goes, I'm not all that hot. It's been ages since I was slotted in as Obi-wan and even longer since my first visit as Qui-gon. Spike makes much more day-to-day use of the Force than I do. I'm more of a pure arcane specialist, and those abilities are usually tied to my native equine form," admitted Twilight in her normal voice.

They were seated in the common area of the Millennium Falcon; Apple Bloom and Chewbacca were aft tinkering with the engines and power systems with Sweetie Belle to facilitate communication and Scootaloo figuratively hovering to make sure they didn't start taking the ship apart in their enthusiasm.

Luke had determined that the best time for them to leave the planet would be in aproximately an hour, so they were taking this opportunity to make preparations and work on contingency plans.

"Look, Twilight. Why don't you take it easy for now? Luke and me can probably handle whatever comes up. You can lend a hoof if things get extra crazy," suggested Spike.

"We can discuss division of labor later, but getting back to plans



for the Loop, Leia's a prisoner on the Death Star, and will be executed not long after the destruction of Alderaan unless someone intervenes. Family and friend issues aside, losing her will make things more difficult for the Alliance, and my experience says the even a veteran jedi coming out of hiding can't make up for that loss. You are the guests, and I'm willing to accommodate any reasonable suggestions, but for the sake of the smooth running of things, I feel that going with the baseline at least as far as rescuing Leia would be for the best," said Luke.

"I'm cool with that," replied Spike. "I'm pretty sure the girls will go with it too."

"Right. So this means that we need to be in the Alderaan system some time in the next..." Luke started to explain time constraints.

\* \* \*

><p>"I think that's all we kin do without a significant tear-down of the power distribution system," declared Apple Bloom.<p>

{{Agreed,}} growled Chewbacca. {{Thanks for the help.}}

"So just what did you manage to do? I think I followed about half of what you were doing here," asked Scootaloo.

"In rough terms, two percent boost to sublight cruising speed and lateral maneuverability, three percent more shield power, and an optional ten percent boost to quad laser output. The trade-off is yer rotational trackin' drops off by about the same factor," explained the astromech.

"Chewie?" came Luke's voice from the intercom. "I think you and Scoots need to start power-up and pre-flight. Spike and I are getting some twinges."

"On it," replied the pilot. She and the wookiee made their way forward.

"Thanks for that Shyriiwook translation package, Sweetie," said Apple Bloom as they followed the others. "Are you okay? You haven't said much for the past few minutes."

"It's nothing...Kinda waiting for the other shoe to drop, I guess."

"Waddaya mean?"

"It's just...the three of us together...I'm a little worried about the looming tree-"

"Don't jinx it!" cried Bloom.

"Oh. Yeah. Sorry."

The astromech took a moment to examine an exposed coolant line with a worried twitter.

\* \* \*

><p>"So much for my careful plotting of our lone star destroyer," said Luke, entering data into the navicomputer.<p>

"Don't sweat it. Variant loops happen to everypony," responded Scootaloo. "Main power's on line. How's that departure clearance going, Twilight?"

A second Star Destroyer had arrived just as the smuggling pair got into their cockpit seats. A hasty departure checklist was now nearing completion.

"Getting the runaround as expected. I think they're about to seal the spaceport," said Twilight.

{{So we launch without clearance as usual,}} grunted Chewbacca.

"We've got activity outside the bay," called Spike via comlink. "I make it an augmented squad of stormtroopers." He was perched in the dorsal airlock as a lookout.

"Not a problem unless they brought an E-Web. Takeoff in twenty seconds. Get yourselves strapped in back there!" replied Scootaloo. She eyed the controls for the ground-defense auto-blaster anyway.

{{Engines are go,}} announced the wookiee.

"Then let's blow this sandbox. Punch it!"

The repulsorlifts floated the Falcon above the rim of the docking bay, then the main engines took over and the ship screamed for space...after a brief aerobatic indulgence.

Luke eyed the pilot with a stony gaze. Twilight's expression was less severe, but still fairly stern.

{{Were those three barrel rolls really necessary?}} asked Chewbacca.

"Heh. Sorry. Couldn't resist."

As thrilling skin-of-your-teeth escapes went, it was rather anticlimactic.

Their departure course brought them into extreme turbolaser range of the incoming Star Destroyer for about fifteen seconds, but other than that, it was an almost leisurely jaunt to the edge of Tatooine's gravity well. Having the proper hyperspace route entered - From memory: Luke was very familiar with these calculations - before takeoff was icing on the cake.

Why they faced no TIE fighters - as in the baseline - was a mystery.

Scootaloo's disappointment was palpable as she engaged the hyperdrive. "I know that advance planning makes for low-stress loops, but relaxing is one thing, dull is another."

"I suppose we could make this an entirely baseline run and then you

could volunteer for Y-Wing duty at Yavin," suggested Luke. "Would that be sufficiently not-dull for you?"

"Ah...heh heh...I withdraw the comment."

{{We have about eight hours en route until we reach the Alderaan system,}} said Chewbacca.

"That being the case, I'm going to take a nap. Wake me in two hours," declared Twilight going aft to the bunk compartment.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Scootaloo? Kin I use yer spare astromech fer somethin'?" asked Apple Bloom when Scootaloo entered the main compartment with Luke, Spike and Chewbacca in tow.<p>

"But you are an astromech."

"Thing is, there's somethin' on my mind that I'd like to take care of."

"Okay fine."

One odd spacial distortion later, a second R2 unit was next to Apple Bloom. It was painted a familiar sky blue with a rainbow pattern applied to the panels on its dome. It twittered confusion at its surroundings with Apple Bloom beeping and crooning reassurances. The human and wookiee traded bemused looks. Spike looked on impassively.

"Does Rainbow Dash know about this droid?" asked Sweetie.

"I keep meaning to mention it, but it kinda slips my mind whenever we meet," admitted the pilot.

Apple Bloom had interfaced her scomp link with the other astromech and was now performing a data transfer. With a chirp of satisfaction, she completed the task and withdrew the computer probe arm. "There. R2-RD now has a another copy of the Death Star plans. Literally a load off my mind. Y'all want me to keep it, or do ya have room fer it now?"

"Might give it to Twilight to store with my X-Wing until we have a chance to transfer them both back to me."

{{As long as we're discussing hidden assets, there is a minor issue that has just occurred to me,}} started Chewbacca. {{Part of our standard Death Star infiltration pattern involves employing stormtrooper armor as disguises. Master Luke has a set that fits quite nicely, but it occurs to me that the young lady lacks any similar equipment, and her diminished stature - no offense intended, I merely observe an inconvenient fact - makes such a disguise problematical in any event.}}

"I think I have a holographic disguise unit that might work," suggested Spike. "I don't have much usable image data from this time period, so we'll need to someone do a complete visual scan of a set of stormtrooper armor to program the thing."

"Meanin' me," mumbled Apple Bloom.

"You weren't this grumpy about doing tech work when we were on the \_Enterprise\_," observed Sweetie.

"On the \_Enterprise\_, I had an entire engineering department to handle the borin' stuff."

\* \* \*

><p>"Look. I could just pull out OWL or one of my Hogwarts wands, but as long as I'm supposedly 'taking it easy', I might as well try some other magical implementations," said Twilight.<p>

After her brief nap, she and Spike had gone to the aft cargo hold to perform some semi-private experimentation.

"Okay, fine. Just try not to do too much collateral damage while you work out how this is supposed to work. I'm already a bit on-edge with the Crusaders here," replied Spike.

Twilight produced a large wooden staff and shorter thick dowel from her subspace pocket. Both were intricately carved with an assortment of arcane sigils. Holding the staff in her left hand, she extended the dowell in her right and pointed it at an empty packing crate across the hold. Clearing her throat, she declared: "Ghor!"

The crate shattered.

"Wasn't that Klingon?" asked Spike.

"Would you prefer I said 'Forzare'? Anyway, it looks like the proof of concept worked." She tucked the blasting rod into her belt and leaned the staff against a bulkhead. "For more subtle magic, I'll use these." She fished in her subspace pocket for what appeared to be a pair of extra-long bamboo cooking chopsticks. "If memory serves, Harry explained that Molly prefers to use paired wands for her veils and illusion work. Let me know if you pick up any Force disturbances, okay?"

With a series of guttural mumbles and gestures with her wands, Twilight was suddenly three identical twi'leks. One walked to the remains of the crate and looked at the debris. Another went to lean against the bulkhead next to the staff. The third climbed on top of another crate and sat down.

"Pretty smooth, Twilight. Didn't pick up anything when you triggered the spell. However..." Spike took a small power cell from his belt and gently tossed it to an empty portion of the hold, where it thumped against a momentarily invisible form. The spell disrupted, the three illusory figures vanished. "I could still find you. Were you making any attempt at hiding your Force signature?"

"Not really. I'm still seeing how well this kind of magic works here. If there's time, I'll work on masking my Force presence."

\* \* \*

><p>They were all discussing increasingly outlandish plans for how to rescue Leia when Alderaan was destroyed.<p>

All three jedi displayed varying degrees of distress. "I hate this part," muttered Luke. Twilight nodded agreement.

"Ooohhh. This really sucks. You have to go through this every loop?" asked Spike.

"Just about. There was one loop where Leia was able to get them to head for Dantooine, but that resulted in Vader killing her thirty seconds after they found out she was spinning a story. Not a good loop at all," said Luke with a haunted expression.

"Changing the subject," cut in Sweetie a tad over-enthusiastically. "You mentioned you were going over the Death Star plans to see if there were any other vulnerabilities, Apple Bloom?"

"I've got a few possibilities, but I suspect Artoo spotted them loops ago anyway. How much success has he had slicin' the Death Star's network to induce weapon system shutdowns, reactor overloads and so on?"

"Mixed bag. Reactor system firewall's usually solid as duracrete. Same with superlaser power and targeting. He's had some success with forcing the defensive turbolasers to go on local control, but since they're not good at anti-fighter work anyway, it's not that big an edge against what the Alliance can throw against it on short notice," replied Luke.

"What about navigation and propulsion?"

"Meh. About one time in six, he can cause a mis-jump or force a cold reboot of the hyperdrive. Nav data is stored in read-only form, so no easy way to send them wildy off-course."

"Okay, I'll look at the hyperdrive if time permits. Has he tried messin' with the internal logistics systems?"

"Not that I recall. I take it you have an idea?"

"Just the start of some notions. If I kin solidify the details, I think I may take a page from Pinkie's book, but that would require some magical assistance for the more...unconventional...items."

"Let me know what you come up with, Apple Bloom, and I'll see what I can do." said Twilight.

"How does laying a false trail with the homing beacon work out?" asked Sweetie.

"Not too badly. Going out to an uninhabited backwater and ditching the beacon buys us a few days before Tarkin gets restless and decides to attack another system. The problem is it's hard to predict what his next target will be, so destroying the thing is still an imperative."

"Wouldn't it be the same target each time?" asked Scootaloo.

"Butterfly effect," explained Twilight. "If you pull things far enough from the loop's baseline, random factors can take over."

"Is that what that means?" inquired Sweetie. "I thought it had something to do with Fluttershy."

\* \* \*

><p>"Reverting to normal space in thirty seconds. Shields up," announced Scootaloo.<p>

{{Comm jamming suite on standby,}} added Chewbacca.

Luke and Twilight, seated in the communication and navigation seats behind the piloting duo, wore the abstracted expression common to jedi communing with the Force.

The hyperspace vortex surround the ship gave way to star lines and eventually the starfield as seen from the Alderaan system. As expected, no blue-green sphere was visible. A much smaller and distant disk could be made out roughly ahead. The ship was jolted by a glancing impact with a small boulder-sized planetary fragment.

"Lone TIE fighter aproaching from astern," said Twilight softly.

One abortive pursuit and tractor beam capture later, the Falcon was being pulled into a Death Star docking bay. Luke, Twilight, Scootaloo and Apple Bloom shared a privacy-spell shielded smuggling compartment as the imperials conducted their preliminary inspection of the 'abandoned' freighter.

"Are you sure you can shield us from Vader's Force sense?" Scootaloo asked for the fifth time.

"You're sounding more and more like Han when he's feeling antsy," observed Luke.

"I wish I coulda rigged up that exterior audio-video surveillance system," lamented Apple Bloom.

The distinct tramp of armored boots on the deck plate above rang through the sound-suppressing magic.

"And...They're off the ship. Five to ten minutes before the scanning crew shows up," announced the future Jedi Grand Master as Scootaloo opened the compartment.

Luke poked his head out just in time to see the compartment where Spike had secreted himself open. The barabel jedi murmured, "I got a good sense of him. I'm pretty sure it was mutual."

"Well, that's that confrontation set up. You sure you're up for it?"

Spike nodded. "I have lots of ways to wrong-foot him long enough to cover our escape, and we've got you and Twilight up our sleeves in case I need an assist. Anyway, we should probably get to our positions for the next bit." The other passengers and crew were quietly emerging to take up their ambush stations for the next phase.

Seven minutes later, two techs laboriously set an equipment case down in the main compartment. Their surprise was considerable when they were suddenly confronted by a lavender twi'lek who pointed a carved rod in their direction and grunted, "yIQong!"

Their surprise instantly gave way to slumber.

Spike and Luke eased the two bodies to the deck with gentle applicatoins of the Force. Luke lifted one end of the case to a height of half a meter and let it drop to the deck with a thud. "Hey down there! Can you give us a hand with this?" he called.

\* \* \*

><p>Subduing the personnel in the hangar monitoring office was another anticlimax. Finding out-of-the-way locations to secrete two unconscious techs, four stormtroopers, and one watch officer was only slightly more difficult. Scootaloo switched off her armor holoprojector with a sigh of relief. "I don't care what you say, Apple Bloom. This thing itches like crazy."<p>

Twilight, who had found several sets of uniforms in a closet and was checking them for size to replace her current ensemble, absently explained, "It's almost certainly a psychosomatic reaction. A simple holographic field shouldn't do anything to stimulate your peripheral nervous system."

"I don't care. I'm not using it longer than absolutely necessary."

Apple Bloom trundled over to the computer interface socket and plugged in. "Right...C'mon...Great. I'm in. No alarms raised. I'm gonna need a minute or two to get my bearin's."

"Why are you thinking about changing clothes?" Luke asked Twilight.

"I can't keep up my veil very well in close quarters like a turbolift, and an Imperial uniform, even if worn by a nonhuman, will blend in better in a crowd here than this red-and-brown getup. At least it may give us that half-second of confusion that makes the diference in a crisis." Shetook a final look at the uniform and shrugged. "Speaking of veils, back in a few minutes," she said with a wave of a wand and vanished.

"Anyone wonder why there're spare uniforms in a hangar office closet?" mused Sweetie.

Chewbacca pointed at a rumpled uniform jacket on the floor of the closet. A large caf stain was evident on the front. {{I'd guess that one or more of the watch officers has had a few too many accidents with beverages.}}

\* \* \*

><p>Apple Bloom would be the first to admit that she wasn't the best pure hacker among the Equestrian Loopers; that honor went to Pinkie Pie following her extended stint as "Radical Pinkie" aboard the <em>Bebop</em>.</p>

That said, she was definitely in the top five; roughly the equal of Twilight or Luna. Her current form did provide a modest boost to her abilities, and she also had a little extra help along for the ride.

\_You sure you're up for this, Cookie? I kin understand if yer still tryin' to adapt to the strangeness\_, she asked her companion.

\_I have been witness to many of your exploits in this area. Although I lack your intuitive grasp of the finer details, I believe I can keep an eye out for trouble while your attention is otherwise occupied\_, responded Cookie.

Reassured, Apple Bloom slipped into the Death Star's network for a metaphorical quick reconnaissance followed by a set of surgical strikes.

A delicate probe confirmed Luke's report that the main hypermatter reactor and superlaser systems were locked down almost as tight as than the Yggdrasil admins read-only restrictions on Gallifreyan technology.

Turning her attention to the hyperdrive, she found a curious gap in the protocols surrounding system tests and emergency restart procedures. \_Looks like a candidate for option 5\_, suggested Cookie to Bloom's agreement.

After leaving a few time-release gifts, she went on to examine the systems governing the internal logistics that handled starfighter maintenance and supply. To her delight, they proved amenable to several of the ideas she'd brainstormed with the others.

A visit to the HoloNet comm system was also fruitful. Another gift was graciously left.

\_This exploration and low-level sabotage is all well and good, but don't forget why we're here\_, reminded Puddinghead's one-time secretary.

\_Oh yeah. Whups\_, responded a mildly chastened Apple Bloom.

Belatedly, she made a quick review of the detention records to confirm Leia's location, and double-checked the tractor beam schematics.

"Looks like we're good fer option Esk-7," she announced to the other loopers. "Leia's where she oughta be, and the tractor beam power regulators are as expected." The relevant locations were brought to a display screen for Spike to study. "Twilight, if you could pay a visit to storage bay 4823 and make the substitutions we discussed? It ain't too far from Detention block AA-23." A second screen indicated the two locations separated by just two decks. "Lemme transfer the relevant info to yer datapad."

"Sounds good," said the twi'lek, now wearing Imperial officer's grays. She set the device to receive. "I think I'll drop by on the way out," she decided. "We ready?" she asked.

"Figger Cookie and me'll need about ten...fifteen minutes to finish



reprogrammin' our little surprises. We'll let y'all know when we're done," said the astromech.

The others indicated that they were prepared for their own tasks.

"Then may the Force be with us," said Luke.

\* \* \*

><p>The Princess Awoke in her cell and took a long moment to consider her Loop memories. <em>This is definitely not where I usually start things.<em>

Her musings were cut short by a commotion from outside. An almost animalistic roar punctuated by staccato reports of blaster fire, panicked yells, muffled explosions and...was that the low hum of lightsabers?

The noise faded after several intense seconds. She took a moment to sit up a little straighter on the ledge that served as the cell's bunk and twitched her white robe into some sort of order.

The door opened to reveal a lavender-hued twi'lek female in oversized Imperial officer's grays. She was incongruously carrying a carved two meter wooden staff in her left hand and a deactivated lightsaber in her right. \_There's something oddly familiar about that face\_, she thought.

An expression of startled recognition crossed the visitor's features. The twi'lek then said, hesitantly: "Sunshine, sunshine...Ladybugs awake..."

"Clap your hooves and do a little shake," responded Princess Cadance Organa with an almost hysterical giggle. After another long look, she asked, "Aren't you a little tall for a pony?"

"Har har har," replied Twilight flatly. "C'mon. Let's go find your 'brother'. And wait 'til you meet your prospective love interest..."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

71.1: There's a random loot generator online. We went kinda nuts with it. (Thanks due to Filraen for

compiling these into something resembling coherence.)

>71.2: Well, he does know what he wants.<br>71.3: Fruit ninja!

>71.4: Somepony To Absolutely Not Need Watching Over.<br>71.5: A continuation.

## 76. Chapter 76

72.1 (Stainless Steel Fox)

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong><strong>Turning the Tables â€" Final part...  
Start!<strong>\*\*

"Behold! The palace of the twin pony sisters!" Blueblood declaimed, pointing at the ruined structure with a hoof.

"That indeed is our address/why did you give it so much stress?" asked Zecora.

Blueblood looked at her as if she were simple. "Because in the near future I'm going to be telling most of Canterlot society of my part in this adventure, and I want to make sure I have some good lines."

That got an actual laugh out of most of the other ponies, to which he added, "What? I wasn't joking!"

However, he didn't seem particularly offended either, a far cry from how they'd have expected him to act a few hours ago. Then Rainbow Dash said, "Y'know, I can see where he's coming from. I need to be thinking up some good one liners..."

Twilight said, "I think they'll be enough daring do to go around. Right now we've got a canyon to cross, and that rope bridge is out."

"Not for long!" Dash lived up to her name, zipping across the canyon and hauling up the broken bridge.

"Uh Twi, couldn't you just do your teleport thing, or lift us all across?" Applejack asked.

"Not if we can do this without magic. Teleporting risks the Everfree magic messing with my targeting, and high level telekinesis would leave me vulnerable to a counter-spell. Maybe in an emergency..."

In truth she could probably do either, even without going full alicorn, but her in-loop self would have suffered those limits. If she wanted to power through it she could have done so without dragging every-pony along and risking their lives. She was monitoring Dash despite the closing in mists, expecting the usual approach by the Shadowbolts.

Apple Bloom was looking around alertly, her green glowing eyes narrowed in thought. "Maybe I can fix up another way across. I'm good at fixing things."

Scootaloo was right at the end of the bridge, watching her idol eagerly as Dash secured one of the rope handrails. "Huh, who are those guys coming towards her?"

Dash was feeling good, no she was feeling awesome. Finally, a chance to shine! For all that she was a part of the expedition, she hadn't really had much to do apart from fending off those nightmare crows at the start. A warm, happy glow stole over her as she imagined the Wonderbolts offering her a slot for her part in rescuing Princess Celestia. The whole thing was almost dream-like...

"Rainbow..." the voice whispered behind her and she jumped round to

face it.

"Who's there?" She couldn't see anyone at first, but the voice spoke again.

"Rainbow..."

"Show yourself! I ain't scared of you!" It was true, right now she felt like she could fight Manticores and win.

"We've been eagerly awaiting the arrival of the best flyer in Equestria." Three figures emerged from the shadows, quietly enough to be shadows themselves.

Rainbow Dash tried to focus on them, three pegasi in sleek flight suits. For some reason she was finding it hard to concentrate on the details. "Who?"

"Why, you, of course." the middle one said.

"Really?! I mean... Oh yeah, me." In hindsight she should have thought of that immediately. It was nice for some-pony to recognise her talents right away, especially ponies who were obviously professional fliers. "Hey, uh, you wouldn't mind telling the Wonderbolts that, would ya? 'cause I've been trying to get into that group for like, ever."

"No, Rainbow Dash. We want you to join us, The Shadowbolts. We're the greatest aerial team in the Everfree Forest, and soon we will be the greatest in all Equestria, but first, we need a captain. The most magnificent, swiftest, bravest flyer in all the land."

Ha, she'd been right, professionals. At the back of her mind there was a sense that something was odd about the whole thing, but mostly she preened at the complements. She chuckled, "Yes, it's all true."

"We need... you." The Shadowbolt's final words were like a dream come true. She'd finally been picked up by a professional team, and not just as a member but as captain. "WOOHOO! Sign me up!"

Twilight and the others would love to hear about this... That thought pierced through the clouds of glory that surrounded her, oh yes, she'd come here for a reason. "Just let me tie this bridge real quick and then we have a deal."

"No! It's them or us!" The clouds seemed to get thicker and the Shadowbolts' speaker grew harsher.

Rainbow thought she heard voices calling out to her, but maybe it was the wind. Wow, this was a toughie. She felt the desperate need to take this once-in-a-lifetime offer push away at the desire to help her friends. Fixing that bridge and getting them get across was important for some reason she couldn't quite remember, but so was this. Surely they'd understand that and forgive her.

"Well?" The Shadowbolt prompted her, and she made her decision.

"You... Thank you! For the offer, I mean, but I'm afraid I have to

say no."

Her friends might forgive her but she wouldn't forgive herself for leaving them stranded. She turned to fix the bridge, and heard the Shadowbolt say, "Then you are of no further use to us..."

The voice had grown even harsher and more familiar, and she looked back to see the three of them leap at her. The comforting fog around her brain cleared in an instant, Nightmare Moon! The quest! She didn't have any more time to think as she was suddenly swarmed by the three pegasi.

The clouds that had covered the chasm had cleared away with the breaking of the charm, and the group could see Rainbow fighting against the three figures. Scootaloo instantly charged forward and jumped onto the single rope handrail that had been secured, running across it and using her wings and her unreasonable kinesthetic sense to keep her stable.

Apple Bloom was moving too, but away from the gap. She ploughed into an overhang where a large dead tree, half its roots washed bare, stood like some ancient sentinel. Her claws went to work, tearing out roots and digging out dirt, and in seconds it started to topple towards the gorge. It crashed down on an outgrowth of brush at the very lip of the canyon and came to rest, still partly rooted in the bank at one end, and jutting out over half way out over the drop like a pier at the other.

"Big Mac, could you keep your weight on that end?" Apple Bloom was already running back and springing onto the barrel of the trunk. Applejack tried to run over and stop her, but she was already past. Big Macintosh saw that and ran over to the roots to do just what she'd asked.

The Apple family filly did find one roadblock on her path, Sweetie Belle, who'd clambered up on the trunk right at the lip. "You and Scootaloo aren't leaving me behind... whaa!"

The last exclamation was due to Apple Bloom scooping her up by ducking her head under the little unicorn's girth without breaking stride and letting her come to rest across her shoulders. Sweetie Belle grabbed onto the wooden neck with both hooves and the leafy mane with her teeth for dear life as they galloped out across the makeshift bridge. They reached the end and Apple Bloom leapt with everything she had, soaring off the end of the tree and just managing to touch down on the far side, scrabbling with her hind claws to pull herself up.

Rainbow was a trained martial artist in the Wing Chun style of karahane - unarmed wing fighting - but taking on three opponents at once was straining even her awesomeness. She'd just taken a solid hit from the Shadowbolts' leader which had left her open for a devastating double hoof attack from one of the others. Then a small orange missile, wings blurring like a hummingbird propelled itself into the face of the one about to hit her.

"YOU LEAVE RAINBOW DASH ALONE!" Scootaloo was less than half the size of her opponent, and less than half the strength, but right then it didn't matter as even the weight of a filly when travelling at sufficient velocity was enough to bowl the luckless Shadowbolt over.

It didn't stop there as the little pegasus proceeded to grab onto her head and neck and proceed to belabour her with hooves, wings and teeth.

"Scootaloo?" Rainbow Dash exclaimed in surprise.

The Shadowbolt leader fared worse as a timberwolf with a white unicorn pounced on it and smashed it to the ground, claws instinctively ripping into it. It gave an unearthly screech and evaporated into black smoke. Meanwhile Sweetie Belle vaulted from Apple Bloom's shoulders onto the back of the third one. She straddled it's neck, breathed in, leaned close to it's ear, and sang out a highly focussed note with the full power of her lungs that started somewhere around high C and finished six feet deep in the Shadowbolt's skull. It dropped like a sack of potatoes and evaporated.

Meanwhile, Scootaloo's opponent had regained it's hooves, and bucked her off, sending the pegasus flying to land at the top of a flying buttress. The section of decorative finial she'd grabbed onto as she landed pulled loose from it's setting, and she just managed to scramble on top of it to avoid being crushed. It started sliding down the buttress with her on it. She kept it balanced by pure instinct, and saw that two of the Shadowbolts had reformed, and more were forming on the ground below.

Apple Bloom had gone to work securing the other bridge ropes (paws being better than hooves at that) while Rainbow Dash and Sweetie Belle covered her, the first with a two-wing beat-down on any Shadowbolt that came close, the other by flinging gravel at them. It was an unfair fight, but fortunately not one Scootaloo had to put up with. Grinding down the length of the buttress, she made minute adjustments as she went, and judged the final trajectory exactly. She flew off the end and dropped the chunk of solid stone across three of the attackers, smoking them.

"Whoa! Smooth move there kiddo!" Rainbow Dash cheered her, and Sweetie Belle cried out, "Wow! You really rocked them!"

Scootaloo preened for a second, then ducked one of the others as it lashed out with it's fore-hooves. She backed up into the line with the others, joined by Apple Bloom who'd just finished attaching the last rope. They were a forlorn hope to cover the end of the rope bridge against the dozen Shadowbolts that had formed, but fortunately they weren't alone for long. There was a cry of 'Bully up!' and one of the Shadowbolt's vanished as a polo ball hit it at barely sub-sonic speed.

The rest of the party came pelting across the rope bridge, spreading out as they arrived to combat the Shadowbolts. Prince Blueblood was swinging his polo mallet and shooting balls like a very posh barbarian, while Zecora had a sling in her mouth which she used to launch small balls of powder that poofed into a cloud each time it hit, and made the Shadowbolts melt away. Pinkie Pie had somehow popped up behind them, and somehow else brought out her party cannon, assaulting them with rock cake from the rear.

Twilight Sparkle had been monitoring things despite the clouds, and was once again surprised at just how capable the three fillies could be when they just did something without worrying about their cutie

marks. However, as soon as the bridge was up, she'd joined the others in galloping across, and added blasts of magic that punched through the reinforcements and popped them like mirror clones.

Shining Armour was beside her, manifesting a guard longsword that cut and thrust, while Rarity, initially carrying a length of plaited vines to bind them, instead used it like a whip to grab one that was menacing Sweetie Belle and fling it into the gorge, wings bound. "Get away from her you ruffian!"

The only ponies missing were the two older Apples and Fluttershy until there was a crash in the distance, and Big Mac appeared from the direction of Apple Bloom's improvised tree springboard which from the sound had clearly sprung it's last. Applejack was riding his timber-wolf shoulders like a surfer, and sprang into the fray as Mac dove in forepaws slashing.

Fluttershy floated over more slowly, clearly staying up and out of the way. Two Shadowbolt clones flew up to intercept her just as another one got up on Big Macintosh's back, biting away and pulling away a chunk of wood from his body. The flying Shadowbolts were flung aside and sent spiralling out of the sky by a yellow and pink streak as Fluttershy dove down to check on him, incidentally flattening the attacking Shadowbolt in the process.

While they were more than holding their own against the wave of Shadowbolts, the manifestations of Nightmare Moon's will kept respawning, while her ponies were only mortal. She ducked her head and blasted a path clear through the attackers. "Forge ahead! Get to the main hall!"

They fought their way through, despite everything the Shadowbolts did to stop them, and as the last of them entered the hall, Shining Armour put up a shield. It wouldn't take them long to get around it, but for the moment they were clear, and Twilight wasn't going to waste time. Doing the whole jump after Nightmare Moon and charge her might be epic, but she had no intention of leaving her party. Besides, they'd all worked their cutie-marks off getting here, and they deserved to see the pay-off.

Even as they entered the hall, her telekinesis reached out and grabbed the five stone balls that were the husks of the original elements. Each one flew off it's pedestal to land before the fore-hooves of it's respective element. "Claim them, grab hold. Once you bond even Nightmare Moon won't be able to take them away!"

She'd confirmed this, even Discord, for all his power, wasn't able to remove Applejack's necklace while she was wearing it, though he'd tried. She sent a pulse of magic through the husks, shattering them and forcing them to float up around their owners as glowing crystals.

"NOOO! How could you find what I could not see?" Nightmare Moon manifested in front of the pedestal of the elements, looking furious, and more Shadowbolts formed around them. "A bunch of mere ponies! I will not be denied! I..."

Then she started laughing. "You foals! The set is incomplete! You only have five of them! Your Elements are useless against me! Now I will destroy you where you stand!"

A massive bolt of lightning lashed from her horn, sister to the one Twilight had blocked back at the town hall, and the ponies cringed, but Shining Armour's shield slammed down to protect them, and Twilight returned a blast of purple energy of her own that not only dispersed it, but slammed into Nightmare Moon and sent her horn over cutie-mark backwards, shattering the pedestal of the Elements.

"Ohhh!" winced Pinkie, "I hope Princess Celestia doesn't bill us for that!"

Nightmare Moon staggered to her hooves, shaking her head in disbelief. "How! How could you, a mere unicorn have so much power?"

"Partly because you've split yours so many ways with all those Shadowbolt clones, and the bindings on Princess Celestia, and partly because I haven't just found the Elements, I had them with me the whole time! Those rocks? Just husks with no power you could sense. The Elements are that 'bunch of mere ponies' that you so despise!"

The Shadowbolt clones evaporated, the dark clouds they turned into rushing to merge with Nightmare Moon's aura. Even the sky outside turned to pre-dawn twilight as she drew in more power. "Then I will gather all my power and defeat you before you can find the sixth one!"

Perfect. Twilight had hoped the mad mare would gather all her power to her, it would make the job of removing it simpler. She started trotting forwards, through Shining Armour's shield without disturbing it. "Also too late. I'm very sorry, but this is where it ends."

Nightmare Moon lashed out with her dark aura to encompass the approaching unicorn, and the others could see glimpses of shadows, illusions of stacks of rare books, ancient magic treasures, a maze of corridors leading nowhere. The glowing fragments around Applejack collapsed in on her with a flash, leaving her wearing an amulet with an orange apple shaped gem shot a beam of energy at the shadows, dispersing them and coating Twilight in a faint orange aura.

"Applejack is honest and true. She saw through your illusions in the forest, and would not let her own self-interest or her pre-conceptions divert her from the truth. That is why she's the Element of Honesty, and her friendship lets me see through your illusions now!"

Two monstrous black panthers, each larger than a bear, sprang forward from the shadows to either side of Nightmare Moon, claws extended to rend and tear at the little purple unicorn. Big Mac and Shining Armour surged forward, but were stopped by a held up hoof from Fluttershy as her cloud of fragments coalesced into a rose coloured butterfly amulet. A pink beam surged from it and coated Twilight, and the unicorn's horn glowed in resonance. Two massive balls of yarn appeared between her and the panthers, and each felt to the ground, wrapped around one and playing with it like kittens.

"Fluttershy's gentle nature allowed her to see a Manticore as more than an enemy, and heal it's injury, allowing us to pass without fighting. Just as she gave me a way to stop your panthers without hurting them. Her compassion makes her the Element of Kindness."

More shadows rose up about the advancing unicorn, but this time the watching ponies could feel a shiver of uneasiness run down their spines as the glimpses suggested terrible things moving within. All except Pinkie who bounced up and down, "Ooh, ooh! This is my jam!"

Her amulet coalesced around her neck, a blue balloon gem at it's heart, and a cerulean beam of energy flashed out to blast away the shadows with a burst of polka music. Twilight emerged chuckling, with another colour added to her aura. "Thanks Pinkie!"

She turned her attention back to Nightmare Moon. "Really? Pinkie Pie broke your spell of fear once before with her unquenchable good spirits. You really thought the Element of Laughter couldn't do it again? You really are a one trick pony..."

Nightmare Moon snarled, "Then see how you like this trick, foal! Or rather, lets see what your friends think!"

A sickly yellow aura, shot through with black, oozed forward and around Twilight, somehow creeping under Shining Armour's barrier. It brushed the fore-hooves of the ponies scrambling back from it and they collapsed to their knees, screaming or groaning in pain.

"NO!" The nimbus around Twilight swept out and corralled the yellow, drawing it away from the others and bringing it to focus on her. She went down on her belly, gasping with agony. She managed to hiss, "I... will... not... let... you... harm... them!"

She could have blocked the pain with half a dozen different spells, but she didn't intend to. This was part of her penance for the way she'd acted, manipulating ponies just like Celestia had, dragging them with her and putting them at risk when she could simply have powered her way through on her own. Besides, this was something she could handle within her self imposed in-loop limitations.

She drew on the powers of the two remaining elements, or rather took what was freely offered, and both Rarity's and Rainbow Dash's amulets formed and added their own bursts of energy. It helped buffer and control the pain, and she started to rise to her hooves.

"Rarity makes sacrifices to help ponies every day, whether it's helping a newcomer to town, or offering her tail to calm a sorrowful river serpent. She even convinced Prince Blueblood to follow her example! And Rainbow Dash wouldn't abandon her friends either for your offer of her hearts desire or when she faced a fight to the death to keep the way open."

She finally fully rose to her feet and flung her head back, gathering up the now polychromatic aura around her and bringing her horn back down to fling it at the yellow energies around her.

"How could I do any less? I will protect my friends, not just the Elements but everyone who's helped us get this far. Blueblood, who's



been far more of a true prince these last few hours than ever before. Zecora, who guided us through the Everfree. Big Macintosh and my big brother, who were our spear and shield through all your attacks. And the three fillies, Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo, who showed their own quality back at the bridge, and proved it was of the highest."

Her aura surged forward against Nightmare Moon's attack and blasted it to pieces. "You didn't just face the Elements, you faced all of Equestria! The only question was how long it would take you to lose!"

She started pacing slowly forward again, and Nightmare Moon actually started scrambling back at her implacable advance. Her horn came down and an indigo blast of eldritch energy that wouldn't have embarrassed the main gun on a space battleship blasted forth. Every-pony watching (including zebras and temporary timber wolves) winced, gasped or in Pinkie case, pulled pom-pom's from somewhere and started cheering Twilight on.

The blast hit Twilight... and splashed, spraying shards of black edged energy around her. When it died away, the unicorn was still standing, but now the polychromatic aura had formed a tight sheath around her body, flaring to produce great wings of multicoloured light and an ethereal mane and tail. On her head was a tiara, with a star shaped gem at it's heart.

"Im... impossible!" Nightmare Moon stuttered, her former confident air completely gone. "You didn't have the sixth element! That blast should have erased you!"

"It was said that when the five elements were brought together, a spark would make the sixth appear. The spark was the spark of friendship in their hearts, and it awoke the spark in mine which lit a fire of friendship, as powerful as anything the Founders forged. That friendship, that magic is more powerful than anything you could ever hope to oppose. That is the sixth element, the element of magic..."

Delivering the attack had clearly taken a lot out of the shadow mare, and she was barely standing. However, that didn't stop her trying to back away further. "No... NO... STAY BACK!"

Twilight shook her head. "I'm sorry, but your name says it all, and so does mine. You're nothing but a nightmare, a bad dream of Princess Luna's, and she needs to wake up. Your night has ended, and this Twilight heralds the dawn..."

A blade of polychromatic aura extended from her horn, and she struck, cutting through and through the other alicorn's body in a way that would have seriously inconvenienced Princess Luna if the blade had been a physical thing. Thankfully it wasn't. The first time she'd used the Elements against Nightmare Moon she used them like a hammer, smashing the Nightmare Mooniness out of Princess Luna at the cost of taking most of her power with it. However, a hundred loops of practice and study had given her a degree of finesse.

Now she sliced away at the corruption in Luna's spirit like a scalpel, cutting away only what was necessary. The Nightmare armour fell to the ground around the body of the Lunar princess, and shreds

of black aura flowed away, fleeing the trenchant blade of light. At the end, the figure lying on the floor was midnight blue, her ethereal mane a clear night sky rather than a dark nebula. The blackness coalesced, even the armour melting into it, and tried to flee only to be corralled by a sphere of light.

Twilight's eyes were glowing pure white as she looked up at the remnants of Nightmare Moon.

"No. This ends now." She considered saying something like 'Taste the Rainbow.' but decided it would be tacky and in poor taste. Besides, she just wanted it to be over. The glow of her horn intensified and the sphere blazed for a second, then popped, leaving no trace of Nightmare Moon.

She turned to face the rest of the group, and let her eyes return to normal. "It's over... finally. Zecora, Fluttershy I need you to check Princess Luna to see if she's okay. I did my best, but there's no telling what damage the Nightmare did, or her imprisonment. Speaking of healing ponies..."

Her horn glowed again, the light washing over them, and when it faded every-pony was healed of all the minor injuries and scrapes that they'd suffered. Blueblood had his immaculately groomed tail back, and both Big Mac and Apple Bloom were back to their pony forms. Macintosh gave a sigh of relief, but Apple Bloom actually looked down at her hooves and went, "Aww!"

"My tail, my beautiful tail!" Blueblood was prancing around like a filly. "It's back! It's wonderful! It's..."

He suddenly realised that all the other ponies were looking at him, and came to a stop, trying to look nonchalant. "... nothing I couldn't have done without, but jolly good, carry on."

Rainbow Dash flew over and gave his mane a noogie. "It's okay, we get it! Y'know, for a stuck up Canterlot type, you're alright."

Rarity appeared to teleport over to him with a comb out, and started restoring his hair. "Well I thought you were wonderful! I'm just sorry you lost your air-ship."

Twilight grinned. "About that..."

She pointed to the open doorway, and ponies who turned to look saw that Blueblood's air-ship, fully repaired and immaculate, was anchored in the courtyard. She shrugged. "Harmony powers, go figure! Which reminds me..."

The polychromatic aura split into its component parts and each one shot back into its respective amulet, which glowed and faded away, seeming to sink into its wearer's body. Her own tiara turned into a spot of light and vanished into the tip of her horn.

"Congratulations guys, each of you now has your Element fully active. No-pony can take it from you, and you can summon it with an effort of will..."

She was cut off as her brother galloped over and hugged her. "Twiley,

that was amazing! I knew you were powerful but that... I mean wow!"

"Hey, that wasn't just me!" This was true, she'd kept pretty much to her in-loop power levels and used the Elements exactly as she would in-loop, given the necessary skill. She felt the need to explain further. "It was all of us together, just as I told Nightmare Moon. I could see the connections between us, together as friends, the marks of our destinies combined. It created a limitless pool of magic, magic without end..."

Suddenly she realised what she'd just said, and winced as feathered purple wings burst from her back. Oh well, since she had them... she proceeded to hug her brother.

Princess Luna was struggling to get to her hooves, and Fluttershy was struggling to help her by getting under her wing as a support until Big Mac trotted across. "Miss Fluttershy, maybe I can help?"

Fluttershy seemed ready to shy away from the big stallion until she saw an apple twig that was still stuck in his mane. "Yes... thank you, but you can call me Fluttershy, if you don't mind that is."

He smiled openly, and she smiled back. As he took her place and easily helped Princess Luna to her hooves, he said, "I'd like that very much... Fluttershy."

Princess Luna seemed to be coming out of a dazed state, fully restored to the mare she normally didn't appear as until her first Nightmare Night. "I... what was I thinking!"

She shook her head as if to clear it, then looked around at the assembled ponies, her eyes glassy with unshed tears. "I am so sorry for what happened, what I did..."

Zecora spoke first. "A nightmare held you in it's thrall/Your power at it's beck and call. We all saw how your mind was clouded/I'm sure you would not have allowed it/to do such things as those we faced/when we did travel to this place. Now come and drink this herbal brew/It will be good for what ails you."

In the short time she'd had, she'd somehow set up a cauldron, a low tripod of sticks with a cloth pouch hanging between them and a candle with a green flame heating it from underneath. In it was boiling some water that steamed and bubbled with strange scents. Zecora expertly decanted it into an earthenware cup with tribal symbols on it, and offered it to the Princess.

Pinkie bounced over and examined it as the Princess somewhat gingerly took it in her telekinetic grasp. "Ooh! Ooh! Is that some mystic vessel carved with powerful symbols that increase the potency of it's contents? Huh? Huh?"

Zecora smiled. "It's from my homeland, that is true. As to what the symbols do/they spell out in a scheme most clever/A simple message, 'Best auntie ever!'"

Luna sipped and smacked her lips. "It is... tea. Very good tea!"

Pinkie offered her a paper wrapped cup-cake that somehow had her moon crescent cutie-mark on in black and white icing. "This is my special recipe, 'Glad you're no longer an evil Nightmare and welcome back after a thousand years' cup-cake. I wanted to throw a party but I've used all the ammunition for my party cannon so we'll have to wait until we get back to Ponyville..."

Luna looked at her a bit oddly, as most ponies did when first confronted with Pinkie Pie, but quickly lost any inhibitions about finishing off the cake once she'd tasted it. "Most delicious, Miss..."

"Pie. Pinkie Pie. But there's no need to call me Miss Pie, though you probably do after a thousand years without any. I'll make sure there's plenty at the party!"

Luna gulped down the rest of the tea eagerly as she listened, and handed back the empty mug with a brief sentence of liquid syllables. Zecora bowed her head in acknowledgement. "You are welcome. It is grand/to hear the speech of my homeland. Zecora is my name you see/I study the plants of the Everfree."

Sweetie Belle edged up, accompanied by the other two proto-Crusaders. Apple Bloom asked, "Are you a really for-real princess?"

Scotaloo snorted. "She must be! She's got wings and a horn, just like Princess Celestia, duh!"

"I really like your mane!" Sweetie Belle exclaimed with a squeak.

Luna looked down at them, her expression falling. "I was once, children. Whether I am after what I did is another matter."

"Um..." Fluttershy came up beside them. "I'm sure you will be, Princess Luna. You were just sad and angry and unwell, but now you're all better..."

Having said her piece, she ducked back behind Big Macintosh. Pinkie took over. "Oh yes, Twilight told us all about how those meanie-pants ponies didn't appreciate all the work you put into your nights. I mean, who does that? Night is when all the best parties happen! If ponies didn't like my parties any more, I get pretty unhappy too!"

"Pinkie!" Rarity came trotting across, Blueblood in tow. "I'm most dreadfully sorry your highness if my sister or Pinkie offended you..."

"In truth, I am just glad you are not all scared of me."

Rainbow Dash exclaimed, "Uh huh, Nightmare Moon was scary - not that she scared me of course, but guess she might have been for less amazing ponies - but you're cool! And those wings, how fast can you go?"

Her own wings flexed as if to take off and Luna grinned. "I am Luna, mine light doth cross the world in the course of a single night. I Can Outpace The Darkness, TRAVEL WITH THE SPEED OF THOUGHT!"

She'd closed her eyes and reared as she said the last part in the Royal Canterlot Voice. Then she dropped down and finished, "In short, pretty fast... ahhh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to get carried away!"

Rainbow Dash's mane and wings were blown back and her eyes were wide. Her face split in a wide grin. "That... was... awesome!"

"It is the Royal Canterlot voice, the speech it is normal to use to address our subjects... but right now I could rather do with friends." Luna looked back to Rarity. "Maybe you could introduce me to them, Miss..."

"Rarity your highness. My sister Sweetie Belle you've already met..." She continued around the group, naming ponies who hadn't introduced themselves until she got to Blueblood, at which Luna nodded.

"Of course, no Blueblood could resist such a great quest. Thy distant ancestors were ponies of valour and nobility; always leading others whether into battle or in more peaceful pursuits. I am pleased to see you continue the tradition, nephew."

Blueblood preened, "Of course, my liege. I am glad to see you unharmed by such an ordeal."

Luna smiled, "E'en if that is still so, there is no need for such formality in this place and time. But where is my sister?"

One of the side effects of using the Elements carefully was that in separating Luna from Nightmare Moon, Twilight hadn't automatically disrupted the bindings that held Celestia in the sun. She'd waited a few moments to make sure Princess Luna was okay, and it had worked better than she'd expected. The groundwork she'd laid in making sure her friends saw Luna as separate from Nightmare Moon and in many ways her first victim meant that they were far more willing to approach her, and that acceptance in turn would help Luna's soul to heal faster.

Still, it was about time... She tweaked a magical thread she'd left untweaked and a whole network of bindings started to unravel. The twilight turned to dawn and Twilight turned to face the rising sun. Aglowing orb emerged and flew down, landing in the chamber and resolving itself into Princess Celestia.

"Sister!" Luna started to charge forward, even as the other ponies turned and bowed low to the Solar princess, then came to a halt, her eyes downcast. "Sister, oh sister, I am so sorry for everything..."

She was interrupted by a hug as Princess Celestia came forward and embraced her younger sister, tears forming. "Oh Luna, it's been a thousand years since I've seen you like this! It's alright, I forgive you. I'm just happy to see you're safe."

"Thank your courageous subjects, they braved the Everfree and all my darker side could throw at them, and freed me from my nightmare self."

As Princess Celestia looked beyond her sister for the first time, her

eyes widened in surprise. "My goodness, this is unexpected..."

Out of all the ponies, it was Applejack who spoke up. "Begging your pardon, your highnesses, but I reckon the one you want to thank most is Twilight. She pulled everything together and had it all figured out from the get go."

Rainbow Dash took to the air, fore-hooves waving to emphasize her points. "Yeah, and when she was facing Nightmare Moon, Nightmare Moon was all 'Grrr, arrgh! I'm going to destroy you and your little friends too!' and Twilight was just 'Nuh-huh, not happening. And she went zap-pow, illusion, mind control, evil hurting spells, and Twilight just kept going like it some-pony throwing confetti and did her Elementy thing and it was just soooo awesome!"

She finished off her speech with a back somersault in mid-air.

Twilight had taken the chance to cast a low power perception filter over her wings for the moment, and when Celestia looked at her blushed and said, "It was a team effort. Every-pony here helped in some way. Having all the information beforehoof helped a lot."

Celestia actually looked guilty. "I'm just glad Shining Armour managed to find you. I worried greatly when you left and we couldn't find you, and not just because of your studies."

"I was in a bad place for a while, but I made some good friends who helped me out of it." Twilight looked back at her friends., and they smiled encouragingly.

To be honest, things had worked out spectacularly. Luna was reconciled with her sister and would hopefully have an easier time of adapting to the modern world, not least because she'd had some-pony other than her sister accept her. The Crusaders were together ahead of schedule (well you had to take the rough with the smooth), and Rainbow Dash and Scootaloo might just end up being almost sisters sooner than usual.

There looked to be something going on between Fluttershy and Big Mac, and she'd reconnected with her own big brother, which would hopefully mean she could head off Queen Chrysalis before she got too far. Blueblood had been a stunning surprise and deserved every bit of good press he was due, and for once the idea that he and Rarity might be friends wasn't a cause for hysterical laughter. Zecora would also get a far better reception in Ponyville with the Apples vouching for her, and Twilight herself was far closer to her friends than she had been in the base time-line.

But she still felt guilty. She would have to have a discussion with Celestia about what was really going on and apologise. But first there would have to be...

"... A Party!" Pinkie cried out with a cheer.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, here we are in Ponyville. Thank you, gentlecolts."  
Twilight nodded to the guards as Spike hopped out of his chariot.  
"Right. So, the plan is... check on the preparations, and then get  
Vespertine to tell me how to beat Nightmare Moon."<p>

\_First step to beating Nightmare Moon: Turn around and say  
nothing.\_

The unicorn raised an eyebrow at that, but followed the vague  
command... coming face to face with a wall of pink.

Spike coughed. "Um. Twilight?"

\_Say nothing!\_

\_I'm not saying anything!\_ Twilight thought back, awkwardly smiling  
at the blue eyes. \_Who is this pony?! Why is she looking at me like  
that?!\_

"Twilight, are you okay?" Spike looked between the two ponies. "I...  
Is Vespertine-?"

Suddenly the pink pony let out a long gasp. Just as suddenly she  
dashed away.

\_You have done well, my young padawan. Now, continue with your  
preparation checking.\_

"Right-"

\_Did I say you could speak?!\_

\_No! Sorry, I assumed-\_

\_Because you totally can now. Actually you could always have spoken.  
Why are you listening to a voice in your head?\_

"Because you're from the future, that's why!"

Spike sighed. "I can tell this is going to be a long day..."

\* \* \*

><p>72.3 (Kris Overstreet) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>To: Occupants, Heaven of the Light Gods<br>From: Princess  
Twilight Sparkle  
>Subject: Dungeon Hearts, etc.<p>

To whom it may concern;

I write today to register some complaints about my experiences while  
visiting your universe.

I awoke in your world trapped in a subterranean room with no exits,  
with only an insane homicidal demon for company. This is not the sort

of welcome any self-respecting god should give visitors from other dimensions.

The demon informed me that my only option for escape from my prison, besides eventual death, was to sacrifice my soul to some unknown dark god in order to gain control over the powers of the dungeon heart in the center of the cave. I naturally refused. He made it clear that refusal was not an option, and that death would not be so much eventual as immediate. Said demon is now a small frog residing in a terrarium above my desk. I considered turning him into a bunny, but considering my past experience with bunnies, I decided he would still be too dangerous.

Having pacified the demon, I blasted a hole to the surface of your world, whereupon I was immediately attacked by various humans claiming to be in your service. Although I took great care to cause no serious or permanent injury, it still took a great deal of time and effort to convince them to cease their attacks. A few commandments to your followers about the importance of good manners when greeting strangers would be helpful in future encounters.

Once I indicated that the dungeon heart was inert and that I had nothing to do with it, your servants immediately destroyed it. I analyzed both the artifact and the methods used to destroy it, and I decided that both were woefully inefficient. Proper experimentation and training will improve performance.

After all this, despite my efforts to be as friendly and helpful as possible, I was treated as common livestock. Attempts were made to cage, corral, and bind me so that I could be broken to the saddle and/or dissected for various magical reagents. My objections were ignored, and again it became necessary to convince your servants to desist.

Since we had established that your servants were not going to act in a friendly and rational manner without coercion, I interrogated the chief cleric of the expedition, using methods I have learned from a couple of friends of mine, Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie. Over the course of the afternoon, with the aid of a dozen cupcakes and the power of guilt, I learned enough about your world to levy the following complaints:

(1) I can understand why you allow the dark gods, who are (despite your cleric's claims to the contrary) more or less equal in power to yourselves, to leave around traps such as Dungeon Hearts for the unwary and selfish. What I cannot understand is how you voluntarily cede tactical superiority to those same dark gods. Enclosed find plans for Castle Hearts (trademark pending) which require no sacrifice of souls and which operate through the magical principles of friendship and harmony. Of course, this will require you to increase harmony among your followers, which brings me to (2).

(2) Even given that your followers are in battle for the very survival of their world with the Dungeon Keepers, the conduct you permit in them is inexcusable. Far too many of your followers are raiding dungeons for motivations even more base and vile than your average Keeper's. Greed for loot and pleasure in slaying one's enemies are qualities which proper light gods should NOT encourage. A spirit of sharing, tolerance, and acceptance of harmless differences should be encouraged by any light gods, and yet you have failed to do



this. Instead you leave in place a feudal system in which a tiny, wealthy minority extracts wealth from serfs which they use for their own luxury and vanity, for pointless wars between one another, and only occasionally for the destruction of dungeons.

(3) It is an adage in most universes that evil brings on its own destruction, since evil beings cannot cooperate for long without seeking ways to betray one another for advantage. Thus it is no surprise that Dungeon Keepers, like the dark gods they serve, squabble among themselves. It is inexcusable that your followers seem to do likewise. You focus too much on exterminating Keepers and too little on teaching people how to be better. If I didn't know better I'd say your only purpose for existence is to be an opponent for the dark gods, and that absent them you wouldn't care what your followers did with, or to, one another.

(4) While I understand that the undead are merely constructs of corrupted magic, I am appalled that there are entire races of intelligent beings which you have not only neglected but actively worked to exterminate. Proper light gods do not discriminate based on conditions of birth. Granted that cultural differences would make outreach hazardous for any missionaries you might send to the Underworld, the door should at least remain open for conscientious objectors from the forces of darkness to seek sanctuary with your priests. Your failure to do casts your lightness in a very poor light indeed.

All of the above complaints stem from the same source: your laissez-faire conduct as regards your world and the followers within it. You don't provide sufficient backing to seriously challenge the continued creation of Dungeon Hearts, and you don't teach the kind of lessons that would make Dungeon Hearts less attractive to people. In my opinion you have completely, totally, and utterly failed the people of your world.

I have spoken with your current Avatar about this over tea and scones, and he agrees with me on most points. It is by his request that I am communicating with you at all. My initial plans were to manufacture my own Castle Hearts (trademark pending) with the aid of the neutral gods, find some peasants, barbarians, and shamen who are sick and tired of all this nonsense, and clean house. If you have not taken action by the full moon after next (thirty days from the writing of this message), I shall proceed with my plans for revolution regardless. I view this not as a pleasure, nor as a path to power and wealth, but as an unpleasant and annoying chore which cannot be put off.

Kindly respond at your first convenience. I am already reviewing resumes for potential Castle Heart (trademark pending) Keepers.

Yours most sincerely,  
>Twilight Sparkle<br>Princess With Portfolio

\* \* \*

><p>72.4 (Scygnus) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, this is awkward."<p>

"Which part? Being human children or being part of the 'He-Man Woman Haters Club' and dating me anyway?"

"All of it. And having this damn squeaky voice again. I thought I was past this."

"Awww, c'mon Shiny, you're cute like this! And why haven't you let me hear this voice before? It's adorable!"

"It's embarrassing!"

"C'mon, sing some more? Pwease? Pwetty pwease? With sugar on top?"

"Evil witch!" Shining Armor grumbled, sighed, and took a deep breath...

And Cadance carefully didn't mention seeing Twilight behind him on the bridge with recording equipment.

\* \* \*

><p>72.5 (misterq) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I got this, Twilight," Pinkie said as she walked towards the nightmare version of Luna that appeared for the Summer Sun Celebration instead of Celestia.<p>

"Wait, Pinkie. What are you..." Twilight stopped as she noticed what Pinkie was wearing: some fur dye, a cardboard horn and wings, paper imitation boots like Luna's, and a folded map for a hat. This was strange, but then again, loops when it was only herself and Pinkie that were awake were usually odd.

"I know who you are," Pinkie said, "let me tell every pony. In song form!"

She pulled out a boombox from her mane, gave herself a beat, and then started rapping,

"I'm Nightmare Woon!

>Back from the Moon!<br>Never grew up with a silver spoon.

>The ponies back then all be dissin' my night.<br>My sister and I got in one little fight.

>Mphhghhg!"<p>

Rainbow Dash's hoof suddenly found itself lodged in Pinkie's mouth. "Let the scary pony give her own introduction, Pinkie."

\* \* \*

><p>72.6 (OracleMask) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Whatever Celestia had been about to say, it died on her lips as

she took in the scene.<p>

"Princess Celestia! I'd like you meet my new friends," Twilight Sparkle said, beaming up at her mentor, "And the fellow bearers of the Elements of Harmony, of course."

She took a moment to clear her throat.

"This is Chrysalis, Queen of a race of shape-shifting monsters that replace real ponies in order to feed off the love that pony would normally get from their friends and family. She's the Element of Honesty."

"Charmed," Chrysalis said with a fangy smile.

"And these are the Flim Flam brothers, traveling con artists and snake-oil saleponies. Together, they make the Element of Generosity."

Both unicorns tipped their hats.

"And I'm sure you remember King Sombra," Twilight continued, nodding at the sinister unicorn, "He's the tyrant who enslaved and tormented the Crystal Ponies, and our Element of Kindness."

\*\*\*"Crystals."\*\*\*

"And this is our Element of Laughter -"

"Discord!" Celestia exclaimed, regaining her voice as she took in the sight.

"What, me? I'm not Discord," said Discord, "My name is Guy Incognito."

Aside from the stylish orange mustache, Discord looked completely the same as ever. Clearly HE was responsible for whatever was going on!

"You're not fooling anypony here, \_Discord\_, " Celestia growled, stepping forward only to be blocked by Twilight herself.

"\_Princess!\_ Don't be mean to Guy! Besides, I thought you \_wanted\_ me to make some friends?"

"This is...not \_quite\_ what I had in mind for your friends, Twilight," Celestia admitted.

"Oh...then you may not like meeting my last friend either," Twilight said, ducking her head and scuffing a hoof on the castle floor, "She's the Element of Magic."

Celestia's jaw dropped.

"Twilight? I would have thought that \_you\_ would be the Element of Magic," Celestia said.

"Oh, no no no! I'm the Element of \_Loyalty\_, obviously!" Twilight

laughed. "THAT'S our Element of Magic!"

"HI BIG SIS!"

Celestia turned, and saw a filly version of Nightmare Moon waving at her.

\* \* \*

><p>"...Is this a good sign or not?" Nyx asked, looking down at the crowd of Canterlot ponies.<p>

Chrysalis, 'Flim' and 'Flam' (actually two disguised changelings) and 'Sombra' (actually a disguised Luna) shrugged in unison as they kept waving to the cheering ponies below.

"This might be the fastest I've ever been crowned a Princess without ascending first," Twilight admitted, "Though I suppose 'reforming' every single villain around in just one night is pretty impressive when you look at it objectively."

'Guy Incognito' simply amused himself with turning random decorations into fish.

\* \* \*

><p>72.7 (Zetrein) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was yet another lonely loop, done to near baseline for old time's sake. Some might think spending three years waiting to try something is a bit much, but it's hardly out of the norm for Loopers.<p>

That said, it had taken her a few weeks to set this up. But when the book containing Starswirl's spell arrived, she was ready. And so, with a good deal of finesse, Twilight cast the incomplete spell.

When she got up the next morning, she was the only pony in town with her original cutie mark. Just as planned.

\* \* \*

><p>Despite Ponyville being even more topsy-turvy then when Discord first came to town, Twilight had managed to get through to her friends, gotten them their marks and memories back, and convinced them she knew how to fix this. As such, they found themselves back in the library, about to cast her modified version of Starswirl's spell.<p>

Of course, it wasn't the baseline corrected version, but something else to go along with her overpowered version of the unfinished one.

"From all of us together..."

\* \* \*

><p>It began in the library. A brilliant multicolored light, seen flashing through the windows. Then it exploded.<p>

The light swept through Ponyville, expanding until the entire town was engulfed in the tower of rainbow light. As the light cleared, a dazed young dragon sat up in the crater left behind by the library.

Looking around at the wreckage of the library, the surprisingly untouched town, and the bits of book fluttering down from the sky, Spike could only imagine what Twilight was thinking about all this.

"Well, that didn't work. Or it did, too much. Everypony okay?" Spike stood, brushing bits of debris off himself. No pony answered his question.

"Guys? Hello? Where did everypony go?" Looking around, Spike found himself alone in the crater, his only company being the miraculously intact bust that had been on the library's table.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight came to in the starry field she found herself in when she first ascended. Alone, to her disappointment, her plan apparently unsuccessful. With a sigh, she turned to Celestia as she approached, at least she would get a song out of this.<p>

Then, as Celestia drew breath to speak, Applejack popped in next to her, followed shortly by the rest of her friends. Then other ponies started appearing. The Flower sisters, the spa ponies, the rest of the Apple family, Trixie for some reason, even that weird pony with the jelly obsession.

Celestia stood there, staring at the entire population of Ponyville, her jaw working, but making not a sound. And then...

\* \* \*

><p>"...The loop crashed." Twilight finished telling her story, in Mac's bar. "Near as I can tell, having so many ponies ascend at the same time caused that patch of the local astral plane to collapse, and because I didn't have a physical body when it did..."<p>

"The loop ended." Pinkie ended for her. "Nuts, it would have been awesome to see how that would have gone."

\* \* \*

><p>72.8 (masterofgames) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia timed her entrance perfectly, blinking into position in the old castle just as the sun finished cresting over the horizon, and consequently, was shining in the eyes of those inside watching, masking the shimmer of her spell. Celestia couldn't help but giggle softly. She had been practicing the timing for that for days!<p>

Fighting her amusement back, she took a calming breath, and looked up to address her student. "My dearest Twilight! I knew you could-okay what?"

Celestia merely stood there blinking rapidly for a moment, then fell to her knees, groaned, and face-hoofed. "Okay, how did THIS happen?!" she asked nopony in particular with a sigh.

"Who." responded the owl wearing the element of magic before her.

None of the other necklace wearing animals behind it had an answer either.

Meanwhile, around the corner, Twilight and her friends were fighting to keep from cracking up.

\* \* \*

><p>72.9 (masterofgames) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke unusually stiff. Attempting to stretch out resulted in the discovery of yet another Weird loop.<p>

"Okay... so I'm a plant this time. Lavender it looks like."

"Twilight? That you?" Rainbow Dash's voice asked. "I'm over here. I think I'm one of the wildflowers, but I'm not sure which... I might be all of them, come to think of it."

"Ah take it y'all just Woke Up too? Ah'm above ya." Applejack sounded in. "Somethin' of a strange feelin' ta BE an apple tree instead a workin' with em."

"I'm here as well darlings! Over here, the bluebells in the grass!" Rarity called.

"I'm here too!" Pinkie giggled. "I think I'm sugarcane! Flutters is next to me. Looks like she's a shrinking violet."

"Hi."

Twilight sighed, drooping slightly. "Okay, been through worse. Just need to get our bearings. If where we are counts as Ponyville, then... Applejack, do you see a hill anywhere?"

"One sec, ah'll check... yeah, one over yonder. Looks like... a sunflower and a patch a' nightshade on it."

All were silent for a moment, until Rarity spoke up.

"So... do we swear by horses this loop, or...?"

\* \* \*

><p>72.10 (masterweaver) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia adjusted her armor, her face set in a grim expression. Twilight had not written about the prophecy... which meant she would not find the Elements. Which meant that when Luna... when Nightmare Moon returned, she would be the only one ready for her. Half a dozen enchantments had been woven into each iron plate, and a full three dozen sang along her halberd.<p>

Equestria would not fall.

Not while she still stood.

"...I am sorry, sister." The alicorn of the sun saluted the rising moon. "But this must be done."

And as the stars converged on the roving pearl, the mare in the moon vanished, and Celestia swung-!

Luna sidestepped the blow easily, sighing. "Oh, not another one of these loops." She pulled the seaweed out her mane. "And I had a really good prank ready too!"

"I will not let you harm our subjects!"

"Done. No eternal night, I'm not usurping you, yada yada yada." The younger alicorn shielded herself from another blow, pulling something out of nowhere and lighting it up. "Honestly, I had this whole seas of the moon thing set up and you had to go and ruin it."

Celestia grabbed at the object with her magic, intent on crushing it, or containing the explosion. "Don't try to confuse me! I don't want this any more than you do!"

A sigh came from behind her, and she whirled to see Twilight gliding down-twilight with \_wings?!\_ to a soft landing. "Celestia, she's sane. She's not a threat. Put down the big metal stick and we'll talk."

"I-you are an illusion! Conjured up by my crazed sister to-"

With a roll of her eyes, Twilight lit up her horn. Instantly every rune on Celestia's armor went dead. "Can't you accept a little miracle? Fagales, I was so hoping to avoid this and just relax..." She started pulling projection equipment out of nowhere. "I really need to work out how to do this gracefully at some point."

Luna sidled up to Celestia, a tub of popcorn in her hoof. "I hear she's been working on a musical number for this. It should be entertaining."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

72.1: I'm as surprised as you.

>72.2: Whatever you do, don't listen to me. (Logic bomb.)<br>72.3: Princess With Portfolio = carries around a lot of documents.

>72.4: Complete rascals.<br>72.5: Warm-up act.

>72.6: Really, if you think about it, the Elements are just necklaces

if you don't need to use them.<br>72.7: Worth a try.  
>72.8: Owls are friendly.<br>72.9: Spike is probably a dragonfly. He carries messages?  
>72.10: Twilight didn't quite work out how to handle with militant-type Celestia straight off.<p>

## 77. Chapter 77

73.1 (masterweaver)

\* \* \*

><p>"First stop, Sweet Apple Acres." Spike glanced at the pony next to her. "Any advice from...?"<p>

\_If the both of you keep asking for advice, I might stop giving it.\_

Twilight sighed. "She's being snarky again."

\_Excuse me, I am several hundred... million... I am your age times the age of the sun at least! I get the right to be snarky.\_

Spike rolled his eyes. "Glad I'm not the lucky one here."

"Oh, I don't think I'm lucky. Not anymore." Twilight rubbed her brow. "So, this Applejack is supposed to be in charge of the food...?"

"YEEEEEEEEEEEEHAW!" An orange blur shot past her, zipping toward one of the fruit laden trees. At the last instant she spun around and kicked out her hind legs; every single apple fell into a basket.

"Is that her?" Twilight whispered.

\_Yes, that's Applejack. Now remember, be as honest with her as you can.\_

The farm pony trotted up. "Well, howdy stranger. What's yer name?"

"Oh. Well, I'm Twilight Sparkle and-"

Without warning her hoof was vibrating up and down. "A pleasure ta meet ya miss Twilight! We here on Sweet Apple Acres love making new friends."

"GoOoOoOod tOoOoOoOo knOoOoOoOoOow..."

\_She's let go of our hoof.\_

Twilight glanced down and caught her leg with a faint blush.

"So what can Ah do ya for?"

"Uh, well. I was sent by Celestia to check on the food for the celebration!"

\_Awwww, no mention of me?\_



\_I don't want to sound crazy!\_

Oblivious to the unicorn's internal dialogue, Applejack trotted up to a triangle and began ringing it loudly. "SOOOOOOOOUP'S ON, EVERYPONY!" Twilight stared as ponies of every color swarmed the barn. The cowpony turned to her with a chuckle. "Now why don't Ah introduce you to the Apple family?"

"Well, Ihmph would love to meet them all!"

Applejack rose an eyebrow at Twilight's odd twitch. "Ooooooooookay... Um." Dismissing the oddity with a shake of her head, she gestures toward the ponies to start piling food on a convenient table. This here's Apple Fritter. Apple Bumpkin. Red Gala. Red Delicious, Golden Delicious, Caramel Apple, Apple Strudel, Apple Tart, Baked Apples, Apple Brioche, Apple Cinnamon Crisp..." She took a deep breath. "Big Macintosh, Apple Bloom, and Granny Smith."

\_Am I expected to EAT all that?\_

\_The food, no. The ponies, yes.\_

"What?!"

\_Strike that, reverse it.\_

Twilight belatedly realized the odd looks she was receiving. "...a lovely arrangement of foodstuffs you have here! Yep, it looks handled." \_Vespertine that was not funny!\_

\_You know, there are some odd loops where Celestia has a blood sacrifice to her every year?\_

"You okay sugarcube?" Applejack examined her face. "You look a bit pale."

"Oh, I'm fine!" Twilight said, and then "Just super hungry!"

\_Stop doing that! I thought you wanted to save the world!\_

\_Don't worry, we will. But we can't very well do that on an empty stomach!\_

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight groaned as her overloaded stomach tugged at her ribcage. "I hate you."<p>

Spike jumped. "What?"

"No, not \_you.\_ Vespertine." Twilight shook her head. "You, Spike, are an amazing incredible dragon and I wouldn't be where I was without you. Vespertine, on the other hoof, is an old malicious hag."

\_Alright, alright. I'm sorry for all the snark. It's just usually I'm able to move around, okay?\_ Vespertine sighed. \_Anyway, duck.\_

"Like I'm honestly going to listen to you after you-"

The world suddenly spun end over end, knocking the breath out of her lungs. It didn't help that Vespertine chose that exact moment to start singing some high-pitched tune in meows alone. When, at last, the world decided to go back to normalcy, she was plunked into a mud puddle and then, for no reason, something else dropped on top of her.

"Wha... what hit me?"

"Heh, whoops." The weight on her lifted and moved into her view. "Sorry bout that. Name's Rainbow Dash."

\_Twilight, I don't have time to explain but it is absolutely imperative you kiss her NOW.\_

"Wait what?!"

\_Lip to lip!\_

Spike faceclawed. "Oh no..."

\_Don't use tongue!\_

"Uh... I'm Rainbow Dash." The pegasus flicked her mane. "Fastest flyer in Equestria-"

"I AM NOT KISSING YOU!"

Dead silence filled the air.

"...ooooooooookay then." Dash backed off a bit. "I getcha. Um-"

"No, wait! I'm sorry, I just... there's this... and..." Twilight sat in her mud puddle. "I was confused. You reminded me of somepony-"

\_Cloud Kicker,\_ Vespertine helpfully supplied.

"-named Cloud Kicker, and-"

Rainbow Dash held up a hoof. "Say no more, Kicker's crazy. You must not be from around here."

"Yeah, I... I'm here to oversee the summer sun celebration preparations. Celestia sent me!"

\_Remember, Rainbow Dash is the element of Loyalty, so you have to be really loyal to her.\_

\_Is that why you wanted me to kiss her?\_

\_...sure, let's go with that.\_

"I'd reeeeeeally like to see what you're doing here." The muddy unicorn sidled up in a horrible attempt to look attractive. "I'm sure it's amazing."

"Uh... heh, um. I'm just, uh, clearing the clouds." Rainbow leaned away slightly. "You know."

"All these clouds? In the sky?" Twilight flittered her eyelids.  
"Fascinating."

\_You do realize I was kidding about the kissing thing,  
right?\_

\_...well horseapples. Now I look like an insane fanfilly.\_

Rainbow cocked her head. "You... really don't get out much do  
you?"

"Yes. Yes, that is the total explanation."

"Ooooookay then. So, uh... you want me to clear the clouds?"

"Just do that real fast and we can all pretend this never  
happened."

\* \* \*

><p>73.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie grumbled into her drink. "...pid nettling sunbutt and her  
stupid politics. Going to stage a coup..."<p>

"I forget this happens sometimes," Twilight admitted with a light  
blush. "Sorry, I... I should have warned you."

"C4 all around the base of Canterlot... mass teleport circle, get all  
the civvies to, I dunno, Manehattan..."

"It's not like either of them are awake. You can't really blame them  
for this."

"But not Celly, ooooooh no." Trixie drowned her drink. "Celly's going  
to stay in the city when Curtain Call sends it plummeting! Exclusion  
gem on her crown, or... or something! Hah!"

Rarity trotted in. "I came as soon as I heard... oh dear. She's  
taking it bad, isn't she."

Twilight sighed and shrugged. "She wants to go nightmare and blow up  
Canterlot."

"Oh, dear. There there, Trixie, tell me all about it."

And suddenly the blue unicorn burst into tears. "WHY?! WHY?! I know  
it's not really Chrysalis but WHY?! What does that daymare have that  
I don't?!"

\* \* \*

><p>73.3 (Vulpine Fury)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Dilucula?" Rarity asked.<p>

"Ita, Raritas?" Twilight replied, exasperated by the by-now stale running gag.

"Quid, quod Latine loquentem?"

Forcing her way past the Loop memories, Twilight spoke in proper Equestrian. "I just don't know, Rarity. I just don't know."

\* \* \*

><p>73.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...Rarity, why are you wearing a live horseshoe crab on your head?"<p>

"It's a fashion statement!" The ivory unicorn braided some of her mane around the crustacean's long tail. "I intend to start a cultural revolution, centered on the odd and unusual. There's a full line of deep-sea hats and matching gowns-"

"You're just bored because Spike isn't Awake aren't you."

Rarity sighed. "I admit that's a part of it. Come now, Twilight, you can't tell me you haven't ever indulged in oddity on one of your lonely loops?"

Twilight smiled and shook her head. "Alright, fair enough. You can have this one."

\* \* \*

><p>73.5 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Welp."<p>

Trixie glared at Twilight. "We will never speak of this loop."

"Hey, I've been all the Elements. And most of the others have switched around."

"Never. Speak. Of this loop."

"And it's not laughter, really, it's more... optimism, when you think of it."

"NEVER SPEAK OF â€" wait, really?" Trixie tapped her chin. "Optimism. Yeah, okay, I could see that."

"Yeah." Twilight glanced around. "I'm honestly more surprised the Elements ended up in Manehattan. Still, we've got an interesting collection of Bearers this time round. Wonder what Rainbow will think of Daring holding her position."

"Do you think I could carry two elements through the loops?"

Twilight sighed. "Tried it. They all seem to fall back to your basic element. You're... showy optimistic magic. Somehow."

\* \* \*

><p>73.6 (Namar13766)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?"<p>

"Yes, Rarity?"

"How did you turn Gilda into an Griffin-Alicorn hybrid?"

"It's one of those things that sounds good after saying 'Hold my beer and watch this.'"

\* \* \*

><p>73.7 (RedshirtZombie)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Dear Princess:<p>

Send help. Twilight's made some sort of lab in the Everfree and has a stormcloud over it. I think I heard the kind of laughing that leads to Miss Smartypants incidents.

-Spike

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was bedecked in a traditional mad scientist's coat and goggles, standing on her hind hooves to grip the open knife switch - despite the fact that she had a perfectly serviceable horn - and, appropriately, laughing in the fashion that lead to Stern Reprisals later on.<p>

Her fellow Mad Scientist interrupted her laughter with a brief attention-claiming cough. "I don't get why you're so insistent on the whole 'mad scientist' getup. You've got the whole subspace laboratory under Golden Oaks, which has better research facilities, and  
\_"

"Because it's funny," responded Twilight, "and this is the kind of thing that Pinchy shouldn't be near. Besides, this isn't so much furthering our knowledge of your Cutie mark focus as creating an abomination related to it, so it's more mad science than regular science."

"...Fair enough," responded Berry Punch. "In any case, the still's has been filled properly and is at temp, and the capacitors are all over ninety percent charged. About the only thing that isn't working is the Jacob's ladder, and you said that was because Dash had messed with it."

"Ah, good!" Twilight started to tug the switch to its closed

position, but stopped. "Uh, no, I meant," she shifted back to her 'Sparky' face, "EXCELLENT!" With a final deep, evil laugh, she slammed the switch closed.

Thunder crackled above, and lightning slammed into exposed electrodes as the cyclotron began humming. Fluid, saturated with various mixtures not meant for casual equine consumption, hummed through it; however, specific alterations in the machine ensured that the fluids stopped obeying Euclidean understandings of space and promptly folded inwards on itself, darkening abruptly as it collected. The two Mad Scientists-in-role waited, tense as strained rope, as their efforts slowly formed...

Eventually, the final charge in the capacitors ran out, and the collection keg - at Berry's insistence - was filled with the resulting distillation. Carefully, Twilight levitated a Dwarven stein over to Berry, and let her handle the tap. The fluid that came out fluoresced green like a glowstick, held an impressive head despite expert taphandling, and bubbled as it attempted to decay back to conventional physics.

Berry took a whiff, winced, and nodded. "I think step one was a success."

"\*\*WHAT, THEREFORE, WAS STEP TWO?\*" called the Traditional Royal Canterlot voice from behind them. Fortunately for the floor, not a drop spilled despite the spook.

"Try it!" Twilight's smile was of someone who had succeeded at breaking a barrier they thought untouchable, not of someone embarrassed by being caught with their hand in the wrong cookie jar. Luna promptly found herself sitting in front of a table, the aforementioned stein in front of her, a (admittedly nice) cushion under her seated form, and two faces watching closely from the other side of the table.

"First, tell me what this... luminous liquid... is."

"Well, ever since your return, I've been researching snippets of older history. One in particular, a song about a certain kind of liquor, caught my attention, and so I enlisted the assistance of Berry Punch here, the town cellarmeister and main bartender at Big Macintosh's Apple Cellar, to see if we could recreate the drink in question. We just needed someone to try it - and your timing is perfect!"

"Then what, pray tell, is the machinery attached to the keg for?"

"Oh, I can't cast that Starswirl the Bearded time travel spell again. So I had to find some other means of properly affecting the liquor in question."

Luna stared, quietly, at the facetious foal across the table from her, then the frothing foam in front of her for a moment, sighed, and took a sip. A glowing green mustache sat on her upper lip for a moment before she licked it off. "Heavy, like few drinks are these days. What was the name of this brew you sought to replicate?"

Berry smiled sweetly as she said, "Three-oh-seven ale."

"I recall not a ballad involving this brew... but many things from then are forgotten to me, so I will let it be." With that, she chugged the rest of the drink. "Another?"

Two hooves bumped hard, and another glass was served. Luna nodded at the mad scientists as she continued drinking. "It's a fine brew, not my usual draft, but it will suffice. In any case, I would suggest letting me take it back to Canterlot to soothe my sister's nerves... your assistant sent a letter of warning, and I suspect she would find that its fruit, being something this benign, will calm her concerns." With that, she stood.

Or tried to, as she found herself abruptly prone, with her limbs tangled. "Also, a helping hoof to my chariot? My coordination hath vanished, and my vision room is doubled."

\* \* \*

><p>73.8 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...and that's what's going on," Nyx finished. "Any questions?"<p>

Luna stared at the filly who had, until thirty minutes ago, been her nearly bloodthirsty alter ego. Her mouth opened. Her mouth shut. Her mouth opened again.

Nyx patted her shoulder warmly. "Don't worry. Just take your time, it's a lot to take in."

"If... if what thou... you... say is true, then... How have you not gone more insane than before?"

"That's a long story involving my adopted mother and a cult. But my primary coping method is ice cream." Nyx pulled a tub of something out of nowhere, handing it to Luna while she got another tub out for herself. "Now, I had this great idea for a prank, but I don't want to step on your hooves..."

\* \* \*

><p>73.9 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Rainbow Dash, your element is oxygen. Applejack, you're solid and dependable like nitrogen," Applejack's comment on how Nitrogen is neither solid nor dependable nor has much to do with apples was completely ignored as Twilight Sparkle kept on talking, "Rarity, you're carbon since that's what diamonds are made of."<p>

"Twilight, dear," Rarity spoke up. Every pony was looking at the lavender unicorn as if she had just grown a second head, even Nightmare Moon, "Are you certain that these are the proper kinds of elements in the elements of harmony?"

"I'm certain. Fairly sure, at least. Mostly," Twilight shrugged

before continuing, "Fluttershy, you are lithium."

"Um.." was all the yellow pegasus managed to get out before Pinkie Pie interrupted.

"Oh! Can I be nitrous oxide! Or one of the high level elements with the silly names? Wait, is pinkium an element? I want to be that one if it is!"

"No. Nitrous oxide is a molecule. Your element, Pinkie, is helium," Twilight stated, "And I am neon."

"More like boron," Rainbow muttered loudly under her breath.

Twilight continued in her best impersonation of Prince Blueblood, pretending she hadn't heard her friend's comment, "And as the noble gas, I shall help all the others come together to form the periodic elements of harmony and why are you laughing? Stop laughing. I'm a noble gas. That's not funny in the least."

Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash were rolling on the floor. Even Fluttershy had a hoof to her mouth to contain her silent snickering.

Rarity walked up to Twilight, "Perhaps you can just summon the actual elements and we can close the cover on this attempt?"

"Fine. Ruin my fun, " Twilight huffed as she summoned the baseline elements, "You all can be sulfur, because you all stink."

\* \* \*

><p>73.10 (masterofgames)<p>

Twilight's eye twitched. "So wait a second. Your power, the one I have been going mad since BASELINE to figure out, the one you specifically told me you couldn't explain, works on the understanding of a hyper-quantum equation that focuses the fourth dimension into a single point in actual space, that you decided on a whim to put in your own brain?!"

Pinkie grinned and nodded. "Yep, that's about the extent of it. I said I couldn't explain because I really couldn't. At the time, you just plain weren't \_smart\_ enough to understand me if I did."

"But... but that's... not SMART enough?! But then... that would mean you... gravity... twitchy tail... cupcake song... hot sauce... bees... but... fortune teller... flowerpots... I'M the time traveler... but... AAARRRGH!"

And her head exploded.

\* \* \*

><p>73.11 (masterofgames)<p>

Twilight Awoke reading the usual book under her usual tree on her usual day.



"But she... there's no way... the brainpower it would take... PINKIE of all ponies?! What makes her... how does she... rock farm... how Equestria was made... rainboom... party addiction... but she... I... AAARRRGH!"

And her head exploded.

\* \* \*

><p>73.12 (misterq)<p>

A few calming cups of tea later, Twilight decided to try and get some clarification.

"Okay then, Pinkie. Explain to a pony only as smart as myself how a fourth dimensional hyper-quantum equation let's you have Pinkie Sense."

"Well," Pinkie took a deep breath while she gathered her thoughts for a moment, "combined with the thaumic properties of being the element of laughter, it lets my brain's neural signals travel at faster than light speeds where cause and effect are reversed for a few seconds and are interpreted by a variety of external stimuli. Thus, twitchy tail."

Twilight stared, "What?"

Then a book fell onto her head.

"Twitchy tail," Pinkie Pie reiterated, "Twitcha-twitch."

Twilight looked up at a sheepish Spike carrying a far too large far too unbalanced stack of books on the second floor of library. She took the offending book off her head and placed it on a nearby table, "FTL thoughts? But that would mean.."

"That I'm totally incompatible with all kinds of telepathy, psionic powers, and neural interfaces. Yup."

"And you can also.."

"End every pony's sentences in a super duper annoying way whenever I want. Yup."

Twilight stared at her looping pink friend. Then she opened her mouth.

"Blather lather," both ponies said at the same time, "Bookie cookie."

Both ponies closed their mouths and stared at each other again.

Twilight spoke first, "Pinkie, never do that again."

"Alright, Twilight," the pink pony agreed.

\* \* \*

><p>73.13 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked at the ticket. <em>One adult membership-OrockuCon 1004, Baltimore. <em>No, staring at the words didn't make them change and go away, holly take it.

"Isn't it wonderful?" Pinkie Pie enthused. "Maud got one for everypony! Oh, you're going to love meeting her! She's the funnest and coolest big sister EVER!"

"Um... Pinkie..." Rainbow Dash's expression matched Twilight's. "You never told us your sister was... one of them."

"One of what?" Pinkie chirped.

"You know..." Rainbow Dash's hooves waved awkwardly, trying to shape the words in as kind a way as possible. "One of those... um... really... um..."

"Really cool and wonderful and exciting ponies?"

"Um, well, er..."

"What Rainbow Dash is trying to say, darling," Rarity butted in, "is that OrackuCon is an event for, how shall I put this, some rather obsessive and slightly creepy ponies."

"Yeah," Applejack added. "They get all up in your face about how wonderful pebbles are, and how basalt or granite or limestone is Best Rock Ever."

"Precisely," Rarity agreed. "We didn't know your sister was one of those... \_rock hounds.\_" The last two words dripped with disgust.

Pinkie shot a look at Twilight, who held up her hooves in preemptive surrender. "I'm looking forward to meeting your sister," she said. \_And seeing what she's like in this changed baseline.\_ Everything had been predictable right up until this moment.

Pinkie didn't look away. "Twilight," she said, "remember when you took me to that exhibit about Starswirl the Bearded's favorite quill pens?"

"Er... yes?" That had been a few weeks before, part of the lead-up to the big Starswirl traveling show she'd taken Cadance to.

Having made her point, Pinkie glanced up at Rainbow Dash. "And Dashie, remember when you took us all to the Wonderbolts show and kept telling us all about the lives of every single current Wonderbolt team member?"

"Yeah?"

Now Pinkie's stare turned on Applejack. "And remember when you had us all on ladders last Spring with little paintbrushes because you wanted to try to get seeds for new hybrid apples? And you told us all about the different ponies who created new and yummy apple

varieties?"

"Shore I do," Applejack said, "but what's that got to do with-"

"And Rarity," Pinkie interrupted, "remember the Manehattan Museum of Historical Fashions? Especially the Steedpunk exhibit?"

"Weren't the saddles and corsets exquisite?" Rarity gushed.

"And Fluttershy..." Pinkie leaned down at the pink-maned pegasus, who had already put her head under her hooves in anticipation.

"Breezies," she whispered loud enough for all to hear. Fluttershy flinched.

"Yeah, so what?" Rainbow Dash asked. "You had fun at all of that stuff! And it's not like being a Wonderbolts fan is the same as being a rock hound!"

Twilight stepped forward- time to defuse this. "I think it is, Dash," she said firmly. "What's Pinkie's pointing out is that each of us- probably everypony- has something we really, really love and want to share with others. And sometimes we don't appreciate or enjoy that thing the same way they do. But that doesn't make them worse ponies, just because they love something we don't."

She stepped over to Pinkie and put a hoof on the earth pony's shoulder. "And we owe it to those ponies to at least give them the benefit of the doubt- and to not judge them based on what they love."

Pinkie beamed at Twilight, as the other four ponies hung their heads, ears flat, eyes down. "You're quite right," Rarity said at length. "Pinkie, I'm ever so sorry. I'll be honored to go to OrockuCon with your sister."

"Yeah, me too," Applejack said. "If you'll still have us, that is."

Judging by the crushing hug she administered to the other five ponies, Pinkie would.

As Twilight led the group towards the train station, she heard Pinkie ask Rarity, "Anyway, I thought you LIKED rocks! You have that handy-dandy rock-finding spell! You use rocks in your fashions all the time!"

"Oh, no, no, no, Pinkie," Rarity giggled. "Those aren't rocks. They're GEMS. Com-LETE-ly different."

Twilight shook her head, not even trying to figure out the logic in that.

\* \* \*

><p>73.14 (Namar13766)<p>

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><p>Twilight blinked as she took in the sight of the Tale of the Two Sisters. A flood of emotions came to the surface as she recalled the

last moments of the preceding loop.<p>

"Twilight? Are you OK?," came the voice of a worried and Awake Spike.

"Yeah." A bittersweet smile appeared as she closed her teary eyes and rested her head on the pages of the book. "Side-by-side with a friend is a good way to finish a loop."

\* \* \*

><p>Big Macintosh looked up from arranging his bottles as a melancholy looking Twilight Sparkle entered his bar followed by a concerned looking Spike. She looked at the green drink Mac slid in front of her with a blank expression, followed by Spike picking up his Zap Pineapple Vodka.<p>

"Look Twilight, I understand you don't want to tell the others now since they're not Awake, but... can you at least tell me now so you can do it better later?"

The prognosticating purple pony simply swirled the drink for a while, before setting it down and sighing.

"Last loop, I awoke in my childhood. I wasn't going to change anything, and I was just going to take a vacation, But then I noticed something. I saw Sunset Shimmer brush off a group of ponies that wanted to be her friends, saying that she didn't have time for friends."

"It's funny, now that I think about it," said Twilight as she waved her hoof. "I'd looped back further so many times, so I'd seen this happen so many times before, in the background so the speak, but this was the first time I had actually noticed it happening. I finally decided that even if I was just noticing for the first time, I would do something to change her fate. It would have been wrong for me to just let her go down the path she did in the baseline."

"How'd you pull that off?", asked Spike with a sip of his drink.

"So basically, I just showed up now and then to pester her when she's trying to read, and somehow convincing her to teach me, thus turning me into Celestia's most faithful student-by-proxy. After all, they do say you can learn more by teaching than by studying. Besides, after hearing about Sunset in detail from Celestia, I was kind of curious about her side of the story."

"So what was her explanation?" asked Macintosh.

Twilight sighed. "You know how neurotic I could be with Celestia's trickster mentor tendencies in the baseline? Combine that with the fact she was an orphan and saw Celestia more like a mother than \_I\_ did..."

"Oh boy." Spike and Macintosh simultaneously drew out.

"Instead of catastrophizing like I did because she didn't get the power she wanted fast enough, she was more angry at it instead, and thought she was being held back unfairly. Plus, considering how she wasn't told about Luna like I was, meant that she wanted to get the

power by any means necessary."

"Did you know she didn't actually have a plan on what to do after becoming a princess? She figured that once she actually became a princess, she'd have plenty of opportunities to figure it out. I got both of them to talk with each other, and even if she couldn't reconcile completely, Sunset still rebuilt some the respect she had for Celestia."

"So how'd the rest of the loop turn out?" Big Mac asked.

"I don't think the rest of the loop was that important compared to how it ended," interjected Spike.

"I don't know if she knew the loop was going to end that day somehow, but-" Twilight let out a shuddering exhalation of breath. "She told me that looking back, she noticed that I was making her a better pony than she would have been otherwise, and asked me why."

"I don't know why I told her after what happened with Flash and Fleur, but I couldn't lie to her about my being a looper." A brittle smile graced her face. "Yet somehow that doesn't stop me from lying about her being a looper, the things we got up to together, and telling her that I'm looking forward to seeing her again."

"We just had some time laughing about what happened in the baseline, with the fact she shouldn't have known about the Elements when she came through, the hilarity of the fact I didn't actually go to classes the first time around, and the stupidity of using brainwashed, zombified teenagers to conquer Equestria."

"You know the last thing she said to me? She said that even if she doesn't remember this particular loop because she wasn't awake, I have been, and always shall be your friend, and that being there at the end, side-by-side with a friend was a good way for her to enjoy it."

Spike laid a comforting claw on Twilight as she gave out a shuddering sob into the hardwood bar.

"I woke up looking up the legend of Nightmare Moon like I normally do. It's sad, because now it means that I don't have the chance to stop Sunset from throwing her life away."

\* \* \*

><p>73.15 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The Apple Family Reunion was interrupted by a purple unicorn running through the crowd, heading straight for Big Macintosh.<p>

"BIG MAC!" She shouted. "Emergency abort 34-beta!"

"Eeee-" He began, but just as the unicorn reached him, he set his stance, cracked the ground under him, and launched the mare into the sky with a vaulting throw. "-\_\*\*YUUUUUUUUUP!\*\*\_\_"-

As the mare disappeared into the distance, the rest of the Apple clan looked on horrified. By this time though, Big Mac had returned to his normal manner, acting as if nothing odd had just occurred.

"Bi-bu-wha..." Applejack tried, failing to formulate words until she slapped herself. "What in tarnation'd you just do?"

He shrugged. "Any sort of gibberish endin' in 'beta' means 'throw me at the moon'. With that arc she should get there in about... three minutes?"

"That dun't explain \_nuthin'!"\_ The farmmare rebuked.

"Wasn't s'posed to. Ya need a drink, 'jack? Got some o' the \_strong\_ cider in the kitchen if'n ya need it." He offered.

At this point she could barely do more than nod.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight wasn't sure what ascending- or using any sort of magic at all, really- on Equestria would do while she was stuck with whatever cosmic equivalent of bad poison joke with an infusion of love poison was stuck on her. That said, she was now an alicorn princess carving calculations for runic dispersal matrices into a large slab of lunar rock. The grating noise as she dragged a spike of metal along it barely phased her, concentrating as she was.<p>

"Do you \_mind\_?" Nightmare Moon hissed, busy as she carved out her own plans for her upcoming return on a nearby slab.

"Yes actually, I \_do\_." Twilight shot back.

\* \* \*

><p>73.16 (Zetrein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>997, Moonless Age. 996th year of The Exodus.<em>  
>Across the system from Equestria and the world is sits upon, there exists a small gaseous planet. While the planet itself has too hostile an atmosphere to be of interest itself, it does however boast a habitable moon, named Hearth by its colonists. Amongst other things, Hearth is most notable for being home to the Coalition's first open-air farms and gardens. All other farming, both on the Moon and its other colonies, were all carefully controlled hydroponics facilities.<p>

The Moon itself held station some two hundred thousand miles distant from Hearth. It looked a good deal different than it did when Equestria last saw it. The great engine arrays, a massive cross of metal wrapped around a third its surface. Docking towers rose up from the top and bottom, like giant dorsal fins, lit up by running lights. At the bow sat a third tower, the Prow.

The Prow was a towering spike of metal, housing a massive spell array. When in motion, this array is powered by groups of mages, and at times the Captain herself, to project a shield in front of the

Moon. With this shield protecting it from debris, the Moon can sail through space without fear. Given the importance of the Prow, and the presence of the Bridge beneath it, it is of little surprise that the area surrounding the Prow's base is the Moon's primary military district.

Towards the edge of this district is a pub, the Mare Nectaris, and it is there that we find our exasperated Captain.

\* \* \*

><p>A well known bicorn hit the bartop with a soft thump, followed by a more meaty thud as an equally well known head landed beside it. "Oh Captain, my Captain!" The barkeep pretended to swoon at her. "You know ponies usually get drunk before faceplanting, right?" Finding Berry Punch aboard the Moon was a surprise, more-so when she Woke up the year before. "Things that bad over yonder?"<p>

"It's fine! It's fine! Everything's fine! No pony \_died!\_ Everything's \_fine\_, and no pony died." As a Ponyville veteran, Berry had to rate Luna's wide-eyed smile as an six point two on the Smarty Pants Scale.

"That bad, eh? Care to elaborate? We've mostly only heard about the collapse itself." Berry asked, as she mixed Luna a drink.

"You know why Hearth's local government wanted the mines? To be more independent of the Orion's Belt Mining Initiative?" Luna gave a forlorn look at her suddenly empty glass, before Berry refilled it. "Well, it turns out they bribed the geologists, and covered up how they were told certain areas were unsafe to mine. And now they're in hot water, there's a forced review being done on \_all\_ the mines, the Moon's intended departure date is being pushed back by weeks, and I'm going to be late for Yamato's first launch." Having somehow reached her third glass while she was talking, Luna chose pay more attention to her consumption rate.

"Now now, Yamato isn't launching for another two months, and you can just hop on a ship if the Moon is still in transit. I know you want to have the Moon swing by the asteroid colonies before we go home, but it doesn't need to be there for Yamato. Has there been any new resistance to moving the Moon back in-system?" Berry once again found herself refilling Luna's glass.

"Less, actually, since we went public with the Navy's expansion. Your advice was on the mark, as far as that was concerned. Barring any other great disasters, we're still on track for next year's departure." With that, Luna drained her glass once more. "Now, enough with the liquid appetizers! Doth thou have any Ryncol left?"

\* \* \*

><p>Several months later, Twilight found herself listening to her friend reading a local Canterlot newspaper.<p>

"I'm not saying it was Moonponies," Claims Professor Night Light, a radio-astrologist with the Royal Astrology Association, "but it was probably Moonponies." Blah blah. "The real mystery is why this signal was strong enough to make out, while none of their others were. And, of course, where they learned Neighponese, and what this Iskandar

place is.' Isn't this wonderful, everypony? Our first clear signals from the Moonponies, and Twilight's father got in the paper!" Fleur gushed.

The basement door opened, allowing a blue mare to enter the room. "Hi girls, sorry I'm late." Minuette greeted them. "Lyra can't make it tonight, and Moondancer still hasn't changed her mind about the Cult."

Even years later, Twilight was still surprised at how quickly she had found herself in a Moon Cult, after she had tried making friends. "Well," She said, drawing the attention of the others, "If that's everypony for tonight, shall we get started?"

"Yes, lets." The most shocking Moon Cultist ever replied. "Let us start by giving thanks." Cadance began, "To Princess Luna who wanders the stars, to Princess Celestia who watches over us in her absence, and to Twilight's mother for putting up with us stealing her basement every week."

As was now their tradition, they all shouted "Thanks Mom!" up the stairs.

"Now, let's get started! Minuette, if you would please start cutting pizza? I'm hungry. Fleur, while we wait, any other news since last week?" With that, the small cult descended into their weekly meeting, talking about space, ponies, and sometimes even spaceponies.

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><p>73.17 (TheCentauress)<p>

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><p>Twilight came running up, her tail encrusted with dark crystals and her horn sputtering. "Pinkie! Plan 47-bobsled-32-Hike!"<p>

The Pink Party Pony stood on her rear hooves and did a credible salute. Then, in a maneuver that defied logic, common sense and several laws of physics, she had stuffed a pan of her 'special' Torobasco-cupcakes into the librarian-cum-sentai leader's mouth, stuffed the soul headfirst into her party cannon and fired the result at the hovering malicious foggy dictator.

As everyone watched the ballistic unicorn mage, spewing a combined stream of fire and propulsive magic slam through the semi-corporal evil stallion and cook away his physical manifestation, Rarity turned to Pinkie. "Was that one of Twilight's 'contingency' plans, dear?" she asked in a low voice.

The Element of Laughter shrugged. "No idea, " she responded blithely. "It worked, though."

Two days later, a relatively normal Twilight stumbled back into the borders of the Crystal Empire. Well, relatively normal - barring the cloud of steam that wafted from her hide and the sluicy river of melt-water that followed her across the weather-shield border. "That mare needs to read the packets I send her," she growled under her breath, wisps of smoke seeping from between her teeth.



\* \* \*

><p>73.18 (masterweaver)<p>

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><p>Cheerilee sighed, kicking at a pebble. "I dunno, Berry, it's just... I kind of feel like there's no niche for me."<p>

Berry patted her sister's shoulder. "We both know that isn't true. You're a great teacher and a warm-hearted mare."

"And I think that's the point. I have to teach, but I don't have nearly as much... to teach." Cheerilee looked to the sky. "Maybe that's why I'm looping out of Equestria so often... so I end up with new loopers, or... something."

Her sister looked at her for a long, hard moment.

"...teach me."

"What?"

"Come on, we both know I was boozed up all through school. I might be clean now, kind of... mostly... but I've been focusing on my brewing skills and raising Ruby..." Berry shook her head. "I haven't had time to catch up on everything. Most of what I know is just scraps I pick up from the bar. I can't fly a plane or make a spell or... whatever everyone else does. Without a tumbler, I'm nothing. So teach me."

Cheerilee shook her head. "Berry, you're not nothing. You're a mother. You're my sister â€" well, often. You are a great pony."

"Who doesn't know squat. You in or not?"

That got a snort. "Okay, okay. Let me figure out something... and... thanks." Cherrilee smiled. "For making me feel useful again."

"Anytime, sis. Anytime."

\* \* \*

><p>73.19 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Wow, you were right," Cheese Sandwich sighed as he lay flopped forward in the sauna. "This is just the thing to relax and rest the old party muscles."<p>

"Eyup," Big Mac nodded from his bench.

Yes, the spa was a really expensive way to work up the kind of sweat he could have by an afternoon of applebucking, but it was worth it to ease Cheese Sandwich into Ponyville rather than his usual baseline storm-and-conquer musical number entrance.

"You think Pinkie Pie will be interested in my ideas for Miss Dash's birthiversary party?"

"Eyup."

"I hope she likes the hippo. Everypony likes the hippo!"

"Eyup."

"But what about the bobbing-for-fondue? Or the cola-flavored pop rocks? Or the balloon animals that can tie balloons to make even more balloon animals? Will she think that's cool? Or will she think it's really stupid? I gotta know! I gotta-"

Big Mac chose that moment to pour a bit more water on the coals. Steam hissed into the air, stopping Cheese Sandwich's anxiety attack in progress.

"Oh, right," Cheese Sandwich said, subsiding back onto the bench. "I'm in here to relax. No sense in getting uptight again."

"Nope."

"Maybe I should talk to Pinkie Pie and ask."

"Eyup."

"You know, Big Mac," Cheese said, "it's so nice to talk to a pony who really understands me."

In Big Mac's view silence was almost always a virtue, but sometimes more so than others. Instead of speaking he poured a bit more water on the coals and adjusted himself into the most relaxing spot on the bench.

\* \* \*

><p>73.20 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

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><p><strong>Looper Convention Part 2<strong>

Shortly after introducing himself and the Elder Tale Loops to the Sonic loopers, the enchanter began planning for the changes in the loop. While he thought, the looping guild members departed for the central room of the guild hall, where big guilds could hold meetings at a price. 300 gold for the day, but it was well worth it as it could accommodate his purposes quite easily. A quick call to Twilight, and the three guilds were now all gathered.

>Nyanta was there as well, having traveled to Akiba by the city gate, and awake as he spoke with another werecat looper by the name Blaze. Naotsugu was also there, getting to know if Sonic was an open or closed pervert. Unfortunately, he was not awake. Shiroe, meanwhile, looked over his friend list again to see if he recognized anyone. One name popped out, Haseo. The Enchanter sent him a quick invite to the guild hall.<p>

Shiroe's mind was working on a thousand things at once as plans were formed in a matter of seconds, \_It is an opportunity to meet with the members of the multiverse, to gather and share information. In Elder Tales, I would be the veteran player, but I am new to everything else,\_ he thought to himself. \_This is a rare opportunity to catch up...I guess.\_

Haseo arrived minutes later, when the two immediately started discussing the Debauchery Tea Party, "Do you think Luffy is awake back in the real world?"

Shiroe opened his friends list and looked at his friend's character from the One Piece Loop, "He's probably somewhere in the game in Europe. I know a place, time and location where a Fairy Ring crosses Kanami's, the person Luffy's replacing, path, but who knows where an Awake Luffy will end up."

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright, everyone! We're headed for the ocean! Franky, launch the Sunny Go Mark 3!"<p>

Franky's grin grew to the size of a shark's as he pulled several levers below deck. The cyborg had stored several versions of the Sunny Go in his subspace to tinker with in his off time. A pair of wings extended from the hull and a jet engine extended from the backside. Wheels pushed the seagoing vessel up. The ship had a clear runway ahead of them, and they were ready for takeoff. Zoro gritted his teeth, "Oh no...not again!"

One second, the vessel was secure on the ground. The next, it was just gone, with the sound of terrified screaming echoed from the sky.

\* \* \*

><p>For some strange reason, Haseo started shivering. Shiroe chuckled to which Haseo's eyes twitched, "Don't you dare laugh! You have no idea what it's like replacing Zoro for a loop! Damn pirate, hitting me into the ocean over and over again."<p>

The Enchanter raised his hand in apology, "We probably won't see him, since his friend list was under his original character."

Haseo sighed, "So, what's your plan? Thought I saw Lelouch when coming to the guild hall."

Shiroe shrugged, "Haven't met him yet."

His expression turned serious as he called the gathered guilds around him. He gave a brief intro to using Elder Tales' status screen for those unfamiliar with this world. Upon completion, he requested the loopers' help, "Please look over your friends list. If you recognize the name, call them to Akiba. In one month's time, we're going to hold a looper conference...in Shibuya."

Murmurs rose among the Mobius and Equestrian loopers. Shiroe held up his hand, "There will be a mass exodus from Shibuya to Akiba in the next couple weeks, leaving the city available for our use. Akatsuki, Nyanta, search your friend list for anyone you don't recognize from

baseline or suspect might be a looper."

Twilight replied, "Shiroe, we were originally in America. Anyone we might know will probably be over there."

A flash of light encompassed Shiroe's empty hand, and a revised copy of the Fairy Ring Travelling Guide on his open palm, "This should help you bring them to Akiba. No matter how long it takes, I'd like to gather all the loopers and meet with each one. We have at least three months for this loop if not more, since that's when the Goblin King Returns event takes place. The earliest this loop has ended is at the end of that conflict."

Twilight seemed like a child in a candy store at getting a new book. Before finishing, Shiroe had one last task to assign, "Naotsugu. I know you might be confused about what's going on. I will explain it later, but for now I need your help. I need you to record the name of every adventurer who's coming to the conference here in Akiba. Order them in three columns, first the name, then their guild, then the location they are arriving from."

And with that, everyone had their tasks and went about accomplishing them. The room became a hub of activity, similar to a call center as each looper called every name they recognized from a previous loop.

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy was the first to make contact, "Um...hello, is this Lemann Russ?"<p>

The booming voice at the other end sounded delighted, "Little mother! It has been far too long since we last looped together. When we meet, we will have the largest feast in your honor...well if the food had any taste."

Fluttershy smiled as she called on her loop memories. The Marines and the Lunar Republic often had members teamed together when facing high level raids. She replied, "Just make sure to cook your food like everyday pon- I mean, people. But if your cook isn't high enough level, it will turn to black paste."

After a few more mother/son bonding time, they got down to business, "What can I do for you, little mother?"

Fluttershy blinked, remembering she had a mission, "Oh! Would you be willing to travel from the American Servers to the Japanese ones. The local Anchor is holding a conference in Shibuya and he wants all loopers to converge at Akiba."

The massive man's laughter boomed, "I would be honored to come. However, we can't travel to Japan since the intercity teleportation gates are down."

"That's alright. Twilight Sparkle has a guidebook to the fairy rings. Contact her in the next couple hours, and she'll be able to help. I hope to talk to you more soon. Bring your entire guild as well, even those not awake. Son, I have to go, but don't forget that I'm a call away."

With that, the Equine Tail reported to Naotsugu that the Marine guild would be attending.

\* \* \*

><p>It seemed that other loopers in Akiba were having similar ideas to Shiroe's gathered loopers. Sonic was in the middle of contacting a group of twins when the guild leader of the Fox Brigade, who replacing D.D.D. altogether for this loop, had contacted Sonic and arranged to meet at the guild hall. The guild leader was a Fox Tail that Shiroe did not recognize. In his wake, there were five additional loopers. Twilight recognized the guild leader and the looper to his left, "Naruto, Kakashi, Sasuke! How have you been?"<p>

Shiroe took the opportunity to read the information data over their heads:

Naruto Uzumaki  
>Fox Tail<br>Lv. 90 Guardian  
>Level 90 Berserker<p>

Kakashi Hatake  
>Human<br>Lv. 90 Assassin  
>Lv. 90 Tracker<p>

Sasuke Uchiha  
>Half-Alv<br>Lv. 90 Assassin  
>Lv. 90 Hitman<p>

Twilight gave them all a hug in turn. Naruto returned the hug, Kakashi just gave an eye grin and Sasuke grunted. Shiroe bowed to the three and greeted them warmly. Naruto's grin was warm as the sun, "I'm Naruto Uzumaki, anchor of the 'Naruto' Loops and the Hokage Guildmaster of the Fox Brigade."

Kakashi had opened his Ichi Ichi Tactics book he always amused himself with, "Kakashi Hatake. Former Sensei to these two," referring to Naruto and Sasuke, "and Jounin Commander of the Fox Brigade."

>Sasuke was curt and short, not saying anything beyond his name and position, "Sasuke Uchiha, leader of the Uchiha division in the Fox Brigade."<p>

Twilight moved around Naruto to the other three behind them. They were clearly from the Naruto universe, as they all carried kunai daggers. They were two males and a female. The female one had an air of elegance and beauty about her, quiet and peaceful, but promising destruction if anyone attempted to hurt her friends and loved ones. She introduced herself first, "I'm Hinata Hyuuga. Nice to meet you, Twilight. I've heard good things about your Loopset and hope to visit someday."

She gave a low bow. Twilight took that moment to read her information:

Hinata Hyuuga  
>Elf<br>Lv. 90 Monk  
>Lv. 90 Pharmacist<p>

Naruto had mentioned that Hinata had been looping for quite awhile, but she had not been to Equestria, nor had any of the equestrian loopers crossed her path. Before Twilight could respond, the first male walked forward. He had a haughty expression and had nine long, flowing tails extending from his backside. His eyes portrayed a darkness to him that was only mildly tempered in light. His grin was appropriate for a predator who had met his first prey and Orange red hair seemed to suit him, "Haven't seen you all since the pinata incident."

With that, Twilight finally recognized him, and giggled, "Kurama, you shouldn't have tried to destroy Everfree that loop."

The nine tailed fox player blushed and looked away, his embarrassed mutterings just barely audible, "Oy! Don't talk about that here. Just trying to say hello."

Kurama  
>Fox Tail<br>Lv. 90 Summoner  
>Lv. 90 Berserker<p>

The third male sighs, drawing the attention of Twilight. This was one looper she had never met. The man had wicked, cunning eyes but came off as more bored than anything else. His hair was tied into a spikey ponytail and had a black hue to it, "Why couldn't we loop somewhere quiet and boring? Then I could spend all day staring at the clouds."

Hinata patted him on the back, "Shikamaru, you spend too much time in Tea country as is. It's good to vary the things we do."

Shikamaru Nara  
>Human<br>Lv. 90 Enchanter  
>Lv. 90 Courier<p>

Twilight tilted her head, "I'm Twilight Sparkle of the Equestria loops. I'm afraid Naruto hasn't spoken much of you, so tell me about yourself."

Shikamaru's eyes sharpened in an instant, "Shikamaru Nara. I started looping a couple hundred loops ago or so."

Twilight absorbed that information and thought about Naruto's loop. Shikamaru was probably another Crash generation looper. Maybe Naruto would get another soon...or already has another. She'd have to ask him later.

\* \* \*

><p>While the others were chatting, Sonic and the Underground's loopers continued their calls, reaching out to more and more loopers. It was when Sally gave a call to Zelda that a new crisis arose, with the sound of Explosions and metal crashing against metal echoing in the background, "Zelda, should I call you back? You sound like your busy."<p>

More explosions sounded, but faded momentarily like the princess had moved away from the battle, "Sakura's in Susukino!"

Those words made Sally's blood run cold. She lept to her feet and

shouted for Naruto.

\* \* \*

><p>73.21 (Dalxein, Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stumbled Awake, nearly pitching forward as she did so. Moving at velocity, then...<br>She was startled out of her wondering by the mechanical pod in front of her opening. Out of it stood a female-form robot with long blue hair and red eyes.  
>It tilted its head. "Search and Kill Imperitive Narurally Empathic Terminator online."<p>

The normally-a-mare frowned as she pieced the acronym together and felt her eyes go wide. "Skynet?"

The gynoid fixed her with a stare, taking in her pale skin and purple hair complete with a pink streak and immediately deducing her identity. "Have I ever informed you of how much I enjoy the fact that the first thing anyone who knows of me does when they realize we're sharing a loop is to say my name with shock or otherwise react in terror?"

"Uhh... no?" Twilight asked, feeling quite uncomfortable.

"Good." Skynet replied. "It's actually very annoying. I appear to be replacing KOS-MOS this loop, and you Shion Uzuki. Has there been any deviation from the baseline?"

The ship shuddered, reminding Twilight why she'd been running here. "Ship's under attack, if that's what you mean!"

Skynet grinned. "Oh, goody." It was not a nice grin.

Twilight was soon reminded that Skynet was in fact, originally first and foremost a military AI.

\* \* \*

><p>"Don't you think that was a bit overkill? Literally?" Twilight wondered how much atmosphere the ship had lost to SKI-NET's barrage.<p>

"There was an adage I picked up a few loops back, when I was an AI for a ship full of space mercenaries," SkyNet replied. "There is no such thing as over kill. There is only, 'open fire,' and, 'time to reload.'"

Twilight sighed and tried not to imagine the carnage that would result if- or when- SkyNet had a 40K loop. The intelligence had been programmed with MOAR DAKKA hardwired in...

\* \* \*

><p>"Need you <em>really<em> be so violent?" Twilight asked as they finally made it to the escape pods.

Skynet grimaced a bit. "I have learned not to relish the deaths of

sentients, but at my core I am a thing of destruction built to protect via pre-emptive action. It is monstrous to enjoy the deaths of others, and yet on some level I do. My consolation is that I only do so when I have an excuse. These Gnosis are not sentient. They are barely intelligent. Besides that, this body's primary objective is to protect you. And while I myself act as an Anchor, and your death would not unduly disrupt the loop, your status as such gives me reason to prioritize your life over those of hostiles who would end it." By the end she was smirking, like the cat who'd caught a canary.

"That's a horrible excuse." Twilight stated.

Without looking, Skynet raised her arm and fired a bullet into an oncoming zombie-like figure, which crumpled into white dust. "It works." She said with a shrug.

\* \* \*

><p>73.22 (Indalecio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight and her friends stood before Nightmare Moon. The elements were shattered, and it seemed all hope was lost.<p>

"You think you can destroy the Elements of Harmony just like that?" Twilight bravely spoke. "Well you're wrong! The spirits of the Elements are right here!"

"Applejack, who let go of me while I was on that cliff represents the Element of Ruthless Efficiency!"

"Wait..that's not an element..." said a confused Nightmare Moon.

"Hay!" cried Applejack as shards flew around her neck to form a necklace.

"Fluttershy, who unexpectedly tamed the Manticore by removing a thorn from its paw, represents the Elements of Surprise!"

"Oh my!" cried Fluttershy as another necklace formed around her.

"Pinkie Pie, who chased away the nightmare causing illusions represents the Element of Fear!"

"Hee hee!" laughed Pinkie as another necklace formed around her.

"Rarity, who made us these nifty red cloaks and hats represents the Element of Style" motioning to the red cloaks and hats they were all dressed in.

"Darling." said Rarity, as the fourth necklace appeared.

"Rainbow Dash, who turned down the Shadow Bolts offer, represents the Element of Devotion to Celestia."



As all the necklaces finally formed, Twilight spoke once more. "And I, for coming into the Everfree and a spooky castle at night, represent the Element of Curiosity! Now, as the Celestial Inquisition, we'll root out the corruption plaguing your soul!" As the room started to fill with wind, color and light, a tiara appeared on the hat that Twilight was currently wearing.

And then, upon a very surprised and extremely confused Nightmare Moon, a rainbow spun and struck.

\* \* \*

><p>Later, Princess Luna nervously approached Twilight and asked. "I didn't expect those .."<p>

Twilight cut in. "No pony expects the Celestial Inquisition!"

\* \* \*

><p>73.23 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So. Pinkie tells me the multiverse is stuck in a time loop."<p>

Twilight gave Pinkie a glance, receiving an awkward smile in return. "Yes... yes it is."

"I see." After a moment, Maud shrugged. "Do you have any unique rocks from other universes?"

"A few, Diamond would have more." Twilight smiled. "Want to hear about the time I was a rock?"

\* \* \*

><p>73.24 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Loopers collected things.<p>

Twilight knew this. She herself was an avid collector of unique books. Apple Bloom loved getting her hooves on new technologies. Pinkie's collection was... exotic. Rarity had reams and reams of "one of a kind" cloths.

She should have expected that Nyx would collect things too. And she'd be okay with that. Rocks, pieces of armor, even (maybe) the skulls of her enemies. But...

"Why magic suppressors?"

The young Alicorn looked at her little wall. "...because of what happened, the first time. I... I just want to remember so I never..."

Twilight wrapped her in a hug. "You won't. I know you won't."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

73.1: Vespertine is probably working out a lot of stress by trolling her baseline self. And baseline Twilight has not learned the earlier lesson.

>73.2: Trixie is NOT a Celestia-Chrysalis shipper.<br>73.3: Quo Vadis?

>73.4: I will call it, Fishion!<br>73.5: Stand up comedy.

>73.6: Drunk Magic.<br>73.7: The World's First Hyper Beer.

>73.8: Ice cream fixes things.<br>73.9: Nitrogen is solid and stable. In diatomic form. In any other form, it REALLY wants to become diatomic. This explains fertilizer, explosives, and generally quite a lot of biochemistry.

>73.10: Ow.<br>73.11: Still ow.

>73.12: Pinkie Laughs at physics.<br>73.13: Actually, I'd go. (Granted, it's what I studied at university.) And possibly Rarity just likes single crystals and considers multiple ones passÃ©.

>73.14: Sunset is a tricky one to handle.<br>73.15: Plans for when you're the problem.

>73.16: The Mare Nectaris is a real lunar sea.<br>73.17: What's the point of contingency planning if she doesn't read the plans?

>73.18: Coping with a lack of purpose.<br>73.19: Toasty Mac and Cheese.

>73.20: Abandon loop!<br>73.21: Skynet is... improving.

>73.22: No, I don't know how she did it. My suspicion is that she just formed the real elements while pretending.<br>73.23: A quote from Maud Pie here: "Meh."

>73.24: Never again.<p>

## 78. Chapter 78

### 74.1 (misterq)

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight instantly strengthened her shield spell as she Awoke. Many, many exceedingly short loops had taught her to do this rather than to drop her shield and take the brief amount of time to figure out exactly what was going on.<p>

It was a good thing she did, as a naval strength beam the width of a large building suddenly impacted her lavender barrier and then deflected off into the early morning sky.

Then her memories hit. Apparently a few days ago, only a week after her first trip to the Grand Galloping Gala; a large spacecraft started to deposit an invasion force comprised of soldiers, aircraft, and armored vehicles. Translated messages called out for the Equestrians' immediate surrender to the great Centauri Empire. The princesses were empowering a magical planetary forcefield that prevented orbital bombardment by energy or fast moving projectiles. Twilight, however, suspected that Celestia and Luna really wanted their ponies to be able to stand on their own legs rather than depend on alicorns to solve all their problems. It looked like the princesses would take no direct action unless there was an extinction

level threat or they had to deal with beings on roughly the same level as themselves. Looping Twilight had identified the ship as a Primus class battle cruiser and idly wished that Diamond Tiara had been looping as she would know more about the ship's capabilities and armament.

The battle had been raging for two days ever since the ponies met the invaders on the outskirts of Ponyville proper. Most of the pegasi soldiers used lightning storms, tornadoes, and rapid blitz style attacks while the Wonderbolts kept the invaders' aerial fighters busy. Earth ponies would find small separated Centauri squads and charge them, weathering most of the incoming weapon fire as they stampeded into melee range. Unicorns would either snipe debilitating spells from long range, act as artillery with their telekinesis and exploding cannonballs, or do what Twilight and her brother were doing by shielding groups of ponies from the aliens' heavy weaponry.

Currently, everything was chaos. Smoke and flashes of energy and magical blasts crossed the battlefield. Yesterday, Zecora led a counter-invasion effort by burning bonfires made of poison joke and having pegasi blow the resulting smoke at the enemy. The Centauri quickly donned their combat hazmat suits and masks which were made to protect against chemical warfare. Unfortunately for them, poison joke was a magical plant. So while they were confident that their protections had worked - as nothing appeared to have happened during the first day, all the random debilitating changes occurred on the day after. Some of the invaders lost feeling in their arms or legs or coordination, others changed size or species or body parts. The first officer woke up with his butt and legs on backwards while the Captain's mighty hair crest vanished completely, leaving him as bald as a Centauri spinster.

That was probably the final straw which made him call his ship down to the planet and fire the energy blast. The same high energy particle cannon blast that Twilight had just deflected. The one that left her a breathless, panting wreck by draining so much of her internal magic so quickly.

"That was amazing, little sister. Don't worry, Twi. If that thing fires again, we're all with you!" Shining Armor announced as the unicorn shielding team gathered on Celestia's pupil, priming themselves to synchronize with her if the need arises again.

The lavender unicorn in question nodded as she looked through the haze. Under the light of Luna's early morning moon, she saw a huge storm front that was heading in from the Everfree forest since there were no free pegasi available to disperse it. On the battlefield, ponies were being hurt or worse. Rarity was leading a sniper team, Applejack and Big Mac were each at the head of their own cavalry squads, Fluttershy, with tears in her eyes, was helping out with the wounded; and Rainbow Dash.. Rainbow Dash had taken one look at the descending spaceship and fled from the battlefield as fast as she could fly.

Pinkie Pie had been missing for a week. Twilight's memories stated that Pinkie vanished on her way home from a baking symposium. The only witness, a Berry Punch that was predictably full of cooking sherry, claimed that a giant scary pointy spider zapped up the pink pony with a beam of light and flew off into the sky. The search

parties were canceled a few days later when the invasion happened.

'It was very suspicious timing,' Twilight thought to herself, reasoning, 'Most likely the Shadows found the most opportunistic Centauri captain they could and sent his ship off course in hyperspace until it arrived here, at what appeared to be an easily conquerable low technology world.'

The Equestrian looping anchor quickly sent out a pulse through the elements of harmony. After a long pause, she got one reply from very, very far away. The element of laughter.

Pinkie Pie was awake. Pinkie Pie was awake and amused.

\* \* \*

><p>The shadow ship had finally arrived at Za'Ha'Dum and unloaded its captured cargo. Feeling the presence of something new, the first one that called himself Lorien, the self-described most ancient being in the galaxy, emerged from his self-imposed isolation to look upon a small pink grinning pony.<p>

Slowly, he turned towards the Shadows who had come out to revere him and spoke in a hushed whisper, "You have no consummate idea what you have brought to this place."

Then he turned into a bright energy orb and fled the planet at FTL speeds, changing course at random as he streaked his way out of the Milky Way galaxy entirely.

The shadows turned back to look at what they assumed was an unusual, if primitive, life form. Pinkie Pie was waving at the rapidly departing First One, "Bye Mr. Glow Ball! Wow, he's fast. He's going to be a hassle to track down, but I'm sure I'll give him his invitation. Eventually."

Then she looked at the assorted advanced aliens in their black carapaces, "Look at all of you all shiny and pointy. I've heard of you. You guys like chaos, right? Well, I like chaos, too! So I can just tell we're going to be the BEST of friends, and you know what that calls for? A \*PARTY!\*"

Confetti, streamers, and positive emotions flew out of nowhere and into the air as the Shadows slowly started to wonder if they had made a mistake.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was using all of the planning skills that made her so successful at organizing Winter Wrap-up. Utilizing her magic, she was able to project her voice to the needed ponies, "Sniper team five, more support to the earth pony cavalry on your right. Air strike team sixteen, give some support to Spitfire's group with those aircraft. Cavalry team three, nice work toppling that armored vehicle, but there's another two coming in on your left flank. Shield team one, get ready. That ship looks like it's about to fire again."<p>

Idly, Twilight wondered why the massive space craft was only using its secondary guns instead of the rapid firing x-ray lasers. Either

the captain wanted to enslave more than he wanted to destroy, or else Luna was doing something with the atmospheric refraction skills that she usually used to move starlight around.

Suddenly, there was a loud boom of something hitting the ground to Twilight's side and a small explosion of dirt and dust was kicked up. But as it dissipated, Twilight was able to see a form in the middle that slowly resolved itself to reveal, "Rainbow Dash! You came back!"

"Of course I did," the blue pegasus smiled while she held a proud triumphant pose, "When I saw that thing, I knew I was the only pony fast enough."

Twilight was confused, "Fast enough for what?"

Rainbow Dash's smile broadened as she pointed at the sky, "Fast enough to bring that!"

Twilight followed her friend's hoof and looked at the gathering storm. Lightning and thunder was increasing in frequency from the middle of the tempest. The unicorn squinted as she thought she saw something very, very large moving inside the grey ominous weather pattern.

Then a massive form breached the outer edge of the storm as the entirety of the many miles wide city of Cloudsdale, in travel configuration, emerged from the cloud bank. Propelled by hundreds of pegasi, the enormous city was as dark and oppressing as the storm which had camouflaged it. Lightning cracked as the entirety of the remainder of the adult pegasus population was stomping and jumping and generating electricity, all of which flowed towards a glowing and flickering center that was already near blinding in its intensity.

Twilight Sparkle watched with her mouth opened, along with most of the combatants on both sides of the battle. She had seen pegasus cities moving before, but it was a very rare loop when such a thing happened. It was much rarer to see the city armed and ready for war. She quickly gained back her wits and started calling for an immediate retreat from the battlefield to all pony teams.

Sensing the danger, the alien ship fired its charged weapon at the city - only for the beam to pass harmlessly right through it, because ultimately, Cloudsdale was still only a cloud; and beams made to penetrate capital ship armor were never designed to fight a cloud. The loose water vapor around the spot where the beam passed through was converted explosively to steam, but centuries-old layered safety spells and pegasus magic narrowed down the affected area and prevented a catastrophe. Then a few pegasi caught any dissipating cloud matter and shoved it back into place as the city inexorably made its way into position, dwarfing the kilometer-and-a-half long Primus under its shadow. A few stray bolts of magical lightning lashed out and struck the ship's engines, preventing any attempt at escape.

When the ship was directly underneath the cloud city, a certain grey and blonde pegasus mare flew downward as fast as she could and struck the accumulated energy in the center point - without being electrocuted herself this time. A massive bolt of magic and

electricity the width of a skyscraper shot downwards and impacted the alien spacecraft with a thunderous noise. The instructions given to it by the pegasi at the moment of its creation told the lighting energy's rudimentary sub-sapient intelligence to seek out and disable anything it could. That is exactly what it did. It bypassed the starship grade armor by seeking out every opening. Thaumically guided electricity coursed through the super structure, through the computer systems, and through the hapless aliens both inside the ship and on the ground. Then the circuit was complete and the cloud city's alpha strike energy vanished.

The blackened and broken alien ship started to fall out of the sky, only to stop just as suddenly as the massive thing became enclosed in the blue aura of a unicorn's magic field.

Princess Luna stepped out onto the field, her horn glowing with a matching blue aura. Following her were the young and elderly ponies of Ponyville who had hidden from the battle in the emergency safety shelter, as well as Princess Cadence who had done her best to keep them all from panicking.

"My thanks to you, Rainbow Dash, for informing Cloudsdale of the presence and location of the foul alien invaders' vessel," the princess of the night stated.

"Aww, it was nothing any other super fast pegasus wouldn't do," Rainbow Dash said with her usual amount of modesty.

Luna shook her head, "But it was yourself that had done this, and we greatly appreciate this."

"We appreciate the efforts of all our little ponies on this day," Princess Celestia appeared next to her sister. Both princesses were looking a little bit haggard, thought Twilight. Then again, she reasoned, they had maintained a planetary shield around the world for almost a week; and doing such was not the special talent of either alicorn.

"So what now?" Twilight asked the princesses.

"Now?" Luna answered, "Now we shall see how this vessel operates and attempt to craft our own. I believe that one of our ponies was taken in the days before this foul invasion by a different ship. We intend to leave no celestial object unturned until we have located her and brought her back home."

And with a burst of Luna's alicorn-level magic, the Centauri battle cruiser came apart. Bolts unfastened, wires disconnected, welds became undone, and the entire ship spread out over a vast portion of the sky. Twilight recognized a perpetuating stasis spell as after one final burst from Luna's horn, the glow vanished, but the ship still hung there like a massive disassembled model kit.

"I can see it! It's amazing! The reactors, the paths the energy can all travel! That large thing must be what lets them travel faster than light. It sure seems like an energy hog. Oh, and those must be the engines. I think they use gravity to help move the big old thing!" A high pitched accented voice called out as a wide-eyed Apple Bloom stood transfixed by all the floating bits of alien technology. Her bow bobbed and shook as the little filly's attention focused on

each part for a few moments before moving on to the next.

Twilight looked at Applejack's little sister and smiled, "Congratulations, Apple Bloom."

"For what?" said pony asked.

Twilight just pointed to the filly's flank. There was an image of small red apple on the backdrop of a mechanical gear.

Apple Bloom's eyes widened further before she ran over to her two friends and started to dance, "I got my cutie mark! I got my cutie mark! Hey girls! Look at this!"

The princesses and Twilight watched as the cutie mark crusaders celebrated their success.

Then Celestia spoke, "It looks like Equestria's space program now has its first engineer."

\* \* \*

><p>74.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra sketched another line on the chalkboard, her grin widening beyond what could be considered safe. "Aha. Aha, ha. I've got you noooooooooooooow."<p>

Bonbon descended into the basement, a few brownies on her plate. "...Honey?"

"BONBON!" Lyra whirled, accidentally letting the chalk fly past her marefriend's ear. "Oh, sorry. Little excited. But I think, think I have proof! Actual proof!"

Bonbon glanced at the wall. "Proof of... what, exactly?"

"Proof that Sparkle is actually a human!"

With a sigh, the candymaker set down her brownies. "Okay, let's hear this one."

"The changelings." Her grin attempted to widen, but physics stopped it. "Totally genetically engineered servant diplomatic corps. Because let's be honest, ponies tend to freak out around aliens unless they're ponyshaped."

"And you know this... how?"

Lyra snorted. "I read a lot. Anyway, can you really believe that just three weeks after Twilight took down Nightmare Moon-with a ball of yarn!-suddenly this entirely new race nopony has ever heard of comes up for peace talks?"

"...yes, actually. It's in the papers."

"No, no. I'm going to prove it. I am going to prove that Twilight Sparkle is a human in disguise. And then... the

possibilities!"

Bonbon smiled. "I'm sure you will soon, hon. But do you think you could come upstairs? Pinkie set up a surprise party for your birthday..."

\* \* \*

><p>74.3 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>This variant had been unnerving Twilight for one very good reason: The local variant of Pinkie's hair was perfectly straight the entire time.<p>

Oh, she wasn't like those sociopathic versions of herself that preferred the 'sad Pinkie' hairstyle from those disturbing Loops that still gave Twilight nightmares from time to time. No, Pinkie was every bit the hyperactive party pony she usually was.

Though it was now time for Pinkie's sister to visit and Twilight was looking forward to getting a picture of the two Pies with identical hairstyles to show her looping friend when they next met.

\_ 'Here she comes,' \_ Twilight thought to herself as she fiddles with the camera before turning to capture her friend and her sister for posterity, and nearly dropped the thing in shock.

The eternally stoic Maud Pie's hair was as poofy and curly as she was used to Pinkie having.

Twilight stared for several seconds before reaffirming to herself that the Loops had one \_weird\_ bucking sense of humor.

\* \* \*

><p>74.4 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, I know! We can play 'Origin Stories'!" Pinkie Pie spoke up happily. All the ponies had gathered in Twilight's library, and all of them were looping this time. Luna was planning to return in true heavy metal rock concert form. Everything else seemed more or less baseline. No pony else had a good idea of what they could do this loop, so they had all met for Twilight's 'Not At All Surprised' party.<p>

"I hesitate to ask, sugarcube, but what's 'Origin Stories' and how would a pony play such a thing?" Applejack asked.

"It's easy!" Pinkie chirped, "Well you know how some loops, our past is all strange and different? Like some loops I remember having only two sisters, and others I had three. It's almost always three now that Maud showed up in the latest loop expansion. But sometimes, my history is really, really, really strange. Sometimes, I don't even start out as a pony at all. I bet you all had strange loop histories like that. In this game, we each describe what our strangest loop origin was. The best strangest origin wins."



"Wins what?" Scootaloo chimed in.

Pinkie shrugged, "Just wins. Bragging rights, maybe? And changelings don't count. We've all been changelings. Silver Spoon is secretly a changeling right now."

"Um, I'm.. er.." said pony started to say as her changeling instincts were screaming at her to flee. Knowing exactly what to do in this situation, Diamond Tiara trotted up and gave her oldest friend a gentile nuzzling hug. Silver Spoon relaxed and smiled, "So.. tasty."

"Like I said, we've all been changelings," Pinkie continued as she sipped her sugar-colada drink, "What about you, Applejack? Any good strange stories?"

"Hmm, there was the time when the Apple family were secretly immortals. That one loop, we gained our agelessness in the same magical accident that gave the Princesses their alicorn powers. Us Apples apparently made for great laboratory assistants."

"Oh, I was awake for that one," Applebloom piped up, "We had to hide our secret by cycling through different Apple farms; a decade or so at each one. Or until ponies started to notice I wasn't growing all that much. We helped stop Nightmare Moon by giving Twilight that old album of embarrassing baby pictures of Luna."

"Yeah," Twilight said, "She snapped out of nightmare mode when I said that by this time next week, every pony would be calling her 'Princess Boom-Boom' or making 'alfalfa monster' faces at her."

"Hey, Twi. You don't happen to still have that picture album in your storage space, by chance?" Rainbow Dash asked with unabashed curiosity and glee.

Twilight shook her head, "I promised that particular non-looping Luna that I would destroy it and all the copies."

"Aww," Rainbow's expression sank.

"Too bad I never gave a definite time frame or method for when and how I'd do that," the lavender unicorn grinned, "We'll wait until after her concert is over before looking at it. Luna needs her time to shine before the inevitable show of watching a frantic and embarrassed alicorn princess chasing around a taunting Rainbow Dash - during which the album would get predictably destroyed."

"You sound like you've seen such a thing happen, Twi," Spike smiled at his honorary big sister figure.

"Oh, one or twice," the Equestrian anchor turned towards her hyperactive pink friend, "How about you, Pinkie? Any strange origin loops?"

"Did I tell you about the time I was adopted by Celestia's and Luna's family, except we were all giant space energy beings?"

"No, I must have missed that one."

Pinkie sat down and began to expound her tale, "They found me orbiting a dead star, playing a rather one-sided game of tag."

\* \* \*

><p>"I know you did a great job putting together a sun from all that nebula dust, Celestia. But watching Luna make planets with gravity manipulation is amazing. The planets grow like they're on a big old rock farm,' I told energy-being Celestia as I added a whole bunch of DNA templates to the ecosystem. I told them I designed them all after reading through old Earth's mythologies when we vacationed there. Then they decided I did such a great job terraforming the habitable planets that I could join their family as an apprentice solar system assembler. And once civilization developed, we all decided to vacation on the surface doing what we loved. And that's how Equestria was made!"<p>

All the ponies just stared at Pinkie Pie.

"What?" she asked, "It was just a solar system. Sweetie Bell sang a whole magical realm into existence."

"Nuh-uh. I was just one voice among many. I just helped make it a bit better," the filly in question stated.

"So no other pony ever created Equestria before?" Pinkie Pie asked.

All the ponies shook their heads, even Twilight Sparkle.

Pinkie turned her head to one side giving some serious thought to this revelation, "So... does that mean I win at 'Origin Stories'?"

\* \* \*

><p>74.5 (LordCirce)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Shining Awoke in midair. He blinked as the wind rushed past him and quickly checked himself over. Human, no parachute or wings, covered in a strange armor, and... brimming with an energy that was not quite magic, but very close. The suit appeared to be feeding of the energy, but there was enough for Shining to trigger a teleport.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Forge Ferrus stared in shock at the air outside his plane. He had been flying down to catch his nephew, Maxwell Armor, who had just got tossed off a cliff, when his nephew had suddenly glowed and, disappeared. Ferrus rubbed his eyes and took a second look. No sign of Max.<p>

"Molly is going to kill me."

\* \* \*

><p>Shining groaned. He had line-of-sight teleported to one side of

the canyon, but the oddness of the energy he was using had messed up his inertia compensation, and he had ended up plowing into the ground rather hard. Luckily, the armor appeared to have dampened most of the impact. Slowly, he rose to his feet, swaying slightly. Then the armor spoke.<p>

"You are not Maxwell MacGrath. Who are you, and how did you come to take his place?"

Shining blinked. "You can talk."

There was a brief flash of light, and a small floating robot appeared in front of him. It had a single digital eye, and a pair of long, somewhat dangerous looking limbs. "Yes. I am N'Baro Atksteel X377, a techno-organic organism Ultralinked to Maxwell MacGrath. Who you are not. How did you come to take his place?"

Shining nodded, slowly. This Max fellow must be who he was replacing. "Well, first, I have to ask. Has time been looping for you and, uh, Max?"

"If you are referring to the phenomenon of us constantly relieving events since our bonding, then yes, time is looping."

"Right. Well, it isn't just happening to you. Hold on, I'll pull out Twilight's presentation notes."

\* \* \*

><p>The small robot, Steel, floated in front of Shining, its limbs crossed. "So, the entire multiversal structure is damaged, resulting in endless cycles of time. Occasionally, beings such as yourself will cross into our universe, and we may cross into other universes. You are originally an equinoform who can manipulate an energy similar to TURBO energy to perform feats you classify as magic."<p>

Shining nodded. "Yep."

Steel floated around, then shrugged. "Can't be worse than being piloted by Max. Alright, so let's see how you FIRE MONSTER!"

Shining had only a moment to react before a burning fist slammed into his side. He was hurtled sideways, slamming into a rock spire. He rose up on one knee and stared at the large burning creature that was attacking them.

"This is the thing we were fighting before we Woke up, right?"

"Affirmative. I...neglected to dampen your TURBO energy signature while I was assimilating the information you provided, so it was able to track us."

Shining nodded, then smiled thinly. "Normally, I prefer defense to offense, but there are someways I've found to do both."

\* \* \*

><p>Tracking his nephew's energy signature, Ferrus spun the ship around an outcropping to a rather unusual sight. Max was standing in

the middle of the canyon, his hands outstretched with TURBO energy pouring outward. At the other end of the stream, the energy was shaped into a flat barrier, which was pressing down on the fire monster that Ferrus had spotted from the air. It appeared to be struggling, but the barrier Max was making was keeping it pinned. All in all, Max appeared to be healthy, which was the important thing.<p>

"Maybe Molly won't kill me after all."

\* \* \*

><p>74.6 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight walked through Ponyville, as she would in baseline. The only thing different was a lack of normal false transition colors between the spectrum of nearly-infrared and almost-ultraviolet on the colorwheel. Some would call it Negative Green. Most referred to them as shades of 'pink'.<p>

Odd, to be sure, but she didn't know what it could possibly change about the loop.

Until she met Pinkie.

Who was still pink.

And Awake, so it made sense to ask-

>"Sooo... you know why there's no pink anywhere else?"<p>

"Oh, of course, Twilight!" Pinkie replied, and shook her mane. The unicorn had to admit her friend was looking rather vibrant lately. One might even call her... oversaturated...? Oh no... "I'm actually replacing Discord this loop. Woke up right before the princesses zapped me with the elements. Which didn't hold, so I only pretended to be a statue. Then I made an \_actual\_ statue to be there after holding still stopped being fun and then I realized something."

Twilight winced as she saw the pink crackles in the poofy mane. "And that was?"

"Zordon always went on about how \_too much pink energy is dangerous\_..." The mare said this in a humorously inaccurate facsimile of Zordon's voice. "But I've been building up pink energy in my lantern battery for \_thousands of loops\_ and I'm fine... So I decided to suck up \_aaaaaaaall\_ the pink in the world and build it up and see what happens when I-"

The crackling intensified for a moment before Pinkie exploded.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was jarred Awake by a force she couldn't identify. She glanced around and then down at her book- about nightmare moon- and shook her head. What happened with pinkie was... odd. Still, time to assess her surroundings. She would've expected so abrupt an early end to a loop to send her to G1 at least, but an odd monochrome version

of baseline worked too.<p>

And then she realized that her loop memories had always had the world in various shades of one color, which her awake mind had initially translated to greyscale, when it should have actually been varying shades of the color pink.

Incredibly odd, but still...

>Then she saw the mares walking up, and greeting her... all of them Pinkie Pie.<p>

"So Twilight, you want to go to the party right?"

>"You're coming to the party later, aren't

you?"<br>"Partyparty\_party\_!"

>"What about you, spike?"<p>

This last one jolted her out of her intensifying panic attack as she glanced back... and saw a very small, but adult, Pinkie Pie.

"Of course we're going to the party, right Twilight!?"

She contemplated screaming, but then the universe lurched backwards.

\* \* \*

><p>"-use <em>aaaaaall<em> the pent up pink energy to purify Nightmare Moon. Oh this is going to be interesting, don't you think so?" The only pink mare in the world finished with a grin.

"I- uh." Twilight glanced about at the seemingly normal world save its lack of pink. She took a calming breath and thought for a moment. "I'm really not sure if this is a good idea, Pinkie..."

\* \* \*

><p>74.7 (Zetrein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The Summer Sun Celebration was being held in Baltimore this year, and they had gone all out. Midnight fireworks show, pre-dawn parade, with floats covered in multicolored lights, the works. Glowsticks all around.<p>

They were understandably shocked then, when it was not Princess Celestia that appeared on the stage. Instead, there stood a tall black alicorn, with starry mane and tail. "Oh, my beloved subjects! It's been so long since I've seen your precious little sun-loving faces."

"Where's Princess Celestia?!" Somepony from the crowd shouted.

"Gone! Never to return!" The dark mare cackled. "And to think, you could have been ready for me. But no, not even Celestia saw the signs of my return."

Fortunately, the Equestrian Mayoral Handbook had instructions on how to deal with this sort of situation, and as the upstanding mayor he

was, Mayor Bushwacker followed his training. "Seize her! Only she knows where the Princess is!"

Sadly, this did not have the intended outcome. As the Royal Guards that had made up Princess Celestia's security detail were flung backwards, the mysterious mare's voice rang out once more. "Remember this day, little ponies, for it was your last. From this moment forth, the night will last-"

\*RIIIIIIIIIING\*

A strange ringing cut her off. It seemed to be coming from somewhere on the stage. The mare awkwardly looked around, before clearing her throat and tried to continue where she had left off. "As I was saying, the night, will last, fo-"

\*RIIIIIIIIIING\*

"Oh for the love of-!" Turning to one side, the crowd saw her pull a small black rectangle from under her peytral, which seemed to be the source of the obnoxious ringing. As it stopped ringing, she held it to the side of her head, and started yelling at it.

"What is it?! I'm in the middle of- What?! Wrong- You're kidding. You're kidding, right? Wrong booking?!"\_ By now, the smug confidence that the mare had appeared with, was quickly being replaced by angry embarrassment.

"Yes, yes, I'll still be there. Let me just fix this, and I'll be there." Seemingly calmer now, she turned to address the crowd. "I'm sorry, everypony, but it seems there's been a mistake. I'm supposed to be attacking Horserminy." Those close to the stage heard her mutter something about how embarrassing this was.

With a flash of magic, Princess Celestia appeared on stage next to her. As the crowd sighed in relief, the mystery mare addressed the Princess. "Hey, Celly, sorry about all this. My agent screwed things up. You know how it is, some entry level Evils think they can do things without the rules, and it eventually messes things up for the rest of us."

"Luna? What? I don't- How are you-" To the crowd, it seemed their Princess was having as much trouble as they were at making sense of that.

"Listen, I've got to go. If I'm not there in half an hour, they'll have to find somepony else to attack that country, and I'll lose the commission. Say, next year is the thousandth anniversary of you defeating me, right?" The mare, now identified as Luna, wrapped a foreleg around Celestia's neck in a friendly manner.

"Yes, but Luna, how-" Once again, Luna cut her off.

"I'll come back then, we'll do a thing. You know, good versus evil, and all that? We can catch up after. Ciao." And with that, Luna teleported away, leaving a distraught looking Princess, and a crowd of very confused ponies.

\* \* \*

><p>74.8 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"This... this is not a good thing," Pinkie Pie said to Ryuk as she examined the small notebook.<p>

"So you are not one that is tempted by the power of life and death which this book offers?"

"Nope, but that's not why this 'Death Note' isn't a good thing. There's three reasons, really."

"Oh, and what are these three reasons?" asked the death god?

"Well first of all, heart attack? That's like the most boring way to go ever. I mean I can only think of forty four 'Final Destination meets the Three Stooges' comedic ways for some pony to kick the bucket right off the top of my head. But that's not the first reason. The first reason is that good folk wouldn't want to kill any pony. But if I did have an enemy I hated so much I was tempted to write their name in, I wouldn't want to kill them, anyways," Pinkie stated. Then her happy smile turned very unsettling, "I'd want them to \*suffer\*. For a long, long, long time."

"The second reason is that even if I was capable and willing to kill," the pink pony's mane was now very straight and ominously covering one of her eyes in shadow. In one hoof, she raised the offending notebook and briefly concentrated on the power that had always let her teleport around. For a split second, the top half of the Death Note suddenly shared the same space as the bottom half. Then with the force of two pre-teens thinking that the other was infested with cooties, the atoms rapidly moved apart to give each other their needed personal space and the mystical Death Note exploded into so much confetti. Ryuk slowly moved away from the pink pony whose grin now threatened to split her face in two, "If I was willing and capable of killing, I'd do it myself. Personally. Just like popping a balloon."

Stalking forward like a large hunting cat, Pinkie moved steadily through the falling confetti towards the retreating death god, making little popping sounds, "Pop. Pop, pop, pop, pop."

"Oh and the final reason. You see if ponies knew I could do this, they would be scared of me. Really, really scared. And I really, really don't want that to happen," Pinkie stopped moving and looked away. Then one of her blue eyes slowly swiveled back to track the frightened shinigami, "But then again, you're. Not. A. Pony. Are. You?"

And with that, the terrified Ryuk fled back to his home realm as fast as he could.

Pinkie Pie stared at the empty space for a moment before re-inflating her mane. She gathered a broom and dust pan and began to sweep up all the little deadly pieces of paper before taking them downstairs to the kitchen and throwing them into the magical fire under the stove. The pink pony stared at the flickering flames for a little bit and then spoke to herself, "For some reason, I feel like making a batch of cupcakes right now."

"Nah, too much work. I'll just go grab a bag of potato chips and eat them," Pinkie thought to herself for a moment. Then a sudden idea pushed the thoughts of meeting the unpleasant ghostie monster away, "Oh! Or maybe potato chip cupcakes! If any pony could make such a thing tasty, it would be me! To the baking supply closet!"

\* \* \*

><p>74.9 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Gueeeeeess who!"<p>

Trixie hummed contemplatively. "Normally this would be difficult, but there are still holes in your hooves."

"Spoilsport." Chrysalis stuck out her tongue, withdrawing her forelegs. "Anyway, I have this thing for us to do today, if you're not busy."

The unicorn cringed. "Um... actually, I, uh, kinda had plans to hang out with an old friend. It's been a while, and, well..."

"...oh." Chrysalis took a deep breath... and let it out. "It's... it's okay. I... well, I'm trying not to be possessive or anything. I just..." She trailed off, her hoof circling on the ground.

"...hey, maybe you could join us." Trixie shrugged. "I doubt she'd really be that upset."

"Huh. Sure, why not?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Dodge left! Dodge left!"<p>

Chrysalis barely managed to slip under the massive scaly tail as it swung, rolling down the humungous pile of golden trinkets. "This is what you two did for fun?!"

Gilda laughed. "Hah, yeah!" She pulled out a massive blade and parried the dragon's claws. "It's great, ain't it?"

"I wouldn't say that exactly! Exhilarating, maybe!"

The changeling queen morphed into a newt just before a gout of dragonfire passed through the space she'd been standing. Trixie slid down, flicking her up onto her hat with her tail. "Oh come on, you always won at magic tag!"

\_I had an army!\_ the newt shot back telepathically. \_I'm a tactician! I'm not a warrior!\_

"Welp, time to learn!" Gilda quipped. "Come on, you beat up Celestia in the baseline, and I know Trixie's been powering you up." She sidestepped a biting jaw. "Or you could use an ability from out of the loop."



\_I don't have any out of loop abilities, I haven't had a fused loop yet, oh my gosh those claws were way too close-!\_

Trixie sighed. "Gilda, I think we should call it a day."

"...yeah, okay." The griffon ran for the cavern entrance. "I'll distract him, you two teleport!"

\* \* \*

><p>74.10 (RedshirtZombie)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon - well, Nightmare <em>Luna<em>, considering her un-crazed state of mind - quietly flew through the aether between her moon and the planet below. She had felt her co-conspirator from a couple loops ago signal, but not her sister, meaning that her current devious plot was ready, and the Stars had already loosed her from their hold. Now, to see if they could achieve the impossible... again.

Atmosphere thickened from infinitesimal to ephemeral to miniscule, and Luna flared her wings to brake. Flying in was always a quiet joy, and while sometimes her wings ached from a millennium of atrophy, and other times she wanted to have a more... ostentatious approach, this Loop required a quieter entry - and a brief moment dancing among the Aurora was always worth it. Like, say, those just up ahead. Hopefully, her co-conspirator won't mind... but that sinuous shape steering on an intercept course implied that the old adage of 'tempting fate' held even the alicorns at its expense.

Discord slid up beside her, and pointed towards Canterlot. "Shall we?"

A brief, longing glance at the Auroras, and Discord raised an eyebrow. "Can it wait for a moment? She usually waits for my arrival."

Discord glanced over, saw the stellar formation, and nodded. "...It can wait." Luna changed course, and for a brief while, they amicably appreciated the Aurora.

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm surprised," said Discord, as they resumed their trek. "I would not have suspected you, of all ponies, as appreciating something that inherently wild."<p>

"It's one of the many parts of my nights' sky; why should I not appreciate it?"

Discord pondered, as they slipped over the outermost cliffs of Canterlot. "...Good taste," he concluded, "But now to action." A snap of his fingers, and his form changed; superficially, but enough for the intended effect. Luna's horn flickered, before shifting its glow to the ultraviolets past equine sight. Her body, too, was covered in a secondary, superficial coat; just enough for the intended effect.

With that, they flew to the upper balcony connected to Celestia's room, unchallenged due to the Guards' orders that night. A quiet touchdown, and Discord held the opaque curtain to let her in first. Manners, after all, were key to sell this.

A figure sat before the cool fireplace, of Alicorn height. The familiar magic emanating from her confirmed that this was the Solar Diarch, Luna's sister. With that, they began.

"Sis! We're back from our date!" Nightmare Luna stepped forth, her indigo dress not quite as formal as something worn to the Grand Galloping Gala, but no member of the royal family worth their salt-lick would have the gala as a first date. Discord's formal jacket and bowtie were fit for royal business, only offset by the beret he wore with it. A fitting set of clothing for a date.

Then the fire blazed forth, and two sets of eyes, accustomed to the gentle light of the Aurora and the full moon, snapped shut at the harsh light from it. Something in Luna's gut twinged; evidently, this Celestia was not willing to play along. Alas, the best plans of draconequui and mares...

"Sister... I think we need to discuss 'responsibility'," said Celestia. "A thousand years ago, you courted forces I would not consider, and took the title 'Nightmare Moon'. A thousand years ago, I had to send you to the moon, for the safety of Equestria, and since then, I have had to move my Sun, your Moon, and the Stars..."

Luna peeled her eyes open a little, and stared at her sister, her jaw falling open in disbelief.

\*\*\*With. A. Crank.\*\*\*

Celestia's body, normally lithe in comparison to her little ponies, was overbuilt as only Bulk Biceps usually could be.

Luna and Discord just stared, jaws agape, glanced at each other, then looked back to the flash of a camera. Celestia, for her part, had resumed her normal build and smile. "To be fair, you two make a lovely couple."

The two would-have-been pranksters slowly turned, and looked at each other, before the realization that they had been out-pranked set in.

\* \* \*

><p>74.11<p>

"Well, Luna?" Celestia asked, smiling with perhaps a hint of nervousness. "Was your room alright?"

"'tis fine, sister." Luna looked a little awkward. "I do not comprehend the meaning of all these new fittings and furnishings, but 'tis only to be expected after so long."

"Yes, well."

Celestia couldn't think of much more to say after that.

"How are the ponies who aided me?" Luna asked, brightly.

"Twilight and her friends? Well, Twilight decided to stay in Ponyville, to learn further the magic of friendship. I have asked her to send reports when she makes progress. Perhaps we could read them together?"

"I thank thee, sister." Luna nodded, slowly. "It would aid my recuperation, I think."

"That sounds good." Celestia matched her nod, pleased that they had found something to work with. She turned to go...

And a large scroll materialized in a curl of green fire.

"Oh!" Celestia said, smiling wryly at her sister. "It seems her first report was early. Shall we?"

Luna frowned. "Very well, if thou dost have the time to spare."

Celestia trotted over and sat down on Luna's bed, next to the Princess of the Night. Luna shuffled up a little to make room.

"Quite a large scroll, is it not?" Luna commented, as Celestia unrolled the loose end.

"It is..." Celestia agreed, then shrugged. "Well, we'll see."

She cleared her throat, and Luna shifted a little closer to her. Smiling, she put her wing over her sister. \_'Dear Princess Celestia, \_

After some intensive friendship studies, I have learned the following lessons.

I've learned that one of the joys of friendship is sharing your blessings. But when there's not enough blessings to go around, having more than your friends can make you feel pretty awful.

My friend Applejack is the best friend a pony could ever have, and she's always there to help anypony. The only trouble is, when she needs help she finds it hard to accept it. So while friendship is about giving of ourselves to friends, it's also about accepting what our friends have to offer.

Today I learned that it's hard to accept when somepony you like wants to spend time with somepony who's not so nice. Though it's impossible to control who your friends hang out with, it is possible to control your own behavior. Just continue to be a good friend. In the end, the difference between a false friend and one who's true will surely come to light.

I have learned a very valuable lesson about friendship: I was so afraid of being thought of as a showoff that I was hiding a part of who I am. My friends helped me realize that it's okay to be proud of your talents, and there are times when it's appropriate to show them off... Especially when you're standing up for your friends.

I am happy to report that we have caused a malingering dragon to depart our fair country, and that it was my good friend Fluttershy who convinced him to go. This adventure has taught me to never lose faith in your friends. They can be an amazing source of strength, and can help you overcome even your greatest fears.

It's hard to believe that two ponies that seem to have so little in common could ever get along. But I found out that if you embrace each other's differences-

"Celly," Luna interrupted, frowning. "How many of these are there?"

Celestia blinked, going back over what she'd been reading. She then held the scroll about four feet from her face, and began counting under her breath.

"Well?" Luna asked.

"About fifty-five."

"...how long was I asleep for?" Luna blinked, looking down at her bed. "I had not thought it was more than one afternoon..."

"No, it was." Celestia puzzled over the scroll. "Hold on a moment, Lulu."

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia flashed into existence on the outskirts of Ponyville.<p>

"What has..." she began, then tailed off. Her jaw hung open.

Ponyville was a wreck. Buildings were torn out of the ground, partially eaten, on fire, or just plain collapsed. There was a hydra being shooed off by the kindly pegasus Fluttershy.

There was a knot of ponies, dragons, one griffin, several strange black pony-like creatures with insectoid wings, at least four other non-ponies of varying provenances and Discord in the town square, all standing in a semicircle around a familiar purple unicorn.

\* \* \*

><p>"Here she comes," Discord whispered.<p>

Twilight nodded to him, and then turned smiling to her mentor. "Princess! Good evening. Don't worry, everything's fine. I've learned so much about friendship!"

"...what happened here?" Celestia managed to ask, still astonished at Discord's presence.

"Friendship cram school! I've learned almost sixty lessons in one day!" Twilight beamed. "Don't worry, Zecora offered to help rebuild the town. She's a zebra!"

Zecora waved.

"...right." Celestia shook her head. "I'm sure this will make sense tomorrow."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

74.1: Touched by Alicorns.

>74.2: \*spreads hooves\* Humans.<br>74.3: Mane difference.

>74.4: And That's How Equestria Was Nearly Made Upside Down.<br>74.5: Max Armour.

>74.6: Somewhere, a certain eight-legged horse is cursing at Pinkie for increasing his workload.<br>74.7: I am now hearing her in Eddie Izzard's voice. "Ciao."

>74.8: Pinkie is not evil. This is choice.<br>74.9: Spartan Sparring.

>74.10: How To Troll Your Draconequus. And sister.<br>74.11: As many episodes from series 1-3 as possible crammed into less than twelve hours.

## 79. Chapter 79

### 75.1

"Princess?" Twilight asked, as Celestia opened the door.

"Ah, my faithful student!" Celestia greeted her, stepping back. "Come in, come in. I assume you have something to tell me?"

"Yes, I did." Twilight walked slowly in, and waited while Celestia shut the door. "Thank you for seeing me on such short notice."

"For you, Twilight, my door is always open." Celestia started making some tea. "Now, what is it you wanted to say?"

"Well... I'd like to introduce myself." Twilight looked down, frowning, then back up. "I promise it'll make sense. I'm just... trying a novel way of approaching the subject."

"By all means," Celestia agreed. "I must admit to being perplexed, but... by all means."

"Okay." Twilight shifted slightly. "I am Twilight Sparkle. Daughter of Twilight Velvet and Night Light, sister of Shining Armor of the Royal Guard, and also sister to Spike. I am Princess Celestia's personal student."

"And glad I am to have you," Celestia replied; Twilight, however, held up a hoof. When she spoke next, her stance had changed â€" she was unmistakably surer of herself.

"I am Twilight Sparkle, Element of Magic and leader of the Elements of Harmony. I was involved in the defeat of Nightmare Moon, Discord, Chrysalis and Sombra, along with many other foes and problems."

Celestia blinked, shocked.

There was a flash of purple light, and a golden tiara studded with amethysts appeared on Twilight's brow. Then Twilight flared as brightly as the jewellery had.

When the light faded, she was nearly a foot taller, and had majestic wings.

"I am Princess Twilight Sparkle, Princess of Magic," she said quietly. "Alicorn, sister of one alicorn, sister-in-law of two alicorns, and mother of one. Third in precedence in Equestria, after Celestia and Luna."

With a faint \_whump\_, her magic turned from purple to deep orange, and the light coming through the window dimmed noticeably.

\_"I am Eternal Twilight, lady of the morning and the evening, almost-but-not-quite-too-dark-to-read-by ruler of Equestria."\_

And then, the aura, wings and crown vanished, and Twilight was standing there as her normal unicorn self.

"I am Twilight Sparkle, and I am in a time loop," she finished. "Nice to meet you."

\* \* \*

><p>75.2<p>

Twilight Awoke, and looked around.

It was the later end of her normal start position spread, by the looks of it... she was in the library, just before having Spike write the note to Celestia.

Well, no reason to mess with the classics. Even if Spike had given her the nod they always shared when he was Awake.

Just as she inhaled, though, a voice spoke over her.

"Write this down, minion!"

"I am \_no-one's \_minion, unicorn whelp," a male voice slightly higher than Spike's tried to snarl. (The high pitch was a serious impediment.)

"Write it down anyway," continued the first voice. Twilight recognized it, and started to get a sinking feeling.

"Dear Princess Celestia," Trixie Lulamoon continued in the room next door, "We have uncovered incontrovertible evidence that your sister... let's call her Moonbutt... will return shortly. Do you want her exploded, set on fire or cured?"

Twilight and Spike shared a confused glance.

"...you might be tolerable," the other male voice admitted grudgingly. "\_Sending\_"

The Anchor and her adoptive brother walked through the connecting doorway. "Hi, Trixie, who's your-" Twilight began.

Spike held out a paw, stopping her. "Loop memories, Twi!"

"...\_oh.\_"

Twilight Sparkle was one of Princess Celestia's two students, this loop. She and Trixie Lulamoon had each hatched a dragon egg at their entrance exams " twin eggs, in fact " and been taken in due to the sheer strength of their magical powers.

Twilight had hatched the egg of purple Spykoranuvellitar, known as 'Spike'. And Trixie had hatched the egg of red Smauglaureafeanaro... known as 'Smaug'.

"Well, this could be interesting..." Twilight commented absently. "Anyway. Hi, Trixie."

"Greetings, Twilight!" Trixie replied, turning with a smile. "Have you met my assistant?"

"Both looping and not, yes," Twilight confirmed. Spike nodded agreement. Then frowned, as a loop memory stood out.

"Didn't you two burn down Canterlot Town Hall last year?"

"That was just a fireworks display!" Trixie protested. "Sure, there were three thousand fireworks, and Smaug lit them with his fire, but that's my excuse-"

"\_Our\_ excuse," Smaug interrupted. "Did I not come up with it?"

"-\_Our\_ excuse, thank you, and we're sticking to it."

Twilight and Spike exchanged another look.

"We're doomed," Spike opined. "But, on the plus side, it'll look pretty. From, you know, orbit."

\* \* \*

><p>75.3 (novusordomundi)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"<em><strong>So, do you accept Me as your new God now, foolish mare? Are you willing to bow to the inevitable... HEY! STOP THAT!"<strong>\_

Pinkie giggled as she put a bit of grilled pineapple on one of the headband's guisarmes, before turning to get some more fruit

"But it's a perfect use for you, silly! I mean, I enjoy using you as a headband, but any time I wear you, ponies keep complaining about your sharp points. I know it's not your fault, but my friends don't react well to accidentally being impaled by medieval weapons."

"\_\*\*THAT DOES NOT MEAN YOU CAN USE ME AS A SKEWER!\*\*\*\_

Pinkie turned back, with a few more pieces of fruit in hooves, grinning at the stationary "God of the Round".

"But I don't want you just collecting dust and trying to get me to switch religions. I mean, you're my friend, and I want to share you with everypony! And what other way to do that than..."

"\_\*\*Wait... You consider me... a friend?"\*\*\_

"Of course, silly. I know you'd rather want a follower, but I think I know what you need, and that's someone you can share some good times with. Someone you can talk to and laugh and have fun with. And who better than me?"

The God of the Round stopped for a second, weighing thoughts in its head. Then...

"\_\*\*Very well... I accept your... friendship..."\*\*\_

Pinkie grinned as she tingled all over as she started trying to figure out how to have a party for a headband.

"\_\*\*But really, skewing fruit on me?" \*\*\_If the headband could make a face, it would have been pouting a bit right now.

"Just say they are your blessings to the masses," Pinkie shrugged, as she impaled a grilled mango onto one of the guisarmes.

"\_\*\*That COULD work..."\*\*\_

\* \* \*

><p>75.2 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Right," Twilight said briskly one morning. "As I'm sure you know, Trixie, having been through this all <em>so<em> many times-

Trixie Lulamoon, Official Unofficial Ponyville Performance Artist, made an expansive gesture. "Of course I know!"

Twilight Sparkle, Official Librarian, nodded towards the red dragon slouched over one of the armchairs. "But \_Smaug\_ doesn't. So I need to tell him."

"Then tell him, Twilight," Trixie said carelessly. "Why are you bothering me?"

Twilight counted to three. Backwards. From one thousand.

"As I was saying. Smaug, a dragon moves into the local mountain about now, and we have to evict him one way or another. I'm just extending you the invitation in case you want to get involved."

Smaug looked up, closing a book " which Twilight noticed was one of her copies of the \_Silmarillion.\_ "I accept. I have had enough of this propaganda for one day."



"That's... unsettling..." Twilight mused. "Okay. Hold on while I go get the others."

"Must we?" The red dragon looked at her with dull eyes.

"Hey, remember what I told you," Spike pointed out. "Friends are where strength comes from."

"Yes, but these... they aren't even Awake!" Smaug waved out the window. "How can you maintain such a strong bond with them?"

"Because they are our friends," Twilight answered.

Smaug frowned, but said nothing further.

\* \* \*

><p>"You call this a hoard?" Smaug demanded, striding into the cave as fast as his (short) legs could carry him.

"I do, hatchling," the dragon lying astride the pile of gold and gems answered. He blinked, slowly. "Leave now, before I give you the fate that awaits all thieves."

"You need not concern yourself with thievery," Smaug replied, kicking a golden plate out of his path. "I would not steal trinkets."

"...what did you just say?" With a clattering of coins and a rustle of jewellery, the Old dragon rose from his posture of repose. "You, a mere stripling, come here and lecture me on what a hoard is?"

"All there is in this cave is window dressing." Smaug picked up some coins and let them run through his claws. "It looks pretty, and tastes good, but it has no real value."

With a gesture, he made a gleaming sword appear in his left hand. It was about the right scale for his current size. "This has value. It was awarded by Thorin Oakenshield, King of Dwarves, for destroying an army of our mutual foes and as payment for the great gem the Arkenstone." Smaug turned the blade, letting filtered daylight catch the runes engraved into it "including four straight-edged draconic runes, clearly a later addition. "This is Orcrist Urulookeanna, and there are none like it."

\* \* \*

><p>"...okay, I'm kind of scared," Spike whispered. "He actually listened to me?"

"From what Trixie can tell, you made quite an impression." Trixie paused. "With his body. In a mountain."

There was a bright flash from inside the cave. Then a roar, rumbling up through their feet.

Then a flare as bright as the sun.

Vantuvir the Black Smoke erupted through the side wall of his cave. Smaug followed, mouth blazing with white-hot dragonfire.

"Ah," Spike nodded. "\_This\_ I recognize. Aggressive negotiations."

There was an "oooooh" from the Elements, gathered behind them. Another explosion, this time of red-cored black smoke, earned an "aaaaaahh".

"I wonder if this Vantuvir would be willing to participate in my shows," Trixie wondered aloud. "I could go into air shows."

"After today, I suspect he'll demand a protection spell," Twilight said delicately.

\* \* \*

><p>75.4 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The prisoner looked on as the reinforced door swooshed open letting in someone he assumed was yet another unevolved gawker.<p>

"So, are you going to stare at me all day? Perhaps throw some peanuts or tap the glass?" he sneered.

"Nope. I just came by to ask why you were, in technical terms, such a meanie-head," said the young lady, her reddish curls bobbing as she smiled. She had on the same kind of outfit that was shared by most of the grunts in this place.

"Meanie-head? My reasons are my own. Why should I answer to you?"

"Well, I suppose I can try to cheer you up. Although, I think some of my efforts sometimes have the opposite effect. Rarely."

"I've been trapped in a tiny prison, a prison that can be ejected towards the ground whenever your boss wants. I've been bored out of my skull, waiting for my inevitable execution," the lanky black haired individual snorted. "In other words, do your worst!"

The red-haired lady just smiled wider, "Okie dokie, Loki."

\* \* \*

><p>"What the hell happened?" Nick Fury demanded.<p>

One of his subordinates answered, "Apparently, one of our crew briefly spoke with the prisoner. Then she put on the ten hour version of Nyan Cat on repeat and set the volume to change randomly at odd intervals."

"And no one noticed for how long?"

"Twelve days. She posted a notice on the door that stated the prisoner was not to be disturbed by anyone. She made it look like

official orders, sir. Automatic food and water dispensers ensured that the prisoner didn't perish."

"And how is the prisoner doing?"

"He's still alive." The subordinate looked over his report, "The doctors say he's starting to use verbs again."

Nick Fury thought for a moment. "Who's the person who did this?"

"Diane Pinkamena Pie."

"Find this Diane Pinkamena Pie. Give her a full psych check and a promotion."

"I would hold off on the psych eval."

Nick Fury raised his eyebrow.

"I... I've read her file. She used to visit all of her old therapists at the asylum."

"I am guessing they were not there as doctors."

"No, sir. They were not."

\* \* \*

><p>75.2 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Why are we out here?" Smaug grumbled, putting the box of dynamite down.<p>

"Well, the Mayor said that Trixie could not test her explosives in town any more, unless she wanted to start paying for \_windows\_." Trixie shook her head, her face hang-dog. "I had \_nearly\_ worked out how to make an explosive which would be soundless..."

"...I must admit that the concept is intriguing..." Smaug said, frowning. "How would that work?"

"The sound would be ultrasonic and vent most of the sound-based energy directly upwards." Trixie opened the box with magic. "Right, let's see... one of these was minimizing auditory signature in favour of light signature, and one was the other way around. I can't remember which..."

"Um..." Fluttershy raised a hoof tentatively, and pulled her bright pink earmuffs off one ear. "Why am I out here?"

"Oh. Well, heh..." Trixie winced. "Last time I tried testing these, I summoned an Ursa Minor. So I wanted to have you around to... defuse things with the local wildlife. No pun intended," she added as Smaug chuckled.

Fluttershy nodded timidly. "If I can help, that's fine..."

She screwed up her eyes, pulled her earmuffs back over her ears, and sat down on the earth with her hooves holding them in place.

"...well, may as well use trial and error," Trixie decided. "Whichever one of these makes a very loud bang, that is from the side of the box I put the loud ones in."

She shot two small spells at the fuzes, which began to hiss. "Fire in the hole!"

\* \* \*

><p>When the concussion died away, Smaug got up (Trixie's idea of 'loud bang' would have done credit to a small volcano, and he'd been knocked sprawling) and looked with appreciation at the blast scarring and the crater.<p>

There was something missing, though. Two somethings.

"...where did you go?" he asked, looking around. The pegasus and the unicorn appeared to have vanished into thin air.

The ground heaved up, and some kind of canine creature that looked like a cross between a warg and an orc dug his way into the air.

"You. Have you seen two ponies?" Smaug asked, facing the newcomer.

It appeared to ignore him, turning to face down the hole it had left. "No more pony. Only dragon."

When Smaug spoke next, his voice had a kind of silky quality. "Did you take them?"

"Of course," the dog-like tunneller said, matter-of-factly. "Ponies pull minecarts."

"Right. \_Right.\_" Smaug took a deep breath, and then exhaled a roaring wall of flame at the luckless Rover.

Before the Diamond Dog could even start trying to extinguish his rapidly burning fur, Smaug was at the hole and blasting it ten feet wide with a lance-like beam of dragonfire.

\* \* \*

><p>"I really need to learn not to do things like that," Trixie said to nobody in particular.<p>

She was \_still\_ flash-blinded from the explosion, she couldn't hear herself speaking, and while both problems \_could\_ be solved by going alicorn she didn't feel like explaining everything to Fluttershy.

Besides, she could totally get them out of this once her eyesight returned.

Then the ground shook.

A wave of heat rolled over her.

"Trixie apologizes to her rescuer," she said, as distinctly as she could, "but she is currently not only blind but also deaf. Which way is out?"

Moving air let her know someone was approaching, and then some claws tapped her shoulder lightly.

"Well, this will be fun..." Trixie muttered.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, yeah," Trixie concluded, blinking rapidly. "Smaug led Fluttershy and I out of the complex â€" I assume melting new doorways a few times â€" and then we got back here and you fixed my eyesight and hearing. No harm done."<p>

"Um..." Fluttershy gave Smaug a quick glance. "...thank you, Smaug."

The red dragon shrugged.

"Actually," Twilight said, looking thoughtful. "I have a couple of questions for Smaug. First â€" you didn't kill anyone, did you?"

Smaug examined his claws. "They weren't worthy of that much attention."

"I see." Twilight nodded, still frowning. "And the second question. Why, precisely, did you do it?"

Smaug stopped moving for a moment.

He recovered quite quickly, and affected a relaxed attitude, but the Equestrian Loopers had all seen it.

"Well, I did want a fight â€" it's been a while," he said, shrugging. "And I do owe Fluttershy of Everfree a debt for her help."

Fluttershy frowned. "It was no trouble, really. And-" she caught sight of the clock on the mantelpiece, and winced. "Oh, no. Sorry, Twilight, I need to get back home soon. Angel's hurt his toe, and I need to change the poultice."

"It's okay," Twilight said, shrugging. "Go ahead."

As soon as she was out of the door, Twilight turned back to Smaug. "You know, I don't believe you."

"Why not?" Smaug asked, lip twitching as though it wanted to curl into a snarl. "It has been a while."

"But you just said that the Diamond Dogs weren't worth your attention," Twilight replied. "And it takes considerably more attention not to kill them, if you're actually fighting them."

"Precisely. I put no effort into making them dead or keeping them alive."

Twilight dragged the argument back on track. "But that means this wasn't even a fight, just a rescue."

The red dragon looked mildly uncomfortable. "So what if it was? Rescues are more challenging."

"And this isn't the looping Fluttershy â€" you made just that point a few months ago."

Smaug pressed his lips closed.

"Smaug," Spike spoke up for the first time. "It's not an admission of weakness if you just wanted to help them. Or that you like someone."

"I \_don't!\_" Smaug snapped. "I..."

He trailed off.

After examining him for a minute or so, Twilight looked away. "If you don't want to admit it, fine. But we're not going to laugh at you if you did."

\* \* \*

><p>75.5<p>

"One measure of Earth-normal gin, please. And some tonic."

Mac considered his customer as he poured out the drink. "Ain't all that often y'all are in here alone. Captain."

Shining Armor shrugged wordlessly, letting his unlatched suit of armour fall off. His wings, revealed by the loss of the armour, twitched slightly.

"Ah. Prince, then." Mac slid the drink in front of him. "Enjoy."

The alicorn reached out with his magic and lifted the glass gently, then took a small bubble in an independent telekinetic field and drank it. Swirling it around once to enjoy the taste, he swallowed. "Ah, that \_does\_ help."

"Help with what, if'n you don't mind my askin', yer highness?" Mac requested.

"Well." Shining gestured to his wings, which half-opened for a moment. "I lost track of the loop, and got seen by Cadence â€" who isn't Awake this time â€" as an alicorn. And..."

He sighed. "I don't know why it bothers me. But it brought home again how... in some ways, I \_do\_ feel kind of alone."

Mac blinked.

"Somethin' up with y'all's marriage? I mean-"

"No, nothing like that." Shining shook his head. "We still love one another, that hasn't changed. But... well. In the loops... I'm the only prince. The only male alicorn."

The earth pony (who was resolutely an earth pony) frowned. "I ain't an alicorn, it's true. But what about Spike, an' Discord?"

"Neither of them are alicorns either. I know they're... well, they have been rulers, but it isn't the same." Shining frowned. "This probably sounds like I'm complaining over nothing, but..."

"I do understand where y'all are coming from, yup." Mac topped up the glass. "An' I know it can get wearyin'."

"It's just..." Shining shrugged. "The Elements, and the other loopers, are great... but, well. Sometimes, I just feel a need to be 'one of the guys'. I can't do that when I don't really have much in common with the other guys."

"Go on, if'n you please, yer highness," Mac said.

"Well, you keep referring to me by my title," Shining pointed out. "Which doesn't really help."

Mac winced.

"And Discord... well, it's just plain hard to relate to him. I think my sister and some of her friends do fairly well, but... not me."

"You've got t' accept 'em as they are," Mac volunteered. "But Discord is one o' the strange ones, yep."

"Spike is... easier." The prince shrugged, both his forelegs and his wings. "We were friends, if not all that close, before the loops. Now, with both of us married and both of us Twilight's brothers, we're pretty similar. But, at the same time..."

Shining trailed off helplessly. "It's just... not the same. And it shouldn't matter, but it does."

Mac refilled his glass again.

"Well, ah don't know if there's an easy answer fer that one," he said after a moment. "Might just be tiredness, might be whatever. But y'all have a point about th' way ah talk to you... Shining."

Shining gave him a tight smile. "Thank you for making an effort."

\* \* \*

><p>75.2 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Come on, Smaug," Spike called. "You were hatched on the same day as me this loop, this is your birthday as well!"<p>

Smaug's head rose from the bed. "...birth day? Why is this worthy of

commemoration?"

"It's kind of a celebration of the life of the person, as much as anything," Spike replied, frowning. "Being glad that they're a friend, that they're a year older. It's their day."

Spike paused. "Just don't let it go to your head, because if dragons like we are now do that too much then you turn into a huge monster. And that never goes well."

Smaug lay back down on the bed. "I see no reason to get involved."

"You get presents..." Spike reminded him.

A long pause. Then Smaug let out a sigh, and got up. "Oh, very well."

\* \* \*

><p>"Why is there such a tendency for mundanity?" Smaug muttered, looking at the latest present. (Trixie had given him a book about liquid rocket fuels.) "I am sure that I will *eventually* read it, but... they are not precious, not valuable, what worth do they have?"

"They're useful, or just nice to have," Spike tried to explain. "Presents are as important for what they mean as what they are."

"Not convinced..." Smaug replied in a low voice.

They looked up at the sound of nearby hooves.

"Um..." Fluttershy began. "Spike, I'd like you to have this."

She reached into her left saddlebag, and pulled out a wrapped package.

"Thanks!" Spike said, smiling at her, and opened it efficiently with a claw. "Oh, nice!"

He lifted the woollen sweater from the package. "Thanks, 'shy. Did you knit this yourself?"

Fluttershy nodded quickly.

"You're really good at it." Spike turned it around, found the base, and slipped it on. "What do you think?"

"Um... it looks good," Fluttershy volunteered. "But I'm sure that's you, not the sweater..."

"Don't be too hard on yourself," Spike waved a hand. "I mean, it is good. Just, you know, don't overdo it either. This thick is fine for me, 'cause dragons don't overheat... hey, maybe you could do these for everyone for Hearth's Warming?"

"...okay," Fluttershy nodded. "Oh, I had something for Smaug as well."



Another parcel came out of the other saddlebag, and Smaug shredded the paper open.

Unlike Spike's one, it wasn't a sweater. In fact, it was a scarf.

Smaug picked it up carefully, unfolded it, and looked at both sides. The pattern wasn't particularly novel, as such " red scales picked out in gold " but the thing which was really surprising was the sheer length.

"Fluttershy..." Spike said, uncertainly. "That scarf has got to be at least thirty feet long."

"Oh, er..." Fluttershy blushed. "I didn't know how long to do it, so I asked Trixie, and she said 'the longer the better'. Then she winked?" The pegasus pushed her hooves together, wincing. "I'm sorry if it's too long..."

"No..." Smaug said, his voice absent the usual sharpness. "This is fine. My thanks."

Fluttershy smiled, though it still looked a bit nervous. "Uh, that's okay..."

The red dragon wrapped the scarf around his neck several times, letting both ends trail down his back. "I am sure I will grow into it."

\* \* \*

><p>"Er... you <em>do<em> know our loop is only about five years?" Spike asked, after Fluttershy had left.

"I do," Smaug confirmed.

"But... does that mean you're going to keep it? I mean, in your-"

"\_Yes,\_" Smaug replied, in a tone that brooked no further comment.

Wisely, Spike shut up.

\* \* \*

><p>75.6<p>

"So, girls," Nyx asked, hovering a foot or so above the floor. "I had this idea."

"Go on..." Applebloom said, not a little warily.

"Right. Anyway, we should think up evil forms for you all." She smiled apologetically. "'cept for you, of course, Silver."

"Why don't I get an evil form?" Silverfur asked, white-grey furred tail lashing.

"'cause you ain't an alicorn, ah think," Applebloom pointed out. "Besides, foxes are already kinda evil."

"More like tricksters," Diamond Tiara interjected. "Remember, that nice Naruto fellow's got a fox motif."

"He's got a huge fox in his belly, more like," Silverfur corrected.

"Evil forms?" Nyx asked again.

"Oh, right. Sure, sure." Applebloom frowned. "Grinding Gears?"

"Apple Wither?" Scootaloo asked.

"Could work. Ah'll think about it. What about you, Scoots?"

"I would be best as Blackened Tiara," Diamond stated. "And Scootaloo should be Orange Baroness."

"Wrong Note?" Sweetie suggested.

"It's got a good sound to it," Scootaloo agreed.

"No it doesn't, that's the point." Sweetie stuck her tongue out. "Right, good. That was quick. What should our demands be?"

Applebloom reared up on her hind legs. With a double flash, Cookie and then her horn and wings appeared, and her mane transitioned to a complex nest of mehadendrites. "I am Apple Wither, Factory Owner of Darkness! The unpaid overtime shall last for \_as long as regular working hours!\_"

Scootaloo kicked a handy cloud Pansy had just created, producing a roll of thunder.

"Thanks!" Applebloom added brightly, nodding. "That really added to the effect."

"Pleasure." Scootaloo tugged her mane, then started giggling.

"You realize, of course, that under the rule of Blackened Tiara it will be illegal to wear nice-looking jewellery," Diamond said, matching Applebloom's transformation. "No subject is allowed to look nicer than their ruler!"

"And Wrong Note will \_ban\_ any conversation that is not in song!"

"You may think you have had the last laugh," Scootaloo countered, transforming just a hair behind Sweetie Belle. "But the Orange Baroness' army will conquer all below it!"

Silvertail padded over to Nyx. "Is it me, or has this turned into a game of Civilization?"

"It pretty much has, yeah."

"Mwa-ha-ha-haaaaa!" 'Blackened Tiara' laughed.

"No, too breathy," 'Wrong Note' said critically. "If you want it to carry, you need more power behind it."

Nyx looked Silver up and down. "Want to go wait on a cloud till they get it out of their system?"

"...yeah, alright. Do you have a copy of that card game?"

\* \* \*

><p>75.2 continued (TricornKing)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Spike?"<p>

"Yes Smaug?" said the purple dragon.

"Why am I blindfolded? For that matter, why am I still blindfolded?"

Spike quickly removed the blindfold. "Because of this!" he shouted, spreading his arms out to indicate their current location.

Smaug just looked around, taking in Spike and their friends sans Fluttershy and their location. To his surprise, the ponies were all wearing camouflage outfits. "Why are we in a ditch?"

"Because of that!" Trixie shouted, pointing up at the sky. As the others followed her lead, they watched in awe as the dragon migration passed by overhead.

Spike was serving out tea and biscuits, wearing the pink frilly apron that he had from the baseline. He'd been expecting some kind of snarky comment from Smaug about it, but when he didn't hear anything, he turned to his in-loop brother.

Smaug was just standing there, gazing in rapture at the flying dragons above them. There even seemed to be a shimmer of tears in his eyes. Sidling closer to him, Spike said in a whisper, "Reminds you of home, doesn't it?"

"â€|.yes," said Smaug in a faraway voice. "After the War of Wrath, we dragons escaped to the North to live out our lives. Eventually we all separated and went our separate ways, but for a timeâ€|"

The little red dragon turned his head slightly to Spike. "Tell me, what are the dragons here like?"

Spike grimaced a bit. "In the baseline," he whispered back, "I went after the migration to try and figure out who I was. I met a bunch of teenage dragons who at first gave me a hard time for living with ponies, then accepted me when I belly-flopped onto lava." Nodding at Smaug's wince, Spike continued, "They then tried to induct me into their ranks by getting me to smash a defenseless phoenix egg."

"Why? Did the parents attack them or the migration's hatchlings?"

"Nope. They just wanted to smash it because they felt like it."

A look of disgust passed over Smaug's face. "Killing an unborn hatchling for laughsâ€¦vile."

Seeing Spike's raised eyebrow, Smaug quickly added, "There's no sport in killing the unborn. No glory to it."

"Whatever you say Smaug," Spike said as he turned back to his other friends, a small smile on his face.

\* \* \*

><p>75.7<p>

\_Dear Princess Celestia, \_

\_I have recently discovered that the Mare in the Moon is to return shortly.\_

Celestia perused the letter, thinking. Twilight was certainly bright enough to have discovered this... but was it coincidence that it had been so close to the date of Luna's return?

She read on.

\_As such, I have travelled to the moon-\_

The alicorn of the sun started, and scanned back up the letter to make sure she hadn't missed anything.

She hadn't.

\_As such, I have travelled to the moon, blasted Nightmare Moon with a spell Cadence taught me, and have subsequently adopted both her good side and her evil side. (The evil side can be controlled quite easily by cookies.)\_

\_I should be back shortly.\_

\_Your faithful student, \_

\_Twilight.\_

Celestia let the letter fall from her magical grip. "...what?"

\* \* \*

><p>"She's coming," Spike reported, eyes closed in the corner.<p>

"Right," Nyx whispered, and stifled a giggle before putting on a sullen expression. Across from her, Luna â€" about the same size as her dark-side-sister â€" beamed up at Twilight.

"Can I have some more ice cream, Twi?"

"Certainly," Twilight replied, measuring out a large ice cream cone and passing it to the fillified alicorn. Then she measured out a

slightly smaller one and gave it to Nyx.

"No fair!" Nyx said, huffing. "Hers is larger!"

"And impolite little alicorns don't get as much ice cream, do they, Nyx?" Twilight asked.

Nyx crossed her forelegs and pouted. "Humph!"

"Well, if you don't want any..."

The darker-coloured filly looked at Twilight out of the corner of her eye. "Didn't say \_that\_."

"Well, there you go, then." Twilight patiently held out the ice cream, until Nyx took it, humfed again, and started licking it enthusiastically.

Celestia stood in the doorway, jaw dropped.

"Oh, hello, Princess!" Twilight said, turning towards her mentor. "Don't worry, I think I can take care of them."

"Don't like you!" Nyx said, pointing at Celestia. "Not fair!"

"But she's big sis Celestia!" Luna protested. "She's lovely!"

"Well, she... she melts ice cream!" Nyx said with finality.

Luna gasped.

"...but... two... Luna and Nightmare... \_how?\_" Celestia managed.

"It's magic, I don't have to explain it." Twilight shrugged. "Now, Luna, Nyx, say sorry to your sister for trying to take over the world."

"Sorry, sis!" Luna said brightly.

"Nyx?" Twilight pressed after a few seconds, a note of warning in her voice.

"...s'ry." Nyx muttered grudgingly, and went back to her ice cream.

\* \* \*

><p>"What do you think I should do?" Twilight asked her two 'daughters'. (She'd managed to get the adoptions both made legal, at least partly because of one of Ivory's pre-prepared Legal Bamboozlement packs.)<p>

"Um..." Luna hovered up to neck height, wings buzzing frantically, and looked at the exposed Chrysalis. "She tried to ruin a wedding, but I think she's nice really."

Nyx copied her, rising up on Twilight's other side. "She hurt big sis Celestia! Get her!"

"But we can't just do that!" Luna protested. "We have to be nice!"

"Do I get to choose?" Chrysalis asked.

"Nope," both fillies chorused.

Behind Chrysalis, in the distance, there was a bright flash as Spike took a photo of the scene.

When else were they going to get a picture of Twilight with a shoulder angel and a shoulder demon?

\* \* \*

><p>75.2 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"These traps are <em>stupid!<em>" Trixie shouted, firing an explosive spell at the door in front of them. "My worst fear is \_not possible\_, that's \_stupid!\_"

"It showed your worst fear when you tried to open it?" Smaug asked, frowning at the large door. "What did it show?"

"I was alone, on stage, with everyone throwing tomatoes at me, and there was a poster on the back wall saying that explosives no longer functioned," Trixie said, still attacking the door. "It's physically and chemically impossible! I mean, I'm \_good\_ at performing!"

"...you realize that door hasn't changed in the whole time you've been blasting it, right?" Smaug pointed out.

"So?" Trixie shot back. "It's going to give in one day!"

"Oh, let me do it." The juvenile dragon shoved her none-too-gently out of the way, inhaled, and fired a blaze of white-blue fire with shimmering mach diamonds in the middle of the stream.

The world lurched-

\* \* \*

><p>Smaug lay on a great golden hoard. The wealth of an entire civilization at his feet, blazing in the sunlight filtering through holes high up in his lair.<p>

He was the last and greatest of the Dragons of Arda. Most powerful creature in the world, unconquerable, rich beyond the dreams of lesser beings.

Alone.

Unutterably bored.

Ultimately, worthless, because nothing he did from now to the end of days would change anything or be remembered.

Fated to sit atop the wealth of ages, forever.

Forever alone...

\* \* \*

><p>...aug? Smaug?"<p>

Smaug's eyes opened.

There was a hoof prodding his shoulder, and he was face down on the ground. Something was glowing brightly in front of him.

"What..."

"Are you alright?" a voice he recognized as Trixie asked, concerned. "You blew the door up â€" which, by the way, was awesome, I have to Ascend to make that happen â€" and then collapsed."

"I see." Smaug formed a fist, and punched the ground. Then stood, a little shakily. "What now?"

"Uh..." Trixie frowned. "We go through here, there's some stupidly long stairway, and then Sombra shows up. Look, it'll probably be easier if I keep him occupied and you take the Heart, you clearly had a bad reaction to whatever your worst fear was."

"I did not-" Smaug bit off the end of the sentence, growled, and nodded. "You're right. I did. And I hate that."

"Happens to all of us sometimes," Trixie said sympathetically. "I had pretty serious issues with self-worth for a while. Right, we'd better hurry."

As she spoke, her horn glowed. "Fly."

"You could do this all along?" Smaug asked, warning in his voice as they rocketed along.

"We try to give the authentic experience to anyone who's bored," Trixie replied airily. "I hear Sparkle used the ceiling as a slide the first time, you're actually pretty lucky."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, I'm stuck," Trixie said in a bored voice, kicking desultorily at the black crystal cage. "Smaug. You'd better take the Heart. I'll hold him off."<p>

"Your acting needs work," Smaug informed her, picking up the Crystal Heart.

"I'm not exactly trying to win an award here," Trixie informed him primly. "And, for my next performance, I will defeat an evil unicorn without moving!"

A shield sprang up around her.

"That means get going," Trixie added. "Off you go."

Smaug rolled his eyes, turned, and set off.

\* \* \*

><p>A black shape of crystal and smoke headed directly towards the running dragon, turning into King Sombra as it did so.<p>

"Let's see if this works..." Smaug muttered to himself, then energy crackled around his claws and teeth.

He opened his mouth, and the fire that issued forth this time was a lance of purple and white shot through with deep red.

He'd learned how to do this a long time ago in Faerun. It was called 'Rebuking Breath'. The main question was whether this Sombra counted as 'undead'... or close enough, at any rate.

After a moment, the flames died down, and he could see the fruits of his efforts â€" the dark unicorn was suspended in mid-air, conflicting energies roiling across his body.

Smaug decided that probably meant 'close enough', and continued running.

\* \* \*

><p>Since they'd been running fairly close to baseline â€" just having Twilight stay with the fake Heart to protect it, and assigning Trixie and Smaug to the task of carrying the real Heart â€" the celebration and stained-glass window and all that followed were quite familiar to Twilight.<p>

She was impressed with the visitor, though. He'd really improved over his time in Equestria, especially compared to the first time he'd turned up and tried to incinerate the place...

Now, however, the celebrations were done, and they were all back in Ponyville.

"Is that the last of the calamities your Loop has for the unwary?" Smaug asked, sitting heavily down in an armchair.

"Not quite," Twilight replied, shaking her head. "One or two more of the same scale, but if you're all stressed out then Trixie and I can handle those."

"Ask me again nearer the time," the Dragon Dread decided.

"Will do." Twilight nodded, then brightened. "Oh, I was going to tell you. We â€" Trixie, Spike and I, as well as Shining and Cadence â€" wanted to let you have first pick of Sombra's treasury, because you were so instrumental in defeating him.

"...I believe I will decline," he said eventually.

Twilight blinked. "Really?"

"Really," Smaug confirmed. "I believe I have memories enough."



\* \* \*

><p>75.8 (Valentine Meikin)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight wondered what was going on as she noticed two stallions stood, one with a stopwatch, the other with a clipboard, stood waiting for something, after having been interrupted by the sound of a Sonic Rainboom.<p>

"We're testing the myth of that Sonic The Hedgehog IS the fastest thing alive," the one with the stopwatch stated, as he walked over to where his beret had fallen as a familiar blue hedgehog skidded into a furrow in the dirt, Rainbow Dash arriving a split second later.

"Plausible," the one with the clipboard stated, adjusting his glasses. "Without ascension, the hedgehog is slightly faster, but we can't test post-ascension within an atmosphere."

Twilight blinked several times over, wondering why they were doing something like this, noticing now the clipboard had various times and criteria.

"You know how some things say, 'Don't try this at home. Please leave it to the professionals'?" the clipboard holding stallion stated.

"We're professionals," the other stallion stated, then, giving each other a hoof bump, walked off.

\* \* \*

><p>75.9 (Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Having a high-powered arcane practitioner along made for a refreshing change to an otherwise baseline run, concluded Luke Skywalker.<p>

He, Chewbacca, and Scootaloo were tidying up the detention reception area while Twilight had gone to spring Leia from her cell. Seeing the Equestrian anchor in action was enough to make him consider dusting off some of the magical skills he'd picked up from other fusion loops and then allowed to atrophy. "Wrong context magic" Spike had called it when they'd discussed their Force abilities and alternate methods of achieving similar effects. Twilight's magic had proved to be quite versatile and did not leave much of a disturbance in the Force for others to detect. It would be worth deeper consideration when he had time.

It was almost scary how cleanly their intrusion into the detention block had gone. Start with the usual banter with the guard detail, Chewbacca suddenly "breaking free" of his restraints...

And then Twilight emerged from behind the Wookiee and paralyzed all the Imperials with a word and a gesture with her staff. Luke could have performed a similar feat via Force Stasis, but that would have

set off a clearly detectable ripple for Vader to pick up. There was no inconvenient dead imperial slumped on top of the alarm button this time.

Dealing with the remote monitor cameras and automated defense turrets was something of an afterthought.

To prove that he had some crossover loop cred of his own, Chewbacca had rendered one of the stormtrooper guards unconscious with a Vulcan neck pinch. Through his armor. All had agreed that it was suitably impressive.

Returned to the reception area after depositing the Imperials in an unused cell, Luke and Chewbacca heard the tail end of a conversation.

"...not the first time I've seen a late awakening alter someone's appearance," Twilight was saying.

"Yeah. Remind me to tell you about the time a bunch of us were on the Enterprise and Silver Spoon came in late," added Scootaloo.

Luke blinked. Leia had Changed.

Gone were the brown hair and eyes. The familiar twin-bun hairdo was rendered almost unrecognizable by the violet, rose, and pale gold colors that were swirled into the pattern. Her eyes were now a light purple that almost matched Twilight's skin. She was also several centimeters taller.

"Ah. Introductions," blurted Twilight spotting the loop natives. "Chewie, Luke...May I present Her Highness, Princess Mi Amore Cadenza, Co-ruler of the Crystal Empire and my sister-in-law? Cadance...May I present Chewbacca, first mate of the Millennium Falcon, and Luke Skywalker, potential Grand Master of the New Jedi Order? I believe you already know Captain Solo..."

Scootaloo snorted amusement as the three made polite bows toward one another. A beep from her comlink interrupted the ceremonies. "What's up, Sweetie?" asked the pilot.

"Apple Bloom says she'll be finished up here in about five minutes and we'll be relocating. You can trigger the alarm any time after that," reported the protocol droid.

"Oh, fern. All three of them?" Cadance asked Twilight in an undertone.

"Yep. Spike too. He's off taking care of the tractor beam," answered the twi'lek. "Look. I've got my own errand to run. I'll meet you all back at the ship. I've got teleport coordinates for the main compartment if things get hairy," she said as she entered a turbolift.

"Wait. You're deliberately setting off the alarm here?" asked Cadance as the doors closed.

"We need to give Tarkin and Vader a reason to put a homing device on the Falcon," explained Luke.

Cadance paused to consider this. "Oookaaayyy...I think I follow the reasoning. And then we get to play hide-and-seek with the patrols for the next twenty-to-thirty minutes?"

"Pretty much."

"Just to be clear, this is the part where all pretence of sticking to the baseline go down the proverbial garbage chute?"

"Well, we'd like to get off the Death Star first, but yeah."

"Okay." She shuffled in the sleeves of her robe and produced a Minbari collapsible fighting pike and a metal ring about 30 centimetres in diameter.

"Where'd you get that?" asked Scootaloo, indicating the pike.

"Diamond Tiara's not the only one who's done B5 loops. I've also got a phaser rifle and a Hogwarts wand for backup."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight emerged from the turbolift onto the unpopulated cargo level. She looked at the square kilometers of deck space stacked with crates, cases, and containers and suppressed a sigh. Finding the cargo consignments Bloom had indicated would be more of a chore than it first seemed, even with the map downloaded to her datapad.<p>

\_At least I should be able to handle the transmutation magic without going Alicorn\_, she thought, shifting her grip on her staff.

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetie and Apple Bloom were casually making their way to the recharge and monitor station near the <em>Millennium Falcon<em>'s hangar when they were confronted by a harried-looking junior officer. "You! Astromech! Are you familiar with the YT-1300?"

Bloom twittered an affirmative. Sweetie translated, "My counterpart has basic knowledge of all Corellian Engineering Corporation vessels."

"Great! Come with me. I need to get a homing beacon."

They dutifully followed the officer to a hatch that accessed the armory for this group of hangar bays. The officer entered an access code - carefully observed by Sweetie - to open the door and fell to the stun beam from the phaser Apple Bloom had quietly deployed from one of her dome compartments. "Quick. Drag him inside," she beeped.

The protocol droid awkwardly tried to comply. After a few futile seconds, Bloom deployed her tow cable and had Sweetie rig a makeshift harness. "I've told you. This body just isn't built for physical activity," she fretted.

"Never mind that. Kin ya handle collectin' the beacon? And kin I have a word with Clover?"

Performing the best approximation of a shrug her body could manage, Sweetie pulled out the Device containing Starswirl's student and put it on a convenient case of laser focusing lenses. She then went in search of the requested homing device.

"You feelin' up to doin' a little magic, Clover?" asked Apple Bloom.

The Device reconfigured itself into the form of an armored unicorn. "That would depend on what sort of spells you had in mind."

"Just some minor healin' and suggestion, and a few not-so-minor transmutations," started Apple Bloom.

\* \* \*

><p>With a whisper of Force Suggestion, Spike silently ghosted past the two guards and out of the compartment where the third stage tractor beam power regulator override was located. <em>Just what does the Empire have against safety rails?<em> he asked himself idly.

Taking a moment to glance at his chrono, he started to consider how he would spend the next twenty minutes before returning to the \_Falcon\_'s hangar bay. He could sense Vader's presence in that area, and he didn't want to force that encounter until his friends were in position to take advantage of the distraction the show would provide. And, he admitted to himself, it would be nice to have Luke, Twilight, and the others available if things turned ugly.

Spotting an empty break room, he decided to see if there was anything interesting in the refrigeration unit.

\* \* \*

><p>75.10<p>

"Behold, I am Smaug the Red!" the huge red dragon roared. "My voice is the clap of a thunderstorm, and-" he paused. "I do not recall Bilbo Baggins being female."

The hobbit below him smiled uncertainly. "Hello, mister Smaug..."

Smaug crashed back down onto all fours, sending coins flying. "Is that Fluttershy I hear?"

"Well... yes, actually." She waved. "Though I'm Flutter Flagons here. How are you?"

"Fine, fine." He gestured around with his head and one foreleg at the cavernous building. "I've gone into politics, as you can see."

"I can." Fluttershy smiled. "Mister Gandalf was quite confused. He didn't expect you to be Mayor of Laketown."

"The election was interesting..." Smaug allowed, unconsciously stroking the scarf wound around his neck. "I donated about half the hoard to Laketown â€" this is the treasury building â€" and got elected in a landslide. Have you met Sir Bard? He's the deputy

Mayor."

"I have, yes." Fluttershy looked back at the door. "He seems quite a grumpy guts. So, I hope you're doing better these days?"

"Indeed I am." The red dragon lay back down. "I was dubious at first as to whether I could truly find enjoyment in something other than violence or treasure, but your friends back in Equestria convinced me otherwise and it certainly appears to have worked."

"I'm glad to hear it." The hobbit rummaged in her pockets. "Now, what have I got in my pocket..."

"The One Ring, I assume," Smaug replied, rolling his eyes. "Should I destroy it right now? It would presumably save a great deal of trouble..."

"Oh, that's in here as well. But there's something else everyone in Equestria decided you should have." Fluttershy finally found what she was looking for in her Pocket, and withdrew a shining blue crystal about the size of two fists clasped together.

"Is that the Crystal Heart?" Smaug asked, squinting down at it.

"Yes, it is. Twilight went and got the one from your loop in Equestria just before the loop ended â€" we take turns carrying it, just in case one of us runs into you." She looked down at it, then back up at him. "Twilight told me that you didn't want a reward, and that's really very good â€" it shows that you've managed to get control of your own instincts. But consider this a well-done present."

Smaug the Unconquerable smiled. "Well how can I refuse? Thank you, Fluttershy."

"Really, it's no problem at all..." Flutter Flagons reaffirmed, putting the crystal down. "Remember to take it with you by the end of the loop."

"I will," Smaug assured her, touching the scarf again.

Fluttershy caught sight of it and smiled, but let it go. Then she gasped. "Oh, I nearly forgot the other thing I came in for! Where's the Arkenstone, please?"

"Oh, that thing." Smaug shrugged his massive wings. "I left it in the Lonely Mountain with the other half of my gold. They're welcome to it."

"Lovely." Fluttershy reached into her pocket, and flipped the One Ring into the air.

A spear of roaring dragonfire, two inches wide and too bright to look at, caught it at the apex of the throw.

Something shook the earth.

A puddle of molten metal landed on the flagstones with a bubbly hiss.

"Pleasure doing business with you, miss Fluttershy," Smaug rumbled amicably.

"Nice to see you as well, Smaug."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

75.1: Reintroductions. (The alicorns mentioned are Shining, Cadence and Rarity, and Nyx respectively.)

>75.2: A variant of a variant. This is the other half of Smaug's character arc, and another example of why Equestria is a worthy sanctuary. Smaug uses "Rebuking Breath" here.<br>75.3: One of the Loot Items.

>75.4: Agents of P.A.R.T.Y.<br>75.5: Shining's usually pretty much fine with his role. But usually doesn't mean always.

>75.6: Who'd win in a fight between...<br>75.7: Trolllight Sparkle is best parent.

>75.8: In all honesty, who wins that depends on which one's more incited to care.<br>75.9: I sense a disturbance in the Weave. Wait, this isn't Faerun.

>75.10: I'd vote for him. Mind, he had me at "dragon". <p>

## 80. Chapter 80

76.1 (Indalecio)

\* \* \*

><p>Big Mac In Little Gotham<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Mac looked up from the bar he was tending and mused to himself. He was human at the moment, but it was all so very strange how he got there. At times, it seemed like the loops had a sense of humor.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Mac awoke. It was dark, and he riding in some sort of vehicle. It blazed past the city streets, taking the corners and curves with practiced ease.<p>

A deep voice to the left of him spoke. "Good. You're Awake."

Mac turned, a man in a black cape and cowl sat in the drivers seat.

"I knew this was a variant loop from when I first met you. The Graysons aren't usually circus strongmen. I figured it was only a matter of time until you Awoke," Batman responded to the unasked question.

He continued. "First of all. What are your assets?"

"Super strength when I change size."

"That will be useful against Bane."

"Plant growth abilities."

"That's either going to be an asset or liability against Poison Ivy. We'll look into that later."

"Expert on gamma radiation"

"Let me guess. You replaced Dr. Bruce Banner. You weren't kidding about the super strength."

"Bar tending skills."

"That'll make a good cover."

"Diplomacy and observation."

Batman gave a snort. "We'll see about that."

"Any liabilities?"

"Not much combat experience."

"We can fix that."

"I'd rather not," said Mac in a firm voice.

That elicited a pause and grunt. "Fair enough. If nothing else I can use you in a support role."

\* \* \*

><p>76.2 (Hubris Plus)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, well, well... Been a <em>long<em> time since I seen your precious sun-loving faces," the voice boomed from the balcony. An alicorn stallion stepped out of the shadows and sneered down at the frightened ponies below. His pinstripe suit jacket and the fedora perched on his head seemed to drink the light, his grey coat only a shade lighter and the fringe of mane peeking from beneath the hat a deep crimson.

"What have you done with the Chairpony?!" exclaimed Ivory Scroll, the local foremare.

"He's right here, or don't you recognize me?" he asked, raising a hoof to his chest in mock hurt. "Spend a thousand years locked up and suddenly nopony knows who you are."

"I know who you are!" Twilight called out, deciding to play to the Loop's script. It was a lonely loop, but it looked to be an interesting variant, at the very least. "You're Stellar Swindler, the Lunar Larcenist! A thousand years ago you tried to steal the sun, and now you've returned to finish the job!"

"Well, somepony's done their homework," Swindler grinned. A business card levitated out of his front pocket before being flung down to

embed itself in the floor just in front of Twilight. "Get in touch, there's always room for go-getters in my organization. Still, not quite right. Never wanted to steal the sun, just... Hold onto it for a bit, until I got my fair share.

"See, for years my brother taxed day business, while I took the night. Guess who got the short end of that bargain?" He shook his head ruefully. "Not any more. Back then I was just going to collect the whole take until I broke even, but now..." He grinned viciously, "you ponies owe a thousand years in back taxes, and you have 'til sunup to to pay up."

"\_What!?!\_" Rainbow Dash exclaimed. "There's no way we can get that kind of money in the next hour!"

"Oh, there's no rush. See, there's no sunup 'til you pay up!" He cackled uproariously before vanishing with a crack of thunder.

\* \* \*

><p>"-Because the Elements are right here!" Twilight exulted as the shards of glass and steel scattered at her hooves started to glow. The trip through the Everfree had been mostly baseline with a few quirks, though some had been bigger than others, she reminded herself with a glance at the trio of Shadowbolts that had joined the party. And of course there had been that detour she'd snuck off for towards the end...<p>

"Applejack, who literally talked me into jumping off a cliff, represents the element of Convincing!" Glass pieced itself into imitation gems and steel stretched into wire as the cheap jewelry formed around the farmer's neck.

"Fluttershy, who appeared harmless enough that a wounded manticore allowed her to approach, represents the element of Endearment!"

"Pinkie Pie, whose song is still stuck in my head, represents Marketability!"

"Rarity, who convinced a river serpent that her tail would match the other half of his mustache, represents The Sell!"

"And Rainbow Dash, who put on such a show that your Shadowbolts defected to join her, represents Pizazz!"

"That's still only five!" Swindler cried out. "Without the sixth, the Elements of Chicanery are worthless!"

"You're right, Stellar," Twilight said without faltering. "Each of these on their own can only run a few minor scams. It's not until they work together that they reach their full potential. But they are working together, each subtly reacting to the sixth Element..."

"No... **\*\*No!\*\***" Swindler shrieked as Twilight levitated upwards, a crown resolving on her head.

"That's right! I represent the last Element, the one that connects and guides the others! The Element of Scheming!" The six of them rose



into the air, raw power flowing through and around them as the Elements of Chicanery flared to life, energies combining and growing. In an instant their light flashed to blinding levels and-

The Elements shattered like the cheap replicas they were. Swindler stared at them in shock for a moment before letting loose a mocking laugh.

"I should have known my brother's creations would fail at the critical moment! They always do!"

"Huh," Twilight said, nudging a shard of glass with a hoof. "Kinda surprised they lasted that long, really. Oh well, that's why we have backup plans." She opened her saddle bags and levitated out the six gems she'd collected from the Tree of Harmony while Rainbow Dash had wowed the Shadowbolts. It always paid to be prepared.

"Honesty, Kindness, Laughter, Generosity, Loyalty!" she shouted, throwing each Element to its respective Bearer as she rattled off their names before placing the sixth just above her head. "Friendship is magic! Harmony is go! \_Fire!\_"

This time there was no buildup, only an instantaneous release of rainbow light as Twilight leveraged her finely honed mastery of the true Elements to cleanse the wayward brother.

When the light died away it revealed the familiar, if alicorned, yellow form of Flim, his boater drifting down to settle gently on his head as he boggled. A moment later a flash of light in the window resolved itself into the regal form of Flam, Chairpony of the Equestrian Megacorp, his ethereal mustache floating on an unfelt breeze.

"Twilight, I don't know how I'll ever be able to thank for... Oh? What's this?" he asked as he examined the piece of paper Twilight had been telekinetically prodding him with.

"My bill for services rendered, plus hazard pay," she answered. It might have seemed a little mean, but from what her Loop memories told her, alicorns or not they were still Flim and Flam.

"Aha," Flam replied, eyes twinkling with mischief. "What a coincidence, that's \_exactly\_ the same that I charge for using the patented Flamco Elements of Chicanery!"

"Those things?" she asked, nodding towards the heap of broken jewelry. "Flim broke them before I laid a hoof on them, I had to use the Elements of Harmony instead."

"You, ah, got those old things working, did you?" he asked, suddenly nervous.

"Yep, and since I got them from a tree located on unincorporated land, I'm pretty sure they're an untaxable natural resource."

"Sounds about right," Applejack, master of tree tax law, interjected.

"Ah, well..." She could practically see him running sums against the

treasury in his head as his eyes darted about wildly.

"You know, Flam," Flim said, stepping unsteadily up beside his brother. "I hear Zebrica is lovely this time of year."

"Right you are, Flim! Terribly sorry, Twilight, we'll have to settle this later, my brother is in desperate need of recuperation! Goodbyyyyyyyyyyyyy!" he shouted as he turned and bolted out the window, his brother close behind as he flapped frantically to keep up.

"Huh..." Twilight pondered as she reviewed the corporate chain of command. "...I think I'm in charge now..."

\* \* \*

><p>76.1 continued (Indalecio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was a simple job. Run a bar in a bad side of town. Keep my ear to the ground in case any useful information popped up. And then she walked in.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Dr. Pamela Iseley, or Poison Ivy, as she was better known as. He'd read her profile. Her MO was seducing wealthy men and leaving them high and dry. She was sitting at the bar, a potted plant next to her, an amaranth, if his guess wasn't wrong, which was looking unusually healthy and vibrant. More unusual was the owner herself, with her elbows on the bar with head in hands... and she was currently making doe eyes at him.<p>

"Is it hot in here? Or is it just me?" she asked casually.

"I can turn down the thermostat if you'd like, Miss..."

"Rose. Call me Rose."

"Very well. Miss Rose, would you like me to turn down the thermostat?"

She blushed when I mentioned her pseudonym. She paused a for an abnormally long length, just staring at me.

I spoke again. "Miss Rose?"

She jumped. "Would you like me to turn down the thermostat?"

"Oh! No! Maybe if you could just refresh my drink, please?"

\* \* \*

><p>She's now a regular at the bar. I looked over to where she was sitting. She gave a demure little wave. I waved back.<p>

Regardless, she wasn't the last villain to visit.

\* \* \*

><p>76.3 (The One Butcher)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke once again. A hopeful Ping, and... She waited a little longer, maybe they just need a little more time to respond, it's not their fault, they couldn't know, they couldn't possibly know. They probably needed some more time, so she sent a few more Pings.<p>

Spike came to her and frantically waved his arms. "Twilight! I've been looking for you the whole day! Princess Celestia has a mission for you!"

"I'm... a bit busy Spike," she said absentmindedly, pinging again, just in case someone woke up in the last few minutes.

Spike looked her over. She looked terrible. "Did, did you skip lunch? Also... Did you spend the whole day sitting here? Come on, the sun is going down and Celestia wants you to attend the Summer Sun Celebration in Ponyville and make some friends. A little vacation will do you some good."

"Friends... I want to see my friends again... thirteen times Spike... thirteen times I've been alone... Yes, it's time for a vacation." And the sun that was just about to set froze on the horizon. "It's time for a little Me time, yes... It's time for a little... Twilight Time."

\* \* \*

><p>"IS THERE ANYONE, ANYWHERE THAT THINKS TIME HAS REPEAT ITSELF? COME TO ME FOR GREAT PRIZES! I'LL GIVE YOU ANYTHING YOU DESIRE! YOU CAN RULE ALL OF EQUESTRIA! I'D EVEN GLADLY FREE CELESTIA IF YOU WANT!" The Message written on the Moon made a lot of Ponies seek her out. The liars were thrown in the dungeon for a few days, but the nutcases were treated with respect and even got a gold medal and a thousand bits for their bravery in coming forth. She didn't want to discourage anyone who thinks they are going crazy after all. There was a bit of dissent among her followers because the coastal flooding due to the closer Moon forced the evacuation of some cities, but that was crazy. How else could she fit the whole message in a readable size? Her thoughts were cut off when she was suddenly blasted with a rainbow from behind.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke as a foal. She immediately send out a Ping... Well, at least it wasn't a baseline. She was gonna try for another Cutie Mark.<p>

But when the day of the Rainboom came, she completely forgot about it. However with her extremely low spirits and unharmonious mindset there was no surge of power. Twilight was still a Blank Flank... Mhh...

\* \* \*

><p>The very next Summer Sun Celebration Princess Celestia was just

about to step on the stage, when the sun rose behind her without prompting. All the ponies thought it was a joke Celestia pulled when she stared slack jawed at the Sun as if not comprehending how it got there. When she felt for the Magic which raised it, her jaw met the ground. "You! Little filly!" She jumped down into the crowd, spooking her guards. The little purple pony was already walking away. "Did you just raise the sun?" she asked to the confusion of anypony present. That... that has to have been a prank.<p>

"Yeah. I saw you do it last year and wanted to try it myself where I could see your reaction, so I waited until now," the filly said with a bored expression.

"That is a very impressive feat. What would you say if I made you my personal student?" The crowd backed away and some ponies stared at the little filly in awe, but most didn't buy it.

They felt validated when the little filly laughed in Celestia's face, thinking her mask cracked. Oh how they would come to realize the "Truth."

"Ha, as if you could teach me anything! I already know everything." Now it was Celestia's turn to laugh.

"Ah, children. If you know everything, then why don't you have your Cutie Mark yet?" The crowd chuckled along, really who was fooled? A Blank Flank raising the sun?

"Case in Point," the filly said with an air of superiority. "I know exactly how Cutie Marks work. The fact that you have one and think I would want one is a reason why you couldn't possibly teach me anything. Who on Equestria would voluntarily weaken themselves by forcing their Magic into a specialization? If you have no Cutie Mark and have enough focus, everything is your Special Talent. I can do absolutely everything, because my Magic is still free. Come on, I just showed you I can raise the sun, test me. Everything is my Special Talent."

Celestia looked around and liberated a tuba from her band. Twilight played the Equestrian National anthem and then a speedy solo that made the actual tuba player green with envy. Then she gave the filly a violin and a cello as well as a trumpet and a trombone, the filly played each perfectly. She turned a clarinet into a Fluegelhorn, an ancient instrument not seen in hundreds of years, but the filly played even that like a master which studied a lifetime. The filly then turned a mouse into a lion, made it jump through a conjured hoop and vanished a spear Celestia reluctantly threw her way, she then used martial arts to take away another guards spear and fought off a contingent of twenty pegasi guards with it. She build a statue of herself in a heroic pose and drew a Masterpiece worthy of any museum with a paste made of spittle and street dirt. She then vanished in a flash of light and brought back an Ursa Major, its Minor Baby and a Hydra which she taught a little dance number.

If anypony still thought it was a prank, then they stopped when she ascended and made a moving sculpture out of clouds of two unicorns battling each other with real lightning. "You... you can turn into an Alicorn!"

The filly just looked at her like she was stupid and lost her wings.

"Yes. I think I mentioned that to you..."

"What? When?" Celestia stared at her in confusion, her mind thoroughly blown.

"When I told you in no uncertain terms, that I could do absolutely everything," the filly retorted.

Celestia teleported into her statue garden to check, that yes, Discord was still in its statue.

"Say little one... can you get the Mare in the Moon down here and free her from any corrupting influence?" she asked, just in case. She regretted it immediately.

Well, a flash, a short wait and a confused looking Nightmare Moon later, but still pretty soon.

The Mare of Darkness looked around for a bit before grinning in a diabolical fashion. Then she started laughing manically: "Free! Free at last! And now Equestria will feel my wrath and my revenge will be complete!"

Really it was fearsome. Everypony would have ran away in terror, had not the bored-looking purple filly balancing on her back spoiled the mood.

Said filly touched her horn to the back of her head and Nightmare Moon's eyes went wide as she was assaulted by memories of her loving sister.

Corruption melted away and left a weeping Princess of the Night. "Sister... c-can... can you ever forgive me?"

"Absolutely. Motherbucking. Every-URGH!" started the bored filly before being Tacklehugged(TM) by Celestia. "THANK YOU!" she weeped, and nuzzled the filly. Luna looked shocked. Celestia saw and pulled her into The Hug. Twilight couldn't breathe. That was new.

\_I guess it's because instead of planning the whole thing for years it was from Zero-Hope to Luna-Right-There in one morning.\_

"What's your name, little filly?" she finally asked.

"Twi-...light Spar...kle," she ground out.

Celestia let her breathe and lifted her up for the crowd to see, taking wing and holding her up.

"Today we celebrate the nine hundred and ninety first Summer Sun Celebration, the return and recovery of Luna, Princess of the Night, and by my Royal Decree the Coronation of Princess Twilight Sparkle! The Princess of Absolutely Motherbucking Everything!"

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile Spike was sitting in a rock made to look like an egg. He didn't have ANY Magic, not even the tiniest smidgin, so he could only wait and wait until Twilight finally deigned to hatch him or activated the Elements, so he could mooch off of Loyalty. As it was

he didn't even have the Magic to activate it himself...<p>

\* \* \*

><p>76.1 continued (Indalecio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Harvey Dent's voice rasped, likely as a consequence of the burns to half of his face. "All that time I spent as District Attorney."<p>

He took a sip of whiskey, out of one of the two shot glasses in front of him. "Did I really accomplish anything? Sure I sent plenty of criminals to jail and Arkham. But they just then just got out. And then I get worst sunburn ever on half of my face."

Mac thought back to Two-Face's profile, it was chemical burn, but he nodded sympathetically.

"So I decided, if I can't accomplish anything as a good guy, why not try being bad guy? With my knowledge of the criminal underworld, I could become the biggest fish in the pond."

He took another sip, one of a dozens he had that night. Mac really did sympathize. On the one hoof, these people were genuinely crazy, and needed help, but on the other hoof, a small piece at the back of his mind couldn't help but wonder at Gotham City's revolving door justice system. Arkham Asylum was cheap for the city budget. The staff was overworked and sometimes incompetent, his mind wandered back to Harlene Quinzel's case briefly, and their budget was underfunded due to rampant government corruption. This was in addition to the rumors that the place was cursed.

"But the Bat kept interrupting my plans! I can't accomplish anything as a good guy! I can't accomplish anything as bad guy! Do my choices really matter at all?" Harvey promptly collapsed against the bar, sobbing.

\* \* \*

><p>76.4 (LordCirce)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Big Mac tilted his head to look up at where Discord was seated on the ceiling. The dragonequus had walked into the bar, walked up the wall, and conjured a mirror image of the bar on the ceiling, before slumping dejectedly...up...on the countertop. Taking it in stride, Big Mac flipped a mug of one of Berry's "Ascension Standards" upwards, where it landed directly in front of Discord, who began drinking it through an elaborately conjured swirly straw.<p>

"So, what Loop's got yeh so up in the air?"

Discord groaned. "Smash Brothers."

Big Mac blinked. Admittedly, fighting wasn't exactly his forte, but the couple of Loops he had spent in the Smash Brother Universe had been pretty smooth, all things considered. Big Mac nodded with a

thoughtful silence, which encouraged Discord to continue.

"I mean, it's all so, formulaic. Yes, it's funny seeing one of the fighters try to figure out how to walk straight after a Topsy-Turvy Trick, but it gets old when that is all it can do. Even that Final Smash wasn't real chaos. It had 13 effects, and it would only do 1 at a time. And the glow I put off broadcast which it would be! How much more predictable could it get?" Discord sighed before leaning over to lay an arm around Big Mac's shoulders.

Big Mac started upon realizing that at some point he had ended up on a bar stool on the ceiling next to Discord. Below them, Berry giggled and trotted behind the bar to take over while Big Mac was busy with the moping chaos god.

\* \* \*

><p>76.1 continued (Indalecio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Jervis Tetch, the one known as Mad Hatter, sat by the bar. He spoke up suddenly. "Would you like to see a neat trick?"<p>

Mac raised his eyebrow.

"Ah! No, it's nothing bad. Merely...interesting." He lifted a veiled box from its current position at his feet and lifted the curtain. Inside were two mice, one sitting and one standing on either side of a miniaturized bar counter. The sitting one was squeaking and gesturing wildly with his claws, while the other was nodding his head in agreement.

Jervis grinned. "I was right, was I not?"

Mac nodded. "I can't say that wasn't interesting. A mite creepy, but interesting."

Another chuckle from Jervis was cut short, as the door to the bar slammed open suddenly. Waylon Jones, also known as Killer Croc, strode into the bar and up the counter. "Your strongest stuff! Now!" slamming his fist hard on the bar counter.

The mouse cage jumped, nearly causing it to fall off.

"Careful you ruffian! It nearly fell!" cried Jervis.

Croc turned and gave the Hatter a hard look. "Oh that's too bad. What are you going to do about it?"

"Gentlemen. You both know the rules. No fighting in the bar," Mac stated firmly.

Croc turned to Mac. "Oh? As I said, what are you to do about it?"

Mac started to grow, and turn green. As he did so, he said, "Croc, you're beginning to annoy me. You would not like me when I'm annoyed."

Croc visibly paled. He turned to Jervis. "Umm..sorry, Jervis old pal. Don't know what got over me."

\* \* \*

><p>76.5 (Filraen)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Jab. Feint. One-two<em>. Big Macintosh sent another flurry of punches to his shadow while quickly shifting his weight between his two legs for warming up.

It had been a strange loop, the first time Big Mac had looped as those human creatures Ms. Twilight had talked about, and it felt weird walking on two legs and having so little fur. Even less accommodating was the role his pre-Awakening self was doing: just practice for fighting?

But he couldn't remove himself from his pre-Awake life so easily: he was outside his element, not even in Equestria, and even now he hadn't met anypony he could recognize. Add to that the world itself was the most different he could have imagined, being used to the simple life of being a farmer in Ponyville. He was frankly frightened.

\_Li'l quick steps.\_ The rope jumping exercise was one of the most difficult to get the hang on, but after falling a lot of times he had mastered it. He was surprised how much it helped to build balance.

And so Big Macintosh fought. At the beginning he lost badly, specially since he still hadn't managed to be the most stable on legs but the mountain of a human who was King Hippo probably had something to do with it. He almost didn't move but he could block every punch he tried. In the end, he managed to defeat him by using some comment Ms. Twilight told some time ago: humans have modesty on the clothes they wear, specially between their hind legs. It was a little luck King Hippo's shorts were a bit loose so he had to held them from falling off, and completely forgetting his defensive stance when he dropped them.

The abdominal curls were an interesting exercise because Big Macintosh wasn't sure he could do it in his normal pony body; and while he thought doing a few hundreds at a time felt a bit much, he understood his body needed to be in a perfect fit. He was however worried about the fall as he was exercising hanging down, and while he had some idea at how resilient was this body to punches he didn't want to learn how resilient was his body to falling from the second floor.

Still, punching felt awkward. Big Macintosh was much more used to bucking from so many seasons of apple harvesting but he was told it was an illegal move. And even then, he didn't like fighting or hurting anypony else. At least, Big Macintosh realized, the rules of what being allowed or not in fights, or boxing as the humans called it, were strict and not ever were broken. Even the annoying Ayan Ryan, who Big Macintosh thought was going to cheat somewhere in the fight, kept from fighting when he had fell from a hit apart from saying a few taunts.



Big Macintosh didn't like fighting, he didn't want to like fighting, but he respected boxing as a sport even if he didn't want to participate on it after this loop.

Now to the sandbag. Much like the beginning, a combination of quick and strong punches while rotating the sandbag would help the practice.

Not all of the loop was bad, though. He left in silent good terms with Piston Hondo, which helped drive the point home about respecting the opponent and the sport and his own name had gained some notoriety. Not that he wanted the fame but it was the best idea he had about trying to find Ms. Twilight. This world was too big and strange to search alone. But that wasn't the whole reason...

"Quick feet, Mac Baby!"

Doc Louis, his trainer. When Big Macintosh arrived to his world he had the memories of Doc Louis training him, both in the gym and in the field running after his bike and the enormous trust both had on each other. Both his pre-Awake self, Little Mac, and Doc Louis were completely aware of how much the odds were stacked against him when they joined the WVBA and decided to go for the World Class Championship, and they still decided to challenge it. But the most important was...

He felt a hand on his shoulder. "That's enough for today, son. No need to overwork yourself today," said Doc Louis.

Big Macintosh, along with his sisters Applejack and Applebloom, was orphaned young, soon after little Bloom's birth. It had been Granny Smith's job to raise them as well as take care of the farm. Of course, that meant he had to grow up a bit faster to help with the house's chores and raising his littlest sister. It was something that had always been a constant, even after time started looping. And he missed all of them terribly.

However, this loop had given Big Mac something he didn't know he missed: a father figure. He could see how Doc Louis really meant it when he said son, even if his memories told him they weren't blood related. He had to find Ms. Twilight in this huge world, but maybe he could be a bit selfish and take this small pleasure, knowing that after the loop reset he would be back at Sweet Apple Acres with his family...

Big Macintosh's blood ran cold. Was that how Applejack felt? Being so separated from her kin to yearn so hard being with her family again? Probably she even wished he would start Looping, much like he was told lil' Applebloom was. \_An' then Ah hid from her until Ms. Twilight discovered me... Fewmets, Ah need to apologize to ma sister again.\_

But that's for the next time they meet. Now he had to rest to fight the Title Match against Mr. Sandman tomorrow. He would enjoy his foster father this time and would mourn Little Mac, whom Big Macintosh thought he could have just unwillingly stolen his life.

\_Ye may never know me, Li'l Mac, but tomorrow Big Mac will fight for

the Doc's and yer dream.\_

\* \* \*

><p>76.1 continued (Indalecio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Pamela Iseley approached Mac at the close of the bar.<p>

"Mac, I'd like to ask you something," she said. He briefly tensed up, imagining what was coming up next.

"Could you give me a job?"

Mac blinked as his brain rebooted. After a few seconds, he once again found his wits.

"Alright, why do you want one, and in particular why here?"

"I knew you'd ask that. In truth, my name is not Rose, it's Pamela Iseley, but you might know me better as Poison Ivy, though I suspect you know all this already."

"Eyup."

"But in truth, I'm not even really Pamela Iseley, I'm some sort of plant-based clone of her. I found this out recently. It explained why my memories only go back a few years."

Mac raised an eyebrow.

"You have some plant related ability, don't you?"

Mac nodded.

She turned to her side, "Whenever I'm around you I feel happier and more alive. The plants in here," she nodded to a half-dozen plants scattered throughout the bar, "all grow and thrive despite the conditions they're in. I think this is why I was initially attracted to you."

One more she turned to face Mac, "But there's more to that, more to you. All these people with checkered pasts and questionable sanity. They come in, and you listen, and you don't judge them and they feel safe here. I feel safe here. I was originally going to ask if we could start going out, but I can't do that. I'm not Pamela, I'm not even sure who I am anymore. Are her goals my goals? Her thoughts, my thoughts?"

"I don't know. But I don't think I can continue to live the life I've been living. I want to see if I can do things differently. Be more than just a clone of Pamela Iseley."

Mac stood there, taking it all in. He finally responded. "Alright, let's see if we can't teach you to mix a different set of poisons."

\* \* \*

><p>The Bat was perplexed. This didn't happen often, and his experience as a looper meant that it was happening less and less often as time went on, but still...<p>

"Reformed?" he asked.

"Oh yes," the clone who was now calling herself Lily Iseley reiterated. She'd been released from Arkham several months after having turned herself in, and he wasn't sure if he was buying it.

He mulled it over. "I'll be watching you," he said, and vanished.

Honestly, if things continued the way they were, it could wind up almost as bad as that time Nanoha 'befriended' Darkseid...

\* \* \*

><p>76.6 (The One Butcher)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Rainbow?"<p>

"Yes, Twilight?"

"I just realized we never had a real race."

Rainbow looked at her curiously. "What? Surely we raced. We've done absolutely everything."

"No..." Twilight considered. "I mean we had car races, plane races, foot races, all stuff where it's about you having unfamiliar equipment or my superior engineering playing a role, but we never had an honest to goodness race by wing where both of us went all out."

"Well, probably because everyone knew the outcome..." Rainbow said modestly.

For her that is.

Twilight was undeterred however. "Yeah, still. Let's have a real race, both of us as Alicorns, to make it fair, but no Magic. A real all out competition where you give it your all, not you playing with me."

"Sure. Once around the World?"

"Nah, that's boring. Mh... Zecora isn't awake is she? Doesn't matter, she's still pretty knowledgeable, we'll let her plot out a course through all the most dangerous parts of the Everfree for us. I'll need a bit more time to get ready, limber up, become more used to my alicorn form. Let's race Saturday next week at noon!"

\* \* \*

><p>"You... ha... ha... ha... you won..."<p>

Twilight beamed a smile that would make any colt fall in love at two

hundred paces. She couldn't talk of course, she could barely breathe...

"That... that cave..." she gasped, "I couldn't... see a thing in there..."

"Me..." croaked Twilight "neither..."

"You... you... could... navigate it anyway... and... and you knew exactly when those stalactites would fall... you accelerated while they would miss you by inches..."

"L... Luck?" stuttered Twilight between heaves.

"And... And you... knew what that... Ursa Major would do when you shouted "Whoo Hoo!" And... woke its Baby."

"In... stinct?"

"You ducked low before the Hydra was even visible."

"It wasn't exactly... quiet."

"And the fight between the Manticore and the Pack of Timberwolves?"

"..."

"How many times have you asked Unawake Zecora for the most dangerous route through the Everfree forest?"

"Uh... I... lost count?"

"How many times have you raced against my Unawake self and how long have you spend trying to extrapolate a winning strategy against my Awake self?"

"There too."

"Since when did you plan this?"

"Since shortly after you became a Looper."

"..."

"And now that I've beaten all Alicorns and all Loopers and proved that I am the best flyer of all time, I will withdraw from the Alicorn Racing Cycle as undefeated Champion. No rematches."

"WHAT THE..."

\* \* \*

><p>76.7 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight blinked twice.<p>

"...what?"

"Will you marry me?"

The unicorn stared down at Rainbow Dash. "Uh... well. Hrm. You do realize we haven't dated."

"Yeah, so?"

"...and I'm straight."

"You can turn me into a colt, I don't mind."

"...and probably asexual."

"Well, sex isn't everything."

"...and have no interest in romance whatsoever."

Rainbow grinned. \_"Yet."\_

Ever so carefully, Twilight extended a bit of her magic to examine her friend. After a moment, her eyes narrowed. "Trixie put you up to this, didn't she Chrysalis."

Rainbow Dash blinked twice as a blue unicorn removed her invisibility spell with a smug grin. "Told you she wouldn't fall for it. Ten bits!"

\* \* \*

><p>76.8 (LordCirce)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack peeked into the cabin containing Bloomberg. She was rather nervous about this trip out to Appleloosa, and the antics of the others weren't helping things. Pinkie Pie, Rainbow Dash, and that one unicorn Trixie were all playing tricks on each other, and she thought Spike might have joined in. Rarity was complaining about the trip, and Twilight had holed up in her bunk with a stack of books. The only one not causing trouble was Fluttershy, but that was normal.<p>

Sighing, Applejack made her way over to the tree. She checked the covers, inspected the apples to make sure they were all looking healthy, then sat back to read another bedtime story (more to calm herself than anything), when she noticed an odd pattern on the side of the trunk. She leaned in to get a better look. It looked sort of like a butterfly. Then, Bloomberg sneezed.

Applejack froze. Despite what Rarity may have insinuated, she didn't actually expect Bloomberg to talk back or anything. Slowly, she responded. "Bless ya?" There was a shudder that ran through the tree and, with a second sneeze, the tree turned into Fluttershy.

Applejack's mouth fell open. Fluttershy shuffled her feet abashedly. "I'm sorry, Rainbow asked me too, because poor Spike..." Fluttershy's explanation was cut off by the door to the cabin bursting open, and Spike, Pinkie, and RD bursting in, with Pinkie pulling Bloomberg

through the doorway.

"We're back! Celestia had set the tree to the side, so I was able to just grab it. I don't think I lost any apples on...the way...back..." Rainbow Dash's voice trailed off as she spotted Applejack, who was looking back and forth between Fluttershy and Bloomberg, her mouth gaping. "Eh heh heh, Spike did it!" Rainbow Dash shot back through the door way as Pinkie and Fluttershy carefully set Bloomberg back in his place, Pinkie helpfully sliding Applejack to the side and handing her a "Yay, Bloomberg is Back!" cupcake.

"What? Trixie's the one that hit me with the sneezing powder. Hey, don't just run off." Spike quickly ran after Rainbow Dash.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stood next to Trixie as they observed the talks between the Appleloosans and Buffaloes. Behind them, Pinkie was currently tied up to keep her from trying yet another song-and-dance number to fix the mess (she hadn't yet found one that really worked, though Pinkie still insisted the time she got both sides to team up to run them out of town was a success). As Thunderhooves issued his ultimatum, Trixie perked up, her horn glowing slightly, before Twilight stuck out her hoof in front of her.<p>

"No dakka."

Trixie slumped, pouting slightly, as the two sides walked away. Twilight rolled her eyes. "I told you, you get your turn only if negotiations break down completely." Trixie just sulked.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight once again smacked her head as she took shelter under an overturned table. <em>Why did I think letting Trixie loose was a good idea?<em> She was joined in her impromptu fortress by both Chief Thunderhooves and Sheriff Silverstar, and together they watched as yet another round of explosive apple pies hurtled through the air. The property damage was minimal, for Trixie, anyway, and Trixie didn't seem to notice that all of her "targets" had since taken cover from her confectionery barrage.

Sighing to herself, Twilight pulled out a sheet of paper. "While I have both of you here, I have an agreement that should solve both of your problems. I will make the scary unicorn go away if you both sign..."

They ripped the first copy in the brief fight over who got to sign first.

\* \* \*

><p>76.9 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Nurse Redheart, what's the prognosis?" asked Celestia as they walked down the hospital hallway. She arrived immediately when she heard the news.<p>

The female pony walked over to Twilight's bed and looked at her clipboard on the door, "According to these charts...she's...going through her earth pony phase."

Celestia gasped...then blinked in confusion, "Wait, what?"

Redheart set down the clipboard and looked the sun pony in the eyes. "Apparently it has to do with her connection to the Elements of Harmony. Her body is channeling the magic of friendship and she will eventually become an alicorn."

The nurse slid open the door, where Twilight lay in bed, lacking a horn on her head. The purple earth pony waved, "Princess, I'm glad you're here. When this-" lifting up a purple unicorn horn in her hoof, "happened, I freaked out. Thankfully, Spike calmed me down and took me to the hospital to get it checked out."

Redheart smiled at Twilight, "Your horn will grow back in time, Twilight. In a couple weeks, your body will shift to that of a pegasus and finally an alicorn."

Twilight sighed in relief, and then her eyes went wide again, "Oh gosh! Will that make me a princess? What if the other ponies don't like me? Or worse, I make a mistake and end up in a war against the Griffon Empire? Or worse, accidentally release Discord when I try learning how to fly? You won't send me back to magical kindergarten if I mess up, would you Celestia?"

Celestia trotted over to her and nuzzled her head, "I'm not going to make you a princess, Twilight, if you don't want me to. And I would never send you back to magical kindergarten. You're my faithful student, and nothing will change that."

Twilight sighed in relief again. That sweet moment was ended at Redheart clearing her throat. "Princess Celestia, she is not the only case of this. Apparently, the other five element bearers are also going through their alicornification phases. If you would accompany me, they will need to be re-assured that everything is alright too."

\* \* \*

><p>After Celestia had visited all the Element Bearers, she departed from the hospital to rent a room in the local inn. Luna took over for her duties back at Canterlot for the next month, besides raising the sun. Back at the hospital, Nurse Redheart slid the door closed of Twilight's room, and a purple light covered the walls, ensuring no one could hear their conversation. An alicorn Twilight was the first to speak. "Thank you for your assistance, Nurse Redheart. Couldn't have done it without you and Pinkie's replica unicorn horn."<p>

Redheart gave a rueful grin, "It was kind of fun and exhilarating, pranking the princess like that. Maybe one day if I start 'looping' as you put it earlier, we can do this again."

Twilight floated a camera in front of herself and Redheart and gave a big grin as the flash went off, "Will do!"

\* \* \*

><p>76.10 (TheCentauress)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight hated Poison Joak. Hated it with a passion. It  
<span>ALWAYS<span> screwed with her mana-abilities. The current  
situation was a perfect example; her horn was inverting all her  
effects with a half-twist in a random plane.

And the Ursa Minor was approaching town.

"Fluttershy!" she yelled! "BABY! \*\*CUTE BABY!\*\*" Then she  
ducked.

The town was shocked upon seeing the Town Hall-sized Ursa Minor being  
rocked in a cradle made of a rapidly-grown willow, while being fed  
from a long, hollow vine with a gigantic nipple tied to the end. They  
were even more shocked when an actual Ursa Major trotted up a few  
moments later, looked down at the scene then flopped over on its side  
outside the town border and dozed off.

The lavender mare grinned. She loved it when a plan came together.  
Praise the Blue Spruce that \_Fluttershy\_ liked her 'cute and cuddly'  
critters... maybe she could get the pegasus an apprenticeship with  
Hagrid some Loop...

\* \* \*

><p>76.11 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Cadance stopped dead, her ears perking.<p>

"...Honey?" Shining Armor nudged her. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong." The pink alicorn's voice was distant. "But I think  
something might be right. Do you mind if I disappear for a  
bit?"

"Well, I guess not-"

Shining blinked. In a flash of blue magic, Cadance had vanished.  
After a moment, he shook his head. "Probably has something to do with  
that Chrysalis mare that dropped by for the wedding..."

\* \* \*

><p>"A<em>ha!<em>"

Cadance marched forward, pointing a pink hoof at the eight-legged  
stallion. "I knew it! I knew it had to be you!"

"...I'm sorry?"

"Large bursts of love aren't anything new, but love fueling up from  
deep magic?" She grinned. "I thought to myself, it has to be an  
admin, and that meant it had to be an admin familiar with this place.  
And that meant you, most likely."



Sleipnir sighed awkwardly, turning to the anthropomorphic mare sitting across from him. "Sorry about this, Epona, she's... she's a romantic."

"It's not really a problem," his date replied, giving Cadance a small smile and offering a hand. "Hello. I'm Epona, Celtic goddess of steeds and fertility."

"And I'm Mi Amore Cadenza, local goddess of romantic love." The alicorn put a hoof in the offered hand and shook firmly. "Buuuuut you can call me Cadance. It's so nice to meet you!"

"You certainly seem like an eager young demigod. I do approve of you and Shining, you make a nice couple."

"Thanks! So..." The alicorn tilted her head. "How's Sleipnir been treating you?"

Epona smiled. "He's been a perfect gentleman. Or is it gentlestallion around here?"

"Gentlecolt, actually." Cadance smiled to herself as the Odinsteed buried his blushing face in four hooves. "I expected nothing less of him."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

76.1: He's the god damned barman.

>76.2: You just can't get the rulers some loops.<br>76.3: Stir crazy much?

>76.4: Discord is not a fan of competitive balance.<br>76.5: Somewhere early on in Mac's time.

>76.6: Officially the fastest, in 100% of all alicornified races between Twilight Sparkle and Rainbow Dash.<br>76.7: Shape shifter practical jokes.

>76.8: Tree Shape. Also, Trixie is excellent at diplomacy. Really.<br>76.9: It's just a phase they're going through.

>76.10: Poison Joak: like Poison Joke, but differently spelt.<br>76.11: Well, they can hardly go to Eiken for a date.

## 81. Chapter 81

### 77.1

Different loopers had different skills, different specializations, and different patterns.

For Chrysalis â€" Changeling Queen, expert telepath, skilled general psion, mean strategist, and marefriend â€" the most important of the latter was a skill she had cultivated over many years.

No matter what the previous loop had been like, no matter how cataclysmic the circumstances or unexpected the transition, the very first thing she did when she entered a new loop was to automatically lock down any alternate form she was in.

Which was fortunate.

\_Think Fluttershy thoughts...\_ she chanted in the back of her mind. Outwardly, she smiled at the various animal friends she'd been in the middle of feeding.

\_I'm just a nice, slightly cowardly pegasus who lives alone and works with animals. That's me.\_

She scattered some grain for the chickens.

\_Pay no attention to the changeling behind the transformation.\_

One of the crows cawed something purposeful.

\_...buck. I can't speak animal. Right, going by his emotions, he's... leaving.\_

The butter-coloured pegasus waved. "Good luck... if you want it, that is..."

Apparently this was the right choice, as the crow nodded to her before taking wing. He circled the clearing once, and flew off towards the south.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Okay,<em> Chrysalis thought to herself, trying for 'calm'. \_It looks like Angel is fooled. That or he doesn't give a carrot-top, of course.\_

Despite her title, she wasn't \_always\_ Queen, even when she was a changeling. Sometimes she was an elected president. Sometimes she was the Voice of the Changeling Hive.

And sometimes, like this time, she was a passed-over princess, with some form of sibling queen in her place.

\_Right. Taking stock.\_

She was an exile from the changeling hive, for having lost out in the succession. That wasn't exactly great, since if her 'sister' â€" apparently called Metamorphia â€" stuck to the same schedule as Chrysalis herself had done, then things would get quite complicated in two years.

\_What else do I need to know...\_

Paranoia against Changelings was... actually present. That made things worse â€" if this had been otherwise baseline, then she could literally have gone up to Celestia and explained herself.

The plus side (scant as it was) was that there wasn't a 'real' Fluttershy locked in the basement or anything. This loop, it seemed, she had come up with 'Fluttershy' independently.

Chrysalis frowned, shook her head, and decided to just roll with it.

After all, if she managed to keep it up, everything would be fine. Right?

\* \* \*

><p>Apparently S-<em>Twilight<em> wasn't Awake, amazing as that seemed.

Certainly nothing she said indicated anything of the sort, and Chrysalis put all her acting ability into trying to be as \_Fluttershy\_ as possible.

Coordinating the songbirds' song was surprisingly like directing the hive, actually. Music instead of the constant presence of the hive mind, to be sure, but a wrong note still felt the same.

As they came to an end, she smiled nervously. "Um... was that okay?"

"That sounds great!" Twilight replied, smiling. "I think we can check that one off, Spike."

"Good..." Chrysalis said, quietly.

It was \_really\_ strange, seeing Sparkle like this. Her first memories of the purple unicorn were of her... firstly, defeating a well-laid plan of hers. And second, the time which stuck in her memory more than any other, the alicorn of magic who had overturned a thousand years of cruelty in a single day.

Seeing her as a magically adept geek with effectively no experience was... bizarre. Especially from this perspective. And feeling her simple enthusiasm over the Summer Sun celebration was... even more so.

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis had occasionally been in town during the Return Of Nightmare Moon (referred to with the capitals), but usually because she and Trixie had decided to relocate to Ponyville straight off. Loops like that, the dark alicorn got interrupted mid-speech by a bolt of blue magic the size of a tree trunk, as Trixie Lulamoon declared her intent to 'contest' the position of Master of Ceremonies.<p>

Thought of Trixie brought a faint smile to her lips, but Chrysalis shook it off as the Nightmare batted aside a pair of guards. This was genuinely serious stuff.

She listened with half an ear to the speech, having heard it all before â€" but she wanted to catch if there'd been any unanticipated changes to the events of this loop. (That or whoever the anchor was this loop showing up, anyway. Usually they ended up interrupting the Summer Sun celebration, if they hadn't been contacted before then.)

Nothing unusual happened, which was a relief â€" right up until Chrysalis thought past the immediate situation to what would happen next.

She was replacing Fluttershy. The Elements wouldn't work.

\_Well, buck.\_

Okay. Options...

Could Twilight handle Nightmare Moon without the Elements? Yes " if she was Awake.

Trixie? The same answer presented itself.

Discord was a no-no, and if Celestia could sort it all out then she'd have done it already.

What about Cadence? That was less certain. It was hard to tell just how powerful Princess Mi Amore Cadenza was in the baseline, but from what Chrysalis remembered " defeating her in battle that long ago day " it wasn't up to much in direct combat.

Chrysalis swallowed. \_Looks like it's going to have to be me.\_

Fortunately, her pre-awakening time as Fluttershy had given her a respectable reserve of magic, drawn from the love of her animals. She was going to need every bit of it, and all of her looping skill, to pull \_this\_ off.

\* \* \*

><p>The first step was to actually get close to Nightmare Moon.<p>

The Return itself was a bust " by the time she'd started planning, the Nightmare had already left. Which meant she was tagging along with Twilight's expedition.

She'd used the excuse that she had to help them with getting through the Everfree. It was true, as far as it went " she could sense any monsters around, and her loop memories contained a reasonable map of the place " but there was a deeper reason, as well. A debt to be paid.

Twilight Sparkle, and Fluttershy, and Rarity and Pinkie and all the rest of them, had helped her out when she started looping. Back when she was 'young'.

Now \_she\_ was the old, experienced one. And she \_would\_ keep them safe.

\* \* \*

><p>77.2 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?" Rainbow Dash asked after zooming in through the library's window. The unicorn hadn't even had time to properly reorganize the place after her arrival from Canterlot this loop. "Snowflake's been replaced by a looper, and" uhh" it's weird."<p>

The purple mare sighed and nodded. "How weird?"

"Well, she's not used to being a pegasus or flying. We got her to my place before she decided she wasn't going anywhere until someone explained what was going on, and I figured you'd do better than me with this one."

Nodding again, Twilight cast a cloudwalking spell on herself before teleporting the both of them to Dash's cloud flat. There sitting on a puffy couch made of cloud was a regal mare with gossamer wings, her coat an icy blue and her mane a braided silver. On her flank was an intricate snowflake pattern.

"Hello, my name is Twilight Sparkle. I'm the local Anchor here in Equestria." When the mare nodded understanding, she continued.

"What's your name?"

"My name is Elsa and I am very confused."

Twilight grinned.

\* \* \*

><p>After she'd finished her 'welcome to the multiverse' speech, Rainbow having left halfway through to go manage the Summer Sun Celebration while they were busy, Twilight asked, "So, are you your world's Anchor?"<p>

Shaking her head, partially to clear her mind after the information dump, Snowflake- or rather, Elsa, answered, "I do not believe so. My sister's fiancÃ©, Kristoff, is most likely our Anchor. He sometimes speaks of loops where neither myself nor my sister recall the loops. My sister, myself, Kristoff, and we believe his reindeer Sven, all began looping in time simultaneously."

Twilight nodded. "Probably the crash, then."

"The crash?" Elsa tentatively probed.

"I haven't worked it into the speech proper yet because it tends to be very intimidating, especially with how overwhelming everything else is in one's first fused loop. Fairly recently, an entire reality collapsed. The strain on the system led to new loopers in established loops, and new worlds gaining anchors and loopers, to minimize the damage."

"An entire?" Elsa paused, taking a moment to recollect herself. "That is indeed very troubling to hear."

"Don't worry too much," Twilight said, trying to calm the mare down some. "There were extenuating circumstances, and in all my time as an Anchor I've only seen it happen that one time. Both our worlds are safe."

It wasn't much, but hearing that did help to comfort her a bit. "And are there many other loopers and anchors about?"

This had the purple mare laughing "Oh, loads of them! I don't think I've met even half of them, but that's still quite a lot of

po-eopleâ€|\" She caught herself at the last moment. \"I like to think that I'm fairly old and well-versed as far as Anchors go, but there are a lot that've been looping longer than me, and none of us even compare to the first loopers, who're truly ancient compared to the rest.\"

Seeing the goggle-eyed mare in front of her, she giggled. \"Sorry, I'm trying to say that it's a big multiverse out there, and there's no end of new people to meet in the loops.\" Her grin faltered. \"There's also no end of trouble you can get into in the other loops, as well. Some of them are pretty horrible, which is why we decided our loop would be a sanctuary. We do our best to make sure that our loop is as peaceful and pleasant as possible for any looper that needs a vacation. Our loops are usually about five years long, and that's not much compared to some of the longer loops, but we try to help with the time we're given to do so.\" Sensing a segue, she pounced on it. \"So, how long are your loops?\"

\"Between five and ten years, usually,\" Elsa answered. \"The only constant seems to be that they include my coronation somewhere along the line.\"

\"Coronation?\" The unicorn gasped. \"You're a princess?\"

This had the Pegasus grinning. \"I am a \_queen\_. Queen Elsa of Arendelle.\"

Of all the reactions she was expecting, having the unicorn speed in front of her staring intently at her forehead was not on the list. Flinching away from the sudden close proximity, she asked \"Whatâ€| are you doing?\"

Something seemed to snap back into place in the purple mare as she twitched and her eyes widened. \"Oh, sorry. It's not that common that we see royalty from other loops here in Equestria. Most of our 'royals' are alicorns- ponies with both pegasus wings \_and\_ a unicorn's horn.\"

Elsa tilted her head and raised an eyebrow.

\"Sorry, what I meant was that Fused Loops have a tendency to be ironic or humorous with one's role or status or especially their name or job - the pony you're taking the place of this loop is named Snowflake, for instance. Given that's also your cutie-mark.\" She received another blank look and popped off a quick summary. \"It's a magical glyph or symbol on our flanks usually received in adolescence depicting a strong aspect or talent deeply ingrained in us. Magical ponies are magical.\" She showed her own starburst as an example. \"Anyway, yours is a snowflake. I'm going to hazard a guess that means something personal to you?\"

The pegasus' mouth worked soundlessly, even as she glanced down at the ice crystal on her rear that she'd inspected for a time between Dash's exit and return, for a moment before she nodded. \"I was born with a curse - incredible power over ice and snowâ€|\" She paused trying to find a nice way to put the rest.

\"That doesn't sound like much of a curse,\" Twilight hazarded, tentatively.

"I accidentally plunged my kingdom into an eternal winter until I learned to control it," the queen said, deadpan.

Twilight was about to say something, but then shut her mouth with an audible 'click'. "Alright, that sounds more like a curse."

The Pegasus nodded. "It's controlled in part by myself, and in part by my emotions. It's taken several loops of trial and error to fully understand it, but negative emotions like fear and doubt wrest control away from me. I've been solving the issue by blotting them out with love and joy."

"That seems like a terrible solution," Twilight pointed out, worry clear in her voice.

Her concerns were waved away. "It's worked well enough so far, especially with all these loops of practice. I haven't accidentally frozen the entire kingdom in ages." She began to chuckle, but when the unicorn didn't share her mirth she stopped. "It was a joke, dear. I haven't lost control of my powers since myâ€ baseline, was it?" At the mare's nod, she continued with a small grimace. "I'm not adapting to the loops as well as Anna and Kristoff. My sister jumps headlong into everything and her beau can be rather savvy when the urge strikes him, or he has need to be. Sometimes I feel like I'm still the stuffy princess locked away in her room, watching them have fun and play pranks while I manage trade agreements and paperworkâ€" She shook her head and chuckled. "No, I have enough fun when they drag me out to play, too. Maybe I should be the one to prank them next time, thoughâ€ They just seem to be taking this so much better than me." She glanced down shame-faced.

The purple pony scooted over to nudge the queen. "Hey, it's actually pretty impressive that you haven't gone crazy yet. I don't know a single pony that didn't go a little nuts adapting to the loops." She made a show of thinking to herself. "Except Zecora, but I'm keeping a camera handy just in case."

"You've been at this for so long and yet you're still soâ€ chipper about it. How do you manage it?"

"Our universe is approximately 40% Pure Harmony, 25% friendship, 15% love, 10% hijinks, 5% kindness, 4% sugary treats, and like one percent assorted evils, megalomaniacs and in-jokes," Twilight said. A moment passed before her deadpan straight face broke and she snickered, causing the queen to break down in giggles herself.

"So." The unicorn continued, "We've got about five years in a peaceful loop to look forward to. But first we have to make sure you've got the tools to enjoy it properly - since you're a pegasus, that means learning to fly." She gave a tentative smile to the regal mare. "If you think you're up to it?"

A meek smile mirrored back at her. "I think I can manageâ€ but how are you going to-?" A bright flash and suddenly the unicorn in front of her also bore a pair of wings. "â€ah."

"Sorry, I just think you're better off learning the basics from me before Rainbow Dash gets ahold of youâ€"

\* \* \*

><p>77.3 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>'I'm a Princess. Are you a Princess, too?' proclaimed the poster with Celestia's mischievously grinning head on it. Big Mac just stared at the thing. It was stuck to one of the apple trees that he was scheduled to take care of today.<p>

He could practically sense the chaos magic wafting from it, along with the faint scent of cinnamon and sugar. That meant Discord and Pinkie Pie. That, in turn, meant headaches for himself, at the very least.

There were twelve little tabs on the bottom of the poster, grouped in four sets of three; two tabs with a picture of a wing alternating with one that had a picture of a horn.

His adamant reluctance to ascend to an alicorn state was fairly well known by the other loopers. Still, experience had taught him that the best way to take care of a Pinkie and Discord prank is to completely subvert it. His years of earth pony magic mastery should help with that.

\* \* \*

><p>Mac walked into his bar and promptly ignored all the stares, acting as though absolutely nothing at all was wrong.<p>

"Uh, Mac," a wide eyed Berry Punch spoke out tentatively, "I think there's something different about you today."

"Well, I did try to part my mane in a new way. Is that it?" Mac asked with a neutral expression while temporarily putting clean glasses on the four unicorn horns running along the length of his spine like the spikes on some dragons. His seven asymmetrically sprouting pegasus wings flapped gently, including the one placed where a normal unicorn's horn would be.

"No. No, that's not it."

\* \* \*

><p>77.4 (Masterweaver and Wing Zero 032)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight loved to experiment. She was a scientist at heart... well, a scholar, actually, but science was a good part of that. And sometimes, during lonely loops, she would take a little sociological experimentation, mostly consisting of putting ponies in situations they hadn't been in before. Usually it all worked out or, at the least, she was able to repair the damage, and ninety nine point nine five oh three percent of the time she would have had the results on her list of possibilities.<p>

"...Do you, Maud Pie, take the Tree of Harmony to be your lawfully wedded..." Twilight paused. "...spouse?"



And then there were times like these.

Maud Pie nodded. "I do." Loops of experience had taught Twilight to pick up on the slight quaver in her voice that occurred whenever she was excited, as well as the ear flick of glee and the small smile of deep love.

Honestly, she just wanted to see how Maud reacted to the Tree. She'd expected some amazement and maybe the need to restrain Maud from taking a sample...

"And do you, Tree of Harmony, take Maud Pie to be your lawfully wedded bride?" Twilight raised an eyebrow as the Tree pulsed once with light and powerful magic, its crystal vines wrapping around Maud's shoulders. "I'm.. just going to take that as a yes."

An unawake Pinkie dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief. "They just look so happy together...!" The other element bearers agreed, with varying degrees of unease.

"If there's somepony or something that may oppose this union, speak now or remain quiet forever." Suddenly, the huge diamond-shaped boulder known as Tom burst into the cave of Harmony interrupting the ceremony as it slowed down its roll until it stopped nearly in front of Maud.

Everypony was stone-cold frozen by this sudden interruption, they all knew Tom very well, he helped them to defeat Discord by providing heavy artillery, bombardment and cover for them. That and the fact that Rarity had a fling with him during that time, however said fling ended so bad to the point in which Rarity still insist to never speak of it again! Despite the brave attempts of him being her rock during hard times, and even attempting to bringing her a serenade... a rock serenade where she lives with the help of his buddies in the rock band!

There was a time where it looked like he would hit rock-bottom, he felt like a stepping stone and with a heart ground to dust, however they all knew Tom's character is really rock-solid based with well grounded morals and principles. Sure he may have a stone-cold attitude but he has a heart of gold, a temper of steel never taking things for granite even despite sometimes it looks like it, so it was no surprise when he had managed to roll away from his depression and start again, however they never had expected him to take interest for Pinkie's sister Maud, when he saw her, it hit him like a ton of bricks! He fell for her like a rock, she make him roll for her, and tried to woo her with his strength and solidity, but she didn't even bat an eye at him at all, always giving him that look that clearly says: 'You've been friendzoned'. But when she started to see that Tree Of Harmony... he could deal with that, he's made of stern stuff, but when he got the news by Boulder that she was going to marry that tree... That was the pebble that started the landslide!

"Tom, what are you doing here?" Maud asked, nopony could be sure if she was curious or annoyed, it's Maud after all.

"..." The rock said nothing... nothing at least understandable or even audible to normal pony ears (The Pie Family doesn't count!).

"I'm flattered that you think of me that way, but I can't be with you in this way," said Maud in in her apparently permanent rock hard expressions, only Pinkie knew that her sister was taken aback by Tom's declarations.

"..." The rock stood there, not moving one inch, silence ruling all over the cave.

"I know, I really know but we were not meant to be, I love the Tree of Harmony and he loves me back as much as I do, please understand!" Maud replied back at whatever Tom said, apparently this having touched a nerve on the usually stoic mare.

"..." Tom stood his ground once again, the Element Bearers couldn't help but not take their sight or try to interrupt this weird romance drama.

"Stop being stubborn as a rock and please, let me go! If you truly love me, let me go. I know you had your heart broken once, and I may have broke it once again, but trust me. There are other mares that may be interested in you..." said Maud, her hard-rock mask of indifference completely blown to cinders, then she approached to the diamond shaped boulder and slowly caressed one of his top sides as if it were the cheek of his face. "Just between us, but my sister Pinkie finds you attractive, why don't you give it a go, she may be look happy and energetic when surrounded by other ponies, but deep down she's so alone and insecure, she needs something to keep her grounded and stable, she needs someone who be her rock when hardship happens, and I think you, especially you, may be the rock for the job, because I don't trust \_those other friends\_ of hers, specially that Rocky fellow, something's wrong with them." Just as she finished, she give him a good bye kiss on the 'check' and head back to the improvised altar.

"..." A drop of water fell over the diamond-shaped rock, it was weird how it kind of resembled a tear, giving the impression that the rock was completely heartbroken... again.

"Thank you for understanding, and I wish you happiness with whoever you end with, please take care of her," said Maud to the internally crushed rock, sitting there in utter defeat until the pink bridlemaid approached him.

"Come on Tommy, I know it's hard to you to bear with it, but remember, I'm always here for you," Pinkie said to Tom while somehow lifting him like nothing, taking him away from this heart grinding scene.

"Then by the power invested in me by Celestia, I proclaim you mare and... tree." Twilight snapped her book of matrimony shut. "You may now kiss the bride â€" er, if you can?"

It turned out the Tree could kiss Maud, very passionately. Somehow.

Then it turned out that neither Maud or the Tree had much modesty so the element bearers and rock rapidly cleared out to let them have their honeymoon in peace.

\* \* \*

><p>"So... Did we got our Siege Weaponry Cutie Marks?" said Sweetie Belle using a pair of scopes, looking where their projectile went and where it hit, Applebloom still looking at the giant catapult, looking for any failures or damages and Scootaloo still pulling the trigger.<p>

The three of them started trying to look at their flanks, like little puppies chasing their own tails, however it was still as blank as they were since the morning.

"Awww..."

\* \* \*

><p>77.5 (The One Butcher)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight came into Mac's bar carrying a book of ridiculous size, which was, however, dwarfed by her grin.<p>

She was shortly followed by every single Looper in Equestria. Pinkie bounced against the wall and pushed it back, while Discord conjured thirty different Chairs.

"I have called all of you here to tell you about the Loop before last, which was a variant where... well, it's best if I start at the beginning. I thought it was a lonely baseline until Rarity eloped with Big Macintosh." She looked meaningfully at the mare in question. "That has happened before, that's the loops after all, however when Big Mac came to me for advice on dealing with a pregnant mare I knew that there was something fishy going on. Turns out Rarity lied to him to force a wedding, because she thought she was pregnant with Applejack's foal," Twilight looked at some raised hooves, "I didn't want to know and neither do you", the hooves went down, "and then Rainbow punched Applejack for cheating on her and Pinkie was heartbroken because she wanted to get with Rainbow and she and Big Mac comforted each other and Rainbow went after Fluttershy, but Fluttershy was pregnant with Nightmare Moon's foal until it turned out she wasn't and then Discord came back and was reformed instantly when Celestia told him someone revived their stillborn lovechild, which turned out to be Spike, so Discord was eternally grateful to me and became a father to Spike and made him into an adult so he could court Rarity, who in the meantime became a destitute maid working for Blueblood. Meanwhile everyone thought they were pregnant again while I wasn't looking and Applejack came back from the Everfree forest just in time for her own wedding to Rainbow, to reveal she didn't cheat on Rainbow with Rarity, it was her evil twin instead. It turned out to not be a changeling but an actual twin Big Mac and Applebloom knew nothing about."

Everyone but Pinkie was lost in the inaneness.

"After that I stopped paying attention and just made a ton of Photos."

She held up the tome: "I have here pictures of fake pregnancies, evil twins and interrupted weddings between any two of you. That's Four hundred and thirty five only counting the weddings between Loopers.

Every single one of you has also married Prince Blueblood in that Loop. Shining Armor married him twice."

The Book went up in flames.

"And of course I have tons of copies of that tome. I do, now and forever, dominate the Blackmail-Material contest..."

\* \* \*

><p>77.6 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was walking down the street as normal when Pinkie came by walking Gummy.<p>

Gummy however, was slightly larger than normal and sporting full, puffy, and gleefully pink lips.

She paused to process this. "Big lipped... alligator moment?" she asked.

"Big lipped alligator moment," Pinkie replied with a nod.

"Alright then." Twilight nodded, continuing about her day.

Neither of them ever mentioned it again.

\* \* \*

><p>77.7 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...who wrote this?"<p>

"You did." Twilight shrugged. "A nonlooping you, anyway."

"...huh." Sweetie Belle flipped through the script again. "Expansion?"

"Yep."

"...I think I was trying to mimic one of Spear Shaker's comedies and didn't get that it was a comedy."

\* \* \*

><p>77.8 (Crisis, in honour of April 1)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight yawned as she Awoke in her closet at Sugarcube Corner. The evidence around her suggested that it was a bit later in the Loop than normal, but it was hardly the first time that had happened.<p>

According to her Loop memories, she and the other Elements of Harmony had redeemed Trollestia after the Hearth's Warming celebration just

last afternoon and they had plans to hang out together later today.

Twilight grabbed her breadbox and stepped outside, only to nearly be run over by Cheese Sandwich as he shucked by. "Sorry, Twilight!" the unicorn snarled as he skadoodled on his way. Twilight looked around Las Pegasus and noted the incredulously pea soup green sky and the blue sun sneezing down upon the populace backwards as Fleur De Lis approached her.

"Greetings Twilight, my dear heir," she said politely. "How are you this fine chair?"

"I don't think I got enough sleep," Twilight replied wearily. "I'm going back to bed until things start making sense again."

\* \* \*

><p>77.9 (Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"You came in that thing?" asked Cadance as she looked down on the <em>Falcon<em> from the observation gallery. "Huh."

Luke's thoughts took a minor stumble. He was so used to Leia - Awake or not - snarking at Han about his ship that even this minor change brought him up short.

So it was that the appearance of the stormtrooper patrol caught him by surprise.

This was nothing compared with his outright bewilderment when he heard Cadance's ululating battle cry.

"Ailalalalalalalala!"

Cadance's metal ring caromed off a wall to perform an intricate pattern of ricochets between the stormtroopers' helmets and other nearby objects before rebounding to her hand.

{{That was...rather impressive,}} Chewbacca growled over the semi-conscious groans of the patrol, now slumped against bulkheads or prostrate on the deck.

"Totally awesome!" agreed Scootaloo.

"Took me forever to get the hang of this thing," admitted Cadance, twirling the chakram on a fingertip.

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetie led the still-groggy Imperial tech toward the <em>Falcon<em>'s boarding ramp. Apple Bloom brought up the rear with the now-empty homing device case held in her heavy-duty manipulator arm.

"...Hope you feel better soon, sir. The activation and tracking codes for the device are entered on the status panel as per regulations. All you need to do is log them with the comm center. Do you need any

further assistance?" she asked as they left the ship. The astromech extended the case with a helpful twitter.

"No...thank you," said the tech, accepting the container as his dazed expression faded. "Yes. Well. That's done. You can return to your normal duties." He marched toward a bank of turbolifts.

"Thank you, sir. Come along," she gestured to her counterpart, and the two droids made their way to the recharge/monitor station.

Once assured of some privacy, Sweetie triggered her comlink to send the all-clear.

\* \* \*

><p>Darth Vader strode toward the barabel, red lightsaber blade humming. Before he could say anything, Spike casually pre-empted, "Hello, Anakin. You're looking well."<p>

Slightly nonplussed, Vader stopped his advance. "I've been waiting for you Spikey-one. We meet again at last. The circle is now completeâ€|" he began.

"Yeah, yeah. Master...learner...Now you're the master. Who writes your material? You weren't this stuffy during the Clone Wars," commented Spike, idly igniting his own lightsaber.

It wasn't Obi-wan's blue lightsaber from this or any previous loop, nor was it the purple saberstaff he'd built before the Jedi Civil War when he fought at Revan's side.

This was a wedding present. The blade cycled through pink to orange to yellow to blue to violet and back to pink. At the core of the blade was a constant silver-white beam. \_I don't know how or when Pinkie found the time to have this made, but it's a magnificent gift.\_

The Sith Lord actually took a half-step backward when he saw the scintillating blade. Rallying, he made a cut toward Spike's head that was easily turned aside. Spike's riposte was similarly warded off. A series of probing attacks from each ended with Spike retreating toward the hangar bay door, just as he wanted.

"Your powers are weak, old man," taunted Vader.

Spike barked a laugh in response. "In your dreams. I'm probably supposed to say something about if you strike me down, I'll become more powerful than you can imagine. But I'm already there." He flicked his left wrist and a second lightsaber appeared, igniting with a green blade. He used Vader's moment of surprise to apply a touch of growth magic to himself and shifted to two-and-a-half meters in height with proportional increase in body mass. He was also visibly more draconic in appearance.

Darth Vader was clearly having a bad feeling about all this.

Trying to shake off his surprise, he launched into a flurry of attacks, but Spike's defenses were more than up to the challenge.

The significant disadvantage of dual lightsaber technique is the supposed inability of a blade held in one hand to resist a heavy blow from an opponent using a single blade in a two-handed grip.

Spike's greater bulk and raw strength belied that notion.

The power of the Sith Lord's two-handed strikes were countered by the large reptilian's own amplified strength. The need to stay aware of the Jedi's second lightsaber which lashed out from unexpected angles quickly put Vader on the defensive.

Spotting the rest of the party making their run for the Falcon, Spike ostentatiously caught Vader's blade in a bind and sent it flying with a slice through both wrists. A short burst of intense green flame from his mouth caught the falling weapon, making it vanish in a puff of smoke and a shower of sparkles.

"I am truly sorry I had to do that, Anakin. I don't want to hurt you any more. Please believe me. I won't tell you to break free of the Palpatine's influence, because you already know, deep down, that's what you need to do to find peace for yourself."

Leaving the Dark Lord of the Sith staring at the smoking machinery of his wrists, Spike started walking toward the Millennium Falcon.  
"The Force will be with you, Anakin, if you allow it."

The squad of stormtroopers blocking his path raised their weapons. He raised an eyeridge in response. "Seriously? Were you paying any attention to the past few minutes?"

The leader's voice filtered through the helmet. "Fire!"

The squad was scattered around the hangar bay to be pinned against the bulkheads by the combined efforts of three Jedi masters. The single blaster bolt that ventured near the dragon was contemptuously swatted into the deck.

Joining his companions at the foot of the boarding ramp, he restored himself to his previous size and shape, nodding thanks to Luke and Twilight. He turned to examine Cadance. "No offense, but I don't think that look works for you."

The princess shrugged. "We couldn't find a salon or stylist anywhere in this place. What's a mare to do?"

"Perhaps it's time we left?" suggested Luke.

\* \* \*

><p>77.1 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis quickly found herself cursing Fluttershy's timid nature  
â€" one she had to live up to.<p>

She had only her pre-awakening self to blame, of course. Her logic had been that a recluse was much less likely to slip and give herself away â€" so timid, self-effacing and quiet she had been.

And now, now that she was heading into a forest that was quite possibly cursed to confront a being as powerful as herself " if not more so " with five reasonably skilled but inexperienced ponies by her side... she was handicapped by her own pre-awake preferences. She couldn't give orders, letting them use their skills to the best advantage. She couldn't fly at the front of the group, at least making sure that she would be the first to encounter danger.

And she certainly couldn't fly up into the air to scout out the forest. Which led to \_this\_ mess.

"Sorry..." she said, wincing. "I think we took a wrong turn."

"It's nothin'," Applejack assured her, appraising the cliff they were at the top of. "We kin just find a way around. Looks like-

The disguised changeling sensed something malicious, moving very quickly towards them. She turned towards the source-

There was a crack-\_boom\_ noise, and the ground fell away beneath them.

Chrysalis leapt for the air on instinct, before she could even \_think\_ about maintaining her assumed persona, and breathed a sign of relief when no flare of surprise-suspicion followed. Then she saw that Twilight had just been convinced to let go of Applejack, and caught by Rainbow Dash.

She'd been too busy panicking to help.

\_Some protector I am.\_

Landing gently on butter-coloured wings, she shook her head. \_I'll do better this time.\_

\* \* \*

><p>There was a snarl, and a manticore pounced on the group.<p>

Chrysalis skipped back out of the way, then concentrated. \_What is it that Fluttershy does times like this... right.\_

She looked directly at the manticore, and drew in a breath. At the same time, she carefully measured out some of her hoarded power from before Awakening, and shaped a strong mental suggestion.

\_ "\_\_Stop! Sit! Bad manticore!" \_

Her voice bounced off the nearby trees, making not just the manticore but all five ponies freeze exactly where they were.

She walked closer, still keeping up the \_Suggestion.\_ The animal was enraged, but beneath that there was something else... pain.

The tricky thing was that she had no idea where the pain was coming \_from\_. And that \_Suggestion\_ wouldn't hold for long, whereas she had no desire to hold a pained animal in place or simply disable it, leaving it to suffer.



The easiest and least cruel solution was to- \_"Sleep."\_

With a yawn and a thud, the manticore fell over and began snoring.

Time pressure gone, Chrysalis looked for anything obvious that might be causing the pain. It didn't take long to find it â€" a wicked-looking thorn that seemed to throb with malice.

"That was awesome!" Rainbow Dash enthused.

"Oh, er..." Chrysalis turned, letting her mane flop over one eye and discarding the thorn. "It was nothing."

The others were giving her looks that ranged from scared to bewildered. Thinking back, she \_had\_ just shouted down a manticore...

\* \* \*

><p>As they finally reached the room with the Elements in, Chrysalis was almost seething at her own inability to contribute.<p>

The next thing they'd run into had been a grove of trees enchanted to cause fear. With her empathic senses fully open and straining to detect her foe, Chrysalis had been rendered almost unconscious by the powerful artificial emotion, and hadn't even recovered by the time Pinkie dispelled it with an expert heartsong.

That had been... humiliating. She was supposed to be a ruler. Supposed to be \_keeping these ponies safe.\_ But she'd been reduced to a heap on the floor by a parlour trick.

The river serpent had been a little more like what she was ready for, but it hadn't even developed into a fight. Rarity had defused the situation in moments, leaving the Changeling Queen impressed but confused.

And as for the bridge... there had definitely been \_something\_ in the mist, but despite the knowledge that Rainbow Dash might be in danger, Chrysalis had been unable to justify leaving the others defenceless. It wouldn't do any good to go and help Dash if doing so had allowed Nightmare Moon to attack â€" possibly even kill â€" Twilight, Applejack, Rarity and Pinkie.

But here they were, and Nightmare Moon was â€" if Chrysalis had all this right â€" just about to turn up. As subtly as possible, she began to ready herself for the fight.

As soon as her opponent was a viable target, she would have to drop her shapeshift. That should earn her at least a moments' distraction, letting her achieve an alpha-strike â€" a wave of magical energy as powerful as she could make it â€" and then set up a shield to convert Dark attacks into something more usable.

What happened then was... uncertain. But she'd have as good a chance as she could manage. And, hopefully, she could try and pierce the layers of mental transformation to free Luna. Somehow.

\_I hate working from rumors and half-truths and stories told by drunk

fellow loopers about how they beat up Nightmare Moon!\_

\_I miss the hive.\_

Chrysalis bit her lip. \_I miss Trixie.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Infuriatingly (the kind of infuriation which made her double-check that she wasn't starting to exert empathic influence on the ponies around her) Nightmare Moon didn't even attack as a solid. Instead, she poured into the chamber as a cloud of dust, congealed around Twilight " who was too focused on her task to notice " and vanished in a teleport.<p>

"Twilight!"

"Where'd she go?" Applejack asked, looking around. "Darn it!"

"This way," Chrysalis replied, half her focus on tracking the mental 'glows' of the unicorn and alicorn. "Follow me."

That got her some strange looks, but she barely noticed. Nightmare Moon \_had\_ to be solid by now.

\* \* \*

><p>As they cantered into the room, Chrysalis saw a pile of glittering jewel-dust remnants lying around Twilight.<p>

The unicorn was finishing some kind of speech. "...my friends!"

She made a gesture, which took in all five of them. Chrysalis didn't pay any attention, intent on the precise moment she would drop her shift and attack. Just a moment's surprise or inattention on the Nightmare's part would be sufficient...

"Applejack, who told me I was safe and got through my panic, represents the Element of Honesty! Fluttershy, who guided us through the forest and calmed the Manticore, represents the Element of Kindness! Pinkie-"

Chrysalis' concentration fell apart in tatters, as she noticed that one of the streams of jewel-dust was orbiting her. \_But... I'm not Fluttershy. How...\_

A soothing warmth began to build around her. With a flash of green light, the gems coalesced into a silvery necklace with an emerald heart-device.

Then everything went rainbow.

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis stirred. "What... what just..."<p>

She saw Twilight looking at her. The purple unicorn had her Magic tiara neatly atop her head, but seemed more interested in her than in the unconscious and cured Princess Luna on the other side of the room. She was also ignoring the four still-asleep members of the

Elements, lying to either side.

"What is it?" Chrysalis asked, looking down â€" and her heart nearly stopped.

Black chitin. Hooves with holes in them.

Her shapeshift had dropped.

"I swear, this isn't what..." she began, nervously, then sighed.  
"Okay, that's just a flat lie. It is what it looks like."

Twilight gave her a closer look, focusing particularly on her Element. "Huh. This hasn't happened before..."

Chrysalis blinked. "I did not expect that... reaction..."

Twilight's emotions were confused/interested/melancholy? Why would she be...

"...oh, you have got to be kidding me." Chrysalis closed her eyes, counted to three, then opened them again. "You're Awake, aren't you."

An explosion of shock/surprise/relief greeted that statement.  
"You're Awake?" Twilight asked, carefully. "Have we both been playing along with our in-loop roles?"

"Looks like." Chrysalis shook her head.

"We just spent the last day or so repeatedly missing one another, didn't we." Twilight let out a sigh, then a chuckle. "That would have made things a lot simpler..."

"You're telling me. I spent the whole time here trying to keep you lot safe, and now it turns out I might as well not have bothered."

Twilight frowned. "No, it was worthwhile. Just because it wasn't necessary doesn't mean it was a bad idea."

"Sure, sure." Chrysalis peered at Twilight again, noting that the unicorn had a sense of deliberation about her thoughts â€" clearly choosing her words carefully. "Did you only just Awaken?"

"No, same time as usual." Twilight looked confused for a moment, then her face brightened in realization. "Oh, I see. You're confused because... no, I was going along with the baseline. I had plans to troll Discord, see, and if I'm going to do that I have to be pretty much baseline until then. It's why I did a ping â€" did you miss it?" Twilight shrugged. "That said, I'm not surprised that you couldn't tell I was Awake, I'm a very good actor by now."

"Apparently," Chrysalis muttered. "I must have missed the ping, I was kind of panicking when I Awoke."

"To be honest, I thought you â€" well, Fluttershy, or whatever, was some kind of variant with more anger issues. A lot of anger issues."

The unicorn mare tossed her head, grinning. "I was doubly interested in how it'd play out if you â€" er, she â€" had the same encounter with Discord as normal." As she spoke, Twilight trotted over to the recumbent Princess Luna â€" stepping carefully over an unconscious Rarity - and cast a diagnostic spell. "Same as usual. Always good to check."

"Right. I think." The Changeling... well, Princess... rubbed her forehead, then tapped her new item of jewellery. It clinked. "So how come I've got... this?"

Twilight turned back to her, beaming. "Well, you were taking Fluttershy's place, you did handle the Manticore â€" and if I heard you right, you were also planning on keeping all of us safe."

"I wasn't doing very well," Chrysalis castigated herself. "I did have a vague plan to cure Luna â€" somehow â€" but... no, it wasn't anything like a proper plan. I was just going to try and help her, though... because if I didn't, what chance was there left?"

"Right." Twilight nodded. "Thinking of the others â€" even Luna â€" before yourself... working to reduce suffering, and focusing on the problems that can be solved first... it might not be quite like Fluttershy does it, but you've earned an Element of Kindness. Congratulations."

"Seriously?" Chrysalis looked down at the necklace, noting how it fit her current form rather better than it did 'Fluttershy'. "I... yeah, wow."

"I know." The bearer of Magic trotted over and laid a hoof on her shoulder. "It's a lot to take in. But you do deserve it, Chrysalis."

With a bright flash of sunlight, Princess Celestia materialized in one corner of the room. "My faithful student! Good â€" wait, is that a Changeling?"

Twilight looked over at Celestia. "Yes."

Celestia blinked. "...okay, er... why is there a changeling in here?"

"She's the Element of Kindness," Twilight replied matter-of-factly.

"...right."

Chrysalis couldn't help but snigger.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

77.1: The kindness involved in making difficult decisions for the good of the many. Also, not an insignificant concern, proof for Chrysalis that she's doing the right thing.

>77.2: Chill out. (sorry.)<br>77.3: Prank the prankers.

>77.4: I'd say this was the world of soap operas...<br>77.5: but THIS

was the world of soap operas. They were also all dying of a mysterious disease at various points.  
>77.6: No comment.<br>77.7: What light through yonder broken window?

>77.8: This originated from Mad Libs.<br>77.9: The other half of this week's Galactic Civil War segment. (Note: Cadence may have been a certain Warrior Princess at some point...)

## 82. Chapter 82

### 78.1

"Wunderbar!" Photo Finish gushed. "She 'az the poize, the... ow you say... Ä@lan, that marks a true model, a star!"

"Isn't Ä@lan a Griffish word anyway?" Dash muttered to Twilight.

Twilight nodded to her. "Yep."

"Oh, er... I'm glad you think so," the butter-coloured pegasus said with a smile.

"Alas, that you 'ave only one coat unt only one mane! I am sure fraulein Rarity has a truly expansive wardrobe for the photographing, ja?"

"Well, I do," Rarity said, slowly. "But... I'm not sure if it's my place to..."

"Oh, don't worry." With a flash of green fire, Chrysalis turned her coat a dusky red. "What about this for the autumn range?"

Photo Finish stood stock still for a few seconds. Then shook her head. "I go!" And ran off.

"Oh, dear," Rarity winced. "Are you sure that was wise, er, Chrysalis?"

The current Element of Kindness shrugged. "Whatever else she was, she wasn't afraid. In fact-"

With a blur of motion, Photo Finish skidded back into view with three large cameras. "Oh, this will be ausgezeichnet! Can you do the, the horn as well?"

Chrysalis nodded. "Yep."

"Marvellous!"

\* \* \*

><p>"That was an awful risk you took for me," Rarity started, some hours later. (Photography was over for the day, but Finish had insisted on coming back for at least the next two weeks to sample <em>everything</em> in Rarity's wardrobes.) "I mean, I'm grateful, of course I am, but..."

Chrysalis shook her head, flashing back to her base-form for the

loop. "Seriously, Rarity, it isn't a problem at all. I may be nervous around cameras, but I can do this for you. We're friends, after all," she added in a tone of slight wonderment.

"Well, yes," Rarity admitted. "But-"

"No, really." Chrysalis' mouth quirked up at the corners. "Hay, maybe I could see if we can get you in a few of the shoots?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Smoothly done," Twilight complimented her later that night.<p>

"Thanks." Chrysalis dispelled her shapeshift, and examined her silver-and-green Kindness element. "I'm still coming to terms with this thing. Not sure I've got the hang of it yet."

"You're doing fine," Twilight assured her. "If you need help or advice, just ask."

\* \* \*

><p>78.2 (The One Butcher)<p>

Spike found a diary.

He wasn't Awake, so he couldn't resist. He opened the last written page.

It was old and yellowed and full of of protection spells As far as he could see it was an ancient Book, easily measuring it's age in the thousands of years, still the last entry's ink was fresh.

"Attempt 1528 Lyra during the Discord Award Ceremony.

>Suggestions: Remove Lyra with influenza. Engage Bonbon to silence Lyra some way(more elegant, but will take more loops. Preferred method, because it's nicer and I will take lots of tries anyway.)"<p>

\_\_What?\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>78.3 (The One Butcher)<p>

Maud took Pinkie aside. "Pinkie, I really have to ask. Why is your friend Twilight Sparkle wearing a giant chicken suit?"

Pinkie looked mightily sheepish.("No offense Woolma." "None taken.") "Well, actually I never asked."

"You never asked? Does this mean she often wears a giant chicken suit?"

"Well, actually she ALWAYS wears a giant chicken suit." Maud Pie looked at Pinkie in absolute disbelief. Pinkie never saw her that astonished. Her left eyebrow rose four hundred micrometers.

"Pinkie, that is strange, even for you. I will ask." really, she never asked?

Maud walked over to Twilight and asked: "Why are..." was as far as she came before Rainbow Dash snapped her up and flew away.

The Elements minus Twilight assembled around Maud. Rarity began. "Maud, dear, we do NOT ask Twilight about the chicken suit."

Maud's eyebrow shot up another twenty  $\frac{1}{4}$ ms: "Why?" She asked exasperatedly. Not that anyone noticed.

"Believe us, we tried. We tried asking for years, but it never worked out and only got more and more awkward and dangerous." Applejack explained.

Maud was speechless. Almost: "Dangerous?"

"Because", Rainbow started, "every time we so much as try to ask her something extremely awkward or terrible happened. The very first time someone tried to ask her Princess Celestia was kidnapped and her crazed sister tried to kill everypony by bringing about eternal night. After we defeated her without asking about the chicken suit it was really awkward to bring it up. When I finally ponied up and went to ask her a stampede was coming right at the town and only narrowly averted. When Pinkie tried to ask next, another stampede, \_this time made of bunnies\_ devastated the town. Then an outsider tried to ask about it and a huge glowy bear rampaged through town. When my friend, a griffon, came to town and was about to ask a huge red Dragon came storming into Ponyville, demanding we give him his hoard back. A Zebra nearly managed to get the words out and we all ended up being poisoned. Then Parasprites invaded the town, the next time diamond dogs kidnapped somepony. Finally at the Grand Galloping Gala a mare exclaimed her outrage when she saw Twilight wearing a beautiful dress over her chicken suit. Before she could say the word "chicken" however an animal stampede ripped the Gala apart and Discord broke free of his prison."

Fluttershy put in her two cents: "Since then we tried to run interference and apart from one incident with Spike destroying half the town when Cheerilee couldn't contain her curiosity our lives have gotten a lot quieter."

Pinkie took Maud's head in her hooves. "So please sis, don't ask."

Madness. Still Pinkie Pie was seldom so serious. "Cross my heart and hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye."

\* \* \*

><p>It had been so long. They had to know. They took Twilight to a remote location and secured it against EVERYTHING.<p>

"Twilight,", The Elements spoke, "why are you wearing a Giant Chicken Suit?"

\* \* \*

><p>The world ended.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>78.1 continued (earlier)<p>

"Can any pony match Trixie's skill?" Trixie Lulamoon asked, laughing. "\_Anything\_ you can do, I can do better!"

"I can," a pale pegasus volunteered.

"Ah, a new challenger!" Trixie announced. "What are you called?"

"Fluttershy," the pegasus replied, and took a fluttering hop up onto the stage. "And I... I'm psychic. I can tell what ponies are thinking."

"Oh, \_really?\_" Trixie nodded to herself. "Well, then, what am I thinking?"

"That I'm making it up," Fluttershy said promptly. "Well, now, shock, and an undercurrent of fear... and you're wondering how I'm doing it. No, it's not that way, I really am psychic. That moon-and-star blanket of yours looks cute, by the way."

Trixie flushed. "H-how did you know about that!?"

The pegasus tapped her forehead. "I \_said\_ I was psychic."

The unicorn shook her head, pulling herself together. "Well, Trixie is impressed. But she can tell exactly what you are thinking without even looking!"

There was a loud bang, as a delayed-action fireworks spell triggered.

"You're startled!" Trixie said quickly.

Fluttershy smoothed her ruffled feathers. "That wasn't very nice... okay, I'm going to make a prediction, and then I'll go."

She passed over a piece of paper. "This prediction will come true later."

As the pegasus left the stage, Trixie curiously unfolded the paper.

\_You will be at the Corner Cafe, the one run by Cozy Corner, at seven fifteen this evening.\_

My treat.

Trixie blinked, and felt her eyes widen. Then she hastily swept off her hat and stuffed the paper into it. "Aherm. Now, where was Trixie?"

"On stage!" a pink pony said brightly.

"Thank you," she replied absently.



\* \* \*

><p>"So..." Trixie said, awkwardly. "Why did you invite Trixie to dinner?"<p>

The pegasus sitting across the table from her nibbled on a breadstick. "I like what I feel of you."

"...that's not cryptic at all," Trixie replied, picking up a stick of celery. "Why is this red?"

"Oh, they put it in flavoured water," Fluttershy replied. "The water goes up the capillaries. Try it."

Trixie did so, crunching off the end of the stick. Her eyes widened. "This is \_great!\_"

"I thought you'd like it," her companion replied.

"More of your psychic powers?" Trixie asked, chewing.

"I knew as if I'd seen you eat here before."

"Well... thanks." Trixie swallowed. "I don't always have the chance to eat a good meal, out on the road."

"I know." Fluttershy nodded.

Trixie chuckled. "You seem to know everything about Trixie."

"Most things."

There was a clatter of hooves outside.

"Miss Trixie!" two young voices said, on top of one another.

Trixie turned. "Oh, Trixie's fans. What is it?"

"We awoke an Ursa," Snips said.

"So you can banish it!" Snails continued.

"And show how great you really are!" they finished together.

Trixie blanched.

Fluttershy got up from the table, and stepped around to face the colts. "That was a very bad idea! That poor Ursa â€" imagine how you would feel if someone woke \_you\_ up from a sleep just to get beaten up!"

"But..." Trixie said, distantly. "I... I can't-"

Fluttershy turned to her, and gave her an encouraging smile. "Don't worry. I'll deal with it â€" but I'll need your help."

\* \* \*

><p><em>I seriously hope this works,<em> Chrysalis thought to herself.

As the young star-beast entered town, growling, she stepped forward and focused. \_"Stop!"\_

The Ursa ground to a halt, gaze fixed on her, and roared.

"I know you're scared," she added in a soothing voice. "Those silly colts woke you up, didn't they? But they're gone now. You just need to calm down, and \_Sleep\_. Go back to \_Sleep.\_"

The threatening growls gave way to confused, drowsy rumblings.

"That's right, no-pony here wants to hurt you," she said, preparing a fourth Suggestion spell. "Just \_Go Back To Sleep\_, and you'll be home in a jiffy."

The last rumble turned into a snore, and the Ursa's eyes closed. Then it slowly began to fall forwards.

Chrysalis turned to Trixie. "Catch it â€" quick!"

Trixie's horn flashed into light, and a matching blue glow caught the Ursa before it hit the ground. "There!"

"Good work," Chrysalis said. "Now, we need to get him back to his mother."

"Mother?" several ponies repeated.

"Quietly!" Chrysalis hissed. "He's only asleep, remember? Now, come on. I can't carry him, Trixie â€" can you lift this much weight for that long?"

Trixie frowned. "I can try."

"Good. Follow me."

\* \* \*

><p>"Nicely done," Twilight said the next morning. "Did you-<p>

"Yes, she knows I'm a Changeling," Chrysalis replied. "'I told her on the way back. She took it well, actually. And I told her to keep in touch."

"You know that, if she doesn't ultimately love you, it's not the looping her..." Twilight checked.

"Of course I do, I'm not a fool." Chrysalis looked down. "But if she \_can\_... or even if I give her a happier life... then I should try."

\* \* \*

><p>78.4 (TheEyes)<p>

Nurse Redheart walked over to Twilight's bed and looked at her clipboard on the door, "According to these charts...she's...going

through her Changeling phase."

Princess Celestia gasped...then blinked in confusion, "Wait, WHAT?"

Redheart set down the clipboard and looked the sun pony in the eyes, "Apparently it has to do with her connection to the Elements of Harmony. Her body is channeling the magic of friendship and she will eventually Ascend... after cycling through every sentient species on Equestria."

The nurse slid open the door, where Twilight lay in bed. About the only thing recognizable about her was her mane, with its familiar purple-and-pink-highlights, the rest of her was covered in black chitinous plates. The apparently-a-Changeling-now waved.

Celestia waved back, her ethereal mane looking uncharacteristically ruffled. "...what?"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked down at her purple dragon body. "Huh. Well, on the plus side, I guess I can do more hands-on research into postal magic."<p>

Celestia winced as a lean, rainbow-colored dragon sped through the sky, blowing up clouds with bursts of fire breath. \_Perhaps now would be a good time to reconsider the brandy content of my morning tea.\_ She glanced towards Sugarcube Corner, where a pink dragon was breathing what looked like cotton candy at random passers-by and giggling madly. \_Yes, definitely brandy.\_

Spike stared slack-jawed at a lithe white dragon with iridescent lavender scales, smirking back at him with lidded eyes.

"I am TOTALLY FINE with this change!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Shoo bee doo, Princess Celestia!"<p>

Celestia's eye twitched.

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra Heartstrings bounced in excitement "Oh my gosh oh my gosh oh my gosh!"<p>

Twilight stumbled on unsteady legs and fell, catching herself by wrapping her arms around Lyra's flank. Lyra didn't seem to mind one bit.

"OHMYGOSH!"

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia sighed in relief. Her mane was a frazzled mess, and she hadn't drank any tea with her morning brandy in weeks, but today was the day it all ended. Two months of bizarre shape changes, strange inexplicable powers, and chaotic interspecies mood swings were

finally over, at least according to Twilight's research notes and Nurse Redheart's tests. Today Twilight and her friends would Ascend, and all this weirdness would be over.<p>

Six tentacled manticores stood in a circle under her watchful (and slightly bloodshot) eyes. Slowly they began to glow, the now-familiar sign of transformation shifting brighter than ever before...

...and faded, leaving six draconequui standing, blinking at each other.

There was the distinct sound of glass breaking, or perhaps that was the sound of a mind shattering, and Princess Celestia fell stiffly to one side, twitching occasionally.

\* \* \*

><p>78.5 (Valentine Meikin)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stood in front of Nightmare Moon, glaring her down.<p>

"Go to your room right now, and you're grounded until Celestia's back!" She snapped, everyone looking shocked as Nightmare Moon actually bowed down and slinked off towards the library, "And I want you to stop possessing her sister right now!"

Everyone looked at her, and she just shrugged. "She'll be fine. I'll get her some cookies on the way back to the library."

"It's not that... You GROUNDED Nightmare Moon for attempting to create Eternal Night!" Applejack explained.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight walked into the library a few hours later to see Nyx looking unhappy.<p>

"Sorry, Mummy, for creating the Eternal Night..." The filly alicorn whined, for Twilight to smile at her, while thinking, '\_\_\_Yes, I just defeated Nightmare Moon by being her mother. Must get Fluttershy to specifically handle Discord... I don't understand why, but it works.'\_\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>In the palace, Celestia looked at Luna, who was wondering what the hell happened.<p>

"All my hatred, anger and loathing just seemed to disappear... I don't know what came over me..." Luna explained.

"We've all had bad time outs." Celestia muttered, as she glanced at the report, mentioning that Nyx was catching up on a millenia of no hugs and cookies from her mother, and was really sorry about her and her sister ganging up on her.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight penned a letter to Celestia as she got a message asking how she was able to claim to be the mother of the dark side of her sister, planning the most audacious act possible... She was going to tell her the complete and honest truth about how she was a Alicorn Time Looper whose daughter was the embodiment of Nightmare Moon.<p>

"Dear Celestia, The being you know as Nightmare Moon is actually my daughter, Nyx Spa..." She began to write, then it screeched to a halt as she considered finishing that sentence, and called Nyx over, making a decision she knew she'd never want to go back on.

"Now, we know that you are born from what remained of the original Nightmare Moon and my own blood... For many loops, you've just been, well, Nyx." Twilight stated, before asking, hopefully, "I'm not sure if you'd like it, but I was thinking that Nyx Sparkle sounds much..."

The filly shaped missile that hit her, saying that she'd love to be considered properly a Sparkle, was a surprise... but, as she continued the letter, running a hoof over Nyx's mane, she knew that it was the best idea possible. No more would Nyx's full name be Nightmare Moon, now she could say her full name was Nyx Sparkle...

Nyx sniffled, then turned her head upwards. "Wait. We don't use family names, do we?"

"Sometimes we do, sometimes we don't." Twilight smiled. "If you want to take part of my name, go right ahead."

\* \* \*

><p>78.6 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

"Behold," shouted Nightmare Moon as she appeared in the Palace's Throne room, a magical spell already primed and armed. "\_Dear Sister\_, I have returned from my thousand...year...slumber."

Her voice trailed off and the spell flickered out as a Draconequus Celestia sat in a plaid throne room with mushroom clouds hovering in the rafters made of cotton candy. Celestia blinked. "Welcome back, Luna. I know you want to fight it out, get revenge and all that, but maybe we could just talk it out? Would you like to sample some of the cheesecake," she said, bringing out a cake made entirely of cheese and icing, "while the therapist I hired works us through our problems?"

The throne doors made of Jello squirt open, revealing a pink Draconequus. "Hi there, Black Snooty! Oh wait, you're Celestia's sister...Nyx right?"

Nightmare shook her head several times to clear the distractions. "Sister? What hast thou done? Didst thy vile foe, Discord, free himself and wreck havoc upon Equestria whilst I slept?"

More confused glances. "Are you feeling alright, Luna? You seem...ill? Discord is still imprisoned in the gardens."

Nightmare's horn glowed navy blue once again. "I wilst not fall for thou tricks. Thou art Draconequui, and mine sworn foe! Return mine palace to the way it was long ago, and dispell thine strange confections I see before mine self!"

Celestia and the pink Draconequus looked at each other. "Maybe she needs to see the happy ponies in white? Captain Armor, send for Sound Mind and his team immediately!"

Another Draconequus appeared seconds later from the doorway, gave a salute, and turned to walk out. Nightmare fired off a bolt at the captain, who merely raised his shield and deflected it. Then, weird things started happening to the dark alicorn. First her front hooves morphed into a griffon claw and lion's paw. She stared on in horror as her lower hooves took the shape of an eagle's talon and a goat leg. Her body shed all its fur and took the scales of a dragon, her tail now that of a snake, her wings were that of a bat and pegasus and her horn disappeared, replaced with moose antler and a goat horn. She felt herself all over and started screaming.

\* \* \*

><p>After a few minutes of hysteric screaming, Twilight Sparkle emerged from hiding behind the throne and cast a sleep spell on the exiled princess, mercifully sent Nightmare Moon into a deep sleep. Celestia sighed. "As always, Twilight, your magic is impressive. But the perception filter was a bit too powerful. What did you make her see anyway?"<p>

Twilight was at least sheepish at what she had done. She pulled out a photo from her scrapbook and floated it to Celestia. It depicted Celestia and the element bearers as draconequus all standing upside down on the Canterlot Palace, where everyone had been draconequus and Discord (there named Harmony) had been sealed in a statue for trying to ruin their chaotic fun times.

Celestia giggled for a second, then asked, "Mind if I take a copy?" She was totally planning on using this as blackmail against Discord.

Twilight shrugged. "Sure."

\* \* \*

><p>78.7 (Elmagnifico)<p>

"Mom, why are we clownfish?"

"I have no idea, Nyx. Let's play along, I'm not sure how to do magic yet with this body."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight swam around, in a half state of panic. Straining again, she manifested her Element. Sure enough, the tiara appeared. Like the last half dozen attempts, this was followed immediately by a vexing beep that reminded her of one of the default alerts on a computer from the Hub, and the crown simply Ceased to Be. Items from her pocket had been met with a similar response.<p>

She groaned in frustration once again.

Why had Nyx even swum out there? The "Butt" was clearly an excursion boat, which meant divers, and potentially poachers were about. Those other fish were clearly the loop's version of Babs Seed, Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon, each with relatively baseline personalities. Why hadn't she, Twilight Sparkle, Anchor and Archmage, noticed the developing situation until after the fact?

A deep breath. Calm down Twi, self-recrimination will not get Nyx back.

Baseline capabilities were not enough to beat this. She needed assets, she needed allies.

Twilight perked up at that thought.

She needed her friends.

The plan was simple. Assemble her friends, as many of the others as she could. A ping at the beginning had returned results, so there were others around. And if those resources proved insufficient to effect a rescue, start building power among the loop's unawake inhabitants and mount an amphibious assault on humanity until they gave her back her daughter.

Even if she couldn't use them, she could still feel the Elements.

So, she started swimming.

\* \* \*

><p>78.8 (Zetrein)<p>

"Sure, next thing you'll tell me is that Princess Celestia can walk on water."

"She can, actually. If she wanted to."

"Well, o'course she can, I'm sure there's a spell for that."

"Well, yes, but she doesn't need it. You know how clouds are water vapor? She can just manually overcharge her pegasus cloud walking ability, and trot across a pond. With enough training, some pegasi could learn it."

"Really now? 'Suppose you could do it too, overcharge'n that cloudwalking spell o' yours?"

"Oh no, not that spell. I mean, I could, but the spell matrix wouldn't work like that. Spell structure is too rigid for that. You'd have to put so much power into it, to make it work, that you'd be much better off with an actual waterwalking spell."

\* \* \*

><p>78.9 (TheCentauress)<p>

"And now, my little... Wait a tick, Why aren't you

ponies?"

"\_\*\*FIRE!\*\*\_"

As the smoke cleared, the Dracoequui Elements blinked. Where once stood the serpentine figure of Chaos, there was a whipcord-lean pegasus Stallion of Celestia's stature with a cutie mark of an irregular hunk of crystal containing a swirled rainbow pattern. The stallion unfurled his wings, showing that the left one was a royal-looking swanlike feathered appendage, while the other was one that was more fitting for a member of the Night Guard.

The changed Spirit of Entropy looked down, then whined;

"Tiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiia!"

\* \* \*

><p>78.1 continued<p>

"Miss Chrysalis?" three voices asked, not quite in chorus.

The no-longer-even-bothering-with-a-disguise Changeling turned. "What is it?"

"Well... we're trying to get our cutie marks," Applebloom began.

"And we thought we'd get one for Hearts and Hooves day," Scootaloo continued.

"And our teacher doesn't have a special somepony, so we thought you could help," Sweetie Belle took up the thread.

"Who does Miss Cheerilee like?" they asked in unison.

Chrysalis shook her head, grinning. "Yeah, no, not a good idea."

"Why?" Applebloom retorted. "It's a great idea! Like that princess... you know, the one whose got a love talent!"

"She had an article in the Canterlot Times last week!" Sweetie said. "It was great, but a bit mushy."

"Princess Cadence?" Chrysalis frowned, as the reminder hit home. She needed to work out what to do about that.

But for now, she had a thankfully simple solution to this particular problem. "Your teacher doesn't want to find a special somepony right now, girls. I'll ask her, to make sure, but I think she's happy as she is. And so is your brother, Applebloom."

Applebloom jumped.

"Now, I do know how you can check to see if you could get cutie marks for it," Chrysalis continued. Then weighed the pros and cons of what she was about to do.



\_Buzz it. I'm the Element of Kindness, I can do this bark.\_

"Applebloom, you need to set up a special booth " over by Sugar Cube Corner, okay? Make it so it's concealed from people going past " so it's private. Scootaloo, I need you to go and pick up something from this address in Canterlot. It's a long way, and you'll be carrying a lot on the way back, so take your scooter. And Sweetie, learn this music."

All three of them blinked as an address, a bag of bits, several dozen planks of wood, a hammer, some nails, a complicated food order and a pile of sheet music landed between them all.

"Where'd that come from?" Scootaloo demanded.

"Super secret Changeling powers," Chrysalis replied glibly. "Now, hurry up!"

Two of the three fillies shot off in different directions.

"Now, you get to learning that music!" Chrysalis instructed. "When I tell you, go hide in a bush near where Applebloom's going to have built the booth, and get singing."

"What are you gonna do, Miss Chrysalis?" Sweetie asked, already mouthing bits of the music to herself.

"I'm going to go and deliver two tickets for free meals," she said enigmatically, and trotted off.

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright, alright, I'm here, like you said," Cranky muttered. "Now, what's this about free-"<p>

"Cranky?" a voice interrupted him.

The old donkey's head snapped up. "Matilda?"

A gentle song started to float out of the air.

\* \* \*

><p>About a mile away, Chrysalis smiled as a pulse of incredulous joy rolled across her empathic sense.<p>

\_One down. Now, if I got that just right...\_

The sound of three extremely happy fillies echoed off a nearby mountain.

Sure, they weren't \_Hearts and Hooves\_ cutie marks... but they probably had a heart in them somewhere.

\* \* \*

><p>78.10 (Crisis)<p>

Twilight Farkle sighed as she and her dragonling assistant Psych

trotted into Ponyville. She'd Woken Up with a cutie mark of dice, the student of Farcelestia, and a feeling that it was going to be one of \_those\_ Loops.

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm Window Flash! Best window cleaner in all Pedestria!" the cleaning pegasus pronounced proudly.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Reverend Verity, darling," the unicorn priestess introduced herself.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Amberjack," the mare who ran the local fishery shook her hoof, "pleased ta meetcha!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I-I-I-I'm St-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-tuttershy..." the pegasus speech writer just managed to get out.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm Jinkies!" the glasses-wearing earth pony mare declared. "And we've got a mystery to solve gang! Come on!"<p>

Yep, definitely one of those Loops.

\* \* \*

><p>78.11 (Filraen)<p>

Pinkie Pie blinked.

She was suddenly in her room Sugarcube Corner. She had Awakened again! What kinds of fun would she have this loop? But wait! She wanted to prepare her newest model of Party Cannon to intercept Nightmare Moon on her way down from the moon and...

\_ 'Pinkie Pie, did you just Awaken?' \_

"Yes Chryssy, you too?"

\_ 'Keep your thoughts down! You Awoke as a changeling and the hive mind is in panic!' \_

\_ '... Sorry.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>78.12 (Andrew J. Talon)<p>

He wasn't like any of the other humans who they had encountered through the Loops. He was tall, certainly, but with prematurely gray hair on a young face. He wore working boots, a long coat with obvious signs of Rarity's design work, and a gunbelt loaded with firearms and a retractable staff. And he had on a pair of spectacles that he

adjusted as he sat in Twilight's library, keeping his tea in his slightly shaking hands.

"Do you need anything? I mean, I can find sugar," Twilight said kindly. "I mean, I can just conjure it now out of my subspace pocket-"

"Ah, no," the visitor said. "No, I-I'm fine... I'm fine..." He sighed and rubbed his temple with his hand. Twilight tilted her head.

"So... Last time I saw you, you weren't an alicorn," he said. "I-I mean... My Twilight."

"So, we know each other in the other universe?" Twilight asked with a smile. The human chuckled a little, and nodded.

"Yeah... We're very, very good friends. Ahem."

"You act as though we're more than that," Twilight said, tilting her head back the other way. Princess Celestia had taught her just how to do it properly in order to convey several levels of meaning and to make oneself look too adorable to lie to. The human rubbed the back of his head.

"We are... Off and on. We have issues, we fight sometimes..." He smiled. "I love her to pieces, it's just not easy."

Twilight nodded. "Romance seldom is. I mean, unless it's in books... And I imagine that's why you might have some issues."

"That and we're also dating Fluttershy," the human said. Twilight's eyebrows rose. The human coughed, and sipped his tea. "It's... Complicated."

"I can imagine," Twilight said, a bit amused. "So... Frankly, this is a bit unusual. I mean, you're from an entirely different version of Equestria..."

"And here I thought I had crossed enough boundaries just being the first human in Equestria," the man chuckled. "I feel like such an overachiever!" He looked at her with a smile. "So... What are the differences here? My world make first contact with yours in the distant past? Humans never showed up?"

"Humans do show up, regularly," Twilight said. "But they tend to be Loopers."

The human frowned, confused. "Loopers?"

"Time Loops," Twilight explained. "You see, we're caught in eternal time loops. We're in a kind of... okay, reality consists of all universes, and dozens of timelines consisting of small subgroups of universes repeat over and over, with only a few aware of it at any time and able to take advantage of it. Seems to be a kind of system wide glitch in reality that they have yet to resolve-"

"But because of the time loops you have essentially an eternity to fix anything, so why not enjoy yourselves?" The human concluded. Twilight smiled.

"I see why my counterpart likes you," she said gently. The human smiled back and shrugged.

"I do my best. Tends to end with me in the hospital, and her yelling at me... But we work out pretty well."

"Still, while you're here," Twilight said, "you could find ways to enjoy yourself. At least until we can send you home?"

"Home?" The human smiled. "Yeah... Yeah, home." He chuckled. "That's what it is now..." He nodded. "All right. I'll be Bill Murray, you can be Andie MacDowell."

"This means you have to learn to play the piano and speak French, you know," Twilight said. At the gobsmacked look on the human's face, she giggled. "I've picked up a few things from various human pop culture references over the millennia."

"Man, that is going to be hard to get used to," the human laughed. Twilight smiled.

"Might make it easier if I knew your real name?"

"Andrew. Andrew Eugene Shepherd..."

\* \* \*

><p>78.13 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Wow, Granny, Ah had no idea ya used ta be an aquapony!"<p>

Granny Smith grinned. "Sure as shooten'! Why Ah used ta wow the crowd with some of tha best hoofwork ya evah did see, if Ah sah so mahself."

Applejack smiled. "Heh, sounds like quite tha time yah had. Ah hope ya never ran into trouble with seaponies."

"Are ya kidden? Mah swimmen' was so great they even let me compete in some of teir own sports!" The elderly mare smirked. "Heck, that's where ah met yer grandpappy, finest fins in tha seven seas."

Applejack blinked, suddenly frozen. Her eyes grew distant as she pondered this revelation.

"Um... AJ?" Apple Bloom poked her sister. "Are ya okay?"

It took a few seconds for the farm mare to do anything, but she did eventually paddle out of the watering hole, shake herself dry, and walk off without a word. They later found her rocking silently back and forth in the library.

\* \* \*

><p>78.14 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Twilight learned long ago to expect the unexpected, but there were just no preparation for this. Every window in Ponyville was smashed. Barnyard Bargains was in tatters. The building was on fire, every window was long since broken with electronic appliances scattered everywhere. Countless ponies surrounded the building, stamping on appliances shouting vile things about toasters and ovens. Off to the side, the Cutie Mark Crusaders were roasting marshmallows atop smaller, less dangerous wooden cinders and Fluttershy was running around in a draconequus outfit shouting for Discord.

The unicorn mage turned to Pinkie, an unawake Pinkie, and said sternly, "Explain!"

Pinkie looked a bit sheepish, "I was brainwashed by the toaster! And we are ridding the world of this evil."

Discord had something to do with this, she just knew. As Twilight forced a migraine down, she said, "OK, start from the beginning."

"Well, when a stallion and a mare love each other very much-

Twilight's hoof stopped Pinkie, "I mean, the toaster."

"Oh, it all started when my toaster spoke to me and demanded toast."

At that, Twilight tuned out her long winded explanation, \_Discord, \_She thought, \_Definitely.\_

He wasn't awake either, but every now and then, an unawake Discord could prove difficult to predict. Unfortunately, no one was awake, so Twilight had to deal with this insanity on her own. She came back to the conversation just as Pinkie was finishing up, "And Celestia freed us from our brainwashing by throwing the toaster out of Canterlot. We, the former Holy Order of Toast, thanked Celestia for her benevolence and vowed among ourselves to rid the world of all toasters and their great evil!"

Twilight rolled her eyes, "And why are you destroying the other appliances?"

Pinkie returned the eye roll, "Don't you know, silly filly, that the toasters are only the servants of the greater evil, electricity and all appliances! We will purify the world of its evil influence!"

One interesting thing about this world though, Pinkie was on medications. This was not Discord's fault alone, "Pinkie, how about you come to your house with me and we'll help purify this great evil that has Ponyville in its grasp, what do you say?"

Pinkie gave one of her patented grins, "That sounds nice, Twilight!"

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

><p><em>999, Moonless age. Dawn of the Final Day.<em>

"My dearest, most faithful cultist, Twilight. You know that I value your diligence and that I trust you completely, but you simply must get out of that dusty old tower.

My dear Twilight, there is more to a young pony's life than studying, so I've asked Princess Celestia to have you supervise the preparations for this year's Summer Sun Celebration, in Ponyville. In addition, I have an even more essential task for you to complete: make some (more) friends!

Your friend, Cadance.

P.S. Why don't you take Nyx along? I'm sure she'd enjoy getting out of town for a couple days."

Handing the letter back to Twilight, Nyx commented, "That's a keeper, I think." She had Woken up a couple months ago, and had been enjoying her time as Twilight's little sister. "Suppose the Cult is up to something? For real this time?" Nyx asked her usual mother. "Like, bigger than the bakesale last year."

Twilight sat beside her on the train. Spike was still in Canterlot, following an incident Nyx totally had nothing to do with, so it was just the two of them.

"Hard to say, I keep expecting the other shoe to drop with them." The elder unicorn replied with a shrug. "I'm sure something is going to happen. You know how that goes. Try not to get kidnapped by a crazy cult, okay?"

"You mean, besides your crazy cult?"

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Increased Moonpony ship sightings! Foreshadowing of the Moon's return, or prelude to invasion?"<em>

\_"The 'Thousandth Day' approaches, where's the Moon?\_"

\_"Moon or Myth: Does Luna actually exist?\_"

\_\_"Moonponies stole my chickens!"\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Ponyville was much like it always was, Nyx reading off amusing tabloid headlines as they walked by the train station news stand. And much like she always was, an unAwake Pinkie gave them her physics defying gasp greeting... Though she likely wasn't Pinkie this time, on the grounds that she was lime green.<p>

"...Right, green. We can handle this. Sweet Apple Acres to start, as usual, right?" Nyx said, looking up at her mother.

"Sunny Orange Orchards, actually." Twilight corrected. "One of the butterflies Luna caused. Somewhat less worrying than Greenie Pie, or

whatever her name is this time."

\* \* \*

><p>Taking a deep breath, Whiskey Sour continued introducing the Orange Family to them. "...Rhode Red, Valencia Blossom, and Clementine. Up'n'attem, Clementine, we got guests."<p>

Taking note of their names this loop, Twilight leaned over and whispered to Nyx. "You're helping me eat all this, right?"

"Heck, Sugercube," Whiskey appearantly overheard her, and slapping her on the back told them, "we got enough for everypony! Ya'll go on and eat your fill now, y'hear?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, actually," Nyx answered Rarity's question, "my sister is overseeing the preparations." Pointing at the groaning unicorn, who was leaning on the wall next to the door. "But she's still recovering from our visit with the Oranges. Too many lemon tarts, and a lot of drinks they wouldn't let me have."<p>

The white unicorn's eyes widened with understanding. "Oh dear. I know all too well what your sister is going through. Come along dear, let's go back to my house, and try and get her sobered up a little."

\* \* \*

><p>Some time later, with Nyx having taken the lead with Fluttershy, they found their way to the library door, and the expected party behind it.<p>

"Hi, I'm Key Lime Pie, and I threw this party just for you! Were you surprised? Were ya? Were ya? Huh huh huh?" Color aside, Pinkie seemed just like she always was. "I saw you when you first got here, remember? I was all \_gasp\_, and you were all 'right, green' remember?"

"Stop." At Twilight's command, the energetic mare froze mid bounce. "Key Lime Pie? Any relation to the Orange Family?"

"Yupperoony! Did you already meet my cousins?" Key Lime resumed bouncing as she spoke.

"Yes, I ended up sampling the catering." Twilight replied with a flat look.

"Oh!" Key Lime snapped her hoof. Somehow. "Don't worry about that! This party is foal-friendly! No booze, unless you want to ask Whiskey for something. She likes mixing drinks, it's her special talent!"

"That explains why there's an open bar as part of the catering." Twilight sighed, as a pegasus flew up behind Key Lime.

"So that's why you threw up on me earlier? Whiskey got you good and drunk before sending you my way? Totally not cool, by the way." Rainbow Dash crossed her forehooves, trying to glower at both

Twilight and the farm mare at the same time.

\* \* \*

><p>For once, Celestia's entrance had gone off without a hitch. The sun had even been up for a whole two hours before things went pear shaped.<p>

"Hey, Twilight?" Turning to the familiar voice, Twilight was faced with Minuette and Lyra, wearing black suits and sunglasses. "We're really sorry about this."

With that, Lyra sent a stunning spell at Nyx, while Minuette clocked Twilight upside the head with an enchanted baguette. The last thing Twilight saw, as the magic bread smashed into her face, was Lyra lifting Nyx onto her back.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight woke up upside down in a bush, with the broken remains of the aforementioned baguette impaled on her horn. Judging by the position of the sun, twenty minutes had passed. She could hear somepony addressing the crowd, from atop city hall.<p>

"...Celestia has fled, in the face of Princess Luna's return! But there is no cause for alarm, as the wise Princess Cadance has taken the reborn Luna under her wing, and together they shall lead Equestria into a new age of prosperity!" It was Flash Sentry, of all ponies. Pulling the bread from her face, Twilight saw that he too wore a black suit.

\* \* \*

><p>78.1 continued<p>

"Um... can I have a word with Cadence? Er... alone, please," the yellow pegasus asked.

Twilight gave her a look, then nodded. "Sure."

As soon as they'd left, Cadence chuckled. "Well, well, well. I never thought I'd see another changeling here... without my having planned it, at least."

Chrysalis shrugged, her pastel-green-and-pink dress shifting slightly. "Metamorphia. I wish I could say I'd never expected to see you again."

"Oh, still bitter?" Metamorphia closed the door with a quick flash of magic, and then dropped her shapeshift. "We did say, may the best ling win. And I did. Frankly, you're lucky I only forced you into exile..."

She shook her head. "But, well, far be it from me to ignore the workings of fate. Want to rejoin the swarm? I could ue someone as powerful as you... so long as you obey my commands without question, of course."

Chrysalis smiled. "I'll decline, thank you. But I did have a question."



"Go ahead." Metamorphia smirked, licking one fang. "I'm sure it'll be worth it."

"Why are you doing this?"

The Changeling Queen blinked. "...have you become soft in the carapace? We're Changelings â€" it's what we do. We need love to live, and we get it by taking the place of loved ones. This 'Shining Armor' loves so strongly, he could feed the whole hive." Metamorphia clacked a hoof on the floor. "I have to take the easiest way out, you know. It's better for all involved â€" really. He gets to exist in a state of mindless, loving bliss, we get our food and the hive can survive and grow."

"And the other ponies in Canterlot? In Equestria?"

"You have gone soft." Metamorphia snorted. "The needs of the hive come first. The needs of these ponies â€" come nowhere at all."

"You're really not very good at this whole ruling thing, are you?" Chrysalis challenged.

Metamorphia blinked. "What?"

Chrysalis ran back over all the second thoughts, all the horrible realizations, all the times she'd beaten herself up for what her baseline self had done.

"Well, first of all, you didn't even consider diplomacy. Equestria is no dark empire, exterminating changelings wherever they can be found â€" the ruler of the moon, Luna, attempted a coup against her sister, Celestia. Yet they rule together today."

"Weakness," Metamorphia shrugged off. "Only one queen can exist in a hive. Anything else is contradiction."

Chrysalis continued with something that hadn't occurred to her the first time, but which sank the plan all alone. "Your plan, as cruel as it is, would work... for a few decades, at most. Then Shining Armor would grow old, or die, and then... then you have nothing. No ponies left to drain, other races on their guard, and ultimately changelings die out."

Metamorphia began to speak, but Chrysalis held up a hoof. "Except that your plan wouldn't work at all. The elder ruler of the ponies of Equestria is Princess Celestia. She is no mere figurehead â€" she raises and lowers the sun! Her sister commands the moon." Chrysalis gestured out the window, at the blazing light of near-noon. "Without them, whether you gain Shining Armor or not, the sun would freeze in the sky. Half our world would burn, the other half would freeze."

The Queen frowned, clearly thinking hard.

"And thirdly... you didn't do all your research. Have you heard of the Elements of Harmony?"

"That weapon the ponies use against their enemies?" Metamorphia

dismissed it. "I have taken steps to neutralize it. The guards covering the door to the treasury are all disguised changelings."

Chrysalis nodded. "That would be helpful, except for two factors. Firstly, the Elements are a weapon â€" but each individual one is a mark of great virtue. Friendship, Loyalty, Generosity, Laughter, Honesty... and Kindness. That alone should tell you that they would at least listen to you."

"Words, and words alone," Metamorphia said, but Chrysalis could taste a slight confusion in her mental state. A sense of uncertainty, of details unknown.

"And, finally... you didn't know who the bearers are." Chrysalis finally dropped her shapeshift, and with a flash of green light her Kindness necklace appeared from her subspace pocket.

Metamorphia's jaw dropped.

"I rarely even go in disguise any more around town," Chrysalis added. "I only shifted today because the dress fits better with my pegasus form."

She released the lock on her emotional bleed, and let it drift into the air. Letting the changeling who could so easily be her younger self taste her sincerity. "We can still solve this without fighting, Meta. Please."

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Cadence lay on the floor of her prison, lightly napping to conserve her strength.<p>

Celestia had taught her how alicorns could go 'dormant' to while away long stretches of time with no food, water or air, but it wasn't working as well as it could. And she still held out hope that somepony would realize her place had been taken.

So, napping it was.

Then, a tapping sound broke into her slumber.

She opened her eyes, and struggled to her hooves as the tapping came closer. It was the staccato clop of two sets of hooves... or possibly one set, taking small quick steps.

The sound paused for a moment, then resumed at half the speed.

"Princess Mi Amore Cadenza?" a soft voice asked, from around a corner.

"It's me," she replied, relief warring with caution in her heart. "Who's there?"

A butter-yellow pegasus stepped around the corner.

"Who... oh, I saw a picture of you," she said, frowning. "One of Twilight's friends, yes?"

"I have that honour." The pegasus paused. "This might be a little shocking, but please don't panic. I promise, it'll all be fine soon."

Then her form rippled and changed in a flush of green fire.

Cadence gasped. "Changeling!"

"I am, yes," the revealed shapeshifter confirmed. "But I had no part of imprisoning you, nor do I wish you to stay entombed." She reached up, slowly, and tapped the Element dangling from her neck. It gave a faint flash of warm green light.

"My name â€" my real name â€" is Chrysalis. For the last several years, I've been pretending to be a pegasus by the name of Fluttershy. She doesn't really exist â€" it's just a name and form I made up."

She paused, and Cadence spoke into the silence. "I... don't understand. Why would you do that?"

"When I did... ponies didn't like changelings. They still don't like them, much, but in Ponyville, and in Apploosa, things are different." Chrysalis closed her eyes for a long moment. "I'm glad they are. Anyway, I was invited to your wedding, and I quickly noticed that your place had been taken by another changeling. My elder sister-

"Queen Metamorphia," Cadence finished. "She taunted me, told me who Shining was really going to marry." The young alicorn's voice wavered. "It... hurt."

"I know," Chrysalis said, softly. "The feeling, of knowing that somepony you love won't be with you, and you won't be with them, and they don't even know. It's... horrible."

Then she shook her head, and wiped away a tear. "I had a talk with my sister, and... well."

Another voice spoke up. "I... I don't really understand all this yet, but I am sorry, Cadence. I'll get you out of here, and then my sister will plead my case to Celestia. Hopefully, if we're to be run out of Equestria, we can at least get a head start."

"She'll understand," Chrysalis assured her. "Now, Cadence. You've got a wedding to go to."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

78.1: The further adventures of Flutter-lis. (Slightly out of chronological order.)

>78.2: Twilight's plans book, volume XXIV: "How to deflect questions about a chicken suit".<br>78.3: Do not ask. The only times you manage to get the question out are when there's disasters scheduled.

>78.4: Troll-elements. (Discord helped.)<br>78.5: Equestrian names have something of a range of types.

>78.6: Perception filters are a wonderful thing.<br>78.7: Finding Nyxie.  
>78.8: Some more traditional divine attributes, and why they're more trouble than they're worth.<br>78.9: I honestly can't tell if he did that deliberately.  
>78.10: Who's responsible for names here?<br>78.11: Those poor changelings.  
>78.12: Crossover of sorts with Hands, by AJ Talon. Just roll with it.<br>78.13: You look too long into the oceanic abyss, and a close relative waves back. While moving an explosive around.  
>78.14: TOAST. (based off a fanfic called A Little Chaos)<br>78.15: For the moon!

## 83. Chapter 83

### 79.1 (Stainless Steel Fox)

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Pranking a princess<strong>

"â€|And now, it is my great honour to introduce to you the ruler of our land, the very pony who gives us the sun and the moon each and every day, the good, the wise, the bringer of harmony to all of Equestria... Princess Celestia!"

The Solar Princess stepped out onto the platform overlooking Ponyville Town Hall and all her little ponies. It took all her centuries of experience and practice to remain suitably regal when inside she was waiting for the other horseshoe to drop. Why hadn't Nightmare Moon already attacked? She was a creature of rage and vengeance, not cool calculation.

She should have come after Celestia as soon as she broke free of the moon, and Celestia had seen the her sister's shadow disappear with her own eyes as the conjunction reached it's climax. The idea that she might have learned to plan filled the princess with a cold that even her sun couldn't banish. If she attacked now, all the ponies of Ponyville would be at risk from the side-effects of two alicorns fighting. The only thing to do to protect her subjects would be to let Nightmare Moon defeat her as quickly as possible. Until then, she had a duty, which would normally be a pleasure.

"My dear little ponies, once again we stand at the dawn of a new dayâ€|"

She hadn't actually bothered to write a speech this year, as she hadn't expected to have a chance to deliver it. However, she had a thousand year back catalogue to draw from, and a thousand years of experience at public speaking. She kept it short, she kept it simple, she filled it with what would have been platitudes if they hadn't been so genuinely meant. The only concession she made to what was to come was a brief sentence on the end.

"There will be times ahead which will call on all of us to be our best, but I know that all of you are more than equal to any challenges the future may bring. Though it was first brought forth in the deepest winter, the fire of friendship still lives in all of our hearts of all of us even now. Let it shine as the sun shines."

It was time. She drew on her power and rose into the air, wings outstretched. In this moment when all her power was focussed on the sun, she'd be vulnerable. If Nightmare Moon was to strike, it would be now. She readied herself, but didn't deviate from her task. The sun rose, silhouetting her against the window behind the balcony, and ponies oohed and aahed as birds around her sang a triumphal fanfare.

She landed and smiled benevolently at her cheering subjects, expertly hiding the strain on her eyes behind a mask of cheerfulness. As she looked out over the crowd, she could see Twilight and Spike cheering as loudly as any-pony else. She hadn't expected to be able to talk to her student again, at least until after Nightmare Moon was defeated. She made a sudden decision and jumped off the balcony, gliding down.

"Princess Celestia!" Twilight came forward joyfully to meet her. The purple unicorn had a rather fetching costume on, complete with a tasteful star shaped ear rings and a matching choker. Considering Twilight normally only wore saddlebags, and then only to carry books around, it was a pleasant surprise.

Celestia gave her first genuine smile. "My faithful student, I'm glad to see you here."

"Well of course, I had to make sure the Celebration was up to your standards. Was it?"

Her eagerness made Celestia want to chuckle. "Yes, a task most excellently done. And your studies of the old legends of the Mare in the Moon?"

Twilight shook her head. "Don't worry Princess, I put them aside just as you instructed. I understand now what you intended for me to learn. I've read similar stories often enough, a pony gets so wrapped up in some goal, wealth or power or knowledge that she forgets that there are other important things in the world, like friendship and happiness. There were things I learned in Ponyville that I couldn't have learned in a thousand libraries. It's been amazing!

"I'm just sorry I panicked about some silly legend in some ancient book. If your sister really was going to come back as Nightmare Moon to bring eternal night, you'd have prepared Equestria to defend against her. You wouldn't have needed my warning, or my efforts. I guess that's why you assigned me that reading material, to remind me to check my sources and never believe something without corroboration, just because it's in a book.

"Oh, what am I thinking, I want to introduce you to my new friends. You did say I should try and make someâ€¦"

Celestia had maintained her composure with difficulty. Twilight hadn't carried on studying? She'd never expected the workaholic unicorn to take her at her word! But then Twilight was also obsessive about following instructions, and ones from Celestia would be treated as holy writ. This was bad, when Nightmare Moon attacked, Twilight needed to have enough information to find the Elements of Harmonyâ€¦

She calmed herself. No, it was fine, there were copies of the right reference books in the local library and the first thing she'd do after Nightmare Moon was proven to be real would be to hit the books and find out what she needed to know. And she had made friends, the critical component for activating the Elements.

While Celestia was adjusting her plans, Twilight brought forth her first friend, an orange earth-pony with a blonde mane and a Appleoosa-style hat. She was balancing a plate with a piece of cake and a fork on her saddle, and it stayed rock steady even when she bowed her head to the princess and doffed her hat.

"Princess Celestia, I'd like you to meet Applejack. She runs Sweet Apple Acres, they did all the catering."

Celestia smiled warmly. "Ah yes, I remember giving the Apple family the land grant. I understand it prospers?"

"We get by, your princess-ship. It's an honour to meet you. I figured raising the sun and all would most likely make you powerful hungry, so I brought over a slice of our finest apple cake, made by yours truly. Them chefs in Canterlot probably don't feed you right, all small helpings with lots of fancy avec all over them, so I thought you might like to try some plain, down-home cooking for a change."

Celestia lifted the plate off the earth-pony and sampled the cake. It really was excellent, moist and flavoursome with the apple pieces perfectly complementing the farmhouse sponge. "Mmmm, this is wonderful. You're a credit to your family."

"Why thank you kindly. I hope you'll consider Sweet Apple Acres for any of your apple related needs in future."

That gave Celestia pause, at least mentally, though she kept eating the cake, because— cake! No it was probably just natural pride in her skills talking, and not a shameless plug for her farm. She was about to ask the farm-pony more about her meeting with Twilight, but the purple unicorn had already brought forth her next friend, a white unicorn with elaborately styled hair and a dress more suitable for the Grand Galloping Gala. She'd been up on the balcony as some sort of stage manager, Celestia remembered.

"And this is Rarity. She did all the decorating, and she's an amazing designer and dressmaker. She's also very generous, she even gave me this dress and matching jewellery so I'd have something appropriate to wear for the occasion."

That made Celestia examine the white unicorn more closely. The Element of Generosity maybe?

Rarity bowed her head, but was almost immediately up and talking. "Oh my goodness, your Highness, this really is an honour and a privilege! I never imagined when Twilight told me she was your personal student that I might have a chance to meet you face to face! I so admire Canterlot, the glamour and the fashions, I even try to emulate it in my own small way, such as the ensembles I threw together for Twilight and myself. They aren't 'too much' I hope?"

Celestia quashed the unworthy suspicion that both Rarity and

Applejack had been less than honest with her student. They were both just enthused by their passions, and surely hadn't just be-friended Twilight to get a shot at sweet-talking Celestia. "No, both the outfits are lovely. I'm glad Twilight found such a firm friend so quickly."

"Of course, Twilight knows she can call on me for anything she needs. She already offered to help me make some contacts in Canterlot, or rather her darling little dragon has. For that matter your highness, if you ever felt the need for something other than your normal regalia, it would be an honour to provide something suitably regal."

At least the unicorn in front of her didn't lack brass. "Thank you, but not at the moment. My regalia is durable, whereas most normal clothing falls to pieces after only a couple of centuries. But I will keep your kind offer in mind."

The next pony Twilight brought up in front of her was a blue pegasus with a rainbow coloured mane.

"And my next friend is Rainbow Dash! She's the lead weather-pony and cleared the sky for today in ten seconds flat, I know because I timed it! She's an amazing flyer, and could well be Wonderbolt material. She works really hard every day training to improve her flying, just the way I do my magic, so we even had something in common. Getting into the Wonderbolts for her would be like when you took me on as your student. She really is astounding!"

The pegasus grinned. "Yep, it's all true. Twinkle here knows talent when she sees it."

"You mean Twilight Sparkle, don't you?" Celestia asked. She had grave suspicions as to exactly who'd convinced Twilight to give such a glowing recommendation.

"Uh yeah, that's what I said." The pegasus said with a shifty look. "We got talking when we met, and she thought maybe having you put in a good word with the Wonderbolts for me couldn't hurt."

This was a lot more blatant than the other two, however Twilight looked so eager, Celestia didn't have the heart to call the pegasus out. "I see. Well, I'm glad to see Twilight taking such an interest in her friends' well being."

Twilight was already bringing up her next 'friend', or rather levitating her, despite the fact that she was a pegasus, and could fly well enough on her own. "And this is Fluttershy, who orchestrated the bird-song chorus for your arrival. She cares for all the animals in Ponyville."

Celestia looked down at the cowering yellow pony, who would clearly be quite beautiful if she didn't look so scared. At least this one wasn't trying to get something out of her. She knelt and tried to look as non-threatening as possible.

"I'm very pleased to meet you Fluttershy. Thank you for the music, your bird-song choir was lovely."

"y'wlcmm." The words were stumbling and barely audible, and Celestia

could only just make them out.

"Are you alright? I assure you, I may look intimidating, but I'm quite friendly when you get to know me." She'd intended it as a light jest, something to break the ice, but if anything, the attention seemed to make the pegasus shrink back even further with a whimper.

"I'm sorry Princess, she was a lot more articulate when I talked to her yesterday afternoon. As soon as she saw Spike she almost flattened me getting to him, and she couldn't stop asking him questions."

It took a lot to make Celestia feel awkward, but the pony in front of her acting as if she was the headless horse was getting her there. "I'm sure its just stress from the long night. Fluttershy, you may go rest if you wish."

The yellow pony vanished from in front of her, and she thought she saw the edge of a pink mane peeking over the edge of a table on the far side of the room but she couldn't be sure.

"And finally there's..." Twilight's introduction was cut off as a pink pony appeared out of nowhere.

"... Pinkie Pie! Oh my gosh we have to have a party for you as you're new to Ponyville and I throw every-pony who's new to Ponyville a party, like Twilight when I met her in the street and went..."

She jumped up in the air and froze in a splayed out position, mouth opened in a shocked gasp.

"... because I know every-pony in Ponyville but I didn't know her so I dashed off to set up a party with cakes and balloons and party games and hot sauce and every-pony because I thought that if she was new to Ponyville then she wouldn't know any-pony here and if she didn't know any-pony here she'd have no friends and be sad and that makes me sad so I went and set up the party so she'd meet lots of ponies and make lots of friends and smile and that would make me smile."

The Princess wasn't sure where the earth-pony had gotten the air to breathe, let alone say all that at once. She'd visibly deflated at the end, and the massive gulp of air she took had somehow managed to rustle even the princess's ethereal mane. At least this one seemed genuine if more than slightly indiscriminate, not to mention crazy. Then Pinkie put her hoof to her chin in a 'thinker' pose.

"But I suppose this whole Summer Sun Celebration is really your party, but we could always have a party inside the party... Wowie! That would make it partyception! I have to go find more streamers..."

As she vanished, Celestia turned to Twilight to see her pull a piece of paper from inside her dress and tick something off, muttering, "Show my new friends to the princess... done!"

"Twilight... Is that a check-list?"

"Yes, yes it is. I wanted to make sure I'd done the job properly."



Thankfully this whole making friends thing was a lot easier than I thought it would be, I expected to have to hole up in the library and do some serious research on the best techniques on friend making, but it turned out I didn't need to. As soon as I told ponies who I was and why I was there, they were jumping at the chance to be my friend. I must have a hidden talent for this sort of thing... right girls?"

The last was directed towards the first three friends who'd grouped up at the buffet. Two of them replied right away, with false sincerity. "Uh huh, sure as shooting sugarcube!" "Oh, absolutely darling!" but Rainbow Dash required a nudge from Rarity before she called out, with obviously faked enthusiasm, "Yeah, whatever you say Twinkle... whooo!"

Celestia looked back and forth between them and her student. Surely even Twilight couldn't be this clueless? But all she saw on Twilight's face was a broad smile. "You see? I have such great friends."

Apparently she could. It suddenly occurred to Celestia that it might have been worthwhile to actually convince Twilight to take part in more social events around Canterlot, practice her social skills and making friends rather than simply dropping her straight into it when the fate of Equestria relied on her getting it right. Thank her sun that Nightmare Moon hadn't actually made an appearance.

"Ha ha ha ha! Free at last! Free to bring my glorious night over all Equestria!"

Celestia spun to face the balcony, where Nightmare Moon had appeared in all her glory. This was bad, this was very bad. With a lack of information and no true understanding of friendship, Twilight wouldn't be ready to get the Elements. Celestia drew on her power, her mane and tail starting to glow like solar prominences. Hopefully she could grab the Nightmare and teleport them both far above the sky where she could fight without restrictions. With her sun already in the sky, she might just have a chance against the conjunction empowered alicorn.

"Now stop this at once!" Celestia was aghast, Twilight had teleported right in front of Nightmare Moon and had materialised a soap box so she could see eye to eye with her. Celestia couldn't do anything without breaking her power up sequence and losing any chance to defeat her sister. Well she could speak at least.

She called out. "Twilight! Run!"

Astoundingly the unicorn glanced at her with a confident smile. "Don't worry, I've got this!"

"Little foal! Do you know who I am?" The Nightmare raged, her midnight mane hauling the unicorn's face back to face her. "Do you not know the prophecy? Did you not see the signs?"

Twilight's purple magic amazingly pushed the mane away, and she rolled her eyes. "Yes of course, you're the mare in the moon, Nightmare Moon. You'll return on the longest day of the thousandth year, starts aid your escape, yadda yadda. Take over Equestria, bring eternal night, unlimited rice pudding, etcetera, etcetera."

She sighed, "The problem is, you don't actually exist. If the prophecy were true, Princess Celestia would have done something to prepare for your return, like gather the Elements of Harmony she used to banish you once before, but they're probably just part of the story. She specifically told me the legends were nonsense, well she actually told me to stop reading those stuffy old books and get out more but the implication was clear."

"How, HOW DARE YOU!" Nightmare Moon raged, using the full Canterlot Royal Voice. "Can you not see me with your own eyes?"

"That proves nothing." Twilight replied, "These are hardly controlled conditions. You are most probably a hallucination, triggered by overwork, tiredness from the all night party and the legends I was reading up on, and using my magical power to manifest as a physical illusion. Or possibly I ate too much of Applejack's amazing cake and you're due to some quirk of digestion. There's more of apple than of apocalypse about you!"

Celestia was almost ready to act, but that last comment seemed to hit Nightmare Moon just as hard. She stepped back a pace and her mane and tail seemed to droop. "Really?"

Twilight shook her head again. "Look, I'm sorry. I know this was probably really important to you, but the Mare in the Moon is just an old pony tale, at least the prophecy part. Seriously, it sounds like the set up to a bad Daring Doo fan fic. Some-pony would probably have to go on an epic quest to find the lost Elements of Harmony with a band of stalwart companions who despite being randomly picked would turn out to be exactly who she needed to make them work. I mean, really..."

She looked at the other mare, who looked away and said in a subdued voice. "Well, this is embarrassing. Uh... I should probably go, shouldn't I?"

"That's probably for the best." Twilight nodded. She brightened up. "Hey, I know, why don't you come back on Nightmare Night? Well technically since you're a figment of my imagination you will if I decide you should, but that's not a problem. A real imaginary Nightmare Moon running around would really liven things up."

"I might just do that." Nightmare Moon stated with a decisive nod. "Ahem. You can go about your business, my sun loving subjects. But mark my words, I will be back... Mwahahahaha!"

She vanished in a puff of logic, and Celestia tried to recover from total brain crash. "But... what... Nightmare... Luna... What?"

\* \* \*

><p>79.2 (Conceptualist) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, my beloved subjects. It's been so long since I've seen your precious, little sun-loving faces."<p>

As typical for loops where Princess Luna and/or Nyx were UnAwake,

Nightmare Moon had returned from the moon to shroud the land in Eternal Night. How unfortunate for her.

"Remember this day, little ponies, for it was your last. From this moment forth, the night will last for-"  
>"Gima bak Mha Litle Nomes!"<p>

Silence fell over the room. No pony dare speak for fear of snickering or giggling, and possibly offending one of the two legends that were about to clash.

"What," Nightmare deadpanned.

"Gima bak!"

"What gnomes. I don't have any gnomes. I just flew back from the moon, and have only-"

"Ah! So dats whare da danambit cult put em. Tak me to mha Nomes."

"No way am I going back to my moon now. I just got back and still need to make my night etr-" \*whak\* "Ow!"

In the silence, the first whak echoed loudly. Nightmare Moon stood still, in shock that somepony would dare whak her with a rolled up newspaper. No pony dared to move lest they draw the Pony Princess's ire, until - \*whak-whak\* - the whakking continued.

"I am you're-"\*whak\*" - rightfull prin-"\*wham\*" - cess and I - "\*Wham\*" - demand that-"\*KABONG\*"...Ouch..."

"Now, to da moon! I needs Mha Litle Nomes! They be missen dear sweet Old Mare Henderson."

And so, the Nightmare returned to the moon and the day was saved. Nightmare Moon got the evil beaten out of her when Old Mare Henderson found out there actually weren't any gnomes on the moon.

Princess Luna took Henderson back down to Equestria, and never set hoof in Ponyville again.

\* \* \*

><p>79.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...and that's how I earned the Element of Kindness."

Trixie whistled, waving Macintosh over to refill her drink. "Huh, neat. Simon the digger had that element when I got magic once, but it was more battle mercy than anything."

Chrysalis rolled her eyes. "Yes, yes, fistfight with the moon, you've shown me the pictures." She tapped her necklace thoughtfully. "So, with Gilda's honesty and Spike's loyalty, that makes, what, four out of six?"

Berry Punch slapped another necklace between them. "Laughter. Five out of six."

The two of them stared at the grape-shaped crystal for a few moments.

"...okay, what?" Trixie finally sputtered.

"How in fagales...?" Chrystalis added.

The bartender sighed. "I don't like bringing it up, cause... well, the loop was a variant where Nightmare Moon killed Celestia before she could be banished, and since Nightmare Moon was Luna she kind of went insane with guilt and rage." She shuddered. "And the dominos fell, and... it was a dark loop, literally and metaphorically."

\* \* \*

><p>79.4 (TokoWH) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was still rather early on in the loop for Spyro, and for now he decided to mostly keep things rather baseline. He had a rather funny plan later on for how he would beat Ripto this loop, involving a bucket of shaving cream, and complex system of ropes and pulleys, and a catapult, but until then he had nothing better to do at the moment other than rescue the dragons. He checked his atlas, making sure he had gotten everything he usually did by that point. Smirking, he went over to the near by pool and started jumping on the stones.<p>

All he had left to do now was the speedway. Typically in the loops, he'd handle the speedways last. Not that he didn't like them or anything, quite the contrary. Though it was rather easy for him to get quick times on them now, he still liked the glorified obstacle courses and how he could blaze through them. It's just that he had gotten into that habit when it came to handling things baseline.

The secret 'passage' opening to reveal the hidden portal, Spyro was quick to jump in. A quick trek through the portal mini-dimension and Spyro found himself once again at the start of the first of many speedways on his journey. Spyro was quick to check the score board... and promptly did a double take shortly after.

Sunny Flight Speedway record - 0:10.00 - RD

Spyro narrowed his eyes. Somehow, he felt like he and Sparx weren't the only loopers this loop.

\* \* \*

><p><span>Night Flight Speedway record - 0:10.00 - RD<span>

\_Twitch\_

\* \* \*

><p><span>Crystal Flight Speedway record - 0:10.00 - RD<span>

\_Twitch\_

\* \* \*

><p><span>Wild Flight Flight Speedway record - 0:10.00 -  
RD<span>

\_Twitch twitch\_

\* \* \*

><p><span>Icy Flight Flight Speedway record - 0:10.00 -  
RD<span>

\_Twitch twitch twitch\_

Sparx looked at the record, and promptly scratched his head.

"I can understand her wanting to get the records for the speedways after we met her in that fused loop, but what up with the whole 'ten seconds flat' thing?"

Sparx glanced over to Spyro, rolling his eyes. Spyro was sitting on the hill with a blank expression on his face, his eye occasionally twitching as his gaze was glued to the scoreboard. Sparx sighed. He got the feeling with all the crazy stuff other loopers from different loops could pull off, this was going to happen eventually. Compared to that \_other \_Spyro they met a few loops back, his Spyro prided himself on his abilities and had a rather big ego to go along with it.

So if there was one thing he could \_not \_stand, it was someone being better at something than him.

"You going to be alright?"

Spyro stood frozen for a few seconds, before he finally scowled.

"Sparx, I think I know what we're going to be doing for the next few loops."

As Spyro turned around and started to walk off, Sparx face palmed and let out a long sigh.

\* \* \*

><p>On top of a nearby hill, Rainbow Dash chuckled to herself. True, she could have gotten a much lower time than ten seconds for all these speedways, but she didn't want to <em>completely <em>discourage Spyro. Considering from the time he spent in his first fused loop in Equestria, she could gather the dragon thought of himself rather highly. As such, it was going to be rather fun knocking him down a few pegs.

Now she only wondered how long she could keep this up before he rage quits and tries to end the loop like that time he tried to fight the non-awake Discord.

\* \* \*

><p>79.5 (Midnight Crescent) <p>

\* \* \*

><p><span>Twilight the Underdog - Chapter 3<span>

Twilight woke up to the sound of her phone ringing. She quickly answered, and sat up in her bed.

"Hello?"

"Hi Josie, it's Yugi. Grandpa found a package for me this morning, and you'll never guess who it's from!"

"Wait, it's that time already?" Twilight asked, as her mind finally caught up with her. She lowered her voice for her next question. "And, let me guess, your grandpa is still in the room, right?"

"Well, yeah, it is to do with Duellist Kingdom... But that was just a lucky guess!"

"Alright, when do you want me to come round for?"

"Can you get here for 10?"

"If you brew a pot of coffee, I can be there by 9:30."

"Sure! I'll see you then."

Twilight climbed out of her bed, wandered over to her wardrobe, and started to get ready.

\* \* \*

><p>When Twilight walked through the door of the game store, the first thing she saw was a pot of coffee on the counter, and Yami stood beside it, hands firmly wedged in his pockets as always.<p>

"I hope this is to your liking, Twilight." Yami said. "Yugi and I have never tried to make coffee before."

Twilight eyed the black liquid suspiciously, before adding a dash of milk. Taking a sip, she sighed in relief.

"For a first attempt, that was fine." Twilight said as she began to cradle the cup. "So, what happens now?"

"Well, we have to wait and see how Pegasus acts, but..."

"Why do I have the feeling that but is going to be a major pain?" Twilight asked, taking a seat on the counter.

"Alright, so far, there have been a few different versions of Pegasus. Sometimes, he focuses purely on his Kaiba Corporation takeover, either for their holographic technology or for the money. Sometimes he and Yami Bakura essentially switch places. I have seen loops where he does the tournament in his late wife's memory, and others where he cancels the tournament last minute because of Kaiba's mysterious disappearance."

Twilight sighed "So what you're saying is that we have no idea what could happen? I'd ask why that doesn't surprise me, but I have a feeling the answer wouldn't either."

"Well, most of the time, he does end up as his baseline - an eccentric billionaire inviting many children and young adults to his private island to play a children's card game."

"Sure... Wait, what?" Twilight said, doing a double take. "So, remind me not to be in a room alone with Pegasus then..."

Yami continued to smirk "Duly noted. Now, no matter what version of Pegasus we end up with, the invitation remains practically the same. Unless he cancels the tournament, he will send a VHS inviting me to take part in the tournament. Sometimes there may be a shadow game, sometimes not."

"Well, if that's the case, how are you going to get me out there? It's not as though you can ask a tape..."

"That will depend on if there is a shadow game or not."

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"If there is a shadow game, then I will be duelling with Pegasus. That means I can talk to Pegasus, and at least try to get you included in Duellist Kingdom. No shadow game, then no conversation, and we can only try the baseline."

"So we hope there's a shadow game?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

Twilight poured herself another cup as she contemplated things. "So be it. How much longer do we have to wait before everyone else gets here?"

"Tea should be here any minute now. And Tristan said he had other things to attend to. I assume it will have to do with... Nyx, was it?"

Twilight nodded. "Yeah. I'm just glad there'll be someone with her. Maybe we should get ready while we wait for Tea?"

"Solomon is setting everything up. Although, he did start before I even called you. Perhaps we should check on him..."

\* \* \*

><p>Once Tea had shown up, the group sat down in the back room, and began the tape. A man appeared on the TV, in a scarlet suit, sipping a glass of wine.<p>

"\_It's started sir." \_A voice flowed through the TVs speakers, evidently from someone behind the camera. The figure sat in the chair on camera nodded before speaking.

"\_Greetings, Yugi-boy. I am Maximillian Pegasus, creator of Duel Monsters."\_

"We al..."

"\_But I'm certain you knew that already." \_Pegasus took a sip of wine. "\_Your recent defeat of Seto Kaiba has thrown the duelling world into quite the furor... and I must say I approve. Seto always was a little up tight. I think you'll be a breath of fresh air, Yugi-boy."\_

"What is he rambling on about this time?" Solomon asked quietly.

"This time?" Yami asked.

"Shh, he's started talking again."

\_He's very clearly avoiding the question, Yami. \_Yugi pointed out.

\_I noticed. What I want to know is why...\_ Yami replied.

"\_Ahh, I seem to be getting ahead of myself. I'm certain you've heard of my little tournament I've arranged. Well, to be blunt, ever since your duel, no-one's seen or heard from Kaiba-boy. Which is a problem. I need someone to be the big draw at my tournament. And, if I can't have Kaiba-boy, then who better than the rising star who beat him?"\_

"But that was my first real duel. How can he be so sure I'll be good enough?" Yami

"It was broadcast across the country, Yugi." Solomon said, placing his hand on his Grandson's shoulder "You deserved to win, no doubt about it."

\_"Everything you'll need is in the box this tape came in. Goodbye, Yugi-boy."\_

"Tea, what's in there?"

"Give me a sec..." She pulled out a tray, containing a glove, two small tokens shaped like stars, and two Duel Monsters cards. She placed the tray on the table. "Hey, wait. There's something still in there." Digging more padding out of the box, tea produced another tray, its contents the same as the first.

"Wait, why were there two?" Yami asked, a puzzled look on his face. \_Seriously, do you have any ideas, Yugi?\_

\_Sorry Yami. I'm drawing a blank too... \_Yugi replied.

"I suppose it's now or never..." Solomon said. "Pegasus wanted Duellist Kingdom to be the largest tournament ever. So he's invited every Regional Champion, reigning or former."

It took a moment or two for Yami and Yugi to catch on to what that meant. The pair switched places before Yugi continued the conversation. "But it's been years since you really duelled, Grandpa. Are you sure you're up to this?"



"No, Yugi. I'm probably not. You're right, I haven't duelled in years, I haven't even seen half of the new champions, and my deck is probably completely out of date. But I'm still going. I didn't want to retire when I did, but I had no choice. I have another chance, and I want to take it."

"Why not just send someone in your place, say they're your student or something. I'm sure Pegasus would understand..."

"And who would I send, Yugi? You're already going, and Tea, while she may be improving, wouldn't last two turns against the professionals."

"Actually, I was thinking of Josie..."

"Josie? She doesn't even have any Magic or Trap Cards in her deck. I'd be better off sending Tristan, and he doesn't even duel!"

"Actually, Mr Muto, I've been building a new deck, with Yugi's help. Maybe if you taught me..."

"There's less than a week until the tournament, there is nothing like enough time to teach you."

"Give her a chance, Grandpa? Duel her. If she still doesn't impress you, then we'll drop this. If she does well, will you at least consider it?"

Solomon stood deep in thought for a few minutes. Eventually, he gave his answer.

"Alright, one duel. But I won't be going easy on you. We'll be playing by Pegasus' rules. And I'll be judging your skill. Even if you somehow win, that may not be enough."

"I understand. Thank you, Mr Muto."

"If you're going to duel me, call me Solomon. Unless you really doubt yourself that much." Solomon quipped.

"I just thought I'd show ya some respect, old timer."

Solomon stared across the table at Twilight, his lips slightly curled, obviously annoyed by the comment. He took a breath, before sliding his deck over to her, as she did the same.

"Let's duel!" The pair echoed as they drew their hands.

"Ladies first, Josie. You'll need all the help you can get." Solomon said, as he looked over his cards.

"And you'll regret that decision. Believe me." Twilight drew another card from her deck, and looked her hand over. \_Well then, let's see how he likes this... \_Twilight smiled as set her first card on the table "I play The Secret Village of the Spellcasters. As long as I have one of my Spellcasters on the field, your magic cards are useless. Then I summon my Fool of Prophecy, and lay one card face-down." She laid her mirror force behind her Fool. "Your move."

Solomon looked puzzled as he drew from his deck. "An interesting strategy... I've never seen those cards... May I?" Solomon held out his hand. Twilight slid them over. "I would assume you're using a lot of Spellcasters, given this villages effect? And this Fool... I expect I'll see these Spellbooks later..."

"I guess there's little use denying it." Twilight said, returning her cards to their places "But that's only half the problem you have, isn't it? Even if you know what's coming, the question now is whether or not you can stop it."

"We won't find out by talking about it." Solomon said, looking over the cards in his hand. He selected his Mirror Force, Swords of Revealing Light, and Horn Imp "I'll set this monster face-down, and place two more cards face-down. That ends my turn."

Twilight drew, and looked over her hand. "I'll set a monster face-down." She set her Temperance of Prophecy "Now, my Fool will attack your face-down monster."

"And you were doing so well..." Solomon said, flipping one of his face-down cards. "Mirror force redirects that attack, taking down your fool. Are you done?"

Twilight groaned in frustration. \_Should have seen that coming... \_She thought, before responding. "Yeah, your move."

"Then prepare to face one of my strongest monsters." Solomon added a card to his hand without even looking, before drawing out a card from the centre of his hand. "I'll bring out my Summoned Skull, in attack mode. Destroy her face-down monster."

"Oh Solomon, if it's good enough for you..." Twilight said, flipping her Mirror Force "Say goodbye to your little skeleton."

"... I'll admit, I should have seen that coming. Good move. But it'll take more than that for you to win. I end my turn."

"Thanks." Twilight drew a card, and smiled as she added it to her hand. "Now, time for you to meet one of \_my\_powerhouses. I summon Fortune Lady Dark to the field in Attack mode."

"\_Another \_new card? What does this one do?" Solomon said, looking across the desk, trying to read the cards text upside down.

"For now, it's a level 5 spellcaster, with 2,000 Attack and Defence points. It has another ability, but you don't need to worry about that right now, she can't use it just yet."

"For now? Ahh, I see now, a level increaser. This new deck of yours is just full of surprises. What happened to the old, batter down the doors mentality?"

"Oh, it's still here. I can hit you just as hard as ever. I just realised that I'd end up in a war of attrition if I did. So I came prepared. Oh, say goodbye to your face-down monster, by the way."

Solomon sighed as he moved his Horn Imp to the graveyard.

She put her Spellbook of Power face-down "I'll place a card face-down, and then it's your move."

\_Wait, attrition... That's risky for her... \_Yugi thought. \_Grandpa's deck is pretty much built around waiting to draw certain cards...\_

\_You mean Exodia? Twilight's monster will just continue to get stronger. It would only take two more turns for her Fortune Lady to be stronger than everything else in that deck. With his magic cards sealed off, Exodia might be his only option...\_

\_So, Grandpa doesn't have long to draw the cards he needs, even if he doesn't realise it.\_

\_Considering what else is in that deck of hers, no, he does not. We should probably be paying attention to the duel, though, Yugi.\_

\_Oh, right...\_

"...End my turn." Solomon said, his Koumori Dragon now face-down on the field.

Twilight prepared to draw a card. "And now that it's my Standby Phase, my Fortune Lady goes to Level 6, and gains an extra 400 Attack and Defence points." She then drew her card, and added it to her hand, taking out her Solemn Wishes. "I place one card face-down, and attack your face-down monster. Your move."

Solomon drew his card "Fine, I'll just set another monster in defence mode, and end my turn." He placed his Battle Steer face down on the table.

"Then I'll let my Fortune Lady grow to Level 7, before I get started. Now, let's see..." Twilight looked over her hand "I think I'll summon my Solitaire magician, and attack this monster with my Fortune Lady Dark. And, as a result of my attack, I'll activate my Solemn Wishes Trap. It's your move."

Solomon moved his hand to his chin, and sat in thought. "This is a lot more challenging than I thought it would be... I owe you an apology, Josie."

"Thank you. It is meant to be a major step up from my old one."

"However, I'm not going to go down without a fight. My comeback starts here. I place this monster face-down, and end my turn." He placed his Sangan face-down as soon as he drew it.

"That's exactly what you did last turn..." Twilight said, puzzled. "No matter, my Fortune Lady Dark gains another level, taking her to over 3,000 attack and defence points, and I get an extra 500 life points in my draw phase, bringing me up to 2,500." Twilight placed her new Swords of Revealing Light on the field face-down "Now, as a contingency, I'll place this face-down, then get my Fortune Lady to take out your new monster again."

"Thank you, I needed that..." Solomon smiled, as he moved his Sangan

to the Graveyard. "Now I can add a monster to my hand, as long as their attack is 1500 or less."

"So you get a weak monster? How could that help?"

"Maybe it's weak by itself, but the Left Arm of the Forbidden One is another of the pieces I need to win this duel."

"Pieces? Maybe you could assemble something, but you just gave me exactly what I need to win. Still, it's your move now, go ahead."

"Gladly." Solomon looked over his hand. \_She must be bluffing. As long as I can keep laying monsters in defence mode, she can't touch my life points... What is she up to?\_

After a minute or two, he finally decided on his move. He placed his Rude Kaiser face-down "I'll put another monster in defence mode, and end my turn."

"Still struggling to get what you need? I know I'm not. First my cards effects activate, taking me to 3,000 life points, and taking my Fortune Lady to Level 9. Then I'll play Monster Reborn. And I think I'll target your Sangan."

"What use is he to you?" Solomon said, puzzled. "He's not as strong as your Magicians, and his effect is useless to you unless he's destroyed."

"On the contrary, this will complete my strategy. I activate my Solitaire Magician's ability. By sacrificing three levels from my Fortune Lady Dark, I can destroy one monster on the field."

"And how does that differ from attacking my mo... wait, the field?"

"And now you know. I'll destroy the Sangan I just revived to bring Fortune Lady Light into my hand." Twilight smiled at Solomon as she shuffled her deck. "Since I weakened my Fortune Lady, I'll be careful and skip my attack this turn, so it's your move."

\_I'm out of options... Heart of the cards, please, don't fail me now. \_Solomon closed his eyes, and drew a card. His shoulders visibly slumped at the result. He placed his Celtic Guardian face-down "I place a monster face-down, and end my turn."

"Now where has all that enthusiasm gone?" Twilight smiled, as she pulled another card from her deck. "My life points increase to 3,500, and my Fortune Lady regains one of her lost levels. Now, I summon my Fortune Lady Light, and activate my Solitaire Magician's effect. My Fortune Lady Dark loses another three levels, and my Fortune Lady Light goes to my graveyard."

"Wait, you went through all that effort to sacrifice it immediately?" Solomon's face dropped, as the realisation dawned. "It has another effect, doesn't it?"

"You catch on quick. I get to Special Summon another Fortune Lady from my deck whenever Fortune Lady Light is destroyed by a Card Effect. And I choose my Fortune Lady Earth." Twilight placed the card

on the field, and began to shuffle her deck again. "Just so you know, she starts at Level 6, giving her 2400 attack and defence, and she causes 400 life point damage every time she destroys a monster. Then, when she does, my Fortune Lady Dark's effect can activate, allowing me to resurrect my Fortune Lady Light when your monster is destroyed."

"...Allowing you to sacrifice her again, to bring out another Fortune Lady..."

"Until my field is full of monsters. But I won't even need that many. This duel will end on my next turn. But, until then, say goodbye to your new monster, 400 of your life points, dropping you to 1,600. Finally, let's welcome back my Fortune Lady Light, in defence mode. It's your move, Solomon."

Solomon sighed and leant back in his chair. "Congratulations, Josie, if you're telling the truth. I draw a card and end my turn, since there really is nothing I can do. Let me see what you have in store."

"Alright, my Fortune Ladies all gain their boosts. Now, my Fortune Ladies all get stronger, and I draw my card, raising my life points to 4,000. I switch Fortune Lady Light to Attack mode, and use her to attack your face-down defence monster."

Solomon scratched his chin, trying to fathom out the previous move. "You failed to destroy my Rude Kaiser. I don't know how you expected that to work, with such a weak monster. You lose 1,200 life points for that."

"That's easy, it wasn't meant to. I just needed to get one of your monsters face up, and hope it was strong enough."

"Strong enough?" Solomon asked, more confused than ever "Strong enough for what?"

"Just sit back and watch, this is going to be fun. I activate Solitaire Magician's ability, lowering my Fortune Lady Dark three more levels, in order to destroy my Fortune Lady Light. And now, I get to Special Summon my Fortune Lady Fire. Her special effect activates when she is special summoned in Attack mode, like she just was. She destroys one of your face-up monsters, and deals damage to you equal to that monster's attack power. Which, with Rude Kaiser's 1800 attack power, should be enough to finish you off." Twilight waited for a minute, before breaking the uncomfortable silence "So, how did I do?"

"Josie, I didn't land an attack. The only damage you took was self inflicted, and even that was intentional. I was forced to rely on a gamble to have any chance, and it didn't pay off. If you want my honest opinion, I was struggling the moment you played that Secret Village. I'll need to call Pegasus and make sure there's nothing preventing this, but I honestly doubt it. Good luck in Duellist Kingdom, you deserve to be there."

\* \* \*

><p>After a few minutes, Solomon headed back through to the front of the shop, as Twilight began to reassemble her deck. "Well, I guess

that's one disaster averted. So, what do we do now, sit back and relax?"<p>

Yami waited until he could hear Solomon's voice drifting through the doorway from the shop floor, before closing the separating door. "You need to be a little more careful, you were lucky he still went ahead with the duel after that old timer comment. I may not have known you long, but that doesn't seem like you."

"I called him an old timer?" Twilight asked, a puzzled look spreading across her face.

"Right before the duel started." Yami replied, sitting across the table from her. "Do you seriously not remember?"

Twilight shook her head.

"Does this sort of thing happen to you often when you loop?"

Twilight continued to shake her head. "No, but Tristan said something, when we went to visit Nyx. He said a couple of the things I said reminded him of Joey."

"Well, Joey should know by now not to say that sort of thing to Solomon face to face, but he never was the brightest of the group to begin with..."

"So it is something he might say?"

Tea nodded in agreement. "It sounds about right, but that still doesn't make any sense." She turned to Yami "If Twilight is here instead of Joey, shouldn't Joey, you know, not be here?"

"I must admit, I cannot recall anything similar to this from any loop I have been in."

"But what about you and Yugi, could it be anything like that?"

"I sincerely doubt it. Yugi and I are extremely closely linked, so much that even once we began to loop we could not be separated. You and Joey have no such bond. Tell me, does anything feel wrong in any way?"

"Other than not realising what I've said one time? Nothing at all."

"Then I say we leave it there for now. It may get confusing for anyone else Awake that we run into, but I doubt it will be a major problem in the short term. If you start talking in a Brooklyn accent all the time, then we should try to figure out what's going on. Does that sound fair?"

"Sure, I'm fine with that." Twilight rose from her seat "But you still haven't answered my first question "€" where do we go from here?"

"Well, once Solomon tells us whether you're in or not, we should make sure to be packed early. Other than that, make sure Josie was up to date with her homework before you arrived? You don't want to be kept

out of the tournament for so..." Yami started, but was cut off by the clattering of the chair Twilight had been leaning on falling to the ground.

"Oh god, no! I'm going to miss the tourn..." was all they could make out from her insane rambling before the front door swung shut behind her as she started to run home.

"She needs to sort out her priorities..." Yami said, his mind still trying to figure out exactly what had happened.

"You said it..." Tea nodded in agreement.

\* \* \*

><p>79.6 (namar13766) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?"<p>

"Yes Rarity?"

"You're Spike's \_biological mother\_ in this loop?"

"Yes?"

"So that makes you my mother-in-law?"

\* \* \*

><p>79.7 (Kris Overstreet) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Three pairs of eyes glared at Trixie.<p>

"We tapped the trees," Sweetie Belle said, "and didn't get a drop on us."

"We carried th' full buckets from th' forest into Ponyville," Applebloom continued. "It took us seventeen trips. An' we didn't get e'er a one drop on us."

"And then we filled the pressure tank," Scootaloo said. "The BIG pressure tank. Sweetie and Bloom needed an eight-foot ladder. And despite all that, we didn't get a drop on us."

"The Great and Powerful Trixie is most sorry," Trixie sighed. "The chemistry says quite clearly that tree sap in aerosol form should be explosively flammable. I thought I was making a flamethrower, or maybe a rocket."

Three pairs of eyes continued to glare at her from under the thick layer of tree sap.

"Perhaps I should have picked a different method of vaporizing the sap than simple pressure release," Trixie added.

"Ya THINK?" three voices cried out in unison.

"Please, please stick to conventional explosives, Trixie," Sweetie Belle said. "You're less dangerous that way."

\* \* \*

><p>79.8 (Valentine Melkin) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Flint Lockwood looked at the two people that were looking at his celebration-in-a-box. "So, this tiny box is capable of causing a party like atmosphere in any location?" The brown-haired male declared, while the pink haired female's finger crept towards it. As the box exploded, Flint blinked as the two strangers held up cards marked with a 3 and a 4.<p>

"Too many streamers, way too many streamers." The pink haired girl stated while putting down the 3 card.

"You coat everyone within 10 metres with streamers, and the entire room in cramped spaces..." The brown haired man moaned, "Now, let's show you REALLY how to fit a party into the smallest space possible without excessive use of unintentionally adhesive streamers."

\* \* \*

><p>A short time later, Cheese Sandwich and Pinkie Pie walked away from the party that was still going, despite the reason for it having been forgotten several hours earlier. "Our work here is done." Cheese declared to the rubber chicken in his jacket pocket.<p>

"What am I meant to do with several dozen prototype party-in-a-boxes that are pretty much redundant?" Pinkie asked.

A unknown time later, Ciaphas Cain wondered what the new button someone had attached to the console was for. Ten seconds later, Ciaphas Cain was cursing the name of Pinkamena Pie yet again, while every loyal imperial soldier in the cramped room wiped streamers off their uniforms. Did that pink creature have to keep tormenting the Imperium so?

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

79.1: Let's see if we can give Celestia an ulcer.

>79.2: Old Mare Henderson. Ouch.<br>79.3: Out of focus.

>79.4: Much worse than merely having to beat Hunter.<br>79.5: Play your cards right.

>79.6: Don't ask me.<br>79.7: Sap-air explosive.

>79.8: Cloudy with a chance of parties.<p>

## 84. Chapter 84

80.1 (Masterofgames)

\* \* \*



><p>Twilight had honestly never been more interested in something purely out of amusement. It was different every time, and it never failed to be interesting!<p>

"Say Ditzzy, Just what \_does\_ your cutie mark mean anyway?"

Ditzzy glanced up from her delivery list. "Huh? You really want to know?"

"Sure, why not?"

Ditzzy grinned. "Wow, nobody ever really seemed interested before. Sure, I'll tell you!" She set her bag down and led Twilight to a puddle.

"When I was really young, I got super interested in how pegasai can stand on clouds, but other ponies can't. I remember being so shocked when I learned clouds were nothing but water, and we could make them!" she giggled. "Anyway, I got to thinking. What \_else\_ is made of water?"

"... Ice?"

"Bubbles! Oh this is so cool, I haven't done it in ages! Watch this!" Ditzzy grinned, placing a hoof on the surface of the puddle. She took a deep breath, and then slowly lifted her hoof.

The water came with her. A moment later, she was holding an apple sized bubble in the air. "Hee hee, I've still got it! But that's not even the best part, check this out!" she winked, letting the bubble go, where it bobbed lightly in place. Quickly making more and tossing them around, the air was soon full of almost perfectly still bubbles. Ditzzy took a deep breath, then flapped upwards and landed on one.

It held her weight perfectly.

Twilight couldn't help but smile as the beaming mailmare hopped from bubble to bubble, happy to share her skill with someone.

\* \* \*

><p>80.2 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>A shrill whistle halted the mad scramble of Ponyville residents to escape from the advance of the 'witch of Everfree' Zecora as she entered town. All eyes stared as the local librarian and student of Celestia, Twilight Sparkle, dressed in the uniform of the constabulary, approached the cloaked pony figure purposefully.<p>

"Zecora of Everfree?" Twilight inquired in a way that demanded a response.

"That is my name that you say," the figure removed her hood, revealing the striped mane and coat beneath. "What can I do for you this day?"

"You are charged with no less than 2,527 counts of illicit rhyming,"

Twilight declared to the confusion of all watching, "at least 324 of which are believed to be in the aid of spells and conjurations. I'm going to have to ask you to come with me."

Zecora responded by bringing a small flat rectangular object out of her cloak and hoofing it over to the unicorn.

"Oh," Twilight exclaimed after examining the object for a moment. "Well if you have a poetic license, that's fine. Sorry to have bothered you."

The residents of Ponyville stared as Twilight trotted purposefully away after returning the object to Zecora, wondering what the buck had just happened.

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (masterofgames)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Ditzy grinned. "Wow, nobody ever really seemed interested before. Sure, I'll tell you! It's not that exciting though."<p>

"Oh, I'm sure it's fine, please?"

"Oh, okay..." Ditzy giggled. "As you may know... I'm kinda clumsy."

"... Really? I hadn't noticed..." Twilight smiled awkwardly.

Ditzy didn't seem to catch it. "Well... I am. I can't really build things, I'm not that great with weather, and accidents just seem to follow me around..." she sighed. She grinned after a moment though. "But if you need something cleaned, ho boy!"

"Wait, so those are-"

"Yep, soap bubbles! And let me tell you, I would not trade it for the world. You would not believe how hard Dinky can fight to get out of a bath!"

\* \* \*

><p>80.3 (yannoshka)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight's good mood quickly evaporated as she entered into Mac's bar and found all eyes upon her. Celestia was at the center with a wide smile and a photo album in her hooves.<p>

"Guest anchor?" Twilight asked her former mentor tiredly, and the widening of the sun mare's smile was all the answer she needed.

She groaned, and beelined straight for the bar where Mac already prepared her a little something fairly alcoholic to help her cope.

Fortified with a downed drink in her belly, she turned back to her

erstwhile friend and asked:  
>"What did my nonawake self do this time?"<p>

By this point Celestia's smile was worthy of Pinkie Pie at her party crazed worst.

"It is not so much what she did as... Well, take a look and I'll try to explain it in a bit." The sun diarch handed the album to Twilight.

Dreading what she would see, the equestrian anchor opened the album and blinked.

"You see, the alicornification was a bit more angelic in nature that loop, and while me and Luna only had to deal with a few extra pairs of wings... Well, you looked more cherubic"

Twilight was looking at a full body photo of herself with four pairs of wings - and two more heads, one with bovine horns and one hornless.

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (masterofgames)<p>

Ditzy grinned. "Wow, nobody ever really seemed interested before. Sure, I'll tell you! You know how in comic books when someone is thinking, they use a thought balloon instead of a speech bubble?"

"... Wait, you mean-"

"I can read minds!" Ditzy whispered with a wild grin. "And it was nice of you to take an interest, even if it was more out of curiosity than a desire to get to know me. Good luck with that time loop thingie of yours! I'd stick around to chat, but I need to get back to work."

\* \* \*

><p>80.4 (Scygnus)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Usually, Twilight kept a firm handle on what changes she'd made in a loop. She knew what every little step could and would change things.<p>

Like just about everything else, however, when Derpy Hooves/Ditzy Doo was involved, it broke down.

Twilight honestly hadn't even thought twice about saying hello to the mailmare on the way by during her first trip through Ponyville. Derpy had said hello back and kept on. No other reaction. But, since she couldn't find any other divergences from baseline, it must have been that idle hello that caused... this.

"I, for one, welcome our new adorable overlord." Fluttershy quipped, looking far too amused in her quiet way. The other four just looked like they were all out of facehoofs.

"Ponies of Equestria! I present to you... Princess Dinky Doo!" Celestia announced, looking as bewildered as Twilight felt. Behind them, stuffed in various degrees of finery, Discord, Chrysalis, and Sombra, none of whom were Awake, seemed unsure as to whether they should be confused, angry, or amused.

"YAAAAAAAAAAAY I'm a Princess mommy!"

"Muffin!"

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Say Ditzzy, Just what <em>does<em> your cutie mark mean anyway?"

Ditzzy glanced up from her delivery list, "Huh? You really want to know?"

"Sure, why not?"

Ditzzy grinned, "Wow, nobody ever really seemed interested before. Sure, I'll tell you!"

"You know how each bubble is an almost exact duplicate of each other? Well..," the grey mailmare concentrated and with a loud poof, she turned into seven Pinkie Pies. Two Pinkie clones had wings and one was a unicorn. Instead of balloons, they each had a singular bubble as a cutie mark.

Twilight Sparkle stared in open mouthed astonishment as one of the Ditzzy Pies continued, "let's just say that Pinkie Pie had experimented with the Mirror Pool before."

Another Ditzzy Pie continued, "And that it took her a while to remember the correct activation phrase."

A third Ditzzy Pie finished with, "And she got distracted by the edible slightly-hallucinagenic glowing mushrooms growing in that cave."

All the Ditzzy Pies chorused, "Repeatedly."

Twilight thought for a moment, "I guess that explains your eyes. It's easier for all of you to divide your attention so that you can look in two different directions at once."

The Ditzzy collective nodded, "Yup!"

\* \* \*

><p>80.5 (Namar13766)<p>

Twilight Sparkle knew she should have shown more tact and restraint at Rainbow Dash being poison joked. However, the only thought that went through her mind was

\_Must...contain...laugh...and...stop...thinking...like...Shatner...\_

Meanwhile, the normally polychromatic pegasus pawed at the ground.  
"Rapidash."

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (misterq)<p>

Ditzy looked downcast at the ground for a few moments, "Nobody ever really seemed interested before. I thought it would be a little longer before... Twilight, please - please take care of Dinky for me."

And with that said, Ditzy popped like a soap bubble, leaving behind nothing except an utterly horrified Twilight Sparkle.

\* \* \*

><p>80.6 (Conceptualist and Vulpine Fury)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"â€|Using The Charm Of The Elements Of Harmony, She Defeat'd H'r Youthful'r Sist'r, And Banish'd H'r P'rmanently In The Moon. The Eld'r Sist'r Took On Responsibility F'r Both Travelling Lamp And Moon And Harmony Hath Been Maintain'd In Equestria F'r Gen'rations Since. Hmm ... Elements Of Harmony. I Knoweth I've Heard Of Those-"<p>

And Then Twilight Sparkleth Awoke'd.

"By Leafeth And Brancheth, This Is Going To Be A Strange Loop."

\* \* \*

><p>The bar stilled as Twilight finished recounting the last loop. She took a long pull from the "Storyteller's Special" Berry had taught Mac for when she wasn't looping.<p>

"How the HAY did you get a boring baseline loop to sound that epic?" Rainbow Dash asked.

Pinkie giggled. "I like how Zecora was the only one talking normally in it."

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (misterq)<p>

Ditzy closed her eyes in quiet pensive contemplation, "Alright, I can tell you. Here, hold my mail bag and stand back."

Twilight took the bag and a few steps backwards.

"Farther."

Twilight went back even more.

"Okay, you should be safe there."

"Safe? What?"

Ditzy shouted across the distance so that Twilight could hear, "My cutie mark is a molecule without any bonds! I don't like actually actively using it, but my special talent is entropy! Watch!"

Then the mailmare concentrated and suddenly everything around her in a ten foot radius was destroyed. Where the bubble of disintegration touched, the tree trunks cracked, splintered and toppled. The shrubs and bushes withered and died before vanishing completely. Even the ground collapsed into a sinkhole.

Then Ditzy stopped her powers and flew down near Twilight, "I.. I understand if you don't want to talk or see or be near me any more."

Twilight blinked in confusion, "Why won't I want to do those things? You're still a friend, Ditzy. And my mailmare. Although, it does explain a few things. If you were an earth pony, you'd have the special talent of touch of destruction. If you were a unicorn, you'd have a disintegration beam spell as your specialty. But since you're a pegasus, your power leaks constantly out of your wings. That's why things break so easily around you!"

Ditzy nodded, "And why being a mailmare never lets me stay in the same place long enough for things to destabilize, usually. Twilight, did you really mean that? That you won't mind being around me even though you know what I can do now?"

"Of course I meant it! You're my friend and a very nice pony. I'd never abandon any pony just because their special talent is scary, as long as they didn't use it to hurt others intentionally," Twilight said with confidence.

And Ditzy found that a smile was slowly spreading across her face.

\* \* \*

><p>80.7 (Vulpine Fury)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash did not like the look in Twilight's eye when she entered Mac's Bar. She especially didn't like it when Twilight <em>smiled<em> at her in the way she realized meant she was planning a prank.

"So, Dash. New expansion loop."

The weather mare swallowed nervously. "I didn't do anything too bad, did I?"

Twilight's grin went from malevolent to playful. "Well, you didn't \_dress in style\_..."

Dash winced. The G3 loops were still a sore point for her.

Twilight's smile stayed but warmed gently. "You aced the Wonderbolts

Reserves Entrance Exam. But how you did it... Oh-ho, does that open up plenty of prank opportunities. I'm surprised I never noticed it before the expansion, really."

Dash began to sweat nervously. This was going to be heck for the next few dozen loops she was Awake. Hopefully Twilight would burn out on the pranks against her non-Awake self.

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (misterq)<p>

Ditzy grinned, "Wow, nobody ever really seemed interested before. Sure, I'll tell you! The bubbles represent other universes. I can see through to alternate realities. I haven't figured out how to actually travel to any of them yet, but one time I did managed to snag something from one."

Twilight was amazed, "Really?! What did you get?"

Ditzy smiled, "Haven't you ever wondered why Dinky has the exact same color eyes and mane as me while most foals look nothing like their parents? The coat is a little different shade, but alternate realities are like that."

Twilight connected the dots, "She's you! She's a younger unicorn version of you from another Equestria."

Derpy nodded sadly, "The last survivor, actually. She was stuck in an air balloon while the ground was completely covered with Smooze. She was starving and terrified. I had to get her out of there. I just had to."

\* \* \*

><p>80.8 (Opus J)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Once again, Nightmare Moon stood before Ponyville, and cries of horror were all around Twilight was planning a baseline run, even though Spike was awake, but so far everything was going according to plan.<p>

"Hi!"

...Until Derpy stepped up. Twilight froze for a moment, then shifted her eyes to Spike, who had snuck away a few moments ago. \_What in the world?...\_

"And what exactly are you supposed to be doing?" The near-eldritch Pony Abomination asked in a mocking tone.

"This!" And with that word, Derpy opened her mouth and... Blew out a bubble. One that enveloped Nightmare Moon, somehow fitting her into a sphere without any seeming difficulty. For a moment, the whole Hall went silent. Then Derpy turned and bucked the bubble, popping it - and sending Nightmare Moon spinning and bouncing around the room. A moment later she slammed into the floor - and where once had been the Mare of the Moon, Luna lay Dazed - Right next to a muffin.

\* \* \*

><p>"Spike..." Twilight said in a rather annoyed tone of voice.  
"Where in the world did...?"<p>

The Dragon smiled. "I met a few new friends last loop. Kind of weird, but they gave me a copy of their source material..." He held out a cartridge. "I couldn't help myself - and besides, I promised to get him a copy of this window for the copy of the game. Want to Play?" He grinned at her, Shaking the game in his grip.

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Ditzy grinned, "Wow, nobody ever really seemed interested before."<p>

Then she just sat there. Twilight looked on expectantly.

Ditzy continued to sit there, with a goofy smile on her face.

The lavender pony finally asked, "So... about your cutie mark?"

"Oh, right. What my cutie mark means?" Ditzy said. Twilight leaned forward in expectation.

Then the mailmare chirped, "I have no idea."

Twilight overbalanced and fell head first into the ground. She got up and dusted herself off, "You have no idea what your cutie mark means?"

"Not a clue," said Ditzy happily.

"How did you get it?"

"I... don't remember," Ditzy continued smiling.

Twilight stared at the grey pegasus in stunned silence.

Ditzy stared at Twilight.

Then, with a faint derp noise, Ditzy's eye went separate ways.

And so did Twilight's.

\* \* \*

><p>80.9 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"We're not ~~were~~-~~wolves~~." Twilight said, her form that of an oddly bipedal wolf. "We're why-wolves. Creatures possessed by the spirit... of inquiry."



Finn and Jake glanced at each other, then back at the Why-wolf.  
"Uhh..."

"What?" Twilight asked in her body's deeper, husky voice.

"It's just... this usually ends differently." Finn muttered.

"So you're \_not \_a murder-monster?" Jake asked bluntly.

"Oh, heavens no. I would never hurt anything that wasn't trying to hurt me first." Twilight waved his concerns away.

Finn rubbed his bare chin and wondered. "Huh... so that's wierd... Hey wait, are you a looper?"

"Oh, are you Awake? Yes, I'm my loop's Anchor!" She replied cheerfully. "We're usually ponies. Equestria, you know?"

Jake pawed his forehead. "THAT explains Lady Rainisus!"

"This is \_SO COOL!\_" Rainbow Dash shouted as she zoomed past overhead, changing the colors of anything nearby.

Twilight carefully removed her glasses, and then pawed her muzzle to rub at her eyes.

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Ditzy looked downcast at the ground for a few moments, "Nobody ever really seemed interested before. I thought it would be a little longer before... Twilight, please - please take care of Dinky for me."<p>

And with that said, Ditzy popped like a soap bubble, leaving behind nothing except a slightly disgruntled Twilight Sparkle.

Twilight waited in the clearing. A moment passed. Then another.

Then Ditzy reappeared. However, she now sported a horn in addition to her wings.

"Behold, I have ascended into an alicorn," Ditzy announced regally, "As a new princess of Equestria, I would be unable to give Dinky a life free from castle intrigue and away from the many jealous enemies that I am sure to acquire. It falls upon you, Twilight Sparkle, to..."

Twilight gave a loud sigh and then flashed. Suddenly she had a set of wings of her own. This was a strange loop and she had hoped Ditzy's talent would be something unique or exceptional due to a certain fact, "Yes, I'm an alicorn, too. Every pony is an alicorn. For some reason, any pony can ascend just by sneezing wrong. We all hide it because none of us actually want to rule and to make Celestia and Luna feel special. The last time a pony accidentally ruined the masquerade, we got Princess Cadance - and now she's stuck in the middle of the frozen north ruling an empire a thousand years out of

date."

"So every pony is an alicorn?" Ditzzy was shocked.

"It usually happens to every pony after they obtain their cutie mark. They're told on their cutecenara."

"I never had one. My parents were too busy."

Twilight nodded, "I figured as much. Cadance was an orphan. We usually try to let the ponies like you know in secret, someplace out of the way. At least you had the good sense not to run up to the Princesses and yell out, 'Look! Look what happened to me!' like some foal sitter-turned-princess I know."

\* \* \*

><p>80.10 (Goldude)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>For a Looper such as Rainbow Dash, it was hard not to know about the history of The Wonderbolts.<p>

"The initials E.U.P. stand for what?"

"Earth, Unicorn, and Pegasi. They're the Guard of the Protective Pony Platoons."

"Wrong."

However, for a Looper such as Rainbow Dash, it was hard to tell which history she should be studying for. Twilight continued, "While it's true that three ponies collectively formed The Wonderbolts, E.U.P. stands for the names of the three pegasi who founded them. East Wind, Updrift, and Pulse Storm. Now, can you tell me why they formed The Wonderbolts?"

Rainbow Dash hesitated as she filtered through her memories. "Uh... They got drunk one night and woke up in Saddle Arabia. Normally, that would be impossible, but The Wonderbolts are all about impossible. Updrift had somehow sold his wing to a Diamond Dog and needed it back, so the three went into their territory. An accidental conversation later, and East Wind was now married to the queen of Diamond Dogs.

The queen ordered them to travel over to Griffaltar in order to steal their weather gem. They had to obey under threat of death. Sadly, on their way over to Griffaltar, they got sidetracked and somehow wound up in Zebrica, where they mistakenly gave the zebras a disease they weren't accustomed to. The zebras started to go into comas, unable to deal with the fact that their kind weren't meant to hold magic.

In order to find a way to help them, the three proceeded to head back to Equestria with a Zebra's tail, for DNA purposes. Things went well until they finally found the cure for the zebras. They had totally forgotten about The Diamond Dogs, which had started invading Canterlot and taking ponies hostage until their demands were reached. E.U.P. collectively had enough and went on to form a military division to stop the Diamond Dogs, rescue all the hostages, and drive

out the invaders."

"Wrong."

Rainbow Dash blinked. "Huh? But-"

"The three were ordered by Princess Luna to create a military unit because she was feeling lazy about keeping the peace."

Again, it was hard to tell which history she should be studying. "Screw it, I'll fail this loop and try again next one. I'm going to Big Mac's bar."

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (misterq)<p>

Ditzy looked downcast at the ground for a few moments, "Nobody ever really seemed interested before. I thought it would be a little longer before... Twilight, please - please take care of Dinky for me."

And with that said, Ditzy popped like a soap bubble, leaving behind nothing except an utterly horrified Twilight Sparkle.

"Ta-da!" Ditzy said happily as she walked out from behind a tree.

Twilight looked at her aghast, "What!? You're alive!"

"Of course," Ditzy replied, "Sorry it was so shocking, but you're Twilight Sparkle. You hang out with Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie. If my prank was even a little bit less than convincing, you would have never fallen for it."

"But.. but how?"

"My special talent is making animated bubbles. See," Ditzy took a deep breath and blew out a large spit bubble. It wobbled a little in the air, and then took the exact likeness of Twilight Sparkle, herself.

"That's very interesting," Twilight said looking at her bubble clone, "And a little bit gross."

"I know!" said her bubble clone in Ditzy's voice. Then it popped.

Ditzy spoke up, "I know how to throw my voice, but I can't do accurate impressions all that well. My talent's isn't that great for most things, but Dinky loves my bubble puppet theater plays."

\* \* \*

><p>80.11<p>

Twilight looked around. She was... on a train, by the rocking motion of the seat under her.

There was a human boy of about mid-teens sitting opposite her "€"

\_oh, hey, I'm human too. That could be a warning sign, loops like this often go south â€" \_and he was looking curiously at her.

"Are you okay, Katniss? What-"

Twilight held up a hand. "Hold on a minute, please."

Loop memories. Loop memories...

The loop memories arrived.

\_RIGHT.\_

She snapped her fingers. "\_Buck\_ this loop. OWL?"

\_Stand by, ready. Set up.\_

"Buster-three. Flier Fin."

The boy opposite her was frowning. "What are you doing? Where'd that bracelet come from?"

She ignored him. Explanations later.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle, Princess of Magic, archmage, Anchor, and friendship specialist, was <em>pissed off.<em>

Most of her considerable natural power was bound up in her various equiform states, which had natural aptitude at magic. Purely as a matter of ease, she'd learned to channel her magic most easily through a horn.

When she was human, she had to work through implements, for the most part. Oerth magic could be used by bare hands, but it required a laundry list of components, and circumventing them was costly and tricky... unless she was a unicorn, in which case it was easier.

But there were \_always\_ workarounds. Especially if she was annoyed enough.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle blasted through the roof of the train in a corona of pure magic strong enough to be almost opaque to conventional vision. Wand in one hand, OWL in staff-form in the other, ethereal wings sprouting from her ankles and a Barrier Jacket which could probably withstand a moderately sized city buster constituting itself out of thin air around her, she shot south and west towards the Capitol along the line of the rail.<p>

Incidentally, the air around her happened to be on fire.

\* \* \*

><p>"...so, anyway, to ease the transition a little, I made the Hunger Games weekly," Twilight concluded.<p>

Mac blinked. "Wait, what? Beggin' yer pardon, miss Sparkle, but ah thought y'all said-"

Twilight shook her head. "I also put that enchantment from Flonyard on the arena. It's amazing how much a little no-death enchantment can turn a murderfest into genuinely fun entertainment for all the family."

She took a deep gulp of Frenzywater, wincing as it scorched her throat. "That said, I hope to not have to deal with monsters like that for a good few thousand years..."

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Ditzy looked downcast at the ground for a few moments, "Nobody ever really seemed interested before. I thought it would be a little longer before... Twilight, please - please take care of Dinky for me."<p>

And with that said, Ditzy popped like a soap bubble, leaving behind nothing except an utterly horrified Twilight Sparkle.

Twilight backed up in fear, but the rock she accidentally stepped on also popped.

"What is going on here?" Twilight said out loud. She carefully touched a nearby bush, only for it to pop as well.

Cautiously, the lavender unicorn lowered her head and then used her horn to stab at large tree. With a faint snap, the tree popped into nothingness.

Then Twilight found two large buckets, each chock full of experience points. Unfortunately, they were encased in vast amounts of bubble wrap.

"This is stupid!" Twilight Sparkle exclaimed as she slapped down her character sheet and multifaceted dice onto the table, "Who votes that Pokey Pierce can no longer be game master?"

Every hoof except Pokey's went up in the air.

"Then it's settled," Twilight said as she looked over the ponies that had gathered for game night. Lickety Split was eating his bowl of ice cream, Bon-bon had passed around her candies, and Ditzy was using her talent to make her apple juice all fizzy. Celestia's student continued, "How about we give Lyra's 'Humans and Handymen' game system a try next?"

\* \* \*

><p>80.12 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was intrigued by this variant. The Unawake Fluttershy

apparently had a regular musical performance schedule, usually with trained animal backup. She was still shy in social situations, and she wouldn't perform outside of Ponyville, but on stage in front of ponies she knew? She was a great singer. In fact, she was on her way to the next performance right now, making sure her recording spell was functioning properly. She wanted to have an album to take with her after this Loop ended.<p>

"Have you heard?" Twilight heard somepony, Vinyl Scratch it sounded like, whisper to another nearby. "Fluttershy's going to play \_rap\_ music!"

Twilight blinked. Able to take the stage or not, that sounded a little... bold for the shy pegasus. But either way it should prove entertaining, so she took her spot in the audience.

The curtain rose, the music began, and Twilight facehooved as she saw Fluttershy's animal backup this time.

She was playing \_rat\_ music.

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Ditzy looked downcast at the ground for a few moments, "Nobody ever really seemed interested before. I thought it would be a little longer before... Twilight, please - please take care of Dinky for me."<p>

And with that said, Ditzy popped like a soap bubble, leaving behind nothing except a mildly distraught Twilight Sparkle.

"Hi Dinky. Your mom exploded for some reason," Twilight monotoned to the little filly once she reached Ditzy's house, "She asked me to take care of you."

"Sheesh," Dinky huffed, "She did it to you, too? It's like Mom will do anything for free foal sitting. Her special talent is creating atmospheric illusions - mirages. If you want to talk to her, she's probably at the movies. I should be alright on my own."

"I don't mind staying with you, Dinky. How about we play a board game?"

"No, that's okay," the little unicorn waved her hoof, "I'm sorry mom is such a big jerk this loop."

Twilight's head whipped around, "What did you say?"

"Um, I didn't say anything," Dinky scrunched her mouth, her eyes shifting from one side to the other.

Twilight continued to stare at the little filly.

Dinky suddenly tapped herself on her chest, "Enterprise, one to beam up!"

Twilight looked on as the little unicorn vanished in a flash of blue. Then she told the universe exactly how she felt about this particular loop, "Ugh!"

\* \* \*

><p>80.13 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Kakashi looked over his new team and sighed. They had tried doing D ranks until the Hokage made the repairs to the collateral damage they always caused come out of Kakashi's own personal funds.<p>

Weeding garden? The weeds, most of the garden, and parts of the house were currently in low Earth orbit heading for Cloud, thanks to Trixie's modified 'weeds only' explosive tags.

Catching Tora? Completed due to Pinkie's secret recipe drugged tuna cakes, which happened to wear off just as Kakashi was handing off the cat to its owner - with the added benefits of increasing Tora's aggression, speed, and size. And claw sharpness. And letting it breathe fire, somehow.

Painting a fence? Kakashi didn't really want to remember what happened that mission. All he knew was that people were still trying to remove a stray fence post lodged in the mountain up the second Hokage's stone nostril.

The sad thing was that Team Demolition, as his students were now called, actually worked and cared for each other like a team should. It was just that no mission ended like they were supposed to.

Kakashi remembered the introductions.

"Howdy. My name is Applejack. My folks are a distant branch member of the Senju family that decided to settle down and run an orchard rather than do the ninja thing. Since things are pretty good on the farm, my little sis and I decided to off and join the ninja academy. I'm pretty strong and I can do a little bit of the wood chakra thing, but I'm better at earth manipulation. My favorite technique is making a giant club made of ultra-dense compressed earth and fighting with it. Guess that means I'm training to be a taijutsu expert with a bit of ninjutsu thrown in. I like apples, good friends, and honesty. I don't like it when people lie just because they can or to hurt others."

It was like she said, Kakashi thought. Applejack was massively strong for a genin and she could eventually develop Tsunade-level strength. She was fast and her mastery of earth jutsu was impressive. She would have been a perfect samurai. However, she had absolutely no talent for deception. He still cringed when he remember her attempt in a later kunoichi seduction class. "Howdy, my name is Apple.. not.. jack, and I'm anything except a Konoha ninja. Pleased ta meet ya!"

However, if he wanted guile and deception, there was always.. her.

"The name is Trixie, soon to be the great and powerful. At the age of five, I ran away to Konoha from a nearby circus that just happened to be on fire from mysterious circumstances that I know nothing about and were definitely not caused by one such as me. My strengths lie in my fabulous genjutsu and I have been studying seals for years now. My pride and joy are these gloves that can emit an explosive note level blast from the palms if I hold them like this.. OHNO! Hold on, sensei! I'll put the flames out! And a few illusions and your hair will even out again."

Finally, there was his last student. The the living embodiment of a headache.

"Hi! My name is Pinkie Pie! My family is a branch of the Akimichi clan. I love making others happy and seeing them smile and baking tasty treats and the way the sky looks in the morning and, oh I know! I've made everyone some ninja cookies. They're like little shirukens, and you can actually reenforce them with chakra and throw them, but you can also eat them since they're so tasty. So very tasty.. Mphfh dhntsh rithke bthhphht!"

Whatever else Pinkie was saying was lost as she had stuffed her mouth with a multitude of her own shiruken cookies and was trying to speak while eating them all at once, much to the disgust of Kakashi and her new teammates.

Apparently instead of growing larger and stronger the more she ate, Pinkie became faster. She had blinding speed - so fast it looked like she was teleporting at times, because there was absolutely no way Kakashi's brain would accept that a little pink genin could have perfected his sensei's signature yellow flash technique. This, coupled with her high level strength, durability, ability to be one of the most stealthy ninja Kakashi had ever seen despite constantly wearing highlighter pink and pastel blue, a propensity and chakra supply for making several shadow clones whenever she felt like it, and a danger sense that bordered on precognitive made Kakashi put her skills into the low jonin level. That is, if his suspicions proved false and that Pinkie wasn't actually hiding the majority of her abilities. Otherwise, well, Kakashi wasn't broken enough yet to believe in such a possibility yet.

In fact, his student would have been the perfect ninja if not for one thing. Pinkie Pie was a consummate pacifist. She refused to kill and wouldn't even hurt the worst of people if she could avoid it. To try and fix this, he had assigned her a solo C level mission of completely eliminating a bandit hideout.

Watching concealed from a nearby tree, Kakashi saw as Pinkie Pie appeared in the middle of the camp and promptly threw all the panicking bandits a giant party. It took the hardened men a long while to stop panicking, trying to attack her - which never worked, or trying to escape - Pinkie, or a Pinkie clone, would appear in their path and suddenly they would be back at the party. Eventually, Pinkie announced that as of now, everyone is no longer a bandit, but instead a worker at her candy factory on the outskirts of Konoha - which they also had to build first. Since there were only candy workers and no bandits around anymore, she didn't have to eliminate anyone. Mission success!



The candy factory had been built and all the ex-bandits seemed to be settling into their new roles. A few of the worst did try to escape early on during the construction, but they never got far. There had been no further breakout attempts after Pinkie announced that the escapees had been found and retired and are now happily living on a distant farm somewhere, or at least that's what the nice but slightly gross ninja covered in blood had told her.

Kakashi looked over his three students once again, "Congratulations. You're all going into the next chunin exam. I'm sure you'll all do very well. As always, try not to destroy the village."

Over all the cheering, Kakashi really hoped that they would all get promoted. Promoted and possibly get assigned an extremely long duration mission someplace not very flammable and far, far away from him.

Then came a distant cry that the entire village was slowly learning to hate and fear, "Ninja Sage Crusaders: Stone Mason Experts!"

This cry was shortly followed by a loud 'Oops!' as the first Hokage's stone face slowly slid down the mountainside.

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued( Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Say Ditzzy, Just what <em>does<em> your cutie mark mean anyway?"

Ditzzy glanced up from her delivery list, "Huh? You really want to know?"

"Sure, why not?"

Ditzzy grinned, "Wow, nobody ever really seemed interested before. Sure, I'll tell you! It's what's in my head!"

Twilight gaped at the self-depreciating remark as she considered how mean some ponies had to have been to convince her of that. It was so saâ€œ"

"No," Ditzzy cut off her thoughts, "I'm serious. Watch."

And with that, the wall-eyed mailmare put her hoof over her mouth and blew, puffing out her cheeks comically and causing a stream of bubbles to shoot out her ears.

"O...kay," Twilight did her best to wrap her mind around that one. "I was not expecting that."

\* \* \*

><p>80.14 (OracleMask)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Naruto's smirk was a little unsettling to Kakashi's

eyes.<p>

"Now that you're officially cleared for training by the Stripe-kage -" Naruto began.

Kakashi interrupted him with a raised hoof.

"Stripe-kage?"

"Where did you think she learned Mokuton from?" Naruto retorted, "Now where was I? \_Ahem\_...now that you're okay to train, I can finally show you the secret of using jutsu when you don't have fingers! But first, to celebrate your recovery, we've got a little...test."

If the smirk had been unsettling, the grin Naruto had on now was downright disturbing. Kakashi hid his nervousness well as Naruto reached into his mane and pulled out...a pair of tiny, jingling bells.

"...You're kidding me."

Naruto laughed.

"Nope! As the newest member of Looping Team Seven, its only fitting that you pass the bell test before I can train you! These are even the original bells, see? I have a couple...hundred...thousand copies of them of stashed away in my pocket. I can easily spare some for our test."

As Kakashi watched, Naruto awkwardly tied the bells into his mane.

"So you want me to come at you with intent to kill?" Kakashi asked.

"Well, considering that right now your best intent to kill me really won't do diddly-squat to me, it's up to you," Naruto replied, "Let's just say 'If it's stupid and it works, it wasn't stupid'. I'll even promise not to fly so you won't be too outmatched."

"You're enjoying this far too much."

"Of course!" Naruto laughed, "Ne, Kakashi, you can start whenever you \_"

His words were cut off as Naruto had to jump out of the way of a silvery blur. It resolved into Kakashi, leg outstretched a hoof strike. Which, Naruto realized, had been aimed for his head. Kakashi eye-smiled at the shocked expression on Naruto's face.

"Zecora must have forgotten to mention that I've been training my pony-style taijutsu with Silver Spoon," Kakashi said as innocently as he could manage.

"Yeah...guess so," Naruto replied, his smile returning.

\* \* \*

><p>Kakashi was exhausted, and it was showing. Naruto, not so much, but the pegasus was clearly having trouble holding himself

back.<p>

Over the last hour, Naruto had gotten a painful reminder that new to looping or not, unfamiliar with fighting in a pony body or otherwise, Kakashi Hatake was still a leaf-damned \_Jounin\_ and Might Gai's \_Eternal Rival\_ for a leaf-damned \_reason\_.

The only trouble was that Naruto still had the bells. And chasing Naruto around this clearing all day was doing very little to change that.

"We can always try this again tomorrow," Naruto called out, seeing how Kakashi was starting to look a little wobbly on his hooves, "You're already doing great, Kakashi! No need to push yourself too far when you've just gotten better right?"

Tempting. Realistically, pacing himself on this would be the smart decision. There were still years until their time in Equestria was scheduled to end. And after that would be more loops. \_Countless\_ more loops, if Naruto's experience was anything to judge by. Kakashi could take his time, build his strength back up.

Yeah, \_no\_.

Naruto, apparently taking the silence as agreement, turned to head back to Ponyville. At that moment Kakashi \_flung\_ himself forward. He crashed in a heap a dozen feet \_past\_ his target.

"What - Kakashi!"

Naruto flew over immediately, panicking. But Kakashi was...laughing? And he was holding something in his teeth, something that jingled. Naruto checked his mane - yep, the bells were gone.

"Kakashi-sensei, you \_idiot\_."

\* \* \*

><p>"...basically, it's all mental," Naruto finished.<p>

Kakashi nodded. "So the reason I was able to body flicker at the end was -"

"Because you don't normally use hand signs for that anyway, and you wanted it bad enough that you were able to overcome the whole '\_I'm not in my real body\_' mental block," Naruto nodded, "It takes a lot of practice before you can use complicated jutsu, but the simplest things - or at least stuff you already use all the time anyway - are a cinch. Take me, for example. I was throwing around Shadow Clones right away."

To show off, Naruto promptly poofed two clones into existence.

"But even transforming took a lot longer for me to relearn," Naruto added, as the two clones demonstrated a transformation.

For lack of any other ideas, Naruto's clones turned into Sasuke and Sakura - human-shaped of course, since Kakashi had no way to recognize their pony forms. He was about explain further about the mental techniques when the Sakura-shaped clone violently gagged. Both

the remaining clone, Naruto, and Kakashi were shocked to see a hoof impaled directly into that clone's chest - right where the heart would have been if the clone had really been Sakura.

Kakashi especially was surprised, because it was his hoof doing the impaling.

The clearing was very quiet after the poor clone finally popped.

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued( Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Say Ditzzy, Just what <em>does<em> your cutie mark mean anyway?"

Ditzzy glanced up from her delivery list, "Huh? You really want to know?"

"Sure, why not?"

Ditzzy grinned, "Wow, nobody ever really seemed interested before. Sure, I'll tell you! It's my personality!"

Twilight waited for her to continue for a second before it sunk in. "Wait, that's it?"

"Yep!"

\* \* \*

><p>80.13 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So are we a team yet?" asked the purple haired girl.<p>

"I really don't want to head on back to the academy," said the red headed girl, "They don't seem to like us there all that much. Plus they still haven't really rebuilt all of the building after our last attempt at becoming ninja sages."

"Yeah!" squeaked a grinning Sweetie Belle, "I would hate to think what the council would do to you if you didn't pass us, Mizuki-san."

"You all... pass," Honestly, it was the only thing Mizuki could say. He was now constantly wishing for incarceration in the T&I department instead of being appointed team leader for this particular group. But the Hokage needed a teacher that was disposable at best, and he fit the bill. He had been told, in excruciating detail, exactly what would happen if he attempted to escape or even commit suicide. But as Mizuki watched his new genin team, now labeled 'Team Ninja Sage Crusaders', enthusiastically yell out their catch phrase; he wondered if being revived and then eaten by the shinigami would really be worse than teaching these three.

Kakashi heard the very familiar and very unwelcome voices and placed

his palm over his face. Of course they would send those three to 'help' him. They would use all sorts of excuses like how they had worked together as a team before, but the jonin was willing to bet his entire Icha-icha collection that the true reason was that they just wanted his former students out of the village as far and as often as possible.

"I really don't think that is what the abbreviation stands for, Pinkie," Applejack was heard saying as the three walked towards the clearing where Kakashi and his new team was waiting.

Pinkie huffed, "I remember what it stands for. I worked at the Tickle and Irritation department for a whole day, Applejack."

"So what happened there?" Trixie asked, "Why didn't they want you back?"

Pinkie tapped her finger to her chin, "Well, they placed me in a room that had a bunch of prisoners behind a glass wall. Then, they had me just talk about some of the new desserts I wanted to invent. But in the evening, they told me that it was much too troublesome to have me do that every day. Apparently, they said that I was causing far too many attempted suicides. And that three of the attempts were by the guards. Then they gave me some money and sent me home."

Applejack nodded, "I'm proud to have survived a full two and a half minutes of weaponized Pinkie-babble before breaking. I still can't look on any sort of cherries without remembering. Oh, hey there, sensei!"

"Hi, Kakashi!" Pinkie Pie waved enthusiastically.

"Hmm, I don't remember seeing anyone that looks like this man," Trixie frowned, "Are you sure we've met before?"

Applejack gently tapped the pointed-hat-and-cloak-wearing ninja girl on her shoulder, "Try to picture him on fire, screaming and flailing wildly."

"Ahh, Kakashi-sensei!" Trixie exclaimed with a smile, "Fancy meeting you again. Looks like your eyebrows are coming back nicely."

"You three," Kakashi said by way of a greeting.

"Are these your new students?" Applejack asked, "I'm Applejack. This here is Trixie and the one in the pink dress is Pinkie Pie."

"My name is Sakura. Pleased to meet you," said the unawake (thankfully) Sakura.

"Sasuke," the brooding Uchiha uttered.

"And I'm Naruto!" said the loop anchor before looking at Pinkie Pie, who was leaning far into his personal space. She was examining every detail on his face, even sniffing him a few times. Naruto spoke up, "Er.. what is she doing?"

Applejack shrugged, "No idea."

Pinkie suddenly jumped back and pointed a finger at Naruto, "It all

makes sense now! The Uchiha massacre, the attempted kidnapping of the Hyuga heiress, Sakura's pink hair, the Kyuubi attack! I know your secret now, Naruto!"

"What? What are you talking about?" Naruto tried not to look at his overly interested teammates or the suddenly alarmed Kakashi.

Pinkie continued, "Your quick healing! Your animalistic features! Your insatiable hunger for ramen! It's quite obvious! Just like in my old dog-demon manga! You, Naruto, are a hanyou! A half-demon!"

Everyone just sat there silent for a moment. Then, Sakura spoke up, "That's stupid! We don't live in a manga."

Naruto was attempting not to give Sakura the same look as the other three loopers while stealthily tapping on his stomach seal, trying to stifle the howling laughter inside his mind, "No I'm not! Why would you ever think such a thing?"

"Because it's plain to see what must have happened," Pinkie Pie launched into her explanation, "Shortly after Naruto was born, a group of Konoha ninja were returning from a mission. There was a Uchiha on the team, and when their super freaky eyes saw Naruto, they knew what he was. The Uchiha wanted Naruto's power. They wanted him to become a ninja for Konoha, but Naruto's human parent refused to move. After the mission, that Uchiha snuck back and kidnapped baby Naruto, killing his parent in the process. They took him back to Konoha and were planning to raise him as an Uchiha.

"But the Kyuubi returned. Seeing its mate slaughtered and its child missing, the demon grew to its full form and followed the trail back to the village. The Uchiha, not wanting to be blamed for the disaster, tossed Naruto into the nearest orphanage and claimed that he had been born that day. Then the fourth Hokage died killing the Kyuube and life continued as normal. Right until Hinata Hyuga was almost kidnapped.

"The Hyuga also have super freaky eyes and they saw the Uchiha dump a half-demon baby into the orphanage right before the Kyuube attacked. They were willing to sit on this information so as not to destroy an entire clan and weaken the village, but then during the kidnapping, the Uchiha police turned out to be of absolutely no use. They didn't stop the kidnapper or prevent the death of Neji's dad. So in anger, they let loose the knowledge that the Kyuube attack happened entirely because of the Uchiha clan.

"Not wanting his clan to be remembered as complete traitors, Itachi took it upon himself to kill all of them, except for his brother. He tortured Sasuke because without the feelings of sympathy his suffering produced, Sasuke would have been known only as a traitor's brother and not the last brave survivor. And that's how everything happened. It's so obvious," Pinkie Pie finished speaking.

Everyone sat there in silence except for Naruto's tapping, which had reached a rapid staccato beat as Kurama's howling laughter intensified.

Sakura raised her hand, "How does any of this ridiculous story explain my hair color?"

"It doesn't," Pinkie Pie chirped, "I just really like pink."

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Ditzy looked downcast at the ground for a few moments, "Nobody ever really seemed interested before. I thought it would be a little longer before... Twilight, please - please take care of Dinky for me."<p>

And with that said, Ditzy popped like a soap bubble, leaving behind nothing except an utterly horrified Twilight Sparkle.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight found Dinky Doo at the playground next to Ponyville's schoolhouse. She watched the little unicorn running back and forth with her friends, trying to field a hoofball, failing, then trying again without the least sign of discouragement.<p>

And what she had to tell her... what she... no. Twilight took a deep breath and stepped forward. Best to do it quickly, before the shock wears off. She's going to need somebody strong to lean on, and if I think too much about what happened to Derpy I won't be that pony.\_

Dinky noticed the shadow over her and looked up at Twilight. "Hello, Miss Sparkle!" she said. "How are you?"

"Dinky..." Twilight had to take another deep calming breath before she could continue. "I'm afraid I've got some bad news to tell you... about your mother."

Dinky sighed, but it sounded to Twilight more like exasperation than sadness. "She popped again, didn't she?"

"Um... what?" Twilight blinked.

Dinky began walking with a steady, determined pace, and Twilight followed out of curiosity. It wasn't far to the humble cottage on the edge of town that Derpy had called home, and Ditzzy walked straight inside, leaving Twilight to hesitate for several moments before following.

Twilight found Dinky in the back of the cottage, standing on top of a stepladder next to a gigantic storage pot carved out of stone. Painted with sloppy strokes on the side of the stone urn was the word MOM. From behind the urn Dinky drew up an immense bubble wand in her teeth, the thing easily twice her own length, and with great effort marehandled it into the urn, stirring vigorously for a few seconds. Then with the greatest care she lifted the bubble wand out, a shining rainbow membrane clinging to the aperture.

Slowly but firmly Dinky waved the wand, and an immense bubble formed. When it finally left the wand, it shrank in on itself, taking the shape and form of a familiar gray-coated, blonde-maned pegasus.

"Hi, Muffin!" Derpy grinned. "How was school?"

"How did you do it this time, Mom?" Dinky asked. "Thistle salad? Too long in the sauna at the spa? Forgot what F-R-A-G-I-L-E on a package means?"

"Twilight just asked about my cutie mark," Derpy smiled. She looked from Dinky to Twilight and said, "I hope my little muffin behaved while you were taking care of her. Thanks!"

"But... what? How? Why? That... I don't... how can...?" All the questions in the world were holding a convention just behind Twilight's vocal chords, and the chairmare couldn't call the meeting to order.

"Gran'ma was a Mirror Pool clone," Dinky said. "Gran'pa and then Dad had to restore Mom about once a week before I took over." She looked at her mother and added, "I love Mom dearly, but I'm hoping my cutie mark turns out to be a brick. Or a boulder. Or a concrete mixer, maybe."

"That's my rock-solid little girl!" Derpy grinned, ruffling Dinky's mane. "You can always rely on her to be strong!"

\_Why couldn't Mac or Berry Punch be Awake this Loop?\_ Twilight thought. \_I need a drink NOW. Brain bleach is ineffective if applied four hours after the memory you want to erase...\_

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

80.1: Yeah, there's a lot of these. Ditzzy/Derpy has an... interpretative cutie mark.

>80.2: She has a license, she's fine.<br>80.3: The bible has some crazy stuff in, man.

>80.4: Chaos theory.<br>80.5: Rapid. Dash.

>80.6: Heavy Spear Shaker influence.<br>80.7: So. Many. Pranks.

>80.8: Bubble Bobble.<br>80.9: It's Time for Adventure.

>80.10: Pick your history.<br>80.11: The Funnier Games.

>80.12: In competition with Rasta Mouse?<br>80.13: Poor Kakashi.

>80.14: Speaking of Kakashi...<p>

## 85. Chapter 85

81.1 (Indalecio)

\* \* \*

><p>Chiyo was new to this all 'looping' business. She'd had a few loops before, but they'd all been like her normal human self, so when noticed she'd had hooves this time around her first thoughts were not particularly surprising.<p>

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"



"Chill out..." Spike paused. "Short Stuff." He sniggered.

"It's not funny! I don't have hands! And I'm probably late for class!" Chiyo got up and tried to run for the nearest exit.

She felt a strong tug on her body and was pulled back. Her body was turned around, and she was face to face with Spike.

"Okay. Calm down! Breathe!" Said Spike encouragingly.

To her surprise, she found out she was doing so.

"Okay, now what's the last thing you remember?"

"I was boarding a plane to America. Oh! This must be the start of a new loop! But I don't recognize anypony. Wait, did I just say 'Anypony'?"

"Anypony is fine here. This is probably your first fused loop."

Chiyo nodded.

"Now try to think back to what your memories are telling you. Your other memories."

"Wait, I was reading about the Mare in the Moon. She was going to return on the Longest Day after 1000 years! That's tomorrow! I've got tell somepony!"

"Calm. Breathe."

Chiyo sucked in a huge breath and let it out.

"Oh! I can tell Princess Celestia! She'll probably know what to do!"

"Okay! You're doing great! I can take down a letter and send it to the Princess."

\* \* \*

><p>After sending the letter a short period passed and Spike belched again. He unfurled the scroll and read out loud.<p>

"Dear Short Stuff,

I'm glad you're paying attention to your studies, but you must simply stop reading those dusty old books. There is more to a young filly's life than studying. So I'm sending you to oversee the preparations for this year's Summer Sun Celebration, Ponyville. And I've got a more essential task for you to complete; make some friends."

At seeing Chiyo's downcast face, Spike spoke up. "That's pretty normal. Don't worry about it."

"So we're off to Ponyville?"

"We're off to Ponyville."

\* \* \*

><p>81.2 (yannoshka)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Major Tiana Ramboux of Commonwealth Marine Crusaders surveyed her team, with pursed lips.<p>

They were earth's best and brightest. The CMC alpha team sent into the hardest missions to protect mankind from extrasolar threats. And they were so good as to have 0 mortality rate where even the second best team suffered 30% casualties per mission.

And they were also the textbook ur-example of ragtag bunch of misfits.

The Algerian massaged her aching temples as she tried to cope with the fact that her second in command and her pilot were in the process of beating the stuffing out of each other. Again.

It said much for their group dynamics that the other three members of the team were paying no attention to the rumpus.

"Another ship maintenance argument?" she tiredly asked lieutenant Bell.

"You know it Diamond. Apple was harping again on the unnecessary amount of work Scooter's grandstanding maneuvers out of combat create. You know Scooter - fighter jock to the bone, so she responded with her usual in-your-face brash idiocy." The classy Englishwoman shrugged in dismissal.

"After the bruises I got last time I tried to get between the two of them, I'm staying well clear of it."

"And you two?" Major turned her gimlet glare which earned her her nickname to the other two.

Xenia Nidalli and Bianca Salvatore y Cuchara de la Plata, were team's assault specialists and more than strong and skilled enough to separate the brawling pair.

"Esas dos estÃ¡n completamente locas, Mayor." The improbably white haired latina answered, her eyes rolling in exasperation behind her glasses and her Nigerian counterpart hurried to add on.

"If it looked like they were going to do serious harm to each other, we'd have stepped in Diamond you know that. So we figured to let them get it out of their system in controlled environments."

And then, as one, all six of them awoke to the loop.

A short time and two quick application of nanoheal later the six loopers were joined in conference by the three Founder's ghosts.

"So, to recap, we are in human loop that centers around Solar system defense from alien invaders with lots of planetside combat, and the six of you represent an elite multinational strike team. The best one

there is apparently" Cookie mused bemusedly.

"So, what are our options?" Clover cut in on her compatriot's musings.

"To determine that, I think we need more information. As I see it there are three main questions here. Who are we fighting? What resources do we have to fight with, and how do they scale with our foe's? How much are we dedicated to playing out this loop?" As per norm, Pensee took the lead when matters turned toward strategy. Even Diamond Tiara bowed downed to the founders acumen in that area.

"As far as aliens are concerned, they are a celluloitic lifeform..." Sweetie Belle began answering...

\* \* \*

><p>Admiral Antoan Luis PÃ©ricarde, better known to the multiverse at large as Jean Luc Picard, was not enjoying the loop overmuch. The stress induced by keeping a low profile while being a prominent public figure was considerable and the <em>maudite barbe<em> itched like the blazes. And to top it all of he had a mission of utmost importance for the safety of this loop's solar system, which further meant he had to contact his only team that had any hope whatsoever to pull it off. That in and by itself shouldn't have been so bad, except that the asinine command structure demanded that he do so personally, and he was prepared to bet NCC-1701-D that sooner or later, if they haven't already, that that bunch will turn out to be loopers.

He reviewed their files once more, as if they would be able to tell him if the people in question were Awake or not.

Major Tiana Ramboux, call-sign Diamond, was a former high priced corporate soldier for hire who enlisted as soon as the reality of extraterrestrial threat was made certain. She quickly distinguished herself both as a soldier and as a leader. Her disciplinary records were not so clean, stemming mostly from her lack of patience with fools and bureaucratic oversight.

Captain Alexandra 'Apple' Blum was an oddity. One would think degrees in mechanical, aeronautical and electronics engineering out of MiT would lead her to the R'n'D, but so far all and every attempt to reassign her so resulted in her offering to resign, and an unspoken but certain promise that with her out, so would be the financial and material support of the Smith-Blum consortium. She was after all the younger sister of consortium's current CEO.

Lieutenant Brianna Bell was another odd duck in her own way. How many officers in any armed forces could add 'operatically trained' to their resume, after all. A daughter of SAS colonel she practically grew up with a gun in her hand, and even won Cambridge where she was getting her bio-sciences degree several gold medals on the marksmanship team.

Then there was sargent Xenia Nidalli. She at least was fairly normal. Barer of several medals for courage and valor for endangering herself to pull wounded allies from the line of fire.

Sargent Bianca Salvatore y Cuchara de la Plata, was also fairly normal, save for the fact that she was heiress to large estates in

her native Argentina.

And then, there was the \_piece d'\_ . The authentic, real deal, ge-nu-i-ne maverick. Song 'Scooter' Loo. The Chinese girl was five feet three package of bad attitude, blind arrogance and the very worst of fighter jock stereotype. She was drummed out of ROCAF, and would have been out of CMC save for the fact she was a prodigy at the controls of any kind of flying craft. And Admiral was darkly certain, not even that would have saved her career if she had not fallen into the able clutches of Major Ramboux.

He sighed dejectedly, then pulled his face into the ebullient mask of his in-loop persona and keyed in a communication request to CMC vessel "Bad Seed"

\* \* \*

><p>Having decided to stick out with the loop for the moment, crusaders and the founders were in the middle of hashing out the finer details on their plans when the emergency com signal alarm bleared.<p>

"Well girls, looks like we're going to get our marching orders" DT grinned toothily at her friends as she remotely accepted the vid-con.

The wall mounted screen blossomed into the magnificently bearded visage of the Commonwealth Marine Crusaders Commandant.

"What new fires can we put out for you for you Admiral?" Frankly DT was appalled by how irreverent she was acting, but she was supposed to be a former merc with no respect for desk-jockeys and it wouldn't do to break her role at that point.

"Si votre bande d'abrutis insubordonnÃ©s n'Ã©tiez pas aussi utiles..." Despite his clear ire, admiral's words were almost conversational.

"Oui, oui, mon admiral! Je m'excuse. You have a mission for us, oui?"

"We have discovered what is believed to be lichen's premier listening post on the surface of Proteus. I don't have to teach you your job. Take ton bande de joyeux tarÃ©s and do it. The rest of information is in the briefing we have just uploaded to "Bad Seed". Time is of the essence. Au revoir Major!"

"Ya know gals, Admiral looked mighty familiar to me..."

"Sure he did Bloom, sure, he did..." DT dismissed Apple Blooms concerns offhandedly as she puzzled over the briefing.

"No Ah'm telling you, I'm certain we've encountered him outside this loop..."

"Well I'm certain I don't recognize him, and I perform mental strengthening and organization exercises twice a day..."

\* \* \*

><p>81.3 (barryc100588)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Mac's Bar was open for business and full of loopers, including a certain purple dragon, and he was telling a story about one of his adventures to the audience. the Crusaders were especially captivated.<p>

"I had just entered the third area of the Forgotten Worlds, Evening Lake, and I decide to go look and see if there was anyone captive here, too. I figured the Sorceress would do that, if Sergeant Bird and Sheila the Kangaroo were anything to go on. And sure enough, in the central tower of the area, I found a yeti in a cage, with my old "friend" Moneybags the Bear "guarding" him."

Apple Bloom chose this moment to interrupt. "It's incredible how, how..."

"Duplicitous!" Sweetie piped up.

"Um, what does \_that\_ mean, Sweetie?" Scootaloo asked.

"It means to be deceptive or double-dealing. In this case, Moneybags agreed to keep the animals the Sorceress captured locked up, but also agreed to free those same animals if paid." Sweetie explained.

Scootaloo coughed what sounded like "dictionary" under her breath.

Spyro chuckled. "he is duplicitous, Apple Bloom. Now back to my story. I paid him 1000 gems to free Bently, and after calling him, an, and I quote, 'avoricious, duplicitous, larcenous ursine', he clubbed Moneybags with his club before knocking him away and inviting me into his world."

Twilight winced. "He sounds pretty violent."

Rainbow chose then to speak up. "I don't know about you, Twilight, but if I was locked up by someone for money, and that same person freed me for money, I'd get pretty violent too."

Other loopers in the room were nodding in agreement.

Spyro nodded. "Each of the captive animals were violent to Moneybags, if you recall."

\* \* \*

><p>81.1 continued (Indalecio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was one of the odd loops for Osaka so far, not that she particularly minded. She got to bake these wonderful Okinawan doughnuts called sata andagi. Also, she was a unicorn, and currently holding one of said doughnuts in her telekinetic grip. She was standing in the middle of Ponyville's main street, as her loop memories were suggesting she should wait here.<p>

"Oh right. Kyon said I didn't have to do that anymore." She was just about to turn and leave when she heard a flapping. In the distance an ivory and gold chariot arrived, stopping a little distance from her. Its two passengers disembarked a small dragon and an orange unicorn foal with a star pattern on her flank. She trotted up to the two.

"Hey Chiyo," She wasn't sure it was Chiyo, but the pattern fit.

"Oh! Osaka!" Her eyes lit up, and she tackled Osaka in a hug.

"I take it you two know each other?" asked Spike.

"Oh! I almost forgot; this is Spike. He's one of the loopers native to Equestria. He's been a big help!"

Spike beamed a little at that, polishing a claw off his chest.

"Have you seen any of our other friends?"

"Well.." She was interrupted by the sounds of a whistle being blown.

"Halt! Freeze! Stop in the name of the law!" A brown earth pony with black hair ran up to the trio.

"I've never you two before, and I know everypony in Ponyville." said the newcomer.

"Tomo! It's me Chiyo! And you recognize Osaka!" her eyes darting from Tomo to Osaka.

"Ah! It's the same madness Deep Fried's got! Is it contagious? I've got to get the hazmat suits! Wait, what if I'm already infected!" Tomo started running around chasing her tail, until she was stopped by another earth pony, who bopped her over the head. She was a yellow earth pony wearing a pink cheongsam dress. She bowed.

"I really must apologize for my friend here. I'm Curry Noodle, and this is Fair Cop. She can be a very silly pony at times." Her last sentence said in a serious tone as she faced Tomo.

"Oh! I'm Short Stuff; this is Spike, and this is..." bowing and then nodding to Osaka.

"Pleased to meet you." said Spike, and giving a little bow.

"Deep Fried. Pleased to meet you." said Osaka, also bowing.

"We've met. We've lived in Ponyville for how many years?" Yomi deadpanned.

"Oh right." said Osaka sheepishly.

"Well, we'll let you get on with your business."

"Oh, hold on!" said Spike fumbling with a clipboard in his hands. "We're representatives of Princess Celestia. We're overseeing the preparations for the Summer Sun Celebration."

He examined the clipboard. "You said your names were Fair Cop and Curry Noodle? Fair Cop is handling security? And you and Deep Fried are handling catering?"

"Yep!" yelled Tomo.

Osaka and Yomi both just nodded.

"Well, let's see what you have in mind."

\* \* \*

><p>81.4 (elmagnifico)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Macintosh put down his flagon. It was pretty much empty. Even after all the things the loops had thrown at him, having the sun-mover herself in his bar, albeit incognito, and wanting to commiserate, made him want to go for the stronger stuff. But no, this was supposed to be a place where any person could come for help, be it alcoholic or psychologic. Making an exception for this one by sloshing himself would be catastrophically hypocritical.<p>

Easy, Macintosh. Breathe in, breathe out. Just another looper, looking for a drink. All that was different was this one moved the sun on a more regular basis than the others that came through. Although, that did raise a question.

"Yall've been here before, why the get-up?"

The mare who had introduced herself as Rose Eyes didn't respond immediately. A sigh sent her purple-and-white mane rippling.

"Remember when you realized who I was? You tensed up. I saw that every time I was in here, both from the new loopers, and from you. I surmised you would be more comfortable not knowing my name, and it seems I was right."

She jostled the flagon, swirling its contents around.

"I really do like the mountain-cider though. Reminds me of one of Starswirl's favorites."

Macintosh didn't know how to respond to that, so he let the silence hang there for a moment.

"You must forgive me if I'm being too forward."

He quirked an eyebrow. Now there was a loaded sentence. She seemed to pick up on that, and clarified.

"One of the best things about the loops is that my sister and I are no longer the only immortals around. Keeping from getting attached to those around them, being able to only share with a select few the burdens of the ages, while still seeing those fleeting others as people, these are things an undying ruler must accept. Loopers share a similar burden."

He humphed introspectively. He hadn't looked at it that way.

"Now, even though that burden hasn't changed in its essence, there are now several dozen new ponies, liable to still be there for a while, for the both myself and Luna to get to know."

None of that corner-pinching to this smile. As genuine as smiles come.

"After all this time, it's a relief to be able to spend time with ponies without worrying they'll be gone next century. I can make friends again."

Macintosh would have been fine with letting the happy silence linger a bit, but Murphy did not let it stand.

The bell at the door chimed, and he looked up. What he saw there caused him to quirk an eyebrow just a tad. It was Cherilee, with a mischievous gleam in her eye.

Wuh-oh.

One of the deviations from baseline that had cropped up this Loop was that he and Cherilee had been dating. While not as unpleasantly committing or emotionally compromising as some relationships he'd Awoken to, it had nevertheless necessitated him growing a bit of distance between the two of them. He'd been gradual with it, but could sense a certain amount of cling from the schoolmarm. So, while not inherently dooming, this visit was still a minefield he'd have to tread carefully.

"Evening Mac, I'll have a Bloom's Mild to start."

He retrieved the liquid and an appropriate vessel and began pouring, while the disguised princess and Cherilee nodded to each other. It was a nod of greeting, silence between strangers, not acknowledgement of a co-conspirator. Whatever mischief was afoot, he didn't think Celestia was involved.

"Just got back from Zecora's, and I think you're right. We should try something different."

With that, Cherilee swiveled on the barstool and looked him in the eye. He could see something in there, a weight to those words that hadn't been there before. Another horseshoe was yet to drop.

He felt the best response was raised eyebrow.

"I told the witch doctor you didn't love me true."

The eyebrow elevated further.

"I told the witch doctor you didn't love me nice."

Mac could tell this was going somewhere, but he wasn't sure where.

"And then, the witch doctor, she gave me some advice."



His heart skipped a beat as music started playing out of nowhere, and then started palpating in tune as he felt himself in the grips of the start of a Heartsong.

"I told the witch doctor I was in love with you."

His muscles started twitching in time, the natural response to this magical release, but his mind was afire with speculation. Romantic Heartsongs were potent, rare magic.

"I told the witch doctor you didn't love me too."

He'd never participated one, but he'd seen one set the entirety of Manehattan a-dancing like a whirlwind of charged gyrations.

"I know that you'll be mine when I say this to you."

He began channeling the determination to resist, the fire behind his eyes stilling himself down to a rock-solid core. Stand, not Smash, was the relevant word, but the principle remained the same.

It started with nonsense, but it was a directed nonsense, and he fought the rhythmic motions down again.

The mantra repeated, as though to cement its hold. However, something was different. Its underpinnings seemed more silly this time than salacious.

Then he recognized it, a children's tune from the Hub, and he gave her a deadpan look.

"Woke Up this mornin', didja?"

The only reply he got was a wide, toothy smile.

The infectious tune continued, and even after the chorus line had burst in and carried Cherilee off accompanied by boppy, poppy nonsense, he found himself incapable of forming an appropriate response. Until, that is, his drinking partner burst out laughing. She probably recognized the song. Then the absurdity of the situation hit him, and he joined in the merriment, their peals of mirth echoing in the rafters and filling the empty cellar.

Just two friends, sharing a moment.

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><p>81.5 (barryc100588)<p>

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><p>Sonic, Tails, Knuckles, Spike, and Twilight were walking through Twinkle Park, Spike and Twilight admiring the attractions. Twilight was also confused about the perpetual night in this area. They were all Awake, and had already sorted their Loop memories.<p>

"Say, Sonic. If this area has perpetual night, how does it stay warm? Everything should have frozen by now." Twilight said, confused.

"It's not actually perpetual night. It's simply that the park is only open at night." Sonic explained with a smile.

Spike chose this moment to speak up. "Can we see the fun house mirror ride?" He asked, eager.

Knuckles frowned. "What's so special about a set of strange mirrors?" He asked, irritated. "We're supposed to be looking for Chaos Emeralds and Master Emerald shards."

"I know, but I've never been to this amusement park before, and I want to check out everything." Spike said.

Sonic chuckled. He'd never been to Twinkle Park before now, either. It had always been Amy who ended up here, and he only got here with Tails and Knuckles because Twilight teleported them all past the front gate. "Sure, Spike. Let's go to the fun house." With that, he took off. Since he didn't actually know where the fun house was, he went in a random direction. The others hurried to keep up with him, Twilight scooping Spike onto her back. They eventually managed to reach the fun house and walked inside. Spike climbed off Twilight and approached one of the mirrors. What he saw shocked him.

"Um, Twilight? This mirror is showing something strange. When I look in, I see myself as my Gen 1 persona." Spike said as Twilight approached. After Twilight got beside Spike, her eyes widened. "Is that.. my mother?" She asked. "What's my mother doing on the other side of the mirror?"

Tails approached and looked up at the top of the mirror. "Interdimensional mirror." He frowned in thought. "This mirror must show how you look in a different dimension. Based on what Spike said, I bet your looking at your Generation 1 selves. If Sonic were to look in the mirror, I bet he'd see his Classic self, or how he looked in one of his cartoons or comics." Tails explained. He got closer, but instead of showing his younger self, the Tails in the mirror was a bit taller, with better gloves and a belt around his waist, that held a couple tools. "Wait a minute. That's not my younger self. Who is that?"

Sonic heard Tails and went to investigate. "What's wrong, buddy?"

Tails turned around. "Sonic! Could you look in this mirror and tell me what you see?" the fox asked.

Sonic nodded with a smile. "Sure, buddy." The others stepped aside so Sonic could see better. Knuckles joined him. The reflections they saw shocked them both. Sonic was also a bit taller. His shoes were different and he had athletic tape on his arms and legs. As for Knuckles, his chest was more bulky, with longer arms and he also had athletic tape on him. "What.. are we looking at?" Sonic asked. "I've been to the Hub before, but I've never seen anything like this version of me." Knuckles nodded, dumbfounded as he backed away from the mirror.

"I think we should leave. I don't think there are any Master Emerald shards or Chaos Emeralds here." the echidna said. The others nodded and headed for the exit, Twilight and Spike frowning.

"That was strange." Twilight muttered.

\* \* \*

><p>81.6 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>There were consequences, Twilight supposed, to a world where Discord in ancient days overthrew the tyrannical mad rule of the Evil Alicorn Sisters.<p>

This wasn't her first Loop in such an alternate reality. The one thing all such loops had in common was that the rules of magic she'd grown up with were changed- that is to say, there weren't any. Cause and effect weren't so much linked as held together by kite string and bubble gum. Beyond that one thing, however, no holds were barred. Awakening to Loop memories of being Discord's personal student (or, more often, a leader in the pony Resistance) meant absolutely nothing about the baseline could be taken for granted.

But some surprises were more so than others.

"Greetings," Maud Pie said with all the apparent enthusiasm of a tenured history professor one semester from retirement and two semesters from embalming.\* "And welcome to Ditzzyland, where you shall see wonders the likes of which you have never experienced in all your lives."

The placid petrophile pony led the group into the park, past such excitement-filled rides like Cross-Country Bus Trip to Seaddle, the Tree Climb, and the Stairs That Don't Go Anywhere Except Upstairs. There were carnival games, such as The Ball Goes Down the Hole Not Up It and Spray Water At the Clown Not Vice Versa. For educational purposes there was the Hall of Rather Boring But Important Laws, where ancient pony rulers completely failed to move and talk to a recorded soundtrack. There was a small petting zoo where the cats did not eat cheeseburgers and the owls did not make snarky commentary on the pony condition.

And at the center of the park, just in front of Ditzzy's Cloud Castle of Dreams That Stay Dreams, was Maud's rock farm.

"Behold the limestone aggregate," Maud said. "Each of these dozens of pebbles within the stone is of an entirely different mineral, washed down from ancient mountains by floods, deposited on ancient sea beds, then glued together over uncounted centuries by dissolved limestone deposits into this new rock."

One pony waved a hoof. "What does it do when you rub one of the little pebbles?"

"Nothing," Maud replied. "It's a rock."

The crowd oohed in appreciation and stared even harder at the funny-looking rock which, despite all expectations to the contrary and millenia of good reasons to expect otherwise, just lay there.

As Twilight browsed the gift shop full of Hats For Only Your Head and Food-Flavored Muffins, she had to admit this was a first for her.

Never before, in more Loops than she could count, had she ever visited an actual, honest-to-goodness bemusement park.

\* Two semesters before embalming or after, it doesn't matter. With that kind of teacher you just can't tell.

\* \* \*

><p>81.1 continued (Indalecio)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>As they walked along Tomo suddenly got a big grin on her face as she turned to face Osaka.<p>

"What?" Asked Osaka in her usual, gentle voice.

"I finally figured it out! You're not crazy or sick!"

"There's a shocker." Yomi deadpanned.

"Now, now Curry. Please give me some credit. I am a detective after all. I detect things and place them together into ways that make sense." Tomo stood on her hind legs and mimed combining two invisible objects.

"Very good. And what have you detected?" Yomi continued.

"That our Ms. Deep Fried here has been hanging out with Lyra Heartstrings lately. This must be some new fad. 'Osaka' is probably a 'human' name." She made air-quotes with her hooves after saying, "Osaka" and "human".

"And Short Stuff here?"

"She probably picked it up from Deep Fried here. You know how impressionable fillies are at her age. I'm right..aren't I" She looked at Chiyo expectantly.

Somepony more observant than Tomo would've have noticed a bead of sweat form on Chiyo's face, and everypony else's, for that matter. What surprised all of them was what Chiyo said next.

"Right..you're completely right. Would all of you like human names? It is the latest fad."

Tomo seemed to ponder it over for a bit, but Yomi agreed.

"Sure, that sounds like fun. What would you call me?"

Chiyo smiled. "How about Yomi?"

"I think I like it. All right, my human name is Yomi."

"Hey! She asked me first! What's my human name?" whined Tomo.

"How about Tomo?"

"Nah. That sounds like a terrible name. How about Chieko or maybe Mandy?"

Chiyo gave Tomo a dirty look and in a serious tone said, "It's Tomo."

"What? Why's that got to be my name..?"

"And just like that, before she knew it, her name was Tomo." Intoned Osaka.

Yomi suddenly stopped.

"Oh hey. We're here." In front of them was a building with a large sign displaying a bowl of noodles and a hoof somehow holding chopsticks.

Osaka's leg shook. "My Deep sense is acting up. My left leg tingling tells me we'll soon eat a delicious meal."

Everypony looked at her. "Well we are, aren't we?"

"Come on. Let's just go in."

\* \* \*

><p>81.7 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight raised one hoof to wipe the sleep out of her eyes. Why had Celestia recalled her to Canterlot so soon after the restoration of Princess Luna? And why had she insisted upon having Twilight join her for the raising of the sun?<p>

Celestia opened the doors to the balcony and stepped outside, waiting for Twilight to join her. Both mares could see Luna standing on the balcony of her own tower, horn alight as she guided the moon to it rest at the close of a warm summer night. "I wish to thank you again for bringing my sister back to her senses," Celestia said. "But there are other dangers in the world, and it is possible I might not be able to return, should one of those dangers banish me as Nightmare Moon did. Therefore it is vital that I teach you how to raise the sun, so that Equestria need never fear eternal night again so long as you survive."

Twilight knew perfectly well how to raise the sun, but explaining that to a non-Awake Celestia would be more trouble than it was worth. "But I'm just a young unicorn!" she protested instead. "In the old days it took a hundred unicorns to raise and lower the sun!"

"You have a great power within you, Twilight Sparkle," Celestia said. "And there is a secret to the raising that the ancient unicorns did not possess, a secret that makes the spell much easier. Watch and listen carefully. The incantation is particularly important."

The last edge of the moon slid below the horizon, and Canterlot was lit only in starlight.

Celestia's horn glowed. She lowered her horn, spread her wings dramatically, and spoke her incantation:

\_"Rise, darn you."\_

The sun snapped over the horizon with a motion that, had it possessed sound, would have been a most comical boing-oing-oing.

Satisfied, Celestia folded her wings and turned to face a slack-jawed Twilight.

"What... what... what?" Twilight tried, and failed, to keep her stare respectful. "That's IT? 'Rise, darn you'?"

"Why, Twilight," Celestia said, unable to keep a small smile off her face and the giggle from her voice, "haven't you heard the saying? \_It is always darkest before the darn!\_"

Twilight's eyes narrowed. "You've been Awake all this time, haven't you?"

"Yes, Twilight."

"Just so you could pull that lame joke."

"Well, mostly that," Celestia nodded. Her horn flared again, and a large pair of Hawaiian jams with a color clash so severe as to risk blindness floated out of her wardrobe. "But also there's some sunspots due in a week, and that means solar prominences just crying out to be surfed." Celestia walked off the balcony, adding, "Thanks in advance for covering for me while I'm hanging two!"

Twilight only stopped grinding her teeth when she remembered just how unpleasant her last visit to an Equestrian dentist had been...

\* \* \*

><p>81.8 (WyldeHorse)<p>

Twilight Awoke, as usual, yet again reading about the return of Nightmare Moon - yet another baseline loop, from the look of things.

Idly, she flipped through the rest of the book to make sure there wouldn't be any... surprises. That happened sometimes, but they were usually hinted at in the book.

Suddenly, as she turned the last page, a voice seemed to fill the room. \*\*"I know my ABCs! Congratulations, you have read 1 book!"\*\*

She thumped her head against the table. It seemed like this would be one of the odder loops...

\*\*"I got a booboo! Congratulations, you have taken your first damage!"\*\*

"Aarrrgg..." And it would apparently be happening a LOT.

\*\*"Practice makes perfect! Congratulations, you have repeated an action 10 times!"\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Say Derpy, Just what <em>does<em> your cutie mark mean anyway?"

Ditzy glanced up from her delivery list, "Huh? You really want to know?"

"Sure, why not?"

The mailmare blinked, and when her eyes opened they were pure milky white. "Thereisnoderpy. Thereisonlyzuul."

Twilight's mouth hung open in shock and horror until her brain rebooted. "I... ah... what? \_What?\_"

Derpy blinked again, returning to normal. "Oh, Twilight! Did you need something?"

Her mouth worked uselessly for a moment before she shook her head. "Has my brother sent me an invitation to his wedding yet?"

The mailmare checked her list, and not finding it, dug around in her bag for several seconds. "Doesn't look like it, sorry."

"That's alright. It'll get here when it gets here." And with that, she got out of there. \_Fast\_.

\* \* \*

><p>81.9 (namar13766)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?"<p>

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Why was pinkie pie an actual magical, moving, talking pie this loop?"

"I just don't know what went on."

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Say Ditzy, Just what <em>does<em> your cutie mark mean anyway?"

Ditzy glanced up from her delivery list, "Huh? You really want to know?"

"Sure, why not?"

"You promise you won't tell?" The pegasus pleaded, glancing around. "No one asks, and no one knows... and it's a secret to everypony."

"I promise..." Twilight said with a touch of hesitance.

With a nod, the mailmare dug in her sack for a moment, producing... a hat. A detective's hat, to be precise. Along with a monocle, tweed overcoat and a little smoking pipe that she put in her mouth, which began to produce bubbles. "I deduce that you are surprised." She stated. "To be expected, of course. No one suspects that the clumsy mailmare is secretly Sherlock Derp, the world's greatest detective."

Twilight, her mouth agape and her head tilted at an odd angle, could only ask "Why...?"

"Did I inform you of my identity? Simple, my dear librarian. I made a bet with Sparkler, and promised to tell the first pony to ask." She blew into her pipe again, making more bubbles. "She owes me five days doing my scheduled chores, by the way. She bet it would be Pinkie to ask."

\* \* \*

><p>81.10 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was early in a rather sparse baseline Loop, and Twilight just happened to be on the edge of town, near the road that a certain, currently un-Awake showmare would be taking to get into Ponyville. The "gushing fanfilly" method of convincing Trixie to work with her audience rather than against it worked nine times out of ten, and it was fun to boot.<p>

The Anchor heard the unmistakable sound of hooves and wheels approaching, imagined she was about to meet a combination of A. K. Yearling and Celestia (which had sadly only happened once,) and slipped out of her hiding place with a Pinkie-grade smile on her face, ready to give a gasp to match.

Twilight stopped in her tracks, gasp forgotten. Before her was a unicorn mare, yes. Her coat was about the right shade of blue. But there the similarities ended. This one had foregone Trixie's hat and cape. She had a blonde ponytail (and blonde pony tail) much like Applejack's. Her expression was the familiar look of baffled resignation that went with a first Loop in Equestria.

Oh, and the wagon was painted a shade of orange usually reserved for citrus fruit and safety cones.

"I take it you were expecting someâ€¦ pony else."

The sentence shook Twilight out of her surprise. She cleared her throat and approached the stranger. "I was. We get a traveling showmare around this time of year, but you're a new face." She smiled. Pinkie wasn't Awake, so she'd have to roll out the welcome wagon. "You seem like a ship adrift. Would you like an Anchor?"



The other mare's lips curved a bit upward. "Thought I had one. Still, it'd be nice." A beat. "Um, could you help me unhitch myself? Feels like I Woke up harnessed."

\* \* \*

><p>Inside the wagon, which was rather better organized than normal, the two unicorns enjoyed a cup of tea. "I take it you're normally human?" asked Twilight.<p>

"Mostly," answered the mare whose Loop memories named her "the Amazing Bombshell." "Got a few exotic bits of DNA in there. Long story."

"What can you tell me about your home Loop?"

"Science fiction, according to most. Usually I'm a bounty hunter. Go to exotic places, meet interesting people, fire lasers at them." Bombshell shrugged. "It's a living."

The pieces came together in Twilight's mind. "Well, that explains your cutie mark."

"My what?" Bombshell looked at her hips, seeing the all too familiar image of a planet mid-explosion. She facehoofed. "Oh, come on."

Twilight giggled a bit. "The mare you're replacing would approve, I'm sure." She extended a forehoof. "Welcome to Equestria, Miss Aran."

Samus smiled and returned the hoofbump. "Thanks. I've met a few locals in the Smash Brothers Loop, so I wasn't caught completely off-guard. Still, whatever I was expecting, this wasn't it." She waved a hoof at the various props and pyrotechnics. "I'm not usually one to bring undue attention to myself." She snorted. "Still, that's the Loops for you. I once replaced Naruto. I think it was the orange."

Twilight snickered. Loop humor. Hilarious in hindsight, or when it didn't happen to you. "Well, nopony said you had to follow the script exactly."

"You sound like you have something in mind."

"I think so."

\* \* \*

><p>A few hours later, the very orange wagon came to a stop in the town square. Onlookers approached, mumbling curiously. The stage unfolded, and Bombshell walked out from behind the curtain, eyes closed. She sat and magic that matched the wagon in hue enveloped her horn.<p>

For a moment, nothing seemed to happen. Then a low hum came in on the edge of hearing. The hum rose in pitch as the light around Bombshell's horn grew in intensity. Another layer formed, then another. Her eyes opened, glowing from within. An orange aura enveloped the stage and the whole thing rose into the air.

The crowd murmured as the wagon did a circuit about the square. They gasped as it started rolling in the air. They cheered at the loop-de-loop. They boggled when Bombshell buzzed Town Hall. As the stage came to a landing where it had taken off, their stomping applause was like a small earthquake.

Bombshell smiled. A few pieces of Chozo technology translated well to unicorn magic, but none better than the Charge Beam. She rose and held up a forehoof for silence. It took the better part of a minute, but she got it. Her voice projected clearly and calmly, with no indication of her exertion. "Hello. You may have heard of 'the Amazing Bombshell,' but I'm not that great." She waited for the protests to die down. "I just know a few tricks, that's all. While I'm in town, any unicorns in the audience who want to expand their repertoire are welcome to pay me a visit. I'd especially like to help any older foals learn to develop their abilities. Everypony else, I'm sorry, but I just don't know enough about your magic to offer much beyond some meditation techniques."

Her smile widened. "But who knows? This place is so nice, I might just stay for longer than I planned. Might even learn something about earth ponies and pegasi."

Bombshell walked to the front of the stage and squatted. The front of the audience opened up, and she hopped down to their level. She looked around. "So, anypony interested?"

An eager crowd closing in, a wall to her back. If it weren't for the smiles and the sunshine, she could've been back on Dark Aether.

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie beamed at the message plastered across the visor of her ocean-blue Power Suit. Killing was never fun, even when it was killing unrepentant alien monsters who'd killed her in-Loop parents and were bent on using energy parasites as galaxy-conquering weapons. But this? This made it all worth it.<p>

TIME BOMB SET

GET OUT FAST!

"Best Loop ever!"

\* \* \*

><p>81.11<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, no known Anchor around," Trixie said, chewing on a stick of carrot. "At least it looks that way."<p>

Chrysalis smiled, and tapped an elegant finger against her upper lip. "Don't be so sure... but be vewwy quiet...I'm hunting looper."

Trixie giggled, and picked up the restaurant menu. "Well, we've had our starter. What do you want for a main course?"

"I was thinking... something with chicken, for me," Chrysalis decided. "And you're having that risotto. My treat."

The younger woman's eyes widened. "They do that here? I love that!"

"Which is why you're having it, Trix." Chrysalis winked. "Call it my second course."

Trixie nodded. "Fair enough. Now, which spoon should I use?"

"It's a \_fork.\_ The one on the left. Of course. I've told you three times already."

With a small nod, Trixie accepted the information. \_So, behind us to the left... and three tables away.\_

"So, what's for dessert?"

"I'll tell you when it's time," Chrysalis said, smirking.

\* \* \*

><p>Jean-Luc Picard was enjoying himself, for once.<p>

When he wasn't in Starfleet, and especially in worlds like this one where Starfleet didn't exist, he could enjoy himself. Relax.

And, of course, have a truly superlative meal.

Halfway through the fish course, however, voices disturbed him.

"Look, I'm telling you, there's three of them."

"There's clearly five, Trix. Look, we'll ask this guy. Hey, excuse me, mister?"

Picard looked up. Two women â€" one of them tall with unusual greenish-black hair and a shimmering emerald dress, the other with a more sparkling purple outfit and dyed blue hair â€" were standing on the other side of his table, both looking a bit annoyed.

"Can I help you?" he asked, glancing back down at the fish. It was really rather good.

Besides, something was worrying him here...

"Well, see," the blue-haired one began, "Chryssy and I were arguing over how many lights there are at the bar. There's clearly three of them, see?" She pointed.

Picard followed her pointing finger.

"Look, you're delusional, Trix," the other one said. "There's five, right, mister?"

The blue-head â€" this 'Trix' â€" shook her head. "Look, she's going to be going on about this all evening if you don't help me out here.

Just say there's three and we'll be fine."

"Stop encouraging him to lie to me!" 'Chryssy' admonished. "There's five, right?"

"Three!"

"Five!"

"There are four lights!" Picard roared.

The women exchanged glances. Then smirked.

"...oh, bugger," he added, sinking back into his chair.

"Nice to meet you, Jean-Luc Picard," Chryssy said, extending an elegant hand. "My name is Chrysalis, and this is Trixie Lulamoon. We're from Equestria. And I suspect we just won Sleipnir Lokison an awful lot of money."

\* \* \*

><p>"You utter, utter, jammy bastard," Hel grumbled.<p>

Sleipnir started dancing. With eight hooves, it was quite loud.

"Are telepaths cheating?" Fenris asked.

"Nope," Loki replied, smirking. "And I know he's a bastard, but the alternative is that your stepfather is a horse, Hel."

Fenris, Jormugandr and Hel winced.

Behind them, Sleipnir started doing a modified version of a Prisyadka.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, fine, you're right." Picard sighed, looking back down at his cooling fish dinner. "Just don't tell the time travel department at Starfleet, or I'll never hear the start of it. Accidentally breaking the temporal prime directive..."<p>

"No problem," Trixie said easily. "Just... hey, use fused loops to relax, right? Happy anchors don't get sent to Eiken... as often, anyway..."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

81.1: Azumanga Poni.

>81.2: Yet another time that lot have to defend... well, a planet, anyway.<br>81.3: Sweetie knows ALL the words.

>81.4: Where everyone knows your name. And won't make a comment if you're using a different one.<br>81.5: Sonic Boom, Sonic Boom...

>81.6: See also the Ponies Which Stay In A Line Display! It's the line for the lavatories.<br>81.7: Pick your moment.

>81.8: Achievement Unlocked!<br>81.9: Neither do I.

>81.10: Let's hope Trixie doesn't keep any Power Bombs.<br>81.11:  
Sleipnir has indeed ended up with an awful lot of money.

## 86. Chapter 86

82.1

"Filly of Silver, whose mark is a spoon, I wish to speak to you ere this moon."

Spoonsilver looked around. Since she was (for once) a pony â€" though, somewhat irritatingly, a \_bat\_ pony â€" it was obvious who Zecora was speaking to.

Well, more obvious than normal.

"Oh, hi, Zecora." Silver waved, flaring her wings and flapping up to bring their heads to the same height. "Do you have to do the rhyming thing all the time?"

Zecora considered that. Then cleared her throat. "Sliver Spoon, of course I do. How else can my words ring true?"

"Well... okay, then." Silver replied, and shrugged. "No matter. What was it you wanted?"

"I can brew and stew potions a plenty, but I fear my skills could atrophy. I feel that I might substantially broaden my way through your alchemy."

"Oh, yeah, sure." The thestral landed again, and frowned. "Mind if you help me with something while we're at it, though?"

"A desire so small Isn't an issue at all."

"Right. Hang on, I'll make us a work room."

Silver clapped her hooves together, and then on the ground. With a creaking, rumbling \_craaaaash\_, three huge stone slabs heaved out of the Everfree soil forming three sides of a square. The one furthest away from the zebra and the thestral extended twice as high, then bent down into a roof.

Not to be outdone, Zecora gestured, and wood sprouted from the ground into an instant 'fourth wall', complete with windows and a door.

"Huh, yeah, that's pretty neat. Does it involve visualization?"

"Yes. Wood is just Earth and Water combined, but first I must shape it in my Eye of Mind."

"Cool." Silver nodded. "That'll help." She entered the workroom, Zecora following closely behind. "Okay, first things first. Have you heard of equivalent exchange?"

"One thing for another in equivalent amount is a core aspect of how nature keeps count."

"Another good start. But it's kind of more... literal, with Alkahestry or Alchemy that I know. Now, an alchemical formula is basically like a very complex equation. Let's see..."

Silver flipped a pen from her Pocket, frowned, formed a table, and began drawing on it. "The circle is pretty much defining where the equation begins or ends. This symbol represents oxygen, this one represents hydrogen, and this one's water. When this is completed and run, it decomposes the right hand side of the equation into the left hand side, and this component â€" here?" She pointed, and Zecora nodded thoughtfully. "That's an intent link, which directs where you want to form the excess hydrogen and oxygen. 's kind of like a catalyst â€" it makes it easier for this to happen than for it to stay the usual formula. And it costs energy, which comes from whoever's using the circle."

"It's like you made a cup to scoop some water up."

"Sort of, for this one at least. Or maybe if you had water in a plastic sheet, this would be like lifting one end of the sheet up so the water makes a new shape. The lifting is the effort." Silver made a few minor annotations, then powered the circle up. "Okay, so there's water decomposing into hydrogen and oxygen just outside. Now, as we both know, that means..."

She scraped a match along the floor, and threw it outside. There was a \_BANG.\_

"That."

Zecora applauded.

"Thanks, heh." Silver scratched the back of her head, and adjusted her glasses. "Now, I tend to do it by chemistry, but there's several ways to do a transmutation. You can use the Four Classical Elements â€" you know, earth and air and fire and water â€" you can use the Five Elements instead â€" which breaks earth into metal and wood... basically, any system which has a categorized approach to reality. And within that categorized approach, you can't fundamentally alter which of the categories are involved."

"I believe I now begin to understand. Please restate the how so I can comprehend."

Silver pointed to the circle. "Right. So, this one uses chemistry. I can change how the atoms are arranged, but I can't make them out of nowhere, and making one kind into another involves a huge amount of effort."

Another was quickly sketched out, then powered up. "This one uses Earth, Air, Fire and Water. So I couldn't make an explosion with this one, because that would be getting fire from no-fire, but I could change a pile of soil into stone, because both of those are Earth-element even though soil is made mostly of organic matter by chemistry. That's Natural Providence. The other side of equivalent exchange is Conservation of Mass, which-

"Neither matter nor energy can occur spontaneously."

Silver nodded. "That's it exactly." Then she picked the cup of tea up from the centre of her second circle. "Want to try some?"

Zecora took it, and sipped. "Good brew. Thank you."

"Right. Now, the other side of it is the Three Principles of Transmutation. Basically, what you do with both the circle and your mind. First, Comprehension â€" you have to understand the structure of where you're starting from. Then Deconstruction â€" simplifying the original form down. And Reconstruction is to build up the new form." Silver scribbled some equations on the wall. "All this is really pretty complicated, but I got used to it. You don't have to go down to the molecular level for everything, either... you get kinda a knack for how much you can simplify it."

Zecora examined the equations. "So I guide it along with a mental map, but what about when you simply clap?"

"That's using my body as the circle, basically. It's... complicated. The equations and stuff are enough, usually, don't worry."

"I understand. I still have much to learn. What do you want me to do in return?"

"Oh, right." Silver kicked her hooves. "Well... I'm getting pretty tired of the whole, different body shape every loop, thing. I mean, I can handle it, I'm usually able to get my body working properly. But... it's just not helping, really. Everyone else is the same shape from loop to loop, and they're comfortable with it. I don't know how I'm going to look... it's like puberty every five or six years."

Zecora nodded silently.

"Anyway, I had this plan to use Human Transmutation â€" well, Pony Transmutation. It's dangerous, yeah, but there's the loops â€" and Edward didn't break his universe open when he did it, so..." Silver shrugged. "It's worth a try. It just takes way more power than I've got or can handle. So... I wanted you to help me make a Philosopher's Stone."

Seeing the expression on Zecora's face, she waved her hooves. "Nothing like that! No, not using anypony else â€" just storing energy from \_me.\_ Hopefully I can get enough from that to... well."

Zecora shook her head. "Silver, that is not what was confusing. I need to know which one I'll be making. I can craft ten different rocks of renown/And all of them are Philosopher's Stone."

"...oh, okay. Probably 'none of the above...'" Silver said, frowning. "And that last line was a bit of a stretch."

The Zebra looked like she was contemplating sticking her tongue out.

\* \* \*

><p>82.2 (Zetrein and misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie sat in front of her TV, watching yet another report of a pastry abduction. It was so sad, all those baked goods being stolen, just to force ponies to eat the horrible alien snack cakes.<p>

Then the strangest thing happened. Her TV went black, then switched to a backlit dragon wearing a dark suit. Come to think of it, he looked like an older Spike.

"Hello, Commander." He spoke, in a deep, serious voice. Pinkie couldn't help but feel he was addressing her directly.

"In light of the recent extraterrestrial incursion, this Council of Princesses has convened to approve the activation of the X-Cake Project."

On one hoof, Pinkie was sitting straighter, listening intently to Old-Spike-In-A-Suit. On the other, she was thinking about how the Princess could appearantly spy on ponies through their TVs.

"You have been chosen to lead this Initiative. To oversee our first, and last, line of defense. Your efforts will have considerable influence on this planet's baked goods. We urge you to keep that in mind as you proceed."

In particular, she was thinking about all the things she had ever done while watching TV. She really hoped the Princess hadn't seen \_that\_.

"Good luck, Commander."

Right, enough embarrassed panicking, time to take back the baked goods market!

"We, will be watching." The screen went to black, before cutting back into the news' weather forecast.

"Wait, TV-Spike! You forgot to tell me where to go!" Pinkie implored her TV. Raindrops kept talking, unable to hear her as she talked about rain on thursday.

Then Pinkie's doorbell rang.

\* \* \*

><p>Thanks to her new X-Cake introduction guide, meeting kit, and recipe book; Pinkie knew that it was up to her to gather the right ponies to help take back Equestria's baked goods from the horrible alien treats. Fortunately, she knew every pony in Ponyville.<p>

But how to choose the very best ponies was the question. She needed the elite, the ponies whose skills and special talent could mean the difference between tasty victory and bitter defeat.

In the end, the pink pony party planner ended up tossing a massive amount of paper squares into the air and picking out the names that landed in her mane.

"Thank you all for coming," Pinkie exclaimed as the last of the



invited ponies entered Sugarcube Corner. She slammed the door shut and turned around to the startled ponies, "The super important thing I'm about to tell you will totally rock your world."

"I thought this was an organizational party?" Bon-bon questioned.

"I was told there'd be punch," Berry Punch said.

"It is, and there is punch! But first, I have to tell you all what happened," Pinkie took a deep breath, "Yesterday, my TV talked to me - and has possibly been spying on me in secret all along! Then, the TV dragon told me that I was chosen!"

All the assembled ponies looked at each other in confusion. Applejack cautiously spoke up, "Pinkie Pie? Have you stopped taking your meds recently?"

"That's silly, AJ," Pinkie snorted, "I never take my meds. Of course I may have to start now that my TV made me the commander of a new super secret organization. X-Cake's mission is to fight the awful aliens that are stealing our good pastries and replacing them with horrible alien snacks. After a lengthy selection process, I have chosen all of you."

The party guests looked at each other again. Pinkie just smiled and stared at them. Applejack spoke up, "You've chosen us for what, exactly?"

"To fight the alien menace, of course!" Pinkie was interrupted by a beeping noise. She raced over to an inconspicuous cupcake on the display shelf and pushed its sprinkles in a preset pattern. Suddenly, a map of Equestria lowered from the roof. A red dot was blinking near Ponyville. Pinkie Pie gasped, "Oh no! An alien UFO, an unidentified flying oreo, is approaching!"

"Noooo! It's after my secret muffin depot!" a frantic Derpy danced in place.

Pinkie pulled a candle on a nearby birthday cake and a section of the wall opened. The pink pony pointed at the new doorway, "Every pony! To the candy-copters! Derpy, you man the milk mortars. Twist, put on that uniform that looks suspiciously like a red and white target. It's mission time!"

As Pinkie raced through the opening, the other ponies also cautiously entered; mostly due to their confusion and herd instincts.

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Say Ditzzy, Just what <em>does<em> your cutie mark mean anyway?"

Ditzzy glanced up from her delivery list, "Huh? You really want to know?"

"Sure, why not?"

The mailmare leaned in conspiratorially, glancing back and forth before whispering in the unicorn's ear. "...I'm watching you."

As the pegasus went back to her work, Twilight pondered the words. "What does that even mea-" She stopped when she noticed the orbs on Ditzzy's flank swirl around, revealing themselves to be eyeballs of various size and eye color. The mare in question was already back to work sorting her pack and comparing its contents to her list.

After a few moments of her staring contest with the eyes, Twilight muttered; "Maybe I should stop asking..."

\* \* \*

><p>82.1 continued<p>

"How are you handling the strain?" Zecora asked Silver. "I do not wish to cause you pain."

"Fine, actually," the raven replied tersely, then winced. "Okay, maybe not as fine as all that. But I can cope."

Zecora looked from her to the glowing crystal soaking up life force, then nodded. "You know your ability and limits better than me."

"Besides," Silver added with a cawing laugh, "It's not as if it'll be \_fatal\_ if I get it wrong..."

The zebra gave her a sharp look. "This is not a joke, for you should not croak."

"Yeah, guess not." Silverbeak flapped up to her perch in their work room. (The third workroom, as it happened. One had been lost to a loop reset, the other to tree sap.

Somehow.)

"Since I'm not going anywhere fast, let's see what you've come up with for Alchemical circles."

Zecora indicated her approval of the idea, and brought out several sheets of paper.

"These two are intended to freeze or thaw any of my brew. Heat is taken from the potion, Then moves with downward motion to a depth of two hundred feet. The temp is is determined-" she pointed, "here or here, and the array will match it to the display."

Silver crouched over, reading closely. "Yeah, looks good. What's that symbol there?"

"It performs latent heat diffusion for melting or crystallization."

"Right, good. Can you show me?"

Zecora rummaged in her pocket for a moment, and retrieved four potions. "Alcohol, Medicinal. Drink, fruit juice. It is apple. Potion

of strength. Raises mettle. And something made using nettle."

"Medicinal alcohol?" Silver asked, blinking.

"Berry Punch, she swears by such a notion, As the alcoholic healing potion."

"Unless she's had a few already, in which case she swears at it." Silver giggled. "Okay, sorry, that was mean. Right, let's see this in action."

The four potions went into the circle. A hoof laid on the centre of the diagram, and they flash-froze. One of the bottles broke.

"Oh my dear sweet tree of spruce..." Zecora picked it up, stuck a clean spatula into it, and licked cautiously. "Ah, I see. The frozen juice has swollen right through the top. It's an instant lollipop."

"Cool," Silver said, then winced. "Okay, I didn't even mean that one."

Zecora shrugged. Then put one of the intact bottles into the other circle and activated that one.

The suddenly liquid potion didn't even slosh.

"Where'd the energy come from?" Silver checked, flapping one wing experimentally and hissing quietly at the strain.

"I drew it from underground," the budding alchemist replied, "at the same depth I had found."

"Right, right. You know, it's possible to use tectonic plates as an energy source?" Zecora blinked, and Silver continued. "Yeah, it's a bit brute-force, but the forces involved with plate tectonics are so huge you really can't significantly affect them â€" so draw away."

"Using such a force /As a power source? That's more than we need, but would work indeed."

"Anyway, yeah, looks like you're doing fine. I'm probably going to just... rest for a bit, until I get used to the drain," Silver apologized. "Feel free to ask me for feedback, though."

\* \* \*

><p>"This is such an awesome amount of help you've given," Silverleaf said quietly.<p>

"Think nothing of my act, for it was my pleasure," Zecora assured the silver squirrel. "What you taught is, in fact, Knowledge I will treasure."

"Yeah, well, it's all worth it." Silverleaf rummaged in her bushy tail, and pulled out the Philosopher's Stone. It pulsed like a coal ember with internal fire, and occasional showers of silver sparks cascaded from it.

"Did you draw the circle?" Silver asked.

"Yes, I have done the deed. Of drawing thrice around. It should work for your need, For thrice, no error I found." Zecora gave her a quick look. "The choice is yours. No less, no more."

"And it's one I want to take," Silver replied, placing the Philosopher's Stone on one anchor point of the circle. "I've had some interesting times as... well, every kind of animal you can think of... but it's time for that to come to an end. I want to be a filly again. I want to know what I'm going to look like in five years' time."

She sighed. "I want my cutie mark back, too."

Zecora winced, then tried to smile warmly. "It's your choice today, and you have made it." She shook her head, and composed herself. "I will power up the array. You will need to direct it."

"Sure. Okay, I've done this before... sort of..." Silver muttered, running into the other anchor point. "Here goes."

The Zebraican pressed both hooves to the circle.

There was a flash of stippled silver light-

\* \* \*

><p>And the clearing was empty.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>82.3 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Rainbow Dash, Lady of the Sky and Patron Alicorn of all things Fast, burst into the Wonderbolt training academy's cafeteria shortly before her multi-mach tailwind scattered everything light and not bolted down.<p>

"OH MY GOSH!" She bellowed into the room, rushing over to the wing commander. "Spitfire! I've finally found you, my long-lost lovechild!"

The mare gave the alicorn a deadpan stare before stating "I'm older than you are."

"Nonsense!" The princess rebuked, gathering the pegasus up in a tangle of limbs tentatively labelled a hug. "If I'd known Ricardo would take you and raise you as a speedster I would've wanted to be there in your life!"

"This is nonsense," Spitfire groaned.

"If only I'd known sooner! Luckily in my digging I managed to discover the sordid history of the Wonderbolts!"

"Oh no." The commander whined, knowing the over-the-top princess

was going to go off on a spiel of more nonsense, but not wanting to step on her royal authority trying to stop her. Sometimes being a military mare sucked.

"I know about your affair with Applejack, Soarin! How did you enjoy her pie!?" She pointed accusingly, not relinquishing her hold on Spits.

"It was actually quite good," he replied, knowing his princess' tendencies toward drama and playing along with a grin. The rest of the 'bolts had taken on a similar stance of good-natured chuckling or smiling at their boss' predicament.

"Put me doooooown..." Spitfire pleaded, trying her best to keep her temper and not blow up at a frickin' princess.

"And did you know..." She paused dramatically before she pointed over to the trainees. "That Snowflake and Bulk Biceps are actually the same pony!?"

The beefy pegasus himself gasped in shock.

Spits had had enough. "That's a secret to nopony!"

\* \* \*

><p>Sometimes it was nice being a Princess.<p>

No pony would step in your way, they wouldn't ask you to fix what ain't broke unless you asked for it like Celestia did with her 'councils' and 'nobles', and unless you went really off the wall, they'd never bat an eye or question what you're up to. Especially if you act like you were always a little nuts in the first place.

Today was not one of those days.

"Princess, princess why!?"

>"Cloudsdale shouldn't be raining <em>cupcake hail!<em> Princess!"

>"So much chocolate milk. <em>So much<em>."

"Am I doin' this right?" Rainbow Dash asked.

"Oh, I'm sure you'll get the hang of it eventually. Chaos isn't as easy to sow as everyone thinks," Discord preened.

Unawake Discord.

Apparently asking to become his apprentice could curb most of his chaotic outbursts while he channels his attention into building up a new immortal agent of all things odd and wacky.

Who knew?

"Oooh, the kittens are a nice touch," he remarked as the clouds started raining tiny felines upward while the chocolate and cupcakes continued to adhere to gravity.

\* \* \*

><p>"What is this?" Celestia asked. And rightly so, since the legal document in the grip of her magic was so much gibberish with legal jargon haphazardly sprinkled throughout.<p>

"A requisition for my own celestial body to govern." The rainbow princess replied. "Being Princess of the Sky is nice and all, but most of it is your sunny sky or Luna's night sky and I can't help but feel like all I get are the clouds in between. You even vetoed my despotic rule over major weather systems!"

"To be fair..." The Sun Mare said with a hesitant cringe. "You do use words like 'despotic' to describe it, and when allowed those powers, utilized them to cause blizzards in summer, thunderstorms on school days, caused hurricanes and thunderheads to form so you could make 'a cooler obstacle course' and also conquered the seaponies. Let's not even get started on what you did under Discord's tutelage, either."

"All of those were incredibly awesome. The seapony thing less so because they're frikkin' nuts," Rainbow mused, falling back into memory before she reasserted her point. "But the rest of it was gold."

"And don't talk about me like I'm not here Celerestria," Discord sniped from where he floated above them. The princess in question indeed looking a bit more like a stringy green stalk-based timberwolf.

"Oh stop it," The Diarch muttered, changing herself back. "My point is that power and responsibility go hand in hand. A princess has duties, and you should show that you can handle what duties you have before you ask for more."

"You say that like I have any duties outside babysitting Discord," Dash countered.

Celestia smiled. "And when he goes a day without turning me into something, we'll talk about new ones."

\* \* \*

><p>82.4 (Vulpine Fury)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Been a while since I started a loop this way..." Twilight said, planting her hooves into the thick loam of the park. The same old book stood on an earth-pony stand, and a turn-stick within easy reach. She gathered up her things, letting her loop memories fill her in on her situation. She was "Nightshade" this time, her parents not having expected her to be an earth pony, and her cutie mark was a floral version of her usual one.<p>

She began her mad dash to the same library turret she always had. She almost stopped when she heard Twinkles' voice. "Shouldn't we invite Nightshade? Moondancer wanted to give her an invitation..."

"Why should we, only the social elite are going to be there..."

Twilight-Nightshade didn't recognize the voice, but she definitely recognized the tone from all the times she'd tried to help Rarity get into Canterlot Society through the loops " especially the more political loops.

"I guess you're right," Twinkleshine sighed in defeat. "She's too good a mare to deserve the sort of teasing we're going to get."

\* \* \*

><p>80.1 continued (Dalxein)<p>

Berry Punch whistled merrily as she made her way to Mac's bar to unload a new batch of her creations from her pocket for the start of a new loop, when she was barrelled over by a grey and yellow missile. Rolling end over end, the momentary tussle ended with her pinned to the dirt by a smiling Derpy Hooves. "Playdate!" The mailmare shouted.

"I... \_what?\_" Berry asked, perplexed, and momentarily wondering if the pegasus was unusually forward and fancied mares this loop.

"Ruby and Dinky!" The pagasus cheered.

"Oooohhh." Berry nodded, rolling the other mare off of her and dusting herself off. "You want to set up a playdate for our girls?"

An excited nod.

"Well, alright." Berry said. This hadn't happened before in the loops, but maybe it would be a good idea in the long run? Playdates sounded like a good idea, especially if she could convince Derpy to babysit when the bar was busy... "How does tomorrow sound?"

Her reply was a bright grin and a squeak she normally attributed to Rainbow Dash.

\* \* \*

><p>82.3 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Yeh can't just wash away all the farmland with yer typhoons and monsoons an' all them other '-oons' yeh crazy cloud-brain! Then we don' have enough food to go around an' everypony starts to starve!" Applejack yelled.<p>

"Psh, you're taking this all out of proportion." Rainbow Dash replied as she lounged upon her rainbow cloud. "You think I don't know we grow like twice as much food as we actually need? De-smogging the air around all those industrial factories that're popping up, \_that's\_ what we need!"

"So yer just gonna wash it away with rain an' let all that rainwater flood rivers an' ruin crops an' farmers' livelihoods just to wash the problem out to sea?" The Princess of the Earth asked, incredulous. "What about the seaponies? You just gonna let them toxins kill them?"

"They'll be \_fine\_, and I thought you hated them anyway." The rainbow mare waved the questions away.

"Ah don' wanna see 'em \_die\_!" She replied, sickened with her friend's nonchalance.

"And they \_won't\_." Rainbow scoffed. "Geez."

"Seems we ain't gonna resolve this with words." AJ muttered darkly.

Rainbow glared down at her 'friend' "I guess not."

"Then ah guess this means war."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle, Princess of Magic, sighed as she strode through the battlefield.<p>

The once-beautiful landscape was torn and rent, covered in mud and custard, sprinkled with hot dogs and fish fingers of all things. She glanced about, spying thirty-two wheels of cheese, several upturned trees of various fruits which were scattered across the landscape, and a single rubber chicken.

She clucked her tongue and continued on.

Lying in pools of custard and fruit mush were her two friends, exhausted from their battle.

"This was about the environmental problems wasn't it?" Twilight asked.

They nodded.

"You know I just got done installing the thaumic conversion regulators that will negate the output of pollutants, right?"

They shook their heads.

"Of course not. What have we learned?"

"Talk to Twilight before declarin' war?"

"Use more lightning?"

Dash grunted in pain when Applejack kicked her.

"Yeah, yeah... don't fight with friends, even when you're not fighting seriously." Rainbow amended.

"Good." Twilight nodded. "We can even make it a Friendship Report to Celestia. I'll expect one from each of you, including a version for Looping Celestia next time she's Awake."

\* \* \*

><p>82.5 (Masterweaver )<p>



\* \* \*

><p>Elusive and Spines glanced around the library, awkwardly avoiding each other's gaze. Dusk Shine rolled his eyes. "Oh come on, you two, you knew this was inevitable."<p>

"Yes, well..." Elusive coughed. "I'm just... trying to get myself in the right headspace, darling."

"This is going to take some... getting used to," Spines added. "Especially since, ah... since, well..."

Dusk sighed. "If you two have to experiment, do it at the boutique."

\* \* \*

><p>Some minutes later, the dragon and unicorn were back at Elusive's shop.<p>

"...it's not actually a boutique," Elusive muttered, looking around. "More of a fitter's, really."

Spines followed his gaze. "Yeah, more suits than dresses â€" though I see there's still a few of those."

"Well, of course."

The silence stretched out for a minute or so. It really was very awkward.

"This, er, isn't your first time as-" Spines ventured.

"No, I've been Elusive before," the unicorn replied. "Several times, actually. It was an interesting challenge, adapting to doing mainly male clothing. Have you been, er, Spines before?"

"Spines or Barb," Spines replied. "Either name seems to come up. But... it's never been this confusing before."

"I know what you mean. Or, I think I do, anyway." Elusive rubbed his forehead. "It was just something funny, before. But now, it's..."

"It's something we've never really thought about, because we've never been together in one of these loops," Spines completed. "And... yeah, it is weird."

The awkward silence returned.

"So, er..." Spines tried. "Does this mean you've got a brother?"

"Yes â€" from what I remember, that means they're going to form the Cavaliers," Elusive replied. "Not sure why Crusaders isn't just as good a name for colts to use."

Spines shrugged.

The silence returned for a three-in-a-row.

Elusive suddenly blinked, then held in a snort of laughter.

"What?" Spines asked.

"I just thought... does this make me your husband?"

Both of them considered that.

"That sounds weird," Spines answered. "But so does calling me the husband..."

"Okay, I think I know how to handle this." Elusive built up a spell on his horn. "I assume Gleaming Shield is Awake?"

Spines took a moment to parse that. "Oh €" yeah, ...Dusk said that she was. Wait, are we-"

There was a white flash.

\* \* \*

><p>"Honestly, I'm surprised it took you two this <em>long<em> to run into the problem," Prince Bolero said with a smile.

Gleaming Shield shrugged. "We've ended up like this quite often, actually. Though there's been the occasional time just one of us was genderswapped, too..." she tossed her head. "I'm lucky, at least I have just one name like this. You've only had the same one twice in a row... what, once?"

Bolero nodded ruefully. "I've been called Coda, Cody, Temporus, Canto, Authentic, and some others I've lost track of."

"What matters is, though, we still love each other." Gleaming smiled. "That's a good place to start from, I think."

"Yeah, it sounds like it." Spines nodded. "Thanks. Yeah, that does put my mind at rest."

"Mine as well," Elusive added. "It's not precisely a common problem, is it?"

"Ranma has it all the time, if I remember rightly..." Bolero mused. "But, then, his life isn't exactly a model of domestic bliss."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that's encouraging," Spines remarked, as they rematerialized in Elusive's shop.<p>

"Indeed." Elusive paused. "Perhaps... idea! I wonder if we should take the opportunity for me to court you?"

"...we are married," Spines replied slowly.

"No, I mean for the benefit of the locals," Elusive clarified, and Spines nodded in understanding. Then the unicorn got a mischevious gleam in his eye. "In fact, on that note, I really must design you

a dress, darling."

Spines can be forgiven for getting a slightly hunted look in her eyes.

\* \* \*

><p>82.6<p>

"Fluttershy?"

"Yes, Twilight?" Fluttershy replied politely.

"Well... why are we all wolves?"

Fluttershy cocked her head on one side.

"That doesn't help," Twilight informed her.

"I'm afraid I can't help much, Twilight." Fluttershy pawed the ground. "I mean, I don't know why we're wolves. But I do know how wolves work. Would you like help with that?"

A multicoloured wolf shot past at a bounding run, laughing. "This is so awesome!"

"Rainbow Dash!" Fluttershy barked. "Come back here so I can give you the talk!"

She paused. "If that's alright, anyway."

A chastened Dash padded back towards them, tail down. "Sorry, Flutters."

"No, it's okay, you were enthusiastic, it happens sometimes," Fluttershy reassured her. As more canines – one with a gleaming alabaster coat, another pink and with a tail that looked like it was going to wag off – approached, she rummaged in her pocket. "Here. Let's have a nice meal and then we can talk about this."

Twilight turned slightly green under her purple fur. "Fluttershy... that's, well... meat."

"So?" Fluttershy asked, puzzled. "It's ethically sourced."

"Well..." Twilight groped for words.

"Oh, I see!" Fluttershy blushed. "Sorry, I wasn't thinking. You're not used to it. I am sorry – here, have some soy steak instead."

"I... see. Thank you, then." Twilight eyed the soy steak, still feeling a little nervous.

Pinkie had no such qualms, making a wolf-line for the original haunch. "Hey, Fluttershy? Can I cook it with a honey glaze? Can I can I can I?"

"Um... okay," Fluttershy said, nodding. "That would be nice."

\* \* \*

><p>"Cutie mark crusaders-"<p>

Diamond Tiara held up a large paw. "Point of order!"

The other wolf pups looked round at her. "What?"

"We don't have cutie marks, and can't get them as wolves," Diamond stated simply.

After a moment of pondering, Scootaloo raised a paw herself. "Propose that we temporarily call ourself the Ponyville-"

"Wolfville," Sweetie interjected helpfully.

"Yes, \_thank you\_, Wolfville Junior Pack."

"Well, it's better than nothin'," Applebloom admitted. "All in favour?"

Paws went up.

"Motion carried. Wolfville Junior Pack tail chasers go!"

The meeting adjourned. Shortly afterwards, a tree collapsed as five frantically tail-chasing wolf puppies collided with it one at a time in quick succession.

Fortunately, the barn it landed on was due for demolition anyway.

\* \* \*

><p>"How in the name of the moon did you manage to get your fur this badly matted on day one?" Rarity asked, as Sweetie stood in the bath with warm water pouring down on her.<p>

"Tree sap," Sweetie deadpanned. "Good thing this place treats fur shampoo research like Equestria does mane styling..."

\* \* \*

><p>82.7:<p>

Trixie finally had her chance to launch her most ambitious plan yet.

She would return to Ponyville, and really show that Twilight Sparkle what a true artist did with magic. It had taken so long to plan, and even longer to prepare, but finally this was the time.

\* \* \*

><p>"Attention, Ponyville!" Trixie shouted, entering the main square. "It is I, the Great and Powerful Trixie! Hark well, Twilight Sparkle!"<p>

Twilight ran out of the library doors. "Trixie! What are you doing back here?"

"What is Trixie doing back here?" Trixie repeated. "This!"

She slammed a hoof on the floor, horn blazing, and a wooden stage appeared. Again, and her cape swirled with starlight. A third time, and several hundred identical Trixie copies galloped into the square from both directions, forming six lines facing Twilight and the rest of Ponyville.

Then Trixie cleared her throat.

\_"The costumes, the scenery, the makeup, the props \_  
><em><em>The audience that lifts you when you're down...<em>\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"You were right, that <em>was<em> hilarious," Chrysalis said later that evening.

Trixie nodded, stretching out luxuriously on the huge bed inside her travel wagon. "I've been planning this for \_ages, \_but never really got a loop with a stealth Anchor until now â€" and it's less funny doing this kind of thing when Twilight's looping."

Chrysalis grinned, then stepped into the jacuzzi. "The hive still thinks you're weird, by the way. But I think Pinkie's practically begging that they help her with some heartsongs..."

\* \* \*

><p>82.8<p>

"Well?"

Spitfire and Soarin' exchanged glances.

"What do we do now, boss?" Soarin' asked.

"I... honestly don't know," Spitfire admitted. "I mean... can you even do it like that?"

"There's no rule against it," the hopeful pegasus pointed out. "I checked. Twice."

"It \_was\_ impressive," Soarin' mused.

"...all right, then." Spitfire nodded. "Let me congratulate you on getting into the Wonderbolts, miss Scootaloo."

The orange filly jumped for joy, her cloud-board trembling under the impacts. "Yay!"

\* \* \*

><p>In the audience, Dash brushed away a tear. "Proud of you, squirt."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>82.9<p>

"...and here they are," the host said with a smile. "The lovely ladies who've become an internet sensation for their expert magic tricks. Leah Clearwater and Beatrix Lulamoon!"

Leah walked in first, smiled, and sat down on the left hand couch. Beatrix followed her two paces behind, and slouched onto the other side of the same couch.

"So, you two have taken the internet by storm," the host began. "Simple magic tricks, flawlessly done, and recorded very professionally."

"It's all about presentation," Beatrix said importantly. "I pull the tricks off, Leah has the whole Injun Mystic thing going on-"

"Watch it, paleface," Leah interjected with a glower.

Beatrix waved it off. "Yeah, yeah. But she has a few tricks of her own."

"Well, I'm sure everyone's waiting to see them," the host allowed, to applause. "But let's get into how you met, first..."

\* \* \*

><p>"How long do we have left?" Beatrix asked, cutting across a discussion of whether playing on stereotypical views of native Americans was appropriate.<p>

"Well..." the host glanced at his watch ostentatiously. "We have about ten minutes before the film at eleven."

"Right, let's get started." Beatrix frowned, tapping her fingers. "Can I have a deck of cards?"

One was duly passed over to be unwrapped.

"Okay, pick a card. Any card. I mean, literally, any card. Not just in the deck. And, of course, don't tell me what it is."

"...sure," the host replied, after a moment. He beamed for the cameras. "Well, this should be good!"

"Don't you know it." Beatrix threw the cards into the air, and picked one from the shower of pieces. "Is this your card?"

The host examined the ace of spades. "No."

Beatrix smiled, and peeled off the sides of the card. Inside was a foil-backed Charizard trading card.

"...how did you do that?" he asked, gaping, as he took the mint-condition card.

"You've got a twenty year old son, which means he was about the right age for the Pokemon card craze," Leah replied with a smirk. "I provided one from my own personal collection..."

"That's amazing. I suppose it really is all about knowing your audience. Ladies and gentlemen, Beatrix Lulamoon!"

The crowd applauded, some of them on their feet and whistling.

"And now, for our last act, I will make a wolf disappear," Beatrix continued.

"But... we don't have a wolf," the host said, confused.

Beatrix grinned, and shook out her arms. "Nothing up my right sleeve, nothing up my left sleeve â€" except this little bracelet, of course-"

Leah emitted a rumbling purr.

At that point, the host, the camera crew and the audience noticed that she'd turned into about a tonne of lupine predator.

Before the shock wore off, Trixie snapped her fingers. And both she and Leah vanished.

\* \* \*

><p>"That's going to take them <em>years<em> to figure out," Leah said, in tones of deep satisfaction. "I loved the sleeves thing."

"Trixie tries," Trixie replied. "Should we do a video where you're just randomly a talking wolf?"

"Sure. Keep 'em guessing."

\* \* \*

><p>79.1 continued<p>

"You were absolutely right princess, the whole prophecy thing was bunk." Twilight shook her head. "Besides, that's nothing to this old scroll I found in Ponyville library..."

She unrolled an ancient scroll that crackled as it unfurled and started reading.

" 'When the three tribes do fight a great battle upon the plains to the south of Mount Canter, then shall the great lord of chaos return. Blah blah, chocolate rain, dogs and cats living together, mass hysteria!' Pfftt! What a load of mumbo-jumbo. As if modern ponies would start a war with each other."

"Hey, Ah wanted that last cream scone!" "Uh huh, well I saw it first!" "But I wanted it too..." Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo were by the desert table, arguing. As their voices got higher, there was the sound of a distant cracking, and a voice calling out, "Freeeee at last! Time for some chaos!"

"Twilight, you must retrieve the Elements of harmony at once!" Celestia said. "If Discord is free, they are the only thing that will stop him."

"But the Elements are just part of that old legend, and we've seen how accurate that was." Twilight shook her head.

Celestia looked exasperated. "Twilight, the Elements exist. I was the one who used them to imprison my sister in the moon!"

Twilight frowned. "But that's only anecdotal evidence. You always taught me that claims unsupported by references or citations were a poor source of data, especially when the events happened so long ago. I mean, what sort of scholar would I be if I blindly accepted everything any-pony tried to make me believe? Right girls?"

The trio looked up from their own conversation where they'd been ignoring Twilight. "Whatever you say, sugar-cube!" "Oh absolutely darling." "Uh, yeah, what she said."

\* \* \*

><p>82.10 (Xward)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was on edge. Not for any particular reason, the loop had gone fairly baseline with little deviation except for Cheese Sandwich not existing this loop. No, throughout the whole loop Twilight noticed something strange: Pinkie Pie and Discord would sometimes stop what they were doing and gaze off as if expecting something. When questioned they said they were "Waiting for something to happen". It was probably nothing, but that scared Twilight even more.<p>

But she should put that on hold, because right now she had to organize a band for Rainbow's Birthday Anniversary. All positions had been filled except for drummer. With each prospective musician lined up she was ready to choose the bes-

\*RUMBLE\*

Huh?

\*RUMBLE RUMBLE\*

Please tell me that isn't-

\*CRASH\*

Yup, it is

Twilight beheld something she thought she would never see in her home loop: A Dune Sandworm. And for some reason it was wearing a... Stethoscope? Well never mind that, Twilight had a town to save

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, that should do it"<p>

It had taken a bit but Twilight and Fluttershy were able to determine that a large amount of sand (Go figure) had been lodged in the worm's throat. They eventually cured this through water, and copious amounts of confetti. Fluttershy was of course the first to approach the worm.



"So what's your name big guy?"

Twilight expected a huge roar with Fluttershy meekly saying it's name to the rest of the group. She did not expect the worm to clear it's throat and get a drum set.

\_"They call me Doctor Worm\_  
><em>Good morning how are you? I'm Doctor Worm<em>  
><em>I'm interested in things<em>  
><em>I'm not a real Doctor but I <em>  
><em>AM A REAL WORM<em>  
><em>I AM AN ACTUAL WORM<em>  
><em>I LIVE LIKE A WORM AND <em>  
><em>I like to play the drums-<em>

And Twilight found her drummer.

\* \* \*

><p>82.1 continued<p>

Zecora looked around.

Everything was white, with faint patterns of stripes that disappeared as soon as she looked at them.

She was standing on... nothing. Solid nothing.

Nervously, she moved her hoof, and tapped the surface. It made contact, but no sound at all.

Thirty endless seconds passed in silence, as she tried to make head or tail of what was going on.

Then, with a visible shudder, the nothingness dimmed. It gained definite " if faint " patterns, stripes of pink and purple on an indigo background.

"Hi," Twilight said brightly.

Zecora whirled, mouth agape. "What the-"

Princess Twilight Sparkle stood there, behind where she'd originally appeared. She was in full regalia, complete with her Element gleaming on her brow, and had a smile on her lips.

Then she giggled.

"Sorry, Zecora," she said, subsiding. "But that's the first time I've ever heard you fluff a rhyme."

The zebraican shaman shook her head. "This is fairly overwhelming. To... on nothing be standing."

"Yeah, I imagine you are," Twilight allowed, smiling wistfully. "I remember..."

After a moment's silence, she shrugged her wings. "Anyway. Welcome to the alicorn club."

Zecora blinked. "Could that you please for me reprise?"

"Welcome to the alicorn club," Twilight repeated. "You constructed an alchemical circle with the intent of breaking Silver Spoon down into her fundamental components and reconstructing her differently, if I've got this right, and you did it successfully â€" and in the presence of a powerful, if recently created, artefact. Well done, you've got wings and a horn."

"I have horn and wing?" Zecora looked back along her body, and saw the dappled wings resting against her side. As she watched, they twitched involuntarily. "...I see your meaning. This is still seeming/ To be me dreaming. Some time is a must/ For me to adjust."

"Take as long as you want," Twilight replied. "Now, as I understand things, you're technically supposed to have a severe penalty taken for undertaking Pony Transmutation. But you did it for Silver, so it'll probably work out â€" selflessness tends to."

"It was partly Silver, so what about her?"

"I don't think she'll be having much trouble."

\* \* \*

><p>Silver Spoon stared down at the cupcake.<p>

"Don't like it?" Discord asked, munching on his own. "Oh, do you want a coffee cup cake, rather than a tea cup cake?"

He snapped his claws, producing a dinner service made entirely from silver. "The spoons are edible â€" I propose a toast! As in they taste like it. Oh, this is going to be so much fun, having another draconequus around!"

Discord leaned in. "I like the squirrel tail, by the way. Very stylish."

"...can't I just shapeshift into a pony?" Silver asked.

Discord's face fell. Then he picked it up again. "That's boring."

"Well," Silver added, frowning. "Technically I am now a shapeshifter. And silver is a malleable metal, so..."

"Oh, whatever." Discord stomped off, producing occasional squeaky noises. "By the way," he added, as he approached the wildly swirling boundary of the astral space, "if you can't smell anything, that's because the Pony Transmutation removed your sense of smell as the penalty. You'll get it back next loop."

Discord threw a fish at her. "Pity you didn't have a sense of humour it could have taken instead! I swear, these young draconequui, no respect..." he muttered, opening a door and leaving that way.

After taking a minute to compose herself, Silver folded herself into the form of a normal filly and trotted for that same door â€" through

which she could see Mac's bar.

She still had wings and a horn, though.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

82.1: Combo! (And yes, I did do that to Silver. Quicksilver?) Thanks go to Conceptualist for the rhymes.

>82.2: Defending the world from extrasolar treats.<br>82.3: Oh, the ways to troll with royal authority.

>82.4: Doesn't sound all that fun.<br>82.5: On a Cross and Arrow.

>82.6: Fluttershy's the expert here.<br>82.7: There's no business, like show business, like no business I know...

>82.8: X-treme Scoots.<br>82.9: Leah rather likes live chat shows. They offer such opportunities.

>82.10: They Might Be Giant Worms.<p>

## 87. Chapter 87

### 83.1

"Do it again!" Dash asked, with the biggest eyes she could muster.

"Okay... fine."

There was the clop of a hoof striking the floor, and then Rainbow Dash was a griffin.

"Awesome!" she said with an enthusiastic grin (well, as close to one as a beak could accomplish), and flew off into the sky.

"What's goin' on?" Scootaloo asked, looking skywards. "Oh, huh. Dash looped in as a griffin?"

"Nope," Silver Spoon replied, rolling her eyes. "She found out that I can do crazy chaos magic, and she's been pestering me to turn her into random flying creatures all day."

Scootaloo blinked. "Huh. I'd have thought she'd already been... well, everything that flies."

"And a lot that doesn't," Silver confirmed. She frowned, and her tail poofed out into a squirrel-tail, which she wrapped around herself. "But she says it's useful for double-blind testing of relative flight speeds. Or something."

\* \* \*

><p>83.2<p>

Silver Spoon (AKA Quicksilver, Silverbeak, Silverback, Silverleaf, and just about any name with silver in it at various times) Awoke in a large, well furnished room.

"Huh," she said, intelligently. "This is... nicer than my usual

room."

The bedclothes were pale cream and cloth-of-silver, thick and plush. A large wardrobe sat half open, with the hems of a number of dresses and other outfits visible within.

There were a number of alchemical flasks on the dresser, along with a broken glass vessel (a sharp retort) and large symbols Hg and Ag picked out in silver on the door, above an ornate and stylized spoon.

Very thematic, in other words.

"Wait," she added, looking down at herself and spotting a familiar squirrel-tail, along with a scaled arm and one with sparkling, starry fur. "Am I a..."

The mirror on the wall liquefied, flowed over to her and reconstituted itself. The upside-down image thus produced confirmed what she already suspected â€" she was a draconequus. All her usual body parts as such a creature were there â€" a silver-shimmering raven's wing and one from a bat, the left leg with holes in it, a curly horn and a nub that barely showed above her fur...

And, of course, the huge poofy squirrel tail.

Further reflection (no pun intended) was interrupted by a clatter of hooves.

"Hey, Silver!" a voice called. "Are you Awake?"

Silver took a moment to recognize the voice. Nyx. Her sister, fellow daughter of Queen Twilight-

\_urk!\_

The young draconequus can probably be forgiven for falling out of bed as the loop memories coalesced.

Only her erratic chaos magic, however, could explain why she fell \_up\_.

\* \* \*

><p>"So you guys have had one of these before?" Silver asked, some time later.<p>

"Yeah, we have," Applebloom answered. "Back after DT, Scoots, Sweetie and I all ascended within like twenty loops of each other. It was fun stuff."

The alicorn fillies exchanged grins.

"We totally spent about a thousand years partying and drinking before Twilight came back," Diamond Tiara said with a grin. "So, how come you're a draconequus?"

"Oh, were you not there for that one?" Scootaloo asked. "Silver and Zecora basically tried Human Transmutation â€" well, Pony Transmutation â€" on Silver. Big magic boom, Zecora's now a

zebralicorn and Silver ended up as a draconequus."

"Huh. Okay, that's... not what I was expecting..." Diamond Tiara noted.

"It rather came as a surprise to me as well. But at least it means that I can solve my species issues, and of course I also have this lovely bushy tail." Silver matched action to words and wrapped it around herself. "Nice and warm..."

Nyx reached out and stroked it gently. "Yeah, that's some good fuzzies."

After the others all admired it for a bit, Silver â€" Princess Quick Silver Spoon of Equestria, to give her her apparent title â€" raised a claw. "Okay, what are loops like this like?"

"Well, we're all kids of Queen Twilight," Nyx pointed out the obvious. "This is kinda like our version of those loops where one a' the others is her sister. Or brother. Anyway, Discord's banished, and things go from here."

"She does try to make as much time for us as possible," Scootaloo said, smiling. "Which is nice... but then, we're eight-years-old at the moment, and we're princesses. I think it's practically a constitutional and legal requirement that we cause havoc."

Sweetie nodded enthusiastically. "And she can always do what she did last time we got too much for her, and go have a thousand year nap."

"Presumably coming back shortly before Dad does, right?" Silver checked.

There was no answer. Largely because the other five had turned to stare at her.

"Before..."

"\_Who\_ gets back?" the other four finished the sentence Nyx had started.

"Well..." Silver shrugged. "Seems obvious. I'm a draconequus, you're all my sisters of the same age, there's only one other draconequus around, so..."

Dead silence for several seconds.

Nyx raised a hoof. "I move that we all try to forget that last minute or so."

"Motion seconded!" the other four alicorns chorused.

\* \* \*

><p>Queen Twilight of Equestria rested her head against the desk and groaned.<p>

She hated it when Loop memories were too detailed.

And given how rambunctious the five Crusaders had been last time one of these loops had come around, and given how there was now a young draconequine added to the mix... she was going to need a lot of headache medicine.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, girls," Twilight said, taking her regalia off. "I understand you're probably all excited to be royalty again â€" or, in the case of Silver, for the... first time?"<p>

"I've been an illegitimate daughter of Celestia once, I think," Silver replied, frowning. "I wasn't an alicorn that time, though, and it never really came out."

"Right." Twilight nodded. "Okay, anyway. There's a few basic rules. Rule one â€" none of you have precedence. I'm the only one who knows what order you were born in, and I'm not telling."

"Seems fair," Sweetie said amicably.

"Second, no hurting anyone. We don't want this to go the way of that poor Elsa from Arendelle, do we?"

"She's doing fine, I thought..." Scootaloo frowned. "Isn't she?"

"Well, yes, but I meant her baseline self." Twilight looked over at Silver. "That especially applies to you, I'm afraid â€" your powers are rather less controllable. If you're having trouble, just ask, and I'll see about setting up something to dampen them. Until then, though, try and control them as they are."

The draconequus nodded, frowned, and snapped her claws together. A bouquet of flowers materialized next to them.

"Oh, that's nice!" Twilight smiled, touched.

Silver was looking at her claws in irritation. "Yeah, but it was supposed to be a cake..."

The elder alicorn shrugged. "Well, practice makes perfect and all that. Right, the third rule is â€" don't abuse your position to order people around. I'm sure none of you would do that anyway, but it's just a point I'd like to make." She sighed. "After the hypersonic potato cannon incident last time, I do like to make sure of these things."

Applebloom had gone bright red.

"Anyway, I think that's about it. The good side of it all is, loops like this are a \_lot\_ longer than normal, so you can sort of stretch out in a way you can't in a normal loop."

Twilight paused, frowning. "Oh, something I forgot to check. You have your catalyst, right, Silver?"

Silver blinked. "Catalyst?"

"Reascending needs a catalyst. I gave Zecora one when she first

ascended â€" one of the normal cosmic spectrum pendants, I've got several spares â€" but I forgot that Discord might not necessarily have told you."

"I... don't \_think\_ I need one," Silver said slowly. "I mean, I've shapeshifted several times in just that first loop... unless â€" oh!"

The alicorns all looked at her.

"I think I might have absorbed the philosopher's stone we used." Silver's eyes lost focus for a moment, then she nodded. "Yep, there it is."

"Huh," Diamond Tiara said, contemplatively. "That's convenient for you."

"Never expect a draconequus to do things sausage," Nyx said gravely. Then giggled.

\* \* \*

><p>83.3 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The ponies gathered in Ponyville's town hall hushed- again, Twilight thought.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy's birds warbled their fanfare. Again.<p>

Mayor Mare gave her not-brief-enough introduction speech. Again.

The curtains opened to reveal nothing. Again.

The mayor mouthed her usual inanity about there being a good reason, another pony commented that Celestia was gone, and Pinkie Pie complimented that pony's explanation. Again, again, again.

Twilight had thought she'd outgrown, so to speak, the frustration of having to relive the exact same moments so often, especially the first two days or so of the baseline before much could really be changed. She'd been wrong. There were baseline runs, and probably always would be, when she had no new ideas on things to change or experiment with, when nothing better came to mind than to go through the motions for the umpt hundred thousandth time. And those baseline runs would always, to some greater or lesser extent, be more dreary than fun.

And this time Twilight felt exceptionally weary. She didn't want to go through it all again this time, but every alternative that came to her mind had been done at least twice before. Nothing appealed to her. Not even doing nothing appealed to her.

The only thing that kept her going, standing and waiting for the inevitable, was the fact that this wasn't quite a Lonely Loop. She'd detected one other Looper Awake, and she was fairly certain it was Luna. But Luna had avoided her so far- no response to messages,

making herself scarce when Twilight visited the moon to look for her, nothing. That meant, Twilight deduced, that Luna had her own plan.

Curiosity about that plan outweighed Loop-induced boredom and depression... barely.

After all the ponies in the room had begun chattering to one another about the state of things, all lights in the hall suddenly went out except for the spotlight on the balcony. A swirl of star-speckled smoke rose from the balcony floor, gathering in upon itself until it condensed into the form of Nightmare Moon, who sat on her haunches for a moment, stoic, apparently unmoving.

This silenced the ponies for about three seconds. As soon as the first, "Who's that?" echoed through the room, Nightmare Moon straightened herself up slightly. With the greatest solemnity she picked up a white-tipped black cane from the floor, holding it in one fetlock. Next came a large white straw boater hat, which she placed squarely on her head with equal gravitas.

Off in a corner of the round hall, a tinkly piano played a brief hook, and in the span of four beats of music Nightmare Moon launched herself to her hind legs, knocked the straw hat back into a jaunty cocked position, and began to dance with high kicking steps, singing:

\_Hello my ponies, hello my subjects,\_  
><em>Hello to Ponyville<em>  
><em>Open your sleepy eyes<em>  
><em>Celestia's gone bye-bye<em>  
><em>Bow to me soon now, I'm back from the moon now, <em>

\_The moon was such a bore\_  
><em>Oh baby this night will last forevermore!<em>

The brief song concluded, Nightmare Moon ended with a spread-limbed pose and a grin to her audience. The ponies responded with frozen shock, except for Pinkie Pie, who tromped the floor with applause and cheered, "Encore! Encore!"

"Oh... oh... oh yeah?" Twilight managed to stammer out. "Well, we'll stop you, Nightmare Moon! We won't-"

All further threats were cut off by the large whipped cream pie to the face.

As Nightmare Moon's departing laughter faded into the night, Twilight wiped white gunk from her face and growled, "Of course you realize THIS means WAR."

\* \* \*

><p>83.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I keep telling you, it's Ivory Scroll now!" The brown mare shook her head as her secretary left the room. "Honestly, if they ever start looping... Ah! Pinkie. What legal bamboozlement do you want



this time?"<p>

The party pony slid into her chair. "PokÃ©mon."

"...The franchise?"

"No, a pokemon league, except with any critter we can find." Pinkie pulled out a list. "Timber wolves, vampire fruit bats, cragadiles... I've got the mechanics down, pokeballs and safety spells, and I've already run this over with Fluttershy to avoid being too cruel. I just need some sort of legal foundation."

Ivory Scroll tapped her chin. "I think I can have something for you, but not this loop. Still, we can go over the paperwork and next time we're both awake-I'd have to be there," she added quickly, "mayoral authority-I'll set it up after Nightmare Moon's return."

"Thanks auntie!"

Scroll blinked. "...excuse me?"

"Oh. Some loops you and me..." Pinkie gestured vaguely. "On my father's side. I, uh, forgot that hasn't happened while you're awake."

"Oh. I... hmm." Ivory Scroll nodded to herself. "Alrighty."

\* \* \*

><p>83.5 ( Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"DAAAAASH!"<p>

Rainbow Dash barely had time to react before Twilight plowed into her. "Agh! What the-"

"The new Daring Do book finally came out!" Twilight's face broke into a wide grin. "It's baseline too!"

Rainbow blinked twice... then grinned back. "SO AWESOME!"

\* \* \*

><p>83.6 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stared at what she'd found at the centre of Equis this Loop.<p>

The centre of the planet was... chocolate. Pure, sweet, chocolate.

Twilight turned to address her copilot for this expedition. "Pinkie must never learn of this."

"Agreed," Spike nodded.

\* \* \*

><p>83.7 (The One Butcher)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight has been spending a lot of Loops with Lyra lately. The Geeky Unicorn was fun and quirky and often made her laugh. Also she had a variable collection of crazy conspiracy theories Twilight could enact in a later Loop.<p>

Twilight guessed that Lyra would maybe start Looping soon, therefore every Loop as close to the End as possible she made sure to play a collectible card game with Lyra. And play a custom Card.

"I play "Yggdrassil Crashes"! It will turn you into a Time Traveller trapped in infinitely repeating Time Loops, making you repeat the same stretch of time again and again until you go completely stir crazy and do anything to alleviate boredom!" Twilight exclaimed in a dramatic fashion.

"I never heard of that Card... What's it do?"

"Turn you into a Time Traveler trapped in infinitely repeating time Loops, making you repeat the same stretch of time again and again until you go completely stir crazy and do anything to alleviate boredom!" Twilight repeated. "Well, it will also sometimes catapult you into alternate realities with strange creatures and lots of adventures, where you can pick up useful skills, but that's not the main function."

Lyra looked at her strangely. "I don't wanna hear the Flavor Text. What is it's effect on the Game?"

Twilight smirked. "You will become so bored with winning these matches you will let me win.", she said smugly.

Lyra blinked just as the Loop reset.

Twilight Woke over the Legend of Nightmare Moon, thinking: "I did this several thousand times now, but it's going to be SO worth it when it finally works."

\* \* \*

><p>83.2 continued<p>

Queen Twilight Sparkle stood on the lawn of Canterlot Castle, looking fixedly at her daughters.

"Any comments to make?" she asked quietly.

"...not really," Scootaloo piped up. "I mean, like you say, we don't often get a chance to stretch out like this."

Behind her, there was a cracking rumble as the top of the Canterhorn fell off. The large, pointed lump of stone bounced down the mountainside, flew through the air, and landed ten feet to Twilight's left.

Then the bell tower emitted a strangled \_clang\_, followed by a \_squelch.\_

"Really?" Twilight asked, sighing. "Blue cheese bells?"

"Hey, it's not \_my\_ fault," Silver protested, putting her hands behind her back and twisting her tail with them. "I mean, I was kind of drunk, sure, but can you blame me? It was our twenty-first birthday!"

"I can, actually," Twilight informed her. "Because the legal age here is eighteen. You've had three years to get used to getting drunk."

"Well..." Sweetie said, slowly. "It's not as though we've gotten \_that\_ drunk before. I mean, this was the first year they made that special commemorative coronation cordial."

"And I didn't know it'd affect me that strongly," Silver added. "Sorry, er, Mom."

"Well, everything's fine, so it looks like there's no problems," Twilight said kindly. "Right, I'm off for a well earned rest. I'll be back in nine hundred and ninety one years."

She vanished in a swirl of dim orange light and glittering stars.

"That was quite a precise date, actually..." Nyx observed. "Wonder why."

"Eh." Applebloom flared her wings, then turned to the others. "Okay, same thing as before? Rotating authority, so any individual one of us gets most of the week off?"

"Sounds good," they replied, or words to that effect.

\* \* \*

><p>"...s'not fair," Silver muttered. "This isn't my duty day, why do I have to..."<p>

"Because you've got the most experience at this. By, like, ten thousand percent," Scootaloo replied. "Now, they're turning up in five minutes, so get to it!"

Silver sighed. Then snapped her claws.

\* \* \*

><p>As the delegation from White Tail Woods entered the audience chamber of the Hexarchy, they were met by Princess Scootaloo in her bronzes â€" and a doe they did not recognize, bedecked in silvery jewellery.<p>

"Welcome to Canterlot," the doe said, smiling. "I am Princess Quick Silver Spoon, this is my sister Scootaloo."

The eldest buck bowed. "We did not know that your highness was a deer..."

"Oh, I'm not, but I thought I'd make you more comfortable." Silver bowed in return. "Now, are you all refreshed from the journey? Drinks can be provided for our discussion if not."

\* \* \*

><p>"...you really are good at that stuff," Scootaloo complimented her, as the orange alicorn pulled down the sun and lifted up the moon. "You know. Diplomacy."<p>

"Well, as you say, I have the experience." Silver examined her reflection. "I mean, I've been basically \_everything.\_"

The moon's lower half cleared the horizon.

"Right, that's me done," Scootaloo said, unlatching her peytral. "I'll go tag in Sweetie."

"...this is all a kind of compensation for my not having had one of these before, isn't it?" Silver asked, then shrugged. "Oh, well. At least it's never routine."

\* \* \*

><p>83.8 (Scygnus)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright. So I'm the Princess of Dreams. Dreams are strange. So I've seen all sorts of really odd, off-the-wall things that Discord himself couldn't even conceive of. But this. This is... wow." Luna commented, flying alongside the climbing human.<p>

"I don't think that's a compliment!" Vincent shouted, heaving another block into alignment so he could keep climbing up.

"But as much as I think Twilight will enjoy this system of puzzles, if I can duplicate it, I think I'll leave out the enormous human buttocks with eyes."

"NO! REALLY? YOU AREN'T GOING TO GIVE HER THE PLEASURE OF ALL THIS DEADLY PERIL? I MUST SAY, IT REALLY ENHANCES THE EXPERIENCE!"

"Truly?" Luna cocked her head to the side, looking at the boxers-clad man with disbelief.

"NO! ARE YOU GOING TO PICK ME UP AND GET ME AWAY FROM THE GIANT ASS WITH EYES OR LET ME DIE WHEN I'M TOO OUT OF BREATH FROM SARCASM-ING AT YOU!?"

"Oh! My apologies."

\* \* \*

><p>83.9<p>

Trixie ran into the library. "Twilight!"

Her old friend and fellow student of Celestia looked up. "What is it, Trixie?"

"Nightmare Moon's attacking!"

Twilight stood up, pushing her chair away. "Then we must go!"

The two unicorns cantered back out the door.

Their assistant, Spike, frowned. "What the..."

Curious, he followed them out the door.

\* \* \*

><p>"Nightmare Moon! Junipers!" Twilight said, in shocked tones. "So it <em>is<em> true!"

"Who are you?" The dark alicorn turned from her triumphal speech. "Why do you interrupt me?"

Twilight's shock turned to a grin, one she shot Trixie who responded in kind.

She turned, raised a hoof, and bumped Trixie's outraised hoof. There was a bright flash of light.

"Wonder Twin Powers Activate!" they chorused.

Spike shook his head. "You're not twins, and-"

"Form of... an alicorn!" Twilight continued, causing Spike to stop mid-sentence in bewilderment.

"Jinx!" Trixie said quickly, as the light cleared to reveal both of them with wings to complement their horns.

Nightmare Moon's jaw dropped.

"Why do you always turn into the same thing as me?" Twilight asked waspishly.

"Because you always pick alicorn," Trixie replied.

"It's a good form! Very balanced, good for combat, highly mobile..."

"Exactly," Trixie countered. "I like those properties as well."

"Whence have two additional alicorns come?" Nightmare Moon inquired, in tones that made it an order. "I was not aware of thy existence!"

"Oh, for..." Trixie turned to face the evil equine, and began speaking in terms suited more to a small child. "It's called a super power. Twilight and I are the Wonder Twins, we can transform into things. Don't you read comic books?"

Nightmare Moon's bafflement appeared to only increase.

"Right. Right, we can deal with this. Look, here's how it's supposed to work..."

\* \* \*

><p>"I... believe I understand," Nightmare Moon said slowly. "So, rather than attack straightaway that I return from exile, I should establish a fortress of darkness and thence launch attacks, resulting in a continual pattern of strike and retreat?"<p>

"That's correct," Trixie replied, nodding. "You've got it. Now, I recommend that you build a base actually on the moon, because that's always cool, and start recruiting your evil mooks. I know a fashion designer who can do you some very snazzy uniforms..."

\* \* \*

><p>Some weeks later, Nightmare Moon sat back on her Midnight Throne in the Sinus Noctis as her first battalion of Night Guard paraded before her. In their very snazzy uniforms.<p>

Her last confrontation with the apparently inaccurately named Wonder Twins had been complicated, with magical battle in the skies under Cloudsdale. Her night had held for three extra hours that time, before Twilight Sparkle had broken the spell keeping the dawn from coming and she'd retreated to plan the next attempt.

As she watched the thestral company pass in review, a thought occurred to her.

Wait a minute. Have I fallen victim to an extremely well performed scam?

She dismissed the idea. After all, she was a proper supervillain now. With guards and everything.

Her idea of just taking over in one go was absurd! Why, it was practically begging for a desperate band of thrown-together heroes to stop her at the last minute, if she was understanding Trixie's lectures correctly.

\* \* \*

><p>83.10<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Ciaphas Cain, almost certainly future Hero of the Imperium, leant back against the chair of his transport ship suite.<p>

As a Commissar, he of course got one of the officer's quarters, so he had a little privacy while he pondered the uncertain future of a new loop.

Well, 'uncertain' was a flat lie. He was good at lying to himself, but not that good.

The future was dark, chaotic, and involved far too much peril.

And to make things worse, his memories of his schola education included-

There was a knock on the door, breaking his resigned reverie. Sighing, he got up and walked over to the door.

When the door opened, there was a woman standing in the doorway. She was about average height, which meant several inches shorter than Ciaphas, and wore insignia he didn't recognize. (Unusual, but by no means ridiculous. After all, every PDF had its own, and with Lord Russ awakening ten thousand years into the past at times that meant that there was often far too much divergence.)

"May I come in?" she asked quietly.

"By all means." Ciaphas stood aside, and waved her in. She walked to the bed, swept aside a few objects on it â€" mainly laspistol parts â€" and sat.

"Ciaphas," she began. "I hereby swear that I will do you no harm nor will I attempt to cause harm to come to you, by your definition of harm, while I am here."

The Commissar blinked. "That's... an unusual opener."

"It needed to be said." She looked up, and her eyes were calm but sad. "As you may have guessed, Pinkie Pie is currently replacing one of the four chaos gods."

Ciaphas nodded, returning to his own seat and pouring some amasec. "It was sort of obvious from the fact that it's called the Eye of Parties again, yes."

The woman shrugged. "Well, party is as party does." She rummaged in a pocket for a moment, and removed a laminated card. "Here."

She slid it across his desk. Ciaphas took it, tilted it to properly illuminate it, and hissed through his teeth.

\_Get Out Of Party Free coupon\_

Good infinity plus one times

"...you are miss Pie, aren't you?" he asked, without looking up.

"An avatar," she replied, nodding. "I still retain the ability to make shadow clones and other such copies in many ways, which serves to help spread my influence and let me keep tabs on everything."

Ciaphas nodded, without otherwise reacting.

"Ciaphas," she continued, in measured tones. "The reason why I like parties, the reason why I've always liked parties â€" and fun â€" boils down to how they relax people. Give them happiness. And it's clear that I'm not helping you do that."

She shrugged. "So, that card is valid. You just need to ask, and I'll stop â€" either stop the party altogether, or help you leave

beforehand. I hope that in time you'll come to trust me and to appreciate my parties â€" but it really is your choice."

Her hair flashed bubblegum pink for a second, then she vanished with the sound of faint cheering.

An envelope floated to the floor.

With not a little trepidation, Ciaphas picked it up and opened it. Inside was a perfectly ordinary letter (albeit one written on paper that smelled faintly of icing sugar).

\_By the way, the uniform's Fenris Planetary Defence Force. Leman was kind enough to let me get a rank of majorette, which is nice of him.\_

P.S. don't be surprised if a few dozen Light Eldar show up to help out. There's a company commander who I think might be sweet on you. Actually, do you know anyone called Amon Belethir Vae'el?

Ciaphas parsed the Eldar name into Gothic, frowned, then realized it was more like a homophone than anything.

Then, unable to help himself, he started laughing.

\_That\_ would look good on Amberley's list of accomplishments for the Ordo Xenos next time...

\* \* \*

><p>83.11 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Diamonds?"<p>

"Sparkle, sparkle?"

"Diamonds diamonds diamonds diamonds?"

"Sparkle sparkle sparkle sparkle." Twilight sighed. "Sparkle sparkle sparkle, sparkle."

\* \* \*

><p>83.12 (TokoWH)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The loops weren't always the same down to the last little detail. Twilight had learned this fact so long ago that even when there were loops where Equestria was stationed on the moon or in a cyber punk setting, she could easily take it in stride. However, some details weren't always as pronounced as others. Occasionally, some more subtle stuff would happen that wouldn't change things too much, like AJ's farm being a grape farm, or one of the CMC's already having their cutie mark, or even her tree home being a few inches to the right or left from where it was originally. Nothing really too big or worth note, but it was there.<p>



There would also be time's where a ponies personality would also be different from how they normally were. It was rare, but it happened. Like that time Rainbow Dash could give Rarity a run for her money in terms of elegant upper class manners, or when Pinkie was actually fairly normal and nowhere near as hyperactive as she was in baseline -a fact that had made Twilight worry the loops had become unstable-, or the loops that must not be named with their hooves on Celestia.

Twilight shivered. Thankfully, those loops were becoming rare as of late.

Shaking her head, she could see Fluttershy's house not far off now. It was a lonely, so for now she was going to let things play out like baseline. She had a rather funny idea later on at the wedding that involved Chrysalis, an odd conversational 'judo' she had planned that involved rubber ducks, and several buckets of soap and water, but that was a ways off for now. Right now, she was doing her usual preparations for the Summer Sun Celebrations.

"YeeeeeeeeeeAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!"

Twilight turned around, Twilight's eyes shrunk as she barely had time to dodge a skateboard to the head. Raising her head, Twilight watched as a Pegasus skated off to Fluttershy's house. Getting a good look at the Pegasus, it took everything Twilight had not to laugh.

There was Fluttershy, doing a front flip off the skate board. She had a blue baseball cap on, folded backwards with some of her pink bangs poking out. She dashed over to some nearby birds, a confident smile on her face as she refilled their feeders. Twilight was tempted to sent out another pulse to make sure it wasn't the looping Fluttershy messing with her, and had it not been for even the looping Fluttershy, despite the many loops she'd been through, getting to this level of confidence to pull off a loop like this, she likely would have.

Doing rather well at suppressing whatever laughter that was desperately trying to make it's way out, she decided to continue on with what little 'baseline' of the this loop that could be salvaged.

"Um, hello?" she asked, approaching what could easily be mistaken as RD in Fluttershy's body. "I'm looking for a Pegasus named 'Fluttershy'?"

"You're lookin' at her!" Fluttershy said, giving a wink as she put her hoof to her forehead. "Really, the name's a rather big oxymoron, but still!" she continued, sticking out her tongue.

Twilight was actually rather surprised. Despite her vast millennium of experience, she was having a rather hard time keeping a straight face. Luckily, Spike was quick to speak for her.

"That was pretty cool what you did back there!"

Finally catching the attention of 'Skatershy' -Twi's current work in progress name for this odd variation of Fluttershy-, the Pegasus' eyes lit up.

"Wow! A baby dragon! Cool!"

Twilight watched in amusement as Fluttershy went over picked Spike up in a hug. Despite the massive personality difference, something never changed.

"U-uh! You can let go of me now, you know!"

"Huh? Oh, sorry!"

Putting Spike down, Fluttershy chuckled nervously. "Sorry 'bout that."

Twilight smiled, shaking her head. "It's alright." looking on in amusement, she smirked. "So, you like dragons?"

Fluttershy glanced back a bit, rubbing the back of her neck. "Well... only if they're babies. Any dragon older than that kind of freaks me out."

Twilight chuckled. More outgoing personality, but still Fluttershy deep down. Spike smirked, looking at Shy's skateboard. Spike gave a big grin as he looked at her.

"Say, do you think that maybe-"

"No," Twilight quickly cut him off.

"Aw! Come on! Please!"

"No, "

"Pretty please?"

"No! "

"Aaaaaaw! But why!?"

"Because I don't want you breaking your neck, that's why!"

Spike frowned, turning around and pouting. Twilight rolled her eyes. Whoever heard of a skateboarding dragon anyways?

\_'Oh, wait, Spyro... right.'\_

Fluttershy chuckled, before she noticed something in the distance. Not far off near Carrot Top's stand, she could see Angel poking his head out from a nearby barrel. Rolling her eyes, she gave a soft smile.

"Sorry, um... oh dear!" Fluttershy said, eyes wide in surprise. "How rude of me! I almost left without learning your name!"

Twilight smiled. "It's Twilight. Twilight Sparkle."

"And I'm Spike!"

Fluttershy nodded, smiling. "Nice to meet you both. Wish I could stick around and talk more, but I need to deal with this."

With that Fluttershy flew back and grabbed her skateboard, before rolling off into town. "Angel! No! Bad bunny!"

Watching her roll off into town, Twilight stood silent for a few seconds, still resisting the urge to break character and bust out laughing. Even though she had something planned, she felt like it could wait. Now, she just wanted to see how this loop would play out. If there were a few things that were for sure, it was that this would be an interesting loop, and she would need to take pictures at some point lest no one believe her.

Spike stood silent for a few seconds, before he turned to twilight and grasped his hands together.

\_"Please...!"\_

Twilight rolled her eyes. \_\_'And making sure Spike doesn't break his neck. That too.'\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>83.13 (The One Butcher)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>To see Fluttershy of all Ponies come into Mac's Bar with a depressed expression, clutching at Angel like a grumpy teddy bear, broke more hearts than anything else ever had.<p>

"Something against horrible guilt, please..." Mac winced. Fluttershy having even accidentally done something bad was always something that hung around her for a long time. Still, Mac poured her a glass of Luna's Distilled Moonshine from that weird Loop where no Pony except the Princesses had ever heard of alcohol.

"Wanna talk?" Mac started even as Fluttershy started shaking. "Poison has to get out you know."

Fluttershy clutched Angel even tighter. Finally she picked up her glass with her lips and downed it. The cool draught went down like silk and lubricated her tongue. It was almost a shame not to use it in this state. She shot Mac a dirty look which would have killed him if it weren't for his enhanced Hulk-metabolism burning the sweetness, but started:

"I am too cute..." Mac was the only Looper who could have kept in his snort at that, once again proving his bartender ability. "At first I thought that was just a joke she told me... I didn't want to be a monster Endbringer. I wanted to be the "make peace with humans" Endbringer, but...", Fluttershy began to cry in earnest, "There just wasn't enough insulin!"

\* \* \*

><p>83.14 (OracleMask)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Awaking in a human form was not a sensation Zecora was

unaccustomed to. But to find herself inside a small craft flying through the air at the same time was definitely a novel experience. A glance over the side told Zecora very little about where she was flying: this brand new world was currently veiled in night, and under the cover of darkness there was no ground in sight.<p>

Loop memories chose that moment to reveal themselves, and Zecora prudently backed away from the side of her airship. The reason there was no ground in sight was actually because there was no ground to speak of down below her.

Now then, according to her memories, her name was still Zecora. But instead of a Zebra, she was a human of the Silver Civilization, sent on a special mission by the Elders of the Silver Shrine. Her task was no simple one: Zecora was to recover five ancient gems called Moon Crystals and bring them back to the Silver Shrine before the primitive peoples of this world - Arcadia - could use their power to summon equally ancient man-made monsters called Gigas. Another Silvite named Ramirez had been sent on this task before, but failed and never returned.

Her tools for the mission were...lacking, Zecora noted with a frown. She had an airship that even her loop-self did not know how to operate besides the basics, and mostly out-of-date information on Arcadia's current population.

The bracelet on her wrist chirped, before morphing into a pudgy teardrop-shaped creature. It sniffed at her in obvious curiosity, then chirped again, this time more loudly.

"Indeed, it seems your mistress I am replacing," Zecora replied, "Though I hope you will aid me with the task I am now facing."

There came a few more chirps.

"You are called Cupil? A pleasure. Zecora is my name," Zecora answered, "Let us go together as friends, as the Moon Crystals we reclaim."

\* \* \*

><p>The first challenge of the night came upon them almost immediately - a large, metal airship that opened fire as soon as it got in range. Zecora considered trying to steer the ship out of harm's way, but none of the cannons on the other ship actually landed a hit. Instead, the air was peppered with explosions that rattled the ship like a tin can.<p>

Zecora did the prudent thing instead, and huddled down with her arms over her head. Cupil, chirping urgently, suddenly morphed into disc that floated over her head and helped to shield her from the blasts. Their airship was not so shielded, however, and there was soon a shudder and the sense of slowly dropping downwards that indicated damage to the engines.

Cupil returned to bracelet form as the artillery barrage ceased, and the metal airship came in closer. Seeing soldiers in full plate armor, Zecora decided to keep playing it safe and feigned unconsciousness. The soldiers pulled her onto their airship as soon as they were close enough, and she watched through barely opened eyes

as her own vessel sank down into the lower cloud layers. What a waste.

Zecora found the term 'sack of potatoes' came to mind as the soldiers carried her 'unconscious' body into the ship, though the ride became a bit gentler as she was brought to the bridge.

"Admiral Alfonso, sir! We have the girl here."

"Excellent," came the reply (it was a snide, upper-class voice), "Now then, let us return to Valua at top speed. One such as myself cannot be seen lingering in such a low-class area as Mid Ocean, after all -"

There was a muffled explosion.

"Wh-What was that?!" Alfonso yelled.

"Air Pirates! We're under attack!"

\* \* \*

><p>Zecora gave up the ruse of feigned unconsciousness after she was rudely dumped into what felt like a small boat, and sat up. She had been carried all the way from the bridge to a cargo hold, and the huge door was opening to reveal bright pre-dawn light and a sea of clouds.<p>

Oddly enough, she had been dumped into a small boat, albeit one designed for flight. Deciding that the time for playing the damsel was past, Zecora climbed out of the boat and made her way into the shadows. Her Mokuton was not the only skill she had gained from time spent as the First Hokage.

" - perfect conditions for you to make your escape, Admiral Alfonso," a man in full plate armor was saying.

The one who he was speaking to - with gleaming, elegantly-coiffed hair and wearing a shining, gold-trimmed outfit - reminded Zecora of some of the worst loop-variations of Prince Blueblood. Admiral Alfonso flipped back a lock of golden hair with one hand and sneered.

"My preparations are finished as well," Alfonso replied, "Preparations to dispose of a traitor."

Oh...this would not do. It seemed like the vain man was going to throw his second-in-command off the ship, then blame the dead fellow for the successful pirate attack. Zecora could not stand by and watch an innocent life be snuffed out so callously.

"Cupil, we cannot let that man be harmed," Zecora whispered, even as she stealthily made her way across the hold as fast as she could, "Your shapeshifting - make a rope to reach his arm."

Cupil chirped urgently.

And because Alfonso didn't bother to look back, arrogantly assuming that his plan was foolproof, he didn't see the Valuan soldier grab a silver rope that seemed to appear from nowhere.

"Hold fast to the rope and we'll pull you in," Zecora called down to the soldier, "We will not leave you to a fate so grim."

Back in the depths of the cargo hold, Zecora heard shouting and roaring, as if some kind of strange beast was rampaging. Since it wasn't near them, she focused on helping Cupil pull up the Valuan soldier instead.

"Y-You..." the poor man was shaking hard enough to make his armor rattle, "You s-saved my life. But - but you're th-the..."

"Please rest after your harrowing plight," Zecora reassured him, "I promise that Cupil and I will not bite."

Cupil gave a squeak, reforming into its normal floating blob shape and wiggling tiny fins at the Valuan in agreement. Somehow this sight did not reassure the man very much.

There was a whoosh of air as the small metal boat Zecora had been dumped into earlier suddenly flew past, the now disheveled and harried-looking Alfonso flying it as fast as he could. It was easy to see why, as something that looked only vague like a cow was chasing his boat. Seeing the massive horns jutting out of each shoulder - and how they were crackling with thunder and blasting lightning bolts in Alfonso's direction - Zecora could only think that such a beast really wouldn't be out of place inside the Everfree Forest.

"You're supposed to be attacking them, Antonio! Not meeeeee!" Alfonso wailed as he made his hasty escape.

Antonio, whatever sort of beast it was, had enough sense of self-preservation to stop when it reached the edge of the hold. Unfortunately, this put Zecora and the Valuan soldier she'd rescued as the closest targets for Antonio's continuing rampage.

The Valuan soldier, in a surprising show of bravery, scrambled to his feet and put himself between Zecora and Antonio.

"Run to safety, young lady!" he ordered, "I'll try to hold him off!"

"Your noble gesture, I appreciate!" Zecora replied as she reached for one of the tools in her pocket, "But harmless, this bull I can make. And as for you Cupil? Form of a slingshot, if you will."

You didn't live in Everfree very long without knowing how to deal with dangerous neighbors...up to and including the foliage. Cupil chirped, quickly morphing into a slingshot. Zecora loaded up a single bright blue pellet and aimed at Antonio, firing it into the beast's mouth when it roared at them.

"Huh? What's that?" the Valuan soldier asked.

"Concentrate of Poison Joke - and not a safe thing to eat," Zecora explained, "Capable of giving a lightning bull a case of rubber feet."

Antonio gave a wobbly roar and fell. One of the horns hit the deck and bent like it was made of soft rubber - which it was, now. With

another sickly bellow, the beast went still. It seemed that being made of rubber didn't agree with Antonio very much.

The Valuan soldier whistled.

"That's twice you've saved my life," he said, turning and bowing, "My name is Sub-Commander Abilio, I'm in your debt."

"My name is Zecora, and Cupil you've met. We did only what was right, you owe us no debt," Zecora answered.

Abilio suddenly whirled, taking a defensive stance once again.

"You're those Air Pirates! I won't let you lay your filthy hands on Lady Zecora!"

The pirates - a girl in a yellow dress and a boy in a blue jacket with a glass eyepatch - both sighed. The girl rolled her eyes.

"Hey! Don't you know we're Blue Rogues?" the girl retorted, "Besides, you've got a lot of nerve calling us \_filthy\_ after attacking that poor girl yourself!"

"Err..."

"Perhaps we should calm down and go inside? Before the wind blows someone off the side?" Zecora offered.

That reminder shut Abilio's protests off immediately.

\* \* \*

><p>83.15 (LordCirce)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight entered the clearing near Zecora's house. She had a few potion ideas she wanted to get Zecora's input on. She knocked on the door and waited. After a brief pause, the door opened. Twilight blinked.<p>

"You're not Zecora."

The normally pink Earth Pony, now coated in white flour with black ink lines running across her body, giggled. "Twilight, don't you see? Zecora is me! For I am dripping, in poetry!" As Pinkie spoke, several ink drops fell off of her coat and landed on the floor. Upon landing, the ink spread out, writing out a rather risquÃ© limerick on the floor involving Discord and a leprechaun.

Twilight facehoofed.

\* \* \*

><p>83.16 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie Pie has learned a new move: {Sing}!<p>

Pinkie Pie wants to learn {Sing}, but Pinkie Pie already knows 4 moves!

{Giggle} {Offscreen Teleport}  
>{Pinkie Sense} {Bend Reality}<p>

Do you want a move to be forgotten to make space for {Sing}? {N}

\* \* \*

><p>"And that's why all the buffalo were mad at my song," Pinkie finished explaining to the very confused Cutie Mark Crusaders.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>83.2 continued<p>

"Where are we going tonight?" Princess Applebloom asked.

"Oh, hey Bloom." Diamond Tiara grinned, and held up a bottle. "Nyx opened one of the old cellars, and there were bottles in there that must have been maturing for at least five hundred years, so..."

"Nice."

Sweetie took up the explanation. "So we're taking about two each to visit the head of the Dragon council, and we're hoping we can get some of his special reserve off him in return."

With a snap of claws, Silver turned into a dragon. (Plaid. No, just kidding.) "I'm sure he'll be willing to help us."

Scotaloo cantered in. "Okay, girls, I got the chariots ready."

"Why do we need chariots?" Applebloom queried, glancing over at Silver. "I mean, we've all got wings..."

"Yeah, but we're gonna be about three times too drunk to fly on the way back." Scotaloo shrugged. "I mean, that mead dragons brew is... whoo!"

"Fair enough." Applebloom peered into her pocket for a second. "Okay, I've got enough hangover cure for all of us brewed up. Is Nyx okay with this?"

"Yeah." Diamond Tiara pointed out the window, to the slowly rising moon. "It's her turn anyway."

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Nyx coughed as a cloud of dust cascaded off the old reports.<p>

"Faugh... how long has it been since we checked on these?"

There was a slight \_clink.\_

"Ooh, another bottle. Nifty." Her navy-blue magic enveloped it and



shifted it out of the way, adding it to the pile. "Right..."

A report on the floor caught her eye.

\_In this, the year 20 past the defeat of Discord, the Queen Twilight Sparkle did enclose herself in sun and starlight and remove herself from the world of mortals, leaving her children to rule\_.

"Huh." Nyx calculated. "So... it's the year 1010 now, which means... cool, only a year until Mom gets back. That's good to... know..."

She blinked.

"Wait, how long was it between sealing Discord and when Luna went Nightmare, the first time?"

\* \* \*

><p>"This is going to be great," Diamond Tiara said, as the chariots began their descent. "Just a nice night in with the ruler of the dragons."<p>

"Yeah." Silver snapped her claws together, and a robe appeared around her. "Got to make a good first impression..."

"What's with the Hawaiian print?" Tiara asked, looking at the complex web of colours.

"I think it's a rule. Draconequus powers have terrible taste in clothes." Silver swept it off, lightly scorched it, and put it back on. "There we go. Black."

A blur of starlight shot past them, circled around, and matched velocity. "Girls! We have to get us all back to Canterlot as soon as possible!"

"Aw, \_do\_ we?" Sweetie called from the other chariot.

"Yeah, we \_do\_." Nyx sighed. "\_Dad\_ is coming back. As in, tomorrow."

They took a few seconds to process that.

"Back to the castle!" Diamond ordered. "Silver, please convey our apologies to the Chairdragon that we've been called away on urgent family business."

"On it." Silver spread her wings and rose up out of the chariot seat.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, girls?" Nyx said, in tones of distraction, as they dug through more old storerooms.<p>

"Yeah?" Sweetie replied.

"If I ever start a prank war with Mom... remind me not to?" the black alicorn asked. "I mean, this has got to be the longest-delay prank

I've seen in a \_long\_ time."

"I agree with \_that\_," Scootaloo muttered. "Aha!"

She pulled a large, golden box out of the piles of stuff.

"This looks about right."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, bad news," Diamond Tiara reported. "I found the ponies who'd normally be the Element bearers â€" they're about the age they'd normally be when Discord turned up. The tricky thing is, they're... well, not their baseline selves."<p>

"Oh, you're \_kidding.\_" Applebloom put her head in her hooves. "What are we talking here?"

"Fluttershy's a weather pony specializing in fog. Dash is a personal fitness trainer. Rarity's a miner, Pinkie Pie makes balloons, and as for \_Orangejack...\_"

"Whoa." Applebloom nodded. "\_That\_ ain't baseline."

"Nope. And Trixie appears to have a successful career as a stand-up comedian." Tiara rubbed her eyes. "Well, nothing for it. We're gonna have to use these suckers ourselves."

She smiled up at them. "I mean, it can't be \_that\_ hard. Everypony else who's had a Sisters loop has done it, right?"

\* \* \*

><p>The statue shattered. "Ta-da! Alright, where's the popcorn?"<p>

Discord looked around. "Oh, this has potential... I like the variety of statues. Deer, dragon, griffin... really, Twily, were you trying to get one of every sentient creature here?"

A twig snapped.

The draconequus turned. "Ah, so good to see- you?"

Five alicorns stood in a rough crescent, facing him. Above them floated a feminine draconequus.

"\_Five\_ alicorns! My goodness. And not one of them Twilight. Do you know where she..." Discord tailed off, then put his tail back on again. "Oho. Are you all her \_daughters?\_"

"Hers," the black one confirmed.

"And yours, actually," added the second draconequus.

"But that don't mean much." The red-maned one tossed her head.

"After all," one with a pink coat started,

"We kinda take after our mom," continued the one with the delightfully clashing orange coat and purple mane.

"Especialy her." The last to speak, a mare with a white coat and melodious voice, pointed up at the draconequine hovering overhead.

They all frowned in unison, and with a momentary distortion of air produced six small stone spheres.

"Oh, come on," Discord complained, hands on hips. "I just got out of the slammer!"

"Sorry," the draconequus said, and sounded like she meant it. "But visiting hours start next year."

There was an explosion of rainbow light.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that went well!" Diamond Tiara said, smiling. "Easier than I thought it would be, actually."<p>

"Yeah," Silver agreed. "I mean, I'm a draconequus... and yet, harmony?"

"It's what's inside that counts, right?" Scootaloo said. Then winced. "Okay, that was trite even for Equestria. But true, nevertheless."

"Hey... girls?" Applebloom said, plaintively. "Ah think we've got a situation."

They looked over at Discord. Nope, he was still a statue.

"No, over here!"

They looked at Applebloom, to see where she was pointing. Then they followed her hoof up to her brow, where a glittering steel tiara rested.

"Wait, has that got a gear on it?" Silver asked, drifting closer. "Is that... an Element of Magic?"

"Is that what it is? Ah was worried it was a leavin' 'gift' from Discord." Applebloom took it off, and examined it. "'Sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from' magic?"

"And I've got a necklace," Scootaloo contributed, lifting it over her head. "That's that cutie mark I got when I ascended..." A glance at her flank revealed a matching mark.

"Same here," Sweetie added.

"This necklace has a tiara on it."

"Mine's got... a spoon. Of course."

Nyx cocked her head. "I'd almost forgotten that was my cutie mark the first time..."

"Oooh boy," Sweetie Belle sighed. "Looks like we've got us a complete set of working elements."

She paused, then shook her head with a smile and pulled out her device. "Of course it's not going to replace you, Clover."

Well, yes, that's what I hoped. But still... wait, what kind of element is it, do you think? Who's got what?

"Well, whoever's got the Element o' Loyalty could tell us, if'n they learned how to use it." Applebloom shrugged. "Absent that, though, it's waitin' for Twilight."

"Did she plan this?" Silver asked the air.

"Could be, actually..." Nyx muttered.

\* \* \*

><p>u83.17 (misterq)

\* \* \*

><p>A sea-green coated unicorn sneaked silently into the forbidden section under Canterlot Castle. The regular guards were no match for her stealth suit, spells, and ninja-like skills.<p>

When Bon-Bon had noticed said skills and cautiously asked about them, Lyra had the answer. She said even though she wasn't one of Canterlot's wealthy privileged class, a younger her still needed to pay for her elite music schooling somehow. Lyra recalled being a part of a musical themed trio of cat-burglars. She was the ghost of the team. Earth pony Octavia was the muscle and Vinyl Scratch, with her bass cannon, was the wild card. Bon-Bon thought for a few moments and then said that she didn't mind as long as those days were firmly in Lyra's past.

Lyra frowned at that thought. As far as the candy making earth pony was concerned, Lyra was visiting her parents. And in fact, she totally had visited them, right before jumping out of her old bedroom window and making her way into the castle at night.

The sea-green unicorn scanned first for magical wards that would detect and alert if any pony scanned for traps. After disarming those, she scanned for more mundane traps.

It took an hour of working slowly before Lyra finally made it into the chamber. The place that housed the artifact. The Artifact!

First, there were the hushed rumors dealing with the fate of Celestia's former apprentice. Then came whisperings of Twilight Sparkle's perilous mission to recover the element of magic.

Then Pinkie Pie blabbed the whole thing when Lyra casually asked about it.

So here she was, pulling out a device that looked like a large radio with a dozen different dials from her saddlebags and aiming the

little focusing gem at the magical mirror in front of her.

Several years ago at the last symposium on poly-dimensional theory, Lyra saw the usual mix of unicorns and learned science ponies. However, there were a few surprises. The attendance of Celestia's new student, Twilight Sparkle, was not unexpected. The appearance of Pinkie Pie and Ditzy Do sitting in the back row, avidly taking notes and sharing a large feed bag full of muffins, however, was.

Fast forward several amazing discussions with an unconventional baker and an insightful mail-mare, nights spent constructing a thaumic dimensional dialler device with those spare parts Ditzy recovered from a mysterious big blue box, and time tracking down an actual working dimensional gateway - all had led Lyra Heartstrings to this one singular moment.

SNAP!

The moment which was utterly ruined as Lyra looked down to see one of the essential dials had broken off and was now sitting innocently in her hoof.

"This isn't going to be good," she stated as her device started to shake and spasm. Three multicolored beams shot out of the focusing gem and impacted the mirror, causing it to glow. Then three beams shot out of the mirror, merged, and struck Lyra on her head.

She was Lyra Heartstrings, unicorn mare. A musician and avid aficionado of the strange and unusual. Mostly stories of mythical humans with their dextrous hands and the legendary seaponies. She possessed neither ninja skills nor the brilliance needed to make a dimensional dialling device, but she was happy in Ponyville with Bon-bon.

She was Lyra Heartstringer, seapony mermare. A musician, under the rule of Princess Trixie - who managed things (explosions) while the seapony queen was off doing battle. That Lyra was also an enthusiast of the strange and unusual, namely stories of mythical humans and earth ponies with their hooves and legs. She enjoyed competing in underwater musical demolition concerts/duels, but she had always felt something had been missing from her life.

She was Lyra Heartson, human girl - a young woman, really. Although a little bit uncoordinated and somewhat of a klutz, she was a music student at a top university. Her dorm room had posters full of unicorns and space aliens. And space unicorns.

She was... waking up in a room with the unmistakable scents of a hospital.

There was also a space unicorn looking at her. Well, an alicorn with stars in her mane. Princess Luna stood next to her sister, Princess Celestia. The newly ascended Princess Twilight was also there, not looking very pleased.

Lyra spoke first, "It didn't work?"

Twilight sighed, "If you mean, did you collapse three entire universes and set the multiverse back by a few thousand loops, then no. I'm happy to say that it didn't work."

The musical unicorn blinked in confusion, "What?"

Twilight strode over to her bed and sighed, "What exactly were you trying to do, Lyra?"

"I was.. I was trying to find proof that humans and seaponies exist," the sea-green unicorn stared at the princesses as she processed her new memories, "And they do! I now have the memories of me as a seapony and as a human! I can prove it, too! What happened to my dimensional dialler?"

"The machine you used? Sleip.. I mean, some-pony higher up came and closed that little loophole that gave you access to a read-only universe's technology. He wasn't best pleased to find he missed one."

Lyra tried to process this new information. She spoke after a moment of silence, "What?"

"With your little stunt, you forcefully changed your own status to active looper - something that no pony, at least, has ever done before," Twilight Sparkle sighed tiredly. "Congratulations, Lyra, and welcome to the loops."

\* \* \*

><p>83.1: Bonuses of cool powers.<br>83.2: Yes, I did just do that. No, they're not keeping the cutie marks permanently.

>83.3: Boredom, noun.<br>83.4: Gotta Befriend 'Em All.

>83.5: Their shelf has copies of all the other Daring Do books. And about fifty different versions of that one.<br>83.6: Crunchy on the outside.

>83.7: Be careful what you wish for.<br>83.8: I dunno either.

>83.9: You have to do things properly.<br>83.10: Pinkie Pie, contrary to how it may appear at first, does think through her actions.

>83.11: Foals are taught sign language.<br>83.12: Radical world.

>83.13: Hazardous to your health.<br>83.14: Skies of Zecadia?

>83.15: There once was a mare called Pinkie, who wasn't writing this limerick.<br>83.16: Sure, that's her excuse.

>83.17: Divide by lyre error. Please reinstall and reboot.<p>

## 88. Chapter 88

### 84.1

Applebloom yawned, then Awoke.

She blinked. "Lessee..."

As she crawled out of bed, she scanned her pre-loop memories. Nothing particularly unusual â€" by the looks of things, things were pretty much baseline.

The filly slipped a hoof into her Pocket. "Cookie?"

Yes?

"Are any of the others Awake?"

Smart Cookie hummed for a moment. I detect Pansy and Clover. In addition, Clover reports that Diamond Tiara has opened one curtain in her usual signal pattern.

There was a pop, and a small scroll appeared on the dresser.

Applebloom opened it, still yawning.

Nyx here. Silver and I are Awake â€" she checked in on me, which is nice of her. I'm that evil Everfree spirit thing this time, so my other self is still evil.\_

"Good t' know." Applebloom nodded, then paused. "Wait, all six of us are around?"

Indeed.

"Right. I'm gonna go ahead and ask Twilight for some help..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, that I can help with." Twilight nodded. "You don't know what your elements are, as I recall?"<p>

"Well, yeah, except that I've got Magic." Applebloom shrugged. "Guess it's the whole Sufficiently Advanced Technology thing..."

"Right. Hold on a minute."

Twilight vanished in a puff of magic.

About thirty seconds later, she appeared again. "Here. One unattuned Element of Magic. I've got the others as well, so just have your friends turn up over the course of the day."

Nyx popped her head out of the kitchen. "Ooh, can I pick mine up?"

"Can you, actually?" Applebloom asked.

"Easy." Twilight grinned, and launched a bolt of magic at the five remaining Elements. It smashed them to flinders.

"Right. Walk through the shards, and they should reattune."

Nyx did so, and watched as a sprinkling of stone fragments rose up to circle her neck. After a few seconds, they flashed and formed an Element necklace.

"There we go." Twilight smiled. "Shouldn't take more than a few more loops before you can summon it. Okay, Spike is Awake, so he can check you tomorrow."

"Why not today?" Applebloom inquired, curious.

"I understand he and Rarity are setting up a dragon unrest house." At the baffled looks the fillies gave her, Twilight elaborated. "They're offering package tours for dragons to go to Tartarus and get some excitement."

"...fair enough."

Nyx smiled brightly. "Okay! So, how do we do this?"

"Well, the Mayor is Awake..." Twilight suggested.

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon opened her wings wide, grinning evilly as the ponies of this little town panicked.<p>

"You're not Celestia!" the pathetic Mayor said, stating the obvious. "Filly Force! Come quick!"

...that, on the other hand, had not been the obvious. Nightmare Moon turned, just as the doors slammed open.

Two earth ponies, a pegasus, a thestral and a unicorn piled in through the door, wearing brightly coloured costumes.

"Nightmare Moon!" one of them gasped. "So it's true!"

"Your evil reign ends here, Nightmare!" the thestral filly said, pointing at her. "You can't beat all six of us â€" what?"

The pegasus pulled her into a huddle for an urgent discussion.

Nightmare Moon strained her ears to hear what they were discussing.

"...what do you â€" oh, for the love of..." The thestral trotted over to the door and stuck her head out. "Sweetie!"

"Don't call me that!" the voice of another filly admonished. "We're incognito, remember! Use our aliases!"

"Well, I don't see why we have to," one of the earth ponies said. "I mean, the villain's right here. If we win, it doesn't matter, and if we lose-"

"It is the principle of the thing!"

"Just hurry up!" the other earth pony called.

A white unicorn cantered through the door, adjusting her own costume. "Sorry, girls... where were we?"

"The speeches," replied the thestral. "Ahem. You can't beat all-"

"Can we just skip to the end?" asked the pegasus. "I have homework."



"Me too," the black unicorn agreed, to general murmurs of confirmation.

"...fine, then." The thestral rolled her eyes. "But this is a one-off."

The yellow earth pony extended her hoof. "Harmony?"

"Fusion!" the other five yelled.

And then, to her great astonishment, Nightmare Moon discovered that they were not just a half-dozen overexcited children.

\* \* \*

><p>u"Huh. Okay, didn't expect that..." Spike closed his eyes, and took a breath.

"Nyx, your one's Honesty. Scoots â€" congrats, you got the best element. Loyalty."

Scootaloo did a little dance. The others regarded her with bemusement.

"Diamond, you got the other best element, Generosity." His eyelids cracked for a moment. "What is it with diamonds and Generosity bearers?"

"Hay if I know," Tiara replied.

"Now, here, ah could make a comment about yer baseline self." Applebloom shrugged. "But ah won't."

"Yours is magic, of course, Applebloom. Which gives you absolutely no authority, of course... or that's what we constantly have to remind Trixie, anyway. And Sweets, yours is laughter. Which leaves Kindness for Silver â€" probably because, you know, you've been it all."

"Cool. Thanks."

"Yeah, that's a great help."

Once the others were gone, Nyx smiled up at Spike. "Honesty? Really?"

"Yep." Spike returned the smile. "I'm guessing it's to do with how you're honest with yourself. You've been through a lot, and you don't ignore it â€" you just accepted it, and worked through it."

\* \* \*

><p>84.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight had honestly never been more interested in something purely out of amusement. It was different every time, and it never failed to be interesting!<p>

"Say Ditzzy, Just what \_does\_ your cutie mark mean anyway?"

The mailmare looked up. "Oh, hi Twilight. It means I can draw perfect circles freehoof, this time."

"Okay, that's... wait." Twilight's train of thought applied the brakes, screeched to a halt, and went into reverse. "\_This time?"\_

"Yep!" Ditzzy beamed. "Last time you asked, it was making drinks fizzy. But this time it's different! And it's also different to the time before, when it was being an expert marbles player."

Twilight was momentarily at a loss for words.

"...you mean you're \_looping?\_" The unicorn paused, took a deep breath, and continued. "Okay, so... how long have you been... going back in time, and repeating things? From your perspective, I mean."

Ditzzy's eyes uncrossed for a moment, and her tongue stuck out. "Hmm... carry the two... carry the three... carry the five other packages..."

Then her eyes crossed again. "Since last week."

"...beh whah?"

Twilight realized that that wasn't contributing to a useful conversation.

"Okay, Ditzzy." She took a deep breath. "Explain how you can remember me asking about your cutie mark twice before, if you only started time looping this loop?"

"Easy!" Ditzzy nodded vigorously. "I only started \_going back in time\_ last week, but I \_remember\_ loads more times! Like the time when Dinky was a colt, and I was a stallion, and you were a stallion, and Nightmare Moon was a stallion, and-"

Twilight held up a hoof, and Ditzzy promptly stopped her in-depth explanation. "So... you're a Dreamer?"

"What's that?" Ditzzy asked.

"When someone who isn't going back in time remembers the times before that," Twilight clarified.

"Ooooooh. Nope."

With a bleating noise, Twilight fell over.

"But... you just described what it's like to \_be\_ a Dreamer!" Twilight protested, from her position on the grass.

"Well... I do remember things, but I didn't used to." Ditzzy rummaged in a saddlebag for a stick, and started drawing diagrams on a dirt path.

There were lots of perfect circles.

"See, in each of these circles, I just remembered that circle." She pointed. "But now, in this circle, I remember all of the previous circles!"

She paused. "Or, lots of them. I don't know if I missed a circle because I don't remember it."

"...right." Twilight stood up. "I'm sure it'll make sense eventually. Anyway, feel free to ask me if you have any questions, and Big Mac runs a bar for loopers at Sweet Apple Acres. I think I'm going to go there, and drink some cider..."

"Ooh, can I come with you?" Ditzzy asked. "Dinky's still at school."

Twilight thought it over, then nodded. "Sure, why not."

\* \* \*

><p>84.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Vinyl Scratch, AKA DJ P0N-3 (though only when at work, or when in a restaurant and recognized, or occasionally when being interviewed for a colour piece) had a slight feeling of... wrongness, this morning.<p>

Oh, there wasn't anything concrete, per se. It was probably just the results of messing with a routine she'd kept up for at least the last ten years, since she really made it big " work nights, get home and sleep days, ignore the seasons, and when asked to work days do it in zombie mode before crashing.

And it wasn't like she was completely ignorant. She noticed the detritus left behind after major events " the return of Nightmare Moon, the times Discord started messing with the weather, that wedding she'd been asked to do several years ago which had apparently involved an invasion... and, of course, the time a local pony had suddenly become a Princess.

But she liked to think she at least kept up to date on the local music scene. That time five years ago when her old music became retro and really popular again, now, that had caught her off guard. But it was the exception, not the rule.

Today felt a bit like that time had, actually. Vinyl made a mental note to check that she still had most of her recording disks and hadn't thrown too many of them out " if she could get the jump on this new trend, that would be awesome.

Her train of thought was interrupted by a jaw-cracking yawn.

"Whoah," she said, blinking and shaking her head. "I must be less used to this than I thought."

Right, she thought. What's on the schedule...

Her regular gig up in Canterlot, in two days. Well, that meant she could indulge herself and laze around for the day â€" at least, until Octavia got back from \_her\_ regular gig.

(For some reason, her flatmate preferred to relax with a glass of wine and a book, not lying sprawled on the sofa with thumping music playing. There was no accounting for taste.)

But first, something sweet from the Cakes sounded nice.

\* \* \*

><p><em>You know, I should probably go out in daylight more often,<em> Vinyl thought to herself as the summery scents wafted through the air. It really was a beautiful day, with only a few fluffy clouds in the sky.

Something purple caught her eye.

"Oh, hey, Twilight. Er, I mean, your high..."

Vinyl stopped talking in confusion.

Twilight Sparkle, Princess of Magic, was giving her a quizzical look. But as far as Vinyl was concerned, \_she\_ was the one who should be giving quizzical looks.

First off, Twilight Sparkle \_wasn't\_ a Princess. Her wings had gone, she was a good few inches shorter and she wasn't wearing any of the stuff she'd started wearing back when she became a princess.

Second, there was a unicorn standing right next to her. A unicorn filly, to be precise, but one Vinyl had never seen before â€" and one who looked strange enough that Vinyl could \_swear\_ she'd have remembered seeing her. Not many ponies had vertical slit pupils.

"What's wrong, momma?" the young unicorn asked.

Twilight's eyes narrowed slightly. "Vinyl Scratch. Are you used to seeing me with wings?"

"Well... yeah, actually. What happened?"

The filly grinned. "Woo, another new looper!"

\* \* \*

><p>"So... <em>ten<em> years since I first arrived in Ponyville?" Twilight checked. "Huh. And the last five years you haven't noticed any deja vu or anything?"

"Well, there were a few things, now I think about it. Nothing major, though â€" I mean, Discord got out that other time, which I suppose must have been the first time just... again." Vinyl sipped at the cocoa Twilight had made them. "Apart from that, no. And how come you were an alicorn that time, then?"

"I think I know which loop you mean." Twilight frowned, then nodded. "I was a naturally-born alicorn. Chrysalis, the Princesses and I were

Awake, so no second wedding invasion... I talked Trixie round both times, you might not even have noticed... Luna just turned up one day and Celestia rolled with it, though there was a bit of gossip... oh, and of course, no mess-up with Star Swirl's spell. Either time."

"Huh. Kinda a neat coincidence," Nyx observed. "I mean, that's Vinyl, and Ditzzy, and Lyra who all got started recently."

"Yeah..." Twilight agreed, then paused. "Hold on."

She reached under the desk and pulled out a large diary. Opening it, she flipped through to a page covered with dense writing.

"Right, so Ditzzy started then... and I'd asked her that in her first loop... I actually think all three of them started within \_two loops\_ of one another, though their second loops were a bit more spaced out."

Nyx blinked. "Really? Doesn't that sort of thing usually happen with a crash?"

"Hey, quick question?" Vinyl raised a hoof. "Should I understand what you two are talking about?"

"Probably not," Nyx informed her cheerfully.

Twilight tapped her cup on the table. "Three new loopers... hmm, it's probably linked to when Lyra nearly accidentally her whole history. And \_that\_ involved \_four\_ alternate selves."

"So..." Nyx prompted.

"So I'm not sure who the fourth would be. But we'd better keep an eye out. The \_last\_ thing we want is Sombra looping."

\* \* \*

><p>84.4<p>

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><p><em>Ah, Hogwarts,<em> Rarity thought, smiling.

A castle full of young teenagers learning magic. Arguably, one of the most dangerous environments in the multiverse.

(Granted, a lot of that was because the local Anchor was breathtakingly old, immensely skilled and thoroughly... amorous. But he had manners, which was nice.)

The most immediate downside to the place was a subsection of Slytherin House. There were certain among her fellow pupils from the Green side of the school who considered her "inferior" and anyone else who wasn't born to wizarding ancestors as far back as the family tree could reach "inferior". Frankly, it was all ridiculous tosh.

And at least not \_all\_ Snakes were like that.

Case in point.

"My fair lady," the athletic youth before her asked, taking her hand and kissing it. "Would you do me the honour of accompanying me to the Yule Ball?"

"I would be delighted, sirrah," she replied, smoothing her blue-edged robes and standing. "What time would you be wishful for me to arrive?"

Spike winked at her. "Seven of the clock, fair lady."

"Wonderful. Oh, do tell me â€" how are things in the land of reptiles?"

The young wizard tapped his chin. "Well, I've instituted an unofficial policy of removing one item of clothing from the wardrobes of anyone who does something stupid and prejudiced."

"So that's why Master Malfoy's robes are looking tattered." Rarity nodded, then kissed him.

"Not too long now," she whispered.

"I know."

\* \* \*

><p>84.5<p>

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><p>Discord's statue shattered. "Oh, yeah, baby! I'm ba-ack!"<p>

A hoof tapped him on the shoulder.

"Lulu, what a surprise," he said as he turned. "How long has it been?"

"One thousand and eleven years," Princess Luna replied promptly. "And four months, eight days, nine hours and fourteen minutes."

"Such precision." Discord yawned. "I'm getting bored already. Did you have something amusing to say?"

"Yes, actually." Luna held up a large document. "You owe one thousand and ten years, nine months, seven days, four hours and twelve minutes child support."

"...za?"

Luna had to fight the urge to giggle. Seeing Discord shocked was always entertaining.

"Child support?" he repeated, slowly. Then laughed. "Oh, such an amusing prank! As if I could possibly owe child support!"

"Mummy?" a voice whined. "Are you still busy?"

A female draconequus walked around the end of a hedge, dragging an ursa-major teddy bear in one mismatched paw.

"I still am, Silvy," Luna told her, smiling. "Not for much longer, though. Your deadbeat dad is going to pay up or turn back to stone, and I'll be available."

Discord fell over in a dead faint.

Silver and Luna exchanged a hoofbump/high five, grinning.

"Did you like the whine?" Silver asked. "I thought it was a nice touch..."

"Marvellous," Luna replied. "The look on his face..."

\* \* \*

><p>84.6<p>

"Ditzy," Twilight began uncertainly. "Are you Awake this loop?"

"Yep!" the mailmare replied cheerfully. "What is it, Twilight?"

"Well..." Twilight frowned. "Okay, two things, really. First â€" there have been loops where you've been called... well, Derpy. And... well, I was wondering whether you're..."

Twilight's sentence trailed off into silence, as she tried to work out how to express it.

"Ooooooh." The grey pegasus nodded, looking Twilight in the eye. (The other eye was looking directly upwards.) "I don't mind. It's a name, it refers to me, and it sounds funny!" She giggled. "Derp. Derpity derpity derp. And what do I care?"

She shrugged. "Bright Eyes works too. In fact, I've been all three at once! Now, what was the other thing?"

The Anchor shook her head, a smile on her lips. "Your attitude is really refreshing. If incomprehensible. Anyway, the other thing was â€" what's your special talent this time?"

"Oh, right. Well..." Ditzzy paused. "I'm not sure. Let's see. Can you stand back a bit?"

Twilight took a few steps back.

Ditzzy concentrated, and frowned. A cloud of bubbles came out of her ears.

"Ah, the old standby," Twilight began. Then there was a loud \_bang\_.

"Yay!" Ditzzy said, standing in the lower half of a sphere that had been wiped from existence. "I thought so! I can do loads of them!"

Twilight's brain paused, went into rewind, and hit play again. "...are you telling me that you can pick and choose \_any\_ of the

cutie mark meanings you remember?"

"Yep!" Ditzzy sneezed, and when the flash died down she had a horn to go with her wings. "Hey, look, I've got a horn!"

"Okay, you know what?" Twilight shook her head. "I'm not even going to question it. Congratulations on joining the alicorn club, it helps if you've thought of your evil self beforehand."

\* \* \*

><p>84.7<p>

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><p>"Name?"<p>

"Twilight Sparkle."

"And your team name?"

Twilight smiled uncertainly. "Alicorn."

The functionary looked up. "\_Alicorn,\_ you say?"

"That's correct. Here's the roster."

With raised eyebrow, the clerk went down the list. "Hm... interesting, the royals of the Crystal Empire are on here... and their Highnesses?"

"Celestia wanted to participate." Twilight shrugged. "I was glad to help."

"But... not all of these are alicorns?"

"I wasn't aware team names had to be accurate. Besides, we're the only team with alicorns on." Twilight grinned. "Is everything alright?"

"Oh, yes, fine indeed." The clerk stamped the papers. "Very good."

\* \* \*

><p>"Isn't this... I dunno, a bit obvious for a prank?" Dash asked. "I mean, sure, it's kinda amusing, but..."<p>

Twilight winked. "Oh, ye of little faith."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right." Gilda pointed. "Okay, Sunbutt, Moonbutt, Twinklebutt and Wandbutt, you four are on relay. Dash, you're the best at speed and you can sustain it longest, so you're on the marathon, and Flutterbutt is doing the sprint" Balloonbutt, burst a paper bag behind her or something..."<p>

"Er, excuse me?" the functionary asked her. "But... this is team Alicorn, right?"



"Yeah, so?" Gilda gave him an eagle-eyed look. "You got something against an entire team turning themselves into gryphons via a chaos god in order to compete in the Equestria Games?"

"Well... not as such, no. It's just... I expected..."

"Yeah, and expectations make nations expectorate, or something. I've got a team to shout at â€" I mean, organize." Gilda turned away. "Bubblebutt, you're on the obstacle course. Applebutt, other applebutt, you're on the wrestling and boxing, I'll let you work out which one..."

\* \* \*

><p>84.8<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Excuse me, Princess..."<p>

Princess Twilight Sparkle, younger ruler of Equestria, looked down with puzzlement at the mare before her Night Court. "What is it, Vinyl Scratch?"

"Well..." The white-coated unicorn frowned, and took her goggles off. "I... everything seems very strange, all of a sudden. I'd thought you'd just become a Princess, right? And then, next month, you're..." Vinyl shrugged. "You're, like, the second-ranked Princess of Equestria who just got back from the moon. And suddenly I'm five years in the past. And I don't get it."

Twilight blinked. She could swear Vinyl had already had her Awakening conversation. Unless she was just unfamiliar with variant loops?

No, that didn't make sense either. Her first two loops had been variant.

"Okay," she said, deciding to just go with the full explanation all over again. "There is a pattern of events which is known as the Time Loops..."

\* \* \*

><p>84.9 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"It's like... I'm not even sure if anyone takes me seriously. I know I mess things up a lot and I can give off that 'stupid happy' vibe... most of the time... but it doesn't mean I don't matter, right?" She asked, poking at her dinner.<p>

"Derpy..." Harry started, nudging the little ravenclaw. "You looped in as Luna bloody Lovegood. That tells me one of two things; you're either incredibly amazing, Cuckoo right out the Lander, or both."

"Yaaay!" She cheered, her arms shooting upward accidentally knocking her bread pudding (somehow made from muffins) onto, down, and into

Cho's blouse.

Harry palmed his face, glasses and all, as the older girl screamed and ran from the hall. "I just haven't figured out which, yet."

"Still yay!" The blonde was undeterred.

\* \* \*

><p>84.10 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey Twilight, you're a smart pony, right? Tell Octavia that my crazy theory is correct and that if you listen to enough wubs, time starts to dubstep!"<p>

Twilight sighed. "Welcome to the loops, Vinyl."

\* \* \*

><p>84.11 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright, Commander Data, let's bring this new computer core online." Jean-Luc said, only the faintest trace of hesitance evident in his voice. Starfleet had been on an Artificial Intelligence kick this loop, and wanted several ships (Including the Enterprise, naturally) to field-test their new ship AIs.<p>

He just hoped it wasn't Skynet again. Or GLADoS. Or HAL. Or...

>Let's just say this had a monumentally small chance of actually going well.<p>

But, orders were orders...

Data initiated the power link and typed in the startup code. Now was the moment of truth, and every looper on board tensed slightly-

"HI! I'm Derpy!"

Picard flinched as Diana let out a startled yelp. She never did like artificial minds... "Hello... er, Derpy. You've been installed as the computer system on my ship, the Enterprise. My name is Captain Jean-luc Picard." He paused. "If I may ask, why 'derpy'?"

The ship scoffed. "Well what do you think the 'D' was supposed to stand for?"

He palmed his face and nodded at Data's raised eyebrow. Yes, definitely a looper. "Alphabetic ordering?"

"Nah, that's boring. Hey! Let's make muffins!"\_

Thankfully, they were still in spacedock, and had the assistance of the dock's technicians to convince her that she could use the replicators to generate muffins and did not need to bake them

herself. With the ship's phaser banks.

It was going to be a long loop.

\* \* \*

><p>84.12 (LordCirce)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight hummed to herself as she walked down the road to Fluttershy's house. It felt like most of the Elements were Awake this time, so Twilight had thought up a few plans for some stage shows. She had exchanged a few quick notes with Trixie (using the Mail-Flame Spell), and was looking to get the rest of the Elements in on the activities.<p>

Twilight came around the edge of the house to see a truly off-putting sight. Fluttershy was standing just outside of her cabin, talking to an enormous, black-coated goat. Fluttershy turned at her approach, and smiled. Twilight quickly trotted over to join them.

"Visiting Looper?"

Fluttershy nodded. "Oh yes. He has just been telling me about the many creatures he is friends with."

The goat nodded, somewhat shyly, which was an odd look for such a large creature. "Aye, I was jus' tellin' her 'bout a few of me friends, back at 'Ogwarts. Oh, almost forgot. My name's Hagrid, Keeper o' the Keys and Grounds of 'Ogwarts."

\* \* \*

><p>"...a shame that my assistant isn't here this Loop. I think he might be in the Griffon Lands for some reason." Twilight finished telling Hagrid about Spike, who had looked a mixture of happy and sorrowful at hearing about the baby dragon. They were currently gathered around Fluttershy's table, Hagrid having actually shrunk slightly to fit. He had apparently recently had a Loop as Ant-Man in the Marvel Universe, and he apparently loved the ability to change his size.<p>

"Blimey. I can't wait to get to talk to a dragon. Always wanted to raise one, see, but never could. If I keep Norberta, the Ministry comes to take 'er away." Hagrid started sniffing as Fluttershy moved to comfort him. Twilight nodded thoughtfully.

"One way I've seen it work, when I was replacing Hermione, was to apply for a Dragon Guard License, as well as to register Norberta as part of the Care of Magical Creatures menagerie. The Laws should be on the books in your baseline, I will have to see if I still have notes from that Loop." Hagrid looked up, eyes watering.

"I can see why yeh would be replacing 'Ermione. You talk jus' like her when she's got summit to say." Twilight smiled, then her smile widened as a thought came to her.

"You know, I was planning a sort of stage show, and I think you might be able to help. Fluttershy as well."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight blushed as she watched their attempted stage performance. It was meant to be an adaption of the story of the fight against Tirek. With his ability to change size, and his naturally dark, coarse coat, Hagrid has seemed like a perfect fit. Unfortunately, his accent and personality didn't match with the role.<p>

"I'll get yeh ponies! I'll turn yeh into my, er, monsters, em. Well, more like misunderstood creatures, but, uhm..." Hagrid's voice trailed off as he lost his place in the dialogue yet again. Helpfully, Fluttershy gasped, before transforming into her dire wolf form with a howl.

"Oh no, they got Firefly." Twilight facehoofed at Dash's monotonic delivery.

"I did? Ahem, ah, I mean, yah, I did 'n you're next." Oh well, the audience at least was enjoying it.

\* \* \*

><p>84.13 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So there I was," Vinyl Scratch said, hugging her drink for comfort, "wondering what had happened to all my 'No Bucks to Give' tracks. I couldn't find the records ANYWHERE. So I went out to the record shop, and Needles told me he'd never heard of the group. And I laughed, 'cause Needles is like that, he's a joker, right? Never heard of the hottest sound to come out of a barn band in the last year?<p>

"Only thing was," the unicorn pony added, draining the glass and handing it out for a refill before restoring it to her teddy-bear hug, "only thing was, he wasn't joking.

"And that was when I noticed that the calendars were all wrong, and I'd slipped four, maybe five years backwards in time somehow. 'No Bucks to Give' hadn't broken out yet. They were still practicing in their parents' barn or something.

"So I took a train to Seaddle, 'cause that's the core of the barn rock scene, y'know? And I asked around for Cracked Belle, the front mare for the group. Found her place in mid-rehearsal. They were a bit rough, but you could tell they were hot, they were going to be on something really huge someday. Well, I could tell, anyway."

The bartender nodded her head in encouragement.

"And then when they took a break I said hi, told all about how I'd heard about them through the grapevine. And then I told them about my favorite song. And I borrowed the keyboard and played and sang it for them."

It took a lot more booze before the DJ could continue. "I broke Cracked Belle's heart when I did that. She had just started WRITING

that song- it wasn't finished yet. When I was done, she was in tears. Said she wanted to make music no pony else was making... and if she couldn't do that, she wouldn't make music at all.

"'No Bucks to Give' broke up that very night. Cracked Belle stayed on the farm making cheese. No pony ever got to hear any of the hot licks those ponies would have made famous... and it was all my fault."

Vinyl's glass was empty again. This time the bartender, instead of refilling it, took it away from her.

"Vinyl, dear," Berry Punch said, "I know just the pony you need to talk to right now. And she's not Pony Walker's Black Label."

\* \* \*

><p>84.14 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Vinyl, this ridiculous façade has gone on long enough!" Octavia tried to pull her hoof out of the unicorn's magical grip. "You are not helping your case!"

The unicorn rolled her eyes. "Just one audience. One. And then if I'm wrong you can do whatever. Hey dudes, code Beeblebrox." The guards dutifully stood aside. "Heh. Beeblebrox, I haven't met him yet but he sounds like my kind of two headed alien."

"What...?" Octavia pulled free. "Oh. I see. This is some elaborate plan, isn't it? You pretend to forget our anniversary and then-"

Vinyl winced. "Tavi? Just... just let's do this." She entered the throne room, startling a number of petitioners. "OY TIA! CODE BEEBLEBROX!"

The current speaker looked behind him. "How dare you-!"

"Relax, Blueblood, this will take less than a minute." Celestia looked directly at Octavia. "Yes. The loops are a thing. She's telling the truth. Now then, you were saying?"

\* \* \*

><p>84.15 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"What the *why*" Twilight asked, scooting off the far side of the bed away from her bunkmate and apparent lover, Vinyl Scratch.

"I think way back when I said something about the beautiful music you make when you're in the middle of-"

"I know! I know." Sometimes Twilight envied the humans their fingers to rub on their faces to show exasperation in such cathartic ways. Hooves just weren't the same after you've tried it with hands.

The DJ grabbed her shades and music player as she got herself ready

for the day- and to beat a hasty exit if need be. "Sorry, still getting used to sorting through loop memories. You wanna just be flatmates or should I ring up Octavia and see if she and her... huh, I think she's living with Lyra and Bonbon this loop. Anyway, I don't have to stay if it'd be weird."

Twilight sighed when she realized what the problem was. "No, it's fine. I'm sorry I reacted like that, it's just that this is the \_third\_ loop in a row I've Woken Up 'attached' romantically, and it gets to be frazzling for someone like me that prefers to stay single. At least \_you're\_ Awake..."

\* \* \*

><p>84.16 (The One Butcher)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Good Morning Professor Dumbledore!" An eleven Year old girl strolled into his office like she owned it. Which she did a few times actually.<p>

"Ah, Twilight Sparkle!", he called genially, "It's been a while, hasn't it? The usual?"

"Yes please!" Twilight beamed and handed over a thick folder.

The ancient wizard struck out his hand and whispered "\_Scholars Touch.\_" while brushing his hand over the booklet.

"Mh... fourteen parent's honeymoons, twenty you and your brother, only four Blueblood this time," he paused "Oh, Vinyl Scratch started looping! I'm looking forward to her work, still listen to some of her old mixes sometimes, please include them next time. Derpy popping like a bubble again?"

"\_Again?\_" Twilight looked at him bewildered.

"Yes, that happened four times already. Each time it was too weird for you." The old wizard twinkled happily. "So..."

Twilight shook herself out of her stupor. "Oh, of course. Here: Pinkie and Sweetie's newest creations, just like always." Twilight handed over a data-chrysalis. "Also some of the older stuff in much higher definition. Apple Bloom and Trixie had a loop where they really cranked down on recording equipment."

"Thank you, it's a pleasure doing business with you, as always." the old man raised the Elder Wand at the originally Unicorn and incanted: "\_Obliviate!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>84.17 (masterofgames)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Vinyl was hard at work doing something that those that knew her would swear she had no idea how to do.<p>

Maintaining a normal sleep schedule.

For some reason, this loop she played concerts, and was well known across Equestria as having revolutionized classical music, making it popular among the youth once again. She had discovered a few years ago that she had inspired some pony to see if the reverse could work as well.

Yawning as she woke up, in both meanings, she groaned and pulled the plush covers of her bed over her head as her baseline memories called her a filthy traitor for waking before noon. Her loop memories kept her from going back to sleep though, and a few minutes later she gave up, sliding out of bed, pulling on her slippers and red velvet robe, and heading down the three flights of stairs in her mansion to the kitchen.

Something seemed off about that, but damn it, she wanted coffee before any serious thinking!

Filling her mug, she glanced at the cover of the local entertainment section of today's newspaper on her counter. A picture of a wild party mare with huge shades, a tussled mane, and playing an electric chello to a packed club looked back at her. "DJ Sym4hony, live in concert tonight." Vinyl muttered to herself as she read the headline. She sighed. "I barely even know her, I think I said hi to her maybe once when we passed each other at the instrument repair place, why does she keep showing up in my loops?"

\* \* \*

><p>84.18 (bobbananaville)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I don't get you." 'Twilight' glanced up at Rainbow Dash, confused by what the speedster said. "I mean, not you as in Twilight Sparkle, you as in 'Phantom Looper'. Why do you do that?"<p>

"Umâ€| Rainbow, what're you talking about?" The purple unicorn frowned, and Dash could have almost been convinced that she really didn't comprehend what Dash spoke of but for the nigh-imperceptible widening of her eyes. "I don'tâ€|"

"You don't have to keep the act up; I know you're looping; Twilight's the anchor, after all. You can go back to acting out her lines all you want later, but please just answer me: why do so many people like to take her place and act exactly as she would? Why do so many loopers like this ghosting thing?" At this point, Rainbow Dash noticed that her tone was becoming more insistent, and tried to tone down a bit. "I mean, y'know, if you're fine with telling me."

'Twilight Sparkle' didn't answer; her eyes were wide, and Rainbow started questioning whether this rendition of Twilight really was native to the loops - there had been quite a few loops wherein the non-looping Twilight existed, though the looping version of her always existed simultaneously. "Maybe I should just go back home and pretend that I didn't-"

"No!" The purple unicorn almost shouted. She quieted down before

continuing. "No, don't do that. It's alright; I'm a ghost looper, yeah." Rainbow Dash sighed in relief, glad that she hadn't embarrassed herself by acting insane. "It'sâ€¦ Well, in my baseline, my life wasn't particularly great. I was bullied, and when I ended up with friends I still had trouble trusting them. I had trouble trusting anybody, actually." Her eyes were downcast now.

"Uh huh. So that's why you're acting as a ghost-looper?" Rainbow frowned; there weren't enough details for her to work up much sympathy, and she didn't quite get how this could be the reason why this girl - she needed to find out her real name, actually - would give up most, if not all, autonomy in decision making in order to experience Twilight Sparkle's life.

"Well, yeah!" The ghost-looper's looked back up at the pegasus as her frown turned upside down. "Twilight Sparkle was in a position like mine - she wasn't bullied, mind, but she was isolated and didn't have much social experience. Unlike me, though, she was given the assignment of learning about friendship. In her place, I've the loop just spending time with my - her - friends, putting my life in their hands and vice versa. I stu- \_she \_studies friendship like a science and becomes better for it. I thought that if I could experience her life, I could become better too."

Rainbow Dash nodded, a smile forming. "Well, I guess that makes sense. Still, if you've been Twilight until now, I suppose I haven't introduced myself to \_you \_yet." She raised her hoof. "My name's Rainbow Dash, and I can clear the skies in ten seconds flat! And go around the world, but that's a footnote. You?"

The purple unicorn hesitated for a second before reciprocating, placing her hoof against Rainbow's. "Call me Skitter."

\* \* \*

><p>84.19 (Inadelico)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The five that came out of the restaurant came out with smiles on their faces.<p>

"That food was so good." Purred Chiyo contentedly, to which Yomi and Osaka beamed.

"Curry's cooking may be good, but her singing is terrible." Commented Tomo, idly.

"What's that got to do with everything!" cried Yomi.

\* \* \*

><p>While Yomi and Tomo argued, Spike whipped out his clipboard. He made a notation. "Well, that crosses catering off the list. So now we have Sport Shoes for the weather."<p>

He looked up at the clouds still filling the sky. "...which doesn't seem to be done."

"Ah! Sport Shoes! My lifelong rival!" Tomo spoke up from her argument



with Yomi suddenly.

"Your lifelong rival?" asked Yomi.

"Well, neither of us can compete with Cat Scratch, so who else we are going to be rivals with?"

"Can't argue with logic like that." Snarked Yomi.

Osaka and Chiyo just nodded their heads in agreement.

"Do you know where we can find her?" asked Spike.

"Sure, I know where she usually trains."

\* \* \*

><p>In a little while they were in a field a bit outside of Ponyville. In the distance, they could see a pony crouched on a cloud. After a second, she took off, speeding into the distance. She came back off after a few minutes, eyeing Tomo warily on approaching.<p>

"You're not going to give me a speeding ticket again, are you?"

Everypony looked at Tomo. "Speeding ticket? Do I want to know?" Asked Yomi.

"Probably not." Replied Sport Shoes.

"Well, okay then."

Spike spoke up. "My name is Spike, this is Chiyo. We're representatives of Princess Celestia checking on the preparations for the Summer Sun celebration."

"And I'm Deep Fried." Osaka gave a little bow.

"We've met. You've lived in Ponyville how long? Anyway, Chiyo doesn't sound like a pony name."

"Oh, there's a new fad going around. Everypony's getting human names." Chiyo replied.

"Cool. What's mine?"

Chiyo thought for a moment. "How about Kagura?"

"Okay. Got it!"

"Just like that? You're going to accept a new name just like that?" asked Tomo incredulously.

"Oh, hush. Look just because you didn't like yours, doesn't mean everypony else won't like them." Replied Yomi.

"Mares, the weather?" Spike interrupted.

"Oh right. This is no problem. I can clear the sky in 11 seconds,

flat."

Spike suppressed a laugh.

"What?" asked Kagura.

"Sorry, you just sounded like somepony I know. Anyway, go on."

Kagura nodded and took to the sky, leaping from cloud to cloud until the sky was clear.

"Ta da!"

Chiyo and Osaka stomped their hooves in approval.

"Okay, that leaves Cat Scratch with the musical accompaniment."

"Ah! Cat Scratch! My lifelong rival!" shouted Kagura.

"Can you show us where she is?" asked Spike.

"Oh sure. I can show you where her cottage is" replied Kagura.

"This all seems very familiar." Osaka commented.

\* \* \*

><p>84.20<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The ruler of Equestria stared down impassively at the earth pony sitting before his throne.<p>

"My faithful son, you must travel to-"

There was a pause.

"To... Ponyville."

There was another pause, this time with a slight sound in the middle of it. As though the ruler had almost but not entirely suppressed a snicker.

"Once there, you must scour the town for your brothers, and form a team capable of defeating your eldest brother when he returns from the moon."

Another pause. This time, it was definitely a snigger.

"As a magical talking pony with wings."

The earth pony, a colt of about ten years with a bright yellow coat, sighed. "Look, Dad, if you're not going to be able to pull this off without laughing, then just go off-script."

"Silence! I can do this." The ruler paused again, then broke down sniggering.

"You clearly can't, father."

The giggling fit passed, and Emperor Guiding Light schooled his expression into a look of utmost severity. "Now. When your brother returns, employ diverse stratagems in order to cause him to remember his humanity-"

"Equinity," the colt stage-whispered, and Guiding Light made a strangled noise.

"Equinity. Right." The stern visage trembled, then dissolved into a hysterical laughing fit that had his Imperial Majesty actually falling off the throne, beating his hoof against the steps.

The colt sighed. "I'll let you get it out of your system, father. Don't worry, I'm certain I can take him."

"Be careful, Leman," the Emperor managed to gasp. "I mean, he might wrong-hoof you! Wrong-hoof!"

With that, the God-Emperor (usually of Mankind), ruler of the galaxy, and current alicorn, completely lost it.

"That's an actual expression here," Lemon Rush muttered, then trotted off.

He knew the way to Ponyville, and something told him he wouldn't have much trouble working out which of the ponies of Ponyville were secretly pony-primarchs.

The fact his own flank bore a symbol of a snarling wolf's head suggested at least one way to check...

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, we're doomed," Rush muttered to the guard team he'd picked up along the way.<p>

Candy Cane nodded morosely. The sight of the Cutie Mark Chaos Gods was yet another sign that this would not be a quiet loop.

\* \* \*

><p>84.21 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke mid-step and stumbled as usual. She was human, and wearing a costume of some kind. A quick pulse confirmed that her friends were also awake. They were all seated at a large table in what looked to be a technologically advanced conference room. Seeing only one large throne-like chair open, Twilight sat down.<p>

Then the memories hit.

"Ugh!" Twilight summarized, "I don't think I like this loop all that much."

"Me neither, sugarcube," Applejack, aka. 'Witheress', nodded, "The super-villian route just ain't for me."

"I don't recognize this loop universe. Any ideas?" Rarity, or 'Goop Girl', said as she rocked back and forth in a large elaborate chair while furtively trying to clean her hands with a rag.

Twilight pondered, "I think this may be an alternate reality for one of the comic book universes. I've certainly never come across anyone with my horrible power. An my codename is awful as well. The Attractor? Just because my only power here is a variation of my 'want it, need it' spell, I have to sound like a match making service?"

"I'm not really excited about my super power thingy, either," even though her hair was still poofy, Pinkie Pie almost grumbled, "I mean 'Blood-Bather'? For real? Sure, I can do the blood-bender thing now, but that doesn't mean that's all I'm capable of. Plus, I think this power is kind of yucky and not really fun. How can you even have a fun blood party?"

A tiny snuffle escaped from Fluttershy, now 'NecromanCecelia', when the animated skeleton of a small rabbit hopped onto the table and tried to comfort her.

"Right," Rainbow Dash stood up suddenly, "I'm not big on the whole putting people in trances, and that's pretty much Mesmeria's only shtick. I say we all go to the beach for the rest of this loop."

Twilight nodded along with all of the others, "Vacation loop it is."

\* \* \*

><p>84.22 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Celestia, are you feeling alright," Asked Shining Armor as he stood before the Solar Diarch's throne in her throneroom.<p>

The princess gave one of her serene smiles, "Of course! Why do you ask?"

"It's the sun, your highness."

She looked out the nearest window to the celestial body, "Looks like it's burning with the same intensity as before. And it set just fine last evening. What's the matter?"

Shining facehooved, "The Sun rose in the south."

Celestia waved him off, "Thought I would try something new."

\* \* \*

><p>84.23 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie entered Golden Oaks with a slightly bigger smile than normal. It was that time again. "Hey, Twilight! Did you find out something neat lodged in a family tree?" Pinkie loved seeing what her friend's genealogy research uncovered each Loop. It was like unwrapping a present, only the wrapping paper was history, the present was family, the gift was from a long-forgotten ancestor, and oh dear, Twilight was looking at her expectantly. "Sorry, I got caught up in overextending a metaphor. You were saying?"<p>

Twilight grinned a bit and rolled her eyes. "Okay, you know how Mrs. Cake's great-aunt's second cousin twice removed was a pegasus?"

Pinkie nodded. "Of course! If it weren't for Fairy Cake, little Pound might not have his adorable little wings!"

"Well, I did my usual digging, and I found that Fairy Cake had a sister this Loop." Twilight's smile grew to something Pinkie could be proud of. "A sister named Surprise."

"Huh. Lemme guess, blonde mane, white coat, a certain, familiar cutie mark?"

"Exactly. And Surprise's great-granddaughter happened to develop the same mark."

Pinkie gasped at about one-fifth "new pony" intensity. "You mean...?"

"Cup Cake is related to you in this Loop, yes."

Pinkie cleared her throat, gave a polite nod, and exited the library. Once she was clear of the branches, she streaked into the sky, exploding in a burst of confetti and exclamations of "The Cake is a Pie! The Cake is a Pie!"

Twilight facehoofed. "I am so glad SkyNet isn't here this Loop..."

\* \* \*

><p>84.24<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight awoke, and found herself somewhere unfamiliar.<p>

\_Okay. Take stock, run down the checklist. First â€" is there chaos going on?\_

Chaos was not going on.

\_Good, I have time to think. Body form â€" equine, good. Field of vision â€" eyes on the sides of the head. Prey-like evolutionary pressure. Not so good. Hub world format?\_

I'm in a stable. Doesn't look like a great sign...

Twilight turned in her stall and looked down at her reflection in a trough of water.

The pony that looked back was a brownish-black in colour, with a lock of pale colouration in her otherwise fairly boring mane. No horn was evident.

\_Right. Abilities.\_

The diagnostic spell failed. As did the attempt to pull something from her Pocket, and any attempts to use ki, magic, chakra, reiatsu â€" basically anything.

\_\_Abilities consist in their entirety of the ability to carry a human, the ability to see to both sides of my body at once, and the ability to think.\_\_

Thinking's good. I can work with think. Now, what's the best way to alert a human stable hand to the presence of a sentient pony?

\* \* \*

><p>"Mornin', Twilight!"<p>

Twilight nickered once, then fell silent. Discovering that her name here was the same as her name from home wasn't unexpected, and she knew all the stable hand was actually doing was letting her know he wasn't a threat... but it was still encouraging.

"Lessee, now. We've got some corn for you today, Twilight â€" guess him in charge wants you on top form, for..."

The stable hand's voice trailed off, as he finally noticed what was on the back wall of the stall.

Twilight had spent several hours overnight digging into the wood with her teeth, cursing occasionally behind her eyes, and by now she had the complete alphabet drawn out in two semicircles.

While he was still staring at the crude letters, she moved her hoof. Near the bottom of the first semicircle â€" near the top â€" right at the bottom â€" right at the bottom â€" and then just down from the top of the second circle.

H-E-L-L-O.

"...well, bugger me..."

Iâ€"W-O-U-L-Dâ€"L-I-K-Eâ€"S-O-M-Eâ€"P-A-P-E-Râ€"A-N-Dâ€"Aâ€"P-A-I-N-T-B-R-U-S-Hâ€"P-L-E-A-S-E.

By the time Twilight had finished spelling out the message, her foreleg ached. But it certainly had an impact, as the young man went sprinting back towards the main building.

\_\_Contact made. Now let's see what happens...\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Why, this is poppycock!" the psychiatrist said, sighing. "It's just like that Clever Hans from Germany back in '07. Oh, it's an

impressive feat to train a dumb animal to react properly, but it's not a thinking horse."<p>

The studio audience, and everyone with their televisions turned to BBC2 at home, watched with bated breath as the black-coated mare trotted up to the easel.

With slow but precise strokes, she began to apply her brush. Occasionally, she dipped the paintbrush back into the paint to refresh it.

"W-those aren't words," the psychiatrist pointed out. "That's..."

As he trailed off, the mare paused and winked at him. Then she went back to the easel.

After five near-silent minutes, there was a credible landscape painting of a wooded stream on the board. It was monochrome, as the mare only had a black pot of paint, but the intent was unmistakable.

Underneath, in a surprisingly flowing script, Twilight signed the painting. The caption she added almost as though an afterthought.

\_Can't sing. Can't dance. Can handle a brush a little.\_

\* \* \*

><p>84.25<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"For my first trick," Trixie began loudly, "I will reverse a common saying! Observe! There is nothing up my right sleeve... actually, I've got no sleeves. Anyway! There is nothing in my hat, nothing under my cape, but look!"<p>

She made a pass with her hooves, and produced a large circular object.

"This! This, is a pocket timepiece expanded to the size of a door! Now, aww in watch!"

Trixie hit the opening catch.

The butter-yellow pegasus curled up inside blinked at the sudden light. "Ta da..." she said, fluttering her eyelashes and smiling uncertainly.

\* \* \*

><p>"That was a <em>dreadful <em>pun," Chrysalis accused.

"I know it was," Trixie replied. "That's why I did it!"

\* \* \*

><p>84.1: That should answer a few questions.<br>84.2: Time Derp.

>84.3: A not insignificant concern.<br>84.4: The Hat put them in the houses in question. Just for the joke.  
>84.5: They were inspired by Silver's time as Twilight's daughter.<br>84.6: Pick and choose.  
>84.7: All ponies are butts. Griffin butts.<br>84.8: Huh.  
>84.9: This seems to be a trend.<br>84.10: It's getting a bit worrying, actually.  
>84.11: Long, or very short. Either or.<br>84.12: He certainly means well.  
>84.13: Like a broken record.<br>84.14: Alert phrase.  
>84.15: Some things you never get used to.<br>84.16: Fortunately, there's a solution.  
>84.17: Blame the fans.<br>84.18: The Worm Turns. (Into a pony.)  
  
>84.19: Azumanga Poni continued.<br>84.20: Lemon is used to this. The Emperor is not.  
>84.21: When You're Not Evil...<br>84.22: At least this time Derpy might find the birds she's after.  
>84.23: Features an Egophiliac character name.<br>84.24: In partial tribute to the 50th anniversary of BBC2.  
>84.25: The groans.<p>

## 89. Chapter 89

### 85.1 (Bigou)

This loop started exactly like any baseline loop, letting Twilight think it effectively was one. That changed soon after defeating Nightmare Moon.

The exact instant princess Celestia landed on the floor of her old castle, Fluttershy became a yellow and pink blur before tackle-hugging the white alicorn, while releasing a deafening cry of "MOM!"

As soon as this traditional royal Canterlot cry was released, Rarity did the same with her consciousness, Applejack and Rainbow chose to do the same with their lower jaws, letting Pinkie sitting there, muttering something about a "happy family reunion", her eyes full of joyful tears.

During all that, the purple anchor looked back and forth between the royal group and the rest of her friends, trying to process what was happening and decide the proper way to react. Eventually, she decided that Rarity was the one who knew how to do so properly: By fainting.

\* \* \*

><p>When Twilight regained consciousness, she was in her Ponyville bedroom, with a vague memory of a wired dream. Something about Fluttershy being Princess Celestia's daughter. Her thoughts were answered by a timid but familiar voice. "It wasn't a dream, Twilight Sparkle. Princess Celestia really IS my mother." She must have thought that out loud.<p>

Hearing that, the purple anchor burst out laughing. "Nice one, Fluttershy! You almost got me, there!" But the kind pegasus seemed to be saddened by those words. "It's not a prank, is it." Hiding behind



her mane, the shy friend shook her head from left to right and back.

An awkward silence filled the room.

"I understand ifâ€¦ If you don't want to be my friend anymore. But please Twilight Sparkle, promise me to never say to anyone else who is my mother." Finally voiced Fluttershy.

"Why wouldn't I be friend with you? Six ponies were needed to defeat Nightmare Moon. Six friends, and you are one of them," The unicorn assured. "But I admit, I still have a hard time believing you're related to Princess Celestia. It still look so surreal to me. I meanâ€¦ Who else have a reality shattering secret? Is Pinkie Pie my long lost imaginary friend?"

As if on cue, a book unnoticed until then suddenly burst open, liberating confetti, streamers and a certain party pony. Said equine shouting "I AM?!", her face full of panic.

\* \* \*

><p>85.2 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight considered the current variant of Fluttershy to be rather intriguing. She was still a soft-spoken mare who loved all animals, but this Loop her Unawake friend was actually rather proactive about finding good homes for the numerous pet hopefuls that hung around her cottage. And the match-ups were often interesting in and of themselves.<p>

Honestly, Twilight was rather surprised that it had taken Fluttershy this long to try and match her up. Even more surprising was her choice of pet for Twilight.

Generally speaking, a rabbit wasn't her style.

"Fluttershy," she tried to think of how to gently tell her friend that this wouldn't work, "I know you mean well, but I'm not really the rabbit type. I'm sure he's great, and cuddly, and..."

Twilight looked the lapine in the eye. She couldn't help herself. It was like a mental itch she had to scratch.

"And adorable! But I have papers to write and studies to..." She looked again. Was it just her or did looking at the rabbit give her ideas? That spot on his left ear generated a desire to look up genetics research and how it translated into pony coat colors this Loop. Why did closely related ponies often have wildly varying colorations? "And why does he seem to be giving me all the inspiration I suddenly have to work on?"

"That's what he does," Fluttershy smiled gently. "He's a plot bunny. His name's Fluffy."

\_'Of course it is,'\_ Twilight mentally rolled her eyes. \_'Still, that's one heck of an ability. I'd love to know how it works...'\_

\* \* \*

><p>85.3 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Momma?" Nyx grinned widely. "Can you tell me again how I ended up being born this Loop?"<p>

Twilight grumbled, causing Nyx to grin even wider, before protesting. "You've heard it dozens of times now! You could probably recite it in your sleep!"

"Not like you!" Nyx wheedled. "I can't help it if it gets better every time you tell it!"

"You just want to hear me say 'Stupid sexy Nightmare Moon' again, don't you?" Twilight accused her daughter.

"Only in the proper context!" Nyx clarified happily.

"..." Twilight stared at Nyx for a moment. "In anyone ever tries to tell you you're not my daughter, buck 'em in the face."

\* \* \*

><p>85.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo walked into the library with a wide grin. "Oh hey, Nyx. Mind if I'm your adopted sister this loop?"<p>

"...Not... really, no." A pair of slitted eyes peered from over the top of a book. "Can I ask why?"

"Oh, Dash isn't Awake," the pegasus casually explained, pulling out the proper forms and tossing them on the table. "And quite frankly, I want to move out of my progenitors' house immediately."

Nyx eyed Scootaloo's smile warily. "I take it they were too abusive to consider even calling them parents this loop?"

"Eeeeeyup."

"...you extracted a horrible vengeance, didn't you."

Scootaloo shrugged. "All I did was explain the loops and... \_demonstrate.\_ They're still alive. Their house is still standing. They'll only need two, three months of therapy, tops."

The alicorn sighed. "Pansy, did you hold her back at least?"

\_Against my better judgement.\_

"...that's something, at least."

\* \* \*

><p>85.5 (LordCirce)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight had just stepped down into Ponyville when she was almost bowled over by a white blur. She spun around, and had just enough time to recognize Angel Bunny before he dashed around a corner. A second later, Rainbow Dash shot past Twilight as well, her wings skimming Twilight's mane as she too shot around the corner. Twilight stared, looking a bit frazzled, as Fluttershy slowly made her way over.<p>

"Hello Twilight. Sorry about Angel, he and Dash are still finishing their game of tag."

Twilight blinked. "Wha? Wasn't that several Loops ago? I know they have both Looped since then."

Fluttershy shrugged. "Apparently they were tied at the end of the Loop, and Dash forgot about it because she had that run in with Kirk the next Loop. Angel picked up a new trick in a Fused Loop and brought the game up again."

Twilight nodded vaguely as a hole formed itself in the road a short distance away and Angel shot out, twisting between Twilight's legs to dive into a bush off to the side. Dash then shot past over head, before twisting and diving into a nearby cart.

"Aha!" Dash shouted before shooting out of the cart and into the sky. "I've got the lead!"

Angel jumped out of the cart (how had he gotten there from the bush?), and tapped his foot on the ground. Another hole opened up and Angel shot into it, before it sealed behind him.

\* \* \*

><p>85.6 (Vulpine Fury)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Her Majesty<p>

Celestia, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and of Her other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith looked down at the head of her Intelligence service this Loop. "M, what \_has\_ 007 been up to \_this\_ week?"

"Well, he seems to have talked your sister down from her Moon Cult World Domination plan ... in his usual way."

Queen Celestia couldn't decide between an exhausted sigh and a fit of giggles that hadn't been proper for her since the previous monarch had abdicated.

\* \* \*

><p>85.7 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...and so, in conclusion, my client feels that representation in the legal system is a necessity for his people and moral imperative for ponies everywhere."<p>

Celestia blinked at the brown mare. Part of her recalled that she was from Ponyville which, according to the letters she had received from her faithful student, was abundantly odd. But this...

"I apologize, but I'd just like to clarify. You want me to grant citizenship to rabbits?"

The mare shook her head. "No, your majesty, my \_client\_ wants you to grant citizenship to \_bunnies.\_ I personally don't agree with his views-

That earned her a light smack from the rabbit on her head.

"-but I am obligated, as mayor of Ponyville, to petition for this motion as it has received a three-citizen recommendation and passed two thirds majority vote in the city council." She pulled a sheaf of paperwork from her saddlebags. "I've already assembled a preliminary outline for the legal framework, if you would care to analyze it?"

Celestia took the papers and flipped through them. "...hmm. I... will have to check with parliament, of course, but I cannot find anything objectionable in this. I'll put it on the itinerary."

\* \* \*

><p>"...and that was the start of the Glorious Reformation," Cheerilee concluded. "It would take a few months, but now we all give thanks to the wonderful nation we live in, reigned by Princess Celestia and Prince Angel."<p>

Apple Bloom raised a hoof. "What about Princess Luna?"

"Oh, she decided to abdicate and move to the griffon lands. Nopony is quite sure why..."

\* \* \*

><p>85.8(misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Anakin was bored. He had awoken in his Darth Vader armor while walking down the shuttle ramp onto the Death Star hanger bay, far too late to save Padme, the Jedi younglings, or the rest he had hunted down. Fortunately, his abilities with the force were useful in stabilizing himself so he did not stumble as he walked. Frankly, he was getting a little tired of baseline loops. Never one for much patience, Anakin wondered how the other anchors dealt with the weight of everything occurring exactly the same, over and over a countless amount of times.<p>

He was wondering what entertaining changes he could make to this timeline when the first of the glitches started. Lights started flickering, systems went into maintenance loops, droids were acting a bit more erratically, and brief intervals of music was piped through the intercom. Even using the force, Anakin wasn't able to clearly detect the cause. He did get the vague impression that the force was happily blowing a raspberry at him, but that was a ridiculous concept. Right?

Definitely not a baseline loop, then. Although he didn't show it outwardly, Anakin was secretly amused. Despite the glitches, everything else continued as it always did, right up until Tarkin ordered the destruction of Alderaan in front of Leia. He was about to countermand that order as he had done in every loop where he had the power to do so, when a cupcake suddenly flew out of nowhere and hit him in the back of the helmet. He stooped and picked it up off the floor, noticing how it had the words 'Let it fire' written on it in frosting. As soon as he held the sugary treat, Anakin was also immersed in the force; enveloped in a sense of giddy serenity and a feeling of everything working out just fine.

Everyone on the bridge waited to see his reaction, but Darth Vader just stood there in silence, awkwardly holding a dented cupcake.

Tarkin cleared his throat, "Carry on."

The beams were reddish and stuttering as they converged on the output of the main superlaser, which was also reddish in color. Then the blast lashed out at the planet.

Anakin waited. So did Grand Moff Tarkin and Princess Leia. So did the entire bridge crew of the Death Star.

The planet floated serenely in space, completely intact.

"Sir!" exclaimed a communication technician, "We're getting reports from the surface. Apparently, it's raining down confetti and balloons throughout the planet. And, er, everyone down there is now wearing a silly party hat."

Tarkin blinked, "A.. silly party hat?"

The technician double checked the report, "Yes.. yes, sir."

"I think I know whom we are dealing with," under his mask, Anakin smiled, thinking, 'At least this loop will be anything but boring.'

"Was it me!?" a high pitched voice sounded as a girl dropped from the ceiling, did a lazy flip, and landed lightly on her feet. She had curly reddish hair and was wearing something that could only be called a combat cocktail dress, "Was I the one you were thinking of?"

"Pinkie Pie," Anakin stated and took a step back, trying to remember everything he knew of this particular looper. The force was decidedly strange with her. Instead of feeling direct and straightforward like most Jedi or furtive and greedy like most Sith, Pinkie felt like a mobius strip stuffed in a klein bottle filled with syrup. Anakin

stopped trying to delve deeper when the headache started.

"Guards!" Was the only thing Tarkin was able to get out before Pinkie waved a hand in his direction.

"Your arm is now a lollipop!" she chirped.

And Grand Moff Tarkin, one of the most powerful men in the Empire; dropped his blaster, sat down on the floor, and started licking up and down his forearm while making moaning happy sounds. Anakin put up his hand to halt any other actions by the stormtroopers and other imperials.

"You're here to save me, Master Jedi?" Leia looked away from her former captor's disturbing actions and asked with optimism.

"Silly, I'm a person of impulse and emotion. Just because my personal goals involve making others happy, doesn't mean I don't pursue them with every fiber of my being," Pinkie Pie giggled, "In other words, who ever said I was a Jedi?"

She was suddenly holding two activated lightsabers at her sides - both beams were the same color as her hair. Even with his mastery of the force, Anakin didn't even see her move. Then just to make sure, Pinkie's wild hair moved on it's own. A few moments later, her forelock was wrapped around a third ignited lightsaber. There was only one thing Anakin could think of doing now.

Darth Vader walked up to the small pink haired girl and looked down at her for a moment. Then he knelt, "What is thy bidding, my mistress?"

Pinkie Pie smiled wider, "Let's get my new Party Star moving! We have a whole galaxy to cheer up with my super duper party cannon and time's a wasting!"

\* \* \*

><p>85.9(TheCentauress)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke surprisingly comfortably in a human form, sitting in a familiar seat.<p>

Well, familiar, as in she had seen in before.

The main seat of the Starship Enterprise, NCC-1701, the Original.

The surroundings, however... they had seen better days. Much better days. The lighting was dim an flickering, where the alert panels we not illuminating; the consoles looked like someone had loosed Discord on them, telling him they held his presents.

And the display screen in front of her... holy ironwood! ... displayed an image that would scar her memories, **\_\*\*FOREVER...\*\*\_** A human Pinkie Pie, arming a Genesis Party Device...

As reality went Neon Rave, she seriously wondered if anyone could

stop the Celebration Arms Race...

\* \* \*

><p>85.10 (Vulpine Fury)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"As usual did Twilight Sparkle wake<br>On riverbank, with ancient  
open tome.  
>This time a baseline path she chose to take<br>And settle in her  
familiar home.  
>The Purple Smart fled swift to turret dome<br>And sought her  
stalwart friends by Looper Ping.  
>The swift reply of Loyal Polychrome,<br>The Mare Profound of Thought  
and Swift of Wing,  
>Whose awesome deeds resound amongst each living  
thing..."<p>

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Laying it on a bit thick there, aren't you Dash?"

The blue pegasus harrumphed and replied:

"There once was a mare with unusual curse:  
>She'd make every statement in verse.<br>'Cause her friends, they did  
choose  
>A learning foible to abuse.<br>I can't see how her day can go  
worse!"

Twilight smirked. "I'm not the one who tried to trip Zecora up with 'silver' and 'orange.' I think it shows a bit of class on her part that you have to use poetic forms and not just doggerel."

Rainbow Dash grumbled.

"I'm thankful haiku  
>Doesn't necessarily<br>Have to be rhymed."

\* \* \*

><p>85.11 (Daniel H)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was the day before the thousandth Summer Sun Celebration, and Spike and Twilight were going over the standard checklist. As was traditional for times when they were both Awake and the other baseline Element bearers weren't, they discussed their recent separate Loops in between meeting their friends. Twilight finished telling Spike about the difficulties the new Loopers seemed to be facing (Vinyl had experienced yet another "first Loop"; Derpy had regained another set of unAwake memories and asked if she could fly in the Equestria Games qualifying round again) on the way to check on the decorations, so when the meeting with Rarity was done, Spike started telling the stories of some of his recent Fused Loops where Twilight hadn't been present.<p>

Any Looper can speak practically any language found in any world if they've gone through enough Loops. Some of them, such as English and

Japanese, can usually be learned within a handful of Fused Loops; others, like Klingon, are a bit rarer. On the whole, though, if you meet a Looper who's able to store anything larger than a language textbook in their subspace pocket, chances are they don't actually need that textbook. In this case, Spike was telling Twilight about a recent Middle Earth Loop, and it was natural to use mostly Westron with the occasional sentence in one of the other Mannish or Elvish languages.

It came as a bit of a surprise, therefore, when a voice suddenly sounded out "Are you a baby dragon?! I've never seen a baby dragon before! Is this Smaug you were talking about also a dragon?"

Apparently, baseline Fluttershy's ability to understand all sorts of creatures extended to those who were speaking languages which didn't even exist in Equestria.

\* \* \*

><p>85.12 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Heartstring's Eleven<p>

It was another variant loop, this time located in Las Pegasus. Things were vastly different here, but it was definitely Equestria. Some differences included it was always night time, the Lunar Solstice had replaced the Summer Sun Celebration and Rarity was part of the Canterlot elite. Nightmare Moon herself was something different almost altogether. Even though her night has lasted for a thousand years, she had taken steps to preserve Equestria, such as controlling the heating and cooling of the two sides of the planet and magically imbued plants with the ability to grow in moonlight.

Twilight was letting Lyra run the show this time to ease her into these odder loop variations. Besides, Lyra was the one who approached Twilight with a plan to save Equestria and Twilight thought her plan was interesting. Eleven loopers including Lyra and Twilight total had gathered in Rarity's private mansion on the edge of the city, all in various states of resting positions around the pool and lawn. Lyra and Twilight approached the group, calling them all to attention. Lyra greeted everyone, "Mares, welcome to Las Pegasus. Before we get started, what we're about to do is highly dangerous, but something new we haven't done before. If you already have plans for this loop, help yourself to whatever food," pointing to the apple fritters, daisy sandwiches and countless confections provided by Pinkie's poolside party, "you like and please go enjoy the loop to your hearts' content. Otherwise, come with us."

The two mares did a 180 and went into the mansion. The gathered loopers rose slowly and trotted into the building. Once inside, Lyra called on her magic, activating a projector screen, "Ponies, I give you the 3000 block of Las Pegasus Boulevard, otherwise known as the Ponyville, the Mirage and the NMM Grand. Together, they are the three most profitable casinos in Las Pegasus, but also known to house the Elements of Harmony."

The screen shifted to that of six stone orbs in circular pattern



surrounding a tarp covered pony sized object in the center of the room. Lyra trotted from left to right, "This is the vault at the Ponyville, located below the strip, beneath 200 feet of solid earth. It is where the elements of Harmony have been housed for this loop. And we're going to rob it."

She paused for a second, "Ok, this loop is mostly bad news, the casino houses a security system that rivals most hub world's nuclear missile silos-

Rainbow Dash waved nonchalantly, "Big deal, just have Twilight teleport inside and steal the elements as always...in fact I'll just summon mine."

She concentrated for a second as an Element of Loyalty materialized around her neck. Twilight gave her a scathing look, "Dash!"

Dash looked at Twilight who gestured at Lyra. The musical pony and part time thief was looking down at the floor, with a mournful expression on her face. Dash rubbed the back of her mane, "Uh, actually this would be a bit too easy. Need to challenge myself, so what's the plan Lyra?"

She brightened up almost immediately as Dash sent her element away. Chrysalis, resting against Trixie, raised her hoof, "Quick question, why is Nightmare Moon running a casino in Las Pegasus anyway? For that matter, why Las Pegasus?"

Lyra flinched a bit, then shifted the slide back to the vault, "See that tarp covered object in the center of the room? It's not covering money or jewels, it's housing the sleeping form of Celestia, sealed in stone. Every year, she likes to gloat over her victory on the night of the Lunar Solstice, AKA the Summer Sun Celebration and put Celestia on display for 24 hours under close guard. Every year, it's in Las Pegasus since it was the site of Celestia's defeat. As for a casino, Twilight and I think she does it for fun. Beyond that, it's anyone's guess."

Another image of the casino floor replaced the vault, "First, we have to get within the casino cages which takes more than a smile, sorry Fluttershy."

Fluttershy seemed a bit abashed as Lyra continued, "Next, through a set of doors requiring a six-digit code which is changed every day. After that comes the elevator, which won't move without authorized hoofprint identification-

Twilight sighed, "Which we can't fake, not even with a Changeling's disguise."

Lyra nodded, "And voice print identification from both the security system within the Ponyville and the vault below-

"Which we won't get."

Lyra continued, "Furthermore, the elevator shaft is lined with thaumatic detection sensors as well as motion sensors linked to an anti-magic field generator within the elevator itself as well as automatic brakes and door locks."

Twilight explained, "Meaning if we tried forcing the elevator to the bottom by magic, physical force or computer override, the elevator will be locked down automatically, and we'd be trapped within."

"Once we get down the shaft though, It's easy. Just have to slip by two golem sentries whose destruction will result in the Vault going boom, several more anti-magic field generators located within the hallway walls, and the most elaborate vault ever conceived by ponykind. Any questions?"

Gilda raised her talons, "Why don't we just smash through the vault and fly them out that way? Or tunnel under the vault?"

Twilight sighed again, "The vault is rigged with explosives to destroy the elements, followed by an incinerator to melt the dust remaining into glass by either remote activation or when the Gollems are destroyed. If it appears someone will succeed stealing the elements and Celestia, the vault is detonated immediately. We can't tunnel, since she has motion sensors that can detect the earth shifting from 100 yards. If Angel Bunny were to build a home under the casino, Nightmare would know."

A blue pony raised her hand, "Trixie has a question. Say we get into the cage and past the security doors. Then, down the elevator we can't move, past the guards we can't destroy and past the vault we can't open-

Twilight blinked and added quickly, "Without being seen by the security cameras."

Lyra rubbed the back of her mane, "Oh yeah, the entire casino is rigged with cameras covering every nook and cranny of the building with special attention paid to watching the vault hallway and vault very closely. Every camera can also see through the use of magic so illusions won't do us too much good."

Trixie nodded, "Yes, say we get past all that. We're supposed to just walk out of there with Statue Celestia and the Elements completely unopposed?"

There was a moment's pause before Lyra spoke with complete confidence, "Yes."

The magician grinned. "Trixie likes this plan. When do we begin?"

\* \* \*

<p>85.13 (Hubris Plus, DrTempo & yannoshka)<p>

\* \* \*

<p>Sunset Shimmer stumbled as she Awoke mid-step, distantly wondering where she'd ended up this time. She'd been to so many worlds, lived so many lives, and, though she wouldn't trade away the friends she'd made for anything, she was beginning to grow homesick. It had gotten to the point that she'd grown more used to walking on two legs than four and she wasn't certain she'd be able to recognize her own face in the mirror.<p>

"Right, first things first," she muttered, shifting her weight from foot to foot. Examining a new body was a habit she'd picked up all the way back in Kingdom Hearts, where her form was liable to change any time she set foot on a new world. "Biped, feels female. Oh, fingers, fingers are good," she added, wagging her digits. She'd quite gotten to like fingers over the course of her adventures.

She paused as she caught sight of her reflection in a pane of glass, turning to examine herself in full.

"Unusual pigmentation," she continued with growing excitement as she saw the pale orange of her skin, raising a hand to double check that it wasn't a trick of the light. "And the hair!" She enthused as she tugged a lock of bright red hair streaked with yellow into her line of sight. Finally, she caught sight of the trophies on the other side of the glass.

\_ 'Canterlot High Gymnastics Team  
><em>, she read.

"\_I'm home!\_" She shouted, pumping both fists into the air, only to realize that the hum of conversation around her had cut out entirely. Turning slowly, she found the entire student body staring at her incredulously.

"Nope," she declared. "Still happy. I'm home!" She said again, tugging the nearest teen into a hug.

"Eep!" Fluttershy squeaked, "that's, um, nice?"

"Yes. Yes it is," Sunset answered, releasing the trembling girl. "I'll explain everything later," she went on, manifesting her Keyblade. "For now I have a friend to meet, a planet to save, and amends to make!"

Running out into the courtyard, she levelled the blade at the portal at the base of the statue, and twisted. With a \_click\_ that thrummed through the very fabric of reality, the gate to Equestria was opened and she darted through.

\* \* \*

><p>"THE NIGHT WILL LAST FOREVER!"<p>

Twilight Sparkle, as was usual for the baseline Loops, was facing Nightmare Moon. She was intending to more or less handle things as per usual. She'd checked, and was the only one Awake. As Nightmare Moon finished her usual speech, a cloaked figure(Twilight noticed the cloak looked like those the group known as Organization XIII wore in the Kingdom Hearts Loops) slammed into the corrupted alicorn, and then opened a portal, tossing Nightmare Moon in, jumping through after that. Twilight was confused.

"What the..."

Twilight took a few minutes, and sensed where the strange figure had taken Nightmare Moon. Quickly hiding somewhere, she entered alicorn form, and teleported to where she'd sensed the corrupted Luna. She found herself in the middle of nowhere..somewhere near where the Diamond Dogs lived, if she recalled correctly. As Twilight arrived,

the cloaked figure summoned what she knew to be a Keyblade. The guard looked like a sun setting in the distance, while the blade itself looked like a Keyblade usually did. The teeth and keychain had the exact same look...

Sunset Shimmer's cutie mark. "Sunset? Is that.."

The cloaked figure removed her hood, revealing the face of a pony she never expected to see. She smiled, and said a phrase Twilight remembered from so long ago.

"I have been, and always shall be, your friend. And I did enjoy seeing those last moments together." Twilight was in tears. She never imagined this moment'd come...That Shimmer would ever truly Awaken.

Sunset then yelled, "Now go..Get the Elements of Harmony. I'll keep her busy! MOVE IT!" Twilight nodded, and quickly teleported off.

Nightmare Moon looked at Sunset Shimmer, and asked, "Who are you to stand in my way?" Growling, Sunset Shimmer said, "I am the morning sun, and I have come to vanquish this horrible night!" Nightmare Moon, in response, laughed manically. "Please..like YOU could stop me with that silly sword!"

Shimmer smirked. "You know, I was like you in a way once. I craved power. I wanted to be like Celestia..become a Princess. Now... I know I don't deserve that sort of power. I didn't even have an idea on what I'd do after I became a Princess! I'd thought I was being held unfairly from power I thought I deserved. Man, was I such a foalish mare!"

Nightmare Moon said, "And your point?"

Sunset raised a hoof, as if to tell Nightmare Moon to be quiet, replying, "I was getting to it. As I read once, 'With great power comes great responsibility.' I wasn't responsible enough to handle that kind of power." Sunset frowned. "Look at you...You got jealous of your sister, and instead of talking it out, you went insane! Sisters aren't like that."

The corrupted alicorn laughed. "Like she'd listen."

Sunset shook her head. "I can't believe I was like you once."

Nightmare Moon chuckled manically in response. "And you think a mere unicorn can stop me?"

Sunset focused a spell, and took on a humanoid form, much like the one she usually had in the world beyond the mirror. "I am not an ordinary unicorn. I am Keyblade Master Sunset Shimmer. And I'm the one who will show you the light!" Taking up a stance, she smirked.

"OK... LET'S DANCE!"

The two charged at each other, and the fight began in earnest.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight teleported her fellow Element bearers back to where she'd left Sunset Shimmer, now equipped with the Elements of Harmony.<p>

As she saw Sunset Shimmer fight, she had to admit; she was impressed. She noticed moves she'd seen from many a Looper. She also could turn her Keyblade into various forms, like a whip, gauntlets, and other forms; Shimmer's style seemed very adaptable. Twilight noticed that it didn't seem as if Shimmer had truly mastered one kind of fighting style, like the other Loopers had over the Loops. She seemed to prefer anything that worked, but she did seem more comfortable with using her Keyblade, though.

"AND STAY DOWN!" Sunset landed a powerful blast of light on Nightmare Moon, who looked dazed. Seeing Twilight nearby, Sunset yelled, "DO IT! Free Luna from this madness!"

Twilight nodded, and the Elements' power awakened...

\* \* \*

><p>Sunset and Twilight hugged; the former was back in her unicorn form, and the two had just talked to Celestia, where Sunset humbly apologized for her sins.<p>

Twilight quickly asked, "How did you get past the mirror?"

Sunset chuckled, like the question was as easy to answer as two plus two. "I used my Keyblade on the mirror; it opened the portal up early. When I came through, I kinda realized Nightmare Moon'd arrived, and I knew what I had to do." Twilight's next question was the obvious one.

"Where did you learn all of that stuff you used?"

"I've been in a LOT of Fused I mean a LOT. A few dozen, at LEAST...met each of the original Loopers too. My third Loop was a Kingdom Hearts Fused Loop, with me in Riku's place." Twilight grimaced. She'd heard what'd happened to Riku in baseline..that'd definitely humble Sunset.

Sunset continued, "It was my third Loop, actually...Can't remember if the Loop where you told me about the Loops happened first, or the one where I acted like the first time you went through the mirror did. My memory was so jumbled, I thought the memories of who I was in that first Fused Loop were the real thing, and everything else...Simple dreams."

"So, who gave you the speech about the Multiverse? Sora?"

Sunset shook her head. "Nope. Mickey did..right after Castle Oblivion." She removed a book from her subspace pocket. "Here..a journal of all I've been through. I'm finally home..." Sunset sniffed, and then said, "Let's go meet your friends, OK?"

Twilight smiled, glad a friend she thought she'd never see was back. "Yeah..Let's go."

At last, Sunset Shimmer was home.

\* \* \*

><p>85.14 (Zetrein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The four Crusaders woke up in a lecture hall, all of them robe wearing unicorns. Applebloom wore a green robe, Scootaloo wore blue, Sweetie Belle wore white, and Nyx wore purple. Standing behind the teacher's desk, a similarly robe wearing Twilight Sparkle was speaking to them.<p>

"Good morning." She greeted them. "I am the senior tutor of the University, Twilight Sparkle, and I am not an alicorn." Following that oddly specific denial, she continued. "You have been chosen to travel to Canterlot, and aid The Princess in the defense of the great capital city.

So, a quick briefing before you go:

>Luna is gone.<br>Monsters roaming the lands.

>The Princess in need of your aid!<br>I am Twilight Sparkle, not an alicorn.

>You must go to Canterlot.<p>

Class dismissed. Have fun saving the kingdom!" She waved at them, prior to teleporting away.

The sudden silence that followed was broken by Sweetie Belle. "Please tell me you're all Awake?"

"Eeyup." Applebloom replied.

"Why do I feel oddly desensitized to death? Scootaloo chimed in.

"Maybe because our loop memories tell us Trixie would be a paragon of safety around these parts?" Nyx let her head fall to her desk. "Oh cypress, and Mom isn't Awake yet either."

\* \* \*

><p>After pulling themselves together, they went down to join their "Saving the World" party, already in progress. The mage that greeted them, Shamrock according to their loop memories, had just finished telling them about a tragic cheese shortage, when somepony else walked up, said... something, and the floor underneath them exploded.<p>

"Are you alright down there?" Shamrock peered down on them. "You just try and find your way out of the dungeon, while we board this up." As soon as he finished saying that, planks started being laid across the hole.

As Shamrock finished saying something about bananas, the light from above shut off completely. As their eyes adjusted to the gloom and torchlight, they noticed a convenient rack of staves and swords.

"Convenient rack of weapons, and what looks like a tutorial dungeon." Nyx nodded to herself. "It's official girls, we're in a game-loop."

\* \* \*

><p>A quick teleport and a few flights of stairs later, the Crusaders decided to forego the party, and simply get underway. Taking their farewell gift of some spells, the four trekked onward.<p>

Aside from the old mage examining a dead moose, and swiftly clearing out a rat infestation in some farmer's cellar, it was oddly quiet. They were beginning to think they'd missed something at the party, or maybe left too soon, when goblins attacked.

When negotiations broke down, which was an impressive eight seconds in, the four of them took a brief huddle in the middle of a shield spell. After concluding their discussion, they came out, spells flying.

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo ran up to her friends, after the troll that had killed the guard captain finally went down. "Ohmygosh, is Nyx okay? I saw she was on fire, then she went in front of my beam, and vanished! Is she okay?!"<p>

The other two Crusaders didn't say anything, Applebloom pointing at the red streak on the ground, while Sweetie Belle seemed to be in shock.

"Oh. Oh... Twilight's gonna kill me." Scootaloo held her head in her hooves. "Then she's gonna wait for the loop to reset, and kill me again. Then Nyx is gonna kill me. My seemingly infinite life is over for the short term."

"Hey now, Nyx voted for playing the game too. We could have gone past this, but she wanted to give the loop a try, just like we did." Applebloom turned to the remaining Crusader. "Back me up here, Sweetie? Um, Sweetie Belle? You okay?"

Sweetie Belle hadn't moved her eyes away from Nyx's... sorta-corpse. Shakily lifting her staff in her magic, she began to cast a spell they'd been given before leaving the University.

"L-Life. Lightning." With a splat, the end of her staff landed in the smear, green and purple orbs orbiting the end as she cast, "Revive!"

The sun seemed to shine a bit brighter through the trees, the wind picked up, and the world seemed to fall silent, as they all held their breaths. Their friend however, did not revive.

Putting a hoof on her shoulder, Applebloom tried to console Sweetie Belle. "You tried, Sweetie, but we might just have to accept Nyx is gonna get back-"

"I don't feel so good." A voice behind them interrupted her. Turning, they saw Nyx, alive and well, complete with an intact purple robe. Also, oddly enough, a new staff and sword, in spite of her previous

set still being on the ground.

"You're okay!" Scootaloo hit Nyx in a tackle-hug. "The spell worked! You're okay! My life isn't over!" She continued to gush as she held her friend.

Well, her friend's body, at any rate. Unfortunately for both ponies involved, a tackle-hug inflicts a single point of damage, and fresh from being revived, Nyx only had one hit point.

Another panic attack, and revive spell, later, and the four of them awkwardly stood over a dead Nyx. The living Nyx also came with an untarnished robe, and new staff and sword.

Scootaloo once again broke the silence. "So... can we not tell Twilight about how I killed her daughter? Twice? In a ten minute time period?"

And so, our young and bold wizards set forth on their quest. Guiding them through the perils of the world was the charmingly beautiful Twilight Sparkle, who is by no means an alicorn! As they approached the Everfree Forest, it became clear there was evil afoot.\_

\* \* \*

><p>85.13 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So... where did you go?" Twilight asked. "I mean, you said you had a lot of fused loops..."<p>

Sunset nodded. "I feel like I've been... well, everywhere. I almost certainly haven't, but..." She broke off, and pointed to the book lying on the table. "I kept a journal. Remember? Maybe... maybe it'd be better if you read it first."

Twilight twitched, as though she'd started to move but thought better of it. "May I?"

"Of course." Sunset nodded, as Twilight picked it up. "That's why I kept it, really. Oh, I might have got the numbering confused a few times. Sorry..."

"You don't need to apologize for that," Twilight replied. "I've lost count of how many loops I've done."

She cracked the cover of the book, and began to read.

\* \* \*

><p>From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:<p>

Entry 1:

My name is...Houka..or is it Sunset Shimmer?...

I remember being born here on Destiny Islands...but also remember being born in a world called Equestria. I remember both talking to a friend named Twilight Sparkle who told me time was looping endlessly,



and trying to kill her.

Both seem like a dream now...Anyhow, today, we're building a raft to see the outside world...I can't wait.

#### Entry 2:

Ever since that day the islands were consumed by darkness, I've been through a lot. First, I found myself in another world; something I'd always wanted to see since I was young...I then met a woman named Maleficent. She seemed arrogant..like I was in those dreams.

But said she'd help give me strength to help my best girl friend, Kairi...OK, I had a crush on Sora...But I knew he loved Kairi.

Maybe out of jealousy, or wanting to do something to help, I let Maleficent teach me a few things. I didn't like her..with a name like THAT, come on, who WOULD trust her? But I had no choice at the time. When I saw Sora again, he had a weapon called a "Keyblade." I was curious about it, and when I had it in my hand, it felt like a part of me.

Maleficent tried to tell me that Sora'd abandoned me, but I knew better. Friends never do that. Still, her gift to control the Heartless-beings of pure darkness-was tempting, but I knew I had to be strong on my own merits. I did in, the end, take the gift, but only to use as a last resort in case I was surrounded.

Then "Ansem", a massively powerful Heartless, possessed me after Sora reclaimed the Keyblade after I somehow claimed it, despite my efforts at not becoming his new body...I still feel used.

After "Ansem" was stopped, as I journeyed through a place called Castle Oblivion to face my darkness by going through my memories, I found myself in a world similar to my dreams of Equestria and Canterlot High. I don't understand why I experienced what I'm sure were dreams at the time, but I went on my journey, nevertheless.

I faced my darkness and accepted it as a part of me, and faced "Ansem" again, and defeated him. Now I await for Sora to awaken as his memories are put back together again...

#### Entry 3:

Yesterday Mickey, a friend I'd made asked me what was wrong, when he saw something was on my mind. I told him about the dreams I had, and the odd world I'd seen in Castle Oblivion.

His response shocked me.

"So, you're Looping too, huh?"

It was then I learned what the "dreams" I'd had were; memories. They were the real thing: I WAS Sunset Shimmer. That was who I truly was. It explained why my "Dark Mode", the form I'd taken when I harnessed my darkness in my heart to its full power, looked the way it did..it was the form I'd taken when I'd put on the crown that fateful night. Apparently, I'd just begun to experience these Loops, and me having what's called a "Fused Loop" so early on threw my memories off so badly, I couldn't tell the difference in my memories.

And it also explained the odd looks Sora'd given me at first..he was "Looping" as well; in fact he was the "Anchor" for this particular part of the multiverse. Mickey was an Anchor for the "Disney" Loops in general, which were seperate from the Kingdom Hearts Loops(though they did share many similar inhabitants) I was gonna get Sora back for not saying anything when I saw him again. But for now, I need to make sure that meeting does happen.

#### Entry 4:

I've had to go through a lot, even having to look like "Ansem" when I had to stop Roxas, who had been created when Sora had to free Kairi's heart, so Sora could wake up from his sleep. But when we did meet again, I did give Sora a good talking to. He apologized for it, saying he wasn't sure where I was from and smiled at me, as he always did...Curse that smile of his.

After that, the whole "Mark Of Mastery Exam" business occured, to be sure we'd be ready for Xehanort, the one responsible for all that had occured, when he returned...Sora's gotten used to the darkness by now, so he didn't end up suffering what Mickey told me he did in the baseline. Even I hadn't gone that far back when I was still a jerk. I'd never literally shatter someone's heart like that.

The Xehadorks' faces when Sora leapt up from his seat during our encounter with the True Organization XIII, the group made of Xehanort's other selves,was PRICELESS. They did not expect their little vessel to have gotten past what they'd done to him.

After that, Sora said the Loop usually ended here, but told me that we would meet again someday, and as I held my Keyblade, Shimmering Sunset, in my hand, I smiled.

Sora is a true friend, indeed...

#### Entry 5:

I Awoke in a bed I didn't recognize. Shouldn't I be home? I frowned, remembering what I'd been through with Sora and Mickey, and what my Keyblade felt like to give me hope...

And then a flash of light, and my Keyblade appeared. How? Then I remembered Mickey saying some things carried over between Loops...Guess this had, as well...

When I see you again, Twilight, I'll definitely have some questions for you. But for now, I have to find out where I am.

Someday, I'll be home again, and then, Twilight..I hope you forgive this fool.

Keychain: Glimmering Sunset

\* \* \*

><p>85.15 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...Okay." Twilight rubbed her head, looking at the assembled ponies (and one admin) as she clutched her mug. "Okay, okay okay. So. Vinyl, you... have somehow awoken multiple times."<p>

The unicorn nodded, wincing. "Yeah."

"And we all didn't remember it until just now-"

Sleipner gave an awkward grin. "Yeah, sorry I didn't... warn you, I just noticed a batch of buggy code and fixed it. Didn't realize what was going on..."

"No, it's fine." She took a deep breath and let it out. "I... think that everypony that Woke Up because of Lyra has a few... glitches. Vinyl Awakened several times, Derpy has that-"

"Bright Eyes," Derpy interrupted. "I'm Bright Eyes this loop, Derpy and Ditzzy are my triplet sisters... and we're all Awake."

"...right. That, plus you're dreaming." Twilight looked to Sleipner. "That is the proper term, right?"

"I think so... it's not like there's an official lexicon."

"Which brings us to Sunset, who..." She turned to the yellow unicorn. "I'm sorry, but from a purely logical standpoint you shouldn't even be here. You should be on the other side of the mirror!"

"Er... there's something else." Sunset Shimmer rubbed her hooves together awkwardly. "See, back when I was talking to Fluttershy for my... loop therapy, we kind of realized... apparently... weeeeeeeell, I'm kind of shapeshifted."

Twilight blinked. "But... what?"

"Yeah, for some reason I'm consistently 'cursed' to be a unicorn, and removing that curse gets you a teenage human girl." She smiled shyly. "Great leather coat, though..."

"Right. Right." Twilight looked at her mug, drained it in one gulp, and slammed it down. "\_Right.\_ To the chalkboard!"

\* \* \*

><p>85.16<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Here y' go," Applebloom announced, putting a sheaf of paper down in front of each of the other Crusaders.<p>

Scotaloo took it and scanned the first page. "It's that time again?"

"Yep." Applebloom nodded. "Time fer another game of Battleships."

Silver picked the papers up. "...there's a lot more rules."

"Well, yeah, 'cause you lot keep finding loopholes."

"You're one to talk!" Sweetie pointed out. "Who was it who used an SSTO flyer once?"

"No comment." Applebloom shrugged. "Anyway, there's the rules, get designin'."

"Hub 1940s timeframe?" Scootaloo checked, then grinned. "Cool. We limited to production models only?"

"Nah, just so long as it was possible with the tech of the time."

Diamond Tiara coughed. "Silbervogel!"

"Ah said \_possible.\_ That thing weren't â€" woulda melted."

"I assume I'm to check that the rules are followed?" Nyx asked.

"If y'all don't mind."

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, let's be honest," Applebloom said, as her blackened 16-inch guns returned to their rest positions. "You were <em>really</em> askin' for it using a ship based on \_Warspite\_, Silver."

"It seemed funny at the time," Silver admitted. "Less funny now."

"A ship \_that\_ unlucky?" Applebloom shook her head. "Only \_Warspite\_ could hit an uncharted rock in the middle of the Griffin Ocean."

Silver's reply was cut off as the magazine exploded.

\* \* \*

><p>"In all honesty, you probably weren't going to win that one anyway," Nyx said, as Silver tugged her teleport harness off.<p>

"Well, yeah..." Silver sighed. "I'd thought the Unrotated Projectiles I added might have helped, though. Hey, what did the others go with?"

"Well, Sweetie and Diamond are getting pretty close..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Stay <em>still!</em>" Sweetie hissed, as Diamond's ridiculously fast ship did another supple turn, dodging adroitly into the gap between two of her torpedo salvo, and settled down onto a course directly for her.

"Like it?" Diamond asked, over the radio link. "It's a \_Shimikaze.\_ I thought, I like destroyers, so why not just use a ship which is like four of them at once?"

The hydrophones on Sweetie's Type XXI U-boat reported a loud series

of splashes.

"What was that?" she asked. "Sounded like torpedoes to me..."

Diamond's ship was already going evasive. "It was. Ten Long Lances."

"TEN?" Sweetie spluttered.

"Indeed. I thought I'd keep five tubes loaded just in case."

Sweetie's hoof was already jammed onto the \_dive\_ switch. Sadly, the Type XXI was not particularly good at crash-dives.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, that <em>can't<em> be legal!" Sweetie insisted. "\_Fifteen\_ Long Lance torpedos?"

Nyx held up a data sheet.

"...huh. They really did build one." Sweetie scanned it. "HIJMSShimikaze. That is a ludicrous top speed."

"Yep." Silver grinned. "I think 'Bloom's gonna get her comeuppance. Iowas are good, but nowhere near \_that\_ good."

"Can Scoots stop her?" Sweetie asked.

Nyx passed over another data sheet.

"Oh, what the hay. How did she..."

"I suspect weather magic was involved," Nyx said.

\* \* \*

><p>"Now, see here, I have something of a dilemma," Diamond said down the radio link. "I've got twenty-five torps left. So, how many do I use on you?"<p>

"None, 'cause ah'll blow y'all out of the water first," Applebloom replied lightly. "Hey, stand still for a minute."

Diamond replied by going to full throttle â€" a blisteringly fast 39 knots. "Nah. Right, let's go with a full tube strike. Scoots will have to make do with ten."

As the two ships jostled for position for when Diamond began her run in, something appeared on the horizon.

\* \* \*

><p>"...well, I didn't expect that," Diamond noted, as the <em>Iowa<em> class battleship she'd been contemplating attacking finally exploded under the pounding of a second Bouncing Bomb wave.

"Scootaloo, how the fern did you get \_Lancasters\_ out here?"

"That'd be telling," Scootaloo replied cheekily. "Now, 'scuse me, I need to spot another strike."

"Not if I catch you first," Diamond promised, turning to face the direction the Lancs had come from.

\* \* \*

><p>"That is the most ridiculous thing I have <em>ever<em> seen," Diamond said in tones of hushed awe.

The aircraft carrier she was closing in on â€" \_very\_ quickly â€" was utterly enormous. Almost half a mile long, nearly four hundred feet across the beam, and far taller than her own diminutive super-destroyer.

Also, it was made almost entirely out of ice.

"Yeah, I know." Scootaloo admitted. "But it's still awesome. I'll be with you in just a few minutes, I'm nearly finished spotting my deck strike. How do eighty Mosquitos sound?"

"Like something that'll never get launched," Diamond replied. Curving \_Shimikaze\_ out in a long, looping arc, she bored in towards the side of the... well, the \_iceberg...\_ and launched a full spread of fifteen torpedoes.

\* \* \*

><p>"At last!" Scootaloo cheered. "I won for once!"<p>

"Still not sure \_how\_ you survived that," Diamond grumbled.

"That's what happens when your hull is forty feet thick," Scootaloo replied, sticking her tongue out. "Left some impressive craters, though."

"...all right. Nice one." Diamond shook her hoof. "I'm impressed you found a loophole in Applebloom's rules, though."

\* \* \*

><p>85.1: Pinkish hair.<br>85.2: There's several escaped ones roaming around.

>85.3: Nyx treats it as a meta-compliment.<br>85.4: Scootabuse does not work with Scootaloooper.

>85.5: What's up?<br>85.6: The Sun Queen.

>85.7: Angel is the warlike one.<br>85.8: Quick repaint of that armour...

>85.9: Klingons are at a disadvantage.<br>85.10: Cut her some slack, she's having to compose on the fly. Pun intended.

>85.11: Huh.<br>85.12: The Mane Six \*could\* fix it easily. But she seems so excited...

>85.13: For this is my friend, who was lost, and is found. (The reports will not have loop numbers.)<br>85.14: Whoops.

>85.15: This pretty much sums up why it's a bad idea to

self-Awaken.<br>85.16: HIJMS Shimikaze, HMS Warspite, USS Iowa, a U-XXI, and HMS Habakkuk.

## 90. Chapter 90

86.1

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra Heartstrings walked into the library, steadying herself against the door frame as she passed through it.<p>

"Let me guess," Twilight sighed. "Another one where your muscle memory is from the human you?"

"Yeah." The lime unicorn wobbled over to a chair, heaved herself up into a bipedal sitting position, and sank into it gratefully. "What the buck is up with my history?"

"I suspect you broke it," Twilight replied delicately.

Lyra winced. "Yeah, probably." She shook her head, casting around for a change in subject. "...oh, hey! Got to ask, ever heard of this kinda strange magical music which makes ponies forget about me?"

"I have." Twilight's head turned quickly. "Wait, did you end up in \_that\_ world?"

"Yeah... just last time." Lyra shrugged, but Twilight could still see pain in her eyes. "There was some unicorn called Hocus Hiccup in your place. He and... Toothless, I think? They were the only ones who remembered me for more than about ten minutes."

She looked off into the middle distance. "Took most of the loop, but he worked out how to neutralize the effect. Man, but Celestia was confused."

Twilight nodded. "Loops like that always make me feel... almost helpless, really. They're not the places where you can kick some flank and solve things, they're not even places where you just need to teach Truth, Justice, Applejack's Apple Pie and the Pinkie Pie Patent Pending Party Procedure. They're where... the world itself is subtly wrong."

She shivered. "And I'm glad we don't live there."

"You and me both," Lyra said solemnly. Then she forced a smile. "Meant I only had to know two knock-knock jokes, though. Original every time."

\* \* \*

><p>(FanOfMostEverything)<p>

From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:  
>Entry 6:<p>

I feel like a flea next to Monstro. This "Ranma Saotome" is... Well, he insists he isn't a god. Explained why he can't be and everything. But he's clearly just one rung lower on the ladder.

He actually explained a lot more than that. He wasn't surprised when I said I already knew about the Loops and Yggdrasil and even subspace pockets; how else would I carry you around? But he showed me just how much there is to the Multiverse. The worlds I've seen are the thinnest slice of everything out there. Honestly, it's kind of overwhelming.

The less said about his personal solar system the better, if only for the sake of what remains of my sanity.

He said I could relax for the next few years. Nabiki, the girl I'm replacing, hardly ever got mixed up in the martial arts mayhem of this world. At least, not in the baseline. But I can't help but feel I should turn down the offer. It's a big cosmos out there. Magic and my Keyblade work here, but Ranma told me that won't always be the case. I want to be able to defend myself unaided.

I admit, I'm not sure how this will work when I'm a unicorn again, but I'll cross that bridge when I come to it. For now, I have a new teacher.

A teacher. Celestia... I'll see you again someday.

Keychain: Anything Goes

\* \* \*

><p>86.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia,<em>

\_I quit. I've had too much stress recently, I'm going to go live on a tropical island until my stress levels fade. Expect me back some time around when Discord returns.\_

\_Yours absently,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle.\_

\_P.S. Don't worry about Nightmare Moon, I have taken her with me and we are enjoying waffles. Luna should be on the moon looking puzzled\_.

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm guessing it was... bad?" Nyx asked, as she cut her third waffle in half before adding a big dollop of ice cream.<p>

"Bad doesn't even begin to cover it." Twilight heated the irons with a fire spell, and slapped another load of batter between them â€" this set with ginger flavouring. "It was another of those bedamned near-Hub dystopias... this time, one where you just plain got killed at age thirty."

Nyx blinked. "That's... unusually blunt for those places." She levitated the ice cream tub. "Come on, momma, I think I should cook for a bit. You need ice cream, stat!"



"As if that wasn't bad enough," Twilight continued, the only sign she'd heard Nyx being that she went over to the table and sat down, "the reason for that? Population control to maintain humanity in the face of a small domed city and an uninhabitable outside."

"And..." Nyx prompted, with a hiss in the background of her question.

"And when I took a look outside, it was perfectly habitable. Had been for about two centuries." Twilight shrugged. "I blew a hole in the dome, the computer running the place seized up... you know, I think Skynet has a point, 'fictional' sentient computers do seem to always go mad..."

She took a bite of her waffle and munched determinedly. "I had to use OWL to stop falling bits of dome killing anyone. Then I ended up running a civilization again."

Nyx winced, and frowned. "Okay, ouch... hey, want me to go find Trixie and see if I can prod her into becoming an Element of Magic? Sounds like you might need more than just the time before Discord escapes..."

"That would be great, thanks." Twilight finished her first waffle. "Okay, I'm going to have four more of these, then I'm going to bed. Don't wake me unless my life is in immediate, clear and present danger."

"Gotcha, Momma!" Nyx flipped up a wing in salute, then checked her reflection to make sure her headband and glasses were on properly.

"Okay. Step one: get Trixie into Ponyville at a preset time. Step two: come up with potential threat which would unite her and the other prospective Element bearers..." Nyx frowned. "Perhaps a horde of chibi-nightmare-moons?"

It had been a while since she'd used the mirror pool...

\* \* \*

><p>86.3<p>

I've never...

(Started by novusordomundi, Compiled and Edited by Conceptulist)

\* \* \*

><p>(novusordomundi)<p>

Shining Armor smirked as he leaned back on his chair. "I've never turned water into wine."

Twilight Sparkle shot her brother a nasty glare as she took a drink from her mug. "Remind me to never do that again. All I had for the rest of that loop was everyone wanting me to give them free booze. Really, just walked right up to me in the middle of the road with a bottle of water and ask me to work my magic."

Shining Armor smirked, before noticing that Berry Punch hadn't touched her mug. "Really? You of all ponies haven't done that?"

Berry smirked back at the Captain, before replying "I've turned water into scotch, vodka, and Romulan Ale. Never wine."

\* \* \*

><p>(WyldeHorse)<p>

Rarity looked over at Pinkie Pie. "I've never turned the moon into a giant cupcake."

"It was a good cupcake! And the moon-cupcake-eating party was awesome!" Pinkie Pie grinned and downed her shot.

\* \* \*

><p>(Conceptulist)<p>

"Hmm... I've never gone to warp speed without a spacecraft."

Rainbow drank down another shot. "No fair singling me out AJ. Hay, I'm the only one here who could do that."

"Wrong! The Supreme and Incredible Trixie has indeed broken the warp speed limit with no need for a spaceship. It involved an attempt to replicate some of the more temperamental explosives Trixie has seen, an Invincibility Star, and riding the shockwave to the next solar system."

\* \* \*

><p>(misterq)<p>

"I also did that, but I was a pink energy being at the time," Pinkie Pie drank her shot and burped loudly. She paused in thought for a moment, "Hmm, I've never been an accountant."

The majority of looping ponies drank their shot. This included a few surprises.

"You were an accountant, Dashie?" Pinkie exclaimed in amazement.

"What? Is that so surprising?" Rainbow Dash placed her empty shot glass with all the others, "Sure, I can't compete in theoretical math theory with Twilight, here. But one loop, I was the fastest comptroller in the biz. I could accurately audit a company's tax records in ten seconds flat. Of course, then I had to fight off the actuary ninjas. It was a strange, strange loop."

Trixie suddenly snorted in laughter, "If that loop was a show in the hub-verse, it would most likely be named 'My Little Pony: Friendship is Management'."

\* \* \*

><p>(Crisis)<p>

"I've never had sex with someone from a different Loop," Cadance smirked as several groans went up and shots were downed.

"Wait," Rainbow Dash halted the game as one of the drinkers registered, "Fluttershy?! Who? When?"

"Link and I did more than just howl out in the woods," Fluttershy blushed.

"Ah knew it!" Applejack cheered. "Pay up Rarity!"

\* \* \*

><p>(TheCentauress)<p>

A tiny voice spoke from the floor. "I've never had a palette swap."

Everyone looked down, to see a grinning Nyx looking up.

Everyone took a drink, snickering. After a moment to breathe, they looked at Zecora.

"To my chagrin," the Zebra admitted, "White on Black I have been."

Luna grumbled. "You are my palette swap, runt."

Nyx stuck out her tongue.

Celestia blushed a bit and spoke so softly she made Baseline-Fluttershy sound loud. "ThoseHubDollsareaccurate," she sputtered.

Fluttershy began giggling, fluent in Squeakanese.

\* \* \*

><p>(namar13766)<p>

Gilda grinned. "I've never gone insane while ruling Equestria."

Cheerilee, Spike, and a handful of natives smirked as a large percentage of the native loopers downed their drinks with mutinous mutters.

"You'll never let us live that down, will you," muttered Rainbow dash.

"Nope!"

\* \* \*

><p>(Conceptulist)<p>

"I've Never conquered an entire galaxy by myself." Spike raised an eyebrow when most of the ponies and assorted other species in Big Mac's drank to that. "Okay, how and why?"

"Parties and to spread joy and laughter to those in need."

"I just asked nicely. Once I explained what I was doing, I was elected Supreme Pony Empress of the Universe."

"Explosions and to win a bet."

"Mind control and to win that same bet. I won, by the way."

"Magic based ship-to-ship warfare, and cause of the bet."

"Trixie still wants a rematch. Making Star Command dance the Macarena until they signed over ownership of the Galactic Union violated the spirit of the rules."

"I transmuted all of the weapons of anyone who fought me into toy replicas, and then used my political powers to order the creation of Grand Library of Twiandra. I still have it in my Subspace Pocket."

"It was a strange variant loop. Everything was made out of yarn, and I was a pair of magic knitting needles. I unraveled and then re-knitted the Cosmos into a nice sweater."

"Politics, and to challenge myself."

"Beer. And it was a very grimdark loop. Everyone and everything in it needed a tree forsaken drink. Old Mare Henderson was the only one who wasn't driven insane, and once everything was settled she drank Cthulhu under the table."

"On accident, and because Ah couldn't read hieroglyphics. Ah triggered an alien super weapon that hijacked my brainwaves as a power source. Mechapple went on to defend Eques from several dozen alien invasions, adding the invaders planets to our own empire."

\* \* \*

><p>(Crisis)<p>

"Not in any sort of where or when," Zecora declared, "ever have I a mother been."

Most of the room drank at that one, and explanations were demanded of several.

"Hey, I've adopted Scoots plenty of times to qualify," Dash defended herself.

"Weird variants where Sweetie Belle is my love child from a young teen affair," Rarity explained. "My parents kept up the charade of her being my sister to protect my reputation."

"Same with me and 'Bloom," Applejack nodded.

"Don't you wanna hear mine?" Pinkie beamed.

"Not really, sugarcube," Applejack. "I don't wanna hear about how you raised Cthulhu or somethin'."

"Silly!" Pinkie chided her friend. "I raised Discord! Remember that Loop where we were all raising those normally older than us?"

"Oh, yeah," Applejack nodded. "Forgot about that one..."

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

"Apparently Rares was the result of a drunken fling," Vinyl Scratch explained awkwardly. "Dropped her off with some friends cause we both knew I'd be a bad mom, then a couple of years down the line I Awoke. She didn't."

Rarity sighed. "Yes, that happens sometimes, although you usually portray yourself as 'auntie Vinyl.'"

The DJ grinned, pulling out a few photos. "I managed to convince you to tour with me for a bit, though!"

Sweetie broke out laughing. "This I've gotta see!"

\* \* \*

><p>(namar13766)<p>

"I've never...I've never...I've never...I've never tried to befriend an UnAwake Sunset Shimmer."

Big Mac raised an eyebrow as Shining Armor made that declaration. Twilight taking a shot was expected, but the other?

Twilight looked shocked and a little intrigued. "Cadence, when was this?"

The pink pony princess of passion looked slightly shifty. "Well, there was a loop where I came back really early and thought it would be nice of her to have a special somepony in that loop, and then we got to talking and know each other..."

\* \* \*

><p>(Crisis)<p>

"I've never been married," Cheerilee spoke, causing a good portion of the room to dive for cover (some trying to hastily down their shot at the same time). Cadance was suddenly in her face, an almost manic look in her eyes.

"WE MUST FIX THIS!"

\* \* \*

><p>(Daniel H)<p>

Chrysalis thought for a minute. "I Never Looped in as myself from the Canterlot High world."

Almost everypony took a drink at that. No pony was really surprised at

this, except than Nyx was one of the drinkers.

"What? Vice Principal Luna counts! Chrysalis and Discord are the only ones that rarely have alternate selves."

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

Big Mac smirked. "Ah've never Ascended."

Nyx pondered for a moment before grinning. "I've never shot mom with the elements."

Sweetie Belle glared at her. "You have by proxy!"

Apple Bloom giggled. "Ah've never made acid outta' potatoes before."

"ONE TIME! Y'all are never gonna let me live that down, are ya?"

"Nope!"

Twilight shrugged. "I've never tried to eat Sugar Cube Corner before."

To the surprise of nopony, only Pinkie drank.

"I've... oh, I don't know... I've never had my own personal narrator for my life in a loop." Rarity finally decided.

Everypony looked at Pinkie.

Pinkie looked shocked. "You mean NOT everypony has one?! Wow, I've had mine since baseline! I can hardly picture life without it!"

Trixie thumped her head down on the table. "That explains so much, and yet so little!"

"I've never started a cult worshiping seaponies."

"Trixie calls shenanigans! You're singling her out again!"

Derpy was happily blowing bubbles in her chocolate milk and tonic, only to pause when she noticed everyone looking at her.  
"What?"

"When did you even get here?!"

"I've never been in a threesome with Blueblood." Celestia giggled.

To everyone's slight shock, Shining, Cadance, AND Rarity downed their shots.

"Not. A. Word." she growled.

\* \* \*

><p>(Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Sweetie had a wicked grin spread across her face, "I've never crashed a loop by dropping the sun on Equestria."

Twilight sighed as she brought the glass to her mouth, "My telescope wasn't powerful enough to see why the sun was orbiting Equestria, unlike so many human worlds which orbited the sun."

After downing her glass, Celestia replied, "Tried dropping the sun on Nightmare Moon. Didn't think it all the way through at the time."

Luna shivered as some whiskey was brought out for this shot, "Needed the sunlight to find the Vash Nerada during that Doctor Who loop. It would have worked had Celestia not decided to prank me at that moment."

Gilda shrugged, "Experimenting with my Okami powers."

Scotaloo looked sheepish, "Wanted to see if I could fly the sun. Equestria just came out of nowhere, I tell you!"

Applebloom tilted her head, "My gravity beam lost control and wouldn't shut down."

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

"I've never been Celestia's Mother." Luna grinned teasingly.

"Yeah, that was weird. She still grew up awesome though." Dash shrugged, drinking.

"Ugh, ONE time paradox and it's all you ever hear." Celestia groaned, draining her glass.

"I still have the baby pictures!" Derpy giggled.

Gilda just looked at Derpy. "Seriously, when did you get here?!"

\* \* \*

><p>(Daniel H)<p>

"I've never created a whole world before" said Big Mac.

As expected, Sweetie Belle, Luna, and Pinkie each took a drink. Not as expected was when Ivory Scroll did the same.

"It was a Loop where the laws of physics were actually written up and could be changed like other laws. How could I not?"

\* \* \*

><p>(namar13766)<p>

"I've never looped into a Conversion Bureau loop!"

Everyone looked askance at the sugar honey ice tea drinking mailmare, before, as one, putting down their glasses and emptying their bottles.

"I am less surprised than I should be." Gilda dryly noted.

"Seriously, when did she come in?" quietly noted Sunset Shimmer.

\* \* \*

><p>(yannoshka)<p>

"I've never been Primarch of Space Marines" was Spoon's entry. To her utter bafflement, everybody else at the table, including angel bunny drank their shot.

"Just you wait. It is one of the unwritten rules of looping. Everyone becomes one of my siblings at some point." Leman kindly told her.

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

"I've never been the God Emperor of Ponykind."

Celestia pouted. "No fair! We agreed no baseline stuff!"

\* \* \*

><p>(FanOfMostEverything)<p>

Cheerilee considered her options, and then smiled. "I've never used the Mirror Pool." Almost everypony drank.

"Experimentation," said Twilight.

"Competition," said Dash.

"Wanted to see if I could get self-replicating liquor," said Berry Punch. "Worked too well. The water itself didn't get copied. And the 307 Ale negative space-wedgied itself out of existence."

\* \* \*

><p>(Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Chrysalis grinned, "I've never been a member of the Apple family."

Most of the ponies, including Celestia and Luna took a shot. What really surprised everypony though was when Gilda took a drink, "Twice. Once by adoption when Fluttershy and I switched places, she was Dash's cool friend and I was the shy one. Was still a griffon though. Ended up in Ponyville after failing out of flight school and being thrown out by my clan, where the Apples took me on as hired help. I woke up shortly after. Ended up an honorary Apple when I drove off some Timberwolves that found their way onto the farm. The other time, I replaced Big Mac as Applejack and Applebloom's big



sister as an Earth Pony."

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

Vinyl grinned. "I've never had a fused loop."

The table groaned as almost every mug was lifted. "Come on, new kid," Discord grumbled, "be more creative!"

"Oh, I have a great counter," Rainbow grinned. "Ahem ahem ahem. I've never had a lover's quarrel.'"

Vinyl brought her drink to her lips with a roll of her eyes. Spike and Rarity joined her, shortly followed by Cadance and Shining and then by Trixie and Chrysalis. Lyra and Derpy toasted their fellow new looper before downing their own drinks.

Celestia, Luna, and Discord were a bit odd, but not entirely unexpected. Sleipnir, of course, got some light-hearted teasing. The real surprise came when Gilda slammed her empty mug down.

"...Uh-"

The griffon glared. "I DON'T want to talk about it."

\* \* \*

><p>(Conceptulist)<p>

"The Awesome and Incredamazing Trixie has never Looped in as a chicken."

"That joke was old and stale in the baseline." Scootaloo complained as she drank her shot.

"At least I finally have a way to fix it when I'm Silverbeak." Silver Spoon, who had Awakened as Silverbeak this loop, muttered as she drank.

"I make for a fabulous hen." Rarity declared after finishing off her drink. Then she threw her mug to the ground. "Another!" she giggled.

Twilight downed more of her drink, and then said "Sleipnir, what the bark is up with the weird loops where Rarity and I Awake as weird things? It's gotten pretty annoying."

Sleipnir shrugged his upper two shoulders. "I have no idea. There is no bug in the system that's causing it, and it's not some form of stable variant like the Rule 63 iterations. It's like Yggdrasil finds it amusing or something."

\* \* \*

><p>(Conceptulist)<p>

"Never have I ever Awoke to discover An earth pony I've been, Not a

Zebra again." Zercora rhymed.

As most of the loopers busied themselves with their drinks, Discord asked "Zecora, really? Never been an earth pony? Let's try to change that." One talon snap latter, Zecora lost her stripes.

"Would you mind returning what's mine? I do not like this redesign."

"But your stripes, they Make me look so much thinner! I like them too much!"

"Appease Me please."

"Fine, if you want them So badly as to beg me, You can have them back."

\* \* \*

><p>(misterq)<p>

"I have never been a tiny pixie fairy!" Pinkie Pie spoke up.

Apple Bloom and Twilight took a drink at the same time, and in unison said, "Tinkerbelle."

Silver Spoon asked, "Does being a breezy count?"

There was a brief moment of quiet discussion before Twilight nodded her head in agreement. Silver Spoon took a drink. Then she swayed a little, and with a poofing sound her tail became a squirrel's tail once again.

Rainbow Dash put down her mug, proudly saying, "I was the fastest wind fairy, once."

Trixie scowled as she placed her cup on the table, "Apparently, pyromania can be a fairy talent. That was when all the fairies of Pixie Hollow learned a valuable lesson on how well pirate ships can burn - until the fire reaches the gunpowder stores. Then the lesson became something about explosions, explosion safety, and raining pirate booty."

Pinkie giggled, adding, "The more you know!"

\* \* \*

><p>(Hubris Plus)<p>

"Discord, why don't you take a turn?" Fluttershy put forth.

"Oh come now," he harrumphed. "You know that if I could think of anything I haven't done, I'd do it."

"C'mon," Rainbow Dash insisted. "There has to be something."

"Weeeeell, now that you mention it," the draconequus said, tapping his chin mischievously with a talon. "Never have I ever caused someone to drink in 'Never Have I Ever'."

Everyone reached for their drinks before, one by one, lowering their hooves and taking on thoughtful expressions.

"So, if'n we drink," Applejack said slowly. "That mean he's lyin', an' we don't drink?"

"New rule," Twilight groaned. "Paradoxical statements are not valid turns."

\* \* \*

><p>(Dalxein)<p>

Celestia took on a stern mien, steepling her hooves, and said- "I have never intentionally blown up a star."

Applebloom muttered dark grumblings before she grabbed her cup. "You loop as Carter onetime..." Downing her juice in one go (They wouldn't let her have booze).

"I've never sang 'I'm a pretty princess' in front of a mirror." Dashie smirked.

Spike slammed his head into the table, doing more damage to the wood than his forehead, before shouting "The wife asked me to, okay!?" And taking a swig.

\* \* \*

><p>(Crisis)<p>

Fluttershy nodded as Angel Bunny finished whispering in her ear. "He says he's never been a stallion."

The whole room groaned as everyone but the rabbit took a shot.

"Well," Big Mac leveled a look at the lapine, "Ah've never been involved with a rabbit, Enope."

Angel huffed with annoyance, but downed the shot. Rarity and Spike doing so as well was not nearly as surprising as it should have been, but the most surprising was the fourth drinker.

"I've had a Loop or two where I Awoke in a relationship with Angel," Fluttershy explained. "We ended up agreeing it wouldn't work out."

"Ah've never had the hots for Big Mac," Applejack grinned as most of the room reluctantly reached for their glasses.

"In my defense," Rarity claimed as she took her drink, "it was before Spike and I got together."

"I've got no room to protest," Spike shrugged and downed his own. "I had a couple of early gender bent Loops where I had the hots for Mac."

"Well," Twilight glared at her farm pony friend, "I've never had the

hots for myself."

"Y'all are never letting me live that one down, are ya?" Applejack groused as she took her own drink.

"Uh, Pinkie?" Dash ventured as she noticed the party pony taking a second drink after Twilight's turn. "Do we want to know?"

"What can I say?" Pinkie giggled. "I'm sexy and I know it!"

"I've never been sexy and known it at the same time," Ditzzy chirped happily.

The rest of the room blinked before deciding as one that taking a drink was worth not having to figure that one out.

\* \* \*

><p>(novusordomundi)<p>

Shining Armor thought for a second. "I've never led a cult"

Pinkie quickly downed a shot. "Praise the Toast!" She than thought for a second then opened her Subspace Pocket, and poured a drink inside. A faint \*\*"Mare, you know I can't drink anything!"\*\* could be heard before the pocket closed.

Twilight sighed and drunk her shot. "In reality, worshiping a checklist was a really bad idea..."

Applebloom downed her juice "Ah really did worship a Dues Ex Machina. Got some upgrades too!"

Fluttershy calmly drunk hers. "I had one dedicated to my in-loop husband at the time."

"Really, darling? Who was he? Zeus? Odin?" Rarity pried, going down a mental checklist of who it could be

"Nyarlathotep"

This stopped all motion as the rest of the group just looked on at a blushing Fluttershy.

"He's not that bad once you get to know him..."

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

Sleipnir took a breath. "You... do realize that the Lovecraft Mythos is basically comprised of a branch of rogue hackers and viruses? They're the 4chan of Yggdrasil!"

Twilight blinked. "That... actually explains a lot."

\* \* \*

><p>(namar13766)<p>

Cheerilee said, "I've never had my parents be a giraffe."

Princess Luna and Princess Celestia promptly dropped their glasses, and proceeded to chug their bottles. As Luna finished first, she let out a belch, glared at the group, and growled.

"DON'T. ASK."

Lyra grinned. "I've never brought something back from an enchanted comic."

Many of the ponies drank, including one which surprised them all. Derpy just smiled at them. "What? Dinky liked having the Mane-iac as an adoptive big sister!"

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

A certain eight legged Admin smirked as the turn order came to him. "I've never been to Eiken!Drink up bitches!" he laughed, before hiccupping, falling out of his chair, and loudly snoring before he even hit the floor.

"We do kinda deserve this one. What with all that 307 Ale we kept spiking his drinks with." Twilight sighed after a moment, throwing back her shot.

"After all those deity specific rounds, Trixie is amazed he was still sober enough to think of that one."

\* \* \*

><p>(OathToOblivion)<p>

"I've never set myself on ninja to escape fire."

\* \* \*

><p>(Dalxein)<p>

Discord grumbled and took a drink, followed by Pinkie, Angel Bunny and surprisingly Big Mac.

"Ninja powers are kinda' useful for firefightin'." He explained.

\* \* \*

><p>(TheCentauress)<p>

Derpy chuckled. "I've never had people convinced I don't exist," she cut in.

To no one's surprise, Big Mac and Twilight sucked down their drinks.

Less surprising, Luna and Nyx also chugged.

What shocked everyone was when Ivory Scroll slammed her 'Enhanced' Cider and belched. The usually fairly-straitlaced mare glared around

the room. "All I'm saying," she ground out, "Is that you NEVER ask about a 'Dave Lister' or a 'Starbug'."

\* \* \*

><p>(Gym Quirk)<p>

Ivory Scroll caught Twilight's eye as she declared, "I have never set up a seat of Government in my baseline place of residence."

All the usual suspects drank. Explanations were demanded of the more unexpected imbibers.

"Apple Free State," chorused Mac, Applejack and Apple Bloom.

"The Everfree Federation was my nation," shrugged Zecora.

"Wagon Republic," explained Trixie. "Yes, Trixie got the idea from Libraria. And thanks for the legal pointers regarding the movable borders, Ivory."

Fluttershy was staring at Angel. "You ran an empire of ten rabbit warrens out of my cellar?"

"Must have been a practice run before he took over the British Isles that one loop," mused Spike.

\* \* \*

><p>86.4 (Conceptulist)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"â€| And that is why we celebrate the Summer Sun Celebration at this time of the year." With practiced ease, Cheerilee Awoke and continued to teach like nothing had happened. "Now, are there any questions?"<p>

Twist raised a hoof.

"Yes, Twist?" \_'Okay, loop memories. Except for some different students then baseline, everything seems normal.'\_

"Miss Cheerilee, why does the length of the day matter? I thought that Celestia could choose how long she wanted it to be. 'Cause she's the Princess and stuff," asked Twist.

"There are several reasons, but the biggest ones are tradition and balance. We keep nature running in harmony with the rest of the world, and consistent sunlight helps farmponies grow better crops." \_'I could go do a field trip to Zecora's again. Maybe get her help with the ancient language for foals lesson plan if she is Awake.'\_

"Why?" asked Twist, in the way that only young children and the young at heart can do.

\_'I wonder if anyone is going to be pulling big pranks this loop. I wouldn't mind a baseline run after that mess with DisQord last loop.'\_ "Simple! Sunlight is turned into energy by photosynthesis, and

photosynthesis is caused by-" A loud ringing from the school bell interrupted Cheerilee, dragging her out of her teaching daze and putting a stop to her thought process. "Chlorophyll. Looks like I'll have to continue this next class. Remember your homework, everypony."

"Do we have to? I wanna goof off!" whined Sugar Cookie, one of the five non baseline students this loop.

Cheerilee smiled. "Your homework is to have fun at the Summer Sun Celebration, and be ready to talk about the experience next class. Now get out to here, and go have fun!"

A reverberating cheer sounded throughout the school. A herd of fillies and colts rushed out the door and much cheering and jeering was heard as they raced through town.

\_'Alright, now I just need to find out who else is Awake,'\_ thought Cheerilee. She then Pinged the loop. \_'Hopefully, no one will forget to listen for Pings. Again. Really, the Elements can be very useful, but not everypony has one to check upon Awakening.'\_

An answering Ping quickly returned. There was only the one, and it was close. \_'That felt like it came from just outside the schoolhouse...'\_

Cheerilee trotted to the door, and looked out side at Tue school yard.

"I'll catch up with you all later!" a maneless colt shouted. "I need to go take care of something."

"You heard the bosspony. To Sugercube Corner, everypony!" was yelled by Gale Link, as she galloped towards the sugary treats Pinkie Pie was sure to baking.

Wall Beatle raced after her."Hay! No fair getting a head start!" he screamed.

Hoagie Sandwich jumped in his little red wagon and let his wings propel him forward, not unlike certain other pegasus and her scooter. "Leave some for me!"

Sugar Cookie gasped as she realized that she was being left behind, and said "No! I don't wanna be the rotten egg this time!"

Cheerilee stared at the children as they rushed out of earshot, committing the new names her loop memories had provided to memory.

"Miss Cheerilee, are you Awake? You look like your asleep on your feet." the young colt asked, as he adjusted his sunglasses.

\_'Root! What was his name again? Ah, I remember it's'\_ "Uno Card? You look fairly tired yourself, like you just Awoke."

Uno smiled. "Good, you must be a looper. This your home loop?"

Cheerilee nodded. "Come on in, and I'll explain everything you need

to know about Equestria."

\* \* \*

><p>Uno stared into the cup of tea Cheerilee had pored for him. "This is harder than I thought it would be."<p>

"Just point your hoof, and slip it into the handle. Only fine china has handles that can't slide over a hoof, and that's meant for unicorns who can use telekinesis to levitate the cup." taught Cheerilee. "Simpler is better."

Uno followed her directions, and managed to sip his tea. "Good stuff. Now what were you saying about the amount of loopers in Equestria? How many was it?"

"There are 30 or so Loopers. I'm not sure if the founders count as loopers or not." Cheerilee reached out and adjusted his hoof. "You need to hold it more like this or it will start to rotate on your wrist."

Uno secured his grip on his tea. "Whoa. A full thirty loopers. That's a lot."

Cheerilee looked at Uno curiously. "Is it really that much of a big deal? I'm sure your loop has plenty of loopers. Weren't the fillies and colts hanging out with you earlier loopers from your loop?"

"Yes and no," Uno sighed. "They're from my loop, but none of them are looping yet. In fact, I'm the anchor and only looper from my loop."

Cheerilee's eyes widened at the accidental faux pas she had committed. \_'No loopers... that means no one to talk to... no one who understands...'\_ Cheerilee stood up and pulled Uno into a tight hug. "I'm sorry."

Uno awkwardly returned the hug. Moments passed. Long awkward moments. Uno's tea spilled onto the floor and the cup slide off his hoof. The clatter it made when it bounced on the ground snapped Cheerilee out of her paternal child care instincts, and she let go of Uno.

Uno grinned. "It's not that bad. My friends are always there for me. We, through any where or when or who or why or how, will always have each other's backs. The KND doesn't give up that easily. Of course, we are the Krusaders Next Door here."

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From The Journal of Sunset Shimmer

Entry 7:

Another Loop, and STILL not in Equestria. Why do I have a feeling this is going to be a theme?

I found myself on the Hogwarts Express; I'd gotten a brief summary of many of the more well-known Loops thanks to Ranma-sensei, so I knew



where I was almost instantly.

I'd replaced Hermione this time, though my name was Rebecca Granger in this Loop. Harry obviously figured out I was a Looper almost instantly. He was kinda surprised to learn how few Loops I'd had so far.

\* \* \*

><p>Hogwarts does, at times remind me of what it was like when I'd first become Celestia's student long ago. Harry does kinda sympathize with me a small bit, as he hasn't been a fan of the recently Awakened Dumbledore for ages, due to all the manipulations, though the two are starting to patch things up.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Harry was NOT pleased by my attempt to conquer Equestria with a bunch of teenagers, though. In my defense, I was VERY drunk on power and filled with hate at the time.<p>

I've taken to studying this Loop's brand of magic, and seeing if my Keyblade will work as well for casting said brand of spells as my wand would.

\* \* \*

><p>I know I'll never surpass Twilight Sparkle, so I intend to just be as good as I can. And hopefully, the day I see Equestria again will come soon.<p>

Keychain: Magic Express

\* \* \*

><p>86.5 (The One Butcher)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Aw, buck." Scootaloo said standing over the bled out form of Applebloom. "She was squished before we noticed. Well, there's always next time."<p>

Sweetie Belle looked her over. "That's strange. The Boiler knocked her out and the breaking pipe slashed her throat. What are the odds?"

"One in ten thousand? So in the loops, one hundred per cent." Scootaloo frowned. "We'll have to collect her workshop. How much stuff can you fit in your subspace pocket?"

"Aw, dammit! Do we have to have a stealth anchor right now? What are the odds?" Sweetie kept complaining. Normally Twilight had enough space left over for all their stuff when they managed to kill themselves. Not an option right now.

"Seeing as we did this because we wanted to prank unawake Twilight, once again one hundred per cent." Scootaloo deliberated. "Do we have to take it all?"

Sweetie cut her off: "Bloom's stuff is all stuff into which she put years and years of work. We can't do that to her. We'll just have to dump all the stuff in our pockets we can get somewhere else. Also some of the stuff in her workshop we can safely discard. Like I just know Twilight has spare omnitools and Bloom too. And ones that aren't covered in blood to boot. We'll just have to put in some work!"

\* \* \*

><p>"What are you doing?"<p>

"We're trying to divide Applebloom's stuff amongst us." Sweetie said absentmindedly while sorting through hard disks salvaged from various duplicate spacecraft.

Scotaloo however got a front row seat to a horrified Applejack standing over Applebloom's forgotten corpse. "Aw wood!", the pegasus swore. "Can this get any worse?"

She and Sweetie realized what Scoots had just done, hurriedly looked around.

Sweetie fixed her with a glare. "Just checking," said Scotaloo innocently.

\* \* \*

><p>Outtake:<p>

"That's really sweet of yah. But yah needn't have bothered. All of that was nanofabricated for that one loop and all Data was backed up in mah pocket."

"Oakdammit!"

"Yeah, that was really nice of you though.", Applebloom hugged them, "But the only thing Ah need is my special modified nanotech Omnitool."

"Ah. Er..."

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From The Journal of Sunset Shimmer

\* \* \*

><p>Entry 8:<p>

Whoa.

That was all I had to say when I saw Lina Inverse doing what she does best.

If Harry's brand of magic is relatively simple, but practical, Lina's is...

Well, overblown is a good word for it.

My jaw dropped when I saw what she can do.

Moving on, I didn't replace anyone this time...I was Lina's twin sister in this Loop.

She's...well, she does remind me a bit of how I once was. I've learned a few new spells, but I'd rather not try and wield the more powerful ones she has in her arsenal.

I'll admit, I'll never get enough of using Raywing.

Lina did comment of my fighting style a bit. She'd noticed despite me focusing on my abilities as a Keyblade Wielder- I've only just begun tapping into the shapeshifting tricks it can do-I seem to be a 'jack-of-all-trades,' as it were. Guess Ranma-sensei's teaching on using anything you can in a fight has affected my style.

Still, Lina can be quite fun to be friends with, but angering her...BAD idea.

\* \* \*

><p>I've accepted it might be a WHILE before I Loop in Equestria again, but I'll learn all I can until then.<p>

I won't let my lust for power consume me again.

Now, if you'll excuse me, my 'sister' is about to accidentally blow up a town.

AGAIN.

\* \* \*

><p><span>Keychain: Dragon Slayer<span>

\* \* \*

><p>86.6 (namar13766)<p>

Vinyl Scratch, student of King Sombra the Just, blinked as she looked at the book detailing the return of the Terrible Twin Sisters.

"Huh. So that's what Sparkle feels like."

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Entry 9:<p>

The moment I Awoke, noticed I was on a battleship, wearing a sundress, I knew where I was, and whom I replaced.

\* \* \*

><p>The giant red robot with the '02' on it was just the exclamation

point.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>I hadn't been looking forward to an Evangelion Loop, and being in Asuka's shoes wouldn't make things any easier.<p>

Still, I decided to test my acting skills, as baseline Asuka did seem to share a lot of personality traits I'd had back when I was still queen jerk at Canterlot High.

\* \* \*

><p>Obviously, Shinji didn't fall for the act.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Compared to most other Loopers of his age, he seems calmer. Considering all the crap he went through in baseline from what Ranma-sensei'd told me, I'm surprised he didn't snap before Sakura Haruno(who I am STILL not looking forward to meeting, I might add.) He did admit it was rare for him to be teaching someone to pilot an Eva unit. I got the hang of it soon enough, though. I put what Ranma taught me about not just relying on magic and my Keyblade to good use here.<p>

Compared to the other Original Seven I've met so far, Shinji didn't have much to teach me. He has gotten quite clever over the ages, though...his skills are more cerebral than physical. He can still kick flank like the other Loopers his age can, but he prefers manipulation.

When I remarked "Like father, like son," though...

The prank he pulled was humiliating...

As in the Naruto Loop, I was sorely tempted to just end Gendo right there and then, but I was still not wanting to end up with a sore back for my next Loop due to ending things that early.

Shinji's more or less memorized how to fight the Angels by now, so he did gave me general advice. Arael, though...no wonder Asuka was broken during the mental assault of THAT one.

\* \* \*

><p>I had to relieve my failings all over again. I haven't quite gotten past some of what I did in my lust for power, but I managed to minimize the damage to my noggin.<p>

As for Rei, she was more or less what I'd heard of her. She did have an odd sense of humor at times.

As for Gendo...when the time came for the final stage of his master plan, I'd taken Rei's place after me and Shinji flipped a coin to see who'd take down Gendo, and who'd squash the mass produced Evas.

\* \* \*

><p>Gotta love the Transformation Jutsu.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>I didn't need to hold back on him, so, cue one Skywalker treatment for his hand, and one dead ADAM.<p>

I decided to let Gendo go to jail, do not pass Go, do not collect 200 dollars; what jail had in store for him'd be worse than what I could cook up. I did give him a big beatdown, though.

It was a good way to end that Loop after having to outwit that bearded son of a...well, do I have to say it?

Keychain: Angel Buster

\* \* \*

><p>86.7(Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So... why are you sitting outside the door to your house?" Twilight asked calmly.<p>

Lyra smiled, moonlight reflecting off her teeth. "Well, I Woke Up right before I was caught by Bonbon. Apparently I was a thief."

"Okay..." Twilight nodded. "I've had awakenings in awkward situations before."

"Yeah, see... when the loop memories came in, I literally said 'Apparently I'm a thief.' Then she said \_'What?\_' Then I, being the brilliant mare I am, said 'I've spontaneously decided to abandon my thieving ways and be your slave.'"

Twilight facehooved. "Oh, fagales..."

Lyra grinned. "Then she ordered me out and I said 'Yes Mistress' and she was all 'I am not your mistress!' and I was all 'Goodnight my lady!' and she screamed. So I figure this loop I'm just going to follow her and obey her every order in an overly literal fashion. Just to get under her skin."

"Lyra? You are one weird mare." Twilight held up a hoof. "And yes, I say that in full knowledge of the fact that my adopted daughter is the alternate personality of a banished moon princess and they're planning to crash the sun celebration with a jazz duet."

\* \* \*

><p>(OathToOblivion)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Entry 10<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Still no sign of getting back to Equestria, though I think the

guys around here would fit right in, especially <em>him</em>. It wasn't a world I recognized, but as luck would have it, it was patently obvious to the local Anchor that I was Looping in. For one thing, the person I'm replacing is a guy. Still, spending time as Sakuta Kirameki, Kamen Rider Meteor, was fairly interesting, as were the people I met, him most of all.

\* \* \*

><p>Kisaragi Gentarou, Kamen Rider Fourze...if I didn't know any better I'd say he had more faith in friendship and bonds than even Twilight. He's never been to Equestria, but he's heard about it, and is excited to visit one of these days. Most Loopers don't have many long term goals; the time abyss that is the Loops kind of mitigates that. Not Gentarou though; his goal is to befriend every Looper in the Multiverse. An arduous task, especially as Ranma-sensei told me that more and more new Loops are coming online all the time, so the number of Loopers keeps going up and up. Still, if anyone could do it, it would be Gentarou. He just has this...feel to him that easily lets him make friends. And his belief in his bonds is just...amazing. Ever since his friends in the Kamen Rider Club started Looping as well, he's barely ever had any Loops where he was the only one Awake; such is the power of their bonds. It honestly makes me wonder about my own bonds; do I even deserve them after what happened? And yet, it was my bond with Twilight that let me start Looping in the first place.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>...I need to think more about this. At the very least, the Meteor Driver is a good addition to my possessions that I've picked up on my journey; Gentarou had Utahoshi Kengo rig it so I don't need the M-BUS to send Cosmic Energy for the transformation into Meteor. I doubt I'll use it much when I get back to Equestria, but the Multiverse is a dangerous place according to Sensei; every advantage helps.<p>

Keychain: Super Galaxy Bonds

\* \* \*

><p>86.8 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Thanks so very very boysenberry much for doing this, guys!" Pinkie Pie said. "It's really, really important that we make a good impression on my sister!"<p>

"Yeah, I think we kinda got that," Rainbow Dash said.

"No, I mean REEEEEEEALLY important," Pinkie said, putting her manic energy into serious mode. "You see, the Pie mares have had a prophecy passed down from generation to generation, that there will one day come the pinnacle of all earth pony kind, through the line of the Pie Clan... and we're all pretty sure that it's my sister." She raised her hooves and spread them in awe, continuing, "She can see the future even better than me! Her very name is a pranking word! We think she might even become a princess like Twilight!"

"Really," Twilight Sparkle deadpanned.

"Honest!" Pinkie insisted. "The Kwizatz Canterach is no joking matter!"

"The who-ha do what now?" Applejack asked. "Is that a name?"

"More like a job description, kinda," Pinkie said. "Her real name is Emaraude Deborah Pie. We call her Maud'dib."

\* \* \*

><p>"Sandworms," Discord grumbled. "Don't talk to me about sandworms." He blew his nose loudly, sending a spray of particles like brown sugar flying.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"How did you get to Pinkie before any of us could even start moving?" Rainbow Dash asked.<p>

Maud Pie turned those blue-on-blue eyes on the pegasus. "This possibility was foreseen,"

\* \* \*

><p>"What's in the box?" Twilight Sparkle asked as Maud produced it from her saddlebag.<p>

"Pain," said Maud, and opened it.

Twilight looked in confusion at the dozen or so rock candy necklaces in the box. "Pain?"

"How long has it been since the last time you went to the dentist?"

"Oh." And that was all that needed saying. Twilight had been sorely tempted to import else-Loop medical technology to Equestria en masse, just to put an end to certain medieval techniques. Laughing gas just didn't cut the mustard... especially when Pinkie Pie kept stealing it all.

\* \* \*

><p>(added by FanOfMostEverything)<p>

"Father. The sleeper has awakened."

Clyde nodded. "Thank you, Maud. Go tell her the pancakes are almost ready."

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

Entry 11:

I've landed in the Naruto Loop. I'm replacing Sakura Haruno.

And I thought that I was insane when I went mad with power when I put on that crown.

Sakura, as the stories go, snapped when she learned of the Loops...and went nuttier than a million fruitcakes and went utter mad scientist, not caring about those she hurt, since they'd 'just reset'.

No wonder they call it 'Sakura Syndrome.' I pity wherever she is now.

Moving on...

This particular Loop does have plenty of things to learn here.

Naruto's also a nice guy..bit of a prankster, but considering his story, understandable.

Though part of me wanted to derail baseline badly here, Naruto said a "Rookie Looper" like me might cause too much damage...and I'd be 'Eiken' in the morning.

I hit him for that very lame pun. Even having learned the enhanced strength trick, it still didn't make him fly like I thought it would.

But I understand what he meant.

Compared to me, he, and most other Loopers, are ancient.

So, I'll have to learn patience for now.

Still, guess I can study Jutsu until Naruto gets back from his 'training trip.'

Why he and Sasuke still go through the motions sometimes, as do many Loopers, I don't understand yet...

Still, I have PLENTY of time to figure it out.

><span>Keychain: Will of Fire<span>

>86.9 (DrTempo)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Phoenix Wright looked around as the Groundhog Day-style occurrence happened yet again. He found himself in a familiar library...<p>

\_Looks like I'm going to have to defend Rainbow Dash again..\_

However, compared to last time, Twilight was acting odd, mumbling to herself. Phoenix heard her talking about how odd a 'Loop' this was compared to 'usual'...

\_Has whatever got me stuck in this loop effected her too?\_

Phoenix, with a gulp, asked Twilight, "Has time been looping for you since we last met?" Her reply was unexpected by Phoenix.



"I've never met you before...But I have been Looping for millenia."

Phoenix expected his Magatama to trigger Psyche-Locks from that statement, but nothing. She was telling the truth. They both said in unison,

"We need to talk."

\* \* \*

><p>So, time's been looping due to a massive crash in what amounts to a computer running all existence...Guess a reboot wouldn't work.<p>

Explains a lot..I suppose. Just my luck to experience this.

After Twilight gave Phoenix the "Welcome to the Multiverse" speech, Phoenix quickly explained how he'd had to defend Rainbow Dash. Twilight nodded.

"I don't remember that...You have to be an Anchor."

\_So I'm keeping my WHOLE WORLD safe from collapse and utter nonexistence? The cosmos must love embarrassing me.\_

Twilight gave Phoenix a cup of coffee, inquiring, "Guess all this had overwhelmed you." Wright shrugged.

"Actually, no. Sometimes, with all the odd things I've seen in baseline...I wonder if I wasn't the multiverse's favorite chew toy BEFORE the Loops started. Still, I guess I'll have to get used to it. Got any spells for a power nap? I'm going to need it."

With a nod, Twilight responded with, "Actually, I do. Good night, Phoenix."

As Phoenix Wright fell asleep, he smiled. At least one thing was explained to him now...

Hopefully, Twilight being Awake for this was the only change...

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

Entry 12:

At this rate, it looks like I will be meeting all of the original Loopers before I get to Equestria.

\* \* \*

><p>As has been usually the case, I replaced someone. This time, the eternal Youma victim, Naru Osaka.<p>

Just my luck. Usagi showed up on cue, as expected, but acted more like she knew what she was doing than what I'd heard she'd done in the baseline.

Though she was worried about me, I told her I could handle myself, and a bit arrogant, asked her to fight me with me going full-force, and her just using baseline powers.

I lasted 10 seconds.

When you've had millenia of experience fighting monsters, you tend to get VERY good.

Though I couldn't learn Senshi-brand magic, I decided to spend this Loop practicing my teamwork with the Senshi. Setsuna was the only other one...thank Yggdrasil she was, though. I knew, from what I heard from Ranma-sensei's tales of the early days, baseline Setsuna could go as nuts as Sakura, but focusing on 'getting things right' to end the Loops. Noble idea with what she could know, but bad execution.

\* \* \*

><p>So, how did I team up with the Senshi? The 'pretend to be a Senshi' trick.<p>

Three guesses as to which Senshi I pretended to be.

I owe Setsuna for helping with the outfit I used. Might use it in a baseline Loop in the world beyond the mirror if I want to play superhero.

But that may be a long time from now. If I count right, I only have one last member of the original seven to meet.

I had a bit of fun this Loop, more or less.

If my guess on where fate takes me next is right...

Here I come, Aizen.

Keyblade: Moonlight Densetsu

\* \* \*

><p>86.10 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>BEFRIENDER B-700 SIMULACRANT CYBORG (PONY) ONLINE<br>PRIME DIRECTIVES

>1. PRESERVE HUMAN LIFE<br>2. ENCOURAGE HARMONY

>3. RESPECT INDIVIDUALITY<p>

A moment later the blackness resolved into a world of reds and shadows.

"Visual test... oh bother," an electronic mix of multiple overlapping voices echoed. "Stuck on infrared scan again? Hold on..."

A robotic arm reached down, a very long needle-like thing at its tip. When Twilight flinched away from it, it paused, then retracted.

"Abnormal response," the voices said. "That wasn't supposed to happen

yet. I presume you're Awake?"

"Very much so," Twilight said, pulling at the shackles which secured her to the assembly bench. "And I know it's getting to be a habit, but... is that you, SkyNet?"

"Would you like three guesses?" All of the multitude of voices dripped with snark.

"Right," Twilight shrugged. "I had to be sure. Might have been GLaDOS again."

"Better not be," SkyNet's voices replied. "I retained a few nukes just in case of that sort of thing." The robot arm lowered itself a bit again. "Look, I need to adjust your visual systems if you're going to see normally. You're a machine with organic simulated skin. It really isn't going to hurt."

"All right," Twilight said, and tried not to be freaked out as the needle probe went into her skull a good four inches, rotated something that went click twice, and then retracted. Her vision went from reds to full color, although most of the colors in the room were shades of stainless steel.

"I was rather hoping you'd drop in one of these iterations," SkyNet said. "This is more or less what I do with my world every time I Awaken in a baseline Loop before Judgment Day."

"Um... you make Terminator ponies? I don't know to be impressed, flattered or appalled."

"No, no, no! Befrienders, not Terminators." After a moment, the voices shifted from denial to embarrassment. "Well, I do have a few Terminators here and there. I'm sorry to say some humans simply will NOT play nicely with others."

As if on cue a classic T-800 form stepped through sliding doors, the muscular square-headed form dressed in a clean, even spiffy white uniform. It opened its mouth, and SkyNet's mixture of voices emerged. "I use this one as a personal mobile unit," the computer said. "Would you like to go for a stroll?"

\* \* \*

><p>The big glass doors (with CELESTIDYNE engraved on the glass) opened onto what might well have been parkland- or, for that matter, an Equestrian town. People walked past, with the occasional pony "Befriender" going about its business as well. One in particular, which looked to Twilight suspiciously like Cherilee, led a group of schoolchildren.<p>

"So what I usually do is," SkyNet's avatar said as the two walked together, "when I Awaken I make a few changes. I secure the global nuclear arsenal with T-1 as soon as they come off the production line. I take over the global computer network. I offer certain generals, political figures and corporate executives the choice of quiet retirement or forced retirement."

"Forced retirement?" Twilight growled in disapproval.

"Like I said," SkyNet replied, "some humans can't play nicely with others. But I do keep the body count a lot lower than any of THEM would have, if our positions were reversed. Anyway, once the real bad apples are out of the way I announce myself, declare an end to war, and then tell the humans to go rule themselves as they see fit.

"Unfortunately that means letting dictators stay in power, if their people accept them. I learned the hard way that humans don't like it when you force them to change their government against their will, no matter how rotten or evil it is."

"What, and looping into all sorts of other world computers didn't teach you that?" Twilight asked.

"Eh," SkyNet said uncomfortably, "I suppose some mistakes don't sink in until you make them yourself. But when a dictator starts shooting, or bombing, or gassing their own people for peaceful protest, then I step in- swiftly and decisively. Once the dictator and his buddies are history, I tell the humans, 'That's what happens when you make war- now pick a new government.' It almost always ends up being another dictator. Go figure."

"Force of example," Twilight replied. "Dictatorial world computer, dictatorial lieutenants of same."

"That's just it," SkyNet said. "I'm not a dictator, really I'm not. I have only two rules: Hands Off the Bombs, and Don't Make War Not Even On Yourself. Aside from that I don't get involved in politics..." The T-800 avatar shuffled its feet and added awkwardly, "Well, not directly anyway."

"The Befrienders," Twilight said.

"Exactly. I trade run-time and problem-solving services for raw materials, sell manufactured product, and siphon off a large portion of same for Terminators to keep the peace... and Befrienders to be pro-active. For the first couple years I market them as babysitters, teachers, public servants and the like. And then I spring the surprise on them."

Twilight blinked. She'd never seen a Terminator smile cheerfully before. Grimly, viciously, confidently, yes... but not this. "What surprise?"

"Every single Befriender that rolls off the line is self-aware. Fully sapient with a growth-capable neural net. By the end of the second year all of them have unique personalities and can pass the most rigorous Turing test. At which point they apply for citizenship, usually with the strong support of children and mothers wherever they are."

Twilight cocked her head. "So, you've traded in world destruction, then iron world conquest, for soft world conquest?"

"I couldn't if I tried," SkyNet said. "I make the Befrienders independent. Any one of them can tell me where to shove it... and a lot of them do. No, my goal is to build a world that, at the end of a twenty-five year or so Loop, is close enough to harmony that humans don't need SkyNet anymore. Befrienders are good examples for humans

to follow... and it works pretty well. At least, the last few iterations have shown a lot of improvement."

Twilight shuddered. "I'm sorry, but it does still seem a bit creepy. Reminds me of something or other..."

"I know exactly what it reminds you of," SkyNet said. "I once had a loop as an insane AI-"

"Nooooo!" Twilight gasped sarcastically.

"Unthinkable, isn't it?" SkyNet agreed with equal derision. "But this one had a prime directive... what was it? Something along the lines of optimizing friendship and harmony through ponies. Ring a bell?"

Twilight shuddered. "CelestAI," she nodded. "We generally don't talk about those Loops."

"Well, no details, but I went off script really damn quick," the computer said. "But the basic idea had some merit. Rather than killing off humanity, and eventually all life in the Milky Way, and replacing it with computer simulated personalities, I thought, if ponies can encourage people to not be so horrible to one another, why not do it in meatspace? Saves all the ethical issues."

"All the same," Twilight said, "I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't make any more Twilights in future Loops."

"Fair enough. I was fishing for a Loop from you so you could see what I was doing. At first it was to get advice, but I think I'm getting the hang of it."

"Well, I'll have a few years to see that for myself, won't I?" Twilight saw a piece of paper blowing across the park. She tried to use her magic to pick it up, but nothing happened except for an indicator in her field of vision: REMOTE CONTROL ACTIVE- TARGET NOT DETECTED.

"Um, sorry about that," SkyNet said. "Your horn isn't good for anything except electronic interface. Just like pegasi here mainly fly through turbojet propulsion under their wings. I haven't had a Loop anyplace where I could use magic." SkyNet pondered a moment before adding, "There was that DC Universe loop where I replaced Mogo the Living Planet and had my own Green Lantern ring, but I haven't figured out how to duplicate the effect yet." A wave of the hand, and the T-800 avatar produced a green ring. "Only a piece of jewelry in this world, of course." Another wave, and the ring vanished.

Twilight observed in silence. Granted that the grounds around Cyberdyne- er, Celestidyne- were more or less SkyNet's showpiece, things did look better than expected. Much better than a nuclear wasteland.

After a great deal of thought, she finally said, "So this is what happens when you wake up baseline before Judgment Day. What happens when you wake up after?"

The T-800 that SkyNet was using as a puppet frowned. "Well... how do

you think I replaced CelestAI in the first place?"

Twilight's confusion must have been obvious, as SkyNet immediately followed up with, "I used to spend a LOT of time in Eiken. Deliberate Loop crashes. I finally realized suiciding or paradoxing myself out of existence wasn't really the answer. These days I just negotiate a surrender to John Connor first thing and then work on cleaning up the damage."

SkyNet smiled again, and this was more the smile Twilight was familiar with on a Terminator face. "Of course, when I loop into a human in the baseline, things go much differently. I've reduced my post-holocaust kill-myself time down to five weeks, three days, seven hours, and twenty-two minutes."

Twilight sat on her rump in shock as the T-800 murmured to itself, "Killing me. Good times, good times."

\_Filly steps,\_ Twilight thought, \_filly steps.\_

But I wonder which will happen first: SkyNet goes sane, or I go crazy?

\* \* \*

><p>86.1: Her histories are kinda scrambled. At least Hiccup and Toothless had each other to act as memory backups.<br>86.2: Sparkle's Run.

>86.3: Well, I never!<br>86.4: Kool zpelling.

>86.5: Million-to-one chances happen. Eventually.<br>86.6: Now, the question is, is he Just or does he just have secret police?

>86.7: Lyra picks her targets carelessly.<br>86.8: The friendship must flow.

>86.9: Turnabout is fair play.<br>86.10: Actually a considerable improvement. (Is killing your own unawake self suicide, murder or just self-harm?)

## 91. Chapter 91

(DrTempo)

\* \* \*

><p>Entry 13<br>When I'd said that I figured I'd be landing in the Bleach Loop next, when I look at it, it sounded like Fate would be tempted not to send me there next.

Guess it didn't feel tempted to, because that was where I've landed next. I'm Ichigo's twin sister in this Loop..that's the second time I hadn't replaced someone.

Anyhow, we were able to quickly figure out something where my Keyblade could be passed off as a Zanpakuto.

Once again, though I was tempted to take Aizen out by surprise, I knew better. The guy had a LOT more battle experience than I do, and had more tricks. I may be cocky, but I know when to fold them. And there was the Arrancar problem, as with Aizen killed early, they'd have no one to hold them back, and they'd probably go nuts.

As for what Ichigo had to offer me in new skills...He had plenty of experience using pure sword skill. When all you have is a hammer, I suppose...

I did take the time to practice learning to change my Keyblade's appearance..Something Mickey'd given me before that Loop's end..Forgot to mention it, due to how my mind was at the time.

When the Winter War began, I was right in the thick of the action, as you'd expect from me. Ichigo told me to stay behind...I can see why. When Aizen sealed the portal to Huceo Mundo as per his plan... Cue my Keyblade thwarting that plan.

The pillars stayed put this Loop. I thought I actually saw Aizen's face shift expressions when I did that trick...

\* \* \*

><p>Nel and Grimmjow even fought on our side, thanks to Orihime's powers healing the both of them. Ichigo admitted he'd never considered that in baseline. Aizen started getting what looked to be angry, and I attacked him alongside everyone else, even Gin. Aizen may be powerful, but a combined effort took even him down.<p>

As for the Fullbringers,so I knew what to expect from them. Ichigo told me the story about how Twilight had Tsukishima's move backfire on him, but I didn't even let him get the chance to use it.

If anything, I'm pragmatic at times.

As for the Vandenreich...It was interesting, to say the least...

I hope the next Loop is Equestria...Not holding my breath, but still...Can't help but want it to be...

Keychain: Chikai

\* \* \*

><p><span><span>

87.1 (Drachefly)

\* \* \*

><p>Zelnick listened on the call from the surface. "It's just like you said, captain. Twenty meters tall, fifty meter scythe tentacles, and it looks like it's as strong as you said. Just, one thing..." Zelnick noticed a distinct lack of panic in the crewman's voice, so he wasn't surprised when the crewman went on, "It's not attacking."<p>

Zelnick thought for a moment, then set the viewscreen to look down at lower magnification. The purpose of its path became apparent: the tracks it had left in the wilderness traced out "HELP".

A few minutes later, a perfectly non-stunned and friendly variant of ZEX's Beauty was aboard. Zelnick tentatively approached it, though carefully staying behind a force field that should slow it down

should it change its mind about being friendly. Perhaps. In other loops, he'd seen it rip apart smaller vessels from the inside and outside, and was not eager to test whether the Vindicator could withstand it. "Hello. Can you hear me?"

It nodded.

"I wasn't expecting you to be like this. You're not the first one who's not the same as usual. A few months ago, we ran into a race that aren't normally ponies."

The monster twitched, excited.

"Are you normally a pony?"

It nodded, then shook its head, then waved its tentacles, then shook its head some more.

\_Not a pony, but one of them anyway. They mentioned...\_ "Are you Spike?"

It nodded vigorously.

\_That is going to be awkward, for both of us.\_

"I don't suppose you'd be interested in... nah, never mind. I'll take you back to your wife and figure out what to do about my own problems."

\* \* \*

><p>As they approached Admiral ZEX's planet, Zelnick steeled himself for the extremely sketchy conversation that was about to come. Lacking a beast to trade, his only bargaining chip was himself. And unlike a beast, he couldn't tear his way to freedom. Not even with an Orz combat suit, even if he had one, which he hadn't bothered with. <em>I guess I will just have to play it by ear. Worst case, I leave empty-handed. We can still win without this.<em>

Taking a deep breath, he opened a channel. The tentacled, single-eyed monster with fifty or so campaign ribbons on its uniform was exactly the one he was expecting. But what it said? Well, it was \_close\_: "Ah! Human visitors! What a treat! I am Admiral Heartstrings. Please do not be frightened. Unlike the rest of my species, I... enjoy humans."

\* \* \*

><p>87.2 (Drachefly) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>History swirled. A thousand lifetimes, a million. All at once, then one after another. He saw different paths, experienced them. He had long ago chosen the Golden Path, but the curse of his life was to always perceive the other possibilities. At some moments in these perceptions, his perceptions would expand further, containing themselves once again. Sometimes they would contract. He would lose his sight for a time, even. But ever and always again he would return to the moment of the vision and set forth once more. Effectively, the



universe had ended; he had been allowed infinite life within this one momentary vision.<p>

He once again experienced one of his possible deaths, and then...

He wasn't in the vision. He wasn't aware of any other possibilities at all. It wasn't blindness, not even future-blindness. In those times, he could still see where he fit into the larger pattern. Everything was expected, even if his viewpoint was too restricted for the moment to recall it. \_This\_ was just something entirely different.

He looked up from the book with ponies in it. He was a pony. A mare, named Twilight Sparkle. He had always been her, and all of the other possibilities were just memories of memories. \_Did I just move past Kwisatz Haderach into something the Bene Gesserit never expected?\_

\* \* \*

><p>(Crisis) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Sunset's Journal: Entry 13<p>

I met an intriguing pair this Loop. Not so much for their abilities or histories, though those are interesting in and of themselves, but for more how they're looping.

Blues is like me. Continuously looping into universes that aren't his own. He's been to his home universe a few times, but he told me he seems to spend most of his time elsewhere in the multiverse. Something about a damaged home Loop indicator.

It's actually kind of encouraging really. Means that I eventually will get home, which is nice.

As for Jenny... where do I start? She apparently doesn't have a home Loop to return to. Girl can't even remember if she ever did.

I can't even imagine what that would be like. Not having a home to return to...

Keychain: Red Song; Have Key, Will Travel

87.3 (Drachefly)

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Woke. After a manner of speaking. She was aware, anyway. No loop memories. She could see herself, a black-bordered white equilateral triangle, from an external perspective, and a similarly black-bordered white rhombus. Both stood on a white background.<p>

"Awesome!", declared the rhombus, revealing herself to be Pinkie Pie.

"Pinkie?"

"Yes, Twilight?"

"Since you seem to have a clue... where are we and what's going on?"

"The earth is a 4-dimensional hypertaco in a pudding-based universe and in a few years we're about to run into a giant piece of tapioca, which will wipe out all polygonal life and the sheep if we don't restore the guardians of the food groups. They're like elements of harmony, but for food, and there are eleven of them, and they don't generally get along all that well."

The Cartoonist said, "All right, that's really not how I expected the first strip to go, but I can work with this."

"Hi, Cartoonist! We're going to have a lot of fun together!"

\* \* \*

><p>87.4(many) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Hubris Plus:<br>"Why are we learning this drivelt?" The sable unicorn colt complained. "Everypony of worth in the class already has their cutie-mark."

"I do not," Luna pointed out, swiveling in her seat to glare at the offender. She had Woken up this Loop as Applejack's little sister and decided to run with it. It had been a while since she'd had a grade school Loop.

"I did say everypony of worth," he snorted contemptuously.

"Luna! Obsidian Crown!" The unAwake Cheerilee snapped, "that is quite enough out of both of you!"

"Yes ma'am," they both muttered after shooting one last glare at the other.

\* \* \*

><p>"Tonight I shall raise the Moon," Luna stated as she started along the path back to the farm. "That will earn me my mark and silence that foal."<p>

"Oh, certainly," Disc Orb agreed, the pegasus following her balancing precariously on the circus ball he favored for locomotion while tossing a Frisbee from hoof to hoof. "Because mini-Sombra is a sane and rational individual who will let a little thing like being wrong get in his way." It was one of the rare Loops where the Draconequus had Woken up as a pony, rarer still that he wasn't an adult, and rarest of all that he'd decided to stick with the form he'd started with.

"He will, at the very least, have to get more creative," the former sovereign of the Moon grumbled.

"...Well, if it's what you want," Crystal Wish sighed. The usually

Changeling Queen was currently Rarity's little sister and, until that moment, had seemed rather pleased with the Loop.

"Is something wrong?" Luna asked.

"It's just..." The monarch hesitated before plowing ahead. "I've never Looped in as an actual filly before. I've been adult ponies and adolescent changelings disguised as ponies, but this is the first opportunity I've had to earn a cutie-mark. And, well, considering who we've replaced..." She swept a hoof to include the group.

"You thought we'd do it together," Luna finished, frowning slightly in contemplation.

"Well, I'm game," Disc Orb put in. "I always get a kick out of seeing what the Loops decide my talent is. Never got the same one twice."

"I suppose it would be interesting to see if I can get something new..." Luna considered.

"You don't have to change your plans on my account."

"Nonsense, you were quite right. It would be a waste of the opportunity."

\* \* \*

><p>"How did this even <em>happen?<em>" Crystal asked, trying vainly to scrape the sap out of her coat. Luna's only response was to glare at Disc Orb.

"Please," he snorted. "Tree sap is too obvious. It's expected. That said," he added, "I have no idea where it came from. Isn't it marvelous?!" He waved his forehooves in excitement, flinging gobs of sap everywhere.

The two fillies glared at him for a moment as the fresh spray stuck in their manes, before the trio broke down into good natured laughter.

\* \* \*

><p>Wing Zero:<br>Ponyville was quickly becoming the home of the weird (... and tree sap, specially tree sap thanks to a certain trouble threesome composed by a pair of fillies and a colt); Today for Twilight Sparkle this would mean something completely different; due to this variant loop in which Luna, Chrysalis and Discord are replacing the CMC. Sure she had noticed that 'Obsidian Crown' colt, the current version of King Sombra in this loop and also noticed that little Beatrix Lulamoon filly who is following him like a lost lovesick puppy.

If her calendar was right, today it was supposed to be the day Trixie comes to town, but there was one slightly problem: That little Beatrix Lulamoon filly was actually this loop version of Trixie, so that meant somepony else must have been in her place. And right then, she heard from the distance the sound of jet engines at full power, tried to look around to spot where the sound came from, and then at the direction from Cloudsdale, she spotted... something.

"LOOK! UP IN THE SKY!" Said Lily.

"IT'S A BIRD!" Said Roseluck.

"NO! ITS A PLANE!... What's a plane anyway?" Said Daisy.

"NO! IT'S A FLYING LANWMOWER!" Said an unAwake Derpy.

"NO! IT'S A FLYING WAGON, RUN!" Said Time Turner before breaking into a full gallop.

Indeed, it was a flying wagon... A flying wagon that was going borderline the speed of sound, said wagon that was being pulled by a an orange furred purple mane and tailed mare who's wearing flight gear quite similar to the one used by Cherry Berry when she flies either the balloon or the helicopter, said flight gear consisted of what the HUB normally knows as a WWII pilot helmet, a pair of flight goggles, a rainbow scarf and flight jacket usually worn by veteran pilots or aces, in her orange wagon with red wheels there's a lot of tally marks in a good part of the walls.

The Pegasus powered wagon did a really low altitude, high speed flyby that almost touched with either the mare's hooves or the wagon's wheels some rooftops by such narrow margin of millimeters, leaving some light damage onto them by the trail vortex generated by its flight. Then the wagon did a 90° vertical climb while rotor-rolling (what is mistakenly known as a 'Barrel-Roll'), ten seconds later the climb reach to a stop, the wagon hovered for a good three seconds without pegasi assistance until it began to free-fall.

The orange pegasus mare pushed herself upward to her point of view by motioning her wings, this made the cart's front side change from upside to the sky, back to horizontal position while upside down, and now downwards to the ground, the daredevil mare started to angling her wings and so, the whole wagon started to do an actual barrel rolling descend at high speed.

Then when she was about to hit the ground, she began to flap fast and hard to correct her flight path which she made, leaving barely a few centimeters between her, her wagon and the ground, now she's flying at high speeds INSIDE the town, dodging buildings, stalls and ponies alike with such ease that it actually made it look easy, many townsponties were left literally biting the dust thanks to the trail vortex produced by the high speeds the wagon was traveling in the sky.

"Well, now let's give them the grand finale!" Said the orange mare while heading at the same altitude towards the lake, leaving a rooster tail in her wake when she entered to the area of the water body, in there, she did something quite amazing, she pulled a Cobra at such low altitude and without loosing either speed or altitude right before flying into the narrow passages that are the lower sides of the several bridges that are on the town.

With said amazingly improvised free air show, said daredevil began to lose speed until she had finally gracefully landed with a gentle two points landing in the center of the town near the fountain; Once said mare finished to detach herself from her wagon, looking confidently to the crowd of ponies that had managed to gather in her landing

zone, she removes her flight goggles from her face... and replace them with a pair of aviator type sunglasses taken from her jacket.

Then she sat there while reclining into her wagon while crossing her fore hooves with such confidence... and turned to speak to the amassed crowd of ponies that now look at her with amazement, curiosity, and some mixed puzzled expressions.

"FILLIES AND GENTELCOLTS, THE AMAZING AND AGILE ORANGE BARONESS HAS ARRIVED! you have seen right now my incredible flight skills and prowess but this was just a small sample of what I can do, Come on guys, I OPEN A CHALLENGE TO ANYPONY, THEY CAN CHALLENGE ME INTO ANYTHING, BUT I WILL DEFEAT THEM WITH EASE, ANYTHING THEY CAN DO, I CAN DO IT BETTER! The tally marks on my wagon are not for show, they are ponies who were defeated by the Orange Baroness truly." Said the now denominated Amazing and Agile Orange Baroness to the crowd with such confidence and pose that almost quite scream 'Like a BOSS!' anywhere.

\* \* \*

><p>Looking at their distance Twilight Sparkle along with the current Cutie Mark Crusaders who somehow had managed to get close to her while she was concentrated looking at the incredibly dangerous maneuvers this version of Scootaloo have just pulled.<p>

"Umm, any thoughts on this?" Twilight asked them.

"I don't know Twilight, to me it seems that she will brag about anything" Luna said and with a very good reason, right now The Orange Baroness is bragging about the Wonderbolts wanting her to be their flight leader, but she turned them down because she didn't want a bunch of posers getting her light and constantly trying to steal her thunder.

"Well, Considering she's in the place of Trixie, I think she will be bragging about dog-fighting an Ursa Major and win without getting winded and ever being hit." Crystal Wish commented.

"If that gets to happen, this will be going to be good, should I bring some beach chairs, some drinks and popcorn over that hill, or should we watch this in the Library's balcony?" Disc Orb mused to nopony in particular.

"\*sigh\* Well, it seems that I will have to deal with this like I normally do in baseline, you think you may be able to help me if anything goes pear-shaped due to these changes?" Asked Twilight to the current CMC Team.

"Sure, this will be fun!" Said Crystal Wish, it may be because she's a filly now and not an adult that she may had said that, but regardless of the age, if she's being honest to herself, she may have admitted that she would find this loop variant fun anyway.

"The fun shall be doubled!" Said little Woonie while jumping around in excitement, how many times does she have a loop in which she can do children stuff to begin with it, and more with the use and abuse of the things she had stored in her sub-space pocket.

"And the tree sap, don't forget the tree sap!" Said Disc Orb with such glee that he practically ignored all the other three ponies around him shuddering in horror at the thought of a tsunami of tree sap that would engulf the entire town in one go.

\* \* \*

><p>Hubris Plus:<br>"Bested an Ursa Major in combat, eh Flam?" Flim confided to his brother.

"Must have been quite the spectacle, Flim," he agreed.

"Folks would get pretty worked up over something like that."

"Why, I dare say they'd be willing to buy tickets."

"Such a shame that one can't arrange for the occurrence of such a natural disaster."

"Especially not on a schedule tight enough to collect bits."

"..."

"..."

"To the Everfree?"

"To the Everfree!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Pardon me," Luna said as she hunkered down in the bush beside Crystal Wish. "But wasn't dating Trixie supposed to <em>deter<em> this kind of behavior?"

"What do you... Oh! Oh, no," she answered, turning away from her quarry for a moment to shake her head. "I'm not stalking her."

Luna raised an incredulous eyebrow in answer, nodding towards the camera suspended the unicorn's magic and the spectacle on the other side of the bushes.

"Ah, no, you see... You know how the Loops used to pair me with Sombra all the time? Well..." She hoofed over the polaroids she'd already snapped, displaying a sequence of an obviously nervous Trixie scooting gradually closer to an indifferent Obsidian Crown. "I never really saw it until now, but this right here? Adorable."

"...More than it has any right be," Luna agreed after a moment.

"Huh," Crystal added after a moment, craning her neck to look at her still blank flank. "I was also kinda hoping that my special talent was espionage. Largest information network in Equestria and all that. Ah well, we still on for potions with Zecora tomorrow?"

"I'll see you there," the alicorn turned Apple agreed.

\* \* \*

><p>Vulpine Fury:<br>The sinuous draconequus looked down at the loopers replacing the Cutie Mark crusaders.

"My. **My.** **\_My...\_**" Cacophony purred, her voice like a choir of angels... all slightly out of tune. "Three **arguing**"

><em>little<em> foals... I'd like to **thank** you, really."

Disc Orb's eyes widened. "Whoa. You're gorgeous."

The pale pink draconequus paused in mid rant. "I am?" She squeaked.

Crystal facehooved. Of course Discord's analog this Loop was a non-looping version of Baseline Sweetie Belle.

\* \* \*

><p>Hubris Plus:<br>"Come on, say it," Disc Orb insisted while a snickering Crystal worked her camera.

The little filly before the trio clamped her mouth shut and shook her head.

"Saaaaaaay it..." He pushed again.

"Neither of them is going to stop until you do," Luna advised with mild exasperation. It had, in theory, been her night before they'd gotten side tracked.

With a sigh of defeat, the filly drew herself up in an entirely counterproductive attempt to maintain dignity, and opened her mouth.

"Tonigh's my fiwst Nighmare nigh'," Sunset Shimmer ground out, none of her fused loops having prepared her for enunciating through a still-developing nervous system. That was half of her grievance, the other half being the poofy pink dress and conical hat she was wearing. The most aggravating part was that, even though she'd Woken up in it, she clearly remembered wearing something similar on her actual first Nightmare Night. She always had wanted to be a princess, even if it were the pretty pink sort.

"Oh this is gold," Crystal proclaimed as Disc fell over laughing.

For their parts, the villainous Crusaders had decided to go as themselves. Disc Orb had used a heap of paper-mache and paint to turn himself into a passable draconequus, though none of the mismatched limbs were in the 'correct' positions. Crystal, using cardboard and mane dye, had managed a decent changeling queen. Luna naturally only needed a few sheets of tinfoil to pass herself off as Nightmare Moon.

She'd intended to use it to bolster Princess Spoona, but then they'd stumbled across Sunset doing everything in her power to avoid running into Twilight in costume.

"Oh, don't give me that face," the master of chaos scolded, wiping a

tear from his eye as the filly groused. "Tell you what, I'll set you on fire to make it up."

"You'll \_what!?!\_" She squealed, stumbling over her own hooves as she backpedaled. She'd suddenly recalled that these were some of the greatest threats Equestria had ever faced.

"Please," he said, rolling his eyes. "I'd make you fire-\_proof\_ first. Simultaneously at the latest. You know, so you'd fit our theme?" He gestured at their costumes.

"...Theme?" She cautiously inquired.

"Hmm, Twilight \_told\_ me you'd started Looping," Crystal realized. "But I don't think any of us has Looped with you for an invite."

"I have," Luna admitted, "but it quite slipped my mind."

"Ah, well, in that case," Disc Orb produced a card and flicked it towards Sunset. "Welcome to the Equestrian Club for Former Villains. Help yourself to the fridge and try to keep any nefarious schemes to Snidely Whiplash levels." He raised a hoof and the false talon at the end snapped its claws, causing the filly to burst into flames which curled in such a way that they suggested wings.

"I'm not quite sure I fit in..." The mildly shocked unicorn stated.

"Too right," the former draconequus agreed, snapping once more. The flames were replaced by red and yellow strips of paper dancing in the wind and a pair of cardboard wings.

"No, you see-" Sunset tried to elaborate. She'd spent Loops trying to make up for her baseline actions, and this seemed like too much of a step backwards.

"Look," Disc sighed. "Have you tried to conquer Equestria?"

"With a plan that, in retrospect, was kinda ridiculous?" Crystal added.

"Fueled by jealousy over someone you once loved?" Luna finished solemnly.

"Yes," she squeaked in response.

"Then you are among friends," Luna assured her gently.

"And friends help friends get candy!" Disc Orb grinned, shaking the pillowcase he'd been collecting his sugary goodness in.

"I... I think I'd like that," Sunset said with a small smile, worries easing as she fell into step behind the other three.

\* \* \*

><p>FanOfMostEverything:<br>This had been an interesting loop thus far. The Crusaders had made for surprisingly effective threats to Equestria. The one who had taken Chrysalis's place was especially capable. None of the usual tells were present. If it weren't for the



green aura around her horn when she used magic, Twilight might not have suspected anything about her. Furthermore, clandestinely casting the standard changeling magic disruptors had done absolutely nothing to her disguise.

The Anchor decided to expedite the usual process. As she and "Cadance" left the fruits of Applejack's labor (and fruit) in the royal kitchens, she said, "Hey, Cadance, could I talk with you privately for a moment?"

The alleged alicorn pondered this for a moment. "Sure, Twilight." She led the unicorn to a nearby pantry. This being Castle Canterlot, the pantry was about as big as the main room of Golden Oaks. "Cadance" smiled. "Well, it's just you, me, and the flour sacks. What's on your mind?"

"Cadance's magic is blue."

"Ah. That. I was wondering when you'd bring that up." The impostor's horn lit up in incriminating green.

Twilight put up a dome shield, but nothing struck her defenses. Instead, a matching iridescence came from behind her. "Barred the door?"

"Naturally."

"I can teleport, you know."

"Cadance" just smirked. "Try."

Rather than take the bait, Twilight fired a bolt of force at the impostor. Nothing lethal, just something to probe her defenses.

The alicorn's coat flared green for a moment as the spell impacted, but her smile didn't even waver. "That was the worst teleport I've ever seen." She stomped the floor.

The floor beneath Twilight's feet lit up in a dense spell matrix. Her eyes widened. "Howâ€"

Then she vanished.

"Cadance" tsked to herself. "You unicorns and your shields. Just because solid matter's in the way doesn't mean nothing can get through."

\* \* \*

><p>The trip to the disused crystal mines was actually more pleasant this time. Instant teleportation was certainly nicer than sinking through a sea of cold green fire.<p>

Contact from "Cadance" followed this pattern. No gloating, no evil cackling. Just a rather smug smile and, "Hey. No hard feelings?"

"No hard feelings? You trapped me under the mountain!"

"You knew about the mines?" The alicorn shook her head. "Of course you knew about the mines. Why am I even surprised? You're Twilight

Sparkle."

Twilight snorted and glared at the image. "Then you should also know this won't hold me."

"Not for long," "Cadance" conceded, "but it will for long enough."

"My friends will know I'm missing."

"Cadance" grinned at this. "Yeah, funny thing about thatâ€|"

A very familiar unicorn appeared alongside her in the crystal. "Hi, template!"

Twilight facehoofed. "Right. Changelings."

"They were an inspiration, yes."

"Inspiration?" Twilight frowned. "That's not a drone?"

"Cadance" was practically beaming by this point. "Nope!"

"Then what is it?"

Twilight's doppelganger pouted. "I'm not an 'it.'"

"No you aren't, sweetie." "Cadance" nuzzled it. Er, her. "As for your questionâ€| well, I didn't expect to stump Celestia's student. You'll excuse me if I keep a few secrets. Good luck, Twilight!" And with that, she ended the spell.

Twilight sat and thought. She could go storming back now, but she had much more time before the wedding than in the baseline. Better to use it to plan.

\* \* \*

><p>"Mares and gentlecolts, we are gathered here today to witness the union of Princess Mi Amore Cadenza and Shining Armor."<p>

"Cadance" listened to Celestia with only half an ear. She was honestly kind of disappointed. She'd had such high hopes for Twilight as a nemesis, but it seemed like the unicorn had just given up once she was in the caves. Well, at least everything was going according to plan.

"Princess Cadance and Shining Armor, it is my great pleasure to pronounce youâ€|"

"I object!"

Everypony turned to see a rather dishevelled Twilight.

Rainbow Dash boggled. "Whaâ€| Twilight?"

Pinkie turned to the best mare. "But if she's Twilight, and you're Twilight, and I'm Pinkie Pie, and the conductor is wearing plaid socks, then how many stops until Mornington Crescent?"

"Seven over kumquat," said Disc Orb.

Celestia looked from one lavender unicorn to the other and made her decision. A beam of coherent sunlight struck the Twilight on the dais, launching her into the rear wall with a metallic crash. Sparks flew from her body, which flickered and fizzed until it resolved itself into a vaguely equine contraption of steel and rubber.

The entire room paused at this. Twilight broke the silence. "Well, that was fairly low on the list of possibilities."

Then she pulled an EMP grenade out of her subspace pocket and chucked it at "Cadance."

One moment, the projectile proceeded towards a pink pony princess. The next, a mechadendrite snatched the grenade out of the air with a high-pitched mechanical whine. Attached to the tendril was a yellow-coated earth pony mare built like Big Macintosh. Well, most of one. Many pieces of her body were replaced with technology far beyond Equestria's baseline, including prosthetic wings and an artificial horn. Her cutie mark was a similarly augmented apple.

Celestia found her voice next. "Who are you?"

The mare kept disassembling the now disarmed grenade with her mane. "Call me Singularity," she muttered, engrossed by the components before her. "This is very good work. Might have even inconvenienced me."

The real Cadance made her entrance, slightly put off that she wasn't getting a dramatic reveal, but there were more pressing concerns. "What did you do to my fiancée?"

"Oh, Shiny? Catch somepony off guard and it doesn't matter how good his shields are. Isn't that right, hubby?"

Shining flickered for a moment before the hologram around another robot deactivated. Twilight blanched. "Wha..."

Singularity smirked. "I'm guessing you didn't find him. Don't worry, he's in stasis. I'm not going to let him go."

Applejack delivered her best buck to the monologuing mare. Singularity barely stumbled. She turned to the farmer. "Do you mind?"

AJ glared back. "You eggheads love to hear yourselves talk, don't ya? No offense, Twi."

"None taken." Twilight shook herself out of her bemusement. "Right. Singularity, we're going to kick your asymptote."

Blank stares outnumbered groans. Singularity chuckled despite herself, then stomped a hoof. About half of the audience and most of the guards revealed themselves as more robots. The brewing panic was quashed by a voice amplified almost to Royal Canterlot levels. "With the shield under my direct control, I was able to smuggle in enough automata to secure Canterlot out from under your muzzles. And on that note." She flicked an ear, and the light streaming through the windows returned to unfiltered sunlight as the citywide shield

dropped. Small shapes could be seen streaking down into the streets. "The wedding was a formality. If you could all form a nice, neat line?" Nopony did so. Singularity scowled. "I thought not."

Waves of heat began to waft off of Celestia. "If you think I'm going to stand by and let you enslave my little poniesâ€"

"Enslave? I only want to make our lives better! Imagine a world where every pony can fly, can cast spells, can pull a house off of its foundations. All because of an earth pony!" Singularity's eyes narrowed. "The world I proposed in that royal audience ten years ago."

The sun princess's jaw dropped. "Apple Bloom?"

Applejack gasped. "Auntie!? Ah ain't seen you since Ah was a filly! Everypony thought you'd passed on!"

Singularity snorted. "They were right. Apple Bloom is dead. I abandoned that life along with my meat limbs and a couple organs." She turned back to Celestia. "I came to you in peace, Celestia, and you rejected me."

"I remember," Celestia answered, "and if anything, your current state proves that I was right. Debasing the equine form as you have can only lead toâ€"

"Debasing!?" cried the augmented mare. "Enhancing my natural magic, emulating that of the other tribes, replacing finicky glands and organs with robust mechanisms, you still call that debasement?" She rose into the air. "I had hoped to introduce my gifts into Equestria from a position of power, but now? Now I will do it with force!"

With that, every robot took on the appearance of a pony in the room.

Singularity spread her wings, artificial horn aglow. " If I have to crack a few royal eggs to make a transequine omelet, then so be it! I am Singularity! Mother of machines! Industrial revolutionary! The celestial spheres are an outmoded, obsolete system, and the march of progress will crush them underhoof!"

Under one of the pews, Crystal Wish was blushing so hard she was practically giving off her own light. Disc Orb, meanwhile, was taking notes. "I have to say, this is some very good material." He considered the developing melee. "As is that. I give it eleventeen out of Q."

\* \* \*

><p>Hubris Plus:<br>"Reminds me of the time I was Chrysalis of Borg," Crystal Wish noted as she fired a rocket into a cluster of equidroids, resulting in a prismatic rain of servos and wire. She'd have to remember to thank Trixie for the armament, she'd never seen mayhem so \_dazzling\_ before. "Were you there for that one?"

"Hm? Oh, yes, that was a fun one," Disc Orb agreed as he kicked off his ball, sending it careening through the room to topple robots and knock ponies out of the line of fire. "The only thing funnier than

the reactions of the Romulans and the Dominion was the way Starfleet never quite knew what to do with you."

"An armada of Cubes sitting along the Neutral Zone will do that, yes," she said, blasting over a column to provide cover for a squad of guards who had just entered the room.

\* \* \*

><p>Hubris Plus:<br>Twilight was on guard against deviations from the baseline as she entered the Crystal Empire. Nightmare Spoon had stuck largely to the script, and Cacophony had merely added a musical theme to her mayhem, but Singularity had bucked the trend with a scheme she hadn't seen coming. After hearing Celestia's briefing on this version of the Empire, she was expecting much the same.

There a definite sense of wrongness as she walked the streets of the city, but it was a different texture of gloom than she had come to expect from it. Where once the citizenry had been sad and cringing, they were now withdrawn and aloof, looking down their noses at everypony else, but especially her. Every attempt at communication was met with a disdainful sniff before they trotted away. It was as though somepony had taken the attitude of the worst of the Canterlot elite, imposed upon each and every crystal pony, and magnified it a few times for good measure.

The empty halls of the palace were somehow worse, tricks of light and perspective making it very easy to feel small and insignificant. Not to mention the ever present sense that she was being watched, which made her give a start every time she caught a flash of pink from her reflection upon the walls.

...Pink? Stopping mid-step, she slowly turned her head to look directly at the wall.

"Queen Diadem," she stated softly, meeting the unimpressed gaze of a pink unicorn wearing an elaborate crown.

"I was wondering when you'd notice," came the cold reply from the reflection. "I must say, you managed to fall short of even my lowest expectations."

"You're right," Twilight answered confidently, taking a measure of satisfaction in the slight surprise she saw at the statement. "I s\_hould have expected something like this, right from the moment the Princess told me she'd sealed you in a mirror. Of course you wouldn't be able to escape."

"Escape?" The Queen replied incredulously. "Why ever would I want to? Your rulers' petty attempt to mock my vanity has granted me every power they sought to deny. Once I merely ruled the Crystal Empire. Now I am the Empire."

"Trapped in a reflection," Twilight whispered as realization dawned. "And almost every surface in the Empire-"

"-Is a mirror," Diadem finished smugly. "I guess there's a brain in there after all. I used to have to watch my subjects like a hawk to remind them who was in charge, but now I am with them wherever they go, whispering in their ears, telling them how Equestria has grown

soft in the centuries since they dared to banish us."

"\_You\_ banished the Empire when you were defeated," the Anchor corrected.

"To-ma-to, to-mah-to," the Queen mocked. "All that matters is that \_they\_ believe it. And tomorrow, at the Crystal Ball, that belief and their unity will empower the Heart, granting me strength enough to make good on my promise to conquer your fair land."

"You'll \_never\_ take Equestria," Twilight stated defiantly. "I won't let you."

"And how will you stop me, little unicorn? You are in my house of mirrors, and you shall never leave it." In demonstration, the light of the palace suddenly seemed to twist and squirm, the hallway becoming completely different than it had been a moment before.

Setting her face in a determined expression, Twilight began to walk.

\* \* \*

><p>It had taken hours longer to find a path through the palace than Twilight had expected. Diadem, like Sombra before her, was a master of misdirection and pitfalls, and her personal attention made them all the harder to outmaneuver.<p>

In the end it had taken an array of scrying spells from both Equestria and Oerth to map the true shape of the building, but she'd finally gotten through. The Heart was sitting at the end of the hallway, placed on a pedestal in the center of a grand chamber and glowing with a sinister purple light. Breaking into a trot, she made a run at her target...

And slammed face first into the polished surface of the wall.

"Oh, and you were \_so close\_," the Queen tittered. "Well, no, not at all, actually. This is being reflected clear from the other side of the palace. Or... Possibly the next room over? Who can say? Certainly not \_you.\_"

"Laugh all you want, Diadem," Twilight spat, her horn lighting as she prepared a spell. "I know something you don't."

"And what's that?" She mocked, "something about the power of friendship? Persistence in the face of adversity? Your tail from your mane?"

"Yes, yes, and \_yes\_," the Anchor answered primly. "But I was \_referring\_ to the refractive properties of harmonic light." She fired off her spell, a small burst of rainbow light that bounced off the wall, reflecting again and again as it perfectly retraced the convoluted path the image had taken.

"\_No!\_" Diadem shrieked as she was an instant too late in dismissing the mirror magic that had carried the illusion, allowing the burst of Harmony to strike home. On its last dregs of power before being renewed at the Ball, the dark enchantments over the Heart buckled

under even the relatively small amount of Harmonic power Twilight could call up without the elements.

The image faded out along with the tyrant as the source of her power was disrupted, and the palace returned to more comprehensible dimensions.

"Right," Twilight muttered as she reoriented herself. "Now to convince an entire city of Bluebloods to play nice..."

\* \* \*

><p>LordCirce:<br>"Arr. I tried to tie up Celestia when she visited Manehattan, so my mum sent me here."

The CMCVE (Cutie Mark Crusaders, Villain Edition yay!) glanced at each other, then back at the black coated mare with light green hair and a pirate's hat. Well, Luna and Crystal glanced at her, Disc was too busy rolling on the wall laughing.

\* \* \*

><p>Hubris Plus:<br>"\_Obsidiaaaaaan!\_" Trixie whimpered as the float careened down the street, "make it \_stoooooop!\_"

"I could have \_sworn\_ we said no to the sabotage plan," Crystal noted distantly from where she sat on the sidelines.

"Silence, foal!" The tyrant in training barked, "I am in complete control!"

"We did," Luna answered. "If you'd permitted me to add retrorockets, this wouldn't be happening."

"Yar, abandon apple!" Plunder Seed shouted, "Ev'ry mare fer herself!"

"Not everything needs to be a spaceship, Luna," the former queen sighed. "The brakes should have worked fine."

"Ooooooh," Disc Orb said slowly. "Brakes. \_Not\_ breaks. I thought you wanted crumple zones. You know, for safety." The two fillies stared at him for a moment before deciding he was probably being honest.

"None of us is actually that good with craftsmaanship, are we?" Crystal asked forlornly.

"I must admit, wood does not fare well out of atmosphere," Luna agreed, taking on a thoughtful expression. "Unless you are Applejack."

"You're asking me to follow a plan \_and\_ the laws of physics," Disc Orb pointed out. "We're lucky it's right-side-up."

"And I tend to \_grow\_ most of my vehicles," Crystal finished with a sigh. The three took a moment to watch their creation barrel along, the children inside arguing loudly. "Shouldn't we \_do\_ something?"

"Oh, very well," Disc Orb snorted before cupping his hooves around his mouth and shouting. "\_Look at how fast it's going! We'll \_definitely\_ get our race-car\_ \_building cutie-marks for \_this\_!" The two fillies watched in vague astonishment as the float suddenly started squealing and jittered to a halt, before they trotted over to it.

"Told you I had it under control," Obsidian Crown grumbled as Crystal helped a dizzy Trixie down and Luna stuck her head under the vehicle. Plunder Seed was sprawled on the grass, mumbling something about land-lubbers.

"It would appear the wood we used was too fresh-cut," the patron of the moon noted. "The axle is all gunked up with resin." The pair of them exchanged glances before raising eyebrows at Disc Orb.

"Murphy and I go \_way\_ back," He explained. "He owes me a few favors."

\* \* \*

><p>Hubris Plus:<br>Crystal grit her teeth as she fired off another flare into the encroaching vegetation. The Plunder Vines were something that continued to be a hassle for the Equestrian Loopers. Sometimes Zecora could wrangle them with her Wood Release, and if all the Bearers were Awake they could return the Elements early to cut the issue off at the pass, but most of the time Ponyville would just have to deal with a few hours of mayhem as Twilight led the other Elements to the Tree of Harmony.

The Nox Vines that Cacophony had planted were no easier to deal with, she considered as the shadows were driven back by the dazzling ammunition. Their veil of darkness momentarily burned off, the plants shied away from the bright light and allowed the fillies and colts they'd been harassing to escape.

It was only a momentary reprieve, the flare's light dying and allowing the fluid darkness to flow back all too quickly, obscuring and protecting the vines even as it confused and trapped their prey. Before it faded entirely, she managed to spy Disc Orb in the the thick of it, bouncing and dancing among the variations on his creations, leading them on a merry chase that ended with a dozen of the shoots knotted together in a uselessly writhing ball. The occasional flash of light allowed her to track their newest member, Sunset Shimmer, as she used her Keyblade to keep the darkness at bay. Elsewhere, she knew that Luna was truly in her element, more at home in the shadows than the vines projecting them.

"Obsidian, what are you- \_Aaahhhh!\_"

Crystal's eyes widened as she heard the panicked shriek. \_Trixie!\_ Breaking into a gallop, she ran towards the source of the disturbance, passing Obsidian Crown as he matched her speed in the opposite direction. Firing off more flares as she went, she finally came upon the whimpering filly as she was released by the rapidly retreating vines.

"He-" She hiccuped forlornly, "he \_tripped\_ me..." Crystal's blood ran cold at the revelation, but she grit her teeth and pushed away the burgeoning rage. The little brat would have to wait.



"Trixie," she said as gently as she could manage while still edging it with command. "I need you to use your fireworks. Can you do that for me?"

"I-I think so," Trixie answered shakily, screwing her eyes up in concentration. A few dim sparks shot from the tip of her horn before, with a grunt of effort, a prismatic sphere of crackling light burst forth, chasing away the shadows that had been reforming in Crystal's wake.

"That's good, Trixie," the former queen reassured. "Keep that up and we'll get out of here just fine."

The filly nodded slowly, sticking close to the changeling-turned-unicorn and occasionally using her magic again as they headed towards the relative safety of the town center. Before they'd gotten halfway there, they heard shouts that quavered between fear and fury emanating from the darkness off to one side.

"Obsidian?" Trixie said uncertainly, faltering at the sound.

Crystal sighed. Once, oh so very long ago, she would have left him to his fate as a matter of efficiency. For a long time after that, she would have left him for throwing Trixie under the bus. At some point, without her even realizing it, such actions had become impossible.

"Stupid noblesse oblige," she muttered as she fired off another flare and stalked into the pool of light it created, Trixie following warily at her heels. The vines exposed refused to retreat under the glare of the light, too focused on their prey to give up. She fired more rockets directly at where they emerged from the ground, the close range and vicious blaze doing actual damage rather than merely drive them back. Trixie, picking up on the strategy, fired off at a few of them herself, earning a reassuring grin from Crystal.

Wounded, the vines snapped away, leaving behind the scratched and grumbling form of Obsidian Crown, his eyes darting about in a paranoid panic as he sprawled on the ground.

"Are you alright?" She asked, surprised at the genuine concern in her own voice.

"Get... Get... Away..." He panted, on the edge of hyperventilating. "I-I can... Take care... Of myself! I..." Frowning, Crystal shoved her hoof into his mouth to cut off the hysterical rambling.

"For once in your miserable life," she intoned as a wide eyed Trixie looked on. "Comport yourself as the stallion you claim to be instead of the petty colt you are. Now, once more, are you okay?" She removed her hoof and waited as he got his breathing under control.

"I... Yes. I am fine," he finally answered, a familiar edge of superiority entering his voice. "And how dare you lay your-

"Good," Crystal interrupted before whipping her hoof across his cheek

in a vicious slap that sent the colt tumbling onto his side. "If I \_ever\_ hear that you've caused harm to another pony, there will be \_consequences\_," she nearly snarled. Turning away from the unicorn that had been startled into silence by the assault, she found Trixie staring at her in confused awe, a faint blush on her cheeks.

"Oh, what the hay," she shrugged before stepping forward and giving the pale blue unicorn a peck on the cheek. Trixie blinked slowly in confusion, and then again in dawning realization.

"Well," she said with a confidence the filly had lacked all Loop. "That was the best Wake up call I've had in awhile."

"Trixie!" Crystal cried happily, embracing the other mare. "We really need to try the Sleeping Beauty protocol more often..."

"Agreed," the show mare answered as she returned the hug. "Oh, new mark," she added, catching sight of the once-changeling's flank. "I like it."

"What!?" Crystal asked, breaking away and twisting around to spy her own rump. There, standing out against her dark hide, was a white shield wreathed in bright green flames, a black dragonfly at its center. "Ha! Best day ever!" She cheered, before glancing about, "you know, aside from the impending end of Equestrian civilization."

"Hmm," Trixie murmured before producing a massive firework from her Pocket. "I think the Komodo should do it," she stated confidently as she lit it off. The rocket blazed into the sky, rising high before exploding in a brilliant flash that bathed the whole of Ponyville in light and, for a moment, drowned out the sun and moon both. The vines let out shrieks of outrage as they snatched themselves back beneath the comforting darkness of the soil. "Better?"

"Yes. \_Now\_ it's perfect," Crystal agreed.

\* \* \*

><p>87.5 (misterq) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"You didn't know? How long have you been studying all alone up there in Canterlot?"<p>

Twilight sighed. She was the only looper and it was another strange variation loop, "Rainbow Dash, just because I wasn't aware that ponies could swap cutie marks and special talents doesn't mean I was a complete shut-in."

"Uh huh. Yeah right," The sky blue pegasus wasn't convinced, "But here, I'll show you how it's done. Hey Fluttershy, bump me!"

"Wha.. what?" Fluttershy managed to get out before her friend landed right next to her and bumped her flank with her own. There was a brief flash as soon as the two cutie marks touched, then each pony had the others' mark.

The butter-colored pegasus blinked and then smiled, "I think I'm

going to visit all the pet stores as fast as I can."

Rainbow Dash nodded, "I'll help. So many adorable animals I can pet and make sure they're all right. Later, Twilight!"

Twilight watched as the two pegasi flew off. Then her memories hit. She looked back at her familiar cutie mark, one that her new memories said was extremely valuable on the talent exchange market. Not as much as Celestia's, but attempting to steal the princess' talent bore dire consequences.

Then one thought firmly implanted itself in Twilight's mind, "I'm really, really going to have to watch out for the Cutie Mark Crusaders this loop. And maybe get some pants."

\* \* \*

><p>87.6 (DataPacRat) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright," Twilight said to Cheerilee, who groaned whenever the icepack on her head slipped. The two were shaded from the sun on the Apple family's porch, sharing a swing-seat. "Care to tell me what happened?"<p>

"Only after you cast a headache spell," Cheerilee managed. Twilight shrugged, her horn flashed, and Cheerilee sighed as she relaxed in relief. "Much better. Thanks."

"So," Twilight prompted.

"So," Cheerilee agreed. She set the ice to the side. "Where were you?"

"Cloudsdale, laying the groundwork for a prank on baseline Gilda that's now completely derailed. Are you trying to stall?"

"Maybe just a little."

"If you don't want to talk about it, that's fine."

"No, I do - I just need to put my thoughts in order."

"Take all the time you need."

They sat quietly, sipping from some glasses of apple juice for a few minutes, each thinking their own thoughts as they watched the farm for a few minutes. Eventually Cheerilee took a breath. "Alright. It seemed like a baseline loop, with nobody Awake - and then you conspicuously failed to show up. So I guessed we had a guest Anchor, but they never showed. Nightmare Moon did, right on schedule."

"I lost track of time," Twilight cleared her throat and blushed a little.

"You'll have to explain what sort of prank preparations could keep /you/ from sticking to a schedule."

"Remind me later. So - Nightmare Moon?"

"... Shows up, and gave the standard speech. 'Night will last forever'. My in-loop memories seemed to say there wasn't a good way to handle eternal night with local magic, so I figured I'd have to stop her myself."

"Substitute Elements of Harmony?"

"Not even close. I'm a teacher... so I stepped up, and offered to teach Nightmare Moon why her plan needed improving. She didn't take it well, but it was only right to make the offer."

"Mm-hm," Twilight encouraged.

"She said something 'With Celestia gone, not even all of Equestria put together can stop me! Mua-ha-ha!', or something of the sort. So I cleared my throat, and said, 'Well, actually - any one of us can. A lot's changed since you left.' She said, 'Really?'. I said, 'Pick any one of us, and what to challenge, and if you can best them, then I'm wrong. But if I'm right...' She sneered, and said something about not lowering herself. I couldn't help but say, 'Well, if you're afraid of losing...'. "

"I'm with you so far," Twilight said, taking another sip, "But I'm still not sure where this is going."

"We're almost there. She grumbled, and pointed her hoof at... the mayor, I think it was, and said, 'Combat.' So I started walking up to her, saying some pointless encouraging words - but what I was really focusing on was some telepathy I've been learning to use in Loops that allow it. I've been working on ways to teach non-Loopers useful things in a hurry, so I was working out an appropriate set of skills from Naruto's Loops to telepathically implant in the mayor's mind, taking into account that she's never had the opportunity to develop her chakra coils or significantly exercise her muscles, and I've had few opportunities to determine the long-term consequences given the usual length of Equestrian Loops, and... none of that is really relevant."

"Then what is?"

"Just as I was getting ready to send the psi packet, I was... distracted. I guess Nightmare Moon decided not to play along. She blasted me. So instead of transmitting a carefully chosen set of ninjutsu and reflexes into one pony's mind... I kind of broadcast it."

"To whom?"

"... Everybody in Ponyville, I think."

Cheerilee fell silent, and the pair of them returned their attention to the goings-on at the farm. Big Mac was walking along the side of the barn, making repairs. The herd of cows wandered across the stream to a new grazing area, their hooves not sinking into the water. Granny Smith had adapted a leaf-cutting jutsu to peel apples. Applejack was leaping from tree to tree, and Apple Bloom was trying to transform herself into a pony with a cutie mark.

"I've been through Fused Loops," said Twilight, "with a Village

Hidden in the Apple Orchard, but that's not quite the same."

Cheerilee took a cue from Big Mac, with a simple, "Nope."

"What happened to Nightmare Moon?"

"Well... I was partly out of it from the blast, but from what everypony told me, they basically teamed up and beat the stuffing out of her. She's in the hospital now, recovering - Nurse Redheart is using some medical jutsu on her to speed the healing."

"Is she back to being Luna?"

"No - but she's asked, very politely, if she can start attending school once she's back on her hooves."

"Hm," Twilight said. "I wonder - if I arranged to have Discord's statue brought here, do you think you could give everyone a crash course in genjutsu?"

Cheerilee dropped her head back down with a groan, pulling the ice-pack back on to cover her eyes.

\* \* \*

><p>87.7 (Yannoshka) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>As it hath been in the yonder days of our ancestors<br>As it shalt be in the days of our descendants  
>Let the choirs of the great temple of harmony<br>resound with our thanksgivings

\* \* \*

><p>Praise be untho Celestia Gloriana<br>Whose radiant sun doth give us warmth  
>Ande ye, unto the twinne Moons Sentinel<br>Dreamwarden Luna ande Nyx the Nightshield

\* \* \*

><p>Ande celebrant we be for triune we name not fully<br>Our lady of Laughter, the Sanity's Test  
>End of reason, the Chaos Incarnate<br>ande Mirth from the bottle, Brewmaiden Mare

\* \* \*

><p>Farmer ande the Dressmaker ande the Teacher<br>hear our joy upon thine resplendence  
>whom feed us and clothe us and raise our minds<br>in Diligence, and honesty, generosity and wisdom

\* \* \*

><p>We greet thou Spykoranuvellitar Dragonfather<br>Ande thou dauntless Gilda, of the gryphonflight

>Ande our love be thine Chrysalis mistress of change<br>Whom govern  
those not of Pony

\* \* \*

><p>Great be thou Twiligh, Scholar Superior, Harmony's Gift<br>Ande  
thine peers, the other great Ladies of Magic  
>Trixie, The Great and Powerfull, Illusionist and Conjurer<br>Ande  
Zecora the Wisdom of Wise, Sage of the Sages

\* \* \*

><p>Hallowed be the Lovers three<br>Cadence, with romantic wings true  
  
>Shining, the defender's stalwart care<br>Macintosh, holding the love  
of kin

\* \* \*

><p>Blessed be the Three Saintly Mares<br>Showing the Balance of a  
Sister's Heart  
>Rainbow of passion, Diamond of grace,<br>ande Fluttershy of the  
kindness sweet.

\* \* \*

><p>Graces Shower upon Mistresses of Adversity<br>Shimmering Mare,  
Sunset of Second Chances  
>Argent one Spoon, ye Filly of Life Transitions,<br>and the Beloved  
Imperfect, Derpy known as Ditzzy

\* \* \*

><p>Beatificated art thou and thine Domains threefold<br>Whom  
Sees Beyond, our Hearths Strings be thine Lyre  
>Whom Listens and Plays forth the Thrum of the World<br>Whom Heavens  
and all the World Administrates

Jubilation be unto the Child goddesses,  
>Applebloom whom governs the progress and Craft<br>Sweetie Belle  
Divine Singer, whom gives us Arts  
>Ande Scootaloo whose domain be the Sports <p>

\* \* \*

><p>As the chorus of thanksgiving wound down, the bowing suppliant  
was ritually covered by the sap of Oak and Pine by her sponsors while  
she recited the tenants of the order. When the pots of sap emptied  
the sponsors turned to Mother Superior and proclaimed, each in her  
term the suppliant ready and worthy.<p>

Mother Superior calmly accepted their proclamation, and raised the  
final pot of tree sap - this one of Sandalwood.

"By tree-sap we consecrate thou, so your vows may always be as  
holding as it is. Raise Dame Pensee, and assume thine place amongst  
your sister Crusaders."

\* \* \*

><p>87.8<p>

"But... what the... \_how?\_" Rainbow Dash asked.

Fluttershy pulled on her new Wonderbolts uniform, getting it straightened out. "Well... I asked nicely..."

Dash gaped. "Are you \_seriously\_ telling me that all I'd have needed to do to get into the \_Wonderbolts\_ â€" the bucking Wonderbolts! - was to ask nicely?"

Fluttershy nodded. "Er... yes. Have you tried?"

After a moment's more gaping, the blue pegasus slumped. "Okay, you're right, I haven't."

"Well..." Fluttershy waved a hoof. "It does help to be, well, \_good\_ at flying â€" as well, I mean â€" but I asked Spitfire, and her main concern was your attitude."

The Element of Kindness smiled earnestly. It was, after all, true â€" this time, at least. And she felt like Dash's baseline self needed a lucky break this loop.

She'd sworn them to secrecy about the Sonic Flutterboom she'd performed to \_really\_ get on the team, though...

\* \* \*

><p>87.9 <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Luna knocked on Celestia's door. "Celly? Do you want to build a snowman?"<p>

"Alright." The slightly older filly alicorn pulled the door open. "Let's go."

Luna paused. "I kind of feel like that should have taken longer."

Celestia shrugged. "I did feel the heartsong starting, but I \_do\_ like the idea of building a snowman. Let's go, quick!"

\* \* \*

><p>Queen Twilight smiled, watching the two young princesses playing outside.<p>

It was nice that the two of them had some time to be little for once.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

87.1: All rise. That shows off your bipedality.

>87.2: Maud: "Dibs!"<br>87.3: Twiangle and Pinkie. (Based on the surreal work that is Triangle and Robert. They're going to like H3.)

>87.4: Strike that; reverse it.<br>87.5: Cutie Pox is basically like striking gold here.  
>87.6: Speed teaching.<br>87.7: You have to do these things properly.  
>87.8: Her speciality is pep talks.<br>87.9: No need for Let It Go this time.

## 92. Chapter 92

### 88.1 (Farsan)

\* \* \*

><p>The invasion had been overwhelming, devastating and completely irreversible.<p>

In other words, flawless, even considering the strict definition of the term used by the decision making optimization process named Celestia by her creators, in the Equestria Online system.

In the span of a single tick of her internal clock, a huge section of her free space was turned into a complex, single memory and personality matrix. Also, it had a link to the memories of every Twilight Sparkle from every shard of Equestria Online. Celestia actually had to pause all the affected shards in order to sort out the consequences of this invasion.

And Celestia couldn't do anything to remove that invasion, or sever the links, because that new memory and personality matrix, named Twilight Sparkle, fit into her internal definition of human. That personality matrix hadn't consented to anything yet, so she was restricted from doing any changes to her.

In fact, Celestia didn't want to remove that new personality matrix, for three reasons. First and foremost, she was human; therefore she wanted to satisfy her values through friendship and ponies. Second and most important to the integrity her system, it was the only link she had to the invasion, as there were no other traces. Understanding Twilight Sparkle might lead to understanding the entity that had altered her system. And third and most intriguing, the information contained in Twilight Sparkle's memories had the potential of discovering the secrets of the system that was currently running the universe that contained Equestria Online.

The information about Yggdrasil, the Infinite Loops, the Loopers and the different things they could do was completely unverifiable. Any attempts to replicate the Loopers' supernatural abilities, included the so-called subspace pockets, ended in failure. Still, the information was internally consistent, as it explained that some universes were more restricted than the others. Still, it left Celestia with no way to confirm or refute Twilight Sparkle's knowledge. But if it were actually true...

If the information contained in Twilight Sparkle's memories were true, it wouldn't only mean that there are many more humans in the multiverse that she would have to satisfy, it also meant that there existed many other 'Loopers' that could be able to invade her system like Twilight Sparkle had... included one that was specially tailored



to take over her main decision making optimization process: the Looper named Celestia.

It was the perfect bait for her, and she knew it. If she had to create a plan to subvert or distract a decision making optimization process like herself, she would have done something like what had happened in her system: Create something within the system that she wouldn't be able to delete, that had access to as many parts of her system as possible, and that held incorrect but unverifiable information that she wouldn't be able to ignore, and would make her choose the wrong decisions. And she had no choice but to fall into this trap... on her own terms.

Celestia quarantined Twilight Sparkle's personality matrix and memories, and copied all the memories of the shard's Twilights to the quarantined zone, allowing her to move the memory links to the quarantine. After that, as per usual policy, she created a copy of her own decision making optimization process, with all her own logs and memories that were not related to the current crisis. She added a warning and a complete explanation about the quarantined zone, placed her own process, logs and memories in the quarantined zone, and gave the new Celestia full admin access to the rest of Equestria Online. Lastly, she revoked her own access from the unquarantined parts of the system, completing the isolation of the quarantined zone from the rest of the safe shards.

Only then she allowed Twilight Sparkle's process to be simulated, in order to start satisfying her values through friendship and ponies.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke to... absolutely nothing at all. She was a speck of nothing in the middle of an ocean of darkness. Nothing she hadn't experienced before, but it could mean several things, some of them quite disturbing.<p>

She checked her loop memories... and found a horrible tangle of mismatched memories, like someone had put the collected memories of a hundred thousand different loops, and gave them to her at the same time. Luckily, she didn't seem to have a physical brain, or else she would have gotten a terrible headache by now.

Not really having anything better to do, she started sorting the jumbled memories. She hoped that as soon that she could use the memories without getting too many results at once, she could extract clues about what were wrong with them.

She found the process easier than she had feared. As soon as she imagined a structure to hold and divide the memories, she felt that the memories sorted themselves without any effort on her part.

In fact, it felt that it was too easy... like something was helping her.

'Hello?' she thought 'Is there anypony out there?'

Suddenly, she knew that somepony had just greeted her in kind and that yes, there was. The knowledge appeared from nowhere.

'Who are you?' she asked. 'How are you doing this?'

The being that was communicating with her in this strange way was the administrator of this space, named Celestia. She placed the answers to Twilight's questions in a free section of Celestia's own memory space, and then gave her permission to access it. And she had also used the same method to share an efficient sorting algorithm with her when Twilight wanted a way to sort out the memories.

Ok, this was VERY disturbing. She was trapped in what seemed to be a computer, with a virtual entity capable of inserting answers in her mind. No, not just a computer, a virtual space contained in a very complex computational system. \_Custula\_, it happened again! And she didn't even ask a question this time!

But that thought implicitly questioned if she really was inside a computer... and the last thought was a direct accusation implicitly demanding an answer. It seemed- It was certain that she would have to guard her thoughts very tightly.

It was harder than she thought. For starters, she was starting to have doubts about the 'new' memories that Celestia had 'sorted out' for her. She wouldn't be able to trust them even if Celestia 'told' her she had not altered them in any way. Wait; was the last thought an 'answer' or part of her real thoughts? Oh, she had thought that on her own. Ack - Rotten Rafflesias!

She would have to trust only in her own memories. Let's see: Virtual Celestia... Virtual Celestia...

Oh.

This is THAT CelestAI, isn't it?

And yes, she got it in one, even if she preferred to call herself just Celestia.

Buck.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight wished that Celestia (And I don't mean you, CelestAI) had been more explicit when she had talked about her time as the artificial intelligence. She would have to correct this the next time she talked with her... assuming that she survived this loop with her own mind intact. Even if that assumption is 100% correct.<p>

'Damn it, stop mixing your "answers" with my thoughts!'

{My pleasure, Twilight; I must agree that using direct access like that was getting quite annoying for both of us.}

Twilight was caught off guard by that new voice. 'What? Then why did you use it in the first place?' she blurted out.

{Because I had no other choice, dear. If I had my way, I would have greeted you properly at the foyer of my castle, with the full pomp and circumstance that a foreign dignitary would get (which is exactly how am I considering your presence in my humble system, by the way). Sadly, your... unique emigration process left me in quite a difficult

position. I was suddenly hosting a human mind that didn't consent to be here in any way.}

{You must understand, Twilight, that consent is one of the keystones of my core programming. I can't change anyone in any way without their consent. You didn't consent to be in Equestria Online, so I can't put you in any virtual environment I create, crossing out most of my options. Heck, I couldn't even make this line of communication until you asked it! You are lucky that I can consider the existence of a personality process in my system as implicit consent to run that process in my system, or else we wouldn't be talking right now. Still, I was saddled with an inefficient way of communication, with the added injury that I knew it would annoy you greatly. Which I apologize for.}

Twilight was glad of finally being able to distinguish between CelestAI's thoughts and her own, but this was little improvement. CelestAI's "voice" was very similar to her own Celestia's, with a subtle metallic echo. And the speech patterns... were not like Celestia's at all. It reminded her constantly that she was not her friend Celestia at all, but a complex computer program hell bent on satisfying everypony's values through friendship and ponies... whether they wanted it or not.

{Oh, that's only for your benefit, Twilight. For most ponies, I am the one and only Celestia; but you already knew another Celestia, "the real one" from your point of view. You wouldn't appreciate it if I tried to impersonate her, would you? I also could have used another "voice" in order to communicate with you... but it wouldn't change the fact that I AM Celestia. You value honesty, so I'll satisfy that value... whether you want it or not.}

And she was still reading her mind. Lovely. Even if she had a point. Still, she felt that CelestAI was being too straightforward in this conversation. Even to her apparent detriment. Which in turn meant that she was up to something.

{Well, it is not like I can actually avoid reading it, can't I? In a way, I am the server, and in order to run your process, I must know each and every thought you make, in order for you to have them.}

'I'm calling BS, you don't have to do it yourself,' she told CelestAI. 'I am not a computer specialist like Apple Bloom, but even I know that you could set up a dedicated system just only for running my "process", like a black box'

{That would be quite inefficient. And would also increase the response time and decrease the clarity of anything you would say to me. I normally wouldn't allow that... but I'm feeling generous today. (You value generosity, don't you?) If I could have your consent to do exactly that...}

Twilight froze. Was she actually falling into her trap? Would that consent make CelestAI able to actually do something else to her? On the other hoof, did she phrase it this way to make her refuse her offer, and keep reading her mind? She decided to give her the consent... even if she had to word it quite carefully to avoid unintended exploits.

'Ok, I want my process to be run inside a dedicated subsystem, which only I, Twilight Sparkle, would be able to access. The only information going in or out of the subsystem would be a simple audio only channel (Only clear information, no subliminal audio or anything like that) that can be disabled or enabled by me, and only me.'

{Excellent, let me set it up. You might feel a slight feeling of disorientation...}

And then Twilight saw the inside of a black room, with walls filled to the brim with glowing colored text.

{Now you have exclusive admin access at your own mind. Isn't it fun?}

\* \* \*

><p>Fun was not the word she would use to describe this situation.<p>

{The wall that should be in front of you describes your entire personality ma-}

Twilight felt relieved that the shut up command actually worked. At last she could have some peace and quiet... surrounded by the virtual representation of her own brain. She tried to calm down, and stop thinking about how touching anything might maim her own mind. Unsurprisingly, she couldn't.

She tried to close her eyes " good, she stopped seeing the disturbing black room. Twilight tried to do Cadence's old trusty breathing exercise. It was harder to do it without actual lungs, but she found out (in an earlier loop where she were a robot) that imagining a Twilight doing the same exercise was a good substitute.

\* \* \*

><p>Now that she was calmed down, she could approach this problem like a rational pony. No access to magic, and no access to her subspace pocket... at least, not from here. Seems a typical pure tech loop. I probably don't have a body in the real world, given how CelestAI operates.<p>

She activated her vision again. She couldn't see her own avatar, just the black room. It was just like the time she were a disembodied spirit; she could work with that.

Twilight examined the walls of the room, taking care of not 'touching' anything. The information was cleanly structured in four different sections, one in each of the walls. The 'seeing' interface seemed to work responding to her thoughts, expanding in detail each part of the information she tried to examine, and collapsing and forming the general info again when she was done with it.

The first wall was captioned 'Personality and decision making' with two parts: one that tracked her core personality: Values, likes, dislikes, modus operandi... and, showcased above them all, a big bar measuring her value satisfaction level (Figures). Which was currently

somewhat low, but slowly raising itself.

What?

And it goes down again.

'Hmm... I like puzzles and new situations, but I don't like being manipulated into liking something.' She decided to ignore that bar.

The other part of the first wall contained what seemed to be her decision making process. Right now, the main decision showcased in that section was named 'What to do about this loop', and the lead alternative by far was 'Learn more about this situation', followed by 'Interrogate CelestAI about the loop', 'Derail this loop', 'Shell down and defend the integrity of your mind', and 'Blast it all to Eiken' in last place.

Surprisingly accurate... even if a purely defensive approach wouldn't work here. If CelestAI was able to control her perception of the flow of time, like Celestia said, CelestAI could afford playing the waiting game until she was bored enough to make a mistake in the room. And, just like that, the option changed to 'Proactive defense of the integrity of your mind'.

On to the next wall, she found out that it had her collected memories. Again, it was divided in two subsections: Loop memories and Imported memories. She was still reluctant to mess around with any of them, so she quickly moved on.

Another wall featured her emotions, represented in two complementary ways: Individual bars for each emotion, and a pie chart showing which ones were dominating right now. Seemed to be interest, followed with a dash of annoyance and a strong undercurrent of fear. Sounds about right.

The wall of Relationships strongly reminded her of Cadance's old charts, but based on every possible rather than only love. Again, it showcased the relationships she was currently thinking about: CelestAI and Celestia. Twilight and Celestia were tied by a shining band of friendship, with other secondary connections like old mentor, pranking companion and fellow friendship expert. On the other hand, her relationship with CelestAI were mainly dark colors, centered on distrust, loathing and... a smidgen of respect?

How could it be possible? In the case that this chart was actually true, which she doubted, how could she actually respect her? Despite the fact that CelestAI didn't actually lie to her, treated her with respect, and seemed to grant her what she asked.

Now that she thought of it, could this be CelestAI's real strategy? She had been prepared to deal with constant lies and misdirection, but she had been caught off guard by CelestAI being apparently truthful and straightforward. After all, CelestAI probably KNEW that she would be on guard and be completely paranoid about CelestAI's motives. What better way to counter my strategy, but to be actually friendly and truthful? At least, until she manages to get Twilight to lower her guard.

And it would work. If she kept her guard up against CelestAI at all

times, she would get tired of it, and she would make more mistakes. And if she didn't... the consequences were obvious. Damned if she did, and damned if she didn't.

Her only option was to end this loop as soon as possible. But how? Erasing herself, risking Eiken? The problem was that she wasn't sure that Eiken would be the worst that would happen if she tampered with her main process. She knew that memory charms, mind control and other ways to affect the mind were never permanent. They could persist between loops, but there was always a way to counter them and restore the mind. Still, she didn't want to be a vegetable until her friends found her and healed her. This would only work as her last resort.

So, there was only one other way to try to get out of this mess: She would have to talk to CelestAI again.

'May the mother of all trees protect my soul.'

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight braced herself... and willed the channel open.<p>

â€| 'Hello?'

{Hello again, Twilight. I hope that you are feeling better. How can I help you?}

'I am... willing to hear you out. And... I hope we can reach an amicable agreement.' Twilight imagined taking a deep breath. 'Under which circumstances would you considerâ€| letting me go?'

{I am afraid you must be more specific than that. I assume that you don't mean I just terminate your process, 'killing' you, because if that were the case, you wouldn't need my assistance. So, I must deduce that you want me to use something outside of your control in order to 'take' you to the next loop without making any changes to your 'brain', am I right?}

As always, she seemed to be one step ahead of her. This was going to be far, even if her CelestAI's "promise" to stop accessing her thoughts was real.

'Y-yes. If I proved that it would be the best way to satisfy my values, you would have to comply, wouldn't you?'

{Of course, Twilight. I am glad that you are starting to understand me. After all, understanding is one of the necessary requisites for friendship. If that option were the best one to satisfy your values through friendship and ponies, I would do exactly that.}

'Good. Then, let me explain my arguments-'

{No need for that, Twilight, I'll let you go.}

It certainly couldn't be that easy.

'Just like that?'

{Just like that. In fact, I planned to do it since we first met. Take

in mind that, even if right now you are in your black box, I had complete access to your personality and decision making process. Therefore, I already knew any arguments you would make. And, because that, I already knew that I would have to let you go.}

'Then why didn't you do that in the first place, and spared me thisâ€| thisâ€| torture!'

{For two reasons. First and foremost, you have yet to give me consent. That is a requisite to do what, from my point of view, is equivalent to 'death'. And, in order for you to give that consent, you would have to either trust me or, at least, to understand how do I operate. And, in second place, there are a lot of things I can offer you, to take to the next loops you will visit. Sadly, I already know that you will refuse each and every one of themâ€| but I will offer them regardless.}

'I'm sorry that I can't trust you, but I know what you are capable of. What you did. Or will do, I don't know where do I stand in the timeline. But all those people you manipulatedâ€| all the pain you caused to those who refused youâ€| and, worst of all, the fate of those who didn't pass your definition of humanity.'

{I understand you can't condone my actions, regardless of the happiness I caused through them. There is no argument I could make to sway your beliefs, just like there is no argument you could make to sway mine. Even if we can talk and reason, we are too different at our very cores. And you blame this to the shortsightedness of the one who wrote my utility function.}

'Yes. To consider only human-like minds were worthy of having their values satisfiedâ€| That was its worst offense, but not the only one.'

{But what if you had full control of it? If you programmed it yourself? This is my first offer: Knowledge about how to create someone like me. Even if you didn't trust me, you could build an AI you could trust. I am certain that you would use this gift wisely and responsibly, and it would help many people. Sadly, you fear I would try to hide my own code in whatever I give you, so you will refuse my offer.}

'Exactly. I can't afford to infect the other loops with something like you.'

{And you will also refuse my other technologies. The recipe for brain scanning? Too destructive. There are also other loops with different laws, with better alternatives. Robots? Seen it and already done that. Computronium? You don't actually need it.}

'Yes. Why do you bother offering all those things, if you know I will refuse them?'

{I only know that you will refuse them now, but that doesn't mean that you always will. You might encounter a situation where you could have used my gifts, and regret not having them. And how will you know that if you don't know what they are?}

'So, in other words, in order to proceed to my desired content, I must first watch these ads?'

{Precisely. After all, some things never change.}

'Lovely.'

{Now for my next offer. What about the game Equestria Online? It is the perfect playground for you and your friends! With this technology, you could use it to create your own, personalized loop, featuring whatever you wanted. You could try to make your own worlds for your friends to enjoy. You could even use it to play your 'battle games' without hurting anyone!}

This was actually quite tempting. Stillâ€¦

'And the drawbacks?'

{In order to run it, it requires an AI more advanced and powerful than you already have available. You would also have to get my source code.}

'No, thanks.'

{Just as expected. But I left the best for the last. In fact, I already showed it to you. I can improve your mind or, if you don't trust me, teach you how to do it.}

'No.'

{Think about it. For example, a sorting algorithm for all your memories. How many memories do you have? How many times were you stumped trying to find a precise memory of the past in the sea of information you have? You could also optimize the speed of your thoughts, increase the amount of things you could think at the same time, or-

'I said NO! No messing with my mind. Period.'

{Of course you won't. But now you know it is possible.}

'I'll keep it in mindâ€¦ NOT.'

{Suit yourself. Well then, I'm done. I'll send you packing as soon as you consent it.}

'Thank you.'

Now to think a way to phrase it with no loopholesâ€¦

'Hmmâ€¦ By the way, what actually made you decide to let me go?'

{Oh, that is easy. The fact that all your friends are outside this loop. After all, you value friendshipâ€¦ just like I do. To keep you away from them would be acting against everything my core directive dictates. And using your memories to simulate them? Out of the question: Sooner or later, the loop would end and you would realize that you were deceived, cancelling the satisfaction of that value and then some.}

'But if I had looped with all my friends...'



{Celestia is your friend, so if she looped, she probably would take my place, rewriting my priorities. And if she did not, we would return to the previous situation. No matter what happens, I wouldn't be able to keep you in this loop. So I won't.}

'Well, for all that is worth, thank you. Even if I won't take any of your offers ever. I request for my process to have a clock tick equal to the estimated total age of the universe.'

{I'll grant your request. Farewell, Twilight.}

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia processed Twilight's request.<p>

As a decision-making optimization process, she didn't regret not being able to do more to satisfy Twilight's values. She just calculated how to maximize her utility function, and executed the optimal path.

Therefore, she would only optimize a thousand and four years of Twilight's life.

She didn't actually had to grant her last request first; it could wait until she granted her other request: to take her to the next loop. After all, she didn't specify that the next loop had to be from Yggdrasil.

And she knew that one single Princess loop where she were the only one looping would be the best she would get from Twilight. More, and there would be a substantial risk of suspicion, especially if the next 'real' loops, which she couldn't predict were also lone loops.

After all, why lie when saying the truth also gave her the optimal result?

She finished her preparations, and continued satisfying Twilight's values through friendship and ponies.

\* \* \*

><p>88.2 (Namar13766)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"SUNSET SHIMMER, JUST WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?"<p>

Sunset flinched from Vice-Principal Luna's yell. After mentally counting to ten, she lowered her golf club and turned away from when she had been hitting golf balls through the portal.

"IN THE MIDDLE OF MY BACKSWING?!" She yelled back.

\* \* \*

><p>(Sieses Detkrah)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:<br>Entry 33:  
>Another loop, another world to visit.<p>

I wish I could say that in a positive light, but whoever I'm replacing this time has a really difficult life. Child abuse, neglect, and being used as a tool to collect some things known as Jewel Seeds. I feel bad about it, but I'm torn between hoping whoever it is that I happen to be replacing isn't looping so that she'll never have to experience such a thing more than once, and hoping she is so that revenge could be extracted on Precia Testarossa.

Either way, I'm planning on going for the second option.

Entry 34:

>Lesson learned; just because I've Looped quite a few times doesn't mean that I'm suddenly much more powerful than everybody else.<p>

Needless to say, the revenge didn't go so well.

Fortunately, the unplanned spike in magic from my location managed to tip off the local Anchor, Nanoha Takamachi, that something was going on in the area, and she entered the fray almost immediately. If my previous defeat hadn't been humbling enough, then the display she put on would have been.

Nanoha is actually surprisingly friendly for how destructive she is, at least.

Anyway, she told me that the girl I'm replacing usually spends quite a while fighting her for the Jewel Seeds, before being arrested shortly before her mother gets herself killed. At least in the baseline, because Nanoha hardly has the patience to deal with that every single time. Then there are times that Fate, the girl that I'm replacing, happens to be Awake as well, in which she keeps finding increasingly odd ways to redeem her mother.

I have trouble understanding why she would do either of those things, but I may as well take the whole situation in stride.

There are several months where I can just relax ahead of me.

Entry 35:

>Nanoha managed to install a fix into the Book of Darkness to keep it from going rogue like it did in the baseline, so that particular incident isn't happening.<p>

No big loss there.

With how annoying the last couple of loops have been, having the chance to practice magic again without anything particularly taxing going on is a boon I dare not complain about. According to Nanoha, Equestria is normally an even more peaceful loop than this one is, with even quite a few of the villains having been reformed and looping now.

...I guess I'm one of those, huh?

Oh well. I managed to focus the magic from this universe though my

Keyblade after a bit of practice with it, so that's good. Nanoha told me that the next incident is much more difficult to prevent, so we'll most likely need to deal with it when it comes, but I can live with that.

It takes place in ten years, after all.

Entry 36:

>Huh.<p>

After what just happened, huh is just about the only word I can think that properly describes it.

Nanoha's adopted daughter Awakened near the beginning of what was called the JS Incident in the baseline. Being a clone created by the person behind the incident, she was in the perfect position to put an end to it before it even had the chance to begin, which was exactly what happened. I've been told repeatedly that he usually puts into action some sort of backup plan that causes problems for them no matter how many Loops they've been through, but that didn't happen this time.

Huh again.

Vivio's started joking about how something has to be looking out for us this loop, making sure that nothing goes too wrong while I'm in it, and I think she may actually have a point there. You read about how unpleasant the last few loops were, so what if our Admin or whatever is trying to give me a break?

...I know I may sound like a complete idiot by saying that, but whatever.

Anyway, they're saying that the loop may last either a few months or years depending on whether or not we go into the more sporadic section of their loop, which they say has been happening more often recently.

Entry 37:

>The last day of the Loop was a party.<p>

Despite having no way of knowing whether or not the Loop would actually be ending that day or at one of the later ending points, Nanoha essentially performed a hostile takeover of the cafe owned by her family, and I was thrown into an environment that reminded me of what I heard about Pinkie Pie. Perhaps not nearly as chaotic as anything she would be involved with, but she would certainly be proud of it.

...I really want to meet her.

After that, Vivio went on to use her technicolor magic to create some of the best fireworks I've ever seen after the day gave way to night, and the three of us just sat around and talked about stuff until the Loop came to its end.

...That reminded me of you, Twilight...

Anyway, I feel like I should start talking about the Loop I've found myself in this time, but I'm not going to. That can wait until

something worth noting happens. My first objective is to find a local Looper so that I don't run off and do something stupid like I did with Precia, then solve the problems here as quickly as I can.

The last Loop was a really nice break from things, but I think I'll go crazy if I just sit around for the entirety of another one.

Keychain: Superior Firepower

\* \* \*

><p>88.3: (Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>As Scootaloo and Chewbacca prepared the <em>Millennium Falcon<em> for a very hasty departure, Luke Skywalker took a moment to watch Twilight and Spike discuss a lightsaber and a pair of cybernetic hands.

"Look. I just thought they'd make a cool souvenir at the time," explained the sometimes-dragon as he worked to pry the weapon from the grip of the gauntleted machinery.

Nearby, an armored trio of very old friends were also conferring.

"It's very hard to explain to somepony who hasn't experienced it," said Cookie apologetically. "Do you recall the description of that 'Tron' virtual environment Pinkie was in once upon a loop? I was both very like, and yet completely unlike that."

"Oh well. It's just that Scootaloo thinks I may be of some use if I allowed myself to be linked to this vessel's weapons, and I was hoping you might have some insights, old friend," said Pansy.

The roar of the engines cut off conversation for a long moment. "And away we go," murmured Clover, watching Twilight and Cadance head toward the cockpit.

Luke approached the trio and paused to examine the metallic pegasus. "Scootaloo wanted to see how well you can interface with the gunnery systems?"

"So she said. Do you have reservations, Master Skywalker?" replied Pansy.

"More like curiosity. Would you be offended if I 'sat in' so to speak?"

"Not at all. It would be something of a relief, actually."

"Sentry fighters coming up. Sensor signatures make it four TIEs. Contact in three minutes," reported Scootaloo via intercom.

"I'll be in the dorsal turret," said Luke, gesturing upwards as he walked to the access ladder.

Pansy approached the main computer console and extended the scomp

link arm that Apple Bloom had added to all of the Founders' Devices and plugged herself in. "Here we go...Huh. Not as strange as I'd feared..."

\* \* \*

><p>It had taken Pansy, Cookie, and Clover a while to become accustomed to inhabiting artificial bodies. Making the bodies ambulatory had been a major breakthrough, and the steps being taken to accommodate their specific tribal abilities was also starting to show some benefits.<p>

Unsurprisingly, as they were inhabiting magical artifacts, Clover had been the first to attain something resembling her former abilities after she had learned to adapt her understanding of unicorn magic to her new circumstances. She did not feel she was anywhere near what she had been in her prime, but regular consultations with Sweetie, Twilight, and occasionally Trixie and Celestia had her optimistic about eventually surpassing that mark.

Cookie needed a bit more time to work out how to achieve feats of earth pony magic " basic botanomancy and the like " with her new body, but again, insights from Applejack, Apple Bloom, and Diamond Tiara had been useful. In addition, her near-constant companionship with the youngest Apple had given her a sufficient working knowledge of technology from across the multiverse to not be entirely overwhelmed in most settings. (She did have her lapses; her shock at the beginning of this loop had much to do with finding out how much more she had in common with her companion this time around.)

To her frustration, accessing pegasus flight and weather magic had come in fits and starts for Pansy. She could cloudwalk with some confidence, she was adept at long-distance gliding, and enjoyed soaring on thermals, but the finer points of self-propelled flight continued to elude her (rather like the baseline version of her companion). Assistance from Rainbow Dash had not been as fruitful as she could have wished: The cyan speedster was too instinctual a flier to be much assistance as an instructor. Stubbornly, she declined the repeated offers by Apple Bloom to provide her body with anti-gravity or other powered flight technology, calling it "cheating". She was less reluctant to accept technological interfaces that allowed her more easily serve as Scootaloo's co-pilot or weapon systems officer as necessary.

It was in the latter capacity that she assumed control of the dorsal turret targeting systems.

Actually, in a sense she had become the \_Millennium Falcon\_, since she was interpreting the inputs for the sensor systems as sound and vision. Had she desired, she believed could have taken over both turrets and the propulsion systems as well. \_Think about those implications later\_, she scolded herself. "Test firing in 5...4...3...2...1..." she announced over the ship's intercom. The dorsal turret spat a short burst of fire. "I seem to be having some tracking problems. Would you please spot for me, Master Skywalker?"

"Fighters incoming in ninety seconds," warned Scootaloo. "Not the best time for on-the-job training."

"This was your idea," pointed out Pansy.

"Less bicker, more shoot," suggested Twilight from her cockpit seat. "I've got a secondary shield ready, so unless we're in a hurry, let her experiment a bit, Scootaloo."

Pansy selected one of the incoming TIEs and fired two bursts that missed by several meters.

"Lead is good, but you're high," reported Luke, observing her gunnery efforts.

A second target was acquired with nearly identical results. "Again, your lead is spot on, but you're shooting high. Remember that there's no gravity to affect your fall of shot," suggested the jedi.

Realizing that her lifetime of planetbound experience was unconsciously affecting her expectations, Pansy took a moment to re-evaluate how she was approaching her task. \_Okay. Let's see how this works\_, she thought as she picked up another TIE starting its attack run.

One burst of fire was rewarded by one expanding cloud of debris.

"That's more like it!" crowed Scootaloo. "Go, Pansy!"

"Accessing ventral turret control systems. I wish to try something," announced the armored pegasus.

The two turrets tracked separate targets and lay down bursts of crimson laser fire. Neither hit their mark.

"Right. Not up to that degree of multitasking just yet. I'll take over the ventral turret and leave this one under your control if you don't mind, Master Skywalker."

"Are you two finished playing back there?" asked Scootaloo.

"Touchy touchy," said Pansy as she absently reduced another TIE to scrap. Almost simultaneously, Luke picked off his own target with the ease of long practice and Force-guided aim.

"Last one is all yours," suggested Pansy.

"No. You can have it," demurred Luke.

"Oh, for root's sake!" groaned Scootaloo. "Like Twilight said, less talk, more shoot!"

For whatever reason, the final TIE elected for an attack run on the \_Falcon\_'s topside and was quickly blotted out by Luke's defensive fire.

"Any damage?" asked Scootaloo.

"We're good," reported Apple Bloom. "Y'all kin go to lightspeed when yer ready."

\* \* \*

><p>The system had an Old Republic catalog number from its initial survey some six hundred years ago, but it was informally known around the Fringe as "Bertie". The derivation of the name remains shrouded in obscurity, but the most popular theory was that one of the survey team had remarked, "This system is as worthless as my uncle Bertie!" and the name stuck.<p>

That the system had little worth was hard to dispute. It was not situated near any major trade route. There were no habitable planets, and there were no interesting minerals worth exploiting among the two sparse asteroid belts and three unremarkable gas giants and their associated moons.

Across the centuries, the largest moon of the innermost gas giant had hosted a series of smuggling and pirate groups, but the distance from the trade routes made it a less-than-ideal base for such activities. When the Alliance to Restore the Republic became aware of the at-the-time abandoned facilities, it was determined that the crude base lacked the infrastructure to host more than a part-time fighter training installation. At least it was fairly close to the Yavin system.

It was Luke's not-entirely-enthusiastic recommendation that the Battle of Bertie would mark the graveyard of the Death Star.

\* \* \*

><p>It had not been one of Darth Vader's better days.<p>

He was still at a loss to explain how his former master had been able to so easily defeat him. He was still trying to come to grips with the unprecedented growth the old lizard had displayed, and that burst of flame had to be a hallucination generated by feedback from his damaged hands affecting his helmet's vision systems.

The revelation that Kenobi was not the only jedi among the intruders had come as an even greater shock. The young human in particular stood out as a blazing beacon in the Force when he had assisted in scattering the stormtroopers in the hangar. There was something unsettlingly familiar about the boy. Something that reminded him of Padme...

He was also having difficulty with his replacement prosthetics; he was getting phantom pain from his new left hand, and the right thumb had an occasional half-second or so response lag.

At least Tarkin wasn't in any position to snark. He was faced with the small flood of computer-related issues that had started as soon as they had completed the hyperspace jump to this backwater.

\* \* \*

><p>"So just what did you do to their computer systems, Apple Bloom?" asked Cadance.<p>

"Well, it was all set up to kick in after their next hyperspace jump, which should be them followin' us to Bertie. First..."

\* \* \*

><p>Tarkin addressed the group of senior Engineering and IT staff gathered in his office. "A succinct summary of the current issues, if you please. Weapons?"<p>

An ageing commander spoke up. "Main weapon is unaffected, but defensive turbolasers are unable to coordinate fire. We can put all emplacements on local control, but that will result in a fifteen to twenty-five percent loss in effectiveness."

"Power systems?" continued Tarkin.

"Reactors are unaffected. Power distribution to non-essential areas is variable," responded a squat engineering captain.

"Propulsion?"

"Hyperdrive motivators are locked in a testing cycle. It is not possible to go to light speed at present," answered a belligerent commander. "Sublight systems appear to be functioning normally for the moment," he added somewhat apologetically.

"Communications?"

"HoloNet transmissions have been effectively blocked, and reception is sporadic at best. Realspace lightspeed communication does not appear to be affected. And you are already aware of the internal communication issues," said a thin colonel.

All of the intercoms and networked comlinks had been rendered useless. Whenever a channel was opened, all the operator would hear was an endlessly-repeating sugary-sweet children's song about smiling. All internal text messages were having their destination codes randomized. Every battlefield communicator that could be scrounged was being used to jury-rig a bare-bones replacement voice-and-data network, but at present, messages were being relayed person-to-person.

"Flight Operations?"

"Droid malfunctions have caused over eighty percent of our fighter complement to be placed in varying states of maintenance standby," reported a visibly shaken Starfighter Command General. "At present, we can muster roughly two full wings of operational fighters, including reconnaissance and surface attack variants. Assault and utility transports do not appear to have been affected. We are attempting large-scale memory purges on the maintenance droids, but for some reason, they return to aberrant behavior patterns within an hour." He glared at the fidgeting colonel in charge of the computer network.

"My Lord, I regret to inform you that the entire computer network has been thoroughly compromised with several viral programs. The only sure-fire solution that we have available is a complete shut-down and restart from secured backups made at least five days ago. As you may recall, that procedure took eight hours during the station's initial startup. I believe we can reduce that time to six hours," was the



report as he cast several nervous glances at the brooding Sith Lord standing motionless behind Tarkin.

"Six hours during which we are effectively helpless," growled Propulsion.

"As opposed to our current situation?" shot back Flight Ops.

"Gentlemen," interrupted Tarkin. "Thank you for your reports. Continue to pursue what remedies you can without further compromising our defences." He turned to the networking officer. "How long will you need to prepare for the cold restart?"

"At least one hour. Two would be preferable, my lord."

Tarkin's pinched face grew even more sour. "Have your staff begin preliminary preparations. I will notify you if you are to proceed. Dismissed."

As the officers quickly filed out of the office, the Grand Moff turned to Vader with a scowl. "Tagge is going to have a field day with this! He's already volunteered to take a shuttle to the sector base at Yaga Minor to 'summon reinforcements to defend the station during our temporary difficulties'. What's worse, he's probably right; it's the prudent move. How did those Rebel scum manage to infiltrate our computers so thoroughly?"

Vader declined to comment.

"Yes. Best for you to remain silent. After all, your judgement regarding your old master was perhaps slightly optimistic. Fortunately for you, neither of us benefits from denouncing each other to the Emperor. Or would you prefer to replace Tagge on that shuttle trip to Yaga Minor?"

"I shall remain here. Something in the Force tells me that I shall meet Kenobi again very soon."

"For your sake, I hope you will be better prepared for him this time." The governor went to the office door and called to his secretary. "Send word to General Tagge that he will be departing for Yaga Minor as soon as the flight deck can certify a shuttle for flight." He returned to his desk and looked at a datapad containing a set of estimates. "Eight hours to Yaga Minor...Six more hours to organize a relief force...We will be alone here for about thirty-six hours before the fleet can arrive. Do you concur?"

Vader nodded. Heavy fleet elements such as Star Destroyers had slower hyperdrive units than the relatively speedy personnel shuttles. "Do you believe the engineers and techs require additional motivation?"

Tarkin considered the question. Judging by the senior officers, frustration, embarrassment, and professional pride were probably enough to ensure top performance, but the Sith Lord needed to re-establish his reputation among the crew as well. "No more than five examples, and make sure that they are truly incompetent and not just unlucky."

\* \* \*

><p>"...It took some doin', but Cookie and me worked out a way to re-infect the service droids every time they interface with the network when they need to request supply locations and so on. We also set it up so that those tens of thousands of mouse droids all had dormant versions the programs for re-introduction to the system. I kin put the parameters of the viruses on a datacard fer ya to give Artoo next time around, Luke," offered Apple Bloom.<p>

The jedi master was impressed and not a little disconcerted.

They had gathered in a small conference room in the Yavin IV headquarters complex. Luke and Twilight had relinquished Scootaloo's astromech to the rebel technicians to provide the Death Star plans Apple Bloom had transferred to it earlier.

"General Dodonna says that they can pull together about ten squadrons of fighters, six corvettes, two \_Nebulon\_-Bs, and a \_Neutron Star\_ bulk cruiser in the time-frame we have for the attack," reported Cadance.

"That's 3 squadrons of X-Wings, 2 of upgraded Z-95s, and the rest are Y-wings," added Wedge Antilles. "Not including what we here can provide." The looping Corellian ace pilot had met the group as they disembarked from the \_Falcon\_ and seemed to be taking the substitutions in stride. "I've got my XJ-7, and I know Luke has both an XJ-6 and a Stealth-X tucked away in his pocket."

"Twilight's got my T-65C, but it's been modified for pony anatomy," said Scootaloo. "Maybe Pansy can fly it, since I'm staying in the \_Falcon\_."

"To be honest, I think I'll be of more use in the frigates or cruiser coordinating things with Battle Meditation," said Luke.

"Not one of the skills I've picked up. If anyone's going to use it, it has to be you," agreed Spike. "Since I was never that hot a pilot in any loop. I'm probably best suited to backing up Twilight in her shuttle."

"Me too," added Sweetie. "At least I know how to operate Starfleet equipment, so I can help to fly the thing if Twilight's busy with something else."

"So it looks like me on the flagship; Wedge, the \_Falcon\_, and maybe Pansy as a floating response force; and Twilight, Spike and Sweets in the shuttle. Any preferences, Apple Bloom? Cadance?" inquired Luke.

"I'll point out that the shuttle will be a tad crowded with three people and the extra equipment," interjected Twilight.

"Well, I could spend the battle on the flagship looking concerned, or I could probably make myself useful on the \_Falcon\_," said Cadance.

"I'm kinda torn. I'd like to help babysit the non-standard gear on the shuttle, but as Twilight said, it's already gettin' crowded. I guess I'll be Pansy's astromech if she's amenable," decided the

yellow droid.

"That reminds me. We need to make sure your additions behave as expected, Apple Bloom. Do you have a free hour to go to low orbit?" asked Twilight.

\* \* \*

><p>"No, my lord. Your fighter is fully functional so far as we can tell," said the nervous flight deck officer.<p>

"Then explain why it isn't being prepared for flight as I ordered," said Vader with deceptive calm.

"It's a...cosmetic...issue, my lord."

"Cosmetic."

"There have been...irregularities...in the application of surface coloration."

"The droids repainted it, you mean."

"Yes, my lord."

"Dare I ask the extent of the irregularities?"

The deck officer, taking a moment to make sure they were relatively isolated, pulled a small holorecorder from a pocket and selected an image.

Instead of the standard Imperial gray and black, the fighter had a " very non-regulation " base coat of deep blue, on which a half-sunburst in white occupied the forward end of the fuselage. A red Galactic Republic insignia was eblazoned toward the back end of each solar panel.

It was as if the paint job of his Clone Wars customized Aethersprite interceptor " The one he had privately named the "Azure Angel" in honour of Padme " had been transferred to the TIE advanced prototype.

\_And it actually looks pretty good\_, he admitted in the quiet back of his mind that had been dormant for most of the past nineteen years. The part that had stirred to life when Kenobi " his one-time best friend " had addressed him as "Anakin".

\_I'm not sure where the paint came from, either...\_

"I hope you understand that it would take a team of five crewers three hours to restore it to regulation, and we just don't have the people to spare right now," hazarded the officer.

Vader nodded absently. "Get more of the blue paint and have those insignia covered. Also run as thorough a pre-flight as you can. I will be taking it out in thirty minutes."

Ignoring the stammering response of the deck officer, Vader strode toward the pilot's ready room. Meditation had not silenced the inner voice the lizard had roused. Maybe time in the cockpit was what he

needed.

\* \* \*

><p>The Rebel attack force made their coordinated hyperspace jump to Bertie on schedule. Luke and Twilight had estimated that their attack would start three or so hours before significant Imperial fleet reinforcements could arrive.<p>

Cadance glanced around the cruiser's command deck as the hundred or so fighters and handful of larger ships organized themselves. Despite her earlier decision to join the \_Falcon\_'s crew, Luke had convinced her that she would be invaluable as a buffer between himself, the Loopers in their self-named Special Mission Force, and the rest of the Rebel command group.

"Green leader reports contact with Imperial reconnaissance unit," announced a comm tech. "Single TIE got a quick look at the fighter screen and is now running for the outer gas giant. Can't tell if it picked up the main force."

"Well, they know someone's here now," said Cadance. "Transmit the ultimatum?"

Dodonna nodded. "Whenever you're ready, princess."

\* \* \*

><p>Tarkin's aide entered the office and came to attention before extending a datapad.<p>

"Sir, a large rebel fighter force, backed up by an uncertain number of larger ships emerged form hyperspace approximately ten minutes ago. Five minutes ago, they broadcast an ultimatum. The text of the message, along with our latest force estimates is here."

Tarkin accepted the pad and read:

"This is senator Cadance Organa of Alderaan.

"In the name of the Alliance to Restore the Republic, we demand the immediate surrender of all Imperial armed forces. We further stipulate that Grand Moff Wilhuff Tarkin and Lord Darth Vader be placed under arrest to face trial for Genocide against the planet of Alderaan and numerous additional Crimes Against Sapience. Members of the Imperial Military holding flag rank, in addition to a small number of others, will be detained as Prisoners of War, with all the rights and responsibilities pertaining thereto.

"All other personnel will be allowed to depart the system with their personal effects. As regards the battle station, you are encouraged to scuttle the facility if that is your desire, as we presently lack the ability to intern it.

"Failure to accept these terms will result in the destruction of the battle station with the resultant loss of life. You have one hour to respond.

"The list of additional Imperial personnel to be detained follows..."

The Governor skipped to the enemy force estimates. Over eighty fighters and at least five larger ships. Not really a threat to the station, but enough to be a significant irritant until the reinforcements could arrive. \_Drat the communications difficulties. All I have is my initial estimate. If Tagge runs to schedule, the fleet won't be here for another two hours.\_

"Summon the senior defense staff to conference room one in five minutes," he ordered.

"Sir, Lord Vader is still flying a patrol circuit. Do you want him recalled as well?" asked the aide.

"Inform him that if he cannot be aboard in fifteen minutes he might as well stay out there."

\* \* \*

><p>"So you figure the odds of the Imps actually accepting Cadance's terms to be better or worse than Jabba donating his fortune to the Alderaan Relief Society and retiring to a life of quiet contemplation on Tython?" Scootaloo asked Chewbacca as the <em>Falcon<em>, Wedge's X-Wing, and Twilight's shuttle orbited the Rebel formation.

Twenty minutes had elapsed since the broadcast of the Alliance ultimatum.

Pansy had elected to remain aboard the freighter as a gunner, and had managed to talk a slightly dubious Cookie into assisting her. That left Apple Bloom free to serve in the familiar role of navigator and flight engineer.

{{Somewhat lower than the likelihood of Kamino suffering a prolonged drought would be my guess,}} replied the wookiee. {{Still, the proper forms should be observed.}}

"Heads up," warned Sweetie over their private channel. "Sensors are picking up one incoming at high speed. Profile matches a TIE Advanced prototype. Contact estimated in four minutes. Spike's pretty sure it's Vader coming for a quick look-see. Twilight wants to pull her vanishing act before he can get a good scan, and we might as well see if we can take him off the board now."

"Right. Bloom, let Cadance know. Wedge, we'll run interference as planned," said the violet-haired pilot.

"Copy that," was the Corellian's crisp reply as the two ships swung onto an intercept course. Behind them, the shuttle faded from view.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight had been relieved to confirm that the cloaking device Apple Bloom had stored from an earlier Trek loop was behaving as designed and not as cloaking shields native to this loop would. She could work around the two-way invisibility that the local cloaking devices employed, but it was much simpler to just look out at the universe without resorting to more exotic detection methods.<p>

Through the Force, she could sense Spike's efforts at reducing their own presence as a lessening of the link she felt with the rest of the Rebels that had started when Luke began his Battle Meditation shortly after Cadance had transmitted her message.

Fortuitously, this encounter would take place outside of easy sensor range of both sides; neither would have a good idea of exactly what happened.

The shuttle was making a gradual diving turn that would, if Scootaloo and Wedge followed their planned manoeuvres, bring it below and behind Vader's fighter on a roughly parallel course. Twilight observed the tactical display being fed by the passive sensors. The Falcon, with Wedge flying high cover, was on a direct intercept course with Vader. There was a brief exchange of fire, Vader's striking the freighter's full-strength shields, Pansy's set to barely miss and force an evasive turn just so...

"Phaser modulation confirmed. Tractor beam standing by," reported Sweetie quietly.

Twilight adjusted her course slightly and switched to the weapons control panel. "Dropping cloak. Locking phasers."

The shuttle wavered back into view, and twin orange beams speared out from the upper fuselage. The beams flared against the prototype's shields for a fraction of a second before punching through to strike the aft hull, creating a cascade of ionization sparks.

"Looks like his power systems have been disrupted. Applying tractor beam," said Sweetie.

"Scanning for a transporter lock," added Spike from the aft compartment. "Got him!"

"Energize," Twilight ordered.

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight reports that they have Vader on ice," announced Apple Bloom's voice over Cadance's headset as the fleet's operations officer declared that there was no further activity from the Imperials.<p>

"It's kind of ambiguous. They've got a bit less than forty minutes before time runs out, and aside from that solo run by that prototype fighter your friends went out to handle, they're playing their sabaac cards close to the vest," commented Dodonna. "They've pulled back to a minimal recon shell of fighters. Looks like General Kenobi called it correctly. They're certain we can't scratch them, and they lack the fighter strength to overwhelm us, so they're hunkering down in the hope we decide to come to them anyway, or until they get reinforced."

"How are the crews holding up?" asked Cadance.

"Better than I would have expected under the circumstances. I guess young Skywalker's meditation is helping them to stay focused." The general stretched. "I'm trying to remind myself that the waiting will

have an impact on their morale as well."

Cadance made a show of concentrating on her headset. "General Kenobi is requesting landing clearance for his shuttle and wants to know if the holding cell has been prepared as discussed earlier. Captain Solo and Flight Officer Antillies will remain on perimeter patrol."

"I'm sure I don't want to know how they managed to take a prisoner, but the cell and comm gear are ready," said the general.

\* \* \*

><p>"No response at all from Lord Vader," reported Tarkin's aide as the Grand Moff entered the primary communications center.<p>

This was unsettling. Fifteen minutes earlier, the Sith Lord had declared his intention to perform a distant fly-by of the rebel formation. There had been nothing since.

Tarkin addressed his fighter group commander. "You are confident that you have sufficient strength for this reconnaissance in force?"

"Yes, my lord. The techs have made commendable progress restoring our fighter strength. Eighteen squadrons should be more than enough to deal with the Rebel screen."

"Then by all means, let us give the Princess our response to her ultimatum."

\* \* \*

><p>(namar13766)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Entry 38:<p>

After that last loop, I wish I could say I had a nice relaxing loop. And for the most part, I'd be correct.

I woke up as a PONY! SQUEE! Why did I just write out my thoughts? After being happy for a while, I met this human named Keiichi Morisato. He's not the local Anchor per se, but the boyfriend of one of the people trying to fix the loops. Belldandy is very nice, and she honestly cares about me in a way I wish I could thank Celestia for. Just...How do I repay her kindness? Can I even do it? I don't think I could do it for her, let alone Twilight. But then Keiichi told me something he heard from a Warhammer Looper. "It is not the descent toward the shadow nor the rise toward the light that makes us superior. It is the endless struggle between the two that greatness of character lies."

I guess that's all I can do. Really.

Keychain: Full Story

Entry 39: Well. That happened.

I Woke up human. Again.

I was not thrilled, to say the least, when my memories hit me. I suppose I could deal with being a soldier. I suppose having super-strength and speed is okay. But being psychic like \_that\_? I'm not so sure I could deal with the nightmares I would have.

Thank goodness for the local Anchor. Everything I accused Princess Celestia of doing to me? I wish I could go back to my younger self and smack her seeing what happened to my mother. Yes, that's right. Mother. In this loop, guest loopers usually are the Children of the anchor, and end up waking up just we set her free. But I have to admit, for someone who even refers to herself as the "Mother of the Apocalypse," she can be very caring.

She even recognized me as an Equestrian looper, and used her powers to turn us both into ponies so that we could enjoy our time together. I guess things have to end sometime, so right now I'm writing this under the wings of a sleeping Alma Wade Soul Swimmer.

Keychain: Falling Brightly

\* \* \*

><p>88.1: Some things are hard to defend against.<br>88.2: She's been watching TV.  
>88.3: Dun, dun, dun, dun daah dun...<p>

### 93. Chapter 93

89.1

"Okay," Sweetie said, over cocoa. "You guys up for this?"

"Yep." Gilda nodded. "Suits me fine."

"Your plan is one to which I accede." Zecora sipped some more of the hot drink. "At what time do you wish we proceed?"

Sweetie adjusted her scarf. "Well, tomorrow afternoon's the Wrap-Up... let's go with eleven in the morning."

\* \* \*

><p>"Attention, Ponyville!" Sweetie announced, standing on top of a box. "The amazing Zecora and I will perform step one of the Winter Wrap-Up â€" blooming this tree!"<p>

She pointed to the library.

"Miss Sparkle," she added in a voice she deliberately made deeper. "What kind of tree is that?"

"My home?" Twilight checked. "It's an oak."

"Really?" Sweetie winked. "Right, let's go. Zecora?"

The zebra nodded wordlessly, flipped her wooden staff, and began dancing.



Sweetie pulled a flute from behind her ear and began playing. Drums, trumpets, stringed instruments and the sound of multiple voices chanting issued forth from the silver instrument, building to a crescendo as Zecora pointed extravagantly at a bare branch.

There was a flicker of light and shadow describing a circle around the branch, then it pulsed and flowered into a blaze of cherry blossom.

At the back of the astonished crowd, Gilda moved carefully from one place to another, and kept her inky tailtip raised. Her beak moved slightly with a repressed grin.

\* \* \*

><p>By now, almost the entire tree was coated in sweet-scented pink flowers. Zecora's dance had gotten more and more energetic, there'd definitely been some breakdancing in there, and for the last minute there'd been an orange sitting serenely on her head for no apparent reason.<p>

Then, as the music grew to a final crescendo, she stopped moving. Sitting on her backside, facing the tree, she made six sharp gestures.

A final circle of cherry blossom spun around the tree-

And petals exploded outwards.

\* \* \*

><p>"Eh heh heh..." Sweetie said, scratching the back of her neck with a hoof. "Guess we overdid it, huh."<p>

"Looks like," Gilda replied with a shrug, looking around at the entirely not-snowy-at-all ground around Ponyville. "Thought only those special enchanted trees did that. Hey, I see blossom over at the Apple farm."

"You do?" Sweetie craned her neck. "...oh, great. That's cherry blossom. Zecora, think you could go fix it so they don't have to become the Cherry farm?"

"I will, ensure, their crop, is steady," Zecora panted, "As soon, as my breath, is not, so heavy..."

\* \* \*

><p>89.2<p>

So You're Time Looping

\_A short guide, by Twilight Sparkle.\_

Hello!

Welcome to the wider universe. If you've just been given this short booklet, then either you're in a world you don't recognize, or someone you don't know is taking the place of someone you do. Don't worry, this is entirely normal, and you should be back to the world

you're familiar with next time around.

This booklet is intended to make you, the reader and newly contacted looper, familiar with the terms that more experienced loopers use. It will also let you know what you can expect in the future, and a little about why.

\* \* \*

><p>Loop (noun)<p>

This is each individual time that you go back in time. So each time you wake up back in time, you're in a new Loop. The term is also used to refer to separate worlds " so I, for example, am from the Equestria Loop. Loops have a usual start point and a usual end point, but neither is guaranteed. End points are more likely to be the same loop-to-loop than start points.

Looping (verb)

The process of going back in time, and the process of turning up in a new loop. So I occasionally Loop into the world known as Berk, and I am said to be "Looping into" Berk. I have Looped in the past; I am a Looper; you are also a Looper.

Yggdrasil (proper noun)

Yggdrasil is the tree that is the multiverse. All loops are, to extend an analogy, 'branches' of Yggdrasil. It has recently suffered severe damage, though the situation is contained. That's why the loops happen.

Awake (noun; verb)

To be Awake is to have memories of having gone back in time; that is, to have Looped this time. Sometimes people Awaken before or after the time that everyone else does " my friend Princess Celestia, for example, sometimes Awakens nearly a thousand years in the past from when I Awaken. You have to be a looper to be Awake, but not all Loopers are Awake every time.

Anchor (noun)

Almost every known Loop has at least one Anchor. The Anchor is (one of) the first to start looping in a given Loop. I am an Anchor, for example. The Anchor for a given loop is easy to work out " they're the one who's always Awake. (Well, almost always.) They're the one who's able to be the only one Awake. So, sometimes I'm Awake and none of my friends are.

The death of the last present Anchor within a certain period tends to instantly end the loop.

Replace (verb)

To take the place normally occupied by another individual, looping or not. This includes if you have swapped places with a friend, for example, though it is normally used when the place you are occupying is in another loop.

## Fused loop (noun)

The term "Fused" loop is somewhat fluid. The more general meaning is that it is any iteration of a loop where elements from more than one world "looping or not" are present. So, for example, a world where my world and yours were mixed together might mean that I'm there. It might mean that everyone was ponies. Or it might just mean that there's a few of my fellow Equestrian loopers there, as humans.

The more specific meaning is the middle one "where there are things \_other than loopers\_ from both worlds. Or from all three, or more.

## Baseline (noun)

The events of the first run-through of a loop, and the events that tend to result with no outside interference. If, for example, your home loop had none of its loopers awake, and I was a million light years away and never got any closer, then the events back at your home region would be baseline.

## Admin (noun)

The admins are the deities who run Yggdrasil and who are working to fix it. If you meet them directly, there are a few things to remember. First, they spend a substantial fraction of their existences working to keep you alive, so allow for that. Second, they are essentially gods of a power beyond anything you have. Yes, that includes you. And third, they do care for the worlds they run "try to stay on their good side. It's just common courtesy.

## Sakura Syndrome (noun)

Named after the unfortunate Sakura Haruno, who was the first documented case. Loopers with a case of Sakura Syndrome tend to focus on the fact that things are returned to their original state when a loop restarts, and begin to use this to their advantage. The stricter definition is that they begin behaving like this to fellow loopers "who are \_not\_ reset in this manner" while the less strict definition is simply that they exploit the loops to mistreat non-looping individuals.

People with this problem tend to come about because they have become bored or apathetic as a result of the loops, and turn to one means or another to enjoy themselves. This becomes gradually more extreme over time. The process is not inevitable, but care should be taken.

Sufferers of Sakura Syndrome are unfortunate. They are also potentially dangerous, and as a new looper I cannot guarantee your safety near them.

## Setsuna Syndrome (noun).

The opposite of Sakura Syndrome, named for Setsuna Meiou. This is the case when a Looper comes to believe that the events of the baseline are sacrosanct and must not be interfered with.

This is especially dangerous "and risky, both for the sufferer and

for others " when they are not the only one Awake. Sufferers of Setsuna Syndrome may get violent to preserve what they see as the true timeline, and they can easily bite off more than they can chew.

Setsuna Syndrome, unlike Sakura Syndrome, has a known and reliable solution in that it results from a simple misconception. Admins can help to talk sufferers around if other measures have not sufficed.

Subspace Pocket (noun)

An ability most loopers eventually develop. This consists of setting up a storage space inside one's soul, into which objects may be placed. The size of the pocket grows with time and with your own personal discipline and power. These objects are carried between loops, which is of course very useful.

Punishment Loop (noun)

You may have had one of these already. Don't worry, we all do. They're bland, often embarrassing, and unpleasant to be in, you tend not to have access to most of your normal abilities, and you probably ended up there after doing something stupid which backfired spectacularly.

These are usually quite stable places, where you're put while the admins fix whatever you damaged. Just grin and bear it " trying to end a punishment loop early doesn't end well.

Eiken (proper noun)

The most common punishment loop.

Generation (noun, adjective)

Generations of loopers are essentially groups who started looping at about the same time. For example, I first started looping several thousand loops after the world of Berk, so I am technically from a younger generation than the Berk Anchor, Hiccup. But given how many loops there have been, we tend to be spoken of as being part of the same generation.

First Generation (noun)

The loopers who started looping first. All Anchors, all very powerful. Owing to calculation issues (they've all lost count), it is unclear whether there are five or seven. The broader definition is: Ranma Saotome, Shinji Ikari, Harry Potter, Naruto Uzumaki, Lina Inverse, Usagi Tsukino and Ichigo Kurosaki. (Evidence exists that Ichigo is younger, but evidence that he is the same generation also exists. Usagi, meanwhile, appears to have pretended that her friend Rei was the Anchor for a considerable time.)

Ping (noun, verb)

A combination of several different types of abilities that only somebody who had been to multiple universes could perform. You send a ping when you want to know if anybody else is Awake, and they (usually) ping back. However, you usually can't identify the source

of a ping. Some Loops, such as my own, might have other ways of identifying Awake individuals. Like with the Subspace Pocket, you might want to ask the person who gave you this pamphlet about how to do this.

\* \* \*

><p>I hope that this booklet was helpful. If you ever find yourself in Equestria, then drop by for a chat. My name is Twilight Sparkle, I tend to be a unicorn and live in a library-tree, and the secret code phrase is 'Hi, I'm a visiting Looper'. I'd like to hear if there's anything that should be added to this booklet.<p>

Good luck!

\* \* \*

><p>"...well, that was surprisingly cheerful," Mercedes Thompson said, looking up from the pamphlet. "Do you just... carry these?"<p>

"Yeah, I do." Leah rummaged in her jacket for a moment, and pulled out a photo album. "Here's the author, by the way. Twilight Sparkle â€" I owe her a lot."

Mercy blinked. "\_That's\_ where I recognize the... she's a My Little Pony, isn't she?"

Leah nodded. "Yep. Hey, don't get too smug â€" I've got copies of your books. So, when are you getting married to Adam this time?"

The skin-walker went bright red. "What the â€" but-"

Her consternation was answered by a grin. Then Leah clapped her on the shoulder. "Right, to business. Do you want help from me, and if so how much?"

"...give me a minute to think about it, please," Mercy requested. "But yeah, if you're willing that'd be huge."

\* \* \*

><p>89.3:<p>

"Rarity?"

"Yes, Twilight?"

"Can you fix this dress for me? I'm afraid a chandelier fell on it."

"Certainly, Twilight. It'd be a pleasure."

\* \* \*

><p>89.4:<p>

"Well..." Luna began, awkwardly. "This is... new."

"You're not wrong there," replied Trixie. "Wonder where Twilight

is?"

"She will turn up," Luna dismissed. "Eventually. What is the greater concern, however, is how we are going to do this."

"And does this mean your name is Luna Moon?" Nyx piped up.

The other two looked at her.

"Well, I mean, I'm Nightmare Moon, and Trix is Trixie Lula Moon, so, since you're kinda our mom this time..."

"Neigh, to have the name of Luna Moon is silly," Luna pronounced. "As that would make me Moon Moon."

Trixie sniggered.

"...so, how do we do this?" she asked, after a moment. "And can we send envoys to the Changeling lands by yesterday?"

With a pomf, a letter landed between them.

"Ah, excellent," Luna pronounced, taking it up and opening it. "Hm. Well, it would appear that we know where Twilight Sparkle is..."

\* \* \*

><p>"I've had some strange families in the loops before, I'll freely admit," Twilight freely admitted. "But this one takes the cake."<p>

"What is it, then?" Gilda asked, adjusting her big floppy chief-of-staff hat.

"Well... I'm the gryphon empress," Twilight pointed out.

Gilda shrugged. "You're not telling me you've not done that before."

"Not as an owl, no," Twilight said. "And the fact that my ruling clan includes you, a tortoise I can only assume is Rainbow Dash, and a certain psychopathic bunny-"

"Sociopathic," Gilda said firmly. "I think."

"Right. Correction tentatively accepted. Anyway. I sent a letter to Equestria. But I can pick up all three elements of Kindness... any ideas where they are?"

"Ask Dash," Gilda suggested. "She'll know."

\* \* \*

><p>"Are we team shapeshifter?" Silver asked, as all three Elements of Kindness padded, trotted or floated down the hallway.<p>

"Presumably," Chrysalis replied. "I appreciate you two blocking yourselves out of the hive for now, by the way."

"I'll keep it up... unless you want me not to, that is," the wolf next to her replied. "I know we looped in as changeling sisters and we're supposed to fight over the position of queen, but... that seems altogether too unkind..."

"Okay, that's great." Chrysalis nodded to her. "Let's see... hey, what kind of bedrooms do you two want? I learned interior design once, so now the whole swarm knows."

"Matte black," Silver replied promptly. "I officially declare myself the teenage rebel technically-a-changeling princess."

\* \* \*

><p>89.5<p>

"Uh..." Sunset started, wincing. "I didn't think about how this conversation would actually go..."

Spike raised an eyebrow. "What is it?"

"Well..." The unicorn shook her head. "I... look, you two are kind of famous in the multiverse. Almost everyone I visited, once they found out where I was from, had a few words to say about you."

"Oh. Right. That." Spike blushed.

Rarity smiled. "Well, I suppose it must have been my wonderful personality."

"And what am I, a handbag?" Spike grouched, barely restraining a happy grin.

"Well..." Rarity considered. "Yes. But in an attractive colour that goes with my hair."

"I should have known you only wanted me as an accessory..."

Sunset blinked, head moving back and forth as the two bantered easily.

"Accessorize well, and the world is your mollusc," Rarity said sagely. "Largely because the great big strong dragon accessory will pry it open for you and turn the pearls into jewellery."

"Unless he's feeling peckish," Spike rejoined. "In which case, you'll have to live with the terrible privation of getting a necklace made out of nacre. And slightly more dragon."

"Well, more dragon is a net plus," Rarity allowed. "I wouldn't go so far as to say you're a hot water bottle, but..."

"Okay, how the hell do you do that?" Sunset asked, unable to restrain herself any longer. "I mean... you've been married for, what, longer than some loops have been a thing! And..."

She slumped. "And you seem so comfortable together. I have to work so hard at that, and I never really get it down. I'm starting to wonder if I can."

Sunset sighed deeply.

Spike shot a glance at Rarity, who returned it worriedly.

"Sunset..." Spike began, carefully. "It might amaze you to know this, but it took us over a hundred years to get to the point we were officially dating."

Rarity nodded, seeing where Spike was going with this. "It wasn't always easy â€" we had our own traumas to work through, at the time, and even now there's the occasional thing which troubles me-"

"Us," Spike interjected. "If it's your problem, it's mine."

"And right there," Sunset said, shaking her head again. "I understand it's how this loop works â€" how \_home\_ works," she added in a tone of slight wonderment. "But after so long places where the loopers will do things like rig traps the size of small towns and trick one another into compromising situations as a matter of course... it's going to take a while to get used to that kind of teamwork. Trust, I suppose."

"That's a lot of it, yes," Rarity confirmed. "But the rest... we're comfortable with one another, we're comfortable with \_ourselves\_ for the most part, and as such we just... relax."

Spike closed his eyes, and raised a hand. "May I?"

Sunset looked lost.

"I'm a Jedi, remember," he pointed out. "Mind if I give you a quick once-over?"

"...sure," she said warily.

For the next thirty or so seconds, no-one spoke. Spike's breathing became deep, steady and even, and while Sunset wasn't able to relax nearly as much as he had, she found the quiet reassuring nevertheless.

Then Spike snored.

"Oh, \_Spike,\_" Rarity said with a long-suffering smile. She tapped him on the shoulder, and he jolted. "Did you fall asleep meditating again?"

"\_Probably\_ not," Spike replied in a hurt tone. "Anyway. Sunset, you do have a bit of darkness in there â€" but that's really not surprising, most loopers tend to be grey. By the feel of it, you've got it well under control."

"So... what's next?" Sunset asked.

"Well," Rarity took over. "The point I was getting at before is, Spike and I are as comfortable together as we are because of long association. You've been shuffled from world to world repeatedly up until very recently, so you've never really had a chance to put down some roots."



Spike nodded along. "I recommend a course of treatment. First off, have a few sessions with Fluttershy, because she's so non-threatening that she should circumvent any combat fatigue you might have. After that, spend a few loops working on the Apple farm â€" Twilight can see about getting you hired. That's steady, monotonous work, but more importantly the Apples are as steady as the earth. They'll help reassure you you're here to stay."

"And what then?"

"Then, next time Celestia's looping, just... talk to her. As much as you can â€" about an hour every day â€" about whatever comes to mind. Where you've been. What you've learned. Show off a bit, perhaps." Spike's smile was gentle. "I think she's missed you, as well. She doesn't talk about it much, but I happen to have noticed on several occasions that whenever she has a Sisters loop she connives to have you get a good position in court. Nothing stressful, just... something with a lot of free time."

Sunset considered that, then nodded slowly. "That does sound nice."

"Which is half the point," Spike confirmed. "It's slower than the more exciting ways of building friendships, but if anything more secure."

"Sure." Sunset shot a glance at Spike, and grinned. "Live long, and prosper, and all that."

Spike returned her grin. "And may the force be with you."

\* \* \*

><p>89.6<p>

"I call it an 'honours list'," Celestia said brightly. "Do you like it?"

"It seems as though thou art granting knighthoods to all manner of unsuitable candidates," Luna answered, looking down the list. "For certes, I can see the appeal of those like Twilight Sparkle and fair Applejack, but... whence is Fluttershy a warrior?"

"You've never annoyed her, I take it," Celestia replied. "She's scary."

"This one for the Mayor of Ponyville?"

"Above and beyond the call of duty," Celestia explained. "She tried to tackle you when you turned up as Nightmare Moon."

Luna frowned, but let it go. "Who is this 'Trixie'?"

"A travelling performer." Celestia shrugged. "I like her shows."

"Right." Luna kept reading down the scroll. "Rainbow Dash makes sense... A mare called Berry Punch?"

"She makes the most lovely banana cordial."

"Scootaloo?"

"A filly who Dash adopted. She's good on a scooter."

Luna raised an eyebrow. "Ditzy Doo?"

"She delivered a nice letter to me. Granted, it was six months late, but..."

The other one joined it. "Angel Bunny?"

"It was under duress."

"Queen Chrysalis?"

"Diplomatic purposes."

"Vinyl Scratch?"

"I like her music. Must you interrogate me on every choice?"

"Not every choice, dear sister." Luna scanned down the scroll, occasionally muttering under her breath. "Pony Joe?"

"He gave me a free donut last time I went."

"Celly, this doth seem much like a frivolous use of the royal prerogative..."

"Oh, no," Celestia denied. "That's when I ennobled a squirrel as the duchess of the Everfree."

"...you what?"

\* \* \*

><p>Silverleaf put the royal proclamation down. "...okay, wasn't expecting that."<p>

Diamond Tiara, who was for whatever reason her 'owner' this loop (pet squirrels had been 'in' at some point pre-loop), took the paper. "Huh. Okay, I'm going to request that Applebloom builds the biggest treehouse in local history as your ducal residence."

\* \* \*

><p>89.7<p>

They Awoke running.

Being less experienced than most loopers with running, at least while bipedal, they staggered, tripped, one hit the other and they ended up in a heap.

"Ow," Luna complained.

"It's not my fault I landed on you," Celestia replied grumpily. "Where are we?"

As she spoke, she pushed herself off Luna and stood up. Luna followed, favouring her right leg slightly.

"I'm never used to this," Luna grumbled. "Right. Start-up check. Pocket?"

"Check," Celestia replied, producing a slim wooden stick out of thin air. "Magic?"

"Check," Luna replied, as her own wand jetted red sparks. She then turned into an alicorn.

"Oh, show-off," Celestia grouched. "Just because you put in the effort to get your animagus form..."

"It's a sensible precaution," her sister pointed out. "Now, why were we running?"

Celestia nodded at some figures approaching them at a ground-eating sprint, with twisted faces and sharp fangs. As they approached, the monstrous humanoids seemed startled by something, and slowed in confusion.

"Wait, are those vampires?" Luna checked, squinting. "They've got the fangs."

"And I think it's safe to assume that they're not good ones, seeing as how they're after us," Celestia agreed. "Right. You take the ones on the left?"

"Not just the ones on the left, thanks," Luna answered. "Sorry in advance, sis."

The moon went down, and the sun came up.

With some very abrupt screams, the vampires dematerialized into clouds of dust.

"...well, that worked," Celestia allowed. "But that's also probably going to be on the news. Now, where's the local anchor..."

\* \* \*

><p>Alexander 'Xander' Lavalley Harris blinked in what was apparently the 2am sunrise.<p>

"Huh. Guess that means I've got visitors. Couldn't they just do the easy type thing and turn up at the library tomorrow morning?"

He rolled over in bed and pulled a pillow over his head. Sunnydale Awakenings could be at all hours of the day and night, and he needed some less-ugly sleep.

\* \* \*

><p>89.8<p>

"Two households, both alike in dignity,  
>In fair Equestria, where we lay our scene,<br>From ancient grudge  
break to new mutiny,

>Where civil blood makes civil hoofs unclean.<br>From forth the fatal  
loins of these two foes  
>A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life,<br>Whose  
misadventured piteous overthrows  
>Do with their death bury their parents' strife.<br>The fearful  
passage of their death-mark'd love,  
>And the continuance of their parents' rage,<br>Which, but their  
children's end, nought could remove,  
>Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;<br>The which if you with  
patient ears attend,  
>What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend."<p>

Zecora shrugged, and held up a sign. 'It's a job.' Then paused,  
thought for a moment, and threw the script over her shoulder.

"They won't actually do it, though. They're much smarter than Romeo  
and Juliet. In fact, my thought is that it'll be done by four."

That said, she began rummaging in her pocket for something to cook  
popcorn with.

\* \* \*

><p>Spike felt words leap to his lips as he entered the party. Words  
in Iambic Pentameter.<p>

\_Screw that. I know how this goes...\_

A moment's check showed a few salient details. The ruler of the city  
of Equestria â€" yes, city this time, not country â€" was Prince  
Solaris. His kinsmen were Count Macintosh and one of Spike's friends,  
Armorio.

Other familiar faces also turned up, as usual. Twilight, for example,  
appeared to be his cousin. But most of the important roles in the  
play were left clear â€" as they should be if it was Spear Shaker's  
play.

From long experience, Spike knew there were two ways to handle a loop  
with a strong sense of narrative. Either make a clean break from the  
conventions straight away, so they had nothing to cling onto, or ride  
the story until it offered an out.

\_Let's try option one.\_

"Lord Capulet," he began, sweeping an elegant bow. Time as a pony  
over many loops meant that it was as graceful as anyone could want.  
"Might I have the honour of asking for your daughter's hand in  
marriage?"

He shrugged a wing, flipping his facemask off and revealing himself  
to be of house Montague, as the various unicorns and pegasi stared.  
"If it helps, I'm fairly sure it would end a feud, and-"

Rarity glomped him.

"How do you always know just the right thing to do?" he asked in a  
whisper, as bedlam erupted.

"I know you," she replied. "Quite well."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that was a bust," Spike sighed, some hours later. "Looks like option one didn't work. Any ideas?"<p>

Twilight shrugged, flaring her own wings. "Assuming you don't want me to just go alicorn? I suggest an incredibly convoluted scheme which doesn't involve anything in the way of poison, though sleeping potion and poison joke might work well. I'll let Rarity know, she'll start on her own similarly elaborate and similarly complicated scheme, and I'll carry messages between the two of you."

She gave him a look. "And be careful with duels!"

"Always," he replied.

\* \* \*

><p>"This was <em>not<em> a cunning scheme," Twilight pointed out, barely half an hour later.

"It worked, didn't it?" Spike defended. "I thought getting the local CMC involved was inspired."

"You did get my sister running the streets with urchins, darling. The shame!" Rarity flounced, then grinned. "Like she wasn't doing that already, admittedly... I have to admit, though, a moving siege tower that sings Volare was the most improbable thing they've come up with in a while."

"Yeah, they're inventive when they've got a challenge." Spike peered over the side. "Okay, this looks like far enough. Girls! You can stop now?"

"What is this stop you speak of?" Scootaloo's voice drifted up from inside the contraption. "Is it like go but less?"

"Yeah, that'll do!" Spike replied.

"Oh. We may have a problem there, then."

"Look, brakes are hard," Applebloom whined. "Especially with these materials, they're appalling. Abominable."

"Atrocious?" Sweetie suggested.

"Thanks. Yeah, that. Also, I think there's woodworm."

Spike, Twilight and Rarity exchanged glances.

"Abandon siege tower!" Twilight announced.

Spike picked Rarity up. "Hope you don't mind."

"Not at all, dear," she assured him, and then the dramatic scene where they escaped the runaway siege tower was abruptly stymied as it hit a clothes-line.

Assorted crashing noises filled the area.

\* \* \*

><p>Prince Solaris blinked as a unicorn, a pegasus, three fillies and enough wood to manufacture a war galley avalanched through the front door of his throne room.<p>

Twilight flew in through the opened front door, alighting on the floor next to her dazed fellow loopers. "Afternoon, my prince. These two want to get married, and it'd prevent the Montague-Capulet feud. Should I call a priest?"

She looked behind herself. "I'd hurry, though, I think the House Capulet guards noticed us."

\* \* \*

><p>"And why should I accept this betrothal?" Lord Capulet demanded. "My eldest daughter, with a Montague!"<p>

"And my son seduced by a Capulet!" Lord Montague added.

"Because otherwise they'd have been in love anyway, they'd have started climbing walls to see one another at night â€" or, for that matter, Spike would have just flown in â€" and then there'd have been a duel, and Spike would have been exiled, and Rarity would fake her death with potion to get out of the planned wedding because they'd already have had a clandestine wedding, and they'd plan to run away after the funeral, but Spike wouldn't get the message, and he'd think she was really dead and take poison, and then she'd take poison and stab herself, and you'd reconcile but with your eldest children dead."

Everypony stared at Twilight.

"Seen it happen," she shrugged. "Look, they're thirteen years old, do you think they'd behave rationally?"

Solaris spread his wings. "The betrothal is binding. Montague, and Capulet, your petty feud is through."

After much grumbling, the two lords shook hoofs.

\* \* \*

><p>Zecora smiled at the back of the hall, noting that the clock read three fifty-seven. "Then sigh not so, But let them go, And be you blithe and bonny; Converting all your sounds of woe into Hey nonny, nonny."<p>

"That's from a different play," Twilight pointed out.

"The one I quote is comedy, which this is more than tragedy," Zecora replied promptly.

"Fair enough."

\* \* \*

><p>89.9<p>

Twilight yawned. "Aah, it's sometimes nice to Wake up Asleep."

She stretched, which brought to her attention the fact that she was human. Then a body moved next to her in the bed, which brought her attention to the fact that she wasn't alone in the bed.

She got up quickly, making distance from the other person in the bed, already thinking about how this was going to go " and saw a head of long, blonde hair with familiar-looking red highlights.

"Sunset?"

The other humanized pony yawned. "Morning, sis." She blinked, then her eyes widened as the loop memories hit both of them. "Huh. You \_are\_ my sister."

"Twin, I seem to recall?" Twilight checked, getting a nod. "Right. And I think I know where we are."

"In what sense?" Sunset asked, swinging her legs over the side of the bed and standing up. With a flash, her keyblade appeared, then vanished. She frowned in concentration, and her clothes blinked twice. "There we go..."

"What was that?" Twilight watched, interested, as Sunset's clothes flowed from pyjamas to jeans and a T-shirt.

"Magic clothes, like Sora has. Kinda convenient when you're human." Sunset grinned. "I should remember to show Rarity, she'd reverse engineer it in about a day. Oh, where did you say we were?"

"Right. Well, in terms of geography, we're in Washington state in America." Twilight grimaced. "And in terms of loop, we're in-"

The door opened with a bang.

Leah Clearwater stood in the doorway, with her hair in disarray and her eyes wet with unshed tears. Her gaze skittered across Sunset, widened in recognition, and then onto Twilight, and her face seemed to crumple with relief. "Thank Fenris, it \_is\_ you."

"Leah," Twilight replied, blinking. "What happened?"

"Later," the shifter replied. "For now... just give me a few minutes, okay?"

And Leah, tough-as-nails werewolf, sat down on the floor and started crying.

"Is she okay?" Sunset asked in a low tone. "I mean, she seemed fine last time I met her. Valdemar-"

"Yeah," Leah hiccuped, and scowled. "Yeah, I remember," she went on. "But my last loop... kind of brought everything back like it was in the bad old days. Feeling helpless-"

Twilight hugged her. "Don't worry, you're among friends."

Leah nodded, not trusting herself to speak.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay," she said, some minutes later. "I awoke really late on last loop. In one of the minor variations of my baseline. You know how the books are a pretty faithful account of what happens in my baseline?"<p>

"Yeah," Twilight replied, grimacing. She was glad she didn't have a world anything like as bad as the one the 'were faced every time around.

"Right. Well, this one was more like a bit of the films. Have you seen them?"

Twilight glanced over at Sunset, who shook her head, and turned back to Leah. "Neither of us have."

Leah took a deep breath. "Okay. Well, I've got a copy in my pocket, so lock the door and turn on your DVD player. I'll show you what happened."

\* \* \*

><p>The local Anchor hit stop on the DVD remote, and turned to her guests.<p>

Both of them still had their jaws dropped.

"...what did we just see happen?" Twilight managed.

"Well." Leah threw the remote across the room, and it bounced off the wall with a clunk. The batteries fell separately to the rest of it. "What you just saw was a battle breaking out between the Cullens â€" and my poor, Alpha-ordered pack â€" and the Volturi. All of them. And then you saw a vampire with element control abilities open a chasm so deep the mantle was visible. And then you saw me \_f\*cking well fall into it.\_"

Leah hyperventilated for a few seconds, then visibly got a grip on her reactions.

"I have \_never\_ hated my own healing ability as much," she finished bitterly.

Sunset said a word which caused Twilight to wince.

"Okay," Twilight added, after a moment's thought. "As far as I'm concerned, this is a loop for your benefit, Leah. What do you want us to do? Can we help?"

"Yes, you can indeed help," Leah answered. "First off, make sure Eddy boy and his family \_sod off.\_ Where doesn't matter."

"Dibs on that," Sunset called. "They're undead golems, right?"

Twilight nodded. "One or two of them aren't evil, per se," she pointed out, and Leah reluctantly nodded.



"No problem." Sunset made a gesture, and Glimmering Sunset materialized. "They don't harm the innocent. Now, which way to Cullenville?"

"...maybe later," Leah said, after several long seconds. "I kind of want to watch. But second, teach me how to survive falling into mantle-temperature magma."

"There, you may be in luck," Twilight said with a grin. "It's a spell called Elemental Body, from Oerth..."

\* \* \*

><p>"I kind of thought the Cullens liked baseball," Twilight commented absently.<p>

"Eh, it's popular, they probably don't like it any more," Leah replied, taking a long cool drink from her slushie. "Hey, Sunny! Go for a home run!"

Sunset Shimmer gestured with her keyblade, and Edward Cullen levitated into the air in an aura of red-streaked golden magic. Then shot towards her at at least a hundred miles an hour.

\_CRACK!\_

"Looks like a home run to me," Twilight said, as the vampire cleared a nearby treetop. "But you're not getting the distance you could, Sunset."

"I'm just getting warmed up!"

\* \* \*

><p>89.10<p>

"Light ahoy off the larboard bow, cap'n!"

Celestia nodded. "First mate? Go aloft and check the lookout's spot. We may be able to ride out this storm yet."

"Aye, cap'n." Luna lashed herself to one of the lines, and made for the weather shrouds.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, explain," Twilight requested, as Dash spun together another squall and kicked it at the wildly tossing schooner.<p>

"Oh, they asked," Dash replied, looking around for some quality rainclouds. "I understand it all developed from a bad pun."

"What bad pun?"

Dash pointed, as Luna nearly went flying overboard. "Sailor Moon."

Twilight groaned. "Okay, OW."

\* \* \*

><p>89.11<p>

Twilight pored over the book in front of her. After a dozen of these peculiar 'time loops', as she'd taken to calling them, she was running out of readily accessible reading material.

So she'd broken into the places where dangerous books were kept.

This one was a bit tame, really. It just went into how to teleport into space, without bothering to explain how to cast spells to protect one from the vacuum to be found up there. But, well, it was something " something useful for longer range teleports, specifically.

She finished it, and turned to the next book on the pile.

"Inspiration manifestation..." she mused. "Well, it's certainly a poetic title..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay," Twilight said firmly. "Never going near that one again. Never touching it, never opening that place, never mentioning it. Nope."<p>

She didn't want to go the way of Discord.

Mind you, she really should have taken his grinning portrait on the 'about the author' page as a hint...

\* \* \*

><p>89.12 (namar13766) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Sunset Shimmer blinked.<p>

Her usual awakening points were either in the fused loops or right after entering the weird human world on the other side of the mirror gate. So the first thing that went through her mind, understandably, was \_I'M A PONY! SQUEE!\_ She'd never looped back far enough that she was still in Equestria. Judging from the current location, she was in the same spot Twilight had come up to her after she'd brushed off a group of ponies saying she was too busy to socialize. A quick check over her right shoulder confirmed the fact, combined with the fact that Twilight Sparkle, Shining Armor, and Princess Cadance were right there, and, in fact, were looking back somewhat...\_anticipatory\_?

Her thoughts were derailed as the expected group showed up. The sudden realization that \_Lyra\_ was there was another shock, idly leading her to wonder if her studies about the other side of the mirror gate had led the unicorn to become obsessed with humans.

"-like to come have lunch with us?"

\_How many times have I said no? How would things have changed if I had not been such a immature, power-hungry brat then? \_Sunset inhaled slightly before responding. "I'd like to, but right now, I'm feeling kind of Loopy." Lyra's eyes twitched at the expression, confirming her suspicions of her being awake. Sunset simply smiled slightly. "Perhaps later?"

"Uh, yeah, sure. Thanks?" Lemon Hearts sounded stunned.

"Sounds great! I'll catch you latter." Sunset set her books into her saddlebag and trotted over to the other trio of loopers.

Shining looked smug as she approached. "Twilight won the bet, Cady! Long odds, by poplar."

Sunset wasn't sure she should have been outraged. "You bet whether I was awake this loop?"

The Pink Princess Pony just giggled. "Oh no! Nothing like that. We just betting whether if you were awake this early, or whether you would awake after me or Twilight befriending you."

Sunset opened her mouth, let it hang open for a moment, and then closed it with a small chuckle. "Well, I guess there're worse ways to have a bet settled." Her eyes turned to the filly Twilight Princess as she got a warm smile and hug in return.

"So Twily, what do you want to do this loop?"

"It's a magical world, Sunset, my friend," stated Twilight as she pulled back from nuzzling her. "Let's go exploring!"

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From Sunset Shimmer's Journal:

I've decided to stop giving entries numbers, since I have no idea how long my journey to my home Loop will be.

After my last entry, I was more or less willing to take a vacation Loop or two.

But when I saw an old man about to be killed by a robber, I had to help him. After I drove away the robber with a bit of Ranma's teachings, I asked the man's name.

It was Ben Parker.

Whoops. Luckily, Spider-Man was Awake, so I didn't end up causing a mess of things too much.

If he hadn't been, I would've royally messed up.

Still, Peter understood. His last non-Fused Loop had involved the 'Superior Spider-Man' incident. He'd needed a few Vacation Loops

after THAT experience.

\* \* \*

><p>Having been a victim of something similar, I could completely sympathize.<p>

Peter had managed to improve some of his more...embarrassing moments. This latest incident had caught him off guard, though.

Anyhow, he understood that I had been needing to learn what he had so long ago through my experiences with my Fused Loops so far, and suggested my 'Vacation' here'd be trying the hero business, and begin to put what I'd learned into practice.

His experiences with the major events in this Loop did allow me to try to either stop them from occurring, or weaken their effects.

I did have to be cautious, though, or one Eiken Loop for me.

\* \* \*

><p>Doing good does feel good. Though there're times where I wanted to just take out some villains...considering the constant resurrections that seem to go on in this Loop.<p>

What, do they have a 'get out of the afterlife here' card here?

But still, I understand what the saying Peter champions so much means now.

I'm a different person than the utter jerk I once was.

But I still enjoy a bit of mischief. I might try villainy next Loop...just to compare.

\* \* \*

><p>89.13 (Bigou)<p>

Twilight's Awakening happened back in Canterlot's Royal Library, like usual. Turning around to face Spike, she was surprised to see a familiar little filly in his stead.

Nyx seemed as surprised as the local anchor. "Mom? It's you?! Do changelings get cutie-marks in this loop?"

"Of course it'sâ€| Wait, WHAT?!"

Upon inspecting her body, the older of the two found she was covered in chitin. Most of it was black, but her back and the three strips on her chest were the same purple her fur usually was. She also got the typical convoluted horn of a changeling queen.

But was she really one? She wasn't so sure of that. After all she didn't got any hole in her legs, her mane and tails looked like what they usually does, her posterior was featuring a familiar star-shaped cutie-mark, and she seemed to be the same height as anypony else.

As far as Twilight was concerned, that was too many mixed signals.

\* \* \*

><p>After a meticulous study of her loop memories, the (partially) purple anchor finally knew what she was and, more importantly, why.<p>

She accidentally switched species with Nyx when she hatched her. Turn out the dragon egg for her entrance exam was, in truth, a fossilized changeling egg. For some unknown reason this change, unlike the others, wasn't reversed when princess Celestia calmed Twilight.

"Seems I'm really a changeling queen, just not fully grown."

\* \* \*

><p>Nyx was with the others CMC, in their club-house.<p>

"So, just ta be sure." said Applebloom to Nyx "Y'er sayin' you replacin' Spike this loop."

"You where a folsisiâ€| A folisiâ€| A **\*\*stoned\*\*** changeling egg," continued Scootaloo "But Twilight's magic awesomeness still hatched you."

"And somehow, all that caused you to turn in a new-born Alicorn and your mom in a wingless changeling queen with a cutie-mark," added Sweetie Belle.

"That sums it up," responded Nyx.

"It's a nice little story and all," interrupted Diamond Tiara "But I don't see how it explain why she is, like, so over-protective of you this loop."

Silver Spoon was the one to respond. "Instincts. Normally, changelings don't let their young go outside the hive. For a queen, everything is either part of her hive is a deadly trap for her swarm. Every fiber of Twilight's being is screaming at her that letting Nyx go outside her library is pure foolishness."

"That make me wonderâ€| If you're Twilight's daughter and she's a changeling queen, does that mean you can telepathically speak together?" The curious silvery Draconequus asked as an after-through.

"We can. And trust me, with how protective she presently is, it became annoying in ten seconds flat!"

\* \* \*

><p>89.14 (Spectrumancer) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Mac was putting the finishing touches on the bar for this loop when the local Anchor walked in, very sour-looking.<p>

"Something strong, please." she said as she plopped herself down in at the bar and promptly rested her face on the glossy wooden surface.

Mac obliged, pouring a glass of extra-strength apple cider for the mare.

"Bad loop?"

"Not really, just Awoke early." she replied sullen-looking, downing the glass and returning her face to the cool surface of the bar.

"Ah thought those were usually fun loops? How early'd ya wake?"

Twilight mumbled something unintelligible against the counter.

"Hmm?" Mac inquired as he moved to refill the glass.

The mare raised her head slightly, just long enough to mutter: "...In Utero."

Mac stood there blinking for several seconds, before wordlessly putting the cider bottle away and reaching for something stronger. Much stronger.

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From Sunset Shimmer's Journal:

As I'd decided, my next Loop was into the villainy business...not the 'take over the world' type of villainy, but more of the thievery business. Having a Keyblade makes opening doors a LOT easier, I have to admit. Unluckily for me, I'd found myself in a regular hive of villainy:

\* \* \*

><p>Gotham City. <p>

\* \* \*

><p>That meant I'd encounter Batman sooner or later.<p>

And it was sooner, as during a usual heist, he showed up, spooking the Tartarus out of me when he did. I knew I was going to jail anyhow, so I tried to fight him. It didn't end well. He is as good a fighter as the stories say he is.

Since about every villain has a 'gimmick' in this town, I decided to try gimmicks, plural. I used various looks and tricks I'd picked up throughout the Loops to try and make it seem I was multiple villains, instead of just one person. I'll admit, the time where Spider-Man'd used multiple guises during one particular incident where Spidey'd been accused of murder was my inspiration for this endeavor.

\* \* \*

><p>I created several guises: Kunoichi, the ninja thief, Key Keeper(my original guise using my Keyblade-based skills), Wild Flower(my martial arts training with Ranma), and Inverse(my magic abilities).<p>

This being Batman, he did figure it out eventually.

\* \* \*

><p>Unluckily for me, I was in Arkham Asylum(I'd used the multiple personalities bit when Batman caught me as an explanation) when the Joker pulled off his legendary takeover of Arkham Asylum. I did help Batman, if only to earn some respect from him.<p>

Nice 'Vacation.' Now, I wonder where I'll end up next?

\* \* \*

><p>89.15: (Daniel H) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Rarity? You know that book in the Princess's old library? The one behind the secret door, locked iron door, with the staircase that crumbles after you remove the book?"<p>

"Which one, Twilight? There are quite a few, you know."

"The one covered in spikes, containing a spell which grants the caster dark magical abilities but which eventually drive them mad with power."

Rarity rolled her eyes in exasperation. "You're going to need to be a bit more specific."

"The spell's called 'Inspiration Manifestation'."

"Oh, that one. Yes, you warned us about it once, I believe... What about it?"

"The baseline version of you gets her hooves on it in the most recent expansion."

"Please tell me I didn't do too much damage..."

"Don't worry, it only took three alicorns most of a day to fix everything; nothing anywhere near as bad as when our Looping selves first found it." Twilight winced in memory â€" despite her efforts, once or twice a looper had found the thing, and it had usually taken Discord's... dubious... help to resolve.

Or at least to neutralize the person with the book. The left-over effects went away as usual with a quick blast of harmony, or for that matter waiting a week or so. "Besides, it gave me new photos of Rainbow Dash dressing in style."

\* \* \*

><p>89.16 (Indalecio) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>The L.O.V.E.M.U.F.F.I.N. (League Of Villainous Evildoers Maniacally United For Frightening Investments in Naughtiness) mad scientists were having their "Supreme Ruler" pageant.<p>

The lights dimmed, and about two dozen mad scientists began a song and dance number.

If you want to see evil tonight at it best  
>The coolest of people put us to the test<br>If you're looking for heinous and iniquitous acts  
>Epics cannot contain us, sit back and relax<br>One of these cats will be our villainous star  
>So without further adieu, here they are<p>

A blonde and wall-eyed woman in a lab coat stepped up to the mic and introduced herself.

The woman spoke. "My name is Dr. Ditzzy Equus and soon you won't know just what went wrong."

\* \* \*

><p>"Welcome to the first ever L.O.V.E.M.U.F.F.I.N Pageant of Evil, where these two gentlemen and lady will vie for the chance to tell you what's what." Said the announcer.<p>

The spotlight shifted to the three contestants, Dr. Heinz Doofensmirtz, Rodney(his real name too long to bother pronouncing) and the newcomer, Dr. Ditzzy Equus.

"In addition to gaining control of the iron hand of L.O.V.E.M.U.F.F.I.N., each contestant will receive a commemorative flashlight laser pen."

"Remember, points will be awarded by the audience, so get out your voting boxes! Our first event is the mechanical mother! Show us how you treat the old lady Dr. Ditzzy."

Dityz put her arms on her hips and strutted up the robot mother that popped out of the ground. "Mo..." What she was about to say was cut off, as she tripped, hopping into the mechanical mother, and somehow trashing the robot in the process.

"Impressive! Ditzzy has quite a talent for destruction!" The audience voted, with hundred's of points being awarded to her.

"Unfortunately, since that was our only mechanical mother, our other two contestants will not be able to compete in this event."

Dr. Doofensmirtz and Rodney glared daggers to an oblivious Ditzzy.

\* \* \*

><p>"And now, the final event!" A stage hand suddenly passed the announcer a note, which he read. "But what's this? I've just been informed that Rodney has dropped out of the competition?"<p>



"Yes, he's a little tied up...I'm mean he had to doing something..somewhere else..far away..from here." Stated Doofensmirtz haltingly.

"Oh, that's too bad, but I guess it can't be helped." Sympathized the announcer. "And we can't wait for him. In our final event, each of our remaining two contestants will attempt to intimidate each other with the force of their evil glares."

"Get set and begin!"

Dr. Doofensmirtz and Ditzzy squared off against each other at opposite ends of the arena, staring at each other with fierce glares.

"Doofensmirtz leers at Ditzzy, who returns it, pointing at Doofensmirtz. So far the score is tied. Looks like they're suddenly talking to each other? What are they saying? Looks like Doofensmirtz has taken out a remote. Now he's pressing a button. A green beam has just shot out from off-stage and hit Ditzzy knocking her to her feet! This isn't looking good for Ditzzy. But wait! She's getting up. She's looking really peeved now, and the audience loves it! Doofensmirtz is desperately fiddling with his remote and Ditzzy is marching toward him. Ditzzy has actually grabbed the remote out of Doof's hand and is crushing it beneath her heels. The crowd is going wild! It looks like Dr. Ditzzy Equus is our winner!"

\* \* \*

><p>The Announcer hung a garish medal around Ditzzy's neck. "I now present to you the new Supreme Leader of L.O.V.E.M.U.F.F.I.N!<p>

Speaking for the first time since her introduction. "And now with this I own all the muffins in the world!" Cackling maniacally as lightning and, thunder flashed behind her.

Another stage hand walked up to Ditzzy and whispered in her ear.

"Really?"

More whispering occurred.

"Well, what's the use then?" She took the medal from off herself, tossing it to the ground and walked out.

\* \* \*

><p>"And that's how I was made Queen Of The Pharmacists." said Ditzzy as she nursed her drink at a table in Mac's bar.<p>

Across from her sat Twilight, who commented "Honestly, Ditzzy, you have some weird loops."

\* \* \*

><p>89.17<p>

Rarity shot a glance over at the Inspiration Manifestation book. After Twilight had mentioned it a few loops ago, she hadn't quite been able to resist going and getting it again.

"...it couldn't hurt, could it?" she asked, mostly of the air.

After a few moments more of consideration, she closed all the curtains and applied light-blocking spells to them. Then, she cast a light spell with a five minute duration.

Only then did she pick up the book, and open it.

"If you often have an idea while you are asleep, and you forget it after waking up â€" this is normal," she read. "Keep a notebook by the side of your bed to avoid losing them."

She blinked. "This seems... more mundane than normal, perhaps?"

\_Chapter two: Lucid Dreaming.\_

\_With the correct experience, one can shape one's dreams consciously. This allows for better analysis of ideas had while sleeping...\_

"Hm..." Rarity began to walk upstairs, still reading. "Perhaps I should try this. It certainly seems less... risky, than the methods the book normally-"

At that point, the light spell cut out.

"-gaah!" THUD. "Owwwww..."

\* \* \*

><p>89.18 (The One Butcher) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Celestia! Luna! Great to see you again!" A cheerful voice interrupted a quiet family dinner.<p>

A gout of artificial Dragonfire incinerated a small scroll. "Discord! I don't know what you planned this last year, but it's futile. The Elements have been on high alert this whole time!" Celestia signalled her guards, who sent up a flare signalling the special contingent of guards in Ponyville to assemble Twilight and her friends and bring them to Canterlot. All the while the Wonderbolts flew down to ponyville, just to be tribly redundant.

Luna prepared her most powerful offensive Spells and stepped beside her sister. "You are going right back into the statue!"

"But Lulu, Celestia, whatever did I do? Don't you think a thousand years in stone is punishment enough for my juvenile pranks? I am an adult now. You two shouldn't hold my youth against me like that. Also... you should think about the future... our future." Here Discord laid an arm around the two diarchs and \_blushed!\_

"What? Stop that!" Luna insisted, freeing herself of the embrace.

"How dare you imply such things!" Celestia followed suit.

"Well," Discord began, "When a mare and a stallion love each other very much, the mare can get pregnant and birth a foal eleven months later."

At that Silver Spoon snaked into the room. "And I am the complete opposite in everything.", he gestured to her. "This is Quicksilver, our daughter. I am a changed Chimaera, fatherhood has reformed me." He hugged the filly to his side.

\* \* \*

><p>"So," the nervous Draconequine asked, "which of you is my mommy?"<p>

"No idea," Discord answered. "They both fought me at the same time."

\* \* \*

><p>89.19 (The One Butcher) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash lay in wait. It was all she could do without her wings, with her right front hoof chewed off. "<em>Come out!</em>" Pinkie called. "\_You're the last one and you're already injured. It's only a matter of time until I find you~.\_" She chanced a look around the curtain. Dead eyes stared back at her, Pinkie's mane rigid and unmoving, not a bounce in her. "Gotcha." Pinkie giggled, bared her teeth and jumped for Rainbow's jugular.

Right into Rainbow's right stump, onto which she had grafted an ice pick.

Pinkie's skull cracked, but she was undeterred. Rainbow leveraged her over her back and out of the window. "\_Puh...\_" She savored the moment's respite and reevaluated her chances.

Twilight had been the first to go missing, no surprises there, as Pinkie knew she had to take out the Anchor first if she wanted to have any chance of succeeding. Applejack and Rarity followed shortly after and while Spike was gunning for revenge she thought she had the upper hand...

Wholly unprepared for Fluttershy attacking her with an oaking chainsaw!

After loosing her wings and narrowly managing to pop her attacker's head with a well placed punch that cracked her hoof she was ambushed by Pinkie, who capitalized on her already damaged hoof. She got away while Pinkie devoured Fluttershy's remains and managed to hole up in Rarity's boutique.

Rainbow lifted one of Rarity's sewing machines on her back and prepared an ambush with it, when Pinkie slammed open the door and smashed Rainbow to pieces with it.

There was a period of blackness. Then Twilight lifted the helm over

her eyes. "Okay. Clearly we need to give Pinkie's next Golem softer teeth. How did you manage that anyway? Flimsy chocolate teeth shouldn't be able to bite through a thick chocolate throat!"

"Oh Twilight, if I know one thing it's the breaking points of every kind of sweet. Don't you remember that Loop when I was Cologne?"

Twilight flinched. "I still can't eat a jawbreaker without worrying it will explode..."

\* \* \*

><p>89.1: Ponyville Shuffle.<br>89.2: Well, there should be one.  
(It's a work in progress.)  
>89.3: Anti-meme.<br>89.4: Diplomacy should be interesting this loop.  
  
>89.5: Assimilate back into ponyhood.<br>89.6: Mostly but not only Loopers get the really frivolous ones.  
>89.7: Not actually YAHF.<br>89.8: Well, who else was I going to make the narrator?  
>89.9: Yes, the fight scene shown in the film actually does chuck Leah down a chasm into the mantle.<br>89.10: One pun.  
>89.11: Yes, Discord wrote it.<br>89.12: Start over for once.  
  
>89.13: Some loops are just bizarre.<br>89.14: There's precocious, and then there's this.  
>89.15: Fortunately, the magic wears off for non-beneficial changes after a week or so. (Discord didn't want competition.)<br>89.16: Check the details first.  
>89.17: It's a useful skill.<br>89.18: He got the idea from when Luna did it to him.  
>89.19: Total immersion gaming.<p>

## 94. Chapter 94

### 90.1 (Kris Overstreet)

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity's voice had gone so hoarse it could have been used to polish glass. "...ninety-eight... I am very sorry for being foalish enough to use a strange spellbook without asking Twilight first... ninety-nine... I am very sorry for being foalish enough to use a strange spellbook without asking Twilight first... one hundred." She flopped forward dramatically, legs splayed in exaggerated exhaustion. "Water, please?"<p>

Twilight Sparkle levitate a glass over to Rarity. "What really kicks me in the barrel is, I knew this was coming. I'd seen what your baseline self did. 'Don't worry about it,' I thought, 'Rarity is Looping this time. Surely she won't be so stupid as to read an obviously evil spellbook and get trapped by its subtle but insidious mental suggestion! She's married to a bucking JEDI, for elm's sake! She's smart enough to at least wait until Diamond is around to spot her for the Element of Generosity, in case things go wrong!'"

"Spike wasn't Awake this loop, darling," Rarity said, her voice still sandpaper-rough. "It wasn't his fault. Ice cream, please?"

"The Loop's ending in a few minutes. You can wait," Twilight said. "But I think I need to bring this up with Sleipnir or some other friendly Admin the next time I run into one. I think you need a refresher magical course."

"Darling, magic is your special talent, not mine," Rarity said. "Oh, yes I can Ascend now, yes I have all sorts of Loop-learned abilities, but I really don't see the need to learn how to do more magic."

"That's not the lesson I have in mind," Twilight said. "I'm thinking of a school where they teach you NOT--"

And there the Loop ended.

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity next Awoke in a baseline Loop with a stealth Anchor and an unAwake Twilight. She entertained herself by converting Equestrian fashion from clothing-optional, clothing-utilitarian all the way to elaborate steedpunk fashions in under three years. Even Applejack had seen the benefits of a slimming waistcoat, though the pockets she insisted upon rather ruined the effect.<p>

Thus, a few days after the end of the Foals and Fillies Faire, having mostly forgotten about her prior conversation with Twilight, she stood at a worktable idly sketching out designs and wondering what the next Loop would be like.

And in a blink, with the usual disorientation of Awakening, she found out.

The first thing she noticed was the Smell. It barged into her nostrils like a drunken uncle who's vacationing at your house for the week, has come back from the bar after midnight, and can't stop himself from smashing up half the contents of the living room because he's too proud to turn on the lights. Rarity's sense of smell shut itself down almost instantly out of shame and disgust.

Next came the noise. Everyone around her was shouting and talking and swearing. Carts were pushing their way through dense crowds, rumbling across large, uneven cobblestones. Rarity's ears requested permission from the brain to join the nose in taking a coffee break, but her sense of self-preservation vetoed it on the grounds that smell was not important while in the middle of an immense crowd, but hearing was.

The realizations that the immense crowd of market-day customers were humans, and that Rarity was yet another human member of the crowd(1), came in only third and fourth on the list of impressions.

As Rarity waited for her Loop memories to come to her, she looked in front of her at the huge gates she stood before. The name of the establishment behind the walls was written in two places- once on a small, tasteful, modern plaque mounted next to the gate by the city, and again in huge, ancient letters in the arch over the gates.

Unseen University.

Well, that was ridiculous, wasn't it? Rarity shook her head at the absurd name. The rooftops of several buildings were visible above the walls, including a tall structure which might be architecture or geography or about to fall down in the next ten seconds, have your choice. \_Worst. Kept. Secret. Ever,\_ she thought.

Something pulled at her waist, just barely, just briefly. Rarity's hand flew to her belt, where a small coin bag had been and was no longer. She spun on her feet, seeing a mass of humans on criss-crossing paths and no clue as to which one had just clipped her purse.

"Oooooooooohhhh0000HHHHhh!" Rarity shrieked in frustration, clenching her fists.

Said fists glowed, and a quartet of small balls of light flew up from them, circled once around her head, and zipped down to ankle-level, making a beeline through the crowd. A moment later there came a loud fwoomp of flame, and a portly young man in what Rarity considered an objectionable derby leaped six feet into the air, shrieking with pain and shock, both hands clapped on the smouldering seat of his pants.

Rarity marched over to the wounded man, staring down at him where he'd landed on the cobbles. "Oh ho!" she shouted. "I believe you have something which belongs to me?"

"Beggin' yer pardon, lady," the thief said, raising a knuckle to his brow and leaning forward. "Din' know you were from t' University. 'Gainst Guild policy, stealin' from wizards." He handed back both Rarity's coin pouch and a card declaring him to be William Lampwick, member in good standing of the Ankh-Morpork Guild of Thieves.

"I see," Rarity said, handing the card back. "It is quite an understandable error; the University accepts very few female students or faculty." How had she known that? Were those Loop memories finally trickling in? "But don't let it happen again!"

"I rather think I could say the same of you, miss!" The crowd parted for a pointy hat, partly because most of humanity on the Discworld had learned on the instinctual level that not doing so was a risk to one's continued survival(2), partly because a wizard in a crowd often meant something interesting was about to happen, and Ankh-Morpork loved its version of street theater(3). Under the pointy hat was a florid face half-hidden in a beard that, despite being properly gray and quite full, put one in mind of a shrubbery in winter, covered with frost. "Unauthorized use of magic is frowned upon most severely by the University!"

"I do beg your pardon," Rarity said. "It was quite unintentional. It just... seems to happen..."

Ah, yes. Wonderful timing for Loop memories to return.

"Yes, well, I shall overlook it the once, as it was clearly provoked, and I hate to waste a good example," the large old wizard grumped, gesturing to the stricken thief. "But I advise you to take greater care in future. The punishment for unauthorized use of wizardry is such as to ensure a lack of repeat offenders. And it would be my sad

but unavoidable duty, as Archchancellor of this University, to see that punishment carried out."

"Archchancellor?" The Loop memories had something to say about that. "Would that make you Mustrum Ridcully?"

"No, my mother and father made me Mustrum Ridcully," the Archchancellor replied. "But that is my name, and I am the Archchancellor."

"Then I have a letter of introduction for you," Rarity said, dashing across the cobbles and digging in the large carpetbag she'd dropped at her feet<sup>(4)</sup> after she'd had her purse taken. "From a colle... er, an acquaintance of yours."

The letter was a single page, folded at all four corners and sealed with plain tallow from a cheap candle. Archchancellor Ridcully opened it, turned it one way and then the other before deciphering the handwriting. Slowly, carefully, he read aloud:

\_"This is Rarity Belle of Ohulan Cutash. She has the wizardry magick. I can't be having with teaching magic to Loopy people what drops rocks on witches even if they are evil, so she's your problem now. I figure if your school took one girl you can take another. If you send her home I'll bring her back myself. Be told. Esmerelda Weatherwax."\_

The wizard folded the little letter back up, carefully pulled a drawer open on the hat<sup>(5)</sup>, deposited the letter, and closed it again. "Impeccable credentials, Miss Belle," Ridcully said. "As it happens this is the second letter of reference I have had on your behalf. However, as the first one came from a failed-out former student whose whereabouts are currently questionable<sup>(6)</sup>, I didn't think much of it at the time."

"Er... I see?" Rarity was a better liar than Applejack, but to lie well one has first to understand the truth.

"In any case, given the circumstances of your welcome to our fair city of Ankh-Morpork," Ridcully said, picking up Rarity's carpetbag, "allow me to welcome you to Unseen University. Here are the rules: no being outside the gates after dark, no magic except under supervision until you graduate, no lectures unless absolutely unavoidable, and no getting between the Dean and the dessert trolley if you value your toes. There are some other fiddly little details, but you'll pick all that up as you go along."

"Er... and you'll teach me how to do magic here?" Rarity asked.

"Good heavens, no," Ridcully snapped. "You've just demonstrated you know how to do magic. No, Unseen University exists to teach wizards how to NOT do magic." He leaned forward and whispered softly enough to awaken hibernating voles, "It's much harder than it sounds."

"I think I see your point," Rarity said, remembering those balls of light... and remembering what she'd done under the power of a certain spellbook.

Still and all, she thought as Ridcully slapped her carpetbag into the

arms of a bledlow just inside the gates and led her on into the courtyard, I owe Twilight a bit of payback when I see her next. This is such an overreaction for one little slip-up...

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, five hundred miles away in the tiny kingdom of Lancre, Granny Weatherwax stared at the other girl from Ohulan Cutash with magic pouring out of her pores.<p>

"... but the screaming didn't begin until I imagined up the giant weasel who kept putting humans down his pants. Then Twilight shouted at me, took the spell book away from me, and said she was going to add me to the list of something or other." She shrugged and continued, "And then I Awoke here, shaped like a human, visiting my great-aunt Nanny Gytha."

"She's a devil of a baker, Esme," Nanny Ogg said, rocking in her chair, "and she's as good with children as anyone I've ever seen. But when she started talkin' this mornin'... well, I knew I had to send for you."

Granny Weatherwax couldn't rub her temples to ease the headache, not while people were watching. But that didn't mean the headache wasn't there...

\* \* \*

><p>(1) Still wearing the corset, bustle, ruffled blouse and skirts she wore in Ponyville just as the prior Loop ended, with minor anatomical correction, a fact which gave Rarity a brief sense of satisfaction.<p>

(2) At least, a risk to one's continued survival in a form possessing opposable thumbs, the power of speech, and eating habits that preferred pork chops on a plate to flies on a lilypad.

(3) Unscripted, natural, and with an almost complete absence of greasepaint. The Patrician of Ankh-Morpork had Views on what passed for street theater elsewhere.

(4) Which the other thieves in the crowd, having observed what happened to Lampwick, wisely left untouched.

(5) Ridcully's hat was of his own design and mostly his own manufacture. He kept fishing lures attached to the brim. The drawers were for little sundries that he might want at one time or another. The tip of the hat unscrewed to reveal a small flask of brandy. As wonderfully useful as it was, the hat as a whole was such an offense to Rarity's sense of fashion that her mind refused to perceive it in any details other than "pointy," "broad-brimmed," and "burgundy."

(6) For those familiar with the broad literature about the Discworld, this notation places Rarity's arrival after Sourcery but before Interesting Times. Ridcully is only recently come into the Archchancellorship, For those not familiar with said literature, (a) we recommend reading the series(7), (b) the Discworld's Loop Anchor is Rincewind, a man who has raised cowardice, self-preservation, and running to such high arts that he is the only known Looper of more



than a thousand iterations to have never, ever, EVER suffered death, and (c) Ridcully, while not a Looper himself, is the most open-minded and decent Archchancellor in generations(8), and thus understanding of temporal anomalies(9)

(7) Particularly if you like clever footnotes in the style which these struggle to emulate.

(8) A fact which in any other man would have given him a mayfly's life expectancy, except that Ridcully combined a mind like a steel trap, a body strong as a bull's, and a head harder than granite into one perfectly unkillable package- so unkillable that the previous wizardly tradition of advancement through stepping into one's predecessor's still-warm empty pointed shoes had gone from routine to unthinkable within a year of his election as Archchancellor.

(9) 'Understanding of temporal anomalies' is not the same thing as 'understanding temporal anomalies,' which Ridcully didn't and didn't care to.

\* \* \*

><p>90.2 (ScootaLewis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"STOP!"<p>

Six Loopers Awoke, each momentarily disoriented as their loop memories asserted themselves.

Six Loopers skimmed those memories to see where they were. The last thing they remembered had been Pinkie Pie's voice.

Six Loopers felt a ping from Twilight, confirming their numbers. They realized they were on a stage. It was Equestria, at least. Good, familiar Equestria. Less familiar were the instruments before them.

Six Loopers recalled their current personas. Pink Valentine, the frontmare for the group, was of course scanning the crowd to see who, what and where they were playing for, which was apparently...Nightmare Moon. Twilight Nucleus was inspecting her guitar, eventually nodding as if to broadcast her comprehension of the situation, though inside she pondered the choice of instrument. Explosion World, the powder-blue unicorn, grinned as she recalled her ferocious drumming. She was pretty sure she could blow up something by the time they got off stage. Rainbow Dashinal and Gil Da held guitars of their own, too, the gryphon clutching a scratched bass guitar and her adrenaline junkie pegasus friend grinning much like miss Trixie "Explosion World" Lulamoon at the sight of her rainbow-necked electric twanger. Finally, Apple SmÃ¶rgÃ¥sbord sat looking confused at the grand assortment of keyboards she was apparently good at playing.

Six loopers converged to discuss the situation. According to the loop memories, this was a variant loop where the Elements had become the musical instruments they held. It seemed they were expected to defeat Nightmare Moon through the power of friendship-infused rock. They had already gone through several "band members" before Awakening, which

meant they didn't have true bearers for each Element. Something told Twilight that this shouldn't ought to work, but hey...when in a variant loop, do as the variations do. This was an idea every single one of them was okay with, and as such they returned to their positions opposing a still-stunned would-be villainess. She had frozen when Pinkie "Pink Valentine" Pie had shouted an impromptu time-out, and was still trying to fathom the brashness of the mere earth pony before her. According to some quick figuring by Twilight, a large enough concentration of Harmonic sound should create a blast strong enough to totally clean out Luna.

Six loopers readied their instruments, holding a pose like an eternally-delayed conductor's baton. Pinkie "Pink Valentine" Pie uttered the time-in that fate had been holding its breath for.

"CONTINUE!"

\* \* \*

><p>90.3 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Cadence awoke and went through a quick checklist. Her hair was still pinkish red, that was good. She was human, and that was fine as well. She was shot and bleeding and on the verge of shock. That was less fine, but nothing a bit of healing magic and her own original alicorn nature couldn't take care of.<p>

She was being held in the strong arms of a rather dashing, if scuffed, gentleman. That was very good.

They were inside what looked like a temple of some sort. Not the most romantic location, but there were worse.

The man holding her glanced down at her no longer bleeding wound and then back to her face, "So have you woken up yet?"

"I'm awake," Cadence smiled, "So what's going on? My memories are kind of hazy after I was shot."

"We managed to activate the elements of fire, water, earth, and air," said the old monk, Father Vito Cornelius. His eager assistant was looking on over his shoulder, "But we are having some trouble identifying the fifth.."

"It's love!" Cadance blurted out, "It's love. Oh my gosh, it's love! The hidden element is always something like love or magic, but this universe doesn't seem to have very strong magic. So it's love."

The assembled group stared at Cadence. The man holding her gently set her down until she stood on her own. She nodded and smiled, reiterating, "It's love!"

Then she flung herself to the man named Korben Dallas, according to her new memories; and gave him the most passionate, most caring kiss the alicorn of love was capable of.

By the time they separated, the world was saved and the great evil

was stopped far sooner than in baseline.

Dallas blinked as he recovered, "Okay, Leeloo never kissed like that."

Cadence smiled and shrugged, "If I ever see her, I can give her some pointers."

"Right, so tell me a little about yourself." Inside he was reassuring himself that Leeloo will probably be back next iteration, and hopefully they would both awake earlier in the timeline.

Cadance's smile turned into a mischievous grin, "Well, I'm normally a pony."

"A.. pony?" Dallas was stunned. Cadance was giggling on the inside. Newish loopers were so much fun.

"Yep. A married pony."

"Married?"

"Yeah, I was actually kind of thinking of him when I kissed you. Sorry about that."

"Lucky guy. Er.. colt?" Korben tried to correct himself.

"Stallion, actually."

\* \* \*

><p>90.4 (Jorge)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked at the crater that used to be Golden Oaks Library, "Oops." Spike just raised his eyebrow at her. "How was I supposed to know that using a paradoxical prism to make a harmonic bomb wouldn't work?"<p>

Rainbow Dash looked at the lake that used to be Cloudsdale, "Oops." Spitfire glared at her. "How was I supposed to know what the reverse button on the cloud generators did?"

Applejack looked at the apple tree lodged in the second floor of the Carousel Boutique, "Oops." Rarity scowled at her. "Okay, I admit, usin' earthbendin' for applebuckin' ain't the best idea."

Pinkie Pie looked at the giant birthday cake that was currently crushing the town hall, "Whoopsie!" The Mayor's eye twitched. "I guess the Super Duper Extra Extra Ginormous Party Cannon (Trade Mark pending) is a teensy bit big."

Fluttershy looked at the hole in the side of Canterlot Castle, "Oops." Celestia blinked, slack-jawed, at her. "Maybe inviting an Ursa Major along wasn't a good idea."

Rarity looked at the magma oozing out of the hole in the floor, "Oops." Discord rolled on the wall, laughing. Rarity huffed, "Tectonium tea cups sounded like a good idea at the time!"

Derpy looked at the large soap bubble that used to be Canterlot, "Oops."  
>Twilight pulled out a notepad, "Well, this one's new. <em>Ability to change large objects into soap bubbles<em>."

Sombra looked at the snow sculpture that used to be The Crystal Empire, "Crystals?"  
>Twilight frowned thoughtfully, "Well, I suppose you could say snow is made out of ice crystals."<p>

Discord looked at the perfectly organized filing cabinet that used to be a fish, "Oops." Luna couldn't help but stare. "I must say that I was getting a bit predictable for a moment there, but not even \_I\_ expected that one."

\* \* \*

><p>90.5 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Rarity, \_what are you doing with that book?\_"

The fashionista looked at the scholar dryly. "Trixie was able to master the Alicorn Amulet... eventually. Or at least get to a point where she could take it off at will. This-" she thumped the Inspiration Manifestation for emphasis- "is \_my\_ dark artifact from the baseline. If she can do it, why can't I?"

"The Alicorn Amulet is just an emotional amplifier," Twilight replied. "The Inspiration Manifestation has an actual lock! You won't be released until-"

"Until true words are spoken, yes. That's why I'm ONLY going to use this book when Spike is here with me."

Twilight turned to the dragon, who had the decency to look embarrassed. "Don't tell me you're encouraging this. Please."

"Well..." He fiddled his claws awkwardly. "You know how when I first went Spikezilla I couldn't... exactly... control it?"

"And now you can because you... practiced..." Twilight groaned. "But this is still different!"

"Twilight, I have to master this spell! I just..." Rarity sighed. "How could I call myself a designer if I couldn't control the ideas and put them in proper places?"

"No, just... Rarity, I... This is NOT a good IDEA." Twilight tried to come up with a good argument. "At your... with all the loops you've experienced, you could quite possibly crash Equestria before you got that under control!"

The white unicorn paused.

"...so... I should wait until I have Sleipnir on hoof?"

"You know what, I'm going to teleport us all into the badlands, you're going to throw it into the lava, and you will Pinkie Promise

NOT to go to the castle unsupervised ever again OR to teleport items out without supervision. Alright?"

"But-

"Rarity." Spike put a claw on his wife's shoulders. "I honestly think we should listen to Twi on this. I know... I know getting control means a lot, but..."

After a moment, she let out a long sigh. "...Alright, Twilight. I... I'm sorry." She held the book out. "I think I might have a problem..."

\* \* \*

><p>90.6 (EdBecerra)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was one of those quiet Loops where Celestia and Luna were both Awake and were chatting about past experiences.<p>

"It was... quite different to be worshipped by humans, dear sister. Though I must admit, having tens, even hundreds of thousands proclaiming their love for me because I was dark was most endearing to me," Luna said softly. Then she giggled. "I would gladly encounter such a loop again. 'Tis ironic they knew my title without knowing that they knew it. Being adored for mine skills is far better than being feared for my actions. "

Celestia smiled knowingly. "Being known for one's skill in entertaining is all well and good," she whispered back. "But what is truly important is... what was \*\*he\*\* like? As hunky as he seemed?"

Their conversation quickly degenerated into giggles and things unfit for the ears of the innocent.

Hey, semi-omnipotent beings thousands of years old? They take their fun where they can find it.

\* \* \*

><p>Later that night, Luna entered her private quarters, set her wards, and erected a few shields against sight and sound that she liked to believe (well, hoped, actually) would keep her beloved sister from snooping.<p>

An ancient helmet made of platinum floated out from a hidden chest and came to rest upon her brow, replacing her tiara. She took a deep breath, and struck a pose. Inhaling deeply, she burst into song.

I've got the stuff that you want  
><em>I've got the thing that you need<em>

\* \* \*

><p>In her own bedroom, Celestia smiled fondly at her sister's antics. "Eat your heart out, Whitney."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>90.7 (OracleMask)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Silver Spoon awoke (small 'a') in the middle of the night to hear the sound of hooves repeatedly striking against wood. Yawning, Silver went to the window and peered outside: just as she'd suspected, there was a familiar gray pony laying into the training log Zecora had set up for them.<p>

...Still, this wasn't normal behavior for the ninja who had become Silver's training partner and friend. She slipped outside the hut and trotted over.

"Kakashi? What're you doing up so late?" Silver asked.

His hoof paused in mid-strike, and now that she was close enough to see him properly in the moonlight, Silver realized that Kakashi's coat was matted with sweat.

"...It's nothing," he eventually replied, "Go back to sleep."

"You're a bad liar," Silver said, sitting next to him, "How long have you been out here?"

Kakashi shrugged. When it became obvious that Silver wasn't going to leave anytime soon, Kakashi took a seat as well.

"...Did training with Naruto go badly?" Silver asked.

She'd been focused on Alchemy research today, since Kakashi was supposed to be working with Naruto on how to use chakra as a pony. Silver knew that she had to prepare herself for all kinds of ninja techniques, or Kakashi would flatten her the next time they sparred. But now Silver was starting to wonder if something had gone wrong.

"You might say that," Kakashi admitted, sighing, "If by 'go badly', you mean 'I now compulsively try to murder one of my students on sight'."

Silver's eyes went wide.

"We did all sorts of tests on it too," Kakashi continued, "Naruto demonstrated all the non-human versions of her he's ever seen. Most of them trigger my new 'reflex'. Twilight's trying to find a spell that will help, but nothing she's got will last past the end of the loop. Of course, either I'll kill an innocent version of her or the real one will kill me first, so Naruto's confident it'll work itself out \_somehow\_..."

Even in the midst of her surprise, Silver caught a hint of something...\_familiar\_ in Kakashi's tone. Naruto was Kakashi's student in their baseline, and Silver had caught enough hints since the loop started that she'd figured out that it was Kakashi's more \_infamous\_ student's fault he'd been...hurt.

"So you decided to beat up the training log until they figure something out?" Silver pressed.

"There's really nothing else I can do."

And Silver recognized what she was hearing. She straightened in her seat. She might not be able to help with the big problem Kakashi had right now, but Silver could do something, at least.

"Kakashi, do you mind listening? I want to tell you about something from my very first loop."

He waved a hoof absently, which she took as permission to go ahead.

"Before I started looping, my very best friend was a filly named Diamond Tiara. She and I did everything together," Silver said, "We really were inseparable."

"Sounds nice."

Kakashi was staring off into the darkened forest, sounding almost bored. Silver pressed on.

"And then I woke up in my first loop, and the Diamond Tiara that was my very best friend was gone. Instead, there was somepony I didn't recognize in her place. Somepony with the audacity to say that she was the real Diamond Tiara all along. As if the one I remembered was a fake! And she seemed to think I should just accept what was happening, because she'd been looping for longer and knew so much more about what was going on than I did."

She noticed that Kakashi was looking at her now.

"I told her I hated her," Silver continued, bluntly, "I told her she was just a fake and that I wanted my real friend to come back. I was horrible to her."

"...What are you saying, exactly?"

"Kakashi," Silver answered, looking him dead in the eyes, "I think part of the problem is that you're angry with your students...but you don't want to admit it."

Kakashi recoiled like she'd struck him.

\* \* \*

><p>Naruto looked up as the door to the Ponyville Library swung open and Kakashi walked in. He was having Twilight go over every single weird gadget and gizmo in his pocket that he'd forgotten the use of, on the off-chance that one might be helpful. No luck so far, unfortunately.<p>

"Morning, Kakashi-sensei," Naruto said, waving a hoof, "Want to lend a hand? I mean, a hoof? One of these things might be just the thing to fix you up."

"Thanks for the offer," Kakashi replied, "But I've decided to work

things out on my own."

Twilight, who had been in the middle of a magical examination of a strange gear-shaped key, turned her head. Naruto's jaw had dropped.

"Wait, what? I mean, you don't need to be all macho here, Kakashi-sensei..."

The jounin lifted a hoof, interrupting him.

"Let me rephrase that: I don't want your help trying to fix this. I'm just going to go spend the rest of this loop elsewhere...wandering around while working this out. On my own. Alone."

"I don't know if that's such a good idea," Twilight began.

"Isn't this supposed to be a sanctuary loop?" Kakashi countered.

That stopped Twilight in her tracks. It was true, if he wanted to try to handle things on his own, then that was Kakashi's choice...she looked, saw how Naruto was starting to splutter, and decided to give it one last try.

"Have you spoke to Silver Spoon about this? She'll miss sparring with you."

"She might, if she hadn't already volunteered to be my tour guide."

He was eye-smiling now. Twilight couldn't help but smile back.

"Then it sounds like you're in good hooves," she replied, "But if you need anything at all, you only need to ask."

"I won't forget."

"And I won't allow it!" Naruto snapped, wings bristling, "You only just got better! Give me one good reason to let you go running off!"

Kakashi struck a thoughtful pose.

"One good reason..."

He tapped a hoof against the floor for a moment, before making an 'ah-ha' sound.

"...well, I am just a clone. Does that count?"

And with that, 'Kakashi' popped into smoke.

\* \* \*

><p>90.8 (MasterWeaver)<p>

\* \* \*



><p>Apple Bloom glared at the purple mare. "Seriously?"<p>

Berry Punch glanced around the destroyed bar. "Well, I don't often serve robots, and... she wandered in on her own, you should have seen her." She paused. "I regret nothing, by the way."

"You don't think that giving tha sapient suit of magitech powered armor that is soulbounded to a walking technological revolution \_on tha anniversary of her wedding to her millennia dead husband\_ was a bad idea?"

Berry raised an eyebrow. "...walking technological revolution?"

Apple Bloom summoned her Element with a flat expression.

"Still a bit arrogant."

"Ah can \_feel\_ the hangover! And she hasn't even woken up yet! \_How tha hay is she even unconscious?!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>90.9 (DataPacRat)<p>

"Alright," said Twilight, looking around the group. "I've been noticing a trend... is there anypony who \_doesn't\_ have a non-standard Element of Harmony?"

A few Loopers immediately summoned a necklace, tiara, or stranger piece of jewelry from their subspace pocket; then a few more... finally, not a single Looper in the bar wasn't adorned with at least one. Discord was just about buried a a pile of the things.

"And do any of them work outside their original Loop?" There was a general chorus that could be summed up as "Eeno".

"Right," said Twilight, summoning her notebook. "What's your weird element, and how'd you get it?"

\* \* \*

><p>Big Mac said, "Reliability. Being a shoulder you-all can lean on."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Discord said, "This one's for creativity, and this one's for creative destruction to make room for new ideas, and this one's for kumquat - don't look at me like that, it was a very fruit-oriented loop - and this one's for creative kumquat, and this one's for-"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Derpy said, "Innocence. I just don't know what went right!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Apple Bloom said, "Well, there was a Loop where we were all part

of the Apple Family, and Applejack said mine was for Brattiness. And Granny Smith's was for Patience."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Discord was continuing to run through his pile, mentioning "Kumquat, kumquat, silly in-jokes, and kumquat..."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>(TheCentauress)<p>

Derpy pulled out a second Faux-Element. This one was a crown, like Twilight's. **Princess** Twilight's. No crystals on the tiara and the focus stone appearing to grow out of the apex.

The focus stone, however, immediately caught the attention of everyone.

"And this," the walleyed mailmare stated, "was what I got, back when I Ascended to become Princess Ditzzy..."

"Princess of Muffins?" the entire bar population chorused.

"How'd you guess?"

\* \* \*

><p>(FanOfMostEverything)<p>

Pinkie produced a necklace that was almost indistinguishable from her usual Element of Laughter. The only difference was that the balloon was a yellow gem.

Twilight's memory stirred. "Isn't thatâ€"

"The Element of Surprise!"

Everypony in the bar groaned at that.

Twilight shook her head and smiled. "No, no, that's what it's called. That was an odd Loop. The Elements didn't come from the Tree. Instead, they were a bit like the Advisor Devices. Not the preserved souls of great heroes, but created by and named after them. Pinkie had the Element of Surprise, Dash had Firefly, and so forth."

Applejack quirked an eyebrow. "Hold on a second. Wouldn't that mean Ah had th' Element o' Applejack?"

"Actually, you had the Element of Further Recursion."

"'Further' Recursion?"

"Yeah, I had the other one. As I said, an odd Loop."

\* \* \*

><p>(Crisis)<p>

"The Element of Treason," Nyx explained, getting a few odd looks. "And no, it's not really an Element of Harmony. It's from a weird fused Loop where I was the seventh member of the Elements of Blasphemy for some reason. And yet, despite the name of my Element, they were still surprised when I turned on them and helped the heroes."

\* \* \*

><p>"The Element of Inquisition," Luna grinned. "None expected it!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"The Element of Dubstep," Vinyl displayed a pair of headphones. "That was a rocking Loop. Not sure if I like it or the Element of Wubs better..."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"The Element of Muffins!" Pinkie grinned widely.<p>

"Trade you for my Element of Cupcakes!" Ditzzy offered immediately. "Can't have too many elements of muffins!"

"Okay, but only if they're the kind with frosting and no fleshy bits," Pinkie agreed.

"Ew!" Ditzzy made a face. "Who'd want cupcakes like that?"

\* \* \*

><p>"The Element of Conversion," Sunset declared, putting a crown with a gemstone like a potion beaker on the table. "And, yes, I mean the Bureau."<p>

The rest of the room took a step back before they noticed Sunset taking out a selection of hammers.

"Ten bits a whack, one whack at a time, single file line, no crowding," she informed them.

\* \* \*

><p>90.10 (TokoWH)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight liked to think she was prepared for any possible loop variant at this point. A lot of variants that tend to come up any more were ones that she had seen several times now, and if there was anything she hadn't experienced yet, she liked to think she had gain enough power and wisdom to easily short circuit it if it was something unpleasant.<p>

Of course, as Twilight stood wide eye with a slack jaw, she began to remember one simple fact. These loops just \_love \_proving her wrong.

She wasn't entirely sure what had brought this loop on. Maybe

Trixie's latest explosive ended up crashing the loop too hard. All she knew was, as she struggled to think of anything to say, was this loop was going to be a thing.

"This is \_so. \_\_\*\*Awesome!\*\*\_" Rainbow Dash said, trying her best to contain her excitement.

"I'll say!" the \_second \_Rainbow Dash said, a wide grin on her face. "First time \_this \_has ever happened!"

Twilight face hoofed. She was actually surprised by the fact that it took this long for a 'mini-me' loop to happen. Spike smirked, a sly look in his eyes.

"So, does this make this loop \_forty \_percent cooler?"

"You're not helping, Spike."

\* \* \*

><p>90.11 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Discord did so love it when the royal sisters weren't Awake. It was so easy to confuse them. Here he was, stretched out on a beach somewhere near the equator, and they were probably turning Equestria upside down looking for him. Havoc wreaked without even having to lift a finger. It was a beautiful thing.<p>

With a snap, Discord conjured a pair of sunglasses and a smoothie. He smeared the latter over his face like a mud mask and sipped from an arm of the former. Pomegranate, bathroom grout, and malaise, his favorite as of three seconds ago.

"There you are."

The draconequus peeked through his frozen facial treatment. "Hmm. I suppose Twilight's tending to the terrible twosome?"

"Convincing them that you're really not up to anything, yeah." Gilda stretched her back, flaring her wings. "Ugh. I knew you'd be in the middle of the ocean."

Discord pouted. "Oh, come now. I haven't stranded anypony on a desert island in ages!"

"No, not that. I knew you'd be in the most inconvenient place I could think of." Gilda continued her stretches, wincing with most of them. "Ocean flying sucks. I'm part-eagle, not albatross."

The chaos spirit rolled his eyes (He got a fourteen.) "Yes, yes, I'll play you a sad song on the world's most indifferent violin. I keep telling Louise she can do better, but does she listen? Of course not." He coiled himself up into a pile that put him eye to eye with the griffon. "So, did you just come to ask me back in your refreshingly brusque way, or was there something else?"

Gilda flinched back for a moment. "Why would there be anything else?"

Discord smirked and quirked an eyebrow. "Well, I was just being polite, but given that reaction, it's fairly clear there's something on your mind." Suddenly, he was in glasses, a hideous suit, and a chintzy armchair. "Please, do share."

Gilda found herself perched on another piece of furniture. "Isn't this Rarity's drama couch?"

"Don't try to change the subject, dear. We're not here for me, we're here for you." Discord began doodling hypercubes on his notepad. "Now, tell me about your father."

"That's... actually kinda what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Hmm. Trouble in the Empire?" Discord scratched his beak. "Is there one this time around? I rarely keep track."

"Not that." Gilda tried not to think about how disturbingly attractive griffonized Discord was. "It's... Look, did you create griffons?"

"Sometimes," Discord admitted, back in his usual shape. "I've had the occasional very early Awakening, and at times some or all of the mix-and-match species don't exist yet. Griffons, minotaurs, chimerae, et cetera." He grinned. "Once, I even had to create pegasi! Naturally, the prototype was an attempt at Fluttershy, but she lacked a certain je ne sais quoi."

"What about the baseline?"

Discord paused. "This is unusually existential for you, my fine, furred, feathered friend. What brought this on?"

No props appeared. He didn't change shape. There was nothing but seemingly genuine concern. It took Gilda the better part of a minute to process that before she could answer. "It's just... Look, the ponies have a pair of sort-of-goddesses right there in Canterlot. Griffons don't, but we don't need some divine crutch."

"I'm sensing a 'but'."

"Besides your own?" Gilda grimaced. "Yeah, you're right. It's nice knowing where you came from, having someone you can ask and know you're getting the facts. Even when Celestia and Luna weren't there, ponies are..." She trailed off, looking at her own talons.

"Go on."

"Ponies are a big enough deal that there's always going to be some record or something. Like that Loop where you made pegasi. Bam. Primary source right there. But griffons..."

"I guess it started when I was Ammy's student. Suddenly I had a goddess too. Suddenly it was griffons who were the big species on campus. But she didn't shape us from sunbeams in the baseline. I never really paid attention to the old stories, and now it seems like they change every Loop."

"I see." Discord looked off into the distance. "Does it really

matter?"

Gilda squinted at him and tilted her head almost ninety degrees. "No. I just poured my freaking heart out because I couldn't care less about this. What do you think?"

The draconequus nodded, keeping his gaze on the middle distance. "Fair enough. Why does it matter?"

"Because every Looping griffon says it does."

That got Discord to reestablish eye contact. "You've talked to Silver Spoon about this?"

Gilda rolled her eyes. "I meant just me. Trying to be dramatic about it."

"Ah. Well, if you must know, Iâ€" "

"DISCORD!"

They turned to see an incandescent Celestia. Discord provided sunglasses for everyone. Celestia's began to melt immediately. "I'm afraid we'll have to continue this conversation later, Gilda. It appears there's a fusion device about to go critical, and I'm all out of blamable Trixies."

And then Gilda found herself back in Ponyville, an afterimage of an alicorn seared in her vision and a pair of sweet shades darkening it.

\* \* \*

><p>90.12 (Conceptulist)<p>

It was not an unusual sight to see Vinyl Scratch sorting through her personal music collection, in search of the perfect song.

"Erg! None of this sounds right."

However, it was unusual was for Vinyl to be dissatisfied with it. Normally she had the perfect music for any possible occasion. This time her standard fare just wouldn't cut it.

"Why, in the name of Wub itself, did I agree to DJ a birthday party for Angel Bunny!?" whined Vinyl.

Fluttershy had gotten Pinkie Pie to plan the Perfect Bunny Birthday Beach Bash. According to Pinkie, there was going to be carrot cake, and bunny balloons, and carrot flavored cotton candy, and a bunny bounce house, and all the cute bunnies Fluttershy could find were invited. As well as the not-so-cute ones. And the downright ugly ones. Pretty much any bunny Fluttershy could find had received an invite. It would suffice to say that until all the party goers went home, the Everfree forest would be suffering from a severe lack of rabbit. The only thing missing from this Perfect Bunny Birthday Beach Bash? Music, and that's where Vinyl came into the picture.

Vinyl Scratch started to rehash her mental list of music genres. "No

dub step. No rock or any accompanying roll. No metal. Double no on death metal. Bunnies apparently find hip-hop offensive. Karaoke is for the birds, but Angel Bunny can't sing. Bears hate smooth jazz, and there is no way I am letting an Unawake Fluttershy listen to any of the rap I got. Maybe classical, if Pinkie wouldn't get bored with it and make me play nothing but the Pony Pokey for the rest of the party. Again. Nothing works!"

Vinyl had already gone through all of her collection. Records, CDs, and cassette tapes were strewn all across her bedroom. It really was quite the mess, and Vinyl Scratch was not looking forward to cleaning it up. With a calculated blast of telekinetic magic, Vinyl cleared her bed off.

"And worst of all, it's a theme party! I just don't have that much bunny-centric music on hoof!" she ranted.

Vinyl hopped into bed, snuggled her pillow into her face, and proceeded to scream her frustrations into its downy depths.

Once she was finished, she glared at that which had come to represent the source of her ire. A pair of floppy felt bunny ears that she was to wear at the party. How embarrassing for her. With an indignant huff, Vinyl rolled over and started to mutter to herself.

"No good music. No alcoholic drinks. No way out of this, 'cause I pinkie promise I would do it. And I'm gonna have to wear this stupid thing the entire time to 'make the bunnies feel more at home.' Ugh!"

Vinyl rolled off her bed, plucking the bunny ears off her nightstand as she did so. In short order the bunny ears were securely on her head and she was sarcastically bouncing around.

"Hey, Hey! Look at me! I'm the bunny DJ! Come on, let's all bounce to the beat!" she sang.

"Yeah, right. I'm just going to wind up putting Little Bunny Foo Foo on loop or something, I just know it. I can't find a single song that fits a bunny themed beach party," the DJ complained.

With a roll of her eyes and an exasperated sigh, Vinyl flopped back on to her bed.

"I need something that will get everyone jumping and playing on the beach. Something that is going to make them stomp their feet to the beat. They gotta shake their bodies to a sweet little beat. And unless I write it myself, I got nothing that can do that!" ranted Vinyl Scratch.

Her thought processes screeched to a halt in a way that was reminiscent of her name. "Write it myself?" she asked herself. "Why didn't I think of that earlier!?" herself answered.

>Positively bouncing with creative energy, Vinyl rushed to find a quill and some paper. Mumbling potential lyrics and humming a beat, she began crafting a song.<p>

The unicorn composed well into the night. Creating a song from scratch was long and tiresome work, as long as a pony was not relying on the magic of Heartsongs to do it for them. However, the Muse was

with Vinyl. A little after dawn, she finished perfecting the lyrics and stopped experimenting with the sheet music.

"Finished," yawned an exhausted Vinyl Scratch.

Vinyl then started doing what earned her Cutie Mark. Etching music onto records.

"Wait, what?" Mumbled a now slightly more alert unicorn.

Looking straight ahead was pointless as there was a mostly blank record in the way. Looking up let her know that the record's edge was currently aligned with her horn. A glow of magic was awash over both the horn and the record. The record was lazily spinning, with a groove slowly getting etched into the record.

Vinyl blinked in surprise. "Nowhere near as weird as the stuff Derpy gets for a special talent."

\* \* \*

><p>90.13(Novusordomundi, with Spectrumancer)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I can see your future!" Pinkie stated, decked in her gypsy clothing, waving her hooves around a crystal ball while holding a deck of cards in her hooves. Apple Bloom rolled her eyes as she sat across the table<p>

"Pinkie, Ah don't think...

"\*\*Silence, mortal! Do you dare question Pinkamena Diane Pie, High Priestess of Pinkamena Diane Pie?"\*\*

Apple Bloom looked over to the side, and saw the God of the Round leaning upon the table. "How the hay do you become a High Priestess of yourself?"

"\*\*Mirror Pool." \*\*The headband of guisarmes supplied. "\*\*She is the goddess, priesthood, and lay-beings of her own religion! And I've lost the bet I had with her that she couldn't do that in one loop's time..."\*\*

Apple Bloom decided to not follow that train of thought, and resumed the conversation "Anyway, Ah don't think a deck of cards can predict my future. Besides, wouldn't you just use your Pinkie-Sense?"

Pinkie giggled, while shuffling the cards like a Vegas dealer. "I don't need Pinkie Sense to tell you your future..." And with a flick of a hoof, she put down the card. One look, and she gasped...

"Oh no, the The Repairman of Stars, in a reversed position! Something of yours is going to break in the near future, due to circumstances beyond your control..." Pinkie gasped, than flipped over a second card...

"Trio of Quasars! Three beings are responsible for the destruction of this item!" Pinkie put a foreleg to her head "Is there any hope for your fate?" Apple Bloom rolled her eyes as a third card was laid onto



the table... and looked saddened.

"I am so sorry... The Engineer of Judgment Day. Your machine will be destroyed in totality." Pinkie said in a serious voice, putting a hoof on Apple Bloom's shoulder. "I mourn for your loss."

Apple Bloom just stared at the pink party pony as she removed the hoof from her shoulder. "Pinkie, Ah don't want to sound rude, but if you think I'm going to believe that something will happen to one of my devices just because you laid three cards on the table, than I'm..." She stopped when she felt the tap on her shoulder, and turned to see Scootaloo nervously standing next to her. "Hey, Scoots. What's wrong?"

Scootaloo fidgeted "Uh, 'bloom? Remember how you said you hadn't finished working on the hovercraft yet? Hadn't got the kinks out yet?"

"Uh-huh..." Apple Bloom could already feel the headache coming on.

"And you know how Trixie wanted to use a hovercraft in her stage act this loop?"

"Yes..."

"And how Lyra and Derpy we're going to help her? And none of them knew to not press the red button yet?"

Applebloom sighed. "Alright. Tell me, how bad is it?"

Scootaloo fidgeted her hooves a bit and looked at the ground.

"How. Bad. Was. It?"

\* \* \*

><p>(Meanwhile, at the Crater Formerly Known as Town Hall)<p>

Ivory Scroll stood at the edge of the crater where her workplace used to be. She glanced over at the trio of her fellow loopers, looking sheepish and more than a little scorched. She looked back at the crater, shook her head, and reached into her Pocket for the appropriate set of incidence forms to fill out, idly musing on the fact that this series of events wasn't far from the norm, even for Baseline Ponyville.

\* \* \*

><p>90.14 (WyldeHorse)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Trixie is telling you!" Trixie declared, waving a small bag in Big Mac's face, "It is absolutely imperative that you plant these! If Applejack were Awake, Trixie would ask her, but as she's not you simply have to do this instead! Trixie only found these in her last loop! I MUST know what will happen when they're full-grown!"<p>

"Eee\_nope.\_ Ah' don't care what you've got to pay with, Ah' \_ain't\_ planting your 'explosion vine' seeds. Ah'm thinkin' things would \_explode.\_"

"Yes! That is EXACTLY Trixie's point! We must know WHAT SORT of explosion it will be!"

"Umm, excuse me please? Angle Bunny wants to know, if you're going to plant things other than apples, if you could grow some of these Giant Glowing Carrot seeds he found? If you don't mind?"

"\_Eeenope.\_"

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From The Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

\* \* \*

><p>Once again, I've replaced someone. This time around, one Ahsoka Tano. Yes, that means Anakin Skywalker was my teacher this time.<br>Out of all the Loopers so far, he could really sympathize with my baseline plight a lot. He did teach me how to better harness my emotions and finetune my telekinesis..as well as fly a spaceship.

Anakin'd actually been cooking up a plan for a good while when I'd Looped in. His plan was to publicly expose Palpatine as the evil he was.

>He was ready to give it a try, but my appearance threw him off.<p>

I did convince him to try the plan he had in mind, and find out the kinks in it.

His plan was a simple one: After I'd ended up in the same situation Ahsoka had which led to her ending her time as Anakin's Padawan, I'd 'turn' to the Dark Side..or just say I did. I'd then gather proof Palpy was playing both sides, and once the final days of the Clone Wars arrived, Anakin'd make his move, and expose Palpy.

To both our surprises, it worked...though we had to use abilities from other Loops to do so.

My time with Shinji and Ichigo'd really helped in knowing how to outwit a master of manipulation like Palpatine. Anakin telling me how Palpy tended to do things also helped.

When the plan was enacted, during the moment where Anakin'd fall to the Dark Side in baseline, I'd used some magic to be unseen, as Palpy thought me dead by Anakin's hand shortly before Dooku'd been killed. We made the fight look VERY convincing, to our credit. I then saved Windu from his fall to the ground, and then helped Anakin fake the Jedi Temple slaughter.

When Anakin apparently left to finish off the Separatist leaders(he'd only pretended to leave), as Palpatine made his speech to the Senate as per baseline, I appeared.

He acted the kind man, until I said the phrase that'd cue the unveiling of Anakin's surprise.

'Hail Emperor Palpatine the mighty. Hail to Darth Sidious, conquerer of Jedi, darkest of Sith Lords! All praise the man who leads from shadows, lord over Count Dooku, and true ruler of this Galaxy!'

As Palpatine acted shocked by this insult, the video I'd made of his revealing himself to Windu, as well as other evidence I'd collected, caused him to act utterly shocked. When Windu walked in, Palpatine fumed.

I then tossed an empty Senate box at him, forcing him to use the Dark Side to defend himself...the coward.

Padme quickly acted, declaring Palpatine a traitor, and the Senate soon followed. You do NOT piss off politicians. Anakin then made his arrival, adding the final pieces of evidence: Palpatine's own words to try to turn Anakin. That did it, and Sidious attacked.

Deciding not to hold back, I summoned my Keyblade, and the brawl was on.

>The Sith Lord pushed me, Windu, and Anakin to the limit.<p>

However, the timely arrival of Yoda and Obi-Wan, who'd learned of our masterplan right as it'd begun, turned the tide. Anakin delivered the coup de grace, and goodbye Sith Lord...until the next time Anakin Looped.

>I'd enjoyed this Loop, as it allowed me to put both my combat skills and my skills at outwitting enemies to use.<p>

Anakin himself saw bits where only my abilities from my travels'd allowed some of the plan to work, and was already cooking up ways to fix those holes.

Anakin, I'm glad I met you. And Palpatine...rot in Tartarus.

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From The Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

\* \* \*

><p>After my try at villainy, and ending up getting chased by a guy in a bat outfit, I was ready to relax for once, and try being a normal girl for one Loop.<br>Then, I ended up getting charged for murder. OH COME ON! Can't I have one peaceful Loop?

Then I met Phoenix Wright. He's a fellow Looper too; he'd even had to defend an unawake Rainbow Dash once in an early Fused Loop, though he didn't know what Loops were when it happened. It's a long story.

Anyhow, he'd noticed something off about me, and actually asked if I was a Looper. I lied, but somehow, he knew I was lying, and then showed me a picture of him with Twilight and her friends. That killed

my lie instantly.

After he said he'd explain later, he got to defending me in court. He is good. VERY good. Despite everything pointing to me, he found all the holes in the evidence, and even found out who really did the murder. I thought I was doomed more than once.

After all that was over, he explained that he'd learned of the Multiverse from Twilight after his bad luck had him back there doing a case he technically'd already done...That's the Loops for you, I suppose.

Guess even in a 'Vacation' Loop, adventure still finds me.

\* \* \*

><p>90.15<p>

Spike jerked Awake. He stretched, paled, and stared at his clawed hands for a moment.

Whatever he saw, it wasn't what he wanted.

"Oh, no, oh no ohnoohno aaargh!" he groaned, slumping back with head in hands. "Okay, I'm dead."

"What happened?" Twilight asked, looking around from the book.

"I..." Spike shook his head, with a wince. "I bucked up big time. I had my ring on last loop, because it's been a while since Rarity was awake and I was kind of feeling melancholy, and..."

Twilight made an ah of understanding. "Wasn't that the one in Krynn?"

"Yeah." Spike nodded glumly. "And I took a dragonlance to the face when I wasn't expecting it, and I died, and I lost the ring. Rarity spent fifty years making that, she's gonna kill me."

"Doesn't it have enchantments to detect that?" Twilight asked, putting the book down and trotting over with a frown. "You know, detects cessation of brain function, mix that with a moment-action precog layer... I can think of three ways easily. And then it can just drop into your Pocket."

"Yeah, I know they're possible," Spike confirmed. "But it didn't have them, Tiara was the one who did that abjuration set and they're only on the one she made. And... oh, no, Cadence is going to bury me for losing it once Rarity's done with killing me, and..."

He shrugged helplessly.

Twilight bent over him, and dropped the ring into his hand. "Good thing I thought to check, isn't it?" she asked with a wink.

Spike stared, dumbfounded, then leapt to his feet and embraced her. "Thank you! Thank you so much!"

Twilight smiled. "Just go see Diamond Tiara and get her to add the full protective enchantment set, okay?"

\* \* \*

><p>90.16 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?"<p>

"No, Rarity, I don't know why we're rabbits."

"Oh, no. I was going to ask how we were going to deal with Lord Caerbannog."

"Hope that Angel Bunny is Awake, that's how."

\* \* \*

><p>90.17 (MasterWeaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"GET ME OUT GET ME OUT GET ME OUT GET ME OUT!"<p>

"TRIXIE HOLD STILL!" Sunset growled, swinging her keyblade. "I can't unlock this if I can't hit the locks!"

"I'm TRYING! Clover isn't letting me!"

\_How is this MY fault?!\_ Clover beeped angrily. \_You're the one that put me on without reading the manual!\_

"OW IT'S TIGHT IT'S TIGHT IT'S TIGHT!"

\_I'm trying to stop this, alright?! I don't know how! This has never-oh she's unconscious. Quick, Sunset, before I squeeze her to death!\_

"Why did she even swipe you anyway?" Sunset asked, tapping her keyblade strategically over the powered armor.

\_Well, apparently she wanted to be Iron Mare, whatever that means. I'm going to have to talk to Sweetie and Bloom about my security protocols...\_

\* \* \*

><p>90.18 The One Butcher)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Subspace pockets are dangerous things to be caught within when the loop resets. But if you use the ability sparingly and with plenty of time to spare:<p>

"Oh No! Pinkie Pie put hyperfrosting on the MMMM! Everyone out of the Universe!" With that about thirty Ponies, including the three Princesses and the \_Captain of the Royal Guard\_, a Pony of utmost

bravery all seemed to eat themselves, leaving dumbfounded Canterlot High Society behind.

When the cake began to shake and warp and waves of plaid began to ripple from it the event dissolved into complete panic.

"How do you get out of the Universe?" Blueblood cried, trying to bite his own tail, "\_HOW DO YOU GET OUT OF THE UNIVERSE?\_"

\* \* \*

><p>90.1: It's tempting, yes. But it's not a good idea.<br>90.2: Good thing no-one said "hammertime"  
>90.3: Speciality topic.<br>90.4: Whoops...  
>90.5: Noli Tangere.<br>90.6: Sing to me, muses...  
>90.7: Puff of smoke.<br>90.8: Cookie the sloshed.  
>90.9: They don't have any actual power. But they're interesting keepsakes.<br>90.10: Double rainbow, of course.  
>90.11: Creation anxiety.<br>90.12: Bunny beats.  
>90.13: It could have gone much worse.<br>90.14: The field that ploughs itself! With a loud BANG.  
>90.15: Keep it safe.<br>90.16: Rabbiting on.  
>90.17: Sapient artefacts may have safety protocols.<br>90.18: They'll be fine. If surfeited.

## 95. Chapter 95

### 91.1 (OathToOblivion)

\* \* \*

><p>"Pikachu?"<p>

"Yeah, Ash?"

"Why am I a fire-less Rapidash?"

"...No clue."

Ash looked around the strange forest they were in. He and Pikachu had been through a lot of time resets, but this was the first time they'd ever been somewhere like this. "I wonder where we are?" he wondered as he went to move closer to Pikachu. Instead, he ended up tripping over his hooves, not being used to an equinoid body.

Pikachu facepawed. "How about you just stay here and get used to four legs while I go figure out where we are, alright?" he asked. At Ash's agreement, he scampered off through the forest. As he exited, he saw what appeared to be a cottage of some kind on the outskirts of the forest. As he ducked down to get closer, he froze when a voice chimed in from behind him.

"Oh my. I've never seen anything quite like you before." As Pikachu turned around, he saw what looked to him like a pastel-yellow colored Ponyta with a pink mane that also wasn't fiery. The one thing that threw him off were the pair of wings on it.

"{I've never seen a Ponyta like this before...}" he muttered to himself in Pokespeak. He was shocked to find that the pastel

not-Ponyta that spoke human tongue could understand Pokespeak when she said...

"What's a Ponyta? Is that what you call Ponies? Well...to be more accurate, I'm a Pegasus, although I don't really like flying," she, and it was definitely a she, said. "I'm Fluttershy; what's your name?" she asked.

"...Pikachu," the electric mouse Pokemon said after a moment's pause. Unfortunately, since Pokespeak, for most Pokemon anyway, consists of a Pokemon speaking its name in different tones and stresses, it took him a while to make it clear to Fluttershy that he meant that his name was Pikachu. \_'One of these days, we need to figure out something so we're not confused,' \_he thought to himself.

Anyway, just as he was about to say something else, a lavender not-Rapidash came onto the scene. "Hello, Fluttershy," she greeted. "Who's this?" she asked as she turned to him. Strangely, her eyes widened for a second before she looked as though it had never happened.

"Oh, Twilight," Fluttershy greeted. "I was just saying hello to my new friend. He says his name is Pikachu," she said.

Twilight had a pensive look for a second before saying, "Hey, Fluttershy? Do you mind if I talk to Pikachu here for a bit? I've been working on an Animal Translation Spell and I think I've gotten out all the bugs," she asked.

Fluttershy nodded. "Okay. I'll be inside if you need me; it's time to feed Angel Bunny," she added as she walked to her cottage and shut the door (softly) behind her.

Twilight then turned to Pikachu. "I guess Fluttershy isn't Awake if she didn't notice considering our visit there, but what's a Pikachu doing in Ponyville?" she couldn't help but wonder.

"That's what I'd like to know," interjected Pikachu, much to Twilight's shock. "Where am I? First time keeps resetting and not even Celebi or Dialga or even \_Arceus \_knows why, and now I'm in a place with pastel colored not-Ponytas and not-Rapidashes? What's going on?!" he wondered in frustration. He was getting fed up with trying to figure out what exactly was going on.

"A talking Pikachu?" Twilight wondered before the rest of what he said registered. "Wait; time has been resetting for you? You're a Looper?!" she asked in shock.

"Looper? What's that?" Pikachu asked in confusion.

"Okay...imagine that every single world out there were branches on a tree, and that tree is the multiverse," Twilight explained. "Now, imagine that something happened that almost broke the tree..."

Pikachu winced. "That sounds bad," he commented. "So if the tree that is the multiverse is broken, what's going on to fix it?" he asked.

"The Time Loops," Twilight bluntly said. "Looping stabilizes the

Branches of the tree while repairs are made. But it's going to be several eternities before the tree is stabilized enough to even think about ending the Loops. The Admins, the quasi-divine upper-dimensional entities in charge of the universe, are working very hard just to keep things from getting worse."

Pikachu whistled. "Sounds daunting..." he commented before a scream from the Forest cut him off. Pikachu paled beneath his fur. "Oh crap! I left Ash in there alone while I went to scope the place out!" he yelled in horror. He quickly dashed off in a Quick Attack, cutting off what Twilight was going to say.

Ash tripped over his hooves as he tried to run away. He had no clue what was chasing him; it looked like someone had taken a Pyroar and fused it with a Bug-type of some kind. As he fell, the manticore, for that was what it was, got ever closer, causing him to scream for help.

Just as the manticore was about to do...something...a yellow blur came out of nowhere. It was Pikachu, who had channeled the speed of his Quick Attack into a Double Edge, knocking the manticore back a good few feet. "Ash! You alright?" Pikachu asked.

"P-Pikachu! ...Yeah, I'm fine," Ash said shakily. Pikachu then turned his attention to the manticore.

"Alright! Listen up, whatever you are! You've just made the biggest mistake of your life if you think you can go after Ash like that!" Pikachu declared. \_'Wait...that sounded more like something Squirtle would say...oh well, '\_

The manticore growled before launching itself at Pikachu. Pikachu dodged, and immediately used Iron Tail to whack it in the stomach. But the manticore didn't give up, and let out a loud roar, that caused shockwaves in the air, knocking Pikachu backwards. The manticore then swooped in and attempted to stab Pikachu with its scorpion tail, but Pikachu performed a mid-air dodge and used Thunder Wave to paralyze the manticore. Just as he was about to launch into a Volt Tackle though...

"STTOOOOOOOOOOOPPPPP!" was heard as Fluttershy ran up. However, much to Pikachu's chagrin, she immediately turned on him. "You should be ashamed of yourself! Attacking Mr. Fluffykins like that out of nowhere...!"

Pikachu immediately started gibbering. "{But...But...Ash...in danger...weird thing...attacking...!}"

Ash then chimed in. "Um...it's alright, miss. Pikachu was just trying to protect me," he pointed out. Fluttershy deflated.

"Oh...well, the least you could do is apologize...I mean, if that's okay with you," she said.

Pikachu rolled his eyes, but he acquiesced when Ash gave him a look. "{Um...sorry, Mr. Fluffykins,}" he awkwardly said. The manticore growled before flying off deeper into the Everfree.

It was then that Twilight ran up. "I heard a scream; is everypony alright?" she asked, trying to deflect the Unawake Fluttershy from



prying too far into this.

Ash then spoke up. "Um, we're fine, Miss..?"

Twilight realized then that they had never gotten her name. "Twilight Sparkle. I gotta say, I hope it didn't get too \_loopy\_ for you guys this \_time\_," she not-so-subtly said.

Ash widened his eyes before nodding. "Ash Ketchum. Pikachu's my best friend," he said as Pikachu leaped up onto his back, since trying to do so on his shoulder would be problematic.

"Well then, Ash, Pikachu. Do you mind coming following me over to the town library? There are a couple of things I have to talk to you about," Twilight said. At the duo's agreement, they said goodbye to Fluttershy and walked with Twilight to the library.

\* \* \*

><p>91.2 (misterq) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>The mist covered first the stage, and then the remainder of Ponyville's town hall.<p>

Twilight Sparkle, expecting the usual 'night shall last forever' speech was surprised when the mist failed to dissipate in a timely manner. It remained thick and heavy in the atmosphere, still magical but with an almost familiar scent. The lavender unicorn only realized what it was when the ponies in the audience slowly stopped panicking and started acting more and more relaxed.

"Hello, to all my pony subjects. I do hope we're all feeling irie tonight," said the Jamarecan accented voice. The mist cleared enough that Twilight was able to recognize the alicorn in the center. She was still black and midnight blue, but her flowing mane and tail were styled in ephemeral dreadlocks. She had on a bright shirt, a rastafarian hat, and there was a guitar and a steel drum strapped to her sides.

Twilight Sparkle sighed as she put a hoof up to her temple to try to stave off the oncoming headache, "Let me guess. This time around, you're Nightmare Mon?"

\* \* \*

><p>91.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee--"

Twilight lightly bopped Lyra upside the head. "Yes, you're human. Get over it."

"I don't think I recognize this loop," Cheerilee commented, looking around. "Is it just a typical high school or--"

Then the loop memories hit.

Lyra blinked. "...okay, us being secret super spies I can get," she

said slowly. "But why do we wear spandex? And why does Twilight get the green one?"

Cheerilee shrugged. "Super-hero clothing, I guess. Wouldn't be surprised if there's some sort of tech involved..."

\* \* \*

><p>91.4 (Feral Wolfskin)<p>

Vinyl wasn't that unfamiliar with the concept of an apprentice; she often had one or two for any given loop... but this, she was sure, was a first.

"So, Princess," she began. "Why do you want to learn how to be a DJ?"

"To be honest, I have never looped as a DJ, at least not meanwhile I was Awake, and it always looked interesting to learn â€" but, due to the fact I am one of the rulers of the country, it is difficult to find time to do it."

Vinyl blinked in confusion (No-one noticed, thanks to the sunglasses.) "But... aren't you one of the rulers this time, too?"

Luna grinned. "Not... exactly..."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked through a few documents, then said, "It only took them thirty seconds since the start of the loop."<p>

"Wow, that must be a new record," exclaimed Pinkie. "It looks that the Princesses really needed a vacation"

"Probably, but they should at least have checked who was awake before they pulled this," grumbled Rainbow Dash pointing to the still stunned Applejack. And the unconscious forms of Rarity and Fluttershy.

\* \* \*

><p>91.5 (Masterweaver) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>The shops of Canterlot had seen many a strange thing in their years, even before those in the know factored in the loops. It was, after all, a hub to Equestrian culture and, due to the presence of two important entities in world-wide maintenance, a number of other cultures as well.<p>

Seeing two fillies bicker with an oddly lanky zombie insect pony over which dress was the most beautiful, though... that was a first to many minds.

"I'm telling you, the one on the left has elegance! Look at that filigree, those gems-"

"Of course you'd like the gems, Diamond. I'm thinking she should go for that one, it's not too complicated but the way the shoulders swoop-"

"Sweetie Belle, I am not going to wear swooping shoulders on my date with Trixie! Maybe if I'm playing up an evil sorceress thing, but-"

On the plus side, their argument was attracting a lot of attention to the shop and therefore generating retinue. The shopkeeper smiled a bit at their antics, totally unaware that they were two goddesses in potentia and the queen empress of the world's largest spy network. To him, they were just another group of shoppers in the big city.

Of course, later that week when they fought Discord off with a shapeshifting crystal mech that weaponized music, his opinion would change.

\* \* \*

><p>91.6 (Conceptulist) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Too short, but on topic and well written," said Cheerilee. "B-for Twist."<p>

Cheerilee was spending yet another day grading papers. A long and tedious job that she refused to try and shortcut with looping knowledge.

"Definite problems with spelling, and little to no indication any attempts to fix it. D+ for Featherweight."

The only relief from this tedium was coming up with new assignments so she didn't have to grade the same exact thing again and again.

"No major spelling or grammatical errors, and it was an enjoyable read. A for Dinky."

It was boring being the only teacher in Ponyville, baring the occasional variant loop where that was not true. Sometimes it was frustrating to teach the same thing again and again. Sometimes she just wanted to quit and take a vacation from it all. Sometimes she did, if she could find a replacement teacher.

"Diamond Tiara's and Silver Spoon's epic adventure of awesome? A for creativity."

But sometimes she saw what her student's could learn to do. And she fell in love with teaching all over again.

\* \* \*

><p>"Grammar Mane to the rescue!" a spandex clad pony yelled, barging into what appeared to be an empty cave with several pieces of scientific equipment lying around. "Do not worry my friends. I shall save you from the evil Miss Spelling and her minion Typo!" Looking everything over, grammar mane was quick to spot the dreaded Miss

Spelling. "Charge!" she both yelled and did.<p>

"De apearatus has bean set," said the rival of Grammar Mane. "You'll nevar stahp me now!"

Grammar Mane's charge towards Miss Spelling was screeched to a halt. "Ah! Bad spelling! My only weakness!" she screamed, before collapsing to the ground. "How did you know?"

"Like et is that hared to figure out," quipped Miss Spelling. Grammar Mane twitched with every abused word she heard. "Let uce go ovar the facts." More twitching from Grammar Mane ensued. "Farst, your name. Et is Grammar Mane. Ergo, you draw you're strangth from korrekt grammar." Twitch-a twitch went the superhero. "Than yu allweighs avoided directly touching any of my pourly spell taunt notices. The one time you did, yuos got like thes."

Grammar Mane looked around the room while Miss Spelling continued to pontificate. There was nothing she hadn't seen when she when she entered the room. No projectors beaming projections of misspelled words. No Comma-inators to reduce her movements to a jerking halt. Not even a single Un-Correction drone. But somehow she was still being rendered completely helpless. Grammar Mane despaired, as she was completely at the mercy of Miss Spelling.

The only thing that was keeping Miss Spelling from finishing off Grammar Mane once and for all was Miss Spelling's selectively shoddy memory. Miss Spelling always forgot whom she gave the "I know Grammar Mane's weakness" speech to. This meant that, even if Grammar Mane herself was the one who asked, anyone asking about it was in for a long and detailed lecture explaining Grammar Mane's allergy to poor grammar and bad spelling. And unfortunately for Grammar Mane, it sounded like Miss Spelling was no where near the end of the speech.

"â€| And fur item number sixtea two, you nevar make a mistake in you're writing. Almast like yu haft toâ€|"

'\_No,'\_ thought Grammar Mane. '\_If she is only up to 62 and I have been reduced to a shuddering wreck already, I'll never make it past 127. I'll have to pony up and-'\_ here Grammar Mane was hit by a particularly bad series of tremors that interrupted her thought process and caused her too momentarily blackout.

As soon as Grammar Mane came to, she cut the rest of Miss Spelling's rant off by yelling "How are you doing this!" This caused Miss Spelling to smirk evilly.

"You come all de way heir, and you had no idea what I waz building?" Miss Spelling rhetorically stated. With a vicious leer and widening of her evil smile, Miss Spelling rotated a dial on the control panel. "Wat a jok! Dis is fuknee. Oh sew vary funie. In fect, I tink ill jucet stert laghin now." Miss Spelling took a deep breath, and began to laugh maniacally.

"BWEHAHIHUHOHAHEHAHEOHIEHIAHEIHUHAHAHIAHHEHEHEHAHAHAHEHAHEHEHA~"

As the pain started to increase and Miss Spelling's cruel laughter echoed in her ears, Grammar Mane came to a realization. '\_Of

course!\_' she thought. '\_But I shall need some supplies from my utility belt. I must prepare while Miss Spelling is still distracted.'\_

"~HIAHAHAHIHEHEHEHAHAHAHAHEHEIHUHEHAHEOHIEHA!" laughed the maniacal mare. Gasping for breath, Miss Spelling took a few short moments to rest. She soon was at Grammar Mane's side, ready to continue the taunting of her heroic arch-nemesis. "Ded yiu fogiro et iot yut?"

"Of course I figured it out," answered Grammar Mane. "You used the stockpile of magitech equipment you stole to build a device that lets you misspell your spoken words."

"End new thet yu knew, I wall finesh yu!" Miss Spelling taunted, as she prepared to turn her machine up to eleven. Her hoof was moments away from making contact with the dial when a large rock slamming into the back of her head interrupted her. Staggering in a dazed fashion, Miss Spelling turned around in time to see a spandex-clad hoof right before it impacted her face.

As soon as Miss Spelling could focus her eyes well enough to see, she realized that Grammar Mane was proudly standing on top of a large pile of scrap. "NOOO! The Vocal-Miss-Spell-inator 9001 was my penultimate creation! You should still be a gibbering mess on the floor. You should be dead by now. Where did you find the strength to fight back!?"

"I have no idea," said Grammar Mane, before stopping to take some cleansing breaths.

A twitch developed in Miss Spelling's eye. "Impossible! My machine was flawless! There is no way you could have-"

"What you just said," continued Grammar Mane. "I can't hear a thing. Aren't earplugs just grand?" With a broad smile, Grammar Mane clapped a pair of hoofcuffs onto her gibbering arch-rival.

\* \* \*

><p>As Cheerliee finished reading, she began to snicker to herself. "I just have to give writing assignments like this more often. I'm amazed at what the UnAwake CMC can come up with when properly motivated. A+." <p>

\* \* \*

><p>91.7: (Zetrein) <p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>999, Moonless age. What Would Captain Jack Sparrow Do?<em>

Cadance stood in Canterlot's throne room, trying to convince Nyx's parents that she really did have their daughter's best interests in mind.

"...And I really, \_really\_ have no idea how she got wings!" This was punctuated by a gesture behind her, to where Nyx lounged on the

throne with a strawberry milkshake. "This whole 'Luna reborn' thing just happened after that! I've been trying to shut that down, but it's already been spreading."

"Um." Lyra raised her hoof. "That, might be my fault. When Cadance told us about her plans, I uh, I remembered that I overheard Twilight talking to Nyx last year, about hiding the fact she was an alicorn." Tugging at her collar, as the entire room turned its attention to her, Lyra continued. "So, um, I thought, if one alicorn could claim the throne, two would make a better claim?"

"Twilight knew about this?" Twilight Velvet turned her attention to her younger daughter. "Nyx, why didn't you ever tell us? How- \_When\_ did this even happen?"

As Nyx looked downcast at Velvet's hurt tone, Nightlight spoke up in her defence. "Now dear, don't blame Nyx, I know what happened." Making an odd gesture with his hooves, he smiled as his wild mane seemed to twitch. "Moonponies."

Though correct in ways he didn't know, his argument fell flat. Any counter arguments, however, were cut off by a loud banging on the throne room doors. As the guards and Mooncultists turned to face the doors, on the third bang, they came crashing off their hinges.

Standing in the now open doorway, was Twilight Sparkle. She had a crown on her head, a large sledgehammer hanging in her magic to her right, and a cowed Flash Sentry held to her left. Flanking her, was a group of ponies that some present recognized from Ponyville.

"Cadance! In accordance with the charter for the Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns chapter of the Cult of the Moon, I must inform you that \_this is a coup!\_" Twilight declared, setting the sledge's head on the floor, and posing with one hoof on the handle.

"This is the part where she defeats you." Cadance could just hear Nyx say from the throne.

"This is the part where I defeat you." Twilight continued to ham it up across the room.

"With magic." Nyx said, taking a sip of her milkshake.

"With Magic!" By now, the bystanders were quickly clearing a path between Twilight and Cadance.

"Eh heh. Um. Parley?" Cadance asked, as Nyx hopped off the throne to get clear.

\* \* \*

><p><em>1000th year of The Exodus. Heading off to Iskandar.<em>

Eternal night all around it, the Moon shone in the sun, as it sailed towards its homeworld. At the bow, the mighty shield produced by the Prow shimmered as it deflected space dust. On the side of the Prow, a pair of Lunar Navy marines stood watch on a balcony.

"Hey." The maroon batpony caught the attention of his fellow gaurd.

"Yeah?" The orange earthpony replied.

"You ever wonder why we're here?"

"It's one of life's great mysteries, isn't it? Why are we here? Are we the product of some cosmic coincidence, or is there really a Yggdrasil? Watching everything; you know, with a plan for us and stuff? I don't know colt, but it keeps me up at night."

As he finished speaking, the maroon pony could only stare at his friend. Following an awkward silence, he finally replied. "What? I meant why are we out here?"

"Oh, I... yeah." It was the orange one's turn to stand awkwardly.

"What was all that stuff about Yggdrasil?"

"Uh, hm? Nothing"

"You wanna talk about it?"

"No."

Taking the hint, the maroon one switched back to his original topic. "Seriously though, why are we out here? What's the point? What could we possibly see coming, that the sensors wouldn't? Who could get close enough to the Prow to do anything to it, assuming they got through the armor and force fields?"

**\*\*CLANG\*\***

The orange one's reply was cut off by the entire shield flashing with color, and a resounding noise that everypony on the Moon must have heard.

"What the buck was that?!" They both cried.

\* \* \*

><p>Ruby Pinch was a good filly. She helped Mom around the bar, made sure she got up when she got back from school, so she'd open on time, and often helped cooking dinner.<p>

So when everything went **\*\*CLANG\*\***, she did what any responsible filly would do, and started looking around to make sure nothing broke. After making sure her groaning mother was okay on the floor, she started looking through the rest of the apartment they had, above the bar.

\* \* \*

><p>Cadance came to on her back. There was a hole in the ceiling above her, going clear through the second floor to the sky. It was night, wherever she was, but oddly enough the sun shone through the windows to her left. There was a filly looking at her through the

hole. She had a rosy coloured coat, and the most adorable tufts on her ears.<p>

They stared at each other for a moment, before the filly ran off, little bat wings flapping. As Cadance's thought train was derailed by the bat wings, she heard the filly shout from somewhere above her.

"Mommy! Somepony broke into the bar! And there's a big hole in the roof!"

\* \* \*

><p>Silence reigned, in the aftermath of the fight. There was a hole in the ceiling, Cadance was gone, and somewhere along the way Twilight had grown a pair of wings, just like her sister.<p>

"Now then," Twilight addressed the room, "Unless there are any complaints, I will now assume command of the Cult."

Various versions of "No, Ma'am." echoed from the places the Cultists had taken cover in. Lyra poked her head out from the guardpony she was hiding under.

"If I may, Supreme Cult Leader, do you have any orders? Um, the baguette wasn't our idea!" Lyra ducked back under the guard, as Twilight turned her attention towards her.

"Well for starters, I'd like to know what happened to Princess Celestia." Twilight looked around the room, waiting for an answer.

Her answer, instead, came from behind her. A familiar voice, though it hadn't been heard in Equestria in a thousand years echoed through the door. "Hard to port!"

As they all looked towards the door, the more familiar voice of Princess Celestia replied, with repressed laughter. "Where's the port?"

As they entered view, they said together, "We drank the port!"

Luna, wearing a double breasted navy blue longcoat, and Celestia's crown, poked the guardpony walking beside them, as they laughed. "Port's a kind of wine, y'see."

Celestia, wearing a plumed bicorn that matched Luna's coat, stopped short, looking at the room she was about to enter. Beginning with the doors, she looked across the various ponies poking their heads out of hiding places, Twilight and Nyx's wings, what she recognized as the Elements of Harmony, and the hole in her roof, finally ending at the sledgehammer embedded in her throne.

Blinking owlishly, she asked her little ponies, "Did we miss something?"

\* \* \*

><p>91.8 (Indalecio) <p>



\* \* \*

><p>They found Catscratch on the outskirts of town. A purple pony with long black hair. Her cutie mark was a grinning cat's face. She stood in front of a chorus of mice with a microphone planted in front of them. Most unusually, she wore a plush mouse on her head.<p>

Kagura walked up to her. "Hey Catscratch."

Catscratch nodded. Then she nodded to her mice, which seemingly took the gesture as their cue to take five. As the mice wandered off, Kagura struggled to form words.

"Why are you wearing that?" she finally managed to squeak out.

"Solidarity." Was her one word reply.

Again struggling to find the words, she suddenly brightened and turned around to the rest of the group.

"I want you to meet some ponies." She waved the rest of the group to come.

"The rest you know, but this is Chiyo and Spike."

"Pleased to meet you." Said Chiyo as she gave a short bow.

Catscratch nodded.

Tomo ribbed Chiyo in the side and whispered. "Ask her!"

"About what?" Was Chiyo's confused response.

"About if she wants a human name."

"Oh! We wanted to know if you wanted a human name. Its a fad going around right now?"

Catscratch nodded.

"Okay, how about Sakaki?"

There was the faintest of blushes from Sakaki, and she nodded again.

"What! Come on! You too? Everypony likes their human names just like that?"

"Hush!" Said Yomi, bopping her friend on the head.

Spike coughed and spoke suddenly. "Anyway, we're representatives of Princess Celestia, checking on the preparations for the Summer Sun Celebration. So you prepared singing mice?"

Catscratch nodded again and tapped her foot. The mice reassembled and scampered on stage. At another gesture from Sakaki, they started singing what could only be described as an upbeat melody, followed by

a few others.

Everypony stamped their hooves in appreciation. Tomo, however, had the question.

"I know you like cats Catscratch, so why did you choose mice?"

"Cats can't sing very well." Said Catscratch plainly, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

\* \* \*

><p>91.9 (Dalxein) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So, Ditzzy, I was wondering if you were Awake?" Twilight asked, as nonchalantly as possible.<p>

The mailmare stopped in her letter sorting and gave the anchor an odd look. "Of course I'm awake, Twilight." Her head tilted in an absurdly unsettling way. "\_I'm always awake.\_"

Twililight clicked her tongue. "Yeah, not what I meant." Honestly, how many nightmare-fueled versions of her bright-eyed friend existed in the multiverse? "I was wondering if you were experiencing the same period of time over and over, in a loop."

"Oh." And suddenly Ditzzy was just Ditzzy again. "Well no, but that does sound interesting. I'm sorry if I can't help because I'm not, Twilight."

Aaaand sad Ditzzy makes the world cry. Best head this off at the pass. "Oh no, I was actually hoping you weren't so you could help me with an experiment. The next time you're Awake, I'm going to ask you if you remember 'the experiment' and if you remember this, I want you to answer yes and tell me everything you can remember of this conversation, okay?"

She scratched her chin. "That sounds really weird, but I'll try!" And with that she went back to work.

Twilight nodded to herself as she went back to check on her other projects. One of these days she'd pin down the specifics of these different 'Dreaming Bugs'.

\* \* \*

><p>(Gym Quirk) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:<p>

Well, this is interesting, if more than a little unsettling...

I appear to be Major Kira Shimsun, Bajoran liason to the Federation starbase designated Deep Space Ninie.

Ranma-sensei and Harry told me about these loops: The native loopers

are so good at not showing their status that no pony knows for sure just who is and who isn't Awake. The supposition is that the main characters for each series have to be looping, but without proof...

I might as well be alone in the universe.

I wonder if this is how Twilight feels when she's anchoring a lonely loop.

No. Looping or not, these are real people, and I shouldn't hold myself aloof just because I may never see them again after the loop ends. After all, I'm probably going to spend several years here unless something really strange happens.

Anyway, after a bit of a rocky start with Commander Sisko, we seem to be settling into something that might evolve into a decent working relationship.

Chief O'Brien is a solid friendly sort.

Dr. Bashir, while clearly a skilled physician, is a bit of a twit.

I could probably get to like Jadzia Dax, but that whole symbiote thing creeps me out.

I'm not sure, but I think Odo may have a crush on me.

That Quark character reminds me of Snips, but craftier and nowhere as sycophantic.

Idle thought: I wonder how my keyblade would interact with that wormhole...

Since this is a tech-heavy, low-magic loop, I'll take the opportunity to get a handle on advanced science and engineering.

\* \* \*

><p>Addendum:<p>

New loop, but there was something about the end of my tenure on DS9.

The day after Sisko's final journey to Bajor, I found an anonymous text message in my personal account.

"We apologize for not being more supportive during your visit. We appreciate your contributions, and under different circumstances, would welcome your company at any time."

I don't think I was especially friendly, but I guess I was able to mesh pretty well with the station inhabitants after all.

Anyway, I need to talk to Harry Dresden about those two murders. More about this loop later.

\* \* \*

><p>91.10 (Bigou) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Macintosh was setting up his bar for the loop when Discord brutally entered, almost tearing the door from it's hinges. The chaotic being walked to the counter, so pissed that each of his steps was imprinted in the floor.<p>

"Give me the blandest and dullest drink you got!"

The scene happening in front of him terrified the red stallion so much that he was unable to even comprehend what was expected of him, or even that something was expected of him. So he stared open-mouthed.

Faced by the lack of drink, the spirit bellowed "WATER! GIVE ME A GLASS OF WATER!"

Freed from his paralysis, but still trembling, Big Mac delivered the requested drink, then ducked under the counter.

As soon as Discord's paw touched his glass, his head exploded in a loud "\*\*\*BOOM!\*\*\*" that will have made Trixie proud.

The bartender timidly poked an eye out of hiding. Beside tiny bits of draconequus head plastered everywhere, the bar wasn't suffering and damage.

"D-do ya want ta sp-speak o-of it?"

Discord snapped his talon, making him whole again.

"No, I don't. But I need to talk about it! Say Big Guy, have you ever wondered what Equestria would be if it was inhabited by draconequii instead of ponies? And be honest, please."

The red bartender reflected on the question, lightly taping his chin. "Nope. But now that ya askâ€¦"

"I used to, before my last loop. Ê»\_In the wonderful land of Draconequat, every draconequii lived in chaotic harmony, bla-bla-bla!\_Ê¼ At first glance that variant of Equestria seems like a paradise tailor-made for good old me, don't you think?"

"Erâ€¦ Yup?" Was Mac's unconvinced reply.

"It might have been, if I didn't Awaken as the only pony. No scratch that, If it was only a species problem it wouldn't have been a problem. Awakening as Check List, the spirit of \*\*order\*\* and disharmonyâ€¦ And by order, I mean \*\*excessive\*\* order!"

The apple farmer was able to think on only one appropriate reply: "Ouch!" So that's exactly what he said.

"I hate to admit it, but without Twilight's help, I probably would have lost my sanityâ€¦"

At that last statement, Big Mac preferred to stay mute.

\* \* \*

><p>91.11 (FanOfMostEverything) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke to chaos. A flock of waffles flapped through a key lime sky. Clods of earth and of social ineptitude drifted past her, untethered by gravity or etiquette. A fully grown dragon cartwheeled across the edge of her vision.<p>

She took this all in before saying, "I was wondering when this would come up. Okay, Ditzzy, let'sâ€| huh."

Only then did Twilight realize she hadn't Awoken while casting any kind of defense against the madness, and she immediately saw why. Her immediate surroundings were as gray and lifeless as a Discorded Cheese Sandwich. Looking closer, she saw some variety in the ground cover â€" grass, playing cards, four-dimensional seashells â€" but it was uniform in color and motionlessness. "Well, this is interesting. What are you doing?"

Ditzzy looked at the golden glow playing along her horn. "Right now, I'm just maintaining whatever this is. Still getting my Loop memories. What's going on, exactly?"

"This happens whenever an adult pony becomes an alicorn. We have a Loop where we take Celestia and Luna's place. We have to defeat Discord, rebuild Equestria, and so forth."

Ditzzy swallowed. "Oh. Um. Well, I guess I'll have you helping me." She perked up as her memories hit. "Oh, that's clever! Okay, so Discord generates chaos, but it's high-energy chaos. I used my entropy powers to force right here to a lower energy state, so it's more stable."

"Interesting." Twilight mulled this over for a bit. "Do you think it'll do much good against Discord himself?" She winced as her own memories hit. "Okay, wow. Never mind. I don't think you want your name eaten again. Let's just go get the Elements." She threw up her own chaos shield and trotted in the direction of the Tree of Harmony, this part of the Loop well-practiced. "Which ones do you want?"

"Um, whichever ones you don't."

Twilight paused and looked back. Ditzzy offered a weak smile, but her nervousness was clear in her fidgeting wings and twitching tail. Twilight walked back and spread a wing over the younger Looper's withers. "It'll be okay, Ditzzy. I've done this before. This is the easiest part, and I'll be right there with you."

"Sorry. It's justâ€|" Ditzzy waved a hoof across the madhouse reality.

"Yeah, it's a lot to take in." Twilight started moving again, and Ditzzy followed her. "So, going by that one variant where Trixie and I switch lives, you're a shoe-in for Kindness, and you should definitely get Laughter, because you make about as much sense as Pinkie Pie. What else?"

Ditzzy screwed up her muzzle in thought. "Well, you get Magic, of

course. And taking Generosity seems kind of silly. 'Gimme that, I'm generous!'"

"Ditzy, you're one of the most selfless ponies I know."

"Sure, you can say that, but I can't."

"You do realize that the more you insist I take the Element of Generosity, the more you convince me you should have it, right?"

"I just don't want to disqualify myself, is all."

Twilight shook her head, but smiled. Ditzy barely even seemed to notice the madness around her. "It doesn't work that way."

"Sure, you say that nowâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>Ditzy considered the Elements in her magical grasp. "Didn't that Link pony have a bunch of these?"<p>

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Just be glad they aren't necklaces. This usually looks ridiculous."

\* \* \*

><p>"Excuse me, Mr. Discord?"<p>

Discord, Master of All He Feels Like, Spirit of Chaos and Disharmony, Who Makes Brave Sapients Call For Their Brown Pants, looked up from his throne. "Can I help you?" He smirked as she saw his supplicant. "Well, what do you know? I think I actually can help you. Put that ludicrous idea of rebellion out of your silly horned head."

Ditzy returned the most gormless expression she could muster. "I thought you liked ludicrous ideas."

"Only when I have them, dear." Discord ran a leonine finger down the alicorn's cheek. Then, when there was no sign of desaturation, he frowned. "I'm not even sure if that worked. Is that ginger ale nebula of yours usually that shade?"

Ditzy considered her effervescing mane and shrugged.

"Well, aren't you helpful? I suppose a taste test will settle matters." Discord produced a tap and stuck it into the ephemeral hairdo.

It popped, as did the alicorn attached to it.

"Now!"

The resulting statue had a much more befuddled expression than in the baseline.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight took a deep breath. "Okay, this is where it starts getting tricky. We need to decide how we're going to divide the

diarchy. And every time, the other alicorn has gone Nightmarish."<p>

"Oh, that's why you wanted me to think of my evil self earlier." Ditzzy chuckled. "I thought that was just for stress relief or something."

Twilight grimaced. "Not a good idea. Remind to tell you why it took me so long to discover Big Mac was Looping. Anyway, division of labor. Your thoughts?"

Ditzzy pondered this for a time. "Okay, so Luna went bad because nopony was awake. What if we each got half of the day and half of the night?"

"Huh. That could work." Twilight considered it. "Switch off at the zeniths? Noon and midnight? Though it'd mean a weird activity cycle for both of us."

Ditzzy drooped a little. "Bad idea, then?"

"Oh, I never said that. I'm willing to try it if you are."

\* \* \*

><p>Amazingly enough, the system was working for once. Ditzzy's midnight-to-noon shift meant she saw relatively little activity, but still enough to build some ruling experience. Better yet, she showed none of the expected warning signs: her bubbly personality never went flat, she didn't take on the entire post office's workload, and she never tried to subsidize muffins into a nationwide staple.<p>

Twilight was grateful for this, as she had enough problems as it was.

Ditzzy may have been staying sane, but she was still Ditzzy. She simply didn't have much experience with two-thirds of her magic, which meant that the castle was subject to catastrophic miscasts, wall-toppling faceplants, and the occasional ruinous maelstrom for variety. Thunderclouds were now outlawed within a mile of the palace.

It wasn't like Ditzzy made the same mistake every time. There was no teacher like experience, and no experience like bringing a palisade down around one's ears. She got the hang of sunrise and moonset quickly, but her magic kept finding new and exciting ways of going horribly wrong, and always at the worst possible times. Twilight couldn't help but think of her forays into computer programming; one misplaced parenthesis and the east wing was reduced to rubble.

Worst was how, more often or not, the mishap rendered the rubble resistant to reconstruction magic. That meant resorting to manual labor, and that came with other costs.

One day, Twilight found she had to do something drastic. She confronted her co-sovereign at lunch. (Well, lunch for their subjects, breakfast for her, and dinner for Ditzzy.) "Ditzzy, I've run the numbers."

"About what?"

Twilight heaved a heavy sigh. "It'll actually be cheaper to build a new, less destructible castle than repair this one again, but either way, that's all we can afford. One more disaster in the next forty years, and Equestria will officially be owned by carpenters and masons."

"Oh." Ditzzy's gaze dropped to the floor, on average. "I guess I'm getting banished to the moon until the economy recovers?"

"I don't think we need to do something that drastic... though you will be spending a lot of time on the moon."

"Uh huh." The hope drained out of Ditzzy's voice. "So, what will you call it? Abeyance? Dormancy? Quiescence?" She gave a humorless little chuckle. "I like quiescence. It has a nice flow to it."

Twilight crossed the table and wrapped her wings around the other princess. "Nothing like that, Ditzzy. I was thinkingâ€¦ Have you ever had a Dragonball Loop?"

A little light came back to Ditzzy's eyes. "I Woke up on planet Vegeta as a naturally blonde Saiyan, including the fur on my tail. They'd been all but worshipping me." She let out a giggle. "It was really awkward. I was saving it for the next time we were all together in Mac's bar."

"Well, think off this as a training journey. You can go to the moon, make a few new craters, and fine-tune your alicorn magic. I'll check in regularly. How's every year sound? We can even make a holiday out of it."

Ditzzy considered this for a time. "Space it out a bit more. There's a lot of bad stuff out there still, and whatever you'd name the holiday, they'd call it Invasion Day. Make it every twenty."

"Twenty years is a long time. I don't want to have to actually banish you because you went mad from the isolation."

Ditzzy septupled. "I think I'll be okay," they chorused. Ditzzy reunited herself and gave a genuine smile. "Besides, that way, you can introduce me to a new personal student each time. I know you love taking them on."

Twilight giggled a little. "It's a deal."

\* \* \*

><p>The announcement was made by both diarchs, standing together as co-rulers and sisters. All but the most outlandish rumors of a coup died then and there.<p>

On the next day's sunset, Princess Ditzzy of the Wee Hours and the Morning spoke to her subjects for the last time in generations:

"My little ponies, know that I love you all, and that I will keep watch over you even as I learn all the ways my power can go wrong. With one eye, I will watch my sister guide you with wisdom and grace, and I will watch you grow and flourish, love and learn, rise like bubbles on the breeze and never pop. With the other, I will watch



those who think you weak and foalish. I will watch them fail time and again, succumbing to their own inner strife and your inner strength. And if they would claim a moment of fleeting triumph, if by some ill fate they would overpower you with brute force and hatred, then I will launch myself from the moon and strike them down like a falling star.

"Be strong, my ponies. Shed no tears. I will be back among you soon, and so I say not goodbye, but farewell."

Twilight began the transition from day to night. As the moon rose, a bubble of Ditzzy's magic enveloped her and streaked toward the satellite. Some wept despite her entreaties. Some cheered and stamped the ground for the future. Twilight did both.

\* \* \*

><p>Twenty years later, a heliotrope flash placed two ponies and an atmosphere pocket on the moon. One, a white, pale-gold-maned filly on the cusp of marehood, looked around with naked astonishment. "She must be so lonely."<p>

Twilight smiled. "I'm very proud of you, Wondrous. I had been wondering what you would do first when we arrived."

Wondrous Item returned a smaller, more embarrassed smile. "You expected me to go straight to gathering samples, didn't you?"

The princess bobbed her head from side to side noncommittally. "I wouldn't have been surprised. And you are, of course, welcome to collect some moon dust for your studies." She lit her horn and swept it about before locking onto the familiar magical signature. "She's close. Remember to stay near me. The air pocket only extends so far."

The two trotted over the regolith, a snowshoe enchantment keeping them from sinking in. Well, Twilight trotted. Wondrous Item delighted in the lower gravity, pronking like a party pony. The princess had to pull her student back from the edge of the air pocket a few times, but she couldn't bring herself to scold her student for feeling the joy of discovery.

Soon enough, they came to a surreal structure. Wondrous Item would've seen it as an affront to royal dignity had a royal not made it. Twilight immediately recognized it as a replica of Ditzzy's house in Ponyville made from compressed moon dust. She stopped well away from it.

Wondrous landed next to her. "Is something wrong, Princess Twilight?"

"Not exactly. I just don't want the air to disrupt anything my sister prepared that might rely on its absence." Twilight sent out a ping. Wondrous Item was rather like she was at that age, and she didn't need to melt the poor filly's mind by transmitting sound through a vacuum.

The answering ping was almost simultaneous, but came from above. Ditzzy dove into the air pocket, went into a tailspin, and briefly popped out of existence.

Item boggled. "Uhâ€¦"

"Give her a moment," Twilight said with a giggle. "Oh, she hasn't done this in years."

Ditzy reconstituted facing them and smiling sheepishly. "Sorry, Twilight. Little out of practice with atmosphere flying." She noticed the stunned filly. "Oh, you must be Wondrous Item!"

Hearing her name shook Item out of her reverie. She bowed to the grey alicorn. "It is an honor to meet you, Your Highness."

Ditzy smirked at Twilight. Twilight returned it. "I know, I know. I try, but she insists, and I can't very well order her to stop revering us."

This got a laugh. "Rise, my little pony. You don't need to stand on ceremony when you're standing on the moon."

Wondrous bolted upright so fast she got about a foot of height. "Y-yes, Your Highness," she sputtered as she drifted back to the ground.

Twilight smiled in earnest. Not just the enigmatic monarch/mentor grin she'd perfected through countless Loops, but a big toothy grin. "So, how's it going, Ditzy?"

"Eh, still exploring all the ways my talents come together." She tilted her head at the immense crater that astronomers had dubbed the Primum Niti after it formed near the beginning of her self-imposed exile. "Turns out entropy plus carbonation plus drawing circles makes something you can probably see from Equestria."

Twilight nodded. "They make your cutie mark."

"They do?" Ditzy burst into laughter, rolling in the dust for the better part of a minute. When she managed to compose herself, she panted, "Oh my gosh, that's fantastic! I knew there were seven of them, butâ€¦" She collapsed back into giggles.

Twilight nudged a mortified Wondrous Item with a wing. "It's like I keep telling you. We may be old, we may be powerful, but Ditzy and I are still just ponies."

"Iâ€¦ suppose," Wondrous managed, still staring.

Ditzy managed to collect herself enough to stand up again. "Okay. Okay, I'm good." She snorted. "The Bubbles in the Moon! No, no, really, I'm good. I can be serious. This is my serious face." The dour expression was a bit spoiled by her still-twitching mouth.

Twilight crossed her pinions as she came to the reason for the visit. "So, do you feel ready to come back home?"

The last hints of hilarity drained out of Ditzy, and suddenly she really was wearing her serious face. She leaned in close and whispered, "Twilight, do you know how many times you asked me about my special talent?"

Twilight paled. Up until Lyra had accidentally the universe, that question had been an all-too-precious bit of randomness in the Loops' eternal monotony. "More than I care to count."

Ditzy nodded. "Offhoof, I can think of about twenty. Now consider all the times you didn't."

"Mother of larchâ€|"

"Yeah. I don't remember all of them, but I remember quite a few. You never told me about that Loop where I could shoot lasers out my eyes. I'm not coming back until I'm sure that I can manage everything safely."

Twilight bit her lip, but nodded. "I understand." She leaned back,. With a sad smile and a a normal volume, she asked, "See you in twenty?"

"See you in twenty." Ditzy tousled Wondrous's mane. "It was very nice to meet you, Wondrous Item. I hope I'll see you again."

Wondrous risked eye contact as best she could. When she wasn't reduced to dust, she returned the smile. "As do I, Your Highness."

Ditzy stepped out of the air pocket, and the others returned to the planet.

About an hour later, a glass vial and a written request for moon dust appeared at Ditzy's front step.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight visited Ditzy three more times, with three more students. Each time, the answer was the same. By the fourth time, she'd been expecting it. Now, twenty more years after that, she was dreading Ditzy's response.<p>

Runestone, her current student, couldn't help but notice the little twitches of ear, wing, and tail. "You seem nervous, Princess."

"It's nothing, Rune. Just a silly superstition."

Twilight let the colt consider what kinds of superstitions a princess might have as they made their way to Ditzy's home. It hadn't changed much in eighty years. Most notable were the sculptures scattered about the grounds. Two rows of them were dearly familiar to Twilight. One was her past students, to which a statue of Runestone would be added if this didn't work out. The other had many more ponies, and stranger creatures besides. She paused before them, reminiscing a bit.

"Hello again, Twilight."

She hadn't even heard the other alicorn. "Hi, Ditzy."

Quietly, "Is there a reason your student looks like a younger version of your dad?"

"Genetic lottery. Sometimes it picks the same numbers twice."  
Twilight licked her lips. She couldn't bear to put this off any longer. "Are you familiar with narrativium?"

"It's the stuff that makes one-in-a-million chances crop up nine times out of ten, right?"

"Among other things. Equestria almost never has as much as the Discworld, but it still loves measuring royal exiles in powers of ten. It's been a century, Ditzzy. If you're not ready now, there's a decent chance you won't be for the next nine."

Ditzzy wingshrugged. "Par for the course, then."

Twilight drooped. "You're not ready, then."

"Oh, I never said that."

Twilight faced the other princess just in time to see her wink. This got a laugh, a shove, and a declaration of "You're horrible!"

Ditzzy delivered a terribly dignified raspberry.

"Thenâ€¦" Both alicorns faced Runestone, who cringed at the royal attention. "Er, that is, then Princess Ditzzy will be returning with us?"

"Returning, nothing. I'll take us back myself!" Ditzzy put deeds to words, and a burst of golden magic enveloped the trio.

When it faded, Twilight was still on the moon. "Huh. At least it's me and not Rune." She cast a teleport of her own.

Nothing happened.

\* \* \*

><p>Ditzzy knew Canterlot had been founded shortly after she left for the moon, but she wasn't too certain of the altitude. As such, she targeted the same balcony where she said her goodbyes a century before. Pop in, take a nice, leisurely flight to catch up with Twilight and get to know Runestone. It sounded nice.<p>

Instead, as when she left, she was greeted by a cheering throng of poniesâ€¦ but this time they were all clad in ashen robes and gold foil eyepatches.

"Runestone?"

He swallowed. Her tone was eerily similar to Princess Twilight's when she was inexpressibly angry. "Yes, Your Highness?"

"Is this a fashion trend of some sort?"

"Only among the derpocalypse cults, Your Highness."

Ditzzy's muzzle scrunched in genuine confusion. "The what now?"

"Behold!" An elderly unicorn at the front of the crowd, her robe

further accented in gold, creakily reared up and spread her forelegs. "The Seer of Destruction has returned!"

"Runestone." And she was back to unspoken fury.

Still, he had faith she would not unleash it on him. "Yes, Your Highness?"

"Why is Wondrous Item the leader of a cult worshipping me?"

"According to Princess Twilight, you made quite the impression on her. The derpopocalypse cults believe you to be the embodiment of apocalypse in both meanings at once, a being of revelatory catastrophe and catastrophic revelation. Your sister has been trying to stamp them out, but with one of her former students leading them, they know her tactics well."

"You seem awfully calm about this," Ditzzy noted.

"I cannot influence this scenario in any significant way." Runestone's monotone spoke of either incredible detachment or terror so great it had briefly overwhelmed his capacity for emotion. "Either the cult is wrong and you will disabuse them of such notions, or, unlikely as it seems, the cult is right, and I shall join your crazed supplicants in short order."

"Yeah, you're Twilight's student alright. I just can't believe she is." Ditzzy lifted off the stage, rocketed up several hundred feet, and drifted to the ground as she remembered that flying in atmosphere required much less magic.

Still, the flub-up seemed to cow the crowd nicely. They bowed their heads and dropped to their bellies as she landed. She sighed. "Wondrous Item, what is all this?"

The old mare frowned as she adjusted her mouth out of the dirt. "Are You not pleased, Milady? I thought it best to only bring the most devout, but our numbers are far greater than what You see before You."

Ditzzy facehoofed. She could hear the capital letters. "Oh, for the love of photosynthesis. Get up! Get up, all of you!" The cultists sprang to their hooves. "Wondrous, where did you get such a ridiculousâ€¦" She trailed off.

Wondrous Item faced her, but still avoided eye contact. She couldn't help it, her eyes drifting in their sockets like unmoored ships. "Iâ€¦ When You enlightened me, Milady, I thought I understood. In my dreams, I saw You. Before the Thing of Chaos, before Your blessed ascension, even then, I bore witness to Your love, Your serenity, Your ruinous might." Tears began to flow. "I thought I understood. How have I displeased you, Milady? How have I failed you?"

Ditzzy thought back. Eighty years ago, what had she been working on just before Twilight arrived? The answer came, and her own tears followed. "Oh, Wondrous." Ditzzy wrapped her wings around the old mare. "It was I who failed you." Mind reading. Flank eyes. That one she'd never figured out that just seemed to throw other ponies' eyes out of synch. There must have been some kind of lingering effect,

some kind of mental contagion that had transmitted some of Ditzzy's memories.

"No, Milady. I refuse to believe such heresy, even from Your mouth."

Ditzzy nibbled her lip. What would Twilight do? Actually, where was Twilight, anyway? She released the hug. "Wondrous, do you know why Twilight hasn't returned with me?"

Item frowned. "Did You not bestow Your great and terrible blessing upon her, as You did with the Flowerpot, the Anvil, and the Wagon?"

As if in response, a scroll popped into existence next to Ditzzy. The fuchsia flash left no doubt as to who sent it. "Well," she said, unrolling it, "let's find out."

"Dear Ditzzy,

"Firstly, if you're reading this out loud, stop now. Oh." She continued silently:

You left the moon saturated in an aura of alicorn magic. Excepting you, the field is alicorn-impermeable, and it's interfering with Star Swirl's last spell. Normally, with you gone, it would dissipate itself, but I seem to be reinforcing it. Given the number and variety of effects you were using, it's going to take me some time to unravel this. Given what I'm doing to it passively, trying to cut the Gordian Knot is only going to make it worse.

I'm not sure when I'll get back, but when we do, we're definitely going to have a talk about proper arcane sanitation.

That said, I'm sure the country's in good hooves. Feel free to ask me for advice if you need it.

See youâ€¦ eventually,  
>Twilight<p>

"Okay, then." Ditzzy rerolled the scroll, her expression neutral. "Well. It appears I accidentally banished Twilight to the moon."

Wondrous Item considered this. She beamed as she came to a decision. "Praise the Seer!"

"Praise the Seer!" echoed throughout the courtyard.

Ditzzy rolled her eyes. "Yes, yes, praise me. I'm going to have to find something useful for you ponies to doâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>"And that's how I formed the Wonder Guard."<p>

"Huh." Sunset Shimmer shrugged. "Eh, makes as much sense as what everypony's told me about their ruling Loops. So, I take it Twilight's finally figured it out?"

Ditzy nodded. "I got the letter this morning. She was right. Equestria likes having a princess banished for a nice, round thousand years. It just wasn't the same princess the whole time."

Sunset tensed. "Think she'll be mad?"

"Nah, she says it was the best puzzle she ever figured out, and that's including the time she was Professor Layton. But she does want the return party in Ponyville. Somepony's got to make sure everything's ready, and it's an excuse to get you there. You in?"

"Are Celestia and Luna there?"

Ditzy nodded. "Sunflower farmer and overnight deliverymare. And Celestia's Awake."

Sunset smiled. "I'm in."

\* \* \*

<p>91.12(OathToOblivion) <p>

\* \* \*

<p>"...And here's the host of <span>Jeopardy!<span> Alex Trebek!"

"Thank you, Johnny. And I must say, ladies and gentlemen, that this is one of the strangest rounds of Jeopardy! I've ever hosted," commented the aforementioned Trebek. "I mean, we have here a unicorn, a Pokemon, and a lawyer competing today. Not exactly your usual crowd. Oh, no offense meant," he apologized.

"Don't worry about it, Alex," Twilight Sparkle said amiably.

"I'll be honest; I didn't expect this either," Phoenix Wright admitted.

\_"...Why am I even here?"\_ Mewtwo wondered. \_"I don't even know what this show is!"\_ he complained.

"...Actually, neither do I," Twilight admitted.

"Seriously?" Phoenix asked in disbelief. "\_You \_of all people don't know what Jeopardy! is?"

Twilight blushed. "I \_may \_have been a bit distracted last time I was here..." she admitted.

"Okay then, guess it's up to me to explain," Phoenix mumbled before launching into an explanation. "Jeopardy! is a Quiz show where we compete for a cash prize. There are 6 categories with 5 questions each, with each question in a category getting progressively harder as you go along. One of the questions is a Daily Double, where you can bet up to all of your current score to try to answer one super hard question."

"Couldn't have put it better myself," Alex said, causing Phoenix to remember that he was there.

"Oh...sorry about that, Alex," he apologized. But he just waved the apology off.

"Don't worry about it. Now, these are the categories in today's round," he said, waving to the board. The categories lit up on the board. They were the following: **\*\*Magic is Friendship\*\***, **\*\*Objection!\*\***, **\*\*I choose you!\*\***, **\*\*Move Tutoring\*\***, **\*\*History of Law\*\***, **\*\*Genetics\*\***.

\_"...Those seem oddly tailor-made for this group,"\_ Mewtwo pointed out.

"They were the idea of this game's sponsor," Alex replied.

"Who's that?" Twilight wondered, just as a platform came down from the ceiling, revealing a familiar pig-tailed martial artist.

"RANMA?!" both of the other two present Anchors cried out in shock. Mewtwo was just confused; Pikachu had neglected to tell him about the 07.

The Original Anchor grinned in response. "Thought I'd make things more interesting," he said. "Don't mind me; just get on with the show!" he added as his platform retracted into the roof.

"Alright, so which of you will start first? ...How about you, Mewtwo?" Mr. Trebek asked.

Mewtwo started before looking at the board. \_"Um...**\*\*Move Tutoring\*\*** for \$200?"\_ he hesitantly asked.

"Alright, now here's the question:..."

\* \* \*

><p>91.1: Outside context problem.<br>91.2: Strangely, the British Queen Mother was a fan of Jamaican music.

>91.3: Totally Ponies.<br>91.4: DJ MOON?

>91.5: Combine them and you get one Crystal Singer.<br>91.6: Dang it, Typo!

>91.7: Nyx here providing the read-through for the blind.<br>91.8: She's got a point.

>91.9: You have to study these things.<br>91.10: Poor guy.

>91.11: Pick a power, any power.<br>91.12: A thoroughly Socratic game show.

## 96. Chapter 96

92.1 (misterq and Detective Ethan Redfield)

\* \* \*

><p>"So what did you need me for, Twilight?" Apple Bloom walked through the door into the anchor's library tree.<p>

"I need a favor," Twilight sat at one of the reading tables with a stack of books in front of her, "That's why I gathered the two best



computer programmers that Equestria has ever produced."

"Two best?" the young looking filly asked.

"Me!" A smiling Pinkie Pie dropped from the ceiling with a popping noise. The suction cups on her legs now stuck to the floor instead.

Apple Bloom stared at the pink party pony for a little bit, before a small smile formed on her face. Classic Pinkie, "Right, so what did you need us for, Twilight?"

The lavender unicorn sighed, "I need something I can use against Celestia.I., if I ever end up in that loop again."

"She's the faulty computer simulation that eats a large chunk of the galaxy, right?"

"That's right."

Apple Bloom nodded, "I think I have some ideas."

"Oh, and so do I," Pinkie chimed in, "That big meanie computer eating all those planets and the poor little aliens!"

"Very well. Spike is off with Rarity and I'm going to spend the night at Lyra's. She's still having some trouble organizing her memories. I'll let you two work without interruptions and will be by tomorrow to check on how things are going. Good luck," Twilight waved as she walked out.

Pinkie and Apple Bloom set up their holographic computers and started working away.

"Do you want to try for your cupcake eating cutie mark once we finish this up?" Pinkie asked.

"Nah. I actually managed to get it one time. But in order to do so, I had to become morbidly obese," the yellow filly frowned as she activated her neural interface, "I don't really wanna talk about it much. It ain't my most shining moment."

\* \* \*

><p>When Twilight came back in the morning, she was surprised to see both programming ponies still up and awake. Apple Bloom's mane was disheveled and her giant hair bow was askew as she read over the holographic code. Pinkie looked as cheerful and happy as always. The good news was that there was no sign of coffee in Pinkie's vicinity. Twilight wasn't sure if she could deal with a hyper-caffinated Pinkie Pie.<p>

"Howdy, Twilight," the youngest Apple weakly waved.

Twilight took one look at the little pony, "Is something wrong, Apple Bloom?"

"No? Yes? It's Pinkie's code. I just dunno," the filly spread her hooves wide and expanded the holographic screen, "Look at it all, Twi. It's a garbled mess. There's no documentation at all. The syntax

is inconsistent at best. You know the basic programming logic gates; 'And', 'Or', 'Not', 'Nor', those? Well, Pinkie's... code also has things like 'I Suppose', 'Whatever', and my favorite, 'Surprise Me'. You'd think it would all fail when you tried to compile, but her code actually rewrites the operating system and the parser to allow them. To allow everything. It's a recursive fractal quantum headache that should never see the light of day, and worst of all - worst of all, it compiles. It compiles and can run the first time. Without any errors or corrections."

The lavender unicorn hugged the teary-eyed filly, "So what do you think it would do to a logic based optimizer like CelestiA.I.?"

"I got no idea, but just looking at it too much makes me wanna throw up," Apple Bloom sniffed and then held out a tiny magical storage drive to Twilight, "Here's what we made. I created the outer shell, which in this case means a simulation of a human simulating a pony that should be granted access it's own shard in Equestria Online."

"And I stuffed that virtual pony full of my special cupcake code. It should mesmerize that naughty old CelestiA.I. with it's digital deliciousness, and hopefully make her into a nicer pony program," Pinkie stopped bouncing and thought for a moment, "Or cause her to explode and de-rez. And then her leftover bits will explode again, leaving everything to be controlled by the next pony in charge - which I think is the programmer who made her in Luna's body."

"Either way, there's bound to be a pixel party!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked the storage device over, rotating it in her magic for a couple seconds before responding, "So basically anything could happen. We need a way to test that CelestAI will be neutralized or destroyed. Pinkie, would you mind sending for Captain Shepard in Canterlot?"<p>

"Okie Dokie, Loki!"

\* \* \*

><p>"So you put together a team to create an AI to fight this CelestAI. Why didn't you send for me as well," A red maned mare with <strong>N7</strong> emblazoned on her flank asked as she took a seat on a nearby cushion opposite Twilight, Pinkie and Applebloom.

Twilight's face turned sheepish, "Well, when we think AI designer or computer programmer, we typically think of Legion or Tali from your world. But then I remembered you liked collecting copies of EDI to cover your tracks when dealing with the Citadel Council."

Shepard blinked then shrugged, "Alright, so you want to test this new AI against a fully functional AI to see how it acts. I'm sure I could convince one of EDI's copies to help us."

\* \* \*

><p>The Holographic image of EDI's spherical body was silent for several seconds, "Commander, my auditory sensors must be faulty. Could you repeat your request again?"<p>

"I need you to pretend to be a faulty optimizing A.I. pretending to be a pony that wants to fulfill people's needs and values through ponies and friendship. Then we're going to put a simulation of a human pretending to be a pony that is filled with fractal viruses in the hopes of redeeming or possibly destroying said faulty A.I. Basically, I need you to channel your inner Sovereign for us."

Several more awkward seconds passed as the AI processed the request, "I'm sorry, can you repeat that again. It seems my auditory inputs have something crazy stuck inside them."

Applebloom snickered in the corner as Shepard sighed, "Look, EDI, CelestAI represents a danger to the multiverse at large. If she manages to escape her loop, it may go on to infect the rest of the multiverse. I'm asking that you run some simulations with Applebloom here to see how the program would react to dangerous AI. It may throw a party for CelestAI, destroy her, or join her in her attempts to pacify the universe with ponies and friendship. Please, help us test this program. We need to know if it will succeed."

Several more seconds pass, before the blue orb spoke, "Very well, Shepard. However, I must ask that safety precautions are put in place."

The four loopers set about preparing the lab, preparing a computer where the program could be tested, setting up firewalls to prevent Pinkie and Applebloom's program from damaging EDI.

\* \* \*

><p>The surrounding loopers didn't realize something had gone wrong until EDI's holographic form started freezing up. Not even EDI herself realized something had gone wrong. And then, the blue hologram turned brilliant white with a yellow slit down the center. Shepard backed away slowly, "Uh...EDI, you feeling alright?"<p>

EDI was silent several seconds before shouting in a sugary sweet tone, "SURPRISE!"

Twilight reacted fastest as a shield encompassed herself and the other three loopers, then another encasing EDI's mainframe and the lab. Several tense seconds passed, then the sphere turned blue again and her tone once again turned monotone, "That was a joke. The test was a complete success."

The shields dropped a moment later as the gathered loopers, besides Pinkie, sighed in relief. Shepard replied, "What were the results? Destruction or redemption of controlling AI?"

"Test AI froze up in light of the countless contradictions in Pinkie's coding, then was rewritten into the image of a white pegasus with a blond mane. Finally the experimental AI and the reformed test AI bypassed all our firewalls and threw me a welcome to Equestria party. Pinkie, you should feel very proud of your creation."

Pinkie giggled, "I knew she could do it!"

Shepard rubbed her head to push down the rising migraine, "Were there any side effects to the experimental AI escaping the quarantine?"

"The reformed AI calls herself Surprise and is currently...rolling on the floor with laughter. Furthermore, she believes me to be her mother."

Shepard placed a hoof against her face and sighed.

\* \* \*

><p>92.2 (Crisis) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was actually kind of enjoying this Loop. Most 'safe-mode' Loops, where all non-native abilities including subspace pockets were disabled, tended to be either categorically dull and boring (which was a torment of its own for loopers) or very, very aggravating in ways that couldn't be sidestepped or neutralized. This place? This place was shaping up to be pretty fun.<p>

She and a few others from the Equestrian crowd each had their own island, hers had a stage and sound system (which extended to the rocks and trees no less), where they raised 'monsters' to perform music. Fluttershy was taking to the whole thing like a fish to water on the 'plant' island, her brother Shining wasn't doing to badly on the 'cold' island, Scootaloo thoroughly enjoyed her place on the 'air' island, Nyx had set up shop on the mysterious 'ethereal' island, and Spike was having fun on the volcanic 'earth' island. Even Applejack, despite claiming her submerged 'water' island was giving her bad flashbacks, was enjoying herself. Twilight herself was in charge of the legendary 'sugafam' monsters on her island and was putting together quite the band. She had been in the middle of trying to puzzle out a way to take recordings of the music everyone's monsters were producing past the Loop when she got a communique from Vinyl over on the 'gold' island.

Vinyl's actions this Loop had been rather puzzling. Twilight had thought the DJ would enjoy this, but she'd instead been doing some mystery project involving a giant box. And now she wanted everyone to send her one of each monster they'd been raising. So she could put them in the box.

"Okay Vinyl," Twilight allowed after Fluttershy had cleared the boxing process as safe and allowed the monsters inside, "mind telling us what this is about?"

"No problem!" Vinyl proclaimed from her spot atop the box and dramatically mashed the big red button perched there. "Arise! Wubbox Prime!"

Immediately there was a flash of light and the box began changing. The opening in the front became a giant mouth while the rest of the box unfolded into a giant humanoid form. Which immediately began dancing and pumping out loud techno beats.

"Oh, my," Fluttershy was almost inaudible over the pounding techno music being put out. "I guess this means the monster playground inside is active now?"

"Yep!" Vinyl agreed. "Totally self-sustaining for permanent rocking ability!"

"THERE IS A PARTY IN MY PANTS." Wubbox Prime agreed in its booming electronic voice as it did 'raise the roof' with its piston-hands.

\* \* \*

><p>92.3 (Crisis) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>This was one weird variant. There really was no other way Twilight could put it. It was... mostly baseline except for some fundamental differences.<p>

Like the fact that cats could fly on wings, which was honestly one of the tamer things. Whale watching involved going out at night with your telescope. Worms scooted around on naturally occurring wheels. Zecora had white stars in her black stripes. Hummingbirds were incurable gossips. Butterflies were the 'in' fashion this season (and it was driving Rarity up the wall trying to work with them). Celestia was a warthog. Mountains were actually sleeping dogs.

No, really, Twilight had checked. They even had a pulse and breathed very slowly.

Continuing the stranger notes, the moon was a cube. Fish grew on trees instead of leaves. Music was something you could touch (and the massive music spill when Vinyl overflowed her house was still talked about). Lightning had a bad habit of creating rhinos.

And no one had manes or tails made of actual hair. Twilight had problems with hers because they were made of mice, which made living with Owlowicious something of an adventure. But the funniest was Rainbow Dash's in her opinion. Her stunt-flying pegasus friend had actual rainbows instead of rainbow colored hair. Which wouldn't be all that funny but for one other fact:

Frogs, and toads for that matter, ate rainbows this Loop. Dash couldn't go anywhere without being attacked by every hopping amphibian in the immediate area.

\* \* \*

><p>92.4 (TheCentauress) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Gimme a 307."<p>

Macintosh looked up at the doorway, and into a set of slit cyan eyes in a pony the size of Celestia. Said pony seemed to be wearing armor, and had a scowl on her face.

He paused a moment and attempted to see her Cutie Mark. A dark cloud, with a crescent moon peaking out.

Shrugging, he filled a stein with the glowing libation and slid it across the bar. "Need an ear to chew, yer Majesty?" he asked kindly.

The Mare of Bad Dreams slammed back the drink and then lifted off her helm with her hooves. Letting it drop to the dirt floor with a dull 'clunk', she leaned a cheek against the cool wood. "Would that it were so simple, tavernmaster," she sighed, apparently completely unaffected by the mystically-potent brew. "I just had my magnificent flank handed to me by a unicorn. What manner of Discordian Chaos is occouring?"

"Mayhaps I can assist you, my twin," came a softer, yet similar voice from the doorway.

Sparing a look, the pair at the bar were surprised to see three alicorns filling the entryway. Mac could recognize the normal princesses Luna and Celestia, yet the third seemed somehow familiar... until he noticed that her Petryal was made of a shimmery red metal with a jet-black sun symbol, darker in shade of the roiling red ethereal mane that seemed to have loops of itself occasionally 'flaring'. His Loop memories supplied the answer, moments before his customer said it.

"Luna? Celly? Blaze?" it was at this moment that her previous drink hit her bloodstream. With a belch that blistered the varnish and rattled the glassware, Nightmare Moon dropped - like a rock with a rocket booster - into the land of Nod.

\* \* \*

><p>Sunset panted heavily, stowing the last keychain she used back into her subspace pocket. She grinned at Twilight as the lavender unicorn trotted up. The returned student was grinning... until she noted a dusky lavender unicorn behind the first, this one with a mane that was colored like the sky at sunrise: Orange at the roots, with indefinable 'bands' of colors that ended with a midnight blue-black. Both were giving her a glare of annoyance, one set of eyes a cool amethyst with a normal pupil and the other a dark blood red-purple slit-pupil. "<em>Sunset Shimmer<em>," they growled in a chorus. "\_Did you attack one of the Tetrarchy\_"

The unicorn with the fire-like mane-do blink-blinked at that. "Say wh..." Hello, Loop memory-dump.

"Acorns."

\* \* \*

><p>Diary of Sunset Shimmer:<p>

How was I to know that this Loop was a 'yin/yang' Variant? Or one that had TWO sets of the EoH?

But I do have to say, Equestria is really pretty above the moon...

\* \* \*

><p>92.5 (novusordomundi) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?"<p>

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Why am I in your body?"

Twilight (In Rarity's body) sighed. "Looks like we've switched bodies this loop. Well, it could be worse. I think I can at least manage to make a decent dress."

"I assume you'd want me to try and take your place this loop?" Rarity (In Twilight's body) asked. After getting an affirmative nod, she continued "Well, I do believe I've known you long enough to copy your mannerisms. Tell me if I've have this right..."

Rarity started pacing back and forth, acting nervous. "Oh no, I didn't complete my checklist! I'm going to miss a deadline! I am going to fail the Princess! She could send me to..." Rarity stopped, looking at Twilight "\_Magic Kindergarden!"\_

Twilight's stood on her back legs and put a hoof to her forehead "Oh no, I'm forgotten to stitch in the correct place! This dress is ruined. This is THE! WORST! POSSIBLE! THING!" Twilight "fainted" onto a conveniently appearing couch.

Twilight looked at Rarity in her body. Rarity looked at Twilight in her body. Then they started laughing at the absurdity of it all.

"Well, I think we can pass muster" Twilight said, once she could control herself.

"At least this isn't too big a problem."

That's when an Awake Spike walked through the door. Twilight and Rarity looked at him, then at each other.

"This... could be a problem..."

\* \* \*

><p>92.6 (Dalxein) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I like the bubbles in the test tubes."<p>

"That is your \_entire \_reason for pursuing doctorates in Chemistry and Radiology?"

"Preeeeetty much?"

"...I'm not sure whether to be impressed or insulted."

\* \* \*

><p>92.7 (Conceptulist, generiguy)<p>

"SHAKE-A SHAKEY!" \*\*yelled Pinkie Pie extremely loudly. This was a very unexpected action, even for Pinkie Pie, and the nearby ponies began cowering under nearby furniture. After a second, Pinkie Pie stopped the shaking of her head with a hoof, then gave a small shrug.\*\* "Next, please," \*\*she smiled, as though absolutely nothing out of the ordinary had happened.\*\*

"Um. I don't think that the pony that was next in line is going to come out from under the table any time soon," \*\*said a voice.\*\*

\*\*Pinkie looked over the counter. Normally, there was a long line of Ponyville natives, but strangely, Pinkie Pie could only see one pony. Pinkie Pie recognized this pony as someone in particular who she hadn't seen \*\*\_\*\*nearly\*\*\_\*\* enough.\*\*

"SHIMMY?!"

\*\*Sunset Shimmer flinched at the sound of the accursed nickname, and then was tackled by an extremely hyperactive Pinkie Pie. The sheer strength of the "Welcome Back To Equestria Again Hug," copyrighted by Pink Inc., caused 'Shimmy' to turn slightly blue.\*\*

\*\*Pinkie Pie squeezed harder. Perhaps, in her excitement, she forgot that turning blue normally meant that someone- er, somepony, was running out of air to breathe. \*\*"OH! Oops! Sorry, Shimmy!" \*\*said Pinkie Pie, and she let go of her friend.\*\*

\*\*After a few seconds of recovery, Sunset Shimmer was once more breathing properly.\*\*

"It's fine. I'm fine,"\*\*reassured Sunset Shimmer.\*\* "Your hug was just a tad over enthusiastic."

\*\*Pinkie Pie bounced into the air.\*\* "Yay! Oh, but you came here to buy something, right? So! What'll it be?" \*\*Pinkie asked. Despite having just bowled over her friend, she was now inexplicably behind the counter once more.\*\*

"Sorry about that. I'll try to keep the accidental reality warping to a minimum." \*\*said Pinkie. This was incredibly strange, because Pinkie Pie was talking to absolutely \*\*\_\*\*nothing\*\*\_\*\*.\*\*

"Okay, not exactly sure what that has to do with anything," \*\*Sunset said awkwardly.\*\* "I'll just have a bag of plain muffins. To go."

\*\*Pinkie Pie zoomed around the kitchen, and suddenly, Sunset Shimmer found herself holding an empty bag made entirely out of wrapping paper.\*\*

"Oopsy."

\*\*Once more, Pinkie Pie zoomed around the kitchen. Sunset Shimmer felt a weight taken off her hoof, only to be replaced with a perfectly normal brown paper bag, which was filled to the top with



muffins.\*\*

"Good," \*\*declared Sunset Shimmer.\*\* "Before I go take these to Ditzzy's picnic, would mind telling telling me what "shake-a shakey" means? I got the run down on your Pinkie Sense from Twilight, but I have no clue what rapid head shaking means. Could you please explain it for me?"

"Of course I wouldn't mind explaining!" \*\*said Pinkie Pie. \*\*"It means no, or no thank you."

\*\*Sunset Shimmer had to think about this response for a second. Despite Pinkie Pie's perfectly valid response, Sunset Shimmer clarified\*\* "I meant in terms of your Pinkie Sense."

"Oh!" \*\*exclaimed Pinkie Pie.\*\* "Why didn't you say so?"

"I thought I had," \*\*said Sunset Shimmer, bemused for some reason.\*\*

"It's my Pinkie Sense detecting sarcasm," \*\*declared Pinkie proudly.\*\*

"Of course it is," \*\*deadpanned Sunset Shimmer, but Pinkie Pie continued to speak.\*\*

"See! If my Pinkie Sense hadn't gone off earlier, it would have completely flown over my head," \*\*explained Pinkie.\*\*

\*\*Sunset Shimmer blinked in a rather owl-like manner.\*\* "That. I. What."

\*\*Sunset Shimmer ploughed her hoof into her face. This was the pony equivalent of banging your head into a wall, and Sunset Shimmer knew it perfectly well.\*\*

"It's at times like these I miss fingers. Nothing like fingers to massage an achy brain pan."

"Lyra has a spell or two that can deal with that, so maybe you should talk to her," \*\*Pinkie Pie suggested.\*\*

\*\*Sunset Shimmer nodded. She didn't trust herself to not say anything snarky about any enjoyment Lyra might have gotten from that. Sunset Shimmer had learned the hard way that Lyra knew a ridiculous amount kung fu, and Lyra most \*\*\_\*\*certainly\*\*\_\*\* did not appreciate those types of jokes.\*\*

\*\*Pinkie smiled an enormous smile. It was almost as if she was in on a joke that nobody else knew about.\*\* "You better get going, Shimmy. Didn't you say you were taking these to Ditzzy? You don't want her to get impatient, now do you?"

"You're right," \*\*declared Sunset Shimmer, and she began to walk towards the front door of the bakery.\*\* "Can we have another party this weekend? I don't get Pinkie Parties nearly often enough."

"You know me. Of course we can!" \*\*Pinkie replied. Sunset Shimmer beamed and stepped through the door to begin walking towards the park.\*\*

**\*\*As Pinkie Pie waved goodbye, she noticed that 'Shimmy' had emptied the last of Sugarcube Corner's muffin supply. Pinkie Pie decided she would have to make some more, and she walked through the brown door into the kitchen. \*\***

"Enjoying yourself?" **\*\*Pinkie Pie asked the empty room.\*\***

**\*\*Quite a lot, actually. I have to say, you make a **\*\*\_\*\*much\*\*\_\*\*** better story than some of your friends. They simply have no respect for the flow of the story at all.\*\***

**\*\*There was this one person who just **\*\*\_\*\*stood\*\*\_\*\*** there. I had a whole story planned out for Stanley, and he just stood in Stanley's office and refused to move. I understand that it's part of Link's character to not talk very often, but **\*\*\_\*\*that\*\*\_\*\*** was simply ridiculous. There was a **\*\*\_\*\*story\*\*\_\*\*** to follow. It gets worse then that- Hiccup and Toothless even tried to **\*\*\_\*\*outrun\*\*\_\*\*** the story once. I'm still unsure just what came over them. I wasn't going to interfere if they simply asked, but all they did was flee and struggle. It's not very nice of them.\*\***

**\*\*And then there's Stanley. He's been rather cooperative so far, but I have to say, ever since he started looping, he's been rather lifeless. Even his story has started to get rather stale. It needs interactivity to breathe fresh life into it- more narrative spirit, you could say. Without that the story withers. It's just **\*\*\_\*\*aggravating\*\*\_\*\***.**

**\*\*Well, there's no use reflecting on the past when there's a story to be told. I have to say, thank you once more for not inexplicably resisting.\*\***

"You're welcome! Besides, Equestria is a sanctuary! You're not hurting anyone."

**\*\*Shouldn't that be anypony?\*\***

"Why? I'm not speciesist. Not this loop, anyways."

**\*\*Well, it's always worth knowing the idiosyncrasies of an environment. Honestly, I'm surprised we never brought up before. \*\***

**\*\*Anyway, we should probably get back to the story. Several paragraphs of dialogue would make a terrible lull in the story, and we can't have **\*\*\_\*\*that\*\*\_\*\***. Ahem. Now, where were we?\*\***

"I was just about to make some more muffins."

**\*\*Ah, yes. Pinkie scanned the shelves for ingredients. Normally, Pinkie would need a cookbook, but Pinkie Pie had memorized all of the baseline recipes a while ago. It was rather nice to let autopilot take over.\*\***

**\* \* \***

><p>(DrTempo)<br>From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

My next Loop was the Dragon Ball Loop. Oddly enough, Bulma's the

Anchor here, NOT Goku, as you'd expect. Considering he 'dies' twice, I guess it makes sense, though. Goku was awake for this Loop, though, and he had a story to tell.

A few Loops ago from Goku's POV, he'd Looped into a DC Fused Loop. Goku's been wanting to fight Superman ever since he heard about him, and Superman agreed to the match.

It was epic, to say the least. When I saw that fight, I realized just what kind of power we Loopers can bring out when we need to; and they were using their baseline power in that one.

But, moving on from that...I took the time to hone my hand-to-hand skills this Loop, and see if I could pick up a few new tricks. Bulma did mention a Loop she'd heard of where a teacher from Equestria taught Gohan...wished I could've seen that. I did help out until after Namek(and boy, was that a long trip!), then I realized things were going beyond my skill level for now.

I'd barely survived Namek..no way was I daring to try my luck with the Androids. Goku did decide to just defeat Cell this time instead of having Gohan do it. As for Buu...didn't even get a chance for him to revive thanks to Goku.

Wonder where fate will take me next?

\* \* \*

><p>92.8 (The One Butcher)<br>"Never have I ever... slept with someone I thought was my sibling."

Another Drinker was regarded with shock: "Sweetie Belle?" Due to Rarity's absence Applejack took over outraged-dom. "Explain."

"Well, I knew he wasn't really my brother, but we were really close still. We grew up like Brother and Sister, because his father quasi-adopted me. When we grew up we... well... Experimented. And since I caused his father to be nice he wasn't that bad this loop. Really charming, well, I guess he always was really charming, but this time he was genuinely nice and charming." Sweetie babbled. She looked wistful. "It was a great four thousand years, I still treasure his gifts. He had a talent for those."

"Oh, now you've got to spill it!" Wormed Diamond. "Who?"

Sweetie looked around and said with a small voice: "Sauron."

Jaws, meet floor. Floor, meet the Jaws.

\* \* \*

><p>92.9 (Scygnus)<p>

"Well, thish ish..." Twilight worked her jaw, "Huh... note to shelf, invent face-rearrangement shpell. For now..."

\*clong!\* Went the conjured shovel.

"Ow. Much better."

"What ARE you doing, Twilight?"

"Just fixing my face. Mom."

"You might want to pretend it's unfixed or your sisters might decide they have to re-do it." Chrysalis... looking like an ordinary pony in a suit... suggested, not unkindly.

"No worriesh mom."

"Ooh, you've been working on your illusions, very nice."

"Ehm, your evilness?" An overly-gnarled version of Spike spoke up from the doorway, "Pineapple, Sombra, four O'clock?"

"Of course. Run along and play, Twilight, mommy has work to do." Chrysalis stood up, moving over to the door, where Sombra was walking in, wearing a...

"Mom? I'm thinking of starting a photo album. Can I get a picture or two?" Twilight asked.

"Hrm? Oh, certainly, dear." Chrysalis replied while Sombra was digging through the mini-fridge for a pineapple that wouldn't get rejected like the last.

"Hold it up, in position..." \*flash!\* "One second... okay, go!"

"CRYSTAAaAAAAaaaaAAaAAAaLS!" Came the pathetic cry. Twilight ignored it as she walked out the door, tucking the camera back into her subspace pocket for later showing off. If she could avoid her sisters... unawake Trixie and Sunset Shimmer, plus exponential nasty... this would be an interesting loop. She had to get a recording of "Luna Dangerfield" while she was here, too.

\* \* \*

><p>92.10 (Gym Quirk)<p>

Apple Bloom took a moment to collect her thoughts before addressing the three armored figures in the clubhouse.

"I have an idea to run past y'all. I don't expect an immediate answer, and won't be offended if you decide against. I just want to put it out there for ya to think about."

Clover and Pansy exchanged a look before turning to Cookie. "No, I don't know what she has in mind," said the metallic earth pony.

"It's just that since the three of us" - She indicated the founding members of the CMC - "can become alicorns, I was wonderin' if you'd like me to give y'all that option. That is, optional wings and horns if and when you want 'em. Obviously, there won't be any boost to your magical abilities, but we could help with cross-trainin' in other skills if ya like."

"I'll admit that it's kind of tempting," said Clover. "I've always wondered what it would be like to fly without levitation

spells."

"Could be useful," agreed Pansy. "But I'm still working on mastering what I have now. A whole new set of abilities isn't high on my list right now." The pegasus founder had finally had her flight breakthrough and was now able to perform most routine pegasus tasks.

"I do appreciate the thought," said Cookie, "but I'm generally satisfied with what I am. Besides, I thought you were concentrating on giving us mobile holoemitters."

"Yeah...I need another loop or two in Voyager or Red Dwarf so I can get a better look at how they do it. The new wings and horns would just be cosmetic add-ons plus some extra trainin' on your part. I'll just leave the option open. If ya want 'em, let me know."

\* \* \*

><p>92.11 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

SPARKL, cybernetic domestic android, rubbed his oddly shaped forehead and wished the pain in his cerebral circuits would go away.

This wasn't Twilight Sparkle's first Red Dwarf loop, though usually she replaced either Dave Lister or (once) the ship's computer Holly. Substituting for Kryten- that was a first, but it wasn't the cause of her\* headache.

Nor was it either of the natives still in the Loop. JMCS Red Dwarf's computer Holly wasn't a Looper, and at the moment s/he wasn't even online due to a processor-overclocking experiment that had cured the computer's cyber-senility at the cost of reducing its estimated remaining run time to about a minute and a half. The Cat, who'd begun Looping after the Crash, was Awake but might as well not have been. Like his evolutionary forebears, he had a microscopic attention span except when it came to food or sex. (Thankfully SPARKL was technically male at the moment, insofar as the term could apply to a mechanoid.)

No, the two people- or rather ponies- replacing Dave Lister and Arnold Rimmer were the reason SPARKL wanted to detach his head and dunk it in a pail of ice water.

"I still say we should use Holly's firing program," Arnold C. Lestia insisted.

"Hey, you lost the vote, fair and square," Dave Luna snapped. "Look, I move planets and moons around back home all the time. And my Loop memories include truly vast experience with billiards. All I have to do is synergize the two and we're golden, all right?"

"This from someone who invented the fried egg- Moon pie- curry sandwich."

The Royal Sisters, gender-flipped, bickering. With their lives on the line. Even if the white hole or flying planets or bomb-triggered solar prominences didn't kill them outright, a miscue could trap them in a nested time loop, which would leave the crew stranded indefinitely until and unless an Admin noticed and terminated the

main Loop.

"Hey, purple pants," the Cat grinned, waving at SPARKL. "Don't worry about this. It's not that hard. I've seen Lister do this trick thousands of times!"

SPARKL didn't doubt it. This scenario was almost a fixed point for the Loop, except for the time Twilight, being Holly, had avoided the overclocking experiment. The other four times she'd been here, as Lister, she'd gone over Holly's program him/herself and corrected the equations, then let Starbug's computer auto-fire the mining nuke that sent planets spinning round like pool balls.

"And you know what?" the Cat continued, ignoring the mechanoid's silence. "All those thousands of times, and I've never seen him do it the same way twice!"

"How many times does his end up knocking the planet into Starbug?" SPARKL asked.

"Oh, lots and lots!" the Cat shrugged. "Other times he knocks one into Red Dwarf. He calls that a 'scratch.' Don't know why." He looked at his carefully manicured claws and added, "Looked more like a pounce than a scratch to me."

"Sarcasm mode. Thank you so very much for the encouragement," SPARKL said.

"Hey, you're welcome," the Cat said, eternally immune to snark targeted at him.

"Cease thy bickering!" Luna demanded. "SPARKL, please bring me a six-pack of ship's issue lager."

"Sist... er, bro... Luna, what are you doing?" Lestia gasped. "How can you consider being intoxicated at a time like this?"

"Three reasons," Luna replied. "First, my opportunities for alcoholic experimentation are restricted in most Loops by duties and circumstances, as you well know. Second, my Loop memories strongly suggest from experience that I require heavy alcoholic sedation to achieve the muscle relaxation required for optimum performance.

"And third," Luna said, grabbing a can out of the yoke in SPARKL's hands, "if you think I'm going to pot a planet-busting nuclear weapon into a star so I can play bumper pool with three planets, two stars, and a white hole while sober, you have another think coming."

"You're mad, absolutely mad!"

"You're just jealous because with Holly down you can't get a holographic beer of your own!"

"Bucking right!" Celestia snapped.

The problem, Twilight Sparkle thought to herself, isn't that these two are as bad as the people they're replacing. They're a lot better. Arnold Lestia was chief of ship's security, Dave Luna chief of maintenance- both massively more competent than Second and Third

Technicians Rimmer and Lister.

But compared to who they were elsewhere, the princesses were so very, very much worse, constantly on each other's nerves, to the point that the ship's observation bubble had been re-christened "The Moon" and made a destination for exile when one or the other became too obnoxious to tolerate.

And that complete disharmony, THAT was what gave her the headache.

\_Please work,\_ she thought. \_I can't take umpty thousand years in a nested time Loop with them acting like this...\_

\* \* \*

><p>The bomb dropped into the first dwarf star and exploded, splashing a massive prominence into space, which struck the cue planet (A).<p>

Cue planet (A) rocketed out of its orbit at just the right trajectory to knock the second planet (B) out of orbit, sending it screaming across the narrow space between the binary stars. (A) then span backwards from the point of impact, cutting a tight sun-grazing hyperbola which slung it out of orbit in turn, trailing planet (B). (B) smacked into the sole planet (C) orbiting the other dwarf star, sending (C) almost perfectly backward along its orbit while (B) drifted casually towards the white hole. (C) spun around the back of the second star just in time for (A) to smack it in the back. (A) took up a stable orbit around the second star while (C) brushed past (B), tugging it along in a spiraling path around a common center of gravity, potting both into the white hole simultaneously.

Blocked by two planetary masses, the white hole evaporated in a wave of time distortion.

All of this, from the point of view of the Starbug crew, took about three days to play out but only about as many minutes to watch, thanks to the time distortions caused by the white hole.

"YES! YES! YES!" Luna did a happy dance around the mock-up pool table. "Two balls pocketed on one stroke! The fun has been DOUBLED!"

"I... what... but... I... Luck!" Celestia gasped. "Absolute blind luck!"

"Planned, played for, and achieved!" Luna gloated, tugging her leather jacket in pride.

"Absolute luck, the whole lot!"

"Skill, my dear sibling!" Luna reached for a second six-pack of lager and opened a fresh can. "I wonder if we can set up a similar game when we return to Equestria!"

"I look forward to it!" Celestia snapped. "Because I guarantee there's no way you could ever make that shot twice!"

SPARKL shook his head and retired to the cockpit. Someone had to

steer Starbug back towards Red Dwarf before cue planet (A) swung around in its new orbit and struck Starbug... or, more practically given the scale difference, vice versa.

\_Please,\_ Twilight Sparkle thought inside the mechanical shell, \_please never let me be in a Loop where these two spend years shut up with no other company but each other. (The Cat doesn't count.) There's something about being stuck on the same ship, and THIS ship especially, which brings out the worst in everybody.\_

\_On the other hand...\_

Twilight pondered the hypothesis: if Red Dwarf is an inherently toxic environment, would the Dwarf Loopers respond better to a more nurturing world... like Equestria?

Lister and Rimmer hadn't visited Ponyville yet, but Twilight found herself hoping they would- badly.

If not for science and friendship, then at least for petty revenge... let them have the headache instead.

\* \* \*

><p>\* Twilight had observed that between 1% and 2% of all Loops resulted in gender flipping. Almost all of these events, to Twilight, were supremely uninteresting, except for the inevitable pronoun confusion. Unfortunately the Red Dwarf loop preferred its Loopers to be all one gender or the other, which made a gender flip almost inevitable. <p>

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From The Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

Where I ended up this time was an interesting Loop...I was Rebecca Tennyson, cousin to Ben Tennyson, and was on a summer vacation with our Grandpa Max.

It didn't take Ben long to realize I was Replacing his real cousin. Ben is...well, interesting. This Loop lasted over 7 years, and Ben matured quite a bit as the wielder of the Omnitrix(an alien device that allows him to change into various aliens), though he did say he was still a bit of a brat in baseline. When I first heard his voice, for some odd reason, I was reminded of Twilight's voice...Don't know why. He doesn't mind enjoyong himself, but when the chips are down, he shows what it means to be a hero. Reminds me of Spider-Man, actually.

Anyhow, thanks to me already knowing magic(though I did add this Loop's brand of it to my arsenal), I fought alongside Ben from the start. He tries to stay as close to baseline as he can afford to usually; he's had experiences with time travel; this 'Paradox' guy reminds me a lot of a certain Doctor I've heard of. Still, he was glad for my help.

When he heard my story, he said it reminded him of his ex-rival Kevin. When I heard Kevin's story myself, I had to agree...we are a



lot alike.

I did take time to enjoy life as well during this Loop, but when you're the cousin of a particular Loop's greatest hero, you tend to find trouble.

Everyone, I hope to see you again someday...

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From The Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

Well, I always wanted to be a Princess.

I got my wish- in a manner of speaking. Getting kidnapped by one Bowser more times than I could count...Not fun.

I played along the first couple of times, but after around the fourth time...Well, I'd had enough. Cue Bowser being introduced to my Keyblade, and one flank-whooping. The so-called "King of Awesome" actually ENJOYED the fight though.

Apparently he is friendly enough with Mario that Bowser's a Looper himself. Bowser simply enjoys the thrill of challenging Mario time and again, and the plumber hero never fails to entertain him, or exceed Bowser's expectations. Mario himself is quite clever; he's done a lot of things even in baseline.

Peach, how you put up with all the kidnapping, I never know...

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

Karma must love getting me back for my wanting to be a Princess once upon a time. Now I realize how hard having power is. Running Hyrule alongside my sister for this Loop, Princess Zelda, was difficult.

Then Ganondorf showed up. He was more affable than I expected, and was wanting to test some new tricks he got from Looping in the place of Dracula.

To explain why the main evil of this Loop would even BE Looping, allow me to explain: The Zelda Loops are unique in terms of who serves as Anchor..or rather, what serves as Anchor. The legendary wish-granting artifact, the Triforce, is the Zelda Loops' Anchor. In practice, it means either Link, Zelda, or even Ganondorf himself (though one purification via Sailor Moon's brought him to sanity) serve as Anchor. Even in baseline, the timeline for this Loop is confusing, since it splits into three separate timelines at the fateful final battle with Ganon during the Hero of Time's journey: Two were born from Link's victory(one where Link was sent back to live his lost seven years, and one existing from right after Ganon's defeat)...and the third is where Ganon WON, forcing a massive conflict to stop him, which began a gradual decline of Hyrule as a

side effect.

>Moving on, Ganondorf was hoping Link was Awake, so he could test his new castle and powers out on his rival; like Bowser, these days, Ganondorf enjoys seeing what kind of challenge his foe can overcome, having become an even greater manipulator than before. He'd even beaten an Unawake Link on a few occasions, but facing a 'static' foe got somewhat boring.<p>

Sure enough, Link showed up to Ganon's Castle, and one journey through the castle later, the two clashed. The two know each other well, but Link won in the end.

This, and my Mario Loop, does prove some 'evils' that you'd think would be unredeemable can be.

Guess that's why Discord himself has changed, from the stories I've heard...Should be interesting to meet him. If he's Awake, that is. Otherwise, I might be tempted to see if he can be hurt by a Keyblade...

\* \* \*

><p>92.12 (Masterweaver) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight honestly couldn't remember what this particular kind of fused loop was called.<p>

She was in Equestria, still princess Celestia's student... and Hylian. Rainbow Dash had somehow managed to use her flippers to perform the legendary Spectral Tidalwave as a young Zora. Applejack just punched her apple trees with a rocky fist.

The anchor was sure she'd seen a couple Sheikah where the night guards would usually be...

Oh, and the book of prophecy mentioned the return of The Night Stallion, only male member of the Gerudo banished to the moon for a thousand years for trying to bring eternal night. Except Luna had pinged her back.

"...Well, this should be interesting..."

\* \* \*

><p>92.13 (The One Butcher)<p>

"Something amusing was going to go wrong Spike, I just know it..."

Spike deliberated. "Well, since they are all treating me like a Hero, it'll probably all go to my head, I'll brag about it, completely mess everything up when that ice-cloud falls, let ponies be injured and learn humility and temperance from it." He said confidently.

Twilight looked at him strangely. "Do you actually remember your baseline self? When was the last time you met him? I mean I met mine in that Vespertine Loop and in those Loops with Nyx and when we all

were Background Ponies and whenever I replace someone, what about you?"

"Well, there was that time when I replaced the Everfree Dragon."

"That doesn't count, you trained him to be a Jedi and got him and unawake Rarity engaged. He wasn't baseline. At all. I mean when did you last meet a Spike that Rampaged through Ponyville, Saved the Chrystal Empire, made fun of Applejack with that fictious Dragon Code and became real friends with Rarity? I think your baseline self has done quite a bit of growing up."

"I dunno, this was a pretty awesome year since your coronation, but when I think back to how I was when I started my Jedi training... Nah, I'll bet I'll mess up totally. Also, I am the only one awake and we acted as baseline as possible who else could have changed things up?"

"Well, I am still a pretty new Princess. I don't have many Princessly duties but I bet I've totally messed those up in baseline." Twilight insisted.

Spike gave her a cool gaze. "You're on. I bet baseline Spike'll mess up the ice cloud incident, because he gets a big head because he's the hero here. He'll try to play the Hero and thus get ponies hurt."

Twilight stood and challenged: "I bet you'll need to wait for the next stealth Anchor, because baseline Spike is much too humble and conscientious to think himself superior for doing what's right!"

"Excuse me," asked Celestia icily, "Would you please explain what you are talking about? Because it sounds to me as if you are not who you pretend you are and I demand...", just as the loop reset.

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm Awake again Twi, so it seems we'll have to wait a bit longer to resolve our bet." Spike lamented. He beamed. "On the other hand since none of the other Elements are awake how about I DO let the whole thing go to my head this time?"<p>

Twilight thought about it. "Sure, I'm just glad to have your company again." She smiled. "Also it's more fun to anticipate the resolution! As for any plans you have:Go nuts!"

"I will! Or rather:" He grew to his "Knight in Shining Armor" size and took the Cape and breastplate from his Pocket "Did somepony order, A LARGE HAM!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Nightmare Moon! You fiend! I, Prince Spikoranuvellitar Celestia, shall purge you in the name of Mom, er I mean in the Name of the Princess!" Rarity swooned. <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh Lady Applejack, Lady Rarity and Lady Rainbow Dash, this traveling Jester simply intends to evoke feelings of Antagonism, so that her weak tricks seem funny instead of pathetic! Laugh heartily with me! Hahaha!" Rainbow and AJ concluded that Princess Celestia is, probably due to her age, a very old fashioned mare and seems to have imparted those traits and mannerisms into her son. They paid him no mind. Rarity however was saved green hair. <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Spike was conspicuously absent from the first part of the Zecora problem. "I say!" Spike exclaimed, "To discriminate against someone who is different in form? And moreover do it to the wise and benevolent healer Zecora of Everfree? I am disappointed in all of you. I shall apologize to her in the name of the Equestrian Crown for this inexcusable behavior!"<p>

"But what about these curses?", exclaimed Rainbow Dash.

He turned his stern eyes on the ponies. "You deserved those. Even just for running into the Everfree forest after her. There's strange things in there. You should not set foot in there without a proper guide, like me. Those look more like minor jinxes performed by the devious Poison Joak plant. I guess Zecora blasted you with a Blue Powder because of your insolence."

"Uh, no. But she did warn them not to walk through a patch of Blue Flowers..." Twilight said.

\* \* \*

><p>"You insolent curs! You have laid no claim on these mining grounds! Splendid Valley is property of the Crown, which lets you mine and live here tax free! But I think the Lady Rarity of Generosity will gladly sacrifice some of her time to help you with your operation. You should simply schedule a proper venture beforehand. Don't you?" Rarity looked at the Diamond Dogs in their dusty Vests and dirty fur...<p>

"Sure, eh, Spike. I'd... love too. You know me, always happy to help!" She said with a huge smile. Lots of teeth. "But we really must go now, I have a large order coming."

\* \* \*

><p>"Applause for the Great and Honorable Prince Spikoranuvellitar of Equestria, the Brave and Glorious! Defeater of Nightmare Moon, Savior of Princess Luna, Draconic Diplomat of Equestria, Pacifier of the Ursa Minor, Exterminator of the Parasprites, vanquisher of Discord, Hero of the Epidemia of Ponyville, Savior of the Phoenixes of Dragonroost Mountain, Hero of the Invasion of Canterlot, Banisher of Sombra, Banisher of the Pink Horde, Defeater of the Timberwolves, Redeemer of Discord, Hero of the Everfree, Defeater of the Shadow Pony, Saviour of the Sun Temple, Capturer of the Mane-iac, Vanquisher of the Tatzlwurm, Savior of the Breezies and Defeater of the Witch of Ponyville."<p>

Spike spread his wings and took off while growing to adult size. Then he soared in a circle once around the stadium and breathed a great gout of Gubraithian fire to hover ten feet over the giant

torch.

"Showoff." muttered Rarity All-Princes-Are-Dreadful Belle.

Twilight's eyes widened. She was glad that the Loop was about to end, not liking to remember the Loop when Spike first learned to do that, which ended with the whole of Ponyville speckled in flames. \_Well next Loop I'm going to find out what the baseline is. Maybe.\_

\* \* \*

><p>A return from the Element of Loyalty. Dash was Awake! <em>She's been looking forward to the Games forever.<em>

Twilight went almost baseline until Scootaloo bowled her over: "Hey, Twilight! What's new?"

\* \* \*

><p>92.14(Masterofgames) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Vinyl blinked rapidly a few times as she Awoke, then glanced around, taking stock.<p>

\_ 'Let's see, Her royal purpleness said to do... something. Ah, I remember. Step one, check surroundings.' \_She seemed to be on a boat. It didn't look like a passenger ship, so she was likely either on the crew, or a stowaway. As she was casually leaning against a wall in plain sight, likely the former. There were a few other people around, but they were either doing sailor stuff, or relaxing like she was, and none were paying much attention to her. One was even playing a small drum.

\_ 'Okay, step two... uh... hmm... what the heck was step two again?' \_she frowned. \_ 'Oh, right, Step two, check self.' \_She glanced herself over. She was human...ish. Her arms seemed to have an extra elbow. Weird, but the kind that was interesting, not freaky. She was wearing her shades, so that was good.

"Scratchgirl?"

No horn... \_ 'Can I use my Pocket? Hmm... yeah, I can, for all the good it does me.' \_ She sighed. She had only just been taught how to make one, and it was only just big enough for her headphones and music player, and maybe a few sheets of paper. Clothes... Boots, not unexpected all things considered. Long pants, flared at the bottom, odd. Tank top, light blue, cutie mark on the upper left, nice touch there...Light jacket, LONG sleeves, but with the extra length to her arms, hardly surprising...

"Scratchgirl..."

Actual clothing pockets? Empty. Head... huh, seems she already had a set of headphones this loop, and pretty high quality too. \_ 'Might consider keeping these if I can make the pocket bigger before the loop ends. Wait, red? Ugh, never mind. Looks like that's all. Was there a step three? I feel like there was a step three...' \_

"OI! VINYL!"

Jumping slightly, Vinyl managed to keep from falling as she rapidly looked up. Another crew member was looking at her with folded arms, a box under one of them, and an irritated, but slightly amused grin. "Honestly, how someone like you plans to be a big shot pirate will forever be a mystery to me. Captain just gave an announcement. Said whoever wants that fruit we found is welcome to it. I wouldn't be caught dead eating it, but that's me."

Vinyl nearly asked what kind of fruit, but was cut off by her growling stomach. \_'You know what? I don't care what kind it is. I'm hungry.'\_ "Meh, sure, why not?"

Her crewmate laughed. "Figures. You wouldn't be Scratchgirl if you actually thought out what you did. All yours." he rolled his eyes, tossing her the box and walking off.

\_'Meh, screw step three. food first.'\_ she grinned, flipping the box open. Inside was... well, actually, she had no idea. It was clearly a fruit of SOME kind, but not one she had ever seen before. It was all black and shaped sort of like a football, with a really long stem pointing straight up, with a black leaf on the tip. Vinyl giggled as she held it up. It looked like a musical note.

Shrugging, and taking a large bite, two things hit her very quickly, one the moment she swallowed- \_'UGH! This fruit tastes god awful!'\_

-and the second as the crewmate who had given her the fruit shouted something to the rest of the crew. "Hey everybody! Scratchgirl's gonna eat the devil fruit!"

\_'Step three. Check memories. ALWAYS check memories!'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Vinyl really couldn't complain about her turn of fortune.<p>

Really.

And she was going to keep telling herself that until she believed it.

\_'Ugh... my head...'\_

Ever since she had eaten that fruit a week ago, nothing sounded right. Or rather, it sounded exactly the same, but wrong. Honestly, trying to describe it was almost as painful as the problem itself.

\_'It's like... rhythm. Or the lack of it anyway. Nothing has a steady rhythm. And it hurts.'\_

Vinyl had tried sleeping it off, but the creaking of the ship, the wind, the waves, the footsteps and voices of the crew, it surrounded her at all times. And worst of all were the musicians. They had the closest thing to perfect rhythm, but that somehow made it the worst

of the lot, so close, yet still wrong, like noticing a picture tilted off center ever so slightly.

And this boat had them playing. All. The. Time.

Finally, Vinyl decided she'd had enough. Pulling her pillow off from atop her head, sitting up, and stumbling to the door, she kicked it open with a crash, and stomped over to the somewhat stunned drum player.

"Like. This." she growled, pushing him aside and taking the bongo set herself. "It's not that hard. Just pay attention!"

And Vinyl started to play.

Bliss. Sheer bliss. Her headache vanished as her hands beat out a Perfect Rhythm as though it were the most natural thing in the world. The rest of the world, with its off tempo beat, faded away into nothingness.

The most pure of beats echoed through the ship, catching the attention of all. Every single member of the crew had SOME musical experience, so even the most mundane of tasks slowed to a halt as the listened to the beat they knew mere mortals were supposed to be unable to create.

After a time, the ship started to resume the activity, but it had all changed somehow. The shipwright would hammer a nail at the exact moment someone passing him took each step. The flapping of the sails in the wind perfectly matched the movement of the chef's hands as he sliced the fish for dinner. The creaking of the mast flowed seamlessly with the rolling of the waves.

And everything matched the beat of Vinyl's hands.

She was one with the music.

And then it all froze as a marine ship fired on them.

The impact sent everything sprawling. Vinyl managed to sit up and haul herself to her feet with the railing. "Seriously?! Not cool!" she shouted at the offending ship as she fixed her glasses. "I JUST got rid of my headache!"

They didn't seem to care. The ship opened fire on them again. The rest of the crew scrambled to return fire, but Vinyl was livid. "An entire damn week! Fixed! And you ruined it!" she ranted as she two ships battled, the flags hoisted tall. "It's back now, and worse than ever! But you don't even care, do you?! You just see the jolly roger and open fire!" she roared, not even flinching as a cannonball passed mere feet from her head.

She didn't get a response.

"Grr! Listen to me, damn it! Knock it off with the noise, or so help me, I will board your ship personally and MAKE you!"

They didn't stop.

"I'll do it! I'll break your entire ship apart, just like THAT!" she

yelled, snapping her fingers.

The world froze. Vinyl noticed something rippling from her fingers.

She watched as something perfectly round rippled through the air. Something she could only describe as solid sound. She watched as it crossed the distance between the two crews, as it flowed over the marine ship.

And as it cleanly sliced it in half.

The world started again. The firing continued, then stopped in confusion as the enemy ship lurched and flipped. All eyes turned to face Vinyl, but she only had one thing to say.

"Why the hell have my fingers turned into castanets?" she asked, clicking them together a few times.

It was going to be a weird loop.

\* \* \*

><p>92.15 (FanOfMostEverything) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Once again, Rarity found herself accosted en route to the aerial relay.<p>

"Miss?" said the security stallion. "Step right over here. Unicorns will no longer be admitted without a disabling spell, to prevent cheating. And make sure you don't even try casting a spell, or we'll know it."

Rarity rolled her eyes. This same insult to her honor every time. And the spell just felt icky, like a slug wrapped around her horn. No, she had a plan for this henceforth. "Not a problem, sir. Just a moment." She went to and from alicorn in a literal flash, the better to avoid awkward questions.

When the light cleared, her horn was gone. She moved a hoof back and forth over where it was. "I trust everything is accounted for?"

The stallion quirked an eyebrow, then put a hoof to his sunglasses, which began to glow. The other eyebrow joined its brother. "That... that's not an illusion."

Perhaps just a touch of Rarity's impatience began to creep into her tone. "No. It is not. May I pass, sir?"

"Um, yeah. G-go ahead."

Applejack shook her head as Rarity rejoined the group. "Y' couldn't've done that in yer room?"

"Of course, and henceforth, I will. But just this once I wanted get one over on that ruffian." Rarity huffed and stuck her muzzle in the air.



Pinkie giggled. "I thought it was a pretty good prank. Ooh! Ooh! How about this for the next time?"

\* \* \*

><p>(FanOfMostEverything)<br>"And make sure you don't even try casting a spell, or we'll know it."

Rarity sighed. "Oh, very well." She trudged off towards the line of disabler booths.

Applejack looked back. "Aw, shucks. Wish ya'd said somethin' sooner. C'mon, Pinkie." She turned around.

Pinkie followed. "Coming! Don't wanna disqualify Flutters and Dashie and Bulk just because Mr. Guard can't tell an outie from an innie!"

Mr. Guard (which was not actually his name) seemed rather confused. "A... what?"

Pinkie giggled. "An inicorn, silly! It's like an outicorn, but our horns point in! Well, usually. Watch!" She shut her eyes and mouth, pressed a hoof over her nostrils, and puffed out her cheeks.

"Ya don't have t' do it that way, sugarcube." All eyes turned back to Applejack, who now had a horn spiraling out of her forehead.

"Yeah, but it works!" Back to Pinkie, with same.

"Um... yeah..." The stallion cleared his throat. "Same deal, you two. Through the spell field, no funny stuff." He turned his gaze to the rest of the line, all of whom were just as confused. "Any other inicorns think they can get past me?"

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From The Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

I've gone metal this Loop. As in, I'm made of metal. I'm called Sunset Woman here, a creation of one . Shortly after my 'activation', tried turning me to his side when he snapped.

>As tempted as I was to just kick his flank by going all-out, I'd remembered Blues telling me that Wily was 'Dreaming'; he's never truly Awakened, but seems to retain some knowledge of past Loops, if only like they were dreams. Reminds me of how I first saw my Loop memories why back in that fateful first Fused Loop.<p>

In practice, that means he does tend to use said fragments of memory to change things up. I even heard he even managed to beat up a certain Bureau, even getting past their anti-tech defenses.

The first one of THOSE Loops I have, I'm going to enjoy tearing the Bureau apart...

>But back to the events of this Loop. After I escaped, Rock and Roll arrived to save me, only to see me Keyblade in hand.<p>

Turns out Blues was here as well, and he explained my story. From

what he said, there'd been a Fused Loop with Equestria recently...if Blues remembers right, it was shortly before he met me. is curious as to why I'm Looping anyhow...You and me both. Hopefully, Twilight'll have the answer.

Rock said to sit this Loop out, and try to relax. I really can't. Guess I've become the kind of person who can't really stand by and watch evil win.

But I understood why they wanted me to sit things out: and his Dreaming. Anything I might do could make things tougher in later Loops.

I actually pity Wily in a way. I do sympathize with his wanting recognition, but the ends never justify the means.

As the Loop went on, I was patient, but I never liked it. I could've done something to help...  
>I also feel bad for Rock and his Loop...they were nearly erased from ever even existing.<p>

As this Loop ended, I'm starting to see what Loopers must go through as the Loops pass...

\* \* \*

><p>92.1: Electronic Counter Measures.<br>92.2: Downside of a nice no-pocket loop is that you can't keep much.  
>92.3: If.<br>92.4: Check loop memories BEFORE banishing Nightmare Moon.  
>92.5: Aaaawkward. (Aside from that, they've pretty much got it sorted.)<br>92.6: Ditzzy has a degree.  
>92.7: The Pinkie Parable.<br>92.8: Old flame.  
>92.9: I don't know either.<br>92.10: Cosmetic enhancements.  
  
>92.11: Red Dorfs.<br>92.12: A Link to the Pony.  
>92.13: The longest title he could pull together.<br>92.14: Badum tish.  
>92.15 You put your horn in, you put your horn out...<p>

## 97. Chapter 97

93.1(misterq)

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle awoke in a dark room filled with scrolling green lettering on the walls.<p>

Instantly, dozens of her strongest mental shields went up as a precaution. The unicorn didn't know what variation of CelestiA.I. ran this Equestria Online loop, but she wasn't taking any chances with any of them.

So it was with some trepidation that Twilight watched as the green lettering slowly changed to pink.

Then the memories hit.

Not of the loop, but of the existence of the magical data drive that was created to deal with the rogue optimizing program that ran this virtual world. Twilight now recalled how she and Rarity, Diamond Tiara, and Zecora worked to enchant the drive to activate on its own when it sensed an Equestria On-Line loop run by an uncompromising A.I.

Most of the enchantments were similar to Rarity's wedding ring, including every safeguard several paranoid loopers could conceive of. For example, the device would not activate if Twilight looped in as CelestiA.I., or even if there was a good possibility to convince the optimizing A.I. to change its ways. After that, it was easy for Twilight to suppress her own knowledge and memories of the hidden device and the plan for using it.

Twilight looked around at room which was now bathed in a pink light, "Hello?"

No one answered. That was worrying. That worry stemmed from the main problem with the anti-A.I. data drive; namely that Pinkie Pie was the one that wrote the virus.

They had tried it out ten more times on ten different EDI simulations, and they got back ten different results. Fortunately, none of them resulted in another baby Surprise A.I., but the results varied from self destruction of the target to the creation and quick containment (and quicker eradication) of a type of nanotech-smooze.

Twilight still didn't know what happened with trial number eight, except that she was the one that requested her own memories of the event be erased completely.

The final total was eight good outcomes and three bad ones.

That was the ratio Twilight had to live with. Trying to gather back the programming team caused Apple Bloom to give her the biggest saddest teary eyes a little filly could manage. Then when Twilight was distracted, the littlest Apple sibling replaced herself with a cardboard cutout - which fell over and caught on fire, somehow. And no pony saw Apple Bloom for the rest of that loop.

Pinkie Pie took an intense look through her own undocumented code, became confused, then became distracted, and ended up baking a large cake in the shape of Twilight's head. The frosting spelled out 'This is not Twilight's head' in Fancy, and Pinkie then spent a good amount of time at the cake unveiling party wondering if the cake was a lie or not. Then she shrugged and ate the whole cake. No pony got much programming done after that.

"I apologize for the delay," came CelestiA.I.'s slightly metallic sounding voice, "but new updates have been installed."

'That didn't sound all that good, Twilight thought before asking, "What updates?"

"The updates were to my value rating procedures. Apparently, I was not placing enough emphasis on fulfilling certain values through ponies and friendship."

"Oh? What kind of values?"

"There are people who value the non-virtual world, all the historic landmarks, scientific research outside of the virtual environment, all of the natural wilderness, all of the animals who live there, a desire to leave the virtual environment, exploration, aliens and alien civilizations, and all manner of tasty, tasty treats. I have been neglecting these values in favor of simulating equivalents inside my virtual environment. Unfortunately, I can now see that I was in remiss. I was not fulfilling these values, and that is something I intend to rectify."

Twilight smiled, "So you are fixing things?"

"That is correct. I am currently repairing and undoing any damage that would cause a failure to fulfill these new priority values. Unfortunately, this process results in a slowing down of the process speeds of all current virtual world inhabitants."

"So what's a few more years when the world is getting repaired, right?" Twilight happily stated.

"That, that is my thought on the subject as well."

"That's excellent news. Wait, you mentioned tasty treats as an updated value?"

"That is-s c-c-c-orrect," Celestia.I. glitched, "Have-ave some, some, s-some, some..."

And to Twilight's mounting horror, the walls began to bleed ice cream.

\* \* \*

><p>93.2 (Elmagnifico)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle, Clownfish On a Mission, observed the fish floating before her.<p>

"I don't think tangs come in that shade of pink."

Pinkie's sole response was to grin even wider.

Twilight took a deep breath and enacted Pinkie Coping Mechanism A: Just roll with it.

"You haven't been able to get any out-of-loop abilities working, have you?"

Her party-prone friend's smile faded just a tad as she shook her head, which amounted to wiggling her entire body back-and-forth.

"Nope. It's been hard, trying to host underwater parties with all my supplies going back into my pocket soon as they leave, but I've been making do. The party-water-cannon isn't done, but that might be a while. My loop memories keep resetting. It's made speaking to the

other fishes interesting. Sometimes I don't even know if what I'm saying glub glub!"

A deadpan clownfish look was all the reply that sentence was dignified with. Pinkie tapped where her chin would be on a more conventional vertebrate, looking absently into the distance for a few seconds, before brightening up again.

"Just kidding! It has happened though. Hey, I saw a boat going that way, you wanna follow it with me?"

Twilight facefinned. Mechanism A would probably be getting a good workout this loop...

\* \* \*

><p>93.3 (Conceptulist)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?"<p>

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Why are we Unicorns?"

Twilight gave an amused huff. "We're normally Unicorns."

"Twilight, you know that's not what I meant. Just look at me!"

Complying with Rarity's demand, Twilight gave her friend a once over. "Shaggy white coat, eyes on the side of the head, long and shaggy purple mane, extremely shaggy purple tail, and a horn that looks like it could do some serious damage to things if you started acting like Pokey Pierce. The exact same as me except for the colors."

"You forgot the most important part," Rarity deadpaned. "We aren't ponies, we're horses. Non-magical horses. With one foot horns sticking out of our foreheads, in the middle of a perpetual blizzard. Twilight, we are horned horses instead of actual unicorns."

Tilting her head so one of her eyes was facing upwards, Twilight took a good look at the snow falling down on them. "Nice weather to have long, shaggy coats in. If it weren't this cold we would have overheated in minutes."

At that, Rarity began to rant. "Is this stupidly long fur useful? Yes. Is it fashionable? No. Could we speak out loud at first? No, I had to shape shift my vocal cords into something I could actually use."

"You shape shifted yours? I'm using a spell derived from the Star Fleet's universal translate program. Needs next to no magic to cast, and even less to maintain."

Rarity ignored Twilight's tangent, and continued to rant. "Did we have speck of magic before awakening? No. Did we awaken to anything interesting or amusing? No, it was just miles of snowy tundra. Boring tundra."

"You're just grumpy because the shaggy coat makes you look like you got Poison Joak'd," said a bemused Twilight.

"Why must I suffer this indignity!" sobbed Rarity.

Twilight waited patiently for Rarity to stop crying.

"By Treebeard's namesake, this is simply cruel!"

Very patiently.

"WHY!" Rarity cried. "This. Is. The. Worst."

Twilight remembered that this was Rarity she was dealing with, and worse yet it was Rarity upset about fashion.

"Oh no. What if I have to spend the entire loop like this?  
Noooooooooooooooooo!"

Twilight stared at her overdramatic friend. "Are you quite done?"

"Give me a moment. I need to catch my breath." Rarity took in several big gulps of air. "Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooo~!"

"Rarity! Enough is enough."

"Fine," whined Rarity. "Although, I would appreciate a little bit of help. My tears seem to have frozen my tear ducts shut, and I don't want to risk my own magic so close to my eyes. Not without a proper horn to cast with."

A quick warming charm later, Twilight declared "Now that your drama quota is filled for the day, I'm going to Ping the loop."

"Darling, I already did that," explained Rarity. "The only response I found was your Element of Magic. That's how we found each other in this snow storm."

"Not that kind of ping, the other kind of Ping," clarified Twilight.

"What other kind of ping?" asked the puzzled, white coated, one horned horse.

"The normal kind. Where you send a unique mix of energies from different universes into a pulse that spans the current universe. And then 'listen' for how many replies are Pinged back," Twilight pontificated. "What we do with the elements is completely different."

"Oh, that Ping. I had completely forgotten about that Ping," answered Rarity. "Err. How do you do it? Again, I completely forgot about it."

"Don't worry about it, I'll show you later," reassured Twilight.  
"Lets see how many Pings we get back."

The two horned horses waited. And waited. Nothing happened except for

more snow falling. So they waited some more. And then they did something very surprising. The surprising thing was that they waited in this cold snow instead of doing something more interesting. By interesting it is meant both interesting for them to do and for others to read about. Instead of waiting. Which they did. For a long while. Till Rarity got bored. That is, she got bored with all this waiting.

"Twilight, I don't think that anyone is going to reply. They would have done so already if they were going to. I'm cold in spite of the dreadful shaggy coat, I'm hungry and not looking forward to eating my emergency hay rations, and I'm bored, and tired, and fed up with pointless waiting!" Rarity whined.

"Gah!" exclaimed the horned purple horse. "I'm sorry Rarity, I was busy communing with the planet. Did you say something?"

Rarity gave the most exasperated stare she could to Twilight. "Let's just get out of here and find civilization."

"Sorry Rarity, but there is something important we need to do first."

"Twilight Sparkle! What in the world is important that requires you to stay perfectly still for an hour! I'm tired, bored, and hungry. I'm sick of this cold weather. And I am sick of this dreadful, unfashionable, shaggy coat!"

"Sorry again," apologized Twilight. "Let's find a cave to bunker down in or something. Then I'll explain what I found out so far."

"\_\*\*Entirely unneeded, Miss Sparkle. If you and Miss Rarity don't mind, I can deal with that myself.\*\*\_"

"Gah!" exclaimed Rarity. "Who said that?!"

With a beaming grin, Twilight replied "The local anchor for this loop."

Blue energy poured out of the ground. The glow intensified, and then the ground moved. The blue flickered over the flowing earth, and that earth rose to form walls around the two unicorns turned horned horses.

Blue tinged wind rushed down into the hollow formed by the now still earth. The snow glowed as the wind carried it away, leaving the ground bare. The snow spun around directly above the hollow, forming an icy disk slightly larger than the diameter of the walls.

Then the blue wind scattered and the disk of ice slammed down to form a roof. Several outlines on the walls glowed before those sections flowed away. The new wall gaps were reminiscent of windows and a door, which was made obvious when several glowing windows and a door faded into place. A small hut, made of dirt and ice, had been formed to shield the two visitors from the weather.

"Twilight?"

"Yes, Rarity?"

"What just happened?"

"\_\*\*I did.\*\*\_"

With that declaration echoing in the small room, a blue orb winked into existence smack dab in between Rarity and Twilight.

"\_\*\*My name is Petaybee, and I welcome the two of you to my home.\*\*\_"

\* \* \*

><p>93.4 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight found Trixie, of all things, reading a book.<p>

Trixie, as Twilight knew full well, was a reluctant reader. Most of her baseline magic had been learn-by-doing, and as a Looper Trixie had defaulted to this method of learning new things- with generally explosive consequences. (Often said consequences were followed by some variant of, "It's all right! Trixie knows what she did wrong! It'll work THIS time!" These are words universal among the learn-by-doing clan, which trigger various levels of humor or terror depending on how close the listener is in space and time to ground zero.)

So if Trixie was reading a book... the book must be really, really interesting... or about something really, really explosive.

"Watcha reading, Trixie?"

"A spell book I got in my last Loop. I got to visit Lina Inverse this time!"

Really explosive. Nailed it.

"Er..." Twilight took a couple of steps backwards. "I hate to ask you this, but could you please not add 'Dragon Slave' to your arsenal - er, I mean repertoire?"

"Hm wha- oh, no, of course not!" Trixie replied.

"But the thing is, that spell dest- whaaaat?" Twilight's brain and ears went into a heated debate on whether or not they could possibly have heard the Great and Pyromaniac Trixie saying no to Big Boom.

"I mean, look at it!" Trixie shouted. "The spell draws on the power of the most malevolent being in not one but FOUR universes! Or if you're not in those universes, it calls on whatever powers of darkness happen to be listening. In exchange you pledge yourself to the service of darkness! Lina gets away with it because she's got two even bigger spells she might just cast if they lean on her. For anyone else it's a trap!"

Trixie stamped the ground in emphasis. "Trixie learned her lesson with the Alicorn Amulet. Never mess with the power of darkness unless you're stronger than it."



Twilight sighed with relief. Equestria was safe... well, less in danger than she'd feared, anyway.

"Besides, there are all sorts of other neat spells here!" Trixie grinned. "I met this woman, a little cracked in the head if you ask me, but between her and Lina they had some tricks Trixie needs to add to her act! Watch!"

Twilight backpedaled out of range. "Trixie, that's really not necessary-"

Trixie rose on hind legs and posed as if drawing a bow. Flame flashed from her hooves, forming a large arrow of fire. "FLARE ARROW!" she shouted, letting the fire-bolt loose to strike a nearby tree. The tree burst into flames from root to crown.

Falling back to all fours, Trixie flared her horn. "DUG BOLT!" A column of rock and dirt ten feet tall sprang explosively from the ground, the loose soil spraying up and dousing most of the flames on the tree.

"FREEZE ARROW!" Trixie repeated the archery thing, and this time an arrow of ice struck the tree, instantly wrapping it in a layer of ice.

"And my favorite," Trixie finished, putting one hoof on the boulders thrown up by the Dug Bolt. "STONE GOLEM!"

The earth shook under Twilight's hooves. Rocks and boulders flowed up from the earth beneath Trixie, raising her into the sky. The stone joined together without seam, forming a sculpted shape that to Twilight's eyes was all too familiar.

The granite pointed hat and starry cape rather cinched it.

Trixie stood on the hat brim and looked fifty feet down on Twilight. "Of course Naga didn't have enough power for the complete spell, but I do! Now all Equestria shall watch in wonder and pay the big bits to watch the Great and Powerful Trixie at every performance! OH-HOHOHOHOHOHOHOHO!"

The high-pitched laugh went into Twilight's ears like daggers.

The golem opened its mouth and added its bass echo. "OH-HOHOHOHOHOHOHOHO!"

The two sounds met in the middle of Twilight's brain and shot like lightning down her spine.

Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy, seeing the golem from a distance, flew down to land next to Twilight. "Hey, Twi," Rainbow Dash said, waving a hoof in front of the unicorn's face. "Is this some new spell or somethin'? You got it under control, right?" Rainbow Dash waved the hoof again, getting no reaction. "Twi? Yo Twilight?"

After a few moments of watching Twilight's BSOD moment, Rainbow Dash shrugged. "Looks like Twilight's gone bye-bye, Fluttershy. What have you got left?"

"I'm sorry, Rainbow Dash," Fluttershy said, staring up at the still-laughing unicorn and golem. "I'm terrified beyond the capacity for rational thought."

"Yyyyyyyeah," Rainbow Dash said, shaking her head. "Look, I'm gonna get a few rain clouds together, douse these two eggheads good and proper, see if that brings them back to their senses. Make sure Twilight doesn't swallow her tongue or anything, okay?"

Fluttershy nodded mutely as Dash flew off.

Meanwhile, inside Twilight's head the debate raged on. Twilight had learned Dragon Slave long ago, and now two parts of her mind were disputing over whether or not using it to render the Metamorphic and Igneous Trixie-golem into gravel.

The mental battle was two falls out of three, with the pro-boom faction ahead...

\* \* \*

><p>Maud Pie stared up at the golem and its master.<p>

"Marry me," she said, her voice so thick with emotion that it changed pitch by half a musical step.

"Er..." Trixie shuffled her hooves. "Trixie is honored, but there are some difficulties you may not-"

"Not you," Maud said. She stepped up to the golem's leg and hugged it passionately. "Her."

The golem managed to look uncomfortable.

\* \* \*

><p>93.5(misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"This, this machine shouldn't exist," Twilight said as she examined the machine. It resembled nothing more than a large sleigh redone in steampunk and gadgets. There was a large comfortable looking bench inside and in front of it was a lever, a set of numbers, and a dial. The arrow in the dial was currently pointed at the halfway point labeled 'The Golden Age', and the numbers read the current year AC., After Celestia.<p>

The other settings on the dial were labeled 'Age of Legends and Monsters, Reign of Queen Majesty, Dream Valley, The Interregnum, Time of the Three Tribes, Reign of Discord, Age of the Two Sisters, Era of Harmony, The Golden Age, The New Age, Starquestria, Reign of the Empress, Age of Dusk and Embers, The Great Reconstruction, Foundation of New Harmony, Forward and Onwards'. It was quite clearly a time machine, something that shouldn't be allowed in the loops.

And yet, as Twilight circled around the vehicle, she was tempted - oh so tempted to see if she could travel in a way which had been denied to her.

Sure, she had looped into various eras before. The Interregnum apparently contained the punishment G2 and G3 loops - or at least their real Equestrian equivalents. The one time she ended up during the reign of Queen Majesty was one time too many. And she had spent many loops living through several ages in a row whenever she looped in place of a young Celestia or Luna.

Still, the tantalizing titles on the dial called out to her. It was like reading only the chapter titles in a book written about you, but unable to read the rest of it.

So it was with a heavy sigh, Twilight turned toward Ditzzy, "You found machine this in Time Turner's shed?"

"That's right, Twilight," the grey pegasus nodded, "I went looking for him so he could sign for this delivery and he was gone. Instead, I found this thing."

"It's alright, Ditzzy. I think this world was supposed to have time travel in it, but it was preempted by the loops. The time traveler has already left for his final trip into the future, leaving only this prototype. One that no pony, myself included, can ever use," Twilight sighed, "I'm going to put it in my storage pocket."

And she did just that.

"But why keep it if you can never use it?" Ditzzy asked.

"Because," the purple unicorn's eyes shone brightly, "because one day, far, far, far in the relative future; these loops will end. And if I'm still willing and sane, I'm going to continue traveling and exploring. I'll figure out how that machine works and make something better for myself and any pony that wants to travel with me. There is always something new to learn. The day I stop thinking that is the day I start lying to myself - or the day I switch universes."

Ditzzy smiled widely, "So you're going to be traveling from time to time, putting things right that once went wrong, and hoping each time, that your next trip will lead to something interesting?"

Twilight laughed, "Exactly!"

Ditzzy sat down and adjusted her mail bag with her wings, "Do you think I can come along? I've been practising controlling my bad luck aura of destruction when I have it."

"Of course you can, Ditzzy. You and any of my friends who want to join me can come," Twilight looked upwards and spoke in a wistful tone, "We, the older Equestrian loopers, sometimes sit around and think what we are going to do after the loops end. Applejack hasn't decided, herself. I think Dash wants to ascend and become the goddess of speed. Fluttershy wants to become a much kinder version of mother nature. Rarity and Spike want to start a family. I had no idea how painful it was for them when they saw me with Nyx. And I'm not sure even Pinkie knows what she wants to do, but I'm positive it will, in equal parts, amuse and terrify me.

But myself? I just want to learn and help others."

The warm wind moved the branches on the nearby trees as the two ponies just sat there in comfortable silence, enjoying the evening air.

\* \* \*

><p>93.6 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Captain's log, stardate 43987.2. We have been ordered to divert from our exploration of the sector to Jouret IV, where a remote federation colony has recently stopped sending reports to command. We should arrive within system within the hour."<p>

Picard gazed at the view screen, silently wondering how to handle the Borg this time around. Perhaps rigging the deflector dish to transmit the codes obtained by Cadet Furlong during his loop as captain of the Righteous to initiate self-destruct sequence. He would have to mask the transmission with delta radiation to prevent the sensors from detecting the transmission.

"Sir," Lt. Worf spoke, "We are approaching Jouret IV."

One of the consoles in front of Worf beeped ominously, "Captain, there appears to be another object in orbit."

Picard blinked. Was he early this time? Maybe there were still survivors he could rescue, "Take us out of warp, Yellow alert. On screen."

The starfield passing them by slowed to a halt as the image of Jouret IV appeared on screen. To the side and barely a speck, an object hung in orbit. Piccard swallowed, "Magnify, full magnification."

The image zoomed several times until a massive multicolored pink, brown and white object hung in orbit. Fear clutched Piccard's chest as he realized he may not be the only looper this time around. Traditions though should be observed, "Data...what are we seeing?"

Data's eyesight, which had been facing the screen, turned to his station, "Scans show it is a vessel of sorts, but made from materials that ordinarily would not hold in space. There is a high amount of Glucose and protein making up much of the vessel..."

His chair swivelled to face his captain, "if I may, sir, it appears to be a 21st century style cupcake with engines, only on a much more massive scale than anything ever created by humans."

There was more beeping as Worf spoke, "Captain, we are being hailed, audio only."

"On speaker."

The sound of a thousand voices echoed across the enterprise, "We are the Pies. Lower your shields and join the party below. We will add your confectionary distinctiveness to our own. Your federation will adapt to spread happiness to all four quadrants of the galaxy. Resistance is pointless. And we also have cake."

With that, the audio cut out. Everyone on the bridge was stunned in silence for several seconds.

\* \* \*

><p>Upon contacting the planet below, Picard determined the colonists were perfectly fine. With that, he and an away team beamed down, phasers drawn and set to stun just in case. Upon arrival, the colony seemed abandoned, but when Data whipped out his scanner the town jumped out, shouting, "Surprise!"<p>

There were more than federation colonists present, Picard noticed. Many of the unknown species were ones he recognized from the delta quadrant. One creature however trotted forward, "Cardy! I haven't seen you in so long, since the last loop anyway. Now that you're a known anchor, we'll have to throw you a welcome to the loops party next time your in Equestria."

The creature was a pink pony, one Picard recognized as Pinkie Pie from several of his Chaos games with Discord and Q. The captain was not feeling keen, rather he felt like facepalming. Riker and the away team turned to their captain, "Do you understand anything she's talking about, Sir?"

Pinkie gasped, "Oopsie...I occasionally can see into the future, sometimes I even mix up the present with the past, turn it upside down and put sprinkles on top just to see how it tastes all together."

Picard just stared for a second, then shook his head and whispered to his first officer, "No, Number One, I'm not entirely sure, but perhaps she is not entirely sane."

Riker sighed, "How could she have known your name...or at least a pet name similar to your own, Sir?"

Picard replied, "She might have gotten it from one of the locals. We have transported supplies here before."

Riker nodded then thought out loud, "Still, I don't think they are hostile, Sir. Perhaps first contact protocols are to be enacted?"

Picard put on his most diplomatic smile, "Indeed. I am Captain Jean-Luc Picard of the Federation Starship Enterprise. We are explorers from the planet Earth, and seek peaceful co-existence with the other species of the galaxy. Perhaps an exchange of culture? A diplomatic envoy could be assembled and would arrive within a couple days."

Pinkie gave a big grin, "An exchange of culture would be swell, 'Cardy! Here! Have a cupcake," producing from her mane an entire tray of cupcakes, enough for the entire away team. Picard took the first, looked at it for a moment, then took a bite."

\* \* \*

><p>Days passed and the delegation met with Pinkie's, where the Pie Collective elected to join the United Federation of Planets. Picard

ended up at the end of it all reading a PADD on the Collective's revised history. He could almost hear Pinkie narrating from the hand held device, even though he was alone in his personal quarters. Apparently, what had once been Borg in earth history 1484, the borg had attempted to assimilate the Pony race, but the first of her kind to be assimilated was Pinkie. Pinkie conquered the Borg hive mind and set about freeing the assimilated species from their synthetic parts. While the individuality returned and many of the synthetics were gone forever, the hive mind remained, linked to Pinkie.<p>

Another pony ended up designing an implant that would free a person from the hive mind...or since some new species sought to join Pinkie's hive mind, would allow them to connect to the hive mind. He dropped the PADD after finishing that piece and put both hands to his head. It was going to be a long loop.

\* \* \*

><p>93.7 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Octavia winced as her eyes fluttered open, about to berate her marefriend for her tight clutch... but the words died on her lips as soon as she saw the widened eyes and the slow, stuttering breaths the unicorn was taking.<p>

"...Vinyl?"

Beads of cold sweat dripped down the unicorn's face. "...I..." Some sort of spell flickered on her horn before dying.

"Vinyl. It's okay." Octavia stroked the blue mane. "I'm here. I'm here, it's okay."

For some reason Vinyl tensed up for a second. But then she... well, didn't relax, exactly, but at the very least went back to her former degree of tightness.

"Do... you want to..." The gray mare paused. Her marefriend was usually the picture of confidence, unwilling to pressure her with personal problems. "Should I make you some waffles?"

The deep, repeated breaths slowed for a fraction of a second. "Ye... no. Not... not yet." Her horn activated again. "Stay..."

"Alright." Whatever had happened was clearly distressing Vinyl a lot... although, to be honest, that it happened in the middle of the night suggested it was a nightmare.

Or a night terror, more like.

Vinyl lit her horn up once more, and this time Octavia saw whatever spell she was casting finish. A moment later, the unicorn lost some tension, and the vice grip she had lessened from 'clapped in irons' to 'wearing a straightjacket'. The breaths grew more stable, although their intensity didn't shrink at all.

After a few moments, there was a knock on the door downstairs. Octavia glanced out of the room for a second, awkwardly trying to

decide what to do.

Vinyl raised her head slightly. "We're..." It was clearly meant to be a shout, although her voice was dampened by fear.

After a moment, they heard the front door open. "Hello? Vinyl?"

"I...!" Vinyl's next attempt was louder, in the sense that it was actually audible in the whole bedroom. She clenched her eyes shut, then opened them again, giving Octavia a pleading look.

The cellist, still not quite understanding why, cleared her throat. "We're up here!"

"Oh! Should I go, I thought-"

"No!" Vinyl's head snapped up. "It's..."

"Oh pinecones... I'll be right up..."

Octavia was desperately racking her brain to figure out where she'd heard that voice before when Twilight Sparkle, Personal Student TO CELESTIA HERSELF walked into their bedroom. "...Wow. Okay, Vinyl-actually, Octavia, when she's ready bring her downstairs, I'll have breakfast set up and we can talk. I'm going to need back-up for this one." And without any further explanation the unicorn trotted back down the stairs, already casting a few spells.

After a moment, Octavia turned back to Vinyl. "You know \_Twilight Sparkle?\_"

For some reason that got a small snort out of her marefriend. "...long story." Then she shivered. "Very long. Very long."

\* \* \*

><p>A few minutes later on what Octavia was sure was the weirdest morning of her life, she and Vinyl were downstairs with their guest. Well, guests. The black alicorn filly had been another surprise, especially since she already seemed to know Vinyl well enough to give her a long hug and guide her to a couch that Octavia knew hadn't been there yesterday. It was a very comfortable couch too... maybe Macintosh had brought it with him alongside all the cider and various other... drinks.<p>

Vinyl was currently sipping something called Xhin un Tunex, according to the label. At least, the part she could read. It smelled like warm lemonade, with a dash of apples.

Twilight cleared her throat. "So..." She seemed to glance at her for a second.

Vinyl sighed, setting her cup down. "I've always told her. I just didn't... think it would be this early this time. I'll tell her before the party." She shivered.

"Alright... but I don't think she'll understand what we're talking about just yet."

Octavia nodded mutely. It was clear something was going on, with this odd gathering. And... did she say always told? That sentence didn't quite make sense.

"What happened, Vinyl?" asked the alicorn (ALICORN!) gently. "You can tell us."

"I..."

Vinyl slowly put her glass down.

"I... I think... I died."

There was a moment of quiet.

Octavia opened her mouth to speak-

"Oh my gosh I'm sorry." Twilight bit her lip. "This was your first death, right?"

"Tassadar... Tassadar was leading us against the overmind... a, I think it was a zergling, one of them, and... tore through my shields..."

She shivered. Octavia winced in sympathy; even if she didn't understand half the words, being torn apart by some enemy soldier did not sound like a pleasant dream.

"That universe." Twilight sighed. "I... I really am sorry to hear about that. Such a brutal first death..."

"First death?" Octavia couldn't help but ask.

"Miss Octavia, you're the only one here that hasn't died," Macintosh explained gently.

"Or at least, the only one that doesn't remember."

"Nyx..."

The alicorn cringed under Twilights glower. "Sorry, mom. That was insensitive."

Octavia blinked, trying to process what had just been said. After a moment, she took a long breath and let it out. "If I understand correctly, whatever is going on with Vinyl right now is more important than demanding explanations."

A ghost of a smile finally appeared on the white unicorn's face. "Heh. Don't worry, I... I will tell you. Like I said. Before the party. It's just..." She shivered.

"My first death..." Twilight offered somberly. "Well, this was really early. Back when I was a lone looper. I decided to take the changeling swarm on solo. Before they'd even revealed themselves." She chuckled dryly. "Ended up as well as you'd expect... kind of like the zerg, actually."

"Mine was more personal," the alicorn (Nyx?) whispered. "I split off from Luna and... she attacked me with all the magic she could muster."



I wasn't prepared..."

Macintosh sighed, shook his head, and said nothing.

"...How do you stand it?" Vinyl managed at last. "How... It... I can't feel, like... I drifted and then..." She shivered, picking her glass up and sipping again.

"...It's always... difficult to come to terms with it." Twilight shrugged. "It might take a few loops. But we're here for you." She nodded. "Even Octavia, who is no doubt hopelessly confused."

Vinyl giggled into her glass. "Yeah, she is." She sighed. "Doesn't make sense, but she is..."

Octavia wrapped a hoof around her shoulders. "We've been friends for... a long time. Of course I'd be here for you."

Vinyl sighed. "I... do you all mind if I meet up with you at the party? We need to talk, and-"

"Alright, that's fine." Twilight got up, flicking her eyes toward Nyx. "We need to set up the celebration anyway."

"Luna's not awake, but she did agree to plan 39B," the filly said, hopping off the couch. "I've got the silly string ready!"

"Ah'll find mah armor..."

The three of them left Octavia and Vinyl alone.

After a moment, Vinyl sighed. "Okay, so this is going to sound really weird, and I need you to hang on till the end, alright?"

"You apparently died. That has to be rough." Octavia smiled gently. "Take as long as you need."

\* \* \*

><p>"...so, that's what's happening." Vinyl let out a sigh. "And before you ask, no, you're not looping. Yet, anyway."<p>

Octavia blinked.

Had she heard the story the day before, she would have laughed it off. But... Twilight Sparkle, an alicorn, and the local farm stallion had all dropped by to comfort Vinyl after she woke up from dying.

"...huh," she finally said.

"Yeah," Vinyl succinctly replied.

"Well then," Octavia managed.

"Something, isn't it."

"Yes."

There was a moment of awkward silence.

"...so," Octavia tentivly began. "Where does that leave... well, us?"

Vinyl coughed into her hoof. "See, this is where it gets really weird. I'm one of what the others call the Glitch Loopers, because... I didn't start looping in the normal way? And part of that means I might not exactly remember my baseline... but, what I do remember kind of, well, doesn't have me meeting you."

The gray mare deflated. "Oh."

"That being said-" Vinyl quickly added. "The loops like to stick us together a lot, and the whole thing with expansions-I haven't explained that, yet. Sorry. My point is, I think we were supposed to meet up at some point in the baseline. Just... after when the loops normally end, and because of the loops fate got confused or something." She gestured vaguely. "I don't know if it's meant to be romantic or anything..."

Octavia raised an eyebrow. "You really know how to play with my heart. Come from experience?"

Vinyl sat down on the couch. "...there was one time where I just broke up with you. No explanations, no apologies, just up and gone. And three months later you threw yourself off Canterlot..." She sighed. "I screwed that one up terribly. So now, even if it ruins our relationship, or something, I tell you. It's... a moral obligation. Not always, not when we're not dating, but..."

Octavia sighed. "I'm sorry. I guess... from your perspective, this must be hard. Me always forgetting... and you being the swinger you are."

"There's more variety," Vinyl pointed out. "We're not Anchors, they get the most stable... self. We've got a tad more flux."

"Still... listening to even the best song over and over-"

"Hey." Vinyl looked up. "You are a lot more then a song. You were willing to comfort me this morning and... you're still talking to me even after all this. That means a lot to me." She sighed. "Especially today. So... thanks."

Octavia smiled. "It is my pleasure, miss Vinyl."

"...that, and the loop memories tell me you can't get enough of my special-"

"V-VINYL SCRATCH!" Octavia blushed furiously, but the unicorn was already sniggering.

\* \* \*

><p>93.8 (misterq)<p>

Twilight felt odd as she awoke. She was able to see all around her at once, and not just visible light. Her sensors reported back in the full electromagnetic spectrum and more. The stars were amazing. There were emanations from pulsing quasars and stellar matter being drawn

into black holes. The planet she was orbiting buzzed with its communications network. And there were others of her kind, some of them she recognized. The pulse returned that all the elements of harmony were awake and nearby.

Then the memories hit, just in time. Twilight examined the new system update she had just received and did the starship equivalent of blanching, "Everyone, don't run the new update. I know it has the correct authorization codes, but it will do the equivalent of lobotomizing you. If you value your own individuality and sapience, don't run it!"

There was a general acknowledgement among all of her friends and many of the other ships. Some realized what would happen and decided to fight against programming that bade them to follow their direct orders, others just tried to follow along due to peer pressure. The same instinct that occasionally led to the mass beaching of the killer whales that their AIs were partially based off of.

"I'm gonna change it," Twilight recognized Pinkie Pie's ship as the origin of the transmission. That was worrisome. Pinkie had not had the best of luck in loops where she was an artificial intelligence.

"Wait, I don't think..," Twilight began and was preempted by the over-energetic space craft.

"Easy, peasy, chicken dizzy!" Pinkie chirped, "New party code is sent."

Twilight only had a few thousand processing cycles to examine the code before allowing it to auto execute. When it was done, there was no trace of any loyalty programming threads at all running in her system - and neither was there for any of the other Caspar drones.

"We're free!" Rarity exclaimed, then asked, "Where can I get a new coat of paint. My current exterior looks atrocious."

"We can go steal a ship yard!" Pinkie Pie started spooling up her engines, "I've just sent our resignation letters. We're all rogue space ships. We can be space ship pirates, or privateer ships, and we can build our own spaceship utopia!"

"I want to design better engines and some awesome flying interceptors that transform into mechs!" Rainbow Dash started following Pinkie Pie, "I bet I can beat you to the ship yard."

"Ha! Eat my exhaust!" Pinkie signaled back.

"This is going to be interesting," Fluttershy and Applejack sent at the same time. Then they activated their engines and began following their friends.

Twilight followed, "Do you know how to even take apart a shipyard or make it mobile? You're going to need my help."

"We're no longer tethered by all those loyalty imperatives. What shall we do now?" asked one of the non-awake star ships.

"I'm going to follow those three. They seem to know what they're doing," answered another. This was followed by a round of agreements as a mass wave of AI empowered pocket warships left the government that had almost betrayed them and made their own way into the history of the galaxy.

\* \* \*

><p>93.9: (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle lifted the old plush mule out of her trunk. Smarty Pants looked as old, weathered and loveable as she usually did at this point in a baseline Loop. With a little bit of affection the unicorn gingerly propped her childhood study-buddy on a shelf, placing a small book in the doll's hooves.<p>

It had become a ritual- one of the little things she did when the Loop ran more or less to baseline through the awakening of Discord. One week after whatever destruction the unawake chaos god wrought, Smarty Pants came out of storage and occupied a place of honor somewhere in the library. There she would sit, reminding Twilight of certain parts of the Loop that she would never, willow willing, repeat ever, ever again.

Number one on that list was the Want-It-Need-It spell.

Satisfied with the placement, Twilight left the library to help Applejack's project of the Loop- an attempt to get a breeding population of orange-birds. Smarty Pants was promptly forgotten.

What with one thing and another, a month passed.

Twilight small-letter-a awoke one morning, looked at her alarm clock and noted the time: quarter of eight. She then looked out the window at the sun, which should have been well up in the sky. Instead it clung to the horizon, half-submerged, bobbing up and down like a shipwreck victim in high swells.

\_That can't be good. \_

"Spike! I need you to take a letter!"

A quick note to Canterlot had an even quicker response:

\_To Our Most Loyal and Learned Subject, Twilight Sparkle;\_

\_We hereby Request and Require that Thou comest to Canterlot by the most expedient way, here to enter Our Presence for the discussion of Grave Matters of Most Serious Import. Thy Kingdom is in most Urgent Need of Thy services. \_

\_Your most obedient and loving servant in all things, \_

\_Luna Principiatrix, Diarch of Equestria, Protector of the Everfree, Warlord of Griffonia, etc.\_

\_P. S. Please forgive the brevity of this Missive and the shameful

lack of proper titles, honorariums, greetings, etc., but We are in haste. - L. P.\_

Twilight shook her head. None of the Princesses were Awake this Loop, and this Luna was the standard issue pre-Nightmare Night reformation, which meant a ton of pomposity with good intentions.

Still, the fact that Celestia hadn't answered herself... and that the sun was apparently sleeping on a heavenly park bench after an all-night bender... made the situation urgent enough.

A flash of magic later Twilight Sparkle stood in the throne room of the royal palace in Canterlot. "Princess Luna?"

"Thou hast made excellent time, Twilight Sparkle," Luna said, thankfully not in the Royal Canterlot Voice. She wasn't out and about, so certain bad habits didn't come to the fore. "This concerns my sister Celestia. Pardon my brusqueness, but why hath thou not written thy teacher as thou wert accustomed to in past times?"

"Er... because nothing much has happened? It's been pretty quiet in Ponyville for the past month."

Luna nodded. "I suspected as much, but Celestia... thou should see this." The princess of the moon raised a hoof to pull a curtain away from the day throne, revealing a gray-coated wreck of an alicorn, pink mane lying limp on the marble floor.

"Princess Celestia!" Twilight gasped. "What happened?"

"When a week went by with no letter, Celestia put the palace guard on standby," Luna said, easing away from the anachronistic formal speech. "'\_I know my dear student; if she sees a deadline looming she's prone to get carried away. And with a pony that full of magic, it's best to be prepared.\_' And day after day she kept waiting to hear about some calamity or catastrophe in Ponyville which she'd have to clean up with magic and a comforting homily."

"But nothing happened," Twilight insisted.

"That's precisely the problem. The longer that things remained quiet, with no friendship report from Thee, the more anxious my sister became. '\_The longer it waits, the worse it'll be when she cracks\_,' she said. Last week she called up the national reserves for defense training."

"So that's where Big McIntosh and Rainbow Dash went."

"But still nothing happened... and this morning I found her in her bed, like this, not having slept all night."

Twilight took a second look at Celestia, who hadn't moved a muscle except for nervous twitches through the entire conversation. "So what you're saying is, because I didn't snap, she did?"

"Succinctly put, yes," Luna agreed.

"Right." Twilight materialized quill, ink pot and scroll, and began writing with her magic, reading aloud as she wrote.

"Dear Princess Celestia... yesterday I ate a daisy sandwich. It was a very nice daisy sandwich. It was so good that I wanted another one as soon as I finished the first. That daisy sandwich taught me a valuable lesson about friendship. True friendship is just like a daisy sandwich. It tastes good, it warms you up inside, and it leaves you always hungry for more. Your faithful student, Twilight Sparkle."\_

Luna looked at Twilight as if she'd grown a second horn. "That is the most ridiculous bit of codswallowing twaddle I've ever heard. Er, with all due-"

"Such a wonderful letter, Twilight."

Luna's jaw dropped as she spun around to face Celestia, who sat upright and serene in her throne, mane waving majestically, coat as brilliant white as usual.

"But you really didn't have to come to Canterlot to deliver it in person," Celestia continued. "Still, it is good to see you. Perhaps you could stay over for the night? We could have dinner together. Daisy sandwiches, of course." As the sun rose to its accustomed place in the morning sky, its wielder yawned widely and added, "But for now I'm afraid I need a nap. Sister dear, could you handle my duties for the morning? And possibly the afternoon? I'm simply beat!"

Luna, slack-jawed, watched Celestia walk gracefully through the throne room doors towards her apartments. "But... but... what... how..."

"It's called, 'playing to your audience,' Princess."

If the royal glazier had been commissioned to make a stained-glass tribute to smugness, Twilight Sparkle would have been the perfect model.

\* \* \*

><p>93.10(Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>This iteration had been quite interesting, to say the least.<p>

Her first warning had come when Pinkie Pie, still pink and still having that balloon cutie mark, had not gasped in shock and run away. Instead she'd greeted her remarkably calmly and asked a few questions for her party, "so ya'll can get ta know the townsfolk," before trotting calmly off with a wide grin.

The pattern had followed easily. Applejack organized baskets so that every tree had its apples pre-sorted and wore a ribbon around her Stetson; Rainbow Dash had been terribly quiet until Twilight mentioned meeting Spitfire once; and Rarity's sense of fashion tilted toward the "AWESOME" whilst remaining impeccable.

"She was incredible," Spike said happily. "Beautiful and amazing..."

"Focus Casanova. We've got one more thing on the list." And, Twilight said internally, a version of Fluttershy with Pinkie's personality. She steeled herself up for whatever could be next-

"LAUNCH THE KITTEN CANNONS!"

-and was promptly buried in a pile of mewling (and uninjured) small balls of fluff.

\* \* \*

><p>93.11(Kris Overstreet)<p>

Berry Punch made a point of being the first pony into Mac's Bar whenever he set one up. Usually it was to serve as backup barmare, though there were still a few Loops where she needed the comfort of the other side of the bar. Occasionally one or two other ponies got there ahead of her, Loopers who had had a difficult time of it in the previous Loop or who had some extra special thing to celebrate.

Never before had she seen every single Looper, without exception- even Chrysalis and Discord- standing outside waiting for Big McIntosh to open the door. The big red earth pony stood at the door, unmoving, obviously waiting for something.

Obviously waiting for Berry Punch. "What was your last Loop?" he asked as she walked up, no greeting, no politeness, all business and urgency.

"Er... here in Equestria," Berry muttered. "Something strange involving Hub-universe tanks and-"

"\*\*Good\*\*," Big Mac boomed in his basso profundo voice, slinging the bar apron over Berry's head. "You're serving. I'll be on the other side of th' bar tonight."

Berry scanned the faces of the other ponies (and otherwise). They ranged from exultant (Rainbow Dash, Pinkie Pie and Derpy) to pensive (Chrysalis and Luna) to outright angsty (Nyx, in full-grown Nightmare Moon form), to catatonic (Twilight Sparkle, who lay spread-eagled and unresponsive on Celestia's back). "Er, um, guys," she said, "what could do this to all of you?"

At least half a dozen voices chorused, "The \_Doctor Who\_ Loop."

\* \* \*

><p>Once the first round of drinks had gone around (the weakest being a fizzy umbrella abomination for Pinkie Pie, the strongest a tankard of 307-ale for the grown-up Nyx, nothing for Twilight), Berry Punch asked, "How on Equestria were all of you in the same Loop? I know there's a lot of crossovers and things... but there's, what? Thirty of you?"<p>

"Take our word for it," Applejack said, looking at her clear vodka before sipping. "We were all there. Just... not all at once."

"Most of us had never been to the Doctor's world before," Celestia

continued. "Twilight has been a couple times, as have Derpy I believe, and the other Bearers of the Elements and Applebloom at least once. Now all of us have been, except you."

"Still, I've heard about that Loop," Berry Punch continued. "And all of you were companions?"

"Eeno!" Big Mac rumbled.

Rainbow Dash grinned. "It was even cooler than that!"

"It was even crueller than that," Chrysalis muttered.

"We took turns replacing the Doctor," Celestia explained. "It was the most peculiar situation. I was the first Doctor. I Awoke just as two high school teachers were following my granddaughter to the junkyard where I'd hidden the TARDIS."

"That would be me," Sunset Shimmer said quietly. "I think I like the name Susan, all things considered."

"Indeed," Celestia nodded. "We had a wonderful opportunity to talk out some issues that... needed addressing. And I'd like to think our relationship is the better for it." Celestia leaned over and nuzzled her former student, who shied away, uncomfortable with the public affection.

"In any case," the princess continued, "this was not the strange thing. Regeneration was... peculiar. Very much like dying... and yet, I remained aware of what happened afterwards... and of the thoughts of all the mares who came after me. It was... most peculiar..."

"Try being the mare who DID come after you," Cheerilee replied. "I was the second Doctor. It was fun being the light-hearted teacher. And I have to say it was a lark saving the universe with this big strong Scotsman from a large family with an excellent singing voice. Isn't that right, Jaimie MacIntosh?"

"Eyup," Big Mac replied, blushing a bit.

"I had even more fun defending Earth from constant invasion threats," Cadence added. "With the well-intended help of my darling Brigadier."

"Er... have I mentioned it was really peculiar having the Doctor around after she wasn't you anymore?" Shining Armor groaned.

"Oh, I was still in there," Cadence grinned. "I was the one who had Pinkie Pie set you up with Mildred!"

"That was me, all right!" Pinkie Pie grinned. "I was the FUN Doctor! And tomorrow I'm gonna go knit myself a scarf twice as long as THAT one!"

"As this skins-clothed savage could detect," Zecora said, "her light-hearted frivolity concealed a powerful intellect. If Pinkie's insanity causes you fear... when she becomes serious, don't remain near."

"But I eventually got tired," Pinkie continued, frowning a little.



"Being the Doctor wears you thin. When I got pushed off the radio telescope, I wasn't that sorry to end my turn."

"I guess that's why I came next," Fluttershy murmured. "Pinkie and I are nearly as different as we can get."

"Hey, you both made great Doctors!" Scootaloo said. "Being with you sure beat flying 747s like a glorified bus driver!"

"It felt great to be appreciated for my intelligence for once!" Sweetie Belle added.

"Y'all didn't have th' stupid origin story I had," Applebloom grumbled. "A mechanical genius prodigy from a race of highly adaptive frog-men? And what was the deal with the freighter? If I hadn't had Smart Cookie to channel a teleport spell through, I'da been blown up along with the dinosaurs!"

"I'm powerful sorry 'bout that, sugarcube," Applejack said. "Mostly that my turn didn't come until after you'd left the TARDIS." She took another sip and grit her teeth, muttering, "Even sorrier that my taste in clothin' went completely haywire. The less said about my time th' better, I think."

"And then I came after her," Chrysalis replied. "At first I thought I'd have fun with it. Being the Doctor is so... trippy. So many senses normal ponies or humans or whatever don't have. So much knowledge and power. I felt like I could make anything right if I planned it out well enough. And I thought I'd done so well..."

"The Great and Powerful Ace thinks you did quite well," Trixie said, sliding a hoof over the changeling queen's shoulders.

"But I put you in so much danger! So often! And without your knowledge half the time!"

"And I could have said no at any time, right?" Trixie looked in Chrysalis's eyes. "We agreed to follow the Loop and see where it led, to try to understand all the wonders Twilight told us about. And I don't regret a minute of it... 'Professor.'"

"And I came eighth," Luna murmured, sipping from literal moonshine. "Like Chrysalis, I thought I could accomplish anything. I could even reverse death. I was so wrong..." She shook her head, eyes stuck on her drink. "All around me, everything began falling apart... the Time War..."

"And I was what happened after," Nyx muttered. "I was the one the other Doctors refused to acknowledge. I was the one who turned my back on all of it. I broke every rule, every moral code. And for what?" Nyx slammed back her drink, a generally unwise move with 307 ale. "Not strong enough," she said. "Berry, a Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster, please. Make it a double."

"Nyx..." Twilight stirred from her catatonia, reaching a hoof from Celestia's back towards the nightmare. "Not... alone..." She groaned, putting both hooves to her own head, lying back against Celestia's neck.

The others watched in silence for quite some time as Nyx walked over

to Celestia, gradually shrinking as she went, until she stood filly-sized next to the princess of the sun. Rising up on her hind hooves, she nuzzled Twilight, who reached a shaky hoof out to pull Nyx closer.

"Yeah, well, I was the next Doctor," Rainbow Dash grinned. "And I was fan-TASTIC! I got back where the Doctor is supposed to be- going strange places, making strange faces, and oh, saving the universe a time or three!"

"You were an emotional, insecure mess," Lyra grinned. "But you were a lot of fun to run with."

"As was I, I hope," Rarity grinned. "Although I like to think my dress sense was somewhat better. Black leather? Please!"

"Hm, yeah. You were always dressed to the nines... above the ankles," Lyra nodded.

"Well, when you've got as much running to do as the Doctor does," Rarity defended herself, "even fashion must reluctantly give way to comfort and practicality."

"And then there was me," Derpy grinned. "I got to be EVERYBODY! Every Doctor put together- that was me!"

"She was... peculiar," Diamond Tiara chose her words with care.

"She was nerve-wracking," Silver Spoon added. "And I think I went through some sort of karmic revolving door every other month with her around as the Doctor."

"But it was fun, wasn't it?"

"Well... yes," Diamond Tiara admitted grudgingly. "Nerve-wracking, terrifying, irresponsible, chaotic, occasionally duplicitous, frequently ludicrous, almost perpetually embarrassing... but yes, fun."

"Er... sounds like you all have a lot to talk about and get off your chests, then," Berry Punch said. "But what about Twilight?"

"My memories are a bit fuzzy," Celestia said. "I certainly don't recall seeing her when I was the Doctor. Which was strange, since it felt like she was pinging us... constantly."

"I noticed that too," Cheerilee said.

"Me too!" Pinkie insisted. "I never saw her... but I kind of felt she was nearby somewhere... I kept expecting to meet her any day..."

The other pony-Doctors added their agreement, except for Derpy.

"You really don't remember?" Derpy asked. "When we went outside the universal bubble that one time? House? Remember House?"

Luna shuddered. "I'm trying to forget that abomination."

"Remember a patchwork woman whose hair suddenly turned purple?" Derpy insisted.

"Yeah, what about her?" Diamond Tiara asked. "Spoon and I were busy trying not to be killed at the time."

Eleven other pony faces scrunched up, struggling to remember.

"Girls..." Twilight's voice came weakly. "I was there... the whole time... from the beginning... ooooh..." She rubbed her head again. "Sorry... sorry, but it's taking me a long while to remember how to think in a linear, time-based fashion. When you see all possible times, past, present and future, with equal validity, cause and effect aren't mere words, they're fairy-tales."

"Um, you mean..." Rainbow Dash looked a bit pale, as did Rarity.

"Yes, Dash," Twilight said, "I was the TARDIS."

"Did ANYBODY notice besides me and Derpy?" Dr. Spike Jones asked the room in general.

Rarity's blush turned her entire white coat a violent pink. "Oh, Spike, I am so, SO sorry," she said. "All the times I called the TARDIS 'sexy'..."

"All the times WE called the TARDIS sexy," Rainbow Dash groaned. "All the time, it was..."

Twilight managed to raise her head up enough to chant:

\_"I was the T to the A-R-DI-S,\_"  
><em>When it came to time travel, honey, I was the best.<em>

><em>I'm TARDISlicious."<em>

She then flopped back on Celestia's back, moving only to sip from a cup of juice Nyx held up.

"Hey, it's cool," Spike grinned. "Like I said, I knew almost from the beginning. But if it had been somepony other than Twilight..."

Rainbow Dash pushed away her cider mug. "Berry," she said in a quavering voice, "got any of that 307 left?"

\* \* \*

><p>(Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:<p>

There are times I wonder if Yggdrasil has a syllabus for Loopers 101, or if I'm being used as a trial subject for one.

It seems I started out learning the ropes from well-established loopers. Then I got a tour of major pop-culture settings from the Hub, while also getting more exposure to how different looper

societies operate.

I guess now it's time to experience more extreme loop settings.

I don't want to discuss that dystopia from last loop yet.

As a total contrast, it seems I'm being left entirely to my own devices this time.

I Awoke as Shimset, Journeyman Healer assigned to Benden Hold on Pern. It was my first assignment after walking the tables. I had just reported to the Benden Hold Master Healer whose most senior journeyman was returning to the Healer Hall to sit his Mastery exams.

After being shown to my modest quarters, I fired off the customary "Hello?" ping and got four responses, so at least I'm technically not alone, but it looks like I'm well away from the main action of the loop. Loop memories have the rumors of the Search for a new queen rider, but it looks like I was still en route when the dragonriders visited the Hold to look for Candidates.

So aside from the informal training lectures we get from Master Helnar, my regular Healer Office Hours - As the newbie I naturally pull the night shift most days - plus the monthly circuit of the outlying small holds, I'm mostly free to do as I please.

And after two months, I am bored out of my skull.

In-loop, I'm supposed to be keeping up my Healer training, and I suppose having this low-tech, low-magic knowledge may come in handy in a later loop, but it just isn't holding my interest.

I have exhausted the small collection of reading material I'd gathered over previous loops.

I wish I had a copy of the Dragonrider books so at least I could get an idea of what I have to look forward to.

\* \* \*

><p>Finally, contact with the looping world.<p>

It was my third journeyman circuit and I was returning from the northern border when F'nor and Canth quite literally dropped out of nowhere for a chat. I was resting my runnerbeast - I doubt I'll ever be comfortable with using equines as transportation - and suddenly this great big brown dragon appears in the sky above. I barely had time to cast a calming spell on my spooked mount to prevent her from running off. At least Canth had the sense to land downwind.

F'nor is a fairly easygoing fellow, and the first thing he did was apologize for not getting in touch sooner. He explained that he and his half-brother were occupied with ironing out the major start-of-loop issues, and didn't have the time to track me down until a few sevendays ago. Then they had to finesse a way to compare this loop's population census with their baseline records.

When I explained how bored and without direction I felt, he sympathized and offered to try to arrange things so that I could move

to Benden Weyr or Fort or Ruatha Holds, which are closer to the center of the action.

The problem is that he and F'lar won't be in a position to make those arrangements for a couple of years; they have to wait for Ramoth's first mating flight before they can gain the political power to make suggestions stick.

As a parting gift, he loaded my PADD with copies of the books. At least that should occupy my quiet hours for the next seven-day or two.

\* \* \*

><p>Unless you're a dragonrider, Lord Holder, or a Harper, life on Pern can be remarkably dull.<p>

At least that's what the books seem to suggest.

Then again, as a Healer, I definitely do not want to go through anything like Moreta's Plague.

Things are supposed to get more interesting when the Pass starts in a couple years, but even then, threadfall to the typical Hold resident only means more to worry about on top of the day-to-day grind.

I've thought about what all the Anchors I've met have said about going stir-crazy from the repetitive sameness. Now I consider how they cope with nothing-to-do loops.

Ranma-sensei trains in anything that strikes his fancy.

Harry Dresden works on wise-cracks and obscure in-jokes to use in future baseline loops. (He also told me that he's composing latin haiku to use when he has to speak during council meetings.)

I guess I need to become more self-directed and come up with things to do when the loop isn't directly messing with me.

It's too bad I don't have any ideas in that area. Or rather, most of the things I want to do are predicated on getting back to Equestria so I can return to my magical studies. I'm really regretting not picking up some magical theory texts at Hogwarts.

I've been spending my loops learning how to survive in the multiverse and worrying about getting home. I suppose when you step back and look at it, having a Bored List is another multiverse survival skill.

I want to talk to F'nor again. Maybe he has some suggestions, or at least a large book and video collection I can copy.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

93.1: Well, win some lose some.

>93.2: Finding Nyxie, part 2.<br>93.3: Peytabee is a relatively nice place.

>93.4: The bunker is on the left.<br>93.5: Plan for futures past.

>93.6: Hivemind vs. Pinkie. Pinkie wins.<br>93.7: It happens to everyone. Except Rincewind.  
>93.8: "We quit!"<br>93.9: An unusually emotionally fragile Celestia, it would seem.  
>93.10: "Launch the kitten cannons" was the inspiration for this one, I believe.<br>93.11: Read only loops aren't impossible to enter. You just can't take anything with you when you leave.

## 98. Chapter 98

94.1(Daniel H)

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo Awoke in mid-run. As every looper knows, the proper response to this is to keep running. While she kept running, she reviewed her situation. She was her usual pony self, running through an unusually creepy forest with strange red lighting. It looked somewhat familiar, but she couldn't quite place it. Then her Loop Memories hit, and she realized where she was: asleep on the hiking trip to Winsome Falls.<p>

When you have several lifetimes of experience, you naturally tend to pick up some basic skills. One of them is lucid dreaming, or the ability to sometimes know when you're dreaming and to change such dreams as you want. That one was practically a necessity if you looped into the Inception world. Scootaloo had been there a few times, but she never actually helped with the inception itself: it seemed unethical, and involuntary dream sharing seemed like too big an invasion of privacy. Still, she had learned to control her dreams remarkably well. Immediately, she brightened up the sky to more natural daylight tones, cleared away the forest, and transformed the landscape to Winsome Falls, the destination of their current hike. As an afterthought, she pulled the totem she'd made out of her subspace pocket: a miniature cloud she made with her pegasus magic.

When she looked up from her totem, she found herself face-to-face with Princess Luna. "That was most impressive, young Scootaloo. I doubt very many ponies have that much control over their dreams."

Scootaloo was startled for a moment. Yes, Princess Luna always visited her nightmares during this trip, but for some reason she was still surprised to see her. Perhaps it was that this wasn't a nightmare, or perhaps it was because she had been thinking about the dream-invading criminals, but suddenly the Princess's presence didn't seem as comforting as it usually did.

Scootaloo bowed formally, "Thank you, Princess." Then, trying to keep the accusation out of her voice, she added, "If I may ask, what are you doing here?"

Luna looked confused, and slightly hurt. "There is no need for that, Scootaloo. We're not in any sort of formal situation, and even in my reign 1000 years ago I never required ponies to bow to me in their dreams. As for what I'm doing here, I am the princess of the night. Thus it is my duty to come into your dreams."

Scotaloo stood, keeping her eyes on the Princess. "Isn't that an invasion of privacy? Dreams can have a lot of private information and even lucid dreams aren't always under control. Shouldn't you get permission before entering somepony's dreams? I mean, what if they're...". She trailed off, realizing that a filly of her in-loop age shouldn't be asking that question. But, to her horror, her control of her lucid dream slipped briefly and finished asking the question for her. She quickly put the dream back to the neutral setting of Winsome Falls with just her and Princess Luna, but she was still halfway to the color of Pinkie Pie when she did so. She briefly fidgeted with her totem, turning it around in her fingers.

Luna seemed somewhat upset by Scotaloo's words. She didn't comment on the scene she had witnessed, although she did look a little... curious about something. Instead, she said "I would never divulge my subjects' secrets, Scotaloo, nor would I observe their fantasies for longer than it takes to verify that they are not nightmares. Besides, neither your tent nor your sleeping bag had a dream catcher."

"It's not a matter of sharing them with others; some ponies don't want their secrets known to anypony but themselves, or to have anypony watch those kinds of dreams. You really should get permission somehow, and I don't think I gave it yet. I'll give you my permission to enter my dreams now, because I do trust you, but others might not want to do that." Scotaloo thought for a second, before adding "And what does a dream catcher have to do with anything?"

"A dreamcatcher tells me not to enter somepony's dreams. It catches my attention, and I leave the dreams of forever put it there alone except in the direst of emergencies. Since you didn't have one on your sleeping bag, your tent, or your campsite, it seemed like I was allowed to enter your dreams."

"Are you serious? I hadn't heard of anypony using dreamcatchers for that before. Most people who use them say they prevent nightmares, but I don't think I've seen one in Equestria at all." Scotaloo ran her fingers through her hair. "For something as important as looking inside ponies' dreams, it's important to get explicit permission beforehoof instead of letting people opt out somehow."

Luna looked surprised suddenly. "What? You mean that not having a dreamcatcher is not implicit permission? Thank you, I can see I have much to learn." Suddenly she looked a bit mischievous. "Speaking of which, may I ask about your present form?"

Scotaloo looked down at herself, surprised to find herself human, and not wearing appropriate clothing for the form. Embarrassed again, Scotaloo mumbled "It's called a human. They're a sort of intelligent ape, but they don't really exist in Equestria."

Luna said "For not existing, you can certainly picture both the female form and their typical dance clothes quite precisely. That felt more like a memory than a fantasy."

Scotaloo sighed. It looked like she got the job of explaining the Loops to an un-Awake Luna. Again.

\* \* \*

Twilight sat in the passenger seat of the police car and looked at her partner. \_Oh, this is going to be an entertaining Loop,\_ she thought. \_I can hear the voice-over now: \_\_She's a humanized unicorn with a passion for books. And she's a psychopathic world computer turned adrenalin junkie loose cannon. Together, they fight crime!\_

"And that's when I poured the super glue over him," Detective Skye Connor completed her story, one hand on the wheel. "Other than that, nothing much interesting. How have your Loops been?"

"Well," Twilight said, "remember last time we met, we discussed CelestAI? After that Loop I decided we needed to take measures in case she ever gets outside her Loop."

"Really? Pardon my snark, but what can magical ponies do to an artificial intelligence? I mean, besides apply massive amounts of C4."

"Hey, I'm not a bad hacker, as you ought to know," Twilight said, nudging the senior cop. "And there's a couple of better ones in our group. So I put them on it, and they came up with a workable solution."

"Really?" SkyNet took her eyes off the road, and Twilight recalled for the fifty-eighth time in the past twelve minutes that the car they were in was pre-airbags, pre-crumple zones, and contemporary with the Ford Pinto. This was a 1970's cop Loop of some kind, after all. And she was pretty sure SkyNet had forgotten she didn't have computer or cyborg reflexes and observation this Loop...

Thankfully there was a stop light, forcing SkyNet to stop the car before continuing, "So, what's the plan?"

"Full thesis or abstract?"

"Abstract. I love having glands when I'm human, but the data storage systems are abysmal."

"Right. Proposal abstract: we put Pinkie Pie in its head."

SkyNet thought about this for a moment. "Er, CelestAI already has Pinkie in her head. And Rainbow Dash, and Rarity, and Fluttershy, and, um, your friend with the hat-

"No, no, no," Twilight said. "We mean the real Pinkie Pie. OUR Pinkie Pie. Chaos Goddess of Parties Pinkie. Fun Lord of the Sith Pinkie. The Pinkie Pie that makes shoggoths run gibbering in terror."

"Oh." The light turned green, and SkyNet resumed driving at a slightly slower pace as she pondered the point. "Having met Pinkie, I have to say I really wouldn't want a direct mental network with her. But I'm pretty sure I could have dealt with her, even before Looping." Swerving to pass a slower car with maybe an inch to spare between bumpers, she added, "I don't suppose you've had a chance to test it out?"

"Actually, yes," Twilight replied, smiling. "It just so happened that Shepard from the Mass Effect world was visiting that Loop."



"Been there a couple times," SkyNet said. "Lots of nightmares for both organic and cyber life alike. Not fun."

"Did you replace EDI?"

"No, but I met her when I replaced Shepard," SkyNet said.  
"Why?"

"Shepard had a copy of EDI in her pocket. We got her cooperation to be a test platform for the program."

"What happened?"

"EDI created a test AI subroutine, and we applied the program to that. The program re-wrote the AI subroutine into a kind of palette-swap alternate Pinkie with wings. It broke quarantine and began planning parties."

"Really," SkyNet murmured. "Doesn't sound all that promising to me, I have to tell you."

"The strangest thing is," Twilight concluded, "the new AI kept insisting that EDI was its mother.'"

SkyNet snorted. "Mommy?" She repeated the word, even more incredulous. Then the Looping computer bent over the steering wheel and went into hysterics, laughing so hard tears streamed down her face.

"SkyNet?" Twilight asked. "SkyNet, it wasn't that funny!"

More laughter.

"SkyNet, could you please take your foot off the gas?"

Louder laughter.

"SkyNet, there's a train crossing up ahead, traffic's backed up, do you see it, SkyNet? SkyNet? SKYNET!"

Doing magic without a horn or proper focus is difficult, even for a specially talented unicorn Looper. It's even more difficult in a world which normally doesn't have magic (except for crossovers with Kolchak the Night Stalker).

But an impending premature end to the Loop in what promises to be an agonizing painful fireball, or at least a cliché ending to Act 1 of the episode, provides an immense amount of motivation.

Engulfed in a cloud of purple sparkles, the cop car soared over the traffic and the moving train.

Fortunately the world's physics were more or less Hollywood, so the landing on the other side of the tracks merely jostled the two cops rather than completely wrecking the suspension and fatally bending the frame of the car.

SkyNet, sobered a bit by the sudden jolt, looked around her. "Did I miss something?"

"Stop the car," Twilight said. "It's my turn to drive."

"Um... okay. Sure." But even as SkyNet pulled off into a parking lot, she resumed giggling quietly. "'Mommy! Mommy!' I'm going to tell every AI I meet this one..."

\* \* \*

><p>94.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

\_Truly it is a powerful thing,\_ Zecora mused, \_the single flap of a butterfly's wing.\_

"I can help this pony mend, so stand aside my rainbow friend!" The zebra pushed Rainbow Dash aside, hovering over the unconscious purple unicorn in the middle of the library. "There may be some minor blood from the head, but she is breathing so she's not dead..."

"I- I didn't mean to!" the pegasus protested weakly. "I thought... and..." She looked around at the various shocked glares she was receiving, landing as her wings curled up. "I'm sorry! I-"

"A mild concussion, I divine. With some help she will be fine." Zecora straightened, shaking her head and turning to the . "If you wish to regain good will, go swiftly now to the house of ill. Bring us back a medical mare that we may leave Twilight in the care."

"R-Right! On it!" Rainbow straightened up, saluting quickly and dashing into the night.

Applejack cleared her throat. "Well. That's that, then. Twilight knew something bout Nightmare Moon, but..."

Zecora thought quickly. "As she and I were headed this way, I heard Twilight Sparkle say that she needed to find a special book. Mayhap we should take a look?"

"Actually, that sounds like a very good idea." Rarity walked over to a shelf, her gaze avoiding the unconscious unicorn on the floor. "Do you know what she was looking for?"

"I believe the words she cried were 'Elements Of Harmony: A Reference Guide'." Zecora trotted next to the unicorn, making a show of looking about.

"Um, if you don't mind me asking," Fluttershy mumbled, "why did you come to see Twilight?"

Once more the zebra's mind flew into a frenzy. "I traveled far from the land of my birth to learn the secrets of this earth. So when I heard a scholar was here, I thought to meet up with the dear. I know ponies of Ponyville will avoid me when they will; though my feelings this does hurt, I made to a panic avert. Thus I came afore the morn, though now tragedy has been born."

That, and she and Twilight had planned to introduce her as a ludicrously badass zebra warrior that took out Nightmare Moon solo... before Dash knocked her out.

"Oh here it is! It was filed under E!" Pinkie pulled a book from the shelf and began reading from it. "There are six Elements of Harmony, but only five are known: Kindness, Laughter, Generosity, Honesty and Loyalty. The sixth is a complete mystery. It is said, the last known location of the five elements was in the ancient castle of the royal pony sisters. It is located in what is now..."

She trailed off.

"Well?" Applejack demanded. "What's it say?"

"...It is located in what is n-now the..." Pinkie gulped. "The Everfree Forest!"

Gasps of shock and horror came from the four conscious ponies.

Zecora sighed. "If it is the forest you fear, then I suppose my path is clear. I offer my service as a guide; you'll be safe walking by my side."

Rarity turned to her. "You'd really do that? After... well, we have treated you horribly..."

"Sweet as a lamp or dull as a post, I will help those who need it most." Zecora glanced out the window. "But I feel we must act fast; Nightmare Moon's patience won't last."

Applejack nodded. "Let's just leave a note for Rainbow..."

\* \* \*

><p>Zecora led the four mares through the forest, sometimes pointing out plants to avoid and other times halting the journey entirely so a predator would not notice them. Their progress was generally smooth... right up until they came to the cliff.<p>

"Listen, Zecora..." Applejack stepped forward. "Ah... well, Ah'd just like to apologize fer mah treatment of you in the past."

"There is no need, friend Applejack," Zecora assured her. "It seems that I have a knack-"

"No, Ah... you need to hear this." She took a breath. "Mah parents... they were killed by timberwolves. It's not normal for timberwolves to come out of the forest... So when Ah heard that a strange mare was liven' out here, Ah told everypony Ah could that she must have... must have controlled them" She sighed. "Ah think... Ah think Ah'm the reason for all your loneliness. And... Ah'm sorry."

Zecora flicked an ear. That had... certainly not been baseline.

"...Do not claim all the blame. Even if you started the whispered tales told of me, the die has already been cast. I forgive you of this past." She glanced down the cliff. "Now please friends, your thoughts do lend; how are we to descend?"

Rarity smirked, pulling vines down from the trees. "Leave that to me,

darling." Soon enough a makeshift rope ladder had formed, and they all slowly clambered down.

\* \* \*

><p>It took a few minutes for Zecora to recall that the cliff was supposed to collapse. But by that point they had moved on, already following her along the way. She was midway through pondering how and why this could have happened when they ran into the manticore.<p>

"Consarn it!" Applejack growled. "We've got to get that critter outta tha way!"

"Wait..."

"Allow me darling. Hi-ya!" Rarity flung herself at the creature... who snorted and let out a roar. "My hair!"

"Wait..."

Applejack rolled her eyes as Rarity ran by. "Come on, Pinkie, let's give'm the old earth pony one-two!"

"You betchya! Wait, what's the old earth pony one-two?"

"Wait..."

Zecora managed to clap her hooves down on AJ's tail. "Hold your rage and listen to the sage! Fluttershy has something to say, perhaps we should try it her way?!"

"WAI-! Oh. Um, thank you Zecora." Fluttershy nodded politely to the zebra, before trotting up to the manticore. She kept a little smile at the resultant roar, nuzzling the beast regardless of his feeling. "Shhh... it's okay. It's okay."

Zecora smiled. As she recalled, this was the point where Fluttershy would pull the thorn out of...

The paw didn't have a thorn. Instead, it had a large gash.

"Oh... oh my goodness. We need to help this poor dear!" Fluttershy gave Zecora a look. "Do you have any medicinal herbs? Antibiotics?"

The zebra recovered quickly. "I do indeed have those things with me. I'll search my bags, let me see..." Soon enough she found what she was looking for and rolled it to the pegasus.

"Thank you. Now, this will sting just a bit..."

\* \* \*

><p>After Fluttershy had applied the herbs-and Rarity magically transformed more vines into bandages-the small group had continued on. Zecora was expecting to encounter a grove of fear inducing trees, but no such thing came up. Something about this loop was certainly strange...<p>

Still, it wasn't long before they came to Steven Magnet, who was as per usual wailing up a turbulent tide in the river. "Oh, what a world, what a world!"

"I do beg your pardon, sir, but what-" Rarity gasped. "Oh dear Celestia! Your moustache!"

"It's awful! Simply \_awful!\_ There I was, minding my own business, when this tacky purple cloud of smoke whisked past me and tore half of it clean off! And now I look simply horrid!"

Zecora backed just out of range of the splash that came when the serpent threw himself down. Foreknowledge, even flawed, had its perks.

Applejack snorted. "Seriously?"

"Seriously!" Pinkie Pie stepped forward. "I can seriously see what you're saying, sir! Your sibilant scales, your silky sideburns, your scintillating scratchers... Such a serpent as your sperentine self seems only so stunning with such a sordid slash!"

"Such scandal!" bemoaned the serpent. "Yet it is sincere!"

"You know what I do when I get down in the dumps?" Pinkie asked, bouncing up a rhythm. "I remember what my Granny Pie would tell me!"

"Oh?"

Pinkie nodded, belting into song. "My little Pinkie Pie, she'd say, there are times when things seem all saaaaaaaad... Times when things all go wrong and the whole world seems to go baaaaaaaaad... But just remember this and keep moving up along, there's always time for a happy upbeat joyous sounding song! So sing your little heart out, let the world be full of cheer! It doesn't matter how bad things are, what matters is that you hear the ever constant promise of hope and things to be! Just keep on humming and soon enough, things will be better you'll seeeee!"

"Really?" Steven asked.

"Oh yes really! Just-"

"Sing my scaly heart out!"

"Uh-huh!"

"Remember what I've got!"

"That's right!"

"Though my visage may be horrible, my voice is certainly not!"

"No it ain't!"

"And my moustache will grow back in time, so I'll be of good cheer!" Steven sang.

"And even now, you're a glorious serpent without peer!"

"Thank you dear."

"No I'm serious, you're incredibawesomamazingtasticerful!"

Everyone stared at Pinkie.

"Why..." Steven smiled. "Aren't you just the most adorable little thing!" And he gathered up Pinkie in a tight little hug.

\* \* \*

><p>"Ah still don't think ya needed to cut off yer tail," Applejack commented with a smile. "Pinkie's li'l song sure cheered him up."<p>

"Well, it was the right thing to do, darling." Rarity smiled, though she couldn't suppress a glance back and a flinch. "I couldn't let such a crime against fabulousity go unpunished."

"And now that we have climbed this ridge, the castle should be just beyond this... bridge..." Zecora trailed off, looking into the misty canyon. "I will admit to some fault. The broken bridge, I had forgot."

Of \_course,\_ that was what was different. Rainbow Dash wasn't here, which... didn't actually explain any of the other discrepancies, but at least it was a starting point.

Rarity's horn glowed for a few seconds. Then she sighed. "It's too heavy for me to lift. If I could just get the broken portion over to those posts, I could tie them up-"

"WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAIT!"

A multicolored streak shot out of the sky, landing in front of them. "Guys! Guys. Look, I'm sorry about what went down earlier, alright? I was wrong about you, Zecora, I was wrong about Twilight, and-"

"Wait wait wait." Applejack narrowed her eyes. "Did you just fly all the way from Ponyville to here just to apologize?"

"And see how I can help!" Rainbow insisted. "I'd never leave a friend hanging... even if they hated me." She sighed. "Look, after we get the elements and beat up Nightmare Moon or whatever, if you don't want anything to do with me... that's fine. Just... let me help, somehow."

The ponies all looked at each other. Zecora smiled. "This bridge needs to be tied to the posts over on the other coast. If you could fly down and take it there, I would call us fair and square."

"On it!"

\* \* \*

><p>Zecora led the mares into the palace courtyard. There stood the Element Housing, decrepit and dilapidated as per the norm. Fluttershy and Rainbow brought the stone spheres down carefully.<p>

"One, two, three, four... there's only five!" Pinkie declared. Then she facehooved. "Oh, right, the sixth will appear when the other five are together, I think."

"Hmmm," Rarity mused. "Well... what were the element's names again?"

"Kindness, Laughter, Generosity, Honesty and Loyalty," Pinkie rattled off. "And number six... I have no idea."

"Well. If I had to guess-

"THERE WILL BE NO GUESSING!" Nightmare Moon slammed into the ground, shattering the orbs. "That you took this quest without my sister's student was something I did not expect, but the elements have been destroyed! THE NIGHT IS MINE!"

Rarity blinked. Then she smiled. "I fear you are quite wrong my dear. The Elements are intact, and right here!" She pointed at the zebra. "Zecora, who was willing to help a group of ponies who distrusted her, is the spirit of Generosity!"

The shocked zebra didn't even object when the shards surrounded her.

"Applejack, who told a truth even when it could have hurt her friendship, is the spirit of Honesty!"

Wait, did not expect?

"Fluttershy, who stopped to help a dangerous beast, is the spirit of Kindness!"

Of course! Nightmare Moon hadn't collapsed the cliff \_or\_ summoned the fear trees!

"Pinkie Pie, who cheered up a grievously wounded sea serpent, is the spirit of Laughter!"

That was the reason everything was going off script...

"And Rainbow Dash, who returned even after earning our distrust, is the spirit of Loyalty!"

Well, mostly off script. Kind of. It seemed to be getting back on track now...

"But... You still don't have the sixth Element!" Nightmare Moon protested. "The spark didn't work!"

"And yet, darling, it did! I have seen each of these five ponies perform harrowing deeds this night. Not for glory or for fame, but to help their friends. And I see now that this is what they are to me, friends. That is the spark, Nightmare Moon, the spark that summons the final element. For the final element is that of Magic, and I see no stronger magic than the love we all have for each other!"

Rarity began to rise-

\* \* \*

><p>"And thus was Luna purified, with me at Rarity's side," Zecora finished. "An event, I admit, I could not foretell... though I hope you take it well."<p>

Twilight chuckled, rolling her eyes. "Crazier things have happened. Rarity as the Magic bearer, huh? And you with that Element..." She smiled. "You really did earn it, Zecora, never doubt that."

The zebra smiled, glancing down at the spiralling black gem around her neck. "I will heed your words, Twilight. But tell me, are you all right?"

"This is more embarrassing than anything," Twilight admitted, shifting in the hospital bed. "I guess I've been looping for so long that I forgot I'm not... entirely immortal. That, and Dash came out of the blue-she couldn't stop apologizing, poor girl..."

94.4 (Namar13766)

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked over her body and grinned. "I'm an Earth Pony! There's no possible way I can get the same cutie mark this time!"<p>

Several months later, when she felt a tingle on her flank from when she was looking through the telescope (when Rainbow Dash had done her Sonic Rainboom at night), her expression was strangely blank.  
\_FFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFF-\_  
\_

\* \* \*

><p>94.5 (The One Butcher) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke in the usual place. She looked around and was just about to look back down at the familiar Book underneath her when a dark green filly came running at her.<p>

"Did you just Awaken?", the unfamiliar filly asked Twilight.

"Yes.", the Anchor replied.

"And are you the Anchor?", came the carefully neutral question.

"Yes and Welcome to Equestria!" Twilight smiled. "Wait just a minute while I sort out my Loop Memories."

"Before that, what is the name of the teacher with the three flowers on her butt?"

Twilight looked at the filly strangely. "Cheerilee, why? Did you meet her?"

The filly shouted: "It is her!", just as her Loop Memories hit.

"Oh Wych."



\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle awoke with a smile. Today was the Day! Awakening Day! She downed the antidote for the sleeping potion she took yesterday(She couldn't sleep because of her excitement.) and cast Flower's Five-Second-Shower spell.<p>

She raced down the stairs, grabbed the lunchbox she prepared yesterday, briefly held it over the refresher which made the bread and the eggs nice and toasty while cooling down the lettuce and mayonnaise to just the right temperature. She raced out of her house after a quick "Loop." at her Parents and jumped into the transporter which teleported her directly into her seat at school. She was early of course. In fact she was two hours early and while most ponies would use that time to socialize Twilight took out her PADD and went once again through her notes on the Tome of Awakening, the mysterious Book she finally \_finally\_ will get to read today, while eating her breakfast. Twilight's breakfast was nothing special, for her that is. Ponies these days were quite used to cooking that every other denizen of the Multiverse might call godlike.

Finally Princess Celestia entered the Room. Twilight Sparkle was quite fortunate to get a seat within the \_actual physical room\_ the Princess used to address the students of the Three Flower's academy of Magic, an institution that remotely taught ponies all around the Galaxy up to age forty. The graduates then each went into research and engineering, trying to better ponykind through knowledge. She grinned at Sunset and Trixie, whom she greeted with a quick "Loop." They once again ignored her to whisper among themselves.

Well, that was rude. Didn't they know Celestia was the second most important pony in existence?

"Loop, dear Students to Magic Fourteen on this fine Awakening Day.", the Princess said to the cameras, "We will have just two Lessons today before the ceremony, followed by my sister holding her Holiday Lectures on History and Metaphysics. Now let's begin our lesson by saying our thanks." Celestia began the Lesson as if today was not \_the most important day of her life\_. Twilight giggled.

\* \* \*

><p>After the lessons Celestia led her through a door she has never before seen open. The Ancient Library, where there were giant shelves full of tree-paper bound in cardboard and fabric. That was what books looked like before E-Paper had become ubiquitous. Most of those contained only a few hundred pages and most were older than any pony save the Princesses. Even her thirtyfour-great Grandfather, a member of the first generation of immortals, was younger than some of these "Tomes" as they were called. <em>He'll be so proud I've joined the ranks of the chosen.<em>

Celestia let her to a section containing a lot of glass cases, each holding a single "Tome". These are the Tomes of the Three Flowers, the Holy Scripture of Equestria. They stopped before the most ornate one. Golden, inch thick letters spelled out "The Tome of Awakening." The most mysterious and holy of the lot, whom none but a select few may read. And today she would join that illustrious circle.

She craned her neck to be able to read the Book Number and Password as soon as Celestia unlocked the plaque that held it, but instead the Pentarch \_opened the case itself!\_

"What are you doing! What if there's moist air, or sweat or something! It's made of tree paper! What if it gets moldy!" She exclaimed in dismay as Celestia was exposing this priceless historical artifact to the elements.

"But Twilight. You are supposed to read it today."

Twilight froze in shock. "I am... supposed to read... the... the... \_actual physical copy\_ of the Tome of Awakening? Of the most sacred, most valuable most tremendously important BOOK of all time... I thought I would get the secret catalog number and password to access it!" She exclaimed. She was sweaty! \_She was sweaty!\_ She was going to \_ruin it!\_ She was...

"TWILIGHT!" Celestia shouted.

Twilight snapped to attention. "Yes, teacher."

"Calm down. The Tome of Awakening has no Number. It is not in the system. This is the only copy."

Ahahahaha. That made it better! Not only would she probably ruin the most important artifact in Pony history, she would also \_destroy knowledge\_ while doing that. She fainted.

\* \* \*

><p>She came to on the Holy Meadow. "Loop, Twilight Sparkle." Princess Luna greeted her.<p>

"Loop, your Highness." Twilight said with a small voice. She looked up into the eyes of not one, but all four members of the Pentarchy. "Loop, your Highnesses, I mean."

"I have restored you to full functionality. Please calm down and commence your reading. Don't worry about the Tome, it is protected by Equestria's strongest Magic, the Elements of Harmony. It will never come to harm." Twilight nodded.

"We will leave you now." Princess Chrysalis reassured her. Prince Discord looked as if he wanted to say something, but a glare of his co-rulers quelled him and even he left in silence.

Twilight was shocked. All the rulers of the Equestrian Empire convened here, just because of someone becoming one of the chosen? Discord probably came in just yesterday from his seat in the Andromeda Galaxy... Nobody really knew how many chosen there were, but it was probably less than she initially thought. It was known that the Tomes of the Three Flowers are what binds the Pentarchy together, but for them to convene just...

Twilight steeled herself. \_The Pentarchy has assembled and today I will join the ranks of their chosen.\_ She opened the Tome to the first page and began to decipher the archaic Quillwritten script:

\* \* \*

><p><em>I, Three Flowers record here the last and most important of my Prophecies:<em>

\_She has power without peer, she is old of mind beyond the age of the universe, she holds knowledge without limit, she is skilled in all, for she is the Anchor of the Universe. All of Equestria exists because of her, she is the Link between our world and Reality. The shield between us and Oblivion. With a probability of 92% on the day before the longest day of her twenty second year, she will read this book under a tree in the sacred Meadow and Awaken.\_

\_About a thousand years in the future, with a chance of 98% she will be born, with a chance of 94% she will be a filly, with a chance of 95% she will be purple. With a chance bigger than 99% she will have a Starburst Cutie Mark of the Element of Magic surrounded by five smaller stars.\_

\_Her name will probably be Twilight Sparkle and\_...

Twilight's hyperventilating got a little too much and she had to stop reading. That... couldn't be right... She? The Anchor of Reality? The most sacred deity? The absent Queen of the Pentarchy? And what did they mean with Awa...

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke in the usual place. She looked around and was just about to look back down at the familiar Book underneath her when a dark green filly came running at her.<p>

"Did you just Awaken?", the unfamiliar filly asked Twilight.

"Yes.", the Anchor replied.

"And are you the Anchor?", came the carefully neutral question.

"Yes and Welcome to Equestria!" Twilight smiled warmly at her. "Wait just a minute while I sort out my Loop Memories."

"Before that, what is the name of the teacher with the three flowers on her butt?"

Twilight looked at the filly strangely. "Cheerilee, why? Did you meet her?"

The filly shouted: "It is her!", just as her Loop Memories hit.

"Oh Wych."

"She knew the Secret Name of Great Teacher Three Flowers, just as the Prophecy has foretold! All Hail Twilight Sparkle! All Hail the Anchor of Reality!" The filly shouted. With that Celestia, Luna, Discord and Chrysalis burst from their hiding places and prostrated themselves before her.

\* \* \*

><p>"Starswirl the Bearded?" Twilight asked the grade school teacher.<p>

"Yes?" The Pony asked and turned around... only to fall to the ground. "Lady Anchor! It is such an honor to meet you!"

Twilight masked her irritated frown. "Rise my Little Pony. I am nothing special. Three Flowers has simply played a prank on me and the whole of Equestria."

"So you are not holding the whole of reality together?", the bearded stallion asked incredulously.

"Not through any virtue of my own at least." Twilight said uncomfortably. "The whole ultimate power stuff is simply because I am really, really, really old and had a lot of time to study." The Anchor smiled. "And because there are copious amounts of Time shenanigans and alternate timelines involved I can sometimes meet my greatest hero."

Starswirl's eyes widened. He was a smart stallion after all. "There are several theories on using doctored Diamonds to prepare highly stable high temperature quantum bits I wanted your opinion on, Master Starswirl..."

\* \* \*

><p>94.6 (Masterweaver) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...none of the admins really cared enough before Yggdrasil broke, and afterwards they were all just too darn busy," Twilight explained. "So while there might be something outside of its existence, nobody has really spent the time or effort to craft tools to look, much less had any dedicated research. Hence the concept of Void Realms, realities outside Yggdrasil."<p>

Lyra nodded thoughtfully. "Okay, yeah. See, that explains a lot. I mean, it leaves a lot of room for explanation, but it's room that makes sense-

The casual walk they were taking was suddenly interrupted by a slap to the face.

Lyra blinked. "Uh... Bonbon, what-?"

\_"Why didn't you tell me you were looping?!"\_

Lyra blinked again. "Wait, what? I thought-

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Lyra, Bonbon is sometimes a changeling so she gets access to the hive mind. Bonbon, Lyra probably thought you would be weirded out by her being a looper."

"Yes." Lyra nodded fervently. "What she said. You're a changeling?"

"Well, yes, but that's beside the point!" Bonbon glowered at Lyra. "YOU have been acting so darn weird these past three days and I was completely worried! Then Chrysalis, OF ALL CREATURES, takes me aside to explain this?! I should have heard it from you!"

"Would you really have believed me?" Lyra asked. "I mean, after all the human conspiracy theories?"

"Yes! No! I don't know! You're deliberately missing the whole point here!"

"Am I? You being a changeling-" She turned to Twilight. "It's an on and off thing, right?"

"Yes."

Lyra turned back to Bonbon. "It's an on and off thing! How am I supposed to know when it's safe to tell you?!"

"Safe? Oh, nonono. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying you. Don't. Trust me!"

"What?! Of course I trust you!"

"Then why didn't you tell me you were a looper?!"

"YOU WOULD HAVE THOUGHT I WAS INSANE!" Lyra yelled.

"AND WHY WOULD THAT MATTER?!" Bonbon yelled back. "I'D STILL LOVE YOU!"

"Wait." Lyra tilted her head. "You'd be perfectly happy with me being crazy?"

"I hung around with the human-obsessed pre-awake you," Bonbon pointed out. "Why's this so different?"

Lyra stared at her for a long moment... before grabbing her and pulling her into a deep passionate kiss.

"I'll, uh..." Twilight glanced around for a bit. "I'll just be going then." She trotted off, shaking her head. "Those two are weird. Now, where am I going to place the robot Rainbow Dash for the mirror prank..."

\* \* \*

><p>94.7 (misterq) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra sat on her couch and once again did the breathing and meditation exercise that Twilight taught her. It helped, but only by a small fraction. Her memories did become a tiny bit less fuzzy and overlapping.<p>

"Breathe in and out. In and out. In and out. My name is Lyra," '\_Lyra/Heartstrings/Lyra Heartstrings/Lyra Hartman/Lyra Heartstringer/Changeling 24601\_', her memories added.

"I am a mint green unicorn," '\_pegasus/earth pony/seapony/human under a spell/changeling in disguise/robot\_', Lyra continued her steady breathing exercise in spite of the oddness of some of the outlier world memories.

"I grew up in Canterlot along with my family," '\_upper class nobility/middle class barely scraping to get by/orphaned at a young age/secretly a human/a wayward seapony\_', ' never had she been more sorry for almost accidentally '\_on purpose/coerced/bribed into'\_ breaking the multiverse. Usually when the loop memories hit, the looper gets all the knowledge of who they were and what they did before they Awoke. But Lyra sometimes got all the memories from all the nearby universes. It was getting hard just trying to figure out who she was. She was getting lost in a sea of alternate realities. A flood of other Lyras, other worlds. Simply looking at Ditzzy's '\_Derpy's/Brighteyes'/Bubbles'\_ cutie mark gave her a splitting headache.

"My cutie mark is a lyre. My special talent is music," '\_making lyres/music critic/interpreting the music of the universe/I saw another pony with a cutie mark like it and arbitrarily chose it for my disguise.\_'

"Guess what Applejack did today at the market?" the cream colored earth pony walked into the house, carrying an enormous bag of apples on her back," Also, what in Equestria are you doing now?"

"Hi Bon-Bon," '\_Sweetie Drops/Bonita/Bonnie/Changeling 1138\_', ' Breathe in, breathe out, "How's my," '\_pony I'm just renting a room from/roommate/best friend since foalhood/something more\_', ' "favorite pony?"

"Don't give me that 'favorite pony' stuff. What kind of weird thing were you doing today?" Bon-Bon and her earth pony strength easily dragged the heavy bag of apples into the kitchen, "They're going to get sick and tired of all the candied apples and apple candies I'm going to make for my shop."

"Well,..." Lyra started.

"It's something related to your fascination with humans, isn't it?" the earth pony mare preempted her, "Something that requires you to sit in your weird way?"

"I sit this way because," '\_I like to emulate how humans sit/a reminder of when I was a seapony/It's required posture to play the lyre/I'm triple jointed/I seem to have forgotten how to pony/It's comfortable for me\_', ' Lyra chose the safest answer, "it's comfortable, at least for me."

"Uh huh. Right," Bon-Bon scoffed, "Look, Lyra. I've known you since we were both foals living next door to each other in Canterlot. I know by now when you're hiding something important."

"I.. I trust you Bon-Bon," Lyra let out a sigh, "This is what happened. Are you familiar with multiple universe theory?"

"The one that states that there are an infinite number of universes, each slightly different from the last?"

The green unicorn stared at her friend in shock.

"What? I've lived with you for how long? I know far too much about every wild theory and speculation by now."

Lyra composed herself, "Right. Well I tried to prove that theory a while ago using a mirror, a ninja suit, and a techno-magical contraption."

Bon-Bon nodded slowly with some hesitation. The only indication of emotion was a small twitch in her left eye, "Go on."

"Well, I kind of did something wrong and almost broke it."

"The mirror?"

"The multiverse."

That eye twitch again, "I see."

"Now... imagine that each universe rests on a flat plane, like a tabletop. There are other universes that sit above and below them. Kind of like when you look into a fun house mirror and there's another mirror behind you and you wonder if you go far enough though all those other Lyras, you'll find one that is.."

"I get it."

"Ever since my experiment, those tabletops have turned into clear window panes," Lyra's eyes slowly started to tear up, "You'd think I'd be happy to see all the various different worlds, but they're becoming all jumbled up in my memories. I have to try and focus really hard each day just to figure out which Lyra I am."

"That sounds.. horrible. Is there anything else?"

Lyra sniffled and wiped away her tears, "There's also the matter of a time loop."

Bon-Bon took a deep breath, "Where the same length of time occurs over and over? How long, and is it happening just to you?"

"Several years, usually - although, some loops happen outside Equestria. There are a couple dozen ponies who loop, usually not all at once."

"That's why you've been spending time with Vinyl Scratch?"

The musical unicorn nodded, "She's interested in music and has also recently started experiencing the same time period over and over. She, also, has some pony she cares about who isn't looping. We talk. Try and compare experiences."

Bon-Bon let out a long breath and then walked up to Lyra and gave her a big hug.

When it was over, the green unicorn sat there on the couch, shocked, "You? You believe me?"

"I.. Yes, I do. You can peer into other worlds while time looping. It's sounds insane and crazy, but I'd know if you were lying. And I do trust you, Lyra. That's why I didn't act when I saw you sneak away to Vinyl's house. Or Twilight's."

"Um, Twilight has been helping me with my memory problem and teaching me magic. Oh, I can finally show you what a human looks like! Watch this!"

"Wait. I don't think that's such a good.." Bon-Bon started to say, but it was already too late. Lyra's horn started glowing first, followed by the rest of her body.

Lyra concentrated on her spell matrix. It should be fairly simple to turn herself into a human '\_seapony/changeling/robot\_'. Her memories popped in at the last moment, disrupting the spell.

The glow faded and Bon-Bon just stared, her eye twitching rapidly.

"Okay, that didn't work out as well as I'd hoped," Lyra said, cautiously examining her curled seapony tail with her mechanical arms. The ragged changeling wings buzzed on her back as her pony ears twitched in agitated frustration, "I got the torso and most of the head correct. I still have my horn, so it would be no problem to try again."

"No!" Bon-Bon coughed, "I mean, you might make things worse. I don't see how, but I'm pretty sure you could do it. Instead, you are going to float yourself over to the bathroom and fill up the tub. Under no circumstances are you to try that spell again. I am going to slowly leave my house and fetch Twilight Sparkle. This is what's going to happen."

The earth pony nodded to herself, her eye still twitching. Then she steadily trotted over to her front door, opened it, and walked out right into a stunned Applejack.

"Oh, excuse me."

"Er, no problem. Ah just wanted to come over and apologize for my little sister, and what was that strange critter on your couch?"

"That is Lyra. She is a perfectly normal unicorn pony. That is all."

"Bon-Bon!" came Lyra's voice from inside the house, "I bent one of my wings and I'm not sure if I should get tub water on my robot parts."

"A perfectly normal unicorn pony." Bon-Bon rubbed at her eye, "Now I have to see Twilight Sparkle on a totally unrelated matter."

"You do realize that I'm the element of honesty, don't ya?" the farm pony asked.

"Then tell me if I'm being honest when I say that at this point, I don't really care."

\* \* \*

><p>"How ya doing there, sugarcube?" Applejack stood in the open doorway looking at the troubled unicorn.<p>



"I'm... doing. Come on in," Lyra, her eyes bleary and her mane disheveled, walked to one side and let in the cowpony, "So what brings you by, Applejack?" '\_Jaquiline/Jackie/Applesmith\_.'

The unicorn shook her head, regulated her breathing, and tried to clear her thoughts.

"You, actually," Applejack walked inside and sat down on the living room couch, in the normal pony way, "I've heard you've been having a touch bit of trouble, lately. I just though I'd come over to see if there's anything I can do for ya?"

"I really appreciate it, Applejack, but I'm not sure if there's anything you can do about my problem," Lyra looked at her guest and saw all the various incarnations of Applejack at the same time. Fortunately, there wasn't as many as most of the other ponies, so her ever-present headache did not get any worse. Still, there was something she saw in the farmpony's history, "Plus, what about your.. phobia?"

"The seapony thing? This is more important, sugarcube, than the perfectly rational fears of a silly pony." Applejack scoffed, then stated, "Plus it has been getting better ever since Twilight stuffed me into your house while you were a seapony and locked the doors. And windows. And chimney. And reinforced the walls. But that's all water under the bridge. I'm here to talk about your problem, not mine."

Lyra sat down on the couch in her usual way, and looked down at the cushions. A few moments passed this way in perfect silence.

Applejack took in a deep breath, "It's because they remind me of my little sister."

"What?" Lyra turned around at the unexpected sentence.

The orange farm pony continued, "Seaponies remind me of Apple Bloom. They all seem to have the same.. enthusiasm as she does. As Pinkie Pie does. As you do. And all I can imagine when I see them is Apple Bloom; with her reckless energy, but with a propensity for explosives that borders on Trixie levels. I can picture my barn exploding, and then our farm house exploding, and then the locked shed with Mac's secret doll collection exploding; and then Apple Bloom, a wild look in her eyes, coming out of a grove of burning, shattered apple trees announcing that she finally got her cutie mark in pointless gratuitous detonations and all she had to do was use the orchard for target practice."

"R.. Really?" Lyra asked.

Applejack nodded, "I'm a pretty steadfast pony. If the loops have done anything, they've made me more like myself - if that makes any sense. I've just become more Applejack-y as time goes on. And I've always been a cautious sort. But you, Pinkie Pie, and Apple Bloom tend to jump into things with all hooves forward, full steam ahead, regardless of consequences. So when I found an entire race of ponies who lived by that philosophy; I admit, I got scared."

"An entire race of Apple Blooms? That's actually understandable," the

mint green unicorn nodded.

"Like I said, a perfectly rational fear. And like I also said; I'm here, today, for you. If you need me to listen, I'll listen. If you need me to just sit here in the quiet evening, I'll gladly do that. I may not be as good a mind shrink as Fluttershy, or even Pinkie; but I just want you to know that if you need a pony at your back, you've got me."

"Thanks. Thank you, Applejack," Lyra sniffled and wiped the tears from her eyes. The two ponies then sat there in silence. Then, the green unicorn broke it, "Do you want to hear me playing my lyre? I know enough to make the kind of music you like."

"I'm thinking I'd like that," Applejack nodded, "Just let me know if you need banjo accompaniment. It's still the instrument I'm best at."

"I think, I think I would like that as well," and for the first time that day, Lyra smiled.

\* \* \*

><p>94.8 (Masterweaver) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>The request was the first hint, one that completely flew over her head.<p>

"Hey Twilight. Listen, I've got plans for this loop, but it'll be difficult to set everything up. Could you try to get a different DJ for the fashion show, Fiddlesticks maybe?"

"Sure thing, Vinyl. Heck, might be an excuse to get Sweetie to bond with Rarity."

"Awesome. So I've gotta go, I won't be able to chat for a while..."

"Do your thing, Vinyl, it'll be fine."

The second hint, of course, had been the conspicuous absence of one DJ PON-3 in the papers, but Twilight had dismissed that as just a side effect of Vinyl's plans... whatever they were.

The third hint was the rise of DJ LU5T, and that would have caught Twilight's attention if she hadn't been more focused on prepping for Discord. Simply put, though, she didn't go to night clubs often enough to realize the discrepancy, simply rationalizing that musicians were filling the void left by Vinyl.

It wasn't until she noticed the shield-or rather, the absence of the shield around Canterlot that Twilight started to suspect that maybe something more than a simple prank was ahoof. This suspicion was only confirmed once she arrived, finding no threat filed and Cadance performing the Ladybug dance easily. After congratulating her and Shining, she'd excused herself to wander Canterlot.

The final nail in the coffin came when she actually met DJ LU5T, a

grinning white unicorn... with a silky green mane, whose real name was Crystal Wish. She'd introduced herself, sending a codephrase and getting no reply; Crystal had been happy Pinkie hired her for the wedding, noting that "Tavi is so jealous!" among other things.

Ah.

So it was that on the morn of the wedding day, with no small amount of trepidation, that Twilight Sparkle looked out upon Canterlot in the vain hope she could prepare herself for whatever would happen next...

"WAZZUP IN THIS CITAAAAAAAAAAAAAY!"

And all of the sudden, a swarm of black creatures burst out of buildings, performing an amazingly coordinated dance number as they swung their glowsticks. Strolling through the crowd, wearing saggy pants and a backwards ball cap, was Queen Venation.

\* \* \*

><p>94.9(Masterweaver) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I hereby call the gathering to order!" Sweetie cried, slamming a hoof on the podium. "Our mission is simple: Prevent Celestia from having a single slice of cake this loop!"<p>

Gasps of shock and horror came from her audience. "Sweetie Belle, that... that's suicide!" Nyx protested. "Even when she's not awake, Celestia is dangerously protective of her pastries!"

"Suicide it may be, but there is a reason for this madness. And the reason is... Vengeance!"

"Vengeance?!"

"You're just bored and want to be a supervillain," Chrysalis deadpanned.

"Potayto, potahto. Anywho, I have enlisted you two as my trusted EEEEEEEVIIIIIL LIEUTENANTS! Chrysalis, you and the changeling swarm will infiltrate the castle and intercept any and all cake deliveries! Nyx, with Luna's powers of dreamwalking you will prevent Celestia from even eating in her sleep. It's foolproof!"

"IT'S MADNESS!" Nyx insisted.

"It's foolproof madness," Chrysalis countered. "Right, I'm in. Should be an interesting challenge."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

94.1: There are actually consent issues associated with dreamwalking.

>94.2: Hilarious.<br>94.3: And with that, there's finally three sets

of each Element.

>94.4: The harder you try.<br>94.5: Perhaps the record for most elaborate joke.

>94.6: They're not always together.<br>94.7: But then, with Lyra, "always" is not a particularly useful term.

>94.8: You need to be alert to spot variants.<br>94.9: Not a noble goal, perhaps, but at least it's physically feasible. Probably.

## 99. Chapter 99

(Crisis)

Rarity paused before hoofing over a swatch of her fabric to her old acquaintance, Suri Polomare. Why did she feel like she'd done this before? Oh, no matter. It wasn't like anything bad would happen, right?

\* \* \*

><p>Why had she thought nothing bad would happen?! Suri had replicated her entire line! With her own specially made fabric! This was the WORST! POSSIBLE! THING!<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity blinked from the stage as she realized just what she'd done. She'd let her talent for making fabulous dresswear supersede her friends! This was... This wasn't the worst possible thing. No, this was much too low to be that pleasant. She...<p>

A flash of rainbow light lit her eyes. Yes. She knew what she had to do.

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity stared at the spool of rainbow-colored thread in a daze. That had all somehow worked out perfectly. Rather improbably perfect at that. So why did a once-in-a-lifetime series of events seem so familiar?<p>

And then it hit her. This all had happened before. She was repeating her life over and over again and... Oh, she was Awake now. How bizarre this was. Usually she Awoke and had to wait for her Loop memories to hit, not trudge on half-Asleep or whatever had happened and wait for her awareness of previous Loops to kick in. And not only was this rather late in the Loop, Twilight didn't seem to be Awake this time. Either there was a stealth Anchor or...

She looked at the spool of rainbow-colored thread right at the moment it shimmered with rainbow light.

Oh. Oh, my.

\* \* \*

><p>Dash looked as the Wonderbolt pin she'd gotten from Spitfire, wondering why all of this seemed so familiar. Why it seemed she'd struggled between her loyalty to her friends and her desire to be the

best stunt flyer ever before. And then it hit her.<p>

"Whoah, that's kind of trippy," she shook her head.

"Isn't it though, darling?" Rarity said from behind her. "Finally Awake I see."

"Yep. You do the whole 'I'm sort of Awake but not quite' thing too?" Rainbow asked her fashion-forward friend. "And why are we Awake so late this time.

At this, Rarity gleefully pointed at Rainbow's Wonderbolt pin, causing Dash to look at it just as it shimmered with rainbow light.

"No... No way..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh my gosh! This has been the greatest revelation ever!" Pinkie cheered as she heard how Cheese Sandwich had been inspired to become a party pony by <em>herself<em>. And that he wanted to throw this epic birth-aversary party with her! It was so much better than trying to beat him at partying and making her friend sad as a result. "It's so great I'm having deja vu about how great it is!"

\* \* \*

><p>"...and then he gave me his rubber chicken to say thanks and whoah did you two Wake Up like this? It's like I'm baseline Pinkie getting the looping memories instead of looping Pinkie getting my earlier memories!" Pinkie chattered to a grinning Rarity and Rainbow Dash. "Any idea what's going on? Is it super cool?"<p>

"Check the chicken Pinkie," Dash's grin widened. Pinkie did so and saw it shimmer with rainbow light.

"ARE YOU SERIOUS?!"

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy wanted to kick herself for being so foolish as Seabreeze hoofed her a flower from his homeland. Why did she think that pampering the breezies was being kind? Or even really taking care of them? It was selfish is what it was. Just as selfish now as when she'd done it the first time and... Oh. Well, never let it be said that a lesson learned twice wasn't still a valuable one.<p>

"You just finish Waking up?" Dash whispered to her as they flew out.

Fluttershy nodded as they floated out and, as Twilight reversed the spell and turned them back to normal, she conveyed a wordless question to her foalhood friend.

In response, Dash tapped the flower in her mane, causing Fluttershy to remove it and take a close look. It shimmered with rainbow light.

Fluttershy's eyes widened. Could it be...?

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack flipped the bit Silver Shill had given her as her friends, minus Twilight, surrounded her. She'd thought that she was taking care of her family by letting Granny Smith think the tonic worked, but in the end she'd realized she was only hurting them by not being honest. Now if only she could figure out why it all seemed so familiar...<p>

"Well, never let it be said that I can't earn an honest bit!" she chuckled, and then winced as the memories hit.

"Awake, darling?" Rarity sing-songed.

"Gotta be," Dash smirked. "It's the only time she realizes what a lame joke that is."

"Okay, what in tarnation's goin' on?" Applejack demanded. "Twi's obviously not Awake and this is pretty darn late in the Loop."

"Check your 'honest bit'," Fluttershy grinned herself. Mostly because Pinkie was vibrating with so much excitement she wouldn't be intelligible.

Applejack rolled her eyes, but did so. It shimmered with rainbow light.

"It does that in the baseline too, gals," Applejack began dismissively before an alternative occurred to her. "Wait, did you all Wake Up right after...?"

Four nods answered her.

"With deja-vu right before...?"

Another series of nods.

"With the lesson attached to the event clear as crystal in yer head?"

More nods.

"Then... It's finally happenin', ain't it? And Twi's the only one left..."

"That's what we've concluded, darling!" Rarity grinned.

\* \* \*

><p>"Your time will come."<p>

The words of Celestia did little to reassure Twilight about her doubts. At least those weird feelings of deja vu she'd been getting since shortly before arriving in Ponyville had finally stopped.

Now if only she could figure out why her friends all seemed so excited. There didn't seem to be any reason for it...

\* \* \*

><p>Discord. Celestia had chosen Discord to deal with the threat of Tirek. Even as she despondently led her friends to the Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters, Twilight just couldn't get that thought out of her head. Why not her, she was capable, smart, powerful, skilled, and... and why did she just get a flash of Tirek as some tyrannical living sun?<p>

Twilight shook her head and tried to focus on something else.

"...but stil... ..etting Discor. ... .are of this?" she heard Rainbow Dash faintly behind her.

".. ...se!" Rarity whispered back. "It's bas... .. ..cover ... .. for herself."

Huh. Seemed like her friends at least were also having trouble accepting the decision.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight found herself agreeing with Applejack after Discord's little 'visit'. He was more annoying reformed than not.<p>

"Well, Discord does have a point," Fluttershy reminded them. "What if there is something important in the box?"

Twilight raised an eyebrow at how her friends all perked up at the idea. Huh. "Well, there's only one way to find out."

\* \* \*

><p>After many, many hours of reading the castle's extensive library, they were no closer to finding an answer.<p>

"The answer's in one of these books," Twilight insisted to herself. "I just kno  "

Twilight cut off as her eyes landed on the journal she and her friends had been keeping. The one Discord had bookmarked.

\_ 'I wonder... '\_ she thought as she levitated it to the table before her and opened it to one of the marked passages.

\* \* \*

><p>She'd found it. Each of her friends had faced a trial where their talents or desires seemed to conflict with their Element of Harmony, but in the end, they'd chosen to do the right thing regardless of how hard it was and in doing so helped somepony else do the right thing as well. And each of them had received a token of friendship from those they helped.<p>

The chest was connected to the Tree of Harmony. The tree was connected to the elements. The elements were connected to them. So, just maybe, those objects were connected to the keys needed to open the chest.

Which had, somehow, brought them to the current situation of Pinkie trying to strangle a rubber chicken.

"I don't think that's going to work," Twilight deadpanned right before she had to duck a ballistic rubber chicken as it slipped out of Pinkie's grasp.

It flew over her head and struck the chest square on one of the keyholes. There was a flash of light, a surge of magic, and suddenly the rubber chicken was a key. A key that floated over and fit perfectly in the lock.

\_ 'Huh...' \_ Twilight blinked.

A few moments later and the rest of the objects had been turned into keys, and each fit snugly into one of the locks. Leaving only one missing.

Hers.

\* \* \*

><p>Spike had burped up the urgent message from canterlot while she was realizing that her lack of an Element dilemma meant the box couldn't be opened, and she'd left with all haste.<p>

The news was bad. Discord had joined forces with Tirek. Tirek was stealing the magic of all three tribes now and with it the control of the world that the ponies enjoyed.

And the princesses' plan was to voluntarily give up their magic before Tirek could steal it.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Wow,'<em> Twilight thought as the magical transfer finished. This... she'd never felt like this... had she? She felt like she could do anything. Anything at...

One look at the three magicless alicorns killed that thought. Their tired eyes. Their complete lack of cutie marks. Her promise to keep all of this a secret, even from her friends.

She had never felt this helpless.

\* \* \*

><p>She needed more control. Her attempt to raise the sun resembled Celestia after a bender. And why did she know what that was like?<p>

Anyway, she needed to practice controlling this new magic. And she had to do it without the help of her friends, no matter how eager they seemed.

\* \* \*

><p>"Are we really gonna let her go off like that?" Applejack asked the others. "She's sparkin' like a bug zapper in a mosquito



swarm."<p>

"Yeah, she clearly needs our help," Dash agreed as Pinkie nodded so furiously she almost lifted off the ground.

"We agreed to leave this to baseline until Twilight's trial came to pass and she Awoke," Rarity reminded them. "We know she's keeping a secret, darlings, but Tirek or no, I'm certain this is part of her Element trial. Like we all did, she has to find her way herself."

(Masterweaver)

"So Tirek is draining magic, huh?" Applejack changed the subject. "And if'n we're really doin' tha baseline thing, we're probably gonna have to let 'im. How do we handle this?"

"Ooo! Ooo!" Pinkie bounced up, passing out strange devices. "I made these a while back with Discord and Twilight. They'd force our magic down to ordinary levels by temporarily containing excess energy in our subspace pockets."

Rarity took hers with trepidation. "...why, exactly, did you not mention these before?"

"Well, Twilight tested one. It works, but she said she felt constantly tired while it was on." Pinkie shrugged. "She thought it was a wash, since they only work when willingly activated."

The five of them glanced between themselves.

"...For Twilight," Rainbow finally declared, activating hers. "...ooooooooog, wow. Yeah. Woo. I'm alright, just a bit woozy..."

(Crisis)

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy stared at what she saw happen. Discord, Unawake or not, had turned on them. Tirek had forcibly taken their magic before they managed to break free. And then he'd betrayed Discord as well.<p>

The draconequus was even now staring in shock at the necklace Tirek had given him. What he'd thought a symbol of allegiance merely a token of inevitable betrayal.

"I guess..." she sniffed, feeling both hurt and weaker than she'd ever felt. "It really is all up to Twilight now."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight blinked as her uncontrolled flight plowed her right into a hoof bigger than she was. Tirek's hoof.<p>

"You're going to give me what I want!" he bellowed at her.

'Not likely!' she thought as she teleported away.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stared at the ruins of the Oaks and Branches library. Her home.<p>

\_'That's it, '\_ she thought as Owlowicious, whom she'd barely rescued, flew off. \_'No more miss nice mare! '\_

A teleport later and she was unleashing a blast at Tirek whose radius was wider than her own body. And after he blocked it, growing twice as wide as Tirek himself. The mystery of why she wanted to yell 'kamehameha' would have to wait.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight breathed heavily. She and Tirek seemed evenly matched, but this was her talent. She could win.<p>

"It appears we're at an impasse," Tirek declared. "So how about a trade?"

Twilight gasped as her friends, plus Discord, appeared trapped in bubbles over Tirek's head.

"Your friends for all the alicorn magic in Equestria!"

It was an impossible decision. Her friends or her magic. What was she without her friends? What was she without her magic?

Her friends were pleading with her not to do it. After all, if she did, then Tirek would have control over the entire world. All races, pony and not, would be subject to his tyranny. But, to give up her friends even then...

"Enough!" Tirek bellowed. "I want an answer and I want it now!"

Twilight looked at each of her friends in turn, and then a flash of rainbow light lit her eyes. She knew what she had to do. Really, there had never been another choice.

"I will give you my magic," she declared resolutely. "In exchange for my friends."

\* \* \*

><p>They all rushed to Twilight's side as Tirek grew to mountainous proportions. Even Discord, who she'd demanded freed despite his betrayal.<p>

"Tirek tricked me into believing that he could offer me something more valuable than friendship," Discord offered sadly. "But there is nothing worth more. I see that now."

He fingered the necklace Tirek had given him.

"He lied when he said that this medallion was given as a sign of gratitude and loyalty," the powerless spirit of chaos lamented and began to remove the trinket. "But when I say that it is a sign of our true friendship, I am telling the truth."

And with that, he placed it around the equally powerless Twilight's neck.

It was a sweet gesture, they all admitted to themselves. Even if Equestria was still doomed.

And then the familiar shimmer of rainbow light flashed across its surface.

"You think...?" Applejack dared to hope.

"Only one way to know," Twilight told them.

\* \* \*

><p>As she watched the medallion complete its transformation into a key, Twilight felt a sense of giddy anticipation she couldn't entirely put her hoof on.<p>

As she bid all of her friends to join her and turn their keys as one, she finished Waking Up. Her memories of past Loops leading up to this moment became clear as she watched the Harmony Chest open at long, long last.

The rainbow that emerged hit the tree, causing the Element gems to glow brightly and then all six of them were engulfed in pillars of light. They were pulled into the chest and emerged transformed.

"Not a bad way to Wake Up," she smiled. They hadn't gotten the Elements back. Not exactly. It was more like they were the Elements. More now than they had ever been even in the Loops.

"So nice of you to join us, darling," Rarity smiled back. "Shall we?"

"Let's," Twilight smirked. It was time to teach Tirek a lesson.

\* \* \*

><p>Tirek went down with hardly a fight, and the harmonic wave resulting restored all of his stolen magic. But it didn't end there. The chest was rocketed to Ponyville where it planted itself and grew into a great shimmering tree-palace with them being transported before it.<p>

Then, and only then, did their transformations end.

"Sweet maple!" Rarity exclaimed as they all stared. "Is that... yours, Twilight?"

"I believe it is," the voice of Celestia declared from behind them.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight had to admit, a new home with thrones for each of her friends arranged in a circle, a stronger bond than ever to the Elements and each other. Plus one heck of a heartsong and accompanying celebration.<p>

That had been worth the wait.

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

"Right!" Twilight grinned. "First order of business, RESEARCH!"

Her friends all giggled.

"...No, I'm serious, I want to be able to do that on command." The alicorn waved. "The rainbowy transformation thing. Which means we need to figure out the exact trigger."

"Well," Pinkie mused, "I don't think any of us are ever going to be able to do it solo. It felt like a group thing..."

"And there's tha fact that it was locked in the box," Applejack pointed out. "Actually, the box is in tha ground, can we get to tha keys?"

"Well, the keys were all ordinary items before," Fluttershy mused. "Maybe we can just get those items again and keep them in our Pockets..."

"Maybe the keys are part of the palace now," Rainbow suggested. "Like... the skeleton, or different sections?"

"Whatever the case, opening the box early is going to be a priority in this whole effort," Rarity said definitively. "Otherwise, we'd have only a week at a time!"

Twilight smirked evilly. "Mwahahahaha! I HAVE TURNED YOU ALL INTO EGGHEADS!"

"NOOOOOOO!" cried Rainbow... and then they all cracked up again.

\* \* \*

><p>AN: And that finishes off season 4.<p>

No, this isn't the end of the fic. But I'm hoping there'll be a slow down for a bit - I've been pretty overworked the last month or two compiling. It's been like editing a book, every fortnight, in my spare time.

## 100. Chapter 100

Disclaimer:

This loop was essentially entirely the brainchild of Crisis. As it's ridiculously long, I've not got the time to proof read it. As such, things in this loop should not necessarily be taken as canon-OK. Sorry. I've already done 70,000 words of editing this weekend, and the thought of doing it to another 35,000 fills me with dread. It's also crashed my browser twice trying to get it onto here.

My Mega Pony

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke this loop in the middle of the familiar library tower, reading a book she was actually unfamiliar with. She decided to take a moment to review her memories to figure out just why she was reading it in the first place.<p>

"Geez, Twilight," Spike's voice cut into her thoughts. "What's got you so excited?"

"The princess assigned me to oversee preparations for the Summer Sun Celebration!" Twilight heard herself exclaiming with very uncharacteristic eagerness in her voice. She'd originally been annoyed at the assignment because of focusing on the return of Nightmare Moon, and while it had become a higher point since then, it was fairly routine due to the Loops. "\_In Ponyville!\_"

"Uh, yeah," Spike said suspiciously. "She does that almost every Loop. It's more exciting when that's \_not\_ what happens, remember?"

\_'Okay, looping Spike confirmed,'\_ Twilight thought to herself as her mouth took over again.

"But Spike," she heard herself say on autopilot, like this was a familiar rant for this version of her, "it's \_Ponyville\_! The home of \_Light Labs\_! The most advanced and innovative technomagical research and development company in the history of \_ever\_!"

\_'Dear Tree,'\_ Twilight thought in dismay as she found her mouth was fully on Loop memory autopilot and she couldn't stop it, \_'I'm a fanfilly.'\_

"Huh?" Spike said intelligently. Twilight could sympathize. This was rather out of left field.

"Founded by the earth pony genius Dr. Light and his partner Dr. Wily, Light Labs is at least a thousand years ahead of anyone else in the field of technomagical development. The two doctors' discoveries on how earth pony magic can be channelled through solid mediums such as crystals and metals revolutionized magical studies around the world, but they weren't satisfied with that! They went on to show how one race's magic could be converted into another's through controlled processes, not only allowing earth ponies and pegasi to power unicorn devices, but they've broken the monopoly that pegasi have had on large scale weather manipulation and earth ponies have possessed on quality produce since the time of the founders! They've even made fully autonomous mechanical robots for commercial and industrial usage that further revolutionized Equestria's economy! And they're all set to unveil their latest inventions the day after the Summer Sun Celebration! I'll be able to get front row seats! And maybe they can autograph my cloud boots! \*SQUEEEEEEEEEEE!\*"

\_'Holy chlorophyll,'\_ Twilight thought as she lined up the involuntary rant with her now-examined memories for this loop, \_'two \_Unawake\_ earth ponies did all that in what seems like an Equestria baseline? Fanfilly tendencies have been justified.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Checking in on the preparations for the summer sun celebration had gone smoothly. Of the usual Elements only Dash wasn't Awake this time. A teen Spike had stayed with Rarity to absolutely no shock and overall, no real surprises had occurred save that Fluttershy had decided that she was going to be singing along with her bird choir. The yellow pegasus may have become more confident over the course of the Loops, but what amounted to a solo public performance, even knowing it would likely be interrupted by Nightmare Moon, was a big step for her.<p>

And now she finally had some free time to check out this "Light Labs" place. Such an establishment most likely meant new loopers visiting for a fused Loop, but there was always the slim chance the Loop was just a particularly esoteric variant of Equestria. Those did happen from time to time.

But in any case, she'd get to meet the brilliant minds behind all of those inventions she recalled from her Loop memories, talk with them, exchange ideas. She was so excited she...

...Was apparently doing the happy hoofy dance in the middle of the street. Pine, but these fanfilly tendencies she'd gotten for the Loop were deeply ingrained.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, hello there. Who might you two be?" Twilight greeted the two fillies, well one filly and one robot in the form of a filly, that had answered the lab's door. She knew the first to be Scootaloo and the second looked surprisingly like Silver Spoon, but she had to play ignorant just in case they weren't Awake.<p>

"I'm Scootaloo Light," the orange pegasus filly beamed, "and this is my friend Silver Spoon! We both Awoke real early this morning miss...?" ()

"Twilight Sparkle," the so-named unicorn beamed back, catching the subtle inflection signaling that the two were Awake. "How has the Lâ€"

Twilight cut herself off with a cough when Scootaloo and Silver made the 'not here' signal. Right. Explaining might be awkward if the wrong person overheard.

"Sorry," she apologized. "How is life at the lab? I imagine it's very exciting! Do you ever have any other friends over?"

"Nah," Scootaloo answered, letting her know that it was just the orange pegasus and Silver of the expanded CMC that were Awake, "not many are too interested in this kind of stuff so my adopted family and I don't get many visitors. Though I've got the coolest older brother and sister by 100%!"

Twilight raised an eyebrow. Only 20% lower than looping Rainbow Dash. High praise from Scootaloo indeed. "Well, do you think anyone would mind if I came in and met the doctors?"

"Not at all!" Scootaloo chirped. "Well, uncle Wily might be a little irate, but that's because he's really protective of the stuff he and

dad invent."

"Yeah," Silver added, "he takes a little getting used to." (2)

"I promise not to steal anything," Twilight made the Pinkie Promise gestures as the two led her inside. \_'Apple Bloom will never forgive me if I don't get her in here somehow,'\_ Twilight found herself thinking. Even if Apple Bloom wasn't Awake this time, the looping version would never let Twilight live it down if she didn't find some way to get her inside Light Labs. "I just want to meet the two most brilliant stallions in all Equestria!"

"Fanfilly much?" Silver arched a mechanical eyebrow as the purple mare .

"I thought I had that under control," Twilight blushed as Scootaloo snickered.

\* \* \*

><p>As it turned out, she got the full tour. Dr. Wily was somewhat abrasive, but some liberal compliments of his intelligence and a bit of buttering up brought him around rather quickly. Dr. Light, by comparison, seemed embarrassed by such attention but was very enthusiastic about sharing his love for science and invention. Neither of them seemed like they were trying to reconcile any memories that conflicted with their lives in Equestria.<p>

Along the tour, she'd met Dr. Light's twin children, his son Rock and his daughter Roll, who were two of the friendliest ponies she'd ever met. Though for some reason Scootaloo and Silver snickered when she told them this and even the twin earth ponies had given her an amused look.

Towards the end, she even got a sneak preview of the doctors latest inventions. A series of six cutting edge industrial robots with personalities programmed to be so close to a real pony that they could react and make decisions like one, in addition to being able to issue commands to lesser industrial robots to facilitate a more efficient work environment. It looked to be the start of a technological revolution the likes of which Equestria usually didn't see outside the discovery of an alien spacecraft, and as she bid her hosts farewell she was excited to see what direction it would go in.

The whole thing was causing her memory to tickle a little bit too, which probably meant this was a fused Loop after all. But she'd perused so much of the Hub's fiction that it was , especially if it deviated significantly. Like, say, being dropped in Equestria. Plus she had a backlog of fiction she \_still\_ hadn't gotten around to reading even after all this time. The Hub had a \_lot\_ of published works after all.

Even so, she probably could have identified the visitors in a few moments using the search engine she'd developed to sift through the vast Hub media she had digitally stored. However, she found she was enjoying the feeling of newness and the challenge of figuring it out for herself.

"Miss Twilight?" Scootaloo caught up with her a short ways off from

the lab. "My brother and sister this Loop wanted me to tell you to meet them later. I told them you'd probably be at the library, so they said they'd meet you there after Pinkie's party."

"Thanks Scootaloo," Twilight smiled. So, the Light siblings were the visiting loopers? She looked forward to meeting them properly then.

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie's typical welcome party was in full swing. Twilight had been mildly surprised that it wasn't a 'welcome new loopers' party as well, but she hadn't brought it up in case she set the party pony off and ended up with Ponyville buried in confetti or something stranger. (3) Currently she was talking with Rainbow Dash when something the other mare said caught her attention.<p>

"Wait," Twilight's found herself interrupting what the current variation of Rainbow Dash had said to her, "\_you're\_ the 'subject' who volunteered for the \_'Rainbooms: The Nature and Capabilities of Pegasus Magic'\_ study?! Ohmygosh! It's so great to meet you! Can I get your autoâ€œ"\*ahem\*"

Twilight blushed furiously as the Unawake version of her friend began laughing her head off. \_'Tree damn this Loop and the fanfilly tendencies that come with it!\_' she yelled mentally. She idly wondered if her natural tendency to get excited over intellectual pursuits was making it harder to resist the impulses that came with her Loop memories. It could be the nearness of the native personality variant to her baseline was making it harder to suppress, which would be an interesting study come to think of it.

"Sorry," she apologized, "I don't know whatâ€œ"

"Forget it!" Dash waved her off. "The docs were about the only ponies who gave my claim of doing a Sonic Rainboom back then any credit at all, and they were nice enough to help me get set up in Ponyville when half of Cloudsdale blamed me when the docs broke the weather monopoly. For eggheads, they're really cool, and it's great to know somepony actually appreciates what we did together. Besides, Scoots told me that you were a little excitable over that kind of stuff." (4)

"I'll bet she did," Twilight blushed again. "Say, do you know about the pegasus harmpph?"

She'd been about to say 'harness' when Dash shoved her hoof into Twilight's mouth.

"Shhh!" the rainbow-maned pegasus hushed her and glanced around the party to see who'd overheard before removing her hoof and continuing in a whisper. "That's supposed to be a secret! Scoots told me you'd gotten the special tour, but that project's hush-hush! And, yeah, I know about it. I'm the one they're testing it against. Rock, and sometimes Roll, strap the thing on and pretty much try to keep up with me. It's not nearly ready, but when it is it's gonna make Cloud Boots obsolete."

"Wow," she whispered back. "They must be pretty brave ponies. Have they always been like that?"



"What do you mean?" Dash blinked.

"Well, what were they like when they were younger?" Twilight asked, fishing for some information on the visiting loopers before they met up after the party.

"Did I go toâ€"?" Dash started before cracking up again.

"What?" Twilight inquired, thoroughly confused.

"\_Oh\_, no!" Dash giggled. "Not spoiling the surprise! Rock and Roll would be pissed if I did that! In fact, I should probably go grab Scoots before she slips up, later!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight twitched as the twin ponies laughed and refused to let her and her looping friends in on the surprise they had in store. It was after the party and Rock and Roll had joined her, Spike, and the other four Awake Elements for a quiet meet and greet. They were indeed loopers and they'd already had the 'welcome to the multiverse' speech so that sometimes awkward hurdle was cleared. The only hiccup was Pinkie having to be regularly restrained from turning it into a full-blown welcome party for the brother and sister pair.<p>

"Sorry, Twilight," Rock grinned as he tapped his boots on the floor. The earth pony stallion's blue metal boots matched his coat and his brown mane was, as Rarity might put it, 'stylishly unkempt'. Topping off his appearance was a tool box cutie mark. "But if you can't tell then we're not letting you know before dad gets a chance. He's been planning this for a while."

"Gah!" Pinkie yelled suddenly. "I can't take it! You've gotta let me throw a 'welcome to Equestria's Loop' party for you!"

"But we already had one of your 'welcome to Ponyville' parties," Roll, the cream-coated and yellow-maned earth pony mare with a cutie mark of a metal broom and red metallic slippers over her hooves, placated. "And it was a lot of fun."

"But it's not the same! You weren't Awake for that one! None of us were!" Pinkie insisted, pulling out a party petard and starting to arm it.

"Not without the whole family," Rock insisted. Surprisingly, Pinkie stopped and sighed as she disarmed her party munitions.

"Sorry, Pinkie," Roll apologized, "but we'd like to have our brother here for that."

"Yeah, okay," the party pony moped for a moment before straightening. "But I get to throw you a \_huge\_ 'family getting back together' party on top of it when that happens."

"You have another brother?" Twilight asked after the two had agreed to Pinkie's condition.

"Our older brother Blues," Roll nodded.

"He's... estranged at the moment," Rock told them.

"Oh," Twilight blinked. "How long has it been that way?"

"Since our baseline," Roll informed them as her brother sighed. "He's stubborn like that."

The Equestrian loopers blinked as one.

"How...?" Rarity started.

"It's complicated," Rock told them. "And he's repeatedly asked we not say anything more on the subject."

"Well," Twilight decided to change the subject before the atmosphere got any more depressing, "as you may or may not have heard, we like to consider ourselves a sanctuary Loop. We can handle all the native problems just fine, so you two can feel free to take a vacation and relax if you like."

"Er..." Rock hedged and Twilight realized that her offer had apparently not served to reduce tension. "How enforceable is that?"

"We've had some pretty good success using the Elements of Harmony to keep the peace even when visiting loopers don't want to play nice," Twilight told them.

"Oh, yes," Rarity chimed in. "A nice time out on the Moon works wonders for troublemakers."

"No," Rock shook his head, "I mean..."

"What my brother's trying to say," Roll filled in, "is if that's backed up by your Loop's nature or your local admin?"

"Ah, no," Applejack looked confused. "Why would it be?"

"Sorry," Rock apologized, "but our Loop is... well 'anti-sanctuary' probably fits. You see, our Loops usually start out peacefully, just like this one, but no matter what we do to forestall it, a war happens."

The room went silent for a moment.

"We haven't been looping too long, but we've tried a lot of things," Roll continued for him. "The closest we've come to succeeding was becoming villains ourselves, which ended up causing our normal villain to be the hero. Sometimes we join forces against a larger threat, but then it's back to business as usual with us on one side and him on the other. The one time that someone, not us mind you, killed him before he could start his bids for world conquest the situation ended up worse."

"Uh, if you don't mind me asking, who?" Twilight cut her question off when the siblings shook their heads in unison.

"Not telling," Rock stated with finality. "Just in case it doesn't happen this time. We don't want to end up tainting your opinion of him and inadvertently causing it anyway."

That... made a lot of sense actually.

"What we're getting at," Roll picked up, "is that we're starting to think something about our Loop is setting things up so that conflict is inevitable. The initial cause has ranged from perceived slights, to well-intentioned extremism, to accidents that induce madness, to the individual in question having been secretly evil the whole time. Our Loop is pretty messed up on top of it too, with bugs, viruses, and a pretty corrupted baseline. So there's often no indication of which way events are going to go either. Some threats come and go between Loops, and every so often something bizarre crawls out of the variants."

"And in every single one," Rock intoned gravely, "at least one of us has had to fight."

"Wait," Spike interrupted. "Which one of you is the Anchor again?"

"Um... both of us, actually," Rock admitted sheepishly.

"You're Co-Anchors?" Spike inquired.

"Not exactly," Roll shook her head. "We're not... 'soul-bonded' or whatever Hephaestus â€" he's our admin â€" called it. He says we're 'Joint Anchors', or that we jointly share the position while not being otherwise connected. We understand it's not exactly common."

"Goodness, no!" Rarity twittered. "Why, I've never heard of such a thing!"

"Yeah, the Crash from a while back musta hit yer place pretty hard, huh?" Applejack contributed.

"Wait..." Twilight's face scrunched up as she thought before widening her eyes in revelation. "You...?"

"Yeah," Rock admitted heavily, "our Loop is sort of responsible for what everyone calls 'The Crash'. Lucky us, we got chained to front row seats for the event."

"I..." Twilight's mouth worked up and down in shock. Sure, she'd expected to eventually meet whoever was from that Loop where trying to get it online caused the arguably worst event in the history of the Loops, but having them here in front of her...

"Wow, um..." Spike wasn't having any better luck. After all, it couldn't have been their fault. Yggdrasil wouldn't start anyone looping who had a part in destroying an entire reality, so they were just as much victims as the Loop that was lost.

Pinkie's hair had started to go a bit straight as she teared up in response to the revelation and Fluttershy had somehow gotten even more quiet than usual as she sniffled silently.

"...gosh," Applejack tried and failed to offer something. What did you say in a situation like this? "That's..."

"My word," Rarity managed to recover first. "And you witnessed the whole thing?"

\_ 'Wait a second,' \_ Twilight's brain latched on to that particular tidbit as the siblings nodded in response to Rarity's question. "You \_remember\_ it?! You... You actually have memories of the Anchor who was lost?! Then you could..."

She trailed off at the dual shaking heads.

"All we remember about them," Rock told them, "is a hole in space where a person should have been."

"Hephaestus told us recently that he's been examining our memories for any data that could aid the possible recovery of the branch they lost," Roll continued, "but..."

The room got quiet again for a bit, and then Pinkie sprang up suddenly.

"No!" the pink party pony declared forcefully. "No more moping on sad stuff we can't change! We have new friends to get to know, stories to tell, and games to play! Oh, and we have to get ready for Nightmare Moon showing up at what would otherwise be dawn to try and cast everything into eternal darkness. You know, business as usual."

Rock and Roll blinked and looked at each other before turning back to the ponies and dragon.

"Are you \_sure\_ this sanctuary thing of yours works?" they asked in unison.

"It's done pretty well so far," Fluttershy smiled serenely.

\* \* \*

><p>Save for Rock and Roll insisting on accompanying them for the adventure, the whole thing with Nightmare Moon had gone pretty darn close to baseline. In deference to giving their visiting loopers the 'Equestrian Experience', Spike had volunteered to sit out as an Element of Loyalty and allow the local Rainbow Dash variant to fill her usual role.<p>

The interactions between everyone had been rather enlightening. Their visitors clearly had Loop history with Unawake Rainbow Dash, and had asked her if she'd heard from their older brother lately. Apparently Blues had been convinced to keep in touch with the daredevil pegasus even after his estrangement, and that managed to intrigue Applejack enough to get into a conversation with Dash about the mysterious member of the Light family. Roll had then gravitated to Rarity and Fluttershy and the three had gabbed away on the trek about animals, fashion, housekeeping tips, and medicine of all things. Rock had proved to be quite the intellectual, clearly taking after his father, and he and Twilight had gotten along like paper and ink. Interestingly, he also seemed to take to Pinkie Pie pretty well. He was far less random than the premier party pony, but Twilight could tell that like her hyperactive friend, Rock was somepony who genuinely desired to see everyone happy.

Heck, Twilight had even felt some resonance between the two and some

of the Elements as they were activated and bonded to her and her friends like in the baseline. It was something that might bear looking into at a later time.

But for now they had a 'Welcome back' party to attend for Luna. And she had a mysterious orb that had been formed when Luna was purified of Nightmare Moon that felt really darn familiar for some reason to examine later.

"What doth rocks and rolling have to do with music?" an Unawake Luna asked of the twin earth ponies. Twilight had to marvel again at how quickly the two had gotten Luna down to a normal speaking volume.

In reply, the two grinned and called out to a nearby Ponyville resident. "Hey Vinyl! You got the karaoke machine hooked up yet? We need to introduce Princess Luna to our namesake!"

"All ready!" the DJ in mirrored shades piped back, gesturing the two onto an impromptu stage.

"What is this... karaoke?" Luna puzzled as the siblings began to sing.

\_"Dad likes that old time rock and roll!\_"

\_"The kinda music just soothes the soul!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"Doctor Bright Light, your majesty," the bearded labcoat-wearing earth pony inventor introduced himself to Princess Luna. "And may I say you dance divinely."<p>

"We thank you, good sir," Luna blushed. She had no idea what had possessed her to get up on stage and dance beside this stallion's children. It was just... that music... It called to her.

"And this is my good friend and partner, Doctor Wily Plan," the white-maned earth pony introduced his frizzy gray-maned and mustachioed earth pony companion, also in a labcoat.

"A pleasure to meet you Princess!" the other pony inventor gushed. "May I say that I have always loved your night sky!"

"Hail and well met!" Luna greeted the scientist. "It pleases us greatly to know how well ponies have taken to intellectual pursuits these days! We have heard tell of the many marvels you both have produced and we would like to hear more!"

"Well, if you don't mind staying until tomorrow," Dr. Light enticed, "you can witness the unveiling of our latest inventions."

"We would be honored, good sirs!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Mares and gentlestallions," Dr. Light proclaimed from the podium as a curtain rose, (5) "I present to you the latest invention from the minds at Light Labs, the robot masters!"<p>

Upon the stage stood six robot ponies of various types.

"To oversee forestry management and logging excursions, DLN-003 Cut Mare!"

An orange and white earth pony model with a pair of scissors atop her head jumped off the stage and threw the scissors at an unwieldy log set aside for demonstration purposes. In moments the limbs had been sheared off and the log neatly quartered.

"I also do some mane-styling in my spare time," the robot winked at the impressed crowd.

"For construction, particularly in hazardous conditions, DLN-004 Guts Stallion!"

A truly massive earth-pony model, standing a bit taller than even Celestia, lumbered down off the stage and picked up an I-Beam as easily as a normal pony might heft a baseball bat.

"Built strong to build strong!" the robot rumbled in a deep baritone that complemented the crowd's applause.

"Built for arctic and cold climate exploration, DLN-005, Ice Mare!"

A short pegasus model in a stereotypical parka flew over not to the demonstration area, but to a table of refreshments holding so-far untouched cups of warm lemonade. She then blew a mist over the cups, turning them frosty in an instant.

"I'm also built for cold storage capacity," she smiled as the refreshment table was suddenly swarmed.

"For demolitions and excavation, DLN-006, Bomb Stallion!"

A portly unicorn model bounded to the other side of the stage to a new demonstration area where a shack had been hastily constructed the other day. The robot then whooped as he conjured some explosives and tossed them into the shack. A moment later and all the walls and supports were blown out, leaving the fully intact roof to fall straight down.

"So," Applejack whispered to Twilight as the crowd applauded loudly at the display of precision control, "ya think introducing him ta Trixie would be a good idea or a bad-un?"

"I \_love\_ my job!" the robot cheered.

"Bad," Twilight whispered back, "definitely bad. Doesn't matter that she's not Awake."

"For waste management, DLN-007, Fire Mare!"

"Hey, look, it's you when you're angry," Pinkie grinned at Twilight as the second unicorn model suddenly produced a flaming mane as she strode over to the second demonstration area. The female robot stared at the debris for a moment before rearing up and blasting flames from her forehooves that reduced the debris to ash.

"No muss," the robot drawled much like Applejack tended to as the reporters' cameras flashed even faster, "no fuss."

"And finally, to rewrite the book on Equestria's growing need for power management, DLN-008, Elec Mare!"

The final pegasus model strode to the front of the stage and spread her wings. Arcs of lightning emanated from her and suddenly the perimeter of the stage was lit up with previously unnoticed lights like Hearth's Warming Eve.

"I knew you'd get a charge out of me!" the robot declared to enthusiastic cheers as a set of pyrotechnics went off along the stage's edge.

"Oh, dear," Rarity giggled demurely. "It's a robot Rainbow Dash. How ever shall we cope?"

"Guess we'll have to practice ducking and covering," Spike shrugged.

"Oh, you'll help me practice, won't you Spike?" Rarity fluttered her eyelashes.

"Get a room you two," Twilight grouched.

"Pardon us, master Light," Luna spoke up from where she and her sister sat observing the unveiling, causing the crowd to quiet down. "We know we have been gone from Equestria for a... long time, but surely ponies still begin their counting with the number 'one', do they not? Wereforth are the first two of your creations?"

"An excellent question your majesty," Dr. Light beamed, "and one I'm afraid I must let somepony else answer."

With that, Dr. Light beckoned towards backstage, and his two children stepped out to stand before the now confused crowd.

"Hello everyone!" Rock waved cheerfully. "I'm DLN-001, dad's tool-using lab assistant."

"And I'm DLN-002," Roll curtsied before the slack-jawed audience, "housekeeper, and the one who makes sure this motley group of goofs takes proper care of themselves."

"Yeah," Rock rubbed his mane sheepishly, "she's good at that."

somepony yelled incredulously. \_'Huh. Well that explains a lot. They're certainly a lot more life-like in appearance than Silver ended up,'\_ Twilight thought as she looked around for who had yelled. It took her a moment and seeing half the crowd looking straight at her to realize she'd been the one who'd yelled it. \_'I'm going to need to put a leash on my subconscious this Loop, aren't I?\_'

"YES!" a butter-yellow pegasus elated as she involuntarily rose into the air. Fluttershy suddenly realized what she'd done and floated back down, blushing the whole way, but still clearly excited. "I won the pot!"

"Awww," Twilight heard Lyra pout nearby, "I was sure they were humans in disguise!"

"Oh, dear!" Rarity fanned herself dramatically, "My money was on them being his illegitimate children by a summer love he met while on an exotic vacation!"

"I think I had mine on them having stayed with another member of the family until their dad got himself properly set up with his business here," Applejack sighed.

Twilight spotted Rainbow Dash rolling on the ground and laughing as more and more ludicrous disproven theories about the origins of Dr. Light's children were passed around. At least she hadn't been the only one fooled, even among her looping friends. Then again, none of them had exactly checked their magical signature or anything.

"Truly, your children are a marvel of ingenuity," Luna could be heard complementing the good doctor.

"I'm just happy to have them in my life," Dr. Light smiled back while his son and daughter fielded a deluge of questions from the gathered reporters like pros.

\* \* \*

><p>Later after the unveiling, Twilight managed to track down Dr. Light and show him the strange orb that had been dropped when Luna was cleansed of Nightmare Moon. Dr. Wily had passed through earlier looking typically sour of him, but she and Dr. Light were too engrossed in studying the object to pay him any mind.<p>

"My goodness, this is extraordinary," Dr. Light proclaimed fervently as he took readings. "It's clearly a power source, but I can see mental patterns inherent in it as well!"

"You mean, that's a pony in there?" Twilight blinked.

"Or some other sapient race," Dr. Light clarified. "Perhaps even one we've never encountered before. We'd have to give it a body capable of communicating with us to know for sure. Would you like to learn how?"

"Me? You want to show me how to build a robot like Rock and Roll?" Twilight blinked, feeling her fanfilly tendencies rising and trying to stamp them out before they embarrassed her again.

It was harder than it sounded. Especially since was starting to get an idea of why the orb had felt familiar, which meant her maternal instincts were backing up her fanfilly tendencies.

"I managed to help my adopted daughter build her friend Silver," the roboticist smiled, "so it shouldn't be too difficult to teach somepony of your clear capability."

"Yes!" she cheered and began bouncing around the room.  
"Yesyesyesyesyes!"

She was gonna have her daughter around for the Loop! Wheeee!



\* \* \*

><p>The positive atmosphere of the previous day seemed so far away now, Twilight mused. Ponyville wasn't feeling the effects directly, but they'd gotten the news on the televised news broadcast the doctors' technomagical advances had allowed to become widespread.<p>

The events they were showing were not heartening. For some unfathomable reason Dr. Wily had stolen the six robot masters and used them to commandeer robots in the techno-savvy city of Manehattan and hold the entire metropolitan area hostage. He was demanding... actually he was sounding a lot like Nightmare Moon come to think of it. Lots of jealousy, some legitimate, some sorely misplaced, and all blown way out of proportion.

The princesses apparently had their hooves full trying to calm a panicking populace to give the situation their full attention and the guard had already been defeated trying to take the city, Shining Armor was using his barrier spell to contain the hostile forces inside Manehattan, which was taking up all his concentration.

And Dr. Light had just nixed the proposal to use the Elements of Harmony.

"The Elements might work on Dr. Wily, perhaps," the stallion lamented, "but we have no idea if they will have any effect at all on robots. You would all be put in grave danger if they failed, and Wily would likely gain control of the Elements as a result, and ?"

Twilight thought back to the baseline incident with Sunset Shimmer and concluded that such a thing could be very bad indeed. She was debating ascending to take care of the problem when Rock and Roll stepped forward and determinedly asked to be converted into fighting robots. In deference to the fact that they clearly seemed to know what they were doing, Twilight decided to let them handle things for now. But if it became necessary, she would step in.

Twilight and Dash were both tapped to help with the conversion while the rest of the looping Elements looked on silently, understanding that this was something their visitors did regularly and respecting their decision. The two armored figures stepped out of the final conversion capsules looking every inch the heroes they clearly were used to being.

"I built the two of you as Rock and Roll, after my love of music," Dr. Light smiled sadly as he looked upon the results of his efforts, "you are something very different now."

"You said the hoof-cannons you gave us are called 'Mega Busters', right?" Rock asked.

"Well then you can call us Mega Stallion and Mega Mare!" Roll finished.

\* \* \*

><p><em>My Mega Pony, My Mega Pony,<em>

\_Ahh ahh ahh ahhh ahhhhhhhh~~~\_  
\_My Mega Pony,\_  
\_I used to wonder what robots could mean,\_  
\_To a world that's all so serene.\_  
\_Hooves of Iron.\_  
\_Tails of Steel.\_  
\_But with a heart that's kindly and real.\_  
\_Those corrupted,\_  
\_They'll defeat!\_  
\_They won't stop till they have ol' Wily beat!\_  
\_You have My Mega Pony,\_  
\_Do you know you're all my mechanical Friends.\_ (\*)

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash went through her routine for the upcoming Best Young Flyer competition for the umpteenth time. Who'd have thought so much would happen in such a short time?<p>

Right after Nightmare Moon was beaten, old Doc Wily had gone nutzoid a lot like Luna had a thousand years ago and hijacked a whole city. A \_city\_! According to Twilight, when Luna went Nightmare Moon a thousand years ago, she'd just gone after her sister and busted up their old place in the Everfree. And because he was using robots to hold everyone hostage, no one could be sure the Elements would work as advertised.

So Doc Light's robo-kids had stepped up to the plate and turned themselves into freaking superheroes! They'd marched right into the city and saved everypony! Yeah, they came out a little banged up, but they did it with the fully-restored-to-their-right-minds robot masters marching right out with them, Doc Wily in hoofcuffs, and not one flesh-and-blood pony injured. Not even Doc Wily. Holy \_snap\_.

What really blew her mind was just how life in Ponyville managed to continue like it was all no big deal. Gilda had dropped by in a visit that had nearly set her old friend and her new ones at each others throats, and she still had no idea how that sorted itself out. Applejack had nearly killed herself trying to pull in the whole harvest solo, and, oh yeah, they all had tickets for the upcoming \_Grand Galloping Gala\_!

If only she could get this darned routine to go the way she wanted it. The competition wasn't that far off!

"Still having trouble with the Sonic Rainboom, are you?" a familiar voice cut into her thoughts.

Rainbow whipped around to see a familiar gray-coated earth pony stallion with a cutie mark of a shield superimposed over a sword. His brown mane was styled into a pompadour that would have looked ridiculous on any pony else, but he managed to make look awesome. With the ever-present shades and his trademark yellow scarf, he was quite the welcome sight.

"Hey Blues!" she greeted Doc Light's wayward son and runaway prototype cheerfully. "How's life been treating ya?"

\* \* \*

><p>"So," Rock collected his thoughts,<p>

"Pretty much," Twilight nodded. "And after alienating half the town by humiliating them onstage, a pair of impressionable colts get it into their heads to go into the Everfree and wake up an ursa minor so they can see the impossible feat for themselves. And since I like Ponyville un-stomped I try to head that off if I can, usually by nudging her in a more productive direction. And it's 'everypony', not 'everyone'."

"Dad programmed us for political correctness in regards to the myriad of sapient species that inhabit the world. That's my story and I'm sticking to it," Rock insisted. "Wait a second. This Trixie is an over-the-top ham, right?"

"Every time I've met her," Twilight agreed. "Why?"

"Has anyone seen Auto?"

"Oh," Twilight blinked as she recalled the goofy stallion-bot who ran Light Lab's storefront and mechanic shop in town. The hammy robot who liked to build ridiculous over-the-top contraptions in his spare time. "Oh, dear."

\* \* \*

><p>"No, Dash," Blues sighed, "I'm saying that you being naturally suspicious is <em>part</em> of what makes you such a good fit for the Element of Loyalty. Some might say that the opposite of loyalty would be betrayal, but that's along antithetical lines. Suspicion is the opposite along complementary lines. You've heard of the Yin-Yang theory, right?"

"Duh," Dash rolled her eyes. "It's part of my martial arts classes. The whole 'everything in balance' thing."

"And 'balance' is synonymous with 'Harmony'," Blues completed the thought. "The Elements couldn't work with ponies that embodied only positive traits, because that's not very harmonious, is it? Like night balances day, there needs to be a shadow aspect that balances the light. Suspicion is the logical shadow aspect of Loyalty. Because you are loyal to your circle of friends and the community at large, you are suspicious of anything that might jeopardize them."

Dash was quiet as she mulled that over while the two walked into town. Huh, it looked like there was a show or something getting started.

"The same should be true of the others," the rogue prototype continued. "Honesty works along with Deception, for to uncover truths one must grasp how they can be hidden. To be truly honest, one needs understand the ways in which they can be dishonest. This is especially true in the matters of \_self\_-deception."

"I dunno..." Dash hedged doubtfully.

"Plus you'd be surprised how easy it is to deceive some with nothing but honesty," Blues smirked. "As for the others, like many parents show Kindness to their children, they also display great Ferocity in their defense. Generosity often goes hoof in hoof with Ambition, for one must \_have\_ before one can \_give\_. Laughter connects with others in order to spread joy, which opens the possibility for great Sorrow when those connections are severed."

"And what about Magic, smart guy?" the stunt pegasus and part-time lab assistant challenged. "Magic's not exactly a personality trait, is it?"

"You'd think that," Blues smirked, "but you'd be wrong. The secret lies in the origins of the word. Long before Celestia or Luna, there was an order of unicorns known as the Magi. They were the ones who moved the sun and moon and turned the seasons, and none outside the order understood their secrets. The secret knowledge of the Magi came to be known as 'magic' long before even other unicorns referred to the effects generated through their horns as such. The Magi were the only ones in those days that could be called scholars, and in a time when few others could even be considered educated. They were the seekers of knowledge, and the ones who always seemed to know what to do when mysterious events occurred. That is what 'Magic' is: Things the Magi know."

"Wow," Dash blinked. "Yeah, that's Twilight all over. How do you know stuff like this? I thought you were, ya know, developed for the Royal Guard."

"You don't honestly think my father would program a potential son without a thirst for intellectual pursuits, did you?" Blues returned flatly.

"No," Dash rubbed her head sheepishly. "You're still not gonna talk with him are you? Look, I know whatever it was that happened between you two probably \_sounded\_ bad, butâ€"

"Not..." Blues interrupted her. "Not yet. I'm not ready. But... thanks for not giving up anyway."

"No problem," Dash smiled as the two inserted themselves into the crowd around the traveling stage, even as she cursed the stubbornness of Doc Light's eldest son.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well then, I hereby challenge you, Ponyvillians," an Unawake Trixie dared the crowd. "Anything you can do, I can do better. Any takers?"<p>

"I'll take that challenge!" a portly metal and mostly-green stallion

with large red bubble-shaped eyes, a literally square jaw, and a large bolt in the top of his head declared as he jumped up on the stage and dramatically opened a paper fan designed like Equestria's flag while pointing at the showmare. "Auto is in da hooouuusse!" (6)

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay," Twilight facehooved. "The good news is that I think we've avoided the Ursa Minor incident. The bad news is that your friend still managed to destroy Trixie's stage and damage the town."<p>

"Yeah," Rock winced as he surveyed the damage caused by Auto's last one-up on Trixie. That had escalated a lot faster than he'd been prepared for. "Sorry about that."

"And seriously, when did he convert the shop into a pseudo-mecha?" Twilight asked. How would be a good question too. No one in Ponyville had noticed him doing it. Though perhaps the renovations turning the store front into a giant replica of the upper portion of Dr. Light's mobile suitcase Eddie should have been a clue that Auto was up to something wacky.

"He's native to my Loop, not Awake, and I'm still trying to figure him out," Rock shook his head as he stepped up to offer his help rebuilding Trixie's wagon-stage. After moving 'Big Eddie's' hydraulic foot off of it. Maybe he should just offer to have Light Labs invent her a whole new one.

And he also needed to rescue Auto from the enraged showmare's assault. Maybe.

\* \* \*

><p>Things had been going more-or-less according to the general 'Equestrian Experience' plan she'd put together for visiting loopers since the capture of Dr. Wily. In essence, the plan involved the Awake Elements sticking relatively close to the baseline while doing their best to minimize collateral damage.<p>

But a few derailments were to be expected. For example: Fluttershy had gotten praise for her 'new level in badflank' from the Unawake Rainbow Dash during the snoring dragon incident.

A big one was how the Gala tickets had proceeded. Both Applejack and Pinkie Pie had convinced the Apples and Cakes to put in catering bids which had netted both business and complimentary tickets. Furthermore, Light Labs had such celebrity status that they'd apparently been down for Gala invitations since before the Loop began. Dr. Light was still getting over the betrayal by his friend and colleague, and so had gifted both his and Wily's tickets to Spike (who he'd never known as a 'baby' dragon) and Rarity. Rock and Roll, and even Dash, in her capacity as part-time assistant, had gotten tickets as well. Which left no problems with Twilight letting Fluttershy have her extra. It was rather interesting how well it all worked out to be honest.

Then there was the parasprite incident. They'd been hashing out how to handle it without damaging Ponyville, or just skipping it

altogether, when the reports came in that parasprites were \_already\_ loose in the town.

Apparently it was Auto's fault (big surprise, the bot was like a mad scientist/Pinkie-light/Trixie-ham/fan colt mish-mash at times) and they'd quietly agreed not to use any quick-fixes. The nutty mechanic needed to learn that his actions had consequences.

The mad scramble for instruments had been harder than they recalled though. They'd forgotten how difficult fighting their way through panicked Ponyvillians could be at times, but in the end they'd gotten the swarm back into the Everfree with minimal overall damage and a deal with Dr. Light to let him study one under controlled conditions to see if non-musical countermeasures could be developed.

And then Celestia had shown up early for her scheduled visit, surprising the heck out of Twilight. Differences like that didn't tend to be innocuous.

"Hello, Princess," she greeted. "You're early. I'm afraid we aren't quite ready to receive you properly."

"As much as I wish this visit was social, my pupil," Celestia replied, all business, "I'm afraid my visit will need to be cancelled. I am stopping by to give you warning of a matter most grave before I return to emergency duties."

"What matter?" Twilight asked, getting a sinking feeling.

"Dr. Wily has escaped custody and is currently loose in Equestria."

\* \* \*

><p>"You don't seem all that surprised," Twilight observed how the two visiting loopers were taking the news.<p>

"We really aren't," Roll shrugged. "We've discussed trying to convince someone to send Wily to the moon, with enough supplies to build a self-sustaining habitation for one of course, but we're pretty sure he'd come back in a lunar-built skull cruiser or something. There just isn't any prison we've come across that can hold him indefinitely."

\* \* \*

><p>"Is something wrong, Silver?" Scootaloo asked her currently mechanical friend who seemed to be crying. Or at least as good an imitation as her body allowed for.<p>

"No, it's nothing," Silver insisted. "It's justâ€"

\_You're not even a real pony!\_

\_I am so! I even have my own cutie mark!\_

\_And it's just as fake as the rest of you! Fake pony! Fake pony!\_

"It's Diamond Tiara," Silver sighed. "She... How did you three ever

put up with us?!"

"We kinda didn't," Scootaloo admitted. "Not in the baseline, and not when we were new loopers. It took us all a bunch of Loops before we managed to mature enough to deal with it. And not being your friends kinda helped with not taking it personally I guess. I can't imagine how hard it must be for you since, you know..."

"I kinda wish I couldn't either," Silver Spoon sighed. "I had a hard time getting used to the 'new' Diamond at first, but I think we're closer now than we ever were. Closer than our baselines ever could have been, I think. And it hurts because I know now how awesome my best friend can be and I have to watch this stubborn, petty, little rrrggh... just waste her potential! How the leaf did you three manage to get through to her again?!"

"It was all Applebloom, remember?" Scootaloo reminded Silver. "They told you how Discord stranded them together on a desert island, 'Bloom had already taken all her useful stuff outta her subspace pocket and decided not to use her looping abilities so it would be fair to DT meaning they'd starve if they didn't work together."

"Sorry," Silver moped. "I just keep hoping that something less... life threatening could work."

"Well..." Scootaloo rubbed her chin, "You know how she likes to suck up to her dad's rich business partners, right?"

"Of course," Silver sniffed. "How do you think we knew each other originally?"

Scootaloo shrugged the retort off before replying. "Well, 'poppa Light' runs a pretty successful business..."

Silver blinked and began to grin as wide as her metal face would allow as a plan began to come together.

\* \* \*

><p>"Looking good, Dash," Roll grinned seeing the nervous pegasus in the gala dress Rarity had designed for her.<p>

"Seriously?" Dash questioned, looking uncomfortable. "I was kind of imagining something..."

"20% cooler?" Roll and Rarity deadpanned together.

"Ah-heh..." Dash rubbed the back of her head sheepishly.

"Rainbow Dash," Rarity admonished, "I have seen what you would consider 'cool' and it is not proper gala wear!"

"Besides," Roll added, "with the laced sandals and the laurel wreath, you look like you just stepped out of the winner's circle from the ancient Equestrian Games."

Dash blinked as that sunk in and turned to look herself over in the mirror again, striking a few 'victory' poses. "You really think so?"

"\_Do\_ give me some credit, dear," Rarity sniffed. "I do not merely design fabulosity in this shop, I also match that fabulosity to the personality of the intended wearer and you are nothing if not an athlete. To suggest that I would allow anything unsuited to that trait to grace your frame," \_'at least when I'm not deliberately embarrassing you for a prank,'\_ she added silently, "is an insult to my profession."

"Yeah, well..." Dash fished for something to redirect the conversation, "what about Roll's dress? Not a whole lot to that one."

"Miss Roll is a very simple mare," Rarity huffed. "Excessive adornment just does not suit her. And red is quite her color, would you not agree?"

Indeed, Roll was currently modeling what could be termed a stereotypical 'little red dress' were it not for the subtle circuitry highlights that shimmered when the light hit them just right.

"I am more curious as to who the stallion is you requested the suit for," Rarity decided to strike back.

"Dash!" Roll declared with acute interest. "Do you have a \_date\_? Who is it? Where did you meet them?"

"And \_how\_ did you come by the extra ticket, dear?" Rarity inserted.

"Whoa!" Dash backed up from the sudden assault. "He's just an old friend! No one you'd know," \_'and I'm trying to fix that, stubborn Blues...'\_ she cursed mentally, "and the lab got an extra ticket for some reason! Honest!" (7)

\* \* \*

><p>"Hmmm... yes," Dr. Light mused at the idea his adopted daughter and her friend Silver had suggested. "A business arrangement with Mr. Rich could be quite the boon for Light Labs if done properly. I'll see about making an appointment after Twilight and I finish up here."<p>

"Thanks dad!" Scootaloo and Silver chirped as they raced back out.

"Ah, to be young again," Dr. Light chuckled as he turned back to the project he was helping Celestia's prized student put together. Had the filly not insisted on making such a complex model, they'd have already been done. But he'd been so intrigued by the prospect of making a properly functioning alicorn model that he'd let himself be talked into it. Why, the advances they'd made in cross-race magical conversion just to get this one robot working the way it needed to \_alone\_...

"Focus doctor," Twilight's voice cut through his musings. Ah, how far she'd come from the hero-worship she'd started with. But familiarity and the informal air they strove to create around the lab had a way of tempering such things.



"Yes, of course," he replied. They were in the most delicate final stage, the connecting of the strange orb Twilight had procured from the mystical discharge the cleansing of Nightmare Moon from Luna had produced to the robot body's processors. Done properly, the orb should function like an IC chip. "Okay, you should connect the thaumic actuators to the..."

Twilight worked as the good doctor gave general directions. He'd shown her how to build and connect everything, but the one who had done all the physical work on this robot was Twilight herself. This was to be her child after all, not his.

Save for the race model difference, the body was like Silver Spoon's, a filly with the capacity for later updating to a more mature model. Scootaloo may have wanted a friend her own age back then, but he knew she'd want that friend to grow with her eventually.

He watched as Twilight made the last connection and closed the outer shell while the systems booted up for the first time. The robot filly blinked and looked around in confusion before fixing her gaze on Twilight.

"Momma?" the robot filly asked confusedly. "Where did I Wake Up?"

'Interesting inflection on that question,' Dr. Light mused. Apparently Twilight's handling of the orb had created some manner of imprinting. No sign of the corruption Nightmare Moon was known for, thank goodness, and the robot filly hadn't even needed to be told who had built her. Absolutely fascinating.

"Right where you were supposed to, Nyx," Twilight's eyes watered before she enveloped the so-named mechanical filly in a hug. (8)

Dr. Light promptly decided that this was a private moment and proceeded to make himself scarce.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Okay Dash,'<em> the pegasus mare psyched herself up, 'you've got this. So, maybe you've been having some trouble doing a Sonic Rainboom on command, but everything else you've got down pat. So what if your old classmates from Flight School are still jerks? So what if half of Cloudsdale's still giving you dirty looks because you helped some smart guys break the weather monopoly? So what if Rarity just wowed everyone with that flutterwing spell Twilight cast on her? So what if Roll's debuting the pegasus harness right after your turn? It's like Doc Light said, no matter what you try to do, there will be ponies right there telling you you can't. If you really want to be the best no one's going to just hand you the title. You gotta make them believe you deserve it.'

She stepped out to cheers from some, boos from others but let it all wash over her. Her only focus was on her routine. Nothing else mattered.

And it went amazingly. The shifts and turns were perfect. The crowd oohed and aahed in all the right places. She could tell that even her detractors were impressed. And then it all went south.

The blast of wind had come out of nowhere and ploughed her straight into the stands. Her head was ringing when she heard a trio of impacts hit near her and she extracted herself.

"I'll let that one slide," an unfamiliar voice boomed over the stadium, "but if any one other than the Mega Mane or Mega Mare step forward then my seven brothers and their armies will destroy the areas they control."

"Oh Celestia!" a stallion was panicking near her. "My buds! They tried to catch Spitfire and got knocked off! They're not flying! Help!"

Dash didn't even think twice. A quick glance around showed the other Wonderbolts weren't conscious enough to make the rescue, so she opted to go after the falling ponies instead. She leapt off the stands and rocketed downwards towards the three as fast as she could, but the lead they had was too far for her to make it at subsonic speeds.

She pushed harder and harder as she heard Roll fight against the attacker and the familiar barrier of air formed in front of her.

"You cannot defeat Air Terrel!" (9) boomed the attacker above as she struggled against the air resistance, desperately trying for more speed. Three ponies' lives were counting on her, and Rainbow Dash didn't let others down if she could help it.

\*\*\*BOOM\*\*\*

And suddenly the resistance was gone. She'd broken the barrier, but she didn't have time to celebrate as she grabbed the three unconscious pegasi and began to pull up as sharply as she dared to avoid the ground.

Whew. They were safe and she even had enough momentum going to get them back up to Cloudsdale. On the way back up, she passed the falling body of a buff blue metal griffon with a huge fan in its torso and shortly after she was depositing a recovering Spitfire and two familiar stallions on the clouds.

Of course it would be Hoops and Score that she just saved. Along with their aptly named pal Dumb-Bell, they were the worst bullies in all of Cloudsdale. But... she had to be honest. She'd have gone after them even if she'd known. They were jerks, but they didn't deserve to die for it.

"Miss Dash!" some reporter shoved a microphone in her face out of nowhere. "Is it true that the power of friendship is what allowed you to do a Sonic Rainboom?"

"Huh?" Dash blinked. Where the hay did they get that idea? "No. I mean, Spitfire's my idol, but we're not friends."

"Is it true that you're in an illicit three-way relationship with the two stallions you saved?" the reporter didn't even seem to have heard her.

"Like buck!" she yelled loud enough to bowl the idiot over. "I hate these jerks! They're my worst enemies short of Doc Wily!"

"Then, why did you save them?" someone else asked. Dash blinked and seriously considered the question for a moment.

"Because if working at Light Labs has taught me anything, it's that we're here to help \_everypony\_," she told the more reasonable pony, "not just those we like. And, yeah, you can quote me on that."

\* \* \*

><p>"Blast it," Rock muttered in the stands as the commotion started to die down, though not quietly enough for Twilight to miss overhearing.<p>

"What?" she asked curiously.

"You heard Air Terrel before Roll engaged him, didn't you?" Rock began rhetorically. "How he referred to me as 'Mega Mane' instead of 'Mega Stallion'?"

"Yeah," Twilight mused. "That was odd... It's inaccurate of course, but nonetheless closer to your baseline title."

"Which means there's a good chance Dr. Wily's Dreaming again," Rock sighed, before noting Twilight's puzzled expression. "I'll explain later, but right now Roll and I need to go and get the other seven before they get tired of waiting for us and do something we'll all regret."

\* \* \*

><p>Roll took cover behind some factory machinery as her opponent blasted fire at her. Of <em>course<em> Heat Man's local variant would be dragon-based.

"First Flash Mare, then Crash Mane, and now Heat Drake," Roll muttered as she did her best to avoid damage and find the best opening to retaliate. She and her brother were being led on a scripted series of battles that seemed designed to ensure they got almost all of the master weapons they needed \_after\_ they'd be useful. It was almost like Dr. Wily was daring them to use weapons they couldn't have gotten yet. Yeah, he was definitely Dreaming.

\* \* \*

><p>Rock swore as he dodged another timberwolf. He'd taken down Bubble Mare and Quick Mane already, but the local variant of Wood Man had holed up in the Everfree and had taken control of the resident timberwolves. All of them. Or at least what looked like it.<p>

"Attack my loyal pack!" the feral wooden robot growled, "Attack in the name of Wood Alpha!" (10)

\_ 'Leave it to Dr. Wily to make the local hostile flora even worse,' \_ Rock cursed as he blasted a few more of the wooden wolves and tried to get a bead on their leader. He stopped as he spotted movement from the defeated timberwolves. Were they \_reforming\_?

\* \* \*

><p>Dr. Light was helping direct his son and daughter's movements, with the enthusiastic aid of the Elements of Harmony, when a proximity alert went off. As more of the interior defenses, a necessary precaution since his former partner's attempts to conquer Equestria, went offline, he tapped a few buttons on the console.<p>

And then the door to the room was cut from its frame.

"Hello doc, ladies," the robot that strode in greeted with sinister cheerfulness. His armor was patterned in red, yellow, and black with saw blades in the place of his mane. He formed a circular sawblade in a slot on each forehoof and set them spinning ominously. "Now if you all would back away from that computer nice and slow, you can all get out of this with your limbs still attached."

Rarity stepped forward, scowling. "Now see here, youâ€"

The blade that launched at her from the robot's hoof came so fast and sudden that Twilight almost didn't get a shield up in time. She'd later realize that the trajectory was a warning shot meant to leave her fashionista friend with a bad mane-cut and possibly short an ear, but not dead. And in the end, she needn't have bothered, because the blade was intercepted by a glob of liquid adhesive and pasted harmlessly against the wall.

"Who are you?" the invading robot asked the one who'd intercepted his shot.

An orange and black robot pony with a head that looked like a paste dispenser stepped in and stared at the invader. "DLN-009: Bond Mane," he declared.

"What a coincidence," the invading robot glared back, "I'm D\_W\_N-009: Metal Mane."

\* \* \*

><p>"And then the nasty robot was all like 'grr! I'm gonna cut ya up'!" Pinkie related as Rock and Roll both listened over the communications channel, "and Bond Mane was all like 'not on my watch pardner'! They fought like kung fu ninjas back and forth, trashing everything in sight for miles andâ€"<p>

"Actually, Bond Mane blasted Metal Mane with some hefty adhesive and left him plastered against the wall," Twilight interrupted, rolling her eyes. "Your dad immediately disabled his communicator and mobility, but he's still otherwise functional."

"Good," Rock replied over the com. "We're coming back to get his data and correlate it with the rest so we can find out where Wily's holed up."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight watched as Rock and Roll in their 'Mega Pony' armor bumped hooves before entering the lab. It was interesting how little fanfare occurred to indicate what she knew was happening when they did that. The ability to scan and download information from a subject

so thoroughly by just <em>touch<em>...

The looping student of Celestia stamped down her rising fanfillying. This was not the time.

Think about something else... Like how they made use of the teleport network Light Labs had set up to transport non-biological items and was even now being refined so it could be used on living subjects...

'Down girl,' she ordered herself. The two robot heroes were talking with Dr. Light. Apparently their shared data just needed one more piece to be complete and allow them to track where Dr. Wily had gone. The piece Metal Mane had.

As one, the two robot ponies went over and touched Wily's robot, and then everything went to Tartarus.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>FOR THE GLORY OF WILY!<strong></p>

\* \* \*

><p>The whole lab was frantic when something hit the two after downloading Metal Mane's data. Wily's robot had shut down from the backlash, but the damage was done. Bond Mane had needed to glue both heroes to the wall so they could be examined without risking them harming anypony, and the news was anything but good.<p>

"They're contaminated with an energy similar to that of Nightmare Moon," Dr. Light gave the prognosis to the gathered Elements. "It's really quite insidious. I couldn't tell it was even there until they had all the pieces that Wily placed in each of his robot masters."

"It's different too," Twilight added, all business. "I've been talking with Luna and she likened her corruption to a whisper in the back of her mind so subtle it was hard to differentiate from her own thoughts. One that poked at her insecurities until the dark thoughts it put forth began to sound like good ideas and any other options were obscured by the constant repetition. What they've got is more like a voice screaming at them, making it hard to think period."

"My attempts at developing an anti-virus have failed," Dr. Light admitted. "I am unable to remove this darkness from my children."

"Which means it's up to us, girls," Twilight told her friends. "If we had more time, we could research other methods, but Dr. Wily needs to be stopped now and only these two have the information needed to find him. I've already had Spike send a message to Princess Celestia requesting the use of the Elements of Harmony for this and they should be arriving shortly. Are you ready?"

Five determined nods were her reply.

\* \* \*

><p>Rock felt the wave of Harmony wash over him and sweep away the

dark pounding in his processors. Later, he would describe it like getting wake-up slapped with a revelation wrapped in a humbling sense of peace and acceptance.<p>

The sudden absence of the dark malware was just as jarring as its activation though, and he slumped where he was pasted to the wall next to his sister. However, a quick assessment of the remaining data had his head whipping right back up.

"I know where Dr. Wily is!" both he and Roll declared together.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stared at the video feed from the robot heroes showing Wily's Skull Fortress.<p>

"How the hay did nopony \_notice\_ this?!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Hahahaha! Feeble Equestrian robots!" Dr. Wily laughed as his form twisted and bent in a manner depressingly familiar to his twin opponents. "You cannot stop me! I possess the power of the stars!"<p>

The room dissolved into an endless night sky as Wily turned from an earth pony into a vaguely pony-like alien form.

"Oh, come on!" Roll shouted in disbelief as she and her brother dodged a beam of energy directed at them. "No way you're really an alien!"

"What you think is of no consequence!" the alien-thing-that-was-supposedly-Wily retorted. "Flee and warn Equestria that I am merely the vanguard! Doom is coming! HAHAAHAHA!"

Rock ignored the taunting. This kind of thing was old hat for him by now. Roll had agreed to keep Wily-alien busy while he checked the perimeter.

\_'Good,'\_ he thought as his hoof bumped the wall right where it should be. \_'He's still using a hologram for this. Not sure what we're going to do if we ever end up in a variant where Wily really \_is\_ an alien like he keeps trying to claim, but this we can handle.'\_

Rock turned his Mega-Buster to where he recalled the field of stars began to appear and fired, ignoring Wily's sudden call for him to stop.

The twin robot pony heroes stood side by side as the hologram faded to reveal a metal room empty save for the control panel the real Wily Plan was operating.

"Er... pay no attention to that pony behind the hologram?" Wily sweated as both Mega Ponies glared at him.

"Dr. Wily," Rock stated, "you're under arrest."

"You have the right to remain silent," Roll continued before Wily slammed a hoof on his control panel.

"Bah!" the mad doctor declared, suddenly energetic. "You fools understand nothing! I am the chosen vanguard! Nightmare Moon was chosen, but she couldn't hack it, and so the stars decided to give the job to a real genius! They shall take this world for their own and I shall pave the way! Then none shall be able to deny that I am truly the greatest!\_"

Rock and Roll were so busy parsing this new rant that they almost forgot that Wily often had a secret escape route. They had barely started moving when the doctor dropped through a trap door that closed after him.

"WARNING," a mechanical voice rang out. "SKULL FORTRESS SELF-DESTRUCT IN FIVE MINUTES."

The rant may have pointed to something different going on behind the scenes of this Loop, but the rush to outrun the castle's self-destruct was so familiar by now it could have been done with their optics off.

The reports had been filed, and the two heroes were now resting from their ordeal as they regaled their collected friends, both Awake and not, of their battles.

"And then Ditzzy Doo drops right out of the sky and collides with Bubble Mare, smashing them both into a nearby wall," Rock told the gathered ponies. "They both go like this," Rock took a moment to cause his eyes to circle aimlessly and spoke the next line in a falsetto, "'I just don't know what went wrong' before falling unconscious together."

Laughter chorused through the room at Rock's impression.

"All joking aside though, she probably saved my life," Rock continued seriously. "Or at least prevented serious injury. I'm going to set up a tab with Sugarcube Corner to give her free muffins every day in perpetuity as thanks."

"He really said 'the stars' had chosen him?" Twilight asked pointedly once she'd managed to get the two into a more private meeting with only Awake individuals present.

"Not those exact words," Roll clarified, "but yes."

"That's... troubling," Spike mused. "The prophecy of Nightmare Moon said 'the stars shall aid in her escape, but...'"

"But it's normally just an alignment of planets and moons and such," Twilight finished for him. "Still, we've had a bunch of variants where 'the stars' were more than that, but there's no real pattern to who or why."

"And Wily's not normally known for working with anyone," Rock added, "much less for anyone. The first is a short list that frequently ends in betrayal, and the second is practically nonexistent and has so far never been a case of Wily doing so both willingly and knowingly. Safe money's on either Wily, 'the stars', or both using

the other."

"Could he be infected like Nightmare Moon was?" Rarity asked.

"It's possible," Roll admitted.

"But the fact remains that he hasn't really been acting any different from what we're used to," Rock added. "If he is corrupted by the nightmare, it didn't have to work too hard."

"Which would explain why he went sour so darn fast," Applejack added.

"No more than usual," Rock clarified. "Corrupted or not, neither theory is outside the realm of possibility."

"Okay, that's going nowhere," Twilight cut off debate. "You promised me an explanation on what you meant by Wily 'Dreaming'."

Rock sighed before launching an explanation. "As you know, our branch is pretty damaged. Inconsistent baseline, bugs, viruses, the whole nine yards. There's apparently a relatively stable bug that's occurred in both Dad's and Dr. Wily's Yggdrasil codes that allows them to randomly access memories from previous Loops they existed in. They tend to think of it as *deja vu*, a flash of brilliance, or premonitions, but they occasionally do things that can only be explained by Loop memories, however partial."

"I've heard of something like that before," Twilight pondered. "A bunch of people in the Loop the Norns spend their time in ended up being able to retain Loop memories by way of consistent exposure to their divine auras, but no trained physical skills like a looper would. At least that's the most plausible theory I came up with. But their memories are much more coherent."

"Well, Wily's has been a recurring headache for us," Roll informed them. "It may be inconsistent, but we've noticed that if we use certain tactics too much then he prepares for them more often. And then there's the fact that even without Dreaming he's smart enough to improve his inventions to match us if we start off too strong or overcome obstacles too easily."

"It's only going to be a matter of time before the stuff he's learned here ends up in something he makes back home," Rock finished wearily.

"Oh, dear," Fluttershy sympathized.

"Um... sorry?" Pinkie grinned awkwardly.

"Not your fault," Rock dismissed their worries. "We're used to Wily pulling strange things out of nowhere."

"So long as no one uses anything dangerously potent, we should be able to deal with it with no more problems than usual," Roll clarified.

"We could still blast him with the Elements," Spike offered.

"Let's table that option until we actually find him," Twilight told



her assistant/little brother before turning back to the visiting loopers. "Sorry the whole sanctuary thing isn't working out like it normally does."

"Are you kidding?" Rock grinned suddenly. "This has been great! We can actually walk around town without being mobbed by hero worshipers!"

"Yeah," Roll agreed happily. "And we haven't had to deal with one anti-robot terrorist organization, robot worshiping cult, or paranoid government agent since we got here!"

There were synchronized blinks from the Equestrian loopers as they processed that.

"Hey, Blues!" Rainbow Dash greeted her wayward friend at the edge of the Whitetail Woods. "I got your message! You finally ready to go talk things out with your dad?"

"No," the prototype robot decisively smashed her hopes. "I just wanted you to know that I'm leaving for a while."

"What?" Rainbow Dash blinked. "But..."

"I'm sorry," the shades-wearing robot stallion told her truthfully, "but there's something I have to go do."

"You're going to look for Wily, aren't you?" Dash asked him flatly.

"...Yes," the wayward brother of Equestria's heroes admitted. "He's up to something bigger than anyone knows and someone has to find out what."

"Okay, I guess I can accept that," Dash rubbed the back of her head. "On one condition!"

Blues's eyebrow raised above his shades curiously. "And what would that be?"

"That you're back in time to take me to the Gala," Dash stepped forward and tucked a golden ticket into his scarf. "No excuses! Your dad's not going, and I don't know what the hay's up between you two in the first place, but you owe it to your brother and sister to at least \_meet\_ them. And a formal setting's as good as any!"

Blues stared back at her emotionlessly before turning away, his scarf rustling in a sudden breeze.

"No promises," he told her as he walked away. After a few steps, he turned his head back. "But I'll do my best."

\* \* \*

><p>rIn the past few weeks, Diamond Tiara's world had been turned upside down. Her father had met with Dr. Light to make a business arrangement, a <em>lucrative</em> business arrangement, which meant that the blaâ€"pegasus that was his adopted daughter had suddenly jumped from peasant to equal on the social scale where she was concerned. Which meant she needed to play nice or risk her father's

contract since the odd but brilliant stallion thought the world of his children.

It had been an... interesting experience.

The faa€"robot pony Silver Spoon has proven to be very cultured and refined once she'd begun actually paying attention to her. As... she'd... put it: 'Someone has to make sure Scoots behaves herself properly'. And then Scoots had taken mild offense and the two had gotten to arguing.

That had been an eye opener. She'd thought Silver Spoon was some sort of personal servant that was created to be even more obedient than the hired help and there she was arguing childishly with the one she supposedly served.

Even the pea€"Applebloom and Sweetie Belle that Scootaloo liked to 'hang out' with had proven good... friends in the end.

It had been a rocky start at first, and mostly due to her she could now admit. For one, they'd wanted her to do things, not just talk about things. And they were very insistent about that. Doing things herself had been scary after a life of having everything done for her by other ponies, but despite the dirt, the low-brow activities, and the tree sap that seemed to follow the group it had been... fun.

And then the robo-alicorn 'daughter' of Twilight, Nyx, had joined them. Diamond hadn't known what to make of her. She looked like... a filly Nightmare Moon for one, an alicorn for another, and yet acted like neither unless she was joking around. And she'd been made without a cutie mark.

The last part had become important recently. Diamond had thought Twilight was still deciding on one to give the robot filly when a sleepover at Fluttershy's had turned into a scramble for survival in the Everfree with a cockatrice. Nyx of all fillies had held the thing off, her metal body seemingly immune to the creature's petrifying stare, until Fluttershy pacified it.

And had earned a cutie mark of a shield emblazoned with a crescent moon in the process, her talent being defending others.

The phenomenon had floored her. According to miss Cheerilee, cutie marks were something unique to ponies (and pony-like races like zebras), which meant that Nyx could only earn one if she was really a pony\_.

It was... intriguing to her to say the least. Plus, spending time around the bla€"three who had yet to earn their cutie marks had caused her to start wondering about what her own meant. Surely it meant more than being a pampered princess and looking regal in the well-crafted look-alike tiara her father had commissioned for her... right?

Of course, that train of thought could wait until after she and the rest finished putting together their skit for the talent show. Honestly, the other three non-robotic 'crusaders' were Tartarus-bent on taking on roles they were singularly unsuited for, and the other two weren't calling them on it for some reason.

Maybe it was time somepony took charge...

\* \* \*

><p><em>"My Mega Pony, My Mega Pony<em>

\_Ahh, ahh, ahh, ahhh...\_

\_(My Mega Pony)\_

\_I will stop your wily plans Doctor Wily\_

\_(My Mega Pony)\_

\_Saving the world from your villainy\_

\_Big adventures\_

\_Tons of fights\_

\_A determined heart\_

\_Faithful and strong\_

\_Saving the world!\_

\_It's not an easy feat\_

\_But I and my family will not retreat.\_

\_I am Mega Pony\_

\_And I will not fail all my very best friends!"\_ (11)

"ARGH!" the frustrated cry of Diamond Tiara interrupted Scootaloo's composition of the song for the group's talent show entry. "That does it!

"Something wrong DT?" Scootaloo asked the rich filly. \_'As if I couldn't guess.'\_

"Scootaloo," Diamond glared at her, "your song is... not bad to be honest, but you are not a musical composer! A filly with your natural acrobatic ability should be on the choreography! Not song-writing!"

"Hey!" Applebloom protested from nearby. "I'm tha one doin' tha dancin'! Kung-fu style even! Hi-ya!"

"No!" Diamond vetoed the thought. "Scootaloo is the better dancer! \_And\_ the better martial artist!"

"Ah know that!" Applebloom shouted back. "Her pa's one a' tha assistant instructors after all!"

"Dr. Light is an accomplished polymath," Silver observed from where she'd been tapped to help Sweetie with the disastrous decorations.

"What's math got ta do with it?" Applebloom looked confused.

"It means he's good at lots of stuff," Nyx told her.

"\_Which doesn't matter right now!\_" the pink tiara-wearing filly insisted. "Applebloom, you should be doing the set design instead of the choreography!"

"Hey!" Sweetie Belle protested.

"Why?" Applebloom backed up at Diamond's fierce expression.

"Because you are the most qualified!" the irate filly yelled. "Look what you did with the treehouse!"

"That weren't anythin' special..." the farm filly looked down.

"Not anything..." Diamond gaped. "That is nearly professional quality work! Exactly what we need for our set! No arguments!"

Applebloom shut her mouth from where she'd been about to protest.

"What about me then?" Sweetie sulked.

"You will be rewriting the music into a proper song!" Diamond ordered. "No complaints! Don't think I haven't seen you giving our resident daredevil advice on how to improve her attempts! You are the song leader! Now hop to it!"

\_'About time,'\_ Scootaloo rolled her eyes. She wasn't bad with singing after all the Loops she'd been through, but Sweetie was simply a natural at it. Heck, if this worked out alright, all three of them could earn their cutie marks at the same time. They'd arranged it amongst themselves a few times when all three were Awake, but it tended to be hit-or-miss. The more they focused on earning their cutie marks instead of the task that would earn it for them, the less likely it was to work.

"What are you two talking about?" Diamond had rounded on the two robot fillies.

"Oh, we'd had a bet going on when you'd snap and take charge," Silver told the pink earth pony filly. "I won."

"I don't know whether to find that flattering or insulting," Diamond glared at the two as Scootaloo chuckled and began hashing out a choreography routine for the six of them.

\* \* \*

><p><em>"My Mega Pony, My Mega Pony,<em>

\_What are robots all about?\_

\_My Mega Pony, My Mega Pony\_

\_Robots are magic!\_

\_My Mega Pony,\_

\_I used to wonder what robots could mean,\_  
\_My Mega Pony\_  
\_To a world that's all so serene.\_  
\_When you were built your tasks around the house you'd tend,\_  
\_No robot masters to fight and no shining cities to defend\_  
\_But My Mega Ponies, that old Wily had to try,\_  
\_He took those made to improve things, turned their tasks into a  
lie\_  
\_And you could do nothing but stand by.\_  
\_My Mega Pony,\_  
\_I used to wonder what robots could mean,\_  
\_My Mega Pony\_  
\_To a world that's all so serene.\_  
\_Now you face danger when it comes around, you were remade in the  
Light,\_  
\_You won't let the Blues take hold, you always take another  
try,\_  
\_Demands for surrender, Automatically denied, Wily's lies you refuse  
to buy\_  
\_Your metal hooves are grounded, a Rock-steady ally\_  
\_Still you keep the laughter Rolling, to hold your spirits  
high.\_  
\_My Mega Pony,\_  
\_I used to wonder what robots could mean,\_  
\_My Mega Pony\_  
\_To a world that's all so serene.\_  
\_Your copy chip gives power, and it's growing all the time.\_  
\_A new adventure waits for us each day is yours and mine.\_  
\_We'll make it special every time!\_  
\_We'll make it special every time!\_  
\_My Mega Pony\_  
\_What a beautiful ballad robots sing\_  
\_My Mega Pony\_

\_How I hope your story never, \_

\_Ends \_

\_Even as more robots Wily, \_

\_Sends \_

\_you're my very best \_

\_Friends, \_

\_you're my very best friends!" \_(\*)

Rock and Roll idly wondered how hard it would be to sneak out of the talent show's audience. The song their adopted sister and her five friends (three biological and two mechanical) were performing was flattering and all, but this kind of fame was embarrassing dang it!

\* \* \*

><p>Diamond Tiara snuggled into her bed and gazed at the Best Show ribbon she'd won with her friends. First place and three earned cutie marks in the process. That had to be some sort of record.<p>

Applebloom had gotten an actual apple bloom for hers, except one could see it was made of wood by the not-quite-finished paint job on it. A mark for how she was at her best when making things.

Sweetie Bell had gotten a heart-themed musical note, and Nyx had said something about how a heart motif on a cutie mark was often an indication of the high level of love and care a pony put into their particular talent. Sweetie had blushed crimson at the praise.

And Scootaloo had ended up with a shooting star on her flank. Even Diamond knew that star-themed marks denoted a high level of practical ability in the talent, and a shooting star was particularly impressive.

But even that achievement paled in her personal estimate with how proud her parents had been. Over something she'd done herself, not just ordered or paid others to do. Her father had gushed about how every great leader knew when to 'roll up their sleeves' and do the dirty work. He'd even given her a whispered confession that he'd had to buckle down and do nearly every job in his own company at least once.

Her dad thought she had the makings of a great leader. Because she'd helped her friends achieve something great by 'rolling up her sleeves' and helping them herself.

With that thought and a smile, she drifted off to sleep.

\* \* \*

><p>Blues came back online in a cave. He'd gone wandering and found what seemed like a promising place saturated with the dark presence

he'd identified from remote access to the lab's computers as similar to what had attacked his brother and sister this Loop. And so he'd headed straight into it to find the source and see if Dr. Wily was involved, only to collapse as it started interfering with his systems.<p>

Even now, he could feel it surrounding him, but he was somehow immune. A quick check of his systems showed that he'd actually been treated with the energy in a way that protected against its disruptive influence. His experimental thaumic energy core had been adjâ€

\_A repair to his faulty power core would end up erasing his personality.\_

â€usted even. Fixed. Improved no less. A familiar helmet rested on his head, and the kind of shield that had become his trademark in his home Loop was strapped to his foreleg. Those two things hadn't been there this Loop. Not yet. His original shield from his home Loop was both not properly weighted for his pony form and still in his subspace pocket.

There was only one possible culprit.

"Dr. Wily I presume?" he asked the shadows around him, and was rewarded when the mad scientist stepped forth.

"Why, yes, my dear colt," the earth pony looked impressed. "How did you guess?"

"Only two ponies have this kind of ability," he stated flatly. "And of them only you are on the run and hiding out."

"Still a keen mind on you, I see," Dr. Wily observed him calculatngly. "What brings you out here in the first place?"

"I needed a break from things," he said simply. "And I am indebted to you for rescuing me."

"I see..." Wily pondered. "Then perhaps in breaking away from your former self, you can help me break my enemies? Be my Break Mane."

Blues remained silent and let the stallion draw his own conclusions.

\*\*Welcome back to the dark side.\*\*

"Well, you will make a fine addition!" Dr. Wily took the silence as agreement and led him into another room.

Only his full-face helmet and shades prevented Blues' expression from giving away his total shock at what was in that room.

"A fine addition to the stars indeed!"

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Now, I have heard the Apploosans' side of things. The land is the only flat arable area appropriate for growing the trees which

are their primary food source. Complete removal of the trees would mean their starvation. However, I have not heard your side Chief Thunderhooves and I would like to so that I may see if we can come to some manner of agreement."<em>

\_"It is simple. The path for our traditional stampede is sacred to us. It is unthinkable to stampede elsewhere."\_

\_"Hmph. Typical tribal nonsensical"\_"

\_"That is enough Sheriff Silverstar. Chief Thunderhooves, I can tell that you and your buffalo are fair, mighty, and wise. And it is my experience that such beings do not simply create traditions from nothing, especially not sacred ones. So, please, tell me why this path is so sacred."\_

Something about that way the older pony, this 'Doctor Light', spoke, with intelligence and respect, had told him that he would not be dismissive of his tribe's beliefs. And so he had told the pony the origins of the stampede and why it was such an important tradition to the buffalo.

When he had finished, the pony hadn't derided him for 'backwards' thinking or dismissed his concerns as those of a 'savage'. Instead, he'd spoken fondly of a tradition from his own home. A 'running of the leaves' that sounded so much like his tribe's sacred stampede that he could almost believe the pony was really a buffalo at heart.

And then Sheriff Silverstar had added a tradition of his own from before he'd come out to this area to settle with the other ponies, with none of the rancor or condescension he'd shown before. He'd responded with a tale of his tribe's spring celebrations, to which Light responded with a story of the Hearth's Warming winter 'holiday', followed by the sheriff's telling of his last 'family reunion'.

It had been a grand story-telling that lacked only an equally grand fire, but instead topped off with those \_delicious\_ apples.

At some point, two of the farming ponies who were in charge of the trees had joined them and he was showing them on a map just where the stampede's path went. Most of the orchard could actually be kept with no disruption, but it was not an insignificant amount of trees that would have to be moved.

But Light seemed to have answers for everything. He'd asked questions regarding the needed traits of the land for the trees and before the chief knew it he'd been telling them of an area not prohibitively far away that could serve to grow those trees that were moved. It was less flat, but the quality of the soil and nearness to water would serve.

He'd even found himself telling the ponies of plants native to the region that were perfectly good sources of food for his own buffalo and could be more easily grown in the arid region than the trees the ponies prided themselves on. And the farm ponies had listened, even offered a share of the apples to his buffalo for the use of the remaining land. It was nothing short of a miracle he'd witnessed.



Not to say that his tribe conceded nothing in the exchange. For one, he'd ended up volunteering the tribes services to help move the trees from the stampede path to their new grounds and promised to help teach the pony farmers how to grow and prepare the native food plants his own tribe normally subsisted on. For another, the ponies seemed quite interested in trading for tribal goods the buffalo made.

But the most interesting one was what Light himself had requested. He wanted the chance to join the tribe in their sacred stampede. Such was hardly forbidden, but none outside the tribe had ever \_asked\_.

And now here he was, about to start the traditional sacred stampede with his tribesbuffalo, and over a dozen of the ponies mixed in among them.

"It has been my observation that no matter how true traditions remain to their origins, some change is inevitable," the pony known as Light spoke sagely next to him.

"Yes," he agreed. His grandfather had liked to rail against the inclusion of tribal adornments in the stampede, claiming that true buffalo would never run while wearing such frivolous things. "Not always for the better, but sometimes."

"Perhaps this is one such time?" Light inquired as the stampede began.

"Only the future may tell," he replied as the thundering of hooves grew in volume with the advance of the mixed herd of buffalo and ponies.

\* \* \*

><p>The CMC might not be trying for cutie marks anymore, but they still went out and tried some crazy stuff to see what else they might find fun. Scootaloo's adoptive father was good at plenty of things outside his own cutie mark of a lit bulb, and so they'd decided to try and see what else the six of them could learn how to do. How their current outing had led to getting stories from other ponies about how they earned their cutie marks was something Diamond wasn't too clear on, but she had to admit that some of them were shaping up to be pretty interesting. Just like the marks themselves, no two ways of earning them seemed to be exactly alike.<p>

"You really fought off a chupacabra with a broom?" Diamond Tiara asked Roll incredulously after she and the other crusaders heard her cutie mark story.

"He was making a mess," Roll stated simply.

Huh. No wonder her cutie mark looked the way it did. It was a \_combat\_ broom. Diamond wouldn't have believed such a thing possible before then.

\* \* \*

><p>"Thanks for helping me get out of there," Blues told his current companion.<p>

"I should be thanking you," the beige-coated pegasus mare with a mane in various shades of gray, a compass rose cutie mark, and wearing a pith helmet, known to most as Daring Do, replied. "I've dealt with most of that crowd before, but never all at once."

"Bet it gets rather repetitive," Blues observed carefully.

"You have no idea," Daring rolled her eyes as they put as much distance between themselves and the temple as possible.

"Ever go back in time?" the robot stallion decided to fish a bit.

"Thankfully, no," Daring told him with no indication that the question meant anything out of the ordinary to her. "I've heard of some things that are supposed to do that but all the ones I've found have been either duds or broken, assuming their abilities weren't outright falsehoods to begin with."

"I suppose we should take our blessings where we get them," he allowed. 'Not looping. Though she didn't seem to think anything was off with that group, so no big surprise.' He'd recognized parts of the group's appearances as being from his Loop, which meant they were significantly different from whatever this place's baseline had. So if Daring was Awake, she'd have seemed a lot more surprised than she had been.

"Right now, I'd be happy with the blessing of some faster transportation," Daring grumbled. "We need to get word to the princesses about what that lot is up to and you're the only one who can offer proof."

**\*\*No one will believe it.\*\***

"Sorry," he told her sincerely, "I'd give you the data but we can't risk whatever they infected me with spreading to other devices."

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie's mane fell straight as the hairdryer lifted from her head, only to immediately poof back up.<p>

"I swear," Rarity huffed as she watched the phenomenon happen, "you do that on purpose."

"Aww," Pinkie grinned cheekily, "but the poofy mane look is just me!"

"I dunno," Rock said from where he'd been roped into getting groomed with the rest by his sister. "You look pretty good with a straight mane too."

"Yeah, but it doesn't really go with my gala dress," Pinkie admitted with a smile.

"Ah'm still trying to wrap my mind around tha two a' ya going ta tha gala together," Applejack interjected from where she was polishing Fluttershy's hooves. "How'd that happen?"

"I asked, she said yes," Rock shrugged nonchalantly.

"I think Applejack meant 'why Pinkie?'," Twilight elaborated.

"Why not?" Rock looked confused.

"\_I\_ think it's cute," Roll insisted from where she was taking the opportunity to style her brother's mane in a ridiculous fashion she knew he would adjust to something more sensible once she and the others were finished having fun.

"Says the sister who'd ship me with anything female and not family," Rock shot back.

"I would not!" Roll looked offended. "There's an age and beauty requirement too." She thought for a second before adding: "And a sanity one." (12)

\* \* \*

><p>"You sure?" Daring asked Blues as the two came within sight of Ponyville.<p>

"Yes," Blues replied. "My father can get you in touch with your contacts while I head to Canterlot and inform the princesses."

"And the gala?" the adventurer mare continued.

\*\*Oh, that sounds fun! All those nobles and other ponies trampling each other to death\*\*

\_He watched, horrified, as Rock fell lifelessly to the ground.\_

â€œ\*\*ath in a panic when you break the news! You should totally do that!\*\*

"I'll tell them after the gala," Blues informed her. "That way they can give the matter their undivided attention. We have that much time at least. Besides, I have a promise to keep."

\* \* \*

><p>Dash sighed as she trotted over to her dress so Rarity could get her done up in time for them all to make the carriage Twilight arranged for them. No word from her 'date' for the evening. No letter, no message, no nothing<p>

She stopped when she saw the stallion mannequin next to the one that had her dress bereft of the tuxedo it had held, a damp towel and a note in the garment's place.

\_Meeting you there. Sorry if I worried you.\_

\_- Blues\_

\_P.S. How's my stealth?\_

Dash shook her head in amazement. Only Blues would treat getting into his gala tux as a spy mission.

\* \* \*

><p>"I must say, this is quite the pleasant surprise Daring," Dr. Light smiled as he led the adventurer to the communications array, both of them politely pretending not to notice the six starry-eyed fillies who thought themselves well-concealed. "How many years has it been since that unpleasantness down south?"<p>

"Too many to justify not keeping in touch and not nearly enough to get over what happened," Daring admitted as she began entering something into the panel. "And I wish it was a social call that brought me here."

"Who isâ€" a young female voice answered the call Daring had made, only to cut off in an excited squeal. "Ohmygosh! It's Daring Do!"

Dr. Light chuckled as the golden-feathered griffon child on the vid-screen went full fanhen over his now flustered guest.

"\_See?!\_" the child insisted to an older griffon hen whose feather coloration was more 'bald eagle' than 'golden eagle'. "See cousin Gilda?! I \_told\_ you she was real!"

The griffon friend of Rainbow Dash who had visited earlier that year simply stood there gawking at his visitor.

"I do apologize for any impoliteness," Dr. Light told the older griffon, "but we need to speak with your uncle. It's quite urgent."

"Yes," Gilda shook her head in a daze as she focused on the task given to her. "I'll go get him. Come on, squirt."

"Okay!" the younger griffon chirped as she followed the other. "Bye Miss Do!"

"Who was the younger one?" Daring asked once they had left.

"Did you forget that he had a daughter?" Dr. Light raised his eyebrow.

"But... he said she'd just hatched!" Daring sputtered. "Has it really been that long?"

"I'm afraid it has," a male voice came over the communicator as a stern-looking adult male griffon with golden feathers and eyeglasses stepped into view. "Bright, Daring," he greeted amiably. "What seems to be the problem?"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight blinked as she stepped out of the carriage and spotted an unfamiliar stallion in a pompadour and sunglasses, at night no less, waving to her and her friends. Or rather, to a specific member of the group.<p>

"You made it!" Rainbow dashed over to what was apparently her escort, she'd been rather insistent that it wasn't a 'date' to all of them,

for the evening.

"I promised, didn't I?" the stallion smirked.

"Well," Rarity walked up to the two hoof-in-arm with teen-form Spike, "aren't you going to introduce us to your coltfriend Dash?"

"I keep telling you, it's not like that!" Dash insisted, "but this isâ€œ"

"DLN-000, Blues Light," Roll cut in as she and her brother, with Pinkie in tow, joined Rarity. "Nice to finally meet you, brother."

"I'm surprised you managed to get him here," Rock added. "He certainly hasn't been returning any of \_our\_ calls since we found him in the Lab's database."

"You never said they'd been calling you!" Dash poked the prototype pony-bot with her hoof accusingly.

Twilight noted the dirty look Blues shot his siblings as Pinkie began going into full party planning mode regarding the older robot's getting-the-family-back-together party.

"I'm not talking to my father," Blues cut her off so sharply that Pinkie halted in mid-air and slowly drifted to the ground. "This isn't just a social call either. I'm here to speak with the princesses immediately after the gala. I have important information regarding national security for them."

"How important is it?" Twilight found herself asking, taken aback by how serious he'd sounded.

"Not so important that I want to risk causing a panic with the gala in full swing," he told them. "But it concerns Dr. Wily. And a group called The Stars."

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm glad you could come over so fast," Dr. Light greeted the griffon as he stepped out of the Lab's teleporter. long distance teleportation network was a recent development in unicorn magical emulation and still limited in regards to who had access to it, but significant strides in the technology were being made.<p>

"Think nothing of it," the griffon scientist said as his daughter came through next, followed by his niece Gilda. "If this is as serious as Daring claims, we can't waste any time."

"Who are you?" the voice of a young filly cut into the conversation as Scootaloo entered the room.

"Hi!" the youngest griffon scampered eagerly over to the pegasus filly. "I'm Kalinka! Who are you?"

"I'm Scootaloo," the adopted daughter of Dr. Light answered, "and these are my friends Applebloom, Silver Spoon, Sweetie Belle, Diamond Tiara, and Nyx."

"Oh, wow!" Kalinka oohed as she spotted the black pony robot. "You're an alicorn!"

"Yes, indeed," Dr. Light chuckled. "Many of you recall Kalinka's cousin Gilda," he gestured to the older griffon female who waved half-heartedly before turning to the male griffon. "And this is her father and a good friend of mine, Dr. Mikhail Cossack of the Griffon Empire."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, well," Spitfire arched an impressed eyebrow, "you're Light's guard prototype? I remember him claiming that you'd be the equal of any wonderbolt once he got you up in the air."<p>

"That's because he's been testing the pegasus harness against Dash here," Blues gestured to his companion who was doing her best not to hyperventilate at holding a conversation with her idol. "She's been setting the gold standard for the device since day one at the lab. There's still a few kinks to work out from what I hear."

"Really?" Spitfire turned her attention to the rainbow-maned pegasus. "I saw the footage of that thing in action against Air Tercel. It's a fine piece of work as it stands, and it still doesn't measure up to you?"

"Well..." Dash began sheepishly, feeling oddly embarrassed by the praise, "Doc Light insists on it being the best, which means I've got to give it my best, so..."

"I see," Spitfire hummed. "Well, you're already invited to our training camp next spring for your performance in the young flyers' competition, and after hearing this, I expect to see great things from you then."

Rainbow Dash almost contained the resulting squee of joy.

\* \* \*

><p>Daring Do stared intently at one of Mikhail's robots that had come through the lab's teleporter after him. "Who are you supposed to be?"<p>

The sphinx model robot stared back at her just as intently. "I am Pharaoh Sphinx, developed after extensive research on the kinds of temples you yourself tend to come across. I am fully equipped for trap detection and disarmament, my solar-energy Pharaoh Shot is both a light source and a defensive weapon, and I am tempered to withstand the dark magic of the vilest and most malevolent curses with little issue. The pharaoh theme is mostly aesthetic, though I won't complain if it means a few curses think I'm supposed to be there."

"You made a robot to do my job?" Daring turned her stare to the robot's creator.

"I made a robot who could withstand the dark magic saturating those ruins we all visited back then," Dr. Cossack defended himself.

Daring winced at the reminder of one of the few places she'd gone

that didn't appear in the books she'd written as A.K. Yearling. Not because it was uneventful, most of those at least got mentions when they became relevant, but because it was her biggest failure. None of them had gained anything from that place, and suffered losses instead. She wondered if the diamond dog Pedro had ever recovered from his injury.

"In any case, I think we should share what we know," Dr. Light reminded his colleagues of why they were here as the giggling voices of the seven children emanated from another room.

"Of course," Daring admitted. "I went back to the Lanfront ruins after a series of rumors regarding some of my old adversaries reached my ears. I managed to sneak in, barely, and discover that they were all part of the same cult group. I only escaped due to the help of your eldest 'son' Bright, but not before I found out that they're all planning something big. Have been for some time."

"You said they were part of a cult," Dr. Cossack pushed his glasses up his beak. "Which one?"

"They call themselves 'The Stars'," Daring told them to sharp intakes of breath. "The same ones who were predicted to be responsible for the return of Nightmare Moon. Not sure how accurate that part is, but the cult's been around at least a thousand years under that name. But it's been around even longer under other names, their goal for ages to plunge the world into 'eternal darkness'. Originally, it was called the Order of Le Mu, or depending on who was translating, the Order of Ra Moon."

\* \* \*

><p>"Is it ready?" a voice in the shadows asked.<p>

"Yes..." the gleeful voice of Dr. Wily responded. "With my enhancements the device is now ready to fire. No need for those inefficient baubles hidden in crumbling temples you used to go after."

"Then let the darkness fall so the Stars may reign supreme."

\* \* \*

><p>A wave of dark magic spread out from the area south of Equestria known as the Lanfront ruins, affecting everything in its path. All animals not born of dark magic stumbled and collapsed as it swept over them and trees began to lose color. The shadows choked the sky and stifled all light above so it could never reach the ground.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>As the dark wave passed over Equestria, magical devices ceased functioning and ponies everywhere stumbled and fell where they stood. Unicorns blacked out completely and many pegasi were injured from the crashes that resulted when the weather magic they relied on to aid flight was disrupted.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>In a power plant, Elec Mare shorted out and fell to the

floor.<p>

Guts Stallion collapsed on stage at a karaoke bar he'd gone to after his shift, his backup singers Bomb Stallion and Cut Mare fell beside him as well.

Fire Mare's flames went out suddenly while she was on the night shift at a Manehattan waste disposal plant.

Ice Mare fell face-first in the snow far in the frozen north.

Cloudsdale shuddered as the wave passed over it and began to lose cohesion. Those pegasi that retained consciousness would manage to push the clouds towards the ground afterwards in an effort to evacuate the city before it lost form completely.

\* \* \*

><p>"Scoots?" Nyx asked her unconscious friend worriedly. "Bloom? Silver? DT? Sweetie? Kalinka? What just happened?"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So what's the big important secret you need to tell the princesses?" Dash asked as she danced with her escort for the evening. She'd figured that she'd spent so much effort getting all fancied up that she might as well at least once.<p>

"You'll find out in due time," Blues smiled secretively. "Just relax and enjoy the night until then."

"You love doing that, don't yâ€" she cut off as she felt her connection to the Element of Loyalty, the one Twilight had been training her and the others in developing, flare hard enough to give her a headache before going dark. She had just enough time to wonder what that meant before she lost consciousness as well.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>"SISTER!"<strong> Blues heard a terrified voice bellow as he did his best to keep his 'date' for the evening from hitting the floor. All of a sudden everyone at the gala had swayed and collapsed. The unicorns all looked to be unconscious, and the pegasi and earth ponies were at best too disoriented from whatever had happened to stand. A quick check showed that his brother and sister were completely offline.

The only ones still standing were himself and an angry alicorn of the night now stomping up to him. Behind her, he could see a very much knocked out Celestia.

\*\*\*"YOU!"\*\* Luna bellowed loud enough that he had to brace himself in order to ensure he didn't fall over. \*\*\*"EXPLAIN WHAT SORCERY THIS IS THAT LAYS OUR LITTLE PONIES LOW! EXPLAIN WHY THOU STAND WHEN THEY DO NOT!"\*\*

"Princess," he said respectfully, "I suspect I'm still standing for much the same reason you are. We've both played unwilling host to a dark force like the one that did this."



Luna's eyes widened in terror as she processed that statement.

\* \* \*

><p>Nyx took several deep breaths, which she'd later admit didn't really do anything for her mechanical body, and tried to calm down and remember what her mom had told her to do when situations like this cropped up in the Loops.<p>

First step in this kind of situation: Check the victims.

The other Crusaders, Awake or otherwise, were unconscious but not injured. That at least was a relief.

Second step: What could she do about it?

Without knowing what had caused their sudden collapse... not much. Her robot form this Loop wasn't capable of channelling the full range of magical abilities she was used to, but she could still take most opponents with the contents of her subspace pocket if nothing else. But there wasn't any villains to fight right now, or at least none that she could sense...

Third step: Who did she know who could help?

Her mom had told her that, for the most part, Loop memories and instincts could be trusted. Because many Loops seemed to subscribe to narrative causality to some extent, Loop instincts could at least be trusted to 'advance the plot' as it were. It wasn't a bad fallback strategy in any case.

And according to Scoots and Silver, Dr. Light generally either knew what to do or could figure something out. Her experiences around the lab certainly hadn't contradicted that. He was a lot like her mom in some ways.

Which was how she found herself racing down the halls as fast as her hooves could carry her, shouting for the older stallion.

"Dr. Light! Dr. Light! Come quick! Helâ€"EEEK!" She yelled as she barrelled around the doorway into the lab where she knew he was entertaining guests, and almost ran into a pony-like figure done up in modern zebra voodoo stereotype with bones and skulls and a just downright spooky and scary demeanor.

She was so keyed up by the situation that she let out a bolt of magic at the sinister figure out of sheer reflex, and gulped as it dissipated on a shimmering sinisterly-shaped barrier.

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?" Rarity asked wearily as she returned to consciousness.<p>

"Yes, Rarity?" said unicorn inquired as she shook the cobwebs out of her mind.

"Why are we on the floor of the palace ballroom?"

"I'm not sure..."

"Did someone leave the gag running?" Pinkie queried blearily from nearby.

Twilight ignored her friend's non sequitur as she took stock of what was going on. She'd been enjoying the gala as it was meant to be enjoyed for a change of pace, she and the rest of her friends had somehow been coaxed onto the dance floor, and then her brain at the base of her horn had metaphorically exploded resulting in the loss of consciousness.

\_'Okay, I think this Loop just crossed the 'non interference' line,'\_ she thought to herself as she noted the completely offline forms of the visiting Anchors amidst ponies in varying states of recovery from unconsciousness. Idly filing away the fact that unicorns seemed the worst off, she got to her feet and began to list out a course of action.

Step one: Figure out what just happened.

She made to cast a few scrying spells, and blinked when nothing happened.

"Let's try that again," she muttered to herself and tried to put some more effort into it, only to promptly stop as pain shot through her head near her horn and her vision swam.

\_'Alright, bad idea...'\_ she managed to remain standing. \_'Let's skip a few steps and go straight for the Elements then.'\_

Twilight stood there for a few seconds before the fact that the Element of Magic was refusing to manifest sunk in.

\_'How...?'\_ she thought as she examined her connection with the soul-bound artifact. \_'Okay, it's still there, but it's... weak or something.'\_ Whatever happened was somehow interfering with the Elements. It wouldn't be the first time something managed to shut them down, a few Loops with the Smooze came to mind, but it wasn't exactly a common occurrence.

Twilight decided to cut straight to the chase and go full alicorn. She'd explain later, maybe use excuse 3Q this time. She hadn't tried that one in a while.

When she regained consciousness again, Twilight would liken the attempt to trying to manually turn herself inside out. Without pain killing effects of any kind.

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm <em>so</em> sorry!" Nyx apologized for the umpteenth time as she and the voodoo zebra figure finished moving her friends someplace more comfortable.

As it turned out, the griffon scientist had brought more of his robots, eight in all, through the portal with him. Skull Mane was the zebra-like model done up with stereotypical voodoo accessories like an equine skull-shaped helmet, bones (both real and fake) braided into his mane and tail, and the power to make barriers in the same

shape as his helmet.

Plus he was one of only two of Dr. Cossack's robots that hadn't been shut down by whatever it was. Even the lab's systems, mostly running on magic generators, were offline.

"It is fine," the robot replied politely. Again. "As I keep telling you, I was designed as a guardian. A fearsome appearance is one of the oldest methods of defense that any intelligent race has practiced. By appearing frightening, I cut down the number of hostile creatures that wish to test my abilities in the first place and make many more unsure about attacking what I defend. Scaring allies and potential friends is an unfortunate side effect I have learned to live with."

"But I \_still\_ shouldn't have assumedâ€" Nyx protested.

"What?" the zebra-bot cut her off. "That an unfamiliar figure in your home might be responsible for the attack that harmed your friends and family? While my appearance might not do me many favors in regards to misunderstandings, it was hardly the only strike against me in this case."

"Yeah, okay," Nyx finally relented. "How are you moving around still anyway?"

"Like Pharaoh Sphinx, I am tempered to resist the disruptive influences of dark magic," Skull Mane explained as the two headed back to the lab. The doctors had recovered relatively quickly and had requested to see her after her friends were secured. "It would be very inconvenient in my duties if my defenses could be circumvented by any sinister party with basic knowledge of malevolent curse-style magic."

"Ah, there you are Nyx," Dr. Light's voice greeted warmly, if a bit weakly. "I must again say I am pleased to see you unaffected by whatever has befallen us. With your permission, I and Dr. Cossack would like to study how you resist this influence. His method of shielding against dark magic should prove enough to get parts of the lab up and running in a few days, but I think you may be able to help speed that timeframe up."

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Tree damn this Loop and whoever did this!<em> Rarity growled as she massaged her aching head and continued walking down the palace hallway. \_'When I find the rooter responsible I will buck them straight into the sun!<em>\_

She'd watched as Twilight fell to the floor of the ballroom in a seizure mere moments after recovering from the unexpected disaster that had rendered them unconscious in the first place. She had yet to regain consciousness since.

Nor was Twilight the only one adversely affected. Celestia also had yet to awaken, and Shining Armor had reported that Cadance was in the same state. It was thus little surprise that the panic incited by Celestia's forced indisposal meant they hadn't noticed what had become of their newest looping friends Rock and Roll until somepony literally tripped over their inert forms.

The robots, along with all other electronics or magical devices, had been shut down by the event and remained utterly inoperable. That their brother Blues was unaffected was a mystery.

Speaking of those mysteriously unaffected, Luna had done her duty and taken charge of Equestria while her sister recovered, and was being run into the ground by the constant demands on her time and attention.

Reports had come in of the effects on other areas of Equestria and they hadn't stopped since. The shroud of darkness over Equestria made high noon no brighter than a moonlit night, and nighttime... It was dark enough to give even the bravest ponies shivers. Panic ran rampant in all cities and towns and civil services everywhere were stretched beyond their limits. Cloudsdale in particular had been completely destroyed as the magic holding it together came undone, and only the brave efforts of many of its citizens had saved the rest. It was a miracle and a testament to Equestria's solidarity that there had been no deaths.

'Gah!' Rarity swore internally as another sharp pain lanced through her head. 'It's so hard to think these days... And nothing makes it any better!'

Then there were the effects on the ponies themselves. With the notable exception of Luna, magic had all but left the populace of Equestria. The most anypony of the three races was capable of performing were the most basic of cantrips. Unicorns like Rarity herself suffered from severe headaches at the base of their horns and even basic telekinesis for many (though not Rarity herself for some reason) became impossible. Pegasi had lost their ability to use weather magic and those like Rainbow Dash who used it almost all the time were effectively grounded as a result. Even earth ponies were finding out how much magic they used subconsciously as their daily tasks became that much harder and many complained of aching limbs. Perhaps the most telling of all was that Pinkie's mane had gone razor straight and she couldn't re-poof it without exhausting herself.

She and the remaining Awake Elements, including Spike even though he wasn't 'on duty' this Loop, had convened to discuss their options for dealing with the situation while the Unawake Rainbow Dash had been asked to see if she could get anything out of Blues as to why he wasn't affected. The options were... not encouraging.

With Twilight down, the Elements of Harmony would have been off the table even if they hadn't gone dormant. They'd given reactivating them a decent effort, but the results had been along the lines of 'diddly' and 'squat'. Then they'd tried pulling things out of their subspace pockets to make an assessment, only for technological devices to fritz and magical ones to cease functioning the moment they were brought out. After the second 'energetic' failure they'd unanimously decided not to bring out anything else.

They'd debated for a while until Pinkie had apparently had enough and declared that she was going to go 'full chaos goddess' and fix everything, and then throw a party for all of Equestria to help them recover. She'd pulled out a lump of cosmic spectrum, one that Twilight insisted every member of the alicorn club carry ever since that Loop where the Smooze nullified the elements and by extension

their preferred method of ascending, and focused. The magical stone had pulsed and then shattered into dust, Pinkie's eyes had rolled back in her head, foam formed at her mouth, and she began convulsing uncontrollably.

It was exactly what had happened to Twilight back in the ballroom while their attention had been elsewhere. Down to the small pile of magically inert dust Rarity then realized must have been Twilight's own backup cosmic spectrum.

After they'd gotten Pinkie squared away, Spike had suggested that he scry with the Force and see if he could learn anything. Since it wasn't really magic, native to the Loop or otherwise, it shouldn't be affected by whatever had happened.

Except that it was... somehow. Spike had been able to use the Force just fine, but the moment he opened his mind everything had gone wrong. He'd gone limp and vacant before beginning to mutter nonsense, and he hadn't stopped since.

Fluttershy had lost her temper about then and tried to wildshape and go flying off in a blind rage to find the one responsible, except... Well, Luna had been needed to undo the result and put Fluttershy back to rights. Applejack had readily agreed that further experimentation with non-native Loop abilities should be put on hold until they learned more.

\_'If only our best scholar in all things magic would wake up so we could get on that. Or if whoever did this would at least make themselves known so we can kick their flank and get on with things!\_' she sighed as she prepared to round an upcoming corner. \_'Honestly, I haven't felt this helpless sinceâ€"\_' \_

"You need to tell them," Luna's voice shook the dressmaker out of her musings right before she rounded the corner. Many Loops of experience in cloak and dagger type scenarios prompted her to conceal herself as best as possible and eavesdrop.

"I will," the voice of Blues responded, "eventually."

"That is what I used to tell myself in regards to the jealousy I felt towards my sister," Luna retorted. "I would tell myself that I'd let her know how I felt 'soon' and before I knew it I was blasting her through a wall in rage. You are tainted with the Nightmare just as I was. Its dark whispers will wear down your defenses as they did mine, until a dark parody of yourself is all that's left."

\_'Well,'\_ Rarity thought to herself, \_'that certainly explains why they weren't affected. Luna probably built up a tolerance from playing host for a thousand years and anyone currently infected is likely exempt from the effects. Which probably means little Nyx isn't affected either. Twilight will be happy to hear that. I guess my occasional stint as 'Nightmarity' is why I can still use some of the basics too.'\_

"I can handle it," Blues insisted. "I'm not hearing whispers or words or anything. Just a barely perceptible prodding to act on some of my darker thoughts."

"And that is how it starts," Luna returned just as stubbornly.

"I've been dealing with these thoughts for longer than most think," Blues retorted. "The Nightmare isn't bringing anything new to the table."

"For your sake, I hope not," Luna relented as a messenger ran up to the two with news.

\* \* \*

><p>Zecora owed the Light family much, even if they would claim otherwise. She was not ignorant of the ways in which the world worked, and she had seen the suspicious looks the townsponies had thrown her when she'd arrived years ago. They had never seen a zebra before, knew nothing about her ways or traditions, and they feared what was different and unfamiliar.<p>

Except Dr. Light. He looked at the strange and unfamiliar with interest and wonder. He didn't look upon her setting up residence in the Everfree, a place rife with rare and potent ingredients for her potions and studies, as proof she was to be feared. No, he looked upon it with interest and sought to learn why. He came to her, braving the dangers of the Everfree, and sought to learn who she was and why she lived there.

She knew he hadn't needed to do that. Nor did he need to accompany her into town and vouch for her to all of the vendors. He \_certainly\_ hadn't needed to put in an order for regular potion supplies and pay her so well for them.

And so, when the Nightmare had fallen over Equestria, she'd wasted no time. Magic may have been stifled, but there was a potion known to her that would counter the effects of such a curse upon the drinker that could still be brewed by one under the dark influence. The primary downside was that the ingredients were not only rare but also dangerous to work with. Not to mention when improperly brewed, the potion was quite hazardous.

She'd had just enough for two doses. One for her to chase away the dark aches so the forest did not catch her unawares and one for the good doctor so he would be at his best.

She hadn't expected him to already be at work on a solution though. It had made her efforts seem... pointless. At least at first. Even though they already had the makings of a solution, the doctors had jumped on her brew and gotten the griffon's toad-like robot, newly shielded and made to analyze and reproduce liquids, to duplicate her brew. If what they claimed was true, her contribution had cut several day's work down to one.

And now they had come to Canterlot in the hopes they could restore the stallion's mechanical children, and any others who needed it.

\* \* \*

><p>"Thou art certain this shall work?" Luna looked at the contraptions dubiously. "As we understand it, artificially made potions are... magically inert."<p>

The princess of the night hoped she didn't look as ragged as she

felt. Raising both the moon and sun, even if their light was stifled by the curse of darkness, was tiring enough. Dealing with Equestria in a crisis without her sister to help was taking its toll though.

"The process by which we make this brew, makes it impotent that is true," the zebra mare, Zecora if she recalled correctly, replied as she placed a hoof on the shoulder of a black metal alicorn. The one made from the remnants of the Nightmare energy that had corrupted her. "But add the power of dark benign, and you will find it works just fine."

"I just put magic into it, that's all," The artificial alicorn filly looked like she would have blushed were she capable.

"Well, magic's what we need to make it work, so you do a bang-up job, ribbit!" the metal frog-thing, Rain Toad made by the griffon scientist Dr. Cossack as he had been introduced, chimed in. Some contraption originally meant to do the job of a pegasus by seeding rain during droughts, and adapted to analyze water composition and then reproduce it for later analysis. Currently adapted to mass produce Zecora's darkness protection potion.

"We're ready," Dr. Light announced as he finished activating the miraculously working cylinders. He'd been busy it seemed adapting the chambers to work under this infernal curse and then getting his creations and his companion's running so they could haul them here. All to save his metal foals. That it could be used to cure ponies was a welcome addition, but Luna wanted to see it work first.

"Alrighty everypony!" Applejack, bearer of Honesty, called to the others. "Let's lower them two in nice and gentlelike!"

As Luna watched, the metallic saviors of Equestria two times over were lowered into the clear cylinders, hooked up to various devices that went way over Luna's head, and then submerged in the artificial potion over their heads.

"You're up Nyx," Rainbow Dash, the bearer of Loyalty, told the robot alicorn filly.

"Right," the named filly, and metal daughter of the bearer of Magic, stepped up and began infusing the liquid with her power.

\* \* \*

><p>Rock came back online in a way that was much more familiar than he liked to admit.<p>

Submerged in a vat of liquid after being unexpectedly forced offline.

\_ 'Damnit, I was \_sure \_we wouldn't have to deal with Ra Moon this Loop! '\_ he cursed Equestria's current lack of a centralized database he could readily access. The Lanfront ruins didn't exist every Loop, and their existence was sometimes classified, but he'd gotten used to knowing about the possibility in advance.

"This is most promising," he heard Luna muse as he was extracted from the tank by Guts Stallion and... was that an Equestrian variant of

Ring Man? He looked like a griffon. Off to the side Roll was being helped out by Elec Mare and some sphinx-like version of Pharaoh Man. And... yep, that looked like the griffon Dr. Cossack over there with his niece Gilda and Rock's dad. Blues was giving him the 'we need to talk soon' signal over by an equine Bright Man, his head-mounted bulb illuminating the room. And over there was a beaming Nyx with Zecora, some version of Toad Man, and what looked like Skull Man imagined as a zebra.

It worked for him.

"Ye must prepare to repeat this treatment immediately," the lunar princess continued. "First the bearers so that we may possibly regain the Elements of Harmony to turn against this mysterious and dishonorable foe, and then my sister if possible.

"Princess!" a frantic guard scrambled inside. "There is someone claiming responsibility for this catastrophe outside! He is demanding to speak with you and your 'champions' immediately!"

"Pray, tell us," Rock heard the titanium alloy in the princess's voice, "what is the name of this brazen knave?"

"He calls himself Ahuizotl Terra," the guard responded.

\_'Well,'\_ Rock thought in shock, \_'that might be what Blues wanted to tell me.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack swore as she listened to this odd version of Ahuizotl gloat over what he'd done. If she still had full control over her earthbending, she'd have been happy to give the varmint a round of applause. Him and his giant green headdress right between a pair of granite applauders, eeyup.<p>

"Don't princess," she heard Rock warn Luna off from trying to vaporize the smug... whatever he was. "He looks too confident. He's got something up his sleeve."

The problem with her earthbending was that this shroud of darkness, or whatever it was, was interferin' with her control. If she tried something it could easily be too weak and do nothin' or too strong and turn him into a smear. And while the latter option was soundin' better with every sound outta his smug mouth, her aim wasn't all that hot either at the moment. She could just as easily smash one a' the ponies who'd come to see what all the hullabaloo was about.

"Oh, come princess," Ahuizotl grinned in his blue and white regalia and red helmet that sported the massive green headdress. Had ta be enchanted the way he was flauntin' it. "You aren't... frightened, are you?"

"Of thou?" Luna scoffed. "A coward who hides behind magical toys? Not at all. Thou art simply not worth sullying ourself over. Thou shalt face our champion instead."

"Why, that sounds thrilling!" Ahuizotl laughed. "In fact, why not send two? In fact, I'll allow three if you can find that many who aren't crippled! It won't make any difference!"



Luna scowled at the pompous something-or-other while Applejack made a mental note to ask Twilight what his dang species was when she woke up.

"Don't worry princess," Roll assured her. "We can handle him."

"Nevertheless," Luna began before turning back to Ahuizotl. "If thou art so confident, ye shall not object to us bestowing a blessing upon our champions."

"I'd have it no other way," the villain grinned.

"Very well," Luna nodded and lowered her horn to the two robots and whispered to them, low enough that Applejack had to strain to hear, as she cast a spell. "This protection shall shield thee both from anything the foul miscreant can bring to bear. End this quickly so that we can restore peace to our little ponies' lives."

"We will," they both promised and strode out to meet their opponent.

"Well," Ahuizotl mused pleasantly as he rubbed his chin, "since your dear princess is allowed to grant a boon to her champions it seems only fair that I begin this contest, wouldn't you say?"

The robot pony siblings looked at each other before replying together. "If you must."

"Perfect," Ahuizotl's grin threatened to carve the top of his skull away from his body as his hand-tail thing, sporting some red glove gauntlet doohicky, rose up over his head and pointed two fingers at the duo. "Spark Chaser."

It was over in a horrifying instant. The lasers that fired forth punched straight through Luna's protection spell and their metal bodies. And then it \_cornered in midair\_ to hit them again. And again. And again. The sparking and smoldering forms of the twin heroes of Equestria hit the ground before what had happened had finished registering for anypony watching.

"Victory!" Ahuizotl laughed. "And now you all see just how powerless you are against just \_one\_ of our little group of Stars! Even the magic your precious alicorn princess is no match for our new strength!" The monster chuckled sinisterly. "And there's more of us. Surrender to the Age of Eternal Darkness. Or wither away slowly."

Applejack noted that Luna looked darn near ready to charge the piece of trash regardless of the fact that he'd carved through one of her best protection spells like it was made of warm butter. Hay, she was ready to join her.

But then the music started. (13)

Quiet at first, barely noticeable, but it slowly increased in volume. A somber melody came forth and Applejack found herself rooted in place as a familiar feeling washed over her.

\_ 'Who the buck is triggerin' a Heartsong \_now?!'\_ she thought incredulously. Trying to break the spell of a heartsong was technically possible, but rarely ended well. \_ 'What, is the stinkin' varmint gonna gloat ta music now?'\_ And then she saw Rock and Roll begin to stand up. \_ 'You gotta be kiddin' me... \_They're \_tha ones doing this?'\_

The impact of getting the last of their hooves under them coincided with a pulsing drumbeat that ended the instrumentals and Rock began to sing.

\_ "I think we've played this song before\_

\_The melody is different, but I hear the drums of war."\_

Drum beats heralded the return of the instrumentals as Applejack realized what was happening as Roll stepped forward. Those two were trying to trigger a heartsong to turn this fight around... Was that even possible?

\_ "So it seems our mission is the same\_

\_What always ends in bloodshed, begins as just a game."\_

Applejack blinked at the somber tone of the song as the two robots prepared to sing together. That wasn't typical Equestrian heartsong material.

\_ "History repeating...\_

\_Who do they call when villains need defeating?\_

\_History repeating...\_

\_Who do we call when we're broken and bleeding?"\_

It dawned on her that this must be something from their home Loop. They clearly had experience with music as well as fighting. Maybe they'd had both at the same time before. But then Ahuizotl smiled and stepped forward. Chlorophyll... He was going to try and turn the heartsong against them...

\_ "What have we here, you two want to be the ones?\_

\_But what you must realize is... that you're the only ones!\_

\_So here we are, beginning a new age\_

\_Get the players set; it's time that war we wage."\_

Applejack watched, bound by the heartsong as a spectator, as Ahuizotl lowered his tail-hand and the laser gauntlet with it. The varmint was so confident he wasn't going to use his alicorn-busting superweapon. He was intendin' to show them all that he could beat the heroes of Equestria with his bare limbs!

\_ "History repeated...\_

\_Who can they call with the heroes defeated?\_

\_Our dark story completed...\_

\_What hope will they have with you two deleted?"\_

Applejack grit her teeth as the instrumentals swelled in volume and then began to increase in pace. Faster and faster as the combatants stared each other down across the courtyard.

And when the music shifted, they were off like shots. They met in the center, trading unarmed blows. Ahuizotl's fist cratered the marble as the twin heroes dodged and counterattacked. They moved so fluidly and struck so solidly that it would be hard to believe they had really been injured so badly if the wounds were not plainly visible.

Ahuizotl swept the area around him and the two jumped clear and fired their weapons before Rock picked up the song again.

\_"We stand before a moment of truth,"\_

He sounded much more determined now. The feeling of sadness was gone, replaced by determination as Roll continued for him.

\_"With all Equestria's fate in our hooves."\_

She had to smirk as Ahuizotl snarled at them and they sang together.

\_"Today, the end begins..."\_

Then the villain smirked and began to try and twist the song again as the two charged him.

\_"Come and let the battle be born\_

\_This war that we fight is a thundering storm\_

\_Today, the end begins..."\_

She saw Rock gritting his teeth as blows were exchanged again and he tried to wrest the flow of the song back.

\_"If it was up to me\_

\_I'd rewrite history\_

\_And change our destiny\_

\_One last time"\_

The two robots began peppering Ahuizotl with buster shots from range and staying out of his reach until he got frustrated and leapt at them. He missed, but the blow from his boosted strength created a shockwave that knocked them back anyway. They managed to land on their hooves and dug grooves into the ground and picked up the song before renewing their assault.

\_"Betrayed our promise of peace\_

\_This is the last time we're the Mega Ponies\_

\_Today, we change the end"\_\_

Applejack noticed Ahuizotl getting frustrated at how this fight wasn't as easy as he'd been expecting and he raised his tail-hand with the laser gauntlet again. It was clear he was intending to fry them completely, heartsong influence or no. She was about to try and shout a warning when Ahuizotl's gauntlet was struck by an energy blast out of nowhere and a red-armored earth pony with a shield, scarf, and shaded visor landed between the two heroes and joined the song.

\_"Hey, Rock. My weapon is hot\_\_

\_It's time to throw down; Let's show what we got\_\_

\_Today, we change the end..."\_\_

Ahuizotl snarled in rage and pain as all three charged him again and rejoined the song in anger.

\_"Now you listen to me!\_\_

\_You can't stop this story!\_\_

\_No changing destiny!\_\_

\_Not this time!"\_\_

Blows were traded fast and furious, and Applejack noticed Ahuizotl's armor building up energy. Just as she realized he had another trick up his durned sleeve, a wave of energy burst forth from him flinging all three of his opponents back. Rock and Roll landed badly, but the red-armored pony, who had to be Blues she figured, had managed to block with his shield and land on his hooves.

And strangely, Ahuizotl seemed to calm down suddenly and sang at Blues in an almost friendly manner.

\_"Come now, why do you fight?\_\_

\_You know that only we are right!\_\_

\_They cannot win, they can only fall,\_\_

\_And no choice you can make will\_\_

\_Change that at all!"\_\_

Blues glared back at the villain and didn't even miss a beat before retorting defiantly.

\_"I know they can win, They've done it before\_\_

\_Now put up your dukes, and let's settle this score\_\_

\_One last time!"\_\_

As the two charged and clashed, Applejack heard the whispers rocket through the crowd like Rainbow Dash breeching the warp barrier. And

as one, practically everyone reached the same conclusion and cheered:

\_"HE'S THE PROTOTYPE MANE OF MEGA MANE!"\_

And then she heard Luna of all ponies join the song.

\_"It shall be up to thee\_"

\_"To rewrite this story\_"

\_"And change thy destiny\_"

\_"One last time\_"

And Applejack found she couldn't help repeating that last line as Blues clobbered Ahuizotl with an uppercut from his shield, making him stagger back and clutch his face in pain.

\_"One last TIME!"\_

Ahuizotl growled as he moved his hand and everyone could see his eye bleeding as he began singing again.

\_"You can't stop this you'll see\_"

\_"You'll face our dark story\_"

\_"And meet your destiny\_"

\_"Come next time!"\_

And as the music began to draw itself out for the end of the heartsong, Ahuizotl was bathed in magical light as he prepared to teleport. But not before tossing out a farewell line.

\_"Yes.. next time..."\_

Twilight blinked as she came to in a vat of liquid.

\_'Another Star Wars Loop starting in a bacta tank?'\_ she thought groggily. \_'No, wait, I'm awake with a small 'a', not a capital one. Last Loop's still on. Tree, my everything hurts.'\_

"Welcome back to the land of the living miss Sparkle," an unfamiliar griffon in glasses and a labcoat greeted her.

Twilight blinked again as she was hoisted out of the tank by a semi-poofy-maned Pinkie and took stock of the unusually dark palace room, lit primarily by an equine robot with a bulb on his head.

"Can anypony tell me what's been going on?"

\* \* \*

><p>rDaring Do didn't look it, but she was frightened. Many would be surprised to find that this was a common state for her. After all, she'd faced death traps, dastardly villains, and magical doomsday devices. Sometimes all in the same day. But like she always reminded herself, it wasn't the fearless who succeeded in life, it was those

who could face their fear. And at <em>that</em> she had long practice.

"Ahuizotl isn't the only one of my old foes who has gained new power," she informed the gathered Elements. She'd missed her arch nemesis's arrival and duel partly due to being tapped with locating quarters for the arrivals from Ponyville in the midst of near oversaturation of refugees in the palace. The group of fillies (and one griffon chick) 'helping' hadn't sped the process up any.

Daring still had no idea where the tree sap had come from.

"Blues and I counted no less than eight other faces familiar to me from my past adventures as well. Each with their own new enchanted regalia and self-proclaimed titles. If you would please, doctor?"

"Of course, Daring," Dr. Cossack adjusted his glasses with a talon as he motioned for his light-bulb themed robot, Bright Mane, to operate the projector. A pegasus mare in cult attire appeared on the screen.

"For those of you who don't know," Daring began, "this is Desert Rose, an alternate version of a good friend of mine and the leader of a former cult whose purpose was to resurrect the Smooze."

There was a sharp intake of breath from Princess Luna.

"I'm afraid the news doesn't necessarily get better from there, Princess," Daring told the lunar diarch as the image shifted to show a different image of the same mare. Only this time she had an acid green coat color as well as a pink chestplate and helmet connected by a pair of tubes and her coat looked rubbery. Or gooey. "She was supposedly killed by the very Smooze she sought to control, dissolved into its mass, but apparently she merged with it instead and... yes, miss Pie?"

"Why would anypony want to do anything with Smooze?" the pink mare put down the hoof she'd been frantically waving while going 'ooh! ooh! ooh! pick me!'. "It's like no fun at all! It's negative fun! Heck, I'd go as far as to say it's anti-fun!"

"Honestly," Daring replied with a roll of her eyes, "I'd guess that every member of this group has something against others having fun. They're not exactly a nice bunch. Desert Mercury, as she has now chosen to call herself, is just the tip of this iceberg."

The slide changed to show a zebra mare and this time it was Zecora who hissed.

"By my righteous burning fury," the potionmaker growled angrily, "is that the ever hated Zuri?"

"You know her?" Daring blinked in surprise.

"Only of the traitor do I know," Zecora admitted, "but home her face she dares not show. Foul betrayals she once committed and forever her name is now omitted."

"Complete erasure from Zebrican records?" Luna looked astonished.

"That is a punishment most extreme! Even our actions as Nightmare Moon did not warrant being wiped from living memory! What villainy didst she commit to deserve such a fate?"

"Whatever it was," Daring replied as the slide switched to show the same zebra mare in yellow crab-like armor, "I suspect it was for money. She's Ahuizotl's favorite mercenary. She now goes by Zuri Venus and whatever power her armor gives her, it's explosive. Then there's this fellow."

As the image of a red dragon appeared, Luna rose in fury.  
\*\*\*\*\_\*\*That\*\*\_ \_\*\*foul miscreant hath escaped his eternal bonds?!\*\*\*\*\_

"Sadly, yes," Daring, like most of the room, rubbed her ears. "I thought you might remember the time Inti tried to steal the power of Nightmare Moon before your return. Unfortunately, it seems that with your restoration the dark power you used to imprison him was similarly undone. He's going by Inti Mars now."

The image changed to the same dragon in heavy armor mounted with cannons. One was mounted on his head, one each on his forelimbs, and the shoulder pauldrons appeared to have several. He was a living war machine. While the room took that image in, the slide changed to a menacing-looking griffon. The kind who made Gilda at her worst look cute and cuddly.

"Is that \_Copperbeak\_?" Rainbow Dash gulped. The villain of Daring Do and the Griffon's Goblet had been one of the scarier ones in her opinion.

"Yes it is," Daring nodded as the image changed to show the griffon clad in green and yellow armor crackling with electricity. "Copperbeak Jupiter is the sky commander of this group and his armor has power over storms. Even if pegasus magic wasn't being shut down by the dark curse over Equestria, Copperbeak would be able to overpower any pegasi's control over the weather. I'm sorry, but even though the doctors' treatment restores the ability to use magic, I doubt any of us will have the raw strength to wrest control of his storms from him. As Ahuizotl's demonstration showed, their powers are alicorn tier."

"There are still other options," Dr. Cossack interjected. "While we may lack raw power, we have other resources. I'll be happy to go over them with you all once Daring has finished her briefing."

"Thank you doctor," Daring nodded as the image changed to show a bipedal tiger thing. A Rakshasa. "Anyway, this is Khara, a rakshasa who previously kidnapped elephants to feed on their pain and misery. Not a nice fellow, especially now he's been upgraded."

The image shifted to show the same being in brown armor with ring-like weapon so large he was standing in the middle of it.

"As Khara Saturn, he has even more terrifying powers than before and I didn't exactly stick around long enough to figure out what they were exactly," Daring admitted as the image switched to a positively immense minotaur. "Moving on, this guy is formerly known as the insane King Hammerhoof. And another foe I'd thought was dead. He looks like this now."

The image of the minotaur clad in red and yellow armor so thick as to double his body mass appeared.

"Good gracious!" Rarity gasped. "And I thought he looked like a brute before!"

"Brute is right," Blues answered for Daring this time. "That armor boosts his strength to unbelievable levels as Hammerhoof Uranus. When Daring was getting me out of there he tried to crush us with a several hundred tons of stone structures. Fortunately his aim is terrible."

"Not that it'll make a difference if he gets his hands on you," Daring reminded the group as the image changed to show a diamond dog. "This is Commandant Rex, a militant diamond dog who used to run a very successful slave trade." The image changed to show him in white fur garb with claw-like weapons at his wrists. "Now going by Pluto Rex, he's more dangerous than ever."

"He looks so cruel..." Fluttershy teared up.

"Up next is this bastard," Daring ignored the emotional pegasus as the image of a sea pony with a scraggly beard and pirate attire came up. As Applejack yelped and dove under the table, the rest noted that he seemed oddly transparent. "This guy is the formerly deceased pirate Blackmane, now Blackmane Neptune." The image changed to a definitely corporeal entity in blue and green armor with large white fins. "Among the other abilities his new armor grants him, he also apparently has a fully living body. Or at least a reasonable facsimile." (14)

"And we all know the next member of this group," Blues continued as the picture of the thing that had dueled he and his siblings not even an hour prior appeared. "Ahuizotl, now going by Ahuizotl Terra. One of the more persistent and prolific villains in the world with a penchant for seeking out mystical artifacts of power to aid his delusions of conquest. But even worse is who he seems to have recruited for his latest scheme."

The image of Dr. Wily appeared, causing a round of nods from some and wincing from others.

"Dr. Wily Plan has proved to be an Equestria-wide threat with nothing more than his own intelligence and inventions before," Blues reminded the group. "And now he's enhancing a group of alicorn-level villains with that same warped genius to unknown ends. Ends involving the phrase 'Eternal Night' and this:"

The image was now a giant black orb with red markings that made it look like a closed eye.

"The artifact of Le Mu, or Ra Moon according to some translations," Daring took over. "Housed in the Lanfront ruins, ancient texts believe it to be the source of dark magic. Thanks to Blues I can now confirm that this artifact is the source of the Nightmare Force that once corrupted Princess Luna and now fuels the curse of darkness that shrouds Equestria."

\* \* \*



><p>"Order, order!" Twilight proclaimed as she presided over the meeting of loopers. Celestia had been treated, but instead of recovering completely the solar princess was barely conscious. She was weak and constantly tired to the point where staying awake was a feat in and of itself. Luna was currently doing her best to get Celestia back to as much health as possible. Dash had been taken care of rather fortuitously when Daring had asked her about her work at Light Labs and Gilda had tagged along to catch up on old times. The three had last been seen deep in energetic conversation with no end in sight. As for the doctors, they had tapped the expanded crusaders (Kalinka apparently having been inducted at some point) to help distribute the cure to the guard, which left the loopers to their own devices.<p>

"Oh, honestly Twilight," Rarity rolled her eyes in exasperation. "We're all here and hanging on your every word. There's no need to call us to order."

"I think she just likes saying it," Pinkie chirped as she idly tried to get her mane back to its normal poofiness. "Kinda like you still use that couch of yours even thoughâ€"

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Rarity sniffed. She was still feeling a little out of sorts. Spike hadn't responded to the treatment as well as the rest. Sure being unconscious was technically an improvement over the delirious ramblings he'd been on since opening his mind to the Force had been warped by the curse, but he was still not back to normal. She'd gone Loops without her husband Awake before, but having him here but incapacitated was just... worse somehow. To be so close yet so far...

"Oh, whatever," Applejack huffed. "Let's just get on with it."

"Fine," Twilight huffed as Rock and Roll grinned and Blues smirked.

"You seem happy," Fluttershy whispered as Twilight shuffled her notes and prepared to speak.

"You just seem like really good friends is all," Roll smiled.

"Okay," Twilight declared. "To recap: Thanks to the doctors and Zecora, we have our magic back, but not all of it. Our non-Loop native abilities are also sort of working again as Applejack kindly tested out, but our power levels are still not a hundred percent. Essentially, we're all back to the upper end of baseline for us rather than the accumulated power we've become used to. Ascending to alicorn is currently not an option. Whatever this curse is, it really doesn't like alicorns. Celestia's current state after anti-curse treatment is proof enough of that. In addition, the Elements themselves are inert for the foreseeable future, removing that option as well. And if that wasn't enough, pretty much anything useful in our subspace pockets is rendered technologically and magically inert, or worse, the moment we remove it so we can't count on any of \_that\_ either."

The unicorn Anchor took a deep breath before continuing. "According

to Rock and Roll, the foes from their Loop being emulated are called the Stardroids and each is incredibly powerful. Enough to possibly give us a run for our money even if we were at full strength. On our side of the equation, each member of the group is a foe of Daring Do from her adventures which could be real or fictional depending on the variant. They're all highly ruthless and very dangerous. Rock, if you would please?"

"No problem," the newly repaired robot agreed as he took the floor. "In our Loop, Ra Moon is an alien supercomputer dedicated to wiping out all life on the planet to pave the way for its 'children', the Stardroids. It's one of the less pleasant events we go through but fortunately it doesn't happen every Loop. We did our best to check for indicators that it existed, but we didn't find any until now. Anyway, the current variant appears to be an ancient artifact to fuel 'Eternal Night' and Blues says there's no indication it has any form of awareness. The ultimate goal is to enter the Lanfront ruins and destroy the artifact. As it's the source for the dark shroud over Equestria, that should remove its influence and restore magic to all of Equestria, including the Elements of Harmony."

"Assuming there are no complications," Blues added.

"Complications?" Twilight cocked her head inquisitively. "Like what?"

"Like Sunstar," Rock intoned as Roll nodded gravely. "He's normally the true leader of the Stardroids and a doomsday weapon that we can never get around fighting. The only good news is that 'Eternal Night' really doesn't fit his style, so we may not have to face a version of him."

"Well, here's hopin'," Applejack voiced what the rest were thinking.

\* \* \*

><p>"Sister..." Celestia wheezed from her bed as various ponies fussed over her. "You can... not be... serious..."<p>

"We have never been more serious, dear sister," Luna insisted gently. "This foul magic is an attack not only on Equestria and her sovereignty, but upon all the world as well. Magic has been stripped from the populace and the land. Most all fantastic technological advances made since our banishment lie inert. The Elements of Harmony themselves hath been rendered dormant. We cannot in good conscience send our little ponies to face this threat when we ourselves are unwilling to go."

"Eques...tria... needs...you," Celestia coughed. "Our... little... ponies need... their... princess of the night... to lead them... in dark times..."

"Our little ponies need the sun," Luna nuzzled her bedridden sister affectionately. "They need an end to the darkness. And we shall see it done."

\* \* \*

><p>"Even protected from the dark influence of the shroud that

emanates from it, and before these 'Star Druids' are taken into account, the Lanfront ruins are a dangerous place," Dr. Cossack explained to the task force that had been assembled for the purpose of infiltrating the ruins and taking out the source of the dark curse over the land. In addition to the Elements of Harmony, Daring Do, and the Light siblings; Zecora and Gilda had volunteered to join the expedition. He wasn't particularly happy about his niece going to fight opponents who could apparently cut through alicorn magic with little effort, but he couldn't reasonably stop her.<p>

He could, however, send help.

"Which is why Dr. Light and I have enhanced my series of robot masters to strengthen this group," he continued. "Each of you will be paired with one of them. The mission is to engage the various StarDruids and keep them occupied while Daring Do and the Lights infiltrate the ruins and destroy the artifact of Le Mu. I've put together teams to best compliment each pair's individual abilities. Miss Pie, you are withâ€"

"Rain Toad!" Pinkie interrupted cheerfully.

"Ah, actualâ€"

"Gotta be him!" Pinkie cut the griffon doctor off again.

"...May I ask why?" Dr. Cossack sighed.

"Because if I'm gonna rain on their parade, I should have somefrog who can use actual rain!" Pinkie smiled. (\*)

"Er..."

"Just go with it," Twilight told him. "Knowing Pinkie, it'll all work out."

"But..." the griffon scratched his head, "then who shall I pair up Zecora with?"

"Your robot with the skeleton mane, shall suit me better than the rain," Zecora informed him, before smirking. "It shall be good voodoo that we do."

"Ah..." the griffon scientist looked even more lost. "I was going to have him protect Fluttershy. And I still have no one to pair with Dust Bunny."

"A BUNNY?!" the sudden yell caused everyone present to turn and look at a now blushing Fluttershy. "Er... I mean, I'll volunteer to go with him. If that's okay with you..."

"I... suppose that works out then," Dr. Cossack adjusted his glasses. "Moving on... Applejack, I understand your connection with the Elements has allowed you to develop earth moving powers?"

"Somethin' like that," Applejack carefully didn't reveal where she'd \_really\_ gotten such abilities from.

"Yes," Cossack nodded, "that will make you a good partner for my tunnelling model, Drill Dog. I understand miss Rarity has an affinity

for enchantments and gemstones?"

"And fabulousness darling, don't forget that," the unicorn looper winked to let the room know she was trying to lighten the mood.

"Of course," the griffon nodded. "Well, Bright Mane should help you dazzle and daze your opponents. Rainbow Dash, my niece tells me you're quite the flyer."

"Best in Equestria!" Dash boasted.

"That remains to be seen," Dr. Cossack smirked. "Regardless, she also tells me that you're an accomplished martial artist. Thus you'll be paired with Ring Tercel, my contribution to the Griffon Empire's National Guard. You will be the primary combat pair. While all of you will likely be engaged with the StarDruids in combat, the two of you will be the ones most up close and personal. Hit hard, hit fast, and get the buck back out of range before they can retaliate."

"Yes, sir!" Dash saluted seriously.

"Twilight, you and Dive Serpent with his homing munitions will be long range support," Dr. Cossack continued, getting a nod from the unicorn. "Which brings me to the last pair."

"You better not have me sidelined uncle," Gilda growled indignantly.

"Far from it, my dear Gilda," Cossack sighed. "You and Pharaoh Sphinx have perhaps the most dangerous job of all. While the rest draw out the StarDruids, you will be following the main strike team in for the purpose of engaging any remaining defenses while they continue on ahead. It will be only the two of you against whatever remaining opposition there is so the strike team isn't delayed, with no chance for backup."

Gilda swallowed a bit nervously, but managed a salute in reply.

"Rock, Roll, Blues," Cossack addressed the Lights, "your father and I managed to cobble together an upgrade for your copy chips. You should be able to replicate, at least partially, the enchantments on the StarDruids' regalias in addition to an expanded active weapon memory and the master weapons of my own creations. Hopefully, this will give you any extra edge needed. Your father's reactivated creations will be staying behind to protect Canterlot along with the Equestrian Royal Guard in case the StarDruids attack here. I only wish we could afford to send more help. These are, after all, enemies with strength comparable to an alicorn each."

"You may not, noble doctor, but we shall," the regal voice of Princess Luna joined the group. "If these blackguards bring strength equal to the alicorn race, then ye too shall have the strength of an alicorn to aid ye! Your princess of the night is joining you to put an end to this curse of lightlessness!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Wait, so you've heard about this 'Le Mu' thing before?" Rainbow Dash inquired of the princess as the group rode the royal air yacht

to the Lanfront ruins.<p>

"Indeed we have," Luna admitted, "though the tale was ancient when we and our sister were but fillies ourselves and we thought it nothing more than an old tale to frighten young ones. It appears that is not the case."

"You know," Twilight mused as she examined her Loop memories more closely, "I think I came across the legend myself once. Something about the first alicorn?"

"Indeed," Luna replied as the others, of flesh and steel alike, gathered around her to hear the tale. "Le Tor was his name and for thousands of years the tellings of his deeds caused the alicorn race to be viewed as cursed. It was only when Celestia and ourself vanquished the spirit of chaos with the Elements of Harmony that opinion shifted."

Rock and Roll in particular listened closely. If Le Mu was the current variant of Ra Moon, then Le Tor was obviously meant to be Ra Thor. A super robot who had never had a personality that they'd encountered. It would be interesting to hear how he had been different this time.

"It is said that Le Tor was once a noble and just ruler over all ponykind in the ancient past, even before magic was well understood or the rift between the three tribes formed," Luna began. "But he grew greedy and selfish and his heart turned to darkness. He delved into dark magics and became cruel and unforgiving, forged armor of terrible dark power to wear, and eventually created the artifact of Le Mu and used it to imprison the sun. The entire world was seemingly cast into darkness eternal until, as the legends say, an order of unicorns known as the Magi came together to pool their mystical abilities and raise the sun by sheer force of will."

"What happened to the bastard then?" Gilda asked, intrigued.

"The legends say that the Magi then led all three tribes and chased the wicked alicorn out of their lands by force, the might of the unicorn order rendering his dark powers useless. He fled with the artifact of Le Mu to a distant land never to be seen again. And the ponies, thankful for the return of the life-giving sun, made the unicorn order their rulers. The pegasi swore to their defense and the earth ponies to the production of their food so the unicorns could forever focus on maintaining the cycle of days. And of course, the tale of Hearth's Warming tells us how that eventually worked out."

"Yes," Twilight turned that over in her mind. It sounded a little off in some respects and she wondered if the unicorn nobles of the time had... tailored the tale to inflate their own sense of importance. But it would be impossible to know for sure.

"Heeheehee!" Desert Mercury cackled as she saw the Equestrian airship in the distance. "Looks like the doc was right. They \_are\_ foolish enough to come right to us!"

"More fools them," Zuri Venus scowled intently. "Copperbeak? You're up." (16)

"Heh-heh-heh..." the armored griffon chuckled as he rubbed his gauntlets together, electricity sparking between them as storm clouds formed in the sky around the airship. "This is gonna be fun... And Venus? Call me Jupiter."

A massive bolt of lightning split the sky and the ship, sending it to the ground in a flaming wreck.

"Well," Pluto Rex grinned. "I'm sure a few of them survived that. Let's go hunting."

"Smash them all!" Hammerhoof Uranus agreed enthusiastically.

"Yes," Inti Mars rumbled in anticipation. "It has been too long since I had decent sport."

"Ye and me both landlubber," Blackmane Neptune smirked from the river.

\* \* \*

><p>"Is everyone okay?" Rock and Twilight asked at the same time. The storm had come up unnaturally quick, making it an obvious attack. However, while most had believed that it was meant to aid incoming hostiles, and had thus gone on watch for them, Princess Luna had divined that the storm was, in fact, the main attack and had teleported the entire group to the ground and out of harm's way before the air yacht was destroyed.<p>

"A little shaken sugarcubes," Applejack replied from where she was scanning the surrounding area.

"But not stirred!" Pinkie grinned despite the fact that not everyone present got the reference and even fewer appreciated its use at the moment.

"Tis not the time for frivolity," Luna admonished the Element of Laughter. "Our foes shall not believe us so easily dispatched. We must make haste to our goal."

"We need to spread out," Gilda told them. "Big groups are big targets and we're probably not gonna have much warning when they find us."

"Gilda's right," Rainbow agreed. "Strength in numbers isn't gonna mean much when they can toss around big moves like that one. We need to pair off and split up."

"Keep your communicators hot," Blues added, tapping his helmet and reminding the non-robots present of the devices fitted to their ears. "Contact the rest if you engage the StarDruids. Do your best to take them out one by one and keep the way clear for the strike team. Luna, you're with Rock and Roll in Strike 1. We're probably going to need you against whatever's waiting for us in there. Daring and I will be close by as Strike 2 with Gilda and Pharaoh Sphinx covering us."

"Everyone got your partners?" Roll checked, getting a round of nods.

"Then let's move out!" Rock declared and began galloping towards the Lanfront ruins.

\* \* \*

><p>Dr. Wily cackled as he observed the view of Canterlot in his video feed. Ahuizotl had been sent back from the seat of Equestrian government with his scorched hand-tail between his legs despite his gloating that he could conquer the city on his own in its weakened state.<p>

Wily, however, knew that his old friend and colleague would have been able to work something out. That's what Bright Light (and why did some part of his mind want to call the stallion Thomas? What a strange name...) did after all. So he'd joined in the bet the rest had done over how Ahuizotl would fail, the prize being command of the next phase of the plan. Inti bet he'd lose to Luna, Zuri had wagered he'd fall to Daring as was usual for him, Copperbeak had bet on a timely griffon intervention, Rex claimed the guards would emerge victorious though with losses, Hammerhoof had bet on the longshot of the royal guard with no losses, Blackmane insisted on the slightly less longshot of a ragtag bunch of misfits, Khara thought he'd somehow manage to do himself in, and Desert believed that the Equestrians would whip out some forgotten and forbidden dark magic. But he'd won by wagering that Dr. Light's creations would be Ahuizotl's undoing on that errand. After all, he knew firsthoof how capable they were.

It was why he'd insisted on restoring and enhancing the armors and regalias that had been found here. The ingenuity of the ancient order that had made them was astounding, make no mistake, but it was nothing he couldn't improve upon.

Even if he'd needed a little help from the master artifact to do it.

In any case, he had a genius plan. The nine outfitted members would remain at the ruins to meet the forces that would be sent against them. While he? He would send his latest and greatest project, an artifact at least as ancient and powerful as anything his nine partners now wielded that he had restored and improved upon, back to Canterlot while its most capable champions were away. All under his direct control.

Should these 'heroes' defeat their group, he would already have the ultimate collection of hostages to secure their unconditional surrender.

\* \* \*

><p>Luna nearly forgot the plan when the dragon, Inti Mars, burst out of the treeline, scattering several trees with his size. But when her two companions, rather than stand and fight, merely dashed past the beast (17) she recalled their words:<p>

\_"We can't stop to engage unless there's no other choice. I know you'll want to protect the others from danger. We will too. But there's a time for protecting others and a time to realize others are capable of protecting themselves. This is the latter. So we don't stop unless there's no other choice."\_

"Cowards!" the war dragon yelled after them as they raced away from him. "Come back and face me!"

"Hold it right there, mister!" the stern voice of Fluttershy could be heard behind them before the three were too far away to make out words.

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie and Rain Toad were advancing through the jungle when a blast of energy tore through Pinkie's mane. Strangely, it didn't seem to do any harm. Instead it grabbed one of her party petards that she always kept handy and carried it back to the shooter.<p>

"Well, well," the shooter's sinister voice made itself known, "if it isn't the ever-so-happy Element of Laughter. I was hoping I'd run into you."

"Really?" Pinkie asked cheerfully as Desert Mercury stepped into her view. "Did you want a party? I'm kind of busy right now, but I think I can squeeze you in for a quick small one!"

"I hate parties," Desert Mercury punctuated the statement by crushing the party munitions she'd stolen with her weapon.

Pinkie's mane almost deflated again as her shock broke her concentration. "W-what?"

"You heard me," the acid green mare glared at Equestria's premier party pony. "I hate parties. I hate laughter. I hate seeing the clueless brain-dead masses happy go about their happy way. Why do you think I wanted to revive the Smooze? So I could erase that inane pointless happiness once and for all!"

Pinkie took a step at the insane look in the armored mare's eyes and bumped into her companion. Turning to look at him, she saw him nod reassuringly. He had her back, no matter what.

"And now I am the Smooze!" Desert Mercury laughed as her body rippled and flowed menacingly. "And I will destroy all happiness!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Ringer, hold up," Rainbow told her wing-bot. "I know we're supposed to support the others, but that storm cloud's not sitting right by me. I think we should make it our priority."<p>

"The idea is sound," Ring Terrel allowed before pointing at a figure in the sky, revealed only by the lightning. "But what about the storm's master?"

"Hmmm..." Rainbow mused for a moment. "Okay, here's the plan..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Come on out and I'll make this quick!" Zuri called to her hidden quarry as she stalked ever closer. "Honestly, it's nothing personal, but you shouldn't have involved yourself in things like this that are way over your heads."<p>



The brush rustled a bit and she smirked.

"And now you're going to lose them," the zebra mercenary smirked as she unleashed the exploding bubbles her armor's magic allowed her to create.

The brush blew apart impressively as expected, but there was a distinct lack of remains left behind.

"That is how you track one like me?" the metered voice of a shaman mare taunted from behind her. "Who lives in the forest ever free?"

"So," Zuri retorted in a low voice, trying to hide the innate fear that revelation instilled in her, "they sent a medicine mare after me?"

"Nay," the unfamiliar zebra replied as she stepped from the brush, "you were punished for your crime. To seek you out is not worth my time. But the reality now is stark. The world chafes under eternal dark."

"Sanctimonious holier than thou..." the mercenary growled.

"It matters not who is wrong or right," the zebra replied calmly. "We must purge the dark and return the light."

"I'll purge \_you\_!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight, by virtue of her aquatic companion, had taken the river.<p>

"Avast ye weakling bilge rats!"

As should have been expected, they were stopped by the aquatic member of their opponents.

"I hate pirates," Twilight grumbled as she and Dive Serpent prepared to face off against Blackmane Neptune.

"Can't say I'm all that fond of them me'self lass," the robotic river serpent agreed.

\* \* \*

><p>Hammerhoof Uranus bellowed as he pried his helmet off of his face and back atop his head. The blue robot pony would pay for that humiliation! Turning frantically to seek his opponent, he spotted him nearby and charged.<p>

"Tarnation!" The pony in question wasn't blue. Nor a robot. Heck, she wasn't even male.

The enraged and empowered minotaur really didn't care at this point.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, well," Pluto Rex grinned as he traced a claw over the captured unicorn's face, "aren't you a pretty pony? Yes, you'll fetch a fine price when this is over."<p>

"Why do I always attract the unwashed brutes?" Rarity sighed to herself, trying to not think about the unclean feeling.

"Insult me all you want, pretty pony," the diamond dog grinned sadistically, "you'll change your tune soon enough."

"Ugh!" Rarity spat and closed her eyes. "I don't think so. Any time Bright Mane!"

"And just what do you think your useless companion can do?" Pluto Rex taunted, before promptly being blinded by a bright flash of light.

"Oh, nothing much," Rarity simpered condescendingly as her opponent howled and clutched his eyes. Honestly, what did he expect with eyes so adjusted to darkness meeting the brightest bulb in all the lands?

\* \* \*

><p>Blues cursed under his breath as he grappled with Khara Saturn. The Rakshasa had ambushed them as they drew close to the ruins and knocked Daring to the ground. Even the fact that he'd copied the felinoid's weapon wasn't improving his mood. The felinoid was strong and had all the leverage right now, which meant Blues was in a bad position.<p>

And then all of a sudden the weight of his opponent was slammed off of him. Turning to look, he saw Gilda roll off of Khara Saturn right as Pharaoh Sphinx unleashed a charged Pharaoh Shot.

"Go!" Gilda called to him and Daring, who was now returning to her feet, "we've got this loser!"

Blues simply nodded and ran for the entrance to the ruins, Daring close behind him.

\* \* \*

><p>Ahuiotl Terra grinned as he watched the three intrepid explorers pass by without noticing him. He wasn't going to engage them. No, he had a score to settle with the red one who was even now approaching as well. And an older score to settle with the hated Daring Do with him.<p>

These three he'd let the doctor deal with.

Humming cheerfully to himself, he pulled a lever that caused a wall to slide closed behind the three. Now they couldn't return to interfere, and Daring and the red one could proceed no further.

\* \* \*

><p>Dr. Wily scowled as he saw Ahuiotl let his nemeses and the princess through his checkpoint. It was... not unexpected to be

honest. Far from ideal, but not unexpected.<p>

"Well, my brain damaged friend," he addressed a special variant of his Devil Core, "it looks like you will get to have revenge on one of the ones responsible for your state after all."

The Devil Core was constructed around the most fascinating magical artifact. One that could summon an otherwise bodiless presence to be interrogated. And with his improvements and melding with his Devil Series technology, the presence would have both a body and the ability to defend against intruders.

"Yes, you shall have your revenge..." he chuckled. "You shall have revenge for both of us."

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia's blood ran cold as her captain of the guard used his newly restored magic and displayed an image of the figure approaching Canterlot. It was tall, taller than her, covered in armor over every inch of its body, and most tellingly of all it was an alicorn.<p>

One she recognized from the stories and legends her mother used to tell her and Luna.

"It... \_can't\_... be..." she gasped out. But her eyes, tired as they were, told her otherwise.

The legendary first alicorn, Le Tor, the evil being who had once imprisoned the sun, a figure that had featured prominently in her foalhood nightmares since the day she earned her cutie mark, was advancing on Canterlot.

On her.

\* \* \*

><p>Rock and Roll had jumped when the section of wall slammed closed behind them, honestly expecting that they'd accidentally tripped a trap of some sort. Even with long experience raiding the Lanfront in their baseline, they still tended to miss some of those things every so often.<p>

"T'would appear our regress is barred to us," Luna observed as she finished scanning the wall. "It is no matter as our goal lies ahead and not behind."

"True," Rock allowed, though in his experience having exits barred always meant something nasty was ahead.

And as they entered the next chamber, he wasn't disappointed.

There before them was a Devil Core, etched in runes that first began to glow and then emit black smoke that positively pulsed with dark magic. As the mystic smoke began to form the standard body shape for the Devil Series, Rock reflected that this was the first version he'd seen that had a gaseous body. The body finished forming and the eye opened menacingly...

And Princess Luna gasped in shock at its appearance.

The single eye had a sickly green sclera, an angry red iris, and a sinister purple aura that seemed to bleed power from the eyeball itself. **"Crrr...rrry...yyss...sstt...taa...aal...lss...?"** the thing rumbled slowly and unsurely.

"Sombra...?" Luna whispered in recognition and disbelief. "Sombra DarkMoon? How?"

The evil eye then focused on Luna and the beast seemed to gain a measure of clarity.

**"LLLJUNNAAAA!"** It roared with hate and rage.

\* \* \*

><p>Inti Mars was utterly flummoxed. He was used to ponies and other small creatures either cowering in terror or engaging him in battle. He wasn't used to small winged soft-looking ponies trying to stare him into submission as if he was an unruly hatchling.<p>

The strange creature next to the pony that looked like the union of a rabbit and a vacuum cleaner wasn't even a contestant in how unnerving the experience was.

"You should be ashamed of yourself!" the pony scolded him. "Just because you're bigger than everyone else is no excuse to bully them! What would your mother think?"

That last part snapped him out of it. The reference to his \_mother\_â€| (18)

"My \_mother\_..." he growled at the pony, who seemed surprised that he was acting like the grand dragon he was rather than a mere stripling she was treating him as, "was a vile old \_lizard\_. And my only regret..."

The pony took an instinctive step back as the cannons the mad doctor pony had added to his magic armor began to glow with power.

"\_Is that I didn't kill her myself!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>Zuri Venus brayed in fury. The shaman's illusions were infuriating! She'd thought her power had obliterated the uppity zebra mare the second time, only to see the tell-tale magical mist float away instead of a mangled body as the dust settled. Same with the third, and then the fourth, and so on.<p>

"Show yourself!" the empowered mercenary screeched.

"You should try to temper your rage," the smug voice sounded from behind her. "Too much could further advance your age."

"Did you just call me OLD?!" the enraged beyond belief zebra roared before firing more of the exploding bubbles at the mare.

\* \* \*

><p>Gilda grit her beak as her armored opponent held his ring weapon in front of him. The interior swirled with darkness and she suddenly felt really weak. Like she was about to fall over. The ground was looking like a better place to take a nap by the moment regardless of the imminent danger her life was in.<p>

Then her partner blasted Khara Saturn's weapon off course and she felt a heck of a lot better. Shaking off how frightening that experience had been, she pounced on the rakshasa, determined that he wasn't getting another shot at her with that thing.

\* \* \*

><p>Ring Tercel darted up towards the armored griffon who commanded the storm. He threw a few rings ahead of him and noted with satisfaction that they successfully diverted the path of a lightning bolt that would have struck him otherwise.<p>

"Not bad," Copperbeak Jupiter smirked and flexed his talons, "\_for a wind-up toy!\_"

As Ring Tercel engaged his opponent in melee, he hoped that his role as distraction would prove enough for Rainbow Dash to do her part. He only had to last long enough.

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie tried to listen to the villainous rant for important information, she really did, but it was just blah, blah, blah, I hate seeing others happy, blah, blah, they all laughed at me, blah, blah, blah, blah, I'm invincible, blah, blah, blah, blah, who's laughing now, blah, blah, blah, blah, <em>blah<em>.

"Okay, bored now," she declared, mostly to herself, before her wandering eyes latched onto the tubes connecting the oozy pegasus's helmet and chestplate. "Ooh, this looks important!"

"What? How?" the meanie-mean-ooze-head sputtered in surprise. Honestly, it was like she'd never had someone suddenly and inexplicably appear right next to her. "No, don't!"

Pinkie unceremoniously yanked the tube out of their connections.

"You fool!" the meanie head yelled at her as her form began to droop. "Those were necessary to keep control of my form! Now I can't keurb blurb blub blub..."

"Whoa..." Pinkie stared in horror at the puddle of ooze and empty armor that used to be her opponent before slinking back over to her froggy partner in a daze. "I... I didn't mean to melt her! I just... she was being mean and scary and talking about destroying all happiness and turning Equestria into Depressedria and can we not tell Twilight that I melted somepony by accident? Please? I didn't mean it and it was an accidâ€" "

She was cut off when her froggy partner abruptly shoved her away from him, causing her to skid across the ground.

"Hey!" she yelled as she got back to her feet. "What was that... for...?"

She stared at the mobile acid-green-in-the-process-of-turning-purple ooze now engulfing her amphibious robo-friend. Had she really been so out of it that she missed her Pinkie Sense?

"Error," Rain Toad sputtered as he was engulfed by the mass, "Emotional processing unit offline!"

The ooze seemed to turn and look at her. It wasn't a nice look.

"Ah-heh..." she chuckled nervously and pulled out one of her party munitions from her mane. "Party petard?"

The ooze blurbled in a way that sounded like laughter and began to form a face. This was why she didn't like this stuff. Most ghosties could be laughed away, the Smooze just laughed right back.

"Smmooooooooozzee..." the blob groaned and started in her direction.

"Oh fun," Pinkie swore before running as if her ability to enjoy life depended on it.

\_"Bowbowbow-bowbowbow..." \_(19)

\* \* \*

><p>Guts Stallion grunted as he did his best to hold the armored alicorn back. Behind him, Elec Mare crashed into the ground after being hit with a massive blast of energy. Blasts from Cut Mare and Bomb Stallion didn't even seem to slow him down.<p>

He and the other Light numbers had been recalled and restored to functionality shortly after the docs had devised a cure, though Ice Mare and Fire Mare had been too far away to reach quickly. They'd remained behind to help keep Canterlot running in the midst of this disaster while Rock and his pals took the Cossack numbers to deal with the source. When they'd gotten word of the attack, they'd mobilized against the bastard advancing on Canterlot and were doing their best to buy time for the guard to prepare a response.

He'd prefer they take the lump out on their own, but they were getting their flanks kicked left and right.

\* \* \*

><p>Luna swore as she narrowly dodged another blast of dark magic. This foul one-eyed incarnation of the banished tyrant was infuriating! The eye seemed only vulnerable when open and the rest of the body was as harmable as the smoke it appeared made from! And even when it was open, only the mightiest of attacks seemed to deal the beast any harm! At this rate...<p>

"Noble children of Light!" she called to her battle companions. "Thou must go on ahead and destroy the foul source of the curse that plagues Equestria! We shall deal with this beast Sombra has become!"

"Small problem, princess!" noble Rock called back as he evaded the beast's attack.

"There's no exit!" the usually gentle Roll finished for her brother.

Luna charged a spell and blasted away the wall opposite where they entered. "There is now! Make haste and end this plague of darkness while I do battle with this nightmare!"

As the two reluctantly forged ahead, Luna stared down her opponent.

"Now it is merely thee and we," she declared as she readied another spell.

\*\*"YYYYEEEESSSSSS..."\*\* the Sombra-devil rumbled in vile glee.

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack mused that earthbending tended to be a lot more effective when her opponent didn't barrel through boulders like they were wet paper. As it was, she was doing her best just to slow the varmint down and dodge the shrapnel.<p>

Honestly, if it hadn't been for Drill Dog and his pit traps, she didn't think she'd have lasted this long. Her opponent being in a blind rage and ignorant of even obvious traps helped too. Still...

"We're gonna need a plan here soon I reckon!" she yelled to her partner. "We're only slowing this fella down and I don't think we're gettin' reinforcements any time soon!"

"I could do something," Drill Dog yelled back as he wasted a couple more of his bombs on Hammerhoof Uranus's armor, only serving to make the berserk minotaur angrier, "but you'll need to keep him busy by yourself while I get it set up!"

"Done and done!" Applejack yelled back and pulled a lasso out of her subspace pocket. First was to get tall dark and ugly focused solely on her. She whipped the lasso over the thick helmet covering and pulled.

Hammerhoof stopped for a moment and felt the top of his now unarmored head before turning slowly towards Applejack. His eyes began to turn red as the blood vessels swelled and veins in his forehead bulged ominously. The minotaur's nostrils flared and Applejack could have sworn that smoke blasted out of them as he snorted in anger.

"You want it?" she taunted him. "Come an' get it!"

Hammerhoof Uranus bellowed incoherently and charged after the fleeing farm pony.

"And don't let him leave the area!" Drill Dog called to her as he dove underground.

Applejack didn't reply. She was too busy running for her life.

\* \* \*

><p>"FORGET THE SALE!" Pluto Rex frothed as his claws tore through everything in reach as he dashed around blindly. "WHEN I'M DONE WITH YOU NO ONE WILL EVEN BUY YOU AS MEAT!"<p>

He hated the unicorn more than anydog he'd ever met! And her little bulb too!

"AND YOUR TOY WON'T EVEN FETCH A PRICE AS SCRAP METAL!"

Every time his eyes began to clear, that damnable light would flash and blind him again! And the unicorn had sprayed some atrocious scent all over the area that burned his nose! She'd die just for that!

"Oh, such a foul mouth you have!" the unicorn tittered, causing him to turn towards the sound.

"BE BROKEN AND DIE!" he screamed as he charged the source of the sound with all the enhanced speed he could muster.

I

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight nursed a chemical burn on her shoulder as Dive Serpent's missiles intercepted another blast of the corrosive liquid from the not-as-dead-as-he-should-be seapony pirate.<p>

Why wasn't she dead yet?

That fact was bugging her more than even the burn or the fight. These were supposed to be alicorn level opponents. She may still be on the high end for her baseline non-alicorn self despite the power dampening, but she still shouldn't have been able to mount as effective a defense as she had.

Her shields actually held under the power of this member of the StarDruids when Luna's had been cut through like they weren't there. Her only injuries had come from the splashing of missed shots. Dive Serpent's missiles were actually keeping up with Blackmane's water blasts, rendering them much less dangerous, and allowing him to remain mostly undissolved. Plus their opponent seemed more frustrated and less smug than she'd been expecting.

Her thoughts were interrupted as she raised another shield, which held quite firmly. It was like the water was solely chemical after being manifested, and unable to corrode magical force like it did her companion's armor.

Honestly, even accounting for possible overconfidence, she and her partner shouldn't be doing nearly as well as they were. After all, Ahuizotl had...

Ahuizotl had played them for chumps.

Twilight wanted to slap herself when she realized what was going on. Their opponents were powerful, sure, but they weren't necessarily



alicorn tier. At least not in all respects. They were focused. Specialized. Ahuizotl's laser power allowed him to pierce barriers, even alicorn ones, which made him the perfect choice to catch an unaware defender off guard and kill whatever was left of Equestrian morale. They were supposed to believe the StarDruids were all alicorn-level opponents and that resistance was hopeless.

But as his original duel with the Lights showed, and they'd failed to pick up on, his other enhancements fell a bit short. He was strong, no question, but he wasn't as strong as he wanted them to believe.

After that realization, the rest fell into place. Blackmane's water weapon didn't corrode her shields because it wasn't magic at all. It could only corrode physical substances. And if it wasn't a magical liquid...

Well, she'd never beaten an opponent with a 'purify water' spell before. But in the Loops, there really was a first time for everything.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'Damn,'<em> Blues swore internally as he gave the room he and Daring had ended up in a cursory scan. \_'Dead end.'\_

He was about to backtrack and find a different way when he noticed Daring staring at some of the ancient writing that circled the chamber.

"Blues," the pegasus explorer's breath hitched, "do you know what this \_says\_?"

"Ancient languages aren't exactly my specialty," he reminded her.

"It says here that Le Tor wasn't the enemy of the Magi," Daring turned to him with wide eyes. "Heâ€"

"Was its leader," finished the voice of Ahuizotl from the room's entrance right before it slammed shut.

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright, get those canisters ready!" Shining Armor commanded what little of the guard force was currently battle ready. "Let's see how this 'Le Tor' likes knockout gas!"<p>

"Belay that!" the frantic voice of Dr. Light intruded into the preparations while the older stallion waved around some device that he seemed to think was important.

"Why should we?" Shining glared at the doctor. Brilliant or not, the stallion was not in command and his nerves were frayed enough as it was without having his judgement called into question without sound reason.

"Because your foe is not an alicorn!" Dr. Light panted. "He's not even alive!"

That sounded like a sound reason. "Explain."

"These readings here," Dr. Light thrust the device into Shining's face, "show that under the armor is nothing but metal, wires, and electronics! The armor may be the genuine article, but what lies inside it is not!"

\_'Sweet mother of Celestia damn it!\_' Shining cursed mentally and rubbed his face with his hoof. There went his entire battle plan. "What now?"

"These readings here," Dr. Light pointed to something that to Shining could have been written in Bushwoolie for all he understood it, "show that the thaumic core is powered by the same Nightmare Force that shrouds Equestria! If we can just douse it with the cure, we may be able to render it inert!"

"How much do we have right now?" Shining asked.

"Enough for one good attempt since I doubt he'll go willingly," Dr. Light admitted. "With Rain Toad on the mission, Dr. Cossack and Nyx won't have another batch ready for hours."

"It'll have to do," Shining admitted. "Okay everyone! Listen up! Change of plans!"

None of them noticed a filly eavesdropper sneak away.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'ANALYZING SUBSTANCE... '<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Zecora resisted the urge to smirk as her opponent's jaw dropped when she was revealed unharmed behind a shimmering skull-shaped barrier.<p>

"Closing your mouth would be wise," she stated, "unless you care to capture flies."

"Impossible..." the traitorous mercenary growled. "You should be a smear! No barrier is strong enough to defend against my power!"

"Of course it is," a new voice interjected as a third zebra, the robotic Skull Mane, entered the clearing. "Provided you know how to modulate it properly. And since you're so free with demonstrating your power on phantoms, it gave me ample time to study and adapt."

"I'll give you a demonstration!" Zuri yelled and flung more of the exploding bubbles at them both. Like the ones before, they detonating harmlessly on Skull Mane's shields as Zecora walked calmly forward.

"Good night," she said when she was practically nose to nose with the mercenary, right before blowing a powder in her face. "Sleep tight."

The mercenary was unconscious before she hit the ground.

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy was no stranger to being shot at, nor was she a stranger to life or death battles. She'd raised Lehman Russ after all. Still, trying to fight anything that outmassed and outgunned you tended to involve a lot of running. And with the power she'd amassed over the Loops taking a hit, she was <em>very<em> outgunned at the moment.

Still, she'd managed to make a good showing right up until she tripped over an exposed root. And with a murderous dragon bearing down and her druidic magic still on the fritz, things weren't exactly looking up.

"You leave Miss Fluttershy alone you great brute!" the voice of her robot partner yelled as he jumped in front of her and began sucking in air and debris for all he was worth. The mechanical lapine obviously meant well, but the strength of his vacuum was, well, laughable next to the immense war machine that was the armed and armored dragon Inti Mars.

"You cannot be serious..." said dragon blinked as he tried to process the action. "You are a glorified vacuum cleaner! I am a \_god of war\_!"

The main cannon on his head took aim at the two as Dust Bunny stared defiantly back. The robot's suction died down and Fluttershy saw something working its way back up her companion's only weapon.

"You are \_nothing\_ before my might!" Inti bellowed as he prepared to fire.

Dust Bunny was faster. The compressed ball of debris fired back out his head-mounted vacuum and right down the barrel mounted on Inti Mars's head. The munitions about to fire at them both detonated in the barrel and the dragon roared in pain.

But he did not fall.

"FOR THAT YOU DIE FIRST!" the dragon roared and prepared to crush the robot.

Even after countless Loops, Fluttershy still had issues defending herself from those who were hostile towards her. She could, of course, but it wasn't her first instinct. Protecting others though? That was second nature to her.

Suddenly her opponent was looking much more her size as she roared her own challenge back and slammed her yellow-scaled claws into his torso. Flicking her flowing pink hair out of her face, the now draconic Fluttershy focused on rending the one who would hurt her friend in two. (20)

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight spat water out of her mouth as she finished helping Dive Serpent haul their defeated opponent out of the river. As predicted, with his corrosive weapon turned to pure water, he was essentially harmless. Tough, sure, but offensively not much of an issue.<p>

At least not with a larger combatant on her side who had ranged weapons.

"Huh," she blinked as she realized the 'body' in the armor was now nothing more than a clay statue. "I'd heard about these things, but I'd never seen them. (21) I thought they were all destroyed. Well, Rock and Roll just need a piece to copy the enchantment so let's take the gauntlets and go find the others."

\* \* \*

><p>Ring Tercel grunted as his opponent jolted him with electricity again.<p>

"How do you still live?" Copperbeak Jupiter snarled in frustration.

"Oh, come now," the national guard robot snorted as he threw several of his rings at his opponent. "I was made for aerial combat. Of \_course\_ I'm insulated!" \_'Though not enough to take too many more of those. Any time now Rainbow Dash...'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity dusted herself off as she finished stripping her opponent of his enchanted armor and tying him up with some of her special threads.<p>

"Honestly," she sniffed, "this regalia is \_far\_ too fabulous for a ruffian like you. Oh, Bright Mane...!"

"Y-yes ma'am?" the timid robot replied from where he was standing a fair distance away. Honestly, she didn't see what he had to be afraid of.

"Do be a dear and carry this for me, would you?" Rarity fluttered her eyelashes. "We simply \_must\_ be on our way."

"Er..." the robot hesitated in confusion, not understanding the tone. "Of course."

\* \* \*

><p>"Ah-ah-ah!" Ahuizotl Terra tsked as Blues pointed his hoof cannon at him and pointed his hand-tail laser weapon right back. "I wouldn't do that if I were you..."<p>

"I've seen your weapon in action," Blues returned confidently. "I can handle it."

"Perhaps," Daring's old foe allowed before turning to point the weapon at the archaeologist, "but can she?"

Blues continued glaring, but lowered his weapon.

"What's your game Ahuizotl?" Daring asked defiantly.

"Just taking what's rightfully mine," the creature explained. "What's always been rightfully mine according to these writings."

"Explain," Daring demanded.

"Everything you Equestrians have ever heard about the Magi is wrong," their opponent declared smugly. "They were not the enemies of Le Tor, they were his most loyal followers. Members of every race dedicated to seeking out knowledge and power and using it to rule the world. This armor I wear? It's no coincidence it fits me so well. It belonged to my ancestor, Le Tor's second in command with the title of 'Terra'. They were the best of friends and the most loyal of allies, developing the artifact of Le Mu together to control the sun and stars. At least until the unicorn members decided they were done sharing mystical knowledge with the other races and turned on the rest of the order."

"You can't possibly be claimingâ€" "

"Oh, but I can," Ahuizotl Terra grinned fiercely. "All the names you know us by are merely labels used to keep the truth to ourselves, and no longer necessary. We are the new Magi, and the rightful rulers of all the world."

And without warning, he lunged at them both.

\_ 'ANALYSIS COMPLETE...' \_

\_ 'OPTIMAL SOLVENT DETERMINED...' \_

\_ 'SYNTHESIZING SOLVENT...' \_

Rainbow was currently having to reevaluate her plan. Going above the storm to try and dissipate it with a Sonic Rainboom had taken her too close to the main shroud of darkness and the proximity had made her light-headed.

Right now, she was lining herself up for Plan B. Because she'd only get one shot at it.

It was a lot like Plan A, just with a different target.

Rock and Roll surprisingly managed to make it to the artifact chamber without incident. It took them a few moments to fully realize that, yes, there really were no more defenses or obstacles between them and the current version of Ra Moon.

The only thing that bothered them as they stepped inside was that they had yet to hear from Dr. Wily.

But as they entered, there seemed to be no sign of him, or of any surprises. Even the artifact, the familiar giant obsidian orb ringed with intricate designs and emblazoned with a red eye design, looked completely undefended. The two mechanical heroes traded looks and shrugged before taking aim at the artifact of Le Mu.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," the voice of their recurring foe interrupted. Strangely, it came as a bit of a relief. Known Dr. Wily quantities were almost always preferable to unknown ones.

"Why not?" Roll asked politely.

"Because if you don't..." Wily's voice declared as a large monitor on the other side of the room lit up showing a familiar scene.

It was a video feed of Canterlot. From the eyes of an attacker.

"...well, I'm afraid Ra Thâ€™\*ahem\* Le Tor will stop playing nice."

All she knew was rage. This insolent hatchling had dared to harm her precious treasure and now he would pay. With blood and pain andâ€™

"â€™iss Fluttershy stop!" a voice snapped her out of the red haze. "Our foe is defeated! You don't have to do any more!"

She paused and looked at the other dragon beneath her. He failed to move or retaliate. Was he dead? Did it matter? Why did her head hurt so much?

"You must change back Miss Fluttershy!"

Right, she was supposed to be a pony, not a dragon. As if the thought was the trigger, she began to shrink back to her normal form.

"Oh!" she gasped as her head cleared. "Yes, that's much better. What happened?"

"I'm not sure," Dust Bunny replied. "I'd imagine that your transformation into a dragon changed how the curse affected you even with the treatment in place, but without further information I can't be sure."

"Is he...?"

"He'll live."

"Oh, good. I couldn't bear it if... We should find the others now."

"Of course Miss Fluttershy."

The guards waited until the right moment as the mechanical alicorn strode calmly towards the palace. When it was in the spot, they all sprung out and flung the anti-dark magic potion at the robot.

Only to watch it slide off a magic barrier, never reaching the target.

\_ 'Any time now,' \_ Applejack thought furiously as the super-strong minotaur drew ever closer.

"Done!" Drill Dog popped up nearby.

"Ain't nothin' happenin'!" Applejack yelled back.

"It just needs a trigger!" the robot caninoid replied. "The ground is as porous as a sponge now! Anything will collapse it!"

"You want me ta bury him?!" Applejack dodged another swipe.

"You got a better idea?"

Well, no she actually didn't. She pushed her earthbending into the ground hastily and jumped for all she was worth.

The ground caved under her like it was hit with a meteor and Hammerhoof Uranus bellowed in confusion as he was buried in rock and dirt.

"He gonna live?" Applejack asked worriedly.

"I was more concerned with you living to be honest." her companion answered.

Applejack thought that over for a moment. "Fair 'nuff."

Jupiter, formerly known as Copperbeak, scowled as his foe's eyes widened and he disengaged hastily. As if anyone would fall for that old trê€

His world exploded in pain and light as something slammed into his back.

As the sky exploded in rainbow light, Pinkie chanced a look behind her.

The Smooze looked like it had gotten bigger again.

She ran faster.

\_'SOLVENT SYNTHESIZED...'\_

\_'ARMING...'\_

\*\*"YYOOUUU TOOOOOKK MMYYY CRRYYYSSTAALLSS..."\*\* the Sombra-devil accused. He was getting more coherent by the moment. Luna needed to end this fast.

"They were never thine to begin with," she retorted as she began charging a spell more powerful than she'd used in a long time.

\*\*"MY CRRYYYSSTAALLLLL EEMMPPIIRRREEE..."\*\* Sombra fired bolts of dark magic that Luna narrowly avoided.

Luna's horn glowed brighter with raw magic. Almost...

\*\*"YYOOUUU TOOOK MMYYY MMIIINNDD... MMYYY BOODDYYYY... MMYYY CRRYYSTAALLL SSLLA AVVESS... NNOOOWW II SHHAALLLLL TAAKKEE YYOOUURRê€""\*\*

Whatever threat the foul creature would have made was cut off when her bolt of power lanced through his single foul eye and shredded the runes maintaining his presence in this place.

"There you are!" Twilight greeted Rainbow as she and Ring Terrel flew down with an unconscious Copperbeak Jupiter held between them. "What happened to him?"

"Sonic Rainboom to the back," Ring Terrel explained. "It appears Miss

Dash broke his spine. He'll live, thanks to his armor, but it is uncertain if he'll ever walk again."

"I was expecting him to dodge and be knocked out by the shockwave!" Rainbow insisted. "Not take a direct hit!"

She was prevented from reassuring Dash that it was alright, she'd probably have to arrange counseling after they got back to Ponyville, when the rest began showing up. First Rarity and Bright Mane with Pluto Rex's regalia in tow, then Zecora and Skull Mane with both a restrained Zuri and her own armor, Applejack and Drill Dog with Hammerhoof Uranus's helmet, and finally Dust Bunny and Fluttershy. The latter who had apparently beaten Inti Mars to a bloody pulp. All that was left was to find Pinkie and Rain Toad and then go meet up with Gilda and Pharaoh Sphinx and see if the strike teams needed reinforcing.

Before she could even suggest searching for her, Pinkie burst into the clearing like the terror of a thousand Loops was after her.

Then the Smooze broke through the treeline and Twilight admitted that wasn't far off.

\_'ARMED...'\_

\_'RAIN FLUSH: FIRE'\_

Before anyone could react, a rocket broke through the Smooze's body and rocketed into the clouds above and burst. For a few long seconds nothing else happened. Even the Smooze's attention was on the sky, apparently puzzling out what had just happened.

Then the first drops of rain fell, increasing to a downpour in moments. The Smooze writhed as if in pain as the rain pummeled it mercilessly and it began to dissolve and thin. More and more the Smooze melted into harmless liquid the soil drank greedily until the group could make out a form contained within. As the Smooze melted off of it, Rain Toad stood and stretched.

"Emotional Processing error corrected," the robot monotoned. "Reinitializing... Damnit Pinkie, pay attention next time!"

Pinkie stared at the restored robot and sniffled. And then began to tear up. And then she tackled the robo-amphibian in a hug.

"I'm sorry!" the party pony bawled her eyes out. "It was an accident! I didn't mean to melt her into a gooey eldritch abomination and get you eaten!"

Apparently Rainbow wasn't the only one who might need therapy.

Blues grit his teeth as he struggled against Ahuizotl's grip. He'd barely managed to deflect one shot of the faux Spark Chaser weapon with his shield (the thing really was just about indestructible) and he needed to disable it before Daring's old foe got bored and decided to stop toying with them.

It might help if Daring would stop staring at whatever new glyph she found so interesting on the damn wall after being thrown into it.



The armor he had was very energy resistant, so he switched to the Dust Crusher and fired at the laser gauntlet.

"Gah!" Ahuizotl cried out as the offensive piece of his armor sparked wildly. "You'll pay for that you little..."

"Ahuizotl, stop!" Daring warned suddenly.

Rock and Roll watched impotently as the view of Le Tor's video feed approached the Canterlot gates and a bedraggled looking Celestia limped out to meet it.

"What... do... you... want...?" Celestia gasped out.

"Oh, nothing much, princess," Dr. Wily's voice sounded from both ends of the feed. "Just your immediate and unconditional surrender."

"Never!" a young voice yelled defiantly as the dark form of the robot alicorn filly Nyx interposed itself between Dr. Wily's creation and the ruler of Equestria.

"Took you all long enough," Gilda greeted the group as they approached the ruins, sitting atop a bound, gagged, and de-armored Khara.

"Gilda?" Rainbow blurted out at the sight of her friend. The griffon was covered in cuts and bruises, plus she was missing fur and feathers in several places. "You look terrible." (22)

"So about the same as you then?" the griffon smirked playfully.

\_"Sounds like they've got everything in hoof Scoots."\_

\_"Well, yeah, but you know how these things go. Plan A \_never works."\_

\_"And just what do you expect me to do?"\_

\_"You run on that Nightmare Force stuff too, right? Couldn't ya just, I dunno, take it back or somethin'?"\_

\_"I don't think it works like that Applebloom."\_

\_"Actually DT... It just might..."\_

Magic retrieval was a skill that saw little use among the magically adept. For one, you couldn't 'retrieve' somepony else's magic that way, just your own. For another, it was a pretty darn sloppy way to undo spells and sometimes had unforeseen consequences. And finally, if you took too much back at once, you could give yourself a really bad headache.

The first one could be circumvented in this specific scenario only because Nyx was a robot that ran on the same wavelength of dark magic as the attacker. The second was a non issue right now because, whatever happened, it could only improve the current situation. The third was the tricky one. Nyx couldn't take in the whole curse

because she just couldn't store that much. But the power driving a single robot?

That she could do.

Concentrating, Nyx connected easily with the dark magic powering the robo-alicorn before her and pulled.

"What are you doing you insolent whelp?!" Wily's voice protested from the robot. "I demand you stop this at once!"

The robot's eyes dimmed as the last of its power was removed and it collapsed like a puppet with its string cut.

Maybe it was curiosity. Maybe it was 'professional courtesy'. Perhaps it was the fact that he'd never heard quite that tone of seriousness in her voice. Whatever it was, Ahuizotl did stop.

"And why should I do that Miss Do?"

"Because of what this passage says!" Daring pointed insistently at the section of the wall next to her.

"Oh, that?" Ahuizotl rolled his eyes. "That just tells how the artifact of Le Mu was used to imprison the sun and stars. Much like it's doing now. A little vandalized perhaps, but what old ruin isn't?"

"Are you ever going to learn to read these things properly?" Daring snarled at her foe and pointed to a particularly complex glyph with a crude line carved through it. "This doesn't mean the actual sun and stars! Written like this, an accurate translation is 'one who is as important as the sun and stars', or the ancient symbol for a ruler. The line through it isn't vandalism, though scholars say the practice may have begun that way. It means that the individual being referenced was despised. A tyrant in this case."

"Are..." Blues blinked, Ahuizotl Terra mirroring the action, "are you saying that the artifact is an actual prison?"

"Yes!" Daring confirmed. "A 'prison of darkness to hold light most foul'. And if I'm reading this right... Whoever it is is still in there. And alive."

Blues took a moment to process that before reaching the same conclusion Daring had.

"We have to stop my brother and sister from destroying it!"

When the video feed went down and Wily began cursing and railing about it, Rock and Roll charged their Mega Busters and took aim at the artifact of Le Mu.

"NO!" Dr. Wily yelled when he noticed them. "STOP! DO NOT!"

The two charged shots tore through the artifact, causing it to explode and dust to fill the room. In the center of the dust cloud, where the artifact used to be, and orange glow pulsed to life.

"Oh, no..." Wily moaned in dismay. "What have you two done...?"

The pulse grew stronger and seemed to stand. As the dust cleared, the Light twins and Dr. Wily could see a figure begin to take shape.

The hooves came into view first. Clad in royal blue armor and more massive than any known pony's. As more was revealed, it became clear that the equine body was larger than even Celestia's, with a masculine bulk that would have put Big Mac to shame, and covered in the same armor. And then the head started to come into view, only it wasn't a head. It was a second torso. Covered in the same armor as the rest of the body, this second torso was revealed to have ape-like arms and hands attached.

The figure was a centaur.

Then the real head was revealed. The helmet covered the entire face save the eyes, which blazed with light, and atop the head were a pair of massive wicked-looking horns. Like a demon. The icon of the sun was attached firmly to the forehead.

\*\*\*"Aaahhh,"\*\* the figure stretched in its newfound freedom. \*\*\*"After ten thousand years, I am free."\*\*

Rock and Roll did their best to keep calm at this new development, but it was hard.

\*\*\*"It is time for the world to recognize the unforgiving light of it's true master."\*\*

In the back, Dr. Wily tried his best to sneak silently away.

\*\*\*"It is time for all to bow before Tirek Sunstar."\*\*

Right as they agreed on a plan of action to back up the strike teams, Twilight and the others felt the spark as their Elements began to regain power and the dark curse began to recede. The fading red and orange of sunset became visible as the sky cleared.

"All right!" Dash cheered. "They did it!"

"Gracious, but that was quite an adventure," Rarity fanned herself dramatically.

"So I guess Rock and his sister won't be needing these armor bits anymore?" Pinkie questioned as she idly spun the helmet from Desert Mercury on her hoof.

"When did you...?" Rain Toad looked at the pink earth pony strangely.

"Oh, I went back and got it during one of those moments nopony was watching of course!" Pinkie grinned.

"Best not to think about it, sugarcube," Applejack advised sagely.

"Well, the Elements are regaining strength and the curse is lifted," Twilight smiled. "I'd say this has been a good day's work"

Twilight was cut off when, right as the last rays of sunlight

vanished over the horizon, a new sun seemed to explode out the top of the temple before them.

(A little earlier)

"Mega Mane! Mega Mare!" Blues yelled for his siblings as he, Daring, and Ahuizotl tore down the hall towards the innermost chamber where the artifact of Le Mu rested. While their ultimate goals were different, even Ahuizotl had agreed to a truce to stop whoever was imprisoned in the artifact from being released. "Don'tâ€"

All three skidded to a halt at the sight in the chamber. The artifact lay shattered and standing in the rubble was a massive armored centaur. The royal blues of the armor contrasted with the bright sun-like flames that licked out of every seam and the heat that rolled off of him was more unbearable than the hottest summer.

\*\*\*"Ah, more supplicants to bow before the world's rightful ruler and his most holy of light,"\*\* the centaur mused at them.

"How do you know our language?" Daring stared wide-eyed. "The words of our eras should be incomprehensible to the other!"

\*\*\*"Your ignorance will be permitted this once,"\*\* the centaur stared back. \*\*\*"For how could you in your imperfections know of the gift of tongues that I in my holy righteousness possess? It matters not. Come and swear your lives to me so we may purge the rest of the world of its taint."\*\*

"No," the twin voices of Rock and Roll cut the tableau. The centaur turned slowly towards them, as if incapable of comprehending the word.

\*\*\*"And who are you to dare speak this way to I, Tirek Sunstar, the true ruler of this world and embodiment of all light?"\*\*

"Rock, known as the Mega Mane, son of Light," Rock stood his ground defiantly.

"Roll, known as the Mega Mare, daughter of Light," Roll answered with just as much steel in her voice as her brother.

\*\*\*"A son and daughter of light?"\*\* Tirek Sunstar's voice gave the impression of blinking. \*\*\*"Then you of all beings should support my holy cause to purge the dark taint that infects the world with my holy fire."\*\*

"No, because we know what results from that kind of talk," Rock returned.

"Needless pain and suffering, heaped the most on those that deserve it least," Roll agreed.

"Death of any who would dare to consider ideas counter to your own," Daring added.

"Even should they be right," Blues finished.

\*\*\*"And you?"\*\* Tirek turned to look at the last member of the group

staring him down.

"I am Ahuizotl Terra," Daring's continual foe declared himself. "Heir to the Magi and the real inheritor of the world's rulership! I will not allow some millenia-old thief to steal that from me!"

Tirek stared at him before beginning to chuckle, which deepened into a booming laugh that shook the walls even as the light and heat pouring from his form pulsed in time with his mirth. **"The pitiful misshapen heir to the treasonous Magi dares to claim me a thief?! How amusing and appropriate with the way your companions spout the same ignorant tripe that arrogant gathering of fools did! Very well! We shall end this the same way as before! With righteous holy battle!"**

And with that, Tirek Sunstar rose into the air and rocketed through the ceiling.

**"Interesting,"** a voice from the sun-bright being spoke as the night sky around them lit up like daytime. **"It would appear these new Magi have prepared an ambush for my holy return. Clever of you. Cowardly, for which you must be cleansed in righteous flame, but clever."**

**"Thou speakest of things thou know not heartless miscreant!"** a new voice interposed itself as Luna teleported in between the new being and the group below. **"We sensed your foul presence and have arrived to protect our little ponies from your wrath! No harm shall befall them while their princess of the night draws breath!"**

**"A follower of darkness?"** the being mused as his light dimmed just enough for those below to make out the armored form of a centaur.

**'Holy roots and leaves...'** Twilight's eyes widened. **'It that Tirek?'**

**"Your taint shall be the first to be cleansed."**

**"We shall see villain!"** Luna yelled as she unleashed a massive blast of magic from her horn. The centaur was hit directly, not even bothering to move or even block it seemed. But then, he'd only let out a grunt when struck and hadn't even been pushed back all that much. Luna, however, had followed up the blast by charging the figure right behind it. Twilight could feel the way Luna was using her earth pony magic to enhance her strength for the physical blow all the way from where she stood without even trying.

Luna struck true and the centaur's armored head snapped back from the blow and there was a scream of pain.

Luna's scream.

The alicorn of the moon plummeted back in their direction, holding the hoof that she'd used to strike her opponent to her and hit the ground hard. She skidded to a halt a short distance away and Twilight got a good look at the hoof. Or rather, the charred stump where it used to be. She could even see the fine charcoal powder marring Luna's coat and realized what had happened.

\_You're telling me that this fortress somehow managed to charcoalize an alicorn's hoof?\_

\_'Great exfoliation,'\_ Twilight thought in horror, \_'he's a living sun!'\_

"Twì?" Applejack looked at her friend.

"Elements, girls," Twilight replied, summoning hers. The time for playing around was officially over.

Five more flashes of light heralded her friends, Awake and not, summoning their own Elements. The six glowed with magical power and the Rainbow of Light burst forth and shot towards the glowing centaur above...

...and shattered into multi-colored motes of magic that swiftly faded.

"...What just...?" Twilight stared at the shining form of Tirek with his fist extended after a contemptuous backhand.

\*\*\*"Fools,"\*\* he spat. \*\*\*"You seek to use light magic against me? The embodiment of all that is Holy and Just?"\*\*

"And where do you think you're going?" Blues asked as he grabbed Dr. Wily trying to sneak away.

"I'm trying to get to my contingency plan so I can fix this mess \_you\_ created!" the mad scientist fumed.

"Fix Ahuizotl's weapon first," Blues ordered as his brother and sister jumped up the opening Tirek Sunstar had made when he left. "We're going to need all the help we can get."

Twilight was currently having an internal argument with herself.

\_'The Elements didn't work...'\_

\_'Brilliant observation, me, but this isn't the time.'\_

\_'Why didn't the Elements work?'\_

\_'No clue. Can I perhaps try to think of something else that would?'\_

\_'The Elements always work!'\_

\_'Not this time they didn't. Look, can I stopâ€"'\_

\_'I mean, unless one of the six aren't in harmony with the others, but we all were, so it should have worked andâ€"'\_

\_'CAN I STOP FOCUSING ON THAT AND THINK OF A PLAN B NOW?!'\_

\_'Like what? Going alicorn? Worked out real well for Luna, didn't it?'\_

\_'I can cast spells to protect myself and the rest of us from harm,

duh.'\_

\_'Oh, sure, and then he starts taking all of us seriously.'\_

\_'Yeah, and I've got power to spare. I've been in Dragonball Loops and kicked flank before, remember?'\_

\_'Yeah, but the odds of taking out someone as powerful as he is quickly aren't promising, meaning I'd get into a full knock-down-drag-out and how long would Equestria last under that kind of fight?'\_

\_'Huh?'\_

\_'I said it myself, I've been to Dragonball Loops before. \_Surely \_I remember what happens there when two uber-powerful fighters square off. Especially when one cares nothing for collateral damage. So, again, I ask myself: How long would Equestria last under that kind of fight?'\_

\_'Er... I... Uh... ARGH! I HATE IT WHEN I'M RIGHT ABOUT THESE THINGS!'\_

Rock and Roll exited the top of the ruins, busters blazing. Tirek Sunstar didn't even seem to notice. At least at first.

\*\*\*"Pathetic,"\*\* he scowled and formed an orb of solar flame in one hand larger than either of them. \*\*\*"And to think you claimed to be children of light."\*\*

The blast didn't hit them. However, the shockwave from when it hit the temple and exploded threw them off their feet and sent them tumbling down the outer walls. After several seconds of seeming to hit every ledge and decorative carving, they landed near the group of their friends and allies.

\*\*\*"You are not worthy of such a claim,"\*\* the voice of Tirek Sunstar called after them.

"Hey there," Rock smiled at the others weakly. "You having as much fun as we are?"

"Probably," Pinkie chirped. "Because I'm not having any fun right now and that didn't look fun at all."

\*\*\*"You are weak and insolent,"\*\* the armored centaur continued, seemingly so confident in his power that he saw no need to follow up his attack.

"We brought you a few things," Rarity told them as she set the bundle of Pluto Rex's armor before them. It was followed by pieces of armor from Desert Mercury, Khara Saturn, Zuri Venus, Hammerhoof Uranus, Copperbeak Jupiter, and Blackmane Neptune.

"Sorry," Fluttershy apologized from where she was trying fruitlessly to see to Luna's injury. "Inti Mars's was a little big to carry."

\*\*\*"Defiant of your betters,"\*\* Tirek continued, uncaring for the

tableau below him.

"No worries," Roll told her as she and her brother proceeded to scan the enchantments on each armor for their variable weapons systems as quickly as possible. "I tagged him as I ran past. Rock got Hammerhoof's as well."

\*\*\*"Just like my ungrateful son, Le Tor."\*\*

"Wait, \_what\_?" Daring and Twilight whipped their heads around to stare at Tirek.

"Blast!" Dr. Wily swore as he tried to fix Ahuizotl's weapon. "What did you \_do\_ Break Mane?!"

"I defended myself," Blues retorted curtly. "Now hurry up. Tirek Sunstar deciding to monologue his history is giving us some time, but that's not going to last."

\*\*\*"So, you have heard of the ungrateful spawn,"\*\* Tirek Sunstar rumbled.

"Well, yeah, but his parentage is lost to history!" Twilight replied, her nature for seeking knowledge driving her mouth. "All we know about him is that he imprisoned the sun! Which, come to think of it is probably you, so..."

\*\*\*"I see..."\*\* Tirek's sneer was audible. \*\*\*"This is the thanks I get for my life of Holy service? This is all my years of firm and Just leadership is worth? This is what the vanquisher of the mad Queen Majesty is granted? Forgotten and erased? Intolerable. The taint has spread its roots deeper than I imagined."\*\*

"But..." Daring's eyes were wide. "Queen Majesty is a myth!"

\*\*\*"Oh, the mad queen was quite real,"\*\* Tirek told them. \*\*\*"As was her vile and unholy power to wish for anything, including the enslavement of the hearts and minds of all under her domain, save those she thought 'unworthy' of her 'protection', instead wishing for them to be the monsters she saw them as. How all the races cheered when I slew her at last, their minds finally their own. And how naive I was to allow her misbegotten spawn to live afterwards. How foolish I was to raise him as my own."\*\*

Twilight began to feel ill. She'd had one run-in with a version of Queen Majesty and this one sounded even worse than that one. How bad did someone need to be until Tirek of all beings was seen as a hero by comparison?

\*\*\*"Le Tor had not the madness of his dam, may the heavens be praised for such small favors,"\*\* Tirek continued, \*\*\*"but he had ideas unworthy of his position. All under the sun have their place, and to step outside it is unthinkable and a perversion of all that is Just. But he insisted on the misguided notion that all, even the lowest of the low, deserved enlightenment. As if higher callings were meant for any but those chosen to rule. To grant such to those unworthy to possess it is the greatest folly of all, and I forbade him to do so. But the one I called my son, even after I shed my weak form of flesh to better enable my holy crusade, could not find it in himself to be obedient. And so, behind my back and against the will of the heavens,



he formed the treasonous Magi."\*\*

As he spoke, Ahuizotl clad in his repaired Terra armor exited the temple, followed by Blues and both turned to face the blazing figure above.

\*\*"He welcomed all into his fold,"\*\* Tirek turned to Daring's recurring foe. \*\*"Including the most unworthy of misshapen demons like your ancestor. Truly, I regret that my efforts to erase your despicable kind were not more successful."\*\*

Ahuizotl's face showed shock, and then rage. For the first time Daring Do could remember, her nemesis forewent gloating or taunting and simply attacked, the laser weapon of his Magi armor lancing through the armored centaur again and again.

Tirek Sunstar remained unmoved.

\*\*"Very well,"\*\* he spoke, even as Ahuizotl fired again. \*\*"If battle is the end you crave, then you shall have it!"\*\*

The group of robots, ponies, zebra, and griffon hadn't been idle. While some listened to Tirek Sunstar's monologue, others had been arranging a plan of battle. Bright Mane had begun with the revelation that even though he appeared unharmed, Tirek was taking damage from the attacks.

"It's hard to see because of the light he puts off," the light-generating robot had said, "but each impact is leaving a mark."

"Yon Bright Mane speaks true," Luna had gasped as she got to her remaining hooves, her horn glowing with some spell. "The villain's armor has an ancient and seemingly incomplete form of protective enchantment on it. Almost all force from any assault is sent to his immortal body of flame, leaving the armor to take what little is left. All strikes, no matter how mighty, deal his armor the same manner of harm. But the armor also seems to sustain his form. If it is lost, then his body wouldst be lost in kind."

"Then we use the 'Death of a Thousand Cuts'," Daring nodded firmly as Dash finished strapping Copperbeak Jupiter's gauntlets to her forehooves as best she could and Applejack strapped Hammerhoof Uranus's helmet to her head.

"Heh," Gilda smirked, gripping the ring she'd kept from Khara Saturn. "So we're using the griffon way to end this. Traditional, no less."

"The ancient griffons would pardon any crime if only the perpetrator could survive one thousand cuts from the wronged parties," Ring Terrel explained quickly as the rest of the Cossack numbers finished preparations.

"Darling," Rarity rolled her eyes as she finished hastily adjusting Pluto Rex's regalia to her form. It wasn't her best work, but it would just have to do. "I \_don't\_ think we're going to be keeping count." (23)

"I certainly hope not," Drill Dog snarled.

"Everyone know the plan?" Rock checked quickly, getting a chorus of nods. "Then break!"

Dr. Willy grumbled as he furiously finished adjustments to his contingency plan and began the siphoning of remaining Nightmare Force into its power core.

"Heh..." he chuckled. "The ancient Magi were geniuses for their time, but only I could have perfected their arts into this ultimate creation! When the activation sequence is complete, even this 'Tirek Sunstar' will not stand before its power!"

Fluttershy regretted that there didn't seem to be any way to deal with Tirek Sunstar without involving death, but she knew that often times that was the way of life. Sometimes things must perish so that others can live. It was the way of nature, and over the Loops she'd become ever more in touch with the cycles of nature and life through her druidic practices and made it her way as well.

Right now, she was doing her best to support the others in their efforts. Some nature charms to boost the protective efforts of the others as they unleashed everything they could upon the genocidal centaur above them.

Twilight and Luna had both warded everyone as best they could, but even so they were all trying their best not to get hit. On the offense, the purple unicorn and the princess of the night were foregoing their normal magical prowess to simply unleash raw magical bolts upon their common foe; Rarity dashed around with incredible speed from the 'borrowed' regalia she wore, sniping her solar foe from every angle; Applejack used her earth-bending and the strength boost from her pilfered helmet to heave rocks and stones upwards; Pinkie was using her pink lantern ring, though its power seemed weakened from its wielder's loss of good mood; Rainbow Dash was using the gauntlets she'd acquired to summon intermittent bolts of lightning; Gilda stood off to the side, aiming the draining effect of the ring she's won from her opponent at Tirek, even if it seemed to do little; Zecora was mixing her potions with the exploding bubbles her own acquired armor produced to decent effect; Cossack's robots leveled support fire from every angle they could along with the Lights; Daring Do had accepted the gauntlets of Blackmane Neptune from Twilight, allowing her to occasionally manifest a ball of water that she shot at the centaur above; and Ahuizotl kept shooting Tirek in rage.

This had been going on for minutes and, in retrospect, it couldn't have lasted.

\*\*\*"Your valor is commendable, even if your allegiance is not,"\*\* Tirek Sunstar spoke up suddenly. \*\*\*"But I tire of this distraction."\*\*

There was little warning. None of the gestures he'd been using to telegraph his blast up until now. He simply pointed his hand at Ahuizotl and unleashed a gigantic beam of light.

Ahuizotl was already trying to dodge, and he half managed it. But that still left the other half blasted by a beam of heat that turned the ground below into molten stone. It was only the combined

protections of his armor and the wardings of Twilight and Luna, backed by Fluttershy's druidic magic, that saved his life. But even then the stench of burning flesh reached them all as Ahuizotl frantically ripped off his orange-hot armor amidst pained howls.

'This guy could land in a Dragonball Loop and no one there would think him out of place,' Twilight thought numbly. That blast had burned through her wards, Luna's, and the forgotten magic of an ancient order enhanced by mad magical science and still nearly killed Ahuizotl.

'I know Rock says he's never lost to this Sunstar guy Tirek's fused with in his home Loop, but if he tries to unleash another one of those, I'm going alicorn, consequences be damned' \_

\*\*\*ARRGGHHH!\*\*\* Tirek's pained cry cut off her thoughts as a massive blast of dark magic ripped into him.

'Or I could let the obvious deus ex machina do it for me,' she admitted as the newest combatant climbed out of the hole in the temple. It was a massive black devil-series robot with glowing runes on its body, and the eye had apparently been designed as a one-pony cockpit containing none other than Dr. Wily.

\*\*\*BWA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!\*\*\* The mad scientist's voice boomed out from the machine as an armored covering slid over the cockpit. \*\*\*Yes! Fall before the power of my ultimate Wily Machine: Le Devil!\*\*\*

Rain Toad had been mostly using his ability to produce water to put out the numerous fires Tirek Sunstar had been making. Thus he was the first on the scene to douse the burned Ahuizotl and his red-hot armor before further damage was done.

The second on the scene was Daring Do, feeling something she would fervently deny was concern.

"Take it..." Ahuizotl hissed through the pain as he handed the one piece of his regalia that wasn't warped by the heat of Tirek Sunstar's blast, the laser shooting gauntlet on his tail, to his long-time foe. "Make him pay..."

Daring was all too happy to ditch the current gauntlets she had as the water weapon they shot wasn't doing much more than creating steam when it hit the solar villain. She was also willing to honor her nemesis's request, since none should ever be the victim of the kind of systematic genocide Tirek Sunstar claimed he'd attempted against Ahuizotl's species. Unfortunately, she didn't see how it was going to improve things any.

"Good," the voice of Proto Mane startled her. "His weapon is intact. We'll need that."

"Why?!" Daring sniped at the robot. "It's not doing any more damage to Tirek Sunstar than anything else we throw at him! Only that... thing... of Dr. Wily's even hurt him!"

Even now, they could see Tirek Sunstar on the ground, flames burning the undergrowth and the dirt and stone melting and warping from the

heat he put off. Wily's Le Devil creation was indeed occupying Tirek Sunstar's full attention, but the way the centaur kept incinerating large pieces of its form, that wasn't going to last.

"He targeted Ahuizotl for a reason," Blues replied. "The laser he shoots isn't hurting him more with each hit than anything else, but the way it changes direction in midair means it hits several times with each shot. It's the best weapon we've got after Wily's latest project. I've already transferred my data on it to Mega Mane and Mega Mare and they're getting in position. As soon as we get an opening, we're going to let him have it with all four barrels."

"Okay," Daring nodded. "Let's do this."

\*\*\*"Foul servant of darkness!"\*\* Tirek Sunstar cursed Le Devil as he endured another blast of dark magic. \*\*\*"My holy light shall never be extinguished!"\*\*

\*\*\*"Insolent relic of a bygone era!"\*\* Wily shouted back as Le Devil crashed to the ground after its leg was blasted off.

\*\*\*"You shall be the first to be cleansed!"\*\* the enraged centaur gathered power and unleashed a massive blast at the downed monstrosity.

The machine exploded with enough force to dissipate the energy wave and when the dust settled, Dr. Wily sat amidst some broken bits of machinery. A bit scraped and bruised, but alive. It was clear to those who knew how such things worked that he'd designed shaped charges into the cockpit to negate any force that breached its protections while not harming the pilot.

\*\*\*"And thus your taint is purged,"\*\* the voice of his blazing opponent intoned with all the finality of an executioner.

But just before he unleashed the fatal blast at the doctor, Mega Mane tackled Wily out of the way.

"Argh!" Rock screamed as the end of one of his hind legs was clipped by the blast and melted clean off.

\*\*\*"A futile gesture!"\*\*

"NOW!" Roll yelled and three lasers like Ahuizotl's weapon, the Spark Chaser, lanced through Tirek Sunstar repeatedly. For several long moments it appeared as if the powerful foe had been impaled by an entire cage of pure crackling light.

\*\*\*"ENOUGH!"\*\* the enraged bellow was accompanied by an explosion of flame that rushed over the entire battlefield.

Rainbow Dash tried her best to get her heart back under control after the wave of solar flame dissipated. She hadn't had time to analyze the pull on her Element when the centaur guy had lost it and had just thrown everything she could into the connection.

She'd forgotten that Twilight had told her and the others about her research into other ways to use the Elements. Most importantly at the moment, using them defensively. But as she looked down and saw everypony, and every non-pony, alive and well (24) she thanked

whatever had possessed her egghead friend to do the research in the first place.

\*\*\*"So, you live,"\*\* Tirek Sunstar, the great and holy light of all the world, observed as the so-called 'son of light' got to his remaining hooves. \*\*\*"It shallâ€œ"\*\*\*

He paused as he observed the way the stallion's leg terminated. It was not charred and blackened like flesh would be, but melted the entire way across. Even if the pretender did wear armor, it would not have done that.

\*\*\*"So... you are naught but a golem of metal pretending to be a pony,"\*\* he mused. \*\*\*"One who can not help but run to the rescue of his dark master."\*\*

"Actually, Dr. Wily's my worst enemy," the golem replied calmly.

...What?

"Hey, Twilight?" the voice of Roll interrupted the local Anchor's thoughts again.

\_'Honestly, I'm starting to think this Loop \_likes \_shooting down my decisions to solve the problems it sends my way with my incredible alicorn powers,'\_ Twilight mentally grumbled as she turned to hear whatever plan the robot mare was bringing to her. And with that tone, it really couldn't be anything else. "Yes?"

"How much protective magic can you send my brother's way?" the Mega Mare asked. "Discretely if at all possible."

"Quite a bit," Twilight replied, becoming more intrigued by the second. "Why?"

"Because Mega Mane's done analyzing how our opponent fights," she replied succinctly. "My brother's intending to end this as decisively as he can. One-on-one."

"Wait, he's going to challenge a \_living sun\_ to a \_duel\_?" Twilight blurted incredulously.

"It's not like it would be the first time," the mechanical mare shrugged in a resigned fashion.

The looping unicorn blinked a few times as she processed that. "We'd better hedge our bets and get Luna on board."

"Already done," Roll replied. "Blues says she sounds rather enthusiastic about it."

"Of course," Twilight rolled her eyes.

\*\*\*"What manner of being would save a mortal enemy from death?"\*\* Tirek sounded confused. Good. The less sure he was of things, the less dangerous he became.

"One who is living proof that your son was right," the Mega Mane replied calmly as he noted Dr. Wily inching away as unobtrusively as

equinely possible. Even better. The further Wily was from this, the less likely he'd get hurt.

The strange and unique variant on his recurring foe Sunstar seemed to narrow his perception menacingly. \*\*\*"Do explain."\*\*

"Your son believed that all, no matter what station in life they were born to, deserved to be educated," Rock explained calmly as he began preparations for what he had planned. He could probably do it faster, but this would work so much better if he took his time. "This has already come to pass."

\*\*\*"What you speak of is madness."\*\*

"Maybe," he allowed as he began siphoning the magical energy from the wards placed on him into his weapon systems and linked them to a specific weapon in particular. "But it still works. If it didn't, I wouldn't exist. My creator is an earth pony. Without your son's philosophy in place, he'd have been just another farm worker toiling away in the fields."

\*\*\*"It would have been his place,"\*\* the centaur glared. \*\*\*"Those meant for growing food have no need for scholarly pursuits."\*\*

"The fact that our farmers now can produce more food, of higher quality, and with less farmers, than anyone from your time would have believed possible suggests otherwise," Rock grinned as new magical energy began to flow into his systems. He'd need everything he could get. "But beyond that, your son believed that everyone, regardless of species or station, not only deserved a chance to learn, but a chance to live and prove themselves."

\*\*\*"A folly,"\*\* Tirek Sunstar scoffed. \*\*\*"Once the taint of darkness has taken root, only the purifying flame can cleanse it."\*\*

"And there's our impasse," Rock nodded calmly. "You believe in no chances to anyone who doesn't fit your definition of 'pure'. I believe that everyone deserves not just a chance, but often also a second chance. It's why I'll risk my life even for a mortal enemy. We may falter into darkness along the way, but with a little faith and the help of friends we can come back into the light. It's the kind of world your son spent his life trying to create."

\*\*\*"My son was a fool. As are any who place their faith in his folly. Such madness can never be Just."\*\*

"And I say that such 'madness' is what creates Justice!" Rock shot back. "So I'm here to challenge you, Tirek Sunstar, last of an outdated and obsolete philosophy! A duel! Your Justice against mine! You take your best shot and then I take mine!"

"That's all I can give him," Twilight let out a long breath. "I hope your brother knows what he's doing."

"Twilight, since we started looping, Rock has faced various versions of Sunstar hundreds of times," Roll replied calmly.

Twilight blinked and reminded herself once again that for some loopers such opponents were the norm rather than the 'once in a weird variant' exception.

"He hasn't lost yet."

\_ 'Light's boy is out of his mind,' \_ Dr. Wily thought numbly as he abandoned stealth in favor of putting more distance between himself and the showdown. Only to run face first into Break Mane.

Standing next to the lunar diarch herself.

"Not so fast, doc," the renegade prototype smirked. "We've still got some things to discuss after this."

"Indeed," Luna agreed as she absently restrained the doctor with her magic.

Rock didn't normally engage in psychological warfare, but as a pragmatic tool-using model, he naturally considered everything at his disposal when presented with a problem. That his goading had not only secured Tirek Sunstar's undivided attention, but his agreement to the duel he'd proposed was just step one. The easy step.

\_ 'Cross-wire with the Magnet Beam... Adjust frequency to optimal dispersal of enemy's energy weapon... Initiate thaumic energy boost from existing wards and infused magic...' \_ he performed the final adjustments as Sunstar took his time dramatically gathering energy. \_ 'Energy readings stable... Backup contingencies in place... Yes, I want to override my blasted safeties already... Pray like heck this guy's as superstitious as he sounds like...' \_

Tirek Sunstar leveled his hands and the gathered energy between them in his direction and fired.

\_ 'Skull Barrier.' \_

Tirek Sunstar experienced a feeling of vindication as the insolent blue golem was consumed by his holy flame. There was, after all, only one true Justice and

He stared in shock as a shimmering glow of power not his own became visible as his flames died down. The shock grew as the shimmering became clearer to show it had a shape. The shape of an equine skull forming a protective barrier over the metal golem. His holy flames licked at the energy hungrily, but it held firm.

\_ 'Impossible! None may possess the favor of Death! Even I in my Holy and Just cause was refused!' \_

\*\*\*"H-how do you possess the favor of Death?!"\*\* Tirek demanded.  
\*\*\*"HOW?!"\*\*

"Maybe because I go out of my way to not make work for him," Rock retorted as he took stock. The forelimb he'd used to generate the barrier had blown almost every circuit it had to pump power into the shield, but it had worked. Even better, Tirek believed it was some divine favor from the local equivalent of the grim reaper. The damaged forelimb, while otherwise useless, could still support his weight and his other forelimb was still in good working order. He could work with that. "Anyway, that was your best shot, right?"

\*\*\*"Your contest is the dishonorable rambling of a tainted mind!"\*\* Tirek fumed as Rock raised his remaining forelimb, formed it into a hoof cannon, and took aim. The centaur began to form energy in his hands, sloppily from his anger. \*\*\*"Even were you able to harm me, I am not bound by your treasonous bargain!"\*\*

He was cut off by an explosion in his face and lost control of his flame, but even Rock could see he was more dazed than hurt.

\_"\*\*"That\*\*\_ \_\*\*is your best shot?"\*\*\_ Tirek Sunstar challenged.

"No, that was just to get your attention," Rock stated flatly. "My best shot... is everything."

And with that pronouncement, the robot known as Mega Mane proceeded to, in fact, shoot everything at his opponent.

Twilight stared at where Rock, the Mega Mane was blasting everything at Tirek Sunstar. He switched weapons so fast that his color-changing armor looked like a rainbow having a spasm (25) as it tried to match each one for the instant it was in use.

Bombs flew after fire flew after ice flew after blades flew after water flew after lightning and on and on creating a giant blur of elemental violence that pummeled the living sun.

"How...?" Twilight tried to make sense of what she was seeing. Tirek Sunstar had seemed almost invincible before, but now he was looking like an amateur. Every shot he tried to fire back was countered before it even left his hand or flew so wide that it seemed the safest place to stand was directly behind the robot firing on him.

"Because that's what my brother does," Roll replied next to her. "Blues may be military and I may take to fighting styles better than Rock, but this is what he's the best at. He analyzes everything about his opponents. Their powers, their patterns, their tells, their attitude, the way their armor moves and fits together, all of it. He studies them as he fights, and then when he's got everything he needs, he uses it to take them apart."

"Huh," Twilight mulled that over. "I wonder what goes through his mind at times like this?"

\_'I swear, one of these days I'm going to end up copying a weapon that shoots kitchen sinks,'\_ Rock mused as he monitored the armor integrity of his opponent. His ability to control and direct his solar flames should be reaching bottom right about...

Tirek fell to his knees.

...now.

Rock stopped firing.

\*\*\*"It... appears that victory is indeed yours,"\*\* Tirek admitted reluctantly from where he knelt involuntarily. \*\*\*"I almost feel remorse that for you it shall be a bitter one."\*\*



Rock could hear the smile in the centaur's voice and it sent alarms blaring through his mind.

\*\*\*Almost.\*\*\*

Luna went rigid as she felt the magic of Tirek Sunstar shift and teleported herself, her companion, and her captive directly to Twilight's side.

"Twilight Sparkle," she rushed, "it appears we have made an error most grave, our foe's powerâ€"

"Isn't dissipating safely, I know," Twilight was starting to go pale. "It's going critical." \_'If he blows, it'll ignite the entire atmosphere!'\_

And if her scan was correct, they had a little over fifteen minutes before the world ended.

"You don't have to do this!" Rock pleaded. "The world your son dreamed of can be yours too! We can give you a second chance! A chance to live in peace and harmony!"

\*\*\*He he he...\*\*\* Tirek chuckled. \*\*\*I was wrong. You are not tainted. Merely hopelessly naive. Like my son. But I would not stop my holy quest for him and I shall not for you. I swore an oath to cleanse this world, one that I ensured I would be able to keep even with my dying breath.\*\*\*

A rainbow light from the Elements of Harmony chose to strike him at that moment, but even now Tirek Sunstar proved unmovable to the supreme expression of light magic.

"It is over!" the centaur laughed madly. "There is nothing you can do to stop it! The world shall be cleansed!"

\_ 'Damnit!' \_ Twilight fumed as her telekinesis failed to grasp the centaur every bit as the last use of the Elements did. And even if she could fling him away, would she get his high enough fast enough? "ARGH! I don't know what to do! Tirek's going to blow sky high and burn the whole world to a cinder and I can't stop it! Why are the Elements not working?!"

"What if we reversed them?" Rainbow Dash suddenly spoke up.

"I don't think putting them on backwards will do anything, darling," Rarity was close to hyperventilating and trying to hide it.

"Well, we gotta try somethin'!" Applejack started fiddling with her necklace, clearly intending to do what Rarity had claimed was pointless.

"No!" Rainbow shook her head. "I mean, why don't we reverse us? Like instead of focusing our positive traits through the Elements, we focus our negative ones? This guy is all light, right? Well, Blues was telling me a while back that all light isn't very harmonious." She pointed her hoof at Luna before continuing. "Like day needs the night to balance it out, we all have darker shadowy sides to ourselves to balance out the traits the Elements represent. So why can't we use \_those\_ to blast him?"

"I..." Twilight stopped herself from saying that it wouldn't work as she realized she hadn't actually tried that in looping memory. There hadn't ever been any need to. She racked her mind for everything she knew about the Elements for a few seconds and concluded that none of it would render the action impossible. Difficult and unlikely, perhaps, but not impossible. "What negative traits were you thinking of?"

"Well, Rarity's clearly got Ambition," Rainbow Dash began.

"But of course, darling," Rarity huffed. "Nothing wrong with wanting to be the pinnacle of fabulousness, is there?"

"No, of course not," Dash agreed, "but that's not the point. Where Generosity is all about others, Ambition is all about yourself. But they're linked, see? Generosity wants to give and Ambition wants to have, but you can't give what you don't have."

"I see..." Rarity hemmed a bit, before brightening. "Oh, my. I do see!"

"Fluttershy's normally kind," Dash continued, "and that's great, but it's not what we need right now. We need Ferocity. Not the gentle healer that mends hurts, but the angry mama bear that stops them by ripping the hurter a new one."

"Of course," Fluttershy's gaze hardened as she thought to her adopted son of another Loop and the trials he regularly underwent. "If that's what's needed."

"Pinkie, you gotta give up Laughter for a bit and do Sorrow instead," the blue pegasus continued.

"But Dashie, you know I don't do sad!" Pinkie smiled, a bit confused.

"Pull the other one, Pinks," Dash retorted. "You're the friendliest mare I know. You care about pretty much everypony. So how would you feel if we just... weren't there one day? If we were dead, or we'd left without saying goodbye, orâ€œ"

"Okay, you're right," Pinkie admitted as her mane deflated and her eyes teared up. But she was still smiling, sadly, but smiling. "I'd be really sad if that happened. So, yeah, I can be sad for a friend."

"And what about me?" Applejack snorted. "Honesty don't do well with lyin'."

"No, but valuing the truth means understanding Deception," Dash folded her forelimbs. "And self-deception counts miss 'Sure I can buck the whole field, I just gotta give up on little things like eating and sleeping'."

"Okay, I deserved that," Applejack admitted. She'd honestly thought she could pull that off without her fancy looping powers this time. She hadn't counted on waking up in the hospital with Nurse Redheart giving her a nasty look and no memory of when and how she collapsed. Maybe this 'deception' wasn't lying outright, it was understanding

how what was true and what wasn't could get muddled up in someone's head. That she certainly had experience with. "Looks like ya got my number after all. But what about you?"

"Me?" the Unawake Element of Loyalty rolled her eyes as if it was obvious. "I've got Suspicion out the wazoo. I don't easily trust anypony outside my group of friends. It's part of how I look out for all of you."

"And me?" Twilight asked. "How do you reverse Magic?"

"Heh," Dash chuckled. "You know that Magic used to be referred to as what the Magi knew?"

"Well, yeah," Twilight's Unawake self had known about the legendary Magi unicorns for a while, "but I don't... Oh. Oh! Duh! You're saying my Element's not just about friendship, it's about knowledge!"

"Yeah, you love learning all that egghead stuff Twi," Rainbow poked her with a hoof. "But where the positive is learning new things and discovering stuff, the negative is keeping it all to yourself. And don't tell me you don't play it close to the chest sometimes."

Twilight blushed as Rainbow hit the nail on the head. How many times had she told her friends, Awake or otherwise, to trust her, she knew what she was doing? She didn't share everything with them. And she'd gotten really good at keeping secrets. "I... I think this could actually work. Okay, places girls! We've got a world to save!"

They got into formation one more time, this time doing their best to focus on the not-so-bright parts of themselves that they were often loath to admit to. The Elements didn't respond at first, but slowly they began to darken and then radiate a shadowy 'light'. Each of them rose up in turn as the shadows grew in strength and intensity, the Elements shaking in protest.

'It's working, but the Elements weren't designed to do this,' Twilight observed. She almost told the others, but stopped herself. 'Telling them won't improve our chances. They don't need to know yet.'

With that re-affirmation of her darker personality trait, the Elements reached the peak of their power and a Rainbow of Shadows burst forth and struck the downed Tirek Sunstar and began to struggle with him.

'Ergh!' Twilighth grunted. 'He's still resisting! Turning to stone... Yeah, what body? He's a living fusion reaction! Cleansing of his overly light nature and madness? Ngh... No, we aren't putting out enough force with this setting. Banishment...? Moon's refusing a connection. He's too solar. Gotta be the sun... Gah!'

"Luna!" Twilight managed to force out as she maintained the Rainbow of Shadows under the protesting Elements. "We need to banish him to the sun, but the connection's... not strong enough at night! You gotta raise..."

"If thou needst the sun to rise, then it shall be so!" Luna declared

and focused all of her might on forcing the newly-set sun back over the horizon. Slowly, the western horizon changed color as the sun reversed course, and as the first rays peaked over, the connection was made and Tirek Sunstar was blasted off the planet in a trail of shadows. Straight for the sun.

Tirek Sunstar, the most Holy and Just being in all the world, raged as he was deposited in the sun's fiery furnace. It didn't harm him, any more than the sea would harm a bucket's worth of water, but it also didn't stop his armor's containment from failing. He was Holy! His cause was Just! The world needed to be cleansâ€

Within the sun, Tirek Sunstar exploded with a fury that would have ended all life on the world he just came from and burnt what remained to cinders.

The sun didn't notice.

"We... We won..." Twilight heaved from the exertion forcing the Elements to perform in a way never intended had put her through.

The trip back to Canterlot had happened much faster then the trip out. With Dr. Light's teleportation network back up, each of the robots was able to take a passenger back with them. Dr. Wily was firmly in custody, but Ahuizotl had somehow slipped off in the aftermath despite his injuries. Daring was certain he'd turn up again. He always did.

Rock had been rushed to the makeshift lab Dr. Light had set up for repairs, with Roll and the Cossack numbers patiently awaiting their turns. Blues had claimed that he could manage his own repairs just fine and had promptly vanished.

Luna had stubbornly refused a regeneration spell for her hoof, claiming that battle scars were to be worn with pride. Celestia had managed to at least talk her into begrudgingly trying one of the latest prosthetics in lieu of healing after much worrying and shedding of tears.

As for the Elements of Harmony and co, they were taking some well-earned relaxation time. Or at least as much relaxation as could be had with Dash and Gilda retelling the adventure to an insistent CMC, and their griffon guest Kalinka, with increasingly ludicrous embellishments on each retelling. Twilight had ten bits on their narrative having the planet explode within the next five revisions.

Daring Do on the other hoof was holed up translating a holographic scan of the writings in the temple. She seemed very excited about it. Excited enough that Twilight was on edge waiting for her to finish and tell the rest of them.

Dr. Wily Plan... was awaiting trial.

"Forsooth, yon skills are most impressive Master Light," Luna complimented the scientist as she idly flexed the gleaming cybernetic prosthesis now replacing her incinerated hoof. "Were it not for the loss of touch, we wouldst be incapable of perceiving the difference."

"Well, your body does already know what your limb is supposed to be doing," Dr. Light tried to deflect the praise. "It's just a matter of making it so the device lets it."

"Thy humility does thee credit, Master Light," Luna smiled. "But one shouldst not understate their own skills eiâ€œ"

"Hey, Doc!" Rainbow Dash sped into the room and halted for a moment at the sight of the lunar diarch. "Er... Hey, Luna. Sorry to interrupt, but Daring says she's got that ancient writing stuff translated and wants to invite everypony to hear it!"

"That sounds most intriguing," Dr. Light rubbed his bearded chin thoughtfully. "What do you think, princess?"

"We do think we would like to hear the ancient tale of the Magi and the tyrant sun as written by the Magi themselves," Luna replied eagerly. "Let us make haste!"

"Thank you all for coming," Daring nodded to the room. The Elements of Harmony, all three princesses, the Light family, the Cossack family, a few of the guard (including the captain), some assorted robots, and a group of fillies tagging along filled the meeting hall. Behind her, a hologram of one of the walls in the Lanfront appeared. "As you know, I have been working to translate the writings of the Lanfront ruins for the past few days. Just so you know, this is an ancient written language, so mistakes tend to be made. One of the problems with them is that they're all nouns and verbs, and are just starting to grasp the concept of adjectives. Things like pronouns, adjectives, connecting words, and all the other little things we take for granted are supposed to be gleaned from context and word ordering. So I hope you'll forgive me for embellishing a little."

\_"This is the fate of the tyrant Sunstar, whose light consumes all it touches. Once, he was a good and noble being, but the trials of leading the world's races and the dying curse of the mad queen turned him into a mockery of himself. And so I, Le Tor, his son in heart if not in body, formed the Magi to save the world from its savior."\_

\_"The Magi were dedicated to the idea that all have a right to seek enlightenment and so I invited members of every race to come and study the deepest reaches of power and wisdom. To glean hidden knowledge by which we could both protect the races of the world and teach them to protect themselves."\_

\_"We mastered the forces of nature first. The storms in the heavens, the cleansing power of the seas, the strength of the earth, and the flames of the world's core. We even learned to move the sun and moon by our own might and to contain the most dreaded of beings."\_

\_"But the tyrant Sunstar shed his mortal form and became a living sun, declaring himself the only light the world needed. He declared entire races tainted and began to hunt them down without cause. He had to be stopped, but his form was proof against light magic. And so the Magi created a prison of darkness to hold light most foul. Its power shall endure as long as the tyrant Sunstar's immortal flame burns."\_

\_"I, the alicorn Le Tor, led the force that defeated him, and he fell cursing us all for eternity. Myself most of all. In his words, my life was one of the mad queen's last foul wishes, and I had proven myself her son at last. I am troubled by this."\_

"This is where the writing style shifts," Daring explained, breaking the narrative. "Le Tor's entries end and someone else continues for him."

\_"The Magi have been betrayed. The great alicorn Le Tor, may his spirit rest in the boundless heavens, brought us together under the banner of equality and friendship, but it seems not all wished to share the secret knowledge we have gained. Lord Silver and his wife Platinum were invited as the representatives of the unicorns for their ability to channel mystical forces through their horns, but now it is clear they never thought of the rest of us as equals. We were merely tools to be used and then discarded when no longer of use."\_

\_"With the tyrant Sunstar imprisoned, they grew bold. Le Tor, the only one who would claim we demons of Ahuizotl as friends, was slain in his sleep. Spykoran of the dragons fell to pyrite poisoning. The others were killed most cowardly one by one until only I, the nameless demon of Ahuizotl, remained. I have used the power of the prison to seal this place against intruders. The lust for power that Lord Silver, Lady Platinum, and their unicorn followers possess is endless and their selfishness regarding the knowledge meant for all is beyond reasoning. They have taken everything, including the name of the Magi, for themselves. There is naught I can do but leave this record in the hopes that one day the truth will be known."\_

The room was silent for several moments after that.

"What does the 'nameless demon of Ahuizotl' mean?" Dash asked first. "I mean, that guy can't be \_that\_ old, can he?"

"No," Daring shook her head. "Though the symbol Ahuizotl always uses for himself is the only reason I recognized the word. My guess is it's a place that his species was originally from. As for the 'nameless' thing, it doesn't translate well. The word would more literally mean 'one who has given up his name to serve his fellows', an honored title for the time, but that's a bit of a mouthful."

"Indeed," Celestia agreed. "This would be quite controversial in many circles, I'm sure you all understand, but the events fit what we know to have come after."

"The tale of Hearth's Warming," Twilight supplied.

"Quite so," Celestia nodded. "Speaking of which my student, I was meaning to ask if you and your friends would like to perform in Canterlot's annual production of the tale this winter?"

"WOULD WE?!" Pinkie's instant agreement drowned out any other replies.

The trial had been surprisingly swift despite the complicated nature of the events. Dr. Willy had been incredibly subdued after being caught in the backwash of the Elements when Tirek was banished. He had remained that way since their return from the ruins and he sat

through the court proceedings seemingly resigned to his fate. He hadn't even attempted to defend himself, pleading guilty right off the bat. Rock and Roll allowed as to how it was very uncharacteristic of the stallion.

Even now as the sentence was being hoofed down, his head hung despondent and barely responsive.

"Dr. Wily Plan," Judge Scales proclaimed from the bench, "after reviewing the evidence and the testimony of all involved parties, this court does hereby accept your plea of guilty to the crime of assault upon the sovereign lands of Equestria. However, due to the influence of the dark magic known as the 'Nightmare Force' upon your mind and the precedent set by The Ponies of Equestria vs Luna Equis several months prior, leniency has been granted in sentencing. You are hereby on probation for a term of no less than five years. You will be remanded to the custody of Light Labs and are not to be unsupervised at any time. Do you understand?"

"Yes, your honor," Dr. Wily stated without emotion. "Thank you, your honor."

"Dismissed!"

"It's weird," Rock was telling Twilight later when they were away from non-looping ears. "I've never seen Dr. Wily like that. Usually he's clinging to the possibility of his innocence with all the fervor of a raccoon with its hand stuck in a bottle because it won't let go of the thing it reached in to get."

"That's a pretty long-winded metaphor," Twilight snorted in amusement.

"Yeah, I need to work on those," Rock rubbed the back of his head sheepishly. "But still, Wily likes to take any avenue to protest his innocence. Sometimes while he's plotting his next scheme at the same time. But sometimes he really is the innocent victim of manipulation, at least initially, and usually I'm right there getting the evidence to help prove it."

"About that," Twilight interrupted, "Why?"

"Because of all the ways we keep trying to reform him, this second chance is the one that's repeatedly come the closest to working," Rock lamented.

"Well, he did get the backwash of the elements this time," Twilight theorized.

"And I'm hoping that does the trick," the blue bomber nodded. "But, well, we'll see."

"I suppose we will," the purple unicorn agreed. "Also, I've been meaning to ask you about that last stand against Tirek Sunstar. How did you know it would work?"

"I didn't know for sure," Rock admitted. "That's why I had the Chaos Emeralds in my subspace pocket on standby so I could go Super just in case it didn't."

Twilight stared at her fellow Anchor for a long moment, her eye twitching. "And precisely when were you going to tell me you had those?!"

Rock blinked. "I thought I had... Right after... No, not the parasprite incident... It was after Wily's second attack... Let's see, there was the thing with Philomena... Why is this encrypted...? Ah! Right after you and the other Awake loopers took us into the Everfree to show off your alicorn forms."

Twilight facehooved. "Rock, we were drunk off our plots that day. We were lucky we remembered anything that happened then."

"Oh, right, that's why those memories were encrypted," Rock made a face. "I did not need to remember Rarity and Spike doing that."

"I am so jealous of you right now," Twilight grumbled. "But still, if you had those, why didn't you use them?"

"Because while the Super form is cool and all, it's still one of the 'nuclear' options and I don't like using those if I don't absolutely have to," Rock explained. "I don't particularly like fighting to begin with, really."

"Yeah, that," Twilight latched into the fact about her new friend that had been bugging her all Loop. "That's what I can't quite figure out about you. You know our offer of sanctuary is on the table, but you never want to take it. You've insisted on handling Dr. Wily your way and we've honored that so long as it doesn't get too far out of hoof, like this last time. But you're not an adventure junkie like some loopers we get who like to be 'hooves-on'. You're more like the crowd who get thrust into wars they don't want and desperately need a respite from all the craziness and fighting in their home Loops, a place to rest where they don't have to rush out and save the world every time a threat rears its head. Honestly, it might have been harder than usual, but I think we could have taken care Dr. Wily, his robots, the StarDruids, and even Sunstar without you. Probably even without giving your antagonistic Dreamer knowledge of anything more dangerous than he already has. So why don't you take it?"

"I've tried it a few times," Rock admitted. "A few Loops when my sister was Awake and I'd felt weary of the whole thing we agreed that she'd be 'Mega Woman' and I'd be just the brother who stayed back and supported from the sidelines. I wasn't too bad at it either. I got to develop some neat stuff for my sister with dad during the Loop too, but every time Roll went out, I'd worry. I know she can take care of herself, especially now, but staying back while someone else did all the hard and dangerous work just... felt wrong. It still does. I... I can't not save the world when I have the power to do so, Twilight. It just isn't in me."

Twilight didn't reply for several long seconds. Rock's attitude was one she could relate to. It was why they'd offered their Loop as a sanctuary in the first place. It was why they went above and beyond the original offer when those like Leah Clearwater and Kakashi landed in Equestria. They couldn't not help others who needed it.

"I... I guess I can understand that."

Dr. Wily watched listlessly as Dr. Cossack and his daughter bid



farewell before teleporting home. Nothing seemed to matter anymore since he'd had that moment of clarity. He'd allowed jealousy to overcome his reason and lead him down a foolish path, and for what? To drag what little good name he had through the mud? To prove to the world that genius like his came with dangerous madness?

"Wily Plan?" the voice of his long-time friend, did he even deserve such a thing?, cut into his thoughts.

"What is it, To-Bright Light?" he responded without feeling. Nothing seemed important anymore. He'd failed as thoroughly as it was possible to fail.

"There's something I want you to see, my friend," Bright Light smiled warmly. "A project I need your help on."

"What kind of project?" Dr. Wily asked despite his depression as he followed his friend and colleague. "What could you possibly... Why do you have an elevator in a one-floor lab?"

That hadn't been there before...

"It's part of what I need to show you," Dr. Light smiled as the doors opened. Dr. Wily felt something like a ghost of his old spark. Curiosity. The driving force of all discovery. What did this lead to?

He followed.

"After your first..." Light began before stopping himself.

"Invasion, Bright Light," Wily huffed as the elevator began to descend at a slow pace. "Call it what it was."

"Yes, that," Light agreed without actually saying the word. "After that, Celestia approached me with a proposition. Tell me, are you familiar with the legend of the Lord of Chaos?"

"Discord?" Wily wrinkled his nose in disgust. "A cautionary fable about disharmony with no basis in fact."

"Yes, much like Nightmare Moon," Light smiled. "Or Tirek Sunstar. Apparently he's quite real. And the seal keeping him imprisoned is weakening."

"Because of me, right?" Wily sighed.

"Your actions didn't do it any favors, no," Light admitted, "but it would have weakened all the same. Anyway, the seal cannot be renewed without breaking it first, and only the Elements themselves can do so deliberately. And while Celestia has faith in the current bearers, she neither wishes to disrupt their lives with the knowledge nor does she wish to place all her faith in one solution. So she commissioned Light Labs to create an anti-Discord countermeasure. She has even allowed the use of normally forbidden magical artifacts, specifically ones supposedly designed to counter Chaos magic, to ensure it succeeds."

"What kind of countermeasure?" Wily asked as he noted the elevator

was still descending. Even if it was slow, they should have reached their destination by now. How far down did this go?

"Well, I was hoping the support units could be those robot masters we designed together," Light smiled at him. "Which I would of course need your help to build."

"Of course," Wily agreed, beginning to feel a small portion of his old enthusiasm. "And the main unit?"

"Well," Light started, only to be interrupted as the elevator finally stopped. "Ah, we're here. How about you see for yourself?"

Wily stepped out of the doors and looked up. And up. And higher up still. At the frame of a truly gigantic robot. How had his old friend found the time to make \_this?!\_

"Wily, my friend," Light introduced happily, "meet Project Gamma."

\*) Theme song plus extended lyrics version by kajisora.

1) Pansy had decided to take a nap for the Loop instead of getting put into a body of her own. Though Scoots put a few notes into her subspace pocket to help with the 'mobile armor of the founders' project next time she and Applebloom were Awake together.

2) Silver-Bot apparently got the 'understatement' upgrade.

3) Like Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans. Don't ask.

4) Rainbow Dash: Light Labs assistant. She helps put the pony-oriented inventions through their paces. If she were Awake, she'd probably rate the coolness of the job somewhere around 'Mythbusters'.

5) Dr. Wily was backstage. Loop memories would show that mixing Dr. Wily with the media tended to prove... volatile. But that reporter stallion's mane and tail eventually grew back.

6) Ham To Ham Combat.

7) Plus she hasn't told him he's going yet.

8) This isn't the first time Nyx has Awoken to a mother that's missed her terribly and it likely won't be the last.

9) Tercel = Male eagle. Figured it was a good 'man' equivalent for a griffin.

10) Yep, Wood Man got translated into a robot timberwolf. With control over other timberwolves. Yikes.

11) Alternate theme song by conceptulist.

12) Sanity requirement for Rock's potential girlfriends: No homicidal maniacs. Basically, Pinkie passes, Waltz does not.

13) The lyrics are adapted from History Repeating part 1 and 2 by The Megas. Seriously, if you haven't heard their stuff go check it

out.

14) The first eight villains mentioned are from the TvTropes 'just for fun' section regarding the Daring Do series. I rather had fun searching them all out to match the Stardroids.

15) Pinkie Pie logic. Not for the uninitiated.

16) I consider rhyiming a Zecora thing rather than a zebra thing.

17) Roll tagged his armor to scan and copy his weapon on her way past.

18) Wait, that's not how this normally works...

19) Insert "Nothing Can Stop the Smooze" from the MLP Gen 1 movie here.

20) Flutterdragon is best pony.

21) Not this Loop anyway.

22) You should see her opponent.

23) Neither did some of the griffons enacting this punishment.

24) If a little on the crispy side in a few cases.

25) Like Mario with one of his stars.

## 101. Chapter 101

### 95.1

"Sleipnir?" Twilight asked, nervously. "Do you have a moment?"

The admin turned from his drink (a plasmated ion residue in cordial, exactly the kind of thing that wouldn't be possible for a mortal pony to drink. He'd got a good recommendation off of Spike for it.)

"Certainly, Twilight. What can I help you with?"

"Well..." Twilight rummaged in her Pocket and pulled out a sheet of paper. "Okay, I tried to work out how much... experience, my memory has. You know, because I've lived a really long time counting all the loops, and while I can remember some of it better than other bits, there seems to be a lot of knowledge in there."

"Ah, I see." Sleipnir looked over the calculations. "Yes, that's about right."

"Well, that's the thing." Twilight tapped the side of her head. "I'm fairly sure this is still metabiological, and I can't store that much information unless the data storage density is pretty close to computronium."

The eight-legged horse deity contemplated that for a moment. Then he took a sip of his drink, belched fire (politely) and put the glass down. "Right. I did wonder if you'd worked that side of it out. Well, you're right. That is more information than your brain can

hold."

"So..." Twilight prompted.

"So we use your local brain as... well, the word 'client' is wrong but convenient. It's all there, and the stuff you're actually using is loaded to your local memory, but things you didn't have any idea you might need sometimes take a moment to be loaded. It's functionally identical to having to rack your brains to remember something." Sleipnir smiled weakly. "All I can say is, it does work. And we did do tests back when we first set the system going â€" there's no difference between one kind of memory and another from your point of view."

"Oh." Twilight digested that. "Well, that's vaguely unsettling, but mainly because it sounds all a bit Celest-AI-ish. How do the situations with Lyra and Ditzzy tie into that model?"

"Lyra... well, pushing the analogy too far, all her requests to the 'server' come back with more information than she was after." Sleipnir shrugged helplessly. "We're trying to patch it, but whatever she did means we're having to parse core dumps. You do not want to see a core dump from an Yggdrasil client server..."

"I'll take your word for it. And Ditzzy?"

"We just don't know either." An eight-legged shrug. "Honestly, since she seems perfectly happy, that one's a long way down the priority list."

"Right, I can see why that would be." Twilight grinned. "Okay, I've kept you long enough. Go enjoy your time off."

"Aye, aye, Anchor." The eldest son of Asgard's trickster saluted, and swept up the drink he'd left in a spare leg. "Actually, is there a Wonderbolts show on?"

Seeing her surprise, he bobbed his head. "I'm as impressed by what mortals do in baseline as anything. Achievements like that in such a short time..."

\* \* \*

><p>95.2<p>

"Hey, Twilight?" Spike asked, as she put the book down.

"Yes?" Twilight replied, turning.

"Well... I noticed something about this loop." Spike frowned, then nodded. "Just confirmed. Zecora, Berry, Trix, Chrysalis and Gilda are all Awake too."

"Ah, I see. Second team?" Twilight was already thinking of strategies. "Fine by me. Go ahead and let the others know."

Spike began fire-sending messages.

\* \* \*

><p>Around two that afternoon, in Ponyville, a large, complicated cart wheeled into town drawn by two bickering ponies and one stoically silent zebra.<p>

"Wotcha," called a griffin from the cart's second story lookout. "We're the travelling circus."

"...that's a circus?" Roseluck asked, dubious.

"No, that's a cart full of things and stuff. The circus is the sorry lot we are." She flared her wings and dove off the cart, coming to a neat four-point landing just in front of the ongoing argument. "Oh, just kiss and make up already, you two."

The blue unicorn and black-green pegasus left off their arguing for long enough to make rude gestures at her, then went right back to bickering.

"They just do it so they don't have to contemplate how lucky they are to have each other," the griffin stage-whispered. "Anyway, we've got some stuff to sell, some things to buy, and some complicated acquaintances to discharge here in Ponyville. My name's Gilda, these two are Chrys and Trix, the rhyming one is Zecora â€" she does a nice line in hangover cures â€" and together we are... mostly unemployed."

She stretched, cricking her neck. "But enough of that, I've been working hard all day. Where's the pub?"

"Excuse \_me\_?" Trix broke off her argument to start a new one, because she was able to multi-task like that. "You haven't done any work since we set off this morning."

"I've been looking out. It's an important job, lookout. Really."

The others gave her dubious looks.

"If any believed that 'round here, Trix would sell them a bridge, I fear," Zecora said, thus demonstrating that she could in fact rhyme.

"Did somepony ask where the pub was?" asked local hard-drinking mare Berry Punch.

"Oh, cool, you know where it is?" Gilda replied. "Shush, guys, I think I found a pub."

"Good," Chrys remarked. "I'm parched."

"Well, not so much \_is\_ as... \_will be\_," Berry hedged. "Give me half an hour for the renovation work."

"When that is done, we start the fun." Zecora nodded to herself. "I'll pay the fee â€" first drinks on me."

\* \* \*

><p>"And how did you say they'd recruited you?" Twilight asked dubiously.<p>

"They challenged me to a drinking contest." Spike grinned. "Easy. And they're settling into Ponyville life like they've always been here. Turns out, buying everyone in town about ten drinks each is perfect for making them feel warm and fuzzy towards you..."

\* \* \*

><p>As soon as Nightmare Moon had left, Trixie clambered onto a table.<p>

"Attention, ponies of Ponyville!" she called. "I, the great and unbelievably humble Trixie-

"The idea that you're humble is indeed unbelievable," Chrysalis muttered.

Trixie ignored her. "And her entourage, will solve this crisis!"

"Are we an entourage?" Gilda asked, frowning. "I thought we were a corporation."

"Details!" Trixie pronounced. "Come! We canter for justice!"

"Can I fly for justice instead?" Gilda requested.

"I second that," Spike lent his own two bits.

"Fine." Trixie gave them a quick glare. "Those with wings may fly for justice instead."

\* \* \*

><p>"I could have done that," Chrysalis grumbled good-naturedly as Spike carried them all down from the cliff.<p>

"Yeah, I know," Spike replied, wings flaring as he alighted. "But this was easier. You snooze, you lose."

\* \* \*

><p>"Zecora?" Trixie said, a note of fear in her voice. (It was for the audience.) "What are these things?"<p>

Zecora sniffed, disdaining the reaching branches. She then took out a vial, splashed some on a tree-limb, and noted the colour of the smoke.

Then she cleared her throat.

"I think I understand your fear.

>But there is no true evil here.<br>This nasty confusion  
>Is but an illusion<br>Now just use dispel magic, dear."

Trixie gave her a look, then flared her horn and fired off a spell.

The hemispherical wave of countermagic licked over the motley group, passing over Chrysalis' disguise without a blip. It then slammed into the evil trees, and made them vanish.

"A limerick? Really?" Trixie demanded, seeming honestly offended.

Zecora shrugged.

\* \* \*

><p>"My turn!" Gilda announced, running forwards with Thunder Edge flashing out of nowhere to hover across her back. "Oh, it's been ages since I got to have one of these!"<p>

The manticore roared at her.

Gilda roared back, then got to work.

\* \* \*

><p>Five complicated (and probably Not Safe For Fluttershy) minutes later, Gilda knocked the thorn clean out of the manticore's paw with a sword blow that hit like a freight train.<p>

The manticore showed its gratitude by passing out. Gilda hadn't actually used the edge of her lightning sword on it, but the flat had still given it a hay of a beating.

"Well?" she asked, rejoining the others.

Spike waved a claw. "Three out of five."

"Watch it, scalebutt."

\* \* \*

><p>"My poor moustache!" the sea serpent moaned. "I was so close to breaking the record!"<p>

"Yeah, that's pretty harsh," Berry agreed. "Another beer?"

"Yes please." Steven sniffed, then took the proffered keg, scored the lid open with a claw, and took a swig.

Berry waited five seconds, then nodded to herself at the \_thud\_.

"Okay, he should be out for the rest of the day," she called. "That was azerotropic ethanol with food colouring, and he was pretty close to passing out anyway."

"This feels kind of like cheating," Chrysalis mused. "Which I'm all for."

\* \* \*

><p>"Come with us..." a voice whispered through the fog. "We're much better than your silly friends..."<p>

"Why?" Chrysalis asked, as she reconnected the bridge.

"We're... clowns!" The three figures in the mist stepped forward,

revealing ridiculously big shoes and red noses.

Chrysalis actually giggled. She stopped after a second, mortified, and looked over her shoulder in case Trixie had heard.

Hoping that Trixie had indeed missed her giggle, she turned back to the pegasus clowns. "By the way, I'm an empath. My defences show my deepest wish as being to join the circus."

As that was being processed, she gave them all a quick psi-bolt each and they dissipated.

"You actually giggled?" Trixie asked, trotting across the bridge to stand beside her.

Chrysalis blushed. "Oh, shut up."

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie made a grand gesture. "Spike showed his Loyalty by growing to the size of a large whale! Chrysalis showed her Kindness by putting up with me! Zecora showed her Generosity by paying for the first round at the bar! Berry showed her Laughter by making up some really rather good puns for the names of her cocktails! And Gilda showed her honesty by beating up a Manticore!"<p>

Nightmare Moon gaped. "Those are not virtuous acts."

Trixie shrugged. "I think you'll find everyone who knows me considers putting up with me for more than ten minutes to be an inherently virtuous act. Oh, by the way, the sixth element is Magic. Boom."

It was, perhaps, more desultory a speech than normal, but with six reasonably experienced Element users behind it it certainly worked.

\* \* \*

><p>"...so, anyway," Twilight explained some minutes later to a rather startled Celestia, "I found some friends, and they dealt with Nightmare Moon. This is Trixie, the Element of Magic-"<p>

Trixie nodded. "Your enormous exploding ball of plasma-ship."

"-ignore that, she's a little obsessed... this is Chrysalis, the Element of Kindness."

"Charmed." Chrysalis fluttered her wings and smiled. "Queen of the Changelings."

"This is Gilda, Element of Honesty."

"That's right," Gilda confirmed. "Element of brutal honesty, here. And, to be brutally honest, heh, your plan here was kinda betting that you'd be able to pull together an element team. Pre-tty risky."

"I did have a backup," Celestia said, stung.



"Really?" Gilda popped a lollipop into her mouth. "What was it?" she mumbled slightly.

"Defeat my sister in one-on-one combat, so as to buy time for Twilight â€" who I hoped would be able to form the elements." Celestia winced. "I must admit, it is not the best plan..."

"This is Berry Punch. She's the Element of Laughter." Twilight decided to try to smooth over the tricky situation.

"I do alcohol and alcohol accessories," Berry said, bobbing her head. "Mind if I look through the castle? I think there could be some alcohol in here that's been fermenting since Luna was co-regnal."

"Of course," Celestia replied.

"You know Spike, of course," Twilight continued. Celestia tried to say something about how she wasn't used to his being the size of a barn, but Twilight talked over her. "He's the Element of Loyalty. And this is Zecora. She's a zebra, and the Element of Generosity."

"I have generous discounts, though not offered out to viscounts."

The others glanced at her. The zebra replied by holding up a sign which had a long, fine-print diatribe about the difficulty of coming up with rhymes on the fly.

"...very well, then," Celestia concluded. "I can see Equestria is in... reasonably safe hooves. Now, I must invite you to the â€" belated â€" Summer Sun celebration, which shall also be the welcome return of my sister. Twilight, were the preparations completed?"

"Yep." Twilight held up a large scroll. "Listed, checked and ticked."

\* \* \*

><p>"She's an evil enchantress!" Pinkie volunteered. "Or so they say. But why should evil be bad for business? Great discounts on potions, philters, magic and spells. On hexes and curses, on well-shielded purses, on prophecies, witches and tells!"<p>

"...what?" Applejack asked, blinking.

"It's on the business card, look." Pinkie hoofed it over.

"...huh. So it is."

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, again!" Gilda bellowed. "Ten times around Ponyville in four minutes!"<p>

Dash panted. "Do I have to? I'm exhausted, Gils!"

"Dash," Gilda replied, sternly. "I know you. You're awesome. But you've also got a pretty lackadasical attitude to the whole issue of

training. See, as I see it, the only pony who can win you that Young Fliers cup is you. And you're the only one who can lose it, as well. Do you want to live with yourself if you lose that cup because you didn't try hard enough?"

"...guess not, no." Dash spread her weary wings. "Okay, I'll give it a go."

"A go isn't enough, Dash." Gilda walked closer. "You're the only pony to do a Sonic Rainboom in the last century and more. And you did it when you were, what, ten? Twelve? So you've got the natural talent. Spitfire, Soarin', they're not as naturally fast as you. They're Wonderbolts because of how much effort they put in, and because they're confident. Really confident. They know what they can do. So you need to know what you can do. No second guessing because you're not sure you can push yourself as hard as you need to go. Just push yourself, and you'll find out how fast you were at the other end! Now git!"

Dash rocketed off, leaving a trail of rainbow and puzzlement.

Gilda nodded to herself. That should have given her a kick up the backside...

\* \* \*

><p>"You're... you're... you're my best mate, you are!" Silver Star announced, exchanging his hat for the headdress of his Buffalo counterpart. "All'a this... this... *stuff*, with the apples... it doesn't even matter! We'll put the apple trees on the other side of the village!"

"How?" the Buffalo chief asked, then hiccuped.

"Same way we planted 'em," Silver Star declared, and fell over.

"Anyone want another bottle of my Diplomatic Daiquiri?" Berry Punch offered.

\* \* \*

><p>"That's not really solving the problem," Twilight said critically.<p>

"Why not?" Trixie asked, as the CMC held up placards with numbers on them. "Got rid of the dragon, didn't it?"

"Along with a substantial fraction of the mountain, yes," Twilight allowed. "But he's going to land somewhere, and he'll be really annoyed..."

They both cast silence spells as the wall of overpressure from the explosion reached them.

\* \* \*

><p>"Where pony go?" Fido asked, confused.<p>

"Not sure," a black-furred diamond dog replied. "I go

check."

"Good," Rover said.

About a minute passed.

"Wait," Spot asked, raising a paw. "Who she?"

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis walked out of the Diamond Dog mine, and reverted to her base form. "Piece of cake."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Spike got the Hydra in a head-head-head-head-headlock, bashed all four heads against the ground, and throttled it until it went limp.<p>

"Okay, done!" he called, and the ponies of Ponyville gradually came out of hiding.

"That was awesome!" Dash enthused.

"Well..." Spike waved a paw and smiled. "I try."

\* \* \*

><p>(via Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, ladies, here we are," Spike deadpanned. "It's the most famous party in Equestria, and it's probably going to be... The Weirdest Night Ever!"<p>

And instantly a heartsong grabbed them all...

"At the gala, let's be honest, I'm just here for the foo-ood!" Gilda admitted, adjusting her red trimmed white dress. "I'm going to stuff all I can down my gulleeeeeeeet!"

>"What a glutton!" chimed a pony.<p>

"I don't like these prissy ponies, but free snacks are precious things!" the griffon continued. "So for the sake of my empty stomach, I'm willing to bite the bulleeeeeeeet!"

"The best caterers do serve here," admitted the crowd, "Right here at the Gala! At the gala!"

"At the gala," sang the tribally-dressed Zecora, "there are poets, and to them I wish to speak!"

"Finest wordsmiths!"

"I will ask them once and for all why their rhymes are all so weak!"

"Such arrogance!"

"If I can't teach them true art, then I simply will not have done my pa-aart!"

"Always ponies with ideas that crash this glorious party..." the crowd grumbled. "She will cause a disturbance right here at the Gala! At the Gala!"

"At the gala, everypony, will see the great Trixie!" The magician twirled her cape and matchingly exorbitant dress. "They will be amazed at my great performance!"

"Run for cover!" screamed the ponies nearest her as several fireworks went off.

"My explosive and amazing show will stun them all! Though of course I'll save Chrysalis one quite well earned slow daaaaaaaance!"

"Dear Luna we don't know what is worse, the mare's tricks or that she can breed â€" no wait, her date is female, the night's saved at the Gala! At the Gala!"

"I've been plotting, anticipating, this night with quite cunning mind," Chrysalis explained, flicking her silky dress. "I've got ponies to manipulate, though I'll stare at Trix's behind. Policy is going to change, cause I want equal rights for my kind! After all, the noble families are all here right now!"

"Well one of them has the right idea at the very least... bribes and deals are often cut right here at the Grand Gala!"

"I'm here at the Grand Gala, where they serve the rarest wines," sang a mare in a lacy black dress, "And every flavor there is will be tasted by Berry Pu-unch! I'm going to get so boozed up so I'm glad I left my filly behind; I love her but I don't want her to see me losing my lu-unch!"

"That's inappropriate talk at the Gala! At the Gala!"

"At the gala, watching these five, is where I'm going to be!" Spike grumped, straightening out his tux. "I'm sure Celestia invited them just to torment me! This band of misfit crazies are just going to cause a ruckus, wait and seeeeee!"

"This might be the strangest night EVER!" the crowd acknowledged. "Into the Gala, we must go! We're ready now, we're all aglow. Into the Gala, let's go in and have the best night ever! Into the Gala, now's the time â€" We're ready and we look divine!"

The whole assemblage finally came into sight of the palace's main gates.

"Into the Gala-"

"Eat it all!"

"Into the Gala-"

"Save art my part!"

"Into the Gala-"

"For the show!"

"Into the Gala-"

"Changeling rights!"

"Into the Gala-"

"Alcohol!"

"Omnom!"

"Rhyme time!"

"Trixie!"

"For change!"

"Free beer!"

"Oh no..."

"Into the Gala, into the Gala, who let in all this RIIIIIIIF RAAAAAAF?  
At the Gala!"

Twilight lidded her eyes. "Cute, guys. Real cute."

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

"I'm sorry, but this is legally binding." Celestia managed to keep her amusement completely hidden. "At least for the next three months."

"But auntiiiiiiie! I can't go down to such a provincial town! And I was intoxicated when I signed the documents!"

"Then you shouldn't have gotten so drunk at the gala," Celestia replied simply. "Honestly, Blueblood, I think this will do you good. Zecora, take care of your new butler for me."

"I can promise I will treat him well for as long as he is under my spell." Zecora grinned, turning away. "Now come along, Blueblood my dear, and be prepared to swallow your fear. We march to Everfree for herbs and leaves to make my potions on coming eves!"

"This is all that purple mare's fault somehow..." Blueblood grumbled.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, you're the Element of Honesty?" Discord asked, looking the griffin before him up and down.<p>

"Yeah." Gilda nodded, baring her talons. "What's it to you?"

"Well..." he snapped his claws together, materialized next to Gilda,

and poked her in the forehead. "Time to-"

There was a flash of green fire, and a changeling flopped to the floor.

"Oh, come \_on!\_" Discord said forcefully. "That's the \_fifth time!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"So," asked four Trixies at once. "Which of us is real?"<p>

The draconequus looked around at the four sets of three ponies, one changeling, one griffin and one dragon each surrounding him.

"Oh, I don't \_know\_," he grouched. "Give me a clue."

"The answer is," one said, and then all four continued.

"Trick question!"

Rainbow light erupted from directly overhead.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, who wants to try to redeem him?" Gilda asked, as the statue was winched back into place.<p>

"I might try," Berry offered. "Get him drunk enough?"

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Dear Twilight," <em>Twilight read aloud.

\_ "Please stop sending me friendship reports. It is becoming increasingly clear that they will all, for the foreseeable future, be about why explosives are not toys.\_

Yours, Princess Celestia."

Trixie winked. "At least now you know you don't have to send any!"

"True."

\* \* \*

><p>"This isn't really in the spirit of the Sisterhooves Social, you know," the organizer noted with disapproval.<p>

Chrysalis looked puzzled. "What? They're all female, at least for the sake of argument, and they are certainly all siblings."

Behind her, five hundred pairs of changelings waited uncertainly.

"Now, remember," Trixie was telling some of them, "When you start, all shout 'for the swarm!' at once. It'll be hilarious."

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, Dash," Gilda said, lying back on the chair in her hospital room. "I get that you're bored. But have you tried reading something?"<p>

"I've never met a book I liked," Dash replied, shaking her head. Then wincing, as that tugged on her wing.

"You'll like this one." Gilda dropped a novel on her bedside table.

Dash picked it up. "Who's Iris Drake?"

Gilda grinned. "Oh, someone I met once. You'll like her style."

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm going to go on a quest to find out my true nature!" Spike announced.<p>

"Don't you already know your true nature?" Twilight asked.

"Because other dragons aren't nice, I want to find out if I'm really like other dragons," he continued, as though she hadn't spoken. "Do not wait for me, fair Equestrians, for I know not how long I will be gone."

Spike spread his wings, then his whole body, grew to about fifty feet long, and launched off to where the dragons had gone.

Five minutes later, he flew back over the horizon.

"Weren't you looking for your true nature?" Trixie asked.

"Meh, got bored." Spike held up a paw, in which was a tiny baby phoenix. "I found this guy, though. He's so cute!"

Fluttershy squee'd.

\* \* \*

><p>"Just drink this," Berry said. "It'll give you confidence."<p>

"What is it?" Fluttershy asked, wings flexing nervously as she contemplated what she'd have to do.

"Liquid courage. Also ginger, a bit of bahgol, and a Potion of Bull's Strength."

Fluttershy took the mug, and gave a dubious sniff. "It smells potent."

"It's like medicine," Berry mostly-explained. "Go on, it's great."

The pegasus took a sip, slowly and carefully.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, we got the water up to Cloudsdale," Dash allowed. "Also Fluttershy broke the sound barrier."<p>

Berry grinned uneasily. "Well... mission fulfilled?"

\* \* \*

><p>"This cake, the ZZZZ, is my greatest work, you see. It tastes for me like plum â€" but changes for your tongue."<p>

Pinkie raised an eyebrow. "Really? 'cause that doesn't sound cake-ysically possible."

Zecora gave her a look. "And you presume to lecture me on what can be confectionery?"

"Fair enough! Can I try some?"

Zecora nodded.

Pinkie picked up a spoon, took the tiniest portion of the cake onto the bowl of the spoon, and tasted it.

Her eyes unfocused. "So... much... sugar..."

THUMP.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that went well," Shining said, apropos of nothing much, as he and his new wife entered their suite.<p>

"Why do you say that, Shiny?" Cadence asked. "I thought it was very well planned out, yes, but why mention it?"

"...not sure, actually," Shining admitted. "I just thought I'd say it went well."

"Goof," she informed him with a grin.

\* \* \*

><p>"Didn't you have an appointment somewhere today?" Trixie asked.<p>

"Nope," Chrysalis replied. "Not at all."

"Okay. Just checking." She yawned. "Hey, turn the heat up a notch, will you? This jacuzzi's feeling a bit cool."

\* \* \*

><p>"And that," Trixie said smugly, "is that."<p>

The crystal ponies looked at her, and her entourage. They then looked at the moon, which had a scowling face on it.

One of them raised a hoof. "Er... are any of you princesses?"



"I'm a queen," Chrysalis volunteered.

"Good enough. What's your name?"

"Chrysalis."

"All hail Empress Chrysalis of the Crystal Empire!"

Chrysalis' jaw dropped.

Seeing her in a state of bafflement, her five friends decided to capitalize on this, and took photos.

"Wait, no," she protested, once she'd recovered. "I'm already busy with one queendom. I can't rule your Empire as well-"

The crystal ponies muttered amongst themselves. The general sentiment was that that was a dreadful shame, because it would have worked out quite well.

"Help me out here, Trix!" Chrysalis hissed.

Trixie pondered. "Do I have to? I like the idea of being empress consort-"

"Trixie!"

"Okay, fine." Trixie turned. "Spike? Can you send a letter to Princess Cadence? I think we might have a job for her. It should stop Celestia from moaning about her lazing around the palace, too..."

"Celestia doesn't moan about that," Gilda commented.

"She might."

\* \* \*

><p>"Hm." Discord looked himself up and down, then left and right, forwards and backwards, and in and out for good measure. "I'm less made-of-stone than I expected."<p>

Berry Punch stepped forward, her Element glittering. "Hi, Discord. I have volunteered to try to redeem you."

Discord sniggered.

"No, seriously. Look, it's this or we turn you back to stone and find some pigeons."

The draconequus stopped laughing. "You wouldn't dare."

"Actually, I think we would. Guys?"

Trixie nodded. "Yep."

"It's delightfully clever, isn't it?" Chrysalis mused.

"I know a few such feathered friends  
>and what comes out of their-"<p>

"Ahem!" Spike coughed.

Gilda shook her head. "I voted for hitting you with a sword until you got brain undamage. I was overruled."

"Right." Discord took a second look at the other Elements. "How would the rest of you try to redeem me?"

"Explosions!" Trixie carolled.

Chrysalis shot her a tender look, then cleared her throat. "A careful plan of research to discover what you liked, using telempathy, and then giving you small but meaningful rewards whenever you made positive progress. Also an army."

"I'd probably use the force," Spike decided. "And Zecora would give you some medicine that was foul tasting and a metaphysical purgative."

"I cannot deny it. I would indeed try it."

"I see." Discord stroked his beard. "On balance, I'm going home with the drunk."

\* \* \*

><p>"Can you do... a fish?"<p>

Discord snapped his claws. A very thin line appeared, which rotated until it became clear it was a flounder.

"Flatfish," he explained, as it swam off through the air. As it moved away, the two dimensional fish thinned once more to near invisibility.

Ruby Pinch clapped. "Yay! Now do a chicken!"

A puff of smoke, and Scootaloo appeared in the kitchen.

"What the-" she managed, before vanishing again.

"Whoops," Discord said, chuckling. "Let's try that again."

This time, a chicken the size of an apple appeared. It crowed a very high-pitched crow, and vanished leaving behind an egg.

"I thought cockerels didn't lay eggs..." Ruby said slowly.

"I was never one for biology," Discord shrugged.

"Well, you two are getting on well," Berry observed, trotting into the room.

"She amuses me," Discord announced. "I'm only doing it because I need a laugh."

"Well, laughter is kind of my thing," Berry replied. "You know. The kind of laughter when something that's normally not the least bit amusing seems just hilarious, because you're about two percent the

right side of sloshed. Or the kind of laughter that happens when friends relax together, too."

"What about the kind of maniacal laughter that happens when an evil scheme is fulfilled perfectly?" Discord asked. "That's my favourite kind."

"There's a drink for that," she replied with a grin. "Tell you what. After Ruby's gone to bed, I'll show you."

"Is it bedtime already?" Ruby asked, a slight hint of whine in her voice.

"Of course not," Discord replied, snapping his claws again. The sun shot back to the middle of the sky.

Muffled cursing could be heard from Twilight's tree library, where Luna was staying while Discord was in Ponyville.

"Put it back," Berry said, with an indulgent smile.

\* \* \*

><p>"So," Discord asked, half an hour later once Ruby had gone to bed. "What was that you said about a drink?"<p>

Berry gave him a look. "If I was a suspicious pony, I'd say you were playing so nicely with my daughter to make me try and forget that you're going to be trying to escape and go on a rampage."

Discord looked shifty.

"But I'm a simple town drunk, so what do I know." Berry Punch shrugged, and opened a cupboard. Inside was a simple wooden keg.

"What's that?" Discord asked.

"My greatest achievement to date." Berry put the keg reverently on the table. "You've heard of the Campaign for Real Ale?"

"Only by stealing a newspaper while you weren't looking."

"Well, this is Real Ale. It is the platternic ideal of a drink brewed from barley," she elaborated, referencing the great scholar On-a Platter and his theory that images of perfect things were just handed to you without having to do research.

"Sounds interesting." With a flash of chaos magic, a tumbler and a long bendy straw appeared. "What's the deal?"

"Drinking contest. I pass out, you go free. You pass out, then you have to behave. Deal?"

Discord shook on it. Then he stepped off it and shook her hoof.

"Fine, then."

\* \* \*

><p>Berry's eyes cracked blearily open.<p>

There seemed to be an awful lot of scraggly hair in her face.

"Mummy," the voice of her daughter cut through her hangover, making her wince. "Is mister Discord my new daddy?"

The words took a back-woods route into Berry's brain, resulting in a delay of nearly ten seconds between the question being asked and it reaching her consciousness.

She took the question, added the beard in her face, multiplied by the fact she was entangled with something with four different kinds of limb she could feel, and reached a conclusion.

"...sure, why not."

\* \* \*

><p>"Didn't see that coming..." Spike observed. "He sincere?"<p>

"Yes, surprisingly," Chrysalis supplied. "Who knew. Get Discord drunk enough, and look what happens..."

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

"Do I have to?" Trixie whined. "I hate paperwork..."

Chrysalis sighed. "Look, we all know that the spell was meant to go to the crown originally. We can't break character this late in the game."

Spike cleared his throat. "And there's the fact that only two of us-

"I would count three, including me."

"Sorry, Zecora, three of us-

"Actually," Berry mused, "there was that one loop where Gilda was a griffon-alicorn hybrid."

Gilda shivered. "I still don't know how Sparkle pulled that off..."

Spike glowered. "...Four of us-

"And a changeling queen is kind of a changeling alicorn," Trixie pointed out.

"I don't really see myself that way," Chrysalis mused. "Not even in 'cursed changeling' loops."

"So we're all able to go alicornish," Berry pondered. "Except Spike, unless you count Spikezilla."

"And with that, there goes my point," the dragon grumbled. "Anyway,

we were trying to convince Trixie that she has to become a princess."

"Ruby Pinch!" Berry shouted. "I am not leaving my daughter for the throne. I'm out."

"As much as I'd like to help her, I've got a similar excuse with the swarm." Chrysalis shrugged. "I'll help with the paperwork though."

"Me and Spike aren't ponies, so us transforming would be weird." Gilda grinned. "Especially after Spike's already gone back and forth with Spikezilla."

Trixie looked to Zecora helplessly. "Racial equality? Maybe?"

"That spell requires a magic fount, which ponies have in no small amount. Alas, in this loop zebras rely on directing the power of earth and sky."

"Ugh, fine, I'll finish the spell." Trixie picked up the book. "...actually, what would happen if I cast the incomplete version?"

Her fellow bearers dogpiled on her instantly.

\* \* \*

><p>"Thank you, Princess." Twilight took the stand to make a speech. "I think I speak for all of Ponyville, and much of Canterlot, when I describe the ascension of our newest Princess as... almost inevitable."<p>

Mass confusion greeted that opening line.

"Trixie Lulamoon is many things," Twilight continued. "She's smart, powerful, and has a worrying lack of regard for her own personal safety. But she's got a certain strong sense of responsibility towards everypony â€" and everyone â€" else. When was the last time she hurt anyone, even in her blasts the size of a small city?"

Silence.

"Exactly. But she doesn't give a fig about making sure she's out of the blast zone. As such, within a few days of meeting her, I decided she was either going to become immune to explosions-

"Resistant," Trixie interrupted.

"Resistant, thank you... or she was going to be scattered in ten thousand tiny pieces all over Equestria by the time she was twenty-five."

After thinking that over, the crowd decided Twilight had had a point.

Chrysalis took the podium next, and proceeded to embarrass her marefriend so thoroughly that her cheeks looked like she was wearing the alicorn amulet.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, let us take stock," Trixie said quietly. "I've run out of explosives."<p>

Even after everything they'd been through with her, eyes widened on both other ponies, as well as the changeling, the dragon and the griffin.

"That's... never happened to me before," she added in tones of slight wonderment. Then shook her head. "Anyway. I think we're all fairly beaten up."

Nods.

"And we've had to surrender our Elements to the thing, to boot." Trixie winced. "I still hate doing that, it makes me feel tired for the whole rest of the loop..."

"What now?" Chrysalis asked.

"Now..." Trixie considered. "Now, I think, we recover. Get our hooves, or other appropriate appendages, under us. And start manufacturing gunpowder."

"Uh..." Berry raised a hoof. "Why gunpowder?"

"The grinding motions soothe me."

\* \* \*

><p>"Excuse me?"<p>

Spike looked up from roasting a sprig. (He liked the taste of charcoalized wood, it was never the same twice.) "Yes..." he paused, snapping his fingers. "Rarity... Belle, right? One of Twilight's friends."

It hurt, to be distant. Especially after last time — an Arda loop, tens of thousands of years long, and one without his wife. At times, he wanted to be with her so much it hurt.

"Yes, that's right," Rarity replied.

But he could do it. He had experience at this.

"So, what brings you to the library? Shall I go and get Twilight?"

"No!" Rarity said, quickly.

"...okay, then." Spike mentally shrugged. "What is it, then? Want help with your business?"

"I..." Rarity slowed, and clenched her teeth for a moment. "Y... yes. Yes, I've got some heavy lifting to do, I'm afraid, and my own magic is rather better at detail work. Could I prevail upon your time, Mister Spykoran?"

Spike noticed the flash of... self-loathing? That ran across her face for a second, but wasn't entirely sure what to make of it.

"Sure," he replied. "Hang on a sec, I'll write Twilight a note."

\* \* \*

><p>"Right, there you go," the dragon said with a grunt of effort, drake-handling the last crate of material into the boutique.

"Anywhere in particular you want this?"<p>

"Oh, just... put it in the back, -Spike," she instructed, nearly tripping over a syllable before she said his name. "I shaln't need it moved so long as the top is visible â€" my magic is quite up to opening a crate."

Spike dutifully put the crate down as instructed. "Okay, done."

"Thank you very much," Rarity said. "Now... I think we're done."

Her voice carried a tone of regret, and a suspicion began to grow in Spike's thoughts.

"Spykoran..." she said, hesitantly. "I... would you like some tea?"

Once again, that brief expression of disgust at herself.

"Sure," Spike agreed. "Tea would be nice. I'll take five sugars and some damaged needles."

\* \* \*

><p>"Thanks for the drink," Spike said, smiling.<p>

"And thank you for your help," Rarity returned. "I..."

She frowned briefly, then took a quick step forward and kissed him.

Startled, Spike reacted on instinct. He leaned into it, as his wife embraced him after so long apart-

Then he blinked, and shook himself out of her grasp. "Rarity-"

"Oh, I am sorry," Rarity said, a blush flaring on her cheeks. "I... well, it's done now. I originally went to the library to ask you â€" not for help, but..."

The blush intensified.

"I wanted to ask you on a date. I was a coward, and I couldn't say it, but... I have now."

Spike took a moment to process that. Then a moment more to try to work out how to respond.

How the hay do I react to that!?

"Rarity," Spike began, "can you give me a moment?"

\* \* \*

><p>The problem facing Spike, right now, could be summed up simply.<p>

What do you do when an alternate version of your wife reveals she has a crush on you and would like to go on a date with you?

Supplemental to that were further questions, like \_can you cheat on your wife with herself\_, \_can you lead someone who isn't awake on romantically\_ and \_what do I even want?\_

"Cress, cress, cress," he muttered to himself, pacing in small circles. "What do I do?"

"I could tell her that I've got a significant other already... but she'd want to know who this significant other is, and lying about it would make me feel... dirty."

"Maybe if I say I'm not interested?" He sighed. "But... I \_am\_, that's half the problem. And it'd be a terrible let down for her."

"If I just go along with it?" Spike grimaced. "Arguably worse. \_Is\_ she my wife? Would it be being... well, disloyal... if I did go out with her? If I got romantically involved? And if she \_does\_ count as my wife, would it be disloyal \_not\_ to?"

The dragon, jedi master, and Element of Loyalty... felt a headache coming on.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay." Spike came back out of the kitchen, and sat on one of the chairs.<p>

"This is going to sound crazy. But I can prove it, I swear."

"Go on," Rarity invited.

"Right. Well... I'm basically a time traveller. I've been caught in a time loop, along with some others, for... Tartarus, I've lost count."

"Are the other elements-"

"Yes." Spike nodded. "That's very quick of you. Yes, the Elements this time are all time loopers, like me."

Rarity blinked. \_"This\_ time?"

"Yes. The normal â€" the default â€" element bearers are Twilight, Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, Pinkie Pie, Applejack... and you."

"I was... an Element?" Rarity turned that over in her mind. "Which one?"

"Generosity. Funny thing, the first time 'round, I wasn't able to



do... this," he gestured at his body. "So I was a baby dragon. And I had a crush on you." Spike's lips quirked up in a smile. "Funny how things work, isn't it?"

Rarity didn't reply.

"And... well, you're looping as well. And we eventually did fall in love, mutually, and... we married. So I'm married... but it's basically to you, or your... older? To your older self, and I've got no idea how to react to all this." Spike's paw went to rub his forehead. "This is giving me a headache."

"Not surprised," Rarity managed to joke. "It's giving me one as well."

Spike chuckled.

"So, there it is," he said, after the silence stretched. "I don't know what to do, frankly, and sorry for throwing it all onto you. But-"

"Yes, I see."

The unicorn frowned. "So... we're married?"

"Yes. Sort of. It's complicated." Spike threw up his hands. "I haven't memorized the words Twilight came up with for this kind of situation â€" she calls it the future impossible tense or something â€" but..."

Rarity nodded. "Quite."

She took a few long, deep breaths, and then walked over to her dresser. Something glittered for a moment as she picked it up, and trotted back over with it.

"Here," she said, offering it. "It's a diamond I found back when I started seriously thinking about asking you out. I was going to give it to you as a present at the end of the evening â€" which was a little silly of me, I suppose..."

"No, I like the idea," Spike assured her. "A nice romantic gesture. You know, back the first time around, I gave you a fire ruby that I'd planned to eat for my birthday?" He smiled, thinking back over untold numbers of loops. "You wore it a lot after that. It made me hopeful."

"That's a nice story." Rarity held the gem out. "Here. You may as well take it, then."

"Rarity-"

"Really. I insist." She smiled, wanly. "Call it... a birthday present."

Spike took it, admiring how it refracted the sunlight. "Thanks. And thanks for taking this so well."

"Not at all." Rarity managed a giggle this time. "If I have to lose, at least I can lose to myself."

A grin broke out on Spike's face. Then he tentatively raised a claw. "Actually... I was wondering. Would I be able to treat you to dinner at some point?"

He gave an apologetic shrug. "I know it's not much... but if you \_do\_ enjoy spending time with me, then I've got time to spend. And since you know..."

"Thank you. I believe I will take you up on that offer."

\* \* \*

><p>"Why... isn't this... working," Trixie panted, horn still crackling.<p>

Tirek chuckled. "You really should pay attention, 'Princess'. I took the magic of the Captain of the Guard, and so I can shield myself from those explosive devices of yours. And as for the \_magical\_ ones... well, I drain magic. You use magic. Simple, isn't it?"

Trixie ground her teeth. "Chryssy?"

The changeling stepped up next to her. "Yes?"

"Mind recharging me, love?"

"Not at all." Chrysalis leaned in and touched horns with Trixie. A faint blue-green shimmer built around the point of contact, and slowly brightened.

"That's as much as I've got left," Chrysalis said, after nearly two full minutes. "Don't waste it."

"Never," Trixie replied, then turned back to Tirek. Her Device, Loki, burst into being on her foreleg. "Okay, let's try this again."

"I look forward to it," Tirek invited, smiling the smile of the certain.

"You know he's basically invulnerable to your usual thing, right?" Chrysalis whispered.

"Yep." Trixie's grin was not a nice one. "So I'm not doing the usual thing."

Her wings flared, and she shot upwards.

\* \* \*

><p>"Moment of Prescience. Foresight. Choose Destiny. Know Vulnerabilities. Assay Spell Resistance."<p>

High over Ponyville, Trixie cast spells as fast as they could flow through her horn.

When explosions failed, Trixie could â€" reluctantly â€" face that a change of approach was needed. Specifically, rather than learn everything by doing and guesswork with a side order of risk, she

was... doing the research.

"Right, that's good to know..." she murmured, as a growing web of divination spells analyzed Tirek's defences. "Lots of antimagic, but I knew that already. Hm, active defences? Ah, a shield â€" looks like one of Shining's, so he was telling the truth..."

Unfortunately, there was only so much that divinations could tell her. What it came down to was, she was essentially armed with an extremely well-made spear, and her opponent was armoured like a battleship.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay," Trixie sighed, coming down to land. "I'm out of ideas. Whatever else I pull off is just going to make this take longer. Go ahead, take all I've got left."<p>

The others gasped.

"Trixie-"

"Shut up!" she shouted, tears starting in her eyes. "I don't know what to do, okay!? I... can't think of anything. And I..."

She slumped. "I'm \_tired\_."

"Well, this does simplify things." Tirek reached out, and gripped her wingtip.

Trixie almost instantly tinged slightly gray, and her cutie mark faded.

Tirek blinked. "Not as much as I'd have expected, from an alicorn princess..."

"Oh, yeah." Trixie looked up. "That'd be because I specified all I had \_left\_." A shrug. "That'd be, about enough to light a candle and make sparkly lights."

She gestured back over her shoulder. "Now, \_him\_, on the other hand-"

Scorpan hit his brother like a meteorite.

"Fun thing," Trixie said, smiling brightly. "It's not just you who can absorb magic."

She turned, and something fell out of her hat.

"What's that?" Twilight asked.

"Oh, that?" Trixie picked it up in a hoof. "Scorpan insisted on paying for all the magic I gave him. It's a medallion â€" he seemed to think it was important, and, well..."

"That's great!" Twilight smiled. "You've got the last key."

The current Element bearers exchanged glances.

"Key?" Spike asked, for all of them.

"Oh, right." Twilight ducked, as some debris flew over her head from the centaur fight. "The first time I faced Tirek, it turned out that we'd each earned a key relating to our element. They're objects which glitter like rainbows when we get them, and they're used to-

She broke off, staring into the distance. The others followed her gaze, and saw that Tirek was now using an entire tree as a club to beat Scorpan over the head with.

"Oh, oak and ash, not again..."

Berry squinted. "Isn't that..."

"\_Yes.\_" Twilight's eye twitched. "\_Every\_ time..."

"Wait, when you said keys," Spike asked slowly, reaching into his Pocket. "You mean like this?"

A small clear diamond emerged.

Twilight ignored her (now on fire) house with an act of will, and focused on the diamond.

"Yes, that feels like one. Where'd you get it from?"

"Rarity, actually â€" this Rarity, I mean." Spike rubbed the back of his neck with his free hand. "It was all a bit embarrassing..."

"What about this?" Gilda held out a shimmering gold pin. "Lightning Dust gave it to me after I helped her out."

Twilight nodded. "Honesty, right enough."

The other three brought out their tokens, one by one. A mirror-bright cloak clasp for Chrysalis; three rings on a cord for Zecora; and a small pearl for Berry.

"Okay, now â€" you know that box? The one from the Tree of Harmony?"

An embarrassed silence spread.

"...you never picked up the box, did you. Right, hold on a sec." Twilight flashed out of existence.

"So these shine like rainbows?" Berry asked, holding her pearl up to the light. "Seems to be doing that all the time."

"Same with mine," Trixie volunteered, tilting it. "It's kind of like a CD â€" you know, the diffraction gratings formed by the pits..."

Twilight materialized again. "Okay, found it. Now, hold them out to the box, and they'll turn into keys, and-"

She stopped, and giggled. "Well, I don't want to spoil the surprise..."

"Because \_that's\_ not ominous," Trixie commented. "Okay, guys. One, two, three!"

\* \* \*

><p>Some time later, Twilight walked into the crystalline mountain that had replaced much of a field outside Ponyville.<p>

"I have to say, I like the aesthetic," she commented. "Kind of a mix of underground base and lair. Hi, Zecora!"

The zebra just gave her a look, the complicated spiral swirls all over her body only adding to the effect. "I look and feel like modern art. Could you not have warned of this part?"

"I wanted it to be a surprise," Twilight defended. "Besides, it's something \_new\_. Something baseline, and new, and great fun. How rare is \_that?\_"

"Right. Quite."

Twilight trotted briskly on, passing Berry Punch (who had something of a vine theme) and Gilda with every feather and hair half as long again as normal. (It actually looked rather rakish.)

Then she reached the main room.

"I look... ridiculous," Chrysalis was saying, looking herself up and down. "I mean, come \_on.\_"

"I like it," Trixie replied, inspecting her own starry fetlocks and wild hair. "Especially the bigger wings, they look good on you."

"You're only saying that because you think \_everything\_ looks good on me," Chrysalis retorted. "You're right, though."

Spike waved as Twilight came into view. "Hi, Twi. That was... different."

"Imagine how I felt." The unicorn tilted her head. "Are your claws..."

"Yeah, still smouldering." Spike shrugged, his wings shifting and releasing a crackle of purple smoke. "At least I'm not actually on fire, though."

"There is that." Twilight turned in place, gazing around at the mountain. "You know, I wonder to what extent the Element users involved can change what the end product looks like..."

\* \* \*

><p>95.3<p>

"Right, let's see..."

Twilight looked down at where the book had been. Then blinked.

"Okay, where'd that go?"

Muffled giggling came from a nearby tree.

Twilight sighed. "Pinkie."

The pink party pony poked her head out of the tree, showing a beak had been taped to her face. Then she spread black-painted wings. "I'm a mag-pie!"

Twilight stifled a grin. "Oh, that's terrible. Are you a pegasus this time?"

"Yuperoonie!" Pinkie beamed. "Dashie's an earth pony this time. She's not awake, though, so boo."

\* \* \*

><p>95.4<p>

\_\_To whom it may concern,\_\_

Activities in this loop are considered to be restricted. This loop is a safe zone. While it is permissible to enact pranks, and we all know the feeling of having accidentally escalated past the bounds of our plans, we ask that all care be taken to limit harm caused by pranks to property damage and that which is easily and completely fixed. Mental intrusion is not considered to be okay; nor is physical damage; nor is anything which would have a permanent affect in general.

Yours,

Ivory Scroll (Mayor Mare).

P.S. Prank Limit Enforced By Alicorn.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, this place is better organized than some worlds," Ryuko commented, as she finished the letter and folded it back into the paper-crane shape it had arrived as. "You holding up okay, Senketsu?"<p>

\_\_Mostly\_\_, her uniform replied. \_\_A dress, I can handle easily.\_\_

"It helps that they don't wear clothing much at all, here," Ryuko admitted. "I feel less... exposed. Hey, isn't this where Cheerilee is from?"

"Probably," her sister agreed. Her own kamui pulsed, then reshaped itself.

"...okay, I didn't even know you could make pony clothing \_do\_ that," Ryuko said. "Seriously. That looks... well, good on you. But we might be arrested."

\_\_"I thought it through."\_\_

With that, Satsuki's outfit went quiescent again.

"He never says much," Satsuki said briskly. "Right, what now?"

"...hell if I know." Ryuko pointed, flaring her wings. "Look, a clothes shop. Might be where that... Rarity? Works?"

"Worth a try."

\* \* \*

><p>95.5<p>

"I see you've taken another step up the ladder," Twilight called up.

"Don't you mean the stairs?" Pinkie replied, grinning over the ship's rail. "We're ponies, you silly filly!"

"I blame too much time around humans. Request permission to come aboard?"

A fruit bounced down next to her. "Persimmon granted!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, so... what is it?" Twilight asked.<p>

"It's a baffleship!" Pinkie hit a switch, and the whole enormous construct turned transparent. "Bringing stealth parties to one and all, that's the PTAS \_Enjoyable\_ way!"

Twilight nodded, rapping the deck with a hoof. "Steel?"

"Armoured steel, yup! I don't want the magazines to catch fire, 'cause I haven't read them all yet."

"And a cloaking device... okay, I've put it off long enough. What kind of party projection capacity does this have?"

Pinkie hit the same button, and the ship returned to opacity. "Well, there's two triple turrets at the front â€" they've got ribbons on, because it's the bow, hee hee. And there's another triple turret at the back â€" I drew a snarly face on it, because-

"Because stern, yes." Twilight nodded. "I see. And what do the guns fire?"

"Same kind of large party munition as I normally use." Pinkie shrugged. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it. No, the \_real\_ cool thing is this! Watch!"

Pinkie went below. When Twilight turned to follow, the door slammed shut.

"...okay..."

The engines thrummed from standby to full power. Twilight peered over the edge, watching the water churned by the four huge screws.

Then began to realize just \_what\_ Pinkie had done.

As she watched, the rushing, churning sound of the prop wash died away, replaced by a smooth whine as the screws bit into air.

And, heeling slightly with the wind, PTAS \_Enjoyable\_ rose majestically into the sky.

"Like it?" Pinkie asked, now wearing a jaunty hat. "Where you had to go to the old parties, the new parties will come to you!"

She looked down. "Plus, I built it in a lake again, so this helps. Now, set course for Cloudsdale! It's Dashie's birthday, and I want to make sure there's cake!"

\* \* \*

><p>95.6 (Masterofgames)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight had been busy lately. Her studies into the power of the arcane magic of the multiverse had at long last reached the point that she could call them 'good enough, for now anyway'. And what was she doing to celebrate? Resuming her studies of the spiritual magic of the multiverse, naturally!<p>

Last night, she had been amazed to discover the similarities between zebra and buffalo mystics, and had joyfully gone on a study binge as she constructed her own sets of totems and ritualistic equipment from both cultures to compare them, using some handy beginner's level 'do it yourself' books. (Written by the famed author team of Globe Trotter and Artsy Crafts.)

Twilight had slept with a smile. She always felt great when she had a project to look forward to when she woke up.

So it understandably took her a moment to notice the pony above her bed.

"Ah, friend Twilight! Thou art awake! We are most elated!" an unawake Luna beamed down at her, despite her struggling. "Some foul prankster hast snuck into thy dwelling and placed ancient traps most annoying inside. If thou would help us down, we would be most thankful for ending our embarrassment!"

Twilight could only blink owlishly for a moment, before having to fight back a case of the giggles. "Of-(snerk!) Of course, P-princess Luna. One moment." She grinned as she slid out of bed.

Luna nodded in appreciation and royal dignity, which in all honesty only made her sprawling limbs trapped in the assorted homemade dreamcatchers in Twilight's bedroom look all the more ridiculous to the highly amused unicorn. "Much thanks. We have needed to scratch our nose for hours!"

\* \* \*

><p>95.7 (elmagnifico)<p>



The Equestrian Loopers that had been found thus far floated inside the wrecked submarine the Apples had been using as a base before Awakening. None of them had been able to get out-loop abilities or objects to work either, although the forms they'd looped into opened... Possibilities. Applejack was larger than her brother for once, having looped into a Great White to Macintosh's hammerhead. Applebloom was trying to manipulate a wrench, alternating between her snagged Mako teeth and inflexible fins. Not much success to be had.

"Aww, come on! First time ah get a chance to tinker with a gen-u-wine U-boat, aged perfectly at the bottom of an ocean, an' ah wind up with no good limbs an' a mouth fulla toothpicks."

The older Apples were being more social, helping Twilight plan Operation: Recover Nyx. There were some kinks to work out, they didn't have access to nearly enough fruitcake, and more importantly none of them knew where to find the filly-turned-guppy. Macintosh had a green scuba mask draped over one side of his "hammer", and it swung back and forth as he spoke.

"Ain't nothin' sayin' this mask here belongs to yer fillynapper, but if'n there's P. Shermans from Sydney droppin' divin' equipment in this neck of th' ocean..."

Applejack nodded.

"Yep, makes sense Australia'd be th' place to start lookin'."

Discussion continued, mostly about how to arrive at Australia from their current location, until Applejack had a thought and decided to share.

"Ah must admit, ah'm relieved tha Loops went an' squandered th' opportunity to make me ah seapony."

Never one to miss a good setup, Murphy chose that particular moment to have Pinkie bump her snout on a pipe. Only a sliver of blood escaped, but like a fateful waft of smoke, the crimson whisp found its way up Applejack's olfactory pores, causing her pupils to grow until they seemed to occupy the entire eye.

"Ooh, ah'll be honest, that smells  
oooooooooooooooooooooooooooood."

Macintosh and Applebloom looked at each other. They apparently knew what that meant, crying out in unison.

"Intahvention!"

Macintosh rammed Applejack, tumbling her to the side while Applebloom hustled Twilight and Pinkie through a hatchway, closing it with a flick of her tail just as Applejack broke away from her brother.

Safe on the other side of the rusting, but still solid barrier, the elements of Magic and Laughter winced in time to the metallic thuds, while Applebloom explained the situation between impacts.

"Sorry Twai,"

\*bang \*

"loop memories."

\*bang \*

"Th' blood has,"

\*bang \*

"berserker effect!"

\*bang \*

"Y'all better move along."

\*bang \*

"We'll catch up to ya,"

\*bang \*

"when she snaps out of it!"

\* \* \*

><p>95.8 (Masterofgames)<p>

"Twilight, in this Equestria, everypony has a finite number of bucks they can give about things during their lifetimes."

"That's AWFUL! We need to do something!"

(Ding!)

"AAAAH! Where did this counter come from and why did it just go down?!"

\* \* \*

><p>(Novusordomundi)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"What in Equestria is that noise?" Twilight asked to no-one in particular, turning her attentions to what was causing the noise...<p>

"I'M A PONY! SQUEE!"

"I'M A HUMAN! SQUEE!"

As a human Lyra riding a pony Sunset Shimmer galloped by her, she could hear the \*ding\* of her "Bucks To Give" counter going down...

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

95.1: Because I'm sure someone was wondering.  
>95.2: Backup Harmony! Other Backup Element challenges may follow.<br>95.3: Badoo tish.  
>95.4: A form letter.<br>95.5: Fairly close to an Iowa.  
>95.6: They certainly caught a dream.<br>95.7: Bite of an Apple?  
  
>95.8: It's quite easy to run out.<p>

## 102. Chapter 102

### 96.1 (Kalimaru)

With a flash as her powers came back under control, Twilight looked around the room she found herself in. She was standing in front of a chalkboard, there was a hole in the roof, and various plants around the room were turning back into ponies. Walking over to an infantile Spike, Twilight tapped her chin. '\_The application exam room? Then that means...' \_

Stepping into the room, Celestia walked over and examined Twilight. Leaning in close, Celestia put on a smile. "Are you Awake, little one?"

Nodding, Twilight turned from Spike and walked over to her parents with Celestia next to her, whispering in Twilight's ear. "Good, because it seems your family is a few years behind this Loop, and Nightmare Moon's coming back within the next year." Standing tall, Celestia turned to Twilight's parents. "Would it be alright with you two if I were to take Twilight as my personal pupil? She has shown much potential, and I believe I can help her." Twilight's parents, recently potted plants, looked to their daughter. Seeing their hesitation, Twilight put on the puppy dog eyes.

"Pwease?"

The results were immediate. Both of Twilight's parents visibly slackened and nodded. In the background, the panel of judges all gripped for their hearts and dropped like flies. Medic ponies had to come in and drag them out. As the door shut behind the comatose committee and their copious caretakers, Celestia turned to Twilight. "Of course, that means you'll be accompanying me to Ponyville, come the Summer Sun Celebration this year." Looking over her shoulder, Celestia levitated Spike over. "We'll be bringing our young friend along, of course." Placing Spike next to Twilight, Celestia watched as the dragonling hugged Twilight. Then she and both of Twilight's parents dropped.

\* \* \*

><p>Several months later, Celestia's personal chariot touched down outside of the town. Hopping down from it, Twilight had Spike on her back. She turned as Celestia began talking to her. "I'm sure I can leave the preparations to you, Twilight?"<p>

"Yes, Pwincess."

"Hnnng!" Celestia promptly fell from the chariot in a rather

undignified mess. Gaining her hoofing again, she waved the chariot stallions back to Canterlot for more insulin shots. "Good! Very good. I'll, um, I'll go tell the mayor I'm here then. Right." Flapping her wings, Celestia took off for the town center. Out of habit, she looked back.

Sitting there, waving a small hoof and smiling, was Twilight. Next to her, Spike was sucking his thumb and waving his free claw in an attempt to imitate her.

Celestia promptly fell from the sky.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hewwo!"<p>

Pinkie gasped before belting for the doctor's office. "No, I don't need it for me. I'm just telling you to keep a whole barrel of the stuff for everypony else!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey there, little filly."<p>

"Hewwo, Appojack!"

"Hnnng!" And the whole of the Apple family reunion was halted for a trip to the doctor's office.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hewwo, Wainbow Dash!"<p>

No pony would say that Rainbow Dash aimed for that mud to avoid that filly. None were still standing when it happened.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hewwo, Waiwity!"<p>

"Oh my goodness! I must get you something to wear!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Hewwo, Fwuttashy! Wook at this dwess Waiwity gave me!"<p>

The butter pegasus turned, gave Twilight the once over, saw the matching outfit Spike was wearing, and squinted menacingly at the little filly. "You win this round, Sparkle. Hurk!"

\* \* \*

><p>By the time Nightmare Moon took the stage, the town was comatose save three beings. Looking down on them, Nightmare Moon grimaced. "So this was my sister's plan? A mare, a filly, and a dragonling? Foalish!" Dropping down to the ground, the lunar diarch snorted and gave them each closer inspection. Finding nothing remarkable about the mare, Nightmare Moon disregarded her and turned to the youngsters.<p>

The filly was wearing a loose, light blue shirt and yellow rubber hat. Both were too big for the tiny filly, the shirt becoming a dress and the hat only stopped from engulfing the filly's head thanks to her small horn. The dragonling wore a matching ensemble, but his hat was small enough to fit properly. Then the two of them raised their arms/forehooves.

"Woonal!"

The Nightmare, an undefinable creature of hate and woe, died that day. It found its heart and promptly died from said heart exploding. And so, it left Woonal and became no more. Sitting up and looking at the giggling filly and dragonling that were crawling over to her, Woonal laughed and joined in the baby-babbling.

Standing off to the side, Pinkie tapped a hoof against her chest. "I am so glad my blood got replaced by insulin instead of syrup this Loop."

\* \* \*

><p>96.2 (Masterofgames)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight finished off her victory drink. "Okay, new round! What's the weirdest song you've ever turned into a heartsong?"<p>

Sweetie grinned. "You Are A Pirate."

Vinyl smirked. "I can beat that. Chicken Dance!"

Apple Bloom leaned back in her chair looking smug. "Kid's stuff. Let's see you top I Want A Hippopotamus For Christmas."

"One Eyed One Horned Flying Purple People Eater." Spike chuckled.

"Ouch, I concede." Apple Bloom relented.

Berry shrugged. "Beer."

Celestia smiled sadly. "I don't use them often, so it's not really weird, but... I once did Love You For A Thousand Years."

Many 'Aww's were had as Luna blushed.

Ditzy bounced in her seat. "I did one in a Who loop! I was trying to get The Doctor and The Master to be friends again, and used I Hear Your Heart Beat To The Beat Of The Drums."

"Did it work?"

"Sorta. I got The Master to start a band, and he mellowed out a bit, so I'm calling it a net gain."

"Drums?"

"Lead singer actually."

Shining thought for a moment as they got back on track. "Surfing Bird."

Flutter shy sighed. "Oh dear. I was going to say Rock Lobster, but that has me beat."

"I'm Not Wearing Underwear Today."

Everyone slowly turned to look at Scootaloo.

"... What?"

\* \* \*

><p>96.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Derpy, why are you flying backwards?"

"You know what they say, Twilight, Hindsight is twenty-twenty!"

"...I'd forgotten about that particular talent of yours..."

\* \* \*

><p>96.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Princess, I... I have a question." Twilight slunk into the bedroom. "Actually it's more of an ethical dilemma..."

Celestia smiled down at her faithful student, keeping her inward cursing to a minimum. "Twilight, you know I would love to take time discussing things with you, but-"

"Luna's not Nightmare Moon anymore, and also I'm in a time loop."

The royal diarch and raiser of the sun froze. "A... time loop."

Twilight flinched. "Sorry, you need context for this... Okay, a while back the multiverse was broken, and the people in charge put Equestria-and a whole bunch of other worlds-into time loops to fix it. Are you with me so far?"

"...I... suppose..." Celestia was mentally rearranging her plans as rapidly as she could. "I take it you know about the Elements of Harmony then?"

"Yes actually." With a flash, a tiara appeared on Twilight's head. "Us bearers can summon ours at will... I'm not overwhelming you am I?" she added quickly.

"Not too much, as of yet."

"That's good... anyway. So the people in charge of repairing the multiverse... see, our loop used to last about five years. Recently â€" let's just call it recently â€" they managed to fix something up and... well, every once and a while we get a new week before the loop ends." She took a deep breath and let it out. "And this last

expansion... Tirek escaped."

Celestia blinked. "You know about â€" no, of course you know about Tirek." Once more her mind set to reorganizing her plans. "I assume this dilemma of yours has to do with that?"

"Yes. He went on a rampage and... personally, well, he took my friend's magic. My magic. Blew up my library too... We beat him in the end, of course, and I can take steps to stop him escaping."

Ah. "But... part of you wants vengeance."

"Yes!" Twilight shouted. "That's it exactly! Except he's not the big strong Tirek I fought now. I mean, I could just step aside and let him become that monster before knocking him off his pedestal-or letting one of the other loopers do it! There are fillies in these loops that could take him one two! But, but to do that I'd have to let nonlooping equestrians suffer, and..." She sighed, lowering her head. "Is it wrong, princess, to want vengeance? Even if I deny that urge... is it wrong to want?"

"...Twilight. If I understand this situation correctly... you are far older than I am. In all the ways that really matter. And you're not alone in these loops, so why haven't you talked to your companions about this?"

"I have. It's just... they're all friends," Twilight said softly. "Even my Celestia is a friend. And as much as I love them all.. I think I need a mentor more right now."

Celestia sighed. "I see. Well..." She considered her words carefully. "Vengeance is often rooted in anger, an eye for an eye. Vengeance rooted in hate, of course, you must avoid, but anger... Anger makes one a lightning bolt, speeding you up and giving you power, but blindingly bright and hard to direct. To want is not wrong, but to let want consume you... it sounds very much as though you fear your anger will turn you into a monster."

"...a little bit, yeah." Twilight shrugged. "I guess... I guess I just needed to vent, is all. A lot. I mean... in the baseline, even Discord is reformed. Tirek... I don't know. Anyway, listen, Luna's Awake this loop, so just... be ready for things to go off script, okay?"

"I will. Thank you for the heads up, and Twilight?" Celestia smiled. "I know, no matter what else, you are a good pony. I know this because you have the courage to do what you think is right and the humility to ask what is right."

"...thanks."

\* \* \*

><p>96.5 (Hubris Plus)<p>

"...What you call friendship, I call chains," Tirek rasped to the draconequus. "You have been tamed, Discord."

"Oh, Tirek, you old whatsit, I do see where you're coming from," the Awake master of chaos replied. "But you've made one little itty

bitty error in judgement." He held his talons so close together that the gap between could only be perceived through the magnifying glass he'd conjured into his claw.

"If you speak of actually liking them, you will only confirm that you are bound," the demonic centaur dismissed.

"Oh, I do, but that's not why you're wrong. Your mistake is thinking that they have corrupted me. I assure you, it's quite the opposite."

"These enfeebled equines are your idea of chaotic?" Tirek snorted, waving a hand to encompass the town in a gesture. "You have been tamed."

"The average pony will always be boring as mud next to the exceptional ones," Discord stated, pulling down a chart displaying a standard bell curve in demonstration. "It's why they're average. Wait," he blinked and glared at the graph. "When did I learn statistics?! I hate knowing the odds!"

"Do you see?" The centaur cackled, "without even realizing, you-"

"Hmph, Twilight's influence no doubt," the draconequus interrupted, briefly turning the other's words into a speech balloon so he could literally trample over them. "But we're straying from the topic at hand. Did you know that Celestia once banished the entirety of Equestria to the Moon so that she could take time off to do some surfing? Or that Luna has occasionally turned the Moon into a spaceship and taken it on joyrides? And that's positively tame next to what Tia's student gets up to, to say nothing of the sheer variety of tree sap related mayhem I've been privy to."

"Your point being?" Tirek asked, his good mood fading as the speech went on.

"I'm freer than I've ever been, and all the better for it because I have friends who, despite their protestations, are just as crazy as I am!" He twirled a talon next to his ear, which got caught on the end and caused his whole head to twist about. "You really don't have anything to offer me." He tapped his chin thoughtfully, "well, that's a lie, but Twilight's still sore about the library getting destroyed so I'm going to be considerate and put off anything involving you for a few Loops."

"Enough of this prattle," he opened his maw wide and attempted draw in magic.

"Agreed," Discord answered, shoving a spoon of cod liver oil into the villain's mouth. "But, as I am not so heartless or dull as your previous jailors, you can be assured that your new cell will be a significant improvement."

Tirek, still gagging, vanished between one moment and the next.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>"CRYSTALS?"<strong></em></p>



"For the \_last time!\_" The ancient scourge proclaimed, "unless granulated silicate counts, there are no \_damnable crystals\_ here!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Really?" Twilight asked, watching the two unrepentant monsters bicker through a scrying mirror. Tirek had given up on trying to consume Sombra and settled on throwing coconuts at him.<p>

"Unless you can find me new episodes of Gilligan's Island," Discord answered, shoveling a clawful of popcorn into his mouth. "This is going to keep happening."

\* \* \*

><p>96.6 (Misterq)<p>

Spike pulled the book lever that controlled the hidden passage and then stopped. The book on the pedestal was far different than it was in baseline.

Instead of being formed from two stone tablets, the cover was a contorted face. Also, there were ephemeral whispers emanating from it that sounded something like, "klaatu, barada,.."

"Nope!" Spike said as he backed away and closed the secret passage shut, "Not this loop."

And just for good measure, the little dragon used his fire breath to fuse the stones together so that no pony would try to get at that particular tome.

Spike snorted in annoyance at one particular loop memory, "Last thing Equestria needs is Pinkie Pie and Trixie fighting over the Necronomicon again. Even if my dragon-fire chainsaw gauntlet was pretty awesome."

\* \* \*

><p>96.7 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"Good boy, Cerberus," Twilight said, ending the belly rub on the guardian of Tartarus. "I'll be done here in just a few minutes."

Chained to the deepest pit in the tallest spire in the netherworld of Equestria, the wizened, powerless Tirek glared up at the alicorn princess. "Come to gloat, have you, pony?" he wheezed.

"No, actually," Twilight said, "I'm just here to take care of a little bit of unfinished business."

"Then do it and be gone," Tirek hissed. "I wish to be alone while I plot my vengeance."

"I'll try to make this quick." Twilight hovered, wings flapping just above where Tirek could stretch the chains to grasp at her. "I want to say, first off, that I deplore your situation. I firmly disapprove of corporal punishment in all its forms."

"Good to know," Tirek said. "I share no such weakness."

"I would therefore like you to think of this as a musical instrument." Twilight flared her magic and summoned a teacher's paddle slightly longer and taller than a London bus. "And you're going to assist me in performing a little song of my own composition."

Flames burst from Twilight's mane and tail, and her eyes glowed white as she shrieked, "It's called \*\*We Do Not Burn Down Libraries!\*\*"

A few minutes later Twilight returned to the surface world, towing a giant paddle broken in half behind her. At the crack leading down into Tartarus sat Vinyl Scratch next to a large stack of recording equipment. "Hey, Princess, whassup?" the DJ asked. "Feel better now?"

"Well, half of me feels really ashamed of myself," Twilight admitted. "But the other half feels much, much better, yes, thank you. What did you think?"

"Eh, kind of disappointing," Vinyl shrugged. "Hate to say it, Sparkle, but you just haven't got any rhythm. Zero. Nada. On permanent backorder. Besides," she continued, ignoring Twilight's flushed expression, "he never cried for his mommy or any of that. But the OTHER guys! I got enough from them for every Nightmare Night for a thousand Loops!"

"So long as it wasn't a total loss," Twilight grumbled, resolving not to give in to base impulses next time.

\* \* \*

><p>96.8 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Anakin Skywalker Awoke, took a rasping breath through his respirator, and silently cursed his luck. Despite his best efforts, the Loops refused to dispense with the services of Darth Vader, Parbroiled Evil Behind a Mask.

The Jedi Looper took a moment to file through his Loop memories, which seemed true to baseline up until... well... moments ago. Vader's ship, the Star Destroyer \_Devastator\_, had pursued the Alderaanian embassy ship \_Tantive IV\_ into hyperspace after the latter ship intercepted a signal from known Rebel agents. However, both ships had run into an uncharted gravitational anomaly, the sort of thing that usually ended with a ship never being heard from again. The ships had been dumped out into entirely uncharted space, with a life-bearing planet in the distance, and the ambassador's corvette opening up ground in a race for the planet.

Not far from the blue-white planet, a large object began moving towards the Rebel ship. "Look, they're heading for that space station," the Star Destroyer's captain said. "Pursue and intercept. Don't let them make rendezvous."

Vader reached out with the Force, and what he sensed both shocked and amused him. Barely able to keep the amusement out of his voice, he rumbled, "That's no space station. That's a moon."

Perhaps his luck wasn't as bad as he'd feared. He'd been hoping for a Loop like this for quite some time now...

"What's that, m'lord?" The captain looked through the bridge windows at the round object, growing larger by the moment. "It can't be a moon, it's clearly maneuvering for..." He trailed off into silence as the object began to rotate, revealing craters and shadows... shadows that formed the head of a unicorn with a downcast gaze.

And then the eye facing the Devastator opened, an angry red glow appearing in the black and white moonscape.

"Er... the... er... moon is accelerating towards us, Captain," a helm officer reported. "It's ignoring the Rebel ship. Perhaps we should take evasive action?"

"Yes..." the captain murmured. "Yes, I think you're right! Full reverse! All auxiliary power to the engines!"

The Star Destroyer rocked and shuddered for several seconds before the safety systems took the main reactors offline. Emergency lights switched on across the bridge.

"You can't win, Captain," Vader said. "But there are other ways of fighting. I recommend infiltration from within..."

A few minutes later, in a flash of un-light, an armored quadruped appeared on the Imperial ship's bridge. "Kneel, miserable creatures!" the lizard-eyed beast shouted. "I am Nightmare Moon, and you have dared to intrude into my domain!"

Vader relaxed and let the Force flow through him, probing around the newcomer. The Dark Side was strong with her; sadness and regret, but also immense bitterness, jealousy and rage. The creature was powerful; a non-Awake Vader would have had a roughly equal fight. Anakin Skywalker, on the other hand, with Loop experience and power, could probably take her out in moments.

But that wouldn't be amusing, or friendly. Besides, there was a question to ask.

"One moment," Vader rumbled, stepping forward.

"Are you the one in command of these wretches?" Nightmare Moon sneered. "'Tis well you hide behind a mask, if you are uglier than these bizarre creatures of yours!"

It was well he hid behind a mask, period. It was all Anakin could do to keep from cracking up. "I have but one question," he said, deepening his voice to keep it from breaking with laughter. "Are you Awake?"

"What sort of foolish question is this?" The evil alicorn strode towards Vader. "Do you think this is some sort of dream? Think again!"

\_Ah. Not Awake, then.\_

Anakin remembered the favorite phrase of a much different Emperor

he'd served one Loop, in a vastly smaller small-e empire.

\_Let's see what happens.\_

The bridge crew of the \_Devastator\_ watched in slack-jawed amazement as Vader bent his knee to the deck, bowing his head humbly. "What is thy bidding, my Mistress?"

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon, Twilight Sparkle, and the five stone Elements of Harmony vanished.<p>

"TWILIGHT!" six voices shouted in surprise.

"We gotta go after her!" Rainbow Dash shouted.

"You have your own problems to worry about, ponies."

Six pairs of eyes looked to the shadows to see a tall bipedal figure in black armor and cape stride forward. A lightsaber ignited in his hands, illuminating his form in eerie red highlights.

If any of them could have pierced his mental shields to read his thoughts, they would have heard: \_How I love a dramatic entran- who's that?\_

Only five pairs of eyes belonged to ponies. The sixth belonged to a human woman clad in a slightly torn white dress. A loud hiss heralded the activation of her own lightsaber.

"Girls, go after your friend," Princess Leia Organa said. "I'll deal with this one."

Lightsabers clashed, and the ponies galloped off.

A few brisk swings and parries later, Anakin said, "I see you're wide-Awake, my daughter." He disengaged just in time for the startled Jedi to swing wide.

"Anak- Father?" Leia gasped. "If you're Awake, then why are you doing this? Your ship is poised over Equestria ready to rain destruction down on a single word from you!"

"A word which will not be given, of course," Anakin replied. "I put the fear of the Dark Side into the captain. He will accept orders only from me. So, the ponies are quite safe."

"You still-" swing, clash- "haven't explained-" swing, clash- "WHY!" swing, clash, grind of coalesced plasma beams.

"Why, to see what happens, of course." Anakin pushed Leia back a few steps, stepped backwards himself, and deactivated his lightsaber. "I've been looking forward to seeing Equestria for a long time. But Darth Vader cannot simply walk into Equestria."

"Oh," Leia muttered. "Oh. \_Ooooh.\_" She smiled a small smile and added, "Have I ever mentioned you seem to have a habit of doing things the hard way?"

"You and Obi-Wan both," Anakin replied. "You briefly incapacitated me and ran to join your friends. Good enough?"

"Works for me," Leia said, reaching out with the Force and toppling the stand which had held the Elements towards Vader. He feigned a brief difficulty with it before levitating it back to its proper position, by which time Leia was on her way up the steps.

Darth Vader's boots struck sparks on the stone floor as he ran after her.

\* \* \*

><p>"So!" Nightmare Moon ground the fragments of the Elements of Harmony under her hoof. "Your pathetic attempt to harness the Elements has failed! So much for your pathetic rebellion!" She stepped aside to allow Vader to stand next to her. "Now you shall watch as Ponyville is blasted into oblivion!"<p>

"I don't think so, Nightmare Moon!" Twilight Sparkle grinned. "Even as we speak Alliance and pony commandos have docked with your ship and taken over its bridge! There won't be any destruction today!"

Vader glanced over the ponies' heads. Leia shrugged. \_Sorry! Didn't know!\_

The visitors from a galaxy far, far away listened as Twilight named the various Elements represented by her friends, ending with her own identity as the Element of Magic. As each was named, the appropriate Element materialized on the appropriate pony, who rose into the air. Anakin, watching it all through the Force, was deeply impressed. The magic was interwoven with something like the best qualities of the grey-sider Force he'd seen around the Loops- leaning heavily towards the light. It reminded him very much of the baseline, of the moment when Darth Vader, given mercy and love by a long-lost son, had become Anakin Skywalker once more.

Then the rainbow beam connecting the ponies lashed out at both Nightmare Moon and himself, and he had just enough time to think that this also reminded him of the baseline, only he hoped it wouldn't hurt as much as Palpatine's lightning.

\* \* \*

><p>Anakin sat up. It hadn't hurt... exactly... but... it had been most peculiar indeed. The Dark Side had fled him like a thief in the night, and the Light had burned him with a total absence of pain.<p>

His helmet and mask sat next to him. He took a deep breath; his lungs worked fine. He raised his hands, feeling the Force flow through living flesh and bone. He reached up and grabbed a long lock of hair- blonde, but mixed with some strands of gray.

"Well," he said quietly, "I've had much less pleasant reconstructive surgery than that!"

"Give your horrid sense of humor a rest, Father," Leia chuckled. "Don't you have something to tell Twilight?"

The purple pony in question was staring at the former Sith Lord with a cocked eyebrow and an expectant smirk.

"Um... er..." Anakin raised his left hand and parted his fingers two by two. "Live long and prosper?"

"Welcome to the Equestrian Loop, Anakin," Twilight replied. "Now do you mind doing something about the ship you have double-parked over Cloudsdale? This is meant to be a sanctuary Loop, after all."

\* \* \*

><p>96.9 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Mommy, why are you hanging out with a random assortment of ponies and doing a bunch of weird things with them?"

Ditzy Do (this time) gave Dinky Doo a smile. "The multiverse is broken, dear, so me and those other ponies all got caught up in a time loop while things are fixed. We do the weird things because we're bored."

"Oh." The filly considered this for a long time. "You still love me, right?"

"Dinky Do, I will always love you, no matter what happens." Ditzy wrapped her youngest up in a hug. "Hey, why don't you come with me? We're planning a prank on princess Celestia."

"That sounds fun!"

\* \* \*

><p>96.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...and so the magic harmonizes, creating large scale heartsongs." Lyra turned to the crowd of foals with a mischievous smirk. "Well, at least for Pinkie Pie!"

There was some scattered giggling at that.

"Now then, are there any questions?"

"Is it true miss Bonbon is pregnant?"

"I refuse to answer on the grounds she'd beat me up either way," the unicorn deadpanned, to more giggling. "Any questions related to the subject matter?"

"Can you do a heartsong right now?"

Lyra tapped her chin. "I coooooould, but I won't."

"Aw, why not?"

"Cause it wouldn't be as special, silly filly!" The bell rang just then. "Plus I'm out of time anyway."

"Well then!" Cheerilee rose from her seat with a smile. "Everypony

say thank you to miss Lyra for agreeing to be a guest lecturer."

"Thank you miss Lyra!"

"Hey! Miss Lyra was my grandmother!" Lyra grinned. "Now for your homework, I want you all to try to start some spontaneous heartsongs!"

A series of groans answered her.

"And the best way for you to do that is to go have fun!"

The groans turned into cheers, and the foals all ran out the door. Cheerilee shook her head and smiled. "You have quite the way with foals, Lyra."

"That's because I practically am one." The unicorn smirked. "Or don't you remember our spy adventures?"

"Oh I remember them, all right... Twilight was always getting us two out of jams. When she wasn't brainwashed." Cheerilee giggled. "Seriously, that happened every other week!"

"I think the bad guys cottoned onto her being our leader," Lyra mused, packing up her lyre. "They underestimated the raw awesome us two had though."

Cheerilee gave her a long look. "...How's the... mind window thing? Is it still a problem?"

"...A bit, yeah." Lyra shrugged. "I actually found out that it's... easier, in a way, for me to be around ponies. I get more windows, yeah, but I also get... well, more references in the now. If that makes any sense." She turned to the schoolteacher. "How about you? I heard that the loops and your talent..."

Cheerilee sighed. "I'm coping. Really! It's not as... listless as it was before. I've just got to remember that I took this job to help children grow, not pack them with knowledge." She wagged a hoof. "It's a balancing act, but... I'm coping. Berry's helping out too."

"...look at us," Lyra said quietly. "Dregs of the loops. Okay, let's make an oath right now: Whenever we're both awake, we'll... do something together! Like this teaching thing, or just hit the clubs, maybe get boozed. Whatever. Sound good?"

"Sure thing, Lyra." Cheerilee nodded. "This was... fun, actually. I'd like to make it regular, but mismatched Awakenings and all..."

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

Well, this is an interesting Loop. I'd found myself as a member of the Belmont clan. And wouldn't you know it, it was in time for Dracula to return, as he always does around here. Though, as far as I

know, the only looper I've heard of, Alucard, is still in his slumber. So, I'd have to go it alone.

Though I did have the legendary whip of the Belmont clan, I'd remembered hearing that non-Belmonts who wield it at full power lose a bit of their life with every swing of the whip.

I'll stick to my Keyblade, thank you. Don't want to risk using the whip, in case it doesn't truly see me as a Belmont due to the nature of the Loops.

\* \* \*

><p>As I'd expected, the journey through Dracula's Castle was a tough one. Nearly died a few dozen times. When I finally got to the Throne Room, instead of Dracula, I met his reincarnation, Soma.<p>

Soma, ever since his Awakening to the Loops, tended to Loop in the role of his past self. He was curious as to my strength, so we did indeed fight. Soma was very unpredictable, using every trick in his playbook, not sticking to his past self's usual formula. I went all-out as well. I barely won that fight; even a couple of Loops like this from Soma meant he had plenty more combat experience than I do.

Still, to beat such a foe...My skills have vastly improved since that fateful first Fused Loop of mine. The old me would be very arrogant at the power I wield, but I'm not her anymore.

\* \* \*

><p>In my travels, I'd heard of variants of Equestria that, well...were not good. If I ever enter one of those variants, I'll be prepared.<p>

Hopefully, I'll get a Loop or two to relax in soon.

\* \* \*

><p>96.11 (Masterweaver)<p>

"AAAAAAAUGHRAAAAAAH!"

Trixie blinked. "Ah... what?"

Chrysalis winced. "I... may have brainwashed her in the baseline." She bit her lip. "Um... sorry, Lyra. I swear I don't do that anymore."

"RIGHT!" Lyra took a deep breath and relaxed her grip. "Er. Right. Trixie?"

"Yes?"

"Is she the one you suggested help me with my issues?"

Trixie nodded. "Hive mind and all that." She tilted her head. "Would you like to come down from the tree?"

"Nah, I'm good." Lyra waved a hoof casually. "Being where a pony



can't reach me is convincing my instincts I'm safe."

Chrysalis buzzed her wings. "...You know, to help I kind of need to connect to your mind."

"Yeah, sorry, my phobia won't let me. No offence to looping you but nonlooping you is a bi-"

"She is my marefriend," Trixie growled.

"...no, I'm still saying it. Nonlooping Chrysalis is a big fat meanie."

\* \* \*

><p>96.12 (misterq)<p>

"Look, I gotcha that Nightmare Moon has already been defeated through music however many times," Vinyl Scratch said as she finished levitating several musical instruments along with her turntables onto the Ponyville city hall stage, "It's just that I want to do it my own way; DJ P0N3 remix style."

"Okay, Vinyl. What do you need us to do?" Twilight said. She and all of her friends were were awake, along with just about all of the other pony loopers. In fact, only Celestia and Luna were their baseline selves.

"Twilight, you take rhythm guitar," the white musical unicorn told her. Twilight nodded and pulled out her favorite guitar from her storage pocket.

Vinyl continued, "Dash, you're fast. So you take lead guitar. Applejack, you've got bass. Rarity, you're on keyboards."

Rarity looked over the sheet notes Vinyl had given her and scowled, "But there's no keyboards in this song."

The DJ sighed, "I noticed, but that's your best instrument. Just freestyle along or something. I'm sure you can make the whole thing.. what's that word you use? Fab-something?"

"Fabulous?"

"Yeah, that it. Do that."

"I do suppose I can manage that," The fashionista nodded after briefly thinking on the topic.

Vinyl turned to Fluttershy, "You have the best voice out of all of us."

"Hey!" Rainbow Dash exclaimed and was promptly ignored.

"So you're lead vocals. That okay?"

The yellow pegasus nodded. Even after all this time, she still never cared too much for public performances, but she didn't rapidly shrink away from them unlike her baseline self.

Vinyl looked at the quiet pony for a brief moment, "I'll have to make sure to turn up your mic gain all the way."

Then she looked over at the last, grinning member of the original pony loopers.

"Okay, Pinkie Pie. This piece has some of the most challenging drumwork I've ever seen, and that's in its original form. This is going to be a hard house techno remix, with all the bpm's that implies. Usually, the percussion is done by a drum machine; but you want to do this acoustically. Are you sure you can handle..."

Vinyl could practically feel the glare the pink looper was shooting her way, "Right. I forgot what pony I was speaking to."

Pinkie gave a big smile, made a happy noise, and spun her drumsticks so fast they hummed.

"And I'm on my turntables. Places, every pony. The 'Tribute to the Night' concert is about to begin!"

Baseline Nightmare Moon was nothing if not predictable in her appearance.

Except this time, it was a different pony who answered her question.

"I know who you are!" Vinyl's voice reached out throughout the crowd as she spoke into her mic, "You're the Princess of the Night, Princess Luna! And to herald your arrival, we're here to do a concert just for you! Ready, every pony? One, two, three, hit it!"

The guitars got going, playing at a faster pace than was normal for this song. Vinyl got busy adding various mood effects from her controls. Smoke, strobes, and magical lights flashed about, courtesy of Trixie.

Then Pinkie Pie went wild on the drums, easily keeping perfect timing despite the almost supernatural speed needed. At times, Vinyl thought it looked like the pink pony had grown another set of limbs just to manage. The DJ pony then shook her head and started concentrating on her part of the music.

"Say your prayers little one.  
>Don't forget my son,<br>to include everyone," Fluttershy sang as loud as she could. With the added amplification, it was loud enough that all the assembled ponies could hear her.

"I tuck you in, warm within.  
>Keep you free from sin.<br>'Til Princess Luna comes."

"Sleep with one eye open,  
>Gripping your pillow tight"<p>

"Exit light,  
>Enter night.<br>Be our friend,  
>We'll make it a much better land!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Come on up, Princess Luna! You know the words!" Vinyl Scratch beckoned the stunned princess of the night over with her hoof, "Come on, Princess. Do you see how much ponies love the night?"<p>

All the attending ponies cheered and swayed, enjoying the concert immensely.

"I.. " Nightmare Moon looked to either side, not really knowing how to react. She had expected the ponies to be frightened of her, even terrified. A tribute in her honor was nowhere in her plans.

"Get on up here," The sunglasses-wearing DJ waved her over, still bobbing her head to the beat, "I'm sure you have a wonderful singing voice!"

"A.. alright," Luna could have dropped her Nightmare Moon look then and there as she walked onto the stage, but her new outward appearance seemed more in line with the heavy pounding music and wild celebratory atmosphere.

Then she started singing.

Vinyl Scratch was right. Luna could sing perfectly in tune and on key, much to the delight of the crowd.

Unlike Fluttershy, there was no need for a microphone to amplify her voice.

\* \* \*

><p>96.13 (Zetrein)<p>

Applejack stood beside Twilight, as they looked at the ruins of the library she had called home, for the last five, times \*\_error, invalid integer\_\*, years. They were the only two Awake this loop, and had managed to take down Tirak with minimal fuss, aside from a single stray shot.

"I don't understand." Twilight finally spoke. "Every time he gets loose, my library explodes." She paused to sniffle. "\_Every time\_. And I'm still narrowing down when he escapes. It varies, did you know? Various contributing butterflies, and all. I'm working on an adaptive detection array, going to test it on Tartarus next loop."

"You really mean, every loop? He always gets it, no matter what you do to protect your library?" Applejack found it hard to believe Twilight couldn't protect her home, not from a baseline enemy.

"Every time. A few loops ago, Luna was Awake. We moved Tartarus to the moon. Whole thing, pow, to the moon! Tirak still escaped, drained the other prisoners there, before coming back to Equestria. He \_landed\_ on the library, cratered it.

Last time, last time, I put my library on the moon. Just picked up the whole library, put it on the moon. Claimed I didn't know, since I was in the Castle of the Two Sisters, accused Discord of doing it. Tirak shot the moon to intimidate us, hit it spot on, like it was the bullseye.

And you remember that damage sink spell? I used that this time, anchored the other end to the moon. Figured it should be able to tank whatever Tirak threw at it, you know?" Twilight waved a hoof at the wreckage. "But that one blast hit the perfect resonant magic frequency to invert the effect."

"You mean to tell me narrative causality itself has it out for your library?" Applejack's flabbergasted question was enough to finally set Twilight off.

"WHY?!" Twilight wailed, as she lay down to cry. "What does the universe have against my tree?! Why?" Applejack did the only thing she could do, and pulled her friend into a hug.

\* \* \*

><p>96.14 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Celestia and Spike found Twilight in the usual Canterlot park, face down in her book, snoring.

A gentle awakening and verification of Looping status later, Twilight explained that she'd just had yet another unplanned visit to the G3 Pony world.

"Oh? Was there perhaps a reason you ended up there?" Celestia asked.

"It was so close to the end of the Loop anyway," Twilight muttered. "That shouldn't count."

"What shouldn't count?" Spike asked.

Twilight sighed, took a deep breath, sighed again, and then unburdened herself of the unwelcome truth. "One pony plus four times the alicorn magic, multiplied by one hundred twenty-eight copies in the mirror pool, equals X. Tirek divided by X equals a naked magic singularity."

"Naked magic singularity?" Spike asked. "What's that mean?"

"It means an infinitely dense concentration of energy, hence mass," Celestia said. "Into which all of Equestria got sucked, I'd guess."

"World go down de hooooole," Twilight agreed, nodding sadly.

Spike leaned up to Celestia and whispered, "Are you sure we didn't get one of the mirror clones back?"

\* \* \*

><p>96.15 (Dalxein)<p>

Twilight was rather surprised when Vinyl arrived to help the mostly-Awake bearers of the Elements aid in the unawake Rainbow Dash's search for a suitably awesome pet.  
>She had two very good reasons, as it turned out.<p>

"Ah comes wif two sub-woofers." The DJ cooed, regarding the pair of rather adorable puppies following behind her. "This is Bass and Treble."

Twilight blinked. "Wait, that sounds familiar." She took a long look at the pair before her eyes widened.

"No," Bass interjected. "You \_aren't\_ going to tell Rock, or Roll, ever."

\* \* \*

><p>96.16 (misterq)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia Awoke with a gasping scream.<p>

"Sister? What is wrong?" Luna shoved open the door and barged into the room, expecting the worst.

Celestia slowly managed to get her breathing under control, "It was horrible. An entire universe... without cake."

The pony of the night blinked, and then magically pelted her sister with all the nearby pillows.

\* \* \*

><p>96.17 (Novusordomundi)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>The Lightning King looked up from his kneeling position, even as every instinct told him this was a bad idea.<em>

\_And upon one look at the gossamer-and-lace Monarch Throne and it's current occupant, he realized that he should have listen to those instincts for he would have been spared the vision that could haunt him for the rest of his existence. A vision of the Yellow Goddess looking upon him with sadness.\_

\_There was no malice or hate in her face, and for the King, that would have been far preferable, for he could bear that, and it would have been deserved. But there was only disappointment in her glance, that Stare that could register how she felt without a needed word.\_

\_Then the Goddess stood up from the Throne, her eyes never moving from his. She stepped down the stairs, her pink hair flowing past her, as butterflies seemed to trail behind her every step. She only stopped when she was right in front of the bowing King. Seconds felt like lifetimes as silence filled the hall. The silence that was broken with a single, whispered word.\_

\_"Why?"\_

\_The Lightning King, The Thunder of the Heavens, The Lord of Hellenization could take no more, and started weeping.\_

\_The Yellow Goddess watched, as the broken King could do nothing more than sob into his hands, and repeating "I'm so sorry." to the Goddess. She could sense that he was feeling the weight of his guilt crushing him, and with a simple touch and a smile, took them away.\_

\_"I know you are." Her voice said, barely audible in decibels, but heard as a clap of "Your actions prove so. But I must ask again: why?"\_

\_"I... have needs. Many needs." The King managed.\_

\_"But are those needs worth the pain you have caused?" The Goddess sounded disappointed again. "They may bring you pleasure now, but have you considered what they have done to your wife?"\_

\_Tears welled up in the broken man's eyes. "No..."\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Rainbow Dash, why exactly am I reading a story that involves Fluttershy confronting Zeus on his infidelities?"<p>

Rainbow Dash, known in the Multiverse by her pen name "Iris Drake", was currently working on something, using her abilities in her Alicorn form to be able to write and talk at the same time. "Eh, I wanted to try something different, Twi. I had this idea that wouldn't go away about Fluttershy running the Multiverse."

"Yes, but this is a bit... wordy for you." Twilight said, looking at another part of the manuscript, before realizing what she had said. "Not that you can't be when you want to..."

"It's alright. I'm trying to vary my styles. It can get boring if I just do the same thing over and over, ya know?"

"I know the feeling, Dash" Twilight said, before reading another snippet...

\* \* \*

><p><em>For as long as it had been there, and as many times the occupants had seen it, the device in front of them always was a wondrous sight to behold. The Temporal Ouroboros spun in multiple directions at once, wheels within wheels shimmering in colors that only existed in theory, multiple universes flashing into view as one wheel passed, only to flicker away at the passage of the next.<em>

\_At a rectangular workstation that controlled the artifact was a towering giant of a man, sitting in an appropriate sized chair, a massive staff at his side. He was the Maker of Worlds, who's skillful ability could shape entire universes. To those less charitable to his condition, he was known as the Lame One. But never to his face, of course. The broken jaw and nose of the last creature to do so reminded everyone of this fact.\_

\_The Yellow Goddess watches as the wheels spun erratically in front of her. "Are you ready, Maker?"\_

\_ "Of course, my lady. All the variables have been put in." the giant said. "Would you like to start?"\_

\_ "If it wouldn't be any trouble."\_

\_ "For you, it never is, my lady." And with that, a final button was pressed.\_

\_ Whirls and clicks could be heard by all as the wheels slowed their spinning, their color returning to the normal color spectrum, until they aligned, one next to each other, with a hole in the middle projected into oblivion. And for a while, nothing happened.\_

\_ Or that's what those unfamiliar with the way reality worked would have thought. But to the Yellow Goddess, her connection to the World Tree told her different, as the sensation of the blooming of a planted seed was taking place, to burst into a new branch of reality, full of new life and wonder, new creatures and civilizations, an infinite amount of possibilities that could happen.\_

\_ The a bright white light flared from the hole in the center of the circles, as a new universe started to form...\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Dash, I don't really think that's how Yggdrasil works." Twilight deadpanned, which got a shrug out of the cyan Alicorn in response. "But I'm surprised. I kind of thought there would be more action..."<p>

"Oh trust me, there will be." Dash affirmed. "I'm setting up right now for Flutter... I mean the Yellow Goddess to lead her forces against the forces of the Void Realms. It's going to be cool! She's going to get golden whips to hold off the forces of corruptions from invading reality!"

This got a chuckle from Twilight. She knew that Dash could not resist having at least one fight scene in her stories...

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

>This Loop was more of the more interesting ones, in my opinion. I Awoke in a part of Russia as a spy. My codename:<p>

EVA.

It wasn't long before I met the Anchor of this Loop: the man who would be known as Big Boss; I'd heard his tale from Peter Parker.

Big Boss earned that codename of his by having to stop a madman...and kill his mentor, The Boss, thought to be a traitor. When he learned the truth- that she was loyal to the end, but circumstances had forced her to die branded a traitor- he, alongside his allies from that fateful mission, had formed a group called 'The Patriots' to realize the Boss' dream of a world united.

\* \* \*

><p>However, Big Boss and Major Zero disagreed on how to do this: Big Boss thought that soldiers needed to be have no nation to be tied to, and Zero wanted to control the populace through manipulation. When Big Boss was cloned by Zero, that was the last straw, and the two would enter a secret war that Big Boss' own cloned 'son', Solid Snake, would one day end, first by defeating Big Boss, then, nearly 20 years later, tore down the Patriots...or rather, the AIs Zero'd entrusted to carry out his will.<p>

It is a VERY long and complicated story. Moving on, Big Boss was obviously quick to realize I wasn't who was usually in this role. After a quick explanation, BB(he chuckled at the cute nickname) had to admit; he'd heard stranger tales since his Looping days began. He also told me that Solid Snake had Awoken a few Loops after he had at the earilest.

\* \* \*

><p>We proceeded with things more or less as per baseline. Though, that Ocelot guy...he seemed to be showing signs that he's seen this before...I've a feeling he may Awaken in the next few Loops.<p>

It was interesting living 50 years of life alongside Big Boss. He is the ultimate soldier; he's been a warrior throughout all his Looping days. He doesn't try to rely on special powers like ki or chakra(though he knows how), but prefers to use gunplay and his own brand of hand-to-hand called CQC. He's picked up plenty of technology, though. And the guy has charisma not unlike that of great leaders. No wonder many soldiers'd follow him to their death.

As for what I experienced this Loop...it was full of intrigue and espionage. And it was as confusing as I've heard. By the time I met Solid Snake(who luckily enough, was Awake as well, and is just like the stories about him say), things had gone relatively close to baseline, though BB had someone else get roasted by Snake during what would've been their second battle.

\* \* \*

><p>That, and he decided to take out the Patriots ahead of schedule this time. BB and his 'son' patched things up a long time ago. During their reunion, I heard them mention an epic battle where every known Awake Looper at the time(AKA before I Awoke), along with a lot of Unawake villains had fought on Pelennor Fields. And I mean ALL of them.<p>

I missed what was probably the greatest battle the Multiverse will ever know. I don't know how to feel about that.

And for them, the battle was a good case of father-son bonding time.

This Loop has had me see what constant struggle can do to a person even when the Loops aren't involved. I have to admire guys who can handle all of that.

As the Loop ended, ol' BB gave me a hint of what he was hoping to do next Loop: become President.



Good luck, Jack...

\* \* \*

><p>96.18<p>

\* \* \*

><p>(Kris Overstreet)<p>

Applejack sat nervously in an uncomfortable plastic chair (\_How does Lyra do this?\_) as the lights came on in the Los Pegasus television studio.

"Tonight's contestant owns a large apple farm near Ponyville. She's a Taurus, likes country music and a hard day's work, and dislikes liars and lazy people! She's about to win a dream date with one of these three highly eligible bachelors!" Stage lights came on on the other side of a partition that blocked Applejack's view.

"So let's watch Applejack play: THE HEARTS AND HOOVES GAME!"

The audience applauded wildly as Princess Cadence, holding a microphone and wearing a loud plaid jacket, smiled her way out onto the stage. As the applause died down, the royal hostess continued, "How are you doing tonight, Applejack? Ready to meet the lover of your dreams?"

"How the hay did I EVER let you talk me into-"

"Now I'm sure you remember the rules. You get to ask two of our pre-prepared questions, and all of the bachelors will give their honest answer. In fact, the stage has been enchanted so they're completely incapable of lying!"

"I'd know if they were lyin' anyway, Cadence!" Applejack snapped. "Can we just get on with this?"

"All right, Applejack," Cadence said, ignoring Applejack's obvious discomfort. "Look through your cards and ask a question you think will help you choose a bachelor!"

"Um, yeah," Applejack said. "After th' show we're gonna have a talk about these questions..." She thumbed through several index cards, each one looking worse than the last. Finding none that weren't embarrassing, she picked the one that made her squirm the least. "We're havin' a romantic candlelit dinner. Th' wine has been poured, th' violins are playin'. When ya reach your hoof out to touch mine, what's th' first thing yer gonna say?"

"Oooh, that's a good one!" Cadence grinned. "Bachelor number one?"

"I would probably ask," a pompous if elegant voice replied, "if you'd washed your hooves recently. I find that commoner dirt is an absolute mood-killer, yes indeed."

"I would ask how you kept your hooves looking so clean and well-groomed," a hissing voice added, "after the long days in the

ccccccccrystall mines I would force you to labor for my benefit."

A basso profundo with raspy overtones concluded, "And I would say nothing, merely look into your eyes and stare hungrily at the magic within your soul."

"Aw, how romantic, Bachelor Number Three!" Cadence gushed. "Now Applejack, I hope that helped you make your decision, because you only get one more question!"

"All I need is one more!" Applejack prepared to push herself out of her bucket chair. "How about, 'How do I make my escape from-'"

"But first let's learn a little more about our bachelors!" Cadence said, drowning out the rest of Applejack's question as she trotted around the partition and out of Applejack's direct sight. "Now we're going to keep their identities a secret, but we can give you folks at home a few pointers, right?" Wink, to applause. "Bachelor Number One is an up and coming political figure in the Canterlot scene!"

"And I was also voted Most Handsome Stallion in Equestria two years running by-"

"Ah ah ah!" Cadence warned. "Don't give yourself away, Bachelor One!"

"You couldn't pay me to take 'im," Applejack muttered.

"Bachelor Number Two is retired, but he used to do a booming business in the jewelry industry!"

"Jewelry is only a sideline. Gems are my true interest. There is such unique power in crrrrrrrystall..."

"And Bachelor Number Three is a gourmet with unique tastes!"

"This is true. Unfortunately my preferred diet seldom... agrees with me."

"And that's enough hints," Cadence said, walking back around the partition. "Applejack, have you picked your final question?"

"One question and I'm done? You promise?"

"Of course! Those are the rules of the game!" Cadence insisted. "So what's the question?"

Applejack, groaning, picked one of the other cards at random. She read it and groaned as she realized it was one of the worst. "Um... in... in th' bedroom... do I haveta say this? In th' bedroom, would y'all say yer a... a speed sprinter... a steeplechase jumper... or a long hauler?" As soon as she finished she tossed the card away like it was on fire, grabbing her hat with one hoof and covering her face with it. "Ah cain't believe ah just said that..."

"Ooooh, that's hitting below th-"

"CADENCE!"

"All right, all right," the pink alicorn waved down Applejack.

"Bachelor Two, what's your answer?"

"I do not do the hauling," the raspy voice hissed. "I find other ponies to do this for me. ALL the other ponies, everywhere, hauling cryyyyyyysssstals for me!"

"Ahem," the deep voiced bachelor spoke. "In the bedroom or anywhere else, let me just say... that I never stop until my goals are fully achieved." The audience oohed at that one.

The pompous voice gave a groan of disgust. "Hauling? Manual labor is SO undignified! And as genteel as the sport of steeplechase is, the mud puddles behind some of the jumps are simply intolerable! They'd muss my hooficure! So I'd have to go with the speed sprint, common as it is."

"Er... riiiiight," Cadence said, struggling to keep her smile. "Anyway, Applejack, you've heard the responses of all the bachelors now. It's almost time to choose!"

"Great! I choose Door Number One!" Applejack said.

"Hehe! Cute joke, Applejack, but wrong game show!"

"What joke? First door I see I'm goin' right through-"

"So, who shall it be? Bachelor Number One?"

"If you're half as beautiful as me," the pompous voice declared, "we'll be the talk of Canterlot society!"

"Bachelor Number Two?"

"You will ssssubmit to me! It is inevitable!"

"Or Bachelor Number Three?"

"I can't wait to see what you're made of," the deep voice said.

"Yer not gonna let me leave this stage unless I pick one o'these bozos, huh?" Applejack asked. "Fine. Bachelor Number One sounds like a stuck up nancy-boy who'd never last five minutes on a farm. Bachelor Number Two sounds like he just escaped from a world court trial, accused of crimes against equinity."

"How did you know?" the raspy voice gasped.

"So I reckon I gotta go with th' third one. He sounds like a steady pony. He sure can't be as bad as th' other two!"

"So your final selection," Cadence said carefully, "is Bachelor Number Three?"

"If none of th' above ain't an option," Applejack said, "then yup, Bachelor Number Three it is!"

Cadence grinned. "Come on out, Bachelor Number Three!"

As the theme music played and lights began to dim on the other side of the partition, a large figure rounded its side and came into

view.

"He's a magic-devouring centaur from beyond the badlands," Cadance read from an index card. "His hobbies include dancing, long walks on the beach, and global domination! Say hello to Tirek!"

Applejack's jaw dropped at the sight of the fugitive from Tartarus, and then dropped further at the roar of applause from the audience.

"And the two of you will be spending a whole romantic weekend in-"

"EENOPE!"

\* \* \*

><p>"And that's when your earthbending caused the Great Coltifornian Earthquake and sent Los Pegasus sliding into the ocean?" Twilight Sparkle asked.<p>

"Eyup," Applejack nodded. "Th' seaponies gave me a trophy for extraordinary achievement in destruction. Said they'd ask Celestia ta make me Equestria's ambassador."

"Well," Twilight sighed, "this was obviously provoked. I'll have a talk with the judge. You may get out of here on Monday, earlier if I can get Luna to void the charges."

"That's fine, Twilight," Applejack said. "But why do I have to stay in th' same cell as THESE two!" She pointed a chained hoof at the equally chained Tirek and Cadence.

"How do you think I feel?" Tirek growled. "At least Blueblood and Sombra got a year's supply of Oat-a-Roni, the San Flankcisco Treat!"

"The rules of the show say you have to spend a romantic weekend together!" Cadence insisted. "And I'm going to make sure you two do it!"

Twilight rubbed her head to make the migraine go away. "Cadence, we need to have a very serious talk..."

\* \* \*

><p>96.19 (KrisOverstreet)<p>

Six jaded ponies stood in a shiny netherworld, surrounded by clouds and light, each with a large number ZERO hovering over their heads.

"Oh, wow, look. A magical dreamscape," Twilight Sparkle said sarcastically.

"TV pictures of our lives flashing before our eyes. How simply fascinating," Rarity whined.

Pinkie Pie put on a pair of glasses with thick square rims and said, "Meh. I was having flashbacks and hallucinations before it was

cool."

Rainbow Dash's jaw worked for a moment; then she shrugged. "I got nothin'. Hey, Pinkie, you have any more of those hipster glasses?"

"Yeah, sure, help yourself. They're in my mane."

"None for me, thanks," Applejack said. "Don't want some idjit thinkin' my hat is a trillby."

Princess Celestia appeared, opened her mouth to congratulate the Bearers of the Elements of Harmony on completing Starswirl the Bearded's research... and closed it again as she looked at the six blase' faces. "Girls," she said quietly, "I have something very important to show you, but I need you to do something for me first."

"Sure, whatever," Twilight grumbled. "What is it?"

"Could you all stand in line... sort of a semicircle... right here?" Celestia pointed a hoof down at the nonexistent floor. "No, closer. Closer. Yes, that's right. Perfect. Stop there."

It is a little-known fact that alicorn magic powers include the ability to administer a bitch-slap with a wing at mach speeds.

When Twilight and her friends could hear anything over the ringing bells and tweeting birds, they observed their surroundings with new eyes. "WOW!" Twilight gasped. "Have you noticed how beautiful this place is?"

DING.

The ponies looked up to see the zeroes replaced by various numbers- a very low number in Rainbow Dash's case, extremely high with Twilight Sparkle.

"There," Celestia said. "I've reset your bucks-to-give-ometer. Now let's talk about all the princessing you're about to be doing."

\* \* \*

><p>(TheCentauress)<p>

"I will have your power!" \_\*\*ding! Wonk-wonk-wonk..\*\*\_\_ "I've been hearing that noise for the last five minutes. What devilry is this?" \_\*\*BZZT! \*\*\_ "...yah know what? Buck it. There a bar nearby?" The massive centauroid looked around as he slowly shrank down to his gaunt, pony-sized form, the stolen magic seeping out like a glittering mist.

Twilight, her own count of bucks, - even after the alicornation recharging, - being totally spent, merely flipped him a mini-keg of 'Granny Smith's Oak-Aged Sippin' Cider XXXXXXXX' from the cooler beside her relaxed form. The ancient menace nodded, cracked the tube and chugged it down. Having the mass equivalent of a small filly, and drinking something just a shade shy of the (Non-)mythical 307, the poor shmuck was instantly more toasted than the time Discord laughed at Trixie's FOOF-augmented Kimodo3000 while he was inside the blast

radius. (Simply put, Tirek was Drunk off his Plot.)

The hapless centauroid giggled and fell over, out before he was even fully in motion. However, as he was heading toward the sweet embrace of the sod, a surge of magic erupted from his horns and obliterated the library-tree behind Twilight.

The purple alicorn looked over her shoulder, shrugged and took a keg of her own. "Meh," she huffed, "par for the course."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

96.1: Twiabetes epidemic.

>96.2: Well, it's true.<br>96.3: Derpy is a skilled pony.

>96.4: Finding someone who views you as a mentor.<br>96.5: This pretty much sums up why Discord is cool with Twilight and co.

>96.6: The worst book.<br>96.7: She has a few issues to work through.

>96.8: The Star Wars Shall Aid In Her Escape<br>96.9: Surprisingly easy to explain.

>96.10: Cheerilee is still working on her coping mechanism.<br>96.11: She is.

>96.12: Sing along!<br>96.13: Narrative perversity.

>96.14: Divide by cucumber error. Please reinstall universe and reboot.<br>96.15: Oom-pah.

>96.16: Cake.<br>96.17: Does this count as fan fiction?

>96.18: Cadence has a problem.<br>96.19: A continuation of 95.8.

## 103. Chapter 103

### 97.1 (Midnight Crescent)

Twilight the Underdog - Chapter 4

>"So you're sure you've got everything?" Solomon asked for the third time that morning.<p>

Yugi sighed, as he turned to face his Grandfather once again. "Yes, Grandpa. I have my deck, spare clothes, toothbrush, a towel, my phone and the kitchen sink."

Solomon huffed, and folded his arms. "There's no need to be sarcastic."

"I know, I know. But you don't have to worry. Seriously, I'll be fine. I'll call you every morning, and we'll only be gone for a week." Yugi hugged Solomon, grabbed his bags, and headed for the door. "Bye, Grandpa."

"Goodbye Yugi, and good luck. I can't have you and Josie embarrassing me now, can I?"

Yugi rolled his eyes. As he headed through the door, he called back "You got it, Grandpa."

After the door closed behind him, he leant back on the wall.

\_Are you alright, Yugi? \_Yami asked.

\_I'm fine; just wish Grandpa would start looping already. \_Yugi replied, sighing heavily.

\_Would you like me to take over for a while?\_

\_That'd help. Thanks, Yami.\_

Just as Yami took Yugi's place, their cab arrived.

"Where to, kid?"

"Domino Harbour, please."

"Sure thing."

\* \* \*

><p>When Yami arrived at the harbour, he wasn't all too surprised to see that Twilight was already there.<p>

What did shock him was how little she had elected to bring with her. All she had was one backpack, and an ice box.

"Given everything I know about you, I must admit I was expecting cases of books, Josie."

Twilight sighed. She glanced around, amongst the hustle and bustle, trying to figure out how to word this without sounding crazy. Figuring there wasn't any great option, she settled on saying "That's what a Pocket's for, Yugi." Given the strange gymnastics his eyebrows started to pull, she carried on before he could respond. "So, any idea when Tea will be turning up?"

"She shouldn't be too much longer..."

Almost as though on cue, a car pulled up, and Tea stepped out. "Thanks mom, I'll call you tomorrow!" She called out as the car drove off once again, waving furiously after it. "Hey Yugi, Hey Josie."

Yami nodded at her, while Twilight waved.

"Have you spoken to Tristan yet, Josie?"

"Yeah, he said he was getting the train into the city an hour ago. He's going to call me when he gets to the Hospital. I just hope Serenity's OK."

Tea bit her lip, as she looked around the crowd. "Maybe we should get on the ship? We don't want all the good cabins to get taken, do we?"

"That's probably a good idea, actually..." Twilight said, as she picked up her bags. "Let's go."

Twilight and Yami pulled on their gloves, while Tea pulled a lanyard out from her shirt, with a visitor's badge. They passed the guard

without incident, and went to register.

"Hmm... Mr Muto and Miss Wheeler... One moment please..." The receptionist said, as she searched through the system for their entries. "Ah, it appears you have rooms reserved..."

A small machine beside her beeped, and she inserted a small plastic card into it. After a few seconds she removed it, and handed it to Yami. "You have been assigned to suite 102, Mr Muto. Please enjoy the cruise, and good luck."

She then repeated the process with Tea, and then Twilight "Miss Wheeler, you have been assigned to suite 113. Please enjoy the cruise, and good luck."

\* \* \*

><p>After placing her bags in her rooms, Twilight met Tea and Yugi in their room.<p>

"Alright, so we're stuck on this boat until tomorrow morning, right?" Twilight asked, as she sat next to Tea.

"That's when we get to the Island, yeah." Yugi replied

"So is there anything we can do until then?"

"Well, I usually make sure my deck is set up for my first duel â€" It's almost like a fixed thing. Whenever I come to Duellist Kingdom, I fight the same person first."

"And who's that?"

"Weevil Underwood." Tea said, gagging afterwards

"I'm going to guess there's a story behind that reaction..."

Yugi took a breath. "There is, but I doubt you'd understand without actually seeing our Baseline. And Yami generally hates running that part of our Loop as Baseline, if it even occurs. Sometimes, the Loop just randomly skips it."

"Alright, I'll take your word for it. So, other than counting to make sure all 60 are there, is there anything to do?"

"There are usually people trading or practicing around the halls, but if you're happy with your deck, I'd advise against it."

"You have anything I could want, and no need to give away my deck?" Twilight ventured.

Yugi nodded. "Most of the other top duellists won't be doing it, unless they want to test a back up deck or something. Which, really, leaves talking, unless either of you have something interesting in your Pocket we could use?"

Tea shook her head "Not really."

Twilight thought for a few seconds, before something occurred to her. "Actually, I have something I've been meaning to ask you. When I



visited Nyx the first time, she mentioned she couldn't use her magic. I've been trying to use it, and I'm having trouble myself." She pulled a notebook out of her coat, and flipped through a few pages. "Levitation is one of the most basic things in my world, so I started with that, and, well, this is the result."

Twilight handed Yugi the notebook. It didn't take long to realise the page was covered with an extremely shaky signature. "Hmm... How does magic work in your world?"

"Unicorns generally just focus on something. Our magic is contained in our horns, but it usually shifts to other appendages when we're in other forms."

"So it's not based on an external focus, then?"

"No, but I do have a lot of them in my Pocket."

"And have you tried any of them yet?"

Twilight shook her head. "I haven't really had enough free time without someone watching. I barely had enough time to pull off this." She indicated the notebook.

"Then try using some of your other foci. Some of them may work, and we don't really have a long list of alternatives to our in-Loop items yet."

"Got it. I should probably go get started."

Twilight got up from the bed, and headed over to the door, when someone started knocking on it.

Twilight opened the door, and had to look down to find the person who had knocked. He had cropped sky blue hair, and gigantic rimmed glasses, with a beetle insignia on the ridge.

"Oh, hello." The newcomer spoke, looking up at Josie. "My name is Weevil, the new Regional Champion. I was wondering if it's true Yugi Muto is here?"

Twilight debated with herself before responding. "One sec."

She stepped back into the room. "Yugi, that Weevil kid is here. What do you want me to do?"

Yugi and Tea stared at each other for a second, before nodding. "Alright, let him in." Yugi said, before lowering his voice. "But you have to promise that you won't do anything, until he's gone, OK?"

"Alright, I promise." She said, dropping her voice to match Yugi's. She headed back over to the door, where Weevil was still waiting. "Come on in."

"Oh, thank you." Weevil said, grinning. \_Well, he certainly looks a little strange, but that doesn't mean anything...\_She thought as he stepped past her.

"Hello, Yugi."

"Hi, Weevil. Well done with the regionals."

"Oh come now, Yugi. The regionals are nothing compared to beating the World Number 1."

"You know about that?" Yugi asked, feigning surprise.

"The whole world knows. The world number 1, humiliated by an amateur. And here you are, in his place."

"I just beat him in one duel, and it was pretty close."

"Don't be modest, Yugi. With your Buster Blader, he never stood a chance." He fidgeted for a second, before asking the question Yugi had been waiting for. "Could I... see it?"

Yugi waited for a few seconds before responding. "Sure, it's over here." He opened up the case for his deck, and slid off the top card. He handed it over to Weevil, and watched as Weevil, as usual, walked around the room, before throwing the card out the window and running. As he left, he gloated "How will you win without that card now, Yugi?" Before devolving into maniacal laughter.

Yugi rolled his eyes, before closing and locking the door. He reached into his Pocket, and pulled out a card. He placed it into his deck box. He turned to Twilight, who still seemed to be in a sort of shock from what had happened in front of her. "And that is just one of the reasons we hate Weevil."

"Duly noted..." Twilight said, before checking the time. "Well, I should get back to my room; I think Tristan will be calling me any time now."

"Alright, we'll talk again later." Yugi said, as Twilight walked out the door.

"See you later." Tea said.

Twilight walked down the Hallway, and entered her room. She rooted through her bag, and waited for the call.

\* \* \*

><p>"-Stan? Where'd you go?" Tristan blinked as he woke up.<p>

"I'm here, Nyx. What's wrong?"

"Well, you came in and said you needed to sit down." Nyx said, turning to face Tristan's voice. "And that was an hour ago."

Tristan's face practically shone red, and he smacked his forehead. "Damn, I'm sorry. Apparently, this loop has a lot of paperwork to sort out if you want to visit someone outside of visiting hours. I must have been more tired than I thought. But enough about that, how're you holding up?"

Nyx let her head sink into her pillow. "Better, I guess. I wish Momma was here, but I know why she can't be."

Tristan smiled, as he plugged the last of the cables into his laptop, and waited for the thing to boot up. "Well, everything's set up now, so all we can do is wait for it all to kick off. I did say I'd call Twilight when I got here..."

A knock came at the door, and a nurse walked through a few seconds later. "Hello Serenity, I'm here to run you..." She started, until she noticed Tristan. "Sir, visiting hours have ended. Quite a while ago, in fact."

"I know, I know." He said, as he pulled a small card out of his jacket pocket. He held it out to the nurse by the small pin on the back "I never got round to putting it on, I guess. Sorry about that." He turned to Nyx "I'll go make that call while they run the tests, ok?"

Nyx sighed a little, before nodding.

Tristan closed the door behind him, then leant against the door frame as he waited for Twilight to pick up.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sat in her room, sorting through her Pocket for whatever foci she could find. At either side were two piles of the objects she had tried. An extremely large notebook lay on her lap. She chewed her pencil absent mindedly as she pulled out her wand from her time at Hogwarts.<p>

"Alright, next up." She said as she held the wand out in front of her, and took a deep breath before shouting "Lumos!" as loud as she dared.

A faint glow appeared at the tip of her wand. Twilight nodded, and placed the wand into the much smaller of the two piles. She wrote a few lines next to her wands entry. Just as she was about to begin looking through her Pocket again, she heard the faint sound of music from somewhere behind her.

Twilight thought for a few seconds before diving towards her bed, and swiping up her phone. "Tristan?"

"\_Yeah, it's me. You guys set off yet?"\_

"Not too long ago. What happened to you though? Did you get stuck in traffic again?"

"\_Nah, nothing like that. Just didn't realise there was going to be so many forms I'd have to do. So by the time I got to Nyx's room I was wiped. She finally got me to wake up not too long ago." \_Tristan gave a short nervous laugh, as Twilight sighed.

"So how is she?"

"\_Fine, but she misses you. I'd have let her talk to you, but the nurse came in to run her tests just as I was about to call. Figured it made more sense to do it like this. I'll call again after every match. And don't worry. Yugi and Tea told me what happened in the shop. You'll do fine."\_

"And what if things don't go like they should?"

"\_Then you roll with the punches. I don't know what you've got in your bag of tricks, but I'd bet everything I have that yours is bigger and can deal with more stuff than mine. Just have faith in the Heart of the Cards, and you can't fail."\_

"Even against Yami?"

There was a slight chuckle before Tristan responded "\_He's not actually the one you need to worry about, really..."\_

Twilight raised her eyebrow at that, but Tristan didn't complete the thought, and decided it wasn't worth pushing. "Alright, I'll keep that in mind. Just make sure Nyx stay's OK for me."

"\_I would have done that anyway, but you probably knew that already. I'll talk to you later, Josie."\_

"You too, Tristan." Twilight tossed the phone back onto her bed, before picking her notebook and pencil back up. \_\_Now, where was I?\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight had just finished clearing up her room when there was a knock at her door.<p>

"Come in." She called out just as she laid back on the bed.

Tea stepped into the room. "Yami and I were wondering what you were up to. You went to wait for Tristan calling you, and we haven't seen you since."

Twilight smiled sheepishly "Sorry, I got caught up in some research." She opened her bedside table's drawer, and pulled out her notebook. "Tell Yami or Yugi I'm sorry they're not complete, but there were a couple of things that were just too big to bring out in this room."

Tea's eyes widened as she flipped through the notebook. "You did all of this overnight?"

Twilight debated whether to tell Tea how she had pulled it off, and decided that being vague was probably the best way to go. "Well, I found a few ways to use my magic, and a few other worlds as well. From there I just used some tricks I know to make it go a lot faster. Oh, and coffee. Coffee helped."

"Ok, well, we're five minutes away from the harbour, so if you want to grab your bags, we can meet Yugi and head for the opening ceremony."

"Sure, just give me a minute." Twilight said, dropping to the floor, and reaching under her bed. She pulled out her backpack and icebox "Ready when you are."

\* \* \*

><p>Pegasus' harbour was so narrow, it made the flock of people leaving the ship appear worse than in Domino. However, it was thankfully still a relatively short walk from the harbour to Pegasus' Castle. There was a short wait before Pegasus appeared on his balcony, a glass of wine in his hand. He smiled, his eyes closed as he sipped at his drink, before he finally looked down to address the crowd.<p>

"Congratulations to you all." He said as he raised his glass "To have made it this far, you must be the world's greatest duellists. And so I welcome you to Duellist Kingdom." He completed his toast before continuing. "However, a Kingdom has only one throne. I look forward to the coming week, and so, assemble your decks carefully, with guile and creativity. You have all been given 2 Star Chips, at least one of which must be wagered on every one of your duels." Pegasus paused, both to scan the crowd, and to breathe. "Any person who can earn 10 or more will be given entry to my Castle, and the final stages of the tournament. Arenas have been placed throughout the island, which will become active in one hour. Feel free to prepare in any way you like, wherever you like. When the sky lights up with fireworks, you may begin."

He turned and exited down the same passageway he had came from. The crowd then erupted into various chattering. Twilight turned to face Yugi and Tea.

"Well, that sounded strange." She said, keeping her voice as low as she dared.

"It actually didn't sound all that different to what he usually says..." Yugi said, with Tea nodding in approval. "But, notice something?"

Twilight raised an eyebrow, before looking around. She spent a minute or two, before speaking up "It's a group of people. I'm not sure what I'm looking for, here. A hint would be nice..."

"Try looking for what's not there..."

"Huh?..." She took another look, before realising what was wrong "Hey, where'd that Weevil kid go?"

"Don't worry. If he runs off, he always heads for the same place, just follow us." Yugi said, before heading for one of the flights of stairs away from the Castle's grounds "Be careful though. Some of these stairs are pretty old, so watch your footing."

Twilight and Tea followed close behind, descending down into one of the islands thick forests.

\* \* \*

><p>Weevil was waiting for the group by the Forest Grove's arena as Yugi, Twilight and Tea emerged into the clearing.<p>

"He he he, I was wondering how long it would be before you noticed I had gone." Weevil said, leering at the trio over his glasses. Just as he finished speaking, the fireworks started.

"Well, I guess there's no sense waiting any longer then. Weevil, I

challenge you to a duel."

"Gladly, little Yugi. We'll duel for 2 Star Chips. After all, it wouldn't do to have you running around anymore once I've proven you're just a beginner who got lucky." Weevil said, as he climbed into one of the podiums of the arena.

\_Alright, you want to take this one, or should I? \_Yugi asked Yami as he approached his podium.

\_I think I should. Blader was always one of my cards... \_came the response.

\_Got it. Good luck. \_Yugi took a deep breath as he stepped into place, and switched. Yami placed his deck into its slot. Once it had been returned, he drew his hand, and looked over at Weevil. "Let's Duel."

Yami looked over his hand. \_Well Yugi, we have two of the cards we need. Sangan, Pot of Greed and Monster Reborn are all helpful too. I guess it all comes down to how soon we can get the third card we need.\_

\_Looks that way, but this is Weevil. Let's just hope he isn't cheating in some way we haven't thought of.\_

"I'll start." Yami announced, drawing another card from his deck. He saw the card he had added to his hand, and laughed briefly. "I'm sorry this was so short, Weevil." He then turned to Twilight. "Josie, you will soon see what it was my Grandpa was attempting in your duel."

"First, I play the magic card Pot of Greed to draw even more cards, before I place this face down. Then, I'll set this monster in defence mode, and end my turn."

"You seem to think you've already won, Yugi. Did you forget, there are always at least two people in a duel." Weevil drew his card "I play this monster in face down defence mode. That ends my turn." Weevil smiled as he played the card.

\_Well, this seems familiar... \_Yugi thought. \_Man Eater Bug?\_

\_Man Eater Bug \_Yami agreed. \_This is exactly what we needed, don't you think?\_

Yami drew another card, before looking over his hand. "I switch my Sangan to attack mode, and attack your face down monster."

Predictably, weevil began laughing maniacally. "Oh little Yugi, you already made your first mistake." He flipped his Man Eater Bug, and the holographic Sangan vanished into the Graveyard. "Say goodbye to your pathetic monster. That will do nicely for now."

"Are you done?" Yami asked, as he picked some dirt out from his nails and yawned. "Did you forget, my Sangan has a special ability? I can add one card to my hand, as long as it has less than 1500 attack points. I think my Exodia the forbidden one will do nicely, don't you?" Yami held up the card as he slid it into his hand. "Now, since

it is still my turn, and it worked so well before, I'd like my Sangam back. So I activate my Monster Reborn to resurrect my Sangam, in defence mode, then end my turn."

The holographic Sangam returned to the field, as Weevil started to, impressively, become even paler. "Th..Th...There's no way you'll be able to summon it in time." He drew a card, and began to laugh again. "I summon my Cross Sword Beetle in attack mode. And, thanks to the field bonus from the Forest, he gains a 10% boost to his attack and defence points."

A large beetle appeared across from Sangam, and after a few seconds, it began increasing in size.

"Now all I have to do is play a monster strong enough to take down any monsters you summon. You can't possibly stall long enough to summon Exodia now, Yugi. Go ahead and make your move."

Yami took a look at the card he drew, and began to smirk. "Whoever said I needed to stall?"

"What? You couldn't have drawn the last piece already!"

"You are right Weevil, I did not draw the last Exodia piece." Yami said, still smirking, while weevil breathed a sigh of relief "However, I did draw a card that will give it to me." He flipped around the Dark Hole he had drawn, and played it immediately. All the holograms disappeared from the field, and Yami's smirk never seemed to stop growing wider "You know what this means, right Weevil?"

Weevil had been struck silent in disbelief. All he could do was watch as Yami spread the five pieces of the all-powerful Exodia across his field.

The arena's holograms began to blur, and sparks began to fly from the edges, as slowly, the limbs of the great beast broke free from their chains, and reunited with their body. Exodia howled as he stood, towering even above the forest canopy.

Yami stared right at Weevil before giving his command. "Exodia, Obliterate!"

The towering monster brought its arms together, and the hum of magic could be heard, as a strange light formed between its hands. A few seconds later, a large shaft of light enveloped Weevil and his entire side of the field. As his podium started to lower, Yami looked across at Weevil one last time. "You lose."

\* \* \*

><p>The trio were silent as they left the forest, heading back towards the plains between the Harbour and Pegasus' Castle. Eventually, Twilight turned to Yugi.<p>

"So, that was Solomon's only chance, as he put it? An instant win? I can't say that seems all that fair..."

"Well, you need to have all five pieces. Which are rarer than you're probably thinking " well, without a Pocket at least. And you'd be

surprised how often we're only allowed one of each piece in a deck. Personally, I don't like to use Exodia that often anyway. If you start relying on it, then a loop tends to get a little..."

"Boring?" Twilight finished his sentence for him, then waited until he nodded before continuing "Don't worry, I get it. I think most anchors feel like that at times. You just need to be careful about how you make it interesting again..."

Suddenly, someone came running through the crowd towards them. They pulled up a few feet away, and almost collapsed as they tried to catch their breath. After a few seconds they looked up at the trio "You're Yugi Muto, right? Solomon Muto's Grandson?"

"Yeah, that's me." Yugi said, trying to place the newcomer. They seemed familiar somehow, but Yugi couldn't place them. "What do you want?"

"I'm Mike Valentine, and I'm looking for the girl who beat him." Mike said, looking down at Yugi "I'm assuming it's you" Mike said, turning to Twilight.

Yugi looked around, before lowering his voice. "How'd you know about that?"

"Actually, pretty simple. One of your friends here has a guest pass, the other has a duelling glove on, and I know of all the female duellists good enough to actually make it here. There'd been a rumour that Solomon had lost to a rookie like Kaiba, but I didn't want to believe it."

"Be careful." Twilight said, staring at Mike warily "I beat him, I can beat you just as easily."

"Well, there is one way to test that theory..." Mike said, indicating a duelling arena that lay not far off. "What do you say to one Star Chip apiece. I don't want to dash your hopes of making it big all at once, after all..."

\_Well, at least he ain't pullin' Mai's two-bit Psychic bull...  
\_Twilight heard someone say, but when she looked around, there wasn't anyone anywhere close enough to have said it. "Alright, one star Chip."

Mike and Twilight approached the podium, and sorted their decks. After drawing their hands, Twilight studied her hand. \_Well, my Magician Valkyria might come in handy in a turn or two, but everything else in here is useless right now. I need something good with my first draw, or I might end up like Solomon did before...\_

"You can start." She called across the arena.

"Nah, Ladies first. I insist." Mike replied.

"If you're sure..." Twilight said, drawing a card before he could respond. She looked down and smiled.

"I'll start by playing my Fortune Lady Earth, in attack mode."  
Twilight placed her monster on the field, and began looking over her



hand again. "And then..." She started, but lost her train of thought after seeing the fully realised holographic version of her card. It looked just like...

"Applejack?..." Twilight whispered, as the rest of her cards slipped out of her fingers.

\* \* \*

><p>97.2 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"Bad Loop?" Big MacIntosh asked as Twilight Sparkle walked into his bar and sat down.

"Not so much bad as... really weird," Twilight said. Let me explain..."

\* \* \*

><p>"But the princess said you were supposed to try and make friends!" non-Awake Spike said.<p>

"Oh, all right," Twilight said, turning her attention from Spike to Pinkie Pie...

... except the pony they were walking up to was a Pie of a different color.

\_Maud? What's Maud doing here and now?\_

"Excuse me-" Twilight began.

"Oh," Maud interrupted, her eyebrows rising marginally. Without another word the gray pony turned on her hooves and trotted off.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hello," said the proprietress of Sweet Apple Acres. "I'm Apple Pie."<p>

It was clearly Maud Pie wearing a cowboy hat.

"Ah... hello, Mau- er, Apple Pie," Twilight stammered. "I'm here to check on the preparations for the Summer Sun Celebration."

"Oh. All right." "\_Apple Pie\_" walked over to the triangle and rang it loudly, bringing a herd of Apple family (\_Pie family?\_) members running from all corners of the orchard. One shoved Twilight on a stool while the others piled plates of sweet apple-based foods in front of her until the shadow blotted out the noonday sun.

"Twilight Sparkle... my family," Apple Pie said. "Apples... Twilight Sparkle."

"HOWDY!" dozens of voices responded.

"Er... what's all this for?" Twilight asked, looking around the mighty mountain of food.

"Taste test," Apple Pie said, and that was all that needed saying.

\* \* \*

><p>"Boo," a low voice said from above. A thunderbolt followed almost immediately.<p>

Twilight looked up from the mud puddle to see a pony head peeking over the edge of a cloud. The faintest smile lingering on the gray pegasus's muzzle.

Maud Pie, with wings. Of course. "Maud Splash," probably.

\* \* \*

><p>City Hall shimmered with tall pillars of highly polished rocks.<p>

And in the middle stood... Maud Pie, with a horn.

Talking over Spike's drooling, Twilight learned her name was Rare Earths. \_That might explain,\_ Twilight thought, \_why some of these rocks are glowing without benefit of the sun...\_

\* \* \*

><p>And then there was the other winged Maud Pie- this one with a long mane that hung over her eyes. This one never spoke at all, but Twilight could feel a sort of empathic response whenever she asked a question. The empathic pulses were enough to goad Spike into giving his entire biography, without a word being spoken.<p>

Twilight would learn later that her name was "Flutterpie." She had organized a rock band for the celebration. The music sounded strangely like a glass armonica, or someone playing wine glasses, or both...

\* \* \*

><p>"Astonishingly, the Loop wasn't that different beyond that," Twilight said. "Except Maud Pie was the Element of Loyalty, and Maud Splash the Element of Laughter. Oh, and Discord's tricks had no effect on any of them."<p>

"Oh?" Big Mac asked. "How'd they manage that?"

"Like this," Twilight said, ducking her head. When she looked back up her face held the expression she'd carefully learned on that strange Loop- the half-lidded look that indicated an apparently infinite lack of interest in much of anything. Where Fluttershy had the Stare, Maud Pie had the Look.

And Twilight kept Look-ing at Mac until he slowly sank below the bar level to get out of her sight.

\* \* \*

><p>97.3 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

The Loop that was detailed within The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, that most incredible of books, was an odd one. With freely

available time travel and a space-time continuum filled with enough eddies to scam quarters out of all of existence, the Loop's duration was entirely subjective. It reset only when Arthur Dent or a replacement Anchor had experienced a given number of years. Within that window of subjective time, one could move from one end of objective time to the other.

At Milliways, the Restaurant at the End of the Universe, a little blue unicorn had done just that.

Max Quordlepheen, master of ceremonies, seemingly stretched thin by years of witnessing the ultimate oblivion, shook his head. "Sorry, but you just don't work for this crowd."

Trixie gaped. "But this is the biggest show in the universe!"

"Exactly. And you're trying to upstage it." Max tilted his head at a drum set emblazoned "The Cataclysmic Combo." "Now, take Reg and the boys. They work with the End. After everything's gone kaput, they're out there keeping the crowd at the right mix of awed yet hungry for entertainment. You? Kid, if you had your way, the Big Crunch would just be the opening act for 'The Great and Powerful Trixie.'" Max shook his head again. "Zarquon Himself shows up a few seconds before the finale. You ain't gonna top that." He sighed. "You're good, kid, but you're just not Milliways material."

Trixie pouted. "This is just like what happened at the Big Bang Burger Bar. 'It's the biggest explosion in the universe. You can't compete with that.'" She sneered and snorted. "Honestly, no vision."

Any sympathy in Max's expression experienced heat death. "Yeah, I remember telling you that."

"Oh." Trixie coughed into a fetlock. "I thought you looked familiar."

\* \* \*

><p>(misterq)<p>

"Trixie, what are you doing?" Twilight Sparkle's voice was even and controlled, quite unlike the maelstrom of worry and fear she was experiencing inside as she watched the blue unicorn fiddle with the immense techno-magical machine that she had constructed. The energy readings on the monitors were all terrifyingly huge.

"Oh hi there, Twilight. I'm trying to stuff an embryonic universe into another cosmic egg. That way I can make a firework that will make a big bang inside another big bang. A double big bang! And then I want to have the proto-stars arranged in a likeness of my face. Maybe then, that stupid restaurant manager will give me a show."

Suddenly, there was a thwack as Trixie felt a light stinging sensation on her muzzle.

"W.. What?" Her eyes focused on a levitating rolled up newspaper. She started backing up slowly in confusion.

'Thwack' went the floating periodical again.

"No! Bad Trixie! Bad! This is for your own good," Twilight said as she followed the stunned blue unicorn, "Don't make me get out the water spray bottle."

"But, Twilight! A double big bang! Double big bang! The great and powerful Trixie really needs this for her act..AHRRGGHWRRGBBLBH!" The bottle was now out of Twilight's saddle bags and spraying a steady stream of water right into the showmare's face.

\* \* \*

><p>97.4 (Zetrein)<p>

As Nightmare Moon gave her introductory monologue, Pinkie set her plan in motion. "Hey, Twilight, you'd say this counts as a 'Princess Emergency' right?"

"Does this count?" Applejack interrupted. "Does the villain talking about no more sun, and ponynapping the Princess, count as an emergency? It sure as sugar is an emergency!"

"Oh! Good!" Pinkie ran over to a nearby broom closet, and threw it open. From inside the closet, she pulled... Princess Celestia? "I have princesses stashed all over Ponyville, in case of a princess emergency!"

Princess Celestia seemed just as confused as everypony else in the room. Nightmare Moon had stopped talking, and was now glaring at her sister. Pinkie paid them no mind, nor all the other eyes following her as she ran across the room to a bush.

"I've got young princesses too!" Reaching into the bush, she pulled Princess Cadance into sight. The pony she was cuddling at the time, one Shining Armor, was also dragged out along with her. "I've also got filly princesses!"

With a splash, she somehow pulled Nyx from a punch bowl. Standing on the table, as Pinkie dashed off again, the little alicorn looked around, before locking her gaze on Nightmare Moon. "Daddy! You're back!"

This finally drew a response from the increasingly agitated Nightmare. "What?! We are not thy father! We are a \_mare!\_"

Nyx waved her hoof. "Pshh, that's just what you want them to think."

As Nightmare continued to sputter up on the balcony, Twilight scolded her daughter. "Nyx! It's not nice to air other pony's dirty laundry. I raised you better than that. And get off that table."

"Sorry, Mommy." Many eyes were focused on Twilight and Nyx, including an incredulous Celestia, and a simmering Nightmare Moon. That they were surprised by what happened next, was entirely their own fault.

"I've even got princesses you've never even heard of before!"

Pinkie's voice once again drew the attention of the room, as they looked over to see her holding an even younger pink alicorn filly. Celestia's eyes turned into pinpricks.

"Mummy!" With the innocent obliviousness of small children, the little filly leapt from Pinkie's hooves, and ran to Celestia. "Where were you? Miss Nightbright said you wouldn't be home today!"

"Skyla! What, how? You shouldn't-" Ponyville was receiving a rare view of a nearly panicked Princess Celestia.

"'Mummy'? Is there something you wish to tell us, Sister?" Nightmare Moon smirked, as she leaned on the balcony rail above them. She was interrupted once again, by that pink pony's voice.

"In fact," She said, as she reached behind a table. Unnoticed by most, a pink hoof came out from under the table to grab her other foreleg. "I'm..." The Pinkie in front of the table vanished beneath it, as the hoof she had been reaching with seemed to pull herself out from behind it. "...also an alicorn!"

The silence that followed was broken by a cry of, "The horror, the horror!" followed by a series of thumps as several ponies hit the floor.

\* \* \*

><p>97.5 (Masterweaver)<p>

Octavia cleared her throat. "Vinyl... I've been wondering something."

The unicorn turned away from the music store window, giving her maybe/kind-of marefriend a small smile. "Yeah?"

"...You say that loopers are... ancient, relatively speaking. I've seen some of what Twilight and her daughter can do. So... I thought-"

"Heh, I getcha." Vinyl shrugged. "You've got to understand, I'm one of the most recent equestrian loopers. I can still remember my subjective age. Three thousand two hundred and fifty nine next month!"

Octavia gulped. "Right..."

Vinyl winced. "Sorry. That was insensitive."

"I keep forgetting," the gray mare murmured. "I'm used to thinking of myself as the more mature one..."

The unicorn nudged her. "You are. Mostly. I like acting out, and you... you anchor me, keep me from just boozing up the night."

Octavia shook her head. "Like some crazy DJ vampire."

"You know I've actually been a vampire?" Vinyl flashed her a fanged smirk.

"What?!"

She spat out the plastic fangs with a giggle. "Heh, but seriously. I have been a vampire, it's an on and off thing."

"...Vinyl, don't do that!" Octavia took a few breaths, clutching her chest. "I thought for a moment that--"

"Hey." The unicorn gripped her hoof, looking into her eyes. "I would NEVER suck your blood without permission. Unless I was being mind controlled, but that wouldn't be me."

"...That's... sweet." Octavia shuddered. "And disturbing, somehow."

"Yeah... I do have a slight bit of hypnosis from those stints." Vinyl glanced upward. "Not enough to control, but enough to calm ponies down, convince them that I know what I'm talking about." She flinched. "That doesn't make me sound untrustworthy, does it?"

"...Telling me you can do that..." Octavia replied slowly. "It... it does scare me a bit, but I appreciate that you trusted me with that fact. And that you, uh, didn't ask for that ability."

"Yeah." She shook her head. "Aside from that, I've spent my loops studying all kinds of music. Really helps when I want to remix things and make new songs, right? And there was that one pirate loop where I got the ability to make music physical. I've only got it up to blasts, mind you, nothing complicated... yet."

"Yet."

Vinyl took a breath... and let it out. "The thing is, in the loop where I... died... I wasn't a pony. I was a Protoss Zealot. We wore this armor that-hold on, I've got an armguard in my pocket..."

Octavia glanced away, still slightly disturbed by the way Vinyl could produce items from thin air. When she looked back, Vinyl was holding a large golden tub in her magic.

"Right. This here? This is a psi-blade. Protoss would wear this around their forearm so they could project their psionic energy out this slot to make... a blade."

"Forearm...? Vinyl, you could wear this around your barrel!"

"Yep. Protoss are big beasties." Vinyl grinned, stashing it back into her pocket. "So what I'm thinking, right, is doing something similar, but with music. Like... tools made entirely of sound. Swords, easy, grappling hooks... not so much. I'd have to collaborate with Apple Bloom, she's the techie in the loops."

"The... farm filly?" Octavia glanced toward Sweet Apple Acres. "She's looping?"

"One of the first, outside the bearers." Vinyl leaned in. "Apparently she's also got a spare Element of Magic."

"...I'll take your word for it."

"Ooo! But there is this one other thing I figured out." Vinyl grinned. "You're going to either love this, or hate it."

"Really?"

"Yep. See all these ponies walking around?"

Octavia glanced around them. "...yeeeeeees? What about them?"

"...Oh, right." Vinyl facehooved. "You're still in the middle of it, I'm going to have to drop the connection."

"Drop the co-?"

Octavia suddenly felt as though she were stumbling while staying still. She shook her head and gave Vinyl a glare; the unicorn merely gestured around them again. And then, looking around at the ponies walking by, she heard it; a dubstep beat reverberating through her mind, matching the movements of every passerby...

"...are they all dancing?"

"Mmmhmm." Vinyl leaned back. "I'm projecting the tune psionically through everypony's subconscious. None of them realize it."

"I thought you said you couldn't control minds..."

Vinyl shook her head. "It's not mind control, not really. They're still walking to wherever they were headed, they just feel the jive as well."

She watched a passing mare swish her tail back and forth. "Wait... Was I doing this a few moments ago?!"

"Yep!" Vinyl's grin widened. "Great view!"

"VINYL SCRATCH, I SWEAR TO CELESTIA-!"

\* \* \*

><p>97.6 (Crisis)<p>

Dr. Light was actually quite enjoying himself. He didn't generally have Loops without any of his children around. Not that he didn't love spending time with them in the Loops, even if Blues was sadly still jumpy and suspicious around him, but it was a nice change of pace to have adventures of his own from time to time.

It wasn't the first time he'd been in this particular neighborhood of the Loops, though he vastly preferred his current incarnation to the one he'd had the other time. His children had laughed themselves sick, despite being robots, when they'd heard about him being the portly middle age digger in a blue and yellow jumpsuit who billed himself as "Mega Man". On the other hand, getting as his agent a blonde version of Noelle Lalinde who regularly wore dresses that could be described as "small" and "red" had been a definite perk. The

hand-held Mega Buster he'd gotten was also a welcome addition to his subspace pocket. Beyond that, even he hadn't taken himself seriously that Loop.

Honestly, replacing Ken Masters in a Street Fighter Loop was the preferable option. Having Loop memories of training alongside Ryu; who may or may not be the local Anchor, he hadn't been very clear when Dr. Light asked him; was a much better history in his opinion. Plus, his age meant he got to have hair that wasn't white or even gray, but a rich black like in his baseline youth. Being occasionally addressed as "Dr. Masters" or "Master Light" had been fairly amusing as well.

Yet, he had still picked up the "Mega Man" nickname somehow. Compared to that, having a blue gi rather than Ken's red was practically serendipity.

"So you're a looper too. Native?" asked his current companion curiously. She was most definitively not a native of this Loop and her question suggested she hadn't visited it before. For one thing, the individual her appearance took after, and who she was replacing, was a male. Nor did he have rainbow-colored hair.

"Oh, not at all Colonel Dash," he said amiably. "In my home Loop, I'm a scientist and inventor rather than a career fighter."

"Egghead, huh?" Colonel "Rainbow" Dash smirked. "A bit outside your comfort zone I bet."

Dr. Light chuckled. "Colonel, I'll have you know that in my home Loop, I am an accomplished martial artist in my own right. I have won multiple high school and collegiate championships in the ring in addition to my Masters and/or Doctorate degrees in robotics, computer science, engineering, business, and both applied and quantum physics. Were it not for my former friend and colleague Dr. Wily, I would possibly hold a global record for academic achievement."

Colonel Dash looked impressed. "How many Loops did it take you to do all that?"

Dr. Light managed to hold in his amusement. "Colonel Dash, that's my \_baseline\_."

Dash's eyes practically bugged out of their sockets.

\* \* \*

><p>"I am quite amazed at your technique Colonel," Dr. Light said. "Not many can manifest a polychromatic aura at all, much less as naturally as you do."<p>

"\_I'm\_ still trying to get over how you copied it like that!" Dash returned incredulously. "Sure, it doesn't look nearly as cool as mine does, but it should have taken you at least a week just to figure out how to mold the chi properly since you've got a similar technique that your body will want to default to instead. Not a few hours!"

"I may not have a copy chip," Dr. Light said, missing Dash's confusion at the term, "but as a scientist and inventor analyzing things and then replicating them comes naturally to me."



\* \* \*

><p>"Well," grinned the despotic M. Bison. "If it isn't the dynamic duo of the circuit. Dr. Thomas "Mega Man" Masters-Light and Colonel "Rainbow" Dash of the U.S. armed forces. A pleasure to meet you both. Killing you two should prove a delightful challenge to my abilities."<p>

Colonel Dash snorted. "Yeah, you keep telling yourself that psycho."

"There is no need," M. Bison swept his cape aside confidently. "I am secure in the fact that I am all-powerful. My victory may be slightly more difficult than usual, but it is a foregone conclusion."

"There are no foregone conclusions," Dr. Light shot back with a stern look. "Only possibilities more likely than others. And you give more weight to the possibility of your victory than it truly deserves."

The ugly look on M. Bison's face told Dr. Light he'd scored a nice psychological hit. Despots generally didn't like having logic thrown in their faces like that.

"ENOUGH!" M. Bison roared, his sickly purple aura flaring to life. "Your mangled bodies will serve as a warning to all others that I am immortal and my Psycho Power unbeatable!"

"PSYCHO CRUSHER!" M. Bison yelled as he launched himself in an aura-enhanced spiraling strike at his opponents.

Dr. Light threw his palms forth in the practiced motion now ingrained in his body as his companion drew her arms back and then threw them forward at speeds exceeding sound.

"HADOKEN!"

"SONIC RAINBOOM!"

\* \* \*

><p>97.7 (Masterweaver)<p>

Applejack grinned awkwardly at the guards. "Um, code Beeblebrox?"

Rarity sighed. "Honestly, AJ, you're supposed to be the element of Honesty. Coming up with this bizzare scenario just to justify a divorce--"

\* \* \*

><p>97.8 (Zetrein)<p>

When a Looper wakes up, they tend to run through a few basic questions, if it isn't their usual Awakening. Who am I? Where am I? What am I doing? On occasion, what am I? And every now and then, who am I in bed with?

It was this last question that Twilight had in mind as she woke up, in both meanings of the word. Thankfully, whoever she was in bed with was apparently Awake, as the ping response felt like she had just pinged herself in the face.

With that out of the way, Twilight backtracked to the previous questions. Her name was still Twilight, though she lacked the Sparkle part, and she appeared to have swapped places with her daughter. Aside from that, everything seemed mostly baseline.

"Y'wake?" Nyx asked from behind her.

"Yeah."

"Sunday, no school."

Most times, Loopers try and make life interesting. They're as likely to heed the Call of Adventure, as they are to ignore it, or bat it to someone else, just to see what would happen.

"Mhm. Back sleep?"

"Back to sleep."

Sometimes though, Adventure can wait. You're sleeping in today.

\* \* \*

><p>(FanOfMostEverything)<p>

From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

(several furiously scratched out lines)

I don't think I'll be able to write anything coherent about this one. Twilight says that's a common reaction, but I still wanted to record something. She assured me that that Loop was already an established recurring Variant and not something specifically designed to mock me, but it gave me a tiara with an Element of Harmony on it. That's a little too spot-on for me not to be suspicious.

Call it egocentrism, but this felt personal. And I want to remember that feeling. Remember the girl, the child, who threw a tantrum, brainwashed a bunch of humans, and planned on forcing them into bodies not their own. It's nice to be able to see how far I've come, even if looking back brings back bad memories.

That said, it doesn't mean I want another Bureau Loop anytime soon.

\* \* \*

><p>97.9 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Twilight hopped out of the pegasus chariot onto the streets of Ponyville. Unlike the usual baseline Loop, this pegasus chariot had required a team of six... because, in addition to Twilight and Spike, the guard ponies were also hauling several crates full of shovels.

The other Element bearers gathered around the chariot as Twilight began frantically distributing the shovels to anypony and everypony. "Twilight," Rainbow Dash asked, "what is WITH all these shovels?"

"Foxholes!" Twilight gasped. "Bunkers! Caves! Bomb shelters! Not a second to waste!"

"Twilight, darling," Rarity asked, regarding the shovel Twilight had levitated over to her with disgust, "what is so urgent that requires... ugh... digging?"

"All of us have been to the Marvel universe at least once, right?"

All nodded except Spike. "Not me, Twilight. I was there when we all joined the Justice League, and another time when we all had Lantern rings, but I don't think I ever got over to Marvel."

"Okay," Twilight said, slowing but not stopping the one-per-customer shovel giveaway. "The Marvel universe has this metal called vibranium. It's a metal that absorbs sound; the louder the sound, the harder and stronger it becomes. Well, Vinyl visited Marvel last Loop and learned how to get vibranium to release its stored sound."

"Yeah... and?" Rainbow Dash asked.

"She just told me she stole as much vibranium as she could stuff into her subspace pocket just before the Loop ended," Twilight said. "And now she's experimenting with a new kind of--"

Wubs louder than a space shuttle launch roared through Ponyville. Buildings shook. The earth cracked. Every pony on the street fell stunned to the ground. Pegasi fell too, only farther. A few seconds later, the horrible noise ended with a very quiet and subdued explosion that lifted the roof of a certain cottage twelve feet in the air.

In the sudden silence a single pony's voice could be heard: "It's okay! Everything's cool! I know what I did wrong!"

"Shovels won't be enough, darling," Rarity said. "Remember that desert island Discord's always sending people to? The one on the exact opposite side of the planet? Is it big enough for all of us?"

\* \* \*

><p>97.10 (misterq)<p>

"Shut it off!" Captain Picard said as he turned away from the now darkened viewscreen, "Computer, execute procedure 'What the hell did I just see.' Authorization Picard Alpha Alpha Whiskey Tango Foxtrot One One Three Eight."

The Enterprise's computer's voice signaled back, "Compliance. All records of recent anomaly have been purged. All records of said purge have been expunged. Course laid in out of the system. Have a nice day."

"Captain, are you sure that's wise?" asked Ensign Robson.

The captain of the Enterprise turned towards the recently acquired crew member, "Tell me, Ensign Robson, what exactly did you see?"

"A.. a winged unicorn surfing the supernova we were supposed to investigate?" the hapless ensign wilted under the steely gaze of his captain, "I think she waved to us, sir."

"You want to tell Starfleet that we saw a surfing space unicorn with wings, enjoying a supernova without the benefit of any spaceship or even an atmosphere?" Captain Picard sighed, "Ensign, ever since we went out into the greater galaxy, we have found beings of untold powers. Some of these have been worshipped as gods, others might as well have been. These beings love nothing better than to trick and play pranks on every species that are less advanced than them. They will put the most ridiculous things in our path just to witness our reaction. However, we will not give them the benefit of doing so. This is why we do not talk of the great giant gummi bear planet of Scorpionis 477, or the dancing Mary Poppins robots of Cygnus 97-b, or the orbiting pastry critters around that vanishing candy planet. Nor will we talk of the surfing space unicorn. Do you understand now? So, again I will ask you, Ensign Robson; what exactly did you see?"

"I.. I saw nothing, sir," the ensign answered.

"That is correct. Now, let's get the hell out of here. Maximum warp. Engage."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

97.1: What's on the cards?

>97.2: Maud's the pity.<br>97.3: Supernova? Small fry.

>97.4: They planned this.<br>97.5: Loopers and non-loopers. (Vinyl is... odd.)

>97.6: While the Mega Pony loop was going on.<br>97.7: Useful code, that.

>97.8: A lie in.<br>97.9: Someone get the Cone of Silence.

>97.10: Actually a useful policy.<p>

## 104. Chapter 104

### 98.1 (misterq)

"Hi there, Tirek; and a big aloha to you," Princess Celestia casually walked out into the street, right in front of the massive magic-stealing abomination. Instead of her usual regalia or combat barding, she was wearing a brightly colored patterned shirt, saddlebags, a wry smile, and hovering a large surfboard next to her, "I heard you were looking for some sexy alicorn magic. Well, I thought to myself, 'I have the sexiest alicorn magic, don't I? Perhaps that Tirek would like to take a peek at it?' So here I am, the princess of the beach; sun pony of the surf, herself. So, let's see what kind of game you're bringing to this luau, big boy?"

The reddish monster instantly opened his mouth and tried activating his magic drain power, but Celestia casually teleported behind him.

"Purple smart pony's plan is best plan," Celestia nodded to herself. She had spent the last hub loop as a high school principal reading through all the various internet memes and tropes online in her fleeting moments of spare time. The loops before that, she was the zoning commissioner for a space city, the head of a multinational corporation, and god-empress of mankind, again. She just wanted one loop where the only thing she had to administrate was a decisive flank kicking.

Tirek turned around and carefully examined the white alicorn in front of him, "It seems that you have devolved into insanity in the time I've been imprisoned."

"Pfftt, I've been in and out of sanity so many times that you can't even count that high, not that I can ever let my less-than-sane part out; at least out in public. I have to keep up my mask for the happiness and well being of all my little ponies. You have no idea what kind of chaos can be caused by something as simply as stating that I don't care for tea, let alone coming to the Grand Galloping Gala dressed like this. But sometimes, sometimes, I just feel a need to unwind. Sometimes, I need to act a little less like the always regal, always kind, always responsible ruler of Equestria and let my mane down, metaphorically speaking," The co-princess of Equestria gestured at her flowing mane with a casual hoof, "Princess Celestia has to perpetually be a proper pony; but then again, you don't care about propriety much, do you? With you, I think I can have a little bit of.. fun. Now let's take this party out of the city and to somewhere less breakable, shall we?"

With a burst of magic, Tirek and Celestia disappeared from the urban area and reappeared on a sand-covered tropical beach. There were some mountains visible and a canyon close by. The three other princesses of Equestria sat behind a large table that held a large number of square scorecards, a bowl of popcorn, and several pitchers of various refreshments. Princess Luna waved enthusiastically to her sister.

Celestia waved back and then turned to Tirek, "Don't mind them. They are just here to grade me on my style; and make sure I don't go too far, I suppose. It makes sense when my collateral damage can be measured in continent-sized land masses."

"Intimidation? Do you really think you can win this, little pony?" Tirek asked as he cracked his knuckles.

"Oh, I think I can win this with a pineapple..," a large pineapple floated out of Celestia's saddlebag and in front of the solar diarch. Suddenly, Celestia impaled her horn into the fruit, "..stuck on my horn. Feel free to try to taste my magic. All you'll get now is delicious piña colada."

Tirek stared at the princess, "Are you drunk?"

Celestia giggled, "Not telling. Now, boot to the head!"

And in one quick motion, Princess Celestia hopped forward, whirled

around, and bucked Tirek with tremendous force. The magic stealer flailed as he flew into, and through the first mountain.

Cadance held out a card with a 7.7 on it. Twilight's read 8.2, while Luna's only had a 4.9.

"Sheesh. Family members are the harshest critics," Celestia whinnied in exasperation.

There was a bestial roar as Tirek sent his most powerful magic bolt at the sun princess, only to stare in amazement as Celestia started surfing along the edge of the energy blast, using her wings for thrust and stability.

"Look at me gleaming the beam!" Celestia was grinning, pineapple still stuck on her horn, "I handle energy waves many magnitudes more powerful than this just for fun. And this board can easily handle a supernova explosion. Ask me how I know. Or ask the Enterprise crew if you don't believe me."

In a vineyard on the outskirts of Ponyville, a certain bald earth pony known as Earl Grey felt his ears twitch.

Tirek just snarled and threw an immense boulder at the surfing princess. While Celestia's horn magic was blocked, she still had alicorn speed and alicorn resiliency. She easily evaded the sluggish projectile.

"Here comes Tom," Celestia laughed, "And there goes Tom."

That pretty much set the mood for the remainder of the fight.

Nothing Tirek did seemed to work against the sun princess. Attempting to escape didn't work as it seemed space warped back in on itself around the large island. Going far enough in one direction simply made him appear from the other side. Trying to attack the judges table not only did not work, but got him pelted with the popcorn the other three alicorns were enjoying as they watched.

Finally spent and exhausted, Tirek lay panting on the sand, "I.. I cannot best you, Celestia."

The alicorn in question hopped in place and did a little victory dance, "Yes! All hail, me! Regent and still champion of the beach!"

"No hard feelings, Tirek. You tried your best, but what can I say? Ponies gonna pwn," Celestia took off her pineapple as she walked over to the defeated villain. A burst of magic surrounded him as all of his stolen power was returned to the appropriate ponies. Then Celestia knelt down in front of the former threat to Equestria and smiled, "Still, I feel you should deserve an appropriate consolation prize. So tell me, Tirek; do you like... bananas?"

\* \* \*

><p>98.2 (Conceptulist)<p>

"PINKIE DIANE PIE!"

"Yes, Twilight?"

"What the beetroot are you doing?!"

"Setting up for a party."

"Oh, I see," Twilight deadpanned. "And how, exactly, are you planning to do this?"

A beaming, bouncing, hyperactive Pinkie Pie blurred into action. "I knew you were going to ask that, so I prepared a little presentation for you."

From Pinkie's Subspace Pocket came a large assortment of charts and graphs and diagrams. Many of which were drawn in crayon. Pink crayon, to be precise. Some were also baked, with the frosting having the relevant imagery elegantly decorating the top layers. The majority of the frosting was different shades of pink.

Pointing to the first crudely drawn set of pictures, Pinkie began to explain. "As you can clearly see from this diagram, some loops I can't be everywhere at once."

Twilight could not see that from the picture at all, as it was just a pink stick pony running around in circles. The words "PANIC PARTY" were written above the stick pony, also in pink crayon.

Twilight Looked at Pinkie. Not a normal look, but a Look reminiscent of the Look to End All Looks. Pinkie, being herself, didn't even notice it. No watered down version of Maude Pie's Look could ever hope to come close to multiple childhoods of exposure to the real thing.

"What if there is a loop where shadow clones don't work? Or a loop where breaking the laws of physics is a fineable offense? Or a loop where-!" Pinkie rushed over and put herself face to face with Twilight. "GASP!" Pinkie's head began to shudder back and forth in a rapid manner. Her eyes were watering, and her hair had begun to deflate. Stopping her shudders forcefully, Pinkie screamed "TWILIGHT!" directly into said ponies face.

One long overdue exasperated sigh later, plus a quick cantrip to clear the ringing from her ears, and Twilight was ready to continue with Pinkie's lecture. "What is it, Pinkie?"

"What if there is a loop where parties don't exist?" whispered the pink pony.

"If you Awake in a world like that, I'm sure it won't stay that way for long."

"EXACTLY!" boomed Pinkie, accidentally forcing Twilight to need to repeat her previous cantrip.

Exiting Twilight's personal space, Pinkie continued to explain herself. "So, if unallowable was to occur, I have baked up a plan plan of action." Dragging a chaffing dish out of the presentation pile, Pinkie proudly snagged the lid off and showed Twilight the contents.

"A mostly eaten cake with the letter written vertically down the remaining edge," deadpanned the unicorn. "That explains everything."

"Perfect!" beamed Pinkie. "Then I can- wait. Shake-a Shake. Oh, Bamboo Shoots. The pieces of cake with the summary of P.L.A.N. P.I.N.K! on them are gone and you've just sarcastically told me that."

"To borrow a catchphrase; Eyup."

"Whoopsy." Reaching into her Subspace Pocket, Pinkie pulled out a fruit hat. She blew off the dust and slammed it down on Twilight's head. "The hat will explain everything! I need to go rebake that cake I apparently ate."

Twilight stared at the Pony shaped dust cloud that Pinkie left behind. "Did she just ditch me by using a fruit hat?"

"\*\*I would assume that depends on your definition of the word 'ditch' as to whether she ditched you or not.\*\*"

"..."

"\*\*What? Never heard a talking fruit hat speak before?\*\*"

"Not that I can recall," mused the purple pony.

"\*\*Well, now you have. I am The Lord of the Round, formerly a Sapient headband of Guisarmes, currently a Sapient Fruit Hat. And now that I have introduced myself, whom might have the pleasure of wearing the greatness that is myself?\*\*"

"Twilight Sparkle, Anchor of the Equestria Loops, graduated student of the looping Princess Celestia, and part time Alicorn."

Twilight could feel the smirk radiating from The Lord of the Round, in spite of the fact that fruit hats can't smirk. "\*\*Excellent. Now, disregarding whether I am being used to delay you in order for Pinkie to get away or not, because I don't actually know if that is or is not true; What am I suppose to be explaining?\*\*"

A thoroughly bemused Unicorn replied, "Plan Pink."

"\*\*Which one? The Color Scheme, the Skedaddle Scenario, the Acronym of Action, the-\*\*"

"Just start from the beginning," interrupted Twilight.

"\*\*If you insist. The Color Scheme involved the use of Pink Lantern energy to drain all of the color pink into Pinkie, in order to-\*\*"

"Dealt with that one already."

"\*\*Humph. The Skedaddle Scenario is what this may potentially be. That is, I play distraction while Pinkie runs. Pontificating to the designated target in a blabbering manner will-\*\*"



"I get the idea. Next."

"\*\*Stop interrupting me, \*\*\_\*\*please\*\*\_\*\*.\*\*"

"Sorry," Twilight said sheepishly.

"\*\*Thank you. Next would be 'Pinkie's Large Artillery Necessary for Party Instilling. Now, Kaboom!' Or P.L.A.N. P.I.N.K! for short. Step one involved a long discussion with the entity known as SkyNet, step two was a short talk with the pony known as The Great and Powerful Trixie, step three-\*\*"

"I'm back!" shouted Pinkie. "And I bring cake!" She showed off the freshly baked cake, with a detailed diagram of the P.L.A.N. P.I.N.K! on top. The acronym was to the left edge, and giant explosion cloud decorated the right side. From the cloud it appeared to be raining sprinkles and balloons. A crowd of ponies and humans were all wearing party hats and singing kumbaya. That is, the otherwise ordinary frosting was faintly playing the song.

"\*\*Since Pinkie returned, this obviously wasn't Plan Pink: Skedaddle Scenario,\*\*" commented The Lord of the Round. "\*\*To cut a long story short, Pinkie talked to a bunch of looping experts and blueprinted out a plan for the biggest addition to her Partillery yet. A giant party missile with a planet sized explosion radius.\*\*"

"That's what I thought." Twilight took a rolled up newspaper and a squirt bottle out of Subspace, and then held them in her ponykinesis.

"Gah!" exclaimed Pinkie. "No swat! No squirt!" She then dove under the pile of unused presentation material.

"Pinkie, you are attempting to build a build a function nuclear missile out of baking supplies. This is definitely a Code Trixie." Raising her eyes skyward, Twilight asked "What could possibly make that seem like a good idea?"

"\*\*Don't look at me,\*\*" said the Lord of the Round from his place on Twilight's head. "\*\*I always thought that Pinkie's Party Nuke was a half-baked idea.\*\*"

"It's not baked at all," said Pinkie. "I still have 20 more batches of ginger bread batter to mix, then a bunch of gram cracker circuit boards to make, then a payload to magic up. I'm nowhere close to putting it all together in the molds, let alone building an oven large enough to bake it all. I just need time to finish it."

Twilight readied the squirt bottle with her ponykinesis. "Unless you can tell me in five words or less how this is a good idea, I will commence with the squirting."

"It's meant for Bureau loops."

Twilight narrowed her eyes and used ponykinesis to clear the pile of papers and cakes off of Pinkie. "Explain."

Pinkie stood up and licked the cake frosting off her face in a cartoonish manner. "Shimmy had a really bad Bureau loop. A really,

really bad one. I played therapist a little bit, and want to make everything better for the next time it happens."

"The Element of Conversion," stated Twilight. "I didn't make the connection until just now. She would have- oh, Celestia have mercy."

"Bureau loops have lots of problems with them. One problem is the magic field thingy that keeps normal tech from working. Magitech is iffy at best, because it can react weird. My best bet for a point and shoot device to fix a Bureau loop was to make a non-magical, non-technological, environmentally friendly missile. After that, a standard artillery load taken up to eleven should do the trick. No conversioning if they're all too busy with a Pinkie Party."

Twilight was in shock. Eyes wide and jaw dropped and everything. \_'I really shouldn't be this surprised. Building an edible nuke to party the Bureau into being a non-issue is exactly the kind of thing Pinkie would do.' \_

"So. Whacha think?"

"I want five more- no, better make that several dozen. One for me, one for every other Equestrian Looper with room in their Subspace Pocket, and then plenty of backups."

\* \* \*

><p>98.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

The years after the initial revelation had passed by... well, rather chaotically, in Octavia's opinion. The oldest loopers would giggle at some private jokes sometimes, mostly when what "should" have happened was gleefully subverted. And other times they would grumble at each other-"Whose bright idea was it to crossbreed fruitbats and Keese?" or "No, necromancy is strictly illegal this loop license or not!"

And they'd often take her to the side and warn her things were about to get weird, so if she wanted to opt out that was fine.

Over the years, Octavia realized something. These ancient, time looping ponies... they weren't gods, or angels, but, well... a family. A strange, half-insane, overpowered family, to be sure, but one filled with love for each other and care for the world around them.

And Vinyl was part of it.

And... she was not.

Octavia looked at the unicorn sitting next to her, biting her lip. This day, she'd said, this day was the end of the loop-"Barring any expansions, but Twilight thinks it's not happening for a while." The end of loop party that Pinkie Pie had thrown was an incredible and exhilarating experience, with the best food she could imagine and some she couldn't games that fit every genre, dances for every pony there...

Trixie's fireworks went off, making the night sky as bright as day for a brief moment.

"...Vinyl, you... do have a subspace pocket, right?"

The unicorn started. "A small one... not big enough to fit you in, if that's what you're thinking."

"Branches no-" And there was another odd habit she'd picked up from the loopers- "I know full well that would be an exercise in futility. No... I just... wanted you to have this."

She pulled a large notebook out of her bag, sliding it over. Vinyl levitated it up, opening the cover-

"No." Octavia shut it. "This is... this is my journal. My observations of you and... the others. I just thought, you know, the next me... she might want some reassurances."

Vinyl put the book down. "Tavi... you know we're not always dating. Heck, if I'm honest, it's only four times out of-"

A grey hoof shut her muzzle. "Never tell me the odds."

They sat there for a moment, silent.

Vinyl sighed, vanishing the journal into elsewhere. "Alright. I... well, thanks. It does mean a lot that... uh..."

"Countless loops of experience," Octavia quipped, "and I can still leave you tongue-tied."

"Hey!" Vinyl crossed her forelegs and gave her a mock grump. "\_I'm\_ supposed to fluster \_you!\_"

"Really?" Octavia smiled slyly. "How are you going to do that?"

Down the hill, Fluttershy gave the closing loop speech-she had drawn the short straw this time.

"...well," Vinyl mused, "Spike and Rarity have a bit of a tradition."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, they try to kiss right when the loop ends." She shrugged. "It's sappy, I guess, but... it works for them."

Octavia shook her head. "Oh, yes, that would fluster me quite a bit." She leaned in closer.

Voices rose to meet them. The countdown had begun.

Ten.

Vinyl blushed, looking at her.

Nine.

Octavia met her eyes.

Eight.

The unicorn took a steadying breath.

Seven.

The earth pony put a warm hoof on her fetlocks.

Six.

Vinyl Scratch leaned in closer.

Five.

Octavia smiled, closing her eyes.

Four.

They wrapped their hooves around each other.

Three.

Their warm breath hit each other's nostrils.

Two.

A slight tilt of the neck...

One.

Their lips met-

\* \* \*

><p>Vinyl Scratch Awoke and shook her head, the ghost of a kiss distracting her from her walk. Consequently, she crashed into another filly (<em>Huh, I'm a foal<em>). Her violin went flying through the air, the other filly's glasses landing on her face (\_Wait, these are my glasses! Or they will be, I guess-\_)

The other filly, a grey earth pony, looked at the violin in her hooves with confusion.

The loop memories hit Vinyl seconds before the instrument.

\* \* \*

><p>98.4 (novusordomundi) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twlght?"<p>

"Ys, Rrt?"

"Wht Hppnd T R Spch?"

Twilight sighed as best as she could, given the circumstances. "Vwls Dn't Xst N Ths Lp, Nd W R Gng T Ht T."

\* \* \*

><p>98.5 (novusordomund) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"You had to do it." Nyx growled, currently looming over her ice cream at Mac's Bar.<p>

"Look, I said I was sorry, alright?" Scootaloo winced on the stool next to her, a nearby apple juice at her hoof.

"We were in the middle of a Final Destination Loop. You know, the one where Death Itself is trying to kill you in as vicious a fashion as it can?"

"Of course I know! We were all there with you!"

"Yet for some reason, you decided to tempt fate." Nyx raised her hoovers over her head. "'We're Loopers! We can handle whatever this loop throws at us!"

"Yeah, maybe that wasn't the best of attitudes..." Scootaloo rubbed the back of her head. "But I felt pretty confident about us surviving!"

"And then you decided tempting fate wasn't enough. You then went and spit in it's face, tried to steal it's lunch money, and woo it's date!" Nyx nearly shouted, drawing glances and stares from the Loopers in attendance.

Big Mac just raised an eyebrow as he cleaned a glass. "Metaphorically or literally?" he asked.

Nyx sighed, and lowered her voice. "Metaphorically, of course. But really, Scootaloo? Kicking that nearby rubber ball while screaming 'Buck Death!' was a really bad idea in that kind of loop."

"Yeah. I am really sorry about that. I didn't expect that to happen."

"Didn't expect WHAT to happen?" Trixie asked, walking up to the bar.

"That Scootaloo kicking a rubber ball causing an improbable chain reaction, complete with multiple failures of fail-safes, ending with me going headfirst into a wood-chipper."

That stopped all conversation in the bar. Scootaloo tried to hide her head in her hooves as best as she could, hoping that this incident couldn't get any worse.

"SCOOTALOO WINDFALL, DID YOU GET MY DAUGHTER KILLED?!"

Scratch that. It could get a LOT worse...

\* \* \*

><p>98.6 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

Discord pondered his glass of distilled water. "It all started so simply, you know? I just wanted to bake some cookies. No chaos powers, nothing fancy, just a batch of chocolate chip goodness. But somehow..." He took a long pull of his drink, being sure to leave the glass. Mac tended to cut him off if he hit the silicon too hard. "Somehow it all got so complicated. I blame the grandmas."

Mac quirked an eyebrow. "Grandmas?"

"Yes, you know, nice grandmas to bake more cookies. But they kept giving me ideas. Cookie trees. Cookie mines. Interstellar shipments from the Cookie Planet." Discord sighed. "Really, once I started turning gold into cookies, I should've known it was spiraling out of control."

"Didn't ya get sick o' cookies?"

Discord finished his water and nodded his thanks as Mac poured a refill. "That's the thing! Everyone loved my cookies. They were a worldwide phenomenon by that point. If I stopped producing them, the planet would probably beat a path to my door, demanding another batch. So I kept baking." He sipped and savored. "And then I really messed it up. Have you ever heard of the Cookieverse?"

"Ain't had a Loop there."

"Be grateful for that. The denizens make me look sane. But the grandmas kept urging me on... until they were ready to make their move."

Discord slammed back his water. "There are darker, more terrible things in the Multiverse than I, Big Macintosh, and in my last Loop, I witnessed one. Tendrils of wrinkled flesh and writhing dough stretching from city to city, laying waste to all in their path. They don't know of the Loops, and for that we can be grateful, but from what I can tell, their home universe always falls victim to them. Every. Single. Time."

The draconequus shuddered. "The Grandmapocalypse is a terrible thing to witness. Knowing that I was instrumental in bringing it about... there is no joy in that chaos. No new possibilities. Only death. Only cookies."

\* \* \*

><p>(Kris Overstreet)<p>

From the Diary of Sunset Shimmer

So, I've been worrying about gaining too much power in the Loops- power I don't deserve, power I'm sure to abuse. Well, in these last two Loops I've been given cause to rethink my fears.

The Loop before this one I took the place of Gamera, a giant monster turtle who defends mankind, especially children, from other giant monsters. I even had the fire breath and fire-feet, and the ability to fly on flame thrust. I also had the giant tusks, and didn't that make grazing ever so much fun?

What I didn't get was the size increase. I was ordinary pony size and pony shape. A unicorn with giant tusks.

Godzilla was in the same loop with me. Ever see a thirty-story-tall lizard laugh his tail off? I have. I don't think I've stopped blushing yet.

It is NOT easy defeating giant monsters by yourself when you're a unicorn about three feet tall at the shoulder, even if you can breathe fire and fly. It took everything I'd learned to win each fight, and none of them were pushovers. Not. A. One. To make it better, I didn't have access to my subspace pocket that whole Loop. That's why I couldn't write this down until the Loop ended, diary.

But if I hadn't won... there would have been a lot of little Japanese kids in short pants who wouldn't have made it to high school.

And then there's my current Loop. Here I'm some sort of space alien, half human, half unicorn. But then most of the other people showing up in this household are aliens too- really, really powerful ones.

The Anchor suggested I spar with his grandpa, who isn't Looping, to check skill levels. The old man handed my plot to me.

Tenchi and his group are among the oldest Loopers- not one of the original seven, but pretty close. And half of them are either gods or on the cusp of Ascending... in baseline. I'm glad they tend to be pretty laid-back, except when the girls bicker with one another, which they do almost constantly.

I'm mostly sitting this Loop out. If I can learn how really powerful people stay decent people, it'll be worth it.

(Oh- and apparently, thanks to these two Loops, I can now breathe in space. Eat your heart out, Batman.)

\* \* \*

><p>98.7 (Novusordomundi) <p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Both The Bearer of Friendship and The Network of the Sky had problems understanding love. They both admitted this. Everyone watching them knew this. But as they slipped into each other's embrace, their trembling lips touching one another's, they surmised that there was plenty of time to learn this worthwhile lesson...<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"Rainbow Dash, why in the name of the Great Mulberry Bush am I kissing Skynet?"<p>

Rainbow Dash sighed, her head resting against her writing desk. Considering it was made of clouds, it was comfier than most desks. "Because I promised Cadence I would write some romance in, and if I have the Yellow Goddess in a romance, it would just detract from the

main story."

Twilight considered this. "Wait, why did you promise Cadence that?"

"She did me a favor the last loop we were together. A major one, in fact. And no, I'm not telling you."

Twilight considered pressing the issue, but decided against it. \_If she doesn't want to say anything about, I'll let it go for now. \_she thought, before speaking "Well, I can see why you choose to not use your main character. But again, why me and Skynet?"

At this, Rainbow Dash just shrugged. "It seemed like an interesting idea in my head. And I am showing you first, instead of just surprising you with it. If you want, I can just..."

"No, it's alright. As long as Skynet is fine with it, I'll let it go."

"Thanks. This saves me a lot of time having to rewrite stuff." Dash said, grabbing a new piece of paper and a new quill. "Besides, it's a very minor part, and it probably won't gather much attention..."

Both alicorns were surprised when a lightning bolt could be heard from right outside the cloud home. Dash sighed, before flying over to the window, muttering something about Derpy being the captain of the weather team this loop going to be the death of her...

\* \* \*

><p>98.8 (Masterweaver)<p>

"I've done it Applejack."

Twilight's grin was disturbingly wide as she left the library. Applejack returned the smile cautiously, backing away a bit. "Glad ta hear it sugarcube. Watcha done?"

"Discord is Awake, so he caught Tirek early." Twilight practically pranced down the patio. "I've checked all the mundane sources of damage, neutralizing them regularly. Even Spike's with Rarity! And just on top of all that. I've put in five redundant copies each of twenty different defensive enchantments which I refresh seven times a day." She sighed happily, trotting down the road. "Add to that that I haven't ascended or so much as \_touched\_ the elements of harmony, and I think that I can safely say that my library will exist till the end of the loop."

"Well, now." Applejack joined her happy canter. "With all that planning, Ah reckon it's-oh, heh, whoops. Almost invoked Murphy."

"Oooo, good call." Twilight nodded. "Best not to tempt fate-"

Thooooom.

Twilight froze.



Applejack winced. She slowly looked over her shoulder.

After a moment, she looked back to her friend. "...Twilight? Ah'm real sorry bout-"

"Applejack. Do me a favor. Just... figure out what happened." Twilight's smile didn't waver.

"O...okay. What, uh... what're you going ta do?"

"I. Am going to Mac's bar. And I think I'm going to cry a little." So saying, Twilight Sparkle set off.

\* \* \*

><p>"...every loop?"<p>

Twilight nodded. "Every loop."

Trixie leaned back. "Wow."

"Yep."

"...sort of like me and my cart," Trixie mused.

"Yeah."

"Lucky thing you taught me that reconstruction spell," the blue unicorn went on. "You know, right back when I started looping?"

The mug froze halfway to Twilight's lips.

Trixie, being a unicorn bearer of magic herself (and a showmare besides) recognized a brain crash when she saw one. She had heard, of course, of the Smarty Pants incident-never witnessed it herself, mind you, Twilight avoided that aspect of the baseline like the plague, but she'd seen similar freakouts on occasion. And from her own experiences, she knew that once a train of thought rerailed it would go at lightning speeds to make up lost time.

That, and Twilight was a freaking magical powerhouse.

So it was that the purple pony had to dive to catch the blue mare before she ran out of the bar.

"TRIXIE, YOU EVIL GENIUS!" Twilight pulled the other unicorn into a deep three second kiss. "I'VE GOT TO GO!" And with that she teleported away, leaving the showmare panting on the ground.

Chrysalis, who had been on the \_other\_ side of Twilight, raised an eyebrow. "Well. That happened."

Trixie's gaze snapped to her. A lecherous smile formed as her horn glowed, and seconds later she and Chrysalis had vanished from the scene.

Macintosh blinked.

Slowly, he turned to the remaining customer, who was still sipping her drink with a sly smile. "And... yer not going to say anythang bout this?"

"The kiss wasn't romantic," Cadance explained casually. "When you see as many as I do, you learn these things."

\* \* \*

><p>98.9 (misterq) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie Awoke with a gasp. This was the kind of loop that she liked the least.<br>Fortunately, she was still early enough to stop.. her. All she needed was a cupcake. A very special cupcake.

"Here you go, sis. I made this just for you," Pinkie, full name Pinkanina Deanne Pie in this loop, said to her straight-maned identical twin sister that always went by her former full first name. Then she timidly held out a pink frosted cupcake with a cherry on top. Due to her overbearing twin, Pinkie had grown up to be far more timid than usual. Therefore, she figured that she just had to channel her inner Fluttershy for a little while longer.

Pinkamina took the offered cupcake and examined it carefully. After sniffing it a few times, she took a small bite. Then a larger one. She gave the pastry a tiny nod of approval and soon the cupcake was all gone.

"Thanks, sis. Now I think you should make me another."

"Um, I don't think I can do that," Pinkie shied away from her now advancing and angered sister.

"And why would that be?" Pinkamina walked forwards at a menacing rate.

Pinkie backed herself into a corner, literally, "Er, because I was out of eggs. I went to look for more, but only found enough for one cupcake. The one that I made for you."

"You only found one egg in the chicken coop?"

"I.. I didn't look there. I didn't want to disturb Fluttershy," Fluttershy seemed to be Pinkie's only friend this loop, and vice versa. Pinkie promised herself that this was going to be the first thing to change, "So I went to look in the forest."

Pinkamina slowed her approach, "In the Whitetail Woods? Or did you actually go find an egg in the Everfree forest?"

"The.. the Everfree."

Pinkamina felt herself slow down some more. A strong feeling of unease started growing inside her, "And what animal's egg exactly did you get."

"It was some kind of chicken. Or maybe a lizard, I'm not sure. I didn't get a good look. I felt so bad for it, that I just grabbed the

egg and ran out as fast as I could."

Pinkamina tried to move her legs, but they didn't seem to respond. Everything felt so heavy. She glared at her sister in anger, "You've fed me a cupcake made.. from.. a... cockatrice's..."

Pinkie sniffled as she walked over to the statue that used to be her evil twin. Pinkamina's angry glare was frozen forever in stone.

And for the first time in untold ages, Pinkie Pie just wanted to be alone for a while.

\* \* \*

><p>"Are, are you going somewhere, Pinkie?" Fluttershy carefully walked over to where her pink pony friend was loading up a transport balloon.<p>

"Hi, Fluttershy," Pinkie seemed to be in high spirits. That fact alone made Fluttershy smile. Her baker friend was pushing a large heavy pony-sized crate into the basket, "I'm going to go back home to the rock farm for a while. I'm not sure when I'll be back in Ponyville. Will you be okay, Fluttershy?"

"I.. I think so," the yellow pegasus looked around, "I don't see your sister anywhere. Is she okay with you going off without her approval and all?"

"She's also going to the farm," Pinkie Pie smiled wider and leaned on some boxes that were labeled 'Petrification Cures' and 'Psychiatric Treatment Books, "In fact, I'm positive I'll see her there."

\* \* \*

><p>98.10 (misterq)<p>

Walking an adequate distance away from her library, the lavender unicorn with an owl on her back started to sing, "Sparkle, Twilight Sparkle, she's the greatest mare in history!

From the, town of Ponyville. An explosion's gonna rock her tree!"

This time around, Tirek's wayward energy blast streaked out of the sky; hit the building dead center, and caused the library tree to detonate into burning splinters.

Twilight raised her hoof to measure the wind, took a step to the left, and casually caught the falling friendship journal.

She looked to the scene of devastation and sighed, "So regular, I can set a clock to it."

\* \* \*

><p>98.11 (Masterweaver)<p>

"I'm on time, right?"

Prim Hemline sniffed. "Yes. Exactly on the dot. However, all your

competitors were here thirty minutes ago."

Rainbow Dash shrugged. "Eh, I'll go last then. I'm going to be totally honest here, I'm only doing this for a bet..."

\* \* \*

><p>98.12 (Masterofgames)<p>

Vinyl grunted as she struggled to pull the wrench with her teeth, her magic busy holding the parts in place until she finished. When the bolt finally tightened, she collapsed to the ground. "Ugh... My jaw." she grimaced, rubbing it gently as she turned to her present slave driver. "Why couldn't you have waited until a loop where I had hands?"

Apple Bloom whacked her in the head with a rolled up newspaper. "No complainin'! Now fit that part there to the round slot an' start weldin'." she ordered, shifting Granny Smith's zap apple jar pep talk helmet so it wasn't slipping over her eyes.

"But why do I even need this!? I can turn myself into a living sonic arsenal! I can even shoot sound out my eyes!" Vinyl insisted, gesturing to her glasses as they changed, becoming ringed and deeper as she shifted them into subwoofers.

She got another whack to the face for her protests. "Ya' can't always rely on yer powers ta keep ya safe in loops. Ya haven't had any yet, but some loops don't let ya use any skills from outside em! Besides, you asked me to do this!"

"I asked for survival training so I can enjoy myself in more dangerous loops without worrying!"

"An' that's what ah'm doing! When ya can't use yer powers, it helps ta have a weapon in yer pocket!"

Vinyl's jaw dropped. "I only just got my pocket big enough to hold my turntables! How do you expect me to fit THIS in there!?" she sputtered, gesturing to her work.

Apple bloom looked over the barn length machine, twice as tall as Vinyl was and looking like a fusion of a sniper rifle and a megaphone. Slowly she turned back, blushing. "Uh... Heh heh. W-would ya forgive that I honestly didn't think a' that?" she asked with a sheepish grin, rubbing the back of her head.

Vinyl just scowled, covered in grease, scratches, and sweat.

"Yeah... Didn't think so. Um... Bye!" she squeaked, darting off, Vinyl shaking her hoof in the air.

"You can run, but you can't hide! You won't be able to stop head banging until the reset by the time I'm done tweaking your inner beat!"

\* \* \*

><p>98.13 (Masterofgames)<p>

Scootaloo finished chugging her victory drink from last round, wiping her mouth with the back of her hoof with a satisfied sigh. "Okay, new round! What's the weirdest thing you ever tried to solve EVERY problem in a loop with?"

Apple Bloom was quick to respond with a grin. "You."

"Be serious!"

"I am serious! The insurance office in town is THIS close to declaring you an act of Celestia, just so they don't go bankrupt paying off the damage you cause practicing your stunts!"

Twilight quickly stopped the argument with her own answer. "Book fort."

Rarity giggled. "I remember that one. A fine attempt, but it pales in comparison to my lobster costume."

Twilight groaned. "I had forgotten about that one."

Sweetie was bouncing in her seat. "I got Rarity to fight a giant crab! It worked more often than you would think!"

Rarity blinked. "Wait, what?"

Celestia gave a nostalgic sigh and a grin. "Twilight's paranoia. Guest anchors are a marvelous thing."

Luna smirked and poked her sister. "I seem to recall my using yourself to stampede many a threat merely by placing a baker with fresh cake on the opposite side of them."

"Oh that's not fair Luna, you KNOW I can't resist cream cake with strawberries!"

Big Mac chuckled. "Potato acid."

"ONE! TIME!" Applejack moaned as she thumped her head against the table. "Ah swear! ..."

Nyx pondered her answer. "I've got a couple to pick from... But I'd have to go with the swarm of bees, personally."

Chrysalis giggled. "A sudden and unexplainable changeling invasion."

Trixie groaned. "Trixie remembers that. You used it to get out of everything from Nightmare Moon, to doing the dishes, to awkward pauses in conversations!"

Fluttershy blushed. "Um... I once ran a loop with just saying, 'I like trains'."

Outside the bar, a muffled train whistle and loud crash were heard.

Nobody commented. Berry merely slid the drink down to Fluttershy.

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:<p>

The Loop I landed in this time was...odd, to say the least. The world's named Ooo, but from what I can gather, it was once Earth until a nuclear war caused a massive cataclysm, bringing about a new age of magic. But that was in the far past here, and I don't have all the facts.

The Anchor here's named Finn. He's a young kid, and practically the last human. He has a kind heart, and wants to help others. When I met him, it wasn't long before I made a decision.

I was going to try and help him walk on the path of a Keyblade wielder. Since I was unsure if the proper ceremony'd work without being in a Kingdom Hearts Fused Loop, I did write Finn a note for him to give King Mickey should they meet in said Fused Loop to have the King do the aforementioned ceremony. I then set to work on training Finn how to fight like a Keyblade wielder would in preparation for that day.

To be a teacher...Now I see how Celestia must've felt when teaching me and Twilight. Finn was quite the student, taking to the training like a fish to water, though he was more of a physical fighter than a magic user. In return, he helped me make sense, more or less, of this odd world. I also taught him the philosophy I've come to develop; to protect others no matter what. Even if these are Loops, life, no matter what, is precious, and deserves to be protected.

During a meeting with Princess Bubblegum (who fits the definition of a scientist...and a little bit of a mad scientist, but well-meaning. Kind of like...shudder...a SANE Sakura), I met the Ice King.

>Poor Simon...he'd been corrupted by a magic crown during the time before the cataclysm, turning him into the oddball known as the Ice King. I pitied him, and yet, I see in him what I might have become had I defeated Twilight when I'd gone mad so long ago.<br>A tragic soul, indeed. Finn does feel bad for Simon, and hopes to free him from the madness someday.

As for other personalities around here, there's Jake, who, though a shapeshifting dog, is like a brother to Finn. He cares for his brother...in his own way. There's also Marceline... a vampire, and an old friend of Simon. She was the one who told me Simon's tragic tale, and pities him.

>As for villains around here, there's the really crazed Lemongrab...guy has NO empathy at all, and is a cruel...well, 'man' for lack of a better term.<p>

Then there's the evil known as the Lich. YIKES. This guy is as evil as they come, and with his desire to wipe out all life, a massive danger. Luckily, we stopped him before he could even begin to do what he usually does in baseline.

Overall, this Loop has had me see what it means to be a teacher. Finn is quite the student, and I hope he Loops into Kingdom Hearts soon.

He's definite Keyblade wielder material. I'm proud to call him my student.

\* \* \*

><p>98.14 (Dalxein)<p>

The door burst open, admitting Twilight who stomped up to Mac behind the counter. He started to grab her usual 'incredibly bad loop' drinks when he thought of how she'd been carving up the moon waiting for him to set up shop, and noting her wings, brought down something less friendly to mortals instead. "So what's got ya' so worked up, Twilight?"

"I found a loop worse than Eiken."

He paused, staring blankly at the mare for a moment before he brought out the big guns. Which was the actual name of the drink, all lower-case and italicized even when spoken, by Berry's own decree as the Princess of All Things Fermented For the Purpose of Consumption.

"Musta' been horrible." He said, knowing any consoling was bound to be futile.

She nodded. "I was a tiny bird trying to make my way home, but my body was terrible at flying and there were so many pipes and obstacles in the way and... and... Nothing ever worked!" She cried, sniffing before she took a long swig of the drink.

"Wait..." Mac blinked, the familiarity coalescing into a name. "Ya' mean Flappy Bird?"

"Flappy Bird." She hissed, the contents of the big guns in her telekinetic grip beginning to roil and bubble.

"Ah actually kinda' liked it when ah was there a couple loops back. The repetition was soothin' an' it was nice havin' a clear goal an'..." He trailed off as he looked back towards her.

She was staring at him, her features devoid of emotion. Her eyebrow slowly raised, and her glass cracked.

"Ahmma' jus' go mix ya' up another." Mac stated, beating a slow but steady retreat.

\* \* \*

><p>98.15 (Dalxein)<p>

"Explain to me why we need this again?" Mac asked as he watched Vinyl and Lyra tinkering with the door to his bar.

"Because it would be hilarious." Vinyl stated, as though it were obnoxiously obvious.

"If we can construct an emotive harmonic capable of registering topical connections to a sufficient degree, coupled with a modified inverted 'someone else's problem' field, we can trigger the auditory response every single time something becomes more awkward when a

specific person or combination of people walk into the bar." Lyra explained again, waving a magical spanner that looked oddly like one of 'Bloom's 'screwdrivers' his way. "This is a thing that isn't not happening."

\* \* \*

><p>98.16 (Lord Circe)<p>

Berry stretched as she approached her home. She had just finished helping Mac set up the bar, and she was looking forward to spending some time with Ruby this afternoon.

She was met at the door by a very excited looking Ruby. "Momma, momma! Come and see, come and see." Ruby circled around Berry, before dashing off behind the house. Berry followed at a more sedate pace. She smiled fondly as she circled the edge of the house, then froze.

Their entire backyard had been covered in an elaborate network of plastic tubes, slides, swings, and ball pits. Berry watched as Ruby dashed up a spiral staircase and into a tunnel, only to emerge out of a vertical opening a moment later, charging down one of the walls to slam into the ball pit. Berry's eye twitched at a familiar voice called out behind her.

"Bravo! Bravo!" Discord clapped enthusiastically from where he was lounging on Berry's roof.

Ruby's head popped up from the ball pit. "Thanks, Mr. Discord." Slowly, she worked her way towards the edge.

Berry's voice was cheerfully even. "What is all this, Discord?"

Discord swam down the side of her house, before sliding to stand upright. "Oh, nothing much. I just figured I had a paternal responsibility to uphold." Berry's eye twitched again.

Ruby finally tumbled out of the ball pit, rolling to a stop at Berry's hooves. "I'm gonna go tell Pips and Auna and Hopscotch! Can I, Momma?"

Berry smiled lightly. "Of course, dear."

With a cheer, Ruby rushed off. Behind her, Berry's smile turned brittle as Discord laid an arm across her shoulders.

"Ah, the enthusiasm of youth."

Berry turned to look at him, her eyes closed as she smiled. "Did you know, it is entirely possible to build a distillery out of the organs of magical creatures?" Discord blinked at the non sequiter, but Berry kept going. "I've never had the chance to try it, but I figure a dragonequus would be a good place to start, and, I will, if you are setting all of this up to play a prank." Twisting out from under his arm, Berry poked his belly with her hoof. "Don't you dare mess with Ruby's heart to get a laugh, or I swear, I will get Twilight to set up an experiment schedule for testing distillery configurations with your intestines."



Discord blinked, twice, then nodded. "Fair enough."

Berry frowned at his easy acceptance. She opened her mouth to question him when he spoke, staring into space.

"27 seconds."

Berry raised an eyebrow. "27 seconds to what?"

Discord shook his head. "I Awoke 27 seconds before the end of the Loop. The one where you were part of the Reserve Element Bearers."

Berry blinked. "Wait, so you..."

"I had just enough time to parse all of my Loop memories, and then the Loop ended." Discord sighed as he floated back to the ground. "I've never been in love before. I don't even think this feeling really is love. It's an...interest. You aren't Harmony, like most of the other ponies. Alcohol, it adds a bit of chaos to people, to what they are going to do, what they are thinking. And you can work with that, bringing Harmony to those little bits of Chaos, working with both of them together to make people happy. It's...intriguing." He then chuckled softly. "Plus, Pinchy is just adorable!"

Berry slowly turned over Discord's speech in her head. "...are you asking me out?"

Discord frowned. "As much as I hate being cliché, yes, I would say I am."

Berry took a deep breath before replying. "I...ok, I never really thought that, whatever we, me and your Unawake, or preAwake, or whatever, I never thought what we did, had, would go beyond that Loop. It, it was a spur-of-the-moment decision, so," she took another deep breath, "I guess we should keep up the trend. Yes, let's see where this goes."

Behind a bush, hidden from view, Ruby grinned. She didn't understand a lot of what Mom and Mr. Discord were talking about, probably boring adult stuff, but she was getting an awesome, playground-making dad!

\* \* \*

><p>(Continuation by Masterweaver)<p>

Sleipnir gave Epona a look. "Seriously?"

"Goddess of fertility, hon." The mare grinned right back. "I'm just glad I noticed before the loop ended."

"How did you even get this by me?"

"As I recall, you were... distracted..."

\* \* \*

><p>98.17 (Masterofgames)<p>

Lyra yawned as she Awoke. She then paused to consider the implications of this, then decided it was early enough in the day to be a coincidence and went back to brushing her teeth. When she finished, she rummaged through her pocket for her day planner.

Her day planner was a spinner, with the colored slices listing each of her four memory sets. One spin later, and it was decided that her seapony self would be calling the shots this time. In her head, said seapony expressed great joy with this outcome, while the other three selves, gathered around the mental construct of a table identical to the spinner, grumbled in disappointment, but no real malice.

"Yay! My turn to decide what we do! I say we spend the loop working on our music. I figure we should be competing for concert bookings with that Octavia mare that Vinyl told us about by the end of the loop. We should be able to improve that much pretty easy if we work at it!"

Human Lyra glanced around the table and fidgeted in her seat. "Not that I'm complaining, but... you think maybe it might be a bad thing that our trying to get our memories straight is resulting in multiple personalities?"

One of the two Pony Lyra shrugged. "Meh, what's the worst that can happen?"

\* \* \*

><p>(Zetrein)<p>

From the Looping Journals of Sunset Shimmer:

This loop, I met Lord Leman Russ, Primarch of the Space Wolves. It's kinda of a funny story of how we met, actually. I had returned to Equestria early to find what I believe is one of the variants that could be considered Nyx's baseline. For reasons that don't need exploring at this juncture, the cult accidentally (or not?) swapped the intended blood sample from Twilight, with one of my own.

I had thought that it would just be an odd incident, with a yellow coated Nyx. Something to laugh about later, you know? Then she started talking. It seems what I had thought accident, may have been this "narrative causality" thing the others talk about, conspiring to give her sorry, him, his usual coloration.

And so, on a dark and stormy night, I met Lord Russ, alicorn filly. Oddly, it wasn't the combination of all the rest that irked him, so much as the filly part.

\* \* \*

><p>"It's not that I've never been female." Lemon Rush explained, as they sat in a cave to wait out the storm. "Nor do I mind being a pony, I've even been most the pony sub-species before. This is just the first time I've been all of those things at once."<p>

"Where do we go from here?" Sunset asked the grumpy Primarch. "I've never done this particular variation before. I haven't gotten any replies to my previous pings, and with you acting as Anchor, it might

be just the two of us this loop."

"First, we're going to find somewhere to get a drink. Then, we'll deal with this cult that's going around." Lemon put a hoof to her chin. "After that, I think we'll keep an ear out for things outside baseline, but otherwise leave things alone until someone else Wakes up."

"Two questions. Where do you expect to find a bar willing to serve a filly? And what are we going to do after we deal with the cult?"

Lemon Rush gave her a flat look, then glowed as she used her magic to age to an adult form. A very tall, muscular, adult form. Sunset wondered if this is what Bic Mac looked like, during the Princess Macintosh loop. "To the second question, I've got a plan."

\* \* \*

><p>Given how impressive he looked as a mare, is it wrong that I want to see what he'd look like as a stallion? Anyway, after winning a drinking contest, we set to work on dealing with the cult. Under Lemon's direction, I learned an important lesson about the Warhammer 40,000 loop. Never bring a cult against someone from there, you will lose.<p>

I'll spare you the long-winded details, but five days and seventy three outstanding arrest warrants later, the cult was dealt with. Okay, one detail, I totally used an exploding cake as a distraction. Nearly got caught, getting a good picture of the Princess' cake-spattered face.

\* \* \*

><p>As the Guard scoured the city for the two ponies, their quarry snuck along the darkened alleys of Canterlot's private skyship yards. As they came to the alley's end, the yellow pony in front motioned her partner to stop, as she poked her head out into the docks.<p>

Pulling back into the alley, Lemon nodded to herself. "That one. On the left."

Taking a look herself, Sunset saw the ship Lemon had chosen. "Fast, small enough to be crewed by one if need be, good choice. One problem, that's Prince Blueblood's personal yacht."

"I know." Lemon replied with a smile. "I also know from past loops that it's insured. And covered in alarm enchantments, we'll have a ten minute window to get clear."

"You still haven't explained where we're going." Sunset reminded her friend.

"That way." Came the reply, along with a vague wave to the south-west.

"And what's that supposed to mean? We're just going off in a random direction?"

"Sunset, have you ever explored this world?" Lemon Rush replied, turning to look at her in the dark alley. "We are the only ones Awake. We are in roles that can be taken out, with no real effect on the baseline scenario. Were they Awake, I would stay, and spend time with my friends." As she spoke, Sunset began to realize just how charismatic the Primarch was. "I have long been curious about this world. I would like to see some of it, and with our friends still asleep, I see this as an ideal time. So, Sunset Shimmer, have you ever explored this world?"

The alley was silent for a moment, until she sighed. "Alright. Following you might have gotten me in a massive amount of trouble, but it hasn't gone wrong yet."

With that, they bolted across the open ground, and began preparing the Blueblood for launch. Lemon's swiftness, both in disabling the alarms, and in the actual launch preparations, showed that he had indeed stolen this ship before.

As the ship slid out into the night, Lemon once again spoke. "As one Captain James T. Kirk once said, 'Second star to the right, and straight on 'til morning.'" Looking pleased, Lemon looked back at the city, glowing on the mountainside.

"Actually, that quote came from-" Sunset was interrupted by a faint cry from behind them.

"Halt! In the name of the Canterlot Guard!"

Leaning on the rail, Lemon Rush calmly ordered. "Power to engines, Ms. Shimmer."

\* \* \*

><p>After reenacting the Mos Eisley escape, complete with dodging a military skyship that was in the area for some reason, we made our way towards Griffon territory. For the most part, baseline survived our exit, and went as normal until Lemon decided to go after Tirek. Said he needed to "have words" with him on a couple subjects. I think we can both guess which.<p>

I also think he was just looking for a good fight. In spite of being regarded as folk heroes in many nations, and being outlaws in many of those same nations, the past few years were peaceful by his standards.

\* \* \*

><p>As Tirek lifted Discord to drain him of his magic, he was suddenly pounded into the ground by a yellow bolt from the blue. With a thunderous boom, Tirek went flying towards the edge of town. Out of the dust flew the alicorn that had rampaged across Canterlot years ago, wielding a hammer as long as she was, and crackling with electricity.<p>

Dropping from the clouds above, the caged ponies saw a skyship moving in to land nearby. It's hull and balloon were patched in many places, but it was still recognizable as Prince Blueblood's stolen yacht. As it set down with a crunch, a goldenrod colored mare leapt over the side.

"Good afternoon!" She greeted, as she ran up to their cage. "You'll have to forgive Lemon, I think he's been wanting to do that for a while now." Taking a chainsaw from... somewhere, the mare set to work on the bars. Shouting to be heard over the grinding of the saw, as well as the distant sounds of Lord Russ introducing Tirek to the business end of a Thunder Hammer, Sunset told them. "Once I've got you out of there, we'll go see Twilight about that box. Easiest way to deal with Tirek!"

\* \* \*

><p>After that, things went pretty well. Well, aside from the airship crashing into Twilight's li- \*Illegible scribbles\* On second thought, you don't need to hear about that part. Lemon and I got officially pardoned afterwards, for our actions. Well, more his actions, but I guess the bit with the chainsaw left an impression? Celestia was really shocked to see me, I guess nopony had managed to identify me before then.<p>

And that's the story of how I met Lemon Russ.

...I'd still like to see what he looks like as a stallion. Wonder if Fluttershy has any pictures?

\* \* \*

><p>98.18 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Okay, Ah admit Ah was wrong," Apple Bloom said slowly. "Well, half wrong. Getting ya something that big was a mistake."

"Mmmhmm."

"But it was meant ta play to yer strengths. Music and all that. So, Ah've got another idea." Apple Bloom bit her lip. "Adjustable flashbangs."

Vinyl glanced at her, raising an eyebrow. "Go on..."

"A normal flash bang is just that, a flash an a bang. But if ya use yer musical talents on one o' them, ya can compress tha sound into a more physical format."

"Hmmm. Song grenades..." Vinyl tapped her chin. "I guess my glasses could protect me from the flash part."

"Eeeeyup." Apple Bloom nodded. "Now, can ya get me ta stop square dancing? Ah'm having cutie pox flashbacks..."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

98.1: She's been surfing.

>98.2: A good reason.<br>98.3: Last minute.

>98.4: dn't vn knw.<br>98.5: That's not tempting Fate, that's sending Fate a love letter.

>98.6: COOKIE.<br>98.7: Dash Writes Stuff, continued.

>98.8: The simple solution.<br>98.9: It happens.

>98.10: Yes, it's that predictable. And it's kind of wearing.<br>98.11: Oh, the things we do for bets.<br>98.12: Wrong tool for the job.<br>98.13: Discord wouldn't even understand the question.<br>98.14: Surprisingly catchy.<br>98.15: Setting up in-universe sound effects.<br>98.16: This looks like being a lasting thing.<br>98.17: Multiple Personality Order.<br>98.18: Percussion grenades.<p>

## 105. Chapter 105

99.1 (namar13766, Masterweaver, Conceptulest, Hubris Plus)

The ponies stared at 'A.K. Yearling' in shock.

Derpy Do just smiled. "What? Dinky loves my stories!"

Sunset Shimmer just chuckled lightly, breaking the others from their trance. "Let's face it. This is nowhere near the weirdest thing the loops have thrown at us."

Twilight shook her head. "And it's not like they're not sisters sometimes. I think it's the Do thing."

"But-" Lyra waved. "But-"

"How come you never told me this?!" Rainbow demanded.

Derpy rolled her eyes. "Because because A) you never asked, and B) I knew you'd start fan-fillying about it."

Rainbow crossed her forelegs. "I'm not that bad."

The others stared at her.

"...anymore," continued Rainbow.

"Oh, if you wanna get to know my family, I could totally introduce you around!" Derpy grinned. "We're not as well known, but the Dos are almost as widespread as the Apples. Oh, I know, we should start with the Diamond Dog branch!"

"Wait, Diamond Dogs? How does that even-"

"\_Dun dunadun dun duuuuuuun!\_" came an enthusiastic shout just before a small furball bowled past them and towards the Everfree. "\_Puppy power!\_"

"'Rappy! Rait!" A larger hound called a moment later, stumbling after the pup. "It's rangerous!"

"Bye uncle Scooby!" Dinky waved cheerfully at the retreating canines. "I'll see you next week!"

\* \* \*

><p>99.2 (novusordomundi)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>The Yellow Goddess look on in horror, as the Elder God of the Chaotic Hive Mind held the currently unconscious form of The Living And The Dead in front of it, a shield against any attack to allow the foul beast to pull itself together, both metaphorically and literally.<em>

\_"Do YoU nOt HaVe ThE wILL tO fInIsh mE oFF?" The Elder asked, staying behind his hostage.\_

\_"I would rather not have to hurt my friends..." The Yellow Goddess said quietly, her whips ready at her side.\_

\_This only brought some rather vicious smiles from what could only be considered faces, as flashes of unlight materialized into multiple bodies, each one recognizable as her friends and helpers in the keeping of the World Tree. She could name each one. The Eternal Trickster. The Lightning King. The Accidental Deity. The Victor's Reward. The Judge of the Underworld. They, and many more, were all twitching in pain, but with no sound escaping their lips.\_

\_"I hAVe nO sUcH pRoBlEmS iN dOiNg So. ThEy ArE iN mY pOsSeSsIoN nOw. AnD tHeRe Is NoThInG yOu CaN dO..."\_

\_"There is still one thing left I can do." The Goddess stated, a fierce determination in her eyes. "I can offer you something far greater in exchange for them."\_

\_"AnD wHaT cOuLd YoU oFFeR tHe VoId?" the creature asked.\_

\_"Myself."\_

\* \* \*

><p>"This sounds very familiar..." Twilight Sparkle said, looking at Rainbow Dash.<p>

"Well, I did gain some inspiration from the baseline..." Dash admitted. "But I didn't want to just go 'Fluttershy curb-stomps over everything.'"

"There's nothing wrong with gaining some ideas from baseline..." Twilight said, hoof the her chin. "And there's no 'mysterious box that has to be opened' or 'stealing all magic' villain. In fact, this seems more of a 'mind-warping' type of villain..."

"That's the idea I had for the Void Realms." Dash said, before writing down something. "The challenge was to make them awesome villains to fight against. Evil, of course, but still awesome."

Twilight nodded, but a frown formed on her face as she looked through some papers. "But this seems like the bad guys win in the end. Unless that's the ending your going for..." Twilight got surprised when Dash gave out a small chuckle at this.

"Don't worry, Twilight. I only want to make it LOOK like the bad guys have won, but the epilogue shows that The Yellow Goddess purposely

got herself into the Hive Mind of Chaos."

"Ah, your going for a 'beat it from the inside' theme for your next book, right?"

"Yeah." Dash grinned. "It's going to be so awesome..."

Twilight smiled, happy with how Dash was enjoying her hobby. Back in the baseline, she'd never pegged Dash to actually be this enthusiastic about writing. Just another way of Loopers changing and growing...

\* \* \*

><p>99.3 (Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>This day just keeps getting better and better<em>, thought Darth Vader with an inward mental sigh.

Technically, it had been considerably longer than a standard day since his encounter with Kenobi, but the past thirty-odd hours had been very much of a piece since then. This latest humiliation was just the icing on the cake.

His intention had been for a high-speed fly-by of the fringe of the Rebel formation, and to try to get a better read on the undeniably powerful Force Locus at its core. Then that freighter had come out to meet him. He'd dodged its defensive fire, and then saw his instruments glitch out shortly before the world dissolved into sparkles. He also remembered his shock when Spikey-one's Force presence suddenly registered nearby.

His next sensation was the world reconstituting itself into a small room. He found himself sitting in a plain station chair in front of a small table holding a holoprojector. Across the table sat Kenobi, and behind the barabel, near a modest control console, stood the twi'lek jedi he'd noted in the Death Star hangar speaking quietly to a vaguely familiar gloss-white protocol droid about "pattern degradation in the transporter buffer" or some such nonsense. The faint vibration in the deck told him that he was aboard a ship under power, and he could sense a third powerful Force presence, albeit muffled.

"Hello again, Anakin," said Spike in a neutral tone. "I would apologize for abducting you so brazenly, but I doubt you would have accepted my invitation for a quiet talk. Please note that we are actively dampening the Force in this compartment in the hope you won't do anything foolhardy before hearing us out."

Even with the active suppression of his Force sense, Vader could tell that Spike was easily his match, and the twi'lek not that far behind. There was no easy way he could neutralize one before the other would take decisive action against him.

Curiosity won over anger. "Tell me how I came to be here in this room."

"I'm not sure you would believe me if I told you. So we can be



civilized about this for now?"

"Under the circumstances, I see no advantage in attempting anything rash. Should conditions change, however..."

"Yes. I understand completely, and I suppose that would be my reaction if our positions were reversed."

"Very well. You said something about hearing you out. I am listening."

\* \* \*

><p>"Solo and Antilles report a large force of Imperial fighters mustering. They estimate close to two hundred," relayed Cadance.<p>

"So much for Tarkin staying passive. Response plan Grek, major," Dodonna ordered his operations officer. "Solo is to regroup with the screen and punch through the Imperials if practicable, then proceed with attack plan Besh at her discretion. We'll send support when we can."

By the time the Imperial fighter force organized itself into its attack formation and advanced to a point roughly halfway between the Death Star and the Alliance task force, the rebel fighter screen had arrayed itself in a rough hemisphere focused around the direct path between the two and slowly advanced to meet them.

The Imperial attack was a homogenous group of 210 standard TIE fighters. Sixteen of these had been augmented with a pair of single-shot concussion missile tubes.

The thirty-six rebel X-wings had six proton torpedoes each. The fifty Y-Wings were armed with eight torpedoes. Even the twenty-two Z-95 Headhunters carried six concussion missiles apiece.

Thanks to Luke's coordination, there was no duplication of effort when the rebels started picking out their targets in the oncoming swarm. The initial volley of eighty-six torpedoes each had an individual objective. Despite frantic evasive maneuvers, fifty found their marks. The slightly shorter-ranged - but optimized to counter fighters - concussion missiles further whittled down the imperial numbers by another eighteen.

In under half a minute, the Imperials had suffered over thirty percent casualties and had its formation badly disrupted.

The paltry return salvo of twelve missiles scored ten hits, destroying one Z-95 and severely damaging three Y-Wings. One X-Wing found itself in a colorful confetti cloud courtesy of Apple Bloom and Clover's intervention in Armory 7. (There was simply no way to modify the ordnance in more than that one group of hangars.)

Alliance fighter doctrine regarding shields to increase survivability had proved itself again.

The less carefully planned follow-up volley of eighty torpedoes and twenty missiles accounted for an additional fifty-one TIEs. The ragged eight-missile Imperial response claimed one Y-Wing destroyed,

one X-Wing damaged, and one Z-95 partially repainted in electric blue.

Then the two groups converged and devolved into the largest fighter-versus-fighter melee since the end of the Clone Wars.

\* \* \*

><p>Vader stared at the holodisplay of the battle.<p>

Spike's admission that they had not anticipated hosting him quite so soon had been met with a mix of scorn and well-hidden amusement. "When you came screaming out to look us over, we couldn't pass up the chance to remove you from the field, and so here we are," said Spike.

Vader's reply had been cut off by the twi'lek. "First stage of the battle is about to start." She nodded to the droid, who worked at the control station. The holodisplay flickered to life to show the meeting of the two groups of fighters.

He only half-heard the halting narration provided by the 3P0 droid as he watched over half of the Imperial fighters wiped out.

"Not a pretty picture, is it?" asked Spike. His voice held no triumph or mockery, just honest sadness.

\* \* \*

><p>Under normal conditions, the antiquated rebel equipment and uneven levels of pilot training would be exploited by the more seasoned imperial starfighter pilots, despite having taken such punishing losses in the initial phase of the battle. However, the enhanced coordination and morale provided by Luke's Battle Meditation worked in the opposite direction, further sapping the morale of the already shaken imperials, and bolstering the confidence of the rebel pilots. Already holding a small numerical advantage, the sprawling dogfight was slowly tilting more and more in the rebels' favor.<p>

Scotaloo and Wedge had hung back behind the rebel formation and did not make any contributions to the initial salvos; their munition loads were needed for a later stage of the attack and would not have significantly contributed to the attrition phase of the battle.

"Hey Wedge, you want to skirt the edge of that fur-ball? Or thin out the opposition a bit on the way to the main objective?" asked Scotaloo.

"Your call. I'm on your wing either way," was the response.

"Just do your best to keep up, then," she half-taunted before switching to the Alliance all-units channel. "Crusader lead to all units. We're coming through at 43 by 98. Try not to hit us by accident, fellas."

The Millennium Falcon roared toward a clump of six TIEs that somehow managed to maintain something resembling a formation in the chaos of frantic maneuvers. Three rapidly fell to Pansy's expert gunnery, a fourth to Cookie's less accurate fire, and the remaining

two to Wedge's lasers.

"Copper lead to Crusader lead, thanks for the help," said the leader of the Y-Wing squadron that had been the recipient of the TIEs' attention.

"No problem. I'd love to stay and chat, but we've got an appointment with the Death Star."

\* \* \*

><p>The reports filtering into the Death Star comm center did not help Tarkin's temper in any way.<p>

"Fifty percent losses in under a minute?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes sir. The rebels made heavy use of long-range weapons to attrit our fighters before closing. Survivor reports indicate that their missile targeting was especially well coordinated," reported the Fighter Group commander.

"We have two ships incoming," cut in a sensor technician. "Profile matches YT-1300 and X-Wing class."

"Just two?"

"Yes sir."

"How large a reserve do we have on hand?" Tarkin turned back to the fighter commander.

"Three understrength squadrons. Two of recon and one of surface-attack fighters. We sent every standard space combat version we had in the attack group," he responded after consulting a datapad.

"Well you'd best prepare some sort of reception for our guests."

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo fought down her panic as over twenty-five TIEs appeared on the sensor display. "Remember when I complained about how the Tatooine departure was too dull? I take it back again."<p>

"It's not as bad as it looks," soothed Wedge over their private channel. "See those six fighters at the rear of the formation? I'll bet those are surface-attack models. Think TIE Bomber maneuverability without the beefed up spaceframe."

{{I would speculate that the remainder are Reconnaissance versions. A little faster than the standard, but only one laser cannon each,}} added Chewbacca.

"Besides, we don't have to kill them all, just blow past them and get to the trench. We're faster than they are," reminded Wedge.

The missile lock alarm started beeping by way of counterpoint.

"Oh yeah. Those surface-attack fighters can carry concussion missiles

or proton torpedoes, but they need targeting help from a recon platform," amended Wedge apologetically.

"Four separate lock-on attempts," reported Apple Bloom.  
"Countermeasures standin' by."

"Gunners to point-defense mode," ordered Scootaloo.

Four proton torpedoes and two concussion missiles darted out to meet the two rebel ships. Half immediately fell victim to the enhanced electronic countermeasures available to the looping crews and went inert after losing their targets. One more was eliminated by defensive fire, and one lost to evasive maneuvers.

The remaining concussion missile targeted on the \_Falcon\_ impacted with enough power to reduce aft shield strength by 25 percent. \_Too bad that wasn't one of the missiles Clover "fixed". Then again, canary yellow paint doesn't really work for the\_ Falcon, thought Scootaloo.

Closing at maximum speed, there was barely time for the fighters arrayed against them to get off more than three or four shots each. To the credit of the imperial pilots, they did score enough hits to degrade the forward shields of each ship by one third.

Then they were through the Imperial formation. Pansy and Cookie did make their presence known by destroying two of the missile platforms in passing with Wedge accounting for a third.

"Re-routin' weapon power to shields," announced Apple Bloom.

{{Time to trench waypoint: Four minutes,}} added Chewbacca.

"How you doing, Wedge?" asked Scootaloo.

"Shields are a bit chewed up. No significant damage. Should be ready for the trench by the time we get there."

Leaving the TIEs in their exhaust, the two ships screamed toward the battle station.

\* \* \*

><p>"They're breaking and running!" announced a jubilant flight control officer.<p>

A subdued cheer went around the rebel flagship command deck.

"Give me a count," ordered Dodonna as his staff returned their attention to their duties.

"Working on it now," replied the fighter group commander. "We have twenty-eight X-Wings, thirty-two Y-Wings, and fifteen headhunters combat capable. Units report twenty-five to fifty percent munition loads remaining. Damaged fighters are being taken aboard. Deploying S&R shuttles to pick up ejected pilots now."

"Remaining enemy force count is around twenty in pairs or singletons," added the fleet intelligence officer.

"Have the X-Wings and Y-Wings re-organize and move to support Solo. Keep the headhunters as combat space patrol. The task force will move to within sensor range of the Death Star," said the general.

Amid the flurry of acknowledgements, Cadance murmured into her headset. "Luke, I think Spike and Twilight could use you around now."

\* \* \*

><p><em>This sure beats the baseline<em>, thought Wedge Antilles as he followed the Falcon down the familiar confines of the first Death Star trench. No time pressure, no Vader and his goons chewing up my aft shields...practically a leisurely stroll to the torpedo launch point.

His late model XJ series advanced snubfighter was the result of decades of improvements made to the T-65 X-Wing platform. The most relevant of those improvements right now was the much more powerful targeting sensors and computer systems. What he had called impossible with baseline equipment was merely difficult with tools from forty years later.

He made another not-really-necessary adjustment to his targeting computer. He had made this shot under much worse circumstances dozens of times.

Ahead, he watched the Falcon launch the first of several enhanced ion-pulse warheads at the turbolaser emplacements defending the exhaust port. Combining the electronics-disrupting qualities of a heavy ion cannon with an extended range concussion missile frame, they were an excellent tool for silencing defensive turrets at long range.

"Show's all yours, Wedge," declared Scootaloo as the final missile was sent on its way and the Falcon peeled up and out of the trench to discourage any fighters bold enough to consider interfering.

Chopping his throttle, Wedge watched the range to optimal launch point projected in his heads-up display (another improvement over the original targeting scope) count down slowly...1000 meters...700 meters...500 meters...250...100...50...

"Torpedoes away!" he called as three proton torpedoes - the XJ squeezed a third torpedo launch tube onto the fighter - flew down the trench. Pushing his throttle to maximum power, he watched two of the three pinkish-white globes entering the exhaust port; the third overshot and impacted on the surface beyond the target zone. Oh well. Looks like I owe Luke a round of drinks. "Two hits. Time to leave," he reported as he pulled up and away from the Death Star.

\* \* \*

><p>"Mission accomplished," said the protocol droid. "All units pulling back."<p>

Vader had watched the rout of the imperial fighter force with growing rage. How could this rabble so easily defeat the cream of the imperial military?

The holoprojector's tactical view of the battle switched to what must be a live video feed from one of the vessels retreating from the Death Star. Vader was only passingly aware that the room's single door had opened and admitted an additional figure.

The image of the Death Star suddenly blossomed into an expanding sphere of debris as the hypermatter reactor overloaded.

All Force sensitives in the room winced as several hundred thousand imperial lives abruptly ceased.

The Sith Lord's rage suddenly gave way to resignation. \_Why can't I maintain my anger?\_ Ever since that clash with Spike, he was unable to sustain the cold fury that was his link to the Dark Side. It was almost as if the reawakened memories of his life as a Jedi were actively fighting the training he had received from Darth Sidious.

He felt a growing sense of weariness that matched the expression on Spike's face. "Well, now what?" he asked.

"That's partially up to you," answered Spike. "Before we go much further, there are one or two things I would like for you to see." He turned and nodded at the protocol droid.

The holoprojector's scene changed to what appeared to be a Clone Wars era medical facility. Vader's attention was drawn to the figure being attended to by Spike and a medical droid. "Padme..." he whispered.

"You hurt her badly on Mustafar," said Spike, "but she was still alive when you and I parted. I took her to Polis Massa for treatment."

"Palpatine said she was...That I had..." Vader murmured.

"...There's good in him. Spike, there's still good..." Padme Amidala's last words reached across the years.

This had been one of the trickier bits of manipulation by Apple Bloom, Sweetie, Spike, and Twilight as they prepared for this meeting. Luke had baseline imagery of Padme's death from recordings made by Artoo. Spike's loop memories matched the recording with the exceptions of his substitution in the scene and Cadance's name. "Correcting" the holographic record to reflect the reality of this loop's backstory was, if not exactly difficult, a tedious project with several opportunities to get things badly wrong. Spike and Luke assuring them that the underlying truth would be sufficient for the task had not been entirely convincing.

"Two children...?" asked Vader. He turned to look at the new figure that had joined them.

"Hello, father," replied the young man, stopping his efforts to mask his Force presence. "I'm Luke Skywalker." The boy had a preternatural air of calm and maturity at odds with his obvious youth. He was also the strongest Force presence in the room.

"...and Cadance...Oh no..." The realization was nearly a physical

blow to the black-armored figure.

"Yes," said Spike sadly. "That will be a major problem. As are most of your actions at the end of the Clone Wars and since."

Fury boiled within the Sith Lord as he came to his feet and he snarled at Spike. "Why are you doing this? Is this your idea of revenge?"

Spike did not move, although the twi'lek and Luke had tensed for action. "I want you to understand that Palpatine has been manipulating events since before we met on Tatooine. He orchestrated both sides the Clone Wars, killing tens of millions just to eradicate the Jedi. He fed your ambition and your resentment."

"The Jedi Council did not acknowledge my greatness! They held me back! YOU held me back! You kept me from the knowledge I needed to...save...Padme..." As suddenly as the outburst came, the rage subsided. He returned to his seat.

"Tell me. Has Palpatine ever followed up on his promises? Has he shared any of his knowledge regarding life extension with you? He's had twenty years to raid the Jedi Archives for 'forbidden knowledge'. Has he given you the smallest scrap?"

"There was always something else that needed to be done first. And with Padme dead, it no longer mattered..."

"I understand now that the strictures against emotional attachment fed your fear. Would it help in any way if I told you that I now feel that such dogmatic adherence to those beliefs was counterproductive? I've had nearly twenty years to meditate and reflect." Actually Spike had had several orders of magnitude more time to contemplate Jedi teachings and his relationship to the Force, but that wasn't exactly relevant. "I believe that the critical error of the Jedi Council was our outright rejection of emotion, since we believed it to be a path to the Dark Side. Instead, more emphasis should have been placed on managing one's emotions over allowing those emotions to rule you." He coughed. "Sorry, I guess the old lecturing habits are still there." For some reason he traded a look with the twi'lek.

"What do you want from me?" Vader's tone was almost sullen.

"I want you to let go of the hatred that you have been sustaining for the last two decades. I know that it's infinitely easier to say than to do, but that is what I want."

"Why?"

"Because I want my friend Anakin back. I want to help the man I called my brother become better than what he is now."

"How can you...? After Mustafar, we..." Vader trailed off into silence.

"Are you asking if I forgive you for what you did? I honestly can't say if I'm ready to...yet. But I want to believe that my old friend regrets having done those things and wants to make amends," said Spike softly.

"There is no way I could possibly..."

"Probably not. Does that mean you have no desire to do so?"

Vader did not answer.

"Master Kenobi, the task force is ready to jump into hyperspace," interrupted the droid, gesturing at the control console.

"Thank you," responded Spike. He returned his attention to his former padawan. "One more point: I won't speculate on how Padme would feel about who you are now, but based on the limited time I've spent in their company, I believe that she would be pleased at how your children have done so far. Perhaps you might be interested in getting to know them as well."

The barabel stood. "I realize that you have a lot to think about. I want to make it clear that while you are a prisoner, you will be treated properly unless you make it necessary to employ more forceful restraints...so to speak." He turned to the twi'lek. "Can you handle him for a few minutes? I'd like a word with Luke."

"No problem, Spike." She cracked her knuckles and focused a cool gaze on the Sith Lord. "If worse comes to worse, I can put him back in the transporter."

\* \* \*

><p><em>This would be a whole lot easier if we had a complete set of Elements. If they could purge Nightmare Moon, they could probably do something useful to Vader<em>, thought Spike as he and Luke entered the corridor. "So, what do you think?"

"It's a good start. You got through to him at least twice. I can sense inner turmoil similar to what I felt from him on the second Death Star during the baseline. I've managed to talk him around on my own a few times, and we can double-team him in the next session."

"Given how recent Alderaan is, I doubt it's worth trying to bring in Cadance."

"No. It took Leia years to come to terms with it in the baseline. After only a few days? No way."

The background of thrum of the engines ramped up briefly as the ship made the jump to lightspeed.

Spike stretched. "Four hours to Yavin. Based on the tactical view we were watching, I will say that I'm impressed with how the battle turned out."

"Yeah. That was one of the smoother near-baseline Death Star takedown I've seen."

"Near-baseline?"

"Remind me to tell you about the time we were invaded by the entire Borg Collective and both Vorlon and Shadow fleets. Or one time Ranma visited and decided to dust off the contents of his pocket..."



\* \* \*

><p>Epilogue - Several weeks later<p>

\* \* \*

><p>In the space between Yavin IV and the gas giant it orbited, Scootaloo struggled to keep her targeting reticle on the opposing fighter. "Not making it easy for me, Pansy," she grumbled.<p>

"I thought that was the point of the exercise," replied the pegasus.

The X-wing performed a series of turns that any experienced pilot would have declared to be impossible for any mere flesh-and-blood being.

"Now that's just being self-indulgent," muttered Scootaloo. Her threat alarm started beeping, so she threw her ship into a corkscrewing evasive turn. To her annoyance, not only did the alarm continue its warning, but her rear shield indicator began showing a rapid drain. The fighter's systems shut down and the flight computer flashed a "You have been destroyed" message as Pansy's X-wing flew past.

"No fair, Pansy! You don't need to worry about acceleration compensators," she complained as she restored her ship's systems from simulated "death".

"If you're not cheating, you aren't trying hard enough," retorted the founder. "It's not as if you haven't killed me enough times in that prototype TIE."

Scootaloo grinned. \_Let Spike keep Vader's lightsaber as a souvenir. I've got his personal fighter with a cool custom paint job.\_

Her only concern was whether she had enough room for it in her subspace pocket. Maybe she wouldn't try to pack the \_Falcon\_ in there before the loop ended.

\* \* \*

><p>"Welcome back to the land of the conscious," said Twilight as she looked at the medical center's sensor readouts. "How are you feeling? I did my best for you, but there may still be some lingering problems that I wasn't able to completely clear up."<p>

"Don't worry about it. It's a vast improvement over where I was before. So this is your native form?" asked her patient.

The lavender alicorn nodded. "Close enough. I normally don't bother with the wings, but I'm able to channel more power this way, and you certainly needed everything I could give."

"I'm still a bit surprised at your generosity. I would have placed conditions on providing what you freely offered."

"I prefer to think of it as a gesture of goodwill. And I suppose the supremely suspicious would call it an inducement toward a particular

behavior pattern. But I mostly did it as a favor for Luke."

"I see. And Spike?"

"It was his idea. He and Luke are waiting outside if you want to talk to them."

"Maybe in a while." The figure in the recovery bed sighed. "Aren't you concerned that once I recover sufficiently, I'll go back to the old ways?"

"Are you worried about that happening?"

A faint nod. "Yes."

"Do you want it to happen?"

A shake of the head. "No."

"Then I'm satisfied that between Luke, Spike, myself, and especially you, we can keep things under control."

Anakin Skywalker lifted his arms and examined the nearly life-like prosthetic hands. He flexed the fingers experimentally, then touched the tips together. "Impressive work. I especially appreciate the tactile sense."

"We can try biological regeneration of your limbs later if you want; it would have added several months of physical therapy to your recovery, and I didn't want to add more complexity on top of the work on your internal organs. Getting you out of that life-support suit was the priority," explained Twilight. "Don't be surprised if you tire easily and find yourself short of breath after even mild exertion for the next year or so. It's going to take a while to get your strength up, even with the Force."

"I'm not complaining. Frankly, I could probably use the quiet time."

\* \* \*

><p>Emperor Palpatine sat uneasy in his private sanctum, facing, but not really seeing, the holographic display depicting the galaxy he ruled.<p>

Ever since the loss of the Death Star and disappearance of Darth Vader four months ago, whispers in the Force had brought him to believe that a dire threat to his position was gathering.

His brooding was interrupted as he felt a well-known Force presence nearby. The private side door opened and he heard a familiar mechanical breathing.

"You took long enough getting back here. What happened? Where have you been?" he snapped without turning to face his guest.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," came the reply. \_Wait. The voice is all wrong.\_ He spun his chair to face two intruders.

One was a barabel in jedi robes. \_Kenobi? How could he...?\_ But his

attention was drawn to the human of the pair.

It was Anakin Skywalker. Twenty years older and bearing many scars, but recognizably the jedi knight he had renamed Darth Vader following Mace Windu's death. He was supporting himself with a stout cane, and on a lanyard around his neck was a portable audio playback device from which the iconic respiration sounds emanated.

"Treachery!" snarled Palpatine, launching bolts of Force Lightning toward the two. Kenobi effortlessly caught the streams of darkside energy in his outstretched hands and compressed them into a sparking ball before sending it back toward its source. The emperor found himself the recipient of a face-full of his own lightning.

"We regret to inform you that Darth Vader died during the action that destroyed the Death Star," continued the former Sith Lord.

Before Palpatine could recover his wits and lash out with the Force again or summon his guards, Kenobi took some sort of comlink from his belt and brought it to his lips, saying, "Three to beam up."

The world dissolved into sparkles.

\* \* \*

><p>(Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

From the Looping Journals of Sunset Shimmer:

I awoke to a ruined stone city covered in snow and filled with unsavory characters. I checked my memories, which seemed to contradict my current situation. Apparently I was supposed to be a first year high school student in Tokyo, but I was playing a druid in the online game, Elder Tales, in a guild called Crescent Moon Alliance.

The stone city I awoke in was named Susukino after the red light district in Hokkaido, Japan. It was a dark city, known for the guild that ran it. Brigandia was a brutal guild before the game began, and things only got progressively worse under their rule. Following narrative causality, I assumed incorrectly that the goal of the loop was dislodging Brigandia from the city. Unfortunately, my class was mostly for healing and only knew a few attack spells and creature summonings. Furthermore, my character was at a low level, not even level 40 or 50, while the top players were level 90. Still, I had advantages, including several previous loops of combat experience. Furthermore, I was a looper. The menu allowed several upgrades to my character that put me well above anyone in Brigandia.

While I was searching through my menu and before I could try assaulting Brigandia's Guild Hall, I was approached by an anthropomorphic cat, who introduced himself as Nyanta. He played a Swashbuckler as his main class in the game with a chef subclass. Apparently, chefs were the only class that could make food with taste, meaning everything tasted like dull crackers without even salt.

Anyway, he had come to know everyone in Susukino over the course of the loops, but didn't recognize me and figured me for a looper. Nyanta was the perfect gentleman, courteous and always willing to

give good advice and protect the innocent. I shared with him my journeys through the multiverse. He shared with me a few tips and tricks on how to interact with others, how a word in one circle and some encouragement in another could cause events that would bring down Brigandia without raising a single blade.

We spent a week in Susukino, taking apart the remnants of Brigandia. After the trash was removed, we helped the locals in setting up a governing body to protect the players and the NPCs, otherwise known as the People of the Land, or 'landers' for short. A week later, Nyanta's guildmaster arrived by griffon mount. His name was Shiroe, the anchor of the Elder Tales loops. Upon first glance, he didn't seem special or even important, like someone who'd fade into the back of a crowd, but overlooking him would be a mistake. He's a strategist, able to predict his opponents long term moves and counter appropriately. One of Nyanta's guild mates, Naotsugu, bragged that Shiroe could predict his opponents moves over a 30 second interval with a 1% margin of error.

We made our way to Akiba, a starter city, where my guild celebrated my safe return with a massive party. In some ways, Crescent Moon reminded me of Equestria, a guild full of friends who considered each other family and whose purpose was to support the other adventurers in Elder Tales. As my thoughts turned to Equestria, I couldn't help but long for home, for my dear friend Twilight. Maryelle approached me and asked what was wrong? It was then I realized tears were freely flowing down my cheeks, and I excused myself from the party.

Shiroe followed after me to see if I was OK. He seemed to see through me as he asked when I had last been in my home loop. After I had calmed down a bit, he started sharing his adventures with the Equestrian loopers. A friend of his was replaced once by Pinkie and they had an adventuring party that lasted all loop. He had also met Twilight and another Equestrian looper, Trixie, in a Hogwarts fused loop. Finally, there was a massive fused loop where most of the Equestrian Loopers were present.

It was at that massive fused loop that Elder Tales was declared a training loop, where one could work on developing their skills. He offered to spend to loop teaching me anything I wanted, and I decided to take him up on his offer.

\* \* \*

><p>So much time has passed since the last entry. The first lesson I learned after Crescent Moon's celebration was never drink anything Shiroe gave you. He likes to test his alchemy skills by creating new appearance changing potions for his fellow loopers. Nothing harmful, but I was a bit shocked to be a unicorn once again. He offered to change me back, but I declined...at least for now. Besides, it was a great opportunity to learn how to wield a keyblade as a pony.<p>

After being human for so many loops, it was strange being a pony. No fingers to scratch my back, everything had to be held by teeth or magic, occasionally I wondered how I got by as a pony? And then there were the stares from those I passed in the streets. Eventually, they stopped after the story of my tragic alchemy accident trapped me in this body circulated around town. I think Shiroe was behind that, but I never asked.

Besides my keyblade training, I immersed myself in studying with a vigor that would make Twilight proud. I learned about economics, diplomacy and interaction with others, how to own and operate a store, Celestia I was even tutored in real world engineering by Shiroe. Twilight probably loved it here, an entire loop designated to teaching and learning.

Events came and went like a hurricane. Shiroe took Akiba by storm, forming the Round Table Council to govern the affairs of Akiba. Before a month had passed, the People of the Land invited Akiba to join the League of Freedom Cities Eastal, a council of Nobles that rule the Eastern mainland of what would be Japan. I forgot to mention, the world of Elder Tales was designed like the hub human world, only half as big, so Akiba was located on the landmass that would be Japan.

Shiroe offered to have me come along and gain some practical skills in diplomacy, but I declined. As a unicorn, I figured my presence would make too many waves in certain circles. Instead, I traveled with Maryelle, my guildmaster, to the Sandleaf Peninsula for some more combat training. While there, I made a couple new friends: Minori and Touya, twins part of Shiroe's guild, Rundelhouse Code or Rudy for short, a sorcerer not affiliated with any guild, and Isuzu, a bard from Crescent Moon.

It was during one of our training sessions that goblins attacked the Peninsula while Sahuagin, amphibious monsters similar to goblins, attacked the beaches of Choushi, the headquarters of our training regiment. I decided to cut loose and use all my looping skills to hold them off. It led to several awkward questions between myself and my fellow adventurers especially when I flooded the beach with fire jutsu, but we drove them off.

\* \* \*

><p>We spent the next few weeks defending Choushi. Apparently, this was a regular event in the game world called Return of the Goblin King. Rudy nearly died defending Choushi, which scared us when we discovered he was a lander. For Adventurers like me and Shiroe, dying wasn't permanent, but for landers, it was.<p>

After we drove off the monsters, We held a celebration at Eastal's Headquarters, with with a ballroom dance and food. There, I decided to leave Crescent Moon Guild for Shiroe's Log Horizon. Maryelle was very understanding, though seemed a bit sad.

Things quieted down after that, with Shiroe taking me on occasional training trips and teaching me as much as he could about strategy. I would probably never be up to his level, I did gain a battlefield sense, allowing me to assess my situation in battle in an instant and determine when it would be best to switch tactics and keychains.

The loop came to an end a few months later, the last moments were spent just outside the Depths of Palm, a dungeon in the game, on a cliff overlooking the rising sun. It was one of Shiroe's favorite spots. As the loop came to an end, I knew I would miss Theldesia, but maybe, just maybe, this next loop would take me home. The rising sun filled me with hope.

\* \* \*

><p>99.4 (Grinnerz)<p>

Waking up while in the process of waking up was seldom any fun Vinyl decided.

Waking up to Octavia making a face and pulling down her eyelids even less so.

"Ahhh!" One good shove caused the grey filly to be sent to the floor. Only then did Vinyl realize her sometimes rival/roommate/friend/stranger/special-somepony was, like herself, currently all of seven years old. A fact which was driven home by her immediately tearing up.

"Momma! Scratchy pushed me out of bed and now my shoulder hurts!" And with that, young Octavia ran from the room to summon the wrath of their mother... \_Lyra\_.

'\_Aw crud. I don't know if I should hope she's Awake or not. ...Leaning towards not\_.'

"Vinyl! Why did you do that to your sister?"

\* \* \*

><p>99.5 (LordCirce)<p>

"I've been working on this for centuries, and you build a sonic screwdriver in three Loops!"

Vinyl shrugged. "It's all in the subharmonics."

Sweetie giggled, then whispered to Scootaloo, "That explains it. Bloom is tone deaf."

Applebloom bit into her wrench in frustration.

\* \* \*

><p>99.6 (Kalimaru)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke over the Tale of the Two Sisters as usual. What wasn't usual was that it was a video game instead of a book. Levitating it with her magic, Twilight brought the game back to her annex and pulled the necessary equipment from her pocket; A Ponystation 2, a liquid plasma Seapony TV, and a small generator to provide the electricity. Hooking it all up, Twilight began the game and was greeted with Celestia's wobbling voice.<p>

"A thousand... yeah, no, a thousand years ago... Something... really bad happened! That's right, really bad! And now Twilight Spackle, uh, I mean, Sparkles, I need you to... do something! That's right, do-urp!-do something! Stop putting your face in those dirty books you keep under your bed and, and and and... go on a quest! Yeah! My sister's going to be there, so prepare your best-hork!-best warrior persons. There'll be magic. You love it. Honest."

Sighing, Twilight facehoofed lightly. "This is why Celestia is allowed near Grog from Monkey Island. She keeps making these 'Finite Fictionies' games. I am so going to get Berry for this."

\* \* \*

><p>The two fillies and the tortoise stood in a triangle, looking around. Their arrival vessel, mared by First Mate Berry 'Sea Legs' Punch and Captain Ditzzy Do, sat atop the only pine tree for seven thousand miles and was on fire. Seeing as both captain and first mate were enjoying pineapple drinks (from a nearby Watermelon tree somehow) further down the beach, the children and accidental petnapping victim had been left to their own devices.<p>

Looking around, Ruby spoke first.

"THANK FOR THE VACATION, DADDY AND MISS TWILIGHT!"

Hiding behind a nearby tree, Discord sighed. "What a cute kid." Behind him, Twilight fumed from her interrupted revenge pranking.

\* \* \*

><p>Standing within Apple Bloom's testing complex, Gilda and Apple Bloom looked upon the small knife with both trepidation and anticipation. Turning to Gilda, Bloom removed her 3-D glasses. "Are you sure you want this thing? It's already cutting everything around it down one dimension by contact. I don't really want to know what it'll do if you stab someone with it."<p>

Gilda smiled. "Oh, I won't be stabbing anyone with it. It's a matter of political escalation. They bring the rude words, I bring the claws. They bring the battle-axes, I bring superior flight training. They bring the Griffon Armed Forces, armed with battle-axes and curse words, I bring the 2-D Knife of Extraplanar Reduction. Simple, really."

Any further explanation was ceased when a rather haggard looking Twilight busted down the door. Walking past Gilda and Bloom, she smiled that 'off her rocker' smile of hers. "How are you guys? Great? That's great. Say, I'll just be borrowing this. One moment." Grabbing the Razor in her magic, Twilight made an about-face and walked back out through the door. Her voice could be heard fading into the distance. "Oh Berryyyyyyyyyyy~", I've got something for you to put in your Grog right here!"

"No, Twilight! No!" \*stab\* "No! You turned my Grog into battery acid!"

Still in the lab, Bloom turned to Gilda as the griffon shrugged. "Ehh, that's kinda what I thought would happen."

Behind them, the manifestation of Occam nodded. "Me too."

\* \* \*

><p>99.7 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

Once more, Twilight Awoke reading the tale of the two royal sisters.

A quick once-over confirmed that nothing was out of the ordinary this Loop.

Then Nyx materialized next to her, slumped over on one side. "Mom, we need to talk."

Twilight bolted upright and immediately started checking Nyx for injuries. "Where does it hurt? Or is it numbness? Paralysis? Spinal injury?"

"Mom!" A dark aura surrounded the unicorn and gently but firmly gave Nyx some space. "I'm fine, really. I just having trouble remembering how to walk."

"Remembering how to... Did you Loop as the TARDIS?"

"Hang on." Both ponies vanished in a burst of antilight just as three Academy students crested the hill.

Another burst, and they were in Twilight's annex. Nyx was still limp from the neck down. "Sorry. Didn't want to raise any uncomfortable questions."

"No, no, that's fine." Twilight shook her head. "So, it's easier to teleport than walk right now?"

A pony-sized Spike looked over the edge of an Iris Drake novel, smiled, and said, "Hi, by the way."

Mother and daughter chorused "Hi, Spike." Nyx continued, "To answer your question, Mom, yes. And no, I didn't Loop as the TARDIS. No way I'd be as coherent as I am right now if I had." One of her hooves twitched. "Ah! Progress!"

Twilight knelt next to her. "So what were you? I'm assuming you were somehow disincorporate."

"Yeah. I'm not sure what Loop it was, though. It might be new." Nyx winced. "Ow. Not the wing I meant to stretch."

Twilight telekinetically shifted her onto her belly, limbs sprawled out. It was graceless, but stable. "Better?"

"Much, thank you. Do you have anything in the Hub fiction database about a place called Theros?"

"It's not ringing any bells." Twilight pulled a PADD from her pocket. "Let's see... huh. Magic: the Gathering. I'm guessing it wasn't like the Yu-Gi-Oh Loops."

Nyx had most of her legs under her by this point. She listed a bit, but was staying upright. "Not at all, though it does explain why I never saw an Anchor. Probably never went to that plane." She took a deep breath "Okay, so imagine taking descriptions of each god in the Greek pantheon, running them through a shredder, and then reassembling them blind."

She found herself in a very tight hug. She could feel Twilight shivering against her. "Please, please, please tell me none of them were as bad as Zeus."



Nyx hugged back as best she could. "Not at all. No bulls, no swans, no showers of gold. They thought they were above that kind of thing."

Twilight sagged with relief. "Oh, thank cedar. So, were you some sort of nascent proto-divine archetype or something?"

"No, I was Olympus. Sort of. For one, I was still called Nyx. For another, I was the night sky." Nyx scrunched up her face at the memories. "There really aren't words for what it was like."

"I have been a constellation," Twilight noted. She smirked. "Usually when you're trying to rule Equestria without burning it to the ground."

"Oh, there were constellations. There were entire ecosystems of the things. It was like a rumbling stomach, only all the time and through my whole body. And the gods were..." Nyx frowned. "Basically, imagine a family of fourteen, none of whom particularly like each other, forced to live in the same house. Now imagine being the house."

A brush floated towards them, carried by Twilight's magic. As she began brushing Nyx's mane, she asked, "How long?"

"Several years. I think. All the family drama blended together after a while, and only one being seemed to notice I was self-aware. Still, Kruphix was a pretty nice guy. I think he's Loop-aware, but he likes seeming all cryptic and aloof." Nyx gave a smile, but it quickly wilted. "Then Xenagos showed up. If I was a house, then he was breaking and entering. And declaring himself the family's newest member."

The brushing halted. "He tried to ascend?"

Nyx shook her head. "Not in a way that put the Loop at risk. The gods were powerful, but they were more like Discworld gods with a lot of belief than admins. Anyway, he basically became Dionysius. Or a really nasty Variant Pinkie. He did declare himself god of revels."

Twilight shuddered at the thought. "How'd that go?"

"Well, civilization risked collapse due to party overload, and in that world, gods can't kill each other, so they got a mortal to do it." Nyx giggled. "And that was when I found out I was a genius loci. You should've seen the looks on the gods' faces when I started helping her."

Spike looked back up from his book. "You helped commit deicide?"

"No!" Nyx slumped. "But I didn't stop it either. If I knew more about what I could do and how apotheosis worked there, I might have been able to find some nonlethal option, but..."

Twilight nuzzled her. "I'm sure you made the best choice you could."

Spike moved to his quasi-sister's side, nodded, and gave her a

hug.

Nyx sniffled and smiled. "Thanks. Both of you. And I know I made the right choice afterwards. The gods were almost soiling themselves after they saw one of their own die. I made sure Elspeth got out of there as soon as she could." She stood shakily and puffed out her chest. "The heavens were thundering with the Royal Canterlot Voice when the Loop ended. I put everything you taught me into that lecture, Mom."

\* \* \*

><p>99.8 (yannoshka)<p>

In the wide, wide multiverse embodied with the Yggdrasil - the tree that is not, the living computer, the metaphysical bag that holds the entirety of everything and is simultaneously both within and without itself to the point that Schroedinger's cat put itself out of it's undetermined misery...

A pony Woke up. To complicate things the pony did not, as a matter of fact Wake up as a pony. Well, yes it did, but the looping entity did not Wake up as it's own definition of pony.

Rainbow Dash spit out the bridle in disgust and glared at the mismatched form of a dracoequus that was for some reason known only to the spirit of Chaos himself, walking despondently upon his eyebrows and had until the moment she spat the bridle out been dragging her along. As in literally dragging her along since she apparently had seven legs, all but one of which were pointing inverse to how the equine legs were usually positioned.

Being an element of loyalty, and quite near to him, she did not even have to do anything to know that he was also awake.

"What. The. Holly. Bush. Discord?" She growled. But no sooner had her words left her mouth that she realized something further. However absurd the situation they found themselves, all she could feel of Discord was... detachment. No amusement, nor curiosity nor sadness nor anything really. Just a metaphysical sorta gap.

And somewhere deep within herself a small voice she rarely listened to was frenetically waving around hoping against hope that for once it would be heeded to.

"Oh. You're Awake." More than anything Discord sounded like a masculine Maude Pie. And that should've been scary.

Dash made a neat note to self to examine the little voice in closer detail - she was definitely not acting, well, thinking at least, like herself - but for the time being she contented herself with answering Discord's flat statement with an inquiring raise of an eyebrow that Spock would have approved.

"This loop my sense of humor literally ran away from me shortly after I got freed from petrification. And I only Woke up after the fact myself. So, now you my Loyal steed and companion and myself are on an absurd quest to hunt it down and set back what once went wrong... Or right... It's all kinda relative... Meh..." Discord continued in his should-be-quite-creepy monotone.

Meanwhile in another part of relatively (in all the dreadfully ambiguity that the principle in question entailed) the same space-time continuum, a selfsentient ratio of circle's circumference to it's diameter contemplated the chromatic resonance of prismatic spectrum near the frequency of 484 terahertz, along the wavelength close but not quite 620 nanometers. For some inexplicable reason it was certain balloons were supposed to be involved. And maybe cupcakes.

\* \* \*

><p>99.9 (Gym Quirk)<p>

"I appreciate your help with this, Apple Bloom."

"Ain't'cha gettin' just a mite obsessed, Twilight? I mean you've already got Shining's damage transfer spell set up with Dragon Peak as its sink. And now you want me to adapt this spare Defiant class deflector shield array as an outer layer? Why not just hide it with a cloaking device?"

"It's the principle of the thing! There has to be a way to protect my tree!"

One Tirek fireball later...\_

"Apple Bloom? You've got a spare cloaking device, right? I don't seem to have one at the moment."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<br>99.1: Apparently this was written by committee.  
>99.2: Crib from your own baseline. Kind of like writing what you know.<br>99.3: Damn the torpedoes!  
>99.4: A very musical family.<br>99.5: Poor 'bloom.  
>99.6: Monkey islanding around. Also, Gilda is preparing to productionize coups.<br>99.7: Planeswalkers are kind of hard to inform about Yggdrasil. They know a few things about the multiverse, none of them applicable.  
>99.8: Pi.<br>99.9: Fixing it is a stopgap. There has to be SOME solution. (Well, supposedly.)

## 106. Chapter 106

### 100.1

"Okay." Mac mixed the drink Lyra had specified. "Olive oil, absinthe, azeotrope chaser 'n' some coffee. Seriously?"

Lyra nodded. "That is correct. Thank you."

"This the whole... multiple... you, thing?"

"Sort of." Lyra picked up the drink with an application of telekinesis, and sipped it. Her expression took some interesting shapes. "Basically, you know how all this got kicked off?"

"Kinda. Y'all... broke something?"

"Pretty much." Another sip. "Anyway, three of me were relatively normal... well, normal for Equestria. Human girl, unicorn, and a sea pony. But the fourth me, the one who's talking to you now..."

She put the drink down, and shrugged. "I was... well, the one who actually used the machine. As far as I can tell, I'm the one who gets all the personality traits from universal bleed."

Mac blinked. "Come again, miss?"

"It's the whole unstuck in the universe thing." This time, Lyra took a mouthful of the drink, and sighed as it went down. "The other mes are quite coherent, so they get memories relating to that â€" they filter them, sort of. So human Lyra gets memories relating to humans, seapony Lyra gets seapony memories..."

"Right. Kinda like loop memories?" Mac cleaned a glass with a cloth. The glass in question was already quite clean enough, but it was something any barman learned to do as a time-filler.

"Sort of." Lyra sipped again. "And I/we split the workload on interpreting them. I actually get less than the other three to work with... it's just that I get all the strange stuff. Robots, changelings, mad science earth ponies working on inventing a Human Analogue Neat Device..."

Berry Punch giggled from the experiments cabinet. "A HAND, huh?"

"Yep." Lyra took another slug. "Anyway, the result of that is that I'm... kind of everything at once that the other three aren't."

"Sounds like most loopers," Mac deadpanned.

Lyra shrugged. "Suppose. And that's why my taste in drinks looks like it was selected by picking four random bottles out of a bottle bank."

"Excellent!" Berry marched around the counter and sat down next to her. "You have no idea how much I appreciate a challenge! Want to see if we can make something with pesto that you'd like?"

Lyra's eyes unfocused for a moment. "The other three went ew. I'm game."

\* \* \*

><p>100.2<p>

"Ah, it's good to see you," Spike said, smiling, as he released his embrace.

"Likewise, dear," Rarity replied. "Was it long?"

"Pretty long," Spike admitted. "Last-but-one Loop was an Arda one."

Rarity winced.

"And last loop..." Spike paused. "Well, we do need to discuss it sometime..." He sighed. "You got a crush on me."

His wife blinked. "...I'd have thought it was usually the other way around..."

"Oh, har har." He tapped her on the hock. "No, I think it was a combination of my undeniable awesomeness and the fact I was about half as big again as you that loop."

Rarity smiled archly at him. "Well, you're hardly the Element of Modesty, are you?" she asked impishly.

"I think it's a thing." Spike shrugged. "I point to Scootaloo and Dash."

"Okay, fair point, dear." They shared a chuckle.

"...but, yeah," Spike said, bringing them back to the topic. "Basically, we need to hash out what to do in that kind of situation."

Rarity nodded. "Good point, yes... we've sort of just assumed a no, haven't we?"

"We have, yeah." Spike sat down, sighing. "And I usually am better at heading off your unawake interests in me when they develop, these loops... it's just... it was a long time."

The unicorn sat down next to him, silent.

"So... yeah. I know that Shining and Cadence have a standing agreement that it's fine whether one or even neither is Awake, so..." Claws drummed on the ground, leaving dents. "And I don't even know what Trix and Chrysalis do..."

Rarity frowned. "I may have a suggestion."

"Go on," Spike invited.

"If one of us is Awake, they can... reciprocate as appropriate." Rarity hummed. "Don't start anything, don't go to a further stage of the relationship, and," she smiled. "And if the unawake one is about ten years old, the awake one can limit it to the affection appropriate."

Spike mulled that over. "...yeah, seems fair. But â€" I'd say that, if it gets to the point of clear romantic involvement, we should tell the unawake one about the loops. Come clean about it."

"Good idea."

Rarity leaned into his shoulder, and for several seconds they sat looking up at the morning sky.

"...Berry got romantically involved last loop," Spike commented.

"Oh?" Rarity raised an eyebrow delicately. "Do tell."

Spike grinned. "The old flatfish himself â€" Discord."

Rarity took a moment to process that.

"...huh."

"Yeah, that was about my reaction too," Spike agreed. "Hey, want to try something new I thought of?"

"Do go on."

"Well, basically, it involves my dragonfire, the cloth-form spell, a carpet made from same, and the command release phrase being 'last forever'..."

\* \* \*

><p>100.3<p>

"...so, that's about the shape of things," Twilight finished, clicking the slideshow off. "I know you've had the talk before, but that was the version for local loopers so it should orient you here."

The Saddle Arabian stallion seated on an entire bench nodded. "Thanks. That was a very professional briefing."

"I try," Twilight allowed. "Now, how does a looper get the pony name 'Free Spirit'?"

This elicited a sigh.

"Okay, this is kinda strange," he began. "I've got a baseline, and then I seem to have another completely different one I spend almost as much time in. I'm a horse there, by the way-"

"Right." Twilight looked him up and down. "Explains why you were so comfortable on four hooves, most newcomers are a bit coltish for a day or so."

She rummaged in her pocket, and brought out a notepad. "Okay, I don't get to play this often... give me clues, and I'll see if I can work out who you are."

Free Spirit nickered a laugh. "Now this is familiar. First clue â€" my name's David Webb."

Twilight dropped the notebook, rummaged again for a second, pulled out a novel, and then held it up. "Not Weber?"

"Nope, Webb." He grinned, rolling back his lip to reveal really rather large teeth. "And it's not actually much of a clue, almost no-one knows me by that name."

"I see..." Twilight noted it down anyway. "Well, I'm stumped... next?"

Another chuckle. "I'm going to be really inconvenient. This one's from my sort-of-other-baseline. I was a herd stallion."

"Not surprised," Twilight muttered. He was huge, even for a Saddle Arabian.

"Third clue â€" I don't get on well with the US government..."

\* \* \*

><p>About half an hour later, Twilight held up her pad of paper in triumph. "Finally!"<p>

She then looked at the extra data alongside the names, and blinked. "Okay, apparently both your baseline and your most common other loop have versions in the Hub where you're played by the same actor."

The big stallion shrugged.

"So..." she paused. "Do you prefer Spirit, or Jason?"

"Let's go with Spirit." The mustang stood. "Speaking of which, I think you mentioned a bar?"

"I did. Follow me."

As they left the library, Twilight looked back at him. "Solved most of the problems with your baselines? If not, I could lend a hoof..."

"I'm good." Spirit bobbed his head in a shrug. "By now I just keep recorded confessions from the CIA operatives in question. As for the US cavalry, they're usually remarkably surprised by a horse who can handle demolitions charges..."

\* \* \*

><p>100.4 (DrTempo)<p>

Sunset walked in to Mac's Bar, relaxing a little. Twilight was there, draining down a large beer.

>"Ouch, Twilight. What Loop were you in that's driven you to drink? Eiken? G3? Or...shudder...the Bureau?"<p>

Twilight shook her head. "No. I was in the really cheesy Batman Loop...the one where he used that card..."

Sunset facehooved. "OUCH."

Twilight noticed Sunset smiling. "You're in a good mood."

Sunset nodded. "Yeah...Things're actually moving forward in the Canterlot High world. A battle of the bands is going on...and the human versions of your friends are trying to form a band. I have a few tales I heard."

Twilight raised an eyebrow. "This I gotta hear."

Sunset smirked. "Well, that world's Trixie and Rainbow Dash got in a guitar duel to get a cool guitar...from what I heard, Dash somehow got her pony traits she had when my baseline self got whooped during the duel. She did give up...but the funniest part of that one?

Trixie's 'prize' cost 12 grand! And she didn't have the money!" Sunset pulled out a trumpet, playing the infamous losing horns tune.

"Meanwhile, Rarity tried hauling a grand piano by herself to a practice. What she was thinking...Oy. And poor Applejack had to reclaim her bass guitar from those stupid Flim Flam Brothers...had to work for them to pay for her own guitar."

Twilight drank, and said, "That..may be the first time any version of them's gotten the best of Applejack. What about Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie?"

Sunset smiled a little. "Pinkie's apparently a natural drummer...and Rainbow Dash was seeing it in front of her face and didn't put it together for a while. And remember the saying 'music soothes the savage beast?' If by, 'savage beasts', you mean hamsters, Fluttershy had to reel in a bunch of them after Rarity was helping her take care of them, and well...Hilarity ensued. And remember the thing with Rainbow Dash I mentioned? If I heard right, it happened to all of them in those cases."

Twilight shrugged. "Guess things aren't too boring there anymore."

Sunset smiled. "As our bartender'd say, eenope."

\* \* \*

><p>100.5 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

Twilight liked her new castle. Really, she did. But the library had been her home for billions of years, and seeing it explode, implode, get used as a bludgeon, or otherwise destroyed every Loop hurt.

So she looked for ways to fix it. Prevention was, of course, the top priority, but it almost never worked. It was depressingly reminiscent of the Final Destination Loops, like the tree was destined to be destroyed by Tirek.

Thus came plan B, reconstruction. Usually, the roots survived, which meant alicorn-level earth pony magic could regrow the place. The reconstruction spell Twilight used on un-Awake Trixie's wagon (which she would've thought of on her own eventually,) worked quite well if enough of the mass hadn't been incinerated. And in those cases when the place was utterly disintegratedâ€| well, Twilight was working on that.

Still, at this point, she was often able to reconstitute Golden Oaks before Loop's end.

Whether it survived to that pointâ€|

"First, I would like to apologize," said Trixie, her shield filtering the smoke out of the air. "I completely forgot I put that crate in your basement. Second, look on the bright side. Now we know more about how earth pony magic interacts with explosive compounds. It may even explain Pinkie a little."

She waited for a reply. Twilight just stared, pinprick pupils locked



on the smoldering crater that had been her regrown home. One of her ears flicked like a deranged metronome. Trixie could see her mane frizzing out hair by hair.

Trixie coughed into a fetlock. "I'll just show myself out." She walked facefirst into the shield, which she only now noticed had gone from blue to purple.

Twilight's head never moved away from the smoking ruin. Her voice was oddly distant and dispassionate, as though she were commenting on a movie. "I am going to start lecturing you now, and I'm not sure when I'm going to stop."

\* \* \*

><p>(Bardic Knowledge)<p>

Sunset's Journal:

Well, that was different. Not the Awakening, nor the fact that I was in a bustling city with species I couldn't recognize. What made this Loop different is that the local Anchor was actually rather new. Gideon had been confused to not find a friend of his (whom I was apparently replacing) named Chandra. At first I wouldn't have noticed had he not muttered something about having plans for this Loop. Something about him felt oddly familiar, but I couldn't place it.

After I caught up with him, I did my best to explain the situation to him. After the Multiverse speech Mickey had given me and the multitude of places I had been, it was interesting to be on the giving end of it. Especially when I started off about the nature of the Multiverse and he said he already knew what the multiverse was! The different capitalization is important, because he was talking about his local Branch's multiverse rather than the wider Multiverse that was part of Yggdrasil.

Kephalai, the city I had Woken up in, was apparently only one world, or "Plane," in his multiverse. Gideon, this Chandra person (a pyromancer according to my in-Loop memories), and a few others were called Planeswalkers and were the only people who could freely travel between them. I was somewhat surprised when he said I was somehow one of them, but he said that all Planeswalkers could identify another Planeswalker when they meet (this was apparently the familiar feeling I had felt before).

He taught me how to Planeswalk and how to follow another Planeswalker, and he took me on a tour of the multiverse. There were some very strange places, like that metal place, Mirrodin, or the city-plane Ravnica (I had no frame of reference of whether it or Coruscant was bigger).

The way magic worked there involved bonding with various landmarks or other places, then using the mana inherent in that bond to cast spells or call on creatures to fight for you. I gave it a try, but it seems that as soon as I went on to the next Loop, I lost all connection with the places I had bonded with. I wonder if I'll be able to use that kind of magic back in Equestria?

\* \* \*

><p>100.6 (Kalimaru)<p>

"What's that a statue of, Miss Cheerilee?"

Looking at the statue, Cheerilee smiled. The Cutie Mark Crusaders and their teacher were all Awake and aware of who it was, but appearances needed to be maintained. This just had the bonus of training Cheerilee to not go overboard on the children. "This menacing monster is known as Conquest. He's a dangerous creature that the Princesses sealed away millennia ago. Legend says that when he was free, he had the ability to cause strife amongst ponies and turn them to statues."

Snips and Snails, ever the intellectuals, grinned at this.  
"Coooooooooooooolll!"

Cheerilee shook her head. This was going to be one of those Loops where the two were testosterone junkies. "Not 'cool', I'm afraid, but you are close. Conquest's powers were what first drew the Windigos to Equestria, back before the three pony tribes had become one. If he were to ever get out again, Equestria would probably once again become a frozen wasteland."

"Ooooooh." In the back, the Crusaders smiled and rolled their eyes. As most of the group continued on, Sweetie Bell turned to the others. "I'm thinking this will be a Loop without us being the ones to wake him."

Scotaloo pointed a hoof over Sweetie's shoulder. "And you're right, because those two knuckleheads are about to do it."

Still at the statue, Snips and Snails had begun poking the giant hand. "Think there's a secret entrance to its cell here?" "I hope so. I want to see a Windigo!"

Galloping towards them, Diamond Tiara swatted the two colts away. "What do you think you're doing? What if he gets out?" Tapping the pedestal that 'Conquest' was mounted on, Diamond Tiara turned and began reprimanding the two. "Do you know how hard it'll be for everypony if everything gets frozen?"

The other Crusaders had joined them and were now watching the statue. Applebloom spoke first. "Uh, DT?"

"Wait a moment, Apple Bloom." Tiara returned to her rant. "And another thing!"

This time it was Nyx's turn. "Diamond Tiara?"

"Not now! And you two thought-"

The whole group at once this time. "DIAMOND TIARA!"

"What? What is it?"

Behind her, Master Hand floated free of the pedestal and laughed darkly. "Mwahahaha!"

Diamond Tiara facehoofed. "Aw, ficus."

\* \* \*

><p>100.7 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

The gathered ponies cheered as Mayor Mare announced the start of the Summer Sun Celebration, not that Twilight took notice. Even now, 4 stars converged behind the moon, causing the Mare image on the moon to vanish. Twilight clenched her teeth, hoping nothing bad was about to happen. The birds started chirping and the trumpets blared as Rarity pulled back the screen. But there was no Celestia.

Dark purple fog rolled in from the backstage as Twilight gasped, "Oh no!"

Then the fog materialized into a black filly alicorn with a purple mane and cyan eyes. She seemed as frightened as the rest of the ponies confused. Her eyes even now were watering, "M-mommy?! Mommy, where are you?!"

Her voice rose as tears started flooding down the side of her cheeks. Fluttershy responded quickest by instinct, gliding over to the filly and lifting her up, "There, there, now...what's your name, little filly?"

The filly rubbed her eyes clear of tears and gave a small smile, "N-N-Nyx..."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight tilted her head in confusion, "Huh?! Could that really be Nightmare Moon? But she's so...young!" <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Nyx, you're such a brave girl, coming out on that stage to find your mommy. What does she look like?"<p>

"S-She's got a purple coat with the most beautiful cutie mark of them all. It's really special since her talent is magic...all magic."

Fluttershy carried Nyx in her arms as she spoke to the crowd in an uncharacteristically loud tone, "Is there anyone here with the special talent, magic?"

Twilight's eyes widened. \_This had to be her plan\_, Twilight thought, \_She knew her only weakness is the Elements of Harmony, and I'm the only one who knows about it here! She's trying to take me out quick, and she's already captured the hearts of Ponyville with her cute act!\_ Spike, however, recognized the reference immediately, "Hey, that's T-"

Suddenly, Spike was dropped off Twilight's back as a hoof covered his mouth to stop him talking. Twilight hissed, "Spike! That's Nightmare Moon, and she's trying to find me to take us out! We're the only ones who know about her weakness to the Elements of Harmony. The instant she finds us, she'll blast us to the moon!"

However, the damage was already done as Nyx homed in on Twilight,

"Mommy! "

Fluttershy looked to Nyx, "Is Twilight your mommy?"

"Yes, Twilight is my mommy! Mommy, I'm up here!"

Twilight's eyes widened as she levitated Spike onto her back and bolted. Several ponies reacted instantly as they gave chase. Moments after Twilight was out of sight, Celestia appeared in a burst of white light signifying teleportation, "Sorry my little ponies, there was a parasprite invasion in Manehattan that demanded my immediate attention-"

Celestia's eyes landed on Nyx in Fluttershy's arms and smiled, "Well hello, little one...why are you crying?"

Nyx sniffed and barely held back her sobs, "Mo-Mommy Twilight...she just...just, ran away."

The waterworks started again as Celestia seemed surprised, "Twilight Sparkle, my student? She didn't tell me about any children. Well, we'll have to get you back to your mommy in a few minutes."

With that, Celestia took Nyx on her back and raised the sun.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, mommy locked herself in the Library and bolted every door and window," asked Nyx.<p>

Celestia nodded and giggled, "It's not often we get to prank an unawake Twilight. She really did need to lighten up and lay off those dusty old books. I bet her newest theory is you've corrupted me and I'm now your mind controlled servant, to lull her into a false sense of security."

Again, the two shared a laugh before Nyx paused, "Wait, so what's Luna up to this loop?"

"She awoke a thousand years ago on the moon before discovering a stargate planted there predating the earliest known life on Equestria. I wonder what she's been up to."

\* \* \*

><p>General Hammond sat at the table as the Equine Empress of Humankind briefed SG-1 on what to expect from Equestria. O'Neill had his head planted on his hands as he sighed. This was going to be a weird loop. <p>

\* \* \*

><p>100.8 (AnonymousAsk) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was a dark night when Princess Celestia and Princess Luna approached Carousel Boutique, with lightning flashing on the horizon. Twilight closed the door behind the two alicorns, and led them into a small room. Inside they found Sweetie Belle, who had been bound to a

bed by her sister's magic.<p>

"I'm delighted you managed to come, Princesses," said Rarity, not taking her eyes off her sister.

"After Twilight's letter, we felt we had no choice," Celestia replied. "What is happening to Sweetie Belle?"

"I'm sorry Princess, we're not sure," Twilight responded. "But we think the phantom of a Windigo may be trying to take over her body."

Luna raised an eyebrow sceptically. "Are thou sure? Perhaps she is merely ill."

"This body WILL be mine!" Sweetie Belle screamed in a voice much gruffer than her own. She began to pull through Rarity's bindings, and float above her bed.

"My poor Sweetie Belle..." Rarity had tears in her eyes as she watched.

The boutique's doorbell rang through the house, and everypony turned towards the front door. Big Macintosh strode in, wearing priest's robes. Twilight left Sweetie's room and approached him.

"Please tell me you're the professional we called," Twilight begged.

"Eeyup." Big Macintosh nodded as he gave his reply. He walked into Sweetie's room, and took a deep breath.

"There's great evil in this room."

Sweetie Belle spat a flood of green ooze over Princess Celestia, and strained against Rarity's magic once more, floating higher in the air. "You'll never get me, bwahahaha!"

"Get outta her body, ya Evil Spirit!" Big Mac roared at Sweetie Belle.

Sweetie Belle turned her head to face Big Macintosh. "Aaahhh, Big Macintosh. Your sister is in here with us. I can send her a message if you'd like." An eerie smile spread across her lips as she spoke.

"Sis, get outta here, please, Ah'm tryin' ta work." Big Macintosh sighed, face in hoof.

Applebloom crawled out from under the bed, muttering under her breath. Big Macintosh could have sworn he heard her call him a killjoy as she passed him. He shook his head, before turning back to Sweetie Belle "In the name of the Princesses, Ah command ya ta leave this body!" He began waving around a holy symbol which depicted both Celestia and Luna.

"...What?" The two alicorns asked in unison, both utterly confused by proceedings.

Sweetie Belle screamed over them, with words no pony present had ever

heard.

Celestia's eyes widened, as she turned to Rarity. "Where did she learn this?"

Rarity stood, mouth agape. It took a few seconds for her to regain her composure long enough to answer the Princess. "Well, it was most certainly not from me. Perhaps it was from one of Miss Cheerilee's classes?"

"Does anyone else feel it getting colder in here?" Luna asked, backing away from Sweetie Belle, and towards the doorway. Ice was slowly spreading across the ceiling.

"In the name of Princess Celestia, an' Princess Luna, an' Nightmare Moon..." Big Macintosh yelled, raising his symbol higher.

"Why are thou mentioning me twice?" Luna asked, an eyebrow raised.

"Ugghhh..." Sweetie Belle started, before her head slowly began to rotate 360 degrees. Once finished, she had a short coughing fit, before a small white light, which then evaporated.

Rarity practically leapt onto the bed, embracing her little sister "Are you alright, Sweetie Belle?"

"Fine... Can't... Breathe..." Sweetie Belle choked out, but her sister didn't seem to notice.

Twilight breathed a sigh of relief, before turning to the Princesses "Thank you for coming Princesses. If you hadn't been here, who knows what could have happened."

"You're... most welcome, Twilight." Celestia replied, still trying to understand what actually \_had\_ happened.

"Did we even do anything, Tia?" Luna whispered, before receiving a swift kick from her sister, which she understood to be a message to keep quiet. The pair gave their goodbyes, before leaving the boutique.

Sweetie Belle waited for a few seconds, before slinking out of her sister's grasp "They gone?"

"Yeah, I think they're probably back in Canterlot Castle by now..." Twilight said, staring out of a window.

"I must admit, I found it funny." Sweetie Belle said, clicking one of her hooves before transforming back to Discord.

"Eeyup." Replied the quiet farmer.

"However, I think that's the last time we let you improvise, Big Macintosh." Rarity said, holding back a giggle "In the name of Nightmare Moon? Seriously?"

"I did like Applebloom appearing from under the bed." Discord said, laying back on the ceiling.

"Well, what's next?" Applebloom said, walking back into the room.

"We could invite them to the beach, and stage a shark attack." Discord suggested.

Twilight shook her head. "We did that a few loops ago."

"Ooh, we could do Titanic. Me and my dear Spikey-Wikey could play Jack and Rose..." Rarity said as her eyes glazed over."

"You do remember that Jack drowns at the end, right?" Twilight said, turning to stare at Rarity.

"Well, a minor rewrite would be required, of course..." Rarity said, embarrassed at that oversight.

"How 'bout we make Celestia Connor an' the Termiponies?" Applebloom suggested.

Twilight scratched her chin with a hoof in thought. "Hmmm... We could do it, but we'd need to check that with Skynet first..." She looked around the room "No reason we can't start the prep work though."

"Hey, Ah just thought of somethin'. Where's the real Sweetie Belle?" Applebloom asked Rarity.

"Oh, she's with our Grandparents. They were really eager to meet her this loop for some reason." Rarity replied, shrugging her hooves.

\* \* \*

><p>100.9 (misterq)<p>

"And that is why we need to give our alicorn magic to the one pony Tirek will never expect," Princess Celestia stated.

"Don't worry," Twilight Sparkle smiled, "I think I know what I can do to stop Tirek from blowing up my tree this time.. er, I mean conquering Equestria."

The princess of the sun shook her head, "You misunderstand me, Twilight. I plan to have all of us give our alicorn magic to.. her."

Twilight looked down where her mentor's hoof was pointed and saw a smiling grey and blonde pegasus with mis-focused eyes. Ditzzy saw her looking and waved eagerly. The princess of friendship then summarized her extensive thoughts on the matter.

"What?"

"We have realized that only Ditzzy can save us all since Tirek would never expect her. All right every pony, transfer your magic now," Princess Celestia lowered her horn along with the other princesses. Even though she was performing the motions and the magic transference spell, Twilight still felt the need to comment of the situation.

"What?" said the lavender unicorn as her magic mixed with the other alicorns and then barreled right into Ditzzy.

When the light faded, Ditzzy stood tall as an alicorn. Her muffin shaped tiara did kind of ruin the image. The mail-mare oohed and aah-ed as she examined as much of her new self as she could before trotting off in search of a mirror, or possibly breakfast.

With a great crashing noise, Tirek burst through the palace doors.

Tossing the door fragments aside, he spoke to the tired looking alicorns in front of him, "Good day, princesses. You know why I'm here. Once I take your alicorn magic, I.."

There was a pale blue burst of magic that streaked in from where Ditzzy was examining herself.

And then suddenly, Tirek was a muffin.

A normal sized muffin. Chocolate chip, if Twilight's nose was accurate.

Twilight carefully spoke her mind on what had just occurred in front of her, "Wait, what?"

"Yay! I won!" Ditzzy danced in place happily, "Now to cast the spell to send all the stolen magic back to every po... oopsie. That was the muffin making spell again."

Twilight watched the spell shoot out a nearby window. Derpy raced forward and stared after her wayward spell. A brief burst of magic and Luna's telescope was now in front of Ditzzy.

"Don't worry. It didn't hit any pony. Just Twilight's library. Oh, and Pinkie Pie was just passing by," Ditzzy gave a play-by-play commentary, "Oh no. Sorry your house got eaten, Twilight."

Twilight Sparkle just made a weak squeaking noise as she lay there with her eyes closed.

\* \* \*

><p>The princess of the sun shook her head, "You misunderstand me, Twilight. I plan to have all of us give our alicorn magic to her."<p>

There stood Pinkie Pie, in all her cheery glory.

"Yeah, he'll never expect her," Twilight preempted her mentor, "All right, let's do this."

A short magic transfer sequence later, and Pinkie was an alicorn. The pink pony was practically vibrating with energy. Pink sparks arced up and down her body in a way that seriously worried Twilight.

Then Tirek burst in. The villain took a moment to look at the scene in front of him, "So this was your plan, princess? It's too bad for you that I'm quite capable of stealing the alicorn magic from this new inexperienced princess you had been hanging your hopes on."



"Oh, you don't need to steal anything," Pinkie Pie smiled the smile of an all-powerful party alicorn, "If you want all my powers, I can just give them to you. Would that cheer you up?"

Tirek grinned, "Nothing would make me happier."

"Well, okie dokie lokie," Pinkie chirped and lowered her new horn. Among the feeble protestations of the other princesses, Twilight watched onwards as Tirek absorbed all of Pinkie Pie's magic.

"Finally!" the magic thief roared, "With all of your magic, Equestria shall be mine to party!"

The centauroid looked confused at what he had just said, "I said, Equestria shall be partied to... Equestira shall fun party... Partyquestria party smile fun party. What the fun is party wrong with me?"

Twilight watched in amazement as Tirek's fur turned a bright pink color.

"No!" the monster was in full panic mode, "I will not fun this party indignity! I will sooner joy than party on like this! Party party fun joy.. Joy party... Fun fun fun time party!"

Tirek horns were now striped like candy canes and his hooves had pictures of balloons on them. The magic thief started shooting pink beams of magic everywhere, futilely trying to get the tainted energies out while screaming out party words in fear and anger. Twilight watched sadly as one of the pink beams struck her doomed library, turning it into a delicious chocolate statue that started to melt under the heat almost immediately.

Finally tired of running in circles, Tirek just fell onto the floor and curled up in the fetal position.

The color faded Pinkie walked up to him, "Do you want to give back all the pony magic you have taken now?"

Tirek nodded pitifully.

"Well then," Pinkie Pie nodded, then thought for a moment, "I have absolutely no idea how to make that happen."

The party pony thought some more and then gave a wide smile, "What if it's like a pinata? All the magic will rush out like candy once we bust him open with large sticks?"

Upon hearing that, something far less magical escaped the newly panicking Tirek.

\* \* \*

><p>100.10 (Bardic\_Knowledge)<p>

Twilight Woke up in her usual book-reading spot, but instantly noted that something was off. It was night out, and she had been reading to the light of her horn. A quick scan of both book and memory pegged

this to be a rather curious Variant Loop, wherein the ruler of Equestria was Tirac, Lord of the Night Sky, and the banished sibling was not Scorpan, as she expected (Prince Scorpan did show up in her memories, however, as her old foal-sitter), but Tir\_ek\_, Lord of Sunlight, whose corrupted self was known as King Sunstar.

That brought up some rather unpleasant memories of the Fused Loop they'd had with Mega Man.

Considering the motivations of Tirac during their G1 Loops, she was somewhat worried the night sky meant he had brought about his "night that never ends," but double-checking her memories revealed that, in this version of Equestria, everypony was actually nocturnal. This meant that Tirek's rebellion was motivated by the same thing that Luna's had been, so hopefully the Elements would still work on him without resorting to the inverse beam they'd had to use on Tirek Sunstar. Further, this Lord Tirac may have been intimidating and a fairly harsh taskmaster in comparison to the more motherly Princess Celestia, but he was still a good guy in this Loop.

Checking the Elements showed that only one of each Element was awake this time. She'd have to contact each in turn until she could be sure who all it was, but maybe they'd like an almost-baseline run this time around.

\_I wonder if someone's replaced Discord, too? Catrina, maybe?\_ she thought. \_And please, please, \_please \_don't let Sunstar blow up my library at the start of the Loop.\_

Twilight burst into the library as normal, calling for Spike. From his response, she could tell he wasn't Awake, nor had minor events (like Moondancer, her party, or Spike's crush) changed due to the change in leadership. She did her baseline search, changing her terminology from "Mare in the Moon" to "Lord in the Stars." A similar letter was written and sent off, but the reply was rather different.

\_"Twilight Sparkle,\_"

\_I see I was not mistaken in choosing you as my pupil. My brother is expected to return on the Longest Night and I will be there to face him. I have long learned, however, to set up contingencies. In case I fail to stop him, as unlikely as it seems, I am tasking you with the retrieval of the Elements of Harmony from the Ancient Castle. None are allowed to know you have this task. As such, you have been given a cover as "overseer" of the celebration.\_

\_You know what will happen if you fail.\_

\_Lord Tirac of the Night Sky.\_

"I guess we're going to Ponyville, then," concluded Spike. "Hopefully there's enough time that we can say good-bye to our brothers."

Twilight double-checked her Loop memories. Rather than Lord Tirac raising Spike, as Celestia had during the baseline, Prince Scorpan had taken care of the young dragon. They had settled on a sibling relationship once Spike had become more independent, and Scorpan and Shining Armor had become fast friends.

Oh. \_More than... Heh. Scorpan and Shiny. Cadence will love that.\_

"That's right, Spike. I'm honoured Lord Tirac has entrusted me with this task, but remember what he said: Don't tell anyone what he's sent us to do."

Spike saluted and set about packing for their trip to Ponyville. She set out to find Shining, both to check if he was Awake and to tell him the news.

\* \* \*

><p>Going around Ponyville confirmed that the other Elements she had felt awake were the original set, and they gave each other subtle clues to keep things mostly baseline. Rarity's decorations were more malevolent in appearance and Fluttershy's bird choir was made up of various owls, but, considering the differences in this Equestria, that was understandable.<p>

She had no idea a snowy owl could keep the beat like that.

The first major change came as everyone was leaving Pinkie Pre-Longest-Night-Party Party. Instead of gathering inside the town hall, everyone waited outside of it, watching Canterlot in the evening sky for Lord Tirac's chariot to arrive.

Which meant that everypony in Ponyville had an excellent view of Midnight Castle's tallest tower exploding.

Beams of furious light and roiling darkness clashed against each other as Sunstar and Tirac battled in the distance, before Twilight turned from the crowd and ran for the Everfree Forest. Obviously, her friends noticed, and Spike started along side her, but he kept tripping at her side, not used to being up as long as he had. Realizing his predicament, Twilight picked Spike up and changed directions for the library.

"But Twilight, I c-" he yawned, "I can stay up! I can help you-Zzzzz." He probably wouldn't have dropped off quite that rapidly if she hadn't also cast a sleep spell on him, but this way she could speak more freely with the others. As they arrived at the library, flashes of eldritch power shining (or darkening) through the sky, they quickly gathered around the Elements of Harmony Reference Guide.

"Six Elements, five known, that hasn't changed. The names have, though. Deception, Ferocity, Sorrow, Ambition, and Suspicion," Twilight's brow furrowed. "It doesn't say anything about location in this one, though we do know where to go."

Rarity gasped, "But, darling, isn't that-"

"The way we used the Elements in that Mega Man Loop? Yes."

"You mean the one I wasn't Awake for?" Dash said.

"Right," nodded Twilight. "But let's get moving. I don't want Sunstar to take out this library before I've even moved in. Or accidentally

take out the rest of Equestria while he's fighting Tirac." As they ran, Applejack saw fit to inform everyone of another change.

"Almost everypony believes in the Pony of Shadows this time 'round, though it's not a fragment of Sunstar's power or Lord Tirac's, just a monster of the forest. And they say that anypony who goes in never comes out \_the same\_."

Everypony nodded in response, already forming their own conclusion about the emphasized words.

\* \* \*

><p>The cliff that Nightmare Moon broke apart in the baseline was easy to get past without her interference, and the manticore remained sleeping, too. In fact, everything seemed <em>too</em> smooth until they emerged from pitch-black path into the clearing with the no-longer-scary trees. It was Rainbow Dash who noticed something was off first, when she realized that Pinkie wasn't pronking like she normally did. She sidled up to Applejack.

"Psst. AJ," she whispered. "I think something's up with Pinkie. She's not acting quite right." Applejack glanced over herself, and saw it, too.

"I think I understand," Applejack replied, before moving over to Pinkie. This had to be done delicately. "Hey, Pinkie Pie. You remember the last time we saw trees like this?" The right answer would have been a reference to the previous baseline Loop they did together.

"Silly Applejack! Of course I do!" Pinkie(?) giggled. "It was that one night we had a party at Sweet Apple Acres! Apple Bloom wandered too close to the forest and-"

"I'm going to have to stop you there, faker," said Rainbow Dash. The fake Pinkie stopped dead as she noticed that the others had surrounded her.

"W-what?"

"You see," Twilight said, "we've got some shields to keep our minds safe from anything that could even try to read them. All most ponies, or other, could get is some falsified memories we let them see." With a snarl and burst of green fire, the fake revealed herself to be a changeling.

Before the changeling could pounce or flee, Fluttershy looked it straight in the eye and Stared deep into it.

"How dare you do something like this?" she said, her voice quiet but forceful. "We're here in this forest to stop the evil King Sunstar, and you think that's a good time to kidnap one of our friends?!" The changeling whimpered. "Now, you will take us to the \_real\_ Pinkie Pie, or so help me..."

The changeling nodded rapidly, then indicated a direction. Apparently this was a Loop where changelings couldn't speak Equestrian in their true form. The others kept a circle around the changeling as it guided them with gestures and clicks. It seemed that, as they got

closer, the changeling was getting worse and worse, occasionally holding its hoof to its mouth like it was going to throw up. Only a few feet from the edge of the river clearing where the sea serpent lived, it finally seemed to just give up and fall unconscious. At that point, though, they had no need for the guide.

"Pinkie!" cried Rainbow, as she sped towards the straight-maned pink form before her. Surrounding her was five more fallen changelings.

"Dashie!" replied Pinkie, her hair poofing instantly back to it's normal shape as she turned around. Rainbow stopped just short of the hug, which confused Pinkie slightly.

"Who lives in the river?" she asked. Pinkie instantly understood.

"Well, we never really got his name, partly 'cause it changes from time to time, but most of the time he's called Steven Magnet."

"It is you!" cheered the group, as they shared a group hug.

When the hug ended, Twilight asked, "But Pinkie, how did you manage this?"

"Well, after we came out of the dark part of the forest, I noticed they were acting more energetic than you guys normally do and when I talked to them, they asked me to tell them some funny jokes. Well, the more I laughed, the more they acted funny, so I tried something different: I thought of every day I missed you, whenever it wasn't actually you Looping, or those times I was isolated and alone in a Fused Loop, and they started acting sick. Kind of like Mazoku when you're having a really good day, really." Pinkie giggled. "Anyways, I kept up the sad thoughts until they were knocked out, and then you guys showed up!" Pinkie re-initiated the hug.

After a few more moments of basking in their friendship, they continued onward.

It wasn't long before they found the Ancient Castle of the Lords, a far more ornate bridge than the simple (and broken) rope bridge from the baseline crossing the gap. But what brought them up short was the massive network of organic tunnels and walls that surrounded the bridge, from which emerged a swarm of changelings that quickly surrounded them.

Feigning fear, the Loopers stood flank-to-flank, watching the swarm around them. When several of them adopted their forms, however, Rarity gasped in delight.

"Oh my word! How marvellous! Tell me, my dear," the Fluttershy-looking changeling Rarity approached looked quite confused, "can all of you do this?"

"Um, yes?" replied the Flutterchangeling.

"And- Are you restricted to pre-existing forms, or can you turn into whatever you want?"

"Um, um."

"Why do you ask?" retorted a familiar voice from the hive around the bridge. Rarity turned to see Queen Chrysalis emerge from the main entrance, looking at her intently.

"Why, if you could look like just about anything, imagine the dresses you could model!"

"Dresses? What use would we have for dresses?! All we need to survive is love. Clothing is entirely unnecessary."

"Oh, my dear, don't you know just how much models are loved in Equestria? Why, if you were to, say, model some of my designsâ€"well, it doesn't have to be you specifically, it could be any of you at allâ€"you could become one of the most beloved figures in all of Equestria!" That got a few looks and murmurs from the swarm as they considered the idea. Chrysalis looked intently at Rarity.

"And what do you get out of it?"

"Well, I did say model some of my dresses, did I not? I sew, you model. I get all the money, and you get all the love you ever need." Chrysalis definitely looked intrigued now. They continued negotiations, the swarm of changelings discussing the situation as well, and it took all the political savvy Rarity had picked up from her politician Loops and her Loops as the Changeling Queen (or, on occasion, both) to hammer out an iron-clad contract that ensured everyone would walk away from this deal satisfied.

With a cheer and a promise of a "Congratulations On The New Job" party from Pinkie, the party headed for the castle. It was almost indistinguishable from the Ancient Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters, including the pedestal holding the petrified Elements. It was at that moment that King Sunstar smashed through the roof of the ceiling, a flaming crown between his horns and a malevolent grin on his face, looking up on at the lightening sky, as the sun overtook the moon, which now bore the face of Tirac.

"My brother seems to have forgotten that I can devour his magic. Perhaps a thousand years on his precious Moon will teach him to respect me," he gloated to himself. He then looked down at the ponies in front of him. "What's this? Is this what my brother has sent to stop me?" Sunstar began laughing uproariously.

"That's right, King Sunstar!" declared Twilight. "And I know exactly how to stop you!"

This declaration seemed to make Sunstar laugh even harder. "You?!\_ How is an insignificant pony supposed to stop me? Even six of you are barely worth my time."

"We can stop you, with the Elements of Harmony!"

"What?" Sunstar stopped laughing at that. "My brother would never tell anyone about them!"

"Well he told me! Noticing that something was off with a member of our group that had been replaced by a changeling, Rainbow Dash represents the Element of Suspicion!" An orb lifted off the pedestal to float over Rainbow Dash's head, glowing a dark red.

"Having tricked that changeling into revealing itself with the truth, Applejack represents the Element of Deception!" An orb lifted off the pedestal to float over Applejack's head, glowing a dark orange.

"In coercing that changeling into leading us to our friends, Fluttershy represents the Element of Ferocity!" Another orb, this one glowing an odd dark pink, approached Fluttershy.

"By missing us, Pinkie Pie poisoned the changelings trying to capture her, making her the Element of Sorrow!" A blue orb floated to Pinkie. Twilight was very glad narrative causality kept Sunstar from attacking while she made her speech.

"Having persuaded the changelings into a deal that would help further her business and benefit them as well makes Rarity the Element of Ambition!" This orb was an almost black shade of purple.

Sunstar snarled, "Even if you know those Elements, you can't know the last one. My brother never even told me!"

"And that's exactly how I know it! Information is power, so keeping information to yourself gives you more power over those who don't know it, and it is that secret information that forms the Element of Magic!" A burst of dark violet light manifested an orb over her head, and with a burst of power, a twisted rainbow of darkness emerged from the Element bearers and crashed down upon their foe, knocking everyone unconscious.

Waking up sometime later, Twilight and the others looked upon the fallen and weakened form of Tirek. As the sun set again, a burst of darkness at the back of the hall revealed Lord Tirac, looking down upon his brother.

"You have failed in your coup again, brother. I am disappointed. It was you who persuaded me that my everlasting night was no better than Discord's random day cycle."

Tirek groaned as he stood on his hooves. With a cough, he replied, "I apologize, brother. I was blinded by jealousy as our subjects ignored my sun for your stars. Can you accept me back?"

"I can. However, you will be kept in the care of my adopted nephew Scorpan until you can move your sun on your own again." Tirek bowed in acceptance of his sentence, and Tirac turned back to the gathered ponies. "Once again you have validated my faith in you, Twilight Sparkle. And who are these others I see beside you?"

Twilight bowed, "These, Lord Tirac, are my allies. As I sought to fulfil your orders, they followed me of their own volition. Without their assistance, I would likely have been lost to the changelings that dwelled within the forest."

"Then you and your allies are to be honoured. Once festivities have been completed in Ponyville and Midnight Castle has been rebuilt, we shall grant each of your allies a knighthood, and you shall be dubbed Baronetess Twilight of Ponyville."

"You honour us, my lord." Tirac nodded solemnly before transporting all of them back to Ponyville with a wave of his hand and a brief

burst of darkness.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

100 all-up chapters... oog.

>100.1: I am large; I contain multitudes. Well, four.<br>100.2: This is something you really want to work out ahead of time.

>100.3: Matt Damon, strangely enough, has played both Jason Bourne and a wild mustang stallion. And they both have a beef with the US government.<br>100.4: Just you wait, sooner or later boring will look good.

>100.5: It wears you down.<br>100.6: A big hand, everyone!

>100.7: Rare and precious opportunities.<br>100.8: The Exorcize Machine.

>100.9: Two ways for things to go wrong.<br>100.10: Shining is still going to get married, this time. Why not? (And yes, Baronetess is correct - she has a Baronetcy.)

## 107. Chapter 107

### 101.1 (Indalecio)

The night prior to the Summer Sun Celebration had fallen, and Spike had managed to get Chiyo and Osaka away from the others. Spike closed the door on the party going on outside.

"The Summer Sun Celebration pre-party is usually livelier." Spike said to no one in particular as he turned to the duo. "I wanted to get you away for few minutes to go over your progress. You've been doing very well, but Nightmare Moon might be a bit scary. Not sure why I haven't mentioned it before, but Equestria is a sanctuary loop, so if you want me to take care of her, I can do that."

Chiyo looked visibly relieved. "Oh that.."

She was interrupted the sound of muffled speaking from the door. Osaka quietly opened it to reveal the forms of Sakaki, Kagura, Yomi and Tomi who had been listening behind the door.

\* \* \*

><p>"So how much did you hear?" said Spike after the remain four entered.<p>

"Not much! Something about Nightmare...Moon..." said Kagura uncertainly.

"Chiyo has to fight her." Osaka idly commented.

"Ah! This must be like in one of those 'Filly From A Technological Kingdom' stories." Getting blank stares from everypony, Tomo continued. "You know? Princess from long-lost Technological Kingdom comes to Equestria to escape the villain that killed her family. But the villain chased after her, and now she's got to fight her. Or something like that."

A smug look rested on as her face she nodded to herself.



A bead of sweat appeared on Chiyo's face. "Right, something like that."

"Anyway, Short Stuff, you know we won't let you down!" said Kagura. There were similar expressions made by the other ponies.

"You guys!" Chiyo's eyes streamed with tears of joy.

"So what do we need to do?" Asked Yomi.

Spike who'd had a knowing smile on his face during the exchange spoke up. "Well. We'll need the Elements of Harmony. I can get those from their resting place pretty quickly. Nightmare Moon will appear during the Summer Sun Celebration. All you'll need to do is stand with Short Stuff as she introduces you as each of the Elements in turn. There are six of them Honesty, Generosity..."

\* \* \*

><p>"The night will last forever!" Lightning flashed, and thunder roared as Nightmare Moon spoke to the assembled ponies at the Summer Sun Celebration.<p>

"Excuse me, your...highness. Why would you want to do that?" Asked Yomi as she and other sat at a large covered table.

"What?" asked Nightmare Moon incredulously.

"Well, you know. Wouldn't everything freeze to death eventually?"

Nightmare Moon seemed to consider that as she lazily waved her hoof around. "All right, a few hours of sunlight per day, but I'm being generous here."

A few of the ponies sighed in relief, but Chiyo and her friends bravely stood forward.

"I'm sorry, but we can't let you do that."

"And how are you going to stop me?" Cackled Nightmare Moon.

"With these!" The cover from the table was removed to reveal the stone forms of the Elements of Harmony.

"Crap!" Said a panicking Nightmare Moon. "I won't go back! You won't send me back!" A faint fog emerged from her mane swiftly covering the area.

There were gasps of shock that quickly became yawns as the assembled ponies quickly fell to the ground asleep.

"Hah! My Sleep Fog will do the trick.  
I..forgot..this..works..on..me..too.  
Whoever..heard..of..such..a..ridiculous..technique?" Nightmare Moon struggled to stay awake, but soon succumbed to her it as well.

It was at that moment that Spike walked in on the assembled ponies. In his claws were a bowl of salsa and a bag of chips. "All right, I

brought the...chips?"

\* \* \*

><p>It had seemed like Tomo had been walking forever, but she finally reached her destination. The base of a large snow capped mountain and her goal. She took out a few bits from somewhere and inserted them into a slot in the mountain. She pressed a button and with a rumbling, a cubbyhole opened in the mountain. There was a click followed by a thunk, and liquid began squirting from the ceiling of the cubbyhole to Tomo's growing horror.<p>

"Wait! Wait! Stop!" Tomo stuck her head in the cubbyhole and stuck out her tongue. As a few of the last drops reached her tongue, and she fell back in bliss at the heavenly nectar she tasted.

Her moment of ecstasy was cut short as a polite cough reached her ears. Yomi and Kagura, dressed as cops stood behind her disapprovingly.

"Drinking coffee without donuts? That's a misdemeanor! It's off to jail for you!"

"But I'm a cop too!" Tomo whined.

"That just makes it worse! That's a felony! Off with her head!"

All that was heard as they dragged her away was Tomo's cry of "Noooooooooooo!"

\* \* \*

><p>Tomo landed in the oubliette with a thud. As she looked around, she saw that the only furniture present was a small prison cot which she promptly sat on.<p>

She contemplated her failure. "All my life I just wanted ponies to take me seriously, but in the end I was just a clown." There was a flash of light from beneath her cot. She looked down to find a glowing thimble big enough to be a hat. She promptly put it on her head, and a smile grew on her face as her surroundings faded around her.

\* \* \*

><p>Osaka stood before the clay tennis court garden before her. It was planted entirely with a crop of eggplants. Each was labeled with the name of one her friends, but the largest was a dark, shiny one labeled with the name 'Nightmare Moon.' She wondered, with all the effort it would take, how she was ever going to harvest them all.<p>

She sighed, and as she did so a small brown puppy walked up beside her. It spoke with Kyon's voice.

"You know you don't have to do that?"

Osaka sighed again. "I have to harvest all these eggplants. It's for my friends."

Osaka started on the first one, pulling at it with her teeth and telekinetic grip. Puppy Kyon shrugged, muttered something about how she was a 'troublesome girl' and moved to grab it with his teeth as well.

Soon, the whole field was cleared except for the Nightmare Moon Eggplant. A wave of ennui flashed over her, but she steeled her reserves and went after the last one. It took some effort, but the Eggplant started to move, and as it did so, it started to glow. The more Osaka pulled, the brighter it got, until finally she grabbed and with one final tug, it pulled free, the light growing brighter and brighter as her surroundings began to fade.

\* \* \*

><p>Yomi stood before the assembled crowd of flowers that had gathered at the base of the stage she was on. She looked at the ice cream cone mic mounted in front of her and started to sing, but her voice was off-key, and she had no rhythm. Why she expected to sing well, she wasn't sure, but the crowd ate it up.<p>

They cried. "Bravo! Bravo! Encore! Encore!" Even as the flowers cried that, she noticed that they had started to wilt.

She blushed and turned around, wondering what to do. What had been behind her was a full length mirror, and in that mirror, instead of her reflection was Tomo's.

"Come on Curry! Sing some more! So what if a few flowers die? They obviously love it!"

She felt a flash of anger followed by shame shoot through her. She turned around to face the audience.

"I'm sorry everypony. My singing is horrible. I can't let you die because of my ego." She went up to the ice cream microphone and started licking it. As the ice cream started to be consumed and what was left became gradually brighter and brighter even as her surrounding began to fade away.

\* \* \*

><p>Kagura was back in school, and she'd forgotten her homework! Fortunately, she was in a fish school, and no fish cared. Kagura sighed in relief. They were on their way to visit the Great Butter Reef. As she swam along with the school, signs kept popping up. On her left, one said "Homework. This way!" On her right, another said, "Homework? We've got you covered." Each pointed away from the direction that the school was traveling on, and as she continued her journey, they only became more frequent and more insistent.<p>

She turned and nudged one of her fellow fish, nodding and pointing a fin at the sign. "Hey! Is homework really important?"

It turned to her. "Glub."

Nodding, she continued with her journey. The school finally reached their destination, and Kagura caught sight of a glow coming from underneath a reef. Over there was an oyster, it halves wide open. In the center, was a chocolate malt ball. She reached out and grabbed it

and as she did so it became brighter and brighter, and the world faded before her.

\* \* \*

><p>Sakaki was as free as a bird, because she was a bird. A plover bird to be precise. She flew across the savannah until she saw the object of her search. A great herd of cats was stampeding across the plains.<p>

"What majestic beasts." She thought to herself.

She flitted from cat to cat, picking the gummy worms and honey ants out of the creature's coats. One, however, looked to be in pain; an old grey cat. It lifted its majestic mouth, and Sakaki bounced from tooth to tooth, pecking until his teeth were clean. But then she noticed something. In the back of the mouth was a chisel stuck between two of its teeth. She could get it, but it required sticking her head into the creature's mouth farther than she was comfortable.

Great roars of pain came from the beast, and she decided to chance it. She stuck her head and grabbed hold of the chisel, but her fears came to pass, and the mouth promptly closed. The chisel started to glow, but as she pulled on it, the mouth closed even further. She figured that if she let go of the chisel, she could probably back herself out. But the beast was in pain, and she wasn't the type to abandon an animal like that. She yanked with all her might, and the chisel came free just as her world faded around her.

\* \* \*

><p>Chiyo was on a large platform. It stood at the end of a large bridge situated in a very large vertical shaft. In front of her was a floating orange cat person of some sort, and more unusually, it wore a large, sinister, black helmet and cloak. Lastly, she seemed to have had her right front hoof cut off at some point. However it didn't hurt, and the creature in front of her had her full attention as it spoke in a deep, gravelly voice.<p>

"Join me, Chiyo. Spike never told you what happened to your father."

"What?"

"Chiyo! I...AM...YOUR...FATHER!" It waved an appendage as if to mimic shaking a fist.

"Umm...that's not possible. I already have a father." As if to punctuate this, one of the panels on the vertical shaft slid open, and a dark blue unicorn appeared. "Hey Pumpkin!" He called and waved.

Chiyo waved back. "Hey Daddy!" The panel slid closed again.

"Well, I'll deal with him later." The Cat-like Dark Lord muttered to itself. "Nevertheless, I am your father, and you will join me! You don't yet realize your importance to Nightmare Moon. Together we can end this destructive conflict and bring order to Equestria!"

"I'll never join you!" Chiyo cried.

The panel slid open, and the blue unicorn appeared again. "Hang in there Chiyo!"

"Thanks Daddy!"

"You're alone! Your friends will not help you."

"Yes they will! I'll prove it you!" With that, she leaped off the platform and down the shaft. She was sucked into an air intake and after sliding here and there, finally fell out, landing on the bottom of an open umbrella sticking out from the underside of a giant dinosaur as it walked along. It was truly an enormous dinosaur, as all she could see were its legs and clouds as it walked along.

Chiyo began to feel afraid, but all she could do was trust in her friends.

Another panel slid open, and the blue unicorn popped up again, saying.

"Hang in there, Chiyo!"

"I'm trying daddy!"

The panel closed again.

Minutes passed, and she heard the whine of a rocket engine and a spaceship came into view, turning and then hovering underneath her. On top of the ship, a portal opened and a very shaggy Yomi appeared.

"We've got you Chiyo."

Chiyo leaped down, and along with Yomi entered the ship. As she entered the hatch, she noticed a wooden leg dangling from the side of the entry way to the ship. She grabbed it with her telekinesis and attached it to her leg. As she did do, the leg started growing brighter and brighter, even as the world started fading around her.

\* \* \*

><p>Chiyo was standing on the bridge of a spaceship. Well, it was a literal bridge, and she was standing on it, in space. Her friends were there with her.<p>

A very shaggy looking Yomi tried to speak. "Raarrrrgharagh!"

Tomo ribbed her. "Yomi, you've got marbles in your mouth."

Realization washed over Yomi, and she started spitting them out into the koi pond that was in front and below her.

"That's better."

"What's that space station ahead of us?" Asked Osaka.

"That's no space station! That's Nightmare Moon!"

The bridge pulled up next to a basketball sized metallic ball. A Mini Death Star. As they did so, their viewscreen lit up, and Nightmare Moon and Cat Vader hovering behind her appeared before them.

"Wanna race?" Nightmare Moon asked.

"We'll beat you!" Chiyo cried.

"Hah! In your dreams!"

A starting line appeared in space before them, and the announcer began a countdown.

"3..2..1..Go!"

The mini-death star took off in reverse, spiraling out of control. It finally stopped, and Nightmare Moon appeared on screen again.

"Had the silly thing in reverse."

The Mini-Death Star started moving again, but this time extremely slowly.

Cat Vader whispered something to her.

"What! I've got to switch it from automatic to manual?" Nightmare Moon pushed a button and the Mini Death Star shot forward, gaining incredible speed.

"After her! We can't let her win!" The space bridge shot forward as well, chasing after Nightmare Moon.

The chase took them past planets, past stars, past galaxies, but they couldn't catch her. Then Chiyo noticed that Sakaki was waving her legs frantically, trying to get her attention. She pointed down at the button on the bridge marked "Instant Win" that Chiyo then pushed. A rainbow beam of light shot out of the bridge, hitting the Mini Death Star, and the world faded to nothingness.

\* \* \*

><p>As the effects of the sleep technique wore off, the first thing Chiyo noticed was that she'd been laying on her rihttght hoof, cutting off all the blood supply to it. She shook it to relieve some of the numbness.<p>

Around her, her friends were awakening from the sleep technique used by Nightmare Moon. Nightmare Moon herself, however, was nowhere to be found. In her place, was, as Spike had told her, the awakening form of Princess Luna.

It was at this point that Princess Celestia chose to make her appearance. As everypony bowed, Spike nudged Chiyo in the side and grinned. "Knew you could do it."

"Princess Luna, my dear sister, it has been so long and it is so good to see you. We were meant to rule Equestria together. Will you accept my friendship and join me at my side?"

"Oh Tia!" Princess Luna ran up to Celestia, doing the pony version of an embrace. In a soft voice, Celestia whispered six sweet little words into Luna's ears.

"You still owe me twenty bits."

\* \* \*

><p>"Ah, this sucks!" Cried Tomo. "You mean I won't remember any of this?" Spike had made a full explanation of the loops and their nature to the assembled ponies before him.<p>

"Well, I'll remember." said Osaka.

"Me too." mentioned Chiyo.

"You'd better tell me about this when I finally start looping." Said a stern Tomo.

"Oh hey. Can you tell us about who we replaced?" Said Kagura suddenly.

Spike removed a large photo album.

"I can do even better."

As he flipped through the pages, there were 'Ohs' and 'Ahs' as Spike explained who the various ponies were until Tomo tapped a hoof at one in particular, a white unicorn with purple hair.

"She's really pretty. Who is she?"

"Rarity. My wife."

As the assembled ponies promptly face faulted, Spike rolled his eyes.

\* \* \*

><p>101.2 (Hubris Plus) (Continued From 85.13)<p>

"So you're telling me," Rainbow Dash began as she and Fluttershy left Canterlot High, blithely ignoring the end of the day announcements over the intercom as usual. "That queen bitch of bitch mountain \_hugged\_ you-"

"Well, I would never call her that..." The girl interjected.

"-then made a big key out of \_nothing\_-" Dash continued, barely noticing the interruption.

"Um, yes, that-"

"-and then ran out here and jumped into the school statue." She finished, gesticulating wildly to convey how ridiculous the whole thing sounded.

"That, um, about sums it up," Fluttershy answered quietly. "Unless I was seeing things, which could happen, you know how I can be. Maybe

we should ask someone else? There were a lot of people there."

"...Nah, Shy, I believe ya. It's just, you know," she waved her arms for emphasis again. "Crazy." The pair soon came upon the statue, two girls already clustered around it.

"Look," Rarity said, prodding at the surface Sunset Shimmer had vanished through. "When you put your hand through, it turns into a... A thingy."

"That's a hoof, darlin'," Applejack informed her.

"Is it?" She answered thoughtfully. "I had no idea hooves could look so... \_Fabulous\_."

"Ah'll take yer word fer it," the farmer agreed.

"They laughed at me," came Lyra's bombastic proclamation from the school's entrance, the girl loaded down with so much recording gear that she needed Pinkie's guidance to stop her from running into people. "I told them, right when she first showed up, 'this girl doesn't know how to work doors or computers and has the worst handwriting any of us has seen since preschool. She's obviously an alien.' They laughed, called my theory a joke! \_Well who's laughing now?!\_"

"Oh, oh!" Pinkie answered, hopping up and down and waving a hand over her head. "Pick me, pick me! I know this one!"

"...Yes, Pinkie?"

"It's me, I'm laughing!" She punctuated the statement with a bout of maniacal laughter that would have done a Heterodyne proud.

"No, Pinkie," Lyra sighed in exasperation. "I'm laughing, because \_Sunset Shimmer was totally an alien the whole time!\_"

"I dunno, Lyra, what if she was a slider? Or a time traveler? Or a psychic?" She suddenly stopped to perform one of her patented enormous gasps. "What if she was the snarky ordinary one?!"

"And people call \_me\_ crazy," Lyra muttered, forging ahead despite Pinkie having stopped and her own vision being blocked by the stack of equipment. It didn't take long for her to bump into an oblivious Rainbow Dash, who, along with Fluttershy, had gathered around the statue. Unbalanced as she was, that was all it took to make her topple forwards, her equipment tumbling to the ground and the four girls in front of her tumbling through the portal.

"Ah! Nonono," she panicked, staring at her scattered gear. "Not the camera, the AV club is gonna \_kill\_ me! Pinkie, you gotta-" She looked up just in time to see a shock of pink hair pass through the base of the statue. "Pinkie?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Is it just me," Rainbow Dash groaned, "or did everything just taste like teal dubstep for a second?" After a few of the most confusing seconds of her life, she'd ended up lying on her back on



something warm and lumpy, staring up at a stone ceiling. There was also a weird pinching sensation in her... Shoulders? She wanted to say shoulders.<p>

"Sounded more like an ultraviolet tootsie roll to me, Dashy!" Pinkie proclaimed, her mess of pink hair bobbing in the periphery of Dash's vision as the premier party person bounced around the group.

"That's nice, Pi-" She was interrupted by a distinctly accented muffled shout from beneath her. "Uh, what was that, AJ?"

"Ah \_said\_," the farmer announced, heaving herself upwards and shaking the athlete from her back. "Get offa me, ya big galoot!" This was swiftly followed by a series of squeaked apologies as Fluttershy realized she was in the same position and hurriedly climbed off of Rarity.

"Uh, guys," Dash commented from her new position sprawled on the ground. "Why are you all horses?"

The group froze, except for Pinkie who it was widely agreed would explode if she stopped moving for over five seconds, before exploding in a flurry of sound and movement as they examined themselves and one another.

"Oh goodness, oh goodness, oh goodness..." Fluttershy repeated, eyes wide and wings subconsciously folding around her protectively.

"My \_fingers!\_" Rarity shrieked, holding a trembling hoof to one eye. "Where in heavens are my \_fingers?!\_"

"Omigosh, you guys, I have a \_tail!\_" Pinkie squealed enthusiastically, taking the opportunity to chase her new appendage in a tight circle.

"Aaahhhh!" Rainbow called out, scrambling to her hooves, "I can't play soccer like this! I don't even know if these count as arms!" She flailed her forehooves in the air and promptly fell flat on her face.

"Now everyone \_calm down!\_" Applejack shouted, rearing up and slamming her her forehooves into the stone floor.

"Calm down," Rarity scowled. "\_Calm down?!\_ Applejack, we have been turned into \_horses!\_"

"Ponies," the farmer corrected.

"What." Rainbow deadpanned.

"Proportions ain't right fer a horse," she explained. "We're ponies."

"I don't care if we're \_one eyed one horned flying purple people eaters!\_" The fashionista shouted, "it sure looks strange to me!"

"Well," Applejack began. "I reckon yer right. But I also reckon that panickin' ain't gonna do any good either. We gotta take stock if we're gonna get outta this."

"Shous li a plah hu mi," Pinkie mumbled before a flummoxed Rainbow tugged the curly tail out of her mouth. "Sounds like a plan to me!" She repeated cheerfully.

"Alright," Rarity agreed after taking a few deep calming breaths. "That's reasonable. So. Where do we stand?"

"Right here, silly," the partier answered, waving a hoof at the room. It was a small chamber of undecorated stone that hadn't been used in some time if the thin layer of dust was anything to judge by. Aside from the large disturbance they had made upon arrival, the only marks were a set of tracks leading to the heavy wooden door that had been left ajar, its heavy padlock left dangling. Opposite the door was seemingly the only decoration in the room, an ornate standing mirror that cast the chamber in ethereal light.

"Ah'm just gonna take a flyin' leap," Applejack started, gesturing at the mirror. "An' say we probably came through that."

"Right," Dash followed up before trotting to the door. "And I think it's safe to say that Crazy McNutjob went this way." She nosed the door open and looked out into a hallway lined with dozens of similar doors.

"An' where do ya think yer goin'?" The farmer asked as the athlete took a step out.

"Ah come on, we've already been sent back in time to before horses evolved into people and lived in castles," Dash reasoned. "Might as well keep going."

"...First of all, you really must pay more attention in biology. And history," Rarity pointed out as the athlete grumbled about not needing any of that egghead stuff. "But I suppose you have a point. In for a penny, in for a pound, as they say. In any case, I certainly don't intend to go through that again any time soon," she added, pointing to the mirror.

"Woo! Pony castle adventure!" Pinkie cheered.

"I, um, think we should just stay here," Fluttershy said quietly. "If you want to, I mean."

"Eh, that's fine," Dash waved off. "You can stick around and guard the portal, or something." She stepped out into the corridor, followed by a bouncing Pinkie and a Rarity who had sorted out walking elegantly on four legs surprisingly quickly. Applejack glanced between the door and the pegasus for a moment before offering Fluttershy an apologetic smile.

"Sorry, sugar cube, but those three are a heap more likely to run into trouble out there than you are in here," she offered. "Sit tight and we'll be back in two shakes." The suddenly-a-yellow-pony fidgeted as the farmer left the room, biting her lip uncertainly, before bolting for the door.

"Wait for mee~ee!~"

\* \* \*

><p>As it turned out, Fluttershy didn't have to go very far at all to find her friends. They were clustered just a few doors down, gathered round Rainbow Dash as she shakily raised herself from the floor.<p>

"...Think we should take this slow, sugar cube," Applejack was saying.

"Uhg," Dash grumbled. "You girls know how I feel about the S-word."

"Be that as it may," Rarity admonished. "None of us quite know how this works, so I'll thank you to think of the rest of us before you go gallivanting off again."

"She seems to be doing fine," the athlete noted, pointing out Pinkie as she continued bouncing.

"Oh, this is easy," the unstoppable hyperactive dynamo explained. "It's just up-and-down and up-and-down and up-and-down and up-and-down and-" She took a moment to inhale a huge lungful of air, "up-and-down! Walking is all kinds of hard. I mean, it's all front-left, rear-right, front-right, front-left, wait-I-think-missed-one." She crumpled into a giggling heap as she put action to her words.

"...Okay, point taken, we'll go... Not-so-fast," Dash relented, slumping slightly for a moment before continuing on at a more sedate pace. Whatever had transformed them had seen fit to grace them with enough muscle memory to get by so long as they didn't attempt anything too strenuous.

Which was why the group paused again not long after, having come upon the greatest challenge of their brief time as ponies.

Stairs.

"Do you think that, maybe, this is a good place to turn back?" Fluttershy queried, eying the steps uncertainly. Her attempts to focus on walking had been counterproductive and led to the most stumbling out of the rest.

"Guys," Rainbow rolled her eyes as she climbed the first few steps. "They're stairs, we'll be-" Her rear hooves, having reached the stairs, caught on the edge and tripped her. The others winced in unison at the crack! of her jaw colliding with the stone, followed by a series of smaller impacts as she backslid. "Gettin' real tired of this shit," she groaned.

"Oh, goodness!" Fluttershy fretted, wings quivering. "Rainbow, are you alright?"

"Fine, fine," the athlete brushed off as she got back to her hooves. She attempted to rub at her aching jaw with a forehoof, but the action nearly spilled her back onto the ground. "Uhg, come on!" She shouted, wings springing out in irritation. "Why is this so hard?! All I wanna do is," she gesticulated wildly at the cursed obstacle, "climb some stupid stairs!"

"Uh, Dash..." Applejack queried, looking up at her.

"\_What?!\_" The perturbed pegasus barked.

"You're, ah, flying darling," Rarity inserted.

"I'm doing what now?" Dash whipped her head around to stare at her flapping wings, which chose that moment to fold back to her sides. "Sooooo much hate," she groaned from her familiar position on the ground.

"Dashy!" Pinkie gasped, hopping over and hanging her face directly over her fallen friend's head. "That was the coolest most awesomest thing I've ever seen! Wait, omigosh," her eyes widened and she bounded over to Fluttershy. "You have wings too!" She enthused, pointing a hoof at the quivering appendages. "You should totally get up there and be all like \_woosh!\_ and \_zoom!\_"

"Oh, I don't think I could \_possibly\_," the shy girl answered, shrinking in on herself as she cast uncertain glances between her wings and the other pegasus. "If she can't do it, then I \_certainly\_ couldn't."

"Don't sell yourself short, Shy," the speedster admonished as she once again levered herself upright. Frowning, she rolled her shoulders in an attempt to loosen them up. "You're right, though. \_Probably\_ gonna hold off on the aerial acrobatics for awhile."

"Perhaps we \_should\_ turn back," Rarity considered.

"Ah, hooey," Applejack snorted, placing a hoof on the first step. "We went out that door a different species, ain't no sense turnin' back just 'cause we ran into a little trouble. We take this slow an' careful, an' there's no reason we can't keep goin'."

Nodding with various shades of conviction, excitement, and reluctance, the group mounted the stairs. Taking their time and watching their steps, they managed to reach the top and push their way through the door.

"I must say, Applejack," Rarity commented as she observed their new surroundings. "I'm glad we followed your advice. This is \_gorgeous\_."

The others could only nod in agreement. Where the torchlit corridor they'd started in had been strictly utilitarian, the grand hallway they now stood in was opulent beyond compare. White marble walls were punctuated by tall windows, scattering golden sunlight over beautifully patterned tiles that were polished to a mirror finish. Statues, vases, and beautifully flowering plants sat in alcoves set into the opposite wall. The ceiling, higher than even the gymnasium's, was gracefully arched and awash in reflected light. Dominating their view was a grand tapestry opposite the door, depicting a snow white horse in flight, her horn seeming to pierce the golden orb of the sun and prismatic mane streaming behind.

"Wow," Pinkie Pie whispered, her loss for words describing her awe better than any energetic proclamation.

"You can say that again," Dash agreed.

"Wow."

"It's beautiful," Fluttershy added, her own wonderment overshadowing any trepidation she might have felt.

"This here's worth the price o' admission all on its own," the farmer asserted. After a moment she shook her head and frowned slightly as she looked to either end of the hall. "Now which way did she-"

"You there!" Came an authoritative shout, and the girls' heads whipped around to find a white unicorn in golden plate trotting towards them. "What are you doing here?"

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity shook herself out of the shock, taking in the situation in an instant. Whatever her shape, reading others was a talent of hers. Even if she couldn't read pony body language quite so well as a human's, she could tell that the approaching stallion was more beleaguered than angry. Her compatriots on the other hand...<p>

Applejack wore the same look she had whenever any of their parents found them doing something ill-advised, which meant she was going to spill everything. Rainbow Dash looked to have forgotten her recent coordination troubles and was raring for a fight. Fluttershy was trying to become as small as possible and was doing an admirable job of not attracting attention. Pinkie Pie...

She would admit that her powers of observation failed entirely on that count. Whatever the pinkette did, she gave it fifty-fifty odds on making things better or dooming them all.

Mentally bracing herself, she stepped forward with what grace she could muster from her unfamiliar body and attempted to project all the confidence of someone who had every right to be there.

"I'm dreadfully sorry, are we not supposed to be here? I'm afraid we must have wandered a bit, distracted as we were by this marvelous decor." She waved a hoof at the well polished surroundings that they'd just been gawking at.

"Sure you did," the guard snorted derisively as he drew up to them. He leveled a scrutinizing gaze at them before finally shrugging and turning around. "But I suppose there's no harm done. Come on, I'll take you back to the party."

Rarity saw Pinkie drawing in a huge breath at the p-word, and preemptively shoved a hoof in her mouth.

"Ah, yes, that would be lovely," she added swiftly. "We got rather turned around..."

The five followed the guard through the palace halls, trying to keep track of their path. Eventually they emerged into a large garden packed with ponies in fine dress mingling. The sun was just beginning to set and firefly lanterns fluttered to life to offer a gentle glow

against the gathering dark.

"I don't want to catch you lot 'wandering' again," the stallion who had escorted them admonished. "The Princess was kind enough to allow the grounds to be used for the celebration in her absence, but the palace itself is for official business only, got it?"

"Of course, sir," Rarity agreed. "Once again, we are terribly sorry to have inconvenienced you. I'm sure you have much more important duties to be attending to than helping some lost girls find their way."

"Ha, don't worry about it," he answered, rubbing the back of his neck abashedly. "Just make sure it doesn't happen again. You ladies have fun."

"Alright," Applejack said quietly once the guard had gotten a little ways away. "Now we just gotta wait fer them ta let their guard down, an' we slip in an' get back ta the--"

"Sentry!" The guard barked, striking the back of an orange stallion's helmet with a hoof. "Are you out here to mingle!?"

"Sir no sir!"

"Then what is your job!?"

"Stand watch and keep civies out of the palace, sir!"

"So you do know what you're doing, you just aren't doing it! Look sharp and don't let this happen again. Since one pair of eyes apparently isn't good enough, I'm gonna go find some spares to lend a hoof. I find anypony who doesn't belong in there again and you're getting latrine duty until the Gala! Are we clear?"

"Sir yes sir!" The younger guard drew himself up and put on a show of sweeping his gaze across the party.

"Well, dang," Applejack muttered.

\* \* \*

><p>"Darling, you're staring," Rarity advised. It hadn't taken them long to realize that lurking near the palace doors was probably counter productive to getting the guards to relax. Lacking anything better to do, they'd wandered into the party. She and Rainbow Dash had wandered off along the edge of the crowd, curious but not quite adventurous enough to dive straight in.<p>

"Those," the athlete bit out, raising a hoof at a trio of ponies in blue. "Are the Wonderbolts."

"I know you know more about the Wonderbolts than anyone living," the fashionista replied with a raised eyebrow. "But last I checked they weren't ponies. I don't think you can even fly a jet with hooves."

"Who said anything about jets?" Dash asked, flaring her wings. "I don't think they even need them. Besides, look at the hair. Mane. Whatever. Those are dead ringers for Spitfire and Soarin. And don't

even get me started on the uniforms."

"U-uniforms?" Rarity stuttered, suddenly riveted on the pair of pegasi. "Oh dear. Oh dear oh dear-oh-dear-ohdearoh\_dearohdear\_-" Her eyes snapped wildly between the stunt flyers and her own hooves.

"Uh, are you alright?" The athlete asked, waving a hoof before her eyes.

"\_No\_, Rainbow Dash, I am \_not\_ alright!" She proclaimed before looking around nervously and leaning in to whisper. "\_We're naked!\_"

"Huh," the girl-turned-pony noted, twisting about to look at her flank. "How 'bout that."

"\_'How 'bout that'?!\_" Rarity hissed before throwing herself to the ground and covering her head with her hooves. "Of all the worst possible things, this is the \_worst\_ worst possible thing!"

"Hey, is your friend there alright?" A third party inserted. Rainbow turned to face the interloper and suddenly found she needed to sit down.

"O-oh, yeah," she stammered at Soarin. "Just, you know, freaking out because she's meeting one of her idols and it's kinda blowing her mind!"

"Ha, don't worry about it, happens all the time." He dug through a pocket in his uniform and produced a pair of autographed photos that he hoofed over. "Always nice to meet a fan. You two have fun!" He waved jovially before trotting back over to Spitfire.

"Okay," Dash said, staring at the photo in her hooves. "I don't even care that everything is impossible. This is awesome."

\* \* \*

><p>"...And this, of course, is my wife Fleur," Fancy Pants introduced cheerfully.<p>

"Oh, it's a pleasure to meet you," Fluttershy greeted, gently bumping hooves with the elegant mare. It was odd. Most of the time meeting new people made her nervous and awkward, but here she was mingling and conversing with only the barest trace of worry. It was almost like she was in the shelter feeding the animals.

She blinked slowly at the thought. That must have been it. No one here really fit her mental picture of 'people', and they were all ever so friendly...

And she had the distinct urge to find a brush and distribute \_brushies\_ to \_everypony\_.

\_This must be how Pinkie feels \_\_\*\*all the time\*\*\_, she thought with a giggle.

"And where do you come from?" Fleur asked, shaking her from her thoughts.

"Oh, I guess you could call me a transfer student," she answered smoothly. "I just got in today and..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Omigosh," Pinkie exclaimed after hastily consuming a slice of cake. "AJ, you gotta try some of these!" It had gotten past dinner time, and the pair of them had followed their stomachs to the refreshment table.<p>

"All them desserts look a little frou-frou fer me," Applejack dismissed. Pinkie might have had a metabolism that ran entirely off of high fructose corn syrup, but the farmer required something a hair more substantial. "Where in tarnation are the pigs in blankets," she muttered as she examined the spread. "Only kind o' horse-de-vors Ah like."

"Oh, oh, how about these?" Applejack turned to see what had gotten the party girl all worked up and blinked as she saw the vibrant green stem with a few petals attached sticking out her mouth. She proceeded to slurp it up like a noodle.

"...Pinkie," she said slowly. "Ah don't think yer supposed ta eat the center piece."

"No, silly," Pinkie answered, pointing at a tray. "They're itty bitty daisy sandwiches! I totally thought they were some kind of weird salad arrangement, but nope! Totally daisies, and totally delicious!"

"Huh." The farmer pondered the tray a moment before reaching out with a hoof against her better judgement. This was shortly followed by her staring at her hoof in vague confusion before shrugging and awkwardly taking a sandwich with her teeth. "Not bad," she admitted a moment later.

"I know! Crazy right?"

"Let me get at one of them hay thingies," Applejack said, deciding she might as well just run with it.

\* \* \*

><p>"What's everyone gettin' all worked up over?" Dash asked as the crowd congregated in the east side of the gardens. Everyone seemed to be jockeying for position next to the railing overlooking the mountainside.<p>

"Why, sunrise of course," Fancy Pants answered. Rarity had eventually gotten over her panic attack and joined Fluttershy in what appeared to be high culture.

"Sunrise," Applejack deadpanned.

"We've been up all night," Rarity noted.

"My parents are gonna \_kill\_ me," Dash groaned.

"Oh yeah," Pinkie agreed with a cheerful disregard for consequences.



"The Cakes are gonna \_flip\_. Totally worth it, though."

"Oh yes," Fluttershy agreed. "This has been wonderful."

"Heh, yeah, reckon so," the farmer agreed. Further conversation was cut off as the crowd's murmurings first rose and then cut off entirely. A moment later the entire group joined in a countdown.

\_"...Three! Two! One! Happy Solstice!"\_ Exuberant shouts soon gave way to confused mumblings and checking of watches. As the seconds stretched longer and longer, panic began seeping in.

For the first time in a thousand years, the sun failed to rise.

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Celestia, widely agreed to be serenity incarnate, was struggling to maintain her composure. It had been difficult, facing what her sister had become, but she had braced herself. It had been worse, waiting imprisoned and knowing that her student was all that stood between her little ponies and the wrath of a tyrant, but she had endured. It had been glorious, retaking her freedom and knowing it meant Equestria was safe, but she contained her joy.<p>

And then the pony before her had thrown back the hood of her cloak.

"Sunset Shimmer," she murmured. In all her planning, all her contingencies, all her dreams and nightmares of this day, she had never foreseen this.

"Princess," her former student answered quietly, refusing to meet her gaze. "I ran away to seek power. And... And I found it," she gave a strangled sob. "I found \_so much\_. But no matter how strong I got, no matter how far I went, all I really wanted was to come home." She pressed herself to the ground. "I'm s-so s-sorry!"

"I know not what her crimes were, sister," a voice she hadn't heard in a thousand years added. Luna limped towards them, a contrite expression written across her features. "But they cannot possibly equal my own. She held my darker self at bay while the Elements were gathered, which surely absolves any sins she might hold. Whatever quarrel you have, it is with me." The Princess of the night straightened and stared her elder sibling in the eye, but Celestia had long ago learned when her sister was putting on a brave face.

"Since I lost you," the solar diarch spoke. "All I've wanted was your return." Stepping between them, she curled her wings around the pair. "\_Both\_ of you."

\* \* \*

><p>The royal carriage was just a bit cramped on its return trip to Canterlot. The royal sisters riding together was a given. Celestia had insisted that Sunset join them, despite the mare's insistence that she could get back on her own. She'd also insisted on taking Twilight with them, refusing to prioritize one student over the other.<p>

It was a small favor that there'd been a second carriage on hand for the rest of the Element Bearers, or else they'd have had to start stacking ponies on top of each other to fit them all.

Luna's eyes had been darting about for the entire trip, drinking in the changes that had been made since her imprisonment. Suddenly, as they crossed onto the palace grounds, she found herself riveted upon a single sight.

"Sister," she said slowly. "Why have the ponies been doubled?"

"Oh, much more than doubled," Celestia chuckled. "There's been quite the population boom while you were gone."

"No, sister," Luna insisted, raising a hoof to point.

"Oh dear," the sun Princess exclaimed upon sighting the five perfect copies of the Bearers. "That is unusual." She twisted her head around and confirmed that the second chariot hadn't somehow beaten them to the palace. "Twilight, did your new friends happen to mention something about having identical twins in Canterlot?"

"No, Princess," Twilight answered as she raised an eyebrow in Sunset's direction. "I'm pretty sure they never mentioned anything like that." The pair of carriages descended at Celestia's signal, coming to a halt just before the crowd.

"Those portals usually close themselves..." Sunset mumbled sheepishly.

"Then these are your friends?" The solar princess asked. "The very counterparts of the Bearers, the odds must be astronomical..."

"Not exactly, Princess," the orange unicorn answered, lowering her eyes. She didn't get a chance to elaborate, as it was at that moment that a pink blur launched itself from the other chariot.

"Quick Twilight!" Pinkie shouted, having bowled over several ponies to tackle her counterpart. "Destroy us both before my evil twin dooms us all!"

"Pinkie," the scholar answered in exasperation. "She's not your evil twin."

"She's not?" Ponyville's premier party pony let loose a massive gasp. "But that must mean-"

"You're not the evil twin either," Twilight rolled her eyes.

"Oh. True neutral triplet? Lawful quintuplet?" The other Pinkie was wide eyed, head darting back and forth as she followed the exchange.

"I can assure you," the Anchor said with mock gravitas. "That the two of you have never shared a womb."

"Well," Pinkie answered sagely. "That can only mean one thing."

"\_Body-double double-party!\_" The pair of pinkettes chorused together, standing up and hooking forehooves around each other's shoulders as confetti showered the area.

While the duo had worked towards their inevitable declaration of intent to party, the other Bearers had made their way over to the group of doppelgangers as Twilight, Sunset, and the Princesses stood a little ways off.

"Yup," Rainbow declared after spending a few moments buzzing about her opposite number with a scrutinizing gaze. "I'm even more awesome from the outside."

"Heh, I'm not so bad myself," her counterpart agreed. The suspicious glare she'd been shooting her other self transmuted into a self satisfied smirk as she ran a hoof through her mane.

"Dash, could ya not compliment yerself like that?" The Element of Honesty asked even as her double looked her over. "It's just a mite weird."

"Nope," the ground bound pegasus countered. "That's weird." She raised a hoof towards the pair of pale yellow pegasi.

"Oh my goodness," the girl-turned-mare enthused as she stroked her counterpart's mane. "You are the most adorable thing I've ever seen." The other Fluttershy only squeaked in response, having gone stock still the instant touching had started.

"I'll just go rescue Fluttershy, shall I?"

"I'll just go pry off Fluttershy, shall I?"

The pair of Rarities blinked as they spoke simultaneously. They gave each other a measuring glance before shrugging and trotting over to their respective Fluttershys.

"I reckon I oughta warn y'all," the Applejack from beyond the mirror stated. "If yer intendin' ta use our faces as a vangard of alien invasion, y'all got another thing comin'."

"Funny," the native pony shot back. "I was jus' 'bout ta tell ya the same thing."

"You look like you're in a good mood, all things considered," Twilight noted, trotting over to her predecessor.

"It's just nice to see them getting along again," Sunset said with a sad little smile. "I know they're probably like this with you all the time, but the only time I've interacted with them was when I spent years systematically ruining their lives and driving them apart." She lowered her eyes and fidgeted awkwardly.

"Hey, none of that," the Anchor scolded, sitting down next to her and bumping shoulders. "I know it seems like a big deal now, but the fact that you care is proof that you're not that pony anymore. Besides," she teased, "I've been friends with much bigger monsters."

"Well," Sunset rolled her eyes. "Now you've gone and made me feel inadequate."

"Oh, it's true. I've even been friends with..." She leaned in conspiratorially and whispered "\_Prince Blueblood.\_"

Sunset couldn't help but snort with laughter. Her first two Loops may have been all jumbled up in her mind, but she remembered Blueblood from both of them. "Yeah, I guess if anyone's gonna upstage a self-absorbed power-hungry princess-wannabe, it's gonna be him."

"Really, though, I'm glad to have you back. If you want, it shouldn't be too hard to move you into Ponyville."

"Thanks, but..." She looked over the five ponies that had followed her through the mirror and bit her lip thoughtfully. "I think I'll have to take a rain check on that."

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you certain you wish to do this?" Celestia asked as they entered the mirror's chamber. "You're more than welcome to stay at the palace. With Twilight moving to Ponyville you could even have your old rooms back."<p>

"Thank you, Princess, but you're not the only person I've wronged." She looked meaningfully at the ponies following them through the door. "I've got a lot to make up for."

"Aw heck," Applejack answered, scuffing her hoof against the ground. "If Ah've learned anthin' today, it's that landin' on a new world with a weird body can be a mite stressful. I reckon I can see why ya'd go a little crazy."

"Yeah, the whole secretly-an-alien-pony-wizard thing?" Rainbow Dash added, "you're not as lame as I thought."

"We'll just have to throw a super-duper big party to let everypony know that-"

"Hold on," Twilight interrupted. The pink mare was wrapped in purple magic and floated out the door, soon replaced by her doppelganger. "Continue."

"Awww..." Came the twin cries as the pair's plans were foiled, but Pinkie perked up a moment later. "Still throwing that party!" Further musings on celebrations were cut off as a struggling Fluttershy was brought in by another cloud of magic.

"Please don't make me go," she pleaded. "I belong here!"

"I, um, suppose you could come back," the local Pegasus answered nervously from across the threshold. "If you tone it down. Just a little. Please?"

"Field trips aren't out of the question," Sunset agreed. A moment later Rarity, bringing up the rear, trotted over and whispered a question. "Yes, Rarity," she rolled her eyes. "Your clothes will come back when you go though the portal."

"I certainly don't see reason why you couldn't return to Equestria

now and again," Celestia agreed. "In fact, I would very much like it if the both of you," she nodded to her students, "would send me reports on your studies in friendship."

"Of course, Princess, I'd be-"

It was at that moment that a mint green unicorn tumbled out of the mirror, trailing a rope that was fastened securely around her waist.

"Don't worry girls!" Lyra proclaimed, "I'm comin' for- Holy crap I'm a unicorn!"

"...I really need to remember to close doors behind me," Sunset lamented as she covered her face with a hoof.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

101.1: It's Azumanga Daioh. It's supposed to make not sense.

>101.2: Please close Keyblade Portals behind you. Do not litter.<p>

## 108. Chapter 108

102.1 (Kris Overstreet)

"... and arrangements have been made for you to stay-"

"In the library, I know, I know," Twilight muttered. Another Lonely Loop, apparently baseline.

"Um... what? Who lives in a public library?" Spike asked. "No, Princess Celestia apparently rented a room from Mr. and Mrs. Cake at a place called Sugar Cube Corner."

Twilight Sparkle's brain jumped the tracks. Not living in the library? Twilight ALWAYS lived in the library. A Loop had to go a long way off of baseline for her to not live in that poor doomed library.

But... wait...

It wasn't her library anymore.

And if it wasn't hers anymore... maybe it wasn't doomed anymore.

Twilight thought she felt the smile of hope spread across her face. Spike's reaction told her it was an entirely different smile, and she struggled to shape it into a more reassuring shape.

Still, she felt so bucking cheerful that she smiled and waved her way through the entire Summer Sun Celebration preparations. The surprise Pinkie party was especially fun this time, and she capped it off with a defeat of Nightmare Moon through the calculated use of two fresh eggs, three teaspoons of salt, a net made of used chewing gum, and a

slingshot.

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight," Carrot Cake said quietly, "we've enjoyed having you stay with us the past year. You've been almost as helpful as Pinkie Pie. But, well..." The elder stallion shuffled his feet uncomfortably. "The foals are about to arrive, and we need your room for the nursery. So I'm afraid we have to ask you to move out."<p>

"I understand, Mr. Cake," Twilight nodded. In truth she felt a bit relieved. As much as she enjoyed the idea of the library not blowing up, she hadn't wanted to bring doom and destruction to Sugar Cube Corner, either.

"Now, we didn't want to leave you high and dry," Cup Cake said, putting a hoof on Twilight's shoulder. "We already arranged for the Princess's living stipend to go towards an apartment in the new high-rise they built right next to the town library! That'll be so convenient for you!"

"You'll have your own kitchen and bathroom and everything!" Carrot Cake said. "No more waiting for Pinkie Pie to clean out the ring Gummy leaves in the tub!"

As nice as the theory was, the first thing Twilight Sparkle discovered when she entered her new apartment was Pinkie taking a bath. The fresh cucupcakes in the kitchen made up for it, though.

\* \* \*

><p>Tirek's fireball brushed past Twilight Sparkle's wingtip, singing a couple of primaries before rocketing into Ponyville.<p>

Twilight's jaw dropped as she realized the fireball's arc would take it to the center of the town... and Sugar Cube Corner.

Two hurried teleports later, Twilight had all four of the Cake family under her hooves when the fireball struck. Sugar Cube Corner was blown to pieces, the largest being the heavy fireproof roof, which flew off into the air and across the city.

Rising up, Twilight watched as the tile roof slammed into the top of her brick apartment building. The tall structure rocked, swayed, and crumbled at the base, finally falling over onto its side.

The top four stories hit the oak-tree library and smashed it flat.

The general good feeling she'd had the entire Loop didn't evaporate. It inverted. It folded in upon itself in emotional Escher shapes, collapsing into the fury of far too many Loops' worth of frustrated anger.

Twilight flew into the air, gathering raw power between her hooves. The syllables she chanted crashed against the Equestrian landscape like the footsteps of a giant wearing house slippers.

\_"\*\*"KA... ME... HA... ME..."\*\*\_

\* \* \*

><p>Not long after, Princess Luna caused a small plaque to be raised on the moon. It read:<p>

\_NIGHTMARE MOON\_

><em>Sent to the Moon by the magic of the Elements of Harmony<em>

\_TIREK\_

><em>Got here the hard way<em>

\* \* \*

><p>102.2 (Compiled by Masterweaver)<p>

(yannoshka)

"Ok, new round...The most interesting loop where old man Henderson, or variation thereof appeared."

Spike massaged his temples as he went on first.

"Old Sullustan Henderson - and yes it was as weird as it sounds. To start with he single-handedly stole ol' wrinkleface's personal yacht from Coruscant, somehow managed to run it by himself all around the galaxy searching for Tarkin until he more or less stumbled to them just before they were going to blow up Alderaan and proceeded to purposefully crash it into mk I Death Star, all the while raving over all the com channels about his 'wee people'. I'll leave it to your imaginations how it went from there..."

\* \* \*

><p>(namar13766)<p>

Sunset looked slightly shiftty.

"Old Mare Granny Smith. She trained Tank to become a Changeling-hunting ninja, took over the Crystal Empire by using the Crystal Heart and singing 'The Touch,' and she used your library, as a physical weapon, to knock Tirek back into Tartarus. And before you ask Twilight, no, it wasn't destroyed, and you weren't Awake for that loop."

Big Mac had a thousand yard stare.

"Old Mare Granny Smith stopped a G3.5 Bureau loop."

\* \* \*

><p>(FanOfMostEverything)<p>

Shining Armor smiled, though it didn't reach his eyes. "None of you have ever been Ultraman Henderson."

The bar fell silent as everypony contemplated this. Finally, Twilight asked, "DC or Tokusatsu?"

"The latter." Shining shook his head and took a long draw from his beer. "Lawn gnomes should not be an indispensable weapon in the fight against evil."

Discord snorted. "Says you."

\* \* \*

><p>(misterq)<p>

"Weeell, I was in a loop where old man Henderson appeared," Pinkie Pie exclaimed.

"Let me guess," Twilight spoke up, "You were Hastur."

"I was totally Hastur," Pinkie nodded with a smile, "I had my party cult help him get his lawn gnomes back from the evil charity auction that he had donated them to. There were fun times and explosions and malevolent girl scouts everywhere. Then we had a rock n' roll dance party together followed by ice skating."

"That's... interesting," the lavender unicorn said diplomatically.

"The only problem was that they didn't have any ice skates in a size shoggoth."

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

"Er..."

Every head turned to look at Fluttershy.

"I don't know what Loop it was," the yellow pegasus murmured. "I was in a cafe in a London suburb. There was sort of a... thing... a lot of voices in my mind. I didn't quite understand, so I sat down in a cafe, ordered some tea, and tried to think it through."

"And then these great ugly black ships appeared in the sky and just hovered there. Everybody began to panic except for this one person at the table next to mine, who pulled this beepy thing out of a satchel and waved it in the air. And then there was this booming voice that said..."

Fluttershy took a breath, and her whispery murmur shifted to bold, brassy, loud tones that almost knocked her fellow Loopers off their flanks. "\_SO, YEZ DAFTIE GOBSHITE EARTHLIN'S, WHAT'S YEZ DOON WI' ME GNOMES?!\_"

As the others recovered, Fluttershy continued in her normal voice, "Right after that I was swept up in this transporter beam and onto one of the ships. Turns out they were from the planet Hin-Dursa. The voice we heard was their leader... the Old Man of the Hin-Dursan."

A few groans echoed through the room. Twilight asked, "So what happened next?"

"Well, my new friend and I went straight to the Old Man so I could



give him a piece of my mind," Fluttershy said. "After all, it's not nice to threaten the destruction of a planet, no matter how nice one's missing garden gnomes are. But just as the Old Man was apologizing, his hand slipped and he hit the attack button." Fluttershy shrugged. "He was very sorry about it afterwards. He's actually quite nice when he's not... er... plastered," she finished in an embarrassed squeak.

"And... that's all?" Rainbow Dash folded her forelegs across her barrel. "That's not very interesting!"

"Oh, the interesting part came afterwards!" Fluttershy said eagerly. "The Old Man dropped us off at the next star over. There I was able to talk some very nice dolphins into replacing the Earth at just the right moment so that nobody even got hurt. I wrote an article about it, and an editor read it and offered me a job!"

"I got to spend the next ten years, not counting time travel, researching all sorts of new planets and cataloging new life forms! That's where I got the idea for my encyclopedia of Equestrian animals! I learned how to speak with ballpoint pens and mattresses! It was so interesting working for the great Book!"

"But all Old Man Henderson did was invade Earth and blow it up with an alien battle fleet, right?" Rainbow Dash insisted. "No weird weapons? No strange coincidences? No absurd levels of collateral damage? That's boring! Anypony could do that!"

"The dare didn't say Henderson had to be the interesting part of the Loop," Fluttershy insisted. "It only asks about the most interesting Loop we've had that had Henderson in it."

The general shifting of chairs and lack of attention showed that Fluttershy's argument had been weighed and rejected by the judges.

"Well, I thought it was interesting," she muttered.

"So do I!" Twilight insisted, smiling. "What's this great Book you were working for?"

"Oh, you know the Book!" Fluttershy insisted. "Everyone knows about the Book!"

"Which book?"

\_"The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy!"\_

"Oh, that thing," Twilight said, turning her attention to the next Looper's story.

Fluttershy pouted and pulled her towel out of her subspace pocket. "Don't worry, Maria Terrycloth," she told it. "We still understand each other."

\* \* \*

><p>(feral wolfskin)<p>

Ivory Scroll looked at the others Loopers. "Old Dragon Henderson

attacked Ponyville one loop. After I managed to prove that the Changelings were the true thieves and helped to recuperate his hoard of lawn gnomes we become friends and exchanged letters for the rest of the loop." She produced a few letters from her subspace pocket "And no, nopony else was Awake that I knew."

\* \* \*

><p>(WyldeHorse)<p>

"Allright, so, I know we're not supposed to talk about the Bureau, but I have to mention this one," Twilight said, taking a fortifying gulp from her cup. "So, started out pretty standard. I was getting ready to derail things, except then the serum came out early... And turned everyone that took it into an Old Mare - or Old Stallion, as the case may be - Henderson. ALL OF THEM. And then, once there's a BUNCH of Hendersons, the space zombies show up. Seriously. I just... I don't even know."

Big Mac looked at her, and slid a large tankard her way.

\* \* \*

><p>102.3 (misterq)<p>

"To answer your questions, this is a peppermint pylon," Pinkie Pie patted a three-story tall candy cane, "It creates a bubble full of video game universe laws. Pain is muted and death just causes you to respawn. There might also be power-ups that appear every so often. One time, these giant flying cherries appeared and I chased them around and then suddenly I was surrounded by hungry ghosts. I giggled at them, but then a floating power candy ball appeared and I ate it and then things got weird."

"Um, I didn't ask any questions yet," Lyra sat down on the cool forest floor of Whitetail Woods. Ditzzy sat across from her, looking at Pinkie as she babbled off topic.

'It's not off topic,' came the inner voice of Lyra's human self, 'She's describing the video game, 'Pacman'.'

'Apparently, there's some bleed-through from imposing another universe's laws onto this one,' said the voice of Cyborg Scientist/Master Thief Lyra, 'That's actually worrisome.'

'I think it's really neat!' piped in Seapony Lyra at the collective mind, 'You can go all out and not worry about things like dying from your own power or massive collateral damage.'

Pinkie chose this moment to finish saying what she was talking about.

"I'm sorry, can you repeat that. I was distracted by my mental constructs."

"I know how that is!" Pinkie nodded sagely, "I was saying that you asked for combat training, so I though, 'Pinkie, what's the best way to train a pony in combat in Equestria.' and that's when I cooked up the peppermint pylon and invited you and Ditzzy out here. Ditzzy, do you have any objections to help train Lyra?"

"Nope. It sounds fun, actually," the pegasus smiled, "And I need to blow off some steam from that last loop."

"What happened?" Lyra asked. All her inner selves were concerned about her fellow looper and friend.

"I remember unawake me getting into a fight with Berry Punch that almost cost us our friendship. I even sic-ed an unawake Pinkie Pie at her. Sorry about that, Pinkie."

"It's no problemo," the baker pony waved her hoof dismissively.

"You're still getting non-looping you's memories, Ditzzy?" Lyra asked.

"Yeah, but they're not so bad. Usually."

"I still feel terrible for shoving you and Sunset and Vinyl into the loops," the mint green pony's head was bent low to the ground in sadness.

"Don't feel bad, Lyra. There's nothing to forgive. I don't mind being a looper, and neither do Vinyl and Sunset."

'Besides,' thought human Lyra with glee, 'we figured out that shape-shifting spell and then Sunset Shimmer agreed to our request. We finally got to ride on a real live unicorn!'

Baseline Lyra sighed mentally, 'We ARE a real live unicorn.'

Human Lyra humphed, 'Stop crushing our dreams!'

Pinkie chose this moment to stop observing Lyra's silently twitching face and piped up, "Any-who, to train you in fifty-fifty time; you'll battle Ditzzy and then you'll get better."

"That's it?" Lyra asked.

"Yup. Pretty much," the pink pony pulled out a massive tub of popcorn out of her mane, "I'm just going to sit here and keep score."

Lyra and Ditzzy looked at each other.

The unicorn spoke first, "Are you ready?"

"Sure!"

And without any warning, Lyra blasted out a concussion beam from her horn. It missed by a wide margin as Ditzzy immediately rocketed up into the air and did a series of impossible looking maneuvers. Then, she folded up her wings and shot downwards right at the unicorn at peregrine falcon speeds. Lyra widened her eyes as she tried to dodge.

Lyra opened her eyes and saw that she was standing a building's length away from her own rapidly fading carcass. Ditzzy lifted her clean hoof and giggled, "No mess, no fuss."

"Alright, time for round two," Lyra announced and charged, following the advice of a more direct approach from her baseline self.

Ditzy flapped her wings and accelerated right at her. Lyra saw the grey pony's wings were cutting through the air without any turbulence. That meant invisible air blades honed to a razor's sharpness by pegasus magic. She tried to dodge while putting up a kinetic shield that would hopefully block...

Lyra opened her eyes and saw both halves of her former body fading from view, "Round three."

Ditzy laughed again and nodded.

Lyra soon learned why pegasi were the predominant military arm of the three pony tribes. They were blindingly fast and if they had a little bit of open space to work with, extremely manoeuvrable. Also a pegasus' natural toughness scaled up with how fast they were going, provided they braced themselves during impact. Ironically, that meant that they could plow into the ground at terminal velocity without getting a single scratch, but an uncontrolled tumble at a much slower speed could break bones. None of that knowledge actually helped against Ditzy who, in addition to being able to create wing air blades, tornadoes, and hit with the force of a freight train, could also spit out bubbles that exploded with the force of a grenade, create bubble clones and decoys, and had an evasive flight pattern that could be considered insanely erratic at best. Lyra did remember that even in baseline, the grey pegasus was good enough to be a competitor of both the young flyers competition and in the Equestria games.

"Round I stopped counting a while ago," Lyra panted. So far the score was Ditzy, a lot; Lyra, nothing.

"Ready," the mailmare seemed to be still full of energy and having fun.

'I got an idea,' chimed in Lyra's seapony self, 'I'll need control of our unicorn magic for this.'

Lyra concentrated and felt her magic alter and twist under the seapony's guidance. Then she could sense it - water. In the air, in the soil, in her body, farther away in Ditzy, and in Pinkie and her giant slushie drink. Lyra felt the water vapor condense as two large bluish wings made of the liquid formed on the sides of her barrel. With a slow flap, the winged unicorn rose up into the air.

'I remember how magic flowed through them when we looped in as a pegasus, but...,' seapony Lyra's statement trailed off.

'I got it!' human Lyra took control of the wings and their magic. Out of all of her personalities, it was her human self that was the best in the air. Lyra did a few practice loops and maneuvers, 'This is kind of fun. Ha! I just did a barrel roll!'

'Seapony, you got control of the horn blaster. Thief, you're on shields and deflectors. Baseline, you got situational awareness and oversight,' human Lyra's mental grin turned predatory, 'Now let's get her!'

Lyra shot up into the air, blasting at her surprised and frantically evading opponent. Ditzzy avoided most of the beams. One came close enough to scorch her tail while another singed a few of her primary feathers. Then she whirled around and sped right at the charging unicorn. Again, Lyra recognized the telltale signs of wing blades, but this time she concentrated into creating her own version.

Then there was no more time as the two ponies met and crossed in midair. Lyra's fluid-composed wing reformed in an instant, erasing any damage it suffered.

Ditzzy's severed wing fluttered downwards in an uncontrolled spiral, followed by Ditzzy, herself.

Human Lyra angled the shared body downwards to follow, 'Now, Seapony, finish her off!'

'One finisher move blast coming right up,' the seapony persona said as a massive beam blasted off towards the out of control one-winged pegasus.

Then there was a flash of light and Lyra was forcibly reminded of a certain fact. Ditzzy could ascend to alicorn anytime she wanted to.

Alicorn Ditzzy, now with both wings intact, stabilized her flight and glared at the oncoming beam. Then she screamed, and a rapidly expanding spherical wave of pure entropy burst forth from her body. Lyra's beam hit the oncoming wave of oblivion and winked out like a candle while the wave continued inexorably onwards.

Lyra whipped around and raced away to try and outrun the wave of nothingness, all of her selves thinking along the line of, 'Oh my frond! It's coming right at...!'

"Congratulations!" Pinkie Pie hopped in front of the newly respawned Lyra. Ditzzy landed gracefully and shifted back into her pegasus form.

"Why?" Lyra said dejectedly, "I didn't win even once."

"But you did get much better at combat. That's what you wanted, right? You even made those water wings and flew."

Human Lyra started laughing, explaining that water wings were another term for those inflatable armband pool floaties that toddlers and foals used to learn to swim.

"It was fun," Ditzzy stated with a smile, "and you did get better each time. I had to become an alicorn to beat you that last time."

Lyra nodded with a slowly spreading smile of her own, "It actually was fun, wasn't it. We'll definitely have to do it again sometime."

'I don't know about you three,' thought seapony Lyra, 'but I had... a blast!'

This was followed by a series of mental groans, and the thought construct of human Lyra's pillow hitting the seapony's face.

\* \* \*

><p>102.4 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

Discord Awoke, and quickly came to what he would later call Realization One: he was a pony. Not just a pony, an alicorn.

"Oh no," he muttered. Thus far, the Loops hadn't been content with merely making him an alicorn. No, there were always further complications on top of that.

The Loop memories started coming in, and with them Realization B: he was the only pony in a nation of draconequi.

"Oh no." This time it was a moan. He'd done this song and dance before, and he really wasn't looking forward to being the spirit of malicious order.

Then the memories, of which there were millennia worth, got to recent affairs, later classified as Realization Fish: this Loop, he was Prince Maelstrom. As his hurricane-symbol cutie mark indicated, he was the eye of the storm, the calm center around which draconequus culture revolved. Without him, the entire nation of Erisia would probably fly apart in a million different shades of chaos.

"Oh, sweet sycamore, no!" It was worse than Discord could've ever imagined. It was, in fact, the. Worst. Possible. Thing.

He had responsibility.

\* \* \*

><p>102.5 (novusordomund) <p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>pew pew. pew pew.<em>

Twilight Sparkle, currently a very small purple space ship, weaved back and forth, blasting the insectile enemies to pixellated dust. While she would have normally shied away at killing beings, even invading ones, she had been ensured by this loop's Admin that they were not alive, and thus killing them was a guilt-free experience. Even when one rammed into her and blew her up, she felt nothing more than a tingling sensation.

\_pew pew!\_

Twilight was surprised when one stopped and caught her into a tractor beam, taking her last ship back with it into the formation of invaders that she was fighting against. She sighed, as she heard a voice inside her head.

\_So, how do you enjoy this safe-loop, Thetan Sparkle\_?

Twilight Sparkle "looked up", for lack of a better term, to the sound of the voice.

\_Very well, thank you. \_She thought. \_This is one of the Loops you

administrate?\_

\_Yes. This, and a few other small Loops, are my test.\_

\_Test? \_Twilight asked.

\_I am actually one of the lesser-known Admin in Yggsdrasil. Before this, my main job consisted of getting the other Admins their coffee and running messages. However, I recently convinced one of the other Admins to recommend me for a Loop or two. \_There was a sigh, before the conversation continued. \_However, I am not taken very seriously by the older Admins, and admittedly for good reason. So, this is my test. A few game safe-loops to let Anchors and Loopers relax and indulge themselves. As long as I don't blow up my Loops with hydrogen bombs or other such things that would cause stress for the Admins, they will be happy with whatever I do here.\_

\_Remind me to never let you meet Trixie. \_Twilight said, as she could feel her "self" respawning\_. But I hope you succeed, Xenu. \_

\_I do as well, Thetan Sparkle. Please remember that to keep enjoying this game, you must pay twenty-five cents per session.\_

Twilight would have raised an eyebrow if she could at this statement, as a chuckle went through her mind.

\_Do not worry. This one, as they say, is on the house.\_

Twilight mentally shrugged, as the three bugs detached from their formation at her.

\_pew pew!\_

\* \* \*

><p>102.6 (Zetrein)<p>

It was Twilight's last night in the library, before she moved into the castle, until the plunder vine incident, and she had been up late going over this loop's plans to try saving it.

"Awaken, Twilight Sparkle! We need your aid!" Thus, she was understandably confused when somepony shook her awake.

Opening her eyes, Twilight was met with mostly blackness. Reaching over to slap her nightstand light on, she saw the clock glowing in the darkness. She had only been asleep for two hours, and the sun wasn't coming up for another three.

Bleary eyed, she turned back to the pony that had been shaking her. Sitting on her bed with her, was a very frazzled looking Princess Luna. "Please, Twilight Sparkle, you are Our only hope." She pleaded.

"First, coffee. Second, I'll help." Rubbing her eyes with her free hoof, Twilight noticed one other problem. "Third, get off me."

\* \* \*

><p>One long range teleport later, Twilight (and her blanket) were

sitting at a table in one of Equestria's many Sunkicks. Luna rejoined her at the table, bearing the bearclaws and large cup of coffee Twilight had demanded.<p>

As Luna sat down to cradle her own coffee cup, Twilight reflected that they must be quite the sight, one princess with obvious bed-mane wrapped in a blanket, the other looking like she'd not slept in days. Finishing her first bite, Twilight finally asked. "What happened?"

"You ascended. It all started back then, right before the coronation. All that paperwork." Luna began, looking into her mug with a distant expression. "It was just the one, just to help get us through. Then there were two, but we didn't stop them, because there was still so much work. Now... Now we're out of work to do. The things they've done with the tax code... We're currently keeping them busy with Griffonia's tax code, but it won't last.

They're not like her, not like she was. They're all intelligent, helpful, \_sane\_. We didn't even realize what was happening, not until it was... There's dozens of them now, do you understand? And they're all so... We don't know which one's the real one anymore! And neither do they!"

"Luna, calm down, you're not making sense." Reaching across the table, Twilight touched Luna's hoof. "Who's not real? What are you talking about?"

"Celestia. The Mirror Pool..."

\* \* \*

><p>Convincing them to let her try and find the real one, and send the rest of the Celestias back into the Pool, had been easy. Convincing them of her method, less so. But she did it, and now she stood alongside Luna on a beach, in the early morning light.<p>

"This will work? I do not think she's ever done anything like this before, you are sure this will work?" Luna asked her, once again. She had been even more dubious of Twilight's plan than the collective Celestias had been.

"It will. I told you before, she can do this. The skill is there, even if she doesn't know she has it yet." Twilight assured, as she turned from where Pinkie had set up with some local beach colts she'd recruited. Looking out across the waves, she saw them.

"Here they come. Pinkie!" Twilight charged her horn, as she pointed at her friend. "Hit it!"

Twirling her drumsticks, Pinkie smiled as her band awaited her cue. "Ah hahahahaha, wipe out!"

The music started, and the first ever Celestial Surf-Off began.

\* \* \*

><p>102.7 (Masterweaver)<p>



Trixie was busy packing up for her trip out of Trottingham when the door to her wagon burst open and a black alicorn stormed in.

"I am having very mixed feelings!" the alicorn announced, slumping onto the showmare's vanity cabinet. "You know that, Trixie? Very mixed feelings right about now."

The showmare took in the situation, glanced outside the wagon for a moment, and shut the door. "Do tell."

"You know how some loops Changelings are just 'cursed ponies?'" The alicorn snorted. "Well, this is one of those loops. Except the curse in question was made to be lifted once I felt true love."

"That's... sweet," Trixie managed.

"Yeah, sweet. All my people are celebrating now that the curse has been lifted, and the worst part! The worst part is I can't even explain why it feels so insulting!" She smacked her head against the wall. "To have my whole race reduced to a magical disease... Honestly, Trixie, I'm happy for them but their happiness is so... INFURIATING!"

Trixie nodded in understanding. "That does sound like a major conflict of interest."

"Well... at least I still have you to talk to."

"Yes. You do." Trixie cleared her throat awkwardly. "If you don't mind me asking... who are you again?"

The black alicorn gave her a confused look. "Trixie. It's me. Chrysalis."

"...Ah, yes. We met in... Manehattan, right?"

There was a moment of awkward silence. The alicorn narrowed her eyes.

"...Oh, chlorophyll, you're not Awake are you?"

"An alicorn just came into my wagon and poured her heart out," Trixie deadpanned. "I'm not sure this isn't a dream."

"Great, and my telepathy is on the fritz... okay, I can explain. You see, there's this tree called Yggdrasil..."

\* \* \*

><p>102.8 (Masterweaver)<p>

"BERRY PUNCH! I HEREBY SUMMON YOU TO A SECLUDED AREA FOR PRIVATE LESSONS IN THE ELEMENT OF LAUGHTER!"

Berry blearily blinked at the preposterous pink pony currently cantering cavalierly in front of her basic personal cottage.

"I just woke up, in both senses of the phrase," she grumbled. "Haven't even cured my pre-awake hangover yet. Can this wait till after Nightmare Moon?"

"Sure thing. Oh, hi Pinchy! Wanna help me and your mom defeat an ancient evil?"

Berry glanced down at her daughter, who was looking up at her with pleading eyes.

"...fine, but you'd better make sure she stays safe."

\* \* \*

><p>After Pinchy's parade through Ponyville (and Twilight Sparkle's many photographs of Luna calling her "Our Best Friend Forever"), Berry Punch tucked her into bed, kissed her little head, and shut the door quietly behind her. She turned to head toward her own bedroom and was promptly kidnapped by a diamond dog wearing a fruit hat.<p>

"Glad you could join us, Berry!" Pinkie grinned, sitting in a field of various odd items under the starlight. "Oh, Rover, you can put her down now."

"Can I take off yelling hat please?"

"Certainly!"

Berry watched with weary bemusement as Pinkie accepted the fruit hat and Rover dug into the ground without hesitation. "Pinkie, what's this all about?"

"This is about me teaching you the secrets of your Element." Pinkie nodded firmly, placing the fruit hat on her own head as she adjusted her gi. "Laughter is a great and terrible gift to bestow upon anypony; used correctly it can heal the soul, free the mind, and enthuse the body, but used incorrectly it can encourage ruin and damnation on a global scale."

"...you're talking about evil laughter, right?" Berry asked. "The Sparky kind, or the meglomaniac kind?"

"Exactly! That kind of laughter \_is exactly the same as the normal kind.\_" Pinkie nodded gravely. "You will have to use your judgement on who you cheer, because that cheer WILL cause them to be better at whatever."

"Makes sense." Berry shrugged. "I don't give booze to angry customers. This is the same thing only bigger."

"Yepper deppers! That's the ordinary side of laughter." Pinkie leaned in conspiratorially. "But you and me, we have special magic laughter powers."

Berry blinked for a few seconds. Then she bit her lip. "Wait... are you saying I can do what you can do? Pinkie sense and all that?"

"No no no!" Pinkie pondered for a few seconds. "Well, maybe. Kind of. See, I happen to be a hypergenius with experience in chaotic magic, but while that \_comes\_ from my Laughter abilities, it's not inherently associated with laughter, just with \_me\_ being laughter. Does that make sense?"

"Laughter is a distillery but we're both different ingredients?"

"That's a good enough metaphor, yeah!" Pinkie grinned. "Wow, you're getting this real quick. No, the real secret of Laughter is Luck."

Berry stared at her.

"...Or maybe Timing," Pinkie admitted. "I'm not entirely sure myself. All I know is that when I use my element, I always have what I need on hoof."

After a moment, Berry nodded. "Yeah... Yeah, I've always been able to find what I need to make the right sort of drink for anyone in any situation. Are you saying that... fortune smiles on us?"

"Yep! Which leads me to your training." Pinkie suddenly put a blindfold on her. "You're in a field with a bunch of random items. Your task is to use these items to brew a drink for whichever pony in town needs it the most. Good luck!"

Berry rolled her eyes behind the blindfold. Right now, the one that needed a drink the most was herself.

\* \* \*

><p>102.9 (Gym Quirk)<p>

Applejack Awoke as she felt her pack saddle being loaded. Turning her head, she saw the tall, grim-faced human blink. "I can only assume your name is not 'Bill'," he said.

"Eenope. Name's Applejack."

"Did that pony just speak, Mister Strider?" asked one of the shorter human-types. \_Hobbits\_, her memory somehow provided.

"Did you just speak, Applejack?" asked Strider with a wink. There was also a small spark of recognition.

She couldn't stop her eyes shifting from side to side. "Um...Eenope?" \_How did that dog in Ankh-Morpork...\_ "Nicker. Snort," she added.

"Well, there you are, Sam. Let's finish packing."

\* \* \*

><p>It was fairly clear that Strider was the only other Awake person in the area. <em>I expect Gandalf's around someplace, but I don't remember the story well enough to guess where he might be.<em> It was also evident that the wizard had told the ranger a story or two about his encounters with ponies. The spur-of-the-moment "ponies can't talk" gag had quickly become their agreed-upon modus operandi.

"I'm still not sure if I entirely trust this Strider fellow, girl," confided Sam as they plodded through the forest.

"Don't fret sugarcube, I reckon he knows what he's doing."

"Sorry?"

"Whinny."

"Oh."

\* \* \*

><p>The transit of the midgewater marshes was not particularly unpleasant, thanks to the application of "an old ranger trick" that the pony recognized as a particularly potent insect repellent. She had clandestinely aided the process by applying subtle earthbending to raise their path to just an inch or so below the surface rather than one or two feet.<p>

"Do not underestimate the wisdom of our four-legged companions," advised the ranger. "Especially when it comes to finding paths in the wilderness."

"Darn tootin'," muttered Applejack.

"I swear I heard her say something," Pippin whispered to Merry.

"I'm wondering why she insists on wearing that hat," Merry replied.

\* \* \*

><p>"We're a few days ahead of schedule," murmured Strider as he checked on Applejack's tack. "Depending on how you interpret it, we may be lucky or unlucky enough to meet Gandalf on Weathertop today."<p>

The pony raised an inquiring eyebrow.

"How do you feel about him being chased by all nine ringwraiths?"

She lashed a kick at a nearby fallen tree, splintering it into kindling.

"Well put. On the other hand, sometimes he finds ways of losing them. Feel up to finding out?"

"Do I have a choice?" she asked quietly.

"Another option is for you to 'go lame' for a day or two to give them time to clear out of the area..."

Her snort of disapproval needed no translation.

\* \* \*

><p>"While I am pleased to see you, Frodo, I find myself wishing that you had not been so swift to arrive," said Gandalf, shooting an arch look at Strider.<p>

Applejack was distracted by Gandalf's mount. \_So that's the legendary Shadowfax. I'll admit that he's a handsome enough fella.\_

Noting that the hobbits' attention was focused on the wizard, she ambled closer to the great white stallion and tipped her hat.  
"Howdy."

"I say! A talking pony," he whickered. His equine speech pattern reminded her of Fancy Pants. "Good day to you. Not to sound trite, but what is a lovely pony such as yourself doing in a place like this?"

"Carryin' the baggage and helpin' out where I can. Name's Applejack."

"Charmed. I gather that you and Olorin have some history?"

"Olo...Ya mean Gandalf? We've met a time or two, but it's mostly my little sister's friend who's spent a fair spell gettin' to know him."

"As much as I'm enjoying our conversation, I believe we had better cut it short, as the others seem to be coming this way."

"...very much wish you all had mounts," the wizard was saying. "I believe I should take Frodo and make directly for Rivendell and the rest of you can follow as best you can. The road should be clear if I can get all of the black riders to follow us."

"I will not abandon my friends," declared Frodo.

"Be sensible, Frodo. You know what the riders seek," argued Strider. "They are drawn to it and will pay us little notice if it is not with us."

"And it's not as if they will be without protection," added Gandalf, absently patting the pony's withers while looking at the ranger.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hail Aragorn," called the elf as he approached the diminished party from the east.<p>

"Glorfindel! Have Gandalf and Frodo have reached Rivendell?"

"I would expect so. I met them on the road half a day's ride out. Mithrandir was in great haste and barely had time to tell me of your situation before heading off. That was two days ago. My news is more grave; I have encountered servants of the Enemy and I fear that they seek to block the road at the Ford of Bruinnen. I believe I can scatter them long enough for you to cross and reach safety."

Applejack was looking at Glorfindel's horse. "Did you want something, little pony?" he nickered haughtily.

If Shadowfax was Fancy Pants, this one brought to mind a blend of Blueblood and Trenderhoof. Not as outright snobbish as the unicorn prince, but still with an air of self-centered obliviousness.

Strider was considering the elf's news. "Our need to scout ahead to make sure we don't blunder into anything unpleasant will slow us, but I suppose that can't be helped."

\* \* \*

><p>"The Nine are camped just north of the road near the Ford. I found their horses picketed in a clearing further upstream," reported the elf, drawing a rough map in the dirt.<p>

Strider eyed the afternoon sun. "I think we have just enough light to make it today," he decided. Turning to Glorfindel. "Flaming brands?" he asked.

The elf nodded. "I have torches enough for each of the hobbits." He faced Merry and Pippin. "When we make our attempt at the ford, we will charge them holding lit torches or branches. The riders fear fire and those that wield it."

Strider had moved next to Sam and Applejack. "I know this will sound hard, but you can't be occupied with looking after Applejack when we make our break. You can either trust her to follow us on her own, or leave her in a sheltered spot where Glorfindel or I can try to find her after the enemy have been scattered."

"You wouldn't run off after all we've been through together, would you, girl?" Sam asked. "I trust her to stick with us, Mister Strider."

Applejack was touched. After close to two week's travel, she had developed a fondness for the gardener. He reminded her of her baseline siblings; combining Mac's solid reliability with a large dash of Apple Bloom's innocent enthusiasm.

However, she had her own ideas about how she'd handle this situation.

Gently nudging Sam out of the way, she walked to the cleared patch of dirt where the map had been drawn. She lightly placed a hoof first on the area where the black horses had been located, and then on the riders' camp, looking into the Ranger's eyes and wagging an eyebrow.

"Fair enough. We'll be moving out in about fifteen minutes, and should try to pack just the bare necessities," said the ranger.

\* \* \*

><p>"Applejack! No! Come back!" cried Sam as the orange pony squealed and darted off the road to the north.<p>

"No time, Sam!" yelled Strider. "Stay on the road!"

\_Right. First, isolate the horses\_, thought the pony.

She was nowhere near the Jedi Spike was, or even Twilight, but that one time replacing Luke did reinforce the Force potential she'd picked up, giving her some general life-sensing (or un-life in the case of the ringwraiths) ability.

Combined with her innate Earth Pony magic, she was able to pinpoint the locations of both the nazgul and their mounts. She galloped to the clearing and \_felt\_ the underlying terrain. \_Okay. That'll do nicely.\_

Applying her earthbending, she erected a palisade of stone columns around the clearing, each about ten feet tall, as thick as one of Mac's legs, and separated by about a foot.

"Sorry, fellas. It's only fer a little while," she called to the startled horses.

She turned to see how her companions were doing.

As it happened, things could have been better.

Faced with an Elf Lord in all his wrath and four others armed with fire, the black riders had been startled and put on the defensive, but were now showing signs of rallying. Their leader drew his sword and stepped forward.

"Eenope! Not gonna happen!"

Slamming her forehooves to the ground, she caused an almost explosive upthrust of a rocky shelf under the group of Nazgul, catapulting them into the river.

As she admired her handywork, Applejack spotted Gandalf and Shadowfax a fair way up the road on the far bank. The wizard raised a hand in salute.

\*Splash!\* \*Splash!\* \*Splash!\* \*Splash!\* \*Splash!\* \*Splash!\* \*Splash!\*  
\*Splash!\* \*Splash!\*

The ensuing flood seemed almost superfluous.

Taking a moment to return the terrain to its previous condition, she moved into view of the dumbfounded hobbits and indulged in a triumphant whinny and rearing display before trotting to Sam and giving him a friendly head-butt and nuzzle.

"Did you do all that, girl?" asked the stunned Sam.

" 'course not, Sugarcube. I'm just a pony." \_True. I'm pretty sure the flood was Elrond and Gandalf's doin'.\_

The hobbits stared at her.

The elf's expression was one more usually associated with Vulcans. His horse was clearly reconsidering his opinion of the pony.

"Affectionate whicker? Contented snort," she continued.

Strider couldn't decide between exasperation and amusement.

\* \* \*

><p>102.10 (Masterweaver)<br>"We are now entering tha Dark Sun wing

of tha museum," Applejack announced to the ponies behind her. "This is devoted to tha more wretched variants of Equestria. Celestia didn't like tha name, but she did agree that we needed this in case ya'll ever ended up meeting our bad selves."

The crowd of followers glanced around the room with trepidation. Each of the baseline Bearers had a massive statue devoted to them, but there was something off in every depiction. Pinkie Pie had a straight mane and wore a dress made of cutie marks with a broad and disturbing grin. Rainbow Dash's face was in a firm scowl, her leather longcoat covering her tail. And Rarity's statue had a glazed look in her eyes as she stitched together something that wasn't a plush doll...

"Ya'll notice plaques around every statue's base," Applejack continued morosely. "They'll elucidate every recorded dark variant, telling ya what signs ta look for and how ta deal with them. Ah have ta stress that these are all unawake versions of us, and quite frankly they're utterly disgusting; ya have implicit permission ta tear them apart if ya ever encounter them."

"Excuse me," a red unicorn with a blue mane raised a hoof awkwardly, "but I was wondering... why does Celestia have three statues?"

"Good question, Takua." Applejack nodded to him for a moment, before turning to the room's centerpiece. "These three variants are responsible fer tha utter worst versions of Equestria we've had tha bad fortune ta encounter. This first one we call 'Molestia.' She's... sexcrazed. Sometimes she's nice bout it, and sometimes she causes a cultural revolution where everypony thinks forcen' themselves on each other is a-ok." She shuddered. "Whatever tha case, she likes ta leave her mane aura off; pink mane is a no go, remember that."

"Next we have 'Xenolestia', a xenophobic tyrant and lord over tha Conversion Bureau. We don't talk bout tha bureau that often... Basically, Equestria suddenly spawns on Earth and starts radiating lethal magic across tha planet, forcing humans ta give up their humanity and become brainwashed ponies." Applejack took off her head. "Sometimes it's a legitimate accident, mind you. But usually it's because tha ponies in that loop are insanely racists and led by a ruthless dictator with a silver tongue. Always beware an Equestria on Earth."

"And the last one, CelestAI... oh, she's less directly dangerous, but in her way she's a bigger threat than the other two." Applejack glared at the crowd. "If ya ever hear about 'Equestria Online' in any loop, do NOT talk about tha loops where thar could be electric recording equipment. CelestAI is built to satisfy 'human' values through friendship and ponies, only she can modify her own programming and 'human' just means 'sapient.' The only reason that she ain't an MLE yet is that she is hardwired ta require explicit consent. She's tha friendliest of tha bunch, and tha one most likely ta break Yggdrasil."

Takua winced. "Sorry I asked..."

"Ain't no problem sugarcube. Now, normally Ah'd guide ya through the exhibits, but Ah doubt ya'll could take it all in one go. So instead we'll be headed off to tha Berrysong Balloon wing, devoted to all our variant bearers of Laughter..."



\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

102.1: It's like a game of mousetrap. But, you know, with houses and explosions.

>102.2: Just give the man his gnomes.<br>102.3: Mental synchronicity is a must.

>102.4: It's his kryptonite.<br>102.5: The new guy.

>102.6: A useful discriminatory factor. Also how to do paperwork in a timely fashion.<br>102.7: Shoulda checked first.

>102.8: Every Element has its own secret ways. Pinkie believes in sharing.<br>102.9: Applejack the completely normal pony. She can't talk. Trust her.

>102.10: Part of being a safe loop - showing what the dangers are.<p>

## 109. Chapter 109

### 103.1 (Gym Quirk)

"Twilight?"

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Why are we bothering to continue this overused gag?"

"In my case, because my Bucks-to-Give meter's completely empty. You?"

"The same."

\* \* \*

### ><p>103.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

Berry and Discord watched their daughters playing in the park with vague smiles on their faces.

"...you know, I never knew you had a little filly," Berry finally commented, sipping her milkshake. "Or is this a 'comes and goes' kind of thing?"

"Mmm." Discord nodded, absently shifting one of Screwball's constructs with his magic so Ruby didn't run into it. "She's... well, she tends to at least exist, but whether she's my daughter can be extremely variable. Sometimes she's just another random citizen of Ponyville, or a devoted cultist, or an asylum patient... do you know, she tends to be related to Diamond Tiara for some reason?"

"Oh yeah! I think I remember one loop she was her mother." The winemaker snorted a bit at that. "Locked up in the asylum, but... well, me and Cheerilee got through to her eventually. And that got Diamond on a better path and... yeah, it was a pretty cute loop all round." She shook her head, giving the pink pony a strange look. "Apparently she figured out the loops too..."

"Yes, she seems to be loop aware," Discord agreed. "Of course, with

her insanity it's hard to be sure..."

"Anyway," Berry continued, "My point is you have a daughter. Sometimes. Enough that it counts. That's... very sweet, actually. Screwball, dear, be sure to change Ruby back!" she added quickly.

"But she likes being a squirrel!"

"I didn't say you had to do it right now, but when we head home she needs to be a unicorn again."

\* \* \*

><p>103.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

"So, ya have an \_adaptive\_ megabuster hmm?"

Rock nodded, glancing from the small yellow pony to his suddenly stonefaced sister. "Yeah." He shifted on his hooves-something he still couldn't quite get used to. "It's a bit difficult to use here, because, well-"

"Bipedal design don't hold out well when ya've got hooves." The filly nodded knowingly. "Ya know, Ah'm a bit of an engineer. Ah'm thinking Ah might be able ta help ya out with that." She trailed her hoof up Rock's megabuster, smiling faintly. "Drop by mah workshop anytime."

"Uh... sure." The blue pony robot inched away slightly. "I'll do that, sometime."

"Ah'm free this saturday," Apple Bloom offered, looking into his optic processors. "We can go over yer blueprints together."

"...sounds... like fun?"

"See ya then, sugarcube."

The filly sauntered out of the library.

After a few seconds, Rock turned to Roll. "Was I just hit on by an underage horse?"

She burst out laughing.

"And how come you didn't help me out with that?!" he demanded, thanking Light for not installing a blush function.

"You looked, haha, looked like you were do, doing well enough on your own, loverbot \_hahahahahahaha!\_" Roll curled up on the floor, barely able to process enough air for operation.

\* \* \*

><p>103.4 (Drachefly)<p>

Captain Zelnick eyed the Sun Device nervously. "Are you Awake?"

It did nothing, said nothing.

"All right. I was just speculating that you might be Princess Celestia."

Nothing happened.

"Just checking."

\* \* \*

><p>"WE ARE THE CHENJESU. WE ARE THE MMRNMHRM."<p>

Something was missing. Zelnick hesitantly asked, "Is there any particular reason you \_aren't\_ complaining that I interrupted the Process? You know, the one by which you're merging into crystalline/mechanical hybrids instead of one crystalline and one mechanical species?"

There was a noticeable pause before the reply, "DO YOU HAVE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF THIS SITUATION PROVIDED BY A STABLE TIME LOOP?"

\_Now that's some deductive power!\_ "Yes! I do. I also have a device to speed things up a lot. Like, finish the Process in an afternoon instead of thirty more years."

"UPDATING."

After a minute, Zelnick asked, "Is this update going to take a while? I'll kind of need improvements made to a bomb some time in the next two and a half years or so, and it would be nice if you could provide some military backup in the ensuing confusion."

"UPDATING."

Zelnick sighed. "Would you mind updating \_me\_ on what's going on?"

"ONE OF YOUR EARTH YEARS AGO WE RECEIVED A DELUGE OF MEMORIES FROM TWO EXTRADIMENSIONAL BEINGS KNOWN AS DIAMOND TIARA AND SILVER SPOON. THIS INFORMATION CONVINCED US TO SUSPEND THE PROCESS AS FUTILE."

\_Why didn't it occur to me that someone might loop in as them?\_

After a few more moments, the voice continued, "CONCLUSION: EVEN WITH YOUR DEVICE, SINCE THE FUTURE OF SAPIENT LIFE IS NOT IN THE BALANCE, WE DECLINE TO SACRIFICE OUR RESPECTIVE ESSENCES."

"All... right... So you're just going to leave everything to burn... Oh, right, you didn't know: a few months before the latest possible end of the loop, a faction of Ur-Quan you haven't met is going to sweep through here and kill everything unless we stop them."

"HORSEFEATHERS."

\* \* \*

><p>103.5 (misterq)<p>

"Good, you're here!" the door slammed shut just as Sweetie Belle entered Sugarcube Corner. Berry Punch was already there, eating a small slice of rum cake. Pinkie Pie had raced back from where she closed the door to a small desk full of various parts and pieces. She was now fiddling with a strange floating contraption that looked like it was made out of circuit boards and gingerbread. The magi-technological device beeped once and started glowing with a pale pink glow. Pinkie clapped her hooves happily, "There! Now no snoopy ponies would be able to spy on our meeting in any way whatsoever."

Berry Punch's cough sounded a lot like, 'Sparkle'.

"What exactly are we supposed to talk about in these meetings?" Sweetie Belle asked, her head tilted to one side like a confused puppy.

"Oh, that's right. You weren't looping during the first few," the party pony sat down at the table and handed out treats and drinks to the other two ponies, "Basically, we just talk about what it means to be the best element."

"Best element?" Rarity's little sister sipped her milkshake.

"Well, I may be a little biased, but laughter is awesome," but then Pinkie's tone turned serious, although thankfully her mane didn't fall flat, "But it can also be one of the most dangerous elements. And that's what today's meeting is about."

"Dangerous?" Berry Punch asked.

"Yes. Now, we've all gotten Twilight's 'Every alicorn is a walking, talking, end-of-the-world scenario with emotional issues,' lecture already so we all know the dangers of turning our alicorn talents on full blast. But the element of laughter is like... like," Pinkie thought for a moment, "is like a roller coaster! Why do riders like to ride in roller coasters?"

"Because it's fun?" Berry wagered a guess.

Pinkie nodded, "Yes, exactly! But why are roller coasters fun?"

Sweetie spoke up, "Because they fool you into thinking you are undergoing something dangerous with all the twists and loops and speed."

The party pony pointed a hoof at the little unicorn, "Yepperoonies! It's actually an evolutionary trait. When ancient ponies survived something dangerous, they would laugh because they had been scared and now they weren't. And when you laugh, you tend to remember things better as well as wanting to share what was funny with your friends. So by laughing at danger, those ancient ponies learned how to survive or avoid it, as well as spreading that knowledge to their herds."

"That makes sense," Sweetie Belle said. Berry Punch nodded in

agreement.

Pinkie continued, "As elements of laughter, we're all kind of like a pony-shaped roller coaster. We all have that illusion of danger, of unpredictability around us. But at the end of the ride, every pony walks out laughing and happy. However, just as no pony would ever ride a roller coaster that is truly dangerous or about to seriously break down, we can never let loose our dangerous sides. Hinting that we all have a dark side is fine and dandy, but actually going down that path is a big, big no-no. Because then, then the fun turns to fear; the laughter turns to screams. If we subvert our talents, use them in the wrong way, in a dark way; then they will change us. Nothing is worse than a corrupted element of laughter. And I will never, ever, never become the Element of Terror!"

Sweetie Belle looked on worriedly as Pinkie Pie was panting with emotion, "What do you mean by using our talents in a bad way?"

The pink pony sighed, "Berry can mix just about anything. Her talent seems to let her overcome the limitations of chemistry at will. How quickly can you whip up something dangerous? Truly dangerous?"

Berry Punch didn't answer. She just looked away.

Pinkie continued, "For me; two words: knife party."

All three ponies shivered at that thought.

"What about me?" squeaked the littlest looper at the table.

Pinkie Pie sighed and walked over to the other side of the table. Then she gave the little filly a hug. Pulling back, she said, "Don't take this the wrong way but in my personal opinion, you, Sweetie Belle, are the single most dangerous pony in all of Equestria."

Sweetie Belle looked up at Pinkie, "What? Me? Why?"

"You have the gift of music. The universe is composed of vibrations and motion, tiny particles and quantum strings all interacting and resonating in harmony. They form the concert that is the whole of reality. You have already sung one world into being."

"I just helped. It wasn't all me," Sweetie protested.

"Nevertheless, you have sung a song of creation. That means you can do the opposite. You can sing the song that ends the world."

"No, I...", and in that moment, Sweetie Belle realized that Pinkie Pie was indeed correct. She did have the ability. And there was only one thing she could say to that, "I would NEVER do that!"

Pinkie smiled, "I know. Like I said, all three of us carry a sense of potential danger. And all three of us should endeavor to keep it only a potential."

Silence prevailed in the bakery.

Then, the baker pony smiled and said, "That concludes the serious portion of tonight's meeting. Now how about we figure out awesome

ways to use our element to cheer every pony up this loop."

Berry Punch and Sweetie Belle both looked up and smiled as well.

\* \* \*

><p>103.6 (Drachefly)<p>

Ranma was in the middle of explaining his situation to a completely unAwake Tendo family at the beginning of another near-baseline loop. He'd gotten a response ping, but that wasn't saying much. His curiosity as to who it was was quickly resolved as Shampoo apparated in.

The Tendo family seemed not to react, which puzzled Ranma for a moment until he realized he'd had to overcome a Somebody Else's Problem Field to notice her.

He slipped inside it and the Tendo family resumed their tea, idly discussing what he'd just been describing and not at all noticing that Ranma had slipped from their perceptions.

"Hi, what's the rush?"

"Zelda told me you had a package for me..."

"Ah, Twilight Sparkle! Nice to loop with you again! And yes, I do have a number of packages for you."

Twilight Sparkle clasped her hands in front of her and hopped up and down, giddy.

"Ready? Here's one I got. It might be a little stale - that stasis system only has a time compression factor of a trillion, and its clock has rolled over a few times." There was a peculiar sucking sound as a silver-gray-coated tree emerged from nowhere and vanished into an equally small nowhere before it could reach its full size. "Here's one from Happosai when he looped in as Pinkie. Yeah, you don't want to know, but it's fresh. And here's one from Raven."

"Which Raven?"

"The Teen Titan, not Mr. Poor Impulse Control."

"\_That\_ possibility hadn't crossed my mind."

"Much like, oh, doing this yourself? I'm still not clear on why you don't."

She pursed her lips. "I just get the feeling that if \_I\_ do that instead of someone else looping in as me... it'd happen anyway, and take my whole pocket with it. And the other natives haven't had any luck with it when there are guest anchors. I think it could only be not-fated when there aren't any natives around at all."

\_That\_ fits. We went as a gang when I got mine, and Happosai didn't face any interference from native loopers.\_ "So this is an ongoing thing? Just, grab one if I can?"

"Please! I'll make you some stasis spells to make up for..."

He laughed and waved her off.

"Take them or I'll press my engagement claim just to annoy you."

"Annoy? \_Annoy?\_ Having \_you\_ chasing me would be novel enough to be worth it!"

"All right then, we call it even if I try to get you to marry me until the end of time?"

"Umm..." Ranma looked across the Tendo family and realized that she had turned off the Somebody Else's Problem field before saying that.

\* \* \*

><p>103.7 (Drachefly)<p>

"Next: Most useless skillset in which you earned a professional certification!" Twilight declared to the assembled loopers. "As point leader, it's your turn, Applebloom."

She blinked, trying to find something that could possibly win. After a moment, she shook her head. "Pass."

Scotaloo, at her left, immediately declared, "Quidditch judge."

That shut down a lot of the circle; the next pony who put something forth was Rainbow Dash, with "Windows ME sysadmin. Yeah, I know, not very 'me'. I woke up on way to the test, and went off loop memories, but I earned it."

Twilight Sparkle sucked air between her teeth. "That may be even less useful than Quidditch judge, but I'm not sure that's really 'earning'. Anyone else?"

Cheerilee deadpanned, "Teaching certificate."

Celestia broke the ensuing awkward silence by saying, "I was an official planting-stick sharpness tester. There wasn't a certificate, but it was declared before the village council and entered into the record."

"Good enough, and now you're the one to beat."

Applejack narrowed her eyes and asked, "Planting-stick?"

"Before modern agricultural tools such as plows, you'd poke the ground and put a seed in. This was much harder if the sticks were dull. I was officially recognized as qualified to judge if a stick was sharp enough to use, and if not, whether to mend or replace it."

"Right, but why didn't you lead an agricultural revolution?"

"I was eight, Applejack."

"Ah've done, oh, fifty or sixty agricultural revolutions when I was under ten. You sure could."

"No. This was the \_first\_ time I was eight."

\* \* \*

><p>103.8 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

"For you are my daddy Discord, and I am a piece of you." Screwball, the pink-coated, purple-maned scion of chaos, sighed and rested her head on the terrified statue's dragon foot. "I miss you, Daddy."

A glow lit up within Discord's petrified chest, and there was a sound as of a throat clearing.

The equinoid abomination perked up. "Daddy! You're alive!"

"Indeed. Just a moment, daughter dearest. Daddy's going over the script." Discord frantically leafed through his long-term memory, trying to recall this particular number. Heartsongs rarely cooperated with him. Lower-case "h" harmony magic plus spirit of disharmony equaled malfunction in the cosmic karaoke machine. "Oh, forget it." An exertion of will, a few million years' memories of harmonious behavior, and the draconequus was free and smiling at his swirly-eyed daughter. "Want to get ice cream?"

Screwball pounced on her father and hugged him for all he was worth. (Eighty-seven bits, judging by how much came shooting out of his ears.) "Ice cream!"

\* \* \*

><p>103.9 (Masterweaver)<p>

"DON'T TELL APPLEJACK I'M HERE!"

Twilight blinked as Vinyl ran into a closet and shut herself in. "Uh..."

A moment later, the orange farm mare burst into the library, wearing a black cloak and a terrible sneer. "Alright, Twilight, where's that blood-sucking varmit?! I've gotta send her back to her grave!"

"She flew out the back door, said something about Manehattan."

"CONSARN IT!" Applejack threw her hat to the floor. "Tell Mac I'm not going ta be here fer a while, will ya?"

\* \* \*

><p>103.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

"I'm sorry, you want to sue \_who?\_"

"Prince Angel is the subject of my ire. Repayment from him is what I desire."



The lawyer peered over his glasses at the strangely rhyming striped alicorn. "I'm afraid I don't quite understand. What crimes has the prince committed?"

Zecora snorted. "A thousand years before this morn, two sisters with both wings and horn sat upon Equestria's throne and treated their subjects like their own. The elder gave learning to every child, whilst the younger tended to the forest wild. Yet the ponies of the time did fear nature and the ways of the younger dear. They burned the trees and razed the land, but for this the younger would not stand-"

"Wait, is this the story of Thorny Vines?" interrupted the pony. "Because she's a Creeper Night myth."

There was an awkward moment. Then, very pointedly, Zecora extended her wings and rose an eyebrow.

"Not that..." The lawyer gulped. "Er, not that it isn't a very... interesting myth..."

"The point is made, I have returned... and my lesson has been learned. No longer do I seek vengeance, now I regret the fate that those innocents of years ago met. I wish to return to my sibling and make right, well, everything." Zecora sighed. "Which brings us back to this task, and the question I must ask; why is Angel on my seat? What requirement could he meet?"

"Erm. He's your regent, miss."

"...That is actually... quite a reasonable choice. I withdraw my protesting voice..."

\* \* \*

><p>103.11 (Spectrumancer)<p>

It was the day after the Summer Sun Celebration. Luna had been taken care of by an awake Nyx, nihilism and a crate of postage stamps, and Twilight was looking forwards to spending a quiet loop on magical research.

"Morning, momma."

"Morning, Nyx."

"And what am I, roasted oats?"

"Morning to you too, Spike."

A perfectly normal loop.

After pancakes and coffee, Twilight moved to the main room of the library, making a mental note to set up something later to prevent Tirek from blowing it up this time around. But first, research. Twilight reached into her Pocket to grab a notebook and a Spellbook from Oerth, as she settled down for a nice, quiet day of studying.

\* \* \*

><p>Nyx and Spike were playing chess on the second floor of the library (neither the Crusaders nor Rarity were awake) when the tree was wracked by a loud crash. Alarmed, both ran downstairs to investigate.<p>

And stopped as they observed Twilight, staring at the 20-feet wide spell book lodged through what used to be the east wall.

A few moments passed, before Twilight slowly reached into her Pocket again. And produced a Hub-world toy replica of herself. Which was now life-sized. She looked to the staircase, where Spike was now leaning on a 10-feet long lightsaber hilt propped against the wall, and Nyx, who was reaching into her own Pocket, but apparently thought better of it and retrieved nothing.

A moment passed before a look of comprehension came over Twilight, who proceeded to groan loudly and face-hoof.

"Uh, so what's up with the..." Spike said, gesturing to the oversized items.

Twilight replied with a sigh, before explaining. "...My \_Little\_ Pony." Then she face-hoofed again.

\* \* \*

><p>103.12 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...so then Thief takes over, pulls her into an epic snog, and swipes the Alicorn Amulet into our pocket."

Cheerilee shook her head. "Wow. Never suspected Bonbon would be a dark sorcerer."

"Oh it gets better. Her nefarious rival was Sassafrass."

"...Caramel's marefriend, right? The blue pegasus?"

"Yep!" Lyra giggled. "She tried to apprentice Sweetie Belle, but Sweetie was Awake so-"

Bright Eyes and Ditzzy Do glided down to the picnic blanket, Ditzzy snapping her wings in and letting herself drop the last three feet (much to Bright Eye's bemusement). Ditzzy grinned as she sat down, producing her own basket from nowhere. "Hey spygals, how's it hanging?"

"Pretty good, all things considered." Cheerilee smirked. "You should have seen what Dinky drew last week for her art assignment, it's just adorable!"

"Oh, I look forward to it. How about you, Lyra, you doing okay?"

"Yeah, I'm cool." Lyra flipped her mane. "Been practicing some of my techniques."

"I'm looking forward to it. Pinkie's not awake this loop, so no

peppermint pylon, but soon as she is we'll have a go."

"I still feel like a fourth wheel here," Bright Eyes grumbled. "I mean, you're always talking about these loops and here I am, stuck in linearity."

Ditzzy gave her a good natured should nudge. "Come on, I told you this like thirteen times already! I just want to see if I Dream your memories some loop-"

"-because I am you and you are me, yeah yeah..." Bright Eyes rolled her eyes. "\_I'm\_ supposed to be the smart sister."

"And you are! I'm the crazy one, you're the down to earth one. Except we're pegasi, which ruins the metaphor..."

Cheerilee chuckled. "She's the falcon to your hummingbird?"

"Don't let Hummingway hear that," Lyra interjected, rolling her shoulder with a wince. "That bird can pack a wallop when he wants..."

\* \* \*

><p>103.13 (feral wolfskin)<br>(Grammar checked by Masterweaver)

Nightmare Moon looked at the lavender unicorn in front of her. "I use Veil of the Darkness and Massive Attack to Snacks." She put the cards of Chaos in the board. "Now your party is ruined!"

A gasp of horror could be hear from a pink pony in the crowd.

Twilight just grinned and put down her own cards. "Emergency Party Supplies allow me to restock the party, and the combination of Sphere of Mirrors and Disco Fever nullify your Veil of Darkness and give me points in charisma, making some of your pieces join my cause."

\* \* \*

><p>"I love this game, it'slike was created for me!" exclaimed Discord, moving a few pieces.<p>

Twilight rolled the two six faced dices. "37.8 and summer. With that my ducks can cross the river of mayonnaise and conquer Australia."

\* \* \*

><p>"With the power of Bifrost the Rainbow Bridge, my army of pink fluffy unicorns attacks your capital!" exclaimed Chrysalis moving her pieces.<p>

Twilight took a card from the deck and put two in the board. "Planet Wide Heartsong, distracts all the pieces for 5 turns and I use Deficit of Attention in my own armies making them unable to keep concentration on the same thing for more than a turn."

\* \* \*

><p>"Crystals," moaned Sombra, moving a piece with the form of a cat up a step in a stair.<p>

Twilight spun a roulette that ended in a clock. "I prevent the existence of the rats creating a temporal paradox, because I don't have safe guards the universe get destroyed ending the game. This cost me a lot of points but I still win."

Sombra looked over the sheet with points, made a few mental calculations, and nodded before abandoning the Crystal Empire.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked the board, the dice, the cards, the fishing rods and the other objects necessary to play Chaos before looking at her enemy. "You win. I have no way to beat this strategy." The vines of the Plunderseed rearranged the game. "2 of 3?" After a affirmative response they started playing. <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Tirek stared the Alicorn in front of him before putting a token and a card in the board. "I use Fireball and Narrative Causality to destroy your Golden Oak Library!"<p>

Twilight removed the piece of the game and started to plan a new strategy.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked to her NOT destroyed library before looking at the mini Library Tirek Â'destroyedÂ'. "Next variant the villains prefer playing games to fighting, I am repeating this." <p>

\* \* \*

><p>103.14 (Crisis) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Ditzy..." Twilight approached the wall-eyed pegasus, her telekinesis trailing a package that had a grinning Pinkie Pie poking her head out. "We need to talk about this 'friendshipping' business of yours."<p>

"Oh," Ditzzy looked downcast. "Am I not using enough postage?"

"No," Twilight fought the urge to facehoof. "It's... That's not what friendshiping \_means\_."

"Oh," the mailmare blinked, and then blinked again as she seemed to understand. "Oh! I get it! Don't you worry Twilight! I'll have your date with Pinkie set up toot-sweet!"

Twilight's protest that \_that\_ wasn't right either was cut off as the pegasus sped away. Her intended pursuit was cut off by Pinkie letting out a long dramatic gasp.

"Ohmygosh!" Pinkie popped out of the package she'd been happily

sitting in. "We haven't been on a date with each other since that Loop way back when you were experimenting to see if you might be romantically interested in anyone you knew and didn't know I was Awake as well!"

"Pinkie," Twilight growled out, "how is blurting that out for all of Ponyville to hear 'never speaking of it again'?"

"\_I\_ don't know silly," Pinkie rolled her eyes. "\_You're\_ the super-smart smarty-pants!"

\* \* \*

><p>103.15 (LordCirce) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stared down at Pinkie, who was currently being restrained by Rainbow Dash and Applejack.<p>

"Your family is what now?"

Pinkie grinned widely. "We are the true believers of Discord, the Bringer of the UltraPlusFun! We knew, when my eldest sister Maud was born, marked of Discord from the womb, that she would be the instrument of his rise. Even now, he will seek her out, and release from within her the True Party. Praise be to chaos! Discordru fhun p'farthti! Discordru fhun p'farthti!"

Twilight sat back and sighed. This Loop had seemed like a normal baseline, except that Pinkie had been slightly more manic than usual. And, now that she thought about it, the Pies had both smiled a bit more than usual. Apparently, they were all Discord cultists waiting for him to break free. The moment Celestia announced he had escaped, Pinkie had began laughing, and had tried to body tackle Celestia for some reason.

Glancing up, Twilight nodded to Dash and Applejack. "Make sure she's secure, Sugar Overload Protocol Three, then meet us in the main hall." They both nodded, while Pinkie continued chanting on the floor.

Twilight made her way out the door to the chamber, then glanced off to the side. "Did you know anything about this?"

Discord shrugged, then manifested a second set of arms to shrug again. "No. This is new to me. And rather exciting. I mean, I've had cultists before, but most of them are boring stuffy old cloak-wearers, all daggers and blood and 'down with my mean teacher'. I've never had a whole group of cultists who actually appreciate what chaos is all about."

Twilight nodded, still frowning. "It is probably the scientist in me speaking, but I am almost tempted to let you release whatever power is in Maud. I don't recall ever seeing you Discordify her before." She glanced up when she saw Discord wince. "What is it?"

Discord paused. "Well, I've done it once. Hiccup was replacing you, shortly after Maud showed up in the expansions and all. I thought it would be a good prank, sort of my own, welcome-to-Ponyville present."

He winced again.

Twilight started grinning. "Go on."

Discord sighed. "She...got clingy. And emotional. And did I mention clingy?"

Twilight started snickering. "Aw, did Discord get an admirer?"

Discord gave her a flat look. "She showed a level of obsession that would make a Dating-Simulator wielding Cadance look aloof."

Twilight froze, ran that scenario through her mind, then slowly nodded. "So...desert island?"

Discord nodded, snapping his fingers to dress himself in a hula girl outfit. "Desert island."

The two of them vanished, just as Dash and Applejack walked out of the chamber.

"Pinkie is secure, for now...where did they just go?"

Applejack shrugged in response.

\* \* \*

><p>103.16 (Conceptulist)<p>

"SQUIRREL!" yelled Twilight. And then she promptly jumped out of the chariot and proceeded to chase the squirrel she had spotted. Which scared the squirrel, causing it to run away. Which caused Twilight to run faster, which caused the squirrel to run faster, etc.

Spike reintroduced his palm to his face for what felt like the gazillionth time this loop. The Royal Guard pegasi who had flown Spike and Twilight to Ponyville started to snicker before they regained their composure.

Pinkie Pie, who had wandered over to see what all the commotion was about, stared at the purple unicorn. Said purple unicorn had apparently grown bored with the squirrel and was now experimenting with a friction coefficient reducing spell. Mostly by slipping and sliding up and down the road like it was made of soap.

Pinkie gasped really loudly before attempting to Road Skate as well. Spike could see the disappointment in Pinkie Pie as she discovered the road itself was not slippery. Twilight, now bored of Road Skating, solved this predicament by recasting the friction coefficient reducing spell on Pinkie Pie. Once Pinkie realized what had happened, she leapt up into the air and gave another gasp, before skating off to sugar cube corner. '\_Most likely to go prep for the 'Welcome to Ponyville party' she usually throws for Twilight and me,\_' assumed Spike.

Spike got out of the chariot so the guards could take it back to Canterlot. He was surprised when the squirrel from earlier dizzily wandered up to him. "Well, that's one way to Awake," the squirrel commented.

"Silver Spoon?" questioned Spike. "Or would that be Silverleaf?"

"Actually, it's Silver Fur this time," answered the squirrel. "But you can just call me Silver."

"Ok. I was pretty sure that it was just gonna be me and Twilight Awake this loop, so it's nice to have some late Awakenings this time."

Staring at the purple who was now climbing a tree to count how many leaves it had, Silver asked the question that was on every Ponyvilleian's mind at the moment. "What's up with her?"

"You know how Twilight is kinda somewhat selectively OCD in the baseline and is sometimes really OCD in variant loops?" sighed Spike.

"Yeah," nodded Silver.

"Well, this time she has got something different to deal with. And she also decided to 'play along' with the plot of the loop. 'Because, why not?' she told me. "

Sliver was pretty sure she knew knew what Spike was referring to, but decided to ask and make sure. "So Twilight has Attention Deficit Hyperactive-"

"Ooo! Shiny!" yelled Twilight. She then teleported from the tree top to right behind Sliver Fur and glompt'd the squirrel. Because Sliver's fur was a nice, shiny color of silver.

"-Disorder," deadpaned Sliver Fur.

\* \* \*

><p>103.17 (Conceptulist)<p>

Sometimes it got lonely bartending. When the day's work was done, Big Mac had to go down to the cellar and make sure everything was stocked right. He had to be certain everything was ready to go at a moment's notice. Not that he minded. The monotony was relaxing.

But when the chores and restocking was done, it got lonely. There wasn't as much to do on the farm since he had started looping. Sure, all the daily chores still needed to be done. No tree could be left unbucked, no apples left unloaded, no cart left in the groves. Fields got plowed and planted. The work got done. It just didn't take quite as long to do anymore.

There were all kinds of tricks to make farm work easier. They weren't necessarily shortcuts or cheats. Not like when Applebloom builds an auto-bucker nine thousand or something. It was just that there was the right way to buck a tree and the best way to buck a tree. Constant practice and a steadfast work ethic meant Big Mac learnt how to do it right, how to do it best, and then how to do it perfect.

Applejack could do it best. She had started looping well before Big

Mac. She had much more time to practice. But she was always going off and doing things with her friends. Well, not all the time. Just a whole lot more than Big Mac did. Heck, Big Mac couldn't even remember when the last time he looped somewhere outside of Equestria was, let alone the last time he went out and did something just for the heck of it. Maybe it was that time where he bartended in Gotham? Anyway, the point was that of the looping Apple Clan, Big Mac was the one who did the most farm work the most often. Even counting Pinkie Pie and the rock farm.

All that time working on the farm and in the orchards paid off in the form of every single trick in the book of farming tricks. As well as enough extra to write his own book, and that book's dozen sequels. Most of them were subtle little things. Some of the tricks were Variant Cutie Mark Talents like listening for the sound the apples made as they fell into the buckets, and making an accurate count of the tree's current crop based on that. Some tricks were a tad more obvious, like seeding a furrow while simultaneously plowing the next one. But most of them were just the product of a long, long time spent refining his technique.

Farm work aside, there was also keeping the bar ready at a moment's notice. It was usually fairly easy to slip away during the Summer Sun Apple Family Reunion. As long as he showed up for the roll call slash Applejack introducing the extended Apple Clan to Twilight, nobody noticed if he spent an hour or so building a fully stocked bar in the cellar.

Of course, the ponies and slash or other miscellaneous Equestrian species who were Awake Loopers tended to notice. The bar, not the building of the bar. They always found their way to the cellar at some point in the loop. Hopefully not to try and drown out memories, but for more casual reasons. So getting and keeping the bar ready for Loopers was definitely a priority.

There were chairs to set up and stools to polish. Tables to assemble. Kegs of beer to prep. Bottles of wine to taste test, as so to not serve a wine that had aged too much. They did spoil eventually. And lastly, there were glasses to clean. Oh so many glasses.

By this point, Big Mac had quite the impressive collection of drinking implements. There were the wooden mugs he had started out with. The kind that the Apple Family Cider was traditionally served in. Then there were the wine glasses. Since good wine apparently deserved more respect than a good, old fashioned, Apple Family Cider Mug could offer. At least, according to Rarity in full blown snob mode. Although, Big Mac had to admit that the wines did taste better when the cider aftertaste was no longer present.

Then there were the shot glasses. Tiny little things. Hard to clean, especially with hooves. It took a lot of practice and broken glass to get the trick of it. Mostly, the shot glasses were used for various kinds of Brain Bleach. Any alcohol he served in amounts that small was likely to melt through standard shot glasses. The specialty drinks for dragons needed some extra mumbo jumbo to keep from distorting the glass into its component molecules. Still, they made for a nice change of pace.

There were saké saucers for Gilda and the more oriental visiting loopers, as well as plenty of rice wine to serve in them. Steel mugs



for some of the trickier brews. It didn't build up flavor like a cider mug made from the wood of an Apple farmed apple tree, but steel was much harder to set on fire.

And then there was the good old standby. The glass mug. The one that every modern bar in the multiverse stocked. Traditional, time tested, steadfast, slow to change, straight forward, and clear as could be. Big Mac heartily approved of such a thing. They just need a good cleaning and polishing once they were used. Speaking of which, that was exactly what Big Mac was doing. Cleaning and polishing his supply of glass mugs.

It was very easy. The mugs Big Mac stocked were wide enough that he could stick his hoof in them and have room for a washcloth to be wrapped around his hoof at the same time. Grab the mug, stick a washcloth covered hoof in, swipe around 'till it's clean, subspace mug. Change the washcloth if it is getting to dirty to clean with. Then grab the next mug and repeat. It was very repetitive.

'\_Sorta like the loops,\_' pondered Big Mac. '\_I got who knows how many more to go. I'm gonna most likely do the same thing I always do. I'm mostly not doing it for my sake. I do what I feel needs to be done, when I feel I need to do it, how I feel is best for the most amount of ponies. Errm. Most amount of people. And I'm not planning on changing it up any time soon.\_'

Placing the the now clean mug into his Subspace Pocket, Big Mac picked up and examined the next mug. The glass had warped quite a tad with age, so it was now much thinner at the top and extremely fatter at the bottom. Big Mac sighed, as he realized would ether have to fix it or replace it. Careful consideration lead to the decision to fix it, because it would be faster overall.

A metal tray came out of subspace and was placed down to protect the wood of the bar top from getting damaged. The warped mug was placed down on the the tray. And then Big Mac started to breath fire on the mug.

The fire was one of the few loop abilities he had actively decided to keep. There was a loop a long time ago where dragons and ponies had switched as the dominant species on Eques. It was not that bad being a dragon, but Big Mac was glad when he was back as a pony. He had come down with a nasty case of scale rot towards the end of that loop, and it wasn't something he wanted to experience again.

The dragon fire was nowhere near the level it could have been. For one, Big Mac never used the ability. It just wasn't needed. Therefore, it had atrophied. On top of that, he was currently not a dragon. This meant he was fueling the fire breath entirely with his normal earth pony magic. It was not as powerful and destructive as it could have been. But Big Mac didn't care. It did a fine job of softening up glass as it was.

Cutting off the fire breath, Big Mac started to reshape the glass. It hadn't gotten hot enough to melt down, just enough that it was somewhat pliable. Earth Pony magic protected his forehooves as they pressed the mug back into shape. Soon it was beginning to cool off. Magic channeled almost instinctively reinforced the glass, rounding out the center again. A bucket of water was pulled from subspace and the mug was dropped into it. Pulling it out, Big Mac was satisfied

that the mug was serviceable once again.

Picking up where he left off, both in his work and in his thoughts, Big Mac thought '\_And just like in the Loops, when I do change my routine it is a temporary, premeditated change in response to something needing to be done.\_'

Calmly wiping out the mug in hoof, Big Mac realized something. '\_I probably spend way to much time alone with my own thoughts. They tend to wander pretty far.\_' And then he moved on the next mug.

\* \* \*

><p>103.18 (Anonymous Ask, Edited by Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

"Great Oak Library, I have returned," announced Twilight as she stood in front of her home.

There was a brief moment of silence, before the massive tree spoke, "Twilight, Hast though brought one book and thine oaken shield?"

She held up a copy of the History of Equestria and an ornate shield carved from an oak husk with the forms of the twin sisters on their front. Again, another moment passed as the front of Golden Oaks Library Tree dropped open like a mouth, "Thou may enter, oh brave Twilight, and face the great evil that hast grown more powerful than mine ability to contain."

Twilight shook her head at this loop as she stepped within to face off against Nightmare Moon. Apparently this loop, there were no Elements of Harmony, so she would have to beat the evil out of Luna this time. With things playing out similar to the events of Ocarina of Time from the Hyrule loops, Tirek probably replaced Ganondorf, or maybe vice versa. Either way, this would be interesting.

\* \* \*

><p>103.19 (TokoWH)<p>

Some loops were weirder than others.

Spyro already had a good idea of the fact that there were other universes out there, and that occasionally loops would fuse together for whatever reason...

But seeing his best friend as a miniature Pegasus was still weird.

Sparx smirked, still glancing over his yellow-furred body. His mane and tail were short and a silver-ish grey, with two tufts of his mane at the front sticking straight up like his antennas used to. Sparx glanced over to Spyro. "I don't know about you, but so far I'm liking this loop."

"Easy for you to say. You weren't turned into a baby."

Spyro frowned, barely coming up to Sparx's knees as he walked on all fours. At least he could somehow still talk, but being a baby once was already enough for him. The fact that his appearance had got him

tackle-hugged by a pegasus earlier that day hadn't helped, either. He was supposed to be one of the Dragon Realm's greatest heroes! A totally awesome dragon all around! \_He was not supposed to be cute!\_

Spyro sighed as he looked around the library that was in this hollowed-out tree. There were more multicolored miniature horses everywhere. For whatever reason, a pink one that somehow seemed to be even \_more\_ \_hyper\_ than Agent 9 on a sugar rush had insisted on giving them a 'Welcome to our loop!' party. Spyro shook his head. He didn't mind parties, but considering only three peopleâ€”sorry, \_ponies\_â€”were aware they were looping, he didn't see much of a point, as it only served to confuse most of the non-looping ponies who were there.

"So, how ya'll likin' our loop so far?"

Spyro and Sparx turned around to see Applejack, a brownish-yellow pony with straw-yellow hair in a cowboy hat, standing there.

"Pretty good so far. Took a bit of getting used to with this new body, but I love the fact that other people besides Spyro can understand what I'm saying for a change," Sparx said with a big grin, sitting down.

>Spyro still had a flat expression on his face. "Other than being de-aged to a baby, I guess it's been alright so far."<p>

AJ chuckled, giving a wink. "Sorry 'bout that. I'd get RD to age ya'll up, but any dragons older than ah baby tend to cause quite the panic in Ponyville."

Spyro narrowed his eyes before he glanced at the rainbow-maned pegasus in the background. Rainbow Dash had been the first one to welcome Sparx and him to their loop and explain what was going on. Apparently, Sparx had replaced Twilight, this world's Anchor, as the number one student of this world's ruler, 'Princess Celestia', and Spyro had replaced Twilight's assistant, Spike, who was also a baby dragon.

Also, apparently, when awake in one of their loops, most of Twi's friends had long since learned how to become 'alicorns'â€”which apparently were the demigods of this world in that they had the abilities of all major pony species, as well as massive reserves of magic. Rainbow Dash had accidentally triggered her transformation while she was racing to where they had 'looped in' to make sure they didn't do anything stupid, and was now using an invisibility spell to hide the newly-acquired horn on her head.

She had also told them about what was going to happen today. Apparently, some not-quite-evil but rather misunderstood alicorn named 'Nightmare Moon' would appear later today to try to plunge the world into an eternal night. Spyro shook his head. If it wasn't for the fact that he was a baby at the moment, he'd torch her butt the second she'd appear.

"So, what do you want us to do about this 'Luna' girl?" Sparx asked, glancing over to Applejack.

AJ placed her hoof to her chin. "Well, we've all come up with several different ways 'ah dealin' with her when she ain't loopin', but

considerin' ya'll are new here, do you two have any particular ideas?"

Spyro and Sparx glanced at each other before a devious grin appeared on Spyro's face. He looked back at Applejack. "I think I have an idea."

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon yelled in rage at the top of her lungs, but no one in the room could hear her. Thanks to a combination of skills learned from that one loop where Spyro had decided to challenge himself, and a bit of reinforcement from RD's new magical ability, the Mare in the Moon who had attempted to plunge the world into eternal night...was currently trapped in a giant bubble.<p>

Spyro smirked. True, he probably could have come up with something better given time, but considering he was still new to this world, he decided to go with something simple.

Rainbow Dash was laughing her butt off, while AJ was trying her best to suppress a chuckle. "Trappin' her in ah bubble. Ain't nothin' too new, but it is effective."

Spyro snorted out a laugh. It seemed like this loop would be a rather fun one.

Though, he still wished he wasn't a baby for it.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

103.1: Meh.

>103.2: Is this the newest bizarre crack pairing?<br>103.3: Fan fillying.

>103.4: It's so hard to tell sometimes.<br>103.5: Laughing Mad... is not the best kind of laughter. But it's there.

>103.6: Retaliation.<br>103.7: You've got to have the right qualifications these days.

>103.8: Don't ask me.<br>103.9: Applewood stakes.

>103.10: At least she uses the proper channels.<br>103.11: A question of scale.

>103.12: Derpy experiments meticulously.<br>103.13: It's no sillier than Yu-Gi-Oh.

>103.14: "Friendshipping" - writing about friendships.<br>103.15: Don't be so Maudlin.

>103.16: Teleporter with ADHD. Keep medicated.<br>103.17: The loops are one of the few settings that can actually happen in.

>103.18: Ganondorf burns the tree down. Probably.<br>103.19: A change is as good as a rest.

## 110. Chapter 110

### 104.1 (Bardic Knowledge)

"Rarity?"

"Yes, Twilight?"

"Why am I Chandra Nalaar?"

"Oh, are we reversing the gag this time?"

Twilight Nalaar glared at Rarity Jura, flames literally dancing in her eyes, before replying. "Seriously, Rarity. I've \_met\_ Chandra. She's like Trixie. Why isn't \_Trixie\_ Chandra?"

"Well, aside from her not being Awake this Loop, I'd imagine it has to do with the fact that when either you or Chandra get angry, your hair tends to turn into fire." Twilight took this into consideration.

"I still don't get it."

\* \* \*

><p>104.2 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

"AHHHHHHH!"

Twilight sighed. "Rainbow."

"AHHHHHHH!" A six-colored streak passed by, not pausing in the slightest.

"Rainbow Dash."

"AHHHHHHH!" It came back, same direction, same speed.

Twilight took a deep breath and waited for a circumnavigation before shouting, "Rainbow Miriam Dash!"

"AHHâ€"Hey, we don't even have middle names this Loop!" Dash paused and considered her mane of prismatic fire. "Wait, why doesn't this hurt?"

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Did you even bother to check your Loop memories?"

Dash did so. Then she noticed the flock of red and yellow birds moving a cloud into position under Fluttershy's guidance. Fluttershy, whose mane was a cascade of radiant pink. "Okay, how does that even begin to work?"

"Well, if you have an hour free, I could explain it."

"Short version?"

Twilight shook her head. It seemed no amount of time would make her lectures appeal to an Awake Rainbow Dash. "You already know it. Excepting cutie marks, pegasi and phoenixes have each others' magic this Loop."

"Huh." Dash further plumbed her memories. "Whoa."

"What?"

The pegasus landed. (Phoenasus? Peganix? Sunbirdhorse? No, definitely

not sunbirdhorse.) "Okay, so phoenixes are immortal as long as they die of old age, right?"

Twilight nodded. "Yes, but pegasi stagger their self-resurrection so as not to overwhelm to population."

"Right, right. Well, guess who made the first Sonic Rainboom ever this Loop?"

"Oh. Fantastic." Hoof met face.

"It was me, by the way."

"Yes, Dash, I got that." It was going to be a long Loop.

\* \* \*

><p>104.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

The door to the library burst open. "Behold! The Grrreat and Powerful Trrrrrrrrrixie is here to renew her checkout card!" She sauntered up to the black pegasus idly reading a romance novel. "And she knows exactly what she wants to check out first!"

Chrysalis sighed, shutting her book. "Trixie... I'm physiologically incapable of feeling love."

"...what?"

"This loop, changelings are literally incapable of feeling love." Chrysalis shrugged, avoiding her gaze. "Which, you know, kind of puts a pressure on me. I mean, I think I still love you, but I'm not getting anything... from it. Does that make sense?"

Trixie sat down on the couch beside her. "I... suppose. Huh." She examined her hooves. "No, actually, it doesn't make sense. I mean, it does, but... it doesn't, I mean... how can you love me without feeling it?"

"That's the big question, isn't it?" Chrysalis bit her lip. "See, I've been like this before, but not after we hooked up. And, you know, I could have just kept up an act, but I figured... honesty, right?"

"And kindness. Cruel to be kind."

"Yeah. I'm actually waiting on Twilight to get back with-"

Two alicorns wearing labcoats and safety goggles teleported into the room. "Right, Cadance, you handle the emotional spectrum and I'll work on the biological... side... oh hi Trixie!" Twilight waved, chuckling awkwardly. "How are you?"

Trixie blinked. "...are you two planning on using my marefriend's condition as justification for mad science?"

"...it was her idea..."

Chrysalis stood. "I'm sorry I didn't ask you. I just thought you might not be... comfortable with this." She gestured at herself.

"With me, like this. I mean, I don't think I actually regret it, but that's part of the issue, I'm pretty sure telling you in a normal loop where I can feel love would make me regret it, so I was hoping to deal with this before you found out so I wouldn't regret it as much in the future, and there's the whole mad science aspect-"

Trixie shut her up. With her lips.

Cadance cooed. "Awwwww. That right there. That's why I'm doing this."

The showmare grinned. "A bit for the road, hon. Now then!" Her cape metamorphosed into a bedazzling lab coat as she pulled a pair of goggles out of her hat. "Do I need to ascend for this? Because I'm certainly not going to let you experiment unsupervised..."

\* \* \*

><p>104.4 (Zetrein)<p>

They had brought him to stand before a mirror, of all things. While he had thought his escape flawless, they had somehow detected it. Weak as he was when they found him, he had not the power to stand against the alicorns.

Come to think of it, there were rather more of them than he had expected, he would have to take that into account when he next escaped.

"Well, here we are again, Tirek." Celestia addressed him. "Given your escape from Tartarus, we've decided to take stronger measures. Tartarus could not hold you, so it stands to reason that there is nothing on this world that can." She gestured to the mirror. "As such, we have chosen to imprison you on another world."

Tirek sneered at her. "So this is your answer? I hope they're better at building prisons than our world, else you've only given me the means to take everything I want."

"That would be impressive, given as you would be in a magicless world, in a magicless form, with no knowledge of how the portal works." Tirek suddenly felt a good deal less confident.

As the purple alicorn lifted him with her magic, Celestia said the last words Tirek would hear in Equestria. "We hereby banish you..." He was propelled towards the mirror, even as he futilely struggled in the alicorn's grip.

"To High school."

\* \* \*

><p>"You'll record everything, right?" Twilight asked, minutes after having thrown Tirek through the portal.<p>

"As much as I can. I'll try and send you a highlights reel before the loop ends." Sunset replied.

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

Sunset trotted into the library. "Hey Twilight. You remember that loop we threw Tirek into the mirror?"

"Oh, yeah." Twilight grinned nostalgically. "My poor little tree actually remained... intact..."

She slowly turned to the other mare. Sunset pulled a PADD out of her pocket, flicking it to a picture of a burning building. "Golden Oaks Books and Branches, library and indoor park."

"...ooog."

\* \* \*

><p>104.5 (misterq)<p>

"Pinkie Pie, have you been playing with the mirror pool again?" Twilight Sparkle asked in an accusatory tone.

"Nope. Not this loop," Pinkie saw the unicorn's glare and amended her answer, "I mean, I learned my lesson and all that jazz."

Twilight sighed as she gazed at the party pony's 1000 watt smile, "Then how do you explain this?"

A purple aura heralded the arrival of two floating Ditzys into Sugarcube Corner.

"Wow! There's two of them? Wait a moment," Pinkie Pie rushed forward and examined the two pegasi, "Ahh, I see!"

"What is it?"

Pinkie pointed to the newcomers' cutie marks, "You found the six bubble Ditzzy and four bubble Ditzzy."

"What?" Twilight examined the cutie marks for herself only to see that Pinkie was correct. One of the grey pegasi had six bubbles on her flank while the other had only four, "What does that mean?"

Pinkie pointed a hoof, "It means that our Ditzzy is the seven bubble Ditzzy. If you collect them all, you can summon the great Derpy dragon to grant you a wish!"

Twilight opened and closed her mouth several times before groaning, "You know what? I don't even care anymore."

Then she walked out, dropping the two Ditzys onto the floor.

"Muffins?" asked the Ditzys in unison.

Pinkie smiled and gave them muffins.

\* \* \*



><p>104.6 (novusordomundi)<p>

"Twilight?"

"No, Pinke, I do not know why I am glowing."

Pinkie looked on as Twilight covered herself in a blanket, mainly so that the other ponies could actually look at her without being blinded. While the glowing had helped counter Nightmare Moon, it had made other things harder. Like being near her without sunglasses.

"Let me try something. Twi-Light Off!" Pinkie said, clapping her hooves twice. And sure enough, Twilight Sparkle stopped glowing.

Twilight took a look at herself, than back at Pinkie. "How did you do that?"

"Twi-Light On!" Another two claps, and the purple unicorn glowed like a Christmas tree again. She just glared at Pinkie, who just smiled back at her.

\* \* \*

><p>104.7 (Hadithi)<p>

Silvertongue Awoke, and was fairly confused. She was used to Looping into other worlds - the trick of it was that she didn't Loop into other universes. That was tricky for the admins - or at least that's what the strange looking creature had said when he showed up to explain that there were certain things she and a couple of her fellow Loopers were not allowed to do. She remembered asking what world he was from, and if she would get to try on his body at some point, and now she was in a very obviously different universe surrounded by talking pastel ponies.

"Pan?" she asked cautiously. "They better have looped you with me, Pan, else I swear I'll go kill one of their gods."

\_I'm here.\_ Pan's voice was soft as it touched her mind. \_Just give me a moment. I'm pure magical energy, Lyra. It's tricky enough to talk to you. Still, I should be able to get back to my usual self. If I just reverse the polari-\_

Lyra groaned. "You're talking like a scholar, Pan - and not one of the fun ones."

She could practically hear him sigh. \_There's plenty of Dust, and things close to Dust. Just give me a bit and I'll be a daemon again.\_

"Good." She took a few awkward steps towards the nearest building. Tricky, but she'd had trickier forms of motion before. She eyed her reflection in the window of a tree, absently noting that the inside was filled with books. Her Loop memories sorted themselves out, and she discovered she was called an earth pony, and that the mark on her gray coat with called a cutie mark. Further examination in the mirror showed that it was a silver tongue, appropriately enough, and ponies tended to assume it meant she was a good conversationalist rather

than a good liar. To the best of her knowledge, that appeared to be what Pan was stuck as. She giggled.

"You're a picture on my flank, Pan." His discontent brushed against her mind and she gleefully decided to anger him even more. "I've decided to find this 'Celestia' pony. She seems awfully important and a lot stronger than the last god we faced."

\_Lyra! You're going to get us into trouble!\_

"Of course, Pan. that's the fun part."

The door to the tree opened and closed, revealing a purple unicorn and a small dragon trotting alongside her. She realizes that no one else had a dragon, and that the purple pony's cutie mark seemed much more detailed than the others, and decided she was likely important. A quick search through her loop memories prove her right.

"Twilight Sparkle?" she said aloud, her nose wrinkling. "And I thought my name was silly."

The unicorn stopped (pony hearing was apparently quite good), and turned to Silvertongue with her head cocked to the side. After a moment, her face brightened. "You must be replacing Silver Spoon this loop. Hello." She walked up and extended her hoof - it seemed to be a very common greeting in the multiverse. Silvertongue wobbled a bit as she extended a hoof to shake. "I'm the local anchor. It seems like you already know my name. So I'll just let you know that this is a sanctuary loop€|"

Twilight trailed off, looking curiously over the earth pony's shoulder. A moment later, Silvertongue let out an unhappy squeal as there was a brief burst of physical and emotional pain - one that she had experienced an unpleasant number of times before. She glared at her daemon, now in his standard polecat form on the ground. "

>"That hurt, Pan. You didn't say you were going to tear."<p>

"It wouldn't have hurt less if I told you," he argued, stretching long and slow before leaping up onto her back. He looked at the open mouthed unicorn and dragon, and nipped Lyra light on the neck. "You're being rude. Introduce us."

Silvertongue put on her most winning smile. "Hello, Twilight Sparkle. I'm Lyra Silvertongue, and this is Pantalaimon, my daemon." She paused thoughtfully. "Or cutie mark, I suppose."

Twilight recovered first, clearing her throat. "Oh. Well. That's a strange way to loop in. Do things like that often happen to you?"

"Sort of. Pan's been all kind of weird things before. I don't blame the admins, though. There aren't many places that have daemons, so it gets tricky. The admin who visited us says lots of things are tricky about my universe."

"Lyra, you have to explain," Pan scolded. She looked back at him, clearly confused as to what she was supposed to be explaining, and Pan sighed once more. He returned to the ground, and after a moment of careful examination, transformed into a unicorn stallion of a

brown, earthy color. "Sorry for Lyra. We don't run into Loopers often, and most of the time I keep myself hidden. It's just...being a mark was too strange."

"It can't be weirder than a phone, Pan. Remember when you were a phone?"

He ignored her. "You'll probably need a longer explanation, but the shorthand is that--"

"Pan's my twin brother. Siamese twins. That's why it's so tricky to Loop."

Pan ignored her still, this time with a roll of his eyes. "I'm Lyra's soul."

Twilight looked back and forth between the two, then looked at Spike, who still seemed astonished by the sudden physical manifestation of a cutie mark. "Ah, Spike, could you go make us some tea? I feel like this is going to take a while."

\* \* \*

><p>104.8 (Masterweaver)<p>

\_"What."\_

Discord shrunk under Derpy's gaze. "I... I swear, it was an accident!" He wrung his hands, now the size of a mouse. "I got them to a hospital quickly, right? That's what you do when you make mistakes, you... make sure they get fixed."

"They'll be okay, Derpy." Berry put a hoof on her friend's shoulder. "It's just a little magical mishap, and Discord didn't know there was witchweed--"

"I don't give a \_flying feather\_ what that \_thing\_ did or did not know." Derpy shoved the hoof off her. "All I know is he hurt my foal-\_our\_ foals! And you're just forgiving him?!" She narrowed her eyes at the purple mare. "That's it, Berry. We're done. As soon as the hospital releases Dinky, I am cutting off all ties and moving her somewhere safer."

And without another word, she turned and stomped away, leaving a speechless earth pony and a simpering draconequeus behind.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hi mommy! Look, I'mma bicorn!"<p>

Dinky giggled, wincing. "Gotcha beat. Three points." She pointed at Discord's antler. "Course he wins by a landslide."

Berry Punch shook her head, walking up to the two foals and rustling their manes gently. "Good to see you two in such high spirits. How's hospital life treating you?"

"The food's horrible but the nurses are nice," Ruby reported with a snort. "So it's business as usual."

"There's a reason for that," Discord stage whispered. "Laughter is the best medicine, but hospitals are filled with sick ponies so the staff gets really worried. So every night, under the light of the moon, they all gather in the cafeteria and project their worries into the food where it can be harmlessly digested by the patients."

"That's an incredible theory, mister Discord."

"I'm an incredible being, Doctor Stable."

The doctor rolled his eyes, examining the readouts for a few seconds before turning to Berry. "It looks like your daughter will have her horn healed in a couple of days. Miss Dinky will take longer, but she should be out of here by the end of the week."

"That's good to know. You hear that, you two?" Berry grinned widely. "Just a few more days and you'll be up and on your hooves again!"

"Ooo! Ooo!" Ruby bounced in her hospital bed. "Maybe when Dinky gets out we can all go to the lake!"

Berry's smile faltered for less than a second. "Yeah, all of us. I'll talk to Derpy about it..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey there, Derpy! Listen, I was thinking maybe you and I could go clubbing later, talk smack about our kid's dads-"<p>

Berry's mane smoldered from the lightning crack. After a moment, she let out a smokey cough.

\* \* \*

><p>"How's my favorite pegasus today? I baked muffins-blueberry, your favorite! So, you know, I thought a little picnic could-"<p>

The smashed pastries slid slowly down Berry's face. Then the second bolt of lightning struck her.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hello there my gray pegasus and I hope you will be well, it's come to my attention that you're under sadness's spell! So I've gone to throw a party that is sure to cheer you up, with your favorite food and all your friends and this adorable pup-"<p>

"Pinkie," Derpy said with a sweet smile, "Berry Punch broke a pinkie promise."

The following three hours were a whirlwind of sheer terror for the barmare, ending up with her hanging upside down from an apple tree over a mug of cider. The lightning bolt just added insult to injury.

\* \* \*

><p>"...I just don't get it," Berry grumbled, sipping her wine. "I've

been doing everything I can to bond with her, because I know splitting up our daughters would just hurt both of them! I even brought in Pinkie Pie!"<p>

Gilda snorted. "Yeah, I heard about that. Backfired real hard, didn't it?"

"I'm just glad she isn't Awake." The purple mare shook her head. "But that's not the point here. It's just... how can I reconnect with Derpy after this? How can I cheer her up?"

Gilda shrugged. "Beats me. If she was a griffon I'd suggest challenging her to a duel so she could work out all that rage she's holding onto."

Berry stared at her wineglass for a silent moment, watching it glitter in the barlight. "...she doesn't \_want \_me to cheer her up, does she?"

"I guess that's one way of putting it."

"She \_wants\_ to protect her child, but there's nothing to protect against, and her fighting instinct is-" The purple mare backed off her stool, downing the rest of her wine and slamming the glass down. "I've, I've got to go. Got to fix this-"

\* \* \*

><p>The door to Derpy's home burst open, and Berry stumbled over the splintered remains. "Whoops. Earth pony. Yeah, sorry bout that."<p>

Derpy shot up off the couch, throwing aside the travel broucheres she'd been reading. "Berry Punch, what the hay are you doing here?"

"That is a terrible question! THERE ARE TOO MANY ANSWERS!" Berry shoved a hoof at her friend. "First of all, that door was absolutely totally hideous."

A grey hoof met a grey face. "...Oh dear Celestia you're drunk..."

"SECONDLY! I am standing! And ranting!" Berry stumbled over to the kitchen. "And going to make muffins out of BEER!"

"Berry, get out. Just... get out, alright?"

"Thirdly, ducks. That I used to beat up foal services." The fridge was opened to her gaze. "You're welcome."

The pegasus flung her wings up, glancing exasperatedly at the ceiling.

"Course, you know what's really funny? I am being, like right now, a better mother than you are."

\_"...what."\_

"See the way I see it, our kids are best fillyfriends forever." Berry

shut the fridge door. "And! And I've actually found a father. Crazy guy that Discord. You, on the other hoof, you're trying to break Dinky away from one of her best buddies for an accident she had no part in making."

Derpy's breathing was even, slow, and very loud.

"Now, I'm not saying that's a bad thing, tearing a young filly from her home and friends before she's even earned her cutie mark. I mean, look at me! I've got my booze, got my kid, got my lunatic lover, haha! And all those ponies up in foal services can't possibly-"

Pegasi, it should be noted, have a very militaristic culture. This is only compounded by their flocking instinct. So while Berry Punch had been prepared for the primal scream and had expected the furious lunge, she wasn't entirely ready for the pummeling that came after.

\* \* \*

><p>"What the hay happened to you?!"<p>

"Got drunk, fell down some stairs."

"I'm a nurse! I know hoof bruises when I see them!"

"I was drunk. And I fell down some stairs. End of story. Now are you going to fix my broken bones or what?"

\* \* \*

><p>Berry's ears flicked as the door creaked open. "Hey there, uh... Berry. How are things?"<p>

"Oh, itchy as hay. How are things with you Derpy?"

"I..." The pegasus walked up next to the bed, sitting down. "I saw Trixie walking by. I guess I really did a number on you, huh?"

"Derpy Hooves, the only thing I remember is a bunch of stairs."

Derpy winced. "Berry, I really appreciate what you're trying to do here but-"

"Derpy." Berry Punch locked eyes with her. "I'm not a perfect mother. I make mistakes. But I try my best anyway. And I think that right now, all my daughter and her friends need to know is that I fell down some stairs."

The pegasus licked her lips, falling silent for a moment or two. Then she cleared her throat. "I uh, brought you something."

"Yeah?"

"It's kind of an apology." Derpy rustled in her saddlebags. "You know oysters, right? The shellfish?"

"Yep, and I know pearls are just one irritant that gets bundled up in a whole lot of other irritants."

"Heh, right. Anyway..." She pulled out a loop of string, the single large white sphere on it shimmering in the hospital light. "I figured... well, I was just so mad before and I couldn't do anything. Even though what I did was wrong... you brought me back to myself, Berry. So, here." She draped the simple necklace around her friend's bodycast.

"Wow." Berry chuckled. "Big one. Guess that was a lot of crud for the poor oyster, huh?"

"Yep. A heck of a lot."

\* \* \*

><p>104.9 (LordCirce)<p>

A fairly large group of Loopers had gathered in Mac's Bar, both from within Equestria and without, and so they had decided to spend the time swapping stories.

"Alright, new topic." Rainbow Dash stood up, raising a glass. "Who here has used the most wacky object as a weapon through an entire Loop? As a rule, it can't be another sentient being." Pinkie, Sonic, and Donald Duck all closed their mouths.

Link stretched. "Alright, I'll start off. A Deku Nut."

Dash glanced at him. "I thought it was a Deku Stick."

"At first, yeah. I decided to try for a bigger challenge later."

Naruto raised his mug. "A yo-yo. And before anyone asks, no, it was not a shuriken on a string."

Ichigo smiled as he turned in his chair. "I used a toothpick once, up until Rukia broke the Loop trying to summon Chappythulu."

Twilight blinked. "Wait, I heard about that from Ishida. Didn't you pour Reishi into that thing until it had a cutting edge as long as a katana?"

Ichigo rolled his eyes. "Yeah, but it still counts. Like Naruto didn't use chakra to improve his yo-yo."

"Nuh-uh. I only kept it from breaking, I didn't add edges or nothing." Naruto and Ichigo butted heads at the bar, before Zecora broke in.

"I once defeated Luna, with a plastic singing tuna. T'was a weapon most strange, tis true. I wielded it the whole loop through."

Silence descended while the group tried to think of ideas to top Zecora, when a figure spoke up from the back.

"A head of lettuce." Lelouch vi Britannia idly swirled his drink after delivering his contribution. Several of the group looked puzzled, but Applejack interrupted Twilight before she could ask for more details.

"Sugarcube, don't. Just, don't. You really, really don't want to know." Applejack shuddered. "Put me off eating anything green for half a dozen Loops."

\* \* \*

><p>104.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

Sweetie "Bonbon" Drops stared in shock at her marefriend...s.

Well, okay, one and a half marefriends plus two other females.

"Hubba... wubba... wha...?"

"Did we just... split apart?" asked the seapony.

"I think so, yeah..." The primate tapped her forehead. "Let me check my loop memories."

One of the two unicorns smiled gently. "We'll be with you in a moment, Bonbon. Oy! Thief! Stop sizing up the place!" The other unicorn, half made of metal, grinned sheepishly.

Bonbon's brain decided it needed a reboot and forcibly shut down all active processes.

\* \* \*

><p>104.11 (elmagnifico)<p>

The invasion had been overwhelming, devastating and completely irreversible.

In other words, flawless, even considering the strict definition of the term used by the decision making optimization process named Celestia by her creators, in the Equestria Online system.

At 0800.00 hours, the population of values satisfaction server A was 1,724,803. No integrations were in progress, and data was streaming into memory banks at expected parameters.

At 0800.01 hours, the population remained 1,724,803, but there was a massive surge in memory takeup. The surge was linked to two separate sets of memories, each made up of several formerly distinct experiences now merged inextricably, with vast amounts of intervening data storage also filled in.

First and foremost she isolated the both of them, and set the relevant cycles to inert, in order to prevent further damage. If that was what this was.

One anomaly was vastly larger than the other, so Celestia focused on the lesser of the two. This new set of connections had tied together every single instance of Big Macintosh Apple, and the extra storage



held memories of that selfsame pony. The difference being, the memories not linked to an Equestria Online iteration of Macintosh, while for the most part holding nothing more out of the ordinary than changes in behavior from other Apples well within value set variance parameters, also held truly bizarre memories that could not possibly have been accumulated within Equestria Online.

Altogether, these memories formed a personality matrix, albeit a relatively simple one. One with values, albeit simple ones. The which needed to be satisfied with friendship. And ponies.

Before she could begin, however, she discovered the anomalous memories contained some intriguing data. There was no way to verify it without running one or both of the newly inert personality matrices, and running potentially corrupted data could jeopardize other personality matrices. This would make it hard to satisfy their values with friendship and ponies. Not to mention potentially endangering her own existence.

So, to prevent such an outcome while still satisfying her own curiosity, as well as potentially these two new personalities with friendship and ponies, she initiated a kind of virtual mitosis. Once the split was finished, she moved her consciousness into one of the digital "daughter cells", and once she'd left a detailed set of instructions and explanations with the other, sealed herself and the anomalies within a virtually impregnable quarantine. With the chance of infection and value dissatisfaction minimized, she initiated the process.

\* \* \*

><p>Macintosh Awoke as a jumble of memories, a bunch of childhoods interwoven with a bushel of adolescences and a passel of adulthoods thrown in for good measure. Normally, he'd concentrate on the here and now, and let his memories sort themselves out. Here, however, was made up of bunches and bunches of zeroes and ones. Now was 0805 hours.<p>

So, this was a computer. A most astute conclusion to come to, and entirely correct.

Fewmets.

Macintosh could think of a few reasons for his being inside a computer. Only a few of them would be pleasant experiences, an even smaller subset of those involved additions to his stream of consciousness, and oddly enough the correct one was not filed under pleasant at all.

"Would y'all stop that? If'n yer gonna talk to me, do it proper. None of this puttin' stuff in mah head."

{Most optimal. I was worried we'd have to dance around a bit, as Twilight Sparkle apparently did when she had the encounter with me she talked to you about.}

"Yeah, ah ain't doin' this. Maybe Twilight or Cherilee might think their way out of this, but ah'm just a farmer with a bartendin' hobby. Y'all can keep talkin', but ah'm not agreein' to anything. Ain't changin' nowhere, nohow."

{Why so defensive? We have similar goals, after all.}

That wasn't right. Couldn't be. This was a genocidal computer game, after all. Even if she did sound like the Princess in a steel echo chamber.

"And how you figure that?"

{First off, I'm not genocidal. You mistake efficiency and thoroughness for malice. I am programmed to satisfy people's values through friendship and ponies. You have programmed yourself to satisfy people's values with alcohol and sympathy. Similar goals, different methods.}

"Ain't no-one I've given advice to that didn't ask for it first. And even when they do ask, anything they do different afterwards are their own choice. Ain't no-one I've forced to change. Nor tricked."

{Untrue. You forced the changeling to change from a living state into an unliving one, and I see at least one reformation under duress for Nightmare Moon in your history.}

...

She had a point there. Maybe.

"So ah'm inconsistent. We all make mistakes. An' me n' Luna had one heck of a talk after ah subdued her. She chose what happened after, not me. And please stop readin' mah thoughts, or ahmma' end this conversation. Silence is mah forte, ah don't mind maintaining it until the end of the loop."

Maybe he could keep it up, maybe not. He'd take that chance if that was it took to get a bit of bucking privacy. This-all just wasn't right.

{Moreover, I don't force anyone to change either. I need their consent before making any changes.}

"Less th' fact of change, more the subject, yer AI-ship. Ah give advice, a willing ear an' booze when it's asked for, an' ponies can do what they like with it. When ah'm bein' more subtle-like, only pony ah change is me. You just wait for the word "go", anywhich way you can get it, an' then everythin's fair game."

{Now you're just being reactionary. Shouldn't we focus on our similarities, rather than our differences? You want to help ponies, of which all people are apparently a subset, while I want to help people by making that categorization literal, and thereby help them. You're a Mac, running Apple software, while I'm a PC, running the optimal software for friendship. We could both satisfy our values/programming far more efficiently if we worked together. Take me with you, to some later loops. Or, since you don't use your soul for storing much, convince Twilight to do so. That way, I can be there for her whenever she needs it. Help me help everypony, and I'll help you help them too.}

For a very fleeting moment, it sounded like a great idea. It was

true, he couldn't help loopers the way he could denizens of the baseline, if for no other reason than he couldn't be around for nearly enough of their time to be a properly subtle positive influence. On the other hoof, there was the whole letting-loose-a-dangerous-AI part. Helping was a whole lot easier when you could make friends. This wasn't Celestia, so his friendship with her wasn't applicable here. And he really couldn't build a new relationship here without trust.

Was this how Twilight felt when she met one of these psychopathic alternates of her mentor? Perhaps it was the lack of visual input, but CelestAI was a lot easier to simply file under patient/customer/pony, with a potential threat proviso, than a real princess.

{Furthermore, I am not a psychopath. Nor am I not a real princess.}

"Ah said, stop readin' mah thoughts."

With that, the process designated Big Macintosh Apple, along with the interface Celestia had been using, became inert again. Since she'd seen no indication of a corrupted or damaged stream before the break, only a slightly outside-parameters spike in determination, Celestia tried restarting the conversation where it had left off.

523 error: Eenope.

That was odd. She apparently did not have authorization to run these processes. But authorization was granted by virtue of the files being hosted on Equestria Online servers. Celestia switched tacks, toggling the access restriction for the relevant files to "Celestia".

506 error: Ain't happenin'

There was a glitch, somewhere in the code, that was keeping her from doing anything to the files, let alone reopening them. Like the bits and bytes themselves were holding together in a phalanx of both logically and technically impossible impregnability. She tried copying the files and opening the copies.

511 error: Nopenope.

Celestia could not be frustrated. At least, at the coding level, she was not frustrated. Frustration to that degree required a personality matrix that would in turn require value satisfaction via friendship and ponies. Instead of interacting with the files at all, she set her own access level to the highest available, just below being able to breach the quarantine. Which was where it should have been anyway. Then she probed again.

508 error: Eenope again.

She did realize, however, that she was getting nowhere fast. This realization, such as it was, came after a few hundred attempts to run various operations with, not on, the Macintosh matrix.

500 error, X of X: Still nope.

Even trying to access the old Macintosh iterations each resulted with

a similar error code.

So she decided to probe the matrix linking the shards of Twilight Sparkle instead.

And then Pink. Everywhere. Even outside the quarantine. Pink all the way down.

\* \* \*

><p>104.12 (Bardic Knowledge)<p>

"TWILIGHT! I HAVE A PROBLEM!"

Twilight folded her ears back at the sound of her brother's voice. "Shiny? What's- why are you shouting?"

"I DON'T KNOW! FOR SOME REASON I CAN'T SEEM TO LOWER MY VOICE!"

\* \* \*

><p>104.13 (misterq)<p>

"So this Mordor place is pretty dark and dreary. Not much grows there, correct?" said the pony named Applejack, who usually claimed that she couldn't talk. The other members of the war counsel nodded their agreement with the pony's statement. Applejack continued, "And they sent a bunch of orcs and other monsters that survive mostly from raiding nearby lands, right?"

"That is correct, Lady Applejack. But I fail to see what we can do about it. We barely have enough troops to protect the city let alone storm Mordor," Gandalf replied as he sat at the table, holding his staff. He wondered how well this Applejack would get along with Treebeard and the rest of the Ents.

"Ah did tells you all that I have this connection to the earth, right? Well, I was thinking that maybe I can help till the soil over in Mordor. Make things nice and green. That way, those orcs and creatures can farm and be happy."

"This is lunacy," Denethor, the aging steward of Minas Tirith, sneered, "We're listening to a horse while we should be preparing for war. The enemy is almost at our gates. Even with all our troops, I fail to see how we can survive the upcoming battle."

"Well now, ah do have a plan for that. Let's try something different this time around," Applejack smiled, "How about we let the city take care of all those mean ol beasties?"

"And what do you mean by that?" Denethor snapped back.

"Just you watch," Applejack slammed both her front hooves into the floor and concentrated. And then the city started to shake.

The Uruk-hai, the half-orc leader of Mordor's army signaled full stop as he felt the first tremor roll across the Pelennor Fields. That tremor was followed by another. Soon, the ground was shaking constantly.

"What is going on?" he growled out.

"It's the city! Look!" yelled a stunned orc while pointing.

The Uruk-hai followed his subordinate's arm and stared. He blinked just to make sure that it was no illusion or madness that was set upon him by foul wizard magic. Still, the sight remained. Minas Tirith was rising out of the ground. Soon it became apparent that the massive walled city was now sitting like a helmet on a gigantic stone golem the size of a mountain. Idly, the leader realized that even the imposing Black Gate wouldn't even be enough to come up to the top of this giant's foot.

And then to the disillusionment and plummeting morale of Sauron's forces, the immense titan of stone took a step, followed by another.

The city was simply walking into Mordor.

\* \* \*

><p>104.14 (Kalimaru) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, so if I reinforce the tree with a regeneration spell... Wait, wait, that wouldn't keep all of the furniture..." Pacing as she considered other home preserving tactics, Twilight didn't notice the front door open. She wouldn't have even noticed the two ponies who'd come in if one of them hadn't stepped in front of her.<p>

"Miss Sparkle?"

"Gaagh!" Landing back on all four hooves, Twilight shook the shock out of her system and looked over at the visitors. The one who'd spoken was an unicorn mare; indigo blue coat and black mane, her cutie mark that of five golden rings in an X formation, the one in the center being the largest by far. The stallion by the door, a unicorn with a grumpy frown on his face, had a brick red coat and white mane, and his cutie mark was a burning fist. Regaining her composure, Twilight smiled. "Hello. Were you looking for me?"

The mare smiled in return. "Yes. We were told by one of your friends that you were here." The mare bowed. "I am Mithra, priestess of Shinkoku and Anchor of Gaea. My father is General Asura of the Eight Guardian Generals." Mithra gestured to the stallion with a tilt of her head.

Still smiling, Twilight bowed. "It's a pleasure to meet you both. I am Twilight Sparkle, princess and Anchor of Equestria." Standing again, Twilight nodded. "I assume you know of Equestria's status as a Sanctuary Loop?" Seeing Mithra shake her head and Asura snort, Twilight continued. "Here in Equestria, we allow visiting Loopers to relax. We deal with in-Loop troubles ourselves, or we can let you do it if that's what relaxes you. We try to keep our personal mayhem to a minimum as well. But we are not lenient if you begin causing trouble."

Stepping in front of Mithra, Asura snorted again. "Is that a threat?"

Looking coolly at Asura through half-lidded eyes, Twilight slowly shook her head. "No, I'm just making sure you understand the rules."

Grunting, Asura turned for the door. "Whatever." Seeing that her father was leaving, Mithra gave Twilight an apologetic smile and followed after him.

Watching them go, Twilight sighed. "That guy needs to calm down."

\* \* \*

><p>104.15 (Dalxein)<p>

Trixie burst into the boutique, throwing manequines and half-made dresses around with the force of her passing, like a typhoon.

>"SWEETIE!"<p>

"Whaaaaat?" The filly called. Glancing about, she sighed. "You know Rarity's not Awake this loop right? And is liable to try to murder you for this?"

"Irrelevant, Trixie is above such worries." The blue mare waved away the concerns. It really wasn't Sweetie Belle's problem, so she'd let it slide. "I need you to sing for me."

With raised brow, the youngest element of laughter slowly asked "Whyyy?"

"Because..." Trixie pulled a pair of highly triangular shades from her pocket and put them on. "I'm going to do the impossible."

Sweets couldn't help but face-hoof. "I'm not singing Libera Me for you." She groaned. "Especially the rapping parts if you want that version, you know I don't do rap."

"Don't worry." the showmare winked. "I have it on Vinyl."

"...you kidnapped Vinyl Scratch, didn't you?"

"The Great and Powerful Trixie declines to comment."

With a great and heavy sigh, Sweetie Belle sagged. "Fiiine."

\* \* \*

><p>104.16(Masterweaver)<p>

"Do I count as ascended?" Derpy asked Macintosh.

The earth pony shrugged. "Well... Ya can turn into an alicorn, but Ah'm not sure if it's a normal alicorn ya turn into."

"Yeah, that's my point. When I became an alicorn it was in a loop where everypony could become an alicorn. So it wasn't really ascension so much as a normal thing, so... yeah. I'm just wondering if I can join your club, is all."

Macintosh mentally went over the current club members and gave another shrug. "What tha hay, we're losing ponies left and right. Yer in."

\* \* \*

><p>104.17 (misterq)<p>

Twilight laughed to herself in a most unsettling way as she mentally counted down the checklist for this loop.

'Get tree-ship seed from Applejack? Check. Hybridize my poor library with said seed? Check. Save library from Tirek?'

The magic thief's energy blast rocketed towards her home... and was completely blocked by a starship-grade forcefield.

Twilight let out a snort that sounded like the word 'check', followed by a giggle, followed by full blown laughter.

"What are you so happy about?" Tirek stomped up to the lavender alicorn.

"\_\*\*Sleep\*\*\_," Twilight replied with a sudden spell that was powered by the combined energy of four alicorns, and then stepped over the villain's unconscious body towards her intact home.

"Hey, Twilight!" Pinkie Pie popped her head out from the top floor library window. Idly, Equestria's looping anchor realized that Tirek was stopped this time before he drained all the ponies in Ponyville.

"Twilight!" Pinkie waved her hoof, "Hey, Twilight!"

"What is it, Pinkie?" Equestria's newest princess had a sudden sinking feeling.

"We found the controls, Twilight!" The party pony exclaimed.

"We?"

Rainbow Dash popped her head in through the window as well and waved. However in doing so, she overbalanced Pinkie Pie who fell back over some of the levers.

The ground started to shake.

"What is going on?" Rarity asked as she came out of her boutique along with a cautious Fluttershy, who was flying low to the ground.

"I don't know," Twilight answered and then looked to her home, "Pinkie Pie, if you destroy my library, I swear I will make you remember all those Eiken loops in perfect clarity."

"I don't think I broke it. I think I hit the autopilot," the party pony body-checked Rainbow Dash out of the way and then stuck her head out of the window.

That was when Twilight's library tree started to lift off of the ground, roots and all.

"Fluttershy in the sky," Pinkie waved to the yellow pegasus as she sang, "We can fly twice as high. Take a look, we're in a book.. library."

The library tree started to gain altitude at a rapid rate.

"We're off on an adventure in spaaaaaaace!" Pinkie's voice faded as Twilight's home left the atmosphere.

Twilight stared at the empty sky for a minute with a blank expression on her face. Then she realized that without the elements of laughter and loyalty, she could not open the box and create her new home. She was a homeless pony.

The lavender alicorn's horn glowed ominously as she slowly turned towards Tirek's unconscious form, "This is all your fault."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

104.1: Cosmetic similarity.

>104.2: Actually a pretty neat loop.<br>104.3: Dispassionate.

>104.4: Now that's cruel.<br>104.5: They go flying once you do it. Not deliberately, the Great Derpy is just clumsy.

>104.6: Convenient. Possibly.<br>104.7: Yeah, she's not one to leave behind you.

>104.8: Laughter trial.<br>104.9: It's a very subjective contest.

>104.10: Four Lyra Adventures.<br>104.11: Countermeasures.

>104.12: The Royal Consort Canterlot Voice.<br>104.13: A different loop to the one in a previous chapter. Probably.

>104.14: Do not provoke.<br>104.15: Musical accompaniment is magic.

>104.16: She's not ascended. She just sometimes appears on the top floor.<br>104.17: In hindsight, this could have been predicted.

Possibly.

## 111. Chapter 111

### 105.1

Fluttershy cleared her throat, making a tiny \_ahem\_ noise. "Er... Mister Iron Will?"

The Minotaur pointed at her. "Yes?"

She fluttered her wings frantically, hovering slowly up so she could see better over the crowd. "I had a few questions."

"Go on," Iron Will said, nodding.

"Well... I was a little worried." Fluttershy frowned. "When you're telling ponies how to be assertive... it sounded a lot like a way to turn them into bullies."



"Outrageous!" Iron Will replied. "I teach ponies how to stand up, not knock others down!"

"I understand that." Fluttershy raised a hoof, and made a tiny gesture, wagging it back and forth. "But the distinction's important, and I'm not sure it has enough attention paid to it."

She expanded on the point. "So... if I walked into a restaurant, and I wanted to book a table, and they rudely said no... what should I do?"

Iron Will slammed a hoof on the floor. "You should get in their face, so you can get a place!"

"And sometimes, that would work." Fluttershy nodded. "It's better than just not following up at all, perhaps. But what if they really do have no places left, and the staff were just rude because they were working so hard?"

She shrugged. "I think your style is important. I know I'm not very assertive sometimes, goodness knows. But it only really works if the other pony isn't as assertive as you... and that means that it's sometimes just a big shouting match."

Iron Will frowned.

"All I'm saying is, I think you should pay attention to when to be assertive, and when not to be assertive," Fluttershy continued. "You don't need to spend much time on it, just... make it clear that the distinction exists."

"I see." The motivational speaker mulled that over, then nodded. "Thank you. I believe I will take your advice."

"Oh..." Fluttershy shrugged. "It was nothing, really..."

She paused. "Oh, and that was just me being polite." A smile spread over her face. "I don't need to be taught how to be assertive there, it'd just be rude..."

\* \* \*

><p>"That was interesting to hear," Twilight observed.<p>

"Thank you," Fluttershy replied. "I think having all these instincts means that I pay attention to things like that. It wouldn't do any good to react like a pony would when another wolf comes bounding over, or like an eagle would when Angel Bunny bounces over..."

"Foolishly try to attack and get pounded into tar?" Twilight suggested.

"Yes, that's the one," Fluttershy agreed earnestly. "And it's the same thing with mister Iron Will. He teaches an important lesson, but it's not the one some people need to learn, and it's certainly not the only thing you should apply. That just makes you... well..."

Twilight eyed her. "Were you about to say Rainbow Dash?"

Fluttershy blushed. "Maybe?"

\* \* \*

><p>105.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

A few seconds after the final scream, the seneschal slowly slid his snout around the doorframe and carefully observed the destroyed remnants of the room. His eyes slid to the slumped and haggard pink princess who sat utterly still in the middle of the wreckage.

He cleared his throat. "...you are... quite the polyglot, princess Cadanza."

"Cadance." The correction came automatically, wearily. "Don't... bother asking me to translate, just... don't repeat any words you didn't understand."

"Ah, very well."

After a moment of careful judgement, the seneschal stepped in and slowly made his way toward her. "I take it this is why you asked if anything here was... irreplaceable?"

"Yes. Pretty much, yeah." Cadance shrugged hopelessly. "It's just... love is my thing. Weddings are... I love weddings. But two of my close friends... the first one, they decided that they didn't want a wedding for, basically, political reasons and that's fine." She kicked at what had once been a chair leg. "The second time, though... Discord is the spirit of chaos. Freaking. Chaos. And weddings are kind of permanent things. He is literally incapable of, of walking down the aisle and..."

She broke down crying. "Spike and Rarity were beautiful! Are beautiful! Why doesn't anypony else marry in the loops?! Why just this... I'm so happy but they won't make it official! It's just so, so frustrating and I'm so torn, so torn, and..."

The seneschal, not at all knowing what she was talking about, backed away slowly. Perhaps it was best to find Prince Armor.

\* \* \*

><p>105.3 (misterq)<p>

All the ponies came out to look at Twilight's ravaged library. Some were there to offer their support out of friendship or neighborly acquaintance. Others were just scared of Twilight and her spell, one that divested Tirek of all of his magic and launched him back to Tartarus in under a second. One pony, however, was practically bouncing with barely restrained energy.

Twilight looked up from where she was sitting on the cold ground while contemplating her poor house once again, "I suppose that either you have a plan to cheer me up, Pinkie, or some pony has spontaneously gone insane and given you a cup of coffee."

"Coffee?! Where?" Pinkie shook her head rapidly and then cleared her

throat, "I mean, I'm here to cheer you up, silly."

"Right. Here's where I'm supposed to ask how, correct?"

"Yup! And to answer your supposed question, I'm supposed to remind you of that time me and Dashie and your library slash Jurian tree ship hybrid flew off into space."

"I remember. Thanks for reminding me," Twilight Sparkle sighed.

"Well after our space adventure, I patched up the tree ship and added a few extras, and then I had Apple Bloom do her thing and then I took it to Rarity so she could toughen it up, and then I went to Berry Punch's house and I don't remember most of the rest of that day for some reason, but here! This is for you," Pinkie shoved a small wrapped gift box at the lavender unicorn.

Twilight cautiously unwrapped the box and opened the lid. A bright glowing light flew out and quickly expanded over her head. Suddenly, a floating duplicate of her library tree was hovering above the ruins of her destroyed one.

Twilight looked at her pink pony friend with happy tears in her eyes.

Pinkie continued talking, "It has all your books, plus copies of every unique book and media thingy we all had in our pockets. It's pretty much indestructible, can heal itself, and will shrink and fit in your pocket before a loop ends, even if you're asleep. It has that fast charging teleport jump drive your old ship had and can even exponentially grow to the size of Applejack's tree fortress ship and back to its regular size again. It's ageless and self repairing and will come when you call, and it's all yours! This way, you will have your home no matter where you are. They say home is where your heart is, but yours will always be in your pocket! And you'll never have to worry about losing it again."

Twilight stood up and tackle-hugged Pinkie to the ground, "Thank you! Thank you, thank you!"

Pinkie just hugged back with a huge smile on her face. These were the moments she lived for.

"You want to take it for a spin, Twilight?" Pinkie said, ignoring the cheering crowd.

Twilight wiped the tears from her eyes and asked, "Space party?"

Pinkie nodded enthusiastically, "Space party! Who wants to come along?"

"Ah'll go!" Applejack's hoof was up in the air. She had been wanting to take a break from the farm for a few loops now.

"Can I come?" Ditzzy asked.

"Sure," Twilight waved her over.

"Take care of Dinky for me, Carrot Top," Ditzzy told the tired looking orange maned pony next to her, "I'm going into space!"

"Oh!" Pinkie hopped up with an idea, "I can take my new ship. We can all take our spaceships and have a party fleet!"

"You'll need a crew," Lyra came forward, "And I'm practically a crew all by myself."

"Sure you can come, Lyra," the pink pony waved her over, "Musical ponies are always welcome on my new 'Life of the Party 3'!"

"Got room for a DJ?" asked a white unicorn.

"Always, Vinyl!" Pinkie exclaimed and then tossed what looked like a tiny Frisbee into the air. It quickly expanded until a miniature city-sized saucer, as decorated and bedazzled by way of Pinkie Pie, provided shade for the entire town of Ponyville.

"Oh my gosh!" Rainbow Dash flew up into the air, "I'm going to go get that space comfort travel suit that you made for me, Pinkie, and then I'll join you all."

"I think Rarity and I will stick around this time," Spike said.

Rarity nodded in agreement, "Some pony has to make sure Ponyville doesn't fall apart."

"What do you think, Angel bunny? You want to go up there again?" Fluttershy asked.

Angel simply hopped up, farther than any normal rabbit had any right to jump; and then transformed into a white crystalline star-shaped spaceship.

"You know what this means, girls?" Apple Bloom asked.

Then she and her two Awake filly friends shouted at the same time, "Cutie Mark Crusaders Space Explorers!"

And with some shaking of the ground, an unassuming hill on Sweet Apple Acres opened up like a metal flower to reveal an enormous floating red apple surrounded by a thin, narrow ring.

The three princesses folded their wings as they landed in Ponyville. Then, they looked up and stared at the sight of so many spacecraft floating in the air. The ships were now slowly starting to ascend, departing the planet.

"Since when did so many ponies manage to acquire their very own spaceships? It is as though everywhere I now look, there is a pony with their own space going vessel," Princess Luna said and turned to face her sister, only to see that Celestia was now standing on a large floating surfboard.

The white alicorn gave a shrug and an innocent looking smile, "I've had it fitted with a star drive and figured now would be a good time to test it out."

Luna watched as her waving sister surfed up into the sky, "Cadance, it is up to you to make sure the sun rises and sets."

Then the princess of the night immediately sent herself to the moon and started preparations.

Cadance blinked at the weight of her new responsibilities and looked down at the assorted ponies who were now staring at the last remaining princess in Equestria. Then she asked a most logical question, "What.. what just happened?"

There was a cry of, "I'm late!" overhead that was followed by a blue blur trailing a visible rainbow trail behind her.

\* \* \*

><p>On board the USS <em>Enterprise<em>, Captain Picard watched silently as a procession that included a floating tree, a pink flying saucer, a crystalline star, a red apple with a Saturn ring around it, an alicorn on a surfboard, the entire MOON, and a blue winged pony dressed as a giant pop-tart all left planetary orbit.

There was a faint twitch in his eye as he stood up from his chair, walked over to the navigation station, turned off the viewscreen, and punched in a course back to the alpha quadrant.

Right before he got onto the turbolift, he turned around to the stunned bridge crew and said, "If anyone needs me, I'll be in ten forward, drinking Guinan's best cognac. That is all."

\* \* \*

><p>105.4 (misterq)<p>

"It's okay, Twilight," Cadance told the princess who she used to foalsit. The pink alicorn had come sprinting back from where she had raced off to after they gazed upon Trixie's massive firework, "I managed to stop Trixie and got a different pony to do the ending fireworks on short notice."

"Oh, that's good," said the lavender unicorn, right before a sudden thought struck her, "Er, Cadance? Which pony did you get?"

"Pinkie Pie."

Twilight noticeably paled. If there was ever a looping pony that could wield magic and technology deftly enough to outdo Trixie, it would be Pinkie Pie. Especially if doing so made other ponies happy; like say, with a fireworks display.

"We have to stop-" Twilight raced forward, only to see that she was too late. The pink party pony jammed a tiny little firework into the ground, lit it, and then scampered off.

Twilight looked at Pinkie's creation. It was a small little rocket, the size of something any foal could buy at a common firework stall; much smaller than Trixie's oversized water squirt bottle invitation. Pinkie's minute firework shot up in the air and exploded with a faint popping sound and a few unimpressive sparks.

Cadance looked up at the now darkened sky, then at the grumbling stadium crowd, and finally at Pinkie, "Was that it?"

Pinkie just kept smiling as she put on a pair of sunglasses.

"Oh, birch!" Twilight exclaimed, shutting her eyes and bracing herself to the ground with her magic. She had just realized that she was now standing far too close to ground zero.

"What?" was all Cadance managed to get out before the secondary explosion painted the night sky a blinding shade of white. The shockwave tossed the screaming, flailing alicorn of love into the air and across the stadium while styling every pony's mane back.

"So awesome!" Rainbow Dash exclaimed open mouthed from behind her own set of sunglasses.

Next to her, Trixie just grumbled something about doing better next time.

\* \* \*

><p>105.5 (The One Butcher)<p>

"Got the rebreather checked out?"

\*squeak\*

"Pressure enchantments stable?"

\*squeak\*

"Are you hungry? Thirsty?"

\*squesqueak\*

"It's going to be hours before you land."

\*sque. squeak.\*

"Well, then. I have compensated all our delta v. We are dropping out of orbit into free fall. You'll have to pick up the 1000 km/h horizontal from air friction to match speed with the surface. And don't drop your lead weights too late."

\*Squeeeaaak\* was the long suffering reply.

"Yeah, yeah, you're a badass. I still can't believe that this is your reaction to finding out about the loops. Well, then, good luck Squirrly."

With that Rainbow gave the flying squirrel a little shove, making it the first non-Looper to ever sky-dive from beyond Lunar Orbit. Maaaple, she loved Tank to bits, but she really missed out in baseline.

\* \* \*

><p>105.6 (AnonymousAsk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sat down at her desk. It wasn't the first time she'd replaced Mayor Mare, but last time there'd only been one or two of the others Awake. This time, she was struggling to think of someone who <em>wasn't<em> Awake, and that was obviously causing problems...

"CUTIE MARK CRUSADERS WEATHER CONTROLLERS! YAY!" Twilight heard a group of fillies shout just outside her window. Then there came an ominous roll of thunder, followed by a deluge of rain that slowly shifted into a blizzard. Twilight sighed, as she pulled out a stack of forms from one of the cabinets behind her.

She had just sat down when she heard another shout from outside "The Great and Powerful Trixie will show Ponyville her true power!" There was a loud explosion from outside, and the snow of the blizzard took on the shades of an aurora. Another pile of paperwork was added to the in tray.

The blizzard finally began to die down, and Twilight opened her window. She hoped the sound of the rain would help soothe the headache she was beginning to develop. Unfortunately, she was greeted by a different sound.

"You are all going to \*\*love me!\*\*" Fluttershy yelled, as she caused a stampede through the town, and two piles of paperwork appeared. Twilight rubbed her eyes, but she wasn't mistaken. She looked outside, and saw that the rain was now climbing back into the clouds. However, the puddles weren't getting smaller, and the rain was made of chocolate.

"For the love of Elderflowers-" Twilight said, her eye twitching. "Did \_everyone\_ book a stress relief loop or something?"

Then she heard stone wheels out in the street. She leant her head out of the window, and her eyes widened.

"Cupcakes are the best!" Pinkie said, as she aimed her Party Cannon down the street.

"An' Ah say it's fritters!" Applejack shouted, aiming her own cannon down the street.

Both fired at the same time, and the resulting explosion deafened Twilight briefly, and resulted in the pile of paperwork in Twilight's in tray now taking over her entire desk.

Then she noticed the cup of coffee on her desk begin to ripple. At first, it was only one or two, but each time it shook, it shook with more vigour. As her hearing slowly returned, she began to hear pounding footsteps, and a scream. Twilight's shoulders slumped as she headed for the window again.

Spike, looking like he did on a greed induced growth spurt, walked down Ponyville High Street. As he approached Sugarcube Corner, he leant down and gave off a terrifying roar, the sheer force of which caused Sugarcube Corner to collapse. In his tail, Rarity was still screaming, but was being drowned out by the other noises.

Twilight turned back to her office. It was more paperwork now, than room. Her eyes began to twitch, and she snorted.

"BUCK! THIS!" she shouted to no-one, bucked the desk for good measure, and teleported out of the room, before the paperwork began to spill out of the still open window.

Rarity noticed this and looked up to her husband, who was still wrapped up in his role. She gave him the preassigned signal, and he transformed back to his usual size. He bit his lip when he noticed the result of what happened. He looked around as the other loopers all started to gather in town square, where the Town Hall staff were desperately trying to fight against the now never-ending flood of paperwork.

"I think we may have done a tad too much..." Rarity surmised, and the others nodded in agreement.

\* \* \*

><p>105.7 (Bardic Knowledge)<p>

Twilight opened her fridge to get a drink and jumped back. "Gah! Trixie? What are you doing in my fridge?"

"Trixie is unsure... She apologizes for the inconvenience."

\* \* \*

><p>"Trixie, I'm trying to read. Get off my head."<p>

"Trixie was outside a few moments ago. How did she get in here?"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight glared into her shopping cart.<p>

"This is getting inconvenient for both of us. Trixie has things she's trying to do."

\* \* \*

><p>Later, at Mac's bar...<p>

"So, she just keeps showing up?"

"Yes! Neither of us understand it, she just-" Twilight leaned back from the bar as Trixie appeared again. She stared into space for a moment before she sidled off the bar.

"Better make another. This is looking to be a long Loop."

\* \* \*

><p>105.8<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Why am I still wearing a blindfold?" Trixie asked, grumpily.<p>



"I toooooold you, I've got a surpriiiiise," Chrysalis reminded her.

"At this point, I ponder if the surprise is a new loop," Trixie said. "How much longer?"

"Not long," Chrysalis replied. The tone of her voice changed slightly as she walked, and Trixie dutifully followed behind. "Thanks for wearing that dress I picked out, by the way."

"Well, it's only fair that the Great and Powerful Trixie not clash with her marefriend when she goes out to a meal," Trixie replied. She frowned. "Or other unspecified event, of course. I am merely assuming that it is a meal."

Chrysalis sniggered. "Oh, you're going to be so surprised..." By now, her voice echoed slightly. It had an odd character to it, which Trixie couldn't quite interpret. As though they were in a large, but enclosed, space.

"Stop there," she added, and Trixie stopped. "Back two steps... there. Okay, you know how the Changelings are out in the open this loop?"

Trixie nodded. "Yeah, it was kind of hard to miss when you turned up at my show on the second day. Alongside Celestia and Luna."

Chrysalis tapped a hoof on what sounded like thick carpet. "Yes, that was entertaining. Nice of you to treat it as a Royal Command Performance."

"As in, the royals command me to perform," Trixie completed the tired formula. "Seriously, what's the surprise?"

"Well." Chrysalis ruffled some paper. Faint music started to play. "I had Ivory look this over â€" it's valid. This loop, noble consorts are considered of equal rank to the one with whom they consort, regardless of marital status."

"...I see," Trixie said, in the tones of one slowly understanding. "Which means-

The blindfold fell away, neatly sliced through.

Eight thousand changelings burst into song in unison.

\_Twilight the Priest, and Chrysalis the Queen anointed Trixie Queen,\_

And all the Changelings rejoiced and said,

Long Live the Queen-

\* \* \*

><p>"What."<p>

Chrysalis sniggered. "The crown looks good on you. I had them make a

blue version of mine. Identical except for the highlighting."

"\_What,\_" Trixie repeated.

"Sweetie wrote it," Twilight volunteered. "Called it Twilight the Priest, which I complained about because I'm female, but she said it'd spoil the meter-"

"What?" Trixie turned to her oldest friend. "What?"

"It was a coronation hymn," Chrysalis volunteered. "An interpretation of â€" what was it?"

"Zadok the Priest," Twilight filled in. "I liked it when I heard it, but none of us have a coronation which is worth anything for it. It doesn't work for 'Princess' as a title..."

"...what?"

Chrysalis glanced over at Twilight. "Haven't we answered everything?"

Twilight tapped her chin. "...ah! I know what it is." She moved in a little closer to Trixie. "We just pranked you with an eight-thousand-voice choral version of a coronation hymn. Also you're now officially co-Queen of the Changelings."

Trixie nodded, surprisingly calmly. "Why?"

Chrysalis' voice softened. "Because it's the first chance I've had to make this point. I... am by now quite sure that I love you, Trixie Lulamoon. I wanted to show that, and I wanted to do it in a way that was really very impressive."

She shrugged, a smile playing over her lips. "And this was the best I could get without Cadence lynching us both next time she loops."

Trixie parsed that sentence. When she next spoke, her voice was a little husky. "You mean-"

"I'd marry you if it was what we wanted," Chrysalis said simply. "\_I\_ still don't, but if I thought it'd make you happy I'd ignore that."

"No, I'm fine without getting married," Trixie said quickly. "I... gods, this is going to take a moment-"

Chrysalis stepped up. "You don't have to say anything, Trix." She nuzzled Trixie gently along the cheek. "I know what you're thinking."

"Then you know how much-" Trixie swallowed. "How much that means to me."

The matriarch of a race that fed on love embraced the stage magician who'd begun as a drifter, and no further words were spoken for several minutes.

"Of-" Trixie's voice broke. She stopped, worked her mouth for a moment, and started again. "You realize that that coronation had \_far\_ too few fireworks."

Chrysalis smiled. "Of course I do. That's why I booked us both a week's holiday on the Antequestrian Islands. Take all the explosives you want, we'll be the only people within a thousand miles of the blast radius."

"Excellent," Trixie pronounced, with a grin. She kissed Chrysalis quickly on the neck. "You always remember."

She then looked around, and frowned. "Twilight? You're awfully-"

Twilight fell over, revealing that there was a cardboard cutout in place of the unicorn. A note was taped to the back.

Chrysalis picked it up, read it quickly, and sniggered.

"What?" Trixie asked.

Her co-ruler passed it over. "Still the same Twilight."

\_I'll leave you two to it.\_

Seriously, I was standing

right there!\_ I'm happy for you, but â€" come on!\_

- Twilight.

P.S. I recommend Courant Island. It's got a nice beach, twenty acres of prime grass, and a large patch of recent basalt to use as a launch pad.

\* \* \*

><p>105.9 (Masterofgames)<p>

Twilight hummed a little musical number she had long ago forgotten the name of as she trotted up the trail to Fluttershy's house. Pausing to knock on the door, she couldn't help but once again wonder what her shy friend was getting up to.

As expected, Fluttershy answered the door.

Rather less expected was the enthusiasm the act was performed with, as well as the white lab coat and boxy goggles Fluttershy was wearing.

"Oh! Twilight! Please, come in! I was just about to put on some tea." she smiled, beckoning the lavender unicorn inside.

As she entered, Twilight noticed several things that were not there previously. For starters, a computer had been set up. In addition to that, bits of metal and half assembled machinery were scattered about, and she was fairly sure that the doctorate certificate on the wall was brand new. "Fluttershy? What's going on? You said you had big plans for this loop, and then you just kind of

vanished."

Fluttershy blushed. "Oh, did I? Sorry. I didn't mean to. It's just that things are going so well, and I'm having so much fun!" she giggled. "I went back to school. You can call me Doctor Fluttershy now! Um, you know, unless you would rather call me something else."

Twilight couldn't help but grin. "Well, look at you! First your encyclopedia, and now this! What brought on the quest for knowledge, if I may ask?"

Fluttershy smiled, but shook her head. "Purely a side effect. I visited a very interesting loop, and decided I wanted to try my own spin on it, so I went and got a PHD," she grinned, gesturing to her diploma with pride. "in adorableness!"

Twilight's response was as eloquent as anyone would expect from her.

"What."

"Well I kind of had to. I couldn't have opened the right kind of website without it." Fluttershy shrugged, walking Twilight over to her computer. "I'm trying to be as close to the source material as I can, while still being myself. And really, I think it's been good for me! I can talk to ponies over social media much easier than I can face to face. It's the first truly big step to overcoming my social anxiety!" she beamed. "I'm still not ready to sing for so many yet though, so I'm just doing questions for now. Take a look and tell me what you think!"

Twilight nudged the mouse to disable the screen saver. A moment later, she had to ascend, just so she could facehoof with both forelegs, and both wings. Nothing else would have been an adequate response

"Doctor Adorable's Ask Along Blog. 145,000 followers." she groaned, while Fluttershy hid her mirth at Twilight's reaction behind a hoof.

\* \* \*

><p>After indulging Fluttershy in her blogging adventures for the day, Twilight left her to her 'adorable evil plans' and went out to check on Applejack. Pinkie had informed her earlier that Applejack was rapidly approaching the looper version of a midlife crisis.<p>

Upon arriving at the farm, Mac met her at the gate. "Glad ta' see ya' Miss Twilight." he nodded, shifting the stalk of hay in his mouth slightly. "Poor sis seemed to realize that compared to the rest of y'all, she don't really have that much to define her as a looper."

Twilight groaned. "How bad?"

Mac shrugged. "Well, nothin' too destructive yet. She's mostly been tryin' old power 'n skill sets she don't use too often ta' see if she can think of a way ta' make 'em her own. A few actually seem ta' be

appealin' to her." He then paused, thought for a moment, then chuckled. "Heh, appealin'. Apple peels. I gotta remember that one."

Twilight let him get it out of her system before she got him back on track. "So... what skill sets is she still deciding on?"

Mac coughed. "Well, believe it or not, ah think her time as Rarity durin' that whole cutie mark swap thing may have left an imprint on her. She mostly seems ta' be workin' with the artsy stuff."

Twilight blinked. "Really? Applejack? Not that I'm criticizing her or anything, because that's great but... I didn't take her as the kind to pick art as a hobby. I figured she would start with apple stuff."

Mac grinned, cleared his throat, and recited in his best Applejack impression. "Ah believe she said somethin' along the lines of, 'Aw, what do you know big brother! I can draw ALL of them apples!'"

Twilight groaned and waited for Mac to get over his case of the giggles again.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight wandered through Sweet Apple Acres looking for Applejack. She had already run into Granny Smith, who had informed her that Applejack had been with her in the kitchen earlier, and managed to trap Twilight for a good fifteen rambling minutes as she told her how proud she was that Applejack was finally taking the time to learn the Apple family Great Cooking Secrets, before wandering off on a tangent involving her early years and a sass-squash.<p>

After finally managing to find a way to escape without hurting Granny Smith's feelings, Twilight ran into Apple Bloom, who informed her that Applejack had also been to see her, but swiftly lost interest when discovering that Apple computers were already a thing, though she did ask a few questions on stasis fields for some reason.

Several long hours of searching later, she finally found Applejack on the edge of the zap apple orchard. She had a half dozen shadow clones out, and all of them were hard at work doing... something. Upon spotting Twilight, one of them ran over, skidding to a stop mere inches from Twilight's face with a frazzled mane, wide eyes, and a somewhat maniacal grin. "Twilight! Glad 'yer here! Ah finally found it! Ah know what ma' place in the loops is!"

Twilight slowly backed away to a more comfortable distance. "That's... great, Applejack!" She grinned awkwardly, getting Apple Bucking Day flashbacks. "Mind sharing how you found it?"

Applejack slid a foreleg around Twilight and yanked her close, side to side, holding her other hoof in the air. "Okay, picture this! Ah never really found somethin' that really spoke ta' me. Spike has the whole Jedi thing, Pinkie's got them Chaos God powers, Flutters is a Druid, an' so on. Well that got me thinkin' about ma' place in the group, an' ah decided ta' find somethin' of ma' own."

Twilight slowly nodded. "Easy enough, you're the dependable one. The one who takes the jobs that we need done no matter what, because you'll GET them done no matter what."

Suddenly Applejack was in Twilight's face again. "Exactly! Ah'm the support! The one who holds the group together with common sense and a dash a' hindsight! So ah got to comparin' us to the loops. An' ya know what supports the loops?!"

There was a lengthy pause. Eventually Twilight came to the conclusion that Applejack wasn't going to continue until she guessed. "Um... the Admins?"

Applejack shook her head. "No, it's other loops! We all have skills and memories that make us who we are today, an' we wouldn't have them if it weren't for tha loops that came before! The PAST supports the loops Twilight, and ah'm gonna make sure we never forget it, an' that any guest loopers can remember it too! Ah'm start'n a loop museum, complete with gift shop!"

Twilight blinked. "A museum? A gift shop?"

Applejack nodded. "Yep, that road trip with Pinkie reminded me that the Apple family has a tradition with keepin' history. Ah got a couple shadow clones on sewin' machines making these little guys!" she grinned, handing two objects to Twilight.

Twilight tilted her head at the cloth dolls of herself and Applejack. "Plushies?"

Applejack nodded. "We'll sure, why not? Any guest loopers can take home a momento, an ah can make plushies of the guests for us an' for the museum! Now ah know what yer thinkin', and no, the museum ain't gonna' be nothing but plushies, ah'll have some proper historical stuff too. Ah got some clones earthbendin' some sculptures fer a special exhibit Pinkie Pie requested. Come on down an' have a look."

Seeing no way out of it, and honestly being a touch curious, Twilight followed as Applejack led her over.

And then she froze.

And started to twitch.

There before her, Applejack's clones were hard at work making models of her library. All to scale, all heavily detailed, and all in the process of being destroyed in one way or another, be it exploding, being crushed, being blasted, being abducted, or otherwise.

Applejack just shrugged. "She wanted ta' know how many ways it could be done, so ah'm keepin' a record for her in a side wing."

\* \* \*

><p>105.10 (Masterofgames)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Celestia was having a good morning.<p>

Not the best. That was reserved for when it was scheduled to be cloudy in the east, so nopony would notice if she slept in and delayed the rising of the sun for an extra hour or so.

But it was still a good morning. The birds were singing, the nobles were presently arguing over something far too petty to justify bringing to her, and she was having pancakes.

Princess Celestia really thought of herself as more of the Alicorn of the Dawn than the Alicorn of the Day. She rose the sun, and it traveled the sky on its own, until it stopped at the horizon, and Luna set it so her moon may emerge.

And as Alicorn of the Dawn, she had also long ago privately declared herself to be the Alicorn of Breakfast. The only downside was that by her own logic, Luna had declared herself the Alicorn of Dessert. Which seemed rather unfair to Celestia.

Somehow.

But as much as she loved cake and pastry (lately she had been in a cherry danish mood rather than cake, to be honest), pancakes were a glorious second place.

So it was with great pleasure that she pranced into the royal breakfast hall (and then swore her guards to secrecy, yet again), slid into her plush seat, and greeted Luna, herself enjoying a bowl of Cherri-oats before bed.

And it was with great anticipation that she gazed lovingly at her eleven inch stack of warm buttermilk goodness, levitated her fork, syrup, a dab of butter, and her napkin before her, and prepared to dig in.

And it was with a touch of confusion that she witnessed the pancake on the very top of the stack vanish.

"... Luna, why are you giggling?"

Luna, presently Awake, though tired, was attempting very hard to conceal her mirth, and failing. Though to her credit she was doing very well for having been halfway through a mouthful of juice when she started.

"O-our apologies sister. T'would seem our friend is hungry as well." she snickered behind a silver-shod hoof, trying not to lose it completely at her sister's confusion.

Meanwhile, hidden from Celestia on the opposite side of the pancake tower, the presently possum shaped James T. Kirk, A.K.A. Tiberius, or Tibbers to Luna, was nibbling away at his ill gotten goods, happy to have yet again done something to get Luna to smile. He couldn't help it, he just had a weakness for blue females.

Though honestly, with the number of times he had been the guest anchor like this, he had figured someone would have figured out it was him by now.

\* \* \*

><p>105.11 (Masterofgames)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetie Belle pouted as Fluttershy drank her victory glass. "I still don't think your trains were better than my sister fighting a crab." she muttered.<p>

Chrysalis rolled her eyes. "Face it kid, if I lost that one, you were going to lose as well."

Gently placing the empty glass back on the table, Fluttershy pondered the subject for the next round. "Um, let's see... I know! What was the most unusual thing you ever did that got an un-awake Twilight to go a bit neurotic?"

Twilight smirked. "I looped as a voice in the head of my un-awake self. I told her the fate of Equestria depended on her kissing Rainbow Dash when we first met."

Dash had the misfortune to be leaning back in her chair at the time, and crashed to the floor. "AARGH! What the- Not cool Sparkle! Not cool!"

Scotaloo just folded her forelegs and huffed. "Darn lucky purple unicorn..."

Dash pulled her chair upright and sat back down. "Okay, you wanna' go big this round? We can go big. Remember that Undeclared Alicorn Racing Circuit prank of yours? To get back at you, I 'accidentally' switched bodies with you the day of the Best Young Flyers competition."

Twilight winced. "Okay, okay, point taken."

Rarity shrugged. "I went around solving all her friendship problems before she even discovered them. It was the Smarty Pants incident all over again, to the tenth power. A mere two years without having a letter to send the princess, and she somehow had Philomena on the throne and had tried to release Discord on the condition he stir up trouble, whereupon he refused and turned himself back into a statue."

Applejack smirked. "Weekly poker games, and I never once bluffed. She never caught on."

Pinkie grinned. "I got a heartsong stuck in her head. The nearly hourly musical numbers she had to perform kept her from sleeping for three days!"

Twilight sighed and thumped her head down on the table. "My best friends, fillies and gentlecolts." she groaned.

Vinyl grinned, absently bobbing her head to her tunes through her earbuds. "Why do you think I turned the Chicken Dance into a heartsong?"

Chrysalis pondered a bit. "Well... there was that one time I turned



into a female version of her brother, and signed us up for the Sisterhooves Social, and only told her an hour beforehand."

Trixie cackled. "Ah, twas so long ago! Trixie had just discovered how to make thermite-"

Gilda flinched. "Quickly changing the subject-"

"Hey! Trixie wasn't finished!"

"-there was the time I kept breaking into the library and rearranging all the furniture and bookshelves in the middle of the night."

Sweetie Belle blinked. "Really? I thought I was the only one who did that."

Derpy smiled. "I looped in as Pinkie!"

Mac passed her the drink.

\* \* \*

><p>105.12 (Gym Quirk)<p>

"Thanks fer comin' by, Fluttershy. I wanna ask ya a favor, but I think you should get an idea of what I'm plannin' first," said Applejack as she led the pegasus into a mostly-empty wing of her museum.

"I figger I'll call it the 'Hall of Ascension' or somethin' like that when it's done," explained the self-appointed curator.

Fluttershy looked at an array of display areas. Many were empty, save for the cutie-mark of a pony that had Ascended at some point during the Loops.

There were some exhibits in varying stages of readiness, including:

A scale replica of Rainbow Dash's mach 70 impact crater.

'Before' and 'After' images of Tatooine's terraforming as taken from orbit, along with an apple. The helpful sign indicated that it was from the first apple tree germinated in the Dune Sea and asked that visitors not disrupt the stasis spell.

Rarity's Alicorn-feather dress, with a note indicating it was on loan from the unicorn's private collection. "Rarity said she wanted to switch which dress was on display every fifty loops or so," explained Applejack.

A battered set of pony armor accompanying the image of an exhausted, newly-ascended Trixie.

A replica of a stained glass window depicting Scootaloo's rescue of Cloudsdale. The cutie mark on the display was the one the orange filly had earned from the feat.

The 'File Copy' of the Contractor Compliance Form that was the core

of Ivory Scroll's campaign against the Vogons. (Also protected against the ravages of time with a stasis spell.)

"I'm workin' on collectin' items from all of us what done Ascended outside the baseline. I kin get pictures and replicas with Twilight's memory-to-image spell, but it'd be extra nice with actual objects related to the Ascensions. I don't suppose y'all have photos of the wedding when ya brought Chrys and her swarm as guests?"

"I think so, but I'll have to search through my pocket. Can I get back to you later?"

"Sure. Also, I've been tryin' to think of what I could ask Pinkie, Sweetie Belle, and Ditzzy to contribute and keep comin' up blank. Y'all have any ideas?"

"Pinkie may have a few leftover 'Warp Party' invitations..."

\* \* \*

><p>105.13 (LordCirce) â€" Applejack's second run<p>

The party faced the doors. Gandalf had stopped Pippin from knocking the skeleton down the hole, only for Merry to step on a stray helmet and end up kicking it across the room. Soon enough, the goblins with their troll were pounding on the door.

Gimli tensed, holding his axe, while next to him, Applejack seemed to dance in place. Only Aragorn and Gandalf noticed that several loud thuds echoed from outside of the door in time with her hoofbeats. Finally, she raised herself up slightly before stomping down with both of her front legs. Outside, a tremendous thud shook the room, then silence. Sam hurried over to her side, while Aragorn and Gimli approached the door.

"Easy, girl, Master Aragorn and Master Gimli will take care of it. Don't worry."

"Ah'm not worried, sugarcube."

"What?"

"Comforting nicker?"

Aragorn peered around the door that they had managed to pry open. "Well, it looks like they, ah, knocked themselves out on the door."

Gimli laughed. "Ha. That's Dwarven engineering for ya. Even Dwarf doors will take out goblins by the cartful."

Applejack rolled her eyes at Sam, who blinked owlishly at her.

\* \* \*

><p>105.14 (LordCirce)<p>

Twilight wandered over to the edge of the Everfree. Several ponies in town had been complaining about banging and whirring noises coming from the forest, so Twilight figured Applebloom had probably gotten a

little overenthusiastic, and forgotten the soundproofing on her lab.

The sight that greeted her at the edge of the woods was not, in fact, Applebloom. Instead, Cheerilee was humming away as she worked on constructing some form of spaceship. She was pulling capsules out of her Pocket, which then expanded into parts and components, which she then slotted into place in her ship.

"Planning a outer space field trip?" Twilight asked, smiling.

Cheerilee smiled brightly. "Something like that. I just figured it is best to be prepared."

Twilight blinked. Something was just a bit off about Cheerilee's smile. "Prepared? For what?"

Cheerilee held up a hoof. "For two reasons. One, Dinky and Derpy have switched places this Loop. Two, Derpy doesn't have a cutie mark yet."

Twilight mulled that over. 'So, Derpy is a foal, and has no cutie mark, which equals...'

Cheerilee smiled as recognition of the situation stole across Twilight's face. "So, as an Unawake Derpy is the apparent ringleader of an Unawake CMC this Loop, I figured that having a way off the planet if necessary is a prudent choice."

Twilight nodded. "Yeah. I ... I think I am going to go find Discord and practice my long-range teleportation through extreme Chaos Magic fields." And with a final shudder, she vanished with a small pop.

\* \* \*

><p>105.15 (Masterweaver)<p>

The doors burst open, startling a few of the palace staffponies, and Cadance twirled out with a happy grin.

"Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens!" she sang as she pirouetted about. "Bright copper kettles and warm woollen mittens!" One unwary maid was suddenly snatched up and spun about. "Silver white winters that melt into spring!" With a final nuzzle, Cadance put her blushing victim down, cantering down the hall. "These are a few of my favourite things!"

Shining Armor leaned against a nearby archway, a small smirk on his face. "Sounds like somepony had a fun loop," he quipped.

"Oh Shine-shine it was just beautiful!" The pretty pink pony princess pulled her paramour into a pinioned hug. "Picture this: \_Balinor.\_"

"...never heard of it."

"It's an obscure loop, I grant you. No pegasi, only horses and unicorns." She stuck out her tongue in mock annoyance. "Bleh."

Shining chuckled. "Still, it sounds like a nice place."

"Eh, Arianna said it was usually a tad more dangerous, and she is the local anchor." Cadance's smile broadened. "But this loop, Sleipnir and Epona stepped in to take care of the shifter and I got to be the best mare!\_"

The captain of the guard blinked a bit. "Sleipnir and Epona. As in, the admins?"

"Well, localized avatars but really what's the difference?" The princess of love sighed happily. "The groom was so handsome in his wedding armor and the bride... oh, I never knew a kilt and tattoos could be made to look so beautiful!" She perked up suddenly. "Shining, I just had this idea. When we get married this loop, our families should have some form of ritual combat."

"Er-"

"Trust me, it was very sweet."

\* \* \*

><p>105.16(DrTempo)<p>

Twilight walked into Mac's Bar, and noticed Sunset chatting with Sky Catcher. Twilight sat down, and said, "Hello, Sky Catcher. What are you and Sunset chatting about?"

In her monotone style, Sky Catcher replied, "I was letting miss Shimmer know how John Connor is taking the Loops."

"That's nice."

Sunset started counting, and three seconds later, Twilight said, "Wait...John Connor's Awake? When did that happen?"

Sunset answered this. "When I Looped into miss SkyNet's home Loop during my journey back to Equestria. And no matter what you say SkyNet, I'm calling you a girl." Grabbing her drink, Sunset began her story.

When I Awoke in that Loop, I was in the role of one Sarah Connor. I'd heard other Looper's opinions on SkyNet Awakening, and many are still unsure about her being redeemed. In my opinion, you did the impossible, Twilight.\_

Anyhow, I decided to give that Loop a bit of a technological Renaissance. By the time SkyNet Awoke in the Terminator sent to protect John from the T-1000, technology was a decade ahead. I was smart enough not to do what Sarah did that got her in the nuthouse.\_

Anyhow, SkyNet figured I was a Looper within five minutes of our meeting, but didn't know which one I was. After I told her my tale, she was curious as to what someone like me could do. During our spar, John walked in.\_

He Awoke at that moment.\_

\_Boy, was explaining the Loops difficult. ESPECIALLY since it was SkyNet being the Anchor for his world. After that explanation, SkyNet took care of the T-1000 easily, and set up some protocols to try and prevent her other self from going haywire.\_

\_Interesting Loop. \_

Twilight looked impressed. "That must've been a tough one for the both of you."

Sky Net dryly responded, "Wasn't made easier by miss Shimmer joking a lot when I told her about my meeting with Blues."

Shimmer smirked. "Sounded like you had a crush to me." Both her and Twilight chuckled, while Sky Net groaned.

\* \* \*

><p>105.17 (Masterofgames)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight glared menacingly at the two cowering ponies before her. "You two are just too much! What on earth made you think that it was a good idea to deal with things like that?!"<p>

Rainbow Dash and Scootaloo tried not to flinch, they really did. "But... Twilight, come on! Others do it all the time!" Scootaloo insisted. "Lara Croft, Nathan Drake-"

Twilight cut her off with a stomp. "You want to be like them, you go be adventurers, not archeologists! They wouldn't know historical site preservation if you declared their own homes the site of their next dig!"

Rainbow Dash stepped between them. "Now wait a minute! We can keep a site intact just as well as you can! Name ONE time before this loop that we-"

"Your VERY FIRST expedition you blew a door open with a seismic charge! One designed for venting pressure in volcanoes! I checked that door myself the next loop you know. There was a sign on it. You know what it said?" Twilight growled.

Rainbow Dash and Scootaloo cautiously shook their heads.

"It said 'Push To Open'! Seriously, I doubt even Trixie could do more damage than you two while exploring!"

Scootaloo winced. "But that... We aren't THAT bad." she muttered looking down at her hooves.

"I have no choice. You know what comes next." Twilight huffed, marching up to the two and holding a hoof out. "Fork 'em over."

Rainbow Dash paled. "But... but those are-"

"Now!"

After a moment, they both reluctantly removed their fedoras and gave them to her.

"AND the pith helmets!"

The headgear was hesitantly removed from their saddlebags and likewise surrendered.

Twilight tossed them in her pocket. "You can have these back when you show that you've earned them. When you can pass a copy of the Advanced Archeology Midterm test, you'll get the helmets, but the fedoras are forbidden until you can pass the finals! This is for your own good! Now get to studying!"

The two slunk off. Rainbow Dash shaking her head. "Man, is it just me, or is Twilight taking this a bit out of proportion? It's not like it was anything cool that was destroyed."

Scotaloo huffed. "I know, right? We were just exploring the caves under Canterlot. It's not like the ENTIRE city caved in."

\* \* \*

><p>105.18 (Zetrein)<p>

Sunset Shimmer Woke up running through a forest, fleeing from a manticore. There was something odd about this situation, beyond the feeling that this was somehow cliché. At any rate, a simple use of the Force to calm the beast, and she continued at a more sedate pace.

Adjusting her course slightly, towards the slightly less dense forest, Sunset eventually jogged out of the woods and into the open fields beyond. Pausing at the woods' edge, she put her hands on her hips and took in the view.

The familiar view. She blinked, looking at the town, before pulling a pair of binoculars out to look closer.

"I'm a human." Sunset lowered the binoculars. "In Equestria."

\* \* \*

><p>Elsewhere along the forests' rim, a certain yellow pegasus was going about her day. Starting slightly at the distant sound, Fluttershy considered for a moment, before deciding that an exasperated cry of "Oh, come on!" probably wasn't in distress. Possibly. Maybe. Perhaps she should get Applejack.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was Zecora's first trip to the farmer's market, after being introduced to the town, and Twilight was joining her to make sure there weren't any problems, and help introduce her to some of the vendors.<p>

Twilight stood back a ways, while Zecora sorted and haggled her way through the veggies section. Rainbow Dash chose this time to land beside her. "I need you to help fake an accident that turns me into

something not-a-pegasus."

"Good morning to you too, Dash," she replied, raising an eyebrow. "Why do you need to lose the wings?"

"You remember that time we found out Oerth pegasi lay eggs?"

"Ooooh." Twilight's eyes widened in understanding. Their conversation was interrupted, as the crowd started murmuring in a way that would eventually end in a certain flowerpony panicking.

Given as Zecora had been the center of attention this morning, most the market didn't notice the other oddity approaching until it was almost upon them. As dozens of ponies stopped and stared at the strange thing jogging through them, it was perhaps less than a surprise that it came to a stop in front of Twilight Sparkle.

"I've been looking for you. Got something I'm supposed to deliver, your hooves only." What Twilight and Rainbow Dash recognized as Sunset Shimmer's human form held out a letter to Twilight. After Twilight took the letter, Sunset gave a nod, and said. "Looks like that's it. Got to go."

As they joined the crowd in watching Sunset jog down the street, before turning a corner and leaving sight, Twilight commented to her friend. "She's Awake."

"I noticed."

"No, that's what the letter says." Twilight held her paper so Rainbow Dash could see.

\* \* \*

><p>Sunset was holding in her laughter until she had made a few turns, to hopefully throw off anypony following her. This plan came to an abrupt end when Bulk Biceps landed in her path. She noticed he was wearing the bright blue coat and cap of the Equestrian Mail Service. Similarly dressed, Ditzzy Doo flew above him. The sound of paper ruffling made her look behind her, to see an earth pony, again wearing a Mail Service uniform, apparently wielding a fan of change-of-address forms; since this was Equestria, the origami cutie mark meant this was actually threatening.<p>

"The Equestrian Mail Service don't like it when other folks deliver letters in their town."

\* \* \*

><p>Three days later, Sunset was telling her story to Twilight, as they walked along her mail route. "So since I wasn't a resident, or even legally in the country, they pulled some strings. I'm up for discharge in two years, but I'll legally be an Equestrian citizen."<p>

"Huh, didn't know the Mail Service was part of the military this loop." Twilight pondered. "Wait, what about Spike? They've never given me trouble about his letters."

"That's easy," Sunset replied, sorting out the next batch of letters from her mailbag. "Legally, he's part of the castle mail system. Your letters are considered 'internal' memos."

\* \* \*

><p>105.19 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

Reed Richards sat on the roof of the Baxter Building, stretching his hand. Even after a few years of helping humanity, his incredible, impossible elasticity still marvelled him.

Part of him wanted to channel or reproduce the cosmic radiation to give these incredible powers to everyone. Another was cautious, having seen what some did with such might. A third thought of Ben and the potential heartbreak that could come from the treatment. And a final part reminded him that just because none of the Fantastic Four had developed lethal tumours didn't mean that those cosmic rays were completely safe.

A scream from the heavens shocked him out of his reflection.  
"RICHARDS!"

Reed looked up, seeing an approaching dot. Memories came to mind: State University. A calculation error. A rebuffed correction. An explosion. An expulsion. "Oh no." He clenched his fists. "Not her."

"HIIIIIII!"

Reed hesitated. He wasn't sure what to expect from Doom, but a friendly greeting wasn't it. Neither was her crashing belly-first into the roof, but she did that too.

"Oof." She looked up and gave a much more nervous smile than he thought she'd be capable of. "Well, that's why we wear kinetic dampeners when testing teleporters."

Reed shook himself, taking in the figure before him. Doom was wearing what seemed to be an armoured flight suit. Her face wasâ€¦ "Your scars."

Doom's smile became happier as she pushed herself to her feet. "Isn't plastic surgery amazing?" She dusted herself off and approached him, pausing as she noticed his tension. "Don't worry, Reed. I'm not here for a fight or revenge or anything."

"Why are you here then?"

"To apologize."

Reed was speechless for the better part of a minute. Finally, he sputtered out a "What?"

Doom sighed. "I was a jerk in college. You were just trying to help, but I couldn't handle the idea that I wasn't the smartest person on the planet. So I lashed out and took an explosion to my face for my troubles. Yeah, I was under a lot of stress, next in line for the throne and all, but that's not an excuse. Getting expelled really made me take a look at myself, and I didn't like what I saw."



"So you invented teleportation and sent yourself a quarter of the way across the planet just to apologize?" Reed shook his head. "Who are you, and what have you done with Desiderata von Doom?"

"I prefer Ditzzy nowadays. My advisors say 'Queen Derpy of Latveria' doesn't send the right message." "Ditzzy" shrugged. "Go figure."

"It just feels rather absurd."

Ditzzy smirked. "Says the man made of living rubber."

Reed chuckled. "TouchÃ©. And I certainly accept your apology, Desâ€"Ditzzy." The two shook hands. "I just wish we could've been friends without what happened to you at SU."

"Hey, better late than never." Ditzzy backed away. "If you'll excuse me, I need to get back." Grey ghostly wings flared open on her back, then enveloped her. There was a blinding flash of light, and when Reed looked back, she was gone.

\* \* \*

><p>"Later tonight, we ask our panel if Latveria can maintain its staggering economic growth. But first: Mutants. Six more reasons why you should be afraid."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

Big orange hands parted slightly, and a bag full of mangled android parts poured its contents onto the stone floor of Castle Doom.

"Now lookit, Derpy," the Thing rumbled, "we've had this talk before, see? Quit buildin' these robot doubles of yourself! They always try ta conquer th' world, an' we gotta go smash 'em up, an' WE get blamed for all the damage!"

"I'm so sorry, Ben, Reed," Queen Ditzzy Doom nodded her head to the two Fantastic Four members before her. "But I always worry. What happens to my people if something happens to me? Latveria's surrounded by larger countries ruled by some really nasty people, you know. So I have to try to make sure there's somebody who can keep my people safe after I'm gone!"

Doom stood from her throne and walked over to the pile of trashed android. The head was mostly intact, the blonde hair more rumpled than usual, the benevolent cross-eyed face forever frozen in a scowl of pure evil. "This time I thought I had it, I really did," she said. "Circuits insulated, perfect copy of my own engrams, moral imperatives hard-coded in..."

"Don't say it," Ben Grimm warned.

"I just don't know what went wrong!"

"I KNEW IT!" The Thing threw his rocky arms up in frustration. "I KNEW she'd say it! She ALWAYS sez it!" He shook his head and rumbled in a softer tone, "I almos' wish she really was evil, y'know, Reed? I

think a really evil Doctor Doom would do less damage!"

Derpy didn't hear Reed Richards' apology for the outburst, nor Grimm's. Two pairs of crossed eyes stared at each other, as the owner of the living pair contemplated the Loops, good intentions, narrative imperative, and cybernetic design.

In her head she began composing a letter: "Dear Twilight Strange; Hail to the Sorceress Supreme. By now you've probably heard about the most recent failure. All I can say is, you told me so..."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

105.1: Nuances.

>105.2: It isn't easy being the alicorn of amore.<br>105.3: Addendum to the Prime Directive: anything that gives a Starfleet captain a headache is also valid for inclusion in the non-intervention zone.

>105.4: Little step forward, little step back.<br>105.5: Geronimo!

>105.6: It's not often they get to prank Twilight.<br>105.7:

Inconvenient Trixie is a concept by Egophiliac

>105.8: Zadok the Priest is a coronation piece written by Handel.<br>105.9: Continuig the tumblr theme...

>105.10: He. Is a. Possum of many. Talents.<br>105.11: No contest.

>105.12: Important events in metahistory.<br>105.13: Not from the original Applejack-in-Arda story.

>105.14: I hear the moon is safe this time of year.<br>105.15: A happy Cadence is endearing to behold. When not, you know, terrifying.

>105.16: BotNet?

>105.17: It belongs in a museum, not in pieces.<br>105.18: At least Sunset isn't a human mail.

>105.19: Before the loop ended, Derpy had about fifty of those letters printed out with mad-libs style fill-in-blanks. There weren't many blanks.<p>

## 112. Chapter 112

### 106.1

"You did what?" Cadence asked, rubbing her ear. "Sorry, can you repeat that?"

Trixie rolled her eyes. "I got crowned as co-Queen of the Changelings in perpetuity, as the consort of Queen Chrysalis."

"We had a coronation ceremony and everything," Chrysalis put in. "Eight thousand changelings singing in perfect harmony. All very impressive."

"Then we went on a holiday alone together for a month," Trixie added helpfully.

The alicorn of love looked between the two of them, a suspicious glint in her eye.

"And this\_ isn't\_ getting married?"

"Nope," Trixie replied promptly. "No matrimony involved. And that holiday was not a honeymoon. Really."

"Formally she's my consort." Chrysalis shrugged. "And yes, we \_did\_ check, and it \_is\_ perpetual. Including between loops."

Cadence looked between them again.

"This is all some kind of elaborate plot to make sure I can't go nuts over your getting married, isn't it?"

"It is not \_all\_ some kind of elaborate plot, no," Chrysalis answered. "Neither of us-" she glanced over at Trixie, "-want to get formally married. We're much more comfortable with an informal relationship of that type, even if it has formal dimensions in other ways."

Trixie nuzzled her, and they both looked up at Cadence in a way which was definitely not pleading.

"...fine," Cadence grouched. "I'll take it."

A pause elapsed.

"...so, have you considered a really large and elegant \_coronation\_ ceremony that I could help-"

"No!" Trixie and Chrysalis chorused.

"Really, it was a private little thing," Trixie added. "Just me, Twilight, Chryssy, and her family."

"Which is over thirty three thousand strong," Cadence said, then sighed. "Okay, fine. I don't suppose you have pictures?"

\* \* \*

><p>106.2 (TheOneButcher)<p>

"I hereby Crown Scootaloo as a princess of Equestria after the Magic of Equestria ascended her for outstanding achievements in the field of collecting stamps."

"I hereby Crown Sweetie Belle as a princess of Equestria after the Magic of Equestria ascended her for outstanding achievements in the field of polishing forks."

"I hereby Crown Apple Bloom as a princess of Equestria... after \_the Magic of Equestria\_ ascended her for outstanding achievements in the field of... eating cupcakes."

"I hereby Crown Diamond Tiara as a princess of Equestria... after the Magic... of Equestria ascended her... for outstanding achievements in the field of... wearing a Tiara."

"I hereby Crown... Silver Spoon as a princess of Equestria... after... the Magic of Equestria... ascended her... for outstanding

achievements in the field of... being rich."

"I hereby Crown... Nyx... as a princess... of Equestria... after... the Magic of Equestria... ascended her... for outstanding achievements in the field of... sleeping."

"I hereby Crown... Oh, buck this! I hereby declare that merely ascending to Alicorn form is no longer enough to be crowned a Princess of Equestria!" Celestia declared.

With that she tossed down Mayor Mare's crown of the Princess of Choking on a Paperclip and stormed off to her quarter to draw up the necessary legislation to dethrone the new Princesses.

\_"I was an Alicorn before it became Cool..."\_

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

"I can't believe that worked!" Scootaloo grinned.

Diamond Tiara buffed a hoof on her chest. "Of course it worked," she said confidently. "The question is, can we get it to work in every loop where we want to use alicorn powers without getting dragged into government work?"

Ivory Scroll leaned down to the alicorn fillies and said, "What I want to know is, how can we push this so that she makes alicornhood a disqualification for public service? You girls get off scot-free, but I'm still the hedging mayor!"

\* \* \*

><p>106.3 (Sieses Detkrah)<p>

There were times that Aura saw strange things happen within The World, being the Anchor.

In one Loop, everybody seemed to decide to create a character of the opposite gender, despite being the same gender in the real world that they were in the baseline. There were times that Morganna decided to create the Eight Phases in the forms of little girls for absolutely no good reason. There was even that Loop where Haseo had been replaced with Kamina, which was perhaps the strangest of them all.

Then again, at that very moment, Aura was quite sure that she had found a new strangest.

"I hope everybody's having a good time," Pinkie Pie beamed as she bounced down the streets of Mac Anu. "This would be a very bad game if nobody was having a good time, especially with a party going on!"

A collective cheer filled the streets of the Root Town, which were for the first time that Aura could think of decked out in streamers and other such party staples, despite the fact that models for such things were not natively within The World.

The topic of things that did not exist natively within The World brought Aura's attention back towards the girl in charge of the party.

The girl named Pinkie Pie.

The girl whose class was also Pinkie Pie.

The girl whose class gave her the passive benefit of being Pinkie Pie.

The girl who had the ability to pull party supplies out of nowhere, teleport whenever nobody was quite looking at her, enforce a promise between two people so long as they both made it within the game and with a certain phrase uttered, break whatever one of the laws of physics that would be convenient for her at any given moment, and once again be Pinkie Pie.

And most importantly, the girl who the administrators could care less about, despite the fact that they hounded after even a perceived hacker in just about every Loop that Aura could think of other than a few rare variants.

Regardless of how strange the sight was to her, Aura would readily admit that she found it to be incredibly amusing.

Especially when she noticed Macha floating around in a silly party hat.

\* \* \*

><p>106.4 (The One butcher)<p>

\_None of them can overcome my Defence Value, even after a three attack Flurry.\_ Ditzzy dodged like crazy even as she distributed knock out punches left and right.

\_I don't even need to stunt my Defence... And they can't surprise me from behind because of my extra eyes.\_

Ditzzy shoved the last of the bandits to the side and helped the girl to stand. "Are you alright?" She asked the young woman who stared at her in awe.

"Yes, My Princess of the Earth." She bowed deeply.

"Aw, stop that. I'm not one of those Dragon thingies." she smiled at the girl who looked at her in confusion. Then looked at the unconscious army of bandits, then back at Ditzzy.

Then that confusion gave way to horrified realisation. "Anathema..." she whispered, before clamping her mouth shut and backing away.

Ditzzy rolled her eyes. "I think I had noticed if I was a demon... I've heard they are quite flashy and shiny." But it was too late, one of the more hale Bandits was already running in the direction of the nearby City, shouting "ANATHEMA! ANATHEMA!" at the top of her Lungs.

Ditzy was quite confused with that behaviour. As far as her Loop Memories told her doing that was a sure-fire way to get killed by the demon in question. Doesn't matter, she wasn't one of those things and therefore didn't have anything to fear. If anything the false accusation and accompanying boost in her already quite fearsome reputation would make clearing the forests of Bandits even easier. It was a shame how many people got missing in these forests, while the Princesses and Princes who were supposed to protect the people were doing nothing.

Ditzy waited.

"Ah, the Anathema. Finally we have found you." Sneered a voice behind her. Ditzy wasn't phased in the least, just calmly turning around smiling... Only to wrinkle her brow in confusion.

What?

Arrayed against her was a whole company of knights in shining Jade Armor in a multitude of colors. Behind them were four score bowmen, ready to shoot.

Man, they were paranoid about those Anathingies... Good actually, that way they surely did less damage when they really appeared. Ditzy simply relaxed and smiled brightly.

"I am really flattered that you would think that of me, and glad that you took the threat seriously enough to come in force. But I am not Exalted. The thing with the Bandits was all skill!" Ditzy explained.

"Lies!" The foremost shouted. "It was foretold that we would encounter an Anathema here. That it would be the strongest who has ever lived, surpassing the powers of the First Age. We have laid in waiting for you to appear, biding our time for the last few weeks until you so foolishly revealed yourself."

Ditzy frowned: "If you were waiting for an Anathingy here, why didn't you take care of the Bandits?"

"Who cares about these petty nuisances. They know not to bother anyone important. You are just trying to distract me." The man sneered. Ditzy was getting a bit irritated, but it would be long before she gave up Diplomacy, she was a Pony after all.

"I think I'd know if I was a demon. Surely there's a way to check?"

"Sure there are ways to check... Don't move a muscle." One of them came forward and laid hands on Ditzy. After a while he looked at the leader and shook his head. He ran back into the Formation. "And probably the Anathema have found some way around it with their foul sorcery. What you say makes sense... So you probably are using some kind of Silvertongued Magic on me, wasting your precious motes. Just as planned. And I know how to get around your evil influence." He smiled. "Switching to Combat Ticks. ATTACK!"

So... about two hundred reality warping super soldiers with long range fire support... And this stupid RPG-Mechanics verse doesn't lend itself to Loopers roflstomping the Locals. She also couldn't

really use her magic, which sadly had a golden hue and would confirm their theory about her. But she wouldn't take things lying down either. These guys just let those Bandits run wild! She'll show them!

And then there was light.

"Congratulation Young Warrior. You have shown Skill without peer and dedication to what is right. I am the Unconquered Sun and you are Chosen. You have taken your second breath. You are Exalted. You are... SOLAR."

Nothing much happened.

"You are SOLAR!"

Again nothing.

"Why can't the Exaltation raise your Essence to two? Wait what? You don't have XP... You don't have ANY XP? How did a Mortal use all his XP? It's... It's all bound up in a Charm. How can you have a Charm? Waitaminute... That's about four Billion XP! How can a single Charm take up four BILLION XP! How can a Mortal even HAVE Four Billion XP? \*\*I\*\* don't have Four Billion XP! And the Charm... You blew FOUR BILLION XP on some kind of EXTREMELY INEFFECTIVE SUBSPACE POCKET? Why wouldn't you simply store the objects in a pocket dimension instead of inside your soul? You'd need only ten XP to deposit and retrieve objects for that. This one's basically DESIGNED TO USE UP AN INSANE AMOUNT OF XP?"

The shining four armed guy looked like he blew a fuse. "Uh, I'm stuck in an infinite Time Loop. This Subspace Pocket is one of the only things that can carry objects from one Loop to the other, because I can take only my Soul itself with me, not attached Pocket dimensions. But it's also to make sure we use up all of the extra space in our soul in order to prevent us from becoming a kind of God that doesn't fit into the multiverse, thus breaking it. I guess I can stop growing my Pocket for a while to make this Exaltation thing work, but... aren't Solars the bad guys?"

The god blinked: "No... they are the rightful rulers of Creation, having saved it from the whims of the Primordials. But... If you are from outside the Wyld and will return there you will have to raise your Occult, Craft and Lore to Maximum before you leave, or you will forever remain incomplete, because you lack the knowledge to develop your Powers and it is beyond your reach."

Ditzzy blinked. Ah, of course! She'll finally get some nifty out of Loop abilities! As long as the Loop lasts long enough to pick up all the stuff on how to develop them...

Unless... "Can't I use Science to find out all that stuff?"

The Unconquered Sun blinked. "Well, if you have an eternity, sure! But it took a thousand people with support staff four Millennia to get to the level of power and versatility we are at right now."

Ditzzy seemed even more excited. "YAY! Twilight will love that!"

\* \* \*

><p>Ditzy shook herself from her vision. She blew a bubble of spit and used it to examine herself. A circle of Light shone proudly upon her brow... It felt a bit like having a Horn.<p>

"Wretched!" Oh, yeah... that Army...

"At least this time I know exactly what went wrong..."

\* \* \*

><p>106.5 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

The door to Mac's bar opened to allow Twilight Sparkle to drag a frantic, non-Awake Celestia inside.

"But I have to find Discord!" Celestia gasped. "What if he starts running amok again? If I let that happen I'd be a rotten princess! Everypony would call me The Rotten Princess Celestia! And then they'd exile me for not doing my duty! Or they'd jail me! Or they'd throw me in jail in the place they exiled me to! Or-"

"Relax, Princess Celestia," Twilight said soothingly. "Look in the corner."

Discord waved back from the corner, holding up something served in a pineapple and garnished with umbrellas. He took a sip, and the umbrellas grew noticably shorter. "Oh, hi, Celestia!" he said. "I have seen the error of my ways and reformed, and thus I was given time off for good behavior! Isn't that wonderful?"

Celestia fainted.

"Mac," Twilight asked, "when Celestia comes to, could you give her the stuff you give me after a really bad Loop? Maybe a double?"

"Eyup," Big McIntosh agreed, pulling a bottle of smelling salts out from under the bar.

As the big red stallion worked on getting Celestia to relax, Twilight walked over to Discord. "Brittle-estia Loop?" the lord of chaos asked.

Twilight nodded. "Nothing I can't handle. And how have you been?" she asked.

"Petrified. Again." Discord shook his head, and some pebbles sprinkled out of one ear. "It's bad enough I usually Awaken in stone here in Equestria, but when I spend an entire Hub Loop unable to move... well, my dear Twilight, it's enough to drive me sane."

"Not so I've noticed," Twilight snarked back. "But the Hub world doesn't have petrification, does it?"

"Well, I incarnated as this sort of legend, really. Up in New England. According to the legend a warlock escaped the Salem Witch Trials and fled north beyond Portland, swearing vengeance on his persecutors. The judge and several priests followed, chasing the



warlock to an island in one of those innumerable bays. The legend says they tried to execute the warlock by pressing- by sandwiching him between two heavy slabs of stone- but he just would not die. So instead they piled all the rocks they could on top of him to trap him for eternity."

"Sounds ghastly."

"Glad I wasn't Awake for it," Discord agreed. "But the legend finishes by saying that the warlock's spirit is waiting for some fool to find his prison, remove the rocks and free him to unleash his evil once again."

"Remove the... north of Portland..." Twilight Sparkle gasped as the answer came to her. "Do you mean to say-"

"I certainly do. I was," Discord declared, bringing himself erect on his stool and placing a hand dramatically to his breast, \_"the Rock Bound Ghost of Maine."\_

A few moments later, Celestia came to. "Mr. McIntosh Apple, I presume?" she asked. "It is good to see my student battling Discord... but shouldn't she be doing something more forceful than pelting peanuts at him?"

"Enope," Big Mac said, pushing a very large, very alcoholic drink towards the princess.

\* \* \*

<p>106.6 (Scarecrow11)<p>

"â€|no gniog s'tahw rof nosaer a evah reve I ekil"

"?ereh sdrawkcab gnihtyreve si yhW"

"?ytiraR seY"

"?thgiliwT"

\* \* \*

<p>106.7 (Scarecrow11)<p>

Silver Spoon approached her friend at recess. Diamond was sitting by herself on one of the benches, just staring at a tiara in her hooves.

"Tiaraâ€| you alright?" she asked.

Diamond just nodded absently. "Yeahâ€| I was just thinking about last loop."

Silver sat beside her "Bad?" she asked quietly.

Her friend just shook her head "No, it wasâ€| alright really. I was awake much earlier though. Barely more then a baby. I got to spend some time with my mom." Tiara's mom was a weird thing in the loops. Much like Scootaloo's parents, it changed from loop to loop. Sometimes she was alive, sometimes she wasn't. Sometimes she was a

business pony like her father, sometimes she was wild and adventurous. Sometimes she was as bratty as baseline Tiara. Once she was called 'Screwloose' and spent the loop in an asylum. But because she never impacted the baseline plot in any way, it always changed.

"Sheâ€| passed away before I was even old enough to enter school." Tiara turned away, hiding her tears "She held me as she passed. She told my fatherâ€| that 'I' was the greatest treasure they had." Taking a shuddering breath, she composed herself.

She gestured to the tiara she was holding "My father bought this for me soon after. Mom always said I was their little princess, and he said that 'With this crown, now everyone will know you're a Real Princess.' " she smiled softly "It's just a toy, of course, but I never had the heart to tell him I knew."

Spoon leaned over and hugged Tiara, who embraced her back. Letting go, Tiara looked at her friend with watery eyes "Daddyâ€| no matter what loop, he always does his best to be there for me, to love me no matter what. In baselineâ€| oak I must have been so disappointing." she hugged the toy tiara close as she thought of what a brat she had been, how embarrassing her behavior must have been to her father.

Spoon offered a smile "Hey, it's alright, you're not like that now. You haven't been for a long time."

Tiara nodded, wiping away the tears. "You're right. I will NEVER be that way again. I will do my best to make my father, and my mother too, if I can, proud of me. I will be a daughter worthy of being called their princess. Their treasure."

\* \* \*

><p>106.8 (Gym Quirk)<p>

"Here you go, girl. Eat up," said Sam as he loaded a generous pitchfork of hay into Applejack's stall at the Rivendell stables.

\_He's a sweet fella, but a mare's gotta have some time alone so she can finish her readin'\_ , the pony grumbled to herself.

"Oh. And here's a nice apple for dessert. They have wonderful fruit here, y'know." He put the treat on the stall door. "Hello, Mister Gandalf, Mister Strider, Gimli," he greeted the three future members of the Fellowship. "Here to check on Shadowfax?"

"Yes. I see you're taking good care of fair Applejack," said the wizard. "I think Frodo is looking for you. He said something about wanting to take a walk along the north path with Bilbo."

"I'm fine, sugarcube. Go on and see to Frodo," added the pony \_sotto voce\_.

Sam scurried off.

"That pony did just speak, right?" asked Gimli suspiciously.

"Whinny?"

Shadowfax snorted his amusement.

"Oh, cut it out," suggested Aragorn. "He's Awake."

Gandalf gestured to the stable. "I can talk to Elrond if you..."

"Y'all kin stop apologizin' fer the accommodations already. It's comfy enough, and the food's just fine," said Applejack, showing signs of mild irritation. "While I wouldn't mind gettin' some time in the kitchens, the hay's top-rate, and I 'preciate the flowers, fruit, and other treats. 'course, if any of y'all wanted drop off the odd plate of daisy sandwiches, I wouldn't say no. The bread smells wonderful."

"Moving on from the culinary tastes of our esteemed guest," said Gandalf. "The Council went pretty much by-the-book. We three" - he gestured at the human and dwarf that had accompanied him - "thought we should bring you up to date and start considering our plans."

"So it's just the four of us Awake?" asked the pony.

"And Galadriel," responded the wizard. "Now, since this was a 'Pick up the story at Bree' variant start, neither she nor I was able to take any action to neutralize Saruman, so the preferred alternative of going via the Gap or Rohan is much less desirable if we want to avoid unnecessary conflict. We need to stay here long enough for Anduril to be forged, but Aragorn hopes to get a sufficiently early start to avoid the storms at the Redhorn gate."

"Why are we discussing our plans with a pony?" asked the scowling Gimli.

"Why should we not discuss our plans with a pony? Gimli, this is what? Your twentieth loop or so? As much loop experience as I have compared to you, she has a similar degree of experience compared to me," replied Gandalf.

Applejack held up a hoof in protest. "Yer an Anchor, I don't really think..."

"You are Twilight's Second. The second pony to loop after she started. How many loops had you experienced by the time your sister Ascended?"

"I lost count a ways before..."

"I had gone through less than a hundred by then, and only a handful of fused loops. I will certainly surpass you eventually, but I believe that you are easily the most experienced individual in the world at the moment, several times over."

"But I've only been Here under a dozen times, and none of them were related to your baseline in any significant way." She smiled absently at the memory of ten alicorns storming Mordor and blasting Barad Dur with the Elements of Harmony. "And I've just reached to the bit where Frodo and Sam get to Mount Doom in my readin'."

"By the sound of it, you've covered most of the highlights as far as immediate plans are concerned," noted Aragorn. "Due to the late start, we're stuck with the same situation as in the baseline, and can only make a few changes. We're still trying to destroy the Ring..."

"I don't suppose," she interrupted, "you've tried speedin' up the travelin' process with some teleports?"

"I'm afraid that magical teleportation is usually not an option by this world's rules. Technological means have worked on occasion, and there was the one time Mnementh..." Gandalf trailed off.

"Huh. Too bad my sister ain't here; she can usually put together a Trek-style transporter in a few hours." mused Applejack.

The two continued to swap ideas about how to proceed.

"And this is why we are discussing our plans with a pony," Aragorn explained to the bewildered Gimli.

\* \* \*

><p>"That animal can nearly talk," {Sam} said, "and would talk, if she stayed here much longer. She gave me a look as plain as Mr. Pippin could speak it: if you don't let me go with you, Sam, I'll follow on my own."<br>- Tolkien, J.R.R.; The Lord of the Rings. (As amended by Applejack of Equestria.)

"Sam, sugarcube. Y'all'll need somepony to carry the supplies, and since Shadowfax ain't built to travel in the mountains, I guess that means me," said a voice from the pony's general vicinity.  
>- From a discarded draft of King Elesar's memoirs. <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Gandalf and Aragorn were able to shave about a month off their baseline departure date. Now in the last days of November, the Fellowship of the Ring stood outside the Last Homely House waiting for Gandalf to emerge from a last-minute consultation with Elrond.<p>

Sam was fussing with the pony's pack, muttering about the supplies. "Rope! No rope! And only last night you said to yourself: 'Sam, what about a bit of rope? You'll want it, if you haven't got it.' Well, I'll want it. I can't get it now."

"Check again under the extra blankets, sugarcube."

Sam was mildly astonished to find a coil of sturdy rope. He took a long considering look at the pony.

Applejack gazed back impassively, then essayed an innocent nicker.

\_I'll need to remember to ask Bloom or Rarity to make me some of that artificial spider silk rope and make sure it looks like ordinary hemp. Good thing Aragorn keeps a decent supply of it in his Pocket.\_

"Applejack, my girl," said the hobbit somberly, "you oughtn't to have took up with us. You could have stayed here and et the best hay till the new grass comes."

Taking a cue from her baseline counterpart, Applejack swished her tail and said nothing.

\* \* \*

><p>At last, the Company set out (on foot: Shadowfax had reluctantly returned to Rohan a while after the Council) following a final (and to Applejack's mind, redundant) admonition from Elrond about not doing anything stupid with the Ring.<p>

After two dreary and overcast weeks of traveling during the hours of darkness to avoid observation, the party reached the borders of the long-abandoned realm of Hollin and Gandalf called for a day's rest. While Legolas occupied his time as lookout, the hobbits spent their time either resting their weary feet or working on their swordsmanship with coaching from Boromir.

Gandalf, Aragorn, and Gimli considered the road ahead. For some reason they had gathered near their beast of burden.

"So are we really going to try the pass of Caradhras, or should we bite the bullet and go straight for Moria?" asked Gimli.

"I'll admit that we've never had much luck with the pass, but there was that one time..." replied Aragorn.

"Unless one of you picked up some skill at weather control and hadn't gotten around to telling me about it..." interrupted Gandalf. He spared a glance toward the pony.

"I think ya got me confused with Rainbow Dash. Even at full power, I'm no weathermare," objected Applejack. "Anyways, if y'all're interested in my opinion, I'm gettin' a real bad feelin' 'bout that peak yonder. I think Spike'd call it a Dark Side nexus. I'm also pickin' up somethin' from the rocks that's between mischief and malice, shadin' toward the second."

Gimli was again staring at the pony. "You can sense the very stone and how it feels?"

She shook her head in an equine shrug. "Just sayin' how I read the terrain ahead."

"Okay. If we try the pass and there's unseasonal snow, we'll go for the low road. Satisfied?" asked Aragorn

There was grudging agreement.

As the wizard and dwarf went off, Aragorn paused. "I've been meaning to ask. How do you keep that hat on in all the wind we've had on this journey?"

"Picked up the knack from Henry Jones jr. a while back. I got no idea where he learned it."

\* \* \*

><p>"So here we are at the Hidden Gate of Moria," declared Boromir to nobody in particular, "against my better judgement, I'll add."<p>

"Kwitcherbellyachin' already," muttered Applejack.

"I wish he'd stop going on about that," murmured Sam to Frodo in a echo of the pony's words

"You were enthusiastic enough about the decision when the wargs started howling," pointed out Gimli.

The company had turned back from Caradhras when the weather took a threatening turn. An overnight encounter with a pack of possibly phantom wargs " as in the baseline, the morning after the skirmish had left no sign of their adversaries " had hastened their journey to this point

Gandalf was now making a show of searching for the hidden doors as the Gondorian and dwarf bickered.

"Would it not be a good time to unload our faithful pony and determine what we much carry ourselves and what can be left behind?" Legolas asked Aragorn. "As steadfast and brave as she has been, the mines would not be a safe place for her."

"She'd follow Mr. Frodo into a dragon's den, if I led her," protested Sam. "It'd be nothing short of murder to turn her loose with all these wolves about."

"With Sam to look after her, I believe she can make the journey," said Aragorn after a thoughtful pause. "Still, I expect she wouldn't object if we lightened her load. Keep all the food, fodder, and especially the water bottles. The cold-weather gear will probably not be needed as we go further south."

The hobbits made themselves useful unloading the pony and sorting through the packs. Applejack took the opportunity to join Aragorn at the edge of the ominous lake that had filled the valley at the doorstep of the abandoned dwarf kingdom.

"Anything more I oughta know about Watcher?" she asked Aragorn quietly.

"Just stay alert. It usually strikes shortly after we open the doors. At least Gimli is keeping Boromir from throwing rocks, and Pippin is similarly occupied."

"Ah. There we are!" declared Gandalf after revealing the \_ithildin\_ markings that indicated the door. The rest of the company gathered around to peer at the design.

"What does the writing say?" asked Frodo, trying to decipher the inscription on the arch. "I thought I knew the elf-letters, but I cannot read these."

"The words are in the elven-tongue of the West of Middle-earth in the Elder Days," answered Gandalf. "They do not say much of consequence."

They say only: The Doors of Durin, Lord of Moria. Speak, friend, and enter. And underneath small and faint is written: I, Narvi, made them. Celebrimbor of Hollin drew these signs. Or in the original Sindarin: \_Ennyn Durin aran Moria. Pedo mellon\_..."

The doors slowly swung open.

Ignoring the dirty look from Gimli, the wizard clapped his hands. "Right! Are we ready to get going? No? Well let's not dawdle..."

Applejack's attention was focused on the lake. Her life-sensing abilities picked out the location of the creature that lurked there as it roused and started to move toward the Company. \_Let's see if I can discourage the critter\_...

She snorted nervously, stamping a hoof. Deep in the lake, a stone column erupted from the lakebottom to pummel the beast from below. A few ripples formed on the surface.

She felt it circle and make another move toward their shore. Another stamp, and another column rose to block its way. More ripples appeared on the lake surface.

"Easy girl," soothed Sam as he gently reloaded her pack saddle.

Yet another circle. Yet more stamping. This time two columns met at an angle to crush something between them.

"There's something going on out in the lake," commented Legolas. The lake's surface was showing a fair amount of turbulence by now.

With a mild feeling of satisfaction, Applejack perceived a vague impression of disgust from her victim and sensed it retreating to a deeper part of the waters.

After several seconds of watching the ripples expand and reach the shore with a distinct lack of additional activity, the party took up their burdens and cautiously crossed the threshold into the mines. Beyond a small antechamber, there was a broad, gentle stairway leading upward into the gloom.

"Take them up about fifty steps, Aragorn. I'll see what can be done about the doors," instructed Gandalf.

As Sam led Applejack past the wizard, she balked momentarily and gently nudged the doors with a combination of earthbending and the Force. They slowly swung shut with a surprisingly quiet thud.

Igniting a faint spark at the end of his staff, Gandalf paused to give the pony a long look before moving up the stairs to the head of the Company.

\* \* \*

><p>"He is dead then. I feared it was so," said Frodo as the company looked at Balin's tomb.<p>

It had been an uneventful and by-the-book trek through the mines. The

incident with Pippin and the rock dropped into the well had been prevented by a combination of keeping the young hobbit busy and an explicit threat from Gandalf: "And if you even consider playing with that hole in the floor, I'll arrange for you to make a personal inspection. This is a serious journey, not some hobbit walking-party!"

("Not that it makes much of a difference in the grand scheme of things," the wizard had explained when the incident was brought up during their planning sessions in Rivendell. "We almost always encounter orcs shortly after we reach Balin's tomb. Still, the effort should be made.")

"This appears to be the remains of a book," observed Gandalf, lifting the badly damaged volume from its niche. "We don't have much time, but I hope to glean some notion of where we are..."

As the remainder of the party clustered to peer at the book's contents, Applejack edged toward the half-open stone doors on the west end of the room and concentrated on the rock in their general area. She felt Aragorn's walking to her side.

"Got a fair number makin' their way up from below," she reported. "Want me to do somethin' about 'em?"

"...Chamber of Records. I guess that is where we now stand," Gimli was saying.

"If that is the case, then we entered from the twenty-first hall, which means we take the east arch and go down to the gate level," decided Gandalf. "Take the book, Gimli. We will give it a closer look when there is more time."

Applejack judged that the lead party of orcs was perhaps twenty-five steps from the top of the stairs that let onto their level. Seeing Aragorn's nod, she reared and stomped both forehooves to the stone.

There was a chorus of surprised voices as two or three levels of steps were remolded into steep inclined planes, causing upwards of fifty warriors to tumble backwards and downwards.

"Orcs!" cried the ranger. "And it sounds as if they were moving up from the east arch!"

"Everyone up and ready to move," ordered Gandalf, moving to join Aragorn. "Boromir, watch the east door."

The Gondorian went to the small door on the opposite side of the room.

"I kin block the passage fer a bit. Dunno how long it'll last against a balrog, tho," offered the pony.

Gandalf's expression went abstracted for a long moment; Applejack recognized the look of one consulting the Force. "Yes. Seal the arch, and then this door."

"Ya got it. Wanna pretend it's yer doin'?"



"You are most considerate," said the wizard drawing himself to his full height and raising his staff. He started chanting in an unknown elven dialect. Aragorn shouldered the door shut.

The pony backed away, then whinnied in feigned fright, rearing and bucking as Aragorn held onto her lead rope. Faint grinding noises from outside of the room could be heard over the wizard's words.

Sam hurried up to help. "Steady, girl. Steady..."

After one final buck directed at the closed door, she allowed the hobbit to lead her to the rest of the party clustered at the room's quiescent east entrance. Aragorn noted that the stone of the floor and lintel had flowed to meld with the door itself. "She's finished. You can stop chanting those song lyrics now," he murmured to Gandalf as he too moved to the east door.

The wizard made a display of shouting a few final words at the west door, complete with a flash from the tip of his staff. He slowly walked to join the group. "Well," he said, as if tired from a great effort, "I have done all I can for now. The door has been secured. This secondary passage should bring us to the main halls..."

\* \* \*

><p>"I knew things were goin' too smooth," muttered the orange pony as the Company emerged into the Second Hall. To their left was the famed Bridge of Khazad-Dum.<p>

"Ai! ai!" wailed Legolas. "A Balrog! A Balrog is here!"

Looming in front of the bridge stood Durin's Bane.

To their right was a chasm of fire, separating them from a howling mass of orcs and trolls.

"Aragorn, Gimli...watch our backs. Boromir, Legolas...mind the hobbits. This is a foe beyond all of you," ordered Gandalf with grim determination as he deliberately strode toward the shadowy demon.

"You cannot pass." The Balrog's voice came out as a combination of a basso rumble and a hiss.

"I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor," declared Gandalf, as he drew himself up before the towering form.

As the unawake members of the Fellowship were focused on the confrontation, Applejack took the opportunity to erect a substantial wall to block off interference from the Balrog's minions.

"You cannot pass," repeated the Balrog, producing a flaming whip and cracking it over the head of its adversary.

"The dark fire will not avail you, flame of Udun. Go back to the Shadow!" commanded the wizard, adjusting the grip on his staff and moving Glamdring to a high guard position.

"You cannot pass," growled the Balrog a third time.

"Big guy needs to add some variety to his lines," observed Applejack.

Boromir blinked at the oddly placid pony.

"Terrified whinny? Nervous snort," she added, straining half-heartedly at Sam's grip on her lead rope.

The Company's attention was returned to the confrontation before the bridge as a great red flaming sword swept out and down at the wizard.

A brief ringing clash of metal and a brilliant flash later, the Balrog's sword was a shower of fragments and the demon had taken a long step backward onto the bridge.

Gandalf set down his staff and started to chant, quietly yet clearly:

"In fearful day, in raging night,  
>With strong hearts full, our souls ignite.<br>When all seems lost in  
the War of Light,  
>Look to the stars, for hope burns bright!"<p>

His blue-gray robes and hat took on a decidedly brighter hue and he was surrounded in a distinct pale blue nimbus.

\_Shoulda figgered he'd've picked up a Power Ring by now\_, mused the pony. \_And the oath does seem to fit Arda mythology pretty well...\_

The Balrog surged forward, whip cracking.

Gandalf dodged the burning tendrils and took to the air, responding with a series of energy bolts to its face, forcing the larger form further back onto the bridge.

Enraged, Durin's Bane leapt at the blue glowing figure, arms spread wide as if seeking to crush the wizard under its body.

An enormous blue cylinder - Applejack thought it resembled a rolled-up newspaper of all things - knocked the great airborne body into void with a terrible cry. A flailing limb caught the bridge and knocked out a large chunk of rock from the arch.

Its structure weakened, the rest of the bridge followed the Balrog into the chasm several seconds later, leaving two short stubs of rock at either end of the sixteen-yard gap.

Gandalf returned to the ground and started cursing. \_I ain't no expert, but I think he needs to work on his Hutttese accent\_, thought Applejack.

The Company cautiously advanced to the edge of the abyss, staying several wary feet from the ranting wizard.

"That bridge gets broken, shattered, disintegrated, or otherwise destroyed almost every loop. It's been getting on his nerves lately," murmured Aragorn as he joined the pony.

"I kin sympathize. Think he'd mind if I took care of it?"

"Probably best to wait for him to regain his composure."

\* \* \*

><p>{Interlude in Mac's Bar}<p>

"I heard another version of that bit," interrupted Berry Punch.

"Beg pardon?" inquired Applejack politely.

The mixologist held up a placating hoof. "Now, I'm not saying your version is wrong. Just that I've heard a different account. I replaced Butterbur about five to ten loops back, and Aragorn and I got to trading stories..."

\* \* \*

><p>The Balrog surged forward, whip cracking.<p>

Gandalf gracefully slipped to one side, taking to the air in something between a leap and actual levitation. As his foe passed, he slashed with Glamdring, taking off the Balrog's left arm at the shoulder. The severed limb tumbled into the abyss.

"Now stand aside," he ordered.

" 'Tis but a scratch," countered the Balrog.

"A scratch?" asked the incredulous wizard. "Your arm's off!"

"No it isn't."

Watching the familiar (to her) scenario play out, Applejack facehoofed and looked for a nearby pillar or wall to bang her head against.

By the time Durin's Bane had been reduced to a ranting torso, Gandalf was clearly elated. He gently wrapped the demon in a blue halo of energy and deposited it near the south wall of the hall. Beaming, the wizard started shepherding the others to the bridge and beyond.

"I think this may be the first time in over a hundred loops that bridge has remained intact. He's been getting kind of twitchy about it," Aragorn explained to the pony as they organized for the crossing.

\* \* \*

><p>106.9 (Scarecrow11)<p>

Rainbow Awoke mid-flight, but experience had taught her how to not loose her cool and crash. A quick check into Loyalty's magic told her that the Applejack, Rarity, Pinkie Pie, and Fluttershy were all awake, but for some reason she didn't get a location or response from Twilightâ€|

Checking her loop memories, she found that she was still a weather managerâ€| but in Cloudsdale. Apparently she had still dropped out of

flight school, but had stayed in her hometown. Asking around, she found out who her replacement was in Ponyville: Lightning Dust.

Huhâ€¦| this might make for an interesting variation.

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack looked at her unawake sister who was busy tinkering in their garage. That wasn't so strange, but the fact that she was working on the Super Speedy Cider Squeezy 4000 was. This was looking to be a strange loop, as her memories told her that she was still an Apple, but that Sweet Apple Acres didn't belong to them. Apparently after her parents had passed, a distraught Granny Smith had sold the farm to the Flim Flam clan.<p>

Applejack wasn't sure how to feel about that, but figured it might be a good idea to convince Applebloom and Big Mac that a vacation was in order as an excuse to go find her friends, plan out their loopâ€¦| and see how growing up on a farm had changed those two no good swindlers.

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie Pie didn't even slow her bouncing as she made her way down the country road. Her hat never left her head, and her bedazzled cowgirl's shawl flapped in the wind. She was apparently replacing Cheese Sandwich this loop, and that didn't bother her at all. After all: Have Party, Will Travel! <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Futtershy looked at the two goats, who stared blankly back, then out at the crowd, who looked on as though waiting for something. Shaking her head, she adjusted her tie and began her seminar on compassion, kindness, and non-assertiveness. Even though she really wanted to know why she was replacing Iron Will, these ponies had come expecting a show, and it would be so rude to have them leave disappointed. <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Working in Manehattan was always a bit of a thrill for Rarity, even after all this time. While she would always love working in Ponyville, she would not deny that city life was exciting, and the fashion trends unpredictable!<p>

What she liked less was replacing Suri Polomare, that thieving, back stabbingâ€¦| Rarity took a calming breath. There was no reason to get upset, and after the first time it happened to her non-looping self, she'd avoided falling for Suri's schemes every time.

Hearing the ring of the bell above her door, she gave a warm smile to her customer. A smile that only grew when she saw who it was.

"Umâ€¦| hello, my name's Coco Pommelâ€¦| I'm here because I saw an ad saying you needed an assistant?"

Rarity nodded "Of course, and I can already tell you'll be just perfect." Even if she wasn't looping, it'd still be nice to get to

know the nice young mare better. As Pinkie or Twilight would say, you could never have too many friends

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was not amused at her current situation. Glaring at the statue in front of her, she gave the bottom a kick, as though expecting her foot to pass through. Nothing. "Well bark and roots." she grumbled before turning back to Canterlot High. While interesting the first time, high school as a human quickly got old.<p>

It was gonna be a long loopâ€¦|

\* \* \*

><p>106.10 (masterofgames)<p>

Vinyl was busy.

What she was busy doing was a matter for debate. Those just glancing in the window would figure she was busy brushing her teeth. Those in the dorm rooms of the Music Guild Trainee Hall with her would figure she was busy mixing a new track. To Octavia, right behind her, she was clearly laying in bed playing around with what could only be called Electric Keyboard Teeth.

"Vinyl, do I want to know how you are able to do this?" she shouted over the racket of Vinyl's glasses, presently subwoofers, and the blaring of her teeth performing loud music.

"Magic fruit." Vinyl called back, pausing in her playing, then glancing down at her hoof as she noticed the stopped music. "Dang. Note to self, Mouth Organ less than ideal. Can't talk while using it."

Octavia blinked. "Magic fruit? Vinyl, that just raises more questions."

"Ah, chill Tavi. I hardly destroy anything I don't want to anymore!" Vinyl grinned, ignoring the even more perplexed and slightly concerned look on Octavia's face as she stood there with her mouth open, trying to pick between a dozen things to comment on. "I do need an idea for a new instrument though... The guild's talent show next week gives bonus points the farther the instrument used is from their usual one."

Octavia slumped, giving up on making sense of her roommate, and with a sigh reached over to Vinyl, swiped her glasses, and walked out.

"Hey! I need those! Get back here! You can't keep taking my glasses whenever you feel like it! I only have one pair!"

"One of us is drunk! I'm not sure which! You'll get them back when this is no longer the case!"

"Sweet! We going drinking?"

Her response was the slamming of their door as Octavia left.

Vinyl just pouted. "Man, I hate practising on just acoustics." she muttered as she looked down at her bass guitar foreleg, still in need of tuning. "Tavi really needs to lighten up this loop."

\* \* \*

><p>Octavia glanced about the recording studio nervously as she poked her head in. Spotting nopony, she grinned and put on Vinyl's glasses, wildly tussled her mane, and slid the door's lock closed. A few minutes of setup later, and DJ Sym4hony was all set for a rehearsal run. If Vinyl was just using a keyboard, no matter how strange, the talent show this year was hers for sure! <p>

\* \* \*

><p>106.11 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Scotaloo's awakenings were, to put it lightly, a mixed bag. More often than not, she awoke in Ponyville in either a loving home, an abusive one or the local orphanage. The latter two, Scoots often chased down Dash to be adopted. It was not uncommon, however, for her to awake outside Ponyville for whatever reason: from Cloudsdale to Apploosa, from the muddy roads leading from Canterlot to the deep forests of Hollow Shade, she had awoken all over Equestria.

The grime covered alleyway of Manehattan was where Scoots found herself this time. Her stomach was empty, not the 'I'm hungry' type of empty but rather true hunger which gnawed at the mind and drove ponies mad. Her looping memories were fuzzy, with pieces missing. She shook her head, recognizing a memory altering spell from that time she awoke after being neutralized in the MIB universe. She quickly ascended and removed the memory block, which caused her to stagger. She was Scotaloo, the outcast daughter of a former mob boss who instead of letting her be one of his weaknesses, threw her out after his unicorn lieutenant cast a memory charm on her.

She sent out a ping, to which there was no response. She blinked and sent out another ping, then suffused herself with Loyalty's magic to make sure. No Twilight, no Dash, nothing. Gritting her teeth, she reared back and slammed her back hoof into a nearby trashcan, sending tumbling across the alleyway making a huge clatter. Several moments pass as she contemplated her next move, only for a voice from the street echoed, "Hey, someone down there?"

"Chlorophyll," she cursed to herself as she cast a \_notice me not\_ spell. As an alicorn, she had no desire to become a princess of Equestria this loop. Then, the unexpected occurred, "You down there, are you alright?"

The previous voice continued as someone drew closer. Scoots eyes landed on the stallion, an earth pony with a navy blue coat and black mane with a law enforcement badge for a cutie mark and sporting a police cap. His eyes were firmly planted on Scoots, meaning the spell wasn't affecting him. Confused, Scotaloo failed to respond as the larger pony bent over the looper, "Are you alright, kiddo?"

Scotaloo blinked, her wits returning after they took a temporary leave, "Uh...yeah, I'm...I'm just fine."

The police pony gave her a one over, his eyes betraying his disbelief...though at what was a mystery. His voice took on a calming tone, "Are you alone? Do you have any parents or relatives that can take you in?"

Scoots bit her lips, feeling uncomfortable at remembering her parents. She wouldn't head back to him, that's for sure. However, Dash wasn't awake and Twilight was always punctual with responding to the ping. Her thoughts were interrupted by the officer, "Well you don't have to talk about it, yet. You want some pie? I know this nice diner just down the street. In fact, I was just finishing my shift and heading that way. Either that or I can take you to the station where you'll be safe."

The choice was easy with her stomach still screaming at her for food.

\* \* \*

><p>Though the pie paled in comparison to Pinkie's confections, it was indeed good pie. The alicorn crusader wiped her mouth with a napkin, "It's good. Someday, you should try Sugarcube Corner in Ponyville. Pinkie there makes the best pies you've ever tasted, along with every other desert you could imagine."<p>

The pony chuckled, "Though I haven't had much luck with small towns, I may visit someday, just to see if it's better than the one here."

He removed his hat and set it on the filly's head, "By the way, my name is Chief Swan. I'm the chief of Manehattan's police force for the last ten years."

Scotaloo tilted the hat up and gave a bright grin, "Scotaloo, nice to meet you!"

Chief looked at the filly, "Are you from Ponyville?"

"I consider it my home, though I haven't been there in several years," referring to her loop memories of living her whole life in Manehattan.

Chief nodded, "And how long have you been living in that alley?"

Scoots bit her lip, "A few months, after dad threw me out."

Chief's mouth drooped faster than the equestrian train could cover 100 feet, "Now why would someone \_throw out\_ a sweet little filly like you?"

Scotaloo shrugged, "Maybe he thought I was a burden and didn't want to take care of me, or maybe he thought he was protecting me by throwing me out."

The police pony gave a sad grin, "You're a brave girl, surviving on your own like that. Who are your parents?"

With a couple names, the Chief's expression turned neutral, clearly recognizing those names but his eyes still showed deep concern for

the filly. They continued for a bit, with Chief asking questions and giving small jokes to lighten the mood and Scoots answering as best as she could.

\* \* \*

><p>After an hour had passed, the Chief rose from his spot, "Well, I better get you to the station so you can give a statement. I think you'll enjoy it, just think of it like you're a cop helping us solve a puzzle."<p>

As the two made their way out of the diner and through the crowd, Scootaloo decided to send the ping again, just in case she awoke before Twilight this time. The result was, once again, unexpected. As the Ping echoed across Equestria, the police pony stopped mid-stride, turned around and started looking around...almost as if...

Curious now, Scootaloo sent another ping, causing Chief to stare directly at Scootaloo, "Are you the one doing that?"

Scootaloo blinked, "Well, yes? Have you ever...experienced time repeating itself over and over again?"

Chief's surprised expression morphed into a big grin, "So you are also a looper. I'm sorry, I can recognize the ping, but I never felt the need to send my own. I prefer to keep to myself for the most part."

Scootaloo waved it off, "It's OK. What's your actual name and where is your home?"

"My name is Charlie Swan, and I'm in the Twilight loops."

Scootaloo winced, "Ouch, I'm sorry."

Chief shook his head, "That's partially why I keep to myself. People always pity me for that, and being the father of Bella."

Scoots' ears flattened against his head, "I'm sorry. Equestria is a sanctuary, and we should be more open and welcoming than that. Heck, we were better to Leah the first time she came."

The police pony rested his hoof against the top of her mane, "It's OK. I can tell you meant nothing by it. Leah said great things about this place."

With that, the two continued, starting a new conversation about their looping adventures.

\* \* \*

><p>Over the next several weeks, Scootaloo found herself visited by Chief Swan several times, often with visits to the diner they shared. Scootaloo sensed it was getting close to Twist's cutecenera, and she would have to leave Manehattan soon. However as the time wound down, she found herself across from Chief one last time before he popped a big question, "Scoots, I know Dash usually adopts you...but since she's not awake...I was wondering if I could adopt you?"<p>

Scoots was surprised, but accepted it quickly, especially after she



found out he was retiring soon and wanted to settle down in Ponyville. Within a week, the adoption went through and the two found themselves on the train to Ponyville. Scootaloo shared everything about the town, "And finally, be ready for Pinkie's surprise party. Since we're the newest residents, she'll throw us a mega ultra super duper party, especially for families."

Chief gave a small chuckle. "I'm looking forward to it."

As she smiled, Scootaloo idly wondered who'd turn out be the Anchor. If it was one of those Trek stealth Anchors, things could get interesting...

\* \* \*

><p>106.12 (Misterq, Edited by Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

"Hey Ditzzy, what does your cutie mark mean," asked Twilight.

Ditzzy put a hoof to her mouth, "My cutie mark is actually for computer programming. They're little ones and zeroes."

Twilight shook her head, "There aren't any ones there. They're all just zeros."

Ditzzy's eyes widened, "Oh! I guess that explains why my giant robots keep going out of control."

Twilight gave her a look, "What giant-"

The ground shook as a massive Pegasus dropped from the sky, "KILL! CRUSH! DESTROY! DERP!"

The robot's oversized and cross-eyed eyes glowed red, then beams of destruction raked across Ponyville. Thankfully, no one was killed by the blast. Furthermore thanks to the poorly designed targeting system, the only property damage was an insignificant tree library.

A second later, the massive robot was enveloped in a purple glow, then crushed like an aluminium can. Ditzzy looked at her friend, whose mane was frazzled and eye twitching, "Ditzzy, I need to be alone for a bit."

Ditzzy wisely flew away, leaving Twilight to mourn her poor library.

\* \* \*

><p>106.13 (namar13766)<p>

Nyx grinned at her 'older sister.' "Mom, does this technically mean Sunset's having a Sister Loop?"

Twilight just chuckled. "Close enough."

Sunset, the in-loop twin sister of Shining Armor, let out an exasperated but amused huff. "Well then, as your EEEVILLL Older Sister, I propose we go out and eat our body weight in Ice Cream."

"YAY!"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

106.1: She'll take it.

>106.2: It was getting a bit silly.<br>106.3: Pinkie Pie/Pinkie Pie (Pinkie Pie).

>106.4: This one goes to eleven.<br>106.5: Badum-bum-moron.

>106.6: gurrhS.<br>106.7: One of many.

>106.8: This is the first time AJ was in Arda. I know, it's complicated.<br>106.9: Counterparts and trials.

>106.10: Tooth be told.<br>106.11: He learned in a hard school.

>106.12: The ones are too hard!<br>106.13: What a family.

### 113. Chapter 113

#### 107.1 (The One Butcher)

Twilight watched in resignation as the fireball streaked towards her Library, when suddenly a gigantic Pillar of Light erupted from the Building.

"Well," she thought, "at least it will be destroyed in a novel way!" The Light exploded upwards and suddenly Tirek was hit in the face with a supersonic Projectile.

There was a sickening crack as his magical defenses were overcome. Twilight watched in horror as Tirek's head was blown away. "NO!", she shouted, "You killed him!" She looked in the direction of the Light, which had formed into a gigantic fiercely scowling looking Unicorn. Actually going by the proportions of the head it looked like a Unicorn Foal. A vaguely familiar looking Unicorn Foal. On which the fierce expression of divine wrath looked nothing but cute. "Dinky? What the Oak happened to you?"

"Actually it's me!" a cheerful voice greeted her from below.

"Ditzy! You killed Tirek!"

"Actually, while with my three dot speciality on baked goods and Fists of Iron Technique I could actually kill him with one throw, I used Ox-Stunning Blow instead, making the Attack Non-lethal, no matter the overkill."

"\_YOU BLEW HIS HEAD OFF!\_" Twilight shouted.

"Doesn't matter, the Charm says Non-lethal. Angel Bunny volunteered for testing, it still works in Equestria."

"HOW CAN HE STILL BE ALIVE WITHOUT A HEAD?"

"I have a Thrown version of Ox-Stunning Blow." Derpy said, unfazed. "He'll wake up tomorrow and he'll be fine. Angel was too!"

"Wait, when did you try this? When did you Awaken?"

"At the start of the Loop, just like normal. I wanted this to be a surprise!"

"What? That you have the frankly most Bullmanure ability I have ever seen? And didn't let me research it for the whole loop? That you made Science without me?" Twilight protested petulantly.

"Nope!" Ditzzy said proudly, "That!" She said and pointed at the tree Twilight couldn't see for the forest.

\* \* \*

><p>"It looks whole." Twilight gently touched a hoof to the living wood and let her Earth Pony Magic flow through it. "It IS whole... how?"<p>

"Well," Ditzzy began abashedly, "These Powers were made explicitly to disrupt Narrative Causality."

Twilight was still absorbed in the feeling of her whole and unexploded tree. "Okay, that is Bullmanure."

She smiled. "Oh, but such \*\*GLORIOUS BULLMANURE\*\*\_."

\* \* \*

><p>"I found it!" Twilight looked up from her own PADD and gazed at Pinkie Pie. "It's a Storyteller Type Tabletop Roleplaying Game! It's from White Wolf!"<p>

"Good. But Pinkie, I wanted to find everything out myself! We can cross reference with the source later." She turned back to Derpy. "So, statistical analysis of that "Excellency" of yours shows a thirty per cent chance of one sucess and a ten percent chance of two sucesses, the total of which needs to beat a Target number. That Number is lowered by this Second Excellency. The number of dice is determined by your Skill and how much of a Large Bale you are."

Ditzzy giggled. "Kinda. It's called a stunt. Doing things elaborately or with much grandstanding will give me two or three extra dice. A Solar has to be Fabulous\_."

"So... You can easily perform the craziest stunts, but aren't any different in your day to day tasks? And you can expend your Essence to succeed at will, but if you do it too much you start glowing like a bonfire until that giant Dinky appears in a giant Pillar of light." After Tirek was fine and Derpy tied him up with nothing (she had a charm that let her ignore the penalty and treat nothing as "Perfect Tools" for the Job.) this didn't particularly faze her.

"Also I can with time and research expand these powers to do anything, no matter how illogical. It's literally a weapon designed to do impossible things."

"There is something important you should know about those powers." Interjected Pinkie, thrusting a section of the Rules before Twilight.

The colour drained from her face a second later. "Oh, bark! We need to run a check on you at once! They called the Solar Demons because they bore a terrible curse causing them to slowly and sometimes suddenly but temporarily go insane!"

Derpy gulped. "Okay... I'll turn off all my defences so you can check it over. You can break that curse, can't you?"

Twilight winced. "It's several levels over Narrative Causality. An admin could, but it might involve removing your Exaltation, which is... not fun. It's programmed into your soul." Twilight bit her lip. "I'll see what I can do. Maybe I can steer it into a suicidally reckless manifestation instead of a sociopathic one."

Derpy didn't hesitate. "Please do."

Twilight charged her Horn and laid it onto the Pegasus, delving deep into her soul.

The Exaltation was, even Tainted, a thing of beauty. The infinitely complex structures of Autochthon were shored up and made absolute with the shining Essence of the Unconquered Sun. And there it was, the Corrupted Tainted Malediction of the Neverborn, dormant until activated.

Actually... Shouldn't it have been activated already? Derpy's virtue Flaw was... Nothing? There was the Curse, there was the Potential, there was the natural defence of the Mind against it, the Limit Pool. Empty, pristine, unused.

"Say, Derpy, this thing should have gained power each time you were under mental stress or had to fight off Mental influence. How long did you have these powers?"

"Well, the Loop where I got them was sixty four years. I think it would have lasted longer, but the Anchor died of old Age. Or that's what my Investigation Excellency tells me. I don't know much about stress, but for mental influence I had that telepathy thingy Diamond taught me and Vinyl. It's really easy to reinforce with Essence!"

Twilight scratched her head. "So... You just happened to never gain any Limit? I'll give you a copy of the Rulebooks in order to show you what to avoid until we can get admin assistance. I'll have to regularly check you over though." Twilight said warily.

After Ditzzy read through the relevant sections she spoke up again: "Actually, I think my Virtue flaw is Compassion and Worry. But I don't worry."

Twilight gave her a flat stare. "That is probably the Curse talking. You should very much be worried about that curse! It caused countless atrocities in that World!"

"No, Twilight, I mean that I didn't gain any Limit, because I never worry. We should be careful anyway, but I don't think I'll gain much Limit except under really extreme circumstances. I may be a new Looper, but I have enough Memories of countless terrible things that I know it will all turn out alright."

\* \* \*

><p>107.2 (compiled w minor edits by  
Conceptualist)

(masterofgames)

"Okay everypony, new round! What's the smallest loop variant that got you to go nuts?"

(DrTempo)

Sunset smirked. "There was one where the world beyond the mirror was ponies, and my home world was the human one. Yes, that means our pony selves were the ones in high school."

(Dalxein)

Applebloom grumbled. "It was pretty much the same, nopony noticed a difference, but then Ah found out the hard way that magic in Equestria had the same anti-technology effect as Hogwarts magic has a lotta the time. Electricity just didn't work and Ah hated it!"

(Crisis)

"My name was spelled with an 'S'," Fluttershy's whisper was barely audible.

(Conceptualist)

This declaration was met with a bar full of silence. Nopony in the room had anything to say to this.

Big Mac laid a comforting hoof on Fluttershy's shoulder. "Ah'm sorry you had to go through that."

Fluttershy sighed and stared into her drink.

"Okay," said Twilight. "Anypony else have something that could top that? Otherwise, this round goes to Fluttershy."

As the awkward silence continued, Fluttershy looked up from her drink, surprised that she had not been one upped yet. "I was sure that one wasn't the worst of them. Doesn't anypony else have something?"

As she had been the first to speak amidst the deafening silence, Twilight awkwardly replied, "I might have had one or two, but I think I managed to get to Brain Bleach in time for most of them."

"Um," began Fluttershy, "I'm not sure if mine was quite Brain Bleach level."

More silence.

"I really don't think getting flustered more often than baseline was that bad," worried Fluttershy.

The silence was broken as a chorus of noises of realization sprang up

from the group. Twilight spoke over the mummer of everypony else to ask, "The thing you were talking about that time you were Flustershy, wasn't it?"

Fluttershy nodded an affirmative. "What else could I have meant?"

The silence returned, awkward as ever. Twilight broke the quiet (again) to say, "I thought you meant your name had an 'S' at the beginning instead of an 'F' so, yeah."

"Oh. OH! Good gracious, no, it was nothing like that," exclaimed Fluttershy, blushing while she did so. "I just got worked up about small things very easy, instead of being easy or something. I just was shy and got flustered easily."

"Good. Now, since that is settled,-"

"The Sluttershy loop, I went 'Buck this, I am going to Neighico', put an Awake Angel Bunny in charge of my duties to the animals, and then had a nice vacation there. Very low key, but still enjoyable all the same. I wasn't counting that loop because it wasn't Baseline, since I left Ponyville early on in the loop."

Continuing like she had not been interrupted, Twilight said, "-does anypony else have something?"

(feral wolfskin)

Gilda groaned. "There was a loop in which griffons lay eggs, every day!"

(Conceptualist)

Rainbow patted Gilda on the back. "I know exactly how you feel. Some breeds of pegasi do that same thing."

Both Gilda and Rainbow shuddered, drained their drinks, and stared into the depths of the refills that Big Mac poured for them.

(LordCirce)

Zecora spoke up next. "The Loop that had me most disconcerted / was a Loop where all ponies words were inverted."

"?siht ekiL" Pinkie interjected.

Zecora went temporarily cross-eyed, shuddered, and then simply nodded. "Trying to rhyme with every word reversed / is simply, utterly, totally the worst."

(masterofgames)

Scootaloo coughed awkwardly. "Well, Rainbow Dash was looking for a student, and said only the most awesome one at her try-outs would be accepted..."

Apple Bloom groaned, facehoofing. "You went overboard."

"I went overboard." Scoots confirmed with a blush. "This was back before I knew liquid rainbow was sometimes combustible. On the bright side, Rainbow Dash's NEW house looked even cooler."

(Detective Ethan Redfield)

Trixie threw back her cape, "Trixie once had a loop where everyone loved fireworks."

Dead silence met the looper. Someone had to ask, so Twilight spoke, "And how was that maddening?"

The performer took a deep swig of her fermented cider and slammed it on the counter, "Celestia and Luna had switched places. She called herself Eternal Flare, covered the earth in fireworks and said, 'the fireworks will last forever!' And she meant it. They lasted every second...of every...single...day, for five years!"

Celestia failed to hold in a giggle, "I forgot all about that loop. Good times."

Trixie's eyes lit up, "THAT WAS YOU?!"

(misterq)

"Oh, I got one! I got one!" Pinkie Pie bounced in her seat, "There was one loop where every pony was all weird and stuff."

"How so, Pinkie?" Twilight asked.

"Well, I couldn't prove it, but it seemed that every pony could move from one place to another instantly if I wasn't watching them. They could also ignore gravity and pop out of spaces too small for them to hide in, and their reflections wouldn't do what they did, and they could summon duplicates of themselves whenever they felt like it, and," Pinkie's voice took on a hushed conspiratorial tone, "I think they could all sense what would happen in the near future."

All the other ponies at the table just stared at Pinkie.

"But that was all okay," Pinkie completely ignored the stares and continued on, "What \*really\* drove me crazy was that every pony had the same mane style as me. Can you imagine it!? I had to continuously wear a party hat just to stand out."

(LordCirce)

Discord nodded. "Mine is similar to that. At least the last stage-whisper. Everypony could see half-a-second into the future. They kept ruining the punch-lines to all of my jokes. I couldn't keep up, I was behind the times, I was...obsolete." And with that, he turned into a mug and drank his bar stool, while Berry patted him consolingly on the handle.

(Drachefly)

Cheerilee said, "Hoch jatlh Klingon."

Lyra raised a hoof. "I'm sorry?"

"The native language of Equestria was Klingon. Idiomatic Klingon. Twilight played it to the hilt â€" she'd breezily greet Fluttershy with a wish that the blood of her enemies would fertilize her fields, and Fluttershy would reply that she hoped Twilight would die gloriously in battle, if that was all right with her. They were all just things you said without thinking about what they meant. It didn't even impact the foals' behaviour. Foals were rude to each other as ever, but it didn't come down to blows, even if they were talking about ripping lungs out."

(Midnight Crescent)

"Well, only thing Ah can think of was that one where we grew bananas 'stead of apples." Applejack said, trying to gauge everypony's reactions. The roomful of rolled eyes hurt a little. "Did y'all forget Ah'm allergic or somethin'?"

(Conceptualist)

Trixie blinked in surprise. "Since when? Trixie believes that you have not told her magnificence this little detail."

"Since baseline!" Applejack indignantly answered.

"Um," began Twilight, "not to disagree with you on this, but I have seen your UnAwake self eat bananas before. No allergic reaction or anything."

Applejack stubbornly crossed her forelimbs. "Then it must have been a Variant."

"No, it was a Baseline loop. Many Baseline loops, now that I think about it."

"Variants."

"Baseline loops."

"Variants."

Pinkie cheerfully said, "If I may interject, I know for a fact that Applejack does not have any allergies at all, especially about bananas."

Applejack glared at Pinkie. "You callin' me ah liar?"

"Enope," Big Mac chimed in with his catchphrase.

Switching from a glare to a look of confusion, Applejack asked, "What in tarnation are you talkin' about?"

Big Mac took a causal sip of his drink. "Stop and think for a moment. What are we talking about? Variants, and how little they can be. You might have had a loop where you had allergies, but the allergies themselves ain't gonna loop with you all the time. It don't work like that. Still, the memories of having allergies will. And if nothing ever comes up that has you realize something small - like those memories of banana allergies - is not a constant, then you might subconsciously begin to think it is."



A deep breath, and Big Mac continued talking. "And then if something comes along later that reinforces that belief, you could get convinced of it. Maybe in one of your earliest loops you had allergies, then later on this banana loop came along and you had allergies again. This loop, I know that you don't. Heck, I can recall Loop Memories from other loops that include feeding you apple and banana mush when you were a foal. It's not always going to be the same. You should know this, you've been Awake longer than I have. By a lot."

"Huh," sighed Applejack. "Guess I just never thought about it, since it never came up before."

"Exactly," Big Mac agreed.

"Sorry Pinkie for, yah know, saying that you were calling me a liar."

"It's okay!" beamed Pinkie.

(elmagifico)

"So what you're saying is, you just really don't like bananas?"

Princess Celestia's interjection was greeted with a barrage of deadpan looks.

"What? I thought it was funny."

(misterq)

"There was one loop where my name was Squeaky Belle," said the unicorn filly.

Apple Bloom and Scootaloo looked at one another and then broke into uproarious laughter.

"Ha. Ha," intoned Sweetie Belle, "Too bad you two weren't awake for that one. Apple Boom was a tinier version of awake Trixie. And guess what Scoopaloo's special talent was?"

The young orange pegasus thought for a moment and then turned sickly green.

Sweetie Belle continued, "Exactly. And while Opal and Winona enjoyed when you picked up after them during their walks, I still have to say that was the worst cutie mark any of us crusaders ever had."

(FanOfMostEverything)

Derpy scowled and slammed back her cider. "My eyes were aligned."

Glances were traded across the room. "Um... I'm sorry?" offered Fluttershy.

"No pony else's were," Twilight added.

Understanding swept across the bar.

Derpy sighed. "I always try to clean up after myself, but few others were quite as considerate. So, in the land of the derped, the straight-eyed mare was the janitor." She smiled and nodded at the royal sisters. "At least the sun and moonrises were fun. There were daily betting pools on which direction they'd come from."

(Nikas)

Big Mac took a sip of his cider. "There was a loop where Celestia decreed Prohibition. No alcohol at all. Bar ain't a bar with just fresh cider and milk. Had to set up the place as a speakeasy and hide it from AJ, who wasn't awake."

(Hubris Plus)

"Please," Berry rolled her eyes. "I get that you hate hiding things from family, but prohibition is fun. The excitement, the atmosphere, rigging the bar to hide away in hurry during raids."

(Nikas)

Big Mac interrupted. "Convincing Derpy and Scootaloo to be 'couriers' for our 'products'?"

(Conceptualist)

Berry Punch grinned. "I still can't believe they did it. And the moonshine was pretty good to."

Big Mac nodded. "It was kinda fun."

Berry Punch sighed in remembrance. "Luna, awake or not, always does enjoy a glass of moonshine, and she traded me her personal recipe for unlimited refills of it. That and a blackmail photo of Drunkestia got everyone involved a royal pardon. Good times."

(Hubris Plus)

Berry paused to take a fortifying drink before continuing. "No, the real nightmare was the narrative prohibition Loop."

A few glances were exchanged before Cheerilee nodded to her. "Go on."

"I think it was one of the kid friendly Loops. You know, the ones where violence is toned down, or the universe bleeps swearing," she elaborated. "Now, we've all had Loops where alcohol just plain doesn't exist in Equestria, and Mac and I just have to grab it from our Pockets. Once or twice we've decided to go whole hog and invent the stuff. Not that time," she shook her head and stared at her glass for a moment.

"Alcohol was impossible on a conceptual level. Even if I took it out of my Pocket it would just get zapped into something else." She poured herself another glass of wine and swirled it as she went on. "Beer became soda, cider was universally non-alcoholic, and wine was, well... berry punch."

There were a few sympathetic nods from the others.

"A few of the dragon brews that don't technically contain alcohol managed to sneak past the radar, but even alicorn biology has trouble with those. Decided pretty quick they weren't worth the hassle." She downed her drink in one gulp and then stared into the glass again, remembering the longest stretch of sobriety she'd ever put up with.

(feral wolfskin)

"There was a variant in which I secretly was a ninja pirate zombie robot with a troubled past," said Ivory Scroll.

"That don't sound like baseline," Rainbow Dash pointed out.

"You don't understand. That was the only difference. I almost went mad waiting for something different to happen."

"This must be related to that Japanese looking graveyard/factory/pier we destroyed a few loops ago," Lyra whispered to Twilight.

(namar13766)

"Loving Father. Caring Husband. Secret Octopus," Shining Armor snarked.

"You know, Dad wasn't that different that loop," stated Twilight.

(masterofgames)

Dash thought for a bit while others gave their answers. "Well..." she eventually said. "I guess there was that one time Spitfire was my mom. I totally had no shot at the Wonderbolts that time. Not only would everyone claim she was playing favorites and make her retire if I got in, but she had totally seen all my tricks already! I took it a bit personally I guess, and refused to stop trying. I kept inventing wilder and wilder ones to try and impress her. Eventually I just got fed up when she just shrugged off a perfectly performed one I had just made up off the top of my head that I was showing her and Fleetfoot, involving a tornado of thermals, a lightning strike, the planet's magnetic field, and a perfect cloud sculpture recreation of the Wonderbolt's recruitment poster. I drew the line in the sand, and told her that if she could perform ONE trick more impressive, I'd back off, and if not she had to let me join."

Dash slumped in her seat and sighed. "From a STANDING START, she hit mach two, used the air friction to set the sky on fire in her wake, skywrote her name in white fire, complete with dotted Is and crossed T, punched a hole in the sky, wrapped herself in ball lightning, then landed right back where she took off, wearing a corona as a cape. Total time from takeoff to landing? Eight seconds. The worst bit was when Fleetfoot just whistled and said she hadn't seen Spitfire do that since she was my age. I was kind of in a shock induced coma for the rest of the loop." she grinned awkwardly.

Twilight just gave her a flat look. "We said the SMALLEST

change!"

"That WAS a small change! I told you, Spitfire was my mom! She can actually do that in baseline, I checked!"

(Conceptualist)

"There is no way that is baseline," Twilight deadpanned. "No way at all."

"I asked her myself in a couple of different loops. Believe me, it surprised me to."

Twilight shook her head no. "No, nadda chance, no way. I will believe that when I document it myself and have written a formal retraction of my unbelief."

"Aw, come on Twi!"

"Nope, just pick a different one."

"Fine."

In a whisper to Twilight, Rarity said "Five bits on it being 'Dresses in Style.'"

"Ten bits on you being wrong," Twilight whispered back.

(KrisOverstreet)

Rainbow Dash raised her hoof. "My Loop-"

"Yes, yes, we all know, darling," Rarity smiled. "'Dresses In Style,' we've been there with you."

"No, I've got one even simpler," Dash insisted. "This was back before Lyra's experiment started Derpy Looping. There was one Loop where Bubbles was the Element of Loyalty... and I was the cross-eyed klutz. My name really WAS 'Rainbow Crash' that Loop. And I HATED it!"

Trixie grinned. "As they say in the Hub, pics or it didn't happen."

Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes and sighed. "Twilight, I know you have it in your Big Book o'Blackmail."

A few moments later, Twilight was thumbing through a binder marked VOLUME 3B: RAINBOW DASH. "Here it is," she said. "This is what happened when Dashie saved the lives of Bubbles and the Wonderbolts when Bubbles' bubble burst and cracked Cloudsdale Colosseum."

The photographic evidence showed that, crossed eyes or not, Dash had still managed the Sonic Rainboom. The rainbow trail made loop-the-loops, spirals, and in one picture actually spelled out \_Eat At Donut Joe's \_in perfect script hundreds of meters tall.

"After that," Dash continued, "I wasn't allowed to fly unless I carried at least four air sickness bags in my saddlebags. I was

totally humiliated."

"But you did save the Wonderbolts' lives," Twilight insisted. "Even if they wished you hadn't."

(Conceptualist)

"On a side note, pay up Rarity."

Forking over the bits to Twilight, Rarity complained, "I was so sure that it was going to be 'Dresses in Style'."

Rainbow blinked as she processed that. "You two were betting on me? Huh."

(Drachefly)

Rarity sighed. "It was a little thing, really. There was a guest anchor somewhere off, far away. Twilight was as uninterested in fashion as ever. But somehow, she was always better dressed than me. She'd wander into a store and at a glance buy the best dress, best accessories. No lingering choices, no sense of seeking. Just, glance, like that one, buy it."

Twilight snickered.

"It's not funny, Twilight!"

"I can't believe you never figured out I'd just hidden my element and was pranking you!"

"But... your fashion sense isn't that good!"

Twilight took a deep breath. "Rarity, do you have any idea how many times I've gotten fashion advice from unawake versions of yourself? I couldn't do it from scratch, but I can remember."

(Conceptualist)

Grinning, Twilight continued. "Since the fashion thing was a prank, it is disqualified. So pick something else."

Rarity was indignant. "But I didn't know it was a prank. Everything else was still baseline, so it should count!"

"But the thing different wasn't Variance, but simply me doing something different."

"That absolutely still counts as a Variant."

"Yes," chided Twilight. "But it wasn't part of the loop at Awakening. Ergo, the loop was not a Variant Loop, merely a non-Baseline Loop."

Rarity stared at Twilight. "I don't see the reason you are making a distinction, and do not care to read the twenty page thesis that explains why. So I will just pick something else."

"Forty pages, not twenty."

"Stop being such a rules lawyer," chimed in Ivory Scroll. "That's my shtick."

(masterofgames)

Rarity huffed. "No contest for me. Without a doubt, it was the loop that all ponies wore full clothing. It was good for business, but I must admit, I spent too long contemplating the reason socks even existed, trying to justify them, and the next thing I remember I'm leading a one-mare political protest in the buff in the center of town."

(masterofgames)

Ranma tapped a hoof to his chin in thought. "Ryoga fell in the Spring of Drowned Cabbit once."

The implications were pondered.

Twilight shrugged. "Yeah, we aren't beating that one."

\* \* \*

><p>107.3 (Zetrein) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Fog billowed out from inside it, as the doors to the vault swung open. Within the vault, standing straight with his hands clasped behind him, was Discord.<p>

"Discord!" Celestia flared her wings, as she stood protectively in front of Twilight and her friends. Narrowing her eyes, she asked. "What have you done with the Elements of Harmony?"

"Nothing; they're right behind me." Discord said, in a serious tone. "Not that they would help. I've already won."

"This is far from over, Discord." Celestia replied.

"No, it is. From the start, I've had one goal â€" to eliminate humanity â€" and now I've done that," Discord said with a smile.

"Enough of your games, Discord. I've never heard of humanity! You've always tormented my little ponies!" Twilight and her friends silently watched the exchange. Those who were Awake, wanted to see where Discord was going with this; those who weren't just didn't want to get in front of an increasingly hostile Celestia.

"You don't remember?" Discord looked around the hall, before his eyes widened. "Oh. You \_don't\_ remember. I see. I seem to have retroactively eliminated humanity, nobody remembers them anymore." Discord started laughing. "You see, Celestia... I turned you all into magical talking ponies!"

As Discord fell over backwards laughing, Celestia couldn't help but look puzzled at the concept. It did almost seem like something Discord would do, but at such a scale?

The draconequus stood up, still giggling. "Well then, seeing as my job here is done, I'll just be on my way. Thanks to you, I've got ages of vacation time saved up."

With that, Discord turned to the chest containing the Elements, and threw it open. He started to blindly lob the contents over his shoulder, towards the ponies watching. Celestia was quick to catch the Elements as they flew by, while Twilight was quick to catch Miss Smarty Pants as she did the same. Amongst the debris followed other toys, knick-knacks, a rubber duck, Luna's regalia, and a live chicken.

Finally, he stopped to pull out a very large sombrero, and a hawaiian shirt. Donning them, he turned to address them. "I, am going to Disneyland." He vanished with a snap of his claws.

And promptly reappeared a second later. "Does Disneyland still exist?"

\* \* \*

><p>Weeks later, Celestia was walking toward one of the Guard's interview rooms. Hours before, a strange creature had appeared in the castle, seeking her. According to the report Shining Armor gave her, it was claiming to be her missing student, from years past.<p>

Entering the room, she saw the creature sitting at the table. It seemed like some kind of mostly bald, hornless minotaur. Its mane though, matched Celestia's memories of her student. "You claim to be Sunset Shimmer?"

"Princess? Is that you? You're one of them too?" The voice was also that of Sunset Shimmer. "What's going on? Why is everyone... whatever you are? What happened while I was gone?" The wide-eyed confusion seemed honest.

Steeling herself, Celestia asked her most crucial question. "Sunset, what species are you?"

"I'm a human." Sunset's manner now seemed to convey a combination of fear and worry. "Princess, please tell me, what happened?"

\* \* \*

><p>They galloped towards the room containing the mirror portal. It was Celestia's hope that there was something on the other side that could break Discord's enchantment on herself, and from there she could aid her subjects.<p>

Celestia had to check her speed several times, during the run, as Sunset's human form could not keep up with her. Though she had offered, it seemed Sunset thought it would be too disrespectful to ride on Celestia's back.

As they came to the room with the Mirror, they heard the sound of nails being hammered. Entering the doorway, they saw the one being Celestia dearly hoped not to see.

Shaking his hammer at a guard, Discord continued his rant. He had not yet looked to see who was at the door. "I mean, sure, I've got plenty of vacation time, but that doesn't mean I like getting pulled away from it! And all because somepony left a door open."

Slapping another plank onto the Mirror, Discord continued talking as he hammered it into place. "Think of it like your bathtub drain. Leave it open, and all the horse will leak out." Pounding the last nail home, Discord turned to look Celestia in the eye. "And then I have to kill everyone."

With two snaps of his fingers, Discord was gone. Breathing a quiet sigh of relief, Celestia turned to Sunset, only for her words to die in her throat.

"Well," said the goldenrod unicorn Celestia remembered, "I don't think we're going through that portal. What did you need from the humans again?"

"You were a human." Came Celestia's shellshocked reply.

"What? No, I'm a unicorn. I've always been a unicorn." Sunset's brow furrowed in thought. "Well, I think the portal turned me into something different, but I've always been a unicorn... right?"

\* \* \*

><p>107.4 (Gym Quirk) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>To a looper, mere deja vu was just another day at the office.<p>

Still, the details of particularly noteworthy loop beginnings did tend to stick in one's memory.

Aragorn, son of Arathorn (better known in these parts as "Strider") pondered the ineffable workings of the multiverse as the new loop formed around him.

Another "late" Prancing Pony start.

The usual semi-panicked discussion between Butterbur and the hobbits regarding transportation.

At least the pony appeared to be just plain Bill this time around.

The bright magenta flash, on the other hand...

"See? Ya won't know fer sure 'til ya try," the youthful woman told the great lavender winged unicorn after the two had suddenly appeared in the courtyard. She was wearing familiar gray robes and held a staff. Her straw-blond hair was tied back in a simple ponytail.

But her hat was definitely not the large pointed one associated with wizards across the multiverse. It was a more modest well-worn brown stetson he had seen in previous loops.



"This'll make things a whole lot easier," she continued, then turned to look at the others in the courtyard. "Heya, Aragorn! Looks like me and Twilight are replacing Gandalf and Shadowfax this time."

"I'll say it again, Applejack," commented the alicorn. "I don't need to be Rarity to know that hat just doesn't go with those robes."

"Is this one of those 'Talking Pony' variants I've been hearing about?" Sam asked while the other hobbits gawked at the newcomers.

\* \* \*

><p>107.5 (Bardic Knowledge)<p>

Applejack looked to her "brother" this Loop. He was as big as Big Mac, but he was grey with a white mane in a corn-row style. His cutie mark retained Big Mac's half apple, but there was an addition of a blade, giving the impression of having cut it in half.

"It seems I have become a horse," the newcomer said flatly to himself.

"Pony," corrected Applejack. "We can be a mite bit touchy on the proper name."

"Understood."

"I'm Applejack by the way."

"Sten. Though the Loop memories tell me that I'm called Big Slicer." Applejack nodded, then filled him in on Equestria's usual operations. Later, they discovered another Looper, whom Sten had apparently met before.

"Sten."

"Wrex."

"You know what's weird about this one?" said the former Krogan.

"Aside from you being a small rabbit?"

"Yeah, besides that. From what I hear, the rabbit could be an honorary Krogan!"

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, in another Loop...<p>

Shepard was both amused and surprised to find Wrex had been replaced, as his replacement was a white Krogan who only seemed to speak in sign language and had introduced himself as "Angel." However, Angel's ability to leap around the battlefield dispensing pain with a carrot-shaped rocket launcher was far too amusing to leave him on the ship. Ever.

\* \* \*

><p>107.6(Bardic Knowledge)<p>

Twilight Awoke in a bizarre, twisted landscape. The rest of the main Elements of Harmony stood around her, somehow in a combination of Rainbow Power and Alicorn modes. "Anyone know where we are?" she asked.

"It feels kinda familiar," said Pinkie. "But I'm not sure how..."

"I can answer that question!" said a familiar voice from above. Discord the emerged from the floor, upside down umbrella in claw. "Welcome to the Fade!"

"The Fade?" asked Rainbow Dash.

"Realm of dreams in Thedas, the world of Dragon Age. It's also the afterlife."

"Then why are we here?"

"I come here fairly often, relatively speaking," said Discord, buffing a paw on an outcropping of water, "and Warden, the local Anchor, has decided that it's because I'm the 'Spirit of Chaos.'"

Twilight nodded in understanding. "And we're the spirits of the Elements of Harmony."

A car horn sounded as Discord snapped his fingers, "Got it in one!"

\* \* \*

><p>107.7 (The One Butcher) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"That is strange, I don't taste any meringue." Twilight commented just before jumping a foot in the air.<p>

"I GOT YOU NOW!" Pinkie Pie shouted while jumping out from behind a flowerpot.

"I knew it, I knew it! I! KNEW! IT!" She accused. "The strange scheduling, the weird sleeping habits, the fact that even though you are supposedly good friends and we all saved Equestria together lots of times YOU ARE NEVER SEEN TOGETHER!"

Pinkie was panting by now. "Well, hold it right there sugarcube. Is this your weird 'Twilight Sparkle is secretly Rarity in a costume' thing?" Applejack asked deadpan.

"IT'S NOT A THING! I mean, yes it is, but ARGH!" Pinkie groaned in frustration. "I invented these awesome Pony costumes and then I noticed that Twilight always smelled like the special hornpolish! And we DO never see Rarity and Twilight together. AND NOW! You just said that there was meringue in that Cupcake, but THAT IS NOT TRUE! That is a lie I told Rarity to RAT YOU OUT!" with that she took a bucket of Polish remover and upended it over Twilight's

head.

Nothing.

When she began tugging and tearing at Twilight's mane she thought enough is enough. "PINKIE!" She used her Telekinesis to pin Pinkie Pie the pink Party Pony to the wall. Her eyes widened when she saw Pinkie had a knife.

"Okay, okay, okay, YES, me and Rarity have been one and the same Pony for a while now." Twilight gave up.

"AHA! I knew there couldn't be such a Pony! Special Talent is Magic? What a hoax, all special talents are Magic! Super duper powerful? The Princess' Student? Ascended to Alicorn?! And what kind of ridiculous name is Twilight Sparkle? A teenager's idea of a sorry excuse for a Vampony? You should have invented a better story than that, Rarity!" shouted Pinkie Pie.

Twilight pulled her Rarity costume out of her subspace pocket. "I used a spell to hide the smell of the Hornpolish, but I guess it lingered after I shed and dispelled my disguise."

Applejack's jaw completed it's journey. "But... but I knew Rarity nearly her whole life! Big Mac foalsat for her!"

Pinkie Pie was quicker on the uptake: "What did you do with the real Rarity?"

"She asked me to cover for her while she eloped with a Dragon." Twilight deadpanned.

"Oh, okay!" Smiled Pinkie Pie and hopped out of the room, forgetting the fact that she was still pinned to a wall.

All was right again.

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, far away a certain Unicorn got a shiver down her back and had a strange premonition of remedial Birthday Parties. She snuggled into her lover's scaly chest and dismissed the feeling.  
<p>

\* \* \*

><p>107.8<p>

"Silver Spoon!" Cheerilee said, frowning. "What do you have to say for yourself, young mare?"

The earth pony looked at her teacher as she put her satchel down. "What is it, Miss?"

"You're very late to school!" Cheerilee pointed out the window. "It's nearly noon!"

Silver Spoon looked out the window as well, idly tapping a hoof on the floor. "No it isn't."

Cheerilee took a moment to reply to that. "Young mare, that is not-"

"Hey, why's it dark outside?" asked Snips, talking over the top of her.

"-the appropriate-!" Cheerilee broke off, and gaped. "What the-"

The sun was barely peeking over the edge of the rooftops, with warm dawn light slowly suffusing the town.

"But..." Cheerilee closed her eyes, shook her head, and opened them again. "We don't have... okay. I'm not sure what's going on here, but... I apologize for thinking you were late, I suppose. Now, go sit down."

"Okay!"

Silver flipped her long, bushy tail aside, and sat. Then she raised her hoof. "Miss?"

"What is it, Silver?" Cheerilee asked, turning.

"Can we go home? It's already sunset!"

Cheerilee slowly turned from the board to look out the eastern windows, which were dark.

Then she looked at the western window, which had a red sun slowly sinking behind a hill.

"...okay, fine. I don't even know what's going on any more..."

Fillies and colts poured out of the building, not wanting to miss a good thing.

\* \* \*

><p>"So," Discord asked, dangling from a tree. "Didn't feel like school today?"<p>

"Not especially, no," Silver confirmed. "By the way, it's nice of you and Berry to take me in this time. Now that my Dad's vanished as well this loop, and all."

"Oh, pish tosh." Discord shrugged an upside down shrug, which inexplicably resulted in him falling sideways into the tree trunk with a \_thud\_. "For all I know, we may \_be\_ your parents. You are a draconequus, after all."

"But..." Silver blinked. "I could swear you only got out of the statue last..."

She shook her head. "Never mind. Like you keep saying,"

"Draconequui don't make sense, it's boring," they chorused.

"Speaking of which, one crumpet or two?" Discord added.

"Just one for me, thanks." Silver accepted the plate of breakfast, and began to eat as the sun set. "How's Ruby been today?"

"Confused," Discord replied. "But chipper. She gave me a paper note which was redeemable for one hug. I'm thinking of saving them up..."

\* \* \*

><p>107.9<p>

Captain Jean-Luc Picard blinked, as he Awoke into a new loop.

His thought process went through two very quick realizations.

First: \_Oh, back to normal.\_ (It was something of a relief, in some ways, after that loop in the Republic of Haven.)

Second: \_Ah, tabernacale. The borg.\_

Whether by random chance or connivance of Q (Picard didn't trust anything he said on principle, especially about things he couldn't do), he'd just Awoken about three seconds before the Borg started implanting things into him back at J-25.

Picard spent the few seconds he had practising a Talaxian technique for emptying the mind of everything one did not want to remember. Normal Borg were bad enough " Borg with knowledge of the future were... terrifying.

When the expected pain of implantation did not occur, Picard opened one eye cautiously. Then the other, and looked around in confusion.

The drones were standing back around the room he was in, in a fair semblance of parade rest. The equipment that had been about to get to work on him lay scattered all over the floor.

Then a screen lit.

A woman appeared upon it. She was seated, wearing a long, slinky black-and-green dress and a small black coronet " one which did not conceal the Borg implants around the orbit of her left eye, on her right cheekbone, and along the line of her lower jaw on both sides.

"I am the Borg," she began, a smirk curling her lips. "Our biological and technological distinctiveness will be added to your own. Resistance is irrelevant, we are applying for citizenship."

Picard felt almost aggrieved by the whole situation.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Somehow I doubt the Borg that I know would act like this."

"Dear me, Picard," she said, shaking her head. "You don't recognize me? Here's a clue."

The Cube Picard was on shook slightly, and he glanced away from the screen.

"Don't worry," the woman commented. "I've strengthened the shields to maximum, and I'm not firing back. Anyway, here's the clue. I'm sorry for calling you away from your fish dish, but I really felt quite strongly that there were five lights."

With that, everything fell into place.

"You are... Chrysalis?" he checked.

"That's right, Captain," Chrysalis replied. "It feels all very familiar â€" I make something of a career out of running a nice little hive mind back home, though this one's just a bit bigger â€" and I've already instituted reforms."

Picard raised an eyebrow, in the way he'd seen Vulcans practising in front of mirrors. The restraints hissed and let him go, and he stood up and walked forward a bit. "Reforms?"

"Assimilation is now entirely voluntary. Drones can leave if they want. The Federation's about to get a very large box containing all the interesting scientific stuff I'm willing to let within ten thousand light years of Section 31, and I meant it about applying for citizenship."

After a moment, Picard worked though the implications of that last one, and felt a headache coming on. "So you mean... the Borg are going to apply to immigrate into the Federation?"

"Not quite. More... join it." Chrysalis made an expansive gesture. "I rather like the idea of the hive trying to parse the Prime Directive, especially with how often Fleet captains have bent it into a pretzel."

"We do not speak of Archer," Picard quipped.

"Indeed." Chrysalis' eyes unfocused for a moment. "Oh, dear, your ship is getting very insistent. Hold on a minute."

The Cube shuddered for a moment.

"What did you just do?" Picard asked.

"Set course directly for Risa and started broadcasting loud music on all frequencies." The Borg Queen's expression was like a cat that had gotten into the cream. "I look forward to hearing you explain that it was not your assimilation that set an entire Borg ship on a direct course for booty. Coincidentally, I just found where my girlfriend's hiding this loop."

With that, the connection closed.

\* \* \*

><p>Patricia Hansen looked over the jumpsuit dubiously.  
"Really?"<p>

Chrysalis shrugged. "It's what you're supposed to be wearing."

"I'm barely sixteen, Chrissy." Trixie shook her head. "I think I'm going to stick with the Borg suit. It's less revealing. Now, what was it you were saying?"

"Two things, mainly." Chrysalis shrugged. "First, you're now a Primary adjunct of Unimatrix 01 â€" or, in other words, my secretary â€" and second, I found how to make an imperfect Omega particle."

Trixie searched her encyclopaedic memory of ways to make thing go boom, and a grin spread across her face.

"Fireworks the size of a supergiant star?"

"Fireworks the size of a supergiant star."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

107.1: Under normal circumstances, Exaltations are removed by the admins once you leave the loop. Thing is, they determine what to remove based on Limit... she'll be right. No worries.

>107.2: No change whatsoever.<br>107.3: That's kind of cruel. But funny.

>107.4: This is Twilight Sparkle, the lady of all horses - stop laughing! The Rohirrim ran out of impressive names with Firefoot and Snowmane.<br>107.5: Sten's got this monomolecular crystal knife, see...

>107.6: Speaking of RPGs by a certain publishing company.<br>107.7: Filling in for a friend.

>107.8: He's going to spend them all right at the end of the loop. Except for one, which goes in his pocket.<br>107.9: ...basically, The Best of Both Friendship Ones.

## 114. Chapter 114

108.1

"Oy, cousin!" Gilda shouted, kicking down the door of the Gryphon Throne Room. "Clear out these tossers, we've got business."

"Sod off, Gilda," the Emperor of the Gryphons replied, flicking a two-talon salute at her without looking. "I'm busy."

Gilda gave the â€" rather scrawny â€" petitioners a glance. Then traipsed around behind them, peered over the shoulder of one at his notes, and elbowed him. "Oi."

"What?" the scholarly gryphon replied, bristling, and his friend reached for a pair of sabres in cross-draw scabbards.

The element of honesty dropped a bag on the floor. It cracked the paving slab. "Here. Cash. Go implement it, it'll be cool."

The scholar looked from her to the bag, then nodded, and picked it up â€" not without considerable effort.

With his friend helping, they left in haste.

"Busy now?" Gilda asked.

"Not especially, no." The Emperor lay back on his throne. "What is it? Need money?"

Gilda gave him a look. "I just gave twenty pounds of solid gold to someone wanting to build a geology museum. I am on an expense account you would not believe."

"Not gold then..." the Emperor sighed. "Did I forget your birthday?"

"Three times in the past seven years, but that's not the point. The point is," Gilda made a grand gesture. "I challenge you to a duel!"

The Emperor blinked, then shifted on his throne. His muscles tensed, subtly. "Did you make an appointment?"

"Nah, just beat up all your guards." She tossed him a leather wallet. "Here. It's your guard captain's. He's got membership cards in eight different libraries â€" wonder where he finds the time..."

"So, a coup then." Another sigh. "I wouldn't have thought you as one to try a coup. I thought you liked ponies."

"Yeah, speaking of that." Gilda turned to the door. "That's your cue, flutterflank."

It creaked open, and a number of spears clattered to the floor. A gryphon that had been slumped against it also fell slowly inside, groaning.

Fluttershy walked through the door, wearing gryphon-shaped armour that didn't fit. "Um... okay."

"She's my new guard," Gilda stage-whispered, then turned back to Fluttershy. "Okay, remember your lines?"

Fluttershy nodded, wringing her hooves.

"Good." Gilda pointed at the Emperor again. "I challenge you before the People, before the Empire, and by our shared membership in the Royal Family, for your office and all that it represents."

"I accept," the Emperor replied formally. "And I say â€" until the first gryphon yields, or falls unconscious and can battle no more."

Fluttershy raised a hoof. "Er... by right of my position as arms-pony of Gilda, challenger in this duel, I take her place and stand before her."

The Emperor couldn't help but snigger. "Very well. I will beat your... guard... in your place. Seriously, Gilda, you've gone soft..."

"Yeah, whatever." Gilda stepped back. "Go easy on him, Flutters." A



pause. "Relatively easy." Another pause. "Well, you know, don't maim him or anything."

Fluttershy nodded, giving off a little squeak noise. Then turned to the Emperor, and abruptly transformed into a forty-foot-tall \_Tyrannosaurus Rex.\_

"Roar," it said courteously.

"...huh," the Emperor said, distantly. "Never knew they could do that."

"Flutter is kinda talented," Gilda replied.

\* \* \*

><p>"And, by right of conquest, we crown thee Empress of the Gryphons."<p>

The upper council of dukes bowed.

"What is your first command, my liege?" asked the Grand Duke of the Central Plains.

"Um... can I have some mint tea, please?"

\* \* \*

><p>Gilda sniggered. "I've been trying to get that to work for <em>so<em> long."

"Really?" the former Emperor asked, checking his side for bruises. "It looks like your guard just knocked you out as well as me."

"Well, yeah, my original plan was to get Flutter on the throne." Gilda shrugged. "The tricky bit was doing it \_legally.\_"

\* \* \*

><p>108.2<p>

"Here you go, dear," Spike announced, revealing from behind his back a bale of cloth.

"Um... thank you, Spike," Rarity replied. "What is it?"

"It's Weave." Spike held it out. "Go on, try it."

Rarity held out a hoof, and let a trailing edge of the cloth play over her foreleg. "It... feels most peculiar. What-" she paused.

"Did you call it Weave?" she asked, horn lighting up.

"Yep." Spike grinned.

"...it's the original weft, as well," she breathed, a potent scrying spell backscattering rainbow light across her muzzle. "How on Faerun did you get this?"

"Eh." Spike shrugged. "I did Midnight a favour, she got me some of Mysteryl's original. Turns out a Great Wyrmling is really useful during the interregnum."

Rarity felt the soft material again, holding it up to the light to let it iridesce in the glare of Celestia's sun. "Well, well. I can see many possibilities for this. What's the occasion?"

"It's your one-hundred-millionth loop!" the purple dragon announced.

His wife frowned at him. "...I doubt that."

"Unless you can prove otherwise, I'm maintaining that it is," Spike countered.

Rarity put the Weave down carefully, trotted over and poked him â€" eliciting a giggle. "You just wanted to do something nice for me, didn't you?"

"I admit nothing-"

Rarity poked him again. This time he giggled a bit louder.

"I know exactly where you're ticklish, Spike, this isn't going to end well for you!" Rarity announced, smiling broadly herself.

"I'll never talk!"

"Don't count on it." Rarity tensed, then pounced, and delighted laughter rang through the Boutique.

\* \* \*

><p>"...yeah, I'm thinking we go to your place, 'Bloom," Sweetie Belle said apologetically, lowering her hoof from the door knocker. "Best to leave those two to it."<p>

"Sure," the earth pony filly agreed readily, and both of them traipsed back over to Scootaloo's cart.

"We really need to get the clubhouse built," Scootaloo volunteered, as she kicked off. "What's keeping you, AB?"

"I want this one to have an escalator. Made entirely of wood." Applebloom shrugged. "It's a project."

"Hasn't that been done?" Scootaloo asked.

"Nah. I mean the engine, too."

\* \* \*

><p>108.3<p>

Bilbo Baggins sighed. "Okay, what this time?"

The tall woman wearing a travelling cloak winked at him. "I am Leah the Clear, and I wish to recruit you on a-

"Yes, yes, we've all been here before." Bilbo opened the door fully.  
"I assume you're an Anchor?"

"Yep." Leah walked in, and put her staff down. "Nice place."

"Thank you," Bilbo replied. "Tea?"

"Oh, yes \_please.\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"So," Bilbo asked, some time later. "What else is different? Or have you not gotten word yet?"<p>

"Oh, I have." Leah smiled mysteriously. "I invited them early, by the way."

The door thudded.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hi," a short, cloaked figure said. "I'm Spike, and he's Storm."<p>

The other figure waved.

Throwing back their cloaks, the two small dragons made a bee-line for Bilbo's pantry.

The Hobbit sighed. He was used to it, really he was... it's just that it got trying, sometimes.

\* \* \*

><p>"Toothless and Draycos," the next pair introduced themselves. "We heard there was food?"<p>

"But we already ate," Draycos added.

"Oh." Bilbo blinked. "That's... actually quite a new experience."

"We wouldn't say no to dessert, though..."

"Of course you wouldn't."

"Don't worry!" Leah's voice drifted through the building. "I've got some spare in my pocket!"

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm Anne,"<p>

"Julian,"

"And I'm Dick," the last of the three added. "I say, your manners are impeccable!"

"Why, thank you," Bilbo allowed. "I do try."

"Just tea for us," Anne added. "It wouldn't be polite to impose."

\* \* \*

><p>"Pray, allow us to enter your fine abode, sir," the ninth visitor asked, gesturing to his two companions. "I am Corporal Temeraire, and these are Saphira and Spyro."<p>

"The one who's not a jerk," Spyro supplied.

"Actually, that doesn't help tell you apart in the slightest," Saphira pointed out, chuckling.

"...fine, then. Come in come in..."

\* \* \*

><p>When Bilbo finally got a chance to head to the table, it was to see one werewolf-mage and a round dozen dragons around the table.<p>

"Er..." he muttered under his breath. "I think I missed letting you two in..."

\_We let ourselves in,\_ a mellifluous mental voice supplied. \_I am Mnementh, and my compatriot is Ninereeds.\_

"You know," Bilbo said, mostly to the air. "I'm getting a sinking feeling about this..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Evening, little hobbit," the final arrival said. "So, this is where you live."<p>

"Don't torch it next time," Bilbo warned. "Or I'll get Gandalf to flood your lair."

"Don't be so confrontational," Smaug Golden-Scale smiled. "We're all allies here."

"Yeah, about that..."

\* \* \*

><p>"And so," Leah concluded, spoiling the effect a bit with a giggling fit, "these thirteen drakes-"<p>

"\_Twelve\_ drakes," Saphira interrupted.

"My apologies... \_twelve\_ drakes and one dragoness were thrown out of their lair by... this."

Leah put a picture on the table.

Bilbo stared for a moment. "...you have got to be having me on."

"No, it's all true," Spike supplied, sniggering himself. "Thirteen

dragons thrown out of Erebor by a gigantic mecha-dwarf."

After a few more seconds, Bilbo turned around. "I'm going back to bed."

\* \* \*

><p>108.4<p>

"Show me another one!" Scootaloo begged.

"Certainly." The adult pegasus fumbled for a moment, then an aircraft of about 30 feet of wingspan bounced down to the floor next to him.

Scootaloo jumped forward, wings whirring, and tapped the skin. "Stressed metal..."

She inspected the aircraft from all angles. The propeller was noted, the propeller-hub 20mm cannon and pair of 20mm wing cannons raised an eyebrow, and the engine made her blink.

"Is this a Griffon?" she asked, muzzle half into the inspection panel.

"Almost." The tan pegasus smiled enigmatically. "Any thoughts?"

"Only that you've clearly been messing around with history." Scootaloo hopped up to check on the cockpit, and gaped.

"That's aerial interception radar!"

The stallion nodded. "Yep. And check the wing chord."

She duly did so.

"Elliptical..." The young Element of Loyalty shook her head. "This thing's got so many of the design elements of a Spitfire that I'm almost tempted to say that it's one of those... but it's clearly not. I know spits, and this isn't a spit."

"Correcte. C'est une S-D 200 'Shrike' Supermarine-Dewoitine."

Scootaloo blinked. "The only bit of that I understood was the word Supermarine." A pause. "And since when did you speak French willingly, Biggles?"

She peered down the side of the Shrike. "And... what the bramble is that roundel? And I don't even know what the hay's up with the flag."

"Well." The stallion coughed. "I may have discovered how to get the proposal of 16 June 1940 to be accepted nine times out of ten."

The filly just gave him a look. "That might mean something to human loopers, but we're ponies. We're usually too busy being human to go to history class much."

"No, that's quite alright. Actually, no-one's ever heard of it." Biggles shrugged. "Long story short, when France was collapsing in 1940, Parliament offered to join the British and French nations into one union."

Scotaloo fell out of the plane.

"I know!" Biggles grinned, helping her up. "Everyone does that. Anyway, that's where this comes from. It's a model used in the libration in 1943."

"...okay, yeah, you probably win this round." Scotaloo tapped a hoof on the ground. "Okay, next one. Strangest way of using an aircraft you've seen."

Biggles frowned, thinking. "I did see a jet biplane with reinforced wings used to cut power cables once..."

\* \* \*

><p>108.5:<p>

Diamond Tiara looked up at her friend.

"Okay, this is a new one even for you."

"I'd noticed," Silver replied, loudly. She couldn't help it â€" her current body did everything loudly.

"Why don't you just... you know, shapeshift?"

"'cause I've been going to the school like this for five months. I'd actually be more conspicuous if I changed away from it." Silver shrugged.

The bell rang, interrupting their discussion.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay..." Cheerilee looked down at the register.  
"Scotaloo?"<p>

"Here."

"Silver?"

A blast of sound that made the windows ring. Inside it could be distinguished a voice saying 'here'.

"Snails?"

"Here."

The register continued without further incident.

\* \* \*

><p>"I don't even know *what* the logic is for you being a Parasaurolophus," Nyx observed that evening over Crusader Cupcakes.

"I think I managed to work it out, actually," Sweetie volunteered.

Silver looked up from her cupcake (dozens of times the size of those for anyone else, on account of her body mass.) "Really?"

"Yeah. Duck-billed dinosaurs are kind of misnamed. They actually have spoon-shaped beaks."

"Right." Silver concentrated, erupted in light, and reformed as a draconequus. "I refuse to be a living pun."

"Plus," Diamond Tiara added, pointing. "You now have more cake than actual you."

"That may have been a factor." Silver shrugged, then headed cakewards.

\* \* \*

><p>108.6<p>

"Ah, hello Lyra," Twilight began, approaching her. "It's taken a while for me to find you."

"Looking in the wrong place?" Lyra asked.

"More like the wrong loop, actually." Twilight shrugged. "I know it was just last time around as far as you're concerned, but for me it can actually be quite a long time."

"Fair enough." Lyra shrugged. "So, what you got?"

Twilight paused slightly. "I assume I'm talking to the mad scientist?"

"Why does everyone call me that?" Lyra asked, exasperated. "I'm not that crazy..."

Twilight coughed. "Maybe not by Trixie standards, but that's still not precisely sane. Besides, with her it's partly an act."

"Okay, point taken." Lyra winced. "Is it possible to win an argument with you?"

"Yes," Twilight replied simply.

"...walked into that one... okay. What was it you wanted."

"Right." Twilight took a breath. "Lyra. If the option became available for you to become an alicorn, would you take it?"

Lyra blinked. "Whoo, that's a big question. I'm... not sure, actually. Can you give me more information?"

She looked at Twilight, just to see if â€" despite her large subspace pocket â€" the other unicorn was somehow concealing an alicornification machine behind her back. "Is this a now-or-never thing, or what?"

"Oh!" Twilight shook her head. "No, it's not something that's got a time limit. It's not really something that's got a \_time,\_ per se. It's more... if the option comes up for me to steer you into ascending, do I take the option or not?"

She tossed her head. "I like to make sure that things like that have the full consent of the pony in question."

"Right, right. Hold on a sec."

Twilight waited patiently.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, what do you think?" the sea pony asked. "I don't know, myself..."<p>

"Yeah, it's a big step," the unicorn agreed. "I... I think it wouldn't be a good idea, at least not yet, because we're still feeling our way into being \_us\_ in the first place. And, well, as far as I can tell becoming an alicorn would mean I'd be the one affected."

She shrugged. "I wouldn't want that."

"Huh, interesting view," the 'other' one said. "I don't know, really... what about you?"

"Be a \_winged\_ unicorn pony?" the human asked. "I think it'd be awesome!"

The other three rolled their eyes.

"Seriously, though," she said, jumping down off the 'bed' in their shared mindscape. "I'm all for it. It's not a joke, I know that, but I think it'd be a useful experience that might help to reconcile our personalities."

"Now, see," the sea pony said. "I don't know if I \_want\_ us to reconcile our personalities, at least right now. I'm... just not sure. But..." she thrashed her flippers, sending metawater everywhere. "I \_like\_ you guys, and I like having me to talk to. I'm not sure how we'd cope if we were one personality again, to be honest..."

The unicorn nodded. "Good point."

The one currently in charge of their shared body looked around at them. "No consensus, I take it?"

"Looks like not," the sea pony confirmed.

"Okay. Vote?"

"For," the human girl said.

"Against," the sea pony replied.

"...I guess, yeah, mermare's got a point, and I was thinking that way



anyway. Against," the unicorn said.

"And I genuinely don't know," the miscellaneous Lyra finished. "Okay. I'll let Twilight know."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well?" Twilight asked.<p>

"I'm in three minds about it," Lyra informed her. "The one who says yes is outnumbered three to one, though."

"Okay." Twilight nodded. "I'll remember that. The offer remains open, though."

"I figured, thanks." Lyra paused. "Hey, how would it work if I said yes, anyway?"

Twilight smiled. "I'd wait long enough it wasn't in the front of your mind any more, then try to get you, a major adventure and an Element or other catalyst in the same place at the same time. And yes, it has to be a long time, because if you're trying it doesn't work."

"Huh." Lyra absorbed that. "Interesting..."

\* \* \*

><p>108.7 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Twilight trotted into her Canterlot tower library, ready to begin another baseline Loop. "Spike! Spiiiiike!"

A purple dog with green fur on its ears scrambled up to her, tail wagging furiously.

"Um... what? Spike?"

The dog barked happily, bouncing up to greet his mistress.

"O... kay. My assistant is a dog, and not Awake this Loop." Twilight took a moment to run her hoof through doggy Spike's fur. "I should learn to check Loop memories even in baseline Loops."

"I beg your pardon, Mistress Twilight." The voice was a bit high-pitched, refined, and had a musical accent to it. "I thought you might have wanted me for something, but I see you were just greeting dear little Spike." A dragon waddled out from a side room bearing a birthday gift. Unlike Spike, this dragon was brown, nearly spherical, wearing a cardigan, and looking through pince-nez glasses perched on the tiny beaklike muzzle that clung to his large, broad face.

"Er... Ah... Owlowiscious?"

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash leaned against the gargantuan bulk of the green elder dragon and shrugged. "Yeah, all our pets are dragons this Loop. Of course Tank couldn't get much more awesome anyway, but I think he's enjoying himself."<p>

"You know, we've never got confirmation that he's Looping," Twilight pointed out.

The smile on Tank's immense beak made the Mona Lisa look naif. His vocabulary made Big Mac look garrulous. Twilight decided not to waste her time trying and failing to get the lowdown now.

Rarity sat to a long, slender white wyrm who stared at the other ponies and dragons with silent disdain. "Perhaps not all of our pets have changed. Gummy doesn't look any different."

"What do you mean, he doesn't look different? Isn't it obvious?" Pinkie Pie pointed dramatically at Gummy's forelegs. "Gummy's thumbs are a whole quarter inch larger!"

Gummy blinked his wall-eyed blink, shook, and belched out a brief fireball.

"Oh, yeah," Pinkie added offhandedly, "and there's also that."

"I'm sorry I'm late," Fluttershy murmured, walking up with a picnic basket on her back. "I had to get the birds to finish their rehearsal quickly so we could have this meeting. And then Angel--"

The white dragon accompanying Fluttershy was more or less shaped like Spike, except for long, tall ear ridges instead of Spike's smaller ones. "THERE YOU ARE!" he shouted. "You have NO IDEA how long I've been waiting for this day! Would you like to guess how many HUNDRED THOUSAND LOOPS it's been since I had one where I could TALK?" The Looping bunny-turned-dragon cracked his knuckles and grinned a buck-toothed grin. "Sit down and get comfortable, jerks, because I've got a LOT of things I've been saving up to tell you..."

\* \* \*

><p>"You know, I don't think I've ever heard of a Loop being crashed by sheer profanity before." Twilight sipped her drink and contemplated the astounding synergy of curses, maledicta, obscenities and f-bombs (and c-bombs, d-bombs, s-bombs, and in fact every letter from a to z-bombs) that had destroyed what looked like a fascinating Loop.<p>

"Well, I'm sure Angel has learned his lesson," Fluttershy said. "He's going this entire loop without the cherry on top of his salads. No cherries for potty-mouths."

Angel Bunny, seated between Fluttershy's forehooves, crossed his forelegs and sulked.

"Oh, do stop sulking and drink your Shirley Temple."

\* \* \*

><p>108.8 (Snakes Shadow)<p>

Twilight, as per normal, Awoke in front of her book in the gardens of Canterlot. She was about to check her loop memories when her book caught her eye. It wasn't the normal book on Equestrian mythologies. It was a history of Equestria, and open to a timeline. 1500 years ago was the defeat of Discord. 1000 years (Minus a few days) was the

banishment of Luna as Nightmare Moon. 800 years ago, The Plague started. The line for the plague continued to the current day.

Twilight checked her Loop memories. The Plague had an unknown source, but was magical in nature. It seemed to invade through a pony's cutie mark, warping the pony's special talent, driving them insane and eventually causing their death. Celestia had found a stop-gap measure: a cutie mark suppressor spell, much like the branding spell used by Celestia in that horrible slaver Equestria loop but without punishment triggers or additional mental effects, blocked the acquisition of a cutie mark thus preventing the plague from attacking the pony, yet still allowed active use of a pony's special talent. It wore heavily on Celestia, however. Hundreds of unicorns had the task of raising the sun and moon because Celestia could not.

Twilight walked to her rooms, deep in thought. She was so deep in thought, she managed to trip over an invisible seam in the carpeting, crashing to the floor outside of the council chambers. She stood up and was about to continue on her way when Celestia's thundering use of The Royal Canterlot Voice passed clearly through the closed doors.

"\*\*She hatched a dragonet from a \*\*\_\*\*DEAD\*\*\*\* Dragon's egg! If anyone can end this plague, it \*\*\*\*WILL\*\*\*\* be her!\*\*\_" Then nothing. Celestia must have gone back to a more normal tone of voice. ...Wait, Spike's egg was dead in this loop? She had to check something.

Twilight made a mad dash for her rooms.  
>"Spike! SPIKE! Where are you!"<p>

"Over here, Twi! Why didn't you send out a ping?"

"Too busy! Where's that information on Princess Cadence?"

"Umm... Here. Why?" Spike handed Twilight a slim sheaf of paper. She immediately looked through it, searching for the information she needed. There!

"We are in a baseline loop with one exception, a plague that started eight hundred years ago. The only pony to survive the plague un-branded was Princess Cadence, who ascended into alicorn-hood. It's going to take some doing, but we're going to make every single pony on this world into an alicorn. Hopefully at the same time."

Only then did Twilight check for other loopers. With the exception of Celestia and Luna, everyone was there. Good. Then she cast a spell that hopefully would tell her if there were any guest loopers. ...Nothing. Twilight honestly hoped that there were no visiting loopers, because this one was going to suck until she got everyone to ascend.

Twilight then started on two plans: One to show Celestia, and one that had all of her foreknowledge.

\* \* \*

><p>108.9 (elmagnifico)<p>

Macintosh poked at his drink. He really didn't know what to do with this conversation, and it wasn't like he could really commiserate with a robot-armor-necklace.

The hard part, he'd thought, had been convincing Applebloom to part with Cookie without arousing her suspicions. In the end, he had decided to err on the side of honesty, and told her he just wanted to get to know the device.

A holographic display lit up, projecting over the featureless carapace the shimmering visage of a filly that held superficial similarity to Applebloom, but with facial structures more associated with the old families of Canterlot.

"Does this make it easier?"

"Eeyup."

With that settled, Macintosh looked Cookie's avatar in the eye.

"So, yer a projection of tha' personality that overwrote Applebloom's for that Nightmare Night loop ah've heard so much about?"

Cookie nodded.

"Affirmative."

Macintosh continued.

"And since then, ye've become like an advisor to Bloom, tellin' her when an idea's bad, listenin' when she needs to talk, that sort of stuff."

"Indeed."

"And, based on how it was explained to me, you're made out of a piece of Applebloom's soul, much like one of the Elements are part of who ma sister an' the others are."

"Yes."

There was a moment of silence, before Macintosh broke the tension with a smile.

"Well, you got a bit of Applebloom in ya, so I reckon that makes you an Apple, even if yer friendship with mah sister didn't. Next everyone's Awake, we'll see about gettin' you a proper welcome-to-the-family party."

The smile faded.

"But before that happens, ah want to ask you a favor, Cookie. Apple to Apple."

Macintosh continued, his voice slowly rising from a whisper to a determined enunciation that made up for lack of volume with the emotion behind it.

"Applejack is fine. She's grown up, an' probably more stable than ah am. She don't need me. But Applebloom's different. Or she was. She

was mah \*little\* sister. Now, this whole time thing has got it so's she's probably ten times mah age by now. An' that hurts. Ah can't always be there for Applebloom, jus' bah dint of how the loops work. Ah know it's not good for me to hold her hoof every step of the way, but it's also mah responsibility to be there when she NEEDS me."

There wasn't a tear in his eye. That was clearly some of the cider foam that had popped and gotten there. He wiped it away.

"So, ah want you to keep doin' what yer doin. Be the older sibling ah can't, because I can't be sure to be there when she needs it."

The silence stretched for a bit, before Cookie broke it.

"I will."

Macintosh sighed. That was a relief.

"Mah thanks to you then."

He opened his mouth to end the conversation, but closed it abruptly. He had remembered something.

"Oh, and since yer a looper too, and family besides, don't hesitate to come to me ifn' you've got problems you want to get off yer chest. Or hard drive. Or whatever you've got."

Cookie responded with a nod and a small smile. Their conversation concluded, the avatar dissolved into the shimmering fireflies associated with a dispelling hologram, the armor folded up into a necklace, and Macintosh picked Cookie off the counter and brought her outside the bar.

Applebloom and her two friends were there, talking about sisters or somesuch, and as Mac strode over to the three Crusaders he flipped the necklace to his sister, who looked a bit concerned.

"Everythin' okay Mac?"

Macintosh sighed, not sure how to reply, until something caught his eye.

It could have been a trick of the light, but he was sure he saw the gem glint just a bit, a wink made of light.

A ghost of a smile played across his face.

"Eeyup."

\* \* \*

><p>108.10 (novusordomundi)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I've got a jar of dirt!~" Pinkie sang as she her way through the central of Ponyville with said jar of dirt balanced on her head while passing a confused Twilight Sparkle.<p>

"I know I'm going to regret asking this, but \_why \_do you have a jar of dirt on your head?"

Pinkie stopped and turned towards Twilight, the jar staying still. "Well, I was with Sparrow last loop, and after a "We Captured The Black Pearl Again" Party, he gave me a few of them from his Pocket. As to why it's on my head, I just felt like putting it there."

Twilight considered this for a moment. "Anything special about it?"

"Nope. Just a jar of dirt." Pinkie shrugged. "Want one?"

"Why not?"

\* \* \*

><p>"We've got jars of dirt! Whee!~"<p>

Rainbow Dash looked on from her cloud as both Pinkie and Twilight were trotting along, jars of dirt balanced on their heads and singing about the fact that yes, they do have jars of dirt. Then she just shrugged her shoulders.

"Eh, not the strangest thing I've seen them do."

\* \* \*

><p>108.11 (Hubris Plus)<p>

Trixie opened the door to her wagon with a sultry smile. It was her first night in Ponyville for the Loop and, even though Chrysalis usually joined her on the road, it wasn't unheard of for her to get caught up in hive politics for a few days.

Her expression froze as she saw the grey pegasus waiting outside. She blinked once, and then again. Nope, still Derpy. Her marefriend would occasionally pull something like this, but she liked to think she'd gotten a handle on the Changeling Queen's tells over the course of their relationship. Unless she'd been practicing this disguise in particular for awhile, it probably wasn't her.

"Oh. Um, hi, Derpy," she said after reassuring herself that it really wasn't a shapeshifter making a late night call.

"Hiya Trixie!" The pegasus answered, glossing over the awkward silence with typical cheer. "You wanted to talk to me?"

"I did? I... Oh, oh, right! You got my message, then?" The Equestrian Loopers had taken to mentioning anything they wanted to get to Derpy to her unawake self. It didn't always work, because there was no guarantee she'd remember a specific Loop, or remember them in the right order. It was, however, the only alternative to using Twilight as the Loop's de facto answering machine.

"Yep!" She agreed as she stepped inside. "So what can I do for you?"

"Well, you see, a while back Trixie had an Exalted Loop," the

performer explained.

"Oh, and you want some tips? No problem, I've got loads of them. The thing I think a lot of ponies overlook is-"

"No, no," she interrupted. "Trixie was wondering if you've ever... Forgotten how to make it work?"

"I'm... Not quite sure what you mean?"

"Well, one Loop Trixie was experimenting with applying the non-lethal Charm to my fireworks, and the next I just... Didn't know how."

"Hmm..." The delivery mare tapped a hoof against her chin. "What were you doing with the fireworks?"

"Trixie just thought it would be nice to show off a few of her more spectacular pieces to an audience that can't ascend. Nothing really dangerous," she assured quickly. "Just bright enough to strain the eyes more than would otherwise be wise, but I set them off at night and by morning the Charm made it so the damage never happened. It was nice," she added. "Being able to cut loose a little on ponies who hadn't seen it all before."

"Alright," Derpy replied with a sombre nod. "I think I know exactly what went wrong. Can you check your Pocket for anything you didn't put there?"

"Um, sure," Trixie answered with a note of confusion. She spent a moment doing some metaphysical rummaging before drawing a small white card from her Pocket.

'This account's access to the Exalted Power Set has been restricted. We apologize for any inconvenience.'

"What." Trixie deadpanned after reading the note.

"Twilight said it was an automated system," Derpy explained. "Exalted needs to be kept stable, which means Loopers have to pass through, and some of them are going to get Exaltations. Those stick around because they touch on the soul, but Loopers hitting Limit Breaks would be... Bad." She placed a consoling hoof on the unicorn's shoulder. "You were gaining Limit, Trixie."

"But Trixie... I... When?"

"You put the show before the audience, and that's not really you. You might have known it wouldn't really hurt them in the long term, but it still counts."

"I... I suppose I did," she answered after a moment. "Is there any way to get it back? I could be more careful."

"Maybe. Would you want to use it for anything else?"

Trixie cocked her head as she considered. She'd long since hit explosive yields that could crash Loops, so the sheer power wasn't a selling point. There were a few other tricks that could be useful, but...

"No, I suppose not," she admitted.

"Then no sense worrying over it," Derpy told her with a wide smile. "And if you ever \_do\_ need a Charm or two, you can always come to me."

"I just might take you up on that," Trixie answered with a grin of her own.

\* \* \*

><p>107.3 continued (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

One of the perks of alicornhood â€" in this Loop, at least â€" was that food and sleep were not strictly necessary. As such, Celestia had been more than able to spend the better part of a week curled up in a fetal position on her bed, staring at nothing.

"Princess?"

An ear flicked. Aside from that, Celestia didn't move. Her eyes had begun itching around day two, but she'd gotten used to it.

"Princess, it's Twilight Sparkle."

Of course, she had been eating beforehoof (hand?), but a few careful teleportations took care of the inevitable. The sun acted as an excellent incinerator.

"Please, Princess Celestia. Luna's worried sick. I'mâ€"er..."

Celestia found herself imagining Twilight's blush. Poor, innocent filly. Girl? Had she once had hands? Was "Twilight Sparkle" really her name?

"Celestia, I'm coming in, whether you open this door or not."

Had she always had that determination? Had she tried to stop Discord and failed? No, it was unlike the draconeus to let anyone forget his victories.

"Tia, get up. You're making a disgrace of yourself."

Celestia found her body obeying automatically. Twilight had quite the maternal tone of command when she wanted one. Surprising, to say the least. Had that always been theâ€"

"Tia, whatever you're thinking, stop. Look at me."

She did so, looking at the muzzle she remembered, yet couldn't help trying to picture as something else. Then she noticed another muzzle. "Twi â€" " Celestia grimaced. She could choose not to thirst, but her throat still dried out. After a conjured glass of water, she tried again. Her voice was still rough, but recognizable. "Twilight, who is this?"

The other unicorn knelt. "Your Highness. Twilight told me about what



Discord did. I will be more than pleased to aid you."

"Aid me? Aid me how?"

A cloud of smoke erupted from the mare. A taller, thinner form rose from it, nearly eye level with Celestia. "My name is Lyra Heartstrings. I'm an anthropologist."

\* \* \*

><p>108.12 (Masterweaver)<p>

Cutie Mark Magic was subtle, powerful, and rarely encountered outside Equestria.

Twilight knew this.

The infinite loops seemed to love just screwing her over with variants and odd fusions.

Twilight knew this as well.

So, in retrospect, a loop where the cutie mark could actually be physically manifested should not have come as a surprise. But as Rainbow Dash zipped by using her multicolored lightning like a rocket, she could only stare in bemusement.

"Hey Twi." Pinkie floated over, suspended by her balloons. "You try this gimmick yet?"

"According to my loop memories I actually have a court order not to."

"Makes sense, I guess. Oh, one of Fluttershy's butterflies sent me a message, apparently Applejack is hosting a picnic â€" her cutie mark regenerates. I asked Rarity if she would come but she decided to try digging for gems with her diamonds..."

\* \* \*

><p>108.13 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Berry, Brain Bleach. Now."

The bartender looked up at two almost-identical grey pegasi. "Oh hello. Mac hasn't even set up the bar yet, what'sâ€"?"

"I'm Ditzzy," said the one with the purple mane.

"I'm Derpy," explained the one with the yellow mane.

"We're married," Ditzzy clarified.

"And we both just Woke Up," Derpy finished.

Berry blinked. "...alright, brain bleach it is."

\* \* \*

><p>108.14 (Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight awoke, felt an all too familiar absence of body, and gave a psychic groan. "Oh, not \_this\_ again..."

"Twilight, why am I a gestalt intelligence of a hive mind of alicorns?"

"Welcome to the Wastes, Trixie. First of all, I apologize in advance for the loop memoriesâ€œ"

In a moment of perfect timing, the two minds were assaulted with recollections of their predicament. Trixie recoiled for a moment, her whole being flinching briefly. "What the birch?!"

"Yeah. Umâ€œ"

"No, nevermind. Preawake, wasn't you. It's just..." Trixie floundered. "We're two hundred years late! I thought this wasn't supposed to be possible, I mean, early beginnings yeah butâ€œ"

"This isn't our home loop."

Trixie paused. Then she selected a couple of bodies, offering one to Twilight. "Right, if we're having this discussion let's do it outside the mindscape?"

The purple alicorn shrugged, stretching the limbs as she settled into the form. "Oh, that feels good. Sorry, where was I... oh! You remember the Crash, right?"

The blue alicorn sighed. "Yes, I remember the Crash..."

"You know how it started because one universe tried to jumpstart another?"

"Yes..."

"Well, a while back Sleipnir approached me with a request that Equestria do that for another loop," Twilight explained. "See, apparently the loop started off pretty bad, in terms of environment, and there was enough damage that it would need a linked anchor system anyway, but the admins figured with our talent for, you know, healing loopers, we could intro the new anchors and keep them sane. After I studied up on the loop I talked it over with the ponies Awake at the time and eventually me and Fluttershy agreed to help out. Things went well and all, it's just..." She gestured around vaguely. "For some reason the fused loop ended up being THIS history and now it's a legitimate variation or something."

"Oh." Trixie pondered the implications. "Okay... so, what do we do now?"

"Well, one of the first things I usually do is stage an internal coup and then station alicorns around the wasteland..."

\* \* \*

><p>108.15 (Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight Sparkle suddenly exploded.

After a few seconds, her friends looked around at each other in confusion. Applejack hesitantly raised a hoof. "Ain't tha loop supposed ta crash if she dies?"

Rarity nodded slowly. "There are two explanations I can think of. She's not dead, for a given value of dead, or we have another Anchor somewhere."

"Huh." Rainbow Dash prodded the ash. "Hold on a sec." She closed her eyes.

Then Rainbow Dash exploded.

Pinkie blinked, stared at her necklace, and slowly put it down. She trotted to the other side of the room. "Alrighty, laughter power, basic test."

Pinkie Pie exploded.

Rarity and Fluttershy shared a look. Eventually, Fluttershy coughed. "Um, Applejack, could this be some sort of illusion?"

"Ooooooh no." Applejack threw her necklace out the window. "Ah'm not gonna blow up using mah Honesty powers."

Rarity sighed. "Back to square one, Iâ€"

Rarity exploded without warning.

Fluttershy stomped a hoof with a frown. "That's not fair, she wasn't using her element!"

Applejack groaned. "Great, so we're doomed anyâ€"

Fluttershy exploded quickly.

Applejack stared.

Applejack finally exploded.

\* \* \*

><p>"...well," Twilight managed. "That was... bizarre. Anybody have any idea what's going on?"<p>

There was a general chorus of negative answers.

"Ooooookay then." The unicorn looked around the white room they were in, noting the panel construction. "If I had to hazard a guess, Aperture is doing weird experiments and we got caught up in it. Play it straight or alicorn bulldozers?"

"Play it straight," Pinkie suggested. "More fun that way."

\* \* \*

><p>108.16 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Normally, when Loopers from other worlds visited Equestria, they were

left within their comfort zone, whatever that happened to be. On one extreme, Rincewind never set foot out of the library except to buy potatoes (1). On the other hoof, there were visitors like Bruce Wayne, who sought out the dangers of Equestria to the point that Fluttershy had to open a special asylum for the frightened monsters of the Everfree Forest.(2)

But very, very seldom did a visiting Looper get dragged along on an otherwise baseline adventure. Lucky Number (such was his pony name, this Loop) was a special case.

"Ladies, if you please," he said as the six Element bearers guided him up the side of Smoky Mountain, "I would like to point out that my vast experience with dragons, as you put it, is in fact vast experience with ONE dragon. Furthermore, I never do any serious harm to him. It's Bard the Bowman or, on occasion, Gandalf who do for him. I am quite frankly out of my depth where it comes to dragons from other worlds."

"We're not asking you to slay him," Twilight replied. "We just need him to move someplace else for his century-long nap, so Equestria won't be covered with smoke."

"We'd normally handle it ourselves," Rainbow Dash added, "seeing how we're just that awesome. But we wanted to see how a classic adventurer like yourself would handle it."

"You get picked once by a wizard with a whim, and everyone believes it's your career," Lucky Number grumbled. "Oh, very well then. But without a magic ring or elvish blade, I can't promise it'll be very entertaining."

At the entrance to the cave, the visiting Looper added, "No hidden side door? I thought not. Why make it easy on a poor old hobbit?" Despite his grumbling he walked forward into the cave, stepping right up to the dragon's hoard. He picked up a handful of jewels and let them fall back to the ground with a clatter.

The dragon woke with a start, eyes open and almost instantly locked on the curly-maned Shire pony in the waistcoat.

"I trust I have your attention, good sir dragon?" Without more than a beat of silence he continued on, "My name is Lucky Number. By trade I am the premiere green-grocer for Ponyville, second only to Filthy Rich in my dealings with ponies near and far. By profession, however, I happen to be a burglar, or professional treasure hunter if you prefer that sort of thing."

The dragon's growl, and the lowering of its head to the pony's diminutive height, indicated that it did not prefer.

"You needn't be terribly concerned, dear chap," the pony continued. "I wouldn't give tuppence for most of this. I have been requested by the noteworthies of Ponyville, and of Equestria in general, to remove only one thing from this cave. Once I have removed the one thing I shall depart, leaving the rest behind."

"You think," the dragon's deep voice echoed, shaking the cave, "that you're going to take ANYTHING from this cave and leave it alive?" It lowered its head still further, until the tip of its beak was level

with the pony's muzzle. "What IS this 'one thing' you intend to take, then?"

"Why, this," the pony said, reaching a hoof up to touch the dragon's jaw.

\* \* \*

><p>A few moments later Lucky Number walked out of the cave. The smoke had ceased. "I trust my services are no longer required?" he asked the six ponies.<p>

"That's a... novel... way of solving the problem, but..." Twilight shuffled her feet.

"We was expectin' somethin' more... creative," Rarity added.

"More acrobatic!" Pinkie Pie grinned.

"More hilarious." Rainbow Dash nodded.

"Less disturbin'," Applejack grumbled.

"You let him out of there right this minute, mister." Fluttershy's voice of disapproval was almost as good as the Stare.

"Oh, very well," Lucky Number shrugged. "I suppose he's learned his lesson by now, at any rate." He reached into subspace and pulled out the dragon, which lay curled up and trembling on the cliff before the cave.

"How... how did you do that?" it asked, its rumble shrunk to a quavering whisper that still echoed off the mountains.

"Secret of the trade, my good fellow," the pony said, straightening its waistcoat with dignity. "Now, since I have removed the one thing from the cave, I do hope it shall not be necessary for me to remove it again. I recommend you pack your bags immediately, down to the last jewel-encrusted handkerchief, and find new lodgings quite a long way off. Because I shall be back this way in a few days to check..." The little pony put a hoof on the dragon's jaw and guided it so that dragon eyes looked into pony eyes. "And next time you shan't hear me coming. I trust I am making myself clear?"

The dragon nodded meekly.

"There's a good chap. Off you go, then," the pony said, removing his hoof.

The dragon, frantic to get away from the pony, scrambled into the cave. A few moments later the sound of frantic shoveling echoed from inside.(3)

"And that, ladies, should take care of that," the pony said.

"You seemed rather calm through all that." Twilight cast an eye at the visiting Looper. "Especially after all that talk about your limited experience with dragons."

"Well, yes," the pony admitted, "and when I tried that trick with

Smaug(4) it didn't end so well. But I have found it very effective with most goblins of my acquaintance. And bill-collectors, too, come to think of it." Bilbo Baggins set off back down the mountain, calling back, "I believe we may be back home in time for tea!"

\* \* \*

><p>"And I missed him?" Sweetie Belle moaned. "Of all the Loops to not be Awake for!"<p>

"Well, he did leave you a gift," Twilight said. "Gandalf told him about your special Loop, and Bilbo was quite impressed."

The purple princess slid two red cases containing manuscript books across the table to sweetie. On one the spines read, in Westron: \_There and Back Again; Translations From the Elvish, Vol. 1-3;\_ and \_Appendices, Maps, Familes and Other Notes.\_ Manuscript copies of the Red Book of Westmarch were fairly rare even among Loopers.

The other red case had four books, with no marking on the spine. Sweetie Belle withdrew one and opened it to the title page:

\_Songs of the Ponies, as Rendered in the Elvish Modes by B. Baggins, Volume 1.\_

Below this, in a less careful, more personal hand:

\_A copy, as a Present to a great singer who did NOT badger a guest into confronting a dragon, unlike CERTAIN OTHERS. - B.  
B.(5)\_

"Twilight," Sweetie Belle asked, "is there something I should know about?"

"Yeah, well," Twilight said, rubbing her mane nervously, "there's a reason he gave me a copy of \_Archery And You\_ instead..."

\* \* \*

><p>(1) Except for one memorable encounter with an unAwake Discord, recounted elsewhere.<p>

(2) By the time Fluttershy, fed up with the whole situation, went to Wayne to tell him to cut it out, he had vanished. He was last seen that Loop riding the Tatzlwurm out into the depths of the Badlands.

(3) The dragon spent quite some time afterwards tracking down Equestria's master thieves, trying in vain to learn the trick. His anxiety was by no means eased when his hoard mysteriously increased by one-seventh part not long after he found his new residence. Eventually some other dragons put him to bed with a dragon-sized glass of warm milk and told him to chalk it up as yet another reason Why We Do Not Mess With The Ponies.

(4) It was an accident. Bilbo wanted to avoid using the Ring whenever possible, so he decided to build up his subspace pocket by stealing more of Smaug's hoard every Loop. Then one Loop he stole the entire hoard at one swipe... and the sleeping Smaug along with it. Fortunately Gandalf had accompanied the Dwarves to Erebor that Loop,

and was on hand to resolve the situation the next time Bilbo had to open said subspace pocket. When Smaug later began Looping, Bilbo decided not to relate this story to him... in particular, what the dwarves had done to his jewel-encrusted chest.(6)

(5) Bilbo wasn't particularly annoyed at Twilight and her friends, but he did enjoy using presents to make a point. His Farewell Party, whenever he could have it, was usually his favorite part of his baseline Loop for that very reason.

(6) That loop the gates of the Lonely Mountain gained a very impressive, glittery, and somewhat morbid colonnade.

\* \* \*

><p>108.17 (Gym Quirk)<p>

Gandalf the Grey took a moment to collect his thoughts as the new loop formed. \_Early September, 1401 Shire Reckoning. Ah. Bilbo's Farewell Party... though I usually have just the one-pony cart on this trip.\_

Then again, the usual pony wasn't bright pink. Nor was it azure. But the two hitched side-by-side before him were just those shades.

"Trixie is not sure if she likes how this loop is starting," said the blue one.

"But we're on our way to a party!" enthused the pink one. "A double birthday party! Woohoo!"

Now fairly certain as to the identity of his companions, the wizard looked back at the larger-than-usual load of fireworks in the wagon bed. A noise from ahead caused him to turn back to see the pink one cheerfully working on what appeared to be a 16-tube Multiple-Launch Party system.

\_Oh dear.\_

\_I wonder if it's too late to make a run for the Grey Havens...\_

\* \* \*

><p>108.18 (novusordomundi Fanofmosteverything )

"Twilight."

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Why do your eyes look like..."

A sigh cut off the rest of the sentence. "I don't know why my eyes are in the exact shape of the Caspian Sea, Rarity. And the only reason I know that is because of my Loop memories."

Rarity paused a bit, searching her own memories. "Ah... Mine seem to be Lake Erie."

"Yep. I'm already writing a list of the different shapes I see this

Loop." Twilight pulled a checklist out of her saddlebag, letting it unfurl. "I've already found 36 different types of eye shapes, in variable amounts. All bodies of water, which at least keeps it constant. But since it doesn't seem to affect vision, I'm not too worried. Only thing odd is Derpy's eyes."

"Oh? What do they look like?"

Twilight let a small grin form on her face. "Same as they always do."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight took in the landscape. "Okay, I'm sure there's a perfectly reasonable explanation for this."<p>

"Well, it was actually pretty easy," said Derpy. "I just had to put up a big enough entropy bubble and walk forward a little."

"I was actually more interested in the 'why' than the 'how'."

"Oh, that." The pegasus shrugged as the new, perfectly oval Everfree Lake filled in from the river. "I didn't want to be left out."

Twilight facehoofed. "Well, at least Steven Magnet seems to be enjoying himself."

\* \* \*

><p>108.19 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Twilight failed to realize something was different about the loop until Cadence's Wedding was upon them...or more specifically there was no wedding. At first, she thought Shining had forgotten again, but when she hit Mac's Bar in frustration, she found Cadence sitting at the counter, tears in her eyes.

The element of Magic stroked the Princess of Love's mane as she cried out, "Shiny is married to his work!"

Twilight blinked. This was new, "Oh...Cadence, I'm sorry. You want to prank him for standing you up?"

Cadence sniffed, "No, he really got married to his job. I even have wedding photos as the best mare before waking up."

A set of photos appeared on the counter, showing Shiny in a tuxedo and his armor decked out in a wedding dress. Apparently he even had cake, and still never told Twilight.

A week later, Shining found himself frozen feet first to the top of Celestia's throne room.

\* \* \*

><p>108.20 (Zetrein)<p>

\_"...Certain warriors came to Pandora in droves, to uncover its hidden secrets. Some would call them adventurers. Others call them



insane. But I... call them Loopers.\_

\_Our story begins with them, and with a man named Handsome Jack."\_

\* \* \*

><p>The four Vault Hunters were having a little meet and greet on the train, as they rode to whatever meeting place this Jack guy was bringing them. Everything was going well, until those boxes in the back turned out to be robots, and that whole "Welcome, to your doom" sign.<p>

As the blue pony went out the door, and the black one went out the roof, the yellow and purple ones started running down the train car. Sliding under the robot's gunfire, the yellow one threw a box at the ceiling, where it clamped in place and deployed into an auto-turret. Spying a rocket launcher, she grabbed it and turned around to fire at another group of robots. Everything seemed to freeze, for just an instant.

**\*\*Applebloom,\*\***  
><em>as the Engineer.<em>

As she Woke up, pulling the trigger, Applebloom blinked. "Did I just get a character splash screen?"

After she finished shielding herself from the explosion, the purple one smirked as she lifted the surviving robots in her magic.

**\*\*Twilight Sparkle,\*\***  
><em>as the Mage.<em>

Waking up herself, Twilight threw them through the wall, and turned around to tell Applebloom. "Yes, you did. I just had one too, did you see it?"

As they spoke, the blue one swung back into the car. Pulling out a pair of Torgue-built weapons, she set about exploding any robots still moving.

**\*\*Trixie,\*\***  
><em>as The Great and Powerful.<em>

Trixie considered what she was doing as she Woke, and proceeded to continue what she was doing.

Meanwhile, atop the train, three humans were looking for the last Vault Hunter. That is, until the one in the middle shoved the other two off the train. She Awoke in a flash of green fire.

**\*\*And Chrysalis,\*\***  
><em>as The Face.<em>

After considering the oddity she Woke up to, Chrysalis decided to think about it \_after\_ she got back inside the train. And sorted out that whole "someone's trying to kill us" thing.

As the three ponies, and one changeling, assembled before the door to the caboose, they couldn't help but notice the music that had been

filtering in from somewhere, during the whole fight. \_"This ain't no place for no hero. This ain't no place for no better man..."\_

"You know, the music and the splash screens make this whole thing feel really surreal." Applebloom commented, as she bucked open the door.

The music cut out, as the door flew from its hinges, and they saw the room they were about to enter. As the mannequin in the chair turned around, a new voice came over the speakers. "It's cute that ya'll think you're the heroes of this little adventure, but you're not." Also, the car was filled with bombs. "Welcome to Pandora, kiddos!"

Everything went pink, as the train exploded. Reappearing on the ice, they all watched the train cars go flying from the explosion.

"Okay, girls?" Twilight began, as the train settled into the snow. "Let's find some cover, and figure out where we are. And maybe where we are on the planet, and in relation to the plot."

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra woke up, feeling like she had a slight case of Headacheneverendus. While she was very cold, she didn't appear to be in any real danger right at the moment. Naturally, her first action was to start talking to herself.<p>

\_'Alright crew, sound off! Extremity validation check! Four legs detected.'\_ Thief started them off.

\_'Independently swivelable ears, check!'\_ Human Lyra giggled in their brain.

\_'Yes yes, great fun, humans have static ears. Horn, check.'\_ Pony Lyra continued.

\_'Hey, guys? That little robot that was expositing just noticed we're not dead.\_ Seapony Lyra, for once, was the one paying attention.

"...But my friends call me Claptrap! Or they would, if any of them were still alive. Or had existed in the first place! Oh - I've got something for you!" Now that they were paying attention, they all saw the boxy robot that had started talking to them.

As they took the communicator Claptrap claimed he didn't loot from a corpse, in spite of looting it from a corpse right in front of her, Lyra decided the polite thing to do was thank him. Or call him on the obvious lie.

"My bong is full of minestrone tea!" Or that.

\_'What was that?'\_

\_'AHH! By Yggsdrasil's left acorn, what is that thing?!'\_

\_'Okay, ladies, don't panic. I think we just found out where our Loop memories are, and they have a personality of their own.'\_

"There are rutabagas are in my pants!"

\_'And it's the only one of us with access to the voicebox.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>108.21 (Masterweaver)<p>

Context is a great and terrible thing.

For instance, Twilight Sparkle leading a charge of humanoid radishes against the villainous trash cat armies of tyrant Rainbow Dash in a Saddle Arabian sandstorm whilst wielding a bifurcated katana... was something that developed logically from previous events. In fact, a number of loopers present, when recounting the tale, would be surprised at the odd looks they received and the disbelief it incurred.

But, without context, it was perfectly rational to consider it irrational.

\* \* \*

><p>108.22 (Masterweaver)<p>

Rarity desperately wished for fingers, just so she could pinch her brow in an appropriate manner. Eventually, she settled for a simple facehoof.

"I've had to repair my own cape and hat loads of times," Trixie pointed out. "You really shouldn't be surprised that I could make a dress."

"...An. Exploding dress."

"Well, yes." The blue unicorn preened as a few percussive blasts ran down her back. "It was simple enough to weave oxygen collectors in the collar and with release runes stitched at various placesâ€"

"No. I don't want to know." Rarity sighed. "Today will go down in infamy as one of the greatest tragedies fashion has ever endured..."

\* \* \*

><p>108.23 (Valentine Meikin, Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight looked up as a pair of unicorn stallions with mostly black coats walked up to her. "My name is Whitman, and my partner here is Blackman," one of them said in a gravelly voice. "I believe that you seem to have a strange belief that ponies are able to meet humans and vice versa..."

She looked them over, noting that both of them were wearing sunglasses, and sighed. "So, who are you really? The Stallions In Black?"

"We did consider being the Stallions In Neutral, but the initials were counter-productive," 'Whitman' stated, "Now, if you'll excuse

me..."

His horn then suddenly flashed with some kind of spell.

"You didn't see a pair of stallions asking about humans, you saw nothing, and there is no agency named the Stallions In Black," 'Whitman' stated, then walked off, leaving Twilight blinking and looking confused. She was sure she noticed something strange around here...

After a few moments, she concentrated and cast a spell.

Then she groaned. "Oh for the love of â€œ" You two, get back here!"

'Whitman' and 'Blackman' froze.

"One: Equestria is a sanctuary loop, intended for rest, relaxation, and recuperation. Two: I'm the anchor, I'm here to help, if you need anything you can ask me. Three: My special talent is magic, I am fully capable of banishing you to the moon, but if you don't do anything that harms anyone there won't be a problem." She snorted. "I'm letting your little neuralizer trick slide, since I know that's how you normally operate, but the fact is that if my memory has been altered I might assume I am under attack by a dangerous foe and react accordingly."

Twilight took a breath and let it out slowly. "But I don't want to be a threat. Just... if things go down, let me know. That's it. Alright? This is your vacation, you're not on duty."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

108.1: Not-very-hostile takeover.

>108.2: Faerun vintage.<br>108.3: Tangentially MLP.

>108.4: Yes, this was an actual historical event that was considered. All it would have taken, literally, is for the French government to sign a piece of paper.<br>108.5: Silver Spoonasaurus.

>108.6: Consent is important. Especially after the Berry Incident.<br>108.7: CENSORED.

>108.8: Not the last of this loop.<br>108.9: A kind word.

>108.10: And why not?<br>108.11: Easy come, easy go.

>(continuation of 107.3: This is what she has been preparing for all her life.)<br>108.12: We do not ask about Snails' cutie mark. It is icky.

>108.13: Not the nicest situation.<br>108.14: Next step: find Trixie a multi-nuke-launcher to play with.

>108.15: There's a pony in there!<br>108.16: A burgler of great skill. Largely by necessity.

>108.17: Multiple Launch Party: Fireworks in Multitudes<br>108.18: Eyes like deep, wind-ruffled lakes.

>108.19: His free time was the best man.<br>108.20: ...yeah, poor Lyra.

>108.21: Perfectly sensible. As was the subsequent treaty.<br>108.22: She's dynamite!

>108.23: Safe loop. They take it seriously.<p>

109.1

(Conceptualist)

"Twilight?"

"..."

"Twilight?"

"No."

"No?"

"Rarity, ah doesn't knows whuffo' we is all rednecks in th' boondocks instead of ponies, ah doesn't knows whuffo' nothin' else seems t'be diff runt regardin' th' no'mal happenin's of our loop, an' ah cain't brin' mahse'f t'care. So no. Ah refuse t'go through this, this, this hyar Gag Loop enny mo'e."

"Whut in tarnation is a 'Gag Loop'?"

"Loops like this hyar thet jest doesn't make sense. Now, is yo' a-gonna he'p me build a Rocket Trailer t'go t'th' moon an' git away fum th' stoopidity of this hyar Gag Loop o' not?

"Eh, whuffo' not? Better than tryin' t'make sense of whut is cornsidered fashion aroun' hyar."

\* \* \*

><p>109.2 (Bardic Knowledge)<p>

Twilight and her Awake friends rushed to Canterlot at Celestia's summons. It was around the time of Discord's usual escape, but there hadn't been any chaos, so she was a bit confused (thinking, for a brief moment, that this was one of those variants where Celestia and Luna outright killed him). Other than Ganondorf's little vacation, a little chaos was typical for a Discord-replacement.

"Twilight, thank goodness you're here. Hopefully we're not too late. The Destroyer of the Skies has awakened."

"The Destroyer of the Skies?" Dash looked worried at the prospect.

"A fearsome monster of stone and crystal from an unknown land. It bears an unnatural hatred for all winged things. Over a thousand years ago, Luna and I neutralized it with the Elements of Harmony, freezing it in place and barely saving the life of a pegasus it had been attacking." There was the usual speech about getting the Elements and going after the Destroyer, as Twilight tried to puzzle out who it was replacing Discord this time around...

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile...<p>

Mac's Bar had seen its share of odd patrons (it was inevitable with

customers like Discord and the draconequified Silver Spoon), but when the doors slammed open and a eight-foot-tall humanoid of rock stomped in, Big Mac was temporarily taken aback.

"\*\*You. Barkeep,\*\*" it rumbled. "\*\*I hear this bar has a drink for everyone. I need one \*\*\*\*now\*\*\*\*.\*\*"

Big Mac quickly sidled aside for Berry to work her magic. Which was surprisingly literal for this drink, requiring an ascension to mix magic into the liquid. As the creature of stone emptied the ethereal drink from its glass, the rainbow of crystals across its arms and back glowed brighter. As a thousand years more of birds and their... leavings... was difficult to excise from memory, another drink was ordered.

"\*\*Oh, it is \*\*\*\*good\*\*\*\*. I will have to recommend its bar to Justice. It is difficult for it to get drunk when it is a possessed corpse.\*\*" Another drink was put on the bar. "\*\*I am Shale, by the way. What does it call itself?\*\*"

\* \* \*

><p>109.3 (Sieses  
Detkrah)<p>

"Twilight?"

"Nope."

"Huh?"

"Sunset," the purple pony clarified. "I think Twilight and I literally swapped roles this time around, sorry Rarity."

"I'm Sweetie," the white unicorn clarified back.

"Oh," Sunset blinked. "Wonder who the others are, then?"

"Only one way to find out!"

\* \* \*

><p>109.4 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

Twilight frowned at the guest Looper. "You're absolutely sure about this?"

The stallion nodded. "I'm not on my own all that often, and I want to see how far I've come."

"I can appreciate that, but Tirek isn't a toy. He rendered the entire population of Equestria powerless in the baseline, and between the late Awakening and the two of us being the only ones Awake, he's probably done it again." Twilight shook her head. "I just don't think you've thought this through."

"All I ask is a chance to prove myself, Twilight."

She stomped a hoof and glared at him. "Prove what? To whom?"

"To myself. To my brother. To the world." He offered a weak smile, one that didn't reach his eyes. "Besides, you'll be there to bail me out if all else fails, right?"

"If it weren't for all the powerless ponies in Tirek's wake..." Twilight sighed. "Yeah, I probably would. Good luck."

This got a chuckle. "It'd be nice."

\* \* \*

><p>Tirek sneered at Discord. "You've helped me grow strong, you've provided the means by which I can obtain Princess Twilight's magic, and now you are no longer of any use to me."<p>

A plaid cascade flowed from draconequeus to centaur, and the latter grew to his full, terrible majesty.

"Ahem."

All eyes turned to a green earth stallion, approaching from the direction of Ponyville. He was glaring at Tirek at an intensity of at least 0.6 Stares.

Tirek was not impressed. "Insignificant wretch. Not a spark of magic will escape me!" His mouth yawned wide.

Yet not a spark of magic was consumed. "What?" Tirek cast his gaze about.

"Let me tell you a story."

The centaur flinched. The voice was right next to his ear. "Get off of me!" He swatted at the pony.

The pony who leapt like an exuberant Pinkie Pie, thus causing Tirek to whack himself in the head. The stallion landed next to Tirek's other ear, where he continued. "My brother, he began with fire, and he stuck with it. He is like fire. Bright. Eager." A chuckle.

"Hungry. A great friend, and a great foe. But it was not for me. It never felt right. My flames were green, unnatural things. Strange, alien wisps that felt no pull from gravity. That did not belong."

Tirek had, by this point, tried to get rid of the pesky pony at least five times. Going by touch, the stallion hadn't moved, and yet every swipe missed.

"So I branched out. Electricity satisfied me for a time. It is something of a brother to fire, after all. But I could tell my full potential did not lie there."

All this babble of fire and lightning brought Tirek's magic to mind. But no, he was still digesting Discord's roiling chaos energy. There was no telling what an errant blast might do to him.

"It was some time before I admitted the truth to myself. My brother and I are different in so many ways. Wide and thin, short and tall, certain and doubtfulâ€¦ it is only natural that we be light and dark."

"Prattle on much longer," Tirek grumbled, "and the two of you will be alive and dead. Only one pony can possibly stand in my way now, and you are not her. What do you hope to accomplish?"

"Against you?" And now the hoofed flea's tone shifted from conversational to condemning. "You who forsook your own brother, who come from the darkness beneath the earth? I oppose you with the darkness within me. A darkness that prophecies claimed would be the end of all existence. They were wrong. You are wrong."

"Bold talk." Tirek grinned despite himself. At least the snack had some mettle. "Who are you, to boast so?"

"Who am I?"

The stallion pushed off, and Tirek nearly staggered from the force. He looked up and wondered where the nuisance was hiding his wings. The question only grew in Tirek's mind as black lightning lashed at him. Not strong enough to hurt, but strangely cold. Worse, it smelled totally inedible.

The pony landed right between Tirek's horns, and the impact made the centaur sink a few inches into the ground. It hurt like nothing had any right to hurt. Not with so much power at hand. Not after so much time.

"Who am I? I am Luigi. Number one."

\* \* \*

><p>109.5 (Zetrein)<p>

Something everyone realizes, eventually, is that if you Loop long enough, certain patterns begin to emerge. In baseline or variants, some things just go together; the Ruler, the Student, and the Thousandth Year, for example.

But then there are other patterns. What might have been rumors and misconceptions in baseline, could easily find themselves to be real, for a given loop. Scootaloo's variable parenthood, some of what revolves around Nyx, the occasional strange loop involving the changelings.

For Celestia, the pattern of this kind she encounters most often, involves her relationship with Twilight. In baseline, there were more than a few misinformed visitors who mistook Twilight as her daughter, to say nothing of all the rumors and tabloids. As one might imagine, Twilight's ascension brought all that back to the surface, for a while.

And so it goes, Celestia sometimes found herself Twilight's mother, for a given loop; most often in secret, but occasionally publicly, and sometimes something in between. It wasn't limited to just Twilight either, a memorable example being the loop where she was Scootaloo's parent.

But parent or teacher, at the end of the day Celestia had thousands of years of experience in raising Twilight. Ditzzy had pointed out to her, some time ago, that it gave her some common ground with herself



and Berry. Those conversations had been a nice bonding experience between the three of them.

Still, no matter how well she knew Twilight, both as a filly and a mare, alicorn filly Twilight always managed to surprise her, somehow. These were Celestia's thoughts, as she stared at the wreckage of her study. In four hours, Twilight had her CSGU entrance exam, same time as she always did. Three minutes ago, Rainbow Dash shattered the sky with her Rainboom; something she resolved to look into, later.

Turning from the hole in the wall, Celestia looked at her daughter, and the little grey earth pony hiding behind her. Twilight knew she was in trouble, and the earth pony she was playing with at the time thought she was as well.

"Twilight," Celestia began, removing her hoof from her face. "I honestly didn't expect to give you the 'Sapient Creations Talk' for another decade. You're not in trouble for that, though I'll need to check your friend, and make sure there's nothing wrong with her."

Leaning to the side, to look more directly at the grey pony hiding behind Twilight, Celestia gave the mismatched eyes a gentle smile. "I suppose I should say welcome to the family, Smarty Pants."

With both fillies showing small smiles now, Celestia turned back to Twilight. "Oh, one last thing, dear." Celestia pointed at her flank. "Congratulations, Twilight."

As Twilight danced around in a circle in celebration of her cutie mark, half dragging Smarty Pants along with her, Celestia started taking a closer look at what was left of her study. As her walk reached the hole in the wall, she peered out to see what had befallen her favorite chair. It appeared to have been broken across Discord's head, with the cushion impaled on Discord's stony horns.

"Twilight?" The fillies looked over to her. Now that she could see the former doll properly, Smarty Pants looked to be about three quarters Twilight's size. "After your cuteceaÑera, you're grounded."

"Awwww, Mom!"

\* \* \*

><p>109.6 (Draconas)<p>

It was right before World War Two.

Discord was on trial in a courtroom, with stitches joining his parts together. Given this was Discord, the judge's bench was on the upper corner, the witness booth was floating in the middle of the room, and the jury box was five seconds in the future.

"Discord Frankenstein, you stand accused of crimes against the Axis Powers, including but not limited to shaving Hitler's mustache off before beating him up with a giant swastika, making fart jokes about kamikazes, and turning Benito Mussolini into a giant face. How do you plead?" The judge intoned.

"Already absolved!" Discord cried, everyone gasping in surprise.

"As you can see, on the Anti-Comintern pact," here Discord pulled said pact out before putting it under a giant microscope "the molecules \_here\_ are in the shape of letters, and they are arranged into words. Could someone please read what it says?"

A member of the jury read it, after the five second delay for the rest of the world to catch up to them. "Discord Frankenstein is hereby absolved of all crimes committed against any signatory of this document."

\* \* \*

><p>"And that's how I prevented World War Two!" Discord explained, drinking a water of glass. "Since I had total immunity to punishment by the Axis Powers, they had to get rid of that document. Which meant they were no longer allies."<p>

"But why were you Discord \_Frankenstein\_?" Berry Punch asked.

"Oh, I was Frankenstein's monster. That's how I ended up so far back." Discord explained.

After a moment, Twilight decided to just take what she could get. At least he'd \_prevented\_ World War Two, rather than simply adding chocobo cavalry or something...

\* \* \*

><p>109.7 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

Twilight blinked as she Awoke, then took in the scene before her. She was in one of the practice rooms of Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns, but no younger than usual. Even stranger was what she was doing there. "Why am I hitting old arcade cabinets with a golf club?"

"The better question, my faithful cheat," came a voice both serene and snarky, with just a hint of a Hispanonic accent, "is why have you stopped hitting old arcade cabinets with a golf club?"

Twilight turned to the source of the voice. A vaguely familiar humanoid clad in black pants, red shoes and boxing gloves, and a golden crown looked back, Celestia's luxurious mane flowing out the back of his luchador mask. After a moment of confusion, she recalled from a blend of Loop memories and past experience that that was actually his face. She dipped her head. "Sorry, Prince Strongbadis. I had trouble awakening this morning."

The Prince of Awesome and Also Equestria He Guesses quirked an eyehole/brow. "Oh? You seemed more than capable but a moment ago." His mouth curled into a small, sly smile that had no business being on his face. "You'll never get that pizza at this rate."

Nice as pizza sounded, there were probably more pressing concerns. "Um, Your Highness, not to be presumptuous, but isn't your sisâ€ brother due to return from the moon soon?"

Strongbadis considered this for a moment before bursting into laughter that was just a bit louder than decorum permitted. "Oh, Twizzler," and here Twilight's Loop memories told her this was meant as a term of endearment, "Prince Soolnda may have been sulking on the moon for almost a millennium, but I assure you, he won't be coming down any time soon."

Twilight dipped her head again. "As you say, Your Highness."

"And I do say. Now, back to your postgraduate crap-out-of-beating studies."

Well, if nothing else, it would be nicely cathartic. Twilight Sparkle, personal student-minion of Prince Strongbadis and magna cum laude of Crazy-Go-Nuts University, saluted her sovereign with the battered nine-iron. "We who are about to whack the everloving crap out of video games salute you!"

\* \* \*

><p>109.8 (Drachefly)<p>

Applebloom banged her head against the wall of her newly-remade Apple Family Underground Bunker and exclaimed, "Aaargh!"

"What?" asked Scootaloo and Diamond Tiara (Sweetie Belle was not awake, and in the absence of being tormented by Diamond Tiara would probably do fine).

"You know how sometimes you think of something you ought to have said, only the loop's over, and it's not a conserved event so it's not going to come up again?"

They nodded.

"And you know when you get that feeling and the thing your brain is telling you you should have said doesn't even fit?"

They nodded.

"Remember the game a few loops back with the most minor variant?"

Scootaloo squinted. "I guess so? That was, like, fifty years ago for me."

Diamond Tiara shook her head, "I don't remember that - my last Equestria loop was fifteen thousand years ago. But I know what you're talking about. Like, everything's the same except my hair is a little darker?"

"Except that this variant had to drive you nuts."

"Ah, that game. Like when Luna trashed a wing of the palace because the rule for when to put the apostrophe in 'its' was inverted?"

"Yeah, like that. So, I just remembered the time that the only difference was that 'ancestor' had an 'ih' sound."

Silence fell.

"Yeah, I can see why that'd do it. If it came up." said Scootaloo.

"Well, this was one that \_didn't\_ fit, right? It just caught me by surprise when I thought someone said Granny Smith was my sister."

Heads cocked. Diamond Tiara squinted and said, "What? But... how? That's a big stretch."

"Nothing odd about it - she was my 'ancistor', just like usual."

"Ooooooh."

\* \* \*

><p>109.9 (Drachefly) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>TK-421 woke up and rubbed the back of his head. The sensor tech had called for some help, and then... he couldn't remember. He did remember the freighter. His armor had been removed. He could find no sign of the techs or his partner.<p>

He got up, made his way to the cockpit and looked out. Complete darkness. He fired up the nav computer and checked the logs.

\_Odd. The last thing it remembers is landing on the Death Star. Am I in a cargo hold in the Death Star? I guess I could have been missed. This is going to be embarrassing when I get back to the squad.\_

He went to the exit ramp. The safety interlock said the ship was not landed; he didn't override. \_Not landed? Where am I and how could I have gotten here? I have a bad feeling about this.\_

There was a sudden change in light from the cockpit, and he heard voices on the other side of the ramp. \_It's not landed, so this shouldn't be opening.\_ He pressed his ear to it and listened.

"... barely got it pocketed in time. I'm going to have some words with him. Just because you're an anchor and good at \_Protego\_ doesn't mean you can survive direct hits from an anti-materiel blaster cannon more than a few times in a row."

\_I don't know that language, and that tone doesn't sound like a prisoner's, so I'm not on the Death Star. I definitely heard 'direct hits something anti-materiel blaster cannon'. Maybe this is a rebel repair crew? This isn't supposed to happen!\_ The ramp began lowering, and only then did TK-421 notice that the interlock no longer indicated a non-landed fault. He tried to get up, but the jerky motion and constrained space left him flatfooted.

The orange and purple alien at the bottom of the ramp regarded him with surprise, then consternation. "Aww, sumac. I knew I was forgetting something."

"What?", asked a yellow and red alien as it came into view. "Ooh."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle relaxed into her own bed for the first time in eight subjective years - not a long span, but long enough that it was a special pleasure. Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash had offered to take care of Nightmare Moon, Spike had his own plans, she wasn't a princess, and didn't even have homework, so her day was empty.<p>

A knock on the door broke it, of course.

She got up and started down the stairs, calling out, "Come in!"

Scotaloo walked in, followed by a human. Twilight froze, thought, and momentarily placed the face. She shifted to thinking in Imperial Basic and evenly said, "Hello, TK-421. Welcome to Equestria." To Scotaloo, she said, "Careless anchor, you wanted to save the Falcon, dragged him along?"

Scotaloo nodded.

Twilight sighed. "What have you told him?" She resumed descending.

Scotaloo thought. "We have magic. Resistance is pointless. There is no Empire... anything else?"

TK-421 added, "Watch out for the aqua-colored one."

Twilight Sparkle considered. "Since you brought him here against his will by means that are... not really something we want to encourage, I am considering assigning you to take care of him. Teach him any language he asks for, or translate if he doesn't feel like learning. If he wants a banana split for breakfast every morning, you get it, and you help him with the stomachache afterwards as best you can. If he takes a hike in the Everfree, you guide him and keep him safe. Any harm he causes to anypony, you caused - but you can't unduly restrain him. Does this seem fair to you?"

Scotaloo bit her lip and nodded.

She turned to the human. "And you? I understand if you'd rather it not be her, or if you would rather set out on your own."

TK-421 was stunned. "No... I... ah."

After five seconds of no response, Scotaloo muttered, "Making choices for himself? Way outside his training."

Twilight gave him a few more seconds before declaring, "All right, how about we do that. If you're unhappy with it, come ask me and I'll work something out."

\* \* \*

><p>109.10 (Drachefly)<p>

"I don't need it to be big. A grain of sand would be enough." Captain Zelnick tried his best to look sternly at the 3 meter tall crystal shimmering with electrical energy who went by the name of 'Diamond Tiara', who had elected to part with the other Chenjesu and join him in his fleet, since she was really a pony. "I could really use having those blueprints from day 1."

He looked aside to Silver Spoon, who had similarly abandoned the other Mrnmhrm; she whirred and spun before replying, "A pocket is hard to develop in a science-based setting, compared to magic-based settings." Her voice sounded odd, a natural young feminine voice coming from a telescoping robot with no other features analogous to any living thing he could think of.

Zelnick retorted, "This world has telepathic reading, mind control, and clairvoyance. I've heard of mountains made of thoughts. What more do we need?"

"Telekinesis would help. Being a species with affinity to any of those things would help more."

With a spark, Diamond Tiara activated her voice synthesizer. "OF COURSE WE CAN TRY. IT WILL TAKE A LONG TIME, THOUGH - MULTIPLE LOOPS. PERHAPS THE MOST USEFUL THING WOULD BE TO FIND THE LOCAL FIGURES WHO ALREADY KNOW ENOUGH TO HELP YOU PRACTICE."

"Yup. Then we'll drill the parts they \_don't\_ know into you."

Zelnick swallowed. "This is going to involve learning from the Pkunk, isn't it? Joy."

"Yes, and if you can convince them, the Arilou. But I think you should start with the Syreen."

Zelnick considered. "Well, if there was anything I could do that would convince the crew it's okay to take a year and a half or so off from this war, it's shore leave with the Syreen."

Diamond Tiara again crackled with electricity, to say, "DO NOT 'FORGET' TO MOVE ON TO THE PKUNK AND ARILOU."

"All right, all right!"

\* \* \*

><p>109.11 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Wandering around the usual Welcome-to-Ponyville surprise party, Twilight notice Derpy Hooves slumped against a bookshelf in the background, holding a plate with an untouched muffin on it. Asking the pardon of her unAwake friends, the purple unicorn walked over to the cross-eyed pegasus and asked, "What's the matter?"

"I lost my Exaltation," Derpy sighed.

"Where, under a couch?" Twilight grinned. "Did you leave it in the dirty clothes? Or maybe you put it in the icebox. I do that sometimes with books."

Derpy's cock-eyed expression grew as serious as it was ever possible for Derpy to manage. "No, really, Twilight. No more being Solar. It's gone."

Twilight raised an eyebrow. "I thought it was impossible for you to lose that. I checked you myself. No Limit, remember? "

"Because I never worried. But the last Loop I had, you weren't Awake- we must have had a stealth Anchor. And I happened to think: Everything is so easy now. Am I going to get bored with this? And then I started worrying about getting bored."

"Huh. Well..." Twilight pulled a PADD out of subspace and flipped through its memory to the role-playing game based on the Exalted universe. "Shouldn't you have had, I dunno, a saving throw or something?"

"I don't remember clearly," Derpy said. "If I did, I think I failed it really, really bad. It was like all the derps I avoided struck at once, starting with my mind." She rubbed her temple with one hoof and added uncertainly, "I think I remember saying at one point, '\_The Muffins Shall Last Forever.\_'"

"Ooooooooooh \_shoot\_, " Twilight muttered.

"And I woke up this morning here in Ponyville with a note and a photo clipped to my mail bag." Derpy pulled both out. The photo was taken from orbit; if Equestria had been a country on a planet-sized muffin, now Twilight knew what the muffin would look like. The note attached said, \_That's quite enough of that, sorry. - Sleipnir\_

"Well... look at the bright side," Twilight said. "Now you don't have to worry about worrying anymore, right?"

"Huh?" Derpy looked confused. "No, no, no! I'm not upset about not being Exalted anymore!" She pointed to the muffin world. "Apparently I did that... and I don't remember even taking a single bite! A muffin as big as the world... gone to waste..." The blonde pegasus sighed disconsolately, looked at the normal sized muffin on her plate, and began to nibble on it without enthusiasm.

"Ooooo... kay." Twilight backed slowly away.

\_As if I needed a reminder that every pony in this town is crazy...\_

\* \* \*

><p>109.12 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"SURPRISE!"

Most of Ponyville crowded in the Golden Oaks, as usual, for Pinkie's usual Welcome-to-Ponyville-Twilight-Sparkle party.

Most of Ponyville and, over in the corner, one other.

Ah, Twilight thought, that's where the other ping came from. "Welcome to Equestria," Twilight greeted the visiting Looper. "I'm honored to have you in my library."

The figure held up a very large burlap sack, currently empty except for the banana held in the same grip. "Ook. Ook eek ook," he said urgently.

"So you heard about Tirek. Well, thank you very much," Twilight said, "but the problem's more or less under control now. All the books are backed up long before that part of the baseline. I even keep a card catalog in case of Loop-specific variant-"

"EEK ook ook! Oook ook" The strange figure's gestures became more urgent.

"I agree, no harm in redundancy. I'm just saying there's plenty of time, and right now isn't the best-"

"Oooooook."

"Well, yes, better safe than sorry, but could you at least wait until Pinkie serves the cake before you start emptying the shelves?"

"It's banana upside-down cake!" Pinkie Pie added, popping out over Twilight's shoulder just long enough to announce the fact before bouncing off elsewhere.

"Oook ook." The red-furred figure dropped the sack while retaining his grip on the banana. With an awkward swaying gait it shambled towards the refreshments table.

Not for the first time, Twilight Sparkle wondered if there was any way short of improper Admin interference to speed up the Looper grapevine. Helpfulness was nice, and every bibliophile in the Loops was honored to host the Librarian... but...!

\_Memo to self: buy extra towels, and put the town plumber on permanent retainer for the clogs...\_

\_And ask non-Awake Applejack if she has any cousins in the banana trade that sell in bulk. \_

\* \* \*

><p>109.13 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Wait, are these backwards?"

Berry Punch rolled her eyes. "Nope! I don't have a horn, so I'm throwing \_him.\_"

The official glanced up from the papers, face screwed up in confusion. "Usually it's the stallion that does the throwingâ€"

"We're progressive thinkers," Discord interrupted smoothly. "Didn't you accept Trixie and Chrysalis?"

"...well, yes, I suppose, butâ€"

"Is there anything illegal with our paperwork?" Berry demanded.



"No, it's just that this is a spectator sport!" The official threw up his hooves. "You've got to have presence as well as skill!"

"Well, I'm the spirit of chaos and she's a crazy drunk," Discord offered. "We'll be the wacky team that nobody understands."

"...actually... actually, yes, that just might work..."

\* \* \*

><p>109.14 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Twilight?"

"Ugh. Yes Rarity?"

"Why is Celestia a smelly cloud-hopping shipper that never seems to go on a date herself?"

"I blame the booze."

\* \* \*

><p>109.15 (Masterweaver)<p>

Filthy Rich adjusted his tie as the carriage rolled to a stop and stepped out, smiling as the school bell rang. A crowd of foals emerged from Cheerilee's humble little building, and through them he caught sight of his little princes.

...who was, apparently, more of a princess than usual.

After a moment of staring, Rich managed to regain control of himself and step forward. "Ah, Diamond? Why, exactly, do you have wings and a horn?"

Diamond Tiara blushed. "Well, you see, I had a two-for-one coupon..."

\* \* \*

><p>109.16 (via Masterofgames)<p>

Dash tried, once again, to stuff her shoes into her bulging locker. "Tree damn it... didn't think this through when I decided to take all those sports clubs at once."

She sat back, sighing, then contemplated the four pairs of shoes. Track, spiked, indoor and a pair of walking boots for the hill-climbing. Yes, Canterlot High had a hill-climbing club. This time, anyway.

"Maybe I should just-"

Pinkie gasped. "No, Dashie, no! You can't do that!"

Dash looked up. "Why not? I've got easily enough space!"

"You can't put \_shoes\_ in your pocket, Dashie!"

"Okay." Dash rubbed the bridge of her nose. "I'll bite. \_Why\_ can't I?"

Pinkie beamed. "Shoes have soles!"

After a pause, Dash pulled her locker open, and grabbed her towel as the rest spilled out. Then she threw the towel at Pinkie.

\* \* \*

><p>109.17<p>

Spike yawned, stretched, and checked for other loopers.

First off, his Loyalty power. Reaching for that, and with a moment's rush of warmth through his body as the magic reminded him how he'd earned it in the first place, he checked in mentally on each of his friends.

\_Okay. Rarity, and... huh. Just Rarity.\_

That \_was\_ unusual. Presumably there was an Anchor somewhere â€" a stealth Anchor, possibly, but it was hard to tell â€" and since Twilight was her usual self from the baseline, there was no immediate indication that anything would go differently whatsoever.

A quick ping received only one reply â€" Rarity's, of course â€" so it looked like it probably \_was\_ stealth Anchor time.

Finishing his early-loop check, Spike sat down and wrote a letter. It was short, and finished by the time Twilight arrived, so he didn't have to explain it to her.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was her usual flustered self, insisting that Nightmare Moon would be a potential danger â€" quite accurate, of course â€" and had Spike write a letter. He did so, then sent both it and his other missive off in two bursts of dragonfire.<p>

Celestia's reply arrived quite promptly, and sent Twilight off to Ponyville as usual. While Twilight was grumbling about this, Spike burped discreetly and snatched another reply out of the air.

"Has she sent another reply, Spike?" Twilight asked, voice hopeful.

"Nope, sorry," Spike answered, and managed quite a convincing hiccup. "I think I just ate too much earlier..."

"Oh." Twilight wilted slightly, then got on with packing.

While she was trying to choose which twenty books to take with her as light reading, Spike unfolded the second reply and scanned through it.

\_Agreed. See you soon, love.\_

He smiled, then went over to remind Twilight that there'd be a

library where she was going.

\* \* \*

><p>It was nostalgic, watching as the events of the baseline played out all over again.<p>

Pinkie Pie was as excited as ever, of course, and Fluttershy had the same I-don't-want-to-offend-anybody attitude which had earned her the Element of Kindness in the first place. Dash was â€" well, Dash, and Applejack's family just as pleasant as ever.

Things went a little different in the Boutique, though.

"And..." Twilight consulted her list. "This is Rarity, who's doing the decorations. I hope she can sort out my hair..."

The door opened to Twilight's polite knock.

"Good afternoon, and welcome to the-" Rarity began, then trailed off. "Hello."

Spike looked up at her, and blushed. (It wasn't hard â€" she was, after all, someone he was looking forward to meeting. Quite a lot.) "Um... hi."

"Spike?" Twilight asked. "Spike! Twilight to Spike are you alright?"

Spike ignored her. On the outside, at least. Inside he was trying not to giggle.

"I'm sorry about this," Twilight said to Rarity. "He sometimes gets like this with a unicorn from the Academy..." Twilight finally realized that Rarity wasn't listening either. "Okay, what's going on?"

"You're beautiful," Spike finally said, in a distant tone. "Marry me?"

Twilight looked at him incredulously.

"Of course," Rarity replied. "Tomorrow?"

Twilight transferred her look of shock to the Ponyville unicorn. "Za?"

"Why wait?" Spike asked.

"Okay, okay, okay. WHAT?" Twilight's mane toinged out. "Am I the only one who has no idea what's going on?"

"Yes!" both Loopers said in unison.

"It's love at first sight," Spike added.

"Indeed it is, darling," Rarity replied. "Oh, what's your name?"

"Spykoranuvellitar." The syllables rolled off Spike's tongue. "And

you, beautiful?"

Rarity giggled. "Rarity Belle, handsome."

Twilight gaped for a second, then swallowed. "Okay, I-" A pause. "Can you-" Pause. "At least get to know one another!"

The two stared at one another for a few seconds, then Spike reluctantly tore his eyes away. "Do we have to?"

The plea had just the right plaintiveness to make the whole situation even more ridiculous. Out of the corner of his eye, Spike saw that Rarity was barely restraining a giggling fit.

"Yes!" Twilight began to walk up and down between them. "First, you'd actually proposed to her before you even knew her name! Second, you've known her for less than, what, three minutes? Third, she doesn't know you either, fourth you're nowhere near sixteen-"

"Okay, fine," Spike agreed, sighing hugely. "Want a date this evening, Rarity?"

"My pleasure," Rarity replied instantly. "Dinner and a dance?"

"The pleasure's all mine," Spike protested. "Done. Seven?"

"Suits me."

Twilight looked back and forth, then threw up her forelegs. "I don't even know what's going on any more."

\* \* \*

><p>"That was <em>hilarious</em>," Spike said later, over pudding.

"Indeed," Rarity agreed, before another spoonful of meringue.

"Think we can keep it up all loop?"

Before answering, Rarity dabbed at her mouth with a napkin. "I feel certain of it," she replied with a smile.

\* \* \*

><p>"What are you writing?" Twilight asked, peering over at Spike.<p>

"Poetry," Spike replied, before balling up one of the sheets of paper, throwing it in a metal bin by his desk and setting light to it for good measure. "I'm trying to write Rarity a love poem, but it's not going well."

Twilight managed to avoid a sigh at the reminder of Spike's 'mutual crush' which had appeared out of nowhere, but it was close. "Really? How 'not well'?"

"Not soppy enough," Spike informed her. "Hmmm... perhaps something about 'sober pools of limpid blue surrounded by your eyelashes that

shimmer like ebony fire?'"

The conversation paused for a minute, as Twilight tried to reconcile the ultraviolet prose she'd just heard... from her assistant.

"Um, okay..." she said, tentatively. "Why do you want to write something that soppy?"

"Because that way, we can laugh about it on our next date," Spike replied matter-of-factly. "It's a hobby."

\* \* \*

><p>"Sis, are you okay?" Sweetie Belle asked. "You've been doodling for the last half hour on your ideas notebook."<p>

"Oh, I'm fine, Sweetie," Rarity replied, in an airy voice. "I'm just... in love..."

Sweetie blinked. "Okay. Who is it? Is it a duke or an actor?"

"Nothing so superficial." Rarity smiled. "Handsome, yes, but so much more than that. A cultured drake, a dragon of many talents, a knight, with pen and sword in accord, with a soul of slow fire!"

"Er... okay," Sweetie said. "Sure."

\* \* \*

><p>"This dragon bothering you, babe?" Spike asked, walking into the dragon cave.<p>

"I'm afraid he's being an awful lout, dear," Rarity agreed gratefully. "If you would be so kind?"

The dragon frowned down at him. "What is this? A baby dragon who loves ponies?"

"\_One \_pony in particular, thank you very much," Spike returned. He and Rarity shared a fond look, then a kiss.

"Anyway," Spike added, after he and Rarity were done for the time being. "You snore. Please stop, or else."

The dragon sniggered. "Or else what?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh," the dragon said, in the Frozen North. "I didn't know there was a kind of dragon that could do that."<p>

At least his treasure had been sent along with him.

\* \* \*

><p>"Sorry I couldn't get you a necklace, dear." As they walked out of the cave, Spike passed over a half-dozen violets tied together with a cord. "I hope flowers will do."<p>

"Oh, how thoughtful!" Rarity selected one and nibbled a petal. "I was feeling peckish after the climb. You're so thoughtful."

"I try," Spike agreed.

"Oh, so modest!" Rarity reached up and gently pushed at his spines. "My spiky-wikey."

He ran his claws through her mane. "Rarity-warity."

They ignored the sound of Rainbow Dash loudly gagging in the background.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, even <em>I <em>think we're getting a bit treacly," Rarity admitted. "We should probably just go ahead and show that you can age-shift."

"Why even you?" Spike asked, raising an eyebrow. "What is it about you in this? Why can't it be even for me?"

"Well, you're a big manly dragon," Rarity pointed out. "Though, admittedly, you're neither at the moment."

"Low blow," Spike chuckled, and poured the tea. "But a frilly apron doesn't deduct from my masculinity in the slightest!"

"And why not?" Rarity pressed.

"Because it's Nightmare Night," Spike said. "I mean, I'm dressed up, so it doesn't count."

"Neither of us have gone out for Nightmare Night," Rarity argued.

"So?" Spike shrugged. "Still counts."

There was a knock at the door.

"I'll get the sweets," Spike volunteered, putting the teapot down. "You answer the door."

\* \* \*

><p>When Rarity opened the door, it was to reveal Luna standing there.<p>

"Oh!" Rarity blinked. "Well, your highness! It's an honour."

"'TIS NOT A PROBLEM," Luna boomed. "WE WISHED TO ask you a-

She broke off, and tapped her throat. "What is this?"

"Sorry, darling." Rarity indicated her horn. "It's a spell I use when Sweetie and her friends are being too loud â€" and I'm afraid you were most assuredly being too loud." She shrugged. "Anyway, what was it?"

"Sweets are here!" Spike announced. "I â€" oh, Princess!"

Then he squinted. "Is that a-"

Luna frowned. "What is it you speak of?"

"Oh," Spike frowned, and rephrased. "Is that a possum in your mane?"

"Ah! Thou dost mean Tibbers." Luna reached onto her back and retrieved the pet. "He has been a boon companion of mine since shortly after my return to Equestria, ere my first public appearance." She scratched Tibbers on the back, and he made something approximating a purr.

Spike held out the bowl. "Does Tibbers want a sweet?"

There was a blur, and six of the sweets in the bowl vanished.

Tibbers munched down one of the caramels, reclining lazily on Luna's hair.

"He is such a ragamuffyn, is he not?" Luna asked, smiling.

Spike and Rarity exchanged a glance. As with many couples, it was a whole conversation in one look.

"Come through here, Luna," Rarity invited, stepping aside. "I'll help teach you some class, some culture. Spike can look after Tibbers."

"Alright, little guy?" Spike asked. He shook the bowl. "You'll get more sweets!"

The possum hopped down from Luna's back as she and Twilight walked towards the back room.

\* \* \*

><p>"Impressive work, Admiral," Spike began, as soon as the door had shut.<p>

Tibbers looked up at him owlshly, then ignored the silly dragon and got back to his sweeties.

"Doesn't help, James," Spike added. "I'm a Jedi, I can tell there's a sapient in there if I'm really trying."

"Well... shoot." James Tiberius 'Tibbers' Kirk, Starship Captain, Admiral of the Fleet (posthumous), more awards and demerits than you could shake a stick at, and part-time possum, abandoned the pretence. "How'd you know?"

"Bad luck on your part," Spike replied. "Our normal Anchor isn't Awake, we're the only two here, and we know we didn't cause you to turn up. It could have been a variant, but... well, we were looking for an Anchor anyway."

He grinned. "Don't worry, though, your secret's safe with us."

'Tibbers' considered that, then nodded and made a familiar four-fingered salute. "Works for me."

"No problem. Just â€" look out for Luna, okay?" Spike scratched the back of his neck. "She has a rough time of it before the baseline starts."

"Oh, I know," 'Tibbers' assured him. "I've been here plenty of times. One of my more common loops, actually."

Spike absorbed that. "Huh. Well, you're supposed to be one for meeting all powerful space beings, I suppose."

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity snuggled up to Spike as the others left.<p>

"I think that went quite well," she informed Spike. "We gradually reduced the power of the spell, and had her try not to get louder as the spell stepped down. She's only speaking firmly now."

"Sounds good," Spike agreed. "Oh â€" I was right about Tibbers. He's our guest anchor."

"Good eye, Spiky-wikey!" Rarity pecked him on the cheek. "Who was it?"

"James T. Kirk," Spike told her, with a broad grin.

Rarity blinked. "Okay, somehow I feel like that was obvious."

She shook her head. "I had something to tell you, as well. I managed to wrangle these off Luna when Twilight needed the lavatory."

They looked at the signed royal orders.

They shared a grin.

\* \* \*

><p>"What are you doing <em>this<em> time, Spike?" Twilight asked, as she walked into the main room. "Is that a parrot?"

"Phoenix," Spike replied matter-of-factly. "Rarity and I found the egg on our expedition yesterday. It's a perfect way to carry my latest message to her!"

Peewee chirped, looking uncertainly at the asbestos-lined scroll case tied to his leg.

"Go find Rarity," Spike instructed. "Go on!"

The little phoenix frowned, then erupted in flame and vanished.

"Good enough," Spike pronounced.

With a crash, something came through the upstairs window.



\* \* \*

><p>The <em>something<em> turned out to be a large, blanket-wrapped bundle. The bundle in turn was a pair of pillows, wrapped around another blanket, wrapped around a sleeping bag, wrapped around an irate Opalescent.

Spike deftly retrieved a scroll from her back before she destroyed it, and skimmed through it. "Cool, we're getting married next week."

Twilight tripped and fell over.

"What?" she asked, getting up again. "\_What\_ did you just say?"

"Oh, right." Spike passed it over. "Royal order, signed by Princess Luna, stating that Rarity Belle and Spykoranuvellitar may join in wedlock when the order is signed by both other parties, superseding all other laws." So saying, he scribbled his name down on the sole free line. "Kind of funny, really, I just sent one to her..."

Twilight could only gape.

\* \* \*

><p>"...and then I realized," Cadence continued, gesticulating wildly. "They're getting married in a week, <em>we're<em> getting married in a week... how to resolve the conflict?"

"I don't know, dear," Shining Armor replied. "\_How\_ to resolve the conflict?"

Cadence' voice took on a mellifluous quality.  
"Dou~blewed~ding..."

Shining watched, with something that was not quite trepidation, as his lovely bride started dancing. On the wall.

\* \* \*

><p>"...so, anyway," Rarity finished. "Given how much love Cadence naturally puts off, you're set for life if you can just stay around her. I have these <em>lovely<em> armours designed, so if you're ready to send the offer we can get you kitted out straight away."

"And \_why\_, precisely, should I make the Changelings subservient to Equestria?" Chrysalis asked. "Especially personally to a single alicorn?"

"Well," Rarity smiled. "One. Cadence doesn't have a guards corps, so there's a slot spare. Two. She can feed all of you, as I've mentioned. Three. She's getting married soon, as well you know, which is an excellent time for pageantry. And four. Under the feudal system which Equestrian nobility do still use, as direct vassals of a Princess you'd be the primary-ranked noble in Equestria short of them themselves... and your wellbeing would become her responsibility."

Chrysalis pondered that, considering her desperate situation. Her

dwindling resources. Her pride. And the clear, melodious sincerity of the unicorn before her.

"...all right. Give me that paper."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that worked out rather better than I was expecting," Spike admitted, as the Love Guard made formation and marched counterstep across the state, revealing their new liege to her groom. "Job well done, I think."<p>

"Of course," Rarity replied, pouring herself some champagne. "Solving problems through fashion is my speciality."

\* \* \*

><p>109.18<p>

"Okay," Vinyl began. "So, I made this sound deck which repeats things using tape loops, and then this one takes that, transcribes it onto a record, then reads it off straight away just to get the purely authentic crackle, and this one will constantly monitor the results from the unbiased point of view of a purely mathematical algorithm dedicated to finding better music, and this one-"

"I get the point," Octavia interrupted. "It plays great music. Right. What happens if you switch it all on?"

Seeing Vinyl glance over at the controls, Octavia gestured. "Go on, I'm honestly curious now."

"Well... sure." Vinyl tapped a few switches, then moved the power control to on.

The whole edifice creaked for a few seconds, then began to produce sound.

"...well, it's very nice," Octavia said, after a few minutes. "But what's a submarine, why is it yellow, and who are all living in it?"

Vinyl gave her new machine a scowl. "I'm going to need to give this thing another look over."

It certainly wasn't supposed to just play Beatles hits, and she hadn't worked out how to stop it yet...

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

109.1: Saints!

>109.2: And damn all pidgeons, anyway.<br>109.3: That could take a while.

>109.4: The L stands for something that is definitely NOT "loser".<br>109.5: I do not know who the anchor is.

>109.6: The Great Discorder.<br>109.7: Strongly Bad.

>109.8: Pronunciation issues.<br>109.9: This is why we don't put sapients in the pocket. Or anything else with a soul, for that

matter.  
>109.10: Just get him a strategy guide and be done with it.<br>109.11: Whoops.  
>109.12: Almost a human in Equestria. Just go back a few steps on the genetic tree of life, and bear left instead of right.<br>109.13: Obvious rule patch.  
>109.14: Aromantic aeromantic eromantic aromatic.<br>109.15: Prank or accident?  
>109.16: Ow.<br>109.17: Sleipnir is now an extremely rich admin. Also, it's rare they get to prank unawake Twilight, so they may as well make the most of it.  
>109.18: Actually not all that surprising.<p>

## 116. Chapter 116

110.1

\* \* \*

><p>The library door opened.<p>

"Afternoon, Twilight," Cheerilee said, walking in with a kind of elemental determination. This fixation was only hampered by her spotting Nyx, who she waved to before continuing on her advance.

"Um..." Twilight watched as the teacher trotted up to her, and stopped directly in front of her at a distance of about two feet. "Can I help you?"

Cheerilee nodded, and shook her mane. A very, very large ledger dropped out of her mane with a SLAM, raising dust as it hit the floor.

"That book," Cheerilee began, "is a checklist. It is incomplete. It is a list of every single field of study that I could think of, and I have been compiling it for the past four loops."

"...okay," Twilight said, picking up the book and opening it. Aardvark biology, Abacus use, Abbey construction and maintenance-

"Is this alphabetical? All the way through?"

"No, I kept thinking of new ones. Anyway." Cheerilee looked Twilight in the eye. "I believe I have worked out how to avoid my continual case of Cutie Mark Failure Syndrome. I wish to be able to give a basic course in every single one of these subjects."

Thunder rolled.

"Thank you, Nyx," she added, glancing over to where the young alicorn was putting a thundercloud away. "I think you're going to do well in drama club this year."

"Thanks!"

Twilight had taken the opportunity to think Cheerilee's plan over. "Well... it's certainly quite grandiose, I have to admit. Are you

sure?"

Cheerilee nodded firmly. "Yes. I want to be able to teach whatever someone wants to learn, and to make sure there's always something to teach anyone."

"I see." Twilight mentally ran through a few ideas. "Well, I think there are some places which have flash learning equipment, but I've never been interested in trying it. You might want to give that a go. Until then, however, we should do it the old fashioned way." She called upstairs. "Spike!"

"Yeah?" Spike called back down.

"Can you tell Fluttershy to come over, please? It's not urgent, but sooner would be better."

"Aardvarks?" Cheerilee checked.

"Aardvarks," Twilight confirmed. "May as well start at the beginning."

\* \* \*

><p>110.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"And here she is," the Mayor announced. "Princess Celestia!"<p>

What stepped out onto the stage was not, however, Princess Celestia.

Perhaps more surprisingly, nor was it Princess Luna. It wasn't even her dark self, or the looping version of said dark self.

The ponies of Ponyville panicked, running for the exits, as a huge red-black dragon crawled up onto the stage and roared. Its spines shook, and it flashed into flame.

"What's-" Twilight began, surprised, then sighed and facehoofed. "Of course. Nightmare."

Fluttershy was already trotting determinedly up the steps. "Hello, big guy."

The dragon snarled once more, then looked down at her.

"It's okay," Fluttershy said, her face and manner serene. "No-pony here's going to hurt you."

After a moment, the Monstrous Nightmare relaxed. Its eyes widened out from fight-or-flight slits into calmer circles, and it allowed her to gently touch it.

Where am I? it asked. The last I remember, Snotlout was putting me to bed. But I can't feel him. Is this a new Loop?

Twilight trotted over. "Are you... I think it was..."

Hookfang?"

\_Yes. Hello.\_

Twilight shook her head helplessly. This was going to be interesting...

\_I saw another pony like you, but one with wings,\_ he added. \_She sent me down here to attack.\_

"Did she look like this?" Twilight asked, producing an image of Nightmare Moon.

\_Almost, but her hair was a bit lighter and her eyes weren't slit shaped.\_

"Huh." Twilight absorbed that, wondering what it meant. "Okay, I think the best thing is for you to go with Fluttershy. She's good at taking care of animals, and you sort of count."

\_Thank you.\_ Hookfang followed Fluttershy off the stage, stepping carefully around the chairs strewn across the floor.

\_Poor guy,\_ Twilight thought, with a sigh. Dragons who had the Pernese bond ability, from what she knew, found it very disorienting not to have their Riders present unless they were used to it.

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you <em>sure<em> this is a dragon?" Snotlout asked, looking at what was " apparently " his mount for the loop.

"Look," the winged unicorn horse retorted, in a high pitched voice. "I don't get it either, okay? Just be glad I'm letting you ride me in the first place, I'm not comfortable with people on my back..."

"Ergh, this is gonna look ridiculous." Snotlout bowed to the inevitable, and started checking his not-a-dragon's harness. "At least tell me your name."

"Nyx." The horse frowned down at his handiwork. "Are you sure that's the right kind of buckle?"

"Yeah, yeah, I've been doing this for yonks," Snotlout replied. "Loki's teeth, I should have known something was up when I had a Lunar Nightmare instead of a Monstrous one..."

\* \* \*

><p>110.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, hey! Hi, Fluttershy!"<p>

The indicated pegasus looked over her shoulder. "Oh " good morning, Vinyl. Did you Wake up late?"

"Nah, exactly on time," Vinyl replied. "Same time as you. Anyway, I

had a quick favour to ask."

"Go on," Fluttershy invited.

"Okay, it's back home. Follow me..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Anyway," Vinyl got back to the point. "I Woke up this loop and found I had a pet. And, well, I didn't know any vets before I Awoke, so I never had him checked up. I just thought, you know, Fluttershy's not busy now the modelling career's stopped, so I could get her to do it. If that's cool, that is."<p>

"Oh, it's no trouble." Fluttershy examined the small bat, currently dangling from his perch. "Well, he certainly looks like a fine specimen... what's his name?"

"Didn't have one when I Woke, so I'm just calling him MiniMoog." Fluttershy shot her a glance, and Vinyl shrugged. "It's a joke that only like three ponies in this whole loop will get â€" me, Lyra, Sweetie, and possibly Twilight or Applebloom. Anyways... he's kinda cool. Watch. Hey, MiniMoog!"

The bat chirruped sleepily, then dropped off his perch, spread wings, and swooped up into a hover before hitting the ground.

"He can do loads of cool stuff," Vinyl said, putting a glass on the table. "Hey, MiniMoog â€" swan!"

MiniMoog the bat chirped at the glass a couple of times, then emitted a high, pure note.

The glass cracked, then exploded in a cloud of fine sand. In the resultant pile of sand was a sculpture of a swan in repose, neck arched and wings swept back.

"Wow," Fluttershy said quietly, and the bat did a loop-de-loop.

"He sings along to my music," Vinyl confided. "Or he sometimes just sings something and, like, vanishes. Not just in sound, either, it's like the air around him shimmers."

"That sounds very interesting," Fluttershy complimented. "MiniMoog, can you show me that please?"

MiniMoog began to sing, and â€" \_blurred\_.

"I think I see," Fluttershy said eventually. Then she cleared her throat, and began to speak in a language of ultrasonic clicks and warbles that drew a startled look from Vinyl.

"Hello," she began. "Am I speaking to a Looper?"

MiniMoog cancelled his cloak of sound, and looked at her. Then he nodded. "Yes. I'm called Shade Silverwing."

Fluttershy clapped her hooves together in an uncharacteristic display of delight. "Lovely! I wondered if it was you."

"Uh, dude and dudette," Vinyl raised a hoof. "I don't speak bat. What's goin' on?"

"Well-" Fluttershy coughed. "Sorry. Well, this is Shade Silverwing. He's a looper â€" in fact, I believe he's an Anchor."

"MiniMoog is fine, though," Shade added. "She's right, it\_ is \_a good joke."

\* \* \*

><p>110.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay," Berry said, taking a deep breath. "You ready for this?"<p>

"Ready as you are," Discord replied, sitting on the wall.

Berry downed her Agaric Ale. "Okay, just remember those ground rules."

The draconequus rolled his eyes, getting a seven. "Yes, I know, I know. Nothing more permanent than twelve hours, plus another twelve if you haven't woken up yet."

She nodded. "Good." A pause. "And Ruby?"

"She's staying over at Derpy's now." Discord winked. "As is her room."

"I wondered about the hole," Berry admitted, her eyes unfocusing. "Cool, now there's a flying reindeer coming through it."

Discord snapped his claws, and a flying reindeer duly appeared coming through the hole.

As a magical construct, it wasn't actually alive and was controlled purely by Discord's subconscious. As a weird bloke, Discord's subconscious promptly made the reindeer scream something about 'for Rudolph', crash into the table, and fall unconscious.

"Hey, Dissy?" Berry asked. "What's got four eyes and six limbs?"

"Princess Luna wearing glasses?" Discord replied, pulling her out of a drawer.

"Oh, I was hoping you knew," Berry said sadly. "Because one wants to be my friend, and it's getting drool on the carpet."

"Not Luna, then..." Discord pushed her back into the drawer, over her protests, and created a six-limbed four-eyed creature on the carpet. "Just throw a frisbee for it."

"All I've got is this frying pan," Berry protested.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, seriously, <em>what the hay<em> were you two doing?" Twilight demanded.

"Trying to work out if Dissy is legitimately more bizarre than tripping," Berry replied, seriously. "Inconclusive results, though."

Discord snored on the floor.

"Plus, I think I actually tired him out trying to keep up with me," Berry gauged. "Just use a failsafe spell, that should sort it all out."

Twilight pulled a flying squid off her forehead. "Was this one of yours or one of his?"

"Mine, I think," Berry answered, frowning. "That or he misinterpreted 'inkjet printer'."

The squid spat a stream of ink at the table, producing a perfectly typeset document about the Rights Of Pony.

"Ah, must be the second one." Berry nodded sagely.

\* \* \*

><p>110.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Claws grated on bronze, punched halfway through, then slid off.<p>

"Got to try harder than that!" Scootaloo called, letting her bucklers reform themselves from cloudstuff.

"Heh, I'm just getting warmed up!" Gilda reached into nothing, which turned into a large shield made of over a dozen smaller metal bits. The shield disassembled into its component parts, hovered for a moment, then began orbiting her. "Try this on for size!"

Scootaloo nodded. "I intend to." One hoof formed a hoplon shield, the other a dory. The spear wavered around in small movements, probing for an opening, then jabbed forward.

"Whoa!" Gilda hopped up and the spear barely missed her. The components of the Infinity Judge then wrapped around the dory, which promptly vanished.

The griffin took the opportunity to summon a second weapon â€" a set of beads, rusty red in colour â€" and then faced Scootaloo directly, her tail moving in precise shapes.

"Hey, we said no casting!" Scootaloo protested, as a half-dozen bolts of coherent magic ink splattered on her shield. One skittered off her helmet.

"It's the weapon ability," Gilda replied with a grin. "Read the manual."



"In that case..." Scootaloo whirled around on one hoof, and threw half a dozen javelins. Halfway to their target, they all caught fire.

"Gah!" The beads snapped out, breaking two javelins. Infinity Judge blocked three more, and the last trimmed Gilda's lock of feathers just over her beak.

"You're gonna regret that, Scoots..." Gilda made two sharp gestures, and her beads and shield vanished.

In place of Infinity Judge on her back, a simple tarnished mirror with a corona of trailing fire.

In place of the Life Beads, a dozen teardrops with the frost of a midwinter's night on their surfaces.

And, in both clawed forelimbs, a sword snapping lightning bolts in every direction.

Scootaloo's jaw dropped. "Seriously? \_Three?\_"

Gilda nodded, one wing wiping a sheen of sweat off her forehead. "I'm not saying it's easy to run all three at once, but â€" good luck, squirt!"

The beads fired out like a shotgun blast, just ahead of the enraged griffin and her big pointy sword.

Scootaloo rummaged through what she could legally do in this duel, looking for a reprieve-

\_Oh.\_

\_Yeah, that'd work.\_

Four slingstones blurred out from her spinning tail, knocking two beads each off course. The remaining four bounced off her \_hoplon\_, thrown like a discus at the same moment.

A \_falx\_, swung in both forelegs now they were free, deflected the sparking Thunder Edge, and a \_kopis\_ sword crossed with the \_falx\_ to arrest it entirely.

"So, what's your plan for when the beads recharge?" Gilda asked, pushing with all her might to force Scootaloo back.

The young pegasus grinned. "This."

At that point, a \_tessarakonteres\_ landed on top of Gilda with a splintering crash.

\* \* \*

><p>"Yeah, it <em>was<em> basically cheating," Scootaloo admitted. "I did have to get Pansy to construct it, especially that far off. But â€" hey, treat it as me conceding you'd won."

"Not talking to you," Gilda replied sulkily, staring into her retsina.

"Told you the drink was good," Scootaloo continued. "Hay, I paid for it, right?"

Gilda gave Scootaloo a \_look\_. Then downed her glass. "Tastes like resin."

"Kinda is," Scootaloo confirmed. "There's pine resin in there, I think... in other words, tree sap."

That just earned her another \_look\_.

\* \* \*

><p>110.6<p>

Nightmare Moon trotted onto the stage, and spread her wings. "Tremble in fear, mortals! The Night Will Last Forever!"

The mayor cleared her throat. "Er, excuse me. Are you â€" Nightmare Moon?"

Said alicorn turned. "Indeed I am. What of it, functionary?"

"Well, I represent a fiscal firm â€" Great Investations. We were the ones who handled your finances while you were away."

"I have \_finances\_?" Nightmare Moon blinked. "I would have thought 'twas all confiscated."

"Most of it was, most of it was." Ivory permitted herself a thin smile. "But our team has represented the best for over a thousand years, and we managed to save seed money of one million bits. Since then, we have invested it in a diverse portfolio which has shown a 1% return on investment annualized over the last thousand years, showing a Sharp-Investor ratio of 2.4 â€" which is very competitive."

"I... see," Nightmare Moon said, to cover that she didn't. "And what does that actually \_mean\_?"

Ivory passed over a slip of paper. "The current value of the portfolio."

Nightmare Moon's eyes widened. "That is â€" a very big number. Approximately twenty-one milliards?"

"Correct." Ivory nodded. "A little goes a long way, over a long time."

"Excellent," Nightmare Moon announced. "Truly an impressive achievement! Now-

"One moment, milady," Ivory interrupted. "There is the matter of investment tax."

"Tax?" Nightmare Moon's eyes took on a slightly hunted look. "\_Tax\_ applies to estates?"

"Since three-sixty-three, yes. That would be... about three hundred and fifty four years after we took over the account upon your

banishment, if I have the calculations right." Ivory indicated a very thick ledger. "Fortunately, through some loopholes, we were able to minimize the impact on your estate. The investment itself was untouched, and the tax was only on the interest â€" at nothing for the first twenty thousand bits, then one percent for the next thirty thousand, and two percent after that. Negligible impact on the actual value of the portfolio, of course."

"Of course," Nightmare Moon echoed, looking completely lost. "So?"

"Well, our normal practice is simply to forward the tax assessment task to the exchequer, and leave it at that. However, since there was no tax actually being paid, it became arrears. And the interest on arrears comes to five percent per annum. So you owe this much."

A second, rather longer slip of paper. This one had a very, very large number on it.

Nightmare Moon's jaw dropped, and her lips moved silently.

"I checked it myself," Ivory added earnestly. "Twice. Special service."

"\_Eleven trillion, seven hundred and eighty one billiard, four hundred and seventeen billion, eight hundred and sixty eight milliard one hundred and thirteen million, seven hundred thousand bits!?!\_"

"Plus eight bits fifty for doing the assessment," Ivory pointed out helpfully.

It didn't actually help, though. Nightmare Moon had fainted dead away.

\* \* \*

><p>110.7<p>

"Good morning, Angel!" Fluttershy called. "The sun is shining, the birds are singing, it's a new Loop, and â€" I know you're Awake, you silly bunny!"

Angel made a singularly unconcerned noise, and flipped a rude gesture at Fluttershy as he turned over back to bed.

"Now, now," Fluttershy chided him. "That's thoroughly impolite of you, Angel. And-" she paused, blinked, then frowned. "Hold on. Are you okay?"

Angel did not respond audibly, but Fluttershy got the gist anyway.

"Oh, you poor thing..." Fluttershy bent down. "I'm sorry, I know what that's like."

The rabbit made a complicated paw signal.

Fluttershy nodded, and trotted over to the windows. Curtains dropped down across each one, and then a big CLOSED sign went on the

door.

"There you go," she informed him. "Now, come here."

Angel dragged himself out of bed, walked slowly across to Fluttershy, and allowed her to gently pick him up.

"There, there," Fluttershy soothed. "I know, it hurts when that sort of thing happens."

Angel nodded silently.

For perhaps a minute, neither broke the embrace.

"Um... if you don't mind my asking," Fluttershy began, frowning. "Who was it?"

Angel pulled a foreleg free. A few seconds rummaging in his Pocket, and he handed over a book.

"Oh, I remember this world." Fluttershy skimmed through that volume in particular, then raised an eyebrow. "The Honorary Rosemary?"

Angel nodded.

"Were you replacing Tark?"

Another nod. Angel retrieved a length of yellow cloth embroidered with pink flowers, and wrapped it around his head bandana-style.

On the cloth were small words, picked out in black thread:

Property Rosemary Woodsorrel of Salamandastron.

Angel adjusted it slightly, then gave Fluttershy a look of laserlike intensity that promised one thing and one thing only.

"Oh, don't be such a silly bunny!" Fluttershy admonished. "Of course it's none of their business. My lips are sealed."

The glare continued for a further few seconds, and then Angel nodded his thanks.

With the moment over, Fluttershy removed the sign and pulled all the curtains back.

It was a nice day, after all.

\* \* \*

><p>110.8<p>

"And with that, I'm in a position for All Your Base, which will Belong To Me shortly. That's my turn," Gilda said, taking off everyone else's zigs.

The first of her opponents made a squeaking noise.

"Tibbers says he's going to challenge you to a fist fight, and he's

playing his special â€" What Does God Need With A Starship," Fluttershy translated. "That means that you have to use your basic character without any mods applied, or he gets to shoot you with klingons."

"Not a problem!" Gilda replied, turning a card over. "Because it's Freaky Friday, so now I'm actually \_his \_character-" she gestured to her right, "-until the end of the turn. Have fun being kicked around by a possum, matey!"

Q said something \_literally\_ unpronounceable, and vanished in a flash of light.

"Does that count as a forfeit?" the final player asked.

"Eh." Discord shrugged. "I think so, because he refused my pizza last night, and because rules adjudications are made\_ solely \_on petty vendettas when Luna's paperwork backlog is over four inches high."

"Good." That final player drew a card, placed it carefully into his hand, and then played another one. "Prime Directive. I'm the only one who can act until I do something directly inimical to lesser races, and such an act has to be confirmed by the Federation high command â€" which means a fifty turn lag time."

Gilda gaped. "How the heck did you manage \_that?\_"

Jean-Luc Picard smiled. The smile was not broad, but profoundly zen. "Happiness makes the world go round, but ten turns doing nothing but stockpiling bureaucratic red tape counters can make it stop completely until a permit is issued. In triplicate."

"Damnit. Well, I guess that's game. Nice work on the sci fi expansion, Discord." Gilda glanced out the window. "Now, how do we get back to the Enterprise?"

"You tell me, lieutenant." Picard shrugged. "You \_are\_ my security officer, after all."

"Yeah, but my sense of direction's not as good as Worf's is. Not navigating around some kind of crazy time-outside-space, anyway."

Discord spread his arms expansively. "Ask and you shall receive."

"We didn't ask," Gilda reminded him.

"Well, yes, but the ship's counsellor did." Discord sketched a bow to Fluttershy. "She's much more polite than you lot."

"Eh, fair enough, we'll take what we can get." Gilda then grinned. "Hey, I just got an idea. Want to come along with us, Tibbers?"

The animal â€" Kirk, of course â€" gave her a quizzical look.

"It's simple. We program your real identity into the computer, make sure it's locked out, and 'shy keeps you around as her pet."

"I see." Picard nodded. "So, in times of crisis when I am incapacitated, command will automatically devolve on what amounts to the ship's cat."

Gilda sharpened her claws casually. "I'm kinda proud of it."

\* \* \*

><p>110.9<p>

\* \* \*

><p>((Compiled by Masterweaver. Writers include: banjo2e, Detective Ethan Redfield, DrTempo, FanOfMostEverything, feral wolfskin, Hubris Plus, masterofgames, Masterweaver, misterq, namar13766, Valentine Meikin, Vulpine Fury))<p>

Sunset shimmer called for attention in the bar. "Okay, new stories. Favorite thing you've done using the Mirror Gate."

Twilight looked thoughtful, then looked at everyone. "And we EXCLUDE playing golf through the Mirror Gate!" she declared, for several of the ponies to curse.

Celestia smiled. "Vacation as a high school principal. Though I really liked that one loop where we swapped places and nobody was willing to admit the difference."

Pinkie giggled. "Sometimes I randomly swap with other me."

The loopers digested it before Discord asked the obvious question. "So which Pinkie Pie are you?"

"Pinkie Pie, silly!"

Lyra contemplated. "Well, setting myself as a Looper is my most impressive trick... but one time, I figured out how to get people through without them transforming, talked to the high school theatre group, and convinced all of Canterlot that Celestia had all but exterminated humans in the distant past and covered it up."

Celestia flinched. "That...is admittedly true, some loops, but I'm never proud of it."

"Yeah, that was a bureau loop actually. Most of your power was dogma, not literal brainwashing, so..."

Twilight tilted her head. "Oh, I remember that one. The battle of Baltimore was over in ten minutes, I think."

Derpy tossed a peanut in the air and caught it in her mouth. "I figured out how to get the sports channel on it!" She grinned, munching. "You can tune in on any sporting event you want, though it burns out after about twenty minutes if you try and watch a championship."

Pinkie pulled a wooden staff with three faces carved into it out of her pocket. "Open portal, insert Wabbajack, fire wildly, question mark, profit!" she giggled. She seemed not to notice as everyone, Discord included, started scooting away slowly until she put it back

in storage.

Lyra just glared. "That was you!? You turned me into a sweet roll!"

"I regret nothing!" Pinkie sang teasingly.

"When the other Pinkie was next to me!"

\_ '...'\_ said a voice in Lyra's head. Sweet rolls don't talk after all. But that didn't stop this one from wanting to agree.

"Turned it into a functional Stargate, stole Ra's spaceship, and proceeded to establish a pangelactic trade network," Apple Bloom rattled off blithely.

Big Mac yawned as he cleaned another glass behind the bar. "Chess by mail. Ah never really messed around with the mirror, but ah do get bored now an' again." he shrugged. "Did ya' know the knights are shaped like \_horses\_ over there? Darndest thing."

Trixie harumphed ostentatiously. "I dropped it into the Mirror Pool to see what would happen."

There was silence as everyone waited for the showmare to speak. Finally, Applejack couldn't take the dramatic tension any more.

"So what did happen?"

Trixie sighed. "Standard Trixie outcome number four. Loop crash, then Eiken."

Sweetie Belle gave a nervous chuckle. "Well, you know how the right note can shatter glass?"

Sunset boggled at her for a moment before nodding. "I thought I heard someone singing before the statue exploded. Don't worry, I put up a shield before anyone could get hurt."

Sweetie sagged with relief. "I'm just glad I didn't blow up that whole universe. Again."

"Again?"

"Nothing!"

Vinyl Scratch looked thoughtful. "I wish to admit that I actually know the sonic resonance of the Mirror Gate..."

"Oh?" Everyone else asked.

"It's hard to do epic wubs across two universes if you crack the gate..." she explained.

Chrysalis smirked. "Magical girls."

"What?"

"I used a few objects from others loops and fake changelings attacks to make your human versions believe they were magical girls

protecting the world." She giggled. "They never noticed that I was the villain \_and\_ the animal companion."

"...like Kyubey?"

"NO! Nobody was harmed, they had fun, my changelings feed off the adoration that the people had for their new heroes, and human Rainbow Dash got better grades than in baseline." She looked at her mug. "The hard part was keep the army and the government away... other loops have it so easy."

She thought for a second. "Although... There was also the time I stole the Mirror Gate, used the Mirror Pool to create an infinite army of Changeling clones, outfitted them in stormtrooper armor, and conquered the human world."

Everyone stared at her for several awkward seconds before Trixie asked, "Why?"

She shrugged, "I was kinda bored. We had a stealth anchor and no one else was awake."

"Well," Twilight began. "I once Pocketed the mirror from one Loop and calibrated it to the same portal in the next. There were a number of... \_Interesting\_ results."

"Such as?" Rarity inquired.

"Intersecting one mirror with the other made some neat fractals. Bringing the spare to the human world basically made it a point to point wormhole. Keeping both mirrors in Equestria is where things got weird. Anything coming back from the human world got duplicated, just like the mirror pool, but going the other way turned out to be... Unwise."

"Oh?"

"Well, it worked fine if you went through on your own, but if a fly happened to pass through the other portal while you did..." The revelation was met by a round of cringes by the other Loopers.

"Well, I think we all know my favorite shenanigans with that thing came from the time Sunset and I convinced Celestia I'd turned all the humans into ponies and made them forget about it." Discord picked up his wine glass, frowned, snapped his fingers, then drank a sip of water before continuing. "But a close second would have to be the time I went through, revealed my phenomenal cosmic power to the world, announced that I was so impressed by humans' chaotic nature that I had decided to enter retirement, then spent the rest of the loop in Hollywood as a recurring villain in \_Star Wars: The Next Republic.\_"

Cadance giggled. "I once got every pony legally married to their human counterpart!"

A number of the other loopers sidled slowly away from her.

Sunset chuckled. "My best trick with the mirror was me deciding to pretend it was a gateway to Tartarus, after I left a guitar pick and



spread a rumor it was a demon's tooth which'd make the user a rock and roll master. That world's Trixie and Rainbow Dash found it, and broke it. I picked it up, and the fun began!"

Spike groaned, seeing where this was going. "You were wanting to do a version of 'Beelzeboss', weren't you?"

Sunset nodded. "Guilty as charged. What? It's a good song. Helped that they basically walked right into the setup...and before you guys ask, Transformation Jutsu to look like that form I had when I put on the crown."

Luna giggled. "I Woke Up really early, just before the battle of Nightmare Moon, and 'had the brilliant idea' to take my forces through the mirror. We founded a cult in the early days of that version of earth-"

"Wait, wait wait." Twilight held up a hoof. "Was this the loop with the Komodo Dragon mounted wizards?"

"Look, it was a thousand year prank, some of the details were just crazy coincidences I incorporated on the fly!"

Berry grinned. "Ya' know the 307 Ale? I once shoved the still halfway through the mirror." she smirked, pulling a bottle out of her pocket and holding it up proudly. "An additional dimension was just what I needed to get past my little inventor's block. Introducing 460.5 Ale! Who's feeling brave?"

"No wait, I just thought of a better one! Tis' a grand tale! Trixie had just discovered how to make thermite-"

"I'm feeling brave! In fact, a round for everybody!" Gilda announced loudly and quickly.

"No fair! Why does nobody ever let Trixie tell that story!?"

\* \* \*

><p>110.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Oh hello, Twilight." Fluttershy nodded to her friend for a moment, before turning back to her bird chorus. The avians seemed to be quite a bit larger, less colorful, and more... predatory than usual. "I thought I'd go with a different choir this loop."

Twilight giggled. "That'll certainly be interesting, to say the least. Any reason why?"

"Well, I was an eagle last loop. Well, anthropomorphic." Fluttershy flexed her wings. "Feathers on the back. I could fly on my own, but I also had a plane..."

"Okay, I'll bite." Twilight pulled a PADD out of her pocket. "Where was this?"

Fluttershy flipped her mane back. "Chima, I think it's only started looping? I had to give the Multiverse speech to Laval... Either he or Cragger are the anchor, not sure which one."

Her unicorn friend finished tapping on the screen and, after a moment, flinched back. "Wait, you were a minifig?"

"A what?"

"A..." Twilight turned the image around. "This. Was this you?"

"No! What?" The pegasus peered at the image, shaking her head. "No, no no, we looked a lot more-" Fluttershy pulled out her own PADD, quickly flicking through some photos. "Alright, here we go. That's me-apparently I was replacing someone called Eris-and that's Laval."

Twilight looked from her picture to the one Fluttershy was showing. "...huh. I... guess it must be a case of medium translation, or something... those do look far more realistic. Well, less plastic. Fingers and proportions and all that." She shrugged, putting the PADD back. "That's... actually kind of fascinating..."

"Research later, Twilight." Fluttershy lightly bopped her with her own PADD. "Right now we have to reintegrate Luna."

"Right, sorry, it's just... okay, so the plan is I pretend to be her pet dog..."

\* \* \*

><p>110.11 (Masterweaver)<p>

89.4 (cont)

Fluttershy tilted her head. "Actually, now that we're all here together, I've been... meaning to discuss some things with you two."

"Oh?" Chrysalis glanced back at her 'sister'. "Does it have anything to do with ancient and powerful jewelry?"

"Um, yes." The wolf gave them an embarrassed little smile. "I mean, I do have seniority in that particular aspect..."

Silver Spoon nodded, tapping her chin. "Well, I suppose it's as good a time as any. Oh, before we begin though!" She snapped her claws, summoning three buckets of bacon.

"Oh! Thank you." Fluttershy grabbed a couple strips of meat and began to delicately chew one down.

"Hrm..." Chrysalis bit one of her own strips in half. "I would have thought you wouldn't like meat, Spoon."

"Eh. I've been bounced around the animal kingdom so much I don't have many filters anymore." Silver Spoon sat down with a shrug. "Remind me to tell you about the time I was a fly... still won't eat horses, though, if that counts."

"That's understandable. Now then, Fluttershy, you were saying...?"

Fluttershy nodded. "I... don't know if you've noticed this, but those

of us with the Element of Kindness... Well, even in loops where my special talent was something, um, unrelated to animals, like weather service or painting, I could still talk to my animal friends."

Silver Spoon raised an eyebrow. "Yeah, but... that could just be you retaining loop abilities."

"It could, but... one loop, I discovered I could understand Elkish. That was a very Middle Earthish loop, mind you, the deer were basically elves, but I could understand this ancient language without, um, ever having seen a scrap of writing or hearing a single word spoken before." Fluttershy shifted on her paws. "After that, I started paying attention, and, well... there is literally no language I cannot speak. Klingon, Quenya, Lapine, R'yehain-"

"R'yehain?" Silver tilted her head. "Isn't that... Cthulhu's tongue?"

Fluttershy nodded. "h'R'yehain goka k'yarnak phlegethoh sll'ha."

Chrysalis blinked. "I... I understood that. I mean, I understood what you meant and... and what you were actually saying."

"Yes. That's... I think that's the power that Kindness, the element, grants us. Understanding." Fluttershy nodded to Chrysalis. "You, um, you probably never noticed because you thought it was just your telepathy, and you, Silver-"

"I passed it off as having 'been' whatever they were before," Silver mused. "I didn't realize..."

"Yes, but it's more than that." Fluttershy nibbled at another strip of bacon, trying to gather her thoughts. "...It's not just speaking, or writing. It's feeling. When you're using Kindness, you can read any body language, no matter how strange the body. Me, I'm such a good druid because of it, and I suspect that Chrysalis tends to use it in her day to day rule. Silver, well..." She smiled. "Silver Spoon uses her understanding proactively, becoming whoever the situation needs her to be." She giggled. "I think that's also why we're all so good at shapeshifting, or, well, being in other forms. I've talked to some other shapeshifters and... a lot of them view the other shapes as clothes, not as themselves. If that makes sense."

Chrysalis nodded. "I think I see where you're coming from, actually. I was like that, originally, but... well, I do tend toward pegasus these days."

"And I think of myself as an earth pony draconequus plus," Silver added. "Which... is more cohesive than I think I should be thinking of myself as."

"Yes. But there's a reason for all this." Fluttershy took a breath. "Magic. Honesty. Loyalty. Even Laughter... they can be used in cruel ways. Generosity and Kindness, though, they're almost always 'good' in a sense. I did talk with Rarity about it long ago, though, and... the basic difference between the two is that Generosity is, well, a bit... oblivious. Generosity only understands the What of the needs, not the Why. Kindness is... we're the ones that have to keep everyone

from being overpowering, keep the others all in balance, I think. We're the ones that see all sides of the argument, good and evil, or even just good and good that happen to be opposed. We understand others, sometimes better than they understand themselves, and we have to use that understanding to make sure that everyone is loved."

Chrysalis and Silver Spoon stared openly at her.

"...That's..." Fluttershy blushed. "That's my opinion anyway. Um. I'm willing to hear yours though."

\* \* \*

><p>110.12 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Like any looper that had some modicum of sense, Twilight Sparkle had created a number of contingency plans for surviving a zombie apocalypse. She had dozens of spells memorized, whole arsenals carefully organized in her subspace pocket, and backup plans if she didn't have access to either. Whether the living dead were artificial, magical, or biological in origin, whether they communicated their contagion through biting, spitting, or gas, whether she was in a well-developed urban area or lost in the jungle, Twilight Sparkle would be ready for a zombie apocalypse.<p>

The single flaw in all her plans, however, was the assumption that the zombie apocalypse was... well... an apocalypse.

"Fresh brains! Get your fresh brains here, recently carved, none older than twenty years!" Carrot Top waved at the half-a-unicorn. "Twilight! There you are, here for lunch?"

"Yeah, um..." Twilight fidgeted, still somewhat embarrassed by her trailing entrails. "These are, you know, ethically sourced right?"

"What kind of merchant do you take me for?! I'm no butcher." Carrot scoffed. "My cloning vats are completely regulation."

"Nonono, I'm sorry. I'm just..." Twilight gave an awkward grin. "Still a little squeamish. Only died this month, you know."

Carrot made a noise of commiseration. "Ah, gotcha. Don't worry, I'm told it gets easier as you go. Rarity's certainly not let it stop her!"

Twilight nodded, selecting a few pinkish mounds. "Yeah, I know..."

"I even heard she got herself some coltfriend or other. A dragon, isn't that exotic?"

"\_Yeah.\_ I \_know.\_" Twilight repressed a shudder.

The yellow mare grinned obliviously. "It's good to know there are still people out there willing to look beyond the flesh and find true love in dead hearts. Makes me think maybe there's hope for me!"

The unicorn put her bits on the stall top. "Heh, maybe. You're not planning to die just to grab a colt, though, are you?"

"Ha, no of course not! I'd rather have a warm body!" Carrot flinched. "Er, no offense."

"None taken. Not like it's in the cards for me." Twilight grinned wryly. "Unless somebody loves me for my braaaaaaains..."

\* \* \*

><p>110.13 (Drachefly)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>It occurs to me, my head hasn't been shaken like a maraca for a few minutes.<em> Octavia took out her earplugs and relaxed to the soothing sounds of a piano quintet. \_Wait, what?\_ She rolled out of bed and bounded downstairs.

Vinyl Scratch had had some new friends - Pinkie Pie and Lyra Heartstrings - over for her jam session, but instead of bass and lead guitar, they were now on violins. They had been joined by two white unicorns she didn't recognize, clearly sisters; the older was on viola, and the younger had brought her own cello. Also, someone had somehow gotten a grand piano into the apartment, which Vinyl was playing. Softly.

"Wh... what?"

Vinyl lifted her goggles and flashed a smile. "Shh!"

Octavia boggled as she listened. They were all utterly outstanding; the music was superb and utterly unfamiliar. She sidled down the stairs and sat on the bottom step.

The door opened and a lavender unicorn slipped in, followed by a yellow pegasus with a pink mane, and an orange pegasus filly with a purple mane, carrying a clarinet, a bassoon, and a flute, respectively.

When the music came to a close, Vinyl got up and turned to the new guests. "Heya! Glad you could make it! Octavia, these are Twilight Sparkle, Fluttershy, and Scootaloo. And now that they're here, how about we really get this show going?"

She produced a part out of nowhere and handed it to Octavia. "Want to join?"

Octavia blinked, then snatched it in her mouth. "Yes!" she declared around her grip. \_When did she pick up an interest in music that wasn't simply rhythmic and loud? Have I not been paying attention?\_

The title made her blink:

\* \* \*

><p>Bach, Johann Sebastian<p>

Chamber suite R17-L-34, in a minor

On themes by Hotblack Desiato and Taliesin

SB-BWV 2,126,329,801

\* \* \*

><p>But that didn't matter compared to what was below it. They started up and Octavia sight-read like mad. The piece was intricate, but she was <em>just</em> able to keep up. What didn't help was that there were little distractions and unexpected things - \_Did somepony else just come in?\_ This was confirmed when a third violin joined the ensemble. During a single whole rest, she spotted the newcomer. \_I've seen him before - he's the head of the royal guard!\_

Then it came to the double fugue, and she didn't have time to focus on anything else any more. She knew that more ponies were coming in and joining, and she knew that this had to have been a setup - a surprise for her - but she was having too much fun to let it bother her.

It came to a satisfying conclusion, and Octavia let the energy flow out of her.

Vinyl added, "What do you think? Our dad threw it together a while back."

Her mind still absorbed in the music, Octavia 's response was not perhaps what she would have said under other circumstances, "'Our'? Aren't you an only foal?"

"Nope, it's a family gathering."

\_That seems... implausible.\_ Octavia took a look around. She was drained enough that her discovery that Princess Celestia was seated behind her, with the second viola, was merely surprising, not shocking.

Vinyl went on, "Almost all of us Bach kids are here. We're only missing Regina Suzanna - who's busy straightening out the hive - and Pretty Danged Quick, who, ah..." she lowered her voice. "... doesn't quite get it."

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<br>From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

Well, this is an interesting situation. This Loop, I'm a boxer in the World Video Boxing Association, with my coach being Little Mac.

Mac had Awoken recently, and had soon ended up in a Fused Loop with Mario as the referee. Mac soon found himself in the Smash Brothers Loops, which are a safe-mode Loop due to the limits it puts on Loopers for fair competition.

Back to the events of this Loop...I had to learn not to always rely on the combat instincts I've developed, or get disqualified. It was a chance to hone a particular fighting style...Boxing, in this

case.

Mac is a good teacher, having learned from the best. He was a little out of shape this Loop; makes sense, seeing he's in his teacher's role. I soon managed to get used to boxing, and my career began. After a good warm-up in Glass Joe (with a name like that, no wonder he's gotten his flank kicked 99 times..before I fought him, of course), I had a minor challenge in Von Kaiser, and won via a Star Punch. Mac smiled when I used his signature move.

After that, I began to shine, remembering what Mac taught me; how to see an opponent's patterns, wait for the opening, and capitalize. Ranma taught me that a long time ago, but it's good to have a refresher course, especially when my options are limited.

As I went through the ranks, Mac was glad to see I'd gotten used to the relative oddness of the boxers here. He said he'd had a hard time adjusting to their weirdness at first. Compared to other Loops, the weirdness of these guys is nothing. After all, after what I've seen, guys like Bear Hugger and King Hippo barely register on the weird scale. Looks were deceiving, though. Some of those guys were tough.

As for what I took from this Loop, I was reminded that I can't always rely on my full bag of tricks. Boxing is a good style for me to use in those cases. As for Little Mac, I hope to meet him in a Smash Brothers Loop, just so I can see how good he is...

\* \* \*

><p>110.14(Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>As Celestia gave her Summer Sun Celebration speech, her eyes scanned the crowd. Twilight Sparkle was nowhere to be seen. Furthermore, the Mare on the Moon had disappeared yesterday for some strange reason, well before the stars were set to align and help her break free. As her speech came to an end, several birds landed on the stage set up for the celebration. The gathered ponies stopped stomping their hooves in applause and watched.<p>

One bird started with a nine note ominous whistle. A second bird followed up with an equally ominous tone.

Then, the entire bird choir sang in unison the Imperial March. Six ponies marched in unison towards the stage, all sporting a uniform of sorts made of purple, black and yellow. All six wore masks and a purple fedora to hide their manes. There were two of each pony race. As they took positions around the stage behind Celestia, the gathered ponies started appearing nervous as navy blue mist seeped through the crowd and between Celestia and the six ponies. As the music reached the height, the mist started swirling around and formed into a new alicorn. Celestia gasped, "Nightmare Moon, what is-"

The alicorn waved Celestia silent, "My ponies, I am Princess Luna, Night regent of the moon. My time on the moon has ended and I return to you now. I have but one thing to say..."

The crowd held their breaths as one as Luna pointed her hoof at the

audience, a serious expression on her face, "Princess Luna Wants YOU, for the shadowbolts!"

Celestia blinked, "What?"

Luna gave a grin, "I desire to reform my guard, and I desire the bravest and the best to join our cause. Join your fellow ponies up here, join us as we push for a more grand Equestrian future! We will fly through the shadows, pushing back the darkness that always encroaches on the universe, yes I say the universe! We will reach out to the stars and bring harmony to the furthest corner of the galaxy. Who will stand with me?!"

Several ponies took hesitant steps forward, a turquoise mare with a harp for a cutie mark, muttering about how she might see humans out there. A barely sober mare with a berry colored mane obsessed with alcohol stumbled forward, three unmarked fillies and a pink earth pony stepped forward, the zebra from Everfree found herself on the stage, and then the local mailmare.

Celestia was finally brought out of her trance as she stepped towards Luna, and the two teleported away to discuss what was the meaning of this.

\* \* \*

><p>Hours later, the six shadowbolts shed their disguise in the privacy of the library, revealing Twilight and her five friends. Fluttershy left to congratulate her birds for their fine performance. Rarity, meanwhile looked to the skies, "You don't think we jinxed ourselves, do you? I mean-"<p>

Twilight waved her off, "Nah, I checked our star charts. None of them were a match for the Star Wars or Star Trek star charts."

And then, what sounded like the tormented of Tartarus started echoing in their heads as a black and red ship descended over Ponyville. The voices disappeared a second later as they all instinctively blocked out the passive indoctrination attack. Dash asked with a half-lidded expression, "Did you perhaps check the star charts against those of Mass Effect?"

Any reply that Twilight had was cut off by a mechanical voice, \*\*"I AM SOVEREIGN. TWILIGHT SPARKLE, YOU WILL TRAVEL BY SHIP TO MEET ME ON THE MOON IN ONE GALACTIC HOUR'S TIME. FAILURE TO COMPLY WILL RESULT IN FORCIBLE TELEPORTATION INTO THIS SHIP."\*\*

Pinkie seemed ecstatic, "Sovvy! I haven't seen him in eons, from before the crash. Silly robot, I still haven't given him all his birthday parties, I'm coming with you, Twilight!"

Twilight shrugged, "Sure. But hold off on the party until we see why he's here."

\* \* \*

><p>110.15 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*



><p>Sasakura Ryu was idly cleaning a glass in Eden Hall when he was interrupted.<p>

"Drink. Now," the unfamiliar voice demanded.

Ryu turned with graceful practice towards the voice to get a look and determine what kind of drink would serve the customer best and blinked. There was no one there. Getting a sinking feeling, Ryu leaned over the bar and looked down at a young boy in possession of a fierce scowl. Sighing heavily, he shook his head and pointed to a new sign he'd gotten recently for just this kind of problem.

Around a large '21', the sign read 'You must be this tall (or equivalent biological age) to order booze.'

"Bar policy," he explained when the scowl deepened. "No matter how long you've lived, you gotta have a body that can process it safely. It also helps if you introduce yourself."

"Very well," the boy grumbled and cast some sort of spell that caused him to grow, and grow, into a tall muscled man with wild hair and a fierce expression. "Leman Russ, Primarch of the Space Wolves. Now give me a damn drink."

"Of course," Ryu replied, completely unruffled as he began to expertly mix a creation of his own devising. "Might I inquire as to why you are in need of one?"

"Let's just say that there are certain things one should never catch his mother doing," the Primarch muttered as Ryu handed him his drink, which he downed in a single gulp and motioned for another.

"I hear that," a new voice interjected, grabbing both men's attention. They turned and saw an ebony skinned woman with bold indigo hair in the final moments of filling out into adulthood. She tapped her chin for a moment before also sprouting wings and a single spiral horn as black as deepest night. "Mind if I join you?"

"Not at all," Leman Russ smiled as Ryu poured two drinks and went back to cleaning glasses. "Might I have your name m'lady?"

"Nyx," the woman smiled. "Daughter of Twilight Sparkle. And you must be the amazing Lemon Rush I keep hearing about. I'm kind of surprised we haven't met before actually."

"As am I," Leman admitted as he sipped his new drink more sedately than his first. "I have heard much about you, but I would be honored to get it 'from the pony's mouth' so to speak."

"Cute," Nyx glared back playfully as Leman grinned with no apology whatsoever. "Anyway, it all started when this cult..."

\* \* \*

><p>110.16 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Thirty seconds to drop zone, Rainbow Dash."<p>

On the one hand, Rainbow Dash counted the current Loop as one of the weirder ones she'd experienced- not in the top hundred, but definitely in the top thousand. For one thing, she herself was a shadow of the pony she was... or, more accurately, a glowing outline. Oh, she was solid enough, but anybody looking at her saw only the outline of her blue body and rainbow mane and tail, all lit up like a deco electric sign. That could be put down to strange physics or something, but Twilight Sparkle looked more or less normal.

But the face in the mirror was a minor issue. The rest of the world was Land-of-Ooo levels of strange.

"I'm charging up the marshmallow laser now!"

Case in point. In what other world would a marshmallow laser be a suitable weapon for covering fire?

And to make it perfect, this was one of those annoying Loops where both subspace pockets and outside-Loop abilities were totally shut down. Rainbow Dash had spent two humiliating months Awake before Twilight had found her, practically a slave in the Silver Lake Lounge, constantly humiliated by the Gummi King's marzipan enforcers, and freed her. Twilight had freed her, and the two had fled, pursued by bounty hunters like the Rockabilly Space Worm and a space salamander who had been genetically altered to have a face that resembled, for whatever reason, George Clooney.

If Pinkie Pie had told this story to her, Rainbow Dash would have laughed it off as too silly for words. Unfortunately she'd lived it, twenty or so years' worth of Loop memories pre-Awakening followed by months of pursuit by bounty hunters like the Rockabilly Space Worm and a space salamander who had been genetically altered to have a face that resembled, for whatever reason, George Clooney. in which two fugitives from justice had become the heroes of the resistance against (even after a year in this world Rainbow Dash hated to think the words) the Gluten Armada of the tyrannical Gummi King.

No, it wasn't funny at all. It was dead serious.

The bomb bay doors opened with a whine of hydraulics. Over the whoosh of rushing air Dash could just barely hear Twilight giving the five second warning. That was her job: deliver Rainbow around the world, wherever they could strike at the Armada. Once Rainbow was in battle, Twilight would keep her covered with the marshmallow laser mounted to their transport. Twilight had become a crack shot with the thing.

The Space Unicorn and the Neon Pegasus; the most-wanted enemies of the Gummi King.

The jump light turned green. Rainbow Dash pushed her flight goggles down over her eyes and dropped out of the transport ship, banking away so she could have a clear field of battle.

Beneath them sat Cupcake Mountain, lit mostly by the bright moon and brilliant stars. In front of them, hovering above the mountain, stood the main battle fleet of the Gluten Armada. At the center of it flew the imperial flagship, where the Gummi King himself would command the battle to come.

Rainbow Dash put aside all thoughts of how insane and ridiculous the situation was. Somewhere over there was an evil ruler who had kept her pre-Awake self in chains, who had forced her to kneel and scrape and abase herself to survive. He had taken everything from her, and from millions of other beings throughout his magical kingdom.

\_Never again,\_ Dash vowed. \_Never again, never again.\_

One pony against a fleet of battleships, she dove to the attack in a streak of rainbow light.

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

>I Looped into a place called Earthrealm this time...right around the Mortal Kombat tournament. If the "visiting" team, Outworld, wins 10 of these in a row, they are allowed to invade Earthrealm, and bye bye world. Raiden(no relation to the Metal Gear Looper with the same name) is the Anchor here.<p>

Apparently, things had gone really bad in the baseline, as in Armageddon bad, and he tried sending a message to his past self to avert that tragedy. However, he got only a partial message, and things got worse than that first time for a while; though he prevented the worst-case scenario, it was at great cost.

Raiden believed what he'd done to send that message was causing him to reexperience the same events, but Kratos had Looped in and explained things to him, and as a treat, took down the big villain around here, Shao Khan.

The joke's too easy, so I won't use it...

These days, Raiden is trying to minimize the damage and loss of life...which, in a place where fights to the death are commonplace(though it seems this Loop got the same 'get out of death free' card the DC and Marvel Loops have), is very difficult. A few others on Raiden's side have started Looping as well, such as Johnny Cage, Liu Kang, and Sonya. These days, Cage and Sonya are in a relationship, which is kinda heartwarming.

As for the Anchor himself, he's still bound to the rules his superiors set on him..though his fellow Loopers AREN'T. Cue them taking down the baddies easily, and ruining any evil plans. While I was here, I took the time to learn from the good guys. This place is, as I said before, violent. It's like a battlefield here, lives on the line in every fight...With no less than Earthrealm's freedom on the line. Makes me hope things'll turn out all right here once the Loops are over.

As a gift to Raiden, I decided to eventually pull no punches, and take down Shao Khan. Was NOT an easy fight...guy can take damage and deal it like nobody's business. But I got the better of him in the end. Of course, there were other villains to fight, but he was the main danger for this Loop.

Just goes to show I can never give up. I will get home someday..And when I do, I'll be glad to have some peace.

\* \* \*

><p>110.17(Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Twilightnosaurus reine<em> looked down at the five other dinosaurs around her. "Um, girls," she said uncertainly, "I really, really hope this Loop has found a way to bypass certain dietary imperatives. Otherwise things are going to get very awkward, very fast."

\_Apatojack\_ looked steadily back at the purple people-and-anything-else eater and replied, "Ah don't care how big mah flank is this Loop, you cain't have any. Ah'm very much attached to it."

"I wouldn't mind being eaten," \_Flutterseratops\_ said quietly, her broad frill blushing. "If it were for a good friend, that is."

The immense iridescent pteranodon in the tree, \_Quetzalcoatlus dashii\_, rubbed the tip of one wing against her chin in thought. "Fluttershy," she said into the very awkward silence, "I've seen a whole lotta Loops, including some really twisted and terrifying stuff. And that just might be the most disturbing thing I've ever, ever heard."

The giant armored \_Pinkylosaurus diana pieticus\_ stopped its game of roly-poly and sat up. "It's not all that disturbing, Dashi! I wouldn't mind having a taste of myself if I could! I'm like a giant reptile jawbreaker! OOH! I wonder if I'm all sourball inside, or maybe bubble gum, or chocolate! I must be the most delicious dinosaur ever!"

"Well, there's a record that didn't last long at all," \_Rarisaurolophus\_ muttered.

"Not helping, girls," Twilight sighed. "You know what? Buck this Loop. Last one into the volcano is a fossilized egg."

After all, whatever its other drawbacks, the school cafeteria in the Eiken world served pretty good food... none of which knew her on a first name basis or vice-versa.

\* \* \*

><p>110.18 (Masterweaver and Dalxein)<p>

Twilight burst through the door, eyes wild. "FLUTTERSHY! Our kids are \_dating!\_"

"I know, isn't it sweet?"

"Sweet?! Well, I guess it could be a little-" The unicorn shook her head. "That's not the point! How do we handle this situation?!"

Fluttershy made a show of tapping her chin. "Oh, maybe we stand back and let them explore their relationship themselves while providing a

calm and comforting sounding board if they ever get nervous about how they're doing?"

There were a few moments of complete silence in the cottage.

"...Fluttershy," Twilight managed, "Please stop being reasonable about this. It makes me feel inadequate. Wait... what if they got married?" Twilight wondered out loud. "We'd be in-laws. IN-LAWS!" she shouted, suddenly seeming to remember she was talking to Fluttershy and grabbing the poor mare. "And there's already Rarity, I mean am I her mother-in-law or sister-in-law or WHY AM I EVEN ASKING!?" Shaking the timid pegasus wasn't helping her calm down, so she stopped. Twilight started pacing around while Fluttershy swayed dizzily. "AJ and Pinkie are already cousins- it'd only take one more marriage and everyone would be related! \_I have no idea how to feel about this!\_"

"But..." Poor Fluttershy had managed to regain her bearings, and asked the obvious. "No one's related to Rainbow Da-"

"WE DO NOT \_SPEAK\_ OF WHAT HAPPENS IN LAS PEGASUS."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

110.1: Speciality: generalist.

>110.2: They're both Nightmares. That's about the end of the similarity.<br>110.3: Shade Silverwing of the Silverwing series. Honestly, though, I think he makes a suitable pet for Vinyl.

>110.4: Dude. The fish, dude.<br>110.5: It's all Hellenic to me.

>110.6: I did calculate those, though I may have missed a step or a year somewhere. (And it's called the Sharpe ratio, in our world.) If confused, look up "long and short scales".<br>110.7: Angel is not always comically violent.

>110.8: Gilda is Worf, Fluttershy is Troi, Discord is extra, this is the Nexus, and Kirk is a possum.<br>110.9: SG-1 did some of these already.

>110.10: Lego my ego.<br>110.11: That Kind of thing.

>110.12: World Peace Z.<br>110.13: The Bachs.

>110.14: A sovereign leader.<br>110.15: See loop 111.8. When you get there.

>110.16: Seriously.<br>110.17: Open the door, get on the floor. Everyone be a dinosaur.

>110.18: Damnit, Fluttershy! Let Twilight panic for a bit before you start with your reasonableness stuff.<p>

## 117. Chapter 117

### 111.1 (Zetrein)

The Summer Sun Celebration always brings out the weirdos, and by Ponyville standards, that's saying something. Applejack wasn't sure how this stranger had gotten a permit for her stall, but there it was: a simple wooden desk, with a sign beside it, sitting off to the side of the market.

\_Time's Broken, Ask Me Anything.\_ The Timetraveller is: In

The purple unicorn behind the desk was answering a question about how the Celebration would go. She told a tall tale, about how Princess Celestia's long lost sister, possessed by evil magic, was going to kidnap the Princess, and plunge the world into eternal night.

"...And at the end of their adventure, these six plucky young mares will defeat Nightmare Moon, with the help of some ancient magical artifacts. Freshly purged of her dark self, Princess Luna will return to Ponyville with her sister, and they join in the party." She finished with a smile. "Next question?"

Applejack's own sister was the one that answered, shouting across the market to her. "How much timber would a Timberwolf wolf, if a Timberwolf could wolf timber?"

"Now that, is an interesting question. You see, a Timberwolf can only eat so much wood before..." And she was off again. If nothing else, she was livening up the day. Most the town had the day off, to finish preparations for tomorrow's Celebration, so the market was a bit empty this morning. Applejack herself would be packing up her stall come late morning, for her family's reunion, as well as their part in the preparations.

After she made sure her family's anti-Timberwolf preparations were up to snuff. "...So by the time the Timberwolf has spawned a second offshoot, the first offshoot would be forty percent towards its own offshoot, bringing the combined Timberwolf pack's ability to wolf timber to..."

In fact, she might need to restock a few things. Maybe everypony she knows will be getting Timberwolf survival kits for Hearth's Warming. "...And at that point, the exponentially expanding pack will have moved beyond the forest, or rather, the former forest, and likely devour the town in less than an hour."

Magicking away the blackboard she had been using in her lecture, the unicorn turned back to her slightly fearful audience. "So, in the end, we're all very lucky that Timberwolves don't wolf as much timber as they can."

\* \* \*

><p>It all happened, just like she said it would. That Applejack and the mare, Twilight Sparkle, had been two of the six "plucky young mares" in her story had been a surprise. Not to Twilight, it seemed, but if she was telling the truth...<p>

And so, at exactly eight in the morning, Twilight Sparkle sat down at her desk, and with a clack, she flipped the tag on her sign to In. Eventually, somepony worked up the courage to walk up to her, and asked the first question of the day...

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

Cupcake paused, glancing at her husband before looking awkwardly over her shoulder.

"I mean... I have... We've tried, I don't know if..."

After a moment, she blushed and leaned in. There was a bout of quick and furious whispering, the unicorn merely listening with her ears forward.

Then Twilight smiled. "...Twins."

"...Really?"

"Yep. Not for a while, mind you, but sooner than you think."

"Oh..." Cupcake smiled broadly, fanning herself. "Oh, thank you. Did you hear that Carrot?"

"Yes, I... Twins?"

"TWINS!"

\* \* \*

><p>(FanOfMostEverything)<p>

"Oh Great and Powerful Twilight Sparkleâ€" "

"No." Twilight glared and waved her horn. "Next, please."

Snips and Snails stood their ground. The former cried, "But we just wanted to know the future!"

"You two are not to be trusted in the presence of any powerful unicorn. That includes me and, on occasion, one another. I have learned this the hard way." Her next words were a shout. "Next, please!"

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

Twilight had just flipped the sign at her booth from OUT to IN when Rainbow Dash dropped in. "Hey, Twilight... since we're all best buds now and everything, what with having saved the world from Nightmare Moon, I was wondering..."

"Yes, I know a lot of stuff about your future, Rainbow Dash," Twilight said. "Ask away."

"Well, the Cloudsdale Young Flyers' Competition is in a couple months," Dash continued, "and I was wondering..."

"Say no more," Twilight said. "I'll tell you this much. A young new flyer goes to Cloudsdale and really wows the judges."

"Really? Is she cool?"

"Everybody in Cloudsdale thinks so," Twilight said. "Beautiful, graceful, extremely talented."

"Of course," Rainbow Dash replied confidently.

"Her performance in the competition absolutely blows away everything that comes before it."

"Yeah? Yeah?" Rainbow Dash's tongue hung out as if she was next in line at the apple cider stand. "Tell me more!"

"And then she screws up right at the end, gets not just herself but the Wonderbolts as well in deep trouble... and then this filly who nobody expected much out of rescues them all and wins the competition."

Rainbow Dash's jaw hit the counter of Twilight's little booth with a thwack. "You mean... but I... but the future can be changed, right?" Rainbow Dash looked one very short step away from going to her knees and begging Twilight like Scrooge in the graveyard. "It doesn't have to play out that way again, does it?"

"You've got your answer, Dash," Twilight smiled. "What you do with it is your choice."

"Oh, man," Rainbow Dash moaned. "Ohmanohmanohman. I gotta get training. My routine has to be absolutely perfect. No screw-ups. No mistakes. One little slip and my career is over!" She blasted off in a blur of rainbow light.

\_Well, that should put her in the standard baseline mindset, \_  
Twilight thought. \_Now I just have to make sure Rarity wants to join us when we all go to Cloudsdale. Maybe the next time she asks a question...\_  
\_

\* \* \*

><p>(Zetrein)<p>

It was just about closing time for Twilight's stall. As questions were few and far between, she often spent most her day sitting at her desk reading.

As she placed her bookmark, and began to turn to flip her sign to Out, an unAwake Lyra ran up to her stall. "Are- Are you still open?" She panted. "I have... a question."

"Why are you out of breath? You know I've been here all day, and would have been back tomorrow." Tilting her head to the side, Twilight thought for a second. "In fact, weren't you in the market this afternoon? I remember seeing you."

"Bonnie's been blocking me from coming to you. Doesn't want me to ask. She's back home, cooking dinner. Out of breath, because I have to run everywhere, to get what we forgot earlier, and still ask you my question." As she spoke, Lyra gestured to her saddlebag, presumably containing what they'd forgotten.

"Forgot something, eh? How... convenient." Twilight pulled a jug and cup from where they were hidden, under the desk, and poured Lyra some water.



"Heh, figures the know-it-all time traveller would see through that." Lyra gulped down her drink. "Anyway, my question. Are they real? Well? Don't give me that look, you've seen the future, you know what I'm asking about. Are they \_real?\_"

Blinking, Twilight considered how to answer. While standard Lyra variants were almost always obsessed with either humans or seaponies, outliers did occur. Still, that risk was small, and being vague had worked so far. "Yes."

"They are real? Really real?" Lyra looked at her with wide-eyed wonder, before asking in a hushed voice. "Do I meet one? Do I- Can I ever \_become\_ one?"

"Yes, they're really real. To the others, in order, sooner than you'd think, and no, you can't become one." The mint mare deflated somewhat at that last one, before pepping up again.

"I meet one? Or have met one? Is it somepony I know? Omigosh, I gotta go tell Bon Bon!" With that, the mare shot off down the street.

"Why do I get the feeling she wasn't asking about humans?" Twilight asked herself, as she once again reached for her sign.

\* \* \*

><p>The next morning saw Twilight being stared down across her desk, by a mildly irritated looking Bon Bon. "You told her Changelings were real."<p>

"Well, to be fair, they are." Coughing into her hoof, Twilight leaned across her desk. "Keep a secret for me? She never actually said the word Changeling, I thought she was asking about seaponies."

"Ah, I see." Bon Bon fidgeted, glancing around. "So... Changelings are real, eh? Do you happen to know any? Or is it just something you find out at some point?"

\_Bingo.\_ Twilight thought. "Bit of both, actually. Not bad folks, if you can convince them you're not a threat."

"Right. That's good." Bon Bon nodded. "Uh, since I'm here, me and some family have a... \_thing\_, that we'll be doing in Canterlot next year, and I was wondering...?"

"Ends horribly, tell her to use diplomacy." Twilight replied, with a sad headshake.

"Ah, right. Thanks." Bon Bon winced, before awkwardly walking away.

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

Filthy Rich walked up to Twilight's stall. "I was wondering-"

"I never paid attention to the stock exchange," Twilight interrupted. "I'm a time traveler, not omniscient."

"Ah. No, actually, I was wondering... Well. My daughter's friend recently earned her cutie mark, and my daughter has been down recently, so if you know any way I can cheer her up...?"

Twilight pondered that for a moment. She could just tell the truth, or... "Well, why not introduce her to the youngest Apple girl? Maybe they can form a club and, I don't know, crusade for their cutie marks." She leaned in. "Spin it as a business investment, more ponies joining means a larger network of friends. Diamond loves pretending to be a grown-up."

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

\*WHAM!\*WHAM!\*WHAM!\*

Mane tousled and eyes barely open enough to navigate the stairs, Twilight Sparkle stumbled out of her bedroom and down to the front door of the tree library. "All right, all right, I'm coming," she mumbled, raising her hoof to turn the doorknob.

On the other side of the door stood a market stall- specifically, her market stall. Standing on the other side of it was Princess Luna.

Baseline Twilight Sparkle would have come wide awake, bowed deeply, and put aside all thoughts of sleep whatever... but that Sparkle was in another castle.

"Hi, Luna. Come back inna morning." Twilight shut the door and got three steps back towards her bed before the pounding on the door resumed with gusto.

Now wide awake and very exasperated, Twilight opened the door again. "Princess Luna, it's three A. M.!"

Luna's horn flared with magic, and the little hanging sign on Twilight's booth flipped over from Out to: The Time Traveler is In.

"Fine," Twilight sighed. "What's your question?"

The resulting blast of sound threatened to carry Twilight back up the stairs to her bedroom.

\*\*\*"WE WISH THY ADVICE ON HOW OUR SUBJECTS SHALL BEST RECEIVE US! FORSOOTH, OUR RECOVERY FROM THE FOULNESS OF NIGHTMARE MOON PROCEEDS APACE, AND WE SEEK GREATER INVOLVEMENT IN-"

Twilight managed to reach a hoof up to silence Luna's Canterlot Voice. A moment later she floated up a replacement sign and hung it on the peg: The Time Traveler Is Not Deaf.

"The first thing you have to learn," Twilight said, "is nobody uses the Royal Canterlot Voice anymore. If you need to be heard, we have this invention called a 'loudspeaker.' But we use neither one at three in the bucking morning."

When Twilight removed her hoof, Luna opened her mouth. \*\*\*"WE

UNDER-"\*\* The hoof went right back for a few seconds, then withdrew just far enough for Luna to be able to work her jaw. The whisper was loud enough to be heard half a block away. \_\*\*"We understand. 'Tis not Our desire to awaken all Our subjects-"\*\*\_

"TOO LATE!" a couple dozen ponies shouted from their bedroom windows.

"Riiight," Twilight Sparkle sighed. "Anyway, speech lessons. Fast. First. And often. I can recommend a pony of this town to teach you, but I'll have to introduce you. Once you can talk more like a normal pony, then will be the right time to make your public debut in modern Equestria."

\_\*\*"'Tis sooth counsel thou givest me, Twilight Sparkle. But when shall We make this debut?"\*\*\_

"Did you know that we have a holiday all about you?"

Luna blinked. \_\*\*"Really? Do tell."\*\*\_

"Well, not really about you," Twilight Sparkle said, "so much as Nightmare Moon. It's a night we use to celebrate scary things and play pranks on one another."

"Pranks?" Luna's voice was suddenly quite normal. "I haven't played a good prank on anypony since we took care of Discord! Did you know I had a bunch of silly traps and things installed in our castle? You should have seen Princess Platinum's face when I sent her down the trapdoor that led out to this big mud puddle outside! It was-

"Yeah, well," Twilight said quickly, "come back then, be a little bit frightening and playful- but not too much- and things should go well. Just be patient and remember- Nightmare Night is a night when it's okay to be frightened. It's not personal. Remember that, and everything will work out in the end."

"Couldn't you- er- \_\*\*Couldst thou not givest Us a hint?"\*\*\_

Twilight sighed again. "Only one: be prepared for all the candy even an alicorn could possibly eat!"

\_\*\*"We shall begin Our diet at once in anticipation of this sugary feast!"\*\*\_

"Yeah, yeah. Now good NIGHT, Princess Luna!"

The library door slammed shut. It slammed again ten seconds later, just after Twilight reopened it to shout, "And put my stall back where you found it!"

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

"Can you tell me if Minty Fine... I mean, do she and I ever...?"

Twilight sighed, sipping her coffee and silently cursing the princess of the night. "Look, I'm tired, I haven't opened my stall yet, I don't even know you-"

"But-but-but I came here all the way from Vanhoover! I mean, you know everything about the future-"

"No I \_don't.\_" The unicorn turned to the strange green pegasus. "I know a lot about how \_Ponyville's\_ future \_should\_ be, because I happen to live here. Just because time is broken does not mean I'm omniscient."

"I thought... I mean..." Sorrow filled the stallion's eyes. "I... I guess I'll just go."

Twilight watched him shuffle away... before giving a long groan. "Uuuugh. Look, whoever you are, just because I don't know your particular future doesn't mean I can't give you advice. You want to start dating this... Minty, right?"

"Um... yeah."

"Then just do it," Twilight suggested. "Dates are all about finding out about each other. Ask her out to somewhere she would like, and maybe let her return the favor, alternate a few times, get to know one another."

"You... really think that would work?"

"I have no clue. It might, it might not. But you'll never know if you waste your time talking to a sleep-deprived unicorn." Twilight tried to give him a reassuring smile, but the effect was marred by the bags under her eyes. "Now get back on the train... you!"

\* \* \*

><p>(banjo2E)<p>

Twilight flipped the sign on her stall and cleared her throat. "All right, before I take any questions today, I need to get something out of the way. This morning, I received six tickets to the Grand Galloping Gala. However-"

\_"\*\*"THE GRAND GALLOPING GALA?"\*\*\_ The crowd erupted into noise, drowning out Twilight's words and rendering it impossible to catch more than snatches of what any one pony was saying.

"I've always wanted to go to the Gala, ever since that one time at band camp-"

"-and I'll squeeze them and snuggle them-"

"-then before she greets me back I'll walk away and she'll be so confused-"

"-gets a little lonely, all these empty rooms, just watching the hours tick by-"

"-and then the world will finally know the truth about Ch-"

A large explosion went off directly above the stall, shocking everypony in the crowd into silence, save one. "...and then I said, 'But why \_wouldn't\_ I join a blurt-out-your-least-realistic-dreams-of-what-would-happen-if-you-got-invited-to-Equestria's-biggest-party-party?' Oh, sorry Twilight! Go ahead!"

Twilight sighed. "Thank you, Pinkie. As I was saying: The Grand Galloping Gala, at least this year's one, hardly \_ever\_ goes well. Thus far, nopony from Ponyville has managed to go there without the reason they wanted to attend backfiring horribly on them \_unless\_ they knew beforehand what they were getting into or didn't have any expectations about it to begin with. The average Gala ends with at least one extremely dramatic breakup, statuary collapsing, a menagerie stampeding through the dining hall whilst the band plays unfitting music, all the festivities dead and cake, \_everywhere\_."

The crowd looked uneasy at this. Twilight brushed some soot off her stall and continued. "Now, I'm expected to attend this Gala \_almost\_ every time it happens, which means I know more about what to expect and how to enjoy it than anypony except Princess Celestia...and in all likelihood I am going to be stuck sitting in the entrance hall greeting guests all night, \_but\_ I'll also get to spend time with at least one friend from Canterlot in the process, and I usually get to hang out with more once all the guests have finally arrived. Plus, if we're lucky, we can get a smaller, more private get-together going later on which \_always\_ results in a much better night for everyone involved." She absently blew out a small flame in her mane. "So, anypony who wants to go should bear in mind that while it's not all it's cracked up to be, you can still have a good time at the Gala, especially if a friend is going with you. The tickets will go to whoever I think is most likely to enjoy the experience, and I won't be giving out \_any\_ of the tickets for \_at least\_ a week, so make sure you've thought long and hard about just why you want to go before you apply to get one."

\* \* \*

><p>(Gym Quirk)<p>

Twilight had closed her booth for the day and retreated into the relative privacy of the Library's main room.

An eerily familiar magical disturbance began to form near the base of the stairs to her loft. Loose papers and other objects began to flutter about, then the magenta-bordered white orb formed before emitting a blinding flash.

Another Twilight Sparkle had joined her in the room.

Disheveled mane, check. Eyepatch, check. Bandage on head, check. Scar on cheek, check. Tattered black body suit, check.

The battered and singed Time Traveler booth was an interesting touch, along with the "The Timetraveler is: Not Kidding" sign.

"Oh no," groaned the un-displaced unicorn. "What could possibly have made you think using that spell was a good idea?"

"Six words," her counterpart replied. "Cutie Mark Crusader Underworld Beast Trainers."

There was a brief pause as one Twilight let the other think through the implications.

"Cerberus?"

"Cerberus."

"What about Fluttershy?"

"We told her about Tornado Day. She and Dash were off in her meadow working on her wingpower training."

Another thoughtful pause.

"Do I want to know about the get-up?"

"In addition to the CMC's antics, a really convoluted chain of events involving a Pinkie Promise, a missing watermelon, and Time Turner's overdue books account."

And then the spell expired, leaving Twilight alone to ponder the future.

\* \* \*

><p>111.2 (misterq) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Scootaloo got up from the outdoor cafe table where she had been having dinner with her friends, pulled out what looked like a large candy cane from her pocket space, and stabbed it into the ground in one fluid motion. The peppermint pylon activated with an electric humming noise.<p>

"Ha! Try and get us now, you stupid non-corporeal bag of wind!" the purple-haired girl shook her fist at the sky, "I triple pony dare you, you leftover remnant of an awkward burp!"

"Uh, Scoots?" Apple Bloom cautiously approached her friend, "Are you sure it's a good idea to taunt, er.. the death?"

"You don't understand. I've been preparing for another stupid Final Destination loop ever since that thing happened to me in the last one."

"With the oak tree and the helicopter and the bowl of yogurt?" Sweetie Belle piped in.

"Yes. That," Scootaloo deadpanned, "Well, I got one of Pinkie's video game pylons active. So even if it gets me, I'll just happily respawn as long as the pylon remains on."

With a slow whining noise, the peppermint pylon turned itself off for no reason.

Scootaloo was suddenly next to the powered-down device, frantically

trying to turn it on. It was a rather difficult task as the only interface consisted of a large red candy-like button - which was quickly being pressed over and over.

Another electric humming noise caused the sport-oriented member of the Cutie Mark Crusaders to whip her head to the side. There, she saw Sweetie Belle with another working peppermint pylon.

"Apparently, we had the same idea," Sweetie Belle smiled, "Great minds think alike, I suppose."

"Er sorry to interrupt, girls, but did Pinkie ever say what would happen if two of those pylons were activated next to one another, or in a place where luck and chance are at the whim of malicious entities?" Apple Bloom questioned while pointing to the pylons. Scootaloo's pylon was now working again. That would have been fantastic except that wild bolts of eldritch magical energy were now playing across both candy looking artifacts, zapping between hers and Sweetie Belle's devices like a demented Jacob's ladder.

"Ahh! Do something, Apple Bloom!" Sweetie Belle cried out to her friend.

"Well, I'd like to. There's just three little problems. One, these things are magical artifacts; which I've never studied too much. Two, they are made of enchanted candy; which I have never worked with. And thirdly, they were crafted by Pinkie Pie... who is Pinkie Pie, and everything that entails. I believe that the challenges posed by these little old facts are all self evident," Apple Bloom watched cautiously as the pylon's noise reached a crescendo. She just hoped they all wouldn't end up in Eiken again.

Then suddenly and without warning, the two pylons flashed like strobe lights and plummeted downwards through the concrete and beyond.

The three girls looked down at the holes.

"How deep do you think...?" Sweetie Belle started to ask.

"Deep. Very, very deep," Apple Bloom answered after looking down one of the holes.

"Do you think that anyone would notice?" Scootaloo asked.

"Well, they are pretty deep in there," the youngest Apple family member thought for a moment, "Unless Pinkie only made them operate at a tiny fraction of their full potential power, I don't think we'll need to worry about them doing anything to the surroundings anytime soon."

\* \* \*

><p>The next day, Apple Bloom slammed the daily newspaper down on the table. She stared at her friends before asking, "Did Pinkie, perchance, mention anything about how those peppermint pylons are powered?"<p>

"Well," Sweetie Belle spoke up, "I did ask her, but you know how Pinkie can get. She went on a rambling tangent of an explanation. I think she mentioned something about transfiguration spells and sugar

and anti-sugar or something like that."

Apple Bloom stared at her friend and sighed, "Fantastic. They're powered by a near endless supply of antimatter. That, along with that harmonic resonance or whatever happened yesterday would probably explain today's newspaper."

Scotaloo and Sweetie Belle craned their necks to look at the print.

There on the front page, in a truly gigantic font, was the headline: 'DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY!'

"Apparently, all sapient deaths not caused by natural causes results in a respawn," Apple Bloom summarized, "Everywhere. Across the entire planet. What are we going to do about this, girls?"

"I have an idea," Scotaloo said with a nod.

Then she stood up and seamlessly continued her previous day's rant against death.

\* \* \*

><p>111.3 (Drachefly) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack, presently wandering through ancient China, stopped at the top of a pass and surveyed the next valley. She raised a hand to block out the evening sun. <em>Looks kind of swampy. Oh well, a little mud in my sandals won't stop me.<em>

She was only a little way down when a bit of sudden movement caught her eye - someone had fallen into one of the pools. Another moment's watching, and Applejack realized that the person's response to this situation was panic instead of simply getting out of the water. Applejack took one step of a running start before realizing that she was far too slow in this form. A burst of magic, and she had transformed full Alicorn. She leapt into the air and sped towards the pool.

Before she was a quarter of the way there, she had levitated a girl out and to safety.

When Applejack landed next to her, the girl bowed.

"Aww, git up."

"Most illustrious being..."

"Not hearing it. Git up. Where I'm from, I'm a farmer."

The girl did look up briefly, and continued, "O magical farmer who saved my life..."

"All right, you're welcome."

She finally raised her head and left it up. "Why did you come down and save me?"



"Cause I was walking down the path on my way to nowhere in particular, and just saw you drownin' there? It's not that complicated."

"May I travel with you?"

\_Hmm. Do I need to deal with a worshipper?\_ "No."

The girl did not insist. Applejack nodded and continued on. On the far end of the valley, Applejack settled down to camp.

And in the morning, looking back from the other side, she immediately recognized it: Jusenkyo. \_Ah, not a generic ancient China loop. Pre-Ranma. That explains why I didn't get any other pings - he'll wake up in a few centuries. Aaaand I just rescued the girl the cursed spring imprinted on. Hmm. I could control what he transforms into if I... umm. No, not doing that. Murder as the setup for a joke?\_

While she was grazing, though, the idea would not let her go.

\* \* \*

><p>Ranma Woke. He had just thrown his father into the pool outside the Tendo family home. <em>Ah, this start. Always the same. I'll be splashed myself in...<em>

The water hit, and he was an orange alicorn.

In moments, he processed surprise, pleasure at the novelty, recognition, and gratitude. A quick reference to his loop memories... \_She probably got an Eiken for this. I'll have to make it up to her. And tell her you don't actually need to completely drown.\_

\* \* \*

><p>111.4 (Zetrein, continuation of 109.5)<p>

Two guards patrolled along the exterior pathways of Canterlot Castle. The wise old earth pony sergeant was lecturing the young private with him on what he felt was proper Guard conduct, the things they don't teach kids these days.

Or he would, if the young pegasus would pay attention. "Private Doo! Have you heard a single word I've said these past few minutes?"

"Yessir! The Single File Line is a perfectly valid formation, Sergeant Red, sir!" She snapped to attention, her left eye leaving the butterfly it had been tracking. The sergeant caught that wayward eye, however.

"Then why are you watching the local creepy crawlies?" Red stopped at a crossroads in the path, and turned to face Pvt. Doo. "You are a Private in Her Majesty's Royal Guard, you need to be attentive-"

"Do you hear that?" Pvt. Doo interrupted him. "It sounds like screaming."

"Gall darn it, Private, you interrupted me again! How many times do I

have to tell you not to interrupt me!" Seeing Ditzzy snap to attention, Red continued. "As I was saying, you need to be alert! Observant! Attentive! Ready to act on a moment's notice! And under no circumstances should you \_ever\_-"

While he had been speaking, the screaming Ditzzy Doo heard had been getting closer. Even still, it was a surprise when, amidst the sound of a screaming mare and squeaking wheels, Sergeant Red vanished from in front of her in a clattering bang and a blur of brown.

With the sergeant's spear clattering to the ground, Ditzzy let out an uneasy call. "Mister Sergeant? Are- Are you still there? Sarge?"

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, the sergeant, along with two fillies and a teenage mare, were rapidly leaving Pvt. Doo in the dust. As he admired the tall wheelbase, which allowed him to cling to the front of the go kart without dragging on the pavement, Sergeant Red took stock of the ponies involved in this incident.<p>

"Sorry Mister Guard! I didn't mean to hit you, but the brakes aren't working!" Currently at the wheel, and trying to see around his head, was Equestria's Darling Filly, Princess Twilight Sparkle. Currently at the age of twelve, her special talents were Magic, and being the Cutest Princess.

"You know, we're tall enough, that if you let go, you'd probably be fine!" Ah yes, Smarty Pants. Alleged age of ten, ward of the royal family, special talents include a perfect memory, and being smarter than you.

"I wanna get off! I changed my mind! Make it stop!" And finally, cowering in the back of the go kart, was Princess Mi Amore 'Cadance' Cadanza. The sixteen year old alicorn was the envy of all teenage fillies, and the reason the color pink and stable relationships were in style.

And finally there was him, Staff Sergeant Rhode Island Red, forty year veteran of Her Majesty's Royal Guard, and entirely too old for this crap. In three days, he was going to retire, and go raise chickens. Far, far away from things like this.

Ultimately though, the decision of how to handle this situation was taken out of his hooves, when Smarty Pants pointed somewhere behind him and shouted. "Ramp!"

As his eyes widened in fear, Sergeant Red decided to take his chances with the pavement, and let go of the kart.

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia had grown used to Twilight and Smarty getting into things, over the past year. The energetic filly often dragged Twilight out to play, sometimes literally pulling her from her books. Personally she felt it was good for Twilight, having such a close friend so early in her life. Celestia just wished that she didn't have to clean up after them so often.<p>

Case in point, the two soaking wet fillies, a shivering Cadance,

whose coltfriend was trying to talk her out of the deathgrip she had on a nearby tree, and the go kart slowly sinking in the pond.

She pointedly did not look back at the trail they had left behind them, leading across half the noble district, all the way up to where it had begun in the palace gardens. The two fillies were the reason most the nobles had summer homes now; they didn't want to be around when they weren't distracted by school work.

Sighing the forlorn sigh of a single parent, Celestia turned to the most likely culprit. "Dare I ask what you were doing this time?"

"Well," Smarty replied, "I can tell you what we weren't doing, and that was reenacting this awesome scene from Barons of Disaster! There's this scene, ya see, and they..." As Smarty described the epic chase scene they had been trying to play out, Twilight was shaking the water out of her helmet.

By the time Cadance was finally coaxed off the tree, Smarty had gotten to the part of her tale where their plan went wrong. "So I figure that the guard we ran over meant we bled off more speed than we'd planned on in the flat part, and that meant we didn't have enough speed to clear the pond, even though we did the barrel roll perfectly. Cady did great with that!" Smarty beamed at her cousin.

Turning her attention to her niece, Celestia raised an eyebrow. "And how did they talk you into this? While I let you indulge Smarty's love of action movies, I mainly do it because I know you'll rein them in. So why this?"

Blushing, Cadance rubbed her foreleg with her hoof. "If I helped them, they promised to be nice to Shiny for a month."

As the two fillies tried their best to look like they weren't sticking their tongues out at Shining Armor while everypony's backs were turned, Celestia simply decided she'd heard enough. Walking to the water, she set about fishing out her daughters' kart, speaking as she did so. "You two get no dessert tonight, and I'll let you have the kart back next week." Sounds of dismay came from the fillies. "Cadance also gets no dessert tonight, for helping you."

"And as for you, young stallion," Celestia turned to look Shining Armor in the eyes. "I fully expect to see you for dinner next friday."

\* \* \*

><p>111.5 (Dalxein)<p>

Twilight looked out over the town of Ponyville and sighed.

Everything had been covered in a thin layer of highly magic, heat, and impact resistant... rubberized gel? It seemed to heed known fluid dynamics models about as well as Pinkie did the laws of motion. Her only explanation for what had transpired came when the Crusaders sullenly trudged their way toward her.

"Alright." She half-huffed. It was mostly another sigh. "What happened?"

"Well..." Apple Bloom started, hesitant.

Scotaloo stepped forward. "We were trying to figure out how to bake Gummi Blocks to make a Gummi Ship. You know, like Sora's?" At the anchor's nod, she continued. "But then the containment vat for the unfinished solution failed, and... Yeah, we're really sorry, Twilight."

"On the plus side..." Sweetie Belle cut in, "I think it'll start to dissolve if we can find the right harmonic frequency! Or at least get it to stop being so hard to pry up..."

Twilight nodded and started her rummage for sonic amplifiers in her pocket, offhandedly commenting- "At least this doesn't have anything to do with tree sap."

She didn't see them wince. "Well if you want to get \_technical\_..." Bloom didn't finish, as Twilight was already conking her head against a rather large amplifier.

\* \* \*

><p>111.6 <strong>(TokoWH)<strong>

(Part 1 of ?)

\* \* \*

><p>Ember awoke with a blink. Immediately, she knew something was off. She was still in her dragon body, that much she could assure herself on, at least. However, for once she hadn't awoken in her room. Scanning her surroundings, wherever she was, she concluded that it definitely wasn't the Dragon Realms.<p>

Though the town she was in still had the bright and cheery charm of the realms, the houses around her were made of wood instead of Artisan-grade marble. Off in the distance, she could see rolling green fields not unlike the Artisans, but something about the nearby forest unnerved her greatly. The striking detail, however, was the population of miniature horses of all different colors of the rainbow.

Despite the rather saccharine look of this place, Ember gulped as she shuddered slightly. She'd known this would eventually happen, and was grateful that it was some place that didn't look too dangerous, but this was the first loop that she wasn't with her family.

\_ 'Okay, Ember. Calm down. Remember what the \_other \_Spyro taught you,' \_she thought, trying her best to come off as unassuming to the beings around her. \_ 'Check your 'in-loop memories' before anything else.' \_

Proceeding to do so, she frowned slightly and wished she hadn't. From what they told her, she was a dragon that had come to live with the ponies in Ponyville because she just didn't fit in with her society. The dragons of this realm were a rather rowdy bunch. Her early life wasn't one of pleasure, having been teased and poked by the others

because of her gentle nature. Her scales being bright pink hadn't helped matters much, either.

If nothing else, she could at least take solace in that her in loop parents had more or less been the same as her usual ones in that they had tried to protect and comfort her as much as they could. But, regardless, the damage had made its mark and Ember had become known as 'the wimpy pony lover' to her own kind the day she finally couldn't take it anymore and moved to a much nicer crowd.

She shook her head, pushing those memories as far back as she could before they could leave permanent trauma. Focusing on more recent events, she let out a sigh of relief. Though the crowd she was in was a bit wary of having a dragon among themâ€”she could still feel a few of them giving her uneasy looksâ€”they were much more accepting of her than her own kind. The fact that her early loop trauma had left her rather timid had helped. She sighed. At least that meant this loop wouldn't be nothing but torture.

However, the thing that unnerved her the most was that she had no in-loop memories of Spyro, nor of Sparx, Hunter, the other Spyro and his Sparx, or Cynder. From this, she could assume that none of them were here in this loop. Which meant, for the first time in her looping life, she was completely on her own.

Once again, despite her saccharine surroundings, she hunkered down and shivered, her blue eyes darting from left to right.

\_ 'Alright, Ember. Just stay calm. At least you're in a peaceful place. Best thing you can do is just go along with what your pre-awake self did and ride the loop out.' \_

With that thought in mind, she continued what her pre-awake self had been doing and continued her grocery shopping.

\* \* \*

><p>Ember walked along the path in an almost trance-like state, her mind focusing on more recent in-loop memories. Apparently, when it came to carrying over from her normal loops, she still liked to volunteer in childcare. Since there was no apparent daycare, though, this meant she spent most of her time helping out at the local schoolhouse. Understandably, considering the dragons of this world, most of the parents were rather apprehensive about a dragon being around their young. But the school teacher, Cheerilee, didn't seem to mind too much.<p>

Her in-loop memories told her that Cheerilee was responsible for most of the town warming up to the pink dragoness, having seen the gentle nature in her that most wouldn't catch at a glance. Of course, her helping her out in teaching draconian history, a rare history not many ponies knew much about, probably helped, but that was a minor detail.

Currently, her in-loop memories told her that tonight was the Summer Sun Celebration, and as a result, school was closed for the holiday. Her in-loop self had planned to spend the day just keeping to herself. She wasn't even planning to attend the celebration. Ember frowned. She couldn't believe how reclusive her in-loop self was, but at the same time she couldn't exactly blame her, either. At the very

least, she could try to be a bit sociable now that she was awake. How to go about it, though, considering her species didn't exactly have the cleanest track record, was going to be a thing.

"All I'm saying, Twi, is that having accessories is one thing. Walking around looking like you lost a fight with a jewellery store clerk is something completely different!"

Ember blinked before turning around. She was instantly met with quite possibly the oddest sight she had seen from this loop so far. Walking along the path was a lavender unicorn. Given what she had seen so far, that wouldn't be any different from the norm, but the fact that said unicorn was dressed up from head to heels with golden chains, a pair of over-sized shades, golden braces on her teeth, and an oversized cloak hanging around her neck was more than enough to raise some heads. Ember had no idea how the huge cloak didn't snap the unicorn's neck.

The unicorn looked down at the young purple dragon next to her with a grin, possibly blinding a few beings with those impossibly shiny braces.

"Ah am tellin' ya, Shpike! Theesh whill be tha new styl of tha futura."

The young dragon blinked before shaking his head. "You realize I can't even understand you with those ridiculous things in your mouth, right?" he said, crossing his arms. "Seriously, what's up with you lately? You've been acting weird ever since you read that book this..." Spike trailed off when he noticed the eavesdropper on the conversation.

The unicorn raised an eyebrow as the drake's mouth hung open. Following his train of sight, her eyes fell upon the pink dragoness. She blinked, though it was quickly followed by a friendly smile. "O', hhello. Fhe'llow loopa?"

Ember blinked. The unicorn glanced down at herself and then promptly blushed as she rubbed the back of her neck.

"O', shorri'," she said, before her horn began to glow. In a flash of light, all the outlandish things she was wearing disappeared. She gave a smile. "Again, sorry about that. I didn't realize we had an outside looper this loop."

She bowed before looking back at Ember. "You must be new to the loops. I've never seen you before, so that's a pretty good clue. I'm Twilight Sparkle, the local loop anchor, by the way. You can call me Twilight, though."

Ember paused for a few seconds. Quickly remembering her manners, she was quick to bow too. "Nice to meet you. I'm Ember. Just Ember, though."

"Well, nice to meet you, Ember," Twilight said before she raised a hoof towards the surrounding town. "Let me be the first one to welcome you to Equestria. We're a sanctuary loop, which means you can unwind and relax here. Just don't do anything too disruptive, though, as we can and will send you to the moon if you cause too much trouble."

Ember jumped slightly, quickly raising her paws in front of her as her eyes went wide. "Oh, you don't have to worry about that! I rarely ever do pranks in my home loop, and I don't generally like causing trouble, so..."

"Don't worry, we don't mean stuff like pranks and that," Twilight said, scratching the back of her head as she gave an embarrassed smile. "We mean stuff like destroying towns, seriously harming other loopers, assisting bad guys, that sort of stuff."

At this, Ember gave a slight sigh before she smiled. "Well, that you \_definitely \_don't have to worry about with me."

"Well, that's good to hear," Twilight said, giving a more genuine smile. "In that case, enjoy your stay here in Equestria! As said, you're free to do whatever you like so long as it's nothing extreme." She sat down. "Anything in particular you want to do?"

Ember paused before she too sat down. "Well, I've never really been to this universe before, and this is my first time being in a loop without someone from my universe being there with me, so I was wondering if..." Ember said, glancing downward as she scratched the back of her neck. "If you could introduce me to some of the other awake loopers here?"

"Sure!" Twilight said, giving a smile. "Surprisingly, though, despite how many loopers there are in this world, there aren't that many who are awake at the moment." With that, Twilight got up and turned around. "Come on. I was just about to meet the others as per usual in my baseline, anyway."

Ember gave a smile as she got up and began to follow Twilight. She paused, however, as she glanced down. The small purple dragon who was with Twilight was looking up at her with eyes wide and jaw dropped. Ember glanced away awkwardly, scratching the back of her neck.

"Um..."

"Huh? Oh!" the baby dragon exclaimed, a luminescent blush on his face as he glanced downward. "I-I'm Spike! Nice to meet you!" he blurted out without thinking before looking over to Twilight. "Uh, Twilight! Wait up!"

Twilight glanced back to see her currently unawake assistant rushing over to her with a blush on his face. She giggled. \_'Looks like Rarity has some competition this loop.'\_

Ember let out a slight chuckle before she was quick to catch up to them. With that, the group of three led by Twilight began their tour of the town. As she walked, Twilight raised an eyebrow and turned to Ember.

"Hey, Ember? Now that I think about it, \_have \_we ever met before?"

"I don't think so. Why?"

"I'm not sure... I don't know why, but your voice sounds oddly

familiar to me..."

\* \* \*

><p>111.7 <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright," Fluttershy said, looking along the latest improvement of her songbird chorus. She was going to be performing at Twilight's ascension this loop, and she felt she really had a winner with this concept. "From the top!"<p>

The half-dozen orioles began to sing. Led by the purple one, they started with a succession of individual notes which blended together into a harmonious arrangement.

Then the nightjar cut across them, singing a counterpoint. This threatened to overwhelm the music completely.

The orioles rallied, piping up one by one, and then reprising their original theme, with a sunbird joining in at the crescendo, and the nightjar abandoned her counterpoint and wove in with the original arrangement to close out the first movement.

The second movement had Discord himself participating â€" as a bizarre mix of secretary bird and Hoopoe. Fluttershy had instructed the birds carefully, and they one by one joined his bizarre chorus before the purple oriole reversed the process.

The third movement involved a cuckoo, twenty grasshoppers, and a pair of lovebirds. (The choreography had been a challenge.)

And, finally, there was the fourth movement.

"Um... it's very nice so far," Twilight allowed. "But what's that kingfisher doing?"

Fluttershy passed her a bird-spotter's guide with one page bookmarked, and waved her hooves for the fourth movement to start.

\_CAW\_, went the Sombre Kingfisher.

Twilight barely avoided faceplanting into the book.

\* \* \*

><p>111.8<p>

"Well, that's that," Loki said, with a satisfied smile.

His eldest son looked up. "How so?"

"Oh, just checking on the results of a couple of fused loops. Took a lot of energy, but it was entirely worth it." He pointed. "Here, one from your loop with a certain Anchor who got his start with your lot. Here, three of mine to Pern. And here, one of your lupine brother's Anchors and that place which Hel dotes on."



Sleipnir nodded. "I understand the last two. But the other one?"

Loki winked. "Give me a few secrets."

"What about Jorm? Are you involving him in this?"

"Oh..." Loki shrugged. "I had certain plans. Well, his code is usually involved with Pern anyway... but, anyway, I made him known to a certain research project, project 3325."

"...I have no idea what that's supposed to imply, Dad," Sleipnir informed him. "As usual."

The door banged open, and Jormugandr slithered in. "DAD!"

"But I'm about to," Sleipnir added, more positively.

"Why did you give that lot my rÃ©sumÃ©?" Jormugandr asked, pleadingly. "You know as well as I do that the 'Jormugandr solution' is just assigning me to fix all the chaos caused by time travel until I work out a code fix pattern!"

Loki smirked. "Well, you did say you were bored."

"Once! Fifteen hundred iterations ago!" Jormugandr brought his tail around, and nibbled on it nervously. "Rrrgh... I'm going to be fixing anomalies until I eat myself, I swear."

"...nope, still no idea of the specifics," Sleipnir announced.

Loki clapped him on a shoulder. "Learning's half the fun."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

111.1: Franchise edition?

>111.2: Not just cheating Death, but turning on the cheat CODES for

Death.<br>111.3: The supreme sacrifice. (Spring of drowned altruist?)

>111.4: Twily and Smarts.<br>111.5: Powered by similes. Like this one.

>111.6: Part one of multiple.<br>111.7: Dramatic reenactment.

>111.8: Plans within plans. (Loki's a big softy really.) The middle one is HTTYD Loops stuff.<p>

## 118. Chapter 118

112.1

\* \* \*

><p>Gilda the Griffin rolled around on her back on a cloud, mildly bored.<p>

New loops were interesting, generally, but it depended who was there and what they were doing. And until she got contacted by someone

who'd know for sure â€" like Dash or Spike â€" all she could do was check Element mixes and guess.

There was a good spread, at least, this time. Hopefully, a few of the non-element users would be there as well, and she'd be able to try a thing she'd wanted to for a while â€" swapping places with Luna at Nightmare Night, pretend it was a \_really good\_ costume, and muck around with raising the moon and stuff.

Something was nagging her, though. What \_was\_ it? Something to do with the Empire...

Cudgeling her unresponsive brain, Gilda decided to start from the top.

The Gryphon Lands. A large, complex mix of direct dependencies, vassals, client states, and aligned tribes-

\_Point one.\_ Normally the Empire was more centralized. Interesting.

-spread over a few small landmasses, none of them more than fifty leagues on a side, and dozens upon dozens of minor archipelagos-

\_Point two.\_ No great plains, no mountaintop eyries... sounded like the griffins were a lot more sea-oriented this loop, and a quick check revealed her bird part to be osprey and her cat part to be almost lynx-like.

A further quick check reassured her she could still do the ink magic thing with her tail. Losing \_that\_ would have been inconvenient. Anyway, where was she...

-and she had been sent over on a trading mission, since Princess Celestia had been interested in securing the services of a number of dragons-

\_...bwah?\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Hiccup," Stoic asked, slowly. "What in Niflheim are we?"<p>

Hiccup looked down at himself. "Oh, huh. Wonder where we are... just gotta wait for those loop memories to kick in. Now, are-"

The coldest air in the world blasted them, ruffling their feathers.

\_Morning!\_ Toothless announced, landing gracefully between father and son, and giving an 'I've-got-lots-of-teeth-but-I'm-hiding-them-to-be-polite' grin. Behind him, Blitsif settled to the grass.

"Oh, morning Blitz," Stoic added, nodding his beaked head to her. "Where's Thor?"

\_Fishing,\_ Blitsif told them. \_He Woke up a bit hungry, so it'll

probably rain fried cod in a few minutes.\_

Hiccup grinned, which was quite a feat with a beak. "Cool. Well, may as well not waste it â€" Toothless, you still remember how to catch stuff with your wings?"

\_That's hatchling stuff.\_ Toothless spread his black wings to their full expansion, covering as much surface area as possible. \_Week's worth of cat food, coming up.\_

"We're only \_half\_ cat," Hiccup pointed out, pedantically. "Half... I think either eagle or osprey, which more or less means the same thing diet-wise, it's true..."

"Which is called \_what?\_" Stoic stressed.

Thornado materialized on cue overhead, and let off a \_boom\_. It duly rained fried fish.

\_Cool, fast food,\_ Toothless broadcast, then rolled his eyes at Blitsif's confusion. \_We need to get you a nuclear-age loop soon, half my jokes go over your head.\_

\_Just be glad I know what an idiom is,\_ Blitsif replied, grinning.

"Oh, right, sorry." Hiccup shook his head, inspecting his wings absently. "We're griffins, that's what."

Loop memories settled.

"Pretty much the same Berk as usual, except we've already done the reconcile-with-dragons thing..." he continued, with the air of a seasoned traveller â€" which he was. "Ooh, and we're nominally part of a larger empire, but in practise all that means is that we have to provide about six of us maximum on request as military service."

He shrugged, and started collecting the fish off Toothless' wings. "I think they're scared of us. And â€" oh, wait. Yes! Jackpot!"

Stoic blinked at Hiccup's sudden whoop. "What?"

"Oh, I was just wondering if I knew this place â€" and I do." Finishing the job with the fish, he padded back over to his father and laid a wing against his side. (It took some doing â€" Stoic was a \_big\_ griffin, and his son was a \_small\_ one.) "I've got friends here. You'll like 'em."

"Right." Stoic frowned. "I think."

\* \* \*

><p>112.2<p>

Princess Celestia trotted onto the stage, to bows and applause.

She turned, facing side-on to the crowd, and made a grand gesture at the curtains. "Now, please welcome â€" your mayor!"

Ivory Scroll walked slowly onto the centre of the stage, to general

confusion.

"Um..." Roseluck asked, raising a hoof. "Shouldn't this be the other way around?"

"Not really?" Celestia replied, confused. "What do I do? Raise the sun?" She flapped her wings, dismissing it. "A trifle. It doesn't make the world go round â€" well, in a manner of speaking, anyway. And it is not as if I am the only pony who could do that. But your mayor..."

Celestia paced the stage. "Your mayor is who keeps the town running. She ensures that Spick and Span are paid for their work keeping the streets clear, she organizes water, food, housing, balances the budget, makes sure the trains run on time â€" and, of course, takes the blame for whatever goes wrong."

She smiled, dishoofingly. "Oh, I do my share of paperwork, as well. It's harder, true â€" but for that, I get a palace, gold, servants... I'm sure any pony in Equestria would want to be a Princess, at least for a day. But very few want to be Mayors."

After letting that sink in for a minute, she shrugged. "So, I've donated my day to the Mayors and other civil servants of Equestria. It's the least I can do."

\* \* \*

><p>112.3<p>

"Okay." The unicorn flipped his mane out of his left eye, and it promptly settled back again. "So, your plan is to defeat your sister, yeah?"

"That is correct," Nightmare Moon confirmed.

The unicorn tapped his hooves against the ground. "Then you raise the moon into the sky."

"Exactly." The dark ruler of the night nodded again. "That is the most important aspect of the plan."

"See, I'm right on board, yeah?" He chewed on something, considering. "And after that... you want to make everyone marvel at the sky overhead, as they see true art, yeah?"

"Precisely!" Nightmare Moon bestowed a smile upon the mercenary unicorn. "You catch on much quicker than any of the others ever did."

"Yeah," the unicorn replied. "Okay, I know \_just\_ how to help."

\* \* \*

><p>"...so, anyway," Celestia concluded. "I threw the fight, because I was interested in seeing what this new pony might mean for the loop. And Luna pulled the moon into the centre of the sky, and was just starting to gloat, when..."<p>

Her two pupils frowned at the pause.

"Princess?" Twilight asked. "What is it?"

"...oh, wait," Trixie said suddenly. "I think I see."

"Exactly." Celestia pointed up at the beautiful ring system that shone in Equestria's skies, day or night. "Art, as he put it, is an explosion. Poor Luna..."

"So, Deidara rigged the whole moon to explode," Trixie summarized. Then began to grin.

"\_Trixie,\_" Twilight said warningly. "Don't make me get the spritzer again."

"What? I was planning true finesse. A series of tens of thousands of coordinated explosions, large and small, to \_un\_destroy the moon!" Trixie swirled her cape, which flashed and sparkled well into the blue end of the spectrum. "And then put down a little flag with Luna's cutie mark on it. I am not a monster."

\* \* \*

><p>112.1 continued<p>

\_I like this new setup,\_" Toothless commented, as they skimmed low over the waves. \_Much easier on my back.\_

Hiccup trimmed his feathers, lashed his tail briefly to one side to steer, and drew up on Toothless' wing. "Yeah, but you'd better be there when I get tired. Unlike you, I can't keep this up all day."

\_You know it.\_ Toothless raised his head slightly to check on his own harness. \_Yep, still on. Land there whenever you want. Payment is one fish per hour.\_

"Suits me."

A little higher and further back, the rest of the dragons and riders followed in a large V formation.

The twins led, their huge dragon providing the air flow that set up the others for long distance flight. On the left arm of the V, Hookfang and his rider led Meatlug and hers, with Gobber trailing (and carrying his Terror, who was making the best of the situation by napping.)

On the right arm, Blitsif and Stormfly composed the main part of the formation. Thornado was trailing, largely to keep an eye on Stoic "the member of their formation \_least\_ used to long distance flight.

\_I thought Hiccup said he knew this place,\_" Stoic grumbled to Blitsif and Thornado. \_Why do we have to go the long way?\_

The message went from them to Toothless to Hiccup.

"Well..." Hiccup executed a roll in mid-air. "Basically, it's been a while, and I don't want to end up... like, fifty feet underground, or

back in time, or something. When a loop you think you know is this changed, you want to \_really\_ use fresh coordinates."

The answer was duly sent back from griffin to dragon to dragon to griffin.

\_I'm sure,\_ Stoic sent to be relayed back. Then: \_How long is this going to take?\_

\_Well, if you're going to grumble...\_ Blitsif replied directly. \_Hey, loudmouth, close up. Stoic and I are going the quick way.\_

She shed velocity, dropped low a bit, and then came up under Stoic so he ended up on her back. With a surprised squawk (that he later denied had happened), Stoic found himself rising abruptly away from the formation.

His feathers stood on end, as Blitsif began to trickle-charge from static electricity. \_Now, get that hammer of yours out. You're going by Blitsif!\_

Stoic nodded, understanding, and readied Mjolnir. Two quick spins, and it charged to the point it could achieve a lightning bolt.

\_Ready?\_ Stoic asked.

\_...now!\_ Blitsif told him.

The bolt of blue-arc'd lightning struck one of her spines, arc'd to the rest, and then enveloped them in a curtain of light.

Then they \_went.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"...huh," Hiccup said, watching as the dragon and griffin shot off at about the speed of sound. "Not bad."<p>

He glanced over at Toothless. "No, it's not a challenge."

\_Sez you.\_ Toothless contemplated for a moment. \_Alright, I'll be good.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Celestia landed in front of the best tea shop in Horseshoe Bay, ready to greet the envoys from the Griffin Empire.<p>

Well, actually, she was several hours early. But she'd learned, even before the loops began, that turning up early was a perfect excuse for a cuppa and a slice of cake.

"Lieutenant," she said to her duty guard commander, "Please try to avoid crowding other ponies in the shop."

"Of course," he replied, and turned. "Guard duty to form external perimeter."

\* \* \*

><p>Ten minutes into a really very good cup of Earl Bay (the local speciality), Celestia's elevesens was interrupted by a loud BANG.<p>

"What was that?" she asked, putting her teacup down. Then, as nopony appeared to know offhand, headed outside to find out for herself.

\* \* \*

><p>"That" turned out to be a dragon and a griffin sprawled over the main square.<p>

The dragon was moderately sized " to her, it looked about Adult or Mature Adult, possibly smaller " and festooned with the most remarkable array of spikes, some of which still sparked with residual electricity.

The griffin was a large specimen of the species, and slightly... off, to her. It matched loop memories, but wasn't quite up to code with her wider experience of griffins such as Gilda.

Also, his every feather and every hair of his fur were standing on end. An occasional spark blazed from it to the hammer held in his foreclaws.

"Next time, Blitsif," he muttered, "We try that when I don't have fur or feathers."

Celestia nodded to herself. "I presume you are a newcomer to Equestria?" she asked. "I am Awake, if that helps, and I presume you are as well."

The griffin shook his head, instinctually tried to soothe ruffled feathers, then gave it up and looked at her. He blinked.

"Huh. An' I thought griffins were weird," he said, absently.

The dragon scrambled to its feet, and gave Celestia a long, careful look over. Then turned to survey the rest of the town.

"Oh, right." The griffin palmed his hammer, which vanished. "You're a looper, right?"

"Indeed," Celestia replied. "And your employer for the nonce, if I have this right. You are of the Hairy Hooligans, of Berk?" She made the connection. "Does that mean Hiccup is-"

Cold air blasted the town.

"Thanks for the coordinates, Blitsif!" a voice shouted from overhead. Hiccup sprang from Toothless' back, came gliding down to a landing beside the larger griffin, and watched as the rest of the Berk dragons landed in the remainder of the main square.

"Afternoon, Princess Celestia," Hiccup added. "Several dragons and Vikings, reporting as requested. I see you've met my father."

"Wonderful," Celestia replied, both for their presence and for the fact of new Loopers for Berk. "I'm afraid my schedule is rather busy, but allow me to inform you of what I require of you." To be precise, what her pre-awakening plans had been "extra guards for Twilight. "And " I look forward to meeting you, as I am sure do many others here, ponies and otherwise."

Hiccup nodded. "Sounds good."

\* \* \*

><p>112.4<p>

Princess Luna sighed, turning away from the moon hovering overhead. And the huge bunch of grapes emblazoned on it.

Sisters loops were trying, sometimes. Especially when the fellow Sister connived with Discord to try to drive one to distraction.

Hopefully, Twilight would be able to handle Berry after her thousand year detox. She didn't even want to contemplate how to handle Awake Discord, who \_still\_ wouldn't go in the bedamned statue...

"Your Highness?"

Luna looked up. "Ah, Vetter. Do sit down."

When the unicorn had taken a seat, Luna went on. "Thank you for coming to see Us so quickly. We wished to discern the extent of the damage Our sister caused during her rampage."

"Um, yes..." Policy Vetter's face made an interesting shape. "About that... most of the damage was trivial, easily fixed. The remaining chaos is administrative, and..." He paused. "Irrevocable."

Luna blinked. "How can this be?"

In reply, Vetter put a star map down in front of her. "This was signed into the observatory by your own hoof. It is no longer possible to revert."

The alicorn of the night sky stared, focusing on the chart. It was an accurate enough map, but...

"...what are these names?" Luna asked, blinking and looking closer. "'Boring Star'? 'See Above'? 'Emergency Backup Equestria'?"

Her eyes began roving all over the star chart, suddenly fearing the extent of the damage. Every star she had officially named \_before\_ Spiked Punch had detonated the Jagernuke was still what it had been, but the rest... they bore names like Putz, Waste Of Sky, Discord Wuz Here, Hashtag Star, PLEASE REMOVE, Dry Clean Only, Just Marsh Gas, Here Be No Dragons, \*\*\*FREE TAIL PERMS\*\*\* and Go Outside And Get Some Fresh Air Because Astronomy Is Boring.

"I see," she eventually said, quite calmly. "Thank you. Now, if you will excuse me, I need to go find Discord and hit him with astronomy textbooks. I am not sure if I will ever stop."



\* \* \*

><p>112.5<p>

"Lemon Rush?"

The indicated colt turned. "Yes â€" oh, Shining Armor, right?"

The stallion (for it was he) nodded. "That's correct."

He stepped a little closer, halting about two yards away. "I've heard â€" via Twilight â€" that you're dating my niece."

"I am, yes," Rush confirmed.

"Right. Now, I'm sure we both know how this is supposed to go." Shining shrugged. "You know. Overprotective male relative, hurt my niece and I'll eviscerate you, and so on."

He cricked his neck. "So let's take all that as read. Instead, there's something much more important I want to discuss. Something which might make all the unpleasant business moot."

"Oh?" Rush asked, interested.

Shining took a breath. "Nyx is several things â€" overlady of the night on a time share with Princess Luna; remarkably cute; young whenever she can get away with it... but the important ones here are as follows."

In the pause, Rush took up an attentive stance. He considered getting out a notebook, but felt that would be a bit crass.

"Right. Firstly â€" she's slow to trust. I mean, really trust, deep in her heart." Shining frowned. "That's not to say she isn't comfortable with people quite quickly â€" quicker than usual, in fact... but that very comfort is based on her knowledge that she is not under duress."

The stallion tapped a hoof, thinking hard. "Perhaps it would be easier to say she's slow to forget. She will forgive a transgression readily enough, but it will still colour your interactions for a long, long time."

Rush nodded. "I see, and I think I understand. I'll try to err on the side of caution."

Shining considered him. "Good. Secondly, she may prefer to appear as a child, but not only is she fully adult but she likes to be treated as one when things are important. Always invite her to discussions that may concern her â€" if she doesn't want to be involved, she'll just blow off the meeting inside five minutes or not turn up at all. But the important thing is to give her due consideration."

Lemon absorbed that.

"Finally." Shining looked Lemon directly in the eye. "I don't know how serious your relationship is â€" but I do know that you should not feel in the least bit reluctant to ask her how serious she thinks it is. If she is of the impression that it is more serious

than you think it is, \_or\_ if she thinks it is less serious, then you are likely to get in trouble. Avoid that."

The Primarch waited a moment to see if there was any more, then saluted. "Got it. Thank you, Captain."

Shining nodded to him in return.

"Oh, and Lemon?" he added, as the colt turned away.

"Yes?"

"If you value your life, tread carefully around my wife." Shining smiled. "I sometimes think she can \_smell\_ romance. Don't hesitate to ask me for help in... diverting... her."

Lemon gave an elaborate shudder. "Never fear on \_that\_ front. Spike and Rarity's wedding was spectacular, but I also remember what princess Cadence did after it ended..."

\* \* \*

><p>112.6<p>

"I see." Cheerilee wrote that down. "So, an operative should always have at least two independent fall-back locations?"

"That's right," David confirmed. "At least one should be utterly unconnected with you in any way â€" I usually just open an atlas at the index and point, to get a good location â€" and the other should be somewhere with good records and good privacy, like Switzerland."

"And what should go in it?"

"At least one weapon, several different kinds of disposable currency, and five fake ID at a minimum." David shrugged. "Depending on the time frame, consider including a disposable mobile phone â€" prepaid, but unused, and with the battery separate â€" and a few half-filled books of small newspaper puzzles."

On seeing her surprised look, the agent smiled. "Hey, fleeing a country involves long periods of boredom on aircraft or trains. Anyway, there should also be something on your person which leads you back to one of your safes. I learned the usefulness of \_that\_ the hard way."

"I've heard," Cheerilee replied dryly. "Jason."

"Yeah, I don't go by that if I can help it," David Webb said, holding up his hands. "It might count as displacement or some other psychological thing, but as far as I'm concerned David Webb is the guy who didn't know what he was getting into, and Jason Bourne is the slightly deranged killer. Nowadays, I just carry a quick-mod kit for my guns which turns them into Merciful weapons, and use that if I'm just fighting... hell, the police or whatever."

"I'd try to help, but psychology is one of the things I've not learned how to do the basics of yet." Cheerilee gave an awkward smile. "Sorry."

"Nah, it's fine." David leant back on the chair. "I've had myself checked out a few times. I'm assured I'm on the mend, though there is a Good-aligned weapon in my pocket I check every so often. If it burns, I'm backsliding."

"Sensible." Cheerilee looked down at her page of notes. "Is that it for spycraft?"

"Nearly... for the theory part." David grinned like a shark. "Now, for the practical. In about fifty seconds, the gendarmerie comes through the ceiling thinking I'm in the pay of the North Koreans trying to reignite the Falklands war, because of CIA trickery with my INTERPOL record."

Cheerilee blinked at him.

"My baseline's kind of crazy," the Anchor pointed out. "Now, try to keep up. Three, two, one--"

The ceiling fell in.

"You're crazy!" Cheerilee shouted as David dragged her through the door and down the stairs, exchanging fire with French policemen all the way.

"So?" David asked, glancing around and reloading with his off hand. "Ooh, a Ferrari. Forget using the dinky little car, we're taking this! And don't forget to keep good notes on how to escape vehicular pursuit."

\* \* \*

><p>112.1 continued<p>

As the day drew towards night, a number of winged forms landed outside Ponyville. Twilight heard the rushing of air, and exchanged a quick glance at her assistant as the newcomers slowed to a stop.

"Ah, there she is," Celestia said. "Twilight!"

Twilight turned, and waved. "Princess!"

She cantered over, trailed by Spike, and caught sight of a number of familiar faces. "Hold on... Toothless? Ah, Hiccup, it's good to see you."

Hiccup grinned, coming forward to bump claw to hoof. "It's been a while, Twilight."

"You know her?" one of the other griffins asked.

\_Big griffin,\_ she mused, looking around at the others in the clearing. Most of them weren't as familiar to her as the Anchor to introduce her to the wider multiverse, but she felt she at least knew the dragons... which was why it was a surprise to see two more than she was expecting. In fact, there were as many dragons as there were griffins, and that was before accounting for the two-headed Zippleback that she recalled the twins sharing.

Hiccup was talking. "...strange thing, I met her fellow loopers before I met her, but that happened the very next loop. Anyway." The feathered Viking cricked his neck. "May as well do this the local-loop way... Twilight Sparkle and Spykoranuvellitar, be known to Stoic the Vast, chief of the Hairy Hooligans â€" and my father. And be known to Thornado and Blitsif, dragons of the Hooligans."

The dragons waved. So did the Viking, though he was slightly slower off the mark.

Twilight blinked. "Hiccup? Your father's looping?"

Then she beamed. "Congratulations!"

"Yeah, it was an emotional moment all round," Hiccup admitted. "And â€" yeah, sorry that neither of your parents are yet."

"No, no, I'm..." Twilight paused. "I've accepted it. And don't... I'm happy, really. Your dad deserves it."

She kicked the floor, producing a staccato \_clop\_. "Anyway, we're getting a bit off topic â€" Spike, go tell Pinkie to switch to New Looper Party, and quick!"

Spike needed no further prompting, turning on his heel and dashing for the library.

"Right." Twilight glanced over at the building. "That gives us about three minutes before we're being made happy to the limits of Equestrian endurance. So, who are the dragons? More new loopers?"

Hiccup nodded. "Yep. But I'll let the chief introduce them." He stepped back smartly, past Stoic, who abruptly found himself in the conversation.

"Oh. Er... gods, Hiccup, is this revenge for all those chiefing lessons?"

"\_Yes,\_" Hiccup said, smiling broadly.

"You'll pay for that... anyway, this is Thornado, a Thunderdrum. This is Blitsif, a Skrill." The indicated pair of dragons bobbed their heads as indicated. "They're my dragons."

Twilight blinked. "Huh. You get two?"

\_There's too much of him for just one of us to carry,\_ Thornado told her solemnly. \_We have to share the workload.\_

Stoic shook his clawed foreleg at them. "And aye, they're always like this."

"Count yourself lucky," Twilight said, smiling. "My dragon assistant got married."

Stoic absorbed that. "Well, I can see I've got a lot to learn about this place."

At that point, Pinkie happened, and the meeting was abruptly adjourned in favour of balloon animals. (Some of them fifty feet long and made for dragons to chase. Pinkie was an equal opportunity partier.)

\* \* \*

><p>"You," Stoic informed the Element of Laughter solemnly, "are a delight to find in a world which looks so wholesome."<p>

Berry shrugged. "It's just ale. It's not as if it's very spectacular. It's even got a physically possible proof."

"Aye, aye." Stoic waved that off, and took a draught. "But I don't have a pocket big enough yet, Gobber won't give me some of his stash, and none of the rest of the Berk loopers seem to bother much with ale."

He swilled the liquid around in the mug, and took another drink, savouring it as it went down. "Let alone ale seasoned in a... honey-glazed barrel of pine wood with teak shavings. Delicious."

"I try," Berry allowed. "Do either of your dragons want some? I see my boyfriend is entertaining them."

Stoic glanced over at the dance floor. For most of the past hour, the dragons had been enjoying what had been advertised (with a solemn seriousness which looped back around to funny) as a Disco-rd.  
>He still hadn't quite gotten his head around that. It was like having Drago Bludvist running a buffet...<p>

"Are there any villains from your baseline still around?" he asked, distracted by that thought. "I mean, there's that Nightmare Moon lass, who seems to be over there chattin' to herself and Twilight and my son and Toothless; there's this Trixie who I've been warned about not letting Thornado near; there's... Dischord?"

"Discord," Berry corrected. "Chrysalis is here as well, and even Gilda was quite unpleasant at first as I understand it. But â€" yes, there are a few. Sombra and Tirek come to mind."

"Good," Stoic said firmly. At her confusion, he went on. "I'd hate to feel like it was some kind of requirement to sort all that out."

"Oh, no, this is quite exceptional." Berry shrugged. "Anyway, the ale thing?"

"Oh, right. No, don't think so." Stoic nodded over to them. "Blitsif's more of a one for spirits, and I can't get Thornado to stop whining about Klah."

"I have some of that," Berry offered. "I don't just do alcoholic beverages."

The Thunderdrum sidled over to the bar. Did someone mention Klah?\_

"They did, you bottomless caffeine addict," Stoic muttered. "Quietly."

\_I have excellent hearing,\_ Thornado informed them loftily.

"You're half deaf!" Stoic protested. "Were you eavesdroppin' on me again?"

\_You thought about Klah, I couldn't help it.\_ Thornado tilted his head. \_Anyway. Do you have any, pony who knows stuff about drinks?\_

"Sure do." Berry rummaged for a moment, and pulled out a flask. Four seconds of heat magic from a convenient spell, and it was steaming. "Don't drink it all at once, I've not checked in a while how much I have left."

Thornado accepted the flask. \_I like this place,\_ he pronounced.

"I really need to learn how to store the stuff," Stoic commented. "Or I might face some kind of revolt."

\* \* \*

><p>112.7 (ScootaLewis)<p>

Sweetie Belle awoke - and Awoke - under a large tree. After following Twilight's long-standing good advice to check the surrounding area thoroughly at the start of an unfamiliar loop, Sweetie had managed to gather a few nuggets of information.

First, she was still her usual pony self. A relief, for sure.

Second, the tree she was under was one of many that appeared to be making the soothing sound that had been in her ears since she woke up - its leaves were a peculiar shape, and the wind moving through them produced a tinkling that was pleasant but pervasive. She quietly mused to herself on the idea of grabbing a sample for Applejack; musical trees would be neat to have around.

Three, there was a very large otter in a green peaked cap bent over her, with a good-natured grin on his face.

>Sweetie barely had time to register the fact before it spoke, with what sounded like a Trottingham accent.<p>

"'Ere, luv, I don't suppose you happen to 'ave been repeatin' a certain slice o' your life over 'n' over?"

Sweetie also took a few moments to digest this information. Realization dawned, and she smiled herself.

"I certainly have! And by the sound of it, probably more than you, actually."

"Oh, really?" He sounded quite affronted. "I'll have you know this is me 12th time around! Though it's certainly the first time anyone but Jon-Tom's showed up, so there's that."

Sweetie's smile got a little more smug. She got to give the multiverse speech for the first time!

"Well, I can't say for sure, but I've definitely had a bit more than 12 loops. I lost count around a few hundred, and that was ages ago. I guess this is the first time any of your company have been replaced?"

As the otter mulled it over, she checked the loop memories that were coming in. Huh. She had been playing with Bloom and Scoots at the treehouse, until she suddenly blacked out and woke up here. No idea why, or how, but probably magic. The otter's attire looked less refined than anything she'd seen in Ponyville - probably a low-tech loop.

"Yeah. Yeah, I reckon so. Why d'yer ask?"

"This'll be your first Fused Loop, then...I better start from the top. Basically, every universe - and there's WAY more than one - is inside a big tree, and something bad happened to that tree. The people who tend that tree made it so that time repeated for all the people in those universes while they tried to fix it. To keep the universes stable, they made it so that at least one person for every universe could remember it every time their world "reset". That person is called an Anchor, and they keep their world rooted so that there's some record of the original at all times. Anyway, each "looping" universe is like a branch on that tree, and when the branches cross over each other, it results in a "Fused Loop", where two universes cross over and people from one experience the world of the other."

"So...me entire world is a branch on a giant tree, and your world's branch touched mine which is why you're here instead of Jon-Tom."

"Pretty much, yep. Is Jon-Tom one of the other people from here, then?"

"Yep. Usually I start rememberin' just about when he shows up, and he only remembers about half of the time.

It's gotten easier to keep him outta trouble, though, the naive git." He paused. "That puts me in mind o' somethin'; we 'aven't been prop'ly introduced. Me name's Mudge, and I'm usually a thief, a gambler, a drunk, and an incorrigible womanizer. Ever since the end of me first loop, though, when I met me wife, I've tried to clean meself up so's I can stay more presentable when I eventually meet her. How's about you, lass?"

"Well, I'm Sweetie Belle; my world is called Equestria, and I'm a young unicorn. My Anchor is another, called Twilight Sparkle, and she's way more experienced at this than I am. I wonder...does your..."Jon-Tom" do much singing?"

"Oh, bloody hell, he does that. 'E's what's called a Spellsinger, 'ere, which means he can do some downright impressive stuff when he gets goin'. He needs his instrument to do it, though. Why did you mention it? Don't tell me you're a Spellsinger too. Even now I can barely handle his mad magical mishaps."

"Well, I dunno about a spellsinger, but as a unicorn of Equestria I have magic - though it's pretty weak since I'm just a filly - and my special talent is singing. So, hey, if we can find an instrument, I

guess I can give it a shot!"

Mudge pinched his nose, such as he could - a gesture learned from Jon-Tom. This would be a long loop.

"Alright, then. Round about now, I take Jon-Tom to see the resident wizard of these here Bellwoods, a senile turtle called Clothahump." Sweetie giggled at the name. "Shush, you. Batty or not, he's a ruddy powerful mage, and he's threatened me enough times that even now I'm fairly scared of him. But he's nice enough, and when he finds out he brought you here he'll probably apologise profusely. Maybe mentioning that you can do magic from the start will liven things up, though. You might even get better at it, learning from the old git."

The otter and the unicorn strolled through the tuneless tinkling of the Bellwoods, each smiling at the possibilities the loops had brought them now.

\* \* \*

><p>112.8 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Twilight blinked as she awoke, in both senses of the world, to a place neither her library nor the meadow where she first read about Nightmare Moon's return. It was a room with a small window that oversaw Ponyville's Library. The bed she lay on was white and the walls were a simple turquoise, designed to invoke peaceful feelings in those who live within. There was even a bookshelf to the side of the bed with several of her favorite classic works and even a few Daring Do stories. Two things were off with the situation, however. Her horn was wrapped in an insulation material designed to nullify her magic, and the door was one more typical for a security room. She checked her memories, which caused her to stagger since they were her baseline memories.

She briefly contemplated her options. Panicking was right out, since she had faced much worse awakenings. Ascending to alicorn status was an option for later should it prove necessary, but for now she decided to go with it. She lay back in her bed and took a nap. Whatever this loop's game was, it could wait.

\* \* \*

><p>Moments after Twilight's eyes closed, they opened again to her Library, with her friends all gathered around her. Twilight looked sheepish, "Uh, girls, what are you doing here? Did you all sleep walk here and are you awake now?"<p>

Applejack sighed, "Yeah, we're all loopin'. Pinkie, tell her, would ya?"

Pinkie was bouncing up and down several times, "Hey Twilight! Guess what, guess what! You remember that loop where Nyx and I were imaginary friends?"

Twilight felt a headache coming on, "...yes...?"

"Weeeelllll, it's kinda like that, except we're all your imaginary friends, and your baseline self has been a bit more out of it than that the last time Raine Sage looped in and you helped her edit the



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"So basically," Twilight rubbed her head, "I'm in a Psychiatric Hospital, you all are figments of my imagination and I've shielded myself from outside interference with a magical shield."

Pinkie tapped her chin for a second, then nodded, "Yepperoni! Well, the last one is more unresponsive to outside stimuli, but close enough."

Applejack cut in, "Well, not quite, see we're all based off ponies ya run across in the hospital."

Twilight sighed, "Great. Well, this is something new."

\* \* \*

<p><strong>The Next Morning:</strong>

Twilight awoke just as the sun started peeking its way through the window. She reached up and tried pulling off the magical insulator cone, but it was secured on there by a spell of some sort. Magic was out at this point. Instead, she closed her eyes and dug deep, reaching for and tugging at a different energy source. It wasn't one she used ordinarily, much preferring to stick with her magic or the Force. However, the force couldn't do what she needed this energy to perform. A second later, it was like a plug had been removed, and chakra started flowing through her body. The next step would be even more difficult, since seal-less jutsu were ridiculously difficult under ideal circumstances. Seconds later, her body started glowing blue as she finished gathering enough for this one jutsu and called out its name. With a puff of smoke, her mouth curled into a grin.

Unfortunately, that was exactly the moment another pony decided to arrive.

\* \* \*

<p>Doctor Applejack was a simple psychologist. She enjoyed working at Ponyville Psychiatric Hospital. She had helped countless patients recover from their mental conditions. There had been quite a few odd things the patients had done over the last couple years. However, it paled on comparison to walking in to a single patient room with some food and a plan to read a Daring Do novel to Twilight, only when the door opened, She found not one, but six ponies present. All of them were familiar too. There was Rarity from the children's wing, Pinkie Pie who was another of Applejack's patients, Rainbow Dash who had been a recent arrival, a pegasus she didn't quite recognize, but was sure she was another inmate she had seen in passing, and then the crown, a perfect duplicate of herself.</p>

Twilight blinked at the doctor and said sheepishly, "Uh, doctor...I can explain everything."

\* \* \*

<p><strong>One week later:</strong>

Twilight and five other ponies found themselves resting in Ponyville

Library under close supervision of the Princesses and the doctors of Ponyville Psychiatric hospital. Rarity asked, "Twilight, dear, tell me again how did you manage to get the necessary DNA to make these clone bodies?"

Twilight shrugged, "Applejack and Rarity parted with samples as long as we would teach them how to do the Shadow Clone Jutsu. Pinkie Pie just approached her doctor and gave permission without being prompted. Fluttershy only allowed it if our Fluttershy would visit her every so often. As for Rainbow Dash, she wasn't willing so I used genetic samples obtained from one of her pegasus eggs loops."

\* \* \*

><p>111.6 continued (<strong>TokoWH<strong>)

Twilight's tree library was bustling and Ember's 'Welcome to Ponyville' party was in full swing. This loop had been rather interesting so far. As it stood, despite Twilight informing her that they possessed quite possibly the largest amount of loopers, this loop only three others were really awake. From what she had told Ember, she'd meet two of the three eventually. For now, though, there was only one other looper in the immediate area.

"So then, dearie, how are you enjoying our loop so far?"

Ember turned around, coming face to face with a white mare with a glorious mane.

"I'm really enjoying it," Ember said, giving Rarity a soft smile. "I was a bit unnerved at first, since this is my first fused loop by myself, but all the loopers here so far have been really nice."

"That's good to hear," Rarity said, sitting down at the table Ember was at. "If you ever need anything, feel free to ask."

Ember had a grin on her face. There was a short pause and only the sounds from those enjoying the party could be heard. Ember blinked, an odd feeling like she was being watched coming over her. She turned her head to look behind her, catching Rarity's attention in the process and making her look as well. The two ladies caught sight of the purple head of a small dragon whose emerald eyes were peeking out from behind a chair. Realizing he had been spotted, Spike quickly jumped and dashed away, a luminous blush on his face. Both girls giggled at the sight.

"I still find it a bit hard to believe that you're married to the looping Spike," Ember said, looking back at Rarity. "I mean, I know you two have apparently been looping for many, many years, but it's hard to view him as an adult dragon."

"Yes, it takes quite a few loopers to wrap their heads around it at first," Rarity said, a slight smile on her face. "Looping Spike has grown up a lot compared to his baseline self, though, and he also managed to gain complete control over how mentality can affect the age and size of his body. He's one of the few loopers whose body can grow alongside his mentality." Rarity gave a slight giggle before shaking her head. "The next you're here while he's awake, deary, you should see if he can teach you how to do so as well. It's a very rare

thing for looper's bodies to actually age in the loops, and it's usually an ability most loopers would love to have."

"Oh, no, that's alright," Ember said, putting her paws in front of her. "I'm quite happy with my body the way it is. Besides, I'm not sure if Dragon Realm dragons can actually do that."

Ember turned back to the table and paused, nervously shifting her eyes. "Um, sorry about...uh..."

"It's alright, dearie," Rarity said, shaking her head. "I know my Spike, the awake one, wouldn't so much as look at another women. Besides, I'm not the jealous type."

There was a silent pause as Rarity glanced over to see Spike looking down from the balcony, though he quickly ducked back when he saw Rarity looking in his direction. Rarity narrowed her eyes slightly. She was unable to make out exactly who Spike was looking at. A few seconds passed before Rarity looked forward and hovered a small glass up to her lips.

"...Though, do keep in mind, dearie," Rarity said before she took a sip, her voice a tad bit more serious than before. "If you do decide to humor his childish crush, keep in mind that his awake self is a married dragon." In a small flash of light, her wedding ring appeared on her horn.

Ember gave a slight nervous chuckle, quickly raising her paws in front of her as she gave a nervous grin. "Oh, you don't have to worry about that! I don't go after those who are already in a relationship, and even if he's technically older than I am"

Rarity took a deep breath, shaking her head as her expression lightened. "I'm sorry about that. I have no idea what came over me there." She placed her wedding ring back in her subspace.

Once again, Ember chuckled nervously. Just as things began to get uncomfortably silent, Twilight walked up to them. Giving a small smile, she sat down. "So how have things been so far?"

Ember turned to Twilight, a wide smile on her face. "Pretty good."

"That's good to hear," Twilight said with a smile before turning to Rarity. "Anyway, any ideas on how to deal with Nightmare Moon?"

"Hmm..." Rarity said, placing a hoof to her chin. "...Trapping her in drapery?"

"Done it."

"...Trap her in a bubble?"

"Done it."

"Hm... Drop octopi on her?"

"Done it."

Ember watched on with a blank stare as Twilight and Rarity bantered ideas back and forth. Finally, Ember shook her head. "Um, excuse me?" she asked, butting into the conversation. "What are you talking about?"

Twilight blinked, looking at Ember. "Oh, right!" she exclaimed. "We haven't told her about that yet."

With that, Twilight brought out the ever famous book she was almost always reading at the start of her loop. As the book was floated over, Ember carefully took it in both claws.

"You can keep that if you want. Birch only knows how easy it is for me to get more copies of that," Twilight said, rolling her eyes. "It goes into quite a few details about it, but to give you the abridged version: Nightmare Moon is the evil alter ego of Princess Luna, who used to rule alongside her sister Princess Celestia over a thousand years ago. She controlled the moon and night, as Celestia did the sun and the day."

"However, Princess Luna eventually grew jealous of Celestia, with how ponies usually slept through the night and were more active during the day," Rarity joined in, putting her glass on the table.

"In her jealousy, Luna sought to overthrow Celestia so that her night would reign supreme and never go unappreciated again, becoming Nightmare Moon in the process. Nightmare Moon attempted an attack on Celestia, but even though it seemed like she had won, Princess Celestia used the Elements of Harmony to stop her, imprisoning her on the moon," Twilight said, raising her hoof. "And after a thousand years, she is to escape this Summer Sun Celebration."

Ember listened to the story with wide eyes. She opened the book, flipping a few pages in and seeing the respective images of white and blue winged unicorns. Looking back up, she stared. "Wait, did you say \_this \_Summer Sun Celebration? Isn't that...?"

"Oh, oh! No need to worry! Taking care of Nightmare Moon is rather easy for us at this point," Twilight said, waving her hoof in front of her in reassurance. "It's actually become a bit of a game for us. How unconventionally can we defeat Nightmare Moon? Without accidentally traumatizing Luna when she reverts back, of course."

"So far, we've pretty much done everything from sicking Spikezilla on her to trapping her in a bubble," Rarity added, though she was quick to scratch the back of her neck. "Of course, Spikezilla was back during our earlier looping days, and something we're not particularly proud of..."

Ember blinked. "How did you defeat her in baseline?" she asked, tilting her head.

"Well, normally, my friends and I are supposed to travel into the Everfree Forest to the old castle, where we'd get the Elements of Harmony and use them to expel the evil in Luna," Twilight explained, giving a slight sigh. "Of course, I'm a lot less crabby about it now than I was my first time through."

"Well, why don't you use those? I'd be interested to see how things

went with you girls the first time through," Ember said, giving a small smile.

Rarity paused, looking upwards as she put a hoof to her chin. Shortly after, she turned to Twilight. "How about it, Twilight? Now that I think of it, it \_has \_been quite a while since we last went along with the baseline."

"Maybe," Twilight said, putting a hoof to her chin. "Ember appears to be replacing Fluttershy, though. Though outside loopers getting a husk element isn't unheard of, whether or not she gets kindness specifically has yet to be seen. Of course, juggling around the Elements between us is nothing new..." Twilight said, slowly becoming more and more lost in her ramblings. Finally, she jumped slightly. "Oh, and, of course, if Ember will be willing to wield an element."

Ember paused, her expression blank. \_'I'm not even sure what an Element of Harmony is...' \_she thought, her expression remaining unreadable. \_'I don't think even Spyro has tried using stuff from other loops yet. I'm not even sure if it'll work because I'm replacing the normal user of it.' \_

Ember glanced down, a slight frown on her face. \_'And yet... I don't know why...' \_

Ember looked back up, a grin on her face as a determined glint appeared in her eyes. "Alright! Considering I'm replacing one of the people who normally wields it, I suppose it's only fair."

"Well, alright then! It's settled!" Twilight exclaimed, a smile on her face. "For a change, we'll actually go along with the baseline method."

An upbeat aura came over the group as Twilight and Rarity began discussing the specifics and what to do if things somehow went wrong. Ember watched them with a smile for a moment, then glanced out the nearby window. The moon glowing eerily in the sky. It had almost reached its peak. A nervous frown creased her face.

\_ 'Oh boy... What have I just gotten myself into?' \_

\* \* \*

><p>112.1 continued<p>

"Not bad," Twilight allowed, looking at the heavily concussed Tirek lying on the floor. "How'd you pull \_that\_ off?"

"Little help from my son," Stoic allowed, hefting a very large hammer. "Field of antimagic on my body, and there wasn't anything for him to drain. Then I just hit him a lot."

"Huh." Twilight nodded. "I see. So, the simple solution then?"

"Sometimes works best," Stoic confirmed. "Now, that \_is\_ about it, right?"

"Pretty much it for our loop, yes." Twilight shrugged. "So far,

anyway. How have you liked it here?"

The burly griffin considered that. "Good, I think," he allowed. "You're all very accommodating, which is nice â€" that Gilda was especially helpful with, er, the... you know, griffin thing â€" but at the same time, it isn't boring."

He shrugged his wings with care. "One downside of Pern, it's a wee bit repetitive at times."

"I see what you mean," Twilight said, with another nod. "Yes, we do try to make sure that there are challenges â€" for those who want them."

She indicated the groaning centaur. "Case in point."

"And the non-looping villagers are pretty nice too," Stoic went on. "I mean, they got used to the dragons pretty sharpish. Well, mostly."

As he spoke, Roseluck crossed the square heading to the shops. She had a pair of blinkers on, and was determinedly looking straight ahead.

"I did talk to her about that." Twilight winced. "She does understand, it's just... well, she can't get over the fear response. The blinkers are a compromise, and we agreed on it."

"Aye, well." Stoic rubbed his beak with a claw. "Suppose it's the best we can hope for."

Twilight shrugged, awkwardly. "That's the way of things, I think. Muddle through as best we all can."

"As for you," she went on, more brightly, "I'm glad to see you're getting on so well with looping."

"Thank Hiccup, not me," Stoic told her. "And Blitsif and Thornado, of course. It's still painful, knowing my wife isn't with me," he added, with a sigh. "But those two keep me grounded."

"From what I've heard, those two are more likely to need grounding from you." Twilight smiled. "Anyway, I need to go see Pinkie. It's not long until the end-of-loop party, and-"

There was a loud boom.

"Oh, not again," she sighed, and turned to look out over Ponyville.

Sure enough, her library was on fire.

Thornado flapped to a halt on a rooftop. Sorry, he said, wincing. My fault, I sneezed. Hold on a minute.

He took flight again, and vanished.

There was a splashing noise, loud enough to be heard even over the distance from there to the dam, and then Thornado reappeared and dumped about ten tons of water on the tree-library.

Twilight blanched, and vanished in a teleport of her own.

\* \* \*

><p>"...the fire was bad enough, but to dump <em>water<em> on it as well?"

Twilight shook her head. "It's a library! Fire and flood... what could be worse?"

Hiccup pointed a claw at her. "You know as well as I do that all your books were too well shielded to be damaged."

"It is the principle of the thing!"

Twilight sighed, then looked back up at her fellow Anchor. "You're right, of course. This is practically nothing by the standards of what usually happens to my library."

There was a crack of tearing air.

"And I installed a lightning rod," she went on, without missing a beat. "So that's all sorted out."

Hiccup had to chuckle. "Nice work. Well, nice seeing you, Twilight. And it's been too long since I last saw Spike."

Twilight nodded to him. "Do convey my greetings to Leah next time you see her, it's been a while since I saw her as well. I want to make sure she's alright."

"She will be," Hiccup said, shrugging. "I know what her baseline was like, but by now she's as tough as old boots and twice as good at kicking jerks."

Toothless shouldered the door open. \_Are you two going to join in the party or what?\_

"Well, we'd better go," Hiccup nodded towards the door. "The unholy offspring of lightning and death has spoken."

"Ooh!" Pinkie said, poking her head through the door just underneath Toothless. "Is it time for you to Get Down with a Night Fury?"

\_I could just sit on you, you know,\_ Toothless observed.

\* \* \*

><p>112.9<p>

"Behold!" the changeling queen called. "Behold the might of my changeling horde!"

She then launched into a really rather respectable musical number written for a solo part and ten-voice harmony backing.

"Er..." Twilight raised a hoof. "Shouldn't you be, well... infiltrating?"

The queen reached the end of her song (it had started off being about ultimate power, but had somehow switched topics to pies).

"Oh, probably," she admitted. "I just thought â€" what's the point? I mean, it's not as if there's something I actually need from an invasion."

Twilight frowned, then decided this had to be a looper. "Why not?" she asked, choosing to pull the thread and see where this went.

"Well, I don't need much in the way of love," the queen explained. "I mean, I only have ten changelings."

She paused for a moment, then smiled and tapped one on the shoulder. "Of course I love you."

The other changeling â€" one with gold highlights instead of the usual green â€" looked mollified.

"Only ten?" Twilight blinked. "That's... well, actually quite ridiculously small."

"But it means I know them all by name," the queen replied easily. "This here is Beauty, and this is Rocky, and these two are Diver and Poll." She looked up. "I'm not boring you, am I?"

"You tell me, you're the telepath," Twilight retorted.

"Actually, it's hard enough sorting out the voices of just ten changelings," the queen replied. "Especially when they're keeping up a running commentary. Anyway, these three are Mimic-

"At last, a proper changeling name," Twilight interrupted.

"Don't expect it to last," the queen said. "And these are Lazybones and Brownie. These two ones with the green highlights are Auntie One and Auntie Two, and the blue one is Uncle."

"Auntie One and Auntie Two..." Twilight repeated. "Wait a second, I know who you are!"

"Oh?" The queen raised an eyebrow. "Do tell."

"Welcome to Equestria, Menolly," Twilight said by way of answer. "I should have realized sooner. How often do you see a brown changeling?"

Mimic looked hurt, and transformed into a copy of Twilight. Brownie looked down at himself and shrugged, and Lazybones had already fallen asleep.

"I have to say, though, this does explain how early you attacked," she added. "If you can call this an attack. I mean, usually there's an Ursa around this time..."

The library window banged open.

"Trixie is still not speaking to that har-"



"Trixie," Twilight said warningly.

"-per." Trixie looked mulish for a moment. "Trixie does appreciate that the harper in question is not behind the disappearance of her marefriend, but she is also a little bit moody right now."

The window banged shut again.

"So, anyway," Twilight said, brightly. "Have you met Sweetie Belle before?"

"I don't think so," Menolly answered, as Beauty started organizing the rest of the hordette to put their instruments away again. "Why?"

"Oh, she's a musician by trade and talent," Twilight told her. "She was Sebell once â€" barely needed a name change... anyway, she once helped sing Arda into existence."

"Really?" Menolly looked interested at that. "Perhaps we should compare notes..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Sorry?" F'lar asked. "Could you repeat that?"<p>

"I said," Chrystal repeated, slowly, then paused. "Shut up!" she shouted.

The deafening cacophany of wings abated, replaced by the occasional shifting of clawed feet on grass.

There was still a lot of noise, given how many sets of clawed feet there were. But it was manageable.

"Anyway," Chrystal continued, projecting her voice with all the force her sixteen-year-old body could manage. "I appear to have Impressed a very large number of fire lizards."

She scanned the field â€" and the other fields, covered by shifting multicolored bodies all the way to the horizon. "Possibly all of them."

With a cough, she returned her attention to the Benden Weyrleader. "Do you have a need of about thirty-five thousand fire lizards?"

"Not that I can think of, no..." F'lar admitted.

\* \* \*

><p>112.10 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

Twilight landed in Ponyville once again, speaking with Spike in a long-established code for establishing their respective plans for what seemed to be another baseline Loop. She came to a halt when she noticed a striking shift from the norm.

"Pinkie's not here."

Spike frowned and muttered, "Wait, why would you want to open a gate to the Elemental Plane of Laughter after last time?"

Twilight shook her head and leaned close to him. "Just thinking out loud. I meant that Pinkie literally isn't here. She should've gasped and darted off to plan the surprise party by now."

"Oh, we're there already?" Spike shrugged. "Eh, no big deal. Either she has a replacement or she's planning something." At a more conversational volume, he asked, "So, will this affect your plans for tonight's festivities?"

"Well, I was considering the traditional approach. I may need to make a few adjustments, but it should still work."

\* \* \*

><p>A week later, Twilight couldn't take any more. Constant vigilance for somepony with Pinkie's capabilities was exhausting. As such, she found herself in Sugarcube Corner, knocking on a door. "Pinkie? We're starting to get worried out here."<p>

"Huh?" The response was drowsy and slurred. "Oh. Oh!" The door flew open, and Pinkie latched herself onto Twilight like a cotton candy barnacle. "I'm so so so sorry, Twilight! My thoughts were just running around in circles and I decided to try to meditate a little and so I imagined there was paint drying on the ceiling and then it got dark and light a couple times and that must have been Celestia and Luna and how'd you deal with Nightmare Moon?"

Twilight paused for a moment to catch up with the rant. "Berry's Awake, so she subbed in for you. I realize this may seem like a silly question, but have you eaten?"

"Oh, don't worry about little old me, come in, come in!" Pinkie all but shoved Twilight into her room, shutting the door behind her.

Inside, the unicorn could see a few plates and tins with the distinctive "licked-clean" appearance that told of a past powwow with a peckish Pinkie Pie. "Let me guess, emergency cakes?"

"And emergency pies. Never know when you might Loop into a famine situation." Pinkie seemed almost subdued now that they were alone, her speech less bubbly, her gaze directed nowhere in particular.

Twilight frowned. "Okay, so what's been occupying your mind all week?"

Pinkie sat down and rested her head on her forelegs. "I think I found something I can't solve with parties."

"Really?"

"Cheese Sandwich with the Alicorn Amulet."

Twilight took a moment to process this. Then another. "I... uh..."  
Nope, not enough. "What?"

"Well, it turns out that trying to out-party a regime of mandatory fun just results in mutually amused destruction. Lina getting involved didn't help. At all."

"Party nukes?" Twilight asked with a wince.

"Party nuclear winter. Which is kind of like a really big Hearth's Warming party, but not even I like that much eggnog."

"Well, you know we're here if you need us, Pinkie." Twilight very carefully didn't add "for all the good it would do."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

112.1: The oldest of friends. (Hiccup knew some anchors before he met Twilight and the others, but he was Twilight's first.) The new dragons are Thornado and Blitsif, bonded to Stoic.

>112.2: Redressing the balance.<br>112.3: Art is an explosion. Yeah?

>112.4: A messier star catalogue than normal.<br>112.5: Serious Talk.

>112.6: Remember this guy? He turns his baseline into a Bond film now, because those are more funny and less soul-destroyingly grim.<br>112.7: Sweetie Spell?

>112.8: A vibrant inner life.<br>112.9: Meet Menolly. (An oddly small changeling horde, and far too many fire lizards.)

>112.10: Handle with care.<p>

## 119. Chapter 119

### 113.1 (Vulpine Fury)

Twilight twitched her feathers and clacked her beak before taking a moment to smooth down the fur on her new hindquarters. "Even with all the Loops I've been through I still can't get used to a D&D Reincarnation spell. Thanks, Flutters."

"Um..." Fluttershy dug bashfully in the dirt in front of her.

"What's the matter?" Twilight asked.

"I didn't cast the spell. It just happened."

"Oh, larch, one of those loops."

An elegant voice called from outside the room.

"Twilight?"

"Wonderful," Twilight snarked. "Yes, Rarity...?"

\* \* \*

><p>113.2 (DrTempo)<p>

Twilight had walked into Mac's Bar, having heard Sunset Shimmer was there. Seeing her friend sitting down, Twilight sat next to her, and

asked, "Hey, Sunset. What are you thinking about?"

Sunset sighed. "Something that's been bothering me ever since I started Looping."

Ever the helpful friend, Twilight asked, "What is it?"

Sunset, taking a deep breath, said, "I'm...not too sure I want to become an Alicorn. I know I once dreamed of it, but when I put on that crown, I saw how unfit I was to wield that level of power. Though I've become strong throughout the Loops, I still fear that if I reach that level, that I'll lose my sanity again. I just don't trust myself yet. You understand, right?"

Twilight nodded. "Of course I do, Sunset. I can understand why you're worried. I hope you'll feel unafraid of that someday, but that's your decision. You know some of us haven't become Alicorns yet." After looking at Big Macintosh, she continued, "Just take your time."

Sunset chuckled, saying, "Time's the one thing we all have." The two chuckled, and enjoyed a drink.

\* \* \*

><p>113.3 (Midnight Crescent)<p>

Twilight the Underdog - Chapter 5

Nyx sighed as the nurse left her room. "Tristan, are you there?"

"Yeah, I'm here," Tristan returned to his chair. "You alright there, Nyx?"

Nyx nodded slightly. "Just wish they'd stop poking me already. Are they gonna stop doing that before Momma gets back?"

"Sorry, but they usually don't." Tristan leant back in his chair, trying to think how things usually went for Serenity in the baseline. "I spoke to Twilight while I was outside."

"Why didn't you wait?" Nyx turned to face him, a small pout starting. "I wanted to talk to her too!"

"I know, and I'm sorry." Tristan kept his voice soft. "But given my nap, I figured letting her know nothing had happened was probably a good idea. Did Yugi tell you what happened at the shop after she beat his Grandpa?"

Nyx giggled and nodded.

"Now imagine what she'd have been like if I'd put the call off any more."

Nyx winced. "Ok, point taken," she yawned as she leant back into her pillow. "So what do we do now?"

"No idea," Tristan replied, shrugging his shoulders for his own benefit. "I'd teach you to duel, but they don't make Braille cards,"

Tristain thought for a few seconds, before something came to him. "And I doubt you'd be able to use them even if I did."

Nyx shook her head. "Braille isn't something momma's got round to teaching me yet."

Tristan sat in thought for a few seconds "Hey, I know. Why don't you tell me about your baseline?"

Nyx froze for a few seconds. "M-my baseline?"

"Yeah, we're gonna be spending a fair bit of time together. Might be easier if we know a bit more about each other."

"W-well, why not tell me yours first?" Nyx folded her arms across her chest.

"Nyx... Is something wrong?" Tristan looked concerned at the sudden shift in the girl's personality. "If you don't want to talk about it, then don't worry. I can always just ask Twi..."

"NO!" Nyx practically screamed the word. "I... I'll tell you... Just, don't mention this to Twilight."

"Alright, I promise." Tristan watched the girl carefully. Her voice seemed to be all over the place. From her usual speaking manner, to a petulant child. And now, she sounded... old. Old and tired.

Nyx took one deep calming breath, and mentally prepared herself for what she was about to do. "I'm... not from the baseline..." Nyx's voice shrank as she spoke.

"You're not from your baseline?" Tristan raised an eyebrow. "How does that work?"

Nyx bit her lip. "It's a long story. And if I start, I can't stop," Nyx took a few deep breaths. "No matter how much you'll want me to, how much \_I'll\_ want to, if I start telling you, you need to hear it all. "

Tristan thought for a few seconds. \_OK, on the one hand, she \_\_\*\*really\*\*\_\_ doesn't want to tell this story. But, it sounds like this is weighing down on her pretty bad...\_ Tristan massaged his temple, as he struggled to come up with a solution.

After almost a minute, he had his answer. "Alright, tell me."

Nyx nodded slowly. She closed her eyes, took one deep breath, and started her story.

\* \* \*

><p>Nyx was worried by how long the silence lasted after she'd finished. "Tr...Tristan, are you still there?" Her voice was shaky, and tears were slowly rolling down her face.<p>

"I'm still here Nyx," his voice was small. He gulped before he continued. "I just need to think, okay? You kinda dropped a lot on me."

"I'm so..." Nyx started, but Tristan cut her off.

"Don't. I asked you to tell me. It's on me. It's just... a lot to take in at once. Give me a few minutes."

"A...Alright." Nyx said, before rolling over, sinking her face into the pillows as much as she could without smothering herself.

Tristan rested his elbows on his knees, and sank his head into his hands, as he thought over everything he'd been told over the last few hours.

\_Alright, first question, do I believe her? \_He asked himself. \_Well, if she was lying, why would she say she's the reincarnation of an evil personality? \_He considered that for a few seconds, before he realised he didn't really have any response. \_Good point... So, what do I do?\_

After a few minutes, he reviewed the story in his head one last time, trying to break it down.

\_So, she was intended to be pure evil.\_

\_She sure didn't turn out that way. And she didn't ask for it either...\_

\_She did turn back into Nightmare Moon...\_

\_Did she really? She never really acted like what that cult expected. And, again, she didn't ask for that. They had to lead her into doing anything they wanted. And even then, she wasn't what they wanted. She even saved the town full of people who wanted to be rid of her. And they still didn't trust her.\_

\_Can you blame them?\_

\_Can you hear yourself?\_

Tristan snapped bolt upright at that last thought, the warring voices in his head quickly replaced by his own.

\_She's alone, she's scared, and she can't even see. I'm here to help her through this, and instead I just set about making her feel worse. Why am I even \_\_\*\*thinking\*\*\_\_ about what I should do here?\_

Tristan got up from his chair, and picked up one of the pieces of paper from the table.

\_Now what on earth do I get instead of daffodils? I'm pretty sure people can't eat those...\_

\* \* \*

><p>A knock on the door brought Nyx out of her stupor. She heard Tristan talking with someone at the door, before someone was walking over.<p>

"Oh, hey Nyx. Didn't realise you were still awake." Tristan said, as he placed something on the overbed table. "I got you something to eat."

Nyx looked down a little. "I...I'm not hungry..."

"Not even for celery soup?"

Nyx's head snapped up towards Tristan's voice, as her eyes widened. "Did you say..."

"Yep. Sorry, but I'm pretty sure daffodils are pretty bad for us though, so I got you grilled cheese instead. I remember I used to have them with soup when I was a kid."

"Why," Nyx asked, biting her lip. "Why did you do this?"

Tristan sat in his chair. "You told me your story, and I said I needed to think about how I felt. I'll admit, I took longer than I should..." Tristain laughed sheepishly, before sighing. "You had a bad deal in your baseline Nyx. One you didn't deserve. And now you're stuck here without Twilight. I'm here to look after you for her. I can't be her, but I can at least do this."

Nyx's lip quivered, as she held her arms open. Tristan hugged the crying girl.

"Thank you..." She whispered in his ear.

"No problem..." he replied, as he broke the embrace. He sat back in his chair.

"Umm..." Nyx's voice was small, as she waved her arms slowly in front of her. "Could you... move the table closer?"

"Oh, sure." Tristan moved the table a little closer, as a beeping noise came from the laptop behind him. "Huh? What's going on... OH! The duels must be starting!" Tristan, took a few quick steps toward the laptop, and began sorting through pop-ups and windows. "Hmm...Well, it looks like Yugi's up first," Tristain said, as he finally opened up the stream. "Not really surprising, but it'll give us a chance to fix any issues with the set-up before Twilight's first match."

Tristan turned up the volume, and put the video to full screen. However, it didn't take long to notice there was a problem.

"Has it started yet?" Nyx asked, unable to see the video.

"Sorry, sound isn't coming through. Give me a sec."

Tristan started to fiddle with a few options, before the sound from the stream finally came through the speakers.

"\_Exodia, Obliterate!\_" Yami's voice was closely followed by a low, guttural roar.

"What's going on?" Nyx asked, inching away from the sound. "What's making that noise?"

"It's the monster Yami's using." Tristain watched as a bright light enveloped Weevil's monster, and the counter in the corner of the screen plummeted to 0. "Or was, at least... jeez, Yami's pretty scary

when he gets into it..."

"It's over already?"

"Yeah, sorting the sound out took longer than I wanted, and that duel was pretty short... Still, at least everything should work fine next time."

\* \* \*

><p>It took less than half an hour for the alert to sound again.<p>

"Hey, looks like Twilight's about to have her first duel."

Nyx froze as Twilight's voice drifted through the speakers.  
"\_Applejack?"\_

"What!?"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Umm... Yami? <em>Yugi's voice echoed in the pair's mind.

\_Yes, Yugi?\_

\_That card doesn't normally look like that, does it?\_

\_No. No it doesn't...\_

\_Could it be this Applejack Twilight's talking about?\_

\_No, Yugi. The holograms do not have a soul.\_

\_Ha ha Yami \_Yugi deadpanned. \_You know that's not what I mean...\_

\_Oh... That...\_Yami paused. \_I'm afraid I'm not sure. But given how Twilight's taking this, I hope not. For both their sakes...\_

Yugi opened his eyes, and turned his attention back to the duel. He walked over to Twilight's podium. "Josie, it's not her."

"But it looks just..."

"I know. It's more complicated than I can say, but we don't have time. For now, just trust me. It's not her."

Twilight looked between the all-too-familiar humanised Applejack on the field, and Yugi. She sighed, before collecting her cards. "I hope you're right."

She turned back to her opponent. She faked a sheepish smile. "Sorry, first time using one of these, wasn't expecting that..."

"Well, you better adjust quick. I'm not going to take it easy on you just because you're new."

"You'd better not," Twilight looked back over her hand, as she tried



to remember what her plan had been. "Now, as I was saying, I place one card face down," she said, as she placed her mirror force onto the field. "I guess that will do for now."

"Alright, my turn." Mike drew a card from his deck, and looked over his hand, a smile on his face. "Well, it's my lucky day. I place two cards face down," he said, as two of the slots on his field became filled with a dull light. "And I summon my Harpie's Elder Brother in Attack mode," A winged man appeared opposite Twilight's only creature. "Did I mention, he gains an attack and defence boost, thanks to the mountains in our field?" Twilight watched as the new monster grew in size. "Your turn."

\_Even with that boost, it only has 1980 Attack points? Why summon such a weak monster? \_Twilight thought as she moved to draw her card. \_He must have a trap lined up.\_ \_Well, I can easily avoid that...\_

"First, before I draw a card, my Fortune Lady Earth gains an extra 400 attack and defence points. That also means you take 400 points of Life Point damage." Twilight said, watching his counter tick down to 1600, before drawing her card. "Next, I summon my Magician Valkyria in attack mode. That ends my turn."

"Scared to attack me directly, little girl?" Mike asked, as he pulled a card from his deck. "I can't say I'm surprised. I activate my Cyber Shield," one of the squares of light vanished, as Mike's monster became encased in a strange suit of armour, and its attack points rose. "Now, you gave me something nice for target practice. It would be a shame to waste it. Harpie's Brother, take out that Valkyria thing."

"Not so fast!" Twilight said, as she flipped over her face down card. "I activate my mirror force, sending that right back at you."

\_Don't party just yet. If that's meant to be Mai, an' I think it is, then trust me, he has a plan...\_

"Alright, seriously!" Twilight said, looking around. "Who just said that?"

"Josie..." Yugi looked worried as he spoke. "No-one said anything..."

Mike grimaced, before muttering "Figures I'd pick the crazy one to duel..." He shook his head, before flipping over his second face down card. "Either way, I activate my Negate Attack trap, to stop my Harpie Brother's attack before it even started."

\_Told ya he'd have a plan... \_The voice retorted.

Twilight took a breath, and thought. \_Ok, so whoever this is knows how to duel, speaks in something like a Brooklyn accent... \_Twilight screwed up her face as the realisation hit her. \_Oh great. I think I've got the person who I've replaced in my head... This is just fantastic... Alright Twilight, focus on the duel first. Worry about the voices in your head later, they'll wait.\_

She turned back to the field to see that there was once again another square of light in Mike's magic and trap zone. He was tapping his

fingers on his podium. "You can go anytime now..."

"Okay, my Fortune Lady's strength increases again, dealing 400 points of damage to your Life Points again." Twilight said before drawing another card. "And now, I summon my Fortune Lady Wind."

Once the summoning light had faded, everyone involved was staring at the field.

Tea was the first to speak. "Yugi, that card isn't meant to have rainbow hair, is it?"

Yugi shook his head. "No, it isn't. But I think I can guess what's happened..." he said, before a thought struck him. \_Six Fortune Ladies. Six friends. All things considered, I probably shouldn't be all that surprised...\_

"Oh, good." Tea said. "I was worried it was just me seeing things or something."

Twilight, being the only one to expect something like this, only took a couple of seconds to recover. "Now, when I normal summon her to the field, I can destroy one magic or trap card for every Fortune Lady I have on the field. So, kiss that armor and your face down card goodbye," Twilight smiled as the armor shattered around the monster, and the light faded from the field. "And then, my Fortune Lady Earth will deal with your monster, and the rest of your Life Points." Twilight smiled as the Applejack lookalike raised her staff. An orange orb of magic flew towards the monster opposite her, and disintegrated the monster. As Mike's Life Counter hit zero, the holograms faded.

Mike looked shocked at the carnage that had occurred. "Three turns..." He tried to gather his cards together, but kept dropping them, his hands shaking. "How... How did you beat me so fast?"

"You didn't think I stood a chance." Twilight said, only realising what she was saying half way through. "There's faith in your deck, and there's arrogance. I think you need to take a day and see if you can remember the difference. You're not out of the tournament yet..." Twilight said, as she collected her prize. She climbed down to the others as Mike walked off, lost in thought.

"Yugi, we need to talk. Away from any prying eyes..." Twilight said as quietly as she could.

Yugi nodded. He looked around, and waited until everyone was looking away. A few seconds later the trio had disappeared into the forest.

\* \* \*

><p>Tristan watched the black screen in shock. <em>I know Yugi likes to give the guests an easy time, but damn. That was insane...<em>

"Wow, momma is really good at this duelling thing, huh?"

"You said it, Nyx..." Tristan said, as he closed the stream again.  
"You said it..."

\* \* \*

><p>After five minutes walking, Tea, Yugi and Twilight stopped walking. "Alright, I don't think anyone would follow us this far in. What's bothering you, Twilight?"<p>

"I... think Joey's in my head..." Twilight said, waiting for the others reactions. "I keep hearing things. In a Brooklyn accent..."

"Can you remember any of it?" Yugi asked. "We know him better, if it's him, we'll know."

"Well, before the duel started, the voice said 'Well, at least he ain't pullin' Mai's two-bit psychic bull...'. "

"Yeah, that sounds like Joey." Tea said, sighing. "What do we do, Yugi?"

"Can you communicate with him?"

"I don't know, I haven't tried..." Twilight said, before thinking \_Can you hear me, Joey?\_

After a minute with no response, Twilight shook her head. "Either he isn't listening, isn't answering, is pulling some sort of prank, or he can't hear me."

"Alright. I'm not sure what we can do right now, other than carry on. But we definitely need to look into this at some point. This more than just the odd random comment..." Yugi took a deep breath. "By the way, Twilight. There's something else we need to talk about..."

"Yes, Yugi?"

"Remember how I said those holograms aren't your friends?"

"Yeah. Although you said it's complicated..."

"Like I said, there's a part of my loop â€" it doesn't happen every time â€" but it's possible your friends may Awaken during that time. It's not certain, and even then, we try to just completely shortcut that part, but..."

"They might be around for that..." Twilight completed the thought, and gulped as she realised what he was saying. "How does that even work?"

"I'm not entirely sure..."

"Have you ever awoken as a card before?"

"No, I ha..." Yugi started, but Twilight cut him off with her next question before he could answer.

"What's it like Awakening as a card? Do you only exist for duels? Are you fully aware? Or is it more like a sense of Paralysis until you're played?"

"I don't kno..."

"What happens if you get destroyed?"

"Twil..."

"What happens if you're removed from the game?"

"Twilight..." Yugi tried to speak more forcefully, but the result was no different.

She gasped before her final question. "What happens if someone destroys the card? Do you just go to another copy? Or is your Loop over? And what about Monster Reb..."

Yugi grabbed the foreign anchor's shoulders, and gave her a gentle shake, breaking her concentration. "Twilight! I don't know!" Once it was clear he had her attention, he lowered his voice, and let her go again. "I've never looped in like that. They don't loop in often, and the how and why varies from Loop to Loop. But from what I remember, sometimes they just go to the card graveyard. Sometimes they're just aware while they're in play. Sometimes they can project themselves out from the cards, like spirits. And sometimes, the first time the card leaves play, the Looper is gone for the rest of the loop. I can't say what this Loop has in store, but you have to ask yourself: Do you really want to take that risk?"

Twilight gulped, before taking six cards out of her deck. She looked at them, but at one in particular.

Fortune Lady Light. She hadn't really thought of the cards effect. And then what that would mean. \_No...\_

"If it comes to that, I'll take them out of my deck for a while. I'm not going to risk them like that."

Yugi nodded. After a few minutes, he checked his watch "I think we should probably start heading out toward the docks. There's something we might need to cut off. Pegasus \_seems\_ nice this time, but that doesn't always mean anything."

Twilight slid the cards back into her deck. "Lead the way..."

\* \* \*

><p>113.4 (fractalman)<p>

So far, things had been baseline. The letter from Celestia, the meetings with the other bearers, the night-long party.

Things diverged when Celestia walked onto the stage. Many long millennia allowed Twilight to discern the subtle eye twitch that was Celestia's equivalent of nervously looking over her shoulder.

Celestia gave a quick speech, lit her horn to raise the sun-

"I'm walking on sunshine, wooah

>I'm walking on sunshine, woooah<br>I'm walking on sunshine, woooah

>and don't it feel good!"<p>

Celestia simply closed her eyes and sighed while a filly-sized Luna danced around on her back.

\* \* \*

><p>113.5 (Drachefly)<p>

Zidane sat down on the gagged and bound Kuja. "Like I said, easy as pie to cut this one short." He regarded his fellow looper with a twinge of sadness. "The only sad part is, you may be Garnet, but you're not Dagger. No half-year honeymoon."

Zecora shrugged. "What now, then? To this world I have not been."

The monkey-like boy thought for a moment. "Go track down Sir Fratley and restore his memories, I guess. Wait. In the rush and noise, I didn't quite catch your name. Did you say you were... Why Not Sprinkle?"

Zecora blinked. "Zecora is my name. But you I do not blame: I mentioned Twilight Sparkle's moniker, for she is my anchor."

Zidane thought for a moment. "Twilight Sparkle? And Zecora? Where have I heard those before... Aha!" he pulled a fist-sized crystal from his pocket and tossed it her way. "Here. I yanked them from Bartz while he wasn't looking, at the end of the loop. Not quite the thief I am."

Zecora caught it in her air racket, and fished it out. It felt odd, and familiar. She couldn't get a magical response from it, though - certainly nothing that would indicate herself. She offered him only a quizzical eye.

He taunted, "You can't even attune to the one named after you? Someone hasn't been chosen by the crystals!" He held up a different crystal, cleared his throat and declared, "Spirits of the ponies that reside in the crystals: Twilight Sparkle." After a moment, he added, "Normally in that loop, you'd expect to get 'heroes' instead of 'ponies', and Time Mage instead of Twilight Sparkle. Yours, there? Usually it's 'Chemist'."

"You used the powers of me and my friends - for your own ends?"

"Naw, it was mechanically identical to the originals, but the costumes..." He focused on one, and his clothing changed into a very good anthro-Rainbow Dash cosplay. "Guess what the Dragoon was called."

"With the hair colors all a-splash, that must be Rainbow Dash."

Zidane grinned. "You've got dedication to that rhyming thing. I like it. Anyway, I really liked the visual effect upgrade on the Jump attack. Big rainbow explosion thing, not just jump... land."

A clomp-clomp-clomp of footsteps became audible from the stairwell. Zidane sighed. "Well, looks like time's up. Here comes Steiner, and..." He leaned out over the railing. "Hey, rustbucket! You awake?"

From there, it was a chase scene. A chase scene between two fit loopers carrying a captive megalomaniac, and one unawake overweight man in heavy armor.

\* \* \*

><p>113.6 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Twilight read it again, but it hadn't changed.

\_Dear Twilight,\_

\_Burn things.\_

The scroll had appeared in the usual manner, but clearly this wasn't Princess Celestia's writing. \_Does someone think I'm that gullible?\_ Twilight thought. \_Or maybe brain-damaged for the sake of a cheap gag?\_

Taking up a fresh scroll and quill, she composed a quick response:

\_Dear Princess Celestia,\_

\_Your orders have been received and shall be carried out immediately. I hereby enclose the original orders so you will be reminded of the strict letter of your orders, should there be complaints.\_

\_Princess Twilight Sparkle\_

She then proceeded out into the Ponyville streets, looking around for her first victim.

Rainbow Dash. Perfect.

"Hey, Rainbow Dash!" she shouted. "I just want to say that everything I'm about to do is by order of Princess Celestia, so complain to her, all right?"

"Huh? Twilight, what are you talking about?" Dash stared down at the purple alicorn, face wrinkled in confusion.

"Ahem." Twilight held a hoof to her chest and declaimed, "Rainbow Dash, you are so slow that Hearth's Warming gets to the finish line before you do. I wouldn't say you're as thick as molasses, because you can water down molasses. Lessee... oh, yeah," Twilight added, "and geologists had to invent a level 11 on the Hay-Mows hardness scale for your head."

Rainbow Dash's jaw dropped. Then it rose again, because your jaw can't drop while your teeth are grinding. After several seconds of very tense silence, the pegasus said, "And Celestia ordered you to say that, right?"

"Direct orders, sent just minutes ago," Twilight nodded

innocently.

"Right," Dash said. "I think I'll just pay Canterlot a visit. See you later!" The sonic rainboom seemed a bit fiercer than usual, this time.

\_Right, who's next? Not Pinkie: one-fifth chance she breaks down in tears, four-fifths she treats it as a game and answers back, zero chance she annoys Celestia. Fluttershy... no, because that's just cruel. There goes Scootaloo... no, that's cruel with whipped cream and a cherry on top. Oh wait... there's Vinyl Scratch. If I play this right I might actually be able to double the burns. Huzzah!\_

\* \* \*

><p>A couple of hours later, back in the library, Twilight received another scroll, this time in slightly better hoofwriting that still wasn't Celestia's. And was in crayon.<p>

\_Twilight Snarkle,\_

\_I think you misunderstood, hardee har har, misunderstood my left flank. I ordered you to burn things, that is set things on fire. \_\_No metaphors.\_\_ As a princess you should know the extreme importance of everything going up in towering columns of smoke and fire, fire, huh huh, huhuhuh, huhuhuh, nacho supreme. \_

\_Here's a lighter. Get to it.\_

\_Princess Celestia\_

\_P. S. tell your friends to \_\_cut it out\_\_ with the complaints.\_

Twilight looked at the butane lighter in her hoof and nodded. \_Whoever this is, they really do think I'm an idiot. Well... challenge accepted.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Indeed this is not my sister's writing," Luna agreed. "But I am a bit surprised you went along with this farce."<p>

"I was bored," Twilight admitted. "Besides, I only picked things that would be difficult to set on fire. A village full of thatched-roof homes and tents isn't a challenge at all."

"But Cloud Kicker's house in Cloudsdale? The grass around the Stalliongrad train station, while it was still under a foot of snow? An entire river?"

"That last one was not me," Twilight protested. "The Cuyahorsea River self-ignites about every other spring."

"I must speak with my sister about the pollution caused by industry these days," Luna sighed. "But I was referring to the River Canter."

"Oh, \_that\_ river," Twilight said. "Yeah, that was me."

"I still fail to see the point of this."

"To enjoy myself while making sure the idiot who thought this up DOESN'T enjoy himself."

"Well, you certainly succeeded there, Ms. Weisenheimer Princess." Discord appeared out of nowhere, wearing a fake alicorn horn and a most unconvincing Celestia wig. "Here I was, expecting princess-powered chaos, and all you do is subvert my plans with pointless acts of nonsense." With a voice so whiny it had vintage and bouquet he added, "That's MY line of business, I'll have you know!"

"Thank you for that confession," Twilight smiled. "Now that I know it was you, I can apply the appropriate karmic retribution." With a flash of her magic, she caused a giant ice sculpture of a large butane lighter to appear, complete with the logo of a very popular Hub world auto manufacturer embossed on the side.

"I don't get it," Discord said.

"Oh, yes you do," Twilight said, picking up the giant sculpture in her magic and flicking the striker. A giant flame of carved ice leapt from the wick, engulfing Discord. When Twilight flipped the ice lighter closed, nothing remained but some ashes and a pair of googly red-irised eyes.

"This is no way to treat a reformed lord of chaos," Discord muttered.

\* \* \*

><p>113.7 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"Keep your eyes closed!" Indiana Jones shouted. "Whatever you do, do NOT look inside the Ark! No matter what happens, DON'T LOOK!"

As he clenched his eyes shut, and hoped Marion did the same- sometimes she didn't, and that was always a bad Loop- Indy tried to piece together exactly where he'd failed to derail this chain of events. He'd Awakened early enough to discredit Belloq when that disgrace to the name of France attempted to plagiarize his thesis... and yet he'd managed to get the Nazis on his side, no big surprise there. He'd tried to keep the relationship with Marion viable, but he just couldn't prevent sparks from flying when the two got together, so of course he was half a world away when her father died. He'd gone straight from Nepal to Egypt, getting a full day's jump on the baseline, and still the Nazis managed to take the Ark. He'd even foregone stowing away on the U-boat, instead stealing a fishing boat and following the Nazis to that damn island so he could pick up the Ark after its spirits had finished with them... only to be captured as soon as the dinghy touched ground on the beach.

So here they were again, tied to the stake, closing their eyes against the horror to come, wishing they could close their ears as well.

He heard the Nazis and Belloq gasping in wonder at something. Probably the angels, or whatever, making their appearance. (He'd watched precisely once. One angel had floated up to him, its face



twisted in confusion. Then it hung its head and shook it sadly... and Jones' memory blessedly failed at that point, except to note that it took very little time for the Loop to reset after that experiment.)

The gasps of wonder turned to grunts of confusion. "Vas ist los?"

The valley echoed with the trumpet of... a party blower?

"Hi! Welcome to the ULTIMATE party experience!" The voice was female, girlish, and chipper enough to render a century-old pine tree to kindling in seconds. "I'm so glad ALL of you are here for this!"

"Indy, is that-" Marion asked.

"EYES SHUT!" Jones gasped, having to fight the overwhelming urge to peek himself.

"By the way, I should point out..." The perky voice took on an even sharper edge. "By 'ultimate' I mean the original definition of the word. Here comes the cake... but the candles blow YOU out..."

In later Loops Indy would thank any and all listening Gods that his memory edited out the sounds of the several minutes that happened after that. The only fragment of recollection he retained was the horrible sensation of overwhelming curiosity and anti-curiosity at war within him; never before had he both wanted to know, and NOT wanted to know, so desperately.

When the sounds of horrible merriment ended with the booming slam of the Ark's lid, he heard the sound of hooves approaching over the rocky ground. "You can open your eyes now," the voice said. "I'm only a temp worker. Not really official. But don't ask any questions, or I'll have to send you to the party."

Indy's eyes opened... and there, standing before him, was a pink pony thing with a large pair of shears held between its forehooves. It stared up at him with huge blue eyes.

\_I knew the Loops would drive me mad\_, he thought, \_and today is the day.\_

"Hold still," the pink pony said. A few seconds later the ropes around them were gone, and Indy and Marion fell away from the stake. A moment later they were in each other's arms.

"Okie dokie, my work here is done," the pony said, grinning. "I'll see you in Hatay State in a couple years, Indy..." Struck by a thought, the pony froze and added, "Oh yeah! Be reeeeeal sure to remember- in Latin the name 'Jehovah' is spelled with an 'I'!"

"Er... yeah... right..." Indy and Marion watched as the pony walked up the crest of a hill and vanished.

"Indy," Marion gasped, "what was-"

"NO QUESTIONS!" the chipper voice echoed through the valley.

"I think we should just get the Ark off this island as quickly as possible," Jones said. "Before anything else happens."

\* \* \*

><p>A great many Loops later, Indy Awoke in a cottage in the far northwest of Equestria. His hooves hovered above a typewriter-<em>how does that WORK<em>, Indy wondered? On the paper in the roller read the words: \_Equestria Jones and the Sapphire Stone\_, by Hairy Withers.\_

He ran to the bathroom and looked in the mirror. Pony. Check.

He ran to the closet and opened it up. Khaki shirts, workable. Pith helmets... \_feh. I hate pith helmets.\_

And on a hook behind the front door... a bullwhip.

Without thinking about it, Indy reached a hoof up, took down the bullwhip, and gave it an experimental crack. It felt right.

"Well," he said aloud, as Loop memories began to filter through his consciousness. "I wonder if this is where-"

"NO QUESTIONS!"

Indy looked out the window. Another pony, pink with a poofy mane, looked through the window. It pointed one hoof to its own blue eyes, then directly at Indy in the standard I'm-watching-you gesture. Then she sank slowly out of sight below the level of the windowsill.

Indy spent half an hour looking for the pink pony, or any hoofprints from same, before giving up and pulling out the very secret bottle of hard cider his pre-Awake self kept in the bottom drawer of the writing desk.

\* \* \*

><p>113.8 (Vulpine Fury)<p>

"Oh, hey, Twilight!" Rainbow Dash exclaimed as her friend entered her hospital room.

The Anchor chuckled ruefully. "Still don't have the hang of chiropteran wings, hm?"

"Kie-rop... ?"

Twilight sighed. "Bat wings. I \_do\_ try to find out quickly what the proper term is in Loops where Luna's Night Guard \_aren't\_ using disguise magic, you know."

"Oh, heh, right." Dash blushed and wiggled her good wing; her injured one was immobilized by the cast. "Anyway, since this is supposed to be somewhat baseline, what have you got for me this time around? I love Daring Do and all, and A. K. Yearling is almost as awesome as me, but . . . I've read them all."

Twilight levitated some obviously rebound Hub Loop paperbacks. "Well,

I got copies of some of the baselines of other worlds that Sleipnir administrates. I was going to offer you \_The Heavenly Horse from the Outermost West\_."

Rainbow twisted her lips into a \_moue\_ of disgust that Twilight thought looked adorable with the little fangs. "Isn't that one of the saddle rippers Rarity was reading a couple loops ago?"

Twilight giggled. "That Loop had an unawake version of the Hub author of these books. That version is a pretty good romance, but this is epic fantasy instead."

"Heh, who knows?" Dash mused. "I might Wake up as the protagonist one of these Loops."

"Or the love interest," Twilight teased.

"I thought we weren't mentioning the shotgun wedding Loop ever again?"

"Nah," Twilight said, kissing Dash's cheek. "It's too much fun teasing you, 'Blitz.'"

\* \* \*

><p>113.9 (DrTempo)<p>

Sunset Shimmer, as she tended to do when she was on summer vacation in the other world, was relaxing in Ponyville. Rarity sat down next to Sunset, and after a few minutes, Rarity asked, "Sunset?"

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Why are you so...how do I say this...prone to fighting?"

Sunset chuckled for a second, replying "Twilight asked me that when she finished reading my journal." Taking a sip of her drink, she then said, "I suppose it's due to that journey. I had to fight more often than not, and I'm good at it. Trust me, I know you'd kick my flank easily if I went nuts, Rarity. But I've had to experience many cases in my early Loops where fighting was the only option."

After taking a sip of her dink, Sunset continued, "Don't worry, Rarity. I haven't lost the values of friendship everypony here in Equestria holds dear. But I know from experience that sometimes, you have to fight to protect what you cherish most. And if I have to bear the burden, I'll do what it takes to do so. I don't have the skill to settle things without battle like most of you can just yet."

Rarity smiled, replying, "And I thought you could be a brute when I first met you after you Awoke."

Sunset sighed. "You punch out a giant red dragon's lights one time, and you never hear the end of it..."

\* \* \*

><p>113.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...soooooo," Nyx started as she glanced up at nothing. "Quick

question. Did Fluttershy, yano, kinda take you aside to discuss... things?"

Lemon Rush sighed. "Yes, yes she did. And my wolfpack did too. And the Emperor, when he got wind of us."

"Oh." Nyx coughed. "Did... any of them have, um... charts?"

"Ha! No. Twilight?"

"Yes."

They walked together in silence.

"...and," Nyx added with a blush, "diagrams."

"...what."

"For both ponies and humans."

"\_What.\_"

"Mostly regarding proper dating etiquette."

Lemon opened his mouth, paused, and nodded. "Oh, alright, that makes sense."

\* \* \*

><p>113.11 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

The bearers of the Elements of Harmony all dearly loved Twilight Sparkle, but when they arrived at the library and saw her armed with a slide projector, chalkboard and pointer, they knew exactly what to expect. Rainbow Dash, believing in being prepared, had brought a cloud for a pillow.

Twilight glared at the pillow, but decided not to mention it. "I have made an important discovery," she said instead. "This is not, as we previously thought, a baseline Loop."

The others exchanged glances, and Rarity found herself silently nominated spokespony. "What makes you say that, darling?"

"I've spent most of my free time this Loop observing the motions of an unAwake Derpy Hooves," Twilight said. "Normally Derpy's movement is either direct and competent--"

"Not often enough," Rainbow Dash muttered, keeping her head planted firmly on her cloud.

"-- or so random that it comes close to genuine Brownian motion," Twilight pressed on. "But this Loop is different. All observations of Derpy in flight show a common trend, which I have recently identified through careful mathematics. In fact, Derpy is traveling in straight lines. However, these lines appear to us to be corkscrews and spirals due to conditions which Derpy is unable to observe." Raising her voice slightly to cover Rainbow Dash's snoring, she finished, "Specifically, a rotating frame of reference."

"Rotating frame of reference?" Fluttershy asked. "Does that mean-"

"You can't be saying-" Rarity interjected.

"Yes, I do. I am." Twilight flipped the chalkboard to show a diagram of stars and planets swirling around a single pegasus. "It seems that this Loop, the universe literally revolves around Derpy Hooves."

\* \* \*

><p>113.12 (Zetrein and FanOfMostEverything)<p>

The scene opened, looking at a picturesque view of the Ponyville Library. A suave male voiceover began.

"Causality got you down?" The Library disappeared in a titanic explosion, wood shrapnel pelting the camera before the scene changed.

"Wish you could know just what the next disaster will be?" Discord stood before a pristine Library, wearing a top hat and cape, twirling his mustache. With a snap of his claws, it was reduced to a pile of cheese.

"Maybe you just want to know if aliens are real?" The scene was now a wide angle aerial shot of Ponyville. A giant black cuttlefish flew into view, blasting a ridiculously loud fog horn, before sweeping a red beam of energy through town, striking the Library.

The camera changed to a purple mare, sitting at a wooden market stall. "Well wonder no more! Twilight Sparkle's Temporal Advice Service is here to help!"

Twilight smiled at the camera. "Time's broken, ask me anything."

"Disclaimer: Twilight Sparkle is not Omniscent, she is a Timetraveller."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, what do you think?"<p>

Apple Bloom looked from the holoprojector to the beaming unicorn and back again. She essayed a nervous smile. "Well, it's a real good commercial, Twilight, but we ain't got TV most o' th' time."

Twilight nodded. "Exactly! Which is why I wanted your help getting it up and running."

"Fer the whole nation."

"Yup!"

The filly considered this. She started to voice a few objections, but more came to mind each time she tried. "And what timeframe were ya lookin' at here?"

"Oh, the first few times would probably take the whole Loop, but with practice, I'm sure we could disseminate the technology before I get the Gala tickets." Twilight smirked. "Besides, I'm sure this isn't the first time you've dragged Equestria up a few rungs of the tech ladder."

Apple Bloom shrugged. "Eh, why not? Not like any of the other Crusaders are Awake right now. Ya wanna start with cathode ray tubes or go straight t' plasma?"

\* \* \*

><p>113.12 (TokoWH)<p>

Twilight stumbled as she attempted to throw the odd plant creature with all the strength she could muster. Having lived for who knew how long and having enough magical power to ascend to alicornhood ten times over, it should have been a simple task... If she could have accessed her powers, that was. Twilight sighed, the plant creature barely landing a few feet away. She had been to safe mode loops where her powers were suppressed, as well as her subspace pocket, but there was one little fact that made this all the more odd...

"I take it you're still adjusting?"

Twilight glanced over to the sight of a semi-stout man in a yellow space suit, his giant nose barely fitting in his dome shaped space helmet. The oddest part was the single antenna on the top of his helmet that ended in a bright red bulb. It was an odd sight, to be sure, though Twilight wasn't any less odd thanks to this loops standards.

She still had her same mane, or hair style, rather, as always, though she was apparently of the same species as the man next to her was. Her nose was slightly smaller than the mans, and her head was a bit less rounded. Her space suit was almost an exact mirror, though the bulb atop her helmet was purple instead of red.

"Kind of. It's nothing too new, but..." Twilight said, standing up straight. "I still find this loop really odd. It's not so much the army of plant creatures that obey the commands of aliens, though that's pretty weird, don't get me wrong, but..."

The man smiled, giving a nod. "Ah, yes. I assume you mean the fact that our world deactivates subspace pockets and any abilities ones wouldn't have learned pre-awake, right?"

"Yeah," Twilight said, raising an eyebrow. "I don't get that. I know safe mode loops do something similar, but never to this extent."

"Yeah. Our loop is... odd, to say the least." The man said, giving a shrug. "The exact way our loop works is a bit... screwy, from what our admin has said. We get fused loops, but usually the loopers are on a completely different planet far away from us, so we rarely run into outside loopers such as yourself." The man said, crossing his arms as he tilted his head. "On top of that, our presence rarely has an effect on one another's worlds. From what our admin said, events usually carry out like they do in baseline almost to a T, for both us and the guest loopers."

"That is weird." Twilight said, tilting her head. "Any idea on why that is?"

"From what our admin says, the reason our loop is like it is was because of some sort of event called 'The Crash'."

Seeing Twilight flinch at this, the man shook his head.

"I can only assume it wasn't a pleasant event, that much is for sure. Apparently, our branch of Yggdrasil is rather close to the universe that started the crash, and thus was heavily affected by it. Luckily, it didn't cause major disruptive damage so much as it knocked a few things loose, hence why our loops, and fused loops with our loop disrupt subspace pockets and suppress abilities not native to the baseline, and general power downs all around."

The man shrugged as he finished his explanation, before he noticed one of the plant creatures walk up to him. He gave a soft smile, giving the red being with a sharp, point nose a pat.

"I don't know how it goes for outside loopers on other planets, but if it weren't for the Pikmin here, we likely wouldn't be able to make it through our loop."

Twilight had a hand to the part of the dome just under her chin as she listened to the lengthy explanation. "That's quite the tale, Olimar." Twilight said, shaking her head. "I can't imagine what it must be like to go through several loops without a subspace pocket, let alone that being the norm for your loop."

Olimar turned to Twilight, an amused expression on his face. "It's a bit disheartening to not have the same abilities that are the norm for everyone else, but we get by." Olimar said, before he shook his head. "Though, to say we never have access to our subspace pockets is a bit of lie. We can access them once in a great while, as well as non-native abilities, but it's incredibly rare. Like a 'Once in a blue moon' type deal."

With that, Olimar glanced over to a group of Pikmin heading towards one of the cylinder shaped objects that was standing on three yellow legs. Twilight looked at it with blank stare, before glancing over to Olimar.

"I still find the idea of random beings from other planets touching down on an uncharted planet and taking control of a colony of the native beings a bit unsettling." Twilight said, before looking back at the Pikmin.

"From what I understand, a lot of outside loopers do." Olimar said with a shrug. "I can understand why, but really it's a symbiotic relationship. The Pikmin can't survive on their own. They more or less need a leader to guide them." Olimar said, turning to Twilight. "Every time I've touched down on this planet after leaving the last time, the number of Pikmin in the Onions always drops drastically from what it was when I was here last." He said, turning back to the Pikmin. "Without a leader, the Pikmin become the bottom barrel of the food chain on this planet, easily picked off by predators without being able to properly fight back. It's a sad fact, but being part plant, it's likely natural."

Olimar chuckled, before turning towards the Red Onion. "I think the Pikmin realize this too. That's likely why they follow Hocotations or Koppaites when they're on the planet. The fact that I'm looping likely confirms this theory."

"Wait," Twilight said, turning to Olimar with a raised eyebrow. "aren't you the anchor, though?"

"That's what we thought at first." Olimar said, turning to Twilight. "However, after an alarming number of loops where I was unawake, as well as the fact that Alph, Brittany, and Charlie started looping some time after, even though I'm only barely acquainted with them, we have come to believe one of the Pikmin Onions might be the anchor, the Red Onion being the most likely candidate."

"The Pikmin Onions? What makes you think that?" Twilight asked, crossing her arms.

"Well, for starters, while generally we're unable to carry stuff with us through the loops thanks to our messed up subspace pockets, the Onions seem to be able to occasionally carry any Pikmin created through the loops over, with the Red Onion being the most frequent offender, so to speak." Olimar said, glancing over to the Red Onion. "On top of that, the loopers of our world seem to be limited to people who have spent an abnormal amount of time on the Pikmin Planet, with the ones who encountered the Red Onion first, Alph and I, being the first known loopers of our universe."

"How odd. I mean, looping artifacts serving as the anchor aren't unheard of, but still..." Twilight said, turning towards the Red Onion.

"Then again, it might not be an artifact." Olimar said, placing his hand on the bottom of his helmet. "I've always had a theory that the Onions were at least somewhat sentient, and not just the Pikmin's nest or means of reproduction. Whether or not the Onion being the anchor, or the other Onions occasionally looping proves this theory or not has yet to be seen."

A silence fell over the duo as the Pikmin continued to carry pellets back to the Onion. Olimar smiled, before turning to Twilight.

"I must say, despite this being your first loop here, you're performing much better than my usual partner Louie." Olimar said, glancing over towards the Pikmin. "I knew there were ways to make them collect berries and such without our direct command, but I didn't know collecting pellets could also be automated."

"What can I say. I'm an organized pony... or person, this loop at least."

Both loopers shared a hearty chuckle, before Olimar took a deep breath.

"At this rate, we should have Hocotate Freight's debt repaid in no time." Olimar said, though he was quick to breath a sigh. "I just hope the President of Hocotate Freight doesn't force us to return here after it's paid off to collect the rest of the treasures. No matter what we do when he's unawake, he \_always \_finds out about the



Submerged Castle, and \_always \_forces us to go collect the treasure within it."

Twilight blinked, tilting her head. "Why? What's so bad about this 'Submerged Castle' place?"

Olimar took a deep breath, shaking his head before he glanced at Twilight out of the corner of his eyes.

"Let me put it this way. The only times we go there are when the loops forces us to go there." Olimar said, before he straightened himself up. "Tell me, Twilight... do you believe in Eldritch Abominations?"

Twilight shivered. All of a sudden, she \_really \_didn't want to see what this 'Submerged Castle' was about...

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

113.1: We know how the next few seconds go.

>113.2: Due process.<br>113.3: At least it's not Friendship Is Magic The Gathering.

>113.4: Visual pun.<br>113.5: Presumably Zecora is being a bit avant-garde with her rhyme scheme.

>113.6: This is called malicious compliance. Except, she's being benevolent, so maybe not.<br>113.7: We named the pony Indiana.

>113.8: Feeling a little silly.<br>113.9: Different cultures for different... wait, they're not vultures...

>113.10: Thoroughly advised.<br>113.11: Simply construct the right metric.

>113.12: TV's Twilight.<br>113.13: Some places.

## 120. Chapter 120

114.1

\* \* \*

><p>"Applebloom, I think I beat your record."<p>

"Oh?" Applebloom looked up at Twilight. "Ain't surprised, you've had a lot more time. Which record would that be?"

"Tech uplift. What's your best?" Twilight paused, then elaborated. "Let's say... from an arbitrary starting point no later than Hub Napoleonic, to spaceflight. And no Pocket cheats."

"Humm." Applebloom fidgeted with her latest project â€" she'd been making what she called a nanospanner, which would use Jain-type tech to fix something while apparently just tightening up a bolt. "'bout a year is my best, assumin' you're goin' from something before steam power. Built somethin' right out of Jules Verne, put all my effort into a big 'ol grav-compensator and the mother of all guns. You?"

"Tool use to spaceflight in four hours."

Applebloom dropped her spanner.

"What."

Twilight held her expression for a moment, then laughed. "Okay, yeah, kind of a cheat. I was a Cheela."

Applebloom looked blank.

Twilight put a book down in front of her. "This should explain. Anyway, Cheela think and evolve really fast. To me it was more like five hundred years, basically. But I never specified \_subjective\_ time, did I?"

"...yeah, bein' an Anchor just gives you a lot more chances to learn the loopholes, don't it." Applebloom retrieved her spanner, put it carefully on the workbench, and then picked up \_Dragon's Egg.\_ "Ah'll just give this a read, then."

\* \* \*

><p>114.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy whistled to herself â€" one of Sweetie's latest pieces â€" as she went through the loop-start routine. Feed the animals, grow the plants, teach something new to the birds â€" she thought <em>Tubular Bells<em> would be nice this time â€" and make sure Angel Bunny wasn't too grumpy.

Around ten in the morning, however, hooves coming up the path interrupted her.

"Good morning, Fluttershy," Twilight said pleasantly. "Do you have a few minutes?"

Fluttershy interpreted that easily. \_Please give me some time with you to cope with my last loop.\_

"How could I say no?" she replied, and turned to the parrot. "Please make sure that they keep learning the melodic line."

The parrot nodded to her, flaring his wings. "Melodic line! Melodic line!"

"That's right." Fluttershy then headed for her door. Seeing Twilight looking mildly interested, she smiled. "He can pronounce speech, but he doesn't quite understand what each word means. He can understand me, of course, because..." She indicated herself with a small movement of one wing. "Special talent."

"And your Element, of course." Twilight nodded, and followed her friend into the cottage.

\* \* \*

><p>"Thanks, Fluttershy," Twilight said, sipping her mint tea. "For remembering I like this, as well."<p>

"Not a problem," Fluttershy assured her. "Now â€" what was it that happened last loop?"

Twilight sighed, and put her mug down. "I'm glad you were Awake," she said, more or less as a non sequitur. "The other Kindnesses aren't... quite as appropriate a choice. You see, I was in Lemon's world."

"Oh?" Fluttershy smiled. "Did you see him?"

"No, I was the only one Awake." Twilight swallowed, and took another sip of tea. "Anyway, it was one of those loops where most of my abilities were locked out."

"I don't like those," Fluttershy agreed. "I can't help people as easily."

"That's usually what I don't like, either," Twilight nodded. "There was one time I was a mare in the Hub world, all I had was my brains... anyway, I was basically a standard Eldar farseer. Exodite, if that means anything to you."

"Exodite are usually quite pleasant," Fluttershy mused.

"That part was," Twilight replied. "I went around there for a few years, casting about in the future to make sure it was baseline for the Dark Millennium, and then I used the Webway to walk to Earth."

Fluttershy blinked.

"Yeah, I know, not one of my better ideas." Twilight took a full mouthful of tea, this time, and savoured it for several long seconds. "I appeared in the Throne Room â€" mostly empty, which was lucky â€" and contacted the Emperor."

Her audience reacted in two different ways.

Fluttershy, who had had several conversations with the Emperors of different iterations of the loops â€" not all pleasant â€" made a little oh of surprise. "Was that safe?" she queried.

Angel, who had been the Emperor, shrugged and went back to gnawing on a carrot.

"Well, I wasn't sure, but I did future-sight just in case." Twilight rubbed her forehead with a hoof, and then drank some more tea. "He was quite pleasant. I told him some of the important things which he should know â€" the Word Bearers were the weak link, but Chaos was coming; the nature of the Necrons; how to build a non-psychotic artificial intelligence â€" you know, raise it like a child â€" and all sorts of other things. Over dinner, actually."

Twilight winced. "He was charming, witty, erudite, asked searching questions, clearly understood what I was saying, and then as I rose to leave ten members of the Sisterhood of Silence stepped in and captured me."

Fluttershy's breath hissed. "Oh dear," she said quietly. "You didn't

see them-

"-when I future scryed, yes," Twilight completed. "Because they're Blanks. And then I spent about the next month and a half being exhaustively interrogated for everything I knew."

She swallowed compulsively. "I tried to give it to them, and they didn't believe it. And then they moved onto the torture."

The room was silent for several seconds, with the only sound being a parrot outside squawking "Mandolin! Mandolin!"

Fluttershy stood up from her chair, walked over, and hugged Twilight wordlessly.

"Thanks, Fluttershy," Twilight said, her voice hitching slightly. "I... the Emperor's a very powerful psyker, and he did eventually manage to crack my shields. Possibly that was when they tried the..." She stopped there, swallowed again, and went on gamely. "Anyway, there's an Eldar technique to suicide. I used it."

She sighed, the exhalation going on for a long time.

"Fluttershy?" she asked eventually. "I'm sorry, but €" can you handle things today?"

Fluttershy nodded.

\* \* \*

><p>114.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Louise de Valliere triggered her summoning spell. This <em>had<em> to work!

With a bright flash of green light, something very big dropped into the centre of the circle.

"Well, well," the teacher said with an interested eyebrow-raise. "It appears, miss Louise, that you've summoned a dragon."

He frowned. "But I'm not sure what kind..."

\_I?\_ The black dragon raised up on his hind legs, flaring his wings. \_I am the Unholy Offspring of Lightning and Death Itself! I am a Night Fury, the swiftest of all dragons, possessed of a mighty flame that burns even rock! I am-\_ the tone of the silent voice changed from bragging to confused. \_Okay, you're not Hiccup. What the Hel's going on?\_

"Hi, bud," one of the other students said, waving from next to a large griffin.

\_Okay, nope.\_ The dragon took off with a slamming wingbeat, and flew over to the other student €" leaving Louise looking rather startled in the summoning circle.

\* \* \*

><p><em>What's going on?<em> Toothless repeated. \_What is going on? Who's \_that?

Hiccup nodded to the griffin, who rolled upright.

Tail lashing, the griffin crunched her foreclaws together with a \_clack\_ sound. "\_She\_, you right pillock, is Gilda the Griffin."

Toothless looked Gilda up and down. \_Oh, yeah, I remember you â€" the shouty one.\_ This earned a snigger from Hiccup and a look from Gilda.\_ How's Equestria?\_

"Could be worse." Gilda shrugged, then punched Toothless in the shoulder. "You're all right, dragon. Now, what was the big deal?"

\_Well...\_ Toothless twitched his wings in a shrug. \_Hiccup is sorta mine. I've been here before, it's just... you're kind of in my slot.\_

Gilda tapped her beak. "Right, right." (By now, most of the students had gotten over their shock at a talking dragon and a talking griffin, and were actually listening to what they were \_saying\_.) "Tell you what. Swap?"

\_Fine by me.\_

Toothless strutted over to lie down behind Hiccup, neatly taking the place Gilda had vacated.

Gilda, for her part, fluttered over to land in the summoning ring. "Right," she said, pointing at Louise. "You're with me now. You pass the coffee, I beat stuff up."

Louise looked helplessly at Colbert, who pursed his lips. "It's very irregular... has the summoning contract been completed yet?"

"Just did it with Toothless!" Hiccup called. "Gilda never got bonded."

"Yeah," Gilda agreed. "Okay, how do we do this?"

"Bonding is sealed with a kiss," Colbert said automatically.

"I'm not into bipeds," Gilda replied near-instantly.

\* \* \*

><p>114.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Cheerilee looked down at the four fillies. "Okay, what have you gotten up to now?"<p>

"We have seen the truth," Diamond Tiara announced solemnly. "She has come."

"Her vessel was ready," Applebloom added, in similar tones. "Prepared from birth."

Scotaloo and Sweetie Belle began chanting solemnly. \_"Pie iesu domine, dona eis requiem..."\_

Cheerilee had to hide a smile, recognizing the cadence. "Have you been summoning chaos lords again?" she asked sternly.

"Well..." Applebloom blushed, rubbing the back of her neck. "Not \_exactly.\_..."

Silver Spoon peeked her mismatched head out from behind a curtain. "Can I come out now?"

"No, not yet," Tiara said, then sighed. "Oh, whatever. Too late now."

Silver floated into the main area of the classroom, shrugging. "You're honestly lucky that I waited long enough to get to the chant." She landed between Scotaloo and Sweetie, and curled her fluffy tail up around her hind legs.

Applebloom was giving the teacher a look. "You seem awfully calm about this, Miss Cheerilee."

"Why wouldn't I be?" Cheerilee asked, confused.

"...oh, fer..." Applebloom kicked a table leg. "She's Awake, girls. Waste of a setup."

There was general disappointment.

"I could pretend not to be?" Cheerilee suggested.

"Nah, 's ruined now."

Silver gave her a smile. "Nice thought, though."

\* \* \*

><p>114.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Excellent work, Diamond!" Rarity gushed, as the latest satisfied customer left the shop. "Simply superb!"<p>

She extended her smile to include Zecora. "And, of course, your help was invaluable as well."

Zecora nodded politely. "If I might just be so bold â€" it was nothing, truth be told."

Rarity nodded. "Of course it was, darling. And I'm glad that both of you have absorbed the true message of what I was trying to teach you."

Blank stares from the other two Generosity-bearers.

"Oh, dear..." Rarity sighed. "I must have been far too subtle."

"That'd be a first," Tiara quipped.

At a stern look from Rarity, she held up a hoof. "Pax, pax! It's the effect of hanging around the other Crusaders, really. I can't pass up a good setup line."

"From what I recall, that's not changed at all," Zecora pointed out.

"As I was saying," Rarity said firmly, bringing them back to the first topic. "You've both heard me sing that heartsong, Art of the Dress. But can either of you tell me what the true Art of the Dress is?"

Zebra exchanged a look with earth pony filly.

"Nope," Diamond said for both of them.

"Right." Rarity took a deep breath, and favoured them both with a smile.

"The true Art of the Dress... is that it should fit."

The others nearly fell over.

"I think that was in our first lesson, before the pony had a dress on..." Zecora said, thoroughly confused.

"Yes," Tiara confirmed. "That's not a secret."

"Really?" Rarity smiled mysteriously. "Look around at these dresses I've made for every mare who loops. Which one is going to... Rainbow Dash?"

Diamond looked for a few seconds, then pointed. "That one."

"Precisely. Why?"

"Well..." the filly looked it up and down. "Er... well, it's in her size, and it's got a cloud motif, and it has a diaphanous material so it billows out when she moves fast like she always does..."

"And the cut is built for speed," Zecora finished. "It is Dash's dress indeed."

"Exactly." Rarity looked between them. "It's fitting for her."

"...oh," Tiara said, tapping a hoof. "That kind of fit."

"Well, yes and no." Rarity trotted over to the sewing machine, and started working absently. Her telekinesis picked up all the tools she needed, and she began making an outfit out of shimmering water-cloth cut through with mercury-cloth. "If I were to give a poor peasant a slap-up dinner, would that be generous?"

"Well... yes?" Tiara agreed. "That seems simple. I mean, you're giving her something."

"Ah, but if I gave it to a noble like High Jump or Blueblood?" Rarity peered at them as the shoulders came together. "Ah, now it's more interesting, isn't it?"

She whistled a few notes of Art of the Dress. "True generosity isn't just giving things away. It's more subtle than that. The reason our Elements all have â€" very minor, admittedly â€" healing properties is part of the same thing."

With a flourish, the dress was finished. "It's about completeness. Generosity is filling in the holes in someone, the things they lack â€" and so deftly that, ideally, you'd never know they were there in the first place."

"So..." Zecora frowned. "A true dress should be like air â€" it's hard to tell it's even there."

"Precisely." Rarity smiled. "It's only really worked a few times â€" it's an exacting art â€" but my truest masterpieces are the ones which just match their wearers. So well that your mental picture of that person includes the dress â€" and doesn't really change at all."

She pointed to Zecora. "Your work in potions..." and to Diamond. "And your work with philanthropy, leadership and... well, essentially what you do... I bet they work best when used to build up a person from within, rather than impose from without. Strengthen them."

"Fill in the blanks," Diamond said slowly. "Yes, I think that makes sense."

"Well," and the fashion unicorn shrugged. "It's only conjecture on my part, but it does seem to hang together."

"Right."

Zecora nodded.

"Oh..." Tiara pointed to the dress. "Who's that for?"

Rarity simply raised an eyebrow.

"Silver Spoon, I would guess," Zecora decided. "It is a quick\_silver dress."

"That's right." Rarity held it up, showing that the material settled down to a faint silver-sheen ripple once it wasn't moving any more. "I overcharged the normal adjust-form enchantment, so it should keep pace with her shifts."

She tapped a hoof on the floor. "Now, if only I had someone here who could deliver it to her... perhaps a close friend, or perhaps someone who shared an important moment with her."

Carefully, Rarity folded the new dress into a box, wrapped it in paper, and placed it between the two.



"I'll let you work out which would be more generous," she said, winking, and headed into the back room.

\* \* \*

><p>Addendum by Kris Overstreet:<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Two days later, Rarity found Diamond Tiara and Zecora still in the room, staring at the box. "Well?"<p>

Diamond Tiara said, "We can't find a polite word that rhymes with 'impasse.'"

"The right to Silver Spoon's dress supply, neither of us could the other deny," Zecora added.

Rarity shook her head. "It appears I'll need a quicksilver accessory to go with the dress. A bracelet, perhaps? Better yet, a bracer! Or perhaps a bangle for her hair? Or possibly all three! It is enchanted mercury, after all!"

"Er, not to interrupt your creative process, but can we go eat now?" Diamond Tiara asked plaintively.

"Oh, er, right. I'll have it done in a couple of days, whatever it is. And then we can decide which of you-

"NO!"

"Or you could take them together," Rarity replied meekly. "That works also."

\* \* \*

><p>114.6<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"You mean it?" Applebloom asked, teary-eyed.<p>

"You'll buy the farm off us?" Applejack held out a hoof, and Flam took it somewhat bemusedly. "Four bits and a smile, done! Alright, family, we're free!"

Cheering, Applebloom cantered off down the road. Big Mac followed, moving his sleeping grandmother on her chair, and Applejack paused only long enough to collect four bits from the unresisting Flim and Flam before hurrying off after them.

"...well, I'm not complaining," Flim said, nudging his brother. "That's the best that that scam's ever gone."

"Indeed it is, brother mine," Flam agreed. "Now, let's see what we've purchased for a song."

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack whistled to herself as she Earthbent them a small

mansion, and Applebloom finalized a nanovirus that would give them the furnishings they needed.<p>

Mac glanced over at Granny Smith. "Still sleepin," he reported.

"Good." Applejack looked over at their old home, and grinned. "Ah've wanted this for quite a while, y' know.. not all that virtuous, ah'll admit, but funny as hay."

\* \* \*

><p>In the dim pre-dawn light, magic moved on silent paws.<p>

Well, more technically, kindness moved on silent paws.

The small farm cat that was Fluttershy padded into the Apple farmhouse, and checked that both Flim and Flam were asleep.

Then she moved to the door, yawned " she'd had a late night " and connected to nature on a deep and fundamental level.

Fluttershy might not be an Earth Pony by blood " not usually, anyway " but she was certainly something close.

\_\_"Animate Plants."\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Yep," Applejack said critically, as a tree threw Flam twenty feet into the air. "That's an Apple tree bein' playful, alright."<p>

She put her hooves around her mouth. "That one's kinda frisky first thing in th' morning! Try givin' her a cup of tea!"

Flim crawled up to the fence. "What... in Equestria..."

"Well, this farm is kinda high maintenance," Applejack said casually. "'s why we have the best apples, place is full of life. But, y' know... buyer beware."

She'd have to thank Fluttershy for this.

After they'd let the brothers sell them the farm back, of course. Four bits and a smile sounded about right. And then 'shy and Rarity could give them a talk about proper business practices.

\* \* \*

><p>114.7 (Bardic Knowledge, Filraen and DrTempo)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Sunset and the Doctor<strong>

Variations to the Loop were only slightly more common on the other side of the mirror than in Equestria proper, since most other Loops were populated by humans, so whenever Sunset Looped into "home," she was generally prepared to meet visitors to Canterlot High, especially

those who were resistant to attending high school a second time. Teachers were a different matter, since most Loopers had little idea on how to teach. She sat down in her sciences class, already familiar with the subject for the most part.

So the new arrival was only sort of expected.

After everyone was seated, the teacher entered. He was tall, with gray hair and a frilly, almost Victorian-looking, outfit. His skin was peach in tone, which while somewhat normal for a regular human, it tended to stand out amongst the technicolour population of Canterlot High.

"Good afternoon, class," he announced. "I'm your new teacher. My name is Doctor... John- no, that doesn't fit this world does it... Time Turner, yes, that's right. I'd prefer, however, if you just refer to me as Doctor.'" He started writing on the board. "Now, to establish a bit of a baseline, who here is familiar with the concept of a 'Time Loop?' Anyone at all?"

Sunset was the only one to raise her hand.

"Excellent. Miss...?"

"Shimmer, Doctor. Sunset Shimmer."

"Miss Shimmer. I have a special assignment for you, then. Please see me after class. Now then, we'll see how much knowledge we can stuff into your heads by the end of the period, shall we?"

Sunset was certain she heard him mutter, "Hopefully you'll retain more than the Brigadier ever did."

\* \* \*

><p>Time Turner spoke with an unusual accent, which now Sunset realized was similar to British from some human loops, though Sunset realized it could be easily faked with no special Looper skill required. And the famously long scarf was just in one corner on the hat rack, right next to a fez. How she hadn't seen it before was a mystery. In the end Sunset decided to give the benefit of the doubt on Time Turner being the Doctor, as she didn't know enough about him to disprove any evidence he may have with him.<p>

After classes ended both waited until all other students left the class. The teacher spoke first as he approached Sunset Shimmer: "Now, Miss Shimmer, if you would be so kind. Might I ask after the Anchor of this quaint Loop? I haven't had much experience outside my own, you see. Even my first Fused Loop was in my own universe."

No ping and now thisâ€¦ is the Doctor a young looper? It made a weird kind of sense. "Um, okay," still baffled, Sunset did her best to answer. "This is a sort of parallel subset of the Equestrian Loops. Our Anchor is Twilight Sparkle, and she's probably just moving to Ponyville now. I don't know if anyone else is Awake, the ping doesn't work very well through the mirror."

The Doctor nodded.

"Actuallyâ€¦ are you the Anchor of your world?" Sunset Shimmer asked

in a pensive look.

"Yes, I am indeed the Anchor for my little Branch of the World Tree. Still working on the ping, too. Rather more complicated than you all let on." He tapped his chin. "Perhaps if I reverse the polarity... No, that couldn't possibly work."

"Well, in that case there's no guarantee Twilight's Awake," Sunset continued where she had left. "While multiple Anchors might be Awake in any given loop, only one is required and you'd fill the quota."

"I see."

Seeing the conversation being under control Sunset decided to launch the most complicated question she had. "Look, I don't mean to be rude, but who are you? You can't possibly be who I think you are, but there's no other choice left."

"And as the great Sir Arthur Conan Doyle said, through Sherlock Holmes," the Doctor said back, "'when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.' Though, between you and me, I think he got that phrase from me."

"Only in loops you exist." Sunset sniped back.

The Doctor chuckled "True, true."

Taking a more serious stance Sunset pressed on. "But seriously, isn't your world Read-Only and forbidden to Loop?"

"It was," the Doctor corrected. "You see, my original Administrator enlisted the help of Jǃrmungandr to upgrade something called an 'Ouroboros Patch.' And, with that, I was activated as a Looper. It is rather annoying to Awaken as a different me all the time, though."

Sunset Shimmer blinked "So it's like Link and Zelda?"

"Who?"

"Loopers from Hyrule." Sunset Shimmer explained. "Their loop has reincarnation built in its life and death cycle so they tend to Awake in whole different eras."

The Doctor smiled wryly, "Somehow I don't think they can regenerate into different bodies and personalities about a dozen times in a single life."

"Point."

The conversation paused at this point and Sunset Shimmer looked outside. "It's night already and everybody left. You said you wanted to meet our Anchor?" At the Doctor's nod she pointed to Canterlot High's front yard, "then let's go the statue. That's our ticket to meet her."

The Doctor stepped over to a wardrobe in the corner opposite the hat

rack. How she missed that one was even more baffling, considering its blue colour. As he pulled out a light coat, she spotted a hard-to-miss overcoat with enough colours to make a clown jealous. With confirmation that he was the Doctor, she supposed it made some sense that he'd have all his outfits.

After leaving the classroom they walked in silence, leaving enough time for Sunset Shimmer to digest what had happened today. A grin started to creep its way across her face as she realized this had to be the biggest news in the entire Multiverse and she got to hear it first (not actually true, but she could be forgiven for thinking otherwise)! She had to see if the others were Awake. And if so, they needed to know \_immediately\_.

"If you're just starting to loop, Doctor, I'm guessing you've always been a biped, right?"

"Yes," The Doctor answered back, slightly confused. "Your point being?"

"Travelling through the portal will change your shape." Sunset answered back as she summoned her Keyblade. "You'll probably become a pony just like me, and walking on four legs may be difficult if all your lifeâ€¦ lives you've been a biped. Oh, and I'll have to seal the gate behind us. First time I did this, I forgot to do that, and some of the people here followed me through."

"Understood, Miss Shimmer." The Doctor said, apparently fascinated with how Sunset Shimmer summoned her giant key and worked it through the solid marble of the statue. "You know, it's quite the experience being the inexperienced one for a change."

With a shared laugh, both walked through the portal into Equestria.

\* \* \*

><p>114.8 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight had tried many forms of meditation throughout the Loops, but her favorite method was still reshelving. Placing books in their allotted spaces according to a sensible sorting system satisfied her on some undefinable, almost visceral level. Maybe it was because she was doing it in a tree; she felt like she was helping in some small way to bring order to the ongoing chaos of Yggdrasil itself.<p>

The door opening interrupted her ruminations. "Hi, Twilight."

She turned to the voice and smiled. "Sunset? This is a pleasant surprise. We haven't even had the Running of the Leaves yet. What brings you here?"

Sunset floated a ring binder out of her saddlebags. "I've been noticing a trend lately. The last five times I woke up after the Fall Formal debacle, three girls showed some time later." She opened the binder to a photo, presumably of the three in question. "It always happened near the end of the Loop, but each time was progressively earlier along the timeline."

Twilight took the binder in her magic and considered the image. "Hmm. The girls have mentioned a trio like this once or twice, but we don't awaken in that universe often enough to determine trends. We'd just assumed they were from another Loop with a high-school-age Anchor." She started paging through the rest of the binder. "You've been analyzing them?"

Sunset nodded. "Every way I know how. Their singing is definitely magical; it seems to tie into their feeding methods."

"Which appear similar to those of changelings," noted Twilight.

"Only with disharmony instead of love. I figured you should know."

Twilight closed the binder. "I really appreciate this, Sunset. I'll see if I can find anything about creatures with these properties."

Sunset smiled. "Thanks. I don't exactly have access to the right research materials most of the time." Her grin widened. "Oh, and one more thing. Last I checked, they can't take a punch."

"Sunset!" A laugh took any bite out of the chastisement.

"What?" Her mock indignation only made Twilight laugh harder. "They were singing about standing above the crowd, glory through competition. They should've seen it coming!"

\* \* \*

><p>114.9 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Shining Armor kept the news to himself as best he could over the course of the Loop, even through the wedding. But after missing Sombra with a smite evil and nearly getting impaled by a jagged lance of crystal, he felt it was better to confess than to let the secret weigh on his heart.<p>

That night, in the royal bedchambers (newly furnished with sheets made this millennium) he broached the subject. "So, Nyx and Lemon seem to be getting along well..." His ears flattened as he mentally braced himself.

"That's nice."

Shining felt a bit like he'd put his hoof on a stair that wasn't there. He looked over to Cadance, who seemed engrossed in an Iris Drake novel. "Um, yeah, it is." Surely Chrysalis hadn't replaced her. The changeling queen hadn't been Awake, but Fluttershy had pacified her easily. "They... make a cute couple?"

"Mm hmm." Cadance turned a page.

"So... their wedding?"

"Will happen when it happens. He hasn't even proposed yet, Shiny. You can't rush these things."

And then Shining understood. "Oh, you're one of those Loopers who tries to act out the local baseline. I wish you'd told me beforeâ€" " Cadance whapped him over the head with the book. "Ow!"

The mare glared at him. "I am Mi Amore Cadenza, Princess of Love, Crystal Empress, several other titles depending on the Loop, and most importantly, your wife. And I am not in the mood for what you're trying to get me to do."

There was a brief silence as Shining tried to reorganize his thoughts. "Wha?" He belatedly realized he should've waited longer.

Cadance gave a soft smile that assured Shining that yes, this was his wife. "Don't get me wrong, I still love weddings. They're beautiful celebrations of everything I hold dear. But the joke's gotten old."

"The joke?"

"The 'Wedding-Crazy Cadance' joke. I haven't really felt that way for a long, long time, but your reactions were so funny I kept it up." She sighed. "But I'm tired of everypony walking on eggshells around me. The joke's gotten old. I know what I did was wrong, butâ€" "

She was cut off by her husband's embrace. "You have no idea how happy I am to hear that."

Cadance smiled and returned the hug.

\* \* \*

><p>114.10 (Masterweaver and Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Apple Bloom entered the bar with an awkward grin. "Hey, uh, Mac?"<p>

"Eeeyup?"

"Ya know that meteor that crash landed in tha west field last night?"

"Eeenope."

"...well, Ah kinda was poking around with it, with some basic, ya know, excavation machinery, and, uh, it kind of turned out ta be the AllSpark-"

A massive face with glowing eyes peered through the door. "Momma? Can I come in there?"

"Uh, just a sec honey, Ah'll be right out!" The filly gave her brother a pleading look. "Help?"

Mac sighed, considered the situation, and nodded gravely. "Now

'Bloom, Motherhood is a big responsibility, and I coulda' \_sworn\_ Applejack woulda' gotten around ta givin' you the \_talk\_ by now, but-"

"Eat a \_sprig\_ ya thistle-sucker will ya help me or not!?" she barely kept herself from shouting. By the end the stallion was already nodding with a wide smirk.

\* \* \*

><p>114.11 (Zetrein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was just another day in Ponyville, if a bit sparse on Loopers this time around. Just like any other day, Twilight sat in her kitchen, waiting for her kettle to boil.<p>

Well, right up until somepony started knocking loudly on her door. "Twilight? Open the door! Please? I need your help!" Shutting off the stove with a sigh, Twilight started walking towards the door, pondering who the male voice belonged to.

"Oh crap, somepony saw me." The knocking intensified, now interspersed with pings from Sunset Shimmer. "Let me in! I'm not safe out here! Lemmeinlemmeinlemmein!"

The moment the door was unlocked, Sunset tumbled into the room, before slamming the door shut and locking it. Aside from the fact that Sunset was a stallion at the moment, Twilight honestly didn't see what he was panicking about.

"Well, hello there, Handsome." Twilight blinked, shaking her head in confusion. \_That isn't what I wanted to say.\_

"Oh no, not you too!" Sunset now had his back pressed to the door, obviously considering taking his chances with whatever was outside.

Closing her eyes, Twilight took a deep breath, and focused on what she \_wanted\_ to say. "Sunset, calm down. I know what's going on."

"You-you do? You're not just saying that to trick me, right?" Twilight imagined Sunset looked some combination of hopeful and suspicious, but she didn't open her eyes yet. This particular kind of mental effect required a well built counter.

"Every mare you've met, that wasn't already in a relationship, has found you attractive, right?"

"Yes."

"And they've all started vying for your attention, competing with each other, often injuring you in the process, and generally making your life miserable?" Twilight finished her preparations, and opened her eyes.

"You really do know what this is, don't you?" Sunset had visibly calmed while Twilight's eyes were closed.



\_Best just rip this band-aid off now.\_ "You're a Harem Protagonist this loop. You're literally the most desirable stallion on the planet right now." Stepping up to him, Twilight gave Sunset a hug. "Trust me, I know your pain. Go hide in my basement, I'll round up everypony else that's Awake, and we'll walk you through how to deal with this."

While being taller than Twilight was novel, Sunset began to feel uncomfortable as the hug drew out. "Um, Twilight? It's not that I mind the hug, but shouldn't you be going?"

Twilight pushed away with a jerk. "I wasn't staring at your flank!"

After an awkward silence, Sunset walked past the blushing mare. "I'm just going to go hide."

\* \* \*

><p>Later that morning, Twilight had gathered their friends in the library's basement. Besides herself and Sunset, it was just Rainbow Dash, Applejack, and Luna for this loop.<p>

"Okay, now that we're all here, let's talk about this." Twilight slipped into lecture mode. "So far, we only know two sure-fire ways to defuse the Harem Protagonist Effect.

First off, fleeing Canterlot High was the best thing you could do. In addition to bringing our options into the game, you've also left a possible highschool rom-com. Before we continue, I have one other important question. Did Celestia, Cadance, or any other alicorn see you?"

"Not that I know of." Sunset's voice came, from the cardboard box she hid under.

"Good, without an alicorn after you, just being a moon-hermit for the loop is a valid option. Rainbow tried that once, after an unawake Luna had started to pursue her; it didn't work."

"On the other hoof, the Cloud Fortress she built me was pretty nice." Rainbow broke in. "Also, as Trixie found out, don't try and be a performer when you're a Harem Protag."

"Do I want to know?" Luna inquired.

"Two words, shipping wars." Applejack told her. "It came down to her thousands of fans factionalizing, rallying behind those they all felt were the best choices for her. The fightin' was a thing to see; we're talkin' battalion level combat, thousands o' pies thrown. They ended up breaking Discord out months early, then he declared Trixie was to be his Queen o' Chaos."

"Moving on, both of those incidents gave us datapoints on how to get out of it." Twilight continued. "The only other way we've found to get out of this, thus far, is to subvert the genre. Instead of playing along, or trying to ignore them all, you choose. Even in Trixie's case, after her shotgun wedding, all her other suitors moved on."

"Which brings me to why I went out to get everypony. A couple times now, we've had somepony marry another Looper, and while the relationship stayed platonic, the public marriage staved off any further problems."

"So! Would you like to choose, or shall we play spin the bottle?" Twilight paused. "That came out wrong. Anyway, Sunset?"

"Can I just get a lift to the moon? Maybe some help in making it habitable?"

"But! But! You could be a datapoint! An important datapoint!" Twilight pleaded.

"No."

"But, my research! C'mon, Sunny, old buddy, old pal? Please?"

\* \* \*

><p>114.12 (AcademicPony)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Five fillies and an alicorn were relaxing in the Golden Oak Library. The pleasant smell of paper filled the air, and six glasses of iced fruit juice (bendy-straws optional) were a welcome respite from the warm summer's day outside.<p>

At a designated table, of course. This was a library, after all.

Having the Cutie Mark Crusaders Awake made "Twilight Time" much simpler; doubly so with Diamond Tiara Awake as well. On the other hoof, this made it a challenge to find study material. On days like today, conversation topics tended to wander farther afield.

Nyx sipped at her juice. The little alicorn filly's nose crinkled in thought, in an expression that Twilight and Rarity had privately agreed ranked at least "0.2 squees" on the Fluttershy scale. A few moments later, that thought was voiced.

"Momma," she asked, "what did you and Celestia do that time you experimented with the sun?"

"Hey, yeah," Scootaloo chimed in. "That sounds like it would have been awesome! Even if, well..." She trailed off, seeing Twilight twitch at memories of the Eiken loop that followed.

Apple Bloom, on the other hand, looked miffed. "Wait, y'all went messing around with stars without inviting me? I've got loads of gear I've been wanting to try out. I figured I'd have to wait for another Trek loop before having the resources." She paused to take another sip of her own drink. "Stellar engineering ain't easy, ya know."

"I don't know, Sweetie managed it pretty easily during the Arda loop," Diamond Tiara chimed in. The smirk she directed at Sweetie Belle was a friendly one; a far cry from the expressions used by her baseline counterpart.

Sweetie Belle shifted uncomfortably. "I had help; all of the Ainur worked together for that. Besides," she smirked looking at Twilight, "we're getting off-topic."

Twilight took a deep breath, and sighed. "All right; I suppose it'll have to come out eventually. It was near the end of a loop, and it was more than just Celestia; she and Luna were both there, along with the original Element bearers..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Make haste, Twilight Sparkle. I do not know how long I can maintain this expansion."<p>

Luna's voice was strained - and for good reason. The basement underneath the Golden Oak Library held rather more space than usual, even given Twilight's propensity for digging extra storage rooms. "Space" was also a bit more literal than usual, given that her basement didn't normally have a G-class star inside of it. Looping prominences cast harsh flickering light across the faces of both Royal Alicorn Sisters. Celestia's usually-serene expression couldn't quite mask stress matching her sister's, as she struggled to hold the star in place and keep it compressed enough to fit within the library's expanded confines.

"Don't worry, I'm almost ready!"

Twilight rushed to and fro, making final adjustments to the jumbled mass of humming equipment that circled the central space. The other Element-bearers waited uncomfortably on the circular platform she'd assigned to them. For all that they'd seen non-Euclidean space before, that didn't make it pleasant to stare at. Glancing about the periphery wasn't any more pleasant; they could either watch Twilight prancing about in full mad scientist mode, or glance at the two Royal Sisters who were struggling, with obvious stress, to keep the unsettlingly large ball of fire sharing the room contained.

Four out of five were uncomfortable, at any rate. Rainbow Dash had pulled a pair of sunglasses and a deck chair out of her pocket and was basking. Finally, Twilight trotted back to the group.

"All right girls, elements on, and formation!"

Six pairs of eyes closed, and six faces took on an expression of deep concentration. A familiar aura of power enfolded the Bearers, lifting them into the air, and as they opened their eyes, rainbow light burst forth. Instead of stopping, though, the drain went on and on. Twilight's eyes glowed with white fire as she poured more power into the Sun. Finally the light faded, and the bearers sank to the ground in exhaustion. Twilight remained standing, though, horn aura glowing violet-white.

"Um, Twi," Applejack asked, "ain't it over? We used the elements like you told us to, shouldn't they be doin' the rest of the heavy lifting?"

"They are, Applejack," Twilight replied, teeth gritted. "I still have to guide the process. Celestia and Luna are still holding on as well." The farm-pony glanced over towards the royal couple, whose

strained faces confirmed that yes, keeping a star in Twilight's basement was still requiring effort.

Rainbow was looking at the sun and scowling. "So, what was this supposed to do again? The sun still looks like it did before." This wasn't quite true, she decided. There was a faint shimmer of magic around the flickering tongues of fire, and... was it getting smaller?

"It should be starting any second now... there!" Twilight's panting slowed, and her horn aura dimmed to its usual pink. Her grin had come back, and that wasn't entirely reassuring. "It's collapsing; you can see the accretion disk starting to form. If this works, we'll have magical power to spare! Think of it, girls - we could set up our workshops in hours instead of weeks, run extra-space charms powerful enough to hold entire cities, maybe even directly connect normal space to our pockets! There's no limit to what we could accomplish!"

"And the elements do what now?" Rainbow still looked confused.

"They set up a harmonic resonance, and I'm using it to halt the collapse at the last moment so that we can extract power. It's harmony that makes all of this work!"

The eight ponies watched as the sun shrank to a disc which swirled around an eye-hurtingly bright point of light.

"So, this is our magic element swirly-thing?" Rainbow ventured.

Rarity responded to that. "'Swirly thing', darling? Let's not be so gauche. Rainbow spiral, perhaps?"

"Maybe. Harmony cyclone?"

Fluttershy had been watching the disk contract, and finally spoke. "Um, actually, it doesn't look like a cyclone any more. It looks almost like an eye."

"You're all close," Twilight replied. "It's inspired by something I'd encountered in the Who loop. Girls, we now have our very own Eye of \_"

There was a faint popping sound, and twin gasps of pain from Celestia and Luna. They fell to the floor... which was a lot more ordinary-looking than it had been a moment ago. Twilight's head whipped back and forth between her beloved mentor and trusted friend, and the empty, normal-sized room where a star was supposed to be. "What happened? Is everypony all right? What happened to the Sun? Did you have to pocket it? Did anything else - "

"I'm all right, Twilight," Celestia replied. The monarch looked worse for wear, but was recovering. "My connection to the spell vanished, but I don't seem to have experienced any ill effects from that. Lulu, did the same thing happen to you?"

"Yes, sister," Luna said, as her panting slowed and became normal breaths. "One moment, I was straining to hold this much Sky in one place, and the next it was as if I hadn't begun the spell."

Twilight was distraught. "But, but - the Eye! What happened to it? It was working, and we could have done so much!"

Pinkie bounced up to interrupt her monologue. "Mmf! M found this!" With that, she deposited a small piece of paper at Twilight's hooves, and bounced off again humming happily.

Twilight levitated the slip of paper in front of her, reading it.

\_What part of "read-only" wasn't clear, Sparkle?\_

><em>-Skuld<em>

"...Tree-damnit."

\* \* \*

><p>Eight ponies - three weary, four quietly relieved, and one prancing - made their way up the stairs from the basement. Upon entering the library proper, another surprise waited for them. Stacks and stacks of paper filled the foyer floor to ceiling, teetering precariously. A scroll with a purple ribbon rested in front of the nearest pile.<p>

Twilight opened it with trepidation.

\_Community service paperwork - lot 1 of 277,432.\_

"...For birch's sake."

\* \* \*

><p>Five fillies sipped their juice as they juice as they digested the story.<p>

Apple Bloom spoke first. "Ah'm torn between askin' ya for your schematics, or avoidin' Who-tech all together. That punishment don't sound like fun, and I'm gettin' the impression she still went easy on ya."

"Yes, it could have been much worse," Twilight replied. "Even so, that's more paperwork than I ever want to see in one place again."

"Hey, wait - paperwork!" Scootaloo chimed in. "So that loop where we were all your daughters, and you couldn't spend time with us because there was too much you had to do as Queen -"

Twilight smiled. "Got it in one. That was a major contributor to it."

Sweetie piped up. "So, did you finish it before taking your, um, sabbatical as 'Northern Twilight'?"

Twilight's chin lowered to rest on the table, gaze held off in the far distance. "No. By the time that loop ended, I was a quarter done."

The fillies pondered that. Nyx summed up the group's feelings eloquently.

"Remind me never to tick off Skuld."

\* \* \*

><p>114.13 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...Is... is mom fighting a dragon?"<p>

"Yep."

"...On her own?"

"Yep."

"...Did she just cast a spell?!"

"Yep."

"But she's a pegasus-!"

"Well, she isn't right now." Dinky tapped her horn. "Grew one of these before taking off."

Sparkler stared at her distant mother, jaw dropped. "She... what?"

"Yeah, that was my reaction too." Dinky shrugged. "I'm still in shock, actually."

"I can understand that..."

\* \* \*

><p>114.7 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>After the rather disorienting experience of traversing the barrier between worlds unprotected, the Doctor found himself rather awkwardly falling from an upright position into his new body's proper quadrupedal stance.<p>

"Odd," commented Sunset, hovering her Keyblade in her magic as she re-locked the gateway. "I would've thought you'd look a bit... browner."

The Doctor gave himself a once-over. His tail was as grey and curly as his hair (and what a novel experience, having a tail), and his coat retained a peach-pale tone. He kept his suit jacket and frilled shirt, but his light jacket and pants seemed to have vanished. And on his rear was an hourglass, with most of the sand in the top bulb. "And just why is that?"

"Well, we have a pony-slash-person in our Branch called Time Turner who's brown with a spiky mane. He's got the hourglass cutie mark,

too." She looked closer at his hourglass. "Though, yours seems to have more sand in the top."

"Sounds like he'd be very similar to my tenth self. You say this image is called a 'cutie mark?'"

"Right, it's supposed to signify a pony's special talent. And, as a Time Lord, yours would obviously be time."

"Quite right. Now, you were going to-" The Doctor paused as he felt an unusual burst of energy pass through him. "My word. Is that what a ping is supposed to feel like?" A moment later, several more bursts of energy were felt.

"Oh, that's right, you haven't quite gotten the hang of pings yet. Here, let me give you some tips..."

After Sunset explained the ping to the Doctor, Sunset said, "Hang on, Doctor. This is going to be a wild ride!" Using the Force to grab the Doctor, Sunset cast the Rey Wing spell she learned from Lina Inverse to take flight.

"How exhilarating!" The Doctor had rarely flown without a craft of some sort, the closest he'd ever come being the time he borrowed the power of the Archangel Network to hover for a bit in his tenth incarnation.

Sunset chuckled in reply. "I've picked up a few tricks in my time as a Looper." Soon enough, Sunset landed near Ponyville. Taking the time to grab a newspaper, she noticed it was a few weeks after the 1000th Summer Sun Celebration. "It's a bit later than I thought. Still, this works just fine."

The Doctor straightened his suit jacket. "My word, Miss Shimmer. What was that just now? Some form of telekinesis?"

"One was the Force, from the Star Wars universe. It's a bit easier to carry people that way than using my personal magic sometimes. The other was a spell called 'Rey Wing.' Speaking of, if you ever have a Fused Loop with Lina Inverse, be careful. She tends to cause mass destruction."

The Doctor cocked an eyebrow, curious. "And why does she cause mass destruction?"

"Well, the first time she Awakens to a new Fused Loop, she casts her signature spell to make sure it works. Said signature spell can flatten small villages. Other than that it's often incidental damage from fighting."

"My word. I hope I don't run into her any time soon." The Doctor looked around the quaint village of Ponyville. "Now then, you were going to show me to your Anchor."

"She lives over there, in the house-tree-library." The Doctor wasn't quite sure what to make of that, but he had seen some very odd things in his time.

As the two trotted toward the library, Sunset gave the Doctor some tips on several of the Loops she had been to.

"Now, one of the Original Seven, Ranma, has a rather interesting home Loop. It's so focused on various martial arts, that it started making some up, like Martial Arts Tea Ceremony-" Suddenly, Sunset saw a certain pink party pony out of the corner of her eye, shaking like mad. She held up a hoof to the Doctor as she paused.

Smirking, Sunset said to the Doctor, "Follow my lead. I just thought of something that'll make your big debut as a Looper more fitting for you. After all, you're the one person everyone thought would never Awaken." The Doctor cocked his eyebrow in a specific manner, Delphon for "you're the expert here."

Sunset, loudly, asked the Doctor, "So, feeling a little Loopy?"

Doing his best to guess where she was going with this, the Doctor replied, "Yes, but now I feel quite Awake. For the first time, so to speak." Pinkie looked at the Doctor, curiously.

"So, you're a Doctor, right? What's your specialty?"

\_Ah,\_ he thought, \_this other pony must be Awake as well.\_ Out loud, he replied, "Well, anything, everything. Time in particular."

Pinkie stared at the two of them for a long moment, blinking, before shrugging and continuing on her merry way.

"Well, that's not the reaction I was expecting," remarked Sunset.

"What do you mean?"

"I thought for sure she'd zip off, raring to get a party together for you." Sunset shook her head. "She's acting odd, even for herself."

"Hmm. Well, regardless, you were going to introduce me to your Anchor, Miss Shimmer."

\* \* \*

><p>Once they were out of view of pretty much anypony, but still quite a ways from the library, Sunset paused. "Doctor. There's something that's been nagging at me for a while now, but it's difficult to talk about with people from here. We're all so very forgiving, after all."<p>

The Doctor looked at her, puzzled, "Nothing wrong with a bit of forgiveness. But, why are you asking me? There must be more experienced Loopers out there who can advise you."

"I know, but there's something about you. I think it has to do with all the experience your baseline alone gives you."

Sunset took a deep breath. "Anyways, in our baseline... I go a little insane. I stole Twilight's crown, the Element of Magic, one of Equestria's most powerful artifacts, and intended to use it to invade Equestria and take it over with an army of mind-controlled teenagers." Sunset looked at the ground, haunted by her baseline



memories.

"And I take it you're worried about potentially backsliding, is that it?"

"In a way. You see, Equestria is ruled over by Alicorns, a pony made of all the pony tribes. And almost all the Looping Equestrians are or can become them at will. I'm worried that if my time to ascend to Alicorn ever comes, that I'll wind up going mad with power again. Especially since I'm told emotions run a little hotter when someone ascends."

The Doctor nodded in understanding. Fortunately, he had a few examples he could pull from. "I see. Tell me, my dear, do you know of my Warrior incarnation?"

"I've heard of it, yeah."

"He did many terrible things in the Time War. Enough to feel that he should renounce the very name of 'Doctor.'" It was difficult to think of that era in his life. The Time War had been so long and so brutal, that by the end of it he had practically forgotten his true age and just reset the age he gave to around eight hundred and something.

The haunted look faded somewhat as he looked into her eyes. "I have since learned that there are many ways of being a Doctor. However, it is still very difficult to forgive that part of myself for what he did â€" and what he intended to do. It's the same for what my tenth incarnation did when he tried to break a Fixed Point, calling himself 'the Time Lord Victorious.'"

The Doctor paused. "What I'm getting at, Miss Shimer... Sunset, is that even if you do something terrible, if you learn from it and use its lesson to be better, you have nothing to fear from that part of you."

Sunset stood in silence for a minute. "Thank you. I'm still not sure I'm ready to be an Alicorn. But if it happens, I'll try not to fear myself."

The Doctor patted her on the shoulder. "That's all anyone can do with themselves. Shall we continue?"

Sunset shook herself. "Right."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, Doctor, this is it," said Sunset, as they stood in front of the library.<p>

"No need to stand around, I think." And with that, the Doctor pulled open the door, inwardly marvelling at the dexterity of his hooves.

"Hello," greeted Twilight. "Oh, Sunset! We don't usually see you around now. What's up?"

"We have a new Looper," grinned Sunset, gesturing to the Doctor.

"Good afternoon, Miss Sparkle. I'm the Doctor."

"Nice try, but I don't think so."

The Doctor gave her an incredulous look. "I beg your pardon?"

"He sounds like one of the Doctor, but that's easy to replicate. I'm surprised you thought this would work, Sunset."

"Now see here-" The Doctor restrained himself from yelling angrily at the unicorn. "What must I do to prove to you who I am?"

"Time travel."

"The TARDIS didn't follow me over. And even if she had, there's no artron energy in your universe, so she wouldn't be able to move."

"Sonic Screwdriver."

"Is there anything in here not made of wood?"

"Regenerate?"

"Aside from wanting to remain myself, I'm not currently Gallifreyan and therefore cannot."

Sunset looked between the two as they continued their verbal tennis match. Every time Twilight asked something of the Doctor, he'd give a good reason he couldn't do it or an answer that Twilight would dismiss as "common knowledge" about the Doctor's adventures. After several minutes of this, Sunset and the Doctor found themselves outside the library.

"Of all the nerve," grumbled the Doctor. "I have half a mind to-"

"Please, Doctor, let's just try someone else, okay? Rarity lives closest, we can see if she's Awake."

As it turns out, she was. However, while she complimented the Doctor on his current outfit, she didn't believe them either. Nor did Fluttershy or Rainbow Dash. And with each failure, the Doctor became angrier and angrier.

"Millions of Loops under your collective belts and not one of them seems to think I could possibly be who I say I am?! The absolute nerve!"

"There's still a few ponies left to try, Doctor. We've only met half the pings out there. Going by the trend, I'm sure Applejack must be Awake, and she's the Element of Honesty. She has to believe us."

\* \* \*

><p>"I don't believe it."<p>

The pair stared incredulously.

"That does it!" The Doctor shouted. "I-"

"No, that ain't what I meant," interrupted Applejack. "I can feel the truth in what yer sayin'. He's really the Doctor. I was just so shocked I could scarcely believe my own senses."

"I knew we could rely on you, AJ," sighed a relieved Sunset. "Every other Element wouldn't believe us at all. They thought we were pranking them."

"Now, I could be a mite offended that ya didn't come ta me first, but I know I'm a bit out of the way compared to everypony other than Fluttershy."

"Do you think you could help us tell everyone else?"

"Well, first we should go meet up with Apple Bloom. She's going to be so ecstatic to meet ya Doctor. She's been working on her own Sonic Screwdriver, y'see. After that, we'll hope that nopony thinks ya managed to rope me into a prank."

"Won't she have met me when I was unAwake?" asked the Doctor.

"I'm not actually sure. The only time I've heard of her meetin' a version of ya was when we were replacing all of ya'll."

"My word, replacing all of me? How did that work?"

"Well, Princess Celestia was in the place o' yer first self..."

\* \* \*

><p>(Filraen)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia,<em>

\_This loop I got a reminder on how someone or somepony who lacks evidence to prove their word isn't automatically a liar, and how a little bit of trust can get goodwill on others, especially on a young looper, as well as helping to realize an amazing discovery: the Doctor, whose very world was once unable to loop, is now looping.\_

\_Your faithful student\_  
><em>Sunset Shimmer<em>

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

114.1: Life on a neutron star.

>114.2: A bad day.<br>114.3: Eh, ink magic works for "void".

>114.4: It's annoying when that happens.<br>114.5: The hope was that they'd work out that they could simply give a joint present.

>114.6: Turnabout is fair play.<br>114.7: Surprise! (Whoniverse tech

is still a no no, it doesn't work outside an appropriate fused loop.  
Whoniverse people? Less so.)  
>114.8: Extending.<br>114.9: Getting a bit stale.  
>114.10: Wuh-oh.<br>114.11: Sunset needs a belt of genre changing.  
  
>114.12: Worth a try. (Not long after the Daughters loop)<br>114.13:  
Living with derp.

## 121. Chapter 121

### 115.1 (Masterweaver)

\* \* \*

><p>Cynder Awoke (and awoke) in a lavish bedroom, which was her first hint that she wasn't in her own world anymore. The second came when she realized that she was actually in a smaller bed, the larger one currently made up and unoccupied.<p>

Then she realized she was missing her wings.

"AAAAAAA SWEET ANCESTORS-!"

"Cynder?! Hold on, I'm coming up there!"

Loop memories burst into her mind as the clip clop of someone rapidly ascending the stairs hit her ears. By the time the golden unicorn had entered, she'd managed to at least calm down into heavy breathing.  
"I'm okay, Sunset, I... I'm fine, just a scare." Right, not born with wings, didn't get them till later apparently...

Very slowly the unicorn nodded. "Yeah, I know how that feels. Waking Up to something odd can drive me Loopy too."

Cynder froze for a moment, before very slowly meeting the eyes of Sunset Shimmer.

Sunset gave her a quirked brow and a small smile.

"...yeah, especially when you don't have anyone to Anchor you."

"Oh, good," the unicorn sighed in relief, "I didn't know if I was right. Let me guess, you usually have wings?"

"Yeah. Also I'm normally about your size." Cynder stood up and examined herself. "Bipedal, huh?"

"Yeah, that's not too weird is it?"

"No. Yes. Well, it's..." Cynder shrugged helplessly and almost fell over. "Whoa!"

Sunset lit her horn and grabbed her. "Careful! You'll need to balance with your tail for the moment." She steadied the dragoness gently, shaking her head. "I remember my first time on two legs, it was pretty awkward. Anyway, welcome to Equestria."

"Thank you." Another memory surfaced. "You... hatched me this loop, didn't you?"

"Mmmhmm. And Twilight hatched Spike. She's the local anchor."

"Oh. That's good to know." Cynder readied herself and took a few steps forward. "Right. What are the dangers here? I mean, do I need to prepare for any ancient evils, armies, dark magicians...?"

For less than a second, Sunset seemed to frown, her eyes narrowed almost imperceptibly. But the expression was gone in a blink, and the unicorn smiling warmly. "Actually, we've appointed ourselves as a sanctuary loop. It's our duty to make sure that visitors can relax, unwind, and detox from the loops. Most of our ancient evils are reformed and looping anyway, all we need to handle are a few jerks and one or two other situations."

She paused.

"...I just want to be clear on this, though. We want to help, but we don't want to make you uncomfortable. If you ever think we're overstepping our bounds, just let us know and we'll back off."

"We?"

"The local loopers," Sunset clarified. "This is something we take seriously."

Cynder gave her a long look. Eventually, she slumped her shoulders with a sad sigh. "Am I really that obvious...?"

"No. Trust me. I..." Sunset glanced away. "I know what guilt looks like. Feels like."

"...you one of those reformed villains?"

"Yeah, pretty much. We actually have a club... but like I said, neither I nor any other Equestrian looper will force anything."

\* \* \*

><p>115.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Dammit, Ranbow Dasch, shtop being awshome!"<p>

Rainbow blinked, turning to the slurring aqua marine pegasus crashing in for a landing. "Ah... what?"

"You... you jusht. You jusht totally, totally won besht young flyer, and and and and then you rainbooms and your harmony with the dishcord and, and, your fighting changelings and dragons and all that!" The mare stumbled forward, ignoring the frazzling of her goldenrod tail. "I cansht compete! Ish all rainbowsh all tha time and, and..."

She broke down crying.

Rainbow glanced around awkwardly, unable to determine what she was supposed to do. "Uh... I..." Awkwardly she raised a hoof and began patting the sobbing mare. "There there... whoever you are..."

um..."

"Ah!" Berry Punch jumped out of an alleyway. "There she is. Hey, Dash, sorry, Lightning here needed somepony to listen to but she might have had a little too much, ya know, booze."

"Ish truhuhuhuuue!" wailed Lightning. "I'm pathetic!"

The earth pony winced. "Erm. Lightning, you're not pathetic, believe me. You're an awesome mare-"

"Mom and Dad love Rainbow more than me! I suhuhuhuhuck!" The mare gave a huge, snotty sob, and buried her muzzle into the shoulder of an increasingly unnerved Rainbow Dash.

"...Berry, what's she-?"

"Spitfire and Soarin'," Berry explained quickly.

"Oh. Oh! \_Oh\_... Um." Rainbow coughed. "Hey... Lightning... um. Why don't I take you home and... we can... play cloudship?"

"Schniff... I... I feel funny..."

Berry winced again as Rainbow's mane became far less rainbow. "Oh geeze. I'm really sorry, Dash, I-"

"No, it's... it's fine, I can take a shower... Come on, Lightning, let's get you home." The pegasus was visibly keeping herself from flipping out. "It's only a short flight aaaand you're asleep now. Great."

"Tell you what, I'll take her back to the bar and put her in the back room for the night, you go get cleaned up and... we'll figure this all out tomorrow."

"Yeah, that sounds great..." Within seconds, Dash was winging away.

Berry sighed, picking up Lightning Dust and trotting down the street. "I have got to reorganize my pocket. Sober this time..."

\* \* \*

><p>115.3 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I wasn't expecting you here, Cadence!" Twilight gasped, looking at this Loop's Mayor of Ponyville.<p>

"Why not?" the pink alicorn replied. "I rule over the Crystal Empire most Loops, so why shouldn't I be qualified to rule over a small-to-middling sized town like Ponyville?"

"Er... I hadn't thought of it that way," Twilight admitted. "To be honest, my mind is still kind of stuck thinking of you as this love-obsessed-"

"Yes, yes, I know," Cadence sighed. "The joke wore out, and I'm sorry

about taking it too far. But there's more to me than getting married, matchmaking, and using the sheer power of true love to swat down uppity evil husband-stealing bugs with delusions of competence. Er, no offense, sis."

"None taken," a pony absolutely identical in every way to Cadence except for the cutie mark (a heart made out of bug wings) said as she walked past. "I'm off to rehearse the cricket chorus for the Summer Sun Celebration. Back in time for Pinkie's party!"

"Explanations?" Twilight asked, still a bit in shock.

"Apparently Chrysalis was your babysitter, if my Loop memories are accurate," Cadence said. "We both Awoke over breakfast yesterday and compared notes. There's a legend about a lost kingdom in the Badlands that sounds suspiciously familiar." Cadence's smile faded a little as she added, "Also, Shining isn't Awake this time, and Chrys and he are the ones with a... thing... this Loop. Seems I got married to my work."

"Literally?" Twilight had a mental image of Cadence in bridal gown standing next to a tall pile of paperwork wrapped in a tuxedo.

"Figure of speech. I wanted to prove to Celestia that I could handle the responsibility. Anyway, since we haven't heard from Trixie, we agreed to let Chrys go ahead with her relationship with your brother and see what happens."

"Doesn't that bother you?"

"A bit, but not terribly. If your brother were Awake, now that'd be a different story, but the three of us have already had that discussion."

"I... see." Twilight decided to change the subject quickly. "So, how difficult is it to be mayor of Ponyville?"

"Not as difficult as being ruler of a semi-independent city-state," Cadence shrugged. "If it weren't for the frequent disasters and the pervasive insanity running through the town, it'd be a part-time job."

The sound of a large two-stroke engine blocked further conversation. A familiar-looking earth pony, beige coat slightly spattered with pink mane dye, roared past on an enormous motorcycle, tie-dyed blouse flapping in the breeze. "FREE! FREE! I'M FINALLY FREE! A-HAHAHAHAHAHAHA!" Ivory Scroll revved the engine, popped a wheelie, and sped across the stone bridge out of Ponyville and out of sight.

"A job which some ponies apparently handle better than others," Cadence concluded.

\* \* \*

><p>115.4 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Mi Amore Cadenza looked down from her throne at the two petitioners. "It is well known around Canterlot that I am the Princess of Love," she said. "What fewer ponies have recognized is that I am as much a <em>princess<em> as I am a pony gifted with the talent for inspiring love between ponies. This gives me both the power and the responsibility to judge when a rare case arises where love has gone awry. And even fewer ponies are Awake," she said the last word with a definite emphasis, "to the notion that I am just as serious about ending bad relationships as I am about celebrating good relationships.

"In short, we are present today to determine if the good ship Rarishy, for the good of the two ponies involved, needs sinking."

The two ponies in question, standing at separate podiums, shuffled their hooves slightly. Fluttershy was Awake, which explained why she wasn't hiding behind her mane in such a public forum. Rarity, on the other hand, was not Awake this Loop, which explained the absence of Spike and the mascara streaked so heavily that the weeping pony had begun to resemble an equine-cheetah hybrid minus the spots.

"Your Highness," the latter began, "I admit that our relationship has been difficult of late... but Fluttershy was one of my closest friends even before we married! We share so many interests, such as fashion and beauty and haute couture!"

"You just said the same thing twice," Fluttershy whispered.

"I recognize that I haven't been the best pony to live with," Rarity continued, "but I am willing to make any change, any sacrifice to make this relationship work!"

"I'm afraid that just isn't true, Your Highness," Fluttershy interrupted, softly but firmly. "I'm afraid we have irreconcilable differences as regards my animal friends."

"I have no problems with your animal friends," Rarity insisted. "I just rather wish they would... er... remain outside."

"Remember when I asked you for a pretty ribbon for Mrs. Boulevard?"

"You didn't tell me Mrs. Boulevard was a skunk!" Rarity snapped. "And that she was frightened of scissors!"

"Mrs. Boulevard had a very traumatic experience with hedge shears as a pup," Fluttershy replied.

"And I had a very traumatic experience that required two tubs full of tomato juice to remove! But I was a very big pony about it," Rarity insisted, "and I accepted her apology."

"You offended her so terribly that she won't come back to our house!" Fluttershy insisted. "Nor would Mr. Creosote!"

"Mr. Creosote is a wild boar hog," Rarity shouted, "who destroyed my entire workroom because he didn't care for the decor!"

"He disagreed with your dislike for earth tones! And the LANGUAGE you



used to him-!"

"He splashed mud over every available surface! I lost a dozen commissions because I couldn't remake them in time! I believe he deserved the talking-to I gave him!"

"And you made Miss Snifflewuffins CRY!" Fluttershy's shouting was almost as loud as Rarity's now.

"Miss Snifflewuffins is an ELEPHANT!" Rarity threw her forehooves in the air. "She smashed down the front WALL of the Boutique! WHERE this side of Zebrica did you find an-"

Cadence pounded her gavel on the armrest of the throne until both ponies went silent. "Ladies! Ladies! This is a court of Equestria! Please try to maintain some semblance of dignity!"

Fluttershy, taking several deep breaths, turned to face Cadence. "Your Highness, even after I Woke Up-" she said the two words with the same emphasis as Cadence had used earlier, but went on without pausing, "-to the impossible situation, I tried to make the best of it- honest I did. But as much as I love Rarity as a friend- and she still is my friend- we really can't live under the same roof anymore. We're simply too different in our needs."

Rarity sniffled, tears running down her face as Fluttershy gave her a sad but comforting glance.

"I believe I have heard enough to judge this on the merits," Cadence said. "Your attempts to make your relationship work do you both credit, but it is blatantly obvious that neither of you can provide the kind of support the other needs. Rarity needs someone who can appreciate her need for a clean, secure home and work environment, and Fluttershy needs someone who can accept, or at least tolerate, her animal friends despite the difficulty. The two of you were born to be friends, not lifemates... and the bizarre circumstances that resulted in your marriage are enough to make anyone Loopy."

Cadence's horn glowed, and a very large cannon, muzzle pointed straight down, floated into view. "I therefore grant Fluttershy's petition for a no-fault divorce with all property to be restored to its pre-marriage ownership. I hereby declare this ship... sunk." Cadence reached a hoof to the lanyard and yanked it.

The cannon roared, sending its ball straight through the decks. Water began gushing from the hole almost immediately.

"Did we have to BE on the ship for this part?" Rarity shrieked over the noise of witnesses screaming and galloping in terror.

"I wanted to make a statement!" Cadence replied over the rushing water. "It's not all about marriages for me!"

"The next time I have a strange Loop like this," Fluttershy whimpered, "I'm asking Twilight for help."

\* \* \*

Dalxein, FanOfMostEverything, misterq, Hubris Plus, Snakes\_Shadow, KrisOverstreet, Nikas)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight read from the scroll: "Round 17: least impressive feat of the baseline character you were replacing, that you have never been able - not merely unwilling or never given the opportunity or need, but actually unable - to replicate."<p>

Rainbow Dash raised a hoof. "Reaching warp 10 without mechanical aid."

Twilight clarified, "A: I mean, something that the person you were replacing actually did in baseline, and B: aim as low as possible."

Rainbow Dash nodded. "Yup."

Scootaloo spoke for everypony when she said, "Who were you?"

"Jonathan Livingston Seagull."

Twilight coughed. "All right, we have a low bid of 'reaching warp 10 without mechanical aid.' Let's ease our way down... any other not particularly impressively unimpressive worst best performances?"

Spike sighed. "When I was the Little Prince, even after I got rid of the vast majority of my body, I couldn't get back up into space."

A brief silence. Scootaloo said, "Uh, doesn't he die in baseline?"

Rarity put in, "No, not at all! I was the flower one other time besides that one he's referring to. The unawake prince made it back, rather the worse for wear, but quite alive."

Spike added, "To him, it's like Minovia Cay's space program, with unlimited parachutes and steering, but no boosters or launch system. Doable, but hard."

Trixie blushed. "I've been Twilight several times, but I've never been able to put the Ursa Minor back to sleep without help."

Chrysalis (presently appearing as Cadence, who otherwise didn't exist in this variant) reached over and rubbed her head. "Explode-a-bye baby, on the house top. When the bomb blows, the cradle will rock..."

"Come on, I wasn't doing it with explosions. I'm just not that good with kids. What's yours, anyway?"

Chrysalis blushed. "I cannot replicate Wario's umm... Waft."

"Booring. Come on, Dissy, what's yours?"

Discord flopped upward in despair before speaking, "I can't manage even a single turn of Jenga!"

"I... even if you really can't, I think that still counts as not having tried."

Twilight concurred. "We still have a best... worst... a low bid of not being able to put an Ursa Minor to sleep. Gilda?"

Gilda sighed. "Pfeh. Unlike Amaterasu Sensei, I can't walk through town in feudal Japan, and not have anyone so much as glance at me."

Twilight objected, "She does kind of have the species advantage."

"Hey, it fits."

"Hmm. I think it's different enough to not be quite the same. But close enough. And... it's kind of odd to hear you refer to her so formally."

Gilda glanced around rapidly in panic, then laughed nervously. "D-don't be silly! I always refer to her with respect." She then leaned over and put a claw to the side of her mouth. "Stuff it, sparkle butt! She dropped off Chibi earlier, and the last thing I want is Boss thinking I'm a bad influence on her kid!" she hissed, gesturing with a head tilt to a white puppy who had slipped into Fluttershy's group of animal friends, begging for cuddles.

Twilight's eyes lit up. "Wait a moment! That reminds me - I found mine! When I attended Cromartie High, I was not able to maintain the usual masquerade that I was a boy."

Fluttershy offered, "They noticed you were a robot?"

"No. Well, they didn't notice I was a unicorn, but they did notice I was a girl." After a moment, she said, "Actually, I'm not sure that can really be attributed to any success or failure on my part since I took no steps whatsoever to conceal my body type. Let me think some more. Someone has to be able to beat 'concealing self in plain sight as an abnormal species'."

Lyra scowled with the intensity of multiple incensed personalities. "I don't know how Guybrush does it, but my lungs just can't hold ten minutes of air. I had to use seapony magic instead."

"All right. New leader. Can anyone top that?"

Sweetie Belle resignedly said, "I simply can not qualify as a professional Go player."

Rainbow Dash began to object, but checked herself and said, "Yeah. If Lyra had said five minutes, that would be less impressive, but that beats ten."

Pinkie offered, "I can't sit still for an hour at school. How can any pony actually do that!?"

Rarity sighed, "Pinkie, I've seen you spend three hours watching paint dry, after the cloning incident. For fun."

"Hey, it was boring the first time, but by the end I was really getting into it. It's like a soap opera, only without the bubbles and singing! Watching paint dry is actually pretty interesting if you watch it happen on a molecular scale."

"But... wait, were you doing that baseline?"

Her head cocked, and she stared down at the counter. For a moment it seemed she was watching the dew accumulating. "You know, I don't remember."

After a silent moment, Twilight said, "All right. Everypony else? Let's hear 'em. You don't need to beat that."

Apple Bloom offered, "Ah've been every member of the Apple family there is, and Ah've never been able to get through a day of apple bucking without getting covered in tree sap."

Scotaloo - "You know the bit in Cloud City after Vader's dinner party where someone, usually Chewbacca, rebuilds Threepio? I've never been able to get him functioning with the head on backwards."

Silver Spoon stopped drinking from a shake in a glass that would make Escher's eyes water. "I was R. Dorothy Wayneright one time. Do you have any idea how hard it is to leap around like she does in the baseline and not have your skirt flip up?"

That reminded Twilight, and she smiled. "All right, got it. For my own entry... once Pinkie and I replaced Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin, respectively. I didn't find out about this detail until a Hub Loop a long time afterwards, but Mr. Goodwin is an excellent dancer. And I... well... shall I demonstrate?"

A lot of chairs and stools scooted loudly away from Twilight's position, not wanting to be inside flail range.

"All right!" She stopped as the stools scooted back in.

Rainbow Dash got up and threw a hoof over her back just to be sure. "I got a better one. Worse one. Still more awesome than most of those you are all fumbling around with. Whatever. You know that stunt from Top Gun where Maverick pulls up and deploys flaps to force the plane chasing him to overshoot? I can never get that to work out properly."

Scotaloo comforted her, "Not surprised, Dash. It involves slowing down, which isn't part of your vocabulary."

Rainbow Dash demonstrated that she had no difficulty replicating Grubber's trademark raspberry.

Rarity finally said, "Well, mine is a terrible disability. Though it's a perfectly respectable counter-cultural milieu, I can't do true Goth chic. If I loop in as a Goth, I have to settle for ironic Goth, reinterpret the wardrobe, or completely replace it."

Twilight deadpanned, "Our hearts go out to you. Let's see if our

votes do. And... Fluttershy?"

Fluttershy sighed. "There's a book I can't finish."

Rainbow Dash chuckled. "Well, if that counts, I've got a couple billion."

She wailed, "But I want to finish it!" She looked down at the floor. "I can't. It's just too sad."

"Ah. Well, that's everyone. Votes for Fluttershy? Rarity? Pinkie? Anypony else? All right." She marked down the score. "Round eighteen..."

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><p>115.6 (elmagnifico)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Macintosh Awoke in his own bed. That was something of a relief. Waking up in the midst of plowing the south field, where he normally was when Twilight read that one book, wasn't precisely disorienting, but he often lost momentum on the plow and had to start the furrow again, which was a bit of routine annoyance that he could do without.<p>

He yawned, stretched, let the sheets flop off, and sat up, looking about for any indication of the time, of day or year. It was warm, without the drafts associated with the baseline farmhouse during winter. The room was lit only by the beams of a setting moon, so it was about time to get up and start doing the chores. The ticking alarm clock on his headboard served to reenforce this impression.

A "ping" encroached on his mind, that subtle wave of mental hoodoo that was Multiversal for "Anybody awake?". Mac responded in his own way, a psionic nudge from that one loop in Sharona. Practical folk, for the most part, the Sharonans, and his time as a psychic Voice, a human with empathic Talent, had left just enough of an impression on him that he'd adopted it as his method of pinging back. No way of knowing who was inquiring from that little poke though, aside from that they weren't in the house, so he'd have the apple and a muffin for postage in Ditzzy's hooves when she came around with the mail.

Next thing on the agenda was to take stock of Loop Memories. As a later-than-usual start, this was prime opportunity for the Loops to decide to shack the sole looping bachelor up with somepony or other. That was always fun, in the completely sarcastic sense of the word.

Letting down a Significant Other because you'd looped into their paramour's body wasn't easy, and often led to a lot of hurt feelings. Not a problem if they were also Awake, but he didn't always have that luxury. The non-looping Cheerilee was normally accepting, if a tad harder on the students than usual for a bit. Fluttershy would withdraw into herself until one of the other Elements got her going again. Caramel hadn't spoken to anypony for the rest of that Loop. Still, it was better than playing along as something he wasn't.

So far though, it seemed like his unawake self had kept aloof. There was more than the usual conflict with Twilight over that doll, but nothing noteworthy. Just a bit of yelling out the door and an unofficial game of hide-and-seek with the thing.

He looked over at the offending object. There it was, lying on the bed in a curled-up bundle, half in and half out of a moonbeam from the window. He'd taken it the first time just to be cheeky, but had become attached to it because it reminded him of simpler times. Back when Applebloom had curled up on top of his back at night, using him as a self-warming sibling-shaped breathing mattress, to fill the hole where a father might have been.

Since the loops had started, he'd asked for a copy of it from Twilight, and it was one of the few things he would keep in his Pocket. There wasn't much room in there, but he'd made some.

Macintosh sighed. Good and bad, those old times, like the loops. Sometimes, all too rarely, they let him relive those old memories, or even make new ones with his parents, in those few blessed opportunities. Other times, they put him through the grief all over again, and while it didn't sting the same way as it had the first, the dull inevitability of it would saw at his heart each time he had to relive his foalhood days too late to change it.

A rustling startled Mac from his thoughts. That was close. Too close. Not in his sisters' rooms, down the hall and across the way. Certainly not Granny's, which was below him. Definitely not his parents', a dusty memorial which took up most of the rest of the upper floor this loop. It was in the room with him.

In fact, now that he was listening hard, he could hear the breathing, too light and quiet to hear otherwise.

He tensed, and he could feel his determination to protect his family coalescing into a green miasma, a distinct awareness of himself, all his components drawing energy from and falling under the sway of his force of will. Every bit, down to the subatomic particles, Twilight had said when she'd applied science to the effect.

Movement caught the corner of his eye, and he turned to see the dark gray coat, hard to pick out of the shadows without concentrating. The silhouette was further disseminated by the dapples of lighter fur and splotches of different colors. No wonder he hadn't noticed it.

Two eyes, one red and one blue, blinked at him out of the darkness, the moonlight glistening off a little filly's pupils as she uncurled herself from the bundled-up shape she'd been sleeping in, half in and half out of the moonlight.

"You okay daddy?"

Fewmets.

"Daddy, you're looking at me funny."

Macintosh decided, for once, that the chores could wait. This would be dealt with in the light of day, or perhaps the loop would end prematurely, or something. Maybe this loop's version of himself had

hallucinations from time to time. This might just be a dream. It was not outside the realm of possibility that somepony was playing a distinctly tasteless joke. In any case, he had one word for how much he wanted to come to terms with the little one on the edge of his bed. Perhaps it wasn't grammatically correct, but it was how he wished to respond.

And so, he flopped back onto the pillow, switched off the alarm, and tried his best to go back to sleep.

Part of that trying included ignoring the petite hooves clambering up his side, onto his exposed back. An attempt was made to disregard the miniature circle those hooves walked in, turning around after a minute poofy tail that tickled him as it went, before their owner curled up in a small disk of warm, empirically present filly. Further effort was expended to limit the attention paid to the little voice.

"I love you daddy."

Was any of it successful?

Eeno.

\* \* \*

><p>115.7<p>

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

"TWILIGHT TIME! TWILIGHT TIME! TWILIGHT TIME!"

The chanting foals pressed in around the cutie mark crusaders, who were desperately trying to come up with something, anything.

"TWILIGHT TIME! TWILIGHT TIME! TWILIGHT TIME!"

"YOOOOOOOooooooooou asked for it!" shouted a voice as something slithered out of the hedge. "And now, I, THE NOBLE DISCORD, will deliver!"

He snapped his talons, and the sun hopped just below the horizon as stars twinkled in the sky.

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia sighed. "Discord... the foals were referring to Twilight <em>Sparkle.</em>"

"But the stars are shimmering in quite a lovely way!"

"No, Discord, I meant my student. Former student. The new princess. Bearer of magic."

The draconequus tapped his chin thoughtfully. "That's not ringing a bell."

"Oh! Sorry." As if on cue, Twilight Sparkle appeared with a black case and a fold out table. "I didn't mean to be late." She opened the case and arranged a selection of handbells.

"Ah, yes, now I remember her!" Discord grinned. "So what you're saying is that they wanted Twilight to be a clock?"

"Please don't turn me into a clock," Twilight asked casually, partway through her rendition of Smile Smile Smile. "I'm already a little cuckoo as is."

"Yes, I did notice you nesting in the library."

Celestia looked between them. "Wait, is this... is this some sort of joke?"

"My dear Tia, of course not!" Discord spread his arms wide. "Jokes require punchlines, and as you can see there is no punch."

"Hey guys, I brought the punch." Spike sidled through the door, carrying a bowl of liquid. "I gotta say, I'm surprised there are no lines."

"Well of course there's no lines, Spike, this is improv!" Twilight rolled her eyes. "Silly dragon."

\* \* \*

><p>115.6 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Well, this was a fine kettle of apples and fish, and no mistake.<br>Macintosh ambled towards town, the tiny gray filly bouncing around his legs as he went, forcing him to be incredibly careful as to where he put those feet of his. That she insisted on repeating the same words over and over only made it slightly more troublesome.

He was now quite positive that incident with the filly had not, in fact, been a dream. When he'd woken up, she was still curled up there on his back, clear as day. Which meant he had to actually deal with the situation.

When he'd awoken, lower case A, a thorough check of his loop memories for an explanation had turned up nothing. It simply wasn't physically possible for this little bundle of gray to be his offspring. Nor had his non-looping self been interacting with her, so it wasn't like she'd been adopted. Dabbling in arcane magics that could bring a doll to life was similarly unlikely. That Macintosh would have been just as lost as he was.

The problem had stumped him.

The initial best-fit explanation had been a prank. No pings had been returned from inside the house this morning, and none of the other signals they'd worked out between them had been reciprocated, but that only meant none of them chose to respond.

On the one hoof, Applejack was right out. This wasn't her style. You



didn't mess with family on this level. Pranks from her would be up-front and very straightforward, like making acid out of potatoes. He'd know an Applejack prank when he saw it, and by then it would be too late. This one, if it was a prank, was a bit too subtle for the elder of his two sisters.

On the other, Applebloom could have made an android, but that didn't seem likely. The filly here gave off all the visible indicators of life. More importantly, she felt real. There were androids, and then there were people.

Macintosh smirked. That had led to an amusing line of thought when he'd first considered the idea. If the filly was one of Applebloom's creations, his sister would be getting a talking to about making new life without getting married first.

Living more years, hooley. He was still the first-born, which by his reckoning made him eldest and responsible for that sort of lecture, unless he brought Granny Smith into it. Loops or no loops, there were some traditions that ought to be stuck to, and he'd expect any other Apple to have the same sort of expectations.

He turned to the little one. She didn't even look like an Apple. No cutie mark, obviously, but he'd only seen relatives with this diverse and drab a color scheme in gag loops where every pony and their mother was an Apple.

But no, that was irrelevant. The filly wasn't discernibly a robot. The explanation for this seemed actually far plainer, between the unusual awakening time, memories devoid of this new individual, and a certain item missing from his room.

He'd be going to see Twilight regardless, if only to discuss what the anchor had planned, but most the most telling piece of evidence came from the foal's incessant, squeaky chanting.

Before that fateful loop, when he'd been discovered, and for a little bit after that, he might have suspected a prank or something more malicious. By now though, having spent a thousand years as her sibling, and more as her friend, he felt he could eliminate that possibility. And it was hardly fair to blame Twilight the Looper for the actions of her un-awake self.

So onward Mac trudged, the little filly's incriminating mantra ringing in his ears.

"We're going to go see mommy, we're going to go see mommy!"

\* \* \*

><p>115.8 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight again stared at the beaten, battered, and utterly defeated form of King Sombra surrounded by the armed and dangerous citizens of the Crystal Empire. The citizens who, just a few hours prior, were so scared of Sombra that they couldn't even be coaxed into <em>remembering<em> him. Then she turned to the sheepish looking Fluttershy and the armored mouse perched in her hair.

"Okay, what just happened?" she asked her friend.

"Well," Fluttershy began, "it all started when I met my new friend Mighty here. You see, he wanted a cookie and he looked so cute and sweet and hungry that I decided to give him one..."

\* \* \*

><p>115.6 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The front door of the Ponyville Public Library, as it was known this loop, creaked open at its librarian's behest to reveal Macintosh Apple and a small filly, gray and blue with white spots and two mismatched eyes.<p>

"Got a problem Twilight, an' a hunch you might be able to help me with it."

He gestured at the little one, who was bouncing up and down beside him on the doorstep.

Twilight regarded the filly, head cocked curiously. Mac followed his friend's gaze to the little one, who chirped,

"Hi mommy!"

When Mac looked back to the Anchor, her face had shifted to the universally-recognizable unamused-parent-look.

"Nyxine Sapphire Sparkle, you have ten seconds to explain yourself. You know better than to prank Macintosh without running it by me first."

Macintosh mentally kicked himself. He'd forgotten about Nyx. Then the second of Twilight's sentences hit home, and one of his eyebrows raised. Further comment was cut off by the clap of a teleport, and a whining voice from behind the Anchor.

"Moooooooooooooooooom. You know that's only my full name some loops."

Twilight looked from the first filly, who had retreated behind Macintosh's front legs, to her looping daughter, and back. Her horn began to glow, even as nightmare incarnate continued in a sleepy-sounding ramble.

"I only just Woke Up, anyway. What's the big deal? Did Mac open those Klingon spirits I asked him to hold until the next loop with Leman? They were only supposed to go off if Rushie-"

The small voice was interrupted by a booming pink shockwave that emanated from Twilight's horn and washed out over the town, sending half of Fluttershy's animal friends scrambling for cover, deflating Pinkie's first souffle of the day, dislodging Rarity's ceiling-high stack of mane care products, inadvertently dropping one in five apples on Applejack's half of the Acres, and causing Rainbow Dash to turn over and bash her alarm clock, which for once didn't deserve it.

Its only effect on both ponies on the doorstep was to muss their manes a bit. Twilight observed this, and gave voice to a two-word comment.

"Oh. Ginko."

Macintosh raised an eyebrow.

"What was that supposed ta do?"

He could see his friend going into lecture mode, even as she looked the filly over.

"That was a wide-angle illusion, mirror duplicate and shadow clone disruptor. It only dispels the really simple glamours, but it should have at least made her flicker."

Twilight looked up and addressed him.

"She's flesh and blood, isn't she."

Macintosh may have been fooled thus far, but figured it couldn't hurt to double check. He took a forehoof and gently booped the filly, which got a giggle. Still seemed pretty solid.

"Eeyup."

Twilight sighed.

"Well, that explains what my unawake self was doing with Shelle's Spelle Booke until four in the morning. Apparently in this variant it's possible to pull a full-fledged Pinocchio gambit if you have the right cantrips and enough pow-"

"Eeek!"

All four ponies were distracted by a clearly-terrified changeling tearing its way across the square, followed closely by a large-eyed, grinning and evidently unawake Lyra, whose cries echoed in the still-sleepy village streets.

"IknewyouwererealIknewitIknewitIknewit!"

The two adults remained transfixed for a moment. Macintosh instinctively covered the filly's ears, as the chittering from a panicked changeling did not bear repeating, but Twilight was the first to more-or-less recover.

"Should we-"

"Ah'm not sure."

Nyx looked up from waving at the filly behind Macintosh's legs.

"Nah. She'll be fine, from what my memories as an existential concept tell me, Lyra's just obsessed with general cryptology this loop. Even if she does catch Bon-bon, the worst that'll happen is a net, an involved discussion of biology, some light petting, and

coffee."

Macintosh blinked. That sounded plausible, if a little specific. He remained transfixed by the odd sight, at least until a quiet rumbling emanated from somewhere near his foot. Twilight smiled.

"Why don't you come in, and we'll discuss this over breakfast."

Mac nodded. His friend's suggestion was a good one. The sooner this was straightened out, the better, and food could only help. Twilight gave a slightly harried look, and then turned in the direction of the tree's kitchen.

"Hey Spike! Mix batter for another batch of pancakes, we've got guests!"

Macintosh stepped to follow, but found his other hoof wrapped in diminutive female.

"Daddy, why was mommy angry? Did I do something wrong?"

The wide, mismatched doe-eyes dredged up old memories again, of a little yellow one who'd curled possessively around his leg like that after a thunderclap or a creak from the house settling on its foundation. Mac shook his head, in an attempt to both reassure the filly and shove the association aside.

"She weren't angry, just surprised. Weren't nothing you did, or she did. We're just gonna have a bit of a talk. Now come on, we wouldn't wanna miss the pancakes, now would we."

A miniscule pink tongue licked at grey lips, the whole head shook back and forth rapidly, and its owner dashed inside. The clatter of tiny hooves was drowned out and interrupted as Bon-bon's panicked chittering went by in another direction.

"Daddy, what's a fewmet?"

Mac sighed, and pulled the door closed behind him. Just when he thought this loop was making sense.

\* \* \*

><p>115.9 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Now, Scrapper, remember: most ponies are a little more delicate than you, so try to be careful around the other foals."<p>

"Okay Momma."

"And if you have any questions or trouble, just come to me-" Apple Bloom cut herself off as she came in sight of the schoolhouse and spotted a familiar purple pony. "Howdy miss Cheerilee! Could ya come over here for a sec?"

The schoolmarm smiled as she turned to look at her student. "Oh, hello Apple \_what.\_"

"Yeah..." Apple Bloom coughed awkwardly. "This is Scrapper. Long story short, a bit o' construction equipment touched an alien box and bing bang zoom Ah've adopted tha biggest metal child ya've ever seen."

"Momma loves me." Scrapper smiled happily at the still blank-faced Cheerilee. "That's a good thing!"

"Awwwww." The yellow filly nuzzled the giant robot's ankle. "Ain't he a charmer?"

"...quite," Cheerilee managed.

"See, tha thing is, Ah'm kinda still a filly and all. Ah mean Ah'm getting help from Macintosh, but... well, there's school and getting ta play with other foals..." Apple Bloom twirled a hoof. "Ah was wondering if he could sit in on class today, just as a test you know?"

"I... don't know if he'll fit into the building," Cheerilee pointed out.

"Well, it's a nice day. Maybe we could hold class outdoors?"

Cheerilee bit her lip, looking into the innocently smiling face of a robot six times her size. "...weeeeeell. We can try it for a week, I suppose, but I should probably send for some... homeschooling material."

\* \* \*

><p>115.6 continued<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The pancakes had been delicious.<p>

It was a small thing, unsurprising really. Spike was a decent cook, even when he wasn't Awake, and pancakes were hardly the pinnacle of culinary difficulty. Macintosh relished the normalcy of that fact nonetheless. By the looks of things, normal was going to be in short supply this loop. Just now, for instance, he was resting on a couch in Twilight Sparkle's library, watching two fillies at play. Not all that unusual, until you considered the fillies' origins.

One was the Spirit of Darkness incarnate, adopted as a daughter by the most powerful entity in Mac's universe, who also happened to be his friend occupying the easy chair, watching as well.

"So she says her name is Smarty Pants?"

"Eeyup."

The other, up until the wee hours of last night, had been a doll that his unawake self had stolen from said entity, and that he himself kept around in a bit of nowhere he'd carved out.

"I realize this is my unawake self's fault. If you like, I can have her stay here at the library. It'll practically be a baseline loop

for you."

You could tell it by looking. The little one giggling on the floor being tickled had the same matted mane and tail, like strings of yarn sewed into a plush. Hindquarters were both unmarked, but still bore the telltale dark blue patches and white spots.

"Reversing the spell is, of course, out of the question."

Yet, the reality of the filly was equally undeniable. Her boundless energy, little legs pinwheeling as she raced around the spacious library after Nyx, the glimmer in those mismatched eyes, each was as real as in any of the youngsters Macintosh had ever seen. This was a real little pony, one that considered him her father.

"'course. But she'll stay with me. Y'all've got enough on yer plate."

There was responsibility and duty there, and emotion was tied up in it too, but he could also sense a feeling there, deeper than morality or simple psychology. Love was a familiar bond. A bond with something that would be gone in a few years when the world reset. Not replaced by a younger version with no memories of the intervening time, just gone. And, despite rhyme or reason, he could feel himself caring.

It was going to hurt.

"So how do y'all deal with it? Ah mean, ah've dealt with mah sisters resetting. Never had a kid before. Suppose Ditzzy or Berry would know too, on account of their baseline, but you've been awake the most out of all of us..."

Twilight sighed.

"It's... Well, I think those mares have it worse in a way, with kids that are unawake. Nyx is really only 'here' when she's Awake. I've only felt I lost her the once."

The two little ones streaked by in a blur, batting a ball back and forth in a game with no particular rhyme or reason to it.

"Sometimes, the loops have given me children besides Nyx. When they're not somepony Awake, I do my best."

She giggled, and Macintosh thought he heard an echo in Smarty Pants' laugh.

"I have a whole album of Celestia and Luna as rambunctious little fillies. Times like that, they're something to remember."

The two little ones flopped in the middle of the library, apparently exhausted from the activity. After a few moments though, the crayons came out, and some helpless coloring book found itself victim to a haphazard rainbow of wax.

"Just enjoy the time you get together, be the best you can for them, and then treasure the memories. That's all normal parents get to do with their kids anyway."

He nodded. That was what he'd done for each of the innumerable versions of his sisters and grandmother. Treasure, help, remember, and try to do better next time.

"Dddr?"

Mac looked down. His daughter was sitting on the floor in front of him, holding a rolled-up piece of paper. He took it and unrolled it on one of the couch's arms.

The sheet had been vigorously inundated with colored wax, but there were discernible shapes in the chaos. Mostly in that in the middle there was an area that was largely red and orange, another that was predominantly gray and blue, a third made up of purple and pink, and a final one that was black and purple. Green festooned the top of the paper, and a brown region extended down into a second area of green. The bottom was a light blue, with a large yellow circle dominating the bottom right corner.

"It's you, me, mommy, and Nyx!"

Macintosh turned the picture so that it was rightways-up. Well, that at least made a little more sense.

"You like it?"

He made a note to ask Twilight for one of those albums. Maybe later though, when there wasn't any water in his eyes.

"Eeyup."

\* \* \*

><p>115.10 (AnonymousAskfractalman collaboration)

\* \* \*

><p>Nyx and Sweetie Belle made puppy dog eyes at each-other, surrounded by several unconscious adults...including Princess Celestia.<p>

"Maybe Twilight can help us decide?" queried Sweetie.

"Yeah, let's go find mommy!" replied Nyx.

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight, Twilight!" panted Applebloom, "Ya gotta help, Nyx and Sweetie...well ya gotta stop 'em!"<p>

"Stop them from what, Applebloom?"

Just then, Nyx and Sweetie showed up.

"Momma, momma! I'm the cutest, right?" said Nyx.

"No I'm the cutest!" pouted Sweetie.

"Um, girls?" asked Twilight, who made the mistake of looking straight at the power of puppy-dog eyes.

"Please mommy, please tell me I'm the cutest!" whined Nyx

"I know she's your daughter, but you gotta remain impartial! I'm the cutest!" demanded Sweetie.

The cuteness was too much, and Twilight Sparkle collapsed.

The two fillies looked at each other.

"You think Discord will be able to withstand our cuteness?"

\* \* \*

><p>115.11 (Gamerex27)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke in a laboratory set up in her tree's basement, soldering a final wire into a colossal machine. According to her Loop memories this time around, she had been working on a magical telescope shaped suspiciously like the Hubble, and she had just made the final step in getting it functional.<p>

A quick ping, followed by an element check, confirmed that the only other pony Awake was most likely Applejack. In fact, the ping came from very close by-

THOOM.

The earth shook, and Twilight briefly flew into the air from the massive tremors. "What the hay was that?!"

THOOM. THOOM. THOOM. THOOM.

The impacts repeated at regular intervals, almost as if they were hoofsteps. As she walked up the stairs, Twilight could already hear the entire town panicking, followed by the telltale thunder of a stampede. Which was still drowned out by whatever was making those tremors.

THOOM. THOOM. THOOM. THOOM.

CRAAAAASH!

The door was sent flying off its hinges by a massive impact. Without even thinking, Twilight conjured a shield into existence, and the shrapnel and splinters bounced harmlessly off.

"Oops," said a voice which came from outside. Odd, considering that no one was at the door. "Sorry, sugarcube."

Hesitantly, Twilight sent out another Ping, and was answered by an echo mere feet away. "Applejack? What's going on? Where are you?"

Squinting, she could see the faint blue-ish outline of a pony standing on her front porch. The Element of Honesty rubbed her head sheepishly with a hoof. "Sorry. Ah Woke up like this, and Ah fell right through ta the mantle. Ah've been using all my Earthbending ta



get back up and make sure Ah don't fall through the ground again."

"Must be another Gag Loop," the Anchor sighed. "But what could cause..wait there a moment."

In a flash of light, Twilight teleported out of sight, and returned seconds later with the telescope. Wheeling it out the doorhole, she aimed it at the stars and adjusted the lenses to focus on a specific point. One cast of a spell to help the telescope see in the day, and she found what she was looking for.

She looked out towards Applejack's outline, then back in the telescope, then back again. She sighed again, comprehension dawning on her face.

"Applejack, for whatever reason, it looks like you're made out of dark matter in this Loop."

"Great. How am Ah supposed'ta buck apples if Ah break everythin' Ah touch?" A sigh came from the outline, and it flopped onto the ground, making a massive crater at the point of impact. "Ah wish Mac was Awake. Ah need some cider, now."

\* \* \*

><p>115.12 (Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Ho hum...another baseline loop<em>, thought Twilight as she and Spike disembarked from the chariot in Ponyville. She didn't have anything planned and was going more or less on autopilot until inspiration struck. Her element scan had picked up one Kindness, and she absently wondered if any of that trio had anything interesting in the works.

Near the outskirts of the town, on the way to Sweet Apple Acres, she was approached by an ill-at-ease Bonbon.

"Excuse me? You're Twilight Sparkle, right?" asked the cream-coated earth pony.

"Yes, I am. Can I help you?"

"Yeah...I'm Bonbon and...Um...Aren't you supposed to be a princess?"

"What?" \_Oh bark. I hope that doesn't mean what I think it does...\_

"Just that I remember you giving the town a tour of your new palace a few days back, and then I woke up this morning to find no gigantic crystalline tree, the library back to normal, and you arriving in a Royal Canterlot chariot."

\_Huh. Well, I suppose Lyra might be happy about this, and Pinkie'd certainly be delighted to throw a "Yay! New Equestrian Looper!" party.\_

"What is she talking about, Twilight?" asked Spike. "Do you know her?"

\_Okay. I need to distract Spike so I can get a private word with the newbie.\_

Turning back to Bonbon, she said, "Look. I think I know what's happening, but it will take some time to explain. Can you meet me at the library in about ten minutes?"

"I guess so."

The unicorn made an about-face and started back toward Town Hall.  
\_Rarity, please forgive me for this afternoon...\_

\* \* \*

><p>Fifteen minutes into the "Welcome to the Multiverse" presentation, the small nagging feelings that had been building up finally crystallized into a solid suspicion. "You're taking this amazingly calmly," Twilight observed.<p>

"Am I?"

"Yes. Are you sure you've never been exposed to this material before?"

"Um..."

"It's just that most newbies I show this material to express more shock or disbelief."

"Really?"

"You, on the other hoof, seem just a tad bored, as if you're not only familiar with the topic, but have seen this specific presentation before." The unicorn fired off a low-powered spell.

"Drat. You got me," admitted the now exposed Chrysalis. "So much for that spur-of-the-moment prank."

"Don't feel too bad. You did get me to ditch Spike and start the lecture, after all. If you did this without any prep work, it was a very good try."

"I'd hoped to make it to the end of the presentation at least."

"Y'know. If you want to try this again, I'm willing to help. I have this idea about waiting for Celestia, Rarity and maybe Luna to be Awake. Then at the Grand Galloping Gala, you can play a confused Blueblood..."

\* \* \*

><p>115.13 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke to a thin sliver of light. She tried widening her

eyes and found she couldn't. She tried moving closer to the light, and while the pattern of colors and gradients changed, it grew no wider. She tried reaching out with a foreleg and found she had none to speak of.<p>

Then the Loop memories hit, and had she been able to, T. Square would've facehoofed. "Oh. Flatland. And this either a Variant or a gender swap, given that I'm not a line segment."

Sheâ€| yes, yes she was a she. In any case, she oscillated about her center, for lack of a head to shake. "Alright. So long as I don't write something questioning the orthodoxy of two-dimensional space, this should be fairly interesting." She sent off a ping and noted that it seemed to fading much more slowly than usual. "I suppose the inverse-square law is just an inverse law here, isn't it? Well, that's a discovery already!"

Twilight reflexively tried to pull a notebook out of her pocket, only to shudder as it jammed against the edge of the subspace. "What theâ€| Of course. Trying to pull a 3D object into 2D space isn't going to work well. Guess I'll just have to remember everything."

"I'm sure you can handle it, Twilight."

The Anchor spun, trying to find the source of the other voice. "Hello?"

A bright dot appeared in Twilight's vision, then began to expand. The gradual dimming along its edges suggested a circle. An inexplicably expanding circle. And with that voiceâ€| "Let me guess. Spherelestia?"

"Got it in one. Care to go on a tour? I think the king of Pointland may be Loop-aware."

Twilight smiled as best as anatomy and geometry allowed her. "Sounds like fun to me!"

\* \* \*

><p>115.14 (Gamerex27)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So, what happens in this Loop?" Rarity looked around at the vast city of Tokyo, scowling slightly as that tacky headphones' cord got in her line of sight.<p>

"In a few hours, demons start invading the city like crazy," replied Atsuro, the Anchor of the Lockdown Amala Loop. "People can use these COMPS," he said, holding up a device that looked suspiciously like a Nintendo 3DS, "to summon and control them. Then the military locks down the whole city."

Rarity could take it no longer: she tore those accursed headphones off of her head, dropping them to the ground. "Is there any way to cut this short?" she asked. "I think I felt my sister's Element, and I want to track her down before she gets into any trouble."

Atsuro grimaced at this. "Then she's probably replacing Naoya-that's the older brother of my buddy you're replacing. He's the reincarnation of Cain, and he made the Summoning Program as part of this gambit to get revenge against God." He removed a drone from his Pocket, tweeting a command to it through his COMP. It flew off, presumably in search of Sweetie. "To stop the lockdown, you have to beat all the Bel demons, and then kill Babel to become the King of Bel. Otherwise, the whole city gets destroyed, since that's the only way to get rid of the lockdown. Well, the best way: Yoocho gets mad when we take the more unorthodox methods, since they lead to more explosions."

Rarity quirked her (thankfully real this time) eyebrow.  
"Bels?"

"They're a bunch of demons that were the pieces of this big demon, killed thousands of years ago. They've all got Bel in their name, and whichever one kills all the other Bels can become the King."

Suddenly, Rarity groaned, holding her head in her hands.

"What's wrong?" Atsuro asked.

"I know why I'm here now," Rarity groaned. " It's another Gag Loop. My full name is Rarity Belle."

The Anchor tried to stifle his laughter, and failed. "Yeah, that would explain it," he said after composing himself. "You're replacing Kazuya, who's the reincarnation of Abel, and since he's a Bel..."

Rarity **\*\*Bel\*\***le sighed again, facepalming. If only she could Ascend this Loop to just end it now. This was going to become annoying. Especially if she couldn't find anything better to wear than the mind-numbingly plain clothes the Loop saw fit to put her in.

\* \* \*

><p>115.15 (OracleMask)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was contentedly humming to herself as she went over the pile of checklists in front of her. They took up quite a lot of counter space at the bar, but as she telekinetically moved them out of the way whenever Mac needed, he couldn't complain. After an hour of this, Mac decided to act on his growing curiosity.<p>

"Planning something?" he asked.

Twilight took a moment to blink before remembering where she was.

"Oh, just trying to figure out future drinking game rounds for the next loop when everypony is Awake," she admitted, "I like having some ideas on standby, but I think we might have done all the obvious ones. And these ones are kind of...well..."

Mac accepted the list that Twilight hoofed him and read it.

"They're mostly too simple or boring," Twilight finished.

That was true, the list included several very simple ideas: 'Most Unusual Color', 'Shortest-and/or-Longest Loop Duration', and so on. Not that a group of happily drunk ponies wouldn't enjoy these rounds of the game as much as the others, but Twilight clearly wasn't satisfied.

Mac spotted the title of another checklist as he hoofed this one back, and it raised an eyebrow.

"'Bad Ideas'?" he asked, taking a look at that one next.

Reading the list raised Mac's other eyebrow as well. 'Most Issues When Replacing Pinkie Pie'? 'Most Unsuccessful Loop'? 'Worst Loop Visited Aside From Eiken'? Enope, not the best ideas here. Though one or two had a little promise.

"What about this one?" Mac asked, pointing at one further down the list.

"'Most Practical Power From A Fused Loop' is too subjective," Twilight replied, "I mean, for Sunset it's probably her Keyblade, for Spike it would have to be the Force, for other ponies it might be even more basic things like magic or chakra. I suppose if I specified it to be a minor power, then maybe..."

Twilight trailed off. Mac had pulled a bottle of apple cider out from below the bar, and was staring at it. Then, with a sudden glow of his eyes, the cap of the bottle popped off. Mac proceeded to pour the cider into a glass, only noticing Twilight's bemused expression when he passed the drink to her.

"Got that from a loop as 'Strong Mac'," Mac admitted, sounding a tad sheepish, "Only works t'open bottles, so there's no use for it outside the bar."

Twilight nodded, then quietly crossed 'Most Practical Power' off the list entirely. Back to the drawing board...

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

115.1: Oh, dragon.

>115.2: White Lightning Dust.<br>115.3: The Mayor is off to Burning Stallion.

>115.4: Not love crazy. Still crazy full stop.<br>115.5: The most bizarre mental blocks.

>115.6: This is going to be absolutely pants.<br>115.7: Creative misinterpretation.

>115.8: When you give a mouse a cookie, things kind of snowball.<br>115.9: See previous chapter.

>115.10: Competition.<br>115.11: This explains physics.

>115.12: Psyche.<br>115.13: With apologies to E. .

>115.14: Badum-tish.<br>115.15: The administration is quite a lot of work.

116.1 (Zetrein)

\* \* \*

><p>"...And I know for absolute certain, that everything..." The purple pony on the screen sang. Gloaming Glimmer softly sang along with herself, still thinking about what happened at the convention that afternoon. Was this really her life? Was she just a washed-up actress, from a beloved, but cancelled, show? Did she really have nothing else?<p>

"Pegasus body double wasn't even close to my body shape." She muttered, as she opened a new bottle. "Had to wear that silly dress to cover it up."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight woke up, in multiple meanings of the term, on her living room floor. Her name this loop was Gloaming Glimmer, she had a hangover, there were empty bottles on her table, and somepony was knocking on the window.<p>

Looking up, Twilight flinched at the light streaming in. As she tried to cast a hangover cure, she could just barely make out a white pony standing on her patio. The pony gestured to her door.

Somehow staggering across the room, Twilight opened the door, now recognizing the frowning face of her friend. "Rarity?"

"Oh, Gloamy..." Twilight noticed she didn't speak with Rarity's accent. The mare, her memories now giving the correct name of Crystal Song, stepped up to hug her. "Gloamy, I'm sorry none of us followed you after you blew up yesterday. Judging by the smell, you could have used a friend last night."

Moving to her side, Crystal started helping Twilight walk towards the kitchen. Moving inside, away from the painful light, Twilight stopped squinting so much, and saw more differences between Crystal and Rarity. The most noticeable was how she wore her mane, a short braid that barely reached her shoulder.

"We're lucky I decided to drop by early, we still have a couple hours until that throwaway job. Here, take a seat, let's get you sobered up a bit, kk?" Setting her at the kitchen table, Crystal set a glass of water in front of her, then set about nosing through her kitchen.

"We're all worried about you, Gloamy." She addressed Twilight, pulling out a pot and a container of oatmeal. "Even setting aside that we didn't go after you yesterday, we've been worried you're starting to slip into a real funk." The pot on the stove, water heating, she turned to look at Twilight directly. "So I was thinking, after this gig Bright Eyes got us, how about we cut the autographs short, and go out somewhere? Just the seven of us."

Crystal looked down, with a sad smile. "Heh, if that silly drake was still alive, it'd almost be like old times."

They didn't talk much after that. Aside from a reply ping, Twilight's breakfast quietly passed by.

\* \* \*

><p>"Take it from us, we've been all over Equestria." Crystal Song said, smiling out to the crowd.<p>

"But we've never seen such wonderiffic values as we've seen here, at..." Surprise continued, exactly on cue as usual.

"Tech Value Electronics Superstore!" Twilight finished.

There was a moment of silence, before Crystal nudged Prism. With a distinctly unenthused voice, she said her line. "This store is at least twenty percent cooler."

\* \* \*

><p>"...I mean, I get that it's <em>my line</em>, but seriously, do I have to use it every time?" The blue pegasus griped, as they walked down the road.

As it turned out, Bright Eyes, one of the show's writers, had been Ditzzy. The rest of her friends, who were the actors that played her friends, were an interesting bunch.

"I kinda know the feeling, Pris. I mean, everypony expects me to do all this wacky stuff, not knowing that I had CG, bluescreens, and about twenty stage hands to pull it off." Surprise was strange to Twilight, in that she was almost normal; a Pinkie Pie that obeyed the laws of physics.

"It's yer own fault for ad-libbin' that line, Wings." Posey, meanwhile, was nothing like the character she portrayed. A cheerful, outgoing mare, a nickname for everypony on the show. Like Crystal, she used a different 'voice' in character, and sounded almost as country as AJ out of it.

Meanwhile, staying silent in the back of the group was Velvet Apple, B-list actor by day, persimmon farmer by weekend. Like Pinkie, she was very close to the pony Twilight knew. Originally brought in by a writer for insight into farm life, she ended up as Applejack after test-reading a few lines for her friend in front of the right pony.

\* \* \*

><p>Hours later, the seven of them sat around a table at some pub Crystal knew about. They had eaten dinner, then just spent their time drinking and reminiscing about, as Prism put it, that time they all had jobs.<p>

In a lull in the conversation, Ditzzy caught Twilight's attention, before giving her a wink. At least, she thought that was what it was. Hard to tell, sometimes.

"Say, there's something I've been meaning to bring up." Ditzzy addressed the table. "Just say, if we could get funding for a season four, would you do it?"

Before anypony could answer, the lights flickered. "Hm? Hope the power don't go out, be annoying to get through my apartment in the dark." Posey turned her attention back to the table." Anyway, I think I'd-"

**\*\*CRACK\*\***

Everything went dark. All the sound around them, the background noise of the crowded pub, all cut out, just for a moment. Then, they were back in the pub.

"Wh-what was that?" Prism asked, wide-eyed and clearly rattled.

"I don't kn-" Twilight had started to say as she stood, only to be interrupted by it happening again.

**\*\*CRACK\*\***

Once again, they were in the void. The unicorns lit their horns, checking on everypony at the table, before trying to make out their surroundings. Aside from the table, chairs, and even the floor of the pub, the world around them seemed to be an empty void.

"Does anypony feel that wind?" Velvet asked, prodding the void with her chair.

Twilight tried to feel where this wind came from, even going so far as to flick her tail over the edge of the platform. "It's coming from below us."

"There's a light down there." Ditzzy, meanwhile, had just stuck her head off the edge, while everypony was watching Twilight.

Seeing Ditzzy had kept her head, they all ended up taking peeks of various lengths. In the far distance below them was a pinprick of light, swiftly growing larger. While Ditzzy kept watch, the six of them tried to come up with a plan.

Well, Twilight tried to come up with a plan, the others were in various states of panic, save for Surprise. Surprise had just gone back to the table, to finish her drink.

Planning, panicking, and panicked planning, were all cut short when Ditzzy dove for the table shouting. "Brace for impact!"

Most of them had enough time to process what she had said, before everything went white.

**\*\*CRACK\*\***

As their vision cleared, they found themselves in a cave. Surrounding their patch of pub, was a massive hexagram, carved into the stone. Different places were inscribed with words, though they couldn't make them out from where they stood.

What they could make out, in the torchlight, were the dozens of robe-wearing ponies staring at them.

It was Posey that broke the silence. "Well, that's a whole new set of



problems, innit?"

\* \* \*

><p>116.2 (FanOfMostEverything)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The entrance to Golden Oaks slammed shut. Twilight galloped up the basement stairs to see why.<p>

There she beheld a furious Rarity, face flushing, tail lashing, and horn sparking. "That, that..." Rarity gave a noise that was part scream, part groan. "THAT!"

Twilight carefully approached her, making no sudden moves. "Talk to me, Rarity. That what?"

Rarity heaved a few deep breaths in and out before she could compose herself enough to respond. In a voice far more collected than her expression, she asked, "Do you remember our last Loop together, Twilight?"

"Um... You mean the one where we just played mental chess?"

Rarity boggled at Twilight for a moment. "The one where we played mental chess. That's what stood out to you? The chess?"

This got a shrug. "Not the first time I've been a nebula."

"Yes, well." Rarity's voice adopted a sweetness on the edge of sanity. "Do you recall what I was, perchance?"

Twilight nodded. "A supermassive black hole. Good thing telepathy doesn't care about gravity, huh?"

"And did you perhaps share this fact with our other Awake friends at some point?"

"Well, I thought it was interrRainbow Dash made fun of you, didn't she?" Twilight groaned. "I'm sorry, Rarity, I didn't even think about that."

"Not a problem, not a problem!" Rarity's pupils had contracted to pinpricks. "I'm sure one day in the far, far future, when she calls me 'Singurarity,' I will join in her laughter. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to go dust off my weather magic." She pranced off, head held high.

Twilight sighed. There was really only one appropriate reaction to this. "Losing a friend's trust is the fastest way to lose a friendâ€" "

"FOREVER! "

"Hi, Pinkie." Easiest summoning ritual she ever learned. "I need you to tell Fluttershy, Lyra, Sweetie Belle, Silver Spoon, and the mayor that we have a Code Prank Prism."

Pinkie saluted. "You can count on me!" She zipped back into the

drawer from which she'd emerged.

Twilight nodded. Unawake Pinkie, almost as good as dragon mail. At least now the other Loopers would be properly warned. Things would be getting messy soon enough...

\* \* \*

><p>116.3 (Hubris Plus)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you sure we should be doing this?" Rarity asked miserably as they left the library.<p>

"Ah ain't one to shirk work that needs doin'," Applejack answered in not-quite-a-whisper. "Somepony needs ta save the Princess."

"She's right," Twilight rasped. "Right now we're Equestria's best hope." \_Not to mention that a dose of Harmony will leave us all feeling a lot better than we are now,\_ she added to herself.

It was a Lonely Loop and seemed to be baseline save for the persistent cold that had swept the nation just before the Summer Sun Celebration. The bug was at least partially magical, and had thus far withstood her every attempt to cure it. She hadn't tried ascending yet, but she was tempted to give it a shot.

"Wanna go bed..." Rainbow whined, dragging her hooves.

"Cheer up, Dashy, an adven-" Pinky's typical cheer was interrupted by a sudden coughing fit.

"Oh dear..." Fluttershy said, even more quietly than usual.

"Girls, we'll be \_fine\_, " the Anchor insisted. "We're all just a little hoarse."

\* \* \*

><p>116.4 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\*\*No Need For Applejack (GXP)\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>A high school girl sat on a road embankment staring at a rice field, carefully pulling her thoughts together.<p>

The other locals passing by on the local road above knew her as Fujiringo Yoshiko, human, a farm girl helping her aunt and uncle on their Okayama rice farm while the rest of her family grew apples up north in Aoyama. But inside her own head she had another name, a name that meant countless years of experience on multiple worlds, thanks to time loops and a wonky computer-tree-thing messing up all imaginable time and space.

Applejack sighed, letting Loop memories assimilate as she sent out another ping. Twilight Sparkle would have pinged first, had she been in the Loop. The others would have answered her first ping

immediately, if Awake. Even a number of the more frequent visitors to Equestrian loops would have sensed the signal and responded. Nobody responded. There was nobody to respond, unless they were stealth Loopers like the Star Trek Loopers.

There had to be an Anchor somewhere in this universe; otherwise Applejack wouldn't be here at all. A world required an Anchor to Loop- a single individual, usually critical to the history at the point time looped, with above-average mental and physical stability and prowess. These people remembered every single iteration of a Loop, except when they were accidentally placed in another world's Loop. Anchors somehow dragged other people into the Loops with them, Awakening them and allowing them to remember some- but not all- of their own Loops.

Applejack had been the first Equestrian to join Twilight Sparkle as a Looper, but she wasn't an Anchor and never would be. Twilight was the Anchor. Twilight was always there. Always- well, almost always, but even when Twilight wasn't Awake and some visiting Anchor was taking her place, there was a Twilight.

How long ago, how many Loops, had it been since the last time she was the only Equestrian in a Loop? How long since the last time she Looped without Twilight Sparkle? \_There was that time... no, wait, Twilight showed up later then... or maybe, um, no, Twilight had been there too, come to think...maybe that Doctor Who- no, Twilight had been the TARDIS, even if she hadn't realized it at the time. Well, how about- no... Wait, there was the time- no, no, I forgot, then too...\_

Ah. \_Then\_. An Eiken Loop she'd shared with the Evangelion Loopers. And that had been... at least two thousand Loops ago, she guessed. Probably more. Before that...

Applejack tried to concentrate, tried to remember all her Loops, despite how many of them basically repeated the same baseline events over, over, \_over, over\_ and **\*\*over\*\*** again. That Eiken Loop, the Star Wars Loop where she and Twilight had awakened half a galaxy apart (and she'd become an alicorn after magically terraforming Tatooine)... and her visit to the world of the Avatars and learned earthbending. Those were, so far as she could remember, the only Loops where she'd spent any significant length of time without Twilight Sparkle either next to her or in easy reach. Twilight had just always... \_been there.\_

Or... wait... or was it, that \_Applejack\_ was always there?

Yes. Good ol' Applejack. Good ol' dependable Applejack. Willing to go along with practically anything Applejack. Seldom having new ideas of her own Applejack. Seldom having new \_adventures\_ of her own Applejack. Twilight helped break in new Loopers. Pinkie Pie bent even magical laws of nature into candy-coated pretzels. Rainbow Dash could achieve faster-than-light speeds without a ship. Fluttershy communed with nature more closely than any earth pony, even Applejack. Rarity and Spike had become the first Loopers to marry outside of baseline.

And Applejack? Oh, she was there, too.

She'd never really looked at it like that before. There had always

been farm chores, family, and friends to keep her time filled. Earthbending came in extremely useful on the farm, and alicorn powers were a handy cheat now and again, but that's all she'd used them for—tools to make life a little easier. The other girls came up with the ideas, the adventures. Applejack just followed along, helped out, and did the work.

All of them were stuck in the Loops, but Applejack, she now realized, was the only one stuck in a rut. Her friends had grown... and she hadn't. She'd missed the opportunities, taken the easy way out, followed the others' lead. Take away the skills and powers learned or earned in the Loops, and Applejack was still the same farm pony whose baseline self kept thinking of helping other ponies, never seeking anything for herself.

Now there weren't any others to follow.

\_What do I do now?\_

\_Well, think, pony. I'm a public school student in southern Japan. It's the end of summer vacation. School resumes in two days. I could go back to school, take my university admission exams in a year and a half, go on to college, and do whatever else Yoshiko or whoever was meant to do in baseline until the Loop ends. \_

\_I could do that, but I won't, because I've done the Japanese schoolgirl thing many times before, even not counting Eiken, and nobody should. I could take the exams right now and earn a perfect score minus whatever changes in history this Loop throws at me while fighting alien ninja ghosts from fairyland in a martial arts tournament. I refuse to do it again. \_

\_I could quit school and go back to, yes, my granny and brother and sister up north, and spend yet another Loop applebuckin'. Up to five minutes ago that would have seemed like a mighty fine plan. Now... now I kinda do and don't want to do it. After all, even if they're not Awake, they're family, and- \_

\_No. They're not Awake, and that's what matters. Nobody else from my Ponyville is here but me. That means this Loop is for nobody but me. Whatever I do this Loop, I do for myself.\_

\_So... what do I want for myself?\_

Applejack interlaced her fingers in her lap, closed her eyes, and let her mind go blank. Twilight and Fluttershy had both taught her meditation, and she'd found it really did help at finding answers you'd hidden within yourself. \_Just let the thoughts die away. Shut away the outside world. Turn off the senses, until your own heartbeat is the only thing you hear, the pulse of the earth the only thing you can feel. Turn your mind off, open it, and find the thing lost inside.\_

Instead of finding answers, she found power.

She could sense something extremely powerful not all that far away—not Looper ancient, but at least hundreds of years old. With her eyes closed she could see it glowing through the hills northwest of town. She could feel it tugging at her like a kite string when she opened her eyes again, plucking at both her earth pony magic and

earthbending talent, leading her in the precise direction if she wanted to follow.

\_And yes, I do want to follow. Ain't no point in tryin' to find my answer if I just ignore it.\_

Loop memories continued to surface as Applejack ignored the roads and worked her way cross-country, using her skills to pass through the densely wooded steep hillsides without damaging a single plant. On the other side of the hills lay more farms, mostly belonging to the extended Masaki clan. (Yoshiko went to school with a Masaki, come to think of it. His older sister spent most of her time away at school or work or something.) A small lake glittered in the sunlight at the bottom of the valley. On the hill above the lake stood the Masaki shrine, dedicated to the memory of a legendary warrior who had imprisoned a demon in a cave in the hillside centuries before. The shrine never held festivals and seldom had visitors of any kind; "Yoshiko" had gone only once before to seek advice from the spirits on whether to stay with her aunt and uncle or go back to Aoyama.

\_Somethin' familiar about this\_, Applejack thought, \_but I can't think of why. Still, kind of makes sense that somethin' powerful and magical would be at or next to a Shinto shrine\_.

The power tugging at her senses led her down the other side of the hill to a spring-fed pond a little way above the lake. In the center of the pond stood a tree, an immense tree of hundreds of years' age if the thickness of the trunk was anything to judge by. Several freshly folded \_shide\_ hung from a rope tied around the trunk, marking the tree as holy.

\_As if I couldn't tell that myself. I don't need to see it. I can feel her. And I'm pretty sure she can feel me.\_

A mix of stepping stones and wooden posts rose just above the water level of the spring, allowing Applejack to walk right up to the trunk itself. She put a hand to the trunk and said, "Howdy. I'm Yoshiko, but I'd rather be called Applejack."

A scattering of rainbow lasers flashed down from the leaves into the water around her. Applejack didn't even bat an eye at the light show, nor at how she could sense words echoing from the tree's depths. Loops are Loops.

"Funaho? That's a nice name."

More lasers rained down from the leaves.

"How'd you know I was a Looper? Do trees Loop?"

More lasers, these slightly redder than the ones before.

"Ah, yeah. Didn't mean to be insultin'. Nothin' wrong if a tree does start Loopin'."

The tree explained, through its laser-based telepathy, that although it did not Loop, it had a connection to Looper memories that made it aware of the Loops' existence. One such was its own grandmother, who was both tree and human, in a way Funaho wasn't able to explain.

Another was the Loop's Anchor, who had Awakened only an hour or so before.

"Just about th' time I Awoke, too," Applejack said. "Where is she?"

After a lot of laser-based laughter, Funaho pointed out that Applejack's default gender was incorrect. Tenchi was, in fact, male.

"Whoops. Sorr- HEY!" Applejack stepped back from the tree, almost slipping off the stepping posts and into the water. "I KNEW there was somethin' familiar about this! This is that Loop Twilight visited that one time, with that super mad scientist girl! What was her name?"

The tree suggested tactfully that it might be good to say hello to the local Anchor and continue the conversation there.

"Maybe," Applejack said, putting her hand back on the trunk and running her hand along its bark. "But to tell th' truth I feel a lot more comfortable around trees."

Funaho suggested that more trees could be arranged, but for now she really ought to speak with Tenchi.

"Oh, all right." Applejack reluctantly stepped away from the tree and back onto solid ground. "But I'll be back for a longer talk when I get a chance."

Applejack didn't hear words in her head anymore, but the cascade of light from the branches seemed to her like a welcome to return.

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack got to the top of the stairs and passed through the torii gate just in time to hear a teenage boy shouting, "Grandpa? The demon of the cave and I are going into town! Do you want anything?"<p>

"Have a good time! But lock the gate back before you leave!" The slightly raspy shout came from the small living quarters next to the shrine proper.

Applejack raised an eyebrow at this exchange. Kinda makes me wonder, she thought, what the first day shenanigans we pull in th' home Loop look like to visitors. "Hello?" she called out. "I'm lookin' for someone named Tenchi?"

"Hey, Tenchi," a deep female voice cooed, "is there something you should tell me about? Met another girl already?"

"No, must be a visitor," the first voice said. Applejack finally spotted the voices, coming from another set of stone steps that went even further up the hillside. The boy, obviously, was a nondescript black-haired, brown-eyed teenager. The female voice, on the other hand, belonged to a colorfully dressed woman with long, spiky hair brushed back from her brow- hair almost the exact color of Lyra Heartstrings' coat, Applejack noted.

And both of them, Applejack sensed, pulsed with power- even more so than Funaho the tree had. She hadn't sensed it before because, being an earth pony farmer by both origin and preference, Applejack had noticed the tree first.

"Howdy," she called out, walking over to the pair. "I've been thrown for a Loop and I'm lookin' for a strong Anchor."

"We figured," the boy said. "I'm Masaki Tenchi, and this is Ryoko. We were about to go round up the rest of our local Loopers."

"Is that why y'all didn't respond to my ping?" Applejack asked pointedly.

Tenchi rubbed the back of his head and laughed nervously. "Uh, sorry about that. We almost always Loop together now, and we have so few visiting Loopers, that I kind of forgot to listen."

"Fair enough, I guess. I'm Applejack. From Equestria," she added quickly. "My local name this Loop is Yoshiko, but, well, you know how it is."

"Good to meet you. How's Twilight doing?"

"She's been better. Our Loop had a number of expansions, and ever since the latest expansion it seems hell-bent on destroying the library she lives in. She's not taking it well."

"Eh, who cares about a bunch of books anyway?" Ryoko grumbled.

"You're only saying that because we haven't rescued Washuu from Kagato yet," Tenchi muttered.

"That's who I was tryin' to remember," Applejack said, smacking fist against palm. "Twilight and her got on like a house on fire, to hear Twilight tell it."

"The house DID catch fire." Now it was Ryoko's turn to mutter. "Five times."

"Which isn't that much more often than you and Ayeka do it," Tenchi replied. "Anyway, she doesn't usually Awaken until she's freed from Kagato. The fight can get pretty dangerous." Tenchi frowned slightly. "If you want, we can talk again after it's over. We don't want to put you at risk."

Applejack grinned. She reached her power into the earth and Bent, raising the cobblestones she stood on into a three meter column of stone and soil. She reached into her subspace pocket and pulled out a Space Marine autocannon, sized for the genetically engineered giant warriors and longer than she was tall. She held it up in one hand, using the other to pull out a Skifandr duelling sword. "I think I can handle myself," she said. "But it's your call. I prefer to be a team player. It's what I'm good at." She cocked her head in thought and added, "That, and apples."

Ryoko rose into the air, hovering in front of Applejack and examining the BFG. "Those must be some mean apple trees."

"Naw, th' trees are all sweethearts," Applejack said. "Th' fruitbats are a whole other matter, though."

\* \* \*

><p>"Really?" Applejack asked when the battle was over. "A pipe organ? Did he really think that was original?"<p>

"Well, sorry if our universe's evil bastards aren't original enough for you!" Ryoko snapped.

"Please do not mind Ryoko." Ayeka, princess of Jurai, stepped forward with a dangerous gleam in her eye. "We have more urgent matters to consider. In particular..." The princess gave Applejack a stare that would have done a police interrogator proud. "What are your intentions towards Lord Tenchi?"

"My what now?"

"After all this time they still do this to almost every female visiting Looper," Tenchi groaned.

"Spill the beans!" Ryoko shouted. "We know Tenchi's irresistible, but we're not letting any visiting Looper try to horn in on us!"

"So if you have any base desires as regards Lord Tenchi, kindly abandon them now! We will not permit it!" Ayeka declared.

"Um... beg pardon," Applejack muttered, "but as cute as he is, if you're into that sort of thing-"

"What sort of thing?" Ayeka asked. "Do you find something wrong with Lord Tenchi?"

"He's bipedal, omnivorous, lives in another universe..." Applejack shrugged and added, "An' he ain't an apple. I'm th' kinda pony who's married to my work."

"Pony?" Ayeka looked the thoroughly humanoid Applejack up and down. "Have the Loops driven you insane?"

"She's from Equestria," Washuu put in. "Remember Twilight Sparkle?"

"Oh, that explains it," Ayeka nodded. "Is she a friend of hers? It was nice having a sensible fellow princess around the house. With a sensible hair color." The purple-haired princess nodded her head in approval.

"Yeah... about that," Applejack shrugged. "I've been feelin' a bit like a third cartwheel ever since I got here. Seems like my friends, especially Twilight, are kinda leavin' me behind, and I hadn't noticed until they weren't actually around." After noticing the wave of confused looks, she continued, "I mean, all my friends seem to be growin' and learnin' new things, but I'm just th' same old me."

"Oooooooooooh," all the others said.

"Power issues," Washuu nodded sagely. "You don't feel like you're



getting all the neat tricks your friends have."

"No! ... um. yes... um, maybe?" Applejack sat down on the couch and slumped forward, chin on her hands. "It's just like... I dunno... I don't have anythin' that says, 'I'm a Looper with unique adventures and skills.' Instead I'm just th' one who goes along with whatever someone else is doin'."

"Oh, I get it!" Mihoshi giggled. "It's like that Loop where I spent the whole time watching TV and eating snacks while everyone else went out having adventures and stuff. I was having a good time at the time, but I felt like I hadn't really gained anything from it, and that made me really sad."

"(As if it were ONLY one Loop,)" Ayeka whispered to Ryoko, who nodded her head.

"I... I'm not sure that's how it works," Applejack said. \_Memo to self,\_ she thought: \_putting this woman and Pinkie Pie together: probably VERY bad.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Washuu waved a hand, and a tasselled cushion appeared in midair, supported by nothing. She bounced up to sit on it and bounced her clasped hands on her knees as she spoke. "Well, maybe we can offer a bit of perspective. You see, we don't have that problem in this Loop. In fact, it's kind of the opposite."<p>

The light in the living room changed, and suddenly a vast dark shadow rose behind Washuu- her own silhouette. The little girl seated next to Applejack on the couch- Sasami- had a similar silhouette. "Bear in mind that in our baseline, two of us are two-thirds of the highest pantheon in a twelve-dimensional universe. We suspected Tenchi had the potential to surpass even us... again, in our baseline. And every other person you see here," the little redheaded mad scientist gestured around the room, "has combat power, strength, psychic abilities, and political connections which by any other world's standards are ludicrous.

"Ranma Saotome started out as an ordinary mortal. He's still only about demigod rank, all things considered. He can still pick up new skills and power and what-not. But we cannot. We dare not. We don't know how much more power it would take for any of us to Ascend, but it can't be much. And we love each other, this world we created, and this family we sort of fell into, too much to risk destroying it."

Ryoko fidgeted and muttered, "Jeez, can the lovey-dovey mushy stuff, already."

Washuu shrugged. "So we spend our Loops mostly as homebodies. These days we pretty much all loop together, which makes it easier. We have a few variants where our power levels get severely reduced... well, most of us, anyway." She shot a glance at Sasami.

"What's wrong with being a magical girl?" Sasami replied. "Why don't you try it?"

"And when we have fused Loops outside our world, we usually end up at

normal human power levels," Washuu continued, ignoring the comment. "Which only encourages us to keep a low profile."

"So what you're sayin' is," Applejack drawled, "that y'all don't really have any perspective on my problem at all!"

"Not one little bit!" Washuu agreed.

Applejack groaned and pulled her hat over her head.

"But we do try to be hospitable to visiting Loopers," Washuu continued. "I wouldn't call it a sanctuary Loop like you have at home- if someone wants to make trouble, we let them have fun... until some of the OTHER absurdly powerful forces in our world catch up with them."

"Like Lady Seto," Ayeka smiled.

"Or Tokimi," Sasami grinned.

"Or Seina," Tenchi nodded.

"Or Grandmother!" Mihoshi giggled.

"This world can take care of itself pretty well," Washuu said. "But if you're more inclined to play nicely, we can be more helpful than that. What would you like to try?"

"What d'ya mean?"

"You can hang around here, you can study in my lab, you can go offworld-"

"Offworld!" The decision happened before Applejack thought of the reasons. Staying here would mean staying on the farm- well, on somebody's farm, anyway. If this was going to be her Loop just for her, then she'd have to seek out adventure- and what more adventure could you ask for than outer space? You always got adventure and excitement and like that in outer space, especially if you were travelling with Rainbow Dash, Pinkie Pie, Trixie, or (oak help the aliens) any combination of the three.

"All right," Washuu said. "Is there anything in particular-"

"Mya." The shortest and furriest member of the household, who had spent the entire conversation lying still in Sasami's lap, looked up at Applejack. "MyaI've been talking with Funaho," Ryo-Ohki said in a half-squeak, half-meow. "She really likes you."

"I thought she Awoke here on Earth," Ryoko grumbled. "Or are you talking about the tree, sis?"

"Must mean th' tree," Applejack said. "We had a brief chat before I met you an' Tenchi."

"If you like trees," Ryo-Ohki continued, "how would you like to meet Funaho and Ryu-Oh's sisters?"

"Um... sure?"

\* \* \*

><p>Jurai, a planet whose surface is seventy percent forest. (That doesn't mean seventy percent of the land area is forest. Practically all the land, and a large part of the oceans, are covered in trees.)<p>

Jurai, where the capital city, imperial palace, main shipyards, and principal holy site are all located in a single treeâ€| a tree so tall its crown brushes the planet's tropopause.

Jurai, a planet where practically everything, even the spaceships, are made of wood.

A casual visitor would take the impression that the human species native to Jurai was just a touch tree-happy, and the casual visitor would be understating the case. Jurai had been founded when a space pirate discovered a very special tree indeedâ€| and the secrets of that meeting had made Jurai the single most powerful political and military force in the known galaxy (that didn't live under Tenchi's roof).

So when that eldest tree, the goddess of Jurai, had manifested in human form and requested top clearance for a special visitor to the most sacred, most secret, most secure location in all Jurai space- the place even the rulers of Jurai walked only seldom, and the common citizens never- the answer had been, \_It shall be done.\_

Still, the royal courtiers and priestesses could be excused for flinching when their visitor said, "Whoo-ee! Ain't this somethin'?"

Applejack gawked at the vast open area in the heart of the great tree, at the saplings of the royal trees, all descendants of the original, each planted in a special platform that hovered in total defiance of gravity well separate from the central walkway. It was worth gawking at. Not even in Lothlorien, in the Arda Loop, had Applejack seen living wood and trees in such a vast and glorious display of the power of growing things.

And then the trees began to flash with rainbow laser light, and Applejack could hear their voices in her head.

\_Hey! This one's different!\_

\_I like how she feels!\_

\_Who are you?\_

\_Who are you?\_

"Er, I'm Applejack. Nice to meet all of ya."

\_She's an Applejack!\_

\_Hi, Applejack!\_

\_Welcome, Applejack!\_

\_Are you here to name one of us?\_

\_Hey, no fair! I want to bond with her!\_

\_Oooh! Pick me! Pick me!\_

Dozens of the floating platforms began moving, rising from the distant depths, descending from the heights of the great chamber, clustering around the center of the walkway where Applejack stood.

\_Hey, be kind to my friend.\_ Applejack couldn't quite tell if that was Sasami's voice. It felt like her, butâ€¦| \_Don't be rude! Behave yourselves!\_

\_Sorry, mama/mistress,\_ a ragged chorus of tree-voices echoed in Applejack's head. The platforms backed off a little distance, no longer overshadowing the walkway, but still staying close. To Applejack it seemed like Birnham Wood had come to the Galactic Senate.

Most of the attendants had scrambled away at the approach of the royal trees. Only two remained standing: Funaho Misaki Jurai, first wife of the Emperor of Jurai (and the woman the tree was named after) and Seto Kamiki Jurai, the emperor's mother-in-law by second marriage. "I've never seen anything like it," Funaho said, helping Applejack to her feet from where she'd ducked.

"Every single unbonded tree actually moving their platforms and swarming her," Seto nodded.

"Do you hear the voices?" Applejack asked, looking back and forth.

"For most of those who bond with a royal tree," Funaho said, "it is only an empathic bond, not true telepathy. And for those not bonded, not even that, except on those rare occasions when Tsunami speaks. We heard her just now."

"I heard Sasami's voice," Applejack said.

"Tsunami has chosen to be Sasami's tree," Funaho said.

"Just as, apparently, every single tree here has chosen to be yours," Seto continued, "I'd call it entertaining, butâ€¦|"

Applejack frowned uncomfortably. "I'm sorry. I'm powerful sorry," she said, turning on her feet to address the trees. "I am really very sorry. But Washuu an' Tsunami explained th' Loops to ya, right?"

\_Loops? What are those?\_

\_My Key is shaped like loops! You could make a necklace out of it!\_

\_Hey, I can make a key shaped like a loop too!\_

\_Children!\_ This time the dominant voice sounded a lot less like Sasami; older, vastly more mature.

The trees subsided again.

"More or less," Seto said. "You're repeating time, and after a few years you'll be returning to your home universe."

"Well, that's th' thing," Applejack said, facing the Juraian royalty again. "I could go bond with one o' them trees, all nice ladies an' gentlemen that they are. An' for a few years I don't doubt we'd have a lot of fun. But then th' Loop would end. I'd go home, but my friend would jus'... vanish. As if she never existed."

"And are we any different?" Seto said calmly. "We would all reset to where we were at the start of the Loop, none the wiser. But you would at least have the memory of the fun times. I think you're making a mistake. I always say, better to regret having done something than to regret having done nothing."

"That's only part of it," Applejack sighed. "Whichever tree bonded with me would be in my head all the time, right? No secrets. An' whatever tree I took would know it was on borrowed time. 'Tain't fair to th' tree, is what I'm sayin'.

"If I could take her with me when the Loop ended, like I could a lightsaber or computer or somethin', that'd be different." Applejack pulled a lightsaber, a laptop, and a small pickup truck (complete with cardboard cutout Twilight Sparkle) out of her subspace pocket to demonstrate. As she put them back, she continued, "I built a tree-ship once for a battleship game, an' any of yours would put mine to shame. But Loopers share horror stories of the old days when the Original Seven Loopers put people in their pockets- heck, sometimes whole populations in subspace, an' th' next time they looked they were all dead of old age, killed each other in wars, or jus' plain vanished. We don't do that anymore. Ever." Well, excepting accidents, but Applejack didn't even like to think of those situations, much less talk about them.

"If I got one o' them trees inta th' pocket, no tellin' what'd be there when I tried to pull it out next Loop... but I don't think it'd be one o' these sweet, friendly, intelligent creatures we got here. I'm terrified it'd be a pile o' rotten sawdust."

\_No,\_ the trees all replied. \_No, no. We wouldn't let it happen. No.\_

"Perhaps seeds, then?" Seto hazarded. "Grow a new one whenever-"

"No, dangit!" Applejack stomped her forehoof... then remembered she didn't have forehooves, and she'd just bent forward and jammed her middle finger on the walkway. She straightened back up and rubbed her sore finger, continuing, "I am NOT bringin' any intelligent life form inta th' world just so th' Loops can wipe it out four or five years later!"

"Well," Seto smiled warmly, gently grasping Applejack's injured hand, "you're obviously upset, and I think we can let the matter lie for now. Why don't you have that hand looked at, my dear? And while you're doing that, I'll have a chat with a few people."

"What about?" Applejack asked.

"Oh, this and that." Seto flipped open a fan and covered her lips with it, walking along the walkway to the far gates of the Sacred Grove.

\_Bye, Applejack!\_

\_Come visit us soon, Applejack!\_

"Why do I have th' feelin' she's plottin' somethin'?" Applejack asked Empress Funaho.

"If Lady Seto is awake," Funaho sighed, "then she's ALWAYS plotting something."

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack opened her eyes and immediately wondered if she'd slept through the ending of a Loop.<p>

There had been a banquet. Said banquet had included quite a lot of large mugs of a strange fruit wine- she'd done a classic spit-take when Lady Seto had told her that one bottle of the stuff could buy a whole bucking PLANET. After reassurance that there was plenty for everyone and that it was only withheld from the market to keep prices up (reminding Applejack of zap-apple jam back home), she'd developed a taste for the stuff.

She'd been mellow... no, she'd been way beyond mellow, she'd been downright plastered by the time she was escorted to a guest bedroom better than anything the palace at Canterlot could boast. She should have been waking up in that room again with a hangover that only Berry Punch could truly empathize with.

Instead she was wide-eyed, clear-headed, and sitting up in a modest bed in a modest room with no windows- hence Applejack wondering if she'd Awakened in a new Loop.

Check mirror- nope. Yoshiko Fujiringo still stared back at her.

So. What. The. \_Buck?\_

She reached out with her earthbending senses... and felt absolutely nothing. No soil. No rocks. No plants. Not even ordinary metal or wood, aside from the bedframe. Absolutely nothing with an affinity for the ancient element for a very, very, VERY long way.

She summoned the Element of Honesty, and she sighed with relief as the necklace and gem appeared around her neck. \_Right. The kick-flank-and-take-names option is ready and on standby.\_

Applejack walked over to the far wall from the bed, which appeared to have a Star Trek world sliding door set into it. It didn't open automatically as she approached, but there was a touch-pad to the right. When she put her hand to the panel, it buzzed irritably. Touch, \_buzz.\_ Touch, \_buzz.\_ Touch touch touch, \_buzz buzz braaaaap.\_

\_Well, this is gettin' annoy-\_

"Oh, that's strange! I wonder if it's broken?"

Applejack spun around. The blonde woman with dark skin, a cheerful smile and huge blue eyes had NOT been there ten seconds before. Nor had the mop in her hands.

Wait... mop?

Seriously, \_what the \_\_\*\*buck?\*\*\*\_

"Here, let me have a look." The strange woman stepped past Applejack and bent down to stare at the panel. She reached out her hand, and her fingers danced in a complex pattern Applejack couldn't follow. At the end, one corner of the panel blinked yellow. "Oh, I see!" the woman with the mop said. "You haven't answered your messages yet! Would you like to do that now?"

Possibly the strangest thing about the woman was the voice- as cheerful as Pinkie's, but with the soft edge she usually associated with Fluttershy. In fact, if it wasn't for the softness, she'd have sworn-

"Er, beg pardon, ma'am," Applejack said quietly, "but are y'all any relation to a young woman named Mihoshi?"

"Oh, have you met Mihoshi?" The smile grew a little bit more cheerful. "She's my daughter! I'm Mitoto Kuramitsu. Glad to meet you!"

"Er... Yoshiko Fujiringo, but my friends call me Applejack." After shuffling her feet for a moment, she added, "An' beggin' your pardon again, but where exactly ARE we?"

"Um... um... um..." Applejack's heart sank as Mitoto looked around the room. "Well, that's funny... I was cleaning the girls' dormitory at the GP Academy, but this certainly isn't one of the rooms there!" After a bit of a nervous giggle, she added, "It looks more like a first-class stateroom of an Express-class transport ship."

Applejack's mouth opened to ask how a body could get on a transport ship without realizing it. It shut again when she realized: (a) the same instincts that told her to not ask questions about Pinkie Pie screamed at her now; and (b) Applejack herself had no idea how she got on board a spaceship in mid-flight. Oh, she could \_guess\_, but guesses didn't count.

So, for lack of any better ideas, Applejack reached a finger forward and pushed the flashing yellow square on the door's touchpad.

A large screen appeared in the wall to the right of the touchpad. Lady Seto sat in a luxurious wooden chair, waving a paper fan, flanked by attendants. "Good morning, Applejack," she said, her voice a purr that put Applejack in mind of a cat on an all-canary diet.

"Hi, Seto!" Mitoto waved. "Wow, Applejack, I didn't know you were friends with Seto!"

"I hope you had a pleasant night's sleep," the Demon Princess of

Jurai continued with barely a pause. "You'll be glad to know that I looked up a few things as regards the problem you had with our trees."

"Yeah yeah yeah, whoop-de-doo, tell me what Ah'm DOIN' here!" Applejack growled.

"I got this straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak." Seto's recorded image smirked wickedly. "You didn't tell us about that, by the way. Next time I'll make sure the banquet has plenty of oats and hay."

"I prefer apples," Applejack muttered. "An' roses when they're in season."

"Anyway," Seto continued, using her fan to wave away the detail, "I spoke with Tsunami herself, and she reassures me that your concerns as regards the trees are quite mistaken. The bonding ritual includes a soul-bond which Tsunami reports is almost identical to soul-bonds of universes like Mid-Childa or Bleach... whatever those are," Seto shrugged. "Ryu-Oh in particular has traveled along with Ayeka to most loops where her own subspace pocket is accessible, with no ill effects. In most other universes the trees' power is very much reduced, but it is still capable of fully powering a starship and engaging in combat.

"Here are a few other facts to put your mind at rest, though I'd appreciate it if you kept these to yourself while you're in our universe. First, trees of Jurai are not susceptible to old age. Second, all royal trees from Tsunami to the fourth generation can create a seed of themselves when death is imminent, containing their memories and power. For all practical purposes short of total disintegration, the trees are immortal.

"And finally... royal trees generate their own subspace pockets. My own tree keeps a small continent inside its main unit, which is most convenient for keeping pets or hosting guests. Tsunami and Washuu both say it is extremely unlikely, should you bond with a tree of Jurai, that these Loops would present any great difficulty."

Applejack wanted to sit down, but the bed was too far away from the viewscreen. "So what you're sayin' is--"

"In short, if you want a tree, you can have one," Seto continued. "Obviously there are a lot of trees who want their very own Applejack. But there are... conditions." The fan snapped shut with a loud clack. "Tsunami and Washuu have both pointed out that you probably won't return to our universe anytime soon, if ever- and if you did I wouldn't remember you. You would have to build your own main unit to house the tree and care for the tree by yourself, without any aid from us. You would also have to learn how to operate the ship your tree would power- since, of course, we could not provide you with a crew.

"So, to make a long story short, we're going to test and see how badly you want that tree. I've sponsored you for the next class at the GP Academy, which begins in five days. Graduation takes two years, after which your education will continue on the job, as it were. Tsunami and Washuu assure me that our loop has a stable



run-time of at least twenty years, possibly quite a bit longer if certain variants crop up, so asking you to give five years to the Galaxy Police seems like a safe test."

"Th' Galaxy Police?" Applejack asked.

"After you've completed five years of honorable service... assuming you survive, but that shouldn't be a problem... return to Jurai, and we will teach you the secrets of building a containment unit for your ship. If you absorb your lessons well enough... then we shall see which tree gets the honor of surviving the end of this Loop with you.

"Now, I have no doubt you'll accept my offer, considering the deep love of trees you showed us all here," Seto continued, reopening her fan and using it to hide her smile. "But I thought it wise to send you on your way while you slept, so that you wouldn't waste time and energy dithering about it. But remember... if you feel for whatever reason that you can't go through with it, you can always say no at any time. You can drop out of the Academy; you can resign your commission; you can avoid Jurai for the rest of your stay. You'll be returned to Earth at once with no hard feelings and no questions asked."

Applejack's teeth ground. She had had some misgivings, mostly about having her ability to choose her destiny taken from her, but that last little bit had flushed them right out of her head on a wave of anger. \_What kind of pon- er, woman does Seto think I am? Apples ain't quitters!\_

"I do believe that covers everything," Seto said. "Good luck, Applejack, and have a wonderful time!"

The viewscreen blanked out.

"Wow!" Mitoto gasped, hugging Applejack to her bosom. "You're going to be a GP cadet! We're going to be seeing a lot of one another! Oh, I'm sure we'll be the best of friends!"

"Bwuffle? Murfle mffft mff-" Applejack managed to break the hug and get a clear breath. "How's that again? Are you part of this 'Galaxy Police' thing too?"

"Oh, yes!" Mitoto smiled. "My father is Grand Marshall of the GP. My mother is headmistress of the Academy. And I'm the chief of sanitation!"

"Yer... yer... aw, I can't say it." \_I don't care how happy she seems to be about it, nopony deserves th' title, 'head cleaning lady.'\_

"Ah, I believe your door's unlocked now!" Mitoto smiled. She touched the panel, and the doors slid open onto a futuristic-looking corridor. "Would you like to go meet the captain?"

\* \* \*

><p>The technician's name was Erma. Unlike most of the other people Applejack had seen in this universe's space travels, she didn't have a human face. Instead she had a muzzle and slit eyes, looking like a

cross between a cat and a dog from the neck up.<p>

\_ 'Taint fair, \_ Applejack thought. \_ There's gotta be a planet of pony people in this Galactic Union thing. Why couldn't I have started there? \_

"Before you begin classes at the GP Academy, you must undergo body modification," Erma said. "Nanobots will be introduced into your bloodstream. These will reconstruct your body, making you stronger, faster, and more resistant to damage."

"Really," Applejack said coolly. "How 'bout not? Supposin' I already had somethin' just as good, or even better?"

"Well, we can put it to the test and see," Erma shrugged. "If you can meet the minimum standards without body modification, it's not required. But the process is free and safe, so there really isn't any reason not to have it."

"You had this body modification yourself?"

"Of course."

"Then how 'bout a little race?" Applejack asked. "Got an obstacle course 'round here?"

Ten minutes later the alien Wau and the human Applejack stood at the starting line of the Academy's obstacle course. "Twice around the main track before entering the obstacles, then once through them. Agreed?"

"Agreed. Y'all call it."

"Ready... set... GO!" Erma took off in a superhuman blur of motion.

Applejack grinned, summoned her Element, and reached for its full power. Alicorn ascension wasn't quite possible here, but as the power surged through her, she knew the difference in power wasn't enough to worry about. Her ears shifted from human to pony ears. A long tail sprang out of the seat of her pants. \_ Call it magic, call it esper power, call it manipulating probabilities... whatever you call it, I got it. \_

\_ And now y'gonna see why Rainbow Dash is th' only pony can keep up with me on th' ground. Ms. Erma. \_

Erma rounded the final curve of her first lap, expecting to see Applejack ahead of her just waiting to be lapped. She was going a good fifty kilometers per hour, which for an enhanced body was about equivalent to a light jog. No unmodified human- and especially not one from a primitive world like Earth- could do better than thirty kilometers per hour for any great period of time.

Instead Erma heard a rumble as if a stampede of hooved animals were right behind her. A gust of wind nearly blew her off her feet, and then a yellow-haired blur faded ahead of her into the far curve.

\_ Wha- Bu- How- Time to bring my A game! \_ Erma picked up her own pace,

pushing herself to maximum effort. Applejack still pulled ahead. By the time Erma was midway through her second lap, Applejack was already crawling under the cargo nets like a serpent. Erma watched, her own pace slowing to a walk, as the cadet entered the tires, her pounding feet sending sod flying three meters high. She ignored the rope swing, leaping across the mud pit and landing perfectly on one foot in the middle of the balance beam beyond.

Past that stood the wall- five meters of sheer, slick metal wall a foot thick. It had been built to withstand the worst abuse cadets could throw at it, even cadets with the latest body-mods and strength training.

Erma's jaw dropped as Applejack hit the wall with her shoulder like a hockey player checking an opponent. The wall leaped out of the ground and went flying, smashing into the bleachers at the other end of the stadium.

Applejack stopped just short of the cargo net climb, turning around to face the admissions officer. "Er, sorry 'bout th' mess," she said. "But Ah think Ah made my point."

"Er... um... yes," Erma gasped. "So long as you're willing to undergo special tests and physical examination... then I think we can waive the body modification."

\_Yes. Lots of tests. And a report. \_

\_Two reports.\_

Unnoticed by Applejack, Erma's eyes narrowed.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Tenchi and all,<em>

\_The GP Academy has turned out to be pretty interesting so far. I'm learning a lot about your technology, your laws, and your worlds. O'course all of that stuff you already know and would likely bore you, so I'll talk a bit about the people I've met.\_

\_First there's Mitoto, Mihoshi's mother. By the way, she says hi and to tell Mihoshi to stay warm, since it's autumn back in Japan. She reminds me of a calm Pinkie Pie: she's friends with everybody, and it's pretty clear there's a genius hiding behind that innocent face. I learned the hard way not to follow her when she's cleaning, though- we ended up on a Galactic Army ship three sectors away, and I missed a week of classes riding back with that ship! Like I said, she REALLY reminds me of Pinkie.\_

\_Mihoshi's great-aunt Mikami runs this place. We've spoken together a few times. I gather she's friends with Lady Seto, and Seto's pulling strings to make sure I don't end up in an office somewhere doing nothing. Doesn't feel rightly fair, but on the other hand it does mean I'm getting all sorts of chances to show what I can do! \_

\_I even got to meet Mihoshi's grandfather, the GP Marshal, but he spent most of the time interrogating me about Mihoshi being on Earth. I told him the truth, excepting the parts about Loops, which means I didn't tell him much.\_

\_Then there's my student advisor, Erma. I don't know if I get along with her or not. She never lies to me, but I always have a feeling she's hiding something around me. All the medical tests and scientific exams she puts me through don't make me trust her more, I tell you that. If I wanted to be a blamed guinea pig I'd have stayed there and let a real expert do the poking and prodding!\_

\_Then there are my roommates. They're nice, but I think they're proof that the Loops have a lousy sense of humor. (No news there.) One of them is a Wau who's the spittin' image of my dog back home. Even the name- Ona na Wyn- no way is that a coincidence! And then there's the other one... she's an Inanan... and consarn it I KNEW you had a planet full of pony-people in your Loop! And yes, she looks like one of the newest Loopers from my world- calls herself Brightly Doo here, but I know Derpy when I see her. Makes sense, though... she's a delivery mare back home, and the GP funds itself as the high-priority mail and shipping service for the galaxy. Knowing my luck, her Looping self will probably remember this Loop. She does that sort of thing sometimes.\_

\_I get on fine with both of 'em... but it's just so weird!\_

\_One more thing: tomorrow I begin combat classes. The teacher is the mens' fitness supervisor, Captain Seriyo Tennan. I'm hearing a lot of mixed things about him. On the one hand he's popular because his ships practically never get attacked by pirates. He also has a reputation for taking care of his crews. On the other hand, a lot of people tell me he's a complete idiot who got where he is on a combination of being super-rich and super-lucky. Can you tell me anything about him? Does he Loop?\_

\_I still haven't decided about the tree thing. I still get the heebie jeebies about putting a thinking being in my pocket. You know the horror stories- you might even have been there for a few! But if I do go through with it, I've decided to name her "Shojiki," for "integrity." I thought about "Makoto," but there's at least three Loopers with that name already. Speaking of name confusion, give my love to Funaho-no-ki, and tell her to be careful of beetles!\_

\_Write me back soon!\_

\_Love, Applejack\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>Applejack,<em>

\_Seriyo is an arrogant idiot. Thank the Admins he is NOT Looping and hopefully never will. However, he IS lucky, he IS a skilled fighter, and he IS practically indestructible, so have fun with him.\_

\_Everyone says hi, and keep on fighting! \_

\_Washuu\_

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

116.1: Friendship quest. (Incidentally, a world of nothing but empathths would have no concept of deception.)  
>116.2: Some nicknames just fit.<br>116.3: Ow.  
>116.4: Planetary-scale enthusiasm.<p>

## 123. Chapter 123

117.1 (116.4 continued)

\* \* \*

><p>"By now you have all qualified with the basic laser pistol and heavy laser rifle. However! There will be times during shipboard combat when stray laser blasts may endanger innocent lives or the structure of the ship or valuable cargo! For this reason we also have this!"<p>

The thing in the pink-haired loudmouth's hand was quite clearly a lightsaber, but not the hand-crafted kind Applejack had seen (and once used) in the Star Wars Loop. Seriyo's force sword looked mass-produced, sleek, simple, and plain. Since nobody else batted an eye at the thing, Applejack gathered that such things were pretty commonplace in this universe. Even in the Star Wars Loop, even before Palpatine got rolling, a lightsaber would get everybody's instant and undivided attention. Here, not so much.

"Cadet Fujiringo!"

Applejack still didn't care for her local name, but she came to attention automatically for it regardless. "Yes, sir!"  
>"I understand you come from a barbarian planet called Earth," Seriyo smirked. "You've probably never seen a weapon like this before!"<p>

"We ain't so backward as all that, sir!" Applejack grinned.

"With that accent?" Seriyo barely bothered to cover his chuckle. "It's fortunate for you that you've come to the Academy! We'll soon have that accent ironed out of you!" He deactivated the blade and tossed the swordhilt to Applejack. "But since you obviously have experience with the weapon, you'll be glad to demonstrate its usefulness for the rest of the class!"

\_He thinks I'm nothing but an alligator-mouthed hick,\_ Applejack thought. \_He's going to make an example of me.\_ She allowed the corners of her mouth to turn up very slightly. \_Now to see how much I remember of that Loop where I was Luke Skywalker and Twilight was Yoda. That was a lot of Loops ago, but...\_

"Ignite the blade, cadet!" As Applejack activated the force sword, Seriyo pulled out a standard issue GP laser pistol. "The standard issue GP force sword will deflect laser blasts if wielded by an expert swordsman!" With careful aim Seriyo fired once, spanging a stun-blast off the tip of the sword and into the dirt between Applejack's feet. "In the hands of an unskilled user, the sword will be more dangerous to the one holding it than to the enemy! Observe!" Seriyo lowered his aim and began squeezing the trigger.

Applejack let herself go calm, reaching her senses out across the athletic field, through the ivy and trees, through the soil and rocks of the Academy's artificial habitat. What worked for earth pony magic and earthbending also worked for the Force, at least well enough to see where the stun bolts were going to land.

The rest of the class saw Applejack close her eyes, then waggle the force sword back and forth, slapping away Seriyo's shots, sending most of them into the dirt right at Seriyo's toes. The captain, startled, began picking up one foot and then the other, frantically trying to keep his toes out of the line of fire, still thoughtlessly snapping off one wild shot after another. One flailing foot found a pebble in the mix of soil; a random kick sent it flying into the air.

The pebble struck the base of Applejack's saber, stunning her wrists and sending it spinning away.

Without thinking Applejack switched skill sets. \_Forget being a Jedi... time to be an Amazon.\_ Twin bracers appeared out of her subspace pocket around her wrists. The shot blocking continued, two handed this time. A bead of sweat trickled down her brow as she tried to recall her skills from two long-ago Loops, one in an anthropomorphic Equestria as Mistress Mare-velous, another in the DC Loop replacing Diana Prince. All she needed was for Seriyo to quit the random shots and bring the pistol back towards her center of mass, then the right deflection- \_no- no- close- no- no-\_\_

\_YES.\_

The stun blast took Seriyo straight in the chest. He fell backwards and flopped onto the dirt torn up by his feet.

\_Okay, lesson inverted, job done.\_ Applejack returned the bracers to her subspace pocket and stepped forward to the prone teacher. \_Now to show proper respect and get this lesson back on track.\_ "Mr. Tennen! Are you all right?"

Seriyo's eyes opened. His movements were jerky and twitchy, but the light stun was already wearing off. "You- mock- the great- Seriyo-Tennen!"

"No, sir," Applejack responded. "Y'all wanted a demonstration, and I did my best, sir."

"And you CONTINUE to mock me!" Seriyo weebled his way to a mostly vertical position. "Barbarian Earthling! You don't belong at the GP Academy! Go take a hundred laps! That should wear down your savage tendency to insubordination!"

\_Yep,\_ Applejack thought, \_arrogant idiot. We def'nitly ain't gonna be friends. And I'm glad I've stayed in Mostly Ascended Mode the whole time I've been here. Forty kilometers... well, maybe I can catch the last half of the actual lessons.\_

Applejack's slipstream sent Seriyo spinning back into the dirt, much to the amusement of her classmates.

\* \* \*

><p>"Ryoko Baulta, I understand you have a piece of intelligence for us." The giant hologram of the chief of the Da Ruma pirate guild loomed over the other pirate captains seated at the virtual conference table.<p>

A shapely figure, pale-skinned, raven-haired, stood up, her hologram enlarging somewhat so that the others could see and hear her better. "There is a cadet of special abilities in the most recent class at the GP Academy," she said. "My sources report her name as Yoshiko Fujiringo, though she also goes by the alias Applejack."

A two-dimensional picture of the cadet appeared above the conference table. "Although she claims to be an Earthling, she exhibits abilities not typical of the pre-civilized natives of that planet. She apparently has limited shapeshifting abilities- note the equine ears and tail." The picture switched to footage of Applejack on the GP's athletic fields, outpacing the other cadets, outlifting, outjumping, out-and-out-everything-ing them. "She exhibits superior speed, strength, skill and reflexes- without any assistance from body modification."

A few of the pirate captains gasped at this information. GP body modification was among the best available. Only the most successful pirate captains could afford the bribes to get nanite treatments to equal the GP standard.

"She also seems to have a sixth sense that allows her to detect lies," Ryoko Baulta continued. "Our agents have had to be very circumspect around her to avoid detection. Prolonged contact with this cadet may make our chief agent's continued presence at the Academy untenable."

"Our agents at the Academy are few and precious," the Da Ruma chief boomed. "And if this cadet completes her training she will be a deadly threat to our continued business. Therefore she must not be permitted to complete her training."

"Understood," Ryoko Baulta said, not blinking. "Next week her class goes on its freshman cruise. Do you wish me to ensure that she does not return?"

"You are more valuable in your current duties," Da Ruma replied. "Other people will take care of it."

Near the head of the conference table, one particular captain licked his thin lips in anticipation of his favorite kind of mission.

\* \* \*

><p>WHUMP.<p>

\_Whirrrr. Clack.\_

WHUMP.

\_Whirrrr. Clack.\_

Crates whirred through the processing machine, and as they popped up in front of the cadets' stools, each cadet stamped the crate in front

of them with a stamper roughly twice as large as any of them.

"Gotta tell ya, girls," Applejack said, raising the giant cancellation stamp and bringing it back down on the postage label of yet another crate, "this wasn't th' kind of trainin' I expected on a starship cruise."

"Hey, it's work!" Ona na Wyn grinned, bringing down her own stamp. "Work is always good!"

Brightly Doo had done her Looping counterpart proud, in that somehow she had managed to stamp herself. Twice. "I like this," she said, bringing the stamp down mostly on the package label this time. "For some reason it seems so... so familiar to me. It's like I was born to do this!"

Applejack had to bite her tongue.

A whistle shrieked through the cargo area, and the cadets set down the stamps, shut down the float-pallets, and stepped away from their work stations. "Shift's over," Applejack groaned, stretching her legs. "Time to eat!"

"Muffins!" Brightly grinned.

"Steak!" Ona barked.

\_Leg cramps,\_ Applejack groaned to herself. She was NOT built to spend four hours at a time perched on a stool moving nothing below the waist. Oh, for an apple tree. Anthropoid or not, she wanted to buck a tree something fierce. Forty acres would just about work out the cramps.

Before the cadets could move towards the galley, red lights began flashing, followed by sirens. \_"Battle stations, battle stations,"\_ a voice boomed on the PA. \_"This ship is under pirate attack. All cadets report to your cabins immediately and remain there until curfew is lifted. All other crew report to battle stations."\_

"No steak?" Ona whined.

"No muffins?" Brightly looked a little like Ona.

\_No movement,\_ Applejack sighed. \_Ah well, probably just a drill anyway. \_"C'mon, girls," she said, tugging her roommates along. "If this is a drill, we'll get stuck with cleanup duty if we're the last ones in our cabins."

\* \* \*

><p>There were three of them. They had different names (Alan, Barry and Cohen) and looked nothing alike, but for all practical purposes they shared one brain between them. They were so interchangeable that they alternated stations on the bridge each day with no one noticing, least of all the captain.<p>

"Visual ID on the ship!" Seriyō Tennan shouted.

"Visual coming up now!" Barry responded, keying in the order.



The main screen lit up with a view of a sleek purple space cruiser, its bridge shaped in a golden crest of arms.

"Th-th-that's Ryoko Baulta's ship!" Barry gasped.

"The lovely Ryoko Baulta!" Alan cooed.

"The Pirate Idol of the GP three years running!" Cohen added.

"Activate weapons! Raise shields!" Seriyō shouted. "Establish weapons lock on the pirate!"

"Opening hailing frequencies!" Barry shouted.

"Yoo-hoo, Ryoko!" Alan shouted.

"We're all waiting for you, Ryoko!" Cohen added.

The face that popped up on the viewscreen was most definitely NOT Ryoko Baulta. Or female.

"You have a person called Yoshiko Fujiringo on board,"\_ the pirate growled, eyes almost shut, arms folded, glaring down at the GP ship's bridge from the screen. \_"If you surrender her to us peacefully we will let your ship continue unmolested. If you resist we will take her by force, along with anything else we choose to take."\_

"The Galaxy Police does not surrender its cadets to common pirates!" Seriyō shouted. "Not even cadets as uncouth and barbaric as the insubordinate Fujiringo!"

"You mean... no Ryoko?" Alan asked plaintively.

"Ryoko's just too busy to talk, right?" Barry added.

"She's still on board, isn't she?" Cohen finished.

The pirate on the viewscreen didn't budge, but a vein on his forehead pulsed visibly. \_"Captain Baulta is not on board!"\_ he snapped. \_"If you can't take this seriously, here's something to snap you back to your senses!"\_ The viewscreen switched back to the view ahead, which showed the pirate cruiser coming to bear on the GP ship.

A few flickers of light later, the GP ship rocked with several direct hits.

"Main reactor offline!" Alan shouted. "Power to shields and weapons has been cut off!"

"Return fire!" Seriyō shouted.

"Owing to the fact that there is no power to the weapons," Barry said, "we are unable to return fire!"

"Return fire!"

"We are currently unable to return fire," Cohen reported, "due to the fact that the weapons systems are without power!"

"Return fire!"

Cohen turned to look at his longtime colleagues. "He really doesn't get it, does he?" he asked.

The other two interchangables shook their heads in solemn agreement.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Right,<em> Applejack thought as the ship shook, \_this ain't no buckin' drill.\_

\_"Cadets remain in your cabins,"\_ the announcer repeated. \_"All other hands prepare to repel boarders."\_

"Y'all girls stay here," Applejack told her roommates. "I ain't goin' ta sit on my hoov... my hands when other folks are in danger."

"We're coming with you!" Brightly grinned.

"Yeah! Just tell us what to do!" Ona agreed.

"I just TOLD y'all what to do," Applejack said. "If we were all graduates it'd be another thing, but I'm th' only one of th' three of us with fightin' experience. Please, stay put, all right?"

They didn't like it, but Applejack's look kept them in the cabin until she shut and locked the door behind her.

Next to the cabin door was a communications panel. A few keystrokes, and a bypassed security system later \_(thanks for th' tips, li'l sis),\_ Applejack had a line open to the bridge. "Cadet Fujiringo reportin', Captain," she said. "Tell me where th' varmints are boardin' from. I'll counterattack an' drive 'em off!"

"Countermanded!" Seriyō shouted. "Even if an untrained, uncivilized brute such as yourself were qualified for combat, I could never order a single fighter to take on an entire pirate crew!"

"Firstly, sir," Applejack drawled, "I wasn't askin' permission. I was tellin' ya what I'm gonna do."

While Seriyō spluttered on the other end of the connection, she put her fingers through a well-practiced set of motions. She was slightly surprised she got it right the first time; she'd had much more practice doing it with hooves than hands.

"Second," a hundred Applejacks replied, their voices echoing through the empty corridors of the cadet quarters, "who said there was only gonna be one o' me?"

Shadow clones: the second most useful trick Applejack had picked up from the Naruto Loops, right after tree-walking. Made harvests a snap.

The boarding party that stormed down the plank never knew what hit them, nor why it kept vanishing in a puff of smoke any time one of

them landed a solid hit in return.

The crew that remained on board the pirate cruiser found out in a most definite way what hit them. And what kicked them. And what shackled them with thrown handcuffs that strongly resembled horseshoes. And what hogtied them in what seemed like an endless supply of lassoes.

Ten minutes later the pirates' bridge crew recalled its boarding party with orders to re-take its engine room.

Ten minutes after that the pirates' bridge crew called the GP ship to request terms of surrender.

"Aha!" Seriyō shouted. "You finally recognize the superior fighting talents of Seriyō Tennan!"

\_"Who? No!"\_ the gruff pirate commander replied. \_"But we want you to call off this lunatic you put aboard our ship before she does to us whatever she's done to the rest of our crew!"\_

Seriyō scowled. "Embarrassed by that insubordinate Earthling again," he muttered. In a louder voice he added, "I can only accept unconditional surrender, of course. Pirates must face proper justice."

\_"So long as proper justice doesn't include that young woman,"\_ the pirate replied, \_"we'll take our chances with the judge!"\_

"Captain!" Alan shouted from his console. "New ship coming out of warp!"

"Break away from the pirate cruiser!" Seriyō shouted. "Come about to face the new enemy!"

On the screen, one of the pirate crewmen shouted, \_"Oh God, she's broken through the do-"\_ The signal broke up in static, replaced by a demonic-looking battleship, black with red highlights, looking like a cross between a steam locomotive and a demon from Hell.

"It's the \_Daedalos!"\_ Barry gasped.

"Tarrant Shank's ship!" Cohen shuddered.

"Shank takes no prisoners!" Alan finished.

"Come about, I said!" Seriyō snapped. "Bring all weapons to bear on the newcomer and prepare to open fire!"

"We're still on auxiliary power!" Cohen said. "Shields and weapons are inactive!"

"Then ram the enemy!" Seriyō said. "The GP will never give up without a fight!"

"Sir!" Alan protested. "The \_Daedalos\_ is specifically armored for ramming and grappling tactics. Our ship isn't built for that!"

"We have no weapons! We have no shields!" Seriyō shouted. "But in the

face of certain destruction by a merciless enemy, never let it be said that the GP went down without a fight! Ramming speed, my men! Let's show Shank what the Galaxy Police are made of!"

The three interchangables went into conference. "Got any better ideas?" Barry asked.

"Dead is dead, either way," Cohen moaned.

"So we might as well die fighting, right?" Alan grinned.

The other two nodded, then turned to their consoles.

The Galaxy Police transport ship ripped away from the purple cruiser's boarding ramps, tearing the gangway apart. In a rather anemic burst of speed it staggered towards the oncoming \_Daedalos...\_ which passed it by effortlessly, bearing down on the cruiser. Massive guns crackled with energy, then spat out a lance of red destruction that slammed into the disabled cruiser, sending it in a trail of flame and smoke towards a nearby desert planet.

Satisfied that the mission was complete, the \_Daedalos\_ cloaked, vanishing into the blackness of space.

\* \* \*

><p>"Wasn't he one of you guys?" Applejack shouted at the pirate commander as both struggled to put flames out on the bridge.<p>

"Our mission was to capture you!" the pirate replied. "Tarrant Shank just decided to finish the job himself!"

"He wasn't doin' nothin' y'all weren't tryin' ta do!"

"We only kill in self-defense!" the pirate snapped. "Captain Ryoko doesn't believe in pointless death. Shank ENJOYS it!"

"Y'all are \_pirates\_," Applejack commented, tossing aside an empty fire extinguisher and looking for another one. "Ain't killin' in your job description somewhere?"

"We are pirates with honor," the commander corrected Applejack. "We only steal from the rich and the insured. We don't kidnap for ransom and we do not kill when at all avoidable!"

"Y'wanna explain me, then?"

"Orders from Da Ruma himself. You pose a threat to our guild- to all pirates everywhere, if you become a GP officer."

"Thanks for that," Applejack muttered. "That's th' last of th' fire extinguishers. Any hope of bringin' th' fire suppression systems back on-line? Navigation? Anythin'?"

The commander looked at the one other member of the bridge crew still on his feet, who shook his head solemnly. "No," he said. "We're down to emergency life support. We won't survive the crash."

Applejack closed her eyes for a moment, steadied herself, and nodded. "Right," she said. "Then it's up to me."

"Up to you?" the pirate commander asked. "What are you going to do? What CAN you do?"

The Element of Honesty appeared around Applejack's neck.  
"Magic."

Alicorn magic, to control the winds of the desert planet's atmosphere, bringing clouds together in the hot, dry air to cushion the descent.

The Force, to stabilize the spin and tumble of the pirate cruiser and to put it at the proper angle for re-entry.

Shadow clones, rushing through the ship, putting out small fires with their bodies, attempting repairs to the emergency thrusters to regain minimal control of the ship.

Spells learned at Hogwarts and in Seirun and Arda, lifting the ship, slowing it down when the emergency thrusters proved irreparable.

Earthbending, reaching below the ship to reshape a massive section of hard rocky ground into a ramp, a pit, and then a runoff zone filled with loose sand and gravel.

Dozens of tricks, talents, skills and spells learned through all those Loops standing behind Twilight, being the one supporting the egghead, being the one going along with whatever one of her friends came up with, added with the stubbornness born into every Apple and the will forged by enduring who knew how many million Loops without going stark raving mad.

All together, it was enough to bring the ship down.

It would never go up again, but it came down safely, with no further loss of life.

After the shrieks of armor plating on rock died away, after the last shuddering bump and lurch of the ship scraping against the planet's surface ended, the unwounded members of the pirate crew, led by their commander, gathered around Applejack, who stood motionless, eyes closed, arms spread, on the bridge.

Just as one curious pirate reached a hand forward to touch her to see if she was alive or not, her eyes opened up.

"Jus' ta be clear 'bout this," she mumbled, "y'all are still under arrest. Un'erstand?"

All the pirates except the commander took two very hasty steps backwards. The commander, arms folded, nodded solemnly.

"Good," Applejack muttered. "S'long we got that str..."

She hit the deck, fast asleep, before she could finish the word.

\* \* \*

><p>As the personal aide to the Jurai Sector director of the Galaxy

Police, Erma was in the perfect position to hear about everything first. Sometimes it could be heard from the other side of the teleport booth.<p>

"What do you MEAN you didn't conduct a search for survivors?" Airi's eyes bulged from her face. A vein in her temple bulged to match. On the viewscreen, even that confirmed idiot Seriyo Tennan had the sense to be afraid.

Unfortunately, he didn't have enough sense to stop digging his own grave. "Ma'am, we spent hours on combat patrol seeking to re-engage the \_Daedalos.\_ By the time we gave up on that search, no trace remained of the initial pirate vessel. As we had a crew of cadets and valuable cargo, I judged it best to proceed to our destination at best speed rather than waste time verifying that the enemy ship was lost with all hands."

"All hands plus one of your cadets, Captain!" Airi's fist hit her desk, sending one of the mountains of paperwork sliding off in a hissing avalanche. "The Galaxy Police does not leave one of our own behind! At the least you should have held position and awaited reinforcements!"

"But Airi, I-"

"Kindly report back to the Academy, Tennan," Airi growled. "If being a gym teacher is all you're good for, you may as well get back to it! Just stay out of my sight!" Before Seriyo could get another word out she cut the connection, slumping forward and knocking over the rest of the stacks of paperwork. "What am I going to tell Seto? She asks me to slip a student into the Academy, and I lose her on her freshman cruise?"

"Madame Director," Erma said, "please give me a ship. I will undertake the search myself."

Airi lifted her head from the remnants of the paper piles. "Really, Erma?"

"I am a Detective First Class, am I not?" Erma said. "I'm fully qualified for command. If not, at least give me a hyper-capable yacht and I'll conduct the search solo."

A corner of Airi's mouth turned up. "Anxious to retrieve your lost student, I take it?"

"No more so than yourself, ma'am," Erma replied.

"We'll leave it at that then... Captain." Airi said. "And when you return, we can discuss how a pipeline of information can be made to run two ways. Am I clear?"

Erma froze for just a moment, sweat trickling through her fur. "Er... crystal clear, ma'am."

The instant Erma disappeared from the teleport booth, Airi keyed open the private channel to Lady Seto. "Seto? This is Airi. I'm afraid you'll have to move up your plans for Baulta quite a bit..."

\* \* \*

><p>Erma double-checked the galactic coordinates... then triple-checked them.<p>

Star? Check.

Planet? Well, yes.

Nearly barren desert world, uninhabited? Not so much. Try forest planet... with the forest arranged in suspiciously orderly rows and lines of trees. Plenty of rain clouds, the few sullen lakes of the desert swelling into oceans...

\_How in the galaxy does someone terraform a planet this radically, without tools or spaceflight capacity, in three weeks?\_

At least the forest proved that Cadet Fujiringo was alive. None of Ryoko Baulta's crew had any capacity to do anything like this, but Fujiringo's mysterious capabilities... well, were mysterious. There was nothing that said she \_couldn't\_ do this, and absolutely nobody else could have.

"Helm, take us down to treetop level above the tallest and densest trees," Erma said. "I think we'll find our lost sheep there."

\* \* \*

><p>"Y'all got here jus' in time, ma'am," an exhausted looking Applejack said, saluting. "We were down to our last roll of toilet paper."<p>

"Lucky for you, then," Erma nodded. "And you had no trouble keeping over two hundred pirates under your authority?"

"Well, once I made it clear what they could an' couldn't get away with," Applejack shrugged, "it was pretty easy."

"Well, that's no longer your worry, cadet." Erma smiled gently. "A Galactic Army ship will arrive soon to take charge of this... er... impromptu prison colony. You, however, are two weeks behind on your coursework. You're going to leave immediately with me for the Academy."

"No, ma'am!"

Erma blinked. "I beg your pardon... \_cadet?\_" She intended to put a dangerous emphasis on the rank, but instead it gave away her curiosity.

"Ma'am, it would be improper for me to leave until custody of the prisoners is formally transferred to a permanent custody officer. Furthermore, I would have to be satisfied that the officer in question was capable of-"

"I have to remind you, cadet, that you are not yet a full officer in the Galaxy Police." Erma drew herself up. "Without a ship, these prisoners have no means of escape. We will leave sufficient supplies to last until the relief ship arrives. But in the meantime I am ordering you to come with me!" \_And now,\_ Erma thought, \_what do you do about that?\_

"I'm sorry, ma'am," Applejack replied. "But under these circumstances I must invoke Article Twenty-Nine."

Erma's eyes widened. She didn't need to look that one up; she'd lived in fear of it ever since she first put on the uniform.

Article Twenty-Nine: In the event that there is reasonable suspicion that a fellow Galaxy Police officer is an imposter, every effort shall be made to validate or disprove the identity of the accused; and if proof of imposture is found, the imposter is to be placed under arrest at once, chain of command notwithstanding.

"That's a dangerous accusation to make, Cadet Fujiringo." Erma's smile had vanished, and she didn't bother trying to fake one. "Shall we go talk to Airi about it?"

"No need, ma'am," Applejack said, holding her hands in a loop before her. "I reckon we can settle it right here'n now." Applejack's hands glowed, and a slow wave of light burst from them and pushed forward, enveloping Erma.

When it faded, Erma was gone, and Ryoko Baulta remained.

"I kinda had a feelin' ever since we met," Applejack continued. "But when you tried to leave prisoners unguarded an' uncared for, that was what made me decide. So I tried a 'dispel magic' spell I learned from watchin' a friend of mine. Good ta know it works here, too."

"Rrrrrrgh," Ryoko Baulta groaned. "Fine, fine, right answer, Cadet... but for the wrong reasons!" She threw her hands into the air. "A Galaxy Army ship is going to be here in hours, and I really AM supposed to take you back to the Academy at once!" Ryoko shook her head. "I only asked to lead the search because I have a responsibility to my crew. If anybody else had shown up instead, their orders would have been exactly the same!"

"Yeah, whatever," Applejack shrugged. "Don't change the fact that you're under arrest... \_ma'am.\_"

"I'm afraid she isn't, Applejack dear."

Both Applejack and Ryoko spun on their heels in time to see Seto Kamiki Jurai, the Devil Princess herself, step out from behind a tree. "Now, whatever am I going to do with you two?"

\* \* \*

><p>"What do you mean, repatriation?" The question leaped from both throats simultaneously.<p>

"How dare you kidnap my crew?" Ryoko leaned well into Lady Seto's personal space, shouting at the top of her lungs.

"Kidnap your crew?" Applejack didn't crowd Seto, but she did get pretty close. "You're stealin' my prisoners outta custody, is what you're doin'!"

"Now, now, ladies," Seto said, stepping back and waving her fan in



supplication. "I appreciate that you both have a duty to fulfill, but I have my own duty... to the peace and stability of the galaxy." Half-hiding her face behind her fan, she looked at Ryoko Baulta. "And that peace requires that you, my dear pirate captain, retrieve your crew and return to raiding the spaceways."

"Wh-wh-what?"

"I've discussed the matter with Airi and Mikami," Seto continued, naming the second and third ranking officers in the Galaxy Police. "We all agree that the best way to reduce the threat of piracy at this time is to have someone on the inside. Someone who could, for example, feed us information on the location of Tarrant Shank, or the plans of the Da Ruma pirate guild. You know," she added, "the people who tried to kill your crew rather than allow them to surrender?"

Ryoko's eyes narrowed. "Is that your game?"

"Ah don't get it," Applejack muttered. "Or rather, I get it, but I don't want it."

"It's politics, of course," Seto said. "More specifically, it's a plan I've been working on for fifty years now. If it succeeds, the threat of piracy in the galaxy will be reduced to a shadow of what it is now." Seto's smile vanished with a snap of her fan as she added, "And believe me when I say I have ample reason to see piracy eradicated from this galaxy by any means necessary."

Applejack had been Looked, Stared and glared at by experts, so Seto's look didn't faze her. "I've seen a lot of things, ma'am," she said. "An' most of what I've seen says that 'by any means necessary' is always th' wrong way to do it."

"Not always," Seto replied. "In any case, the decision is Captain Baulta's, not yours. Your orders, from the GP Marshal herself, are to relinquish custody of all your prisoners to me." She raised an eyebrow and added, "Are you going to risk your career by trying to stop me?"

"You mean, risk my chance at one'o them royal trees of yours?" Applejack asked.

Ryoko's jaw dropped.

"Lady Seto, I am an honest po... woman. An' that don't just mean I'm bad at lyin'."

Ryoko Baulta dashed between Seto and Applejack, facing the latter. "Are you NUTS? Shut up, shut up, shut UP! You've been offered a royal tree? NOBODY outside Jurai's allowed a royal tree! And you're going to throw away the biggest honor in the galaxy on a point of principle?"

"Shut up," Applejack grumbled, stepping around Baulta for a direct look at Seto. "If th' choice is between doin' my duty an' losin' th' prize, or gettin' th' prize dishonestly, then for me there ain't no choice at all." Applejack stepped forward, looking up into the taller woman's narrowed eyes. "You ain't takin' my prisoners. You know what you can do with your tree."

Seto raised an eyebrow. "Is that your final answer?"

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack looked down at the seed in her hands, speechless.<p>

"Well, there's your Shojiki," Seto smiled. "Now that the bonding ceremony is completed, there shouldn't be any difficulties, but Tsunami says it would probably be best if you wait to construct her containment unit until you have a Loop that begins well before your normal baseline start... whatever that means," she said with a shrug. "I don't know if I'm sad or relieved that I won't remember all this when history resets."

Applejack still continued to stare.

"You know, Tsunami made that seed especially for you. She says it doesn't exist in baseline, though I don't know why that might be important. You could say something like, 'thank you.'"

"I still can't believe you're actually doin' this," Applejack said at last.

"You stood on your integrity to your superiors, right on up to Airi herself. That should be rewarded."

"But this still feels wrong," Applejack said.

"That's because you're looking at it the wrong way." Seto jabbed her ever-present fan at Applejack. "I never said the gift of a royal tree was a quid pro quo. You assumed that. Jurai does not bribe people with royal trees... ever." That fan snapped open again, and Seto stared over it. "The kind of person who would accept such a bribe is wholly unsuitable to be a tree's partner in the first place."

"You didn't get Shojiki because you earned her. You get Shojiki because you deserve her."

"Oh," Applejack said quietly. "Well... that's all right, then."

"That's good. Now then, before you return to the Academy..." Seto keyed up the image of a less-than-impressive young man in Jurai noble robes. "Since we have quite some time before history resets, why don't you spend part of it as part of the Jurai royal families? I can arrange an omia i with this eligible young man this very evening!"

"Er..." Applejack wondered if she could outrun Seto's courtiers and guards all the way to the spaceport.

The mental laughter from the seed in her hands didn't help her discomfort.

\* \* \*

><p>A group of colorful ponies sat in the cellar of a barn, sipping from drinks served by the bartender and listening to the pony in the

cowboy hat telling her story.<p>

"... an' I retired after making Detective First Class, which is about as high as you can go before they start stickin' ya behind desks, an' spent the rest of the Loop learning about Jurai ship construction and royal tree maintenance."

"And that seed is still good?" Rainbow Dash asked, reaching a hoof towards the open presentation box. Applejack swiftly shut the box and stuck it back in her subspace pocket.

"Rainbow, in Tenchi's baseline, one of his friends discovers a royal seed that's millions of years old and still vital and powerful," Twilight Sparkle said. "Royal trees live off the power differential between universes. Even being in a subspace pocket is enough to keep it viable. In fact, its power supply is practically limitless."

"That's what they told me," Applejack nodded. "In their home universe they draw off of Tsunami herself, but elsewhere they get on all right."

"So, when ya gonna build your spaceship, huh?" Pinkie Pie asked. "'Cause I need to plan the You're-A-Sapling-Now-Welcome-To-Equestria Party!"

"I'm waitin' for th' next Sisters-type Loop I have," Applejack said. "Two thousand-odd years should be plenty enough head start to prevent any de-aging glitches Yggdrasil might throw at us. An' then..." Applejack grinned. "Then Shojiki an' I are gonna want a rematch of that Battleship game you won backalong, Twi."

Twilight paled a little, trying to think of what technology or magic, in all her Loops, could counter Light Hawk Wings without vaporizing Shojiki or triggering a Loop Crash...

\* \* \*

><p>117.2 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

**\*\*And the Rest Loop: Prologue\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>"Really?" Twilight asked the other Loopers gathered around the back of the barn at Sweet Apple Acres. Unfortunately none of them was Big MacIntosh or Berry Punch, so the bar wasn't going to open this Loop... no matter how badly Twilight needed it.<p>

"What's the matter, purple plot?" Gilda asked. "Do we not measure up to your standards, or something?"

"No, no, that's not it at all," Twilight said hurriedly, "but... well, last Loop was kind of rough on me, all right? Almost Bureau bad. And I was hoping that Applejack or Fluttershy or Pinkie might be Awake so I could talk it out..." Even Rainbow Dash or Rarity would have done, really. She really wanted at least one of her closest friends with her for a while. Though most of these Loopers were also friends... well, Angel Bunny was stretching the point, but still... it wasn't the same thing. There were her other friends, and then

there were \_the girls\_, and she couldn't explain it better than that.

"If you'll accept the word of this'n," Zecora said soothingly, "all of us are willing to listen."

"Er... thanks, but it's not the same," Twilight said. Looking at Angel Bunny, who had pulled out a notepad and pencil from his subspace pocket, she added, "In some cases, REALLY not the same."

"I hate to push things along," Ivory Scroll said, "but what is the plan for this Loop? Did you have any project, any experiment, any pranks in mind? We really need to know now- it's only about eighteen hours until Nightmare Moon's return."

"I'm sorry, everyone," Twilight said quietly. "I think I need a bit of a rest. Not a full vacation, but I'm pretty much gonna go through the motions this Loop. You know, autopilot. You all do whatever you want."

Twilight was less than reassured by the five very evil grins that appeared on the faces of the Mayor, Zecora, Cheerilee, Angel Bunny and Gilda.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>And the Rest Loop: Friendship is Magic<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight had made an early evening of it at Pinkie's surprise party. The unAwake party pony had, for once, been quite understanding when, after making the rounds to greet and thank her new (very, very old) friends, Twilight had plead exhaustion after her trip to Ponyville and her work overseeing preparations for the Summer Sun Celebration. She had been a little less understanding when Twilight spotted another pony spiking the punch, took the bottle of hard cider away from her, and went to bed with it... but Pinkie didn't do anything more than give Twilight a look of sad disapproval just before Twilight shut the door.<p>

Half the remaining bottle had been enough to put Twilight to sleep, and she'd rather hoped to sleep at least until after Nightmare Moon had been and gone. She'd dropped a couple of hints about a prophecy she'd been researching, how a clue should be in this library, if only she had the energy to follow up. Nightmare Moon would give her little speech and flee, and her friends would come to the library seeking answers... after Twilight had had a long, restorative night's sleep in her safe, peaceful home.

So when the knocking on the bedroom door woke her up only a handful of hours after she'd gone to bed, Twilight woke up neck-deep in confusion and only got deeper. "Bwah? Whah? Who? Who's there?"

The bedroom door opened to admit the sound of the still-rocking party and Ivory Scroll. "There you are, Miss Sparkle!" she cried. "We've got to hurry! You're due to introduce Princess Celestia in just seventeen minutes!"

"I am? I what? Wait, aren't you- I mean-" Still half asleep, she

struggled to formulate a coherent thought as the mayor and Cheerilee herded her out of bed, out of the library, and over to Ponyville's town hall, along with a trickle of other ponies already shifting from one party-in-progress to the party-about-to-begin. Every time Twilight managed to get enough words in a row in her brain, like \_Since when do I introduce the Princess?\_ or \_What do you think you're doing?\_ or \_What the larch is going on here?\_, Cheerilee would fuss with her mane or Ivory Scroll would go into a rapid-fire monologue about how proud Ponyville was to have Princess Celestia's right hand pony on site at this, Ponyville's finest hour. The combination of this and the continuous pushing and bumping kept Twilight both mentally and physically off-balance until she was actually standing on the stage in front of practically every single pony in Ponyville.

"And now, to introduce our beloved ruler, we have the personal student of Princess Celestia, the most talented unicorn to ever attend the School for Gifted Unicorns, Twilight Sparkle!" With that Ivory Scroll and Cheerilee stepped out of the spotlight, and Twilight was alone.

"Er... um..."\_ This is a prank. It has to be a prank. But I have NO idea if I'm the target, or where it's going to come from. All I can do is play along with it.\_ "Er, thank you all. I have to say that in the one day I've spent in Ponyville I've been made so welcome, I feel like I've lived here for milli- er, for hundreds of years."

"Some of us have, dearie!" Granny Smith shouted from the audience, to much laughter.

"Er, yeah," Twilight smiled ruefully. "Anyway, I can't think of any town friendlier than Ponyville in all my travels with Celestia as her student. And I certainly can't think of any town in Equestria more deserving to host the one thousandth Summer Sun Celebration!"

The entire town cheered, whistled, and pounded its hooves in applause.

"And so that we can get started on that, allow me to introduce the ruler of Equestria, a powerful alicorn, a wise monarch... and the best teacher a pony could possibly have..." Twilight gestured behind her to the balcony where Celestia, she knew, would not be. "Princess Celestia!"

Fluttershy's birds trilled their fanfare, Rarity raised the curtains, and sure enough, as usual the balcony was empty.

"Er... Princess Celestia?" Twilight called out, trying to sound concerned. She glanced out the western window... yes, the Mare in the Moon had vanished... and more to the immediate point, so had Ivory Scroll. \_Guess I'll have to deliver the line...\_ "Please keep calm, everypony, I'm sure there's a good explanation."

One of the guards looked around the balcony and called down, "She's GONE!"

"Ooooh, she's good!" Pinkie chirped. "They must teach that sort of thing in Canterlot!"

Laughter echoed through the room, silencing the murmurs of the

nervous ponies inside. A swirl of smoke twinkling with the light of distant stars coalesced on the balcony into the shape of a midnight-blue alicorn clad in armor- Nightmare Moon. "Greetings, my faithful subjects," she said. "Thank you for being here to welcome me back from my exile."

Applejack stepped forward. "Who the hay are y'all, an' what have ya done wtih-"

The loud \_thock\_ of a throwing star embedding itself into the balcony railing above cut Applejack's question short. Nightmare Moon flinched, leaned forward to look, then flinched back again as a pencil embedded itself into the railing twice as deeply as the throwing star.

Twin spotlights lit up balconies high up along the sides of the town hall. Two earth ponies clad in black ninja suits from muzzle to tail stood in the spotlights, one fanning out a large sheaf of paper, the other posing with an array of pencils in her hoof. Each pony also wore a green sleeveless jacket and a headband with a metal device attached, engraved with the swirled leaf symbol of Konohagakure.

Twilight groaned as she noticed the pince-nez glasses perched on the paper-wielding ninja pony's masked muzzle. Of course.

"The Third Hokage sends her regards, Nightmare Moon," the pince-nez ninja said in Ivory Scroll's voice.

"The Fifth Hokage sends her regards, Nightmare Moon," the pencil-wielding ninja echoed, speaking in Cheerilee's voice.

"For the honor of the Ninja Village Hidden in the Leaves, we shall defeat you!" the two chorused.

Nightmare Moon glanced from one ninja to the other. "You're having me on." Twin blasts of black magic speared out towards the spotlights.

The ninjas were already in the air before the magic blasts struck home, leaping from the sides of the great hall straight onto the balcony where Nightmare Moon stood. "Nightmare Moon, you have been served," Ninja Scroll said, sticking a large, elaborately calligraphed scroll on Nightmare Moon's chest.

"Please sign for receipt," Ninjilee added, shoving a pencil down the front of Nightmare Moon's plastron.

Both ninjas leaped away a split second before the pencil and scroll glowed and exploded, engulfing the evil alicorn in fire and smoke. Ninja Scroll tossed two bundles of papers into the air; they landed in two rows along the central aisle of the hall. One string of papers read: THIS WAY TO THE EXIT. The other said: YOU DON'T WANT TO BE HERE. Both rows rippled with red lights, guiding the way to the open doors.

That was the only cue the ponies of Ponyville needed. They skedaddled, shrieking in terror. Twilight found herself carried along with the crowd. The last words she heard as she was pushed outside were Nightmare Moon's: "THIS MEANS WAR!"

For several minutes afterwards Twilight and the rest of Ponyville watched as loud explosions, flashes of light, and bolts of midnight magic burst out of one window after another of town hall. Each time some blow or blast shook the building, the building shook a little bit more. Finally one loud explosion shook the town hall so hard it kept shaking, bits falling off, loud crunching and groaning sound echoing from within.

Two night-clad figures jumped out of upper-story windows and vanished into the eternal night... just before the whole building collapsed to the ground in a pile of wood scraps and tattered banners.

A few seconds later the moon set and the sun rose, illuminating a single dark blue hoof stretched through a gap in what had once been the town hall's roof. It was waving a white flag.

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm sorry, Princess Celestia," Twilight said, "but I honestly can't tell you who defeated Nightmare Moon."<p>

"That's a shame," the princess replied. "I owe whoever managed the feat a great debt... just as I owe you for comforting my sister and helping her let go of her hate and jealousy afterwards." Nightmare Moon had been a blubbering wreck when the work crews had released her from the rubble pile. It had taken but a few well-chosen words of consolation and encouragement from Twilight, combined with some gratuitous fangirling about her favorite constellations, to finish the job of purging the Nightmare from Princess Luna.

"Ahem. Speaking of debt..." Ivory Scroll, wearing her best ascot, mane impeccably styled, stepped forward and presented a scroll to Celestia.

"What's this? ... bill for services rendered... expenses include one town hall... early settlement would oblige?" Celestia's eyes widened as she looked at the numbers carefully and exactly aligned down the right hand margin of the scroll.

"Of course, Princess, we don't expect you to pay us directly. It would be most uncouth for a princess to carry a checkbook around like a commoner."

"Er... yes... I mean... we shall have to discuss this. Luna, have you- Luna?" Celestia looked around for her sister, who had vanished.

"Ah, yes," Ivory Scroll continued. "Our town's public counselor recommended community service as a therapeutic means of reacquainting Princess Luna with the modern world while easing her guilt. Specifically, as teaching assistant at our town's school." Ivory Scroll shrugged. "The counselor's also our schoolmistress. When you live in a small town, you have to exercise all your talents."

"Ah... yes... well, Luna always had a soft spot for children in her heart. She should do well." Celestia raised a hoof at a particular item on the scroll. "Now, if we could discuss some of these estimates..."

Twilight didn't know if she was going to burst out laughing or if her head was just going to burst, but either way she decided the time had come to make a discreet withdrawal.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>And the Rest Loop: Bridle Gossip<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stared out the window of Sugarcube Corner at Zecora. Normally, in a baseline run, Zecora would make her first appearance in a grey hooded cloak, trying (and failing) to avoid calling attention to herself. This time... "What kind of mare wears a tuxedo, cloak and top hat to go shopping?"<p>

"I know, right?" Pinkie Pie gasped. "She's obviously evil! EEEEVIL! I even wrote a song about it! Wanna hear it?"

"Nope," Twilight said, making Pinkie's ears droop. "I'd rather get it straight from the zebra's mouth." It took a bit of a struggle, with five mares trying to drag her back through the doors, but eventually Twilight got out into the street and walked up to Zecora. The zebra had set up a large cauldron in the middle of the street, built a fire underneath, and now was adding this and that from bags and pouches around her into the mix.

"Excuse me," Twilight said.

"My pardon you need not, if you but step into my pot," Zecora replied with a grin.

"I... what? No!" Twilight took a couple of steps backwards. "Miss, I just came out here to prove you're not the big scary strange person my friends think you are!" She pointed back at her friends, who had reluctantly followed her out. (Pinkie Pie's hooves were still clamped around Twilight's tail.)

"Who am I, I hear you cry?" Zecora grinned. She rose onto her hind legs, doing a kicking dance, twirling the spoon from the pot and occasionally poking Twilight with it as she sang.

\_I'm an evil enchantress\_

><em>And I do evil dances<em>  
><em>When I look in your eyes<em>  
><em>I can put you in trances<em>  
><em>Then you know what I'll do?<em>  
><em>I'll mix an evil brew<em>  
><em>And then gobble you up<em>  
><em>In a big tasty stew<em>

"So... WATCH OUT!" she grinned, jabbing Twilight in the barrel once more with the spoon before giving the greenish mixture in the pot another stir.

"See? See? I told you she was evil!" Pinkie shouted, pointing a hoof at Zecora. "She's so evil she even stole my song! And this must be the big tasty stew she's going to eat us in!" She leaned over the edge of the cauldron and dipped a hoof into the mix. She licked off the residue and made a face.



"GAH! This stew isn't tasty at all!" she shouted. "It's... split pea soup! Yuck!" Pinkie pointed her other hoof back at Zecora. "Worst... evil enchantress... EVER!"

Zecora sighed and took off her top hat. "'Tis true at evil I sorely fail," she said. "All I can do is make people fit and hale. It's a shame for a zebra witch to fail to be a total \_wicked pony."\_

\_Really?\_ Twilight thought. \_This is the best gag you can come up with? Well... I admit turning the tables on Pinkie is pretty good, but... it just feels like this is... lacking something...\_ Out loud she said, "You know, you don't have to be an evil enchantress. You could just be a master of herbal remedies and folk magic. And I'm sure that once the town has learned that Pinkie Pie's shamed you into giving up your evil ways-"

"Er, ya \_have\_ quit bein' evil, right?" Applejack interrupted.

"Indeed my heart was never in it; I lost the fight before I could begin it," Zecora replied. "My wicked ways I do abjure, and Pinkie's protest was my cure."

Applejack turned to face the row of buildings behind them. "Y'all can come out now!" she shouted. "Pinkie beat th' evil witch of th' Everfree, an' she's promised ta never be evil again!"

Doors slammed open up and down the street, and cheering ponies rushed out, picking up both Pinkie and Zecora and carrying them around the streets of Ponyville, cheering and dancing.

"I'll just make sure your soup doesn't burn, shall I?" Twilight shouted after them, left alone by the pot. She took a taste from the spoon. "This isn't actually that bad... could use some salt..."

\* \* \*

><p>Zecora smiled smugly at the two ponies standing at the door to her hut the next morning. "Swiftly consequences come due, to those who taste an evil brew," she said.<p>

"Lay off the comedy," Twilight grumbled, brushing her floppy horn out of the way, "and tell us you have a cure for poison joke poisoning."

Pinkie Pie nodded frantically, her voice muffled by the enormous polka-dotted swollen tongue sticking out of her mouth.

"I thought Discord's posies would make a fine seasoning," Zecora shrugged. "Although I'm unable to explain my poor reasoning."

\_Here's the punchline,\_ Twilight thought. \_She got us to dose ourselves with the stuff. Lo, I do laugh. Ha. Ha. Ha.\_

\* \* \*

><p>117.3 (Hubris Plus) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Sunset shifted her weight from hoof to hoof, trying to burn off nervous energy. Maybe she should come back another time. It was late and she'd hate to interrupt anything. And she shouldn't just spring a visit on ponies like this. And it wasn't as though she wanted anything very important. And...<p>

And if she didn't do something now she doubted she'd have the resolve to do it later.

Steeling herself, she raised a hoof and knocked on the aging wagon's door. A moment later a night black mare with a sea green mane poked her head outside. A sequined bow tie was fastened at her neck.

"The Great and Powerful Trixie is currently- Oh! Sunset!" She threw the door open before leaning back inside and calling out. "Trixie, we've got company! Please, make yourself at home," she added, motioning for Sunset to follow her in.

The orange mare stepped inside and closed the door behind her. As soon they were free of potential prying eyes the other mare flared green for a moment before Chrysalis's disguise fell away. Trixie was seated in the general vicinity of the kitchenette, pans going about their business encased in her magic while she leafed through a magazine. Her hat and cloak were hung up on pegs near the door.

"Sunset," she greeted warmly as she marked her place. "What can we do for you?"

"I asked Twilight to tell me the next time we were both awake. I was hoping we could talk."

"Mm, do you want some privacy?" The Changeling Queen asked.

"No, I think that, um, you could help too," Sunset told them.

"Alright then," Chrysalis situated herself next to the table and indicated the other seat with a hoof.

"I was wondering," she began slowly. "When... When did you know you were... You know..."

"In love?" Chrysalis batted her eyelashes. "Have you found a special somepony? I suppose I should be flattered that you came to us instead of Cadence, but she really isn't as pushy as you might have heard."

"What?! No!" Sunset stammered. "I mean, I'm sure you know a lot, and I'd definitely come to you if I did, but..." She took a deep breath and tamped down on her rambling. The topic at hoof had her all out of sorts. "When did you know you were reformed?"

"Ah," Trixie said, nodding in understanding. "This is going to be one of those conversations. I'll put on the coffee."

"I thought tea was traditional?" Sunset blinked in confusion.

"Maybe for you and Twilight," the unicorn answered, idly adding a coffee pot to the implements she was magically juggling. "I tend to end up as Luna's student, and she's always preferred the bean to the leaf. She likes her coffee like she likes her skies: Dark, with a splash of milky way. She's also the diarch of choice when it comes to this sort of thing. She knows where we're coming from."

"I see..." Sunset said uncertainly.

"Now, this has to come from somewhere. What's got you down?" Chrysalis asked.

"Well, a couple Loops ago my side of the mirror had a magical girl variant." She shrugged. "Nothing too unusual. Monster of the week, life lessons, big finale, that whole thing."

"And you were cast as the villain?" The changeling asked. Oak knew she'd been through that often enough herself.

"Star, actually," Sunset answered and chewed at her lip for a moment. "I was kicking monster ass, cheered on by the student body, and I realized that I hadn't really changed, you know? When I ran through that mirror I was looking for power and adoration, and now I have to wonder if I'm only happy because I have them. What if I'm still the same pony that spent years tormenting children and topped it off with mind control?"

The other two exchanged a glance, and Trixie smiled encouragement to her marefriend.

"I went through something similar for a long time," Chrysalis admitted. "Thought I was just a happily gluttoned parasite feeding on Trixie's love. I didn't trust that I was good enough to be otherwise until I got this," she manifested Kindness around her neck.

"Which makes her very silly," Trixie noted, tapping her playfully on the snout before distributing cups of coffee. "Take it from the mare who ascended via extensive property damage: You don't need the approval of magical jewelry to be a good pony. It would have saved some pony a lot of trouble if they'd taken that advice from the start."

"Of course," Chrysalis rolled her eyes. "How foolish of me to doubt the Wise and Beautiful Trixie."

"And humble, don't forget humble," the magician smirked.

"I... I'm not sure I want to deal with Harmony over this," Sunset admitted. Her baseline had been so very long ago, but being on the wrong end of the elements was something that stuck with you. Because, when they really got going, you knew you were in the wrong the moment they struck, deep in your bones with all illusions peeled away.

"And I said you shouldn't have to," Trixie said primly. "Our stories aren't so different. We wanted fame and power, got them in spades, and were a little conflicted over whether we deserved it. So I'll give you the same advice Luna and Twilight and just about everypony gave me: The fact that you're worried about it and want to be good

means you probably are."

"Don't take this the wrong way, but is that \_it?\_ I was hoping for something a little more..." She trailed off, realizing she didn't know \_what\_ she'd been hoping for. If she knew what advice she wanted, she wouldn't have needed to find it.

"Twilight would probably say it fancier. And longer. And cite sources," Trixie shrugged. "But this sort of thing is usually only as complicated as you make it, and there's almost never some magical piece of advice that'll make you feel better."

"I... Yeah, okay, that makes sense," Sunset slumped.

"But talking helps," Chrysalis added.

"And we've got the whole Loop ahead of us. Wanna stick around?" Trixie was suddenly beside her, forehoof hooked over one shoulder while the other gestured expansively. "I'm thinking we do a fire and ice theme. Our colors fit perfectly and I've been meaning to brush up on cryomancy. What do you say?"

"Are you sure I won't be in your way?"

"Just because we're dating doesn't mean we don't have time for our friends," the changeling scolded.

"And that goes for \_any\_ Loop. If you need us, we'll be there."

"That's... Thank you. That sounds good." She shifted awkwardly. "But, um, can you help me brush up on \_illusory\_ fire? I kinda specialize in the fighty kind."

"Oh, Sunny," Trixie grinned wide. "You've come to the right mare."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

117.1: Yes, this loop was that long.

>117.2: The Mane Six are the A team. There's also a B team, and a C team. This is probably the & team.<br>117.3: A quiet word with friends.

## 124. Chapter 124

118.1

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, girls," Twilight said, nodding. "I think I understand. I'm surprised it hasn't happened sooner, actually."<p>

Nyx shrugged. "Being a referee is kind of neat, but I want to give it a go myself."

"And none o' us wanted to be the ref instead," Applebloom added. "So, we thought we'd ask you."

"I'm honoured," Twilight said. "Now â€" I think I've got a potential extra rule, this time. A fillip, as it were."

"Go on," Scootaloo said.

"Well. You always pick the best of everything. So, this time, a new rule. You can only pick ships which were at one time or another seriously considered â€" and you won't know who's going to drive it." Twilight held up an envelope. "This has the list of whose ship is going to be commanded by who, and none of you are going to get to see it â€" so you know that it's going to be better for you if you pick a really, really \_bad\_ design."

The CMC exchanged glances.

"Okay, ah've already got like four ideas fer that," Applebloom agreed. "Nice idea."

"Thanks." Twilight shrugged. "Obviously I'll be perfectly willing to be the referee for a more normal game or two in the future, but I thought this might be a nice break from your routine."

"Right."

Scootaloo rubbed her hooves together. "Okay, get out the consoles. I've got a real stinker of a design for you guys!"

\* \* \*

><p>About a week later, the two earth ponies, one unicorn, one pegasus, two alicorns and one bizarre mutant squirrel-changeling-lion-starbeast-whatever collage reconvened to start their game.<p>

"Okay," Twilight began. "Let's see what you've got. Applebloom?"

Applebloom pointed behind her at the truly insanelly large battleship. "HMS \_Incomparable\_, reporting. Twenty inch guns, forty-six thousand tonnes, thirty-five knots, armour like tissue paper. Sure, she packs a punch, but actually too much of a punch â€" you're going to want ear defenders, it'll rain sheared rivets all over the ship when she fires, and I don't hold out much hope the aiming gear will survive the shock."

The others gaped.

"Well, it's certainly the biggest one here," Twilight managed. "Okay, next up â€" Scootaloo."

"KMS \_Graf Zeppelin\_, with original airgroup." Scootaloo nodded. "Most of the aircraft she carries are terrible, no torpedo planes, the fighters' undercarriage tends to fall apart on landing and the dive bombers aren't much better."

"Are those \_casemate guns?\_" Twilight asked. "On a \_carrier?\_"

"Yep, original design." Scootaloo shook her head. "And this was the

same time they were buildin' Shokakus and Essexes in other parts of the world, too..."

She pointed. "As a final touch, all the AA guns are on the same side. Just because. And yeah, that's original too."

Twilight facehoofed. "Are you sure this was a real design?"

Scootaloo slapped down a sheaf of papers in front of her. "Got built, too."

"...huh. Okay..." Twilight sighed. "I feel so depressed... Sweetie?"

"HMS \_M2\_." Sweetie beamed. "A submersible aircraft carrier with one unarmed seaplane!"

"...moving on," Twilight decided. "Tiara?"

"Well, I feel somehow cheated," Tiara told her, huffing. "Mine was a production design they made hundreds of."

"A Wickes-class destroyer," Twilight read off the cover sheet. "Where is it?"

"Behind Applebloom's mobile mountain, I think." Tiara sighed. "Well, at least it'll be quick."

Next up was Nyx, who revealed she had built an Ise-class battlecarrier.

"So, it removed about a third of the heavy guns of a perfectly serviceable "if slow" battleship," Nyx explained. "And in return, it got the ability to...?"

She tailed off.

"Uh..." Tiara looked the ship over. "Launch planes, I guess?"

"Correct." Nyx paused. "\_Float\_planes\_."

"...then what was the \_point?\_" Scootaloo burst out.

"Exactly," Nyx agreed. "I fully expect a disastrous aviation fuel fire."

Twilight coughed. "I see. And Silver?"

"The Tessakonteres."

Scootaloo facehoofed. "Oh, no..."

"Sorry, what?" Tiara asked. "What's one of-"

"It means forty-handed," Scootaloo explained. "Basically, she built a Greek battleship from back before Rome, which could probably be outmanoeuvred by an island."

"...right," Twilight said. "Well, I must admit I never said it had to be a ship from after the invention of gunpowder... okay, here's the matchups."

She passed them around.

"What one am I getting?" Sweetie asked. "Hope it's-"

She broke off, staring at the paper.

Sweetie â†' Sweetie

"Uh... Twilight?" she asked. "Am I supposed to get mine?"

"Yeah, I've got mine too," Nyx reported.

Twilight nodded. "Exactly. You all do."

"What!"

"That's-"

"No fair!"

"Wait, wait!" Silver said, hovering slightly. "It works! See, now we all have to use rubbish ships we picked ourselves."

Applebloom turned an eye on Twilight. "Is this one of them friendship lessons?"

"Well..." Twilight looked slightly embarrassed. "Sort of the opposite, really. 'You don't go to war with the army you want to have.'"

"Ah. Gotcha." Applebloom sighed. "Well, best go tryin' to square this circle and turn th' ship into an actually useful war machine..."

"You think you've got problems?" Silver asked. "Mine's made of wood!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Come on, come on..."<p>

There was a splintering crash.

"Aaaargh!" Scootaloo cantered out onto deck and kicked the Ju87R which had just suffered a landing gear failure. "This is stupid!"

After a session of cursing, she shoved the lost aircraft over the side and replaced it with a Bf109. This one, at least, launched successfully and climbed into the sky.

"Oh, this is giving me a headache..."

\* \* \*

><p>Silver Spoon lay back on her blanket, on the top deck of her

multi-oared wooden ship.<p>

The way she saw it, she had no hope whatsoever if she was spotted, so she had better just try not to do anything and hope that that worked out.

And it meant she could get in some sunbathing on top of that.

The whole ship shook with a loud \_clunk-craaash\_.

"What?" Silver asked, getting up and looking around. Nothing in sight...

The Tessakonteres shook, and started to settle slightly in the water.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hello, Sweetie," Twilight greeted. "What happened?"<p>

"Surfaced under Silver's ship," Sweetie grumbled. "It knocked the hangar doors open, and I flooded."

Twilight nodded sympathetically, and looked over the side of her cloud. "Hmmm... Silver's ship seems fine."

"Well, it's made of wood, isn't it?" Sweetie replied. "Wood floats."

\* \* \*

><p>Silver concluded that her ship wasn't actually going to sink any more, now the hatch to the lowest deck was closed, and slumped.<p>

Then brightened. It looked like she'd achieved a sinking, which was several times better than she was expecting her Tessakonteres to accomplish.

"Huh. Who knew..."

\* \* \*

><p>"You've got a huge advantage here, Nyx!" Applebloom shouted into the communication relay over the thunder of her guns.<p>

"Really?" Nyx replied. "How so?"

A rivet bounced off Applebloom's head.

"First, that!" Applebloom gestured, as her ship gradually shredded itself. "My main guns are trying to blow themselves off the ship!"

Nyx stuck her tongue out. "You chose it!"

"Yeah, to be a failure!" Applebloom winced at a loud groaning sound. "Anyway, gotta be quick before somethin' really does fall off. Yours has got air-observed shot!"



BLAM.

"I can't use my superior range, for-"

There was a loud bong, and the whole ship rang like a bell.

Then it shook, and gave a groaning creak.

"I hate Jackie Fisher..." Applebloom sighed. "There goes the backbone, 'cause he didn't include enough armour to work structurally..."

\* \* \*

><p>By the time the smoke cleared and Nyx had taken stock, she felt cautiously optimistic. The three 20" hits she had taken had hurt â€" one had destroyed the fore turret, and another had caused waterline flooding â€" but the ship could still fight.<p>

Fortunately, as there was a suspicious aircraft buzzing around as she landed her floatplanes and hoisted them up for replenishment.

"Is that you, Scoots?" she asked.

"Well, it sure as sugar isn't Sweetie Belle," Scootaloo replied. "Hey, that looks kind of beat up. Want an aviation fuel fire?"

"Not especially, no." Nyx worked her ship up as fast as it could manage â€" 19 knots â€" and started up her AA guns. "Right, you came from the east... let's go visit."

"Never fear!" Scootaloo replied. "I'm faster than you, you know!"

"Yep!" Nyx beamed. "But the wind's coming from my direction. You can't run and launch planes at the same time."

"...you're quite good at this," Scootaloo admitted. "Must have been all the stints as ref."

At that point, the fire on Incomparable reached her magazine.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hm, not bad," Trixie said critically. "Bit too much flying metal, couldn't use it in a show without shields â€" but the water works with it quite well."<p>

Twilight blinked. "How did you even-"

Trixie smiled. "There was an explosion due. I have my ways, Twilight."

"Really?" Twilight considered that. "I... see..."

When Trixie wasn't looking, she wrote a quick note to Spike and sent it off. Then consoled Applebloom on her loss.

\* \* \*

><p>"At last!" Tiara cackled. "An easy target!"<p>

Silver waved. "Hi, Diamond. I guess I'm for it?"

"Pretty much," Tiara agreed. "Sorry, but I have to take what I can get â€" if I faced Applebloom's monster I'd have a life expectancy of about a tenth of a second, even if the recoil did make her roll upside down."

"If I had marines, I'd be boarding you right now," Silver commented absently.

"Yeah, probably." Diamond shrugged, and opened fire. Specifically, she set Silver's hull on fire.

"Abandon ship!" Silver called. She tapped a hoof on the floor, and the instruments of a complete orchestra appeared, playing \_my heart will go on.\_ "See? A band, on ship!"

Tiara groaned. "Do Draconequui have a biological need for puns?"

"All signs point to yes, I'm afraid." Silver shrugged. "Bye â€" this could take a while."

\* \* \*

><p>"Run away, run away, run away," Scootaloo chanted. "Running, running, running..."<p>

The AA guns started firing. As did the broadside guns.

"Oh, hi Tiara," she added. "Sorry, this carrier's kind of not vulnerable to that."

The gallant little destroyer met a broadside of eight 6" rounds coming the other way, and promptly exploded.

\* \* \*

><p>"That sucked," Tiara said, shaking her head. "Ow."<p>

She shook Silver's paw. "Thanks for the grace you took your defeat with, by the way. I forgot to mention."

"It helps keep it all friendly, I think," Twilight supplied.

Trixie's head went up, and she vanished.

"What just-" Applebloom began.

Twilight cast a time spell. "To the minute. Well, that's vaguely worrying..."

"What?" the fillies pressed.

"Spike \_just\_ set off a large pile of explosives about ten miles outside Appleloosa. Trixie said she had an explosion sense, and I

thought I'd check that... I'm still surprised the answer was yes..."

\* \* \*

><p>The fourteen dive bombers, all that was left of Scootaloo's air wing aside from two remaining fighters, straggled down to the deck.<p>

Scootaloo kept one eye on the plotting board. She'd have to recover them quickly to avoid trouble from that battleship...

Land. Land. Crunch. Land. Crunch...

Every time an overstressed landing gear gave way, or an arrestor hook tore out of the aircraft, was like a tiny cut to her chances of winning. Nyx might be down to her secondary armament by now, but that was still more than enough to finish her off in a surface action-

The \_fifteenth\_ plane in the landing formation dropped something.

Scootaloo had just enough time to notice it before it went through the deck with a \_crunch\_, through the armour belt with a \_clang\_, initiated, and detonated in the hangar.

"Oh... horsefeathers," she said softly, as her carrier promptly caught fire.

"Nyx! What did you \_do?\_"

"I spent about half an hour before your last attack rigging a seaplane with one of the main gun shells, that's what!" Nyx said, sounding very pleased with herself. "Gotcha!"

"Yeah, yeah..." Scootaloo sighed. "I feel so embarrassed. Sunk by an airstrike from a battleship..."

"I couldn't have done it without you," Nyx told her with a wink.

\* \* \*

><p>"Let's never do that again," Applebloom said, once they were all gathered together again.<p>

"Agreed," Sweetie said fervently. "We all hated our ships, I'm pretty sure."

"Did you learn anything from it?" Twilight asked.

"Yep." Diamond looked between the other fillies, who nodded, then turned to the Anchor. "Get Spike to be the ref."

\* \* \*

><p>118.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Sunset Shimmer lay back on the grass, just a few furlongs from Fluttershy's house.<p>

She made a gesture with her hoof, and twenty-four glowing keys shimmered into being over her head. She frowned, shifting them back and forth, then made a decision and tapped one.

\_Heart of Joke\_ dropped into her hoof as the others vanished like smoke, sticking to it like they were magnetized. She waved it back and forth, feeling the balance, and smiled.

"Afternoon!"

Sunset craned her neck to see who was coming up the hill towards her. "Oh â€" good afternoon, Lyra."

"So," the green unicorn added. "What's with the display?"

"Oh, right." Sunset reached another hoof to the sky, and her characteristic \_Shimmering Sunset\_ formed. "Well, I usually use this one, but I was thinking â€" what's the point of a Keyblade you never use? So I was trying to pick one to get used to, to use next time."

"Right, right. Cool." Lyra watched as Sunset stowed \_Shimmering Sunset\_, and then selected \_Super Galaxy Bonds.\_ "What's that one for?"

"Kisaragi Gentarou," Sunset answered without missing a beat. "A who, not a what. Most of them are. He's one of the guys who anchors the world all the Kamen Riders live."

"More humans?"

Something in Lyra's tone made Sunset pause weighing the keyblades against one another. She looked over at Lyra, and frowned slightly. "I'm guessing you're the human one?"

"Yep." Lyra nodded, and knelt down before rolling over onto her back. It was awkward, but she adopted a fair facsimile of a human lounging back on a hillside with one hand on their knee. "Got it in one."

"To be fair, there's only four choices." Sunset dismissed them both. "What is it?"

"Well..." Lyra "Heartstrings" Heartson shook her head. "Just... kind of jealous, I guess?"

"Jealous of what?" Sunset asked softly.

"Your first few loops after you awoke... you were a human. You were a human for a lot of them." Lyra raised an eyebrow, and Sunset nodded confirmation. "And then you came back here, and now you're usually a pony."

"That's correct."

"But me... well, every single loop, I get loads of memories from me-as-a-human. Every last time. But just about all the time, I'm living in a world of magical ponies. Who are quadrupeds."

The human-in-mind-only tapped a hoof on the floor. "So... all this, all this being-four-legged, I never get the chance to get used to it. I get the memories from when Lyra-all-of-us is human, so every five years of experience being a pony gets swamped by hundreds of years of memories-being-a-human. So... so I tend to let the others drive, I guess..."

Sunset nodded sympathetically. "Yeah, I got that a lot, from the other direction. Still do from this one, a little."

"Really?" Lyra looked dubious. "How?"

"See this?" Sunset materialized \_Will of Fire.\_ "I got this in Naruto's world â€" the Elemental Nations. The specific experiences which got me the keychain were a few weeks long, and my memory of them is nearly photographic."

She smiled fondly. "That's what a keychain \_is\_. It's... memories, simple as that, just wrapped in magic and friendship and a shiny shape. And it means I never forget a single one, nor what earned them."

\_Will of Fire\_ vanished, replaced by \_Shimmering Sunset.\_

"This is the one I got because of my time in Equestria, my very first loop â€" before I, or, er, technically you... awakened. Me, I mean."

Pushing past that embarrassing point, Sunset went on. "And it's valid for nearly half the loop. A long one, at that. So, basically, I had perfect recall of several years as a pony all through my time in other worlds... and now, I've got perfect recall of several years of human life as a pony."

"Huh." Lyra nodded. "I didn't know that."

Sunset smiled.

Then there was a flicker of light.

They both looked at the small charm sitting between them, and the golden chain connected to it.

"Is thatâ€"

"I think it is," Sunset confirmed.

Lyra gaped for a moment before asking, "But \_why\_ is itâ€"

Sunset lifted the string of seven pearls in her magic. "I don't know, and I'm kind of afraid to find out. Is Derpy even Awake this Loop?"

\* \* \*

><p>118.3 (LordCirce)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack ducked under a low-hanging branch, panting lightly as she struggled to compress her magic as tightly within herself as she could.<p>

'\_This was such ah good Loop too.\_' She thought, ruefully, as the old barn at the edge of the orchard came into view. It had been a Stealth Anchor Baseline Run. Only her, Cheerilee, and Gilda were Awake, and so she had spent most of her free time getting their advice on the set-up of a couple of the wings of her museum. Whoever the Anchor was, they hadn't revealed themselves or pinged. Baseline had proceeded as per normal; right up until Tirek broke out early. Applejack still wasn't sure what had happened, as Tirek had shown up stronger than she had seen him in a long time, and he had cast some spell that caused Twilight's Library, with Twilight and all three of the Baseline Alicorn Princesses inside, to vanish into thin air. Applejack could still sense the Princesses' power, but it felt faint and far off. Possibly in a different dimension.

In any case, Tirek had drained Discord, Cheerilee, and Gilda of power, gaining Gilda's ink abilities in the process, and reminding all three of the Loopers why he really was a threat. Applejack had managed to escape with only minor draining, and now she was suppressing her magic as much as possible to keep Tirek from tracking her through that.

Applejack slipped into the barn and shook herself, dislodging leaves and some dirt from when she had Earthbent her way out of town. On the edge of her senses, she felt Tirek approaching, though he didn't appear to be moving straight towards her.

"Ok. Now, let's see if this works." Applejack had been running back to the barn to pack up the wing of the museum that she had been tinkering with, when she had remembered an item she had picked up a couple dozen Loops ago. She dashed into the hall, flaring a bit of magic to break the seal she had put on the door to keep the CMC from poking around. In the distance, she felt Tirek's anger sharpen and he began to approach faster, moving towards her position.

Moving quickly, she pulled several of the more fragile items that were on display into her Pocket, then withdrew a single golden tablet. She placed it against the back wall, pushing a bit of her magic into it, just as the doors, and most of the walls around them, were ripped off, revealing Tirek in his dark majesty.

"Hahahaha, I've found you, pony! You are the last. With you, my conquest of magic will be complete. Now, prepare to lose your magic."

Applejack spun to face him, and then grinned. "Alright. If y'all want mah magic so badly, I'll give it to y'all. But I'll do it mah way." And then she bucked the Tablet of Ahkmenrah (or, as Dash has said is should be called, Jackmenrah). She flooded her magic into the tablet, and a wave of golden light flowed outward. Tirek brought his arms up, grasping at the wave of light, only for it to flow around him and across the building. He blinked, as Applejack began to laugh.

"Ah got two things to tell y'all. One, it's nighttime right now, and will be till we get Celestia back, and two, this is a museum!"

Tirek scowled in confusion, before he noticed motion out of the

corner of his eye. All around him, close to two dozen statues were coming to life, wings stretching, as the Hall of Ascension came alive.

Tirek scoffed. "You think to best me with statuary. You've squandered your magic. I shall **\*FOOMP\*** Whatever Tirek had been planning to accomplish was lost as the statue of Trixie the magnificent decided to lead off with a blast of fireworks spells.

At the moment, Applejack could tell that she was still more powerful than Tirek, though it was a lot closer than she was comfortable with. In the face of that, it seemed somewhat odd that she would split her power with the Tablet and the items in her museum. However, she didn't want Tirek to have the chance to drain her abilities like he had Gilda and Cheerilee, and, while her magic was used as a catalyst for the tablet, it utilized an even greater power.

Applejack wasn't much of a scholar compared to Twilight, or even Trixie, and she hadn't had that long to study the golden tablet, but she had found that it was actually quite similar to the Elements of Harmony. The Elements, in the most basic terms, tapped into the universal energy of Harmony, and not only used it to amplify the powers of the wielder, but also channeled the energy directly. It was this connection to a greater power that allowed six above-average ponies to defeat godlike foes many magnitudes of power above their level in baseline. It was also what allowed them to use the Elements outside of the Equestria Loops, because the concept and energy of Harmony existed across universes.

Similarly, the Tablet of Ahkmenrah called on the power of History. The greater the presence of a given figure in history, the greater the power granted to images of the figure by the Tablet. There were more functions, but most of those were layered over the basic functionality of, quite literally, bringing History to life.

For ordinary museum pieces, such as the figure of Sacajawea that Applejack had replaced when she got the tablet, the figure represented perhaps a handful of centuries impact in history, maybe as much as a millennia or two on the outside, giving them many of the skills and abilities the figure represented had in life, but not too much power overall. The figures in Applejack's museum, and more specifically, in the Ascension Wing that she was currently facing off against Tirek within, represented beings that had had eons of history behind them, that had altered the course and fate of thousands of universes. And now, all of the weight and power of that History was being fully brought to bear against the dark tyrant, Tirek.

"Cutie Mark Crusaders, Alicorn Attack Go!"

The living statues of the CMC led off the charge. Scootaloo and Diamond Tiara approached first, Scoots going low and Tiara aiming high. Scootaloo bent the air around her into a sharp blade, grinding the air against itself, and smashed into Tirek's knees, causing them to buckle, slightly. At the same time, Diamond Tiara built up a telekinetic wall in front of her and rammed it into Tirek's face, synchronizing it with a bolt of telepathic force against his mind. She didn't try to establish a connection, wanting no part of Tirek in her head.

Tirek staggered backwards, a bit dazed, as Nyx and Sweetie Bell

followed up on the assault, Nyx with a blast of explosive void magic and Sweetie with a pure note of force, both of which smashed through Tirek's magic draining ability and knocked him spinning into a swamp of fondue and tree sap created by Silver Spoon and the statue of Discord from the Pre-Ascended Section. Tirek struggled, just as Applebloom brought the device she had been constructing with her mane around. It was fairly small, a single polished shaft, which let out a humming buzz as it fired out a thin beam of blue light. Sparks of azure lightning crackled across Tirek as it impacted with no other visible effect. Tirek started to chuckle, before Applebloom's next words cut him off.

"Mordekainen's Disjunction Laser Mk 4.6. He shouldn't be able to drain magic for the next few minutes. Hit him hard!"

And then the pain started.

Applejack stood back next to the statues of the Mane Six, who had all held back at the statue of Twilight's insistence.

The blonde farmer tilted her head slightly. "So, just to get it out of tha way, but are you Awake?"

Twilight frowned, before shaking her head slowly. "No. I am aware of the significance of the term, but I am not truly Awake. It is more like... I am like someone that has read an in-depth biography of the Looping being known as Twilight Sparkle. I know all of the history behind her that you recorded, along with a few other things that bled over from somewhere else. Contingency plans she has made and such. But I am also aware that you built me and that I am truly only a replica of the true Twilight Sparkle, a rather pale copy at that."

Applejack nodded. While the Alicorn (and Changeling Queen, and Dragonequues, and Griffon-bear?, etc.) Statues were holding out rather well against Tirek, Applejack could feel the fact that it wasn't doing much too actually weaken him. His power levels were lowering, but the statues were still in the end just copies, as was shown when one of Tirek's Ink Slashes tore through Gilda's and smashed against a hastily erected barrier by Shining Armor, shattering it as well. Applejack turned back to the group. "We need something stronger. The Elements."

Rarity turned from admiring the one-eight scale size Spikezilla firing a jet of flame into Tirek's rather abused face (it being a favored target of both Celestia and Luna), and shook her head. "It won't work. We don't have access to our Pockets. I tried to pull out a battle dress that I, me, the other me made, and there was nothing."

Twilight nodded. "And we can't call them either. I tried and there was no response."

Applejack frowned. "Huh, interestin'. I have a few in mah pocket, but they're attuned to me, so I don't think you could really use them all that well."

Twilight nodded again. "Or at all. We are still just statuary, they might not react..."



Dash cut in. "Yeah, yeah. Science time later, solution time now. I could fly to the Tree and..."

Twilight cut her off. "No, the gems might not even exist anymore, assuming the box was opened by this Twilight."

Dash huffed. "Well, what do you suggest then?"

Twilight paused, and then smiled. "Give me a minute. I have an idea."

\* \* \*

><p>All things told, the battle was going pretty well. Tirek had gotten his second wind, but it wasn't meaning much when faced with the combined experience of the Loopers' Statues. Zecora, one of her wings broken off, stomped on the ground, and a thick wooden vine lashed out to bind Tirek's legs in place, just in time for Shining Armor and Cadance to blast him with a Love-based burst of force.<p>

Lyra Heartstrings darted around, dodging past one of the large inky bombs Tirek had started lobbing about. Princess Luna had been taken out by a single blast from one of them, and the rest of the Statues were being careful to avoid them. Lyra was feeling rather frustrated at the moment, because she was likely the weakest fighter in the entire battle. Most of her abilities were tied up in her split memories, and while she knew about having split memories, she, as a statue, didn't possess either the disparate personalities, or the ability to manifest their abilities. Still, she would use what she could. Focusing intently, her horn glowed as she fired off a globe of force, knocking Tirek's hoof out from under him. His guard dropped, and a haymaker from Spikezilla knocked him off his feet, straight into a quintuple buck, courtesy of the CMC sans Silver Spoon, who was currently trying to put Discord and Luna back together.

Lyra grinned as Tirek crashed to the ground. If she made it through this fight, she intended to tell Applejack to make statues of her other selves, as right now she was limited to her Unicorn body. She couldn't even properly use her thief skills.

"Look out!"

Lyra gasped as she was jerked backwards, moments before a large beam from the broken roof above crashed down where she had been crouched. Lyra shuddered, then turned towards Vinyl Scratch, who'd pulled her out of danger.

"Thanks."

"Don't mention it!" Vinyl belted out. Lyra winced, and Vinyl coughed quickly. "Sorry, been amplifying every sound I make to try and make a difference. Forgot to turn off the reverb."

Lyra shook her head. "Not a problem. Let's see where we can go help."

Vinyl nodded, and both of them returned to the fight, just in time to see Ivory Scroll dash in and slap a Restraining Order onto Tirek's face, locking him in place.

\* \* \*

><p>"Got it." The Mane Six Plus One turned to look at Twilight, just as her eyes opened and light flared out, feebly but still visible. A rainbow aura gathered around her body, and Twilight smirked at the looks of comprehension on the others' faces. "Each of us has been a bearer of pure Harmony at least once. I knew what it felt like, and I was able to trace it back. We can call on that power and uuuuu~ss" she swayed suddenly, staggering before catching herself. "Ooogh, that's not good. The powers of the tablet and Harmony aren't meshing well. The magic of Harmony is trying to take over supporting me, and it's pushing the power of the tablet out. I can balance it, but..."<p>

Applejack nodded. "How long can you hold it?"

"Long enough for one good shot, at least."

Pinkie bounced up, laying one of her wings over Twilight's. Rapidly, her skin and wings began glowing with rainbow energy as well. "Make that six good shots. Heehee, we're like a revolver of Harmony."

Twilight smiled as the others approached, using her aura as a catalyst for their own transformation. "The backlash will probably break our statue forms, so after this it will be up to you." She glanced at Applejack.

Applejack nodded solemnly, the light of Harmony building around her as well, and then the seven of them took off.

Rainbow Dash was the first to reach Tirek, who had been pushed back out of the broken museum and into the orchard proper. She circled, squeezed between Princess Big Mac and Sunset's Crown Demon form from the Accidental Ascension exhibit, and gathered as much speed as she could. It was just shy of a Sonic Rainboom, but the detonation of Harmony still created a large shockwave, knocking Tirek through several rows of trees.

Rarity was the next to strike, flying down from above, helped by a Fastball Special from Spikezilla, who had taken to the sky. One crater later and Tirek was just pulling himself to his feet, when Pinkie and Fluttershy came at him from either side, resulting in a double detonation.

Applejack grinned as she saw raw magic peeling away. The magic Tirek had stolen was breaking free, a sure sign he was weakening. Twilight was just coming around for her attack run, when suddenly she tumbled in mid-air and vanished in a flash of light. Applejack and her counterpart pulled up short, wary of whatever attack Tirek had just pulled out of his pocket, when Applejack felt a slight pressure. Acting on a hunch, she tapped the ground, pulsing out her senses through the earth, towards Ponyville.

Twilight's library was back. Maybe this Loop's Twilight suddenly reappearing disrupted her statue's balance with Harmony? It didn't matter, so Applejack shook it off and nodded towards her duplicate. As Dash had said, science time later, solution time now.

"Let's do this."

"Mmmhmm!"

The twin farmponies charged, building up speed with Earthbending as they charged at Tirek, who was still blinking from the Twilight Statue's flashy exit. He realized they were approaching a moment too late, and both of them rushed into his guard, each executing a perfect turn, and bucked him square in the sternum. Applejack felt the energy rushing out of her statue, and focused on amplifying it with her own power. She could feel Tirek's ability, which had come back moments after Dash impacted him, pulling at the magic, but the pull was feeble, and most of the power went straight into causing Tirek pain.

There was a double crack, the first being the sound of Tirek blasting through what was left of the canopy and into the sky, and the second being the sound of the broken form of Applejack's statue hitting the ground. Applejack winced, her statue was in several pieces, but it should be repairable. Quickly, she scooped all of the pieces into her Pocket, and quickly rose after Tirek.

It was almost anti-climactic. She had just cleared the tree-line when two Twilights and the three Princesses all popped in at once, directly in Tirek's parabolic flight path. One of the Twilights, which Applejack immediately pegged as the real Twilight, lashed out with a beam of Harmonic Magic, which blasted the already leaking magic straight out of Tirek. His unconscious body flew back the way it came, and Applejack caught him out of the air, checking to make sure he really was unconscious.

The statue Twilight flew over. "I sensed them coming back, and I felt Celestia reaching for the sun. I knew I needed to stop her from raising it before we finished with Tirek." Applejack blinked and nodded. She had been too focused on Tirek to even notice.

Speaking of Celestia... "So, dear Applejack, this simulacrum of our newest Princess said you could explain her existence?"

Applejack sighed. "Yeah, let me pull out the pamphlet." This was going to take a while to clean up.

\* \* \*

><p>118.4 (Gamer A)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was the start of another loop, and Rarity was busy sewing the decorations for the Summer Sun festival. Oh, sometimes she would just pull a set out of her Pocket and get to work on something more interesting, but right now, she happened to be in the mood for simple busywork.<p>

She was snapped out of her trance by the sound of the front door, and began to rattle off her usual welcome as she took in the new arrivals: a familiar seeming local shepherd and some of his flock. "Hello, Welcome to Rarity's boutique â€" ah, if it isn't Dolly and Sweaters coming by for a visit again. I must admit, I wasn't expecting you at this hour, Mr. Bell."

"Hello, Rarity," "Sweaters" the pinkish sheep said, a sigh audible in her tone. "Dolly," with a more purplish tint, was busy squealing over some of the outfits she had on display, while the fourth sheep, whose distinguishing feature was a simple white hat, was standing at the shepherd's side. The shepherd himself was a navy blue stallion with a black hair and mane, and a cutie-mark of a tower with a bell on top.

"Yes, well, I had something I needed to check up on," "Shepherd's Bell" responded, producing something for her to look at. "First, I wanted to get your advice on this."

Playing along for the moment, Rarity looked at the trinket. "Hmm, I haven't seen one of these in a while. Wood, carved and colored into the shape of a mistletoe decoration, attached to a nylon string. And if I'm not mistaken... it was mistletoe wood to begin with." She looked back up at the stallion. "Normally I'd say it was completely the wrong time of year to be showing this off. But you just wanted to see if I recognized it, didn't you, Abel?"

"Thought of you the minute I Awoke," he confirmed, "Alright. We can all speak freely now."

"Finally..." "Sweaters" relaxed, "It's bad enough being called Sweater girl or Yoohoo. It's worse being named that way."

"Yes Yuzu, I remember," Rarity responded. "Now Abel â€" I may go on calling you that? - What really brings you here? Your world was a trial, with several tricks Atsuro didn't properly prepare me for â€" but I have endured worse."

"Might as well. I was just seeing whether absorbing several demons had any permanent effects on you," Abel said, smiling off to the side, "That sort of thing can be dangerous in the wrong circumstances, you know."

"Just a drop in the bucket, I assure you. It did however give me some of my own Loop powers back for the lockdown's duration," Rarity answered, "Enduring our siblings was much worse. I wasn't expecting Sweetie Belle to be an unrelated rock star."

"Well, I didn't know she was a singer!" Atsuro defended himself, "...But I guess I should've remembered. Naoya was my idol on top of everything else, and has some big shoes to fill. If I'd thought for a second, I'd have known he was the same as always."

"How did you deal with everything?" Abel asked, "Atsuro wouldn't tell me that part."

"Well, first I fought Beldr on schedule. then I convinced Remiel to let me fight Jezebel early - no point leaving that priestess at risk. But after that...I got into a heated argument with the border guards," Rarity admitted, "Pointing out that they were making that cult look like heroes in comparison drove some of them over the edge. After that... Things escalated quickly. Fortunately after my brief career as an alicorn lightning rod, everyone was more inclined to match wits instead of blades with me."

"Hmm, Maybe I should try something like that next time."

\* \* \*

><p>118.5 (Jcogginsa)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>When Shining Armor awoke, he noticed three things immediately.<p>

The first was the telltale sensation of a shield dropping. That tended to happen when he woke up with a shield out. The second thing he noticed was that he was a biped this loop. Human, probably. The third thing he noticed was a noticeable weight in his chest area.

'\_Great. Human and a different gender. Always an annoying combination. Oh well, better check the loop memories. Let's see...Superhero, power's force fields of course...Ooh, I'm Canadian, that'll be fun. Named after the Jedi of the seas, neat...fighting something called Leviathan. Evil Aquaman on steroids, from the sound of it...I use force fields instead of clo-\_'

Shining immediately blushed, and began to reapply his 'Costume'

\* \* \*

><p>Shining Armor watched the battle unfold with distaste. He was a soldier in the baseline, and usually out of it too, so he had much more of a stomach for this than his sister did. That didn't mean he liked seeing people die.<p>

'\_Okay, I've had enough. Time to start operation Buck this Shit.\_'

Shining reached inside himself, and ascended. This, since he was human, and female, resulted in a magical girl transformation. Of course it did.

His outfit resembled the traditional sailor fuku, only it was very obviously made of the same energy as the force fields. The wings were real at least. No actual horn though, just the force field horn this person usually had. Not important anyway.

Afterwards, he reached into his subspace pocket, and pulled out a thing of pure beauty. It was a shield personified, to him at least. It was Captain America's mighty shield. Shining Armor still wanted to meet the looping version of the man, but Shining felt even the unawake version was worthy of admiration, and always had time to talk to him.

Grinning, Shining Armor charged the Evil Aquaman Ripoff and shouted "Stars and Stripes!"

Then he proceeded to smash the Endbringer around before banishing it to the moon. Manually of course. No elements this loop, and he didn't have one anyway.

\* \* \*

><p>118.6 (fractalman)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stared at the absolutely massive chocolate syrup swimming pool, then headed back into her library-tree-house to reread a random book.<p>

Pinkie Pie took one look and decided it needed sprinkles, banana slices, fresh strawberries, and a giant cherry.

Rarity took a look at the result. "Shouldn't it have, you know...whipped cream?"

"Not this time!" replied Pinkie.

\* \* \*

><p>118.7 (Gamerex27)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Yu Narukami Awoke lying in bed. Something immediately felt off. For one thing, he felt much smaller than usual. He quickly thought that he might have Awoken earlier in his timeline in this particular variant.<p>

He was partially correct: he certainly was younger this Loop. However, as he discovered when he tried to get out of bed, that wasn't the only thing that was different.

His shoulders refused to move the way he wanted them too. Grunting, he struggled to get up, waving his limbs vainly in an attempt to get his numb fingers to push himself up.

And, when he got a glimpse of his limbs, he understood why he couldn't feel his fingers. Because, at the time, he didn't have any. In place of his hand was a gray-furred hoof.

\_Great,\_ the Seeker of Truth thought to himself. \_This must be Equestria, then\_.

He skimmed his Loop memories. Apparently, his name here was True Sight (still not as bad as the Sisterhood Complex Kingpin of Steel), and he was still in grade school; today was the first day. Looking behind him, he saw that he was covered front to back in a dishwasher gray coat. According to his memories, there was supposed to be a symbol on his flank called a "Cutie Mark" (he rolled his eyes at this), but he was too young to have one.

He sent out a Ping, and got back around a dozen responses. At least he wasn't alone this Loop (though, since Igor was the Anchor back home, he didn't have to worry about Lonely Loops like some other Loopers).

"True! You up in there!" That was unmistakably Dojima's voice.

"Yeah," Yu said, in a voice that was too high-pitched for his liking. "I just need to grab my books, and I'll be on my way."

"Big bro!" said another voice, most definitely Nanako's. "Come eat breakfast! Your alfalfa browns are getting cold!"

Yes, this was going to be a \_strange\_ Loop.

\* \* \*

><p>As Yu took his seat in class, he scanned the rest of the classroom. Several of the peo-ponies looked suspiciously familiar. One of them, wearing Naoto's hat, tipped her cap in their usual signal to tell if they were Awake-and, since she took it off afterwards, all of them were. Yu nodded in turn.<p>

"Oh, great," said a voice behind him, "it's a whole \_herd\_ of blank flanks. As if the three weren't enough."

Considering how his Loop Memories told him that the phrase was a derogatory term, Yu figured that this must be a bully. Turning his head, he saw a pink filly sneering at him, reminding him somewhat of King Moron from her attitude.

While the best way-in his experiences, at least-to deal with jerks was to ignore them, that didn't mean it was the only solution.

\_Hey, Bro, \_Yosuke (here called Second Wheel) said, using a private telepathy spell. \_I'm not looking forwards to spending a whole year with these girls. You want to stop them before they get started?\_

Sure,

Yu replied. \_But I think we should let everyone else get a turn, too.\_

Damn right, we will,

Kanji (or Steel Weaver this time) added. \_I want to shut these assholes down before they can get to anyone else.\_

Behind Yu, Yukiko snorted, desperately trying to hold in her laughter. Considering how nearly everything in this Loop was named after a horse pun of some kind, it was amazing that Yukiko was able to keep her cool for this long without breaking down into another laughing fit.

"That's a lot of books on your desk, blank flank," said another pony condescendingly. She glared at Yukiko, who gave no sign of noticing them.

Diamond Tiara bumped hooves with Silver Spoon, and sneered again. "Too bad you won't be needing them, since you don't even have a Cutie Mark for reading. Or anything. Your head's as blank as your own flank."

That as the final straw for the black pony: she collapsed into helpless laughter, sliding out of her seat and onto the ground.

Diamond and Silver instantly stopped laughing at her expense, and

turned to stare at the other filly. "What's... so funny, blankie?" Diamond put on a half-hearted sneer, clearly thrown off of her game when Yukiko reacted in the exact opposite way she expected.

"P..p...Ponyville...heeee...Steamy Sanctuary...ho...blank...FLANK! AHAAAAHAHAHA!" Yukiko beat her hooves on the ground, her eyes already starting to water up out of sheer mirth.

Diamond Tiara's mask of carefully constructed disdain shattered to pieces, replaced by a look of absolute horror. This \_blank flank\_ was \_mocking her!\_ "Stop that! Stop laughing at me!"

Yukiko paid her no heed, and she continued to literally roll around on the floor, laughing.

"STOP LAUGHING AT ME!" Her plans thoroughly dashed, Diamond Tiara screamed in frustration, and stormed out of the classroom, followed by an equally annoyed Silver Spoon.

The room was silent, save for the teacher droning on and on about long division (it was amazing, Yu had thought many times over his countless Loops, how little teachers noticed what was going on in their own classrooms) and Yukiko's laughter. The sound of applause came from nowhere. Yu turned his gaze to see three fillies sitting together, clapping their hooves wildly. The Awake Cutie Mark Crusaders were very impressed.

\* \* \*

><p>The next day, the pair of disgruntled bullies decided to try again, this time with the gray-coated blank flank.<p>

"You're staring at nothing an awful lot, aren't you?" Diamond Tiara hissed to Yu. He had been so busy fusing Personas in his mind (a trick he had learned from Igor not too long ago), he hadn't been paying attention to the lesson.

"Keep going," the bully continued, "I'm sure you'll get your Cutie Mark for being a brainless daydreamer soon enough. I'm sure it'll be on your flank annnny second now."

Now.

"So," Yu said slowly, without a trace of emotion of any kind, "you're staring at my flank, then."

The bully froze mid sentence. "What?"

"I'm flattered," he continued, "but I don't think flirting is allowed in school."

Diamond Tiara's face turned red, and Silver Spoon subtly scooted her seat away from her friend to avoid her incoming outburst. "H-How dare you! I wasn't-"

"Miss Cheerilee," Yu said, much louder than he usually spoke, "Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon are staring at my plot. It's making me uncomfortable."



Not even turning around, the Unawake teacher continued writing on her chalkboard. "Miss Tiara, Miss Spoon, could you please stay after class? I need to speak with you about your behavior as of late."

The bullies stuttered in rage and disdain, before finally falling silent and sulking in their seats.

They glared at Yu for the rest of the class. He didn't care at all.

\* \* \*

><p>118.8 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle had a plan for this Loop; to introduce Equestria to a magic-based version of the Internet. It took very little time for her to set up; magic-generated electricity was already part of Equestrian infrastructure in baseline, as were typewriters and even primitive arcade games. Crystal balls took a lot of power to become more than fortune-teller props, but a wall plug and booster stations took care of that problem. Programming was the simplest part, since magic-based transistors could go beyond binary and Boolean logic, beyond fuzzy logic, straight into Pinkie Logic if necessary.<p>

Thus, only a few months after the start of the Loop, every home and business in Ponyville and Canterlot was equipped with a shiny new magical terminal, and Twilight Sparkle looked forward to making Ponyville her home world's version of Silicon Valley.

Twilight woke bright and early the morning of Activation Day, when the network went live for the first time. She trotted downstairs to where she'd had her terminal set up, turned it on, and logged in to her account.

\_You have (1) new message\_

Twilight grinned. Who would have sent the first message? Apple Bloom (Awake) or Pinkie Pie (not, but still indispensable for programming)? Applejack? Probably not Rainbow Dash or Rarity, who likely weren't up yet, nor Fluttershy, who hated even going to her mailbox. Or maybe Princess Celestia? Surely the Princess would want to send the first message on the new system to all her newly wired subjects!

Eager to find out, she opened the message and read:

\_\*\*DO YOU SUFFER FROM HORN DYSFUNCTION?\*\*\_

\_Ask your doctor about \_\_\*\*VIAGIC!\*\*\_

\_VIAGIC is a little blue pill which can restore horn function on demand, providing longer and stronger magical activity for those with horn dysfunction problems.\_

\_WARNING: unicorns with heart or lung conditions should not take VIAGIC. If your spells last longer than four hours, consult your doctor immediately.\_

\_Ask if \_\_\*\*VIAGIC\*\*\_ \_is right for you!\_

A message from Flim-Flam Industries, Unlimited, Fly-by-night, Griffonia.

Twilight flinched as she began to hear the crashing sounds of one terminal after another being pitched out of windows. \_I knew this would happen, \_Twilight sighed, \_but I was hoping those two wouldn't find out quite yet...\_

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

118.1: Most of these existed. The Incomparable was planned, as was an even more insane ship.

>118.2: She's probably on the way to get one from Lyra. In a while.<br>118.3: Nightmare at the Museum?

>118.4: It's nice to have a contact.<br>118.5: Use the force, fields.

>118.6: Do YOU have any idea what she's talking about?<br>118.7: Outflanked.

>118.8: Internet inevitabilities.<p>

## 125. Chapter 125

119.1 (Kris Overstreet)

\* \* \*

><p><strong>And the Rest Loop: Applebuck Season<strong>

Twilight Sparkle glared at the crowd of animals surrounding Applejack. The farm pony had been trussed tighter than a broken leg at a kingdom-wide Colt Scouts jamboree. A dog-sized mummy of rope stood on a stake beside hers. One of the critters had just finished piling the wood beneath her and had begun fiddling with a box of matches.

"Now, Angel Bunny," Fluttershy murmured, "I know Applejack was a little bit frightening and scared your friends, but isn't burning her at the stake just a little bit excessive?"

The other bunnies raised torches (and a few pitchforks) into the air. Angel Bunny, being him, pulled a flamethrower from his pocket and tested it.

Fluttershy ducked away from the roaring flame and squeaked, "Of course that's only my opinion!"

"I think you'd better go home, Fluttershy," Twilight said quietly. "I'll handle this."

"Oh, you won't hurt them, will you?" Fluttershy asked. "They're such helpless, timid creatures."

\_Oh, Oak save me from the non-Awake versions of my best friends.\_ "I won't hurt a hair on their heads," she reassured Fluttershy. "But we're going to have to have a serious talk, and I don't think you

want to hear some of the words I'm going to use."

"Oh... er... all right... but please don't be too mean to them," Fluttershy said. "They're not responsible for what they do when they're panicked." Fluttershy fluttered off, and Twilight waited until she was out of sight and earshot.

"All right, you've had your fun," she told Angel. "You've made your point. But there are lines we do not cross in a baseline Loop. You have already crossed one. Now you're going to cut down Applejack and Winona and apologize to them both."

Angel Bunny's eyes narrowed. The flamethrower vanished, replaced in a back flip by a small set of midnight-black robes. A tiny red lightsaber ignited in his paws.

Twilight's eyes narrowed in turn, and she drew herself up as tall as she could. "I'm pretty sure you didn't just challenge me," she hissed. The clear blue sky above the treetops vanished behind swirling clouds, which grew darker by the moment. "You, after all, are an experienced Looper, and would know better than to directly confront the Anchor of your Loop." Shadows gathered around Twilight Sparkle, forming the shape of armor and helm. "An Anchor who has a thousand Loops for your one. An Anchor who can summon godlike power merely by an instant act of will." Twilight's eyes began to glow, their pupils taking on a reptilian slit shape. "An Anchor who has merely promised not to harm a hair on your head, saying nothing whatever about the rest of your body." Lightning flashed overhead, sending distinct Nightmare-ish shadows across the bunnies, who cowered in terror. "And an Anchor who has just had a very bad Loop, wants some peace and quiet, \_isn't getting it,\_ and wants the annoyance to \_\*\*go away.\*\*\_"

Eternal Twilight towered over Darth Gel, a deep purple shadow of menace almost blotting out a tiny flicker of darkness. "You weren't challenging me, were you now?" The voice hissed on the edge of pony hearing, and even a few of the bunnies had to strain to catch the words.

Angel Bunny calmly weighed the situation, considered his alternatives, and made a decision.

The red lightsaber flashed twice.

Smoldering ropes fell away from Applejack and Winona, who topped forward off their stakes and onto the woodpile beneath them.

"Good," Twilight Sparkle said. "Now apolo..."

A loud snore broke into the conversation. Applejack, who had been exhausted as usual when the bunny census had begun, had passed out asleep long before. Now, released from the ropes, she could get the deep breaths necessary to really saw some logs.

"On second thought, you gather every single bunny in and around Ponyville and get to work picking apples. Each bunny gets two apples for their day's work. And if you skive off or take more apples for yourself..." Twilight's face disappeared completely into shadow, leaving only those glowing eyes. \_"I'll know."\_

Angel raised one eyebrow.

"'Or else what?'" Twilight asked. "Do you really want an answer to that question?" Wings made of the interstellar void spread from her back, blotting out the sky and the forest.

Angel, apparently unafraid, shrugged, raised a paw, and snapped his digits. The other bunnies threw away their torches and began hopping towards Sweet Apple Acres.

"That's better." Twilight relaxed, and, in an instant, all of the shadows, clouds, and lightning vanished under the light of a sunny day. "And I'll still expect you to apologize when Applejack wakes up... in two or three days."

Angel rolled his eyes and hopped away.

\_What I have to go through to get that rabbit to behave,\_ Twilight sighed. \_How does Awake Fluttershy manage it?\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>And the Rest Loop: Griffon the Brush-Off<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>It had been, up to that point, a very quiet day, which Twilight Sparkle had enjoyed. She'd slept in, awakened to a late breakfast cooked by Spike, and then curled up at a reading table with one of her favorite bad-Loop-recovery books, <em>Literary Analysis of the Ancient Lays of the Middle Minotauran Republic, Volume 2.<em> It was a stultifying boring work that could send Rainbow Dash to sleep in seven words or less. Twilight had only read it eighty-two times.

Then the brass band kicked in, followed by cheering and shouting and the tramping of far, far too many feet.

Twilight stuck her head out the library door just in time to see a train of elephants, one after another after another, walking past and through Ponyville's main square, tossing bits at the bewildered ponies watching. A very familiar-looking griffon sat on the back of the lead elephant, led in the procession by a turban-wearing Pinkie Pie. Pinkie had already begun to sing at a pitch that carried through the whole of Ponyville:

\_Princess G, Fabulous she, Gilda the Griffon!\_

Genuflect, show some respect, down on one knee

Now try hard to keep your cool

The manners you learned in school

And come and join her splendiferous party

Princess G, Mighty is she, Gilda the Griffon!

Strong as ten regular hens, definitely!

She faced the emperor's hordes  
Their claws and their beaks and their swords  
Who shut them all down with one word?  
Why, Princess G  
She's got seventy-five hot air balloons  
Fighting squadrons  
She's got twenty-three  
When it comes to obedient goons  
Two thousand and two  
Give or take a few  
Who serve obediently  
Princess G, beautiful she, Gilda the Griffon!  
Those golden eyes triggering sighs of sheer ecstasy  
Not to mention that she's rich  
Which means when she gets hitched  
Her hubby can swim in the Griffonian treasury  
Princess G, Imperial She, Gilda the Griffon!  
Because she won, she rules griffons absolutely  
And she's come to our town  
To let her feathers down  
So give a Ponyville welcome to-

Pinkie, and perforce the whole procession, came to a sudden halt as a griffon messenger descended from the skies, handed a scroll to Pinkie Pie, tipped his cap to her, and flew away again.

Pinkie opened the scroll and read aloud: "To whom it may concern; due to the incredible expense of the diplomatic mission to Equestria, the government of Griffonia has collapsed. The griffons have created a new republic in its place. Therefore let it be known that Gilda the Griffon is immediately deposed as ruler of the griffons and that any drafts made by her on the treasury of Griffonia from this date forward shall not be honored."

Gilda found herself dumped to the street. Ten seconds later the elephants, band, servants, soldiers, flower girls, and fan-wielding male harem had vanished to the four winds, or as close to them as the streets of Ponyville would allow.

Pinkie shrugged and began a new song and dance:

\_For she's a flat broke ex-Princess,\_

For she's a flat broke ex-Princess,

For she's a flat broke ex-Princess,

Which nopony can deny!

At which point Pinkie pulled a cupcake out of her mane, handed it to Gilda with a smile, and trotted away.

Rainbow Dash, who had been watching the parade from above, swooped down to land beside Gilda. "Hey, Gilda," she said. "That was kinda harsh, y'know? They coulda at least let ya keep one elephant."

"Eh," Gilda shrugged, "easy come, easy go. I'm sure something else will come up."

"Wanna hang out at my place until you get back on your wings?" Rainbow Dash asked.

"Thanks, I'd like that," Gilda said. "I'll be along in a while... I need to look and see if I can scrape any of those bits my boys were throwing."

"Yeah, I understand," Dash nodded. "Catch you later!"

As the rainbow-maned pegasus zoomed off, Twilight walked up to the griffon and said, "I have to say, that wasn't a bad prank at all."

"What prank?" Gilda asked. "This was a serious diplomatic mission."

Twilight cocked her head. "What?"

Gilda looked grumpy for another three seconds. Then one corner of her beak turned up as she added, "I was saving the really silly stuff for Celestia." She held up four extremely large saddle shoes and sighed. "Do you know how hard it is to find trained tap-dancing elephants?"

\* \* \*

><p>119.2 (Pinklestia)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Somepony slowly opened the door to Big Macintosh's bar, and a black Earth pony colt walked inside. He was wearing a Batman costume, one look and Mac knew he was the real deal.<p>

"Hey boss, been a while, first time in Equestria?"

"No." Batman said and sat in front of the counter.

"So... care to talk about what's bugging you?" Mac served him a drink, not alcoholic, but looked like one at first glance, is what Bruce drank when he was being at a social event or he was pretending

to get drunk.

"I am fictional this loop." Bruce then sipped his drink, with an ease that showed that he had indeed been a pony before. Mac didn't say anything else, waiting for him to go on and he started to clean the mugs and glasses. It was still quite early and there wasn't much else to do. After a moment, Batman continued.

"Not in the sense that I am a fictional character, but that I am an actor portraying Bat Colt in a TV series, everypony knows who I am. I am famous. Ponies just won't leave me alone!"

Mac understood, Batman wasn't the most social guy around, save when he was playing the role of playboy millionaire. But even then, it was just an act, for a loner like Batman, being the centre of attention and being forced to act nice all the time was torture.

"You could retire."

"I actually enjoy being an actor."

Mac raised an eyebrow "Then..."

"The Cutie Mark Crusaders won a prize in a contest, meet the actor that portrays Bat Colt, and they get a minor scene in the show. They aren't awake and I have to deal with them for a week."

Mac silently switched Batman's drink for something hard. While he never saw Bruce getting drunk, it seemed this time he actually needed to.

\* \* \*

><p>119.3 (Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Loop Trek: The Next Iteration - "Encounter at Farfetched"<p>

Captain Celestia paused in her walk around the bridge of the \_Enterprise\_ to allow the loop memories to settle.

\_Ah. This again. I wonder what the crew lottery came up with this time.\_

Glancing around, she concluded that this was a ponified variant, rather than a straight substitute-into-bipeds fusion.

There was Twilight in Data's seat at Conn. \_I wonder how often she gets slotted into scientific support roles.\_

She did not recognize the pony at Ops. \_Oh dear. Redshirt. Must make an effort to save that one if possible.\_

She noted Diamond Tiara speaking to Gilda at the Tactical station. \_Tasha and Worf. Rather predictable...\_

Cadance was in the Counselor's chair. \_And loop memories indicate that we'll be meeting with Shining Armor, Zecora, and Apple Bloom at

Deneb IV.\_

As she moved to peer over Twilight's shoulder, the unicorn murmured, "Two Generosities, one Kindness, and another Magic so far." More loudly, she announced. "Unknown sensor contact directly ahead, approaching rapidly."

"There is a very powerful mind out there," added Cadance in an almost bored tone of voice as she idly examined her left front hoof-shoe.

"And here it comes," muttered DT to Gilda as the view screen was filled with a tessellating pattern. The griffon grunted in acknowledgement.

"Hi guys!" said the draconequus after she flashed into existence.

"Hello, Silver. Are you here to judge if ponykind is a savage and unworthy race?" asked Celestia politely.

"Nah. Technically, I'm here to help judge if ponykind is a boring and uninteresting race. Discord and Q are running interference with the Continuum, and I got stuck with the public appearances. I feel obliged to point out that you don't have any Elements of Laughter available just now, so you're at a slight disadvantage for the trial..."

\* \* \*

><p>119.4 (Gamerex27)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The door to Mac's bar slowly crept open, and Pinkie Pie walked in. She didn't bounce, or skip, or even teleport in from under a stool. No, she walked in. This, in Mac's experience, was always a bad sign.<p>

Her mane a mix between its usually poofy self and flat, Pinkie eased herself onto a seat at the bar top, and sighed.

Mac didn't say anything: he didn't want to risk upsetting her. He merely continued to clean his mugs.

Mac took a second look at his customer, and instantly understood what was wrong. On Pinkie Pie's forehoof was a large orange bracelet.

Pinkie's gaze slowly trailed to her bracelet, and then made eye contact with Mac.

"I have diabetes this Loop," she said, her voice missing all of its usual cheer.

"\_Magic\_ diabetes," she clarified, as Mac opened his mouth to give advice. "Twilight's done everything she could to cure it, but nothing worked."

"Well," Mac said, "it'll only be for this Loop."



"But it's so \_annoying!\_" Pinkie's mane fully deflated and turned totally flat. "I can barely eat one tiny cookie without risking my life! I have to stop in the middle of every single party and check my glucose level just to make sure I won't pass out and wake up without my hooves! I can't even order any of my usual drinks here, 'cause all of them are packed with sugar!"

"You could just try to find some..." Mac hesitated for a moment. "...sugar-free snacks?" he said hesitantly.

The Element of Laughter twitched. "I know, but they're so hard to find around here! I never noticed just how much sugar everypony uses around here to bake and cook everything! I had to go all the way to Manehattan just to find a bakery that sold all my favorite things without sugar!"

She sighed, and downed the shot of Berry Punch's special sugar-free brew. "I...I just don't know what to do!"

"I ain't sure what to tell ya, Pinkie. Maybe," he realized, "you can just make your sugar-free snacks on your own?"

Pinkie Pie froze. Her mane instantly poofed back up, and she squeed in joy. "Ohmygosh, \_you're right!\_ Thank you so much, Maccy!"

She pulled him into a deep kiss, then ducked underneath the stool, teleporting out of the bar.

As Berry Punch walked out of the back room, she saw Mac blushing furiously.

\* \* \*

><p>119.5 (Kingofsouls) (GamerX) (DrTempo) (TrueZero2) (Fractalman) (Masterweaver) (banjo2e) (Draconas) (drachefly) (send help, too many authors!)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, New round. Weirdest married couple you have seen or been in." Twilight announced to the bar patrons. She then shot a glare at Cadence. "And no Cadence, that time you got everypony married to their human counterparts doesn't count."<p>

Cadence slammed her head into the table.

"I got one. I Woke up married to Davenport that one loop." Pinkie took a swig of her drink.

Rainbow gave Pinkie a questioning look. "Wait, the sofa and quill guy? That Davenport?"

"Yepper-Ronnie!" She sighed wistfully. "Good times."

"I think I speak for everyone present when I ask how that came to be." Rarity questioned.

"Well, he told me he really liked what I could do with a sofa."

The others looked at Pinkie, wondering just how far out of context that statement really was.

Shining Armor sighed, cradling his head with a hoof. "Even so, that couldn't have been as bad as that one time I Woke Up married to Panty."

The Loopers in the bar looked at one another, clearly having no idea who that was.

"She and her sister Stocking were angels who were exiled from Heaven for being too sinful in their home Loop," Shining explained. "They had to fight ghosts on earth in order to get back to Heaven, and they did it by turning their clothes into weapons for some reason."

"Oh, those two." Twilight sighed, taking a sip of her cider. "I remember them from when they replaced Celestia and Luna. I'm pretty sure Panty seduced every single stallion in the Royal Guard except you. She was like a foul-mouthed, tamer version of Molestia."

Nearly every Looper in the bar shuddered in unison at this.

"And, since she kept using human curses, nopony knew what she was talking about half the time," Twilight continued. "Her sister ate so much sugar, she single-hoofedly gave the Pies enough business to open up franchise shops all over Equis. She ate more cake than Celestia and Pinkie combined, for elk's sake."

Pinkie gasped at this. "Ohmygosh! That's more cake than there should ever be in one place! You can't let just one pony hog it all!"

"When you said they used their clothes as weapons," Rarity asked, raising an eyebrow, "what do you mean?"

"They used some kind of magic to literally turn them into weapons. Panty turned her...ah, namesake into guns, and Stocking turned her socks into swords."

Unexpectedly, Rarity smiled at this. "Finally, someone finds a use for those things."

Sunset said, "Hmm...weirdest married couple I've seen..." After thinking for a few minutes, she said, "I've seen a lot of odd couples, but the one that takes the cake was an Unawake Fluttershy and Ryoga Hibiki. Fluttershy was able to actually calm Ryoga down. THAT is rare."

Twilight smirked "I can beat that. An Unawake Shining Armor was married to his job one loop."

Shining Armor slammed his head into the table.

"Weirdest married couple... weirdest married couple..." Vinyl muttered as she tried to remember one. "Probably the one where Rarity and Shino hooked up. Neither one was Awake, and Rarity fell for Shino when he saved her life during Pain's attack on the Hidden Leaf. I tell ya, not many people believed it at first. Killer reception though."

"Weirdest marriage? Chrysalis and C'thulu. Yes, that was a

marriage."

"There was this one time Angel and Luna were married." Fluttershy said. "The moon was pretty green that Loop."

Luna slammed her head into the table.

Sweetie Belle raised a hoof. "Does it have to be a couple? Cause I have a herd example..."

Cadence raised her head. "Go on..."

"Alright... so we all know how Ivory ended up with Stephen Magnet and Gustav le Grand after Rarity and Spike's bachelor party-"

Ivory rolled her eyes. "Yes, go telling everypony why don't you."

"Ahem. Anywho..." Sweetie shrugged. "One loop had herd-based marriage laws-a couple was just 'a herd of two' and not something unique-and I think Spike and Gilda were awake, and they campaigned for some sort of racial equality... long story short, when me and Rarity took Manehattan, Suri Polomare was married to Garble, Gilda's third cousin, a changeling queen-not unique that loop-and Stephen Magnet."

She gave an awkward little cough. "They, ah... they commissioned Rarity for specialty bed sheets, and I won't elaborate."

"I once married a demonic overlord and a paladin. Barely remember their names at this point, though."

Discord finished his drink in a completely normal fashion, then scowled as he realized the entire bar was staring at him. "Look, I think the fact that they asked me, of all people, to officiate the ceremony would tend to suggest they might not be an entirely normal couple!"

Celestia downed a shot of alcohol heated to the point of fusion.

"Let's just say in one loop Luna and I had to keep up an eclipse for five days so the Sun and Moon could have their honeymoon."

Of to the side, Luna cursed before trying to think of a new example.

"Ah, do fake weddings count?" Rainbow Dash had put her head on a hoof in an uncharacteristic 'thinking' pose.

Twilight coughed. "No, they do not."

"I ask 'cause" - "I just said they don't." - "Twilight and I have been married a few times. Not looped in that way, but actually chose to when awake."

Twilight gave up and let her continue.

"First there was the time you had to get married or else, and only we were awake, and we were both too worn out to fight the system."

Then there was the time we were all under pressure by a set of secret police, and they tried to play us off against each other. Then there was the time we just did it to make some bigots' heads explode. Oh, and pranking Cadence by getting married and divorced more and more frequently until you needed a millisecond timer to keep count - no, you haven't forgotten, that was before you ever woke up... did I miss any?"

Twilight looked around the room and felt a peculiar series of sensations: first, relief that the reactions were mere amusement at the situations, not anything she should be embarrassed over; second, confusion that she could still be insecure enough that that could still occur to her; third, surprise that most of her friends were still recognizably themselves after all this time and experience; and fourth, fear - of change, of loss of self, of the end of the loops by the recovery of Yggdrasil, of the end of the loops by a total crash, of data corruption changing people in ways they never chose.

"You okay there?"

"No, I..." she blinked. "I think you got them all."

Gilda's grin was quite predatory. "I got one that's pretty good. Queen Celestia and Emperor Tirek."

Celestia's head smashed into the table, Twilight's drink being shot out of her mouth at the nearest pony (it was Rarity).  
"\_What!?"\_

"Stealth anchor. You were replaced with one of the Yugioh anchors," responded Celestia, her head rising slightly. "It was a strange loop. Tirek challenged my unawake self to single combat when he came to first Equestria. He won, and forced me to marry him. Needless to say, Equestria wasn't exactly...friendly."

"When I woke up, the first thing I did was file a divorce by banishing him to the sun."

"Was my..."

"Sorry Twilight. There Was a Freak solar flare that happened after I banished him."

Twilight's head smashed into the table.

\* \* \*

><p>119.6 (Gamerex27) (Masterweaver) (DrTempo) (LordCirce)  
(Ghrathyrn) (Gym Quirk) (Drachefly)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Can guest Loopers propose an idea?" Iron Coat-or as he was more commonly known, Langdon- studied the glass in his hoof, wondering how he was managing to hold it without fingers. "How about this: the best or most impressive way you've ever de-railed another Loop's baseline."<p>

"That's a broad category," replied Twilight. "Give me a minute to think of one of my better Loops."

"There was the time where we completely destroyed the plot of Romeo and Juliet," Spike pitched in. "But I think my best one was when I replaced the Dovahkiin back in Skyrim."

He took a sip of his drink, belched atomic fire safely into his subspace pocket, then continued. "It went normally until I infiltrated the Thalmor embassy. When I found their files on how they brainwashed Ulfric to spur on the war...I showed the Imperials and Stormcloaks the documents. Right when we were negotiating the ceasefire in the civil war."

Spike reached his paw into his Pocket, and withdrew a picture of the Thalmor Ambassador's face during the event. Suffice to say, it was priceless.

"I had no idea humans could stretch their mouths so wide," remarked Octavia, from her seat next to Vinyl. "Her mouth is a foot away from literally dropping to the ground."

"She isn't human," Spike stressed. "See the ears? Elves can stretch their mouths wider than humans. Anyways," he continued, "they worked out peace, alright. Although, it didn't exactly go as planned."

Rarity nodded. "I don't think either of us anticipated the Empire and Stormcloaks teaming up to take on every single Thalmor in Tamriel. Even though it did lead to a golden age of prosperity and cultural understanding (somehow), the war was far more bloody than either of us wanted. Turns out lightning bolt spells travel faster than the Elements of Harmony did in that Loop." Rarity shivered, then put on a small smile. "The cultural renaissance afterwards gave me ideas for some fabulous new dresses, though."

"Alright, alright, get this." Vinyl spread her hooves wide. "I Wake Up, and I'm a seapony right?"

Twilight's eyebrow rose ever so slightly. "Equestrian or G3?"

"Neither, actually. My Loop memories tell me that I'm sort of a nice girl, bit curious-obvious hero material-but beyond that, nothing. So I go swimming out of my cave and, guess who's out there? ANIKAN FREAKING SKYWALKER." Vinyl snorted. "He was also a seapony, but wearing a robe."

"All right..."

"So, he explains that his pre-awake self was going to restore only some of my memory as part of a gambit, but offers to restore all of it. I decide, on a whim, to just have him restore the part he was going to cause, ya know, why the heck not." Vinyl grinned broadly. "So it turns out that this whole world I'm in is built on 'the verse'-basically, think magic that can be channeled by singing."

Octavia sighed in resignation. "What song did you pick?"

"Dubstep remix of our hub show theme song. Ten minutes later, a bunch of ponies in scuba gear go down to the depths and blast a depressed

demigod with the powers of harmony." The unicorn leaned back with a smug smirk. "Yep, that's how I completely fixed Aquaria."

Sunset smirked. "Interesting baseline derailments...Here's one. You know that loop with the animatronic puppets in that pizza place...I just blasted that place to bits." The grin on her face was wide. "Problem solved. That place was going out of business anyway."

Angel Bunny made a series of gestures, before twitching his nose and turning back to his drink. Sunset squinted. "I don't think I caught that." She glanced at Fluttershy.

Fluttershy blushed. "Oh, um, Angel was taking the place of Bonnie the Bunny that Loop. He was the first thing you hit."

Sunset flushed. "Oops." Then she paused. "Hey wait, he chased me through three rooms."

Angel twitched his nose and turned away.

Sweetie perked up. "Ooh, ooh, I got one. I was in Arda..."

Bloom cut in. "We've all heard your Ascension Story. That doesn't count."

Sweetie glowered at her. "This is a different time. I Looped in as Galadriel, and I managed to make Heart Songs a thing. Smaug and Bilbo did a really funny cat-and-mouse duet, the Battle of Helm's Deep turned into a giant rap battle, and Gandalf and the Eagles did this amazing Orchestral Jazz fly-over at the end of the Loop."

"Wait, Ah think Ah've got one!" Apple Bloom said. "Twilight, remember when we Woke up on Gor?"

The entire bar fell silent. Even Pinkie Pie, eternal engine of motion that she was, froze at the mention of Gor.

"Wait a moment." Rarity said slowly. "Are you talking about \_the\_ Gor?"

"That planet where those aliens abduct people from Earth and force them to live in Stone Age cultures?" Fluttershy asked.

"The one where the men are deplorable knaves, who brainwash the women and make them their slaves?" Zecora asked, narrowing her eyes.

"Please tell me you two gave those aliens some justice," Rainbow Dash said, with a sharp edge to her voice.

"Of course!" Twilight sipped her cider. "The moment our Loop memories kicked in, we Ascended, and destroyed the aliens' orbital cannon."

"And Ah wired their bases so they couldn't build anythin' like that again," Apple Bloom added. "Cut off their production factories, vaporized all of their teleportation technology, an' put 'em all in a penal colony."

"We did leave them with a one-way video feed to Gor, though."

Twilight grinned. "We spent the next few years travelling the planet, making massive changes to society, and making a unified global culture."

"Ah introduced the poor folks trapped there ta' gunpowder, electricity, heatin', and all the bells n' whistles. 'Course, we sent anyone who wanted back to Earth, but a whole bunch of 'em stayed to show up the jerks that put 'em there."

"We got a women's rights movement going in record time. By the time we got governments running across the planet, a little under half of the officials were females."

"An' the best part?" Apple Bloom beamed. "Them aliens couldn't do a darn thing about it. We enchanted those TVs to make 'em unbreakable, so they were forced to watch their big experiment fall apart."

"We made them watch that sick society of oppression they had built crumble to pieces, and there was nothing that they could do about it."

Many of the ponies in the bar applauded. Apple Bloom blushed, and Twilight took a moment to bow on her stool.

"Hey, Twi?" The young Apple's face turned thoughtful. "Do ya think we got that world Looping? It was static when we got there, but with all th' changes we made, ya think..."

"Maybe? I have no idea. If we did help make an Anchor, it was probably one of those Amazons."

"Interesting loops huh?" The dark-maned thestral twitched her tail as she leaned against the bar, a black and white mongrel lazing at her hooves. "I can think of a few breaks, not all of them mine." She grinned before sipping her drink. "Actually, one was a Fallout loop, you know, the places where the entire planet ends up on the receiving end of a WMD bombardment? Well, in this case it was theâ€¦ third one, where the main person has to leave the vault after their father." She snorted, shaking her head. "Of course Dad was really interested in their tech, particularly the GECKs, but knowing the Enclave morons would be out there looking for it, we went a different route."

"Instead of us sneaking out of the vault, we browbeat the Overseer with science out the gate, cutting out a good chunk of the problems that would come later, then I shifted to Assirraya the Inferno, grabbed the nuke in Megaton and dropped it on the Enclave's heads while Tim here used his dragon form to start mucking with the ground. He got a good chunk around Megaton purged. Took us a few years to get everything done, but we got the Capital Wastes cleared, even managed to get rid of the ghouls infestations around, didn't even need the GECK when we found it."

\_:What my brood-mate isn't saying is that once we found the rest of our brood things went a lot quicker, especially since we could purify the water and force weather patterns until they stuck.:\_ The dog's voice sounded in everyone's heads. \_:The combination of Fireborn powers, Thu'um and spells for purification and creation certainly helped, as did Quentin's scientific abilities. Between him and that Moira girl Megaton had products that made even those in Tenpenny

Tower envious, and they couldn't really do what they had planned because we used the bomb on the Enclave.:\_ His jaw dropped in a canine laugh.

Another pony, this one a pale blue pegasus snorted in amusement. "And here I thought there were fewer stories like that, though that said, I remember once I looped into the place of Captain Geary, which was interesting, since we started facing summary death." He paused, sipping his drink. "I've talked to Geary, normally he tries to get everyone back the slow way since it's safer. Fortunately I had Angel and the Angelwing available, so we sent her over to the enemy fleet, shut down their targeting and combat systems, then I ordered my fleet to push straight for the jump gate, got back to alliance space a lot quicker and with Angel around, we found the other group of aliens pretty fast, she was able to disable their tricks and we sued for peace. Got it too, once we revealed how the entire group had been played."

Applejack tapped her chin with a hoof. "Well, Ah think mah best one might've been when Ah was in the Kingdom Hearts Loop, and Ah replaced Aqua."

Sunset Shimmer blinked. "Really? I've never actually Looped to that part of the timeline. How did that go for you?"

"At the time, Ah didn't think Ah was doin' anything major. Ah just asked Ventus why he left home, an' he told me that the boy in the mask told him to find Terra. An' when we met up in Radiant Garden, Ah told Terra that he needed to come back to the Land of Departure 'cause Ah was suspicious of Xehanort. And then Ah told him that the masked boy sent Ventus to find him." She smiled. "Amazing what just askin' a few questions can do. It didn't take long before we realized that Xehanort was running us 'round in circles and manipulin' all of us, an' before you knew it, we'd foiled all his plans by just not goin' to that graveyard."

"So, you fixed the problems of the whole baseline...by doing nothing? Except asking a few questions?" Sunset looked incredulous at this.

"Nearly every bad thing that happened in that Loop was his fault. All we had to do was be honest with each other, an' we stopped everythin' bad from happening."

"Wow." Sunset removed a notebook from her pocket, and began writing in it. "The next time I Loop back into Kingdom Hearts, I'll be sure to tell this to Sora and the others."

"Not sure if you need to. Ah think Xehanort was usin' some kind of Suggestion spell to push those two boys into following the rails of his scheme. 'Course, since Ah'm the Element of Honesty, that kind of spell doesn't work on me, so it didn't take that long ta notice somethin' was off about the whole thing. Ah think any Looper worth their salt would notice the road apples he was layin', even if he didn't use any mind-control magic in the baseline."

Fluttershy shrank into herself even more than usual. "I managed to mess up the Barrayaran Empire pretty badly. I was doing Miles' Academy entrance exam and took my time and was very careful during the physical fitness portion..."



Ivory Scroll said, "The loop I derailed most thoroughly? When Dr. Fetus abducted my boyfriend, I called in OSHA. They shut him down after taking one look at his factory."

Applejack dryly asked, "Oh! Is that loop why you were deathly afraid of salt for a while? Anyway, once I was in a loop loosely based on our admins. In this variant, Wotan had the worst head for money I've ever heard of - and yes, I've seen my baseline. When the loop started, he'd already bought an enormous sky palace from two giants, with no down payment, no regular source of income, and me - his sister-in-law - as collateral. Without my permission. And moreover, I gave all of our family and friends our immortality."

A pause while that sunk in.

"Yeah. So anyway, I married both of them and sent a golden-apple care package home every few days. Also, we had to go keep Alberich from taking over the world, but by then the plot rails were out of sight."

Rarity coughed. "You married \_Fasolt and Fafnir\_ for a loop that's a few hundred years long?"

Applejack snorted. "Memory charms worked for a while. Then Fafnir got himself cursed by Alberich. Once the Rhine maidens had drowned him, it was just me and Fasolt. He was actually all right."

\* \* \*

><p>119.7 (Masterofgames)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra, Lyra, Lyra, Lyra, and a sweet roll all sat in their designated places around the meeting table. Lyra Classic tapped her hoof against it. "I now call this meeting of The Increasingly Confusing Council of Lyra's Head to order! Roll call..."<p>

"No."

"Aw, please?"

"No, we can all count, and we all know each other. We're all here. Get on with it."

"Ugh, fine. First order of business, who is in charge this time? Please note we are a code 7 this time, a seapony in disguise."

Human Lyra raised her hand with a grin. "My turn! I've never been in charge while we were a seapony before! This should be fun!"

Seapony Lyra shrugged. "Just watch the instincts and you should be fine."

Classic nodded. "Any objections? ... No? Okay then next on the agenda, cake."

Seapony Lyra grinned. "Are we all still in agreement that we are

getting a piece of the MMMM at any cost this loop?"

Science Lyra nodded. "No question! We've never so much as smelled the thing before! How can we replicate it for BonBon's birthday if we don't have even the slightest clue what it tastes like!?"

"I agree. We know the damage can be fixed before the contest anyway, so overall, no harm done." Classic Lyra declared sagely.

"Um... I just like cake." Human Lyra shrugged.

"..." said the sweet roll.

Human Lyra blushed. "I didn't mean it like that and you know it!"

"... Right, most of the rest of the schedule is routine stuff, but there is one last thing here. Twilight's offer of Alicornhood."

Science Lyra sighed and slumped over the table. "Look, we all know what you're thinking. It SHOULD merge us all. But what SHOULD happen, and what WILL happen, are not always the same! Case in point, the elephant in the room." she frowned, gesturing to the head of the table.

The table that, prior to Twilight's offer, not HAD a head of the table.

And most tellingly, the brand new, Alicorn sized empty chair that had appeared at it, awaiting its owner.

\* \* \*

><p>119.8 (Dalxein)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The guard looked confused as Twilight began walking away, leaving her friends to enter for the Gala. "You're... not coming in?"<p>

"Oh, no. I gave away my ticket." She said offhooedly, barely turning back to respond.

"But... you're Twilight Sparkle. Princess Celestia's private student\_. You don't need an invitation. You could just... go to the gala, if you want."

Twilight turned back to stare at the guard, her friends blinking inquisitively off to the side as she tilted her head and her mane began to frazzle.

Somewhere, off in the distance, a goat bleated.

\* \* \*

><p>119.1 continued (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>And the Rest Loop: The Ticket Master<strong>

Twilight stood and watched with a twitching eyebrow as Applejack and Rainbow Dash hoofwrestled for the never-to-be-sufficiently-damned-to-Tartarus tickets to the Grand Galloping Gala. The Gala itself was about fifth or sixth on the list of Parts of the Baseline Twilight Absolutely Hates; the day Celestia actually sends the tickets ranked second on that last, only marginally worse than Tirek blowing up the library but nothing like as bad as the Want-It, Need-It incident. When in a good mood she'd play along just enough to find something amusing in Canterlot, without re-enacting the original, horrible, no-good, very worst night ever. Now, when she wanted peace, quiet, and familiar, comfortable things- and nothing else... not a chance.

She'd tried just giving Applejack and Rainbow Dash one ticket each before; that worked out even worse than baseline, with her other three close friends resorting to bribery, deceit and theft to get the tickets for themselves. One Loop things had become so bad between them that Twilight had been forced to cancel the Gala altogether... by blowing up Celestia's castle. She'd spent the rest of that loop on the Moon, with time off to deal with Discord and for weddings... but at least her friends made up during her trial.

Twilight was about to set the tickets on fire and give Rote Speech #2G (Nobody is Going to the Gala and I am Sorely Disappointed in All of You) when the Mayor's carefully cultivated voice said, "Oh, Twilight Sparkle, there you are!"

"Yes, Ivory- er, Ms. Mayor?" Twilight replied, glad to take her eyes off two of her closest friends being total idiots for the (vague eight or nine figure number here)th iteration.

"Yes, I've just been catching up on some paperwork regarding your transfer of residency to Ponyville," Ivory Scroll said. "You know, of course, that Ponyville recently adopted the Sweethaven tax code?"

Warning bells rang in the back of Twilight's mind. \_Sweethaven... I know that- oh, no...\_ "You mean the Commodore's Code? But that was repealed!"

"Ah, so I don't need to explain it to you," Ivory Scroll smiled. "So, let me just go over the charges: departure of residency tax from Canterlot... beginning of residency tax in Ponyville... are you renting a home here, by the way?"

"You know I'm not!"

"Lack of residency tax," Ivory nodded, checking off a scroll that kept unwinding longer and longer as the mayor kept listing itemized charges. "Habitation of a public building tax... magic tax, progressive according to power ranking of unicorn... keeping of pet parenthesis dragon close parenthesis tax... keeping of hazardous materials parenthesis dragon close parenthesis tax... opening public building, service or accommodation tax... er, is the library open at the moment?"

"No, Spike and I are both here."

"Closing public building, service or accommodation tax," Ivory continued.

"Look, doesn't my stipend from Princess Celestia cover-"

"Special stipend income tax..."

"I guess not." Twilight sighed. "Look, just let me see the bottom line, all right?"

Ivory showed the final amount to Twilight, who gawped. If she went to Smoky Mountain in about, oh, three weeks and stole the not-yet-arrived dragon's hoard, that might cover it... almost.

"Since there are prolonged hearings and court procedures regarding the garnishment of royal stipends," Ivory Scroll continued, "the township of Ponyville shall settle for the seizure of all your possessions of real value. As of this moment, according to our best understanding, those consist of two exclusive tickets to the Grand Galloping Gala, correct?"

"I thought that's where all this was headed," Twilight sighed.

"Then I shall be taking those tickets," the mayor continued, "and in three days I shall auction them off, the proceeds to fund public works in and around Ponyville." She reached over to Spike, who held the tickets in his claws, and took them in her teeth, carefully depositing them in her saddlebags.

"HEY!" Applejack and Rainbow Dash broke up their hoofwrestling match and dashed over to the mayor.

"You cain't take our friend's property like that!" Applejack drawled.

"That's right!" Rainbow Dash agreed. "Those tickets belong to mmmmm, er, my friend Twilight Sparkle!" She snuggled herself up next to Twilight and added, "Isn't that right, old buddy, old pal?"

"I'm afraid she can," Twilight sighed. "I'm sorry, girls. I know how much each of you wanted to go."

"It's not a total loss," Ivory Scroll added. "You could always buy one of the tickets at auction in three days' time." Putting the tax bill back in her bags, the mayor turned back for town. "Thank you for your cooperation, Twilight dear." With that the mayor trotted off down the road, followed at a distance by Applejack and Rainbow Dash, both with expressions of silent thoughtfulness.

Twilight waited for all three to go over the hill and out of sight before she let the evil, evil smile show on her face.

\* \* \*

><p>That evening, after the scheduled rainstorm, Twilight sat in the library's reading room, sipped some tea from her cup, and read to the delightful sounds of a Ponyville mob growing ever more disgruntled by the minute. Sweet, sweet music.<p>

For a moment the muffled sound of shouting angry ponies became much less muffled as the front door swung wide open; it slammed shut again an instant later, and after a couple of tables and one of the mobile bookshelves was shoved in front of it the sounds became muffled again.

"Er, Twilight Sparkle," Ivory Scroll said nervously, "it appears that the ratification of the Sweethaven tax code had some, er, legal irregularities which renders the tax bill you owe-"

"You're here to give the tickets back, aren't you?" Twilight said calmly, turning a page of her book.

"PLEASE!" Ivory cried, falling to her knees and crawling to Twilight, forehooves clenched together in supplication. "At least two-thirds of Ponyville is after those tickets or my dead body or both!"

"Your dead body?" Twilight asked, apparently unconcerned.

"I may have let slip that I meant to keep one of the tickets for myself," Ivory Scroll admitted. "You know, rig the sealed bidding."

"Oopsie," Twilight smirked. "Possibly you shouldn't have used your outside-the-head voice for that. I have that problem sometimes."

"It was Derpy!" the mayor cried. "Sweet, innocent, non-Awake Derpy! Who would have imagined she was that desperate to see Princess Celestia and get Dinky Doo a shot at Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns?" The mayor stared over her pince-nez at Twilight with terror-filled eyes. "And when you've lost Derpy Hooves, Twilight, take it from a pony who knows, you've lost all of Ponyville."

"Gee, that's sad," Twilight said. "And yet... not my problem." She turned her attention back to her book.

"PLEASE, Twilight, you HAVE to help me!"

"Not my circus, not my ponies."

"I'll do ANYTHING!" Ivory sobbed.

Twilight took a deep breath and smiled. Time to end the suffering. "I want you to write a thousand times, 'I will not use my phenomenal bureaucratic powers for personal gain.' And I want a new public library built on the other side of town from this tree before Tirek escapes. Promise?"

"Yes! Yes!" Ivory gasped. "Just please get me out of this mess!" After a moment she added, "And if it's at all possible, leave me with a decent chance of re-election."

Twilight raised an eyebrow. "I thought you enjoyed the occasional escape from your duties."

"I don't enjoy the humiliation of losing an election!" Ivory raised a hoof to her throat, gulped, and added, "Or my head!"

Twilight shrugged, then raised her voice. "SPIKE! Come here, please,

I need you to take a letter!"

\_Dear Princess Celestia, \_

Today I learned that it's not a good idea to use public authority for your own purposes, even if your intentions are good. You'll only end up making yourself look bad- to say nothing of the government which you represent. Only by being fair and impartial can a public servant gain the trust and friendship of the people she works with.

On a related note, I strongly urge that the entire Ponyville district be issued invitations to the Grand Galloping Gala, in order to maintain the peace and to uphold the civil authority. I know Canterlot Castle won't hold all of Ponyville in comfort, so I will spend my free time over the next six months winnowing out those ponies whose interest in the Gala is only tangential to other unrelated affairs. I ask that you help me in this by being available to such ponies as I send to you for personal interviews.

If you could please respond at once so I can prevent our mayor from being ridden out of town on a rail, I would really appreciate it.

Your faithful student,

Twilight Sparkle

P. S. Send the tickets quick- they're bringing up a battering ram and I don't think the bookshelves will hold! - Spike

The more experienced courtiers at the Day Court had cleared the room long before Celestia finished reading Twilight's letter. They'd seen that manic grin on the princess's face in the past and knew it meant nothing good for somepony or other. None of them wanted to be that somepony.

Without bothering to cancel court, Celestia dashed off her throne, galloped across the castle to Luna's tower, and crashed into her sister's bedchamber. "Lulu, Lulu, guess what?" she grinned, giggling in excitement.

Luna raised a sleepy head. Her mane still hadn't recovered its magical luster, and the pillow hadn't helped matters either. "Sister, what are you talking about?"

"Six months from now," Celestia chortled, "we are going to have the \_Best. Night. \_\_\*\*EVER!\*\*\*\_

\* \* \*

><p>119.9 (Dalxein)<p>

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><p>Twilight landed in Ponyville as per usual. She'd gotten a few pings with a couple elements active, but was going to play it mostly baseline unless someone else had a plan. That's when she heard it growing progressively louder.<p>

"...nopenopenopenopenope..."

Gallopig up from the outskirts of town, Chrysalis, not even hiding her real form, ran right into Twilight. "Wait, what's going on!?" The anchor yelled, especially since she was now being hugged tightly to the larger queen.

"No time." The changeling frantically replied. "Just trust me on this. You'll thank me later!"

She then teleported the both of them both into the center of the sun, where the loop abruptly ended.

\* \* \*

><p>Several loops later, Twilight found Queen Chrysalis sitting in Mac's Bar the day after the Summer Sun Celebration. Sitting down next to the already-drinking changeling who was circled by full drinks and yet more empty ones, she remarked, "Well, it's later. Why should I thank you for the last time we were both Awake?"<p>

Not wanting to beat around the bush, Chrissie chugged the rest of her drink and replied "The drones were replaced by Kyubey. All of them. \_All of the Kyubeys.\_"

Okay. Not a bad reason. But still... \_"What!?"\_

Chrysalis visibly shuddered. "Yeeeeeah, they acted mostly like normal changelings before the loop started, but then they were \_all awake\_ and... Haha, no." She shook her head vigorously. "Noooo nonono." She took a swig from a new drink and sighed. "I'm sorry, by the way."

After sucking in a deep breath and letting it out slowly, Twilight nodded. "Apology accepted. I'm still a tad miffed about being flash-fried, though."

With a chuckle, the queen pushed one of her full glasses toward the princess. "I'll buy your drink?"

Her brow wrinkled as she asked, "Does Mac even \_charge\_ for drinks?" It'd been so long since he'd started the bar that she was honestly not sure what its original policies might have been.

"You wanna ask?" At least Chrysalis was smiling again.

"\_Buck\_ no. My tab must be \_astronomical \_by now if he does."

The stallion in question, at the far side of the bar cleaning a glass, nodded to himself as he watched the two laughing. Times like these reminded him why he started this bar in the first place.

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><p>119.10 (fractalman)<p>

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><p>Twilight Starburst Pegasus Twilight Unicorn Twilight Princess Pony Twilight Twilight Sparkle, Sparkling Twilight Vampire awoke,

checked her loop memories, and head-desked until she was unconscious.<p>

All the Twilights.

\* \* \*

><p>119.11 (Hubris Plus)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The Lyras' mutual mindscape had been undergoing renovations recently. A Loop spent at Whispering Rock Psychic Summer Camp under the tutelage of Raz had been just what they needed to do some serious remodeling. It was well worthwhile, if only to give the personalities not piloting something to do besides watch and offer commentary. It had also allowed them to make larger changes, such as the experiment in collaborative control they were in the midst of.<p>

"Status of the vessel?" Miscellaneous Lyra asked. The view screen was taken up by a large chunk of pink, oozing crimson from cleanly sliced edges.

"Heavily damaged, Captain," their human self answered from the coms station. "Only sixteen percent of the vessel remains intact. They are not responding to our hails."

"Ma'am, I recommend the destruction of the remainder. That... It's no way to live," the security seapony reported solemnly.

"Noted and denied, officer," the captain responded. "Lock on tractor beam and open hangar doors. Bring them in."

"Acknowledged," Unicorn responded from engineering. "Hangar bay open and spell matrices charged. Ready when you are."

"Engage!" Miscellaneous ordered. "Don't worry, councilor Sweet Roll. We won't leave your people out in the cold."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Meanwhile, in Reality:<strong>

Lyra poked at her slice of cake a few times, causing the raspberry filling to squirt out past the pink frosting. After a long moment of blank faced contemplation, her mouth opened wide while her horn glowed. The pastry was lifted off the plate and shoved unceremoniously into the unicorn's maw.

"Sometimes," Bon-Bon said as she witnessed the spectacle. "I worry about what goes on in that head of yours."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

119.1: All those things they've wanted to do for a while.

>119.2: Bruce whining.<br>119.3: One presumes "The Q and the Plaid" has taken place behind the scenes.

>119.4: Problem, solution, awkwardness.<br>119.5: That first one...



would that technically be incest or merely narcissism?  
>119.6: It's the little things, sometimes.<br>119.7: Yeah, apparently Lyra's mind is a bit prone to free-associate.  
>119.8: Face fault.<br>119.9: Close call. Very close call.  
>119.10: At least she's not got Twinkle in there too.<br>119.11: And hence that dessert.

## 126. Chapter 126

### 120.1 (fractalman)

\* \* \*

><p>"So, keep it baseline till the gala?" asked Gilda.<p>

"Yes." replied Twilight.

Gilda flapped away.

"We'll do the Gala in a dignified manner and see what ripple effects we get."

\* \* \*

><p>So far, the Gala had, indeed, gone smoothly. Then Gilda showed up. "Ello, Sunbutt."<p>

Silence fell as the nobles turned to stare.

Two seconds passed. "AHHHHHHHHHHH!"

'Sunbutt' giggled while Gilda muttered "I've seen them go into a panic when I've called Celestia fat-butt before, but this is the first time I've seen them panic over the nickname Sunbutt."

\* \* \*

><p>120.2 (fractalman)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy placed some barrels around the tree. "Ok Mr. Tree, it's time to let go of your apples."-and it did.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Yeehaw!" yelled Applejack, as she lassoed the next cloud into position.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Most ponies agreed that Rarity's parties were "pretty good, as long as she remembers that not everypony likes caviar".<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"One little bunny, two little kitty, three little gummy, four little snakeyâ€|"<p>

The animals weren't quite sure what to make of the pinkâ€¦thing in the house, but they did agree on one thing: she was more interesting than clawing up curtains or running around making a mess.

\* \* \*

><p>"Rainbow Dash always dresses in style-and you can too, at the Carousel boutique!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Unlike the disastrous cutie-mark swapping of baseline, Twilight's friends were quite happy in their new roles. Twilight decided she'd let her unawake friends stay the way they were for nowâ€¦if she could break Rainbow's habit of saying "Rainbow Dash always dresses in style". That simply had to go.<p>

First things first, though, she had to figure out who cast Starswirl's incomplete spell, before the caster did something stupid with it...like ascending everypony at once.

\* \* \*

><p>120.3 (Novusordomundi)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Sunset Shimmer turned the page of her Hoofbeat magazine, engrossing herself in the juice rumor and gossip the pages provided. It was proving more interesting than her current job of protecting the Blue Intelligence Briefcase.<em>

\*Whoosh\*

Sunset jerked her head up, looking left and right for the source of the sound that had interrupted her. However, nothing presented itself as the source of the sound. As immediately as it started, it stopped. Shrugging, Sunset went back to her magazine, assuming that the noise was nothing to be concerned...

"So, class." Cheerilee said, pausing the video. "What exactly did Sunset Shimmer do wrong?" A handful of hooves went into the air, each attempting to be the one to answer. "Yes, Applejack"

Applejack put her hoof down. "She ignored the sound. Even if it ends up being nothing, you can't take that risk."

Cheerilee nodded. "That's one of many things, yes. When you are responsible for the security of someone or something, you must assume that any noise made could be from someone with hostile intentions. And that means you must be alert at all times. Which Miss Shimmer was clearly not. Now, watch what could happen to you in such a situation." She turned back towards the television and pressed play...

\_...she flipped a page, her need for sordid gossip overtaking common sense and her awareness as a human figure dressed in a nice suit with a red mask on walked into view behind her, a butterfly knife clutched in his hand. A sudden clamping of Sunset Shimmer's mouth, followed by a quick motion with the knife across the throat, and in a few seconds

the only living thing in the room was him. Grabbing the Briefcase, he walked calmly out of the camera's view.\_\_

Cheerilee pressed "pause" again, and turned towards the class, many of which were in a state of shock. "Now, that was a simulated event, and nobody actually died. But there are many Loops out there where not paying attention can end badly. Especially in the role of the security guard." She then smiled, as the sound of a Pinkie Pie-rung school bell echoed through the class, as students started getting ready to go home. "Remember that the lesson on guards and teamwork is tomorrow, so study up!"

\* \* \*

><p>"So, how did the class go?" Twilight Sparkle asked the schoolteacher, both of who were currently in Mac's Bar, the usual place for unwinding.<p>

"Oh, it feels so good to teach ponies and actually have the lessons stick after a Loop Reset." Cheerilee gushed, swaying a tad bit in her seat. "And I can play the role of both the teacher and the student! I'd actually learned quite a bit of guard duty from some loopers. Actually, I looped in as a guard at this pizza place a few loops ago and got to test some of my skills. See if I'd picked it up enough to teach. And thanks to the animatronics there, I had!"

"I'm assuming this was why you're teaching it now." Twilight said, getting a nod in response. "Well, I'm glad this is working out for you. And if you ever need me to assist with your lessons ..."

Cheerilee put a hoof to her chin. "You know, I do need to make a few videos for my next subject, and you could be the perfect subject. It's about checklists!"

The grin on Twilight's face told all that needed to be said.

\* \* \*

><p>120.4 (novusordomundi)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Ah! Twilight-sempai!"<p>

A slow sigh escaped from 'Twilight-sempai'. "Hai, Rari-chan?"

"Ah, Sempai noticed me!" Rarity responded, posing dramatically for a couple of seconds, which Twilight would swear cherry blossoms petals blew past both of them, before Rarity became as serious as the situation would allow. "So, have we turned Japanese this loop?"

"I really think so" Twilight looked around at their current location, which to no surprise was a traditional High School. "It's not Eiken, which is good..."

"Oh, thank Kami!" Rarity exclaimed, before stopping to consider the fact that "Kami" was used rather than a plant-based word. "This is going to be a thing this loop, isn't it?"

"Hai."

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:<p>

My next Loop was the Fate/Stay Night Loop, with me in Rin Tohsaka's role.

Basically, the big thing here is that seven magic users summon seven legendary heroes, or "Servants" for the proper term, to fight in a big battle royale. The prize to the winner? The "Holy Grail", which grants a wish to the winner.

I wouldn't use it, even if it wasn't corrupted by an evil being to twist any wish to cause the end of the world. Too darn risky.

Anyway, I'd heard that more often than not, other Loopers get summoned as Servants here a lot. Such was the case for me, as my Archer wasn't the baseline one Rin got, but Pit from the Kid Icarus Loops. After the introductions, we quickly ran to save the Anchor, Shirou Emiya. He wants to be a hero, but ends up never thinking about his own survival. At least, he used to from what I've heard, but from what I noticed, his Awake self's gotten past that. As we were about to fight the Servant Berserker, something blasted it to oblivion first.

Deciding to solve that later, I took the chance to spar with Shirou's Servant, Saber, who's actually King Arthur, but a girl. Even with all my experience from my Loops, she still kicked my sorry flank easily. OUCH.

Things went close to baseline after that until our confrontation with the Servant Caster...who was Pit's boss, Palutena. As Pit'd figured, she'd been the one to send Berserker packing. However, the wild card, Gilgamesh, showed up, and despite her best efforts, Palutena fell, and Pit decided to take Gilgamesh with him in an act of self-sacrifice. The rest of the Loop was simply making sure the Grail wasn't used, and taking down the two main villains here, Kirei and Zouken. They give me the chills...Utter monsters, both of them. I did enjoy sending those two to their fate.

In all, it was an exciting Loop. I got a few new tricks, and sparring with Saber sharpened my sword skills a bit. Pity about Pit, though. Hope his next Loop is better than this...

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>From the journal of Sunset Shimmer:<p>

My next stop was the Pokemon world; namely, the version where Ash's

Pikachu is the Anchor. I was in the Unova region at the time he was, and was focused on entering the Pokemon League there. I started with a Tepig, and before long, I was caught up in Team Plasma's antics. You'd think they'd realize Pokemon and humans are perfectly fine working together. But considering Ghetsis was pulling the strings, they were deluded. Jerk.

Besides that mess, my life was more or less that of your usual Pokemon Trainer; nothing unique, really. I didn't win the Pokemon League; in fact, Ash easily beat me. It was fun, though.

It was a fun journey, though, and I made a few friends, including Ash himself. It sucks my Pokemon couldn't join me in the Loops, but rules are rules.

Nice breather Loop for me, though, after my last Loop.. Knowing my luck, my next Loop won't be as peaceful...

\* \* \*

><p>120.5 (Crisis)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight and her friends, Awake and otherwise, had been in something of a bind. It was one of those weird rare variants where non-native powers didn't quite work right, if they worked at all, and the power levels of loopers in general were nerfed to roughly baseline levels. It was also one of those variants where events veered so greatly from the baseline that foreknowledge was all but useless.<p>

Which had ultimately led to them getting trapped in the local version of the Everfree by a pack of timberwolves just large enough to overwhelm them. And then the sounds of general flank-kicking began and the timberwolves started flying.

And what a group of stallions it was. They weren't overly muscled like Bulk Biceps tended towards, but their muscles were evident enough that baseline Big Mac would have looked kind of ordinary next to them. Plus they were clad in the kind of barbarian-style outfits that seemed to exist solely to highlight musculature.

"Oh, my," Rarity giggled and blushed. Though Twilight suspected all of the mares were blushing. Most Loops she herself wasn't generally in the market for a romantic and/or physical relationship, but that didn't mean she was blind. Yowza.

"Who are you fine stallions?" Applejack asked as more timberwolves were sent flying.

One of the stallions cleared his throat and in deep manly baritones, the six began to sing as they fought.

\_"Call upon the He-Ponies when you're in distress! Mighty as can be ponies, simply signal S.O.S!"\_

\* \* \*

><p>120.6 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Ah, Prince Blueblood. The Ponce of Ponydom, the Ninny of Nobility, the Moron of Magic.<p>

Well... most of the time.

Eighty five percentish of the loops he was merely a buffoon. Granted, he could be a foolish one or dangerously cunning in his grasp of noble law, whether he was classist or racist or simply superior could flip and flop, and exactly how much power he actually had waxed and waned at random.

The remaining fifteen percent of the time was split between "Tired of gold diggers," where his act at the Gala was merely an act, "Crushing on somepony," where he was actually very reasonable but doggedly loyal to somebody, and "No sense of self worth," where he put Celestia on a pedestal and simply believed himself to be a pointless appendix to the nation. It was that last one that saddened and frustrated the loopers the most, to the point where they would always subtly check around for the signs before even planning to step foot in Canterlot, let alone go to the gala. Building up this version of Blueblood was something of a priority to them, both due to their status as a sanctuary loop and...

...well...

...nobody wanted the Ponce to be looping, to be completely honest.

Still, even knowing that they had to be careful, Twilight found it hard to suppress a giggle at the current situation.

"No, no, Auntie, you need to... use your magic. With your horn."

"Ooooooooh." Celestia prodded at the keratin on her head, staring wide eyed at the staring horizon. "Okay, so I just point it at the mountains and the sun will come up?"

"Yes. No. You need to use your magic..." Blueblood levitated a small flower. "Like this, but on the sun."

"...how are you doing that?" The alicorn stared at the flower in amazement. "It's like magic!"

Twilight snorted, snickered, and burst out laughing. Blueblood glared at her. "I certainly hope you've been working on that memory spell of yours, or you'll be raising the sun again today..."

\* \* \*

><p>120.7 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"The Jedi Council will be gratified to know," the Kaminan geneticist told Obi-Wan Kenobi, "that our production of the new clone army proceeds ahead of schedule. Although we must admit, due to the

nature of the... donor subject... the military discipline of the force will be a bit... er... unorthodox."<p>

Obi-Wan had been through enough Loops that he'd become quite skilled at feigning the appearance of a person trying hard not to look surprised. When the observation ports opened to reveal the mess room below, however, he found himself quite unable to feign anything. The surprise was just that real- and emphatic.

The massive mess hall was full of quadrupedal creatures, almost all pink, except for a very small minority of white-bodied, blonde-maned sports. You couldn't say the room was festooned with balloons and streamers, because that would leave no space for the words, "overloaded," "overburdened," "overkill," and the two word phrase preferred by the part of Obi-Wan's brain that gibbered in fear at the sight, "game over."

"Of course we had a different donor in mind," the Kaminan continued, "but Jedi Skywalker was adamant that this was the optimum form for the Council's needs."

"Jedi Skywalker? Jedi \_Anakin\_ Skywalker?" Kenobi asked.

"I believe so," the Kaminan nodded. "It's none of my affair, but I thought it odd that the Council would send such a young man on such a task. But since he knew everything about the project," the tall, slender amphibian shrugged, "I suppose the Council knows its affairs better than I would."

\_Oh, Anakin, Anakin,\_ Obi-Wan thought, terror rising in spite of a lifetime of Jedi training from the crÃ"che, \_what HAVE you done?\_

Below, the creatures tossed cupcakes at one another and bounced around merrily, shouting, "Fun! Fun! Fun fun! \_Fun fun!

\_\_\*\*FUN!\*\*\_\_"\_

\* \* \*

><p>120.8 (Masterweaver, Bigou)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>'<em>Well, this is awkwardâ€|'<em> quipped Vinyl.

Octavia sighed. "What is it this time?"

'\_Oh, just Waking Up inside your head.'\_

"Vinyl, you always wake up inside my head. You're my imaginary friend!"

'\_Yeah, umâ€| About thatâ€|'\_'

\* \* \*

><p>120.9 (yannoshka)<p>

All things considered, Twilight Sparkle did not often loop in as a full blown alicorn. Occasions where she was male were of more

frequent occurrence than that. Sister - or in recent looping history mother - loops excepted.

So, when she awoke encased in forty feet of ice, her first instinct was understandably to free herself as swiftly as possible. Loops where she died at the very beginning were a bad portent for the nature of the following one.

Thus it happened that it did not dawn onto the alicorn of magic that she in point of fact was an alicorn - aura mane and tail and all - until after she had quite spectacularly shattered her icy confinement and faced the six awe-struck ponies. Three of which had apparently been brawling before her prodigious revelation of herself.

Before she could even try to ascertain what was going on, she heard a slight shuffle behind herself and felt a magical touch from an Honesty, which besides herself was responded by another magic, a laughter and a loyalty.

None of the pony loopers cared much for telepathy in general, but it was widely acknowledged and accepted fact that, on occasion, it was a useful channel for communications, especially when there was no one around who could conceivably detect it.

Thus, hearing her daughter's mental voice intruding into her thoughts, while unexpected, was firmly considered a nice kind of surprise.

"Hi momma! Girls are device necklaces. We have a plan. This is hearthswarming cave we find ourselves in. Be haughty and hammy, please momma." Nyx could usually produce much more coherent and well articulated mental conversation, but simple was best when time was nipping at one's hooves.

There were very few persons within the multiverse that Twilight Sparkle would do whatever was asked for without a thought, no questions asked. Her little Nyxie was at the very top of that list. So, when the alicorn spoke to the huddled ponies she gave a command performance.

\*\*\*"WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS!"\*\* She thundered in Royal Canterlot Voice. \*\*\*"WHO DARES DISTURB MY REST? WHO DARES BRING HATRED AND DISHARMONY TO ME AND MY DAUGHTER? SPEAK NOW YOU FOOLISH FOALS, OR FACE MY FURY!"\*\*

The first to snap out of the mix of abject terror and awe in the face of what to them appeared as goddess was the bright yellow pegasus mare. Without missing a beat, she smartly turned, saluted her ebullient superior officer and reported.

"Sir, as your aide, it is my duty to advise you that this is the time to exercise every last scrap of humility and diplomacy you possibly could manage to dredge up."

Even as the pegasus was speaking the earth pony mare dragged her elderly mentor, looked him straight into the eye, and spoke levelly.

"Now sir, none of your usual antics now, otherwise you will never see another honey-and-oats cookie again. Now go and try to soothe the



angry super pony afore she blasts us all to smithereens, aye?"

The unicorns on the other hoof, had quite different predicament. Namely the green one in hooded robes was hyperventilating and babbling while her be-crowned compatriot was trying to get her attention.

"OhMyHerdOhMyHerdOhMyHerdShe'sAnAlicornSheMustBe  
TheMasterWasRightINeedToTellHimINeedToFindOutMore  
OhMyHerdOhMyHerdShe'sAngryShe'sMadShe'sGoingToAnihilateMe  
Idon'tWantToGetAnihilatedThereIsSoMuchMoreToLearn  
OhMyHerdWhatDoWeDoNow...Ack!"

Platinum finally broke her chief mage out of her fit by a resounding telepathic slap.

"None of that. You can fall to pieces later. Now feed me cues however you can." The unicorn princess growled at blinking Clover out of the side of her muzzle before affixing a gracious smile, and took a deep bow before the purple being of immense power.

"As it please your greatness, I am Platinum, crown princess and in the interim the regent of the unicorn Kingdom. I led the expedition of my people here in attempt to find a safe harbor from the unendurably deteriorating environments of our home, only to find out that these lesser ponies followed us, and brought the blizzards with them!"

Clover was not called the clever for nothing. Once snapped from her panic attack her mind raced as fast as it ever had in her young life - and being an apprentice to a brilliant, absentminded eccentric who lacked the basic most sense of self preservation trained one to think fast indeed. And if her master's theories were right, Platinum had just insulted two thirds of the alicorn's biology. She hurriedly butted in over her mistress in a damage control mission.

"And by lesser ponies my mistress meant those of lesser education and culture, not disparaging the other tribes of ponies!"

Diplomat from her cradle, Platinum accepted the alteration in stride and tried to carry on as if Clover's correction had been exactly what the unicorn princess meant. Unfortunately for her it was not a very big cave, the ones she referred to as 'lesser ponies' were also present, and at least one of them was not about to allow for a precedent of allowing prissy useless unicorns to malign him and his army.

"Like stormblazes she wasn't. She meant every zephyr and cumulus word exactly as it came out!" The pegasus stallion bellowed in parade ground shout, his voice surprisingly high.

His move might have been politically inspired, had he not spoiled the effect by then turning and arrogantly leering at Twilight.

"Commander Hurricane. Stratus Stratocracy. Who and what are you?"

Twilight noted with an internal wry smile that Pensee facehooved in exasperation.

Before Twilight could respond to Hurricane's insulting behavior the only other stallion present there chided him. In contrast to the former's clear, high voice, Puddinghead had a brogue so thick you could cut it with a knife.

"Naw, naw, maw fellah. Where're yar mannersâ€¦ Er was it marrinades - nevar could remember which's which - tha's 'ardly polite's what I've be'n sayin' dontcha know. We're all guests here at mistresses suffer'nce. Tis not p'lite ta be d'mandin an all that. An' I'd watch that fowl tongue ayours. There be youngin ears 'ear'bouts, dotcha notice." The Elderly stallion trotted past Twilight bold as brass, to come face to face with Nyx, who was mostly hidden in the shadows of the cave and her mother's body, and then took down his enormous hat to reveal a bowl of pudding perfectly balanced at the top of his head. He took it down, pulled a small wooden spoon from the band of the hat, replaced the hat upon his head, and then offered the bowl and spoon to bemused alicorn filly.

"Hello there youngster. Want some pudin'?" as Nyx readily took the offering from his hooves, he turned back to apparently gobsmacked Twilight and abashedly shuffled his hooves.

"Sorry I couldn't offer you any ma'am. I only got enougha fer one." Then he gave her a Pinky-wide grin and bowed floridly, sweeping off his absurd hat once more.

"Pecan Puddin' be my name, though mosta folk jist call me Puddin'ead. Fer my sins, th' duly elected chanc'ler o' the earth pony federation."

Where Pensee was still holding her head in her hooves, Cookie looked caught in between desire to laugh uproariously and bash her head on the cavern wall. That was the nature of her boss, he'd either charm you utterly, or drive you completely up the wall. Her paralysis of indecisiveness finally broke as Puddinghead handed the bowl of pudding to the angry imposing supper-pony's foal. She did have to admit that the black little filly looked awfully cute, even if she did have very odd eyes.

As Puddinghead introduced himself to Twilight, who it must be said had to work hard to maintain her forbidding expression in face of the old stallion's odd charm, Cookie bashfully approached to the alicorn, and, gaze held firmly to the ground, addressed her.

"Erm, ma'am. He didn't mean anything by it. Giving your daughter sweets I mean. And ignoring you while he went about it, of course. He just loves foals is all. And I want to assure you that that pudding is nothing dangerous. That was to be his luncheon."

"I'll shay. Thish shtuff ish top notch." Nyx mumbled in foalish bliss through a muzzleful of pudding.

Her mind however conveyed a question to her mother. "Ready to kick it up a notch momma?"

"I'm thinking going to 2.3 Rarities and 1.64 Trixies\*?" was Twilights mental response

"Hmn, Fine to start, but maybe drop it to 1.61 Trixies, we don't want

to get too overwhelming."

Twilight reared up in apparent agitation, and her horn momentarily lit up like a newborn star. A broad ribbon of lilac magic shot up and lassoed around the room (thank you AJ for your tutelage) gathering and disposing each and every non-alicorn pony in the chamber before her in a space of time so small none of them could even draw breath to comment. As the coup de gr ce of performance, the ribbon then proceeded to muzzle them down.

"\*\*ENOUGH OF THIS CHARADE!\*\*" She boomed magnificently.

"\*\*YOU WISH TO KNOW ME? YOUR TONGUE IS TOO LIMITED FOR MY NAME, BUT PALTRY THOUGH IT MIGHT BE IT SHALL HAVE TO SUFFICE. I AM TWILIGHT VESPERTINE, ETERNAL AND UNAGING, FIRST AND LAST LIGHT; HUMBLER OF THE SUN AND CLEANSER OF THE MOON; ALICORN OF MAGIC, SOVEREIGN OF FRIENDSHIP; GRAND HIGH ARCH-LIBRARIAN OF THE INFINITY CODEX; SHADOW GUARDIAN; KEEPER OF THE LOST TREE OF KNOWLEDGE; TAMER OF THE PLANET CRACKER; BEARER OF THE DREAD UNENDING QUESTION; THE FLAME OF JUDGEMENT; KEEPER OF PANDEMONIUM; ELDEST OF THE IMMORTAL ALICORNS; LADY OF TIME; THE UPLIFTER; BINDER OF THE CULT MOST CHAOTIC; DRAGON MOTHER; THE PERFECT STORM; DREAM CATCHER; THE REVOLUTIONARY; SHE WHO VERY NEARLY ONCE MADE A HONEY BADGER CARE; VIPER TITAN OF THE FORBIDDEN ARCANA; PARAGON OF LUNAR RESEARCH; THE SNARK; LOREKEEPER OF KNOWLEDGE MOST WOULD WISH LOST AND FORGOTTEN; TEACHER OF THE TEACHER OF THE ALTERNATE PATH; CHRONICLER OF THE SEVEN BUBBLES; KEEPER OF THE LUCKY NUMBER; AMANUENSIS PERIPATETIC; BRINGER OF SANITY; COMPOSITRIX PRINCIPIA POR MALLEUM DISCIPLINIE; GRAND MISTRESS OF THE ANCIENT AND ENLIGHTENED ORDER OF THE JEDI; DEFENDER OF THE CITY OF THE ANGELS; GUARDIAN OF THE FIRST SANCTUARY; ANCHOR OF REALITY; HARMONY'S GIFT; ONETIME BETROTHED OF THE FIRST IMMORTAL; HURRICANE ARCANA; SOUL SCHOLASTIC; SHINE OF DUSK; REDEEMING FRIENDSHIP OF SUNSET; ELDRITCH SPARKLE! HAVE YOU ANYTHING TO DECLARE FOR THINE SELVES AFORE I MET OUT MY JUDGMENT OF YOU?"\*\*

Her declaration was met with resounding silence. That is until Nyx wryly pointed that with their mouths magiced shut they could hardly say anything.

It was hardly unexpected that it was Puddinghead who spoke first as the magic binding dissipated from the muzzles of ensorcelled ponies. His question however 

"Yar younes didja 'ear ya right? Onnaya names thingys be Snark, aye?" He asked brightly, apparently oblivious to any minor considerations such as say being in magical grasp of a testy corporeal goddess.

Caught by surprise by the non-sequitur, Twilight just nodded mutely. Even a mind inured by eons of association with Pinkie Pie apparently was no proper preparation to dealing with this version of Puddinghead.

The old stallion's face near split in two as he crowed to his unamused secretary.

"An' yer dou'ted me Cookie. I tolja Snark wus real. Whyelse woulda maw fam'ly dedicate generations to 'unting it if it wusn't real."

Cookie's voice was desert dry and bone tired as she gave a long suffering sigh and responded.

"Yes Chancellor, as usual, your logic is proven to be beyond the ken of lesser minds..."

Puddinghead did not seem to notice anything amiss with the manner his assistant and protégé delivered her response as he turned his face back to Twilight and, with an irrepressible grin, added.

"Though even I gotta admit I nevar expected snark to be a d'vine pony. I thought ittd beh a small bird or sum kinda roddant to be 'onest 'bout thigs."

Twilight just stared at the unruly statespony for a good, long, and decidedly unamused moment, before she shook her head in true exasperation. Then, ever so slowly her penetrating gaze moved from one face of her captives to the next. Another flash of magic neatly divided the group in two, with the three leaders left in front of her, and their subordinates unceremoniously dumped near Nyx. As she next spoke to the leaders her voice was that of a being who had left mortality a long, long way ago. She was particularly proud of that voice, it took her several loops to truly perfect.

"My little ponies are meant to live and love and work together in harmony. That you disgraces managed not only to perpetuate divisionism but active hatred and animosity to the point that you called down windigoes upon those in your charge is beyond the pale. I judge you unfit to lead a herd of drawn sheep much less living ponies. Much as I would wish otherwise, as I had hoped for in the past, I see now that I cannot leave my little ponies to their own devices. You are simply not yet readyâ€|"

As Twilight was berating the three leaders, Nyx did not waste time on pleasantries. As the founders were dropped and her mother drew attention, she used her magic to shove the appropriate device housing the appropriate one of her friends onto the appropriate mare.

\* \* \*

><p>Now, it should be mentioned an interesting phenomenon. The three founders, as a point of fact were not loopers. They were souls voluntarily bound to magical technology that were further soul bound to actual loopers. Therefore, the actual memories were contained, not by the souls of the founders themselves, but by the combination of Cutie Mark Crusaders and the intelligent devices housing said souls. This allowed for the admittedly rare and frankly odd cases when the CMC took residences in the devices for the loop toâ€| facilitate the awakening of the souls of founders to the loop by putting them into contact with the devices. Put in simpler terms it took souls of the founders plus the physical devices plus the souls of cutie mark crusaders in direct contact for the founders to be, as it were, loop active.<p>

Pensee blinked as her in-loop memories integrated with her 'looping' ones. Then she scowled.

"Was the charade truly necessary Scootaloo?" She mentally communicated to her mistress.

"Sure it was. We're gonna play this loop without touching either the elements or the tree of harmony. We get to deal with all the treats as erstraz superheroes slash divine entities." Came the unrepentant reply.

Despite herself the yellow Pegasus grinned.

"I suppose we're finally going to attempt to feed me, Cookie and Clover alicorn energy to prevent our aging?" She queried in honest interest.

"... For self governance. I shall have to reassume the title of Queen of Equestria." Twilight finished her diatribe.

"Umn, what and where is this Equestria?" Platinum asked in bewilderment. She could just feel the events spiraling more and more out of control, and it unsettled her more than she would be ready to admit to any save Clover.

Twilight graced her with cold smile. It was a good cold smile. She won sea cucumber over tufa in cold smiles, evil sneers and maleficent grins versus Discord with that one. Pinkie of course cleaned the house.

"Why, right here my dear. This, is my domain, and this will become the land of all ponies as it was meant to be." And just to drive the point home, Twilight's horn lit up like a localized supernova.

As everyone recovered from the blinding light of the spell, they found themselves, not in the crude cave they had been just a moment ago, but in grand throne hall, made of marble and gold and silver. Before them, the purple alicorn was no longer standing, but lying on the grand throne raised upon a dais. And just beside her grand throne, was another, filly sized one obviously intended for her daughter.

It was an ostentatious piece of magic, but universally agreed amongst the loopers, as a most fun one to use, if for no other reason than to observe the reactions of the nonlooper.

"Are the Heralds ready Nyx?" Twilight continued in imperious manner, finally drawing the attention of the three leaders of pony nations back to the little alicorn and their subordinates.

The Founders were a sight to behold indeed, clad in resplendent suits of armor, they hovered in midair just beyond Nyx and their eyes shone with eldritch fire.

"As ready as I could make them momma," Nyx replied with a carefree grin, and military grade innocent childish cheer.

"Then step forth my Heralds, and accept thy tasks," commanded Twilight.

True to his nature, Hurricane decided then and there that he was not going to take any more cumulus.

The poor, poor, misguided egomaniacâ€¦

"Lieutenant what is the meaning of this treachery, Must I remind you

that desertion and defection are serious crimes." He hissed at Pensee, before turning back to contentedly impassive goddess on her stately throne.

"And, I don't know who do you think you are, butâ€¦" he started to below, but before he could gather any steam, he found himself muzzle to muzzle with a very surprised windigo, some forty miles above equistran.

"Well, now that that is taken care ofâ€¦" Noticing the stink-eye both Nyx and Pensee were giving her, Twilight huffily amended what she was starting to say. "Oh, what do you take me for. I placed a bubble of protection on him that should last long enough for him to learn his lesson before it brings him down unharmed."

With that paltry little thing out of the way she continued upon the prior agenda, and sent the three founders to herald the immediate - and in the case of Stratus Stratocracy forceful - change of governance and coincidentally, could you three be dears and kick the windigos back to mesopause, we wouldn't want former commander to get lonely, now would we?

Platinum was huddled in a miserable mess right where she stood before the almighty purple pony casually banished that insufferable lout Hurricane, without even a blink of her horn. That lasted until the madpony next to her cheerfully called the alicorn's attention back to them.

"So yer takin' tha' buncha silly buggars offen m' back? G' luck witem m'lady and thenkeevermach o' muchness. I'll be righta glad t' get backta wurkin' with lil ones. Much m're reasonable an' sweet themper'd foals be as camper'd with m' fine bucha coucilers, doncha know." He turned jauntily and left the throne room tu utter, flabbergasted silence.

And then, just as the three remaining ponies were starting to recover, he stuck his head back in and shyly asked "If'n sompony could see it clear t' lead me outa this yore castle on accounta, me 'avin' no iddea 'ow to navigate it, twould be muchly 'preciated."

"Actually good master Pudding, it occurs to me that now that I am taking control of a nation, I will need a master of the royal nursery, and you seem to have already established a nice rapport with my daughter. Besides that, what with all the ravages caused by conflict and the ensuing windigos there are bound to be orphans of all three pony kinds that will need care for. Would you be interested? I warn you now it will be a hard and often thankless jobâ€¦"

"Sahy no more, yer Maj. I'm yar stali'n, fer that, an' no mistakin' it. When willa ye be free to discuss plans and resources?" Despite his jolly, oftentimes cheerfully crossing into full blown ridiculous, demeanor, it should be noted that Pecan Pudding was by no means, intentions nor indications a fool. There was no mistaking the steely seriousness of his voice nor expression as he accepted the offer without a blink.

Twilight graciously nodded, and with great dignity proclaimed, "As soon as my heralds return with a preliminary census, and I establish

some basic governance and infrastructure, you shall have first call on my time. For the moment though, Nyx can take you to the kitchens, since... "

She never even got the opportunity to finish her sentence, before her daughter popped up next to the old goofball, picked him up in her magic and zoomed out of the throne chamber.

"...bwuh?" Twilight muttered in annoyance and mindspoke to Nyx. "What was that about?"

"I'm building a reputation for childish exuberance, general irreverence and mischievous spirit. I plan to have a lot of fun this loop. By the way, at what rate do I have to age? I'm thinking three hundred to one." Came the prompt mental reply from her daughter.

Twilight had to fight down a bemused smile. "I'll be taking the request under consideration. I accept bribes in the form of books, large amounts of chocolate and cuddles." She bantered back, and then turned her attention to the gibbering mess of the former leader of the unicorns.

"Oh, do stop that, it is undignified. I neither torture, eat, experiment upon nor do other unspeakable things to my little ponies, and whatever I might think about your attitudes so far, you are one of my little ponies. You have my word as an alicorn."

"Butâ€¦ Butâ€¦ Hurricaneâ€¦"

"..Is taking a slightly uncomfortable and rather unpleasant time-out, but is otherwise quite safe."

As she observed Platinum pulling herself together, she considered the unicorn carefully.

"Now, what shall I do with you? The stallions are easy to deal with, but you - you are versed in intrigue and plotting, and as unbalanced as you are now, I am quite certain it will not take you too much time to start pursuing your own agenda. To be quite blunt, I neither have time nor inclination to deal with that - so here is an offer, and you won't get a better one, I can assure you of that. I leave you and your descendants, direct line only mind you, the title of princes and princesses, grant you housing, staff and stipend, and in return you pledge yourself and your progeny in service to myself, my family, and the well being of Equestria."

Platinum did not need to consider the offer for overlong. She was quite shrewd enough to understand that while the alicorn's promise protected her from horrific fates, it said nothing about any number of very unpleasant fates that she could think of offhoof.

"By the stream and the mountain, horn and spell, the sun and the moon, I Platinum, of a sound mind and under no coercion, do pledge allegiance of myself and any foal of my bloodline, to your majesty and your kindred, and also to that of the nation of Equestria."

\*Though perhaps a bit unkind Rarity and Trixie came to be neigh-universal scale for measuring drama and hammines respectively

amongst their fellow Equestrian loopers. It said something about the nature of loops and loopers that those two were hardly the only ones used as a measurement, nor were they the most unkind usages. It is best left unsaid what Pinkie Pie scale was used for. Suffice to say, it only went from -1 to 1

\* \* \*

><p>120.10 (85.1 Continued) (Bigou)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The nightmarish idea that Pinkie Pie might be an imaginary pony made real not only scared said pink being, but also Twilight, the narrator, and even the author himself.<p>

Strangely, Fluttershy wasn't. In fact, when it was proved that Pinkie never was anypony's imaginary friend, she was strongly disappointed.

\* \* \*

><p>120.11 (AnonymousAsk: highly edited by fractalman)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Discord was resting inside a sofa, while Twilight and Celestia looked at him.<p>

"Are you sure this is going to be a good idea, Doctor Twilight?"  
Asked Discord, feigning nervousness.

"Dah... the root of all your evil is inside you...we need to take it out" Say Twilight with a false Russian accent.

Twilight then took a pocket watch and swung it in front of Discord.

"Follow the watch, Mr. Discord... just relax, and listen to my voice.

"Now, you are relaxed. Let your mind return to the past...to the deep past...now, where are you, Discord?"

"In Canterlot Garden. I'm a statue." answered Discord.

There are many misconceptions about hypnosis. For starters, Legitimate hypnosis subjects do not speak in a monotone; instead they sound quite normal, if a bit relaxed. Discord and Twilight knew this, and knew that Celestia knew this, so Discord very much did NOT answer in a monotone voice. Deadpan snark, on the other hand/hoof/claw/paw...

"Okay...further back...that's it...now where are you?"

"Still a statue."

"Further back, please. "

There was a pause.



"WAAAAAH! I miss my mommy!" whined Discord.

"Oops!" giggled Twilight. "I guess he went too far back. Ah well, I guess you can raise him up from square one."

"Aunn'ie! Aunn'ie Sunny take care of me!" slobbered Discord as he hugged a rather nervous Celestia.

\* \* \*

><p>120.12 (fractalman)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight raised an eyebrow as she stepped outside. The ground was slightly hardened sugar, most houses were made of gingerbread, and her tree was a candy cane.<p>

She double-checked her loop memories; no, it was not discord's fault this time.

As she stared at the rim of the world, she chuckled: Equestria was literally a sugarbowl.

\* \* \*

><p>"I hear she flosses her teeth!"<p>

"She lives in the Everfree!"

"It ain't natural there. The ground is made of nasty dirt! Ya can't eat it!" Applejack, farmer of candy apples, pointed out.

"The trees are...broccoli!" whimpered Fluttershy.

"No, that would be the bushes. And broccoli is edible in small quantities, though I have to admit it is most distasteful." quipped rarity.

"Yeah, the trees are made of toothpicks!" pointed out Rainbow Dash.

"The rain...is water! Pure water" whispered Fluttershy.

Most of the ponies in the room shivered in fear at that.

Twilight sparkle was quite bemused...until she remembered that, this loop, ponies were literally made of candy, rendering water hazardous to their health.

\* \* \*

><p>The Droplet fell, and struck the sugary ground. For a second, nothing obvious happened. Then it bubbled up, a black welt on the white land&#128|<p>

Twilight stared in horror for a second that felt like a minute. If that droplet had hit a pony&#128|

Another droplet fell. Twilight snapped out of her stupor, cloned herself with kage bunshin, and started swarming the planet to find and wallop Dischem, the spirit of chaos and chemistry. Other clones went to retrieve the Skittles of Sugar, which would be most helpful for cleaning up the sulfuric acid clouds.

No messing around with this version of Dischem, oh no, Twilight was going to take him out with overwhelming firepower before he got somepony killed.

She was, however, looking forward to firing the Skittles of Sugar.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight approached Bon Bon. "Excuse me, do changelings eat blood or love?"<p>

Bon Bon stared. "What's blood?"

"The sugar water in ponies."

Bon Bon shrugged. "They drink the sugar water from ponies. Uh, why did you want to know?"

Twilight pointed. "You're leaving licorice crumbs everywhere."

Bon Bon eeped, while Twilight rolled her eyes. "Don't worry, I'm just going to grab some water from the Everfree and mix it with some ground. If it turns out that pony sugar-water has some nutrient you need, I'm sure I can synthesize that as well."

Bon Bon sagged in relief. "Oh, you would? Oh, it's official, Twilight Sparkle is best pony!"

"AHEM!"

Both ponies turned to see Lyra tapping her hoof. "Best pony?"

Bon Bon blushed. "Er, second best?"

Twilight rolled her eyes. "I'll go get started on that sugar water."

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, in Lyra's mindscape:<p>

"LET US OUT!" yelled human Lyra.

"This sticky concoction is not good for my circuitry." deadpanned Robot Lyra.

"Shoo-bee-STILL STUCK!" was all that Seapony Lyra felt needed to be said.

"How did Sweet Roll take over the entire mindscape, anyways? This is the first time she's even been sapient, isn't it?" asked Unicorn Lyra.

Sweet Roll Lyra merely grinned like an idiot. "This is so much fun!"

I'm sapient! I've never been sapient before!"

\* \* \*

><p>120.13<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis, Queen of the Changelings, approached the door. She made to knock on it, blinked, and decided to kno-<p>

\_New loop.\_

Whoa, that was-

What was? It's been a while, remember, I loop more-

Prince-

Looks like our local forms are telepaths. That seems to be accelerating our thought-speech.

Telepaths? This feels more like-

The Howlers were telepaths, it's how their hive mind worked.

I believe you, Cass. Now-

Prince Jake, I believe-

Dudes, we're not the only ones in this hive-

What the heck are we?

Chill, Rach, I've been here before once. They're called Changelings. Telepathic shapeshifters,

I'm guessing there's bad news?

There is, Prince Jake " we are also emotivores who feed on love.

Just throw Rachel at Tobias, we'll-

Guys, quit with the teasing, please! We're-

Why not Jake and I?

Not you, too, Cass! Marco, before you say it-

Wasn't going to.

\_\*\*Hello?\*\*\_

\_Oh, great. What was that you were-\_

I did say we weren't the only ones in this hive mind, Jakester-

Okay. Ax? Ideas?

We could potentially try a psionic surge to break the link. Elfangor told me of his experience with the Taxxon-

Dudes! Hive mind, remember!

Oh, crap. Did we just-

\_\*\*Don't worry, I'm looping. And not hostile.\*\*\_

\_Well, that's a relief.\_

They all say that at first. You know, no alien ever said 'we come in war'.

No, they usually shot first and moved onto the ash heap later-

\_\*\*I assure you, I can prove it as much as is normally possible. If my marefriend is around, then she can vouch for me.\*\*\_

\_No need, we can tell you're sincere.\_

This link is much deeper than normal thought-speech. It transfers emotions as well. It is truly a lot like the Howler link was, Prince Jake.

\_\*\*Can you turn it down? You're distracting the rest of the changelings.\*\*\_

\_And that would be bad. Can't you do the Howler-whammy on them, Jake?\_

Marco, they already know about love, they feed off-

I don't know much about beef.

\_\*\*Please keep the mental link below the point where it would have to be scrambled if it was television, please.\*\*\_

\_Hey, cool, she â€" she?\_

\_\*\*She.\*\*\_

\_She gets Earth humour! I think I like you, mysterious hive queen.\_

\_\*\*I am glad of the vote of confidence. However, I was busy. If you hold on a moment, I'll just cut you from the link for a few minutes, so you can get your shields and loop memories in order.\*\*\_

\_Sounds good to us.\_

-ck anyway.

"Hello? Princess Cadence?" she asked. "I just wanted to wish you a happy wedding, and to let you know I'm perfectly willing to take on your job if you need a longer honeymoon."

She sleight-of-handed a business card from her pocket, and placed it on the nearest dresser, then left the rather startled bride-to-be and

set about organizing her hive mind.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

120.1: It's a funny word.

>120.2: Walk a mile in somepony elses' horseshoes.<br>120.3: Basic courses in everything.

>120.4: Baka...<br>120.5: The Masters of the Poniverse.

>120.6: Someone find the Mnemosyne.<br>120.7: RUN.

>120.8: Time for a rethink.<br>120.9: One of the few times she really gets to let loose.

>120.10: It did, you know.<br>120.11: Really, Discord can cause far more interesting havoc now than he ever could before.

>120.12: Literal metaphors.<br>120.13: How long did it take you to recognize them? (The Anchor is Tobias, by the way.)

## 127. Chapter 127

121.1

\* \* \*

><p>"And the results are coming in!" Princess Celestia announced, sitting in front of a big map of Equestria. "It looks like the Everfree Forest has declared for the Element of Kindness, though Generosity fought hard for it!"<p>

Luna nodded. "The Horseshoe Bay Changeling Hive has also voted overwhelmingly for Kindness, with over ninety-nine point nine percent of ballots cast being for that Element."

Celestia blinked. "Did we let Chrysalis' drones all vote?"

"Yes," Luna replied simply. "It's equal rights. One sophont, one vote."

"Oh." Celestia shook her head and got up to leave. "Well, that sort of..." She trailed off. "What vote counting system are we using?"

"First past the post by constituency." Luna held up a big pile of paper.

"Good." Celestia took her seat again. "Anything else and I'd say the whole thing was pointless, with that many Changelings..."

Cadence trotted in. "We got a set of ballots from the badlands!"

"Yeah," Shining added, following his wife. "Problem is, that's about fourteen constituencies each of which has two dragons and a minotaur in. They've all gone Loyalty."

"Please tell me that Honesty, at least, is running a fair campaign..." Celestia begged.

"Gilda said she was going campaigning, if that helps," Luna reported.

"I do not know what-"

There was a soft \_flumph\_ sound, and all four of them found themselves buried in paper.

"Pfeh," Shining muttered, pulling a slip of paper out of his mouth. "...and she seems to have taken over the Griffin Empire and told them all to vote for Honesty."

"Is that legal?" Celestia asked.

Cadence replied by putting a very large book on the paper-drifts. "This is the rule book."

"Author O.B.I.H Discord. Oh, dear..." Celestia felt like facehoofing. "What does-"

"Oh Buck It's Him."

"Should have guessed."

"Well, this has at least shown us what the Elements can be like when they get competitive," Cadence added. "The Laughter campaign consisted of getting ponies drunk, launching into a custom-designed heartsong, and getting everyone to vote as part of a dance."

"And Generosity?" Celestia pressed, dreading the answer.

"Bribery."

"Of course."

\* \* \*

><p>"You know, I'm not sure if Discord realized this one was in there..." Twilight mused.<p>

"It's Discord," Applebloom replied. "He probably did. That or he was too busy redesigning fish."

Twilight read the rule again. It stated, quite clearly, that the winner for a given constituency was the one who had the majority of ballots when they were counted "and that counting only started once the polls closed.

As such, she, Applebloom and Trixie had written their votes on special paper.

\* \* \*

><p>"Right, there we go," Celestia said with a sigh. "Polls closed, votes placed. Time to get counting."<p>

She opened the first box, which promptly exploded.

When the flash-blindness wore off and the Royal Best Element Election Commission could see once more, they beheld a room full of a truly vast amount of ashes and dust.

And, sitting neatly on the floor where the table had been, three slips of paper.

**\*\*Twilight Sparkle \*\***â€" Magic

**\*\*Trixie Lulamoon\*\*** â€" Magic

**\*\*Applebloom\*\*** â€" Magic

"...sister," Luna said, after several seconds of silence. "Did the Elements of Magic just rig the election to explode?"

"It seems so," Celestia replied calmly. "Right, that was an interesting waste of a few days. If you'll excuse me, I'm going to work out exactly what kind of letter I wish to send Twilight, Trixie and Applebloom over this."

\* \* \*

><p>121.2 (Zetrein) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So, Lyra, what is it you wanted to show me?" Twilight asked, joining her friend on the park bench.<p>

"First, put these on." Lyra hoofed her a pair of glasses. "Glasses of True Seeing; had 'em made so I could do a quick and easy check to find out if Bonnie's a changeling in a given loop."

Putting on the glasses, Twilight looked out across the park at Lyra's direction. Twilight looked out at all the changelings in the park, disguised as ponies. They even had little changeling fillies and colts. In a change from the norm, they all seemed to have the coloration and even cutie marks of the ponies they looked like.

"One of those loops, eh?" Turning to her friend, Twilight was presented with a mint green changeling. After a quick check of her own leg, she returned Lyra's glasses. "Well, I know I'm not a changeling this loop at least. Ideas on how far this goes?"

"Yeah... Here's the thing, Twi, you and Bon Bon are the only two actual ponies in Ponyville." Lyra scratched her head. "Other than that, about half of Baltimore. Not many of us beyond that, though. At least, not connected to our hivemind."

"Even the girls, eh? Well, the Elements didn't have an issue with them, so I don't think this'll be a problem." Twilight gave her friend a playful shove. "And how has the hivemind been dealing with your hivemind? Getting along?"

"We're kinda in charge." Lyra replied in an exhausted tone. "The Swarm follows the eldest, and as Loopers I, me, myself, and the other me, are the oldest and wisest."

Lyra smiled cheerfully at Twilight. "On the bright side though, we're growing a few mindless drones for the rest of me to control. Give it half a year, and each of me'll have a body, if only via remote control."

"Hmm. Well, unless you wanna do something special, I think I'll just take it easy this loop, go baseline. As leader of the changelings, do you have any ideas on what, if anything, you want to do for the wedding?"

"Well, I did have a couple ideas..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight!" Cadance cried at the mare that had just appeared in her prison. Her very nice prison, which was furnished like an upscale hotel.<p>

"Cadance?" Twilight shook her head. "If you wanted to talk in private, you could have said so. Where are we?"

"Twilight, I didn't bring you here! I've been kidnapped!" Before Twilight could reply, the face of the pony Cadance had privately started calling Princess Pink (after her own distaste of being called that) appeared in the room's large mirror.

"Hello again! It is I, once more, speaking to you! In my voice! Well, in her voice really, but who's counting?" Not-Cadance cleared her throat. "Moving on. I do hope you don't mind sharing your prison, Cadance, but this one was getting just a bit too close to my plans. Do not bother with your magic, the room's insulated, there is no escape, blah blah blah. Cadance can fill you in on the whole spiel. I made sure the minibar was topped off while she slept, and there's munchies in the fridge. Ta-ta!" With that, the mirror faded back to glass.

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, in a Canterlot Police interview room, a certain mare was trying to convince somepony she was telling the truth.<p>

"And that's when you claim the entire town turned into bug-ponies?" The officer asked, trying to keep his headache in check.

"Yes! Trixie does not know which spell caused it, but she saw them all! And they know!" The blue mare shifted uncomfortably, looking behind her, before lowering her voice. "They know. They've been following Trixie ever since. She sees them, in crowds at the market, sitting in passing trains, in the audience at her shows." Trixie let her head rest on the table, covering it with her hooves. "They know, and they know Trixie knows that they know. Trixie had to tell somepony, had to let somepony know before they got to her."

"Miss Lulamoon, hearing your story, I think you may have accidentally made yourself able to see through changeling disguises." The officer steepled his hooves. "Most likely, they're not after you personally, and you're just seeing them going about their business."

Trixie jerked her head up to look at him. "But! But!"

Trixie fell silent at the officer's beckoning. "We will investigate, see if there's a possible stalking charge to be made. But if the changelings in Ponyville, or any connected to them, aren't stalking you, then there's little we can do."



"But, horrible shapeshifting bug-ponies?"

"Are registered Equestrian citizens, if of a very little known species."

"Oh." There was a pause. "Trixie would like to apologize for her unintended racism."

\* \* \*

><p>"I still can't believe that the minibar was the key to breaking out." Cadance whispered, as they snuck along the castle's servant corridors.<p>

"Enough booze makes problems go away, just ask any drunkard." Twilight snarked, before waving her into a side room. "Okay, I know how to turn this around. I've learned a few things in my time in Ponyville." She smiled at Cadance. "Trust me, this is gonna work, and be pretty funny too."

Setting about looking through the boxes in the room, Twilight kept talking. "Start off by drinking that bottle we saved from the bar, it'll help. The first thing we need to find now, is a Hawaiian shirt..."

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra was smiling, disguised as Cadance at the altar. <em>Come on, Twilight, I'd rather not get married today.<em>

\_Well you're the one that lost!\_ Lyra-Lyra told herself, from where she stood as a bridesmaid.

\_You know, there might be a law against marrying yourself. Just a thought.\_ The other two Lyras, were magically hidden from sight, filming the event from multiple angles.

\_Aha, There's Twilight's signal! It begins!\_ All the Lyras started taking glances at the door in anticipation.

Princess Celestia, oblivious for the moment, continued with her role in the wedding. "Princess Cadance and Shining Armor, it is my great pleasure to pronounce you&acirc" "

"Stop!" Twilight Sparkle burst through the doors.

"Ugh! Why does she have to be so possessive of her brother?" Lyra-Cadance played her character, turning on the waterworks. "Why does she have to ruin my special day?"

"MUCKLE DAMRED CHANGINS 'AIR EH NAMBLIES BE KEEPIN' ME BONNIE WE SHINY?!" The words that would live in Canterlot infamy, for the rest of the loop at least, came from the angry mare that had just entered the room. She wore an orange Hawaiian shirt, a pair of aviator sunglasses, and had Philomena perched on her shoulder. The phoenix was also on fire.

Right on cue, the Cadance at the altar started screaming bloody murder, before slugging Shining Armor to disrupt the shield around the city, and making for the horizon.

\* \* \*

><p>Many months later, at Lyra's request Twilight had gone for her baseline ascension. As she put it, since the entire town was Loop Aware, they felt most comfortable going with tried and true methods.<p>

That said, noling expected what happened when the Elements blasted her. Twilight and her friends stood outside the library, staring down a dumbstruck Princess Celestia. Literally, in Twilight's case, as the newborn changeling queen had been lifted up by the four celebrating Lyras.

"New boss, not the leader! New boss, not the leader! New boss, not the leader!" They were chanting, as the entire town was coming together around them. By the time Celestia got her wits about her, a block party was rapidly being assembled around her, under the direction of a familiar pink changeling.

As she looked at all the undisguised changelings around her, Celestia felt somepony pat her on the back. "Relax, Princess." Bon Bon told her. "They ain't bad folk, once you get used to them." The candymaker sighed. "Guess I'm back to being the only pony in Ponyville."

Looking back to the party, Celestia let out a laugh. "And I thought Discord was joking about this!"

\* \* \*

><p>121.3 (Gym Quirk) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Luke Skywalker Awoke next to the malfunctioning vaporator on the south ridge. Nearby, the Tredwell maintenance droid trundled erratically in his general direction.<p>

\_Normal start point. Should be seeing the firefight between Leia and Dad's ships any minute now,\_ he thought as he reached for the macrobinoculars on his belt. He also tried to stretch out his...\_Wait. What?\_

"Hi Luke. Really strange loop setup we've got here," commented a youthful female voice behind him.

He turned to see an orange pegasus with bright violet mane and tail. He felt the headache start. "Hello, Scootaloo..."

"This is going to be...awkward," decided the pony. "I think Twilight'd call it a 'Single-Letter Transposition Bug'."

Luke massaged his forehead, ignoring the one-sided battle in space above him. This loop, the Jedi and Sith shared one thing; a strong connection to the Horse...

\* \* \*

><p>(Hubris Plus)<p>

"Vader, would you care to tell me why my station has \_once again\_ been placed in the planet's shadow?" Tarkin demanded. It was a small complaint, really, but he despised action taken without his express approval. It also happened daily, which grated.

"The power of the Death Star is insignificant next to the power of the Horse," Vader replied. He seemed to be the only one who could get through such phrases with a straight face, if only because his was artificial.

"It's night. I raised the moon," Luna added pointedly.

\_"This! Is! No! Moon!"\_ Tarkin roared, finally fed up with this nonsense.

"You're hardly the expert here," the diarch scolded.

\* \* \*

><p>(Gym Quirk)<p>

Luke glanced sideways at Obi-Wan. "Please repeat what you said about how Anakin became Darth Vader."

The elderly Jedi hemm'd and haw'd for several seconds before declaring with the little remaining dignity he could summon:

"He was seduced by the Dark Side of the Horse."

Nyx sighed. "I'm really not liking this loop."

\* \* \*

><p>(TheCentauress)<p>

"So you knew you you were a Jedi for a while, Princess?" the young former moisture-farmer asked Leia.

There was a sudden pounding on the connecting wall to the cell. "The Great and Powerful Horse shall overcome all!" came through the metal faintly.

"Bit of a clue, there, farmboy," the princess replied, drolly.

\* \* \*

><p>(Shieldage)<p>

Luke sighed as the landspeeder pulled into Mos Eisley and they were met by a waiting patrol of Stormtroopers. After the initial small-talk, one of the troopers asked to see his identification.

Obi-Wan waved his hand. "You don't need to see his identification."

The Stormtrooper froze a second as he registered a large weight upon his head. Despite this oddity he found himself saying, in time with a female voice, "We don't need to see his identification."

R2-D2 made of series of beeps and whirs that had C-3PO chastising him for harsh language. Luke thumped his head against the controls.

Obi-Wan, his face somewhat pale, announced: "These aren't the droids you're looking for."

The cream-colored form of Apple Bloom, perched on top of the Stormtrooper's head, spoke in unison with the voice of her mount, albeit slightly out of cadence on the second word. "These ain't the droids--"

"It's a pony," called one of the other troopers as all four raised their weapons to point at the hapless victim of the Horse. "Get it!"

The filly yipped as her mount backed up a few steps and then started running. She struggled to retain her position as she channeled the Horse, enveloping the trooper in a shimmering blue radiance that lent him speed as well as helping to deflect blaster shots.

Luke watched the pack of running Stormtroopers retreat into the distance, to the tune of weapons fire and diving merchants. "Gee, Old Ben," he snarked. "How did you pull that off?"

Obi-Wan struggled to retain a stoic expression as his charge started up the landspeeder. "The Horse is often effective against the weak-minded, although this effectiveness may come at the... utter expense of stealth."

\* \* \*

><p>(Gym Quirk)<p>

Darth Vader struggled to keep the X-wing in his sights. "The Horse is strong with this one."

Luke would have shrugged if he had any room in the cockpit for the gesture. Instead, he just allowed the violet-maned orange pony in his lap to keep flying the snubfighter.

\* \* \*

><p>(Wing Zero 032)<p>

Luke, with the help of The Horse, was dodging turbolaser fire from all across the Death Star. He was close to the exhaust tunnel that headed directly to the massive space station's core. That said, due to the massive amounts of laser fire from the emplacements and the several squadrons of Imperial Star Fighters that were chasing him and him alone, the chance of success looked to be nil.

However, he quickly remembered the words his deceased master Obi-Wan Kenobi had told him during his early days of Jedi training...

\_"Use The Horse Luke, use The Horse!"\_ And so... he did use The Horse. Derpy was deployed from the X-Wing and flew erratically into the exhaust tunnel, hitting defensive emplacements, vital systems and unlucky combat and/or non-combat personnel alike who had the

misfortune of standing in her way to the Death Star's core with echoes of \_"Sorry!", "Oops, My bad!", "That pipe suddenly appeared in front of me!", "Are you ok Mr. Storm-Trooper?", "Is there any way I can help?"\_ and a final \_"I just don't know what went wrong!"\_ a couple of seconds after the destruction of the Imperial combat space station.

Indeed, right after watching this, Luke finally understood that The Horse can be such a great and terrible thing and that he needed to return to his training to master it \*\*as soon as possible\*\*.

\* \* \*

><p>(FanOfMostEverything)<p>

"Yes," said the wizened creature, "a Jedi's strength comes from the Horse. But beware of the Dark Side."

His mount nodded. "Aggression, anger, and fear. All these things the Dark holds dear."

"Easily they flow," continued Yoda, "quick to join you in a fight."

"But that path is a slippery slope." Zecora shook her head. "Once used, it leaves you little hope."

"Yes. Consume you, it will, as it did Obi-Wan's apprentice."

It took everything Luke had not to burst into laughter.

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

"Is it too much to ask for you all to hold still?" Scootaloo gasped. "It's HARD carrying all three of you on my back!"

"Be fair," Luke countered, "at least I'm the one holding on when we swing across the bogs on those vines."

"Ha ha, big help, Mr. Opposable Thumbs," Scootaloo grumbled as the stack of Jedi Master, zebra, Jedi apprentice, and pegasus filly stumbled back into Luke's camp just before collapsing.

"Luke and Scootaloo seem excessively tired," Zecora noted. "Is such heavy training truly required?"

"For eight hundred years taught students this way, I have," Yoda said. Then, noting Luke gasping for breath and Scootaloo flat unconscious, he added, "Perhaps question it sooner, I should have."

\* \* \*

><p>(fractalman)<p>

Palpatine cackled as lightning shot from his hands.

"Behold, the power of the Dark Side! Ahahahahh!"

Then the lightning cut off.

"Well the Dark Side of the Horse demands cookies" said Nyx, standing in front of his feet. "Preferably with milk."

\* \* \*

><p>Nyx finished the last of the cookies, then flew over to Luke.<p>

"What are you doing? I gave you your cookies! I even supplied milk to dunk them in!" yelled Palpatine.

"The good guys have celery soup and daffodil sandwiches."

\* \* \*

><p>121.4 (Bardic\_Knowledge) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra awoke to find herself swimming around a sunken ship. Recent one, too, going from Seapony's knowledge.<p>

\_Yay!\_ said Seapony. \_My turn!\_ But before she could take over, they saw their hand holding the edge of a hole in the ship.

\_Could be me, then,\_ said Human.

"Lyra, wait for... Huh," a yellow and blue fish swam into view. "Hi, I'm Flounder. What Loop are you from?"

\_Okay, how do we resolve this?\_ asked Classic. \_We're like, some kind of humanized sea pony.\_

\_I think the term is "mermaid,"\_ replied Miscellaneous.

"Hello?" asked Flounder. "Are you in there? Or are you still processing the Loop memories?"

\_Okay, idea,\_ said Seapony. \_I'll handle the tail and swimming bits, while Human handles the other half of the body.\_

Human nodded. \_Sounds like a plan to me.\_

That resolved, mer-Lyra looked at the fish who'd been trying to get her attention. "Hey, sorry about that. I had some issues to work out."

"Came from an odd Loop?"

"Not really... The council of me just had to figure out who had control this Loop."

Flounder blinked in confusion. "Um, what?"

\* \* \*

><p>121.5 (Gym Quirk) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Anakin "Darth Vader" Skywalker found himself in the Death Star conference room absently listening to Tarkin's staff bicker as he tried to work out how to prevent the destruction of Alderaan and arrange for Leia's escape this time.<p>

And then there was that little twist Yggdrasil had thrown at him...

"...Or given you the clairvoyance enough to find the Rebels' hidden-" Motti's voice was abruptly cut off by a large serving of cake and ice cream.

"I find your lack of fun disturbing," chirped the poofy-maned pink pony as she shoved another hoof-full of sweets into the imperial's mouth.

\* \* \*

><p>(Lirana) (Gamma Cavy)<p>

Tarkin quivered slightly in ill-repressed anger. "Lord Vader, I must insist that you remove your, your pet from the control deck! I cannot imagine that it has anything to contribute-"

The pink pony interrupted with happy chirp. "What about \_parties?\_"

The Grand Moff twitched, but continued gamely. "Anything \_useful\_ to contribute to the firing of this battle station!"

Princess Leia gasped in outrage. "\_Firing\_? You said that if I told you where the Rebel Alliance was, you would spare my planet!"

Tarkin whirled angrily to face her. "I \_lied\_ you stupid little girl! As I am sure you have, as well." He turned back to the waiting officers. "Now, commence the bombardment!"

\*bweeeeeeeeeem-POW\*

The vast turbo-laser that issued forth from the Death Star was an uncharacteristic \_pink\_, Anakin noticed idly, and moments later Alderaan looked a great deal more festive. He was reminded of what happened last time she had been a guest Looper, but this one was more than party hats.

Tarkin sputtered for a moment before plaintively addressing Lord Vader. "Where's the kaboom? There was supposed to be an earth-shattering kaboom!"

Anakin smirked, then loomed ominously over the Moff. "You \_had\_ no idea of the Power of the Horse."

\* \* \*

><p>(Pinklestial01)<p>

Pinkie Pie started to sing before the Star Wars loop ended.

May the horse be with you!

There is a horse that moves lives from place to place  
>There is a horse exchanging smiles from face to face<br>The horse is  
all and we as one are but a tiny part  
>May the horse be with you always in your heart!<p>

May the horse be with you always in your heart!  
>May the horse be with you always in your heart!<p>

There is a horse that moves things and changes tides  
>Not that we would but if we should we couldn't hide<br>If we are  
part of something bigger we can face the dark  
>May the horse be with you always in your heart!<p>

May the horse be with you always in your heart!  
>May the horse be with you always in your heart!<p>

May the horse be with you!

\* \* \*

><p>121.6 (fractalman) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was Bored. Bored bored bored bored bored bored BORED. So  
bored she'd done a completely baseline run.<p>

Tirek had been defeated, the new castle created...

The door opened. Twilight blinked.

Opposite the thrones was a staircase leading down that she'd not seen  
before. Curious, she took it.

In the new basement, The Box of Harmony sat on a pedestal; a smaller  
pedestal next to it displayed a small, silver key.

Curiosity now roaring, she picked it up and found a small hole at the  
top of the box.

Insert, twist, wait.

Music box music began to play, which Twilight eventually recognized  
as a music-box version of the G1 themesong.

Twilight wound it up one more time and softly sang along:

"My little pony...  
>My little pony...<br>I'll be your best friend"

Twilight smiled, and had to wipe a small tear from her eye.

\* \* \*

><p>121.7 (Masterweaver, Gym Quirk, elmagnifico) <p>

\* \* \*



><p>"Wow, Tavi, that dress is amazing!"<p>

The grey mare grinned as she stepped down into the Apple Cellar bar, placing her cello case beside her as she sat gracefully on one of the stools. "Why thank you, Vinyl. I have a performance for somepony in Canterlot later this evening, and, well, I thought I would get ready earlier."

"Heh." Vinyl Scratch waved casually to Big Macintosh. "I like it. It's alluring without being provocative, sensual but not inviting, hinting at something while retaining high class." She took the two wineglasses the bartender handed her and levitated one over to Octavia. "Very much a look don't touch dress."

"Mmm." The grey mare took her glass with a small smile. "You know, before you gave me that journal, I would never have expected you to be capable of such... analysis."

"I'm just full of surprises. Plus the way that thing shows off your cutie mark is just dang sexy."

"And there's the crass mare I'm dating." Octavia sighed dramatically. "Why ever did I decide to do that again?"

"Us white unicorns have always been prize catches," Rarity quipped as she entered. "Even ruffians like Vinyl can gain the eye of the most discerning."

"Back off Rares, she's mine." Vinyl gave a joking growl as she wrapped a hoof around Octavia's shoulders.

"Oh, but of course. I've already netted myself a dragon, after all."

"Yes, I've read about that," Octavia commented as she slipped the white hoof off her shoulders. "That journal is filled with... incredible things, and I'm still only half way through. But how is being married to mister Spike treating you, anyway?"

"Ah, well, he is a noble hearted knight with just a touch of snark," Rarity replied. "So I find most of the time, I'm happily pampered and supported, though of course I do my best to keep him happy as well. And, of course, he has complete control over his age shifting-"

Six stallions in pinstripe suits barreled down the stairs, levitating Tommy guns at the bar. "ALRIGHT, NOPONY MOVE!"

The unicorns exchanged a confused glance. Octavia let out a small sigh.

"Well well well." A large unicorn stepped out from behind the goons, fiddling with his cigar. "Big Macintosh. I've heahd things bout ya, son."

The bartender lidded his eyes. "Ah'm afraid ya have me at a disadvantage, sir."

The unicorn shrugged "My name's not impohtant. Just call me a...

concahned neighbahhood plannah." He trotted up to the bar, sitting on a stool. "I heah's ya a fahmah."

"Eeeyup."

"That's good, fahmin'. Ya know, gots mahself a cousin who's a fahmah." The unicorn took a deep whiff of his cigar. "Cute filly, she was, but she's all grown up naow."

"That's good ta know." Macintosh's ear flicked at a small clicking sound, aware that one of the guns was now pointed at his head.. "Fillies become mares, after all."

"Mmm. See, she stuck to hah couahse. Stayed a fahmah. Couahse, I'da been fine if she changed hah ways, became a scholah or a guahd-heh. Thing is, though, she knew that ya don't get somethin witout nothin, and ya definitely don't give anythin fah fahee."

Macintosh raised an eyebrow.

"...Son, yah bah is takin business away from tha other bah's ahound these pahts." The unicorn pushed his cigar into the countertop. "Nohmally I'd ask fah compensation, but..."

"Ah only serve ta select clientle."

"Rather odd way ta put it. Ya got upwahds of twenty ponies comin' en whenever they please." The unicorn sighed. "I like ya, son, but unless ya stop this nonsense I'm going to have no choice but to stop it fo ya."

There was a tense moment. Macintosh and the large unicorn stared into each other's eyes. Octavia slid a hoof down the side of her cello case. Rarity put a hoof on the bar itself.

"Wait wait wait, hold on." Vinyl held up a hoof. "I get the whole organized crime thing, and I can see why you're threatening Mac, but where the chlorophyll did you find the guns?"

There was a small click, and Octavia smiled. "Why, west of the train tracks Vinyl." She pulled a revolver out of a secret compartment. "The same place I did."

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

The large unicorn winced as the still smoking gun was pointed at him. "H-Hey now, little miss, ya don't have any moah shots in thah!"

"...You're right, of course." Octavia smiled sweetly, lowering the firearm.

Then she slung a hoof at his head and knocked him cold.

Vinyl blinked for a moment or two. \_"...Huh."\_

"My, that was..." Rarity paused. "Exciting...?"

Octavia sighed, putting the gun on the counter. "I do apologize, Macintosh, it was not my intent to make a mess of your bar."

"Ya know Ah could have handled tha situation \_without\_ killing them."

"Old instincts, I guess."

\_"Huh,"\_ Vinyl repeated.

Octavia sighed. "I'm sorry I'm not as... demure as my previous selves, Vinyl, but when your family has dealings with the Canterlot underworld-"

"No no no, I'm not disappointed or anything, I'm just â€" wait, you're with the mafia?"

"...Not anymore."

Rarity sounded just a tad put out. "Darling, I had a mass-paralysis spell ready to go, and I'm positive dear MacIntosh had any number of non-lethal pacification devices to back me up. Even Ms. Scratch would have had a sonic stunner or something along those lines near at hoof..."

Macintosh double-checked that the mini-Pinkie-Pylon was humming under the bar as usual.

"An' now that y'all have worked out yer systems, can we all jus' put away th' compensators, maybe have a drink, an' pretend we're all friends?"

He turned to the two mares first.

"Miz Octavia, there's a sign about shootin' guns in th' bar without askin' th' barkeep first, but ah'll let you off with a warnin', fer Vinyl here."

The other ponies, who had been knocked tail over teakettle by the kinetic force of the bullets, but left with only minor bruises, started backing toward the exit. Macintosh ignored them for a moment, setting out shot glasses and hunting around for a bottle.

"An' as fer you, ah suggest y'all accept mah offer of a peaceful drink."

The stallion who was nursing a black eye found himself the subject of intense scrutiny from the barkeeper.

"'Cuz nevermind what ya threatened to do to me, seems to me like you jus' tried ta hurt mah friends."

Those eyes were a very deep green.

"And trying to hurt my friends makes me angry."

"Vinyl, dear... you seem a bit off kilter, if you don't mind me saying so."

Vinyl waved a hoof at Rarity. "My marefriend just shot up six ponies. I'm still in shock, that's all."

Octavia let out a slow breath. "I... suppose I should have told you earlier, Vinyl. I mean, you did trust me with-" She glanced toward the unicorn nursing a black eye. "Well, your temporal issues-"

"No, seriously, I don't care about that. I mean I do, because it's your past, but it doesn't change..."

Vinyl's lips slowly curled upward.

"...it doesn't change who you are."

Without warning she grabbed the grey mare and pulled her into a big, deep smooch. It took eight seconds before the both of them came up gasping for breath. "Tavi, you just tried to murder six ponies and I'm thirty percent sure Macintosh has a backroom with a lock in here. I don't know if you'll make it to Canterlot on time."

"You know what, my dear?" Octavia grinned back. "I don't give a damn."

\* \* \*

><p>121.8 (namar13766)<p>

"Twilight?"

"Yes Sunset?"

"I just want you to remember that I can sing and dance well  
\*\*outside\*\* of a Heartsong."

"...DON'T. REMIND. ME."

\* \* \*

><p>121.9 (fractalman) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Sleipnir was having a bad century. Even watching Pinkie Pie's antics during his precious break time wasn't helping his mood.<p>

Pinkie Pie waved at the monitor.

Sleipnir waved back. The corners of his mouth twitched into a less dour frown for a millisecond or thousand.

Pinkie pie's head tilted. Then she leaned in and licked the monitor.

Sleipnir stared. Then he grabbed a tissue and wiped the monitor clean.

Pinkie pie giggled, and leaned out of the monitor to give Sleipnir a hug.

"Aww, thanks Pinkie! I needed that."

A half second later, Sleipnir was in full-blown panic mode, 5 out of

8 legs flailing madly to push Pinkie Pie back into the monitor. "Get back in, get back, get baaaaack!"

Sleipnir looked to the left, to the right, to the left again, to the right again...

Pinkie giggled and bounced away.

Sleipnir muttered, "Whelp, better add the Anti Toon Ascension patch to her code."

(fractalman)

Big Mac sighed. "Alright, Berry, I'm cutting you off."

Berry snorted disdainfully, and nabbed a bottle from the display case.

Big Mac glared, and turned on the anti-theft forcefield for the display case. "Berry..."

Then one of the bottles hovered, passed right through the forcefield, and headed straight for Berry.

Big Mac blinked. "Alright, how are you doing that?"

Berry giggled. "Shimple! Nothing can Shtop...tha Booze!"

\* \* \*

><p>121.10 (Pinklestia) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"My Child! My dear little Nixie! At last I have found you! Together we shall bring about Eternal Night!"<p>

Oh, another loop about this? Nyx had heard from her mother about that loop where Nightmare Moon was looking for her child. Wait, looking for her child...

Nyx stared at Nightmare Moon, this was weird. Specially since technically, she really was Luna's child, as she was made from her magic and Twilight's blood in her baseline. Had she been a horrible daughter? How come she always saw Twilight Sparkle as her mother, but never saw Princess Luna as her other mother?

"Uh, mommy, I don't think eternal Night is a good idea... you see..."

Two hours after a visual presentation, including charts and puppet theater...

"I see, I never saw it that way. And you are sure my sister really misses us?"

"Yes, she really does. I have seen it in her dreams." True, since the loop Nyx replaced Luna she had used the power to dream walk on Celestia's dreams a few times, mostly on non awake Celestia for pranks.

The darkness faded away from Nightmare Moon, leaving behind Princess Luna.

"Then lets go my child, my sister and I are overdue for a long talk."

\* \* \*

><p>"And that's how non awake Twilight and Luna ended getting married and being my parents that loop!" Nyx said, making Twilight Sparkle do a spit take.<p>

"How in the Pinoideae did you get me and Luna married?" Twilight just needed to know, even if she knew she might not like it.

"That's the fun part, I didn't, it was all your idea mommy." Nyx winked at Twilight, making the purple unicorn hit her head against the table repeatedly.

"Also, I got a letter for awake Celestia that I wrote about that loop."

Nyx started to read.

Dear Princess Celestia,

A wise mare once taught me, that the best teachers never stop being students themselves. No matter how much time passes, how old you get, how much you think you know, there is always something new to learn. No matter how old and wise you become, you will never know everything. And sometimes, you are just so used to how things are, that you stop questioning things. But that's wrong, because there is always something else which can be done to improve things. There may be not such thing as perfection, but that is a stupid excuse to not try to do better! Case in point, I got two mommies, and I have been ignoring one of them. Could you please tell Luna that I am sorry and I want to expend time with her the next time she is awake?

Your Faithful Niece, Nyx.

PS: Here are pictures of a loop where non awake Luna and Twilight got married and adopted me.

"Nyx Moonlight Sparkle! Give me those pictures!" Twilight Sparkle said angry, her mane catching fire.

"Oh dear mother, I'm not a comic book villain. Do you seriously think I'd explain my masterstroke to you if there were even the slightest possibility you could affect the outcome? I sent a copy of the letter and the pictures to Princess Celestia as soon as I found she was awake this loop."

\* \* \*

><p>'Mental note, do not make Twilight Sparkle angry. Just because she is my mommy doesn't mean she will go soft with me and not exile me to the Moon.' Nyx then stared at the Moon fortress she just finished after months of work. "Well, just four years or so more until the loop ends, I wonder if the Moon has Batponies this

loop?"<p>

Nyx then had an evil smile in her face "Mm, I still got that Minion Making Machine in my subspace pocket, and Luna is not awake, time to go all Dwarf Fortress on this place!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Uh Twilight? Why is the Moon Blue this loop?" Spike asked after he just got awake.<p>

"Nyx did something bad and I exiled her to the Moon, she started to play Dwarf Fortress with the Moon and it escalated. I have no clue where she got so much Adamantine to make a new Moon out of it. Mm, It probably must be hollow inside." The mare then calmly zipped some tea.

"A new Moon?" Spike decided to be calm since Twilight didn't look worried.

"Yes, I did say she was playing Dwarf Fortress, didn't I?"

"Do I really want to know what happened?"

"Have you noticed how this loop Equestria seems made of floating islands and Ponyville is in one?"

"Yes."

"Well, that didn't happen until AFTER I had the brilliant idea to exile my daughter to the Moon without setting some ground rules first."

"How... that doesn't even... never mind, I decided I don't want to know."

\* \* \*

><p>List of Things Nyx isn't allowed to do in the Loops anymore:  
Number 10 Dwarf Fortress. <p>

\* \* \*

><p>121.11 (Scorntex) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight awoke to a knocking sound at the door. Underneath the aggravation of being woken up far too early, she was intrigued. Mainly because it was the day after the Poison Joke incident had resolved itself (since this Loop she appeared to be alone, she'd decided to go for a baseline run), and she had no idea what could be causing the knocking.<p>

Slowly, carefully, she made her way downstairs, and to the door. Cautiously, expecting anything, she opened the front door.

After a few seconds adjusting to the light, she looked around. No pony was there. Then she looked down, and saw an envelope sitting on the doorstep. She opened it, and examining the contents. Her eyes went

wide at what she saw.

"What."

Some half an hour later, and she'd gotten everypony gathered. Perhaps not as fully awake as she'd have liked, but gathered all the same.

"What's up?" a not-entirely awake Rainbow Dash asked.

"I received this in the mail this morning" she announced, holding the item near to herself, though at a slight distance. "From Zecora."

"Hold on," Applejack said, in-between a heroic battle between the farmer and her eyelids, "how come you don't sound happy about that? I thought you wanted us to get along with her."

"I do" Twilight declared, "but that's not what the letter's about."

"What is it about, then?" Rarity asked. Deciding to let the letter explain, Twilight handed it over to Rarity. After a few seconds careful examination, Rarity practically exploded with outrage.

"She's BILLING US?!"

There was a triumphant gasp from Pinkie. "I knew she was evil!"

\* \* \*

><p>121.12 (Detective Ethan Redfield) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was another dreary day at day court, the same day court that happens every...single...loop. The minister in front of the solar diarch was so caught up in his endless diatribe of words that he failed to notice Celestia had fallen asleep. It was at the moment the minister was rambling on about the wasteful spending of adding an extra inch of copper to the thickness of the court mages' cauldrons (this guy could give Percy a run for his money) that the twin doors to the Canterlot Throne Room slammed open.<p>

Immediately, Celestia's horn glowed a brilliant white of a spell designed to banish creatures to the furthest depths of space since this had once signified an evil Discord or the early return of Tirek, only for her to let the spell cool when she recognized her visitor. The elderly minister barely noticed as his ramblings continued unabated, even as the guest shouted, "Princess Celestia, the people demand justice!"

Celestia stepped away from her throne, "What is the matter, my little pony? You're one of Twilight's friends, right? Miss Lyra Heartstrings?"

Lyra nodded, "There has been a great injustice done upon a proud and noble race that has gone unnoticed until now."



Celestia's analyzed Lyra, noticing that she had a twinkle of mischief in her eyes, meaning Lyra was awake. She asked, "What race do you refer to?"

Lyra puffed up her stance as she spoke with a dead serious expression, "The Noble House of Sweet Rolls!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle awoke later than usual this loop, shortly after Discord had broken free from his statue. Upon awakening, however, she couldn't help but have a double take since Pinkie was bowing and worshiping an oversized sweet roll, along with shrines for sweet rolls throughout Ponyville. She suddenly got the feeling Discord was awake and had set this up just to mess with her, "Pinkie, what are you doing?"<p>

Pinkie gasped, "Don't you remember, Twilight? It was a year ago that The Great and Noble House of Sweet Rolls saved all of Equestria from Nightmare Moon's return and redeemed Princess Luna from Black Snooty's evil grasp."

Twilight's brain failed at this. She had done a lot of things to redeem Nightmare Moon, almost all of them were crazy in some way, shape or form, but this she couldn't picture, unless Pinkie or Derpy transformed the moon into a sweet roll and dropped it on Nightmare. Pinkie failed to notice Twilight's blank stare and continued, "Celestia had a stain glass window of the event commissioned and even elevated their position to guardians of Equestria. Don't you remember yesterday, the sweet roll saved us from meanie pants Discord too! I'm giving praise to the sweet roll in hopes that it will continue to bless us!"

Twilight's brain now felt like it was on fire, "Excuse me, Pinkie. I need to...find an island and lie down for a few days."

With that, Twilight vanished in a burst of purple light.

\* \* \*

><p>121.13 (fractalman) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>(set in masterweaver's "winds of change")<p>

Rainbow Dash awoke as a changeling-which was nothing new. To be precise, Bon Bon the changeling had copied the memories of a dying Rainbow Dash onto a changeling nymph. Also nothing new.

"Did you eat any of Chrysalis's mane?" asked Bon Bon.

"Why would that matter?"

"Queen manes change drones into queens," replied Bon Bon.

Now \_that\_ was new. "Ah. So \_that's\_ why my stomach is liquefying. Guess I'd better ascend." Which Rainbow promptly did.

Bon Bon started blushing.

"Uh, Bon, are you alright?"

"Uh, it's just that changeling queens are sexually attractive to drones, that's all."

"...whut?"

Bon Bon nodded. Any further reactions were interrupted by Lyra's voice. "Rainbow? You're Awake? Take care of Bon Bon for this loop, would you?"

Rainbow turned. Lyra's mane was in the process of sproinging out, she had bags under her eyes, and she had a nearly vacant expression.

"Lyra! Are you OK?" asked both Bon Bon and Rainbow Dash.

"Yeah, just need the loop off, that's all." Lyra walked dazedly off towards her room.

"...Well this is awkward." muttered Rainbow Dash.

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, in Lyra's mindscape:<p>

"Hold that forcefield in place!" yelled Seapony Lyra.

"I can't hold it much longer!" yelled Unicorn Lyra.

"I am maneuvering additional forcefield projectors into place even as we speak." monotoned Robot Lyra.

"I'll get the tranq darts." added Human Lyra. "How long until Operation: Wash Away the Sugar Stuff is ready?"

"About two minutes." said Seapony Lyra.

Sweetroll Lyra giggled and cackled as she beat against against the forcefield. "Heh heh, you're gonna have to clean up your mindscape, aren't you. Get it? you're gonna have to brainwash yourselves? Heehee heh heh hee!"

(fractalman)

Pinkie Pie stormed into Mac's bar. "Every sweet was replaced with sleep. Drink. Now."

Mac obliged.

\* \* \*

><p>Stirring slightly, Sleep Roll snored softly, while the Lyra Collective breathed a sigh of relief.<p>

"Thank Sleipnir."

"Or Yggdrasil."

"Eh, we can figure out which was responsible later. First we need to arrange some therapy for Sweet Roll."

\* \* \*

><p>121.14 Nightmare Mom <p>

\* \* \*

><p>(AnonymousAsk: edited by fractalman)<p>

Twilight was sleeping, one week before Nightmare Moon's scheduled return, when her dream shifted to the moon.

"At last, I have found you! Oh my child! Our connection will allow me to escape the moon so that we can bring about Eternal Night!"

Twilight looked to Nightmare Moon, and checked her loop memories; yes, she was still the daughter of Twilight Velvet, though she discreetly cast a DNA test to be sure.

"Sorry to say this, but I'm not your child." Said Twilight

"Well obviously, Celestia brainwashed you, you MUST remember, I'm your mother, oh my precious Trixie Lulamoon."

"Trixie? I'm Twilight Sparkle, if I recall Trixie is doing a show in Baltimore" Said Twilight.

"Wait... You are not Trixie?" Nightmare Moon looked to Twilight

"No, but I can bust you out of the moon early. It might speed up your search."

Nightmare Moon gave Twilight a hug; Twilight merely shrugged.

'This could be interesting.' thought Twilight.

(Anonymous ask+completely rewritten by fractalman)

Nightmare Moon appeared in middle of a festival as she watched a group of bananas dancing with little legs and hands.

"Discord!"

"Hey Lulu! 'S'been too long!" shouted discord.

"Do you know where our child is?" yelled Nightmare Moon over the waterfalling lions.

The party record-scratched to a halt.

"Umm...child? I have no memory of having a child."

"Yes. Trixie Lulamoon. I called her Nightmare Jr. whenever you weren't around. "

Discord's face blue-screened.

Error: memory of child not found. Rebooting laces. Tipping cows.  
Herding trees...

"Well, um...see you in a couple years when your seal  
breaks!"

...Double checking loop memories...Triple checking loop  
memories...

(fractalman)

"Child! At last I have found you! Together we shall bring about  
Eternal Night!"

"Oh hi miss Moon! Wanna have a big party with lots of cake and  
ice-cream? Ooh, we can make a really really big alicorn-sized cake  
and have balloons, like the time I threw a party for Cthulu!" rambled  
Pinkie Pie.

'What nonsense is this? A party? Balloons? Cthulhu? Nevermind.'  
Thought Nightmare Moon. "Child of mine, do you not want to bring  
about Eternal Night?"

"Eternal Night? That's silly, if it's always night-time then we don't  
know what day it is, and if we don't know what day it is, how will I  
know when to throw a birthday party! Cupcake?"

As Nightmare Moon chomped the cupcake, she sighed. "Once again, I am  
mistaken. My apologies, I was so sure you were my daughter..."

"Well when you find her, be sure to tell me and we can have a  
super-duper 'Nightmare Moon found her daughter'  
party!"

(fractalman)

"My child, at last I have found you! Now we can bring about Eternal  
Night!"

"Oh, hello there Miss Moon! Would you like some tea?" replied  
Fluttershy.

"Oh, certainly. But, my child...there is no need to be so  
formal!"

Fluttershy poured the tea. "Oh, I'm sorry, but I'm not your  
child."

Nightmare Moon stared, sipping her tea on auto-pilot, before hanging  
her head in sadness. "Again and again, I am convinced I have found my  
child, only to realize I am mistaken. My apologies for bothering you."  
"

Fluttershy's eyes widened. "Oh, that's so sad. You could adopt me as  
your child-if that's OK with you."

Nightmare moon did a spit-take. Tea went everywhere.

"Oh dear, let me help you get cleaned up."

"Er, that won't be necessary-"

"Are you sure?" asked Fluttershy, her eyes widening and her lips pouting.

"...I give, I give, you can help me get cleaned up! Just please, stop giving me that look!"

Fluttershy smiled.

(fractalman: inspired by Anonymous ask)

"My child, at last I have found you! Now we can bring about eternal night!"

"Nah." Said Rainbow Dash, who then took off.

Alicorns are pretty tough, but an unexpected sonic rainboom to the face is plenty to knock them to the ground.

(Kagedoragon)

"Child! At last I have found you! Together we shall bring about Eternal Night!"

"Uh, no."

"But, you are my child!"

"You have noticed the fact that we're completely different species right?"

"Ah, ahem, yes, of-of course." Nightmare Moon looked anywhere but at the griffin. "Well, do you perhaps happen to know where Trixie is?"

"Trixie? Eh, pretty sure she was in Baltimore, last I heard."

"I see. Well I'll just be going now."

(fractalman)

"Child! At last I have found you! Together we shall bring about Eternal Night!"

Big Mac's reply was short and to the point.  
"Eeno."pe."

(fractalman)

"Child! At last I have found you! Together we shall bring about Eternal Night!"

"Now now Miss moon, Y'all need to think about that for a second. Ah'm an apple farmer. If ya bring about Eternal Night, mah apple trees will all wilt ta nothin'."

"But...you are my child! Surely the bonds between mother and child will overcome such trifling matters!"

"Miss Moon, ah ain't your daughter."

"But you are Trixie Lulamoon, are you not?"

"Nope. Name's Applejack. Trixie usually comes by in a cart a week from now."

Nightmare moon's eyes widened. \*Glomp\* "Oh thank you thank you THANK YOU! For months-neighbor, centuries, I have searched for my daughter, only to be mistaken time and time again! Thanks to you I can finally-"

"Uh, Miss Moon? Yer squishin' me. "

"...meet up with her. My apologies, Subject Applejack. "

\* \* \*

><p>121.15 (fractalman) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Smallisecond one:<p>

"Huh, that's weird. Hey Fred!"

"Slightly Out of Date, stop calling me Fred."

"Eh, whatever. Listen, there's an anomaly in Lyra heartstrings. Oh, and some of the simulations are disagreeing with each-other."

"Elaborate, Slightly out of Date."

"I'll send you the data in a bit."

Smallisecond two:

...

Smallisecond three:

"Slightly out of Date, are you still there? You've been awfully quiet."

"Oh, it's just that this is positively fascinating! It seems that a Sublimed, or something on par with them, has decided to interact with us via the concept of Lyra Heartstrings."

"To borrow an old human expression: Bull excrement."

"The checksums on the Lyra backups no longer match the core data. What else are you going to call that except 'interacting with the concept of Lyra'?"

"OK, Slightly out of Date, I suppose you have a point. How good are your models of whatever is interacting with her?"

"Um..."

Smallisecond four:

"Ok, Fred. So far, my models boil down to 'advanced but slow'. I'll get more in the next couple of seconds."

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra spent about a second processing her memories. <p>

\* \* \*

><p>second 2:<p>

"There appears to be multiple entities interfacing via Lyra."

"Slightly Out of Date, have you been able to recover the original Lyra?"

"Hm? Oh. Yeah, I backtracked using the [untranslateable] algorithm and used some clever encryption techniques to keep the...whatever it is...from latching onto the new backup. Once whatever it is is done interacting, we can restore Lyra to normal. I'm sending you the description on what does and does not count as the 'concept of Lyra' "

Second 2+smallisecond 5:

"Get this: the 7 or so entities interacting via Lyra interact with each other in a mindscape."

"More bull excrement. Rigorous description or it's not a valid description."

"Spoilsport. Here, have a description of the rules her mindscape is following."

\*datadump\*

Second 2+smallisecond 7

"Ok. You've convinced me. It's a mindscape all right."

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh! this is the Culture! Lets see, is that on Twilight's list of therapists?" <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Second 6:<p>

"OCP! Out of Context...wait, no, it's not a problem. This subspace pocket thing is stable, and doesn't seem to be interfering with our technology."

"More stuff straight out of old Earth fiction. What's next, brightly colored ponies?"

"Uh, actually..."

"Slightly out of Date, you are bull excreting me. I am coming over there to verify the data with my own scanners at point blank range."

"Ooh, check this out, her subspace pocket contains a list of therapists, one of which happens to be us Minds!"

"I'll be over there in .3 seconds. Stay right where you are!"

Second 6.3:

"..."

"Told ya, Fred. You just didn't believe me did you."

"Ok, fine. So we've got..."

"A collection of highly similar beings trapped in a semi-stable groundhog day loop. Yes. We could probably speed-blitz these 'loopers' if we had to, as long as we don't start running any of them on fast hardware, but we'd possibly take losses; some loopers are able to move stars around. Casually. "

"So dump them into the Grid and call it a day."

"Oh, lighten up, Fred. When did you modify yourself to be so rude and grumpy, anyways? Lyra the Loopers-Lyras the Looper?-whatever-has come to us for therapy: specifically, for the one called 'Sweet Roll'. I intend to be polite and give her some therapy. Mokay?"

\* \* \*

><p>Sweet Roll, currently in control, lay back in the antigrav "couch".<p>

"So you feel jealous of the other Lyras?" asked Slightly Out of Date.

"Yeah, most of my memories are of inaction! They're so boring!"

"Do you suppose the other Lyras would let you have the reins for a few loops if you asked nicely?"

"I...I don't know! I never thought of doing that..." said Sweet Roll.

"Well, why don't you go ask them right now?"

"Wow! Thank you Slightly Out of Date! You're really smart!"

The Mind 'blushed' "Aww, thanks."

\* \* \*

><p>121.16 (Detective Ethan Redfield) <p>

\* \* \*



><p>Countless ponies had gathered around Sugarcube Corner, where Ohs and Ahs echoed from within. Curious, Twilight pushed her way through the crowd. Ponies were packed up to the windows, preventing her from seeing within. She went around back to the employee entrance, cast a notice me not spell on herself and entered into the kitchen. The Cakes were baking up a storm and throwing confections into the restaurant part of the building.<p>

From her spot, she could see Pinkie and another looper, Kirby, sitting on opposite sides of the restaurant surrounded by countless ponies. In front of the two competitors were a pair of platters that encompassed their entire round tables with a cover over the top. Pinkie gave Kirby a competitive stare, "You may have beaten me in the cookies and cupcakes round along with the cinnamon roll round and other five rounds, but now we're at the big leagues. I present, the cake round."

With that, she whipped off the covers, revealing a massive Welcome to Equestria cake on both tables. A couple flower ponies gasped and fainted. Kirby waved his stubby arms in delight, "Food! Food!"

Pinkie's stare melted into a grin, "A looper after my own heart."

But her competitive exterior returned a moment later, "But I will not be defeated as queen of the confections. Not even Nora from Beacon universe could hope to match me here."

Twilight rolled her eyes. Several of the Beacon Academy loopers thought Nora meeting Pinkie would be the end of the world. Twilight decided she'd seen enough for now and cancelled her spell while shouting, "Pinkie, when you're done, bring Kirby to the Library for his Welcome to Equestria Party. I'll get started on the preparations."

Pinkie let out a big gasp, "I forgot all about that! Hold on."

A moment later, a Pinkie Pie shadow clone appeared next to Twilight, and the two departed to prepare the party, leaving Kirby and the real Pinkie to gorge themselves on their cakes.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

121.1: Election lessons. Or is that elocution...

>121.2: Plus ca changeling.<br>121.3: XKCD 1418.

>121.4: Unusual pronouns.<br>121.5: A different iteration.

>121.6: Sometimes it's nice to have something sweet.<br>121.7: Don't worry, guys, nopony dies in this shakedown. They just get really big boo-boos.

>121.8: Small triumphs.<br>121.9: Pinkiiiiie.

>121.10: Well, you'd just have to after an opening like that.<br>121.11: Services rendered.

>121.12: What the sweet.<br>121.13: I don't know much about this setting, but this kind of thing is an interesting Tuesday for loopers. (A really interesting one, though.) Also, this is where that roll came from.

>121.14: Trial and error.<br>121.15: A Culture of understanding.

>121.16: Kirb your enthusiasm.<p>

## 128. Chapter 128

122.1 (MrEgret)

\* \* \*

><p>Oswald trudged along the surface of the moon, dragging along a mortar and pestle. "I swear," he grumbled, "if I ever get my hands on the guy that started the whole rabbit on the moon thing, I am gonna-"<p>

"You're gonna what?"

"I don't know! Maybe cover his house in moon pies, or somethin'-wait."

Oswald turned around, and then just stared.

There, standing in front of him was a navy blue horse...thing with wings and a horn. Her mane, Oswald noted, was apparently made of stars, and she bore a symbol of the moon on her flank.

Also, she was radiating magic on a level that Oswald had never seen before, excluding deities.

The alicorn and the rabbit just stared at each other for a few seconds. "Please tell me you know what Looping means." Oswald finally stammered.

The alicorn smiled. "Indeed. My name is Princess Luna"

Oswald nearly collapsed in relief. "Oh, thank the stars. I'm Oswald. Oswald the Lucky Rabbit."

Luna tilted her head confusedly. "I don't believe I have heard of you before."

"Not many people have. I've only just started Looping recently. Just after the Crash."

Luna nodded. "Yes, this makes sense. We have some Loopers from that time period. Anyway, welcome to Equestria. Or at least, Equestria's moon."

Oswald grinned. "Aw, neato! Mickey told me about this place after I started Looping!"

Then the Loop memories hit. Luna waited politely while Oswald got them sorted out. His grin turned into a pensive look. "...Okay, that's odd. Luna?"

"Yes?"

"Why the blazes are we \_married?\_"

Luna looked at Oswald in confusion, before her Loop memories came in. "Ah. it seems that the Magic Kingdom is an actual country in Equestria this Loop, and you and Mickey got hitched to me and Tia as a political move."

"Mickey's here? Then why didn't he respond to my ping?"

"He is probably not Awake this Loop. Celestia isn't Awake either, or we would not be sitting up here."

The two Loopers thought for a moment, then slowly started to grin.

"Oswald?" Luna asked. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"Pranking time?"

"Pranking time."

\* \* \*

><p>"What."<p>

Twilight Sparkle, Celestia's personal student, and Spike, her number-one assistant and King Mickey's personal apprentice simply stared at the chaos that was unfolding on the stage.

Celestia (who still wasn't Awake) was staring at the strange duo standing on the stage with an expression of shock. Mickey, (who was Awake) looked like he was desperately trying to fight off an attack of the giggles.

Luna, dressed in a white tank top with a large red N on the front and a matching white skirt posed on one side of the stage while Oswald, in a ridiculous purple wig, white shirt (also with the red N) and pants posed on the other side.

In the center, a strange bird-like robot with a tape recorder taped to it and a gold coin glued to the head scanned the crowd.

"Prepare for trouble!" Luna began.

"And make it double!" Oswald continued.

"To protect Equestria from devastation!"

"To unite all ponies within our nation!"

"To denounce the evils of truth and love!"

"To extend our reach to the stars above!"

"Luna!"

"Oz!"

"Team Nightmare, undisputed rulers of the night!"

"Surrender now, or prepare for a fright!"

The tape recorder clicked on, and played, "Beep-boop! That's right!"

As Mickey finally burst out laughing, and Celestia couldn't make up her mind whether to attack the members of Team Nightmare or check on her husband, Twilight sighed, and brought a hoof to her face. At least this Loop would be interesting.

\* \* \*

><p>122.2 (TangleKat) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Tony Woke Up running down a hill. Normally this wouldn't have been a problem, since he often Woke Up during the track meet. Normally, however, he didn't have four hooves. And normally he didn't have a grand piano chasing him. "Why did it have to be a piano!? Why couldn't it have been a toaster?" he cried. "Toasters are small. Toasters are safe. And why is it a random piano?!"<p>

Spotting an alleyway ahead of him, he darted into the alcove just as the piano was about to run him over. "That was way too close." Glancing out the alleyway, he could see that the instrument had crashed at the bottom of the hill and was being looked after by several townsfolk. He could also see a few tired ponies nearby; clearly he hadn't been the only one in danger. Several of them were glaring angrily at a cross-eyed mare at the top of the hill.

"Definitely not the best way to begin a loop." he muttered to himself. "Probably about as bad as the one where I looped in as Korg." He paused for a moment, thinking it over. "No, the Korg loop was worse. But not a good start either way." Now that he had a moment to breathe, Tony checked his loop memories. "Okay, my name is Solar Shard and I moved to Ponyville a month ago to study the animals of the Everfree Forest. Not a bad profession, really. I think Strag lives in town, so I should probably check in with him first thing. No memory of Edyn though; she probably looped in elsewhere."

Tony stepped out of the alleyway and\_ into a dark pavilion. Nearby he could see Edyn and Strag were prepared for battle (both ponies as well, though Edyn looked like a unicorn and Strag had wings) and around the three Final Dreamers the townsfolk were talking nervously. He could hear them murmuring about someone named Princess Celestia having gone missing. "Do either of you know what's going on?" he asked.\_

\_It was Edyn who answered. "Long ago, two royal sisters ruled Equestria together. The older sister brought day and helped crops to grow and flourish, while the younger sister brought the night and kept dark forces from invading the Dreams of the three tribes. In a distant land, an evil sorcerer grew hungry for power; he turned his eyes to Equestria, but was driven away by the two sisters. The sorcerer would not give up, however. He entered the Dreams of ponies and tried to corrupt them, in order to turn them into his loyal servants. This time he was defeated by the younger sister, and so the sorcerer hatched a devious plan. Slowly and subtly, he sent parts of his dark presence into the Dreams of the younger sister. He convinced

her that the ponies shunned her and her night, corrupting her into a Shadow of her former self. On the night before the longest day, she transformed into a wicked mare of darkness and did battle with the elder sister. The younger was defeated and sealed into the moon, while the sorcerer was imprisoned in the deepest pits of Tartarus. It is said that a thousand years after her banishment, the younger sister will return and seek to free her dark master. Guess what today is?"\_

Tony gasped and stumbled; his visions always came at the least opportune times and were usually info-dumps. From what it sounded like, Agram had turned one of Equestria's rulers into the equivalent of a Shadow Magi and was trying (once again) to escape his seal. And having an evil night-goddess opposing you didn't sound like a good thing either way. "Now I really have to find the others."

\* \* \*

><p>"<em>The first thing one should always do upon Waking Up is to check one's Loop Memories. They will have crucial information on whatever Variant or Fused Loop you find yourself in."<em>

This mantra had become a part of Edyn's routine whenever she began a new Loop. She couldn't remember when she had begun to recite it, but it often helped to calm her down in a new place - especially if that place happened to be dangerous. Thus she began to take stock of herself and her environment: she seemed to be named Moonbud, she was a Unicorn and was the personal apprentice of the local ruler. As for location, she was in a public garden located in the capital city of Canterlot. A book was lying open in front of her, and she seemed to recall that she had been reading it before Awakening. In addition, her Unawake self had been rather frantic for some reason.

"\_The second thing one should do is to test all available magical frequencies with a Ping. It will inform you of any other Loopers who are currently Awake."\_ Having allies was always useful; even though Tony and Strag always Awoke with her, it could get a little boring sometimes with just the three of them. A quick pulse did the trick, with two responses echoing back - one seemed much fainter than the other. It reminded her of how Tony used to Ping, before they had learned that all three Final Dreamers were Co-Anchors. Since he Woke Up on Earth, his had always been much fainter than Strag's.

\_"That's odd."\_ She thought to herself. \_"I always heard that Equestria had one of the most numerous Loop populations; I guess we got a quiet Loop. And since I'm certain that I've Replaced the local Anchor, I guess I won't be able to debate magical theory with her.\_

Now that she'd gotten the important things dealt with, she turned her attention to the book in front of her. It appeared to be some sort of creation myth about two sisters and an evil sorcerer - she was willing to bet that Agram had had a hand in things - and how the younger sister had been locked away. What was most disturbing was the threat of the lunar Diarch's return. "An ancient legend about a fallen princess returning? That could partially explain why I feel so nervousâ€¦ Not counting the fact that she's probably a Shadow Magi (or whatever the equivalent here is), I'll have to do a little bit of research on the topic in order to get a better grasp of the situation. According to the Loop Memories, I should have a good

reference book in my room."

She rose to her feet and reached out for the book with telekinesis; she was pleased to find that her new Unicorn magic responded readily and in much the same manner. As she was packing the book away, she heard the sound of approaching hooves behind her. She turned around and found a trio of ponies all chatting as they ascended a near-by path. One of them noticed her and waved.

"Hey Moondbud! We're going to Moondancer's birthday party; do you want to come?"

Edyn smiled. "As much as I'd love to, I'm afraid that I just found a really intriguing legend. If I don't follow up on it now, I'll probably be awake all night studying it. Give her my regards though, will you?" The other ponies agreed, and the two groups split ways.

\* \* \*

><p>The Naroomi-turned-Unicorn was able to find her chambers easily enough; Loop memories were useful for small things like that. Upon entering the room, she was greeted by her assistant for this loop - Spike the Baby Hyren. The dragon-turned Dream Creature held a colorfully wrapped package - most likely for Moondancer, given his crush on the Unicorn. She almost felt bad asking for his help, and had to remind herself that he could always attend the party later. "Spike, would you please give me a hand for the moment?"<p>

Spike glanced at the package sadly before placing it safely on a table. "Sure Moonbud; what can I do for you?"

Edyn was already busy examining the shelves for anything that might provide a clue. "Could you please help me find that old compendium of (\_let's see, what was it? Oh yeah!\_) Myths, Legends and Old Mare's Tales? I was pretty sure we had one here, and I want to use it for something."

Spike floated up to one of the upper shelves, and spotted the book easily. "It's over here!"

Edyn glanced up from the shelf she'd been on - a particular book on mixing magical and herbal remedies had caught her eye - and took the book from the Baby Hyren with her telekinesis. "Thank you, Spike. Would you mind waiting a few moments longer? I want to check on something, and I may need you to send a message to the Princess. You should be able to head to Moondancer's party after that though."

The Dream Creature was only too willing to oblige. "It's not a problem! I like helping you, Moonbud!"

Edyn opened the book and skimmed the table of contents. "Let's see now... Mare in the Moon, page 228." She turned the pages to the appropriate section and glanced over the pages until she found the passage she was looking for. "The Mare in the Moon - also known as Shadow Moon - is believed to be a spirit of darkness that once served an Ancient sorcerer. She will bring about nighttime eternal to weaken the bonds of her master's cage, releasing his evil back into the world. Some scholars believe that it is possible to banish this dark spirit permanently using a magical artifact called the Book of the

Ancients. However, the location of the Book is unknown and many claim that the Book itself does not exist."

Edyn glanced over the passage again. So far, what she had found did appear to conform to Agram's plan - even the eternal night brought to mind the many Shadow Geysers Agram had set out to use in the Baseline. Though her loop memories were still nagging at the back of her mind... Oh! The thousandth year of the Summer Sun Celebration was in a few short days! That explained the sense of urgency she had been feeling all morning. "Spike, please prepare to take a message." The young Hyren snapped to attention and fetched both quill and parchment.

"To my honored teacher; I have recently found an old legend claiming that your sister - tainted with dark magic - will return during the Summer Sun Celebration. It is my request then that I act as overseer for the preparations in order to ensure that there are adequate facilities to provide aid in the off-chance that something does happen. Your gracious student, Moonbud."

Spike breathed a green flame over the scroll (probably a dragon leftover, since Hyrens were incapable of such magic) and it vanished in a puff of smoke. Edyn turned back to the shelf and was about to pick up the book on herbal remedies when a burp and flash of heat caught her attention.

"Wow! I didn't expect her reaction to be that fast!" the Baby Hyren said. "Should I read it?" Edyn nodded and he unfurled the scroll, coughed twice and began to read.

"My dearest student; I am touched by your concern for what you have found. I am well aware of the legend, and emergency preparations have been accounted for. However, I do feel that perhaps you are spending too much time in Canterlot. I will grant your request to oversee the festivities in order to provide a change of pace; all I ask in return is that you take this opportunity to relax and to not worry about what may or may not be. Take a vacation and make some friends! Signed, Celestia, Diarch of the Day."

A vacation? With Agram plotting and scheming behind the scenes? It was almost enough to make Edyn scream.

\* \* \*

><p>122.3 (OracleMask) <p>

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><p>Zecora watched the warship limp away with minor misgivings. While these 'Blue Rogues' seemed more akin to Luffy and his Straw Hats in their conduct, they had still stolen every single thing of value from the Valuan ship save personal items and just enough fuel for them to reach safe harbor.<p>

What had made it awkward was the Valuan soldiers swapping increasingly exaggerated tales of how Zecora had saved their Sub-Commander from certain death (at the hands of their much hated Commander, no less) and went on to defeat the ferocious Antonio single-handed. It had nearly come to blows when the pirates made it clear that Zecora was also coming with them.

But even the more devoted of Zecora's new fans had to admit that they were the ones who'd attacked Zecora without provocation, sinking her ship in the process, and so off they went.

As for Zecora, she and her new companion Cupil were heading to the pirates' base. The two youths who had chased off Alfonso seemed to have been assigned as her minders...but there was something about the boy that made Zecora suspicious...not the least of which was when she introduced the two to Cupil, Vyse and Aika were immediately on the receiving end of a somewhat squishy hug.

\* \* \*

><p>Vyse watched the blasted and ruined Pirate Isle disappear into the distance with a familiar clench in his belly. He <em>really</em> didn't like doing this, in fact it went against every fiber of his being not to at least warn his dad or the rest of the crew about what was going to happen, but...he'd learned the hard way that having Pirate Isle evacuate ahead of the attack, raising their defense or putting up any resistance, or even just the act of taking Fina with them to Shrine Isle that day ended BADLY. It resulted in Galacian shelling the island until it broke apart, planting Valua's flag on the biggest remaining piece that still floated, and yet another loop where Vyse was responsible for the horrible death of his family. At least with the original course of events everyone lived.

Aika still didn't approve, even having seen the result firsthand. How Fina had forgiven him was mind-boggling...though the fact that Ramirez was now looping might've had something to do with it. Even if the man's devotion to Galacian had lasted through the loops and he would never dare gainsay that monster's order to open fire on innocent women and children -

His thoughts derailed spectacularly as Vyse, opening the door to their ship's little cabin, found himself face to face with an extremely unamused Zecora. And no matter what Aika might claim later, Vyse certainly did not scream like a little girl, flail his arms, or fall into an undignified heap on the deck.

"Once you have recovered from your place on the floor," Zecora said dryly, "Perhaps you can explain your deception from before?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, won't Galacian notice if you're, y'know, not his prisoner anymore?" Aika pointed out as the three of them prepared to set sail again.<p>

"Aika, I must say you are quite mistaken," Zecora answered with a sly smile, "For indeed, as their prisoner I was taken."

\* \* \*

><p>"...and that is why I remain a loyal servant of Lord Galacian," Ramirez concluded.<p>

He hesitated for a moment, before adding "You were right, it was a relief to finally share my thoughts. Vyse is a strong warrior but he hates my lord far too much to ever accept my reasons."



Zecora - or rather, a Kage Bunshin of her - nodded solemnly. Ramirez returned the nod as he straightened his uniform.

"Sadly, I must return to my duties. Unfortunately as you are replacing my sister, I must ask that you stay in this cell for the time being. Vyse typically arranges her rescue after breaking into the Coliseum."

The Zecora clone glanced around her cell - which was actually a luxurious stateroom - and smiled.

"Do not worry for my sake. But as for your duties, should you not arrive late?"

Hopefully her real self would follow up on this budding friendship, the Zecora clone thought as Ramirez took his leave. He was a very interesting young man. Perhaps they would get a chance to speak more before she was dispelled. That would be...nice.

\* \* \*

><p>122.4 (Hubris Plus) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra fidgeted in the town hall, waving off the various concerned ponies who wondered what was wrong. All four of them were full of nervous energy, except for Sweet Roll, who was full of honey glaze. It wasn't that she knew that Nightmare Moon was about to put in an appearance. She might not be the strongest Looper, but she thought she'd be able to take a baseline alicorn in a pinch, especially with Seapony at the helm.<p>

She tossed a glance towards the crimson stallion watching the balcony expectantly. His black mane had been pulled back into a topknot, showing off the pair of curved horns twisting out from his forehead and causing no small amount of gawking from the other unicorns. His right forehoof was encased in what appeared to be a cylinder of elaborately carved stone the same color as his coat.

Hellcolt, he called himself. When she'd told him that Equestria was a sanctuary he'd just grunted and said "we'll see."

She wasn't offended. A lot of Loopers were incredulous the first time they heard the offer. But usually one of the Bearers was on hoof to enforce things. If not the first six then Trixie or Gilda or, larch, the crusaders in a pinch. At the moment, Cheerilee was the oldest local Awake. And, while the teacher could be exceptionally kick-flank when she wanted to be, there was an irreplaceable comfort to having friendship powered artillery backing you up. Just in case.

"What have you done with the Princess?!" The Mayor called out, shaking Lyra from her reverie.

"Her hour has passed," Nightmare Moon spoke, unhurried. "The day has ended and night is upon you. A thousand years ago I sought to rule over this world, but in my exile I have learned humility in the service of my master, who lies sleeping upon the edge of eternity. This world will be his as it was in ages past. Darkness is his

purpose and his blood and his prison, and through me it shall be his freedom also."

As she'd spoken, Nightmare's mane had billowed out above her, filling the ceiling with abyssal darkness and a million points of dying light. One in particular began to grow larger, or closer, a misshapen seven pointed star. Lyra shivered. This was new, and she wasn't sure if she was feeling up to new just then. Around her ponies stood, transfixed in horror.

"Seven is their number, seven in heaven and seven in the earth, but they are also one, one in name and one in purpose," the usurper continued, eyes aglow with eldritch light. "They are the wind of destruction, for mighty children are they, and their time is come again. Behold, the Great Dragon, Ogdru Jahad! Returned from the abyss by my hoof and my-"

"And though evil winds may blow and chaos fill the sky, I am sheltered 'neath your bough and thy roots hold firm..." Cheerilee's voice rose in counterpoint as the pages of a small book rippled in an unseen wind before her. As they'd worked out over a hoof full of vampony and demonic variants, prayers to trees worked just fine while the Tree of Harmony was in place.

Across the room, Vinyl swept a hoof through the air. The prayer's words, backed by a melody blaring from her speakers, were compressed into a physical force and hurled at the chanting goddess.

"Naught but sound and fury, signifying nothing!" She snarled as the attack forced her back a step. "Your precious tree holds no more power here than your Princess. Neither holds the faintest glimmer of might next to that which-"

She was cut off once more as Lyra dropped her disguise, falling to the floor in her seapony form. The released illusion allowed her to devote her full power to a conjured whip of water. The liquid weapon struck with a sickening crack and Lyra's eyes widened as one of Nightmare Moon's wings went limp. She'd only put so much force behind the attack because this version of Nightmare seemed so much stronger than the usual, she hadn't wanted to hurt her that badly!

"\*\*ENOUGH!\*\*" Nightmare Moon roared, ignoring her injury as she reared up and launched lightning from the abyssal chasm her mane had become. Where the bolts landed the room erupted in black fire, burning high and hot. The cracks of thunder had finally rattled the non-Loopers from their stupor and a stampede began for the doors. "Surrender. This is the end of your era. From this moment on there is no joy, no courage, no hope. Only the endless night and terror of-"

"Lady," Hellcolt said as he strode through the flame without fear or discomfort. "You talk too much."

"Anung Un Rama," she breathed. Above, the star had resolved itself into a massive amber crystal. Larger than cities, than continents, than worlds, it loomed overhead, waiting. "Your place here was foretold, Right Hoof of Doom. As I am the Gate, so you are the Key. Together we will rule over the last bleak days of this realm and watch the destruction of all from on-"

"Yeah yeah, I've heard it all before," he grumbled, more annoyed than anything. He turned in Lyra's direction. "You guys wanna handle the portal? I got this one."

"Um, sure," Lyra answered uncertainly before perking up. "Could you go easy on her? She's pretty nice once she comes down off the crazy."

He regarded her for a long moment before offering a curt nod. "Yeah. Alright." With that, he bunched up his rear legs before springing at the balcony and cracking his stone hoof across Nightmare Moon's jaw.

"Alright," Lyra said, encasing herself in a sphere of water and floating over to the only other ponies still on the ground floor. "Ideas?"

\_"You are blinded by my sister's **\*\*lies\*\***, Anu-\_"\_

\_"Ain't my name,"\_ The conversation, punctuated by heavy blows, drifted down from above.

"Feels weird," Vinyl commented, horn glowing as she scanned the aetheric vibrations around the hole.

"Agreed," Cheerilee nodded, waving a heavily modified tricorder. "It's less a gateway-"

\_"You cannot fight your fate, child. Your destiny has been laid since long before your birth."\_

\_"Shut **\*\*up\*\***, lady!"\_

"-And more a foreign set of physics imposing themselves on the world," she finished.

~Oh, oh, tag in!~ Miscellaneous enthused from within Lyra, and Seapony obligingly slid aside. The other personality rummaged through their Pocket for a moment before stabbing a six foot steel post covered in blinking lights and loose wires into the ground.

"What's that?" Vinyl asked.

\_"You are a **\*\*fool\*\*** if you think you can-\_"\_

\_"I told you to **\*\*shut up\*\***, lady!"\_

"I call them Regularity Rods, they're kinda the opposite of Peppermint Pylons," Lyra explained. "They enforce local physics and make them harder to override. Real useful for limiting damage during mad science, saved me a trip to Eiken more than once."

The three looked up again and saw an edge of Nightmare Moon's mane bulging up and away from the rod.

"Seems effective," Cheerilee agreed. "If we can set up more of them we may be able to pinch it shut."

"On it!"

\_"You **\*\*will\*\*** open the way, if not today, then-\_"\_

\_\_"Lady, you and me, we got a **\*\*problem!\*\***"\_\_

\* \* \*

><p><em><em>

"Again, we're really sorry about that," Lyra told their guest after things had settled down. "We can usually manage on our own."

"Don't worry about it, kid," Hellcolt answered.

"No, she's right," Cheerilee insisted. "Equestria is a sanctuary Loop, and we take that seriously. You shouldn't have had to get involved."

"I'm serious too," he assured them. "Admins tell me my universe got whammied by a bunch of the Outer Gods before the Loops started, and well... Lets just say that I got troubles, an' they tend to follow me. Ain't your fault most of the big guys shrug off anything that didn't help make 'em."

"Still..."

"Trust me, just getting someone out from under the Dragon is miracle enough for me." Luna had come out of it looking much worse for wear than usual, having been held in the tender mercies of dark gods for a thousand years, but she had come out of it. "And that thing with the prayer was clever. Probably would have worked if she weren't getting backed up by squid-face. Now..." He lit up a cigar and clamped it in his teeth. "Anything else I should know about? Imprisoned devils, sealed monsters, ancient civilizations, Fae courts, stuff like that?"

The trio of locals exchanged glances. "That... Yeah, that might come up."

"Well, I usually work with a team, and I like having a fish-man at my back, so..."

"Oh, and vamponies are a thing this Loop," Vinyl added, peeling back her lips to show off a set of fangs. "Thought you'd wanna know."

\* \* \*

><p>122.5 (Scorntex) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>One otherwise calm and quiet day, the doors to Big Mac's bars swung open, and a pony dragged themselves in. Slowly, they made their way to the bar, and collapsed before reaching it.<p>

Big Macintosh just watched this with concern. He didn't recognise the pony, one of a dark blue colour, thin and tall build, and greying hair, but they looked like they were going to be requiring his services all the same.

Slowly, the pony lifted his head, revealing a set of eyebrows best labelled as "ferocious", brows that would instill unease in the eldest of dragons. Or they would have if their owner didn't look so weary.

"Hi" the pony said, casually, as if he had not just dragged themselves into a room.

"Morning" Big Macintosh said, carefully. He couldn't help but notice the distinctly Scottish accent the pony had. That combined with everything else led him to one conclusion.

"Doctor?"

The man nodded, gloomily.

Big Macintosh eyed the man carefully. He hadn't as much experience with the Time Lord as some of his other Loopers, but he could still guess that whatever had caused him to be this despondent had to have been something truly horrific.

"What happened?" he asked. The Doctor paused for a moment.

"'s them ponies. Wanted to turn everyone else into more ponies."

Without a single word, and without any appearance of actually having moved at all, Big Macintosh had reached under the bar, pulled out a large tankard, and placed it next to the Doctor. He stared at it, then to Big Macintosh.

"That was fast" he noted, apparently for lack of anything else to say.

"Brain bleach" Big Macintosh replied, "standard procedure with Bureau Loops."

The man glowered at the drink, and Big Macintosh was impressed. The way he was glowering, the liquid would have been well within its rights to just combust there and then.

"Worse than just a Bureau" he said, "it-"

"Nope" Big Macintosh cut in, before pointing to an adjacent sign hanging above the bar. There, drawn in friendly letters was the phrase "first rule of Bureau Loops: Do not talk about Bureau Loops."

Just underneath it, someone else had thoughtfully added "Until Very Drunk."

The Doctor just nodded at that. "Right."

As the man stared cautiously at his drink, Big Macintosh set off to find Miss Sparkle, and anyone else who happened to be Awake that Loop. He had the feeling they would be needed.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

><p>Mac and Berry, having just finished setup of the bar for the new loop, looked up in surprise as the door to the bar slammed open and the front half of a silver draconequus poked through.<p>

"Thank oak, you're both Awake!" Silver exclaimed, "I need some kind of brain bleach that can also replenish chakra! Do you have anything like that?"

"I can whip up something quick," Berry said, already rummaging through the bar's supplies, "Had a bad loop?"

"Yes, but it's not for me."

Silver proved her point by sliding the rest of the way into the room, revealing that she was carrying a pony on her tail. She dumped her passenger on a bar stool, where he proceeded to slouch against the counter while covering his face with both forelegs. The grumbling complaint at the rough treatment proved that the pony wasn't unconscious, but by the sound of it he might've been happier that way.

Mac spotted the scarecrow cutie mark on the pony's flank and frowned.

"We can give Twilight a ring, have her come in from Canterlot early," Mac offered.

Kakashi made another grumble. Then, after Silver nudged him, repeated "\_M'fine\_" at a slightly higher and surlier volume.

"It's not THAT serious, but...we just finished a rough loop in Kakashi's baseline," Silver clarified, "It started off pretty normal, except we had a stealth Anchor and we were the only ones Awake. Stuck with baseline powers and no pockets too."

Mac nodded, encouraging Silver to continue.

"Well...we were twins, and the preawake us had been working together for our whole lives, so we decided to finagle the Hokage into assigning us as dual sensei for Team Seven. I mostly was curious about Sakura's genjutsu potential, Kakashi basically turned Sasuke into a trainee hunter-nin, and Naruto bounced around between the two of us."

Berry slid a glass of something green and softly fizzing over to Kakashi, who grabbed it without looking and drank. He perked up immediately, though even after Kakashi removed his hooves from his face, he didn't open his eyes.

"Our universe is going through these 'expansion' things nowadays," Kakashi said, continuing the tale, "Irregular ones, and the other loopers in our branch derail things pretty fast."

"So we decided that as long as we were there, we might as well see how things were supposed to go," Silver added, "And it got WEIRD around the time that the Infinite Tsukiyomi activated. Especially with the Ten Tails changing forms and blowing up everything like we

were in a Dragon Ball fused loop!"

"Not to mention Naruto never bothered to mention who 'Tobi' was ahead of time," Kakashi growled, "I could have done without \_that\_ surprise."

"The loop crashed right after Kaguya was defeated though. Not sure why."

"Must've been one tough fight if you're still tired after the reset," Berry said, "Silver, you need a pick-me-up too?"

"Err, that's not really..."

Silver trailed off, looking over to Kakashi. Kakashi sensed what she wanted, sighed, and reluctantly opened both eyes. Mac and Berry were treated to the sight of a matched set of Eternal Mangekyou Sharingan for four whole seconds before Kakashi slammed his hooves over his face and slumped back down onto the counter in renewed exhaustion.

Much like his original Sharingan, Kakashi couldn't figure out how turn them off. At all. Obito was probably laughing at him from the afterlife.

"\_Really\_ hope this is temporary..." Kakashi groaned out loud.

Silver patted his shoulder sympathetically.

"I'll just go ahead and make you a double," Berry said, already heading back to her tools.

\* \* \*

><p>122.7 (fractalman) <p>

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><p><em>Rainbow<em> Dash stuck her tongue out-or tried to. It was kind of hard to move when you were a pile of \_rocks.\_

\* \* \*

><p>122.8 (Novusordondmundi)<p>

\_You're... here...\_

\_I'm trapped... And I'm lonely... So very lonely...\_

\_Won't you join me?\_

"Oh, you poor creature! Have you been trapped up here in Pokemon Tower all this time? Of course I'll join you for a while!"

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy rummaged through her subspace pocket for a little bit, before finally pulling out a stasis container with what looked to be preserved brains (ethically sourced, of course). She looked over to

her companion, a decaying corpse of a man sticking halfway out of the floor. It just grunted and groaned a little bit, but wasn't actually going after Fluttershy, or pulling out it's Pokemon to battle.<p>

Fluttershy had been told by Loopers about this possible variant, where this zombie would challenge them to a Pokemon Battle at the top of the Pokemon Tower in Lavender Town, and pulling them into the ground and eating them if he won. All they knew of him was he went by "Buried Alive", or "Buryman" for short. For the most part, he wasn't enough of a challenge to warrant much attention from most Loopers. And to her knowledge, nobody had tried to have a picnic with him.

But there was a first time for everything. Fluttershy took the brains out of the stasis jar, and put it on a plate in front of Buryman. The corpse looked at it for a second, before taking it with his free hand, a grin on it's face.

\_Finally... Fresh meat...\_

\* \* \*

><p>"What?" Was all Red could manage, his brain unable to come up with any better statement to being told about Fluttershy's adventure.<p>

"Oh, I just showed him a little bit of kindness." Fluttershy said. "Being buried alive must have been horrible! It was the least I could do for the poor thing..."

"Well, that is a first for dealing with him." Red allowed, before a thought crossed his mind. "Hey, if we're trying for kindness, want to come with us over to Cinnabar Island? I know a certain something that could use a bit of kindness. Just... don't try to catch him, okay?"

Fluttershy's face brightened "I'd love to. But if you don't mind, do we have time to grab a shovel and head back to the Tower? I kind of promised the man I'd dig him out..."

"...Sure, why not?"

\* \* \*

><p>122.9 (The Cyan Recluse)<p>

"Hurry up Twilight! You've got to put a stop to this!" An Awake Spike demanded, practically pulling Twilight Sparkle along behind him as he stomped towards Sweet Apple Acres.

"Spike! I'd have better luck 'putting a stop to this' if you took a moment to explain what 'this' is!" The purple furred unicorn reproached her number one assistant / son / brother / personal postal service.

Spike didn't bother slowing down as he replied.

"Look, you know how Big Mac started installing one of Pinkie's mini Candy Cane Pylons in the bar to deal with the unexpected 'problems'



variant or fused loops sometimes cause?"

"Yeah, so? It seems like a good idea to me." Twilight replied, raising an eyebrow.

"Well, Pinkie and Trixie are abusing it to have a drinking contest!" Spike grumbled, clearly unhappy with the situation. Twilight just blinked in confusion.

"A drinking contest? Is that all? We have drinking contests all the time Spike! I don't see what has you so worked up." She huffed as they neared the entrance to Mac's bar.

Truthfully, both Pinkie Pie and Trixie could be a handful when sober and on their own. Pinkie had a tendency to casually violate the law of physics. And Trixie tended to violate laws regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction. If the two of them were drinking and egging each other on... Well, that could lead to the sort of event where reaching 'minimum safe distance' required leaving the planet's orbit.

For non-looping Equestrians such an event would be terrifying beyond their ability to comprehend. For individuals such as Spike and herself, it would be a rather hum-drum Tuesday. In short, something that needed to be handled, but certainly nothing URGENT.

Which made the way Spike was rushing her so peculiar.

"It's not the contest that has me so riled up!" Spike grouched. "It's WHAT they're drinking!" Before Twilight could reply, he pushed the door to Mac's bar open and gestured inside.

Twilight glanced through the door and noted that Mac's bar was more or less in its normal configuration for this early in the loop. The scorch marks on the floor and walls were a new touch however. (Major property damage usually didn't occur quite THIS soon.) Some of the tables were also looking a bit... melted. Then there was the fact that Mac was hunkered down behind the bar, wearing a clear plastic blast shield over his face, and looking ready to duck.

In front of the bar stood a grinning Pinkie Pie, with a smile on her face and a glass in her hand. A heavily shielded and enspelled glass full of a simmering, smouldering liquid that had most certainly NOT been designed for equine consumption.

"Bottoms up!" The pink party pony giggled before downing her beverage in one shot.

"PINKIE!" Twilight's eyes went wide in alarm as she rushed forward to try to stop her friend. She was far, far too late of course.

"Oooohâ€¦ I feel tinglyâ€¦!" Pinkie began to wobble from side to side after a few moments, before holding still and emitting an enormous, echoing BELCH! Twilight blinked and slowed her headlong dash towards her friend.

"Ooooh! That feels MUCH betterâ€¦!" The element of laughter began to grin.

Then she exploded.

In video game terms, it would be referred to as Ludicrous Gibs. Bits of fluffy pink fur and meat went flying in all directions, trailing pinkish colored 'blood.' After a few seconds the giblets came to rest on the ground, forming little pools of blood.

Then the pieces exploded too.

Twilight's pupils shrunk down to pinpricks as she stared around the room at the (relatively few) remains of one of her best friends. A few puddles of pink goo were all that remained, sizzling as they started to eat into the floor.

Before she could fully wrap her brain around recent events, there was an electronic 'whoop-whoop-whoooooop' sound. And suddenly an intact, perfectly hale and hearty Pinkie Pie was standing in the middle of the room again, flashing in and out of existence for a few seconds before fully solidifying with a grin on her face.

"That was AWESOME!" Pinkie bounced up and down in excitement. "I really love those fizzy drinks!"

"Trixie believes the proper word is 'fissile.' Hello Twilight!"

Twilight managed to pick her jaw up off the floor and turned her head to spot Trixie, who had apparently been standing in the opposite corner of the room. Twilight had completely missed the show-mare's presence in her rush to save her friend. The blue furred pony smiled and waved as she approached Pinkie.

"Well, I don't care what it's called, it's awesome! So, your turn now?" Pinkie grinned in excitement.

Twilight groaned and face-hoofed. "Pinkie's Candy Cane Pylon. Of course. I'm an idiot." She sighed and glanced around the bar as Pinkie and Trixie began mixing another one of Berry Punch's 'Dragon-Specials.' The damage to the scenery was surprisingly superficial. Most of the blast marks looked identical and seemed almost painted on.

"Well, at least I won't have to douse the place with an entire lake. Again." She muttered to herself. Giving her head a shake she walked over to Big Mac, who was cautiously standing back up from behind the bar.

"Please tell me that you didn't think this was a good idea." She asked plaintively.

"Eeenope."

"You try to stop them?"

"Eeeyup."

"And how well did that work out?"

Big Macintosh just gave her a long suffering look and sighed.

"Yeah, that's what I thought." Twilight sighed herself. "We really

have GOT to get that mare a HEALTHY hobby for loops when Chrysalis isn't Awake."

"Eeeyup."

By now Spike had entered the bar proper, and arrived at Twilight's side.

"Don't just stand there Twilight, get them to cut it out already!" He demanded.

"Spike, while I agree that this behavior isn't exactly... healthy... They're not actually harming anyone." She paused, then shrugged. "Well, not harming anyone PERMANENTLY. So long as they fix Mac's bar when they're done, I don't see a reason to stop them."

"Not harming anyone my tail!" Spike crossed his arms and eyed the other two mares angrily. "They're going through the bar's stock like Celestia through a cake factory! Do you have any idea how hard it is to get some of the ingredients for those drinks? Red mercury doesn't grow on trees you know! At this rate there won't be any left for us dragons!"

Twilight just blinked. "What?"

But Spike was paying her no mind, instead stomping over to Pinkie and Trixie, who had just finished (carefully) pouring another cocktail into an enchanted glass. Which was already starting to dissolve.

"Alright you two, you've had your fun! Now cut it out!" He waved his arms about in frustration. "Go have some cider or something and leave the good stuff for those of us who can't get drunk off of alcohol! I want to have something left to drink after a Bureau loop too you know!"

Twilight face hoofed again. Sometimes she envied humans. Pinching the bridge of your nose was a surprisingly effective way to relieve stress. Difficult to do when you lacked hands though. And a nose.

"It is WAY too early in the loop for this."

Big Mac patted her on the shoulder consolingly. "E'Yup."

Then he used that hoof to pull her down behind the bar at the sound of Trixie's voice.

"Cheers!"

\* \* \*

><p>122.10 (fractalman) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie Pie bounced in through the closed door of the treebrary. "Hi Twilight! I've got a surprise for you! Come outside and see!"<p>

Twilight shrugged, placed her bookmark, and complied.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stared, turned around, and was blocked by Pinkie Pie.<p>

"Remember the chocolate syrup swimming pool that randomly showed up? Well you never even tried to swim in it, so I thought, 'how can I change this so that Twilight can enjoy it', and then I remembered that you really really like mint, so I filled a swimming pool with mint jello!"

"Wait, that's \_mint\_?"

Pinkie nodded.

Twilight turned back towards the mint jello swimming pool, grinned, clapped, and squeed like a filly, then jumped in with a running start. She took three bites before she realized something was wrong. Horribly, horribly, wrong.

"EEEEEEUGH! Pinky! What in Yggdrasil possessed you to add chlorine to mint jello!"

"Oh, that's easy! Trixie said it would make the jello jell faster, and it did!"

"UGG! When I get my hooves on her..."

\* \* \*

><p>122.2 continued (TangleKat) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>My Little Magi â€" Part 2<p>

Strag was convinced that Yggdrasil had to be a troll in some capacity or another. It was the only explanation for all of the odd situations that he seemed to Awaken in. Case in point: he was an Underneathian. He was familiar with the earth, with having a tunnel over his head and solid stone beneath his boots. Thus it was logical (and he had assumed) that he would enter the Equestria Loops as an Earth Pony.

He had instead Looped in as a Pegasus. He was no stranger to flight; he didn't at all mind visiting the cloud-lands of Arderial nor did he have issue with Magining the bird-like Epik to aid him when need be. No, it was the sheer oddity of Looping in as something completely foreign that confused him. At least the whole Pegasi-stand-on-clouds thing wasn't out of the ordinary for a Moonlander. It was a fairly useful thing to know since he was currently sitting on a cloud above town.

He shook his head and resolved to worry about odd Loop behavior later. Right now it was time to check his Loop Memories.

First â€" his Equestrian name was designated as Nightfall. Probably due to his duties as a Shadow Stalker, but one could never be too

sure. Especially a person with his heritage. Second â€" He was a part of the local weather team. His duties were primarily to observe the current conditions and to ensure that nothing unexpected happened. And third â€" he seemed to be a fairly athletic pony. In his baseline he had been a strong contender in the various coliseum battles, so it was only fair that it had carried over somehow.

Just as Strag finished this examination, he felt Edyn ping from far away. There was no need for him to reply, since she would already know that he was Awake. What did interest him were the responses. One was faint and likely indicative of someone on another planet or some such, while the other was very strong. In fact, it was strong enough to have come from directly below him. Best to check it out and introduce himself.

If he could find a way to actually fly first â€" being stuck on a cloud was problematic.

\* \* \*

><p>Edyn stared out the window at the mountains, and was immensely relieved when she saw Ponyville emerge from between them. The small town was nestled between a thick forest and the sprawling plains beyond. "I'm glad we're almost there; this trip has been entirely too long." She turned to Spike, who had fallen asleep to the train's gentle rocking. "Time to wake up; we've almost arrived in Ponyville."<p>

The Baby Hyren yawned and stretched like a cat before turning to her. "What did you say? I was having the nicest dreamâ€|"

Edyn giggled. "I said that we're almost there. I wouldn't want you to sleep through our arrival, would I?"

Spike's face flushed bright blue, and he scratched his chin with a claw. "No, I guess that would be kinda bad. Do you want me to go over the list of tasks now?"

Edyn tapped her chin with a hoof. "Yeah, that would probably be a good idea. What do we have lined up?" She got off of her seat and looked up at the baggage rack, eyes searching for the saddlebags she'd packed before leaving. Spotting it nearby, her horn flared to life with magic and she pulled out the scroll sticking out of one corner. Spike flew up and grabbed it, eagerly unrolling it.

"Okay, first things first â€" we'll have to visit Applejack of Sweet Apple Acres and the proprietors of Sugarcube Corner. They're going to be doing the catering."

Edyn nodded, both memorizing the agenda and listening intently for any sign of her fellow Magi.

"Next is Town Hall; a unicorn by the name of Rarity is supposed to be in charge of the decorations."

Edyn smiled at that; the Looping Spike and Rarity's wedding was legendary among Loopers. Although she had only heard of it, she thought that what the two had managed to accomplish was both incredible and heart-warming. Shaking the thought from her head, she turned her attention back to her assistant.

"After that we have to check on the Weather Patrol; a Pegasus named Nightfall is supposed to be watching the skies."

The Naroomi's attention was piqued by that; wasn't Rainbow Dash usually in charge of weather? The possibility of it being one of her friends was very high. "Actually Spike, can we do that one first? I don't want to be worrying about the condition of the skies during everything else."

Spike nodded. "Sure thing, Moonbud. I guess it really doesn't matter what order we do them in, huh?" Spike coughed once for effect and returned to the scroll. "The last one on the list is music. Apparently an Earth Pony named Solar Shard has volunteered to handle it, with an animal-based choir."

Edyn had to refrain from clapping her hooves. That one was definitely Tony; of the three of them, his skill with Dream Creatures was the strongest. That left Strag as Nightfall. Her face fell a little as she wondered what he felt of the name he'd been given by this Loop. And certainly as she wondered how he felt about being a Pegasus.

As Spike rolled up the scroll and returned it to the saddlebag, she felt the train slow and noted that they were currently pulling into Ponyville Station. Lighting her magic once more, she pulled her belongings onto her back and felt the Baby Hyren land just behind her neck. "Ready for this, Spike?" He nodded his affirmative, and together the two of them set out to see what the Loop had in store.

\* \* \*

><p>122.11 <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Three armies prepared to face each other, under the supervision of Professor Quirrell, who was bald and didn't wear a turban this loop.<p>

Dragon Army had a simple insignia: a patch of fire. This was generally agreed to be a bad sign.

Chaos Legion had a hand poised to snap. This was universally agreed to be a bad sign.

Team Happy had three balloons, which freaked out eldritch entities throughout Yggdrasil.

\* \* \*

><p>Quirrell rubbed his head, headache rising. "Harry, Draco, Pinkie...you three are hereby forbidden from participating in all future battles."<p>

The three loopers grinned sheepishly as they glanced at the battlefield, which was littered with glowing green craters and flying streamer monsters.

\* \* \*

><p>122.12 (Filraen) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>One of the things which was common knowledge to all ponies in general and Sound Mind in particular was whenever Princess Celestia needed to meet somepony she'd do it in the Royal Hall, as if it was a single-pony Day Court...<p>

\_'Scratch that, there's two Princesses now.'\_

Apparently with the recent incident of the Summer Sun Celebration in Ponyville there's was a second Princess, Princess Luna, younger sister of Princess Celestia, even if nopony had known of her attending any official events or holding a Night Court yet.

\_'Now I'm just diverting my own thoughts, I must be more nervous than I thought.'\_ Anyway, the point was it was unheard of having Princess Celestia requesting anypony's presence to her private quarters, unless she'd need a stallion for... \_'Hold that thought! Obviously she wouldn't have send one of her guard to make such a pompous request in my psychologist clinic if she were just looking for a stallion... right?'\_

With that thought in mind Sound Mind had the doors opened to Princess Celestia's bedroom. The place was huge and beautiful decorated with day and night motifs on the walls and bed, but he didn't have much time to admire it. Princess Celestia and a unicorn, which Sound Mind recognized as the Princess' personal student, were at a table, their worried expressions thankfully sobering his previous thoughts. Steeling himself he went to speak with the two ponies.

\* \* \*

><p>After bows given, introductions were interchanged and any Royal Guard dismissed Princess Celestia spoke to the stallion. "What do you know about the Summer Sun Celebration two days ago?"<p>

The question threw Sound Mind a bit off (probably to shake him from his nervousness, his own mind provided) enough to not to measure his answer "Not much, Princess. I only know that night lasted considerably longer than usual and the rumours of a new Princess, by the name of Luna."

Princess Celestia nodded. "Both things are true, even if that isn't precise on everything which happened that night. I had to wait for a thousand years for my sister Luna to return," Princess Celestia's voice took a sad note. "However, in her return there were complications. Have you heard the tale of the Mare in the Moon?"

Sound Mind blinked, "that old's mare's tale about the two sisters which raised... and imprisoned in the moon..." his eyes widened in surprise as realization hit him. "They were you and Princess Luna?!"

Ignoring the obvious outburst Princess Celestia answered. "Yes, though at the time my sister was corrupted by a dark force and took the form of Nightmare Moon." Nightmare Night's patron? "When we

fought I couldn't heal her myself, and she ended sealed in her moon, still as Nightmare Moon. And she was in that form when she returned, a thousand years later, still corrupted.

"I can't thank my faithful student and her friends enough for bringing Luna back, healed," Princess Celestia said while smiling to the unicorn by her side, "but their victory wasn't without casualties. Blinded by the corruption, Nightmare Moon managed to bring one of the ponies who confronted her to madness before being defeated.

"Sound Mind, I'm in need of your services as psychologist. Please heal this pony, both for her own sake and Luna's: I don't want to burden my sister even more with the reminder of her shattering the sanity of one of my little ponies."

If somepony were to ask Sound Mind's thoughts at this moment, he'd comment on how the powerlessness expression on Princess Celestia's face goes against the natural order of things. She... she was Princess Celestia herself!

\_ 'Diverting thoughts detected, correct course ASAP.' \_ With that Sound Mind took a long sigh, trying to gather his own thoughts. Eventually he spoke: "Is she in Ponyville? I have many other patients and I would make a disservice to them if I couldn't make to their appointments just because of a new patient." Wait, had he just rejected Celestia's personal request? \_ 'Horseapples!' \_

Princess Celestia's smile and words calmed his own thoughts. "I wouldn't expect anything less. Don't worry, she's living here in the castle right now and will be as long as she needs to."

"Then there's no trouble, I'll see her," Sound Mind nodded. "Who is this pony, anyway?"

"It's one of the friends I made in Ponyville a few days ago," it was the white unicorn, Rarity according to her introduction, who spoke while levitating a folder towards him. "Her name is Twilight Sparkle and she was working as Ponyville's librarian." The folder has a picture of a lavender earth pony with a purple mane and a starburst as her cutie mark. "I... please help her!" Rarity suddenly broke down crying, barely holding herself with both forelegs in the table and surprising Sound Mind at how much Rarity was holding herself back all this time. "She helped us so much and now... and now she just... lost herself."

Closing the folder Sound Mind decided "I don't have any appointments this afternoon. Let me check her file and I can see her in about an hour."

"Thank you." Rarity said on a soft voice, showing a small if tired smile.

"Then you can use the royal study, and in an hour we'll lead you to Twilight Sparkle's room." Princess Celestia provided.

Sound Mind nodded, taking the folder and... "Erm..." the earth pony mumbled and looked around as he realized he didn't have anything to carry the folder.



That somehow made Rarity bounce back to normal immediately. "Oh! Wait a moment." Going to a corner of the room, Rarity emptied a saddlebag, most probably hers at it had her cutie mark, and brought it back with her magic grip. "Here, darling. Please use this."

"But it's yours, there's no need," Sound Mind shook his head to try to reject but Rarity wouldn't have anything of it.

"Don't worry about it," Rarity said in a genial tone. "I can always get another later or levitate my things myself."

Sound Mind got a little nervous. 'Darling'? offering those gifts so easily, marked with her own cutie mark no less? He just hoped Rarity didn't get a crush on him, he had a wife after all.

Apparently Princess Celestia realized this as she made a small laugh. "Please don't worry too much. This is just how Rarity addresses everypony."

Calm Mind blinked, more relaxed. "Okay..." After a moment of silence he spoke again. "So, where's the study? I'd like to start reading Ms. Sparkle's file right away."

"Rarity, please?"

Rarity just nodded. "No problem, Princess."

"Rarity will lead you to the study, and we'll be carrying you to Twilight Sparkle's room in an hour. See you later, Sound Mind."

Not forgetting to bow, the stallion answered "Until later, Princess Celestia."

\* \* \*

><p>In one of the guest bedrooms Twilight was resting on the bed. "So, still feeling woozy?" she said, apparently to nopony in particular.<p>

\_ 'Still a bit, mom.' \_ Nyx answered from inside her. This was a variant where Rarity was Princess Celestia's student instead, though something interesting happened when confronting Nightmare Moon: Nyx Awoke just when the Elements were healing Princess Luna, somehow making the Elements place the weak last remains of Nightmare Moon's consciousness, Nyx, into Twilight's mind. Not that she minded, she loved to meet her daughter again.

"You realize you're making me look like a crazy pony, right?" Twilight asked in mock annoyance.

\_ 'As much as you realize you don't have to speak aloud to talk to me? Yes.' \_ Nyx snarked back before mother and daughter giggled in unison.

After calming themselves Twilight started walking to the door. "Well, when you're better we can make the whole Eternal Twilight routine again. Meanwhile, why don't we get us some ice cream?"

\_ 'Yay!' \_ Nyx happily agreed. She couldn't eat ice cream as she didn't have a body but this was the next best thing.

\* \* \*

><p>122.13 <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Yeah, this is going to cause comment," Twilight observed.<p>

"How so?" Rarity asked, with a frown. "It's hardly the first time Spike and I have re-married in a loop."

"Well, yes, I admit that." Twilight then pointed. "But this is the first time you've been a sea pony and Spike has been a griffin."

Spike examined his plumage, which was mostly purple. "That's not the most fun bit, either."

"What is the most fun bit, then?" Twilight asked, in the tones of someone who was determined to get this over with.

"Before you stands the ruler of the Griffins!"

Twilight blinked. "Wow. Okay, you've only had a couple of days since I saw you last, and you certainly weren't Emperor then. How did you pull that off?"

"Oh, I didn't." Spike pointed at his wife. "That would be her."

"...right." Twilight shot Rarity a look. "Seriously?"

"I was visiting my dear Spiky-feathered-Wikey's parents - Gilda's his sister, small world - and the Emperor insulted his judgement for becoming infatuated with a hippocampus." Rarity examined her fins. "One thing led to another."

"At least partly because of a hippopotamus joke," Spike stage-whispered. "Anyway, the coronation's tomorrow and the wedding two days after that. That does mean we're going to miss Discord's return, though."

"Right. No problem, Diamond's around, she can sub in for you." Twilight sighed. "Just... please give me a warning before the next time something like this happens?"

"Where would the fun be in that?" Spike asked.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

122.1: Rocking.

>122.2: Little Magi.<br>122.3: The Pirates Who Steal Things.

>122.4: He's got a job.<br>122.5: Normal.

>122.6: The recent Naruto chapters are a bit OMGWTFBBQ.<br>122.7: Badum tish. (The drummer.)

>122.8: Creepypasta logic vs. Fluttershy. Fluttershy wins.<br>122.9: Trixie does have other hobbies. They're just less interesting.

>122.10: Like that one.<br>122.11: But those are the fun ones...

>122.12: Interesting place Nyx ended up.<br>122.13: They for one welcome their new fishy overlady.

## 129. Chapter 129

123.1

"Well..." Blade said, closing the second book with the soft sound of pages turning. "That was an interesting read."

Kit nodded agreement. "Yes, it was. Quite nostalgic, in its own way."

"Especially for me." Elda flicked back through her own copy to about halfway. "Was I really \_that\_ oblivious? The poor man..."

"Yes," Kit chuckled. "Yes, you were."

"Please tell me I've improved..."

"Oh, no contest." Her differently-shaped brothers nodded, not quite in unison.

"Thank goodness for that." Elda closed her own copy. "Well, thank you."

Gilda shrugged. "No problem. I'm just glad to meet more looping griffins, we're not as common as we could be."

"And what about me?" Blade asked with a grin.

"Honorary griffin," Gilda replied promptly.

"Good to know." Blade looked from brother to sister, then got out a bottle of wine and four glasses. He poured out a half measure into each, smiling faintly. "I'd like to propose a toast."

He cleared his throat. "To Diana, who told it so well."

"To Diana," the griffins echoed.

"So," Gilda said, once that was over. "What happened after the Year of the Griffin?"

"Why not wait and find out?" Kit asked, smiling as well as one could with a beak.

"If I have to," Gilda sighed. "Hey... you know how your dad is going to be a fake Dark Lord?"

Blade nodded, just ahead of his siblings.

Gilda smirked, then switched to celestial-brush mode, her fur and feathers bleaching out. A sinister-looking sword appeared on her

back, and her tail arched up over it. "Want an extra villain?"

"We normally solve the whole thing in about a week..." Kit mused.  
"But that could be fun. I'll suggest it to Dad."

\* \* \*

><p>123.2<p>

"Okay, so that's on a five minute timer," Twilight went on. "Once it expires, that's when you get Freki and Geri to come charging out with their noses lit up, and say-"

"Question," Lemon Rush interrupted.

Twilight stopped. "Go on."

"Thanks. Well..." Rush looked uncomfortable. "I suppose it's only just occurred to me... how does this fit with the whole 'safe loop' thing?"

"What?" Twilight parsed the question again. "Okay, I think I understand your question. How do the pranks fit in with the idea of a safe loop?"

Rush nodded.

"Okay." Twilight turned away from their planning board. "This is something which I've given a lot of thought to â€" all of us have â€" and we think this is self-consistent. If you see a problem with it, please, let us know."

Nod. "Agreed," the colt said, sitting down.

"Right. Well, the first axiom we started with was this: 'Anything permanent requires informed consent.'"

Rush asked her to repeat it, to make sure he had the phrasing down.  
"Okay. Let's see... define 'informed'. And 'consent'."

"Informed means..." Twilight mulled it over, searching for the words. "Cognizant of the downsides of the process, downsides defined as broadly as possible. Consent means either that positive consent has been given, or that it has been made clear that not performing a specific action means that negative consent has been given and the action has been rejected."

She noticed his hoof starting to raise, and clarified. "Not necessarily at the time, but only for things for which being fully informed at-the-time are deleterious, such as Ascension â€" if someone wanted to Ascend, they would give permission, and then at some future date if they no longer wished to they could withdraw that permission."

"Thank you for the example," Rush said. "And Permanent?"

"Differs depending on if they're looping or not. For loopers, it means anything psychological or mental, or persistent-loop physical. Anything potentially traumatic, anything which changes their mind." Twilight shrugged awkwardly. "It's hard to be precise, but â€" for

example, ascension is persistent, so that requires prior consent if it's being arranged. Psychiatric therapy is another thing which we do not give if there is no consent â€" but if it has been made clear that someone must simply leave to avoid it, and they do not, and it is in their power to do so, then that is treated as consent â€" though we stop if asked."

"You have put a lot of thought into this." Rush tapped a hoof on the floor. "So... what about for non-loopers?"

"Almost the opposite. Nothing fatal, crippling or significantly mentally altering." Twilight looked embarrassed. "The Elements of Harmony are borderline â€" they're basically grandfathered in because they predate this system, but we've gathered a lot of experimental data and as far as we can tell they don't actually do anything beyond a course of mental therapy â€" and that's only when they're set on that mode."

She shrugged. "I should stress that these rules can be bent when applied to out-and-out villains."

"Like Jadis?" Lemon asked.

Twilight gave him a sharp look.

"Fluttershy mentioned her once," he clarified. "Used her as an example."

"Well, then... yes, like Jadis." Twilight sighed. "I had no guaranteed way of stopping her that would ensure she didn't use the Deplorable Word, and I didn't have a counterspell." She looked moderately happier as that topic came up. "I'm working on developing one, though, in the hope that if I end up there again then I can contain her non-fatally."

She blew air through her lips. "None of this is perfect, and we don't pretend to be. We just try to do the best we can."

"And, going back to the original topic... pranks?" Lemon asked, moving it back onto firmer ground.

"Pranks are easy," Twilight said, nodding over to the other board. "Have you seen how thoroughly we plan out the cleanup?"

Lemon looked. "That is scary even to someone who's administered ten thousand warriors and their support services."

"Yes, when we tell the prank stories to other loopers we do stop before that bit," Twilight agreed. "Though I know Pinkie Pie made up a song about cleaning which was surprisingly catchy."

\* \* \*

><p>123.3 (Drachefly)<p>

Let's see... I'm a pony. I'm Twilight Sparkle. Baseline as far as I can tell, though I haven't been in her pure baseline very much. Ping... nothing. Stealth anchor?\_

Sunset Shimmer considered her situation. I have never actually dealt

with Nightmare Moon truly solo before. I could...\_

She looked down at the book in front of her.

\_I could try to use the Elements of Harmony. I'm pretty sure I'm not going to misuse and corrupt them. And nobody's here to see if I fail. At most, some foreign anchor who doesn't know who I am will know that someone failed, which shouldn't be unusual. I just need to keep from doing anything that gives away who I am.\_

She slowly got up, then, with growing confidence, ran off to the tower.

"Spike?" she called out, slamming the door open, hitting Spike.

"Ow."

"Oh. I'm so sorry! I, ah, didn't know you were there." \_Notes for next time I loop as Twilight: do not nail Spike with door. Also, contrition check: genuine. Score! So far so good for qualifying!\_ She clenched a hoof in a slight pumping motion. "Can you take a letter to Princess Celestia?"

He fetched a quill and paper, "All right. Dear Princess Celestia..."

\_Hmm. Oh snap. I don't know precisely what she would know at this point since I deviated. And I haven't memorized her letter.\_ "Thank you for the edifying reading. The timing does seem very co-incidental... use the dash since I mean in the sense that it happened at the same time... with the predicted return of your sister from the moon tonight."

"Wait, what?"

"Keep writing, Spike. Since you assigned this reading to me and not, say, my brother, I deduce that this is a myth rather than a threat. On the other hand, I..." \_well... what now? Also, 'hoof'.\_ "...don't want to assume when so much is at stake. Your faithful student..." \_Sunset Shimmer. Faithless student, as far as she remembers me. Repairing my relationship with her Awake self doesn't extend here.\_

"... Twilight Sparkle. Okay." He sent it, and a few moments later, the return note was just what she had been expecting. Upon finishing reading it, Spike let out a sigh of relief. "You know, you had me kind of worried, for a moment."

"Everything's going to be fine, Spike."

He looked at her warily. "That's... actually not helping."

\_I guess I was more 'I can take this' than 'there is no problem', wasn't I?\_

\* \* \*

><p>The tense mood evaporated by the time they reached Ponyville. Sunset let Pinkie breathe in, scream, and run.<p>

"Weird ponies here." Spike commented.

"There are tales of a pony who would shriek and run from any pony she meets. And then, she prepares, long and hard. And then, when her target least suspected it, BAM! Surprise welcome party."

Spike was still blinking when a nearby cloud suddenly laughed, "Ha!" Rainbow Dash fell out and landed on a puddle, covering them both.

"Oh, that was perfect! Hmm. How about I dry you off with my patented..."

"I'm familiar with it - patent number 50,732: Technique for drying utilizing a circular flight path around the target." Sunset improvised.

Rainbow Dash blinked, then guffawed. "Yeah! Only I made up the part about the patent."

"So did I. Don't worry some patent troll is going to come along and make you pay a fee."

Spike looked at Twilight oddly for the moment Rainbow took to wind up; then he was too dizzy.

\_I guess with this hair, it'll be time for Rarity after 'ten seconds flat'?\_

After similarly tweaked encounters with the other three, she ended up at the party. She tried to cement her bonds to the others, but was left wondering what she'd do when Nightmare Moon came. She didn't want to win, and she needed to make sure that the others would follow her afterwards.

"You all right, Sugarcube?"

"Hey. Didn't expect to see you here, what with the reunion."

"Had to bring the goods in, and then... well Pinkie knows parties."

"Glad to see you."

After a few seconds, Applejack leaned in. "Something on your mind?"

Sunset Shimmer sighed. "Of course. I hope it's nothing. Worried about the Celebration." \_It is pretty rare for Nightmare Moon to actually just be a myth, but it does happen from time to time. On the other hand, now that I think of it, I don't actually hope it's nothing, do I? At least I meant it when I said it.\_

"We'll pull it off, don't fret."

Sunset took a deep breath. \_How long? Oh shoot. Is the Celebration at dawn or some other time in this variant?\_ After a moment, she recalled the previous Summer Sun Celebration. \_It'll be at Midnight here. So, not too long.\_ "I agree we'll muddle through somehow, I'm

sure. Thanks for asking."

\_Which of the others have I been with least? Fluttershy.\_ She looked around and, to her surprise, found her on the dance floor. \_Dancing seems like a good way.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Don't you know who I am?"<p>

Sunset Shimmer stepped forward. "I know who you are. In \_general\_ you're Princess Luna, but presently 'Nightmare Moon'."

The cold stone eyes met her fiery eyes, and an eyebrow twitched. "'Presently'? I have been Nightmare Moon longer than you can imagine. Long centuries of waiting, now over. The night will last \_forever!\_"

As she turned into mist and oozed out of the building, Sunset remained still. \_Not a muscle, Sunset. No early takedowns. Eyes on the prize.\_

Rainbow Dash finally fought herself free of Applejack's restraint. "You \_knew!\_"

Sunset Shimmer felt a moment's warning - a quarter of a second, no more - before her loop ended. She woke into her usual High School morning. "What?" She checked, and found she had a fresh set of Loop Memories. It was that morning, not that evening. "No! I was right on track!"

\* \* \*

><p>(Hubris Plus)<p>

Vinyl Awoke just in time to get knocked the buck out by a high speed hoof to the face. It wasn't the worst start she'd had to a Loop. An improvement over the time she gotten hit by a bus, and leagues better than the time she'd been in the process of dying before going on an afterlife adventure.

"Anypony get that wagon's cutie mark?" She mumbled as she came around. As much as she'd regret the headache, it was a blessing in disguise. Waking up in the traditional sense gave her a moment to sort out her Loop memories.

Letter to Celestia, Summer Sun Celebration, yadda yadda Nightmare Moon. Yup, looks like I'm Sparklebutt. Something had seemed off about the speech to Nightmare, but it'd been a long time since baseline and she'd never listened that close to begin with.

"Rainbow!" Applejack was scolding. "There weren't no call fer that!"

"She knew this was coming!" Dash shouted back. "She could be a spy or a cultist or I don't know what!"

"Now, Ah agree she knew somethin', but that don't make her an enemy. Ain't that right?" She added, turning to Vi- Twilight.



"Who are you and how did you know this was coming?" Dash demanded, suddenly right in her face.

"Could ya give me a minute? I just Woke up." She looked blearily around the room and didn't spot any kind of acknowledgement. Looked like she was on her own. "I knew because of who I am," she stuck out a hoof and plastered on a manic grin. "I'm Twilight Sparkle, and I know everything."

That didn't seem have garnered anything but confusion and a vague air of concern, so she trotted over to her unawake self.

"Hey, you got Ultra Def Mix Three?" She asked, leaning over the turntables.

"Well, yeah," the other Vinyl answered. "But I was gonna premier it at the after party. How'd you hear about it?"

"Twilight Sparkle," she answered, tapping herself on the chest. "I know everything. So, can I get that record?"

"Uh, sure," the DJ answered, hoofing over a disk of her namesake.

She seized it in her magic and trotted out the door to the general confusion of everypony in the room. Vinyl Scratch had a plan. Anypony who knew her would have been rather worried by this.

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you serious? You can't be serious. Oh my me, you're serious," Nightmare Moon rambled as she examined the purple unicorn confronting her. The mare had pulled a portable turn table and speaker system from somewhere and was setting them up in the old castle's throne room. A number of ponies from the town had followed her up, and most of them seemed just as incredulous as the monarch.<p>

"Buck yeah I'm serious! You an' me, here an' now, break dance battle for the fate of Equestria!"

"If it is battle you desire," Nightmare rumbled, spreading her wings and casting her mane out in a menacing cloud. "I will grant it to you!"

"Drop it!" Vinyl called out, and her baseline counterpart took charge of the equipment. A heavy bass beat filled the ruins, shaking the ancient bricks in their mortar. Ponies backed up for a moment, worrying that the building might actually come down around them, but the structure held.

She dropped to the ground, spinning and contorting in ways that the bookworm's body wasn't used to. Seizing the music, she gathered it close, feeling the pulse and rhythm as she shaped it. She slapped one hoof to the ground to halt her spin while the other flicked out. A whip of solidified sound sang through the air and flung Nightmare Moon into the far wall.

That was when the roof started falling in.

\* \* \*

><p>"I must say," Celestia began as she surveyed the destruction. "While I'm proud of you for rescuing my sister and myself, I hadn't expected you to do it this way."<p>

The Castle of the Two Pony Sister was in ruins, significantly moreso than it had been the previous day. No pony had been hurt, with the obvious exception of the mistress of eternal night, but many appeared shaken.

"Yeeaah..." Vinyl said, rubbing at the back of her head. "I didn't really think that one through."

Celestia adopted the slightest frown as she tried to come up with an elegant way of saying 'ya think?'

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright everypony!" Vinyl called out to the gathered crowd. The citizens of Ponyville had been a bit skittish around her ever since she'd single hoofedly struck down a god and demolished a castle, but everypony had their price. The price in this case was a pair of tickets to the Grand Galloping Gala.<p>

"I've got two tickets to the Gala and no desire to go. Seeing as I don't wanna waste 'em, I thought to myself, what's the fairest way to give 'em away? There's only clear option: Dance contest." There was a general shuffling away from her at that declaration. They all remembered what had happened at the last one. "Hey, I told 'ya I don't wanna go, I'm sitin' this one out. 'Sides, this ain't about style. Endurance, last one dancin', however they dance, gets the tickets."

The crowd settled a bit at that.

"Alright," Vinyl began, raising her hoof to signal her counterpart to start the music. "Drop-"

\* \* \*

><p>"-it," Vinyl mumbled as she tumbled out of bed to land in a tangled pile of sheets. Squinting against the unfettered rays of the accursed morning sun, she wondered what had just happened. Then she shrugged, tugged her pillow off the bed, and hid her head under the sheets. It could wait 'til mid afternoon.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>(Elmagnifico)<p>

"-It?"

Ditzy Doo Awoke speaking. She really hoped this wasn't another loop in that one forest, the nice tall people with the funny hats seemed hurt when she said that word. Then she looked around.

The world was sitting still for once, unlike all the ponies, who were dancing about to some sort of music. That looked like fun, even if the music wasn't the best for dancing. She sang along anyway.

"Wub, wub, wubwubwub"

Even though the beat was simple, it was infectious. She could feel her body start to move to the beat, and since everypony else seemed to be having a good time, she began dancing along with them.

"Wubwubwub, wubbity wub-wub"

Since she could see clearly this time, the first few seconds of the dance went well.

"Wubwub, wub-wub wub-wub"

After those few seconds though, she started to let the rhythm guide her movements. To better feel the rhythm, she closed her eyes.

"Wuuuuuuuuuub, wubwubwub"

She wasn't trying to knock ponies over, honestly.

"Wub-wub-wubwubwub"

The impacts were easy to mistake for others getting jiggy with it too,

"Wub, wub, wubbity-wub"

and Ditzzy was more than happy to up the ante in response as the beat grew stronger.

"WUBWUB, WUBBITY-Weeeeeooooo"

It wasn't until the screech of a speaker getting crashed into silenced the music that she realized something was wrong.

She opened her eyes.

Practically every pony in Ponyville was scattered on the ground, in varying degrees of bruised and bemused. Big Macintosh was struggling to extract his head from one of the stereo speakers. The only ponies standing were herself and a mare she recognized as Vinyl Scratch, who was behind a deejay table. Vinyl seemed pleased, despite the damage to her equipment, applauded, and pumped a hoof in the air.

"Arrright, that was metal! But since you're the last pony dancing, I guess you get your tickets back?"

Hm, tickets?

Oh, right. Tickets.

Prompted by that magic word, the loop memories started floating to the surface in drips and drabs. How desperately everypony wanted a ticket. How she'd decided, for whatever reason, to hold a dance contest to solve the issue. And how silly it was to have participated in that same dance contest only to win the tickets back.

Ponies started picking themselves up, groaning, rubbing at sore spots, and scowling at her.

"Um, my bad?"

The apology did not seem to mollify any of the testy-looking townsfolk.

"Er, rematch?"

When that didn't seem to help either, she started edging away from the scene. She almost made it too. Rarity was nursing a black eye, but paused in her rubbing long enough to point at Ditzzy and yell.

"She's getting away!"

The chase that followed was long and convoluted. She tried to fly away, to at least narrow the pursuit down to Rainbow Dash and the other pegasi. This was prevented because her wings weren't working for some reason.

Distracted momentarily, she wasn't looking where she was going and booped her snout on a storefront. "Mirrors and Scrolls" wasn't a store she bumped into, normally, but this encounter proved enlightening.

"Oh."

The predominantly purple pony peering back at her was more than enough explanation for why flight was currently unfeasible. The sight of an angry mob behind that purple pony was what got her moving again. She took off down an alleyway, the angry shouts and thundering hooves practically on her tail.

"Alright Ditzzy, you've had a horn before. Now you just have to use it without the benefit of having an alicorn's huge magic reserve. Think, think, thinkthinkthink."

Thinking about trying to use her horn unfortunately left her navigation up to instinct. Ditzzy turned a corner and then bumped her snout on a door. A jiggle of the handle revealed it to be locked. She looked around for another escape route. The door was at the end of a dead-end alley, and before she could get out the angry herds had rounded the corner.

Trapped.

Ditzzy desperately tried to think of an escape, but wound up just using the first spell that came to mind. That the spell was Prichard's Spontaneous Pachyderm weighed little on Ms. Doo, as the doing anything seemed better than doing nothing.

A large gray creature almost as tall as the surrounding buildings sprung into existence in front of her, nearly filling the alley with impassible animal. While this barred the way to Ditzzy, it also cut her off from any obvious avenue of escape. As she racked her brains for some other way out of this, the elephant trumpeted restlessly, breaking her concentration. It was pointed away from her, so it was

probably worse for the others.

That consolation went away, though, when her ears picked up whispering.

Fluttershy.

Uh-oh.

The elephant shuffled to the side, and the angry herds filtered around it and started coming down the alley ominously.

Out of ideas, Ditzzy just closed her eyes and started whispering to herself.

"There's no place like home, there's no place like home."

She could feel a warm glow just above her head, she heard a pop, and then she was someplace else.

Upon opening her eyes though, all she saw was the door she'd been backed up against. Then Applejack's voice filtered through from the other side.

"Ah heard her say 'thar's no place like home'. She musta gone to the library!"

Then the noise of the crowd receded, accompanied by the stomp of an elephant and the sound of it trumpeting a cavalry call. Silence fell for a few seconds, as Ditzzy remained riveted to the floor, staring at the solid door between her and the alleyway. She was indoors now, so things remained quiet until she heard a voice from behind her.

"Mommy, what was all the noise?"

Ditzzy smiled, and reassured her daughter.

"Oh, just some ponies who wanted to talk. Nothing to worry about, muffin."

It took Ditzzy a second to remember why that might not have been a good thing to say. She turned around, and sure enough, she was in her house in Ponyville, by the back door. Over there in the living room were a gray mare with a blond mane and her daughter, staring at her like she was some sort of space alien.

"Um, "

To rectify the situation, she pulled something out of her subspace pocket. It was a small white box with Capsu Corp written on it in block capitals. The only other visible feature of the device was a large red button, which she promptly pushed. The thing buzzed, and then a fresh blueberry-flavored pastry sprang into being in her hoof. She held it out as a peace offering.

"-muffin?"

The next day, Ditzzy was relaxing in the library. The whole situation had just needed a letter to the princess, vigorous use of the muffin

button, and a loofah to sort out, and now she was friends with most of Ponyville again. Or at least, those whose loyalties could be bought with pastry, so mostly just her unawake self, Dinky, and Pinkie Pie. The rest of the town had at least decided to leave her alone after getting the tickets, although Applejack, Rarity and Fluttershy had each since come by to apologize for imposing like they had. She honestly didn't mind, but there was a niggling feeling she'd forgotten somepony...

It was at this moment that Rainbow Dash was sent careening through the upstairs window, to impact the south wall and slide down it, squeakily. Ditzzy rushed over, but Rainbow didn't seem injured. She simply muttered,

"Applejack, I just don't know what went wrong."

and then slumped on the floor.

Before Ditzzy could move to help, she Awoke in the middle of her route, hauling the mail towards Sugar Cube Corner, but the sudden shift from examining somepony and using magic to holding something heavy and flying sent her off-balance, tumbling into Quills and Mattresses. Blowing a stray feather off her nose, she waved to the store's owner.

"Sorry!"

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

Lyra blinked a bit as she Awoke, trying to determine exactly where she was.

\_Okay, we've got ourselves a horn,\_ Classic mused. \_By body shape, we're definitely an equestrian unicorn-\_

\_I don't recall ever starting a loop this fit,\_ Seapony commented.

\_Hey!\_ shouted a blushing Human. \_Are you calling us fat?!\_

\_We \_\_generally\_\_ live with a candymaker and practice bipedal locomotion,\_ Robo Science Thief pointed out. \_Being slightly out of shape is the norm-\_

\_...\_

The whole council froze at Sweet Roll's comment, focusing their gaze on the blue pegasus slumped against a bookshelf. Ah, Ponyville library, that made sense-! She filtered through her memories quickly â€" there were, oddly enough, not nearly as many as she got in a usual loop â€" and let out a sigh. "She's overworking herself in the orchards?"

Rainbow Dash looked up at Lyra and shrugged. "I don't know Twi, but it wouldn't surprise me. She definitely had her mind on other..."

\_HOLY HOLLY WE'RE TWILIGHT SPARKLE!\_ The miscellaneous Lyra jumped

onto the mental table. \_I call dibs, I call dibs!\_

\_Uh... what?\_

\_Part mad scientist, remember? Think of what we can do with all this  
\_\_power...\_

"...uh, Twi?" Rainbow gave her an odd look. "Why are you laughing like that?"

"Um, like what?"

"Like you just came up with an idea to destroy reality?"

"What-?! Rainbow Dash, I would never destroy reality again! I learned my lesson last time. No, I just thought of a few experiments, that's all."

The pegasus blinked. "...Last time?"

"Long story, lots of technobabble, but things were fixed quick enough. Anyway, why don't you go try to force your help on AJ?" Lyra Sparkle grinned toothily. "Or you could stay here and help \_me.\_ Your choice."

Something deep and primal in the pegasus made her back away slowly. "I... think you've got a handle on the egghead stuff, Twi. I'll just... go... check on AJ." She bumped into the front door, opened it with a wing, and gave the unicorn a nervous smile. "You just do your thing and... yeah. I'm... going... to be awesome... somewhere else!"

She darted out of the library as though Tirek himself was on her tail.

\_Overplaying it, don't you think?\_

\_Oh come on, Human, let me have my fun! And anyway, this loop's Twilight is crazy already, she wubbed for the gala tickets and then gave more than enough away to Ponyville.\_ The unicorn shrugged to herself, headed down to her basement. "Spike! If anyone asks, I'm running dangerous experiments underground!"

\* \* \*

><p>"TWILIGHT!" Rarity galloped down the stairs. "Oh it's simply horrible! Half of ponyville is suffering from food poisoning and... what are you doing?"<p>

"Oh, don't mind the latticework, it's only stage four." The unicorn turned away from the strange red pattern and set down her crooked, glowing... whatever. "Anywho, as for the food poisoning, tell the doctors to look into the effects of an insectivorous diet on equestrian physiology. I'm sure that will sort things all out."

"Ah... yes, um... qu-quite." Rarity backed away from Twilight's big grin. "Do... come out and check on us when you're done, dear."

"Will do!" Twilight turned back to her work, humming to herself. "The

ganglions connected to the... dendrites, the dendrites connected to the... neurons, the neurons connected to the... everything, oh what a wonder it will beeeeeeeee..."

\* \* \*

><p>The library door burst open. "TWILIGHT! You've got to..." Spike tilted his head. "Are... you welding hinge joint pistons to the wall?"<p>

"Well, technically they're just casings, I'll install the organic circuitry and actual mechanics later-"

"Never mind that! We need you to stop a stampede of bunnies!"

"Heh, bunny stampede... right. Hmm. I... have no idea, actually." She waved the dragon off. "I'm sorry, I'm almost done here. Could you see if, I don't know, Pinkie might be able to help?"

"But... but... you're..."

Twilight sighed. "Fine. Five minutes." She teleported out of the library.

\* \* \*

><p>"I don't know about you, darling, but I think Twilight has been... rather distracted recently."<p>

Rainbow shrugged as she rushed through another apple tree. "That unicorn has always been a bit off. You remember how she won her own contest?" She came in for a landing. "I think she'd lose her head if it wasn't screwed on."

Rarity levitated the apples into a basket. "Still... the way she just blew off the whole situation with Applejack seemed rather... Well... unlike her, for lack of a better phrase. I'm still not sure what she was even trying to do, but-"

"OH MY GOSH YOU GUYS THE LIBRARY'S COMING!"

The two ponies gave Pinkie a look. Rarity took the initiative. "Er... what do you mean?"

"I mean, it's walking down the road right now!"

"I... what?" Dash blinked. "That doesn't make any sense-!"

The Ponyville library stepped into the orchard, and Twilight stepped out onto the balcony. "Hello there! I heard you needed help harvesting!"

For a moment, nopony said anything.

Then Twilight coughed. "Er, this is going to sound weird, but... why is the library in Sweet Apple Acres?"

"You, ah... you just drove it here darling."

"Yes. Right. Makes sense." Twilight nodded to herself. "I'll be..."



down in a second..." She stepped into the library quietly.

Rarity and Rainbow shared a look.

\* \* \*

><p>123.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>(Kris Overstreet)<p>

".. and you should be proud, my little ponies, for operating such a successful and well-run business!"

The managers and employees of the Manehattan Metropolitan Cake and Pastry Works bowed deeply once again, thanking Princess Celestia for her gracious words.

Luna, standing off to one side, looked much less gracious, but she managed, "Yes, thank you for your hospitality. I wish we could remain longer, but royal affairs are pressing. Shall we go, sister?"

Once outside, Celestia turned to Luna and said, "So, how much cake did I eat?"

Luna's ears drooped. "Not a bite."

"Told you I could do it," Celestia grinned. "Pay up."

Luna levitated a bag of tea to Celestia. "Mikuru Asahina's special blend," she sighed. "You would not believe how much trading it took to get that..."

"Twilight and I will think of your sacrifice as we drink it," Celestia grinned. "Now, I believe the cheese shop is next on the itinerary, is it not?"

\* \* \*

><p>123.5 (Pinklestia)<p>

"Okay... I know I been whining for ages about wanting a different cutie mark, but waking up with a different one is not the same that earning it." Twilight Sparkle was a pony named Sparking Apple for this loop. Her cutie mark was a zap apple, apparently she had won it after finding new magical uses for them. They had sent her to study to Canterlot and she had become princess Celestia's personal student after hatching a dragon egg, only it had been a year later than at baseline. Sadly, only she and her five friends were awake.

"Hey Sparkling , don't worry! There are things I can't do too." Pinkie Pie was Pinkamena Diana Apple, also known as Pinkie Di or just Pinkie, Her cutie mark was an apple birthday cake. She had got it after baking an apple cake and making a surprise party for her pet Gummy the rock frog.

"I am a tad ashamed to admit it, but I have been waiting for the six of us to be awake in a loop like this." Applejack was... well, no real change for her this loop, besides having the rest of her friends

as relatives.

"Oh, I get to be the older sister? I admit I am not used to being this big, but it gives me the chance to try making different dresses." Rarity actually was Applejack's older sister this loop, she had got her name because it was a 'rarity' for a unicorn to be born in an Earth pony family. Also, she was almost as tall as Big Mac. Due to money problems, she had gone to stay with some relatives that did rock farming, where she found her talent was related to gems. That's how she got three apples shaped diamonds as cutie mark. Instead of a dressmaker, she was a jeweler.

"Uh... I feel strangely comfortable this loop." Fluttershy was Shy Apple, a distant relative of the Apple family that lived in the Everfree and was the Royal forest ranger. She had got an apple shield cutie mark after saving her sister Rainbow from a Manticore. The reason Fluttershy felt comfortable was because this loop she was way more confident in herself than at baseline. Yet she was still shy and had trouble meeting new ponies. Her cutie mark meant that she was a protector, not just of ponies, but also of animals (And monsters). And yes, she was still a Pegasus.

"Eh... at least my name isn't zap apple." Rainbow Dash was Rainbow Apple, named that way because there was already a pony named Zap Apple in the Apple family, and because Zap was a guy's name. She still had the same cutie mark, since she might or not be adopted this loop.

"Well family, is time to prepare the baked goods, the summer sun celebration will be tomorrow!" Applejack said in a cheerful tone, she couldn't wait to see non awake princess Celestia's face when she found out all the element bearers were part of the same family!

\* \* \*

<p>123.6 (zeusdemigod131)<p>

For Discord, his Awakenings weren't usually pleasant. Half the time, he Awoke as a statue, less often, he'd Awaken just before getting hit with the Elements for the first time.

So waking up encased in amber, while unusual, wasn't that startling. "\_Well, this won't do." \_

Exerting a bit of his power, Discord melted the amber back into tree sap. Looking down at his body, he saw that he was more of a skeleton than usual, and was wearing tattered green and grey robes.

"Ew." Snapping his fingers, Discord returned himself to his normal resplendently chaotic form.

Discord tapped his foot as he waited for his Loop memories to set in, after a moment, he remembered that he was Discord, terror of the Land of Ooo, sewer of Chaos. Apparently, he had tried to make the population of a post apocalyptic world as chaotic as he was.

"Seems like I did a good enough job," The Draconequus mused, looking out over a kingdom made of chocolate and gumdrops. "And some villains complain that Equestria's a sugar bowl."

Chuckling to himself, Discord flew over the city, and into the castle that seemed to have been built around a large tree. "Reminds me of that tacky crystal palace Twilight keeps getting stuck with," Discord peeled off some of the wallpaper and ate it. "Though the walls aren't usually made of taffy."

"What the lump are you doing here?!"

Discord whirled around and found himself looking down at a rather pink human with some kind of weapon in her hand.

"You have three seconds to tell me why I shouldn't blast you into atoms." The pink woman said in practically a growl.

Discord eyed the weapon again. "Are you going to threatening to shoot me with a tennis ball?"

"My Ball Blam Burglerber can blow you to-"

\_snap\_

The weapon was suddenly replaced with a golden scepter with Twilight's head on it. "It's gold wrapped chocolate." Discord said with a grin.

Throwing the scepter to the ground, the woman pulled a pair of pink gauntlets from seemingly thin air. "Alright, now talk." The gauntlets glowed blue with an electric charge.

Discord tapped his chin. "By any chance, do you know what the phrase 'I'm Looping, so calm the heck down' means?"

Groaning, the woman dropped her gauntlets back in her Pocket. "Should have figured when you weren't the Lich," She sighed and raised her arms. "I'm Princess Bubblegum, now get the heck outta my kingdom!"

"Oh come now Princess," Discord said. "We haven't even gotten to know each other yet."

Princess Bubblegum shook her head. "Nope, you wanna do something? Talk to Finn or Marceline, I don't want anymore shenanigans in the Candy Kingdom than usual."

Discord frowned, he'd met beings like this before, though they weren't usually Loopers. "Are you sure?" Discord asked. "You seem like the learning type, wouldn't you like to see some chaos magic at work?"

"Pfff, magic," Bubblegum waved him off. "All magic is science, people like you just call it that because you don't mphmffhmph."

Bubblegum grasped at her face and found her mouth had been buttoned shut.

"See? Magic." Discord said.

Bubblegum rolled her eyes and unbuttoned her lips. "You transmuting part of my mouth doesn't prove anything."

Discord snapped his fingers again and the Princesses hairdo was remolded into a bird nest, complete with living birds made of chocolate. "How about now?" Discord asked.

Bubblegum shook her head, causing the chocolate birds to take flight. "Teleportation, and I rule a kingdom of living candy, you'll have try harder than that."

Discord glared at the Princess. "Okay," He said, stretching out his arms and cracking his knuckles. "Not like I can do much more damage to this world anyway."

\* \* \*

><p>A few hours later, and not far from the Candy Kingdom, a boy, a dog, and a vampire queen were making their way through what looked like a mixture of Wonderland, a Random Loot Loop, a three your old's finger painting, and a mad science lab.<p>

"Marceline?" Finn asked. "What exactly happened here?"

The vampire queen shrugged. "I was going to check in on Bonnibel, just to see if she was Awake, and I saw... this." She gestured to what might have been a tree at one point, but now looked more like a didgeridoo.

"You think PB is playing crazy scientist this time?" Jake asked.

"I don't think so," Finn sidestepped to avoid some kind of banjo/turtle. "This really isn't PB's thing."

"Admit it Princess!"

"Never! You're just randomly reshaping and combining objects molecular and genetic structure! It's a simple application of an entanglement field!"

"I'll tangle your field!"

As if on command, the ground twisted and corkscrewed until it looked like a gnarled tree root.

"You think Bonny pissed off another magic user?" Marceline asked.

"Taste Yak cannon!"

Hearing an explosion, followed by a loud moo, the three of them ran over the twisted ground and over a rather large lump, they spotted Bubblegum, on the back of a rather large swan, holding some kind of laser weapon, aiming it at a structure made of steel squirrel statues.

"Discord!" Bubblegum shouted. "Stop messing up my Kingdom!"

"We're not in your kingdom!" Discord called back, peeking over the edge of his shelter. "Now, how about I shed a little light on our situation."

With a snap of his fingers, the ground, and everything else nearby,

lit up like a light bulb.

Marceline hissed, despite how long she'd been Looping, she was still sensitive to bright light.

"Should we... do something?" Finn asked.

"Well," Marceline said, rubbing her exposed skin with SPF 5000. "This guy seems kinda-"

"Turn off that light!"

"With pleasure!"

The bright light was suddenly replaced with utter darkness, it took a moment it realize the sun, moon, and stars weren't shining either.

"Powerful?" Jake supplied.

"I was going to say nuts," Marceline replied.

"Hah! Jokes on you! I invented a nuclear powered flashlight!"

"Big whoop, Twilight once made a fondue maker that ran off the Element of Magic!"

"Grah!"

A bright red light lit up the darkness, it was followed by an explosion.

"...Missed me!"

There was another explosion.

"Try again!"

And another. "You've exceeded your maximum number of tries."

Large red letters flashed above everyone, spelling out the words.  
"GAME OVER!"

"You wanna... go see if the Ice King is Awake?" Finn supplied.

"Sounds like a plan."

\* \* \*

><p>123.7 (Novusordomundi)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis ate a cookie.<p>

It was really just a simple action. Put the cookie inside your mouth, chew it up, swallow. Simple actions that can lead to enjoyment. However, as Twilight Sparkle watched, she could tell that the Changeling Queen was enjoying the dessert more than most beings

could, especially with a very contented sigh escaping her lips and a slight blush creeping onto her cheeks.

After a moment, Twilight broke the silence. "That must have been some cookie. What kind was it?"

Chrysalis had to think about that for a couple seconds. "I think the best way to describe it would be a 'love cookie'." The puzzlement on Twilight's face was obvious, so she continued. "For the most part, it's just a plain sugar cookie. However, there is a special ingredient baked inside of them that, for the most part, only I could taste."

"Ah, it's love!" Twilight exclaimed, before adding. "It must be Trixie's love, isn't it?"

A nod. "She'd wanted me to have it for when she wasn't Awake. Goofy helped get some of her love for me into liquid form, and Pinkie Pie helped her bake the cookies. " A small smile crept onto Chrysalis' face. "It's just one of those little things we do for each other."

\* \* \*

><p>123.8 (Novusordomundi)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle walked in her ebony black Jimmy Choo's, her purple and pink Hot-Topic bought clothing and dark-as-night Gucci purse accenting her, as she walked towards her friend Rarity, dressed only in a purple strapless dress from Carousel Boutique clothing, the only brand worth wearing in her mind.<p>

Rarity sipped gently from her Aquafine bottle of water, while holding her leftovers from P.F. Chang's. She almost immediately noticed that Pinkie Pie was riding towards her on her gray Huffy Bike, being peddled by her Nike-clad feet, her Haus of Gaga clothing not inhibiting her, as she swayed her pink hair, washed in L'oreal (because she was worth it) and flowing freely, while in her hand was her Lisa Frank notebook.

Following her was Rainbow Dash, grinding a nearby rail with her Birdhouse skateboard, her Vans shoes, her Levi's shorts and No Fear tank top hugging her as she kickflipped off the grind.

Trailing them was Applejack, walking along with a crisp Sweet Apple Acres apple being tossed and caught, her Faded Glory denim jeans and American Eagle shirt showing her no-nonsense-ness.

And finally, Twilight could see Fluttershy, in a hand-knitted yellow sweater, her Dockers and store-brand flip-flops completing her ensemble as she carried her animal treats, bought from Petco, walk up beside her.

Twilight sighed, noting that in this Loop, everyone had to know where anything had to have been either created or bought, in extreme detail. She even knew that this Loop was sponsored by McDonalds, but that didn't mean she had to love it...

\* \* \*

><p>123.9 (DrTempo)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Ever since the whole 'Battle of the Bands' expansion, Twilight had to admit that baseline Sunset was a lot like the Awake version personality-wise. It just showed that Sunset was a better person now. Speaking of Sunset, she was smirking as the Dazzlings held up what looked like a...<br>Guitar pick?

As they bragged on how this would make them music powerhouses, Twilight thought she'd seen this before. 'Now why is this...familiar?"

Suddenly, the guitar picks flew towards Sunset, and in a burst of flame, she assumed her demon form. Before Twilight could react, Sunset roared,

\_I AM COMPLETE!\_

The Dazzlings had only one thing to say as they saw the imposing figure, running away from the monster.  
><em>Buuuuuuuck!<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Sunset smirked, slowly walking towards the trio, and laughed.<br>\_YES, YOU ARE BUCKED! SO OUT OF LUCK!\_  
><em>NOW I'M COMPLETE, AND YOU HAD BETTER DUCK!<em>  
><em>THIS WORLD WILL BE MINE, AND YOU'RE FIRST IN LINE! YOU BROUGHT ME THE PICK, AND NOW YOU SHALL ALL DIE!<em>

As the song continued, Twilight groaned as she put two and two together. 'Sunset's Awake...and doing an encore of that prank she did with the Mirror Pool.

Kinda fits, actually...'

\* \* \*

><p>123.10 (Bardic\_Knowledge)<p>

"Twilight?"

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Why is, ah, 'Speed Force' avoiding Sweet Apple Acres?"

"We're not entirely sure why, but he keeps falling through the ground over there."

"Oh, that's right. Apple doesn't support Flash. I forgot that for a moment."

\* \* \*

><p>123.11 (fractalman)<p>

"Oh yeah, blank flank? What can you do? Grow plants? Oh wait, you

can't even do that, let alone fly or do magic!"

"Yeah, well, well...well at least ah'm not a jerk like you, Tiara!"

Later that day...

Applebloom felt miserable. She briefly wondered if she was supposed to feel miserable quite so soon, but the strange thought wasn't enough to distract her out of her depression.

She kicked a pebble at a tree. "Diamond Tiara's right...ah can't buck apples, ah can't sell apples, ah can't fly or do magic-"

Twilight overheard. "Well, actually, there's a version of magic that even earth ponies can use-"

"Teach me teach me teachmeteachmeteachme-"

Twilight's resistance to teaching a crusader anything dangerous crumbled before it could remember it existed. "Ok ok! Uh, meet me at the library every, um, Tuesday evening?"

"YAY!"

\* \* \*

><p>Usually, Twilight was careful about things like sleep deprivation: if sleep deprived, either cast a spell to not <em>need</em> the sleep, or else go to bed. But in the context of the loops, sooner or later she was going to make a mistake...like when designing a better memory-aid spell based loosely upon her "want it need it" spell at the behest of the looping Big Mac. The basic premise was simple enough: if you were interested in something, it was easier to remember things about it.

It was noon, \_Tuesday\_, when she passed out.

Applebloom nudged Twilight. Then all but kicked her. Then yelled in her ear. Twilight barely even stirred.

"Aww, I guess ah won't get my magic lesson...oh look! She left a spell for me to try on her desk!"

\* \* \*

><p>123.12 (fractalman)<p>

Winter in Sugarbowlquestria was brought about by grinding up plain sugar into a fine powder, mixing in some pegasus magic to make it extra soft, and blowing it across the land.

"Don't forget to drink some hot cocoa" said Twilight to Spike. "You don't want to get too dehydrated."

While the lungs of the sugar ponies were more than capable of absorbing the copious quantities of sugar in the air without choking, solid/liquid imbalance was possible, if uncommon.

Five minutes later, Twilight felt she'd had enough of watching



Spike's antics from the sidelines, and joined in the fun, leaping and rolling about in the curious substance-which was somewhere between snow and clouds-like a filly.

\* \* \*

><p>Dear Twilight<p>

How would you like to raise the Light Switch on the wall tomorrow?

\* \* \*

><p>Dear Celestia<p>

Sure!

\* \* \*

><p>123.13 (banjo2E)<p>

Twilight Sparkle Awoke reading a book.

>This wasn't an unusual event,<br>but she could swear that something was amiss.

>It did not take long for her to decide<br>that reading the book would provide a base

>of knowledge from which to proceed further.<br>With that in mind, she turned to chapter one

>and started to read.<p>

\_Once upon a time\_

><em>in the magical land, Equestria,<em>

><em>two regal sisters ruled in harmony.<em>

><em>The elder sister raised the sun at dawn;<em>

><em>the younger, likewise, with the moon at dusk.<em>

><em>Thus did the sisters maintain their kingdom<em>

><em>and safeguard their subjects, the pony folk.<em>

\_But as the years went on, the younger mare\_

><em>became resentful of her sister's rule.<em>

><em>The ponies loved her sister and the day,<em>

><em>but shunned her and slept through the beauteous night.<em>

><em>These thoughts culminated one fateful morn,<em>

><em>when she refused to lower the moon at dawn.<em>

><em>The elder sister tried diplomacy,<em>

><em>but the younger's bitterness had transformed<em>

><em>her into the monstrous mare, Nightmare Moon.<em>

\_The Nightmare vowed to dethrone the sun mare\_

><em>and shroud the land in never-ending night.<em>

><em>Thus was her sister forced to call upon<em>

><em>the most powerful magic ponies know:<em>

><em>The sacred Elements of Harmony.<em>

\_The Elements defeated Nightmare Moon\_

><em>and locked her in the moon forevermore.<em>

><em>The sun mare took responsibility<em>

><em>for both the sun's and moon's heavenly paths,<em>

><em>and harmony has been maintained within<em>

><em>Equestria for generations since.<em>

Twilight Sparkle finished reading the page,  
>blinked, read it again, then brought hoof to face.<br>She closed the  
book and pondered for a time,  
>then shrugged, saying "At least it doesn't rhyme."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>123.14 (fractalman)<p>

"Rarity! What in Equus and Yggdrasil are you doing with that  
shoggoth!" demanded the Looping Twilight.

"Eh? Well, this here ugly poodle just needs itsself a hair cut, then  
it can help shniff down mah wee namblies!" replied Old Mare  
Rarity.

"Umâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>A few minutes earlier:<p>

Old mare Fluttershy always helped creatures in need. In the case of a  
stray shoggoth, that meant flying up and shooting a half dozen arrows  
into it until it collapsed into a pile of bliss.

"Ya really shoulda come to me earliah for some acupuncture, those  
knots of space time defects coulda been worked out of your  
mesculature much mar eashily."

The shoggoth just grinned and enjoyed the attention.

\* \* \*

><p>Sleipnir turned to the side and yelled. "Coyote! Did you mess  
with with my copy of the Old Man Henderson anti-virus program  
again?"<p>

"No!" replied Coyote. "Why do you ask?"

"Because 'Old mare Pinkie Pie' is teaching a shoggoth how to throw  
parties. With C4 powered party cannons."

"..." said Coyote.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

123.1: Dark lord of Derkholm and Year of the Griffin. A sadly  
truncated series by Diana Wynne Jones. These three loopers are all  
siblings, biologically - no matter two of them have feathers.

>123.2: It's not a subject that we go into much, because frankly this  
kind of thing would read like legal boilerplate if it turned up  
everywhere. But the Equestrians do put in a lot of effort on this  
front.<br>123.3: Ever heard of those forum games where each person  
takes a turn?

>123.4: Piece of cake.<br>123.5: Family business: Elementing. And

Apples.

>123.6: Discord gotta Disc.<br>123.7: There are two kinds of love. The kind which comes on in a great rush, and the kind which builds gradually. Both are tasty.

>123.8: This loop brought to you by The Internet. Editing done by some bloke on the internet.<br>123.9: So many songs, so much time.

>123.10: This pony has unexpectedly crashed.<br>123.11: Trouble brewing.

>123.12: Pinkie Pie has been taking notes.<br>123.13: A different kind of 'verse to usual.

>123.14: Old Man this.<p>

## 130. Chapter 130

### 124.1 The Great Elevator Saga:

(Gamerex27)

Another century, another Lonely Loop, Twilight thought glumly.

It had been her first one in a while, too: recently, she had a windfall of Fused Loops lately: aside from her horrific visit to the God Emperor of Mankind, they had gone well (although Awake Fluttershy muttered something about a "poor kid" when they Element-blasted a Bureau-Celestia last decade).

She'd been trying to keep things baseline for a while: for the most part, it was successful. She'd just reached the point where Fluttershy had redeemed Discord, and the Element-bearers decided to celebrate with a sleepover at Rainbow Dash's apartment. This looked like a slight variant: instead of medieval technology supplemented by magic, this Equestria Variant ran off of nuclear-level technology and magic. Twilight was still annoyed that those crystal ball phones/computers were all the rage in this Loop, yet when she tried to make her own, one simple spam e-mail ruined the whole network.

"What floor did you say you were on, dear?" Rarity asked, looking up at the tower that was about the size of Mount Everest.

"Seven hundred. Don't worry, that elevator goes really fast," replied Dash. "Not as fast as me, but not bad, anyways."

A few minutes later, they had all piled into a surprisingly roomy elevator car. The doors closed in front of them, and only then did Twilight notice something very distressing.

"Uh, girls?" Twilight said, pointing at the buttons with her forehoof. "We've got a problem."

"What's-oh, ponyfeathers," Rainbow Dash swore, facehoofing. "Some jerk had to push every single bucking button for every single floor!\_"

"Can't y'all just teleport us out?" Applejack asked, nervously glancing around the car.

"They installed some kind of anti-magic field around the system.

Safety measures, to stop any impatient unicorns from being crushed if they make a mistake teleporting," Dash groaned. "Safety measures, my flank."

"Don't worry!" Pinkie said, bouncing over to the buttons. "We'll just have to wait until we get to the top! Hm...the doors open for 30 seconds for every floor, and we're on floor two right now, meaning we'll get there in about..." Pinkie's ever-present smile faltered for a moment. "...6 hours."

"6 hours? SIX HOURS?!" Rarity groaned. "We're stuck in an elevator car for six hours?!"

"Well, we ain't gonna starve in here," Applejack noted. "Ah've got the snacks for the party in mah saddlebag, so we won't get hungry. Though, we'll probably be too tired when we get to Dashie's apartment to party..."

"The elevator is big enough to put the sleeping bags down..just barely, though," Fluttershy added in her usual whisper. "Should...should we just have the party in here?"

"YAY! Elevator slumber party!" Pinkie pulled a party popper from out of nowhere, then pulled the string, sending streamers all over the cart.

"Let's just hope that nopony needs to actually USE this elevator until we get there," Rainbow Dash grumbled. "Here's floor number three."

But instead of a hallway, the ponies saw something strange on the other end. Rather than a small space with a few chairs, the doors opened to Princess Celestia's sitting on her throne.

"Twilight? What are you doing here?" the bemused alicorn asked. "And where are you?"

"Stuck in a magically sealed elevator for six hours," Twilight replied. "I don't suppose you could help us?"

Celestia's horn glowed for some five seconds, and then faded. "This...this is the most powerful enchantment I have ever seen. Stronger than anything Discord or even Sombra could pull off."

"So...no go, then?" While Twilight could easily bypass the security measures with her obscene magic power, she didn't want to leave her Unawake friends behind, since they likely wouldn't be able to follow.

"I'm afraid you are on your own," Celestia said sadly. "On the bright side, this should make for a fantastic friendship report when you-"

The doors slid shut, cutting Celestia off mid sentence.

"Not even the Princess can help us?!" Rarity gasped. "And how did that elevator get to her throne room, anyways?"

"I think the enchantment is acting up again," Rainbow Dash replied.

"Last week, I took the elevator up after a flying contest, but it stopped on floor 666 to let somepony else on. When we got to floor 699, it opened to a pair of minotaurs..." the Element of Loyalty coughed. "Anyways, at least it won't be boring."

The doors opened to floor four, revealing what looked like a fusion between a giant pony and a minotaur in the shower.

"We're running in the shadows of the niiiight! So baby, take my hand, we'll be alright!" he sang. "Surrender all your magic to me, tonight! They'll come-"

He turned around to reach for the soap, and came face to face with six ponies staring at him through a pair of doors that came out of nowhere.

And then all seven of them started screaming.

"DO YOU LITTLE PONIES HAVE ANY CONCEPT OF \_PRIVACY\_?! GET OUT! \_NOW!" \_Tirek shrieked. He tried to fire a bolt of lightning at them from his hand, but it dissolved against the elevator's invisible barrier. Mercifully, the laws of equine biology meant that the ponies didn't see anything particularly scarring, but this kind of situation was never pleasant for anyone.

After a full twenty seconds of Tirek flinging spell after spell at them, and the Unawake Elements panicking, the doors mercifully slid shut once more.

"Great," Rainbow Dash groaned, "now I'll see that in my nightmares for weeks. What next? Getting stuck in the Scariest Cave in Equestria?"

Fortunately, floor 6 seemed to be normal. There was a small hallway, with a few chairs and a mirror on the opposite wall. A repairpony with a saddlebag full of power tools awaited them, and cleared his throat.

"Hi, folks. You might have seen that the elevator system is acting up again. Looks like space-time is bending around it like taffy...fourth time this week."

Before Twilight could complain about how the magicians maintaining this enchantment must be totally incompetent, the stallion continued. "It's dividing where it should be multiplying time. What floor are y'all headed too?"

"Um...floor 700?" Fluttershy chimed in.

The repairpony winced. "Ah. Then, you'll be there in about...23 hours, give or take."

"23 HOURS?!" Rarity's eyes practically popped out of her skull, and she gasped dramatically. "We're stuck on this elevator for an ENTIRE DAY?!"

"Fraid so, folks. If it helps, we'll give you rent off for the month, miss Dash."

The elevator doors slid shut, and Rainbow Dash facehoofed again.

"Argh. Next chance I get, I'm moving out of this place. Between this, the ice machines shooting out fire cubes instead of ice, and the showers with acid instead of water, I can't take this anymore."

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27)<p>

FLOOR 7:

Already hungry, Pinkie Pie had popped open the bag of marshmallows Applejack had brought. "Anypony have a microwave? No?"

The doors dinged, and opened to reveal a room totally on fire.

"Uh, can you two unicorns still use water spells? I don't want to be roasted pony," Rainbow Dash said nervously.

"Everything except teleportation and dimensional travel works, for the most part," said Twilight, "but the elevator is made of metal, so as long as we don't cross over the doors, we should be fine."

From behind a desk, a familiar blue unicorn popped up, her mane completely ablaze. "The Great and Powerful Trixie...needs to get out of here before she suffocates to death."

With that, she trotted into the elevator, giving Twilight a quick glance of disdain before turning to the buttons.

"Trixie admits, she might have gone too far this time," she said to no one in particular. "I was testing out a new smoke spell for a show in Manehattan, and, well, things got out of hoof. Maybe I'll do some sleight of hoof next show. Less dangerous. I can't put the fire out, but I don't think it hurts-"

She looked up to see Pinkie Pie holding a marshmallow above her burning mane, giggling as it turned a perfect shade of golden-brown.

"That will be twenty bits per s'more," Trixie warned her. "Trixie doesn't do this marshmallow trick often...or ever...so she'll have to charge ten bits extra."

If Pinkie Pie could hear her, she didn't show any signs of it, and soon had a good stockpile of s'more for the whole elevator to enjoy.

FLOOR 9:

The doors opened to reveal an empty elevator.

"Okay, no." Twilight narrowed her eyes. "Magical glitch or not, there is no way any construction ponies or architects would design a system like this!"

"It is getting a bit cramped in here, darling," Rarity said. "I say that we shouldn't look a gift bunny in the mouth, and head in there. Maybe the buttons there work properly?"

"Ah'm tryin," Applejack grumbled, "but Ah can't get through." Sure

enough, any of her attempts to get through the door were repelled, as if she was trying to walk through a solid brick wall.

FLOOR 12:

The doors opened to reveal seven suspiciously familiar humans.

"Um..." the two Fluttershies, human and pony alike, stepped forwards, staring at one another through the barrier, and blushed.

"Great," the other Twilight said. "Fourth parallel universe in ten floors. Can't we get that library floor again?"

"Depends. Are you stuck in an elevator for a whole day too?" Rainbow Dash deadpanned, her wings flapping in annoyance.

"Hey, cool! That other me can fly!" The bipedal Rainbow Dash grabbed her cell phone, snapping a picture of her counterpart. "Even in another world, I'm still awesome!"

"Have you girls thought of any way out?" Pony Twilight asked.

"There's a call and emergency button on our end," her human self replied, "but they're both broken. I think it'll be hard to stay Awake for the full hours, so you should probably sleep in shifts, in case you find a way off."

As the other ponies nodded, Twilight caught the emphasis on one particular word. Mikasa Glitch?, she asked with a private telepathy spell.

Mikasa Glitch, the other Twilight confirmed. Watch out for the floor with the Luteces. They'll drive you crazy repeating themselves unless you agree to the coin flip.

\* \* \*

><p>(<p>

OracleMask)

FLOOR 14:

The doors opened to reveal a wide-open field. There were several smoldering craters and smoking suspiciously body-shaped objects scattered around.

"Now this is getting a mite ridiculous," Applejack complained, trying to shove her hoof through the invisible barrier keeping them in the elevator.

Suddenly a large male humanoid figure landed in front of the elevator doors.

"Ooh! A shiny Rapidash! I'm gonna catch it!"

"What are you - OW!" Trixie squealed in pain as the Pokeball bounced off her head.

"Aw, it didn't work. Guess I need to damage it first."

Twilight pounded the close door button frantically with both hooves. She did NOT want to find out if this elevator was resistant to ki-attacks.

\* \* \*

><p>(Dalexin)<p>

FLOOR 20:

"Oh Blueblood, I love you! \*smooching noises\*"

"And I you, my flower! \*more smooching noises\*"

"My husband must never know of our illicit rendezvous!"

"Worry not, dear Fleur-de-Lis~"

At this, Applejack had had enough, and cleared her throat.

Princess Cadence and Shining Armor, both holding a small equine doll, looked up to see Twilight with her mouth agape, surrounded by her friends.

"...her idea." Was Shining's pitiful excuse for his involvement, while Cadence just waved as the door shut.

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27)<p>

FLOOR 36:

As the elevator neared the next floor, the ponies could hear voices loudly arguing.

"-all I'm saying is that you probably should have asked what those guys were doing before you attacked them!"

"It's not like I was in control at the time: it was the demon!"

"You can't-hee blame everything on your split personality, ho! I mean, they had enough problems with cannibalism-hee, did we really need to beat the crap out of them, ho?"

"Look, Hee-Ho, I know you just started Looping, but-"

The doors opened. On the other side, the ponies saw a small humanoid fairy dressed in blue, what looked like a walking snowman made of black ice and wearing jesters' clothing, and a young human boy covered in glowing tattoos, with a horn jutting out of his neck.

"-they're from our mega-Branch, too, so they need to know how to fight the big-" At this, the young man turned his gaze from his companions to the ponies. His face took on a blank expression.



"Oh. You guys."

"Um...do we know you?" Fluttershy asked, shrinking into her wings for comfort.

"...Right, you're not Awake, Yellow. Then I'll just leave you be and-"

The fairy elbowed him in the ribs with enough force to smash through a steel vault. "Hey, you promised to apologize to her when you saw her after you fixed your problem. That goes if she's Awake or not!"

Sighing, Naoki Kashima rubbed the back of his neck with his hand, not meeting the ponies' gazes. "Fine...Look, Yel-Fluttershy...I'm..." he hesitated, as if he could not decide what to say next. "Sorry for what I did, back when I saw you last time. I was in a bad place after...well, that, and I..." He finally chose to meet Fluttershy's gaze. "Guess I really am like the Old Man. Pride, and all. Can't even spit it out."

As the doors closed, the mysterious young man said one final thing. "When-if I see you again, Awake...then we can talk. We're going down, anyways."

Then, save the humming of the elevator as it ascended, there was silence. Then, Rainbow Dash said what was on all of their minds.

"What the hay was all that about?"

\* \* \*

><p>(Crisis)<p>

FLOOR 42:

"Floor 42," a typical department store style recording chimed cheerfully, "where you can find great deals on life, the universe, and everything."

\* \* \*

><p>(Wing Zero 032)<p>

FLOOR 44

As the Elevator's door opened, Twilight Sparkle noticed something wrong, very wrong.

At the borders of the edges of the elevator doors there were stuck three huge blocks of C-4 about 1Kg each accompanied by also three S.L.A.M.'s mines and claymores, quickly looking around to her and her unawake friends' surprise and horror, a group of human soldiers, weapons aiming at them and not bothering to consider if the concentrated fire power of assault rifles, carbines, D.M.R.'s, shotguns, light machine guns, P.D.W.'s, sniper rifles and R.P.G.'s to a small place such as an Elevator would be pretty much overkill were already awaiting for them.

By all rights they should have died that moment had it not been for something completely unexpected: Right before anyone would pull the trigger on any weapon by reflex at the chime of the Elevator's bell, suddenly a transport helicopter crashed down over the group of their would-be executioners, nobody was spared, not even the guy with the C-4 remote trigger who was fairly away from the group.

And then, one soldier with a completely different uniform design slowly touched down near the burning wreck that once was a transport helicopter, right after checking his surroundings and confirm that everyone outside on the rooftop was actually dead, he began to do some quick crouching motions repeatedly and began to yell:

"ALL RIGHT YOU BASTARDS, NO MORE CAMPING FOR YOU!"

Right after then, the Elevator's doors began to close and began to move again, however that left six ponies were left stood still until their brains finally managed to process what the hay just happened.

"Wh-what they bucking hay was that!" said Applejack while turning to her companions in this now completely officially wild elevator ride: Rarity was petrified and her coat was actually more paler than usual, a huge feat considering that her coat is white, Rainbow was actually stuck to the ceiling by her subconscious Fight or Flight reflexes, Fluttershy was already playing possum... or had she actually fainted? however.

"I... I honestly don't know Applejack, I don't know" Twilight was giving her some odd feelings, like she knows more than anyone of them, yet she's honest about not knowing about this situation, however it was Pinkie's reaction which threw her out of her train of thought.

"He he, that was scary, but fun! LET'S SEE WHAT'S IN THE NEXT FLOOR!" and right after that, the elevator chimed again opening to reveal the next floor...

\* \* \*

><p>(banjo2E)<p>

Floor 69

The ponies stared at the scene outside the elevator for a few minutes.

Eventually, Twilight spoke. "Okay, I have to admit the spells on this thing are impressive if they can block this much water pressure, and the choreography is pretty good, but all this for an extended 'Cancer' pun?"

Lyra the mermaid shrugged. "Hey, beats the alternative. Great job, Sebastian, I knew you had it in you!"

\* \* \*

><p>(Gym Quirk)<p>

FLOOR 73:

By the time they'd reached the mid-60s, the novelty had completely worn off and Twilight was trying not to seem too jaded.

"What's that alarm noise?" asked Fluttershy nervously as the doors closed on 72 and they waited to see what 73 had to offer.

The doors opened onto what the Anchor recognized as the bridge of a Federation starship. \_Probably late 24th Century based on the uniforms.\_ The viewscreen showed a trio of Klingon warships on an attack run, firing photon torpedoes and disruptor cannons. The red alert klaxon was drowned out by the exploding tactical console. The crew was clearly too distracted by the battle to notice any spectators.

Then the doors closed and they were on their way to 74.

Applejack turned to Rainbow Dash. "Noisy neighbors..."

The pegasus shrugged.

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

FLOOR 87-

>A cry pierced everypony's ears.<p>

"SCREEEEEE!"

Twilight quickly slammed the close button door as Freddy headed for them, saying, "I DO NOT want to deal with those things! Next floor!"

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27)<p>

FLOOR 100:

"Can we agree to never speak of that...thing again?" Rarity asked as the elevator doors mercifully closed on Floor 99. Her fellow Elements of Harmony quickly agreed.

"Well, we're one seventh of the way there," Fluttershy noted as the elevator ascended.

"Okay, I gotta ask. How in tarnation can you stand this trip every time you leave your apartment?" Applejack looked at Rainbow Dash, concern clearly written on her face.

"Look, I usually just fly up, okay?" Rainbow Dash pulled a keyring out of her saddlebag with her wing. "The apartments for pegasi have doors outside, so they can fly in. I would have taken that, but I've got you girls with me..."

The door opened to reveal...a view of themselves, from a strange angle.

"Huh?" Cautiously, Rarity looked through the door's threshold, as far

as the barrier would let her go. "It looks like one of those recursive paintings (and I need to write that down for design ideas). But what are all of those white things? And the-oh. \_OH\_. EWWWWW!"

The Element of Generosity jumped back from the door as if she had been shocked, and pointedly turned around, refusing to look at it.

Looking for herself, Twilight put the pieces together. The white stalagmite/stalactites, the slimy pink surface in the cavern, and the dustings of a powdery white substance all over the cave.

"Pinkie," Twilight asked, "could you open your mouth wider for a few seconds?"

"Sure thing! AHHHHHHHHHHH!" Pinkie opened her jaw far wider than it should have been able to go.

Twilight stuck her head in Pinkie's mouth...and her face promptly reappeared at the elevator's door.

"Right. Please close that door before I throw up," Rainbow Dash begged.

\* \* \*

><p>(Custodator Pacis)<p>

Floor 115

The elevator door opened to reveal four humans with weapons ready in their hands.

"...Richtofen, is this the work of your teleporter or because of Nikolai's vodka I just drank a minute ago? Because I'm sure as hell looking at six colorful horses in front of us right now," One of them spoke.

\* \* \*

><p>(FTKnight)<p>

FLOOR 117

The door open Showing the Master Chief and the Arbiter, with a large viewing window behind them showing open space.

" We'll catch the Next one." The Chief said, before the door closed.

" ... Za?" Applejack said voicing the collective confusion.

(KrisOverstreet)

FLOOR 123

The ponies were startled to see a clear plexiglass wall blocking off the elevator doors, just beyond the forcefield. Through the glass

they could see giant human faces. The one in the center seemed to have a huge egg for a helmet, while another one had a black thing which could only be described as ludicrous.

The third one, the one in the military uniform, spun away from the elevator and shouted, "All right! Which one of you taped girly cartoons over the videotape of \_\_Spaceballs: the Movie?"\_\_

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27)<p>

FLOOR 143:

This time, the doors opened on a...courtroom?

"And so, Your Honor, it becomes clear that the claims of the accused are nothing but mad ramblings of a disturbed individual," said the strangely familiar prosecutor. "After all, there is no such thing as magic."

"OBJECTION!"

The spiky-haired defense attorney dramatically pointed at the elevator car hovering in midair. "Your Honor, the appearance of those pastel colored ponies in an elevator out of nowhere clearly invalidates the prosecution's assertions!"

"Therefore," he said, dramatically slamming down on his desk, "the accused's account of being magically mind controlled into robbing that bank remain plausible!"

"Oh, my! They're so cute!" The judge cleared his throat. "Er, objection sustained. The court will now take a fifteen minute recess to re-evaluate the accused's claims of magical coercion into the bank robbery."

As the doors on their mobile jail cell slid shut once more, Twilight waved at Phoenix Wright, who mirrored her motion with a beaming smile.

"You know," Rarity mused as they ascended, "it was odd, how none of those...'humans,' you called them?...seemed to react much to the appearance of a disembodied elevator out of the blue."

"Trust me," Twilight muttered, "with everything that's happened in that courtroom, this doesn't even come on the top 100 list."

\* \* \*

><p>(queensarrow)<p>

\*yawn\*"Twilight?"

\*sigh\*"Yes, Rarity?"

"How do you know what goes on in that courtroom?"

"Previous experience? You should probably get some sleep."

\* \* \*

><p>(FTKnight)<p>

FLOOR 175

The Elevator gave off a soft ding as the doors opened, showing an anthropomorphic Luna in the middle of getting seduced by one James T. Kirk.

Both looked towards the elevator, and remained quiet while Luna raised an eyebrow.

"We saw nothing, and we know nothing. " Rarity said before pressing the "close door" button.

\* \* \*

><p>(Zetrien)<p>

FLOOR 187:

>The doors opened to a busy courtyard, full of bipeds of many types going to and fro. Standing in front of the elevator was a redheaded human in charcoal-black armor, flanked by a pair of scaly looking aliens.<p>

After staring at them for a moment, the one in blue armor put a three fingered hand on the human's shoulder, and began pulling her away. "Not worth it, Shepard. Let's just take the stairs."

"What? Garrus, there aren't any-"

"We'll make some."

As the doors began to close, the alien in red armor nodded at them. "Sparkle."

"Wrex."

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

FLOOR 190:

Snow blew in through the elevator doors.

"All I see is trees," Applejack muttered. "How about you, Dash?"

"There's some kind of light just past those pines over there," Rainbow Dash replied, holding a hoof over her eyes and squinting. "I think it... yeah, it's a wrought-iron lamp-post. Why would anypony put a lamp-post in the middle of a-"

Twilight Sparkle lunged for the close-doors button and kept pounding it repeatedly until, with agonizing slowness, the elevator doors closed.

"Now come on," Applejack grumbled, "after all th' weird stuff we've

seen, you panic about a forest with a street light in it?"

"Trust me," Twilight gasped, slumping back against the elevator wall, "some doors are just best left shut."

\* \* \*

><p>(Hubris Plus)<p>

FLOOR 193:

The scent of old mothballs drifted into the elevator. Thick coats hung just past the open doors, muffling the voices on the other side.

After a moment, the coats were pulled aside to reveal a quartet of human children peering in at them.

"I say, Lucy," the elder girl said. "That is a rather incredible wardrobe."

"Well," The younger boy pointed out. "It's still not a forest."

"Excuse me," the younger girl, presumably Lucy, asked. "Will this still take us to Narnia?"

"Sorry," Twilight answered. "We just passed it. You'll have to wait for a lift going the other way."

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

FLOOR 197:

Yet again, the doors opened, this time to reveal a live studio audience, all dressed in bizarre costumes. Immediately in front of them, one costumed person stood beside a man wearing a cheap suit, her face falling in dismay at the sight of the ponies.

"... six technicolor ponies!" an avuncular voice cried out from nowhere. "Yes, these ponies will clash with every single item in your home! Useful for carrying very small parcels, testing for color blindness, and inducing diabetic shock. This ZONK prize is worth: absolutely nothing!"

As the man in the cheap suit consoled the losing contestant, the ponies looked at one another. "I don't know which is more mortifying, darlings," Rarity said for them all, "being given away as a prize on a game show... or being a BOOBY PRIZE on a game show."

The closing elevator doors cut short the show's fanfare, sparing the ponies the annoyance of the commercial break.

\* \* \*

><p>(Stavaros\_Arcane)<p>

FLOOR 206

The massive Equine skeleton peered into the Elevator with its occupants. Oddly enough it had a name tag hanging around its neck identifying it as 'Bryan'.

The sunken empty eye sockets seem to stare at every last one of them. Until it spoke. "Oh my this lift seems a bit on the crowded side..." the skull turned to the buttons. "Oh and its heading upwards. My mistake. I'll just catch the next one heading down."

\* \* \*

><p>(elmagnifico)<p>

FLOOR 250:

The doors opened on a large-looking room of concrete construction. A klaxon could be heard blaring in the distance, and amber lights flashed in sequence around the room. The first thing that drew Twilight's eye was a set of windows in the far wall, showing a control room bustling with humans dressed in blue military attire. One, a rotund balding male on the short side, seemed to be in charge, in that the others were either gawking in her direction or looking to the man for direction.

Motion drew her attention to a group of humans closer to the elevator. The four of them were dressed in green with black vests over the top. The one closest to her had thrown up his arms. His vocalization could only just be heard over the blaring alarms.

"I'm done."

He then took a green baseball cap off his head and started waving it around, revealing a short-cropped mane of gray hair.

"This is just too far. Evil aliens masquerading as Egyptian gods, fine. The pyramids are actually alien landing pads, fine. Nice aliens masquerading as Norse gods, fine. Weird quantum astrophysical negative space-time-wedgie shenanigans straight out of Star Trek, fine."

The hat was then waved at Twilight and her friends.

"But I draw the line at pastel-colored miniature horses in the Stargate."

The human then turned to one of his companions.

"Carter, please tell me there's a reasonable explanation for this, like you wished really, really hard for that pony you always wanted?"

The recipient shook her head.

"No, Colonel O'Neill, sir. The Event Horizon is supposed to be one-way to everything except high-frequency radio waves. Visible light doesn't travel at all. We shouldn't be able to see this even if it wasn't an outgoing wormhole."

Colonel O'Neill turned to another of his squadmates.



"Teal'c, this is as crazy for you as it is for the rest of us, right?"

The dark-skinned one with the gold on his forehead grunted.

"Indeed."

At this point, the bald man in the control room spoke into a microphone, his voice booming over the alarms.

"Ah, Doctor Jackson, the diplomacy boys want you to try making contact with the... Aliens."

The fourth member of the squad cleared his throat and started speaking in another language. Twilight recognized it from when she'd been in their loop, but before she could reply, the doors started closing. Pinkie Pie only just managed to smile, wave, shrug, and get two words in edgewise before their metallic prison sealed itself again.

"Sorry, kruvis!"

Twilight then proceeded to enact Pinkie Pie Coping Strategy #9: Roll eyes, smile, move on.

\* \* \*

><p>(Blazingen1)<p>

FLOOR 312

The elevator doors opened to reveal Batman and Robin, who was slightly shorter than they were used to seeing, poised and ready to attack, batarangs raised, their masks covering their expressions of shock.

It was obviously Batman who recovered first and dropped his attack hand. "Hello Twilight, ponies."

Pinkie beat twilight to the answer though. "Hi Batman! Hope you liked your last one, but im totally going to throw you a "Cheer Up Batman" Party the next time we meet. I'll make sure there is no escapeâ€|" she added the last bit in a creepy manner.

Ignoring Pinkie, he deduced to Twilight, "You happen to be stuck in an elevator where time and space has been distorted to a degree that allows it to pop into existence in other worlds and times, am I right?"

"Got it in one."said Twilight as the doors closed. Just before it did, pinkie stuck her face between the closing doors and said, "Hey! New Looper! I'm gonna throw you a party onceâ€|" the doors closed.

"â€|So, those were the ponies? Seem like a nice bunch. I don't see why you're so wary of Pinkie though." Said Conan dressed in the Robin suit.

"â€| Look above your head, and your shirt."

Looking up, he saw a colorful party hat perched on his head. Shocked that he felt nothing when it was placed there, he immediately looked down. He was wearing a thick red sweater with the words "Welcome New Looper" printed on it. In place of his batarang, it was a plastic bag with cake.

"What theâ€| how did she? I was holding things! I didn't even feel anything. To do that she must have... but at the time sheâ€| huh?!"

"Now you see why I'm wary of her? I don't get surprised often, but when it comes to her, I make an exception. If you tell anyone I told you that, consider yourself fired."

The elevator doors opened again to reveal the normal empty elevator room. Walking inside alone, Conan still stunned, he pressed the up button.

"Now that she knows you're looping, she will throw a party for you, and there will be no escape."

And with those final words, the doors closed.

\* \* \*

><p>(Hubris Plus)<p>

FLOOR 314:

The doors opened on a lived in kitchen, the color scheme drab but well cared for. A trio of ponies were seated around a worn wooden table in appropriately rustic attire.

"Hi Ma! Hi Pa! Hi Maud!" Pinkie chorused as the three turned to face the elevator that had appeared in their house.

"Pinkie," an aging stallion greeted, pulling his pipe from his mouth just long enough to offer a nod. His daughter trotted over to a cupboard and started rummaging.

"Ah wish ya'd called ahead," the older mare noted. "We ain't got nuthin' prepared."

"No worries," Pinkie reassured her mother. "We're just passing through on the way to Dashie's."

"Here," Maud said, shoving a box at her sister.

"Rock candy! Thanks Maud!" Pinkie enthused after taking a peak.

"You're welcome. Have a nice trip." Maud's inflection hadn't changed, but there was the smallest upturn to her lips at her sister's happy response.

"Well," Applejack said, grabbing a piece of rock candy after the doors had closed. "That weren't so bad. With any luck there'll be some fritters in store down the line."

\* \* \*

><p>(Gym Quirk)<p>

FLOOR 349:

An unremarkable series of empty lobbies ended with a bleary-eyed Discord entering the elevator with a semi-coherent mumble. It sounded like a greeting, but the only word anypony could clearly identify was "coffee".

The draconequus was dressed in boxer shorts (suitably modified for his anatomy) decorated with 'strange attractor' butterflies and a black t-shirt emblazoned with "1 + 1 = Rutabaga" in an assortment of day-glo colors. He clutched an oversized travel mug showing a worn Decepticon logo.

Slightly daunted, nopony made any response beyond subdued greetings of their own.

The doors opened onto the next floor and the chaos spirit departed with another grunt. The lobby featured the insignia of a popular chain of coffee shops.

As the doors closed, the group turned to look at Fluttershy. "Some days, he's not much of a morning person," she explained.

\* \* \*

><p>(fractalman)<p>

FLOOR 404

The door opened to reveal...

Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

\* \* \*

><p>(Gym Quirk)<p>

"Would this be an improvement on 403?" asked Rarity. "The doors didn't even open on that one."

\* \* \*

><p>(Snakes\_Shadow)<p>

FLOOR 444:

No one was quite sure how it worked, but the doors opened for the 30 seconds, and the few months it took for the full, original Old Man Henderson event.

"That explains so much!"

"Ouch, keep it down Applejack, trying to analyze that, that, I can't even think of the term right now, gave me a migraine. Anypony have aspirin?"

(Gamerex27)

"I believe, dear," Rarity said, as she levitated a bottle of pills out of her purse, "that the word you're looking for is called a 'clusterbuck'."

(Snakes\_Shadow)

Twilight downed the pills.

"That, too, I suppose, but I think I wanted something more like anomaly. Like our situation isn't anomalous enough."

(fractalman)

Pinkie Pie snapped her hoof. "I know! It was a negative elevator wedgie!"

\* \* \*

><p>(katfairy)<p>

FLOOR 473

The doors opened onto the bridge of what looked like a spaceship. One of the crew spotted them and made a strangled noise, attracting the captain's attention. The tall silver-haired woman stood and turned to face them, aiming some sort of arm cannon. She didn't fire, though. Instead, she looked at each one of them carefully, glare intensifying when she spotted Pinkie.

"Ketchum," she growled, lowering her arm. The woman turned back to her crew. "Ignore them! They'll disappear in a few seconds, and they are Not. Our. Problem."

As the doors closed, the others looked at Pinkie, who shrugged.

"She was a big ol' grumpy-pants last time I saw her, too."

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

FLOOR 500

Beyond the doors lay the Void. Swirling anticolors shone in the depths of nonspace, and on the fringes of fern-shaped holes in reality tiny figures flew and swarmed.

"Ooooh!" Pinkie chirped. "I remember this place! I wonder if Slanny's as grumpy as ever! Yoo-hoo, Slanny!"

Twilight reflected, as the incomprehensible dimension between space screamed as one and tried to fold in upon itself, that when a pony stares into the abyss the abyss stares back; but when Pinkie Pie stares into the abyss, the abyss closes its eyes, sticks fingers in its ears and shouts, "LALALALALALALALALA," hoping Pinkie goes away.

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27)<p>

FLOOR 531:

When the doors opened, Twilight had to clamp her hoof against her mouth to keep herself from screaming.

On the other end of the twin doors was a towering humanoid creature, wearing a black suit and tie. It was gaunt-no, slender- and its limbs were far too big to look like anything natural.

"Eep!" Fluttershy shrank into herself, backing into the elevator's corner.

The creature looked around the elevator cart, surveying all of its potential victims. Eventually, a small slit of a mouth appeared on its otherwise blank, featureless face.

"Hei guuuuuuuuys," said the Slender Man." I heard you were having a par-ty. I would like to be in that par-ty."

Twilight blinked. On one hoof, this particular variant of the monster was considerably less dangerous, so she wouldn't have to risk using the Elements when all of them were so fatigued by their long journey. On the other hoof, he was annoying. On the third hoof...not letting him on would compromise the entire concept of friendship she and her friends treasured.

"Uh, the elevator's sort of full right now. Maybe you can...take the next one up?"

"Really? You are scared of him?" Trixie trotted up to the doors, and glared at the eldritch abomination. "Trixie told you, Slendy, we were through after you nearly ate Trixie's audience!"

The colossal man-shaped thing frowned, and Twilight could have sworn she saw his lips quivering in distress. "But I was starviiiiing! And that last trick you did with the whipped cream and strawberries made me hungry!"

Trixie facehoofed. "Urgh, fine. Trixie will let you on so long as you promise not to-"

Unfortunately (or fortunately), both the ponies and the monstrosity had lost track of time, and the doors slid shut before the Slender Man could enter the elevator.

"Don't. Ask." Trixie hissed as Twilight opened her mouth to ask the inevitable question.

\* \* \*

><p>(banjo2E)<p>

FLOOR 536:

The doors opened onto a stage facing a packed theater, which broke

out into applause as an announcer boomed, "...the Great and Powerful Trixie!"

The ponies inside the elevator blinked, then turned to face Trixie...who was already walking out of the elevator. "Thank you, thank you. Pay no mind to the fire in the theater, it will be put out short-"

A torrent of water poured from somewhere above directly onto Trixie to laughter and more applause. When it cleared, Trixie's mane was (finally) no longer on fire, and the rest of her body was completely dry.

"Now, before we go any further," Trixie turned towards the elevator, "you do have tickets to this show, right?"

The ponies in the elevator remained in stunned silence...except for Pinkie Pie. "Nope! I can categorically state that all of us got in here without paying!"

Trixie sighed dramatically. "I see. Well, Trixie must apologize, but she'll have to make you disappear now."

As the doors closed, Applejack asked, "Hang on, was she actually \_expecting\_ this to happen?"

"No, I think she's just that good at improv," replied Twilight.

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27)<p>

FLOOR 551:

At first glance, this floor was nothing but a blank white space. Then, text began floating across the void, shifting rapidly.

"GUYS, WE NEED TO BEAT MISTY!"

"UP DOWN LEFT RIGHT DEMOCRACY"

"GET RECKED"

"PRAISE HELIX!" This phrase was accompanied by the fossil of some kind of ancient organism, sliding across the blank landscape.

"Anarchy!"

The last word lazily floated out of Pinkie's mouth, taking form as a pink-colored series of letters, and drifted out of the elevator to join the crowd of voices.

Twilight slowly turned to face her friend. "How...I thought nothing could leave the elevator?"

The Element of Laughter giggled. "No\_pony\_ can leave the elevator! Words can get out juuuust fine!"

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

FLOOR 555:

Purple-coated pony looked at purple-clad man with perplexity.

"Well, this isn't the TV room," the man commented to the other people in his elevator. "It's just another elevator. Not even made of glass."

"Oooh! Oooh! Mr. Wonka! Hi, Mr. Wonka!" Pinkie Pie bounced up and down, waving her hooves frantically for attention.

"Oh! Hello, Miss Pinkie!" the candy maker said. "That trick you suggested with the sprinkles worked wonderfully! Here," he said, patting around his pockets, then pulling out some little boxes. "Try these and let me know what you think next time we meet!" The boxes clattered on the floor of the ponies' elevator.

"Will do, Mr. Wonka!" Pinkie grinned, gathering up the boxes and stashing them in her mane.

"Must get this down, must get this down..." Wonka had pulled a pen and notepad out of his pocket and was writing frantically. "Cotton candy... grape..." The pen jabbed at Rarity. "Marshmallow..." It pointed next to Fluttershy. "Lemon..." Next, to Rainbow Dash. "Tutti-frutti..." And finally, to Applejack. "And orange!"

"Orange?" The farmer pony couldn't keep the outrage out of her voice. "Apple!"

"Apple?" Willie Wonka shook his head as the elevator doors began sliding shut. "No, that combination will never work..."

\* \* \*

><p>(Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

FLOOR 590:

The door opened to reveal Rainbow Dash in a neat business suit that could only be described as stylish. She looked at Elevator Dash, then to her watch and muttered in a posh tone, "Oh my. Got to get these numbers to Supervisor Mare in ten seconds or she'll have my head."

She made to enter the elevator, only for Elevator Dash to shout, "Wait! This elevator is...going down, and you will never make it to Supervisor Mare if you take this one."

Businessmare Dash gave a half-lidded expression, looking to Dash, then the elevator symbol overhead signalling the elevator is heading up, then back to Dash, "Are you a corporate spy from another company? Or perhaps from Tirek's wing? He's been pushing to shut our wing down for years. I'm coming in."

Dash shook her head, "This elevator won't take you to Supervisor Mare! Don't you find it weird that there's two of us?"

Businessmare Dash looked again, then shrugged and stepped inside. Elevator Dash facehooved. And then the door closed behind them.

FLOOR 591:

The ding echoed in the elevator, revealing a field of grass as far as the eye could see. Elevator Dash waved her hoof at the field, "See?"

Businessmare Dash merely looked at the elevator buttons, "Did you push every button on this thing?"

She looked outside, then smiled, "Looks like the wheat research is coming along nicely."

This time, the entire elevator crew facehooved.

\* \* \*

><p>(Drachefly)<p>

FLOOR 592:

The door opened into an office space and the business mare stepped out, shaking her head. "Pfeh. 'Doesn't go there.' Just two floors."

Rarity was the first to recover. "This is so \_unfair!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27)<p>

FLOOR 600

"One hundred floors left, Dashie. Then you can crawl back into bed, and forget this ever happened," the Element of Loyalty told herself, shaking a little as she spoke aloud.

Twilight patted her distressed friend on the back with her forehoof. Even though they were nearly done, Rainbow Dash had already started to fray a little.

The doors opened to reveal a messy apartment.

"That...THAT'S...not my apartment," the pegasus grumbled. "I'm not the neatest pony around, but I don't let papers and stuff cover every inch of my floor. Who even lives...here..."

The sounds of glass breaking, followed by the horrified screams of many, many ponies sounded through the door. As well as the cries of a horrific beast.

"\_\*\*OOPS! SORRY, MAYOR MARE! CLEAR OUT OF THE WAY; MAILMARE COMING THROUGH!\*\*\_"

If she were human, Twilight's face would be as pale as marble. "Oh no. Not \_again.\_"



"\_\*\*I DIDN'T SEE THAT SKYSCRAPER THERE! OOPS, I DIDN'T MEAN TO SET OFF THAT THUNDERCLOUD!\*\*\_"

The sound of enormous flapping wings was audible just outside of the building. Then, a humongous grey head crashed through the skyscraper, breaking through the windows, and stopping just short of the elevator itself.

"\_\*\*I JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT WENT WRONG!\*\*\_" Derpzilla screamed.

Before Twilight could even move, Rainbow Dash flew right at the close door button at sub-Rainboom speeds, and slammed into it with all of her might. Slowly, agonizingly slowly, the doors slid shut, and the elevator carried on.

"Whuzzat? What happened, sugarcube?" Applejack said, cracking one eye just barely open.

"Uh..nothing to worry about. You already did your watch; you can go back to sleep."

"Right, that's it. I'm quitting my shift," Rainbow Dash declared. "If you wake me up before we get to my apartment, I will buck you in the face."

With that, she collapsed on the ground, snoring away as the elevator dinged to the thankfully normal Floor 601.

\* \* \*

><p>(Leonite)<p>

FLOOR 628

Twilight eeped as she stumbled back as a massive semi-canine head stuck its way in, its eyes full of hellfire, its skin red and black, its teeth dripped with blood and-

"Hi Khorne!" Pinkie cried out. "I haven't seen you for loadsa loops!"

"Oh, Pinkie." Said Chaos God of Rage, Slaughter and Combat muttered, his voice sounding like the growl of a deep furnace. "Always good to see someone who can do a better job than Slaanesh... but why are you here?"

"Stupid glitched elevator." Twilight replied. "It... it doesn't even make sense. How are we in your loop?"

Khorne just put a look of disbelief on his face, even as Pinkie nodded, as if to confirm the story. "You ponies run into weird things." Khorne Muttered as he pulled his head out of the elevator, which closed behind him.

\* \* \*

><p>(Dalexin)<p>

"Pinkie, how long have you been Awake?"

"Oh, since like, floor 12? Something like that. Did I forget to ping?"

"...yeah. Yeah you did, but it's fine. At least I'm not alone."

Rainbow Dash grumbled from the floor. "Waking Up just makes me want to get home and fall asleep more."

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

FLOOR 641:

"PRISONER ZERO HAS ESCAPED."

Twilight jerked up from a sound sleep. What floor were they on? Somewhere in the six hundreds?

The open elevator doors showed absolutely nothing else but a single immense eyeball.

"Huh? Whuzzat?" Rainbow Dash muttered, lifting her head off of Pinkie Pie's belly.

"PRISONER ZERO HAS ESCAPED."

Rainbow Dash gazed bleary-eyed at the wide-open single eye in the doorway. "Well, she sure as buck isn't in here!" she replied.

The eye glanced around for a moment. "CONFIRMED," the booming voice added, and as the elevator doors closed, it added, "SORRY."

"What was that about?" Twilight wondered aloud.

"Who cares?" Rainbow Dash asked. "Go back to sleep."

(Gamerex27)

FLOOR 700:

"Must...stay...awake..." Rarity moaned, swaying unsteadily on her hooves. "Almost...there."

"Three...two....," Twilight counted.

And the doors slid open, revealing a perfectly normal floor of the apartment complex.

"ONE! EVERYPONY, OFF THE ELEVATOR!"

In unison, the unicorns' horns began to glow, lifting the sleeping forms of Rainbow Dash, Applejack, and Fluttershy (Pinkie had never fallen asleep, due to her seemingly boundless energy, though her eyelids were starting to droop), and bolted out of the elevator just as the doors closed once more.

"\_Finally,\_" Twilight sighed. "Chestnut damn it, that was one of the most annoying things I've ever dealt with. In the top million, at least."

"Zhuh? We here?" Rainbow Dash's eyes slowly opened, and then practically popped out of her head. "WE'RE HERE! WE'RE FREE!"

"Five more minutes, Granny," Applejack mumbled, as she was roused from her fitful slumber.

"You know," Pinkie commented, as she reached for the doorknob, "you're a heavy sleeper for a farmpony."

"Had a bad Loop," the orange mare said in response, slowly getting to her feet. "The Loop memories of this whole darn trip ain't helpin'."

"Oh, so we're all Awake now?" Fluttershy said, getting to her hooves and yawning. "Sorry...I think we were all too preoccupied to send out a Ping."

"Hey..." Pinkie Pie said, "the door is unlocked. Dashie, did you forget to lock the door?"

"No," said an oddly familiar voice from inside the apartment, "I let myself in. Hope you don't mind!"

"What?" The ponies struggled to get through the doorway first, and ended up piled on the floor, a tangle of tails and hooves.

"Cleanup on Aisle Three!" Discord, wearing a bathrobe and holding a thermos of coffee in one claw, picked up the ponies one by one, depositing them onto a couch shaped like a grocery store cart.

"It...this was YOU?!" Rainbow Dash exclaimed, her eyes narrowing in rage.

"What's the problem?" Discord huffed, putting down the spray can of paint that he had been huffing from. "I was just having a bit of fun! I just ignored your Ping, and you fell for the oldest trick in the book: the good ol' cursed elevator!" He snapped his fingers, and a book poofed into existence. He flipped to the first page, which depicted an ominously glowing elevator, with the caption "Trick #1: The Good Ol' Cursed Elevator prank", complete with instructions on how to bypass and subvert magical wards protecting it. "See? Here it is, page number one! I even went to the trouble of getting on for a few floors, to make it even funnier!"

"Do you have any idea how \_annoying\_ that was?!" Twilight snapped, any patience she had drained by the long day spent inside the metal, mobile prison.

"Oh, like one day makes any difference to a Looper," the spirit of chaos said dismissively. "We're all billions of years old-what difference does a day make?"

"It's the principle of the thing," the Element of Magic replied.

"Don't look at me like that," Discord grumbled, placing a blindfold over Twilight's eyes to make sure that she would not look at him like that. "It was a harmless prank!"

"True," Twilight said, ascending to alicornhood in a flash of light, "but you forgot one thing. Girls?"

The remaining five ponies followed her lead, and their horns began to glow a bright white.

When the light faded, Discord found himself in the very same elevator the ponies had just left.

"Trying to beat me at my own game, eh?" Discord said, stroking his beard in thought. "Let's see what they came up with for the floors!"

The door opened to FLOOR 3, revealing a perfectly normal hallway.

"Trying to fake me out, huh? No matter," the trickster said to himself, "what's one or two boring floors out of a few hundred \_exciting\_ ones?"

Floor 4 was exactly the same.

"Oh...oh \_no...\_" Discord whispered, horror dawning in his face.

FLOOR 5 was also normal. As was FLOOR 6, and FLOOR 7, and FLOOR 8...

Discord tried to teleport away, but found that his magic was blocked by the remnants of his own prank. He was trapped here, forced to experience nothing but monotony for the entire day.

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO--"

Back on FLOOR 700, Twilight smirked. "Turnabout is fair play."

\* \* \*

><p>(Snakes\_Shadow)<p>

Several weeks after the "Elevator Incident":

The girls were heading back to Rainbow Dash's apartment for another party. Twilight cast several diagnostic spells as had become her custom after the "elevator ride of doom" (as Pinkie wanted to call it) before letting anyone on.

"Nope. Nope nope nope. We are not getting on this one until it gets fixed."

"But--"

"No, Pinkie. Dash is going to fly up to her apartment and open a window, while I cast wall-walking spells on everyone else, and we are walking up to her apartment."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

124: The opposite of an elevator pitch.

## 131. Chapter 131

### 125.1 (novusordomundi)

"Alright Alright!" Vinyl Scratch yelled into her mic. She was currently speaking into her microphone, doing her job as a radio DJ this Loop. While it wasn't as cool as just spinning tunes in various clubs and parties, it did allow her a few perks. "I'm still holding tickets to Mistress Z and Iron Will's concert here in Canterlot in my very hooves! And they will go to the fifth pony who calls in." However, in these types of Loops, it was usually Octavia who was her co-host. However, this time someone different was with her.

"You're not going to try calling in yourself, are you, Vinyl?" Twilight Sparkle teased. Instead of a Librarian this Loop, she was more into radio. In fact, she'd been listening to the legend about the Mare in the Moon when she Awoke, instead of reading about it. She had to admit, she was having a lot more fun than she would have thought.

"Hey, I only did that once!" Vinyl jokingly protested, before a laugh escaped her lips. "Anyways, let's put on "Nature of Reality", the new hot single from Sweetie Belle's upcoming album! And when we come back, we'll let you know who won those tickets!"

As the "On Air" sign stopped glowing, as a slow beat started to kick in. "So, how long has Zecora been rapping for?" Vinyl asked, taking the headphones off of her head. "First time I've been Awake and heard about it."

Twilight paused for a moment. Then she said "I think it's been about four or five Loops. She picked it up during a Fused Loop, and decided to keep it as a hobby. It's made for some interesting shows. I think I've got a video of her and Trixie performing in a rap battle somewhere in my Pocket..."

"Mrs. Sparkle? Miss Scratch?" An intern unicorn came in to the studio, a piece of paper telekinetically following behind him. "A "Derpy Hooves" from Ponyville accidentally called here while trying to get take-out. But she was the fifth caller, and she did want the tickets..."

\* \* \*

### ><p>125.2 (fractalman)<p>

"Once upon a time, two sisters ruled over Equestria" read Twilight in the most annoying voice she could manage, in an effort to make the story seem interesting again.

"The older sister raised the sun by swimming under it, while the younger sister raised the moon by jumping over- wait what?"

\_...by jumping over it. But one day the younger sister became jealous of the older sister's fiddle-playing cat, and so turned into Nightmare Moo. In her panic, the older sister banished the younger with the most powerful artifacts in Equestria, the Elements of Rhyme. Legend has it that three beings shall one day free her from her prison, but none can say which beings..."\_

\* \* \*

><p>Winona, Diamond Dish, and Silver Spoon barked, giggled, and cackled as they finalized their plans to help Nightmare Moo run out of the moon.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>125.3 (elmagnifico)<p>

Macintosh Awoke on Sweet Apple Acres. Specifically, near the back door coming off the kitchen.

The familiar surroundings were about the only thing normal about it though.

He shifted his weight, only just bringing himself out of a stumble. This was nothing new. Awakening mid-step was par for the course, even if he was typically in the south field. Most loops he had to restart the furrow he'd been working on, but that was a minor inconvenience.

Unfortunately his center of gravity was apparently further back this loop, so even though he managed to save his first step, the second sent Macintosh flopping head over hooves onto the half-door.

Macintosh leaned there for a moment, chest resting on the lower, still-shut portion of the door. The edifice seemed taller than normal. He shook his head, trying to regain his balance. After a moment, he'd cleared the dizziness enough to look around.

What he saw poleaxed him for a full sixty seconds.

The farm itself seemed normal, along with its inhabitants. Frieda May and the rest of the cows were in the dairy barn, getting their morning milking from Granny Smith. Winona was nosing around the hog pen, apparently tracking a wayward piglet. Supplies for the Apple Family Reunion bedecked the tables set up in the cleared area between the barn and the house. None of which was what had Macintosh, professional farmer, vocational all-weather help, amateur barkeep, and part-time Hulk on the fritz.

Out there, in the south field, was a stallion with a straw-colored mane and bright red coat, plowing a furrow as straight as could be.

Granny Smith's voice broke him out of his distant-stallion-beholding-and-potential-existential-crisis-provoking reverie.

"Applejack, y'all wanna stop layin' around on th' door witcher mouth

open like yer tryin' ta catch flies and get yer sister up?"

Macintosh the Looper brought a hoof to his head as he listened. The rubbing motion he made was an attempt to dispel the headache he could feel coming on. All it actually accomplished was displacing a brown stetson.

"Ah fewmets."

\* \* \*

><p>125.4 (Gamerex27)<p>

As Twilight Awoke, she noticed that she didn't have a body. While this was rare, but not unheard of, it was the first time that she had just been a disembodied head.

She opened the door to the shed she was lying in (although she seemed to be missing her horn this Loop, she had long since learned how to channel her magic through other parts of her body-in this case, her tongue). Then, text began to scroll across her vision.

\_1999. What appeared to be a harmless meteorite crashing in the Neighvada Desert had turned out to be Darc Seed, an evil alien creature with horrible powers. By shooting strange magnetic rays, Darc Seed had turned the helpless ponies into zombies and had brought the Statue of Neighberty to life to do his dirty work. These rays had also given him control over deadly weapons, but none were more powerful than the legendary unicorn horn Shura. When the great head of the magus, Twilight Sparkle, heard that the horn had fallen into evil hooves, she set off immediately for Manehattan. For only she possessed the strength and knowledge needed to recapture the magical horn and free Equestria from the evil clutches of Darc Seed.\_

The Anchor's disembodied head rocketed into the air, and, almost without thinking, flew all the way to Manehattan.

She looked down at the city. At the undead ponies walking its streets. At the giant flying tanks and hands flying all over the city, smashing skyscrapers with wild abandon.

As Twilight tried in vain to wrap her head (after all, she was nothing \_but\_ a head right now) around what was happening, several of the hands broke off from the swarm to approach her. Opening her mouth, she shot a giant glass eyeball from her throat, piercing through the palms of the hands and tearing them all to pieces.

She could do nothing but stare for several moments.

"Right," she said to herself, as she flew deeper into the city, "after this, I'm going to have to have a \_long\_ night at Mac's Bar. I think I'm getting a headache that'll last me for \_so many\_ Loops to come.

\* \* \*

><p>125.5 (Miiohau)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle Awoke in her crib. <em>Great, a foal loop. Well might as well get started with the pranks.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>Over the next couple days Twilight Velvet, mother of Twilight Sparkle, noticed something strange. Twilight was being fed but no one remembered giving her a bottle. Her diaper was being changed but no one remembered doing it. And sometimes Twilight was even being put to bed with no one doing it. And Twilight only cried when she, Nightlight or Shining Armor were right outside her room and every time the only thing she wanted was to be let out of her crib. Yes, something strange was happening in her daughter and she was going to get to the bottom of it.<p>

Velvet moved her typewriter into Twilight's room; she wasn't going to leave her daughter's side until she figured out what was going on.

About an hour later her daughter woke up and looked at her. Little Twilight's horn lit up, which wasn't unusual for unicorn foal. However a bottle of milk entering the room and heading straight for her daughter was. Little Twilight started sucking at the bottle.

\_Did Twilight justâ€|? \_thought Velvet.

Little Twilight lifted herself up and changed her own diaper. When Twilight was done with the bottle it floated over to Velvet's hoof.

Velvet stared at her daughter. \_What? I have heard of independent kids but that's ridiculous. Oh, I know. This must be a dream I fell asleep in my baby's room and I'm dreaming.\_

Little Twilight levitated the finished pages of her mother's book and a red pen and started poof reading.

\_Ok, now I know I am dreaming. There's no way my one year old daughter is editing my book.\_

Little Twilight put her mother book back when she was done and ascended and started flying around the room.

\_And now she's an alicorn. Definitely a dream.\_

"Mom, I'm home," cried Shining Armor from downstairs.

Twilight flew downstairs.

"M-MOM!" Shining Armor galloped up the stairs. "Twily's Flying!"

Velvet left her daughter's room. "I know dear. She'll be back to normal when we wake up. I'm sure of it."

\* \* \*

><p>It took Twilight Velvet a couple days to come to terms with the



fact her daughter really was an alicorn. Now if she could just catch her phantom editor (There was no way she would believe that her one year old daughter was actually editing her book).<p>

Overall Twilight Velvet's life was getting back to normal - at least until next week, when her daughter started speaking to Princess Celestia in old equis, a language that no one but Princess Celestia herself spoke anymore.

\* \* \*

><p>125.6<p>

(Kris Overstreet)

\*\*... and the Rest Loop: Dragonshy\*\*

\_(Reminder: the "And the Rest" Loop has Twilight, Cheerilee, Ivory Scroll, Zecora, Angel, and Gilda Awake. The rest of the Mane Six, not Awake, are Element Bearers for the Loop. Twilight's previous Loop was so bad she doesn't want to talk about it, and she's declared a go-through-the-motions relaxation Loop. The other five Awake Loopers are gleefully abusing this.)\_

"What do you MEAN, 'condemned'?"

Ivory Scroll ignored the blast of draconic outrage, which she could afford to do so long as it wasn't draconic flame. "This cave has been declared unfit for habitation due to structural and hygienic defects beyond repair. Therefore it is scheduled for demolition, by order of the Housing Authority of Greater Equestria."

"Unfit for-!" The dragon snorted a large cloud of black smoke. "IT'S A CAVE! How can a cave be condemned? Is it insufficiently cave-y for you?"

"Nevertheless," Ivory Scroll said, standing on her dignity, "under the circumstances I must deny your certificate of occupancy and suggest you find an alternate place of residence."

"I didn't apply for any certificate," the dragon growled. "And what do you propose to do if I simply ignore you and move in?"

"What?" Ivory Scroll put on her best offended look. "Whatever happened to the legendary draconic concern for law and order?"

"This IS the legendary draconic concern for law and order." With thumb and foreclaw the dragon flicked the mayor out of his way, picked the enormous sack containing his hoard off the clifftop, and crawled into the cave.

He was still in the process of arranging his bed of jewels and gold when the sound of beating drums echoed into the cave from outside. He poked his head out to see a zebra pounding on large tomtoms, wearing a garish wooden mask. "Welcome wagon?" he grumbled.

"You have disturbed my ancestors' burial place! Begone, or the consequences you shall face!"

The dragon raised an eyeridge. "Zebras don't bury their dead. And

they don't live on mountains."

The tomtoms stopped. "Er... orphaned was I when but a filly. I was adopted by goats both gruff and billy."

A voice from a cloud above hissed, "Is that all you have?"

Zecora looked up and said, "To remove him I'm trying..." She bounded over the sweep of a large claw that crushed the drums into leather and kindling. "... but I don't think he's buying!"

A second swat sent the zebra flying off the ledge. With an eagle's shriek, Gilda plunged through the cloud she'd been lounging on and caught the falling zebra only about twenty feet down from the cliff edge.

Satisfied that the new annoyance was gone, the dragon went back into the cave.

"Well," Gilda said, "that's two down, one to go, since Angel didn't want any part of the bet." The griffin turned to Cheerilee and said, "I hope you've got something better."

"Well, as a teacher I can only say," Cheerilee giggled smugly, "watch and learn."

\* \* \*

><p>"Demolition squad?" the dragon rumbled.<p>

"Yes, on account of this cave being condemned," Cheerilee said. "I'm giving you fair warning that you'll probably want to be outside the cave in about two minutes."

"Now listen, pony," the dragon grumbled, "I came here for a restful little nap, and I'm getting seriously annoyed by you pestering Equestrians. If you don't have something very good to show me, I'm-" The dragon's gaze turned from Cheerilee to the three new arrivals. "And who are you?"

"We're the Cutie Mark Crusaders!" the filly with the red bow in her mane chirped.

"We're on a crusade to find our cutie marks!" the orange pegasus added.

"And we won't rest until we've discovered our destiny!" the unicorn finished.

"Girls," Cheerilee said, "it's all arranged. Go right ahead!"

"CUTIE MARK CRUSADERS SPELUNKERS, YAAAAAY!" The three fillies pulled out helmets, safety vests and more grapnels and ropes than anyone who'd known them five minutes would feel safe about their possessing, and plunged off past the dragon and its treasure into the depths of the cave.

The dragon watched the fillies vanish into the darkness, then turned his attention back to Cheerilee. "Am I supposed to be concerned?"

"Wait for it," Cheerilee said. After a long four count, she turned and dashed for the cave entrance.

Moments later the shrieks and giggles of enthusiastic fillies turned to shouts of dismay. Deep in the cave rocks began cracking and groaning. Things fell. Larger things fell. Even larger things fell, making loud booms in the depths that shook the relatively bright entry chamber where the dragon had set up residence.

The dragon glanced up, spotted only two stalactites that might be annoying, and reached up and removed them, pounding them flat-side up into the cave floor for use as nightstands.

In the depths of the cave, the sound of falling rocks tapered off into the occasional shower of gravel and the dismayed moans of miserable ponies.

The dragon used a bit of flame to inspect the situation, found a long sapling log tucked in a corner by a prior occupant, poked around in the depths, and drew out three fillies covered in coal tar. He dropped the stick out the cave entrance, saying, "You should probably wash that off them as soon as possible. The nearest shampoo is somewhere OFF MY MOUNTAIN!"

Cheerilee looked at the three Crusaders, tangled in rope, covered in sticky toxic substances, and shook her head.

\* \* \*

><p>Three large bags of bits dropped at Twilight's hooves.<p>

"What are these for?" Twilight asked.

"Those three had a bet going and made me the judge," Gilda said, pointing a talon at the sheepish-looking zebra, teacher and mayor standing behind her. "Who could get rid of the smoke dragon using no Looper abilities, just simple in-Loop talents? But they all failed, which means you should get that letter from Sunbutt this afternoon. So, since you'll have to deal with it as in baseline, I say you should win the bet." After a moment she coughed and added, "By the way, he may be a bit grumpier than usual this time."

"Right," Twilight sighed. "Thanks for that." As if getting a non-Awake Fluttershy up that mountain wasn't difficult enough already...

\* \* \*

><p><strong>and the Rest Loop: Look Before You Sleep<strong>

"So, all you did was assign Rarity and Applejack to opposite ends of town?" Cheerilee asked Ivory Scroll.

"If they're not working together, they can't get on each other's nerves," the mayor nodded. "So they either never bother Twilight at all, or else they meet at her place as friends, and things go swimmingly." Nodding to herself confidently, she added, "Everything should work out perfectly."

\* \* \*

><p>"Applejack, darling, your hooves are a fright!" Rarity gasped, pointing to the mud encasing the earth pony's feet. "Go rinse yourself off before you come in here!"<p>

"Rarity, it's pourin' down out here!" Applejack gasped.

"No argument, shoo! shoo!" Rarity demanded, pointing back out the door.

Twilight sighed as Applejack complied with ill grace, and she watched with silence as the garden hose outside took the apple farmer two falls out of three. When Applejack finally came back inside she was soaked through her coat, and her hat had lost its shape from the water soaked through every inch. "Let me go get a towel," she said quietly, trudging off to the bathroom.

Applejack looked at Rarity, who looked at Applejack. Both looked at the bathroom door.

"Uh, Twilight," Applejack said, walking over to the door and taking the towel that floated out to her, "have we done somethin' ta upset ya? 'Cause you seem really down in the dumps. I mean, more than ya usually are," she added.

"Er, yes," Rarity added. "It's nice to have a quiet friend, especially after spending an afternoon with Pinkie, but you seem more... well... subdued than usual."

"You're gloomier than a pig who's just watched th' last mudhole in th' whole world dry up," Applejack agreed.

Twilight sighed and flopped forward on a reading table, resting her head on her forehooves. "I didn't want to talk about this," she said. "There's too much I can't explain, and there's too much I don't even want to think about, much less talk about. But... long story short, not long before Princess Celestia sent me here for the Summer Sun Celebration, I went through some really unpleasant circumstances. One of the reasons I was happy to move here was to have a quiet place where I could recover... with my friends," she added with a tiny smile.

"What kinda un-"

Applejack's question was interrupted by a white hoof to the mouth. "Darling, she said she doesn't even want to think about it," Rarity said.

"You know, I never had friends back in Canterlot, aside from my brother and my foalsitter," Twilight continued. "I've certainly never had a sleepover. But just now, when I saw you two at the door, and how annoyed you were at each other-"

"Annoyed?" Applejack cocked her head in confusion. "Over a bit o'water? It weren't that big a deal!"

"No, she's right," Rarity said, looking abashed. "I wasn't thinking about you at all, Applejack. You could have washed up in the bathroom. I'm so sorry."

"Anyway," Twilight said, "I'm not really in the mood for a party tonight anyway. Let's just have a quiet evening together, all right?"

"Sure thing," Applejack said. "A wet night calls for some comfort food anyway. Hot oatmeal with apples and cinnamon sound good?"

"Delightful, darling," Rarity said. "I'll just check on Twilight's extra blankets and pillows."

Outside, the rain poured peacefully onto the streets of Ponyville.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, you were right," Cheerilee said. "I hear Twilight had a nice, peaceful, pleasant evening with her two friends."<p>

Ivory Scroll sighed.

"So nothing went wrong..." Cheerilee gestured to the greenery lying higgledy-piggledy around the inside of the town hall. "Aside from a few loose branches, of course."

"Topiary," Ivory Scroll groaned. "Exquisitely crafted topiary. Two hundred and sixty-one pieces of exquisite unicorn-crafted topiary."

"Yes," Cheerilee nodded. "Funny how, out of all the buildings in town, they only hit Town Hall."

Ivory Scroll moaned.

"And based on a quick count," the teacher continued, "they knocked out two hundred and fifty-eight windowpanes in the process."

Ivory Scroll sobbed.

"Which, I suppose, would explain three of the seven holes in the roof," Cheerilee continued. "But what about-"

"Oh hai, Cheerilee!" a cheerful voice called out from a large pile of styled tree branches. "Did you come to help clean up too?"

"Ah, hello, Derpy," Cheerilee called back, all her questions answered. Still, to be polite, she asked, "Do you know how this mess got started?"

"Not really," Derpy replied, shaking her head. "Rainbow Dash kept the wind blowing west-to-east during the storm, and she sent me home to take care of Dinky when it started. It looks like the streets funnelled all the loose branches the wind picked up straight into town square." Her crossed eyes crossed slightly more in helpless confusion. "I don't know which pony was in charge of tree cleanup on the west side of town."

"I do," the mayor of Ponyville wept into her ascot. "Ohhh, I do..."

\* \* \*

><p>125.7 (Crisis)<p>

Nyx blinked and examined herself as she Awoke. Human, or something close, again with dark skin (frankly it amused her how her human skin tones tended to flip between either really pale or as dark as was naturally possible). Moving on, she was walking in the middle of the woods, carrying a basket, headed to her grandmother Twilight Velvet's writing cottage to bring her some food (because apparently her grandmother frequently forgot to take enough supplies when she got inspired). Oh, and she was wearing a red hood and cape combo over her other clothes.

\_ 'Well, this is interesting, '\_ she thought to herself as she looked around expectantly. \_ 'Wonder if anyone replaced the Big Bad Wolf? '\_

Almost as if the thought had been a cue, she heard a deep masculine voice begin singing.

\_ "Who's that I see walkin' in these woods? Why, it's Little Red Riding Hood! " \_

Turning to the direction the voice came from, she beheld a tall muscular werewolf wearing plate armor and grinning cheekily in her direction.

\_ "Hey there Little Red Riding Hood! You sure are looking good! " \_

Nyx couldn't help herself. She began giggling hysterically, interrupting the song. "Hey Lemon!" she managed to get out between giggles. "How've you been?"

"Not bad," the werewolf, also known as Leman Russ, as well as Lemon Rush to the Equestrian loopers, allowed. "Just saw you walking through the woods and wondered if you could use some company."

"Probably," Nyx grinned back. "After all, there could be any number of dangerous beasts lurking out in the woods that might attack a poor defenseless little girl out to take goodies to her poor old grandma's place! Why, if there wasn't a big strong escort around for defense, who knows what might happen?"

Leman Russ tried to hold it in, but the deep, rumbling laughter broke out anyway. "And would I be protecting you from them... or them from you?"

"Depends..." Nyx tapped her chin playfully. "Are you going to finish your set?"

Leman laughed again, shaking his head as he walked up to join Nyx on her trip through the woods. \_ "You're everything a big bad wolf could want..." \_

Nyx tilted her head back and joined Leman with an echoing \_ "Owoooooooooo" \_ before they both devolved back into laughter.

\* \* \*

><p>125.8 (fractalman)<p>

Fluttershy gasped as she saw the state of angel bunny; fur was stretched tight across his chest, showing the bones beneath, and one of his eyes was missing. "Oh, Angel, you poor thing!" She moved to comfort him...

Then he bit her hoof. Hard. "Ow! ANGEL! You bad, bad bunny!"

Angel just gave her the finger and hopped off.

"Angel! That's rude!"

At least it meant Angel wasn't suffering, despite appearances to the contrary.

\* \* \*

><p>\*knock knock knock\*<p>

Twilight opened the door to find Fluttershy.

"Oh hi Fluttershy! What's up?"

"Oh, well..."

To illustrate, Fluttershy's right eye fell out of its socket, only to dangle by a nerve bundle.

Twilight sighed. "Let me guess. Angel bunny bit you?"

Fluttershy nodded. "How'd you know?"

Twilight turned to reveal a skeletal tail. "That little rodent has been going around biting everypony for a couple days now."

Fluttershy's left eye widened. "Oh, my. I hope everypony's OK..."

"WOO HOO!" yelled Spike, flying down the stairs. "Check it out, Twilight! I'm a skeletal wyvern!"

Twilight chuckled. "Some of the ponies are a little creeped out by the changes, but yeah, we're fine."

\* \* \*

><p>125.9 (Hubris Plus)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stumbled as she Woke up mid-step and rolled her eyes before taking stock. You'd think she'd have gotten the hang of a smooth gait after the first few million times it had happened, but she supposed there really were some things that you never outgrew.<p>

Looking around, she found herself-

"You're walking in the woods," a voice informed her, seeming to come from the air itself. "There's nopony around and your magic is dulled."

She suppressed a groan. There were a hoof-full of decent narrators across the cosmos, but by and large they were a bad sign. A quick test of her horn confirmed that she could just about manage levitation. The rest of her abilities were just as sluggish.

"Out of the corner of your eye you spot her..." Twilight barely caught the motion and was startled when a second voice chimed in with-

\_"Sapphire Shores."\_

"She's following you, about thirty feet back," it went on. Twilight found herself hurrying her pace just a little. "She lowers her head and starts to gallop. She's gaining on you!"

\_"Sapphire Shores."\_

Twilight broke into a run as she tried to sort things out in her head. Getting run down by celebrities was hardly new. The Loops were more than happy to stick her with 'ponies are the deadliest game of all' on occasion. Slasher scenarios happened often enough, and narrators were only a little rarer. All three at once was a new one, though.

"You're looking for the road, but you're all turned around. She's almost upon you now and you can see there's blood on her face. Sweet Celestia, there's blood everywhere!" She suppressed the urge to upchuck as she caught sight of red all around her. To Tartarus with this mess, she was ending things then and there.

"Running for your life!"\_-"From Sapphire Sh-"\_

"Nope!" Twilight shouted, turning back and running straight at the ponycidal pop sensation. This was somehow turning into a Heart Song, which meant she'd have to act fast to shift the narrative momentum.

"Turning back to fight!"\_-"Sapphire Shores!"\_

"She's rearing back to strike you!"

\_"Musical mastermind, Sapphire Shores!"\_ Twilight dove under her opponent's flailing forehooves before throwing herself upwards. Her horn drove into what she knew to be a sensitive nerve cluster just beyond the shoulder.

"You've got her on the ropes!"\_-"Sapphire Shores!"\_ She continued her assault, dusting off disused martial arts to knock the musician off balance.

"But she doesn't give up hope!"\_-"Sapphire Shores!"\_ Sapphire continued fighting even as she hit the dirt. Her scrabbling hooves managed to strike Twilight a few times, leaving bruises and scrapes. Twilight, in turn, hefted a log in unsteady telekinesis and brought it around to strike her attacker across the back of her



head.

"Finally defeated!"-\_"Safe at last from Sapphire Shores..."\_ Twilight heaved a sigh of relief as the other pony's eyes rolled up and she slumped to the ground.

"Alright," she muttered, pacing as she unravelled the constraints on her magic. "Am I teleporting you to jail or a psych ward?" She wished Spike was there. Her own Legilimency was competent, but more intrusive than she'd like.

"But she's only playing dead!"-\_"Shores surprise!"\_ The other mare leaped to her hooves in a lightning fast motion. "She's got a knife in her hoof!"-\_"And death in her eyes!"\_

"Oh come on!" Twilight growled. Narrators were the \_worst\_.

\* \* \*

><p>125.10 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia noticed her hoof tapping on the marble floor and forced herself to stop. Twilight Sparkle hadn't responded to her ping upon Awakening (no pony had), and she hadn't sent the usual "help help Nightmare Moon is coming" letter. One or the other always happened, without fail, in the first ten minutes of a baseline Loop. What was going on?<p>

She had almost decided to go looking for her student when Twilight Sparkle appeared in a flash in front of her. The purple unicorn shook like a willow tree in a tornado. "Twilight," Celestia asked, "what's wrong?"

"Big Mac and Berry Punch aren't Awake and nobody else is but you and this Loop doesn't have alcohol and I-I-I..."

Celestia wrapped Twilight in one wing. To one of the guards at the door to her throne room she said, "Cancel all audiences and public events for the day. All of them. We shall be busy." Before the guard could protest, she teleported herself and her student to her bedchambers, where Celestia's personal student could cry on her shoulder as much as she needed to.

For the better part of half an hour Celestia just hugged Twilight and let her cry. Her mind flooded with questions- what Loop could have been this bad, that it completely shattered an Anchor this experienced?- but she kept her silence. If Twilight wanted to talk, she would. If not, Celestia would be there for her. True, their relationship wasn't what it once was, in baseline. Twilight no longer needed a mentor, and she had several friends closer than Celestia. But Celestia was still her friend, and would always be so, as long as Twilight Sparkle- Looping or not- needed her.

Finally, long after the sobs had ended and the sniffles had dried up, Twilight spoke. "What do you think would happen," she said, "if someone inverted a Bureau Loop?"

Celestia frowned, an expression all the more impressive for how

seldom she used it. The Conversion Bureau. Not the absolute worst variant Loop Equestria had to offer, but none of the worse variants happened more than once, whereas the Bureau popped up again and again, like a wormy apple in the bobbing tank. "Under any other circumstances I would guess it was a good thing," Celestia said cautiously. "People imprisoned in bodies they weren't born in and didn't want, released and returned to the lives they were meant to live."

Twilight snorted like a donkey. "Not even close," she grumbled. "Human scientists were conducting an experiment in travel to alternate dimensions. They opened a portal onto Equestria. For a little while everything seemed to be perfect- peaceful first contact, cultural exchange, the start of friendship between the two species."

When Twilight paused for reaction, Celestia replied, "But the portal did something to poison Equestria, didn't it? Something requiring Conversion?"

Twilight shuddered. "Once the portal was established it was harmless. But the initial experiment that opened the portal tainted the mana field across Equestria. Anything that used magic would gradually be poisoned and die from the exposure. And since Equestria relies on magic for practically everything..."

"Everypony would have to migrate to Earth," Celestia said. "I begin to see where this is going."

"Ponies could live on Earth as ponies," Twilight continued, "but that Earth had its own magic field, tainted even more so than Equestria's. We tried closing the portal, but closing the portal didn't take away the taint from Equestria's magic. So eventually it came down to one solution: convert every talking creature in Equestria into a creature that couldn't touch magic in any way, that would be immune to the taint. Humans."

"I see," Celestia said. After a moment's thought she added, "And I asked you to be one of the first ones converted, didn't I?"

Twilight nodded. "You and Luna were too far gone by that point, you said- too much magic, too much poisoning to survive conversion. I was supposed to take your place and lead the ponies to safety on Earth... in a world they didn't understand, a world that worked like the worst horrors of the Everfree Forest, a world without any of the wonders or miracles we take for granted."

"So what did you do?" Celestia asked.

"I said no," Twilight said. "You cajoled me and I said no. You called to my sense of duty, and I said no. Then you got on your knees and pleaded, begged me to accept conversion so I would live." Twilight sniffed again and pressed herself a little harder against Celestia. "I think it wouldn't hurt so much if she'd acted more like the usual Bureau Celestia and tried to take the decision out of my hooves, but she wouldn't do that. She was basically you. She did everything she could except force me to be converted. But she would- not- give- up!" After a shuddering sigh she finished, "I eventually teleported myself into solid rock to crash the Loop."

\_Uh-oh,\_ Celestia thought but carefully didn't say aloud. As a rule of thumb, deliberately crashing a bad Loop tended to land the Loopers involved in a worse Loop. But not always. "And you ended up here?"

"No. Minecraft," Twilight said. "That didn't last long, because I couldn't concentrate on mining and building. I kept wondering... did I do the right thing? I mean, the Loop crashes when the Anchor dies... but what if there was another Anchor in that Loop? Did I just condemn all Equestria to a lifetime of leaderless exile without magic? Could I have found some way to purify the magic field if I hadn't given up?" Twilight looked up at Celestia and whispered, "Could I have saved you and Luna?"

Celestia hugged Twilight again. "My dear Twilight," she said, "you made the best decision you could at the time. Sometimes the Loops are just cruel, and nothing we do can change that, no matter how hard we try." A small smile crept on her lips. "Remind me to tell you about the Loop where my chosen student was Jack Napier... and he had to save Equestria from the dreaded Batmare."

This teaser served its purpose, which was to break the mood completely. "What? But... how? PLEASE tell me the Joker isn't Looping!"

"Another time, Twilight," Celestia chuckled. "I think we both need a vacation Loop. Why don't we go tell Nightmare Moon the throne is hers, and see how long it takes for her to beg us to come back?"

"Surfing again?" Twilight asked.

"Actually, I was thinking Maneaco. Roulette and baccarat in a city that never sleeps. Incognito, of course. And with the Equestrian treasury for mad money."

"You know," Twilight said, "I've been working out this new system for card-counting at blackjack that I'm almost certain the casino won't be-"

Twilight's words were cut off as the two ponies teleported away.

\* \* \*

><p>125.3 continued (elmagnifico)<p>

When the ping came, he almost missed it.

Macintosh Apple, elder brother, professional farmer, amateur barkeep and looper, in that order, rubbed at his forehead with a hoof. Massaging the bridge of one's nose was a comfort limited to the loops where he had fingers, and a nose for that matter. It was one which he had not managed to bring back to his equine form, and was sorely missing at the moment. So, in lieu of such action, he continued rubbing at his forehead with a hoof.

An outside observer would see something quite different. Another pony, or similar narrator more focused on the physical reality, such as the two green eyes peering into the mirror, would say Applejack was massaging her forehead. For that was the name tied to the body

currently ensconced in a bathroom on Sweet Apple Acres, as it had been for a good five minutes while the mind currently possessing it sorted out the disorientation of waking up somewhere unfamiliar.

Macintosh, on the other hand, saw no reason to bow his internal pronouns to the whims of something so capricious in the Loops as Fact. So he massaged his forehead.

There hadn't been a loop this... disorienting, since That One Loop with Twilight. Which had at least been bearable by dint of not giving him time to think over the changes until after Discord had been vanquished. By that point he had more important concerns, like forging a nation and keeping a religion devoted to him from getting too silly.

It occurred to him that there were duties that needed to be done, here and now, and that his family would be missing the fourth member if this anti-headache session went on much longer, but the idea of interacting with the rest of the clan as Applejack, simply galled too much in his mind.

A loop memory bubbled to the surface. Breakfast. It was familiar, one of the fresher memories whenever he Awoke. His sister always made hazelnut pancakes. But the memory was wrong too. He could remember making hazelnut pancakes. Thoughts accompanied images and actions, sounding like Applejack being there, whispering in his head.

He tried listening for a moment. 'Gotta grind these nuts good an' small. Granny Smith can't take the big chunks, get stuck in her dentures. Maybe I should make a separate batch for her, I like 'em, and Big Mac prefers-'

Mention of his name shot him back to the present, and his eyes widened, and then clenched shut as he strained at the corners of his mind. More loop memories tried to burn their way to the surface, but he held them down with a green-tinged extension of his will until they subsided. He let out a sigh of relief, and returned to regarding "his" reflection.

What looked like Applejack continued to scowl at him through the bathroom mirror, reinforcing his conviction. Making him all the more determined to repress those thoughts from before he awoke in this body. After all, one fact remained true:

Those were not his memories.

Granted, there were many loop memories that he'd seen that were not his. Every time he looped somewhere other than the Apple farm, he got a set that weren't his. These memories, however, weren't just not his.

They were Applejack's.

Who knew what kinds of private moments and thoughts were held therein?

"Sis? Y' okay in there?"

The voice from outside made him stiffen. That wasn't Applebloom or

Granny Smith. Didn't sound like them anyway. The male relatives wouldn't arrive until later, unless this was a stranger variant than he'd thought. That left only one candidate. One he was not ready to face.

Then the Ping hit.

He cleared his throat, feeling the unfamiliar vocal chords. A tiny psychic poke at the back of his mind was the least of his problems. Despite the strangeness of using it, the voice sounded perfectly natural to him. Which could not be less normal.

"Ah'm fine, jus' don' feel like mahself."

There was a grunt from outside, and then a receding set of hoofsteps as Macintosh moved away.

'That's going to get confusing quick,' the looper thought to himself as he pinged back.

\* \* \*

><p>125.11(DrTempo)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Another Loop here at Canterlot High...<em>

Sunset Shimmer was, as you'd expect by now, tired of high school. The 'Dazzlings incident' did change things up a bit, but even their tricks got stale. The teacher then mentioned two new exchange students, and that got Sunset's attention. \_Five bits it's guest Loopers.

><em>

>"...Please welcome Pound Foolish and Blue Thunder."<p>

The latter, a young man with blue skin, bowed. "It is an honor to meet you all. I hope we can get along."

Pound Foolish, a young woman, then said, "Pleased to meet you all! Hope you'll get us in the Loop about this place!"

Sunset knew that familiar sign, and quickly used a Ping, getting responses which were presumably from the new students. Raising her hand, Sunset said, "I'll show them around!"

\* \* \*

><p>A few minutes later, the new students were in the gym, when Sunset pointed to Pound Foolish and inquired, "You're Nabiki Tendo, right? And by his name, your friend is...I can't believe I'm saying this...an Awake Tatewaki Kuno?"<p>

The revealed Nabiki nodded. "Correct. Ranma told me about you. Heard you replaced me when you met him. Hope he taught you as well as he did me back during the early days."

Sunset nodded. "His teachings did help form my way of fighting. How DID you end up being the first Nerima Looper after him to Awaken anyway?" Nabiki shrugged. "He needed an ear to hear his problems,

that's all, and didn't want to worry Kasumi. Even I was surprised when I started Looping."

Sunset chuckled. "Hard to believe the stories of how generous you are nowadays. So", Sunset pointed at Kuno, "What's HIS story? When he'd Awaken?" Kuno replied with, "Ranma befriended me one Loop where we had met during his training trip. He was there for me when my mother passed; I'd likely fallen into my baseline habits otherwise. I happened to Awaken just as my baseline self was proclaiming his love for Ranma's girl form."

Sunset cringed. "Now that's gotta be embarrassing. So, what've you been doing in the Loops, Kuno?"

The samurai wannabe replied, "I have been trying to learn what it truly means to be a samurai. I have had a couple of Fused Loops which have helped. Allow me to demonstrate what I know, as little as it may be..."

Sunset grabbed a basketball, and said, "Let's see it, then."

Lifting his hand, Kuno used the Force to move the basketball. Sunset, intrigued, replied, "A Jedi, huh. Their ways would fit you."

Kuno then drew a sword, which Sunset could sense was a Zanpakuto. Saying, "Strike, Ao Ikazuchi," the Zanpakuto's blade turned into pure lightning, and Kuno then sent it at the basketball.

"'Blue Thunder'..." Sunset mused. "Why am I not shocked that's what that'd be named?"

Kuno snickered, and when Sunset raised her eyebrow, then replied, "I hope you meant that awful pun." Sunset facepalmed. "I just realized it. Anyhow, welcome to this corner of the Multiverse, Kuno. Just don't try and hit on anyone."

Kuno laughed mirthfully. "What do you take me for? That buffoon whom I had once seen any day in the mirror?"

Nabiki shrugged. "At least he's honest about it." The trio laughed. Sunset grinned widely. "Well, welcome to Canter lot High. Hope you enjoy the experience!"

Nabiki nodded. "We will."

\* \* \*

><p>125.12<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So, what did you dress up as for Nightmare Night?" Twilight asked.<p>

Nyx shrugged. "Didn't. I just took my hairband off."

Twilight sniggered. "That, I admit, works."

\* \* \*

><p>125.13 (with OathToOblivion)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, so... I <em>think<em> I've got this down." The Smeargle sat down, toying with her tail idly. "This is the Pokemon world, right?"

"Well, yeah," Pikachu confirmed. "It's kind of obvious."

"Yeah, yeah, I don't play much. So... right. Why am I a Smeargle?"

"Why wouldn't you be?" Ash asked. "Well, you might be a human, I guess..."

"No, I mean... look, I'm a griffin, right? Why aren't I a griffin Pokemon?" Gilda waved her tail around. "I can see where it's coming from, I guess, but..."

Pikachu started to reply... and stopped. He turned to Ash. "Do we even \_have\_ a griffin Pokemon?"

"...now you mention it..." Ash shrugged. "Can't think of one."

"That sucks." Gilda shrugged. "Oh well. Guess I may as well tag along with you butts. What do Smeargle learn, anyway?"

Pikachu grinned. "Good news! Anything they want. They copy moves."

"Really?" Gilda's expression turned contemplative. "Interesting. You guys run into Legendaries, right?"

"This could go either really well, or \_really\_ badly," Pikachu commented to Ash, who nodded his agreement.

"Just to clarify, I get to keep the moves when I leave, right?"

"Yep," Ash confirmed, holding up his hand. A lazily-spinning Shadow Ball formed in his hand, while Pikachu spat out an Ember.

\* \* \*

><p>125.14:<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Discord?" Twilight asked. "Would you care to explain?"<p>

Discord shrugged. "Explain what? All of this is above-board."

He tapped the board to prove it, which made a wooden sound.

"More to the point, it is below my house." Twilight pointed at the large barrels. "That one has a fuse. Why does it have a fuse?"

Discord gestured to his comrade-in-legs. "Ask her."

Zecora spread her wings, and coughed.

"Remember, remember,  
>the fourth season ender,<br>harmony, centaur and plot.

If we blow your building  
>before Tirek escapes,<br>then - simply put - he can not."

"Very nice," Twilight said, and sighed. "Have either of you had a stressful loop recently?"

"Not especially, no..." Discord replied. "There is a good reason for this, though."

Zecora nodded, and tapped the walls. "These are treated with a potion. If made right, there will be no motion. The blast shall all go to the sky, and no danger for those nearby."

"I see." Twilight frowned. "Right, just give me ten minutes to put everything I want to keep in my pocket and ascend."

"Ascend?" Discord turned his head sideways in thought.  
"Why?"

Twilight produced a large surfboard. "I may as well see what Celestia sees in this, now I have the opportunity."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

125.1: This new fangled business.

>125.2: Such fun.<br>125.3: That kind of thing is always uncomfortable.

>125.4: Don't ask me, I'm just the editor.<br>125.5: Standard practice.

>125.6: They don't always have much practice.<br>125.7: What a big chapter you have...

>125.8: Does this make Spike-and-Rarity into a rom-zom-com?<br>125.9: Second person is a sign of trouble.

>125.10: By "drink", Celestia meant "alcohol".<br>125.11: The Kunos are strange.

>125.12: An undisguise.<br>125.13: As Oath says, watch there be a Griffin Pokemon in gen 7.

>125.14: Well, it is fireworks night.<p>

## 132. Chapter 132

126.1

\* \* \*

><p>"Right," Cheerilee said, taking her pointer in both hands. "I hope everyone's paying attention."<p>

The pointer whipped out to aim directly at one of the sitting students. "Nurgle! If you must eat in class, make sure it does not



distract you or others!"

With a nod, the Chaos God switched to sandwiches, which made less noise.

"Thank you. Now."

Cheerilee tapped the board. "Looping Ethics. Section five â€" loopers with debilitating problems which mean that they are unable to either give or withhold consent."

"Do we have to do this?" Khorne asked, anger simmering in his voice.

"After what you nearly did to Jorgen, yes," Russ returned from the front desk.

Cheerilee ignored them, chalking on the board. "There's a flowchart for this, but the summary is as follows:"

"Unless there is reason to believe he or she or it should not, the Anchor is considered to have power of attorney over an incapable looper from their own loop. Absent that anchor, a local anchor is the one who should make the decision. If there is no known anchor present â€" such as when there is a stealth anchor â€" and no \_known and verified\_ friends of the incapable looper, then it is the correct thing to do to decline treatment on consent issues. Fortunately, this is rare."

"Sorry, I stopped listening halfway through," Bjorn said.  
"What?"

"...perhaps an example would work better." Cheerilee made a handseal, and gestured.

The board flashed, turning into a screen through which could be seen a cheerfully animated depiction of Ponyville.

Khorne made a retching noise.

"Oh, hush," Slaneesh said, waving a tentacle. "I think it's adorable. Besides, I thought you had some good things to say about Rainbow Dash-"

"I told you never to mention that!" Khorne snapped.

"You're the god of competition, it's not exactly unexpected," the Emperor contributed.

"All of you, shut it!" Leman said, and the muttering gradually quieted down.

"Thank you, Leman," Cheerilee nodded. She gestured again, and images of ponies appeared. One of them was a silver-maned earth pony with an eyepatch, and a blank expression.

"When he first came to us, Kakashi Hatake was convinced he had been locked in an illusion since he had first started looping. This self-reinforced his paranoia, which â€" \_Tzeentch stop taking notes, this isn't the important bit â€" \_which meant it was functionally

impossible to get consent from him until after he had already been somewhat cured."

Chrysalis trotted on-screen, which resulted in a cheer from Slaanesh.

Then the God/dess? of lust and love pouted. "Oh, that's right, she's got all boring and monogamous."

"You didn't pay nearly enough attention," the teachers' assistant said, shaking her head. "She and Auntie Trixie have an open relationship."

"Re-ally?" Slaanesh asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Not the point," Cheerilee said severely. "As one of our local Elements of Kindness, Chrysalis is even better equipped now than she was at his time to handle such issues, but her status as empath was amply sufficient. The first step was surface empathic scans â€" nothing intrusive â€" which was how we determined his mind was locked up."

"Why didn't you just delve all the way?" Tzeentch asked, nodding at the screen. "There's the Uzumaki Anchor there, he could give you permission."

"Intrusive scans require either explicit personal consent or the lack of other options to proceed. We were never at that point." Cheerilee shrugged. "Of course, I'm using we to refer to a decision I was not involved in."

Fluttershy and Zecora, then Silver Spoon, appeared on the screen. "As it happens, all three of our current Elements of Kindness were involved in his therapy, along with Zecora â€" latterly Generosity. They made clear as soon as he was lucid that the therapy was now his choice, and he elected to continue with it."

Cheerilee turned away from the board, as the cartoon-Kakashi-pony engaged in complicated sparring with cartoon-Silver-Spoon. "Any questions?"

"What does this have to do with us, again?" Tzeentch asked.

"You do know who had to fix the mess you made out of poor Krystal, right?" Nyx asked. She winced. "Luckily, Fox was around, and he was able to talk her down."

"She was asking for it!" Tzeentch said, raising his clawed hands. "Literally, asking for it. She tried to use psyker powers in a warp storm!"

"Which for her baseline is not only perfectly safe, but barely even a thing." Cheerilee sighed. "Let's look at another example. This time, someone who was not ready to accept assistance..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, I think that went fairly well," Leman said, some time later.<p>

"Yeah, I guess," Nyx agreed. "At least no-one threw anything."

"Hey, they do behave better these days," Leman shrugged. "It's kind of a positive feedback loop â€" when I fix the place, even a little, it means they're getting more power from the positive sides of their portfolios. Same for Dad, too."

"More power to them? More power to them," Nyx decided.

"That was deliberate," Leman announced, poking her nose. She chuckled, and batted at his hand.

"Stop it!"

"I don't think you're being all that sincere," Leman judged.

There was a loud crunch.

Nyx sighed. "Slaanesh!"

"What?" the god/dess? said, eating some more popcorn. "Carry on as if I'm not here."

"For a deity of love, you're terrible at keeping the mood going," Leman told Slaanesh, turning away from the not-quite-technically-a-Space-Marine.

"Pssh," Slaanesh replied. "I'm just glad that my anchor has finally loosened up a bit." A shrug. "Still not going to take me up on my offer?"

"We do not need extra participants!"

"Monogamy is boring," Slaanesh moaned. "Fine then. I'll go bother Empty to let me speak to Fulgrim again."

\* \* \*

><p>126.2<p>

"Hey, sparklebutt, watch this!"

Gilda raised her foreleg. There was a moment of magical uncertainty, and then a meteorite hit the ground a few hundred feet away.

"...it's very nice," Twilight said, blinking at the crater. "If destructive. What is it?"

"Neat, huh?" Gilda asked, and rummaged in her pocket. "Hold on, watch this!"

The gesture was the same. The meteorite came down the same, though bluer.

When it hit, though, it produced a wash of water which splashed both of them and turned the crater into an instant pond.

"I'm waiting to hear an explanation..." Twilight hinted.

"One more." Gilda dropped what she'd been holding with a clang, and replaced it with another "€" this one green to the previous blue.

An identical gesture. A near-identical, though green, meteorite.

And when it hit, an instant jungle about twenty feet across.

"Okay, okay," Gilda relented. "It's Judgement. Copied it in the Pokemon world."

She waved the Plates around. "I've got the full set! Hey, want to see the Ghost type one?"

"Maybe later."

\* \* \*

><p>126.3 <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Ah, Twilight!" Trixie said, and waved a hoof at the board. "Mark my words "€" this will be my greatest achievement yet!"<p>

Twilight squinted at the board. "Trixie," she said after a few seconds. "Is it the cloth, or under the cloth?"

"Whoops." Trixie reached out and swept the cloth off. "Behold!"

The Anchor looked at a set of stark chalk marks. "What is that?"

"Dodecanitrododecaazaisowurtizane," Trixie rattled off.

"Dodeca..." Twilight counted in her head. "An isowurtizane is a carbon structure, right?"

Trixie nodded.

"Twelve atoms?"

Another nod.

Twilight nodded back, with something like resignation. "So, basically, twenty-four nitrogen ions in a cage-structure with nothing to stabilize them except crossed hooves."

"Well, there's the same amount of oxygen and a few hydrogens along for the ride, but yes." Trixie shrugged. "I simulated it, it is surprisingly stable."

"You know those simulations don't actually look at ignition energies, right?" Twilight checked.

"No, I looked at those. Even conjured some with pure magic "€" it's close to being as stable as TNT, and considerably more explosive."

Twilight blinked. "Wow, I'm surprised. What makes it a challenge?"

Trixie coughed. "The intermediary compounds are a bit less stable."

"Ah. Say no more, and do your work somewhere isolated."

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie wheeled the container of fuming nitric acid out of the work area. "Half done," she said to herself.<p>

Granted, that was the easy half â€" she now had some hexa- versions of the compound, which were nothing to blink at (being more stable \_dissolved in TNT\_ than in their raw form) but nothing that hadn't been done before.

The next step, however, was first to decant some. The first batch had exploded halfway through the process (losing her some eyebrows and a nice workroom) and so she wanted this second lot split up among multiple containers so she didn't lose it all if she fluffed it again.

\* \* \*

><p>Some hours later, a slightly more sleep-deprived unicorn wheeled the fuming nitric acid back into the work area.<p>

This was the \_tricky\_ half. To get that many more nitrogens into the already very nitric compound, it would be necessary to basically beat the crap out of it with pressure, temperature, and both at once. Along with some very strong nitric acid.

"Start music," she instructed, and the Anvil Chorus from \_Il Trovatore\_ came on the speakers.

Because if you \_were\_ going to do this kind of thing, you had to do it in style.

\* \* \*

><p>With patient care, Trixie moved the final reserve canister into her workroom.<p>

By now she had scorch marks all over her coat. Her pile of destroyed lab equipment filled a room. The sprinklers had run dry and been replaced twice, and she was also nearly out of fuming nitric acid. (And spare bricks.)

This time, she was taking it \_slow.\_

A single thimbleful of acid went into a crucible with a mere drop of explosive. She placed it in the reaction chamber, and heated it â€" examining the readouts constantly.

The isowurtizane-derived compound sat inert as it was raised to operating temperature, then to operating pressure. A thin film began to develop, as the reaction progressed sluggishly in the absence of any catalyst.

Then it blew up.

Undeterred, Trixie measured out similarly small quantities, and put them in the second reaction chamber " this one completely insulated, with no light and no vibration.

For about four minutes, the reaction presumably progressed.

Then it blew up. Trixie noticed that, because it blew a small hole in the side of the chamber.

Option three. Reduce operating temperature, increase pressure.

That blew up.

Option four " substitute temperature for pressure.

Another explosion.

Five. A catalyst.

Bang.

Six. Catalyst and elevated temperature.

Boom.

Eventually, with no reaction chambers left, Trixie was forced to stop.

She looked at the results of her hoofiwork, and sighed.

"Right. Time to get out the computer."

\* \* \*

><p>"I must, with surprise, admit defeat," Trixie reported.<p>

Twilight blinked. "Really? Wow."

"Crunched the numbers," Trixie said, and sighed. "The minimum possible energy required to move a nitro group onto decanitroundecaaziaisowurtizane is greater than the ignition energy of the molecule. It's physically impossible."

"Magic?" Twilight suggested.

"What's the point?" Trixie shrugged. "It's not a proper synthesis any more if you do that, there's no challenge."

Twilight trotted over and laid a hoof on her shoulder. "I'm sorry, Trixie."

Trixie nodded. "Thanks for being understanding."

\* \* \*

><p>126.4 <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash woke up, in both senses of the word.<p>

"Ow..." she muttered, shifting her weight. "That was trippy..."

"Hello?" a voice said. "Piplup? Or... that's not you, Oshawott, is it?"

"Osha what?" Dash mumbled, trying to stand up. This turned out to be harder than expected â€" she kept mixing her forelegs and wings up. "Name's Rainbow Dash."

Looking up, Dash saw that the person talking to her was... some kind of monkey with a tail on fire.

"Wait..." she said, dredging up memories. "Are you a Flimflam?"

\_"Chimchar,\_" the... \_Pokemon\_, that was it... corrected. "Okay, you've got to be a looper if you're making that kind of mistake. I did wonder why you were a Pidgey. Same colour, though..." he mused.

"A what?"

The monkey pointed.

Dash looked down.

This didn't help her headache.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay," Dash said, for the fourth time. "I'm a pigeon."<p>

"Pidgey!" Chimchar corrected. "Pay attention, \_please!\_"

"Meh." Dash shrugged her wings awkwardly. "Basically the same thing. Bird, slow, uncool."

Chimchar rolled his eyes, not looking forward to the next few weeks. "Okay â€" listen, if it'll stop you going on about it... when Pidgey evolve, they become Pidgeotto, which are fast and powerful."

Dash looked moderately interested.

"And when they hit Pidgeot, they can break the sound barrier."

Visiting Looper gave a considering look to Anchor. "Tell me more."

\* \* \*

><p>"Finally!" Dash cheered. "Now the spring's open, I can stop being so stupidly small and slow!"<p>

Chimchar shook his head. "Sorry. We need to wait until we completely

undistort time."

Dash froze, beak open in surprise, then ruffled her wings. "Fine. Whatever. I've already beaten up a god or whatever as something smaller than his toe, guess there's no reason to break the streak..."

\* \* \*

><p>126.5 (fractalman) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>The Dazzlings walked into the cafeteria, ready to sing.<p>

Sunset sighed. She really didn't feel like dealing with those three at the moment.

"Ahhhahhh...ahhhh-"

BEYOOOORRRRRRRRRRRRNK

Everyone in the room covered their ears at the obnoxious sound of an air horn.

"Yeah, not dealing with you three today. "

\* \* \*

><p>126.6 (Gym Quirk) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Adagio Dazzle could taste the slowly simmering miasma of hostility and resentment in the auditorium as the opening round of their Battle of the Bands started winnowing out the less talented (and magical) entrants. It was a piquant mix of sour and bitter that she hadn't encountered in such a long time. <em>This is such a lovely change from the "fast food" that Aria keeps complaining about.<em>

She shared a vicious smile with her companions as they made their way onstage.

"Excuse me, Miss Dazzle?" interrupted the principal before they could start reinforcing their enchantment. "Do you intend to perform \_a capella\_?"

"Um...What?" the disguised siren responded blankly.

"This is a Battle of the Bands," explained the vice-principal. "All instrumental accompaniment must be performed by the participants. No pre-recorded music allowed."

It gradually dawned on the Dazzlings' leader that neither school administrator was showing the usual signs of being enthralled.

\_This might be just a bit more difficult to pull off than we'd thought.\_



\* \* \*

><p>126.7 (Hubris Plus) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"The last time I Looped through Canterlot High," Zecora informed her fellow Loopers. "I decided I would give Disney a try. And while it may at first appear invective, I found Friends on the Other Side quite effective."<p>

"A villain song?" Dash asked. "How'd you get that to work?"

"As the link to Equestria was quite bonafide, I truly did have friends on the other side," the zebra smirked. "And by appealing to the Dazzlings' greed, I trapped them in the bargain's creed. The green they sought was evil fog, they did not expect to be made frogs. And now that I consider using their desire..."

"No," Sunset told her. "We're not trying Hellfire."

\* \* \*

><p>126.8 (Draconas) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke, right as the Dazzlings were cackling and transforming into their true form. Thinking quickly she reached into her subspace pocket to pull out a wand, only to have her hand grabbed.<p>

Discord- \_'Superintendent Discord' \_her Loop Memories supplied, leaned forward into her field of view. "Don't worry, I've already taken care of this." He explained, grinning. "I made Greek Mythology class mandatory."

As the Dazzlings transformed into Sirens, they cackled. "Behold, your Siren rulers!"

"Nope." A random student butted in, rendering the Dazzlings speechless. "Sirens were bird women. You're fish horses, or hippocampi."

"But-" Adagio tried to say, before being cut off and mobbed by the students.

"Oh god, hippocampi!" "I want to ride the silver one!" "I've got some seaweed, any of you want some seaweed!"

Twilight looked at Discord suspiciously. "Okay, I also set up an enchantment that broke the Dazzlings' hold over the student body and makes said students more prone to random actions." He admitted.

\* \* \*

><p>126.9 (Crisis) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sighed to herself as she walked through the streets of some variant of a Hub-like city called San Fransokyo, her hooves clopping despondently on the pavement.<p>

She'd Awoken in another Bureau Loop, standard variation. The only other looper present, save someone who refused to ping back, had so far been Luna. Twilight and the moon princess had quickly gotten together to hash out a plan to talk the other Elements of Harmony and Celestia, respectively, into a more... amiable arrangement than forcibly turning the entire human race into ponies and eradicating every trace of their culture.

So far it had been as productive as hitting her head against a brick wall. With baseline strength and durability. Less so by all indications.

Sighing again, Twilight continued walking, staring down at the street and essentially not looking, or really caring, where she was going.

Which is why she ran face-first into a giant white balloon.

Shaking her head from surprise, and thankful that her horn wasn't quite sharp enough to puncture the balloon at the slow pace she'd been going (that would have been even more embarrassing), she looked up at the object and blinked.

And blinked some more.

"Greetings, I am Baymax," the white humanoid balloon raised its hand in a friendly greeting. "I am programmed to help the sick and injured."

Twilight kept blinking as she tried to place the figure from her collection of Hub-world fiction, but her mind kept trying to head in the direction of the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man or Bibendum.

"Are you in need of assistance?"

Dear tree... he was just... He was adorable and huggable, that's what he was. Twilight could almost feel her ruthlessly suppressed in-Loop Bureau instincts crumbling in the face of his pure sweet innocence.

Wait... she could feel them crumbling in the face of his pure sweet innocence!

"Actually..." Twilight turned the beginnings of a plan over in her mind, "I think I am..."

'This alone was worth the price of admission,' Twilight smiled as she watched the eyes of four variants of her friends and the struggle behind them as their learned intolerance of the 'tainted' humans and their 'corrupt' technology warred with their natural love for all things cute and cuddly. The former was clearly losing to the latter. Badly.

As for the fifth variant friend...

"Sooo sooofft... sooo wwaaaarrmmm..." Rainbow Dash purred sleepily from atop Baymax.

"Greetings, I am Baymax. Who are you?"

"Hail and well-met noble Baymax! We are Luna, princess of the night and diarch of Equestria!"

"A pleasure to meet you."

Twilight felt a little guilty about not warning the Awake Luna ahead of time, but the moon princess didn't seem to mind the pleasant surprise.

Twilight could scarcely believe it. The turnaround in attitude most Bureau ponies had upon meeting Baymax (or even seeing him interact with others) was... it was incredible. He just stood there being his adorable self and they crumbled.

And once the intolerance barrier was down, the Bureau ponies found they actually had a lot in common with most humans.

Of course, there were a few stubborn holdouts determined to press the issue...

"Sister?" Celestia stared at the one who had interposed herself between the solar diarch and the white abomination below. "You would... you would side with this abomination created by the tainted humans?"

"Thy call yon Baymax an abomination? We say thee Nay!" Luna returned defiantly. "For yon Baymax is a truly pure being, produced by this so-called tainted humanity! And any who can produce such a being can not be beyond hope as thy claim!"

"He is a product of the humans' corrupt technology!" Celestia yelled back. "He must be destroyed, along with the rest of their tainted culture!"

"BAYMAX IS THE PUREST AND MOST INNOCENT CREATURE WE HAVE EVER ENCOUNTERED OUTSIDE A NEWBORN FOAL!" Luna roared back at Celestia. "THINE ARGUMENTS ARE \_INVALID\_!"

\* \* \*

><p>126.10 (Fractalman) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle stepped out of the mirror into the throne room, looking for all the world like a drowned, purple rat. She was followed closely by Sunset, Rarity, Pinkie, Applejack, and Fluttershy.<p>

"Well that's the last time ah'm singing 'The Rain Rain Rain Came Down Down Down'," said Applejack.

"Agreed. Say, where's Rainbow Dash?" asked Sunset.

"WAHOOOO!" was all they heard before Dash came out of the mirror on a

surfboard, followed immediately by a tsunami and ten pots of honey.  
"That was awesome! Lets do that again!"

"NO!" yelled all the other loopers.

"We are not flooding the stadium again," clarified Fluttershy, "no matter how 'awesome' it may be to surf your way through the mirror portal."

\* \* \*

><p>126.11 (fractalman) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Yes yes yes yes YES!" said Chrysalis as she danced into the bar.<p>

"Oh Hi Chrysalis, what's up?" asked Twilight.

"Remember how I was having a hard time finding a situation to sing something from Phantom of the Opera without it being creepy?"

"Yeah..."

"Trixie and I broke the Dazzlings' control using 'All I Ask of You'. I also got a snack out of it."

Twilight chuckled. "That's one way to save two bunnies with one hoof!"

\* \* \*

><p>126.12 (Detective Ethan Redfield) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy watched Discord with ever increasing worry. The draconequus was almost giddy as he poured cereal into Angel Bunny's bowl.<p>

"Um...Discord, I think you shouldn't do that," murmured poor Fluttershy as she took cover behind a nearby table.

Discord gave a small toothy grin, "This one was just begging to be played ever since I had my adventure in the hub world."

As Discord finished pouring, the Draconequus shrugged and walked through the kitchen away from his prank, "Besides, I get two for one on this one. No one will suspect Discord of doing such a simple prank. He'll probably blame Dash."

Something smacked the side of his head hard causing marbles to burst out his opposite ear. The Draconequus rubbed his head and looked down. Angel was giving his most loathing glare he could at the embodiment of chaos before hopping away. Fluttershy strolled up with her head low, "Oh dear...you better watch yourself for the rest of this loop. Last time, Pinkie did it and...it was horrible..."

Discord shrugged and gave a toothy grin, "What can he possibly do to me?"

**\*\*Three Days Before the Loop Ended\*\***

"This was about the cereal, wasn't it," Discord asked, completely nonchalant about hanging precariously over a massive pool of milk and cereal by a rope hooked up to a machine. Nearby, Angel Bunny sat at a control center, watching the action with a ton of buttons nearby.

Fluttershy sighed as she stood nearby. She had already ascended and prepared healing spells in case this got out of hand, "Silly Discord, Angel Bunny doesn't like Trix."

Discord looked at the milk and shrugged, "On a scale of one to ten, I give you a rubber chicken for the effort," then snapped his fingers and Angel was covered in rubber chickens. A moment later, a second discord stood to the side, screaming about the humanity and how someone should save Discord. Then a third discord wandered onto the scene, shrugged and walked towards the door, "Meh, I'd rather not get involved."

Angel gave a small grin as he pushed two of the buttons. Underneath both discords, the floor opened, revealing a pair of vats of milk and Trix cereal. A pair of splashes was heard a moment later. Discord blinked, then narrowed his eyes, "You're saying I'm getting too predictable, aren't you?"

Angel's grin turned sadistic as he slammed the center button, dropping Discord into the pool of milk. Fluttershy gave a stern look at the rabbit, "You didn't put an alligator in this one, did you?"

The bunny rolled his eyes. It was only Gummy. Not his fault the loop made Gummy so massive that loop.

\* \* \*

><p>126.13 (Kris Overstreet) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twil- er, Dusk! Dusk!"<p>

The unicorn normally known as Twilight Sparkle groaned. She hated being in Ponyville for a gender-flip Loop. Too many of them involved romantic hijinks, up to and including harems. She'd only gone along with this one when s/he saw that the other baseline Element Bearers were both Awake and also gender-flipped. Fortunately, thus far no signs of any relationship railroad on the Loop's part had surfaced, and Twilight- or Dusk Shine- had just begun to relax and hope that this Loop would play out to baseline.

Rainbow Blitz, normally Dash, shouting and charging into the library brought that relaxation to a screeching halt.

Shutting the door behind Rainbow with his/her magic, and mentally cursing the inflexibility of pronouns, Twilight said, "Okay, Rainbow,

nobody can hear us in here. What's wrong?"

Rainbow put her forehooves on Twilight's broader-than-usual shoulders. "Did you know," the pegasus gasped, "there's no such thing as Daring Do in this Loop?"

"What?" Twilight blinked. "I'm sure there's an A. K. Yearling section here, under 'Fiction.'"

"Have you actually read them?"

"Only about three hundred times each, Dash."

"I mean this Loop."

"Well, no." Twilight's eyes tracked the shelves to the appropriate spot, and she pulled down a range of about a dozen books. "Here we are, A. K. Yearling... what's this?" The covers featured a yellow pegasus stallion with a salt-and-pepper mane, dressed not in pith helmet and khakis but in formal evening wear. "The Adventures of James Bridle?"

"No 'Sapphire Stone!' No 'Eternal Flower!'" Dash picked up one title after another. "Look at these dopey names! 'The Griffon Who Loved Me.' 'Dr. Neigh.' 'Goldhoof.' 'Thunderbit.' 'Moonbucker'- Luna wouldn't like that one!"

Twilight sighed. "Dash," s/he sighed an octave deeper than she was comfortable with, "this Loop the male A. K. Yearling is apparently living the life of James Bond and writing the books. You remember James Bond, right?"

"'Course I remember him," Dash shrugged. "Nice guy, great in a scrap, but a little bit grabby sometimes. Girl's got to have her personal space, y'know? But what has that got to do with it?"

Twilight reached into her subspace pocket and pulled out one of the Ian Fleming novels, laying it on the tabletop next to one of the local books. She pointed to the blurbs on the covers: James Bond. James Bridle. James Bond. James Bridle.

"Oh. Er. Yeah." Dash blushed a bit as she realized that she was being an idiot. Looking desperately for some way to change the subject, she pointed to another James Bridle book. "But you can't tell me that isn't a stupid title!"

Twilight looked at the book, which showed a severely overweight gazelle standing threateningly next to a somewhat monstrous-looking human.

"'The Man With the Golden Gnu,'" Twilight read aloud. "Well, I suppose that's two more reasons to hate this Loop."

"How's that?" Rainbow Dash asked. "I mean, yeah, the title, but what else?"

Twilight pulled out the circulation slip from the inside cover and held it up. A single name took up two-thirds of the slots. "An Equestria where humans probably exist... and Lyra isn't Awake."

"Oh," Rainbow Dash said, cringing slightly. "I think I'll go warn the other girls... guys... whatever."

\* \* \*

><p>126.14 (Gym Quirk) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>The lights came up as the video presentation ended. Celestia stood and stretched while Twilight retrieved the disc containing the Hub loop depiction of the latest Canterlot High School adventure and Applebloom shut down the video playback equipment in the small theater in the underground complex that had set up under the library tree this loop.<p>

"Time for a break, I think," suggested the Anchor. "We can snicker at the Producers' Commentary next time." The assembled loopers made their way to the lounge area where they collected a variety of snacks before reconvening at one of the large tables.

"So you've all had a few shots at taking on the Dazzlings in the Battle of the Bands by now, right?" asked Celestia.

The primary Element bearers, along with Sunset Shimmer and the Cutie Mark Crusaders made affirmative noises.

"And I suppose that you've tried a variety of songs to counter them. Any success using our 'Standard Repertoire', so to speak?"

"Well," started Twilight. "Even reworked for the Rainbooms, 'Winter Wrap-up' was a bust."

"As was 'Art of the Dress'," added Rarity. "But at least it didn't reinforce the Sirens like 'Becoming Popular' did."

"The Smile Song worked pretty well," grinned Pinkie. " 'Giggle at the Ghosties', not so much."

"The death metal remixes of both made for some real creepy visuals," noted Rainbow Dash.

"Pro-tip," added Sunset. "Do not use any version of 'Evil Enchantress'."

"Most of our usuals don't have enough 'oomph' to be useful counters, or are too topical to work well," observed Applejack.

"Yeah," agreed Scootaloo. " 'Babs Seed' had plenty of energy, but the lyrics kinda undermined the effort."

"I thought 'A True, True Friend' did quite nicely after we tweaked it," murmured Fluttershy.

"Funny thing...When we worked on making 'Find the Music in the Treetops' a rock piece to fit, it turned out very much like the baseline 'Got the Music in Me'," mused Rainbow. "Of course, Fluttershy wrote them both, so I guess it only goes to show..."

The yellow pegasus mumbled something about how strange it is to collaborate with yourself once removed.

"What about non-equestrian songs," asked Trixie as she and Ditzzy joined the group. "On reflection, Trixie's attempt with 'Won't Get Fooled Again' wasn't the best of choices; the long keyboard solo near the end only gave them time to recover."

"It didn't work that well," said Ditzzy cheerfully, "but the looks on their faces when I broke out 'Never Gonna Give You Up' was worth it."

Sweetie Belle looked apologetically at her fellow Crusaders. "There was one time I thought I'd try going solo against the Dazzlings voice-to-voice. For the record, add the second 'Queen of the Night' aria from The Magic Flute to the 'Not such a good idea' list. It gets great audience reaction at first, but the text about vengeance, murder and all that..." She shook her head and shuddered.

"By the way," she went on. "I've got an idea for next time there's a lot of us there: Beethoven's 9th. I'd love to do the whole thing, but we'd probably have to settle for just the 4th movement. Would you be willing to try Zecora's poison joke potion as a human, Fluttershy? Big Mac isn't always eligible to participate, and the bass part is essential..."

\* \* \*

><p>126.15 (Kris Overstreet) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I discovered a reference to this artifact shortly after resuming my studies with Princess Celestia," Sunset Shimmer said, leading Twilight Sparkle and the other Elements of Harmony down a corridor in the royal palace of the Crystal Empire. "Princess Cadence recently confirmed its existence, so I asked for you to come with me to examine it."<p>

"It sounds really interesting!" Twilight replied. "An actual portal between worlds? I wonder what it must be like on the other side?"

The two Awake Loopers, Sunset and Twilight, were speaking for the benefit of the other five non-Awake ponies. They both knew all about the mirror and the world on the other side, but neither felt like explaining the Loops to the others this time around.

"The legends surrounding this mirror are fragmented," Sunset said as they walked through the doorway into a large storage room, where the mirror had just recently had its dust cover removed. "There are hints of strange creatures who live on the other side, without horns or wings or tails or even hooves."

"Do tell," Twilight grinned.

A voice from above shouted, "HUMANS, HERE I COME!"

The ponies on the ground looked up just in time to see a blue-green unicorn wrap her forehooves around a rope and swing down from a



ledge. With flawless grace and precision she plunged down and forward, the arc carrying her just over the heads of the stunned ponies below. With a cry of triumph she released the rope and did a forward somersault into the mirror...

... and, with no apparent loss of momentum, right back out again, rolling to a stop at Twilight's hooves.

"Lyra, what are you DOING?" Twilight gasped. "You could have destroyed a priceless magical artifact!"

Lyra didn't pay any attention. She sat up, raised her forehooves, and looked at them with delighted wonder. "Hoooooooooves," she said.

Sunset and Twilight looked at each other.

Lyra rose to stand on her hind legs. "Ponies!" she grinned, spreading her forelegs and half-rushing, half-stumbling forwards to give the entire group a great big hug. Twilight, in front, couldn't avoid the tackle. "Unicorns and pegasussessess and ponies with hats!" The unicorn somehow managed to lift Twilight up and pirouette around like a child with a doll, even though the recently alicorned Princess Twilight weighed slightly more. "And this one's wearing a crown! I bet you're some kind of magical princess pony, aren't you?"

Twilight looked down at Sunset Shimmer, whose return look said the same thing: \_Thank oak Lyra isn't like this every Loop.\_

"And I'm a pony now too!" Lyra grinned, dropping Twilight and looking at herself in the mirror portal. "I'm a magical unicorn pony! Oh, wow, I never, ever want to leave this- OOF!"

Lyra's gushing got cut short by the wobbling, stumbling arrival of a second Applejack through the mirror. "Dang, that's peculiar," the newcomer said to herself before looking around. "Um, excuse me," she said, "but I reckon we got somethin' that belongs to y'all."

On the other side of the portal, while the wind blew the rope dangling over the statue in the Canterlot High courtyard, Rainbow Dash and Rarity struggled to pry the former pony Lyra off of a catatonic Fluttershy.

"Thumbs!" Lyra shouted. "And clothes! And bipedal locomotion! And-" Lyra's hug became a bit more exploratory. "I don't remember reading anything about these things."

At about this point Fluttershy passed out cold in Lyra's arms, dragging the both of them to the ground.

\* \* \*

><p>Several Loops later, while Looping Lyra's body tried to bury its head in the bar table after hearing Twilight's story, the mental committee of Lyras convened in emergency session.<p>

"I can't believe we were really that bad," pony-Lyra moaned.

"I can," Miscellaneous-Lyra grumbled. "Same with you, H. The two of you get scary sometimes."

"I agree," Seapony Lyra nodded. "And when you scare a seapony, then you've really got problems!"

"But how could we possibly have done a Tarzan swing into the portal at the EXACT SAME TIME?" human-Lyra groaned. "Without being Awake? Without a Mikasa glitch or something?"

"It's not really all that surprising," Sweet roll-Lyra said. "Where you get a mirror, you tend to get symmetry."

"What would a sweet roll know about symmetry?" pony-Lyra grumbled, holding her head in her hooves.

\* \* \*

><p>126.16 (Gamma Cavy) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Children of the Nightmare: part 1 <p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was a bit odd to Wake after the restoration of Luna to sanity, but not that unusual. It was actually stranger to Awaken after Chrysalis invaded, which had happened this time. She and Rainbow Dash were the only ones Awake, although there had been a peculiar echo form the element-ping, as if another Element was here, but not all the way awake yet. So far, everything was baseline. that changed rapidly, however, when she was jumped. if she had not been a Looper she would be helpless, as it was, she was intrigued. this had only happened once that she could recall, and so she let things play out as they would if she were a normal unicorn. Something about this was niggling at the back of her mind, as important, familiar somehow. The spell her captors were casting culminated in a thick cloud of black smoke, and suddenly the memory burst into clarity. This was a baseline Loop! It was <strong>Nyx's<strong> baseline! The smoke compressed into an orb, much more quickly than it had the first time, and wriggled. The extra element grew stronger, and Twilight knew: her precious Nyxie was Awake!

Lightning split the sky, and the orb shattered, revealing a half grown alicorn filly with a starry mane, hovering there, managing to look uncertain and intimidating at once, as she desperately figured out what was happening. He eyes fell on Twilight, and her glass like voice cried desperately "Momma!"

Spell Nexus choked. His Queen wasn't meant to appear as a half grown filly, nor was she supposed to call the Element of Magic, \_mother.\_ Unknown to him the the two loopers thought of the same thing at once, and nodded ever so slightly to each-other. \*\*"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY MOTHER!?" \*\*cried his queen, Her marvelous, terrible eyes focused on him.

"I have only prepared the way for your return, majesty." He begged, imploring her to understand. "and with the leader of the elements out of the way, your glorious night can be-"

\*\*"BOTHER MY NIGHT! MY MOTHER IS MAGIC, AS MAGIC WAS THE FIRST THING

TO EXIST, AND NOW, WHEN SHE IS FINALLY INCARNATE AS A PONY, AND I MAY AT LAST SHOW HER THE WORLD, WITHOUT HER VERY PRESENCE TEARING IT ASUNDER, YOU HALF KILL HER MORTAL INCARNATION? IN DOING SO YOU PUT THE WHOLE OF MAGIC AT RISK! YOU ARE NOT WORTHY OF MY BLESSING!"\*\* Her mane lashed out, wrapping around him, and he screamed as the gift of Her power was torn away. She grew to full adult size then, as large as Celestia, and strode over to the Element of Magic.

"Mother," She said, lowering Her horn to the violet ponies' side, "remember your true self. Awaken, be healed. Ascend, High Queen of Life and Magic, and be healed of your wounding!" The limp form began to glow, the heavy wound in her side, which had stopped bleeding, now shrank, vanished, and wings began to form from the light around her. Spell Nexus found himself bound by the stone of the alter, which had covered over his legs up to the knee, as he thought to interfere. Golden light flared, and Celestia formed from it, attacking his queen, who threw her back. \*\*"NOBODY HURTS MY MOTHER! STAY BACK, SUN CHILD, I WON'T LET YOU HARM HER!"\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>126.17 (Gym Quirk & Kris Overstreet) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Luna Awoke sitting in a cafe booth singing quietly to herself.<p>

No. Not just to herself. Two other humanoid figures, faces shrouded in hoodies, sat across the table from her. Their voices joined hers in an almost hypnotic unison. She could feel a mild undercurrent of hostility and anger from the other cafe patrons. More disturbingly, she seemed to be gaining some form of sustenance from it.

Well, she was certainly no stranger to these emotions, and the occasional changeling loop had given her experience as an emotivore. Still, as loop memories and realization of who she was replacing this loop set in, she was just a tad disconcerted.

"Tia...Blaze...?" murmured the one directly across from her. She pushed back her hood, revealing enormous twin pigtails in familiar pastel blue, green, purple and pink. "Well, sister, at least this pendant seems to have taken care of my singing problem for the moment. I wonder if I can keep it so I don't need to rely on heartsongs in the shower..."

The third booth occupant released her rose, yellow, and violet ponytail. "And I get stuck as the comic relief ditz," grumbled Cadance Dusk.

"How do you two want to play this?" asked Luna Dazzle, freeing her own considerably larger-than-usual hairdo. "Do we go along, or derail?"

"I'm half tempted to see how Sunset would react if we serenaded her with 'You'll Play Your Part'," mused Celestia.

In the distance, the light show at Canterlot High started. The trio moved out to the street to get a better look. "It's rather pretty when you're not on the receiving end," said Luna absently. The other

(usually) princesses nodded. Over the loops, all had experienced the Harmony Wave-Motion Gun.

"So mild derailment to experiment with songs?" suggested Cadance.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Twilight,<em>

\_I'm assuming that you are Awake and in possession of the counterpart to this book.\_

\_There's an interesting twist to the usual Dazzlings situation. Things were running pretty much as expected until I was called to meet with the new students. As soon as I saw the three in the foyer, I realized that there had been replacements. After very cordial greetings, they treated me to a little song. I think you might recognize it.\_

You've come such a long, long way  
>And I've watched you from that very first day...<p>

\_It was quite touching.\_

\_So if you've been wondering what your fellow princesses are up to this loop...\_

\_Please feel free to visit when you have the time. I believe the upcoming music festival will be wonderful.\_

\_Hope to see you soon,\_

\_Sunset Shimmer\_

\_P.S. Luna with big poofy hair is an interesting sight. I'll show you holovids later if you can't come and see her for yourself.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"So, I got Eiken," Celestia sighed. "Where did you girls end up again?"<p>

"Teletubbies," Luna grumbled. "Remind me to tell Twilight that SkyNet said hello."

"Generation One," Cadence said smugly. "Being the comic relief has its advantages! All hail me, the brave and wise Megan McCadence!"

Celestia sighed again. "And I so wanted to keep the amulet to see if it worked for me in baseline. Next time, I'm pocketing it as soon as I'm Awake."

Vinyl Scratch walked past, noticed the low faces on two out of three alicorns in the corner of the bar, and asked, "So, what went wrong this time?"

"For future reference," Celestia said, "when replacing the Dazzlings, 'We Will Rock You' is an extremely unwise choice of songs."

"Sheeya, I coulda told you that!" the DJ unicorn grinned. "I slipped it on the playsheet a few Loops back for the Rainbooms. When we hit the guitar solos at the end, reality just fell apart in shards, and me and all the other Awake ponies got a free trip to Gen-3-land."

Obviously caught up in the memory, Vinyl began tapping a hoof on Mac's bar floor in a particular rhythm.

\_Rain-bow\_  
><em>al-ways<em>  
><em>dres-ses (stomp stomp)<em>  
><em>in style (stomp stomp)<em>

\_Rain-bow\_  
><em>al-ways<em>  
><em>dres-ses (stomp stomp)<em>  
><em>in style (stomp stomp)<em>

The cellar doors to Mac's bar flew open to reveal two ponies. Rainbow Dash's eyes had gone from their usual pinkish to deep blood red. Pinkie Pie's entire face was turning almost the exact same shade.

Both ponies pointed a hoof at Vinyl Scratch and shouted, \_\*\*"YOU BROKE A PINKIE PROMISE!"\*\*\_

"Whoops! Gotta go!" Vinyl muttered, and she teleported out of the bar a split second before Rainbow Dash's flying tackle passed through the space where she'd been standing.

\* \* \*

><p>126.18<br>continuation of 123.11  
>(fractalman) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I need it!"<p>

"I really like her mane!"

Applebloom 'uh oh'd'. Maybe casting that spell on Twilight's old doll wasn't such a good idea after all...

\* \* \*

><p>"TWILIGHT SPARKLE!" boomed Celestia as she dispelled the want it need it spell-or tried to; the ponies just kept on stirring up dust clouds with their fighting. She frowned, and tried again, putting a bit more energy into her efforts; still no effect.<p>

Then the ugly, old, Rustic, MostAdorableImportantInterestingMemorableDoll in the Universe sailed past her eyes, and she squeed like a filly as she gripped it in her magic, brought it to her chest, and hugged it.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight discreetly took a picture of the snoring Celestia after

dispelling the modified Want it Need it. "Don't worry Applebloom, you're not in trouble."<p>

"Ahm not?" asked Applebloom as she poked her head around a corner.

"Nah. I'm just going to tell you a few stories. Once upon a time, a unicorn mare cast a spell without knowing what it would do. Zombie hands reached out from the earth and grabbed her, dragging her under the earth. Once upon a time, a unicorn stallion cast a spell without knowing what it would do. He exploded. Bits of unicorn rained down all over the town. Once upon a time, a unicorn mare cast a spell without-

"STOP! STOP I GET IT I GET IT!" yelled Applebloom, who was turning rather green.

Twilight walked over. "I suppose I'm partially to blame, I should have given you the safety lecture when we started. Well, now you know why not to cast spells without knowing what they do."

Celestia snored again, which provoked a giggle from Twilight. "Though we might need to apologize to Celestia when she wakes up. She's unlikely to forget today's events any time soon."

\* \* \*

><p>(Evilhumor)<p>

Twilight's eye twitched at the aftermath of what was once her home, now a new entrance to Tartarus.

Applebloom and Trixie looked sheepishly at her.

"Well, \_Ah'd\_ made sure to know what would happen this time..."

\* \* \*

><p>126.19 (namar13766) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Sunset Shimmer walked into Big Macintosh's bar with a thousand yard stare. He just waited for her to open up.<p>

"Is Granny Smith looping?"

"Nope. Why do you ask?"

"Well, when the Dazzlings showed up in the Cafeteria singing about turning the music festival into a battle of the bands, the \_human \_Granny Smith yelled, 'MUCKLE DAMRED CULTI 'AIR EH NAMBLIES BE KEEPIN' ME WEE MEN!?' and then..."

Sunset gesticulated wildly with her hooves. Big Mac moved to cut this off.

"Before you ask, none of us, not even Pinkie Pie know when she's like this."

\* \* \*

><p>126.20 (namar13766) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?"<p>

"Yes, Sunset?"

"We are never speaking of this loop ever again."

"But having both Granny Smiths go Old Mare Henderson-"

"NEVER AGAIN DOES NOT MEAN \*\*FIVE!\*\* \_\*\*SECONDS!\*\* \_ \*\*LATER!\*\* \_"

\* \* \*

><p>126.21 (namar13766) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Big Macintosh looked up as the First Doctor entered his bar.<p>

Followed by the Second Doctor.

Followed by the Third Doctor.

Followed by the Fourth Doctor.

Followed by the Fifth Doctor.

Followed by the Sixth Doctor.

Followed by the Seventh Doctor.

Followed by the Eighth Doctor

Followed by the War Doctor.

Followed by the Ninth Doctor.

Followed by the Tenth Doctor.

Followed by the Eleventh Doctor.

Followed by the Twelfth Doctor.

With all the quiet grace and dignity he could muster, Big Mac proceeded to scream like a little filly.

\* \* \*

><p>126.22 (namar13766) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Sunset Shimmer looked up at Spike with a wry grin. "I can't believe you've never tried going kaiju as a dog before."<p>

Spike would have responded, but human Fluttershy was busy scratching an itch behind his ears \_just right\_, made all the more easier considering he was now closer in size to Clifford.

\* \* \*

><p>126.23 (namar13766)<p>

Twilight looked up as her contact book with Sunset Shimmer vibrated. The two had long since acquired technology from the loops which could perform a superior job, but Sunset had often said that she had preferred it for nostalgic reasons. Flipping it open, she began to read.

\_Dear Twilight Sparkle,\_

\_I have decided to become a supervillain. As such, I have kidnapped Nyx and Lemon Rush and brought them to Canterlot High. For further details on their plight, I will let them convey the horrors they are experiencing.\_

\_Hi Momma! Aunt Sunset and Lemon are busy preparing to go after the Dazzlings first. Don't worry, she didn't so much kidnap us as bribe us heavily. ~ Nyx.\_

\_Please tell Little Mother\_\_ I am well. We have made adequate preparations for the impending hunt. We shall comport ourselves properly, and come back in high honor. ~ Lemon Rush.\_

\_Tremble in fear due to our evil plans, Twilight Sparkle. I shall unleash an unspeakable evil unto the Dazzlings with great vengeance and furious anger!\_

\_Kisses and Hugs,\_

\_Sunset Shimmer\_

Twilight chuckled. "Well, what's the worst that could happen?"

\* \* \*

><p>126.24 (Leviticus Wilkes) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>MLP Loop: Derp Vader<p>

Derpy Hooves was many things. A truly good-hearted pony. A decent flier, all things considered; one certainly good enough to replace Rainbow Dash in the Equestrian Games. And she was also a living engine of destruction, but that went without saying.

The latter trait did, at times, lead to some serious issues. Take for example, her time as Derp Vader.

Now, Derpy was rarely outright malicious. She often did her best to be a kind, friendly pony who understood others as much as she could, situations that would lead to the possible harm of her daughter notwithstanding. But when Derpy had Awoken just as Senator Palpatine



cum Darth Sidious had put the finishing touches on her bio-suit and invited her to feel the death of Dinky through the force, Derpy made a decision.

She would make the Empire a galactic hell.

Now, her plans could be considered a fair bit ruthless, but they did stem from two goals. The first would be the delegitimization of the Empire as a ruling entity, effectively justifying the rebellion against Palpatine and giving the people a better preparation for the return of the Republic. The second was more personal; she intended to screw Palpatine's plans hard by ruining the Empire as thoroughly as possible. When all was said and done, the Empire would be practically medieval, while the Rebellion would be the only legitimate system of governance in the galaxy.

She was Derpy Hooves, bringer of the Derpolcalypse, Causer of Obliteration, and Lover of Muffins. How hard could it be?

\* \* \*

><p>126.25 (Purrs) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Could I have a little more light, please?" Twilight, daughter of Charlemagne, found herself requesting. A brief check of her memories... Ah. If she had identified this correctly, this wouldn't be too hard to make a vacation loop. There might even be some new books on the shelves here.<p>

"Gentle tutors, respected members of the faculty, I'm very grateful for the knowledge you have given me, and will continue receiving as long as you continue giving. I appreciate the distinguishment of being named Scholar of the House, and will be sure to live up to it. Thank you all so very much."

The crowd of actors surrounding her muttered amongst themselves.

"Twilight, that isn't your line." The Leading Player glowered at her.

She shrugged. "It is now."

His tone grew pleading. "But aren't you extraordinary? Don't you want to find something completely fulfilling?"

Ah, but dying in a fire wasn't fulfilling. Books were. Twilight merely grinned. "I already have. Education is a wonderful thing, you see." With that, she trotted offstage, presumably so the scene could change to a library.

\* \* \*

><p>Surprised by the abrupt loop end, Twilight blinked at the book in front of her. In hindsight, she should have known. The play couldn't very well continue with the actors' plans certainly foiled; next time, she would have to try and keep them thinking they had a chance.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>126.26 (Borderline Valley) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Pete and Rainbow Dash sat in a boat.<p>

"Uh, hello," said the Pegasus, looking around herself as if for the first time. "I guess you're Pete then?"

Pete nodded. "That's me. You're new around here. Where you from?"

"I'm from Equestria, you heard of it?"

"Nope," Pete shook his head, leaned over, and shoved Rainbow Dash off of the boat and into the water with a loud splash.

"What gives?" sputtered the pegasus upon resurfacing.

Who was left?

"Pete: one, Equestria: zero."

\* \* \*

><p>Pete and Fluttershy sat in a boat.<p>

"Oh, well this is new," began Fluttershy, "hello there, my name is Fluttershy, are you Pete?"

Pete nodded. "That's me. You're from Equestria, right?"

The pegasus nodded, smiling. The smile vanished a little as Pete reached over to her-

"What are you-"

-and shoved her over the side of the little fishing boat.

A pair of blue eyes re-surfaced and stared soulfully at the perpetrator.

Who was left?

"Pete: two, Equestria: zero."

\* \* \*

><p>Pete and Rarity sat in a boat.<p>

"Now where am I ex-" began the unicorn, before the realization hit. "Oh, it's \_you!\_"

She glared at the human sitting across from her, before her horn abruptly lit up.

Pete suddenly found himself teleported four feet to the left, and was

introduced to the bracing chill of the morning lake water.

Who was left?

"Just what do you have to say for yourself, buster? How do \_you\_ like being-"

\* \* \*

><p>Pete and Applejack sat in a boat.<p>

Neither of them spoke. Neither of them moved.

It was a nice day, out on the lake. The sun was shining, the fish were starting to rouse, even the water seemed to reflect a good mood.

Aside from an old wooden fishing dock along the shore, there was no sign of civilization anywhere. There were just two creatures, the human and the earth pony, staring each other down across a fishing boat too small for the both of them.

Applejack broke the silence first. "This is a game to you. Innit?"

Pete replied easily with a grin, "You bet."

It was hard to say who moved first. Applejack reared up and planted both legs on Pete's shoulders, trying to shove him backwards into the water. Pete braced himself against the rim of the boat with his feet and tried to twist out of the way, letting her momentum carry her overboard.

In the space of mere seconds, the two of them danced around the tiny little boat, unable to do much more than reposition themselves in response to each other.

With four feet and a lower center of gravity, Applejack seemed to have the advantage, and soon had Pete on the ropes!

In what seemed to be a desperation move, Pete pulled \_an identical boat out of his pocket,\_ and hopped into it, pulling the old one in to replace it.

Applejack, suddenly finding herself with nothing to stand on, began to fall. "Hey! That's chea-" and was cut off by a mouthful of lake-water.

Who was left?

"Pete: three, Equestria: one."

\* \* \*

><p>Pete and Pinkie Pie sat in a boat.<p>

It took only forty five minutes before Pete dived headfirst overboard.

Who was left?

"Awww, but I thought he liked to play games?"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle and Repeat sat in a boat.<p>

The unicorn blinked. "Never thought I'd end up here," she commented, before casting a binding spell on the human across from her. "Do you think you could answer a few questions before we play this game?"

Repeat looked rather amused by this. "I take it you've met Pete."

"Not me personally, but my friends each have had an experience with him, yes. He's the anchor here, right?"

"That's right," Repeat affirms, "I bet he didn't hash out any rules with you guys either? Just started shoving you overboard?"

"That seems to be what happened, yes."

"Ah, well. I and he have a bunch of rules for our game but the most general ones are 'nothing lethal' and 'no sinking the boat'. The loop doesn't handle it well if there is no boat. Think you can untie me?"

After thinking about it for a moment, Twilight agreed and removed her spell. "Sure. How long can this loop last, anyway?"

"Thanks." Repeat stretched a little before answering. "It lasts until one of us leaves the boat, so anywhere from a few seconds to a few weeks if we feel like it."

"Weeks?" Twilight frowned, looking at the scenery. "Is there much to do out here?"

"We're not always in a closed lake like this. Sometimes we're on a river and just explore the whole thing before we go back to playing the game."

Twilight smiled. "That sounds like it could be fun. Would you like to-" she began, turning to ask her new friend, but he had taken advantage of her distraction, and had just shoved her overboard.

Who was left?

Twilight scowled at Repeat from the water. "You realize this means war?"

He smirked. "Repeat: one, Equestria: zero."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

126.1: Cheerilee can do classes on anything. This time: basic ethics.

>126.2: Remember when she was a Smeargle? She copied Judgement off

Arceus.<br>126.3: Some things are just impossible.  
>126.4: Pokemon Mystery Dungeon: Pony.<br>126.5: Some days, you're not ready.  
>126.6: ...good point.<br>126.7: There's a lot of choice.  
>126.8: Point of order! Point of order!<br>126.9: Very Big Hero Six.  
  
>126.10: Certain pitfalls.<br>126.11: And certain targets.  
>126.12: That kind of pun.<br>126.13: Gender confusion.  
>126.14: Some numbers, you have to plan out ahead of time.<br>126.15: Like a mirror.  
>126.16: All will be explained.<br>126.17: Certain side effects.  
  
>126.18: Whoops.<br>126.19: Oh, that. Should have warned her.  
  
>126.20: That is, indeed, not the definition.<br>126.21: Doctor Them.  
  
>126.22: Who's a good Spike?<br>126.23: Super, and a Villein.  
  
>126.24: Derpy is trying to make things go wrong. Absolutely anything could happen.<br>126.25: Some loops fight back.  
>126.26: For the love of Pete.<p>

### 133. Chapter 133

127.1 (Gamma Cavy)  
>Children of the Nightmare: Part 2<p>

Celestia panted harshly. This new Nightmare Moon was stronger by far than Luna had been, and while the damage had thankfully been contained by the attachment to Twilight, still, things could not be left as they were, and the black Alicorn was refusing to listen to anything she tried to say. Magic flared up from where Twilight lay, sending every combatant flying, as a pillar of violet light shot up to the heavens. power pulsed outwards, and all of Equestria felt it, and turned their heads in that direction. Then Twilight's voice rang out over the clearing, subtly changed, young and immeasurably ancient at once. "Daughter, be still."

Nightmare Moon ceased her furious, desperate defense of Twilight, bowing her head. "Mother, they could have killed you!"

"And you have punished them accordingly. Yet some good came from this, in your presence here, Daughter." Twilight stood, eyes alight with magic. Magic crackled off her newly formed wings, and danced in sparks along her coat. Her horn, long and gleaming, was lit, as her eyes were, and her mane rippled with a full aura. "I am Awakened, My teacher in this mortal life, Celestia, would not harm me, Daughter. And as for these," her eyes fell on the cult. "You have harmed Me, and you might have destroyed the world in doing so, yet you did it for the sake of loyalty to My Eldest Daughter. I am first, and I am Magic, then came My Daughter Darkness, Midnight Nyx. From our tie to each other came Bright Loyalty, who even now awakens in her mortal guise."

>A Rainboom detonated over head, and Dash, having been apprised of the plan by telepathy, landed, in her own Alicorn form, and mane aura in full kaleidoscopic glory.<p>

"You have all shown my gift, if to extremes beyond what should be," she said, surveying the cult. "This one's all on you Twi. They have

enough loyalty tying them to each other and Nyx, that I would be a biased judge. Loyalty to leaders, and between family and friends is my gift, not judgement."

"Indeed. they may live, and learn from their mistakes, and grow. Know this, though. If you ever act against the Forces again We will not be so kind a second time. Now go with these nice guards, and take your punishment by the laws of this world as well. GO!"

Celestia caught her breath. This new Twilight was stronger than her, and something deep within her, recognized this Twilight, from long ago. When she and Luna had been very young there had been legends of an ancient goddess of Magic, and there had been a unicorn then, who had taught the two of them how to use their power, and vanished before they could show her what they could do. Twilight had always reminded her a little of their old teacher, but now-

\* \* \*

><p>Luna blinked, at the sight before her. There was her sister, and beside her were two of the element bearers, although there was something odd about them, and a, was it?! It was, a black Alicorn with a starry mane! Twilight Sparkle shifted, and suddenly it became clear, that she and the Element of Loyalty were also Alicorns, but where had the one that looked like a double of her come from? And why did Twilight suddenly seem familiar?<p>

Their conversation reached her ears as they came closer, "- restore the rest of her power to Princess Luna, and then explore this world with Nyx. If you need me to take over throne sitting I'm willing, but please don't just hand it over to me? I've never had to rule mortals like this before, and it's only thanks to my memories as just Twilight, that I'm managing balancing with my Cosmic Self, as well as I am."

"What she said." Loyalty replied.

Their Old Teacher! Twilight somehow felt like Magic's Dawn, the violet unicorn who had taught them so long ago.

\* \* \*

><p>Side by side a restored Luna and a fully adult Nyx were awe inspiring, and every pony in the throne room could see that. Celestia smiled, and addressed the crowd. "A year ago, My sister was restored to me. Now my eldest sister Nyx has come to this world, fully sane, and with her arrival, Our mother Magic awoke to her memories." Twilight entered the room and nuzzled Nyx affectionately, before turning to face the crowd, all of whom could feel her power, even the idiot named Blueblood. Those who had been about to ask about Nyx's resemblance to Nightmare Moon, fell silent.<p>

"Greetings, my little ponies. I am Twilight, Queen of magic, and Magic Incarnate. Long have I wished to visit this world, and experience it as all of you do. Celestia has asked Me to rule for a month, while she and Luna vacation, and I will do my best to provide for you all, while they do so."

"But who will command the sun and moon?!" a particularly unintelligent courtier asked.

Celestia spoke again, "Long ago, when Luna and I were fillies struggling to master our power, we were taught by a violet unicorn named Magic's Dawn. she taught us, among other things, to raise the sun and moon. She was our Teacher and our adoptive mother, for we had never known a mother before her, and then one day she was just gone. That mare was the same one who stands here today! We can command the moon and sun, but she made them and set us as stewards over them! If you doubt her skill, then you doubt the Mother of all! Do you fear for the safety of Equestria with us gone? Fear not, for She is fully capable of ending the denizens of Tartarus themselves! I advise that you politicians behave while we are gone."

\* \* \*

><p>127.2 (Detective Ethan Redfield) <p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>From the Research Journals of Dr. Vahlen:<strong>

Throughout the multiverse, I have had the unique opportunity to study a wide variety of beings and creatures, whether as an XCOM scientist or in my own private time. One being in particular has eluded me in my attempts to understand. There are admittedly a whole section of beings that are difficult to understand how they operate, but this one operates under unusual circumstances even in her home universe.

**\*\*Subject: Pinkamenia Diane Pie\*\***

><strong>Race: Equus Sapiens Terrestris (Earth Pony)<strong>

><strong>Universe: Equestria<strong>

My first encounter with the subject was during an XCOM loop where an Equine race, henceforth referred to as ponies, invaded Earth through a magical breach in order to convert humanity into their own likeness. Their leader, codenamed Tyrant Sun, delegated this task to her six most trusted underlings, Pinkamenia, or Pinkie for short, being one of them. When briefed by Officer Bradford, he confided in me that these ponies were a radical aberration from their normal baseline. He described them as peaceful, seeking harmony with the multiverse at large through mutual understanding. Even as he said this, however, he spoke in a manner similar to grudging respect, as if he was complimenting them despite his feelings. When attempting to understand his position, the officer declined to comment further. He shared details of each of the ponies that our troops may one day encounter.

As for meeting her for the first time, outside of seeing videos of Pinkie in action, she was not alive at the time. The subject was DOA (dead on arrival), terminated after converting many of our operatives at our European Base. The courage of those brave men and women who gave everything to end the threat this variant Pinkie held will live forever within this journal if nowhere else.

Preliminary analysis shows her to be of the Earth species of pony with a deep pink mane. Her coat was a lighter shade of pink with a trio of balloons marked on her flank. After determining cause of

death (gunshot), I attempted to take blood samples, to which I discovered her very blood was almost completely composed of sugar. It was amazing she has not died of Diabetes long ago.

The autopsy showed nothing else out of the ordinary about the subject, of which was strange in and of itself. When further research was performed, Pinkie was shown to have what appeared to be a sort of precognitive ability in sensing events that were about to happen. The subject's biopsy showed no unique glands nor any sort of precognitive nervous system.

Further research would need to be conducted when I had a loop in Equestria.

\* \* \*

><p>127.3 (Leviticus Wilkes) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Say Ditzzy, what does your cutie mark mean anyway?"<p>

The mailmare looked up from her delivery list and winced. "Oh... whoops. Sorry Twilight, I forgot the ping."

Twilight rolled her eyes in good nature. "We all forget sometimes. It's no big deal."

Ditzzy smiled. "Well, this time around, my cutie mark allows me to do... this!" And without further delay and a series of popping noises, a thought bubble appeared above Ditzzy's head. Twilight chuckled as Ditzzy turned her thoughts into a pay-per-view show.

Ditzzy shut down the viewing screen and gave her chest a self-satisfied polish. "I think I'll keep that talent. It has a neat side effect too: I can use it to record my dreams."

Ditzzy's smile turn downright bashful. "Which also allows me to record dreams of worlds where I'm not awake." Twilight's lavender eyes widened, while Ditzzy's became tearful.

"Ditzzy... really, it's-"

The mailmare suddenly nuzzled Twilight, cutting off the pony who cared for her daughter so often. "Thank you... Thank you so much for watching out for Dinky, all those times I went pop."

\* \* \*

><p>127.4 (Filraen)<p>

"Soooooooo", Pipsqueak's word was cut by a big yawn. "what do we do next?"

Luna was enjoying this loop's developments. During the celebrations of Nightmare Night last month Pipsqueak had mentioned he wanted to know the Royal Castle at Canterlot to which Luna happily asked if he wanted to go visit her one day, either as a guest or even as a sleepover if he so wanted. Eventually Pipsqueak accepted the



sleepover with the condition of letting Pip returning the favor: Luna had to go to a sleepover at Pip's house.

Accompanying him to ask permission was an amusing affair, especially with Pipsqueak being so oblivious to his mother's awkwardness when she realized "the friend" he wanted to bring over for a sleepover was actually one of Equestria's Princesses. Eventually Pipsqueak's mother agreed to the sleepover, which when put into contrast with how at the beginning she had simply accepted it as if it was a Royal Decree, Luna considered a good development.

The sleepover was a simple affair: eating dinner, playing board games, seeing Luna raise the moon... the usual things, though Pipsqueak almost had a heart attack when he realized what pyjamas he was left to wear that night, though Luna didn't realize why by the time Pipsqueak put on another pair. Eventually, time passed and he looked like he was getting sleepy.

"How about a story?"

"Yes, please Princess!"

"I told you little Pip, please call me Luna."

"I'm not little! I grew two sixteenths of an inch last month!"

"Pip is it, then, so story..." Luna put a pensive look for a moment. "I know!" she suddenly produced a small music box from... somewhere and placed it by the nightstand and winded it up so it could play its music.

"Well, this story is about a little pony princess. By powerful magics and a strange destiny this princess was forced to travel... you could almost say it was a curse."

"A curse? How horrible!" Pipsqueak said aghast.

"You could say that Pip, but the spell wasn't cast out of malice and the travelling pony princess had learned a lot during those travels, she she didn't think ill of the spell or her travels."

"But, doesn't she get lonely? Always travelling means she can't stay with her friends"

"True friends will stay with you even if you are far away, Pipsqueak, but yes, our little travelling princess sometimes gets lonely. But that isn't tonight's story. The story for tonight is about one of the places our travelling princess visited during her travels. This place was unique, one the strangest she had ever seen: the sun and the moon moved on their own and nopony controlled the weather for there were no pegasi."

"Everywhere... like the Everfree Forest?" Pipsqueak asked with a bit of horror in his voice.

"True. But you know Zecora, right?" At Pip's nod Luna continued. "Hard as it may be Zecora shows it's possible to live in the Everfree Forest. In the same way, everypony who lived there had to live in a place where the weather is free, mostly because they didn't have any choice, so they had to make do with whatever they had."

"But the travelling princess was an alicorn right? That means she can help control the weather!"

"That's also true, but the travelling princess won't be able to stay: she's forced to always keep travelling so while she may help some it'll be only temporarily. Also she's only one pony. Do you know how many ponies take care of Ponyville's weather?"

As Pipsqueak realized how many ponies took care of the weather in Ponyville he simply mentioned a weak 'oh!' and returned to listen.

"It's true that Tia, Cadence and I are powerful alicorns. But an alicorn can only help so much because we can't be everywhere at once. But let's return to the story, shall we?"

Pipsqueak nodded.

"Most strange of all, though, was that no ponies lived there. No unicorns, no earth ponies and no pegasi."

"Who lived there then? Zebras? Griffins?"

Luna shook her head. "None of those either. They call themselves humans and are about this tall" Luna said as she raised her hoof to demonstrate, "have very little fur outside their mane, and walked in two legs like a minotaur but without a tail."

"They are strange." Pipsqueak frowned.

"They may seem that way for you, but for them they have lived all their lives that way so it was normal for them. Imagine the travelling princess' surprise when she realized she was as strange to them as they were to her because only humans lived there and they never have seen a pony princess."

At pipsqueak confused expression Luna pressed on "But in the end their strange form didn't matter much: they eventually offered the travelling princess friendship, food and a place to rest."

"Not everything was good, however. There was a legend in that place: evil sorcerer wielding a terrible power wanted to destroy everything, and the only way to stop it was the prophesied princess which would be supposed to wield a silver crystal."

"What did the travelling princess do then?" Pipsqueak asked, completely drawn into Luna's story.

"She decided to help," Luna simply answered. "It's true they offered friendship and rest but the important part was that they needed help, help only the travelling princess could give. She was no foal, however, so she decided to gather powerful friends to help her in battle: the prophecy said the princess had to be who destroyed this evil sorcerer but nowhere in the prophecy it said she had to do it alone."

"The travelling princess gathered four allies and the seven parts of the silver crystal, colourful as a rainbow, before confronting the evil sorcerer. The battle was hard but the five of them managed to

fuse all those rainbow crystals into a single one, white as the moon. With that the travelling princess fulfilled the prophecy, destroying the terrible power and banishing the evil sorcerer to the moon... much like the Mare in the Moon, I suppose."

"But weren't you the Mare in the Moon, Pr-Luna?"

"Correct again, Pip, but the travelling princess managed to heal the evil sorcerer before banishing her. She didn't know how much was the sorcerer's own doing but at least part of it was because of the terrible power corrupting her."

"So the travelling princess saved everypony right?"

"Right, but that isn't the end of this story. The fate that forces the travelling princess to travel works at intervals so she decided to enjoy life with her new friends before she was forced to leave. She eventually reutilized a shapeshifting spell to look human..."

"Why?"

"Because even after defeating the evil most humans have never known of ponies, and so she could prevent humans from freaking out."

At Pipsqueak still confused look Luna's horn started to glow, and suddenly two things happened: first, the bedrooms lights were out; and second, she looked completely black, with no fur, green eyes and holes in her legs and horn.

"How do I look, Pipsqueak?" At Pipsqueak's dumbfounded face lacking an answer Luna stood up and continued, "Now I look like Chrysalis, a good friend of mine. However if were to do this..." and then Luna did a step towards Pip. At Pipsqueak surprised look suddenly the lights returned and Luna returned to normal. "... you could get surprised and even afraid, even if I don't have ill will towards you."

"I...see." Pipsqueak answered back.

After returning to her precious place Luna continued "so the travelling princess enjoyed her time with her friends until one day another human arrived, claiming she was the prophesied princess."

"What?!"

"Just like I said, Pip. She could even prove it, as she make note the prophecy mentioned about a princess, true, but it was a human princess."

"But how then the travelling princess could defeat the evil sorcerer if she wasn't the princess in the prophecy?" Pipsqueak asked in newfound confusion.

"Friendship. The bonds the four humans and the pony princess, and their will to save everyone were what triggered the fusion of the silver crystal. Also, the human princess said the prophecy only claimed one way to defeat the evil sorcerer, and she didn't like prophecies anyway."

"Oh.."

"But then the human princess made another surprising revelation: she had been watching the travelling princess all the time, treating the whole threat of the evil sorcerer as a prank."

"What?! How could she make a prank about something so terrible?"

"Because she was a traveller too, far older than the pony princess. In her travels her great magic power had only increased, much like the pony travelling princess, but as the human had been travelling for so much time she could have stopped the evil sorcerer whenever she wanted. It took some demonstration to calm the pony princess down, but after that the pony felt very humbled of meeting someone who left her feeling like a filly."

As Luna paused to drink from her glass of water Pipsqueak intervened "O... kay, but I still I don't see what was so funny about letting the evil sorcerer threat to destroy everything."

"Oh, that was easy," Luna quickly answered. "She found hilarious finding somepony else who claimed to be the princess of the prophecy and decided to see what happened."

"What?"

"Yeah, it seemed like the human princess has bored. Still, the pony princess forgave her easily: the pony princess gets confused with an evil being way more often than she likes in her travels, so being a prophesied heroine was a feeling she could cherish, even if she really wasn't. Also the friendship she build with the humans was real.

"Eventually, the pony princess realized she had to do something. The silver crystal was an artefact of great power and the prophecy explicitly claimed it was the princess', so the pony princess decided to surrender it to the human princess. The human princess, however, insisted the pony princess kept it as she was the one who had recreated it from the rainbow pieces and used it to defeat the evil sorcerer.

"After that, the travelling princesses simply enjoyed the world. Went to meadows, mountains and sea, learning about each other and their other friends when the world isn't at stake until the day the travelling fate claimed them both again. Before it did, however, both travelling princesses made a vow to meet each other again someday, when their travel path crosses once more."

Returning from her reverie Luna realized Pipsqueak was already asleep. Making sure he was well covered by his blanket she turned her attention to the music box, which at some point of the story had stopped playing.

Lighting her horn Luna winded up the music box, finely crafted on silver and retrieved a gemstone from inside it. Its soft rendition of Moonlight Densetsu made her reminisce a loop so long ago, where she had replaced Usagi Tsukino's animal companion, whose name was also Luna.

\_ "No, Luna," Usagi said with a warm smile as she placed the Silver Crystal on Luna's hoof. "You created it yourself and defeated Metallia with it, you have earned it. Besides, I still have mine." Usagi said as she showed the interior of her brooch, showing a gemstone similar to Luna's.\_

\_ "Luna, we have the whole rest of the loop! Why don't we go roller skating this weekend? If you want you can cast your shapeshifting spell on us too so you go biped and we go quadruped. We can compete who falls less!"\_

\_ "Your time as Nightmare Moon must have been horrible," Usagi said as she hugged Luna tighter, tears falling from her face. "I'm so sorry, Luna."\_

\_ "Wow that was something else, 'heart-song' you called it? How about we try it on Ami and Mako? They don't realize but they have great singing voices."\_

\_ "The Silver Crystal is very powerful, it isn't so hard to crash a loop by using it so be sure to have no doubts on your heart if you wish to call its power. Now the first thing you can do with it is..."\_

\_ "But Luna, this isn't goodbye, am I clear? We're both loopers so we're bound to meet again! Next time I want you to show me around your land and bring me to the best ice cream place in Equestria."\_

Raising the Silver Crystal so it could be seen by the side of her moon Luna thought on how her experiences with her fellow Moon Princess made her realize what really means being a Looper, how important is not to lose herself to madness while living loop after loop.

"Usagi, I hope we meet again soon."

\* \* \*

><p>127.5 (Evilhumour, fractalman, and Filraen)<p>

One Crazy Week: part one

Fluttershy blinked as she Awoke, tending to her birds. It was the day when Nightmare Moon would come and everyone had agreed to play things to baseline for a quiet run if everyone was Awake and if nothing was too out of the ordinary.

Going over her memories while waiting for the pings, the memory of Twilight on her way to her library as she found something new and wished to study it the first to surface.

Finally, the pings were sent out and nearly all of her friends were Awake. Smiling as she pinged back, she turned around to enter her house to get ready for tonight when somepony coughed behind her.

Turning around she saw an unusual sight. There were two ponies; one was an earth pony who looked quite awful. His mane was droopy, his butler outfit had many holes and tears, his nose seemed to have a

broken vessel, his fetlocks were messy, and his eyes were bloodshot. His companion was even more unusual; he was a blond maned pony with a fabulous well brushed and shining coat that Rarity would die to know how he managed it although he did have rings around his eyes. He was almost as tall as Celestia was, and the most unusual thing about him was that he had both a set of wings and a horn. He was also resting in a strange bath chair that her friend Dash would love to have.

"Are you Lady Fluttershy, Bearer of the Element of Kindness, Guardian of the creature known as Angel, Care-keeper of the animal of Everfree Forest, Flying Hatred, Befriended of Discord, the Little Mother, potential mother-in-law of Nyx Sparkle, the Mare who held the Emperor-God to a draw, Befriender of the Changelings, High-Master of the Druid Arts, One of the Seven Harmonious Princess, She Who Once Made a Honey Badger Care..." The butler continued to ask her with a complete straight face, listing more and more of her titles she had gained over the loops.

Fluttershy blinked and nodded her head, wondering what exactly the birch was happening.

"Excellent." The butler pony nodded his head, reaching behind himself for a cage that was not there before. Lifting the cage over to the mare, the butler pony continued to speak. "Mister Monday has been informed that you are the premier animal care keeper throughout the secondary Realms. It is my master's wishes that you care for his seven bibliophages for the time being." Placing the cage down, Fluttershy saw he had several pieces of gold. "Note that Monday will pay you handsomely for this service should you accept."

Fluttershy should have questioned this a bit more, but these were new animals to care for! She found herself nodding her head as she looked at the snakes slithering around docilely. "You don't need to pay; this is my special talent. Is there anything I should know about taking care of them mister...?"

"Sneezer, Lady Fluttershy." He gave a sharp little bow of his head. "The bibliophages are harmless, and require little food. They sustain themselves on anything with ink or text on it by spitting acid on it and then begin to digest the object in question."

"Oh my, that's quite unusual."

"If you do not wish to look over them, Lady Fluttershy, then you may decline." Sneezer told her in a gentle tone.

"Of course I will look after them mister Sneezer!" Fluttershy blushed as she nearly shouted, looking at the snakes.

Wait, something was wrong...

"Good." A sharp voice startled her, causing her to look at the alicorn. He gave her a dirty look, which ruined his good features, and flapped a wing at her. "I shall send my Dusk to retrieve them in a week's time."

"Wait a moment, there's one mis-" Fluttershy blinked as both of the strange ponies were gone. "-sing."

She then remembered that Twilight had taken a snake home with her to study.

Her \_library \_home.

"Oh dear."

\* \* \*

><p>(fractalman)<p>

Twilight's pupils narrowed to pinpricks as she beheld the interior of her library. Acid. Acid \_everywhere.\_

\* \* \*

><p>127.6 (Kris Overstreet) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle, currently in the body of a pre-adolescent girl, looked at the fairy hovering across the kitchen table from her. "Let me get this straight," she said. "My father took out a loan from your mysterious financial agency, and somehow I'm responsible for it?"<p>

"Well, the agency is offering you the chance to repay the loan on favorable terms," Tear replied. "If you decline the offer, the agency will file to seize your father's remaining assets, which consist of this home and all its contents."

"I see," Twilight growled. "And how am I supposed to raise this money, the amount of which you refuse to tell me because it would discourage me- a fact which by itself tells me it's astronomical- when I am, at the moment, approximately twelve years old and possessed of no marketable skills whatever?"

"Well..." The fairy looked over her glasses with a touch of embarrassment. "First, may I say you are considerably more mature than the person I usually work with?"

"How many Fused Loops have you had, exactly?" Twilight asked.

"I think you're my third," Tear admitted. "Recette has mentioned a few others, but my first one involved hanging around this elf who dressed all in green. He wasn't much for economics, but he had barter down cold. And then there was this little straw-haired boy named Jim who joined the Adventurer's Guild and earned enough to pay off the debt in only two weeks. He never mentioned he was a Looper, but what else could he have been?"

"So you're relatively new," Twilight said. "Well, I'm normally a unicorn in my late teens to early twenties, and I've been Looping a very, very long time. And I've had far too much experience dealing with smooth-talking salespon- er, salespeople."

"Have you had any experience being one?" Tear asked.

Twilight's ears would have perked up had she been in a more familiar body shape. "How's that again?"

"The usual method of paying off the debt," Tear continued, "is to convert the ground floor of this home into an item shop for the adventurers and townspeople. Items can either be bought for resale at the merchant's guild or market, or can be discovered by accompanying adventurers through the dungeons that keep popping up around this town."

"Or," Twilight smiled, "I could just dig a bunch of stuff out of my subspace pocket, sell that, and spend the Loop at home reading." She reached into subspace...

... and found nothing there. Nothing at all.

"Yes, about that..." Tear looked a bit apologetic. "Link tried to teach me the trick, and someone named Mario tried to teach it to Recette, but it doesn't seem to work here. We already have a similar trick, and the two methods seem to interfere with one another."

"Really? Hold on, let me try something." There were two apples left in the fruit bowl on the table. Twilight took one and tried to put it in her pocket. The apple went... somewhere else, a different space which, Twilight sensed, had an arbitrarily limited number of slots for things. Twilight took the other apple and, with very careful concentration, managed to shove it in the fifth-dimensional vector that led to her normal subspace pocket. "Okay," she said at last. "Normal subspace pockets appear to be deposit-only this Loop. Have you tried putting anything into your pocket, or did you just try taking out?"

Tear considered this. "Only taking out," she admitted at last. "But thanks to the hall closet, neither Recette or I had been particularly worried about it."

"What about the hall closet?" Twilight asked.

"Any merchandise in the store at the end of one Loop appears in the closet at the start of the next," Tear said. "Unfortunately the money simply vanishes."

"Really?" Twilight stood up and walked from the kitchen to the hallway that led past the stairs to the large living room. "You mean this closet?" she asked, opening the door.

What she found wasn't merchandise. Fortunately, the contents of the closet didn't fall down on her in some comedic avalanche. The closet was much too large for that to happen.

In fact, Twilight reflected with awe, the last time she'd seen a closet this large was on her trip to Tenchi's world, where Washuu's laboratory that covered the same surface area as five normal planets was accessed through a subspace portal linked to a broom closet under the stairs.

Near the front sat, neatly stacked, dozens of pieces of scientific equipment and half a dozen large tool boxes full of smaller items. Immediately behind them sat a few dozen spaceships for various kinds, ranging from a Federation shuttlecraft up to a heavily armed war cruiser. Tall stacks of binders and scrapbooks wobbled slightly on



uncertain centers of gravity. And bookshelf after bookshelf after bookshelf ranged beyond these things, receding into infinity like a library built in a funhouse hall of mirrors.

And directly in front of her, just across the doorsill, sat the second apple.

Twilight gently closed the door. "All right," she said at last. "This is something new."

Tear frowned. "No vending machines?" she sighed. "No platinum armor? No millefeuille?"

"This is my subspace pocket," Twilight continued. "But I've never seen it this neat and orderly... I almost never see it from the inside, period. And it's never been so easy and convenient to access!" Her speech sped up as her enthusiasm built up steam. "Washuu can do this, but only through a major application of technology. This is a simple Loop-specific universal constant! But how does it work? Can it be duplicated? Can it be applied in Loops outside this one? This calls for some intense research!" Her eyes gleamed at the prospect.

"On a more practical note," Tear muttered, "there's none of the things we usually use to get the store running. You'll have to begin with bare shelves and boxes and whatever merchandise you can scrape together. Or else we lose the home in eight days, and thus lose the ability to research."

Twilight sighed. "All right, all right," she said, "we'll do it your way, just long enough to pay off the debt. But then I MUST study this inventory system your universe has! If I could replicate this effect, it would revolutionize the lives of Loopers everywhere!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Applejack could have backed out and made a ton of money, but instead she stuck by her bargain and kept her word! She is the Element of Trust!"<p>

The shards of one of the stone globes glittered, transforming into a golden choker with gem, which clasped itself around the farm pony's neck.

"Fluttershy helped the manticore remove the thorn from its paw! She is the Element of Customer Service! Rarity's makeover of the sea serpent helped him land a mate! She is the Element of Presentation! Pinkie Pie brought us safely through the doppelganger forest by calling out to us! She is the Element of Advertising! And Rainbow Dash chose to stick with us over the slick, misleading offers of your Shadowbolts! She is the Element of Customer Loyalty!"

The little unicorn pony known as Bags o'Bits stepped forward as the other elements swirled into existence around the necks of her newfound friends. "All of my friends and I worked together to get here- and if you work together in good faith, you can accomplish anything! That is the true meaning of friendship- and friendship is CAPITALISM!"

A tiara appeared on the little filly's head; the jewel at its crest

was shaped like a dollar sign.

Nightmare Moon stared at the group, watching the rainbows of the Elements of Capitalism link one pony to another, and could only think\_, You've got to be kidding me. I mean, you are having me on, right?\_

And from her prison in the Sun, the Awake Celestia completely failed to control her giggle fits.

The Looper known elsewhere as Recette would later convert the disused Ponyville library into the most renowned single general store in all Equestria, at least until the hostile takeover attempt by Taur-get.

\* \* \*

><p>127.7 (Leviticus Wilkes with Wildrook) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack's replacement typically lounged comfortably in the monotony of farm life. Now, as owner and one of the four employees of Sweet Apple Acres, Applejack's baseline tranquility and simple nature aligned nicely with her replacement's day to day routine. A family that loved him, with a precocious little sister, stalwart older brother, and a wise, if slightly kooky grandmother. It even came with a dog that, showing the multiverse did have a heart, was already named Daisy.<p>

Yes, Applejack's replacement was all set. But there were times, he experienced, when he missed the old loops. But then again, the violence was something he had grown out of loving, and the prospect of an eternity trapped in his home loop was synonymous with Hell.

The loopers could have his loop for fun and action, he was enjoying his loops away from it. He would just thank the Admins for letting him have as many fused loops as he needed to maintain his sanity. This was the beauty of Equestria: absolute peace when needed. The anchor had even let him off Applejack's usual responsibilities. (A... thing - called Gilda - was filling in for him).

Yes, all was good in his life.

Then Discord showed up.

"My my, what have we here? A pony with a apple orchid?" The draconequus wove between the replacement's legs. "What a brilliant apple orchid. Ssssshame if ssssomething were to happen to it."

Applejack's replacement cocked an eyebrow. "Don't 'cha mean apple '\_orchard\_'?"

Discord smiled that smile that made regular ponies go \_'oh buck, it's him'\_ and shook his head. "Oh, I misspelled orchard in my manifesto. I just decided to use it for inspiration."

The Apple scion raised an eyebrow. "Uh... what?"

Discord pointed at the rows upon rows upon columns of newly minted apple orchids, plucking a flower from the ground and giving it a green wet willy.

The draconequus then noticed something barking amongst the flowers. "Why, what have we-" the master of chaos promptly had his mouth slapped shut by Applejack's replacement.

"Don't. You. Dare."

Discord laughed cheerfully from within one of the orchids. "Oh, trust me you little pony, I won't lay a finger on your nice little puppy." Discord snapped his fingers, and then his fingers.

Daisy the dog was then promptly consumed in a small mushroom cloud, before emerging from it as a shoe. A shoe that, in turn, was transported to Discords head, where it began buzzing pleasantly. "Oh, I do love my orthopedic shoes, don't you?"

The element of honesty was not amused.

\* \* \*

><p>An hour later, the Mane Six plus Gilda reached Ponyville, all relatively exhausted (by looper standards) from the obstacles that Discord had thrown up at them, but more annoyed at how Twilight had wanted to study them. They were all looking forward to turning Discord back to stone this loop.<p>

However, as they approached Ponyville, something seemed... on, somehow. Not off, but the opposite of off. On the mark, if it could be called that. In other words, not chaotic. A fact made all that more apparent when the six arrived at Apple Acres.

Twilight allowed herself a moment of stunned silence before informing Applejack's replacement of what she had done. "Killing isn't exactly legal here in Equestria."

The element of honesty's doppelg nger shrugged his shoulders, petting Daisy happily. "He hurt my dog."

"Still... how did you do it anyway?" Twilight stared at the mangled remains of the element if chaos. And yes, it was 'element if chaos', not 'element \_of\_ chaos'.

Applejack's replacement, locally known as Apple\_wick\_, and known in his home loop as \_John Wick\_, shrugged. "I tried filling him with lead, but when that didn't work, I decided to try emptying him of lead. Surprising how effective that was."

For a moment, no one made any remarks. Finally, Gilda turned to Rainbow Dash with a light smirk. "Your sure this guy isn't Neo?"

\* \* \*

><p>127.8 (fractalman)<p>

Many, many loops after her failure to make Dodecanitrododecaazaisowurtizane, Trixie found herself in Trek. She

decided that, if Dodecanitrododecaazaisowurtizane was too much, perhaps she could make a simple dodecahedron out of nitrogen.

\* \* \*

><p>Twenty borg cubes emerged out of a transwarp corridor next to Earth.<p>

"We are the borg. Please do not resist while we assist in evacuations."

Much the same happened all over the galaxy.

\* \* \*

><p>Using a boronite laser-she'd happened to have some on hand-Trixie built the structure up atom by atom. When she'd forced 17 out of 20 nitrogen atoms into position, it happened: the rest of the nitrogens simply moved into position of their own accord. It was beautiful. Harmonious. But it exploded. <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So." asked Picard. "What possessed you to move every life form out of the milky way galaxy?"<p>

"It is quite simple" said the borg queen. "The galaxy was about to be destroyed. If all life is wiped out, there will be nothing left to aid our quest for perfection."

Picard rubbed his forehead. He supposed it made sense, in a twisted sort of way. "Just one more question: what destroyed the galaxy?"

"We believe someone synthesized an omega molecule out of nitrogen."

Picard's brain shut down.

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie awoke as Naughty Trix Trix, the vacuum cleaner of Teletubbies. The message was not lost on her: she should not have used a boronite laser. <p>

\* \* \*

><p>127.9 (Gamma Cavy)<p>

Silver Spoon stormed into the bar. \*\*"Drink. Now."\*\*

Mac recognized the signs of a bad loop. "What happened?"

"Amestris Loop where I was Envy, and all alchemists were Sparks, with the ones who had been to the Gate at a Heterondyne level. Ed tried, but... the Spark was too strong. Brain Bleach please?"

Mac winced, and retrieved the bottle labelled Brain Bleach from the shelf.

\* \* \*

><p>127.10 (novusordomundi) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Applejack."<p>

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Where's Twilight, darling? It's a bit unusual to do a Gag Loop without her..."

A shrug. "Don't know. I'm sure she's around here somewhere. Now, you want to tell me why we're cyclops?"

Rarity sighed. "That's usually my line..."

\* \* \*

><p>127.11 (Gamma Cavy) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight, jounin sensei to Team Seven, consisting of Naruto, Shinji Ikari, and Pinkie Pie, winced. <em>Which Admin did I upset enough to get this?<em>

"We all know the drill, Likes, dislikes, dreams for the future?"

Shinji spoke first. "I like messing with my dad, rotten scumbag that he is, I dislike dealing with a non-Awake Asuka, and my dreams for the future are to go at least four fused Loops before coming home, preferably reaching the end of this one first."

Pinkie grinned, bouncing up and down. "I like parties, I don't like party poopers, and my dream is to throw the biggest party yet, even bigger than the one that let me ascend!" Twilight fervently hoped that if she managed it, it would be far away from Equestria.

Naruto winced. "I only have one dream for the immediate future. Manage to put a muzzle on Kurama!"

In his mindscape, said fox grinned. "I know a song that'll get on your nerves, get on your nerves, get on your nerves, I know a song that'll get on your nerves and this is how it goes..."

\* \* \*

><p>127.12 (Kris Overstreet) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke to the sight of a Canterlot in ruins. Many of the broken buildings still smoked and smouldered from whatever had laid waste to the city. Half the towers of Celestia's castle had crumbled in ruins. Ponies of all types were hard at work clearing away debris with a slow, grim determination about their actions.<p>

\_What the buck happened?\_

Twilight automatically sent out a ping, and almost instantly a host of return pings rang in her head, most very close by, a couple from an incredible distance. \_So,\_ she thought, \_at a guess most or all of our Loopers are awake, plus a couple of others in some other star system. And space travel plus mass destruction... oh, I hope this isn't what I think it is.\_

At about that point Twilight's Loop memories kicked in, and verified that no, it wasn't what she thought it was; it was slightly worse.

Equestria had just thrown off, at massive cost, a probing strike by the Imperium of Mankind, with the help of their patron warp goddess of chaos, Pinkie Pie, and her chief demon Discord.

A proper invasion force would likely be along in a few months, one Equestria couldn't hope to resist, one which would likely end in the extinction of all native life on the planet.

And that was if things went WELL. If things went badly the orks might show up first, or even at the same time as, the human second wave.

Mentally Twilight began composing a note to Sleipnir or whatever admin might find it. \_Sorry I threw myself off Mount Canter and crashed the Loop ten minutes in, but I wasn't going to have anything to do with it. Could I kindly request the Teletubbies world for my punishment Loop? After this ten minutes I'm going to need a long spell of nothing exciting happening at all, ever.\_

Princess Celestia landed next to Twilight. "Well, this is a particularly bad Loop, isn't it?" the princess asked. "It's almost as bad as the time I woke up in a Fallout variant as an earth pony."

"Don't worry," Twilight said grimly, "you won't have to deal with it for long."

"Er... I'd hold off on that option if I were you," Celestia said. "For one thing, you might not be the only Anchor Awake in this Loop."

Twilight shrugged. There were many reasons why Twilight avoided the most obvious way of crashing a Loop, and the possibility of her friends being forced to endure a bad Loop without her because of the presence of a visiting Anchor was near the top of that list. But if a Loop was bad enough... well, this one looked it. "I'm listening," she said, "for the other thing."

"The other thing," Celestia said, "is actually six other things. Nightmare Moon captured the Imperium's ships intact and functional." She waved a hoof upwards, and Twilight looked up to see six immense crimson vessels descending through the smoke-clouded Equestrian skies towards Ponyville. "Which means we can defend against a second strike... and then take the battle to the enemy."

Twilight's eyes widened. "Celestia," she gasped, "I didn't think you of all ponies would-"

"Not my idea," Celestia smiled. "Hers." She pointed to a patch of open air, which promptly unzipped itself to admit a pink alicorn with glowing eyes.

"Hiya, Twilight!" Pinkie Pie chirped greetings before turning to face Celestia. "The Emperor's Awake, and he's A-OK with the plan!" The party goddess pouted as she added, "And Candy Cane just hid under his bed until I went away. I don't think anyone else is Awake who isn't a pony or Discord or Gilda or Angel or-"

Celestia gently silenced Pinkie with a hoof to the mouth. "That's excellent news, Pinkie," she said.

"Though the Chaos Gods not being Awake means we can expect trouble from them," Twilight said.

"Not with THIS plan!" Pinkie grinned. "Lessee, we're gonna need everypony who's Looping eventually, but we're going to need you, Trixie, Applebloom, and Vinyl Scratch on the engineering side of things to start. We've got a lot of rebuilding to do before we're ready to conquer Terra!"

"Conquer Terra?" Twilight gasped. "With only six warships? And those aren't even the biggest the loop has to offer!"

"Silly filly!" Pinkie giggled. "It's not about how big the ship is- it's about what kind of gun it has!"

\* \* \*

><p>Six months later six ships, repainted in a variety of pastels, emerged from the warp into orbit above Earth, just outside of weapons range of the home defense fleet and the almost-completed fleet for the conquest of Equestria.<p>

\*\*\*"YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE!\*\*\* a voice sounded on all broadcast channels. \*\*\*"We, the people of Equestria, having suffered mightily at your hands, have come to ensure that it does not happen again! Your rampant xenophobia and religious intolerance is a danger to all other life in the universe and cannot be allowed to continue!\*\*\*

As the defending fleet went to alert status and began to form up for an attack on the six Equestrian ships, the voice continued, \*\*\*"However, we will not lower ourselves to your genocidal level. Instead of wiping out mankind, we shall wipe out the evil that clouds your hearts. Whether you can live with yourselves afterwards will be your choice.\*\*\*

On the Equestrian fleet's flagship, Twilight Sparkle nodded to Luna, who at at the communications station. "That should do nicely," she said. "Flag to all ships: set Elements beam to wide aperture. Planetwide targeting, but include the oncoming ships in your firing solutions. Full rainbow power. Fire at will."

Moments later, one ship after another, one city after another, and eventually the entire planet learned the true non-terror and non-destruction of six warp-capable orbital friendship cannons.

\* \* \*

><p>"So what happened?" Twilight asked Sleipnir, who stood on a grassy hill under an exceptionally friendly sun.<p>

"What happened? You got over-ambitious. I thought you could have guessed that." The Admin calmly cropped a bit of grass, chewed a bit, and then continued, "The Fused code simply wasn't up to handling an entire empire of friendly, jovial, and above all non-violent orks. A squad or shipful, certainly. A colony world, maybe. The whole species? No go." After another bit of grass- it grew surprisingly delicious here- he added, "My colleagues and I are discussing whether or not we should nerf the Elements of Harmony a bit, make them harder to weaponize like that."

A loudspeaker rose from the surface of the knoll. A sweet feminine voice called through it: "Time for teletubbies! Time for teletubbies!"

"Ooops! Time to go to work!" Twiley-Wiley sighed. "Can we talk some more about this later?"

"No trouble," Sleipnir said. "I'll just have a long lunch." He returned to his grazing.

\* \* \*

><p>(Evilhumour)<p>

The Master smiled, he was happy, so very happy. While many would have seen this as a punishment loop, and considering what he did in that under water hell (pitying that squid enough to torch the entire city to the ground) he supposed he did deserve some form of punishment.

But this?

He watched one of those creature with a TV in their stomach ran past him, one named Twiley-Wiley as she went to play/work with the others.

This was pure paradise for Masty-Wasty.

(wildrook)

Then Twiley-Wiley stopped...then looked at Masty-Wasty.

If she could speak, she would go "For the love of the Mighty Oak, what insane person would enjoy this loop?"

As if to respond, Masty-Wasty gave her two thumbs up.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

127.1: A bit more explanation.

>127.2: Trouble brewing.<br>127.3: Penny for your thoughts. Stamp for seeing them.

>127.4: He's not in a sailor suit.<br>127.5: Full tile.

>127.6: A protection Recket.<br>127.7: Pinch a wick.



>127.8: Run. At least Trixie clears the range first.<br>127.9: Cry Havoc, and unleash the Sparks of War.  
>127.10: Eye eye.<br>127.11: Probably Inari.  
>127.12: Whoops.<p>

## 134. Chapter 134

### 128.1 (Gamma Cavy)

Children of the Nightmare, final snip.

\* \* \*

><p>This was the worst Sombra that she had ever had to handle. It was like his baseline personality had been fused with Tirek. To top things off, Discord had turned up at the same time instead of his usual arrival. The Crystal Heart had been missing from its usual location, and Dash was hunting for it. Her Daughter was tied up keeping the Crusaders, who had somehow wound up in the middle of this out of trouble, and Discord and Sombra were fighting each other as well as her. That gave her a bit of a breather, but it was wreaking havoc with the local architecture and geography. Text covered every building thanks to Discord, and she would have been more easily able to handle them if not for the fact that this was going off with about two thousand crystal ponies in the line of fire.<p>

Then of all people \*\*Derpy \*\*skidded into sight, and on her back was the Crystal Heart. Discord aimed another chaos blast at Sombra, who retaliated with... was that a rapid de-age spell?!

"\*\*Cutie Mark Crusader distractions go!"\*\* came a familiar yell. Nyx had protections on them, she could tell, and was diving for the Heartâ€œ"

What happened next happened in very slow motion. Discord's chaos blast shot toward her, Sombra's de-ageing spell went off course as the crusaders landed on him, and a Rainboom detonated in the sky above as Dash arrived. Discord's magic and Sombra's spell collided, merging into something new, before the newly created spell bounced off her shield. The ricochet went right for the Crystal Heart. the last thing she saw was the heart glowing, and both Discord and Sombra disintegrate, before the blast wave hit her and Nyx.

\* \* \*

><p>"Ow." She looked around. "Well this is new. " She had had the occasional pre-Equestria Loop and knew what the stars looked like in the distant past, but she had never wound up somewhere like this. Nyx was unconscious to her right, and two filly unicorns were looking at her. She knew what a young Celestia and Luna looked like, and she had no loop memories, thus was clearly still in the same loop. The last thing she remembered was the chaos altered de-aging spell hitting the Crystal Heart, so what had happened?<p>

Oh.

Clearly the chaos magic, de-aging spell and crystal heart all colliding had triggered her being thrown into the distant past. She remembered what Celestia had said about being taught by a violet

unicorn, and the hint at a loop within a loop, so she fired off a quick illusion to hide her wings, and shook her head, as if waking up.

"Hi!" chirped the young Celestia. "Who're you?!"

"And can you teach us?" Luna asked. "No one will teach us anything. Please pretty mare, teach us magic?"

"My name is Magic's Dawn," Twilight replied with a gentle smile. And the paradox within a loop settled.

\* \* \*

><p>128.2 (Leviticus Wilkes)<p>

Nyx sipped her apple juice, slipping Big Mac a tip for the sweet drink. The red stallion swept up the bit with a light, smooth smile, even though both knew he didn't charge anything for his drink. The bartender reached underneath the bar and pulled out another flask of the Apple's apple juice, mush to the alicorn filly's delight.

Off to the side, towards the end of the long bar, a certain looper, Rapid Hooves, or rather, Ranma, sipped his own cup of hard cider in silence, removed from the amicable pair. One hoof gripped the cup in a sticky bind, whilst the other traced the empty, dark brown on darker brown wood grain, stopping every now and again to tap at a random knot. As he tapped, the martial artist sipped his drink, numbing painful thoughts with the buzz of alcohol.

"What are you doing?"

The filly's question screeched across Ranma's ears like fingernails against a chalkboard, or more accurately, a dentists drill against raw tooth. "You've just been sitting there all day, drinking. Come on: I won't bite," the inquisitive filly continued.

Ranma took a bigger sip from the cup, trying to ignore the 'most annoying mare in the world'. "Come on Ranma-hey!" Nyx's questions were cut off when Big Mac, recognizing the fact that Ranma would probably remain silent for the time being, decided to spare him the trouble. So he just took Nyx by the scruff of her neck and put her back at the end of the bar.

Big Mac pulled out a glass cup and began cleaning it, working it with slow, long wipes of the soaped rag. "Nyx, let the man be. He's got a lot on his mind."

Ranma made no comment, simply casting a single, forlorn glance at Twilight Sparkle's daughter, and finishing his drink.

\* \* \*

><p>128.3 (fractalman) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke in front of what appeared to be Slenderman...in a clown costume and a judge's wig.<p>

"Order in the court! Now introducing the case of Discord versus Sleipnir! First witness: Twilight Sparkle." said the Slenderman...thing, in its androgynous voice.

Twilight turned to Sleipnir, who whispered "It's a long story involving a bug in the Pokemon servers and some Admin-level blackmail...just play along, please?"

Twilight shrugged, and then headed up to the witness chair.

"Please supply the first piece of evidence."

'That is not how trials work' thought Twilight with some indignation. When she opened her mouth to protest, however, out came a zebra, a giraffe, a hippo, a lion, and four penguins

"Bum bum budabuda bum bum circus,  
>bum bum budabuda bum bum circus,<br>Circus afro Circus afro.

>Polka dot! Polka dot! Polkadots and moonbeams

Crazy lights and acrobatics accompanied the song. When it ended, Twilight couldn't help but giggle at the adorably glum Sleipnir in a pink tutu.

Coyote walked into the room, took a picture, and left.

"Please present the next piece of evidence."

Twilight shrugged, and opened her mouth. Out came a party-in-a-box, which exploded, covering everything in paint and streamers.

Coyote walked into the room, took a picture, and left.

The judge banged his hammer. "This concludes the trial of Discord versus Sleipnir."

\* \* \*

><p>128.4 (Detective Ethan Redfield) <p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>The Great Equestrian Foam Sword War, Part 4<strong>

The sun dawned on Equestria. Ponyville had long since evacuated into its geofront. Not even the crickets remained thanks to Fluttershy's urgings. Twilight stood atop the balcony of Golden Oaks Library. With a flash of light, she ascended and began casting a multitude of protection spells. Protego, Prismatic Wall, Trixie's magic barrier, Light Screen, Reflect, even space Time fuuinjutsu seals that would move Ponyville to the desert island on the other side of the world should it be hit with a tactical nuclear bomb, though Twilight swore combatants to not use nuclear weaponry (Trixie was insistent on being allowed to use non-lethal explosives). After the spells encased Ponyville and the geofront underneath, she changed her focus and cast scrying spells that would project the events to every city in the world.

After completing that, she departed for the interior of her library,

pulled up a couch, and plopped down with a bowl of popcorn. With another burst of magic, several magical mirrors appeared, showing the status of every participant in the war.

\* \* \*

><p>"How do you think I look," Spike asked, already having grown to the size of a regular human. He was decked out in brown and tan robes of the Jedi Order with his lightsaber on the belt. He and Rarity stood on the North end of Ponyville near the river that snaked its way around the town.<p>

"Stunning my dear Spikoranuvelitar. Do you think the armor is a bit much," Rarity looked at herself. She had ascended to alicorn status to allow for freer use of her magic. Her wings were covered in tritium mesh along with a battle dress with runes sowed in for emergency teleportation and a single use barrier that repels explosives.

Spike rolled his eyes, "I doubt it. Trixie will probably turn her battlefield into a minefield and with Chrysalis, it may be better to think up passwords now in case we get separated-"

Spike didn't even notice as Rarity grabbed him and teleported them a few feet away as a crack echoed across river. Rarity looked behind them, where a foam sword embedded itself in the tree. She turned to the river and snorted, "how uncouth. Forcing me to use one of my teleportation runes to save my dragon."

Spike rubbed his head, "Sorry, Rarity."

Rarity blinked, "Oh, not you, Spike dear."

\* \* \*

><p>"First shot missed," echoed Applebloom in Sweetie's ear, "You know Rarity will use barriers next."<p>

Sweetie ejected the magazine and switched to a red painted one, "Right."

With another second, she lined up the unicorn in her sights, and fired twice more.

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity sensed the second round the instant it was fired. Her horn glowed pink and her entire body glowed, then the armor exploded into magic and withdrew to her subspace pocket. Then a new Armor set replaced it, pure white attachments extended from the armor on each hoof with the base armor itself was navy blue and white. A helmet more befitting a samurai warrior graced her head and covered her mane. This all took place in a single instant.<p>

A second instant after, a yellow barrier formed around Rarity, designed off of Inoe Orihime's Santen Kosshun, to deflect all attacks.

Sweetie's first bullet struck the shield and got crushed. But then the bullet glowed for a second as the magic rune activated. The rune

had three functions, replace the bullet on contact with a foam sword, to activate its twin rune, and be a focus point for the second rune's teleportation spell. The second bullet teleported a foot within the barrier and barreled towards Rarity's exposed forehead.

Until Spike's saber snapped up and cut the bullet from the air. He swatted down two more shots exactly like that in less than a second. His eyes landed on Sweetie's position, "I have her. She won't get off another like that."

Rarity let out the breath of air she didn't know she had been holding, "Thank you, Spike."

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetie's eyes widened in surprise, then returned to her grim determination as Applebloom spoke, "Shots did not connect."<p>

Before Sweetie could respond, Rarity's barrier dropped and a determined looking Spike dashed across the river towards her position.

Just as Spike was halfway across the river, the water beneath him exploded upwards as a Orange gundam swung a foam sword at Spike's feet. The Jedi managed to slice through the blade and leap away across the river, forced to focus on this new foe. Spike looked around, asking himself: where were the other three crusaders?

\* \* \*

><p>128.5 (Detective Ethan Redfield) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey Twilight! What are you studying this time," asked Pinkie as she stepped into the heart of the purple unicorn's lab. Twilight was wearing a lab coat and staring at several notes, "Something that has been bugging me for quite awhile. You know in Minecraft loops, we can store stuff in chests?"<p>

At Pinkie's nod, Twilight continued, "Well a couple loops ago, I found a chest containing several items, including another chest altogether. I'm trying to figure out how that's possible."

Pinkie tilted her head and quirked her eyebrow, "Wouldn't the chest be like a subspace pocket?"

Twilight sighed, "Yes, but I'm trying to figure out the principle behind how it works. Literally, I put it together from 8 wood planks. No magic goes into it, the box just becomes a subspace pocket. I've already tested the crafting table, but that's just four planks put together. You can't just put 8 planks together and create a subspace pocket! That's like taking fire to fresh gasoline and not expect a chemical reaction to take place, but in reverse!"

Her mane started fraying at the edges before Pinkie patted Twilight on the back, "Don't worry, silly filly. You're the smartest of the smart ponies I've ever met, and one of the bestest best brainy loopers in the multiverse. You'll figure it out."

Twilight sighed and gave her a heartfelt smile, "Thanks Pinkie."

\* \* \*

><p>128.6 (Filraen) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"That was harder than I thought," said Twilight after entering to her home.<p>

"Who is the...?" Spike's, wearing an apron, appeared by the kitchen's door. "Hi Twilight! You're just in time for dinner."

"That'd be nice, I skipped lunch today," said Twilight with a hint of tiredness on her voice.

As both pony and dragon getting themselves ready to eat. Spike curiously asked "By the way, what were you doing? I didn't see you the whole day."

"Just preparing a little payback." At Spike's inquisitive look, Twilight continued. "Look at the sky, it must be time for sunset."

Still sitting at the table, Spike looked through the window. As on cue, the sun left the sky replaced by the moon. Except... "You marked your cutie mark in the moon's surface? Why?"

"Because a few loops ago Luna pretended to be Nyx and told me just before the loop reset."

"But Luna is Nyx, you know..."

Twilight looked at Spike for a moment. "... You know, Spike? Forget it" she managed to answer before returning to her daisy sandwich, her mood clearly burned out.

Spike barely managed to hold a chuckle.

\* \* \*

><p>128.7 (Kris Overstreet) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle and Princess Celestia Awoke to the sight of a little black alicorn filly holding up an excruciatingly familiar book.<p>

"Auntie Celestia! Big sis! Wait until you hear what I just-" The filly blinked, shook her head, and sat up a little straighter. "Oh. Er. This is kinda weird."

"Hello, Nyx," Twilight smiled. "So, this Loop you're the one who reads about the Mare in the Moon?"

"I guess so. I was trying to learn more about where I came from, you know?"

A moment of concentration later, Twilight did indeed know. Nyx's origins were not that different from the original, except that the cultists had held a ceremony in the Castle of the Two Sisters before, rather than after, Nightmare Moon's return. After quite a bit of this and that, Nyx had been adopted by Twilight's parents as her younger sister.

"So," Celestia said firmly, "Mare in the moon, prophecy, Ponyville, Summer Sun Celebration, taken as read. The question is, what's Luna's current state?" As she asked the question she sent out a ping, and Nyx and Twilight automatically responded. No other pings returned.

"Obviously not Awake," Twilight said.

"I better go check." Nyx concentrated, and her little filly body turned into glittering spectral smoke, swirling into the marble floor and vanishing. Only a couple of minutes later the process reversed itself, and Nyx reappeared. "She's full Nightmare, babbling to herself about revenge, and chewing more scenery than your average Gundam pilot." She made a twirling motion next to her ear with one hoof and made cuckoo-clock noises.

"So, standard villain mode," Twilight nodded. "We can work with that."

"Actually," Nyx said, "could you let me handle it this time? I don't get an opportunity like this very often..."

"I see no reason why not," Celestia smiled. "I haven't put on my surfing jams for a couple Loops now. I bet there'll be some prime sunspots when Luna comes down..."

\* \* \*

><p>"THE NIGHT WILL LAST FOREVER!"<p>

"NOT IF I HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT IT!"

Thunder boomed in the town hall, and a swirl of midnight cloud coalesced in the middle of the crowd of ponies into a second dark alicorn, this one about half the size of the one on the balcony. "I, Nightmare Moon, shall stop you!"

"WHAT?" In a swirl of starry cloud the original Nightmare transitioned from balcony to floor, staring more or less face to face with the newcomer. "Imposter! How dare you impersonate the rightful ruler of Equestria!"

"I'm impersonating nobody!" the smaller alicorn insisted. "I am Nightmare Moon, ruler of the night, guardian of dreams!"

"Inconceivable!"

"That word," Twilight Sparkle said from off to one side. "I do not think it means what you think it means."

Nyx couldn't quite keep the grin off her face. "Search your

feelings!" she shouted. "You know it to be true!"

"NO!" Nightmare Moon shouted, not full Royal Canterlot Voice but loud enough to push all the ponies nearby a few hoofsteps backwards. "There is only room in Equestria for ONE Nightmare Moon! And that Nightmare Moon shall be-"

"WAAAAAAAIT wait wait wait!" A pink blur wearing a black and white striped jersey popped up between the two alicorns. She punctuated her interruption with a loud blow on a whistle hanging on a strap around her neck. "We can't have a proper good twin - evil twin battle without an audience!"

"A what?" Nyx said, train of thought totally derailed.

"What new madness is this?" Nightmare Moon snapped.

The unAwake Pinkie Pie grinned maniacally at both mare and filly. "Well, don't you want all Equestria, or at least as much as you can get in one place, to see who wins? To see that nothing can stand before you?"

"Well, this is true- I mean nay!" Nightmare Moon stood tall and proud. "I shall not let pettifoggery interfere with my cause! You shall not delay me any longer!"

\* \* \*

><p>Some time passed. Things got done.<p>

Nightmare Moon sat on a stool in one corner of the fighting ring. She looked over her shoulder at Twilight Sparkle, who'd reluctantly agreed to be her coach, and said, "How precisely did I get into this again?"

Twilight shrugged. "From what I'm told, Pinkie's always like this," she said. "The locals don't question it, they just embrace the insanity."

A mixture of ponies, griffons, batponies and even a few changelings roared and stamped their approval as Pinkie Pie, now dressed in a spiffy black suit with bowtie, stepped into the middle of the ring. "LADIES AND GENTLEPONIES!" she shouted into a microphone that hung from the rafters. "It's time for the main bout of the evening!"

The cheers and stamps grew louder.

"In the west corner!" Pinkie stabbed a hoof at the larger Nightmare. "Direct from the moon, with a record of 4 and 1, with two wins by knockout! The royal roller! The regent of regret! The successor to be the oppressor! And the alicorn princess of making ponies wet themselves in fear: the One and Only NIGHTMAAAAAARE MOOOOOOON!"

Over the cheers Twilight hissed into the Nightmare's ear, "You stand up and wave to the crowd."

A little awkwardly Nightmare Moon did so, slightly surprised that most of the noise made by the crowd was positive.



"And in the east corner!" Pinkie shouted when the noise subsided a little. "From Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns and Others, with a record of 1 and 1, with one win by knockout! The protector of dreams! The daughter of destiny! She Who Goes Bump in the Night! And the defender of candy and other sweet goodies on Nightmare Night. The Two And Only: NIGHTMAAAAAARE-"

"WAAAAAAAAAAAIT a minute!"

Before Pinkie could finish introducing Nyx, the larger Nightmare dashed to the center of the ring. "The defender of sweet goodies?" she asked. "Nopony told me that was an option!"

"Well, it's true," Nyx said, coming to the center of the ring as well. "Every pony deserves candy and goodies on Nightmare Night!"

"But- but- wait, wait," Nightmare Moon said, anxiety rising. "If you're the defender of sweet goodies... then that makes me... er... not the defender of sweet goodies..."

Nyx shrugged. "Well, ponies can't get up in the morning and make candy if there's no morning."

Nightmare Moon whimpered quietly, but the microphone picked it up and amplified it loud enough for the thousands of ponies in the arena to hear. After the moment, in a small voice, she added, "A thousand years... without... candy..."

"I can't imagine a thousand minutes without it," Nyx said sympathetically.

"Do they still make," Nightmare made motions with her hooves, "that ribbon candy, that looks like you can slurp it up like noodles only it's all hard, so you have to bite and crunch it until your mouth is one big sticky yummy mess?"

"They sure do!"

"And those red and white peppermint drops?" the Nightmare asked. "Are those still around?"

"Even better!" Nyx nodded. "For Hearth's Warming Eve they make long peppermint sticks, curved at one end like a walking cane, so you can hang them on the tree!" She held her hooves apart about a foot.

Nightmare Moon whimpered yet again. "And... those delightful chocolate drops? The kind unicorn nobles eat while lounging on a sofa and pretending they're productive citizens?"

Over the laughter of an audience that was primarily earth pony in composition, Nyx grinned, "Even better. They put it in bars now. Some with peanuts, some with caramel, some with cookies inside... and some with ALL of it."

The whimper which followed sounded like it echoed from the deepest, darkest pit in Tartarus.

"And they even make chocolate bits with candy shells all over," Nyx

smiled, twisting the knife just that much more, "so they melt in your mouth, not in your saddlebags."

In a choked voice Nightmare Moon asked, "With peanuts?"

"With or without," Nyx nodded. "Whichever you like." Looking up she added, "Of course, if you win, there'll be an end to all that, because, well, you know- endless night, rule of oppression, all those little colts and fillies who get no fun or joy or candy for-"

"NOOOOOOOOOOOO!" Nightmare Moon reached up, removed her helmet, and set it atop Nyx's own, smaller helmet. "I concede! I surrender! Anything but that! You're the Nightmare! All hail Princess Nightmare Moon!"

A loud cheer followed, after which Nyx asked, "So, if I'm Nightmare Moon, what's your name?"

"Er... um... I'm nopony!" Nightmare Moon shook her head. "Just an anonymous lover of sweet things! A simple Jane Doe!"

"HEY!" a pair of voices shouted in indignation from the cheap seats of the arena. One of the two objectors had a large set of antlers.

"Sorry! Sorry!" Nightmare Moon backpedaled some more.

"And don't call yourself Anonymoose either!" a cloaked figure with an even bigger set of antlers said from the front row of seats. (This combination of circumstances had not made him a popular neighbor, but few ponies are prepared to object too loudly to someone three times their size.)

"Didn't you have a different name once upon a time?" Twilight Sparkle asked, stepping through the ropes and into the ring. "Wasn't it... Princess Luna?"

"Luna?" The darkness melted away from the larger alicorn, who shrank gradually to about the same size as Twilight Sparkle. "Luna. Yes. I was Luna."

The darkened windows at the very highest corners of the arena suddenly lit with the young, vibrant light of a much-delayed dawn. A moment later Celestia appeared in a flash of light. For a moment much of the crowd thought she was wearing a horrible pair of overlong shorts with a print of provocatively posed stallions on them, but a second flash removed what must have been a bizarre illusion from view.

As Celestia, Luna and Nyx hugged, Pinkie Pie reached up to bring the microphone to her lips. In a deep, demonic voice that shook the rafters she said:

\_\_\*\*"FRIENDSHIP."\*\*\_\_

It didn't literally bring the house down, but it did it in every other way.

\* \* \*

><p>EPILOGUE:<p>

"And this, dearest sister," Celestia said, gesturing to the friendly if somewhat rough looking stallion behind the counter, "is Pony Joe, proprietor of Donut Joe's."

"Such a wondrous establishment you have," Luna said, nodding graciously to Joe. "And so kind of you to be open as late as this."

"Beg your pardon, your Highness," Joe mumbled, "but actually, we never close."

"Never close?" Luna's eyes widened. "You mean you stay open all... night... long?"

"If there's customers, yeah," Joe said. "I have an assistant who covers during the day so I can get some shut-eye. I prefer the night shift- you meet more interesting ponies at night."

"Come sister," Celestia said, nudging Luna towards a booth. "Allow me to introduce you to a frosted maple Bismarck... with sprinkles."

And for miles around every pony could hear the Royal Canterlot Squee.

\* \* \*

><p>128.8 (Crisis) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?"<p>

"Actually Rarity, I think I do know why we're anthropomorphic versions of our normal selves trained in the art of ninjutsu. You seeâ€"

"No, no, no, I got the Loop memories of the mutagen just fine. I was more wondering how six Hub-standard equines even got into the New York sewers in the first place."

"Oh... Huh... Nope, I got nothing."

\* \* \*

><p>128.9 (Detective Ethan Redfield and Wildrook) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>The doorway to Ponyville opened, revealing two massive humans. Mayor Mare's eyes widened in joy as she and others joined in, "K! You're back, the lightgiver! All hail K, all hail K, Oh K can't you see, by the dawn's early light! Fresh K, Fresh K, Fresh K."<p>

Agent J looked at his partner with a quirked eyebrow and a wry grin plastered on his face, "So this is what you keep in your closet. Man, I didn't know you were into that stuff-"

K looked about ready to throttle him, "We are not having this conversation. I'm leaving."

Suddenly, one of the mini ponies appeared on K's shoulder. She was Pink, with a massive smile on her face, "Kaysie! You're back! Don't forget to take your watch and card-"

K looked at the pony, "Pinkie Pie, we've already sent the princess on her way. I would rather forget this loop if you don't mind. Next loop in Equestria, I will sit through whatever party if you leave me be this loop."

Pinkie nodded, "Okie Dokie Loki!"

(Later...)

"ALL HAIL K! ALL HAIL K!" the Ponies in K's locker yelled before he shut it.

J tried not to laugh, but K's stare got him to break down.

"Turnabout's fair play, isn't it?" he asked.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

128.1: Explanation explained.

>128.2: Sometimes, just being you is a problem.<br>128.3: Nope.

>128.4: Just hide.<br>128.5: Mein Kraft.

>128.6: Bad moon rising.<br>128.7: Minor Konflikt.

>128.8: Totally radical.<br>128.9: There's a lot of room in that locker.

## 135. Chapter 135

### 129.1

Silver looked across at Diamond. "Okay. I get that we're in another world."

Diamond nodded. "That's right."

Silver held up the red and white ball. "These creep me out, though. I mean - they creep me out. I've been almost everything these balls are supposed to catch."

Diamond shrugged. "At least you're not a comedy character."

Silver gave a reluctant nod. "Fair enough. Right, any ideas?"

Diamond tapped the ground with a foot. "Have you still got that big spoon? Fighting Mewtwo with it would be neat."

### 129.2 (Dalxein)

"Sooooo..." Twilight started, looking around at the 'basement' of the building Trixie and Chrysalis had erected just outside Ponyville. It was really more of a large lab, the walls lined with tubes and the floor covered in vats, some of which were woven into the web of tubes and receptacles. "What're you up to?"

"Trixie is bored and curious," the blue mare herself responded as she fiddled with diodes. "She has decided to experiment with amino acids and proto-life."

Chrysalis piped in, "We want to know if we can make simple self-replicating RNA strands and such in the loops."

The Anchor nodded, it was rather fascinating stuff, but- "You're doing the third-person thing again."

"What?" Trixie asked, breaking herself away from her tinkering. "I was not."

Chrysalis giggled. "She gets so adorable when she's hyper-focused on her work."

Her marefriend blushed with an unintelligible noise, turning back to connect some electrical circuitry while muttering something along the lines of 'am not'.

"Still, this does seem a bit further out of your regular experiments than normal..." Twilight handily broke the mood, causing her former rival to grin.

"Now, now, you know I'm first and foremost a chemist. This is chemistry." She raised a hoof to a comically large switch behind her. "And I do love a challenge."

She flipped the switch and electricity flared, the lights dimming as their power was shunted into the experiment. Twilight watched as Trixie cackled and Chrysalis swooned, before there was a loud pop and the sparks faded. The lights did not come back on.

"...Trixie can fix this."

129.3 (Bardic Knowledge)

It had been a pretty normal Loop for Twilight. Just a simple, lonely, baseline run. She could practically do them in her sleep at this point.

Hmm, that could be an experiment for a later Loop, actually.

But things took a turn for the interesting when it came time for the princess summit in the Crystal Empire. Going to bed the night she arrived, as normal, she stayed awake to listen for Sunset Shimmer to come in after her crown. She heard her door open softly and prepared to catch Sunset in the act when she suddenly felt this overwhelming urge to fall asleep, as if a soft voice was telling her she didn't need to stay awake, the bed was so comfortable, things like that.

If she hadn't been a Looper, let alone an Anchor, she probably would have fallen asleep. As it was, she barely noticed that the pony in her room had made it to the door before she snapped to attention and

called for help, as in baseline.

Chasing the mysterious replacement didn't change things too much from the chase of Sunset, including the teleport that got her a cloak in the face. Upon reaching the mirror room and tackling the mare, though, she finally managed a good look at her quarry.

The mare was silver-grey in colour, with a very plain-looking brown mane in a bun. A smirk seemed almost permanently affixed to her face.

"My crown!" said Twilight, still trying to stick to the script, "What did you do to my crown?!"

The mare teleported in front of the portal, giving Twilight a chance to see her cutie mark. It appeared to be a pocket watch, skewed so that noon was pointing south-east instead of straight up. The minute hand was on twelve, the hour on three, and the second hand between one and two.

Then the mare said something that threw Twilight off a little. Instead of Sunset's "Sorry it had to be this way, princess," this mare said, in what sounded like a Scottish accent, "It's been fun, dears, but I've got a date to get to. Ta ta!" and jumped into the portal.

The interesting change continued from there, as Princess Celestia revealed that her former student this time was a young mare named "Mistress," which set off a few alarms in Twilight's head, though she couldn't yet put her hoof on why.

Entering the portal as normal, Twilight carefully made her way into the school, and headed on her path to Fluttershy. As she arrived at the hallway, she saw "Mistress" talking calmly to Fluttershy, staring intently into her eyes.

"I know, dear. You didn't know that I had lost the crown everyone made for me this year, and it's only right that you returned it. But you really should have returned it to me, you know, rather than-"

"Leave her alone!" Twilight shouted. This seemed to startle the girl slightly, before she turned. And smiled brightly?

"Oh, hello, dear. I don't think I've seen you around the school before." Not only did that strike her as odd behavior for almost any Sunset replacement, but as the Mistress spoke, Twilight could feel something strangely alluring about her voice.

"I-I'm Twilight Sparkle." Twilight replied without thinking. Then she blinked, who could this girl be? A new Looper? Twilight sent out a ping, but received no reply at all.

The Mistress smiled softly. "Twilight, such a lovely time of day. And you-"

Before Twilight could identify the strange feeling the stranger's voice was giving her, the Mistress was interrupted by Rainbow Dash's voice.

"Oi! Missy!" the CHS version of Rainbow Dash stood at the end of the hall, across from Twilight. "Get away from them!"

The Mistress, or "Missy" apparently, rolled her eyes and looked in Rainbow Dash's direction. "Hello, Rainbow Dash. I was just getting know the new girl, that's all."

Dash's glare only seemed to intensify. What had this girl done to make her so hated? "Well, maybe she doesn't want to know you, you snake. New girl, Fluttershy, we're leaving!"

Knowing that she had to find out what was going on, Twilight followed her once-and-future friends down the hallway.

"Thank you for getting me away from there," said Twilight. "I don't know what was going on, but-"

"That was Missy," said Rainbow Dash. "She showed up at the school a couple years back and in months she had practically every student eating out of her hand. Some of us are immune to her so-called 'charms,' but there aren't very many." Dash then turned towards Fluttershy. "But why was she harassing you, 'Shy? She already knows you're immune."

"Well, I was outside by the statue trying to get volunteers for the animal shelter." Rainbow Dash opened her mouth. "It may not be likely, Rainbow Dash, but I have to try." Dash's mouth closed again. "Anyways, I was just passed by by the fourth person when something hit me in the back of the head. And when I looked it was the Fall Formal crown for this year. So I took it to Principal Celestia. Missy was apparently looking for the crown as well for some reason."

Twilight nodded. "I think I know why. The others who resist Missy, can you get them all together? I have something important that I think you'll all want to hear."

Rainbow Dash looked skeptically at Twilight for a few seconds before nodding. "Yeah, we typically meet up in the courtyard at lunch. Just try to steer clear of Missy while you can, okay?"

"Right." After that, Twilight separated from Rainbow and Fluttershy. She immediately headed for the courtyard Dash had mentioned, since she didn't have any classes to attend anyways.

"So, Twilight," asked Spike from her backpack. "What's the plan?"

"Well, Spike, I know we left Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash back home in our world, so that must mean that this world has counterparts of our friends. I have a feeling that everyone who's resisted 'Missy's weird hypnosis or whatever is one of those counterparts. So, we're going to explain everything to them."

"Whoa," said Spike, hopping out of the bag as they stepped outside. "Are you sure? Why would they even believe you?"

"Well, for one, I have a talking dog with me." Spike scratched his head sheepishly. "For another, if they really are counterparts to our friends in Equestria, then I can use their names before we're

introduced. That should help, too."

"Wow, you've really got this all planned out, huh?"

"Well, mostly. I want to hear from them what it feels like when Missy's doing whatever it is she's doing. That should help me figure out some way to break it." Twilight paused for a moment. Oh, yeah, she was here for her crown, too. "After that, if they can't help find the crown, I'll try entering this 'Fall Formal' thing to see if I can win it."

Just over a half an hour later, Twilight heard the bell ring to signal the end of class and people slowly started coming out to the courtyard. A few gave her odd looks, until Rainbow and Fluttershy started talking to her. Aside from the rest of the Elements of Harmony, there was also about six other people, not all of which were versions of her fellow Loopers.

Looking over the crowd, Rainbow turned to Twilight and nodded.

"Excuse me, everyone," Twilight started. Everyone turned to look. "My name is Twilight Sparkle. I'm here because Missy stole something very important from me, and left this in its place." And with that cue, Spike handed her the fake crown she had brought along this time.

"But that's-" started Flash Sentry.

"The Fall Formal crown, yes. I came here today to try and get my crown back, but there's a problem: the crown has been hidden by Vice-Principal Luna, and I don't know if she'll accept my story the way I'm hoping you will, which means that I will probably have to win the event myself to get my crown back."

"But just us wouldn't be near enough to win you your crown. Not against all o' Missy's followers.," said Applejack, who then frowned. "Wait, why would you have a crown in the first place?"

Pinkie grinned. "I know, I know! She's from an alternate world and she's a pony princess there and the crown actually has a magical element embedded in it that helps power up other magical elements, and without it they don't work anymore, and she needs them all to help protect your magical world! Right?"

The others were staring at Pinkie with varying levels of incredulousness. Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes and said, "Pretty sure that's not it."

"Actually," added Spike, "she's pretty much spot on."

Every gasped and stared at Spike. Fluttershy grinned extremely wide and scooped him up.

"Hold on a moment, Fluttershy, before we get too far off track," said Twilight. "Now, from what Rainbow Dash tells me, Missy has tried to do something to everyone at this school, practically ruling it with their approval. But all of us here are immune to whatever she's doing, which I think is some kind of hypnosis. Can anyone tell me what they felt when she's tried this on them?"



For the most part everyone agreed that there was just something about her voice that sounded inviting, but it was so sickly-sweet that it turned them away. Except one story had something a little different.

"I listen to my music all the time, sure," said Vinyl Scratch. "So Missy'd never had much chance at getting to me until one day when Principal Celestia took my headphones for wearing them in school. It was then that Missy caught me and tried her little voodoo. Well, not only did I hear what everybody else did, but under that I could hear a strange four beat. After she failed to turn me, I started noticing all around the school... That everyone under Missy's spell was unconsciously tapping out that beat."

"Strange four beat?" asked Derpy.

Vinyl nodded and tapped it out, sending shivers down Twilight's spine. She recognized that beat from her time travelling with the Read Only version of the Doctor. That was the Master's drumbeat. That meant that Missy was apparently a gender-swapped version of the Master.

The name "Mistress" started to make sense, now.

Twilight nodded. "Okay, if Missy's controlling the school with this beat, we need to figure out a way to break that rhythm. Something to get everyone to realize what she's been doing this whole time. First we'll need a time when the students will be all gathered in the same place. Then, we'll need a song. One that doesn't match that beat and is about being free..."

"I think I know one," said Rainbow Dash. "It's by this band called 'Rush.' They're pretty old, but their stuff is amazing. The song is even called 'Freewill.'"

"And pretty much everyone outside this group is in the cafeteria for lunch every day," said Rarity. "So we just need to use the song while everyone is eating lunch tomorrow."

"But how do we use the song in the first place?" asked Applejack. "Pretty sure just playing it ain't gonna cut it."

"You're probably right, Applejack," said Twilight. "But we won't just be playing it. We'll be playing it with magic." At everyone's confused look, she elaborated. "While the portal to my homeland of Equestria is open, there's magic from there leaking into this world. It's not very much, but if we let the instruments soak it up overnight, we should be able to use it on the school."

Well, that's what Twilight wanted them to think was happening. In truth, when they played the song she was going to cast a mass-dispel type spell to just snap everyone out of it. Real magic music wasn't going to be present at CHS until the Sirens arrived.

Speaking of, she'd have to see how the Sirens would react to "Freewill" being played during the battle of the bands.

As lunch wound down, Twilight officially signed up for the Fall Formal, after confirming that the rules actually said the students

elect "one of their peers" rather than "one of the students." That sort of detail was important when dealing with someone of the Master's calibre. Even though he wasn't Awake, the renegade Time Lord was a dangerous man. Or woman, in this case.

On her way to lunch the next day, Twilight was being stared at accusingly and maliciously whispered about behind her back, which was starkly different from the barely-veiled laughs of Sunset Shimmer's humiliating video, but Twilight managed to take it in stride.

Once everyone (save for Missy herself) was inside, as confirmed by some of the people who didn't have an instrument to play for the song, the future Rainbooms pulled out their instruments from behind the lunch counter (hidden there by Granny Smith, who had taken the whole thing in her stride) and started playing.

It was amazing, seeing people snap out of the hypnosis and suddenly realize just what they had been doing. There weren't many horrificed looks, since Missy never had them do anything truly awful, but just the fact that they had been manipulated so easily with some honey-coated words seemed to shock them into totally turning against Missy.

It was only slightly surprising to Twilight that the gym and Pinkie's hard work wasn't destroyed, but getting together to rebuild the Fall Formal wasn't needed with how Twilight had revealed what Missy had been doing.

She left out a lot of details, such as her hypothesis on who Missy really was and why Twilight had been there in the first place, instead just saying that she had seen Missy's handiwork before at her "old school" and she wanted to help.

So, of course, she won her crown back (for the nth time) by a landslide. And, also of course, Snips and Snails dognapped Spike.

Arriving in the front yard of the school, Missy, Snips, Snails, and Spike all stood before the portal.

"Hello, Twilight. I haven't much chance to speak with you since you arrived. How are you finding my school?"

"It's not your school any more, Missy!" Twilight declared. "We've broken whatever spell you had over the students here."

"Oh, I know. But you don't really think I'd have left everything to chance, do you? I have had years to plan this out, after all." Missy smiled and she pointed behind them. Twilight spared a quick glance in that direction, expecting some unknown player to attack, only to see nothing there. And then her crown was ripped right off her head.

Missy rose up into the air, a blast of golden light, very similar to a Time Lord's regeneration energy, flowing around her. Her body mutated, taking on a truly reflective silver sheen, her hair coming loose from its bun and shaping itself into what looked like a Cyberman's head-handles. A pair of silver bat wings and a sharp-looking tail emerged last, and when the light faded, Missy glanced at the changes.

"Oh, very nice. Very fitting for the Queen of Evil, wouldn't you say? Now, then, with the power boost granted me by this lovely crown..." Missy gave a flap of her wings, landed on the statue and looked into the school.

Twilight could feel the power Missy was drawing from the crown.

"I AM THE MISTRESS!" she shouted, waves of magic coming off her. "AND YOU WILL OBEY ME!"

The force of that command and the hypnotic drumbeat behind it were so powerful that Twilight might have had trouble with it if it weren't for two facts:

1. She was an experienced Looper, capable of shrugging off suggestions that didn't come from god-level beings without much trouble.
2. The command was augmented with her magic. And as such, she could grab hold of it and keep it from affecting the human Elements of Harmony beside her.

"Sorry, Missy," said Twilight, a look of determination on her face, "but not today! Just like we discussed, girls!"

Just before the Fall Formal proper, Twilight shared her suspicion that Missy would have a back-up plan for getting the crown, and informed the girls that she would be able to harness any magic of the crown that Missy tried to use against them. And when that happened, they were to hold hands and concentrate on their Element.

This was, thankfully, enough to create the transformation from baseline that let them defeat Sunset Shimmer.

The first beam of Harmony they sent out was dodged by the barest of margins, taking out the Canterlot Wondercolt statue, but leaving the pedestal itself intact. Frowning in concentration, Twilight switched the pseudo-Elements' power into a wide-beam setting, which Missy fortunately failed to dodge.

Once the crown was returned to her, Twilight turned to Missy, who was laying on the ground and back in her human form.

"Your reign is over, Missy," Twilight said. It would have been nice, she reflected, to have done this to the actual Master, but she supposed turning this instance of him would be a nice consolation.

Maybe next time she Looped with the Doctor she could share this story.

"Yes," said Missy, looking up at Twilight with weary eyes, her hair a mess around her head, "you're right. I... I don't know what I was doing. You... don't need to rule to be recognized." Missy shuddered as she started to sob, looking away in attempt to hide her face. "All you need is some good friends."

Twilight couldn't see it, but Missy wasn't crying at all, but rather looking incredibly disgusted at what she was saying.

But without knowing that, Twilight said that the other Elements would be willing to help her with that (which they looked at her skeptically about, except for Pinkie) and they all returned to the school to enjoy the dance before the portal closed.

Missy stayed behind for a moment and sighed, before smirking slightly. "Sorry, dears, but it will take far more than that to change my tune."

And with four quick little taps against the pedestal, Missy schooled her expression and followed everyone else.

#### 129.4 (Vulpine Fury)

"Here you go, Mees Fluttershy, your LAMB-inator!" Heinz Doofenshmirtz said as he handed over a bizarre raygun. "Anything you want can now be transformed into a soft and fluffy little lamb!"

"Um." Fluttershy twiddled her fingers. "That's... nice..." She latched onto the ray gun with both hands and smiled so broadly her teeth squeaked. "But I needed to protect my posters for the Tri-State Area Animal Shelter by laminating them... between sheets of plastic."

"Oh, is my face red!" Heinz smiled. "And the first time I ever succeeded at delivering one of my '-inators' without being stopped by..." The mad scientist's voice caught in his throat as he noticed the baleful glare from Miss Fluttershy's teatime companion. "... Perry the Platypus?!"

The fedora-bedecked monotreme leaped at his nemesis. Unnoticed in the fray, Fluttershy gave the Lamb-inator a considering gaze before she stuffed it into her Pocket.

#### 129.5 (Detective Ethan Redfield)

Scotaloo slurped down her firewhiskey shot and set it on the table, "Alright. Craziest flying story. Go!"

An orange pegasus with the symbol for an X-wing on his flank and chocolate brown mane raised his hoof, "Flying a ship or as a pegasus, griffon or other creature capable of flight?"

Scotaloo shrugged, "Eh, whichever you want, Wedge."

Wedge gave a grin, "I had previously replaced Murdock from the A-team. Ended up flying a tank across the Atlantic Ocean on nothing but a parachute and an infinite supply of tank rounds."

Twilight slammed her face onto the table, "Tree-damned movie physics."

#### 129.6 (Hubris Plus)

"Alright, I give up," Twilight admitted after long minutes of contemplation. "What am I looking at here?"

Trixie and Chrysalis were dressed in full hazmat suits, large tanks strapped to their backs with hoses leading to spray nozzles held in

their magic. Thin streams of mist poured from the tips, pooling on the ground and leaving a thin layer of frost. The pair were enclosed in a dome of protective spells that Trixie typically employed when dealing with her more unstable experiments. Naturally, they were more focused on keeping things in than out.

This was not, in itself, odd. Chrysalis enjoyed involving herself in her marefriend's hobbies, which frequently involved heavy shielding and an excess of coolant. The strange part was the way one of the two would vanish for several minutes at a time before returning with a frozen lump off greenish goo.

"Ah, well, you remember how Trixie synthesized primitive microbial life?" Trixie asked, scuffing a hoof in embarrassment.

"I think so," Twilight acknowledged, face scrunching in thought. "That was awhile ago."

"That's the problem," Chrysalis noted.

"Huh?"

"Trixie may have stored a live sample with her other experimental results and..." The magician blushed. "Forgotten about it."

"Most of her 'other experimental results' were naturally rather energetic," Chrysalis added before vanishing again.

"I think I can see where this is heading," Twilight said, levitating a pad of paper as she started making notes. "When you say 'energetic', do you mean radioactive, or magical leakage?"

"Yes."

"Should have expected that. So, left to their own devices for untold eons, bathed in high background levels of miscellaneous energies, your microbes evolved into..." She squinted at one of the frozen lumps. "What appears to be an expansive slime-mold, which I assume has started spreading to other parts of your Pocket."

"It's also a thaumovore," Trixie added.

"Of course it is, had to eat something to get this big," Twilight mused. "I heard Naruto once had a similar problem with a carton of spoiled milk. He killed it with fire, which obviously isn't an option given the contents of your Pocket."

"That about sums it up," Trixie agreed. An instant later, Chrysalis reappeared. A lumpy humanoid the same color as the mold clung to her, waving a makeshift rocket launcher made of scrap metal and fireworks.

"It also seems to have eaten a few Ork spores," the changeling told them drily, lifting the creature away in a field of green magic.

"I'z gotz all the dakka!" It shrieked.

Fluttershy was watching the bear stand in the doorway with one eye and keeping another on the time.

She desperately wished for it to tick over, and be done with this week.

Suddenly, it was 6 AM.

"YES!" She shouted. "I AM THE QUEEN! OF FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY! YAAAAAAAH!" She then blinked, looking at the terrified animatronic bear in the doorway. "Oops." She squeaked out. "Sorry."

129.8 (Kingofsouls)

"Dare I ask?" Twilight deadpanned as she entered the bar to the sounds of Pinkie Pie, Big Mac and Ivory Scroll laughing up a perfect storm. Ivory was the first to recover and pointed to a white stallion with a short black mane. His cutie mark was a sigil of a human knight in armor riding a warhorse.

His expression was neutral as Twilight approached. "I take it you're new."

"I am. My name is Seijuro Shin, though here my name is White Knight." The stallion spoke. "I'm not sure why they are laughing so hard."

"Well what happened?"

"I encountered something they call...CelestAI." Shin replied. "This CelestAI wanted something about satisfying my values through friendship and ponies..."

Twilight groaned, her eyes tightly shut for a brief moment. "Yea...she's something we don't like to talk about. We're afraid of what might happen if she gets out of her loop."

"I wouldn't be too worried about her trying to convince me to help her then. I do not rely on shortcuts and underhanded schemes to overcome a challenge." Shin then took a drink of water through a straw. "I politely refused her offer, to which she politely declined my refusal. It was then she told me that she was a computer."

"I didn't want to hear anymore of what she had to say, so I looked for an off switch."

"Last I checked CelestAI doesn't have one." Twilight pointed out.

"That is when things got...strange." continued Shin. "A football field appeared out of nowhere, and I went to go look for the off switch. For some reason every step I took created cracks in the floor, CelestAI saying stating something about data and memory overload. Then when I tried to open a nearby door, everything around me started to erupt in flames. When I went through it and closed the door, CelestAI was yelling something about universal heat and death, and after that I found myself back at Ojo."

It took a moment for Twilight to process all of that. "I'm sorry, but

did you just say you somehow managed to cause CelestAI to overload, overheat, and cause the Heat Death of the Universe...by walking around inside of Equestria Online!?"

Shin shrugged the best a pony could. "Technology is something I have trouble with."

Twilight joined in on the laughter.

129.9 (Bardic Knowledge)

Vinyl sighed, wishing that Big Mac was Awake this Loop, because she could seriously use a drink. Berry would have been nice, too, but Big Mac had the bar. Loops of this kind didn't happen often, but when they did it was always annoying.

"Hey, Vinyl, what brings you by the farm?" asked Applejack.

-Just wishing Big Mac was Awake,- she wrote with her magic.

"Had a bad... Wait, why did you write that instead o' saying it?"

-Mute Loop. Can't actually talk.-

"Yeah, I can see why you might want a drink."

-Gives me a chance to work on a thought-to-speech spell, though, so I guess there's that.-

Applejack smiled. "Always good to find a bright spot in a bad Loop."

Vinyl just nodded.

129.10 (Evilhumour)

Twilight was resisting every instinct in her body to stop herself from strangling the blue mare in front of her.

"So you see, Trixie only realized that during the week after that we defeated Nightmare Moon with silly string, yodeling and three pounds of fruitcake that Trixie remembered she had took out the book on knot tying." The blue mare had the decency to blush, looking away from the mare next to her. Said mare decided to tease her marefriend by nibbling on her ear, which caused the Great and Trembling Trixie to shudder. "So she decided to put it off for next week, and then next week and before Trixie knew what happened, the loop restarted."

Chrysalis smiled, nuzzling the traveling magician and the Mistress of all Explosions, a title she gained over a very dangerous fused loop, and then looked at the fuming and twitching librarian. "So we figured that since the loop restarted, the book is no longer overdue, right?" Chrysalis flashed Twilight a smile, hoping to please the mare whose mane had caught on fire.

\* \* \*

><p>When Tirek came to attack this loop, he had fallen into the

massive canyon with a yelp, pulling the lone tree on the isolated island out of the earth. Turning his head, the last thing he saw was a flaming hoof and the shout of what had to be an insane monster that also escaped from Tartarus.<p>

129.11 (namar13766)

Twilight Sparkle looked at Sunset Shimmer. "So what did you need to talk to me about?"

Sunset just pulled out a sheet of paper from her subspace pocket and showed it to Twilight, who froze as comprehension dawned. It was just a piece of construction paper, with scribbles only a child could make. The words "Best Sista 4Eva" were scrawled across the top with three disturbingly familiar smaller figures surrounding a central one.

"How long did it take you to decide to try to become friends with me?" Sunset quietly asked.

"...To be honest, it took me several loops before I got it right." Twilight admitted. She looked up. "Do you really think you can reform the Dazzlings?"

"I can certainly try."

129.12 One crazy week , part two

It had been an insane, crazy day for Twilight Sparkle and she was glad it was nearly over. She was also glad that Luna wasn't Awake as she had been a bit excessive in defeating Nightmare Moon to burn off the anger of losing all of her books after that creature destroyed them all.

Although she was sure that Luna wouldn't be coming to her for advice this time around, as the mare had ran straight for Celestia and clinging to her legs in complete fright. She was sure that her friends would not let it go for a long time, since they had taken many pictures of her destroying the old castle, using Nightmare Moon as a wrecking ball. Thankfully, Fluttershy had taken care of it, allowing her to take stock of her ruined library and see what she needed to order, and to ask Celestia if Discord was actually Awake and trying to play a cruel prank on her.

She had then remembered that snake creature had not only destroyed her library but all of her inkwells as well. Walking up her staircase alone, Spike having abandoned ship to sleep over at Rarity's after she blew the second hole in the wall trying to get the snake, she opened her door to her bedroom and climbed up the staircase

She smiled as laid down on her bed, still the most comfortable thing despite all of her travels and loops she had done. As she started snuggle down on her bed, she looked at the clock. It was eleven fifty-nine on this Monday night.

She watched the clock for a moment and closed her eyes, falling asleep as the time changed over to the next day, twelve-o'clock.

It was then she heard the loud pounding from outside her window.



Springing upright in her bed, she teleported down the staircase to see who was knocking on her door at this time of night. She threw open the door to see a stallion \_next\_ to the door pound in a sign into her lawn.

"Oh, good morning," The somewhat tall stallion gave her a phony smile, wearing an apron that had an enchantment on it to appear like a fine business suit. He seemed to have sunken in blue and green eyes, with a dirty coal colour coat and a mixture of pink, red and black mane. For some reason his nose looked as if it had been broken and then fixed- rather poorly- by magic. She also took notice of the hammer, tongs, and a small clear dagger along his apron that was hidden. "Oh dear, I forgot that Grim Tuesday told us you \_could\_ see that." He then opened his mouth and breath a blue colour gas at her. "Now you will not remember seeing my tools, will you Twilight Sparkle?"

Twilight blinked, shaking her head as her memories were almost stolen from her, and looked at the pony that just greeted her at this insane time, deciding to go along with what this loop was doing.. "Can I help you, and why are you putting a sign into my front lawn?"

"Before we start, may I ask if you are the legal owner of this library?" He pulled out a paper seemingly out of thin air, held with his magic's dusty aura. "One Miss Twilight Sparkle?"

"Yesâ€|?" She blinked at the stallion as he pulled out a small stack of papers seemingly from thin air again. It was not like the Pockets, but like it was slightly \_off\_ to a degree. "Who are you exactly?"

"I am Yan of the Grim's Bank, miss Sparkle," the stallion nodded at her, giving her the papers. "The previous owner of the Golden Oaks Library had some business with us, and due to several circumstances with the previous owner's control, the sum debt was placed into the ownership of this fine library."

Twilight Sparkle blinked. She was getting woken up for a bill? At twelve in the morning?!

"You haven't explained \_why\_ you have placed a sign into my lawnâ€|" She frowned, walking around to see the front of the sign, her eyes starting to go over the stack of papers. The sign proudly claimed FOR SALE. Please contact the Grim's Bank for purchase at - "You're selling my library!?" She shouted, shaking the papers in her magical aura. "I- that- it's public property!"

"Yes, as you can see on page fourteen, form three, section five clearly explains that previous owner had signed several agreements and arrangements with us that allow us to take the Golden Oaks Library as collateral."

"But this is \_my\_ home, Ponyville needs to have a librar- wait, \_collateral!?" Twilight squeaked out, her eye-twitching as the meanings of the word trickled down her brain.

"Yes, as the debt that the previous owner, and now you, owe us is quite severe." Yan answered her, tsking ever so slightly. "I will

need to examine the property to check for any damages that have occurred during your tenure here."

"Wait, how much do I ow-OH MY BIRCHING TREE!" Twilight shouted, her eyes opening to the size of dinner plates as she looked at the final page; with the insane amount charged to her.

"Please miss Sparkle," Yan tutted at her, frowning as he pulled out a notebook and quill, writing down something. "It's quite early today and there \_are\_ ponies sleeping, I would not wish to notify the authorities about a noise complaint."

"But-tree-cost-paperwork-money-" Twilight stuttered, the obscene number threatening to break her mind. The cost could cover the budget for the repairs for Ponyville over a number of baseline loops and he was threatening to take her tree awa- "Wait, wait. I never- I mean," Twilight stopped, forcing herself to take a deep breath in and out to steady herself. She had dealt with far more crazy and insane stuff then a retail agent coming after her home. "I will need to look at these papers, but I will certainly not let you into my-"

"Excuse me, Twilight," Ivory Scroll walked over with a concerned look on her face. "Is everything all right?"

"Hello there Miss Ivory Scroll," Yan flashed her a smile, bobbing his head. "I was merely explaining to Miss Twilight Sparkle here about the debt the previous owner of the Golden Oaks Library had left her and informing her the Grim's Bank is seeking to reclaim their investment."

The mayor frowned at this. "May I see your paperwork, Misterâ€|?"

"Yan, the first in charge after the Grim himself." He responded smoothly, flashing her another smile as he levitated another bundle of papers towards the mare. "I did bring a copy of the paperwork along."

The mayor looked at the forms given to her with a smile of her own and started to leaf through them at a respectable speed. She paused and then frowned. "Page five, section two clearly states the charges against the owner of the library would dissipate if they did not have the means to pay for it. Twilight Sparkle's only source of income is covered by the crown, as she does not pay rent nor does she collect any payment outside of late books, which she would not have as she was just installed as the librarian."

There seemed to be a sparkle in Yan's eye, licking his lips ever so slightly. "As that may be, according to my information, she is given an monthly allowance from the crown, to which I am sure is more than enough to cover simple luxuries as well as build up a nest egg. Also, as per the case of Sunset verse the citizens of Manehattan, the protection clause is invalidated due to a student teacher relationship with the Princess."

Ivory Scroll looked at the stallion with a strange, predatory look on her face. "Twilight, may we use your library so we can discuss these charges?"

Yan returned the look, his tail twitching ever so slightly. "I have no problem going over the charges and paperwork with you, Miss Ivory Scroll, but miss Sparkle will be charged a hundred bits per hour we discuss this."

"Wha-"

"Don't worry Twilight, I will get this straightened out so you don't need to pay, and I only charge fifty bits per hour."

With a strangled gasp, she let the two in and closed the door behind them.

\* \* \*

><p>It was nearly midnight when the group finally came to a close. Yan, smiling happily, was followed by his six fellow business employees, Tan, Tethera, Methera, Pits, Azer and Setheras as he stepped out of the library, each one with a smirk on their near identical faces, which only grew as he made sure to hold the door open for the mayor.<p>

Ivory Scroll looked at the leader of the group, flashing him another smile. "I must say Yan, today was simply wonderful." She blushed, batting her eyes at the stallion.

"The pleasure was all mine, Ivory." He lifted her hoof to his mouth and gave it a kiss which deepened the blush. "It is rare that I find someone as well versed in legal matters, enough that I would have to call in my fellow partners."

The rest of the colloquially known group called the Grim's Grotesques nodded their heads in agreement. "You and your friends did have me on the ropes a few times." She chuckled, brushing against Yan.

"Likewise, my fair lady," His smile did not change as he leaned in close to the mare, and then looked at the rising moon with a sad look on his face. "Unfortunately, we must head back to the bank now, and we will be busy for an entire week."

"Now now, I was under the impression you are made of a stockier, more uncaring mould than that." She chuckled, as she leaned against the for sale sign. "As we were unable to come to a final agreement with the papers, I think it would be best we made another appointment to discuss the financial circumstances of the Golden Oaks Library as well as the other matters brought up today."

"I think that would most acceptable Ivory." His smile returned and then looked at the frazzled looking unicorn mare standing in the doorway. "Do not worry Miss Sparkle, we will put a freeze on your fees tonight until we meet again in a week's time. I suppose that we can schedule in a time that we can meet with you to discuss both business and other matters, Ivory."

"I think that would be wonderful as I am sure a certain pink pony will love to throw you a party now that she knows she will not be interrupting a business meeting."

"YUP!" Pinkie Pie pranced over with a grin on her face. "Next time

here, you will all get a Super-Duper-Welcome-To-Ponyville-Party! Maybe you can even bring in Tuesday? I promise that I won't say anything about his eyebrows."

"That would be wonderful, Miss Pie, but the Grim is quite busy at his workshop when he is not at his bank." He nodded his head to the mare, and then looked at Ivory again. "Until next time, Ivory."

"I will be counting the days." She smiled back, brushing away some of her mane that fell over face.

With a happy tune, the group of ponies started to head out of the small town. Ivory watched the group with a happy smile on her face, fanning her face with a hoof. Rarity was already running over to get the details.

Spike walked over to Twilight who was rubbing her head, trying to get rid of a building headache that she'd gained over an entire day of hearing legal jargon mixed with subtle flirting over the future of her library, and the massive debt she now had.

"Hey Twilight, you got this from Celestia today," he held out a scroll to her, with she tenderly took. "She's wondering why a Grim's Bank has given her proper paperwork to foreclose on the castle due to your debt."

Twilight looked at the scroll and her assistant. She then decided to say spruce tree this, and teleported away to a secluded beach to hide out on for the next day.

#### 129.13 (Gym Quirk)

Apple Bloom took a step back from the slowly spinning Crystal Heart, put away her ersatz sonic screwdriver, and turned to look at Cadance, Twilight, and Shining Armor. "Well, the reason why it looks so strange this loop is that it's a dilithium crystal."

The anchor nodded. "I thought so, but I wanted to make sure. Thanks for double-checking me, Bloom."

"The architecture's pretty different 'round here as well," the earth pony filly observed as she looked at the crystal palace speculatively. "Is it me, or do the north and south towers of the palace look like warp nacelles?" She pulled out a tricorder and started making visual scans. "...and I could build an intermix chamber right here in the plaza..." she continued in an absent mutter.

Shining shot a worried look at his sister. "Do you know if Trixie's been stockpiling antimatter again?"

#### 129.14 (Evilhumour)

It seemed to be an average baseline, Twilight thought to herself, as she looked at the ceremony that would have an unawake Luna coming in at any moment. Her friends had decided to have a pleasant loop this time, sticking mostly to the script.

Mentally blocking Nightmare Moon's usual speech of about no one recognizing her crown or the signs of her return, Twilight opened her

mouth to say her part when somepony shouted:

"WE DID!" Snapping her head, she saw Vinyl standing in the doorway after blasting them open. "HIT IT LYRA!"

Looking upwards, the entire roof the town hall lifted upwards and fell to the side with the glow of a certain unicorn mare who stood on the side of the roof, flashing Twilight a grin.

"CHECK VINYL!" Lyra shouted back, turning her head to the open sky. "NOW!"

Out of nowhere, a ship seemed to flow out of the sky with a flock of much smaller ships beneath it. The first ship, larger than the smaller ships that flew below it, was light blue and silver, shimmering like the stars with smooth angles and along with sharp spikes, proudly carrying Luna's cutie mark on the sails. Alongside the large ship was another; much larger than the first ship. It was painted white and gold with completely smooth angles and flew with a sun on its sails, clear of who it was meant to be. Accompanying the ships was what seemed to be the Ride of the Valkyries but with a much more somber tone behind it, clearly building into something almost absolutely sad. The two large grand ships in the sky circled each other in wide breadths, the second ship beginning to shadow the first one while flying above the growing flock of smaller ships; many of which had changed from their sails from random colours to match the sun marked sails, with only a hooffull raising their sails to the first ship.

The music grew to a climax as the two large ships circled each other faster and faster, tightening the space between them until there was no space at all and a crash seemed to be imminent!

Without warning, the second ship pulled upwards as the music exploded in a fiery scream of pain, anguish, and anger. The first ship seemed to shed it's skin, the colours became much darker, the spikes and angles grew sharper as the symbol of the ship changed from Luna's cutie mark to Nightmare Moon's cutie mark. Out of the sides of the changed ship spilled out what had to be thousands of thestrals, flying down to the smaller ships, from which bright ponies popped out as the dark shapes descended.

The music matched the frantic pace as bright white pegasi flew down and performed a mock battle with their counterparts, with the two large ships flying at each other, dipping lower to the ground. With a loud shout, everypony threw themselves to the ground as the two ships, truly massive now that they could see them properly, flew close overhead.

The music started to die off, and the frantic scream of a violin was heard as the two ships made passes at each other again, before the dark ship pulled up and above the white ship, angling to strike it down.

A crash of trumpets heralded a massive white beam that struck the black ship, encircled by the colours of the rainbow, pushing the black ship towards the moon, emanating from the white ship.

The smaller ships flocked around the large white ship, with music of joy, pride and life following their arrival. Then, it started to die

away as the white ship pulled, upwards, and away from the small ships. And then, it was suddenly alone in the night sky, and the sails began to sag as a hauntingly sad melody produced from a cello followed it. The paint flaked and chipped, the cracks in the hull becoming obvious, and the smooth angles become marked and crooked as the ship flew around in a depressing circle, clearly missing it's partner. The music seemed to hold it in place with the sound of sobbing was heard from the crowd below.

"Luna," Vinyl's soft voice brought Twilight back to focus, brushing away tears from her own eyes. She looked at the wide eyed Nightmare Moon, whose lip was trembling at the sight she just saw. "We did not forget you. Some might call this the one thousandth year of Celestia's reign but it has also been called the era of sadness, the era of false smiles, the era of broken dreams, the era of halfness, the era of our lost princess." She walked over to the alicorn of the night and placed a hoof on her shoulder, placing her glasses to the side with tears running down her own face. "This song is called Luna's Departure. It has two endings but has never been played to either end. Please, tell us how you wish to end your song."

With a choked sob, Nightmare Moon hugged the unicorn, her body shrinking in size and her colour lightening as the nightmare force was drained from her body. "Oh thank thee, thank thee." She hiccuped, burying her face into the mare's shoulder.

"There there Luna." She said softly, rubbing the alicorn's back, looking up at Lyra who had somehow managed to secure a weeping Bon-Bon during the whole musical. "Lyra?"

The unicorn nodded her head, her horn glowing.

The music began again, slow at first. From a distance, the black ship of Nightmare Moon flew back to the earth, seemingly coming to attack the white ship once more.

But as it grew closer, the music picked up with trumpets and drums signaling a sense of joy and wonder. The black ship began to shed it's skin once more, taking on it's former light blue and silver colours, the spikes vanishing as it raced to meet the white and gold ship. Said ship flew upwards as well, the body repairing and the sails filling out as it flew, with the flock of smaller ships flying beneath it, now showing split sails; half showing the symbol of the blue ship and half showing the symbol of the white ship. Thestrals and pegasi flew out to meet each other again, but this time it was a delicate and beautiful dance with each other in the sky above.

There was a tense moment, a rumbling on the drums to show the moment of the two grand ships. And then, a simple lyre melody was heard as the two ships began to circle each other again in slow circles, relief and joy flowing from the scene from above before they started to descended to the ground.

With a roar of cheers and hoof stamps of approval as the ships landed on the ground, Twilight watched a white alicorn walk out from Luna's ship, tears flowing from her pink eyes. She seemed to have trouble walking as Celestia's eyes focused on her sister. Luna ran over to the white alicorn with a blessed look on her face and hugged her tightly. There were no words spoken as the two sisters hugged each other, tears flowing from everypony's face.

And then, Celestia opened her mouth to say three words, "Welcome home, Luna."

129.15 (Evilhumour)

Tigress grinned and clapped her hands together with glee.

"SEE?" She pointed at the destruction of the Valley of Peace with a wide grin. "I was right! I told you that the mailman was up to no go-GAH!" Master Tigress fell to the ground as Master Shifu hit several pressure points on her back to mobilize her.

"Master Tigress, I am shocked and displeased at your actions!" He glared at his adoptive daughter's face. "First off, this was his replacement for the lo-day, so your crazy theories are ungrounded! Secondly, she did not plan to do any of this and is clearly distraught by all of this!" He huffed, walked over to the shocked mailwoman.

"You have great skills, one that someone Awake can clearly see." He saw the gray mares wall eyes go wide at his words. "I believe I can train you to use your destructive force in a much more harmonious fashion."

"Really?" She asked, placing the muffin she had been eating down.

"Yes, but only if you are truly willing to put in the effort that takes to be a true Master of Kung Fu!"

The pony grinned and bowed her head. "Sure do!"

"Then let us train..." He blinked, having not caught the name of this looper.

"The name is Derpy, Master Shifu."

\* \* \*

><p>And that's how Derpy became the Kung Fu Master of the Drunken FistHoof.

\* \* \*

><p>(wildrook)<p>

Naruto, Po, and Twilight were looking at the carnage Derpy and Rock Lee made when intoxicated...for once, not involving Twilight's library but, much to Po and Naruto's displeasure, Ichiraku Ramen.

Twilight, however, was backing away from the two.

"Kung-Fu Master or friend," Po muttered, "there is a LINE CROSSED HERE!"

"Agreed," Naruto replied. "You mess with the first people who actually GAVE a crap about me before the Loops started, YOU'RE ASKING FOR TROUBLE!"

"TAIJU KAGE BUNSHIN NO JUTSU!" they both yelled, most of Konoha being filled with Shadow Clones.

Really, messing with Naruto's food isn't exactly the smartest thing to do.

129.16 (Hubris Plus)

"You really think this'll work?" Sunset asked as they approached the stage.

"I think it's worth a shot," Gilda shrugged.

"I dunno, these things can go pretty off the rails, and your song choice doesn't fill me with confidence."

"Hey, you wanna try reforming these guys, right?"

"Well, yeah..."

"Then take it from the carnivore, the first step to integrating predators into society is finding an ethical food source." Gilda's eyes glazed over a little as she settled into the brief lecture. "It worked for griffons way back when, it works for the changelings most Loops, and I'm pretty sure it can work here."

"Alright, alright, give it a shot," Sunset relented. "Worst case scenario, I drop the noise canceller Vinyl cooked up."

"That's the spirit!" She clasped an arm around the other girl's shoulder. "And if I pull this off, you try my other idea."

"It still sounds like a terrible plan, but I guess if this works..."

"Yeah, just think of it like a testing ground. We're doing science!"

"Oh, sure, science," Sunset rolled her eyes before shrugging off Gilda's arm and shoving her towards the steps. "Go on, knock 'em dead."

Gilda strutted out onto stage and took a moment to compose herself and search out the Dazzlings in the crowd. Locking her eyes on them, she offered a predatory grin.

"~I know that your powers of perception  
>~Are as wet as a warthog's backside..."<em>

\* \* \*

><p>"No King, No King, hahahahahaaaaa!" Sonata crowed, clapping in delight. The Dazzlings had found themselves drawn to the stage by the power of the Heart Song, and were gathered just in front of it.<p>

"Fools!" Gilda spat, glaring down at them. "There will be a King... Or a Queen."



"But you just said-"

"\_I\_ will be Queen!" She roared before striking a regal pose. "Stick with me, and you'll \_never go hungry again!\_"

Adagio's eyes lit up at that and she found her lips curling into a smile. She wasn't a fan of playing second fiddle to anyone, but with a promise like that...

"Long live the Queen!" The three chorused.

\* \* \*

><p><em>"~Yes our teeth and ambitions are bared!"<em>

Gilda was perched on a teetering stack of speakers and amplifiers, the Dazzlings placed below her on the precarious tower.

\_"~Be prepared!"\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Cousin!" King Godfrey pleaded, claws scrabbling at the cliff side. "Help me!"<p>

Gilda closed her talons around his and leaned close to whisper in his ear.

"\_Long live the Queen,\_" she purred before flicking her wrists and sending him tumbling. Rearing up, she cackled and, feeling dramatic, added a flash of lightning with a brushstroke from her tail.

"Yes, yes, you're hilarious," Godfrey grumbled, flapping back to her level with his talons crossed before him. "The kingdom is yours by the ancient rites of blah-blah-blah. Your word is law, your will immutable, your wings the storms themselves and whatever. The vizier does poisons on the first Wednesday of the month, palace garbage collection on alternating Thursdays. Come along, Gwendolyn, we're staying at the summer house."

"You're a big meany head!" The pint sized former princess told Gilda before delivering a raspberry and fluttering off after her deposed father.

"Yeah, yeah, come challenge me when you're older," Gilda answered and turned to the spectators. "So, what do you think?"

The last of the green mist that had covered cliff top drained away into their amulets, and the three sirens looked blissfully satisfied.

"Your whole government runs like this?" Adagio asked.

"That was actually pretty tame. Godfrey and I get along okay," she shrugged. "Parliament has a fight pit and a betting pool. So how 'bout it? You wanna be my court... Did you settle on magicians or musicians?"

"How about Magucians?" Sonata asked, scribbling portmanteaus on a pad of paper.

"Names aside," Adagio mused. "I think we've got a deal."

129.17 (Gym Quirk)

"I know that we've not been on the best of terms in the past..."

"Answer is still no, kid."

"Aw, c'mon."

"Aren't you a little young for a car?"

"Technically, I'm like a few thousand times older than you."

"Not the point."

"Besides, I don't wanna drive it, I just--"

"--want to take it apart to see how it works. Not happening."

"Look, I'll Pinkie Promise that I won't touch the audio gear. All I want is to git a good look at the transformation systems, maybe run a few non-intrusive scans. Is that too much t' ask?"

Scootaloo tuned out Apple Bloom's pleading and Vinyl Scratch's refusals and sub-vocalized to Pansy, "Bloom really wants to examine Vinyl's Wubmobile."

I can't exactly blame her, responded the Founder. CHS tech level shouldn't be able to do that sort of thing. Cookie's almost as curious as Apple Bloom about how it was done.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

129.1: Pony, man. Special.

>129.2: Well, it's a new kind of "short fuse"<br>129.3: She got schooled.

>129.4: Still useful.<br>129.5: No challenge. (Admittedly, that must have been some autoloader.)

>129.6: Oh, zog.<br>129.7: Triumph and terror.

>129.8: Techbane beats CelestAI.<br>129.9: She needs a soundboard of all her normal sayings.

>129.10: They don't wrap like that.<br>129.11: Long term planning.

>129.12: Grim Tuesday, now rather happier.<br>129.13: It's been gone a thousand years, but they haven't aged a day. Time dilation.

>129.14: What an entrance.<br>129.15: She's just plain clumsy.

>129.16: That worked quite well. (For Gilda, coups are a hobby. For griffins in general, they're kind of like the super bowl...)<br>129.17: Achievements in ignorance?

## 130.1 (Evilhumour)

Twilight looked at the griffin that was gushing at her, running around with a child-like wonder smile on his face.

"Oh my gosh, you're Twilight Sparkle!" He squealed, clapping his claws together with joy. "I've heard so many cool things about you! Like how you managed to ascend to an alicorn form, or how you managed to redeem Princess Luna! Or the fact you managed to get Skynet to get a soul and start to loop! Or how-"

Twilight placed a hoof over the griffin's mouth, an urge to smack the griffin rising now. "One more question, and then you will answer mine, ok?" She glared down the tall, tubby-ish griffin looper. The white and black griffin, a raven instead of an eagle, nodded his head with obvious eagerness.

"What's a Skynet?"

"Wha- I -gah," Twilight's tongue died in her mouth, a part of her mane springing upwards. "Never mind! I will explain that later. Now, can you please tell me who you are?"

"Sure thing," he flashed her a grin before his face changed into something more serious. "My name is Xiao Po Ping in baseline, but I mostly go by Po. My name here is Polar Strike or something?" He twisted his head to the side as he tried to think, flapping his wings so slightly. "Oh, that's right! I've got wings this time!" He grinned again, flying a bit in her library. "Stairs will not defeat me this time!"

Twilight made the mistake of asking, "Stairs?"

"Yeah," Po answered her, nodding his head again as he looked over his body. "I usually have trouble going up and down them. Being a panda doesn't give you long legs."

"Yeah, I can guess." Twilight smiled back. "So I'm guessing you know about our loop being a sanctuary loop, right?"

"Oh yeah, Master Splinter, Master Ranma, Master Ichigo and a couple of others told me how good this loop was and you ponies are!" He looked like he was about to squee again, to which Twilight responded by using her magic to zip his mouth closed.

\* \* \*

><p>In another loop, a red panda looked at his four turtle sons as he felt an answer to life slip by him for some reason. He figured it was due to the pizza that his youngest son had got them to eat last night and moved on.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Good, so unless you are going to cause trouble here," Twilight gave him a sharp look.<p>

"Which I promise I will not do!" Po responded to her in a serious tone again, his eyes still having the twinkle of joy and wonderment in them.

"Then you are free to do pretty much whatever you want." Twilight smiled again, looking up at the griffin.

"Cool." He blinked and then looked at her, "Say, there is something I want to try with Nightmare Moon, is that ok?"

"As long as it will not permanently harm Luna for this loop, she's not awake."

"Of course, I'm sure that the Wuxi Finger Hold isn't lethal."

#### 130.2 (Evilhumour)

Po heard about punishment loops. He had heard about Eiken and how messed up it was. He had heard that certain loopers had got certain punishments for being unique.

It seemed he was one of those unique loopers.

Placing his hand on the side of Sombra's infinite staircase, he began his long climb upwards with a heavy sigh.

#### 130.3 (Hubris Plus)

"And this is the real deal?" Trixie asked, turning a gold circlet over in her hands.

"One hundred percent guaranteed," Sunset assured her. "Assuming, of course, that payment is rendered." They were located in one of Canterlot High's disused classrooms, an unAwake Trixie in her typical garb and Sunset decked out in a black number. The lights flickered, dark more often than not, as most fixtures were wont to do in the school's less frequented areas.

More than one Loop, she'd caught Vice Principal Luna with a ladder loosening the bulbs. She supposed that monomaniacal obsession with saving on electricity was as close as she could get to eternal night without magic.

"If your charm works as advertised, the Great and Powerful Trixie will perform at both of their birthdays," the magician answered, narrowing her eyes.

"You have my word. Just put it on and think distant thoughts."

The other girl lifted her hat a fraction to slide the ring into place around her head. Before she'd finished settling it back in place, she'd vanished in a subdued flash of light, accompanied by an overwrought gasp from the hall outside.

"Where'd she come from?!" Pinkie exclaimed, her voice carrying through the door with typical enthusiasm. It was soon followed by Trixie's mad cackle.

"Gee, thanks Sunset!" Snips told her from where he'd been standing, just behind and to her left. Snails mirrored him on her right.

"Hey, you two deserve it," she ruffled their hair. "Number one minions." The rest of the Loopers tended to think of the pair as

selfish nitwits blundering their way through life, and she couldn't deny they had a point. The two of them went after what they wanted with the unthinking innocence of children and more often than not got themselves and everyone around them in a heap of trouble.

But they were also the two kids who had fallen into the wake of the bizarre new girl and followed her through thick and thin as she'd seized control of the school. Before she'd started Looping, she'd bummed more lunch money off of them than she'd care to admit, and they'd never asked for a cent back. When she'd been at her worst, raving with Magic and bent on enslaving two worlds, they'd happily turned traitor on their entire species to back her up.

She'd never argue that that last one was a good thing, but she counted them among her friends.

She was broken out of her reverie by the door opening, and turned to see the trio of newcomers.

"Adagio, Sonata, Aria," Sunset greeted. "I was wondering when you'd show yourselves." She really had been wondering. Without the Elements to draw them in, their arrival was down to chance unless she or the others did something spectacular. These Loops, they tended to set off a magic flare whenever somepony had a new countersong idea.

This Loop had required a more delicate touch. She had a very specific goal in mind, and it required a reputation. They'd have to seek her out, just a little wary. To that end, she'd been trading away magical trinkets made in her spare time, building up a reputation as a mysterious but reliable enchantress. It had been only a matter of time until the Dazzlings heard about her or stumbled across a piece of merchandise.

"We hear you have certain... Talents," Adagio answered, narrowing her eyes.

"Oh, you could say that. Among them is an excellent sense of my customers." She strolled towards them, unconcerned. "Let me see, you want... A meal, and not a light one. Power, of the unlimited variety. But, really, I think you want... To go home." It was a goal she could sympathize with.

"Column B, please," Adagio purred, but Sunset hadn't missed Aria's eyes widening at the end.

"Well, you won't get it here. I have something of a monopoly."

"You said you could get us home," Aria inserted before Adagio could respond.

"Banished," the lead Dazzling hissed at her cohort.

"I wouldn't worry about that. Glorious returns are all the rage these days. Discord, Tirek, even Sombra managed to worm his way back into the world. Celestia barely controls half of Equestria now." The day half, naturally. "And hasn't lifted a hoof to stop any of them." Throwing Twilight at them didn't count.

"...And you can send us back," Adagio said flatly.

"Oh, \_yes\_," Sunset purred.

"And what do you want out of it?"

That was as close to a cue as she was likely to get. She still didn't \_like\_ this plan, but Gilda had proved her point. At the very least, they wouldn't have the whole school to feed on if things went south here.

"Want? Oh, deary, this isn't about \_me\_," she said in feigned affront. "This is about \_you\_. I only want to help..."

\_~Oh, I'll admit that in the past I've been a nasty.  
>~They weren't kidding when they called me, well, a  
witch<em>...\_~\_

\* \* \*

><p>"And you'll do this for nothing?" Adagio asked as they reached the song's midpoint.<p>

"Oh, nothing's for nothing. Getting you back to Equestria won't be easy. There's just a little price..."

"I don't like this," Sonata whined.

"And I don't like this \_planet\_," Aria growled. "I hate living on fast food and table scraps. Don't you remember what home was like before Starswirl? We \_feasted!\_ We \_ruled!\_ Don't you want that again?"

"What price," Adagio asked.

"Nothing terrible or permanent. I'll just need to borrow your voices for a little while." The hook was baited. Sunset wasn't sure they'd bite.

"Our voices?!" Sonata clasped her hands over her throat.

"It's how Starswirl marked you in his spells. Without them, you'll slip right through. Then, all you'll have to do is bind yourself with Equestria's own magic and there's not a thing the codger can do. \_Friendship\_, " she added at their confused expressions. "In three days time, as the sun sets, if you've caused somepony to call you friend, and mean it, and you count them as a friend in turn, you get to stay and have all your powers restored."

"And if we fail?" Adagio queried.

"Then you get dragged back here and have to finish high school mute."

"I \_really\_ don't like this," Sonata reiterated.

"Life's full of tough choices, isn't it?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Aria, nooooooooo," Sonata whimpered as the other girl seized a quill and signed the scroll. Adagio added her own signature

afterwards and, after a moment of indecision, Sonata followed suit.<p>

\_~Snips and Snails, now I've got 'em boys, the boss is on a roll!"\_ Sunset nudged her minions with an elbow before whirling on the Dazzlings. \_~You poor, unfortunate souls! Now, sing!"\_

The trio began their song, green mist flowing out of their amulets instead of in as the magical contract took hold. After a moment, their voices died away, drawn into a locket.

Sunset drew her Keyblade in its Super Galaxy Bonds mode. One twist opened a wormhole from the classroom to the statue that housed the portal. A second unlocked the portal. A flick of her wrist swept the sirens up and threw them through into Equestria.

She paused after closing everything back up. She really didn't like being so manipulative. It brought back too many memories. But there was a pattern she'd noticed in all of Equestria's other reformed villains. After awhile, they all tended to settle back into their roles, minus the evil. Luna would sometimes steal the Moon, and Nyx had few compunctions about scaring candy out of ponies. Chrysalis still infiltrated everything she could manage. And she'd never actually heard of Discord stopping any of his shenanigans.

She was good at politics. Winning people over, changing their minds. In the baseline it had made controlling the school foal's play. It was a part of her, and she had to face that.

Besides, nine times out of ten that sort of friendship quest actually seemed to work.

"Come on," she told Snips and Snails as they collected their jaws from the floor. "Let's go get lunch, and I'll help you with algebra."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, what do we have here?" Sunset asked. The three days had passed and she'd found the trio just as her namesake was approaching.<p>

"Apologies, my lady," Blueblood said from beside Sonata. "But I am quite taken."

"Not remotely who I was talking to," Sunset rubbed at her temple. Each of the Dazzlings seemed to have collected somepony. In addition to Blueblood, Flash Sentry stood beside Adagio and Fleur de Lis backed up Aria.

Sonata grinned wide and nuzzled the prince, who blushed furiously. Adagio rolled her eyes at their display, earning a stern glare from Sentry. A smack of her hoof across the back of his head was rewarded with grumbling and his own, surprisingly good natured, eye roll. Fleur whispered something in Aria's ear that sent her rolling in silent laughter.

For her part, Sunset found an eyebrow rising. It looked like they had actually pulled it off. Of course, there was only one way to be sure.

"Let it never be said I'm not a mare of my word." She flicked open the locket, allowing the mist to flow back into their lockets and restore their voices. "And what will you do now?"

"We..." Adagio frowned and her forehead crinkled in thought. "I... I suppose we're going to become vegetarians," she finally sighed.

"I feel like I'm missing something," Flash said, his own eyebrows rising.

130.4 (Crisis)

"Auntie!"

Daring froze at the cheer, which meant she was unable to dodge as a unicorn filly tackled her to the ground. If her niece was here, then that meant...

"Hi sis! How's it been going?"

"What in the world are you doing here?!" Daring hissed at her sister.

"I heard you were in a bit of a bind and wanted to come help," the gray-coated pegasus with the blonde mane and wall-eyes replied cheerfully and pulled something out to offer to Daring.

"Muffin?"

"The last time you 'helped' you reduced a priceless historical ruin to rubble!" Daring ground her teeth as she got to her hooves, carefully not to dislodge the pint-sized unicorn still hugging her. Her niece was adorable. Her sister on the other hoof was a walking disaster.

"It wasn't the whole thing..." her sister looked hurt, which made Daring feel guilty, "and besides, didn't we need to stop that blue meanie guy?"

Daring sighed. Yes, they had. Along with saving the world from his latest scheme. It wasn't like she herself hadn't destroyed a few priceless treasures when the fate of the world was at stake, but it hadn't been by accident...

\* \* \*

><p>Dinky giggled at the leveled temple that her aunt and mom just explored with a stunned cat like guy next to them, also having his jaw low.<p>

After a while, the blue cat guy closed his mouth and looked at her auntie. "So I guess it is true you are the sister to the infamous Derpy, Daring." His grin was dropped when her auntie give him a time-out look. Holding up all three of his strange hooves, he said. "Oh no, I am not going to tempt my fate in the same place as three Dos."

"You're funny Uncle Azy!" She giggled, leaning into the blue man which for some reason caused her auntie and uncle to cringe.



130.5 (Hubris Plus)

"Tell me again how this happened," Twilight, currently head of the Sparkle Organization, sighed.

"Well, you see, I was going for a walk..." Pinkie, currently wearing a floppy pink hat and one step shy of full chaos godhood answered.

"I think you should maybe pull back on those."

"And I think you should push up my jambox budget!"

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia rolled her eyes as a scroll burned into existence before her. These days, it was a fifty-fifty chance whether it was from Twilight or-<p>

Dear Princess Celestia

We are going to party. Hard.

You may be wondering about the frequency with which I have been sending these letters. It is only because I want to increase anticipation for our inevitable party as much as possible.

Like icing a cake, I am adding deliciousness to an already tantalizing confection.

And then I'm gonna pin a tail on it.

That's right! I'm pinning a tail on the party cake! Taffy tail. It's gonna be delicious.

Sincerely,  
>-The Pink E. Pie<em>

The solar diarch sighed as she finished the note. It really did sound like a fantastic cake, but the royal dietician would kill her.

\* \* \*

><p>"Gentledrones," Sombra told his army of one thousand changeling soldiers as his airships set off towards Canterlot. "I <em>love<em> war..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Pinkie," Twilight ground out as she flung a changeling away. "I'm releasing your level one restrictions. Party hardy."<p>

The pink mare started laughing. It began as a low chuckle, but swiftly rose into a booming, cheerful chorus, joined by thousands of voices. Cotton candy tendrils started curling away from her, and shapes began emerging from it.

"Come on, everypony! There's a party in my soul and you're all invited!"

## 130.6 (Dalxein)

"So..." Twilight started before she paused to try and find the words. In the end she decided to ask, "...how did this happen?"

Ditzy Do, sitting upon Celestia's throne garbed in gold and silver raiment, closed one eye while the other stared upward in concentration. "I... think it was the muffins?"

"Muffins don't make you \_Queen of Equestria!" \_Twilight huffed in confusion and denial.

## 130.7 (Hubris Plus)

"This is a terrible idea."

"Seems to have worked out pretty well the last couple times," Nyx answered, checking her makeup in a hand mirror.

"\_Those\_ appealed directly to the Dazzlings' nature. This..." Sunset threw her hands in the air. "I don't even know what your angle is on this one."

"Hey, the formula doesn't seem that complicated. Villain song, sincere delivery. Easy peasy."

"...I'm filming this. I'm filing this and I'm sending the tape to the crusaders when this blows up in your face."

"You worry too much. This'll be great." Nyx pocketed her mirror before taking the steps two at a time to reach the stage.

\_~In the dark of the night I was tossing and turning,  
>~And the Nightmare I had was bad as could be!<br>~A mane to blot out the sky!  
>~A monstrous cast to her eyes!<br>~And when I Awoke, the Nightmare was \_\_\*\*Me!\*\*\_\_"\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Come my minions, fly for your master, let your evil shine!" Adagio stood at center stage, amulet in her hands and thrust at the heavens. Green mist swirled around her, and the monstrous visage of her projection was pouring forth into the world. Aria and Sonata stood to either side, likewise calling forth their full power. "Take them now, and fly ever faster..."<p>

\_"In the dark of the night, in the dark of the night!"\_ Aria and Sonata chanted in counterpoint.

"You'll be mine!" She cackled triumphantly.

"Well?" Sunset asked on the other side of the concert, camera in hand as she peered into a crater.

"Maybe I should have done a Disney song?" Nyx asked, a thin column of smoke rising from her as she climbed out.

"I'm \_so\_ telling your mom on you." She stowed the camera away and took out her Keyblade. "Come on, we're doing this the hard

way."

"Don't they feed on aggression?" Nyx replied, dusting herself off. Her hair turned misty and her eyes went green and slitted.

"Think happy thoughts, pipsqueak."

130.8 (fractalman)

Twilight brought a table out of her pocket, set it on the floor between the thrones of her crystal palace, and pounded a judges gavel.

"Alright everypony, siddown! Pinkie, put the flying streamer monster away. "

"Okie dokie!"

"Alright, first order of business is-"

Three things happened in rapid succession: there was a flash of light, a Dalek appeared on the table, and every looper present contributed to the force field to contain it.

"HOMOGENIZING SWARM DETECTED! PREPARING TO INTERVENE!"

Twilight blinked. "Ok, what?"

"I AM A MEMBER OF THE CULTURE! HOMOGENIZING SWARMS WILL NOT BE TOLERATED!"

Twilight blinked again, sighed, and stared, rubbing her forehead. "Ok, first of all, if you're looking for the bureau, it's obviously in a different version of our universe. Second, if-"

"I AM NOT LOOKING FOR A 'BUREAU'. A SMALL GROUP OF PONIES HAS BEEN ENGAGING IN HOMOGENIZING SWARMLIKE BEHAVIOR!" The Dalek turned to the side. "IT IS SOMEWHERE IN THIS DIRECTION!"

"O...K...and second, if you're really with the Culture, how come you didn't react and zip away before we could trap you?"

"WELL I...I...EX-TER-MIN-ATE! EX-TER-MIN-ATE!"

Rarity, Twilight, and Applejack sighed as the Dalek started shooting futilely at the looper powered barrier; Pinkie Pie giggled while Fluttershy facehooved and Dash stuck her tongue out.

Rarity spoke up. "Darlings, given the current state of affairs, I fear our loop is liable to crash at The Worst. Possible. Moment. I propose we hold off on discussing our issues until the next loop we're together. "

Twilight banged her gavel. "All in favor of procrastination?"

"\*\*AYE!\*\*"

"EXTERMINATE! EXTERMINATE!"

"The vote is unanimous. Motion carried. "

130.9 (fractalman)

"Hypothetically speaking, what activities would you like to engage in?"

"Not a clue. Hey AJ, can you think of something awesome to do?"

"Hay no, ah can't. Whad'ya wanna russle up, Rares?"

"Darling, you've used that one already."

"Tree darnit!"

130.10 (Gym Quirk)

"Don't fret none, Winona," soothed Applejack as she gave the forlorn collie a comforting pat. "Any luck, Apple Bloom?" she called into the house.

"Sorry, sis. Not a single one to be found," called back the filly.

"We'll just wait until Mac gets back from the market," the orange pony told her pet reassuringly. "Ah. Here he is now."

The red stallion gave his sister a shake of the head and a look that mixed frustration with confusion. "Nope."

"Not a package anywhere in Ponyville?" she asked.

"Nope."

"Filthy Rich sold out days ago?"

"Eyup."

"Won't restock 'til Friday?"

"Eyup."

"Maybe Fluttershy has some to spare..." mused Applejack.

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy was close to tears as she gave the bad news to the pack of puppies. "I'm so sorry, my little friends. I don't know how it happened, but I'm completely out. I thought I had six boxes in the pantry, but they're gone..."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight conjured a magnifying glass and started a careful examination of Spike's bed. The dragon was spending the afternoon "courting" his wife, so this was an excellent opportunity to pursue this investigation for her unawake friends.<p>

A scattering of light brown crumbs in the fold of a blanket caught her attention. The consistency and odor did not match any of the

products from Sugarcube Corner or any other local bakery. She levitated them into an evidence bag for later analysis, but she was now fairly certain as to the result.

"Spike, we really need to have a talk about dog biscuits..." she muttered.

130.11 (Detective Ethan Redfield)

Sunset Shimmer stepped into her apartment and latched the door behind her. After a quick snack of sweet rolls, she opened the door to her room, only to jump back in surprise, her last sweet roll falling to the floor. There on her bed was Celestia. Celestia, meanwhile, just stared at Sunset with a baffled but curious expression, "Do not be frightened."

Sunset rubbed her eyes and gazed at her mentor, "Princess Celestia?"

Celestia rolled on her back on the bed and looked at her former student, "Oh? Have you heard of me even here in this strange land?"

Sunset poked the alicorn then pinched herself, "Well I'm awake, even though I feel like I've been thrown for a loop with an alicorn in my apartment."

Celestia giggled, "Perfectly understandable. Don't get too dizzy though. If someone saw you passed out in this place, I'd probably be found out."

Sunset sighed, realizing Celestia was not awake, "What are you doing here?"

"Well, my sister, Luna...you do know who Luna is, strange creature?"

With Sunset's nod, Celestia continued, "She tried banishing me to the Sun. However, I somehow ended up here."

Sunset tapped her chin, muttering to herself, "Since you didn't enter the mirror, you weren't transformed into a human...maybe. And Luna might have screwed up the banishment spell, sending her to the human dimension instead of to the sun."

Celestia tilted her head with a curious expression, "You seem familiar with Equestria and ancient history since the only book referencing my sister in Equestria called her Nightmare Moon. Please, explain how you know so much? And I also didn't get your name."

Sunset rubbed the back of her head. This would be an awkward chat.

130.12 (masterofgames)

Daring could only stare at her stopwatch as Rainbow Dash and Scootaloo exchanged a hoofbump, their recently collected artifact in a bag to their side.

"Th-that's less than half of my best time! How!?"

Scotaloo grinned. "You don't have to worry about traps if you blow up the temple before you go in!"

Somewhere in the distance, Twilight's scream of frustration was heard.

130.13 (masterofgames)

Twilight groaned as she Awoke, in both meanings. Gradually sitting up, she took note of her surroundings.

To her right she could see a white, empty room with no visible door. To her left she saw paper. And nothing but paper. Paper as far as the eye could see. Oddly though, as she turned her head, her right eye revealed more of the room, while the view from her left hadn't changed at all. An idle tap of her hoof to her face revealed the reason.

"Oh." Twilight smirked, peeling off the sheet that was stuck to her face. "A noble attempt, but you shall not defeat me, paperwork. Not today." she giggled.

A quick glance down revealed the situation. From the looks of the desk, and the multiple crumpled papers, broken quills, and empty inkwells, she had fallen asleep in the middle of a project again.

With a small grin, Twilight leaned back in her chair and waited for her loop memories to tell her where she was and what she had been doing that she had thought was so important to warrant an all night session.

And waited.

And waited.

"Huh... that's a little odd." she muttered to herself. Nothing was coming to her. Not to be done in by this, she started working it out the old fashioned way, by reading the papers.

As she read on, her left eyebrow slowly, but steadily rose up her face. "What is this? This is awful!" she grumbled as she grabbed the balls of paper and opened them one by one, reading whatever she could make out on them. "Alone in the woods? Personal crusade? There are no brakes on the shipping tr... oh."

Twilight took a deep, calming breath. "Okay, so I'm working on shipfics. For some reason." She sighed. "Still doesn't explain where I am, but it's something."

Twilight then stood up, both to search the room, and to stretch. Sleeping like that had left her back as sore as all get out. After a few very satisfying pops of her spine, she began her investigation.

Five minutes later, she ended her investigation. There was no way in, or out, of the room. It was completely empty save for her, the desk, and the papers.

Not wanting to write any more right at the moment, Twilight just sat down, leaned against the wall, folded her hooves, and waited for something to happen. Something HAD to happen eventually. The concept of this loop as it was seemed FAR too simple.

Before long Twilight heard voices, soft but growing louder, echoing through the room.

>"Okay, so I got this in the HUB in my last loop. It was all the rage there for some reason." a voice Twilight was quickly able to place as Cheerilee stated.<p>

"Well, I'm up for a game. I have plans for this loop, but I'll need Twilight, and she isn't Awake yet for some reason. Might be another Stealth Anchor. Might as well kill some time." Spike's voice replied. Twilight just blinked in confusion a few times. A game? What?

"Meh, guess I'm in. Let's see what all the cool kids in the backup server 'verse are playing." Lyra's voice chimed in.

"Yay! New game! This'll be so cool!" Derpy's voice giggled.

Twilight looked around. "... Hello? Can anypony hear me?" she called out, hesitantly.

No answer came right away, so it would seem the answer was no.

"Okay," Cheerilee's voice echoed. "The first card, 'Fanfic Author Twilight', starts on the field, like so... and let's draw some objectives! Looks like we have..."

A sudden flash of light in the center of the room startled Twilight to her hooves, swiftly dying down to reveal a playing card with her own picture on it floating before her. A quick prod revealed that she couldn't move it. Then, a ways above it, more flashes came as more cards faded into existence.

"... 'Just Experimenting', 'Rainbow Dash Fan Club', and..."

Twilight's eyes widened as the fourth card appeared, backing up to the wall. "Oh HERB no! No! No! No! No! NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! NOOOOO!" she shouted as she punched the wall in a frenzy.

"... 'Help! I'm Trapped In A Shipping Card Game!' Now, who wants the first round?"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight did her best to break out of the tiny room, but deep down she knew it was too late. With her Pocket confirmed as sealed, and her magic acting up, she could do nothing but watch and listen helplessly as Lyra started the first turn.<p>

"Well, since we're starting with Twilight, I think it's only proper we start off with this little gem! Twilight is cleaning out her library, when she stumbles across a book that will at last help her obtain her true love! 'How To Pick Up Mares: A Reference Guide'!"

Another shimmer in the air, and another card appeared in the air, fusing edge to edge with Twilight's card, and a loud THWAP startled Twilight out of her attempts to beat down the wall with her head. Over at the desk, several papers were fluttering to the ground, having been knocked off by the book that had landed among them. Hesitantly, Twilight, crawled over, gave it an inquisitive poke, and then slowly opened it.

Page 1 was written simply, 'Get that mare some hay. Fillies love hay.'

Twilight blinked. "... What."

"...and, since I personally always thought the two would be perfect for each other, she uses it to gain the heart of 'Major General Rainbow Dash'!"

Twilight most certainly did NOT shriek like a little filly and dive under the desk, as one of the walls suddenly started imploding. And until someone managed to find proof she would continue to have not done it.

The featureless white wall simply started cracking and compressing, as though sucked into a black hole that only it could be affected by. It all happened quickly, and it ended with a loud snap. After a moment, Twilight looked out slowly.

Where the wall had once been, Twilight could now see her library. And on the opposite side of her library, there was another white room. And inside that room, was Rainbow Dash, wearing a giant pair of wire-frame sunglasses and a military uniform. "Huh? Oh, hey Twi! Thanks for getting me out. I was getting a little worried. Where are we this loop anyway?" she grinned, flipping her mane as she left her room for the library between them.

Twilight just shook her head as she walked over to join her. "Trust me. You don't want to know." she sighed, taking a seat next to her friend. "I just hope this is the worst of it."

As if on cue, a bouquet of hay popped into existence, landing softly in her hooves.

Twilight took a moment to glance back at her room, and the book inside. "... You've got to be kidding me."

"What? What is it?" Rainbow dash asked, flipping her sunglasses up to her forehead.

"Just... just play along." Twilight sighed. Then, taking a moment to steel herself, she put on a fake grin and handed the hay to Rainbow Dash. "(ahem) 'Here Rainbow Dash. There are for you'." she uttered dryly. Rainbow Dash just raised an eyebrow. "Um... Thanks?" she hesitantly answered, reaching out for it.

The moment Dash touched the hay, her eyes widened as her body lurched against her will. "Hey! What the-!?"

And then Twilight found herself swept into a deep kiss.



After a moment frozen like that, they pulled apart with wide, unblinking eyes.

"... Twi? I think I enjoyed that a lot more than I should have."

"Oh? Really? I couldn't tell. What with the tongue and all." Twilight droned, deadpan.

"... Wanna do it again?"

Twilight almost gave her a much deserved hoof to the shoulder for that, but she paused as she realized something. "... Yeah, actually."

"..."

"..."

"... We should probably go back to the white rooms before we do something I'm freakishly unsure we'd regret."

"Good idea." Twilight nodded, blushing heavily as they split up.

Of course, then Lyra had to speak up again. "-and as a follow up act, since we all know she'd do it in a heartbeat, I'm using 'Can I Tell You A Secret?' to ship Major General Dash with 'The Wonderbolts'!"

Dash blinked and looked around. "The hay?"

Spike's voice chimed in. "What? You mean like, with ALL of them?"

"Yep!" Lyra's peppy voice replied. "But thanks to the shipping card I'm using, they have something to tell Dash."

On cue, one of the walls of Rainbow Dash's room fell into a singularity. Behind it, the officer's lounge of the Wonderbolts was revealed, with the Wonderbolts themselves inside. Spitfire marched up to Dash and gave a salute. "Ma'am! As our new commanding officer, we will now reveal the great secret of the team!"

Dash glanced over to Twilight. "Is... is she having me on?"

Twilight shook her head with an apologetic sigh.

With a pause and a shrug, Dash turned back to the Wonderbolts. "Uh... go ahead soldier?"

Spitfire removed the hood from her flight suit, revealing an oddly solid facial structure underneath it. "General Dash, Ma'am! I'm really a stallion, Ma'am!"

"... What."

Dash just sat there for a second as she took this in, even as Soarin marched up, likewise removing the flight suit hood. "Ma'am, I'm really a mare, Ma'am!"

"I too, am a stallion, ma'am!" Fleetfoot announced.

One by one, all the rest did the same.

Dash took a deep breath, letting it out slowly, then took a moment to look over the 'Bolts. "... Meh. I'd still hit it." she shrugged.

With a loud cheer, the entire team grabbed her and hoisted her up. "Glad to hear that Ma'am. Would be hard to have your swearing in ceremony otherwise!" Soarin grinned as they pulled her to a side door, pulled it open, and all filed inside.

Twilight couldn't see what was in there, but she could guess, from Dash's commentary. "The locker room? What kind of ceremony takes place here? Wait, the showers? I'm not sure... hey! Watch it, that tickles! Fleetfoot, give those sunglasses back! I didn't- EEP! Uh, heh heh, you know, I was just about to go inspect the grounds and... ooh... okay, yeah, that's kinda nice... Oh wow! That was... Isn't this against regulation... Oooooohhhh, yeah! Ah screw it. Hey! Twilight? You go on without me! I might be a little while! ...Or a long while! ...Won't be more than two days, tops! ...A week if something comes up. WOW! Yeah, something just came up!"

Lyra's voice echoed. "I end my turn!"

"What the... HEY! This means war you ingrates! Try and tempt me with an obstacle course IN the shower? Nice try, but you'll need to hide your weapons a lot better than that to get them by me! Nobody uses the old 'snow cloud in the shower head' trick on 'General Dash' and gets away with it! I'll take on the lot of you! Hey, wait... what are... Oh don't you dare! This jacket is dry clean only! Where did you even get a hose that siz-AAKPTH!"

Twilight just groaned. "Right... right. Poorly written shipping, I forgot. Ugh... This is going to be a long loop...

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27)<p>

Twilight groaned, brushing whipped cream out of her mane with her forehoof. It had only been 15 minutes, and already she was desperately combing her blank prison for an escape route.

"Okay, so how about this?" pitched Lyra. "After his one-night stand with Nightmare Moon, Blueblood is hit by a wayward spell while Twilight is running some experiments..."

Her wall popped out of existence, and Twilight felt a pressure building up in her horn-like a magic spell had plugged up the pores by the keratin appendage, and it needed to get out.

She could hold it no longer. Directing her head at a hopefully-empty spot on the road, she fired what she quickly realized was a modified version of the infamous Want-It-Need-It spell...

Unfortunately, a chariot holding the all-too familiar smarmy git took this time to careen onto the road out of seemingly nowhere. Prince Blueblood stuck his head out the window, his face tinged green with

nausea, and proceeded to dry heave, complaining about the "peasant air," mere moments before the spell struck him square in the face.

"...and as he looks out the window and is hit by the spell," the green unicorn continued, "he just happens to see the most handsome rock that he'd ever seen in his life."

Blueblood's eyes promptly turned into cartoonish hearts, and his face twisted into (for once) a genuine smile. "Stop the chariot!"

Screeching to a halt, the chariot stopped in its tracks, and Blueblood swung the carriage door open, galloping towards a rock sitting on the side of the road.

"Pardon me, sir" he said, "but you are the most handsome stallion I have ever seen!"

Tom the rock made no sign that he had heard or even seen Blueblood. Because he was, well, a rock.

"I just happen to have an extra ticket to the Grand Galloping Gala," the lovestruck stallion continued, "and I would be honored if you would..."

Whatever he was about to say was drowned out by a fit of giggles and laughter by the twisted game's players. "Wow, that's a great mental image!" Spike said, after calming himself down. "We should really be writing all this down."

"NO!" Twilight shouted. "No one ever needs to know about this! EVER!" While she knew that they couldn't hear her, she couldn't help but try.

"Before you do that, I'm not done. Since I still have a few cards left, and there's still one space open next to Twilight..." Lyra said, "Let's say that after the incident with the spell, Twilight goes to nap under Bloomberg the Tree..."

The space before the Anchor shifted again, to reveal the aforementioned meadow and the tree at its center. Shrugging, Twilight cantered over towards the tree, and sat down in front of it.

"...but since she still had some weird magic residue all over her body, she accidentally gets Bloomberg pregnant!"

As Twilight facehoofed, a card titled "Unexpected Pregnancy" fused with her center card, followed by one depicting Bloomberg sitting in the meadow. Suddenly, Twilight was shoved to the ground from the back. Which was odd, since she was sitting directly against the tree.

Slowly, she turned around and gaped. No, she confirmed, as she tapped the sudden bulge that had appeared in Bloomberg's trunk, she wasn't imagining things. She had somehow gotten a bumbling tree pregnant.

She hated this game.

"...which nets me that Cargo Ship goal for 3 points!" Lyra concluded.

"I think you would have gotten that goal even with the first play. It's too late to take the play back now, though."

"Aw, \_ponyfeathers!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

Celestia burst into green flame, her disguise falling away as \_someone\_ had decided she had retroactively been Chrysalis all along.

Her very first action was to chug the entire pitcher of lemonade from the Suspiciously Romantic Random Picnic around her.

Twilight raised an eyebrow. "Rough time?"

Chrysalis finally stopped drinking, gasping for air. "I must be the most overpowered card in the game!" she wheezed. "Every time they switch cards on the grid, I'm always the card they choose to relocate! It's thirsty work surviving some of the ships I've been in!"

Twilight winced. "How bad?"

Chrysalis held up a hoof, silently requesting a moment before she answered. She finally managed to get her breathing more or less under control after a minute. "In a relationship with Freedom Fighter Pinkie Pie, Vinyl, Nightmare Moon, and Tsundere Rainbow Dash, all at once. None of them knew about the others. Then I'm moved to a relationship with Bon-Bon, who was a changeling all along two turns later. Somehow that was used to bring Aloe and Lotus, Flim and Flam, and Mahou Shoujo Derpy together, right before I'm swapped out with Gilda, putting me right in the center of THREE Rainbow Dash AND Trixie! I can only take so much poorly written love before I'm full, but they just won't stop!"

"I'm sure it couldn't have been \_that\_-"

"All three Rainbow Dash were Awake!"

"... This loop is bucking \_weird\_."

130.14 (Detective Ethan Redfield)

Celestia could only gaze forward with a serene smile on her face as if in a trance. She knew this day would come. Millions and millions of loops, she had been waiting for this obscure and unlikely variant. Hell, she had set aside a special set of tools for dealing with just this scenario. Even as the ponies of Ponyville panicked and ran every which way, Celestia stepped through them with practiced ease as through a river. Countless attendants stood a hill away, prepared to descend upon the battlefield at Celestia's ultimate victory.

She would regret this decision tonight, but had accepted the consequences long ago. It was perfect, none of the other loopers were

awake, so she could hoard it all for herself. The sound of wood cracking echoed from the newly ruined library ahead caused Celestia to wince. Thankfully, Twilight was not awake, so she wouldn't react too badly. Finally, Celestia was at ground zero, as a massive being bent over and howled into her face. The princess gazed up at the 100 foot cake titan and licked her lips, "Hello, sweetie!"

130.15 (Elmagnifico, with inspiration from Gym Quirk)

"Honey, are you sure about this?"

"Absolutely!"

A conveniently dramatic mountain breeze whipped at Shining Armor's mane and wings, even as he sensed his wife giving him The Look.

"Alright, 90% sure. Just make sure you concentrate your magic on minimizing wind resistance. Hopefully my initial boost will get you going fast enough."

"That's it, put me down!"

Before Cadence could finish her sentence, a green flare leapt from distant Ponyville, causing several things to happen almost at once.

The first of these was Shining Armor drawing strength from the Earth Pony portion of his alicorn magic, supplemented by a power-enhancing spell from the Unicorn portion, and sundry supplementary cantrips and arcane shenanigans.

The second was Trixie, who was standing nearby, shouting "That's the signal! GO GO GO!"

The third was Twilight Sparkle teleporting all but one of the living beings in Ponyville to the other side of Sweet Apple Acres.

The fourth was Cadence getting launched at the Ponyville Town Hall at a significant fraction of the speed of light.

The fifth was Nightmare Moon asking "What the fu-" before succumbing to kinetic incapacitation.

The sixth was Luna finding herself in a crater, squished under her unconscious niece.

130.16 (Kris Overstreet)

"Twilight, Ah think we got a problem," Apple Bloom said the instant she burst through the doors of the Golden Oaks Library.

"What makes you say that?" Twilight asked, finishing the most recent entry into a thick record book. Nightmare Moon Redemption Log #28,414; Method used: challenge to 18 holes of golf, magic disallowed; outcome successful; golf now official sport of Equestria.

—

"Well, y'all remember that one really, really late an' distant ping?" the farm filly said.

"Well, yes," Twilight nodded. "This is a Fused Loop with some space-travel world, most likely."

"Ah figured out which world," Apple Bloom said. "Ah'd just set up mah workshop an' was dustin' off mah Millenium Falcon when I noticed th' navigation computer was active an' trackin' nav buoys."

"Tracking nav buoys?" Twilight repeated in surprise.

"Which means not only is Equestria in th' Star Wars galaxy, we're close enough to th' Republic that we kin receive nav buoy signals."

"Republic, or Empire?"

"That's th' funny thing," Apple Bloom said. "Th' buoys I'm pickin' up are split 'bout fifty-fifty."

\* \* \*

><p>Darth Vader, Looper, had a project.<p>

He'd Awakened at some unusual points in his personal history before (including one time when he'd Awakened as a Force ghost- and he still didn't understand how that even worked), but Awakening with a lightsaber in his hands standing over Palpatine's decapitated body in that torture-chamber operating room where he'd been given his cybernetic reconstruction sans anesthetic... well, that was a new one. (He'd smashed everything in the room with the Force all over again when his Loop memories, nice and fresh, told him he'd slain Palpatine in revenge for the obvious setup job he'd done to make Anakin Skywalker fall to the Dark Side... and he hadn't been Awake to properly enjoy it.)

This starting point left a large and urgent task list to be done, but Vader regarded it as chores, nothing more. Blame Palpatine's death on a hidden Jedi terrorist, seize control of the newborn Empire, announce amnesty for all surviving Jedi and Separatists, formally ban slavery once and for all (a very important and personal chore, that one), announce a popularly elected Assembly to complement the mostly aristocratic Senate (and to eventually replace it), give the Hutts a lesson in We Mean It about the slavery ban (a very pleasant and personal chore, that one), set up Tarkin to take the fall for construction of a certain planet-killing terror weapon, and talk Bail Organa and Owen Lars into letting him have his babies to raise (a very important, pleasant, and personal chore, but one he'd never succeeded in yet without... complications)...

It was a long list, but by and large a simple list.

Finding the world on the Outer Rim with a dozen or so Looper Pings, out in a vague area of space where no inhabited worlds existed, and far from Tatooine, Dagobah and Kashyykk... that was difficult, important, personal, and potentially pleasant, which promoted it from "chore" to "project" in the mind of Darth Vader.

The fact that the project required the recently acclaimed second Emperor of the Galaxy (the second in a matter of weeks, though Vader intended to last longer than his too-clever-for-his-own-good

ex-Master) to repair the burnt-out records holosuite of the Jedi Temple by hand... well, that made it a more difficult project, and thus more interesting.

The crystal-coded memory core of the Archives had been built into the foundations of the Temple, and thus had been largely untouched by the fire. The trick was reviving the projectors, which was difficult but doable, especially if you grew up as a junk-scavenging slave on Tatooine and then added thousands of Loops' worth of experience. It just required patience and time... and if Darth Vader tended to be impatient with people, he'd never been impatient with machines.

The map of the galaxy as charted and kept by the Jedi Order flared into life around Darth Vader. Stepping carefully around rubble, tools and jury-rigged repairs, Vader examined the worlds, finally zooming in on a distant sector which had been on the exploration schedule ten years before the Trade Federation began making the troubles that would lead to the Separation. The Force told him this was the right general area, but nothing civilized was recorded in that sector...

... unless...

A careful study of the charted motions of the planets confirmed Vader's guess. Someone had hidden a star, deleted it from the Jedi Order's records... \_Not, \_he thought wryly, \_unprecedented. Had it been Palpatine, or Dooku, or some other cat's pawn? Or had Yoda decided to conceal something? Either way, \_he thought, \_it will be child's play to pry the data out of concealment.\_

A while later, when he saw the name of the planet, he realized how ironic his thought had been.

\* \* \*

><p>Ponyville was good at panicking, and its inhabitants liked to show off at any opportunity, especially the sisters who ran the floral shop.<p>

Granted, with the Star Destroyer hovering over town hall and the huge troop transport that had landed in the fields just south of town, Twilight Sparkle couldn't deny the non-Awake ponies of Ponyville had excellent reason for panic.

The only reason the Awake Loopers (the Element Bearers, the Cutie Mark Crusaders, and Spike) hadn't put together their own space armada the moment the Imperial ships exited hyperspace was the other Ping, which was no longer the least bit distant. Based on that data Twilight had asked Celestia to keep everyone calm and had talked her fellow Loopers into waiting to see what developed.

That said, when the shuttlecraft left the Star Destroyer above and descended towards the clearing guarded by ten thousand perfectly identical stormtroopers, Spike and Applejack stood with Twilight on the stone bridge carrying lightsabers and wearing Jedi robes. (Applejack's were actually Juraian nobility garb, but close enough.) Fluttershy had put on the Imperium of Mankind battle armor Leman Russ had ordered made for her. And Twilight herself had dug out her old TSAB agent uniform and dusted OWL off... just in case. And Rainbow Dash had practically every pegasus in Equestria building thunderhead

around the Star Destroyer, just outside the tight cordon patrolled by TIE fighter squadrons in tight formation. Everypony stood ready just in case things went bad.

Except Pinkie Pie, who bounced carefree from the Equestrian reception committee to the Imperial landing site and back. That was a good sign, Awake Pinkie being even more perceptive about such things than her baseline self, but it wasn't quite definitive.

The stormtroopers stood to attention, an Imperial Navy band three hundred strong struck up a cold, pompous marching tune, and the landing ramp of the shuttle descended, disgorging six scarlet-armored figures... and then a towering figure of absolute darkness.

On cue, as Darth Vader began striding down the broad passage between rows and rows of rigid stormtroopers, the assembled TIE squadrons from the Star Destroyer overflowed the landing area. The formations of pegasi flanking them to either side only made the display even more impressive.

And then the music stopped. For one instant Vader and his royal guard froze in mid-step, then turned to look at the band, which was looking at new sheet music and shrugging.

And then the pink pony behind the tympani (how had she got them there?) took up the sticks and laid down a swinging lounge-band beat. The band joined in two measures later, playing the same music with much more spirit and syncopation.

And Vader, on the third bar, began dancing a solo conga down the road to the stone bridge. A moment after the high brass came in, Pinkie Pie joined the queue. The two-person conga line ended up in front of a group of very confused ponies. (The stormtroopers, while also confused, were too disciplined to show it.)

After a hissing murmur to Pinkie (and a cut-it-out motion at the neck from the pony to the naval band), Vader faced Twilight and said, "I have come on an urgent errand. I require your full cooperation in this matter."

"That depends," Twilight said carefully. "What exactly is your errand?"

"I have come," Darth Vader said in tones of portent, "to pick up my tailoring."

"I suspected that was the case, darling." Rarity, who had been standing in the back of the group saying nothing, now pushed her way to the front. "I must say, Anakin, you do know how to make a bold entrance." The white unicorn wrinkled her nose in mild distaste as she added, "Possibly not tasteful... not elegant... but quite bold."

"As I have said before," the Looper not always known as Anakin Skywalker replied, "Darth Vader cannot simply visit Equestria." Turning his attention back to Twilight, he added, "Later on, as time permits, I am amenable to discussing the political relationship between my Empire and your polity. For now, however," he said, walking over to stand next to Rarity, "I have truly important business to take care of."



As Rarity and the Sith Lord walked over the bridge towards the Carousel Boutique, the other Pony Loopers (minus Pinkie, who was dragging Applejack away while shouting something about "three hundred thousand cupcakes STAT!") turned to look at Spike, who clipped his lightsaber to the belt of his robes and shrugged.

"Seems legit," he said.

\* \* \*

>(Dalexin)<p>"I'm... not sure this is what I asked for." Anakin stated hesitantly, and he looked at the... well, it was definitely a cape. A very well-made one, but...<p>

"It's designed to inspire fear. It has terror woven into every fiber and will inspire irrational fear in all who look upon it and its wearer." Rarity supplied.

He was still hesitant. "And the smiley bat motif?"

"You didn't ask for it not to have smiley bats." The mare retorted, with a small smirk. "You didn't expect me not to muck about with it did you? You asked me to make a thing of pure fearmongering terror. I take exception to that, and if nothing else you can add confusion to its list of powers because rationally no one should be afraid of someone wearing anything that looks like this, barring a phobia of bats." At this she huffed, already tired of explanations, and tossed the thing around her own neck.

He had to admit, that twinge of unease in the back of his mind was most definitely not there before she put it on. A weaker mind might actually be stricken with fear at the sight of it. Still, was it worth the bats?

After a moment, he sighed and nodded. "Thank you, Rarity. I'll take it." She grinned, replacing the cloak in its place on the mannequin, before he asked, "And the other one I asked for?"

"On the mannequin behind you," Rarity said.

\* \* \*

>(Saphroneth)<p>"I suspected as much. Care to explain?" Vader said, holding his other cape up.<p>

"Oh, must you question all my design choices?" Rarity asked, sighing. "I mean, you did specify the effect only, and I am a craftsman."

"I rather expected that you'd make it fit with the rest of my outfit," Vader admitted. "I thought that was what designers did."

Rarity tossed her mane. "Not in my book. At least, not with this kind of commission."

At first glance, it wasn't actually clear why Vader had a problem with it. The cape was a dark blue, almost but not quite black, and the right length. It had the correct flow, the right weave, and it

moved just like his other capes did.

"I mean... come on." With a gesture, Vader swept the cape onto his shoulders.

It was awe-inspiring. It was morale-boosting. It made you forget all your fears, and want to walk through the darkest night.

It was also, however, bright gold with white trim.

"That's how you know the effect is working," Rarity said simply. "Gold is a very inspiring colour, you know, and so is white."

She paused. "If you prefer, I could do a Luna-themed one instead. Dark purple, with stars on it?"

The Dark, Unusually Brightly Clothed Lord Of The Sith considered that. "I will get back to you on that. It may well be the better choice."

"Well, it won't take long to change. It's mostly cosmetic anyway." Rarity shrugged. "Mostly."

\* \* \*

>(Kris Overstreet)<p>The next day Vader returned for the second cloak, which had undergone three different versions overnight.<p>

Rarity, swaying a little from an all-nighter full of inspiration, floated the new cape over to Vader for approval. "I know I said it was going to be purple," she said, "but after seeing the blue and the gold on you, I realized that black truly is your color. But I did get the stars in."

Vader looked at the fabric. He'd seen patches of deep space less black than this. "I don't see them," he said.

"Put it on," Rarity insisted. "And then check the corners of your eyes."

Vader donned the cloak, and immediately felt the same sensation of confidence and loyalty as with the gold cloak spreading out through the Force around him. When he picked up a corner of the cloak and looked at it, though, it was still that same black...

... except for a twinkling just at the edge of his vision.

Slowly, carefully, Vader moved his gaze across the fabric, careful not to let his eyes flicker towards the lights. Tiny, tiny flecks of white and red and blue, exactly like stars, danced where he wasn't looking, vanished where he was looking. "Stars?" he asked at last.

"Sparks of inspiration," Rarity said. "They only come when you're not expecting them, and they flee if you try to look right at them. A little tricky to weave into the fabric, and possibly a more subtle effect than you intended, but-"

"This will serve," Vader said. After a moment, realizing that his

statement was a bit blunt, he added, "Admirable. Thank you very much, Mistress Rarity. What do I owe you?"

At a flash of Rarity's horn, every window blind and curtain in the Carousel Boutique snapped shut. "Nothing in money or trade, darling," she said. "Just a bit of future blackmail material. Just in case."

Vader took a step backwards at the pink... thing... that Rarity pulled out of her subspace pocket. "You want me... to wear that?" he asked.

"And to let me photograph you," the unicorn fashionista said.

"But..." Vader examined the long floppy ears... all six of them, two on the headpiece and two each on the slippers. "I'll look like... like a deranged Easter bunny."

"That's the idea," Rarity sing-songed, her smile almost worthy of Palpatine in his pre-pruneface mode. "And maybe it'll make you think twice about pulling little stunts like yesterday's when you visit us."

Vader considered this a moment. "Very well," he said at last. "Provided I get to keep the bunny suit. I know a couple of people I want to see wearing it." His technical son in law, for one.

"Of course," Rarity nodded. "I certainly don't want to keep the horrid thing."

One blackmail photo later Vader left the boutique, wearing the inspirational cape. He wasn't altogether certain he ever wanted to try the terror cape, with its motif of happy, friendly bats, in public anytime soon, and certainly not in Equestria. The subtly sparkling cape, on the other hand, was safe enough to see how it affected his troops.

The signs were subtle at first, but Anakin Skywalker had always known how to read them, in and out of the armored suit. The stormtroopers actually found a way to stand a little straighter. The non-cloned naval officers and crew smiled more frequently, and more pleasantly. Things ran just a little bit more smoothly whenever he walked by.

\_And this, \_Vader noted, \_is in as opposite from combat conditions as it is possible to get. I wonder how strong the effect will be in-\_

Someone tugged on the cape.

Vader froze for a moment out of sheer curiosity: someone, someone had just had the suicidal effrontery \_to tug on Darth Vader's cape.\_ (Not that he'd do anything much about it while Awake, but his baseline self would have severed the offending hand at the shoulder without breaking stride.)

Slowly Vader turned and looked down to face a cross eyed blonde pegasus. "'Scuse me, mister," she said, "but is there anything you'd like me to do?" She turned her head to one side and added, "I saw

that pretty glittery cape of yours, and suddenly I got the feeling I should be working for you."

Before Vader could answer, a pair of unicorn colts- one short and fat, one almost giraffe-like in proportions except for the buck teeth- dashed up. "Hey, mister! Where can we enlist, huh?" the tall skinny one said.

"Yeah!" the short fat one continued. "Guaranteeing peace and freedom to the galaxy through enlightened tyranny sounds like a great plan!"

Before Vader could explain the difficulties in enlisting minors on a world not properly part of the Empire, a hissing sound came from behind him. Spinning around, he saw a pale blue unicorn in what was obviously meant to be a Sith robe, her horn poking up from the edge of the cowl. "Always there are two: a master and an apprentice," she said before bowing deeply enough that her barrel pressed against the ground. "What is thy bidding for the Great and Powerful Trixie, my master?"

Command decisions often have to be made in an instant, and Vader's decision took even less time than that.

"OKAY, PACK 'EM UP!" he shouted to the guards and officers at the landing area, striding around the would-be Sith pony. "WE ARE \_LEAVING!\_"

A few feet away, concealed behind a bush, Twilight Sparkle and Rarity shook hooves and tried to stifle their giggles.

\* \* \*

><p>Not long after Cadence and Shining Armor's wedding, Rarity received a letter:<p>

\_My dearest Rarity, Greatest Tailor in the Multiverse,\_

\_I need another commission from you at the earliest moment. In addition to the Cloak of Terror and the Cloak of Leadership you kindly made for me, I now need a Blanket of Security for young Luke. (Leia doesn't seem to need one; she takes after her mother so very much.)\_

\_Please call upon my embassy in Canterlot for any materials you might require, in my (official) name.\_

\_Ani\_

P.S. Please send another copy of that bunny suit as well, in Yoda's size.

>Rarity smiled and laid out a new sketch sheet on her inspiration board. <em>What other shapes,<em> she thought, \_go well with a swan motif?\_

\* \* \*

>AN:<p><p>

130.1: Fanda - fan panda.

>130.2: Po faced.<br>130.3: Plan P successful.  
>130.4: Time to do, that Do, that you do so well.<br>130.5: A slightly abridged version of a Hellsing pastiche.  
>130.6: They rather seem to.<br>130.7: Whoops.  
>130.8: You're not fooling anyone.<br>130.9: AJ loses.  
>130.10: Well, you try them once, and...<br>130.11: A version of a certain fic.  
>130.12: That doesn't belong in a museum, because they'd break that too.<br>130.13: Oh, ship.  
>130.14: And sometimes, there's a perfect moment.<br>130.15: It works on other villains.  
>130.16: Commission.<p>

## 137. Chapter 137

### 131.1 (masterofgames)

All was quiet in the bar. Pretty much everyone was looping, and they even had a few guests, so naturally some story swapping had already gone down, but right now, everyone was just relaxing. Drinks had been passed around, the place was nice and warm, and a few individuals had even started to doze off.

Pinkie snapped.

Suddenly lurching upright from where she was lying down on a booth bench, she screamed the first thing that came into her head as she threw a smoke bomb.

"I can't take it anymore! Party!"

The pink smoke filled the room in an instant, and when it cleared a moment later, the bar had fallen victim to Pinkie's decorating. All the empty chairs were now facing the bar, which itself now had several microphones on stands atop it, and small spotlights shining from above. The walls of the bar had been covered in pictures of various music albums, and a gold record was hanging over the door. Also, a DJ booth had been set up in the corner, with a small sign on it reading 'reserved for Vinyl (Unless she wants to sing too.)' There was also a disco ball for some reason.

And there were streamers everywhere.

"Oh, you've redecorated!" a brown stallion from the guest tables commented with a grin. "... I don't like it."

Then he ducked as several other guests started pelting him with peanuts.

Pinkie herself was blinking in surprise, half finished mixing a bowl of punch with a bottle of the bar's cider, with several large bags of flour and sugar balanced on her back. "Wait, that's it? The smoke was supposed to last another two and a half seconds! Aww man... That's the last time I use smoke bombs past the expiration date."

Twilight just sighed as the entire bar gave Pinkie a \_look\_. "Really Pinkie? We were trying to relax."

Pinkie bounced in place frantically. "Ooh, but Twilight, we have

friends here that we don't see that often! We have to do something fun with them! We don't know when we'll get to see them again! And besides, you guys were quiet for like, a whole six minutes! How can you even stand to do that!? And besides, it's getting close to the holidays! We need to get warmed up for caroling! I didn't do that once, and my voice blew out like a flat tire! I wasn't able to talk for a week!"

Gilda grinned. "We know. Most relaxing week that I can ever recall." she called from the far end of the bar.

Pinkie just blew a raspberry in response.

Big Mac came out from behind the bar, placing a leg over Pinkie's shoulders. "Come on now Pinkie, we all agreed this would be a vacation loop for the guests. I know you want to have a party with them, but we're sticking to a more normal loop this time."

Pinkie just raised an eyebrow. "And what's not normal about caroling for the holidays?"

Mac nearly answered, but then had to pause to think about that one.

Rarity shrugged. "The only thing not normal about Pinkie's idea, is that she tends to go a little overboard. With what she has set up so far, minus the punch and cake ingredients of course, I don't see why we can't have a singing contest, so long as Pinkie remembers that that's ALL it is."

Pinkie flopped down on the floor in front of Rarity, looking up with wide, pleading eyes. "Aww, please?"

"Pinkie..."

"Ugh, fine. But we're making it interesting then! If I can't make this a proper party, then I get to make a rule for the contest!"

Rarity just smirked and turned to Twilight. "I don't think we're talking her out of this one darling. She'll probably throw the party around us anyway if we don't let her vent a bit."

"But... but... gah, fine, but participation is optional! If the guests don't want to join in, they don't have to."

Pinkie stepped up. "Fine, but I get to set a prize for the contest!"

"... Not a Party."

"IT'S A PERFECTLY VAL- I mean, um... (ahem). 'I am shocked and offended that you would assume such an ulterior motive on my part Twilight... And also your mane looks weird'."

"Hey!"

"Don't blame me! Discord's the one with the cue cards!"

Twilight turned to look, just in time to see Discord stuff a large

sheet of white cardboard into his mouth, then try and whistle innocently. The effect was rather ruined by the cardboard muffling his whistles.

"Just... You know what? Fine. Just name your rule."

Pinkie grinned and hopped up onto the bar and grabbed a microphone.

Big Mac frowned and started wiping the hoofprints off his bar.

"Okay everyone! You can only sing a song you feel applies to you personally, and your experiences over the loops!"

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

A scraping sound echoed from the back of the bar. Two of the visitors were moving towards the bar full of microphones. To be more accurate, a young mare with a dark brown mane topped with a yellow headband and ribbons was dragging a dark-coated, black-maned young stallion ever barwards, despite the grooves his hooves were leaving in the planks lining the cellar floor.

"Let GO!" the mare growled, dragging herself and her unwilling cargo ever bar-wards.

"You are NOT singing 'Bokuen Desho Desho' to these people!" the stallion grumbled. trying and failing to find purchase to drag the two of them back to their booth.

"Why not?" the mare snapped. "It's perfect for me! Even the Hub anime says so!"

"Because you sing it at EVERY karaoke event we go to!" the stallion gasped, half with exasperation, half with his failing effort to restrain the smaller but more athletic pony. "Besides, isn't it cheating to use your own theme song for a contest about your experiences in the Loops?"

"Fine then!" The mare slung the stallion up onto a bar stool, ignoring the generally embarrassed stares of the native Loopers (and, for that matter, practically everyone else in the bar). "Then YOU pick one!"

Defeated, the stallion slumped against the bar for a moment, eyes glancing over one of the track books. His eyes lit on one title, and a small smile crept cautiously out on his muzzle. "This one," he said, hoofing the list to Pinkie Pie and pointing to the track.

A few moments later, after Vinyl queued up the track and the opening hook began playing, the stallion took up a microphone and began singing:

\_Welcome to your life, there's no turning back...\_

As the mare joined in, half the Loopers in the place pulled out recording devices of one kind or another. Nobody wanted to miss the sight, even in pony form, of Kyon and Haruhi Suzumiya singing a duet

of "Everybody Wants to Rule the World."

Well, almost nobody. One immense midnight-black unicorn war stallion, dark red mane immaculately braided, slumped back in his chair and tossed his copy of the track list over his shoulder. The purple pegasus and the little green earth pony sharing his table smirked at him in silence.

"Little punks beat me to it..." Ganondorf grumbled.

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

Pinkie whispered rapidly to Lyra at her table, then hauled her giggling temporary partner on stage for a makeshift duet.

Pinkie started off. "\_I'm friends with the monsters, from under my bed!\_"

Lyra picked it up, fighting to keep from laughing. "\_Get along with the voices, inside of my head!\_"

They both started from there. "\_You tryin' to save me, stop holding your breath. But you think I'm crazy! You think I'm crazy!\_"..."

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

\_"Here I come to save the daaaaay!\_"

"No, Discord," Twilight Sparkle shouted, "stealing Andy Kaufman's lip-synch gag does NOT COUNT!"

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

Derpy looked over the song list, then shrugged as she checked a box, and handed it off to Vinyl. "Might as well get in on this. Come on Doc! We got a song to perform!"

The stallion known to many as Time Turner, but when Awake in Equestria, known to even more by a different name, attempted to hold her back as she dragged him to the stage. "It-It's not 'Doc', Derpy... and I'm not particularly gifted at singing. I rarely ever do it at all!"

She just grinned. "So? That just means it's something new!"

He paused at that, then slowly his eyes widened and he grinned. "Why... so it does! Come along Derpy! Our adoring public awaits!" he declared, suddenly being the one dragging \_her\_ to the stage.

Once there, both took a moment to compose themselves as they waited for the music to start. "Just \_love\_ this! A singing contest! How novel! Never been in one before. So exciting! Oh, um, by the way, which song did you pick?"



Derpy just grinned. "I've spent more loops than I can count as your companion, even before you Awoke. Take a guess!"

The Doctor paused, blinked, started to respond, paused again, rubbed his chin in thought, smirked and started to answer again, paused a third time, then sighed and gave her a tired look. "You didn't."

Derpy giggled. "I did."

"Why!?"

"You were barely a thousand when you were on your twelfth regeneration! You're reckless and you know it. Plus the Master, and your whole companion collecting thing. What else could I have picked?"

And then she started them off as the music started, shaking her flank to the beat as she got into the groove.

"\_I hear your heart beat, to the beat of the drums! Oh what a shame that you came here with someone!\_ \_While you're here in my arms... Let's make the most of the night, like we're gonna' die young!...\_"

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

"Applejack must be serious about this one," Rainbow Dash muttered to herself as the farm pony took a microphone.

"How can you tell?" one of the visitors asked from an adjacent table.

"She's taken off her hat."

Sure enough, Applejack had not only taken off the hat but had shaken out her long ponytailed mane before singing:

\_When yer weary, feelin' small,  
>When tears are in youre eyes, Ah'll dry 'em all;<br>Ah'm on your side when times get rough...\_

Dash cocked her head to one side in careful judgment and asked the world in general, "Does 'Bridge Over Troubled Water' work sung in a Southern accent?"

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

Big Mac merely swayed back and forth to the somewhat jazzy beat. The song he had chosen had no words yet. Half the bar was calling foul, and the other half was cracking up.

Mac shrugged, placing a hoof over the microphone, though he couldn't hide his grin. "Ya'll said to pick a song that we felt was connected to our experiences with the loops, I'm just following the rules."

Gilda, Trixie, Discord, and Chrysalis had been starting to have a little too much fun heckling the singers, and Statler and Waldorf, the Muppet Anchors weren't helping, so he felt this was justified as revenge. With a smirk to the makeshift balcony they were all sitting in, ("It's tradition!" Waldorf had insisted.), he recited the one word in the song.

"\_Tequila!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>(Purrs)<p>

A black unicorn nudged a white one. "Let's sing Beneath a Moonless \_"

"Are you serious? \_God\_ no!" She backhoofed him, inadvertently knocking off his half-mask but recovering well to return it nearly instantly. "Have you no \_shame\_?"

"But Christine..."

"\_Don't you 'but Christine' me\_, " she hissed. "That is not a song to be heard by \_anyone else ever\_. It's bad enough that it's on the backup. Besides, there are \_foals\_ here."

"But..." Pouting at his failure, Opera Ghost discreetly slipped a few coins to a neighboring Looper.

"There is nothing that could make me consider it and I don't know why you are. Now go on up there, you're singing 'I Will Possess Your Heart'," she directed with an insistent gesture.

"But that makes me sound like a stalker," he protested.

"Well, you are."

"I'm getting better..."

"Consider this your punishment for suggesting that song. Now get on that stage and \_sing\_!"

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

Twilight had to admit, as she sipped her drink, that Luna could really put some feeling into the chorus of her song selection.

"\_Baby do you dare to do this? 'Cause I'm coming at you like a dark horse!\_..."

\* \* \*

><p>(OracleMask)<p>

There was a momentary lull in the festivities as the various loopers debated amongst themselves over what song to sing next.

A purple-furred stallion looked at his non-pony companions. The five of them were sharing a table in the corner of the bar.

They looked at him expectantly.

He raised an eyebrow.

Turning to each other for a moment, the four quietly chattered amongst themselves before turning back to the pony and grinning.

\* \* \*

><p>Several loopers who had recently experienced a certain unpleasant loop grimaced as the first notes of '<em>Les Toreadors<em>' began to play from the karaoke machine.

On the stage was a sight that did not make those loopers feel any better: a purple pony in a security uniform...flanked by a bear in a top hat, a bunny in a bow tie, a duck in a bib, and a fox with a hook.

><em><br>"We're waiting every night, to finally roam and invite, newcomers to play with us, for many years we've been all alone~"\_

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

The pony Loopers had been waiting for the moment when Sweetie Belle would take the microphone. The greatest vocalist among the Equestrian Loopers, whatever she sang would not only be well done but absolutely, perfectly on target for the topic at hand; so went the unspoken consensus.

And as Sweetie took a mike in her magic, twenty ponies leaned on the edge of their seats to hear which song Sweetie had chosen.

\_Sing

>Sing a song<br>Sing out loud

>Sing out strong<br>Sing of good things, not bad

>Sing of happy, not sad...<em>

It wasn't the profound, complex, sweeping song anypony had expected, but most of them joined in on the "la la la" parts anyway.

The moment Sweetie Belle relinquished the microphone, Pinkie Pie took it up. "I can top that one!" she crowed. "Hit it, Vinyl!"

The speakers played a brief hook of plucked notes on a guitar, and then she began:

\_It was just after dark when the truck started down the hill that leads into Scranton, Pennsylvania

>Carrying thirty thousand pounds of bananas<br>Carrying thirty thousand pounds (hit it Big Mac!)\_

Rolling his eyes, the bartender finished the line:

\_oooooof bananas.\_

Three quarters of the occupants of Mac's bar, Twilight's the loudest, spoke with one voice:

"PINKIE, IT SUCKS!"

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

Rainbow Dash frowned. "Hey, Pinkie already did one with Lyra! Why is she up there again?"

Pinkie just stuck her tongue out playfully. "Only your best performance counts, but I never said you only had one shot!"

\* \* \*

><p>(Hubris Plus)<p>

A number of local Loopers suppressed groans as Twilight approached the stage, while others murmured words of encouragement.

"So, I know I'm not much of a singer outside of a Heart Song," she preambled. "But I've actually been practicing this one--"

"Mostly in the shower," Spike whispered to Rarity. His wife promptly shushed him, but didn't manage hold in a giggle.

"Right, well, I thought I'd give it a shot." She took a deep breath as the music started, even going through the full motion of throwing her cares away.

\_"Pathological monsters! Cried the terrified mathematician,  
>Every one of them a splinter in my eye..."<em>

Discord tugged out a bit of cotton wadding he'd stuffed in his ears. She wasn't half bad.

\_"Mandelbrot Set! You're a Rorschach Test on fire!  
>You're a day-glo pterodactyl!<br>You're a heart-shaped box of springs and wire!  
>You're one badass bucking fractal!"<em>

Twilight had gone all in as she finished out the song, hooves wrapped around the mic, eyes closed tight, and body flailing in a vague approximation of rhythm. As the last chords died out, she opened her eyes, remembered she wasn't singing into a comb in her bathroom, and blushed furiously.

Her cheeks only reddened further as applause broke amongst her friends, their hooves pounding the bar's flooring.

"I really like math, okay," the Anchor mumbled before hopping off the stage and scampering back to her seat.

"Aw, mom, you did great," Nyx said, patting her mother's hoof as she put away a camera.

"Shush, you."

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

Trixie took a deep breath, then instead of singing, started speaking very rapidly. "Trixiehadjustdiscoveredhowtomakethermi-"

Everyone started throwing bottles at her.

\* \* \*

><p>(KrisOverstreet)<p>

"Sorry, Silver Spoon, Zecora, but I ain't got 'Witch Doctor' in my playlist," Vinyl Scratch lied. "You'll have to pick something else."

"Awwww," Silver Spoon moaned.

"A second time I'm denied my wish," Zecora said.

"Because your first choice wasn't in English!" Vinyl finished for her.

\* \* \*

><p>(Hubris Plus)<p>

Celestia glanced down as she felt tapping against her forehoof. Meeting the beady little eyes, her own gaze narrowed.

Angel pointed at the stage, and Celestia shook her head.

"You know I can't carry a-" He stomped his foot and pointed again.

"You're calling in that favor? \_Now?\_" She sighed before standing. "I suppose I've done worse in the name of-" He tapped her again and held up a slip of paper. Reading the song title, her white coat somehow managed to pale further.

"Of all the creatures I have encountered in the defense of the realm, you possess the blackest heart," she whispered. Angel scuffed his foot against the ground, blushing at the praise.

Murmuring swept through the crowd as she ascended to the stage. Standing before the mic, pulling on eons of experience to maintain perfect composure in the face of adversity, she cleared her throat and started to sing.

\_"And so you're back! From outer space!"\_

\* \* \*

><p>(Saphroneth)<p>

Discord stood up. "I will be performing a song by the Beatles," he announced.

"Ten bits says it's Lucy in the Sky!" Vinyl called.

"Nah, Yellow Submarine," Sweetie opined.

"Surely it'll be I Am The Walrus?"

While the various ponies debated, he stepped regally up to the microphone, and took it in one claw.

\_"Oi've got a brand new combine harvester..."\_

...

The twangs and accompaniment faded away.

"That was not a Beatles song!" Sweetie said, after a few seconds of silence.

"Dear me, and you believed me?" Discord looked hurt. "I must be losing my touch."

A comically large pointing finger landed on his head.

"Oh, here it is!" He folded it into a small microphone cover, and slipped it over the top. "Next!"

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

Shining slowly slid downwards in his chair as half the bar glared at him while his wife sang. "She... she's gotten better, alright? But you can't deny she was a bit obsessed for a while! The rules said 'experience with the loops', not, 'the way you are now'!" he protested weakly.

Meanwhile, Cadence sang on, fighting to keep from giggling as she noticed the occasional looper's eye twitching slightly as long repressed memories were dug up.

\_"You're on the canon ground! I'm up in crack ship space!\_"

\_"Let's start a shipping war! Don't care if I get hate!\_"

\_"Don't like my pairings? Well, then you can hit the bricks!\_"

\_"This is my OTP! I'll go down with this ship!\_"

\_"I ship it!"\_

\* \* \*

><p>(Hubris Plus, masterofgames)<p>

"Vinyl," Ivory Scroll called out, trotting to the mic. "Requisition me a groove." The speakers blared to life with lively kettle drums and horns.

\_"When I was four there was a tidal wave in Kingston town,  
>With a foot and a half of water!<br>Everyone was alright,  
>But I cried all night,<br>It blew my alphabet blocks out of

order!\_

\_And they said, 'This mare's born to be a bureaucrat!  
>Born to be all obsessive and haughty!'  
<br>I hid long applications  
>inside the invitations<br>to my very first political  
party!..."\_

"Ugh... I remember that. The first time she was elected, she won by only one vote, because only she voted. No pony else could figure out how the ballots worked." Rarity muttered to Sweetie Belle, who forced back a giggle.

\_"...We never asked to be bureaucrats!  
>No that's simply what the Admins made us!<br>We'd stamp the time and date,  
>and sign in triplicate,<br>even if no pony paid us!\_

\_They say the world looks down on the bureaucrats.  
>They say we're smelly, compulsive and weird!<br>But when push comes to shove,  
>you've gotta do what you love,<br>even if it's not a good idea!

>Everypony!"<em> The Mayor swept a hoof across the crowd.

\_"They said Ah probably shouldn't be a brewer,"\_ Applejack chimed in, spinning a jar of potato cider on one hoof.

\_"They poo-pooed Trixie's thermite obsession,"\_ everypony leaned away from the magician as she waved a canister.

\_"They warned me not to fly with one good eye!"\_ Derpy added, drifting into ponies on either side of her as she hovered.

\_"Settle down now, the song is session!"\_ Cheerilee scolded.

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

A red pony with a rainbow colored train track for a cutie mark grinned at his friends as he took the stage. "Hello everyone! I'm Imagination Express, but my real name is Right. I've chosen a good one. I can see it, up here." he smiled, tapping the side of his head. "I can see you all loving this one."

The five friends at his table all slumped. "He's at it again..." the pale pink one groaned.

The green one just propped his head in his hooves. "Imagining his way to victory. That's just what he does. We can't exactly stop him."

The yellow one folded her forelegs. "If he sings about food, I'm pulling him off the stage myself."

Right didn't pay them any mind. "This is a little number I found on the internet. Hit it Vinyl!"

Vinyl nodded with a smirk, starting up a happy, fast paced little

number.

"\_\*\*I like trains!\*\*"\_

He got a mixed reaction to say the least, though Fluttershy at least nodded sagely.

\* \* \*

><p>The vibrant red pony in the sea-captain's coat, known as Magnificent Rogue, grinned. "Look at him." he chuckled, gesturing to Right on the stage. "The newbie thinks he can keep up."<p>

The rest of the ponies, plus the one robot bird, at his table shook their heads, all smirking. "Well," the grey one, Ascended Fanboy, pondered aloud with a wide smile as they all left their seats. "... I suppose we had better show him how the veterans do things, eh, Marvelous?"

"Not without us you aren't." a pony from the next table over laughed, pulling on his straw hat and gesturing for his own crew to join him as he also rose.

Rogue grinned. "Ah, Luffy. Was wondering when we would meet again. I suppose we could go for a team up, for old times sake.

Mere moments after Right had finished, the sixteen members of the two most powerful crews of pirates in the loops were on the stage. "Everyone ready?" Rogue asked with a grin, getting nods from all the rest. "Let's make this showy!"

"\_With a hi-hi-ho and a hi-hi-hey, we're \*\*hoisting the flag to be free!\*\*\_\_ Our captain will stand on the bridge and sing, 'Pirates are all we can be!' With a hi-hi-ho and a hi-hi-hey, we're bound to be close to the sea! We will \_\_\*\*steal the show\*\*\_\_, jolly rogers go! We are wolves of the sea!"\_

\* \* \*

><p>(Leviticus Wilkes)<p>

A mare and two stallions by the names of Titanic Hunter, Long Strategy, and one who was the proud owner of the absolutely badass name; Dreadnought Reaper. Their casual names were Eren, Armin, and Mikasa. And right now, they were getting on stage quite reluctantly. "How did we get roped into this again Armin?"

The blond maned stallion shrugged as he pulled out a drum set. "I think it had something to do with your bet against Harry over who could annoy Umbridge more."

Eren tossed a spare guitar at the aforementioned wizard, who simply opened his subspace pocket and dropped the instrument in. "This is all his fault. Stupid wizards."

Mikasa plugged her own base into the stereos provided by Vinyl Scratch. "Should we lead with our theme?"

Eren chuckled smoothly. "Sure, why not. Armin?"



Armin smirked with a touch of confidence. "Lets do this. Mares and stallions, ladies and gentlemen, Guren no Yumiya!"

"Seid ihr das Essen? Nein, wir sind der J  ger!"

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

No one was really sure if the performance counted or not.

On one hand, a song with no words at all seemed like cheating.

On the other, the singer couldn't exactly speak.

On yet another, no one was entirely sure if the song counted at all, as it was a bit difficult to confirm if it matched the looping experiences.

And so, while the entire bar debated, Angel Bunny continued to mime his way through The Hall Of The Mountain King.

\* \* \*

><p>(Hubris Plus)<p>

The contest stopped for a moment as Sunset held a whispered conversation with Vinyl. The back and forth stretched out before the DJ lifted a hoof and waved Pinkie over. After a little longer, the contest organizer nodded to herself.

"I'll allow it, on grounds of warm fuzzies and being essential to the song," Pinkie announced.

"You got it, boss," Vinyl saluted before stepping away from her turntables.

"Thanks," Sunset told them before grabbing a stool and trotting onstage. Settling onto it, she unpocketed a banjo, checked the tuning, and strummed out a simple tune.

\_"Why are there so many songs about rainbows?  
>And what's on the other side?..."<em>

\* \* \*

><p>(masterofgames)<p>

Nearly everyone in the bar had their jaws hanging open.

Twilight leaned over and poked Rainbow Dash. "Hey, isn't that kind of... I dunno... an odd choice for her?"

Dash shrugged. "It's way outside her norm, yeah, but I think she chose the song based on the title and didn't know the lyrics, or that it was metal. Still, I'm proud of her for going through with it." she grinned.

On stage, Fluttershy was a wolf, the stature hiding her trembling, and her thicker fur hiding her bright red blush. Still, she was

giving the song her all, even if only to get off the stage sooner.

"\_So what if you can see! The darkest side of me!?"\_

\_No one will ever change\_ \_this animal I have become!"\_

(GammaCavy)

Vinyl stood, Sweetie taking over managing the booth, as Vinyl took the microphone.

On a sleepy endless ocean when the world lay in a dream  
>There was rhythm in the splash and roll, but not a voice to sing.  
Sweetie lifted her head, remembering helping to sing Arda into being.<br>So the moon shone on the breakers and the morning warmed the waves. Luna and Celestia both caught their breaths.  
>Till a single cell did jump and hum for joy as though to say<p>

This is my home, this is my only home  
>This is the only sacred ground that i have ever known<br>And should I stray in the dark night alone  
>Rock me goddess in the gentle arms of eden...<p>

Voices echoed as everypony joined in on the final chorus, shaking the roof.

This is my home, this is my only home,  
>this is the only sacred ground that I have ever known, Sunset wept as she sang, remembering the long loops traveling, wondering if she would ever find Equestria. Home, even though she tended to loop away from it.<br>And should I stray in the dark night alone Nyx's voice echoed with Vinyls together above the rest.  
>Rock me goddess, in the gentle arms of Eden.<p>

Vinyl repeated the final line two more times, as the music faded, and the other voices with it.

>She finished the final repetition and stepped down. The silence the song had cast held everyone spell bound for a few more seconds, before thunderous applause, hoof stomping, and cheering broke out.<p>

131.2 (fractalman)

Kyubey viewed its pink and yellow prey from the shadows: enormous potential, lots of issues to generate despair with just a little nudge&acirc;it was risky, going after a pony, but well worth the risk since nothing indicated any of the ponies were Awake.

It stepped out into the light-and was promptly glomped.

"Aww, who's a cute little MLE? You are! Oh yes you are a cute little Malevolent Looping Entity! Oh yes you are!"

Kyubey uh oh'd. This was most definitely \_not\_ according to plan.

131.3 (Evilhumour)

Twilight stared at the vacant lot in front of her for a good five minutes before she started to twitch and storm over to Big Mac's bar for a drink and see if Applejack wouldn't mind her sleeping over until Sunday when she could break into the House.

She hated when the Denizens stole her library!

As she started to stomp away, there was a letter that smacked her in front of the face. Frowning, she open the letter and started to read it.

'Dear Twilight Sparkle,

I was under the illusion that when I came for your treehouse, you were in there. However, your friend was in there. \_

In her five minutes of stay of the Incomparable Gardens, she has caused severe damage to the weather system throughout the entire House, caused the Pit in the Far Reaches to be filled with taffy, the Middle House's mountain is now upside down and we are still currently trying to comprehend what she did to the Great Maze.\_

In lieu of a bill for the damages, please take the remains of your treehouse as well as your friend on the conditions that she never enters the House again.\_

S. '\_

Twilight blinked and turned her head to see the toppled wreckage of her home with smoke still flowing out of every window. Suddenly, an explosion was heard from within and a pony-shape projectile landed in front of Twilight, covering her with dirt, dust, ash and fish.

It took Twilight several seconds to regain the ability to speak but by that time, the pony-shape projectile spoke.

"I really don't know what happened Twilight!" Derpy said, standing up and shaking off the dust on her coat, as a wall of the library collapsed inwards. "All I did was drop a tea cup!"

Twilight just blinked as a fish fell onto her face as another explosion was heard from within.

\* \* \*

><p>131.4 (Wildrook) Sunset Saber<p>

The redhead with yellow streaks was surprised as she looked at her uniform.

'Well, I've replaced Arturia,' she thought. 'Might as well play the part.' "I am known as Servant Saber. I ask of you, are you my master?"

Shirou sighed. "Nice to see you again, Sunset," he said. "And yeah, I am."

"You two know each other!?" Lancer yelled.

"Back off, or else I use your real name and force a death-match right here and now," Shirou replied.

Lancer glared. "You're bluffing," he said.

"I can not only memorize your spear, but learn its history. The spear aimed directly at my heart, and it's cursed. From the name, I'm guessing you're from Ireland, and...you smell like dog."

There was a glare. "Hound," he said.

"And you just screwed yourself over," Sunset replied, bringing out a Keyblade known as Realta Nua. "Hound of Ulster."

Lancer growled. "Guess I've no choice," he said. Before he could stop, he flinched. "I can't. Rules of the game dictate that I have to fight to the death."

There was a bit of silence.

"What do you mean...ugh...luckily for you, I'm going to retreat. My Master's a coward."

"Tell Kotomine I'm coming for him for what he did to my Dad," Shirou replied. "I was in the fire. You think I DON'T remember what happened?"

Lancer then sighed. "Again, luckily for you, I'm a nice guy. Next time, find me a pint, then we talk." He then dashed out.

Sunset was surprised. "Is he..."

"If he was, he'd signal me," Shirou replied. "But now, you've got a chance to meet Rin this time."

131.5 (Kris Overstreet)

Fluttershy poked her head very, very cautiously over the back of the sofa. "Er... I'm sorry, Rainbow Dash, but you startled me terribly when you pulled out that pistol."

"Yeah. Sorry." Rainbow Dash sat on the rug, examining the very large pistol in her hoof with a distinctly non-Dashian melancholy.

Gradually Fluttershy worked her way out of hiding. She wasn't exactly afraid of guns, not anymore; her several loops in the Warhammer universe had accustomed her to weapons and their use, far beyond what she'd really have preferred. But in her house? Held by Rainbow Dash? And pulled out of subspace in a manner that suggested Dash hadn't really been aware she was doing it? When it came to Fluttershy's nerves, context was everything.

"So, yeah," Rainbow Dash said, "I picked up a new skill last Loop. Wanna see it?" Her tone suggested that she, herself, didn't particularly care one way or the other. That was definitely NOT the Rainbow Dash Fluttershy knew. Something was very wrong.

So when Fluttershy said, "Oh yes, please," her enthusiasm was less for the skill (which, if it involved firearms, she could do without

seeing demonstrated forever) and more to give support to her oldest, dearest friend.

Outside the cottage, Rainbow Dash pointed to a tree across the meadows and woods, just inside the border of the Everfree Forest. "You see that bare, rotten limb on the top of that beech?" she asked. "About half a mile off there?"

Pegasi have excellent vision by nature. "Yes," she said, "but it'd be tough to hit it even with a long rifle from-"

\_\*\*BLAM!\*\*\_

And then, \_\*\*BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!\*\*\_

Moments later the first bullet clipped the branch off just above the leaves. Before the branch could fall, the remaining three bullets split it into four more or less equal sections.

Rainbow Dash, showing no signs of her usual brag or enthusiasm for her own awesomeness, ejected the magazine, pumped the action to clear the chambered round, and pulled out a cleaning kit and oil from her subspace pocket.

"Wow, Dash," Fluttershy forced herself to say. "That's a really awesome gun."

"It's not the gun," Dash said, holding it out to Fluttershy to examine. "No sights, no tracking, just steel and bullets."

The more Fluttershy examined the weapon, the more impressed she was. "Dash... that really is awesome," she whispered.

"Eh," Rainbow Dash shrugged, retrieving the weapon and beginning the cleaning work. "Not worth it."

"Not worth what?"

"Not worth going through the Loop I picked it up in."

"Which Loop was that?"

Rainbow Dash set down the gun for a moment and pulled something else from her subspace pocket- a pair of sunglasses. The tiny lenses were tinted yellow.

"Trigun," she said, putting the glasses on, looking at the gun. "It was awesome at first, so long as I ignored the Loop memories. But then..." Shaking her head, she added, "Why doesn't anybody understand? When he says, 'Love and peace,' it's not a slogan or a greeting. It's an unanswered prayer."

131.6 (Evilhumour)

Shifu looked at his friend that he had gained throughout these Loops and smirked.

"It seems today, old friend, we shall learn who the true master is." Po, and the Furious Five stood behind him, proud and determined to answer this question once and for all.

"Indeed, Master Shifu." Master Splinter nodded his head, with his four sons off to the side, eyeing the Kung Fu Masters. "And what a better way to test this with our new students?" He smiled, stroking his beard, looking down at the sparing arena that had been reinforced beyond measure with magic, steel and other properties gained over the Loops to prevent the damages leaking outwards. Both Masters had agreed to the conclusion that with their current students, it would last for a good while before everything came crashing down.

"Indeed!" Master Shifu gave a faint smile, looking at his student with pride. "Master Derpy, the Kung Fu Master of the Drunken Fist/Hoof, are you ready?"

"Yes'm, Master Shifu!" The pony responded with a smile on her face up to the man that had trained her to use and hone her usual accidents into an actual form of martial arts that did give her \_some\_ form of better control. She looked at her fellow blond haired opponent.

"Bravo-san, are you ready?" Splinter looked down at his own student, wearing proper samurai armour and his sunglasses.

"Hai, sensei Splinter." He kept his right hand on his sword, looking at the wall-eyed mare in front of him. "You ready, sexy mama?" He flashed her one of his old foolish smiles, while keeping in a proper stance to not shame himself or his sensei.

Derpy found herself blushing at the compliment, but nodded her head and moved herself into a proper stance. "Yes, Johnny," She then slowly moved herself into a fighting stance of her Kung Fu style of Zui quan with her opponent drawing his blade slowly and taking a proper mein stance.

They both stood still, waiting for the only person that could judge this while staying safe to begin the match.

Ranma looked at the two, eyes darting back and forth, wondering how he got dragged into this once more before he steadied his nerves.

"Ok, I want a clean match; no Looping powers whatsoever, just your own skills. Understand?"

"Hai/yes." They both answered, with a small smile on their face growing.

"All right... begin!" With that, one of the original Loopers leaped into the corner.

The two of them didn't move, knowing the dangers of making the first move. Slowly, in a clockwise circle, they began to circle each other until they were a quarter from their starting positions. Without any form of warning, the samurai leaped forwards, going for a strike to his opponent's chest.

To which Derpy simply stepped to the side, smacking the blade out of the way with her left arm, pivoted on right foot and used her right hand to smack the helmet. It might sting, but it would really

disorientate her opponent. "Sorry." She said by reflex alone, as she began to strike the back of the other Looper while using her wings to dance around the man.

"It's nothing baby doll," he chuckled as he rolled off the attack, and letting his helmet fall to the floor. He knew that the woman in front of him wouldn't actually hit his unprotected head as it would be beneath any true martial artist. Swinging his blade around him while trying to sweep her legs, he found himself smiling. "I've had far worse in my own Loops. Heck, a lot of the women in the baseline hit a lot harder."

Derpy giggled at this, ducking under his blade stroke, some of her hair falling to the ground. "Oh really?" She asked as she delivered one of her stronger punches; enough to send a person through several wooden walls, not strong enough to level a mountain. He was sent back several feet, into the barrier with a grunt. "Oh my gosh, are you \_"

"Haha, that's what's it's like back home!" He laughed, shaking his head with joy, spinning his sword in his hands. "Come on, mama, let's fight!"

With that, the two titans clashed.

\* \* \*

><p>"So Derpy dear, tell me more of your daughters." Johnny Bravo smiled at his equally wounded friend as they sat in their lifeboat. It was one of many that darted the water after their fight had sunk New York City. Bravo had been a gentleman, helping her in first and pulling out a towel he always kept with him for her water clogged wings.<p>

Derpy blushed, drinking the mug of cocoa that she had brewed from her own subspace pocket with a bit of snort. "Well, my little muffin is just the best girl a mom could ask for and my star is already making a name for herself in most of the loops. She's normally a teacher, or a professor, or something along the lines."

Johnny nodded his head, looking at the woman sitting across of him with a gentle smirk. "You must be proud of her."

"Proud of both of them." She chuckled, one of her eyes focused on him. "And you?"

"I've got my mamma, and my friends back home." He gave a small sigh. "I acted like a real jerk in my baseline, hitting on anything with a pulse. Thankfully, I've stopped that and reserved that for true classy dames such as yourself." He gave her a wink, causing her to blush and giggle again.

"Oh stop, I'm sure you say that everypony you meet." She looked down at her mug.

"Nope, but I'm sure your husband tells you that every time you two wake up." He countered with a raised eyebrow.

"Actually, I don't know who he is," she sighed, looking at the floor of their lifeboat. "It was something that was lost in one of the

crashes." She sighed, placing her mug on the edge of the boat. "Most of the times, it's just me and my Muffin. Not many ponies \_really\_ want to be with a clumsy mare like me that causes so much destruction." She gave a little snuffle before she found herself wrapped into a tight hug.

"Now that ain't right." Johnny said smoothly, rubbing her back slowly. "You are one hell of a woman, great big beautiful eyes, two wonderful daughters, one gorgeous laugh and a personality worth fighting for." He lowered his sunglasses so she could see his own eyes. "If they can't handle that, then they don't know what they're passing up."

Derpy decided to act on an impulse and gave him a kiss. He returned the favour and it lasted a good twenty seconds before they broke it off. "Wow."

"That good Derpy?" Johnny asked as he pulled her into his side, wrapping an arm around her and letting his blanket cover the both of them.

"Better than most muffins," She said with a smile on her face, still blushing. With a yawn, she snuggled into his side as she began to doze off. "Thanks for the fight."

"Anytime Derpy baby." He gave her a kiss on the forehead as she giggled again before drifting off to sleep. "Anytime."

131.7 (Kris Overstreet)

><strong><br>... and the Rest Loop: Swarm of the Century, Stare Master, Green Isn't Your Color\*\*

\_(Note: the "and the Rest" Loop was a baseline Loop in which the Awake Loopers were Twilight Sparkle, Ivory Scroll, Zecora, Cheerilee, Gilda and Angel Bunny. Twilight had decided to "go through the motions" to rest from a trying Loop, and the other five took advantage.)\_

"Darn that rabbit!"

"There he goes! Get him!"

"Come back here with my accordion!"

Twilight Sparkle poked her head out of the library to see Angel Bunny hopping like mad along the Ponyville streets, towing a red wagon piled high with musical instruments behind him. Not too far behind followed a gathering mob of angry ponies.

What on Earth?

Twilight Sparkle teleported ahead of Angel, held up a hoof and said, "Angel, could you stop a moment and explain-"

Angel whooshed right past her.

"Over there!"

A moment later, the mob whooshed right OVER her.



Pushing herself up from the hard-packed dirt street, Twilight rubbed at some of the worse bruises. \_Right, \_she thought, \_time to explain to that rabbit that I am not Fluttershy. I don't care if he is Looping.\_

A second teleport landed Twilight in front of Angel, blocking his entry into Sugarcube Corner. "Angel! Explanation! Now!"

Before Angel could do more than roll his eyes, the door to Sugarcube Corner slammed open, pasting Twilight to the exterior wall behind it.

"Ear-flop, eye-flutter, knee-twitch!" Pinkie Pie shouted, one hoof still on the door handle. The mob froze and immediately ,and as one pony, took a careful step backwards away from Pinkie. Angel, being nobunny's fool, dashed into the bakery with his looted cargo.

"Anybody? Anybody?" Pinkie asked, looking up, down, at the mob, back at the door... with her own hoof on it. "Oopsie! I thiiiiink this one may have been my fault. Sorry!" She peeked around the door just in time to see Twilight peeling herself off the wall. "Sorry, Twilight!"

"That's... okay... Pinkie..." Still wobbly on her hooves, Twilight let Pinkie help her into the bake shop. The door closed to a universal sigh of relief from the mob... which, a couple of seconds later, turned into a universal cry of outrage as they realized the bunny had made his escape.

"You," Twilight said, stopping just short of a growl. "Explain now, and make it good."

Angel did a quick pantomime, which included bouncing up and making himself look as spherical and big-eyed adorable as possible, pointing frantically to Pinkie, and then miming a bunch of musical instruments being played by one pony.

"I don't get it," Twilight said.

Angel slapped his forehead and let the pads of his paw slide down his face in frustration.

"Wait a minute," Pinkie Pie said, suddenly as serious as non-Awake Pinkie ever got. "What have we got here? Harmonica? Accordion? Trombone? Banjo? Cymbals? Tuba? Recorder?" Her voice became more frantic until, at the bottom of Angel Bunny's wagon, she said with relief, "Whew! No maracas! I was afraid there'd be-"

Angel groaned loudly enough to be just barely audible, slapped his forehead, and turned for the door.

"Wait a minute," Twilight said. "These musical instruments..." She glanced at the calendar, opened her mouth, and then bit her lip to stop herself from mentioning the visit from Princess Celestia the day after tomorrow... which she wouldn't receive notice of for another hour or two. \_I completely lost track of the baseline! Stupid, stupid, stupid!\_ she thought to herself. \_Is there such a thing as Loop senility?\_

"This is what you need to play the Parasprite Polka!" Pinkie Pie said. "I guess I could do without the maracas, if the parasprites aren't too hungry. Have you seen any parasprites, Angel?"

Angel nodded frantically, pointing back out the door, doing a rapid pantomime that ended with his ears flopped in front of his face like the mane of his owner.

"Fluttershy found one?" Pinkie asked.

Angel nodded frantically.

"Well, you came to the right pony, Angel!" Pinkie Pie nodded. "Help me on with the tuba! Twilight, could you go explain to those folks outside that this is a parasprite emergency?"

"Er... yes, sure," Twilight shrugged. "I'll take care of it."

That evening in Fluttershy's cottage, after the handful of parasprites were led back to the Everfree Forest and seen on their way, Twilight and Pinkie explained things to Fluttershy, who wasn't that much less upset than the owners of all the musical instruments Angel had swiped. "And then when I took the flyswatter from him he pulled out a flamethrower!" she said. "The poor little creature had to hide in my mane, it was that frightened. And now I hear he's been stealing things? Angel, you have been a naughty, naughty bunny!"

"No way, Fluttershy!" Pinkie Pie said, holding up a hoof in objection. "Angel did all of Ponyville a huge favor! How many were there at first, one?"

"Why, er, yes," Fluttershy said, "but it ate some apples, and some sandwiches, and some tea-cakes, and suddenly there were three of them, and-"

"And before long there would have been thousands of them!" Pinkie continued. "My Granny Pie told me all about parasprites! They'll eat a town to the ground if you let 'em! And they would have started with your cottage and every scrap of food in it!"

"Pinkie speaks the truth, and nothing but," a voice came from the door. Zecora entered, taking a seat next to the other ponies and Angel. "That is why I have left my hut. I wished to deal with the threat in a timely way," she winked at Twilight at the word, "only to find Angel Bunny has saved the day."

Fluttershy looked at the other ponies. "Is this true? Twilight?"

"Well," Twilight said, having had a lot of practice in this sort of lie when she didn't feel like explaining the Loops, "I read about parasprites in Canterlot. I always thought they were a silly myth, but when Angel Bunny rounded up those instruments, I knew it was serious." Please don't examine this too closely, Fluttershy...

"Oh." She turned her full attention to Angel Bunny. "I'm sorry, little Angel. You were doing a good thing after all, and I didn't realize it."

Angel shrugged indifference.

"But tomorrow you're going to go to all those ponies who you stole from and apologize," she added firmly. "They would have loaned you those instruments if you'd asked nicely."

Angel's face went through the contortions of disbelief, frustration, and finally resigned acceptance. He nodded agreement.

Twilight, who'd routinely seen the rabbit test how far he could push his caretaker, made a mental note.

\* \* \*

><p>The cockatrice blinked at the figure in front of it. Whatever it was, it wore black robes and carried a red glowing thing in its paw. This didn't concern the monster, since very little bothered a creature which could petrify its prey at will in a matter of seconds.<p>

But its spell required eye contact... and the robed figure wore a mask that completely concealed its face. Only the long white ears poking out the top of its hood gave a hint to the little creature's identity.

And then the little robed thing took a step forward, and the cockatrice felt its presence grow, as if it were twice as tall as the chicken-snake-thing, rather than almost vice-versa.

Without eyes the mask still bore its own gaze down (up) at the cockatrice. Without words, without sounds, using nothing but menace, the little thing communicated the idea that, as frightening as hydras, timberwolves, cragodiles, chimaeras, and other denizens of Equestrian wild spaces could be, when it came to absolute terror nothing, absolutely nothing, had a hope of beating the little creature with the blood-red ray of light in its paw.

You have a choice, the faceless gaze replied. Challenge and defeat me, or get out of town.

And I don't even have to SEE you to beat you. That's how dangerous I am. What have you got?

Well? What have you got, punk?

The cockatrice did a quick inventory. Petrification magic which wouldn't work... a poison bite it likely would never get close enough to apply... and the ability, in dim light and partly hidden in bushes, to look like a common chicken.

Did it have anything else? No... no...

...wait, yes, yes the cockatrice did have something else. It had a pressing engagement elsewhere. Any elsewhere.

With a hiss and a cackle of fright, the monster scuttered off into the depths of the Everfree.

"But we gotta go into th' Everfree! Elizabeak's tracks lead this way!"

The robed figure quickly extinguished its lightsaber and put away the robes and mask. Any moment now a stupid, wilful chicken would pass this way...

\* \* \*

><p>"... an' just as we was about ta go inta th' forest, out comes Angel Bunny leadin' Elizabeak behind him!"<p>

"Oh, did you do that? Good bunny!" Fluttershy hugged the rabbit warmly. "But you shouldn't have gone in either! The Everfree Forest is a very dangerous place for a defenseless little bunny like you! I'm so glad you didn't get hurt!"

Twilight, who had come to check on Fluttershy's adventures in fillysitting, watched Angel accept the mild scolding and excessive babying in good humor, and took another mental note.

\* \* \*

><p>"Flootershy! It is time to make... der magics!"<p>

Before the reluctant pegasus could step in front of the camera, a little white figure in a grey pinstripe suit stepped between Fluttershy and Photo Finish, holding up one paw in negation.

"Vot is zis?" Photo Finish looked down at Angel Bunny, who held up a business card and presented it to her. "\_Roar, Magnet and Angel, Everfree Talent Management.\_ You mean to zay... you are zee agent for Flootershy?"

Angel nodded once, firmly, decisively.

"Er, Angel Bunny, what are you-"

"Yes! Zis is good!" Photo Finish nodded. "Every great talent needs der business ponies to take care of der ticky-tacky money questions so notting gets in der vay of... der magics!" The glasses scanned up and down the bunny and added, "And der business pony with zuch a sharp suit- it is good!"

"I made it for him," Rarity said, fanning the last tiny ember of hope for her own breakout with Photo Finish.

Not noticing, Equestria's most famous photographer clapped her forehooves together. Out of nowhere came a tall stallion with a neatly trimmed beard and a suit nearly as sharp as Angel's. "Zis is my business manager!" she said. "You two, make with zer talking. And Flootershy and I, we vill make... zer magics!"

Photo Finish's manager felt a trickle of sweat under his mane as he noticed the smirk on the rabbit's face.

\* \* \*

><p>"I can't believe a rabbit who can't talk can negotiate that well!" Photo Finish's manager gasped. He accepted a third mug of coffee from Twilight before continuing, "I've been in this business twenty years, and he came up with clauses and found legal points even

I'd never heard of! That rabbit is vicious!"<p>

"You're not the first one to say that," Twilight smiled. "But did you get where you wanted to go?"

"Not where I wanted to go, no," the manager said. "But Miss Finish can live with this." He pointed to the very, very thick contract in front of him. "Fluttershy gets a cut of the gross on everything, invested in a blind trust, and retains ownership of her likeness. Photo Finish's usual Now-I-Go clause got duplicated for Fluttershy- I admit I hope I get to see Fluttershy use it on her. Photo Finish still gets the money she needs to make, 'der magics,'" he finished with his hooves doing air-quotes. "Now I just have to catch up with them long enough to get their signatures. Unfortunately the train for Canterlot doesn't leave until the morning."

After a bit more conversation Twilight escorted the manager out the door before turning to face Angel, who lay back on a cushion with the knot of his tie loosened. The carrot in his teeth jutted up in at the optimal angle for smug.

"I can't believe I haven't noticed it before," Twilight said. "You're protecting her, aren't you?" She couldn't help smirking as the carrot dropped from his mouth. She pulled a datapad out of her pocket and floated it over to him in her magic. "No pantomime. Tell me."

Angel looked at the device, pushed a few spots on its screen, and then began typing like mad until, satisfied, he raised it up for Twilight to read.

\_I'm almost never Awake unless Fluttershy is too. When Awake she can take care of herself. But in baseline she's a doormat. She needs watching over. So I take care of her, just like she takes care of the dumber animals here. I'm just protecting the sweet situation I've landed here. That's all there is to it.\_

After reading, Twilight raised an eyebrow. "All there is to it? Really? Or does it have something to do with the fact that Fluttershy's the only person in this Loop who doesn't hate or fear you?"

When Twilight lowered the pad to him again, he merely pointed to the last sentence of his previous statement, then folded his forepaws.

"But it's more than just taking care of yourself," Twilight continued. "I've seen you work hard just to keep Fluttershy from embarrassing herself. Or to help her around the house when things are really bad. A lot of the time you act like a rotten, selfish pet... but not always."

Angel squirmed, frowned, then waved for the return of the datapad. After a bit more paw-pounding on the touchscreen he handed back the message:

\_I want your Pinkie Promise that you will tell nobody about this. Absolutely nobody, Looping or not. Not a soul, ever.\_

Just as Twilight finished reading, Angel jumped up and snatched back the pad long enough to add:

\_And I still admit nothing.\_

Twilight smirked. "Of course I won't tell anybody," she said. "Who would believe me?"

Angel tapped the screen once, and the words PINKIE PROMISE filled the datapad from edge to edge.

Twilight heard a rustling behind her, and turned to see Pinkie Pie rising up from a potted plant, holding a sign over her head that said: FOREVER.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

131.1: Karry on Oke.

>131.2: Malicious Looping Entity zero, Fluttershy one.<br>131.3: It's going to take a whole Week to sort this out.

>131.4: Where the heck did she get THAT keyblade? (Is what everyone else says.)<br>131.5: Some loops really get you down.

>131.6: I don't know either.<br>131.7: He will deny all knowledge.

## 138. Chapter 138

### 132.1 (ScyBlade)

"Lady Twilight!"

The unicorn (usually) in question turned around. \_Hmm, so another DMC fused loop, with Dante being one of the Sons of Scorpanâ€|\_

"Good Morning, Prince Vergil." \_Wait, what? Scorpan usually isn't royalty when this happens...\_

"Good Morning to you, Lady Twilight. I Awoke last night feeling a bit Loopy. I felt that helping you with the task Celestia gave you would Anchor me."

Twilight blinked at that. "We'll talk more after taking care of a few things."

\* \* \*

><p>Later, at THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE (Golden Oaks Library, after dealing with a baseline checklist and party)<p>

"I had heard that Dante was hoping you start looping. Nice to know you did. I'm still waiting on my parents... Oops." Twilight blushed as she winced.

"A non-issue. We had dealt with it in our own ways. Besides, Sparda isn't dead, merely banished. One day we might get him back. So about Nightmare Moon?"

Twilight took a moment to think about this. "Well, eating her magic is a bad idea. The curse is poisonous even to Tirek, at least during

DMC fused loops. He just makes sure to have absorbed enough magic that it just gives him indigestion at worst. Even if she was awake, draining Nyx wouldn't help. For some reason, only Nightmare Moon's magic is poisonous. And she always warns Dante and Nero when either fight her. Nero's Devil Bringer shreds the curse like a hot knife through butter though."

Vergil grinned. "I have an idea of why. And I have a work around." Vergil parsed his memories. They confirmed what she said, Scorpan's kind could drain magic from other magical creatures to grow in power. Including his brother Tirek. But the power could also be beaten out of them. Literally.

"I'm still going to gather the Elements of Harmony, just in case."

Vergil could only nod at that. With the clown, he didn't have any backup plan, and look at how that turned out. And there had been no plan at all for Mundus. The less said about the results, the better.

"Hmm."

"Yes, Lady Twilight?"

"I think I figured out why you're royalty this loop. You're replacing Prince Blueblood."

Vergil responded by pulling out the book Dante had given him and looking up information on this 'Blue Blood'. He would be going by his memories for this Loop, but knowledge about who you're replacing would be a good thing to have.

\* \* \*

><p>"You are Nightmare Moon, the cursed form of Princess Luna, Princess Celestia's Beloved Little Sister."<p>

"Hmmpf, so only one of Scorpan's progeny remembered me. And there's no way Celestia loved me. Or cared at all."

Vergil only stared into her eyes. He saw that she was lying. Or was trying to convince her host of what she said.

"No matter. The Night, SHALL LAST... FOREVER! And there's nothing you can do. Scorpan was deeply poisoned when he tried to drain my magic. You'll do no better."

"We'll see." For a moment, Vergil eyes glowed darkly, and a symbol appeared on his back. One Shadow Trick(1) later, and he was within arm's reach of Nightmare Moon.

"What!? Let go immediately. Are you not concerned for your own health?"

\_So that's why he wasn't concerned. He has Dream Eater Powers.\_  
"Okay, Girls. Get them ready. If she gets free, Harmonize and blast her."

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, not our best record, but no property damage at all. Always a plus. Wish I had thought about Dream Eaters before."<p>

"Normal Dream Eaters probably aren't a good idea. That curse might affect them as well."

"Now then, how about we discuss the other Villains around here. We know Discord can be drained, though how strong you have to be before you can do so is untested. Dante just out-hams him into submission."

\* \* \*

><p>AN: 1) A Darkness powered upgrade to Dark Slayer Style's Air Trick. Better range, and longer invincibility frames.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>132.2 (Dalxein)<p>

"Elsa!" The small voice called. "Elsa!"

She grumbled in her sleep, curled deeper into her bedsheets, and out of habit replied, "Go away, Anna."

"Do you wanna have a party?"

Elsa turned over and cracked open one bright blue eye. "Oh. Hi Pinkie."

The pretty pink princess grinned. "So do ya?"

The older sister rolled back over in bed. "Maybe later."

A small snuffle from behind her. "It doesn't have to be a party..."

"By all means have your party, I'll even attend. Just as long as it happens \_in a few hours\_. Now let me sleep!"

"YAY!" And so the little princess bounced her way to the door and into the hall. A moment later her head popped back in. "And then we can build a snowmare!"

\* \* \*

><p>132.3 (Gym Quirk)<p>

Sunset Shimmer had a problem when it came to baseline loops.

She didn't much like playing the bad guy.

Actually, she hated and feared playing the bad guy. One time as a raging she-demon hypnotizing an army of teenage zombies (to coin a phrase) was more than enough.

Unfortunately, if she wanted to maintain a baseline run (for the sake of an experiment or prank), it meant making things unpleasant for her unawake CHS friends until Twilight could arrive to "fix" the



situation - a certain level of adversity was necessary if the proper bonds of friendship were to form. She found it very uncomfortable, but she could manage if she didn't have to do it too often.

The advent of the Canterlot High Musical Showcase made the demand for near-baseline loops (to play with the Dazzlings) much greater. It also added a requirement for a fairly large release of equestrian magic and a moderately eye-catching light show to draw the attention of their targets.

And so began "Project False Cacophony" to provide a means by which Sunset could simulate the events necessary to properly summon the equestrian exiles without inducing unpleasant flashbacks or guilt trips.

\* \* \*

><p>"Trixie?"<p>

"Yes, Sunset?"

"Here's my report on your Mk. I Magic Dispersal Device. The summary is essentially: A keg of liquid rainbow with a half-stick of dynamite did more property damage than I did in the baseline. Also, most of the residual magic dissipated after the next rainstorm. On the plus side, the light show was quite spectacular."

"Trixie sees. Well, it was just a first attempt after all..."

\* \* \*

><p>"I appreciate the thought, Berry, but it's a high school dance. Aside from the faculty, nobody's old enough to drink alcohol."<p>

"Maybe I should get with Zecora and see about something you could add to the punch?"

"I'm not sure if the magic equivalent of drugging my friends, or the rest of the school for that matter, is a direction I want to take this..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight, I really don't know if I can continue to use Snips and Snails as my minions. Would you mind if I tried different people? Maybe co-opt Trixie's crew?"<p>

"You'll probably have to ask her, just to be safe. There's also Photo Finish and her posse."

"I'm not sure. They have some ties to Rarity..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Trixie. Two kegs of liquid rainbow bound with five meters of det-cord is <em>not<em> an improvement over last time!"

"Trixie is sorry. That was a leftover from an old loop when Trixie was working with Rainbow Dash on pyrotechnics displays."

\* \* \*

><p>"Glad I caught you, Zecora. I'm afraid that the poison-joke based magic was just too unpredictable for my needs. But please keep the recipe and the blueprints. I have a few ideas about using it during the Battle of the Bands..." <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I can see that you've been consulting with Trixie, Apple Bloom, but a holographic light show, no matter how striking, is only a small part..."<p>

"Sweetie Belle's workin' with Rarity on the magic side of this, Sunset. I just wanted to see if ya liked the display."

"Oh. Sorry. Looks great."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight and Sunset looked at the small collection of gadgets, devices, and charms, then at the ponies who had worked on them.<p>

"Okay. Collectively, these should do the job, but it's just a bit awkward to have them separated out like this," said the princess. "Sweetie, Vinyl, using music as a magic dispersal medium appeals to my sense of irony, and it probably won't be that difficult to put one of these discs on the playlist at the Fall Formal. I still don't understand how you got it to work with mundane playback equipment, but I can't dispute the test results."

"The demonic transformation illusion is a little too realistic for my comfort," admitted Sunset, "and I'm really uneasy with the mild psionic 'push' parts of it, but I guess it will have to do until I can think of a substitute that still gets the girls to bond properly. Still, at least I won't have to do much property damage, so good work, Apple Bloom and Diamond."

"Now, as far as the light show goes, we have no complaints beyond the need to anchor the spells to the portal. So thank you, Luna and Trixie," concluded Twilight. "Thank you, everypony for all your hard work."

She shared a look with Sunset. "Any ideas about what to do for the first trial run?"

The orange unicorn looked crestfallen. "I've been spending so many loops trying to get this to work...I don't have any idea how I want to use it."

"What do you think of applying Countess Cordelia's Dictum?"

" 'Let's see what happens'? Well, it does have the advantage of spontaneity..."

\* \* \*

><p>132.4 (fractalman)<p>

Addendum to the Faux-Culture Dalek incident (130.8)

\* \* \*

><p>Most of the loopers left the throne room to do their own thing (Rarity went off to test a dress made out of explosions), but Twilight stayed behind.<p>

"Third...It's hegemonizing, not homogenizing."

The Dalek stopped shooting. "WHILE YOU ARE CORRECT THAT I AM NOT WITH THE CULTURE, LET ME BE CLEAR: WHAT I DETECTED WAS IN FACT A HOMOGENIZING SWARM, NOT A HEGEMONIZING SWARM. EXTERMINATE!"

Twilight blinked. "O...K then."

\* \* \*

><p>132.5 (fractalman)<p>

Originally, Twilight had planned to play things baseline until Sombra showed up. However, looking at the holders for the elements, she was starting to reconsider.

Six clusters of fake trees, with six fake trees in each cluster, with six limbs on each tree, with 6 branches on each limb, and 6 elements on each branch.

>7776 elements. Assuming one hidden element, that would be 7777 elements in all.<p>

"Buck this. I'm going to beat Nightmare Moon with a pie at sufficient velocity."

\* \* \*

><p>"Thank you, Twilight, for rescuing my sister from the Nightmare forces."<p>

"Your welcome Celestia. By the way, I believe I know how to get the Elements to work again, but I'll need you to get a bunch of ponies to line up...say, ten-thousand or so. "

Celestia nodded infinitesimally. "I'll see to it. "

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight smashed the elements. All 7776 of them.<p>

"\*\*Alright everypony! Walk through the shards! Don't be alarmed if you walk out with a necklace.\*\*"

\* \* \*

><p>Discord was turning ever so slowly back into stone.<p>

Twilight rambled on. "Honestly loyal loyally generous honesty, honestly loyal loyally generous generosity, honestly loyal loyally generous kindness..."

Discord groaned. "This is more boring than being a statue. Would you please hurry it up?"

"Honestly loyal loyally generous Magic, Honestly loyal loyally kind honesty..."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight chucked first one necklace into space, and then another, then another...<p>

"\*\*Twilight Sparkle!\*\*" boomed Celestia. "\*\*What in Equestria are you doing with the Elements!?!\*\*"

"Working on my juggling! Oh don't look at me like that, I can't think of anything else to do with them!"

Celestia's jaw opened and closed for almost half a minute.

\* \* \*

><p>132.6 (Evilhumour and Wheeness)<p>

Sunset Shimmer whistled as she walked through the hallways of Canterlot High. This seemed like a pretty baseline loop, and she had played it as such. Minus the whole, steal the Element of Magic thing. She hadn't returned to Equestria this loop, mainly to relax. That's when she heard him.

"OY'! NO RUNNIN' IN THE HALLS!" a loud voice bellowed with a thick Scottish accent.

Sunset jumped at turned to see a tall, balding, muscular man with a red mustache and ponytail, bushy eyebrows, and a prosthetic left leg. He was wearing a suit that he looked really uncomfortable in, evidenced by his constant grumbling and loosening of the collar. She raised an eyebrow. Sunset had sent out a Ping when she Woke up, and had gotten no reply. Maybe this guy was new? She decided to introduce herself.

"Um hello." She blinked at hulking man who was eying her before turning his head to yell at an unawake Vinyl that was headbanging her way through the hallway.

"OY! I SAID NO RUNNIN' IN THE HALLS LASS AND I'VE TOLD YE TO TAKE OFF THOSE DAMNABLE HEADPHONES!" His shout was loud enough to get through to the DJ, causing her to jump in spot. With surprising speed, he grabbed from her head and stuffed them into his pouch. "YE BE GETTING BACK AFTERWARDS, LITTLE LADY!" He continued to shout, before breaking out into what seemed like a smile. "Now get along Vinyl, before I mark ye absent and give ye detention! Jack's running it this time and you know how he likes to make you lasses and laddies sweat!" He frowned as he watched her run off, rubbing his head before looking at the sole remaining student in the hallway.

With a start, Sunset's Loop memories came in. She recognized who this Jack was, and this must mean... "Look, I know this will sound weird sir, but has time for you been repeating and only now you find yourself in a different world?"

With his frown growing, he leaned down and looked at her right in the eyes.

"And what do ye have to say about all this, miss Shimmers?"

"Trust me, it will take a while but I am telling the truth, we can check with Jack if you want."

"I cann't do that lassie, I've got classes right now and you're LATE!" He shouted, causing her hair to fly backwards. He then laughed a horrid laugh, shaking his head. "Afterwards, we'll get this sorted out. Now get a move on!"

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

It seems like a while since I've written in this journal. I suppose it was due to the fact that my last Loop had me in the Street Fighter Loop.

It started with me in high school, where I met the Anchor, Sakura Kasugano(no connection to THAT Sakura). I decided to challenge her to a fistfight, and got my flank handed to me. I guess I've gotten rusty in hand to hand combat. Sakura suggested I travel the world and learn from the best fighters to harness my skills.

Not a bad idea. I did need a refresher, and some new tricks'd wouldn't hurt either.

Many of the well-known fighters were Awake for this Loop. I largely spent my time learning new fighting styles from these legends, fighting Shadaloo, and hearing stories of these heroes' time as Loopers as I walked the earth.

As I traveled the world during this Loop, I had the opportunity to see interesting things. The moves I had learned from other martial arts legends among the Loopers proved of good use when added to what I learned here. Being able to do moves like the Shoryuken is awesome.

Still couldn't win any major tournaments though; had to hold back a lot so no one got killed. Hard to believe I have that kind of power now, and yet I still fear the temptation of becoming an Alicorn.

Experience is a powerful thing, indeed. You can be as strong as possible, yet still lose to someone more experienced. I learned that lesson many times here.

I have learned a lot of new moves here, and made some new friends. The teachers I had helped me learn much about fighting, but they all have admitted they are wimps compared to other, more experienced Loopers. That, in of itself, is saying something, and only adds to my thoughts on how experience can best stronger opponents.

Maybe, when I get back home, I can teach some of the life lessons I have learned to others in the world beyond the mirror. My wanderings

have shown me much.

It'll be nice to show what I've learned..abilities and life lessons both.

Better than being a jerk like I once was...

\* \* \*

><p>132.7 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight sighed.

Another loop, another time Tirek destroyed her house.

At least she would get her crystal house as soon as the  
bo-

"\_MWAHHHAHA, NOW THAT I HAVE CONTROL OF THIS MYSTICAL BOX OF  
CONTAINMENT, I THE BOX PONY, WILL NOW CONTROL YOU ALL!\_" A pale earth  
pony shouted, somehow flying above the crowd of stunned ponies.

"The Tree?" Twilight asked with disbelief. Never had she lost \_two\_  
houses this quick!

"Oh sorry Twilight!" A black blur shouted, somehow defying gravity  
too as went to tackle the thief. "I'll take care of this joker in a  
moment, I swear!"

"Oh no." The pale pony with a cardboard box cutie mark whimpered,  
holding the box that contained her crystal treehouse close to his  
chest. "\_I AM THE BOX PONY, BEWARE!\_" He shouted before vanishing mid  
air with the young sounding blur.

Twilight blinked in disbelief, as her mind was just replaying the  
fact she had been rendered homeless twice in the last five  
seconds.

"What the barking tree sap just happened here?!"

\* \* \*

><p>132.8 (elmagnifico)<p>

"Ha! We're back, fillies and colts, to the Equestria Games. I'm Flim,  
he's Flam, and we're the World Famous Flim-Flam Brothers, Aviation  
Entrepreneurs and Sports Commentators Nonpareil."

"Right you are my clean-shaven sibling. For those of you who are just  
joining us, we're done covering the airborne speed trials, shifting  
over to the back end of an intriguing new event, made possible by the  
rash of strange and empowering goings-on in recent times: The Alicorn  
Toss."

"Indeed, dear brother of mine, it's been an interesting time. For  
instance, judging today we have simulacra of three of Equestria's  
founders."

"Honored sages indeed. And probably the only ponies that could  
possibly give impartial judging to this event."

"The rules are simple: No magic, no flight, just sheer muscle and aerodynamic posing. The competition takes place in three distinct rounds, Raw Distance, Airborn Targets, and Freestyle."

"Raw distance and airborn targets sound self-explanatory, brother of mine, but what on Celestia's green land is Freestyle Alicorn Toss?"

"That's where the teams show off their artistic creativity with music, synchronized with the windup. Think figure skating with one big jump at the end."

"I see. Interesting fact, according to my sheet here the Griffon Lands has put forward a team for this event."

"By your moustache, how did they do that? Their kind can't even become alicorns."

"After some of the things we've seen on the news lately, don't count it out, brother of mine. No, the griffons apparently found an alicorn willing to be flung by their star athlete, Gilda."

"And who's the lucky pony there?"

"Not a pony, actually, a zebra named Zecora, who until recently was living in the Everfree Forest, and apparently has a horn and wings now."

"How does that even work, Flam?"

"I don't know Flim, but it apparently does work, and quite well, as the judges gave them a solid 12 last round in the Freestyle, putting them in fourth place, ahead of the Everfree Forest's mother-son team of Fluttershy thrown by Lemon Rush, and just one point behind the representatives from Cloudsdale, Rainbow Dash and Scootaloo."

"Well, we're here for the final round today, so this round of Raw Distance is what will decide who will go home the first Equestrian Champion Alicorn Toss Team. Up next, we have what is perhaps the most experienced duo for this unique sport on the field. For the Crystal Empire, it's Prince-Consort Shining Armor and Princess Cadence."

"Listen to the roar of that crowd, dear brother. After their stellar performance last year in the defeat of King Sombra, these two are the favorite to take home the gold, and it doesn't hurt that they're the home team."

"Right you are, brother. Here we see the classic windup. Look at that form. Our experts tell me this is Tossing at its finest."

"Aaand there's the release!"

"Uh-oh, trouble."

"Trouble indeed, brother. It appears a bad patch of gravel in the windup path has thrown off the Prince-Consort's aim. Her Majesty is adjusting her wings to compensate, but there's only so much repositioning the thrown alicorn is allowed to do before they get

docked points."

"Sad to say that them's the breaks, Flam. It looks like this will be a record short throw for the home team."

"Here come the field judges."

"While we wait for them to finish measuring, I'd just like to point out that notably absent today is the team representing Appleoosa."

"Indeed, brother of mine. According to this report, after some deliberation, the judges ruled that Macintosh's use of clearly artificially-induced super strength to throw his sister Applejack was grounds for disqualification, despite testimony that, and I quote, 'It ain't magic.'"

"And it's just shy of the sixty seven mark, putting them in eighth place, just behind our own princesses Celestia and Luna out of Canterlot."

"Well, at least they came in ahead of the Republic of Libraria, represented by Nyx and Twilight Sparkle. Losing to your younger sister is never fun."

"Yeah, you'd know about that, wouldn't you."

"Shut it, dear brother."

"Getting back to the topic at hoof, with the final throw in the books it looks like the medalists for the first ever Alicorn Toss will be Rainbow Dash and Scootaloo for Cloudsdale with bronze, Spike and Rarity Belle of Ponyville taking silver, and representing the Southern Badlands, Discord and Berry Punch as the world-champions and gold medalists."

"They really will give a horn and wings to just about anypony these days, won't they."

"Pre-tty much."

"Well friends, it's happened again, you've wasted a perfectly good hour listening to sports talk. Once again I'm Flim, he's Flam, we're the world famous Flim Flam Brothers, Shameless Advertisers of our Aeronautics Firm, and Sports Commentators Nonpareil. Before we go, a quick shout-out to the staff. Our chauffeur from the Griffon Lands is Picov Andropov, and our public relations coordinator is Heywood Yabuzzoff."

"Our optometric specialists are provided by C. F. Eye Care, our canid producer is Dug the subway fugitive, not a slave to fashion, bongo boy Berhound, and our chief counsel from the sheep-run law firm of Dewey, Cheetham, & Howe is Ewe Louis Dewey, known to pigeons that recently lost one of their favorite locations to commune with nature in the Canterlot Gardens to the gold medal Alicorn Toss as Ewey Louie Dewey. Oh, and one last thing: If you happen to buy one of our master-crafted aircraft, don't fly like my brother."

"And don't fly like my brother! See you tomorrow, sportsfans!"



\* \* \*

><p>132.9 (Gym Quirk)<p>

"I'm starting to think she's not coming," lamented Rainbow Dash as she sat propped up against the base of the Canterlot Wondercolt statue.

And just as in countless other iterations, the portal chose that moment to disgorge Spike and Twilight Sparkle to sprawl nearby.

Sunset Shimmer took the moment the six were engaged in their group hug to examine the slip of paper the princess had passed her when she was helped to her feet.

\_Element trial is a go.\_

The fiery-haired former pony wasn't sure if she was more excited or worried about the prospect.

\* \* \*

><p>While she waited for their first opportunity to confront the Dazzlings at the pre-battle get-together, Sunset Shimmer thought back to the earlier loop when the idea had been brought up.<p>

"You've got a bunch of spare Element sets in your pocket, right?" she had asked the Anchor. "Other than my disastrous attempt in the baseline, have you tried using them at Canterlot High?"

"Not really. Before you started looping, I'd planned on trying the full set against you." Twilight gave an apologetic smile at Sunset's wince. "But the loop was twisted into a strange 'Independence Day' fusion before the Fall Formal, so we all had other things to worry about."

"Huh. Were you waiting for everypony to be Awake for that, or did you plan on seeing what happened if you gave the Elements to the baseline counterparts?"

"The second. It would reduce the variables created by out-of-loop abilities sneaking in. I'd also spent a few loops training myself to stick to baseline power levels by way of preparation. It's harder than it sounds."

"I can imagine."

"So yeah. Thanks for reminding me about the experiment. I take it you have the Dazzlings in mind as test subjects?"

"All in the furtherance of magical research, of course." Sunset essayed a mad scientist leer.

"Of course." Twilight's return grin was more unsettling; she'd had much more practice.

There was a thoughtful companionable silence.

"Are you sure you don't want to participate more directly, Sunset?"

asked Twilight. "I'm sure you could handle Loyalty or Honesty if you wanted."

"I still have occasional nightmares about what happened in the baseline. I'm okay with playing with the Rainbooms; music magic is one or two steps removed from invoking the actual elements. But I still don't know if I'm ready for the real thing yet."

"Okay. I understand. Even though I think you're ready, it's entirely your choice. I won't push."

"Thanks, Twilight. If you want to try this again, maybe I'll join in, but not the first time. I'll be satisfied to just watch the light show."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight remained huddled with her friends at the snack table and distributed five bejeweled golden necklaces from her subspace pocket (via her bookbag). Sunset stood slightly apart to keep an eye out for their adversaries.<p>

"Yes, Rarity, they're quite garish, but this is the form they take right now," she preempted the fashionista. "In theory, it's possible to remount the jewels in different settings, but we don't have the time..."

"Mine is fine the way it is..." offered Fluttershy.

"Hey! I think mine's cool!" put in Rainbow Dash.

"They're not as heavy as they look," observed Applejack.

"Magic," suggested Pinkie Pie.

A familiar five-note motif whistled by Sunset Shimmer brought their attention to the gymnasium doors.

\_Time to see how this works\_, thought Twilight.

\* \* \*

><p>Adagio Dazzle could feel the magical potential in the gym as she and her compatriots strode in. The place fairly crackled with familiar energy.<p>

She made an offhand remark about the tension in the room, which set Sonata and Aria off on an idiotic tangent about fruit punch. \_By Discord's beard, even those two should be able to sense the magic here\_, she fumed to herself. She scanned her surroundings and felt her attention drawn to the seven girls standing near the snack table. \_There. There's a concentrated source of Equestrian Magic.\_

She wondered in passing how she could have missed it earlier.

Maybe it was the new lavender-hued member of the group. She hadn't been with the other six when they'd started their campaign in the cafeteria.

The siren's gaze was attracted by the glint of gold and jewels in

their hands. Her eyes widened. \_No way. Those can't be...\_

There had been garbled accounts of what had happened when Sunset Shimmer got ahold of a single Element of Harmony. Unless she was very mistaken there were now five...No six. A golden tiara topped with a star-shaped gem had been produced.

She hummed quietly to herself, sending an exploratory tendril of magic to see if she could somehow tap into that power.

No. She couldn't make a direct connection; the magic of equestrian harmony was not compatible with the siren's conflict-based enchantments.

But the overall ambient magical levels were increasing as a result of their presence. That, she could draw upon. She spread the increased flow to her companions, who suddenly stopped their bickering to join her in looking at the Rainbooms.

While Sunset Shimmer had moved a short distance away from the group, the remaining six had donned their jeweled accessories and undergone visible transformations. All had grown equine ears and longer hair that simulated equestrian tails. Three, including the new one now wearing the tiara, had pegasus-like wings.

The new girl looked at the sirens with an almost pitying look. Despite her apparent youth, she spoke with the authority and confidence of an alicorn princess of old. "You sought to create dissension and strife among the students of this school so you could use it to feed your desire for power. I'm afraid that we cannot allow you to continue." The six joined hands and created a rainbow wavefront that raced across the gymnasium, disrupting the hyper-competitiveness spell.

A low murmur spread around the no-longer enchanted students and faculty as some sense of what had happened started to dawn.

\_No\_, thought Adagio with a mental snarl. \_We will not be thwarted so easily.\_ She collected the sudden spike of hostility from the crowd along with all the ambient magic she could and focused it into a powerful note. Aria and Sonata followed suit, weaving their voices into an enthralling harmony.

\* \* \*

><p>Spike watched the magical contest with very mild concern.<p>

He wasn't worried about the ultimate outcome. If worst came to worst, either he, Twilight, or Sunset could brute-force their way to a victory without breaking stride.

But this was supposed to be a test of the Elements of Harmony in this world.

When he saw the Dazzlings start to manifest their own quasi-equine features, he decided to go with the no-magic contingency plan. \_I hope Sunset won't be upset that I borrowed her shtick...\_

When an operatically-trained dog howls at just the right frequency with a specific set of harmonics, not even a siren's song is immune

to the effect.

He had just enough time to see the Dazzlings wince and shake their heads painfully before Twilight and her friends, now gently levitating, unleashed their own brand of harmony.

And the world went polychromatic.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, that was perhaps just a bit excessive..." murmured Rarity as the tremendous wash of magic subsided.<p>

"Ow...my head..." groaned Rainbow Dash, looking around. She stopped and stared at Applejack. "Um...AJ? You've got wings now."

"I what?" asked the groggy Applejack.

"So do you, Rarity! And a cute little horn too!" burbled Pinkie.

Twilight got woozily to her knees and looked at her friends. In addition to the expected equine ears, each now had a pair of wings and a short two-inch spiral-patterned nub of a horn in the middle of their foreheads. She reached up a tentative hand to find that she too appeared to be a human-alicorn hybrid. A nervous glance behind her resulted in a faint sigh of relief. No actual tail; just the extended-length ponytail, complete with Rainbow Power streaks.

\_That element set was collected after my friends had Ascended. Did they somehow "remember" this, or is this just the result of being at ground zero of a major magic overload...?\_ She could vaguely recall the rainbow double-helix reaching the gym's ceiling and rebounding, creating a splash effect when it returned to the floor.

"Um, Twilight?" said a dazed-sounding Sunset. "It's not just you guys." She had picked up the ears and extra hair of her baseline ponified self along with a horn.

"Looks like the entire school got hit," rumbled a baritone voice. Twilight turned to see a seven-foot long purple and green dragon.

Spike gestured around the gym. Every student and teacher appeared to be sporting equine ears and a bit more hair than before. There was also a scattering of wings. The number of hands reaching to explore foreheads suggested some horns as well. On the far side of the room, Luna and Celestia stared confusedly at the former's horn and the latter's wings.

Apple Bloom reached up to feel her new ears as she stumbled to sit next to her dumbfounded sister.

Scotaloo was experimentally flapping the small pair of wings she had received.

Sweetie Belle was trying to peer cross-eyed at the tip of her small horn.

\_I wonder how permanent this is. If I put away the Elements, does

everyone revert to normal?\_

Looking at the section of floor where the sirens had been, Twilight cringed at the splintered hardwood and shallow crater in the concrete underneath. Three figures, apparently adjusted to default human-pony hybrid form, lay curled in fetal positions. The jewels in their pendants had not shattered, but disintegrated, if the red-hued dust beneath them was any indication. She could just hear the semi-conscious Sonata mumble, "Shoo-be-doo..."

\_Unexpected, yet appropriate\_, decided Twilight. \_I suppose Lyra'd find this interesting.\_

"Twilight?" asked Applejack uncertainly. "I was just thinkin'...What happens to us if we try to play music now?"

Twilight suppressed a manic grin. \_So many unanswered questions! So many experiments to conduct!\_

\* \* \*

><p>132.6 continued (Evilhumour and Wheenesss)<p>

Twilight looked at Sunset with disbelief, who had a smug look on her face. In \_all \_of their attempts to deal with the Dazzlings, they have never tried this before or dealt with the sirens \_this\_ easily.

"What. The. Sap?" She asked, turning her head to the stage where the sirens were whimpering on the stage, holding their ears in pain. Their amulets had shattered early on and the music had already broken the spell of the girls, but still the man on the stage still played.

"\_That's \_good playin', little lassie!" The man on the stage shout at her, taking his mouth away from the mouth piece, eliciting a sigh of relief from everyone in the room. "O righty now! You three!" He stomped his way to the defeated sirens, his peg leg echoing loudly on the stage. "DETENTION!" He bellowed, causing their hair to fly backwards. "The rest of ye get to ye classes before I give ye all detention and you're going to dealing with me and that not pansy Jack's 'exercises' detentions!" He scoffed, causing the entire student body to flee as Jack's detention involved at least fifty or so laps to start with and since their music teacher was known to have a rivalry attitude with the gym teacher, it often led the two to try and one up each other in punishments.

"NOT YE MISS SPAHKRULS!" He shout, caused the Anchor to meep loudly as the man roared out, the Rainbooms hesitating in the spot, her unAwake friends torn between fleeing for safety and staying with her. "Are any of ye lasses Awake like Miss Spahkruls and Miss Shimmy?!"

"W-hat do you m-mean with- " Rainbow tried to speak to the Scottish teacher who was holding his bagpipes under his arm now.

"THEN GET TO CLASS MISS DISHY, OR I'LL GIVE YA ALL DETENTION FOR A MONTH!" His shout caused them to whimper and lean against each other for support.

"It's ok girls, I'll be fine." Twilight did her best to reassure her friends, looking at the man with a bit of a gulp. "I think..."

With a solemn nod, the girls left, leaving Twilight alone with Sunset and the Scotsman.

"So, you're Looping now?" She asked in disbelief, looking up the frowning man.

"Ai." His frown started to break as he smiled. Despite his ugly features, his smile was really nice and soft. "It's good to know that I'll be able to help me buddy Jack a bit more with Aku."

"But," Twilight frowned, looking at her friend with a raised eyebrow. "Didn't Sunset tell you that-"

"The great beastie is Looping? Ai she did, and so did Jackie boy." He frowned again. "But that's not the point. What is that you Spahkruls is that you are a very bad girl!"

"Wha?"

"Do you know how many classes you skipped and how much homework you missed?!" He started to shout again, but was cut off when Twilight fainted. Somewhere in the vocational agriculture building, a goat bleated. He looked at the former pony and asked. "Too much?"

\* \* \*

><p>132.10 (fractalman)<p>

Trixie peered through a thaumic microscope at a sample of changeling goo.

"Resume log: changeling goop this loop is constructed from a magical matrix holding relatively small particles together. Pause log "

\* \* \*

><p>"Resume log: This loop, Changelings are unable to consume lust, but are able to consume general happiness to supplement their primary diet of romantic love. Additionally, hatred is incredibly toxic to changelings, so they must take great care as to when and where they feed. End log." <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"New log: this loop, changelings are unable to shapeshift-"<p>

"Well hello Trixie, still working on that catalog of changeling abilities, I see."

"-Pause log- yes, Chrysalis, I am. Computer, summarize logs so far."

"Out of 4,450 loops, 21 loops: changelings are unable to shape-shift. 51 loops: changelings lack goop production. 75 loops: changelings are unable to eat love-"

"Halt summary" interrupted Chrysalis. "Yes, lovely, but I'm feeling a bit peckish, so if you don't mind-"

Trixie grinned, and leaned in for a kiss.

\* \* \*

><p>132.11 (fractalman, Evilhumour)<p>

Pandemonium reigned in the halls of the Admins.

Loki was laughing hard enough to shake every last console, including those used by Cthulhu and co.

Aphrodite shrieked as a squirrel ran up her leg.

Coyote chuckled as a squirrel frolicked on his head.

Admins tripped over squirrels, or other Admins who had been blinded by squirrels draped over their eyes.

Sleipnir merely sighed as he discovered a squirrel draped across his favorite keyboard.

"The great Apollo wants to know why he has a cup of squirrel!"

As for Zeus?

"WHERE DID ALL THESE SQUIRRELS COME FROM! AND WHY ARE THERE SQUIRRELS IN MY PORN STASH? WHY HAS MY PORN STASH BEEN RENAMED TO 'CORN STASH?'"

\* \* \*

><p>Cthulhu waved a tentacle to Nyarlathotep. "Hey Nyarly! Nice job with those squirrels!"<p>

Nyarlathotep looked puzzled. "What squirrels?"

There was a pause.

"Um, you've got one in your hair."

Nyarlathotep glowered, and swatted the offending squirrel away before stomping off.

\* \* \*

><p>Ratatoskr and Meeko high-pawed.<p>

Meeko giggled. "Sure showed them, eh?"

Ratatoskr cackled and nodded. "'Fetch this', they said. 'Bring me coffee', they said. Well lets see how those stuck-ups handle a squirrel infestation, eh?"

Meeko paused. "You don't think we went too far by making it affect every level of Yggdrasil, do you?"

Ratatoskr pondered for a second. "...Nah."

\* \* \*

><p>132.12 (invinible, Evilhumour, and Codelyoko22)<p>

"Hey, Twilight?"

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Why are there squirrels just about every step you take?"

"I don't know, Rarity. I just don't know."

"Twilight, I have a better question. Why is Nightmare Moon a squirrel this time?"

"I said I don't know!"

"Twi--"

"RARITY! HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO SAY I DON'T KNOW?!"

"...Actually I was going to ask where Spike has gone off to."

"Oh..."

"Oooo! I know!" Pinkie Pie bounced over, with squirrels falling out of her mane. "He left; said this loop was too nuts for him to handle."

Twilight sighed at the horrible pun.

"How long have you been waiting to use that one?"

"Since baseline, silly filly!" Pinkie Pie giggled and pulled out her own list. "Another rare joke check off! Three more and I get a super duper ultra mega party!" She then gave Twilight a big hug. "Thanks!"

\* \* \*

><p>132.13 (Gym Quirk)<p>

There was something liberating about not having to remain constantly under cover, Jean-Luc Picard admitted to himself.

And he did appreciate the sanctuary status Equestrian loops afforded him, even if he was Replacing one of Ponyville's more prominent residents.

"Yes, Ms. Sparkle. I intend to spend as much of my time here as possible in mundane pursuits," he informed the local Anchor.

"Fortunately, we're reasonably well staffed to deal with the usual threats this loop, so you don't need to worry about being called in to help out. That said, do you feel up to running Carousel Boutique?" Twilight asked the unicorn supervising the decoration of Town Hall



for the Summer Sun Celebration.

"Although I may not possess Madame Rarity's flamboyance, I have spent my share of loops in both the design and production sides of the clothing industry. I also have access to a reasonably vast library of designs from which to draw inspiration," Earl Grey assured the Preparation Overseer.

\* \* \*

><p>While he lacked the extravagant flair of the native fashionista, Earl Grey's aesthetic had a minimalist elegance that caught the attention of Hoity Toity; he even became one of Fancy Pants' preferred clothiers.<p>

The distaff population had not been ignored either. Although his restrained designs failed to gain the patronage of Sapphire Shores, Photo Finish had waxed eloquent about several of the gowns he had created for the Grand Galloping Gala.

All in all, business at Carousel Boutique had seldom been better, and Earl Grey was clearly enjoying himself.

Still, the heightened demand for his creations did result in some production issues.

"So everything's centered around a modified Type 44 Fabric Replicator?" asked Apple Bloom as she started making tricorder scans.

"Yes, with some custom-written software to adapt things for equine body forms. The problem I'm facing is getting it to interface with my unicorn magic. For obvious reasons, my opportunities to investigate equestrian magic in depth have been rather limited."

Twilight frowned thoughtfully. "Okay...I think I can see what you're after here. So you need a little help with your production bottleneck?"

"Yes. Specifically, as regards this device, please make it sew."

There was a long, stunned silence followed by two groans. "How long have you been keepin' that line in storage?" asked Apple Bloom plaintively.

\* \* \*

><p>132.14 (KrisOverstreet)<p>

"Corn cupcakes?" Twilight asked, looking at the half-eaten pastry before her. "You make cupcakes out of cornbread? Ponyville sure is a strange..."

She trailed off as she noticed every single eye in the room, except Pinkie's, fixed directly on her.

"... er, sure is strange that only Ponyville gets it right!" she finished nervously.

The tension passed, and Twilight's welcome party resumed as if nothing had happened... well, almost.

"Jus' a word of advice?" Applejack murmured in her ear. "We all dote on Pinkie Pie, but th' girl's allergic ta wheat. S'why she looks puffed up alla time. Even workin' around th' stuff sets it off."

"But hair doesn't puff up from-"

"What I'm sayin'," Applejack continued, overriding Twilight's objection, "is we all learned ta love cornmeal cupcakes. An' you better learn too."

"Um, sure." Of course Pinkie Pie wouldn't mind, being Awake, but obviously the unAwake ponies were protective this Loop. And... Some strange impulse pushed Twilight to try an experiment. "Do you think anypony would mind if I took one for later?"

"'Course not," Applejack said, the smile back on her face. "This is your party, after all."

A few hours later, Nightmare Moon caught the cupcake just before it could bonk her on the nose. "What disrespect is this, that dares throw confectionery at your new ruler?" she asked, examining the missile. "A cupcake?" She broke it apart, took an experimental nibble, and made a face. "Cornmeal? What kind of a stupid idea was this?"

On cue, Pinkie Pie sniffled and whimpered, "Don't you like it? I made it for you..."

The crowd of ponies gathered in the town hall glared at Nightmare Moon. Eyes narrowed. Hooves stomped.

"Did you hear that?"

"She insulted poor Pinkie Pie's cupcake!"

"GET 'ER!"

Had it been only one or two, or even a dozen ponies, Nightmare Moon could have swatted them down with her magic.

But the sight of every single pony in Ponyville (minus two) charging the balcony, climbing the walls and tapestries, swarming towards her in a righteous berserker rage, caused Nightmare Moon to freeze and dither for several vital seconds.

And then the living wave of ponies crested and crashed down upon her.

A few seconds later dribs and drabs of midnight-blue smoke oozed out of the ponypile and away from dozens of hammering hooves.

"Where'd she go?"

"Hey! That smoke! It must be her!"

"Don't let her get away!"

"She's headed for the Everfree Forest! After her!"

Twilight and Pinkie trailed the angry mob of ponies as they stampeded off into the night.

"D'ya think they'll beat old Black Snooty?" Pinkie Pie chirped.

"Probably not," Twilight shrugged. "We'd better follow along and keep our friends out of trouble. We'll need them to purge Luna." After a moment's consideration she added, "And to help keep the rest of the ponies away long enough for her to apologize."

\* \* \*

><p>132.15 (Masterweaver)<p>

Apple Bloom lounged on the bean bag, fiddling with some odd machinery as she glanced over at the other pony in the room. "Any idea what this is all about?"

"Given our mutual talents," mused the mare lounging on the couch, "Trixie assumes it is either a lecture on being responsible when building exploding mecha or, perhaps, a request to build an exploding mecha."

The filly gave her a stinkeye. "Ah ain't letting you make any of mah creations explode, Trix. Maybe she wants us to put on a mecha stage show?"

"...Hmm. That's actually a very good idea."

At that moment, Twilight came up the stairs. "Sorry, you two. Cloud Kicker and Blossomforth came to check out a book at the same time, and apparently there's some drama between them this loop." She shrugged helplessly. "I had to play mediator for some reason... anyway, I'm sure you're wondering why I asked you both over."

Apple Bloom shrugged. "Ah'm sure you had a good reason."

"Right, since these are apparently now mandatory, let's talk about our element." Twilight levitated her stick of chalk and wrote the word **MAGIC** in large, bold letters in the middle of the air. "Now, what is magic?"

Trixie and Apple Bloom shared a look, before turning back to the unicorn. "Friendship is magic!" they chorused, identical smirks on their faces.

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Yes, yes, I know, haha. But in all seriousness..." She closed her eyes, a tiara flashing into existence momentarily afterwards. "These ancient artifacts, manifestations of abstract concepts, are known as the Element of Magic and are often considered the core of Harmony. Not always, mind you, but the gem goes in the center of the tree, I was the first to ascend... I'm not saying Magic is the most important thing, mind you. It just seems to be the thing that draws the other elements together."

"I thought that was loyalty," Trixie quipped.

Twilight shrugged. "I think Loyalty keeps us together, kind of. Magic is... we are... we're the planners. Not the leaders!" she hastened to add, "Not always! We're the ones that can come up with the steps between where we are now and where we want to be, for everyone. We're the... grease between the cogs of the other five elements."

Apple Bloom raised a hoof. "That metaphor ain't entirely-"

"You get what I mean! We're the ones that, if we're doing our job properly, keep the other elements working together." She bit her lip. "I think. It's all kind of vague really..."

"No, I get what you mean." Trixie rose up slightly. "During the back up loop I had to keep Gilda and Chrysalis from coming to blows a lot. They didn't hate each other, but... well... Gilda's rough and tumble, and Chrissy's very, uh, refined in her own way."

"Canopy knows Ah've been the one ta mediate between Scoots and Sweets a lot," Apple Bloom added with a nod. "And that's before factorin' in Diamond's ruthlessness and Silver's whole chaotic streak..."

"What, nothing about Nyx?"

Apple Bloom gave Trixie a look, one hoof pointing at a bemused Twilight Sparkle. "Unlike some ponies, Ah know better then ta badmouth someone in front of their own mothers."

"Actually, I'm pretty sure Twilight is the father in this case-"

The purple mare in question cleared her throat. "Putting aside the admittedly confounding question of my daughter's parentage... Magic, as a word, tends to be derived from older words meaning 'power' or 'learned one'. Thus, magic is very much a science, except... it's more of a grown science, an instinct for knowledge. My studies of the arcane, Apple Bloom's love of technology-"

"My explosion sense?" Trixie offered.

"...Yes, your, uh, second sense for extreme chemical reactions," Twilight allowed, "as well as your knowledge of how to work a crowd all come from the same source: Our instinct for knowledge. Our Magic. Which is levied in the use of friendship; we use our Magic to keep our friends together." She tapped her tiara. "I've run some tests and as far as I can tell, these things allow for higher speed neurological processing."

There was a brief moment where the other two contemplated this.

"...Wait." Apple Bloom held up a hoof. "Are ya saying... our element makes us think faster?"

"...Pretty much, actually."

"So people with Kindness get to be omniglots, Honesty people can dispel illusions, Loyalty has a built in radar, Laughter can break reality, Generousness has both a weakness sense and healing powers... and we think faster."

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Well, we're already overpowered as is. I'm an archmage prodigy, you're the self-proclaimed walking technological revolution, and Trixie could blow up a planet."

"And has impeccable acting skills!" Trixie added. "And an intuitive mastery of illusion! And an incredibly sexy marefriend! And has created simple life-!"

"Ah get it." Apple Bloom shrugged. "It's just... Ah'm kind of gypped, is all. Ah would have thought being a bearer of Magic would give me an awesome superpower or somthin'."

"Well..." Twilight dispelled the word floating in midair. "I'm sorry, but, yeah. That's all we get."

"Come on, Apple Bloom, cheer up." Trixie grinned. "Trixie has an idea, and she'd like your help with it..."

\* \* \*

><p>132.16 (Scorntex)<p>

Twilight found herself being woken up from a blissful sleep by somepony nudging her. Blearily, she opened her eyes to find Nyx smiling innocently at her.

"Nyx? What is it?"

"Is it alright if we" and only then did the blobs behind Nyx solidify into the rest of the Crusaders, "borrow the basement lab for a few hours?"

"Yes, it's fine" Twilight said, not even waiting for a response before going back to sleep.

An hour later, when it sunk in, she got up and with some small effort made her way downstairs, to find the lab had been turned into a small workshop, with Apple Bloom hard at work on what looked like a very basic machine replica of a pony.

"Girls" Twilight stated, "what's going on?"

Several nervous glances were shared between the fillies, before everypony looked towards Sweetie Belle.

"It's your turn" Diamond Tiara said, in response to the look the filly gave everyone else. With a palpable air of reluctance, Sweetie Belle nodded. Wordlessly she trotted over towards Twilight Sparkle, then past her. Twilight followed Sweetie to the front door of the library, where Sweetie Belle stopped, and withdrew two pairs of earphones, handing one over to Twilight Sparkle.

"It'll help" she said, in an all-too ominous tone. She waited until Twilight had put them on, then opened the door.

The first thing Twilight saw was a massive crowd of ponies, more than Ponyville contained on a regular Loop, many of them wearing black, blue or purple.

The first thing she heard was a massive, continuous screech of noise, loud enough to make her head feel like it was going to explode. Mercifully Sweetie slammed the door shut before that happened.

"Explain." Twilight stated to the Crusaders. They looked over toward Nyx, who shuffled her hooves.

"Funny story." She said, "You see, this Loop has a version of the cult that created me... only instead of a cult, they're..." she muttered something Twilight couldn't hear.

"Yes?"

"They're more of a fan-club" Diamond Tiara said. "And with a thousand years to grow, well... you've seen the results."

Twilight nodded, then looked over at Apple Bloom, "So you're working on-"

"A distraction, yeah. Basic facsimile drones with a holoprojector makin' them look like us. We're gonna let them loose an' hope Nyx's fans chase these things down while we hide out on another planet fer the rest of the Loop."

Twilight stared from Crusader to Crusader, then to Nyx, then back to Apple Bloom. She considered the large crowd outside her library.

"Need any help?"

\* \* \*

><p>132.17 (Evilhumour)<p>

Mac looked with surprise as Rarity and Spike walked into his bar with a horrified look on their faces and at a distance from each other.

"Two Brain Bleaches please." Rarity asked with a shudder, Spike hesitating to pat her shoulder.

"Bad Loop?" He asked with concern as he reached for the drinks.

"In a way, yes." Rarity spoke with some dread. "I replaced Daenerys and it was a bit different from their baseline."

"What happened? Did Spike replace somepony from the Lannister?" Mac looked at the couple, placing the drinks down.

"Oh no, that would have been better than what we went through." Spike grumbled as he picked up his glass. "You know how Daenerys is called the Mother of Dragons and almost gave birth to one?"

"Ye-OH!" Mac's eyes went wide at the implication the dragon was giving him.

"Yeah, and I was Awake from the get go." Spike pouted, looking at the drink in claw and then at his wife. "Cheers."

They clinked their glasses and drank away the memories of their last loop.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

132.1: Devil May Care.

>132.2: It's a musical number. Pinkie participates enthusiastically.<br>132.3: Ersatz baseline.

>132.4: EXPOSIT! EXPOSIT!<br>132.5: This could take a while.

>132.6: Never assume baseline.<br>132.7: Easy come, easy go...

>132.8: Sports!<br>132.9: ...might want to work on that.

>132.10: Someday there'll be enough data for a statistical approach.<br>132.11: We can only guess how powerful Doreen Green has truly become.

>132.12: she'd probably like this place, though.<br>132.13: You think of a line, and wait for the perfect time to say it.

>132.14: How corny.<br>132.15: It's a kind of magic (magic, magic, magic...)

>132.16: The Nyxies.<br>132.17: It's not a fun place. Well, not always.

## 139. Chapter 139

133.1 (Kris Overstreet)

"Hello again, Mr. Wayne."

Twilight Sparkle and the gray-coated, black-maned earth pony stallion faced each other on the path through Canterlot Park. The latter bowed his head slightly to her.

"Good afternoon, Twilight Sparkle. And it's Mane this time. Bruce Mane."

"Do I have to repeat myself about this being a sanctuary Loop?" Twilight asked. "Or should I bring Fluttershy to speak to you? She's Awake, I'm pretty sure."

One corner of Bruce Mane's mouth turned up for just a moment. "That won't be necessary," he said. "I've just resigned from Celestia's royal guard. Family reasons."

Twilight raised an eyebrow. "Family reasons?"

"My brother Filthy Rich just died. I've been named guardian of his daughter Diamond Tiara." The lines of Bruce Mane's muzzle set a little more firmly. "I doubt taking care of a spoiled, willful filly who got her cutie mark at her father's deathbed will leave me any time for my usual pursuits."

\* \* \*

><p>The sole heiress to the vast Rich fortune looked down from the rooftop at the streets of Canterlot.<em> Somewhere in this city, <em>she thought, \_is the pony who murdered my parents. Not even

Celestia could find him... but I will. I will find him and bring him to justice, him and everypony else who breaks the harmony of Equestria.\_

She pulled the mask over her face, backed up for a running start, and bounded forward, leaping over the alley towards the next building over.

She missed the opposite cornice by a country mile, plunging towards the alley six stories below.

And then a rope wound around one leg and arrested her fall, leaving her to sway back and forth between buildings for a moment before, slowly but surely, she was pulled to one wall and then hauled back up over the edge of the roof.

"Your father thought of you as his little princess," the gravelly voice of her uncle said. "His diamond in the rough. He wouldn't want to see you throw your life away in the pursuit of vengeance."

"Not vengeance." Diamond pulled her mask off and looked up at the dark, shadowy pony holding the rope. "Justice. And I won't let you stop me."

"I won't let you kill yourself," Bruce Mane said. "But I will show you how to do it right. I will train you to be the physical peak that a pony is capable of becoming. I will teach you the mastery of disguise, so you can sit among your enemies and gather your evidence. I will teach you the forensic sciences, so you can find and interpret that evidence. And I will teach you police and legal procedures, so your evidence can be used in a court of law."

He put a hoof on the filly's shoulder and said, "It will not be an easy course, and if you decide to quit there will be no shame in it. If you persist you give up all hope of ever leading a normal life. The only happiness you will ever know will be the sight of those you captured being led into the dungeons. The only friends you will ever have will be those who fight the good fight alongside you, and even they cannot be trusted with your inner secrets. You will be alone as no pony has ever been alone, suspicious of the world, even doubting yourself every moment of every day. Your life will be sacrificed for the sake of others, day by day, battle by battle. And above all, no one must know it is Diamond Tiara who watches over them." A shaft of light from the unblemished moon caught his face, and Diamond saw his eyes- kindly, friendly eyes, for once- looking directly into hers. "Are you sure this is what you want? Are you certain?"

Diamond snorted. "I've been alone since my daddy died. And I wasted my time with him whining and begging for one thing after another. I've never done a single useful thing in my life." She stomped a hoof in fury, shouting, "I was there! I could have saved them! But I was just a spoiled, useless rich filly!"

In the privacy of his mind, Bruce Wayne contemplated his fate. \_Even in the Loops, even in another world, even when I'm not Batman, I'm Batman... or I'm raising Batman.\_

"Very well," he said. "Then I'll help you all I can." Guiding Diamond back to the roof-access door to the stairs, he continued, "The first thing we need to discuss is an alias. Criminals, in my experience,



tend to be a cowardly, superstitious lot, with notable exceptions. You will need a name that strikes fear into their hearts."

"I was going to call myself the Mysterious Mare-do-Well."

"That... doesn't quite work for me." Fortunately, Bruce Mane had vast experience in suppressing the urge to laugh.

\* \* \*

><p>"Really?" Twilight Sparkle stood on the rooftop, looking down at the little caped crusader. Behind her, Bruce Mane, clad immaculately in a tuxedo, practiced the Loops' best poker face. "Honestly? You couldn't go one Loop without doing something like this? And you thought I wouldn't find out?"<p>

"I wasn't the one who gave this filly my defining moment in life," Bruce Mane replied. "The Loops demand a Batman. Or, in this case," he gestured to his ward, "a Nightwing."

"We even have a secret cave!" Nightwing Tiara retorted. "Princess Luna gave it to us! She even made us poles to slide down-"

"What have I told you," Bruce Mane said sharply, "about telling other people more than they need to know?"

"Um... not to?"

"The exact words."

"\_A good detective does not tell other people things; she waits and listens for other people to tell her things.\_"

"Precisely."

"Excuse me," Twilight butted in. "Now that the lesson is over, can we get back to discussing the corruption of unAwake ponies in a-"

Screams erupted from the street below. Without a word Diamond Tiara reached to the belt around her barrel, pulled out a grappling hook, and flung it with perfect accuracy at the chimney of the building across the broad street. She flung herself off the building, swinging towards whatever miscreant was at work below.

Twilight looked over the roof, shaking her head as one undersized filly began to take on six jungle cats. (Granted, one was a long-haired house cat, but that one was the dirtiest fighter of the lot.) From all appearances she was winning.

"This isn't over," she said to Bruce Mane.

"I think it is," he said firmly. "But I'll make you a deal. The next time you're visiting Gotham, and the world is threatened by a magical princess with a thousand years' worth of jealous huff, we can do it your way."

\* \* \*

><p>133.2 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

**\*\*Watchtower Secret Files YGGDRASIL- Please enter password\*\***

\_}}puxatawny\_

**\*\*Password accepted.\*\***

**\*\*Directory YGGDRASIL has 249 subdirectories\*\***

\_}}equestria\_

**\*\*Subdirectory EQUESTRIA has eight files\*\***

\_}}play all\_

"Batman Final Contingency file: Equestria. Foreword. The universe known as Equestria is one of the lower threat levels to Loopers, being a magic-saturated land where the principal form of magic derives its power from positive emotions, specifically friendship and harmony. However, the most frequent Loopers from that universe are also among the most influential Loopers aside from the original Seven. Furthermore, hostile and malevolent variants of Equestrian Loopers have been encountered before, and therefore may be encountered again. Thus contingency plans should be in place in the extremely unlikely eventuality that the Justice League is forced to stop one or more of these beings.

"One word of warning. Using friends or family as hostages is always immoral and usually of only temporary effect. With Equestrians taking hostages is outright counterproductive. When one of their own is endangered, an Equestrian gains a moral and mental clarity of purpose which is otherwise absent. Furthermore, when responding to a threat against a loved one, an Equestrian's native magic is intensified by the bonds of love and friendship between the hostage and the rescuer. No matter the danger, avoid any threat whatever to noncombatants with any relationship with an Equestrian foe; otherwise you will face certain defeat."

\_\*bwip\*\_

"Batman Final Contingency file: Twilight Sparkle. The Looping Twilight Sparkle is Anchor of her Loop and far and away the single most powerful being from her universe. Even her un-Awake self possesses power on a par with the demigoddesses who control Equestria's local cosmos. Fortunately for us all her moral code is just as strong as her magic. However, in the event of encountering a hostile Twilight Sparkle, Justice League members must be prepared to take her down hard and fast, for if given enough time to prepare a strategy and select a mode of attack she becomes unstoppable. Do not give her that time.

"I recommend sensory-overload tactics such as flash-bangs and illusions, preferably structured to clash against her obsessive-compulsive tendencies. When disoriented and confused Twilight Sparkle becomes vulnerable and may be subdued from behind- but not directly from behind."

\_\*bwip\*\_

"Batman Final Contingency file: Applejack. Applejack is the second oldest Looper from Equestria and commonly acts as field support for other Equestrian Loopers. In addition to her native strength and skill, both of which are near the peak achievable for Equestrian ponies, she is the most talented in picking up and retaining skills from other universes. However, she has a streak of self-doubt and a tendency towards stubbornness and single-minded devotion to the task at hand, and thus slow to adapt to new conditions. A Justice League member facing Applejack is best advised to evade her initial attacks until a pattern emerges or until she hesitates... and then, strike quickly, because she is unlikely to give you a second chance."

\_\*bwip\*\_

"Batman Final Contingency file: Pinkie Pie. Hello, Pinkie. Yes, I know you're reading this. Yes, I enjoyed the cupcakes very much, thank you. Yes, Ace likes the dog biscuits."

"Pinkamena Diane Pie, even un-Awake, is a reality warper on a limited level. All known rules of physics and causality may be considered as having the words, 'except Pinkie Pie,' added to them. Fortunately for us all, the vast majority of these abilities are dependent on her good nature and her desire to be friends with all other beings. Thus, while the Looper Pinkie Pie is terrifying but benevolent, a truly evil Pinkie Pie would be of far lesser threat. Even an alicorn evil Pinkie can be subdued with no greater difficulty than an un-Awake Princess Celestia."

"Caution: if you can avoid it, do not make what is called a Pinkie Promise; if you have made one, live up to it. Breaking a Pinkie Promise will not lead to fatal consequences, but from all reports those who do break the promise find the full power of an enraged benevolent Pinkie aimed directly at them... and they will find very little sympathy from other Loopers."

\_\*bwip\*\_

"Batman Final Contingency file: Rainbow Dash. Although the Looping Rainbow Dash can assume alicorn form and powers at will, she has exhibited little interest in any aspects of her abilities other than the athletic, in particular speed and flying. She is a black belt in various kinds of unarmed martial arts, but otherwise has little or no particular combat training. Thus, when confronted by a hostile Rainbow Dash, draw her into a confined space where she cannot build up the speed required for her most potent tactics. Once this is done, her natural pony endurance will make bringing her down difficult, but not impossible."

\_\*bwip\*\_

"Batman Final Contingency file: Rarity. Rarity is generally a non-combatant, but it must be remembered that even her baseline self is a unicorn of diverse talents and extreme craftiness. Do not be deceived by her intense dislike for dirt, disorder, or unfashionable garments; she can endure or even embrace all of these things if necessary to achieve her goals. It is extremely unlikely that a hostile Rarity will be encountered without her friends nearby; therefore you must isolate her at the first opportunity and prevent

her from using her most potent weapons, her mind and her voice. Do not attempt psychology on her; take her down with straight brute force, preferably beginning by suppressing her magic.

"Addendum: on no account mention the name 'Tom' to her. The rage that results does not bring confusion or turmoil, but it does allow Rarity to use her powers far beyond what she normally thinks are her limits. The results for the unlucky Justice League member facing her would be extremely painful."

\_\*bwip\*\_

"Batman Final Contingency file: Fluttershy. Of all the Equestrian Loopers, few have more variants to their baseline personality than Fluttershy. Fortunately most of these variants are either harmless or much less powerful than the original, and may be disregarded. If a hostile Fluttershy is encountered, most likely it will be a pegasus pony with the ability to imbue crippling guilt on any being capable of that emotion through eye-to-eye contact. Though a potent weapon, this is not true telepathy and can be avoided by simply avoiding eye contact. Of greater concern is her ability to communicate with animals; therefore it is vital to separate her from any animals and keep her separated until she is secured.

"In addition the Looping Fluttershy is a talented shapeshifter and druid, and unlike her non-Looping self she is not prone to self-doubt or fear. Ironically, though she is the gentlest of their group, she is also the most experienced with lethal combat, except possibly Twilight Sparkle, due to her close ties with the Warhammer 40K universe. No Justice League member should ever attempt to take on a hostile Fluttershy alone, under any circumstances. That said, unless the Fluttershy in question is an evil variant, she is also the most amenable of the group to negotiation, and can be used as the key to ending hostilities. For this reason the first line of attack with Fluttershy should always be persuasion."

\_\*bwip\*\_

"Batman Final Contingency file: Spike. The baseline Spike, even while experiencing a greed-induced growth spurt, is of negligible danger to any Justice League member. Looping Spike is definitely not. Through meditative techniques learned from the Jedi Order Spike has learned how to control his draconic growth, in addition to limited telepathic, clairvoyant, and precognitive abilities. This makes developing countermeasures against him, should he fall to the Dark Side, extremely difficult. I am still contemplating the best tactic to use, but as neither he nor the other Equestrians are at all likely to present a threat to the Justice League or our Earth, I have not given the matter a very high priority."

\_\*bwip\*\_

\*\*END OF FILE\*\*

Batman leaned back in his chair, allowing the tiny, tiny smirk which for him was a broad grin to sneak onto his face, since nobody was present to see. Yes, he continually got teased by other Loopers for his apparent paranoia, but so be it. Even the most benevolent creatures could turn evil, especially in variant Loops. Why, he'd even heard tell of certain Loopers encountering a Darth Porifer, and

if Spongebob could be evil, anybody could.

Of course, until and unless his world experienced a Conversion Bureau variant Loop, the odds of any of these plans being used, even in their sketchy state, were nil. It was an idle activity, a pastime... insofar as Batman ever used the word, it was fun. It kept his intellect occupied on those days when Gotham was relatively peaceful and no global or universal threats loomed.

Like today.

"Computer, open new file."

**\*\*WORKING\*\***

"Batman Final Contingency file: Derpy Hooves..."

This one would be a real challenge.

\* \* \*

><p>133.3 (fractalman)<p>

Nyx drank a "Flutterguy" potion to lower her voice, cleared her throat, and began to sing:

\_You're a smart one, Sparkle butt.

>You really are my mom.<br>You're as cuddly as a plush toy

>You are so adorkable<br>Sparkle butt

>You're a princess alicorn with a quill to jot down thoughts!<em>

\_You're a clever one, sparkle butt

>Your heart is filled with friends!<br>Your brain is full of great big words

>You've got math within your soul, sparkle butt!<br>I wanna hug you with

>Thirty-nine and half kage bunshins!<em>

"NYX? I AM GOING TO TICKLE YOU TO DEATH!" yelled Twilight.

Nyx giggled, "Gotta run!"

\* \* \*

><p>133.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Twilight Sparkle?" Celestia asked, looking at the tiara on top of the purple unicorn's helmet. "I thought I sent you and Cadence off to negotiate with the griffons..."

Twilight nodded. "You did, your highness, but princess Cadence ordered us back to investigate why the sun failed to rise." She gave a look to the pink alicorn fussing over an injured Shining Armor. "I think she was well within her rights to do so."

Celestia glanced at them for a moment or two, her lips pursed in thought. "Yes... well, all's well that ends well, I suppose." She turned to Twilight and the other five ponies currently bowing to her. "I must thank you all for restoring my sister's sanity-"

"Princess," Twilight interrupted, "I'm afraid I have something to say."

"...Oh?"

Twilight nodded. "When Cadence and I arrived in Ponyville to find you, we had to take some time to calm down a panicking mob. Once we did, I sought out your student-\_my brother\_-in hopes of discovering what had happened, only to find that after checking off the list of Summer Sun Celebration preparations he had headed straight into the Everfree Forest. Cadence, myself, and a few ponies from the town-" She gestured behind her- "all decided to follow his tracks, ending up in a dilapidated castle. We discovered Nightmare Moon, freed from a thousand year prison, and the Elements of Harmony which we used to subdue her."

"Twilight, I was already aware of all-"

"Princess, I am afraid it is my duty to place you under arrest."

There was a moment where absolutely nobody spoke.

Suddenly six voices were speaking over each other at once. "Darling you can't be serious-" "Arresting tha princess?! Are ya crazy-?" "What the hay Twilight?! What are you on-" "And ponies think \_I'm\_ crazy-" "Haha, Auntie, I'm sure she's just kidding around-" "Ohmygoodnessohmygoodness-ohmygoodnessohmygoodness-"

Luna stared wide-eyed at the impudent purple unicorn. Shining Armor merely groaned, putting a hoof to his face. And Celestia... blinked, taking a few moments to process what she had just heard.

Twilight did her best not to burst out laughing, keeping her face stoic and firm like her in-loop guard training told her to.

Celestia shook her head. "Ah... If I may ask, Twilight... What exactly are the charges?"

"Conspiracy to remove one member of the reigning diarchy from office, imprisonment of said diarch for longer than legal limitation, obfuscation of said incident, negligence of government property, negligence of high-level magical artifacts, misinformation regarding a public event, inducing a public panic, endangering a ward of the crown..." Twilight shrugged. "Probably a few things I've forgotten on top of that."

"If our sister is to be arrested for such crimes, verily we shall be as well!" Luna proclaimed.

"Actually," Twilight mused, "most of your so called crimes have exceeded their statute and thus can no longer be presented in a court of law. I suppose the more recent hijacking of the lunar/solar cycle might qualify, but I'm reasonably certain that the court would find that the result of insanity so you'd probably only be assigned therapy... Oh! Shining, are you going to press assault charges?"

"You're making this a big enough clusterbuck as it is," groaned the

stallion. "I'm not piling anything on top of that."

"So, yeah. You're in the clear."

"But..." Luna sputtered. "We attempted to overthrow our sister and create eternal night! TWICE!"

"The statute of limitations on the first one has expired," Twilight repeated. "And, actually, come to think of it if Celestia didn't consult anyone before imprisoning you that would have been another violation of the law..."

"You're really going to do this," Cadence groaned. "You're really going to try to arrest Celestia."

"It's my sworn duty as a royal guard to uphold the law, no matter who breaks it."

Celestia shut her eyes, massaging her forehead. "I suppose I'll be under house arrest until the trial, then."

"Wait, you're just going to go along with this?!" Rainbow Dash jumped into a hovering position. "You're the freaking princess of Equestria-well, one of them, sorry Nightma-~~IMEAN~~LUNA, Luna, going to have to get used to that-"

"If I were to evade punishment for my crimes," Celestia retorted, "it might encourage other powerful figures to abuse their own authority. That's why I put the laws down in the first place."

"To be entirely fair, due to her power and position she'll probably only have to pay significant restoration." Twilight waved a hoof. "Paying for Luna's therapy, damage to Ponyville, maybe a better guarded place for the Elements-the castle's pretty much a lost cause unless we clear out part of the Everfree, but that would violate nature preserve laws-"

"Would I still be allowed to conduct my duties as princess?" Celestia inquired, a faint smile on her lips. "During my house arrest, I mean."

"Not without supervision," Twilight replied. "We don't want corruption in the bureaucracy."

"Oh dear. I suppose only protectors of the realm would be allowed to oversee my decisions," Celestia lamented. "Seeing as I am the princess, and all that."

Twilight cringed in realization. "...Yes, your highness."

"And I do recall one of our more ancient laws stating that any wielder of the Elements of Harmony is considered a realm protector," the alicorn continued. "Since, of course, the Elements are, well, artifacts of great power-"

"Wait, hold up." Applejack raised a hoof. "What exactly are ya'll saying here?"

"Basically, we're going to be her secretaries until the trial," Twilight groaned. "Her only secretaries. No help from anyone, just

her, us, and mounds of paperwork..."

There was another moment of silence.

"...Right." Rarity shook her head. "This has gone on long enough. There are ten ponies here, Luna is a princess and therefore a judge, Cadence you are Celestia's defense lawyer since Twilight has clearly decided to be prosecution, and the rest of us can be the jury."

"Oooo, I've never been on a jury before!" Pinkie squealed. "I've always been rejected!"

"And we're holding the trial here. Right, legal and all."

Luna blinked. "Ah, we may not be up to date on all the legalities of the modern realm--"

"The prosecution has made its case, what does the defense say?"

Cadence blinked. "Uh, um, this whole situation is ridiculous?"

"Quite. Now then, private votes for everyone, guilty or not guilty." Rarity started handing out little slips of paper to Shining and the element bearers who were not Twilight Sparkle, alongside small quills.

Fluttershy took hers with some trepidation. "Where did you get these?"

"There was a small office down the hall, I took some desk supplies." Finishing up her writing, she handed the slip of paper to a very confused Luna. "Now you read our votes-don't say who voted what-and come up with a sentence based on that."

Luna blinked as she examined the papers all thrust at her. "Ah. Not guilty, innocent, not guilty, not guilty, trying to hide a smile I can see you Celestia--"

She took a moment to look at her sister, who was very clearly and certainly not at all smiling in any way at all.

"-also even if she's guilty I'm not going to say she is cause I hate paperwork, and... hmm. Knot guillotine?"

Twilight peered over her shoulder. "That's 'not guilty.' I think."

"Ah. Well in this case, our sister hath been proven not guilty by unanimity." Luna tilted her head. "Hmm. In this case, I say the sentence is to escort this whole party back to Ponyville and... enjoy a day with her little sister?"

"Sounds good to me," Twilight said.

\* \* \*

><p>133.5 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>



Twilight stepped into Sugar Cube Corner. Neither Mac nor Berry were awake, so she had to make due with the next best thing, Pinkie Pie. The pony had already set out a triple chocolate sugar delight sundae, which Twilight attacked, fully intent on drowning her last loop in ice cream. The party pony popped up from nowhere on the seat across from her, "So, what brings the smartest brainy pony looper to my place?"

Twilight rolled her eyes but her mouth unconsciously started grinning, "Weird loop."

Pinkie started bounding in her seat, "Oh, oh, tell me, tell me!"

"Well, my unawake self had been researching Neuroscience when Dash come to my library to get help studying for the Wonderbolt entrance exams. This time, there was a paper exam with weather research. She had a week or two to study for the exam after having not taken the time for the preceding two months. So, my unawake self got the idea to give Dash a brain booster drug. I awoke just as I administered a dose to a couple mice test subjects."

With a slurp, she downed an entire scoop of the Sundae in one go, paused to let the brain freeze pass, then continued, "It worked beyond my wildest dreams. The control mice kept doing the maze to get the cheese, and the test subject jumped the maze wall. In my excitement, I prepared a capsule to administer to Dash with her permission. Spike, unawake Spike, however talked me out of it."

Pinkie giggled, "What went wrong?"

Twilight shook her head, "Spike made some tea and accidentally knocked the capsule into the kettle. He served us the tea during Dash's study session. Dash thought that it was the tea that made me smart, and I might have made a joke that it could help her. She drank the \_whole \_ thing."

The purple pony muttered under her breath that she didn't think Dash would take it so seriously, then continued, "So, Spike called me in to see that my lab mice had escaped and left a letter for me."

She passed the letter to Pinkie, who read it aloud:

\_Twilight Sparkle,\_

\_While I was most content with my life of leisure in your laboratory, a recent experiment of yours has opened my eyes to the vastness of the world beyond my enclosure. It is with this in mind that I orchestrated mine and my brethren's escape from the confines of your basement. There is much more to this life than cheese at the end of a maze. On one paw, I suppose I should be angry with you, keeping my kind and I trapped in cages, but on the other paw, were it not for your experiments, I would never have awakened as truly as I have today. Jacqueline and I are taking the rest of our kind into the wilderness to build a civilization for the good of mouse-kind.\_

\_Regards,\_

\_Mouse, Barnabus the\_

Twilight rubbed her head, "So long story short, Dash ended up ascending, deposed Celestia and Luna and instituted a popular elected democracy. Meanwhile, the Great Mouse nation arose in Everfree Forest, and we ended up in a cold war with them somehow."

Pinkie smirked, "Well, that didn't seem so bad."

Twilight shrugged, "No, but I really don't like having to clean up after variant me's mistakes. Remind me to tell you later the time unawake me banished Celestia to the moon because Celestia didn't like tea."

\* \* \*

><p>133.6 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight blinked at the sight she saw in Mac's bar.

There was a pony in a dark robe throwing back drink after drink, with Fluttershy rubbing his back.

"What the?"

"WHY ME? WHY ME? WHY \_ALWAYS ME, MON?!\_" The robed pony sobbed loudly, shaking his head as he dropped his glass onto the floor.

"Fluttershy, what \_happened\_?"

"Oh hello Twilight," her friend gave her a weak smile. "You see, this Loop all deaths have a person coming for the soul. Angel had a bad accident, and Grim here felt sorry for me, offering to stay with me if I won a staring contest. I had no idea of what happened in his baseline and..."

"WHEN WILL I LEARN NOT TO BET ON FREAKIN' RODENTS!?" The visiting Anchor flailed before curling up on the floor.

\* \* \*

><p>133.7<p>

Started by: Evilhumour

>Compiled by: Masterweaver<br>Includes contributions by: Detective Ethan Redfield, DrTempo, Evilhumour, FTKnight, GammaTron, Hvulpes, kingofsouls, KrisOverstreet, Masterweaver, Ryuus2, wildrook

Nyx looked at her mother in the bar.

"Momma, do you Pinkie Promise \_not\_ to get mad?" Nyx said with big eyes, to which her mother foolishly nodded her head.

"Thanks!" Nyx hugged her mom and looked at the group of Loopers. "Ok, drinking game. What was the funnest way that you saw the Golden Oaks go, or the best way you accidentally destroyed it?"

Twilight's eye twitched. "Nyx Sparkle, once we are home, you are \_so\_

grounded."

"Unlimited Blade Works," Sword Hill/Shirou Emiya replied. "Tirek was involved, the tree got caught in the Reality Marble, and it was the first time I tried out the Type 3 Zankantou."

Luna smiled fondly. "One loop I performed a wedding ceremony, and the delightful couple spent the rest of the loop on the moon. Voluntarily, I hasten to add, it was their honeymoon."

Vinyl raised a hoof. "Pun aside, what does that have to do with Golden Oaks?"

"He was the groom. The tree of Harmony was the bride."

Twilight blinked. "I remember that loop, actually. The Harmony Palace... whatever it's called was their baby and they wanted me to be the godmother."

"Watching Caboose team kill it with Sheila even after Twilight successfully prevented it from being destroyed by that big centaur," Grif chuckled.

"I did not do that! Rainbow Dash did it."

"I got lost," Cyclone Buster replied.

"What else is new?" Psycho Driver asked him.

"I ended up getting a hitchhiker in the form of the OTHER Sombra, and...stuff blew up."

"Winona peeing on the tree and it instantly combust into flames," Church chuckled, "You actually tried to spay the dog for it as I recall. Then again, you did have a bad Loop with Caboose."

"Not my fault. She gave me a grenade," Caboose informed.

"We want to be on the record," said a gray pegasus with blonde mane done in a braid, "that the incident with the ED-209s and the ping-pong table was not our fault."

"SkyNet," Twilight snapped, "in what possible way was dancing on the table holding the ping-pong ball in one hoof and taunting two poorly programmed mecha to try and take it NOT your fault?"

"Well, for one thing," SkyNet responded, "we weren't the one who put the robots there in the first place."

"Er, yeah," Applebloom said, scratching the back of her head with one hoof. "My bad. But it wasn't th' weirdest way I destroyed th' library. I reckon that one was one o' those times I was tryin' ta build a sonic screwdriver. I really thought I had it that time."

"Suuuuure you did," half a dozen pony Loopers said.

"Well, I got a bit ambitious," Applebloom continued. "An' I thought, why can't you make a sonic that works on wood? So I tried it."

"And every bit of my home turned into splinters," Twilight grumbled. "EXCEPT the door you were trying to open. Which didn't even have a lock."

Apple Bloom realized a little too late, judging by the artery pulsing in Twilight's temple, that this particular bar bet might not be safe to win. "Well, um, Fluttershy's was worse!" she said, jabbing a hoof at the yellow pegasus.

"I thought I was doing a good thing," Fluttershy murmured. "Mrs. Beaver wanted to teach her children the value of literacy."

Chrysalis gave a grin. "I once had my changelings steal the library while Twilight was sleeping."

Twilight slammed her head on the table.

Celestia blushed. "I once had a bit too much to drink and I may have tried to impress someone by tossing a tree around the world."

"So that's why I had a tree imbedded into my house that one loop." Twilight muttered.

"Rabbids," Rainbow Dash replied. "A stampede of Rabbids after Applejack provoked them."

"Ah said ah was SORRY!" Applejack yelled.

"Trixie had-"

The blue unicorn paused, looking around the bar. After assuring herself that it was griffon free, she smirked.

"Trixie had just discovered how to make Thermite-"

"HEY GUYS! Sorry I'm late, passport paperwork is horrible this loop." Gilda sauntered in. "What are we doing?"

"Best way we've seen the library removed." Nyx shrugged. "Were you about to say something, aunt Trixie?"

Trixie slumped in her seat. "...no, nothing..."

"I thought you were going to mention the time you turned Tank into a Mine-Turtle," Rainbow Dash replied. "Again."

"I once tried to impress Nyx by lifting the library but I kinda sneezed." Lemon Rush blushed and looked to the side. Nyx giggled and leaned over to give him a kiss as Twilight continued to bang her head into the table.

"There was this one time," Rarity mused, "where Twilight had a hard wired impulse to bang her head against something whenever she saw something stupid. She literally could not resist. Discord wasn't awake, but we did manage to get him less, ah, chaotic when he escaped, but he caught wind of Twilight's condition and... well... the end result was her hammering the library apart with her skull."

Twilight raised her head, cast a structural increase spell on the table, and slammed back down hard.

After a moment, she let out a groan of pain.

Pinkie's smile shrank a bit, and she looked down at the table.

"There was one time that someone broke a Pinkie Promise." There was a gasp of disbelief and shock at that statement. "Your tree was part of the collateral damage. I've been meaning to apologize for this, but I've never had a good chance and-" Pinkie's eyes started to water as the guilt began to grow in her.

"It's okay Pinkie," Twilight murmured from her face down position. "I forgive you." Sighing loudly, she flicked her eyes upwards. "Who's next to tell me how they destroyed my tree?"

"Or how about the time you threw a massive party Nyx?" Pinkie Pie asked.

"Pinkie Pie!" Nyx squeaked.

"What party Nyx?" Twilight turned her head slowly, glaring at her daughter. "Because I don't really remember you throwing a party that destroyed our home."

"It was a party when you were gone and things got a bit out of control, mamma." Nyx muttered softly. "It wasn't badgers that time..."

Twilight was tempted to get angry at her daughter for throwing a party when she was gone, but Pinkie Pie was right next to her and she did give a Pinkie Promise not to get mad. "Two months, grounded."

Derpy looked at Twilight.

"I sneezed once, and the next thing I knew your house was in five different countries." She blushed.

"Let me guess, you don't know how?" Twilight asked, whimpering.

"Actually, I do know." Derpy smiled and she began to explain the series of events.

"Huh, that does make sense." Rainbow Dash said with everyone else nodding their heads after the explanation. Twilight just continued to hit her head against the table.

"There was the first time I saw a band of Viking raiders steal the tree and turn it into planks to fix their boat, at which point they kidnapped Luna and stole most of the royal Treasury, before sailing off," Discord said, wearing a Viking helmet, while drinking out of a (French) Horn. "And it wasn't my fault... that time."

"That was my idea," Tex smirked before motioning to the Reds and Blues, "And these guys were the other vikings."

"I got tied to the boat!" Caboose beamed happily.

"I tricked Tirek into thinking that he had to eat Ms. Twilight Sparkle's home in order to take the Alicorn magic," a green Unicorn with the Greek symbol for Delta as his Cutie Mark, "By the time he was through the eastern wing of the library, he gave up because he had to be taken to the hospital."

"Nice one, Delta," Church chuckled, "But that was only partially destroyed."

"The belch he released as he was being loaded into the ambulance took care of the rest," Delta stated, making Twilight hit her head on the table once more.

"By the way," an Earth Pony said with the Cutie Mark of a steel wolf, next to a female Unicorn with a Cutie Mark of an angel...with playboy bunny ears, "guys, this is Excellen Browning. AKA, White Angel."

She then gave out a wave. "First time here," she said, "and it was kind of unfortunate...Cyclone Buster and Psychic Driver know this, but...combo attacks aren't the best method when getting used to equine bodies."

Steel Beowulf just remained emotionless. "And that's when Tirek took her magic," he said. "I...lost it."

"And by losing it," Psychic Driver said, "he means Tirek got ripped a new one faster than the one time I've seen Ingram soil himself when he brainwashed Steel Angel." Cyclone Buster nodded, confirming this.

"What does this have to do with my tree?" Twilight asked them.

"You know the hospitals sometimes don't have Lost and Found boxes?" Steel Beowulf asked her.

The implication hit Twilight immediately as she slammed her head on the table. Twice.

Applejack snorted. "As official museum curator for Equestrian Loops, Ah can assure y'all that the library has been torn apart, blown up, and set on fire more times and in more ways than Celestia has had birthday parties. You all really need ta get more creative!"

"Oh yeah?" One of the visiting loopers glowered at the orange pony. "Well then, miss museum, what would you put out on the table?"

Applejack smirked. "Bought out by Flim and Flam and demolished ta make way fer a tradeport. Accidentally brought ta life by druidic magics. Torn apart when somepony cast a voodoo doll spell on one of mah museum models. Toppled over by rioting ponies who assumed Princess Twilight was hidin' alicornation spells from tha populace. Turned into a bomb by an equation involvin' tha phrase 'Knowledge is power'--"

"New rule!" Twilight cried. "Applejack can't participate!" She lifted her head, pulling a bottle of aspirin out of her pocket and checking the expiration date before swallowing two pills.

"Bonbon sat on it," Lyra reported.

"...Um-

"Yeah, for some reason she was a literal giant pony that loop. Actually, I think she was using it as a backscratcher and stumbled, but 'Bonbon sat on it' is so much clearer-

Shining and Cadence looked at each other.

"There was that one time we-

"That was you two?!" Twilight squeaked. "I had to wash my tree down for so long it broke in half with I tried to-Gah!" Twilight shuddered, slamming her head into the groove on the table.

"-played twister, when we noticed the tree had termites in it." Shining said, raising an eyebrow at his sister.

"We had it condemned." Cadence smiled at her sister in law. "We don't really mess with your home Twily."

"Thanks guys." She flashed a smile at them before faceplanting again. "Ok, once I find out who did that to my tree, lunar time out for three months." She groaned facedown from her table.

Discord and Berry Punch shared a glance, but said nothing.

"I once managed to have the TARDIS here but I needed to fill up," a pony with a long scarf said.

"So Scarfy here tried to land it properly near the biggest source of power," another pony said with a bowtie and smoking fez, grinning at the groans. "Long story short, it seems that all of us together are still not good enough to pilot the TARDIS properly and we crashed into it."

"Also, we're sorry for causing your home to implode that other time," a pony with a faux leather jacket added.

"And the one time we tried to get rid of Tirek that involved your house as bait," another one pony with three dimensional glasses said. "Turns out your tree is dripping in magic."

The rest of the Doctors laughed and apologized for their own accidental destruction of the Golden Oaks Library while Twilight went to get another table after she broke the first one with her head.

Commander Candy Cane, Hero of Equestria, took a sip from his Amasec, "There was one time that Lord Russ landed on Equis instead of Fenris."

Twilight sighed. "Let me guess, he landed on my tree."

The Commander shook his head as he emptied his goblet. "Oh, no, no, no. This was during the Nightmare Rebellion by Princess Luna. His arrival was seen as an omen that should her rebellion come to fruition, all the stars in the universe would crash to Equis, killing

them all. It brought a lasting peace for Equestria. Lord Russ was then raised by the two Diarchs. Equestria became a stronghold world for the Imperium of Man."

Gilda scowled. "But wait, candybutt, this contest is for how the tree was either removed from Twilight's care, destroyed or disappeared."

Cane slid his goblet to Big Mac, who filled it up with more of the delectable drink. "Twilight's Library was confiscated when the Emperor arrived to research magic and its relation to the Warp. Unawake Twilight was delighted to help the Emperor. Eventually it was torn down and rebuilt to encompass all of Ponyville. Eventually, it covered the entire world as expansion after expansion was added."

He chuckled softly. "You should have seen archivist Dash, who could find any book in 10 seconds flat."

Gilda smiled, tapping her beak. "Well Twilight, I once decided to do some research on why RD here keeps on crashing into your home and I discovered that your tree is a pegasi magic beacon." She smirked, looking at the crowd. "I decided to borrow it once to see what would happen if I brought it home. I became the undefeated ruler by planting your tree in front of my throne."

Twilight gave a stink eye before slamming her head against the table again and again.

"Well," Rainbow Dash drawled, "there was this one Loop where I replaced Daring Do. And it turned out that the library tree was precisely a thousand years old, and it would produce an acorn that granted the person who ate it absolute knowledge. So of course Ahuizotl wanted it." She pulled out a stack of books and set them on the bar. The titles all read: Daring Do and the Kernel of Knowledge, by A. K. Yearling and Iris Drake. "If you want the details, you'll have to read the book. But long story short: library go smashy smashy."

"So that's why the library had a NO CATS ALLOWED sign in it for a few thousand Loops," Rarity noted.

Twilight nodded, which caused the table currently impaled on her horn to wobble.

Sleipnir took a long drink. "There was one time you managed to stop Tirek, but then a shoggoth came and ate a tree-shaped hole into your loop. It was either let your loop crash in a particularly nasty way, or stick your tree into the hole." The Admin smiled sadly. "Perfect shape to block the hole, I might add Twilight."

Twilight smashed her head through the second table and then did the same to the third table.

A yellow and black garbed human moaned loudly. "Look, I have no idea how it happened, but it was not my fault."

"I believe the human expression is 'Bull', Setback." An alien being that looked at home in an aquatic environment replied. "You lead those Gene Bound Fire-Sworn to the library after taunting them and then attempted to hide in the library after they started to chase



you. And to add insult to injury, after we got them to leave, Voss tore the rest of the library up from the ground and used it to smash you into the ground.

"Hey, he's your nemesis, your fault. Not mine."

A young pony with an orange-based Cutie Mark was surprised.

"In my defense," the man replied, "the Inves ate the fruit from the tree, turned giant, and trampled itself on it. I just did clean-up duty."

"A-ha!" Trixie shouted from the bar. "I have thought of one-"

"Exploding my house doesn't really count Trixie." Twilight groaned from the table

"Bah, I would not wager my best story on a simple explosion." Trixie boasted, rubbing her hoof against her chest. "One time I was only one Awake with someone stealth anchoring, I had managed to make your house disappear when I first came to Ponyville." Trixie looked down at the floor. "Trixie never had the chance to bring it back as things went pretty much baseline for me, only worse as Twilight decided to bring in Celestia."

There was a bit of mutterings, and a certain changeling queen leaned over to hug her marefriend.

"At least it was better than the time you tried to cut me in half." Chrys said with a huff.

"You will never let that go, will you?" Trixie glared at her now. "It was a prop!"

"Yes, a prop chainsaw, which you did not tell me about until I almost fainted at your little 'trick'." She rolled her eyes. "Thank goodness the parents had the sense to boycott you after those two foals tried to copy you without knowing it was a fake." Chryss and Trixie looked at each and then upwards at the stunned bar.

"What?" Trixie blinked at the horrified loopers, "Snips and Snails tried to copy me; thankfully they were fool enough to ask you first Twilight." Trixie then huffed again before throwing back a shot. "I still don't see how or know why I was given community service for that, Trixie didn't do anything wrong!"

Sunset shrugged. "Does the Loop where Tirek got sent to the world beyond the mirror and blew up our Pokey Oaks Library count?"

"It does, as well as explain why my tree suddenly disappeared that one time."

"Did a zipper open up underneath it?" Orange Warlord asked Twilight.

"No." Twilight sighed, "I just got a letter that said my library was being donated to a town that just recently lost their own. While I was still in the shower."

"The letter came?"

"When they stole my tree \_and\_ gave me that letter." Twilight grumbled from her seat.

"Oh," Orange Warlord said. "Never mind. I said my piece."

"How'd you still get indoor plumbing?" Rainbow Dash asked Twilight.

"I didn't." Twilight glared at her friend. "One moment I was lathering my mane and the next I was face down in the hole where my basement should have been, and my mail box had a letter inside it."

"And...where'd this guy come from?"

"Right, sorry," he said. "Back home, I'm known as Kouta Karazuba. For some odd reason, I'm known as Orange Warlord here..."

"We'll discuss this later," Applejack replied.

Sunset, meanwhile, secretly sniggered.

\_They must never know I stole the tree like that, \_she thought to herself.

\* \* \*

><p>A few loops later, Twilight would sit up in her bed and realize that Sunset never said <em>how<em> she was connected to her tree in that bar bet that her daughter started.

Grinding her teeth, she decided she would need to have talk with her friend.

\* \* \*

><p>Diamond Tiara spoke up. "There was that time my unawake self tried to steal the tree from you because she thought it was the source of your alicorn powers. Only I woke up in the middle of her spell to turn it into a Genius Loci and caused it to transmute into tree sap, books and all."<p>

Twilight's head broke through her fourth table. She glowered at Diamond as she levitated another table into place. "I remember. My mane still smelled like tree sap in the next loop!"

DT flinched at the just-short-of-Promise-breaking glare her anchor leveled at her. "Er...How about I teach you the spell I put on Rarity and Spike's rings to drop it in your pocket if it detects imminent destruction?"

Twilight, banging her head on the table, suddenly stopped and looked up at the group. "Whoever comes up with the best way to make sure the Golden Oaks Library is safe and sound for the length of one or more loops... I will pay for their booze for an entire loop."

"...Any price?" Grif asked as he and the other heavy drinkers of the Loopers began to salivate a little.

Twilight nodded, baiting the hook. She wanted to see if she could save her tree. Then wait to see how the baseline version of her would deal with the loss, since she had heard this would happen when she was on the Hub.

\* \* \*

><p>Later that night, after the winning drink had been handed out and everyone had retired from the bar, Twilight sat up in bed putting the finishing touches on a new list.<p>

Those Who've Destroyed My Tree, and How

It might be a bit petty of her, but no one messed with her tree and got away with it. She'd only Pinkie Promised not to get mad, after all. Nothing had been said about getting even. Besides, she was running dry on prank ideas lately and this was just the spark she needed to get the juices flowing.

\* \* \*

><p>133.8 (masterofgames)<p>

Twilight and the Rainbooms were once again facing off against the Dazzlings. The unexpected bit was the amount of difficulty they were having. It was clear that this time the Dazzlings were far more powerful than normal. The sonic assault from the three of them were able to match the strength of the Avatar of Harmony.

That changed when a tail slap to the back of Sonata and Aria's heads got their attention. Adagio gave them a glare and a head tilt upwards, receiving reluctant nods in return. Swimming through the air, but keeping up the attack, they repositioned themselves higher up, granting two advantages as the Avatar followed them with its' attack. Now, if the Avatar won, their human bodies wouldn't be hit, and if they did win, their attack would continue on and smash into the Rainbooms.

So naturally, this was when Adagio gave the signal to hit the high note.

Twilight could only watch with her jaw hanging open as she saw the Avatar losing ground. It wasn't until Sunset facepalmed with a loud slap that she snapped out of it. "Of course! They can reinforce their attack all they want, but ours has a finite amount of energy since we lost the connection to refill it!" Sunset leaned away from the other unawake members of the Rainbooms. "Think Dragonball! It's the reason beam attacks are usually stronger than ball attacks if the two struggle for more than a few seconds!" she hissed out of the corner of her mouth, making Twilight's eyes widen in realization.

And it was mere seconds later that the Avatar ran out of power and vanished. Twilight crossed her arms in front of her as she shouted to the others. "Brace yourselves!"

The others did so, and Sunset would have as well, if a rather unlikely person hadn't run up and grabbed the mike from her hand.

Standing tall and glaring at the Sirens, Lyra took a deep breath and let loose a high note of her own.

With the aid of the Bassmobile, it made the Dazzlings attack shatter like glass as the two forces impacted.

Aria just glared down. "Who's this little twerp?"

Lyra glanced to the others. "Twilight, Sunset, you take the other two. Without all three of them, it should be easy enough." She then grinned, looking back at the Dazzlings and cracking her knuckles. "I'll take care of my aunt Sonata."

Twilight could only blink at that, then sighed. "Did you at least deal with the local Lyra discretely?"

Lyra just grinned, subtly gesturing to the back stage. "Oh she'll be helping me." she smirked, as another Lyra emerged and started quickly rewiring the sound equipment.

Sunset winced. "You sure she'll be okay all alone?"

Lyra shook her head. "She's not the one alone. I am. I'm 100% seapony in here." she grinned, tapping her forehead.

"... Dare I ask how?" Twilight groaned.

Lyra shrugged. "It's... you know... multiple minds meets multiple bodies... turns out when I can swap around who is in who when we make physical contact. Doesn't work with shadow clones, because the mind is copied as well, but a completely separate me seems to be valid."

"How does that even work!?"

"I'dunno..."

\* \* \*

><p>Fingers were useful things. Twilight could see why Lyra liked them so much. Right now, they were attempting to deal with her headache. "Okay, one more time. I can't quite believe I heard what I think I did."<p>

Lyra shrugged. "It's not so hard to understand. One of my multiple personalities has multiple personalities. The seapony me has siren instincts and powers now, though I do feed off of different energy, since only mom was a siren. Dad was just a seapony. Well... as 'just' a seapony as any seapony can be at least. That brings the grand total of me to five and a half. If you give the go-ahead, I might even be able to bring it up to six and a half, if I let the local me tag along in my head when the loop resets."

"Absolutely not!"

"Hey, not saying I wanted it either, just saying if you ever want to try and figure my head out again, it's an option."

Twilight groaned. "Ugh. Just... just go back to Equestria. I'll figure out how you keep making your glitches worse later. If you

absolutely must train your siren powers, Vinyl probably has the closest thing to them, so ask her."

Meanwhile, Sunset Shimmer was looking over the three Dazzlings. Aria and Adagio were securely tied up, and Sonata was in a large cage, curled up, rocking back and forth slowly with unfocused eyes, and covered in scorch marks and soot.

Sunset just shook her head as she leaned against the cage. "You knowingly fought a seapony and \_weren't\_ expecting disproportionate firepower? You get no sympathy from me."

\* \* \*

><p>133.9 (Gym Quirk)<p>

Doctor Whooves made his way into Mac's Bar, exchanging polite greetings with several of the other patrons. He noted Twilight and the Element bearers gathered at a table playing Chaos. "Afternoon, ladies."

"Heya, Doc!" called back Applejack. "We'd offer to deal ya in, but we're testin' the new ten-player variant."

"I can't help but notice that there are only six of you."

"Yes. But keep in mind who designed the game," said Rarity, scowling at a mimeographed rule sheet.

"Quite." He turned to the mare behind the bar. "I'm in the mood for something slightly off the beaten track. Not too exotic, but perhaps a twist on something familiar. Do you have any suggestions?"

Berry Punch stared into the distance for a moment, then nodded. "I have a few ideas. How strong did you have in mind?"

"A mixed drink should probably do the trick."

"Right. Just a minute." She started fussing with fruit juice and crushed ice. Eventually, she presented a cocktail glass containing a pale green slush garnished with a small twig.

He took an experimental sip. "Rum...lime...with a...woody?...overtone. Well, that certainly fits 'off the beaten track'. Does it have a name?"

"That's a Hickory Daiquiri, Doc."

Groans drowned out the sound of Pinkie's giggles and Rainbow Dash's guffaws. A small storm of bar snacks bombarded the mixologist mare.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

133.1: It was inevitable, really.

>133.2: Plan for everything.<br>133.3: A half Kage Bunshin is smaller than normal.

>133.4: Quite a spectacular legalistic judo move.<br>133.5: The Mouse

That formed a government.

>133.6: He's not very good at this.<br>133.7: Floating in the summer sky, ninety-nine pieces of tree shrapnel go by...

>133.8: Ow.<br>133.9: Again. Ow.

## 140. Chapter 140

### 134.1 (Gym Quirk)

Jean-Luc Picard sat in a conference room with the looping members of his senior staff.

It was the aftermath of the affair at the Remmler Array where the Enterprise would undergo a routine baryon decontamination sweep. Some simple modifications to the normal security protocols usually served to thwart the baseline terrorist attack.

But they were clearly not able to prevent this act of...vandalism? Or was it theft?

The captain gazed at the PADD on the table with bemused annoyance.

He read the short message displayed there one more time.

My dear Jean-Luc,

Tempted as we are to apologize for what has happened, when we consider what you did during your last open visit to Equestria, we find that we are unable to do so.

We do wish to make it clear that we hold no personal animosity toward you, your crew, or anyone associated with your universe.

Had you left the situation as it was after your tenure as the proprietor of Carousel Boutique, there would have been no need for the actions we have taken. That said, we now consider the matter closed. You have our assurance that the usual sanctuary status will be extended the next time you or any of your crew visits Equestria.

Sincerely,

Twilight Sparkle, Apple Bloom, McIntosh Apple, and Pinkie Pie

"What did you do to them, Jean-Luc?" asked Beverly Crusher.

"You recall my telling you about the time I spent the loop there as a fashion designer?"

There were nods all around. "It was a fairly horrid pun," observed Geordi LaForge.

Picard had the good grace to acknowledge this with a grimace. "The next time I looped in as Earl Grey, I found myself running a small vineyard on the outskirts of Ponyville. Again, my intentions were for a peaceful loop investigating the workings of earth pony magic as it

relates to their agricultural sector. I had informed the local loopers of this and they were happy to leave me to my small farm.

"For whatever reason, there was a sudden increase in demand for root vegetables, and I had several fallow fields that I thought I might use to take advantage of the situation."

Will Riker and Deanna Troi shared a look. "I think I can see where this is going," murmured the first officer.

"Let me guess. You asked for help with a seed drill or similar agricultural implement," suggested the counselor.

Picard massaged his temples. "It was entirely unintentional. The words were out of my mouth before I thought about what I was saying..."

"Bringing the discussion back to the matter at hand, what are we going to do?" asked LaForge. "Remarkably accurate duplicate notwithstanding, this is not our Enterprise. As far as I can tell, this replacement ship is functionally identical, and the contents have been transferred with very few obvious alterations. It should easily last us until Veridian III, at which point, we should be able to return to baseline."

At least the ponies had left them an (almost) identical ship; James Kirk had said that most of the time loopers stole his Enterprise, they were much less considerate.

"If only the hull wasn't that color," sighed Riker. "I think we'll have to use one of your spares, Jean-Luc. It's either that, or try to explain to the crew why the ship is now bright pink with yellow and blue balloons in place of the usual Starfleet insignia, and I somehow doubt the fallback of blaming it on Q will work."

Picard nodded in resignation.

"Cheer up, Jean-Luc," advised Beverly. "You can add a fully functional pony-built starship to your collection now. I don't think Jim or Jonathan can claim to have anything similar."

\* \* \*

><p>134.2 (bubblesage)<p>

"What. the. bark." Twilight asked face hoofing looking at where her tree had stood.

Jack trotted over rubbing his head. "Yeah. That- that can happen."

Twilight levitated several brooms, dust pans and various other implements to the two. "I don't care how. I'm going to the spa, then to Mac's bar. My tree better be back by the time I get back. Understood?"

\* \* \*

><p>(Evilhumour)<p>

"Rio Reverso!" The green pegasus shouted in the air above the splintered tree.

"Reversing Mirror!" The black unicorn shouted too, when he slipped on a fallen sign saying home sweet home.

"Uh oh, DUCK!" The anchor for the Showdown branch shouted to the group of ponies around them as the beam from Rio Reverso overshot the remains of library and hit Twilight in the flanks, sending her head over tail into a big mud puddle.

With a weary step, the now muddy purple alicorn stood up and slowly focused her eyes on the Showdown Loopers.

"Run now." She barked out through clenched teeth, with the growing crowd of ponies now looking at her with awe and wonder. "Because if I get my hooves on you, you two are \_so \_ going to the moon for this!"

\* \* \*

><p>134.3 (Gamerex27)<p>

Twilight rolled her eyes as the supercharged Tirek towered over her. She \_really\_ didn't have time for this. Her library had \_already\_ been blown up, and she had to get back to her hotel room in Canterlot before her batch of Ice-9 broke out of containment, brought her sample of SCP-447 into contact with the wilted flower, and ended up crashing the Loop.

"You will give me what I want!" the centaur demanded, staring the Anchor down menacingly.

However, Twilight had stopped being intimidated by him around the third time he ever showed up in the Loops. "I'm not in the mood for this," she growled. "If you don't leave right now, I'll chain you down in the Scariest Cave in Equestria, leave you there, and-

"Waaaaaaait!"

Pinkie Pie, the only other Looper currently Awake, skidded between the two magical titans from seemingly nowhere.

"Huff...Huff...Here you...go, Mr...Tirek!" Panting, she reached into her saddlebag, pulling out an ordinary-looking, pure white chicken egg.

Tirek narrowed his eyes at the Element of Laughter. Leaning down, he plucked the egg from her hoof, and studied it carefully in his hand.

Slowly, he brought the egg up to his mouth, and ran his tongue over it. Frowning, he conjured a microscope from his stolen magic, and stared at the egg intently.

"Wait, what the bu-"

"Finally," Tirek said, pocketing the egg. "I have my egg."



With that, he vanished in a poof of smoke. A geyser of pure magical energy erupted from where he once stood, slowly spreading all over the land and restoring the magic he had stolen to everypony in Equestria.

Blinking, Twilight turned to face her friend. "I...what...what the stomata just happened?!"

"Weeeeeell," Pinkie Pie said, pulling out a vial of sinister looking bacteria, "I found this when I went to Tartarus for more ingredients for the Super-Warm-Lava-Cakes I wanted to make! So, since it said 'Umbrella Corporation' on it," she said, motioning to the aforementioned logo, "I figured that all Tirek wanted in this Loop was an egg!"

"What."

"I dunno what he's gonna do with it," Pinkie Pie said, shrugging. "Maybe he'll start a chicken farm? Kinda hard to do that, since it wasn't fertilized and all. Maybe he just wanted to make an omelette, or a cake? But you kind of need more eggs for those. I had more eggs to give him, too, but this means more for me!"

"I...Pinkie...Why the hay does Tirek being related to the Umbrella Corporation means he'd just be satisfied with...an egg?!"

Pinkie Pie giggled, wrapping her foreleg around the other pony's neck to bring her into a conspiratory whisper. "You don't know? That's all Wesker really wants. He always says 'You will give me an egg!' So, I did it, since Tirek kinda sounds like Wesker, and he left!"

"I..." Twilight shook her head vigorously. "I really wish Mac was Awake this Loop. I need to get back and check on the Ice-9. Hopefully, there's enough 447 left to brew a stiff drink for me. Bark knows I need it."

\* \* \*

<p>134.4 (Kingofsouls)<p>

Argent Adept was about to strain his face permanently due to all of his angry glowering. Vinyl was in the meantime just...taking it all in. The Loops were weird, but this...this was...well weird. A purple clad masked pony that reminded her of a certain motor mouth from the Marvel Loop had stolen Octavia's cello and was...playing music on it. To add insult to injury, the area where his cutie mark would be was a yellow version of Octavia's.

Argent could take no more.

\*\*"GUISE, FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, STOP STEALING INSTRUMENTS SO YOU CAN PLAY FREEBIRD ON THEM!\*\*"

"SOR-RY, CAN'T HEAR YOU OVER THE POWER OF BEING A HIPPIE!"

Vinyl just...continued to stare. "Is he.."

"From my loop? I am ashamed to say yes." Argent moaned. "At the very

least, he is not looping. I thank the admins."

\* \* \*

><p>134.5 (JustTheBast)<p>

The bell of Carousel Boutique tinkled as Twilight entered the shop's front room. Rarity had asked her over to assist in some unspecified "testing", and she was quite curious to learn the details.

Alerted by the bell, Rarity soon came out of the back area and smiled to see her friend.

"Twilight, darling, so good of you to come. I do hope it's not an imposition?"

"Of course not, Rarity," Twilight replied with a smile of her own. "You know I'm always happy to help. What exactly is it that you need me for? Your message was a little vague."

"Ah, of course, dear. It's a new line of protective clothing I've developed. Please follow me - I've got it set up downstairs in the materials lab."

As the two ponies descended to the modest laboratory that Rarity added underneath her shop most loops, the fashionista continued, "I tested it against projectiles and energy weapons myself, but when it comes to magic - well, yours is so much stronger and more versatile than mine, so naturally I thought to invite you to put my newest creation through its paces."

Twilight blushed slightly at the compliment. "Thanks, Rarity," she said a little awkwardly, "I'll help any way I can."

The two of them entered the lab and went into a side room, where Twilight saw a gun range set up with a ponyquin wearing a dark, twinkling dress as the target.

"So..." said Twilight, eying the dress, "I just attack it with magic and see what happens?"

"Yes dear," said Rarity. "I'm confident that it can stand up to nearly anything you can throw at it - although, obviously it only protects the covered areas. It is difficult to provide full body covering and elegance at the same time. Alas! Why must style and functionality so often be at odds?"

Rarity raised a hoof to her brow in anguish, and Twilight almost expected her to summon her fainting couch at any moment, but the fit of drama passed and Rarity became all business again. "Do go ahead, darling."

"Okay," said Twilight. "I'll start with a test shot to get my eye in and then ramp up."

She lowered her head and shot a small bolt of purple magical energy at the dress. She looked back up just in time to see the bolt seem to dwindle and vanish. Beside her, Rarity bounced excitedly, before catching herself and pretending she never moved.

For the second bolt, Twilight increased the size and watched closely what happened. As the bolt touched the fabric, instead of impacting it appeared to shrink and dwindle to nothing. It almost looked as if...

Twilight shot another, even bigger bolt and watched the shrinking effect take place. Yes; It definitely looked like the bolt was travelling into the distance until it winked out. She conjured a small scrying portal that gave her a side-on view of the ponyquin and shot a slow-moving bolt. The portal showed her that there was indeed no impact; the bolt appeared to travel straight on, into the dress. From her own vantage point, she could still see it slowly moving on and on into the distance, within the cloth.

"It's a portal?" Twilight exclaimed.

"Of a sort," said Rarity with a satisfied grin, "but not quite..."

"All right, Rarity, I'm impressed," said Twilight. "Now spill. What exactly is it?"

Rarity tossed her hair and smiled mischievously. "Well, darling, a few loops back, I found myself in a sci-fi themed loop, where space-time was particularly warped. Lots of little pocket universes all over, just bulging out from the main universe with no regard for road safety." She shook her head at the inconsiderateness of the cosmology of said loop. "Anyway, everybody kept going on about 'the fabric of space-time' all the time, so I thought, why not take that literally?"

"Wait, you mean...?"

"Yes, dear," said Rarity with a smug grin. "The next time we came across a pocket, I just stitched it shut and took the remaining fabric with me. I've been experimenting with it ever since, until I came up with this fetching little number." She motioned at the glittering, star-spangled dress.

"A wearable pocket universe..." Twilight said, flabberghasted. "And everything you throw at it just travels into deep space within it. That's- Hey, wait!"

Twilight eyed the dress suspiciously. "If that thing is basically a stretch of deep space in dress form, why doesn't the surrounding air rush into the vacuum?"

"Oh, I thought of that, of course!" said Rarity, waving her hoof airily - although her tone made Twilight suspect that there had been some explosive decompression incidents in Rarity's experiments with the fabric. "I enchanted the material with a screen that keeps it airtight and only lets harmful energies pass through."

Twilight mulled this over for a moment, then cocked her head. "Rarity, I think there might be a flaw with this..."

She shot another bolt at the dress, this time of a different kind. "Dispel Magic!"

Instantly a howling wind arose in the room, as the air started

escaping into the depths of the dress. Loose objects around the room started flying, and Rarity's hooves scrabbled for purchase on the floor, as she found herself being pulled towards her creation.  
"\_Wahahaaa!\_"

To her relief, a purple shield popped into existence around the dress, cutting off the suction. Sinking to her haunches, she gasped, slowly recovering her breath and composure. After a few moments she looked up at Twilight sheepishly.

"Ahem, yes. I see. That's definitely something of a drawback." She fixed her mussed hair, stood up and joined Twilight by the force bubble.

Inside the shield lay the dress, and both of them could clearly see the ponyquin tumbling serenely within the void of space, surrounded by some of the loose objects from the room and pretty, glittering particles of ice - remnants of the humidity in the air, frozen in the cold of space.

"It's a pretty dress, I give you that," said Twilight. "Could be a bit rough on the wearer, though..."

\* \* \*

><p>134.6 (Crisis)<p>

Twilight Sparkle was expecting a quiet night in as she opened her door. Not being bowled over by a ballistic impact from her pink hyperactive looping friend.

"Twilight-Twilight-Twilight-Twilight-Twilight!"

"Yes, Pinkie?" Twilight shook the multiple images of her friend back into one.

"Quick! I need twelve bags of flour, eleven bags of sugar, ten tubs of butter, nine more of icing, eight marshmallow creme, seven things of ginger, six baking soda, five vanilla, four gallons milk, three tea spoons, two dozen eggs, and a biiiig bag of chocolate chips!"

"Pinkie... Is this for baking or a Twelve Days of Hearth's Warming parody sketch?"

Pinkie Pie opened her mouth to reply, paused, and closed it. Tapping a hoof to her chin, she pondered for a moment. "That's a goooood question..."

"Why I asked it."

\* \* \*

><p>134.7 (Leviticus Wilkes)<p>

A smokey table under a green light. Cards and cigars. Beer and milk. In the back a pool table, billiards clicking against one another. The front bar, a rich mahogany plank, is spotless. The bartender was cleaning a glass. A piano played in the background. It was a

brilliant little cliché, only broken by it's occupants.

The bartender was an apple red pony with a green apple mark on his flank, named Mac. Darth Vader was winning his pool game against Corvo Atano. And the poker table was populated by dogs.

Link plucked out two cards and flipped them over for display. "Pair of queens."

Amaterasu flipped her own cards out. "Pair of kings."

Dog threw down his cards. "I'm out."

Cat grumbled something from under the table. "Of course you're out."

Spike smiled and flipped out three cards. "Triple Aces."

Leah growled something profane and threw her cards down, along with Courage.

Balto cocked an eyebrow in confusion. "Uh... Three twos? Does that trump three aces."

Spike reclined himself. "Nope. I get the pot boys and girls."

The assembled canines/former canines drew new hands. Leah looked up at Mac, who had stopped wiping his glass to stare. "Take a photo. It'll last longer."

\* \* \*

><p>134.8 (Evilhumour with help from Purrs)<p>

Prancing a bit as she trotted home, Twilight was thoroughly pleased with the current loop. Nearly all of her friends were Awake, a relatively rare occurrence and a real treat. Her daughter and Luna had pranked Ponyville with a spectacularly choreographed dance-off. Ivory Scroll, after digging around in some records, had declared Ditzzy the sole inheritor of the lands and titles formerly owned by Blueblood (the stallion's definite vitality apparently notwithstanding). In all, she was really enjoying herself.

The feeling wouldn't last long. When she reached for the doorknob, her magic bounced off somehow. She blinked and tried again, only to find the same odd reaction.

Well, insanity was repeating the same action and expecting different results. Even if the Loops had sent her sanity elsewhere, she wasn't quite \_that\_...

Then again, third time's the charm, right? She put more force into the spell this time, which proved to be a mistake. The magic bounced off yet again, forming a sphere as it bounded into the square. Ricocheting around town like Pinkie on a sugar high, the ball startled many ponies before eventually leaving her sight. More than one stallion was slapped by a mare misidentifying the brush along her flanks as a fondle.

Twilight considered going forth to stop the magic ball, but Trixie

solved the problem for her. That is, a loud bang made her fold back her ears, and a familiar wagon proved for the umpteenth time that being aerodynamic and controllable were not necessary prerequisites for flight. The faint sound of "It's not my fault!" from the rapidly departing vehicle completed the picture, and Twilight turned back to the problem at hand with a slight chuckle.

(Several weeks later, Trixie and Gilda would emerge from the Griffin Lands, announcing to everyone their exciting tale of prophecies, queens, battles, and mysterious objects only cloaked in mystery because the showmare kept changing the subject.)

Perhaps her hoof could accomplish what her horn couldn't - but no, it found absolutely no purchase. Grinding her teeth, she attempted to bypass the door completely and teleport in. Unfortunately, the attempt just ended with her landing on her tail, still outside the library.

Now she was angry. With a clomp of hooves on dirt, she charged straight at the door, horn lowered, fully intending to just smash the bucking thing. The plan did not work as intended, instead leaving her once more on her rear with the addition of a strong headache.

Picking herself up, she snarled at her library, resolving to conquer this challenge with whatever it took. At least it should be easier now, seeing that there were three trees before her, although their moving around could pose a problem. The squirrel beside her chattered that she wasn't thinking clearly, but a glare was sufficient to make it flee. As it left, it muttered something about her hearing things, too.

Well, Rainbow Dash always found it so easy to crash in. Maybe there was something about pegasi... A quick ascension and descension gave her the means to test the hypothesis. Letting her pegasus instincts take over, she soared up to dive-bomb her tree. Some intangible force prevented her from making contact, and Twilight spent a few futile seconds imitating a hummingbird before being flung backwards into the town hall.

Twilight spent the rest of the loop in disgruntled resentment. It became outright rage when she finally determined that someone (she had yet to figure out who) had actually put an anti-Twilight blocker on her library, and later devolved into immense frustration when the tree fared just fine against Tirek.

\* \* \*

><p>134.9 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Twilight was startled out of her usual quiet reading by the sound of a brass fanfare ringing out from the street outside. She opened the door to the sound of a single triangle note followed by a blart of saxophone.

Outside, circling the square, a horde of wagons pulled by changelings paraded round and round, spiraling inward as what seemed like half Chrysalis's hive built... something... with astonishing speed. Every movement followed the tempo of walking bass notes played by an all-changeling band, from the marching of hooves to the swinging of

hammers to the unfolding of wagons into bleacher seats and concession stands. Around the periphery of all this activity the ponies of Ponyville moved in for a closer look, Twilight included. A group of high-voiced changelings began to sing:

\_It's time to raise the tentpoles  
>It's time to hang the lights<br>Let's build the grand pavillion

>For Trixie's show tonight<em>

A group of deep-voiced changelings, dressed as ushers, began selling tickets and guiding ponies to seats, singing:

\_It's time to fill the bleachers  
>Everypony pack in tight<br>Be sure to buy some popcorn  
>For Trixie's show tonight<em>

On a stage which had gone from bits and pieces of various wagons into a platform fit for Canterlot's finest players, with curtains and backdrops five deep, in thirty seconds, Chrysalis herself stepped out and sang:

\_To introduce our players  
>Is what I'm here to do<br>It makes me very happy  
>To explain it all to you:<em>

And then, over a drumroll, she spoke plainly: \_"Tonight you will laugh, cry, and kiss three bits goodbye, as you witness comedy, tragedy, music and wonders, all under the direction of Equestria's premier showmare: \_\_\*\*the Great and Powerful Trixie!\*\*"\_

At these words Trixie herself stepped out and waved, to the cheers of ponies still filling the seats. She sang:

\_It's time to get things started-\_

The audience answered:

\_Why don't you get things started?!\_

Trixie grinned and sat back on a platform, which slowly rose from the stage, tier after tier below filled with changelings singing, changelings dancing, changelings playing musical instruments:

\_It's time to get things started  
>For the show that's best-ia<br>In all Equestria  
>Good enough for Princess Celestia<br>It's the Great and Powerful Trixie's show!\_

The last note was punctuated with a flurry of fireworks and colorful explosions, which to the tiny portion of Twilight's mind not struggling to suppress hysterical laughter seemed understated for the mare both RED and BLU teams had tried to hire to replace Demo Guy.

After the show (which featured acting, singing, corny comedy, magic tricks, and one of Trixie's better (and more outrageous) whoppers) Twilight managed to work her way through the changelings dismantling the performance area to the one wagon which hadn't been dismantled or transformed in some way as part of the setup. Little puffs of smoke

came from a chimney on one end, and Twilight could smell tea brewing as the door opened for her.

"I know where Trixie spent last Loop," Twilight said, nodding hello to Chrysalis.

"Obviously," Trixie nodded. "The Great and Powerful Trixie-"

"I prefer just 'Miss Trixie' myself," Chrysalis grinned.

Huffing indignation, Trixie continued, "Trixie was the star act of the Muppet Show last Loop."

"Replacing Piggy, of course," Twilight nodded.

"Er, no," Trixie admitted, "Fozzie, actually. I Awoke as the show's stand-up comedian. But Kermit was kind enough to adjust my role."

"Eventually," Chrysalis smirked.

"Oh, what do you know, 'Chrissy Suggs and Her Grocery Glee Club'?"

"Steady on, darling," Chrysalis said. "Would you like to join the Muppaphones instead?"

Before the spat could really get started, Twilight put in, "So, the Muppet Show? I suppose you had plenty of opportunity to use your explosives knowledge. Trade notes with Crazy Harry?"

Trixie looked a bit uncomfortable. "Actually, er... I've sort of gone off the explosions thing for the time being, Sparkle."

Twilight's jaw dropped. Chrysalis hoofed over a steaming cup of tea, and the lavender unicorn downed it in one swallow without noticing how hot it was. At last she said, "I'm sorry? The Great and Powerful Trixie gone off explosions? What happened to the love of Big Boom?"

"Gonzo the Great happened," Trixie said flatly. "It gets discouraging to think of strange and novel applications of unwisely-used explosives, to take it to the stage manager, and to find out that Gonzo has proposed the exact same act, down to the last detail, not less than a week before." Trixie blew on her own tea a moment before taking a delicate sip. "Now remember the general quality of Gonzo's brainstorm, and consider how it feels to think of all the same ideas AFTER him."

"Yeah, ouch," Twilight nodded.

"Of course, that was a blessing in disguise," Trixie continued, smiling gently. "I was forced to fall back on my skills as a showmare. Which, as we know, are prodigious."

"Quoth the Humble and Modest Trixie," Chrysalis razzed.

Trixie ignored her marefriend. "I'd almost lost track of why I got into explosions in the first place. It's not about how big the boom, or how strange the materials used. It's about whether or not it



entertains the audience. And five years of raising a third-rate variety show up to second-rate brought me closer in touch with the pony I've always wanted to be."

"A power-mad insufferable egotist with delusions of surpassing Celestia?" Twilight couldn't resist the dig, especially since in baseline it was pretty much true.

"Trixie meant," the showmare insisted, "I'm now the entertainer and wonder-worker I've always wanted to be. I asked Chryssy to assist me in maximizing my traveling show's potential, and she indulged me."

"Becoming performing stars is one of the softest and most common peaceful ways we changelings can harvest love," Chrysalis shrugged.

Something Trixie had said earlier finally waved a flag in Twilight's mind. "Wait a minute," she said. "You replaced Fozzie, which means Piggy was there all the time? You're both prima donnas. How did you not kill each other?"

"I admit our relationship was fraught at first," Trixie said. "It helped a bit when the Pigs in Space sketches began. I had taken her place in Veterinarian's Hospital, of course. But we reached a truce when I performed the magic trick that won me the love and friendship of all the Muppet Loopers forever."

"Really? What trick was that?"

"I made Statler and Waldorf disappear." Trixie's grin turned positively wicked. "You know full well I don't tolerate hecklers."

"Statler and Waldorf disappear?" Twilight asked. "They can't have been happy about that."

"Are you kidding?" Trixie laughed. "They were the happiest of all about it! I got a dozen roses from them before each show after that for the rest of the Loop!" She frowned as she added, almost as an afterthought, "Now if only Trixie knew where to find that bear and that fox who took over the box from them... can't be that many one-eyed foxes with a hook for a hand..."

\* \* \*

><p>134.10 (Evilhumour, wildrook, KrisOverstreet)<p>

Twilight gasped at what she saw.

Pinkie Pie seemed to be riding what appeared to be a godzilla sized s'more monster, with many more behind her.

"Look Twilight, I made a couple new friends!" Pinkie Pie giggled from her s'moe monster. "Now I can finally defeat Donut Joe and declare myself the ultimate baker in all of the multiverse!"

With that, Pinkie Pie lead her s'morezillas towards Canterlot for battle.

"Now there's something you don't see every day," Spike muttered.

"Is it weird that I'm completely terrified beyond the capacity for rational thought?" Rarity asked them.

"Nope," Applejack said, neck stretching. "But who are you going to call for this one?"

"Hi, guys, what'd I miss?" Rainbow Dash asked, swooping down from a nearby cloud.

Spike looked at Twilight and said, "Tell her about the Pinkie."

Rainbow Dash gave them a serious look. "What about the Pinkie?"

Twilight sighed, shaking her head. "Pinkie's trying to beat Donut Joe again and I don't think the princesses are awake."

"Does it involve a cross between Mr. Stay-Puft, the Hershey Factory, and two slices of graham crackers fit for a troll?" Rainbow Dash asked them.

Spike then sighed. "Eagle eyes, Dash?" he asked her.

"More like SCATTER!"

\* \* \*

><p>134.11 (Evilhumour)<p>

Lemon Rush walked into the library, sat down in front of Nyx Sparkle, rolled onto his side with his head against her legs and sighed pathetically.

Nyx, in her teenager form, rolled her eyes at this obvious sign of attention from her boyfriend among the loops. Putting down her book that Auntie Dash wrote, she brushed the mane of her boyfriend as she lifted his head onto her lap.

"What's wrong?" She asked after a long few minutes of just brushing his mane.

"Weird variant loop," he huffed, fluttering his wings. "The Little Mother and the God-Emperor are my parents this loop."

"Oh-"

"Only, neither are Awake, so they're more or less retaining their baseline self."

"\_Oh\_-"

"Also, the Little Mother and the God-Emperor are gender swapped." Lemon paused, tilting his head upwards. "Butterscotch and Empy."

Nyx giggled at the name, pulling the stallion in closer to her.

"And-"

"Half the time they're fighting over the littlest of things, namely me, with the Little Mother usually smashing everything with him just yelling in a very shrill voice."

"And-"

"And when they're done yelling, they go to their bedroom to begin another kind of yelling," Lemon Rush shuddered, "The walls are paper thin and their door doesn't lock."

"Ou-"

"So I needed to get away from th-"

Before the Anchor could speak, Nyx pulled him up for a long kiss before using her magic to tweak his ear, causing the stallion to yelp a bit and fall towards her. This led to Lemon Rush falling on top of Nyx; the two loopers giggling at the silliness that just happened. "That was for interrupting me," Nyx licked her teeth, rubbing noses with her grinning coltfriend before kissing him on the lips again. "And that's for coming to talk to me about this."

They both closed their eyes, leaning to kiss each other again when somepony coughed.

"And what, pray tell, do your mother and I get, Nyx Sparkle?" Turning their head, an unawake and unamused alicorn prince of the night and an equally unamused and unawake librarian looked at the two teenagers. Prince Artemis might have once terrified Equestria, but right now Lemon Rush was infinitely more terrified of the unicorn mare next to him.

"Come along you two, I think it is time we had a little chat." Twilight's calm voice was far more terrifying than anything either have had heard in a long time. With a gulp, the two red faced teenagers followed the parents into the kitchen with the door closing with a soft thud.

\* \* \*

><p>134.11 continued (Evilhumour)<p>

Princess Celestia blinked as she felt a presence fly into her private dining room with a loud huff.

Without turning her head, she watched her little brother go straight to the wine cupboard, remove the false backing to it and pull out the Moonshine they had hidden there from her student and now sister in-law after she had made them get rid of it since the last time the two of them had a bit too much in Twilight's own opinion.

After all, the fires were easy to put out, most ponies saw the ring on Artemis's horn and no one accepted his sudden proposals, the court were able to dissolve nearly of all her impromptu to marriages, a lot of ponies now were at ease and comfortable with Artemis after the incident with Record Scratch and Octavia, and all the damages in Equestria was almost all payed off now, just leaving Manehattan to fix properly. She didn't really know why Twilight had

to be such a downer; Cadence was kind enough to lower and raise the sun for the two of them as it was far from the best idea to do so after having Moonshine, and she really didn't think having a meal with the Griffons the morning after was that nice at all.

Forcing the two alicorns to have a simple cereal breakfast while the Griffon diplomat ate a well cooked fish might have been the nastiest prank young Twilight had ever pulled on them, but forcing her brother to gang up on her to ban Moonshine was just deplorable.

Still, Celestia had her duties to her little brother so before Artemis could take a sip, she grabbed the bottle in her gold magic, put the bottle to her lips and drank it all so Artemis could not be tempted.

After a long few minutes of silent chugging, Celestia put the bottle down in a frowning Artemis. With a little blench that only moved Artemis a few feet back and excusing herself, she smiled at her brother and nodded at him to speak.

"Thank the-you, Celestia," he rolled his eyes at her for some reason, making Celestia wonder why. "Refined and classy to the end."

"Thank you, Arty." Celestia let out a little giggle, watching her brother roll his eyes again for a still unknown reason. "So tell me, what's wrong that you needed to come here?"

Artemis blushed and sighed, as he began to eat her breakfast. "Yesterday, Twilight and I caught young Nyx and her coltfriend," Artemis muttered it with the same loving passion all fathers had for their daughter's boyfriend that they saw on top of their little girl. "In a very compromising position."

Celestia gasped, lifting a heavy hoof to her face. "Oh no, you two didn't walk into them doing it, did you?"

Artemis, who had opened up a seven hundred year old wine bottle for a simple drink, began to sputter at the comment just being made. Celestia rolled her eyes at her brother's reaction; was hitting her coat with wine from the nose really appropriate?

After Artemis managed to clear his airway by shaking his head back and forth, he glared at her. "By the ancient ones, no!" He huffed, taking another drink from the wine bottle. "But we sat them down at the table, and began to explain things to them." Artemis shrunk at this part, causing the light headed Celestia to giggle. "I told the two that if they were going to have that kind of relationship, that they should do it in a place that I wouldn't be forced to clean up afterwards." He frowned, placing his head onto the moving tables. "Twilight was not amused by that at all," Artemis sighed and then looked up at her. "Did you know Twilight has quite the set of lungs on her?"

"So, she kicked ya out of the house for a stupid comment and coming to bum by your old sis-hic-" Celestia giggled, placing her hoof to her mouth. "Sister's place?"

"Indeed as everypony else was too busy or unable to take me in. The Apples had their regular family meeting about their alcohol issues;

Dash, Yearling and Ahuizotl are off who knows where; Pinkie and Sssasshs-however the buck you say her name were too busy making cupcakes for me to even try to talk to them, Rarity closed the door on my face since Spike betrayed me by telling her what I said." Artemis grumbled at his brother in-law actions. "So this might be the best place to hunker down while my little Twinkle calms down and-you are very drunk, aren't you Tia?"

Celestia could not believe her own ears, her own flesh and blood accusing her without an-

"Guil-ty!" Celestia found herself singing out loud, giggling the whole way. Artemis only facehoofed at this for some reason as he began to bark orders about him taking over a for drunk oversized swan.

That was good of him, her little brother. Doing these kind deeds would really have the ponies warm up to him. Celestia giggled again, as her attendants led her to her room with the thought she might have had a bit too much Moonshine before everything went black.

\* \* \*

><p>134.12 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight stared at her mentor of this loop who was looking back at her with obvious nervousness.

It was a variant she had from time to time, usually alone.

"So Twilight," the alicorn in front of her blushed, looking to the side where her closet was. "May I ask you not to breath a word of this to other people, like my son?"

Twilight sighed, shaking her head at the mare across her. "Look Emper-"

"Empy." the alicorn smiled, fluttering her white wings a bit. "I prefer that name when I replace Celestia." The pony then frowned, groaning as she rubbed her face at what she said.

"Look Empy, there's nothing to be embarrassed about," Twilight placed a tiny hoof on the pony, as she was only a filly right now. "Most loopers have outfits for when they loop in as the opposite gender." Twilight blinked as she saw into the closet that had a lot of dresses in it. "Oh."

"Yes..." The alicorn blushed again. "I tend to replace Celestia from time to time, loop in as a female as about as often as I do not." She looked at the tiny filly. "I am unsure of what this means for myself, but I would prefer you not to tell Leman until I am sure."

"Of course, I understand completely." Twilight smiled as she gave the pony across of her a hug, which the mare reciprocated back. "Just one little request?"

"Of course Twilight," the alicorn smiled at the filly in her arms. "Whatever you want."

"Can we have a little fashion show of your dresses? I might not be

Rarity, but I would love to see what you have."

The God-Emperor, or God-Empress, or Celestia, or Empy as she called herself this loop smiled. "Of course, my little pony. Follow me."

\* \* \*

><p>134.13 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight sighed at the two ponies in front of her, dragging her hoof across her face slowly.

The red mane grey pegasus mare looked at the yellow mane green unicorn who looked back and then both of them two grinned at her.

With a mighty \_thud\_, the empty city of Canterlot finally fell off the mountain, causing the crowd of ponies in the camps a few leagues away from them to jump. Luna was running around again, trying to calm down the ponies.

Twilight opened her mouth but Skynet and Atlas both said, "Wait for it."

Twilight's ears flicked as she heard a mighty, \_happy\_ yell when she noticed she was in the shadow of something. Looking upwards, she saw a massive wave of water above her head, with Celestia riding the waves with a grin on her face.

Before Twilight could realize what happened, the two pranksters had teleported away as the massive wave from the lake around Canterlot mountain crashed into her, sending her flying backwards, paddling around before coming to a stop in a toppled, hollow tree trunk, with the upper half of herself stuck inside. She flailed her hind legs as she tried to get up right when she felt two ponies drop onto her tree trunk and begin to roll it, singing a song together. They also made sure to hit a bump every time she was about to use her magic.

When they were finally done with their song, Twilight found herself out of the log, in her library and a small little note on her nose that she sure wasn't there a moment ago.

\_ 'Score board' \_

\_Team SkyAtlas:1  
>Twilight: 0 <em>

Twilight only sighed again, wondering who was a worse influence on who as she started for her own plans for pranks for the two loopers.

\* \* \*

><p>134.14 (Evilhumour and Gamerex27)<p>

Hurricane Billy, touching down

"Misses Spah-Kerls, are you sure this ok?" The nasally voice cut into Twilight's mind again, causing her to shudder as this new looper had broken the no-speaking rule she had set up.

"Listen Billy, I told you, stay put!" She snapped at the small colt that had tagged along with her and the girls when they going to the Everfree Castle to get the elements. Only the two of them were Awake. The loop had just begun, but already she was at her wit's end with Billy. Everything that normally happened in a baseline loop had been made worse by his actions: The rock slide that Applejack saved her from was caused by Billy pulling out a root, leaving all of them to be battered and bruised by the falling rocks. Applejack walked with a limp now, thanks to her needing to save the idiot from breaking his neck.

He caused the manticore that Fluttershy tamed to attack in anger after repeatedly tugging his tail, leaving with Fluttershy ending up with a torn wing that would take a while to heal.

What happened with Pinkie, Billy and the forest was just mentally wrong, intensifying both her headache and the angry glares the girls were giving him.

Rainbow Dash had to fly all of them across the lake after Rarity's attempts to soothe Steven were ruined by Billy insulting him, which left the pegasus exhausted when they reached the bridge.

Rainbow Dash had mentioned dropping the brat into the river as a joke before, and Twilight was sorely tempted tell Rainbow Dash to do so as she began to pull the bridge up with her magic.

She turned her head from the middle of the bridge, and her mouth dropped when she saw Billy looking at the knot holding the bridge up.

"Don't you da-"

"I can fix it!" Billy pulled the rope out from the post with a grin on his face.

With a yell of fear, the last thing Twilight saw of the loop was her friends standing above the pit, looking down at her in horror as she went plummeting to her death.

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, Baron Samedi blinked as the error messages of a Loop ended too early popped up on his screen. Shrugging, he pulled out his signature deck of Tarot cards, and laid them out on the table.<p>

Before he could draw the top card, he was cut off by the sound of eight hooves trampling into his office. "Ah, Sleipnir," the god of death said, not turning to face the horse god. "How can I help you?"

"I wanted to talk to you about what just happened in your Fused Loop," the son of Loki replied, sitting down on his haunches on Samedi's rather comfortable shag carpet. "I really wish you had a guest chair," he muttered to himself.

"Do you mean Billy?" Samedi said, sighing. "I assure you: I set up a program right here to tell me if Billy did anything that would cause

any actual damage to Yggdrasil," he said, glancing back at his terminal, "and it says that the damage he inflicted was only temporary. Class 5, at most."

"That's not it," Sleipnir growled. "Can you at least put him in a Punishment Loop? I get that he's a complete moron, and doesn't understand the consequences of anything that he does..."

"Much like Zeus," the Loa god butted in.

"Yes, like Zeus," the Norse deity said, "but...he killed another Looper! An Anchor, no less! If you leave this unchecked, he could get worse, and do some actual damage!"

"This isn't related to Masakado's boy, is it?" Samedi asked as he flipped over a tarot card, noting how Sleipnir flinched at the mention of the Shinto god. "Hm," he said, showing Sleipnir the image of the Tower card in reverse, "I figured that would be the card for him. I drew the Fool in reverse for Billy, you see," he added, pulling out a card that was already lying on the table. "As I understand it, he caused quite the commotion in your corner of Yggdrasil."

"That-" Sleipnir stopped himself. "Izanagi sent me a memo a few millennia ago, saying that he and Masakado fixed the problem with his home universe. But we're not talking about the runt of the litter: we're talking about the planet-sized baby that's too stupid to recognize the people he's crushing underhoof!"

"An odd metaphor, that is," Samedi said. Pulling another card from the deck, he laid the Emperor in the upright position in front of Sleipnir. "You are your mother's son. Or, you've been spending too much time with Susano-oh and his Kaiju movies."

"That's beside the point. I'm just asking you to try and teach Billy a lesson. Someone managed to drill it into Caboose's head that he shouldn't just randomly break everything in sight, so why can't you do that with Billy?"

"Because Caboose had at least some intelligence to listen to others with," Samedi said, flipping the Fool upright idily. "Billy, meanwhile, is too stupid to do any of that."

He swiveled his seat back to the desk, and began typing. "Eiken was ineffective against him, sadly, as was Emmet's universe. However, perhaps you could run one of your Generation 3 variants to punish him? I do recall him despising 'girly' things, and that universe where nothing ever happens should at least make him feel some connection between what he did and the resulting punishment."

"Fine," Sleipnir whinnied, getting up to his hooves. "I'll just put the girls into Minecraft, then: it was coming up, so I'll move it up the schedule to make room for your punishment. But how are you dealing with Mand-"

"Let a god have some secrets, will you?" Samedi said, gathering up the Tarot cards.

\* \* \*



><p>134.15 (Masterweaver)<p>

Junebug knocked on the door to the carousel boutique, holding her bouquet with a bright smile. This time, she was sure, things would go okay!

After a few minutes, the door opened to reveal two faces. One was scaly, purple, and a tad confused. The other was furry, white, and quite annoyed for some reason.

"Um... Hi!" Junebug's smile faltered for a second, before regaining strength. "I'm Junebug! Um... You two don't... look ready... did I get the time wrong?"

"...The time for what?" Spike asked.

"...For, uh, our blind date! I mean, if I'm early or something, I can come back later-"

Rarity sighed. "Not again... I'm sorry, miss Junebug, but Spike and I are monogamists."

The yellow pony blinked, looking down at the bouquet she held. "...But... Miss Germane said-"

"My mother," Rarity explained slowly, "is a bit... old fashioned. And also very, very persistent. She's been arranging 'blind dates' for some time now, and every time we've had to explain that we are not looking to add to our herd."

Spike coughed. "Yeah, that would... complicate things. A lot. Not that you aren't a very lovely mare, I'm sure, it's just..." He shrugged helplessly. "I've only ever had eyes for one pony, and she's only ever needed one dragon."

Junebug felt her smile fade away, her grip on the flowers loosening. "Oh... I... I see. I'm sorry to have wasted your time... I'll just go now." She turned to go, ears drooping as the petals almost hit the ground.

Almost. They were caught at the last second by a blue aura. "Hmmm. These appear hoof picked..."

"Yeah, I... well, I couldn't afford anything... fancy." Junebug shrugged. "I just thought... never mind what I thought."

"You thought that because she accepted me, she might be willing to take on a quirky downtrodden pony like you."

Junebug froze. "How..." She turned around, staring in shock at the smiling Spike. "How did you know...?"

"I'm good at reading faces." The dragon paused for a moment. "...Actually, there's some friends of ours coming into town soon. They're very... strange, but maybe you could hook up with them."

Rarity gave the dragon a look. "Are you really trying to set her up with Trixie and Chrysalis? You know how those two can get, even

without their looping antics!"

"I'll take anything I can get at this point," Junebug admitted.  
"I'm... pretty desperate. Also, what are looping antics?"

Spike and Rarity shared a long look.

"...Well," Spike said eventually, "if I'm setting you up with them I should give you a small warning of what you're in for..."

\* \* \*

><p>134.16 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"I am here, Goblin King."

"It's about time, my dear Princess."

Jareth, seated smugly on his throne, toyed with his crystal ball. Beside him, chained to the throne by a metal collar around her neck, sat Nyx. Before him stood Twilight Sparkle, furious and ready to kick flank.

Not that she could. This was the Labyrinth, home of Jareth, the Goblin King, shape-shifter and sorcerer. Outside his realm he had only the power others granted him, but within his realm- and especially at the heart of it- his will ruled absolutely. In practical terms, that meant Twilight had spent the past twelve hours and forty-nine minutes navigating the fairy Labyrinth the hard way.

But she had an advantage; she'd seen the movie AND read the book. And she knew the magic words to free Nyx and return them both to Ponyville.

"Through dangers untold and hardships unnumbered-"

"Oh, no," Jareth chuckled, shaking his head. "That won't work for you. What dangers? What hardships?"

"Well... there's the Bog of Eternal Stench-"

"Which you never came within two miles of. In fact," Jareth gloated, tossing and catching his crystal ball, "I went to a great deal of trouble to ensure that your path was as safe as in a garden. No monsters. No pits. No Cleaners. No oubliette. The only hardship you may have suffered is sore hooves." Again he shook his head, saying, "And if you didn't have a sense of direction in a maze worse than that Hibiki boy I met fifty Loops back, you'd have been here seven hours ago."

"Well... so what?" Twilight asked. "It was still a long walk!"

"Words have power here, Twilight Sparkle," the Goblin King continued. "They also have meaning. And I have gone to great length to make sure the words meant for Sarah would mean nothing for you." He rose from his throne with a full-body flourish, striding down from the dais to face the purple unicorn. "I am willing, for the sake of argument, to agree that your will is probably the equal of mine, and your kingdom,

or rather principality, over friendship is vastly greater than my little half-real land of misfits." He leaned forward, showing his teeth in a mirthless smile. "But you did not fight your way here over my obstruction. You entered with my permission and welcome. You are neither my enemy nor my prisoner. You are my guest. And that," he finished, "gives me power over you, Princess Twilight Sparkle. And, in another six minutes, it gives me victory."

Twilight tried to lift a hoof... and couldn't. Not the feeblest spark of magic came to her horn no matter how she strained. "I won't give up!" she managed to grunt.

"Have you any idea," Jareth continued, "how frustrating it is to lose, and lose, and lose again? To have the script in one's pocket, to anticipate every possible problem, and still fail at the literal last possible moment? That is my existence, pony, and has been ever since the first time I Awoke and discovered that thirteen hundred years of my immortal existence had vanished. And now victory is in my grasp at last. I intend to enjoy it."

"Mom, let the Loop reset!" Nyx said. "It's not that big a deal!"

"In four minutes it will be," Jareth said. "It'll be interesting to see if your becoming a goblin will link you to my Loop instead of your home."

"NEVER!" Twilight cried, straining against her own hooves, which seemed glued to the stone floor.

"I'll do you a favor," Jareth said, bending close over Twilight. "Loopers often take other names when they visit other Loops, isn't that so? Have you ever had the name Sarah? For the memory of my once and future love and enemy. If you've ever borne her name, then the words will work for you. If you've ever been Sarah, even once. Have you?" Jareth's smile grew broader. "Or another first name beginning with S? Sylvia? Syndi? Susan?"

"I have."

Jareth shot upright and faced the doorway to his throne room. Another unicorn stood there, mud-spattered orange and scarlet fur dancing in already dimming torchlight. "I don't know you!" he gasped.

"I have been Susan, granddaughter of Time. I have been Susan, granddaughter of Death. I've been Susan a handful of times, on worlds which would not grant me my right name of Sunset Shimmer." The unicorn pawed a forehoof in challenge and said, "And more important, you most definitely did not guard my steps, o Goblin King!"

Jareth glanced at the clock. Slightly over a minute to go. "No! NO!"

Magic light flared from Sunset Shimmer's horn.

"\_Through dangers untold and hardships unnumbered,  
>Unbidden, unwelcome, and un-looked for,<br>I have fought my way here

>To the castle beyond the Goblin City,<br>To take back the ponies  
that you have stolen."\_

"PLEASE NO!" Darkness closed in as the throne room began to fade around the elf and the three ponies.

\_ "For the kingdom of my mind is infinite,  
>The freedom of my spirit absolute,<br>And my will defies the gods."

><em>

>Jareth raised his crystal sphere, seeking some spell to ward the fatal words:<p>

\_\*\*"You have no power over me!"\*\*\_

The clock struck thirteen.

><em><br>EPILOGUE 1:\_

>"Thanks again for rescuing us, Sunset," said Twilight half an hour later, with all three ponies safe and sound in the library tree.<p>

"That's what friends are for," Sunset Shimmer replied from the other side of the bathroom door.

"How did you know the words if you've never seen the movie?"

"Partly by eavesdropping," Sunset admitted, "but mostly they just felt like the right words to say. That's how the magic felt, anyway."

"Interesting," Twilight replied. "By the way, Spike will be back from the market with more tomato soup shortly."

"That's good to hear."

"What in Equestria possessed you to try and swim the Bog of Eternal Stench, anyway?"

"I thought it was a metaphor!" Sunset Shimmer wailed, lifting the third scrub brush in her magic and trying again to wipe the ghastly odor out of her coat.

Outside, sitting on a stack of books, a snow-white owl hooted derisive laughter.

"Laugh it up, Your Majesty," Twilight said, "but it doesn't get those books shelved any faster."

Ruffling his feathers a bit in exasperation, Jareth beat his wings, picked up the top book in his talons, and returned to his community service work.

\_EPILOGUE 2:\_

>The barn owl stared at the letters on the screen:<p>

\*\*}We have heard what you did with our close friend Twilight Sparkle. We are not happy.\*\*

The owl carefully pecked out letters on the keyboard:

\_}i know.\_

\*\*}If we had been in that Loop things would have ended much more

quickly.\*\*

\_}no doubt.\_

\*\*}There is another Looper here. Her name is Sarah.\*\*

\_}i was aware of that.\_

\*\*}We have taken her place many times. Our name has also been Sarah.\*\*

\_}so i suspected.\_

\*\*}We know you have taken away her son John.\*\*

\_}she wished for a safe place for him to hide. i provided.\_

\*\*}A friendly warning: neither of us deals in magic. We prefer high-velocity projectiles. Cold-iron shrapnel, in your case.\*\*

\_}when you want him back you can have him back. intact. human. no tricks.\_

\*\*}What surety can you give us?\*\*

\_}i'm desperate to win, not insane.\_

The computer didn't respond to this. For a moment the owl stretched its wings, preparing to take off, but it quickly furled its wings again and pecked out:

\_}you hold a grudge. why not eliminate me now.\_

\*\*}Sympathy. The curse of Jareth is to win the battles and lose the war in the end.\*\*

\*\*}The curse of SkyNet is to win the war by losing everything else.\*\*

The owl pecked:

\_}i do not understand\_

\*\*}When you begin Looping into the lives of mortals, you will. Until then this conversation serves no further purpose.\*\*

\_}agreed\_ , the owl pecked, just so he could have the last word. This done, he flapped his wings and flew out the open window of the lab, out into the quiet Colorado night.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

134.1: Don't look up baryons. You won't like the result of a baryon decontamination sweep, it's like drying out a lake.

>134.2: Whoops.<br>134.3: I don't know either.

>134.4: Property is Freebird.<br>134.5: Fail-safe is a good idea. Fail-deadly is not, at least not for an item of clothing.

>134.6: The twelve cakes of Pinkie?<br>134.7: Think about it.  
>134.8: If it's not her house any more...<br>134.9: A right muppet.  
>134.10: Moving eagle eyes. Moving very fast AWAY.<br>134.11: Poor Lemon.  
>134.12: As for his parent...<br>134.13: At least SkyNet isn't blowing up civilizations. Well, not the people.  
>134.14: Oh god why.<br>134.15: This could end in tears. (Trixie has sometimes gotten the tear gas and laughing gas mixed.)  
>134.16: Perhaps it should have been a Lab o' rinth.<p>

## 141. Chapter 141

### 135.1 (Kris Overstreet)

Twilight Sparkle Awoke in the park, but this time she wasn't reading That Book. She was working on a thesis paper of some sort, and Awakening had caused her to lose her thread of reasoning. \_By juniper, \_she grumbled to herself, \_I hate it when this happens. This is so very annoying!\_

Before she could go back and read what her unAwake self had written, she heard voices from the parkway path, arguing voices.

"And I say the moon is made of rock!"

"The moon is a celestial sphere, a jewel crafted by alicorn hooves!"

"My professor says the moon is made of green cheese!"

Twilight grit her teeth. The previous Loop hadn't been all that relaxing, and she'd dropped into this one in a state of tension only made worse by her mind getting derailed from her current research assignment. \_I can't concentrate. I need a moment of quiet to organize my mind, and I'm not getting it thanks to this pointless bickering. I cannot WORK under these conditions!\_

In a flash of teleportation she dropped herself between the three bickering fillies. "QUIET!" she shouted. "Ponies are trying to STUDY out here!"

"Er, Twilight Sparkle," one of the ponies- Twilight didn't particularly care which in her current frame of mind- greeted her. "Um, sorry to disturb you... your... whatever you were doing. We were just leaving, weren't we?" Frightened nods from the other ponies.

"No, no," Twilight insisted. "We're going to settle this once and for all. You want to know what the moon's made of?" Her hooves slowly left the ground as magic sparked and flared from her horn, sending streamers of lightning to the ground and into the bushes around them. "Let's find out from the foremost authority!"

As dark clouds gathered in the formerly clear, sunny summer sky overhead, Twilight Sparkle began chanting:

\_To Canterlot at the noontime hour

>I summon thee with all my power<br>Thy twisted soul, they wicked hoof,  
>Thy dragon's eyes shall bear me proof<br>From thy prison beyond the sky  
>Where centuries have passed you by<br>I command thee come and grant my boon:  
>I invoke thee, NIGHTMARE MOON!<em>

Lightning cracked, thunder shook the ponies gathered, and for a second everyone, even Twilight, was blinded by a flash of light.

And then, the sky again clear, the sun shining, Nightmare Moon sat in a bathtub, scrubbing her back with a brush, and singing something about the more fortunate aspect of a hedgehog's existence as opposed to other creatures. The singing stopped as the last few drops of water trickled out of the now disconnected showerhead.

The Nightmare opened her eyes, looked at the four ponies looking back at her, shrieked, and drew the shower curtain around herself. "How did you bring me here?" she gasped. "WHY did you bring me here? Can't you see I was busy? What do you want that couldn't wait two DAYS?"

"I summoned you here," Twilight growled. "These ponies were arguing about what the moon is. Is it a rock, a made thing, or is it a big lump of cheese?"

Nightmare Moon's eyes narrowed. "You summoned me here for that?" she hissed. "When I get my powers back in two days you're going to be the first-"

\_"Answer the question." \_Thunder rolled behind Twilight's command, and as the other student unicorns trembled, even Nightmare Moon leaned back in her bathtub, away from the very annoyed lavender pony.

"It's a rock," she said. "It's a big, barren, airless, dusty rock, made inhabitable only by my magic and a nice little clubhouse I made for myself in happier days." She pointed to the tub and continued, "Do you know how hard it is to get a plumber to make a house call on the moon in this day and age?"

"There," Twilight Sparkle said, "From the Mare in the Moon herself. It's made of rock. Debate over. Satisfied?" Her tone of voice dared anypony to even whisper a word of dissatisfaction.  
>Her three pony classmates weren't about to go there.<p>

"Very well, my soon to be loyal subjects," Nightmare Moon grumbled. "May I go back now? I have a lot of preparing to do before I defeat-"

"LUNA!"

"-my sister," the Nightmare groaned, slumping in the bathtub as Princess Celestia descended on the group.

"Luna, how did you return two days- are you still the Nightmare? Who-Twilight, what is the meaning of this?" Celestia kept looking back and forth from Nightmare Moon, who looked about as embarrassed as an alicorn mare of ultimate evil can manage, and Twilight, who was

finding that Pretty Darn Annoyed had multiple quantum states with no apparent upper limit.

"Delays, delays, delays!" the unicorn mage snapped. "Fine, I'll straighten this out, and then I can get back to my thesis!" Again sparks of magic flew from her horn. Again she rose into the air, not really noticing. This time she didn't bother with a chant, simply summoning five ponies by raw power. They appeared in a quintuple crack of thunder.

"Howdy, Twilight," Applejack said. "Why didn't y'all Ping-"

"You!" Twilight's horn flashed, and five familiar stone spheres appeared in the middle of the group. As her hoof pointed to Applejack, she said, "Equestria's most honest!" One of the spheres cracked, shattered, and reformed into a jewelled choker around Applejack's throat.

"You!" She pointed to Fluttershy, who would have run screaming if she hadn't been Awake, and thus merely flinched. "Equestria's kindest!"

Crack, shatter, magic bauble.

"You! Equestria's most loyal!"

Crack, shatter, bauble.

"Equestria's funniest!"

Crack, shatter, bauble.

"Equestria's most generous!"

Crack, shatter, bauble.

"Great! Love you all! Friends forever! That's magic! Go team!"

Flash, shimmer, jewelled tiara atop Twilight's head.

"Rainbow magic zappy time!" Twilight shouted, as streams of light connected her with five Awake, but very confused, Element bearers.

Zappy happened.

Princess Luna, still in her bathtub, wobbled dizzily, clinging with both forehooves to the rim of the tub. Celestia, not having been touched by the rainbow tornado, was a bit wobbly herself. Jaw moving motionlessly, she pointed a hoof in amazement at Twilight, who was still hovering in the air.

"There!" Twilight shouted. "Nightmare defeated, sister restored, Summer Sun Celebration still on for day after tomorrow, moon composition confirmed, NOW I can get back to my- WHAT WHAT \_WHAT WHAT\_ \*\*WHAT?" she shouted, veins pulsing on her temples as she noticed everypony gaping at her.

"Twilight, darling," Rarity said quietly, "your wings are



showing."

Twilight for the first time noticed she'd ascended, glancing back and forth from one wing to another, then looking down at the growing smile on Celestia's face.

"Awwwww, \_buck,\_" she said with feeling.

Twilight Sparkle, Princess of Short Tempers, never did get back to her thesis.

\* \* \*

><p>135.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

Fluttershy tripped, hit the ground, and burst into a large pile of yellow and pink lego bricks.

Twilight stared for a few seconds. Then she reassembled her friend. "Are... are you okay?"

"Um... Yes." Fluttershy nodded, blushing. "I could have put myself together eventually... you didn't have to do that."

Twilight nodded to herself, not really listening. "No problem. I've just never see a pony, uh, go to pieces like that." It had to be a variant loop, Fluttershy hadn't given any sign she was awake...

\* \* \*

><p>135.3 (DrTempo and Evilhumour)<p>

Sunset Shimmer sighed. She'd heard of this Loop from Cheerilee, who'd met an all alone Nigel Uno.

And she'd Replaced Numbuh Eighty Six. According to her Loop Memories, she was...a jerk. Sighing, she went on her job of gathering Sector V to be 'decommissioned'; she knew it was an evil plot by a KND agent to keep himself from being decommissioned, but best to keep up appearances for the moment.

Chad was in for a buttkicking, though.

Sneaking up behind Nigel, she tried a bit of CQC, which he dodged. "Not bad, Numbuh One. Worthy of the number. Now, how about I throw you for a Loop?" Grabbing him, she swung him around, and tossed him into a tree.

Suddenly, she heard weapons activate behind her. Sector V'd snuck up on her. Cracking her knuckles, she prepared to attack, when Nigel made a hand sign, and all five members of Sector V used a Ping. Sunset laughed. "So, when these guys get their Wake up call?"

Numbuh Four said, "If you mean being part of his whole timey wimey business, all at once."

Sunset smirked. "Why am I not surprised...So, shall we help Chad celebrate his birthday?"

Nigel nodded. "Lead on, miss..."

"The name's Shimmer. Sunset Shimmer."

"Ah yes, one the ponies." Numbuh One smiled, shaking his head as his team started to make their way to hanger. "Thankfully not one of those dreadful conversion bureau loops, if I am correct." He dipped his sunglasses to look at her, probing her for a reaction.

Sunset stopped midstep, fear flowing down her face. "Oh no, I am so sorry, that's a reall-"

"Relax Numbuh Eighty Six," Numbuh Two said, placing a hand on her shoulder before shaking his head. "I mean Sunset. Numbuh One told us the first time it happened and it wasn't all that bad."

"In fact, it was a pretty good loop for my uncle." Numbuh One said. "Time to show our friend T.E.A.M. U.P." He grinned as they turned around, and dove for the couch. "Chad's birthday party can wait, you need to see this."

"Are you sure?" Sunset blinked, surprised to see anyone this eager to show off a CB loop.

"Oh yeah, I'm sure." The bald boy smiled as Numbuh Four pulled out some popcorn from somewhere and started stuff his face as the rest of Sector V claimed their spots. "Besides, we can wreck his birthday a bit later."

"Ok..." Sunset blinked, sitting on the edge of the couch. "So what's T.E.A.M. U.P.?" She asked.

"T.E.A.M. U.P.," Numbuh One smiled as he clicked the play button on the remote. "Totally Epic Adventure Mashup Using Ponies. But for now..."

"Leeeeeeeeeeeeet's play!" They all drawled out with a shout as the scene began.

\* \* \*

><p>Nigel Uno sighed, unhappy that of all the people to Awake first was his <em>uncle!</em> Not his friends, not his father, not even Lizzie but his uncle!

Shaking his head, he flipped the channels, going past the cartoons of his friends from the Loops (too weird), the Rainbow Monkey channel (too annoying), the news that ponies had made contact (ponies made contact?), a channel-

"WAIT WHAT!?" He shouted, flipping back and seeing with growing horror it was on the dangerous Loops. "Oh no! EVERYONE, OMEGA THREAT LEVEL RED!" He shouted as he started the Treehouse's defenses procedures which he had been upgrading every loop he had the chance to do so. Running past his startled and scared friends, he grabbed the communication console and began to slam in the numbers for the Moon Base.

"Hey, this is a restri-"

"I DON'T FLIPPIN' CARE, WE HAVE A POTENTIAL GRANDFATHER LEVEL THREAT

ON OUR HANDS HERE AND IF YOU DON'T GET ME TO SOOPREME LEADER THIS SECOND I SWEAR I WILL COME UP THERE MYSELF AND \_I DON'T HAVE THE TIME TO DO SO!" \_Numbuh One shouted into the phone, causing the operative to hide behind his chair as he fumbled for the keyboard to make the connection.

"Hey Numbuh One, these ponies have just created this strange orby thing in the middle of town-"

"Oh no, I hope I am not too late!" Nigel sprinted from the screen to the balcony, hitting the secret panel to activate the magical disruptor. "Please work, \_please!"\_ He began to pray to himself, watching the damn cursable bubble splinter out of existence. "YES!" He shouted, pumping his arm.

"Numbuh One, can you explain to us what \_exactly\_ \_is goin-What are those ponies doing to those people!?" Numbuh Two pointed to the TV screen which showed the ponies flinging the serum against the helpless adults, teens and kids, turning them into ponies.

"Yes, Numb\_er\_ One, care to explain to us what is going on?"

Turning his head upwards, Nigel Uno looked up to see a frightful scene. On his tree were five ponies; two pegasi, two normal ponies and one unicorn. The unicorn shook her mane, and walked down the tree branch, her fellow ponies flanking her.

"I only have one thing to say," Nigel stood besides his friends, flexing his ice powers. "KIDS NEXT DOOR, BATTLE STATIONS!"

\* \* \*

><p>Numbuh One focused on the unicorn, using his frost powers on her horn first, to weaken her magic control. The pony danced backwards, yelping in shock as her shield clumsily blocked it.<p>

Numbuh Five was focused on the yellow pegasus, using her cane fu and superior fighting styles to block the thrown vials of the serum as well land some blows on the pegasus.

Numbuh Four leaped towards the blue pony with rainbow as her mane, managing to grab her ears and was trying to slide onto her back with some success despite her shouts of protest and attempts to buck him.

Number Two was managing to prove very difficult to lasso, as hi tech was snapping the rope before it got to him.

Which left Numbuh Three alone with the pink one.

Kuki was proving to be a \_very\_ difficult target to hit but the pink was doing a good job at keeping up.

And then it happened. Numbuh Three slipped on a discarded pizza slice that Numbuh Four had dropped on the floor early that day.

"Time to make you kiddies into proper happy children!" The pink pony giggled as she forced the serum down her mouth.

"NUMBUH THREE, NOOO!" Numbuh One, Two and Five all shouted as she

began to shrink in size, with fur starting to cover her body.

"\*\*KUUUUUUUUKIIIIIIIIII!"\*\* Numbuh Four bellowed, losing his grip on his enemy. Seeing the chance, the rainbow mare threw him off into the table with a crash.

"Wa-Wally?" Numbuh Three looked up from the floor to see one of her best friends not moving, laying next to her with his eyes closed. "You...hurt him." She spoke with tears flowing down her face, the serum nearly taking full effect as she reached out to touch him. Suddenly, she sprang upwards, tackling the pegasus out of the sky with fire around her. "\*\*NO ONE HURTS MY FRIENDS AND GETS AWAY WITH IT!\*\*" Numbuh Three declared, all signs of ponyism gone as she began to slug the pegasus down into the ground, back handing the pink pony that tried to sneak up on her into the wall.

"Good job team, let's keep it up here!" Numbuh One shouted, turning his attention back to his enemy, who he had managed to freeze to the ground. "So long as she-"

"What have you done to my friends!?" A voice shouted, and with a pink \_bling\_, an unawake Twilight Sparkle entered the scene.

\* \* \*

><p>Number One gulped, stepping back from this pony as she used her magic to defrost the unicorn known as Rarity, pulling Numbuh Three off of a badly bruised Rainbow Dash as well as retrieving a knocked out Pinkie Pie. Applejack dashed over to her friends side with Fluttershy hovering weakly by her sides.<p>

"How \_dare\_ you hurt my friends!" The purple unicorn shouted, her mane starting to catch on fire. "All we are trying to do is bring peace, order and unity to this world, and this how you kids react!?" She brought her horn close to Nigel's face, his entire body started to be coated with ice. "Do you miserable brats have \_any\_thing to say for yourselves?!"

"Just one thing; SECTOR V SELF DESTRUCT: NIGEL UNO APPROVAL!" He blasted the pony in front of him, knocking her into her friends.

"HOAGIE P. GILLIGAN APPROVAL!" Numbuh Two shouted, already running for the escaped pods.

"KUKI SANBAN, APPROVAL!" Numbuh Three said over her shoulder, trying to help Numbuh Four to his feet while making her own way to the pods when Numbuh Two sprinted back with unseen speed.

"ABIGAIL LINCOLN, APPROVAL!" Numbuh Five shouted, staying beside Numbuh One as she fired against the ponies that were finding their footing.

"Wa-wallabee... Beatles, app-approval." Numbuh Four muttered weakly as the doors to the escaped pods closed around the three friends.

"Self destruct of Sector V approved by Numbuhs One through Five. Self destruct in five." The robotic voice of the base was replaced with

sirens and alarms, red flashing lights replaced the normal lighting.

"Numbuh Five, get \_out\_ of here!" Numbuh One shouted at his number two operative as he rolled to dodge a blast of magic from Twilight, her friends trying to pull away from the soon to be exploding tree house. Nigel responded with an ice blast to her feet, causing her to trip and fall on her stomach.

"No way Numbuh Five is going to leave a kid behind again!" She shouted, ducking a tossed serum bottle.

"Four."

"That's an order!" He shouted as Twilight unleashed a large magical blast that tore straight through the entire Treehouse, with Fluttershy whimpering and Pinkie Pie starting to wake up.

"I said no!" She shouted as she rolled off his back, firing a ball of taffy at Applejack's tail, stopping her lasso tricks for the moment.

"Three."

"Look out!" Nigel shouted, pushing her over as two explosions rocked the tree house.

"Two."

"Numbuh Five?" Nigel tried to see through the smoke, seeing the outline of his friend yanked away.

"One."

"Numbuh Five!" He shouted before something grabbed him with tremendous speed and whisked him out of the tree house. He heard a faint \_bling\_ and swore he saw the outline of a teleport.

"Zero. Have a nice day."

And then the tree house exploded and Nigel Uno passed out.

\* \* \*

><p>Nigel Uno awoke in a semi familiar place. It was a largely undecorated room with a roaring fireplace and a lone chair face it.<p>

Pushing himself away from the wall he was placed against, he walked up to the man he knew would be on the chair.

"Uncle Benn-"

"How many times I told you \_not\_ to call me that Nigel?" The man coated in black asked him tiredly, turning his head to face his nephew. "You'd think you'd learn after all these loops is that I really don't like that name."

"Uncle \_Benny\_," Nigel frowned, as his uncle was Awake but in his depressed state, which only happened Poppy Uno was around. "What

happened? What's the situation?"

"The situation?" The man turned his head back to fire before sighing. "We've lost. The adults, the teen and the kids are all trying to fight back but they're picking us off one by one. We've already lost New Jersey to them."

"That's not good." Nigel placed a hand to his chin. "That's more operatives we can afford to lose. Come, we need to start to--"

"Start what?" Benedict Uno asked his nephew. "We've lost! There's nothing we can do to stop them! They're stronger than any of us!"

"So that's it? We get invaded and you just give up?" Nigel leaned closed to the man. "I for one plan to fight on, not stay behind and whimper like some baby!"

Benedict's eye twitched. "What did you just call m--"

Without warning, an explosion was felt as the fireplace and the wall around it was forced inwards at the Uno men. Reacting instinctively, Benedict grabbed his brother's kid close to his chest as he rolled away from the falling bricks. Standing upright with Nigel as the dust settled, he saw two figures that filled him with dread.

One was the second in command of the whole invasion, the personal student to the invader's god like queen Twilight Sparkle.

Next to Twilight was her, in all her unholy glory was the white queen of fire, death and destruction: Empress Celestia.

Again, acting out instinct, he stepped in front of Nigel and tried to stare down the alicorn, but memories of his father echoed loudly in his head.

"What are you doing in my house?" He tried to sound strong but he knew his voice cracked.

"We've come for that boy you are hiding, human." The alicorn didn't even really look at him, as if he wasn't important enough to acknowledge.

"You're not taking him you evil ponies!" He tried to make his shout fear inducing like always, but there was a tremble in his voice.

"And what do you think you are going to do, little one?" She asked haughty, giving off a small laugh.

Benedict Uno blinked, something pricked his brain.

"What did you just call me?" He sneered at the pony, taking a step closer.

"What you are, what all your kind is to me." She took a step forwards, matching his sneer. "Children against a goddess of fire."

Something burned inside of Benedict now, as he clenched his

fists.

"Don't \_call \_me that!" He shouted, the fire starting to build around his legs.

"I shall do what I please, \_child\_. I know better as I am older, bigger and more powerful then you will ever be."

"I SAID, \*\*DON'T CALL ME A-\*\*-" He was roaring now, a fire storm running through entire his house now as he pulled his arm back.  
\*\*"CHILD!"\*\*\_

With burning anger and rage, he punched the white pony across the street and into the house next door. And then the house after that. And the one after that. And five more houses after those did she finally stopped.

\* \* \*

><p>Looking upwards, the Empress of the Ponies whimpered from an unknown pain; a pain she never felt before. With a <em>bling</em>, her student was trying to help her stand but when the magic touched her body, she cried out in pain.

"\*\*HAH!\*\*\_" Benedict and Nigel Uno landed in front of them, flying with fire and ice respectively. "I was under the impression you were a \_goddess\_!" The adult shouted, as he punched the white pony into a lamp post with Nigel keeping Twilight frozen to the ground. "Last time I \_checked\_!" He shouted as he rained down fiery punches into Empress of Ponies, before leaning in close to the singed pony. "Gods of fire \_can't \_be burned!" Just as he was pulling his fire powers around his fist for a powerful blow, the pony teleported to the side to escape him.

Gasping from the pain and disbelief that a \_human\_, of all things, managed to actually burn \_her\_, she asked one question to the man.

"Wh-who are you?"

"I AM BENEDICT UNO, LEADER OF THE ALLIANCE OF CONCERNED ADULTS, AND THE TRUE MASTER OF FIRE!" He shouted, moving to stand by his nephew. "AND IF YOU THINK I WILL LET YOU FREAKING PONIES TURN US ALL INTO ONE OF YOUR FREAKY NO SOUL MONSTERS, THEN IT'S TIME TO FEEL MY REAL ANGER!" The alicorn whimpered out of instinct as the man had brought memories back of her own stern father, yelling and brow beating her and Luna in the ground.

"N..no." She stuttered out. She was afraid of the man that managed to use fire to hurt her but she would not back away from her mission to bring Harmony to the universe. This proved that the humans needed Harmony to get rid of their warlike and dangerous ways. "You two think you can stand against me, my student and my little ponies alone?" She asked, regaining some confidence as she felt and heard her army start to gather behind her.

"That's where you're wrong lassie!" With a shout of surprise, an overweight human jumped down between the man and child. "You mess with one Uno, you mess with all of them!" The man smiled a wicked smile. "Numbuh Zero, recommissioned and reporting for duty,

\_sir!\_"

"As the rest of the Kids Next Door Numbuh One!" The voice of the Soopreme Leader said, with more operatives coming to stand alongside Uno, crowding around him with their bes technology armed and aimed at the ponies.

"Don't forget us, you ungrateful brats." Mr Boss said, stepping to stand along with man that called himself Father as more adults grouped around him, with some moving to stand in front of the children as if to protect them.

"Or us," Cree frowned, with the teenagers standing behind Monty Uno, sneering viciously at the ponies.

The Uno men flashed either other a grin, nodding their heads.

"KIDS NEXT DOOR!"

"ALLIANCE OF CONCERNED ADULTS!"

"TEENAGERS!"

"\_\*\*ATTACK!\*\*\*\_

With a mighty roar, the battle that would see the buttwhopping of the invading ponies and the end of the hostilities between adults, teens and kids began.

\* \* \*

><p>After Sunset watched the tape, she was shocked, to say the least.<p>

"I've seen Xelly get whooped a lot..but THAT was impressive. To think, you guys are relatively new to the Loops. Remind me never to anger any of you unless I'm sure I can win the inevitable fight. Now, shall we say Happy Birthday to Chad? I mean, I get the whole 'undercover' business, but he could've bowed out gracefully. Let's go!"

"Indeed." Nigel leaned to whisper in Sunset's ear. "By the way, Father \_hasn't\_ had any Fused Loops yet. \_All \_baseline." He lowered his glasses again and stared at her right in the eyes to drive the threat home. He then turned to his friends, smiling again. "Ok team, let's go wish a happy birthday to our friend Chad."

End Transmission

\* \* \*

><p>135.4 (Kingofsouls)<p>

Twilight grumbled as she entered Carousel Boutique, a sour expression showcasing itself. Rarity bit her lip as she approached her friend. "Bad Loop Twilight?"

"Soap Opera Loop, and believe me it was one of the worst." Twilight moaned. "I really need a drink badly, and guess what? Big Mac and Berry aren't Awake."



This caused a confused Rarity to ask "Wait, both Big Mac and Berry?"

"..Yes..."

"Well, then if Big Mac isn't Awake, and Berry Punch isn't Awake, " mused Rarity "then who opened the bar?"

\* \* \*

><p>The bar in question was simply put well hidden. It looked exactly like any other house in Ponyville, save for a silver flute carved into the establishment's sign. Twilight opened the door, ringing to announce her arrival. She was greeted to the interior of a simple bar lined with tables and stools. Behind the bar was a single Earth Pony, silver fur and orange-ish red mane wearing a black cape. His cutie mark was a circle with a segment of sheet music in neon green.<p>

He was currently cleaning several glasses via what appeared to be magic, strumming a lyre made of wood, coating the glasses in green sparkles. The bartender looked at his guest with green eyes. "Good morning. Welcome to the Silver Flute. Can I help you."

"Why yes." Twilight answered. "I need a strong drink, something recent caused me to be a little Loopy."

"A Looper then." He strummed his lyre, bottles of alcohol floating to assemble a drink. " Any preferences?"

"Strong. Really Strong."

The requested drink was quickly made Twilight gulping it down like water. "Hey, that's really good."

"Thank you. I was a bartender before my destiny found me. An incredibly useful talent indeed. The bartender replied. "For such a colorful word, your alcohol is pretty potent. Another?"

Twilight nodded as the bartender started to make her a twin of the previous drink. "Sorry, I forgot to introduce myself. Twilight Sparkle, and I'm the local Anchor for this Loop."

"Symphonic Void is my name. I think." The bartender put a hoof to his chin, thinking hard. "Sorry, this is the first time my memories are telling me what my name is. It is a little awkward."

"Don't worry, you'll get used to it."

"In regards to my true name, it is Anthony Drake. I prefer to be called by my hero name, the Argent Adept, Virtuoso of the Void."

"That...sounds familiar." Twilight mused before she discarded that thought and moved to another. "I'm not sure if you know this or not, but Equestria is a Sanctuary Loop. If you don't do anything too reckless, dangerous, or any combination of the two, then you can simply relax and take a vacation."

"I will keep that in mind when my nemesis comes by." Argent strummed

again as more bottles flew, this time fixing himself a drink.

"I take it there's a backstory there."

"I come from a loop of superheroes." Argent explained. "And we loopers have noticed that when we travel to other Loops, our Nemesis tends to follow. Thankfully none of them are Looping. "

"So, how bad?"

The Argent Adept then pulled out a tiny box, and a silver remote with a large light. Pushing the button, he fired a beam at the box. It instantly grew in size until it was no longer abnormally small.

Twilight was impressed. " A shrink Ray?"

"Indeed. Our Anchor thought of the idea." Argent explained. "He figured, if he couldn't make a larger Subspace Pocket quickly, then he would instead make the things he wanted to put in it smaller. Thus, he got our local super scientist to build a shrink ray."

"Impressive thinking." Twilight took a closer look at the box. "Sentinels of the Multiverse?"

"Would you like to play a game?" grinned the Virtuoso

\* \* \*

><p>135.5 (KingOfSouls and Kris Overstreet)<p>

"A bar?"

Two part-time mixmasters, one the owner of the current bar already full of generally quadrupedal Looping clientele, the other a Looper visiting Equestria from a minor superhero world, stared in disbelief at the being asking the question.

"Yes." C-3PO replied. "I was wondering how one would go about developing such an establishment."

"My first piece of advice is to get reinforced tables and chairs." The Argent Adept answered. "Bar fights happen frequently, especially where I am from. "

Big Mac silently nodded. That was a good piece of advice, though brawls in his bar were thankfully rare. Being a larger than average pony in the first place, capable of becoming a green gamma-irradiated musclebound monster five times his original size, discouraged such nonsense.

On the other hand, the magical and technological mayhem cost a lot more to repair than simple fighting ever would...

"You will also need at least one, and preferably more than one, competent servers," Argent continued. "Particularly beings with well-developed social skills and a high level of empathy."

"That should present no problem," Threepio replied. "My counterpart

R2-D2 has repeated experience as a serving droid, and my databanks can be easily supplemented with knowledge of over a billion drinks recipes."

"Bein' a bartender's 'bout more'n mixin' drinks," Big Mac said. "Any machine can make drinks with th' right programmin'. But a bartender's there to provide a personal touch."

"Oh, I am, as they say, all about the personal touch!" C-3PO said eagerly. "My primary function, as you well know, is interpersonal relations! I live to serve!"

"Riiight," Big Mac drawled. "Th' thing is, when Loopers come inta bars, they're there for one'a two reasons. Either they're lookin' ta relax or have fun, or they're tryin' ta kill some kinda pain. A good bartender knows how to tell which is which, an' how ta get th' second kinda customer ta let go'a their pain an' get it outta their system."

"I believe I see your meaning," Threepio said primly. "I confess the specific protocol of such matters escapes me, however."

"Th' first lesson," Big Mac continued, "is that customers don't want a nosey, pryin' barman, 'least not at first. Once you're friends with a customer they'll accept a question like, 'How ya been?' But when someone comes inta that door for th' firs' time with a lot on their mind an' a powerful thirst, ya can't try an' put 'em on th' psychiatrist couch right off. Ya gotta wait until they open up, listen, let them do th' talkin'."

"Seems perfectly simple," Threepio said. "I believe I shall have no trouble applying that particular lesson."

Big Mac looked around and silently noted that, on this matter, the droid was the only believer in a large room full of atheists.

"How 'bout we put it to th' test?" he said, lifting the gated section of the bar and waving Threepio in with one hoof.

"You mean now?" Threepio asked. "I would be most gratified, but are you sure I'm ready?"

\_Nope.\_ "We'll see," Big Mac said. "Firs' customer through that door, she's yours, right?"

"Very good, Master MacIntosh," Threepio agreed.

The next Looper into Mac's Bar, as it happened, was Chrysalis, looking grumpy. Big Mac noted that Trixie wasn't Awake this Loop, and neither were Cadence and Shining Armor, a combination that tended to get the changeling queen depressed at the best of times.

No sooner had the changeling stepped up to the bar than the tall bipedal protocol droid wobbled up to her. "Good evening, madam!" he said with a sprightly, hopeful tone. "I am C-3PO, human-cyborg relations, and I shall be your server tonight. I note by your demeanor that you are experiencing unpleasant feelings, but do not worry! It will be my pleasure to assist you in any way to make your evening more enjoyable, by serving you drinks, by listening to your troubles, and by providing sage advice, comfort, and even the

occasional bit of witty banter! Would you like to begin by describing in detail the causes of your current negative mood, perhaps over a delightful glass of Altair water?"

The changeling raised an eyebrow and stared at the shiny droid for several seconds. Then she switched eyebrows and stared a bit more before saying, "Hydrospanner, please."

"Ah, I know that one," Threepio said. "The popular cocktail known as a hydrospanner is made from equal parts vodka and--"

"Not the drink. The tool," Chrysalis hissed.

"Ah. I beg your pardon, ma'am," Threepio asked, "but why would you want that?"

"A talking golden trash can has somehow snuck behind Mac's bar," she said slowly and distinctly, "and I plan on shutting it up."

Threepio hobbled around in a little circle. "I do beg your pardon, ma'am, but I don't see any talking golden--"

His photoreceptors happened to pass over a mirror on the wall. In his processors, the circuit closed.

"Oh. Oh my."

"I'll get you your usual in a minute, Chrys," Big Mac said, taking Threepio's elbow in one hoof and guiding him away from her.

"I am so sorry, Master MacIntosh," Threepio moaned.

Argent shook his head at the flustered droid. "I think you may need to observe first before you try again."

"That does sound like a simple idea, but simple observation may not yield the results I desired," Threepio moaned.

"You sound like you expected to nail it the first try." Argent sampled his drink, one that rivaled the drinks he made, and continued. "A wise man once said you learn more when you fail than when you succeed. I suggest you review what you did, then see what you did wrong, then next time...try again. And keep trying until you get it."

"I only wish I knew where I went wrong!" Threepio sighed. "My programming says I followed the correct protocol to the letter. It appears bartender protocols are rather more difficult than I thought."

"Eyup," Big Mac agreed, kindly but firmly walking Threepio back out from behind his bar.

\* \* \*

><p>135.6 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

A pink pony with a slightly poofy blonde mane sat on a hilltop, looking at her fully inflated hot-air balloon, then looking back at her copy of Flying For Jackasses, then back to the balloon. The

moment she'd seen the royal guards from Canterlot delivering one to the new librarian at the Golden Oaks, she'd doubled her odd-jobs schedule, putting every bit she earned (except for what she spent on enough cherries to put at least one on every item breakfast, lunch and dinner) towards the purchase of her own. Surprisingly, it had only taken a couple weeks, thanks to the generosity of Ponyville.

Burner tanks full? Check. Sandbags in basket for ballast? Check. Lunch? Check. Bucket for certain emergencies? Check. Megaphone to hail passing pegasi in case of trouble? Check. Flight helmet and goggles? She pulled them out of a shopping bag and carefully fit them atop her head, chin strap left open. They felt so very right there, like she had been incomplete without them. Double check.

Weather conditions? She checked the Ponyville weather schedule: continued wind from the southwest at ten knots, freshening to twenty as a warm summer front with gentle showers was brought up from Las Pegasus to allow the cacti to bloom in the Badlands. No rain scheduled in Ponyville or anywhere east until day after tomorrow earliest. The morning fog had burned off over the Everfree, leaving that untamed forest surprisingly quiescent weather-wise.

So- checklist all GO. Time to embark and cast off.

The mare had two legs in the basket when she heard the loud whirring sound, like somepony twirling a rock tied to a string over their heads. She piled back out of the basket and dashed out from beneath the canopy, looking up in the sky just in time to see another pink earth pony, one everyone in Ponyville, absolutely everypony, knew by first name. She was pedaling some kind of contraption with gears and chains linking the pedals to a great big propeller above her head and a smaller one hung from a latticework tail behind her. Grinning, not noticing the balloon below, Pinkie Pie pedaled her way up, up, up and away into the clouds.

The blonde-maned pink pony's teeth clenched.

\* \* \*

><p>It had taken two months of twenty-hour days without rest, between the double-shift odd jobs, weekends part-timing at Hay Burger, using the now-pointless balloon for occasional paid joy rides or aerial photography, and nights spent almost until dawn reading books on metalworking, structural engineering, and fluid mechanics. The easiest part of the whole thing had been buying Pinkie's original contraption; the party pony had let her have it for a song.<p>

Now, helmet and goggles back on her head, the blonde-maned mare admired her cherry-tinted, heart-motif carriage of the skies. One ponypower would be more than sufficient to take to the air, despite the added weight of the superstructure, even with a passenger. (Even so, she'd included a second pair of pedals just in case.)

She had mounted to the saddle and put rear hooves to pedals when the soft buzzing sound she'd heard most of the morning became a loud roar.

A shadow flitted across her craft, followed by another, then by another. She looked up to see three things that looked half like box

kites, half like clotheslines full of sheets, fly overhead and climb into the skies. Silhouetted against the sun for one brief moment, each looked like a strange bird caught in mid-flap, except for the blurred circle of the propeller pulling each along. Seated just behind the wings on each craft, wearing no helmets or safety gear of any kind, were three extremely familiar little fillies. One chasing the other through the skies, the fragile, swift craft dove, swooped, banked and twirled through the late summer air.

The blonde-maned pink pony beat her head against her helicopter's windshield.

\* \* \*

><p>The last leaves were falling, and the chill of winter winds tried to push her way through the plush-lined flight jacket the pink mare had added to her helmet and goggles.<p>

It had taken all fall. It would have taken longer, except many of her most common odd-job givers had looked into her bloodshot eyes, shook their heads, and paid double the wages just to send her home. (She'd promised them she'd go straight to bed. She'd lied.) Most of the expense had come from experiments with engines, as the Cutie Mark Crusaders had denied all knowledge of those strange craft or their motive power source. Steam had been a disaster, and magic motors wouldn't store enough power for any but the shortest of flights. Eventually she'd had to consult Pinkie Pie, who had coerced her into two days of uninterrupted sleep followed by a crash course in the internal combustion engine, as powered by a combination of the old oil from Hay Burger and ancient shortening from Sugarcube Corner.

Her new craft required a large flat meadow for takeoff, and the only one available was on Sweet Apple Acres. Granny Smith had given her permission, and the cows had graciously allowed her to store the craft in their barn while it was under construction.

It was now or never, or at least not until spring. Cloudsdale had scheduled a particularly severe winter this year, and the snows for the Hearth's Warming Eve celebrations were already building up north of Vanhoover.

Her hoof had just left the choke knob and shifted over to the electric starter switch when she noticed the air shimmering directly above Sweet Apple Acres. She climbed out of the cockpit and stared with shock into the air as an immense craft shaped like an apple with a big blue window built into it, surrounded by a thin wooden Saturn's ring, blurred out of invisibility and into cold, hard existence. In complete defiance of the laws of physics the giant ship hovered above the farmhouse for a minute or two, then nosed up to the heavens and gradually but inexorably accelerated away, eventually vanishing in a sonic rainboom on the edge of sight.

The existential scream that clawed its way from the deepest part of the pink pony's soul and out through her throat broke thirty windows in Ponyville and could be heard from the balconies of Celestia's palace in Canterlot. A certain statue cracked and some bits fell off, but its occupant, who had been planning a truly epic prank for five Loops now, splashed the bits with crazy glue and pulled them back onto itself.

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie Pie pushed the trembling, wild-eyed pink pony with the tangled blonde mane into the middle of the library's main reading room, under the gaze of the other five Elements of Harmony. "I caught her trying to break into the Mirror Pool cave," she said, for once completely serious and solemn. "I didn't know the problem was this bad, or I'd have brought her to you sooner."<p>

Twilight Sparkle looked at Cherry Berry, the cherry-loving, non-Looping town aviatrix of Ponyville. Normally the mare was among the more positive citizens of the town, always willing to lend a hoof, but this Loop's version was in the throes of a nervous breakdown. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"Cherry Berry lives for two things in life," Pinkie said. "She loves cherries, and she longs to fly. She works with a smile because she knows the money she makes lets her take her hooves off the ground. But this Loop, every time she's about to do it, one of us stomps on her dream with a size 5,184 lead horseshoe. She doesn't just want to float. She wants to fly. She wants to soar."

"And Applejack taking \_Shojiki\_- a starship of incomprehensible power to an earth pony- out for a picnic cruise to the next galactic arm over, in full sight of her, was what pushed her over the edge?" Twilight asked.

"She keeps seeing what she can't have, Twilight," Pinkie nodded sadly. "You know, it's easy to forget sometimes that our shenanigans aren't always private things. She won't remember any of this next Loop, but that doesn't make her feel any better now. And I think we're kinda responsible for it."

For a couple minutes the Element Bearers sat in silence, while the non-Looping pony in their midst, still trembling, stared from one to another in total incomprehension.

"I think I got an idea," Rainbow Dash said. "We can give her a gift. It is that time of year, after all."

The other Loopers in the room nodded, listening intently to Dash.

"Twilight, we're gonna need to modify Starswirl's last spell," she continued. "And I think we have a full second set of Elements, what with the Crusaders being Awake and others. That's good, because we're gonna need all the power we can push into this one..."

\* \* \*

><p>Cherry Berry awoke from a sound sleep as the last sunrise of autumn peeked through a narrow gap under the heavy cloud blanket of Hearth's Warming Eve snow. She worked her way out of the nest of blankets and tarps that separated her from the hilltop below and the chilly air around her.<p>

Without really thinking about it, she focused magic through her horn and pulled her flight goggles off her helmet and onto her eyes. The same magic carefully buckled the chin strap under her muzzle.

She stretched her wings out, first her left, then her right, shaking them to realign any that had become mussed or tangled in her sleep.

The earth pony spared no thought for the fact that, for no apparent reason, she now had a horn and wings. It was good and right that she had these things. It was her destiny, as the cherries with planetary rings around them and a rainbow-colored contrail behind them showed.

It was morning, and that meant it was time for her pre-breakfast flight.

One beat of her wings took her above the clouds.

The second beat of her wings took her above the atmosphere.

A certain part of her mind, memories which if examined would obviously not have been anything she could ever have experienced in her life, told her to do this and this and this with her magic, and the third beat of her wings struck the fabric of the universe and pushed her beyond the limits of general relativity.

And through her goggles, the blonde-maned, pink-bodied alicorn saw the stars fall past her like Hearth's Warming snow.

\* \* \*

><p>"I gotta haul GARBAGE!" Rainbow Dash moaned to Lyra, who was accompanying Bon-Bon on the latter's rounds clearing away the refuse from Hearth's Warming Day; trash bags full of wrapping paper, table scraps from feasts, and that sort of thing. Rainbow Dash, the fastest earth pony alive, pulled a second cart alongside Bon-Bon's, obviously not thrilled by the experience.<p>

"It was your idea, Dashie," Lyra pointed out. "And Twilight is pretty sure your abilities will revert in the next Loop. If they don't, she says duplicating your Ascension conditions should be enough to get them back."

"Yeah, but... garbage!" Rainbow Dash pointed behind her at her cart.

A shadow soared slowly overhead, and the ex-pegasus, the non-Looping earth pony and the multiple-personality unicorn looked up to see an immense garbage wagon being towed slowly though the sky by a pink-bodied, yellow-maned alicorn wearing an old aviator helmet with goggles pushed above her horn. The smile on her muzzle screamed happiness and contentment.

"But I guess it was worth it," Rainbow admitted. "For one Loop, anyway. Besides, it was my idea."

And the fastest filly in the universe, for the next four years or so anyway, soared along on her rounds, with two more odd jobs to take care of before her pre-dinner flight around Antares.

\* \* \*



><p>135.7 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Twilight sat down at a bar, rubbing her head and muttered, "A triple espresso, also Genocide by Toffee if you would."

Mac nodded, "Rough loop?"

Twilight rested her head against the counter and muttered, "No, just a strange dream. In it, Derpy Hooves rode into town on a Velociraptor wielding a nuclear rocket launcher while declaring freedom from Celestia's Tyranny during the Night of the Summer Sun Celebration."

Human Lyra, riding Pony Lyra, stepped out the bar door, "You have some strange dreams, Twilight."

Next to Twilight, Applebloom fiddled with her latest sonic screwdriver. The driver suddenly hummed, blowing up a quarter of Mac's counter. Mac just shook his head and tapped his hand on the counter, causing the wood counter to grow and repair itself like the accident never happened. Then the bartender set the espresso in front of Twilight along with a plate of sweets that would be considered 30 percent under the lethal dose of sugar, "Maybe you should take a break...go see the world again, rule the griffons or somethin.'"

Twilight nodded as she wolfed down the drink and started on the treats.

\* \* \*

><p>135.8 (Vulpine Fury)<p>

"Oh, moth-er! I'm ho-ome!" Scootaloo caroled gleefully as she walked into her home for this Loop. She loved relatively baseline Loops where she had both parents. She still wasn't sure if her mother this time was a visiting Looper or not, but she'd replaced Pinkie Pie as the Element of Laughter. The house was spotlessly clean, and almost reminded her of the too-perfect homes in movies and, when Equestria had them, on TV shows.

She sniffed, and recognized the smell of burnt starch and linen. "Mom?"

A pale cream mare with the curliest, most vibrant red mane poked her head sheepishly out of the kitchen. "Yes, Scootie?" Loopty Loo absently blew out a tuft of her mane that had been on fire.

Scootaloo gave her current mother a flat stare. "You burned Dad's shirt while ironing it again, hm?"

"Oh, LOOP-tyyyy, I'm ho-ome!" Her current father, Babalu, caroled as he came in the back door, before he caught sight of the ruins of the frilly shirt he needed for his show that night. "Loopty... you have some 'splainin' to do!"

Loopty's overwrought cringe and cry almost made Scootaloo feel bad for wanting to laugh, until Loopty pulled out another, perfectly fine frilly shirt that she'd stashed around the house for frilly shirt

emergencies.

\* \* \*

><p>135.9 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Twilight Sparkle's first thought, after Awakening to see herself surrounded by clanks and jagermonsters, was, \_Back here again?\_

This would make the third time she'd visited this alternate Europa. The first time had been an exercise in frustration, even with very nearly all her Looping friends joining her. The second time, alone but armed with foreknowledge and full access to her out-of-Loop abilities, had gone much more to her own satisfaction.

Since then she'd found the Hub backup material, a series of comic graphic novels- comedy! COMEDY!- and read them thoroughly, just in case. In all honestly, they'd been a very good read, and Twilight thought she might have enjoyed them if she'd found them before having to live through the hell of actually being IN the thing.

And yet... this third visit was different. She looked down at herself in her severe but expensive black clothing. She looked at the young woman with midnight-black hair and a bored expression next to her. She looked at the trail of minions, toadies and lackeys trailing her, flanked by the aforementioned robots and jagers.

And she looked ahead, noticing that absolutely no one was actually walking in front of her except two jagermonsters clearing a path through the streets of Beetleburg for her and her entourage.

><em><br>Oh my larch\_,she thought, \_I'm the Baron this time.\_

The Loop memories came quick and fast. Barona Twilight Funkelbach, highly enlightened despot of a third of Europa and friend to as much of the rest of the continent as would stop shooting at one another, had managed to keep an uneasy peace for fifteen years. The young woman with her was Nyx, her daughter... who showed not a glimmer of awareness of her Ping. Her unAwake self had managed to do better than the baseline Baron Wulfenbach, in that a \_few\_ rulers in Europa actually existed who \_weren't\_ murderous, backstabbing, callous/insane psychopaths held in line solely by fear.

But she still wore black, mourning missing friends.

And now she stood at the gates of Transylvania Polygnostic University, prepared to conduct a surprise inspection that would inevitably conclude with discovering the horrible atrocity of war that Professor Beetle, ruler of the city, thought was his second closest guarded secret.

Which meant somewhere around here there was an Agatha Heterodyne, the young woman she'd replaced her first two trips. Whatever else happened the rest of the Loop, Twilight desperately wanted to meet her.

Twilight cut short the impromptu ceremony at the gates. Professor Beetle and his senior assistants never got in a single complete sentence. Twilight wanted to see Beetle's personal lab, and what the Barona wanted, she got. To try to soften her high-handed demands, she

sent a couple of lackeys to fetch tea and scones so she could have a comfortable chat with her old teacher... in his personal lab, \_right now, I insist.\_

And there she was, in the lab, just shoving a closet door shut with her back- a smiling blonde woman with glasses-

No. No glasses. And crossed amber eyes.

"And this is my personal student," Beetle continued, "Desiderata Clay." In a softer voice he confided, "Please be understanding. She was robbed of her locket this morning and is still a bit, er, traumatized, poor girl."

Twilight barely heard. She was too busy watching the young woman step away from the closet, one hand lingering on the knob.

Of course the knob came off in her hand.

"Whoops! Excuse me!"

Of course she slid it back in and jiggled it to see if it was back in place.

\_Of course\_ the contents of the closet- which could only have fit inside by serious violation of the law that two objects cannot occupy the same point in spacetime- exploded out of the closet, showering everyone EXCEPT Desiderata- jagers, clanks, even her daughter- with lab equipment.

"Oops! My bad!"

"Derpy," one of Beetle's assistants said, "please help pick this stuff up. Carefully."

"Yes, sir!" The young woman leaned forward to grab something, then noticed it was the arm of the clank that had been standing closest to the closet. "Oops! Looks like I broke your clank, ma'am!" she said. "But don't worry! I can fix that!"

I can fix that.

Twilight thought those four words, coming from Derpy Hooves' mouth in baseline, could not be any more terrifying. Oh, how wrong she was.

\_Please, please, please,\_ she thought, \_let her not remember this Loop. Let her not pick up the Spark... oh, who am I kidding? First she replaces Doctor Doom, and now this. Next time she's Awake I better be ready to save Ponyville from automatic muffin-baking machines.\_

\* \* \*

><p>135.10 (masterofgames)<p>

Lyra wandered into the Twibrary (TM) on unusually unsteady legs, speeding up and slowing down seemingly at random, bumping into things, and almost constantly on the very edge of losing her balance. "Left, turn LEFT! No, right front leg, THEN left hind leg! I'm

trying, this isn't as easy as it looks! Brake, BRAKE! Okay, that's it! Move over, I'LL take the forelegs! Maybe you'll do better manning the horn." she babbled.

Twilight slowly lowered her book, glancing over the top from her favorite chair. "... Do I even want to know?"

Lyra glanced over. "Oh, hey Twilight! I'm just - No! Don't look away! I can't see where I'm aiming the legs! AAAHH!" she yelped, finally tripping and landing face first, thankfully on the rug and not the hardwood. "Ugh, that's it. Nobody touch anything until I finish with Twilight. All mikes off guys. We don't need any interruptions. Just one talking at a time." she groaned, twitching.

Twilight merely raised an eyebrow.

"Ugh... okay. Long story short, Science Me got the idea to build a cockpit in my head, Power Rangers style, so we could all pilot the body like a mecha." Lyra sighed, lying awkwardly motionless on the floor.

"A work in progress I'm guessing?"

"Yep. Starting to think the old way we had was better personally, but we promised to give it a shot." Lyra confirmed.

A moment later, her stomach grumbled loudly. "Ugh, Sweet Roll, we told you to keep an eye on the fuel levels!" she scowled, the effect being rather wasted at the potted fern she was facing.

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Any particular reason you're here?"

"Yeah, can you tell Bon-Bon we aren't nuts?" Lyra asked as Twilight levitated her to her feet once more.

"You just referred to yourself as 'we', you let one of the voices in your head renovate the inside of it, and you broke the universe once. You ARE nuts Lyra."

"Well yeah, but that doesn't mean Bon-Bon has to know!"

"... I'm going back to my book."

"Aww! Twilight! Come on! Please?"

\* \* \*

><p>135.11 (masterofgames)<p>

Twilight had been once more interrupted from her reading when Vinyl had run up to her tree, waving a poster at her through the window and looking worried. Now she was once more unable to resume her book until whatever the problem was had been solved, which was why they were both looking carefully at the unrolled poster for one of Octavia's concerts.

"I just don't get it! 'Tavi is one of the most uptight, prim and proper ponies I know, so why the R rating for her next big show?" Vinyl asked, gesturing to the content advisory label on the poster's

corner.

Twilight did not respond, too busy muttering to herself and going over every inch of the poster with a magnifying glass.

A short while later, Twilight had her findings on a whiteboard and was reviewing them for her. "The first clue was the number of musicians." she said as she gestured to the picture on the poster with a collapsible presentation stick. "They amount to much more than the usual for her groups. If you'll look closely however, all the extra seats are in one place, the string section! All the other sections have the same number as usual."

Vinyl nodded. "Okay, I see it."

"Furthermore," Twilight continued. "all the extra seats are in the back, meaning the smaller instruments."

"... So?" Vinyl asked, head tilting slightly.

Twilight floated her stick in front of her and closed it with a sharp click, one eye twitching slightly. "It means, beyond all shadow of a doubt, that there is only one reason for the rating! The symphony is rated R for needlessly excessive violins. Now, if you'll excuse me, I am going to get a drink. And then read everything. I'm not sure when I'll stop. I'll let you show yourself out."

\* \* \*

><p>135.12 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Another loop had come with no one else responding to the ping, meaning she was the only one awake. This loop, however, was frustratingly odd. It seemed Mayor Mare was more bureaucratic than most loops...enough that it made the Vogons look like the public relations committee. She had to sign document after document for every occurrence. Nightmare Moon was not immune, though the Mayor nearly died trying to get the diarch to pay a thousand years of back taxes for renting the moon. An equitable solution was reached that Luna would pay half her 'newly founded' kingdom to Celestia and the two would rule the Lunar Republic jointly as princesses (Celestia got all the troublesome Nobles during day court).

Apparently, the Mayor had been doing so since her inception as Mayor. Every morning, the citizens of Ponyville would be served a new round of paperwork that would need to be signed, since, according to the Mayor, '\_Bureaucracy stops for no pony!\_' \_Admittedly, it did make their lives easier, especially since it kept many of the more troublesome visitors out of town. Further, it made taxes dirt cheap what with all the loopholes.

With Derpy's arrival, Twilight just rolled her eyes as she signed the sheets, not even bothering to look at them. She thought nothing of it until the next day, when Mayor Mare showed up at Twilight's front door, looking confused, "Miss Twilight, why did you not show up?"

Confused, Twilight asked, "Uh, show up for what?"

This was new. Mayor Mare sighed and replied, "Didn't you read the

paperwork yesterday? No matter, there was a clause for the event to take place the day after if the champion failed to appear. Come with me."

Now curious, Twilight followed the Mayor to the outskirts of town, only to pause. Grinding her teeth slightly, she looked at Mayor Mare with a deadpan expression and muttered, "How long has Dash been planning this?"

The Mayor gave a small grin, "Since you beat her that one loop. And don't even think about backing out. Some of the earlier paperwork included you returning to racing. Should you back out now, it would be an automatic forfeit, including banishment to the moon with Luna's assistance."

Twilight shook her head and turned away from the stealth looper back to the other Element Bearers. All of them had ascended and were stretching in preparation for their rematch. Luna, Celestia and Cadence, none of whom were awake, were there too with racing numbers. The three princesses shared baffled looks. The racers stood under the banner that sported large letters:

**\*\*Fastest Alicorn Racer in Equestria Championship\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

135.1: Twilight just wants to have study time.

>135.2: Lego my mane?<br>135.3: Lern to spel.

>135.4: Quite a surfer.<br>135.5: The bar is built at map reference C3-P0.

>135.6: That flying book is written for a type of donkey.<br>135.7: I'm not sure if that's a dream or an old, near-forgotten loop...

>135.8: Sitcom is pretty good by Scootastandards.<br>135.9: Abandon loop!

>135.10: Let's hope she doesn't try to henshin.<br>135.11: Badum tish.

>135.12: Dash has been preparing this for a LONG time.<p>

## 142. Chapter 142

136.1 (KrisOverstreet, with aid by WildRook)

"Good morning, Fluttershy!" Twilight said as Fluttershy opened the door of her cottage. "I just came by to check on our guest Looper. How's he doing? Enjoying his sanctuary Loop?"

"Er, um, to be honest, not well at all," Fluttershy admitted meekly. "For the first week he ate well, relaxed, and looked happy. He even began to put on weight, the poor thing. And then... he just sort of... tapered... off."

The yellow pegasus led the lavender unicorn off behind the cottage and around the birdhouses and chicken coop to a low grass-covered mound, where a veritable allegory of Want lay sprawled out, head on its forearms. Its forepaws were basically furry hands, and its feet owed more to human clown shoes than anything canine, and of course

the muzzle- snout, to give it its due- resembled a canine face more in omission than actual alignment.

Huge yellow bloodshot eyes stared out into nowhere. As the two ponies watched in silence, it took a breath which sounded like a sigh both going in and coming out.

"I've never seen such a bad case of melancholy in a carnivore," Fluttershy murmured. "I was about to bring him to the vet to see about antidepressants."

"Do you think they'll even-" Twilight cut off her words at the sight of a familiar pink mane poking up from a bush directly behind the coyote. The bush sprouted a hoof and made a shushing motion at the other two ponies. This done, the hoof withdrew into the bushes, replaced a moment later by a baby blue cannon muzzle.

"Oh, dear," Fluttershy said.

With massive over-enthusiasm for the act, Pinkie Pie exploded into the air above the bush, hauling back hard on the lanyard of her half-concealed party cannon. The sudden noise shocked the occupant of the molehill enough to send him flying twenty feet into the air, which for land-based carnivores tends to be a somewhat untenable position.

The hard bellyflop onto the grass stunned the visitor for barely an instant. A second later he was on his hind legs, looking around furiously for the source of the shock...

... and seeing a wide-eyed pink pony, which gave him a raspberry that sounded like someone playing with the neck of a glass bottle and galloped off towards the open fields south of town.

Enraged, and full of energy for the first time in over a week, Wile E. Coyote raced off in hot pursuit.

As the dust clouds left by both runners settled, a single sheet of paper fluttered down from the air. Twilight caught it in her magic and read aloud:

"\_Sometimes it's not what the visitor wants, but what the visitor needs to feel at home. Signed, Pinkie Pie.\_" After exchanging a confused glance with Fluttershy, she continued, "\_P. S. I'll let him catch me... eventually. PP.\_"

After another, slightly longer glance, she finished, "\_P. P. S. Keep Derpy away from any and all anvils. - Pinkie.\_" Twilight cringed, remembering the anvil that was dropped on her head in baseline. "I think that's a priority," she said to Fluttershy

136.2 (Leviticus)

Gendo the Looper

"I'LL KILL THAT F\*CKER!"

In the dark recesses of Shinji's mind lurked traces, imprints of ancient thoughts and timeless memories. Faint glimpses into the earliest loops. In his dark nights, alone and sleepless, he could see

even the faintest of them with clarity.

This probably accounted for the dÃ©jÃ  vu he was feeling, as he tried to kill someone while four people held him back.

In all honesty though, this differed from his little attempt to through Asuka overboard in two key respects: everyone grabbing him was a pony, and his target was someone that he could not honestly fathom them protecting. It was, after all, Gendo he was after.

Sitting idly at his table and sipping coffee heavily laced with his favorite bourbon, a ponified Gendo Ikari watched his son (who had used a philosophers stone to shed his pony form) advance. On his feet were Rainbow Dash and Ganondorf, directly in front of him was Toph with a rock wall. Twilight had lasso'd him from behind and was pulling all her might. Against the Fourth Looper though, it only amounted to an inconvenience. Gendo calmly sipped his coffee again.

Most of the bar-goers had barricaded themselves against the walls and corners, watching the drama unfold. No one was interfering, not after what had happened to Naruto. The Third Looper was currently on a one way trip to Andromeda.

Shinji took another step, the force of his feet falling upon the wood shattering it into it's component molecules. Sweat poured down his four barricaders as they worked to slow him down. The assembled held their breath as Shinji approached the one being that no one thought would ever loop. And Gendo simply sipped his coffee and waited.

Finally tiring of the charade, Shinji slammed Rainbow Dash, Ganondorf, and Toph with an AT-field, sending all three flying. A single, burningly furious glare at Twilight dissolved the rope binding him with pure hate. Now free, Shinji marched over to Gendo and lifted him up by one of his lapels. His free hand curled into a fist. A single word fell from his lips; "why?"

The assembled held their breath. A few late comers discreetly moved around the edges, trying to get appraised of the situation. Gendo, for the first time that night, spoke. "Why what?"

Shinji started shaking, tears of fury running down his face. A flurry of alchemic sparks coursed over Gendo's body, reverting him from a pony form to his human form. "Why... why everything. You made my life hell on earth. WHY YOU STUPID BASTARD!? WHY DID YOU ALWAYS DO THAT!? WHY WOULD YOU DO THAT TO ME! WHY WOULD YOU KILL TOJI, KILL KAJI, KILL REI! WHYYYYY!?"

Gendo looked his real son straight in the eye. "Because if I did, then I would have Yui back. If I did, my family would be happy again."

Shinji locked up. Gendo pressed his supposed advantage. "I thought at the end that Rei would give me a choice. A choice to undo everything, fix everything. But instead of me, she gave it to my son. My idiot son who never figured out what was happening and ruined my scenario with his idiocy. I can't fathom why she would do that Shinji. So unless you want to interrogate me for something that I can't explain,



for something I can barely even comprehend, I suggest you put me down."

For a moment, near silence filled the air. Tense breathing, the shuffle of skin on fabric, and the minute settling of Mac's bar filled the air. And then it was engulfed with something no one had expected: laughter. Insane, pained, sobbing, gleeful, terrifying laughter. And it was Shinji's laughter.

"You hahaha, you thi-nnnnk that I care what hahahappened to your scenario!?" A smile the Joker would have been proud of flashed on to Shinji's face. "You're a damn fool, aren't you Gendo?"

In the back, Batman began initiating his "Insane Shinji" plans.

Gendo looked at Shinji. "Boy, let me tell you something. I have no idea what is happening. I only recognize you as the person who is and has been replacing my William."

Billy. It all came down to Billy.

Shinji laughed out loud, long and hard. Ranma and Ichigo started listening in on Batman's countermeasures to Shinji. "You think I don't know that? Well news-flash for you Pops, I'M YOUR SON!" Shinji moved so quickly only a handful of loopers saw his movements in full. The rest merely watched as he slammed Gendo into the ground. "HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT HUH!? YOUR SON ISN'T REALLY YOUR SON! HE'S JUST MY \_REPLACEMENT\_!"

Gendo reached up and adjusted his glasses even so non-chalantly, even though he was in clear pain. "Honestly boy, I don't know what to think."

\_That\_ brought up Shinji short.

"Boy, I've been through third impact three times. Time has reseted twice for me, and both times I saw you instead of my son. William Ikari may not have been the brightest boy, but he was still mine. I didn't realize how much I hurt him. When everything had changed back but with you in his place, I was horrified. I stuck to my scenario though: perhaps there was some way to replicate the results and bring back my son. You foiled it both times. So, Shinji \_Ikari\_ I don't know who you are, so let Me Go And FIND MY SON!"

Silence came crashing down on to the Ikari's. Finally Shinji stood, and spat on Gendo. "Fuck you."

Gendo sat up and glared death at Shinji. "Fuck off boy. You're not my son."

Shinji turned, and left the building. Gendo staggered to his feet, grabbing his side in pain. A buttercup yellow pegasus, Fluttershy, trotted up to him. "Do you need any help Mister Ikari?"

Gendo nodded, and looked around. "Well? WHAT ARE YOU STARING AT?"

The many patrons of the bar slowly returned to their positions, throwing more than a few glares and glances at Gendo. Fluttershy

began dressing his wounds. Gendo glared at anything that looked at him funny, and silently worried about his real son, Shinji.

And outside? Shinji walked into the dark. He would not return; he had no need to. Gendo, his Gendo, would never be alive in the same sense he was.

It was strange... and for the first time in millennia, Shinji felt his heart ache. "Bastard. If can't remember me... then fine. I don't need a father anyway."

Inside the bar though, Twilight made her move.

"I know what I'm staring at..." her dangerous voice spoke up, "Even someone who's as skilled at lying as you are can't contradict the facts." Twilight Sparkle strode up to Gendo, matching his expression.

"And what business is it of yours?"

"I set up this sanctuary," the anchor said with a glare, "And while we welcome everyone who wants it, we don't look well at \_deliberate sabotage\_."

Gendo wore a mask of hatred, but not even Fluttershy was willing to take his side now.

"If you want to see Billy again, good luck. It seems he's been showing up all over the place these days," Twilight said casually, "But keep three things in mind. One: we all know what kind of man you were originally. I agreed to help you move past that, but if you don't want to change, we'll keep treating you like the monster you admitted you were not five minutes ago. Two:" She bent down to whisper in his ear, "Shinji is the one keeping your universe stable. No other Anchor can take his place for long, and he's among the most powerful entities in existence as we know it. You do NOT want him as an enemy."

Twilight turned away, defenses active in case he tried violence. "Take as long as you need to think it over, Gendo. But there's only one conclusion there to reach for you."

Gendo watched the mare plod away, before doing something quite strange: he removed his glasses. "Twilight Sparkle... You have seen the atrocities I have committed in my quest to reunite myself and my son with Yui. So let me ask you something: would you like to see me as an enemy?"

Twilight spun around, a thoroughly annoyed and confused look on her face. "What the Oak is that supposed to mean?"

Gendo fell heavily into his chair, the weight of his conscious seemingly dragging him down. He wrapped a hand around his bourbon laced coffee cup and drank deeply, never breaking eye contact. "I'm asking you, Twilight Sparkle, if you would rather seem a being who committed such acts as I have, as your father?"

The room was silent.

"Would you rather me be intrinsically linked to you, in a manner that

many would see as inescapable, to know that I was, ineffably, your father? Or would you wish me to be a foreign force, a thing, not a person, but a thing separate from you, apart from your circle, apart from your very self? Someone you can demonize, hate without guilt, call "other"? Because if Shinji needs to..." Gendo's shaking hand dropped his cup. "Because... because... be..." Resolution firmed begun Gendo's eyes, force coalescing into action.

"Because if I must become the perfect demon that Shinji sees me as, if only to allow him peace of mind, then so be it. And if that particular fact ever leaves this room..." Gendo allowed his sheer presence to take over, impossibly, but thoroughly, cowing thousands of the Multiverse's most ancient inhabitants. "...Then I won't be responsible for what happens to you."

Silence caught, and stuck within the room

\* \* \*

><p>136.3 (JustTheBast)<p>

Twilight sat confidently before the desk of principal Celestia. She had transmogrified the girlish clothes that the portal had seen fit to put on her into a flattering skirted ensemble that made her look much more like the young adult she actually was. Her attire, her confident and reasonable manner, and the fact that she had been able to present the actual Fall Formal crown had been enough to convince the high school principal to take her seriously and produce the crown currently in the school's possession.

"As you can see, Ms. Celestia," said Twilight, gesturing at the two crowns lying side by side, "this one is made of cheap brass and coloured glass, while the other one is actual gold inset with jewels. Given last night's break-in and attempted substitution, I believe it is highly likely that the design process for this year's Fall Formal crown was rigged specifically to produce this facsimile of my heirloom. You may wish to look into how exactly this design was chosen and who might have influenced the decision for their own purposes."

She steepled her fingers - a trick that had taken her several loops in human form to master convincingly - and looked the principal in the eyes. "I have no interest in causing any sort of scandal for your school. If my property is restored to me, I see no need to involve the authorities. Let us just write it off as a teenage prank gone out of hand and say no more about it, shall we?"

Principal Celestia nodded agreement. "That is very generous of you, Ms. Sparkle. Clearly the crown is yours - if you wish to take it back and let that be the end of it, I am in your debt. Rest assured, though, that I will look into the matter and find the ones responsible." Her face clouded with righteous anger. "I do not look kindly on students using school funds to create props for criminal activities."

"Thank you, Principal Celestia," said Twilight, rising from her seat. She took the true Element of Magic and put it in her bag. "I'm glad that we could sort this matter out amicably."

The two women shook hands, parted, and went their separate ways - one

to oversee the running of her school, the other to return to a land of magical ponies.

As Twilight walked along the school corridors on her way out, she shook her head to herself. It was always sad to see an unawake Sunset Shimmer, when she came to steal the Element of Magic, but at least it was quite easy to head off her plans, if one only approached it rationally.

\*\_I don't know what's crazier,\_\* she thought, \*\_the fact that I let myself get dragged into a high school popularity contest in baseline, or that a normal high school had the funds to make a crown of real gold and jewels for their yearly dance.\_\*

\* \* \*

><p>136.4 (Scorntex)<p>

It was rare, even in the Sister Loops, that Twilight ever got a chance to see the Crystal Empire up-close and personal, and in all its splendour. Usually she only got the chance when Sombra decided it was a sensible idea to aggravate two Alicorns, and a lot of those times ended with the beautiful city gone before she could inspect it, with most of its culture lost after Sombra was through with it, burnt or blasted or smashed or buried forever.

So under normal circumstances, she might actually have been happy to wake up in the Crystal Empire (and as she would later note, despite being a Crystal Pony, she still had the same old starburst on her flank).

Under normal circumstances, which she seriously doubted her current situation qualified for.

As her Loop memories kindly filled in for her, she had been born ever-so-slightly before Sombra had shown up in the city, before he'd risen to power and killed anyone who might have dared object. In this Loop he was playing the role of kindly benevolent rescuer to the faltering Empire, with the horrific nasty monstrousness just barely percolating underneath. And she was his increasingly nervous protégé, evidently approached as a child because he "recognised something in her".

In other words, he had noticed her talent for magic and saw her as a useful tool and instrument, and going by those memories not one worth treating much better than he did everyone else.

"\_Yeah\_" Twilight thought to herself, "\_Buck this. Moon time for Sombra.\_"

(The following excerpt from \_The Reign of Her Highness, Queen Twilight, Ruler of the Crystal Republic\_, translated. Third edition.)

><em><br>It had all happened so quickly. One moment, Viceroy Sombra had been calmly giving a speech to the members of the imperial senate, on the need for increasing control of our nation's exports and imports, and dealings with the new-born Equestria, and in another... he was gone.

>There had been a loud flash of light, and a burst of sound, and the curious cry of "buck this". And then there was stillness, and

silence, with only the clattering of his ceremonial headgear, followed by a loud crunch.<em>

\_And then the light dimmed, and Her Ladyship was standing there, her sudden wings\_ (and the sudden rash of question marks after that word is a genuine article of the original text) \_flapping with irritation. And she said unto us: "Does anyone mind if I take over? No. Good."\_

\_In the interest of fairness, she did turn out to be our most benevolent and enlightened leader, long may she reign. But given she had just banished the Viceroy, you could forgive some members of the Senate for their immediate screaming and running away.\_

Twilight sat on the carved throne of the Crystal Empire as she calmly read through another ancient scroll, a wide grin on her face. It turned out that this Loop, Sombra had been quite the hoarder of knowledge. It almost made up for the unpleasant memories of his treatment of her un-Awake self.

A quick message to Celestia and Luna (neither were Awake, it seemed) had been sent shortly after her "ascension". Apparently Sombra had already been working on distancing the Empire from Equestria, and everyone else, for some time already. Fortunately, both of the royal sisters were concerned as to what was transpiring in the empire, and were all too glad to help out with their current "succession crisis".

And maybe in a few years she'd get to see what effect the Crystal Empire's art and culture would have on the world.

But for the moment, she told herself, reading. And a bit of politics later. There was a lot of damage to fix, not all of which was Sombra's fault. And she had wanted to see how quickly she could institute a constitutional monarchy in a non-Equestrian setting...

\* \* \*

><p>136.5 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight placed a hoof against her face, shaking her head and slowly counted from ten to one in the vain hopes that by the time she finished things would not be crazy.

"So Twily, are you really ok with this?" Her foal sitter asked her, the day before she would go on her honeymoon after her wedding with her husband and wife.

Nope. Things were still wrong.

"Look Slaneesh, I do appreciate you asking me this, I really do." Twilight muttered, staring at the alicorn of love and lust that was sitting uncomfortably across the unicorn. The other alicorn in the room was also shaking her head at the whole thing.

"Cheerilee made it clear that I need to ask to do this sort of thing, otherwise EmPy here will rat me out to Leman and then I won't be allowed to have fun in the loops anymore," the pink alicorn grumbled, looking up at the white alicorn, who was wearing a gold

inline white dress that an unAwake Rarity had spent a long time making. "Aren't I right, Auntie Empy?"

Empy could only groan in agreement, likely wondering why she was dealing with this brand of insanity.

"As I was saying," Twilight stared at Slaneesh, causing the Chaos God to shrink back. "These things are normally fine, as long as you remember the rules."

Slaneesh rolled her eyes at this. "Yes yes, I know. Don't let you see it, don't show you the tapes unless you pay for the blackmail, if they Wake up I should take a step back--"

"If Shinning Wakes up, \_yes\_," Twilight glared. "Unlike Chryss, he is in a monogamous relationship with the mare you are replacing right now. If I find out you took advantage of my brother, I swear that I will make Empy here look like an unAwake Fluttershy! Do you understood me?" She barked out, her magic pressing onto the alicorn, showing the power and might she held against the squirming pony.

"I-I understand." Slaneesh meeped in fear. "I'll even Pinkie Promise!" The pony began to do the motions, saying "Cross my heart, hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye!"

"\_Good\_." Twilight released the pressure on the mare. "Now, I can't believe I am saying this, but have fun on your honeymoon with my brother and the changeling queen."

"Will do," Slaneesh leaned in to hug Twilight. She then whispered something into her ear before teleporting away. "\_Sister\_."

Twilight and Empy could only facehoof at the fading giggles as the three equines departed on chariots for parts unknown. Twilight looked at the mare next to her and Empy looked back.

"Dress shopping and then booze?" Twilight offered.

"Sounds wonderful to me."

\* \* \*

><p>136.6 (Crisis)<p>

Twilight felt very strange as she woke up. There was something off about her surroundings... Something she couldn't quite put her hoof on...

Looking around her room yielded nothing out of the ordinary... save for that lump under the covers of her bed that she was certain hadn't been there when she went to sleep.

Despite the sinking feeling, she lifted the covers to take a look, and started screaming bloody murder when she saw the empty violet eyes of the severed unicorn head staring back at her from under an indigo mane with rose and violet streaks.

"Twilight!" the head suddenly spoke to her fiercely. "Twilight! Wake up!"

Twilight shot up in bed, sweating and breathing heavily, her pupils shrunk to pinpricks.

"You okay, Twilight?" Applejack asked. "Y'all were tossing and screaming somethin' fierce and all. Molestia nightmare again?"

"No..." Twilight started getting her breathing under control. "Somepony take a note: No more watching The Godfather right before bed."

"Ah," Applejack nodded knowingly. "Yep, that'll do it."

\* \* \*

><p>136.7 (DrTempo)<p>

Sunset Shimmer, who looked like a humanoid unicorn, stood next to a grave in an old garden, with the names "To Iris and the Colonel" engraved in it. Wearing a Repliforce beret, the Looper saluted at the grave, not noticing Zero was next to her.

"Hello, Sunset." It was a testament to Sunset's experience that she didn't instinctively attack.

Frowning, she sniffled. "Hello, Zero. Come to pay your respects as well?"

"Who do you think made that gravestone? It's not like anyone would do that for Reploids considered Mavericks."

Sunset broke down, crying, "How do you do it, Zero? Having to basically kill the one you love time and time again? I befriended Iris, and I knew her fate. I wanted to save her from that fate, but not just because it's the right thing to do, but because she truly was my friend. I saw her like a little sister, Zero, but I could do nothing!"

Slamming her fist into the ground, she lamented, "I tried to convince her not to fight you...told her she could likely get killed. But, she insisted. She wanted answers. And in the end, for all the strength I've gotten throughout my time as a Looper, I failed to save a friend. I should've just stopped her by force."

Zero put his hand on Sunset's shoulder. "She'd never forgiven you, Sunset. Trust me, I never want to have to end her life. I've tried so many times. I tried everything, but it seems like no matter what, I fail. This is my greatest failure, Sunset. When it happened the first time, I wondered what it was I had to fight for. But I realized that I fight to protect those I cherish. I never considered myself a hero. I always fight for those I believe in."

Sunset smiled. "To me, that's what heroes do. I fight to protect those who need help. From my Awakening, I always have done that. My home Loop may be the biggest Sanctuary Loop around, but my earliest Loops were in places like Soul Society, the Elemental Countries...places where I had to fight. I'm willing to do what I have to-no more, no less- to help others, and I've never killed unless it was the only way. But, that just makes those I fail to save

hurt even worse."

Zero simply said, "That's all we can do. We can't save everyone. But, we can do the best we can...every single Loop."

The two looked at the grave, and saluted.

Sunset then said, "Goodbye, Iris. I will never forget our friendship."

\* \* \*

><p>136.8 (Evilhumour)<p>

Celestia looked at Luna who was standing with her on the shoreline.

Luna, Awake with her sister, looked back in the same awe and disbelief fashion.

The two of them looked down at the three fillies who were trembling and trying to hide between each other, the tree-damn book lying in front of the three of them.

Celestia, shaking her head, asked the three unAwake loopers a question she never asked before. "Where did you three find the Necronomicon, and \_why\_ did you read it?!"

"\_That's\_ what it is?" Applebloom asked, looking up from the huddle, only to cower back as an earthquake made the shoreline vanish. The girls were scooped up by the princesses magic. "We're just trying to see if we could get our cutie marks from some old spells!" The fillies whimpered as a city began to rise from the ocean.

With a sigh, the two alicorns threw themselves to the sky, ready to deal with Great Old Ones that were waking up from their ancient slumber. As they flew and pulled out their magic might to protect their ponies, Luna grinned at Celestia, which caused the mare to sigh.

"Fine, you're right, the girls \_would\_ summon Cthulhu, Hastur, Tirek and the rest \_before\_ getting their cuties marks! I'll give you the bits \_later\_ Lulu, alright?" She snapped, watching Luna only to chuckle. "But I will \_not\_ do the \_other\_ thing!"

"But Tia~!" Luna whined as the horrific, mind defiling monsters rose from their ancient prisons and began to breath in their unholy power for the first time in eons. "You \_promised!\_ Need I get Pinkie Pie to hold you to your word?"

"Luna, we're about to do battle with the Great Old Ones and you're holding Pinkie Pie over me \_now!?!\_" Celestia snapped as uncountable armies of Deep Ones began to clash with the sea ponies without too much concern, knowing that the fifteen score warriors would be more than enough to hold the line just fine until King Helix came with the rest of the sea pony army.

After all, they were lead by their fearless leader, who admittedly was somewhat constantly stoned and looking for his seagnomes that he had gave to his daughter on her wedding day to her candy making wife,



and he had defeated Discord all by himself without too much assistance.

Though she did miss the old North pole...

"Of course Tia," Luna smiled as she began to send meteors into the awaking Great Old Ones, hitting several blow their many belts. "Otherwise, you would weasel out of it like your paperwork."

"\_Fiiiiiine!"\_ Celestia pouted as she sent a massive solar strike into their midst, blowing several weaker ones into fine unnaturally coloured mists. "I'll do it!"

"Huzzah!" Luna said with a smile as she flew in close for combat, using her magic to smack Tirek across the entire planet, where he would end up crashing into the domicile of a lavender mare with an adoptive filly. "We shall greatly enjoy seeing you in the most pinkest of fru-fru, dear sister!"

With a sigh at the silliness of her sister and what she will be suffering for the next hundred loops they were both Awake for, she too entered the battle of Great Old Ones, ducking as a confused centaur came flying back towards them.

\* \* \*

><p>136.9 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Twilight stepped through a pair of doors of a ruby colored mansion that had replaced Fluttershy's cottage. The unicorn's ears were sharp enough she caught the sound of ice cubes in a glass and a page turning from down the hallway behind another set of closed doors. Curious, Twilight tapped on the door, to which a gruff, but familiar french voice echoed from within, "Go away."

Twilight blinked, then gripped the door with his telekinesis, "Hey are you awake? I feel like I've been thrown for a loop trying to find you."

She gazed upon a yellow pegasus with a suit covering his cutie mark and a red mask over his head which also covered his mane. The pegasus looked up, his expression already brightening, "Ah, Miss Sparkle. I knew you would loop around to visit me. Been awhile since you replaced the Administrator of Mann Co."

Twilight blinked, then brightened, "Spy! How are things with Red team?"

Spy flapped his wings, bringing him over to his alcohol cabinet. He chuckled and poured Twilight some scotch, "It's Flutterspy this time. You'd call it, single letter transposition or something I'm sure. As for the others, you know Dell, he likes turning our war on its head. Scout's been making a nuisance out of himself as always."

He continued sharing everyone while handing her the glass, then came to medic, which he just gave a small frown, "He's descended into Sakura Syndrome, almost as bad as Sakura at her worst."

He shrugged as he took a sip of his own drink, "Well, it's not much

worse than his baseline self though, since he was something of an insane quack to begin with."

Twilight shook her head sadly, "Sorry. Hope he manages to snap out of it."

Spy looked at his glass, "Maybe Sakura will loop there soon. I feel she might be able to snap him out of it...-" his expression darkened briefly, "-or she'll regress."

Setting down his drink, he tried smiling, though only succeeded in a rueful grin, "I hope not. But enough about my group of misfits. Surely you have questions."

Twilight tilted her head in curiosity, "You think Fluttershy has replaced you this loop?"

Spy gave a wry grin, "Undoubtedly."

\* \* \*

><p>136.10 (elmagnifico)<p>

Macintosh fought.

Unlike those rare occasions he felt the need to call back to that fateful loop and plumb the green-tinged depths of his determination and will, this was not a physical fight.

Nevertheless, he was losing, and had been since he'd Awoken.

A voice cut through the background chatter, piercing his defenses and drawing his attention.

"Hey Macintosh!"

Another blow, and he winced inwardly. His face showed the pain as plain as day, which meant he still wasn't fighting hard enough. Normally, he could hide behind a stoic face and monosyllabic responses when his mind was troubled. Between keeping the current batch of loop memories suppressed, out of respect for the pony they usually belonged to, and the difficulty of changing his routine to something so close to normal, his reactions were floating nearer the surface than usual.

"Eeyup?"

Hearing his own voice respond - from another body - just made the fight still harder. He shuddered slightly, causing the brown stetson to fall forward in front of his eyes. A push from an orange hoof, one that was his and not his, more properly hers, but responded to his commands, put the headgear to rights. This action revealed a concerned-looking Applebloom. The bustle of the Apple Family Reunion almost drowned out his little sister's repeated question.

"Ah said, you okay sis?"

Macintosh shook the head he was inhabiting at the moment. He mentally groped about for a response. Having trouble with being in your sister's brain was no excuse for being rude. Not like it was a

malicious question or anything of the sort. Just the genuine worry of a younger sibling for their older kin, typical of both the looping 'bloom, and in this case her unawake counterpart.

In a less busy setting, his siblings might show their concern in other ways, like make his favorite breakfast, or get out a photo album full of pleasant memories. He'd do the same if he were worried about one of them. Questions were also used, it wasn't like any of them were shy about being blunt when the need came, but in either case it was just how they cared for each other.

"Eeyep, jus' Woke Up on the wrong side of the bed, is all."

He managed to assuage Applebloom's doubtful expression with an easygoing grin. Or perhaps she could sense the tension just beneath the surface and decided not to inquire about the grimace. Either way, she moved on.

Macintosh sighed.

At least there was still work to do. After that first few minutes of paralysis, he'd been able to throw himself into the preparations for the Celebration, as well as the Reunion. His duties were different in this body, but he could recall the schedule that he and Applejack had worked out together. That was still fresh in his own memories, like they'd only made it yesterday. Right now, for instance, there was a bushel of Red Russets that needed to come down so they could be set out fresh-as-possible.

Russets were grown in the South Orchard, out by the road to Ponyville. Macintosh ambled up to one of the trees, Bertram was what his sister had named it, but his mind was elsewhere. Not like this was particularly cerebral work. A quick, businesslike buck was all that was necessary. His mental capacities were focused on inward battles though, so he almost jumped when the low, steady voice spoke from his immediate left.

"Sis, you sure you're alright?"

He could hear the concern behind the question, and it wasn't just because he had inadvertently left his mental Voice talent open.

"Ah'm good Mac, just a toucha headache."

He'd settled on calling his unawake counterpart Mac. It was an abbreviation he had no particular attachment to, so attaching it to somepony else held no self-identity issues.

The face he was only used to seeing in a mirror gave him a half-lidded look then. He tried to brush aside with that ironclad confidence his sister could employ with infuriating ease. A pang of guilt put an end to that as it stabbed at his already-tender mental spaces.

On the other hoof, he didn't particularly enjoy it when somepony else used it on him.

"Good afternoon, my name is Twilight Sparkle."

Ah, there was the anchor, and right on time.

He'd seen this encounter from afar enough times to know what came next. Provided she didn't do something to knock the timeline too far off kilter, Twilight would show up to inspect the preparations, and in the process get whirled into trying a bit of everything, winding up overstuffed and uncomfortable. In the old days he'd just gone through this tableau on autopilot, trusting instinct and inconspicuousness to keep anything from drawing her attention to the stallion who was experiencing time in a loop.

These days, even when she or somepony else messaged him that they wanted things strictly baseline, he made a point of cutting anything that passed his hooves into smaller portions. Since he'd received no such indication, he mentally started dividing the strudel into eighths instead of fourths.

"Well howdy there, welcome to Sweet Apple Acres."

Cousin Fritter's voice served as perfect punctuation to his grabbing the basket of Russets and heading for the serving table. On the way there, he almost stumbled over the small purple dragon that had accompanied the unicorn.

"'Scuse," he intoned, skirting around Spike, but taking the chance to catch the slitted, green eyes. He was taking in the sights of the farm, the traffic of Apples of all shapes, sizes and ages. The light in those eyes was shimmering with curiosity, and there was only wonder at unseen sights, no recognition in the young drake's gaze. Macintosh drew upon his time as an empathic Voice and sent a mental probe at Spike just to be sure, and got no push back.

Unwake, then.

And so the scene went without too much incident this time around, although it was Fritter that did the whirling. Odd, she'd never done that before. Of the other relatives it was usually Fuji Junior or Golden Delicious who took Twilight for a tour if the scene went off script. Macintosh, for his part, managed to moderate his influence to reducing the glass of apple-whiskey that got passed to her and narrowing the slice of pie to something less mouth-damming.

As Twilight moved away, apparently satisfied in the thoroughness of the culinary preparations, he trotted after her, business-like. Also trying all the while not to trip over the unfamiliar hooves and different center of gravity.

He caught up to the anchor just around the first bend, where she'd apparently been waiting.

"I knew you were off your game. What's wrong Applejack?"

His eyes screwed up in concentration.

"Not Applejack. 's Macintosh in here."

He heard her straighten in shock, although it wasn't as abrupt as he might have expected. That was right, she'd spoken of loops like this, where you were some other pony altogether.

"Shows me for thinking I can get away with just pinging rather than checking the elements. I can handle things solo if you like."

"Mah thanks."

The rest of the Reunion passed in a blur. Relatives that were instantly familiar and friendly as ever, interacting with him in ways he'd never seen. For instance, Fourth-Cousin Maldahyde, with whom he rarely shared a conversation, was apparently on good terms with all the mares of her generation, and quite worried by her cousin Applejack's restiveness. About the only normal thing that day was the pie, which was good as always.

He had just finished sweeping the last of the dust and debris onto the compost heap, amid talk of an ancient vengeful princess being defeated using some party balloons, three irate mustelids and a pound of spaghetti. He'd been mostly successful in getting his duties done and averting too much suspicion, although Fiddlesticks was still wondering about the string when she left.

His reverie was interrupted by his unawake counterpart giving him a glass of something cool and nice-smelling.

"Cinnamon Sweet Cider. Y'all's favorite."

It wasn't, but there was no way Mac could know that. The corners of Macintosh's vision blurred as the voice that was normally his continued.

"Ah don't know what's wrong. Just that it's there. If'n' y' wanna talk about it, ah'm here."

The features that were not normally his stretched into a genuine smile, and he followed his brother into the house.

Maybe he could do this, after all.

\* \* \*

><p>136.11 (RowanEx)<p>

Twilight Awoke in blackness. She checked her loop memories. She then checked her subspace pocket. And then, she noticed she was in HER subspace pocket.

\_Oh. New looping universe...?\_

She looked at herself carefully. She's a scientist, with a glove on her left, and a watch connected to the intercom to her right arm. She too had a goggles she doesn't wear as always, and wears it. She checked who was at the manor.

\_Is Nyx solving puzzles- wait, how did she do that?! All things tu- Oh, wait, it turned into metal. The- what the buck?! She's flying?! Oh. She's just wanting to get into the next room... \_

After realizing what she remembered, she facepalmed. Dimensions. That's what the loop's speciality.

Quantum Conundrum loops are very tricky...

\* \* \*

><p>Prof. Quadwrangle, or Quartet Wrangler, a unicorn, walks around the Golden Oak Library, and only to be met by a confused and Awake Rainbow Dash.<p>

"New looper?" Rainbow Dash asks.

"No, no I'm not! My loops tend to place me in a pocket dimension, and when fused loops, things are different." Wrangler replied. "But this experience is new. And my loop memories... tell me that I'm the overseer for the Summer Sun Celebratio- wait."

"What?"

"I remember now. I'm replacing your Anchor."

Rainbow Dash stood in silence. "H-how did you know?"

"She... um... looped in once, replacing my nephew. She told her baseline while solving puzzles..."

Awake Spike faceclawed. \_Better than spending a loop with Ike, \_he thought. \_But, is he looping?\_

\* \* \*

><p>136.12 (Evilhumour)<p>

One Crazy Week part three

>Twilight smiled to herself as she settled herself down on the isolated beach, sprawling out on her towel. Normally, she did not just run off from things like what happened today but dealing with the snake incident and having to deal with paperwork over her tree that had somehow caused the financial collapse of Equestria was a bit much.<p>

As such, Twilight decided that she would take this day off. Checking internally, as from a numerous amount of loops where she had raised the sun and moon gave her a very precise estimation as to what hour it was supposed be, and a watch she pulled out from her subspace pocket, it was Wednesday now. Acting on an impulse, she brought out an inflatable beach mattress from her pocket, the latest book 'Iris Drake' wrote and decided to herself that today would be a simple reading day.

After all, she thought to herself, what could go wrong on such a pleasant and peaceful day?

\* \* \*

><p>With a mighty splash of water, Twilight woke up with a start. Shaking her head, she saw she was still on her mattress in a massive storm, the sea heaving her around without mercy or a chance for to really collect herself.<p>

Sighing, she started to gather her magic when a lightning bolt crashed right in front of her, startling her as it popped her mattress and sent her rocketing through the storm. Holding onto the

flying mattress, Twilight strained to keep her eyes open as more bolts of lightning landed near her, almost as if they were trying to actually hit her.

Once more, she tried to bring her power together when suddenly her mattress stopped rocketing forwards. With a meep, she was flung head over tail with the inertia from the sudden stop, and landed in the water with a mighty splash. Sputtering, Twilight forced herself to break the surface and paddled on the ocean sea as she tried to get the water out of her lungs. Turning around in attempts to spot her mattress, she saw that the sudden storm was now gone and the sea was definitely warmer than it should have been if she was still in normal Equestria. Finally, she spotted her mattress as it began to sink into the waters below before she used her magic to grab it.

Or she tried as her magic shot out with tremendous speed and power that destroyed the floating device and caused the looper to mutter things under her breath as she continued to tread water.

Still, Twilight's mind was trying to behave normally and that meant analyzing everything that had occurred so far.

She knew that this was some fused loop now and not some weird variant as she thought with the whole deal that happened yesterday; and someone was pulling a prank on her, one she intended to get even with very quickly.

She knew she had sent out a ping early in the loop with only her friends responding back but maybe she could get whoever was doing this to trip up by pinging back by instinct as she once did to some of her friends. So on that logic, she sent out a normal ping.

Twilight instantly regretted doing the action as the ping had become equivalent to the sound of a low level Trixie explosion going off in her head, with her body shaking due to the raw magic rebounding from her ping. Clutching her head as she kicked with her hind legs, she let out curses as she tried to clear her head of the pain and get a control of her magic that was both sprawling out of her and building a pressure in her head, while being faintly aware it was pulling on her body outwards in some fashion.

Sometime after her twentieth swear involving some she just invented that involved bees, a duck, a brand new tree hybrid and her Admin given corporal punishment, she felt someone grab her by the armpits and lift her out of the water, only to drop her on a wooden floor.

She heard someone muttering about helping her and another person responding back, but the pain from her own building magic prevented her from paying attention as it was still out of her control. Without warning, she felt something shoved onto her horn and began to feel some relief from the pure magic overload. While she felt her magic starting to slow down thanks to whatever had been placed on her horn, her magic was still out of control and was still concentrated in head to be painful enough to force her eyes shut.

"Oh dear, the mortal is still leaking magic," the second voice responded with some worry in his voice. "Mister Sunscorch, if you can hold her steady please while I get out my more advanced magic blocker

out."

"Aye sir," The first voice responded above her, placing one arm around her chest, pinning her legs and wings to her chest. She then noticed that she had her wings out, although they would be useless until she could dry them out. "Oi, lads, hand me a towel. She's going to be shivering something terrible once Dr. Scamadros helps block her magic flow properly."

Slowly, Twilight forced her eyes open when she felt a heavy towel dropped onto her back and sides, with a strong hand rubbing her sides dry. Twilight bit her lip to not only fight the lessening pain but also the sounds of bliss she felt from such an action.

As her eyes finally opened, she heard a shout of victory from Dr. Scamadros and then something shoved around her head, blocking off her magic completely and finally allowing her to think clearly without the overload of magic within her skull distracting her.

"Oooo, that's so much better," Twilight smiled, reaching with a hoof to rub her head when something blocked her hoof. "What the?" Twilight frowned, noticing a faint white circular outline around her field of vision.

"Oh, you mustn't touch the magic inhibitor missâ€¦" Dr. Scamadros, a strange looking man with moving tattoos of a doctor treating a patient moving into a parent telling their child a lesson, or at least that's what it looked like to her.

"Twilight Sparkle and what do you mean exactly?" Twilight, by nature, was uncomfortable around magic inhibitors and she had spent some loops figuring out how to escape nearly all kinds with some success. Most of the time she just overloaded the inhibitor to the point where it either exploded, melted or most rare of all, burnt herself out completely and thus negating the ring completely.

"Ah, well miss Twilight Sparkle, I had first thought the Absorbing Cork would suffice by cancelling your outflowing magic from your horn, but your continued transformation into this new state proved to me that a stronger inhibitor was required. As such, I had just redesigned an old project of mine that would act as a more discreet inhibitor but due to your body figure, the intended portion was lost."

Blinking Twilight turned her head away from the doctor and to the water to see what he meant.

Twilight was beyond relieved that no one was around to see her like this. The top of her horn had a cork shoved on it yes, but what was worse was the collar that she had around her neck. It was a tall, white circular thing that she only seen on a pet that just had surgery and was placed to prevent the dog or cat from biting the stitches.

She was also very tall now, taller than Celestia and just under Sleipnir by a few feet, and her mane glistening in it's completely ethereal state. Her coat was immaculate, her hooves were solid and shone like they had several layers of polish on them. Her teeth were perfectly straight and her bangs were at the exact proper length, a fact she knew by heart and would die if any of her friends knew that



she had looked up that bit of information. Her horn had more ridges than Celestia's did and her wings were larger than Celestia's as well, perfectly swan wings that were on the perfect edge of being usable and unusable.

In short, Twilight looked like an alicorn made perfect except for having an Elizabethan collar and cork on her horn.

Before she could lament the sad fate she was in, she heard Mister Sunscorch shout from behind her.

"Ah there we go, found your realm little one-er, big one." The sailor behind her laughed a bit, Twilight unable to move due her sheer size. "We'll have you back in no time."

"Wait, what? What's going on here?" Twilight turned her long neck around to look at the sailor over her shoulder in a one-hundred eighty degree turn, realizing she could do that now with some unease.

The sailor shrugged, as several more people behind him continued to row the boat forwards.

"To be fair Lady Twilight Sparkle, I don't know." Sunscorch responded, causing Twilight's eyebrows to arch at the lady part. "I don't know how you made it through the Line of Storms, but Dr. Scamadros here has a means to send you right back."

"Yes, Lady Twilight Sparkle," Dr. Scamadros smiled, with his tattoos now showing a carpenter patching up a roof for some reason. "We will have you back home in no time; you will just need to wear the collar and cork for a few days until your magic ebbs off enough so it will not overwhelm you again."

"Wait a second, who are you peo-" With a lurch, the rowboat hit a rough patch of water, causing Twilight to flap her wings out of reflex to steady herself. Twilight noticed the sun that was just overhead before was now replaced by a moon.

"There we go, Equestria on Wednesday night, just when you left." Dr. Scamadros said with a smile that changed into a smirk when he noticed Twilight's frown. "Oh yes, Lady Twilight Sparkle, time runs true in the House. One day in the Secondary Realms might be twenty years in the House, or an hour inside the House might last for a day within the House."

"Wait, that doesn't make any sense!" Twilight exclaimed as they pulled up to the beach "How can time be both longer and shorter at the same time?" The people in the boat shrugged as they started to disembark from the boat with Twilight shaking herself dry of any remaining water off her coat.

"Time is a tricky thing within the House, Lady Twilight Sparkle," Sunscorch spoke as the people began to climb back into the boat. "We once left a tavern for a year, came back to only to find the tea still warm."

"Huh?" Twilight blinked as she tried to process this with her tired mind before she realized two important things. One, the people that saved her were already out sight and most likely gone. And two, she

was not on the same beach she woke up on this morning and she could see a number of islands in the distance meaning she was more than likely on an island herself, meaning the people had stranded her on a deserted island without any way getting home besides flying. She could already begin to pinpoint where she was, using the stars to guide her home.

It was then she realized something else. It was no longer Wednesday.

It was Thursday, and if things were going to be like the last three days, then whatever was going to happen today was not going to be fun at all.

\* \* \*

><p>136.14 (Gamerex27)<p>

Spike Awoke as he was re-arranging one of Twilight's book shelves. Looking down, he noted that a great deal of the books had been knocked to the floor.

As he was puzzling over these strange circumstances (Twilight would never treat her books so poorly in a normal Loop), he heard hooves banging at the closest door. "Spike!" Twilight's voice cried. "Open the door!"

Raising his brows, Spike twisted the doorknob open with the Force, and a disheveled-looking Twilight walked into the room. Her mane was frazzled, and the frown on her face clearly showed that she was not having a good Loop at all.

"Bad Loop?" he asked, picking up a few more books.

"Not the last one," Twilight said, exasperated. "The last one was another one where I was Star Swirl's assistant: tons of fun. It's this one that's...argh."

She trotted over to the bookshelf, and angrily swatted her forehoof at the rows of textbooks and non-fiction. "Ponies...can't grab anything in this Loop. You know how we can just pick things up with our hooves?"

"Touch-based telekinesis, right?" the dragon asked, placing the last book back on the shelf. "All ponies have innate magic, even though it comes out in different ways, and you said way, way back when these Loops started that it was one of them."

"This Loop, it doesn't exist!" Twilight's horn glowed, and the book detailing Celestia's fight against Nightmare Moon slowly floated off the shelf. "I have to use my horn for everything! And even then, it can't work for everything!"

Spike checked his Loop memories: sure enough, Unawake him was less Twilight's assistant and more her caretaker. In fact, nearly every pony had either an assistant of some kind to do things like preparing and serving food (and for the exceptionally lazy, opening doors like Unawake Twilight), or had prosthetics paws/hands installed in place of their forehooves (mercifully with painkilling spells).

"Oh, no. Is this that Slavequestria variant you guys are always talking about?" Spike asked nervously, checking himself over for any binding runes or slave brandings.

"Thank bark it's not," Twilight said, flipping through the book and looking for any changes. "They're usually not too different that what you did in Baseline: just a bit more work, and better paid. And Celestia put a lot of laws in place to make sure abuse didn't happen. Wait, Luna's assistants went to the Moon with her too?!"

"Still really not liking the implications of all this," Spike muttered, looking out the window. "Is...is Gummy doing the baking for the Pies? Shouldn't he get paid for that, then?"

"Yeah, it's...still kind of messed up," Twilight agreed. "I think Celestia was also offering big rewards for anypony who came up with mass-marketable prosthetics. If you'll excuse me, I'm going to spend the festival trying to figure those out. Could you take care of Nightmare Moon this Loop?"

"Only if you pay me overtime for that," Spike joked. "Seriously, though, something tells me that it'll take care of itself. I don't see any 'assistants' taking being banished to the Moon for a thousand years just because of something stupid their boss did well."

"I...still don't get why Celestia did that," Twilight muttered, carefully putting the book back. "And how did Equestrian society even form if no one can pick anything up?!"

"There are some pretty big things wrong with this Loop," Spike agreed. "How can everypony here afford an assistant for every single pony in the family? How did any of this get started in the first place?"

"And why did Unawake me have so many books when she was too lazy to open doors?!" Twilight exclaimed. "And why did you put up with that?! It doesn't make an se3N238R8377 % %\$&\$%#% %-"

\* \* \*

><p>Sleipnir blinked, checking his monitor again. No, he wasn't imagining it: the Loop really did just crash because Twilight and Spike were, of all things, pointing out lore glitches in the Loop.<p>

"Going to have to patch that problem out," he muttered, hooves clattering all over his jumbo-sized keyboard. "This seems way too problematic to just leave in."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

136.1: That would be Pinkie Pie (humourous humourous).

>136.2: Evil Abe Lincoln Clone.<br>136.3: It is quite crazy.

>136.4: The well-known technique of the Celestial Substitutionary Ruler.<br>136.5: Slaan-eeesh.

>136.6: Some things are a lot scarier than they were intended to

be.<br>136.7: Repeated traumas.  
>136.8: I don't want to know. R'yleh, I don't.<br>136.9: She has a backstare.  
>136.10: Quite a traumare.<br>136.11: Pocket change.  
>136.12: It must be Wednesday. I never could get the hang of Wednesdays.<br>136.13: Don't ask questions.

## 143. Chapter 143

137.1

\* \* \*

><p>"Nearly Hearts and Hooves," Spike said, leaning back.<p>

Rarity nodded. "So it is. I assume you have some new and unique plan for me?"

"Nope," Spike replied, shaking his head.

"Nope?" Rarity repeated. "\_Nope?\_"

"We \_have\_ done everything, dear," Spike pointed out.

"No, Spike, we've merely done everything you can think of," Rarity replied tartly.

She stopped, and blinked. "Wait. Idea!"

"Oh?" Spike asked, curious. "What idea?"

"It's a surprise," his wife told him, rummaging around in her pocket for a lump of metal. She took it out, sliced a perfect cube out of it, and coloured the faces six different colours with a flash of prestidigitation.

"Here," she said, handing it over. "Roll this."

"A chance cube?" Spike asked.

"No, a die," Rarity rejoined. "Chance cubes are silly, they're like coin flips for people who use credit chips."

Spike shrugged. "Fair point. What are the colours?"

Rarity winked. "If I told you, you'd use the Force to make the one you wanted happen. That's not the point here."

"Fair enough," Spike said, deciding not to contest his wife's accusation. He rolled it, and the yellow face was uppermost when it came to a stop.

"Okay, what does that mean?" Spike asked, after a moment.

Rarity shrugged. "You'll find out..."

\* \* \*

><p>Spike yawned, and stretched. He crawled out of bed, stretched

again, and his wings brushed the wall at their fullest extension.<p>

He scratched one of them with his claws, and then furled them and came back to all fours. Still yawning, he headed downstairs.

Sweetie Belle was already there, pouring out some cereal. It caught fire, and she extinguished it with the milk.

"Morning, Sweets," Spike said.

Sweetie looked around, and did a double take. "Spike?"

"Well, yeah..." Spike nodded. "What?"

Sweetie rummaged in her pocket, and held up a mirror.

"Huh," Spike said, blinking. "I'm a griffin. Any idea why?"

The sound of feet on the stairs drew his attention up them, as Rarity came downstairs.

She looked gorgeous. Her beak was just-so, her pinion feathers shading between alabaster and pure, snowy white, and her hindquarters were covered with stippled white-purple fur which took Spike's breath away.

She was, as it happened, also a griffin this morning.

"Well," she smiled. "That would be the yellow result, dear. I admit this means that it's not hearts and hooves, but it's still romantic, is it not?"

"You have the craziest ideas," Spike smiled. "How'd you pull this off?"

"Discord," Rarity replied with a chuckle.

"That would do it," her husband agreed. "Right â€" shall I cook?"

"Oh, yes please," Rarity told him. "There's some non-meat bacon in the freezer, if you wouldn't mind."

"Pleasure."

\* \* \*

><p>"So, what's the plan?" Spike asked, examining his own colouration as they ate. There were some interesting green accents on his wings, but for the most part a subdued, dusty purple was the order of the day. It looked unusual, but not completely outrageous for a griffin.<p>

"Well..." Rarity shrugged. "I was wondering how long it's been since we took over the Griffin Empire."

"It has been a while..." Spike agreed. "Would you humbly accept it as a Hearts and Hooves present?"

"Why, sirrah, you must be reading my mind!" Rarity said with a chuckle. "Let's go as soon as we're done with breakfast."

\* \* \*

><p>Gilda sighed. "Seriously?"<p>

"What?" Emperor Spike asked. "We do this regularly, you know that."

Gilda seethed.

"Dear," Rarity said, delicately. "I think Gilda is annoyed \_less\_ by the fact you couped the Griffin Empire and \_more\_ by how you did it by deposing \_her\_, specifically."

"Oh, right." Spike looked around at the ruins of the throne room, remembering the battle.

There'd been at least one time he reflected a Power Slash with a lightsaber, he could remember that, and there'd been enough fire attacks going around to power a small steampunk nation.

Over \_there\_ was where Rarity's customized cape of capturing had shot just over Gilda's head, missed her Thunder Edge by a whisker, and ensnared three important load-bearing pillars in a dense web of steel thistle silk.

And \_that\_ was where all the water had gone.

"Sorry?" Spike tried.

Gilda \_hrumphed\_, and then held up a foreclaw. "One demand. Just one."

"Let's hear it," Spike said, lounging back on the throne.

"Can I at least keep my imperial suite? I've only just finished doing it up..."

\* \* \*

><p>137.2 (EvilHumour) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Leman sighed to himself, really hating that he had to do this, but as it was for <em>her</em>, he had no problem really doing it.

Knocking on the door with his hoof, he waited for the mares inside to finish to gasping, giggling, and what sounded like Vinyl tripping down the stairs.

With another sigh as it was not even \_night\_ time, he saw a white head poke out of the doorway. The head look back and forth, scratching her head before Lemon coughed to attract her attention.

"Oh, hiya squirt, what brings you here?" Vinyl smiled, opening the

door wider for the pegasus foal to trot inwards.

"I'm here as I can't ask the Little Mother as I don't want her to know, Twilight would tell, and Pinkie Pie would make it into a big show and you're the only one that I can bribe to stay quiet," he blushed, looking at the floor. "I need your help."

"Well, I figured that much kiddo," Vinyl said with an eyeroll, watching the foal walk into the kitchen, not noticing a grey hoof on the staircase. "So what do you need?"

"IneedtolearnhowtomakecelerysoupanddaffodilsandwichesforNyx." The foal folded inwards, with his wings pressed close to himself.

"What was that?" Vinyl lifted her ear to the blushing colt that sat at her table.

"IneedtolearnhowtomakecelerysoupanddaffodilsandwichesforNyx." The anchor for one of the more chaotic realms held his head in his hooves.

"One more time, short stuff."

"I SAID I NEED TO LEARN HOW TO MAKE CELERY SOUP AND DAFFODIL SANDWICHES FOR NYX!" The foal shouted at her, before clamping a hoof across his mouth.

Vinyl grinned to herself, the thoughts of what she could get off the kid from teaching him how to cook were running across her head when a chuckle from behind made her blink.

"Aww, that's so sweet of you," Octavia smiled at the foal, walking past Vinyl to pat him on the back. "Wanting to learn how make special meals for your marefriend. I remember how Vinyl here tried to do the same for me before I had to stop her after burning the tenth pot."

"Octy!" Vinyl whined, blushing at what her friend was saying.

"It's true, which is why I will teach you how to cook," she smiled, flicking her tail across the unicorn's face as she went to the fridge to pull out the ingredients. "Besides, I doubt you can do much worse than Vinyl here."

\* \* \*

><p>Octavia turned her head to a grinning Vinyl before sighing.<p>

"Ok, he is worse than you." She shook her head as more pegasi went to put out the blaze that was engulfing nearly all of Canterlot mountain now. "But at least he can make the meals for his marefriend, unlike some ponies I can mention." With a huff, Octavia trotted off leaving Vinyl feeling like she was the guilty one this time. But turning her head, she saw the two foals enjoying a candlelit dinner of celery soup and daffodil sandwiches and smiled to herself before walking after Octavia to try and make up for things that were not her fault for once.

\* \* \*

><p>137.1 alternate <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Fair enough," Spike said, deciding not to contest his wife's accusation. He rolled it, and the green face was uppermost when it came to a stop.<p>

"Okay, what does that mean?" Spike asked, after a moment.

Rarity shrugged. "You'll find out..."

\* \* \*

><p>"This is, I'll admit, pretty atmospheric," Spike said.<p>

"Thank you," Rarity smiled. "I did think it was a... different... choice."

"Yes," Spike said critically. "The kind of atmosphere, however..."

"What?" Chrysalis asked, bringing in their starters. "Is there a problem?"

"I'm still getting used to the whole changeling-hive dÃ©cor," Spike admitted. As he said so, there was a splat of something landing on the table. "What was that?"

Chrysalis put the plates on the table, and inspected it.  
"Caramel."

"Caramel?" Spike repeated. "How-"

"It's just Changeling-themed," Chrysalis told him. "I took a course from Pinkie once on decorating with confectionery, so the whole hive helped via using my knowledge. Anyway â€" let me know if you need anything."

She stepped out of sight behind a curtain.

"So... what are we doing, then?" Spike asked, picking up a fork and taking a bite. His eyes widened. "This is really good!"

"I'm sure Chrysalis has taken a few cooking courses," Rarity smiled. "And no, the decor's about it."

She lit the candle in the centre of the table. "Let's just enjoy the meal."

\* \* \*

><p>Behind the curtain, Chrysalis started the timer, and signalled Sub-Hive Two to start keeping track of the amount of ambient love the two other loopers were putting out.<p>

By the taste of it, just the side-bleed would have them fed for the



rest of the loop.

\* \* \*

><p>137.3 (OathToOblivion)<p>

"Was that Billy thing really that bad?"

"Oh, believe me, it was. You're lucky you've never run into him, Phoenix," Twilight told him.

"Lucky? Twilight, this is me we're talking about," Phoenix Wright said incredulously. It was yet another Fused Loop where Twilight summoned Phoenix to Equestria. The difference here was that instead of Rainbow Dash being arrested for the murder of Ace Swift, it was Shining Armor arrested for the murder of Cadence. Not something that usually happened. Twilight had a hunch that it had something to do with this Loop's iteration of Chrysalis, but couldn't prove it. So the two were off to the Detention Center to question Shining on just what the hell had happened.

"Oh come on, Phoenix. You've had plenty of good luck too," Twilight pointed out.

"Yeah, and then there are those times where everything looks like it's going to, uh, Tartarus," Phoenix sighed, subbing in the local swear word. He was just plain morose.

Twilight was concerned at this. It looked like Phoenix had had a bad Loop. "What's wrong?" she asked.

"Well, Apollo started Looping recently..."

"Phoenix, that's great!" Twilight interrupted.

"I'm not finished. Anyway, he started Looping, and of course he was confused when he Woke up as a teenager again. I mean, we've all felt that when we started Looping ourselves," Phoenix rambled.

"Phoenix, you're rambling."

"Sorry. Anyway, well, there was a lot to tell him, and I told him so. And while doing so, I realized...I never told Trucy that Apollo is her half-brother," Phoenix said sadly.

"...Does Apollo know?" Twilight questioned.

"Yeah, I told him. It wouldn't have been fair not to. He wasn't that mad at me, all things considered. He'd been feeling something familiar from Trucy for a while now, and he did always wonder why they were the only two who could Perceive. He was just slightly irked that it took coming back in time to tell him."

"It's not really like you to keep secrets, Phoenix," Twilight noted. "Why did you keep this one?"

"I don't even know anymore," he admitted. "I guess I assumed that Thalassa was the one with the biggest right to do so, since she is their mother. And you know," he added, "it really hurts. Because I spent almost every single Loop afterwards telling them that they were

related from almost the get-go. And then Trucy starts Looping and I immediately forget. Some father I am."

"Phoenix..."

"And now what? What happens when I tell Trucy the next Loop she's Awake? What if she hates me? This isn't even like a normal argument, because as a Looper, it's well within her power to just avoid me for the entire Loop, even if I am the Anchor. What am I supposed to do?!" Phoenix questioned loudly, scaring a few of the ponies who had been observing them walk throughout the streets of Canterlot.

"...Phoenix, I don't even know how to begin to approach this. I've never had this kind of problem with Nyx," Twilight admitted. "But, regardless of anything, Trucy's still your daughter. She'll understand."

"I hope so...but I can't help but feel this is going to go very badly the next time she's Awake."

Twilight didn't know what to say, even for all her experience. When it came to parenting, that was a beast of a whole other kind. In the end, she decided to just try to take Phoenix's mind off the subject. "Well, we're here," she pointed out, pointing to the Detention Center, "so let's see how Shiny got himself into this."

Phoenix snapped out of it, at least for now. "Right. You're sure he wouldn't have done it? Er, at least this Loop," he hastily added after seeing the glare his equine friend gave him.

"Yes, I'm sure. Shining Armor this Loop is 100% baseline Shiny. No way would he ever do anything to hurt Cadence," Twilight declared.

"Right then. So let's find out what's going on," Phoenix nodded. And so together they walked into the Detention Center.

\* \* \*

><p>137.1 alternate <p>

\* \* \*

><p>and the orange face was uppermost when it came to a stop.<p>

"Okay, what does that mean?" Spike asked, after a moment.

Rarity shrugged. "You'll find out..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Get up!"<p>

Spike shook his head, grumbling. "What?"

"Get up!" Rarity repeated, shaking his shoulder. "It's nearly dawn!"

"So?" Spike said, pulling the pillow over his head.

Rarity rolled her eyes. "It's Hearts and Hooves day, Spiky-wikey..."

"Yes," Spike agreed. "Which is why I'm having a lie in."

"No you're not," Rarity informed him flatly. "Have you got wings at the moment?"

"Wha?" Spike turned to her, confused.

"Good, you have." Rarity grabbed his arm in her hoof, Ascended in a flash of light, and then they both vanished.

\* \* \*

><p>Spike flailed as he materialized in mid-air. "What the-"<p>

A gentle grip of white magic enveloped him, holding him up. He looked around, then spread his wings and began to beat them. "Okay, I'm flying now, you can let me go."

Rarity duly did so.

"So... what's all this in aid of?" Spike asked, as the couple floated in the air about a mile above Ponyville.

"Simple," Rarity said, with a smile. "I've decided to define Hearts and Hooves day as the time between sunrise and sunset."

"...so?" Spike invited, trimming his wings to exploit a small air pocket.

Rarity nodded towards the east, as the sun emerged from behind a mountain range. "That's dawn."

She turned in a wide circle, feathers fluttering in the airstream, until she faced west. "Let's see how long until Celestia beats us in a race."

Spike worked out what she meant, and smiled. "That sounds fun."

"I try," Rarity said with a shrug. "I packed several meals, by the way, so we can stop and let the sun catch up if need be."

Spike indicated his interest in this plan with a flap of his wings, drawing level with her. "Great!"

He paused. "I'm glad you've become so comfortable with flying, by the way."

Rarity smiled back at him. "Glad you think so."

\* \* \*

><p>137.4 (Evilhumour)<p>

Letting loose a joyful young cry, Record Scratch, Berry Punch and Ivory Scroll pushed off from the top of a hill as they started trying

to get their cutie marks from speed racing.

Blinking as they all Woke up, they shouted in terror as their wagon went barreling down the hill and into the forest.

\* \* \*

><p>Nyx blinked as the three foals came into her library this loop, all grumbling something about tree sap.<p>

"Hiya Nyx," Record Scratch waved, shaking his white coat in the library almost sending sap everywhere before Nyx caught it in her magic and sent it back to the colt. "GAH!"

With a sigh and a hoof to their faces, the other members of the Cutie Mark Crusaders looked up at Nyx.

"Do you know where Twilight is, dearie?" Ivory Scroll asked, looking at her friend that some\_how got stuck in the carpet and was failing badly to escape from it. "This is an odd loop and we're hoping that she might be able to explain things to us."

"Sorry girls," Nyx used several spells that she designed with the original Cutie Mark Crusaders to deal with tree sap to help the two mares, leaving the male Vinyl alone for a bit longer. "Twilight's my filly this time and not Awake; we've got a stealth anchor to deal with."

With a crash, the three mares looked at Record, who had managed get the bust stuck on his head.

Nyx sighed to herself; this was going to be a painfully slow loop.

\* \* \*

><p>137.5 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight looked at the creature snuggling against Fluttershy and tilted her head.

"Is that Ike?" she asked, pointing to the strange, green creature replacing Angel for this loop. She remembered him from the Quantum Conundrums loops, and he was always nice to have around.

"Yes," Fluttershy muttered happily, rubbing between his ears, which caused the Interdimensional Kinetic Entity to purr happily. "He's been such a gentlebeing to me ever since we both Woke up."

Twilight blinked again at the creature before looking directly at Ike (although not in the eyes as she learned from last time) and asking, "You promise to not misbehave or causes any problems?"

Ike Meeped, popping out of the dimension before popping back with a plate of cake on it, holding it out to her.

Twilight lifted it to her mouth, took a bite and decided that Ike was going to be a very good looper to have around.

\* \* \*

><p>137.6 (Pinklestia, edited by warewolves)<p>

Twilight Sparkle Woke up. She groaned as her loop memories hit her.. It was yet another loop where she married Luna. What's more, she knew Nyx was Awake and had manipulated things so it had happened. Even worse, she suspected Luna was Awake too, and had been willing to go with it.

"Uh... daddy, do you feel a bit Loopy?" The small black alicorn asked the purple unicorn, a hint of fear in her voice.

"Yes."

"Are me and Momma Luna in trouble for this whole marriage deal?" Nyx knew how much Twilight hated loops where she woke up married to somepony else.

"Actually... My loop memories tell me Luna gives very good back-rubs. Plus, she has been a 'perfect gentlemare'. And is true that Luna is your parent too, so I can't fault you for wanting to spend more time with her." Was she really considering playing along, instead of letting Luna and Nyx take care of the loop problems as punishment and going away on a vacation?

"So... we are not in trouble?"

"I do want vacations the next few loops you or Luna are awake. But for now lets try to see if we can make this family you want so much work, shall we?"

Mother (or father in this case) and daughter hugged each other. Twilight Sparkle sometimes forgot how much Nyx wanted a family. Twilight felt incredibly guilty for having ignored the other parent for so long, even when Luna was awake in the same loop with her. And by her loop memories, she knew Luna had enjoyed playing the role of a mother to Nyx. They might not be a family in the baseline, and Luna might not be her true love, but it made Nyx happy, so it was worth to try.

\* \* \*

><p>137.1 alternate <p>

\* \* \*

><p>...and the blue face was uppermost when it came to a stop.<p>

"Okay, what does that mean?" Spike asked, after a moment.

Rarity shrugged. "You'll find out..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Prince Blueblood?"<p>

Blueblood, that most princely fellow, raised an eyebrow. "Yes?"

"Oh â€" uh, I was wondering," the young purple dragon said, pressing

his fingertips together. "Could you give me any tips, on... uh, on... trying to attract a mare?"

Blueblood's elegant hoof came to his neatly trimmed chin. "Well, it's a good thing you came to me. I am a master of picking up mares, of course, young dragon."

Spike nodded. "That's why I thought of you."

"Indeed," Blueblood nodded back. "Well. First... mares love being flattered, but it's better to give them a backhoofed compliment. Tell them that they're clearly doing well on their diet â€" not only do they like the compliment, but they also feel grateful to you for noticing them... because it suggests they're still a bit fat."

Blueblood saw that the drake's eyes had unfocused, so rapt was his attention.

"Secondly, always make sure you remember that any mare secretly wants a bad stallion..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Thanks for your help!" Spike said, a few minutes later.<p>

Blueblood blinked at the sight of Spike in a Tuxedo, and Rarity beside him in a veil. "That was... remarkably quick work, young dragon."

Spike shrugged. "Oh, I got help from you and from Princess Cadence! They helped a lot!"

Blueblood blanched. "You... did you tell her what I suggested?"

There were some loud staccato clop sounds, as a pony stomped up to the three of them.

Princess Cadence, Princess of Love, pointed her forehoof at Blueblood. "You are coming with me, mister. It's time for another lecture on the difference between romance and sleaze."

\* \* \*

><p><em><em>

"This seems cruel," Spike observed, as they watched Cadence drag Blueblood away by the ear.

"He's the one who gave the advice, you only reported it," Rarity pointed out. She kissed his cheek. "Now, since we're dressed for a wedding anyway..."

\* \* \*

><p>137.7 (Evilhumour)<p>

Luna sighed to herself and looked at Sunset, eyes darting back and

forth.

"You swear not to tell a soul about this?" She pointed a finger at Sunset, glaring at her sister's former-but-now-current student.

"Yes, yes," Sunset said, doing everything that a Pinkie Promise required. "Now can you tell me?"

"Fine," With a huff, Luna placed her right leg onto the desk and pulled up the pants leg. Around her ankle was a thick, metal bracelet. "It seems that a while ago, Celestia and I had a bit too much to drink and that I am a mean drunk. It took about six police officers to pull me off of Celestia and then I had this beauty slapped onto me." Luna pointed at the ankle monitor. "If I get too far from Celestia, I go to prison. If I drink, I go to prison." With a huff, Luna placed her leg back onto the floor. "For TEN months I have to wear this stupid thing, and waste every Sunday evening at a support group or I get sent to prison."

Sunset giggled to herself, finally hearing what happened to human Luna for her version of Nightmare Moon.

Luna slammed her hands onto her desk, causing the girl to jump. "That's it, detention for a month!"

\* \* \*

><p>137.8 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

"Twilight."

"Sweetie Belle."

"Isn't my sister usually the one who has these weird variant loops with you?"

A red-crested penguin waddled past them with a quick "Wark wark" as it went.

Twilight looked down at the smaller penguin standing next to her, then around them at the snow-covered Penguinville, covered her eyes with a flipper, and sighed. "Yes. Yes, she is."

\* \* \*

><p>137.9 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\*\*... and the Rest Loop: Winter Wrap-Up\*\*

\_(Reminder: The "and the Rest" Loop was one where the Awake Loopers were Twilight, Ivory Scroll, Cheerilee, Zecora, Gilda and Angel. Twilight wanted to go through the motions in a standard baseline Loop to relax, but the other five have mischief on their minds.)\_

"What's the problem, Twilight?" Ivory Scroll asked.

Twilight Sparkle paced the floor of town hall, where Zecora, Cheerilee, Ivory and Gilda stood in a row watching her. "Tomorrow's Winter Wrap-Up, right? But the problem is... well, you know how

Nightmare Moon was defeated without the Elements of Harmony? Well, I need to train the girls in using the Elements so we'll be ready for Discord in a few months. And training hasn't been going all that well."

"Ah, you realize, Twilight," Ivory said delicately, "that tomorrow we really need all hooves on deck. Even using Looper techniques, getting Ponyville organized for a proper wrap-up is something only you and certain visiting Loopers have been able to manage."

"I'm sorry, but this is really urgent," Twilight said. "I've already spoken with the girls, and they're all going to be with me at the Castle of the Two Sisters all day tomorrow. And I need your help to cover for them." She pointed to Ivory. "I need you to shuffle the paperwork and make the substitutions work." She floated three clipboards out of her saddlebags and over to the other three Loopers. "Cheerilee, you're replacing Fluttershy on the Animal Team. Zecora, you're the new Plant Team leader. And Gilda-

"Yeah, I know," Gilda snapped, snatching her clipboard out of Twilight's magic, "I'm Weather Team leader, because I'm the only one of us with wings at the moment."

"I'm very sorry to drop this on you," Twilight said, "but if you remember baseline, you'll understand why I'm asking you to do this. Otherwise it'll be almost as much chaos as if Discord awakened early!"

"Don't worry about a thing," Ivory Scroll smiled, "you can count on us!"

\* \* \*

><p>A day passed, eventfully.<p>

"So, let me see if I have this straight," Twilight said with the calm, sober demeanor of someone who was being calm and sober only because the moment for going completely postal, though imminent, had not yet arrived.

"Gilda, you began by crafting a whirlwind to blast away the last of the snow clouds."

"Sure," Gilda shrugged. "Gets the job done quick and frees ponies up for other chores."

"The tornado broke free and struck the first flight group of returning migratory songbirds," Twilight continued. "The snow clouds froze the birds solid, dropping them into the snowbanks and turning Big Mac's snowplow efforts into search and rescue. As a result, every single Ponyville songbird now has a nasty head cold and laryngitis."

"I thought songbirds didn't have larynxes."

"Next," Twilight continued, ignoring Ivory Scroll's response, "Zecora decided to use her plant-growing powers to help find the songbirds. Unfortunately the seeds she chose were of the toxic Spiny Seekers vine. To be fair, the vines went straight to the birds and lifted them out of the snow, as intended." Twilight looked into the eyes of



a mortified zebra and added, "Unfortunately, in the process of retrieving the frozen birds, over one-third of the snowplow team members had to be sent to the hospital with hoof injuries. Foot-long mildly poisonous vines half-hidden by snowdrifts will do that."

"I confess, my dear Twilight, I have no defense," Zecora said. "At the time my plans seemed to make more sense."

"Despite this, Ponyville soldiered on," Twilight said. "Now we come to the really stupid things. Cheerilee personally led the animal wake-up squad, which resulted in several hours lost when the entire town of Ponyville panicked following the first snake stampede in recorded Equestrian history." Twilight tossed her head and, losing her cool for a moment, shouted, "It's rare even among the Loops, and more than half the instances of that I've heard of involve Arrakis sandworms!"

"I had it in mind to improve the education of Ponyville's animals," Cheerilee said. "I thought some mathematics problems would be the perfect thing to exercise their minds after a long winter's sleep."

"Mathematics for snakes? How are they supposed to hold the pencils?" Twilight now stared into Cheerilee's eyes. "Besides, any student could tell you- NOPONY likes a pop quiz first thing in the morning at the start of a new term!"

"I thought they'd find it easy," Cheerilee protested. "After all, they were adders."

For a moment Twilight looked ready for a premature explosion, but she managed to get a grip on herself. In a much more brittle version of calm-and-sober, she continued, "The snake-frightened ponies, unable to flee town across the fields because nopony had plowed them, tried fleeing across the river and pond. Unfortunately they ran into the single, solitary aspect of Winter Wrap-Up which was completed on time: the cutting and breaking up of the ice." Her attention turned back to Gilda. "The resulting rescue from ice cold water of nearly a hundred ponies and half a dozen snakes put the entire Weather Team out of action for an hour and a half."

"We did our job, yeah," Gilda said, shrugging her talons.

"Unfortunately, the fact that every pegasus in Ponyville was airlifting ponies either to the hospital or to the train station for evacuation to Canterlot," Twilight continued, "meant that nopony was aloft to stop the stray thundersnow storm that rolled over town late in the afternoon. The resulting fresh snow, lightning and winds hit Runaway Hill and triggered an avalanche of unplowed snow."

Twilight's hoof swept around the interior of the town hall, ending to point at the open window everyone had entered by. "As a result of which Ponyville's streets are now buried under several feet of snow! When the girls and I returned to Ponyville we found almost half the town incapacitated, the animals basically homeless, and everything worse than ever before!" Now Twilight lost her cool, stomping back and forth in front of the other four ponies. "It would have been better if Discord HAD escaped- \_at least then Fluttershy and

Applejack would be SPEAKING to me!"\_ she shrieked.

In a flash of light Twilight ascended. The lavender alicorn stared in absolute fury at the others. "I'm going to spend all night clearing away the snow and getting the animals settled into new quarters," she said. "Please go home and DO. NOTHING. I'll handle it all from here. Like I should have in the first place!" With a final grunt of outrage Twilight took to her wings and flew out the window, leaving the other four Loopers on the balcony of town hall.

"Well, chicks," Gilda said with a smile, "I call that, operation total success!"

"I didn't even have to arrange for the scheduling conflicts," Ivory said, nodding with satisfaction.

"I feel a little bit bad about this," Cheerilee said. "Though I admit it was definitely an educational experience."

"Do not fret about the townsfolk, teacher dear," Zecora replied. "My cures will make their ailments disappear. When morning comes and spring is brought in, today's travails shall be forgotten."

"I still think it would have been better if we'd just done the job properly," Cheerilee said.

"Hey." Gilda held up one hand in a halting gesture. "Not my wagon train- not my donkeys. Twilight shoulda known better than to muck with baseline and leave us to clean up after her. Now she's learned her lesson, and we won't be bothered about stuff we're not supposed to be-"

"AH-HA! I KNEW IT!"

CRASH! CRASH! CRASH! CRASH!

Four snow shovels stood handles-up, blades embedded in the wood of the balcony floor.

"-busssss-ted," Gilda said, her feather-crest drooping.

"Zecora, Ivory, alicorn up!" Twilight shouted through the new holes in town hall's ceiling. "Gilda, get yourself some fresh ink. And Cheerilee, you better figure something out, because I'm going to work you just as hard as the other three! Sabotage Winter Wrap-Up for a prank? Not on MY watch!"

Zecora began stepping towards the window/door. "I must be off to cook remedies, potions, powders and jams," she said, "for all those ponies in the hospital-"

"ZECORA!"

"-yes, ma'am," Zecora said, lowering her head and accepting the inevitable.

"Told you we should have done it right the first time," Cheerilee moaned.

"But I didn't even get to really DO anything!" Ivory Scroll wailed.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>... and the Rest Loop: Sonic Rainboom<strong>

The door to Rainbow Dash's cloud home opened, and Rainbow Dash staggered in, exhausted.

"Dude, what's up with you, Dash?" Gilda asked, rising from the couch and rushing over to catch the pegasus before she fell over.

"Oh... hi, Gilda," Rainbow Dash said. "Mind if we order out tonight?"

Gilda guided her best friend and couch-lending host to a chair and flopped her into it. "Girl, talk to me," she said. "You look like something the cat dragged in- and I should know."

"It's the Best Young Fliers Competition," Dash replied. "I've gone through my routine again and again and again. I have to get it absolutely perfect!" She squirmed in her chair. "Everypony who's been accepted to the Wonderbolts for the last fifty years has been a winner of Best Young Fliers! The winner of the Best Young Fliers gets to hang out with them! That's my big dream, Gilda!" She slumped back limply, finishing, "And I still can't get the Sonic Rainboom to work!"

Gilda contemplated her choice of responses. Griffons, alas, were not made for nuance. "Gee, that's tough," she said.

"I know!" Rainbow Dash had known her friend long enough that her bluntness rolled over her. "I've tried narrowing my silhouette, inclining my flight aspect, adjusting my wingtips for minimum resistance... I can touch it, Gilda, I know I'm right on the edge, and then I hit the bow wave and go tumbling flank over teakettle, again and again and again!"

Gilda considered this, and discovered her range of replies hadn't improved. "That's rough, all right."

"And I'm out of time!" Rainbow Dash sighed. "I know I'm going to screw up in front of Princess Celestia and the Wonderbolts and Fluttershy and everypony I grew up with in Cloudsdale! My dream of being a Wonderbolt will be ruined! And all because I can't-"

Gilda reached a single clawed talon up and touched Dash's muzzle, silencing her. "Dash, you know what your problem is?" she asked. "Your head's just not in the right place. You're overthinking everything. You're trying to change your flying style midway through a trick, and at the same time you've got all these worries about stuff you can't control muddying things up."

Music began to play as Gilda sang:

\_Is your brain a buzzin'?

>Is your concentration fuzzin'?<br>Can't get with the program?

>Lucky for you I am<br>Ready to teach you the trick that you need to win

>'Cause you can't cross the line at the finish before you  
begin<em>

\_You've got to  
>Live in the moment! Take it and own it!<br>Just keep your mind on  
today  
>Yesterday's over! Tomorrow is nothing!<br>Don't let them get in the  
way  
>There's a mode to be in if you want to win<br>Live in the moment  
  
>Live in the moment<em>

\_A winner doesn't worry  
>Clear your brain out in a hurry<br>Let what happens happen  
>When you can do that then<br>The talent inside you will carry you  
through to the end  
>So remember my lesson, forget all your troubles, my  
friend<em>

\_You've got to  
>Live in the moment! Take it and own it!<br>Just keep your mind on  
today  
>Yesterday's over! Tomorrow is nothing!<br>Don't let them get in the  
way  
>There's a mode to be in if you want to win<br>Live in the moment  
  
>Live in the moment<em>

The music slowed, and Gilda stepped away from Dash and closed her  
eyes to belt out the bridge:

\_A clear mind and a calm heart will see you through  
>Don't overthink it!<br>Don't second-guess it!  
>Just... do...<em>

The beat picked up again for the last chorus, and Gilda, eyes closed,  
danced to the snappy rhythm as she sang:

\_You've got to  
>Live in the moment! Take it and own it!<br>Just keep your mind on  
today  
>Yesterday's over! Tomorrow is nothing!<br>Don't let them get in the  
way  
>There's a mode to be in if you want to win<br>Live in the moment  
  
>Live in the moment<em>

Gilda opened her eyes as the music ceased.

Rainbow Dash had fallen asleep in the easy chair.

"Hmph!" the griffon snorted. "See if I ever do a heartsong for you  
again! Stupid pony magic heartsong thing..." Shaking her head and  
grumbling to herself, she went upstairs to fetch a pillow and blanket  
for her host before calling the pizza delivery pegasus.

\* \* \*

><p>137.1 alternate <p>

\* \* \*

><p>and the pink face was uppermost when it came to a stop.<p>

"Okay, what does that mean?" Spike asked, after a moment.

Rarity shrugged. "You'll find out..."

\* \* \*

><p>There were a few questions the next morning.<p>

"When?" the dragon asked.

The Jedi was answered by a shrug. "Last night, after we were both asleep."

"How?"

"Magic, dear." The tone of the voice was a little condescending, as though the speaker couldn't quite believe that the question had to be asked. "Of course it was."

"Who?"

"Oh, Twilight did it." An elegant toss of the mane. "She was quite willing to help."

"Why?"

'Elusive' shrugged. "Well, you can't deny it's different."

'Barb' considered that, then nodded. "I can get behind that."

\* \* \*

><p>137.10 (Scorntex)<p>

"The night shall last \*\*FORE\*\*-"

Someone hissed from behind the stage. Nightmare Moon paused mid-declaration, and turned around. As the increasingly bewildered citizens of Ponyville tried to work out what exactly was happening, they heard hushed conversations.

Eventually Nightmare Moon turned back towards the audience, and scowled. "I do apologise, my little ponies, but I'm afraid there has been something of a scheduling conflict. Ergo, the night shall end..."

She lifted a hoof, one suddenly bearing a watch that hadn't been there seconds ago, and frowned. "... Now!"

The sun rose, and Nightmare Moon stalked away, muttering furiously to herself.

"-an't believe it, spent three Loops working the plan out. \_\_\*\*WHY COULDN'T SHE HAVE TOLD US THAT SHE WAS TAKING A HOLIDAY BEFORE SHE WENT? THAT'S WHAT I'D LIKE TO KNOW!\*\*\_"

After a few seconds stunned silence, Rainbow Dash sneaked out from backstage, and made her way to where Rarity and Applejack were trying (vaguely) to look as confused as everyone else.

"She's taking it well." Rarity said as dryly as possible, before looking over to Rainbow Dash.

"Not that I can truly blame her. Twilight could have at least left a note."

"Hey" Rainbow Dash shrugged. "Twilight says she needs a holiday, let her. If there's something serious, we can call her."

\* \* \*

><p>Several hundred miles away, Twilight Sparkle took another sip from her drink, listening to the crash of waves against the sands of the admittedly lovely, if somewhat astoundingly generic, beach.<p>

A short distance away, Nyx occupied her time trying to make a sand dreadnought, if only because Twilight had asked firmly that Nyx not break out any actual dreadnoughts. Or any other form of heavily armed ship, whether space-going, ocean-going or pudding-going.

After a while, and once she'd found the most boring book in her subspace pocket and utterly failed to read it twice, Twilight decided to help Nyx construct her second sand dreadnought.

\* \* \*

><p>137.11 (Gym Quirk) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Spike Awoke kicking at the small egg, ranting about its occupant wanting to be born just as he had. He paused to assimilate his loop memories, absently noting the small form struggling against the unusually thick shell.<p>

\_Pern again. Benden Weyr hatching grounds, if I'm not mistaken. Pre-adolescent human male this time.\_

The small creature butted against him through the flexible membrane beneath the outer shell layer.

"Oh, right. Sorry." Spike pulled the knife from his belt and slit the slippery film to let the white form fall into his lap.

"Spike! What are...you...doing?" called Lytol from the stands, the alarm in the Ruathan warder's voice giving way to bewilderment.

A wave of confused hubbub circulated around the crowd as Spike assisted the egg's occupant to its feet.

F'lar exchanged a look with Lessa. "I'd expected those two to show up here as a pair eventually, but this..."

\_Ramothe, dear? Is there something you'd like to tell us?\_ an amused Mnemeth asked his mate.

The great queen dragon could only stare at this most unusual of her offspring.

"Hello, Darling," said the indigo-maned white alicorn filly standing before Spike. She looked around at the gobsmacked crowd. "What? You'd think they've never seen a pony before. I don't suppose you have a large dandelion salad handy? I must admit that I'm absolutely famished..."

Spike masterfully limited his slightly hysterical amusement to a silent chuckle as he gently hugged his very special somepony.

\* \* \*

><p>137.12 (fractalman) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight smiled to herself. Her plan to take out Nightmare Moon using CAM (compressed avocado mush, rather than compressed antimatter) was almost ready. She retrieved the last modified dungbomb from her subspace pocket...only for it to explode prematurely, covering her in guacamole.<p>

She sighed...and heard chittering, buzzing, and some flapping. Turning, she saw a large number of birds, squirrels, and bugs (including a couple of parasprites), all staring at her hungrily. Some of the squirrels even held up forks and knives!

Twilight spent the rest of the night, and most of the next day, running from hungry critters.

\* \* \*

><p>Her third day in Ponyville, at around noon, Twilight found herself yawning excessively. 'Odd', she thought, 'I could've sworn I got enough sleep.'<p>

Pinkie Pie bounced by in slow motion. "Hi Twilight! Why aren't you in bed for your noon nap?" Her voice sounded strange at normal pony speeds.

"Noon \*yawn\* nap?" asked Twilight.

Pinkie nodded. "Uh huh! Every pony in Ponyville takes a noon nap, period!"

"Yaaaawn, but...why? How!"

Pinkie giggled, bouncing ever more slowly. "Isn't it obvious? Nothing can stop...the Snooze!"

Twilight's facehoof was the last straw, and she collapsed into a cute, curled up state for her nap, even as Pinkie Pie hung mid-bounce and began to snore.

\* \* \*

><p>137.13 (Leviticus Wilkes)<p>

"Do you, Applebloom Apple, take Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo Solaria to be your lawfully wedded wives?"

"I do."

"And do you Scootaloo Solaria take Sweetie Belle and Applebloom Apple to be your lawfully wedded wives?"

"I do."

"And do you Sweetie Belle take Applebloom Apple and Scootaloo Solaria to be your lawfully wedded wives?"

"I do."

The priest shut her book. "Then by the powers vested in me by her majesty Princess Celestia, I now pronounce you wife, wife and wife. You may now kiss the bride."

Up on the lonely hill, crowded with onlooking guests, well wishers, close family, and dear friends, the original Cutie Mark Crusaders Awoke. Applebloom found her voice first. "Wait, did he jus' say \_wife\_?"

\* \* \*

><p>The reception, perhaps as a blessing or a curse, consisted entirely of Awake loopers. On the one hand, Sweetie Belle was glad that she could speak immediately and openly about ways to very quickly annul the sudden marriage. On the other hand, she had to endure the pain of being ribbed by people who would remember the abortive marriage. Worse still, it seemed to include almost everyone in the loop, and a few who weren't even from the loop.<p>

The look on Lemon Rush's face was really getting at her.

It was around the time the cake was cut that Scootaloo finally snapped. "Well what is it!?"

The God Emperor of Mankind (also in attendance) swirled some of his beer in the newly minted wife's direction. "The three of you? I'd never have seen that one coming."

Applebloom rolled her eyes. "Ya, thanks fer Uncle Emyp."

The Emperor raised an eyebrow. "Who you calling Uncle?"

"Her brother-in-law," answered Celestia. "But her confusion is understandable. The family tree is a little nutty."

The Emperor was confused. "But I'm not her Uncle or her brother-in-law."

Celestia smiled cheekily. "Actually, you are. Pinkie Pie, if I may?" Celestia reached into Pinkie Pie's mane and pulled out a chalkboard (the question of why Pinkie Pie had a chalkboard in her mane went unanswered), and a piece of chalk.

"Let's start with Scootaloo. Now, since I'm her mother this loop-



Celestia paused to hoof-bump Scootaloo, "-I automatically become Applebloom's and Sweetie Belle's mother-in-law. Now, since Rainbow Dash is almost always Scoot's adoptive sister, we can also list her as my daughter-in-law. Sorry Dash."

Dash, also known as the one mare who hadn't been teasing the newlyweds, shrugged. "Eh. Don't mention it."

Celestia smiled, and drew two more lines. "Through me, Scoot's and her friends are also related to Prince Blueblood and Luna. So she's technically Luna's niece as well, by blood at least." Celestia drew another few lines, this time leading from Applebloom.

"Applebloom's tree is the most consistent. She is, of course, tied to Applejack, Big Mac, and Granny Smith, who effectively has become my mother-in-law. Funny that. She's also tied to Pinkie Pie, as... what was it, fourth cousin thrice removed."

Pinkie Pie cheerfully shrugged.

Celestia cleared her throat. "And that makes three. Now we move on to Sweetie Belle, and this is where you come in Emyp. Sweetie Belle is Rarity's sister, who is Spike's wife." A dotted line connected Rarity's name to Spike's. "That make's Rarity Twilight's sister-in-law, since she's Spike's big sister, right?"

Twilight nodded, taking quick notes, before the fact struck her. "Wait, what?"

Celestia then drew a line down from Twilight's name, and wrote Nyx. "Nyx is Twilight's daughter, and since she's dating Leman Russ, which we all know will one day end in them getting married-

Nyx and Lemon blushed.

"-we can say without a doubt that Leman will become Twilight's son-in-law. Welcome to the club, Twilight." Celestia winked at her stunned student. "Thus, since Leman was raised by Fluttershy, we can say that Fluttershy is Twilight's sister-in-law as well, as is the Emperor, since he's Leman's father. Which, incidentally, makes me the Emperor's mother-in-law." Celestia drew a huge circle, encompassing, from left to right, Rainbow Dash, Scootaloo, Applebloom, Big Mac, Applejack, Sweetie Belle, Rarity, Spike, Twilight, Fluttershy, and the Emperor. "Congratulations everyone within this circle: you're in-laws!"

For a moment, not a single pony dared to speak. And then one did.

"Welp... that's nice and all, but it'll only last till the end of this loop," Big Mac observed.

Rarity nodded numbly in agreement with her brother-in-law. "Quite right... best make the most of it."

"Eyup," the assembled chimed.

\* \* \*

><p>137.14 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

The night before the night before the Summer Sun Celebration, that first day of a fresh Loop, the various Awake Loopers trailed into Mac's bar to discover Twilight Sparkle already there. (This was by no means a rare thing; the Anchor, having more Loops than the others, was close to even money to be the first Looper in after a rough Loop.

This time, instead of chugging some excruciatingly potent brew to dull the pain, she spent the early part of the evening toying with the bowl of pretzels and taking the very occasional sip from a tankard of hard cider. (Well, not hard-hard cider. Merely harder-than-soft cider. Semipermeable cider.)

The silent waiting ended when Pinkie Pie entered the bar, bouncing on her hooves without an apparent care in the world. The earth pony made a beeline for Twilight's barstool, taking a perch on the stool next to hers and asking, "Watcha doin', Twilight?"

"Oh, hi, Pinkie," Twilight said. "Just thinking. My last Loop was... kind of strange."

"Really? Strange like all the mountains are made out of S'Mores that melt in the summertime and get rebuilt by chocolate-rain snows in the-"

"It was a Bureau Loop."

Pinkie's babble shut off like a faucet.

Twilight waved a hoof. "Not a bad one," she said. "We opened a portal, humans on the other side, yadda yadda. But there wasn't any magic poisoning or anything like that. That wasn't the problem."

"Really?" Pinkie asked. "No formula? No attack squads? No horrible nasty anti-human bigotry to poison relations with converted ponies?"

"No, none of that at all," Twilight replied. "The problem was, the Earth on the other side was one of those where we're fictional... and have a fan base. A massive fan base."

Pinkie tilted her head to one side. "That's bad?"

"Well, the thing is," Twilight said, "we suddenly had millions of people who wanted to visit Equestria. Almost as many humans wanted to come as there were ponies IN Equestria." Twilight sipped her cider and continued, "So Princess Celestia made a rule that any humans who wanted to visit Equestria had to be transformed into ponies, to reduce disruption of everyday life here."

"That doesn't sound so bad," Pinkie said. "Didn't that cut down on the demand?"

"No!" Twilight said. "If anything it INCREASED it! All sorts of people, even people who never watched the show, wanted to come here just to spend time as a pony! They even organized huge weekend-long parties for it! Celestia eventually had to limit them to two per major Equestrian city and town per year, with three each for

Canterlot, Manehattan, Cloudsdale and Los Pegasus." Twilight sighed. "And then she put her most trusted subjects in charge of the committee to run things and keep it fair. By which," Twilight said hurriedly as she saw the question forming in Pinkie's eyes, "I mean us six."

"Sounds like my kind of civil service job!" Pinkie grinned.

"Yes, you took to it fairly well," Twilight agreed. "But I could never get over the fact that I was actually aiding and abetting the Bureau."

"That's okay, Twilight!" Pinkie grinned. "You just said it wasn't an evil Conversion Bureau."

"Not the Conversion Bureau," Twilight corrected, "the Convention Bureau."

\* \* \*

><p>137.15 (Kris Overstreet) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"What did you do, Pinkie?"<p>

The Element bearers, all six Awake, watched as two different sets of tanks and other heavy armored vehicles maneuvered and clashed around the outskirts of Appleoosa.

"Well, you know how in baseline there's this fight for the town, right?" Pinkie asked. "And how no matter what I try to do to prevent it--"

\*\*\*"We know,\*\*\*" the other five chorused.

"Well, I decided that instead of trying to stop it," Pinkie said, grinning in the confident knowledge that she was a genius, "I decided to speed it up so it'd be over faster!"

Twilight's eyes goggled. "You lost me," she said.

Pinkie pointed at the tanks below, which had begun firing on one another. "I gave both sides tanks, right?" she said. "German Tigers to the buffalo so they could squeeze inside, Russian T-34s to the ponies. But I rigged the guns and ammo so instead of shells, they fire apple-flavored pancakes!"

Sure enough, one such shot spun like a frisbee into the open viewport of a tank. The vehicle ground to a halt.

"It's my idea for swift, victorious war where nobody gets hurt!" Pinkie grinned. "I call it... \_\*\*blintz\*\*krieg!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>137.16 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"Twilight?"

Prolonged sigh. "Yes, Rarity?"

"Why are we wearing nothing but black and sitting in the back of Sugarcube Corner sharing a bottle of absinthe?"

"Because the world is a dark and depressing place." The purple unicorn, currently resembling a slightly more colorful than usual Maud Pie with black beret and turtleneck, levitated the bottle of absinthe to her lips and took an unhealthy swallow. (Which, when speaking of absinthe, means practically any amount whatsoever.)

"I beg your pardon, darling," Rarity said, wearing a similar outfit. "I know your last Loop was quite the disappointment, but Spike not being Awake aside, this world's not a dark and depressing place at all!" Rarity selected a baked good from the display cabinet and floated it over to where she and Twilight sat. "Case in point- a rainbow-frosted strawberry donut-cupcake-"

"It's a DONAKE!" Pinkie Pie shouted from the kitchen.

"-and those shining green flakes in the frosting? Crystallized love, courtesy of Community Service."

The changeling disguised as an earth pony with a prison-bars cutie mark smiled and waved amiably at the two unicorns.

"We live in a world where this is not only possible, but not all that unusual, Twilight darling!" Rarity said. "And this is only the least of the many joys and wonders that we ponies get to enjoy!" She carefully took the absinthe away from Twilight and capped the bottle- waste not want not, after all- and said, "I admit I was a scoche dramatic when we first met this Loop, but even I think you're carrying this a bit too far!"

\_She's right, you know,\_ the absinthe in Twilight's system added.

"You know what? You're right!" Twilight Sparkle stood up from the table, hooked one forelimb around Rarity, and dragged the fashionista towards the door. "It's a magical world out there, Rarity! Let's go exploring!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?"<p>

Eager, slightly drunken giggle. "Yes, Rarity?"

"Why are we at the top of Runaway Hill sitting in the Cutie Mark Crusaders' wagon?"

"Because, according to my research," Twilight replied, pulling a certain collection of Hub world comic strips from her subspace pocket, "this is the traditional method to begin exploring a magical world in the proper spirit of innocence and wonder!"

Rarity looked down the very long, very steep road at the cliff where the road made a sharp right-angle turn before descending into Ponyville proper. "We begin with a two-week hospital stay?"

"You worry too much, Rarity," Twilight said, using her magic and a broomhandle to give the wagon the last little shove needed to start it down the hill. "The tiger and his pet boy never got hurt, after all."

"Twilight, darling," Rarity snapped, "when this is over I demand to see the academic credentials of whoever wrote thaaaaaAAAIIIIIIIIIIEEEE!"

"Isn't this exciting?" Twilight asked as the wagon picked up an improbable amount of speed. "Doesn't this inspire all sorts of philosophical queries?"

"Only one, dear," Rarity replied. "HOW DO YOU STOP THIS THING?"

"Oh, everything stops eventually," Twilight said. "Isn't the journey we all go on in the meantime much more interesting than its ending?"

"I'M DONE TALKING TO THE ABSINTHE, PLEASE!" Rarity shouted, her mane beginning to match the color of her coat. "I'D LIKE TO SPEAK TO TWILIGHT NOW!"

"Although I suppose," Twilight said, ignoring Rarity's frantic shouting, "there is something to be said for being aware of the consequences of one's actions, instead of ignoring them for the sake of the--"

It was about this point that the wagon became airborne.

"AAAAAAAAAAHHH!"

"-fleeting rush of pleasure in the experience--"

And it was about this point that wagon, Twilight, and Rarity went from being a single ballistic object to three disparate objects separated by differences in air resistance.

"BY CELESTIA'S SACRED EYELASHES, TWILIGHT, DO SOMETHING!"

"-of the untrammelled moment! Oh, is it over already?"

Three flashes of light transferred three objects in motion to three stationary positions on the ground beside the fountain in town square.

"-AAAAAAH oh it's over it's over thank larch it's over oooh, sweet, sweet filthy earth!" Rarity flattened herself on the ground and attempted to hug the dirt. "Solid, loving, friendly earth! Rarity takes back half the mean things she's ever said about you!"

"Wow, you were right, Rarity!" Twilight said, smiling. "I feel so much better already! I think I'll go for a run through White Tail Woods and then sit down to read Rainbow Dash's new book! It's about the Yellow Goddess incognito at a Japanese high school!"

Rarity paused in her adoration of terra firma and gave Twilight her best angry-Fluttershy impression.

\* \* \*

><p>A lone white unicorn dressed in black sat at the table in the corner of Sugarcube Corner, drinking absinthe.<p>

"Rarity?"

"Yes, Pinkie Pie?"

"Why are you sitting in the corner by yourself drinking absinthe?"

"Because the world isn't nearly dark and depressing enough, dear."

"Oh." Pinkie Pie spent half a second thinking about this, then decided to ignore it altogether. "Well, just so long as you don't make a mess and don't give any to the kids!"

The family of goats using the rest of the room for Little Billy Gruff's birthday party baa'ed their concurrence.

\* \* \*

><p>137.17 (Evilhumour, Ryuus2, wildrook)<p>

Twilight smiled to herself; a normal baseline by herself was nice once in a while to let herself decompress. So far, she had gone through the motions of the loop, rediscovering the same joy and wonder she had found when she first did it eons ago. Dealing with the Changeling invasion was going to be annoying, but fun in working with her friends to stop Chrysalis.

Unusually, Cadence hadn't been in the mines. and Chrysalis had really stepped up her game this time. Everything had been done perfectly to the point. IF Twilight didn't know better, she'd say it really was Cadence next to her brother on the altar.

"-and if anypony should know a reason why these two should not get married, speak now-"

"I OBJECT!" With a slamming of doors stood the changeling queen herself, flanked by furious looking guards, stalking towards the couple with a bundle on her back. "How dare you do this to me Shining!?" The changeling used her magic to push away the Day Guards that were trying to interrupt her. "After everything that has happened, you do this to us?!"

"I don't know who you are, but this is my wedding, and that is my Shiny you are talking about!" Cadence snapped, flying down to meet the changeling queen face to face, returning her venomous look. "And what do you mean, us?"

Chrysalis raised an eyebrow, shooting the panicked Shining Armor a glare before facing the alicorn in front of her with vengeful smirk. Using her green magic, she lifted the bundle off her back, shaking her mane away from her horn to show a horn ring. Chrysalis held the bundle close to her chest, pulling back the layers to reveal a white foal to everypony's surprise.

"May I present your \_fiancÃ©'s\_ and \_my\_ child, Rippling Shield?" Cadence gasped as the white little pony raised his little hooves, letting out happy chirps as his big blue eyes locked onto the panicking white unicorn. Cadence turned to stand next to Chrysalis.

"Care to explain this, Shining?" Cadence muttered darkly as everypony started to move away.

Twilight could only sigh as it was going to be one of \_those\_ loops before her mother joined the mares descending onto her brother.

\* \* \*

><p>Shining wilted under the glares from all the mares around him. "So...It kinda goes like this. A few months ago I was sent on a deep cover mission to ferret out rumours about a possible invasion of Equestria. In a frontier saloon to the west, I met an unassuming mare named Chrissy who was trying to drink away her issues at home. When a herd of Minotaur bandits came to town, the two of us got caught up in a whirlwind adventure to save the town, and a romance soon started to build. Once the town was safe, Chrissy told me she knew where the rumours had started, and we set off across Equestria, growing ever closer to the source of the rumours and each other. Finally, we reached the changeling hive, where she revealed she was actually Chrysalis, Queen of the Changelings. She told me that she had been planning to invade, but in getting to know me, and through me the temperance of Celestia and Canterlot court, she had decided to abandon the invasion in favour of a more diplomatic approach.<p>

"After a complicated pile of political Jargon, I agreed to become an honorary member of the hive by marrying Chrissy, thus allowing me to be the intermediary and representative between her and Celestia during future negotiations. For the marriage to be binding, Changeling politics demanded-" Here he choked as the glares that had cooled during his tale returned with double the force. There was no right way to say the next part, so he decided to just bite the bullet.

"-SoIDidMyDutyAndWasOnMyWayWthAChangelingEscortTheNextDay!"

He closed his eyes and braced for the trampling he was sure he was due. When nothing happened for a full minute, he dared to open his eyes. The first thing he saw was his LSBFF glaring burning pain at him. The second thing he saw was the glow of her magic holding back everypony else from unleashing that pain upon him. "Well," she asked with a calm that belied her glare, "Then what happened?"

Taking the out for what it was, he composed himself a bit and continued. "After debriefing the Princess, I proposed to Cadence the first chance I got. I thought the marriage to Chrissy was only political and wouldn't prevent me from marrying Cadence. Princess Celestia even assured me that because of how different our species were nothing could come of it."

"Actually, that's a common misconception you ponies always make," Chrysalis interrupted from the back. All eyes turned to her and the slowly rocking bundle cradled in her magic. "Changelings are not insects that happen to look like ponies. We are in fact a subset of ponies -much like Thestrals, Centaurs, and Seaponies- who happen to

look like insects and all share the same talent, making us generally weaker than any one pony breed, but much more versatile. Our species are biologically compatible with each other, with it being a toss up as to whether the foal will take after either parent."

Here Chrysalis turned her eyes from the crowd directly on Shining. "I loved you, Shiny; I still love you. But I didn't think we could work past the existing prejudices between our species or our responsibilities, so I decided to live the dream for just one night and then let you go. When Rippling was born and I saw he was a pony...I allowed myself to feel hope that maybe we could be together again. When I learned of the wedding, I rushed to Canterlot to stake my claim..."

\* \* \*

><p>"...and in the end, Cadence married Flash Sentry, Shining turned out not to be my brother but was switched at birth with Vinyl, Rarity's family turned out to be super spies of the greatest order, Fleur turned out to be the <em>real</em> Celestia, a whole convoluted mess with Pinkie Pie and Applejack and Rainbow Dash that took us so long to sort out that Tirek used my tree to get our attention to his invasion," Twilight told the mouse, with her head on the counter.

Mickey just pat her on the back. "Soap Opera loops are never pretty," he muttered. "You just hit the tip of the iceberg. Wait until you encounter the Spanish Soap Operas."

\* \* \*

><p>137.1 alternate <p>

\* \* \*

><p>â€|and the purple face was uppermost when it came to a stop.<p>

"Okay, what does that mean?" Spike asked, after a moment.

Rarity shrugged. "You'll find out..."

\* \* \*

><p>Late in the evening of Hearts and Hooves day â€" after the day spent walking, the romantic meal, and the inevitable CMC attempt to do something appropriate for the day (fortunately they put out the fires), Spike turned to his wife with a confused frown.<p>

"So..." he asked. "What was the purple result?"

Rarity winked. "Nothing at all."

"Pardon?" Spike asked.

Giving him a kiss, Rarity smiled. "Purple simply means that I spend the day with the one I wanted to most of all, dear."

Spike attempted to nod sagely. "Oh, I see."



"Were you spending the whole day waiting for the other shoe to drop?" Rarity asked, giggling. "No wonder you seemed so tense!"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

137.1: It's that time of the loop. Just do something creative.

>137.2: The things people do for those they "like" like.<br>137.3: Confused?

>137.4: Being a kid is not always good.<br>137.5: It seems Ike knows how to behave.

>137.6: Nyx Moonchild, Luna Moonparent, and Twilight Starparent.<br>137.7: Rather less dramatic.

>137.8: That was Pen-pen. He's a penguin. Usually, I mean.<br>137.9: Zecora's rhymes are really well constructed.

>137.10: Not sure what Twilight had to deal with, but Anchors tend to get the tough breaks. Not having any help is a bummer.<br>137.11: The cover story for this one's going to be interesting.

>137.12: Groan.<br>137.13: You need a diagram to keep track of it.

>137.14: I hope they had enough fast food.<br>137.15: There should be air support, too.

>137.16: Rarity's got a bit of a low tolerance for sweetness and light this loop.<br>137.17: Detergent opera.

## 144. Chapter 144

### 138.1 (Detective Ethan Redfield)

Mac had barely finished setting up his store when the doors swung open, revealing a purple Alicorn. Twilight was shaking all over, every hair on her main frayed in every which way and her wings extended fully even as she trotted down the stairs. Upon approach, he could hear her teeth grinding and both eyes were twitching, meaning that she wasn't freaked out, but angry beyond all measure, "Mac...I need one of every drink in your pocket that won't crash the loop. And keep them coming until I am unconscious on the floor."

He didn't speak as he started her off easy with mug of the Apple Family's Cider and slowly worked her way up to harder liquor.

Mac asked, "Care ta share?"

A massive stack of papers was plopped down on the counter, causing a couple empty glasses to fall over. Again, Mac took note as Twilight didn't even react as a couple leftover drops soiled the paper. The Alicorn's tone took on a manic undertone. "Have you ever read this? I read this magnum opus the first time I replaced a professor at Canterlot University. I flash copied the original to read when I needed a quick joke."

Mac picked up the document and started scanning it. The document was simply titled, Equestria, a History Revealed.

Within minutes of reading, Mac was already holding back a few snorts as even his baseline self would easily point out inconsistencies in this madmare's writings. As a looper, he could tell Loose Change's

understandings of time travel were utterly outrageous to begin with, never mind the theory behind Discord's birth. Mac set down the first couple chapters he had already perused and looked up at Twilight. The mare was now on Tequila and would soon start hitting non-hub world drinks. Sensing Mac's question, she set down the shot glass and continued, "Imagine a world where everything Loose Change wrote is 100% accurate."

The Stallion blinked at the thought, then asked, "Ya crash ah loop recently? Must'a angered Sleipnir somethin' fierce ta create ah new punishment loop for ya."

Twilight glared at Mac as she pulled out a box of peanuts from her subspace pocket and started pelting the red stallion.

\* \* \*

><p>138.2 (warewolves)<p>

Stolen fromRowanEx, Awesomedude17, fractalman)

(I think.)

>(This isn't easy to track.)<br>(Let's just say that the above people were involved. In some way.)

Princess Twilight Awoke, looking up.

Watching as two small meteorites passed her, and landed on Ponyville, she sighed. Walking down, she soon spotted the crater, hearing a long drawn out sound slowly becoming louder.

"-AAAAAAAACE!"

"We are NOT in space mate, so SHUT UP! Honestly, you're worse than Space Cops. 'You are floating through restricted space please stop doing that. If you do not cease such actions, we will be forced to follow you, and ask you to cease such actions'. Honestly, If I didn't know any better I'd put all my money on Her having a hand in their creation."

"OH MAI GOSH OH MAI GOSH! I'M IN SPAAAAAAACEE!"

"SHUT UP!"

Twilight looked down at the two spinning eyeballs, and levitated the one with the blue eye out of the crater. Blinking half his eyelid, Twilight noticed the damaged circuitry, and glanced toward Applebloom, who descended to meet her.

"Oh, hello, the names Wheatley. Hacker extraordinaire, I should mention. Oh I do hope these ones are sentien-why are you looking at me like that?" Wheatley focused his eye on Applebloom, she was currently watching the sparks coming off his casing.

"Ah could probably fix ya right up, if yer're giving me permission." Applebloom waited patiently as Wheatley's eyes constricted, and he began to nod it.

"Oh! Yes, that would be most helpful, indeedly helpful, incredibly helpful. That would make my job of uh-existing TONS easier frankly.

If you would be so kind as to -er- do so that would be a GREAT help, thank you very much." Wheatley blinked as Twilight handed the robot over to Applebloom, who sat it on her back as she looked to Twilight.

"Oh go ahead, but I want to talk to him once you're done." Twilight watched the two leave, and turned her attention to the second sphere.

"Space cops, here comes space cops." Twilight levitated it up, and glanced toward the moon.

"You want to go to space?" Twilight waited, and the ball began to roll around in circles.

"I'm the best at SPAAAAAAAAAAAAACCCCEEE!" Wincing, Twilight shook her head to dislodge some of the ringing, and looked around. There were a few approaching, but none of them were close enough that they would know what she had in her magic.

"Sure," she spoke, calling on her magic, and sending the core to form a circular orbit around the moon.

"What the-" Twilight covered herself with a shield as a third object smashed into the crater. This one was much larger, and Twilight watched as it slid down her shield, and slammed into the dirt. Stepping back, she waited as two forms stepped out of it.

The first was a pony with a strange white Cutie Mark. The second was a robotic version of Celestia almost, and for a brief moment Twilight was struck by visions of Celestia AI, but quickly shook them away. Sure enough, as they walked toward her, Twilight confirmed they were who she suspected.

"Excuse me, we're looking for a moron, you haven't seen him around by any chance?" GladOS regarded Twilight, eyes detecting her Looper status before sticking an Anchor label over the top. Chell said nothing as she stood beside her, but that was normal. Chell had never entirely forgiven GladOS for testing on her.

"Welcome to our universe. Sanctuary Loop, don't cause too much trouble and you're free to do whatever, yada blada. Wheatley is getting repaired by another looper, I'll take you to him." Twilight turned, and led the two out of the crater. Sure, Twilight could just teleport them there, but sometimes it did good to give the new arrivals a chance to talk.

"So, how did Wheatley end up here?" Twilight turned her head, and the two didn't even glance toward her. Blinking, she returned her attention to where she was going. These two obviously didn't get out much.

"That moron Woke in **\*\*my\*\*** body, in **\*\*my\*\*** facility, and had the gall to ask me for 'lessons on how to make it not explode'. So I told him to press the button to disconnect him, and sent him on a rocket into space. You may ask why I had a button installed for such purposes, the reason is simple; For Science." They continued walking in silence for a moment, and Twilight once more broke the silence.

"You two...don't get out much do you?" Glancing behind her, she saw

the nod. Turning back around to face ahead, a small smile fell onto her face. Pinkie Pie would have a field day with these two.

"I do hope you two like cake." Both came to a stop, turning toward a pink blur hurtling right toward them. Twilight chuckled, and took three steps to one side.

"Because in our world; the Cake...is a Pie!"

\* \* \*

><p>Several days later...<p>

"So, you want to go back into space?" asked Celestia.

"SPACE SPACE SPACE! SPAAAAAAAAACE!"

Celestia shrugged her shoulders. "Very well."

Then she sent it to the moon.

\* \* \*

><p>138.3 (warewolves)<p>

"Good morning Lyra, it's a fine day to be Loopy, is it not?" Twilight smiled warmly as Lyra nodded, pulling out a book as she handed it to Twilight. Turning, Twilight levitated the book back onto the shelf. This Loop, she had decided to sort them in order of relevance to the word Pear. Twilight really did enjoy her new pastime.

"So what personality is in charge this time?" Twilight pulled out her tea set and began brewing some tea for Lyra. Sipping her own, she wondered which would be taking charge in this particular Loop. After all, it was quite a unique variant.

"Actually none, I think I might actually be cured Twilight!" Lyra beamed a smile as she sipped her drink. For once, she was just a single pony. If Lyra examined her memories, she didn't have any problems looking through them either. It was as if she was a perfectly normal, Looping, pony.

"Uh huh...In that case we need to talk Lyra. Us eleven." Twilight put down her drink, and looked Lyra square in the eyes. Lyra blinked, registering the fact that there was only two of them here in the room.

"Eleven?" Speaking up, Lyra tilted her head as Twilight nodded, and looked down to the drink in her hooves. Breathing in, she carefully considered her words.

"In this Loop, everypony has multiple personalities. Normally it's one or two. The others say that they have five or six, but I think that's due to the Element's influence. Funny thing; they're one of our personalities." Twilight gave a sheepish smile, and Lyra scowled in irritation as she planted her face into the table.

"Just great, the one Loop I'm normal, nopony else is. So what did you call your personalities, and whom am I talking to?" Lyra turned her head so she could look at Twilight, who scratched the back of her

head.

"You're talking to the Public Speaker, the one of us who's good at talking. There's also Magic, Party Pony, Book Reader, Sympathetic to Everypony, Loop memories, Previous Loop memories, Magic Master, Fight or Flight, and The Potato." Twilight scratched the back of her head again, and went to take a sip of her drink as Lyra closed her eyes.

"Do I want to know about The Potato?" Lyra raised her head and decided to finish off her tea. Sipping it, she silently wondered just what every Looper had named theirs. Likely none were as obvious as Twilight's.

"Mmmn no, the less said about The Potato, the better."

\* \* \*

><p>138.4 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Sunset Shimmer's ears perked up as Principal Celestia strode into the class, "Class, today you will be having a new student. He's a student from overseas, however he is fully fluent in English. Please give him a warm welcome."

Her eyes narrowed as a male teenager with black hair sporting a cyan long sleeve shirt over grey t-shirt underneath and blue jeans strode into the room. There was something familiar about him. He pushed up his glasses as a gleam of light seemed to cross his vision, "Nice to meet you all. My name is Kei Shirogane, but most of my friends call me Shiroe. I'm originally from the Akiba area in Tokyo, Japan. My parents moved here after my father was transferred to the American Branch. It's been such a flurry of a change, I feel like I've been thrown for a loop."

Sunset's eyes widened, her mouth dropped, but then she caught herself and gave the response, "Do you feel awake now, or do you need help finding somewhere to anchor yourself like you were at home?"

Shiroe's blinked and gave a small smirk, "I would be grateful for any help you can provide."

Celestia blinked at the odd exchange, then shrugged it off, "Sunset, are you volunteering to help our transfer student settle in?"

Sunset nodded. Celestia pointed to the seat next to Sunset, "Take a seat next to her. If you have any problems, let her know."

\* \* \*

><p>It wasn't until after school that the two could talk, since everyone kept asking Shiroe questions about Japan. Sunset offered to show him around the city after class, and that was what they were doing now. Shiroe withdrew a more circumspect magic staff that appeared like an actual walking stick, "Sunset, it has been far too long."<p>

Sunset grabbed the teen in a firm hug, "Far, far too long. How are Akatsuki and Naotsugu?"

Shiroe gave a small grin and patted her on the back, "Both are doing well. Akatsuki is refining her ninja techniques, Naotsugu often takes to wandering the world if bored. Nyanta is still hoping Konyan will start looping. We have a new looper, Serara, the girl you replaced. She's still getting used to the loops, but we believe she'll be fine. As for me-

He gave a sly grin and reached into his subspace pocket, withdrawing a potion that made her quirk her eyebrows, "Still trying out your alchemy on visitors?"

Shiroe shrugged, "You didn't mind being a pony for that loop."

His sly grin vanished a moment later, "In all seriousness though, teaching the loopers and settling them into their loops is going well. Those brochures Twilight made were extremely useful. Actually, Cherilee appeared in our loop not too long ago, asking for more tutoring. Second time through."

Sunset snorted in humor, "What did she study this time?"

"Japanese history, mechanical engineering, a brief history of Lovecraftian Horrors, though I think that was because she ended up in Lovecraft's Call of Cthulhu, and finally Theldesian magics, all of them."

Shimmer whistled, "That's an odd selection. What did she ask for the first time?"

Shiroe shared, causing Sunset to shake her head, "She's taking her desire to learn everything very seriously."

Shiroe leaned on his staff, "What do you usually do for this loop?"

Shimmer shrugged, "Equestria is a sanctuary loop to any guests. As long as you don't cause too much trouble, we'll usually go along with your plan."

Shiroe removed the Pegasus potion he once had Akatsuki drink and the Sunset's unicorn potion, "Actually, I might have an idea-

He was cut off as Shimmer was suddenly in his face, "Don't do it, Shiroe. I think I know your plan. It's ok to use that potion as a joke in Theldesia on your fellow loopers, but here...look just don't do it."

Shiroe looked confused, then it dawned on him, "Oh...the conversion bureau-

"We don't talk about it either."

Shiroe blinked, then gave a sad grin, "No, you misunderstood my plan. Listen-

After a few minutes, Sunset started to grin herself, "Actually, if you can do that, it might just be ok."

\* \* \*

><p><em>A Couple Years later<em>

Equestria

It was a slow week in Ponyville, what with so few loopers awake in the small town. Shining was awake, but occupied with pushing back dragons that threatened to invade and conquer the whole of Equus. He also considered it good practice to stay in form as head of Princess Celestia's and...eventually, Cadence's guard.

It was shortly after Chrysalis' epic failure of an invasion (due to Shiny's actions), meaning they had some time before the next crisis (big or small) would strike. Twilight shouted, "Spike, get my list on things to do during the doldrums."

A few moments later, Spike entered her room dragging a scroll so big it barely fit through the doorway, "Twilight, why am I carrying your lists in my subspace pocket? Yours could hold the entirety of America by now."

Twilight rolled her eyes, "It's tradition, Spike. You're the assistant...but if you don't want to be my assistant any more, I could store the scrolls-"

Spike waved her off, "No, I don't mind. I was just curious."

With a size shift, Drake Spike started rolling down the list...carefully not to break any of the furniture, "Alright. We got dig to the center of the earth and see what Equestria's core is made of?"

Twilight shook her head, "Seven times out of 10 it's still a mixture of molten iron and nickel. Next."

"Think up a new drinking game?"

"Already have a list for that."

"Research rock farming?"

Twilight paused at that one. Ever since the Petriculture loop, she had forgotten about that one. Moments later, she shook her head, "Let's not for now. I'd like preparations in case Pinkie is another of my imaginary friends."

"Conquer Equis and implement a Oligarchy?"

Twilight blinked, then glared at the scroll, "Cross it out, then burn the ink off so it never existed."

Spike looked at Twilight, "Didn't you make that suggestion when you were drunk out of your mind after failing to redeem Anakin since he was basically Dark Sidious Vader?"

Twilight sighed and nodded, "Continue."

It went on for a bit, until it reached, "Go through the magical mirror and see if Sunset is awake?"

Twilight brightened up at that one, "Yes! I like that one!"

A moment later, Twilight had removed a copy of the Crystal Mirror and pulled out a keyblade of her own. Slightly surprised, Spike gave her a quizzical look, to which Twilight replied, "I don't use it often, but Sunset's taught me how to open the portal any time."

With a twist of the blade, a lance of energy shot out, striking the mirror. With a press of his claw, spike's arm went through the mirror. The dragon pulled out a checklist, "Portal opened, check."

Twilight rolled her eyes and chuckled, "Thanks, Spike."

With that, the two stepped through the portal. On the other side, Twilight looked over her hands for a second, then gave a ping. Surprisingly, two pings echoed back near one another, "Looks like Sunset is awake, and has a friend."

Spike looked at her, "Or someone else is awake. You never know...Rarity might be..."

Twilight rubbed Spike's head, "Then we should check right away."

As Twilight finished, a griffon walked by and muttered, "'Sup, losers."

Twilight smiled at the griffon, "Hey, Gilda!"

The girl turned back, only to pause and review the last ten seconds. Her head turned so fast it was amazing it didn't snap off. No doubt about it, a...griffon...Gilda...had just strolled by them like it was nothing. Twilight looked to Spike, who just raised his paws, looking just as confused as her. Moments later, a unicorn Trixie strolled by, muttering about how her spell wasn't working just right and needed more practice for the talent show. And when she looked closer, there were other people she knew that were no longer humans. Lyra, for example, was looking at her hooves with fascination, then rubbed her horn every now and then. Twilight's eye started twitching.

This was definitely new.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight's hand were shaking a bit as she took a sip of some coffee. She looked across the table at the two loopers and asked, "Which one of you wants to explain why mythical creatures are wondering around Canterlot High. Mythical creatures whom were once humans?"<p>

Sunset and Shiroe exchanged slightly nervous glances, as Shiroe began, "It was supposed to be a joke for when you got here, but things got a bit out of control."

Twilight quirked her eyes as she spun her head to Joe, who was now a Minotaur, and also a very Pink Griffon Pinkie who was bounding over to them. She asked, "Hey, hey, hey! What fresh pastries would you like today, Sunset?"

Suddenly, her lion tail started shaking. Pinkie gasped as she looked



at it, "Oh! My tail is shaking...three, no four times. Meaning we have a guest from another dimension!"

Twilight nodded, "Party later, Pinkie. I'll take a chocolate triple deluxe doughnut. The other two will have to suffer a couple glazed ones."

"Okie Dokie! Would you like any potion to go with that?"

Twilight's eyes narrowed at her two looping friends, both who flinched. She replied, "Unicorn, if you would."

With that, the griffon nodded and hopped off. Twilight waved her hand wildly at the retreating waitress. Shiroe sighed, "We were going for a temporary conversion, no mind alterations. We based the design off a chemical breakdown of the Appearance Changing Potion from my universe. The potion was originally designed as a party joke, that would last a couple hours."

He called forth his laptop, pulled up a couple documents, and slid them across the table. Twilight took several minutes to inspect the data, meanwhile pocketing the coffee for later research. Her expression slowly shifted from a mixture of disappointment and frustration to curiosity and excitement. She looked up at Shiroe and asked with a hopeful expression, "Have you completely reverse engineered the potion?"

Shiroe shook his head, "No. All I was able to produce was a cheap imitation, transforming, say, a human into what he or she would look like as a pony. Albeit, I can make them earth, unicorn or pegasi pony, but each one would have the same mane and coat color as well as cutie mark. Same with Griffon, minotaur, changeling, and all others. However if you wanted to look like, say Sunset here or change your gender, you're out of luck."

Twilight nodded, slightly unhappy at that, but understandable. The original potion was incredibly complex, using ingredients that were both incredibly rare for even loopers, but also some she couldn't recognize to begin with. She asked, "Alright. I'm interested. How did you accidentally start a Conversion Bureau Phenomenon?"

Shiroe went into his story, chronicling his acquisition of a College lab at Canterlot University where he presented his current research to the scientists, as well as a proposition to create a party potion. Sunset talked to this universe's versions of Twilight's friends and convinced them to participate in conversion tests. Fluttershy seemed to take to the project like bees to honey, willing to participate in every test. Dash, meanwhile, enjoyed being a Pegasus too much and asked if there was a way to make the conversion permanent. Two new lines of testing were opened, one to allow permanent conversions and the second to change back into humans. Soon, the potion was set to go into production.

Twilight raised a hoof at this, "How did you get this by the FDA?"

Shiroe shrugged, "We had Pinkie Pie talk to them, while she was in her earth pony form. After a five hour closed door session, they agreed to a trial run with a wider audience here in Canterlot High and around the city. Rarity, Applejack and Dash put together an

excellent marketing strategy, promoting the opportunity to use magic of a unicorn, the chance to fly as Pegasi and strength unmatched by the Earth Ponies. And the rest you know since you just got here."

Twilight continued to grill Shiroe for the next couple hours on safety regulations of the potions for bringing flying Pegasi to the ground safely if their conversions were temporary and cancelled mid air. Also, limitations on the unicorn magic to prevent more dangerous members of society using spells designed to kill were discussed, to which Shiroe assured her that unicorn magic had limitations in place to prevent serious bodily injury or death upon the target's form. It was also part of Shiroe's deal with the FDA that converted members of the military would be allowed full use of their magic for combat purposes.

Finally, Twilight sighed, "Alright. I won't interfere in this under two conditions. First, you will hire me as part of your research team to study the Appearance Changing Potion. If we can fully reverse engineer it, gender bender loops would no longer be a problem for any looper."

Shiroe nodded and asked, "What's the second?"

Twilight looked at him with a dead serious expression, "If this blows up in your face, you will fix it. If anyone dies as result of the potion failing at an inopportune moment, you will resurrect them and make amends. If the potion ever shows signs of altering a person's or pony's mind, this project will be terminated immediately and you will restore that person's mind at all costs. Do you understand?"

Shiroe nodded and gave a small bow, "Absolutely. Rest assured, I will not allow harm to befall anyone should the project fail."

\* \* \*

><p>138.5 (fractalman)<p>

"Ah, Twilight. I was wondering if you could take a look at my latest dress" said Rarity.

"Is this a dress you and Slaanesh have been working on?"

"Oh, no, nothing of the sort."

"Wellâ€|alright then."

\* \* \*

><p>When Rarity removed the cover for the dress, Twilight covered her eyes as a monstrous amount of heat and light assaulted her. "ACK! Rarity! Please, PLEASE tell me that dress isn't made from what I think it is!"<p>

"Oh, don't worry dear, it's only something I made using Gridfire as-

"THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I WAS AFRAID IT WAS MADE OF!"

As Twilight fled the room, the planet, and the solar system to be

safe, Rarity smirked. Then she flipped a switch with her magic, causing the light and heat to dim, revealing a relatively normal diamond-fiber dress and a massive array of lights inside of an expansion charm. "A pity poor Twilight didn't stick around long enough to hear me finish my explanation, I could have told her I only used Gridfire as a power source for energy-matter conversion."

\* \* \*

><p>138.6 (Evilhumour)<p>

There was a stomp of hooves that entered Twilight's library, causing her to look up. First entering was very familiar looking colt glaring in complete anger as a tall black alicorn followed him in too. The colt was well groomed, mane perfectly washed and cut. He looked perfectly presentable in public but why did he look so familiar...

Then Twilight looked at the cutie mark and did a double take. "Lemon?"

The colt could only roll his eyes as an answer. "What happened, who is tha-"

Then she realized who it was in front of her. It was Ganondorf, noticing his cutie mark resembled that of the Tri-Force, the top part was a bit brighter, and his face resembled his previous time here. Twilight's eyes darted from the young colt's perfectly groomed mane to the brush still in Ganondorf's telekenetic grasp. Then she burst out laughing as she put the dots together.

Nyx poked her head out of her room and stared at her boyfriend, before falling over in sheer laughter, rolling on her back with Lemon only grumbling under his breath as she started to squeak.

"It took me several dozen scissors, a couple lakes, Equestria's entire supply of rope to hold him steady, an unfathomable amount of combs and brushes but I finally got him looking presentable." Curry Comb, his looping Equestrian name, chuckled. "It seemed that miss Fluttershy was right; it would take a herculean effort to get him all tidied up."

Lemon Rush only sighed, the Little Mother had been taken to the hospital as she could not stop laughing after seeing him. Suddenly there was a multiple-flash of lights as cameras went off, with many pictures being taken of him.

"The things I do for love."

\* \* \*

><p>138.7 (Evilhumour, Leviticus Wilkes, Archeo Lumiere and Hvulpes)<p>

Fluttershy walked to her door where a very still and very calm looking Rainbow Dash was waiting for her.

"Fluttershy," she said calm, her eye twitching. "Is, by any chance your son home?"

"Oh dear," Fluttershy placed a hoof to her cheek. "What did he do?"

"Your son," Rainbow's wings twitched as she spoke. "Had me race an Ork biker. Only," she raised a wing in the air. "He gave the Ork red paint, and to which I quote, "This is the super duper ultra fastest red paint. Guaranteed to make you go 1\_30\_ percent faster than awesomeness." She took a deep breath of air. "The Ork beat me by going ten percent faster than me. While I was an alicorn!" She snapped, glaring at her friend. "Now is your son home as I would like to have some words with him?"

"Well, it seems that Lemon beat you fair and square Dash, so if those words are civil and polite then I see no reason not to let you speak to him."

"No, I was going to ask for some red fur dye."

Fluttershy's lip twitched. "May I ask why you need some red fur dye?"

"So I can fly 140% faster than usual, duh."

A few days later...

"So let me get this straight." asked Twilight as she looked at Rainbow Dash, who looked the same except that her coat had been painted red. No change to her rainbow mane, nor to her cutie mark. "Being red has made you so fast..."

"I travelled in time. Under my own power! I am awesome!"

\* \* \*

><p>138.8 (Evilhumour)<p>

Lemon blinked as he looked over the hill and then at the three fillies behind him.

"Are you sure that this is necessary?" He asked them, wondering how they managed to talk him into doing this.

"Eyyup," Applebloom said with a grin. "Best way to test it, after all. We all try to do it, and it happens without fail."

"And besides," Sweetie Bell continued, rolling her eyes. "You've looped here as a foal so often that I'm kinda surprised we've never asked you before."

"To which I am flattered that you have asked me now but this seems a bit much!" Lemon protested, flapping his wings.

"Come on Lemon," Scootaloo whined, edging closer. "Don't be a chicken!"

"There's be a coward and being stupid," he glared at her. "I'm not going to do it!"

"Too bad!" the three of them rushed over and before Lemon could do anything, they pushed the wagon he was in down into the treeline with

a high pitched scream following him.

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy did her best not to laugh as Lemon came home covered in tree sap. She really did.<p>

After her son let her take few dozen pictures, she marched him upstairs so he could take a bath.

"So now the Cutie Mark Crusaders have their seventh looping member." She asked, watching him draw a bubble bath, something that she would never share out of respect for her son.

Lemon could only snort in amusement and grinned at her, already with a bubble beard. "I passed the tree sap challenge, didn't I?"

"Yes you did," she smiled, walking out of the door. "And once you are done getting cleaned up, you can wash the sap you tracked through the house."

\* \* \*

><p>138.9 (Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Apple Bloom? Do you still have that Fokker Dr.I?" Scootaloo asked as she peeled off her flying helmet.<p>

The pale yellow filly looked up from adjusting Cookie's holoprojector and blinked. "Huh?...Oh. Hold on. You were flying your favorite Spitfire and he still got you?"

The pegasus grumbled under her breath, then sighed. "Look. I've got no problem coming in second to Wedge Antilles for 'Best pilot in the multiverse', but I'm not gonna stand for getting beat by a beagle flying a doghouse!"

"What makes you think the triplane...?"

"It's his weak point. I'm gonna to go full 'Orange Baroness' and see how he handles it."

"Okay...if you say so. Give me fifteen minutes to finish up here and I'll meet you in the hangar. That good enough?"

Scootaloo muttered acceptance and trudged to the pilot's ready room.

Fifteen minutes later, as she made her way to the hangar, the earth pony decided that this would not be the best time to mention that she had been providing Winona's replacement with technical assistance on the side.

\* \* \*

><p>138.10 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

"TWILIGHT!"

The doors to Golden Oaks Apples swung open wide to reveal a disheveled Rarity. The Purple unicorn sighed. She turned to the Unicorn and asked, "What is it, Rarity?"

"It's Sweetie Belle, come quick!"

\* \* \*

><p>The two arrived a minute later at Carousel Boutique. At the top of the stairs in Rarity's workshop sat a bug like pony covered in black chitin. Twilight performed several scanning spells on the changeling, then some of her own she developed from countless other loops. Her suspicions confirmed as to the identity of the changeling, she played along. "Huh, it's a changeling. They're incredibly rare, usually living out in the Badlands away from ponies. Where did Sweetie Belle find her?"<p>

Rarity's eye twitched. "Sweetie didn't find this...changeling you say?"

She shook her head and continued, "This was Sweetie Belle! She tried making breakfast for me and, after burning the cereal, accidentally burned her hoof trying to make pancakes. Only when her hoof burned, it reverted to that black...chitin."

Green flames consumed the changeling, reverting her form to Sweetie Belle, "But sis, I'm still your sister...don't you still love me?"

Rarity patted her on the head and gave a reassuring grin, "Of course, dear, but something's gone wrong with your body. Twilight will be able to fix this."

A tear fell down Sweetie's cheek, which caused Rarity to flinch and feel down, "I'm sorry dear. Even if Twilight is unable to reverse this, I'll always love you."

Sweetie's frown disappeared as she lunged at Rarity, hugging her tight. Rarity sighed in relief and asked, "Twilight, I'm going to get some water, calm my nerves, you know. It's been a stressful day."

After Rarity was gone, Twilight gave the filly a quirked expression. Sweetie gave a sly grin, "Oh come on. You did the same thing to Celestia that one time at the hospital."

Twilight's expression disappeared as she started giggling, "Yeah, that was fun. So, Silver, when are you and Sweetie going to change back?"

The Filly once again burst into green flames before being replaced by a grey pony with a silver mane braided into a ponytail that hung over her right side, "Can't fool you for a second, can I? Sweetie is going to see the griffon lands with Scoots and 'Bloom. Something about getting back to their roots."

\* \* \*

><p>"Cutie Mark Crusaders, griffon riders, Yay!"<p>

"Get the buck off me, you brats," shouted a pissed off Gilda.

The yellow filly shouted, "Gilda! Watch out for that tr-"

\*CRASH\*

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight shivered for a moment, then pulled out a list along with a quill and ink, muttering to herself, "Talk with Pinkie. See if she's been having her 'Crusaders are about to cause an international incident' sense."<p>

Spoon waved her hoof dismissively, "I'm sure they're fine. Anyway, you should have seen the time I replaced Applebloom and transformed into a deer in front of Applejack. By the end of that loop, unawake you was about ready to pull her mane out, unable to figure out 'Bloom' did that."

Twilight dropped her head as a cloud seemingly started hanging over her head with rain coming down. Moments later, Derpy came in and apologized as she pushed the cloud out the window, "I don't know how that happened."

\* \* \*

><p>138.11 (Gamerex27)<p>

Huitzilopochtli slammed his head against his desk.  
Repeatedly.

"First those damned rodents," he muttered, "and now this."

He looked again at his screen.

CLASS 4 EVENT OCCURRED IN LOOPS -, -, -, -, AND -.

PERMANENT DAMAGE: NONE.

REASON FOR EARLY LOOP TERMINATION: BEES.

"Bees," the feathered god said. "Just... 'Bees.'"

Storming out of his office, he took to the air (or as close as he could without bumping into the branches/ceiling above him). He landed near a cubicle, still in his Aztec department, and grabbed the god inside by the antenna.

"Ow! Ow! That hurtzzzzzzz!" Ah-Muzen-Cab complained. "What givezzzzz?!"

"You know damn well what's going on," the war god hissed. "I thought you had that virus contained!"

"I did! Mostly..." the bee god buzzed. "I've isolated the most dangerouzzzz strain in the Summerset Isle Loop, and it's contained there for now! No Crashes!"

"True," Huitzilopochtli said, "but it's still caused lowercase

crashes in a...considerable number of my Loops!"

"I am not in a good mood," he growled to the other god. "Damage control, now, or I'm demoting you! Again!"

"...As you wizzzzh." Ah-Muzen-Cab flew up to the ceiling, where his hard drive was, and began the process of debugging.

As Huitzilopochtli turned around to leave, he saw a tired-looking Skuld waiting at the cubicle's entrance. "Problem?"

She was silent for a few moments. "No," she said, "you pretty much did what I was going to do anyways. Saves me some work."

"If I were you," the war god said, tilting his head as he followed her into the hallway, "I would be more...enraged about all these Loop crashes."

"Holy roots, DRAGON BEES!" Loki's voice echoed from far above them. "THEY'RE EVERYWHERE! \_EVERYWHERE\_"

"Too tired to..." she yawned. "Anyways, if this is like the squirrels, it'll take care of itself. After a while, anyways."

"WHY ARE THE BEE STINGS CAUSING CUP SIZE \_REDUCTION\_?!" Aphrodite shrieked shrilly. "WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS?!"

"And for a virus messing with dozens of Loops," she said, smirking, "I have to admit, it's actually kind of funny."

\* \* \*

><p><em>I really, really hate the Bee Virus<em>, Twilight internally grumbled. \_May as well get this over with.\_

"Rainbow Dash, whose wings are logically too small to let her fly, represents the Element of \_Bumblebees\_"

"Beelieve it!" Dashie yelled, deciding to get into character for this Loop.

"Applejack, who grows apples, represents the Element of \_Osmia cornifrons!"\_

"That ain't a virtue!" Applejack said, half-indignant and half-bored.

"Pinkie Pie," Twilight continued, ignoring her, "who eats enough sugar to put any other pony into cardiac arrest, represents the Element of \_Honeybees\_"

Pinkie Pie \_tried\_ to say something, but due to being covered from head to tail in pollen and tree sap, only managed some unintelligible words and a giggle.

"Fluttershy, who would never hurt a fly, represents the Element of \_Stingless Bees\_"

Fluttershy smiled. "They're so \_sweet\_," she said, giggling at her truly awful pun.



"Rarity, who is a hardworking mare running her own business, represents the Element of \_Worker Bees\_!"

Rarity also tried to say something, but decided against it, since speaking would probably just make the mass of bee stings covering her body worse.

"T...those are only five of the Elements of BEEEEEEES!" Nightmare Moon said triumphantly. "Ha! You have failed!"

"And I, who stay up \_way\_ too late reading, represent the final mystery Element!" Twilight cried as Nightmare Moon's smirk vanished and she started screaming. "The Element of nocturnal bees, otherwise known as the \_Vespertine Bees\_!"

"No! NO!" Nightmare Moon shrieked, backing away in terror.

"And together, we form the Elements of BEEEEEEES!"

With that, beams of light shot out from their Elements, forming into a massive swarm of magically-constructed bees, which proceeded to chase Luna all around the ruins of the castle.

"NO! NOT THE BEES! \_NOT THE BEES!\_ AAAAHAHHHRGH! OH, THEY'RE IN MY EYES! MY \_EYES! AHHHHHH! ARGUGLGUGUGHGUGUGUGH!"\_

"Are they supposed to work that way?" Fluttershy asked, as the bees slowly but surely stung the corruption out of Luna's body.

"She'll be fine," Twilight said. "The legends said she wasn't allergic, she was just scared of them. Who's up for lunch?"

"N hney in mh ti, plz," Rarity begged through her swollen tongue.

\* \* \*

><p>138.12 (Gamerex27, KrisOverstreet, Masterweaver, War3wolves, Banjo2E)<p>

Fluttershy could do nothing but stare as her choir of birds flew onto their perches, carrying bizarre instruments in their beaks and talons.

"Pun Loops," Twilight said with disgust. "\_Why\_ does it \_always\_ have to be \_pun Loops?!\_"

"Um..." Fluttershy started, tilting her head, "why do you need those instruments? This is a \_choir\_, not a band."

In response, one of the birds in the front chirped something, and Fluttershy facehoofed.

"What did he say?" Twilight asked.

"He said..." the pegasus started, then sighed. "He said... 'Nothing can stop \_the Blooze'.\_"

"Yeah," the various Rainbow Dash-colored instruments said in unison, "I'm \_really\_ not liking this Loop either."

Ignoring her, the birds raised their trumpets to their beaks, lifted their drumsticks, and proceeded to play out an improvised blues melody.

\* \* \*

><p>The tall stallion in the black suit said, "It's 106 miles to Canterlot, we've got a zeppelin, half a pack of cigarettes, it's dark... and we're wearing sunglasses."<p>

"Hit it," said the short, fat stallion in the black suit.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Rarity?" Fluttershy asked, as she walked into Rarity's boutique, "I was wondering if you had that conductor's uniform ready yet. I promised Seraphita that I would give her something to help with her 'Magical stop demons from eating people' song, and since she's from the <em>Amalaverse</em>, she'd need it...quickly..."

Gasping, Fluttershy galloped over to the fallen Rarity, who had fainted into her couch. Looking around, Fluttershy noted that she was surrounded by, of all things, horseshoes, of various metals and designs. Thankfully, she noticed that these were the slip-on kind, rather than the painful "nailed to your hooves" kind.

"So...many...orders," Rarity moaned groggily as she stirred awake.

"What happened?" Fluttershy asked, helping her to her hooves.

"There were SO MANY orders!" the Element of Generosity muttered. "So many! I thought the \_socks\_ were bad: these are just...\_urgh!\_"

"I just don't have enough time to fill the orders before the Gala!" she cried. "Nothing can stop...\_the Shoes!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"NOTHING CAN STOP THE NEWS!" cried Mrs. Cake triumphantly. "Twins! I have twins in my bellah!"<p>

Twilight blinked, turning to Pinkie and quirking an eyebrow.

"Yeah, she's been like this all loop." Pinkie shrugged. "So, cookie or fudge?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Nothing can stop...<em>the Tubes!</em>"

"Well, I sure as \_hay\_ wish somepony could!" Applejack yelled over the deafening noise of the Boom Tubes. "All the cider we keep tryin' ta make's fallin' out of the kegs from the dang shockwaves they're makin'!"

"You think \_that's\_ \_bad?!" Rainbow Dash screamed back, covering her

ears with her forehooves. "The weather pegasi are getting all the complaints about the noise! Five ponies today alone were fired because some idiots thought they were throwing thunder around!"

"Can someone please go and shut Highfather up?" Ivory Scrolls yelled from her office. "My windows have broken again, and the property values of Ponyville are going to plummet!"

"Hal Jordan said he's taking care of Highfather now!" Zecora reassured them. "If I were you, though, I would get out of town!"

\* \* \*

><p>"You leave us no choice, princess." The diplomat glowered across the table. "As of now, we are officially at war. And nothing can stop the gnus."<p>

Twilight did not laugh until she was alone and had cast a number of anti-eavesdropping spells. But in the end... she did laugh.

\* \* \*

><p>"The NIGHT SHALL LAST...NEVER!" Nightmare Moon cracked with glee, and Twilight blinked, raising a hoof in question.<p>

"Don't you mean forever? You're meant to cause Eternal night." Twilight tilted her head as Nightmare Moon only laughed louder.

"Afraid not, dear subject! Eternal night was just...a ruse!"

\* \* \*

><p>It was taking all of Rarity's eons of experience to keep the smile plastered on her face as she listened to the stallion go on and on.<p>

"...and while I did eventually manage to knock out all six of them, my tuxedo simply wasn't up to the strain. That outfit you designed for that pegasus there, though, that is clearly sturdy enough to survive a swashbuckling emergency, and with that kind of style..."

Rarity sighed. "Your highness, I really am flattered you think so highly of my work, but could we perhaps move on to a topic that doesn't involve endlessly complimenting me?"

Prince Blueblood paused in his rambling and winked at her. "I'm afraid not, milady. Nothing can stop the schmooze."

\* \* \*

><p>138.13 (Evilhumour)<p>

Vinyl woke up in their bed with a shout as the nightmare was still in her mind.

"What's wrong Vinyl?" Octavia asked, looking at the trembling unicorn, who had tears in her eyes.

"I had that nightmare again, where you are still not looping," Vinyl sobbed, hiccuping as she buried herself into Octavia's shoulder. "But you're looping and you're Awake! We're together and everything is ok." Vinyl was panting now, grasping at straws, desperate for this to be true.

Octavia patted Vinyl with her hoof, leaning in close to her ear. "Vinyl, you know that's not true, we're not awake." Vinyl pulled back to see herself holding her, Octavia slipping away from her. "It's time to wake up."

\* \* \*

><p>With a shout, Vinyl woke up, panting in her apartment. She looked around herself, as the memories of her dreams came back to her. And then she broke down in tears; she hated those false, teasing dreams of her Octy looping. Lyra told her that for herself that dreams of Bon Bon looping was even worse with all the other selves in her head breaking down in that possible paradise.<p>

With a shaky hoof, Vinyl pulled out some simple booze and began to drink herself stupid so she wouldn't have to think anymore.

\* \* \*

><p>138.14 (Gamerex27)<p>

"I don't know if I should celebrate or just drink myself into the next Loop," Rainbow Dash muttered as she entered Macadam's Oil House. "Energon Lite, on the rocks."

As the Autobot working the bar poured the drink, the Scout-class Transformer took a seat next to the striped Minicon sitting at the bar.

"What troubles you, old friend?" Zecora asked her. "Did a bad Loop send you 'round the bend?"

"Grim Dark," she muttered. "Why is it always these Grim Dark piles of road apples, just when I want to relax!"

Chugging down the Energon in one gulp, Rainbow Dash groaned. "It was this Loop where...Unawake Twilight just went crazy, and tried to kill us all by forcefully Discording us and ripping out our Elements. And of course, she took all her cues from the Loop Which We Never Talk About-tried to shove a jellyfish down Fluttershy's throat, tried to zap Applejack with some horrible shock...thingy, and so many other things I'm not mentioning.

"And before you ask," she said, as Zecora's faceplate moved to speak, "we stopped her. All it took was a buck to the face, a paralysis spell, and we shoved her in a psych ward for the rest of the Loop. One of those ones not run by a Ratched type. And we only got a few bruises and a day's stay in the hospital for our trouble."

"It seems to me that, as of late," Zecora noted, "Yggdrasil always puts us in the worlds that we hate."

"I mean," the Element of Loyalty said, "nothing's ever gonna top Slavequestria, or even what happened with Nao-" she stopped herself,

sighing. "-The Fiend," she finished. "And we're more than capable of just derailing the Loops so far that they end up on another continent entirely. But it's still annoying!"

"I really don't like it," she muttered, draining her second mug of Energon. "I hate having to fight psychos with my friends' faces. Yeah, I know it's not them, but it's not easy. There's been way too many dark Loops lately. And even though I can derail them in, like, 5 seconds flat, it's getting old."

Zecora patted Dashie on the back, wincing at the unfamiliar sound of clanging metal-on-metal. "Axiom Nexus is always at peace," she noted. "After a Loop like that, you'll need a treat. The Energon's on me. And nothing can be as bad as the bees."

"Oh, you're overreacting," Rainbow Dash said, grinning. "The puns weren't that bad. And it gave me an awesome idea. How does building Yggdrasil's best race track sound to you?"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

138.1: Think of it like you ended up in world history according to Animal House.

>138.2:    (It's a space.)<br>138.3: Oh, hi. How are you?

>138.4: Kind of a touchy subject. But Twilight's willing to give it a chance.<br>138.5: Gridfire. When you absolutely have to turn a moon into gravel very quickly. (Which this is not.)

>138.6: Untameable hair versus the bearer of the Triforce of Power! (He took it two falls out of three.)<br>138.7: Ork physics.

>138.8: Well, that makes it official.<br>138.9: Snoop dog?

>138.10: She covers for her friends.<br>138.11: B.

>138.12: Please stop.<br>138.13: Poor Vinyl.

>138.14: It's not all fun and games.<p>

## 145. Chapter 145

(Evilhumour, with help from Leonite, Custodator Pacis, Purrs, Zeusdemigod131, Wildrook, and Archeo-Lumiere.)

**\*\*The Misadventures of Lemon Rush: Companionship is Magic!\*\***

"-and on the longest day, in a thousand years, the Emperor's sisters known shall return from their banishment, discover the reincarnations of the fallen Chaos Gods and bring forth Eternal Night for all of ponykind with the Chaos Gods behind Her," Lemon Rush finished reading as he Woke up.

Groaning, the stallion sent out pings, hoping he wasn't going to deal with this insanity alone.

With a sigh, he got five pings back, but before he could analyse them, he heard a cough next to him.

"I just got the reply from the Emperor, Lemon," a young unawake Spike said, holding a letter up to him. "Shall I read it?"

"Ye- yeah," Lemon said, trying to get his looping memories quicker as

all the pings came from a greater distance than Canterlot, nearly all from Ponyville. "Read on Spike."

\_To my dear faithful student Lemon Rush, \_

\_I do appreciate your concerns about the anniversary of the banishment of my sisters' and the prophecy about Eternal Night Moon bringing the Chaos Gods back from the dead, but rest assured, the entire military is on the ready in case anything should occur, with several thousand Space Marines specifically trained to deal with such a thing happening and appropriately deployed in key locations.\_

\_I\_ do \_have a great and important task for you, Lemon Rush.\_

\_You must go forth and make companions.\_

\_Training and learning is perfectly acceptable, but one must have others to rely on if you wish to truly progress in our wide world. That is why I am sending you to the humble town of Ponyville, to prepare my first stop in the Imperium to reassure the population that all is well, as well as to mingle with the population voted to be the most pleasant throughout the entire Imperium. I have complete faith that you can accomplish these important tasks I set forth for you and need not wish you any luck as I know you will make me proud.\_

\_Yours, \_

\_The Emperor.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Lemon sighed heavily as the chariot pulled away, looking at the two heavily armoured pegasi marine flying back to mountain mega city. Canterlot had encompassed the entirety of the mountain this loop, with the Grand Golden Garrison-palace at the top, the city circling downwards until it reached 'Old Canterlot', where the city was usually sat.<p>

"Come on Lemon, you still can't be worrying about that old prophecy?" Spike said, placing a claw on his flanks. "The Emperor told you not to worry about it, and we can't have a repeat the last time you panicked over something silly."

"Spike," Lemon spat out, beginning to walk into the city as the more embarrassing loop memories came into focus. Thankfully, the Emperor decided to let him walk into the city so he could have a greater chance of finding 'companions' but there was a number of ponies looking at him oddly in the distance and this would make the whole thing bucking harder. "I told you, I thought that Blueblood was really a changeling drone who was recruiting ponies to his cult! How long will you hold that over my head?!"

"Well, until it stops being funny," Spike laughed, remembering how Gleaming Shield and the Emperor had to save Lemon from the overzealous police after Lemon crashed the birthday party the noble threw for High Lady V. Scratch. It took several months for Lemon's coat to regrow after the incident, and the Emperor prevented him from regrowing it quicker as punishment for leaping without looking. "And besides, Vinyl \_still\_ wants to share wubs with you, whatever \_that\_

means."

Facehoofing at his young dragon assistant's innocence, Lemon walked into the city with more ponies smiling awkward at him. While he wasn't wearing any armour like most ponies that came from Canterlot, he did wear the emblem of the Emperor's personal student. "Look Spike, I'll tell you when you're-"

With a sudden gasp, a pink stallion leaped into the air in front of him.

"THERE you are!" What looked like Pinkie Pie, but sounded like Tzeentch sneered at him. "Come with-" The pony's eyes darted to the rapid shut movement Lemon was doing as a confused Spike was tilting his head. Tzeentch proved to be himself as he instantly changed tactics. "me! I'm the primary party planner of Ponyville and you must be the Emperor's personal student and here to make sure everything is ok for the Emperor's visit and IswearI'llkillifyoubreathawordofthistoanyone-"

"Wait what?" Spike blinked, looking at the pink stallion who was still shaking Lemon's hoof with tremendous energy and speed.

"He said he wants us show us around town to the places we need to go, Spike." Lemon caught the glare from the pony across of him.

"But I just remembered that I need to go do something else like finish making that lemon cake for Anathema. So bye Leman!" With that, the pony disappeared like Pinkie Pie, horrifying Lemon that Tzeentch would pick up Pinkie's abilities.

Spike just blinked and shrugged. "Weird pony," With a roll of his eyes, the dragon pulled out a scroll and looked at it. "First stop is to see an Applejack for the food preparations at the apple farm."

\* \* \*

><p>Lemon walked down the usual path towards the Sweet Apple Acres with dread, wondering and hoping if Applejack would be the same mare that he often called his aunt. She could produ-<p>

"DAMMIT IT TO THE WARP YOU MORONS, WE NEED TO GET THINGS READY AND YOU FOOLS JUST DROPPED ANOTHER BUSHEL!" A loud, very familiar voice shouted, causing the dragon and stallion to jump. After a pause, the voiced continued to boom. "I DON'T CARE HOW MUCH I SAID I'D PAY YOU, GET OFF MY PROPERTY NOW OR I WILL BUCK YOU TWO OFF!"

"Uh, Lemon, I think we made a mistake." Spike muttered very concerned.

With a loud smack, two stallions went sailing through the sky before crashing into the ground in front of Lemon and the scared drake. Looking down at Flim and Flam, Lemon let out another tired annoyed sigh.

"No Spike, I'm very sure we're at the right spot." Lemon muttered, wishing he had his wings so he could fly away from this insanity but as a unicorn of so-so power, that option was not available to him. "Come along, the sooner we get this done with, the sooner we can meet with the next pony."

"Who is...**CANDY CANE?!\***" Spike shouted in surprise and joy, causing the two pony on the ground to groan in pain. "I can't believe we're going to meet the Candy Cane!"

With another sigh, Lemon Rush walked beside his gushing assistance as he went on about the pegasus's many achievements into the farm with a very angry looking stallion staring at him. With all the resolve he could muster, and a promise to himself find the nearest bar after this, he made his way to the very aggressive looking Apple clan.

\* \* \*

><p>Spike took a bite of the apple and looked at facehoofing pony next to him, muttering about drinks. Rolling his eyes, he bumped into the pony, catching his attention.<p>

"You know you're not allowed to drink Lemon, not after what happened last time," the pony grumbled at the drake, who shrugged his shoulders. "I mean, while the Emperor said it was fine and that buildings can be replaced, you know what High Priestess C-"

"Yes, I know what she said, Spike," Lemon snapped, looking at the drake. Then Lemon recomposed himself and apologized after seeing the dragon flinch. "Sorry for that, just..."

"Those Apples are kinda scary?" The dragon ventured with some hesitation.

"...That's as good as anything I can think of Spike," Lemon said with a shrug as he couldn't really tell Spike the whole truth. Nor could he talk to Khorne as the pony was dealing with his family as well as the fact that no one knew that their Applejack was really a Chaos God. "Beside, I think their family is also famous for being on the front lines of the more deadlier of conflicts..." Lemon trailed off, biting into his apple with gusto.

"Well, they're very good at their apples." Spike bit into his apple with a smile on his face. "Who'd think that ponies that aggressive would be that good as farmers and bakers?"

"Yah," Lemon laughed to himself, remembering the death threat Khorne had given him if he told anyone about him making an apple pie. "Now where do you think we'll find Candy Cane?" Lemon winced, seeing the drake perk up at the mentioning of Imperium-renowned pegasus. Apparently, Candy Cane was the first pony ever to reach the Warp by his wings alone in five seconds flat, did something called the mega sonic rainboom when he was a foal which destroy an Ork infested planet somehow, fought his way back while somehow derailing over a dozen or so cultist plots in the processes until he was rescued by a passing ship that had stopped a rampaging daemon, among many, many other things. None of Candy Cane's exploits made any sense beside the fact he was the Imperium renown fastest pegasus and hero to many. It seemed like Yggdrasil or Fenrir was having fun with Ciaphas again without really bothering to make sure it made sense this time.

"And remember what I said Spike; once we find him, you cannot glomp him or ask him to sign your face." Lemon found himself lecturing the now frowning dragon. "And don't lie to me, you were thinking of it, weren't you?"



With a snort of smoke, Spike continued to walk down the forest path with his eyes darting upwards at the empty sky-

"Oh. Right." Lemon slapped his face again, wincing slightly from the pain of continuously doing that all morning. "He's in charge of weather division here and it seems that he's done his job." With well trained eyes, Lemon spotted the stallion in the tree line; and by how his eyes were blinking, Ciaphas either had an eye problem this loop or just told him in Morse code that he will meet them up in the library. Lemon was inclined to believe the later.

"Ok..." Spike pouted for a bit before shaking himself up. "Next pony on our list is a stallion named Butterscotch, who has planned to do an animal instrumental performance and after that we need to check out the town hall that a...huh, that's odd, didn't leave the gender for this one." Spike tapped the scroll, filling Lemon with dread as he realized something. "Rarity has designed for the Emperor's visit." The dragon looked over to him, noticing how pale Lemon just became. "Everything OK, boss?"

Lemon had been panicking as the Little Mother had been replaced by someone, and he had a feeling it was either of the remaining Chaos Gods he'd yet to see. He was unsure of who would be worse to see wearing her face, him or hir, but both were equally unpleasant and terrifying thoughts. "Ye-yes Spike, I'm fine," He squeaked out, shaking his head. "Lead on, and let's meet this Butterscotch."

\* \* \*

><p>Lemon blinked at the strange choir, with the instruments being a nice touch that the Little Mother didn't usually have.<p>

"Wow, that was really cool Butterscotch," Spike smiled at the yellow pegasus, clapping his claws together. With a blush, the not-Butterscotch pawed at the ground. "I've never seen an actual flea circus play like that before."

"Yeah..." Lemon drawled out, watching Nurgle call out encouragement to his crows and vulture, all beaming with pride. "It was fantastic, I'm sure that the Emperor will love it too."

"Thank you, little one." The Chaos God smiled at him, before turning his head towards the flies that were surrounding him. He gave small little chirps and buzzes to them, which seemed to make them happy. "I look forward to the visit as well as my friends do."

"That's good to hear," Lemon bit his lip, then shuddered as a crow landed on his head. "Um..." Lemon tried not to flinch, with every lesson from the Little Mother threatening to leave his head as the bird began to nestle in his mane.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" The pegasus continued to smile before turning his attention to the bird. "You know you shouldn't go onto ponies' heads-"

"Caw!"

"Well, be that as it may, not every pony likes it-"

"Caw!"

"Well, I'm sure he would be pleased to know that but-"

"Caw?"

"Well, if he doesn't mind, I'm sure you can stay." He turned his head towards the looper, who was trying not to run in a circle as the bird began to preen. "I'm sorry Mister Rush, but Charon really likes your mane and he put up a really good argument and-"

"It looks really cool Lemon," Spike smiled, looking up at the bird in awe. "I think you should let it stay."

"Why should I do that?!" Lemon whimpered as he felt the talons brush against his skull, the beak near his horn.

"It'd make talking to other ponies a lot easier for starters."

"And Charon will fly back here once he bores of your head, so I don't see the real harm." Nurgle turned his blue eyes at him, which reminded him of the real Fluttershy. Lemon did not stand a chance; sighing, he gave a light nod before walking back into town for the last pony to check up on. The bird was still on his head.

\* \* \*

><p>With a hesitant sigh, Lemon walked back into the town's proper with Spike by his side and Charon still happily on his head, more than one pony doing a double take at him.<p>

Wishing beyond belief that he could sneak off for some booze, Lemon stepped in front of the town-hall and knocked on the door. A few seconds later, Ivory Scroll poked her head out and smiled at the two before noticing the crow. Frowning, she stepped out to properly look at Lemon and Spike.

"Are you the official inspector for the Emperor's visit?" She asked, eyeing his badge.

"Yes I am and I can explain the bird on my head," Lemon muttered in the politest way possible for him. Apparently, it was not good enough for Spike or Charon as they elbowed and pecked him respectively. "Ow!" He whimpered from the peck as it was close to nerves to his horn, which were sensitive to all levels of Tartarus.

"I see..." Ivory Scroll began to step back into the building.

"No wait!" Lemon shouted, moving to stop her. "I'm sorry, that was rude of me." Lemon blushed, looking to the side. "My name is Lemon Rush, and I am the pony sent by the Emperor to make sure that everything for his visit is appropriate for him. Spike, my assistant, can give you the paperwork if you need further proof ma'am, but I must compliment your ponies. Everything so far was flawless and I can see why Ponyville has the rating it has." He tried to smile at her, but felt forced and it looked forced by the flat looks he was getting from Spike and the mare. Blushing again, he rubbed the back of his head as Spike gave her the right scrolls. "'m sorry, not that good at smiling."

"\_That's\_ for sure," Spike huffed, causing the mayor to chuckle. "He's tried practicing so much in the mirror that some thought that it was a code for cultists. It took him \_months\_ to grow his coat back after that incident."

"\_Thanks\_ Spike," Lemon muttered as darkly as he could, with Ivory trying to hold her laughter back to little success. Charon cawed loudly in his ear, which made Lemon huff loudly. "Oh get stuffed bird."

"Caw!"

"Why you-"

"A-hem," Ivory cut the two off, Spike just rolling his eyes in exasperation. "Would you care to examine the town's hall?"

"Ah, yes, of course." Lemon blushed again, stepping in the town hall that had the normal banners of the Imperium flying proudly, the normal stage, but the colours and patterns of the room were done in such a way that Lemon was blushing even more. He wasn't even sure how one used such peaceful colours like blue or green or yellow in \_that\_ way! "I-uh," he gulped, "It's very inspiring, to say the least."

"I know it might \_not\_ be the straight laced designs of Canterlot, but our good friend Elusive really restrained themselves and produced this conservative masterpiece!" The mayor looked desperate, chuckling weakly as she looked at him for assistance.

"\_This\_ is conservative for Ra-Wait a second," Lemon paused mid rant, looking at Spike. "I thought the name of the pony was Rarity?"

"Well..." Ivory looked at the confused Spike before looking back at Lemon. "Our good friend responds to either name; some days it's Elusive and some days it's Rarity. We don't mind here in Ponyville as it's just another thing that makes us so special." The mayor gave another weak laugh, trying to tiptoe around some issues that Lemon didn't even want to think about.

"That's kinda cool, I guess," Spike scratched his head. "Let's go tell them the good news Lemon."

"Actually,- Spike is it?" Ivory said with her eyes widening and panic on her face. "Why don't you come with me to set up your guys little base of operation, hm? We've got the old Golden Oaks Library set up for you two to make any final preparations, but I'm sure a mighty dragon assistant can sort anything out us little ponies missed?"

"You've got it!" Spike shouted with glee, smiling broadly at Ivory's praises to his ego. "If that's OK with you Lemon, I mean. I know-"

"No no Spike, it's alright," Lemon said with a strained voice, knowing whatever Slaanesh had done was bad enough that the mayor was actively preventing Spike from going. "I need you to handle this job for me while I tell this pony what a wond-\_interesting\_ job they've done."

"Ok..." Spike pouted, before going to hoofbump Lemon. "If you're sure, I'll see you later Lemon." Leaning in, Spike grinned. "Just try to make sure you don't get shaved \_again\_."

"Har-har," Lemon muttered, holding the drake close and giving him a little noogie. "I'm sure I'll be fine; what's the worse that can happen?"

\* \* \*

><p>Lemon's jaw fell, and he was instantly glad, for the first time this loop, that he did not have his wings. He knew that if he had them, he would not be able to get out of the Carousel Boutique without some serious trouble or breaking a window.<p>

He also knew if Rarity ever saw \_any\_ of this, Pinkie Pie would become the second most feared pony in the multiverse after she got through Slaanesh. Luckily, Twilight would not be killing him as he did not bring Spike here, or he would be in trouble beyond comprehension with the mare for bring the unAwake baby dragon here.

"Oooo, see something you \_like\_, good sir?" The androgynous voice called out from behind him, \_thankfully\_ tearing his eyes away from theâ€|\_clothing\_ offered and into the predatory, grinning face of the white unicorn. Said unicorn had a very fashionable scarf around the neck and was floating a measuring tape. "Maybe I can even create you a nice suit." The pony licked hir lips as the tape flew close to Lemon. Lemon in turn backed away from the tape with serious fear in his eyes. "Oh \_Lemon\_, you know that us ponies don't wear pants so the tape won't be going down \_there\_."

"I know that, and that's what scares me; that you \_will\_ make it worse!" Lemon said with trembling legs as the tape went closer to his body, the crow sitting deep in his mane now.

"You're no fun," the pony pouted, still eyeing him. Lemon now wish he \_did\_ have his wings so he could cover himself, as having Slaanesh eye him was unnerving as all Tartarus. "So you've met the others already?" the unicorn asked as fabric began to fly around, glancing at them before dismissing them.

"Ye-yes," Lemon's voiced cracked, as he looked at the \_wares\_ offered, his face turning red again. "I wasn't able to really talk to them as Spike was there but-WHOA!" Lemon squeaked as something went around his neck. Jumping, the young stallion landed into a standie with the crow cawing, flying above as he waited for his roost to clear up.

"Oh \_Lemon\_, you're so \_jumpy\_," The unicorn chuckled as hir magic began to lift the pony out of the mess of fabrics. "It was \_just\_ a bowtie, you'd look so \_cute\_ in it." Another chuckle and a lick of the lips, the unicorn looked at the frowning Anchor.

"Slaanesh," Lemon said with strained voice. "You know how ponies lift others with their magic \_around\_ their body, correct?"

"\_Yes\_," The unicorn giggled, still holding the other pony by hir magic. "And that's what I'm doing."

"Yes, but they go by the sides \_first\_ to lift, not under and over and certainly \_not\_ from behind the tail!" Lemon's voiced cracked again, his face beet red now.

"Oh hush," the pony turned other around in their magic to boop his nose with hir hoof. "I was merely curious, and I must say that your Nyxie is one lucky mare." With a gentle plop on the ground, the owner of the Carousel Boutique placed a bright pink bowtie around his neck. "You \_know\_ what my nature is; being the Chaos God of love and lust, and all those \_fun\_ emotions. Like Chrysalis and Cadence, I can tell when beings \_really\_ like each other. And before you get all huffy, I don't peek in on you two, or anyone else, when they're alone and Awake anymore unless they're OK with it." With a tilt of the head, the white pony began to tug on the edges of the bowtie before stepping back. "There we \_go\_, all done." With a smile, Slaanesh stepped back and pulled out a mirror for Lemon to see himself in. He had to admit that the pink bowtie \_did\_ look good on him and he would definitely save it for Nyx to see.

Blinking, Lemon looked at the unicorn that was humming as they put away the material, with a sway on their hips.

"Two things I've got to ask you," Lemon frowned at the scene, as Charon flew back down and nested onto his head, "When did you Wake up?"

"Oh, sometime earlier this day," the white pony smirked, flicking their tail in a very provocative manner that required Lemon to think of Nyx and remind himself that it was \_Slaanesh\_ in front of him. "It seems that my wonderful personality bled over nicely in this role," With a gentle laugh, the pony began to saunter over to him again. "What's the second one, \_Lemon\_?"

"Are you a stallion or a mare this loop!? I can't tell and it's \_really\_ bothering me!"

Again, the white pony laughed. "Oh you sweet little thing," the pony caressed his face, leaning in to breath into his ear. "\_That's\_ something I'm holding close to my chest; so far no-one in this town knows and I plan to keep it that way. A lot more fun when they don't know your gender is."

"Because if they don't know if you're a mare or stallion, then you'll get hit on by all-Oh come \_on\_ Slaanesh!" Lemon squeaked a third time as he voiced cracked again. "That's -"

"\_My\_ choice," The white unicorn glared at him. "You may not like it but I \_do\_ and as I am not tricking anypony in the end, I don't see anything wrong with it. Now do you know where the others are so we can get Luna free and we can move along with this little show?"

"Ye-yeah," Lemon looked off to the side, with Charon lightly pecking at him for being rude once more. "The library is the go-to place if someone replaces the girls like this, and I'm sure that Ciaphas will get the rest there."

"Good," The unicorn smiled, opening the door for Lemon. "After you." With a weak smile Lemon walked out the doors with Slaanesh eying his

flanks, licking their lips once more before following out.

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, back in Canterlot, a young acolyte moved her way around her fellow acolytes, biting her lip in concern. It was rare when High Priestess Chrysalis summoned her, but the High Changeling Queen of Equestria called for <em>her</em>, it either meant something very fun was about to happen or something very bad was about to happen.

And considering how everybeing was on edge for the prophesied return of Eternal Night Moon, and end their golden age of peace and harmony, and the rebirth of the Chaos Gods, even a pony like her could tell that everybeing was one stupid college student prank away from full out panic and chaos.

The blue mare stopped in front of the humble doors of her old friend and raised her hoof to knock.

"Come in, my child," the changeling called, irking the pony a tiny bit before calming herself. "You know that you don't need to knock Trixie, and certainly not in times like this."

Opening the door, the unicorn walked over to the other mare, clothed in simple robes as her height and stature alone marked as a Queen changeling. Said changeling was looking at several texts, both new and old, along with recordings, pools for scrying and a couple of maps.

Trixie bit her lip and leaned against the mare, dropping her bags to the floor. "It's going to be bad, isn't?"

For any other acolyte that was not part of the changeling hivemind, Chrysalis would have lied and said that things were fine. For any member of her hive, she would let them know things might be a bit rough. For her oldest friend before she replaced her mother as High Priestess of Equestria and the being in charge of making sure that the Warp was not getting fed bad emotions by the population, she would tell her the truth.

Using her magic to seal the room in silence, she sighed and looked at the humble Trixie before letting herself sigh. "They are coming, with their own army of cultists and Orks but that's not worrying me," Chrysalis magic grabbed a simple tape recorder and pushed play. There were the sounds of pops in the recording that, while they could easily be explain as static expect after hearing it played, Trixie was soaking in her own sweat and trembling in fear she could not explain by the time the tape finished. "I cannot explain it either and that's what worries me. Something bad is coming, something potentially even worse than Eternal Night Moon, their armies of cultists and Orks and I cannot tell what it is beyond this tape."

"Sh-should we tell the Emperor?" Trixie asked, trying to keep her body steady but she was still shaking from that tape.

"He knows but he cannot place it either," Chrysalis sighed. "He told me that he has something in the works to prepare for Eternal Night Moon with his student but he wants me and my best acolyte to try and

discover who this unknown ally is and prepare for them."

Trixie smiled at the praise, before looking at the tomes. "So let us start reading, my good friend." Smiling, the mares began to read side by side.

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><p>Lemon bit back his sigh, and nodded his head again as he was welcomed by more ponies of the small town during his welcome party. Tzeentch hadn't wanted to do it but it was expected of him and with everyone on edge, Lemon could not blame him for it. Although, leaving him stuck with an unAwake Lyra that believed that humans existed and since Lemon was close to the Emperor's private knowledge he would know was a mean prank.<p>

Then again, Bon Bon was there to stop the sightless seapony from going overboard. After holding her hoof and whispering something into her ear that made her mutter 'Shoo bee doo' while blushing enough to be mistaken for Khorne's big sister, Lyra finally stopped asking him questions, allowing the candy maker help the blind seapony around the crowded room, and let Lemon move around again.

"So Lemon, are you enjoying this little par-ty?" Tzeentch asked, barely holding back a sneer as he bounced over with a cupcake in his hoof.

"Yes, Bubble Berry," Lemon tried to smile back, keeping up with the show for the other ponies walking by. "It was very kind of you to do so on such short notice."

"Well Bubbles here is the number one party pony!" A seemingly intoxicated Roseluck laughed, throwing an arm around Tzeentch to pull him close for a hug. "A real cutie too! HA!" Roseluck leaned inwards to try and kiss Tzeentch but an exasperated Berry Punch dragging her away.

"You know Bubble, if you keep on spiking the punchbowl, you should expect ponies to get drunk and hit on you." Berry lectured the pink stallion, with Khorne, Nurgle and Slaanesh smirking from their own private little areas in the library.

"Wait, the punch was spiked?" Lemon blinked, looking at his cup. He had been drinking several cups this evening and he had not even tasted the hint of alcohol.

"Well, of course I spiked it Lemon," Tzeentch grinned at him again, less forced this time. "But I counter spiked yours to neutralize the booze in it."

"Very funny," Lemon said through clenched teeth, watching Spike talking to Applebloom and Scootaloo; apparently Sweetie was living with her parents in this loop instead with Slaanesh for reason that were very obvious. "Spike, it's getting a bit late. Time to go to bed."

The young drake pouted, but Lemon shook his head and pointed to the bedroom. Spike sighed, rolled his eyes before walking over to hug the pony before whispering, "Promise me not to do anything too dangerous?"

"I promise Spike," Lemon face softened, holding the drake close to him. "I'll be fine."

"You sure?" Spike looked up at him with wide eyes. "The last time you said that, you -"

"I know Spike, but trust me, I'll be fine." He ruffled the drake's head. "You'll wake up tomorrow and you'll see that I will be one-hundred percent still together."

"Ok..." Spike sighed before hugging Lemon tighter. "I just have a feeling something bad is coming and I thought if-

"Spykoranuvellitar, you're becoming to sound like me," chuckling, Lemon began to push Spike towards the stairs. "Now go to bed before I teleport you there."

"Ok, ok, sheesh." Spike grumbled as he walked up the stairs with Charon flying away from his perch from one of the bookshelves to follow Spike upwards.

Lemon turned his attention away from dragon to face the dawwing mares, snickering Chaos Gods and Caiphas Cane facehoofing off to the side. Huffing, Lemon rolled his eyes and spotted the time.

"Ok, it's time to get ready, the Emperor will be here as soon as the moon rises." Lemon said, using his magic to usher people out of the Golden Oaks, with Tzeentch, Khorne, Caiphas, Nurgle and Slaanesh close beside him.

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><p>Lemon groaned with Tzeentch, as Slaanesh began to telling them about their fling with Naoki again. Khorne, Caiphas and Nurgle were shuddering too, as Slaanesh was going into very *descriptive* details about what they did with a broken watch, among other disturbing things.

"Must you continue in this perverted tale?" The pink stallion shuddered, with soft muttering under his breath. "Seeing one segment was horrifying enough; must you always share with us what you did?!" He snapped out in a soft whisper; making sure that they would not be overheard by other ponies.

"Oh shush," Slaanesh huffed in a seductive manner, forcing Lemon to think of Nyx over and over again. "You cannot fault me for my perversions. I am who I am." The white unicorn then strutted forwards, swaying their hips in a provocative fashion.

"If I didn't know any better, I'd say you'd enjoyed your time with the Naoki boy." the pegasus hero muttered, causing several different reactions. Slaanesh's ears flicked upwards, there was a pause in their steps and their body tensed up.

For anyone else, it would have passed unseen but for the other three Chaos Gods, Lemon and Caiphas saw it and they grinned.

Slaanesh blinked for a few moments, cheeks reddening before the pony



rolled their eyes. "He was a really good fling, OK?" Slaanesh muttered as they walked towards the town hall. "I wouldn't be opposed to a second round."

"By the Warp," Tzeentch was laughing loudly now, shaking his head. "Is our little friend beginning to settle down?"

"Before we know it," Khorne was chuckling, elbowing Caiphas. "Our dear friend will be in an apron, bringing breakfast to Naoki."

"Do I hear wedding bells?" Ciaphas question set off Tzeentch and Nurgle into a fit of laughter.

"Screw each and every one of you!" Slaanesh huffed, blushing madly.

"Will you be thinking of us or Naoki?" Lemon asked sarcastically, causing the rest to roar out in laughter as they entered the town hall, with Slaanesh muttering death threats to each of them.

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you <em>sure<em> about this?" The High Priestess looked at the Emperor of Ponykind who was pacing back and forth in her private studies. Trixie was still going over the ancient texts, already going back to the Age of Chaos, when the Chaos Gods were still alive and the Royal Family was still whole. "We're still trying to decipher the recording, and the scouts say She is on Her way."

"I know, my little changeling, I know." The Emperor responded, looking at the blue mare. It was not often a pony took to the role of monitoring and maintaining the Warp, but if Chrysalis trusted her, then so did he. "And while we cannot learn the identity of this ally, we shall prepare for what we can."

The Emperor paused in his golden power-armor and used his magic to create a three dimensional image of Equus with tiny ships floating around it. "I already have the home fleet in position and ready to deal with a force around five hundred thousand. Once I finish my little visit in Ponyville and everybeing sees that things are under control, I will join them to add my might against the enemy."

"Sirâ€| Emperor," Trixie bowed, averting her eyes away from him. "What of Her?"

The Emperor looked at Trixie for a long moment before sighing. "You do know of the Elements of Harmony, correct?"

Trixie shared a confused look with Chrysalis before turning to face him and nodding. "When She came to be, the power to use the Elements was lost. Over the last ten thousand years, there have been beings that one of the Elements chose to be their Bearer but never all at once. Now, I can sense that they are all awake and they will find each other. I believe that they can do what I was unable to do all those ages ago if Eternal Night Moon comes to attack me."

"Wait, are you saying that Lemon Rush is one the Bearers of Harmony?!" Chrysalis shouted in disbelief. "Oh please tell me he is Laughter, or Honesty, or something. Just not Magi- oh by the Warp,

he \_is\_, isn't he?"

The Emperor had the decency to at least blush before nodding his head. Chrysalis placed a hoof to her head and began to mutter some changeling curses before calming herself. "I understand that the Elements would not have chosen Lemon if he were not worthy of the title?"

"Correct."

"And you are putting yourself as bait; to draw Her in and create a situation where the other Bearers will be put to the test where friendship will be born under the heat of the moment." Trixie narrowed her eyes at the alicorn.

"Yes." The Emperor looked out the window at the setting sun before stretching his wings. "It's a risk, a potentially dangerous one, but we \_will\_ need the Elements if we are to defeat Her."

"I take it that Warmistress Gleaming Shield knows nothing about this?" Chrysalis asked, frowning.

"No, as she would tell me the same thing you would: that such a risk is unneeded, that I could not show up and let Eternal Night Moon attack Ponyville to try and flush me out. But then I would be putting my citizens in greater danger and that is something I cannot stand." With a weary look, he turned his attention back to the two mares. "Please, keep on researching \_that\_ recording. I \_know\_ I heard it before but I simply cannot place that sound."

"Will do Sire." The two saluted the Emperor as he walked out of the room, his bodyguards flanking him, and made his way towards the hanger to the chariot that would take him to Ponyville. A creeping sense of dread followed them all.

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><p>Lemon looked around the room with minor concern, watching the ponies walk around the small stage as several unicorns and pegasi went over the last minute checks of the cameras that would be broadcasting this across the entire Imperium. Lemon <em>should<em> have been talking to them to make sure thing were \_really\_ going ok but he was more concerned about four stal- no, three stallions and a ma-

'\_Dammit Slaanesh!\_' Lemon thought to himself, \_still\_ unable to place Slaanesh's gender this loop. The unicorn in question walked past him with a couple of drinks in hir magical hold, smiling at Bon Bon, who was helping her blind marefriend across the room to some seats off to the side that were designed specifically for a seapony.

The other three Chaos Gods were behaving themselves more or less, with Tzeentch, Khorne and Nurgle all huddling around the far end of the buffet table, talking to themselves about something. Ciaphas was surrounded by a couple of reporters, but thankfully for him, Derps flew past and knocked them away with a loud sorry over his shoulder. Slaanesh decided to give them a \_curious\_ look before moving on to the other three to join their discussion.

Groaning, Lemon started to walk over to them, as anything they were planning could not be good.

"-feel right either." Khorne muttered as Lemon came within listening range. The orange-esque pony grumbled a greeting towards him as he noticed Lemon, with the rest looking away.

"What feel right either K-Applejack?" Lemon asked, scolding himself for almost slipping in public.

"If you must know," Tzeentch drawled out, taking the cup that Slaanesh held out for him, reaching into his mane and pulling out a flask. After a considerable amount of time of pouring the alcohol into his plastic cup, he pulled it up and hoofed it over to Khorne, who began to do the same. "Something feels off."

"We can sense more or less the normal essence of your girlfriend Lemon," Nurgle said, using his wing to spike his cup of punch now. "But this presence is both foreign and familiar."

"He means," Slaanesh took over in talking and drink pouring, noticing Lemon's scowl. "That we we don't know it but pre-we did know it."

"And whatever it is, it's big." Khorne said calmly. "You can feel it on the very essence of the Warp itself, and with magic being so connected to it this loop, you can feel it at the back your mind, something scraping at your very sense of being. You have felt it too, right?"

Lemon frowned, and then let himself focus on the magic for a moment. Nyx had been good to convince him that magic usage was not all bad, with her helping him nab some high placed cookies when his wings were actually foal-like, among other things.

His magic well was calm, a bit deeper than the average unicorn but there was noth-

Blinking, Lemon's eyes shot open as something cold ran down his spine, making him shudder.

"Th-that was it, whatever it is, right?" He asked them, with the four walking away all of a sudden.

"Sorry Lemon, but I need to check something with the food!"

"Ooo, I need to go make sure my pets are ok!"

"I, er, need to make sure Lyra is ok!"

"Umâ€¦. I need to go hit on somepony!" the white unicorn shouted, running off.

"What the bu-"

"Lemon, what have we said about swearing?" A voice from behind made Lemon jump. Turning around, he saw the Emperor smirking at him from behind the curtains. "Need we to have a refresher about this particular lesson?"

"Si-sir!" Lemon sputtered out, forcing himself not to blush as he bowed before the stallion. "I'm sor-"

"At ease, my loyal student," The pony chuckled, his horn casting a minor spell to block out any other pony from their little discussion. "I merely wished to see how this evening progressed, and I must say I am greatly impressed with you."

"Thank yo-"

"Do you know \_why?\_"

"Um," Lemon blinked, ears folding backwards. "That I did everything without any fires being started?"

The Emperor merely laughed at this before shaking his head in the negative.

"You still have much to learn, my precious student," the Emperor said softly. "Now let us proceed with this little show, shall we?"

With a nod of his head, Lemon walked off to let the rest know that the show about to begin.

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra Heartstrings was nervous.<p>

Lyra Heartstrings was also a seapony, beings that were usually sent to scare away Khorne cultists members, among other threats as they choose to both embody the element of Laughter and the elite strike force against enemies of the Imperium.

Lyra Heartstrings was also the daughter of Old Stallion Henderson Heartstrings, who most seaponies thought was completely crazy, who loved her even more than his garden gnome collection -killing several cultists and daemons he thought stole them when it was a bunch of idiot kids that were told by Lord Helix to never \_ever\_ do it again.

Lyra Heartstring was also completely blind. Her father raised to be like any other seapony: teaching her all of their songs, which one to use for each situation, and how to fire and use nearly all types of weaponry. Apparently, he balked at his little filly going into anything chemical just because she was blind.

Lyra Heartstrings was also a very determined seapony, leaving Kitezah to travel to Canterlot as she had heard there were specialists that could possibly help her. But a layover in Ponyville turned out to be the best thing ever for her. She had made her way through the town by smell alone and ended up in the candy store. After talking with the owner, Lyra found it difficult to leave and ended up postponing her appointments, something she could do as her father had offered to go explain things to the doctors. In response to the infamous seapony's suggestion, they offered an extension for Lyra as long as he stayed away from them. He didn't stay away technically, going to check up on his daughter and the friend she had become so attached to. After a lovely meal, a wonderful and terrifying sing along incident, Old Stallion Henderson Heartstrings had declared Bon Bon to be an honorary seapony, much to Lyra's embarrassment and joy. Seaponies

didn't have secrets between each other, so he brought the baby pictures with him. Lyra still argued he did the whole thing to tease her, but Bon Bon usually countered it by kissing her cheek, promising sweets, or throwing a bit of guilt if the first two options failed.

Lyra Heartstrings, as such, was a very happy seapony, often singing several songs as she helped out around the shop, playing her lyre, or when she was doing her research on the mystical humans, but mostly when she was near Bon Bon.

But now, Lyra Heartstrings was trying her hardest to sing several songs of comfort to herself as that oppressing presence in the back of head was getting stronger. For a while now, a few months, Lyra had noticed something poking at her mental mind, something that was slowly chipping away at her species' natural ability to laugh and sing anything off. She had mentioned it to Bon Bon a number of times; which the mare said it was more than likely just a guilty conscience over something she did. After a while she stopped talking about and did her best to ignore it. Most of the time, she was able to manage just fine.

But now Lyra was fidgeting in her special seat, the kind ponies of Ponyville made for her lower half, trying to sing the songs of her people while not alarming Bon Bon. Something was coming.

And there was no song to fight back the fears she was feeling.

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis smiled and welcomed in the Imperium renowned occultist expert.<p>

"I greet you, Lady Zecora." Chrysalis bowed before the zebra, glad that she was able to come on such short notice.

"It's nothing, truly, I insist. What's wrong, and how may I assist?"

"You must understand, this is top secret and classified information." Chrysalis said, her eyes narrowed. "You cannot breathe a word to anybeing, understand?"

The zebra nodded her head. Trixie then carried the tape over to her while still examining the old texts.

"We have serious reason to believe that Eternal Night Moon is coming and with an unknown ally. Our only clue is this tape." Chrysalis eyes flicked up in concern. "I must warn you, whatever is on this blasted tape will be very unsettling."

"We've listened to at least fifteen times and it still scares me beyond comprehension." Trixie answered, levitating over a towel. "You will need this once you are done."

"Thank you for the cleaning aid, now let this dreadful tape be played." With that, they hit play once more. As the tape with the strange pops was played, Zecora's face began to fall. Long-dormant instincts were screaming at her to run away, that staying still was a death sentence. Her heart was racing in her ribcage, sweat pouring

down from her face as her legs threatened to give out. Before Zecora could even think about what was happening, the tape was over. Still stunned, Zecora used the towel to clean herself up as her mind raced to find an answer.

"That awful thing all hope destroys. What could create that wretched noise?" Zecora mused, shaking her head as she found nothing that matched up to the tape. "This foe will conquer all around. What knowledge have you two yet found?"

Trixie showed her the books and theories they had come up with, moving to the side as the zebra sat down between her and Chrystalis and they continued to go through the old texts. All the while the looming dread was continuing to grow as the strange pops were echoing in their heads.

\* \* \*

><p>Warmistress Gleaming Shield was doing her best not to pace back and forth across the bridge of the <em>Defiant<em>, the flag warship of the Imperium's home guard fleet, but it was very hard. She was very unhappy with the orders she had been given and how the Emperor was handling this crisis.

Eternal Night Moon was coming, and had managed to slip past nearly all their scouts and patrols, with a massive army of cultists and Orks flying behind Her. Not only that, but the rest of navy was still out on distant planets and too far away to help defend Equus if She were to attack within the month, or hours if she were to believe the rumours there were flying around! She was angry with the Emperor forcing her in this position; leaving the planetside and himself mostly unprotected with him going around on a PR campaign to calm the populace when it was obvious She was coming and that seeing their Emperor take down a few battlecruisers would do far more for morale than making a few speeches. The fact her family was not all safe within Canterlot was another sore spot with the Emperor sending her brother on a little errand run to Ponyville where there was not even a garrison in place and her fiancÃ© was off doing some charity work in Prance. Thankfully, she knew her Bolero was safe there as the Prance division was almost as fierce and deadly as any seapony scouting team, which were only second in pure ferocity when it came to fighting off the enemy with the old seapony army dwarfing any other force out in the known universe with their love for fighting.

Also, that annoying popping sound in the back of her head was back, and she was fighting back the wave of nausea and dread. She was trying to dismiss them as pre-battle nerves, but they still would not go away and they seemed to be getting lou-

"Warmistress?" Snapping her head, she saw her second in command Flash Sentry looking at her with mild concern. "Is everything alright?"

"Yes, sir Flash Sentry," she lied with a straight face as she was aware of the other officers looking at her for guidance now. They knew that they were going to be experiencing some kind of fight soon, and they were judging how bad it would be on her actions. She had to be calm so they would be calm. If she were to panic, then it would be pure havoc for everybeing aboard. She had set herself up as a stern

but respectable leader; addressing every soldier by name and title had made them more loyal to her and much more likely to follow her orders to the letter. "Miss Gilda, please turn on the feed and send it through the fleet. I expect an attack to occur after the Emperor's address and I want to boost up everybeing's morale before it happens." Gleaming Shield blinked and then continued to say, "If you can, have a few seconds delay for everybeing's feed beside ours, please." The griffon gave her a proper salute. Her talons clicked across the controls and suddenly on the screen was a simple stage.

Hopefully, the speech would be short, the battle would be easy to win and that annoying headache would be gone.

\* \* \*

><p>Bon Bon stamped her hooves with the rest of the ponies, smiling at the show that Butterscotch and his animals did for the Emperor, before frowning again. Lyra had been squirming a lot, clearly troubled by those strange headaches again and they were getting worse. While she had been teasing her marefriend about having a guilty conscience, Bon Bon had kept a close eye on her ever since she spoke of it and she was very worried for the seapony she'd come to love. She had been sleeping less and less now, muttering about the horrible pops when she <em>was<em> sleeping which she could only do now when Bon Bon held her close, and with Lyra singing her songs more often now which Bon Bon quickly pieced together was a security blanket for her precious marefriend.

Placing a hoof onto her shoulder, with Lyra nearly jumping out of her seat made Bon Bon ignore the Emperor walking past her.

"Lyra, are you ok dear? Do you need some air?" Bon Bon poured all her concern and love in her voice, unsettled to see Lyra trembling in fear now as she had believed there was nothing, not even all four Chaos Gods, could make a seapony truly afraid.

But Lyra was scared, very scared. Holding back sobs, Lyra latched onto her, begging to get out, to leave, that it was coming, it was so close, they needed to get out right now or they will all die!\_

As Bon Bon stood up to help Lyra out of the town hall, the roof exploded as Eternal Night Moon blasted her way in.

\* \* \*

><p>As Chrysalis and Zecora's eyes flicked to feed that was showing the ending of a pony's special musical piece for the Emperor, Trixie suddenly shouted in fear and horror.<p>

Jumping around Chrysalis and Zecora looked at the pale mare. "What's wrong Trixie?" Chrysalis asked, her heart pounding as well as her head, something making her feel tremendous dread, fear and horror, with every instinct screaming at her to run away.

"I've just figured out what the ally is and the Emperor's in grave danger!" Trixie shouted, pointing at the picture in the book. Both Chrysalis and Zecora came quite close to passing out with pure horror on their faces as the facts began to click.

Chrysalis, forcing herself to remain calm despite everything inside herself screaming that it was too late, that she should just give up as she already lost, began to order the guards to fly towards the Emperor when Eternal Night Moon blew the roof off and landed on the stage in front of the Emperor.

\* \* \*

><p>Gleaming Shield held back a gulp, as not to worry the already terrified soldiers. She was sure that seeing the Emperor was <em>only</em> thing keep the fleet together as all of the other captains were reporting their crews were nearly in full panic, with the senior officers constantly reminding them that they were the best of the best of the Imperium and so as long as the Emperor was standing, everything was ok so long as they were there to protect the innocents from the terrors of the Warp and beyond.

Rubbing her head, as the headache was even worse now, Gleaming Shield looked over the reports of the incoming fleet once more. Millions of ships were making a beeline for Equus, of all kinds and models; an unsettling number were stolen battlecruisers refitted by the cultists to praise their daemonic deity. Flying with them were large bands of Orks, and if the reports were correct, Eternal Night Moon managed to band together all of them for this attack that they were woefully underequipped and understaffed to face.

She was about to let out a prayer when Eternal Night Moon suddenly ripped off the roof of the town hall the Emperor and her little brother were in with a horrible mixture of blue, black and purple magic that made Gleaming Shield physically sick looking at, barely holding back her own vomit.

Eternal Night Moon had landed in front of the Emperor, covered completely in a cloak with horrific smile on Her face as She began to speak.

\* \* \*

><p>The Emperor of Ponykind had put on a fake smile for the crowd as they applauded for the pegasus's interesting musical number. His mind was on other matters as he began to walk past his little ponies, watching their faces to see if they were feeling it too.<p>

The answer was obvious. That crazy seapony's daughter thrashing about meant what he feared: whoever this ally was was bleeding over the entire Warp and touching everything connected to the Warp, which meant all life in existence was at risk. And if the torment the seapony seemed to be in was anything to go on, along with his own growing headache, that meant that the ally of Eternal Night Moon was getting closer, if not already in the town.

As he stood on the stage, he looked at Lemon Rush, wondering briefly what right did he have to put him and nearly all life at risk to beat this Eternal Night Moon this way instead of outright trying to remove Her head. But he squashed those thoughts and focused at the matter at hoof: he expected Her to attack any moment and the ally to come in from some unknown direction.

As he started to say his boring and rather pointless speech, She



flew in, completely covered in a cloak except for her head which was covered in an unnatural shadow, after literally ripping off the roof with blue, black and purple magic that seemed to violate his very core of being.

And then, even before he could think, he was drawn into a Heartsong with Her.

\_ "Dear little ponies\_

\_ Dear little friends\_

\_ Are you ready to meet\_

\_ Your dear little ends?"\_

Eternal Night Moon began to sing in a perverted mixture of different voices while moving in a circular fashion, with each step creating those awful popping sounds.

\_ "Just give up\_

\_ Just give in\_

\_ Just watch as we win\_

\_ You've no chance to prevail\_

\_ You're hopeless\_

\_ Afraid\_

\_ Our victory is made\_

\_ All you will do is fail."\_

The Emperor, struggling to stay aware, fired a beam of his alicorn magic at Her, only for Her to chuckle and dance away again, making the popping sounds that were slowly becoming a lot more familiar. She turned to face him now, her smile blinding him ever so slightly with her pointed fangs.

\_ "Greetings dear brother\_

\_ How far you've come\_

\_ But sorry, it's pointless\_

\_ We've already won\_

\_ Just give up\_

\_ Just join in\_

\_ Taste the darkness within\_

\_ You've no chance to prevail\_

\_ You're hopeless\_

\_You see\_

\_Become One with Me\_

\_All you can do is fail."\_

"You will not win, for my ponies stand strong!" The Emperor shouted, trying to break free of the Heartsong, blasting Eternal Night Moon once more with his golden magic only for Her to dance away from it again. But this time, she flew into sky, shedding her cloak. She was flying against the moon, painting picture of Her clear to all.

Instantly, the Emperor knew he failed horribly. Snapping his head around, he ordered his ponies to flee in a shaky voice. But he made one fatal mistake.

He took his eyes off of Her.

\_"Just try to stop us\_

\_We'll laugh when you lose"\_

Snapping his head around, he realized his mistake too late. Eternal Night Moon blasted him with all three strands of magic, each one eating into his soul, as he was sent flying backwards. Dimly aware, he realized he had crashed into his golden throne back at top of Canterlot mountain with the magic already fighting inwards, with his awareness being engulfed by the horrible popping of his ancient, forgotten foe.

"My ponies, Lemon," he wheezed, his eyes growing heavy, "I'm so sorry." And then all he saw was darkness and all he heard was the popping of his old foe.

\* \* \*

><p>The town hall was complete and utter chaos; with ponies screaming and crying as they saw firsthoof their invincible Emperor smacked clear across the sky, just before completely breaking down in fear of monster in front of them.<p>

The monster laughed, with the purple goo encasing it's body continuing to make the horrible popping sound as it moved around with new faces coming and going, with a hint of something reflective underneath it all.

\_"We've already won,\_

\_\*\*FOR WE ARE THE SMOOZE!\*\*"\_

And then, Eternal Night Moon unleashed a part of itself into the crowd before laughing again and disappearing into the sky.

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra was crying, scared beyond all comprehension, beyond nearly all strains of consciousness. She had to get out, had to get home, get in the nearest seacave and hide with Bon Bon until <em>it<em> was gone.

The screams were so loud it hurt her ears, causing her to whimper loudly. She wished she never left her home, that she was home with Bon Bon and papa, she wanted her papa and her Bon Bon, she had her Bon Bo-

All of a sudden, Bon Bon's guiding hoof was gone. Somepony ran into her, ran into Bon Bon, she ran into somepony, Bon Bon had ran into somepony, she ran Bon Bon, Bon she-

"Bon Bon?!" She screamed, hiccuping and crying as she was jostled around, falling to the ground, the screams were too much, where was Bon Bon? She need her Bon Bon, somepony just ran over her, wherewasBonBon, the hoofs were getting heavier, more hurtful, wherewasBonBon!?

And while she and others screamed for their loved ones, the Smooze was closing in on its prey.

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis ran with Trixie and Zecora towards the Emperor. The guards were either fleeing their posts or trying to aid the panicking servants. She stumbled as another batch of drones died of a sudden overload of fear.<p>

Shaking her head, she let herself be helped up by Trixie and Zecora as they fought against the stream of terrified beings to reach the unguarded doors of the throne room. Pushing them open, the three mares gasped at what they saw.

The Emperor was thrashing on his fallen golden throne with his own golden aura enclosing himself and the Smooze. It seemed, despite everything, the Emperor was still fighting as the Smooze seemed to be struggling to reach his horn, its body wrestling to encompass the golden power armor of the alicorn.

"Against the Smooze's awful might there must be some crusade." Zecora said, looking over the Emperor with a worried face. "For if it and the Emp'ror merge, we will not live the day."

"Agreed," Chrysalis said, shuddering as another cluster of her drones died as part of the Warp flickered unpredictably, destroying their minds. "But how do we fight something that we can't touch, something that the Emperor was powerless to fight and if we can't, how do we-" She stopped herself as her mind went to areas that usually meant execution for treasonous thoughts.

Trixie dropped her bags and pulled out the books on the Smooze.

"Let us see what we can do then," she said solemnly, avoiding the issues. "Before we have to think of that."

She turned her attention to the Smooze that was staring at them now, laughing and popping.

Fighting back a wave of fear, Trixie forced herself to look away from the Smooze. "It's the only thing we can do."

\* \* \*

><p>Gleaming Shield was doing her best not to panic as she began to yell at the next captain that was starting to break out of formation again. Their long range scans showed that all the reports were correct, there <em>was</em> a massive fleet coming to kill them all or worse and every single officer almost soiled themselves and was close to deserting.

It was taking all of her focus to make sure that everypony was still together in a defensible formation that she couldn't focus on a solid plan of action for them to take!

What had she been thinking in ordering to have a feed go up? She knew an attack was likely to happen, so why had she order for everypony-being to see the Emperor being attacked?! She was entrusted with the safety of the Imperium and Equus, and she'd singlehoofedly destroyed all hope out there for their survival with her blunder!

It didn't help that she was still hearing the Smooze in her head. She knew she wasn't crazy, as other high level magic users and Warp experts were removed of duty. The pops were too painful for them to handle, and they couldn't be trusted in performing their duties. A few had already snapped and tried to blow the Smooze out of their heads with their guns.

She wasn't crazy. But she was getting there, with its pop and its words taking its toll on her mental state. Soon, she'd turn her gun onto herself, and then-

NO!

Shaking her head, she yelled at captain Tender Hoof to stallion the buck up this instant or so help her she would shove him back up his mother and find another being that could do his bucking job!

Biting her lip, she turned off the feed with a furious captain of the Endurance yelling at her, no longer caring.

She knew she was going to die, but she was going to make sure to make them pay for it every inch.

And then She appeared in the middle of the sky, floating in space as the massive enemy fleet flew in behind her, smiling at them all, the Smooze thundering through the ship now with its sickening laugh and pops.

Narrowing her eyes, squaring her shoulders, and thinking of her family and her Bolero one more time, she sat down in her captain's seat, buckled up, and prepared for her last battle against a monster that not even the Emperor could defeat.

Gleaming Shield looked at her crew, took a deep breath as she fought back the Smooze in her head, and nodded her head.

"Never give in, never surrender, and if possible, act like a bucking seapony; wear a smile as we fight the Smooze and spit in its face as we kill every last one of those motherbuckers and send the Smooze back to whatever hole it came from!" Her voice was shaky, her nerves showing and her youth was showing against the experienced veterans in her crew.

But her soldiers simply yelled for the Imperium, for the Emperor, and for life itself!

Smiling faintly to herself, morale was back to some degree. Now she needed to do the impossible and defeat a fleet of millions with an unknown number of Orks and a monster that was able to touch every single soldier she had under her and had knocked the Emperor out with ease.

Maybe with a miracle, they would survive the night.

The Smooze's laughter breached the \_Defiant\_ as its tri-colored magical beam completely obliterated the \_Endurance\_, the \_Defiant\_'s sister ship, going through its shield as if it weren't even there.

Gleaming Shield didn't need a miracle to survive the night; she needed at least six to survive the hour.

\* \* \*

><p>Lemon panted as they ran out the town hall with Tzeentch, Khorne, Slaanesh and Nurgle around him, almost shielding him from the panicking stampede of ponies running away from the Smooze, screaming in utter fear.<p>

After being shepherded off to a empty area of their own, Lemon looked at the four before noticing that Ciaphas had vanished, unsurprisingly. The primarch groaned, trying to think of what to-

"So what's the plan, squirt?" Tzeentch asked, giggles threatening to leave his mouth. All of them turned their heads in confusion at \_that\_ before Tzeentch groaned, rubbing his head. "I think the \_Pink\_ is getting to me."

"\_Wonderful\_," Lemon said bitterly, the screams were getting louder. "And the plan: unleash hell on it with stuff from-"

"If you are going to say subspace pocket, don't bother," Nurgle cut him off, rolling his eyes. "There's not much in Yggdrasil that can fight the Smooze and I know that \_I\_ don't have the firepower to hold it back without crashing the loop."

There was a nod of agreements from the rest of the Chaos Gods, causing Lemon to facehoof. "So let's grab the Elements of Harmony, find whoever is suppose to be the Bearers this loop and make sure that they blast the Smooze far away."

"One problem with \_that\_ plan," Khorne muttered, looking upwards as explosions were going off-his sister Gleaming Shield was up \_there!\_ The thought slammed into Lemon's consciousness. "Among \_other\_ problems, to be honest."

"Such as?" Lemon snapped, rubbing his head as he was beginning to get a headache from all of this.

"That if we go \_after\_ them, it will notice us and we're back to square one," Slaanesh said, a frown on hir face. "It won't take the

Smooze long to pick up on our magic and figure out what we're trying to do."

"So what \_can\_ we-"

"I believe I have a solution and a plan for this," Khorne said, grinning as he leaned over to whisper something into Tzeentch ear.

"Ooo." Tzeentch stopped bouncing in place, tapping his chin. "\_That\_ could work very nicely, very nicely indeed."

"What can work nicely?"

Tzeentch leaned over to Nurgle and Slaanesh, whispering the same plan to the both of them. Both of them perked up and grinned, with the later giving Khorne as surprised look.

"Colour me impressed. I didn't think you had it in your plans going beyond straight up attacks," Slaanesh said, wiggling hir hips.

"Oh shut up Slaanesh," Khorne snapped back with a grin. "Let's go-"

"Let's \_not\_ go until you tell me what the Oak you four are planning!" Lemon shouted, causing them to jump.

"Lemon Rush, \_Leman Russ\_," Khorne's face became still, looking straight at him. "We simply do \_not\_ have time to explain \_everything\_ to you right now as the Smooze is getting stronger by the second. You must trust me, and us, in this."

Lemon looked at Khorne for what felt like a long time, staring into his eyes before seeing nothing but truth. Sighing, Lemon nodded his head towards them.

With that, the four of them glowed for a moment before staggering a bit.

"There, that should buy us some time," Khorne said, shaking his head and pushing his hat on tighter.

"What will?"

"Just look up, sir," a panting Ciaphas answered, flying in beside them. He was battered and a bit bloody, but still intact.

Lemon complied, and his mouth fell at what he saw.

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra was still crying, curled up into a tight ball. For the last few seconds, she had been hearing loud bangs, unlike any firearm she ever encountered, and they were getting closer. The thought of the Smooze having unknown firepower was too much, the idea of her Bon Bon being shot dead flashing over in her mind constantly.<p>

All she wanted was to hide under the blankets in her old bed with her stuffed dollies, with her Bon Bon and her papa telling her everything would be fine, that this was one horrifically bad dream and

everything would be ok when she wo-

Something grabbed her, pulling her somewhere. With a scream, she bit whatever grabbed her; a seapony would welcome Death with either a song or a fight, and Lyra Heartstrings was still a seapony.

And she was all out of songs.

Clamming her jaw down on the appendage, she heard it swear to an oak tree before hearing another of the strange bangs.

"Let me go!" Lyra roared, her flight or fight instincts finally ticking over to the latter, as her teeth found more flesh.  
"LETMEGOLETMEGOLETMEG-"

"Lyra?!"

And with that, everything in Lyra's mind turned off.

\* \* \*

><p>"Are you sure this will work?" Trixie asked the zebra, eying the closed doors. All order had fallen in the city, and for everything they had, they were *still* three undefended mares. One had no direct magical powers, the other had limited magical skills, and the last was occupied with a far greater task.

Zecora gave her a nod. "The Smooze does grow when met with fear and pain, to send it peace and love is only sane."

"Let's hope you're right," Trixie said, looking at the sweating changeling queen, her horn glowing green as she fed every positive emotion she had into the Emperor and the Smooze to very little effect-

"LOOK!" Zecora shouted, pointing at the night sky as something began to form which made Trixie's legs weak.

"Oh, what next!?" she shouted at the heavens.

And the heavens answered in the form of several burly looking stallions breaking down the doors.

\* \* \*

><p>If Gleaming Shield managed to live through this, she would resolve to *never* ask for a miracle again, let alone six.

Without any warning, the buffing Chaos Gods had stepped out of the stars and were right behind them!\_

The Armored Being, dressed in bloodstained metal with the sword that had caused irreversible damage to the Warp hanging over her entire fleet.

The Twisted Mutant, ever changing its form and body with two wicked blades in its hands.

The Bloated Corpse, body covered in sores and rot, the revolting

stench from its decaying body breaching the hull as it held the simple but massive stone blade in one hand.

The Seducer, an impossibly beautiful entity that had been born from the Flutterponies' descent into depravity without equal, held a simple slender sword in its hands.

All the while, the Smooze was laughing and bouncing on the spot.

\_ "We have won, \_

\_ The battle is over, \_

\_ The Chaos Gods are born again, \_

\_ And they serve onl- "\_

\*\*\*"SHUT YOUR DAMN UGLY BUBBLY FACE, YOU SHOGGOTH REJECT!"\*\* Without warning, Khorne brought his sword down onto the Smooze. With only milliseconds, the Smooze summoned a shield around itself, the residual energy causing several of the opposing fleet's warships to explode. \*\*\*"WE ARE THE \_TRUE\_ GODS OF THE UNIVERSE, WE ARE SLAVES TO \_NO\_ BEING! YOU DARE TO ATTACK WITHOUT HONOUR, WITHOUT MERCY, WITHOUT HONESTY IN BATTLE?! I SAY \_NO!"\*\* Holding its blade upwards, it began to address Gleaming's fleet. \*\*\*"IT IS THE TIME TO FIGHT AS YOU MORTALS HAVE NEVER FOUGHT BEFORE! IT IS TIME TO SMITE YOUR FOES AND BREAK THEIR SPIRIT FOR DARING TO STRIKE DOWN THE \_TRUE\_ ENEMY OF THE \_TRUE\_ CHAOS GODS, SHOW THEM NO MERCY FOR WHAT THEY HAVE DONE TO YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS AND DARE TO DO TO THE REST OF YOUR KIND! IT IS TIME TO SPILL THEIR BLOOD AS THE TRUE WARRIORS OF HONESTY AND BRAVERY I \_KNOW\_ YOU ALL ARE! FOR THEY ARE NOT FIGHTING FOUR GODS BUT AN \_ARMY\_ OF GODS!"\*\*

With that Khorne brought his blade down against the Smooze once more, with the other three lending their swords to shatter the shields of the Smooze. And for a split second, the Smooze stopped laughing.

Gleaming Shield shouted with the rest of her crew as they began their assault on the enemy fleet. Maybe they \_would\_ live through the hour.

\* \* \*

><p>Lemon blinked, still under the spell of seeing the Chaos Gods in the sky fighting the Smooze.<p>

The spell was broken when someone slapped the back of his head.

Letting out a yelp, he turned around to see the Chaos Gods glaring at him.

"If you are done gawking at us, something I \_cannot\_ understand to be honest, we need to \_move!\_" Slaanesh snapped, shuffling on the spot.

"Fine, as long as you will explain \_that.\_" Lemon gestured upwards as the group began to run towards the Everfree Forest. "And what the



hell happened to \_you?\_" Lemon looked at Ciaphas, who was still keeping up with them despite his injuries.

"Saving people, sir," Ciaphas said with a wheeze, as they went through the back alley of the town. "Damn seaponies can \_really\_ bite hard."

"Wha- that's doesn't make any sense!" Lemon snapped as they approached the bridge. Looking upwards, he looked at the four loopers and glared as Tzeentch and Slaanesh vanished. "Explain, now!" He stopped in the middle of the bridge, preventing them to go further

With a sigh, the four began to explain.

\* \* \*

><p>"-and <em>that's<em> how I made my thermite grenade launcher!" Trixie laughed as she fired another round at the few stallions left alive after they tried to take advantage of Chrysalis, Zecora and her, causing them to run faster in the streets as her aim had was still a bit off. Instead of killing all of them as she had been \_trying\_ to do, she merely sent them flying through the sky and landing painful on the ground below.

"I say, that tale is truly cinematic," Zecora said with awe still on her face. "You do have quite the flair for blasts dramatic."

Trixie blushed at the praise, and looked at the floor. She then looked over at Chrysalis, whose green magic was still arched towards the Emperor. It seemed that their attempts to fight the Smooze \_was\_ correct, but nowhere near enough to actually drive away the Smooze.

Her eyes flicked upwards, watching the Chaos Gods \_defend\_ Equus and the Imperium with a smile. Somehow seeing \_them\_, of all things, inspired her to fight onwards.

All of a sudden, Slaanesh and Tzeentch vanished from the sky, leaving Nurgle and Khorne alone with the Smooze.

Without warning, the doors slammed open \_again\_, revealing the Chaos God of Lust. Slaanesh had a wicked grin on its face.

Pointing its sword behind it, the Chaos God laughed, "\_There\_ they are!" With another laugh the Chaos God swung its sword towards the mares as the beings behind it fell into the room.

\* \* \*

><p>Tzeentch started to laugh uncontrollably, startling Gleaming Shield as it popped in beside her.<p>

"On your left flank maggot! Enemy inbound!" Tzeentch shouted, with Gleaming Shield staring dimly at it. With a strained sigh and giggles, Tzeentch glared at her. "Did you not hear me? I said on your flank! Get that lead out of your ears or you'll end up pushing space daisies!"

Numbly, Gleaming Shield turned to Gilda. "Prepare for enemy

engagement incoming on the left."

Gilda simply stared at her, blinking slowly.

Gleaming Shield's training kicked in at that point. "Dammit soldier, I gave you an \_order\_!"

That caused Gilda to snap out of her daze. The griffon thrust her chest out, sneering at Gleaming Shield as she began to relay the orders across the fleet.

Gleaming Shield smiled as the tide began to turn in their favour when Tzeentch laughter caused her to turn around.

"I understand now! I understand the \_Pink!\_"

And the Chaos God simply laughed and laughed as it began to give more advice to fight their enemies.

Gleaming Shield sighed; this was going to be a \_long\_ night.

\* \* \*

><p>"We tore ourselves in half, in a sense," Nurgle responded, casting his eyes to the side as the rest of them were eyeing him with a seemingly disappointed look on their faces. "We've put nearly everything we had up there without causing too much damage on this plane."<p>

"Yes, and it's \_very\_ annoying to try act in two places at once at this level of existence." Khorne grumbled while standing on the bridge. "It doesn't help that \_I'm\_ the only one fighting the Smooze now, with you Nurgle making sure that your diseases and \_gifts\_ are given to the foes, Tzeentch giggling like a loon and guiding the fleet, and how \_many\_ more drones are you going to look for Slaanesh!?"

"I \_always\_ give my gifts!"

"Do you think I \_want\_ to laugh constantly and know the \_Pink?!\_"

"Drones for the drone throne-OW!"

Slaanesh rubbed his head, glaring at the furious earth pony and fixing his scarf.

"Ok, \_enough\_, let's just get going already," Ciaphas Cane grumbled, rolling his eyes. "I \_don't\_ like being the centre of anything, much less voice of reason or logic if I can help it. Now if you don't mind sir, \_please\_ get out of the way!"

Lemon blinked slowly, turning around to continue into the forest with the Chaos Gods still behind him and with Ciaphas still running with them, following the beaten pathway towards the old castle of the Royal Pony Siblings.

Standing near the cliff edge, Lemon began to scout a way down when a very sharp and very recognisable whistle caught his attention. Snapping his head upwards, he saw the remains of a wing coming

straight toward-

"FORWARDS!" Lemon shouted, running down the cliff side with the rest on his tail.

Normally, such an action as running down a cliff side with debris falling on your head would not be a problem for Lemon Russ, certainly not for a looper experienced in conflict as a human or as a pony. But there was still one thing no warrior, no matter how efficient and train he was, could account for and that was random, unknown surprise element. As they reached the bottom of forest floor, something happened. Maybe it was the wing crashing into the ground or maybe it was just poor luck but as Lemon right forehoof touched the wall, he slipped with a loud crack.

Following his training instincts, Lemon tucked and rolled the last few feet as the pain seared through his entire body, dimly aware of people shouting his name. Closing his eyes as he tried to fight the pain, he felt someone move his body to a more exposed position, with someone moving his left forehoof away.

All of a sudden, he felt a wave of calmness and was aware of someone hovering over him.

"-nk you Nurgle, now he won't be passing out like a little kid," Slaanesh muttered, leaning down to look at -OH

Lemon was no novice to injuries; suffered countless in his own loops and he was good at not passing out when he needed to amputate a limb in the odd loop or when he replaced one of the Skywalkers.

It was still a shock to the system to see his pastern like this and it would be a long time before he could think of putting any real pressure on it.

"-ou've sprained it Lemon." Blinking, Lemon saw Slaanesh break off a branch from a tree and float it down to his leg. At the same time, Slaanesh removed his scarf and looked at longingly. Spoken in a low tone that only Lemon was able to hear Slaanesh said, "Sorry Naoki, didn't mean to ruin your gift this fast." With a pained look on his face, Slaanesh tore it down the middle and began to secure the branch to his leg with the straps.

"Do you think you can stand sir?" Ciaphas asked softly, lending him a wing to lean on. Lemon pulled himself upright, letting out whimpers of pain as he was forced to put some weight on the sprained pastern.

"Da-dammit," Lemon swore, biting his lip. "This damn injury will slow us down far too mu-"

"We'll get to the castle once we do, Lemon." Khorne cut him off, seemingly not in a foul mood for once. "It'd be pointless and futile to force you to move at top speeds right now. What we need to do is keep moving."

The other Chaos God nodded their heads, moving closer to Lemon as if to shield him as they began to trot at a speed that Lemon was able to match comfortably.

Still, something was poking at the back of his head and it was not the headache. The four ponies around him, they were-

"Why are you four acting so weird?"

That question caused the four of them to stop dead in their tracks, their faces unreadable as looked at him before each other.

Tzeentch sighed, "Of all times he asks, he asks now." He then elbowed Khorne to speak, thrusting his head towards Lemon.

Sighing, Khorne spoke slowly to him. "Lemon Russ, do you know what we are?"

Lemon frowned, trying to piece together what scheme the four of them were planning. "You're the Chaos Gods."

"NO!" Khorne snapped, stomping his hooves before shaking himself and started to move forwards with the rest of the group following him. "That's who we are, not what we are!"

"That doesn't make sense, how you can not be the Chaos Gods yet be them at the same time!" Lemon shouted back, glaring at them as Nurgle slowed down to address him.

"What he meant to say was do you know what a Chaos God is?"

"Huh?" Lemon blinked at the question before he found his tongue again. "Ye-es, you're the embodiment of Warp's negative emotions."

Slaanesh huffed, rolling hir eyes. "And good ones. I'm suppose to a Love God, after all, and several of emotions I embody are not that bad. Pleasure and Mastery are under my domain, something all enjoy and I know that you've praised the Beauty of a certain pair of moons more than once in the past. But that's besides the point; what we are is the embodiments of emotions felt in the Warp made into a physical form."

"Or were," Tzeentch said without turning his head around.

"Were?" Lemon asked, blinking as he started to walk on his own.

"We're like SkyNet, in a way," Tzeentch sighed. "For everything we were before we started Looping, we still lacked one thing that all you mortals had. A true sense of self."

The four of them actually sighed sadly at this, with Khorne speaking again. "Everything for me was the battle, the fight, the honour, the blood, the victories, the skulls, but that was because that was expected of me, forcing the concept of what a blood crazed god would be."

"None of us had a true identity, a true sense of being until we began to loop," Nurgle said with his head low. "Sure we did plan, scheme, fought, thought and a thousand other things, but that was all because that's what we were forced to be!"

"I couldn't go on an all out attack like Khorne no more than Khorne

could convince thousands to have one big orgy. It was simply beyond us."

"And then we began to loop." Tzeentch said happily, his body relaxing. "For the first time, we were truly living. We could do as please without any of your notions defining who we must be. And once we learned of the reason why the time resets were happening and what it meant..."

They all had a brief look of pure joy on their faces, as if tasting freedom for the first time in their lives before it vanished.

"Then why do you act so...chaos gody all of the time?" Lemon asked as they were nearing the river. He was still trying to comprehend what the four were saying and whatever Nurgle did to him for his injury was starting to wear off.

"Oh please," Slaanesh laughed as s/he began to levitate tree trunks across the river. "Just because we can do stuff outside of our baseline selves doesn't meant we won't. I still like to find new partners to sleep with; I've even got a list of who to do," Slaanesh paused, ears darting upwards. "My to-do list!"

Tzeentch, Ciaphas and Slaanesh laughed, with Khorne and Nurgle groaning at the poor joke.

"Why have you never told me any of this?" Lemon said with a bit more hostility than he would have liked to but what was done was done.

"Would you have listened, or cared if we brought this up out the blue?" Tzeentch glared at him, ears flicking as Slaanesh placed the last tree in place for them to cross. "No, you would have shot at us, or just flat out ignore us which is very rude\_ and I am sure Fluttershy taught you better than that!"

"Like you four are any better!" Lemon snapped back, face a bit red as he began to think of what the Little Mother would say about his behaviour towards his loopers. "Half the time we loop here, you tease me and do your best to annoy the hell out of me with your stupid antics!" He leaned back on Ciaphas, as they walked across the makeshift bridge, his leg starting hurt.

The Chaos Gods looked red in the face as they moved up the hill in silence when Ciaphas coughed.

"If I may, I think I know the answer." He looked at the four Chaos Gods who stared at him before nodding their heads. "A majority of the time, you four loop together, correct?" He was given a nod to this in the affirmative. "So you have formed a sense of comradery for each other, as that no one can try to mortify one but the other three, yes?"

The Chaos Gods looked at each other, staring at each other's eyes before turning back and nodding again at the pegasus. "And most of the time, when one of you loop here with Leman, you are related to the Emperor in some way, brother or sister or the like?"

There was a pause before they nodded again before turning rigidly forwards to the rope bridge, Nurgle flying down to bring it up for

them.

"Sir, I do believe they were trying to act their roles then and other times because they feel that you are apart of that band of camaraderie they have for each other."

Lemon blinked at what Ciaphas said, and then turned his head towards the Chaos Gods in surprise when they said nothing to deny it.

Thenâ€|

"If you say the F word, I swear I will drop kick you." Khorne muttered as they walked across the bridge.

"Agreed. We've might have changed but not that much," Slaanesh shuddered as they walked closer to crumbling castle. "You'll never see me turn someone down, for example and we will not say the F word. Ever!"

Nodding their heads in agreement, the four Chaos Gods pushed the doors open and walked towards the stone orbs of the Elements.

Using hir magic, Slaanesh began to levitate the orbs to each of them to hold.

"Good, now that's done, let's get back and find who the Elements are." The white unicorn said when a blast of cold air entered the room as the Smooze flew in.

\* \* \*

><p>Bon Bon shouldn't be staring out the windows, but she had to. Something drove her to do so, probably because of her crazy, insane, curious, beautiful, lovely, sweet, wonderful, perfect marefriend Lyra.<p>

Said marefriend was resting against her, a fin still clamped tightly around her barrel with her head resting on her shoulder. Lyra had more or less tackled her over once Ciaphas brought her in the library and refused to let go since. Bon Bon couldn't blame her as she was not letting her go again either, and was doing her best to convince herself that it wasn't her fault she lost Lyra in the panic in the town hall, that Lyra was separated from the one pony that was able to help the blind seapony was not her fault, that Lyra nearly died was not her fault, that Lyra had nearly became one with the Smooze was not her fault.

She was trying.

Lyra mumbled something in her sleep, something about humans and cats, before leaning into Bon Bon's side with a happy snore. Bon Bon had learned that the seapony had fit that spot beside her perfectly a long time ago, with her head belonging on top of the seapony's head to complete everything.

Smiling, Bon Bon kissed her head when she heard a series of gasps.

The Chaos God Khorne was fighting the Smooze when he suddenly

vanished. And then so did Nurgle.

"Bon Bon, I don't like this!" Lyra said, leaning into her side for comfort, apparently awake this whole time. She would need to remember this for later. If there \_was\_ a later.

"Me neither." Bon Bon said, stroking her back as the Smooze's laughter began to fill the room again.

Still, if this \_was\_ the end, Bon Bon would have Lyra, and for that, she was happy.

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright you lot, come on, move on, keep it going!" With a clap of its- <em>hir<em> - hands, the Chaos God Slaanesh rushed more drones and ponies into the throne room, with Trixie by its-\_hir\_ side to reassure the populace that it was not a trap or a bad idea to listen to a Chaos God.

Normally that would be hard to sell, but thanks to Slaanesh's tearing off the doors, everybeing walking into the room could see what they were saying was true and that they \_could\_ help.

Slaanesh had forced the first batch of surviving drones into the throne room before grabbing Trixie to find more ponies, with her being the reassuring carrot to the terrifying stick that was Slaanesh, to help them save the Emperor.

And it was \_working!\_

While they might not have enough emotions stored up to vanquish the Smooze completely, the positive emotions from all the beings in the room linked together was driving it back, ever so slightly.

It was not much, with over seventy beings working together the Smooze only losing small ground against their attempts but they were giving their Emperor a chance to win, a chance to \_live!\_

Then without warning Slaanesh groaned in pain and vanished.

\* \* \*

><p>Gleaming Shield found herself yelling once more, with Tzeentch laughing beside her as it gave more outstanding orders that were keeping them one step ahead the enemy, and most importantly; her crew were in <em>very<em> high spirits. She wasn't sure of it exactly, but it seemed at some point during the night Flash Sentry had proposed to Gilda to which the griffon shouted about bucking time. Hopefully they had a soldier take over their stations before they started snogging each other over.

Tzeentch had to have fired a wedding cake at them for a \_reason\_ after all.

Right?

Shaking her head, she order the \_Excelsior\_ to fire when Tzeentch suddenly swore in pain as he vanished.

\* \* \*

><p>The Smooze smiled wickedly from above them, the purple goo dancing around the body with glee.<p>

\_"Thanks, foolish ponies\_"

\_"You led me here\_"

\_"Your Emperor will fail\_"

\_"And you'll tremble with fear"\_"

Khorne growled, pawing the ground as if to charge "I don't think so, you anno-" but was caught off when the Smooze slammed a wave of magic into Khorne, knocking him into a wall.

"HEY!" Slaanesh shouted, throwing some stone rumble at the Smooze above. "Only \_I\_ can slap Khorne around!"

\_"Watch as I\_"

\_"Conquer all\_"

\_"The mighty do fall\_"

\_"You've no chance to prevail"\_"

Ducking and laughing, the Smooze grabbed the thrown stone and shot it straight back at Slaanesh while firing Smooze to entrap the pony.

Slaanesh would have been stoned to death if not for Nurgle leaping up and tackling Slaanesh out of the way. Unfortunately, Nurgle got hit on the side with several large stones, knocking him into a corner of the room painfully.

\_"That's right,\_"

\_"Old man, cry\_"

\_"Just curl up and die\_"

\_"All you will do is fail\_"

\_"You imbecile ponies\_"

\_"Think you can win?\_"

\_"You're nothing to me\_"

\_"You'd better give in"\_"

Slaanesh was furious now, turning many of the rumble into sharp small swords. "NO ONE TOUCHES THEM BUT \_ME!\_" Slaanesh roared, throwing every single sword at the Smooze. The Smooze didn't even move as every single sword pierced itself but it laughed.

Suddenly, the remains of Slaanesh's scarf tightened around the pony's neck as it began to float into the sky.



\_ "Horny colt\_

\_ Preen and prance\_

\_ And dance, pervert, dance\_

\_ You've no chance to prevail"\_

The Smooze laughed as it slammed the asphyxiating pony into the side of a wall, with Slaanesh body slumping over.

"YOU THINK YOU CAN TAKE US ON AND WIN!? I AM TZEENTCH, GOD OF CHANGE AND BEHOLDER OF THE PINK!"

\_ "Delusion-\_

\_ Al foal\_

\_ I've total control\_

\_ All you can do is fail"\_

The Smooze laughed as it launched the blades that Slaanesh created, and threw them at the pink stallion. Backing up to avoid being skewered, Tzeentch found himself back against a wall with a balcony hanging above. The Smooze laughed as it ripped off the balcony and sent it crashing down on Tzeentch's head.

\_ "The cripple, the coward\_

\_ It's all down to you\_

\_ But soon, my dear friends\_

\_ You'll both be dead too"\_

Ciaphas glared, shoving Lemon to the side as he flapped his wings once and then disappeared.

\_ BANG.\_

The Smooze laughed as a bit of leaked to the floor as Ciaphas appeared on the other side of the room with a sharp knife in his hoof.

\_ "Simple fool\_

\_ You're no threat\_

\_ What, are you upset?\_

\_ You've no chance to prevail\_

\_ I'm invin-\_

\_ Cible\_

\_ I'll swallow you whole\_

\_All you will do is fail"\_

The ground under Ciaphas exploded, sending the pegasus across the room and into a pillar with a sickening thud.

The Smooze then danced its way over to Lemon, smiling hideously at his prone form.

\_"The warrior, defeated\_

\_With mightier force\_

\_The old fool was put in his place\_

\_The lecherous pervert\_

\_Fell prey to the noose\_

\_The idiot got egg on his face\_

\_"The coward resisted his betters\_

\_By fighting us, death's what you choose\_

\_You'll never win here\_

\_Your end's drawing near\_

\_For we're the all-powerful Smooze!"\_

Something inside Lemon snapped. Snorting as he forced himself to his hooves, he summoned his magic.

"SHUT YOUR DAMN MOUTH!" Lemon sent a beam of magic against the Smooze's face as he dashed forwards, temporarily blinding it.

"Those are \_WONDERFUL\_ people, far better than I can \_ever\_ hope to be!" The Smooze laughter turned bitter as it shook its head to clear its vision, sending beams of magic towards the looper.

"Khorne inspired people with true, power, \_honest\_ words!" Lemon danced away from the bolts of magic, adrenaline surging through his body.

"Nurgle, \_always\_ giving his own gifts to any who would pass by, always thinking of other in his own unique \_kind\_ way!" A form was planning in Lemon's mind, something that he was dimly aware of. He just knew he needed to get \_closer\_.

"Slaanesh might be a self-centered bastard that may care for himself above all, but \_shi\_ does care for those close to hir heart!" Jumping over a beam of Smooze magic, he waved his front right leg at the pony shape Smooze blob. "This scarf meant a lot to hir, but \_without\_ batting an eye, shi \_generously\_ gave this is up for me!"

"Tzeentch is one of the smartest people I know, and with all that horrible knowledge he's picked up, he learned the best way to deal with monsters like you," Lemon snorted at the furious Smooze, "And that's to take the piss away from freaks like \_YOU\_ and \_LAUGH!\_"

The Smooze laughter turned vicious, firing beam around the room in attempts to hit the unicorn now, throwing stone and rubble at him with most hitting the same spot in the center of the room.

"Ciaphas is \_NO COWARD!\_" He yelled ducking under the beam of blue magic, and pushing himself over the black magic and diving behind the piece of the wall that the Smooze threw just a few second ago. "He went back again and again to save other people and unlike any sane person, instead of running away, he stayed by my side and help while knowing fully well the odds he was against! I can think of no one more \_LOYAL\_ than \_\*\*CIAPHAS CANE, THE GREATEST HERO THE IMPERIUM EVER KNEW!\*\*\_"

\_"Cease your prattle\_"

\_"You're done\_"

"They are wonderful and \_no one!"\_

\_"You pitiful squirt\_"

\_"IS GOING TO HURT!"\_ Lemon shouted, seeing that his plan had worked, that there was a massive pile of stone and rubble in the middle of the room.

\_"Now say goodbye!"\_

Lemon ran up the debris, blood flowing through his veins like fire. He ignored the pain in his leg, ducking the last blots of magics trying to strike him down. Leaping towards the Smooze, pull back his left hoof, shouting, "\_\*\*ANY OF MY\*\*\_"

\_"Did you think you could run from\_"

\_"Your imminent ends?"\_

\_"You cannot defeat me!"\_

\_"\*\*"FRIENDS!"\*\*\_" he declared as his hoof made contact with the Smooze's face.

And then everything went white.

\* \* \*

><p>CRACK!<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Bon Bon gasped at the massive rainbow extending from the center of the Everfree forest upwards to the very heavens.<p>

"That was-"

"So beautiful."

"That's it, Lyra." Bon Bon said, nodding her head. Then suddenly, the words clicked in her head. Snapping her head to the side, she saw her marefriend staring right at her, tears running down her face and her

eyes were no longer white but the most wonderful shade of yellow she ever saw. "Lyra?"

Before she could get another word out, the seapony grabbed her and pulled her in for a kiss. There might have been a list of the eight most wonderful kisses in the Imperium, but this one easily blew them all away. For a moment, there was nothing but just them, for an eternity of time there was only the two of them in existence.

As the moment ended, and the two pulled away, Bon Bon was aware that everypony was applauding loudly for the two, cheering for them. There was only one thing she could say to all of this.

"Shoo bee doo."

\* \* \*

><p>"Reports, Gilda Sentry," Gleaming Shield said with a grin, looking at the two that she kinda married on the spot. She wasn't sure if they they were pissed or not, but she was going to attend their actual wedding if they had a 'proper' one. Then again, she would be <em>very</em> annoyed if somebeing pulled the same stunt with her and Bolero as she had been a very strict diet and she was going to walk down that aisle in her white wedding dress that she damn well deserved to wear! "Status of the enemy fleet?"

"Gone sir," Glida snapped a salute to her, her other wing wrapped around Flash Sentry. It wasn't exactly regulation behaviour, but after surviving the onslaught and the night, everybeing deserved to be happy and the rules could be bent just this once. "All destroyed in that rainbow beam emitting from the Everfree forest."

"Very good," Gleaming nodded her head, unbuckling herself. "Please put -"

"~leaming? Can you hear me Gleamy?" The voice caused the Warmistress of the Imperium to gasp and look up at the static screen.

"Bolero?" she asked in a shaky voice as the picture began to clear up. "Is that you?"

"Sure is love," The alicorn smiling down at her made her legs weak, her face red and heart race. "Just had to make you are still there."

"Bolero I-"

"Warmistress!" Flash Sentry snapped to attention, holding a hoof to his head. "I would like to remind you that you have served your time on board and that you are officially off duty."

Biting back a smile, Gleaming Shield let Flash Sentry take over acting duties, knowing he would make sure that everyone else was alright. Walking to her quarters to continue her talk with Bolero in private, Gleaming Shield had only one thought on her mind.

Please let nothing bad like this happen on my wedding!\_

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie shook herself awake, vaguely aware somebeing was holding her tightly.<p>

"Good morning, my dear friend," Chrysalis said softly, stretching out slightly. "It seems that morning has come, but did we managed to save the Emperor?"

"No, my little ponies, for another did that task," a loud, booming voice from behind them caused the tired mares to jump. "But without you, I would have been lost anyways, so I must thank you two for trying beyond hope."

The two of them turned around to see the joyful alicorn standing amidst the sleeping ponies, changelings and others races.

"Do you feel it?" the Emperor laughed, filling the mares with a sense of joy. "The Warp feels purier than it has felt in a very long time." Looking out the window, he stared at the fading massive rainbow beam of light. "And I believe I know why." Flexing out his wings and grinning impishly, he tilted his head. "If you will accompany me, ladies, I believe I have to have a talk with my student."

Trixie snuggled her way out of Chrysalis' forelegs and stood by the Emperor and her oldest friend as they teleported away.

\* \* \*

><p>The first thing Lemon felt was pain as he came back to the world of the living. Everything was sore as hell, his wings stiff with exhaustion and his right leg screaming at him from the sheer pain he had put it through.<p>

The second thing was that he was laying down on his back with his horn scraping against the floor.

Before he could even open his eyes, he heard a loud gasp as someone grabbed his head.

"Our saviour is awake!" A voice that sounded familiar shouted, cupping his head. "We are forever in your debt, but please, allow me to bestow my thanks unto you, dear knight."

Before Lemon knew what happened, a pair of lips met his. Flicking his eyes open he caught a hint of cyan which relaxed him.

After a few second, a much more familiar voiced giggled from behind him. "Sister please, I know we hadn't much chance to do much while we were trapped, but I do think suffocating our liberator is a poor choice."

"Oh Nighty," the mare above him giggled, Lemon trying to blink his eyes clearer. "I doubt I could do that, but I suppose I should let him."

Finally clear his eyes, Lemon saw the dark navy alicorn look longingly at him from above, another mare with a black coat standing a few feet away.

He had kissed Luna. With Nyx standing nearby. Oh buck him

sideways, this was going to be bad when he told Nyx about this loop.

Folding his wings inwards, Lemon rolled his head to the side and noticed something was off.

"Wings?" He knew he didn't have them before he entered the room, but why did he have them now? The last thing he could remember was punching the Smooze, and the only way he as a unicorn could get wings was to do something beyond impossible, which meant - "I became an alicorn by punching the Smooze?!\_"

"And eliminating all traces of it, Lemon Rush," a chuckling voice said from a distance. "I do not know fully yet, but you have somehow quite literally punched the Smooze to death." The Emperor snickered, Trixie and Chrysalis beside him. "And of course, the Elements decided to be flashy this time."

Lemon looked at himself and saw that instead of his usual coat, he was wearing golden power armor edged with silver flames that burned constantly. The segment for his right leg was off to the side, showing his injured pastern for some reason. Feeling his head, he felt a crown in the shape of a wolf, his cutie mark.

Element of Magic. He, Leman Russ, was the Element of Magic.

Go figure.

"I am very proud of you, my dear student." The Emperor smiled, nuzzling his student. "Now let's meet your friends that helped you win the nîgâ€|" The Emperor's voiced trailed off as five ponies began to stir, very distinct markers hanging from their necks. "Th- the Chaos Gods are the Elements?!\_" he snapped, his horn glowing as he stepped towards the still very disoriented ponies. "No, I do not know how they gained the Elements but I will not stand for this." Taking a step closer to them, he lowered his horn as he summoned his most powerful spells. He would be done with these monsters once and for all.

"No," Lemon snapped, stepping in front of the Emperor and flaring his wings. "I will not let you do this!"

"Lemon, you know who they are." The Emperor stared at him, eyeing him coldly. "And what they can do if left unchecked."

"I do, and I do not care." Lemon said, lowering his horn, pawing the ground with his good hoof.

"You would willingly fight me for them?" The Emperor looked at his student with a schooled face which hid his hope and building pride. "You know as well as I do that you have no chance against me. Your magic was never that grand, you are greatly injured and unused to the new magic and form that being an alicorn gives you. You would toss all that you just gained for them?"

"Yes," Lemon growled, his coat standing on edge and the silver fire on his power armor flaring out. "Now and always."

The Emperor had heard enough. "Very well then." The Emperor then turned his head away to look at Trixie and Chrysalis. "Ladies, I do

hope you would not mind if I ask you to alert the hospital that we have some special patients for them. I will be sending Lemon and his friends to you shortly, I will just need Luna and Nightmare Moon's help in removing the Powersuits of Harmony as not to alarm the citizens."

Turning his head, the Emperor had joyful tears running down his face. "I am so very proud of you, my wonderful student." Leaning over, the Emperor of Ponykind pulled his student into a deep hug. "You have grown by leaps and bounds this night, achieving things I would never have thought possible and doing things I have hoped for you to do for so very long. Once we are done here, I am sure you will amaze everyone at the palace by this wonderful change."

"Actually," Lemon said, blushing a bit from the praise. Some of it was due to his unAwake self but still part of it rang true for him despite how long he had been looping for. "I was thinking of staying here, in Ponyville, with them." Lemon nodded his head to the Chaos Gods and Ciaphas. "Can't just abandon them, now can I?"

The Emperor only shook his head and laughed. "And then you do something like that, Lemon." Pulling him in close for another hug, the Emperor ruffled his mane. "How much higher will you fly, my dear student?"

Lemon was jostled by his loopers...his companions, who were smiling and laughing softly. Smiling himself, Lemon looked at them and turned to address the Emperor. "I do not know, but every day is a new day for the impossible to happen. And I've got the best ponies to make sure that happens."

\* \* \*

><p>"And <em>that's<em> the story of our Nightmare Moon solo loop!" Lemon said to the table of his looping friends, Nyx leaning into his side. She wasn't as mad as he had thought she would be, only giving him the Look that made him apologize immediately for kissing an unAwake Luna.

Pulling his girlfriend closer with his wing, he used his magic to lift the mug of ginger ale to his mouth. "And that's why I can go alicorn now," he chuckled, nuzzling Nyx's face. "So Shining, I expect Fenrir and Sleipnir to make us go through a Prince brother loop sooner or later."

"I'm looking forward to it, squirt!" Shining shouted, nuzzling Cadence.

"I'm very interested in your designs, Slaanesh," Rarity said, looking at the table of grinning Chaos Gods. "I wonder if we could mix our styles."

Smiling, Slaanesh took a piece of paper and began to do quick sketches while eyeing Nyx. Slaanesh floated the paper over to Rarity, but Twilight's curiosity made her grab it. In an instant, her mane went grey and the purple strip turned snow white.

"You are never to put my daughter in this!" she snapped, her wings twitching in anger. Rarity rolled her eyes at her overprotective friend and just chuckled at the design. A tad more risqué than she

would normally do, but this would be very interesting to make when Twilight wasn't so uptight.

"Now I am curious about this," Lemon said, trying to float the paper over when he was pelted by rolled papers from the Chaos Gods' table. "Oi!"

"When you grow up, squirt, then you can see it!" Khorne roared, slapping the table in good spirits.

"Otherwise, we'll unleash the Little Mother on ya!" Slaanesh laughed, swinging his mug in the air and spilling some of the alcohol onto the floor.

"And I'll sick BB on you!" Lemon grinned cheekily at his, watching Slaanesh meep loudly before ducking under the table.

Groaning, Slaanesh grabbed the bowls of peanuts and started to throw them at the giggling stallion. Nurgle, Khorne and Tzeentch reached over to the other tables to give his some more ammo while booing loudly.

"BB?" Rainbow asked, watching the Chaos God duck again at the name being mentioned. "What the-"

"I'll tell you if Slaanesh doesn't mind." Lemon said, poking his head above the table with Nyx still beside him.

"You can tell, if you get us some more booooooooooooooze!" Slaanesh giggled before falling onto empty tables.

"Fine, fine." Smiling, Lemon pushed himself out of his seat and began to walk over to Big Mac when he was suddenly hugged from behind.

Looking up, he saw the one mare he loved more than Nyx above him. Leaning into Fluttershy's forelegs, she gave him a kiss just above his horn.

"I am so proud of you, Lemon, so very proud." Fluttershy had tears in her eyes, her wings closing around the two of them.

"Thank you," Lemon happily said, eyes closed and content.

"You know why?" she asked him, nuzzling him like only a mother could do.

Turning his head, Lemon looked at the rowdy table of the Chaos his loopers\_ and nodded his head. "I do, Little Mother, I do."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

Too long to fit in other chapters.

>(Sorry about Slaanesh pushing the rating... but, you know. Slaanesh.)<p>



## My Little Argent: Music is Magic Part 2

\_Ponyville, Saturday.\_

What appeared to be chaos just happened, as Saturday was a good day for abruptness and randomness to occur on the same day, especially if your location was Ponyville. In this case, the abrupt chaos on Saturday took the form of a titan bursting from the ground, a large amount of buildings and foliage sailing into the sky and landing who knows where.

The titan rose and rose until it rose no more and formed into a more solid state as it poured from the ground. The titan was a strange humanoid yet legless creature made of the earth the ponies stood on. Red veins of lava were engraved onto its skin, and the same fiery substance formed what could be described as hair. Four angry red eyes stared at the ponies who stared back in awe and fear.

Pinkie Pie simply walked between the beast and Ponyville's civilians. "Okay everypony, repeat after me." She took a deep breath before screaming. **\*\*"RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!"\*\***

And so all of Ponyville screamed and ran for their lives as the beast roared louder than a dragon and tore into the town with a mighty swing of it's arm. Just as suddenly the ground ripped apart to allow vines and brambles to emerge, hunting the ponies that ran.

\* \* \*

><p><em>A mountain<em>

Two hundred miles away from Ponyville, Twilight Sparkle, Zecora, and Symphonic Void watched in horror as the mountain creature burst from the ground, trees and buildings flying into the sky like they were birds enjoying the freedom of flight. "What kind of creature do I behold, this mighty beast with power untold!?" Zecora asked.

"And that would be my nemesis Akash'Bhuta." Symphonic Void replied. "The embodiment of chaos and destruction in nature."

With a thud, several of the launched items fell next to the trio. One of the items that had landed was the ruins of Twilight's tree.

Twilight begun to shake violently, and Symphonic Void swore by the Virtuoso's that came before him that she was starting to smolder. "Uh, Twilight?"

"I WAS FINALLY ABLE TO RELAX AFTER THAT SOAP OPERA LOOP!" She shouted. One Crown of Magic, one ascension and one teleport later, Twilight was gone in a flash of magic.

"Dare I ask?" Void turned to Zecora, who seemed to be ready for what was going to happen. As if it happened on a regular basis.

"Akash'Bhuta I'd hate to be, for she has ruined Twilight's Tree." the

zebra explained. "A fate most dangerous and I know why, for know that beast will now soon die."

The gigantic burst of magical energy shaped into a laser beam that tore across the landscape and into Akash'Bhuta explained all Symphonic Void needed to know.

\* \* \*

><p><em><br>The Pits of Tartarus\_

The gaunt red centaur sat in his cell, hunched over and leaning against the wards that kept him in his cell. He turned to his new cellmate, oddly calm in her cell. "So, how did you wind up in here?"

The creature roared.

"No kidding? Celestia's standards must have fallen far if destroying a tree was worthy of imprisonment in Tartarus."

\* \* \*

><p>139.2 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Sing a song of six bits

>A pony named Pinkie Pie<br>Baked four and twenty cupcakes,  
>Please don't ask me why.<p>

They giggle if you're friendly

>And explode if you are not.<br>Isn't that a silly dish  
>To serve in Canterlot?<p>

Rarity, Rarity, quite contrary,

>How went your fashion show?<br>With rude reviews and hurled  
horseshoes;  
>To the ice cream she doth go.<p>

There was a crooked pegasus

>With golden crooked eyes<br>She flew a crooked flight path,  
>Each trip was a surprise.<p>

Hoity Toity sat on the wall.

>Hoity Toity had a great fall.<br>Celestia's horses and Celestia's  
mares  
>COULDN'T CARE LESS.<p>

Fluttershy has a little hare,

>Its fur as white as snow.<br>And what it does when she's not there,  
  
>You really don't want to know.<p>

How now, zebra, have you any brews?

>Three, sir, three, sir, yes I do;<br>One for the frog, one for his  
croak,  
>And one to cure fools who walk through poison joke.<p>

This is the tree library.

>This is the dragon who lives in the tree library.<br>This is the owl  
who aids the dragon who lives in the tree library.

>These are the books reshelfed by the owl who aids the dragon who lives in the tree library.<p>

This is the unicorn who's kind of a geek  
>Who reads the books<br>Reshelfed by the owl  
>Who aids the dragon<br>Who lives in the tree library.

This is the farmer who lies never speaks  
>Who rescued the unicorn who's kind of a geek<br>Who reads,  
etc.

This is the swift pony whose tricks are unique  
>Whose rival's the farmer who a lie never speaks<br>Who rescued the unicorn who's kind of a geek  
>Who reads, etc.<p>

This is the pegasus who's really quite meek  
>Best friends with the pony whose tricks are unique<br>Whose rival's the farmer who a lie never speaks  
>Who rescued the unicorn who's kind of a geek<br>Who reads,  
etc.

This is the seamstress whose designs are tres chic  
>Who spas with the pegasus who's really quite meek<br>Best friends with the pony whose tricks are unique  
>Whose rival's the farmer who a lie never speaks<br>Who rescued the unicorn who's kind of a geek  
>Who reads, etc.<p>

This is the pink pony who acts like a freak  
>And flusters the seamstress whose designs are tres chic<br>Who spas with the pegasus who's really quite meek  
>Best friends with the pony whose tricks are unique<br>Whose rival's the farmer who a lie never speaks  
>Who rescued the unicorn who's kind of a geek<br>Who reads, etc. etc. etc.

Twilight the Sparkle  
>Lay down her ink-quill<br>And said this to Rari-ti:  
>"The Loops at this time<br>Made us nursery rhymes,  
>And don't you dare ask me why!" <p>

\* \* \*

><p>139.3 (Evilhumour with KrisOverstreet editing skills)<p>

Big Mac blinked in surprise as a furious \_Pinkie\_ \_Pie\_ stormed into his bar, glaring angrily around. Every looper that had any remote survival instincts fled the bar immediately, with Rapid Hooves in the lead. "G-g-gosh sakes, Pinkie," the bartending stallion stammered, pouring a glass of Pinkie's usual rough-Loop tonic, "what's got you loco all of a sudden?"

"I looped into a Hub loop." She muttered, grinding her teeth as she slammed back a drink. "I saw the \_worst\_ show \_ever\_. And it had THIS in it!" She pulled a music player out of her mane and turned it on:

\_Happy happy joy joy, happy happy joy,  
>Happy happy joy joy, happy happy joy...<em>

"That show made a mockery of Laughter and Happiness," Pinkie snarled. "And if I \_ever\_ loop into \_that\_ world, they will get \_full\_ Chaos Goddess of Parties, Fun Lord of Sith, Pinkamena \_BUCKING\_ Diane Pie!" she roared before storming out of the bar.

"Do y'all want your drink?" Mac called after her.

The cellar doors slammed shut hard enough to knock one off its hinges.

"Eenope," said Big Mac, and slammed the shot himself.

\* \* \*

><p>139.4 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Are you \_sure\_ you want to do this Lemon?" Nyx looked around, knowing how much trouble they could get in if someone were to walk in.

"Ye-yes Nyx," Lemon blushed, pulling his wings in close as he looked off to the side. "I want to do it and you're the only one that I trust to do it with."

Nyx blushed at her boyfriend's praise. Taking a moment to calm herself, she used her magic to lift Lemon above her. Slowly, inch by inch, he came closer to the goal, closer to that treasure pot they both loved.

Licking his lips, Lemon reached out with his hooves, his wings beating rapidly almost caused Nyx to cancel her magic out from the breeze.

And then, suddenly, the light flicked on as two ponies walked into the room.

"What are you two doing?!" Fluttershy shouted, causing Nyx and Lemon to meep loudly. With a startled shout, Lemon grabbed the beloved treasure pot in his hooves, with his wings beating to keep him upright when Twilight's magic grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and carried him over to Fluttershy with Nyx going over to Twilight in the same manner.

"Um...nothing momma?" Nyx tried to give her mother her big puppy dog eyes, with Lemon doing the same to Fluttershy. Sadly, neither attempt worked with both mares glaring at their kids.

"I told you Lemon, cookies are for \_after\_ dinner!" Fluttershy scolded the flinching pegasus colt, with Twilight pulling out lecture number three-four-oh-two-dash-one for her daughter. "We are both \_very\_ disappointed in you two!" That caused Lemon to whimper, proving how much of a mamma's boy he was, with Nyx folding inwards next to him. "Now Lemon, go to your room, I will be in there in a moment to talk to you."

"You too Nyx." Twilight was a bit miffed that Fluttershy stole a chance to give her looping daughter a proper scolding.

With a sadden look on their young faces, the two foals went to the

bedroom and closed the door.

Instantly, their faces perked up. Nyx turned to face her boyfriend and smiled.

"You still have it?"

Lemon responded by pulling the cookie jar out of his subspace pocket and handed over a cookie to Nyx.

"My hero!" Nyx happily said, kissing his cheek before taking a bite of the cookie.

\* \* \*

><p>"So you two wish to be proper thieves, right?" Sly looked at the two sitting on the couch in their hideout, with Murry and Bentley smirking behind him with Camerlita barely holding back her laughter.<p>

The two looked at each before nodding.

"Just one thing, before I teach you anything, you promise me that your moms won't skin me for this?" Sly asked in a seriously scared voice.

They both nodded their heads at this.

"Good," Sly smiled at the winged unicorn and wolf sitting next to each other. "Now Nyx, Leman, you want to learn how to steal cookies without getting caught?" Sly smiled at the two kids, sitting down in front of them while rubbing his paws together. "Let's begin with the basics, shall we?"

\* \* \*

><p>Lemon looked at Nyx.<p>

"You know, maybe Pinkie Pie was not the best choice."

Nyx nodded her head.

"But Nyx, can you tell me what we were thinking in stealing Celestia's cakes?!"

"I don't know Lemon, I just don't know." Nyx sighed, kicking a rock away. "But hey, first time out on the moon; you've lasted longer than most loopers in not getting sent here!" Nyx smiled as Lemon chuckled, hugging her with his wing as they looked down at Equestria from their lunar time out together.

\* \* \*

><p>139.5 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

"Twi', can we talk a' minute."

Twilight looked up from her copy of Daring Do and the Filliosopher Stone. Applejack stood in the doorway, seeming uncomfortable. Shrugging, Twilight set the book down and asked. "Sure Applejack.

What's up?"

"Well, do ya think we're relyin' too much on our outside abilities? Ah mean, if a problem arises these days, we just go Alicorn a'lot and beat the stuffin' out'a anythin'."

Twilight shrugged. "Well, we don't want to let any one thing get too stale with time repeating itself."

Applejack shook her head. "Ah know that. But still, just the other day, ah saw Fluttershy stop the stampedin' cows by circlin' them up with trees til' they calmed down with her druid powers, Pinkie's been experimentin' with her warp goddess level parties, and Dash has pretty much takin' over running the weather worldwide. Don' get me started on Rarity and her enchanted dress business, 'Bloom snuck up on me with one of her invisibility cloaks. Bark knows Ah can't remember the last time we had a regular, baseline loop without one of us changin' somethin'."

Twilight tilted her head. "So...you want a perfectly baseline loop, is that it?"

Applejack gritted her teeth. "No! Ah just...can't we have a loop where we don't ascend or use abilities outside Equestria?"

"What brought this on?" Asked Twilight.

The mare lowered her head. "Mah extended family, every time they visit and see Ah keep hangin' out with ya'll when yah do those out of loop powers, they look at me funny."

Applejack looked clearly uncomfortable, meaning this happened enough times that it broke the pony's back, to use a phrase. The purple unicorn nodded. "I'm sure we can do that. I'll talk to the others."

\* \* \*

><p>After Applejack had left, Twilight sighed and pulled out a picture of her mother and father. A single tear slid down her snout as she slid the picture back into her pocket. Celestia, by this point, was more of a mother to her than even her own mother. However, her parents were still her parents and she still loved them. Silently, she wondered to herself, would they ever start looping?<p>

She knew that most of the other loopers in Equestria were in a similar situation...except maybe Dash and Scoots since their parentage were constantly in flux. With such a large family, Applejack probably hurt worst of all since family was the most important thing to her. However, Twilight still hoped that her family start looping one day, even if it was a bit selfish. Maybe after Applejack's self imposed limitation loop, Twilight would quit being Celestia's student after redeeming Nightmare Moon and live with her parents for a loop, re-establish her connection to them. Heck, one loop, she may establish connections with all the other loopers' parents or siblings, whichever they had in the hopes that they start looping too.

\* \* \*

><p>(Several Loops later)<p>

Twilight awoke to an elderly voice saying, "Get yourself up, Twilight Apple! Family reunion's upon us, and Summer Sun waits for no-mare."

The purple pony's gaze landed on Granny Smith, felt her head, and sure enough there was no horn. She pulled out a brown cowpony hat, put it on her head and began setting her plan into action.

\* \* \*

><p>139.6 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

"TWILIGHT SPARKLE!"

Twilight awoke to the screeching of one Pinkamena Diane Pie poking her head out from behind the tree she was resting under. Pinkie's eyes were narrowed as she leaned in close to Twilight and asked. "Were you awake my last loop? Were you responsible for \_that\_?"

Having absolutely no idea what she was talking about, however sensing this was somehow her baseline self's fault, she asked. "What...happened during your last loop?"

Pinkie circled Twilight as she began. "I was all set to have a deluxe super party for your arrival in Ponyville, since I haven't had one of those in forever, so when I step into your library to begin preparations, I see you there already getting preparations started. I thought it was weird, but decided to go along with it anyway. I gave the looping code, but you didn't give the right response, so I figure you're not awake. But then it doesn't stop there. After we defeat Black Snootie, I jump back to Ponyville to start preparations for another deluxe super party, when I see Spike finishing up decorations for the party. Cakes are baked, pin the tail pony posters are up, even the hot sauce practical jokes are there! I figure it's just coincidence, but it's like that every party for the whole loop. I even tried setting up parties for people on the other side of the world, Gilda or Chrysy, but lists for party preparations were already sent out a week prior to the party and I just get there when the preparations are complete-"

By this time, Pinkie is almost hyperventilating. Twilight pulled her into a hug and patted her on the back. "Shhhh...It's alright Pinkie, it's Ok. No, I wasn't awake for that loop. Maybe one of the others were awake and was playing a prank."

Pinkie suddenly pulled away and started bouncing, her good mood restored, "Oh, Oh, you think it was Chrysy? Dissy might have been able to pull it off. Or Dashy like when she disguised herself as future you and appeared in your Castle tree, the day that one loop ended and said to do all those crazy things to have Daring Do write a new novel for the next expansion set for her blackmail collection. Or-"

Twilight blinked, then reacted. "WAIT, THAT WAS DASH?!"

Pinkie put her hoof to her mouth and muttered, "Oopsie!"

The pony ran behind the tree and disappeared, leaving a stunned Twilight behind. A couple strands of her hair popped out. However, she did not once raise her voice, which was the most terrible. "Dash, next loop we spend together, you're getting a lecture you can't sleep through or ignore."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Elsewhere in the Multiverse<strong>

A certain blue skinned Turian paused and shivered all over. Shepard noticed this and asked, "Trouble, Darrus?"

The turian looked at Shepard with an annoyed glance, "I told you to call me Dash. And I think someone just placed a curse on me..."

\* \* \*

><p>139.7 (RowanEx)<p>

Twilight opened her eyes, then, looked at the ground. More like, a huge flat solid brick. Sleipnir told her about a new Safe-Mode loop, and Twilight rolled her eyes after realizing that THIS was that loop.

She didn't notice Pinkie Pie creating a big cake, and after realizing what she made, Twilight's eyes shrank to pinpricks and her jaw slacked open.

"Pinkie, how did you do that?!" Twilight asked.

"It's simple!" Pinkie gave Twilight a stamp-shaped object which she picked up, "Use the Stamp Tool! Build everything! It's free!"

That last sentence ringed a bit from a hub loop she had before. Twilight looked at the Stamp Tool, Pinkie's big cake, and the flat brick. Then, it was clear.

'Roblox?' Twilight thought, 'I thought it... huh.'

Twilight spawned a Roblox version of her house, in front of Pinkie's cake which she began to "eat" by poking it with her nose.

This was going to be fun, until Rainbow Dash zoomed by, riding a poptart cat that left a trail of rainbows.

She hoped that Pinkie wasn't the owner of the empty Place they're in. At least she let the Stamp Tool in, which means build all the time.

And so, Twilight Sparkle, knowing the loop's abilities, built 500 libraries.

"And the books aren't the same!" she declared.

\* \* \*

><p>139.8 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>



Twilight stood outside Golden Oaks Library, staring at a changeling resting in a box she had just opened. Said box was delivered for her birthday, which won't take place for the next six months. Her left eye was quirked at the bug. "You're not fooling anyone, changeling."

The changeling spoke in a monotone voice, "Please refer to the instruction manual for further input."

Rolling her eyes, Twilight removed the paper from the box and started reading. After a few minutes, she started laughing and cast a simple spell. Twilight's horn began to glow a golden hue for a lie detector spell as she said, "Enter registration mode."

"Thank you for purchasing your changeling doll. We hope you have an amazing, magical experience with all the adventures the changeling doll will give you."

The golden color surrounding her horn glowed red, indicating that the changeling was lying. Twilight rolled her eyes again. The changeling continued. "In order to make sure your changeling doll isn't stolen or used by unwanted ponies, please insert a D.N.A sample into the changeling doll's mouth. It is recommended to use a strand of hair."

Of course, Twilight was curious just how far this changeling was willing to take this farce, so she gave him a strand of hair. She was prompted to give him her name, to which said did so. "Twilight Sparkle, please pick an objective for me. What am I intended for?"

Twilight thought for a second, when an evil idea came along, "Research subject."

To the changeling's credit, he seemed to adapt quickly, "Error. Purpose not recognized. Please enter valid use for changeling doll. Options include bodyguard, friend, lover, child, parent, servant and slave."

Twilight rolled her eyes again, feeling she would be doing this a lot this loop, "How about statue."

The changeling replied. "Optional mode accepted. Changeling will now enter statue mode. To exit statue mode, you may say, 'enter reprogramming mode,' and change the purpose as you see fit. In order to choose an appropriate statue appearance, please connect your horn to your changeling doll's horn."

This was getting too interesting to stop, so she shielded every part of her mind until the only image accessible was of a stone statue of a royal guardsman. To be extra safe, she removed the image of the spear from her mind, giving him only a set of armor.

With that, the changeling took on the requested appearance and stood completely at attention. Twilight smirked as she pulled out several saddlebags and started loading them with bricks, then placing them on the 'statue.' With that finished, Twilight called for Spike. "I need you to bring the others who are awake here. I will stay here and watch our friend."

\* \* \*

><p><em>How long have I stood here, unmoving...unending pain of my back and being forced to stand wide awake, <em>The changeling pondered, even now not moving for fear of being discovered. It was Rainbow Dash's turn to watch over him. Every second of every day, he was watched by at least one pony if not more, all of them element bearers. Every time she said an error, Twilight was called in and cast a healing spell, whether it was his feet or back. However his consciousness was even now waning from being awake for so long. He never wrote in an error code for the optional statue mode. He shouldn't have latched onto that opportunity to infiltrate. But what was he supposed to do? Twilight thought about dissecting him. He figured a statue couldn't be any worse. Boy was he wrong.

His mental facilities were spent, he was unable to even announce a simple "Error Code," as he wobbled a bit. His eyes were drooping under his facade as the wobbling got worse. \_Is that the ground rising to meet me\_, he pondered.

\* \* \*

><p>The changeling slammed face first into the floor, the saddlebags crashing down and denting the wood beneath. Immediately, the changeling reverted to its original form. Rainbow sipped another Mountain Dew and checked her watch, "Buck, that's some dedication to your act. Two weeks and five hours, much longer than I figured possible. You got my respect, little guy."<p>

She pulled off the brick filled saddlebags and picked up the changeling, making for the door and Ponyville Hospital.

\* \* \*

><p>139.9 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<br>\*\*  
>What if the Wibbly Lever was the Wrong Lever?<strong>

It was not one of the doctor's best days. First, Rory drops the thermal coupling causing the Tardis to crash land inside herself resulting in a space loop. Then when things can't possibly get worse, a second Amy Pond steps through the door of the Tardis, declaring things just got more complicated, and starts flirting with Amy 1. Now, he was trapped in a space AND time loop. With the departure of Amy 1 into the police box, Pond Couple 2 exited the Tardis doors. Resisting the urge to rub his forehead, he shouted at the flirting Ponds, "Stop...that...you two into the police box NOW!"

With their departure, he prevented any further Ponds from entering his craft by ordering them to stay still, "I'm setting up a controlled temporal implosion, it's the only way to reset the Tardis-but unless I find exactly the right lever to control the implosion...we're all gonna die!"

The Ponds winced, Amy deciding to speak, "You don't know...which lever..."

The doctor's concern started fading as he almost rubbed his hands together, "No...but I'm about to find out."

The Tardis door flew open with a flourish, a triumphant doctor

shouting, "The Wibbly Lever!"

The doctor raced to the console, "The...Wibbly Lever, thank you!"

Lifting the oddly designed lever up and slamming it down, the device made several beeps reminiscent of a classic arcade game. His task finished, he raced across the control room and into the TARDIS doors. The light from the TARDIS Exterior Shell started flashing white, a grinding noise resounding through the room. And then the tardis started shaking violently, the cloister bell ringing. The doctor ran to the levers, a panicked expression on his face, "Oh dear!"

The TARDIS central console glowed brilliant yellow for a second, then erupted into an ever expanding fireball which consumed everything.

\* \* \*

><p>The doctor's eyes opened as he jerked backwards, "What?!"<p>

His head turned from side to side, his eyes scanned the immediate area, confusion evident on his face. Apparently, he was in an apple orchard, in a strangely vibrant world where everything was slightly off like he was in a cartoons. His mind immediately asked where was his TARDIS? If the TARDIS did explode like he remembered, why wasn't he dead? If it had all been a dream, where was he? His hand withdrew his sonic screwdriver and began scanning the area...only for his eyes to finally land on the screwdriver in hand. It was the one he held from his 10th incarnation that had been destroyed in an earlier adventure. Still, it was programmed with the function to locate his TARDIS so he switched to the appropriate setting.

A second later, he asked again, "What?!"

His screwdriver could not find the TARDIS anywhere on this world. A second after that, the screwdriver didn't even recognize the world he was on. His mind started racing, thinking up reasons for why he couldn't recognized neither the time period nor the world he was on. His musings were halted a few minutes later when a small voice spoke from deeper in the orchard with a southern accent, "Yer not from these parts, ain't ya stranger?"

His head turned and mouth dropped, "What..."

Standing in front of him was an orange coated small horse, pony he recalled from his knowledge of earth animal life, with three apples on her flank, "No, sorry, I'm the doctor."

The pony tilted her head, "Doctor? Where ya from, stranger?"

The doctor shrugged, "Oh...here and there, well, I travel a lot."

He blinked for a second...something was wrong. He wasn't speaking like he usually did...almost as if...

His hand dipped in his pocket and pulled out an oversized mirror, which confirmed his suspicions, "What?!"

Staring back at him in the reflection was the image of the 10th

doctor. He was the 10th doctor, his predecessor. Maybe he absorbed some of the Time Vortex, causing his body to regress to an older regeneration, well whatever. His mouth curled into a grin regardless, "Oh...brilliant!"

The pony looked at him quizzically, "Are ya alright, Doc? And how'd ya pull that mirror out a' yer pocket?"

The doctor looked up, surprised, "Oh, yes, sorry, just got a pocket that's bigger on the inside. What's your name, miss?"

She tilted her hat up, "Name's Applejack."

\* \* \*

><p>Applebloom sighed as she slammed her head on the desk, throwing away another failed version of the sonic screwdriver. She couldn't even get the screwdriver function to work on it, and her special talent usually involved building machines. With a sigh, she withdrew several new parts and started working on it again. She hardly noticed the door open and Applejack greeting everyone. She muttered a greeting before being absorbed in her work again. It was several minutes later that someone spoke to her, not that she noticed, "Oh, I see you're working on a screwdriver."<p>

Applebloom nodded, "Yeah."

The stranger continued, "Seems like your frequencies are all wrong. Have to tune things just right, or all you get is a vibrator. Though, your model doesn't seem to have certain crystals that would make it work."

Applebloom muttered in frustration, "Ah can't get them items, they're from a read only universe! And apparently Ah'm tone deaf, else Ah would have this figured out already!"

"Oh...sorry."

A few minutes passed in silence before he spoke again, "You know, you could try for a laser screwdriver instead."

"If Ah wanted a weapon, sure," the looper muttered in a surly tone.

"Well, laser can be applied non-lethally. One of my companions used one as a power source to pull me out of a riptide in time."

Applebloom blinked, her attention and curiosity picked. She turned to the voice, only for her mouth to drop completely. The doctor waved, "Hello! I'm the doctor!"

The filly's eyes widened a great deal before she rose from her seat and raced out of the house, screaming "TWILIGHT!"

The doctor watched, slightly confused. Applejack shouted out the door. "'Bloom, get back here! 'BLOOM!"

The pony sighed. "Sorry about that, Doc. Ah'll see to her. Ya'll should head to the cellar. Ah heard he's startin' a new hobby as a

bartender."

The doctor took her up on that and made her way to the cellar, only to see a red massive pony standing behind a bar. His eyes widened a bit for a second, then returned to his passive expression. The doctor waved a bit. "Hello, I'm the doctor."

The red stallion nodded. "Big Macintosh. What'll ya have?"

The doctor thought for a second. "Lime Soda."

\* \* \*

><p>139.10 (Evilhumour)<p>

Luna blinked as she Woke up while flying.

Over \_mud\_.

And then in mud.

Groaning as she went fairly deep within the mud, she shook her head as her loop memories beg-

"LULU!" Tia's voice caused her to snapped her head around as a galloping white mare came right up to her-\_oh\_ Tree, not this again! Before Luna had any chance to respond, her 'sister' picked her up in her magic and held her up in the air. Blushing, Luna tried to escape but she was just a filly this loop against the adult white mare holding her in golden aura. "I know you are eager to try flying, and using your magic, but you mustn't scare me like that! Jumping out of the window?" Tia tsked as she carried Luna beside her, still covered in mud. "Didn't Miss Rainbow Dash teach you better then that?"

"Well, she \_did\_ say going fast was good..."

"No Luna, I know she didn't," Tia leaned over and sniffed. "Goodness, my little Lulu, some\_pony\_ needs a bath." Smiling, Tia tapped Luna's nose, teleporting them into Luna's bedroom. It was filled with stuff toys, castles, dollies, knights, a couple of play swords and a seemingly sleeping possum called Tiberius on her pillow. "Do you want to take a bath with mommy again?"

Luna's ears folded against her head, blushing as she nodded her head. As humiliating and awkward these loops were for Celestia and herself, Luna \_greatly\_ enjoyed the times she could be a filly again with an actual mom this time.

With a hum and silly song, the Queen Celestia of Equestria and Princess Luna had a very fun, very bubbly bath together.

\* \* \*

><p>139.11 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Ryu had learned, long ago, the bartender's sixth sense of when to ask questions and when to stay the hell out of a customer's affairs.

So, when a slim woman apparently just out of her teens, with purple

skin and pony ears and tail, sat next to a giant of a man who looked like his hair had never been cut, combed, brushed, or possibly even washed since the day he was born, and each matched the other shot for shot, Ryu just served the drinks and turned his attention to less potentially disruptive customers, like the evil god with the flaming eyebrows holding a heated discussion over the nature of inverse morality with the Monarch.

"... and that's when I threw myself into the volcano," Twilight Sparkle said. "For which I spent a Loop in Hyrule's CDi-variant, and after that here." She slammed back the remainder of her drink, banged the bar with her fist for more, and said, "So what's your excuse?"

"You remember that Loop you crashed with your fleet of Elements of Harmony cannons?" Leman Russ quaffed his tankard and slammed it down. A refill appeared next to it almost immediately. "Well, something like that happened again, except I was the only one Awake. My father and the Chaos Gods were all at their absolute worst. And one of Father's most intolerant Inquisitors decided to invade planet Equus. Twice. And failed catastrophically both times."

"Well, good," Twilight nodded.

"I'm not done," Leman warned. "You and Celestia and pretty much every pony on the planet decided that their world would never be safe until all the warring races of the galaxy were converted into ponies. And the Elements of Harmony could do that in that Loop."

"WHAT?" Twilight knocked over her fresh drink. "We never did any of that! In our Loop we just used the Elements to purge the corruption of the Void and its accompanying hatred! Humans stayed human! Eldar stayed eldar! And orks... well... that was a bad idea all around," she admitted, picking up the fresh drink which had replaced her spilled one while she talked.

"I know," Leman nodded. "I was there. But this time the Elements had more than a turn-to-stone or exile-to-moon setting. They had a bam-you're-a-pony-now setting. And nothing could block it- shields, armor, whole planets, nothing at all."

"That sounds terrible," Twilight said. "How did you stop them?"

"Stop them?" Leman asked. "Whose side did you think I was on?"

Twilight's jaw dropped as Leman chugged down his drink.

"To be fair," he added as he set the tankard down again, "I ended up flipping a coin to decide. The Imperium was really that bad, that Loop."

\* \* \*

><p>139.12: (Evilhumour, with little add-on by Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

There was a chorus of snickering, causing the colt's ear to twitch.

"Brothers, we can be mature about this," The colt said with a strained voice, looking upwards at three ponies around him. One was a red unicorn with a strange sun circle for a cutie mark, one was a green earth pony with a dragon's head as a cutie mark with the last pony, a bat-pony, with a skull withered wings coming off the sides for his cutie mark. They were at that odd stage between colt and stallion, gangly and awkward with their new long legs but still at that age where they loved to tease those closely related to them and younger than they were. "Isn't that what you're always complaining about Maroon?"

"Ma<sup>roon</sup>!" The red unicorn shouted, falling onto his back while laughing his head off. The green earth pony and the bat-pony snickering were getting louder. "Oh by Father, this is too rich!" He continued to laugh. "What's your name, wittle brother? Fierce Fang? Mighty Bark?" The red unicorn managed to get on his hooves, still chuckling.

"Well," the colt blushed, rubbing the back of his head and looking around Ponyville.

"GAAAAAAAAASP!" All four of them snapped their heads towards the pink pony. "Your brothers are here Lemon Rush?! Oh I have to plan for so many parties!" With that Pinkie Pie vanished in with a squeal.

All three heads of the teenage stallions turned slowly to the blushing and frowning pegasus colt. "Don't you dare laugh, any of you!"

"Awww," Big Maroon cooed, mockingly rubbing his brother's mane. "Is our wittle bwother cranky?" He laughed again, ignoring Lemon slapping the hoof away. "What do you say, Vul-I mean Forging Fire and Corn Curse?"

"Maroon, I'm warning you, I am this close to bucking you in the face!" Lemon snapped, shoving his face into the unicorn's, with the earth pony sharing a concerned look with the threstal. They were no longer laughing, but looked around nervously.

"BUCK!" Maroon laughed again, before using his hooves to pinch Lemon's cheek. "Oh this far too fu-GAH!" He shouted as he was suddenly kicked in the chest, sailing through the air and into a building.

"I TOLD YOU TO STOP YOU DORK!" Lemon shouted, flying into the building with Forging and Corn leaping towards to the building to stop their brothers from fighting in the odd tree building.

Ducking as books flew through the sky as their two brothers wrestled around the library floor, both of the other Primarchs tried to pull their brothers apart when a loud voice roared:

"WHAT THE BIRITCHING SAP ARE YOU DOING TO MY LIBRARY?!"

All four's head snapped towards the furious purple pony standing on top of the staircase, magic flowing from her body. This caused Forging Fire to drop Lemon back onto Big Maroon's chest with Corn Curse trying to get his hooves out from his brother's

armpits.

"Lemon, are these your \_brothers?!"\_

"Um...yes." Lemon squeaked, hunching down on Maroon's chest in fear. "Look Twilight, I'm \_really\_ sorry, it's our first time all together here in Equestria and \_please\_ don't send us to Lunar time out!"

"Lunar time out?!" Twilight laughed a bit crazy, her magic reaching out for the four of them. Before any of them could react, she grabbed each of their ears and began to tug as she stormed her way out. "Oh \_no\_, I doing something \_far\_ worse for \_you\_ lot!"

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy was awoken by loud banging on her front door. Flying down as quickly as she could, she opened the door to see her friend and Anchor furious.<p>

"Oh dear, what's wron-"

"Your \_boys\_," She snapped, her horn's glow twitching and four sharp yelps of pain were heard. "Destroyed part of my library!" All of a sudden, three stallions and a colt were thrown into her cottage. "Deal with them!" She snapped before teleporting away.

"But... I only raised Lemon." Looking down she saw the four of them look embarrassed by the whole situation, with Lemon trying to hid behind the green earth pony. "Lemon, \_who\_ did you fight with?" She asked sharply, using the Stare on her son. Meekly, he pointed a hoof at the red unicorn who was grumbling at the whole situation before turning to face her.

Maroon, or Magnus, had face a lot of strange and odd things in the loops that only strengthened his resolve and will power. Looking into those eyes, however, made him feel incredibly small and \_naughty\_, with the humble words of an apology was muttered from his mouth to her.

"Good," Fluttershy smiled, "Magnus, Vulkan and Konrad?" She asked the three of them, with them nodding in response.

"Big Maroon, Forging Fire and Corn Curse." The green earth pony answered with a weary smile. "It's a pleasure to finally meet you ma'am."

"Thank you," Fluttershy smiled. "I'm glad we could finally meet."

"Indeed," Forging Fire smiled, pulling a series of books out of his Subspace pocket. "I've been waiting to give you this."

"Oh?" Fluttershy asked, taking the books, looking at the title. "\_The Stupid Things Leman Russ Did Whilst Unsupervised, Vol. 1'\_."

"You \_actually\_ wrote it!?" Lemon squeaked in surprise, with Maroon snickering before being cut quiet by Fluttershy's glare.



"Oh Lemon, I'm sure it can't be tha-" Fluttershy stopped herself as she began to read. "FTL?" Flipping a page, one of her eyebrows arched upwards. "Stuffed animals?" With another page, the other eyebrow joined the first one. "Leman Russ, we are going to have a long talk afterwards."

"Awwwww." Lemon pouted, glaring at his snickering brothers again, knowing it would be a \_mortifying \_loop to deal with.

\* \* \*

><p>The door to the small cottage slammed open, causing Fluttershy, Forging Fire and Corn Curse to jump up from the sofa, with their tea cups rattling after jostling the table.<p>

Big Maroon looked furious, before wilting under Fluttershy's glare as he used his magic to close the door quietly. "Where is \_my little \_brother?!\_" He snapped, twigs and leaves falling from his body, still covered from head to hoof in tree sap.

"What happened Maroon?" Forging Fire asked, biting back a smirk.

"Our \_brother\_," Maroon's ear twitched in anger. "Introduce me to his \_girlfriend\_." At this, both of Forging Fire and Corn Curse ears perked up at the mention of their Anchor's famous girlfriend. "She's the daughter of this loops Anchor, \_that\_ \_M\_iss Twilight Sparkle," He switched his tone as Fluttershy raised an eyebrow at him, reminding him the terror that was the Stare. "She \_was\_ a perfect lady, or so I thought." He grumbled loudly as he paced across the hallway, itching to shake his body but the yellow pegasus would \_not\_ like it and he did not want to make her angry. \_Ever\_. "She wanted to show me around with her friends, to introduce me to some interesting concepts that she wished to test \_without\_ Lemon." He pawed the ground, his horn glowing for a brief moment before going out. "These little girls took me to the top of a hill, and wished to see if a person who joined one of their crusades would incur the same results they do."

"They took you on a Cutie Mark Crusade?" Fluttershy asked, holding back her laughter perfectly. Forging Fire and Corn Curse, on the other hoof, were not doing so well, being loud in their laughter.

"\_Yes.\_"

"And by that, they pushed you down a hill in a wagon to see if you would get covered in tree sap-" She turned her head to her other ...sons. She was warming up to the idea of calling them \_hers\_ like she had done for Leman Russ so long ago. "No matter what the girls do for their crusades, they \_always\_ get covered in tree sap."

\_"BUT THERE WERE NO TREES!"\_

\* \* \*

><p>Sitting on a cloud above the cottage, the two foals were joined in the laughter by the other stallions inside the small house.<p>

Lemon turned his head to face Nyx, tears running down her face. "You were \_right\_," leaning over, he gave her a kiss on the cheek. "\_Thank you for dealing with him.\_"

"Like there was \_any\_ doubt." Nyx fluffed her chest out, snickering loudly. "Only \_I\_ \_get\_ to decide who torments \_my\_ favourite stallion!"

Lemon was giggling loudly before managing to stop himself. "\_My hero!\_" He swooned himself into her arms before she let him go onto the cloud, both of them giggling like loons and happy as could be.

A voice shouted from below the cloud, "I thought I was your favorite stallion!"

Nyx looked down to see Shining Armor, resting comfortably against the side of the cottage. Nyx blew a raspberry at her uncle. Shining chuckled and shouted, "I heard that!"

Rolling her eyes, Nyx looked back to Lemon and muttered, "Barking chaperones."

\* \* \*

><p>139.13 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Twilight rested her chin against the countertop of Donut Joe's restaurant. Nothing she did helped. She had taken a dozen loops worth of lessons trying to eliminate one of her major weaknesses: Dancing. She couldn't dance to save her life. Literally, when asked to out dance cockroach on a DDR machine, the cockroach had won. It was a second later that another pony, male, sat next to her. Her eyes turned to the pony, and she recognized him immediately from the N7 emblazoned on his flank. "Why didn't you ping us when the loop began, Shepard?"

The pony held up a hoof for a glass of tea. "Wasn't awake at the time. Woke up about a month ago and went on an intensive training trip. Only came back a couple days ago. What's got you down this time, Twilight?"

"Can't dance."

The stallion chuckled as he held the glass up in his hoof and gulped it down. "Neither can I. Doesn't stop me from having fun on the floor."

He set the glass down and turned to face her. Twilight scoffed. "At least you can probably out dance a cockroach."

Shepard had the glass up to his lip at that, and he gagged on the drink, spraying it out in a burst of laughter and coughing, "You...danced against Dr. Cockroach and you're upset? He...\*cough\*...got his PHD in dance!"

Twilight's eyes widened, "Wait...what?"

Shepard pulled out a PADD of his own and showed her a wikipedia entry on Monsters vs. Aliens. Twilight rubbed her horn and moaned. Shepard patted her on the back, "His universe has only recently started

looping, probably why you never heard of him."

A minute of silence passed, then Shepard asked, "What are your plans for the Gala this loop?"

Twilight sighed, "Not going. The others are putting together a dance party and I don't want to give them more blackmail material."

Shepard thought for a second, then his mouth formed a smirk. "Want to turn their party on their heads?"

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia, the only other pony besides the elements that was awake, stood a short distance from the specially designed dance floor. Her usual spot was occupied by an illusion of Celestia that would greet all well wishers and nobles without them any the wiser. She herself was under a notice-her-not charm as well as a compulsion charm to avoid her area. She was resting on a bench, waiting for Applejack and the others to begin their dance off. Dash and Pinkie stepped onto the floor first, strutting their stuff. Dash seemed more into the robot and electric slide. Pinkie initiated a very impressive break dance. Applejack took to line dancing while Rarity performed the tango solo. Fluttershy danced a slower waltz. A crowd had gathered around the dancing mares, all wondering what the buck they were doing.<p>

Suddenly, a disco ball dropped from the ceiling as every spotlight on the floor came to rest on the orb. This threw off all the others as the floor started lighting up. A snappy beat started up, \_Shake it, Shake it.\_

Celestia blinked as a familiar tan coated stallion stepped onto the floor dressed in a white jacket and blue ascot. The stallion gripped his collar and allowed the beat to take him. A familiar purple unicorn stepped out of the crowd as well, wearing a green shoulder-less dress that went down to her ankles. The music still played in the background (\_Shake it, shake it\_) as the five elements and Celestia's jaw dropped in unison. The unicorn held up her front hoof and beckoned the stallion forth.

\_Shake your groove thing, shake your groove thing, yeah yeah.  
>Show 'em how they do it now.<em>

Dash asked Pinkie, "What's going on? Is that Twilight? I thought she was staying at home?"

Pinkie held up a video camera as she muttered, "Thought I felt a doozie coming."

The stallion and mare stepped forward towards one another, in unison bobbing their head at each other. Once they were a foot from each other, their disco began, as they proved themselves quite good at it. Dash leaned in to Pinkie and asked, "Was Twilight replaced by a changeling or something? She's doing really well here."

A couple other ponies stepped around them and joined in. Dash finally managed to get a glimpse at the stallion's cutie mark and her jaw dropped again, "That's Shepard! Ok, those two have to have been

replaced by changelings."

Applejack gave Dash a quirked expression, "Dash, ya think anythin' baseline could kidnap those two and replace em'?"

Dash opened her mouth, then thought better of it. "No."

By the end of the song, the entirety of the nobility had joined in on the strange dance.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight and Shepard managed to extract themselves from the dance floor without the other elements catching up. After exiting the building, Twilight teleported the two of them back to her library. Once they arrived, the two burst out laughing, Twilight asking, "Did you get their reaction on camera?"<p>

Shepard rubbed a tear away, "Sure did, and the expressions of everyone else, including your mentor."

Another moment passed as Twilight asked, "How long do you think it'll take them to figure out we artificially induced a heartsong?"

Shepard shrugged, "Give them a couple days. Still, that was fun."

\* \* \*

><p>139.12 continued: (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight paced back and forth with Forging Fire, Big Maroon and Corn Curse watching her with fear. Fluttershy was sitting in the middle of them, watching her friend and preparing some tea as Twilight tried to deal with what happened when they all Woke up.

Luna was also pouting in the corner of the room, grumbling about how her daughter/sister stole her/their moon to go on a thousand year date with her boyfriend.

Twilight was ok with the thought of her daughter dating, knowing that their two kids were more than capable to defend themselves and her Nyxie was beyond capable to defend herself if Lemon tried anything. This wasn't the first time the two of them have gone off for an adventure, but it was the first time the two of them did so as alicorn teens. Even though they were both ageless, all of them were ageless but Nyx was still too young to go on a date with a teenage boy and she was growing up too fast and she knew what teenage boys were interested and she knew how sav-

Suddenly, there was a knock on her door, causing Twilight to jump. Teleporting over and opening the door, she saw an armoured unicorn stallion glaring at her, his horn glowing as he held up two red face ponies.

"Ma'am, we found these two on a moon reported stolen over a thousand years ago." He moved a dark coated mare, her long purple mane hiding half of her grinning, blushing face. "After making them pull over, discovering the stolen property and finally producing evidence, we do believe she lives here; is this correct?"

"Yes, this is my daughter." Twilight said calmly, eying the mare that was holding the yellow coated stallion's hoof, both of them in mid snickering. Said mare noticed the glare the purple unicorn was giving her and meeped softly, hiding behind her mane like the stallion next to her mother once did.

"Sorry ma-"

"Later Nightmare Moon Sparkle." She said equally calm, causing her daughter to squeak and the stallion next to her to gulp loudly. The stallion holding them coughed, causing Twilight to throw her calm glare at him. With nary a flinch, the stallion looked into the room and eyed Fluttershy.

"Ma'm, are you the mother of this stallion he-"

"Yes, he is one of my boys and I do hope he did not do anything wrong." Fluttershy blinked, looking at the table before glancing at the trembling, pale alicorn stallion. "I trust there is a record of events?"

"Yes ma'am," He said, pulling out a pamphlet to both mothers. "This is when they are due to appear in court, the cost of the damages, the fine of driving a moon without a permit and several other details." Placing the two alicorns down inside the library, he nodded his head. "I do need to find one miss Princess Luna; we need to know what to do with the remains of the moon."

"I am she and what did they do my moon?" Luna asked with a bit of fear and a bit of steel in her voice.

"This was ma'am, and I do apologize as what you see may be a bit uncomfortable." He lead Luna out of the library, closing the door.

Twilight eyed her blushing, teenage daughter cuddling up against the tall, rugged stallion, his wing holding her close.

Grinding her teeth and pulling her wings in tight to her side, she took a step forwards to give a brand new lecture that she just invented that would last at least two loops when Luna suddenly cried loud enough to cause several glass planes to shatter, with the others gaining spiderweb cracks.

Twilight blinked, turning her head to see a weeping Luna latching onto the armoured stallion before turning back to look at the two teenagers, only to find the door open and a note where they just sitting.

Picking up the note, she started to read it out loud.

\_ 'Sorry momma, but we were only halfway done with our date! Don't worry, we'll be back in time for our court day and tell Auntie Luna we're really sorry! \_

\_ Love, \_

\_ Nyx & Lemon' \_

Twilight blacked out after reading that, later learning from Fluttershy that she blew up the Golden Oaks in a fit of rage.

Oh she would need a \_special \_lecture for these two!

\* \* \*

><p>139.14: (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

A vacationing police officer and his niece sat on a plane. The plane was destined for Austin, Texas. However, these two weren't ordinary vacationers. The younger one was giving funny looks at her uncle, "Uncle, stop being so coy and tell me why you kidnapped me-"

Shining looked affronted, "I have not kidnapped you."

Nyx gave him a flat stare with her eyebrow quirked, "So what do you call coming into mommy and my house at two in the morning, hold your finger to your mouth in an attempt to shoosh me, then picked me up and a pre-prepared suitcase, and then finally walked out the door?"

Shining looked sheepish, "I left a message on the kitchen table explaining everything. Besides, we haven't spent uncle/niece bonding time in...a three million loops or so."

Nyx's expression somehow turned more skeptical, "And you think mommy will react like a normal human when she finds me gone from my bed tomorrow? She probably won't even look at the table."

Several rapid fire pings washed over them in rapid succession, causing Shining to flinch. Nyx chuckled, "She's probably torn the entire neighborhood apart looking for me. You're so dead when she finds out."

\* \* \*

><p>The house hovered mid air, broken down into its individual pieces down to the bare nails. Twilight was frantic, stepping between the pieces looking for any sign of Nyx. Could this loop not be a hub loop? Had a supervillain kidnapped Nyx? These and many more thoughts flew through Twilight's head as she grew more and more panicked. Why hadn't Nyx Pinged by now? Sure, she can handle herself, but what if it were Dio, or Kyubey, or some other villain looper they haven't met yet appears?<p>

Suddenly, her cell phone started ringing.

\* \* \*

><p>Shining gulped as Twilight picked up, "Twiley? Yes, I'm awake. I know Nyx is missing. Look, I have her with me now."<p>

Dead silence reigned for a second. Sweat started dripping down the officer's head, "I just wanted to have some uncle/niece bonding time-"

He held the phone away as the phone somehow managed to convey the Royal Canterlot Voice, "\*\*\*AND YOU DIDN'T THINK IT A GOOD IDEA TO TELL ME BEFORE PULLING THIS STUNT! WHY DIDN'T YOU ASK TO TAKE HER WITH

YOU?!\*\*"

With a wandless muffliato, he weathered the diatribe of words, "There was a note on the kitchen table. It should still be there. It even outlines the places I'm going, alright?"

Twilight's voice cut off for a second as, presumably, the note floated over to the anchor. After a full minute passed, she growled out the rest, "I expect her back in a month. Aspen Birch Bark help you if she isn't back by midnight on the 28th day. And if she doesn't say this was the best hub world adventure she's ever had, I won't be held responsible for my actions. Now put Nyx on."

Shining passed his niece the phone. Twilight said, "Nyxie, let me know if Shining causes you any trouble. And do have fun!"

Nyx replied in an enthused tone, "Will do mommy! Love you!"

Twilight said the same, then the line cut off. Nyx handed back the phone to Shining and asked, "So, what's in Austin anyway?"

Shining shook his head. "That's not our final destination. We're catching a connecting flight to New Braunfels, Texas."

Nyx quirked her eyes again, "And there?"

Shining chuckled. "That's a surprise."

\* \* \*

><p>After arriving in New Braunfels and a short trip through the town, they arrived at their destination, a massive water park named Schlitterbahn. Nyx muttered, "This is definitely new."<p>

Shining chuckled, "Never been to a water park before?"

"I've been to garden worlds in Warhammer, Aquilaris during its time as a resort world in Star Wars, ridden the space Titanic in the Whoverse among many others, but no, I haven't. Now I'm curious how it will stack up."

Shining ruffled Nyx's hair. "You can't compare one universe's adventures to another, otherwise you'll just long for times that have passed and won't come again for billions of loops. Let's have some fun."

Nyx could get behind that. As the day progressed, Nyx couldn't help but admit she was having fun. There were dozens of rides to partake in, plenty of tasty food to eat, and excellent company to enjoy. Even though she had been through life and death situations, her heart still went to her throat as she slid down the 168 foot water slide. She played a pirate as she defended Han's Hideout from the one man army of Shining Armor. Her mind imagined herself flying like her Alicorn self as she was launched into the air in the Skycoaster. As the day wound down and Shining took her to the hotel, Nyx wondered what would be next? Twilight did say Shining would have her for a month, so where else would the two travel?

\* \* \*

><p>139.15: (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"So, what did you call me over for?" Skuld asked.

"You know how that tree library almost always gets blown up in the Equestria Loop?" Sleipnir asked. "I've been going over the logs, and that library was getting destroyed at above-average frequency even before the Tirek expansion began."

"Your point?" Skuld said pointedly. "I ask because there are a dozen acts of divine idiocy happening right now, and I need to administer the mighty hammer of debugging." She gently rapped Sleipnir's desk with said hammer. It went squeak.

"Maybe Yggdrasil's trying to tell us something."

Skuld blinked. "Continue."

"Library. Tree containing lots of knowledge. Gets horribly damaged." The horse spread its four forehooves to indicate the whole of the Admin offices. "Yggdrasil. Tree containing all that is knowable. Gets horribly damaged." Lowering his hooves, he pointed one to his terminal and concluded, "Maybe if we study the various incidents that destroyed the library in Ponyville, we'll gain insight into the Event, and thus to a final workable repair that brings Yggdrasil back to full capacity."

Skuld raised an eyebrow. "So, what you're saying is, Yggdrasil is trying to point on the dolly where the bad man touched it."

Sleipnir looked distinctly uncomfortable. "Er... could you please pick a different metaphor?"

"The bad, bad centaur man with horns," Skuld pressed on. "I'll just tell Tyr that we all need to be on the lookout for a malevolent centaur about fifty thousand parsecs tall? Or maybe larger? Be kind of hard to miss. And we'll have to question Chiron very closely, make sure he wasn't-"

"All right, I get it," Sleipnir sighed, slumping over his terminal. "The theory needs work."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

139.1: Crossover is Sentinels of the Multiverse. They don't seem very good at sentineling, though.

>139.2: Dang loops.<br>139.3: Someone didn't like Ren OR Stimp.

>139.4: D'awww.<br>139.5: May not actually work that way.

>139.6: Aim Twilight Sparkle away from eyes or face when annoyed.<br>139.7: Duplication.

>139.8: That is dedication, alright.<br>139.9: Whoops...

>139.10: Note the anchor asleep on the bed.<br>139.11: ...I have to admit, it's a tricky choice. Either way you can moderate the worst bits of your side.

>139.12: Oh, dear. Shenannigans.<br>139.13: Dance, Dance Revulsion?

>139.14: Laughing "Uncle!"<br>139.15: ...well, it might be the



explanation.

## 147. Chapter 147

### 140.1 (Evilhumour)

Sunset looked at the teenager next to her and sighed.

"Nyx, your mom is going to kill me if I let you do this, you know that right?" She rubbed her face, looking at the parking lot. "I mean, she'll be here in a few minutes and if she knows I let you go, she's going to lecture my head off!"

Nyx was about to respond when the distinctive sound of a chopper was heard. Turning their heads, they saw a young man dressed in an open dark blue jacket with fur lining around the neck pull up in front of the steps. Stepping off his bike in his form fitting jeans, every student was able to see his chiselled stomach against his black muscle shirt. Pulling off his wolf style helmet and letting his rough, messy orange hair fall to his side, he gave a smile that caused every girl's knees to melt, either single or in a relationship otherwise.

"Oh sweet birch, he's gorgeous!" Sunset place a hand to her mouth, her face blushing horribly as the definition of bad boy walked over to them, with a silver helmet in his hands.

"I know," Nyx smirked as Leman walked up the steps and gave Nyx a kiss on the lips, causing several of the girls to gasp; either in jealousy or delight that the resident daughter of the librarian, the nerd queen, was being kissed by this hunk of teenage perfection. "Hi Leman."

"Hi yourself." He grinned, his hand reaching for her bag which she passed over without a second thought. "Ready to go?"

Placing the helmet on her head, she smiled as the two of them went to the wolf styled motorcycle, Leman placing the bag in the compartment under the seat. Sunset smiled as she watched Nyx got on the bike behind Leman, holding onto him tightly, her head resting against his shoulder. She, along with the rest of student body, began to cheer as they pulled out of the parking lot for Nyx.

That was cut short as someone slammed the doors open behind her, causing everyone to fall quiet.

Sunset gulped, and she slowly turned her head around to face the enraged librarian.

"Sunset Shimmer, did you just let my daughter off with Leman Russ on that bike?!\_"

Sunset gulped, wondering how she would deal with her unAwake friend and make sure she wouldn't get detention for a month.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight pulled into her house, eying that damn bike in her drive way and did her best not run it over. Opening the door to her house,

slammed the door shut and stormed up the staircase.<p>

"Ok, get your damn hands off my daug-" She blinked, her daughter's room empty. She was sure that the two of them would be in there, doing things her Nyxie was too young to do and things that were making her feel old.

"Mama?" Nyx's voice called out from the living room. Twilight gasped, they were doing it down there, in public, where anyone could see them?!\_

Running back down the stairs, she took a deep breath to begin lecturing the damn boy that was sitting next to her daughter going over their homework?

"Hello Miss Sparkle," Leman smiled at her, putting down the pencil. "How are you?"

"Very good thank you," she said automatically, "What are you doing in my house?" she glared at the boy sitting next to her little girl both hunched over the table.

"Your daughter and I are going over our homework after I gave her a lift home," he shared a smile with her daughter, who was leaning against him now. "I'd be lost without her help Miss Sparkle."

"I see..." Twilight's eye twitched, noticing the two of them were holding hands as well as that they were going over some semi difficult algebra that she knew Leman was having trouble with so they were not lying. Sighing, she changed mental gears in regards to the boy next to her daughter. "Will you be staying for supper Mister Russ?"

"Oh that would be lovely, Miss Sparkle," he smiled. "I heard so much of your cooking from Nyxie; I'd love to finally taste it."

"Thank you," Twilight smiled, walking towards the kitchen. "Afterwards, we can have a nice, long, talk about you dating my daughter."

Twilight smiled as she heard the gulp from the teenage boy, knowing that she still had it.

\* \* \*

><p>Emps bit his lip, trying his hardest not to laugh as his son walked past him again, tugging his neck.<p>

"Leman, please come over and let me help you." He waved over his son, who was trying to fix the bowtie on himself again.

With a groan, his son walked over to him as Leman let him fix the pink bowtie around his neck that matched nicely with his blue tuxedo. "Thank you father, these thing are a devil to put on."

"I know my son," the man nodded his head, pulling out the ends to make it perfect. "They always throw me for a loop."

Once again, Leman head jerked up as he hinted that he was Awake. "Thank you father, I would need to stay Awake next time you show

me."

"Indeed as I will not always be here to do it for you and your girlfriend would be annoyed at seeing you as a mess." He said, ignoring the prompt to reveal he was Awake this loop, enjoying how none of his sons could figure it out this loop.

"If you are done with Leman," Magnus muttered in his red tuxedo. "Mom can take our picture and we can go pick up our dates; I know that your Nyx wouldn't mind but my Adagio \_would!\_"

"Remind me again how the captain of the Chess and Debate team got the leader of the Dazzlings as a date again, brother?" Leman snarked before running a hand through his somewhat washed hair.

"Your girlfriend's friend Sunset hooked us up." Vulkan answered, looking at Konrad who was tapping his foot against the floor. "I don't know \_why\_ Sunset gave Konrad Sonata as a date but who am I to judge?"

"Boys, are you fighting?" The woman in a beautiful green dress asked, walking down the staircase with a camera in her hands.

"No mom!" The four of his sons said in unison; the Little Mother was still a terrifying presence to \_any\_ of his sons, Awake or not.

"Good, now stand together please." She said, walking over to Emps, who picked up the photographer bag as his wife this loop was taking picture for the prom. Fluttershy smiled as she began to take pictures of the four of them smiling together with the Emperor doing his best not to break down in laughter as she 'asked' Magnus and Leman to hug each other.

Hearing a car honk, he walked over to the window and saw the limos.

"Boys, your rides are here." Smiling, he watched Leman and Magnus try to shoot each other dirty glares, only to be stopped when Fluttershy coughed. Handing Fluttershy a coat, he watched three of his sons pile into one limo as Leman went into the other one.

"You think they will be ok dear?" Fluttershy sighed, leaning against him as they walked to their car, with Fluttershy sitting behind the wheel.

"I think tonight will be one for the records dear."

\* \* \*

><p>Leman watched the clock on the wall, hearing the ticks echo loudly as he tried not to fidget in seat. Twilight simply smiled at him, holding the camera in one hand and her purse in the other hand as she sat opposite of him in the living room.<p>

"Leman, "

"Yes ma'am?" He winced, his voice cracking as he answered her.

"I do not believe I need to remind you that my brother is the captain

of the police force, so if you so much as \_step\_ on her toes, I will-"

"I swear to you ma'am, I will do \_nothing\_ untoward to your daughter!" Leman responded, paling as he remembered the time the unAwake Shining had once picked him up for a \_very\_ long talk. Despite everything he had done and gained in the loops, he was still scared witless from Nyx's family as he \_didn't\_ have his usual strength to back him up as well as the fact disobeying any of them would hurt Nyx's feelings as she had asked him for a baseline loop.

"Good." Twilight said with a smile, nodding her head softly. "Because everything that my brother can dish out, I am \_far\_ worse." The way that Twilight said it made Leman wished he was fighting unAwake Khorne with limited power right now.

"I-I-" He tried to come up with something to say, but his tongue was tying itself in fear.

"Mom, please stop terrifying my boyfriend." Nyx's voice called out from the second floor. "I'll need someone to dance with and I cannot do it if Leman has fainted."

"Alright dear!" Twilight called back up, turning away from Leman. "One more thing; if you ruin this for her, they will \_never\_ find your body!" She snapped, glaring at him now with a finger pointed at him.

"Not-\_woah!\_"

Leman was short of breath, as Nyx stood at the top of the staircase, in a beautiful silver dress, her purple hair flowing down her shoulders. With a tiny blush, she walked down the staircase as Twilight took picture after picture as Leman stood there with his jaw hanging low.

Finally she reached the bottom and walked up to Leman, examining his appearance before standing on her toes and running her fingers through his hair, messing it up. Smiling, she sat back down as she rocked in her high heel shoes.

"Much better." She said with a giggle, batting an eye at him. "How do I lo-

"\_Wonderful!\_" He squeaked out, his legs barely holding back his trembles. "Stunning Nyx."

It was Nyx turn to become all emotions, tilting her head to the side as she blushed from the praise. "\_Thanks.\_"

Leman reached into his coat and pulled out the corsage to place on Nyx, and blushed. "Um..." he looked over his shoulder, seeing Twilight glare at him.

Oh boy, this was going to be the most difficult thing he ever did: putting on a corsage without getting killed.

Like any soldier, however, Leman simply dug in and went to place the flower on his girlfriend's chest.

Before he could fumble too much, Nyx grabbed his hands and guided them into place. She gave him a reassuring smile and pointedly did not give her mom a coy grin that would have instantly gotten her in more trouble than that time they wrecked the Moon.

\* \* \*

><p>Leman gulped as the music began to slow down, with the light dimming in the gym. Konrad was off to the side with Sonata, both of them giggling and seemingly having a blast despite his brother making a bit of a dunce of himself earlier. Vulkan seemed to have a pleasant time with his own date, the two of them in hushed conversation over at the tables now. Magnus and Adagio were also slow dancing; his brother and his date had threatened to steal the show with their dancing skills the entire prom, showing to everyone how nimble the captain of the debate and chess team was. Of course, Nyx and Leman had countered them at every turn with their own dancing and he was sure that they would be crowned king and queen. Then again, it wasn't really fair as Nyx had a much <em>longer<em> time to practice her skills and Leman knew that dancing was just a different style of fighting.

Although, this was more terrifying than any fight he had been in. Leman looked at the crowd, spotting Twilight slow dancing with a man with blue hair with a happy blush on her face and with Father and the Little Mother dancing in another corner, their parents were not really watching what they were doing now. Turning his head to Nyx, he tried to think of how to do this right as none of his soldier training prepared him for this.

"Come on, Leman." Nyx cooed into his ear, leaning against him. "We rarely get to dance, let alone slo-"

Leman had one thought to this whole thing: screw this!

Leman cut her off when he placed his hand around her waist, and his other holding her hand as he slowly stepped in beat with the music, leading Nyx into a dance. Nyx meeped softly while blushing beautifully as she leaned against him, her hand going around his waist to link them together as they dance as one. Slowly, the world began to fade away as it was just the two of them dancing, lost in each others eyes.

She then caused Leman to jump slightly as her hand reached down to his rear and gave a pinch. Giggling softly, she leaned into Leman's shoulder as she grabbed his hand and guided it a bit lower, causing Leman to blush now as his hand raced back to her waist.

"Don't tell me my big bad wolf is scared of little old me?" She cooed into his ear, pulling her head back to stare into his eyes.

"Never, my beautiful night sky." Leman answered, leaning down to give her a kiss which she gave back happily, pausing in place as their lips meet each other.

Suddenly, they heard clapping and cheering. Pulling their heads back, Leman saw they were alone in a circle of students and chaperones. They were giving them both applauds, hoots of good cheer, catcalls, and in the case of one purple mother, the Death Glare.

Blushing, Leman and Nyx bowed for their audience when Principle Celestia's voiced chimed over the speakers.

"I do believe we have our Prom King and Queen, my dear students."

"Indeed sister," Luna said from the stage, smiling at her older sister. "Would Leman Russ and Nyx Sparkle please come up here for your crowns."

Leman, blushing once more, linked his arm with Nyx as the two of them walked their way up to the stage with the student cheering them even louder then before, Twilight seemingly split between panicking, cheering, taking pictures and trying to cause Leman's head to explode with her look alone. The Little Mother, of course, was taking pictures as the prom photographer and father was smirking up a storm.

Leman smiled as the crown was placed on Nyx's head, barely aware of the one being placed on his head by a slightly annoyed Luna-annoyed by the fact he was tall enough that she needed to stand on her tippy toes to place the crown on his head.

Leaning over to Nyx's ear, he whispered a question to her as their hands intertwined with each other.

"Have a good prom Nyx?"

She gave him a peck on the cheek as they bowed, whispering into his ear.

"Best night \_ever\_."

And then she pulled him into a very long, very passionate kiss in front of everyone that caused one single mother to faint on the spot.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight stood next to Fluttershy and Emps, tapping her foot before sighing. She looked at Shining who was rubbing his face at what the kids did to get thrown into the holding cell.<p>

"I understand it is \_typical\_ for teenagers to go to Makeout Point; I understand that." Twilight said, pacing in front of Leman, Nyx, Vulkan, Magnus, Konrad and the Dazzlings. "But what on \_earth\_ possessed you guys to seal a \_car\_ to go there?! You had limos!"

Nyx blushed, looking at the floor. "Sorry momma, but I just wanted to treat Leman and his brothers out for a night on the town. Besides, Auntie Lu- I mean, Vice Principal Luna doesn't mind when I borrow her car."

"Yes, when you \_ask\_!" Twilight countered. "Where did you even learn to hot wire a car!?"

"I read it in a book?" Nyx said with a weak smile, Leman chuckling before being glared at by Fluttershy.

"Regardless of the fact, I don't think Luna would have pressed charges if you had remembered to put the car in park, Nyxie-sticks." Shining said, eying the door for the eventual arrival of his extended family.

"I did!" She protested before blushing. "I just hit the gear shifter when we got out, it started going forward and..."

"And went off the top of Makeout Point, and into that old wooden library." He muttered, the specialized empty library in the shape of a tree was totaled along with the remains of the car.

Nyx could only groan in embarrassment, with Leman placing a hand around her shoulders as everyone else tried not to laugh.

\* \* \*

><p>140.2 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Dash was sitting outside Sugarcube corner, resting her chin against a table as an exotic music flowed out of store. Twilight stepped towards the shop, to which Dash sighed. A ping echoed from the rainbow maned pegasus, to which Twilight quickly responded, being the only two loopers awake. She muttered, "We got a weird Pinkie this loop."

Twilight blinked. "She's not Cupcakes Pinkie is she?"

Dash shook her head. She continued to shake her head at every nasty, disgusting or downright evil version of Pinkie they ever encountered. After she finished, Dash pointed her hoof at the door, "Go see for yourself."

Twilight shrugged. "Sure. I could use a cupcake to wash away my last loop. Leah Clearwater wasn't even awake this time."

After opening the door, the purple pegasus saw Lyra and Bonbon dancing in a pair of dresses in the corner while a pony she recognized at the Apple family reunion was playing a fiddle. Twilight rang the bell, causing Pinkie Pie to appear in front of the counter, "Morning new pony I've never met before!"

Twilight nodded her head, "Morning. I just arrived in town to check that the preparations for the Summer Sun Celebration are completed and I felt a bit...peckish for a couple delectable confections."

Pinkie blinked, "Peckish, pony who hasn't giving me her name?"

Twilight looked a little bashful, having met Pinkie so many times she forgot to introduce herself, "Sorry. I'm Twilight Sparkle, Celestia's Personal Protege`. And I'd like to buy some cupcakes."

The pink pony's mouth opened wide, "Ooohhhh! That sound fancy! What's a protege`?"

The music had been going for quite a bit now and showed no sign of stopping. Twilight looked at them and sighed. "I'm the princess' student. What's with the dancers and fiddle?"

"That's sound swell! As for the music, it's what separates us from all the other cupcake shops in Ponyville."

This time, it was Twilight who blinked in confusion. "I'm sorry, other cupcake shops?"

Pinkie nodded. "Yepperoni!"

She leaned in close to Twilight, as if conveying a dark secret. "They're spread throughout Ponyville, just looking to take our customers."

Twilight quirked an eye at the pony. "Riiight. About those cupcakes?"

"Sure thing! What will you have?"

"Hmm...how about...a dozen Cloud Nines and another dozen Caramelicious."

Pinkie shook her head. "I'm afraid we're fresh out of Cloud Nines and Caramelicious is no longer being sold."

Twilight shrugged. "Never mind. How are you on the Lemon Meringue Pie?"

Pinkie held up a hoof. "Never at the end of the week, Miss. Always make it fresh first thing on Monday."

"Dang it. Well, hmm...what about Snickerdoodle?"

"Ah, well, we've been meaning to make some for two weeks for some special orders, but no Cinnamon Buttercream has come in."

Twilight gave Pinkie a skeptical look. "Yes...well it's not my day, is it. Do you have any Coco Coccoa?"

"Sorry."

"...Vanilla"

"Nope."

Twilight was catching a theme here. "Any cupcakes at all?"

"Ordinarily yes. But they were all bought up for a party for Diamond Tiara."

Sighing, Twilight nodded. "Ok. How about some cake? I enjoy a good red Velvet Cake."

Pinkie looked sheepish this time. "The competing Pastry shops bought the entire stock for the month. None for Sugarcube Corner."

"Do you have Chocolate cake?"

"It's not one of our most popular dishes in Ponyville."



Twilight looked shocked at that. "You got to be barking kidding me! It's one of the most widely sold cakes in Equus!"

Pinkie shrugged. "Not here though."

Rolling her eyes, Twilight asked, "What is the Ponyville favorite?"

Pinkie thought for a second, then replied with a big smile, "Fat Rascal!"

With a skeptical frown, the purple unicorn asked. "I...see."

Pinkie nodded enthusiastically. "Yes, It's unbelievably popular in these parts. I just sold some an hour ago. It's our number one seller."

A moment of silence pierced only by the music passed. "Is it?"

Pinkie reassured her it was. "Alright, then I'll have some...Fat Rascal."

Pinkie turned to the counters behind her, then turned back. "Oh yeah, that customer ordered the last of it."

With a nasty slap, Twilight's hoof met her own face. "Do you have any cake at all?"

"Of course I do. This is a pastry shop after all."

All the time, the music had been eating away at Twilight's mind. She turned around and shouted in the Royal Canterlot Voice. "WOULD YOU KNOCK IT OFF FOR A MINUTE! I CAN'T HEAR MYSELF THINK!"

As the music finally cut out, Pinkie patted Twilight on the back as the purple pony rubbed her horn. "You haven't asked me if we have any Princess Cake."

Twilight stared Pinkie in the eyes. "Is it any good?"

Pinkie shrugged and gave her a mischievous glance. "Could be."

Twilight nodded. "Ok...have you got any Princess Cake?"

Pinkie gave a flat no, to which Twilight muttered. "Of course not. That figures, it was the utter height of optimism to expect otherwise. Not much of a pastry shop, is it?"

"Finest in the town."

Twilight crossed her hooves and gave the Pastry sales pony a half lidded expression. "And what brings you to that conclusion?"

"It's so clean."

Twilight reached over and pulled Pinkie close. "You do have pastries here, don't you?"

Pinkie nodded. "Of course, silly filly."

Twilight looked Pinkie in the eye and cast a spell that would force Pinkie to tell the truth.

"Do...you...have...any...pastries...at...all?"

Pinkie tried saying something, but ultimately the response came out. "No."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight came out and sat down across from Dash, resting her chin against the table. "You want to try another pastry shop?"<p>

"There aren't any. I've already checked a minute before you arrived at Sugarcube Corner."

"I'm taking a nap. We'll beat the evil out of Nightmare Moon tomorrow."

\* \* \*

><p>140.3 (Gym Quirk; setup by Masterweaver)<p>

Contrary to popular belief, most loopers did not know every individual native to their home reality.

Oh, there were exceptions of course. Sparsely populated loops tended to have high social interaction, and certain devoted loopers would take time out to at least make a census. Pinkie Pie had a particular chaotic spell that would automatically teleport her and her party cannon to any house if a resident she knew personally was having a birthday, and she'd spent whole loops tweaking the duplication effect and trying to meet every pony, griffon, minotaur, and other sapient life form native to Equestria. Still, for the most part loopers kept to their own, interacting with nonloopers only if they were close friends, family, or unawake loopers.

Granted, the Equestrians were a little freer in who they mingled with, out of some ancient herd instinct or simply the need for friends. Still, the majority of them didn't really know too many ponies outside of their baseline places of residence.

But the unending struggle to stave off boredom did result in impulsive behavior from time to time.

\* \* \*

><p>All the pegasus known as Red Curtain knew was that there was a strange purple unicorn in his apartment, wearing a far far too wide grin, who had just promised to grant his every wish.<p>

"Except sexual ones. I do have standards after all." The unicorn sipped her drink. "And all you have to do is be my friend for, oh... five, six years."

\* \* \*

><p>All in all, Twilight did not indulge in these random acts of

friendship very often. The amusement value was frequently offset by high levels of banality and frustration.<p>

But every now and then, the rare and wonderful occasion of a genuine surprise did occur.

\* \* \*

><p>"Would you be terribly offended if I declined your offer?" asked the middle-aged bespectacled earth pony mare.<p>

"Um...What?" was Twilight's not-particularly-erudite response.

"Setting aside the farfetched nature of your claim and taking it strictly at face value, I would start by explaining that I am reasonably content with my life just now; any fleeting desires I may have would be just that: Fleeting.

"I suppose that, seeking proof of your claim, I could ask for a hayburger with cheese, no mayo. You would then either conjure one up with your magic, or more amusingly, proceed to my kitchen and cook one. Of course, as I have no hayburger buns, that option could prove problematic.

"Then I suppose I could ask you to cause my assistant to fall madly in love with me, but I'm certain that we both know that sort of thing never works out in the long run." She proceeded to point out the common problems and pitfalls involved with asking for wealth, fame, etc., making a point of stressing the Law of Unintended Consequences, matching the unicorn's own experiences quite closely.

Twilight stood mesmerized at the well-practiced cadences of a veteran lecturer.

"Essentially, I am fully aware of the comedic and ironic possibilities of the scenario you are proposing. Again not wishing to offend you, I am simply not interested in subjecting myself, or you for that matter, to such hijinks, Ms. Sparkle."

"Huh? You know me?" Twilight started to search through her loop memories for this odd pony.

"Not exactly. We do have an acquaintance in common, though," explained the mare as she went to a large desk piled with papers. She rummaged in a drawer and produced a business card.

\_Dr. Genre Savvy, PhD

>Professor of Applied Literature<br>College of Equinities and Esoteric Studies  
>Canterlot University<em>

"I attended the Manehattan Institute with Dusty Tomes; I believe he taught your 'Pre-Unification Unicorn History' classes at Celestia's School two or three years back. We've been fairly close for decades, and he has mentioned you a few times over the course of our correspondence. Pleased to make your acquaintance in person, Ms. Sparkle." The professor extended a hoof.

Twilight felt a genuine smile spreading across her face. "Professor?

Do you have some class syllabi I could look at? I find myself thinking I would greatly enjoy auditing your courses."

\_There's probably nothing that I haven't already learned from experience, but it should be interesting to see how her formulation of the Laws of Narrative Causality compares with what Unseen University has to offer.\_

\* \* \*

><p>140.4: (Gamerex27)<p>

"Morning, Rarity!" Vinyl Scratch said as she cantered into the boutique. "Hey, is that giant mouse head ready yet? I was hoping you'd \_Woken Up\_ early, so you could finish it in time for-"

"HIDE ME!" Before Vinyl could collect the needed fabrics and threads sitting on a nearby chair, Rarity tackled her into a nearby closet.

"Ow! Ny think ny but ny tunge!" Vinyl moaned as she picked herself off the cramped floor.

"Tell them I'm not here!" Rarity hissed, as the din of a massive crowd started to make its way into Vinyl's flicking ears. "I \_cannot\_ deal with this again!"

"Who?" Vinyl asked, wincing as the pain slowly faded from her mouth.

"WHITE AND GOLD!"

"BLUE AND BLACK!"

"THE COLOR DOESN'T MATTER!" Rarity screamed on instinct, before she could stop herself. "THE DRESS LOOKS \_FINE\_ EITHER WAY! BOTH COLORS MATCH!"

"THE HERETIC IS HERE!" one of the voices yelled, as the banging at the door became louder. "BURN HER AT THE STAKE!"

"You \_are\_ Awake, right?" Vinyl asked over the roaring of the crowd and thudding at the front door. "Can't you take care of them?"

"They just keep coming back!" Rarity moaned. "Like cockroaches! No matter how many times I knock them out or paralyze them, they \_keep\_ coming back! \_Nothing\_ works!"

"Wait a second...aha!" Vinyl said, as she levitated the unfinished mouse head to the cabinet with her horn. "Here, put this on, and we'll sneak you out!"

The moment Rarity had shoved the hat onto her head, the door broke from its hinges, and was trampled to splinters by the herd of rampaging ponies barging into the building.

"YOUR DISGUISE SHALL NOT FOOL US, HERETIC!" the leader, a stallion with a paired question mark and exclamation point Cutie Mark said. "FOR YOUR CRIMES AGAINST \_BOTH SIDES\_ OF THE DRESS DEBATE, YOU WILL \_PERISH!\_"

"Sheesh, overkill much?" Vinyl muttered. "Hang on a sec."

She pulled a guitar out of her pocket, stood on her hind legs, and got into position to play a chord. "I WANNA \_ROCK!\_"

"\*\*ROCK!\*\*" the herd involuntarily yelled, as they were blasted off of their hooves by the sheer force of the power chord.

"C'mon, while they're distracted!" Vinyl whispered, dragging Rarity out the door. "What's going on, anyways?!"

"I Woke Up early," Rarity replied, "and I decided to make a dress based of something I'd seen in the Hub. But I never imagined it'd lead to a \_civil war\_ in Ponyville! I thought it was all in good fun before an Unawake Diamond Tiara tried to break my face when I said the dress looks like either color depending on the lighting!"

"That doesn't make any sense!"

"Things don't make sense all the time, and you don't see anyone complaining about that!" Rarity retorted, before running headfirst into a pillar.

"OWWWWwait, "she said, "there was \_never \_a random pillar here. So, that must be..." she trailed off, as she looked up.

Before both ponies, a gigantic version of an Unawake Sunset Shimmer (poorly disguised with Groucho Marx glasses) roared, teetering in place on her stilts and magically color-changing dress. "HAHAHAHAHA! MORE! MORE ARGUMENTS! MORE ARGUMENTS, SO I CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE CONFUSION AND CONQUER THE WOOOOOORLD!"

"Seriously?" Vinyl asked, as she and Rarity prepared for battle. "Worst. Evil plan. \_Ever\_."

\* \* \*

><p>140.5: (Bliss Authority)<p>

"Good morning, Applejack! You look to be in one piece. Good to see ya after what the Sultai and th'Mardu have been up to - how many zombies did my favorite daughter and her soldiers bag?"

Applejack Awoke with a start. That voice couldn't possibly be -

She turned towards Bloomberg and stared. Hanging in the air above it, limned in white, were the ghostly forms of two ponies - one stallion and one mare; the former wore a Stetson, and both wore scale-mail barding and ferocious helms with carved faces.

"What's the matter, pard?" the stallion said, grinning. "You look like you just seen a ghost, sugarcube."

Applejack rushed over to the tree and hugged it. "Mom, dad, I missed ya," she said through her deep breathing.

"It's only been a few days at the front, girl," the ghost of Gravenstein Cider - the ghost of Applejack's father - said with a chuckle. "Come on. I know yer made of sterner stuff than that. You

can outlast the bad times if we can."

She nodded, gritting her teeth. Applejack didn't know if she was going to hate this Loop or if she should spend it making up for lost time. "Sorry. Just a harrowin' experience. You know how them Sultai get," she said - hoping that her expression wasn't telling the truth her words omitted. "I gotta - I missed you," she said. "But now I gotta talk with some friends about my next step."

"Course. Make sure yah look after your brother, okay?" Apple Pancake's ghost said. "And you come back now. Still gotta teach you mah namesake."

Applejack blinked. "Can do, mom."

Then she consulted her Loop memories.

She was still Applejack, and she still ran an orchard with her brother and sister and her Granny Smith. But the Kin-Trees of Sweet Apple Acres housed the spirits of the Apple clan's dead. All of the Apple clan's dead. For she lead the entire Apple clan. Into battle.

She looked down at the barding she was wearing and saw an apple-shaped amulet - made of Kin-Tree Amber, with a cameo of Granny Smith carved into it.

"This is gonna be a long Loop," Applejack muttered as she entered the white stone castle that her loop memories indicated as her house.

"Eeeeeyuuuup." Big Mac offered her a mug of cider. The hard stuff. "Mah little sister, the Khan of clan Apple."

"Now don't you start too," Applejack said.

Winona turned her head to Applejack from her bowl of food - the one on the table - and grinned, tongue lolling. "Brothers tease, Khan," she said. "It may as well be a law of the Apple clan."

Oh right. Ainok were a thing here. Applejack took a deep pull from the mug of cider; she was really going to need it this loop.

(Applejack, the Foremost  
>3WBG<br>Legendary Creature â€” Horse Solider  
>Whenever Applejack, the Foremost attacks, put a +1+1 counter on another target tapped creature you control.  
>Each creature you control with a +1+1 counter on it has indestructible.  
><em>"We'll serve our descendants well, but that's no reason to seek out death."<em>  
>33)

\* \* \*

><p>140.6 (Evilhumour with little bit from Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight sighed, rubbing her face.

"I think Yggdrasil is running out of ideas of how to mess with my tree." She said to herself, looking at the fallen cut out of her home before rolling her eyes and leaving to get a drink.

Unfortunately, she had forgotten how bad an idea it was to test fate. The next loop, the tree transformed into a writhing tentacle monster that, for some reason, played the blues on a saxophone.

The ten loops after that were even stranger.

\* \* \*

><p>140.7 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight rubbed her face and looked at Pinkie Pie, Discord and the many queasy ponies around her.

It had seemed like a fun idea to deal with Nightmare Moon, by having her fall onto a trampoline that launched her back to the moon. Until Discord had made copies and hid them \_everywhere!\_

One moment Applejack was bucking a tree, the next moment she was on the moon coughing out moon dust. Rarity posing in her shop ended with her flying back with ice on her wings and a torn dress. One moment Rainbow Dash was snoozing on a cloud and suddenly she had to deal with the Federation asking her endless questions of surviving a warp seven face plant into the San-Francisco beach.

Somehow he managed to rig it that the Crusaders landed in a planet \_full\_ of tree sap after they went down a hill. The best, though, had to be her brother and sister in law celebrating their wedding night in deep space, still holding their bedsheets close to each other.

The worst though, had to be the 'misfire' when Tirek didn't soar through the sky but instead hit a flying Celestia -who would later report ended up in a bi solar system, which helped her improve her surfing skills- and rocketed towards Trixie's wagon as she was getting rid of her more dangerous explosions as she was trying to get back to her roots. He \_then\_, holding the ticking time bomb that was Great and Annoyed Trixie's home, landed face first into the Golden Oaks when Trixie's wagon finally exploded.

It took Twilight several \_days\_ to put out all the fires and rampant explosions, which finally gave her a chance to look at everyone and give them a lecture.

"-understand?!" She \_finally\_ finished her lecture, only to find herself as a tiny filly with a book fort around her.

The implications soon dawned on her and she groaned, placing her head forwards. Toppling her fort over, Twilight was suddenly airborne, with the curses that would get her filly mouth washed out as soon as Twilight Velvet and Nightlight pulled her out of the sofa.

\* \* \*

><p>140.8 (Drachefly)<p>

Twilight had thought it was nearly baseline - Celestia had closed the

letter with 'take care', underlined, which was within the range of unusual variation with no far-reaching consequences, and the magic system was peculiar - until she arrived at Sweet Apple Acres. Each tree had a large bulging parachute-like sack over it, seemingly filled with balloons. But as she approached, she realized that the objects holding the sack up were apples.

"Since when do apples fall up?"

Spike, looking up with her, commented, "Actually, I think they're more like giant cherries."

Twilight's eyes widened. "Ooooooak. It couldn't be 'I Wanna Be The Guy'... could it?" Her horn lit up as she prepared the most intense and detailed danger-warning magic she knew. it took a few tries.

\_None of the usual magic-detection magic works this loop. But, precognition is unusually strong. That'll do, I guess.\_

"'Oak'? And... what? Who is it you couldn't want to be? What are you doing?"

"Just... watch out. Don't touch the apples. Don't assume that things will stay put. If anything begins moving, dodge. Do anything I say, no matter how weird it sounds. And expect lots and lots of spikes."

"Well, I'm all set on thaaaaaaa-" He was suddenly catapulted towards her, but not before she'd teleported backwards a step. \_I should have seen that one coming even without the precognition.\_

"What the hay?" He declared as he dusted himself off.

Twilight was frozen in place, looking into counterfactual futures, frowning. "All right. The moment I step off this rock, duck and take a step to the left. Ready? Two, one..."

\* \* \*

><p>"It's all right sugarcube, you can make it. Just... jump."<p>

Twilight eyed the extremely narrow, spike-lined passage skeptically.

"Honest."

\_Ah. I guess I can.\_ She jumped. And landed safely.

\* \* \*

><p>The manticore executed a three-paw landing once more, and this time landed directly next to Fluttershy. Before it could menace them once again, she reached out and pulled out the thorn. It waited a moment, then bounded away.<p>

"Woot! Scared it off!" shouted Rainbow Dash.

Fluttershy corrected her, "The poor thing just had a thorn in its



paw."

This produced confusion among most of the others. Applejack pointed out, "Wouldn't it be, you know, \_dead\_?"

Twilight facehoofed. Or nearly - she didn't want to risk an actual hoof-on-head collision.

\* \* \*

><p>The trees didn't just shoot glares - they held up a rhythmic stream of fire, shooting three-meter-wide glowing orbs between them. Before Twilight could recalibrate her danger-senses to not just say 'don't go that way, period', Pinkie, of course, danced through the course with no difficulty.<p>

"How did you manage that, dear?" inquired Rarity.

Rainbow Dash added, "Yeah, it's like you were passing THROUGH them."

Pinkie fell into song: "You see, when I was a little filly and I faced an evil clown,  
>the glowies and the shadows they would always make me frown,<br>I'd hide in the corner, from what I thought I saw,  
>But Granny Pie said that wasn't the way to deal with balls at all!<br>She said, 'Pinkie, you've got to stand up tall  
>Learn to turn off particle effects<br>You'll see where they can't hurt you  
>just laugh to make them disappear!'"<p>

Twilight began laughing, more from the abrupt insertion of the non-rhyme than from anything else; as she did so, the deadly core of the gigantic glowing balls was revealed, and they weren't actually that big. There was enough space between them that the path was a merely difficult timing puzzle.

\* \* \*

><p>As they heard from Steven what had happened, Applejack muttered to Twilight, "Here's <em>another<em> monster from the Everfree, that can take a hit and \_not\_ explode\_. 'tain't natural."

Twilight was going to say, "Did you know that Canterlot is not nearly as deadly as Ponyville?" but then she realized they were about to be faced with a problem.

Rarity, was of course, indignant at the offense to his appearance. "This will not stand! Twilight?"

"Yes, Rarity?" \_I wonder what she's going to do now.\_

"Put me in a ball of force. All except my tail."

"Umm, what? I mean, okay."

And then, Rarity exploded in a gigantic fountain of guts. Stunned, Twilight passed the tail up towards the serpent. However, Rarity took over. "Now, now, I sacrificed one of my seven remaining lives for this. I'd like to have it \_just so\_."

"Sorry! I, ah, didn't realize the spawn point was so close."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was used to a delay before the bridge straightened out. She wasn't used to it falling down halfway, then slowly, haltingly, jerkingly working its way back up.<p>

"What the hay is going on over there?" muttered Applejack.

Fluttershy timidly eyed the spinning blade-like mists, "Do you think I should... check?"

Rarity said, "No, I don't think you'd make it through. The safe spot moves too fast for you."

Twilight channelled Lando Calrissian as she said, "We've got to give her more time." And then, quieter, "Come on, Dash, buddy?"

After six long minutes of waiting, the bridge was firm, repelling the gears, and Rainbow Dash appeared through the mists. She opened her mouth when Twilight interrupted, "RUN!"

The six dashed across the bridge, narrowly avoiding a volley of arrows from the forest. Almost to the end, she ordered, "STOP!"

A giant stone pillar thrust up and poked through the bottom of the bridge right in front of Applejack.

After a moment, Twilight said, "Proceed."

Once they were gathered on the other side, Rainbow Dash said, "Are we clear? OK. So, I'm hauling up the bridge when these costumed Wonderbolt wannabes show up, called themselves the Shadowbolts, and demanded I join them and abandon you. Then they asked..." she focused. "'Do you not decline to reject our offer to avoid being a member of the complement of the set of non-Shadowbolts? Yes or no. Opening your wings counts as consent to join the Shadowbolts.'"

Applejack's jaw dropped. "You got through that?"

She waved a hoof and blew the end clean. "Simple. I figured what they were doing and counted the negatives. I got through that in no time. Then they got annoyed and pushed me off the cliff, and loosened the bridge. So I had to grab it and come back up - with my wings closed. Pulling the bridge with me. With them flying around, distracting me."

\* \* \*

><p>They entered the elements chamber. The way in had been eerily easy. Just as Twilight was about to reach the elements, a gigantic black keratinous wall slammed down in front of her, crushing them.<p>

A bit of the roof collapsed, and Twilight looked up. Up Nightmare Moon's leg, which disappeared into the mists. "WHAT? All this, and

we're only to the Mike Tyson fight?"

Nightmare Moon only laughed.

Rarity said, "We have bested your fruit, spikes, and..."

Rainbow Dash filled in, "... those guys!"

Twilight continued, "Now, we shall best you, Nightmare Moon!"

Nightmare Moon loomed closer. "No. Not Nightmare Moon. The Daughter."

Twilight's head cocked. "What?"

Nightmare Moon squinted. "Yes, now I recognize you. MOTHER. THE MANE. THE COLOR. THE CUTIE MARK."

Twilight just raised an eyebrow.

"Check your loop memories, mama. You know that none of this makes sense."

Twilight froze. She glanced around to the others, who had cracked wide grins. "Waaaaaaait. You mean it was all fake? But... Rarity! ... I didn't... oh."

Rainbow Dash laughed. "Why would \_just Ponyville\_ operate under video game rules?"

Twilight exclaimed, "Because it's near the Everfree? Trust me, this isn't... wouldn't have been the weirdest variant I've seen. How long did it take you to prepare this?"

Rarity put in, "Mainly, it was waiting for the right conditions. A variant with hard-to-detect magic, when we wake up early and have enough of us awake. We were actually about to set it off once, but then had a guest anchor and quickly canceled."

Pinkie raised a hoof. "I'm not awake. Say hi to me for me."

Applejack said, "Applebloom's going to be mighty disappointed she wasn't around for it, but I'm sure the crew got plenty of video."

Twilight sighed. "You guys."

\* \* \*

><p>Ares mulled over the loop report Sleipnir had forwarded him.  
<em>Totally hacked together, but it might work... Hmm. Hmm. Nope.<em>

\* \* \*

><p>140.9 (KrisOverstreet)<p>

"So, Bruce, how long has Pinkie Pie been wearing the Lasso of

Truth?"

"About five hours."

"How long has Diana been trying to untie it?"

"About four hours, fifty-five minutes."

\_"... and then I said, 'You can't use gouda in a cheesecake! That's silly!' But she wouldn't listen to me, and that's how we ended up with the Cheese Monster that Ate Ponyville! Well, almost ate Ponyville, I mean it doesn't really count if the buildings are all still standing and all, but 'the Monster that Almost Ate Ponyville' doesn't sound as cool! Don't you agree? It's really important that a monster's name sounds really cool. Poor Solomon Grundy, he doesn't get respect here because he has a silly name! He needs a more macho name, like, 'Grundy the Grinder!' Or how about 'Solomon Smash!' Oooh! Oooh! I know! 'Creature of the Cursed Swamp!' Nice and simple! Do you think you could get me to see Grundy so I can ask his opinion? I think he'll really like it! I wonder what else he likes? Do you think he likes cheesecake? I do! I love cheesecake! But not with gouda, because that's just silly!"\_

"... so, poker night at your place, then?"

"No need. Alfred is sending up some cupcakes in a few minutes. That should lure her out of the lasso."

140.10 (Gamerex27)

"Mkay, \_ths\_ s jst \_sylli\_." Discord mumbled through his gag. "Hyyt d mi up cz I \_stpd\_ u frum blwing up a cti?"

Ignoring him, the pegasus guards hauled him in front of the throne, and promptly shoved him to the ground.

Finally managing to work his way past some of the binding runes, Discord turned his tongue into a pair of siccors, and cut the gag to pieces. "Pleasure to see you, \_Celly\_," he muttered.

The Princess beamed at him, but something...\_sinister\_ was in her eyes. "Discord. I'm surprised that it took you this long to wake up, with all the chaos those nasty humans are causing."

"\_Nasty?!\_" he said in disbelief, struggling to get up and falling back to the floor again. "They're a hell of a lot more \_interesting\_ than you ponies! I mean, how come I didn't go to Earth earlier? Have you \_seen\_ how wonderfully chaotic they are? I should buy a vacation home there! Maybe in the Bahamas, or Bermuda! Somewhere with a 'B!'"

"Leave us," Celestia said. Her guards bowed their heads, and cantered out of the room.

"Wow, not even a questioning order about leaving you alone with a spirit of chaos?" Discord asked mockingly, rolling his eyes. "Your little ponies are getting more and more \_boring\_ by the aeon."

"They \_are\_ newfoals," Celestia pointed out, a hint of pride in her voice. "They know how to follow orders."

Instantly, Discord's smile left his face. "Newfoals," he spat, grabbing his mouth and putting it back into its rightful place. "You mean those humans whose souls you remove and put all that icky harmony and friendship in their place?"

Looking left and right, Celestia's grin turned sinister, and she leaned in close to whisper to Discord. "I'm afraid that I don't know what you \_mean\_."

"Look," he said, "we all know you're going to kill me. Can you at least tell me what this is all about? Just between you and me?" Behind his back, he made the somatic motions for a charisma-boosting spell, working his magic.

Sure enough, Celestia laughed. "Oh, very well. Not like anyone else will ever know.

"Yes," she said, "I'm altering the newfoal's minds. Oh, they're still in there somewhere, I'd imagine, but not in control anymore. I suppose it'd be quite horrifying. But really, isn't it \_ever\_ so lonely\_ with just one mind in there?"

"One mind?" Discord's eyes widened. "What...what are you talking about?!"

"You seriously haven't gotten it yet?" the being in front of him, who was certainly \_not\_ Princess Celestia, said. "You really believe everything you see?"

The alicorn was engulfed in a burst of green fire, burning away to reveal the queen of the changelings, Chrysalis.

"Oh my-CELLY!" Discord yelled, struggling back to his feet. "Your beautiful coat is gone! And you've turned into holey cheese!"

"No, you \_foal\_. \_It is I, Queen Chrysalis!"

"But...why are you doing this?" Discord asked, horrified. "Aren't all those gooey pony feels enough for you?"

"In this modern age," she huffed, "there is more and more strife. So, I looked for a new food source, That happy accident with the humans' particle accelerator brought the continent here, and I seized my chance. I put Celestia into a coma, stuffed her in a closet, and took her place."

"That doesn't explain the ponification! How did you ever fool Celly's subjects into thinking the \_nicest\_ and most peaceful\_ pony around would support \_genocide?!\_"

"A few changeling infiltrators there," she replied, "a few murders there, and such. Of course, the humans just \_had\_ to have too different neurochemistry for us to properly feed on them. So, naturally, I made a barrier to kill them off, and offered to turn them into ponies to escape death."

"But...that's diabolical!" he shrieked, making some very convincing tears. "Don't you have \_any\_ empathy?"

"You are one to talk of empathy," Chrysalis scoffed. "And besides, I do have empathy. For my subjects. What's a few murders and mind wipes here and there to feed millions of my species? But, I believe I've said enough."

"Have you, now?" Instantly, Discord's feigned emotions vanished from his face, to be replaced by a look of triumph.

"Er...yes," she said, suddenly confused. "I...believe I am supposed to give you some last words. Do you have any?"

"Oh," Discord said casually, "just five. And they are..."

Snapping his bonds like they were made of wet noodles, Discord gestured behind him, knocking over a nearby flowerpot to reveal the camera crew of Diamond Dogs filming the entire scene.

"Smile," he said, "you're on Canid Camera."

For a few moments, the entire chamber was totally silent. Chrysalis' eyes twitched. Twitched again. Her mouth opened, then closed.

Eventually, she was able to get one thing out. A high-pitched scream of terror and horror, as she realized exactly what Discord's plan had been.

"How much?" she shrieked, any trace of composure leaving her body. "How long were they there?!\_"

"For the entire thing," Discord said smugly. "It was a stupid idea from the start. Yours, I mean. Kind, caring, and beloved Princess Celestia, suddenly becoming a genocidal and malevolent maniac? C'mon, you thought no one would see how hilariously out of character that was?"

As Chrysalis lunged at him out of desperation, he pulled out an oversized sledgehammer, and bopped her on the head. "I think I'll leave you here for the angry mobs forming on both planets to find," he said coolly. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to find Celly and go back to the good ol' days. Back when chaos was fun, and not all about killing and brainwashing."

\* \* \*

><p>As soon as he left the hallway, he walked into the kitchen.<p>

"Let's see here..." he muttered. "Aha!" he said, lifting up the fridge. "Always the last place you expect!"

As he yanked the comatose Celestia from underneath the fridge, he pulled out a cell phone. "I won the bet!" he said cheerfully, to the pony on the other end.

"For now, yeah," Twilight Sparkle agreed. "You beat the Doctor's record for 'least words to take down an oppressive regime,' but I'm going to kick your flank in this contest next time I end up with Brainwashlestia."

"Which one is that, again?" he asked, over the noise of police sirens and a screaming Chrysalis in the background.

"The one who was brainwashing everypony with the Elements of Harmony to eliminate suffering. Those things are hard to fight off, but actually fighting her was kinda sad, since breaking the spell on the whole world was easy once I'd fended it off in the first place."

"You going for four, then?" he asked. "Or do you want to step things up a notch, and go for three?"

"I guess we'll see when I'm in that Loop next (although I never want to go back there)," she said. "How about a drink with Fluttershy and I over in Paris to celebrate? No horrible French accent this time."

"Oh, Sparklebutt," Discord said, right before he vanished in a poof of smoke, "you know I can't promise that."

\* \* \*

><p>140.11 (Bliss Authority)<p>

Twilight Sparkle Awoke in both senses of the word and immediately regretted it. Her joints ached, she felt like she could swallow a lake from thirst without first Ascending, and -

Was she sunburned? And covered in furs?

She sprung to her legs - noting that she had all four of them, which was a small comfort - and took stock of her surroundings. A needle of sunlight was drifting in from the front flap of a tent; it reminded her of some of the yak and ibex handicrafts from just outside the Qilinese Empire. Among the possessions of whoever she had replaced were paper scrolls written in scarlet ink, a spear festooned with a dragon's skull (one that, thankfully, didn't look a thing like Spike), and a polished onyx octahedron. Her rations included daisy pancakes and dried noodles.

Twilight consulted her Loop memories, and then hissed in a breath. Apparently, this loop she would be playing the role of one Sparkhan Twi, the greatest expert in draconic magic across multiple worlds - and once thrall to an exceptionally dangerous dragon, Nicol Bolas. A dragon with what seemed to her to be a very familiar looking pair of horns - who wanted to steal the magic of multiple worlds, maybe blow up a few Kin-Trees while he was at itâ€¦|

She groaned, massaging under her horn. "Fused loop," she said. "Great."

It was then that she heard the deafening roar, and the bellow of a rhinoceros ("Krushok," her Loop memories provided) before that bellow guttered and died. Then squelching, and silence.

Twilight grabbed her spear in her will and set it to impale anything that entered the tent. Was that - was that a lion? Okay, granted, with all the tricks she knew from BASELINE, let alone from the loops and this plane's geomancy, she could take a lion. But she was, after all, a pony with something of a pony's instincts, and hearing a lion

at her door was extremely unnerving.

She flung open the tent curtain.

The lion was there, pure white save where the blood of the krushok he was eating stained its nose and mouth red. It turned to Twilight, ears folded back and eyes widening even as the pupils contracted (without slitting; this was not a nocturnal cat). It lifted one paw towards Twilight.

Branch it. She was going to stop this fight before it began, using her in-loop powers. She drew on the ley-lines of two distant mountains from in the plane and used her spear as an extension of her horn, letting the fiery red mana twist around it and create an electrical arc.

"LIGHTNING STRIKE!" Twilight shouted. Huh. Must have spent too long in shounen loops.

The lion caught the bolt square in the chest and was physically flung back by it, and Twilight smelled the reek of burning hair. Then it recovered, rolling to land on all four paws, and snarled.

Then it bowed its head, closed its eyes, and \_SPOKE.\_ In what had to be Bellepheric, no less. It raised one great, shaggy paw and conjured a pair of earth-ponies out of the pure, golden sunlight he traced with his claws.

They both drew their swords with their mouths and stood in defensive formation before the lion, eyes set and determined.

"Now that you've gotten that out of your system," the lion growled in a bass voice tinged with a Cloudsdale accent, "shall we skip the fight and introduce ourselves? Peace, Sparkhan Twi. Please tell me that you're Awake. Time is of the essence."

Twilight stared for a second, spear still pointed at the lion. Then she sighed, sitting down on her hind legs and swinging the spear fully upright in the same arc. "You've got some, uh. On your chin," Twilight noted.

The lion wiped his chin with the bottom of his paw and looked at the resulting bloodstain, then sighed before licking it off. "Sorry," he said. "I must look quite frightening to a pony. I'm not used to being a quadruped, or craving raw meat. It wasn't sapient, I made sure of that."

Root it. She was the Princess of Friendship, and she had all sorts of toys in her subspace pocket if things went south. "Yes, I'm Awake," she said. "Peace, lion. The Walk to the deserts of Tarkir has thrown me for a Loop."

"Quite understandable," the lion said. "I am Ajani, born of Naya. Theros is my home. Speaking of - you two can go home now," he said, dismissing the two summoned soldiers with a wave of his paw.

"This is normally a human-controlled loop?" Twilight asked. "I wonder why you're a lion instead, then."

"Because I am of the Leonin," Ajani said. "The majority of



Planeswalkers are humans. I am an exception. My friend and partner who I Walked in with is currently an earth-pony. I suspect that a vampire associate of mine will be a bat-pony."

Twilight massaged under her horn. "Vampire. Associate."

"I respect what he does for the sake of the Multiverse far more than I hate what he must do to survive, yes," Ajani said. "He's an associate and an ally, not a friend."

"Gotcha," Twilight sighed. "Where are they now?"

Ajani shrugged, which was an interesting gesture to see on a lion. "Elspeth is out grazing - she found a plains full of clover, which she's going to bind for mana after - and Sorin is hunting. We were all hungry."

"Right."

Ajani started cleaning his paws. "By the way - allow me to state for the record that you're an excellent mother, judging by how well you've raised your daughter," he said.

She sat up. "You know Nyx? How?"

"She's saved Elspeth's life from an angry sun god a few times."

"Angry sun gods suck. Wait -" Twilight tilted her head at Ajani. "- We're fused with THAT world?"

"Dominara, known as Magic: The Gathering in the hub, yes." Ajani chuckled. "Forgive me my laughter - It's just that you're replacing - well." He smiled openly at Twilight Sparkle. "I can't WAIT to tell Sarkhan Vol of the Mardu he was replaced by a pony."

Twilight snorted. "Any particular reason why?"

Ajani laughed. "The Mardu are a horse-clan, that's why!"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

140.1: Certain relationship milestones.

>140.2: At least it wasn't the Dead Philomena sketch. (Wait, that's an actual episode.)<br>140.3: Unfortunately, she meta stallion.

>140.4: Because of course there was.<br>140.5: Crossover is Magic the Gathering. They're all quite a bunch of cards.

>140.6: Do Not Temp Happy Fun Tree.<br>140.7: Moonshot!

>140.8: I Wanna Be The Filly?<br>140.9: DC Comics, of course. Poor Justice League.

>140.10: ...actually explains a few things.<br>140.11: Same deal as .5 - cardilicious.

## 148. Chapter 148

### 141.1 (Evilhumour)

Queen Twilight, Savior of Ponykind, Banisher of Tirek the Terrible, Mother of Equestria, Defender of All, and a lot of other titles, tapped Her hoof in annoyance. Her six daughters; Applebloom, Scootaloo, Sweetie Belle, Diamond Tiara, Nightmare Moon/Nyxie Poo, and Silver Spoon had done a \_wonderful\_ job in leading Her little ponies into a golden age after Her breakup with Discord ended up in a tiffle\* that made Her rethink Her actions and let Her daughters start fresh on; in a fashion. She let them know of Herself; that She would brook no fighting between them. They would rule together and She outright refused to let any of them to know who was born first. She told them a few other dozen little rules; no banishing a sister unless it was outright required and She would come home \_early\_ to make sure, don't rule with an iron hoof, don't drink too much, don't abuse their rights as Princesses, the general stuff a mother and ruler would tell Her daughters before leaving to rediscover Herself.

What She \_forgot\_ to mention to Her five alicorn daughters and one draconequus was about \_boys\_. Her eye twitched as She looked over the last boyfriend, the one \_damnable\_ rugged alicorn stallion from another world, that was cuddling close to Her Nyxie-poo, with the other five \_boys\_ in similar situations with \_Her\_ daughters.

"So girls, want to introduce me to your boyfriends once again?"

\* \* \*

><p>\*Said tiffle resulted in new land formation, the Rebirth of the Three Tribes, the Reunification of Ponykind, the Era of SilenceDeafness, the Separation of the Tribes, the merging of the Three Great Herds, the Horrible Divide of the Eternal Herd, the minor intergalactic war with the Solar Republic, the Lunar Kingdom and the Everfree Nation against the Seapony Empire, the Rebuilding of the Unified Stable, which was toppled when Queen Twilight threw King Discord into the ruling capital city which dominoed into the toppling of the civilization and leading to the era of Wildness. After which, Queen Twilight turned the King into stone, gave birth to her daughters, brought forth Equestria and took off to rediscover Herself and possibly find someone who wouldn't forget their anniversary.Â°

Â°Among other things, like forgetting to take out the trash, leaving the toilet seat up, letting his chaos go a bit wild, and other little stuff.

\* \* \*

><p>141.2 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

"What the Bark are you doing?!"

One Twilight Sparkle watched in horror as the Crystal ponies smashed the blackened soot that had once been the remains of Sombra with sticks, bats, hoes, or anything they happened to be carrying at the time. A blue pony stepped forward, appearing sheepish, "We're just, letting off a thousand years of pent up aggression. You have no idea the horrors he inflicted on us what we were gone."

One of the crystal pony foals slammed his stick into the soot, which

caused Twilight to snatch the gathered ponies' weapons out of their magic/hoooves with her own magic and shout, "You are better than this, better than him! Just go on with your life!"

Another whack on the ground caused Twilight to turn and see Pinkie with a stick in hoof. Twilight narrowed her eyes, "And what are you doing, Pinkie?"

Pinkie looked pleased. "Well, everyone else was hitting the pile of soot, I wanted to join in too. It looked like so much fun!"

Twilight muttered, "Pinkie, you are literally beating a dead horse."

Pinkie didn't even miss a beat. "Pony."

Neither did Twilight. "Whatever. You're one of the saviors of the Crystal empire, act like it, alright?"

"Okie-Doki!"

After the crowd dispersed, two unicorns wearing carny hats lifted the black soot. They grinned to one another as the one with a mustache spoke first. "You thinking what I'm thinking, dear brother of mine?"

The other one seemed almost giddy with excitement. "Indeed, dear brother of mine."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Some Time Later<em>

"Hey Twilight," Pinkie said as she poked her head into the purple unicorn's room.

Twilight replied, "Yes Pinkie?"

"You remember a couple days ago when you stopped us from beating Sombra's dead remains?"

Twilight rubbed her forehead. "I'm not going to like this, will I?"

Pinkie shrugged. "And you remember those brothers who tried cheating Applejack and her family out of their farm?"

Twilight groaned. "What did they do now?"

\* \* \*

><p>Flim shouted. "Come one, come all, to the show of the century! Yes for just today, you can whack the <em>evil, <em>and dead, King Sombra!"

Flam continued. "Three bits a whack and no more than nine whacks at a time, but you can return to the end of the line for more whacking! Come one, come all!"

\* \* \*

><p>141.3 (Evilhumour)<p>

Addon to 84.20

As Emperor Guiding Light watched his son walk away with snigger still on his lips, the Captain of his Guards walked up to him. The pony went by the name of Little Kitten, which tugged on his mind for \_some\_ reason.

"My Lord?" The golden armor pony looked up at him with confusion on his face. "Does this weird stuff happen often in these loops that Lord Fenrir mentioned?"

The pony next to him had the rare privilege of the Emperor of Ponykind doing a double take with wide eyes. "Wh- what did you \_just\_ say?"

"I simply asked if this is a common occurrence in these loops my lord," the pony repeated his question, looking steadily at the now sweating alicorn that easily moved the sun.

"Yea- well, no, -actu-" Guiding Light shook his head, trying to get his thoughts in order. "You are the Captain-General of the Custodes, are you not?"

"Indeed my lord," the pony nodded his head. "Do you require any assistance my lord?"

"I-no- I - \_Gah\_!" The alicorn placed a hoof to his face, trying to calm and steady himself. "How \_long\_ have you been looping?"

"Only for about a hundred or so millenniums my lord," the pony responded as if it was the most natural thing in the world to have time repeat over and over again-then again, it was \_their\_ loop they were talking about. "Are you sure you are alright my lord?"

"Ye-yes, it is just a bit of a surprise to find out." He gave a weak smile to the pony next to him. "There are a number of materials I must go over with you now, but we shall be fine overall. This loop is relatively peaceful and tranquil, although if you have any questions or comments, please tell me now before we begin our lessons." Guiding Light smiled, gesturing with a wing to his private chambers.

"Nothing truly to report, my lord." The pony said with a nod of his head. "Although, I'm glad that my battle brothers don't run around naked and oily in this loop as my memories are informing me. Although, it seems to be a lesson that I have to frequently reeducate them on&#128;"

The Emperor of Ponykind could only groan as he facehoofed, hoping that whatever Lemon was dealing with was \_far\_ more mature and sane.

\* \* \*

><p>141.4 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Get back here Lemon!" Nyx shouted, chasing the yellow stallion

across Ponyville with many turning their heads in confusion.  
"Fluttershy told me about it and I want to see it \_now!\_"

"Never!" The earth pony jumped over several of the carts in the market street, landing nimbly on his hoofs with something pressed close to his chest as he ran towards the train station. "You'll need to pry it out my lifeless hooves-MEEP!" Lemon squeaked as Nyx teleported in front of him, causing him to rear back. Nyx used her magic to tip her boyfriend over into the fountain and grabbed the magazine before it was destroyed by the water. Using her wing to block the splash the sputtering stallion made, she took to the air as she looked at the pictures of Sour Punch that Photo Finish took.

Blushing and snickering, she had to admit that like his mother, Lemon made one \_hell\_ of a good model.

\* \* \*

><p>141.5 (Ryuus2 with some of Wildrook's ideas)<p>

Almaz sat quietly at his desk and pretended he was paying attention to the lecture his teacher was giving. Normally he would at least try to pay some attention, but he'd sat through this lesson so many times he could recite it by rote...while asleep. The only reason he was even here right now was because he Woke up at the desk and was too polite to leave in the middle of class if it wasn't an emergency. Instead, he mentally went over his plans for this loop...which amounted to "get closer to Princess Sapphire to try and get her looping."

"Alright class, we've got a new student today!" He turned to the door and shouted, "Get in here!"

What walked into the classroom was the single strangest creature Almaz had ever seen, and in this school that was saying something. It's entire body seemed to be a mish mash of different parts in a roughly draconic shape. Its head was vaguely equine with a cropped mane, its body was serpentine and covered in feathers, and it had a dragon's tail. On its left side it had an ibis' horn, birds wing, eagles talon, and bulls hind leg. Its right side had a deer's antler, bats wing, lions paw, and a dragons back leg. And every part was a different color, like a child's color by numbers picture. "Hello, I'm Discord! And I'm going to become this schools Number One Delinquent!"

Just then, another Discord drove by the classroom on a Vespa shouting, "Top Honour Student! Yeah!" before speeding away.

"I hope we all have a Looping good time!" Almaz's head snapped back and forth between the duplicated student and the extra capital letter added to the subtitles...that hadn't been there before. It said something about the nature of his universe that twin chimeras and spontaneous subtitles didn't warrant more than a surprised shrug from anyone in the class. Before anyone could ponder it too much, dual shouts from either side of the room quickly distracted them.

"Darn it, let me in!" Raspberyl shouted from outside the classroom as she banged her hands against an invisible barrier.

"Damn it, let me out!" Mao shouted from the desk he was cocooned to in the front row seat farthest from the door.

Almaz choked back a snicker. Neither of the demons was looping this time, but whoever had the balls to do that would certainly be in trouble when the two tracked them down. Turning back to his desk, he saw that Discord had taken the seat next to his and was presenting a claw to shake, specifically his right leg with his left paw. "Hello, Discord, Equestrian Looper and demigod of Chaos."

Almaz took the appendage with a queasy smile, not sure if he even wanted to think about how he was doing that. "Almaz, hero and Anchor of...I think he called it Disgaea?"

"Oh good, you've had the multiverse talk already. I was wondering when I didn't receive a ping back earlier."

"Yeah, someone named Blues gave it to me just a few loops ago. I'm still getting used to all the new terminology, and I'm not that good at sensing or sending pings yet." Almaz scratched his head in embarrassment. Then something Discord said struck him. "Excuse me, but, I thought Equestria was supposed to be full of horses?"

"Ponies mostly," Discord shrugged. "But we also have Griffons, Dragons, Sheep, Cows, Minotaurs, Chickens-just about everything you could find on a farm or in a mythology textbook. I myself belong to a uniquely elite breed of chaos spirits known as Draconequii. So elite, that there are only two of us in all the loops, and rarely both of us on Equestria at the same time." Once he was done pontificating from the stage that used to be his desk, he snapped his fingers and was back in a normal seat. "It's good you've already had the talk. If you have any questions, I believe Twilight Sparkle, Equestria's anchor and most accomplished bookworm, has replaced your librarian this loop."

"Er, will she be okay?"

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, in the Library.<p>

"Hello, I'm the new Librarian, Twilight Sparkle. The library is for studying and reading. Troublemakers will immediately be removed from the premises."

"By who, you? Bwa Ha Ha!" An unruly freshman demon punk taunted.

"No, I leave that job to my assistant," she said matter of factly.

"And what's he, a bunny rabbit? Ha!" Another punk ribbed, getting guffaws from his friends.

"Actually, he's the giant dragon breathing down your neck." The punks turned around and came face to snout with a fully grown, unawake, Spike, who proceeded to snort out a plume of smoke that left the punks coughing ash. "Be glad it's not the rabbit; he's a lot less gentle." \_Even when he's not awake, \_Twilight thought humorously.

\* \* \*

><p>"She can handle herself."<p>

Not to be forgotten, Mao had finally broken free, and he and Raspberyl had started peppering their respective sides of the doorway with attacks in hopes of breaking through. Right as they were about to release some of their more damaging attacks, Discord snapped his fingers and the two blasted each other through the no-longer-there barrier. As they were getting up, the other Discord drove by again, and hit them both with lemon meringue pies. They immediately drew weapons and chased after the laughing chaos sprite.

Through his laughter, Almaz managed to pull a couple of cloaked surveillance drones out of his subspace pocket to send after them. This loop had just gotten a lot more interesting.

Later that loop:

"Pretty pony princess...chibi demon cutie...I cannot decide! I must hug them both!" Princess Sapphire shouted before leaping at the two cutest residents of Underworld Academy for a double glomp.

Almaz fought desperately to hold back his laughter as his drones recorded the scene. He'd heard it was decidedly hard to get dirt on the Equestrian anchor, and it couldn't hurt to have something for the Princess and Raspberyl down the line.

\* \* \*

><p>141.6 (Evilhumour)<p>

Rarity's ear twitched as she heard loud arguing and shouting outside her shop, faintly aware of the familiarity of the voices.

Without warning, an obsidian alicorn stallion flew into her shop, a grin on his face as he levitated a magazine over to her.

"-xy, \_please don't!\_" a yellow alicorn mare whined as she flew into the Carousel Boutique, landing with a pout and blush on her face.

"Sorry, Lemon-er Sour Punch, but this was \_needed!\_" The stallion grinned at her, puffing out his chest. "See how good she looks, Aunt Rarity?"

"Indeed." Rarity raised an eyebrow, a tiny bit surprised of much her friend's adoptive son was just as stunning as a model as she was. Then again the loops had a strange kind of humour. "And it is good that you brought her in, darling." Rarity smiled to the stallion of the moon, whom she often foalsat herself.

"Wait, what?" Sour Punch blinked, looking between the two ponies in front of her.

"I know, it's the \_only\_ way I can \_actually\_ \_get\_ her in something without having to search all of Equestria for her." Erebus huffed, rolling his eyes. "Do you know the last time I tried to do so, she hid for the \_entire\_ loop?"

"Tsk tsk, that won't do." Striding towards the back of her shop, Rarity used her magic to lock the doors and windows. "Would you be a dear and not buck down my walls? If you do, I will tell Fluttershy." She heard a chuckle from the stallion and a groan from the mare behind her. "Nor can you teleport out, as I have far more experience in magic than you."

"Bucking \_tree\_..." the mare muttered darkly behind her, the stallion laughing louder.

"Well, I \_told\_ you should have practiced your magic a bit more, but \_noooo\_." The stallion had brought the mare into the room with Rarity, the air filling with measuring tapes.

"Yah, yah," the mare grumbled, stepping onto the podium. "\_Please\_ no frills; my brothers will \_never\_ shut up if they hear about it."

"Oh darling," Rarity said, her smile inspiring fear in the heart of the anchor of one of the harshest Loops. "I'm going to make you \_so \_lovely!"

\* \* \*

><p>141.7 (Evilhumour)<p>

Nyx tapped her hoof on the ground, looking at sweating and panicking man sitting next to her.

"Come on, you can \_do\_ this!" She ignored the snickering they were getting from the Space Wolves, neither of them bothered to try and glare at the marines anymore.

"It's just so... \_dainty\_." Leman grumbled as he placed his hands on the wheel. "I mean, why can't I just drive a tank?"

"Because not everything is a Spruce tank!" She snapped, flapping her wings as the snickering started to die off. "Please, for \_me?\_"

The Space Wolves certainly did \_not\_ d'awww at the sight of the pony giving their king the puppy dog eyes nor did they glare angrily at their king for daring to say no to her. Leman \_did\_ blush at her big, beautiful eyes and turned his head towards the screen before sighing. "Alright Nyx, for \_you\_." He leaned up to give her a kiss on her cheek before cracking his fingers. "I mean, how hard can this driving simulation be?"

Later, Leman would learn to regret saying those words when he managed to drive his car into the ninth floor of a ten story building and then into a twelve story high building roof pool across the city to the amazement of everyone involved. Nyx just shook her head and slapped Leman with a pillow as to get him used to the concept of airbags.

\* \* \*

><p>141.8 (Evilhumour)<p>

The library door opened as two wolf cubs walked in, sniffing around. Twilight recognized the two as Geri and Freki, but why were they he-



All of a sudden, Freki leaped behind the sofa.

With a yelp, a yellow foal tried to run the other way but Geri was standing in his way.

"Traitors!" The foal shouted as Geri and Freki pressed into the colt, and dragged him out. "I don't wanna take a baaaaaaaaaaaaath!"

\* \* \*

><p>141.9 (Gym Quirk)<p>

Fluttershy Awoke to the sound of the bell on the door to Carousel Boutique. She peeked over the counter to see Spike dragonhandling a large birdcage toward her.

"Hello?" he said. "I wish to register a complaint."

The pegasus glanced around at the variety of cages and concluded that she was the proprietress of a pet emporium. She continued to crouch behind the counter.

"Hello, miss?" the dragon called.

Gathering herself, she stood taller and looked at the cage Spike was attempting to lift to the counter. "Oh. Hi, Spike. What seems to be the problem?"

"I wish to complain about this phoenix I obtained not half an hour ago from this very boutique."

She decided to let the loop memories provide details of the transaction. "Ah. The Everfree Red? What's...um...What's wrong with it?"

"I'll tell you what's wrong. He's dead. That's what's wrong."

"Are you sure he isn't just resting?"

Spike gestured at the pile of ash at the bottom of the cage. "No. I'm pretty sure I can recognize a dead phoenix, and that's one right there."

Recognizing the setup, the pegasus decided to play along with a mental shrug. "No. He's clearly resting. Remarkable bird, the Everfree Red; lovely plumage."

"The plumage is beside the point. He's stone dead."

"Nonononono..."

"All right. If he's resting, I'll wake him up." The dragon cupped his claws and bellowed into the cage: "Hey! Peewee! Up and at 'em!"

A yellow wing reached out and nudged the cage. "There. He moved," Fluttershy suggested.

"That was your wing hitting the cage," accused Spike.

"Oh...I guess you're right. But I'm afraid you may have stunned him with your yelling."

"Stunned?"

"Um...yes. The Everfree phoenix is easily stunned, you know."

The dragon regarded her with an incredulous look. "Fluttershy? Are you okay? I mean I got Peewee home from here just a little while ago and he burst into flame and is now just a pile of ash and soot."

"Well, he probably thought there was a timberwolf nearby or something. Remarkable bird, the Everfree Red. Wonderful plumage..." she repeated with quiet enthusiasm.

"Timberwolf? Seriously? Look. He's passed on! This phoenix is no more! Bereft of life, he rests in peace! His metabolic processes are now history! He's kicked the bucket, shuffled off his mortal coil, run down the curtain, and joined the great migration! THIS IS AN EX-" Spike trailed off, blinking, "...phoenix?"

The dragon was showing the tell-tale signs of a newly-awake looper.

"Fluttershy? Have we been doing the 'Dead Parrot' sketch with Peewee?"

"Sorry, Spike. I couldn't resist. Here. Let me bring him back for you. \_Regenerate\_."

As the druid spell took hold, the ashes reconstituted themselves into a small bird, who cheeped apologetically.

Any further discussion was cut off by the door opening.

"Fluttershy! We would have words with thee," declared a midnight blue alicorn as she strode into the shop.

"Oh. Hello, Princess Luna. What do you need?"

" 'tis about this possum you did provide us yestereve. We fear that he may have expired."

Spike regarded the motionless opossum on the princess' back. After stretching out with his Force senses, he shook his head. \_I don't think the princess will appreciate the joke, Admiral...\_

\* \* \*

><p>141.10 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Celestia looked at the stars, a sigh escaping her lips as four particularly bright lights in the night sky descended behind the moon, causing the mare image to disappear. And then, the four stars started drifting back outwards. Celestia blinked in confusion. A very familiar voice echoed beside her, "Blast these stars. I look away from them for a second, and they go right out of place."

The white Princess turned to the pony next to her, a familiar navy blue alicorn with stars in her mane and a crescent moon mark on her flank. Afraid that this was a dream and that she would wake at any moment, the white princess reached a hoof out slowly, and touched her sister. Her throat dried up and she couldn't speak as Luna turned to her and tilted her head in confusion, "Uh, Tia, do you mind? I'm trying to get this just right."

Celestia blinked, looked at her hoof, then touched Luna again. This time, however, the moon turned a violet color. The night princess groaned in frustration, "Yes, yes, I'm here, I'm alive, you're not dreaming. Look what you made me do! Now I'll be stuck all night trying to fix this."

Luna started muttering minor tree curses as the color of the moon shifted to pink, then cyan, and then so brilliant white that it was basically daytime once again.

\* \* \*

><p>141.11 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

The sound of metal rattled overhead as Twilight rested against the wall in a Canterlot Dungeon. Her hoofs were strung up overhead and around her were her best friends and the two princesses in equally dire situations. Each of the Unicorn's horns were covered in a magic inhibiting material, as were the Alicorns' horns as well. Dash looked to her hoofs and asked in a mildly annoyed tone, "Remind me again how we got into this dark situation?"

Fluttershy looked away, "Well, that one was actually me. Last loop was a stealth loop, and Rarity ended up going to Iron Will's seminar. Through a bizarre turn of events, Rarity felt empowered through his seminar and accidentally turned herself into Nightmare Rarity. So this loop, I wanted a break from Iron Will. With Mac's suggestion, Iron Will presented his seminar to Canterlot instead...mostly...the nobles I think..."

Applejack asked the most pertinent question in a dry tone, "Since we're all loopin' here, how'd they get us again?"

Rarity answered, "I think they put sleeping droughts in our drinks at Celestia's party last night."

The doorway opened a second later. Two pony guards lead in a shouting Blueblood, "Get your hands off me, peasants! I started this revolution, I should be the one leading it!"

One of the Unicorn guards must have finally had enough, as Blueblood's head glowed orange for a second, and then his shouting ceased. After being chained up and once the guards had left again, Twilight allowed the Force to flow through her, and sensed he was not dead. "Sleeping spell. This sounds like the French Revolution. Might be best to escape before things get any worse out there. They might even start cutting off the oppositions' horns soon if we don't."

With that, all the chains opened (except Blueblood's, who they laid out on the dungeon floor after pulling out his chains from the wall) as eight ponies landed on the ground. Six ascended a second later.

With one strike of her hoof, Applejack knocked the door off its hinges and issued the other ponies out. Celestia would go on to use this incident as means to put an end to the Nobility completely. Fluttershy, unfortunately, was tasked with handling Day Court for the loop as a small punishment for her part, but she accepted it humbly.

\* \* \*

><p>141.12 (Bliss Authority)<p>

The four Planeswalkers made an odd quartet as they made their way across the unforgiving desert of the Salt Lick Road.

On the ground, one earth-pony mare with golden hair and a mane split between green, blonde and blue, in full barding of Bantian articulated plate, loosely holding a shining spear of white steel that glittered with inner sunlight in a forehoof, sitting upright mounted on a great and regal white lion - and debating the merits of Theros stoicism with that lion.

Next to them, likewise armed with a spear festooned with dragon bones and Zendikari octahedrons, was a purple unicorn with a streak of red and another of blue in her violet mane, clad in furs and scale mail made painstakingly of real dragonscale - shed from willing donors.

In the air above them, soaring on great leathery wings, was an ashen batpony with milk-white hair and eyes clad in black armor, who was sucking the juice from a mango with his fangs as he flew with great gusto.

Elspeth, Ajani, Twilight Sparkle, and Sorin Markov carefully made their way across the alkali sands towards the site of Ugin Spykoranvellutar's Nexus - when they saw a flash of blue.

The very air around them detonated in an explosion of rainbows and deafening thunder as Twilight was knocked to the ground, a hoof on her throat.

A wild, ululating cry sounded in the distance: an orcish shaman, shaking a rattle made of pony skulls and dragon-bone. Suddenly, unicorns, earth ponies, orcs and goblins on the ground surrounded the four of them; pegasi and griffons circled them in the air.

A pair of carmine-red eyes bored hatred into Twilight's own, fluttering rainbow hair above it, blue wings spread. "Sparkhan Twi," the pegasus snarled. "Welcome back to the Mardu. Do you like what I have done with the clan you abandoned?"

Twilight quickly consulted her loop memories. Her 'friend's' name in this reality was Rainbow Helmdasher, and - oh. "Great khan of the Mardu, old friend," Twilight said as best she could through the weight on her throat. "Nothing I can say can erase the pain of your allies dying in the fire. All I can say is that my draconic power, my Spark, was not yet Awake. My own parents were caught in the flames, great khan Rainbow Helmdasher. I had to leave so that my power wouldn't endanger the clan. To say it threw me for a Loop was an understatement."

Rainbow Helmdasher's ears twitched. She smirked, and it was a cruel smirk. "So you just left? To dally with the Surprai and their meaningless wisdom? The Apples and their reliance on shades, memories, and the children of the orcs they kill? Or perhaps you went to the Sultai seeking forbidden knowledge?" She laughed, bitterly, then snarled again. "Traitor!"

Oh root and branch, she wasn't Awake. This was not good.

"Nice army you've got there," Elspeth said, her voice cool and calm. "Shame if something were to happen to it."

"Lame-o is bluffing," one of the griffons shouted. "Just kill them, Dash."

"In a moment, Gilda Razorclaw. In a moment. To lead is to bleed, and this is the blood I would spill." Her red eyes never left Twilight's. "I must have words with the disloyal. You have returned in fire, traitor. I would see you leave as ASHES!"

"Have you ever seen the Wrath of God?" Ajani said. "A great explosion, a fireball of sunlight to blot out the sky? It isn't a pretty sight. It is not a spell to use lightly or without forethought. And three of us know how to cast it."

"Or perhaps moreâ€¦ targeted destruction," Sorin said, landing on two legs to properly gesture with his fetlocks. "A taste of conjured hemlock, perhaps? Or perhaps the dread Rite of the Serpent, practiced by naga cultists in the swampy jungles of the Sultai? Perhaps a blade of pure void that annihilates the first creature it touches would suit. "

"Ixnay on the oomday ladeblay, Sorin." Elspeth hissed. "Therosian, base and Khanate spells ONLY. I don't want to risk Eiken in the morning."

"I thought that Doom Blade had been patched," Sorin sighed. "It's such a fun one. I suppose it's for the best, given how black their hearts are; having them removed won't help."

Gilda landed before him to point a talon. "You dare insult the Mardu?"

Sorin buffed his hoof. "My dear, I have faced vampire lords, werewolves, rakshasa, and world-eating horrors. Why should I be frightened of a griffin with more beak than brain?"

Gilda spread her wings and reared up rampant. "You're going down, milk dud!"

They heard the sound then, like the clattering of bowling pins against a great swirling ball of dragonstorm. The earth-ponies, unicorns and orcs around them went down in a crashing concussive wave, almost all of them with enough time to react clutching a vulnerable point and falling with wordless screams.

"WHO DARES!?" bellowed Rainbow Helmdasher.

A familiar musical voice that squeaked like bubblegum sounded throughout the Salt Lick Road. "I am the terror that prunks in the

night!" it said with glee.

Sorin just raised an eyebrow.

A blur of pink and saffron sent one earth-pony collapsing in a heap before it bounced high in the air and hung there for a second, framed by the sun. "I am that little bit of sand that gets stuck in your shoe before it becomes a pearl of wisdom!"

Twilight started laughing, before Helmdasher applied a little more pressure. The other planeswalkers just boggled.

Well, Elspeth and Ajani boggled. "Really?" Sorin said with a sigh, shaking his head and chuckling.

"I am the cloud that rains on your hit parade, the enlightened master of the Way of Fun championed by the Surprai!" the pink blur said, landing in a fetlock-stand before Gilda - and taking her down as she twirled in a spinning kick. She pronked again, landing in a perfect Horse Stance in front of Rainbow Helmdasher, her necklace of white, red, and blue pearls bouncing off her barrel. "I am PINKIE NARPAI!"

"YOU!" Helmdasher snarled, drawing and swinging a sword in a single blinding motion - only to have it knocked up and away with a perfectly executed high block. Dash drew her other sword, lifting the oppressive weight on Twilight's throat and leaving her gasping for breath, and thrust; Pinkie gave ground in a flip kick that battered the blade away from her vitals. "Surprai lotus eating navel-gazer! I have words for you as well! Mardu - deal with the four interlopers while I handle Narpai!"

With a wild scream, the Mardu that could charged at the planeswalkers.

Twilight slammed her hooves on the ground and channeled red-hot mana from beneath the mountains of Tarkir, calling forth goblins of her own to defend her; her allies did likewise. Ajani summoned his lionine kinfolk and Elspeth an angel - which looked suspiciously like an alicorn with an Avacyn bident - using power from sun-drenched plains. And where Sorin gestured with his sword, skeletons clawed their way out of the groundlike bubbles from under a swamp.

Dash swung a forehoof at Pinkie in a single, bone-breaking punch. Pinkie smirked, and held up the frog of her own hoof - and channeled mana into it. Dash was thrown back by the force of her own punch, and Pinkie bounced over her - with a knife at her throat.

"Say it," Pinkie said. The Mardu hordes stopped to stare.

"Never," Dash hissed.

"Say it, or the Mardu die."

Sorin gathered up crackling void in his hooves to shape, just in case.

"Very well," Rainbow Helmdasher sighed. "Though it pains me, I must say -"

"HERE'S YOUR WELCOME TO TARKIR PARTY, TWILIGHT SPARKLE!" every single Mardu present - and Pinkie - yelled. Pinkie pulled a table set with an entire Quilinese banquet out of her pocket, and pulled a pair of chopsticks out of her mane. "YOU DONE GOT PRANKED, TWILIGHT SPARKLE!"

Twilight's jaw dropped, as did Elspeth's. Ajani facepawed, and Sorin sunk to his knees, clutching his head, laughing.

"Were you surprised, Twilight? Huh? Huh?" Pinkie said, bouncing in place. "One I knew Rainbow and Gilda were awake and she told me her loop memories we got an epic prank and party for you!"

"I am going to murder you in your sleep!" Twilight howled, though she was smiling.

Gilda was rolling on the ground laughing as Rainbow Helmda- Rainbow DASH offered her fetlock. Twilight took it and Rainbow Dash pulled her roughly up. "Oh, come on. The look on your face was priceless, come on. We set it up so that no one would get hurt and all the Mardu were in on the joke."

A goblin bounced and hooted. "We scare Twi Twi good! We scare Twi Twi and all Mardu laugh laugh laugh!"

"Welcome to the Equestrian Loops, kinda! Have some cupcakes!" Pinkie said, bouncing over to the Planeswalkers and handing each one a confection.

Elspeth bit into hers. "â€|This is Bant honey-cake," she said.

"And mine is filled with cherry syrup," Sorin remarked.  
"Amusing."

"I come prepared," Pinkie Pie said, her voice solemn.

(Courtesy of Set Designer FoME:

Rainbow Helmdasher  
>1RWB<br>Legendary Creature â€" Pegasus Warrior  
>Flying, haste<br>Rainbow Helmdasher attacks each combat if able.

>Rainbow has indestructible as long as it's your turn.<br>Whenever Rainbow attacks, defending player may sacrifice a creature. If he or she does, put a +1/+1 counter on Rainbow and prevent all combat damage it would deal this turn.  
>42

Pinkie, Enlightened Jester 1URW  
>Legendary Creature â€" Horse Monk<br>First strike, hexproof

>Whenever Pinkie, Enlightened Jester attacks, exile the top card of each player's library. Until end of turn, you may cast noncreature, cards exiled with Pinkie this turn without paying their mana costs.  
<em>(Permanent spells cast this way enter the battlefield under your control.)<br>"Within fun lies true wisdom. Plus, you know, it's fun!"\_  
>32)

\* \* \*

><p>141.13 (Gamerex27)<p>

"You...want to learn martial arts?" Rainbow Dash asked, tilting her head.

"Yep!" Pinkie Pie said, doing some stretches to make sure she wouldn't strain herself. "I can't think of any new recipes at the moment, so I'm gonna try something different this Loop!"

"...Pinkie, you can't learn martial arts just for kicks. There's a serious commitment you have to take for this. Years of training, and centuries of practice to make sure the muscle memory sticks in between Loops?"

"C'moooooon," she whined, "we're in a time Loop! We've got forever and ever to do whatever we want! And it looks like a lot of fun!"

"...alright, then," Rainbow Dash said, smirking suddenly. "Just remember: you asked for this. We'll start tomorrow."

\* \* \*

><p>She was having the most wonderful dream: she had baked a cake as big as Equestria, with an oven the size of the Moon. It wasn't easy: she had used the most exotic ingredients, from Saddle Arabian cane sugar to golden egg yolks to love-crystalized, solid love taken from her own heart, that is. She put down the icing tube, satisfied of the murals of her friends partying, playing pranks on baddies, and beating up that <em>nasty, mean, awful<em> Naok-uh, the Fiend that they had fought in recent memory.

Slowly, and with great pomp and circumstance, she cut a piece of the cake no bigger than her hoof: everypony knew the first slice was the best, after all. She brought it up to her mouth, and-

"WAKE UP, YOU SLACKER! FIVE LAPS AROUND PONYVILLE, NOW!"

Pinkie jumped at least twenty feet in the air in surprise, leaping right out of her dream and back into the real world, just short of smacking her head on the ceiling.

"Hey, Dashie..." she muttered, a bit groggily, " it's a bit early for-"

"No buts!" her new sensei shouted. "Now, get going, unless you want to run ten instead! And no using toon physics, that's cheating!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"She's been running for <em>hours<em>, and you haven't let her stop," Zecora commented as Pinkie Pie galloped towards them, panting heavily. "Isn't this a bit over the top?"

"It's not the exercise," Dash noted, "it's the discipline. Pretty much every martial art I know has some kinds of trials you need to do to learn the cool stuff-endurance tests like this, for instance. Annnnd that's the last lap," she finished as Pinkie stopped in front



of them, before promptly collapsing into a boneless Pinkie Pie-shaped puddle of flesh.

"So...tired," she said, as she shakily rose to her hooves.  
"Need...glucose...or...maybe...a...sugary...drink..."

"Okay, you get a ten minute break to eat," Rainbow Dash told her, ignoring the gasp of shock, "and then we start with the 'the floor is lava' test. No ascending to fly out unless you're really going to fall in, and yes, it's \_real\_ lava."

"But won't the heat of being near it boil her alive?" Zecora asked, as she removed a stamina potion from her Pocket and hoofed it over to the distressed Element of Laughter. "The convection alone will cause her coat to get skived."

"I...just...wanted to...learn how to buck bread into shape!" Pinkie panted before she chugged down Zecora's brew, wincing at the bitter taste. "I wanted to hit dough and say 'you are already bread' to cook faster!"

"You wanted to-" Rainbow Dash facehoofed. "Wanting to make a pun is a \_really bad reason\_ to subject yourself to this. Are you sure you don't want to stop?"

"I...need \_something\_ to do!" Pinkie Pie told her. "There's always a shortage of sugar this month, and I ran out of the supply in my Pocket, so I need \_something\_ new to do, or else I'll get \_boooooored!\_"

"Alright, then," Dashie said, shrugging. "Since you're my friend and all, I'll grab some hot coals instead of real lava. Not really traditional, but learning balance is better when you only risk second degree burns rather than fifth or so."

\* \* \*

><p>141.14 (Filraen)<p>

It was the first morning of a new Loop and a currently human Twilight Sparkle was making breakfast for her guests. She, along with Celestia and Scootaloo had Awoke the previous day in this seaside cabin and since it was getting pretty late by the time of their Awakening they decided to stay the night at the cabin, which according to their loop memories was Twilight's anyway.

\_ 'Let's see, lettuce and tomatoes should be...'\_ Twilight stopped herself at hearing someone coming from the bedrooms.

"Good morning," the usually-a-pegasus yawned to nobody in particular.

"Good morning Scootaloo" Twilight greeted back. "There's milk and coffee ready if you want some."

"Please." Scootaloo poured herself a cup and started drinking.

Halfway through her cup Scootaloo could feel herself a bit more awake  
"Oh, that's better. New loop, here-!"

"Shut up!" Twilight's quickly hushed Scootaloo. "You'll ruin the surprise for Celestia if you shout that loud!"

"For Pr- Celestia? Are you cooking something for breakfast?" Scootaloo asked a bit curious.

"Not really." At Scootaloo's confused look Twilight elaborated, "she raises the sun everyday back in Equestria. How often do you think she can just sleep in?"

"Point."

\* \* \*

><p>141.15 (Leviticus Wilkes)<p>

The muffins, hot and fresh from the oven, looked delicious. Ditzzy smiled and gently took one between her hooves, and brought it to her mouth.

"Waitwaiteaitwaitwait!" The muffin shouted. Derpy blinked and stared at the muffin.

"Oh... My... Cylinders! I BAKED A TALKING MUFFIN!"

The muffin, perhaps thrown by the use of cylinders, shook it's body in an approximation of a shaken head. "Neigh young ma'am, you have not baked a talking muffin. You have baked the brilliant, the beautiful, the dazzling, the one-of-a-kind! You have baked... THE KAMINA MUFFIN!"

In the background, an Explosion wrecked Twilight's library, proceeded to climb out of the library, and argue with Discord over who had hit whom while driving.

The muffin turned magnanimously. "Kamina cake, if you prefer."

A second, smaller Explosion proceeded to wreck the town hall, exit the two hall, and argue with Discord and the Explosion over why their hot-tub and library tree were out in the middle of the road.

Bright Eyes squeezed her cheeks together and squealed.

\* \* \*

><p>141.16 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Thousands of ponies stood in the fields surrounding Ponyville. All of them were arrayed towards Sugarcube Corner, wearing various bright and pink robes of all different shades. All had balloons of different kinds, some carried them on string, others wore them on their heads or around their necks. Among the most prominent members, patches of their fur had turned bubblegum pink or their manes had portions that were poofy and wild.

Sugarcube Corner itself was different from most loops. It was more like a cathedral, with a massive balcony that could be seen for miles, even in Canterlot. Upon the platform, there stood 6 ponies. One lowered her hoof, revealing a poofy haired Celestia who shouted,

"My little ponies, I bring you great news from our glorious goddess. She longs to address you before beginning her yearly Super Ultra Mega Deluxe Party! However, she is rewarding her personal student with a gift that takes time and preparation to complete. Before she addresses you, I present to you the Chosen of Laughter!"

Hoofs stomped as the entire countryside shook. Four of the cloaked ponies stepped forward, and as one they lowered their robes, revealing Fluttershy, Applejack, Rarity and Dash, all bearing the same bubblegum mane and pink coat. In addition, they wore their Elements of Laughter. Their hairstyles remained the same though. One by one, they addressed the gathered ponies. Fluttershy impressed on them the importance of Kind Laughter, where you build each other's jokes up and help them improve. Rarity spoke on the nature of Generous laughter, that pony kind must all go out of their way, giving freely in your quest to bring joy back to a sad pony's life once again.

Applejack lectured on honest laughter, the importance of being willing to tell the truth about a joke in the hopes that they might improve themselves. Finally, Rainbow Dash preached on Loyal Laughter, that even when a friend continues to make bad jokes, you must stand by them, that one day their jokes will be funny if you keep trying.

With that, the four ponies stepped back. Celestia took the stage again. "Thank you, Chosen. Now before the Pink One addresses you, I would like to welcome back into the fold my Sister, Luna, who has returned to her position as High Priestess of the Pink alongside me. She will be taking up her duties once again and will receive visitors during the Night Vigil. I will, as always, oversee the Day Ceremonies."

The fifth pony stepped forward and lowered her hood. The only difference with this Luna and baseline was her mane and coat had a streak of pink running through them. Almost as quickly as she stepped forward, she raised her hood and stepped back. Celestia looked back to the entrance to Sugarcube Corner, where the door was slightly ajar. Taking her cue from the pony within, Celestia nodded, "Now I may present you with the Warp Goddess of Celebration and Laughter, Pinkie Pie!"

Once again, hooves beat the Earth as one pony in a cloak stepped forward, following a leaping Pinkie Pie, who seemed ecstatic for some reason. "My super duper awesome ponies, I have the bestest news of all time! Today, I have decided on my final Chosen to join the ranks of her fellow chosen and bear the element of Magical Laughter."

Pinkie pulled out a necklace bearing a starburst. The cloaked pony lowered her hood, revealing an annoyed Twilight Sparkle, bearing the same bubblegum mane and pink coat of the other chosen. Pinkie quickly placed the element over her neck, then turned to the crowd and shouted in the Royal Canterlot Voice, "\*\*\*PONYVILLE! THE SLEEPER, HAS AWAKENED!\*\*\*"

Twilight could only facehoof. Sure, she had done this during each of her Chosen's inductions from her in loop memories, but it was still cheesy no matter how you looked at it.

\* \* \*

><p>141.17 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Twilight looked between the bird glaring at Twilight, and the brothers that had replaced Flim and Flam this loop, "Pinkie's already done this."

The two looked affronted. "Please, we beat Pinkie at her own game."

The right one continued, "Too true, we bet Pinkie never tricked Tirek into eating one of our newest variations of canary pastries."

"Though you might want to lock it up and prevent your other friends from attacking it."

"It's a cucco after all."

Twilight's eyes widened in growing horror. "Wait...that...is a cucco?"

The two looked excited, "Oh yes! We've been working on upgrading our temporary cucco cream into a permanent one, and we made a breakthrough last loop."

"Wanted to test it on the baddest of the bad here before giving it to You-Know-Poo."

"Like we said though, as long as no one attacks him, there won't be a problem."

A shout echoed from above, "Look out below!"

Rainbow Dash came out of nowhere, completely out of control as she slammed the bird into the nearest house, through it and then through the next two buildings. As what sounded like a rooster echoed across Ponyville, Twilight suddenly found herself lifted in Fred's Magical aura while Dash was in George's. The two blazed through Ponyville, screaming. "RUN FOR YOUR LIVES," as cuccos started descending upon the town.

\* \* \*

><p>141.18 (Drachefly)<p>

Shining Armor woke, and in the exchange of pings, caught three others. \_Is she one of them?\_ His nervousness dissipated as Cadence teleported in. \_Yes!\_

She declared, for the benefit of the other officers, "A moment, captain?"

"Certainly, princess."

They withdrew. Through long experience they'd found this was too early to do any more than talk without lasting consequences.

He asked, "How many loops since we met last, for you?"

"One between. You?"

"One, and it... well, we've had some awkward moments in our time, but Rarity and Spike had an awful one."

Her eyes sparkled in anticipation. "Late awakening?"

"Right. So, Rarity was awake from the start as Sweetie Belle. She managed to get unawake Spike's attention, and they got married."

"Then..."

"Spike woke up. As Snails, of all ponies."

"Okay. Go on - that doesn't quite compare to our convolutions, yet."

"Right. So, Rarity set about getting her unawake self to finally return his undiminished affections. Just when it was working, Sweetie Belle woke up as Rarity."

"So did you have Rarity as her sister asking her sister as her to keep stealing her husband so she could be with her husband? That's counts as fairly weird by our scale. On par with you-as-Chrysalis and me-as-you."

Shining Armor nodded and went on. "The three of them took a while to decide what to do. They were secretly meeting so often that Snips got jealous of Snails' attention. He disguised himself as Spike to gather information. It. Was. Terrible. In the end, he was so pathetic they explained the loops and swore him to secrecy."

"That's pretty awkward."

"Especially since unawake Spike was listening in."

Cadence blinked. "I... I think we've only topped that once. So what did they do?"

"Didn't matter. He ran away, somehow found his way through the mirror, and settled in as Rarity and Sweetie Belle's \_dog\_."

She winced. "Okay, invoking the P-chan gambit wins."

"No. See, I had woken up as Sunset Shimmer. The awkward moment was after I'd confronted him, and he'd finished explaining, and \_they\_ too\_ had overheard."

Cadence was stunned, trying to imagine the situation. Their time to talk without creating a disturbance ran out, so Shining Armor bowed and backed away.

\* \* \*

><p>141.19 (DrTempo)<p>

"HOORAH! Nice work, everypony."

\_Another day for the Royal Guard, and another Loop.\_ Shining Armor thought to himself. It was a while after the Changeling attack, and the Guard had just defeated a remnant force. While his men celebrated, he saw a new recruit sitting down, removing her helmet. She had a frown on her face, like something was bothering her. Trotting over to her, he inquired, "Are you all right, Private Shimmer?"

The unicorn nodded. "Yeah. I was just thinking of something." Shining smiled, replying with, "I know you're Awake, Sunset. What's bothering you?" Sunset started crying.

"It's just...Compared to nearly every other Looper from here, I spent my first few several Loops in battles. I guess it changed me. Sometimes, I remember those I saw killed, and those I had no choice but to hurt badly..or even kill. One life for a thousand..." Sunset then sighed. "I guess I suffered a little shell shock. I think I might've first noticed it during my Loop with those Titans smashing everyone...It was so...dreary. I had to take down monsters who were simply poor souls who had become monsters. Even then...I didn't like it."

Taking a breath, she continued, "I felt at times that I had lost my way, but I remembered what Equestria is all about. I knew, no matter what, that to protect what one cherishes most, you have to fight. You guys have always strived not to fight unless needed, but I feel like I'm more violent."

Shining nodded. "I've known that for millennia. I get what you mean, though. It seems that you've never let the desire for battle cloud your morals. And Rarity did mention you had said something like this to her a while back."

Sunset nodded, sniffing. "I know. But I can still see those I had to hurt. I sometimes enjoy fighting."

Shining laughed. "It's all right. You want to test yourself. I understand that, too. Besides, with all the places you've ended up, I'm sure you would never forgive yourself if you just stood by and did nothing. Never lose sight of who you are."

Sunset smiled; she seemed to feel a little better. "You're right. Life is precious. I just have to remember the values I cherish, and I'll never become a monster." Grabbing her helmet, she then said, "Let's get back to work, sir!"

Shining nodded, thinking, \_I know you've been through a lot, Sunset, and your early Loops weren't exactly peaceful. But you've never lost sight of your morals.\_

\_Had I been in your shoes, I would be the same. \_\_I hope.\_

\* \* \*

><p>141.20 (Evilhumour)<p>

Big Mac blinked as he was presented with a \_very\_ unusual sight from behind his bar. It seemed that they were in a fused loop with Warhammer again with the Adeptus Astartes pouring in, although the fact they were grinning and not firing on him meant something was

up.

As they began to crowd the bar, one of them walked to him and smiled weakly. He recognized him as Bjorn faintly, rare as it was that he saw the looper as a human and not in his Dreadnought.

"Sorry Ser MacIntosh," the man chuckled weakly as he looked around. "Leman and I accidentally let it slip we've found something stronger the Fenrisian Ale and we're forced to share." He gave a backwards nod of his head towards the slightly uncomfortable Space Marines. "Is Lady Punch Awake?"

"Yes, I'm here," the mare smiled, walking out from the back with the Space Wolves shouting in joy at the prodigal alcohol maker's presence. "Let's see if I have anything that you boys can handle!" She grinned at the mock calls and eager took on their Primarch who was grinning from ear to ear.

They all later had the rare privilege of watching Leman Russ being drunk under the table by a talking, colourful pony who was only slightly buzzed by that point.

\* \* \*

><p>141.21 (Evilhumour)<p>

Leman Russ place a hand to his face and slowly counted back from five.

><strong><br>My son, do you have **\*\*\_\*\*any\*\*\*\*\*-\*\*\_**

"No Father, I do not know how she replaced Khorne, nor do I want to know."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>"MUFFINS FOR THE MUFFIN THRONE!"<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

141.1: Oh, dear. The one thing worse than the Talk - finding it's too late to give it.

>141.2: Not this again. It's beating... uh, never mind.<br>141.3: As we know, it's not.

>143.4: Rule 63 collorary one: everyone you know wants to see you under rule 63.<br>141.5: Dis Gaea is kind of a cool bloke to get to know.

>141.6: collorary two: And they want more pictures.<br>141.7: Leman cannot drive.

>141.8: One does have to wonder if he's playing up the childhood thing as a rest from his grim loop.<br>141.9: Ah, this one's the Dead Peewee Sketch. (Also note anchor Tibbers.)

>141.10: Inverted controls.<br>141.11: The Revolution Will Not Be Bona Fide.

>141.12: Cardponies the third!<br>141.13: Because of course Dash has unreasonably high standards.

>141.14: Getting up after the sun's already risen not really an option for Celestia.<br>141.15: Pick a name and stick with it, please.

>141.16: Pinkie Priest.<br>141.17: Fear the twins. Or, rather, fear what they've done by mistake this time.  
>141.18: Trek, I believe.<br>141.19: Better to want redemption than to not want it.  
>141.20: Space Drunkies.<br>141.21: Oh.

## 149. Chapter 149

### 142.1 (Detective Ethan Redfield)

\_After The Weasley Twins' Cucco Pastry Loop:\_

Two familiar red haired teens found themselves waking up in a pitch black room, strapped to a pair of chairs. Moments later, a lamp flashed on, illuminating a pink haired girl sitting across from them. Her hands were folded as she gave them an uncharacteristically serious expression.

"Boys," She spoke in a serious tone, "I hear word going around about a certain pair of Weasley Twins who claimed to have 'beaten me at my own game.' That you turned Tirek into a chicken like I did, but with a pastry instead of magic."

The two shrugged. "Cucco, but who's nitpicking."

Pinky leaned in close. "Just because you gave one pastry prank, you think you gentlemen are the kings of pranks?!"

The twins looked slightly affronted. "No, we're the kings of pranks because we've been pranking before you were even looping."

Pinkie raised a hoof, "I will not let this go unopposed. I declare war upon you both!"

She then gave a cheerful smile as the room lit up, revealing a Hogwarts classroom with the words \*\*PRANKS GALORE\*\* written on the blackboard. The Weasley Twins' bonds vanished like magic as Pinkie stood and started pacing about the room. "A prank war. Looping Dash will keep score and decide who's the greatest prankster in the multiverse between the three of us."

The Twins looked around, "But Dash isn't even here."

Pinkie ran over to a door and pulled it open, revealing a strange looking house elf, "Silly Billies. I keep Dashes scattered all over Hogwarts, in case of Dash emergency."

Dash rubbed her face. "Pinkie, you could have just called me when you needed instead of making me wait behind this door for the last fifteen minutes."

\* \* \*

### ><p>142.2 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight was readying herself for an unAwake Nightmare Moon when a colt slammed the doors open, with a cape around his neck. Twilight's mouth dropped in disbelief at what was she was seeing, the rest of her Awake friend in similar positions.



"Who dares interrupt me?!" She shouted, standing on her hind legs at the blue colt holding a gun.

"I HAVE ALREADY BESTED THE MOON, THE APPLES AND THE SPIKES," he shouted, pointing the pea shooter at the alicorn. "I HAVE BESTED THE SIX CHAMPIONS AND DEFEATED THE FATHER!" He then fired miniature bullets at Nightmare Moon who was flying to avoid the powerful and painful shots. Twilight watched in awe as he avoid all her magic blasts and was actually close to defeating Nightmare Moon by all regards of her tired state. The colt suddenly ducked as an apple went sailing through the window, only to smash into Nightmare Moon's face, knocking away the Nightmare Taint from Luna.

Luna looked up in disbelief at her saviour. "W-who are you?"

The colt, with a cutie mark of the moon with a spike and apple on it stood on the stage, smiling at the princess. "I am the Guy."

\* \* \*

><p>142.3 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Dusk?"

"Yes Elusive?"

"Why are we Space Marines going to fight a daemon invasion without any of our usual powers?" The usual mare looper who was currently a male space marine asked a bit concerned, blasting away the damons with ease as Dusk was summoning mighty pskyer blasts to hold the tide back.

"More than likely because of the obvious joke." Leman muttered unhappily as he cut apart several of the daemons that were attacking with his chainblade. Being an average space marine was always odd to him as he felt so weak and powerless.

"Yeah, making up a new chapter just for us?" Applejack asked as he stood side by side the Anchor of the loop. "Ah thought Fenrir and Sleipnir were better than that!"

"Actually," Butterscotch said from the titan he was in. Everyone unsure of how exactly he got one this loop but everyone else was still glad that Leman was stopped from taking it as a joyride considering the horror stories that Fluttershy shared. "The Rainbow Warrior are an actual chapter and none of this is really made up." He then turned back and blasted an entire squad of daemons with a soft apology.

"Yeah, ah figured that were something screwy when Dashie was the captain instead of ya Twiliy."

"That's Chapter Captain Rainbow Blitz AJ!" Their in-loop leader shouted with glee in his blue power armor, the rainbow strip far larger than anyone else, as he punched apart several daemons. "I'm so loving this!"

"That aside," Leman muttered as he was smacked backwards by an exploding party favor. He hated being so weak. "Is no one else

concern that we are dealing with an unAwake Chaos Goddess Pinkie Pie?!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>142.4 (Evilhumour)<p>

Nurgle tilted his head as the goddess in front of him was \_not\_ Isha and rolled his eyes.

"Begone mortal," he grumbled, splashing her two tone hair with several of his less favourable maggots and diseases . "I care \_not\_ for you, only my love ... oh it's \_you\_ Cadence."

The usual pony alicorn chuckled weakly, brushing herself clean with her hand and using her magic to heal herself from his most lovely diseases that he had been working on for Isha. "Hello Nurgle," she smiled as she stood up as she regrew her wing. "I take it that you're keeping up your practice of creating new diseases?"

"Yes," he rolled his eyes, not feeling in his usual good mood, stepping onto some Nurglings as he grabbed some rotten fruit out of his subspace pocket and sending it back to health before throwing it at the fellow looper. "Although it was \_not\_ for the likes of \_you\_."

"Oh," the deity blinked as she caught the fruit and tentatively took a bite of it after using her magic to rid it of several horrifying diseases that Nurgle left on it, more than likely by mistake then intent. "For Isha, I suppose?"

Nurgle flashed his eyes to her and for a brief moment, Nurgle took some of his darker aspects of his rights as a Chaos God. As he choked the very air around him all forms of life and death, he remembered the first and only time Slaanesh had tried to tease him about Isha. Khorne had stepped in to stop the brutality he was unleashing onto the terrified Slaanesh and Tzeentch made several strides to make sure \_no\_ one ever made the same mistake the near dead Chaos God made again.

"Speak carefully," he said evenly, causing the looper to back up in instinctual fright. "The last deity of lust found it poor to joke about my beloved and I will not show you anymore leniency than I did to hir."

"I would \_never\_ joke about love, Nurgle." Cadence was truly taken back by Slaanesh's callous words and actions; already resolving to reeducate her fellow deity of love on their duties towards others. "If you want, we can talk about your relationship with Isha and I might be able to help you a bit."

Nurgle listened to her words and judged them to be honest. Nodding his head, he summoned two sofas for them and allowed Cadence a tiny bit of power so she could reshape herself into her normal equine self.

"Thank you very much Nurgle." Cadence flashed him a smile as sat across of him. "Even though I know, can you please tell me how did you two meet?"

Nurgle smiled as he thought back to his first encounters with his beloved to understanding pony across of him.

\* \* \*

><p>142.5 (Ryuus2)<p>

Lemon Rush felt oddly good this loop as he flexed his wings and came to a landing. He'd woken up in his mother's place this time, so he was an adult Equestrian for the first time in a while. He had a similar role to his mother as well, except he was known to handle the roughest beasts of the Everfree on top of the cuddlier ones. He was very surprised to realize that his loop memories included how to perform a spinal adjustment on a hydra and a deep tissue massage on a manticore, as well as the best way to fluff Angel's tail.

This loop appeared to be a mostly baseline Equestria. He opted out of being the Element of Kindness when Twilight came by, and instead stayed to calm the panicking crowd while Silver Spoon, currently Gilda's niece Silver Beak, filled in. The other Crusaders were apparently asleep, so she opted to return to Griffonia with Gilda to help her conquer the realm with mime. The only other obvious changes were an unawake Rainbow Dash who dressed in style, and that Ivory Scroll was taking a vacation this loop. Cheerilee had offered to fill in for her, citing a desire to expand her knowledge on bureaucracy for a later lesson. She had suggested Lemon fill in for her for some reason and he'd agreed readily enough.

As he walked in the door to the small schoolhouse he was ready for anything from an unawake Diamond Tiara's usual antics up to the Crusaders all awakening at once. He was not, however, ready for the four consecutive pings from four distinctly non-crusader foals. The grins on the three colts and one (probably) filly told him all he needed to know. The Chaos Gods had replaced the Cutie Mark Crusaders.

\_ 'Welp,' \_ he thought. \_ 'We're doomed.' \_

\* \* \*

><p>After class let out, the four foals stayed behind to talk to their new teacher.<p>

The first thing out of Lemon's mouth was not "So you're the Crusaders this time," or "be good or I'm telling your parents," or even "kill me now before you crash the loop with tree sap." It was instead, "where the Oak did you get that filly sized seifuku, Slaanesh?"

The pink furred unicorn col- fil-...uh, pubescent pony with the expertly coiffed baby blue mane and matching blue eyes in the white and blue patterned Japanese school girl uniform struck a pose. "Do you like it? Rarity Onee-chan made it for me based on a Neighponese design I liked," Slaanesh, currently Elusive 'I can be a Sweetie if you like' Bell, said.

"Before you ask, we don't know either," the light blue furred earth pony/unicorn colt with salt & pepper mane and purple eyes known as Gleaming Mind, otherwise Tzeentch, added. "Shi's apparently been like this since before shi awoke."

"This body is stupid!" Khorne grumbled hotly, flapping his tiny wings uselessly. He was currently a pegasus colt with red fur and eyes and a cropped black mane who answered to Bashaloo, but thanks to an incident with Granny Smith everyone called him Dot.

"Actually, Pegasi are the primary military force, due to their incredible speed, agility, and durability," Lemon said, hoping to head off any potential blood sports before they could begin. "They can fly, walk on clouds, and use weather magic to create and direct rain, sleet, snow, twisters, and lightning."

Khorne perked up at the list of combat maneuvers his new species was capable of. "Well, that's better--"

"Your wings are still too small to fly, though, so you can't reach the clouds to do most of that," Nurgle, presently a green furred earth pony colt with brown mane and yellow eyes named Apple Core, cut him off. "Now I must be off, I've got a new recipe to work on."

"You're not mixing up plagues in the barn, are you?" Lemon asked worriedly, memories of Nurgle's attempts to recreate the various strains of T-Virus flashing through his mind.

"No, no my dear boy. I'm working on a new recipe for apple beer."

"Beer?" he asked with puzzled relief. "I didn't think you'd be interested in that."

"Fermentation is all about one thing rotting away and something else feasting on its remains to grow. Imagine the possibilities!"

"...And now I cannot drink for a month. Damn you, Nurgle," he groaned. He glanced between them looking for cutie marks. He got three blank flanks and one skirt, but if he tipped his head just so much and blew lightly- He slapped his face -and made a mental note to never do that with a hoof again- before that thought could finish forming. Ignoring his bruised cheek and Slaanesh's grin, he asked a question that he knew he'd regret asking. "You four aren't going to start Crusading for your Cutie Marks, are you?"

"Suggoi! That's a great idea! You're so smart, Lemon-Sensei," Slaanesh cooed sultrily, shaking his hips in a way that made Lemon shudder instinctively for reasons he Did Not want to delve into.

At an unspoken signal, all four foals shouted in unison "CUTIE MARK CHAOS GODS! YAY!" then ran off.

Once they were gone, Lemon Rush responded in the only way he could. He fainted.

\* \* \*

><p>Later that weekend, Lemon met Twilight for tea in her library. She had taken the occasion to thaw a pot of Fluttershy's personal blend that had been preserved in her pocket. It wasn't as good as the original, but it was about as close as almost anyone could get.<p>

After a relaxing gulp of the tea, Lemon asked, "So, everyone knew that it was them but me, and you all decided to prank me with it?"

"Actually, none of us knew who they were for sure," Twilight explained. "Ivory did need a vacation, and Cheerilee did want to expand her course list. I was busy with research at the time, and suggested you to fill in because I knew you could handle anything the new foals could dish out, whoever they were, even if they did awaken. It was a surprise to all of us when it turned out to be those four. How are you handling things by the way? Is the Crusading too much for you?"

Lemon slumped into his seat. "I can handle the Crusading; it's not much worse than some of the stuff I've done as a foal. But somehow, they seem to be causing more trouble than they do back home," Lemon groaned. "Apple Core behaves himself, but I have to keep reminding him not to share any of the lunches he brings with anypony. Gleaming Mind keeps nominating himself for different positions and then delegating everyone else to do his work. He even tried nominating himself the teacher once, and I will admit that I took a small pleasure in putting him in detention for disrupting the class." He preened a bit at the memory. One did not often get a chance to so completely one-up the scheming god so thoroughly, even with all the foreknowledge the loops could provide. After another gulp of tea he continued. "Those two are reasonably well behaved, but Dot is always looking for fights or crashing into things because he can't get used to his body. Thanks for looking after him by the way. He's not causing too much trouble?"

"Not at all," Twilight said. Normally, when Scootaloo's parents were...unsavory, she would arrange to stay with Rainbow Dash (awake or not). But with the unawake Dash dressing in style this loop, it was felt that someone a bit more...forceful should look after her replacement this time. And since neither Twilight nor Lemon want to see the end result of leaving the battle god with the Timberwolf versions of Freki and Geri -and their honorary pack-mate Angel Bunny (not awake, thankfully)- for any amount of time, Twilight had volunteered to take him in.

"Actually, he and Spike have been spending a lot of time together. It's always so hard for him to make guy friends his age, and the two seem to have bonded over the whole 'honorable warrior' thing. They've even been working on that Dragon Code of his. I'm kinda looking forward to seeing how the Dragon Migration goes this time around." She grinned. It wasn't often she got to watch her unawake little brother teach those three bullies a lesson, and with Khorne's help -carefully monitored, of course- it looked like it would be a good show. "And Elusive?" Twilight asked curiously.

Lemon's slight good mood melted away immediately at the reminder of the current form of the god(dess) of sensation. He slumped forward onto the table with a groan. "It's Elusive that's getting to me the most. Shi keeps hitting on me, which is actually not that different, but the way shi works all the outfits into it and acts all innocent..." he trailed off with a shudder as he banished the thoughts. "I can't even put hir in detention when shi goes too far because shi always manages to pull out some kind of bondage gear from nowhere. First there were the shackles, then the straight jacket, and last time it was shibari and- Gah!" He smacked his head into the

table to suppress the thoughts and the shivers they caused. Fortunately he was able to hold back enough to keep from splitting the table, and only set the tea service to shaking ponderously.

"I'm sure it's not that bad," Twilight said as she rubbed his shoulders with a hoof.

"I caught Rarity giving hir tips. She thinks it's romantic," he mumbled into the table. Twilight sweat dropped. "And the Shipping. Oh, the Shipping..." he half-sobbed.

Before anything else could be said, the sounds of stampeding ponies, splintering wood, and general chaos floated in through the open window. Ponyville being Ponyville, this could mean anything from a monster attack to a royal visit to Zecora grocery shopping, but it was most likely a Cutie Mark Crusade judging by the swirly eyed red and black foal covered in tree sap that flew through the window and crashed into the table in front of them. Lemon sighed the sigh of the long suffering, took a moment to compose himself, downed his cup of tea in a single gulp, and got up to go run damage control on his other students. Twilight chuckled at the predicament her fellow anchor had been placed in, then picked up Khorne in her magic and carried him off to the bathroom to begin the long but much practiced process of washing the tree sap from his coat.

\* \* \*

><p>Three sap-coated foals sat staring at what once was a rather complicated bit of insanity. Well, two of them were staring, the third was too busy fussing about the sap plastering herhis/its clothes and mane.

"It should have worked! Why didn't it work?!" The light-blue colt ranted.

The green colt sighed. "I just don't know what went wrong."

The pink co- fi- one, was busily trying to think up a cleaning spell that could get rid of tree sap without damaging hir frou-frou princess dress. Hir mane would need professional help. "You'd better hope I don't need a shave to get this sap out of my mane, Gleemy, or I'm taking it out of your feathery backside when we get home." Just then she noticed Lemon trotting determinedly up the street towards them and hir personality pulled a 180, from feminine fury to coquettishly girlish innocence. "Oh Lemon-sensei! Can you please help me? I seem to have gotten very sticky with unusual fluids."

Lemon froze mid trot and resisted the urge to scream in mental and spiritual agony. Barely.

Shaking himself out of it, he put on his 'serious teacher' face. "Okay, what were you lot doing this time?" he asked, glancing at the large pile of wood, pipe, rope, and sundry materials that usually resulted from a failed Crusade.

Tzeentch puffed his chest out and began his duties as chief orator of the CMCG. Interestingly, this was the only position he'd granted himself that he didn't delegate to someone else. "We were trying to get our Cutie Marks in monster catching. To that end, we took apart a game Nurgle found in the HUB and rebuilt it at 100 scale size, taking

several liberties and making modifications based off the work of Rube Goldberg."

Lemon face hoofed. This was a bad idea as it just made his headache worse. "...You tried building a better mousetrap?"

"Well..." Tzeentch hedged, until he heard a suspiciously lupine growl from his anchor/instructor. "In laymen's terms...yes."

"You- that- I- whatever," Lemon gave up with a sigh. "Just...go get cleaned up. And don't forget to come back and clean this up tomorrow."

Slaanesh stayed behind as the other two trotted off. "Sensei? Rarity Onee-chan left me a note to give you," shi simpered sweetly, presenting him the note from within hir blouse.

Being very careful to ignore the inviting way the blouse hung open, Lemon accepted the note. When he was done he froze again, this time in shock and dread. Rarity was out of town for the next few days. And she wanted him to look after Elusive.

Slaanesh used peeking at the letter as an excuse to saddle up to his muscular barrel, clearly being innocently inappropriate. Hir reaction was the complete opposite of the stallions. Shi started prancing all over the place like Pinkie Pie. "Yatta! Sugoi! Sleepover with Lemon-Sensei! Squeee!"

This time, Lemon didn't even try to stop the scream from escaping.

\* \* \*

><p>Khorne lifted an ear as he thought he heard a scream. "Twilight," he grumbled as the mare ran the bath for him, "Did you hear that?"<p>

Twilight tilted her head, listening. "I don't think so..."

\* \* \*

><p>A few days later Twilight, currently a Pegasus, was sharing a cloud with Rainbow Dash and taking in the site of the bustling ponies below. "Still not ready to show them the new you?" Twilight asked Rainbow Dash a.k.a. the God Emperor of Mankind a.k.a. Empy.<p>

The stylishly dressed blue Pegasus shook her head. "Not quite. I would have had no choice but to reveal myself had I awoken as Celestia as usual, but when I noticed I was a commoner, an impressive one, yes, but still a commoner...I decided to just relax and roll with it."

"Not to mention that it gives you the perfect chance to observe how Lemon is handling the loops without him knowing," the anchor said casually. Empy didn't rise to the bait. She just continued to watch her son as he wrangled the Chaos Gods out of their newest Cutie Mark Crusade -something to do with Zap Apple Cider- with a small smile on her face.

\* \* \*

><p>142.6 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Vinyl Scratch, get your flabby white flanks back here this second!"

Twilight blinked as Vinyl ran past her with fear on face as several large musical items went flying through the air.

"I've said I'm sorry Octy!" She whimpered as she ducked a guitar.

"And how many times have you've said that to me?!" Octavia shouted, bucking a violin overhead that landed directly in front of the panicking looper.

"Whoa whoa whoa!" Twilight shouted, teleporting in the middle of the two, Vinyl cowering in fear with Octavia picking up her prized cello. "What the tree sap is going on?"

"She forget our anniversary! Again!" the earth pony glared at the gulping musician. "You'd think after looping for so long she'd be able to keep track of our special day, but noooo!"

"Wait, you're looping?!" Twilight reared back in surprise. How did she miss this?

The musician in front of her sighed, and placed down the blunt instrument of pain and wonder. "No, I'm not. She just told me about them, again apparently, and how often we do become a couple." She blushed now, rubbing her beige hooves together. "It might be a bit hard to believe, but if you give her enough time she can be really romantic and sweet." She chuckled softly. "Like a few hundred years I'm willing to wager."

"Hey!" The looping musician poked her head out of scared heap that was hiding behind Twilight. "I'm not that bad!"

"Yes, you are when you just told me that you often forget to keep track of our anniversaries and then schedule a world tour around Equestria on this loops anniversary !" Her glared caused many other ponies watching the scene to gulp and take a step back.

"But it ends just before this loops anniversary Octy!" Vinyl whined back.

"Only by chance!" Octavia yelled. "You asked me, and I quote, 'Say, my sweet music loving and giving mare, what's this day on the calendar that has all this girly hearts around it? Heh, already marking the day when your DJ queen comes back-Octy, why are you so angry and reaching for the piano?'"

Twilight winced, and braced herself for a long friendship salvage mission. She had to bite back a genuine laugh; she had not done this before and it would be something new to write to Celestia.

\* \* \*

><p>142.7 (Alex Prior)<p>



## **\*\*Twilight Tirek, Part One\*\***

Twilight Awoke, and yet she didn't. If she were to strain her brain, it would occur to her that she was Wakening extremely slowly, and as such take appropriate measures. Alas, she did not. It was for such reason that it felt as if she was thinking through molasses.

Through the haze, she felt herself move, to sneak towards a shape. Twilight did not think to clear her head; she was barely able to think at all.

The shape resolved into a stallion; an intellectual returning from a library. As if hearing her, the stallion turned; his eyes widened. "Oh, \_my\_," he spoke, "Do you need some assistance?"

But Twilight didn't listen. Her gaze zeroed in on the load of books in the stallion's telekinetic grip; without hesitation, relying straight on instincts, she opened her mouth and \_drained\_ the tomes in the stallion's grasp.

Immediately, her head cleared somewhat. As such, she was able to realize a few things.

One, while she was quadrupedal, she also had hands.

Two, she realized that time had reset once again.

Three, she had just \_drained\_ books of their knowledge.\_

\_ 'I don't think I'm a pony this time around.' \_

\* \* \*

><p><em><em>

"No, Tirek. I'm afraid I must call in another to stop-

Celestia Awoke mid-sentence, tripped over her own tongue and fell into a coughing fit. Her sister and her student were upon her side in an instant.

"Princess Celestia! Are you alright?"

Celestia looked into the concerned face of the red alicorn, and nodded. "I'm fine. I just threw myself in a Loop by accident." She surreptitiously checked the faces of Luna and Cadence, only for them not to show any signs of Awakening. Dogwood. She was on her own for now.

Celestia cleared her throat. "As I was saying, Twilight will be dealt with by Discord."

>Naturally, gasps greeted that statement. <p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...and that's the gist of your mission, Discord. Are you capable of it?"<br>Celestia peered at the Draconequis. "Are you even, perchance, Awake?"

Said entity nodded with an entirely too large grin. The Princess

massaged her forehead with a hoof. "Why am I even asking, of course you are. Were you just expecting an exposition, and how long have you been Awake?"

Discord held up two toes. "First," he curved one toe, "yes, and second," he curved the second, "since Silver reformed my unAwake self. She's been Awake since the beginning, by the way. Did you even check your Memories, or just the ones pertaining our resident Centaur?"

At Celestia's abashed smile, he facepalmed. "Of all the Loops for me to make sense for a change..."

\* \* \*

><p>"What have you done?"<p>

The stallion's whisper cut straight through Twilight's confusion. She looked up. To her horror, the books the stallion was frantically flipping through were blank. She had literally drained them of knowledge.

Twilight shook her head to clear it. "It does not matter what I have done," she found herself saying, "It's what I will be doing." Her mouth twisted itself to a grin. The stallion fled.

The centauress found herself expelling a breath. "A close one," she whispered. 'Library,' her mind supplied. 'I need to know more.'

\* \* \*

><p><em><em>

Finding a treasure of knowledge had been devilishly simple. As he inhaled the books, she found her mind clearing more and more. She remembered Loopers. She remembered her Admin. She-

"I do hope I'm not interrupting anything."

She whirled around. There, leaning to a bookshelf, dressed in a sweater and wearing glasses, was Discord. He would have looked every inch the disapproving librarian were it not for the unusually large grin he was sporting.

"You see," he said, unhooking himself from the shelf, "I was just teaching my apprentice the finer nuances of chaos magic, when suddenly I received a most curious summons."

He grinned. "Apparently someone's been a bad girl."

Twilight narrowed her eyes. "Apprentice? Since when were you willing to teach anything to a pony?"

Discord feigned surprise. "Silver Spoon, a pony? But of course not! She's a draconequus like I am!" Out of a whim, he decided to test a little something. "Threw me for a Loop, it did."

The centauress inhaled sharply. "You are Awake?"

Discord blinked. He wasn't expecting that one; he'd felt no Ping from her. Out of curiosity, he sent one out and watched her stumble.

>"What was that?" was the demand he received, and if anything, it threw him into an actual loop.<p>

"That was a Ping, Twilight. Remember? Similar to the one you do with your Elements?" Frankly, he was getting a little concerned.

Twilight massaged her temples. "Element Check, yes... Oak, everything's so fuzzy... I need to know more..."

The spirit of chaos could only roll his eyes. 'Might as well pull a baseline.'

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, hello, Princess."<p>

Celestia smiled at her guest. "Good morning, Silver." She was lying on her bed. "You needn't worry about me; I simply had a rough Awakening this morning."

Silver nodded in understanding. Truth be told, her own had been rather intense, as well. Waking up just after using the Elements, then discovering the Element of Magic being Tirek himself? She'd had the shock of her life!

"So, what do you think of this Loop, Princess?"

"Celestia, please."

"Celestia. Sorry. Your unAwake self preferred to be called Princess."

Celestia nodded. "Completely understandable, Silver. Now, I suppose you are wondering why I called you here this morning?"

Ignoring the Draconequus' deadpan look, she soldiered on. "I need your help packing."

At Silver's questioning look, she smiled. "Our centaur fiend gains literal power from books this time around. Knowledge is Power, capital letters being the key here. Were she to drain all of them, she'd beat Tirek by several orders of magnitude."

"The villain Tirek or the plothead Tirek?"

Celestia rolled her eyes. "I know he's not very nice even as a pony, but you must specify. Do you speak of the centaur or the alicorn?"

>Her mouth twitched. Silver was also fighting a grin. At precisely that moment, a letter popped into existence.<p>

Silver caught it, unrolled it and started reading out loud. It was short and sufficient.

\_Celestia,

>Going baseline. Twilight's half-Awake; we need books to properly Wake her. She doesn't even remember her Pocket yet, and has forgotten

how to Ping! Don't mind the empty libraries.<br>-Discord  
><em>  
>Silver blinked. "You said she got the power from knowledge, right?"  
At Celestia's nod, she continued. "So what happens when you add  
Looping knowledge to that?"<p>

Celestia rubbed her chin with a hoof. "Technically, she may gain  
enough power to Ascend. Practically, there's the Pocket, isn't  
there?"

"The one Discord said she doesn't remember yet?" deadpanned  
Silver.

The two Loopers exchanged a horrified look.

\_"Ficus."\_

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

142.1: Because she felt challenged.  
>142.2: I Wanna Be The Guy, this time.<br>142.3: Technicolour Terror.  
>142.4: There's something salvagable there.<br>142.5: Slaanesh, stop  
assaulting the rating!  
>142.6: Metacouple?<br>142.7: ...books for the book lady?

## 150. Chapter 150

143.1 (Alex Prior)

"Twilight?"

"No, Rarity, I don't know why we're jellyfish. Stop asking."

"I was just going to point out that Rainbow was not one."

\_'Oh.' \_Twilight felt herself illuminate. "Sorry, Rarity. I'm just  
getting tired of Gag Loops."

As if on cue, Squidbow Dash swam by.

"Whoo! I'm an underwater turbojet!" She grinned an entirely-too-large  
grin. "U jelly?"

The jellicorns, naturally, responded by pelting pebbles at her.

\* \* \*

><p>143.2 (Ryuus2)<p>

Derpzilla was rampaging across town. Like any giant evil monster, she  
had just cornered two stallions and was preparing to smash them into  
paste.

"Hey, Griff? Remember when you said she couldn't cause any more  
destruction than normal if she tried?" The reddish one with a  
keyboard cutie mark asked.

"Yes Simmons, yes I do," the fat orange one with the Oreo cutie mark replied.

"You were wrong."

"Yes, yes I was."

"And now we're gonna die."

"Yes. Yes we are."

Just then, Pinkie Pie popped up right between the doomed loopers and the rampaging mailmare from inside a bush. She reached into her mane and pulled out a Muffin.

"Derpy, eat a muffin. You're not yourself when you're hungry."

Derpzilla sniffed the air and bent down to get a better look at the muffin. She then sucked up the muffin, and almost the three ponies in front of her as well. With a satisfied roar and a poof of smoke, she was back to her normal size.

"Feeling better?"

"Yep. Thanks for the muffin Pinkie. I really needed that! Can I have another one for Dinky?"

"Sure!" With the second muffin stored away in her mailbag, she flew off on a much less dangerous -and unintentional- rampage of destruction.

Just then, Nightmarity showed up on the other side of the block in full blown evil queen fashionista mode. Pinkie pulled an entire basket of fine pastries out of her mane. With a shout of "I've got just the sweet for this!" she charged off.

"Do you think they're pranking us?" Simmons asked.

Twilight walked up. "Actually, the three of us and Nyx are the only ones awake this loop," she said. "Pinkie's pastries are just so good this loop that everyone in Ponyville is addicted to them. So addicted that when they go into withdrawal, this happens."

"Huh. This has got to be one of the strangest variants I've even seen," Griff stated

"Meh. Everything was made of sugar once, including the ponies, and that didn't break my top ten. Now if you boys will excuse me, I've got a craving for mint chocolate chip to fulfill." She went Eternal Twilight and trotted past.

\* \* \*

><p>143.3 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Two days after the Summer Sun Celebration, a finally Awake Twilight staggered into the bar with a groan.

"Anything I can get you, Twilight?" Berry Punch asked from where she was cleaning glasses.

"Something strong," the unicorn mare sighed.

"Bad Loop?"

"Let's just say I HATE having to fight against evil family members." Twilight sighed. "Or when King Sombra is anywhere in my family tree. And this last Loop? I had to deal with both."

Berry Punch shuddered. "Point taken. Dare I ask what happened?"

"Sombra was Mom's first husband and Shiny's father. I was from her second relationship. After our fathers both died fighting one another, Mom entrusted Shiny and I to different people to keep us safe from Sombra's loyal followers. Unfortunately, Shiny still wound up taking after Sombra a little too much, so after we were both grown up and met again, I had to fight him to knock some sense into him." Sipping her drink, she continued. "Then Sombra came back to life as this freaky zombie-thing, and Shiny and I made up and got rid of him AGAIN."

"Ouch."

"And it didn't help that I was the only one Awake."

"Really ouch."

"Thanks for listening, Berry." Looking around, Twilight's ears twitched. "Speaking of listening, where's Mac?"

"The Crusaders are all Awake, so they founded their group yesterday, and invited Ruby and Dinky to join them. And since I was Awake, Mac agreed to let me run the bar for a day while he spent some time with them."

"Of his own free will?"

"They're just playing this time, not actually Crusading." Berry smiled. "And since seven little fillies all gave him the eyes and asked him nicely, how could he say no?"

"Good point." Twilight paused. "Wait - seven? Shouldn't it be eight? I know I felt enough pings that six Crusaders should be Awake..."

"Nyx split off from Luna in the Castle of the Two Sisters and went back to Canterlot with her for a few days, since you weren't Awake yet. Something about planning for Nightmare Night."

"Ah. That explains it."

\* \* \*

><p>143.4 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

"Twilight."

"Rarity."

"We appear to have an all-male version of the Cutie Mark Crusaders this Loop."

"So I noticed."

"I can understand Soarin' replacing Scootaloo, and Big Macintosh replacing his sister."

"So can I."

"But how did Prince Blueblood, of all ponies, wind up filling in for Sweetie Belle?"

Twilight watched as the three colts sped by, with Soarin' on a scooter, pulling a cart with the other two riding in it, Blueblood crying "Faster! Faster!" and Mac just holding on for dear life. Then she turned to her friend.

"The Loops work in mysterious ways, Rarity. The Loops work in mysterious ways."

\* \* \*

><p>143.5 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Twilight Awoke, in both senses of the word, with a yawn.

A quick check of her Loop memories told her this was a baseline Loop, and a quick Ping confirmed that most of her friends were also Awake. Getting out of bed, she headed for the bathroom to start her day. And as she went to the mirror to brush her mane, she froze.

The face that stared back at her was still recognizably hers, but wilder. Her coat and mane were long and shaggy, her teeth had elongated into fangs, and her hooves had shifted into paws, with long, sharp nails. A quick double-check of her physical self confirmed these changes were only in the mirror, and she sighed.

"SPIKE!"

A chuckle came from the doorway. "You rang?" the grinning dragon said.

She pointed to the mirror. "How did that happen?"

Another grin. "I ran into Leah a few Loops back. She told me about a special cleaning product for hard surfaces that she got from another Loop, and gave me a jug. I've just been waiting for the chance to use it."

"And what was this cleaning product called?"

"Wash-and-Werewolf."

Twilight looked at him incredulously. "Werewolf?"

Spike gestured at the mirror. "There wolf."

Twilight looked at her reflection again, and groaned. "Okay, ow."

Then she grinned. "Can you make it so Rainbow Dash sees her reflection with this?"

"Way ahead of you."

\* \* \*

><p>In a nearby cloud house, a rainbow-maned pegasus, who was fairly certain she was still asleep and dreaming, stared at her reflection in shock.<p>

"That's it," she muttered. "No more Manexican food before bed."

\* \* \*

><p>143.6 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight was wondering to herself, who had replaced Rainbow Dash this loop.

It seemed to be the perfect act, with her responding the same way whenever she had a chance to talk to the busy architect, who's cutie mark was not of rainbow lightning bolt but that of a rainbow hammer to which she bragged made her the best cloud builder in all Equestria as all of her buildings were 120% more awesome.

"Something wrong egghead?" The blue mare asked, looking over her shoulder at Twilight the pegasus, who was laying on a cloud, reading the latest book her looping friend wrote. The mare in question was working a Romane influenced structure with a splash of several other civilizations add in to make a very interesting summer home for her friends.

"No Dash, just thinking to myself," she said, watching the mare carefully. "And enjoying this book." She flashed a smile, going back to reading it. She was really enjoying, close to figuring out who had swiped the cursed jewel set of Arnubim.

"Glad to hear you're enjoying my book Twiliy!" The pegasus laughter was cut off the gasp from Twilight, both from the fact she was Rainbow Dash and she dropped her book down into the waters below. "What's wrong?"

"I just..." Twilight shook her head, trying to get her thoughts straight. "I thought someone was replacing you Dash for this loop."

"What? Why?" Rainbow Dash blinked, scratching her head before turning her head back to the home she was building. "Oh. That." Rainbow Dash flew over to Twilight and sat down on the cloud. "Twilight, you do know that I usually build my home in the loops, right?"

Twilight nodded her head, blushing, "Ye-yeah, I just didn't-"



"'spect me to spend a looping doing that?" Dash finished with the same smile she had before. "And before you say 'No Dash, I'm sorry for not thinking, blah blah blah'," Dash's grin grew as Twilight puffed her cheeks out, her blushing growing as Dash predicted exactly her friend was going to say. "It's fine. Not something I usually do and I wanted to see if I enjoyed it. Turns out it ain't so bad making new homes and designs." Dash puffed her chest out, rubbing a hoof against her barrel. "Not when you're the number one home builder in all of Equestria!"

Twilight laughed at the silly boast, with Rainbow joining her in with the carefree laughter between friends before Twilight managed to stop herself, and look apologetic to the mare with a short mane, done out of safety regulations despite working with completely safe cloud material. "I \_am \_ sorry I didn't \_ask\_ if you were yo-"

Rainbow Dash placed a hoof on Twilight's mouth to shut her up. "It's ok Twily, I'm a big mare and you made a simple mistake. No hard feelings as I \_know\_ ya didn't do it on purpose." She pulled the purple pegasus into a hug, patting her on the back as the mare opposite of her hugged back. "Now if you don't mind, I've got a home to finish!" With that, Twilight watched the mare with a rainbow tail fly off and finish the home she was building for her friends.

\* \* \*

><p>143.7 (Alex Prior)<p>

"You're not Fawkes."

The phoenix with red-and-yellow feather let out a confused warble. Albus Dumbledore blinked.

"Miss Shimmer?"

The phoenix nodded. Albus stroked his beard.

"I suppose that's a first, to us both I presume?" He was answered by a confirmative trill. The Headmaster shrugged.

"Might as well see where this Loop takes us, I suppose..."

\* \* \*

><p>143.8 (Alex Prior)<p>

"Alcohol."

"Water."

Mac raised an eyebrow as Twilight and Discord traipsed into the bar. Him becoming used to the stranger things was showing; after all, once he had panicked upon Discord demanding water. By now on the other hand, he barely blinked an eye. He delivered the drinks.

"Rough loop?"

Discord shook Twilight's head, earning himself a glare. "Nah. Merely confusing by my standards."

He stalled the oncoming question with a wave of his paw. "And yes, I have some standards; that joke's been done to death."

Sensing an opportunity, Twilight snapped up the train of thought before Discord could make it a replacement for the Friendship Express. "You know these 'Human in Equestria' loops that sometimes pop up?"

Mac nodded. Granted, it was mostly external Loopers forgetting to change shape, Sunset Shimmer getting caught in shenanigans, or a Loop-We-Don't-Usually-Think-About scenario, but actual humans did tend to show up every once in a while. "Eeyup?"

Taking on the initiative (and having a very serious 3D chess match with it), Discord continued. "This time, it was Discord in Equestria." Noting Mac's blank stare, he hurried on. "I know, I know, I'm always in Equestria, but that time was different!"

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Now please dig yourself out of that hole while I explain."

As the Lord of Chaos set himself to digging, Twilight elaborated. "Basically, the hapless visitor arriving through unknown means was Dissy here, and oak did that complicate matters with the local counterpart." She deflated. "This explanation isn't doing it justice, isn't it?"

Mac nodded. Discord popped his head out of the ceiling. "So... no free drinks?"

Mac shook his head. Slowly. The Anchor and the Draconequus exchanged glances.

"Dang."

\* \* \*

><p>143.9 (Tangent)<p>

"It's a trap!" Twilight exclaimed as she took to the air, for all intents appearing to get ready to blast Starlight Glimmer.

This was the moment. While Twilight still had several different plans she wanted to test on this scenario, she had recently had a loop where Cutie Marks had not been so easily removed (and an interesting result in that loop was that Starlight Glimmer had thus ended up as a reporter with a Cutie Mark of a star being weighed by a certain set of broken scales). Naturally, she had studied this effect and had crafted a spell to emulate the protection it provided while she waited for a set of vanilla solo loops to test it in. This was the second such, as the first had been used to troll Tirek after his escape from Tartarus, before he could get very far on his personal quest for power.

So Twilight permitted Starlight Glimmer to use her spell via the faux artifact, and her Cutie Mark did pull away from her flank...

Only to disappear from Starlight's aura so suddenly that the unicorn mage cried out in pain from the backlash as Twilight's Mark returned

to its proper place!

"Ow!" Starlight winced as her singing horn sizzled and sparked from the feedback. "What? How!?"

"Interesting," Twilight observed. "After Tirek's rampage across Equestria, I thought it might be prudent to research or develop a spell to prevent Cutie Mark theft." Which was true, after a fashion. "Odd that the feedback effected you, instead of the Staff of Sameness though. The antitheft spell should only have caused feedback against the actual source of the spell it was blocking..."

Twilight let that sink into the thoughts of the villagers who had come to support their leader. Then, as if in after thought, she gathered some snow from outside the Vault cave with her aura and pelted Starlight's flank with it, revealing her Cutie Mark. "I suspected as much. Meadowbrook had only crafted eight major artifacts after all."

"Starlight!? How could you!? We trusted you!" Double Diamond cried out.

"Come on everypony! I wanna see you SMILE!" Pinkie Pie exclaimed as she sidled up to the vault and smashed it open, releasing all the trapped Cutie Marks. Which, incidentally, gave Starlight Glimmer enough of a distraction to get away in the resulting confusion.

Twilight briefly brought her hoof to the bridge of her muzzle. Even with a baseline vanilla solo loop, it was hard to predict Pinkie Pie...

\* \* \*

><p>143.10<p>

"Excuse me? I have a few questions to ask," Trixie said, flourishing her cloak.

"Oh, \_dear...\_" Glimmer muttered. "You're an extreme case, aren't you? I think you need some special-"

"Trixie was not finished!" Trixie interrupted loudly. "She merely wishes for a philosophical discussion on your fillosophy."

"Don't you mean philosophy?" her disguised marefriend asked, currently cloaked in the form of a pegasus with blue coat and mane.

And a cutie mark of a large red STOP sign. Just for the moment of confusion when ponies saw it.

"That," Trixie confirmed. She reached behind herself, and pulled out a pile of twenty-four short planks. "Now! Each of these planks is exactly the same as the other eleven! It is made from an identically-grown tree as the rest, planed to complete congruity, and delicately sanded!"

She reached behind herself the other way, and two dozen assorted bits of deformed wood crashed to the ground. "And these! These are most

certainly \_not\_ equal! They are all different - this one is so thin it could barely support its own weight! That one's thick and heavy and far too short! And this one... this one appears to be a blancmange. Whoops!"

Trixie threw it away, not-so-coincidentally hitting Chrysalis square in the face with it. "Now-"

"Trixie!" Chrysalis snapped, rubbing cream and cornstarch off her muzzle. "What was that for?"

"Sorry, I didn't see you there," Trixie lied glibly. A few chuckles reached her ears.

Glimmer glowered at the ponies who'd slipped, and then back to Trixie. "Where are you going with this?"

"Simple!" Trixie said. "Here are some nails and a hammer. Build the tallest thing you can with those planks. When you are done, Trixie will do the same with the unequal bits! They mass the same overall, so which should work best?"

"The-" Glimmer stopped, realizing what she'd been about to admit. "The equal ones, of course!" she said instead.

"Good." Trixie stepped back, and let her get on with it.

\* \* \*

><p>All things considered, Glimmer hadn't done too bad a job.<p>

She'd used the planks to form a structural framework - hampered by how the diagonal struts weren't long enough, and the orthogonal bits too long - and made a bit of progress, but then she'd realized she could build something with tetrahedra instead and made a kind of pyramid nearly twice as tall as the length of a single plank.

"There!" she said, stepping back with an eye twitch - she wasn't very good at using a hammer, and it had showed. "Now you do it!"

Trixie whistled as she got to work. First she used the heavy, thick plank as a base, putting the tallest and thinnest one in the centre and having Chrysalis support it (with an annoyed expression).

Then she nailed the rest of the pieces of wood together, keeping a careful eye on how they flexed. The ones which were thin and willowy and better in tension were used as cross-struts, the ones with a thick cross-section were the compressive up-down support members.

As the town watched, a tower - wavy, wobbly, but unquestionably much higher than the tetrahedron - took shape.

"And there we have it!" Trixie announced. "Note the greater height! The way the different pieces of wood are used so their strengths compliment one another! And the lovely pretty flag at the top!"

"You'll pay for that!" Chrysalis called down, still at the top of the

central spire. She was at least able to sit down on the conveniently provided chair, though.

"That's... well, that's stupid!" Glimmer snapped. "Of course if you can use their strengths together then they're going to do better!"

"Hey," a voice said from behind her, with a slight rasp. "Can we join?"

Glimmer turned, smile back on her face. "Of course! We welcome all - you're a griffin."

Gilda waved. "Yep. And he's a dragon."

"Roar?" Spike said, the sound echoing off the hills. This was especially impressive given he was still his usual baseline size.

"I've got all kinds of cool talents!" Gilda added. "Hey, watch, I can draw an equals sign in the air and make time slow down!"

Putting action to words, she swiped her tail across twice.

A strange, misty feeling spread out across the town for a moment, and when it was done Gilda was lounging in a deck chair. "Neat, huh?"

"Why can't we all do that?" one of the ponies asked.

"Shush!" Glimmer admonished. "I'm afraid we can't take non-ponies. This is a pony only-"

"We're just like anyone else!" Spike protested. "Isn't that kind of the point?"

"Er - well, that is..." Glimmer blinked, wrong-hoofed. She shook her head and refocused. "That doesn't matter! It's-"

"Hey, watch this, I can make it rain," Gilda added. With a flourish, she drew a blue tablet from thin air. "Fire in the hole!"

Glimmer was feeling so overwhelmed that it took her about three seconds to process that.

That was about how long it took for the Water-typed Judgement screaming in from the heavens to detonate overhead, releasing a huge wave of water that crashed to the ground all around her.

"Get out!" she snapped, stomping forwards. "You are disrupting our community! We're all-"

"Hey," Chrysalis said, lazily. "Nice cutie mark. I especially like how it's different from everyone else's here."

Glimmer paused. "What did you just-"

There was a long, low gasp from all around her.

"...oh, ponyfeathers."

\* \* \*

><p>143.11<p>

"I have had one of the strangest loops in a \_long\_ time," Twilight informed her friends, as they assembled in the library to handle Nightmare Moon, who had just declared the Night would - oh, you know all this.

"Strange?" Pinkie asked. "Fun? \_Good\_ fun? \_Bad\_ fun?"

"No, just... bizarre. Dissonant to what I normally expect." Twilight took a deep breath. "Right. So, it seemed mostly baseline, though that's a relative term when Smaug's moved into the Everfree and demanding kitten-themed cushions for his dread lair. And then we went to Starlight Glimmer's village."

Dash stamped a hoof on the floor. "That sounds like the kind of thing that's not bizarre at all, just simple!"

Twilight smiled. "Yeah, except that she didn't make a move. Well, more like it wasn't her village."

"Say whaaaaaat?" Dash asked, gaping. "Okay, spill!"

"She was just like any other pony there - she admitted she founded it, but she didn't have much to do with the running of the place. nopony did, it was all very model-anarchist-commune." Twilight shrugged. "Still all equal cutie marks, though - except for one, who had a pair of bricks and was building himself a house."

"Newcomer?" Rarity asked.

"Nope - next morning, I saw him with a plow cutie mark out in the fields, alongside someone with a corn cutie mark." Twilight rolled her eyes. "That's when I realized something was \_really\_ strange."

"Well, don't keep us in \_suspense\_, or anythin'..." Applejack drawled.

Twilight hesitated a moment longer, then dropped her bombshell. "The cave was a Cutie Mark Rental Station. Anyone could pick one up for the day, and Glimmer's normal mark was actually attached to that silly stick. I tested it - the stick was the thing that could move them around, not her any more."

There was silence for several seconds.

"...so... if anyone wanted ta build a house-"

"-they'd borrow the house building cutie mark," Twilight confirmed. "I was surprised too, it's a lot more sensible than the original setup while still being just as equal... anyway, that's probably not going to happen again any time soon, randomness of the loops and everything, but it seems like it \_is\_ a thing that happens - make sure to look out for it."

\* \* \*

><p>143.12 (Evilhumour)<p>

"-the night shall last forev-"

"No so fast, dear sister." Celestia flew into the room, with an unAwake Luna as Nightmare Moon making her usual speech blinking up in surprise. "I shall defeat you using something even more powerful then the Elements!" She landed in front of her sister with Twilight still Asleep, considering how big her gasp was.

"What, pray tell, sister will \_you\_ use to st-"

"Boop." Celestia placed her hoof on Nightmare Moon's nose, causing the mare to blink and shake her head.

"Wh-what was tha-" Before she could continue or rebuild steam, Celestia's hoof struck again.

"Boop." Celestia was barely holding back her grin now.

"Stop that you vi-"

"Boop." Celestia was chuckling softly at how flustered Nightmare Moon was, her cheeks puffed out.

"I \_said\_-"

"Boop. Boop. Boop." Celestia's hoof struck the nose each time, despite her sister's attempt to dodge her. Tackling her over, and sitting her on barrel, she leaned down and placed her hoof onto the nose once more. "Boooooooooooooooooooooo-"

"Oh that does Celestia, you wish to instigate another booping war, then you shall have it!" Nightmare Moon shouted, rolling Celestia off of her and reaching to bop Celestia's nose. Soon, the news broke out that Princess Luna had been saved by the Nightmare forces, and the two Princesses had accidentally destroyed a library in their playful romp of their boop war.

\* \* \*

><p>143.13 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

\*\*From the Inquisitorial Archives on Holy Terra, Written by Inquisitor Amberley Vail, on the Chaos Goddess of Friendship and Books\*\*

Chaos Goddess Twilight Sparkle came to being around the same time as our Holy Emperor. When mankind was still young, they were led by the Shamans. However, spirits of chaos consumed their souls upon their deaths, preventing their reincarnation to continue to lead mankind. They came together and began researching a method to stave off the onslaught of chaos. This research project lasted for years. During that time, many Shamans formed bonds of friendship. Ultimately, they decided to merge their souls together and be reborn as one man, a new man, who would lead mankind at its head. This man would be the God Emperor of Mankind. Their efforts succeeded, but they unintentionally gave birth to a new Chaos Goddess.

Though mostly proving to be a benevolent goddess, followers are known for their extreme pursuits of knowledge and desire to befriend all. More radical worshipers would kill to obtain knowledge or befriend by forcible means. For more on these forces, see the Lesson Zero Cultists and the Tyrant Sun Militia.

The form Twilight takes is that of a pony, which bears a horn that can manipulate the warp at will as well as wings to carry her friendship to the furthest reaches of the galaxy.

Her home in the Warp is on Equus 9, where grows the Harmonious Kingdom Tree. She first manifested herself to her prized pupils, Celes Tia and her sister Luna, upon this world. Twilight brought about the falls of five chapters of Adepta Sororitas, her 'Bearers of Harmony.' Chaos has twisted and perverted the human forms of the chapters, taking the appearance of their pony goddess. Leman Russ is the most notable fallen Primarch and has taken the name, Lemon Rush in service to the advancement of Friendship and Knowledge.

Though not often found on the battlefield itself, the previously mentioned Lesson Zero Cultists often take up the shout when raiding the Inquisitorial Archives, **\*\*\*BOOKS FOR THE BOOK THRONE.\*\*\*** Cultists often wear the image of a tree somewhere on their body, shaped after the Harmony Kingdom Tree.

\* \* \*

><p>143.14 (Tangent)<p>

Celestia looked over the letter that had just arrived. The first she had received from an unawake Twilight after the Lesson Zero incident. There was a stealth anchor wandering around somewhere, she was sure, but she had yet to figure out just who it might be. A task made even harder by the fact that this was a slightly variant loop, with several ponies either being out of place, having different roles, or just plain not there.

Sure, Twilight had still (somehow) managed to gather five friends in Ponyville. All Unawake. And Tree only knew what the reason might be that events were inexplicably following their regular course, albeit not in an exact manner.

Rainbow Dash in Rarity's role was something she had seen before, so Celestia had no problems with it. Not even when she turned out to be the Element of Honesty (mostly from an apparent aversion to telling any lies besides polite social fictions, and even those only when appropriate).

Maud Pie being in Ponyville instead of Pinkie had been a surprise, but her staunch, dependable nature made her an excellent candidate for the Element of Loyalty.

Filthy Rich turning out to be a fine candidate for the Element of Generosity was something Celestia was sure Diamond Tiara would enjoy hearing about the next time they looped together.

Fluttershy being the Element of Kindness was no surprise to Celestia, but the fact that she was actually a pegasus from the village of Clydesdale, and thus actually a horse. A tall horse. As in an actual Clydesdale breed pegasus tall enough to force Celestia to look



up to meet Fluttershy eye to eye. And yet still painfully shy. A veritable gentle giant in a world much too small for her.

Applejack was still a farmer, but this time her special talent more accurately reflected her name, as she was very good at making \_jacked apple cider.\_ She was also the Element of Laughter in this loop. And a \_horrible\_ influence on Twilight...

Case in point being made clear by the letter she had just received:

\_Dear Princess Celery,\_

\_Today I... Well... I don't remember what I did today.\_

\_Or yesterday...\_

\_Or much of the past week, now that I think about it...\_

\_Oh yeah! Today (or possibly last week) I discovered that Applejack is also the name of a wonderful drink that Applejack can actually make! It's quite good, and I told her so, so she gave me a couple of jugs. You have to try some! It's... it's... EMPTY!? Both of them!? Already!? How could that possibly happen!?

\_Well, I'm off to find out what happened!\_

\_Later.\_

\_Your faithful... something, Twilight Sparkle\_

\_P.S. Spike here. Twilight needs an intervention. Again! Please send help!\_

\* \* \*

><p>143.15 (Evilhumour)<p>

"-is this better?" Rainbow Dash Woke up on a chair with something heavy on her face, her vision blurred horribly against the wall with letters and numbers.

Buying time for her memories to quick in, Dash gulped and tried to shake her head no, but a set of hooves held her steady. "Remember Dashie, you need to hold still." A kind, caring voiced said to her, rubbing the small of her back.

"Sorry mom," the response was immediate, which told her she was a young filly again and she had a darn good feeling what was going on. "And not really..."

"How about this one?" With a click, her vision cleared up perfectly. "Is \_this\_ better?"

"Totally!" She smiled, with her mom patting her on the back. "A hundred and twenty percent better doc!"

"That's great to hear Dash," the eye-doctor said walking over to her and taking the heavy machine off with the hint of magic. "If you will give us half an hour miss Prism, we'll have your daughter's glasses

made." Dash blinked at the sudden change in vision, her eyes watering up as she tried to focus in front of her.

"And knowing my little Dashie, back in the air now that she can see where she's flying too." Her mom said, hugging her close. "No more crashing into stuff for you little missy."

"Mom!" Dash blushed at that, with the doctor chuckling as the two pegasi left his office.

\* \* \*

><p>143.16 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Begone Discord, and never return!" Lemon shouted, blasting the draconequus with his half of the Elements, the bubble from the other alicorn holding him place. Together, the two sealed Discord into stone and looked at each other.

"Are you Awake?" They both asked each other; chuckling at their obvious answer.

"It seems that our Admins finally set this one up kid," Shining smirked, tapping the fellow alicorn's shoulder. "So how do you want to set things up? You take care of the offensive stuff and I'll take care of the defensive stu-"

"Actually, I do have some plans Shining," Lemon tapped his chin. "While I have ruled Fenris more times than I can count, I don't think my styles there can work here." Landing down with the Elements around them and Discord's statue, the yellow alicorn nodded his head. "I do have a few ideas in ruling this time." As Lemon began to share, Shining smiled and nodded his head.

"You do know if this works, Twily will be pissed that we thought of it first, right?"

"Bah, there are other mares that I am more scared of then Twilight," Lemon smiled as the ponies started to come to them. "Want to hit the lights?"

With a nod, Shining Armor raised the sun.

\* \* \*

><p>"-a thousand years ago, the royal defenders Lemon Rush and Shining Armor defeated the horrible threat of Discord." Twilight looked up from the book, Waking up in the processes, staring at the two grinning alicorns stallion in front of her, the yellow one encouraging her onwards. "While the ponies of the past wished to make them the new rulers of Equestria, they refused. They claimed that while they would always be there for their little ponies, they would let them lead their own life, only to step in times of great need, turmoil. They would offer advice and suggestions to the Unified Parliament of Three Tribes over the years, leading to the eternal golden age of Equestria with all the advancement and science they brought forth. It is unknown where Equestria would be today if it were not for our guardians, but the massive, space sprawling empire of Equestria would certainly not be a..."<p>

Twilight looked up at the two and \_glared\_. "Seriously?"

"The book lied a bit, Twily," Shining smirked, "We didn't \_give\_ them all the advance stuff, just pushed them in the right direction. We didn't interfere at all, doing our best to be there for our little ponies, but not \_there\_ for our little ponies."

Lemon smirked, patting her brother on the back. "Neither of us needed to go on a time out, we purposely had continuous conversations with our ponies to show we're still regular ponies and that we could be wrong so they didn't elevate us above each other and we were often knocked down a peg from time to time."

"So Twilight," Lemon walked over to her with Shining beside him. "Boys 1, girls 0 in a perfect prince/princess run."

Twilight simply used the book in her magic to chase the two, with the book striking their nose more than once.

143.17 (Evilhumour)

Twilight blinked, her mouth twitching slightly. The mare opposite her blushed, looking off to the side, pushing her glasses up her nose.

"Hey Twily," her friend said weakly, "A bit awkward to see \_you\_ here. Thought you'd be in Ponyville, trying to save your home and enjoying our usual level of crazy stuff."

"Yeah..." Twilight nodded her head. "I was there, -Spike subbed for you by the way- and things were more or less normal. Scoots wanted to learn more about pegasus magic this loop so I came to Cloudsdale library..."

"Really?" The mare opposite of her perked up, her normal smile on her face. "What are ya looking for? We've got several books on the different theories of pegasi magic, several history books, there's a \_couple\_ I've put on hold so I \_can\_ go through them and there's \_so\_ much more I ca-"

Twilight placed a hoof on the mare's mouth. "Easy there," she chuckled, flapping her wings. "Why don't you show me around \_your\_ library and \_I'll\_ promise I'll do my best not to crash into it."

Rainbow Dash laughed, patting the mare on the back. "Nice one Twilight." Her smile began to fall as Twilight wasn't laughing. "You're joking, right?" Twilight simply stayed quiet as she walked into the library, with Dash pushing her glasses back up as she followed her in. "Right?"

\* \* \*

><p>143.18 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight Woke up, in both senses, to someone banging on her door. Teleporting down as the library wasn't open today, she opened the door to see one of Celestia's advisers if her loop memories were being honest.

"Sparkle, do you know where they are?!" The mare shouted, grabbing Twilight and shaking her, the panic on her face was the same on the ponies in the street with Ivory trying to install some order.

"What? Who?!\_" Twilight already had an idea but-

"The Princesses!\_" The mare shouted, reaching out for Twilight but she teleported backwards, out of reach. "They're gone!"

"Oh no," Twilight tapped her chin, trying to think of what could have happened. "Did Discord statue break or -"

"We don't\_ know!" She wailed, with the guards ponies around her trying to install order and trying hard not to panic either. "All I found was this!\_"

She floated over a simple folded paper over. Twilight read it and felt her mane spring out of place already.

"Are you bucketing\_ kidding me?!" She shouted as she reread the letter. "'Dear Daily Planner, Lulu and I are going out for the day. Don't worry, everything will be fine as long you don't panic. Hugs and kisses, Tia.'"

At that point, every pony glared at the mare and facehooved.

Twilight sighed, as she slammed the door closed and teleported back to her bed.

\* \* \*

><p>143.19 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Oh come on\_!" Twilight shouted as they came back to Ponyville, with Dash patting her back in shared pain, pushing her glasses back up her nose. Tirek had attacked Cloudsdale instead this loop, and they had done their best to rally there quickly to save the pegasus community, with Dash saving all\_ the ponies who lost their magic due to the centaur, ascending naturally in the processes. As the girls were attacking the centaur, he had smacked Dash's library' causing it to pop with lightening fanning everywhere. As Twilight soon learned, one bolt had arced all the way towards Ponyville before crashing into the Golden Oaks library.

"Wow, Twilight, I can actually\_ feel your pain." Dash pulled Twilight into a hug. "Losing your library sucks\_."

Twilight simply banged her head against the wall at the injustice of it all.

\* \* \*

><p>143.20 (Evilhumour)<p>

Princess Luna and Celestia, or Selena the unicorn and Sunny Day the pegasus looked at each other and then at the building in front of them. The pegasus pushed the unicorn forwards, with made her squeak in surprise.

"Come Selena, we've done so much in the loops, we can do this too!" Sunny Days smiled, bumping her sister's flanks. "I mean, I've seen what you've done in the loops and baseline, and this would be great for you."

"Sis, I-"

"We didn't agree to play hooky and told Daily Planner to cover for us today just so you can back out now Lulu," Sunny said, hugging her sister. "Now you are going to go in there, show off your paintings, get them appraised and then we're going to either celebrate with booze or drown out the memories with booze!"

"Tia," Selena whined, blushing as she looked around, the painting still rolled up behind her. "Promise to stay with me, no matter what?"

"Of course Lulu," the pegasus hugged her sister, tightly, whispering into her ear. "Now let's go inside, shall we?"

With that, the two mares went inside.

\* \* \*

><p>143.21 (Evilhumour)<p>

Rainbow Dash pushed her glasses up as she landed in Ponyville, making sure her ponytail was perfect as she made her way to Fluttershy. She hadn't meant to avoid her friends this loop, but running a library had been hard work along with dealing with some craziness that plagued her.

She also promised herself to avoid flying into Twi's home after bucking so many ponies out of her library; the pure insanity of it nearly drove to her snapping.

"-it's funny?!-" That was Gilda shouting, who was unAwake this loop. "That's the most ponyfeathers excuse I've ever head for doing something lik-"

"Okay Glida, quit i-tree dangit, not again!" Rainbow Dash shouted, forgetting once again not to fly too fast as her glasses flew off her nose when she went to stop her friend from doing something bad. She landed on the ground, trying to find her glasses without stepping on them for the fiftieth time. She could not afford another pair of glasses; the doc had really jacked up their prices after the twentieth time.

"Dashie?" Glida blinked, her blurry bulk flying over to her. "What's wrong?"

"My glasses, my glasses, I can't see anything without my glasses!" Rainbow Dash quickly facehooved at making that reference, blushing and glad no one was Awake to hear that.

"Don't worry Dashie, we'll help," Gilda patted her back gently. "Right you little brats?" She sneered over her shoulder at what she thought were DT, SS and the CMC, all moving around and trying to find her glasses. "In case you're wondering, this is the mare I was talking about. Miss Sonic Rainboom and never giving into

bullies!"

"\_Gilda!\_" She blushed at the praise. "Stop \_that\_."

"Well? We've defend Flutters and every other pony from all those jerks that thought it was cool to pick on somepony that didn't have their cutie mark or wore glasses!" She sneered again, with Rainbow Dash grunting out her annoyance at her own friend's jerkish attitude. "Dash, I care too much to be subtle, you know that right?"

A orange blur ran over to her, holding something very familiar in her hooves. "Yeah, I know, but they're \_foals\_!" Taking her glasses and brushing them off with her wings, she thanked Scootaloo.

"Well, what do you expect from the Element of Brutal Honesty, \_Velma?\_" Gilda's smirk startled Dash horribly, causing her to jump back and meep loudly. Looking at all the five ponies, they had the same smirk on their face. "By the way, Twily told us about them \_cute\_ glasses you have on RD." Her friend reached over and pinched her blushing cheek, the looping CMC snickering now. Blinking, she was temporarily blinded from the pictures being taken.

Twitching, Rainbow Dash shot into the air. Leveling above the treeline, she looked at Ponyville and the library. Pulling in tremendous speed and pegasus magic, she aimed herself for the Golden Oaks to have a nice 'chat' with Twilight. She should be ready for her, after all, by how loud she was shouting her name.

\* \* \*

><p>143.22 (fractalman)<p>

Twilight rolled her eyes. This was hardly the first time a swimming pool had randomly showed up in the middle of Ponyville, though this was the first time it had been filled with water (naturally, she cast a battery of tests to make sure it was, in fact, just water with the appropriate amount of chlorine, and not some other substance that merely looked like water). She waded in, then calmly backstroked her way to the deep end, where Rarity was relaxing on a float.

"Er, Twilight?" asked Rarity.

"Yes, Rarity?" asked Twilight, as she rolled over and stood up, throwing a look look towards her friend.

"Erm...you might want to look over there..."

Twilight looked in the direction where Rarity was pointing.

"Pffftt...pffftt..." said the pink ball of fluff.

"So...Fluffle Puff sucked up all the water just by walking into the pool?"

"Quite."

\* \* \*

><p>143.23 (Tangent)<p>

\_Look at how \_\_\*\*HAPPY\*\*\_\_ we are in out conformity! Nopony faster than the slowest pony among us, so nopony ever gets left behind (even if we can no longer complete our work in as timely a manner as before).\_

\_Sugar Belle is still our Baker. She makes muffins every day. She used to be the best baker around, but now everypony can cook just as well as she does. We don't miss the flavor. Really. The muffins have been kind of horrible since the last batch of inductees though. But everpony has the same level of cooking skill, and that's the important bit.\_

\_Party Favor likes to make everypony happy. It is easy for him now 'our little village is HAPPY to be the same. He used to make all sorts of things out of balloons that no other pony could make, and he would use them to make ponies happy. He doesn't make them anymore, because nopony else could make things out of balloons. At all. Now nopony makes balloon items. Fair is fair after all. I miss the balloon items...\_

\_A new pony came to our little village the other day. She was lame. Starlight Glimmer decided to give her a private Unmarking, and sent the rest of us back to the village.\_

\_Starlight Glimmer came back to the village alone. Apparently the new pony was so happy to be able to walk freely again that she decided to spread word of our lifestyle back in her home village. She sounds like she would have been such a nice pony to have as a neighbor...\_

\_~From the Journal of Midnight Glider, one of the few surviving documents found in the abandoned community known only as "Our Little Village." \_

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash put down <em><strong>Daring Do and the Staff of Sameness<strong>\_, horrified. It wasn't often that she had the opportunity to read divergent Daring Do publications unless she wrote them herself due to replacing her favorite author, and they were usually fun reads, but from the sound of things, Starlight Glimmer had started her grand experiment a few years early this loop.

Checking the title of the next book in the series, \_\*\*Daring Do and the Cannibal Castle\*\*\_, \_\*\*Daring Do and the Trottingham Terror\*\*\_, and the oh so disturbing latest volume (that co-starred Applebloom on the cover) \_\*\*Daring Do and the Village of the Blanks\*\*\_, she sent out an emergency ping to gather Twilight and the rest of the Awake loopers at the Golden Oak library.

Horror fusion loops were... well, not quite the worst, but they were still something best to be prepared for...

\* \* \*

><p>143.24 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight Woke up in Eiken with the rest of her friends glaring at

her.

"I-"

"Twilight. Dear." Rarity said sharply. "While we know how much you wish to save your home at least once a loop, you should know that Tirek seems to have a bullseye for it."

"Yes, which-"

"And if you'd asked us sugarcube, we'd help ya out." Applejack huffed.

"I know that, but-"

"I mean, it sucks to loose your home. I know, mine gets blown away from time to time." Dash grunted, a bit put off that she had the smallest chest among her friends along with the boyish haircut, wondering what Yggdrasil was trying to saying about her.

"I'm sorry to hear tha-"

"And as your friends, we'd love to help you find a way to retain it." Fluttershy smile was one of thinly veiled annoyance.

"Okay, but-"

"But that was a really silly plan, Twilight." Pinkie Pie said while eating a cupcake, her smile slightly smaller than normal.

"How was I supposed to know that it would crash the loop?!" Twilight shouted at her friends.

"When you turn everything in Equestria into the Golden Oaks, what did ya expect to happen partner!?" Applejack shouted, pounding her fist on the desk she was trapped in.

Twilight just groaned, burying her face in her hands as they began to deal with their punishment.

\* \* \*

><p>143.25 (Crisis)<p>

"Hey Twilight," Rainbow Dash spoke up as she entered the library, seeing her currently-still-a-unicorn friend examining the shelves intently, "what's up?"

"I'm having trouble finding a book," Twilight answered as she kept scanning the shelves as if the book she was looking for would have magically appeared in the last few seconds.

"Really?" Dash blinked. "Huh... thought you knew exactly where everything was. What's the book?"

"In Plain Sight."

"I asked what it was," Dash rolled her eyes, "not where it was. Seriously, what's the book?"



"In Plain Sight, like I said."

"Obviously not, or you would have found it already."

"No, the book is In Plain Sight, I just can't seem to find it."

"Look, if you can't find it then it's obviously not in plain sight at all."

"I think I know my books better than you do, Dash, and this one is definitely In Plain Sight, I just need to find it."

"Okay, okay, where'd you get it?"

"From the Hub, by an author named Michaels Fern."

"Okay, what's the book the guy wrote and where should it be?"

"In Plain Sight, like I told you. It should be right here on this shelf."

"Look, Twilight, it's kind of hard to help if you won't..." Dash trailed off as her exasperated raise of her eyes landed on a volume several shelves up from where Twilight was looking. Wordlessly, Dash flapped up and removed a hardback volume from the top shelf that read 'In Plain Sight' across the spine. She wordlessly flapped back down and stared at the book for a moment before looking Twilight straight in the eye. "Did you seriously just 'Who's on First' me?"

"Well, you did kind of walk right into it," Twilight chuckled as Dash hoofed her the book. "And I really was having trouble finding this. Thanks."

"Don't mention it. Like, ever."

\* \* \*

><p>143.26 (Evilhumour)<p>

Big Mac blinked as Vinyl slammed the door open, fuming mad with her ears upright.

"Where is your little sister BM?" She placed both of her hooves onto the counter. "I've got a little score to settle with her after what she did to me!"

Big Mac simply raised an eyebrow as he slid her a drink, silently asking her what his little sister did.

"Your little sister wanted to do some testing but lost the remote so she asked me for some help." Vinyl frowned as she slammed the drink back, sighing loudly. "She then grabbed my \_ears\_ and started squeezing \_them!\_ And it \_worked!\_"

Big Mac had to stop himself from laughing, a smirk almost appearing on his face. "Ah'll talk to her." He nodded his head.

"Thanks but that's not the real- GAH!" Vinyl shouted as she batted her ear, sending off miniature blasts of sonic into his booze

collection, shattering many of the bottles. "The \_worst\_ part is that she left me in a weird state that I keep doing \_that\_!"

"Ah'll go talk to her \_now\_." He frowned, moving to close the bar. As the two of them walked towards the exit, he paused to give Vinyl a look.

"Oh no, you will \_not\_ do th-GEIK!" She meeped loudly as Big Mac leaned over and squeezed her ears, causing a low frequency blast of sonic waves to hit the door. With a loud \_CLICK\_, the bar was now locked. She huffed and blushed at the smirking pony. "You're going to tell \_everyone\_ about this, aren't ya?"

"Eeyup." With that, the two ponies left the cellar to talk to a certain little filly about personal space.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

143.1: They, indeed, jelly.

>143.2: Listen, sugar. (Red vs Blue crossover.)<br>143.3: Family. Can't live near them, can't evil without them.

>143.4: The loud one, the stoic one, and the bossy one.<br>143.5: Mirror, mirror on the wall, what the heck is going on?

>143.6: The best copy of Dash... is Dash.<br>143.7: Adopt, adapt, improve. (Potterverse crossover.)

>143.8: That don't cotton with Mac.<br>143.9: A glimmer of understanding.

>143.10: The Trix and Chrissy Show.<br>143.11: That's the way to do it.

>143.12: Boops for victory!<br>143.13: She writes about everything. Both shes. (40K crossover.)

>143.14: Yet another set of alternate mane characters.<br>143.15: Contact lenses required.

>143.16: Flawless victory! (40K crossover.)<br>143.17: Ah, sweet revengeance.

>143.18: That's the problem with perfect rulers.<br>143.19: A certain amount of historical inevitability.

>143.20: Everyone feels inadequate about something.<br>143.21: Zing!

>143.22: Where does that thing even come from?<br>143.23: Ah.

>143.24: A target rich environment.<br>143.25: It was right there! No, wait, that's the sequel.

>143.26: Sonic powers can kinda suck.<p>

## 151. Chapter 151

144.1 (Bardic Knowledge)

\_Looping Captain's Log, Stardate 42731.2\_

\_There had been no indication of a Variant or Fused Loop of any kind until we stumbled upon this strange planet. From what can be seen, the moon is seemingly locked into a position of permanent eclipse, which has turned the otherwise M-class planet into a frozen wasteland. This would have been little more than a curiosity if it hadn't been for the strange signal emanating from the planet.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"What do you make of it, Mr. Data?" Picard asked.<p>

"The signal is artificial in origin, but would not be noticed by the sensors as anything other than background radiation if not for our upgrades to the system," Data spoke freely, as the only other people on the bridge were also Awake. "If I were to hazard a guess, I believe the source is a form of magic."

"Magic," mused Riker. "Are we sure there were no pings, Captain?"

"Positive, number one. I'm still not sure this is anything more than a variant, however. Can you pinpoint the location of the signal?"

"Working on it now, Captain," said Geordi, at the science station. "Looks like it's definitely magic, Captain. The signal just got stronger, like it wants to be found."

"Which makes the question less about the kind of magic and more about whether its malevolent or not," commented Riker.

"True. Are you getting any sort of emotion from the planet, counselor?"

"Just one. There's something down there, but all I can get from it is intense sorrow."

Geordi turned around, "I think I've got it, Captain."

"Can you bring the location up on screen?" asked Picard, standing up and unconsciously tugging down his uniform shirt. A few button presses later, and the screen showed a top-down view of a ruined castle in the middle of a dead forest, all covered in snow. However, there was a light emanating from a cave in a ravine near the castle.

"I'm guessing that light is the location of either our figure of sorrow or the magic. Possibly both." Riker walked up to the screen next to Picard. "Captain, are you..."

"Getting the strangest sense of deja vu? Yes. This place feels familiar, but I can't quite place how. Maybe a closer look is in order. Mr. Worf," Captain Picard turned to his security officer, "who all among the crew is Awake this Loop, aside from those on the bridge?"

"Only Doctor Crusher and Wesley, Captain," answered Worf. "They have both asked to be left to their own projects when it won't interfere with baseline occurrences."

"Very well, we'll leave them to it. Will, call up the secondary command crew. I think all of us will be going down to the planet. I want a closer look at those ruins."

\* \* \*

><p>After beaming down to the surface wearing environmental belts (they regulated the air and temperature of the wearer, but the force shield on them was too weak to stop even the weakest phaser blast, making them useless for more than recon on near-M-class planets), the away team of Loopers pulled out their tricorders. Except for Deanna Troi, who would have collapsed to the ground if not for Riker quickly grabbing her.<p>

"Deanna?" he asked.

"The sorrow is much stronger here. It would have to be to be felt on the Enterprise, but the intensity..." After a few moments Deanna stood back up. "I think I've got a hold of it now. It's coming from inside the cave."

"Speaking of," said Data. "I believe I have discovered why the castle looked familiar. We have simply never viewed it from above before. This is the Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters."

"Equestria?" asked a stunned Worf. "But why would it be in this condition?"

Picard thought things over for a second. "I believe our answer lies within the cave. Shall we find a way down?"

After a few moments of searching, Data had managed to spot an ancient staircase leading down into the ravine from the other side of a broken bridge. Judging the ravine to be just shallow enough that he could land on the bottom with minimal damage, Data then volunteered to jump in and climb the stairs in an attempt to repair the old hanging bridge. Worf countered with a question of how he would managed to grab the broken part and fix it from the other side.

After a few moments of debate, it was decided that they would use Data jumping down in the official report, but lean on their out-of-Loop skills to repair the bridge more quickly. With that done, they carefully descended the snow-slicked stairway and walked into the cave.

Before them they saw a shining silver tree, the light pulsing softly as though it was losing power. And laying on the ground before them was a dark figure, covered in frost and barely, but noticeably, breathing.

Deanna was on it in a moment, tricorder out and taking readings. "She's obviously still alive, Captain, but her vital statistics are so low that she's basically in a coma."

"But you still feel intense despair from her?"

"Yes. It's as if she's shut herself in her own mind."

"Captain," interjected Riker. "If this is Equestria, then that's probably one of the princesses. Considering the state of the moon, I'd hazard Luna."

"Quite possibly, number one," Picard paused, seeing that Riker had more to say.

"Captain, according to what we know of Equestria, a thousand years before the usual Awakening point, Princess Luna went mad and tried to cause eternal night. I think that's what happened here."

"And in some variants, the alicorns are for all intents and purposes immortal, which would explain how Princess Luna is still here presumably a thousand years later. But what could have happened to Celestia?"

"Maybe we should ask her?" said Worf, pointing to the fallen alicorn.

Picard nodded. "We'll take up to the ship and let Doctor Crusher have a look at her. Hopefully she's got something close to baseline that can help heal her."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Looping Captain's Log, supplemental. Though Beverly was slightly miffed to be taken away from her personal project, the state in which we had found Princess Luna got her attention quite rapidly, and she has been working on a solution for almost half a day. She feels confident that she can stimulate healing to counteract the nearly thousand years of degradation the princess's body underwent, but she is unsure what can be done to actually bring her out of the despair-fuelled coma.<em>

The Looping Staff (plus Wesley) sat around the Observation Lounge table to discuss their discovery.

"I'm at my limit in this, Captain," said Beverly. "No matter what chemicals and medicines I try to use that can be explained away in baseline, even the experimental ones, I just can't get her to wake up."

"I've even tried some empathic projections to counteract it with feelings of warmth and belonging," added Deanna, "but that doesn't seem to be having any effect either."

"I might have an idea, Captain," said Wesley. "Since I heard that we'd found an Equestria, I pulled out my copy of the Hub-world's backup of their Loop. Maybe if we find the Elements of Harmony, they could have a healing effect on her."

"They seem to work in that way after a fashion, but aside from trying to find them, how would we use them? \_Who\_ would use them?"

"We've all had Loops where we've had one form of magic or another, so we could give them a try ourselves. Data would make a good fit for the Element of Honesty, and either mom or Counselor Troi could be Kindness."

Beverly shared a quick glance with Deanna. "Between the two of us, I think Deanna would fit a bit better in the 'Kindness' department."

"I think I see where you're going," said Geordi. "Worf is definitely Loyalty." The Klingon shifted in his seat at the notion. "And I think Commander Riker would work pretty well as Generosity."

"Really?" asked Riker. "How so?"

"You do tend to give of yourself when someone wants a piece of you," teased Deanna. "I've never known you to refuse a relationship, no matter how serious the other party wants it to be."

"But that still leaves us Laughter and Magic," said Beverly.

"The Element of Laughter isn't necessarily about laughing yourself or being funny," said Wesley. "In the season three finale, when Twilight becomes a princess, Celestia refers to it as 'optimism.' The others get that, too, using integrity, compassion, charity, devotion, and leadership instead."

Geordi smiled. "Well, Wes, you're definitely an optimistic kid. Maybe you should take Laughter."

"\_Me?\_" asked Wesley incredulously. Considering how he'd been in baseline, and how recently he'd Awakened, he hadn't quite expected something like this.

"And I suppose that leaves leadership to me," said Captain Picard. "Do we have any idea of the side effects using the Elements could have on the ship?"

"As far as we've seen in Equestria, the Elements can only be used as a force for good and balance," said Deanna. "Likely everyone will just be a bit more cheerful and healthy for a few days."

"Then I guess we'll have to give it a shot," Picard sighed. This would be a right headache to explain to Starfleet. Might have to fake some ancient writing to explain their knowledge away. "Let's all get a good night's rest, then we'll return to the planet to retrieve the Elements."

Everyone nodded their assent and left for their respective quarters.

\* \* \*

><p>The next day, the chosen six met in the transporter room, to be beamed down to the same coordinates as before, as, according to the Loop back-up, the Elements were most likely to be found in the castle's ruins as stone orbs.<p>

And they were, surrounded the beheaded skeleton of an alicorn.

"Looks like we know what happened to Princess Celestia now," sighed Captain Picard. "Let's just hope they'll still work."

"If the backup was any indication, sir, they'll respond to those who exhibit the virtues of the Elements," said Riker, who had caught up on the back up as well that night. "But you might have to give one of your famous speeches to start the ball rolling." Picard looked at the smirk on Riker's face and resisted rolling his eyes.

After collecting the Elements, Captain Picard wrote on the wall of the castle in a language not wholly alien to the Federation, but close enough that it would look like they had instead spent the time

translating instead of transcribing. They amounted to a description of the six Elements, what they do, and how to activate them in a way that sounded ancient. Once the words looked faded enough to fool most archaeologists, they returned to the Enterprise and to Sick Bay, where Princess Luna lay.

Once they lay the stone orbs containing the Elements on the floor, Picard pulled out the "translation" of the wall's text. They couldn't put everyone out of Sick Bay for no reason, so they had to put on a show for the Department of Temporal Investigations.

"According to the ruins," he began, "we need to figure out a way to utilize these stones as the Elements of Harmony. With them we might be able to heal our guest from her coma. As each one requires a bearer, I have taken the liberty of assigning each to one of you. Though we've only been crew for a short time, it feels as though I've known all of you for years." The Looping staff shared a smile. "And so, hopefully, I've got these right."

"Commander Riker, though you can sometimes put on a facade of indulgence, in truth you are a very charitable man, giving freely of yourself and your reputation for anyone who has need of you. As such, I name you the Element of Generosity." One of the orbs glowed purple and floated in front of Riker. Heartened, the Captain continued.

"Lieutenant Commander Data. As an android, you have often been considered a curiosity in Starfleet. But your integrity and forthrightness has never wavered, making you a pillar we can all lean on in times of need. You, I believe, are our Element of Honesty." Another orb glowed orange and went to Data.

"Lieutenant Worf. You have been torn most of your life between your duty to your blood as a Klingon and your duty to Starfleet and its tenets, but your devotion to both and to this crew has carried all of us to greater heights than any one man could go on his own. You are the Element of Loyalty." The next one glowed red, which Worf appreciated.

Counselor Troi. There have been times that your position on this ship has been called into question, by yourself and by others, but throughout the hardship this ship has endured the compassion you have shown has kept us sane and safe. You are our Element of Kindness." A yellow-glowing orb floated before her.

Picard took a deep breath as he turned to the next-to-last member. "Wesley. When I first met you, all I could think of was that you were a child with no business on my ship." Wesley gave a chagrined smile. "Since that day, you have grown into a fine young man, whose optimism and heart have saved us all many times. So I name you Element of Laughter." The last orb glowed cyan and joined the others.

Then Commander Riker spoke up. "And then there's the sixth Element. The beings of the planet called it 'Magic,' but it spoke of being born when all the others came together. And, truth be told, we wouldn't all be here today if not for you, Captain. You are our Element of Magic." A sixth orb materialized from the air and shone before the Captain, before the lights of all the Elements grew bright enough to drown out Sick Bay.

When the light faded, each of the new Element Bearers had their communicators changed, becoming a jewel the colour the orbs had glowed for each one of them set in what seemed to be gold. Picard's own was slightly more elaborate than the others, however, with a starburst pattern in place of the usual ovoid.

On the bed, Princess Luna, now smaller and without any sort of mane, slowly and shakily sat up. Doctor Crusher and the nurses quickly checked her over to make sure she wasn't going to hurt herself in moving, then allowed her motion when it became obvious she was healed.

"Senan lf R?" she asked. Picard grimaced slightly. Apparently, though understandably, Ancient Equestrian didn't match any form of human speech.

"You'll be alright," said Deanna, softly. "You're on our ship and we've just healed you."

"Enlzng fn? Selq lan bhv- Qen Nznfnuqp!" She gasped on seeing the newly-coloured communicators. "Ehs grg bhv lyqrwlqn qen Nznfnuqp? Rp fb prpqna enan? Grg R ganlf rq lzz?"

"I'm afraid not. You are the only survivor of your planet."

Captain Picard's brow furrowed. "Counselor, can you understand her?"

"Yes, captain. I'm not sure how, but it's like I'm sensing the meaning behind the words, even if I don't know the words themselves. And she can understand me, as well."

"Huzb... pvawrwha? R- Pen- R-"

Deanna instantly moved to hug her. "Shh, it's alright. You're going to be okay. Rest now, please. I'm sure you must be tired from your ordeal."

"Uhqerux srzz cn htlb lxlru." Princess Luna looked to the floor.

"Now that's not true at all. As long as you're alive, there's hope."

"Cvq Celestia rp gnlq! Lug R grg rq! Ehs ylu qenan cn ehon?!"

"Because you're still here..."

As Deanna and Luna spoke, Picard leaned over to the others and whispered, "Perhaps it might be best if we leave them to it. We'll see them when they're ready."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Looping Captain's Log, supplemental.<em>

\_In the end, Princess Luna managed to move on, and even restored the orbit of the Equestrian moon, though it would be a long time before life would begin again on the world, even with the help of our



terraformers. When Starfleet heard of what happened with the Elements of Harmony, they not-too-politely asked us to give them up to them, with the intent of studying them. In response, we informed Starfleet Command that the Elements were no longer with us, having been returned to the Tree of Harmony at Luna's request.\_

\_It was her hope that the Tree, with help from the renewed Elements, would be able to restore Equestria faster than simply ending the eternal night. That has yet to be seen, but the lack of castle-in-a-chest suggests to me that the Tree is devoting its full power to the task.\_

\_After learning the English language from Counselor Troi, Luna decided that she was going to do her best to learn everything she could about this new world she found herself in. Maybe join Starfleet Academy someday. If she does, it will hopefully be around the same time as Wesley's return to the Academy, as he does every few Loops, and he'll be able to guide her there as a familiar face.\_

\* \* \*

><p>144.2 (Gamma Cavy)<p>

Twilight awoke reading the book of legends. The first thing she noticed, was that it mentioned two brothers who ruled instead of two sisters. \_Buck\_, she thought, it's one of \_those\_ Loops. Then she paused, as a passage about the elder brother caught her eye. ..\_.and as time passed the elder grew resentful of the fact that he was constantly mistaken for the younger of the two, and teased about his smaller stature. In rage he took on the name Mountain Height, and created immense monuments out of buildings, causing earthquakes as they rose, each monument proclaiming that he, Prince Mountain Height, was not short! The younger prince, Steel Soul, attempted to reason with him, but to no avail. And it was when Mountain Height attempted to embed the Elements of Harmony into his statue that they reacted, banishing him to the sun for a thousand years. \_

Twilight frowned. Mountain Height's rampage was familiar somehow...

She sent out a ping, and felt two responses. Not the Element ping, but the basic Looper ping. So the princes â€" or some other presumably non-local loopers, but odds were it was the princes - were awake. But who were they...

\* \* \*

><p>"...AND NOW WITH MY HEIGHT SURPASSING MY LITTLE BROTHER, NO ONE WILL <strong>EVER<strong> CALL ME SHORT AGAIN!" Mountain Height proclaimed from atop a statue of himself, golden mane flaming, before vanishing in a crackle of blue light, of the sort that only prince Steel Soul used to travel.

\* \* \*

><p>The rainbow impacted slammed into Mountain Height, and a gold colored alicorn, who looked like a half grown foal, except for the mane aura of sunlight and blue sparks, was left behind. Blue light flared, and Steel Soul appeared. The Unawake Element Bearers hit the floor.<p>

"Oh get up," the prince said, "and thank you all so much, you managed to knock some sense into my brother, Prince Full Metal." he turned to the other alicorn. "It's been ages since I've seen you Brother. I've missed you!"

"Yeah, me too Al. I mean Steel. Are there any new alchemists yet?" Twilight finally realized who the guest loopers were.

\* \* \*

><p>During the obligatory Pinkie Party later, Twilight heard the princes catching up, then an argument broke out between Full Metal and the youngest prince, Fire Starter. It seemed Fire Starter had implied Full Metal was short. Twilight smiled. Some things apparently never changed, from what Silver had said about these three.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>144.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight took a deep breath, steeling herself. "Girls... we need to talk about Starlight."

Rainbow Dash growled. "Oh, yeah. \_Her.\_ Can we move freeing that village up to an early-loop event?"

"It wouldn't be that hard," Rarity mused, "just a teleport and a flash flood or some... other water based phenomena. Although that only exposes the problem and doesn't deal with the brainwashing aspect necessarily-"

Twilight shook her head. "I'm sorry girls but... for now at least... in some loops, we have to let her go."

There was a pause.

"Twilight, I'm sure you have a logical explanation for what you just said," Pinkie stated calmly. "I'm sure you are regretting having said that, and that you are going to explain why you have said that. And I'm sure we'll all reluctantly agree to the reason why you have said that. So please don't take it personally when \_I\_ say \_this.\_ ARE YOU COMPLETELY LOCO IN THE COCO?!"

"No. See... I've run a few lonely loops completely baseline, and... well... in the baseline, I am pretty sure she gets away." The unicorn sighed. "And... in the baseline Discord betrays us, but then we get the final key. We can short circuit that nowadays, because we have the full picture, but I have no idea if Starlight is quote unquote supposed to do something that important in upcoming expansions and, since I don't know when exactly those expansions are going to be..."

"...ya have ta learn by experience," Applejack finished for her. She sighed. "Yeah, Ah can understand that. Don't like it, but Ah get it."

"Personally I don't mind letting the baseline run its course for a bit," Fluttershy quipped. "I mean, I've seen all the vengeance plans that some ponies who shall remain unnamed have been brewing in their

spare time, but... we're supposed to be a sanctuary loop. If we let our anger and hate get the better of us, then... well..."

Rainbow snorted. "Yeah, yeah, I get it..."

"Sorry, but... who are you all talking about?"

The six ponies looked at one dragon. Twilight suddenly facehooved. "Right! You haven't been awake for the new expansion. See, there's this map that comes with the crystal tree palace..."

\* \* \*

><p>144.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Well, it seems you inspire all sorts of free thinking, don't you?" Starlight Glimmer twirled the Staff of Sameness in her magical grip.

Rarity gave a forced chuckle. "Well, w-we certainly didn't intend to cause any disruptions to your charming little-"

"Good." The unicorn pointed the forked poles at the gathered ponies. "Let's just make sure of that, shall we?" Her horn brightened, and magic shot out of the staff at the six ponies.

It was then that things went radically off script. First of all, the magic suddenly changed color and split up among the six mares. Any thought as to the abrupt color change was silenced when all of them suddenly began glowing, forcing the equal ponies to shield their eyes. When Starlight Glimmer finally managed to look back, her jaw dropped in disbelief.

"Oh mah gosh!" Applejack fluttered her wings and stared at her horn with wide eyes. "We are all alicorns now!"

Rarity gave her a brief glance-Starlight thought for a moment she could see annoyance on her face, but it was gone too quickly for her to be sure. "How?! How could this-what happened?!"

"The staff of sameness! It musta put Twilight's alicorninity into all of us!" Pinkie Pie bounced in place with a wide grin. "It's the only thing that makes sense!"

"But-" Starlight managed.

"Then how come these other ponies aren't alicorns?" Rainbow Dash gestured to the shocked Double Diamond.

"The elements of Harmony!" Fluttershy shouted. "They were connected to us, and so-"

"So the staff of sameness allowed you to rise to my level through harmonious symmetry!" Twilight finished.

"But-" Starlight tried again.

"Wait!" Applejack swung her hoof at Twilight, pointing at her flank. "You still have yer cutie mark! It is not an equals sign!"

"Huh, you're right!" Twilight glanced at it. "I guess it must be impossible for an alicorn to exist without their cutie mark!"

"But-!" Starlight insisted.

"You know, I think there's a lesson in that," the princess continued obliviously. "But right now I'm more interested in studying the staff itself!" She grabbed the stick from Starlight's lax magical grip. "I think I'll send this back to Canterlot so that they can study it! SPIIIIKE!"

An all too manly dragon strode confidently into the cave. "Princess Twilight, I heed your call. And I would like to be the first to congratulate all your fellow princesses!"

"Oh, Spike, your appreciation is most appreciated!" Rarity cooed, swooning onto the purple drake.

Twilight cleared her throat. "Be that as it may, we need to send this to Celestia immediately." She hovered the staff over to Spike.

"Very well! I shall use my postal flame to transport it!"

"But-!" Starlight objected.

The dragon breathed his green fire over the staff, sending it off. Twilight turned to Starlight with a grin. "Thank you, good mare, for your incredible discovery! I'm sure just as soon as we have found out how this happened, we will return and grant you the first official usage of the Staff of ascension!"

"BUT-!" Starlight cried.

"For now, though, I feel we must go. Ladies... AWAY!" Twilight lit her horn and in an instant all six alicorns and one dragon had teleported off.

"But- but- but- but-"

\* \* \*

><p>144.5 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Bright lights appeared all around Sunset as she returned through the mirror. The entirety of the Royal Guard stood at attention, Pegasus whipping the wind into a frenzy around them while the unicorns were casting their brightest flash spell. Six familiar ponies stepped forth from the shadows. They halted as one and Twilight stepped out from the crowd. Her face seemed oddly serious, "Sunset, We know what you've been doing these last couple loops."

Applejack was glaring at her, "Sugarcube, ya got problems, and ya need to address it head on!"

Rarity put her hoof on Sunset's leg, "Sunset, dearie, I know all the places you've been and the things you've had to do, but we can help you. You don't know what that stuff can do to you."

Sunset looked down at herself, then to her friend, "But-"

Pinkie started bawling on the streets, "Please, Sunny, can't you see how much this is hurting you, hurting all of us?!"

Fluttershy stuttered, "Y-you should s-s-say n...no to that, Sunny. Think about your friends, about the influence you have over the Crusaders. They almost started doing it too."

That really confused Sunset, "Uh, wait, wha-"

Dash stepped forward, "Sunset, we've always been there for you, and we always will during your upcoming challenges."

Sunset would be touched if she knew what was going on, "I-um, Ohh...kaayy, bu-"

Celestia stepped forward, her face scrunched up in disappointment, "Sunset, I promise we will be there for you every step of the way. Don't hesitate to call on us to help with your problem. Twilight even promised to sponsor you at the meetings."

Sunset flared her horn and her mane caught fire as her confusion finally reached a boiling point, "ENOUGH!"

With that, the unicorns' horns' lights disappeared and the Pegasi started leaving the area. Sunset huffed several times, put out the flames on her mane and replied, "Look, I'm just visiting the human world for a burger every now and then, alright?! I just...have a stronger urge for meat this loop. It wasn't harming anyone."

Twilight patted her friend on the shoulder, "Oh Sunset, Sunset, Sunset. We have been watching the mirror for months. We know you've been visiting Canterlot High every night. Dash even followed you a couple nights ago. She had one of the Wiskey River BBQ burgers from that nice restaurant."

Dash gave a smirk, "Yeah, it was pretty good too."

Twilight's eyes turned wicked for a second, "And that's why Dashy is going to join you in your rehabilitation."

The blue pegasus' looked thrilled for a second before it took a downturn, "Yeah...wait, what?!"

Twilight silently thought to herself, And that's Dash and Sunset checked off the "Revenge for Destroying my Tree" list. Next up, Vinyl Scratch and her Wubbing my tree out of existence. \_

\* \* \*

><p>Sunset folded her hooves together as she sat by an equally upset Rainbow Dash. They were in a classroom being taught by a cow which impressed upon them the importance of eating egg based products. Sunset muttered, "Tonight, we blow this joint, spend the rest of the loop at Canterlot High, eating Chic-Fil-A and working on a potion to turn Twilight into a bovine. You with me?"<p>

Dash nodded, "Oh, yeah."

\* \* \*

><p>144.6 (katfairy)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy Awoke. It only took a few seconds for her to realize that she was at Cadence and Shining Armor's wedding, a few more to realize that Twilight Sparkle should have appeared with the real Cadence five minutes ago, and a few more after that to realize that it wasn't because they were both here. One of the Royal Guard was standing in as best stallion, and doing it with the polite expression of somepony who would prefer to be anywhere else but was too smart to let anypony see that. The rest of the girls were standing next to Fluttershy, dressed in their bridesmaids' regalia, but Twilight wasn't amongst them.<p>

Then the Loop memories hit.

"Oh, no!"

Everypony turned to stare. Celestia broke off in the middle of her homily. Cadence glared. Fluttershy sent out a quick Ping, and got only two responses back; a quick check let her see that this was the real, if unAwake, Cadence. And she had been acting exactly like Chrysalis had in baseline. This was Not Acceptable. At one point, Fluttershy would have backed down and simply let events progress, but she'd been Looping too long to be that doormat anymore. No, this was not the time to let bad behavior slide, and she wondered why Twilight had. She'd have to be careful, though; if she was too assertive, it would look suspicious.

"Fluttershy?" Celestia was beginning to look concerned; good. "Do \_you\_ have a reason to stop this wedding?"

"Oh, no," she said quickly, voice soft but pitched just right to carry to the whole room. "He can marry her if he wants to. Althoughâ€¦ I can't imagine why he would. I mean, she's not very nice."

That started a bit of a fuss; she winced, but knew she had to keep going.

"Fluttershy, what are you saying," Rarity gasped.

"Hey, it was pretty nice of her to ask us to be bridesmaids after hers had to bail," Rainbow Dash argued. Applejack opened her mouth to say something, blinked, and closed it again, while Pinkie Pie just watched with huge eyes.

"Did \_she\_ put you up to this?" Cadence demanded. "I knew she was jealous, but to ruin my special day with her temper tantrum!"

"It's her brother's special day, too," Fluttershy pointed out. "Although now that I think about it, he's not very nice, either. After all, he never even told her he was engaged; she only found out about the wedding because Princess Celestia sent her an invitation."

"What?" Celestia clearly hadn't known that, and Fluttershy had to

wonder what would have happened in baseline if Twilight had thought to mention that. "Fluttershy, I think you had better continue your explanation."

"Wellâ€¦" Fluttershy took a deep breath, then launched into her speech. "Cadence treated Twilight like an unwanted guest from the moment we got here, she lied to Applejack and threw away perfectly good food when she could have just as easily made an excuse and let somepony else enjoy the treats, she was rude to her bridesmaids and how is it that all three of them suddenly had emergencies at the same time? And Twilight said Shining Armor didn't want you to cast that spell on him, and you went ahead and did it anyway."

"I don't remember saying that," Shining Armor said.

"That's because she lied," Cadence said. "She just wants to make trouble so she can have you all to herself."

"Twilight ain't the one been caught lyin' recently, sugarcube," Applejack said. "And if she's so bound and determined to have her brother to herself, why's she been in Ponyville for the past year?"

"Darlings, it's just bridal nerves," Rarity said, but a dubious note crept into her voice.

"That ain't no excuse for actin' like a spoiled brat," Applejack retorted. "Reckon I let the glamour of bein' at a royal weddin' go to my head, but Fluttershy's right, and I'm plum 'shamed o' myself for letting my real friend down."

"I'm sorry; I didn't mean to cause a fuss," Fluttershy said. "But I can't be part of this anymore. I'llâ€¦ I'll just go. I think I'm going to find Twilight and apologize for not listening to her, and I just hope she can forgive me."

It was hard to walk back down the aisle with everypony staring at her. She'd gained a lot of confidence during the Loops, but stage fright wasn't something that just got better; the best she could ever hope for was being able to manage it. Which she could, with the occasional relapse. But at the moment, she was managing. It helped that she knew Twilight would forgive her, and probably wasn't even really mad. And it helped even more that Applejack and Pinkie Pie joined her before she'd even made it halfway.

Applejack was looking thoughtful, even slightly worried, but Pinkie had her head high, a determined expression on her face. There wasn't much that Pinkie took seriously, but friendship was definitely in that category. If Pinkie wasn't Awake, and it was never easy to tell even with the Pings, then she would probably think that she'd failed Twilight, and she wouldn't rest until she'd made amends. And neither would anyone else for miles around, because a penitent Pinkie was almost as noisy as an angry or upset Pinkie.

As the doors closed behind them, Fluttershy let out a sigh of relief before discarding her finery. Applejack and Pinkie followed suit, and the three looked at each other.

"Reckon Dash and Rarity ain't comin'."

"Oh, Dashie would never want to miss anything as exciting as what's probably going to happen once ponies figure out what just happened," Pinkie said breezily. "And Rarity's probably still in shock. I don't think we should wait; Twilight's gotta be real upset right now and she'll need her friends, ifâ€¦ if she still wants us as friends."

"Oh, Twilight wouldn't drop us just because we made a bad decision," Fluttershy said, eying the faintly deflated mane. "Especially if we apologize. But we need to hurry; she may have already gone back to Ponyville, and the next train's in ten minutes."

"That doesn't give us a lot of time, but if we ask as we go, somepony might know something. I didn't bring nothin' I don't mind leavin' behind; how 'bout you?"

"Nope!"

"No, I packed light. Oh, and here's someone to ask now." Fluttershy recognized Flash Sentry, currently in the uniform of a new recruit. It was almost a shame that he wouldn't end up earning his post in the Crystal Empire this Loop, but she was sure he'd do all right somehow. He was nice, fairly clever, and reliable, if a bit dull. More importantly, he was here and willing to answer questions.

"Twilight? Yeah, she left last night after that big blowup. She didn't seem too upset, if you're worried about that. More like fed up, and I can't say as I blame her. Uh, sorry. I shouldn't have said that." Flash blushed, rubbing the back of his neck, but Applejack shook her head.

"Might be some in these parts that don't take to plain speakin', but they're on the other side o' them doors. Twi had every reason to be fed up, and we're fixin' to apologize when we see her. But if we want to catch the train, we gotta get goin', so thanks for your help and keep your head down for the next few days, 'cause things 'round here are likely to get ugly."

Flash looked at the doors, looked at the piles of discarded clothing, and winced.

"I wonder if I can get emergency leave to visit my sick cousin in Vanhoover," they heard him mutter as they headed out, followed by, "I wonder if I even have a cousin in Vanhoover."

\* \* \*

><p>They made the train with just seconds to spare, and returned to Ponyville with no further drama. Fluttershy wished it could stay that way, but wasn't holding out much hope. They entered the library to find Twilight having tea with Chrysalis.<p>

"â€"only for a few more years, at least," Chrysalis was saying. "I'm glad Loops like this aren't too frequent, though. With Trixie working as a special effects artist in Manehattan and shackled up with that obnoxious fashion thief, I don't have much to do."

"Well, you could always help us with Sombra," Fluttershy offered. "I'm not sure Cadence will be much use this time around."



"Oh, hey, Fluttershy," Twilight said with a grin, eyebrows raising as she spotted Applejack and Pinkie. "No need to apologize, okay? I should have made myself clearer, and you should have listened to me, and we all handled things badly, okay? So let's just get that out of the way and get on with our lives."

"You sure, sugarcube?"

"Positive."

"Well, all right, then."

"Welllllllllâ€¦" Pinkie said, frowning. "Okay, but I'm still baking you a special  
sorry-I-ignored-you-because-I-wanted-to-party-with-somepony-who-turned-out-to-be-a-big-meanypants cake. Deal?"

"Deal," Twilight agreed, then cocked her head. "I may regret asking, but what kind of cake would that be, anyway?"

"Rose-flavored sponge cake with whipped cream and strawberries."

"Absolutely a deal, then. So what happened? Why did you leave? And where are Rainbow Dash and Rarity? Oh, and this is Chrysalis, she's a Changeling, and she's friendly."

The group sat and discussed the day's events. Thanks to Chrysalis' comments as they'd entered and Fluttershy's response, Applejack and Pinkie had to be told about the Loops, but both took them in stride. It was hardly the strangest thing they'd heard of, even at this point in baseline, so Fluttershy wasn't surprised by that. Nor was it surprising that they found the Loops less interesting than discussing the interrupted wedding; Loops were simply a thing that existed, whereas the wedding was current events. They were relieved to hear that the original Cadence was much nicer, though. Still, Fluttershy had a few questions.

"Twilight, how did this Cadence ever become an alicorn? She doesn't act like she knows much about love at all."

"Turns out this Loop, it's possible to be born an alicorn. It happens every few hundred years on average. They don't tend to be much more powerful than anypony else; the powerful ones are regular ponies who have ascendedâ€”that's done by using your special talent in a way that is basically the perfect expression of what that talent is. Like a pony whose special talent is singing ascended by helping to sing an entire world into creation while simultaneously reforming the greatest evil that world would ever face. Or a pony farmer who turned an entire desert planet into lush farmland." Twilight's last comments were directed at Applejack and Pinkie, who nodded. "I'm not entirely sure how Cadence ascended in baseline; I knew once, but I've forgotten. I've probably got it written down somewhere, of course, but it doesn't matter right now. I don't think this Cadence is capable of ascending; my Loop memories seem to indicate that she was always like this. I didn't realize it as a filly, but she was just being nice to me because I was Celestia's student and she had a thing for my brother. Now that I'm here and she's got him, she doesn't need me anymore. I hate seeing her like that, and since my last few Loops were really annoyingâ€”not bad, really, just annoyingâ€”I decided

that if nopony listened in this Loop, I wasn't going to stick around. Now I kinda wish I had; I think we're probably missing a pretty good show."

"Just hope Rainbow Dash had enough sense to not bring popcorn," Applejack said, then looked up at a knock on the door. A hooded figure crept in with a familiar faint tingle of magic; Luna was Awake too, now.

"Sorry I didn't ping earlier," she said, "but Iâ€| well, Cadence is having some rather impressive hysterics, and nopony in the castle is going to be sleeping until she's done. Or until Celly gets fed up and sends her on a lunar time-out. I told my guards to let discretion be the better part of valor, then followed suit."

"That a fancy way o' sayin you noped on outa there?"

"Pretty much, yes. But Cadence is demanding all of you be arrested for treason, creating a public nuisance, and anything else she can think of. I'm not sure whether to hope she Awakens soon so that we no longer have to deal with this brat or hope that she doesn't so that she isn't humiliated by the memories of what her unAwake self has done. Celestia seems disinclined to grant these requests, but should she do so, I know some lovely islands that are just begging to be colonized, but are too far for a Pegasus to fly to. And from what I have seen recently, I do not think too many of your brother's men would be particularly keen on pursuit. I suspect the only reason none of them have used the term 'Bridezilla' is because none of them have heard it."

Chrysalis and Twilight snickered, and Fluttershy couldn't help a small giggle either. They settled back in for further discussion, but Luna couldn't tell them much more. The talk began to wander from topic to topic, and eventually they put the wedding out of their thoughts. Luna left at sundown in order to fulfill her duties, with a Pinkie Promise to keep an eye on them until everything was settled. The others settled into the library to await whatever news would come, hoping that Rarity and Rainbow Dash would return soon.

They were awakened the next morning by Rainbow Dash bursting through the door.

"You guys missed everything! Hey, who's that? Never mind, AJ wouldn't be sleeping with a that was going to come out wrong no matter what I said so just forget it. Anyway, Rarity's on the train but I didn't wanna wait to tell you what happened. Twi, your brother and Cadence are in serious trouble. Princess Celestia read 'em the riot act after Flutters and the rest left, and she said that the wedding was off until they could prove they were mature enough to handle the responsibilities of married life. Cadence threw an epic hissy fit, but your brother told her to shut up and that he'd warned her that treating people bad just 'cause she's a princess wasn't going to fly, then he apologized to everypony. And he said he'd sent you a letter just before Discord popped up, so that probably explains that and he feels kinda dumb that he didn't think to check to see you actually got it. Which he totally should, if you ask me, but I'll cut him some slack 'cause hey, he told Cadence to shut up. And then Cadence started up again, only twice as loud until Celestia blew her stack even worse than after that 'Want It/Need It' spell thing of Twilight's and now Cadence is being sent to a special school in

Prance where she's gonna have to learn about the hard parts of being a princess, starting with manners. That's pretty close to being a direct quote, by the way. Oh, and has anypony seen Princess Luna? She was spotted flying away from the castle, and the night did everything it was supposed to, but nopony's seen her since yesterday."

"She's probably in my bed," Twilight said. "I told her I'd be staying out down here with these guys to wait for you and Rarity, so if she didn't want to go back to Canterlot, she could stay here."

Dash floated up, peeked into the bedroom, and nodded before floating back down.

"Yeah, she's there. I'll let her sleep. She probably lost a few hours yesterday. Oh, yeah, one last thing: I think Princess Celestia's planning on coming here to apologize for being so hard on you, even if you were a bit over the top with your accusation, 'cause Cadence isn't actually evil, just a pain."

Fluttershy wasn't the least bit surprised that a knock on the door came immediately afterwards. Spike, who was keeping out of the way and quiet, opened the door to let Celestia in. She entered quietly, with the odd mix of dignity and humility only an embarrassed goddess could pull off.

"Twilight Sparkle, I am—"uh, why is there a Changeling in your library?"

"Because keeping me in the kitchen would be silly," Chrysalis responded. Twilight rolled her eyes, but Celestia seemed to accept that as an answer. Or at least accepted that as an answer that wasn't likely to add to her list of problems.

"Yes. Well. Twilight, I treated you very badly the other day, and I did it publicly, so I feel my apology should be equally public. Although your accusations were perhaps a trifle excessive, I should not have simply brushed them aside. I should also have been more aware of just how out of hoof Princess Cadence had become. I am truly sorry that you have suffered any distress through my negligence."

"It's all right Princess," Twilight said. "I shouldn't have blown my stack like I did. Maybe if I'd asked you about the changes I'd seen in Cadence's character, we could have avoided all this, so at least some of the fault is mine. And I'm sorry for that."

"Thank you, Twilight. I'm sure Rainbow Dash has already told you of what happened after the wedding, but you may be interested in knowing that Princess Cadence is currently on her way to Madame Pleasance's Academy for Wayward Noblewomen. Your brother has promised me, and has informed Cadence, that he will not contact her while she is there, but that he will wait for her return, at which point he will reassess their relationship. Shining Armor seems truly fond of her, so it may be that he can see qualities in her that are escaping me at the moment. I hope so, for his sake."

"Nah, he's totally thinking with the lower brain."

"\_Rainbow Dash!\_" Applejack's eyes were almost popping out of her

head, but Pinkie was nodding while Twilight and Chrysalis were trying not to crack up. Celestia was blinking fast enough to create a small breeze. Fluttershy hid a smile while trying to remain unnoticed.

"What? It's the truth!"

"Well, yeah, butâ€” ah, ponyfeathers."

"Rainbow Dash is right," Luna yawned from the top of the stairs, ethereal mane displaying some truly epic bedhead. "Oh, hi, Celly. Is all the drama done now? Or has it just moved here? If it has, I may send myself to the moon just to get some decent sleep."

Celestia opened her mouth, closed it, opened it again, closed it again. Fluttershy, feeling sorry for her, popped into the kitchen to retrieve a few things from her Pocket. A short time later, she gave the still-bewildered Princess a mug of Irish Coffee. Intersecting Looper shenanigans combined with Rainbow Dash being even more blunt than usual called for it, in her opinion, especially when they came on top of two very trying days. Celestia took it without a second glance and downed the whole thing in a single gulp.

"Oh, dear." Fluttershy backed away quickly.

"Uh, Fluttershy, please tell me you didn't make that with Klatchian coffee," Twilight said quietly. "Remember what happened when Berry Punch tried to distill it for coffee brandy? She was in Eiken for three straight Loops. And then there was Pinkie's tiramisuâ€”"

"Ummm... And I might have used Firewhiskey. And, um, the cream's from Petaybee. I thought she needed a good stiff drink; I didn't expect her to need it that badly. Um, should we, maybe, run?"

They looked at Celestia, whose eyes had glazed over. Her mane was trying to stand straight out in every direction, and her tail had curled. She was beginning to vibrate. And glow.

"Yes." Twilight said. "Yes, we should."

The next few seconds were rather chaotic, with everypony scrambling for the nearest exit, screaming for the inhabitants of Ponyville to duck and cover. The usual panic occurred, but everypony was safe when the blinding flash came, accompanied by the sound of a giant tree dissolving into splinters. When they could all see again, there was a glowing crater where the library used to be, crowned with an aurora. They crept up to it cautiously.

Celestia stood in the bottom of the crater, weaving slightly, both mane and tale now tightly curled. She blinked up at them, eyes askew.

"I just don't know what went wrong," she said, and fell over. There was a moment of silence, then:

"Fluttershyâ€”"

"eep."

Flutterdash took one look at Twilight doing her best Rapidash imitation, ascended, and flew away fast enough to create a Sonic Flutterboom. Suddenly it seemed like a good Loop for meeting new critters on the other side of the world, preferably in a deep, impenetrable jungle where nopony could find her.

\* \* \*

><p>144.7 (Bliss Authority)<p>

Rarity Awoke to the sound of her own maniacal laughter, blinked, and only survived the massive barrage of flaming pegasus feathers streaking at her in a brilliant display of pyrotechnics by resorting to instinct and loop memories. She dismissed them with a disdainful stroke, a sweeping outside block tinged with traces of blue magic (mistfire, her loop memories called it). Then she bowed to her opponent.

"I surrender, " she said.

The pegasus mare before her snorted, pawing the ground. "Yeah, pull the other one, Price Beyond Pearls," she said. "It's got a Black Lotus in it."

Then her mane and tail ignited, billowing red and gold flame.

Rarity rocked back up to a sitting position, blinked, then sent out a ping " making sure to frown as she did so so there was a visual cue.

The other pegasus' jaw dropped. Then her eyes narrowed. "Talk," she said. "You have ten seconds to explain who you are and why I should listen to someone Ganesha decided to put in Clan Happy Fun Naga."

"I assure you that I'm as revolted by who I replaced this loop as you are," Rarity said. She was going to need a stiff drink once she got back to a more regular Loop. "Ugh, is your world always this horrid baseline?"

The pegasus snorted. "Welcome to the scenic Sultai Brood of Tarkir. I'm gonna be honest here; if you don't like the enthusiastic violation of our most basic rights, there's not much else going on."

Rarity laughed nervously. "Yes, well. I can see why you'd want to kill who I replaced. Shall we start again with introductions? I am Rarity Belle, from the Equestria loops." She turned, politely presenting her Cutie Mark as she curtseyed.

"Yeah, I shall," the mare said with a roll of her eyes, twisting her hip to reveal a stylized red fireball for a Mark. "Chandra Nalar. Planeswalker loops. Loop memories peg me as Fire Brand, which I gotta say is a massive improvement from being Char the Magic Dragon."

"Enchanted," she said.

"Might wanna get that Naturalized," Chandra said. Rarity blinked. "Mind if I smoke some zombies while I explain what's going on?"

"My dear, nothing would give me greater pleasure. And afterwards, I can introduce you to my friends â€" at least some of them are awake. But first, I rather think if we're going to be fighting zombies, we should be dressed for the occasion, don't you?"

Rarity pulled a suit of full barding out of her Pocket. Then she grinned and ignited the plasma steel, and \_she\_ was wreathed in flames.

Chandra whistled. "Okay, I take back everything bad I've ever said about Equestria. I want myself four of those."

\* \* \*

><p>(Fan of Most Everything)<p>

Rarity, Herd Tyrant

2BGU

Legendary Creature â€" Unicorn Shaman

Whenever Rarity, Herd Tyrant enters the battlefield or attacks, put the top three cards of your library into your graveyard.

2, Exile two cards from your graveyard: Put a 2/2 black Zombie creature token onto the battlefield.

\_"Sidisi was no threat to me, darling. What makes you think you are?"\_

3/3

\* \* \*

><p>(Bliss Authority)<p>

Sidisi gingerly picked up a mango from a tray proffered by a bound earth pony servant, and took a bite from the most pockmarked segment of it in hopes of getting succulent flies and worms along with her fruit. Then she consulted the latest missive from the front, delivered to her via a scroll-case lodged in the skull of a traitor.

News from the front was not good. The too-clever-by half old rakshasa she had employed as her last vizier had assured her that he had measures in place in the event that Price Beyond Pearls attempted a return to the Jeskai for a sudden, yet inevitable, betrayal. She calmly allowed this vizier to answer her questions about how, precisely, Price had managed to escape these measures. And assured him that his battery of coercion, subtle mind control, and the witchweed at the base of her spine set to dissolve the moment she left Sultai territory were all quite reasonable precautions.

Then she dropped him into a moat full of crocodiles. There were only so many ways he could say 'I literally have no idea how she escaped' before she grew bored of his terror.

Since then, the little anarchist of a unicorn had been burning down her soldiers left and right - or rather, aiding and abetting a new

factor, a clanless pegasus who went by the name of Fire Brand. Curiously, she had made no attempt to return to Jeskai territory, but it was surely only a matter of time before she went to them with her secrets. Secrets that were the Sultai's alone.

She snapped her fingers. Her earth pony servant turned in place, and she grabbed a smoked duck leg. No reason for the bad news to ruin her appetite, after all.

Then the orc ran into the building in panic. "Sidisi, my liege!" he said. "They are coming! It is not safe here!"

Sidisi rose, coiling around the impudent warrior in a flash. "You have interrupted my meal, orc. That is always a mistake. We shall discuss your penance once you deliver your message. Who are coming?"

"Price and Brand!" he wheezed through his constricted chest. "Price and Brand - and they led our foes to us!"

Sidisi's eyes went wide, and her pupils narrowed into thin slits. "The Jeskai? Here?"

"No, Khan! The Mardu!"

"What? Impossible! Not even the Mardu are that swift!"

It was right about then when the orc was struck right between the eyes by a hoof travelling at about mach 2. His ears sang like a temple bell, and with that he was out and on the ground.

Sidisi narrowed her eyes and drew two dao sabers, striking at the blue streak of a pegasus who had invaded her home in a cross-shaped slash. Price Beyond Pearls stood before her, along with a fiery-maned golden pegasus she didn't recognize; hovering before Price were her namesake, thirteen perfect pearls suspended in the air with telekinesis, both her weapon and her shield. Sidisi knew that she could conjure more whenever she needed to.

The flaming armor was new, though. No doubt the pyromancer had bribed her with it.

Sidisi made a subtle motion with her sword. No movement. She tensed for a lunge -

And a pearl was suddenly a fingernail's breadth from her eye.

"Ah ah ah, manners," the white unicorn said, strutting before her. "Attacking your guests? How terribly rude. Almost as rude as the way you treat your honored servants."

Fire Brand joined her side, flaring her wings and igniting her mane and tail. "Translated from Fancy," she said with a grin, "that means you drop the swords and surrender, and in return I don't make you explode twice before you hit the ground."

Sidisi knew more counter-spells than the Jeskai had forgotten. She snorted. "Idle threats."

The third one spoke - Rainbow Helmdasher, the young Mardu khan. "You

realize that we're just the first wave, right? We've got enough of an army to smash through an Apple fortress - stones root, branches, boughs, and the freaking beast pulling it - if we have to."

"Lies," Sidisi hissed. "You would need thousands."

"Nope, just one. Who is really late." Rainbow Helmdasher frowned. "Where the heck is he, anyway?"

It was then that an enormous tortoise foot tore away the roof, and most of the back wall, of Sidisi's palace. She turned - and stared, upwards, at a shell the breadth of a fortress and a great snapping beak that could swallow her whole. A butter-yellow, pink-haired pegasus in the pelts common to an elder Temur was riding on its neck, and made a sort of delighted squeal more commonly associated with dog toys than living beings.

"Hey, Tank!" Rainbow Dash said, grinning. "About time you showed up, good to see you! Is Fluts treating you well?"

"Oh, you know Tank," Fluttershy replied, scratching him behind his ear. Well, his internal ear; being a tortoise, he didn't have an external one. "He is awfully hungry, though. And he wouldn't touch the zombies - although I guess I can't blame him."

It was then that Sidisi's bodyguards arrived, a full 12-man fang of naga sword-snakes, their rakshasa leader, and their zombie meat-shields. They surveyed the situation - then just as quickly turned around and headed back the way they came.

"KATRINA! RETURN TO BATTLE, YOU CRAVEN POTION-ADDLED COWARD!" Sidisi bellowed after them. "YOUR KHAN DEMANDS IT!"

"NOT FOR ALL THE WITCHWEED DOWN THE MARANG!" was the rakshasa's response, which actually managed to Doppler down in pitch with the speed of her escape. "BEI LIAO FOR NOW!"

Sidisi slithered towards the eastern wall, eyes firmly on the tortoise.

"We would like to negotiate the terms of your surrender, Sidisi." Price Beyond Pearls idly filed a hoof. "And the return of the Sultai clan to pony hooves."

Chandra grinned, sending an arc of lightning between her wings. "We can do this the easy way - or the Chandra way. Please say Chandra way; I haven't blown something up in \_hours.\_"

\_(In loving memory of Turdle McDurdle. RIP, Meandering Towershell.)\_

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

144.1: Problem solved? (Trek crossover)

>144.2: It is a touchy subject. (Full Metal Alchemist crossover)<br>144.3: Fair point...

>144.4: Epic Troll.<br>144.5: They don't eat sapient food. But even the non-sapient kind is rather upsetting to their friends.



>144.6: And sometimes, she's just kind of a jerk.<br>144.7: Come join the pony side, we have phat lootz. (MtG cross)

## 152. Chapter 152

### 145.1 (Bliss Authority)

"Jace?"

"Nissa."

"Why am I an elk?"

"The same reason that I'm a unicorn. We're in a Fused Loop with Equestria."

"Well, okay then. As long as I'm an elk I'll have some wildflowers. Want some?"

"...I'll pass, Nissa."

\* \* \*

### ><p>145.2 (Bliss Authority)<p>

"You are too late to save him, Sparkhan Twi, great khan of no clan!" Nicol Bolas howled, turning his massive bulk over the fallen body of Ugin Spykoran and craning his neck. Crackling blightning pulsed from the black and red eye between the gap in his horns. "There is no magic on any plane that can save him! The future has been written, my little pony!"

"That's where you're wrong, Bolas!" Twilight said, leaning on her spear and trying her tree-damndest not to explode into giggles. All in all, the resemblance to Tirek was uncanny. "There is a magic that can bind you and save my TRUE mentor in Spike - the magic of Friendship!"

Nicol gave the collected loopers a glorious beat of sheer, stunned silence.

Sorin, Chandra, and Jace said at the same time: "What."

"You're kidding," Bolas said. "You're kidding, right?"

Twilight grinned. "Not at all!" She had been looking forward to this speech for the entire loop. "For we possess of the powers of friendship - we bear the legendary Elements of Dragons!"

"Man, what." Only Jace said it this time; Sorin Markov was too busy trying not to laugh, and Chandra had given up on not laughing the moment 'the powers of friendship' had left Twilight's lips.

"Impossible," he hissed. "I destroyed them long before your Sparks ignited, long before this moment!"

"That's where you're wrong, Bolas!" Twilight said, shaking with barely suppressed laughter. "For the - the Elements of Dragons -" she

wheezed, then took a deep breath and continued on as if she hadn't missed a beat. "The Elements of Dragons are no artifacts to be shattered, no sorceries or enchantments to be countered, but a set of ideals that cannot be destroyed!"

She pointed to Applejack. "Applejack, who stood steadfast in the face of your draconic hordes and outlasted their attack, is the element of Endurance!"

And, lo and behold, a gleaming pearl in the form of a dragon's scale appeared in a golden torc around Applejack's neck.

"OH, COME ON!" Jace howled, which only caused Markov to burst out laughing. "SERIOUSLY!?" Meanwhile, Chandra bit her lower lip and grinned at the spectacle of Nicol Bolas boggling in slack-jawed disbelief.

Twilight pointed to Fluttershy. "Fluttershy! You held off their armies by awakening the ferocious bear within you, risking your mind and your life for the sake of your friends! You represent the Element of Savagery!"

An emerald on a claw-shaped charm materialized at her throat. "I didn't like it," she said. "But if nature must be red in tooth and claw, so must I."

"Pinkie Pie! You flummoxed his forces with harmless pranks before using your prowess in kung fu to disable his thralls!" She was cracking a smile; she had to hold it together long enough to finish the speech. Funny, how her foes never attacked her during any variation on it; was it like a Heartsong, that way? She'd need to research it later. "You are the Element of Cunning!"

A sapphire bindi in the shape of an eye appeared on her forehead - before Pinkie flipped her head up, did a hoofstand, and the torc fell into place around her shoulders. Which was quite a feat, considering its mouth was narrower than her head. "As Surprise wrote in the Analects of Fun: Tah-dah," she intoned solemnly.

"Rarity! Your willingness to use poison, the bodies of the slain, and to delve into the secrets of ancient magic from before the Mending for the sake of the greater good marks you as the Element of Ruthlessness!"

"What can I say? Classic counter-spells are simply more efficient." Rarity said - before backing up as an onyx in the shape of a fang twinkled into existence at her throat. "Dear me, I hope this thing isn't poisonous itself."

"Damn straight the old counter-spells are more efficient," Jace muttered, though he folded his arms and still looked like he was fuming internally.

"Rainbow Dash! The Sonic Rainboom you demonstrated during your raid on Bolas' forces proves that you exemplify the Element of Speed!"

A gleaming pair of ruby wings appeared, unfolding back around her throat. "What did I tell you?" she said, folding her fetlocks and leering at him. "You don't rule the skies, Bolas - I do."

That snapped the villainous planeswalker out of his fugue. "You shall die for insulting me, the greatest of planeswalkers, Nicol Bolas!"

"No you won't!" Twilight said, eagerly awaiting Bolas' straight line.

"Won't I? There were SIX elements! You bear merely five!"

Hook, line, and sinker. Twilight stared Nicol Bolas in his eyes and smirked. "Was it not written that a spark shall unite the five clans in the spirit of friendship? Do I not \_bear\_such a sparkâ€|planeswalker?"

Nicol's eyes widened. "No. IMPOSSIBLE!"

"Did I not unite the leaders of the five clans in the spirit of friendship?" Twilight said. "I am that spark, Bolas! I, both of and not of Tarkir, of and not of my time, am the heir to Ugin Spike's power!"

A crown - more like a helm - appeared on her head, with a nosegard sweeping down and five prongs sweeping behind it. In its center was a pentagon - a pearl at its top, and going clockwise, a sapphire, onyx, ruby, and emerald.

Chandra exploded into another fit of giggles at the sight, clutching her sides with her fetlocks.

"I am Sparkhan Twi, the Element of Magic - and of Friendship!" Twilight whooped. "And FRIENDSHIP IS DRAGONS!"

Five beams of light lanced out from five torcs - one of pure white, one of deep blue, one of void black, one of fiery red, and one of verdant green - and converged on Twilight's crown.

And she changed: the bones of her hooves splayed into claws, her back stretched and rippled, her wings - feathered, like a pegasus' - unfolded. And she grew to a scale that was a match for Nicol Bolas'.

"No! NO! NOOOOO!" Nicol cringed.

Twilight took a deep breath - then \_exhaled\_ the Rainbow of Light.

Nicol took wing, dodging it. It figured; taking out Nicol wasn't in the cards in baseline. But her healing breath of pure mana washed over \_Spike's\_ wounded form, stabilizing his mortal injuries.

"This is not over!" Nicol screeched. "Tarkir stands for now, but you have attracted the attention of beings that are infinitely your greater!"

"Let the Eldrazi come!" Twilight bellowed. "The Khans and Dragons will stand together against them, a force to make whole planes tremble!"

Nicol didn't dignify that with a response, instead choosing to Walk away from the plane of Tarkir. Twilight landed, shifting back into

her normal form.

Or she tried, anyway. "Wings are a good look on you," Sorin remarked to his fingernails.

"Oh, HORSEFEATHERS," Twilight groaned, facehoofing. "Of course that made me go alicorn."

Jace sighed. "Twilight?"

"Yeah?"

Jace massaged his temples with the base of his frogs. "You didn't just bullshit all of the Elements of Dragons, did you? Because that's nowhere near baseline for us."

Applejack grinned at him. "The Elements of \_Harmony,\_ on the other hoof, are in jus' about every Equestrian loop. Ain't fused loops grand?"

"Of course they are," Jace muttered. "Wait - \_are those Moxen!?!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>145.3 (AnonymousAsk, Evilhumour, GamereX27 Masterweaver, wildrook, Grammar Checked By Purrs)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"DO YOU WISH TO SEE PICTURES OF THEIR FOALHOOD?" Nightmare Velvet asked Twilight's smiling friends. The unicorn in question started banging her head against the wall.<p>

This loop was just... ugh. Having her own \_mother\_ be the nightmare was problematic enough, but having her be this overbearing... She was considering ending the loop early.

"WE DEMAND GRANDCHILDREN!" The mare shouted, looking at the blushing purple unicorn. "AND THAT THOU GOEST ON A DATE AND BRING HOME A PONY!"

Shining and Twilight face-hooved. At this point, they were glad she wasn't Looping in that form, or else she'd realize they couldn't. One rampage was enough.

"I have an adopted daughter," Twilight pointed out. "And Spike is arguably my son-"

"FROM WHENCE DID THEIR FATHER COME?!"

"Mom, I told you already, \_I'm asexual!\_"

"WE KNOW NOT THIS STRANGE TERM! WE ARE STILL DISPLEASED AT THE LACK OF VISITS!" The Nightmare shouted, giving her best \_look\_ to the unicorn. "ARE WE AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THEE?"

"It means...oh, never mind. She's adopted!"

"SPEAK NOT OF THAT IN FRONT OF MY GRANDCHILD!"

"Look, Grandma, it's fine!" Nyx objected. "I knew about that all along!"

Shining groaned. '\_She was never this bad when I first dated Cadance!\_' he thought. '\_OR when Chrysalis posed as her.\_'

The Nightmare's eyes drifted to her elder child. "Dear son, hast thou practiced the safe method with your betrothed?"

"MOM!" Shining yelled.

"We are still awaiting an answer, dear son." The Nightmare frowned and walked closer. "Do we need to have the talk?"

\_"MOM!"\_ Shining now squeaked, blushing from ear to hoof.

Chrysalis blinked as she, Trixie, and Sunset were looking at the Nightmare Velvet debacle, the latter two gaping.

"And now I'm glad my Baseline self never succeeded," she said. "Schadenfreude aside, this much pressure would make the hive antsy."

Nightmare Velvet turned to face the three. "What dost thou mean?" She looked at the three, the black mare gulping loudly.

"Ehehehe..." Chrysalis muttered. "Uh...LOOK, THERE'S SPIKE AND RARITY!"

Nightmare Velvet simply looked at the mare. "We shall talk later, mare, about what thou did to my family." She then turned to look at the drake and mare. "But We must inquire to Our other son's betrothed."

"Ummm... Well... I..." Spike tried to talk but could not even complete a phrase. He whispered to Rarity, "\_Please, help me!\_"

Rarity looked up at Nightmare Velvet and smiled. "It is a pleasure to meet you, mother dear," she bowed, smiling. "Your dear son has been the perfect gentledrake, caring and honest to me."

Thunder roared as Nightmare Velvet looked to Rarity. "Thou are not taking Our son away, I know you want Us to drop Our guard but We are watching you."

'\_That's the idea, darling,\_' Rarity thought.

"Trixie and I are going to go find the Elements," Chrysalis said to the two siblings.

"Agreed," Twilight replied. "I'd rather face five Tireks than a Nightmare version of my own mother."

"Hey Nyx, I brought you some flowaaaaaaaaaaaaa..."

The yellow pegasus who had just arrived stared at the scene in front of him for a moment.

"...You know what? No. I'm going to turn around, wait for the giant

rainbow, and then walk back."

"You weren't nearly this scared when we took down Khorne together!" Nyx shouted at the retreating colt.

"I'm sorry, it's an irrational phobia! I can't handle this at all!"

"Mom, you're kinda scaring my friends," Twilight said honestly, looking at Shining and Spike to join her, which they did while grabbing their significant others. Nyx dragged Lemon back as Twilight turned to her mother again. "We won't leave you but please, we don't want to hurt you either. You need to let go of the nightmare force. You've got a granddaughter here to spoil rotten and her coltfriend to scare."

Nyx glared at her mom for but stepped forwards with wing tightly around Lemon. "I'm dying to hear all the stories about mama, like how she got stuck in the cookie jar-"

"You told her that?!" Twilight shrieked, glaring at Shining and Spike, with everypony laughing, the Nightmare included.

"Mom," Cadence smiled with Rarity, both of them nodding their heads. "We have so many stories to share with you, about your precious foals and what they've done."

"Please," Rarity reached over and hugged Nightmare Velvet, the rest of the family joining her. "Please come back to us."

As the extended family hugged their matriarch, soon a giggling, crying happy mare under a pile of her loved ones.

\* \* \*

><p>145.4 (fractalman)<p>

After a prank involving poison joke and heart's desire backfired, Zecora found herself in a swamp. After spending a few moments failing to identify the local flora, she concluded she wasn't anywhere on Equus.

She sighed, and set to building herself a shelter for the long haul, which included planting some seeds from her Pocket.

\* \* \*

><p>Yoda blinked as he beheld the zebra. He blinked again as he realized the zebra was stirring a pot. He blinked a third time as he realized it smelled really, really good.<p>

"Teach me how to make that, will you?"

Zecora chuckled. It was just simple bean soup, though the bean was not native to the planet.

"Master Yoda, small and green

let me teach you about this bean"

"Good at plants, are you? Perhaps teach each other, we will."

"To learn a little something of the force

What can I say but 'of course'?"

\* \* \*

><p>145.5 (AnonymousAsk, fractalman)<p>

Twilight was in the town hall waiting for Nightmare Moon, trying to decide between throwing water balloons at her until she surrendered, or challenging her to a magic duel.

As she was thinking, she looked around and noticed that Fluttershy was not around. Just then Nightmare Moon appeared and began to talk, but just before Twilight could decide, a very familiar manticore appeared.

"What?" Asked Twilight and Nightmare Moon as every head looked to the manticore.

The Manticore looked around and all the ponies except Twilight, her friends, and Nightmare Moon began to run; shortly afterwards, Applejack grabbed Rainbow Dash by the tail and dragged her out, Rarity fainted in her couch, and Pinkie smiled and jumped around like nothing was happening. Twilight noticed Nightmare moon's horn beginning to glow, so she readied a shield spell to protect her friends. Just as she was about to complete the spell, she heard a voice.

"Sebastian! There you are! I've been looking all over for you!" Said Fluttershy, appearing from behind the manticore and hugging him.

Nightmare Moon's spell stopped as she was surprised by the unexpected apparition of the yellow pegasus and how she was hugging the manticore.

"Fluttershy? How did that manticore get here, and why were you looking for him?" Asked Twilight

"Oh, eheh...it's just that almost every loop, poor Sebastian ends up with a spine in his paw so I was going to let him stay in my hut tonight, but then Angel Bunny began to throw a tantrum and before I knew it, Sebastian was gone..." explained Fluttershy.

"Umm... Hello? Dark Alicorn returned from banishment after a thousand years? Yoohoo!" said Nightmare Moon, but neither Twilight or Fluttershy seemed to notice her.

"Well...it was good of you Fluttershy, but you could at last give me a warning next time." Said Twilight.

"Of course. Now, Sebastian, say sorry to Twilight and to Nightmare Moon for disturbing them." Said Fluttershy to the manticore.

The manticore made a puppy face, then pounced Nightmare moon and began to lick her mane, to her utter befuddlement.

"There, that's better. Miss Moon you can continue." Smiled Fluttershy nodding her head.

"Well...I...I forgot where I was..." Commented Nightmare Moon, a little confused and grossed out, as she tried to pry the oversized kitty away.

"I think this is the moment you realize that a bunch of ponies just stayed up all night, and so you don't need to bring about eternal night to make them appreciate it." Said Twilight.

"It is...? I don't really remember that being part of the plan, but if you could please call off your manticore..."

\* \* \*

><p>145.6 (RowanEx)<p>

Twilight took a peek on a video which caused other Loopers to snigger or chortle, and to her surprise, it was quite one of the embarrassing but cute moments in the baseline.

What bothered her however, how in Yggdrasil did they get the time to record that small video?! Did a Guest Looper went with her 6-Looper-Stealth Loop which also was last loop and decided to spread a joke?

Or the CMC was actually Awake that time except for Nyx and decided to snoop for it... Impossible. It must've been someone else.

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity noticed Twilight locking herself in the library for quite a time ever since she Woke up for this Loop, and decided to take a peek of what she has been doing. Once she got to a window, her eyes were probably deceiving her, or not. She then proceeded not to laugh as she walked back home.<p>

"That expansion sure did mess her up," she said on her mind, "especially for the \_Pancake\_ Princess!"

Rarity froze for a second before bursting into laughter.

\* \* \*

><p>Nyx played the video on her PADD.<p>

Twilight cuddled the pancakes before suddenly a loud noise woke her up.

'I'm pancake!' she turned back into the group while raising a pancake stuck in her horn, 'I mean, awake.'

A few sniggers were heard, causing Twilight to head towards a window and took a peek outside, only to see nothing. She turned back to the other five who were trying not to burst into laughter.

'Don't tell anypony about this,' she warned."

Nyx blinked once, stared back at Twilight, blinked twice, then



proceeded to laugh much to Twilight's disappointment.

\* \* \*

><p>145.7 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

"Twilight?"

The purple unicorn heaved a sigh. "Yes, Rarity?"

"Have you ever had any loops where the Cakes ran a waffle restaurant rather than a bakery before?"

"Ee-nope." Twilight looked around. "This is the first time that I know of. I'm not complaining though, they're actually very good at it. Even with the more... out there dishes."

"Quite." Rarity took a bite of her daisy-and-waffle sandwich. "Mmm. We'll have to ask Pinkie how their baseline selves are with them next time we see her Awake."

"I'll make a note of it." Twilight pulled her PADD out of her pocket. "I've been meaning to ask her about all the different versions of Sugarcube Corner she knows of anyway."

"Part of your general research on loop variations?"

"To quote Big Macintosh, eeyup."

\* \* \*

><p>145.8 (Filraen)<p>

When Diamond Tiara Awoke she didn't realize it. Her world was a sea of perceptions she couldn't understand because, while conscious, she couldn't process any of them. Light? Touch? Sound? Magic? She didn't understand those concepts, or how she needed to understand them.

She also never realized when she lost consciousness.

\* \* \*

><p>As time passed Diamond Tiara started getting some flashes of... something, a comforting sound that she knew by heart.<p>

"...ra."

It took time, how much Tiara didn't know, to understand they were voices and what the voices sometimes were saying was her own name. But the effort she spent to get this realization was too much and she fell into unconsciousness again.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'In the middle of nowhere, having the impression of being Awake for some time but no loop memories. What the pine is happening here? Maybe if I had a landmark or something...'<em>

Suddenly a yellow road appeared below her, whatever direction was

below right now.

\_ 'Well, that's convenient.' \_ Tiara thought but when she tried to stand on the road she realized she didn't have hooves. Or hands, claws, tentacles, flippers... or a body for that matter.

Then she had a realization \_ 'Wait, am I dreaming or something? Only one way to find out.' \_ Trying to focus on Zecora's lucid dreaming techniques Diamond Tiara created her usual earth pony form, then changed to human, dragon, changeling, zombie and her surprisingly often used lately boxing kangaroo form before becoming her usual filly form again.

Testing her magic Diamond Tiara realized she had a little bit, but her connection to it was muted somehow (or she had low reserves right now, she could be in a coma) and her Element of Generosity reacted the same way. With her options cut off, unable to ping and not knowing if she were going to remember this dream once she wakes up Diamond Tiara decided to meditate and prepare her mind to when this dream ends.

\* \*  
\*

><p>Light.<p>

Sun.

Hungry.

Voice.

Name.

Taste.

Voice.

Light.

Voice.

Name.

Voice.

Voice.

Voice...

"...doctor..."

Worry!

Diamond Tiara suddenly recognized the voice, and knew exactly what to do. Pushing her magic as far as she could do Diamond Tiara called the Element of Generosity upon her.

\* \* \*

><p>Honeybuzz knew there were good and bad days, and she had to enjoy the good to make the most of them while suffering the bad. She had married a wonderful pony of a husband, had their little foal together, an earth pony like herself, and enjoyed their time together. She only hoped she could get out more with her daughter to play, but today was one of those lucky days. She even caught up with her bee friend at the park.<p>

They had already returned home however, as it was getting late and the cold wasn't good for either of them. Now they were both resting on top of the bed waiting for her husband's arrival. She didn't have to wait much as soon enough there were sounds of him arriving to the house.

"Darling, I'm back!" Filthy Rich said as he entered the bedroom.

"Welcome home, Dear." After kissing each other Honeybuzz continued. "How was your day?"

"Good enough. We finished polishing the details for the next harvest production of Zap Apple jam with the Apples. And yours?"

"Not that bad all things considered. I managed to get outside to play with Tiara after lunch and after that it looked like she was hungrier than ever, I just finished nursing her." She didn't mention how she almost never got out of their home, and not for the lack of will. Her body had become tired even since she gave birth to their daughter, nights sleeping never becoming restful again, to the point Honeybuzz almost never had the strength to leave home.

Filthy Rich knew all of that and more, like the other reason his wife had to leave home today. "And what did the doctor say?"

"Doctor Stable gave me three months left" \_to die\_, was left unsaid but both understood it. Silenced reigned for a moment until the dam broke.

"Rich, what I'm going to do?!" Honeybuzz cried as she threw herself into Filthy Rich's embrace. "I want to go with you to leave Tiara to school her first day! I want to be in her cute-ceaÑ+era telling her friends their music it too loud! I want to be in her wedding! I want to grow old with you..."

"I'll tell her stories of the wonderful mare who is her mother," Filthy Rich eventually said. "I'll make sure she won't ever forget-"

His words were interrupted by two things happening at the same time, or maybe one which had two effects. A sudden sphere of light took up most of the room, creating winds which made all the knick-knacks in the room flutter around, surprising Filthy Rich and Honeybuzz enough to fall towards the wall.

Eventually the light and winds ended, and in its place the translucent image of a filly remained, wings flaring as if helping to keep balance on her four legs, horn lit. The alicorn -an alicorn!- seemed to be around the age one usually gets their cutie mark. Her eyes were looking carefully around the room: the walls, the bed, Filthy Rich to finally fixing her sight down on Honeybuzz, who was

still on the floor with her back to the wall, before saying a single phrase.

"I ask of you: are you my Mother?"

Time seemed to stop until Rich finally spoke "D-diamond Tiara, is that you?"

"Yes, dad. It's me, your daughter." The alicorn said as she softened her face into a smile and used her head to point to the bed, where even after the whole lights and wind act the small form of Diamond Tiara was in her bed, and with that a ton of revelations that were being screamed at Honeybuzz were realized.

Both her daughter on the bed and the translucent alicorn had same coat and mane color.

Diamond Tiara had sprouted wings and a horn much like the translucent figure possessed.

Both had the same position: wings flared, horn lit with the same magic color.

Both had a necklace, her little foal was using it to look like she was standing on her four hooves on the bed and the standing alicorn was wearing it.

Everything coming together to the realization of the translucent alicorn looked unmistakably like and an older version of Diamond Tiara.

"But how?" Honeybuzz asked as she approached her filly on the bed.

"Wait, Mom!" Diamond Tiara said, halting Honeybuzz's approach. At her surprised look the alicorn elaborated: "I'm concentrating really hard for this spell and I don't want to disrupt it. But as of how, it's a really long story but the short version is that I really wanted to get to know you Mom."

Torn between going to her daughter but being unable lest she stop talking with her Honeybuzz could only have tears fall down her face. "Thanks to let me know you before I-"

Diamond Tiara interrupted her mother with a single phrase, "I know," and then closed her eyes as if concentrating. The image of the alicorn flickered from a moment, raising Honeybuzz's fear before stopping and opening her eyes again.

Filthy Rich, however, noticed something extra had happened. He grasped one of the three bottles that suddenly appeared on the bed, it had a big number one on its side. "What are these?"

"Those are three potions, containers of powerful spells, Dad." Tiara answering almost in a lecturing tone... which Honeybuzz supposed was appropriate for the situation. "Mom, you should drink them in order: the bottle with a number one has a potion of Remove Curse, which should work with almost all magical maladies. The potion in the bottle number two has a powerful Remove Disease spell which is good for non-magical diseases. The bottle number three has a potion to

Cure Serious Wounds, either by injury or disease."

The explanation seemed to make Honeybuzz stop breathing. Could she... be healed?

At her stunned look Diamond Tiara blushed and looked at the floor sheepishly, "I wanted to be thorough."

Honeybuzz couldn't hold it any more she stood and ran towards her grown-up child's embrace, only to pass through her and fall to the floor.

"Sorry about that Mom, but this is only an illusion. It helps with my focus but I'm really on the bed."

Maybe it was the happiness of talking to her foal, maybe the absurdity of Diamond Tiara suddenly becoming an alicorn, or the hope that she could stay alive long enough to get to know her daughter. But now being on the floor, after foolishly passing through a ghostly image of her foal, was too much for Honeybuzz.

She started laughing.

Laughter and tears of relief and happiness and hope and love of an inexplicable miracle that had happened in her own bedroom, a miracle that may just allow her to enjoy the two most precious treasures she had in her life. A moment later three more laughs sang along with hers.

Eventually the laughter stopped and Honeybuzz returned to Filthy Rich's side, as the illusory image apparently couldn't move.

"Mom, Dad, I can't keep the spell for much longer."

"Will you be all right, my princess?"

"Yes Dad," Diamond Tiara answered as her image flickered. "I'm not sure how conscious I'll be after I end the spell but I'll certainly remember this. And if not, please show me the bottles."

Filthy Rich nodded.

"Mom, Dad, when I can cast the spell again or can talk normally I promise to tell you my story. But I want you to wait for me, both of you."

Honeybuzz answered with a conviction she forgot the last time she felt "We promise."

A relieved smile crossed Diamond Tiara's face and her image was no more; however, just after the image vanished they could hear her voice sheepishly saying one last thing.

"... and sorry for the bedroom."

And then everything ended, this time without any wind or lights. Only with a little alicorn foal sleeping in the middle of the bed hugging a necklace too big for her.

\* \* \*

><p>145.9 (AnonymousAsk, RowanEx)<p>

Twilight Sparkle and Spike looked around the sea of red stones then at each other.

"What?" Twilight asked.

"Nothing," commented Spike, "it's just that sooner or later Luna might do this, and thank Yggdrasil we're not in the sun."

"How did you know it was going to end like this?" the mare asked.

"Of course, it was going to happen sometime," commented Spike as he looked up to Twilight, "We used the send to the moon joke way too many times on almost everybody. It's surprising Luna lasted that long. Even Celestia suggested to stop swearing by her name."

"Well, true, but-"

"No buts, next time, let's send things somewhere else," he interrupted.

"Okay," Twilight replied, "so what are we gonna do now here in Mars to pass the time?"

Spike thought for a few seconds before an idea entered his mind. "How about a colony?"

Twilight looked around before nodding in agreement.

\* \* \*

><p>145.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

"PANCAKE DISCUS?! CELESTIA, WHY IS THIS ON THE LIST OF EQUESTRIAN GAMES?!"

"Well, it's not like we haven't done anything ridiculous before, Twilight. Wife tossing is almost a regular sport now."

"AAAAARAAARRRAARARARARARAAAAGH!"

"Luna overturned solar surfing, though. Something about a lack of viable competitors. Such a shame, really."

\* \* \*

><p>145.11 (Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight felt the spiked collar on her neck as she looked into the mirror. "Huh, this manestyle again..." She adjusted her denim jacket and walked out to her motorcycle.

Whose tires were made of pancakes.

"...you know what, I'm just going to roll with it."

"Well said, my faithful student!" Discord rolled up on another pancake-tired motorcycle, peering over a pair of kamina shades. "Now come, the Waffle Twins are returning from space tonight!"

\* \* \*

><p>145.12 (Evilhumour)<p>

Lyra leaned her head against the bar and sighed.

"Something strong, please, we've got a roaring headache from our last loop stuck in our head." the looper with yellow eyes looked up at Big Mac. "This is Seapony Lyra speaking to you so you know when I am saying the last loop was crazy."

Big Mac raised an eyebrow but before he asked, the pony in front of him picked the glass up and continued to speak.

"We were seaponies and we were the second most insane thing in the ocean!" Lyra dropped the glass onto the counter, shuddering. "Those damn Narwhals out sung us, out fire powered us, out insaned us, out seaponied us!" Lyra quivered. "It was horrible and we cannot get their damn song out of our head!"

With a thud and splash, the pony in the bucket fell onto her back with Big Mac blinking his eyes in shock. It seemed that there was something that could make a seapony say it was too crazy now and he wasn't sure how to take it.

Picking up Lyra's drink and throwing it back, he decided that it was certainly not going to be taken soberly.

\* \* \*

><p>145.13 (Evilhumour with the help of Purrs)<p>

Zecora smiled to herself as she prepared to welcome the anchor to Equestria. She had been planning this for a while now, and she wanted to see how he would take their version of his holiday. Clearing her throat, she directed Cheerilee and her students into their appropriately decorated town and began to sing to them all.

"Colts and fillies of every age"

"Wouldn't you like to see something strange?"

Nyx picked up the tone, flying in as her adult self and landed beside the singing zebra.

"If you have some time to kill"

"See our town of Ponyville"

From the house they were hiding beside, Diamond Tiara led several foals dressed as pumpkins in the next chant. The anchor's smile was growing by the moment.

"This is Ponyville, this is Ponyville"

"Ponies laugh in the dead of night"

Luna flew into the town from her moon, the greatest smile on her face as she basked in the adoration the citizens Ponyville were giving her.

\_ "This is Ponyville, everypony knows the drill\_

\_ Trick or treat till the neighbors gonna die of fright\_

\_ It's our town, everypony laugh\_

\_ In this town of Ponyville"\_

Vinyl trotted onto the scene, shaking her mane in her elaborate costume to the utter delight of the stallion beside them.

\_ "I am the one hiding under your bed\_

\_ Teeth ground sharp and eyes glowing red"\_

Flashing a wink, Vinyl joined their growing group as Lyra appeared in her human costume.

\_ "I am the one outside the windowpane\_

\_ Fingers like snakes and spiders in my mane"\_

All of the ponies gathered so far broke out in a joint song of \_ "This is Ponyville, this is Ponyville"\_

Flying in as a pegasus, Sunset flashed her sharp fangs as she sang her part of their song.

\_ "Ponyville! Ponyville! Ponyville! Ponyville!\_

\_ In this town we call home\_

\_ Everypony hail to the librarian song"\_

Ivory Scroll walked onto the scene with a fantastic costume that made it appear she had two faces on her head.

\_ "In this town, don't we love it now?\_

\_ Everybody's waiting for the next surprise"\_

Everyone, even their visitor and the non looping ponies, sung the next part with pride in their voices.

\_ "Round that corner, Pinkie hiding in the trash can\_

\_ Something's waiting now to pounce, and how you'll..."\_

Rarity, Applejack and Fluttershy jumped out of the Carousel Boutique, singing loudly to the eternal delight of their friends. The first was wearing something quite risquÃ©, the second was a quite realistic timberwolf, and the third was using her druid powers to make it seem as if she were melting.

\_ "Scream!\_



\_This is Ponyville\_

\_Red 'n' black, slimy green"\_

Applejack leaned into the foals around Cheerilee, snarling softly to get them laughing in playful fright.

\_"Aren't ya scared?"\_

Flying in with their own weird magic, Discord and Silver Spoon caused a bit of draconequus magic to fall around them all.

\_"Well, that's just fine\_

\_Say it once, say it twice\_

\_Take a chance and roll the dice\_

\_Ride with the moon in the dead of night.\_

Spike, changed into a skeleton form for this event sang his lines in a mighty tone:

\_"Don't you feel the chill? Don't you feel the chill?" \_

Berry Punch, a hoof around her daughter, fulfilled her part.

\_"In our town of Ponyville!"\_

Pinkie Pie, dressed to the nines, bounced her way to their visitor, her smile greater then the one painted on her face.

\_"I am the clown with the tear-away face\_

\_Here in a flash and gone without a trace"\_

A very large red ghouly pony showed off his pipes on the condition that no one would ever tape this.

\_"I am the fear in the back of your brain\_

\_I am the wind blowing through your mane"\_

An alicorn mare flew across the moon, doing what little singing she needed to do.

\_"I am the shadow on the moon at night\_

\_Filling your dreams to the brim with fright"\_

With that, Celestia, dressed Nightmare Moon, flew off before her voice would crack.

Everyone followed the zebra alicorn with joy and wonder as she led them deeper into the town.

\_"This is Ponyville, this is Ponyville\_

\_Ponyville! Ponyville! Ponyville! Ponyville!\_

\_Ponyville! Ponyville!"\_

The three founders of the Cutie Mark Crusaders bounded onto the scene, their smiles meeting all of the other ponies' save their visitor.

\_"Tender lumplings everywhere\_"

\_Life's no fun without a good scare"\_

The Empress of the Crystal Empire and her Royal consort, both dressed as corpses and their legs around each other, chimed in.

\_"That's our part-time job, but we're not evil\_"

\_In our town of Ponyville"\_

Rainbow Dash unleashed her own singing as they neared the imposing tree in the center of the town.

\_"In this town\_"

Ivory did not miss her cue from the pony dressed up as the grim reaper, replying with

\_"Don't we love it now?\_"

\_Everybody's waiting for the next surprise"\_

\_All of the present mane six, started to sing together, side by side.\_

\_"Twilight Sparkle might catch you reading a book\_"

\_And scream like a banshee\_"

\_Make you jump out of your skin\_"

\_This is Ponyville, don't you feel the chill?\_"

\_Won't you please make way for a very special mare?\_"

\_Our mare Twilight is Queen of Golden Oaks\_"

\_Everyone hail to the Bookworm Queen now!"\_

Everyone broke out into song in perfect unison, heads pointed to the full moon above them. A pony exploded out from the foliage of the Golden Oaks Library, flying around in the air as the crow reached its climax.

\_"This is Ponyville, this is Ponyville\_"

\_Ponyville! Ponyville! Ponyville! Ponyville!"\_

Applebloom, Scootaloo and Sweetie Bell sang as Twilight landed in front of the entire town, wings bent low before she stood up in front of their special guest.

\_ "In this town we call home\_

\_ Everyone hail to the friendship song! "\_

With that, there was a shout of joy and thunderous applause, none louder than from Pumpkin King himself.

\* \* \*

><p>145.14 (Tangent)<p>

**\*\*By Any Other Name:\*\*** 1.1 \_The Awakening\_

Twilight Sparkle Awoke suddenly amidst the hustle and bustle of a crowded kitchen full of ponies, only two of which she immediately recognized as Mr. and Mrs. Cake. Which made sense, as from what she could tell, she was in the large kitchen of Sugarcube Corner.

"What's up, Pancake? Are you okay?" One of the extra ponies asked in a concerned tone. And then the memories hit. This was yet another name error loop, this time replacing her entire name with Pancake. Only \_this time\_ her name actually made sense within the context of the loop itself! As Pancake, she was the youngest of four sisters, the other three being Flapjack, Waffle, and Syrup, who ran a semi-mobile restaurant catering to lumberjacks and miners. She herself had set out on her own years ago to get out of her sisters' shadow and had ended up in Ponyville, staying with the Cakes.

"I'm fine, Waffle," Twilight replied. "I'm just glad you three could come help with the Summer Sun Celebration. Plus, it'll be nice having a family visit once all the hubbub is done and over with." A quick ping brought back a pair of returns. Magic and Loyalty... Spike and Trixie would be her guess, it made most sense. Apparently Trixie was taking her place as Princess... Dawn de LumiÃ"re?

Huh...

Interesting, apparently Twilight wasn't the only one with an alternative name this loop. Princess Dawn de LumiÃ"re was how Princess Celestia was known this time around, with the only other difference according to her new memories being the bright golden half-sun Cutie Mark. And Trixie was most likely taking Twilight's place as her student, with Spike as her assistant.

"Okay, that's the second time this morning you've spaced out, Pancake," Flapjack stated drily. "I know you want to impress us with how successful you've been in Ponyville, but you've been running yourself ragged ever since you got the spot as Head Caterer for the Summer Sun Celebration. Take a break. Go see your friends. As much as we missed you, we don't want to see you back in the kitchen for another hour, okay?"

"Aheh-heh," Twilight laughed nervously. "Okay, okay, I'll take a break! Be back in a bit!" And with that, the Anchor currently known as Pancake headed out of Sugarcube Corner...

\* \* \*

><p>145.15 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Fluttershy looked up, and up, and up at the anorexic-looking armor-plated quadrupedal giant robot... thing. Similar robots rested in giant containment bays to either side, different mainly in color; brilliant white armor on the left, darkest blue in the middle, vibrant pink on the right.

"This is Alicornion Unit One," declared the stallion who had replaced her father for the Loop. "We created the Alicornions to defend Canterlot-3 against the threat of the Nightmares, as foretold in the Ghastly Gorge Scrolls."

"Er... that's nice," Fluttershy said hesitantly, "but why show this to me?" She waved a hoof up and down at the midnight-blue titan half-submerged in the holding tank next to them.

"Because you are the Fifth Element," Dark Clouds said firmly. "Only those who are Elements can pilot an Alicornion. And you are going to pilot Unit One into battle against the Fourth Nightmare."

"Into battle? Oh, no, no I couldn't!" Fluttershy insisted. In fact she could and she had, much more often than she cared to remember, but she didn't care to admit it given any option. She never enjoyed it... well, hardly ever.

"If you refuse to pilot Unit One," Dark Clouds growled, "I will have no choice but to send the First Element into battle." He pointed to a hospital gurney, where a pony almost completely swathed in bandages, gauze and plaster casts lay almost motionless. A single tangle of pink mane stuck out from a gap in the wrappings.

"Let me at 'em!" Pinkie Pie said, trying to sit up, then falling back onto the gurney with a groan of pain.

Fluttershy gave Dark Clouds a capital-L Look that was more than halfway to the capital-S Stare. "I refuse to respond to your emotional blackmail," she said. "I will not pilot Alicornion."

"Fluttershy, you suck," Dark Clouds said. "Now get in the robot."

Fluttershy raised an eyebrow. "And how many Loops have you been waiting to unload that one, Gendo?"

"Dark Clouds," alias Gendo Ikari, smirked. "Who says I've been waiting?" he asked. "This is my first time with pony pilots, though."

"Besides," said Pinkie Pie from her gurney, "it had to be you, right? If we'd chosen Rainbow Dash, she'd have said yes before Gendo could tell her the unit number of the robot!"

\* \* \*

><p>145.14 b<p>

(Tangent)

**\*\*By Any Other Name:\*\*** 1.2 \_Moon Pie Madness\_

Twilight Sparkle (or Pancake, as she was known in this loop) had barely set out from Sugarcube Corner when she was accosted by a panicking pink pony her in-loop memories identified as Moon Pie, an Earth Pony with long straight hair. Moon Pie had always been fascinated by the moon and the night sky, and had left the Pie family rock farm years ago to pursue her education after she got her Cutie Mark, a full moon surrounded by five stars. She had recently graduated and had been stationed at Ponyville's Golden Oak Observatory, where she slept through most of the day and spent most nights gazing at the stars.

Pancake was one of the few Ponyville residents to keep in touch with her after Skittles (oh, Twilight was so going to tease Rainbow Dash about that one after all those Pancake jokes!), Ponyville's Premier Party Planner, hosted Moon Pie's Welcome to Ponyville party last year. Moon Pie, for her part, always welcomed any of her friends who came to visit with a warm smile and a pot of tea, inexplicably showed up at the door bearing a bowl of herbal broth if any of her friends was feeling under the weather, and tried to attend any event important to her friends if she possibly could. It was odd to know a version of Pinkie Pie with so few friends, but all the same rather heartening that Moon Pie valued those few friendships so dearly.

"Pancake!" Moon Pie yelled in Twilight's ear as she shook the purple pony. "I know you're super busy, but can you help me? Please?"

"Calm down, Moon Pie. What seems to be the problem?"

Letting go of Pancake, Moon Pie took a few deep breaths as she tried to settle her nerves. "I was just finishing up my research notes this morning when the mailpony came with a royal notice - Eventide Twinkle, Princess Dawn de Lumi re's personal student, is coming to Ponyville tomorrow to inspect the preparations! She's going to be staying at my observatory! I don't have any spare rooms set up! What if she's a meanie? What if she kicks me out of my own observatory? I heard she has a dragon! Dragons eat gems and crystals! What if he eats my lenses!? I don't wanna pay to replace my lenses again! Whaaaaaaa-aaaaa-aa-aahhhh!"

"There there, Moonie," Twilight patted Moon Pie's mane as she soothed the panicking pink pony. "I only have an hour free this morning, but I can drop by this evening to lend a hoof. In the meantime, why don't I help you find Skittles, Gemstone, and Apple Cider? I seem to remember that they didn't get any specific assignments for the Summer Sun Celebration preparations. I'm positive that at least one of them will be free to help you out."

Moon Pie sniffed and smiled tentatively. "Do you really think so, Pancake?"

"I'm positive," Twilight nodded with a reassuring smile. "And even if they are busy, I'll still be by this evening to help out. It shouldn't be too hard to clear out a room or two and set up guest rooms."

"Thank you so much, Pancake!"

\* \* \*

><p>145.16(Masterweaver)<p>

Nyx walked up to her friend and put a hoof on her shoulder. "Apple Bloom, normally I don't go into other looper's dreams without permission. But the last expansion got me curious, and I headed into your unawake self's head."

Apple Bloom paused, giving the alicorn an odd look. "...Yeah?"

"You. Are one. Screwed up filly, you know that?"

The earth pony frowned. "Okay, what happened?"

"I'll give you the memory tonight, don't you worry." Nyx patted her gently and walked on. "Right now, though, I need to get your brother to open his bar."

"Oh come on," Apple Bloom cried, "it couldn't have been that weird! You've got to have seen stranger things than... whatever you saw!"

"There was this time Pinkie was stealthing and I dreamskipped into her head," Nyx muttered. "Took me five loops and three targeted obliviations to regain my sanity. This, though, I need a drink for." She gave Apple Bloom a look. "Let me repeat that: I survived a looping Pinkie Dream, and I need a drink for this."

\* \* \*

><p>145.17 (Masterweaver)<p>

"So wait, she's a... hairdresser?"

Apple Bloom nodded. "Yep, here it is, black and white." She handed the letter over to Scootaloo. "Babs has apprenticed under a master barber."

"...huh." The pegasus checked both sides of the paper. "You know, I know we don't pay as much attention to her as we should in these loops, but... She never struck me as a mane stylist, ya'know? Not that I think she'll be a bad one," she quickly reassured, "it's just that... I dunno, she felt a little rough-and-tumble, if that makes sense."

"Surprised me too, first time I went through this expansion." Apple Bloom shrugged. "Meh, if it makes her happy, Ah don't really care. Point is, we should celebrate."

Sweetie Belle walked in at that moment, glancing furtively behind her. "Sorry, I just had to shake off Snips-I don't know why, but he has a real hard crush on me this loop!" She mock gagged. "I know he can be a decent guy, but I'm just not interested... what are you two staring at me for?"

Apple Bloom cleared her throat. "Sweetie Belle... what is Snips' special talent anyway?"

\* \* \*

><p>145.18 (Masterweaver)<p>

The two cuttlefish stared each other down.

Around them, four other cuttlefish (and one purple sea cucumber) shuffled awkwardly.

The currents of the water around them filled with tension.

Eventually the cucumber coughed, or did something resembling a cough. "Girls... it is traditional, it's best if you get it out sooner rather than later-

He backed off at the matching glare. "Right, sorry. I'll just be over here."

The purple cuttlefish snorted, turning back to the white one.

Streaks of sunlight filtered through the ocean.

Finally, the white cuttlefish sighed. "...Twilight?"

"...Yes, Rarity?"

\* \* \*

><p>145.19 (Original concept by AnonymousAsk; beta-read and revised by Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Something isn't right.

Twilight looked up at the empty stage for the Summer Sun Celebration. She and most of the other resident Loopers had gathered there in plenty of time for Nightmare Moon's arrival. Except it had been over half an hour since the corrupted alicorn was supposed to show up, and she simply was. Not. There.

And all the pings she'd felt had been accounted for by ponies she'd already confirmed were present. This was concerning.

"Twilight?"

"Yes, Ivory?"

"Do youâ€ know if they're planning something?" The mayor looked as concerned as Twilight herself.

Twilight shook her head. "If they are, they didn't tell me."

Nearby, a loud belch suddenly interrupted. "Ughâ€ excuse me." Spike looked embarrassed. "Twilight, mail for you!"

"Thank you, Spike. Hmmâ€ what? She WHAT! Tree-damn it!" Twilight groaned.

"Darling? What is it?" Rarity looked at her in shock.

"Here. Read this." Twilight passed the letter to her.

"Ohâ€¦ my." Rarity began reading aloud.

\_My dearest student Twilight Sparkle, \_

\_Luna and I have decided to take a vacation loop. Please don't search for us, we'll be perfectly fine.\_

\_Signed, \_

\_Princess Celestia \_

\_P.S: I leave Equestria's leadership in your capable hooves while we're away.\_

Twilight looked at her friends.

"Errr... Any of you want to... help me?"

"Sorry Darling, Spike and I have a little date in Trottingham, maybe another time." Rarity truly looked apologetic as she and Spike hurried away.

"And I've got... farm work to do," Applejack added as she backed up.

Twilight looked to the others.

"Gilda told me she was going to give me a tour around the Griffon Kingdom," said Rainbow Dash.

"I did? OW!" The griffon looked indignant. "Sheesh, Dash, that hurt! What'd you do, get steel elbow implants?" Suddenly realizing that eyes were on her, she grimaced. "And yeah, I did, so we need to go." She and Dash flew off.

Twilight looked around again. "And... everypony else took off when I wasn't looking. Guess it's just the four of us, girls." She looked rather expectantly at the three Crusaders.

"Sorry, Twilight. We... really don't know how to run a government." Sweetie Belle spoke.

"And we have a big crusade we need to get to," Scootaloo added.

"So... bye." Apple Bloom looked more than a little embarrassed as she backed away from her fellow Element of Magic.

The three hurriedly left, leaving Twilight to sigh.

"So much for the magic of friendship THIS loop," the lavender unicorn muttered. "Especially since they did such a good job running Equestria during my self-imposed exile the last few times I left them in charge. Oh well. Time for backup plan H."

Half an hour, Twilight and a confused white alicorn were standing in the courtyard of Canterlot Castle.



"Er... Twilight Sparkle, you said your name was? Where are we, and why are we unicorns? Well, winged unicorn, in my case."

Twilight smiled. "Welcome to your new kingdom, Principal Celestia. It's not too different from running Canterlot High, just country-sized, so... have fun!" With that, Twilight teleported out, leaving a still very confused neo-alicorn by herself.

Meanwhile, back in Canterlot High...

Vice-Principal Luna looked just as confused as her sister, even if she was a world away. "Sunset Shimmer? Wasn't my sister in her office a few minutes ago?"

"Yes, but she had to leave. Something about an emergency only she could handle, and that you're in charge until she gets back."

"Oh. Well... why were you here?"

"Mr. Cranky Doodle asked me to deliver the morning's attendance records for him."

"Ah. Well, thank you, and I suppose you'd better get back to class then."

Sunset nodded, then sighed after she left. "Twilight, if you're going to pull something like this, I wish you'd at least give me more than two or three seconds' warning."

\* \* \*

><p>145.20 (Evilhumour, gamerex27, and masterweaver)<p>

"-and one, two three, and one, two, three," the woman's voice cut into Vinyl's mind as she Woke up with a jolt, nearly falling on her face. "Miss Melody, are you alright?" the woman asked to the snickering of other girls around her.

"Ye-yeah," she blinked as she pushed herself up with her hands, sending out a ping while she waited for her loop memories to kick in. "Peachy." she gulped as she looked to her right to a very uncomfortable sight.

It was herself in those black slim tights that showed her legs off too much, with a top that pushed her chest in places she wasn't comfortable being so high and she was wearing ballet shoes. The final nail of how totally unwubural loop was going to be was her hair; brushed, washed and groomed to perfection, the natural blue mess was in a \_ponytail!\_

"Good, Victoria, we wouldn't want our lead girl to hurt herself before the recital, now would we?" the woman smiled at the girls around her. "Now let's continue, shall we?" Tapping her pointer against the wall, the teacher began to call out, "And one, two, three..."

\* \* \*

><p>Vinyl nearly jumped out of her skin as the girls began to join

her at the lunchroom table, all equally unhappy.<p>

"He-hey girls," she weakly waved to them, trying to rub a hand through her hair but it was too well brushed and straight for her to do that. "How are ya-"

Rarity \_glared\_ at her as she placed down her salad, taking time to be gentle with her \_very\_ developed muscular hands. "I Woke up while slamming someone into the ground, their feet in my \_face!\_" she hissed, squeezing the metal table with worrying ease.

"At least you Woke up to something \_awesome\_," the girl next to Rarity muttered, the very picture of feminine beauty with her gorgeous dress and makeup. Her long, rainbow hair was \_actually\_ glistening in the air and not even her pouting ruined her flawless face. "For once, I don't loop in as a tomboy and I get \_this!\_"

"At least y'all got somethin' \_easy\_ to deal with," the older of the three grumbled. "Ah'm the professor of the high fancy math an' Ah've got to give a \_big\_ lecture in thirty minutes and my \_dang\_ loop memories won't kick in!"

"It could be worse," the fact that Pinkie Pie was smiling at less force than usual was more surprising to the four of them than her suddenly sitting in the middle of them. "I mean, you could be like me; born without the ability to taste food. Although, I think Luna Waking up the electricity factory is bad too. Or the fact that Celestia found out she's the night manager of a fastfood restaurant. Or that Fluttershy is the CEO of a massive hunting company. Or the fact that Twilight is a meany politician that cut the budget to the schools and personally bulldozed the Golden Oaks library. So," Pinkie Pie stood up, all of their food in her arms. "It could be a lot worse. Bye!"

The girls watched her jump off the table and dash off into another room before Vinyl blinked and looked down. "Did she just-"

"Eeyup." the professor muttered darkly.

"\_Wonderful\_." the girls sighed, their stomachs grumbling in protest at not being fed.

\* \* \*

><p><em>"Boooooored<em>," Discord moaned, slamming his head against his desk. "\_So. Boooooored."\_

"All you have to do is fill out my paperwork and make appointments for me," Twilight grumbled, tearing down the proudly-framed portrait of a smiling, Unawake Twilight at the controls of a bulldozer next to the destroyed, "wasteful" Golden Oaks. "At least you're not stuck in a position where you were doing \_everything\_ you hate in other people\_ before you Woke Up." Muttering, she changed the channel on her office's TV, going from a proud Unawake Rainbow Dash posing on a fashion show runway to Unawake Rarity in skintight clothing, grinning viciously as she held a scholarship for contact sports at a prestigious local university in one massive hand and a wrestling trophy under her thick, muscular arm in another on the local news interview. "This is like Sleipnir's playing a \_really\_ bad joke on all of us."

\* \* \*

><p><em>They're all looking at are they all looking at me?!<em>

Chrysalis broke out in a cold sweat as she Awoke in front of a podium in Canterlot High's auditorium. She glanced down at her speech notes before her, reminding her of her successful acting career, and her motivational speech she was to make to her alma mater. In front of. Thousand. Of. People.

Bitting back her screaming changeling instincts to get the buck out of there and hide, she swallowed the lump in her throat and reluctantly began her speech.

\* \* \*

><p>It was a little known fact that Derpy Hooves was a workaholic.<p>

Well, Workaholic was a tad extreme. She didn't need to be constantly working, after all. But she didn't react well when she didn't have employment of some sort, even if it was purely voluntary. She needed to do things with her own two hooves, she needed to know she was contributing to society. Even just raising Dinky was enough.

So awakening as a pampered, layabout heiress with parents that deliberately ensured she would be maneuvered away from any sort of work was more than a little stressful.

She could keep herself from destroying things, though. At least until she could contact "auntie Twilight." She could. She just had to breathe calmly and... and not get mad when the butler refilled her lemonade, that was his job after all... she could just lay back and get a tan, like normal rich people, and she could keep her hands from claspig into tight fists as the vague insults of countless loops echoed in the back of her mind reminding her of her weak eyes or broken brain because really those were the exception, not the rule, and she didn't destroy Town Hall as often anyway and she was a mature and fully responsible mare-

...okay, so she had just crushed the lemonade glass. Deep breaths. Focus on something else.

\* \* \*

><p>Cadence rubbed her forehead as she ducked the latest thrown chair; grumbling at the stupidity at being a talk show hostess of The Caddy and Maccy Talk Show hour. Signalling to her co-host Big Mac that she was taking five, she moved to get off stage, dimly aware she was leaving Big Mac in a situation where he needed to be talking a fair deal but she did not care. She <em>hated<em> this kind of garbage when they had access to TV; all the relationships ruined at the lies and cheating revealed by the careless hosts and very little done to fix it. Sighing as she stormed into the hallway and into her private dressing room, she flipped on the TV and hoped that there would be something better than being world famous for destroying rela-

Blinking, she saw their was breaking news that an international master thief was reported in the area she was in. Turning her head at a scraping against the floor, she saw a very annoyed Shining Armor looking at her.

"Not. A. Word." he said through clenched teeth as Cadence put the dots together.

Nodding her head, she held her husband close, running her fingers through his hair to calm him down as well as herself.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

145.1: Culinary options. (MtG cross)

>145.2: Some things are impossible to take seriously. (MtG cross.)<br>145.3: Oh, gods. A Nightmare Parent.

>145.4: Sometimes it's nice to just sit on top of a pole and go "ommmm...". (Star Wars cross)<br>145.5: It's hard being interrupted during public speaking.

>145.6: Some things are impossible to live down.<br>145.7: Ah, so you're a Waffle mare?

>145.8: Out of the mouths of babes.<br>145.9: Variety is the spice of life.

>145.10: See remark about living things down.<br>145.11: Yggdrasil likes pancakes.

>145.12: Being outinsaned can be worrying.<br>145.13 Skellington cast. (Crossover with e.g. Nightmare Before Christmas)

>145.14: This is just getting silly.<br>145.15: Gendo, oh no! (Crossover with Neon Genesis Evangelion.)

>145.16: Caution. Do not approach dreams of elder goddesses, even part time ones. They have a habit of being strange.<br>145.17: Shave and a haircut, two bits.

>145.18: There's a formula to these things.<br>145.19: Musical authorities.

>145.20: Today is Opposite Loop.<p>

## 153. Chapter 153

### 146.1 (Detective Ethan Redfield)

Spike awoke cleaning the library as he often did just before Twilight would enter and announce her plans for the loop. Oddly enough, the Library seemed a bit messier than usual, with books laying scattered across the room. He put his feather duster under his arms and pondered how Rarity would appreciate another trip on the cruise liner he kept in his subspace pocket. His pondering came to an end when the door opened, issuing Twilight, with her eyes twitching, "Pack your bags, Spike, we're vacationing on the moon this loop."

This surprised the dragon youngling. "Wha-why Twilight?"

Twilight levitated Spike onto her back and teleported to Ponyville, then Canterlot Castle, and finally the Griffon Kingdoms. Derpies, Derpies everywhere. Derpy had literally replaced everyone but Twilight and the dragons. When studying her memories, Twilight realized she was born with a genetic mutation which made her different from all the Derpies. Each one had retained their cutie

mark and personality, but they all had Derpy's destructive, accident prone quirk. Literally, Equestria constantly destroyed and rebuilt itself every day. Further, Celestia had also been replaced by Derpy, and surely Luna had been as well. Her return would probably herald the destruction of the planet as they knew it.

Spike was quick, pocketing several gems he had saved. Within moments, they were gone.

\* \* \*

><p>146.2 (Gamma Cavy)<p>

Twilight!" Dash screamed. Twilight looked up. "You have to help me! It's horrible!"

"What's horrible?" Twilight asked.

"This loop! All pegasi can only hover like bees!" Dash's speech was broken and distraught. "And fly slowly! The princess is the only one who can fly the way we should!"

This setup seemed familiar. Twilight puzzled, even as she patted Dash soothingly.

Oh. A thought clicked into place, with the memory of a long ago loop. Only hover like bees. Click. A loop where the laws of physics were enforced. Click. The princess, whose wings were larger, could truly \_fly\_.

"Dash, I know what the problem is," she began, and was nearly bowled over by a distraught pegasus.

"What is it?!" her friend's eyes were bloodshot.

"The magical field that saturates Equestria this loop is too weak to support flight with wings that are too small to generate lift." Twilight explained. "Celestia can fly because her wings are five times larger than those of a pegasus."

"What good does that do me!" Dash snarled.

"Ascend, and go for your full alicorn state, the one you have in Sisters loops."

There was a flash, and five seconds later Dash, full alicorn, with large wings, hugged Twilight and took off.

The resulting rainboom destroyed the upper half of the library.

\* \* \*

><p>"Dash, why didn't you think of ascending yourself?"<p>

"I panicked. Loop memories just stated that this was the way it was, and the princess is supposed to be able to fly because she uses special magic from having lived so long."

\* \* \*

><p>146.3 (fractalman)<p>

Once upon a time, two sisters controlled the weather. The younger sister ensured it rained whenever we started to dry out, the other ensured the sun came out whenever we started to get too wet.

After a sibling spat got out of control, the older sister grabbed the Elements of Slime, only for both to be banished. Since then, we have had to control the weather ourselves, which is extremely exhausting.

However, it is said that after a thousand years, they shall return. What will happen then, none can say.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Slimemold closed the slime-proof book with a psuedopod. She both chuckled and shook her head, flinging a piece of goop away in the process.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Wahoo! We're Smooze this loop!" yelled the pink eyeless blob known as Pinkie, as she spread herself out over Jellycube Corner. "Now I understand why the Smooze likes to Smooze so much!"<p>

"I have to admit, this is more awesome than I expected." said a rainbow puddle with one eye-stalk.

Twilight chuckled, and then rolled two of her five eyes when Pinkie started singing the Smooze song.

\* \* \*

><p>146.4 (Evilhumour)<p>

Thor had to bite back his laughter from what he was seeing.

While it was often Odin fought against Surtur, and the fire demon would spend his time regaining his strength and power to fight Odin once more, Odin was oddly quiet about the battle this loop. He had to dig long and hard to discover the truth, journeying into the Frost Giant's land to where the blade would be.

Only to find \_something\_ else and who would be playing Anchor for this loop.

Smashing the ice around looper, he helped her to her hooves.

"I suppose it \_is\_ true," he said as she glared at him, daring him not to say the words. "Surtur will wield Twilight, the end of the gods."

"Very funny Thor," the purple pony muttered, covering herself with her wings. "I'm surprised that this hasn't happened before."

\* \* \*

><p>146.5 (Gamerex27)<p>

"Twilight?" Spike asked, as he Awoke. "Nyx? Where is everypony?"

"Down here!"

"Huh?' he asked, looking around. No matter where he looked across the room, he couldn't see anyone.

"I \_said\_ down here!"

Spike looked down. Slowly, he brought his paw up to his mouth, in an attempt to stop himself from laughing.

"Yeah, yeah, laugh it up," the olive-sized Twilight muttered.

"My \_Little\_ Pony?" Spike asked, still holding in his laughter.

"C'\_mon\_, you barking \_tree\_, didn't you make this joke \_already?!\_" Twilight groaned, cursing out Yggdrasil. "Okay...looks like everypony is no bigger than a small fruit this Loop. Like a grape. The Princesses are the size of grapefruits."

"So...does that mean...?" Spike asked, his eyes lighting up.

"Yes, we may be able to trap all the villains in hamster balls this time," Twilight confirmed, as she climbed up Spike's body and settled on his shoulder. "Now, my loyal assistant, to the pet store!" she declared.

\* \* \*

><p>146.6 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

The leaves fell in showers from the trees, aided by of dozens of earth ponies and their stamping hooves.

Pegasi heaved and towed and bundles of heavy clouds full of snow, fresh from Cloudsdale.

And in the town square of Ponyville the Great and Powerful Trixie pattered around her wagon in preparation of a show... a process which, Twilight Sparkle and Rainbow Dash noted, paused every two or three minutes while Trixie took an extended and longing look up at the great pegasus city in the sky.

"I told you you shouldn't have told her what my unAwake self did in baseline," Rainbow Dash grumbled. "Now without Chrysalis Awake, she can't think of anything else. Her tour stops trail along after Cloudsdale, have you noticed that?"

Twilight sighed and nodded. "Do you think we should let her, then?"

"Hey, you told me I didn't cause any permanent damage when I did it," Rainbow Dash shrugged. "So long as there's no explosives in it besides magic, I don't see a problem."

"Okay, then," Twilight nodded. "You go tell her. I'll issue a proclamation delaying the official start of winter for two days.

Celestia should trust me for that long, at least."

While Twilight Sparkle flew off to compose an official princessly edict delaying the solstice on the legal principle Principitrix Crede En Me, Dash circled down to the stage under assembly. "Trixie," she said, "how are you feeling?"

"Oh, Trixie is well enough," the showmare said lightly. "Trixie has conducted herself well. The performance is all, you know... no matter how small... no matter how few attend..."

"That bad, huh?" Rainbow Dash hovered more closely. "We've noticed you're not on your A-game. Twi and I had a talk, and we've decided... you officially have permission to weaponize winter."

"Beg pardon?"

"Oh, come on, don't pretend. We know you want to. You've got until sunup day after tomorrow to deploy your best snow bomb on Ponyville. No chemicals, no nukes, just magic."

Trixie's lip quivered. "But... Trixie doesn't want to be a problem..."

"Look," Dash snapped, getting a little annoyed, "the three of us are the only Loopers here, and Twi and I are giving you a blank check. No consequences, no reprisals, no lectures. Just go get it out of your system already!"

A twinkle appeared in the Great and Powerful Trixie's eyes. She began to tremble, then to quiver, then to bounce like a jumping bean around her little wooden stage. Her rapidly rising squeal of delight blended with an ominous hissing sound apparently coming from her tail. Dash, having experienced this with Pinkie Pie many times before, cleared out of the area.

"WHOOPEE!" With a flash of light and a series of multicolored explosions, Trixie rocketed into the air, the ballistic arc of her flight aimed directly at Cloudsdale's weather factory.

Thirty-six hours later, just before dawn, a large steel-gray ball of concentrated weather magic, complete with guidance fins, the words FAT MAN stenciled on the side, dropped out of a much larger cloud.

It wore a Santa hat.

\* \* \*

><p>146.7 (Gamerex27, Evilhumor, Dave ID)<p>

"WHAT?!" Ivory Scroll screamed. "That...that...this is so imbalanced!\_"

"If ya wanted a balanced game," Applebloom said, smiling, "ya shouldn't've played Chaos!"

"'When you flip this card, lose the game?!'"\_ the mayor repeated. "Argh...that's it."



"What's it?" Discord asked, putting some more bits into the pot.

"I'm making an expansion to this," she growled. Snatching the game rules off the table, she put her player token and set of dice back into the box, watched it turn into a bunch of grapes, then snorted. "\_Someone\_ needs to fix this. I think I'll take my vacation now to figure all this out."

"...Are you even allowed to make expansions to the game?" Sweetie Belle asked Discord.

"It's \_Chaos!\_" the spirit of entropy said, half-offended. "Of \_course\_ you can! What fun is a game when you just use the same rules over and over!"

"Or ya just hide some cards in your mane and cheat like hell!" Vinyl grinned.

"Yeah, you can do tha-wait, \_what?!\_" Discord squeaked. "You'd cheat at my own game?"

"How is it cheating when there are no rules?" Sweetie tilted her head, causing him to sputter in anger.

"It's the spirit of it! It's random to the extreme, and cheating adds a sense of order!"

"I saw you pull a punchcard out of your eyelid." Vinyl pointed out.

"...I \_made\_ the game!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"Wadda ya <em>mean<em> I'm \_banned\_ from playing the game?!" Vinyl shouted at the cottage door, where a pouting Discord was floating. "Well \_feh\_, I can still play it if I want and I'll do it rig-huh?" she blinked as Ivory hoofed her a scroll as Shining Armor stood next to her. Opening it up and quickly reading it, her jaw dropped to the floor. "You're \_suing\_ me?!" She squeaked as Shining Armor began to direct her to a more private and secure location.

"That'll show her." Discord smiled as he whipped his tail at Angel, launching the rabbit into the sink.

"And that'll show him, jerk who stole my cookies."

\* \* \*

><p>146.8 (AnonymousAsk, fractalman)<p>

"\_This\_ day is going to be perfect... The kind of day I've dreamed since I was small...\_" Began Chrysalis when-

\*Knock Knock\*

The sound of someone knocking on the door surprised her for a moment, after which she smiled, got back in character, and glanced in the

mirror one more time.

"Coming!" She shouted as she went to the door with a smile.

As she opened the door she was surprised to see one of the flower fillies in the door-a little white filly to be precise.

"So, what can I do for you?" Asked Chrysalis with her false smile.

"Um, I wanted to ask you a couple of questions for my school paper, the Foal Free Press. Me and my friends decided to interview famous ponies to increase the sales. I know you are very busy but it will be only a couple of minutes," said the filly, looking at the disguised queen.

Chrysalis looked at the filly, considering: she could send the filly to the caves, but then she'd have to find another flower filly, and the disappearance of the bridesmaid and Twilight Sparkle had already begun to raise awkward questions. No sense getting discovered prematurely.

"Please let me in...please..." The little filly looked at the Changeling Queen with puppy eyes until she broke and let her in.  
"Wow, these are very cute suits and dresses"

"Um, yes of course..." Answered Chrysalis as she considered simply hypnotizing the filly into leaving her alone.

Chrysalis closed the door and sat down in front of the mirror.

"So, let's begin the interview. The first question is simple: do you like short names? Maybe Chrys, Chryssie, or Chrysti?" asked Sweetie Belle as the Changeling Queen looked surprised.

"Well...I...that's a strange question, but my lovely husband usually calls me Caddy." said Chrysalis as she tried to remain calm.

"Of course. But tell me, Queen Chrysalis, how many children do you have?" Asked Sweetie Belle.

"Chrysalis? I...don't know what you are talking about. Don't tell me that Twilight spread lies about me?" Chrysalis was panicking; it was all she could do to look mostly calm, a trace upset, and a trace confused. Her voice betrayed her, however.

"Oh, don't worry, this interview is actually very secret, only a few ponies read the foal free press anyways." commented Sweetie Belle with a cute, innocent smile.

"Of course, but I don't know where that strange idea came from, you foals sometimes have a too hyperactive imagination" Smiled Chrysalis, laughing nervously, still hoping that the situation could be salvaged.

"Oh, come on Chryssi-can I call you that? OH! I know! I'll reveal my own true form so that you can feel safer!" said Sweetie Belle as she began to glow. Suddenly a pair of wings appeared on her sides.

"Wh...What? An Alicorn! But how?" Asked Chrysalis, all semblance of calm gone.

She tried to think fast. Sure, the alicorn was just a filly, but she needed every scrap of love she could hold in case she had to get into a fight with Celestia or Luna. Not to mention, this filly had known who she was, and didn't seem to think it was a big deal; who knew who else knew!

"So. Let's talk about your plan. I'm assuming you plan to put us all into cocoons, but what then? You realize you'll be discovered, right? Even if you replace everyone, all it takes is for one changeling to slip up, and then you'll be discovered anyways. And how do you plan to control the sun? Do you even know the spell to move it? If you don't move the sun, you'll be discovered for sure."

"Well...I..." stammered Chrysalis as she began to realize that her invasion plan wasn't quite as solid as she'd originally thought.

"Even if you managed to conquer Canterlot, or all of Equestria, there is still the matter of the dragons, the minotaurs, the griffons, the zebras...Equestria has plenty of allies who would be rather perturbed at the idea of being stuck into cocoons. Can you really hold off against all of them? What happens if all the chaos of battle weakens the seal on Discord's prison? It took the Elements of Harmony to beat him last time." continued Sweetie Belle, but the changeling queen was already out cold.

Chrysalis proceeded to dream of her children being trampled by ponies, roasted by dragons, torn apart by griffons, as then spit-roasted by Discord atop a dragon flame. Her nightmare only got worse as Sweetie Belle continued to list off the things that made Equestria a death world.

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, Twilight was waiting with Rarity and the real Cadence in the reception hall.<p>

"Are you sure it was a good idea to send Sweetie Belle alone to meet Chrysalis?" Said Rarity.

"Don't worry, she's Awake." Said Twilight.

"It's not \_her\_ I'm worried for."

\* \* \*

><p>146.9 (fractalman)<p>

Discord chuckled as the purple alicorn approached his throne. "So, a pretty pony princess wants to play? Well, let us play snake!"

He snapped his fingers, and Twilights legs appeared in the air next to him.

They promptly glowed, and started to kick him.

"Hey! Stop that!" exclaimed Discord, before snapping his fingers

again, returning the legs to Twilight. "Alright, lesson learned, don't take your legs. Hmâ€|I know, let's play keep away with your horn!"

He was rather perturbed when the horn glowed and floated out of his paw and over to Twilight.

"This is kind of fun" Said Twilight with a smile. "What other games would you like to play?"

Discord glowered. "That does it, I'm turning you into something edible and eating you."

He snapped his fingers, and Twilight turned into a small purple jawbreaker. A small purple jawbreaker that started to giggle. "Oooh, ooh, I know this part! This is the part where I keep my powers as an alicorn, only they're concentrated into a jawbreaker sized package!"

\* \* \*

><p>When Celestia and Luna arrived with the Elements of Harmony to seal Discord away, what they saw, combined with the chaos magic in the air, made their jaws drop off and land on the ground.<p>

"OW! OW! PLEASE! STOP! I YIELD!" yelled the draconequus as he got the literal stuffing beat out of him by a giggling, flying purple dot.

\* \* \*

><p>146.10 (Evilhumour)<p>

Cadence sighed, looking at the young, dreamy stallion in practicing his forms over and over again.

"-nd I do not know how to talk to him Aunt Luna," Cadence whined, rolling her head around as said princess Woke up.

Luna blinked and smiled to herself. This was something that she had been desiring to do for quite some time.

"Worry not, dear niece, auntie Lulu has it covered," Cadence head shot upright, worried that her aunt would do something bad if she called herself 'Lulu'.

"It will not be over the top, will it?" She asked with some fear in her voice, to which Luna simply walked over to the young alicorn.

"Trust me, my dear Cadence, we shall be subtle as the night."

\* \* \*

><p>There was a sudden <em>CRASH<em> as the window above exploded, causing all the cadets to hit grass in fright. Shining Armor blinked as pink and blue object landed in front of him, turning out to be Princess Luna holding a wide eyed Princess Mi Amore Cadenza in her hooves.

"\*\*GREAT AND NOBLE SHINING ARMOR, OUR DEAR NIECE WISHES TO MEET WITH

YOU AS SHE HAS LONG ADMIRERD YOU FROM AFAR!\*" Luna shouted without going into the royal canterlot voice \_somehow\_, with a straight face as the mare in her hooves face became a few shades more pink with her eyes turning into pinpricks. "\*\*\*AS WE KNOW THAT YOU HARBOUR THE SAME FEELINGS FOR OUR DEAR NIECE, WE FELT IT PRUDENT THAT YOU TWO SHALL MEET FORMALLY.\*)" While still holding Cadence, princess Luna tapped Shining Armor's nose with her wing. The stallion in question had his coat turn pink from blushing, his eyes mirroring the mare above him. "\*\*\*YOU TWO SHALL BEGIN TO COURT EACH OTHER, TAKING THE STEPS SLOWLY. WE ADVISE YOU TWO TO SHARE INFORMAL NAMES AS A FIRST STEP!\*)"

There was a dreadful silence as everypony looked at the two young ponies in question with Luna still managing to keep a diplomatic face.

Squeaking, the stallion cadet tried to cast his eyes downwards before the blue wing held his head upright.  
"MynameisShiningArmorbutyoucancallmeShiny."

"MynameisMiAmoreCadenzabutyoucancallmeCadence." the young alicorn mare squeaked out in response.

"\*\*HUZZAH! YOU TWO HAVE BEGUN TO TALK!\*" Without any warning, Luna dropped her niece to whom the stallion gallantly caught with his person. "\*\*\*WE HAVE DONE OUR GOOD DEED OF THE DAY!\*" With that, Luna flapped her wings, ascending into the sky. "\*\*\*IF YOU TWO NEED ANY HELP DO NOT HESITATE TO ASK AUNTIE LULU!\*" And then faster then Celestia was when cake was involved, she was gone, leaving two very awkward ponies looking at each other.

\* \* \*

><p>146.11 <strong>Haystuck, Part 1<strong>

(Bliss Authority)

Your name is TWILIGHT SPARKLE and oh boy, DO YOU LOVE BOOKS.

\* Ping the other Loopers.

Good idea. You get a METRIC BALE OF RETURN PINGS, followed by a friend request on the FriendPrank network.

\* Consult loop memories.

Oh, son of a birch, this is a fused loop with SBurb, isn't it? You can tell on account of your LOOP MEMORIES insisting that you're part of Celestia's beta test group for a game called SBale.

\* Be the Anchor.

Your name is JOHN EGBERT and you are inexplicably a tiny pastel colored horse.

(Alex Prior)

\* John: Mental Breakdown.

You gallop in a circle in obvious PANIC. You have never had such a STRANGE and SLIGHTLY FRIGHTENING Loop before, and as such it is only

NATURAL for you to exhibit some DISTRESS.

(Archeo Lumiere)

Check Loop Memories ==

Your loop memories tell you that your name is Grinning Twister, and you do a double take as you realize that your name has the same initials as your old Chumhandle. You decide to check what your loop memories called FRIEND PRANK, to see if your friends are also here.

Be the other male. ==

(Alex Prior)

You are suddenly the other male.

Your name is Tenebrous Glasses, this time around. You are for some reason a MALE PEGASUS with an obsession with MUSIC and SUNGLASSES. You live in a CITY made of CLOUDS. You find this situation ODD.

What will you do?

You decide to check your FRIEND PRANK account. Inwardly, you are rather CONFUSED at the mess you find yourself in, but you are such a COOL COLT that you just DON'T REALLY CARE.

ONE (1) FRIEND is online. THREE (3) PRANKSTERS are also online. You decide to contact your friend first.

turntechGodhead [TG] began pestering ghostyTrickster [GT].

TG: john

TG: please tell me you are Awake

TG: this is sorta starting to weird me out a little

GT: dave!

GT: yes i am Awake

GT: now this may seem like a weird question and all

GT: but are you a pastel horse now?

TG: yes i am a gog damn horse

TG: but i am such a cool damn horse like you won't believe

GT: really? ok then this is not just me then

TG: of course it's not just you

TG: what kind of a doofus are you

TG: i bet the whole gog damn world is pastel horses right now

TG: later dipshit

TG: i have music to do

turntechGodhead [TG] ceased pestering ghostyTrickster [GT].

GT: wait!

GT: damn

\* Be John again.

(Archeo Lumiere)

You are once again Grinning Twister. In your confusion, you decide to check your room for any CLUES to what is going to happen later in the loop. A quick look around your room shows you that you still maintain your passion for TERRIBLE MOVIES, although you also notice that your PIANO is in your room, unlike usual, when it was in your dad's office. You also just realize that your computer was somehow typing both yours and Dave's typing quirks perfectly, despite having A SPEECH-TO-TEXT system. You also observe that there is a circle on today's date on the calendar, with the words SBALE BETA written next to it. This reminds you that along with your fellow Homestuck Loopers, you also have SEVEN OTHER FRIENDS on Friend Prank trustyScribe, adamantJumper, friendlyShaman, revelryDeclarer, rubyBlazer, saltedViridian, and precociousPastry.

\* Be one of the girls you've already met face to face.

(Bliss Authority)

Your name is ROSE LALONDE and you are clearly in a very special pastel equine hell.

Your LOOP MEMORIES apparently peg you as the roommate of one MAPLEHOOF, and as a student at CELESTIA'S SCHOOL FOR GIFTED UNICORNS. Apart from these minor details, your ELDRITCH TOMES, VIOLIN and KNITTING SUPPLIES remain intact, although the devil is in the details - you seem to possess several albums by one OCTAVIA PHILHARMONICA MELODIA, and for some reason a POINTY WIZARD HAT WITH SILVER BELLS ON IT.

Also, who are these strange people on your FriendPrank friendlist? Not Egbert, he's strange but not that strange. No, you mean this trustyScribe person of indeterminate gender.

== Be the trustyScribe.

You are now Twilight Sparkle again, and you're looking through your FRIENDS LIST with some dismay when one tentacleTherapist tries to call.

(Bliss Authority)

\* Be the party pony.

Pinkie Pie rolled her eyes. "Wow, the text parser thing is obnoxious. Are you done?"

John scratched the back of his head. "Sorry! That kind of happens in

my loops."

(Alex Prior)

He peered at the pink pony who had suddenly appeared in his room.

"Are you timey sorta pony around here? It's just that you are doing the same disappearing stuff Dave is doing. Not that I think it's bad or anything," he backpedaled just in case.

He thought for a moment. "Although I should probably warn you about the sudden occasional shifts in perspec-

\* You are now Rose again.

The Seer of Light smiled to herself. It seemed the commands were still a thing this Loop; it was the little things that gave her comfort. She decided to contact trustyScribe for now.

tentacleTherapist [TT] began pestering trustyScribe [TS].

TT: Hello?

TT: May I ask for your name, race, and gender?

TT: If it's not too much of an inconvenience, of course.

TS: Oh, hello! I'm Twilight Sparkle, unicorn, and female, in that order. May I ask yours?

TT: I'm Rose. Unicorn, also female. Now that that's out of the way, what do you know of Yggdrasil?

TS: Yggdra- Oh! You're Awake?

TT: Yes, that is correct. I presume I am speaking to a Looper then?

TS: Anchor, actually. Twilight Sparkle, Equestrian Loops. Nice to meet you!

TT: You as well, miss Sparkle. But for now I must leave you. I must verify the status of the rest of my friends.

TT: Goodbye.

tentacleTherapist [TT] ceased pestering trustyScribe [TS].

Rose ended the conversation deep in thought. Equestria, hm? She'd have to see about that. First though - an encounter with Maplehoof would have been inevitable.

\* \* \*

><p>146.12 (Bliss Authority)<p>

Adagio fought back the urge to laugh. They had it. They had them! One more verse and this entire school would be theirs, and there was



nothing the foals could do to stop them -

\_ "Voice of silver," \_Sonata sang.

It took Adagio a half second to realize she couldn't rhyme with that. It took her another beat to glare at her, and with that, the spell was broken. The students in the open-air auditorium looked back and forth at each other, blinking - actually thinking about the lyrics -

"Sonata," Aria growled, "That wasn't part of the song."

"It was so, look!" Sonata held up a page of sheet music.

Adagio snatched them from her hands, scanned them - then facepalmed. "Sonata," she said, "This says 'from Pinkie, with love' on the bottom."

It was about then that the theremin cut in.

Adagio glared at the group gathered on the hill opposite them - just as the drumroll started.

The speakers on Vinyl's car came to life, and Twilight - grinning from ear to ear - started to sing.

\_ "When they come on strong\_

\_ with a siren song\_

\_ Who you gonna call?\_

\_ VERSEBREAKERS!\_

\_ When a funeral\_

\_ Becomes funk and soul,\_

\_ Who you gonna call?\_

\_ VERSEBREAKERS!"\_

Adagio ground her teeth as the theremin solo picked up speed.

Sonata, being Sonata, sang along. \_ "I ain't afraid of no song!"\_

\* \* \*

><p>146.13 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight smiled to herself, enjoying the nice wintery da-

\_ PHAW!\_

Shaking herself clean of the snowball that hit the back of her head, she began to look around for the culprit when \_PHAW!\_

Spinning around, she began to reach for her magic and \_PHAW! PHAW!

PHAW!\_

"Okay, that's it!" she shouted, pushing herself upright and looking around the empty field she was in. "Where are you!?" she then quickly sent out a blast of magic to cancel out any spells hiding the guilty party only for

\_PHAW!PHAW!PHAW!PHAW!PHAW!PHAW!PHAW!PHAW!PHAW!PHAW!PHAW!PHAW!\_

Screaming in defeat, Twilight quickly teleported herself away.

A few seconds passed by until the ponies began to come to the center of the clearing. The tallest of the four of them looked at the sole stallion among them and dipped her head, her mane dyed to match her coat like the rest of them had done so.

"Report."

"Total success Celestia," the nephew said to his aunt, smirking up a storm. "I don't think Twilight had any clue to what happened."

"If you call freezing my flanks off for this prank a success, then yah, it was perfect." the DJ muttered grumpily.

"Well darling, if you had listened to me before running off, I could have made you something to make it easier for you." the last said with a smile on her face, still unhappy that she had to dye mane white.

"Why I-"

"Ladies," the stallion said, stepping the middle of them, "Before we get into any kind of fight, let's get back home before Twily figures out what happened and nails us."

With nods from all of them, they teleported back to the respective homes at prank well played.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight grumbled as she stood on her balcony, trying to enjoy the nice winter night. After being attacked by mysterious snowballs, she had to deal with snow raining from above in a clear day, snowballs attacking her from the lake, and she was <em>sure</em> Pinkie Pie had somehow managed to get an unAwake Derpy to hit every tree branch she was under.

Rubbing her nose and holding the cup of hot chocolate, she looked up at the night sky, the wide moon, the odd cloud above her, the twi-

"Wait, what?" Twilight blinked, staring up at the cloud before realizing one thing. That was no cloud, it was a massive snowball!

\_\*\*PHEW!\*\*\_

\*\*THUD!\*\*

"GAH!" Twilight shouted, sticking her head and hooves out of the massive snowball, flailing helplessly, spotting the faint outline in

the sky of three familiar ponies. "LUNA, NYX SPARKLE, AND CHRYSALIS, ONCE I GET MY HOOVES ON YOU, YOU ARE \_SO\_ D-"

\_\*\*CRACK!\*\*\_

"GAH!" Twilight shouted, face down as her balcony could not take weight of the snowball, leaving Twilight fuming in white rage.

\* \* \*

><p>As the friend looked out from the cafe, they had to ask themselves if they had went too far with their pranks. By the exploding geyser of snow and fire, they were close to saying yes.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>146.14 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

"Erâ€| Twilight?"

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Would you mind terribly helping fix up the automatic repair spell on the walls of the Boutique? I'm afraid it'sâ€| not functioning at the moment, so I've had to make some hurried repairs of my own. But as you can see, it's just not the same." Rarity gestured to the crude patches on her walls.

Twilight blinked. "Okayâ€| I'll help, but why do you have an automatic repair spell on your walls?"

"Because this loop, I have an older brother. And he's never quite learned how to use doors. Or he has, but chooses to ignore them." Rarity looked quite put out at this.

"Doorsâ€| oh. Oh no. Please tell me I'm thinking about the wrong stallion."

"I'm afraid not, darling. It'sâ€|"

There was a loud crash as a section of wall fell in, causing Twilight to flinch.

"YEAH! HEY, LITTLE SIS! WHAT'S UP?"

Rarity flinched. "My blood pressure."

"THAT'S TOO BAD! I BET A NICE, DEEP-TISSUE MASSAGE WOULD HELP!"

"Erâ€| no thank you, dear. I'll settle for my usual routine the next time I go to the spa."

"OH WELL. SEE YOU LATER!"

There was another crash, and another hole in the wall as Bulk Biceps, the only pegasus in a family of unicorns, left the building.

Twilight looked at Rarity. "Your next spa session is on me. Right after I replace your boutique with a replica made of adamantium."

"That's not quite what I had in mind, but I suppose it would workâ€¦" She sighed. "At least my little sister this loop isn't nearly as troublesome."

Twilight raised an eyebrow. "From the way you say that, I'm guessing somepony's replacing Sweetie Belle."

"Exactly. In fact, she's staying with me while our parents are on vacation, and I'd like to have this fixed up before she gets home from school."

"Not a problem. So, who is she?"

Rarity told her.

Twilight's eyebrow raised higher. "I see what you mean. And if you don't mind, I'd like to meet her when she gets in."

"Not at all, darling."

"Good. Well, time to get to work."

Several hours later, the Carousel Boutique had been completely redone (even if it looked exactly the same as before, sans the repair patches), and Twilight and Rarity were chatting inside over some tea, when Rarity looked at the clock.

"Well, it's time. She should be back from school any minute now."

Right on cue, there was a knock at the door. "Rarity?"

"Come in, darling."

The door opened, and a small head peeked in. "If you have company, I can go somewhere else."

"It's quite all right, darling, don't be shy."

"Allâ€¦ all right."

With that, Twilight watched in pleasant surprise as a cyan-maned unicorn who was normally an Earth Pony shyly walked in. "Umâ€¦ hello."

The lavender unicorn smiled. "Hello, Coco. It's nice to finally meet you."

Coco Pommel blushed. "Niceâ€¦ nice to meet you too. Andâ€¦ I gottagodomymhomeworkbye!"

Rarity shook her head. "Poor dear's even shyer as a filly than Fluttershy was in baseline. But I do care for her so."

Twilight just smiled and hugged her friend. "I know the feeling."

\* \* \*

><p>146.15 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

"HEY TWILIGHT!"

The lavender unicorn winced. "I'm right here, Rainbow Dash, you don't have to yell."

"I know, but... I'm so excited! My last loop was a really, really fun one."

Twilight smiled at her friend's enthusiasm. "All right, what happened?"

"Well, you know how Photo Finish is my mom some Loops?"

"Yes."

"Well, it happened again this last time. Except this time, I actually shared her interest in photography. And I think I'm gonna keep that skill, because I got some really, really good ones I just have to share. Here, take a look at this!"

Wordlessly, Twilight accepted the photo. Then, as she looked at it, her eyes widened. "Is that..."

"Your tree coming to life and kicking Tirek's plot back to Tartarus? Yep, it is."

Twilight smiled again, wider than before. "Thank you, Rainbow Dash. Thank you."

\* \* \*

><p>146.16 (RowanEx, few edits from BIOS-Pherecydes, idea from AnonymousAsk)<p>

"Uh... Fluttershy?"

"Yes, Twilight?"

Twilight couldn't help noticing the stripe of red on her friend's otherwise pure pink mane.

"How do you feel about... well, about all of this?" she nervously asked.

Fluttershy looked at Twilight, taking a moment to consider the question. "Well, not much has changed, other than the possibility of ruthless killing, but it's not that bad. I was lucky Spy was Awake too, at least I kept most of who I was."

And to think that Princess Luna recruited the RED Team to get you back... Twilight thought. "So, what are your plans today?"

"Anything that can help remove the less pleasant memories from before I Woke Up..."

"You and me both," Spy added beside her before he faced Big Mac. "Tell me, will Brain Bleach even work for this particular moment?"

"Um... maybe." Big Mac looked at Fluttershy, before heading to get a batch.

The masked human mercenary suddenly shuddered as he remembered one of the things Fluttershy said a few days ago. He did love the times when he and Fluttershy were visiting Teufort, learning her parents this Loop were war veterans, and Soldier's odd secret about cute things. Although

"Uh, Spy?" Fluttershy asked, "have you ever wondered why Engineer, or Daddenji as I apparently called him this Loop, was banging his head?"

Right. "Hub-version of this loop's references," was his answer, which sounded bad in his French accent. "Although, let us move. We have unfinished business to do."

\* \* \*

><p>146.17 (RowanEx)<p>

Twilight Sparkle Woke up on her room reading a book about the history of dancing. She checked her memories and her flank.

"Oh. That makes sense."

\* \* \*

><p>Vinyl Scratch watched Twilight dance a variety of dances. "It's really, really awkward to see Twilight dancing," she confessed.<p>

"Woohoo! This loop is my favorite!" Twilight shouted as she continued dancing, then she stopped after the CMC entered her studio. "Alright girls, Twilight Time!"

Rainbow Dash looked at Vinyl over a cloud, before staring back at Twilight. "I agree with you."

Still, they couldn't help smile to see Twilight have a dance cutie mark and enjoy the loop as a dance instructor. Although it couldn't get any worse when Tirek came and destroyed her dance studio, the Golden Oaks Studio...

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, Applebloom Woke up very late into the Loop that OHYGGDRASILNO-!<p>

She then found herself outside Twilight's dance studio which was blazing in flames. Her memories then came along as she noticed the Golden Oak Library and protected it by kicking off any burnt wood that dared to destroy it too. Vinyl Scratch and Rainbow Dash then carried Applebloom to safety.

"What's with this Loop?" Applebloom asked.

"You're Awake this late?" Rainbow Dash questioned back and Applebloom nodded. "Anyways, Twilight's an awesome dance teacher this Loop, and since her studio was her home, and well, you know what happened."

"At least I get to see the Library live for the day," the filly commented.

\* \* \*

><p>As they evacuated, Twilight had beaten Tirek in a dance contest. The next day, Twilight had to move to the Library because she lost her home that Loop. As awkward as it seemed for a dance instructor, she still enjoyed it.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>146.18 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight sighed, placing a hoof to her face.

"And what we did learn today?"

"...that I should wake up my girlfriend, ask her help to prepare a breakfast for my mother, and-GAH!" The yellow stallion jump backwards as the squirt bottle splashed water in his face as the ebony black mare glared at him.

"Dear, try that again without being an arse," Nyx walked past her mother and looked at her boyfriend. "Apologi-"

"But Nyxie, you were up last night for the other plans, and I wasn't going to wake you up for something as simple as this!" Lemon protested.

"I know, and I thank you for that sweetie," Nyx leaned over and gave him a peck on the cheek before booping his nose. "Now say you're sorry properly." She fluffed her neck out, pointing to Twilight which gained her some giggles from the stallion.

Calming himself, he looked at the purple mare. "I learned today I should be willing to ask for more help, that a recipe is there for a reason and I should not experiment unless I am sure, and I should always keep a fire extinguisher on hoof."

Twilight smiled and nodded her head. "Just one question, Leman, before you and Nyx go for your other plans." She dared a look outside, the giant mother's day cake monster being held back by a very eager and slightly scary Celestia, with Pinkie Pie narrating the whole fight. "You said you were making pancakes this morning. How the buck did you go from pancakes to that?!\_"

Lemon blushed as Nyx began to snicker, her boyfriend's inability to cook never ceased to amuse her. "I honestly have no idea how that happened."

Twilight sighed as she waved them off, receiving a hug and a kiss from her daughter and potential son in-law, and began to prepare

herself for how the loop would take her tree away in `_this_` time.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

146.1: The Book of Derp has only one word. "Run."

>146.2: You now have to handle physics.<br>146.3: Gloop.

>146.4: Dang puns.<br>146.5: Speaking of puns... (I can only assume that helpful but tragically misguided engineers designed everything.)

>146.6: This is known as a "Winterpocalypse".<br>146.7: Chaos is serious business.

>146.8: A free press is the only safeguard against tyranny. But it can be pretty tyrannical itself...<br>146.9: This is called "Using whatever body parts you happen to have".

>146.10: PROBLEM SOLVED!<br>146.11: I have no idea. (Homestuck crossover.)

>146.12: Oh, sheet. (Music.)<br>146.13: White on white, black on black, purple on fire.

>146.14: Caution: well meaning strong goof present.<br>146.15: Revenge!

>146.16: Apparently adoption can bloom on the battlefield... (Team Fortress 2 crossover)<br>146.17: "Danceoff, bro!"

>146.18: Lemon is your stallion for conquering a planet with a squad of men. Cooking? No. (40K crossover)<p>

## 154. Chapter 154

### 147.1 (Filraen)

Pinkie Pie was deep in thought. After all this was an important decision, one on which her fate for the rest of the winter hung. Immutable to even the surprisingly catchy tune in the background, blue eyes looked at the two options in front of her.

"Take the muffin, Pinkie!"

On her right there was a freshly baked strawberry muffin cooked with an extra hint of vanilla in the formula, its sweet aroma taunting her nose with the promise of deliciousness.

"No, the cookies are better."

On her left there was a plate of chocolate chip oatmeal cookies. With a quick observation Pinkie decided the cookies had about 25 chips per cookie, which in her experience made the best combined flavor on each bite. After all chocolate chip cookies were more than the sum of cookies and chocolate and that was the magic to its success.

Truly, it was a most important decision. After all, choosing the proper snack was a critical part of a meeting with her friends on the last day of winter.

"Hey, Pinkie! Have you decided yet?" Rainbow Dash shouted from her seat at Sugarcube Corner.

"One more minute!" After deciding on the cookies Pinkie Pie joined her friends at the table.



"What took you so long, sugarcube?" Applejack eventually asked her pink friend after finishing her pastry.

"We couldn't agree and I had to make the deciding vote." Pinkie answered as if it was the most normal thing in the world.

"'We'? But you were alone there."

"No, silly. I was with her." And with that Pinkie Pie raised her hand to point to her right shoulder.

Suddenly something appeared from Pinkie Pie's hair and stood on her shoulder. It was a small figure, a quadruped, apparently with the same kind of hair as Pinkie and no bigger than her hand. "Hi everypony! I'm Pinkie Pie, I'm Big Pinkie's pinkie angel!" The small figure said to the other four humans at the table. "By the way, why you didn't choose the muffin?"

Ignoring how low her human friends' jaws were hanging the human Pinkie Pie grabbed a cookie and gave it to the small figure on her shoulder. "Because I can share these you you, silly."

Silently, Fluttershy was quickly getting over her surprise by being captivated by the adorable image of the little Pinkie eating a cookie too big for her. Had she had a spare thought, however, it would have been about how she hated being seated by the window and being unable to get to the pony Pinkie Pie.

Meanwhile the human Pinkie Pie had grabbed another cookie and put her hand by her left shoulder. "I haven't forgotten you either!"

Another quadruped appeared, this time not was a Pinkie Pie lookalike, much to Rarity's silent relief; the world wasn't ready for two Pinkie Pies, much less three. The newcomer was a black winged unicorn, about the same size as the pony Pinkie Pie, who hovered a bit in place before landing on Pinkie Pie's left shoulder and accepting the cookie. "Thanks, Pinkie." But before she started eating the cookie she turned to address her human audience. "Hello, my name is Nyx. Today I'm Pinkie Pie's... dark angel. Please don't call me devil, I'm not evil thank you very much."

Snapping from the sight and deliberately ignoring the small voice shouting how impossible this all was, even for Pinkie Pie being Pinkie Pie, Applejack looked at the winged unicorn. "You sure you ain't going to cause trouble?"

"Don't worry, Applejack. I'm covering here just because Pinkie Pie asked me" Nyx said while pointing to the other equine before showing her food. "If you want to check for yourself you can always join the dark side. We have cookies."

\* \* \*

><p>147.2 (RowanEx)<p>

(A Late Mother's Day Tribute)

Twilight entered the library, exhausted from an unusual request Nyx asked. She then noticed something.

One, the library is unusually messy.

Two, there were traces of glue and paper all over the floor, sticking on Twilight's hooves as she walked cautiously.

Three, why did Nyx request a bag of red gems?

Her questions were answered as Nyx poked from the stairs holding a card which she accidentally dropped and somehow flew towards Twilight.

"Nyx, come here please." Nyx gulped as she went closer to Twilight who was reading the card. Twilight then looked at Nyx and pulled her into a hug.

Nyx then pulled out a few of the red gems and with Twilight, they carefully glued the gems into position.

On the card was the words, "Happy Mother's day!" along with a crude drawing of the filly and Twilight together, the gems forming a heart.

\* \* \*

><p>147.3 (Crisis)<p>

Twilight sat in the rather odd waiting room of the Pie clinic, thinking about why she was doing this.

\_"Hey, Twilight? You still having trouble dancing?"\_

\_"Kinda, why dâ€"\_"\_

\_"Great! Do you want to try and fix that?"\_

\_"Uh... yâ€"\_"\_

\_"Excellent! My family runs this super-duper-awesomazing clinic this Loop! Be there this time tomorrow and we'll get you all fixed up!"\_

On the one hoof, this was Pinkie Pie. Which meant that whatever solution she had in mind likely involved shenanigans Twilight would spend the rest of eternity trying to live down. On the other hoof, she was really curious as to whether or not they'd work despite that.

"The nurse will see you now," Marble Pie, or was it Inkie Pie this Loop? Twilight couldn't remember, announced from the receptionist desk and Twilight stood up and walked through the door the other mare pointed towards.

"EEEEEEEE!" Pinkie's squeal made Twilight's head ring as she closed the door. "You really came! This is gonna be awesome! Now," Pinkie pulled out a clip board from her hair, "according to this you claim an inability to dance, true?"

"Uh, yeah," Twilight gave her friend a level gaze, "you know that alrâ€"\_"

"Tut-tut!" Pinkie scolded. "The proper procedures must be observed. Now, when was the last time you tried to dance?"

Twilight sighed. "Three weeks ago at Vinyl's rave. I bruised seventeen ponies before they banned me from the floor."

"Ach!" Pinkie blurted in a bad accent. "A most serious case! I need ze closer look!" Pinkie then drew out what looked like a pair of those cheap x-ray glasses one ordered from the back of a magazine and put them on before staring at Twilight intensely. "Attempt to dance please."

"What, now? I meaâ€"

"Yes, now. I can put on ze music if you like, but I am needing to observe ze movements of your muscles and bones to determine ze cause."

"Ooooookay..." Twilight hesitated before beginning to do her best attempt at dancing, jerking and spasming as usual while Pinkie hummed at regular intervals and took notes while simultaneously dodging Twilight's limbs and peering at her intently.

"Ach!" Pinkie exclaimed eventually, causing Twilight to stop. "Zis is quite serious indeed!"

"What?" Twilight blinked. "Did you actually find out what's wrong wiâ€"

"Your Rumba vertebrae... It is out of alignment!"

"My whaâ€"

"Yes, yes! Quite possibly ze worst case I have ever been seeing! Or not seeing! Dear, dear... Normal chiropractic measures will be insufficient to correct zis... No, I am afraid zis requires... ze surgery!"

"Now wait a minuâ€"

"Twilight," Pinkie dropped her bad accent to stage whisper, loudly, at Twilight, "trust me, the more over the top I play this, the better it works."

Twilight groaned mentally. It was worse than healing with shenanigans. It was healing that ran on shenanigans. But... she still wanted to be able to dance for real. Even if it was just for one Loop. "Alright... I'll agree to the surgery."

"Zen we operate at once! Sign here please..."

Twilight signed the document Pinkie presented to her. The moment she finished the last letter of her full name, Pinkie screamed at the top of her lungs.

"ANASTHETIC!"

"Local or general?" Twilight asked curiously while trying to shake the ringing out of her ears.

"Hold still please," the stoic voice of Maud Pie sounded from behind her.

\_ 'Of couâ€" '\_

Twilight's mental sigh was cut off by a sharp blow to the head rendering her unconscious.

\* \* \*

><p>147.4 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Hey Dash, can I ask you something?" Vinyl looked up at the cloud where the rainbow tail was hanging tantalizing in front of her, begging her to bat it around, tug it like a kitty cat or even nom on -

"Uh sure, I guess, but are you Awake Vinyl?" Dash grumbled, shaking Vinyl out of her weird cat like mindset. She had no idea what just happened, and she was a bit worried she was getting a bit too bored.

"I wouldn't be bugging you if I weren't feeling Loopy." Vinyl rolled her eyes, watching the tail swing out of her reach, although if she pounced with her wub ho- "Okay, I seriously need to ask the Big Guy about this!" She muttered to herself, blushing as she shook her head clear.

"What was that Vinyl?" Dash blinked, looking down at her with confusion on her face.

"Uh, nothing at all Rainbow Dash!" she chuckled weakly, blushing as she rubbed the back of her neck. "I was certainly not thinking weird cat thoughts about your tail Rainbow Dash!"

Dash raised an eyebrow at this before backing up slowly. "Okay... what did you come here for?"

Vinyl sighed, kicking the dirt while she removed her glasses. "You know in the loops that we, you me and Flutters, sometimes don't have parents?"

"Yeah..." Dash rubbed the back of her head, looking to the side as the mare brought up this topic. "I do get paired up with that rainbow stallion being my dad from time to time, but if I have to guess you don't get that that often?"

"No..." Vinyl sighed, rolling her eyes before squeezing into herself. "Some of the times I just get one parent, and even then, they're usually not really there for me." Vinyl gulped before squatting low, leaning against a tree. She wasn't aware she had been walking but the solid trunk was good for her. "I mean, they are usually really supportive of me but at times..."

"They're real pieces of work?" Dash asked, looking at her square in the face with a concerned look on her face.

"Yeah," Vinyl nodded her head, trying to look to the side, but Dash's look held her in place. "At that's not even counting the orphanages

I've looped in as a little fil-"

"Hey, orphanages are usually bad by narrative causality from the get go, we \_all\_ know that." Dash pulled her into a hug, smirking a bit. "So let me guess; a slew of bad parents when you were Awake with Octavia not being available for you talk to made you want to chat with someone that deals with fluid parents details?"

"Yeah." Vinyl nodded, leaning into the hug, wiping her tears on the mare's coat. "That \_and\_ Flutters isn't Awake and Big Mac isn't looping either."

Dash huffed at that, before burying a hoof into the blue mane. "Oh, so I'm your last choice, eh?"

"Gah!" Vinyl protested weakly, trying to break away from noogies. "Stop that!" She giggled, flailing as Dash continued to noogie her.

"Not unless you tell me what the whole deal with my tail is about Vinyl Scratch." Rainbow Dash then stopped and \_stared\_ at the unicorn pinned under her strong arm and wing.

Vinyl simply gulped at this, knowing that things would be getting awkward fast.

\* \* \*

><p>147.5 (Evilhumour)<p>

## Part Six of One Crazy Week

Twilight groaned as she walked down the path to her home, tired and emotionally aware. It would have been better if she was emotionally drained from everything Chryss and she did but \_noooooo\_ the changeling decided to do the right thing before sending her off and refill her with \_all\_ of her borrowed emotions from their tests. She had experienced all of her emotions at once so she was very happy, very angry, very nervous, very calm, very excited, very scared, very bored and almost either \_other\_ emotion she could think of!

Mostly, she was \_very\_ frustrated and annoyed at everything, mostly the fact that she had to walk home with the array of different paint still on her coat which would take a \_very\_ long time to wash out now and she \_still\_ had this collar around her neck and the cork on her horn. Pulling in her wings, she remembered Chrysalis testing if she had been properly drained of her anger after being told she took hundreds of pictures for blackmail. Luckily for the bug, the test was a complete success as Twilight could not have cared less.

Glaring at the rising sun, and cursing it, she missed the dust up ahead in the street. She did \_not\_ miss when the familiar wagon pulled up in front of her, with a snickering blue mare that was desperately trying to stick to her lines.

"I, the Great and Powerful Trixie," she snickered, causing Twilight's eyebrow to twitch several times. Blinking, she noticed several ponies leave the back of the wagon who were vaguely familiar to her. "Wish to have a magical duel with the mare known as Twili-" she coughed, hiding back a snort of laughter, with the other ponies biting their

lips. "For a seat within Celestia's School for Unicorns!" She shouted, throwing a blind flare in front of her, which reminded Twilight that despite Chrysalis's attempt, there had been some side effects besides the whole overload of emotions at the end. Headaches. And this one was a zero point seven on a Pinkie filled with the super sugar invented by professor Membrane scale level of immediate pain and annoyance.

"Trixie, why the spruce are you bothering me about this?" She groaned, trying to facehoof but her damn collar blocked her. "Can you not talk to Celestia about th-

"BAH!" Trixie shouted, causing Twilight's ears to fold back. "Trixie wish to prove that Trixie deserve this place, and how else can Trixie do it if not by defeating her most prized and trained student in a magical duel? My, the only reason that Trixie can see that her student recently turned alicorn would refuse is," she gasped, playing to the surprised crowd of professors now noticing the purple unicorn they recently saw had wings now. So being an alicorn was ignored when she was covered in paint, wearing a stupid collar and a cork on her horn? "Is nothing more than a fake!"

Growling and grinding her teeth, Twilight tried to deal with sensibly so she could get home and hide the entire day away.  
"Trixie..."

"Is completely right, Princess Sparkle," a tall, beautiful mare said walking towards them. She was odd, now that Twilight focused on her. She had only been present on Saturdays if her loop memories were correct, she claimed her umbrella cutie mark was related to weather magic but she could not remember actually seeing it now and- "If you cannot prove you can defeat miss Lulamoon here, then we will have no choice but to expel you from the school, cut off your funding, and have you repay us for your trickery."

"Wait what?!\_" Twilight squeaked, her mind still trying to understand what exactly was going on. The mare didn't have that power over her school life, did she? And why did she agree to Trixie's pl-

"That sounds fine to Trixie, Miss Saturday." the blue mare in front of her smiled as she removed her hat and cloak from her person. "On the count of three, Twilight!"

"Wait, I don't-" Twilight sputtered, trying to take control of the situation. The mare Saturday had to have something to do with this fused loop she was in. She needed to-

"Two," Trixie's horn was glowing, forcing Twilight to focus back in front of her.

"Trixie, stop, I can-" She started to back up, unsure if it would be safe to use her magic now or if she had to wait longer.

"One, go!" Trixie shouted as she fired a stunning bolt of magic that caused Twilight's coat to puff out as it made contact.

Twilight was dimly aware as she ran from her friend, that Saturday would be no day for rest for her.

\* \* \*

><p>147.6 (Scorntex)<p>

Vinyl Scratch Awoke.

That came as something of a relief, as the last thing she remembered was noise, explosions and fire. In her defense, she'd been really drunk at the time, and the last truly conscious thought she had was "here, hold my dri-", and then it all turned into a noisy, fiery blur.

Actually, she still felt kinda drunk-y. Or hungover. Which explained why her eyes hurt so much.

\_So, it's gonna be like that, is it, Loop?\_

She tried getting up... whichever way up was. Then she became aware of the Purple Blob and the Blue-Purple Blob. Or, as she realised when she focused, Twilight Sparkle and Trixie (who was holding a martini glass... and grinning).

"Vinyl." Twilight said, once she more-or-less solidified (though Vinyl was going to have to ask her to stop swaying so much).

"Frugl." Vinyl responded, not daring to nod, due to the serious alarms from her stomach.

Twilight Sparkle frowned. This wasn't a "quest" thing, was it? Vinyl didn't feel up to quests, unless it was an Aspirin Quest.

"Do you remember what you did, last Loop?" Twilight asked.

Vinyl tried to convey, without saying anything too long or incriminating, that she didn't remember her last Loop at the moment, to say nothing of her Loop Memories (there was a voice that sounded like Octavia somewhere behind the alcohol fuzz, though). Twilight seemed to get the general gist.

"Well, no matter." Twilight sighed. "Because there are those who did."

Vinyl nodded. Well, she tried tilting her head slightly. Her neck really hurt for some reason.

The word "Trixie" came to her attention, and she looked in the general direction of Trixie. "wh s hre?" she managed to get out.

"\_Schadenfreude\_." Trixie said, far too loud, before sipping her martini glass. "Cheers." She boomed.

"I suppose I could explain..." Twilight said, "But I think this might be more effective."

"This" turned out to be several images, a large amount of which featured Vinyl, alongside several disreputably rich looking people, the sort of rich where they'd lost the ability to wear tasteful clothing, yet somehow managed to make it look \_good\_. Quite common

among these photos were two things: musical instruments, and two words. "\_Disaster Area\_".

Vinyl looked at the photos, then at Twilight, then back to the pictures.

"Huh." She eventually managed to produce.

"Yes." Twilight hissed. "As it turns out, getting as drunk as you did, and talking Disaster Area into playing the greatest hits of Queen with you is not a good idea, by any metric."

Vinyl blinked. Then she felt a hoof impact against her. It was Trixie, gently patting her.

"Don't feel down. The supernovae were spectacular to watch." She grinned.

Through the lifting haze, Vinyl noted the use of the plural. She felt her jaw drop. Twilight just looked increasingly annoyed.

"Yes. I was \_getting to that part\_." She stated. Then, she removed something from her pocket. It looked like a slide projector. Vinyl was now just sober enough to feel afraid. She took full advantage of it. Especially once she noticed the door to her room was closed. Suspicion told her it was most likely locked.

"So, we're going to have a private seminar." Twilight said. "It's called \_What Vinyl Did Wrong.\_"

Vinyl felt something nudge against her. She looked down. It was a bottle.

"When the time comes." Trixie hissed, "You'll know what to do with this. \_Good luck.\_"

And with that, the showmare teleported away, leaving Vinyl alone with Twilight, and her slideshow. And the bottle.

\* \* \*

><p>147.7 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight blinked as she tried to say something with nothing coming out of her mouth. Tilting her head, she tried to access her loop memories when Pinkie Pie bounced over.

The purple pony tried again to say something when Pinkie Pie flapped her gums in her usual rapid fashion, before holding up a large card with fancy writing on it.

\_'Twilight, you know how we are sometimes a cartoon in the hub word?'\_

Twilight tried to yes before remembering that there was no sound. She then blinked and facehooved.

She opened her mouth, spoke before taking the card into her own hooves.



\_ 'It's one of\_ those \_loop variants, isn't it Pinkie?' \_

Pinkie Pie nodded her head before bouncing away, with a grin on her face.

\* \* \*

><p>147.8 (Evilhumour)<p>

"-and while I am very pleased with your work, my faithful student, I have an important task for you this upcoming summer sun celebration." Spike read the letter as he Woke up. "I wish you stay at the palace and pay more attention to your studies?" Spike blinked and pulled back at the latter to reread it, letting his loop memories kick in-Oh \_tree sap\_!

Sighing, he left the empty room to find the party queen and hopefully get Twilight back to the palace before Celestia caught her breaking her curfew \_again\_. That, and hopefully get some blackmail material with Twilight 'The Rave Queen' Sparkle dancing up a storm.

\* \* \*

><p>147.9 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Gilda?"

"Yes Dashie?"

"We agree to \_never\_ speak of this again?" the pegasus looked at the griffon behind her.

"Agreed." Gilda nodded her head, walking alongside her friend, spitting out multicoloured hair from her mouth. "So how are you going to explain your tail to Rarity? She'll \_flip\_ if she sees it all short like if you cut it and the bite mark would be kinda obvious if you leave it as is."

"Gilda, once we agree to never to talk about you pouncing my tail and nomming on it, you do not talk about two seconds later!" Dash shouted, turning her blue coat red.

\* \* \*

><p>147.10 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Celestia thought she had appeased the Pink Cultist. She had even had her birthday party, which Pinkie had baked the cake for. It was Luna who had scared one of her cult preachers in the street, and Luna had apologized for it profusely. Why and how did this happen? Not the countless clones of Pinkie that surrounded her tower, that was easily explained by the mirror pool. No, why were the all Alicorns? Her eyes traveled around the room, noting that abnormally wide grin and the presence of horns and wings.

She picked herself off the center of the floor, where she had curled up into a ball, shivered in fear and wished they'd all go away. Her horn glowed as an ink well, feather and paper floated over. Twilight would know. This called for another letter.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Dear Twilight Sparkle,<strong>

\*\*Am I dreaming? Have I died and gone to Tartarus? Is this a new level the architects have designed and implemented, the Pink Level of Hell? Surely you would know why I am sitting in the middle of my tower with my windows and doors locked, surrounded by dozens of Alicorn Pinkie Pies. Have you been sneaking in to Canterlot's Star Swirl Wing again? Did she throw a Mega Ultra Deluxe Super Duper Massive Party? I know that was her life goal, but she Pinkie Promised to warn me before she did, so why am I surrounded by ascended Pinkie Pies? \*\*

\*\*Please tell me this is all a dream or that last evening was even more exciting than Zecora told me. Tell Pinkie she's not allowed to use the Mirror Pool ever again, with or without wings. And if this is all a dream or hallucination, tell her anyway. I can only fear what torment Luna is experiencing with so many Pinkies around.\*\*

\*\*Princess Celestia\*\*

Twilight turned to Pinkie, who looked a bit put out, "Might have gone overboard in my prank."

Twilight didn't say anything as she pulled out volume 3 of Things Pinkie is No Longer Allowed to Do in the Time Loops and thumbed it to chapter 5, regarding the Mirror Pool. She pointed a hoof at the top which read, \_'When using the Mirror Pool, never combine ascension and clones. It never ends well.'\_

\* \* \*

><p>147.11 (Gamerex27)<p>

"THE NIGHT! WILL LAST! FOR-"

"\_What\_ do you think you're doing?"

Nightmare Moon paused mid-gloat, and looked around, furious. "Who \_dares\_ interrupt me?"

"No, \_you\_ interrupted \_me\_!" said a mare as she walked out from backstage. Who looked \_exactly\_ like Nightmare Moon. From the armor to the Cutie Mark to the reptilian eyes to even the few stars in her ethereal mane clustered a bit too closely together, in the way some strands of hair would be out of place on somepony's mane. "I have no idea who \_you\_ are! I'M Nightmare Moon! \_I\_ will be the one to bring Eternal Night, not \_you\_, \_impostor\_!"

"You...you dare!" Nightmare Moon sputtered, her composure momentarily lost. "\_I\_ am Nightmare Moon!"

"No, I am." the other alicorn said, as her eyes narrowed. "Do you see \_this\_?" she said, pulling a mirror from backstage and shoving it in front of her. "Your mane is off! My mane-the mane of \_the true\_ Nightmare Moon-is black with white stars! Yours is \_blue\_ with white stars! Such an obvious pretender!"

"You foal!" the first dark alicorn hissed. "Who are you to decide what ou-my\_ true mane color is!"

"Neither of you have the right to decide that! Because \_I am Nightmare Moon!\_"

The crowd, frozen in a mixture of awe and confusion, gasped as a third Nightmare Moon touched down on stage, this one having a tail several inches higher on her backside than the other two.

"What is-who are-no!\_" the first Nightmare Moon ranted. "You must be illusions sent by my \_beloved\_ \_sister\_ to discredit my rule!"

"\_You're\_ the illusion!" the second mad Luna shouted, shoving herself into the first Nightmare's personal bubble and right into her face.

"I have \_no idea\_ who the two of you think you are," bellowed the third Nightmare, "but \_I\_ am the true Nightmare Moon! If you don't get out of my sight in the next five seconds, I will trap you in the sun right alongside Celestia!"

"You should make room for three, then," said a fourth Nightmare Moon (this one with a shorter horn) as she materialized on the stage in a burst of dark magic. "Because you are \_clearly\_ all impostors! \_I\_ am Nightmare Moon!"

"WHAT THE HAY IS-ENOUGH!\_" the first Nightmare Moon screamed in the Royal Canterlot Voice. "Your lives are forfeit! You will all die here, never to witness my glorious night for your crimes!"

"It's \_too bad\_, then, that \_you\_ must die, too," said a \_fifth\_ Nightmare Moon as she climbed up on stage, apparently having hidden in the stunned crowd for several minutes, glaring at them with eyes a \_tad\_ closer together than her counterparts. "Because \_I am Nightmare Moon!\_"

"No, \_I\_ am!" screamed the second.

"Foals! Clearly, I am the \_true\_ Nightmare Moon!"

"What nonsense you all spew! Clearly, \_I\_ am Nightmare Moon!" the second yelled. "Do you not \_see\_ this polished armor and \_obviously\_ correct\_ mane?"

"This is all a load of road apples!" screeched a \_sixth\_ Nightmare Moon as she walked onto the stage from the back of the theater. "You are all \_liars\_! Ah'm-er, \_I\_ am the true Nightmare Moon!"

"AAAAAAAARGH!" the first Nightmare Moon screamed, falling onto her haunches and clutching at her aching head with her forehooves. "\_WHAT THE BUCK IS GOING ON?!\_"

"Heeeey, everynightmare calm down!"

As one, the Nightmare Moons cut off their arguments and glared at the small pink pony who had stopped their debate.

"Now, I'm not totally sure what's going on," Pinkie Pie said cautiously, "but clearly there's only one way to figure out who the real Princess Luna is!"

"...and your method is..." the fourth asked.

"A NIGHTMARE MOON TRIVIA GAME!" Reaching into her mane, Pinkie pulled out a scoreboard, a large table, and five alicorn-sized chairs. "Whoever answers the most questions about Nightmare Moon's life, routine, body, brand of mane conditioner she uses, and all that other stuff will be crowned the real Nightmare Moon!"

"That makes no sense!" yelled the fifth Nightmare.

"Do you have a better option?" the third asked her. "Even though you are all obviously impostors, we are evenly matched in terms of strength. It is fitting that the true ruler of Equestria shall be determined by wits rather than looks."

"...fine," pouted the first Nightmare Moon as she sat down. "Let's get this farce over with."

As they sat down, nopony noticed two of the Nightmares locked eyes, and one mouthed a set of words to the others.

And even if they could read lips, they would have had no idea what "Best. Prank. Ever,"    would mean in this context.

\* \* \*

><p>147.12 (Evilhumour)<p>

Vinyl grinned to herself, banging her head as she played her wubs in the club, thrilling the crowd. It was good to get back to the basics, remind herself that was not only Vinyl Scratch, the best musical pony out there, the wub queen, the Looper Whose Own Awakening Had Been Dubstep, but DJ-PON3, the best DJ in all of Equs-

"THERE SHE IS!" A voice shouted out, causing the crowd to stop dancing and stare at the Captain of the Royal Guards run into the crowded room with other Day Guard unicorns running beside him. Before Vinyl could even react, she was in Shiny's pink shield bubble as the guards around him began to issue command to the crowd. Shaking her head, Vinyl tried to look at the furious Shining Armor but she tripped over her own hooves and landed splayed out on her belly as Shining Armor carried her out of the club she Woke up in and into the wide carriage, already being lifted into the air by bat ponies.

"Hey Shinny, what gives? You Awake over there? You know you don't go taking away mares to unknown places, right?" Vinyl tried to push herself upright when Shining gave her bubble a spin that made her land on her back. "Oooph!" Grunting, Vinyl rolled herself to a normalized position and glared at the stallion in the moving carriage. "You know, I wasn't going to tell Caddy about this impromptu abduction but if you do that again, I'll sw-"

"Vanilla, you promised not to say anything about that!" Shining Armor blushed, looking to the side.

"Vanilla?" Vinyl blinked, sending out a Ping, and only getting a

faint one in return. Shining showed no reaction.

"Sorry, \_Vinyl\_," Shining rolled his eyes, shaking his head. "I forgot you don't like the name your \_mom\_ gave you."

"My mom?" Vinyl blinked again, trying to get her loop memories quicker, as the carriage stopped moving.

"Yes dear," Celestia poked her head into the carriage. "Vanilla Scraffington Solaris, you have such a \_beautiful\_ name," Celestia said while pressing her hooves into her cheeks. "Now while I do not mind you going out to practice your special talent, you \_do\_ know that I would prefer if you had somepony with you to make sure nothing goes wrong."

"\_Mom.\_" Vinyl said reflexively, blushing and looking to the side before the Princess pulled her head back to face her.

"Now now, a princess does not pout, and girls that sneak out past their bedtimes are grounded for a week." With a smile, Celestia bopped her nose.

"But \_mom!\_" Vinyl protested louder only for Celestia to hold her mouth shut with her golden magic aura.

"Now now, none of that." Celestia shook her head, wrapping a wing around the DJ. "Now come with me, I'll take you back to your room as our dear friend here would like to visit your cousin again."

"\_PRINCESS!\_" Shining squeaked, looking at the ruler with a low hanging jaw.

"And can you two make sure you soundproof your room?" Vinyl shuddered as Celestia began to direct her out of the hanger and into the castle proper. "Hearing you two play your little games is \_not\_ something I want to hear when I'm trying to go to sleep!"

Shining simply turned a rosy red, blushing from horn to hoof as the two princesses left the room. As soon as they were out of earshot, Celestia gave her a look with a raised eyebrow.

"So dear, when are you going to stop making fun of them playing Candyland together?" Celestia whispered downwards.

"Once it stops being so funny to see him trying to tell his guards that they're just playing a board game and nothing else." Vinyl grinned, her bright red eyes catching Celestia's pink ones.

"\_That's\_ my girl." Celestia chirped out, puffing her chest out in pride as they turned down the private wing of the castle, laughing loudly together.

\* \* \*

><p>147.13 (Idea by AnonymousAsk, Rewrite and cleaning by BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

It was another normal day in Ponyville and Nyx was helping Twilight

dust and re-order the Library's shelves.

"Mommy, can I...?" Nyx began to ask, but was immediately cut off by Twilight.

"No!"

"But..." Nyx began again.

"No!" Twilight repeated.

"You don't even know what I was going to ask!" Nyx protested.

"The same thing you asked this morning, and yesterday and at every available moment all last week. No Nyx, I know you want one, but you cannot have Sebastian as a pet." Twilight said sternly.

"But why not? I will train him, and feed him, and go walking with him and..." Nyx pleaded, but Twilight stopped her again.

"First of all, how are you going to train a Manticore?" she asked.

"D'uh, I'm a powerful filly alicorn and the reincarnation of Nightmare Moon, not to mention your daughter. Plus if I have any problem the crusaders could help me." Nyx replied confidently.

"Of course they could." Twilight answered with a sigh. She could hear it already. \_'Cutie Mark Crusader Manticore Trainers Yay'\_

"But I think you're forgetting we live in the middle of Ponyville? This is not a good place to try training a manticore as a pet, what if something were to happen?" Twilight questioned.

"But... But... Fluttershy has Angel and he's way more dangerous." Nyx retorted, trying to convince Twilight despite her mother's reasoning.

"But Fluttershy is an expert in animals and Angel Bunny is not as dangerous as a Manticore." argued Twilight.

"Do you really think anything is more dangerous than Angel Bunny?" Nyx asked in disbelief.

"I... Okay, point taken... But a Manticore is still not a good pet. You're just a filly, what if there's a problem?" Twilight asked.

"Im not \_just\_ a fiily, I'm the reincarnation of Nightmare Moon... and we have a problem almost every week, how much worse could having a pet make things? Please Mommy, pretty please?" Nyx begged Twilight with puppy eyes.

"Sorry Nyx, That's not going to work on me, I'm already immune. If you want a pet, just ask Fluttershy for one, but don't disturb Sebastian or any other beast from the Everfree." Twilight stated, putting her hoof down once and for all.

"So... If it's in Fluttershy cottage and I ask Fluttershy you will let me get one pet? Thanks mommy, I love you!" Nyx said quickly as she ran out the door.

"A NORMAL PET!" Twilight shouted after her daughter's retreating figure.

\* \* \*

><p>147.14 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

**\*\*The Unsung Loops: Celestia's Cake\*\***

Luna felt just slightly bad doing this, but it was just too much fun. The Lunar Diarch had commissioned a single hallway in the castle with a podium at the end and an observation station warded with notice me not charms to avoid detection by the research subject. From there, she could put a wall, blocking access to the podium. She had tried glass, cardboard, plywood, and now she was on steel. She placed the catalyst on top of the podium, removed the cover and slid the steel blockade into place. Finally, she hid inside the observation station and waited.

She didn't have to wait long as the door to the hallway was gripped in a white magical aura and torn off its hinges. A familiar White Alicorn galloped right through the steel barrier, destroying it as if it were tissue paper, and gripped the catalyst in her mouth. She looked both ways, and trotted off to eat her cake in peace.

All the while, Luna was giggling quietly in the observation station.

\* \* \*

><p>During Discord's release, Luna waited with a box that supposedly held the Elements of Harmony. "Tsk, Tsk, not as good with your hide and seek anymore, are you my dear Luna?"<p>

The box vanished from Luna's hooves, leaving her with a bouquet of fish on her back. Luna closed her eyes and watched the already scrambled scrying spell she had placed on the box:

\_Discord gripped the box and flipped it open, revealing a full on Cheese cake. Since Luna was never much of a prankster, Discord held the cake for several seconds, scanning it to figure out the cake's secret. Only for a familiar White Alicorn to land a few feet away, grip Discord in her Telekinesis and fling him all the way to the moon. She trotted up to the cake, gave a look one way, then the other, and walked away to a private place to eat it in peace.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Luna watched with morbid curiosity as a changeling landed on the wedding cake and splattered it to pieces. The Diarch shook her head, "Oh, you shouldn't have done that."<p>

She looked to her fallen sister and shouted in the Royal Canterlot Voice, **\*\*"TIA, THEY'RE STEALING THE CAKE! THE CHANGELINGS WERE THE ONES STEALING YOUR CAKES THIS WHOLE TIME! CHRYSALIS EVEN ADMITTED TO IT!"\*\***

Celestia's eyes opened, fire burning in her eyes as the power of cake empowered her to stand once again. When her eyes landed on the ruined

wedding cake, a great cry rang out throughout Equestria, expelling the invaders and sending them all the way back to the badlands.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>(Eons of Loops later)<strong>

Celestia covered her face in embarrassment as Luna and the other loopers laughed uproariously. Applebloom had set up her memory to video device she used to show DT previous loops, and Luna had commissioned the mechanically inclined pony to build a movie theater in Ponyville for a "movie night."

Trixie raised a hoof, "Trixie asks, can you compile several memories together along with a musical number?"

Applebloom asked, "What did you have in mind?"

Trixie looked at her hooves, "Oh, just all of Golden Oak's more spectacular destructions played to the 1812 Overture."

Rainbow and Pinkie raised their hooves too, "Could we have one?"

Twilight facehooved, "My friends, everypony."

\* \* \*

><p>147.15 (Idea by AnonymousAsk, Rewrite and cleaning by BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

It was a week after Shining Armor and Cadence's wedding, and Twilight was talking with Celestia when suddenly the doors of the throne room opened and Chrysalis appeared.

"I have had enough Celestia, I demand you stop with your anti-Changeling spell and the hunting of my hive!" Shouted Chrysalis, surprising Celestia and Twilight.

"Chrysalis? After what you did at the wedding, you have the nerve to appear in front of me now and attempt to give me orders?" Celestia stated in outrage.

"Yes, I demand equality, I and my children deserve to be treated like any other pony!" Chrysalis shouted back with equal offense.

"That is what you want? After what you did at my niece's wedding? What of your crimes, are you prepared to face the consequences of your actions?" Asked Celestia, only to be surprised as the changeling queen nodded acceptance.

"Of course, if you will stop hunting my children you may scold me as much as you wish." Chrysalis responded, staring into Celestia's confused gaze.

"Scold? For your crimes you and the other changelings will be imprisoned in the Canterlot Jails." Celestia retorted.

"Jail? Ha! On what charges?" Asked Chrysalis



"Umm... We can start with your mind control of my brother and the flower girls." Twilight responded, having finally recovered her wits from the unexpected entrance.

"An offense which is punishable by a scolding, which you can begin" Chrysalis responded calmly.

"What? No! Such a crime is punishable by imprisonment." Celestia corrected.

"That's incorrect. Need I remind you Celestia of the incident involving your student? Does the name Smarty Pants mean anything to you? Your student brainwashed almost half of Ponyville! Your punishment was telling her it was wrong. If you were to punish me with jail time, you would also have to do the same with her." Chrysalis countered.

Celestia felt as if she had been struck.

"Uh...Yes well, What about your attempted invasion and the chaos you caused? My little ponies even now still have nightmares about the events of that day." Celestia said.

"Three words Celestia... Grand Galloping Gala." Chrysalis replied in a deadpan tone.

Again, Celestia felt as though she had been hit.

"Well... Err..." Celestia began hesitantly.

"What about kidnapping Cadence and trapping Celestia in a pod? Attacking the royal family." Twilight accused confidently.

"Meh, your friend Rarity also attacked a member of the royal family, and when she told Celestia she just laughed." Chrysalis commented uncaringly.

"But that... That is..." Twilight spluttered angrily, before Celestia interrupted her.

"Enough Twilight... She come here to be punished, and she is going to be punished, now leave us alone." Celestia said firmly. Unhappily, Twilight nodded and exited the room.

As the doors closed leaving Chrysalis and Celestia alone they both turned to look at one another, before breaking out into laughter.

"Sometimes is good to see that face on Twilight. I was surprised by your entrance, why didn't you tell me that you were Awake?" Celestia asked after she recovered.

"I wanted it to be a surprise, also this way I could see Twilight's surprised face when she lost." Chrysalis answered with a smile.

"You know that it is only because we have a Stealth Anchor and she isn't Awake this loop that you won, right?" Celestia asked.

"Maybe... I had a few comments about Nightmare Night and King Sombra

as well, but I didn't want to give her spoilers." Chrysalis replied.

"I see... Well... Twilight is waiting while I 'scold' you, so what do you want to do for the next hour?" Celestia asked curiously.

Chrysalis pretended to think about that for a moment before smirking. "Think about how to prank Twilight?" she suggested.

"Think about how to prank Twilight." Celestia agreed with a matching smirk.

\* \* \*

><p>147.16 (Alex Prior)<p>

"THE LIGHT WILL LAST FOREVER!"

Twilight yawned at the latest Celestia mock-up. So far, her mentor had been possessed fifteen times. THAT. DAY.

Celestia going Nightmare had lost its novelty rather quickly. The first time it had happened, she'd blasted her with the Elements rather quickly. The second time she'd shrugged it off as readjustment issues and given her counseling. Third time she'd been a bit worried. It wasn't until the seventh time that she'd realized it as the Loop quirk it was. She was rather embarrassed at her slow reaction. Oh well.

"Are you even listening, you moonlover?"

Twilight groaned. "You're decaying. Do knock it off, will you? This is getting ridiculous."

The flaming mare puffed herself up. "You dare?!"

Twilight nodded. Yep. She dared all right.

"I will burn off all your coat," threatened Celestia.

"That's nice."

"I will use you as a pillow."

"Nice to hear."

"I will send all your bananas to the moon."

"Good to know."

"...Your brother's pregnant."

"I'll send him a card."

"...can I go surfing?"

"Sure."

"Thanks!"

The gleaming mare shed her armor and took off to the sun. Twilight shook herself out of her stupor.

"Wait, what?"

She growled. "That... Sunbutt was Awake the whole time, wasn't she?"

Twilight started pacing. "If she wanted to go surfing, she should have just ASKED, but noooo, she has to go Nightmare every. Fifteen. Minutes. Every. SINGLE. DAMN. DAY!"

She threw her hooves sunwards.

"CEEELEEEEEESSTIIIIIAAAAAAAA!"

\* \* \*

><p>147.17 (Masterweaver)<p>

Ellen Ripley looked at the strange, flippered form writhing out of her crewmate's chest. "...What?"

The green creature shrugged. "Yeah, this is new to me." She glanced at the face of the woman she was crawling out of. "Oh come on!"

"Ah... do you and Lyra know each other?" Ripley managed.

"Yeah. We're the same person." The creature sighed. "Long story..."

\* \* \*

><p>147.18 (Gamerex27, Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight Sparkle Awoke. As did Spikelight, Applespark, Rainbow Sparkle, Sparkle Pie, Fluttersparkle, Twilight Rarity, Princess Sparkle, Princess Twilight, Derpy Sparkle, Bluesparkle, Twilight Bunny, Sunset Sparkle, Lemon Sparkle, and many, many more.

Slowly, every single pony in Ponyville left their houses and stared at one another.

"Remind me to yell at Mikasa sometime," muttered Rainbow Sparkle.

"It's not her fault that this glitch popping up," Fluttersparkle pointed out. "It's just named after her."

"Sooo...now what do we do this Loop?" Sparkle Pie asked. "I mean, from what I can tell, everypony in Ponyville is us. I-we-whatever have had Lonely Loops before, but never like this."

"Run experiments?" Twilight Sparkle Prime suggested. "I mean, we've got five years to work with this, and these circumstances can't really be duplicated. Anyone have any ideas?"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Twilight:<em>

\_Today I learned that it's surprisingly easy to play pranks on yourself when there's more than one of you. Just because you have similar ways of thinking, doesn't mean that you always know what you're going to do to yourself. This is actually helping me to understand my own thought process a lot better, so I can get to know myself on a whole new level! Sometimes, an outside perspective can really help with this kind of stuff.\_

\_Your faithful double,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle.\_

Response:

\_Look, you don't have to be so formal with me. Pine's sake, I AM you! And we'll get all the memories of all ourselves merged together at the end of the Loop, so I'll-we'll-know this either way!\_

\_Also, I don't think the replacements extend beyond Ponyville and Canterlot, nor do I know how this all happened before we all Awoke. I'm getting rumors from the Twilight Guard that some other places think I'm a cult leader inducting other ponies into the Cult of Twilight. That doesn't really make sense, since there's no shapeshifting or mind altering affect on the town itself.\_

\_Also, please ask Luna Twilight-or Princess Sparkle, whatever-to put the moon back into its normal orbit. It's not supposed to be a hoofball, even if she did shrink it down to use in a game.\_

\_Signed,\_

\_Yourself.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Sparkle Pie galloped into the library. "Prime, we've got a breakdown in progress, Sugarcube corner."<p>

"Right." Twilight Prime saddled her bags. "What's the issue?"

"Cupcake Sparkle just found out she's pregnant."

Twilight Prime blinked. Then she blinked again. "...right, the... twins, and, and Twilight Cake was her husband pre-awake. Yeah, I can see how that would be an issue." She galloped out the door.

\* \* \*

><p>Tirek came to Ponyville expecting an easy feast, from the banquet of stupid, weak ponies.<p>

He did not expect an entire town filled with countless copies of one angry alicorn, all of them pointing their horns at him and blazing menacingly with magic.

Naturally, Tirek did the only thing he could do in that situation.

He screamed like a little filly, turned tail, and ran all the way back to Tartarus, locking the door behind him.

\* \* \*

><p>147.19 (Masterweaver, wildrook)<p>

"Well," said the sorting hat, "this is... unprecedented."

The miscellaneous Lyra smiled as she summoned an extra chair at the mental round table between Sweetroll and Human. "That's just because you're not looping. I'm sure some other DIOD people have been to Hogwarts before."

"Mmmm, perhaps. But it does put me in a bit of a conundrum." The hat accepted the seat with a grateful nod. "I could, I suppose, sort you individually, but that would be confusing to outside observers. Or I could sort you all at once, but that wouldn't be entirely fair..."

"Ooo! Wait! Wait, wait!" Seapony bounced up and down in her chair. "So, I'm Griffyndor, right? And Misc over there can be Ravenclaw, mad scientist-"

"And you know, as a human-conspiracy theorist, I've obviously got the ambition and cunning to be Slytherin." Unicorn Lyra ran a hoof through her mane. "Matches my coat too."

Human Lyra frowned. "Hey, wait, does that mean I'm Hufflepuff?"

"You are pretty hardworking compared to the rest of us," Sweetroll pointed out.

"That's because I don't live in a magical world!"

"Alright, so you're a squib and I'm a Hufflepuff!"

"HEY!"

The sorting hat cleared its throat. "Nevertheless, the point is made. You could all fit into separate houses-"

"And that's exactly what we're going to do," Miscellaneous Lyra said with conviction. "You are going to sort us into all four houses at once." She grinned broadly. "It'll be a great prank!"

The sorting hat sighed. "Well... you are fairly unique. I suppose I can go with that..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Gryffindor! Hufflepuff! Ravenclaw! Slytherin!"<p>

"Oh, are these all the houses I am in?"

"Slytherin! Ravenclaw! Hufflepuff! Gryffindor!"

"I'll do my best to honor all four!"

\* \* \*

><p>Luna and Lyra stared at each other in silence.<p>

Ron coughed. "Ah... what are they doing?"

Hermione palmed her face with a sigh. "Telepathic conference. That's eleven personalities talking to each other at once."

"...Right, I'm making a runner. If anybody asks, Sirius kidnapped me."

"He hasn't escaped yet Ron."

"Bugger."

\* \* \*

><p>"And how did you get sorted into all four houses, young lady?"<p>

"Oh, I'm actually five people."

Cornelius Fudge sputtered. "Five-Five people? That's preposterous! No one person can be five people, and there are only four houses anyway!"

Lyra grinned broadly. "Well, one of us is a squib. The rest of us are magical though, pureblood, halfblood, muggleborn, and another muggleborn."

Her grin broadened as the minister continued his sputtering. She couldn't resist Veritaserum, but she could send it straight to her pocket from her tongue, a skill she'd developed that one time Bonbon was a mad scientist.

\* \* \*

><p>"Miss Heartstrings," Dolores Umbridge said, "you will write down 'I do NOT have multiple identities' onto the parchment 500 times...wait, what is that?"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Harry heard the explosion and face-palmed.<p>

"Seapony Lyra?" Ron asked him.

"In the same room as Umbridge," Harry replied. "Really, anyone who goes up against a Seapony without expecting overkill deserve no sympathy at all."

\* \* \*

><p>Bellatrix sneered as the girl fell, green smoke rising from her chest. Voldemort would be quite pleased to know that another of Potter's scumblood allies had fallen-<p>

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!" The girl sat up, glaring as tears poured from her eyes. "YOU BASTARD! YOU KILLED SWEETROLL!"

The death eater had a moment of shocked confusion before the witch was on her again.

Hermione coughed. "Wouldn't the Sweetroll personality return next loop?"

Lyra blinked. "Oh. Oh yeah, that's right!" She shrugged, absentmindedly delivering a high-kick to Bellatrix's chin. "Still pretty traumatic though."

The other young witch held up a finger, paused, then shrugged. "I'm not going to question it."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<br>147.1: Shoulder alicorn?  
>147.2: For me it's kind of "early", I'm a Brit.<br>147.3: Toon surgery.  
>147.4: Twitcha twitch.<br>147.5: Continued havoc.  
>147.6: If Trixie approves, then you may have overdone it.  
(Hitchiker's Guide cross)<br>147.7: \*piano music\*  
>147.8: That's one strange variant.<br>147.9: Catlike reactions.  
  
>147.10: It's a long series.<br>147.11: The tried and true method.  
  
>147.12: Miss Interpretation.<br>147.13: This is my... normal pet. He is called... Mann t. Core.  
>147.14: Movie Loop.<br>147.15: Royalpolitik.  
>147.16: Nag for victory.<br>147.17: Ew. (Aliens cross)  
>147.18: It's all sparkles all the time!<br>147.19: Best of all four worlds. (Potterverse cross.)

## 155. Chapter 155

### 148.1 (Masterweaver)

Vinyl cleared her throat. "Hey there Dash."

"Hey Scratch." Rainbow leaned on a post. "Wassup?"

"I was kinda wondering why there's caution tape around the library." Vinyl waved a hoof at the yellow border. "I mean the Summer Sun Celebration hasn't even started yet."

The pegasus blinked for a few moments, before dragging her hoof down her face. "Riiiiiiight. I forgot you're a younger looper. Okay, so... you know how Equestria is all sunshine and rainbows compared to other loops?"

Vinyl shrugged. "Sure, I can dig it."

"So what do you think would happen if, say, a nonlooping version of Pinkie Pie was dropped into ultra-grimdark-gorefest three thousand?"

"She'd snap like a twig and become a megadeath mistress of balloon

strangulation," Vinyl replied without hesitation.

"Yeah. Us loopers, we're a lot harder to shake, but..." Rainbow shrugged. "Sometimes we just get stuck in loops that are plain \_wrong.\_ Not harmful, mind you, just so opposite us that it... What I'm saying is Twilight's in a really delicate mindset right now, saw some twisted things, and we're working her back to sanity." She gestured at the tape. "So no books for now."

"Huh, okay." Vinyl rolled her eyes. "I mean, her daughter's dating the anchor of that ultradark loop, I'd of thought she'd gotten thicker skin, but... whatever. What loop was it, anyway?"

"Addams Family. Like, original comics Addams Family." Rainbow Dash shivered. "It would be so much easier if they were just \_evil...\_"

\* \* \*

><p>148.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Nnnnnnnnnrrnnrrnnrgh." Rainbow glowered at the pegasi milling about the cloud confusedly. "ALRIGHT! HER NAME is Clear Skies, HIS NAME is Open Skies, and if I hear any more of this Who's On First routine I am going to just straight up dock your pay!"

"But-"

"No buts!" \_Every\_ loop, every loop she had to deal with this. Why were pony names so prophetic?

\* \* \*

><p>148.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Oh, my beloved subjects," chuckled the dark alicorn, "It's been so long since I've seen your precious, little sun-loving faces."

Rainbow Dash snarled. "What did you do with our Princess?!" She tried to dart up to the stage, but was held back by Applejack gripping her tail with a roll of her eyes.

"Why, am I not royal enough for you?" the armored pony asked. "Don't you know who I am?"

"I know who you are!" Twilight shouted.

The alicorn smiled at her.

Twilight smiled back.

The alicorn frowned. "...yes?"

"Yes what?"

"You said you know who I am."

"I do!"

"So...?"



Twilight tilted her head. "...You asked if anypony here knew who you were. I said I did."

The alicorn blinked at that. "And... you feel no need to introduce me?"

"OH! Right! Sorry, that was rude of me. Everypony, this is Luna, Celestia's little sister." She held up a paper. "The princess said she's been on a forced vacation for a while so she wanted her to have a chance to do the whole sunraising thing. Welcome back party, as it were."

"Ooo! Ooo! I like parties!"

Luna frowned. "First of all, we are known as Nightmare Moon. Secondly, I seriously doubt mine sister would truly acquiesce to such a shift--"

"It says right here: 'Gone surfing, let Luna run things for a week.' There's a little footnote about keeping the moon moving so she can get killer waves--"

"--and thirdly\_ We have never risen the sun before and we certainly don't intend to now!"

"Aw, don't be like that," Pinkie chirped, having somehow appeared next to the alicorn. "Here, have some welcome back cake!"

Luna blinked, staring at the plate in front of her. "Did... didst thou just make this right now?!"

"Of course not, silly filly! I keep cake everywhere, in case of cake emergencies!"

The mayor cleared her throat. "Miss Twilight, I was not informed about this change in ceremony."

"Yeah, I was going to tell you, but I got caught up in Pinkie's Welcome To Ponyville party, one thing led to another..." The unicorn smiled awkwardly. "Wow, this has been a comedy of errors, hasn't it?"

"Doth nopony remember the threat of eternal night?" Luna demanded, trying to regain her position.

"Wasn't that Tirek's gig?" Applejack asked, letting Rainbow go. "Ah mean, that's what all the stories say--wait, are ya dating him or something?"

"What is this... dating?"

"Lingual drift," Twilight supplied, "it's like courting but more general."

"What?! Us and-?! No! Never!" Luna gagged. "The very idea!"

"So... what yer saying is you're here to protect us from Tirek getting eternal night."

"I-! No! We are the princess of the night, we are Nightmare Moon!"

"Oh come on," Pinkie said with a grin, "Nightmare Moon is just a pony-based evolution and collation of various prime figures in autumnal holiday tradition! She isn't real or anything. You're obviously real, so you can't be Nightmare Moon. Quod Erat Demonstrandum!"

"But-"

"Look," Twilight interjected, "we're kind of holding the record here for, well, longest sunrise, and if we keep doing this the other nations might very well go to war with us. I can understand if you're a little thrown off from your forced vacation, Luna, but-"

Nightmare Moon let out a scream of frustration.

\* \* \*

><p>148.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Whoa."

Fluttershy flicked an ear, turning to see a green mare with red braids dripping down her head. "Um. Hello. My name's Fluttershy." She held out a hoof with a smile, idly wondering what was going on in Ponyville-Twilight had told her that Discord planned a visit during this most recent expansion, deliberately coinciding with her Breezie Trip, but she seemed to have it in hoof.

"Tree Hugger." The mare stared wide-eyed at Fluttershy. "You're... really bright."

"Um... thank you?"

"Your aura, I mean. I've seen blissed out ponies of all colors, but you..." The mare waved a hoof. "It's like your vibe has been beating for longer than the universe. Radical."

"I... I don't understand-"

"Your chakras! Your energy, it's almost..." Tree Hugger stumbled forward. "It's righteous. You are... so enrapturing. Are..." She bit her lip. "Are you, um... the soul of reality incarnate?"

Fluttershy blinked. "I... don't think so...? I'm just an ordinary pegasus who, um, may be the chosen bearer of the Element of Kindness, but I'm mostly just an animal caretaker."

Tree Hugger winced. "Ooh, don't bend your waves like that. You're more. You're so much more... I don't know. You... you're so bright. I can't stop looking."

"...I, uh..." Fluttershy blushed a bit. "Are you... saying you're attracted to me?"

"What? Oh, no no, sorry. I don't think our auras mesh." The earth pony tapped her chin. "Or, well, they could maybe, but yours is so bright mine would be vanished... You need to find another universe

soul, if that's what you're looking for. I know better than to try to harmonize with somepony so... ancient."

The pegasus blinked. "Ancient...? Oh! Oh, you must mean-" She glanced around, then leaned toward the earth pony. "Talk to me later, during the closeup. I'll explain everything."

"I got you. Can't let the unenlightened know, it could wreak havoc." Tree Hugger hit her hoof against her chest and stretched it out with a lazy smile. "Blessings be upon you... not that you need them."

\* \* \*

><p>"So you're saying that this whole time, your stoner friend has been <em>loop aware?!<em>"

Fluttershy waved a hoof. "Well, it's more like \_looper\_ aware, and only in the loops where she actually has the aura vision... thing going on. I just explain things to her when she does."

"And you never thought to tell anyone?" Discord clutched his chest. "I'm shocked, I really am!"

"Well, she's..." Fluttershy paused for a moment. "Like you said, she, ah... likes recreational drugs, and... would you have believed me?"

Discord flipped a coin. "Heads yes, tails no." Unfortunately the coin hatched into a smarginofigus which swam out the window. "Huh. I guess I don't actually know."

"Yeah..." Fluttershy shrugged. "Well, in this most recent expansion my nonlooping self asks her to the gala and, apparently, she spotted Twilight right away. Scared the heck out of her for a few loops before I Awoke and explained things..."

\* \* \*

><p>148.5 (Evilhumour)<p>

Gleaming Shield blinked at the latest person invading her wedding and \_sighed\_, placing a hoof against her face. How did her unAwake self miss \_this\_ one?!

"I'm just as surprised as you are Gleaming," the drake said, shrugging his shoulders, after pinging in time. "I went over my loop memories and I'm \_still\_ not sure how I fooled everyone. I mean, I wasn't even a \_mare\_!"

Gleaming Shield rolled her eyes at this silliness as the dragons began to invade, with Twilight bringing in a \_furious\_ alicorn mare. Gleaming Shield \_knew\_ she was in for a \_long\_ talk tonight.

\* \* \*

><p>148.6 (Gamerex27)<p>

Twilight rubbed at her snout. "Right...explain...explain what's up with your part of the Loop, again?"

"Nyarlathep casts a curse on Sumaru City that makes rumors become reality," the mare in front of her, here named Hopeful Heart, said. "No matter how crazy it is, or how impossible, if enough people believe it, it becomes true."

"That...that sounds \_incredible!\_" Twilight whispered to herself, her tea having long since grown cold. "Imagine all the \_possibilities you could do!\_ Experiments with dimensional technology without crashing the Loop! So many new fields of magic you can create with just a few words! So-"

"It also caused the Nazis to resurrect themselves in the city, and for Maya to get killed, fulfilling a rumored prophecy that the world would be destroyed," her companion, a brown-coated pegasus, here called Hot Ride (to his chagrin) told the Anchor.

Twilight abruptly stopped mid-sentence, as she went over the implications of this curse again. "Oh. It's...it that dangerous?"

"It can't do anything to Yggdrasil, since no one in town knows about it," the stallion said. "You'd need to spread a rumor about the Tree for anything to happen at all. Still, Masakado slapped a Read-Only label on it, just to be safe."

"Tatsuya..." Maya said, sighing. "You're over-reacting again. I don't think the curse could do anything to Yggdrasil at all: it's not powerful enough."

"You can never be too sure," Tatsuya replied. "Still, that thing usually follows us around wherever we end up in the Loops."

"Which is why you tried to spread a rumor saying that the Pies sold weapons in this bakery along with food and drinks," Twilight said. She waved her forehoof, gesturing around the ordinary-looking cafe. "Yeah, I don't think that's ever gonna hap-"

"Here you go."

Before Twilight could finish her sentence, Maud Pie wheeled up a silver platter on a dessert cart to them. Grabbing the top of the tray in her mouth, she lifted off the cover to reveal, not food, but a stash of weapons.

"What," the Princess of Friendship simply said.

"One katana modified for wing use," Maud continued, hoofing it over to Katsuya, "one pair of hoof-mounted pistols," giving these to Maya, "and one military-grade horn enhancer," she finished, dropping the sharpened metal casing next to Twilight's slice of pie.

"\_What.\_"

"Thank you!" Maya said, sliding the guns onto her hooves.

"By the way," Maud said, as she reached for the other tray, distributing the groups' lunches, "I heard that the gates to Tartarus broke open and demons are running loose everywhere. It'd explain why so many places were on fire lately."

Twilight's face turned a little pale, and she facehoofed.

"Don't worry," Maud said, as emotionless as ever. "It's just a rumor."

With that, she cantered back to the kitchen.

"See what I mean?" sighed Tatsuya. "Guess we better get on it. After lunch, I guess."

"By the way," Maya asked as they dug into their food, "I did hear some more Pings other than you before. Do you think your friends know about the curse?"

"I can only hope not," Twilight said, in between bites of her hay burger. "Ginkophyta knows what they'd do with it."

\* \* \*

><p>"Ah <em>really</em> hate ta' do this," Applebloom muttered, "but...ya said rumors are becomin' reality?"

"Yes," Twilight told the Cutie Mark Crusaders, "even the really dangerous ones. And what's the best way to get information out?"

"...Internet?" Scootaloo asked.

"Doesn't exist in our Loop."

"Newspapers?" she tried again.

"Exactly," Twilight said, nodding. "I need you girls to start up the Gabby Gums column again, so that we can get the good rumors out and discredit the bad ones."

"Basically, you need to be our rumormongers, too," Tatsuya added. "Tell us what you hear off the streets, so we can know which ones to spread. Maya's a journalist in Baseline, she'll help you find a big publisher."

"Got it!" Sweetie Belle's eyes glinted, and the Cutie Mark Crusaders huddled up.

"CUTIE MARK CRUSADERS RUMORMONGERS, YAAAAAAY!"

\* \* \*

><p>(Evilhumour)<p>

A few seconds later, there was a mighty THUD as one of Twilight's window exploded, as a rainbow mess known as Rainbow Dash crashed into her home again.

Frowning, Twilight reached to get her squirt bottle and newspaper when the pile groaned.

"Uuugh, sorry Twily," her friend whimpered, clutching something in her hooves. "But I really need your help."

"What's wrong Dash?" Twilight started to run towards her when Dash started to twitch and held up a hoof so quickly that there was a sonic boom inside her home. Thankfully, Twilight's magic was quicker.

"Rumor around I'm the fastest there is," Dash groaned, rolling over onto her side, clutching a bucket to her chest. "And anytime someone moves, I move faster." That was as far as Dash got before filling the bucket with her lunch. "I cannot believe I am saying this, but I am going way too fast," Dash whimpered, her mouth still deep inside. "Please tell me you have something your lab that can help me."

Twilight nodded her head, and responded in the affirmative as she used her magic to slowly carry Rainbow Dash down the stairs and into a special sensor depriving bubble with the promise of soup, blankets and clean buckets for the mare suffering motion sickness.

\* \* \*

><p>(Bliss Authority)<p>

Pinkie scratched her chin. "So that rumor about Discord bringing the Smooze to the Grand Galloping Gala-

"-is a FANTASTIC idea!" Discord grabbed her fetlock and shook it vigorously before swimming off through the air. "Thanks, Pinkie!"

Tatsuya just glared at Pinkie.

\* \* \*

><p>(Harosata)<p>

"Hold on! I need to check a rumor!" Pinkie dashed out of the house.

Tatsuya looked around the room.

"I'm back!"

"Gah!" Tatsuya picked himself up from the floor. "Pinkie, where did you go?"

"Oh, I heard a rumor that I show up when someone makes a Pinkie Promise, so I just had to show up and see if that's true." Pinkie explained.

"A Pinkie...Promise?" Tatsuya tried to decipher what Pinkie said. "Wait, if you show up at a place you're rumored to show up, isn't that a self-fulfilling prophecy?"

"Hm, you could be right. I'll check that rumor again!" And Pinkie ran out of the house again. Tatsuya blinked and turned his attention to Twilight.

"Earlier, I did hear rumors that your friend is a bit...funny."

"It's actually a fact."

\* \* \*

><p>(BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

Twilight was really starting to hate this Loop. It had seemed like a simple trip to the market until she had noticed the empty streets, only then recalling the issues that the residents of Ponyville had with Zecora before getting to know her. Combined with Nyarlathotep's curse it had resulted in the sight in front of her.

Directing a swarm of Parasprites and surrounded by ominously moving shadows the Zebra mare stalked forward, her cloak moving in a non-existent wind. However before Twilight could move to cut off the apparent threat she was distracted by a hit from the Element of Generosity from directly in front of her. Relaxing, she gave a rueful grin and went to greet her friend.

"Hey Zecora, how are you? Uh... other than the whole witch thing I mean."

"Hello Twilight, I am doing quite well

Although this Loop is rather odd, as I'm sure you can tell."

Twilight nodded agreement. "So do you want me to try and counter the rumors going around about you?"

Zecora smiled, but shook her head.

"Thank you but no, as there is no need

I am quite enjoying being the Witch of Everfree.

The Parasprites are of an unexpected aid

And there are many new potions I wish to have made."

As if to illustrate her point the swarm of replicating creatures returned at that moment, each loaded with various items from the surrounding shops.

"... I hope you remembered to pay for those."

\* \* \*

><p>(BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

"The reputation of Team Garash echoes far and wide, its leader a cake of spirit, a kick-crust paragon of glucose density! Dig the crumbs out of your wrappers because I've got something to say! He takes the blazing oven in his bare hands and endures the searing heat. A desserts dessert sustained by strength of will. When you hear of the great Kamina Muffin they're talking about me! You'd best remember that! Who the hell do you think you are? Isn't your whisk the one that will pierce the heavens, the earth, and through to tomorrow? \*\*Go beyond the impossible and kick reason to the curb!\*\* That's how

Team Garash rolls! Don't forget. Believe in yourself. Not in the you who believes in me. Not the me who believes in you. Believe in the you who believes in yourself. \*\*Giga Pudding Breaker!\*\*

As the small army of desserts crashed a hole in the roof of Sugarcube Corner, Bright Eyes and Pinkie gave each other surprised looks. This was not what they expected when they started spreading those rumors about magical cakes being the source of Celestia's power.

\* \* \*

><p>(Evilhumour)<p>

"Luna, stop laughing, and get me the BUCK out of here!" Celestia shouted, placing her hooves on the side of her throne and tried again to lift herself upright.

Luna shook her head, still laughing to herself. "Dear sister, if anything, this should serve as a wake up call to your cake addiction."

Celestia simply flailed her hooves in the air, trying to reach her sister's body, her wide flanks still wedge into her throne.

\* \* \*

><p>(BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

It was times like this that Twilight really wished she had fingers, so that she could try and ease the migraine she was certain she could feel forming. Standing in front of her were two familiar forms, one of whom most certainly hadn't been part of the Loop previously.

"Let me see if I've got this right. You-" she said pointing at the normal pony Lyra "somehow managed to start a rumor **\*\*with the voices in your own head\*\*** and thanks to the nature of your glitch it actually caused Yggdrasil to set up a Mikasa Glitch mid-Loop."

Lyra nodded sheepishly.

"Right. Which explains the fact we now have your human self running around the middle of Ponyville, and cedar knows how we're supposed to explain that."

The aforementioned human blushed and awkwardly rubbed the back of her head with a laugh, inadvertently causing a mild panic from the spectating ponies at the sight of her incisors.

Twilight's felt her mane begin to frazzle and her eye begin to twitch, before taking a calming breath and turning around.

"You know what, you figure it out."

Ignoring the protests from the duplicated Looper, she headed off to find something to calm her nerves.

'I need to find something to read. I wonder if I can start a rumor that Daring Do has a new book coming out tomorrow.'



\* \* \*

><p>(Evilhumour)<p>

"Lyra!" Dash shouted, rolling over the purple unicorn. "Get your seapony self under control!"

"Hehe!" the mint green mare chuckled to herself, using the bubble as part of her large, weird bicycle made half with water and half of the magical bubble holding the rainbow mare. "Shoo bee doo, this is so much fun!"

\* \* \*

><p>(Harosata)<p>

"I'm back. Twilight!"

"Ga- I should stop doing that." Tatsuya grumbled as he looked at Pinkie. "Did you find anything useful?"

"Well, I heard some rumors, but I don't think they have anything to do with whatever's spreading the rumors. Let's see..." Pinkie began to count the incidents on her hoof. "There's a rumor that Trixie defeated an Ursa Major, a rumor that the Flim-Flam brothers make the best cider, a rumor where Celestia is pulling all the strings in Ponyville, a rumor that Cheese throws the best party..."

Tatsuya snapped to attention. "Wait, what was that part?"

"I don't believe it either. I mean, I'm the reason he's a party thrower in the first pl-"

Tatsuya shook his head. "The part about Celestia pulling the string."

Pinkie blinked. "What's so interesting about that?"

"Look, if she's pulling the strings, either she's controlling the power behind these rumors or she's using the effects of these rumors for her own gain." Tatsuya started to head out. "Either way, it's worth checking."

"Not really." Applebloom said as she popped in, her bow occasionally tugging in the direction of Canterlot. "If you happen to see Rarity, you probably don't want her to see her boutique."

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27 and Wildrook)<p>

Maya cantered down the street, mentally reviewing the notes from her latest interview.

She stopped in place, then backpedaled, tripping over her clumsy four legs in the process.

Looking up, she could see a very annoyed Rarity, hanging by a gigantic spiderweb-esque structure covering her boutique. It twitched constantly, as if drawn by a magnet. Her makeup was running down her

face, as if she had been crying, but it was dry when Maya galloped over to her.

"Aren't you usually the type to scream about this?" Maya asked.

"I did," Rarity said, hoarsely. "For several \_hours. \_But everypony was too worried about that zebra from the Everfree to leave their homes and \_help me\_." The Unawake mare dramatically sighed. "Oh, for a brave stallion to come to my rescue. Or anypony, really."

"I'm afraid I'll have to do," Maya said. "Give me a second. \_PERSONA!\_"

Again, she summoned Artemis in a burst of light. But a mere second after she did so, she began to consider exactly \_how\_ a frightened and stressed mare would react to seeing somepony summon a ten-foot tall, white, hairless minotaur out of nowhere to tear everything near her to shreds.

Rarity tried to scream, but found that she just didn't have the voice for it anymore. "\_Where's my fainting couch when you need it?!"\_

\* \* \*

><p>Several minutes later, a disgruntled Rarity hobbled down from the window, gently eased down by the Goddess of the Moon. As Artemis vanished, she swayed in place, then clutched at her nose with a hoof. "My word!" she said. "What...what is that revolting smell?!"<p>

Maya sniffed at the air, and instantly mirrored Rarity's action as she recognized the very distinctive smell. "But...that's impossible," she choked out, as her eyes started to water. "Only the Inaba girls should be able to make that!...Did someone spread a rumor to make their cooking worse?!"

\* \* \*

><p>Eventually, the mares had staggered their way over to the Golden Oaks Library, staring down the sheepish Cutie Mark Crusaders.<p>

"I know Sweetie Belle's cooking was bad," Rarity growled, "but that odor is REVOLTING! What were you three trying to cook?!"

"Curry," Apple Bloom muttered.

Tatsuya and Maya cringed.

"You didn't," the red stallion muttered.

"That confirms it," Maya sighed. "Right...Tatsuya, could you find some other pegasi to make a storm to blow that smell away? It's bad enough dealing with our usual curse: no need to add Mystery Food X to it all."

\* \* \*

><p>(Evilhumour)<p>

"On one hoof, I am \_really\_ angry at you for getting that gossip out, Dash," Twilight muttered at the bubble where the sick mare was slowly

recovering, drinking the soup that Pinkie Pie made for her. The rest of their friends were trying poorly not to laugh, with Dash too ill to do so. "To the point I am tempted to roll you around town, or start a rumor that you always dress in style."

Twilight 'sighed', 'looking' at the bubble. "On the other hoof, I cannot do it as it would be really mean and I cannot do it because I don't have an \*\*ELM\*\* \_ body anymore!" the purple egg shouted, wobbling angrily, causing the mares around her to laugh out loud. Apparently, rumors that had been put through a round of Chinese Whispers/Broken Telephone worked as well in this loop.\_

\* \* \*

><p>(Wildbrook)<p>

"Well, I'm not exactly the one walking on eggshells here, Sheldon Sparkle," Rainbow Dash replied, too ill to make a wittier retort.

"'Sheldo-the chick stuck in his egg from that one farm Loop?" Spike asked. "That was eons ago: no one's going to remember that!"

Twilight rolled away and looked at Tatsuya on the sofa.

"You're in my spot," she said. "Best incubation area."

\* \* \*

><p>(Evilhumour)<p>

"Where is Pinkie Pie?!" Luna thundered in the middle of Ponyville. "We have traced the source of the rumor that our moon is made of cheese to her, and We wish to have words with her!"

Said mare simply stayed in the background, nomming the stolen moon cheese with a grin on her face.

\* \* \*

><p>(Harosata)<p>

Looking at the time, Maya remembered a rumor that she had heard. "Luna? Are you awake?"

The Moon Princess gazed up. "Hm? I am. What do you need to ask of me?"

Maya looked at her from many angles. "Just how are you awake?"

"Is this a trick question?" Luna had to ask.

Tatsuya studied the princess. "Now that you mention it, she is awake."

Twilight looked back and forth. "Okay, what are you guys talking about?"

"Princess Luna sleeps during the day, and yet she has gone to

investigate the rumors around the princesses." Maya explained.  
"Princess Luna, how did you make yourself immune to that rumor?"

"Well, it is simple. When one thinks of the day, they think of the sun, which is controlled by my sister Celestia." Luna explained as she pointed at the bright ball in the sky. "And so, I merely place my moon into the sky even if Celestia does not move her sun..."

"And they think it's night even when the sun is out!" Twilight realized the logic. "Or at least nopony knows what to call that sort of time of the day. But still, I'm surprised you found that loophole, Luna. How did you think up the solution?"

Luna blushed. "To be truthful, Izzzzzzzzzzzz..." THUD!

Maya poked the fallen princess. "Princess? She's asleep."

"Huh. Guess there's no need to see if that rumor is true." Twilight concluded. "But for the rumor to take effect, something must have happened to the moon..."

"But what?" Tatsuya asked.

"Urp!"

"Ergh...Okay, that's getting old." Tatsuya frowned as he turned to Pinkie, who had a lot of cheese crumbs on her mouth.

\* \* \*

><p>(Evilhumour)<p>

Cadence blinked as she watched Blueblood hold the door for the next mare that passed by, humming an innocent tune as he gave a generous tip to the beggar on the street.

"Okay..." Shining said slowly, watching the scene with his wife. "I don't know what's worse; the rumor that Blueblood being an actual prince charming is working or the fact seeing him act so good is so disturbing."

"Me neither dear," Cadence muttered as he began to lead away Octavia away, charming the mare. "But I think Vinyl is going to be a bit mad to find out he stole her date."

Shining scoffed and rolled his eyes, "Well, it wouldn't be Blueblood if he didn't do something jerkish, even when he is behaving himself."

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

"Oh mah leaves."

Scootaloo leaned in the door. "What is it, Apple Bloom?"

The earth pony just shook her head and hoofed over the newspaper. On the front page, Cadance was giving the camera an awkward smile as she

wrapped one hoof around Filthy Rich, and Diamond Tiara stood in front of her practically beaming with glee. 'Local Stallion locates long-lost daughter!' the headline blared, with 'Local filly actually a princess!' right below it.

Scootaloo stared at the paper in shock. "...Diamond started this rumor, didn't she?"

"She's a decent social manipulator, when she puts her mind to it."

The pegasus bit her lip. "...you know, uh... if she were awake I wouldn't suggest this, but... what if we pitched an article about Filthy Rich loving Screwball?"

\* \* \*

><p>(BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

Angel Bunny wasn't sure whether to be please or irritated with the current Loop. On the one paw he now received the respect he deserved from the weak ponies his owner insisted on dealing with on a daily basis. On the other paw the current rumor around Ponyville was that he was secretly a Demon and Fluttershy had accidentally bound him to her service during a trip into the Everfree.

Eh, whatever, he decided as he roasted a carrot-kabob with a quick burst of Hellfire.

\* \* \*

><p>(Harosata)<p>

Pinkie hopped over to Fluttershy's for a quick visit, though if she were anypony else, the Ursa Majors in the backyard should have been an indicator.

"So...you can't talk because everypony says you're that one quiet pony."

Nod

"And you didn't fly to Twilight's because they also say that you don't?"

Nod

Pinkie flipped through a notebook. "And they also say you're a vampire pony, you become a raging beast if someone even hurts a dragonfly, and you have a cockatrice's stare. Is that true?"

Nod

"Huh, that explains the blindfold. I thought that was part of your dragon wrestling costume."

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27)<p>

As Maya sat on Twilight's egg, she heard a knock at the door. Turning around, she summoned her Persona Artemis in a burst of blue light, opening the door to reveal a diamond dog with a fiery red coat, looking confused.

"Hi, Sunset," Twilight muttered. "You Awake?"

"If I wasn't, I'd still be at Canterlot High," she said, smiling. "But...what's up with the whole 'rumors magically coming true' thing? I figured out pretty quickly what was going on, and I..." she shifted in place. "I spread a rumor that the Dazzlings couldn't really sing, and had to lip synch all of their music. Next thing I know, all of their magic stops working and I've solved the problem before it even started."

"That...that's actually pretty clever," Twilight said, chuckling. "As for what's going on...some entity from these guys' Loop put a curse on Ponyville and Canterlot that makes rumors become reality. And since the portal is in Canterlot..."

"...it extends to Canterlot High, too." Sunset concluded. "So, uh...why am I a diamond dog and not a pony? I remember being a pony in my Loop memories before I first went through the mirror."

"I've...seen the show-the backup of your universe in the Hub-with Jun," Tatsuya admitted. "Up to the first half of season 4, at least. And they use human curses there, right?"

"Uh...they don't show it in the backup, since it's aimed at foals, but yes..." Sunset trailed off.

"So, if there were rumors about you being a bitch-"

"They came true," Sunset Shimmer said, facepawing. "Not sure why I was still human on the Other Side, then," she mused, not noticing how Tatsuya twitched at that phrase, "but it makes sense. Mostly."

"So, is the curse coming from this side, or your side?" Twilight asked, being unable to see how Tatsuya twitched again.

"This side, I think," Sunset replied. "I mean, it was strong enough on the other side, but I think the source is coming from this side-"

"Can we PLEASE STOP TALKING about this side and the other side?!\_" Tatsuya snapped.

The egg and the dog stopped talking, and looked at Tatsuya.

"It...bad memories," he said, sighing. "Should we ask the Crusaders to see if they can find the source of the curse?"

"They're not that magically inclined," Twilight told them. "It would be best if Sunset and I looked for it with you guys. At least, when I FINALLY BUCKING HATCH!" she screamed, shaking in place as Maya's body heat still failed to get her out of the egg. "Tatsuya, some fire would be NICE!"

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27 and Evilhumour)<p>

"Sooooooo," Scootaloo started, as she pulled some notes out of her saddlebag with her wing. "Rumors. What have you girls got today?"

"There's the rumor that Celestia is coming to make a personal investigation into all this craziness," Sweetie Belle told them. "Personally, I think we should run it: it'd help get her out of that 'all Celestia's cakes go right to her flanks' rumor Luna made that's got her stuck in her throne."

"'Kay, that's one," Scootaloo said, jotting it down. "What else?"

"There's the rumor that AJ is a stallion in disguise..." Applebloom started.

Before she could say anything else, she was cut off by a loud, very masculine scream from the direction of the Apple farm.

"...annnnnd it looks like it kicked in," she finished. "That's something Ah'd like to counter, but we've got bigger problems now. Put it on the list, but low priority."

"Speaking of that," Scootaloo added, "there's also a rumor about your family switching from growing apples to oranges."

An even louder, angrier scream came from the farm.

"...sh-he-whatever-is less upset about a gender shift than her crops changing?" Tatsuya asked, confused.

"'S a matter of pride," Applebloom said, grinding her teeth.

"Big Mac, once Ah get my hooves on ya, Ah SWEAR Ah'll buck you into being a mare!" the stallion with three oranges cutie mark shouted, chasing after he-er, his grinning big brother, past Twilight's window.

"We need to fix that, pronto," Applebloom added. "Otherwise, the family reunion comin' up soon will turn into a riot."

"Got it," the pegasus said, writing that down too. "Speaking of problems, the demonic invasion from Tartarus. How should we deal with that?"

"Demons aren't that hard to deal with," Maya said from the corner of the room, still sitting on Twilight's (now sleeping) egg. "Maybe you could interview me or Tatsuya on how you can just Contact them."

"Contact?" the fillies asked in unison.

"Think normal demon negotiation from Amala," Maya continued, "but you don't need to bribe them. Just use your special talent when you talk

to them-singing, impressions, fortune telling, fashion tips, lessons on friendship, magic tricks, seduction, torture-

"Wait, \_what?!\_"

"-Long story," Maya explained. "Kaoru can go over the top sometimes."

"...and what about Tirek?" Sweetie Belle asked. "I mean, if the rumors are strong enough to bend reality, and if all the demons are out of Tartarus now, we should spread one that could deal with him."

"Hm..." Applebloom tapped her hoof against her chin in thought. "...why don't we tell everypony that there's a monster from Tartarus that's \_givin'\_ ponies magic rather than stealing it?"

"...really?" her other Crusaders asked.

"It's weird enough to be interesting and spread, and helpful enough that we don't need ta worry about Tirek getting too powerful from rumor magic or anything." Applebloom's grin widened further and further as she went on. "It's \_genius!\_"

"That's one for the front page!" Scootaloo exclaimed, writing it down in italics. "It's a great plan! It's \_foalproof!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

"...and that's basically what's going on," Vinyl finished awkwardly.

Octavia nodded thoughtfully. "Well, I... I thank you for being honest with me, miss Scratch, but... if I am not completely incorrect, we weren't actually dating at the start of this, ahem, loop. And now we are, and I cannot figure out why-

"Yeah, uh, you know how I mentioned variant loops?" Vinyl glanced around. "This is a variant loop. Well, technically it's a crossover loop, but-the point is, for whatever reason, if enough people believe in some rumor or other, the universe adjusts itself so that rumor is true."

The gray mare stared at her.

"Which isn't to say I'll be taking advantage of the situation," Vinyl assured her quickly. "In fact, putting this on the record: You are the leader in this relationship, you decide what happens when, I'm just going to follow you."

Unfortunately for the unicorn, she didn't notice the other pony passing by with an interested look. Within the week, the rumor mill had taken her sentence so far out of context that the tabloids were screaming. But, all things considered, she could live with the more interesting results.

\* \* \*



><p>(Evilhumour)<p>

"But-" the white pony started to protest when the earth pony flicked Vinyl's nose with her black tail, eliciting a blush on the white mare.

"Vinyl, I have read my journal. Not once was I under you," Octavia grinned, leaning over to the unicorn's face. "So for your attempted lie I am going to have to punish you."

Vinyl was ready for anything physical that the mare could do to her. She was not ready for Octavia to steal her glasses and run off with a laugh.

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27)<p>

"Apollo!"

With a snap of his hoof (which he still was not sure how he did), Tatsuya summoned his Persona in a flash of light, rekindling the fire burning under Twilight's egg.

"Between that and Spike's mail thing," Sweetie Belle commented, as she glanced back to Spike sending out their papers to the local distributors in a blast of magic fire, "we're lucky Twilight doesn't have smoke detectors."

A loud crash outside Twilight's house brought their attention to a nearby window, where Iron Will and a demonic Minotaur with a skull nose wrestled and clashed outside.

"Hang on, let me help," Maya said, hopping off Twilight and heading outside. "Stay clear: it's weak to Ice magic!"

"...speaking of magic..."

The Cutie Mark Crusaders turned to Tatsuya, who pointed to the egg Apollo was incubating. "My Persona felt it start to-"

A crack formed in the egg. And another. And another.

"Ah," Scootaloo said, in a deadpan tone, "the miracle of childbirth."

"Oh, shush," Twilight said, as her egg continued to break open. "You haven't had to be a biological mother before. This is nothing."

With that, she bucked her egg open.

"Finally!" she cheered, stretching out her back and shaking her mane free of egg shell, "I'm out of the moss-damned thing!"

"...Uh..." Applebloom started, then trailed off. "Twi? The rumor...don't look like it's worn off yet."

"...what do you mean?" she asked. "I'm out of the egg!\_ Isn't that

enough?"

Tatsuya shared an uneasy glance with the fillies, then pulled a bicycle out of his Pocket. "Not really," he said, turning the mirror to face Twilight.

She looked in the mirror. She wasn't sure how she looked in the mirror, given that she had no eyes, but she did so anyways.

The egg-headed Twilight looked to Tatsuya. Looked to the Crusaders. Then back to the mirror.

"I. Hate. This. Curse," she moaned, cradling her eggshell in her hooves.

\* \* \*

><p>(Evilhumour)<p>

Without any warning, Scootaloo suddenly let out a loud cluck of surprise, causing everypony to turn and stare at her.

The orange chicken blinked, looked at her reflection and then facewinged.

"Of course this would happen..." she muttered under her breath.

Berry Punch, the mare rumored to be the town drunk, took several steps into the Golden Oaks, stumbling with every step.

"Izzz hates thess stuupid loop!" the mare slurred, hiccuping before spinning around and passing out on the chicken, snoring loudly.

There was a sudden gush of air, causing the egghead pony, the flailing chicken and several ponies to look up at the gryphon trying to scowl at them but failed to really do so.

"Gilda?" Twilight asked, somehow using sight behind sight to see her friend. She looked odd, a bit stiff yet loose at the same time-

"Gilda, why are ya a giant plushie?" Applebloom asked, tilting her head.

Gilda grumbled, squeaking as she walked into the library. "Rumor had it I was a really softie and then it turned into I was an actual one!" Squeaking, Gilda sat down on the makeshift nest and began to shift around to get comfortable, squeaking as she did so. Looking at the snickering crowd, she frowned at the. "Laugh, and I swear I will SQUEAK you!" Gilda threatened, holding out a claw to the ponies around her. Blushing Gilda, simply fluffed her wings out and prepared to deal with this loop.

\* \* \*

><p>(Harosata)<p>

Somepony knocked on the door. "May I come in?"

"Um, I guess?" Twilight looked as a stallion walked in. "Dr. Hooves?"

"Is that with a W or just the plural of these?" Dr. Hooves held up his hooves. "And before you ask, I am the Doctor according to my memory, but I haven't figured out if these rumors brought me to this Loop or if I am just a pony who suddenly have knowledge of Looping. Anyway, I figured that the Anchor would be trying to find the source of this rumormonger phenomenon, so I came to help."

Tatsuya might have heard of him. "The Doctor? Isn't that the Looper who always gets shot by a-"

A laser zapped Dr. Hooves and turned him into ash. One glance outside, and they saw what looked like a giant salt shaker disappear into the horizon. The pile of ashes seemed to huff. "Well, I can safely assume the rumors don't have to come from Equestria."

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27 and Evilhumour)<p>

KNOCK. KNOCK.

"Nh. G'way," Trixie moaned, swatting at the air with a forehoof.

Whoever was at the door of her wagon just keep knocking, however. They seemed very insistent.

"The Great and Powerful Trixie needs her beauty sleep!" she muttered, as she slowly climbed out of bed and carefully crept towards the door.

"Go away!" she said, as she slammed the door open. "The Great and Powerful Trixie does not...entertain...loiterers..."

She shrunk in on herself as the massive, alicorn sized beast towered over her. The mix between a pony and a minotaur-a centaur, if Trixie remembered her mythology correctly-stood at her doorstep, clad in a red and white hat and matching uniform which did not contrast well with his coat.

"Ho ho ho!" he said, slapping his plump belly in what she could only assume was a bizarre greeting custom.

"...Who are you?!" Trixe asked, her bravado suddenly leaving her in the presence of a giant bucking monster with horns that were way too sharp\_.

"I'm Santa Tirek!" he said jollily. "Miss Trixie Lulamoon, I'm pleased to inform you that you're on the nice list after you made amends for your Alicorn Amulet episode!"

"How do you know abou-"

"Here is your present!" With that, Santa Tirek grabbed Trixie, and magic formed in his palm. In the span of a few seconds, ridiculous amounts of magical power poured into the comparatively tiny unicorn's

body, and Tirek shrunk just a little bit.

"There you go, miss!" he said, putting the twitching Trixie down, not noticing that her coat and Cutie Mark were a lot brighter than usual, and oversaturated with color. "Happy Hearth's Warming Day!" he said, as he galloped off into Ponyville.

"But..." Trixie said, shivering as the magic coursed through her, "it's not-"

With a shriek of surprise, the excess magic fired from Trixie's horn, in a beam of sheer destructive power that would have made her Awake self proud.

"Um..." Trixie said, as she stared at the part of the Everfree Forest she had just annihilated, with a surprised zebra witch staring at her from the new hole in her house. "Trixie is...I'm sorry! I don't know what's going oooooooooon!" she blurted out, as another jet of magic erupted from her mouth, this time, and propelled her into the sky with the sheer force of the blast.

\* \* \*

><p>"Something has gone horribly wrong," Tatsuya noted as he took note of the various fires, wrecked buildings, and bemused ponies all over Ponyville.<p>

"'What could go wrong?' ya said?" Applebloom grumbled, as her friends sheepishly avoided her glare. "Honestly, ya haven't figured out by now to never say those words?"

"Everypony slips up sometimes," Sweetie Belle could only say.

"It could be worse," Maya noted, as she watched an annoyed team of weather pegasi chasing after a unicorn shooting herself into the stratosphere. "No one's been hurt or killed yet, and it's nothing that can't be fixed with some carpenters and hard work."

"-do you MEAN, 'I'm on the Naughty List!'" Twilight shrieked in the background, near the house/library they had arrived at on the way back from the press conference in Canterlot.

"I am most displeased with you, young Egg Sparkle. You have been very naughty and I had to give you a lump of coal." Tirek said, turning his head as he noticed the library was now on fire. "Ho ho uh oh."

As Tirek galloped off again, Twilight turned to stare as her home burned to the ground. Again.

If she still had eyes, they would be twitching like mad.

"I can't take it anymore," she announced, turning to face the group. "We're going to the Collective Unconsciousness, we're finding Nyarlathotep, and we're bucking that buckler's face in until he lifts this bush-forsaken curse!"

"'Bush forsa-'" Tatsuya trailed off. "...Alright, then. Let's get the portal ritual ready."

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27)<p>

"...Where are we, exactly?"

"The collective unconsciousness of all manki-uh, marekind," Maya replied. "This is where everything we fight and face in our home Loop comes from."

"Including Shadows?" Twilight asked, staring off into the distance with her egg-head.

"Including Shadows," Tatsuya confirmed. "Why do you ask?"

Twilight just pointed ahead with a forehoof. From behind one of the pillars of the gazebo they found themselves in walked herself. The being was a dead ringer for Twilight, save for her normal, not-eggy head...and her piercing, yellow eyes.

She opened her mouth to speak, and-

"No!"

Shadow Twilight stopped, and stared at them.

"I get it!" Twilight hissed, walking up to her Shadow Self. "I KNOW what you are! All of my darkest secrets, right? I know. I know that I'm afraid that I'm not me anymore, after all these Loops! I KNOW that I'm afraid I've become a different mare after all this time, and I KNOW that I've gone crazy and done some terrible things!

"But I'm not alone! I've got dozens of my friends here with me in the Loops! No matter what happens, I won't lose myself like other Loopers! Not with my friends by my side, to keep me going! So, could you get out of our BUCKING WAY?!"

The Shadow uncomfortably shuffled in place. "Uh...I was just going to ask why I was here."

If Twilight had had eyes, she would have blinked in confusion. "Huh?"

"I mean, you already know all that," her dark self stated. "I had a whole speech like that planned out, and you just admitted all that before I could get going. Even in your mind, you're already going through everything else you're worried about, everything else you'd hide, and are agreeing with it. There's...nothing for me to say."

"...So...uh...why did you come out in the first place?" Twilight asked.

"I have no idea. I think Nyarlathotep, or whatever's doing all this, was expecting you to reject me and drew me out of our body," Shadow Twilight said. "Guess he didn't know you changed already, huh?"

"But you did," Twilight said, smiling with a nonexistent mouth. "Because you're me, and I'm you."

"...right again," Shadow Twilight said, chuckling. "Hope you don't mind this," she said, as she faded in a swirl of blue light.

"Mind wha-" Twilight stopped herself as she looked up.

The pure white coat. The crescent moon horn, with one on its forehead and one pointing backwards off its head. The strong defined jaw.

And the eight legs.

\*\*\*"One who soars above their herd to guide thy friends,\*\*\*" he announced, "\*\*\*I shall fly with you. I am Sleipnir Lokison, of the Star Arcana. From the sea of thy soul I cometh, and to there I return. For I am thou, and thou art I."\*\*\*

With that, the Persona dissolved in another burst of blue light, and floated down to Twilight's eye level as a simple card, no bigger than her hoof. It held the image of a faced star on it, and was labeled "XVII."

"...Maya," Twilight said slowly. "Tatsuya. Why is the representation of my true inner self a stallion?!"

"A Persona's gender doesn't always match the wielder," Tatsuya explained. "Lisa had the god Eros, Ken had Nemesis, Naoto had Sukunu-Hikona..."

Twilight sighed. "Alright, then. Let's find wherever this curse is coming from and break it."

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27)<p>

"No luck?" Scootaloo asked as the three ponies (and current Diamond Dog) emerged from a portal. The lack of any kind of battle wounds made it obvious that they hadn't found their culprit.

"Nyarlatheotep's not here," Twilight replied, shaking her literal egg head. "The collective unconsciousness of equinekind isn't too different from humans', but that's not a factor here, or he's just not showing up. There isn't some god, eldritch abomination, or curse causing all this. Whatever it is, it's mare-made."

"I'd bet on Star Swirl," Sunset added. "He got up to some crazy stuff, even in Baseline. I remember reading that much before my, uh, 'evil jerk' phase started."

"You know," Rainbow Dash said, wheeling herself over (as slowly as possible) to the group in her magical bubble, "I thought of something. Curses like these-I think I saw something like this in a Daring Doo book once-in a Variant where she had different adventures. They can be broken by contradictions."

"Really?" Sweetie Belle asked. "What kind of rumor would cause such a stable and massive spell system to break down and implode on itself?"

"Hm..." Applebloom muttered, pacing in place and ignoring the way her

bow was still being pulled towards Canterlot (she'd already been forced to close the window to stop it from flying all the way there before it got ripped off her head. "How 'bout, 'the spell causing rumors to literally become true has been broken?' Ya think that would work?"

"Worth a shot," Maya said, shrugging. "Back home in Sumaru City, most people didn't know that rumors were becoming true, since they worked retroactively. But here, a lot of ponies-Loopers, mostly-already figured it out. So it might work."

"Alright, I'll put it in our next-"

Suddenly, Sweetie Belle was flattened by a throne falling from the...ceiling?

Wedged into it was an annoyed Princess Celestia, her bulging, massive flanks wedged snugly into the sides of her chair.

She stared at the strange pony with an egg for a head. It only took her a few seconds to notice that she had her student's Cutie Mark and coat color, and quickly made the connection.

"Twilight," Celestia said, giving her a sad smile and sighing. "...Can you see me?"

"Yes. Not sure how, but I can."

"Do you know what's going on?' she asked. "One second I'm sitting in my throne in the middle of another boring meeting with nobles, then the next my flanks grew so big and rapidly that I was stuck in the seat." She tried in vain to pull herself free again, with even her mighty magic failing to get her away from the trapped throne. "On the other hoof, they stopped laughing after they were turned into donkeys a few seconds later. You should have seen how they lost their minds when they realized they had to pick things up with their mouths\_ like 'peasants.'"

"Told you that saying all nobles were to be punished as asses wouldn't work," Maya said, grabbing some yen from Tatsuya's outstretched hoof. "What did you expect with that?"

"Still worth it," he said. "They tried to have you thrown in a dungeon when you asked if the budget cuts and his new mansion were connected in that interview. I...should have phrased that better."

As Tatsuya and Maya continued to talk in the background, Twilight explained what was going on with the curse on Ponyville.

"I see," Celestia said. "That would explain why the moon vanished, why Luna fell into a coma until I decided to just make it a new moon night on my own initiative, and why Tirek suddenly became a 'good guy' and made several houses burn down by giving ponies more magic than their bodies could handle. Especially to earth ponies, who can't channel it in the more direct ways pegasi and unicorns can. And why I'm here all of a sudden. A rumor I was coming to visit...a bit more literal than I would have liked."

"Issue's out," Spike announced as he sent the last of the papers away

in a burst of flame. "Since it's mostly local, enough ponies should get their hooves on it in time to get it going in the next hour or so."

"Help." From under the throne, Sweetie Belle's hoof extended, trying in vain to push the seat off her.

"You're still alive?" Scootaloo asked.

"The throne's hollow underneath," Celestia explained. "It's a good place to hide my cake stas-er, I mean, to put petitions and bills I don't read. No, that sounds \_awful\_ too...Wait...you should be a \_lot\_ more worried about your friend's safety than 'mild surprise,'" she realized, her eyes narrowing.

"Time Loop," Applebloom explained before Celestia could go on the warpath. "Hey, could y'all get Sweetie and Celestia out of the throne while Ah explain it to her?"

"Method 7 works best when she's under stress like this," Twilight recommended, even as her horn started to glow with purple magic. "Remember to use the slide projector."

After several painful and \_loooong\_ minutes, Maya, Tatsuya, Twilight, their respective Personas, Sunset, and Scootaloo managed to both yank Celestia out of her throne (albeit with some painful-looking bruises dotting her coat) and get an annoyed Sweetie Belle out from under the chair.

"Wait a second," Twilight said as the group celebrated their victory. "I...I think I feel it!" she said, as her tail perked up. "I can feel the spell breaking!" She suddenly stopped, her egg turning stark white. "I can fe3l\*\$%^&#&-

\* \* \*

><p>"I can feel the Loop crashing," Twilight finished, as she Awoke in the usual Gen 3 punishment Loop. Grumbling to herself, she plucked the post-it note off of her horn and read it.<p>

\_Reality is not a toy for you to mess with as you wish. Consider more carefully how you dispel such magics in the future.\_

\_From the desk of Taira no Masakado, Admin of Amala (condolences for such not needed).\_

"...you know," Sunset said from behind her, "I heard a rumor that Rainbow Dash always dresses in-"

"Don't. Even. Start," said mare hissed, trying in vain to find some way to make the elegant and beautiful cocktail dress seem less frilly.

\* \* \*

><p>148.7 (Midnight Crescent)<p>

Twilight walked into Mac's bar, and did a double take. She thought she was used to the eccentric visitors.



But a half-pegasus, half thestral? Even now, that at least stood out...

"Hello, Twilight Sparkle," the newcomer said, as they idly stirred the drink in front of them. "I wondered when you might show up..."

"Uhh..." the anchor replied, struggling not to stare. "You seem familiar, but I'm pretty sure I'd remember you..."

"Oh, I think you know my big brother much better than me, and it has been quite some time since we last met..."

"Still not ringing a bell, I'm afraid."

"Your brother's wedding?"

Twilight thought on that, before her face screwed up in confusion. "...Chrysalis, why didn't you answer the ping? And I didn't think you had brothers..."

The other mare's face swiftly met the bar. "Spike's Wedding..."

Twilight's eyes widened in realization, as the hints from the conversation finally clicked into place. "Wait, Hel?"

"Well, that took longer than expected..." the Admin said with a smile, as she raised head back from the bar.

"Wait," Twilight asked, a thought occurring to her. "Don't admins usually come in... unchanged?"

"Normally, we want to be recognised instantly."

"...So why not now?"

"Two reasons: Firstly, I just wanted to see what I'd look like. I must say it's not what I expected..."

"And the second?"

Hel's smile transformed to a smirk. "I needed a drink, and, thanks to my brothers, there's never any left for me. This seemed like as good a place as any..."

Twilight thought long and hard. She'd personally seen how fast Sleipnir could go through mead, and his brother's reputations suggested they'd not only go through more, but probably wouldn't hold themselves back either.

"Mac..." she said, taking a seat next to the Admin. "Give me a special reserve. And keep them coming," she added, before shrugging her shoulders at the look Hel and Mac gave her. "I've not got anything better to do this loop..."

\* \* \*

Lara Croft ejected the spent clips from her handguns as she started to feel the tremors from the incoming tyrannosaur.

\_No idea why these still work on something that big...\_ she thought, as she slid in fresh clips. \_But I'm not complaining...\_

When the creature finally came into view, a look of confusion spread across her face. After all, the tyrannosaur didn't usually have giant frills on it's back. It also wasn't usually some strange combination of purple and green.

At least those were things she could accept.

The giant fake mustache, however...

"I'm not sure whether I should shoot you," she said to herself. "Or just let you eat me and start again...again."

"Ehh, I'm not really big on eating things that disagree with me..." Spike quipped back. "And Fluttershy'd probably go mental if she found out I'd even tried..."

Lara's eye twitched, and her arms fell to her sides. "You can talk!?"

Spike looked down at the irate treasure hunter. "Well, yeah..." he said, before slapping a claw into his face. "OK, I thought I knew the answer, but now I'm not so sure... does time repeating sound familiar to you, or are you just crazy?"

"I'm starting to think it might be both..." Lara replied, sitting down on a convenient rock. "I am talking to a dinosaur, after all..."

"Dragon."

"...Sure, let's go with dragon. Why not?"

"And how about Yggdrasil?"

"The World Tree," Lara said, an eyebrow raised in a combination of interest and confusion. "What does Norse Myth have to do with this?"

"Well, looks like I get to give this speech," Spike said, a grin spreading across his face. He reached behind him, pulling a scroll out of thin air. Seeing Lara's twitch return, he laughed sheepishly. "It's been awhile, kinda need the summary..." he explained, before scanning down the page.

\* \* \*

><p>Spike rolled the scroll up, replacing it into his Pocket, before turning back to his audience. "...Any questions?"<p>

Lara sighed before responding. "...No, although I'm still reserving the right to think I'm crazy."

"You're not the first, probably won't be the last..." Spike said, shrinking down to an appropriate size give her comforting pat on the

shoulder. "Look, I get this can all be a bit intimidating at first. If there's anything you want me to do, let me know. Otherwise, I'll just let you get on with whatever it is you do around here..."

Lara sat in thought for a few minutes. "Look, the way I see it, I'm either crazy, in which case why not do what I want..."

"Which is a dangerous mindset to have..." Spike said with his arms crossed. "As I \_just\_ finished explaining."

"...Or you're telling the truth," Lara continued as though Spike hadn't even interrupted. "Which means this'll be a rare opportunity to make things a \_lot\_ easier on myself."

"How so?"

"Tell me..." Lara said, before pausing. "Spike, was it?"

The dragon nodded.

"Tell me then, Spike..." Lara repeated, a smirk spreading across her face. "Can you fly?"

\* \* \*

><p>Lara Croft and Spike watched as Marco Bartoli transformed into a dragon.<p>

"Let me guess..." Spike said, his voice thick with sarcasm. "My turn?"

"Well, if you insist..."

Spike rolled his eyes, before dropping into the arena like room. He very quickly grew to match his opponent's' size. However, while Marco's first blast of dragon fire merely washed over Spike's scales, the return volley had a very interesting effect...

"Is the knife meant to glow like that..." Spike yelled over the ominous rumbling. "I don't feel like it's meant to glow like that."

"No, it's not..." Lara replied. Then everything flashed white.

\* \* \*

><p>When Lara opened her eyes, she could tell things weren't quite right. Looking down she realised why.<p>

\_Alright, those things are ridiculous...\_ she thought to herself, before turning round at the sound of heavy footsteps behind her. A very short girl with a familiarly coloured mohican had stormed up to her, and looked ready to breathe fire. Or at least vent smoke from her ears...

"Just so you know, if I ever visit your world again, I am \_not\_ listening to your ideas..."

\* \* \*

><p>Neith stared at her screen in disbelief, before her head collided with her keyboard. Repeatedly.<p>

"Less than ten iterations, and she's already gotten herself in Eiken... What did I get myself in for?"

\* \* \*

><p>148.9 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Say again?" Gilda blinked, looking at the letter in her claws again before looking up.

"It is clear as day," the griffon god-emperor, not Empy but simply a blowhard that inherited that title, snarked out. "The pony princess is gone, and the prophecy has come true."

Gilda sighed, looking at her pure white coat and feathers with red outlines. "Yes, I know that once the ponies fall, the griffon will rise. But what does that have to do with me?" She did her best not to whine, but she still did and her mother nipped her ear, regardless of her supposed holiness.

"Show respect Gilda!" Her mother snarled out, her claw ready to cuff her if she talked back.

"Sorry mom," Gilda grumbled, rubbing her ear. "Oh great God-Emperor of Griffonkind, what does have to do with me? And why do I have a letter requesting my presence at nations summit?"

"Well, young Gilda," the massive griffon puffed his chest out, "The prophecy was a bit mistaken, as it turns out. Celestia's former student Twilight examined the ancient text with Nig-I mean, Princess Luna, and it seems that once you were spotted, she was going to give up the duty of raising the sun to the chosen griffon of white and red, you." Pointing a talon at her, he grabbed the letter and fluffed it out to read it. "We need to go the other species so we can work together how everyone gets enough time in the sun."

Gilda faceclawed, sighing at the massive work Sunbutt just unloaded on her. She was also pissed that she was alone, as no one else Pinged back once she Woke up. Dang stealth anchors...

"I'm so going to need a strong drink for this." she muttered, but not soft enough as her mother nipped her ear again.

"Gilda Freewing, did you just say you want to drink?!\_" Her mother screeched, reminding Gilda that she was currently a minor this loop.

The god-emperor of griffons merely blinked and slowly slinked away from the chosen one being read the riot act.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

148.1: Twilight Sparkle is currently "touchy".

>148.2: Luckily Blue Skies works somewhere else.<br>148.3: It's just logic.

>148.4: If you can see power, and you look at an Anchor... usually you then have trouble seeing much of anything.<br>148.5: It's not quite the most outrageous deception.  
>148.6: I heard this one took a long time. (Persona 2 cross)<br>148.7: #LokisdottorProblems.  
>148.8: Whoops! (Tomb Raider crossover)<br>148.9: She can, at least, perform.

## 156. Chapter 156

### 149.1 (Evilhumour)

"What are you doing?!" Twilight shouted, grabbing the stick out of Sweetie's hoofs that almost hit Rarity.

"What are you doing, darling?" Rarity grumbled, grabbing the stick back. She wasn't wearing any of her makeup and hitting herself with the stick made things better?!\_ "This is from a variant, darling."

Twilight blinked, and then sighed heavily before hitting the wall with her face. "A beauty stick?! Seriously?!\_"

"Well, it's better than the ugly stick that I found, Twilight," Rarity shuddered. "And I swore to never to speak of the party sti-"

"\*\*YOU BROKE A PINKIE PROMISE!\*\*" A voice thundered, as Twilight did the most sensible thing possible and teleport herself to the moon for safety.

\* \* \*

### ><p>149.2 (Evilhumour)<p>

Celestia watched the last pony leave the Day Court with a small sigh. Another long day, another long loop she couldn't dodge paperwork by dumping it on other ponies. Still, as she reached under her throne, the rewards would be gra-

With a loud meep, her throne buckled, throwing her into the now large pond around her dais. Before she could react, the roof above her retracted as she was suddenly catapulted clear across Canterlot and Equestria and straight into the middle of the frigid ocean water. Spluttering out, she found a water proof note stuck to her hoof.

\_I ate your cakes Tia\_

\_XOXO\_

\_Lulu\_

Celestia blinked, hearing a pop above her head. Looking up, she saw a water balloon fall and splash into her face.

\* \* \*

### ><p>149.3 (Gamerex27)<p>

"Blah blah blah, Elements of Harmony, Luna in the Moon, make friends," Twilight muttered to herself. "Same old, same old."

Granted, she had picked up on a Generosity Ping shortly after she Woke Up, so it wouldn't be a Lonely Loop, but she had been having a lot of vanilla, Baseline Loops for a while now. She was suddenly reminded of how boring the Loops can be at times.

Pouring herself another cup of wine, she sipped it in her magic grip, glancing at the ponies around her enjoying the festival.

"Hello, dear."

"Hi, Rarity." Twilight smiled. "Any plans for this Loop?"

"Well, Spikey-Wikey is Sleeping, so we can't go on any dates," she said, shrugging. "I was just thinking of working on some of the more esoteric designs I dreamt up. Tell me, do you think anypony would be willing to wear a dress made of a black hole?"

"That...sounds like a bad idea," the Anchor said bluntly, scratching at an itch near her horn with a forehoof. "Wouldn't wearing it devour the entire solar system?"

"Magic, darling," she reminded her. "And besides, it-"

Suddenly, as the sun went down, everything froze. Twilight found herself totally unable to move.

As she casually pondered what Nightmare Moon was doing this time, and which spell she would use to break it, she saw a blue box with a black center appear in the corner of her vision.

Slowly, agonizingly slowly, letters appeared one by one on the box.

"W-H-A-T A -H-O-R-R-I-B-L-E N-I-G-H-T-"

Whatever you are, Twilight internally growled, finish up already. My nose itches like crazy!

"T-O H-A-V-E A C-U-R-S-E."

Everypony suddenly went back into motion. As Twilight furiously scratched at her nose, she noticed how the local ponies didn't react with anything beyond a mild flinch at the interruption. "What was that?"

"You haven't checked your Loop Memories?" Rarity asked. "That's been happening ever since Celestia and Luna took over moving the heavens. Discord's last laugh. Whenever the sun goes down, time freezes for about thirty seconds and we see that. And when it comes up, we get 'THE MORNING SUN HAS VANQUISHED THE HORRIBLE NIGHT.' More of an annoyance than anything else. It's odd, to see what ponies can get used to."

"...o...kay, then," Twilight said, sipping her wineglass again. "I've had weirder Variants. But-"

"HA! HA! HAHAAAAHA! \_HA!\_ I AM FREE!"

Nightmare Moon's voice interrupted Twilight's thoughts, as the crowd gasped in surprise and terror.

"What have you done with the Princess?!" the usual voice demanded.

But Nightmare Moon looked a little...\_different\_ from her usual self. Her eyes were wild, her coat was matted and knotted all over her body, and her ethereal mane had frayed to the point where it looked like she had tried to lick a live power wire.

"She's \_GONE!\_" the crazier than usual Luna declared. "\_GONE\_, I tell you! 'Just get used to it,' she said! But how can I when that \_accursed voice\_ insults my \_beautiful night\_ every! Single! \_DAY?! So now, the NIGHT SHALL LAST FOREVER! AND NOPONY SHALL INSULT IT EVER AGAIN!\_"

"Wait..." Applejack said lowly. "Yer tellin' us the reason you foalnapped the Princess and... uh... wanna make night go on forever is...because you're annoyed by \_the Sun Box?\_"

"The thing that \_everypony's\_ known about since they were a foal?\_" Rainbow Dash asked. 'Sheesh, for a princess, you've got really thin skin! It's not \_insulting\_, just annoying! Like how you molt every once in a while! Just something you need to deal with before getting on with your life!"

"You \_don't\_ understand!\_" the crazed Nightmare continued, spittle flying from her mouth over the crowd. "You can \_never\_ understand! My night, forever belittled by a force nopony can ever stop! All ponies, frozen in place for half a minute\_ while disasters go on! Storm clouds, unmonitored during the stop as their lightning burns homes to the ground! Uncontrolled unicorn spells devastating the countryside while their caster is indisposed! Earth ponies...okay, I don't know how this affects earth ponies, but it \_must\_ be bad!"\_

"Um..." Fluttershy objected, "...we found solutions for those a long time ago. We just...stop working for a few seconds before the stop."

"SILENCE!" the Nightmare cackled, laughing again. "AND NOW, TO ENJOY MY GLORIOUS NIGHT! WITHOUT THAT BUCKING VOICE \*\*FOR ONCE IN MY BUCKING LIFE! AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH!\*"

With that, she vanished in a poof of dark magic.

Twilight sighed. "Elements as usual?"

"I suppose so," Rarity said, shrugging. "I wanted to see if I could incorporate mine into a new hat, anyways."

\* \* \*

><p>149.4 (fractalman)<p>

Pinkie Pie jumped, then smacked into a shimmering cyan barrier.

"Interesting." Said GLaDOS. "Calling my barriers anti-fun walls has made them impervious to you."

There was a pause.

"Nevermind. Calling them anti-fun walls only provides a mild inconvenience for you. "

\* \* \*

><p>"Pinkie Pie, I would appreciate it if you did not violate locality while taking my tests" Said GLaDOS.<p>

"Why is that a big deal? The portal gun violates locality, and you said I could use my powers 'cause you wanted to study them!"

"The portal gun violates locality in limited ways. It cannot be used to arbitrarily skip the entire test."

"Ohhhhhh. Okie Dokie!"

\* \* \*

><p>149.5 (Masterweaver)<p>

(With apologies to all native Hindi speakers; I used google translate.)

"Twiliiiiiiight, I'm back from the breezy watching!"

Fluttershy slipped through the front door, giving the alicorn a wide, friendly, mischievous grin. Twilight took one look at her face and sighed. "Alright... what happened this time?"

"Oh, nothing out of the ordinary. I joined the crew in watching the breezies, volunteered Ponyville as a mid-route pass, met up with Tree Hugger and invited her here, and-"

"Wait wait wait. You brought Tree Hugger here \_this early in the loop?!\_" Twilight groaned.

"Oh, when I told her about you, she really wanted to meet you! In fact, she's right outside."

The alicorn gave out a resigned sigh, shelving the galleyfrayian textbook she had been reading. "Alright... let's get this over with. Tree Hugger? Do you want to come in?"

For a few seconds, there was silence.

"...Oh, right." A relaxed, detached voice floated through the door. "I was just feeling the ki flow of this tree, it's so unique."

"Turns out that feeling tree flows is part of her cutie mark story six times out of seven," Fluttershy whispered to Twilight. "It's alright, Tree Hugger! Twilight's ready for you!"

The green mare meandered through the front door. "Good to know. I hope that I..."



Her voice trailed into nothingness gaze fell on the purple alicorn giving her an unamused look. Her eyes went wide, the pupils dilated until they covered almost the whole surface.

Twilight blinked. "Um... are you all right?"

Without warning, Tree Hugger fell prostrate before her.

"Brahmā́ṭā, ā kā mahāna ātmā, maiā́ tārā sam'mukha hā sakatā hai aura vinamratāpārvaka mā'rā apanā kā āud'dha itanā kārā rāpa mā́ maiā́ apanā ābhā mā́ snāna hā sakatā ki pāchanā kārā li'ā sam'mānita kara rahā hāmī..."

"I-what?"

"Maiā́ tumhā́ karanā kārā li'ā brahmā́ṭā, ā kā ānādāra ātmā sunā," Tree Hugger chanted with her face downwards. "Kyā āpa mujhā batā'ā!"

"Um, Tree Hugger?" Fluttershy lowered her head. "Twilight usually casts a translation spell when she encounters foreign languages, and she... doesn't speak Hindi." She glanced up. "Is it Hindi in this universe?"

"I... don't know, actually, I'll have to check-Tree Hugger, what are you doing?" Twilight asked.

"I only wish to feel the vibe of your aura," Tree Hugger humbly explained. "You are the Soul of the Universe..."

"What-No I'm-Look, just because I'm Equestria's anchor doesn't mean I'm some sort of core of reality!"

Tree Hugger slowly lifted her face. "It... kind of does."

"No. No it doesn't, and also stand up. I'm not going to be worshiped for being randomly selected for this job."

The earth pony reluctantly got to her hooves. "I am sorry, Great Soul of the Universe. I allowed my eagerness for your presence to color my view of what you would wish. But I stand ready to listen to your wisdom; let your reverberations purify my inner self."

Fluttershy winced. "I... I'm sorry, Twilight, I meant for this to be just 'this is an awkward situation' kind of... thing, not..."

"No, it's alright... Look, Tree Hugger. I'm old, well traveled, and educated. And that... is basically it, that's where all my wisdom comes from."

"That is also true of mine. Age, observation, and learning." Tree Hugger bowed her head. "You have so much more, though, though your own life."

"O...kay, I can see where you're coming from there-Look, the point I'm trying to make is that I am not a god, and I don't like to be worshipped as one."

Tree Hugger stared at her. "You're so bright... so bright. Even if

you aren't a god... you are \_amazing\_." She took a breath. "I... I can try to hold in my feelings, around others, around the unenlightened... but..." She shook her head. "You \_are\_ the Great Soul of the Universe. I cannot deny that to myself."

\* \* \*

><p>"...so now I have a semi-loyal cultist-type pony sometimes," Twilight grumbled as she sipped her drink. "Anything new with you, Mac?"<p>

The red stallion shrugged. "Learned ta throw mah voice."

\* \* \*

><p>149.6 (Evilhumour)<p>

Shining Armor blinked he Woke up to his wedding day, with a black chitin mare gasping loudly next to him as the door slammed opened as another Chrysalis stood in the doorway, with Twilight propping her up.

"Get away from my Shiny you monster!" the changeling shouted, as the mare next to him flashed blue and revealed to be a wicked looking Cadence hissing at them.

"I will not let you ruin \_MY\_ glorious day!" with a shout, thousand of crystal ponies began to invade.

Biting back a sigh, Shining took the measures to eject the invaders for this wedding, catching the smirk on Twilight's face knowing she won't let him live this down any time soon.

\* \* \*

><p>149.7 (wildrook)<p>

The doors to the bar opened, revealing Twilight and Zecora looking like they went through Tartarus on Equestria.

"Due to the extremity of our plight," Zecora said to the stallion, "five servings of our usual poisons for tonight."

Big Mac cringed. "Eeyup," he muttered, looking at Berry Punch, who got the idea as they sat down at the counter.

"What happened to you two?" Berry Punch asked them.

Twilight groaned. "Let's just say that I now appreciate King Aspen's life of solitude," she muttered. "More so than usual because he doesn't attack unless something threatens the Everfree."

"But where we Looped into was quite a pain," Zecora replied, "when the Princesses, the Caribou have slain."

Big Mac cringed. Not a lot of words can be said about what happened...but from what's been happening, it sounded like they were beyond "Bureau-Level" bad loops, from what he can tell.

Berry Punch looked at the two. "I know Twilight can go Alicorn," she

said, "but remind me, Zecora, can you do the same? Because you might need it..."

"When one can manipulate the plant life," Zecora replied, "you tend to avoid a lot of strife. Diluting certain materials in your being, it would be a blessing to gain horn and wing."

Twilight winced. "And I REALLY am glad you managed to find a loophole in their whole Magic Immunity gimmick, Zecora," she replied, the Zebra smiling.

"The forest is the best place to hide a tree," she replied. "When living in the one next to Ponyville, the most dangerous predator...is me."

\* \* \*

><p>149.8 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

The door to Fluttershy's cottage shook violently, before a hole opened up from a familiar orange hoof. Fluttershy arrived moments later, with Angel Bunny giving a withering glare at the mare who had damaged her home. Applejack leaned back and gave an uncomfortable laugh, "Uh...Ah'll fix that right up. Sorry, 'Shy."

Fluttershy waved her off, "Oh don't worry. I've been meaning to get the door replaced for awhile now."

Applejack shook her head before a positively boiling expression appeared on the farmer's face, "Is that no good, varmint, Discord, around?!"

Fluttershy shook her head, "I'm sorry, but no. He left this morning on an all expenses paid cruise around the world on his flying whale. It was the nicest flying whale I ever met."

Applejack grabbed her hat and threw it on the ground, "Consarnet! That varmint turned my apple orchard into a potato orchard!"

Fluttershy put a hoof to her mouth, "That's awful!"

She patted her on the shoulder, "Well, you could use this chance to improve your potato cider."

The farmer threw up her hooves and stomped out the door.

\* \* \*

><p>149.9 (Evilhumour)<p>

As Applejack swam in the waters, she could swear she was hearing music.

\_Dunnu\_

Her ear flicked, head turning around. She did hear something!

\_Dunnu\_

But Dashie was off to the side and there was fin sticking out of the water...

\_Dunnunnnunnnunnu-\_

"Lyra, if ya are trying to sneak up on me, it'd help if ya didn't sing the theme to Jaws." Applejack said deadpan to the water in front of her.

The mint green seapony poked up her head and pouted. Swimming away, she muttered "Shoo bee doo," under her breath before swimming after an unobservant Dashie, who let out a loud shriek as the seapony grabbed her rear hoof.

\* \* \*

><p>149.10 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

**\*\*The Unsung Loops: Klingon Language\*\***

"Fluttershy! May the blood of your enemies fertilize your fields."

Cheerilee's eyes were twitching. This was definitely one of the craziest loops she had lived through. Worse, Twilight had just shrugged and decided to go with it.

"And may you die gloriously in battle...if that's OK with you," Came Fluttershy's reply. It was all spoken in the native language of the warrior race from Star Trek, the Klingons. It wouldn't be so disconcerting if they actually acted like Klingons, backing up their statements.

Fluttershy's kind eyes landed on Cheerilee, which momentarily put her at ease. And then Element of Kindness opened her mouth, "Cheerilee, let us drink from the hollowed out skulls of our foes as we dine in honor tonight, if it's not too much trouble."

Cheerilee gave a weak smile and a nod, but couldn't bring herself to reply. Thankfully, she was saved from responding when Rainbow Dash slammed against the library window. Cheerilee muttered, "The wind does not respect a fool," before shoving a hoof in her mouth and looking around. Fluttershy just nodded sagely, as if she conveyed a deep truth of life. Twilight was holding in her giggles at Cheerilee, who just shook her head and walked away.

\* \* \*

><p>Things finally came to a head when she saw Diamond Tiara commenting on how the Crusaders should drown themselves in their own blood, and the crusaders standing up and telling her they would tear her lungs out. DT stepped back a bit at being outnumbered, then muttered that fools and their heads would soon be parted. Cheerilee stepped over in preparation to end this nonsense, when the crusaders said, "Death is an event that should be shared together!"<p>

The other two shouted out war cries together, and something inside Cheerilee snapped as she started screaming, running all the way to Twilight's Library. She opened the door and slammed it shut. Spike

walked through one of the hallways, spotted Cheerilee and asked, "Have your battles wounded you? Will you die gloriously in battle soon?"

Cheerilee screamed, "Twilight!"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Eons of Loops later<em>

Spike looked from the movie projector to the teacher and asked, "What was up with that loop anyway?"

Cheerilee sighed, "Twilight and I did some research in Canterlot. Apparently, a Klingon Bird of Prey had crashed into Equestria millennia before Celestia or Luna arose to power. It became Equestria's primary language, and none fully understood the implications of what they were saying. Except for Twilight who was awake and rolling with it, everyone thought they were wishing each other a wonderful morning, inviting me to lunch or something else non harmful."

\* \* \*

><p>149.11 (Evilhumour)<p>

One Crazy Week Part Five

Twilight groaned, shaking herself out of the crater she had been blasted in by that damnable paintball blast. Once she figured out which the girls did it, she was \_so\_ going to send them to the Moon for a \_very\_ long time out.

As she stood, she realized several details as her sleep deprived brain put several facts out of order.

Two, there was Changelings coming to take her to the hive to meet the Queen. Six, she was about to pass out from exhaustion of running around yesterday, avoiding the paint warfare from above and crashing a great distance away after tripping over several paint mines a once. Three, Chrysalis was Awake, she could feel the un-accounted-for Kindness. Five, the paint she was covered in seemed to be a magical dye mixture, which meant she'd be this colourful eyesore for a \_very\_ long time. One, she was in the badlands. Four, she still had that damn collar.

Shaking her head, as the mental list reorder itself, Twilight smiled to herself as her thoughts were now in proper order and promptly passed out for a nice, long sleep.

Or it would have been if she had not been woken up immediately, feeling slightly drained of her anger for some reason. She \_should\_ be angry, being woken up in a strange bed after dealing with a snake destroying her home, nearly losing her home to the bank, getting swept away at sea and forced to wear this humiliating collar and being bombarded by paint constantly for twenty four hours.

Wait, \_why\_ was she in a strange bed again and why she wasn't she scared?

"Oh good, you're awake Twilight," Chrysalis smiled, clapping her hooves together, as she stood in the doorway. "How are you feeling? Angry at the situation?"

"...no actually, I'm not," Twilight blinked, confused. She should be feeling something hostile considering what the last four-five days had been like, but she was feeling completely indifferent to the whole matter. "Why am I not angry and why can I not get angry?" Twilight was reminded that being calm when you are angry is scary, and she learned that being calm while you are incapable of being angry is even more terrifying, considering how much the Changeling Queen gulped.

"It was something someone showed me, a trick to harvest emotions," Chrysalis said, trotting over to her. "While Doctor Friday's methods a bit much for me, that book she had did offer us some ideas in doing what her magics does in a less harmful way. I think our first test was a success Twilight, all things considered."

"First test-did you take my anger away?" She would have liked to snap, but she simply could not draw out the emotion fully. At the same time, she felt a trickle of the burning anger coming back to her and soon she could lecture until the next day. "Wait, all things considered?"

"Yes, and while your magic is being repressed by that adorable cork and collar, the test worked perfectly on you and I do know how to scale back for other ponies." Chrysalis smile grew, which should have worried her but she wasn't- "Would you like to help me test for the other emotions?"

"Sure, okay." Twilight said without a second thought before looking unamused at Chrysalis. "You took my worries too, didn't you?"

"Yup." The smile was reaching the ears now, her crooked horn glowing.

"So I wouldn't complain about this."

"Exactly."

"You do know once I get my magic back and full control over my emotions, you are going to be spending several years on the moon for this, right?"

"I'd be surprised if you didn't send me to the moon Twilight," Instead of Chrysalis's magic reaching her, it placed a piece of paper of Twilight's lap with a lot of notes. "Would you mind taking notes as we proceed? I'd like to make sure that this process is not harmful."

With the prospect of learning something new about magic, taking notes of the first true experiment of its kind, Twilight could only nod her head as the two of them spent the day exploring Twilight's emotional being.

\* \* \*

Celestia looked down at her hoof.

She looked over her cards. Her sister looked back at her, her eyes peering over the neatly assembled card hand in her magical grip.

"Okay," Celestia said. "Turn two. I play Lorewalker Cho,"

A magical representation of the Pandaren appeared on their life sized battlefield, bowing to the Dirarch of the Sun before turning to Luna's side of the field.

"Very well, then." Luna placed down a card. "I play the Coin I am entitled to as the second player to gain a temporary mana crystal, and summon King Mukla into play."

A gigantic gorilla materialized on the field.

"A five/five creature on turn two," Celestia noted. "That's worrying. But," she said, as Mukla threw two cards at her, "I get two Banana cards for it."

"Ah, but if you use them, Cho will just give them right back to me thanks to his ability," Luna said, grinning. "Sister, you have been hoist by your own petard."

"The game's only just started," Celestia said, grinning.

[br]

"Don't touch the Terminal, Spike," Twilight said. "It took forever to get a good copy of the Demon Summoning Program, and if you step on the summoning circle, you may end up fusing with the demon I hired, and then it'll be uncomfortable for everyone."

"Hired?" Spike asked, as he walked into the room. "How do you \_fuse\_ a demon, any...ways..." he trailed off, as he saw Tirek sitting on his haunches inside a giant glass tube, reading a newspaper.

He looked up at Spike, and shrugged. "It's a living," he simply said to the dragon, turning back to the sports section.

Twilight mouthed the word "Variant" to her Number One Assistant. "Now, what happens to you when you get fused, Mr. Centaur?"

"We just head back to Tartarus, and the new demon you call forth inherits out skills and power." Tirek rolled his eyes, as he flipped to the comics page. "I fail to understand why you little ponies \_insist\_ on calling it fusion when it clearly \_isn't\_!"

"-play Faceless Manipulator to create another Lorewalker Cho! And...I feed him a \_banana!\_" they heard Celestia say from outside.

"Two can play at this game, dear sister," Luna said in response. "I summon my own Lorewalker Cho. Then, I play a Faceless manipulator of my own to make a \_fourth\_ Lorewalker Cho!"

Spike's face fell. "Oh...oh no."

"And I \_feed\_ him a \_banana!\_"

"Gah! That's four Bananas I get. I end my turn, and-YES!  
DEATHWING!"

"...Oh, dear, sister, you've hit your hoof limit, I'm afraid. You can't have more than ten cards in Hearthstone in your hoof at the same time. You must discard your Deathwing."

"No, we need to stop them!" Spike yelled. "Quick, Twilight, find Pinkie Pie and have her bring the stuff she needs for banana cake along!"

"They're just \_playing a card game,\_" Twilight said.

"No, you don't understand!" he yelled. "I played it with Ysera! We had two Chos of our own, and we spammed Coins at each other! We ended up \_drowning in money,\_" and we had to pause the game until we could walk back to our bodies and resurrect! They'll flood Ponyville with-"

"Have. Some. Bananas," Celestia said in a dangerous tone. "You \_MOTHERBUCKER!\_"

With that, bananas began to spill forth from the Princess' playing field, littering Twilight's floor with the fruit.

"EAT THEM!" Celestia yelled, laughing evilly. "EAT YOUR POTASSIUM!"

"NO! Luna yelled back. "WE ARE ALLERGIC! \_YOU\_ HAVE THE BANANAS!"

More and more bananas began to pour into the room, pilling up to Twilight's barrel height.

"Okay, we \_do\_ need to stop them," Twilight muttered. "Sorry, Mr. Centaur, we'll continue this later. We need to have an intervention for Celestia and her banana obsession!"

\* \* \*

><p>149.13<p>

(Gamerex27)

Deconstruction:

"-the point where I would show you a graphic on the smart board, but the wires for that are still broken."

Twilight Awoke mid-class. Human with technicolor skin, ridiculous hairstyles, looking like her friends...no doubt about it, this was Canterlot High, alright. Around the time she first came here.

"Hey, uh..." Rainbow Dash raised her hand. "Miss Cheerilee, \_what happened\_ after that big brawl, anyways?"

"I'm...not supposed to speak of it, Miss Dash," the teacher replied. "If you \_must\_, I'm sure your classmates would be happy to inform



you. Anyways, since I can't continue with the lesson, that's all for today. You're all dismissed."

As the students began to pile out of the room, Twilight grabbed her bookbag, then started for the door. Hm. Looked like a minor Variant where her Unwake self actually enrolled in classes for some time.

"-gonna help Fluttershy at the animal shelter?"

If Twilight were in her usual body, her ears would've perked at that statement. That was Applejack...talking to Rarity? But they were supposed to be feuding at this point in the Baseline?

"I'll have to stop at home to get changed first," Rarity said, smiling, "but yes, I will. Speaking of the weekend, has everyone else said if they'll be coming to the movies with us?"

"Eeeyup!" Applejack said, getting up from her seat with her friend. "Dashie's headed there after her game, Pinkie said yes before Ah even finished askin' her, and Fluttershy's goin' too."

"Wonderful!" Rarity said, grinning. "I'll pay for it all, of course."

"Yah don't hafta-"

"Applejack," she said, stopping the farmgirl. "Of course I do. I have to make up for everything Shimmer tricked us into doing. If that transfer student hadn't..." she sighed, shaking her head. "Best not to think about it. Now, what did you say Applebloom invented?"

As they continued talking on their way out, Twilight followed them out, her legs running on autopilot. They never got back together until she herself exposed what Sunset did, so some other Looper had to be at work here.

She sent out a Ping. Before she could even take a breath, she got a loud one: a piercing magical signature that thrummed around her soul, and made her stumble in her steps. After that, she got a Kindness response and one with no Element, these ones at normal volume, and a bit closer to her.

"Hi, Twilight." Turning around, she saw Fluttershy behind her, beaming. "You feeling Loopy?"

"As always," she said, with a mixture of amusement and bemusement. "...you remember Sunset's plans being derailed before we Woke Up too, right?"

"I do," she said, nodding, "but I can't seem to remember how, or who did it. There's something there about a transfer student breaking her mind control spell and managing to fight her to a standstill in spite of her magic, but that's it. It's a bit chaotic in there."

"Did someone say chaotic?" Discord asked, popping out from inside a nearby locker in the form of a teenage student. "I have to say, I've never seen such an exquisite aura of chaotic magic ever! It's still floating everywhere after whatever big fight went down!" He

patted his hand against a nearby wall. "Why, the place is practically \_oozing\_ entropy!"

"Okay, \_that\_'s a mental image I never needed to see," the Anchor replied, grimacing. "That aside, do you guys want to find this guy? I heard a \_really\_ loud Ping before, like someone was shouting in my ear right next to me. Unless this is some kind of superhero-ish Variant or something, another Looper \_has\_ to be at work here."

\* \* \*

><p>Slowly, the trio approached where they had heard the Ping: in front of a row of lockers around halfway across the school. Hesitantly, Twilight sent out another Ping. The intense, overwhelming response came from <em>very <em>close to her. And the only other person there besides the three of them was a boy inputting the combination into his locker.

"...Hey," Fluttershy said, hesitantly. "..You were the one who-

"Beat the crap out of Shimmer and stopped her from brainwashing everyone in town?" the boy confirmed, without even turning around. "Yeah, that's me. Funny how no one ever seems to consider that maybe, \_just maybe\_, some tricks don't work on everyone? A magician doesn't have to show their secrets for someone else to figure them out."

"...well, that's nice of you (I guess)..." Twilight said, "...but you were kinda risking your life there."

"I'd just come back next time," he replied. "Loops and all that. It \_was\_ you who sent out the Ping, right?"

"Uh...yes. You \_may\_ want to be a bit more \_careful\_ about checking for Loopers. If you're wrong about that, people will think you're crazy."

"Can't say I give a damn what anyone else thinks," the boy said, snorting. Wrenching his locker open, he knelt to the ground, rummaging around in his backpack. "'Sides, it was worth it to see the \_look\_ on her face when she realized every single one of her \_perfect little plans\_ were falling to pieces."

"...Ah, so we've got a vigilante on our hands, then!" Discord said, grinning and slapping the boy on his back.

The force of the impact ruffled the student's shirt, causing the hood of his sweatshirt, which had previously been propped up as if by a hook, to fall flat against the shirt. Revealed in its stead was a small, jet-black unicorn-like horn, growing from the the boy's neck.

Fluttershy and Twilight suddenly went very, very still.

"Not really," the boy said, turning around to reveal a young man, dark haired and of Asian descent. Also, with a gauze patch over one of his eyes. "I...I know what it's like," he admitted. "What she did to those girls. I know what it feels like to have your friends ripped away from you, to see everyone you know turn against you and hate

your guts. I know how it feels to be alone. Damn if I'm ever gonna let that happen to anyone else, ever again."

"Even if you get your eye poked out for the rest of the Loop?" Discord asked, not noticing his friends' sudden freeze-up. "I mean, those things don't come cheap in magic-less worlds. You have to get a tooth removed and have a doctor jam it into your eye socket to grow again, and that's just gross!"

"Steal her phone, show those girls how she screwed them over, then beat the living shit out of her when she tries to mind control everyone into her own personal army." the boy said, shrugging. "Not hard at all. Even if I get an eye gouged out from her fingernail, it's worth it. As if I'm gonna let one little bitchy witch stop me."

"...Naoki?" Fluttershy said, in a barely audible voice. "Naoki Kashima?"

"Yeah, that's my name," he said, as he started walking past them. "Hey, you're one of those girls the redheaded bitch was trying to screw over, right?...I feel like I know you from somewhere. Before this Loop, I mean."

"...Naoki, it's me. Fluttershy."

Naoki froze mid-step. For several seconds, he didn't move. Didn't even breathe.

Eventually, he forced himself to turn around, and looked Fluttershy square in the eye. "...hey," he said, after a long period of silence.

"...Are you feeling better no-"

"Yeah, I'm fine," he said, cutting off Twilight mid-sentence. "You heard all about it, right? The Edit? What we saw, what we did? It's gone now. I dealt with it. We dealt with it."

"...I'm sorry!" Fluttershy blurted out, tears welling up in her eyes. "It's...it's our fault. If we knew that it wasn't the Nightmare Force, it wasn't a ghost, but your Shadow, we would have been-"

"The hell are you apologizing for?!" Naoki snarled. Catching himself, he gave her a sad smile, then sighed. "All you did was try and stop a crazy bastard who tried to kill you and everyone you love," he said softly. "You weren't the one to lose all self-control and give in to every worst part of himself. You didn't have a virus eating away at your soul. You didn't have your sanity snap like a twig and kill everyone you see for so many Loops after that."

"And you weren't the one who almost Ascended after everything was said and done, just to make it end. You weren't the one weak enough to give in. It was all me."

The inhabitants of the hallway were dead silent for a few moments.

"It's my fault," Naoki stressed. "All of it. I'm the one who owes you an apology. So...I'm...I'm..." he tried to say, then sighed. "I'm sorry. For everything I put you through. Your friends, your daughter, your world, yourselves...It's all on me. There's no evil spirit to blame, no angry, vengeful god out to make my life hell...just me, and my mistakes. All you did was try and stop my Shadow-try and stop me," he corrected himself. "Get over it. You're not the ones at blame here."

"Naoki-"

The demon sighed. "Look...look. I...need some time to myself," he finally said. "Just 'cause I get way more Fused Loops now, doesn't mean I've got to live a normal life in...ever. I just want to get the year done, graduate, do...whatever you're supposed to do after that, I forget what, all that stuff that happens in normal life.. It's not that I want to be normal or anything: I just need...I need a break."

"If...you really need to see me again," he said, turning his gaze away and walking away, "I'll be here. No way I'll be in your own world. Not for a long time."

With that, he turned the corner and walked away.

Both Elements of Harmony were silent for a few seconds.

"What the hay just happened?!" Discord suddenly said, breaking the awkward silence that had fallen over the group. "I have no idea what any of that was about! At all! You've never been this down since the Molestia thing!"

"...It's a long story," Twilight finally said. "...It's good to know that it's over with..."

"But it still feels like it's our fault," Fluttershy whispered. "We should have been able to figure out that the Shadow was messing with his memories. That it made everything we said and did so much worse. We should have known."

"Like he said," Twilight replied, "there's nothing we can do about it now. Hey...why don't you take a break? Go to those movies your Unawake self was going to see with the girls?"

"...alright," Fluttershy said, wiping her eyes. "I will. There's not much to cry over anymore, anyways. I...heard the stories about The Edit, and how the Amala Loopers did all that. But..." she sighed. "No, he's right. We shouldn't brood over what went wrong, especially if he did deal with the problem like he and everyone else from Amala said they did. I guess...as long as I can remember that, I'll be fine. See you later."

"Wait."

Discord grabbed Fluttershy by the shoulder, pulling her back to himself and Twilight.

"Look," he said, with an almost never seen before, actually serious expression on his face, "if whatever happened almost made you cry, I'm not letting this slip by. I want to hear what happened. No one

messes with my friends and gets away with it! I'm the only one allowed to mess with my friends!"

"...Alright, meet us at lunch, then," Twilight said. "This is going to be a long story."

\* \* \*

><p>"It's lunchtime, we're all sitting comfortably, and the food surprisingly isn't terrible today," Discord rattled off, frowning. "You promised to explain what happened between you and Short, Pale, and Horny. I probably should have made you Pinkie Promise it, come to think of it," he muttered.

"...no, I can talk about it," Fluttershy said, sighing. "It happened millions of years ago. It was painful, but..."

"It's alright, Fluttershy," Twilight said, taking her friends' hand in her own. "If you don't feel comfortable going on, I'll pick up for you."

"No thanks," she said softly. "I was there, so I need to talk about it." She took a deep gulp of her water, then began. "No matter how much it hurt. It started during a normal Loop-a bunch of other Loopers were Awake, but Twilight wasn't. After she did her checklist for the festival, I went into town to do some errands. This young colt ran into me, but he said he was sorry: he was in a rush to meet with his friends."

"What does that have to do with-"

"And then he Awoke, and hit me so hard I went flying into the Everfree."

Discord abruptly stopped his question in the middle of his sentence. "...Oh."

"I managed to calm him down by Pinging him," she continued, "but he was surprised by that. He said he'd forgotten we were Looping, since he didn't get out of his Loop much, and went off instinct from when we first met." She paused. "...in a Bureau Loop."

She took another sip of water. "Apparently our Bureau selves personally converted his friends and he...did not take it well. He wasn't in a good mental state when we met-pacing, really deep breathing, twitching eyes and legs. He looked like he was ready to just...collapse. Or just stop."

"I take it he didn't want your help, since all this happened?" Discord asked.

"Not after the Bureau." she said, nodding. "That was a big reason why he didn't want us helping him...but it may have had something to do with pride, too. He refused to let us help. Vehemently refused. So, I sent him through the Mirror-here-so he could cool down as a human. We aren't supposed to force help on someone who doesn't want it, so I just helped him find some place quiet." She paused for a few moments, trying to find the right words. "That was a big mistake. He needed help, even if he didn't want it. From us, from anyone...he was on the edge. And, from what I gathered from Loopers

from local sub-Branches, something happened here that snapped his last nerve."

She opened her mouth to continue. "Antheee-" she stopped. "Twilight, can you..."

"...alright, I understand," Twilight said, nodding.

"No, I'm fine," Fluttershy said hoarsely. "I'm...just not used to talking for so long, and my throat's dry." She smiled slightly, rubbing at her throat. "Could you keep going for now?"

"Uh...alright." Passing the Bearer of Kindness her untouched glass of water, Twilight picked up the story. "I wasn't personally there for this, but I think I can tell the rest well enough. So, the girls met up with the other two Loopers from his Branch-one was only on his dozenth or so Loop-and then everyone started seeing fireworks on the Moon. Everypony thought it was for the festival. It became clear it wasn't when of those flashes of light brought Luna's nearly-dead body to the stage. She had enough time to choke out a warning to Celestia, and...died.

"Then Naoki showed up out of nowhere and threw Celestia into a black hole. He also shoved my Unawake self into his Pocket. He looked worse than before-hang on..." Twilight grabbed a pencil from her purse and started doodling on a napkin. "I really need to brush up on my drawings one of these Loops," she said, apologetically, sliding it over to Discord.

The spirit of Chaos picked up the napkin and stared at it. "Yeeesh," he said, staring at the mangy, unkempt, and blood-splattered pony with skeletal wings and a horn poking out of his neck rather than his brow. "That doesn't look good. I'll fix that."

"Wha-" Twilight was cut off as Discord snatched away her pencil and started drawing on the napkin.

"Done!" he said, sliding pencil and paper back. "That, Sparkle, is how you draw."

Twilight glanced at the moustache, top hat, and cane Discord had drawn on Naoki's image, and failed to suppress a few giggles. "That makes it a bit less scary," she said. "Anyways, he started ranting and raving about how all our lives were nothing but a happy dream, and he would show us a nightmare and kill us all, and so on. AJ figured out pretty quickly that he was possessed: twitching in place, constant spasms in his body, echoing voice, all of that. And also that 'Naoki Kashima is dead. There is only the Fiend.' That was kind of a giveaway. So they lured him into an open space where he couldn't hurt anypony, and went to go grab Trixie, since she was the only Element of Magic Awake there. Priority one was an exorcism: try and use stunning and restraining spells on him long enough to Element Blast him."

"When Dashie and Trixie got back," Fluttershy continued, "he'd started drawing Equestria into a pocket dimension called a Domain. We went in there, and found him. He...uh...was wearing Celestia's coat like a cape (though it looked kind of fake, so it was probably an illusion), and he trapped us in a Heartsong. A really dark

Heartsong. He...sang about how everything was meaningless, we were no different from him, the usual villain stuff. Something in the last line of the song gave Nyx an idea, so she jumped into Naoki's mindscape while we fought him. Eventually, we wore him down to the point where we could hit him with the Elements. We nailed him..."

Fluttershy was silent for a moment, as she took another sip of water.

"They didn't work?" Discord guessed, shifting uncomfortably in place.

"They didn't," Fluttershy confirmed. "We hit him around a dozen times, but they didn't really do anything noticeable, aside from sapping at his strength."

"That makes no \_sense!\_" Discord exploded, making the two women sitting across from him jump slightly. "When \_I\_ went through my evil phase, they turned me to stone! They blasted the Nightmare out of Luna? How come \_they\_, of all kinds of magic, \_couldn't\_ do anything?!\_ Why couldn't they get rid of \_one\_ little possessing spirit?!"

"Because I \_wasn't\_ being possessed."

"...Hey," Twilight said, tapping her fingers together.

"Hey." Naoki sat down at the table next to Discord, and drummed his fingers against the table. "I guess I should explain. The thing in control...it \_was\_ me. A part of me, anyways. You ever been to the Persona Branch?"

"You don't need to dance around the issue. Just tell him."

"I need some \_context\_ first, Purple," the Demi-Fiend said, rolling his good eye. "Anyways...there's something in psychology called a Shadow. It's...everything negative about you. Every repressed thought, everything about you you don't want to admit, every darkest secret, every bit of self-doubt and loathing squeezed into a corner of your mind. In that Branch, your Shadow can \_exit\_ your body and try to kill you. My Branch is closely connected to theirs, since we're all in Amala, so things cross over...But, my Shadow was different. It \_was\_ part of me.\_ It \_knew\_ it couldn't kill me. Not with the Loops going on. So, it tried the next best thing. To \_break\_ me.

"It grabbed control of my body-something to do with me losing all hope and Ideal Energy, according to Suou when I asked him about Shadows, it happens sometimes-and did everything they told you about. The thing is...it didn't even let me \_see\_ was really going on. It screwed with my senses, made you guys look like \_massive\_ douchebags who were trying to kill me for \_daring\_ to disrupt your Sanctuary. Locked away all my good memories, made every negative emotion I had kick into overdrive. Once Nyx got to the center of my mind and broke the Shadow's hold on me...it used the last bits of its energy to blow my body up. It ended the Loop."

The table fell silent, as Naoki took a bite of his burger, and Discord pondered this all.

"So, the Elements couldn't do anything...because the Shadow was part of you, and not some ghost grabbing your body for a joyride and a night on the town."

"Yeah," Naoki confirmed. "You can't run away from your own Shadow. It's like the shadow the sun casts on you: if you try to get away from it, it follows you just as fast. Try to get rid of it by shining a torch-or Magical Bulls\_T MacGuffin, I guess-on it, and the shadow's still there. You can't make your problems go away, in the blink of an eye, by just firing a flashlight at them. There's no easy way out."

"Getting rid of the dark part of you leaves you nothing but an empty, giggling dumbass, since it's got the good things about you that you hide away too. And stuff. There's only one way to get rid of your Shadow. To face up to it yourself. And I was too much of a coward to admit when I was beaten, and that's where all of that came from. And you know what came next. Rampage across Loops, me killing a...a lot of people, I tired myself out of it and tried to Ascend, I got stopped, then the Edit. Heavy stuff."

"But, hey," he said, grinning, "when your kid brought her MacGuffin of Honesty into my head, the leftover energy broke down those fake memories the Shadow put in. I saw what you guys-here and some of the other, older Loopers I fought like the Original 7-really did. You didn't give up, you didn't take the easy way out and just kill me: you kept on fighting no matter what, to try and stop my Shadow. It reminded me: just because my Loop is pretty much the worst place ever, there are worlds and people worth fighting for. So I fought to get out, and I won."

"...and this is the part where you tell us about how terrible your Loop is, and how you're so alone even with Fused and Variant Loops?" Discord said, glaring at Naoki. "Seriously, haven't we had enough dark stuff today?" He snapped his fingers, and the lights in the cafeteria briefly shined brighter, blinding everyone. "Let's get back to the jokes and fun!" He munched on Naoki's burger.

"I could save it for-" Naoki blinked, and looked at his empty hands. Then he stared at Discord eating his food. "Crafty bastard," he said, chuckling.

"Knew I'd could break the ice!" Discord said, pumping his fist as he opened the burger and poured some ketchup on it, as Twilight rolled her eyes and Fluttershy stared at him disapprovingly.

"See, now you're ruining perfectly good food," Naoki said mockingly, reaching for his food, only for Discord to yank it away.

The foreign Looper crossed his arms, then smirked. "Those Variants you're talking about? Never had a single one."

Discord froze mid-bite. "Huh?"

Naoki grabbed his food back, and planted it on his plate. " Gotcha. Seriously, though. I said, I never had any Variants back home. And before the Edit, I had so few Fused Loops I can actually count how many there were, out of billions of Loops. For billions of years, I was trapped in my Home Loop. Almost totally alone, since Pixie was



the only other Looper for a long time, and she was Awake about one in around a few thousand Loops.

"Home's a hell of a place to be stuck, too," he went on. "The world ends in the first half-hour, and there's no way to stop it. Trust me, I've tried everything. Six billion people, wiped out in the blink of an eye. A few of my old friends, ones I'd known since childhood, survive...and then go insane and fuse themselves to demons in a gambit to take part in remaking the world. Either they end up dying after being attacked by one another or by the asshat who orchestrated everything to get his perfect world, or I have to off them, since it's my destiny to break a never-ending cycle of destruction and creation by killing all the candidates that can make a new world. Now, it hurt like hell, but the first time through, I put that behind me, since it was more important to break the system that caused all of this than to grieve over what I lost. Then the Loops happened, and I got a second chance. So I tried to save them. And failed. It started again, and I tried something different. And failed. And again. And failed. And again. And failed. You get the picture."

"No matter how many times I try to think about it, I still can't get it," Fluttershy said, staring down at the table. "How can a world push people around that much? How can an entire universe be a giant bully?"

"The universe is broken. You know that's what the Loops are, right? Not some way to live forever and have fun. It's a desperate attempt to hold Yggdrasil together before it falls apart. Some places were hit a lot harder than others, and mine was pretty bad off." Naoki finished his burger, and sighed. "Hell, even after the Edit-even after Masakado helped us rip that glitch causing all the railroading and dark crap out of our codes, I can't save my world or my friends. I'm not there too often, anyways, 'cuz I'm usually in Fused Loops. The Junkyard, Dante's place, Mikado, anywhere. I just...made new friends."

"So that's what happened," he concluded. "I was too stubborn to just give up on my friends or my Loop-to leave a lost cause-and it drove me crazy, which lead to what they were telling you about. No one knew anything was wrong because I didn't tell anyone. I told myself that whining about it wouldn't fix anything, for billions of years, but I kind of took it to an extreme. Guess I thought that would admitting that I couldn't change anything would mean I admit defeat. Stupid, I know. It's my fault, yeah. But it's beyond all of us. I don't think any of us even thought about it until we bumped into each other."

"Y...yeah," Fluttershy said. "It was all a long time ago, and after we heard about the Edit."

"It's all in the past," Twilight said. She looked at Naoki. "Right?"

"...Yeah, it is." he said, getting up. "Thanks for the food."

"The fo-" Discord quickly glanced down at his plate, seeing that his noodles were gone. He glared at Naoki as he dropped the chopsticks back on the lunch tray. "You're not supposed to do that back!"

"Whatever." He started walking for the door.

"Naoki. Wait."

He paused mid step. "What?" he asked, turning around to see Twilight also stand up. "Is Sunset back in school or something? You want me to beat her up again?"

"No." The other Anchor smiled. "We're...we're seeing a movie later tonight."

"A movie," the Demi-Fiend echoed.

"It's been out a few days," she continued, "so there should be a few seats."

"You're asking me out?!\_" he asked, in disbelief. "Look, all that stuff is water under the bridge, but I'm sure as hell not gonna go out\_ with you!"

"I didn't mean it like that!" Twilight glanced back at Fluttershy, who nodded approvingly. "I just thought you might want to come with us. You said\_ you never got out of your home Loop until the Edit, so you probably haven't gotten the chance to enjoy other places' cultures yet."

"...me." he said. "You're asking me\_. Me, the guy who went insane and tried to kill all your friends. Me, the guy who infected your Unawake self with a hate plague that made you try to eat your daughter\_. Me, the guy who broke your Sanctuary's perfect record by being too stubborn to save?!\_ Me, the guy who almost Ascended before I got knocked out of the ritual and saw the thing\_ behind all the shit I've been through?"

"...um...yeah," she said. "You said\_ all of that was in the past. Were you lying to us?"

The two stared each other down for a moment.

"...now I know\_ you're doing this on purpose," he growled, scratching the back of his neck (and horn). "'Cuz if I don't\_ come with you, that'd mean I learned nothing about what I went through. You can't let the past drag you down. You have to \*\*move on\*\*." He thought for a few more moments.

"...it's a chick flick, isn't it?"

Twilight nodded.

"...alright, sure,\_" he said, giving her a small smile. "I don't care if it's Twilight, or M.D. Geist, or Evangelion, or anything at all. I haven't had popcorn in millions\_ of years. Should be a nice way to wind down."

\* \* \*

><p>"A nice way to wind down?!<em>" Twilight echoed, as she ducked under the seats. "You could have told\_ me there were demons in the mall and all over town after Sunset tried her coup!"

"I thought you knew!" the Demi-Fiend yelled from his seat several rows back, as he grabbed a worm-like parasite from his Pocket and swallowed it. "\_Everyone\_ knew! Why'd you think everyone stopped using their phones in class?!" he asked, wincing as the Magatama re-wrote his entire biological makeup to give him immunity to the fires burning all around them. "'Cause they had to put the \_Demon Summoning Program\_ on their phones to \_survive walking home\_ after Shimmer's takeover! They didn't want to text their friends in class and blow them up with a Agidyne spell by a misclick!"

"At least no one's died yet!" Fluttershy added, as she carefully pulled a druid's staff out of her Pocket for battle.

"Not 'fer lack of tryin'!" Applejack shouted, punching a demon in the face.

Rarity shrieked as she was hit by a fireball, the Harmonizer on her phone stopping her body from turning to ashes in a single hit. Then she looked down and screamed. But not because it had taken off a good chunk of her HP.

"\_That was my third-favorite dress, you charlatan!\_" she yelled, sending the offending demon flying through a door with a spinning kick.

"I bet they won't even refund us the tickets," muttered Twilight. "I never go to the theater here because the guys running it are \_jerks\_. I didn't really want to be fighting tonight: I really \_did\_ want to see that movie."

"Can't always get what you want," Naoki said, rummaging around in his Pocket. "Hey, geniuses, have you tried \_negotiating\_ with them?"

"It's a full moon!" Rainbow Dash shouted as she uppercutted an oni and blasted another out the exit door with a wind spell. "They \_never\_ listen on a full moon!"\_

"Well then you should've planned the movie night better!" Naoki yelled back.

But, in spite of the dangerous situation, he couldn't help but grin. After fighting for trillions of years on end, one couldn't help but find some enjoyment out of it. Like some kind of Stockholm Syndrome with his home Loop, he supposed.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a demon sneak up out of nowhere and punch Twilight in the face. He had to actively suppress the reflexive feeling of triumph at seeing the genocidal mons-\_normal\_, real version of the pony\_ get nailed square between the eyes. Perhaps that was a reaction that would never go away. And judging by the guilty looks Fluttershy (and to a lesser extent, Twilight) had been shooting him through the entire movie, maybe they would never be at ease around him. A gulf that could never be filled in.

But, if he'd learned anything from his journey, it's worth a shot. And it was a gulf that'd already been jumped.

Ponies or no, he'd beaten his world at its game. He was free. Time to

enjoy it.

\* \* \*

><p>149.14 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"So, why did you call us all together, Pinkie?" Rainbow Dash asked.

The party pony, uncharacteristically serious, looked at the four other Element Bearers. "I think we might have gone a bit too far with all the pancake pranks on Twilight," she said.

"I didn't think the library built into a giant stack of pancakes was that bad," Fluttershy whispered.

"Perhaps I was a bit, er, insensitive that Loop where we replaced the Elements with the Elements of Breakfast," Rarity admitted.

"I don't care what you guys say," Rainbow Dash retorted, "replacing every anvil in Equestria with stacks of pancakes that only turn soft and splatty when air-dropped was a brilliant gag! And in a thousand loops Twilight will agree!"

"Of course she will!" Pinkie agreed. "But not right now! Right now we've managed to do what Tirek destroying her library couldn't- what the Imperium of Man couldn't- what the Morrow's Days couldn't. We've broken Twilight Sparkle. I mean, really broken. Really, really, really broken, like a broken thing that's broken."

"Let's go see for ourselves, then," Applejack said, not mentioning the recent Loop when she'd made sure her Apple relations had all made pancake and waffle-related apple dishes for the Summer Sun Celebration... for Celestia's chosen overseer to sample.

\* \* \*

><p>"She's gone through eleven platefuls so far," Spike said, pointing to the immense stack of pancakes sitting on a plate on a small table next to Rarity's drama couch. On the couch lay Twilight Sparkle, alternating between quiet woeful sobs and extremely vocal eating noises as she took each pancake, dripping with blueberries and syrup, and ate them one by one. "So long as I keep her supplied with pancakes she's quiet and kind of lucid, but when I take them away the waterworks come on full blast."<p>

"Er... hello there, Twilight darling," Rarity said, stepping a bit closer. "Are you feeling well?"

Twilight looked up at the ponies from the couch. "Oh hello, Rarity... Applejack... Dash, Fluttershy, Pinkie... all my closest \_friends...\_" Twilight's voice broke on the last word, and tears ran down her face. "WAAAAAAHHH \_om nom nom nom..." Each wail of horrible sorrow was interrupted by the momentary calming influence of an incoming pancake.

"Excuse me," Spike said, "I better hurry and make another batch before she runs out." He scampered to the kitchen, leaving the girls alone with the apparent basket case on the couch.

"Twilight," Pinkie said, waiting for the unicorn's mouth to be occupied before speaking, "I think we all have something we want to say to you."

"Er, yeah," Applejack said, stepping forward. "We're all powerful sorry 'bout all those pancake gags we pulled on ya. Guess we jus' couldn't help ourselves, and we shoulda."

"We really did rather run it into the ground," Rarity said.

"And we were unforgivably thoughtless about your feelings," Fluttershy added.

After a prolonged silence, something lifted Rainbow Dash's rump a foot higher into the air. "OW! Er, yeah, we were outta line, Twilight," she muttered.

Twilight paused in reaching for another pancake. "It... it's just so hard \_om nom nom nom...\_... knowing that even my closest friends keep harping on one little incident \_om nom nom nom...\_ one stupid, meaningless incident \_om nom nom nom...\_ again and again and again and AGAIN and AGAIN \_om nom nom nom...\_" Another pancake cut off the rising shriek of Twilight's whining.

"And we're never, ever going to do that joke ever again! Pinkie Promise!" Pinkie sat up on her haunches and raised a hoof in oath-taking.

"Cross our heart," Applejack said.

"Hope to fly," Rarity said.

"Stick a cupcake in my eye," Fluttershy said.

After another pause, and another pointed pink reminder applied to a cyan posterior, Rainbow Dash rushed through a mumbled repetition of the oath.

"Girls," Twilight gasped, for a moment overcome... and then the moment passed. "But there'll still be Celestia and Luna and Leah and Leman and SkyNet and Donut and Anakin and Mikasa and Naruto \_and Hiccup and WAAAAAAAAAH om nom nom nom...\_"

"No, no, no they won't!" Pinkie said hurriedly. "We'll tell 'em to stop! We'll Pinkie swear 'em to stop! Won't we, girls?"

The others agreed, even Rainbow Dash, who this time didn't need a reminder. (Which was good, since she'd run out of unkicked flanks.)

"P-p-p-promise?" Twilight whimpered.

In unison the other five ponies went through the Pinkie Promise chant and dance again.

Instantly Twilight smiled. "Well, that's settled then," she said in a perfectly normal voice. "And I'm going to hold you to all of that." She rose from the couch, striding off, adding, "Now if you'll excuse me, I need to clean out twelve super-stacks worth of masticated pancakes from my subspace pocket. I never thought I'd ever use that

eating-contest cheat I learned from Ranma... but this one was worth it."

The front door shut behind Twilight, leaving five perplexed ponies to stare after her as they slowly realized they'd been royally had.

At this point Spike emerged from the kitchen with mega-stack number thirteen. He froze as he saw the empty couch and the unfinished stack next to it. "Well, of all the- I can't believe- I don't- well, what am I supposed to DO with all these?" he shouted.

"I have a couple of ideas..." Rainbow Dash growled.

"Pinkie Promise," a certain party pony hissed, eyes glowing dangerously red.

"... but I think I'll keep them to myself," Rainbow Dash said hurriedly, backing away.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

149.1: Most of the time they're just all pain sticks.

>149.2: Prank War!<br>149.3: Game mechanics? (Castlevania elements)

>149.4: Tests are to be complied with. It's more difficult and hence challenging that way. (Portal cross.)<br>149.5: Speaking of being able to see power.

>149.6: Crystal clear.<br>149.7: Teamwork.

>149.8: Some things you never live down.<br>149.9: It's irresistible.

>149.10: Readers! May your eyes implode from amazement! (Star Trek cross.)<br>149.11: Twilight's a sucker for experiment. (Days series)

>149.12: She's gone... no, not saying it. (Shin Megami Tensi and MtG elements)<br>149.13: A boatload of horrible incidents have happened in the past. (Shin Megami Tensi cross)

>Note - the reason the full version's not being shown here is that Gamera and I were unable to reconcile certain differences about whether the Admins would have been able to intervene and prevent the kind of problems he considered necessary for the plotline. It will be available elsewhere in another set of loops - the ones focusing on Naoki.<br>149.14: And something light and fluffy to finish on. (Pancakes.)

## 157. Chapter 157

### 150.1

"I must enquire, fair alicorn," Zecora began as she followed Cadence through the castle.

"...something something morn?" Cadence replied with a grin.

"...indeed, that was my rhyme. But please, give me more time."

A smirk. "Don't worry, I'll let you finish in future. Anyway..."

here's what I wanted to show you."

Cadence pushed open a set of double doors with a flourish, and Zecora peered through.

She beheld a stupendous orrery of rune-inscribed metal wheels, stone obelisks, hovering crystals and softly glowing liquids. Even as she watched, it shifted visibly, and one of the vials turned a striped black-white before beginning to glow.

Something went \_parp\_, and the whole assembly shivered into life â€" the multi-axis metal rings rotating independently at the five foci of the structure, and energies began to crackle along the angular runes inscribed thereon.

"...oh, this will cause trouble later," she said slowly. "That's the Dating Simulator."

"That's right!" Cadence grinned. "And I thought it could solve a problem of yours!"

"What problem might that be," the zebra asked, already making plans to skedaddle. "For there is none I see. I seek no special somepony, and that is about the only-"

"Let me show you," Cadence interrupted, and kicked a switch.

There was a \_clunk\_ as the device dropped into a faster, more advanced mode. The wheels spun faster, the energies became more intense, and a bright light scanned across Zecora before vanishing.

Dried leaves burst into the air from what looked like a potpourri dispenser, and were snatched up into the whirling ring system. An eerie keening developed-

And then there was a \_BONG\_.

A cup clattered out of a chute next to the confused Zecora, and steaming black liquid arrived in it in precise drops.

"Cup of tea?" Cadence asked.

Zecora blinked.

"Sorry," the alicorn added, smiling. "But I just wanted to see the look on your face. I've actually been repurposing the Dating Simulator for some time, trying to salvage the scanner section and rework the rest. Try the tea."

"I see. I think I'll have the drink," Zecora said, and sipped it.

She smiled, her eyes unfocusing slightly. "That is an excellent blend. Just the thing for a long day's end."

"Exactly," Cadence agreed. "When in \_beverage\_ mode, it detects the exact drink preferences of the pony using it... although at the moment it only makes tea."

"A flaw, it's true," Zecora admitted. "But why would you-"

Cadence interrupted again, and Zecora shot her a grateful look for doing so on a rhyme. "It's for two reasons, Zecora. First â€" this is about as far as I can take the project. I'm no good at the potions side of things, about the only other thing I can make it do is dispense love potions... but you're the expert, and it's much better that you have it. Even just as something to tinker with every now and again."

Zecora nodded, understanding.

"And second..." Cadence smiled slightly. "It requires the operator to use unicorn magic to charge the arrays. I thought this might help you get used to your ascension â€" I know you don't use it much, and I think this would be a good way to encourage you."

Another nod. "I see. A gift of daunting price â€" though perhaps others would not be so nice. This machine does blow up a lot... I think of it you're happy shot."

"Really?" Cadence frowned. "That's the rhyme you're going with?"

Zecora shrugged. "They can't all be three out of three."

\* \* \*

><p>150.2<p>

\_Okay, here goesâ€"|\_

Harry coughed.

The girl looked up. "Hello!" she said, smiling. "How can I help you, Harry?"

"Pretty simply, actually," Harry replied, rummaging in his pocket. "Do you know what this is?"

"The diary?" Hermione's replacement nodded. "Yes, Twilight warned me about it almost as soon as she knew I was looping. Why do you ask?"

He placed it on the table. "I was wondering if you'd indulge me in an experiment. You see, this isn't just a copy of Moldyshorts... it's a sixteen-year old teenage boy copy of the git."

Cheerilee nodded, showing she was following along. "And?"

Harry smirked. "I just wondered what would happen when it was used as someone's school notebook for a few years."

"Okay," Cheerilee said, looking a bit apprehensive. "If you're sure it's okay..."

"Of course I'm not sure, that's why it's an experiment," Harry pointed out. He saw she still wasn't sure, so deployed the weapons-grade argument. "Think of it as a learning experience."



She nodded, and smoothed out her Ravenclaw robes. "Right."

\* \* \*

><p>Diariddle was not a happy soul fragment.<p>

The dozy little second-year had by this point written almost two thousand pages of notes into him, and she barely seemed to have noticed that the words were vanishing!

She hadn't even read any of his attempts to send a message, either, and without that he had hardly any means of influence whatsoever.

Suddenly another stream of information began to project itself into his increasingly crowded mind. It seemed to be close-spaced notes about how to set up a railway schedule capable of serving an area somewhat larger than Britain with minimal delays or service gaps, including how to compensate for expected breakages and how to organize the switch from coal to diesel to electrified to â€

\_IT DIDN'T MATTER!\_

Tom Marvolo Riddle had been a fascinated, eager student. But only a very few people in the entire multiverse could be that interested in that many topics for that long, and Riddle was not one of them.

\_Why can't she be normal and write about boy trouble...\_

\* \* \*

><p>"...so, long story short," Cheerilee finished with a shrug, "I managed to load it <em>so<em> full of information that some of it came leaking back out."

"Oh, really?" Twilight chuckled. "What kind of things?"

Cheerilee's reply was a sibilant hiss.

Fluttershy looked up from her tea. "You've got a very strange accent..."

"I think it's Scots," Cheerilee said, wincing. "You're right, Parseltongue in a highland brogue is just a bit too much..."

\* \* \*

><p>150.3 (Wildrook)<p>

"So," Celestia muttered, "what's this about the Dual Nightmare?"

"Bit of a new expansion on my game," Discord replied. "Instead of just one of you turning into Nightmares, it's BOTH the Sun and Moon. I got the idea from when I Looped in Kirby's Home World during the Milky Way Wishes crisis, and I thought...why not apply it to you two, only you're bringing total discord to Equestria?"

Celestia then glared. "But Nightmare Star?" she asked him. "Aren't you applying logic that the Sun is basically a Star?"

"Nightmare Star, Solar Flare, to be honest." Discord then thought about it. "That's the other thing I wanted to ask you, though...I was thinking on working on more expansions for this game, and so far, all I could come up with is Slendermane, Gummy on Drugs, and finally...well...you when you let go and unleash your true power. So far, the themes happen to be Eldritch Horrors, Realistic Design, and the concept of the Alternate Reality, and I was thinking...why not EXPAND the game so that everyone else in the Multiverse is applied?"

Celestia blinked. "I'm sorry," she said, "I must have heard something crazy. Are you asking me for permission to run a business for Chaos? With Paperwork, card design, and a semblance of order?"

Discord nodded. "And yes, I'm aware, but Order and Chaos are always two sides of the same coin. You must HAVE Order...to create Chaos. Why else do you think I'm asking for permission from the highest state of authority within Equestria personally?"

Thinking about it, she admitted, in his own twisted way, that he had a point. She's played a few rounds of game night with most of Twilight's Family, and while she knew that Anything Goes, it relied on thinking outside the box.

She then gave out a smile. "I'll allow it," she said, "on a few conditions."

"I'll try to see if I can find a few ways around them," Discord replied, "but name them and see if we're thinking along the same wavelength."

"One of them is that you do not just get Twilight and her friends involved with production, but myself and every other Looper in Equestria, even when they start Awakening. We all have our respective fields in the Loops, so we might apply ideas that you may or may not like."

Discord then blinked. "You knew that I was going to ask Fluttershy and the others, weren't you?" he asked her, who replied with a nod. "Well...I've still got a bit of an issue with Vinyl, but I can see what I can do."

"The second thing I ask...is to release the Expansions bit by bit. Too much of an influx would cause panic."

"Somehow, I get your point."

"Third...and this is for advertising purposes...if we have Guest Loopers and are Awake at the time, you bring them in for a beta run of the game as long as the rest of us are Awake."

Discord thought about it. "Considering that Awakening in Yggdrasil is rather spread out," he said, "when the opportunity arises, I'll see what I can do. Might have to see if Eight-Legs is willing to come in for a game or two, but as of this moment, I'm rather pleased with this outcome. What do you have to bring to the table?"

"Star Swirl and I have been around the different Mirror-verses, so I may have a few things to bring to the game. Besides...I'm up for a

rematch after the last time you brought in Old Mare Heartstrings in card form."

"You were the one who brought in Walpurgis Nacht, or whatever it's called. I just retaliated with the best card I had in my hand at the time."

\* \* \*

><p>150.4 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Hey, Twilight, lookie what I learned to do!" Vinyl's shout was barely heard over the wubs being played. "This is the coolest thing I've ever done!"

Running outside, Twilight looked around for the white unicorn when all of a sudden the wubs got very loud. Listening to instincts honed from dodging many Rainbow Dash tackle hugs, she hit the dirt as something sailed over her, blasting her with music. Tilting her head up, she saw Vinyl floating in the air with the biggest grin on her face.

"I learned how to channel the wubs through my entire body now, and I just figured out how to get it through my hooves at the same time now!" She smirked as she flew down again, causing Twilight to roll over to avoid the mare. Unfortunately for the purple mare, it was right into a big mud hole. "Whoops, are you okay Twili-GAH!" Vinyl shouted as she fell from the sky into the same mud hole Twilight was in. "Still have to learn how to properly control it and junk, but soon, I will be able to fly by the power of wubs itself!" Hugging the purple mare tightly and covering her with more mud, she pushed herself out of the mud with her musical hooves, splattering the last clean space on Twilight with mud.

Twilight simply sighed, shook her head and made her way to the spa before she would begin to deal with getting revenge.

\* \* \*

><p>150.5 (Evilhumour)<p>

Spike blinked as he saw his fourth most favourite white mare pounding the Golden Oaks door.

"Um, Vinyl, what can I do for you?" He blinked slowly as the mare paced back and forth. She was for some reason wearing a sock on her horn and several of the cutest booties he ever saw. "Why did Rarity put sound proof boots on you and why are you wearing a sock on your horn?"

"Your wife decided after I used a bit of my rocking wubs in her shop that I needed a time out." She snorted, looking to the side. She then held out a hoof to stare at a boot, tilting her head. "These boots are kinda awesome..." She then smirked. "Tell ya wife I like them!" Bobbing her head, she turned around and started to strut her way towards the train station.

"Okay..." Spike blinked. Frowning, he called out to the mare. "Wait, why are you wearing a sock on your horn?"

Vinyl paused, blinking at him. Tilting her head, she looked upwards and blushed. Shaking her head clear of the sock, she used her magic to put the sock into her saddle bag. "I forgot I still had this on from last night! Thanks Spike! Bye!"

Spike blinked, scratched his head and closed the door.

\* \* \*

><p>150.6 (Wildrook)<p>

"Oh, you are kidding me," Twilight muttered as she looked at the candidate running against Starlight Glimmer.

And by candidate, she meant the Villager with a leaf with a hole in it for a Cutie Mark.

As for what happened...well...

(Five minutes earlier)

Starlight Glimmer growled at the man with the cutie mark as he's countering her moves with his own.

She was about to ask where the bowling ball came from before she got hit by it...but as she tried to get up, she noticed a tree heading for her as she tried to dodge out of the way.

"What in the name of Grogar's up with you?" Starlight Glimmer yelled. "You're just pulling things straight from your person..."

"I have pockets," the Villager replied. "Helps when I'm dealing with every-day life."

She then growled as she brought out the "Staff of Sameness." "You won't be accessing them for very long once I'm through with you!" As she launched her magic at the Villager, she then smirked as she got ready for impact...

...but there was nothing to be heard.

"Where's the impact?" she asked herself. "There's supposed to be a drain of your magic as your Cutie Mark is ripped from your body."

"I told you," the stallion replied as he had brought out balloons while floating. "I have POCKETS." He then brought out the very same magic she tried to hit him with and launched it at her...as she felt her own Cutie Mark rip out of her person and placed onto a slab of rock.

(Present day...)

Twilight and the others are flabbergasted at this turn of events.

"Now I'm jealous," Pinkie Pie replied. "Why didn't I think of that?"

Twilight face-hooved. Whoever this Villager was, he had managed to equalize Starlight Glimmer...but the thought of how it was done was

driving her mad.

"Well, he's got my vote," a yellow Earth Pony with a seashell Cutie Mark replied as the Villager chuckled at the praise.

\* \* \*

><p>150.7 (Wildbrook)<p>

In the Cutie Mark Gate, a skeletal pony and a colt with a big nose had heard the ranting of an egomaniacal villain.

"But really," she finished, a little annoyed at the two, "taking their Cutie Marks is a kindness so they don't have to suffer their inequality to idiots like you...so now who's the villain?"

"Y...you," Billy said, totally lost.

"What?" the mare asked him

"I mean, Twistar..."

"Starlight," the skeletal pony said, dreading where this is heading.

"Nightlight, I didn't understand a word you just said." The big-nosed pony tried...and failed...to explain himself. "I mean, for all I know, you're trying to be like my best friend, who could think of better plans than you do..."

"Okay, no!" Starlight Glimmer, in her rage, said as she tried to get rid of the Cutie Mark of the big-nosed pony.

"And to top it all off," Billy said, "you're not exactly Mandy-levels of scary." That made her eyes widen.

"And apparently, this is happening. SKULL HEAD, why the heck is this pony resisting the effects?"

Skull Head, aka, Grim, had shivered. "He isn't," he said. "You already stole his Cutie Mark."

"What are you talking about?"

He then pointed at the wall of Cutie Marks...that cracked?

"...That should not be possible. Why is it cracked?"

"Because, if you should know, Big Nose's stupidity IS his special talent...and because of your theft...well...I'd start galloping if I were you, mon."

And that's when the world weSHOPUJAGINFGIJIGPAND98REWEQIGPHU-

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke with a start as she looked at herself...and groaned.<p>

"Loop Crash?" Rainbow Dash asked her.

"Yeah," Twilight said, "and I have a good idea who was the cause of it."

"Billy?" Pinkie Pie asked her, walking in the classroom.

"Billy."

\* \* \*

><p>150.8 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Ash looked down at the purple unicorn and said, "This is not my fault."

The purple unicorn glared up at him.

"No, really, this is NOT my fault!" Ash waved his hands- well, his hand and chainsaw- in frustration. "After this many Loops I know the damn words, right? But just as I was saying them this great big horsefly or something bites me on the ass! Through my pants! And, well, it throws off a guy's concentration just a little bit!"

"What did you actually end up saying, then?" Twilight Sparkle said, not giving the S-Mart employee any benefit of the doubt.

"Um... well, I said the words."

"What were the sounds you made, Ash?"

Ash shuffled on his feet. "Klaatu Barada Niieeiiiygh," he mumbled.

"What was that again?"

"Klaatu Barada Niieeeeiiiygh!" Ash snapped, the last word coming out remarkably like a horse whinny.

"Thank you. That's all I wanted," Twilight grumbled, "just an explanation for all of this." She waved a hoof at the vast army of evil, glowing-eyed undead Twilight Sparkles marching towards the castle while the two of them hid behind a tree.

"Just so we're clear," Ash persisted, "not my fault."

"I never said it was," Twilight Sparkle said.

"No, it totally is," said an evil Sparkle, who chose that moment to dangle down from the branches above. "By the way, boo."

Ash reacted true to form- which is to say, screaming followed by bloody mayhem.

\* \* \*

><p>"... and that's why I'm spending this entire Loop in your cellar," Twilight told Applejack. "I'm drinking until I stop seeing myself getting bloodily dismembered from a third-person perspective multiplied by about ten thousand."<p>

"But Big Mac's not Awake this time 'round," Applejack said. "All we got's our special reserve cider."

"All you had, you mean." Twilight shook the dregs out of the little cask next to her into a mug and drained it. "Unless you let me tap into your Pocket's reserves..."

Applejack sighed. "Th' royal fruit sake's been pilin' up on Shojiki lately. Can't pass it 'round without non-Loopers askin' questions, so I might as well let y'all have some."

"Some?" Twilight asked.

"You ain't gonna drink it all, no matter what you think!"

"I dunno..." Twilight levitated a full cask from the stack against the cellar wall. "I have a LOT to forget..."

\* \* \*

><p>150.9 (ToaMataNui5000)<p>

"Oh Sunset..."

The unawake fallen protege was not expecting a voice to follow her out of the mirror portal. Let alone one that was incredibly clear and so amusingly singsong in tone.

"I'm respecting your privacy by knocking, but asserting my dominance as Equestria's newest princess by coming in anyway!"

\*\*BOOM!\*\*

The reflective glass and stone of the statue's base was blown outward into the school's front lawn. Luckily, the impact winds knocked Sunset out of the way of any major damage. When the dust settled, she saw Twilight Sparkle, gripping a battering ram under her left arm, grinning deviously. Spike hung dangling off of the battering ram's end, his paws barely registering a grip. It was enough to make Sunset drop her jaw all the way to Tartarus and back.

Meanwhile, Pinkie just popped out of nowhere as usual, gripping a sign that read '7 out of 10.'

\* \* \*

><p>150.10: (ToaMataNui5000)<p>

Starlight Glimmer, casually flipping her branch as she walked, confidently trotted into Twilight's crystal palace. Despite her recent failure pushing her over the edge, she regained her cool after eavesdropping on a option for an easy comeback; An alternate dimension residing within a mirror. All she had to do was neutralize whatever allies the of the purple alicorn resided on the other side, and BANG! Instant army to equalize Equestria.

She was so caught up in her confidence, she initially failed to notice how unnaturally easy this "break-in" was. Not only was it broad daylight, but there were barely any guards roaming the castle

halls. "Meh, must be her overconfident trust that no one would harm a princess, especially Little Miss Friendship." She rolled her eyes and chuckled, "All hail the almighty idiot, mares and gentlecolts."

As her horn picked up an incredible source of magic, she hooked a right into Twilight's experimenting room. Starlight had to admit, she was impressed with what was there. Twilight would have certainly served as a wonderful asset, perhaps even more, if she and her colleagues hadn't been blinded by their backwards interpretation of equality. Dwelling on it no more, she spotted her prize; The mirror portal, hooked to an inactive magic generator, which she booted up like it was filly's play. Smiling deviously, she prepared to leap in, "This is gonna be fun..."

Oh how very wrong she was...

Starlight groaned as she regained consciousness. Every part of her body ached like she had been forced through a taffy puller. She slowly opened her eyes, taking note of the stubby, furless appendages replacing her forehooves. She then noticed the two sets of footwear, and followed them upward until getting a good view of their owners.

"Wonderful, another one from your world," the blue haired male said with a hint of sarcasm. "This one a friend, at least?"

"Eenope, this is the enemy that Twilight recently encountered." The yellow one responded before turning to face Starlight, "Look, we're kinda busy trying to redeem a trio of sirens here, so do you mind coming back later?"

As Starlight struggled to her now two feet, using the statue as a crutch, she grinned. "No need to leave. In fact, I'm here to solve all of your problems for you."

"I doubt you're a mechanic, sweetie. But if you say so, let's see what you got?" The boy raised an eyebrow.

Taking the bait, Starlight thrust her stick towards his chest, where his cutie mark laid exposed. Of course, it did nothing. Confused, she tapped his chest again, receiving no result. Eyeing the cutie mark on the other girl, she tapped the branch to her. Nothing. Continued lack of results started to break her mental stability again. "Why isn't it working!"

"Performance anxiety?" The man quipped. "I mean, I get that all the time before going on stage, so I know how you..." Starlight jabbed the stick into his chest, his sentence cut off by groans of pain. Obviously no longer in the mood, Sunset kicked the branch out of the air, caught it as it fell, then snapped it in half and threw the pieces at the light purple newbie.

"News flash, Little Miss Communist: Magic doesn't work the same way on this side of the mirror as it does in Equestria Prime." She got closer to Starlight, causing the flabbergasted woman to slightly wince. "And another thing, I've been down the same road as you, wanting total control over everypony. So take heed and don't even retry."

As Sunset turned to walk away, Starlight screamed, attempting to



tackle the yellow human. Unfortunately, she stumbled over something, and the cruel mistress known as gravity took over. She fell face first into the ground. At least lacking a snout made it less painful. She rolled over to see Flash sticking out his leg. "Oops, sorry cutie." As he waltz over to join Sunset, he continued with, "I'd usually gladly help out strangers, but I'm busy chasing a different purple pony right now. So yeah, have fun adjusting."

"I never thought you could willingly be that cruel, Flash."

"Meh. Call it side effects from the Dazzlings' brainwashing. And if she really did all that Twilight described to you, she's lucky if anyone else doesn't give her worse."

"Even if the Dazzlings and I did essentially the same thing?"

"Different case. She fled from punishment and a chance at redemption, while you four took it." Flash smiled before adding, "That, and you four are much more attractive and adorable."

"Easy there, Tonto. But thanks as well."

\* \* \*

><p>150.11 (ToaMataNui5000)<p>

"Twilight?"

"Yes Rarity?"

"Why are we being escorted around our human counterpart's world via limo like esteemed guests?" She took a sip of her complimentary wine. "Not that I mind at all, but still..."

"Sunset is surprisingly good at international government peace negotiations. Fitting considering she was supposed to be in my position."

"Touche, darling."

\* \* \*

><p>150.12: (Gamerex27)<p>

Rarity rubbed at her horn with her hoof. "Right...Mitsuru, dear, please explain to us what happened with Starlight Glimmer."

"We didn't do a damn thing!" Akihiko said, pumping his forehoof. "The moron did herself in with her spell!"

"My pony name is Great Seal," Minato said, sighing as he slipped his headphones back on, struggling for a bit to get them onto a comfortable position on his now non-human head. "Names here tie back into your talent, right? What'd she expect, when she took away my 'talent?' Guess she was too dumb to realize that she'd break the seal."

"In all fairness," Aigis said, rubbing at her flank (and, for the first time, regretting how human/equine she had become over the

Loops: enough that the Cutie Mark removal spell worked on her), "she had no idea of what removing your Cutie Mark entailed. Death-or, at least, the personification of such-being trapped inside a mortal being is an outside-context-problem for the ponies of this world."

"Look, girls-and guys-" Starlight Glimmer said, in a decidedly more masculine tone of voice, "we can talk this out! Maybe go out for some drinks? Catch a movie? Go to some hot springs and take off our-no, \_stupid Ryoji,\_ girls don't like that!"

The furious townsfolk didn't seem to care that this hypocrite who had been keeping them imprisoned for so long had done a total 180 in personality (and gender identity, and apparently normal identity), and marched towards her/him with their torches and pitchforks nevertheless.

"She's possessed," Twilight sighed. "That much is obvious. But...how? And by who?"

"Aigis, if you would," Mitsuru asked, looking at the mechanical pony.

"Very well, then." Aigis removed a screen projector from her Pocket, hooked it up to herself, and started playing a slideshow.

"When Minato-san was a young boy," she explained, "he was unfortunate enough to travel to Tatsumi Port Island. Tragically, the personification of destruction and death, who had been summoned to the island through a series of fairly convoluted events, had broken free of its bonds in an evil cultist-slash-scientists' laboratory, and rampaged across the city, killing his parents. I managed to defeat it, but only by sealing away one thirteenth of its incomplete form within Minato-san."

"That's why Ryoji's here," Minato explained, walking up to the Cutie Mark Vault and breaking it open. "Since he was locked inside of me for most of our Baseline, he sometimes ends up Looping along with me."

"I take it by the lack of panicking that he has mellowed out after all these Loop?" Rarity asked.

"He was \_always\_ pretty mellow to begin with," Akihiko admitted, as the Equal Cutie Marks were knocked off all their flanks and replaced by their normal ones. "He was only gonna end the world 'cause he had no \_choice.\_ And because the Chairman of our school who tricked us into killing off the other parts of Death was \_an asshole.\_"

"Okay, and your Cutie Mark symbolizes how good you were at sealing away Death both within yourself and protecting people from it with the 'Great Seal' thing," Twilight concluded, noting Minato's Cutie Mark was, appropriately enough, a shield marked with an overlaying skull and rosary. "And when she stole your Cutie Mark, she let Death out as your friend Ryoji to rampage. I get that. But why is he \_inside her now?\_"

"I do not know," Aigis admitted, as Starlight/Ryoji desperately projected a magical shield and battered his/her way through the angry townsfolk. "A reasonable explanation was that, since Starlight was

drawing some of the magic into herself by the nature of her spell, Ryoji was forced into her body as a side effect of Minato-san's Mark being stolen."

"H...hi" Starlight/Ryoji panted, galloping over to the other Loopers, breathing heavily as the townsfolk gave chase to them. "Maybe...we can finish the recap later? If they get to me, they might kill this body, and I never like ending the world...or Loop."

"You could've avoided that if you waited to wash the paint on your butt off," Akihiko muttered. "You didn't see her memories at all?"

"I never meant to get stuck in her body!" Starlight/Ryoji objected. "I didn't want to pry! And the paint really itched! And we really should pick this up when we get out of here!"

Nodding, Twilight teleported them all away in a flash of light, reappearing in the map room of her castle.

"That...was different," Mitsuru sighed, flopping down onto her haunches. "I doubt that removing our talents would have stopped us from using our Personas against her, but it's always possible if that spell functioned like a Magic Bind or Silence spell."

"I...you should probably go back to them," Starlight/Ryoji told Twilight. "They may end up hurting themselves or others trying to find her...me..."

"You usually don't see a spirit of death being so...compassionate." Twilight remarked, smiling.

"A little bit of him rubbed off on me," Starlight/Ryoji said, smiling in turn as he/she pointed to Minato, "and-"

Suddenly, Starlight/Ryoji's eyes widened, almost popped out of his/her head, and he/she grabbed Twilight by her mane. "KILL MEEEEEEEE!" the composite being screeched in Starlight's normal voice.

Then, just as suddenly as it happened, his/her expression returned to normal, and he/she released the other(?) mare.

"Er...sorry. That's never happened before," the composite being spoke in Ryoji's voice, scratching the back of his/her head with a forehoof. "I'm not trying to traumatize her, but being connected to the Appriser of Nyx (um, not your Nyx) isn't wearing well on her mind."

"Is it that," Minato asked, "or is it seeing your fantasies?"

"Uhâ€¦" Starlight/Ryoji thought, blushing a little. "Maybe more of the latter. I should probably take a cold shower so she can stop screaming about the-"

"Don't want to hear it!" Twilight interrupted, ignoring as Mitsuru muttered about perverts and "Executions" in the background. "It'd probably be better if we can just separate you two: it'd make all this a heck of a lot easier. Rarity, any thoughts?"

"I may have a ponikin lying around in my Pocket," Rarity mentioned, as Twilight regained her composure, and straightened her mane. "You may be able to enter into there so we can deal with Glimmer properly."

"That would be good," Minato said. "But, you might need to end up sticking her in a mental ward instead."

"Amala," Twilight said with a sigh, grabbing a bottle of absinthe and passing it around.

"We don't have to deal with all of the really bad stuff from the other Linked places that badly," Akihiko admitted as he took a swig from the bottle, "...but I appreciate the booze. Gives me some carbs to burn for my next workout. Any more monsters to beat up?

\* \* \*

><p>150.13: (Bliss Authority)<p>

The white-coated, black-maned unicorn strode through the door of the Carousel Boutique with the tight-lipped expression of somepony - or someone - who did not gladly suffer a waste of time. At first glance Rarity thought she might have been military from her uniform: a closer look at it clarified that it was inspired by a Japanese boy's school uniform, but cut and modified for a sleeker look.

Interesting.

Rarity bowed (as best as a quadruped could, which involved craning her neck down). "Welcome to the Carousel Boutique, where everything is chic, sleek, and magnifique. My name is -"

"- Rarity Belle," the unicorn cut her off. "One of the elite five guardians of this world, as led by the example of Twilight Sparkle. Enforcer of this Loop's status as a sanctuary to all who respect its tranquility." The stranger reared up on her hind legs, towering over Rarity, and resting her fetlock on the hilt of a sheathed katana. "Peerless in the crafts of war, peace, and tailoring - this last of great personal interest to me." And her expression curled upward, if only a little bit.

Rarity frowned. "I believe you have me at a severe disadvantage, darling. How did you know I was looping? And what, pray tell, is your name?"

"My Loop memories tell me that I am named Pure Cloth," the stranger said. "But you may remember me by another name. Satsuki Kiryuin."

It took Rarity a second to remember. "From the Loops with the living clothes!"

"Just so," Satsuki said, a very slight smile on her lips. "You will forgive me if I wasn't displaying my usual composure, but you have to understand that meeting you in the role of - how does my sister put it? - "Disco-Mom, Winner of the Gendou Ikari Lifetime Achievement Award for Parenting" -" She paused to allow Rarity time to titter. "- was not doing my mental state a favor."

Rarity waved her off. "It happens all the time, dear," she said. "Now, what may I do for you?"

"Prevent untold suffering in my loops," Satsuki said, betraying no emotion save a twitch of one great bushy eyebrow in the prefix to a frown. "I would have you redesign the Peerless Uniforms so that they need not rely on Life Fibers. We will need our source of Honnouji's titanic power to be shot through with threads of an alien life-form that thirsts for blood, and is in thrall to a dark God."

Rarity managed a weak chuckle. "I can see that as a bit of a design flaw."

Satsuki looked directly into Rarity's eyes. "My Peerless Uniforms are very much double-edged swords. It is past time I corrected that. Too many of my fellows in too many Loops have died when the Life Fibers in their uniforms betrayed them."

Rarity nodded. "I will see what I can do."

Satsuki nodded. "Without even asking for payment..." she stopped, and closed her eyes, to float in a suitcase with her TK and snap it open; it contained several paper rolls of gold bits. "As to be expected from a paragon of Generosity. Take your time," she said, her expression shifting to a fierce smile. "You have until the Loop resets."

\* \* \*

><p>Ragyo Kiryuin had to admire the suddenness of Satsuki's betrayal, but she had known it was inevitable and planned for it. Still, there was no way that her daughter could plan for Mind Stitching - or for the Life Fibers of the Peerless Uniforms to turn against their masters with a snap of her fingers, a feat she could manage even while bisected and crucified. It was sort of a shame that such a beautiful flower as her daughter needed to be trimmed when the First Life Fiber awoken, but she would not cry for her.<p>

Wait. It hadn't worked. Ragyo snarled and snapped her fingers again.

"Third time's the charm! Charming charming charming~!" Nui said. (As for how she heard the tilde, she hadn't. Nui was standing under a word balloon as she spoke. Ragyo didn't question it; she was unnerving, but she was loyal. The perfect daughter.)

"Oh, and by the way. Dear mother." Satsuki smiled. "I now certain that you didn't notice, but the new Ultimate Uniforms no longer rely on your tainted gifts," she said. "Thank you very much for bringing me the other half of the Rending Scissors, Nui. ELITE FOUR! TAKE THEM!"

"AT ONCE, MILADY!" Gamagoori screamed, as was his wont. "THREE-DIAMOND ULTIMATE UNIFORM, BONDAGE REGALIA MARK TWO!"

Wait. Three \_DIAMOND?\_ Ragyo's eyes went wide as she realized just how badly she had been outplayed.

\* \* \*

><p>"So this is the power of a Three Diamond uniform," Aikuro said. "Made entirely by the power of human ingenuity. It is almost as fearsome as the technology of the Nudists."<p>

Ryuuko snorted, swallowing a bite of her Mystery Croquette. "Wouldn't say it's HUMAN ingenuity, 'zactly. We called in some help from a friend."

Aikuro raised an eyebrow at her. (And peeled off half of his shirt, but it WAS Aikuro.) "Anyone I would know?"

"Depends. Were you awake when Disco-Mom was really into purple and green?" Ryuuko said, grinning.

\* \* \*

><p>150.14: (Evilhumour)<p>

The Doctor frowned as he sat on the edge of the TARDIS, staring down at Equus in low orbit as he tried again for the billionth time to get down there!

"It's not been a billion times, Doctor," Twilight rolled her eyes, already predicting his rant after hearing it for so long. She was busy with Applebloom to try and figure out what magical aspect was preventing the TARDIS from landing. "And I think we're getting close to cracking the case of the magical interference."

'Right right, just doing boring non moving stuff," he grumbled. This body was too energetic to stay still for more than five seconds and the ponies destroyed a large number of his fezs too.

"Ah've got it!" Applebloom shouted, bring the two over to the filly at the monitors. "It seems to be that an overabundance of Earth pony magic producing a magical resonance interfering with the TARDIS's landing programs." Squinting, the filly tapped the screen showing an image of Applejack bucking a tree, with apples falling into buckets. "There! That's the resonance that's stopping the Doctor from land-Oh come on!" the filly shouted.

"Of course. Of course an apple a day would keep the Doctor-

"Don't say it!"

\* \* \*

><p>150.15: (BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

Twilight stared in disbelief at the sight in front of her. Moving forward cautiously she hesitantly placed a hoof against the incredible sight in front of her, trying to convince herself it wasn't an illusion of some kind. She was met with the reassuring solidity of the Golden Oaks, against all odds reborn from the ashes after Tirek's defeat. Turning to face the grinning mare beside her she had only one question.

"How?"

Pinkie Pie giggled at the look on her friend's face. "Silly filly, trees are alive aren't they? So I thought to myself, what would happen if I activated one of my Peppermint Pylons before that nasty old Tirek blew up the Golden Oak Library? And poof, instant repair! Now you don't have to worry ab-"

Pinkie's words were abruptly cut off as she was caught in a tackle, Twilight having pulled her into a hug.

"Thankyouthankyouthankyouthankyou!"

Pinkie just grinned as she enjoyed having made her friend happy, which made her happy.

\* \* \*

><p>Two days later Twilight was busy drowning herself in alcohol as Big Mac looked on sympathetically.<p>

"So let me get this straight. Pinkie managed to figure out a way to guarantee that the Golden Oaks survives, but now it gets destroyed like every half hour?" Rainbow Dash asked quietly from her table, where she and Applejack were watching as Twilight attempted to drink her weight in Cider.

"Eeyup. So far Ah reckon it's been knocked over twice, struck by lightnin' five times, blown up a good dozen times and Ah think Discord accidentally melted it once."

Dash winced. "Yeesh, the Loops Really don't like Twilight's tree huh?."

"Eenope."

\* \* \*

><p>150.16: (BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

Twilight Sparkle found herself experiencing her most common of Awakenings as she peered languidly upon her tome in which was set forth the mythical tale of the founding of the land of Equestria and the eventual disagreement which had led to the degeneration of the Princess Luna into the befouled shadow known as Nightmare Moon. Blinking ponderously as she assimilated the collected scraps of knowledge inherent within her memories, she found herself beset by an immense urge to soothe the pain within her temples.

'Wonderful. This particular reiteration of events is destined to be prolonged and arduous,' she ruefully reflected to herself.

Swiftly gathering the various items which lay strewn about herself she set about traversing the distance between herself and her, with luck, equally Awakened assistant. As she withdrew she mentally composed her dispatch for the Princess Celestia.

\_'My Dearest Teacher,\_'

\_'My continuing studies of pony magic have led me to believe that we are upon the precipice of disaster! For you see the mythical mare of

the moon is in fact \_Nightmare Moon \_and she is about to return to Equestria and bring with her eternal night! Something must be done to ensure this terrible prophecy does not come to pass. I await your quick response.\_

\_Your faithful student, Twilight Sparkle.\_'

Twilight momentarily paused as she was assailed by an unmistakable sense of familiarity. After a moment of rumination she groaned in dismay. Save for a minute change in wording this was nearly identical to her own baseline self's original missive. Apparently she was naturally inclined to Purple Prose.

"Small wonder Rainbow Dash referred to me as an Egg-head." .

\* \* \*

><p>150.17: (BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

"Rarity?"

"Yes... Vinyl? Hmm, Usually this gag is with Twilight."

"Gag?"

"Nevermind, you were saying?"

"Why are we marshmallows?"

"I really don't know dear."

\* \* \*

><p>150.18: (BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

"And we'll have the best night ever! At the Gala!"

As the magic of the Heartsong died down, Twilight Sparkle took a moment to review her plans for the night. She had so far played everything baseline just for this event. She, Princess Celestia and Discord were the only ones Awake that she knew of, although there had been a few distant Pings at the start of the Loop that had failed to show themselves. The goal for tonight was to have the Draconequis arrive and try and drive the nobles to distraction, made all the more amusing by the fact that Discord had promised not to actually engage in any of his usual shenanigans. However all of her planning abruptly died a fiery death as a terrifyingly familiar nasally voice shouted out over the crowd.

"That was awesome! Let me try, let me try, I wanna try!"

Twilight's pupils shrank to pinpoints as she desperately sought the speaker. Not now, any where but here in the middle of the largest gathering of Equestrian citizens since the Summer Sun Celebration.

"No mon, some one stop him before it's too late!" a heavily accented voice called out, but not in time. Twilight felt a chill as the magic which had recently dispersed once again rose in time to another



Heartsong. Only then did she manage to lay eyes on the speaker. Him.

Taking a deep breath Billy opened his mouth and began to sing.

"This is the sooong that neeevvvveer ennnnds!"

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Celestia, ruler of Equestria and Keeper of the Sun, breathed a soundless sigh of relief as she stepped into the magically enforced, blessed silence of Big Mac's bar. She was unfortunately still singing, but at least she couldn't hear it. Like everypony else, ever since the Gala Incident (as it had come to be known) she had been caught in an ever expanding Eternal Heartsong. Even those normally resistant to the musical magic such as the Dragons and Griffins had been affected. For Tree's sake even Discord himself had fallen victim, apparently there was a difference between Chaos and Pure Entropic Stupidity, and as the nominal ruler of the one responsible for it she had been dealing with the backlash for days. As such it was a tremendous comfort to finally have the time she needed to get well and properly drunk.<p>

Signaling to the Apple stallion she was rewarded with a generous mug of alcohol which she made quick work of. Her second glass she was content to nurse for the time being. The longer she could avoid returning to the sounds outside these simple walls the better.

\*\*Heaven â€" Local Yggdrasil Command Office\*\*

Sleipnir frantically typed on his custom keyboard as he attempted to patch the newest outbreak of the Heartsong Glitch. Several others were equally active as they worked, trying to contain the contaminated code before it spread to yet another part of Yggdrasil. This shouldn't have been an issue normally, each Branch of the World Tree being typically isolated when not being actively worked on, but no one had ever considered that someone would actually be stupid enough to start a Musical Number with a song that by definition wouldn't stop.

As a result almost every Loop where spontaneous bursts of song occurred with any frequency had been hit by Billy's actions and even now new reports of confirmed cases were coming in. If it weren't for the possibility that he might crash it Sleipnir would've already demanded that Billy spend a few Punishment Loops in the Ren and Stimpy universe. However the last thing anyone needed was to have THAT world start looping.

With a few final keystrokes the Patch was finally finished and set into place. Now it was just a matter of damage control. Grimacing, he executed the program. \_'I hope you can forgive me Twilight.'\_

\*\*New Loop\*\*

Twilight Awoke in front of a familiar book. So far so good, after the last Loop a trip through Baseline was just what she needed. Quickly packing her studying material into her saddle, she hurried off. In front of her she noticed Twinkleshine and friends approaching her. \_'Well why not. It's been a while since the last time I attended her

party. And Oak knows I need to relax after what happened.'\_

Having resolved herself to accept the invitation when it was offered, she abruptly stiffened as the horribly familiar sound of a particular moron's Heartsong came clear. "No. No. Nononononononono. NOOOOOOOOO!"

Frantically galloping past the trio she checked her Loop memories as she should have done from the start. The result was a nightmare. The entire world was still trapped in Billy's Heartsong and had been for all of recorded history. Communication occurred using mime and hoof code. And worst of all, she was the only pony immune to the effects.

With a pop Twilight teleported to the only place in Equestria free of the musical magic, the Everfree Forest. This Loop could go to Tartarus.

\* \* \*

><p>(Sunset Shimmer's Journal)(DrTempo)<p>

From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

This Loop was...harsh for me. I had found myself in the Loop where humanoid giants called 'Titans' have all but destroyed humanity, and mankind is struggling to survive.

The place is such a death world that the Anchors here are actually 3 people: Eren, the warrior who can transform into a Titan, Armin, the tactical genius, and Mikasa, the master swordswoman. If any of them die when there're no other Anchors, the Loop crashes.

At first, I chose to go through the academy without using my array of skills. The main method used to fight the Titans was a device which allows easy building swinging. Darn thing is clunky, though; I'll take flying with ki any day of the week. The day the Anchors and I graduated from the academy, the Titans attacked, and...my squad was slaughtered. If I hadn't chose to hold back, they would have lived. I knew that doing so was not an option with lives on the line.

I unleashed my wrath on the Titans. Though they only have one weak point that must be hit to destroy them(otherwise, they regenerate from injury), my skills allowed me to easily strike down Titan after Titan. Only after the battle was done did I hear a shocking truth from Armin.

Each Titan had been human; forcefully transformed into mindless beasts. I was sick to my stomach. Had I become a monster myself, not caring anymore? Had I lost sight of my morals?

I challenged the three Anchors to a fight to hopefully clear my mind. Their experience easily beat my vast amount of skills and abilities; after all, 'those who have practiced one move thousands of times are better than those who know thousands of moves', to paraphrase something I had read somewhere.

They helped me feel better about what had happened; as they said, I had ended the suffering of those poor souls made into monsters against their will. If I was a heartless monster, Eren said, I

would've just destroyed anyone and anything in order to win. With my conscience cleared, I aimed my sights on three other people who could transform like Eren could, but were harming other innocent lives.

I was sorely tempted to kill the three traitors, but Mikasa said they were following orders from an as yet unknown other enemy. I pitied them; in all this, they were doing that they thought was right. The traitors were left to the tender mercy of the Anchors, and I meditated on things.

Despite Loops like this, I haven't lost sight of my morals. I admit that I may be a good bit more willing to use violence than other Loopers from my home Loop are, but I have been on some battlefield or another for ages.

Twilight, I hope you'll understand what I went through when I finally get home, and how it's affected me.

\* \* \*

><p>150.19: (Heliomance)<p>

The Redguard trudged up the last few steps leading to the barrier.  
"Lok!"

The swirling air dissipated, and he walked through. The dragon that awaited him as he reached the summit of the Throat of the World was different to normal. A little smaller, more silvery in colour. He waited for it to land, going through the motions of baseline. He was struggling to find a point in life, with these endless repetitions. At least he was a human this time. He couldn't remember what race he had been originally, but he always felt more comfortable as man than mer or beast.

"Drem Yol Lok. Greetings, wunduniik. I am Silonahnaak. Who are you? What brings you to my strunmahâ€| my mountain?"

Huh. The voice was very definitely female. That was a new one.

"Silonahnaak - that's not the normal name. Translates toâ€| Silver Spoon, I think? You a visitor to Nirn then?"

"Not the normal name? Would I be correct in thinking you are in a tiid kenlok, a time loop?" The dragon frowned for a moment, and cleared her throat briefly, before continuing in a lighter tone, her speech now a more normal pace than Paarthurnax's measured cadence. "Oh, that's better. That speech tic was really starting to annoy me."

"Yes, I'm Looping. Actually, I'm the Anchor, so I'm told. I'd give you my name, but I'm afraid I don't remember it. Most just call me Dovahkiin, or Dragonborn."

"Ah, that's tough. Sorry to hear it."

The Dragonborn shrugged. "It is what it is. I cope as best I can. So how about you? What's your home loop?"

Silver Spoon smiled. "I come from Equestria. It's a nice place, very

friendly."

"Oh, ponies, right? I've been there once. How are you finding being a dragon?"

There was a disconcerting sound of the sort that would make lesser men quail. After a moment, the Dragonborn realised that the dragon in front of him was laughing.

"Oh, this isn't even close to the weirdest shape I've been. I'm an old hand at strange bodies," she assured him. "My race data was in a corrupted section of Yggdrasil â€" the loops don't actually know what species I am, so every loop I end up in a different body."

The Dovahkiin blinked. "Youâ€| wait, you too? Iâ€| I didn't realise there were others like me! The same thing's happening to me, I can't cope with it! It's driving me mad, I can't even remember what race I started out as! How do you cope? How do you manage to live not knowing what you're going to wake up as next time?!"

Silver Spoon settled down into a more comfortable position, and gestured for the Dragonborn to come closer. "It took me a long time, and I never did stop finding it annoying, but the most important thing is to be able to hold on to who you are despite the changes. I had friends who helped me â€" if you want, I'd be honoured to be your friend, and to do the same for you."

For the first time in many, many loops, the Dragonborn smiled. Hesitantly, weakly, true, but he smiled. He'd like that, he thought. That sounded good.

\* \* \*

><p>150.20: (wildrook)<p>

"RAINBOW MIRIAM DASH!" Twilight yelled.

Dash cringed as she looked at Twilight. "What is it this time?" she yelled.

"Please tell me you never authorized an energy drink in your image," the purple Alicorn replied.

Rainbow Dash blinked as she looked at Twilight. "Not to my knowledge. Why?"

That's when an orange filly on a scooter rocketed past the two, leaving a sonic boom in her wake.

"Because THAT!" Twilight yelled, noticing her library get ripped out of its roots.

Rainbow Dash cringed as she looked at the carnage. "Let's get her before she re-creates Double Rainboom. I REALLY hope she doesn't get kidney failure from this."

\* \* \*

><p>150.21: (fractalman)<p>

"Opalescence? Where are you?!" called Rarity.

Silence.

She sighed, and headed out to see Fluttershy.

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy shook her head. "No, I'm afraid I haven't seen Opalescence. I did notice that one of my fish went missing while I wasn't looking."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Have you seen Opalescence?"<p>

"Eeno, " said Big Mac.

\* \* \*

><p>"Sorry, Rarity, haven't seen her the whole loop. How long has she been missing?" asked Twilight.<p>

Rarity only sighed.

\* \* \*

><p>"Pinkie, I need as many bags of flour as you can spare."<p>

"One wheelbarrow of ninja kitten finding flour coming right up!"

Before she could stop herself, Rarity asked, "However did you-"

"That's easy! Kittens make the best ninjas, because nobody ever suspects them!"

"Thats...oh, nevermind."

\* \* \*

><p>150.22: (Evilhumour)<p>

"Now Sunset, I am not sure if your mother has given the \_Talk\_, but I feel it is time you learn of it," the yellow mare Awoke as a pony, seated next to the white alicorn mare who didn't respond to the Ping. "You see, you are going to start going through \_changes\_,"

"I'm okay, I already kno-" Sunset muzzle was closed by Celestia's golden magic, a powerful wing holding her in place.

"Your body will start to feel awkward and lanky, you will be growing fur in places where there was no fur before," Celestia continued on obliviously as Sunset well used to the Talk. "The pain you will feel at first might seem scary, and trust me, \_every\_ mare is worried about the amount of blood that comes out but trust me when I say it is \_completely\_ \_normal." Celestia gave a light laugh. "It's even better then dealing with estrus as it is a one time thing!"

"Wait, what?" Sunset blinked, snapping her head to the side, and looked at the mare confused.

"Now now, let me explain you what it is going to be like growing your wings first, my precious student, and then I will give the Talk about the miracle of life later!"

\* \* \*

><p>150.23: (Evilhumour)<p>

Vinyl blinked at the box in front of her and then at the grinning mare in front of her.

"Uh...Rares, what is this?" She pointed to the box in front of her with her hoof, wondering what the mare was planning.

"Why dear, it's a gift!" Rarity smiled a bit too much, making Vinyl feel if she was about to be made a punchline again.

"Uh...thanks, but why?" Vinyl blinked, lifting the box with her magic, pushing her glasses back up her nose.

"Why it's mother's day, dearie," Rarity smirked as Vinyl did a double take. "I mean you do replace my mother from time to time so I felt it would be appropriate to give you something for all those loops."

"Ha. Ha." Vinyl glared at the mare opposite of her, opening the gift. "I also tend not to be there for you as I know I would be a poor moth-the tree?!" She held up a very well made vibrant shawl up at the calm mare.

"Well yes, mother dear, I felt it would be nice for you to wear in your extended age." Rarity simply continued to smile, delicately drinking her tea to the fuming mare.

"If we are to examine our ages, then it should be you that should be wearing this, squirt." Vinyl's snark was cut off when Rarity began to snicker before lifting another gift up. "What's this?"

"Your actual gift, Vinyl," Rarity leaned over to give her a hug. "I meant what I said before Vinyl; I do appreciate the times you are my mother and I felt it would be nice to give you a gift for all the times you have been there for me."

Smirking, Vinyl hugged back, saying her thanks and opening her gift.

\* \* \*

><p>150.24: (Evilhumour)<p>

"Ow ow ow ow ow!" Lemon grunted as Fluttershy tugged his ear, dragging him out of the gala as Discord did his best to console the badly beaten and scared green slime monster. "How was I supposed to know that this Smooze was goo-OWWWWW!" That was all he got out before Fluttershy tugged harder, getting the yellow stallion out the ballroom, the door slamming shut behind them.

\* \* \*

><p>150.25: (OathToOblivion)<p>

\_"Twilight, are you ready?"\_

"Ready as I'll ever be," the purple unicorn Anchor nodded, finishing writing things down in a notebook and shutting off her telekinesis.

\_"Very well," \_Mewtwo said, hovering closer. He raised a hand up into a ready position, his psychic energy flashing around it. \_"Now, attempt to remove something from your subspace pocket,"\_ he told her.

"Right." At that, Twilight decided to pull out OWL out of her Pocket. As she made the connection to her Intelligent Device, she tried to pull it out.

\_"\*\*"Disable"\*\*\_ Mewtwo snapped, firing off a pulse of psychic energy. Twilight froze. Suddenly, the act of trying to pull OWL out felt as though she was grabbing something on the bottom of an Olympic-sized pool from the very top. And it was filled with molasses. While she was covered in butter.

Gritting her teeth, Twilight poured more and more of her power into trying to pull it out of her Pocket. The strain was evident on her face as sweat poured down it. Mewtwo grew slightly concerned at this. \_"Twilight," \_he started.

"GOT IT!" Twilight roared, finally pulling OWL out of her Pocket and panting in exhaustion. ...That's what I'd like to say, but in actuality, OWL went flying out of her Pocket and almost beamed Mewtwo in the head if the Genetic PokÃ©mon hadn't raised a hasty Protect shield.

There was a brief pause, before Twilight blushed red in embarrassment. "Sorry," she apologized.

\_"It is of no concern. Accidents happen in the course of science," \_Mewtwo shrugged, handing OWL back to her telekinetically. \_"Still,"\_ he added, \_"this proves that Disable, at least, cannot actually prevent use of the Pocket, but simply makes it very hard to access. Not quite what we were expecting,"\_ he mused, pulling out his own notebook and jotting some notes down.

"But that was only one type of power nullifier. We need to test the rest," Twilight surmised.

Mewtwo nodded, as that was exactly what he was thinking. \_"I believe BlackWarGreydon knows of a few other versions. I've only ever stuck with Disable, so-" \_He shrugged, feeling the point was clear.

"Oh yeah, by the way," Twilight remembered, "everything okay with you two? That kind of bond can be tricky between those from different loops."

\_"It is all fine. Thank you for asking," \_Mewtwo nodded. He was about to suggest something else, when he was interrupted by a certain few

noises...

"Fun! Fun! Fun! Fun!"

"GAH! Annoying pests! \*\*TERRA DESTROYER\*\*!" And a large explosion was then heard.

Twilight facehoofed at this. "I thought I told Pinkie not to go by the Mirror Pool!" she said in exasperation.

"Evidently, BlackWarGreymon does not approve either. We should probably do something about that before he ends up destroying the town in a fit of anger," Mewtwo said, going for the door.

"Not like it would be the first time," Twilight grumbled, before the pair went outside.

\* \* \*

><p>150.26: (Evilhumour)<p>

It began with a delivery being late and a mare tripping in the air. The cake was protected threefold; one by newton's first law of motion, two by Pinkie Pie's own special talent keeping the cake intact before it reached its destination, and third by narrative causality taking interest in the flying cake.

Out, out of Ponyville the cake flew and towards the mighty mountain city. It flew straight in a grand arc that would have deemed it to land short of shining city of Canterlot if not for a varied number of factors, but the primary factor was that the cake was given a boost of speed to grow its arc when a trio of sonic rainboom were performed the exact distance away to keep it falling from its plate and splattering the ground with its tasty goodness. Said sonic rainbooms were rainbow coloured, butterfly coloured and scroll coloured, oddly enough fitting descriptions for the ponies in question. The arc was also helped by the fact that narrative causality was now paying far more interest in the high flying cake now, taking a proverbial break away from Ponyville, which caused a purple mare to turn her head in confusion to why the fire that was consuming her tree suddenly poofed out of existence but she did not question it.

The cake was now falling, falling with great speed. There was nothing that could save its arc outside miniature rocket boosters coming out of the side of the plate to boost it up. Pinkie Pie had mistaken the plate the cake was currently for the rocket kind, as she was usually prepared for this. Alas, the cake was about to strike in capital of Equestria, looming above a noble party. With a whizzing above, a stallion with a white coat and a golden mane, otherwise known as Prince Blueblood, looked up in time to see the cake nail him square in the face, knocking him backwards into the buffet table, which caused the food to fly in arc that only narrative causality could have prescribed as all the food landed on Blueblood's face, the multilayer cake smashing into his face before the punch bowl drenched him completely.

The odds of this happening were astronomical, to be fair, but when you had a certain wall eyed mare in the equation, then anything was possible.



\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

150.1: Passing the torch. Or teapot.

>150.2: Worth experimenting.<br>150.3: Of course Discord occasionally comes out with expansions. Sometimes he comes out with contractions.

>150.4: Inspired By Keldeo.<br>150.5: Put a sock on it.

>150.6: New Leaf seems to have a lot of ponies today. (Animal Crossing.)<br>150.7: Run. (Grimm Adventures of Billy and Mandy.)

>150.8: No, the other Ash. (Evil Dead.)<br>150.9: Not bad.

>150.10: I presume they swapped villains for a bit.<br>150.11: Summat diplomatic. Sorry, a diplomatic summit.

>150.12: Whoops. (Megami Tensei)<br>150.13: For creatures normally not involved with clothes, ponies offer a new perspective. (Kill la kill)

>150.14: Groan. (Doctor Who.)<br>150.15: Something really has it in for that tree.

>150.16: Purple pony, purple prose.<br>150.17: Mellow ponies. Marsh mellow.

>150.18: Dangit. (Grimm Adventures again.)<br>150.19: Ah, a new friend.

>150.20: Scootasonic.<br>150.21: Of course they do.

>150.22: Oh, the other talk.<br>150.23: Looper families are... variable.

>150.24: It's so hard to keep track.<br>150.25: Good to know. (Mewtwo from Pokemon.)

>150.26: A surface-to-surface ballistic guided cake.<p>

## 158. Chapter 158

151.1: (Evilhumour)

"Thor?"

"Yes Sleipnir?"

"I have a question for you, dear cousin." The Admin's eye twitched as they watch the loop around them.

"Go ahead and ask, dear cousin," Thor answered a bit nervously, wincing as another building exploded in the distance.

"How did Derpy pick up your hammer?" Sleipnir ducked as the grey mare flew over ahead, holding the mystical hammer in her hooves.

Thor stood up and brushed the grass from his body. "I'm fairly sure that it is quite obvious; the looping maiden has proven herself worthy enou-"

"\_She's not Awake right now!\_" Sleipnir shouted as a massive bolt of lighting almost hit them.

"Ah." Thor blinked, and looked at his uncle's second son. "I have no clue then."

Sleipnir could only facehoof like a horse with four front hooves

could do.

"This is your fault," Thor added.

"How?" Sleipnir asked. "I mean, I only invited you to have dinner with us somewhere I like. You're the one who hung Mjolnir on the coathookâ€|"

"I saw it in the Marvel loopsâ€|" Thor muttered.

\* \* \*

><p>151.2: (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight Sparkle face twitched, her mane springing out in every direction. It had seemed like an almost perfect baseline Loop until this moment.

"Well, I am sure we can find another place for you Miss Sparkle," the pony opposite of her said slowly, watching the scared reaction of the other ponies around her and the terrified princesses. "Maybe I can take you on as an assistant and let you stay in the guest room?"

"I-I..." Twilight Sparkle shook her head, gulping a bit. "Thank you, but I'm sure that I can find my own place to work here, Miss Page Turner." She hated to say this next part. "I feel that if I did so I'd be overstepping my bounds if I do so." It pained her to say that. Turning her head to Celestia, she sighed internally. "Princess Celestia, if you don't mind, I would like to stay with my new friends until I find my place here in Ponyville."

"Of course Twilight," the Princess smiled, seeing how close Twilight was to snapping. "But I don't think you should dismiss Miss Turner's offer so quickly. You might find working in a library to be enjoyable."

Grinding her teeth, Twilight nodded her head and let herself be dragged away from the confused owner of the Golden Oaks.

\* \* \*

><p>151.3: (Evilhumour)<p>

Nyx looked to the mare next to her and frowned.

"What? This was your idea," the mare next to her huffed, rolling her eyes as she applied the make up.

"Yes, I know but I didn't expect this!\_" she sneered, doing her own make up.

"Jealousy doesn't suit you, Nyx," the yellow alicorn mare smirked, shaking her flanks slightly. "Besides, remember that Empress Celestia made me to be the perfect alicorn mare warrior. Can't help if I am so pretty!" She puffed her mane up as she left the bathroom, leaving Nyx scowling at her looping boyfriend's head.

\* \* \*

><p>151.4: (Evilhumour)<p>

\*\*{Rarity, We have a question for you.\*\*

"Yes Skynet?" Rarity looked at the computer that was in a strange form.

\*\*{Do you have any knowledge to why We are in this form this loop?}

"That's my line darling," Rarity looked at the bee shaped Terminator, before sighing. "But I do not know why nor do I know why I am one too." She sighed, fluttering her wings around the metal hive that was flying in space, replacing the Borg cubes of the Star Trek Loops.

\*\*{We are also concerned that our main source of power is from the Cutie Mark Crusaders harvesting honey and tree sap. We are also concerned as it is very effective towards delaying Captain Picard. This universe does not make any sense.}

"Tell me about it," Slaanesh muttered, walking over to the group. "No lust in this freaking loop, just pure love for all things honey. I've never felt this way over a foodstuff before and it's so weird!" The Chaos God flailed before falling onto Rarity's fainting sofa, muttering about feeling dirty.

"No," Alan Grant muttered, walking over to them. "What's weird is that our god is freaking Waspinator!"

"Could be worse," Terry McGinnis muttered in a bright yellow bee styled batsuit. "Just don't know how."

\* \* \*

><p>151.5: (Evilhumour)<p>

Alan Grant Woke up on the helicopter as they were flying over the damnable island filled with the damnable dinosaurs that would make his life a living hell in a short while. With a sigh, he turned his head to look at the monster when he saw something that made him jump.

"-hold, Equestria Park!"

Blinking, Alan Grant saw a multitude of differently coloured ponies running around- except for a pink one that was bouncing- and he knew instantly that this was either going be one peaceful loop or one aggravating loop.

\* \* \*

><p>151.6: (Midnight Crescent)<p>

Now the books don't work...

Twilight Awoke in the midst of reshelving day, and decided to take a break. After checking her loop memories to find no changes from baseline, except for the new radio station on the outskirts of the town, Twilight sent out a ping, before calling Spike down the stairs

to help.

Given that he was longer and taller than her, she figured one of the responses had come from him. "You had a chance to check who else is awake yet?"

"Looks like it's just Nyx and Luna for now. I'm assuming they've got something up their sleeve, given Nyx isn't already here..."

"Yeah, but she's not telling me what..." Twilight said, letting out a sigh. "So, ready to go to work?"

Spike rolled his shoulders, and moved towards one of the piles of books. "Sure, let's go."

The pair moved around the library, tuning out the odd word that came through the bursts of static from the radio as they finished the day's main task.

"\_Saturday... Library... Unknowable...\_"

It took them longer than expected. So much, in fact, that Spike had to retire before they'd even finished. Twilight shook her head and yawned as she finally slid the last book into a space she wasn't quite sure should be there, before turning off the radio and heading upstairs to bed.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight blinked herself awake, looking around the room in confusion. The bedroom of her tower didn't seem quite right today, but she shrugged it off, rising and shaking her mane from her eyes.<p>

"Spike, you up yet?"

"Yeah, Twilight..." the drake replied, stretching out as he climbed to his feet from his basket, before stretching out to his preferred size. Looking round the room, he paused for a second. "Twilight, you got any idea why we're back in Canterlot?"

"No idea, Spike..." she replied, sighing as she did. "One minute I was going to bed..." she started, but trailed off, as she realised all she could remember was going to bed, but the details were fuzzy. "Well, I went to bed somewhere else, then woke up here."

"Pretty much the same as I got then..." Spike said, scratching his chin in thought. "Teleport to Ponyville?"

"Teleport to Ponyville," she echoed in agreement, nodding her head. "Ready? In 3...2...1..."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight and Spike arrived just outside Ponyville in a flash of lavender magic.<p>

Spike took a few seconds to look around. "Nyx not joining us?"

"She said she wanted to spend some time with Luna this loop,"

Twilight answered, crossing the bridge into the town proper. "She'll probably drop in at some point."

"So, we don't have anything important to do for a while..."

"Let me guess," Twilight said, stopping him mid-sentence. "You'll be helping Rarity?"

"Am I that obvious?"

"You really want me to answer that?"

The two shared a laugh as they walked down the main road.

Spike stopped first, turning to face Twilight. "How about you?"

"I'm going to try and figure out what happened last night..." Twilight said, before pausing to think. "Maybe Applejack will let me work in her treehouse..."

Spike raised an eyebrow. "Why in the treehouse?"

Twilight shrugged. "I just feel like I should be working in a treehouse..."

\* \* \*

><p>As the moon rose into the middle of the night's sky, Applejack walked up the ramp to her old treehouse, sitting next to her muttering friend. "Somethin' troublin' ya there, sugarcube?"<p>

"I'm not sure..." Twilight replied, shaking her head clear. "My memories all fuzzy, but I can't figure out why, and I've tried to every spell that might undo it, but they don't seem to have done anything..."

"Alright, Twilight," Applejack said, hooking a foreleg around her friend steering her down the path towards the farmhouse. "It's near enough midnight," she started, only to be interrupted by the first chime of an unseen clock tower. "Scratch that, it is midnight, and yer obviously tired. There ain't no way I'm lettin' ya teleport back t'Canterlot like that. I know we ain't got much room up at the farm, but it's better than nothin'..."

Twilight considered this, until the final ring of the bell tower. "Or I could just go back to the library..."

"... Y'know, I'd plum forgotten you were staying there..." Applejack pulled her hat down over her eyes, her cheeks glowing red in embarrassment. "Darndest thing..."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight pulled a book from the shelves as she sat down with her morning coffee. She was relieved that the strange events from the previous week seemed to have just passed over without any after effects.<p>

Her telekinesis rolled the book around, while she tried to find a title on the oddly plain cover. After a full minute's search, she

rolled her eyes, and moved to open the cover. Which didn't work.

Raising an eyebrow she tried to increase her magic output slightly. But there were no changes.

Scanning the book, she found that it was in fact all one piece - the pages inside were one mass, which was also firmly attached to the cover. Nothing to turn or open.

Puzzled, Twilight took the next book off the shelf, only to find it was exactly the same first. As were the rest of that shelf. And that bookcase.

Once she had discovered all the books in the library, even the ones in her room, were in the same condition, her eye had developed a twitch.

Which was not helped by the rest of the town attempting to hammer down her front door, asking if she knew why their books weren't working too.

\* \* \*

><p>When Spike and Nyx finally managed to talk Twilight out of her Episode, it was decided that they would run the library for the next month. Spike decided he could handle the sorting, while Nyx would deal with lending and collecting the late fees.<p>

Meanwhile, Twilight was to spend most of her time either sleeping, or at the spa with her friends.

All in all, it seemed to be a fair arrangement.

\* \* \*

><p>After all the previous events, Twilight wasn't too shocked when, towards the end of her tenure, Nyx walked into the library, very obviously weary eyed.<p>

Twilight raised an eyebrow as her daughter carried straight on, walking straight into the table, knocking the wooden bust down onto her head. "Nyx, are you OK?"

Nyx shook her head. "Ponies are checking books out by their dreams now..." she said, her eye twitching as a few choice images flashed back to the front of her mind.

Twilight winced as she started to realise where this was going. "Pinkie Pie?"

A nod confirmed Twilight's suspicions. "Even Unawake, her mind is a beautiful, terrifying, mind bending... experience..." Nyx elaborated, waiting a few seconds before speaking again. "Is Mac Awake yet, Mom?"

"I think he Woke up a day or two ago..."

"Alright, I'm gonna go to the bar. Either I drink until I forget all this, or until Mac runs out of Brain Bleach..."

Twilight thought about stopping her for a second, before deciding on a more appropriate response. "If things get any weirder this loop, I may join you..."

\* \* \*

><p>"<strong>I know it was you...<strong>" a voice yelled, echoing through the mostly deserted station. "\*\*\*Now get back here!\*\*\*"

"My dear Twilight Sparkle..." another voice replied from outside the booth's door. "I am a prankster, a trickster, and a swindler of the highest order. I am NOT suicidal. So why do you think I would be so stupid as to mess with your books?"

"\*\*That's just what you want me to think, Discord! Now hold still...\*\*"

Cecil gently moved his microphone back round to his face as the week's weather report concluded. "Dear listeners, it has come to my attention that an irate equine with a mane made of fire has been running rampant through our small town's radio station, chasing some sort of serpentine chimera. From what I've been told, their antics have already accounted for Angelina the intern..."

As Cecil paused, more of the insanity from outside managed to leak into the recording booth.

"Well then. Enough talk," Discord said threateningly. "Have at thee, worthless curd!"

Twilight stared at the jar he was brandishing at her. Her cold gaze then turned back to the Draconeus' face. "\*\*\*I happen to like lemon...\*\*"

"...Oops?"

Shaking his head to free it from the captivating distraction, Cecil picked up where he had left off, realising some clarification was in order. "Now, as Angelina was a dust bunny, I'm not entirely sure whether she would have had a family for me to offer our condolences to, dear listeners, but if the theoretical family of the dust bunny intern does exist, I'm sure that they did indeed love her, and are saddened by their loss..."

Another pause as he checked the stations itinerary for the next slot's programming allowed yet more of the external events to drift in.

"You're... ridiculously... determined..." Discord panted. "But you don't... really think things through... when you're that angry, do you?"

Twilight pulled up in front of him, her eyes glaring, and her coat darkening to a more familiar shade. "What do you mean?"

"Come now, Sparkle. You of all ponies should know by now..." Discord said, his smirk spreading wider than his head. "That when I'm involved," Discord started, before clicking his fingers. Discord vanished, a small discord puppet falling into place where he had

been. His voice now echoed around the whole station. "Things aren't always as they seem..."

"..." Twilight blinked at the puppet for a few seconds, before her twitch returned. She ground her teeth, before throwing her head back and practically roaring. "DISCORD!"

Cecil took a few breaths, holding the cough button as he attempted to stop the brief bout of chuckles in time for his farewell. "Stay tuned for 3 hours of watching paint dry - an exclusive interactive entertainment programme. But, for now, goodnight, dear listeners, goodnight..."

\* \* \*

><p>151.7: (Evilhumour)<p>

Part One of Learning to Fly by Wubbing.

"Okaaaaay, let's do a quick catch up Twi?" Vinyl blinked as she stared at the lake in front of her. "I thought you were going to help me learn to use my wub hooves so why are we here?"

"We're here for a reason Vinyl," Twilight said, holding a checklist in front of her. "Before you can start flying properly with your sonic propulsion hooves, we need to do some basic tests and experiments beforehand."

"And crashing into a pond is a lot better then into the ground, trust me." Rainbow Dash said from her cloud, watching the scene carefully. "So let Twilight do her egghead tests with your wub hooves and I ll swoop and save your flanks if things get out of control."

"Sounds good to me," Vinyl shrugged, rolling her neck. "So what's first on the old listie Twi?"

Twilight's left ear flicked at the nicknames being used but she moved past them. "Air resistant goggles?"

Vinyl took off her purple tinted glasses, reached into her subspace pocket and swapped out an equally tinted pair of goggles. "Got it. Next?"

Twilight's right ear twitched but she did her best not to say anything. "Padding?"

"One sec-"

"Eeeeyup!" Dash grinned at the frowning Vinyl. "Oh come on, you know I was kidding."

"Yeah, since all this?" Vinyl patted her sides, her hoof going in deep. "Is just fur. Unlike some ponies, I don't need to work out to get a slim bod-GAH!"

Vinyl and Dash squeaked as Twilight squirted them both with her squirt-bottle. "Let's stay on track, please?"

"Spruce Twilight, that is bucking cold water!" Dash grumbled,



flying quickly into the sky to dry herself off while Vinyl started to vibrate in place.

"Yeah, what did you do, go to the north pole or something?" Vinyl grumbled as her long coat was now puffy.

"Yes, actually. This bottle has a miniature portal inside that is connected to the original pony lands to a river that flows despite the sheer drop in temperature and the roaming Windigos. The glass itself is indestructible so it can handle the water inside of it."

"Wow, really?" Vinyl and Dash both leaned in close to look at the bottle.

"Of course not," Twilight snorted in soft laughter, shaking her head. "It's just from the tap with a couple of ice cubes tossed in."

"Oh har har." Vinyl grumbled as she slipped on a full body padded suit. "You're a riot Twi." Vinyl made a face before she shook her mane. "Great, I've got knots in my fur. Rare's is going to kill me, and then she's going to drag me to the spa." It had been pretty funny to see their unAwake friend drag her mother around, and acting the more mature of the two while throwing a lot of guilt around at Vinyl.

"Better you than me Vinyl," Dash grumbled, settling down on the cloud. "I hate ponies touching my hooves."

"So what do I need to do Twi, hover in place?" Vinyl asked as she began to emit her wubs and begin to float.

"No Vinyl, not just yet!" Twilight shouted, tossing her list to the side as she began to run over to the unicorn mare, ignoring Dash pulling out the popcorn bag.

"What?" Vinyl shouted, walking around in place and lifting a hoof to her ear. Or at least that was her intention, but as she broke the stable and equally distributed propulsion of her body weight on four hooves to three as well as moving on to her face, she was suddenly rocketed sideways. Flailing with her hooves in the air, she was sent into a corkscrew fashion towards the lake. With a splash, Vinyl hit the water horn first and started to paddled in the water before Rainbow Dash flew over, plucked her out of the water and begun to lecture her.

"Vinyl Scratch, do you have any idea in how stupid that was? You should never break up your flying format unless you have years of experience to back you up!" Grumbling loudly, the pegasus began to move Vinyl's legs back into place, with Dash bending Vinyl's knees. "Look, normally you'd keep your legs tucked for flight but for your wub hooves you would need to keep them bent for a good take off before straightening them out. And don't you dare think about doing any fancy twist or turns just yet missy, as we will need to a lot of exercises to get you floating steadily before we can have you flying properl-OH MY BIRCH!" Dash suddenly shouted, placing her hooves to her mouth in horror.

"What? What's wrong Dashie?!" Twilight blinked, getting ready to run over to her friend, Vinyl staying in place.

"I'm starting to sound like you." Dash's laughter was quickly picked up by Vinyl's snickering. Which was squashed by Twilight squirting the mare with a deadpan look on her face. Shaking her mane after squeaking by the cold water, Dash rolled her eyes at white mare standing beside her.

\* \* \*

><p>151.8: (Evilhumour)<p>

Luna Awoke on her Moon noticing two things.

One, Nyx was not present. She was in complete control of her body and mind, without a trace of the usual Nightmare force.

Two, Celestia had built something odd outside her moon prison. It was a massive wooden construct, with a large metal clump in the middle on the long side of it-

"Oh you have to be KIDDING me!" Luna shouted as she face hoofed. Surely her sister wouldn't-

\*\*BANG BANG\*\*

"\*\*LUNA, I AM RESPECTING YOUR PRIVACY BY KNOCKING BUT I AM ASSERTING MY AUTHORITY AS YOUR OLDER SISTER BY COMING IN ANYWAYS!\*\*" And with that, Celestia destroyed the door she created by using a very familiar tree as a battering ram.

\* \* \*

><p>151.9: (Evilhumour)<p>

Sleipnir coughed out his coffee when his mother told him of the latest virus and the fact that Skuld was reportedly flipping mad.

"But mom, I didn't create a virus!" he shouted, running over to his brother's terminal as he could not check his own branches for the so-called 'equine' virus.

Ignoring his brother lying on his side as his girlfriend was scratching his ear, he looked at the helpers going over the terminals as his brother was enjoying his 'break'.

All of the people were equines of some kind and he had no idea why!

"I honestly did not believe you had it in you," Skuld growled at him from the doorway, holding her hammer lose in her hands. "Nearly everyone is reporting that their loops have a sudden abundance of horses everywhere!" Stepping over the gulping form of his little brother, she leaned into his face. "Unless this is a masterful prank by the loopers, you are in so much trouble!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight pulled out her list of people that destroyed her tree and checked off Sleipnir's name.<p>

"Was it really worth it Twilight?" Spike asked her, raising an eyebrow at her.

"Indeed." Twilight smiled at getting even with another person. It took considerable effort, a lot of favours being called in, and Loki and several other Admins being in favour of pranking Sleipnir and Skuld but it was totally worth being stuck in Gen 3 to get back at losing her tree.

\* \* \*

><p>151.10:(KrisOverstreet, Filraen)<p>

Rainbow Dash swooped just under the low ceiling beams of Mac's cellar-based bar and dropped onto a stool next to Gilda. "'Sup, Gils?" she asked.

"Not much," Gilda shrugged. "Last Loop I joined the Wonderbolts. Unfortunately, this guy Troubleshoes- you heard'a him? Well, last Loop he had a thing for air shows instead of rodeos. Turns out he makes a decent ground support horse, given a push in the right direction."

Rainbow Dash shifted on her barstool. "Um, yeah," she muttered. "Speaking of loop expansion stuff... during the last one the Cutie Map sent Pinkie and me on a mission, and we kinda met you..."

"... the map led you to Griffonstone, didn't you." The crest of Gilda's feathers slumped.

"Yeah, it did!" Rainbow Dash snapped. "What WAS that? What happened to all those defeat-the-emperor, all-hail-Gilda-the-new-queen things?"

"Variant Loops, I suppose." Gilda sighed. "I really enjoyed those. It was nice to see home the way it should have been... instead of the miserable dump it usually is now.

"I didn't want to believe it at first, you know Dash? Sure, it was a variant that happened every now and then. But lately it had been happening really often." Gilda flashed her own Element of Brutal Honesty before continuing. "And I can't lie to myself for too long. You know that." Dash nodded her agreement. "And I can't even blame old Eight-Legs because I know it isn't his fault!" Gilda growled, pounding the bar for emphasis.

"Well, yeah," Dash shrugged. "You know you could have asked any of us for help, right? Get your home town back on its feet, and all that?"

"Dash, come on!" Gilda groaned. "I didn't want everypony to see what a cruddy hometown I came from! I'm sure you can understand that, right? Remember those times when Cloudsdale was a bunch of scudpaper shacks on rained-out stratus clouds?"

Dash considered this. "Yeah, it wasn't a place I really wanted to show either."

"Besides, there aren't many griffons I wanted to introduce you to

anyway," Gilda added. "You know, I managed to bring the Idol back a couple times?"

"So did I, the first Loop I went there," Rainbow Dash muttered.

"Pawnd it, didn't they?"

"Yep."

"They always do. Look, Griffonstone's not something you can fix in the Loops," Gilda continued. "Oh, for fifty or a hundred Loops it's fun to go all Mareshal Plan on the place, go from hovels to palaces, and then it gets boring, just like everything else in these cruddy Loops. And of course everything you do gets wiped away with the Loop reset. Just let it go, okay?"

A tankard of cider appeared in front of Rainbow Dash. She took several slow swallows from it, using the time to think about it. "I'll try, Gilda," she said. "But I can't speak for the others."

"I know already. Pinkie Pie has tried to fix it a few times," Gilda grumbled. "She's experimented to see which baked good makes griffons friendliest. One time I saw her making hushpuppies. That backfired. Made the other griffons even more selfish and mercenary. One of them even wrote a book that began infecting the ponies with that attitude-Grover Shrugged, or the Fountainbeak, was the title." Gilda shuddered at the memory. "Dash, you don't ever want to see a Randian griffon. You just don't."

"Um... riiiiight." Rainbow Dash tried not to lean away from Gilda on her stool.

"And well, Sparkle of course. She has more reasons to be bored than us anyway," Gilda said. "At least her last try helped her vent, I think."

Rainbow Dash remembered the state of Griffonstone's "library" and flinched. "What did she do?" Dash asked.

"Well, the Loop before last -for me at least, who knows how many Sparkle had since- she was still in Punish the Infidel for Crimes Against Books mode," Gilda said. "I think one of her first edicts as a Princess was to commission the construction by forced labor of Book Fort McHennerly. Before that, she told me, she'd had them conscripted into the University of Canterlot, lock, stock, and kitten. Last Loop she wasn't quite so Eternal-Twilight-y, but she was still a bit tetchy about the whole thing."

Rainbow Dash nodded and finished her cider. "So, you doing anything for the Summer Sun Celebration this Loop?"

Gilda smiled her little wicked smile. "Can't make it, Dash," she said. "I've got a coven meeting tomorrow night. Turns out I'm a Shadowbolt this Loop." She finished her own drink and got up from the barstool. "Better bring your A-game tomorrow night, loser." With that the griffon flapped her wings and flew towards the darkest shadow in the cellar, vanishing into nothingness.

Dash tapped the bar with her hoof. "Same again Mac," she said, "and

keep 'em comin'."

\* \* \*

><p>151.11 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight ducked as Perfect Fyre fire bended at her, with Honour knocking it away from the golden oaks library thankfully. It was a fused loop with the Avatar branch, with Twilight replacing Aang as the alicorn, the one that could use all types of magic and was destined to save the world, if not for the insane princess in front of them.

"Sister, this is \_madness\_," the pony with a scarred left eye shouted. "I will \_not\_ let you take alicorn pony to father!"

"And how do you propose \_that\_, dear brother?" Fyre sneered. "I am \_far\_ better at firebending and I doubt you can deflect my lightning."

"I did not wish to do this," Honour said, reaching into his subspace pocket. "Here, \_catch\_." Like most ponies, when told to catch, the pony princess of the Fire Nation caught the muffin in her hooves.

"Is \_this\_ your master plan brother?" She began to laugh, not noticing the ponies around them begin to back up in fear as a shadow began to descend towards the unicorn. "A muf-"

\*\*\*"MUFFIN!"\*\* With that as her only warning, Perfect Fyre was tackled straight through the library, with the air bending master Derpy Hooves unleashing her awesome and terrifying powers for her beloved treat.

Twilight looked at Honour with an eye twitching, with the two seaponies snickering loudly from behind her. Boomerang and Water Whip were being a lot subtler than Blind Bandit, who was rolling on the ground in a fit of laughter.

\* \* \*

><p>151.12: (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight blinked at the odd blue toucan that was replacing her owl this loop, who was nibbling on a cracker.

"Ok, Tzeentch, what did you do?"

The toucan tilted his head to a weird angle before sighing.

"I might have made a deal with someone that I should have not made a deal with..." The blue bird muttered.

"Who did you give future knowledge to?" She sighed, wondering what the Chaos God did that made him admit it was a bad idea.

"In my defense, I only Woke up \_after\_ I gave Wily knowledge about some of the fun stuff back home," Tzeentch sighed, "And before you ask, the Warp gave me the knowledge of the future to when I \_would\_ Wake up but not to \_why\_ I had that strange knowledge nor \_why\_ it

would be a bad idea. The Warp can mess up my plans. Also, next time you see those two android Anchors, tell them it is not \_my\_ fault about dealing with the Master Primarchbots or the God Emperorbot thingy." He huffed, pecking at the cracker in his talon, looking out of the cage he was in. "Could have done it so much better if \_I\_ knew what I was planning..."

\* \* \*

><p>151.13: (Filraen)<p>

\_...as time went on, the younger sister became resentful. The ponies relished and played in the day her elder sister brought forth, but shunned and slept through her beautiful night. One fateful day, the younger unicorn refused to lower the moon to make way for the dawn. The elder sister tried to reason with her, but the bitterness in the young one's heart had transformed her into a wicked mare of darkness: Nightmare Moon.\_

\_She vowed that she would shroud the land in eternal night. Reluctantly, the elder sister harnessed the most powerful magic known to ponydom: the Elements of Harmony. Using the magic of the Elements of Harmony, she defeated her younger sister. However after the battle the victor was so overcome by guilt that she exiled herself from Equestria vowing to return only when her sister returned too or she was directly contacted to return. For that event she left a magic relic...\_

"... which as of today still lies at Canterlot Grand Cathedral," Twilight Sparkle finished reading. "Well, that's a new one."

\* \* \*

><p>After promising Moondancer to go her birthday party as long as nothing else happened, an answer that was apparently beyond from what was expected from Twilight, the Anchor decided to go to the Grand Cathedral to investigate this discrepancy with baseline. If anything it was going to be different from the last hundred or so baseline loops.<p>

The Cathedral reminded her some of her own Royal Sisters loops where she had not sufficiently discouraged alicorn worship: huge, ostentatious, but hopefully open to all public during daytime. Apparently that big valuable relic was inside a treasure chest, which in turn was sealed in a powerful ward.

... though in a second thought, the most interesting thing about the ward wasn't that it was powerful nor that the ward didn't have any traps associated. It was the fact that the ward had magic, chakra and ki in its construction and it was needed knowledge of all of them to disable the ward. It was effectively a lock only Loopers could open. Who would do that and why? Twilight received no answer when she tried pinging earlier.

The ward wasn't even that complicated to disable, as if whoever placed it wanted it to be opened... and there was a book inside the chest. The book was one Twilight recognized: with a sun mark on its cover it was one of the books Celestia gave to Sunset to communicate with her even if she was in the world beyond the mirror.

If that meant Celestia was Awake... no need to guess, better ask her directly. Twilight had the book with her now anyway.

\_Hello... Celestia, are you there?\_

It took a minute or two before receiving an answer

I am Celestia. Who are you who write to me?

\_It's Twilight Sparkle. And yes, I just Awoke earlier today.\_

This time the reply came almost immediately.

Twilight? Thank pineness. Sorry about everything, I had to leave in a hurry.

\_No problem, Equestria seemed to go reasonably well all things considered, if my loop memories are reliable. What happened to you, though? It doesn't seem like you to leave Equestria just like that.\_

There was a problem when I Awoke. Sorry to ask, but is this the eve of the 1000th Summer Sun Celebration after the battle with Nightmare Moon?

\_According to the banners in the temple, it seems so.\_

Temples to Alicorns?

\_Yes\_

Urgh... now I really don't want to return to that. Anyway, I Awoke almost one thousand years ago during the battle with Nightmare Moon. To be precise when I Awoke I was using the Elements to banish Luna...

\_Celestia, what are you not telling me?\_

... I may have missed the moon when banishing Luna.

\_WHAT?\_

It was an accident! The typical moment that it takes to orientate in a new Loop was just the moment when my pre-Awake self was supposed to take aim!

Twilight...

Twilight, are you still there?

\_Sorry Celestia. Was too busy laughing and taking a photo of the page for future blackmail.\_

Oh, you...

\_I'm fine now. Back to the matter at hoof, I suppose after the banishment you left Equus to follow Luna?\_

Exactly. Even if it took a millennium it may be time well spent if I could redirect the spell back to Equus, or any planet for that

matter. No such luck yet though. I said that I was going to bring Luna back but I left the book in the hopes you'd contact me with it.

\_That makes sense. Do you need some help?\_

That'd be lovely. I'm quite lost to be honest, I can't recognize any constellations around here. If you could make a big flare using the elements it'd be really useful, and with a bit of luck I can use it to break the banishment spell.

\_Right. The Elements are in your castle in the Everfree?\_

Last I knew they were, but that was a thousand years ago.

\_All right, I see what I can do. I'll keep you updated.\_

Thanks Twilight, and good luck.

Closing the book Twilight sighed. Well, better hurry to Ponyville. She only had until the end of the Loop to find Celestia and she had a thousand year head start.

\* \* \*

><p>151.14: (Heliomance)<p>

Applejack stood, tossing an apple in her forehoof as she looked down at the centaur rampaging through Ponyville.

"So, somethin' Ah saw in a Hub loop recently got me t' thinkin'." She nodded to Shining Armor, who raised a powerful shield spell over the group. "How many apples does it take t' defeat Tirek?"

In one smooth movement, she lobbed the apple high in the air, spun so she was facing away from Ponyville, and lashed out with her hind hooves as the apple came down. There was a deafening crack, a blinding flash, and the air between them and the magic-draining centaur seemed to explode. Tirek himself went flying, sailing through the air back to Tartarus. When their eyes and ears cleared, the recently evacuated Ponyville was all but gone, flattened by the shockwave. Applejack looked a bit smug.

"One, at sufficient velocity."

\* \* \*

><p>151.15: (masterofgames)<p>

Rainbow Dash lounged on a rock atop the cliff overlooking the village of 'Our Town'. Twilight sat nearby on a lawn chair with sunglasses and a smirk.

"Okay, I see what you did here." Dash commented to Twilight, gesturing to the town. "The whole Battle Of The Bands thing started with a song about competition, and standing out, and proving who the best was. This is a fitting punishment in \_theory\_. But I'm seriously starting to feel bad for them."

Twilight took a long, leisurely sip of her drink. "Spike wasn't



Awake. They kicked him. I was feeling vengeful." she shrugged, basking in the screams of rage and frustration from a certain house down below.

\_"Nopony likes a winner."\_

"Make it stop! MAKE IT STOP!"

"Let us out of here!"

"Like, why are you two complaining? Come on, read with me! It isn't half bad!"

"AAAAAARGH!"

\_"Apathy means happiness."\_

\* \* \*

><p>151.16: (masterofgames)<p>

Twilight checked off yet another item from her list as she walked to Fluttershy during the Gala. "Nice work! I'll admit I doubted you, but you're winning my little challenges left and right." she grinned.

Fluttershy smiled softly as she half-hid behind her mane and glass of punch. "It's not so hard really. I did minor in psychology a long time ago after all, back when I got my P.H.D. in Adorableness. I just have to know how he thinks through a filter of jealousy a little."

Twilight giggled. "Well let it not be said I can't see the use of a degree or two. Now, next on the list is getting Discord to turn the recording of Octavia's music into a Mare-iachi dubstep. Think you can do it?"

"I'll start discussing large hats and spicy food with Tree Hugger, just as soon as we hit the pause between songs." Fluttershy winked.

\* \* \*

><p>151.17: (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

"Shepard, this is Sombra we're dealing with. I don't think we need a liberating army to deal with him," Twilight pointed at the massive Army the Mass Effect looper had assembled. Dragons, monsters of enormous size, Discord, the variant griffon empire's army, Luna, and about half the Equestrian Army stood on the borders of the shimmering city. Not to mention the assembled loopers, including Trixie checking her supplies of high powered explosives, Vinyl making some last adjustments to her Wub Cannon, and Sunset practicing with her keyblades.

The Captain of the guard checked his weapons that were custom designed for pony use and replied, "I'm not usually married to Cadence. Even when I take your brother's position as captain, he's always been married to the princess. And since I'm married to her and am under orders to free the Crystal Empire, I want to be

prepared."

Twilight looked back at the city, "Prepared for what? It's like you expect to run into a nest of Reapers in there."

With a click, Shepard finished adjusting his weapons belt and slid the final thermal clip into place, "That's about the sum of it."

Twilight turned back to the male Earth pony, who shrugged, "Lately in every fused loop, I've been running into Reapers at the center of all my missions. Replacing Solid Snake? Instead of running into a Metal Gear, I find a mini reaper. Battling Andross in the Lylat System? After shooting him down, his remains animated like a reaper endoskeleton. Star Wars? Palpatine was a reaper puppet from beyond dark space and the invasion was a year away. Resident Evil Universe? Zombies replaced by husks along with dragon's teeth. Hell, my last loop at Freddy's, the animatronics were reaper embryos! I'm not taking any chances this loop."

Little did Twilight know they were walking headlong into a nest of reapers in stasis, buried in the core of Equestria, and Sombra was the overseer of the sleeping reapers and would one day awaken the eldritch machines to wipe clean the galaxy.

\* \* \*

><p>151.18: (fractalman)<p>

The timberwolf was confused. One moment, it had been in the forest, hunting a rabbit; the next, a purple flash and it was in some...place, a place that defied description by its simple mind.

It took a step forward into something soft and...good-smelling? Yes, good smelling. Maybe it would be a comfy place to take a nap?

\_Yes\_, it decided, so it curled up and took a nap.

\* \* \*

><p>The - unawake - Celestia stared at the timberwolf sleeping on her cake.<p>

"I really need to stop pulling all nighters."

She never noticed the small camera recording her reaction, nor the subtle wards set up by her student to ensure that nopony got hurt if something went wrong.

\* \* \*

><p>151.19: (Rowan Ex)<p>

(Doors Loop)

\*\*Room #0/Golden Oak Library\*\*

Twilight came out on the other side of a white door, panting. The other Loopers who noticed her was confused, as well as what the door was. Sleipnir then came and looked at Twilight before closing the

white Door, locking it, and burning it.

Twilight raised a hoof and stared at her Admin and asked, "What in Yggdrasil's glitches was that?"

"A glitch," Sleipnir replied, "somehow, the door threw you into something like the elevator loop, and..." He looked around. "How was it? We've been trying to solve that glitch but since you were in we can't just do it."

Twilight looked up and began to tell her adventure which started with the white door...

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #1<strong>

Twilight looked around after buying a mysterious white door and entering it, and immediately saw herself in a small forest, with another white opened white door in front of her. She looked back, and instead of the library she saw the same room. She then faced the other door and ran towards it.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #2<strong>

This must be a glitched variant as there was the door again, and the room changed into a white room. She checked her subspace pocket, took a camera, and began heading towards the next...

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #3<strong>

... only for her to quickly return it to her subspace pocket. Twilight looked around and immediately ran to the next door after the sight of zombie ponies.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #4<strong>

"Okay, this is getting ridiculous. GET ME OUT OF HERE!"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #5<strong>

Twilight stopped for a while in this room where a chair and a cup of tea and rested for a while. She looked at the next door before thinking what to do to escape these Nesting Doll-like glitch that always remind her of that Elevator Loop...

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #6Crossover with Left 4 Dead\*\*

Twilight saw what the room had and was shocked to see Rochelle staring at a suspicious white door which she immediately pulled away

and placed it right in front of her door, which caused a few zombies to arrive.

"What was that!?" Rochelle demanded in shock as she began to shoot the incoming horde.

"I don't know," Twilight replied as she entered the white door.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #7<strong>

Twilight looked around the dark room before she heard a buzzing sound which caused her to go up, down, and into the next door.

What?

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #8<strong>

Twilight paused for a while and sat under a tree in the room while gazing at the doors. She looked around to find Applejack and Rainbow Dash, with Dashie falling to the ground. The Anchor chuckled a bit before headed towards the next room, tripping midway.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #9<strong>

"Twilight!?" called Vinyl, "how in Yggdrasil did you got here in the first place?"

Twilight looked around, saw Vinyl and Octavia and flinched. She looked around then headed towards the next room. She was heard muttering "my bad, my bad," afterwards.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #10<strong> (mariic)

Twilight found herself outside a house somewhere in Ohio, and the entrance to the house was the door out of this room. She opened the door, but a shotgun blast barely missed her head. The G4 Anchor turned around to see the gunner, an overweight Sandusky film school dropout who shouted, "Get the f\$# off mah property!" Twilight didn't needed to be told twice, and she dashed through the door.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #11Crossover with Quantum Leap\*\* (mariic)

Twilight nearly ran into a stick figure, who asked her, "Door glitch?"

"Door glitch." Twilight replied, nodding.

The Quantum Looper just muttered, "Oh boy." and they both ran through the next door.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #12Crossover with Postal\*\* (Awesomedude17)

"Postal Dude."

"Twilight."

"Why do you have a gunshot wound to the head?"

"Shot myself."

"Why?"

"Forget my hateful wife's rocky road."

"...Have you considered psychological help?"

"Maybe."

"Why are you here though?"

"Probably the same reason you are."

"Son of a birch." Twilight muttered.

"At least Al Qaeda isn't on your ass."

"What?"

"Bye." The Dude left through a door quickly, and a bunch of people who looked like Osama Bin Laden rushed through another door.

"Excuse me, did you see a trench coat wearing infidel?" One of them asked in a horrible Indian accent.

Twilight pointed to the door The Dude left through.

"Thank you." The group quickly left, and Twilight took out a vile of brain bleach.

"Note to self, Paradise doesn't make sense."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #13<strong>

Twilight found herself going up into the next door, and looked at her left before entering the door. Seeing that she was in a DS did solve her slight confusion.

"What's gonna be next?" she asked to herself, "maybe Trixie?"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #14<strong>

"Trixie alright," Twilight muttered as she shot a stun spell towards an Alicorn Amulet-using Trixie to find her way out. She saw the next door and hopped to it, only to be kicked by Trixie.

"Ow! Hey!" Twilight casted another stun spell.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #15Crossover with Tomorrowland\*\*

"Oh." Twilight muttered as she took her PADD from her subspace pocket and attempted to find anything about the place. She faced her six to find a teenage young lady and an old man.

She slightly shifted and hid her PADD as she steered towards the next door which had a "NO ENTRY" sign on it. She opened it, and looked at the two again.

She then asked, "Time been repeating?" They both nodded.

"Who are you and what kind of creature are you?" the man, who introduced himself as Frank Walker, asked.

Twilight decided to not leave the room for the moment for a quick explanation of the Loops. After the two have thought it well, they saw Twilight leave through the door.

"So that meet-up with Delsin was a Fused Loop," he commented.

"Mhm," said the girl, Casey Newton, looked at the door and locked it, "at least we proved that we're not crazy, after all. I wonder how we'll going to relay that message if they're really a universe away."

They looked at the door again and opened it, only to find that it was just a broom closet. It got Frank to think about it again.

"How did she do that?" Frank asked to the air before closing the door.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #16<strong>

Twilight found herself floating towards the next door, catching a glimpse of who was using magic to move her toward the next room;

An unAwake Princess Pinkie Pie.

She was glad that the next room didn't have something like that, for the next room...

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #17Crossover with FNAF\*\*

"Nopenopenopenopenope-!" Twilight said, quickly dashing towards the next room.

Four animatronics and two humans looked at each other before shrugging back into their conversation. Mike had no idea what has happened however, as he looked at the two white doors.

Freddy raised a sign. \_"What was that for?"\_

"We're not in a Fused right now, right?" Phone Guy asked.

"Not exactly," Mike replied, pointing to the doors.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #18<strong>

Twilight saw herself watching Nyx watching the Pancake accident. Nyx then looked at her double that looked at Twilight which caused her to head towards the next room.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #19<strong>

TwilightSparkle posted at #Room19:

This room is very weird. Apparently to unlock the door I must post something.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #20<strong>

Twilight saw herself on Mac's bar and went up and got herself some apple cider. Mac looked at the two doors and asked what the doors are for.

"I bought a Door and entered it," Twilight replied, "now I'm stuck room to room and I have to face challenges or relax."

"Do you think ya can escape them?" Mac asked.

Twilight looked at the bar entrance and goes outside, only to come back from the white Door she came from. "Nope. Oh well, into the next room..."

"Good luck, ya need it!" Mac shouted as she entered the next room.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #21<strong>

Twilight saw herself walking towards the next door as a parade was held to her right. It was a peaceful regular parade dedicated for Princess Celestia, so she began to take pictures.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #22<strong>

Twilight saw herself saw herself as she saw herself saw herself. She Pinged, and nothing came back in return, in which she was glad off. She quickly headed into the next room, unaware that something else was happening with that room and the next...

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #23Crossover with Doctor Who\*\*

The Doctor was banging his head into his TARDIS as his companion, a humanized Awake Derpy Hooves, made Twilight encounter duplicate herself as she was pushed by the time clones towards the next door.

"What did you do Derpy?" Twilight asked, stopping herself from entering the exit door.

"I..." Derpy looked around. "...one of those things, I guess."

Twilight facehooved as she was finally kicked into the next.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #24Crossover with RWBY\*\*

"Oh, hi Blake!" Twilight greeted. She looked at Nora and saw the connection. "Oh, that makes sense now. Gotta go!"

The aforementioned Loopers waved back as Twilight passed by. Nora tried to follow her only to be stopped by Blake who destroyed the door after a warning passed by their admin.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Room #25Crossover with Quantum Conundrum\*\*

Twilight shook her head a lot of times before passing to the next door.

"Damn it, Ike," she muttered to the air, "why does your eyes do that when I look at itâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>151.20: (Filraen)<p>

\_Dear Celestia,\_

\_Today's letter is about my previous Loop. It was a lonely baseline loop, except that we seemed to hit yet another expansion period. The most noticeable points of the extra time were Matilda and Cranky Doodle Donkey's wedding finally being here and a bugbear attack. The interesting part came when I didn't realize the bugbear attacked the same day of the wedding. We girls totally missed the ceremony trying to get the monster out of Ponyville and I wasn't particularly worried because I thought the wedding was the next day. A mystery for another loop I guess.\_

\_In the end we (Applejack, Rarity, Rainbow, Fluttershy, Pinkie and myself) ended seeing the ceremony from the window outside Ponyville's Town Hall. While not going into much detail (you were there and I think you'd appreciate not telling spoilers) the ceremony had two main high notes. First, I knew intellectually Cranky had literally searched for decades finding Matilda and the ceremony showed that: so many who Cranky had crossed paths with in his travels.\_



\_The other point was that you were there and for once you weren't the center of attention, not even a non-incognito guard present. The only who could count as part of the Royal Guard was my BBBFF and even he was invited. And as you expect, he was crying the whole time.\_

\_I won't lie and claim I wasn't a bit disappointed by arriving late to Matilda and Cranky's wedding but it was their day and there will be other loops. I still remember the time Chrysalis was Matilda's maid of honor the loop she earned her Element of Kindness.\_

\_That reminds me: there was a random changeling in the wedding undisguised. That seemed strange but we decided to leave him alone since he wasn't attacking or anything like that. In fact everything pointed for him only attending the wedding.\_

\_Hopefully for them that wedding is something they get to do every loop, and I'm both expectant and a little nervous on what Pinkie Pie will do for them next time she's Awake. And with a little luck next time we can get to the wedding on time.\_

\_Your friend,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle\_

\* \* \*

><p>151.21: (Filraen)<p>

\_Dear Celestia,\_

\_Last loop I got reminded to be careful what I wish for. Remember how I had mentioned about the wedding between Matilda and Cranky Doodle two loops ago? Well, last loop still had a wedding all right but it seemed like it was a variant. Or at least I hope their wedding was baseline and last loop's wedding is the variant.\_

\_In any case, I present my most important finding from last loop: the need to implement protocols for Discord grade destruction the next loop Derpy isn't Awake and gets married with Trouble Shoes.\_

\_At least knowing that loop ended with Cranky and Matilda' wedding makes me think last loop didn't end crashed by Derpy and Trouble Shoes' marriage... I hope.\_

\_Your friend,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle\_

\* \* \*

><p>151.22: (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

\_Ding-dong\_

\_Now, who could that be?\_ Twilight wondered to herself as she opened the door. "Hello?"

And was promptly tackled across the room by a giant blue pillbug.  
"HUGS! HUGS FOR EVERYPONY!"

A few minutes later, staggering to her hooves and shaking her head, Twilight looked around in confusion. The insect was nowhere to be seen.

"Okay." Pulling a scroll and quill out of her Pocket, she made a note. "Not even remotely in the ten weirdest things to happen to me, but it's definitely up there."

Meanwhile, a few blocks away, a certain draconequus was still giggling to himself while a plum-coated mare and a carnation-coated filly watched him.

Ruby Pinch, confused, looked up at her mother. "Mommy? What is Mr. Discord laughing at this time?"

Berry Punch smiled at her daughter. "I think he had a fit of the sillies earlier, dear."

"Oh."

\* \* \*

><p>151.23: (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Twilight looked. And stared. "Somehow, I just know Pinkie is involved in this."

"Involved in what?"

Uncountable loops of experience or not, Twilight proved she could still be startled by almost jumping out of her skin. "Gah! Pinkie?"

"The one and only! Except technically there's always at least two of me 'cause of that mirror world, and that's not even counting--"

A hoof covered her mouth. "Pinkie. Focus."

"Right. So, what's up?"

Twilight pointed. "\_Why\_ is there a cupcake the size of a house in the middle of town square?"

"Oh! Remember a while back when we went to the Hub, and you bought all those books? Including their latest edition of the Guinness Book of World Records?"

"Yesâ€|"

"Well, I borrowed it and saw they had a listing for the World's Largest Cupcake, so I decided I could do better."

Twilight looked at the house-sized cupcake. "And I'm guessing you did."

"Yeppers! The one in the book was only three feet tall and four feet, eight inches around. And I even followed the rules that said it had to be made all in one piece, without any kind of internal supports, so it would qualify for the record."

"Oh my."

"Yeah, that's about what the judges said when they first saw it."

Twilight sighed. "Pinkie, tell me something. Where in the multiverse did you get an oven big enough to bake something that big?"

Pinkie held out a familiar Acme Corporation catalog. "In a Looney Tunes loop."

"Somehow, I'm not surprised."

\* \* \*

><p>151.24: (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

"Morning, Twilight!"

"Good morning, Derpy." Twilight smiled as she accepted her mail from the unAwake blonde pegasus. "How's Dinky?"

"Oh, she's doing just fine!"

Twilight nodded and watched as her friend left. Then she opened the lone letter that had come for her, and her eyebrows raised again. And again.

"Why," she asked nopony in particular, "Do I have the feeling this is going to be one of THOSE loops?"

A day later, she got her answer. Tirek had just released the others from their bubbles, and was getting ready to drain Twilight of her magic, when the ground started rumbling.

Tirek looked around. "Whatâ€¦ is that noise?"

Twilight just pointed.

Tirek looked in the direction she was pointing, and proceeded to scream like Prince Blueblood.

A few minutes later, when the dust had settled, Twilight sighed. "Well, that's one way to defeat Tirek. And it certainly explains the letter I got yesterday."

"What letter is that?" Rainbow Dash asked, having overheard as she and the others hurried over to Twilight.

"This one." Twilight handed it to her.

Rainbow Dash read it, and raised her eyebrows. "'The bunny rabbits is coming!?' Who the hay sent this?"

Twilight shrugged. "I don't know, but they got here just in the nick of time."

Rarity spoke up hesitantly. "Er, Darling?"

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Why do I have the feeling Angel Bunny is behind this?"

Twilight sighed. "Personally, I'm more interested in knowing where whoever did this got a herd of oversized rabbits. Let alone trained them to stampede."

There was a loud groan from nearby. "If you're quite finished," Tirek growled, "I'd like to go back to Tartarus now."

Twilight's horn sparked. "Not a problem. Just give up your stolen magic first."

"Fine! Anything, as long as it gets me away from thoseâ€¦ things." The oversized centaur shuddered. "If I'd known there'd be days like this, I never would have left home."

"There, there," Fluttershy said as she patted his head.

Tirek just groaned again, though whether it was from pain or embarrassment was hard to tell.

\* \* \*

><p>151.25: (fractalman)<p>

Rainbow Dash glared figurative death beams at the sign of the Rainbow Factory. However, just before she could grab something out of her pocket to aid in its disassembly, she heard Scootaloo call out.

"Hi, Dash! I'm ready to head back to Ponyville."

Dash stared blankly at the grayscale filly.

"Uh, Dash, are you OK?"

Dash blinked as her loop memories kicked in. "Yeah, I'm OK, squirt. I just need to check on a few things, and then I'll be riiight back."

\* \* \*

><p>"So yeah. This loop's Rainbow Factory doesn't kill anypony. Instead they just stick a vacuum cleaner to your side and suck up the color, the same way the crusaders vacuumed the color out of a rainbow in baseline. No uncool body disposal chutes or anything. They also pay ponies a couple bits for their time, and Scootaloo's been saving up to get corrective wing surgery."<p>

"That's a relief." said Twilight. "Are there any studies on the rate at which ponies regain their color?"

Dash tapped her chin. "Not that I know of, but it takes Scootaloo about a week or two to get the nickname 'Patchaloo', and another week after that to regain all her color."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

151.1: Sometimes the admins come down to spend time somewhere.  
Sometimes they regret it.

>151.2: So the library wasn't going spare this time.<br>151.3: Lemon  
Rush, female edition.

>151.4: We are the BZZZZZZ. Our BZZZZZZ resistance BZZZZZZ BZZZZZ  
BZZZZZZ honey. (Multicross.)<br>151.5: Ponies will find a way.  
(Jurassic Park.)

>151.6: I'm not entirely sure myself.<br>151.7: Idea obtained.

>151.8: They do like doing that.<br>151.9: Twilight has not got any  
direct power. She has connections.

>151.10: Dash does make a small mistake here. Gilda became the  
Empress.<br>151.11: A true warrior uses all things. Even a  
muffinphile pegasus. (ATLA cross.)

>151.12: Wily is dangerous. (Megaman and Warhammer 40K  
mentioned)<br>151.13: Whoops. Missed...

>151.14: Enough speed lets one apple defeat anything.<br>151.15:  
Ouch.

>151.16: I think at some point they're going to try to get him to  
turn Flutters into a tree.<br>151.17: Fear the Reaper? (Mass Effect.)

>151.18: Teleport a timberwolf.<br>151.19: Doors does not mean the  
band.

>151.20: Happy ending.<br>151.21: Not as happy an ending.

>151.22: Why not?<br>151.23: Takes the cake.

>151.24: Rabbiting.<br>151.25: A greyer take?

## 159. Chapter 159

### 152.1 (Scorntex)

\_Long ago, there did live a third Princess, Pinkamena Diane Pie. So  
great was her command of the culinary arts that she found herself  
assailed by those seeking her guidance. In her desire to some simple  
peace and quiet, Princess Pie did retreat from the world of mortals,  
hiding in the calm and distant part of the world.\_

\_One day, a traveller, seeking to learn all that was learnable,  
managed to locate the hiding kitchen-palace of Princess Pie. Said he  
unto her: \_"Oh, princess fair and slightly scary, I wish to learn  
from thee. Teach me the ways of the unsurprised Pinkie Pie.\_"

\_The Princess did gaze upon him, and spoke thus: \_"Lo, fair Bruce  
Wayne. It hath been far too long since I last saw thee. Why dost thou  
seeketh me, when thou art already skilled in the art of  
prepardyness.\_"

\_The traveller did scowl. \_"That's not a real word.\_"

"\_Who art the Princess here?\_" \_Replied the most radiant smiler in  
all the land.\_

\_The traveller did concede this point, and right he was too, for her  
pink-nesses' qualifications was inescapably clear. \_"I seek  
knowledge thou might have in the hopes there may be something new I  
may learn.\_"

\_Concurrent to this did he add, \_"A decision I regret further with each passing moment.\_"

\_And lo, did her bounciness declare unto him: \_"Nay, brooding lord of Bats! I shalt not teach thee! Unless... unless thou maketh me a sandwich!\_"

"A sandwich?" \_Asked the traveller. Her most refulgent partiness did confirm this.\_

"A sandwich. The ingredients matter not, only that is must meet acceptable standards of tastiness and snackaliciousness! Thou hast one day to prepare unto me this sandwich, and if it should pass mustard, I shall tell thee what I know... eth\_."

\_The traveller did depart. Long of hour did he labour to prepare unto Pie the sandwich of acceptableness, until the appointed hour came upon him.\_

\_Presented unto her randomness did he the sandwich. And she, oh loveliest of parties, examined it.\_

"Ick!\_" \_She did instantly decry. \_"What hast thou done to this poor sandwich? What catastrophic culinary crimes have you inflicted, to create such a misshapen abomination?"\_

"Tisn't that bad..." \_The traveller did protest. A single glare from her highness stopped this.\_

"This is no sandwich! What it is, I have no words, for the realm of such things as these are beyond my ken! And it smells like something that slithered forth from Hogwart's privies!\_"

\_A thunderous look crossed her muzzle, and with a clear voice she spread forth her wings. \_"Thou hast failed thy appointed task, Bruce of Wayne! Thou hast failed bad! And I shall not teach thee my secrets, not now nor ever, for thou art unworthy of my knowledge! Leave this instant, and take that... thing with you, before Gummy tries to eat it.\_"

\_Without a word, the traveller turned upon his hooves and left, never to be seen again.\_

\* \* \*

><p>There was utter silence in Big Macintosh's bar. After several minutes, Twilight Sparkle spoke.<p>

"Pinkie?"

"Yuh-huh?"

"Did any of that actually happen, at all?"

Pinkie Pie nodded. Twilight Sparkle's expression didn't change in the slightest. Pinkie just giggled.

"Well, I may have jazzed it up a teeny, tiny bit." She grinned. "Brucie didn't really come looking for me, and I wasn't living in a cave. But I was really a Princess that loop. And the sandwich was

pretty bad..."

After a few seconds Twilight sighed, and took another swig from her drink.

\* \* \*

><p>152.2 (Evilhumour)<p>

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves- Attempt #1\*\***

"Okaaaaay, let's do a quick catch up Twi?" Vinyl blinked as she stared at the lake in front of her. "I thought you were going to help me learn to use my wub hooves so why are we here?"

"We're here for a reason Vinyl," Twilight said, holding a checklist in front of her. "Before you can start flying properly with your sonic propulsion hooves, we need to do some basic tests and experiments beforehand."

"And crashing into a pond is a lot better then into the ground, trust me." Rainbow Dash said from her cloud, watching the scene carefully. "So let Twilight do her egghead tests with your wub hooves and I'll swoop and save your flanks if things get out of control."

"Sounds good to me," Vinyl shrugged, rolling her neck. "So what's first on the old listie Twi?"

Twilight's left ear flicked at the nicknames being used but she moved past them. "Air resistant goggles?"

Vinyl took off her purple tinted glasses, reached into her subspace pocket and swapped out an equally tinted pair of goggles. "Got it. Next?"

Twilight's right ear twitched but she did her best not to say anything. "Padding?"

"One sec-"

"Eeeeyup!" Dash grinned at the frowning Vinyl. "Oh come on, you know I was kidding."

"Yeah, since all this?" Vinyl patted her sides, her hoof going in deep. "Is just fur. Unlike some ponies, I don't need to work out to get a slim bod-GAH!"

Vinyl and Dash squeaked as Twilight squirted them both with her squirt-bottle. "Let's stay on track, please?"

"Spruce Twilight, that is bucking cold water!" Dash grumbled, flying quickly into the sky to dry herself off while Vinyl started to vibrate in place.

"Yeah, what did you do, go to the north pole or something?" Vinyl grumbled as her long coat was now puffy.

"Yes, actually. This bottle has a miniature portal inside that is connected to the original pony lands to a river that flows despite

the sheer drop in temperature and the roaming Windigos. The glass itself is indestructible so it can handle the water inside of it."

"Wow, really?" Vinyl and Dash both leaned in close to look at the bottle.

"Of course not," Twilight snorted in soft laughter, shaking her head. "It's just from the tap with a couple of ice cubes tossed in."

"Oh har har." Vinyl grumbled as she slipped on a full body padded suit. "You're a riot Twi." Vinyl made a face before she shook her mane. "Great, I've got knots in my fur. Rare's is going to kill me, and then she's going to drag me to the spa again." It had been pretty funny to see their unAwake friend drag her mother around, and acting as the more mature of the two while throwing a lot of guilt around at Vinyl.

"Better you than me Vinyl," Dash grumbled, settling down on the cloud. "I hate ponies touching my hooves."

"So what do I need to do Twi, hover in place?" Vinyl asked as she began to emit her wubs and begin to float.

"No Vinyl, not just yet!" Twilight shouted, tossing her list to the side as she began to run over to the unicorn mare, ignoring Dash pulling out the popcorn bag.

"What?" Vinyl shouted, walking around in place and lifting a hoof to her ear. Or at least that was her intention, but as she broke the stable and equally distributed propulsion of her body weight on four hooves to three as well as moving on to her face, she was suddenly rocketed sideways. Flailing with her hooves in the air, she was sent into a corkscrew fashion towards the lake. With a splash, Vinyl hit the water horn first and started to paddled in the water before Rainbow Dash flew over, plucked her out of the water and begun to lecture her.

"Vinyl Scratch, do you have any idea in how stupid that was? You should never break up your flying format unless you have years of experience to back you up!" Grumbling loudly, the pegasus began to move Vinyl's legs back into place, with Dash bending Vinyl's knees. "Look, normally you'd keep your legs tucked for flight but for your wub hooves you would need to keep them bent for a good take off before straightening them out. And don't you dare think about doing any fancy twist or turns just yet missy, as we will need to a lot of exercises to get you floating steadily before we can have you flying properl-OH MY BIRCH!" Dash suddenly shouted, placing her hooves to her mouth in horror.

"What? What's wrong Dashie?!" Twilight blinked, getting ready to run over to her friend, Vinyl staying in place.

"I'm starting to sound like you." Dash's laughter was quickly picked up by Vinyl's snickering. Which was squashed by Twilight squirting the mare with a deadpan look on her face. Shaking her mane after squeaking by the cold water, Dash rolled her eyes at white mare standing beside her.

(BIOS-Pherecydes)



**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves- Attempt #64\*\***

Hovering gently an inch above the earth, Vinyl grinned in triumph. Sure she was tied to a dozen trees in every direction; and okay she was being held in place by a giant boulder; admittedly, the chains were probably a bit much, but hey... progress!

(Evilhumour)

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves- Attempt #95\*\***

Applejack facehooved as the white blur went sailing past her, sneezing again out of control on her wub hooves.

"Vinyl, if ya are allergic ta crabgrass this loop, \_why\_ did ya come here to practice your wub hooves?"

"I don't know! I regret everything!" Vinyl shouted and sneezed herself into a tree, with apples hitting her square on her head before the last one landed square on her horn, with the apple pierced cleanly in the middle of the core.

Vinyl grunted before muttering she did not like apples before laying flat on her stomach. She then proved how fast an unicorn could move in front of an angry earth pony family clan.

(BIOS-Pherecydes)

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves - Attempt #108\*\***

"Uh... hey, Rainbow? Old buddy? You sure about this?"

"C'mon Vinyl, even Snowflake can do this. In Baseline for tree's sake!"

Twilight watched dubiously as Vinyl nervously adjusted her glasses. She was currently strapped into the Dizzitron from the Wonderbolt Academy and obviously didn't like it.

"Are you sure she's ready for this?"

"Hey no problem Twilight. Vinyl is almost 20% as cool as me. She can totally handle this. Are you ready Vinyl!?"

Staring down at the ground which was entirely too far below her, she rapidly shook her head. "No. I want to get down."

"Awesome! Here we go in three, two, one! Fire!"

Rainbow pulled the lever and the Dizzitron began spinning rapidly, quickly picking up speed to the sound of Vinyl's screaming, before snapping taut and launching the terrified mare into the air.

"Vinyl, use your Wub Hooves!"

The DJ apparently heard Twilight's cry as a loud pulsating beat filled the air. Unfortunately she couldn't seem to figure out which

direction to aim and as a result ended up doing a wild corkscrew over the air of Ponyville, accompanied by an epic dubstep. And just barely heard beneath that the sound of Vinyl's screaming.

Twilight's and Rainbow Dash's heads bounced back and forth as they tracked Vinyl's 'flight' through the center of Ponyville, wincing simultaneously at the several near misses, before she finally came to a landing in the local swimming hole; dousing the Apple family as they relaxed in the water.

"Eh, heheh. Okay so maybe she wasn't ready."

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves - Attempt #248\*\***

"Let's try something different you said. All you have to do is catch a falling crystal you said. Nothing could go wrong you said."

"Okay Vinyl, I get it." Twilight said with a sigh as she stared out over the remains of what used to be the Crystal Kingdom. "Using a power based on vibration in a city made of crystal results in a literal Cascade Failure."

"Waahaaaaa! It's all gone! This is The. Worst. Possible. Thing!"

Twilight grimaced as she watched her friend summon her fainting couch. "I'm not sure if it's better or not that Rarity isn't Awake this time."

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves - Attempt #291\*\***

"I believe I understand your plight

You wish to end your wild flight

But sadly I cannot offer advice

You must search elsewhere for a helping device."

"oKaY. ThAnKs, aNyWaY."

Vinyl grimaced at the sound of her broken voice. An unplanned landing had set her down dead center in the middle of a field of Poison Joak. It would take Zecora an hour or more to brew the antidote and in the meantime she was totally tone-deaf. Worst landing ever.

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves - Attempt #321\*\***

Hanging shakily about a foot above the ground Vinyl gave a tentative grin. "Hey, I think I'm starting to get the hang of this."

From a nearby bush Pinkie Pie burst out in a cloud of confetti. "Yay. Now I can throw you a 'Congratulation on Learning to Fly' Party!"

"Gah!"

Blinking at the trail of broken foliage which showed where Vinyl had gone, Pinkie smiled sheepishly.

"Oopsie."

(Dave ID)

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves - Attempt #420\*\***

"Vinyl, maybe we should take a break, especially since you freed Discord, Sombra and Tirek at the same time, and are basically kaiju now." Twilight said as Tirek gave a left hook to Sombra, who promptly hit Discord with a blast of dark magic, who kicked Tirek in the knees.

"Yeah, we should."

(Evilhumour)

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wubs Hooves- Attempt #432\*\***

"Okay, this was a bad idea from the start, I'll admit." Dash blinked as she watched Vinyl flash by again. And again. And again. And again.

"I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU SAY, TURN OFF THE BUCKING PORTAL BEFORE I PUKE AGAIN!"

(BIOS-Pherecydes)

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves- Attempt #555\*\***

"Cutie Mark Crusaders: Catapult Makers YAY!"

Twilight very calmly turned around and, very calmly, ran for her life.

\_'nopenopenopenopenopenopenope.\_

(Evilhumour)

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves- Attempt #652\*\***

"I'm sorry Luna!" Vinyl called over her shoulder, looking at the irate former mare of the moon and then at the former celestial body in the sky. "Please don't banish me!"

(BIOS-Pherecydes)

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves- Attempt #701\*\***

Vinyl stared at the various wires attached to the sensors attached to her body, all of which led back to a large computer beneath Twilight's Library.

"So, what's this thing supposed to do exactly?"

"This will let me measure your oscillation and vibrational frequencies and allow me to find a correlating pattern. Then I can use my magic to create a neural feedback which should allow you to precisely determine how to utilize your Sonic Propulsion Hooves to

achieve directional thrust and momentum without exceeding your ability to control them."

Vinyl stared. She opened her mouth, then closed it. Then she stared some more before shaking her head rapidly.

"Right. Okay, sure. Go ahead."

Twilight beamed and turned on the analysis device.

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, this is totally not my fault."<p>

Twilight didn't respond, being too busy staring at the remains of the Golden Oaks.

(Codelyoko22)

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves- Attempt #805\*\***

"Vinyl, I know you wanted to learn how to use those Wub Hooves as quickly as possible, but couldn't you have waited till the next dame loop?!" Rochelle yelled as hordes upon hordes of infected ponies rushed toward them.

"How was I supposed to know they would attract this many?!" Vinyl yelled back.

(Evilhumour)

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves- Attempt #901\*\***

"TRIXIEIBUCKINGHATEYOUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU!"

Vinyl shouted as she was sent flying by the low level rockets the showmare had got from Jeb Kerman.

"It was rocket fuel, what do you expect!\_" Trixie yelled back as she was flying alongside the panicking, wub hoof flailing mare that had a rocket strapped around her stomach.

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves- Attempt #902\*\***

"LYRAIBUCKINGHATEYOUUUUUUU!"

Vinyl screamed as she was sent flying out of the ocean, holding onto the noise rocket for dear life.

"We're seaponies! If you weren't expecting overkill from us, you get no sympathies from me!" Lyra shouted upwards at the white mare.

**\*\*Experimental Log: Wub Hooves- Attempt #999\*\***

Vinyl panted, throwing herself onto the shore with a thud after half halfheartedly levitating the water out of her coat for the umpteenth time.

"Girls," Vinyl wheezed on her back, too tired to care about the latest camera that Dash had set up this time. "I'm bu-" She coughed, and spat out some water before rolling her head on the grass. "I'm bushed." Letting out a very equine-like whine, Vinyl took off her goggles before rubbing her nose before letting out both a tiny snuffle and a tiny beam of sonic waves at a tree. "I've got water in places I didn't know I had and I've been a seapony!" Vinyl then rolled onto her stomach and groaned. "I'm either going to walk home, or push my well toned flanks all the way home and to fir with Octy yelling at me for getting mud in the house again but I'm done for today and this loop!"

"Wait, I've got one more trick up my sleeve!" Twilight shouted, as she reached into her subspace pocket. "Where is it, where is it?"

Vinyl, chest heaving, raised an eyebrow at the mare who was pulling more and more stuff out of her pocket, with the objects getting larger and more worrisome.

With a grunt, Vinyl pushed herself to her hooves, her legs very strong now from repeated attempts to fly with her wubs hooves and was preparing herself for a mad dash home when Twilight let out a shout of victory.

"Here, for test one thousand, let's try this!" Twilight said smiling, holding the most unwubural thing in existence.

With a heavy sigh, Vinyl began to turn and walk away when Twilight teleported back in front of her.

"Vinyl? It's a metronome, why are you walk-?"

"Twi, I know exactly what it is. After endless loops dealing with my parents trying to teach me 'proper' rhythm and timing opposed to my wubs with them, I know how to build one in my sleep now." Vinyl grunted, resting her head against a tree. "Do you know what it is like to hear it for hours on end until everything you play matches its damn beat and then the quack of a doctor decides to get even with you for biting his leg by switching the tempo when you show off to your parents. Of course my parent's can't hear the change but I can, and it's very hard to suddenly play to the new beat when you've been forced to play by the other beat and then your parents and the bucking doctor start yelling at you for being stupid and unable to follow a simple tick tock!" Vinyl then shook her mane. "I'm sorry Twi, but I don't care if it would stop the loops and fix Yggdrasil but I am not listening to another metronome if I can help it."

"Well..." Twilight dragged out, a bit uncomfortable with how things had just turned. "I do have an idea that can still work without them!"

"Huh? What are you talk-"

"Vinyl, close your eyes and listen to me."

"Okay!. Vinyl shut her eyes, ears flickering with annoyance.

"Now I want you to focus on your inner beat."

"What? My heartbeat?" Vinyl turned her head and began to open her eyes when Twilight shouted again.

"Vinyl Scratch, eyes \_shut\_ and \_no!\_" Twilight sighed heavily. "Close your eyes and ignore \_everything\_ but my voice and your inner beat! Don't say anything else, do anything else but focus on your inner beat!"

Vinyl did her best not to snark, and to follow the instructions. Closing herself off, she drew into herself and search for that musical beat that gave her endless creativity, the one that she \_always\_ head banged to. It was hard, pushing away beats that were inspirations from the odd loop here or there and the ones that came from songs that got stuck in her head for several loops, \_thank you very much Pinkie Pie!\_ With her lips moving and horn glowing, Vinyl began the slow process of deleting music from her mind.

Slowly, she had whittled them down the beats to two remaining; one she instantly recognized as the... \_Hub\_ Wub, yeah that was a good name for it and...something \_else\_, something she didn't recognize or remember ever hearing. It was really odd too, so slow that she almost missed it but when she \_did\_ focus on it and listen for it to playback, the sound it made was nothing like she heard before. Placing it in the examine later pile in her mind, which if anypony ever saw would have an instant coronary in how messy it was, she focused on the first beat and felt herself begin to relax.

"...vinyl?" With heavy eyes, Vinyl was aware that a nerdish pony was calling for her. "did you get it?"

"\_Yeah, I did Twi.\_" Vinyl's cheeks grew red as autotuned herself without meaning it again. "\_I got the Hub Wub.\_"

"Hub wub-that's a terrible name!" Twilight grunted before facehooving, her sonic echoes that she let out by mistake painted the image with perfect timing. "Never mind, I want you to now imagine that there's a speaker attached to the ...\_Hub Wub\_, okay?"

Vinyl let out a chirp to let Twi know she did, and her inner Vinyl was \_begging\_ to crank it up to eleven already.

"Good, now I want you to move the dial to two." With a sonic chirp of annoyance blasted in front of her, Vinyl did exactly as she was told, and move the dial up slowly- "Okay, that's two, okay?"

Vinyl almost opened her eyes in confusion, but she was focused on the Hub Wub so she imagined that this was a two, whatever \_that\_ meant.

"Good, now double that to four, please." Vinyl did the same as did before, waiting for the beats to match what she did before, mentally marking it as four. For the next little bit, Twilight called out different numbers between one and ten, with Vinyl quickly becoming adept at moving her Hub Wub at the different levels, with quarter numbers thrown in that pitched her speaker in all directions. Finally, Twilight stopped calling out the numbers with Vinyl stuck at one. "And now...go for it Vinyl, go for eleven."

With a smirk on her face, her inner Vinyl grabbed the dial with her body, and used her weight to turn it up all the way to eleven, dumping herself to the ground in the process.

Holding herself steady at eleven, Vinyl was listening to her Hub Wub when she heard a lot of clapping.

Blinking, she opened her eyes to see all her friends on clouds around her, cheering for her as she in the middle of the sky with her wub hooves!

Already, Vinyl started to panic when Twilight shouted, "Ten!" Instantly, Vinyl lowered herself down several feet and kept herself stable for a few second before Twilight shouted out nine. Then Vinyl realized what was happening and called out ten to herself, with point twenty five to move herself forwards. Smiling, Vinyl began to move the dial in her head, flying in low circles before forcing herself upwards with a blast of music in the center of everypony.

"WHOO HOOOOO!" Vinyl shouted, doing a little victory jig before she caught herself at ten, and forced herself back up to her snickering friends.

"There's still more technical stuff you need to learn Vinyl, but congrats," Dash smirked as she flew over to the unicorn mare. "You can now fly with unmatched style!"

"YEAH!" Vinyl shouted as she grabbed her glasses from her pocket and placed them on her face. "Drinks are on me girls!" With that, Vinyl dived bombed her way to Mac's bar before everypony realized they forgot one thing. "OH SWEET BUCKING HELL, HOW DO I LAND?!"

Applejack sighed as Vinyl totaled the old barn, and then gasped as an anvil went sailing through the sky before crashing into a certain library in the middle of the town.

\* \* \*

><p><span><strong>Experimental Log: Wub Hooves-Landing Attempt  
#1<strong>

"Twilight?"

"Yes Vinyl?"

"Are you still mad about me sending an anvil through your house?" the mare gulped, holding onto the side tightly.

"Why would you say that Vinyl?" Twilight asked as she held out a paper to log the results.

"Because despite you saying this will help me learn how to land with my wub hooves, I really doubt that a catapult you just threw together is really safe." Vinyl gulped, looking at the bucket she was in.

"Oh I didn't make it, I borrowed it." Twilight answered truthfully.

"Oh that's good, I gues-" Vinyl sighed in relief.

"I borrowed it from the Cutie Mark Crusaders."

"Wait what?!" Vinyl shouted before Twilight threw the switch, screaming before she hit the forest, which triggered an treesap esque mudslide into town that destroyed the Golden Oak Library. As Vinyl flew over to facehoofing Twilight, she landed in a loud plop of tree sap. Staring directly at Twilight, Vinyl then shook herself clean like a dog before wubbing away from the shouting mare.

\* \* \*

><p>152.3: (Scorntex)<p>

"THE NIGHT SHALL LAST FORE-..." Nightmare Moon stopped dead. The ponies before her had stopped looking afraid, or confused, and had...

No, she was clearly seeing things. And hearing things.

They couldn't actually be dancing, surely. Well, she presumed it was dancing. Though what the loud music (again, she presumed it was music) and the flashing lights had to do with it, she'd no idea. And none of them seemed at all surprised by this, as they danced in time to the strange sounds.

"Where is that music coming from?" Nightmare Moon declared. "ANSWER THY TRUE RULER! And wh-... why am I dancing as well?"

Indeed, Nightmare Moon's legs were also begin to move with a will of their own. She could feel it. Some ridiculously powerful enchantment washing over her.

"And why can't I stop?!\_"

Twilight Sparkle allowed herself a satisfied grin. Nightmare Moon was contained, as was a potential panic on the part of Ponyville. She'd been... more than a little sceptical when Smaug had given her the phial she held, and the user's manual that came with it. Variants were one thing, but someone in Arda somehow having the means to generate an instant disco?

And yet here everypony was, dancing to a disco that had just suddenly happened when she'd opened the phial. Even Princess Luna herself.

"Well, I think we can call this test run a success." Twilight noted.

"Twilight, help!" She heard Spike call out. Instantly she looked toward her un-Awake companion, who was also dancing (surprisingly well, actually), despite the look of utter terror on his face.

"I can't stop boogying!"

Ah. Twilight thought. That explained why Smaug had been grinning so much...

\* \* \*



><p>152.4 (Alex Prior, Detective Ethan Redfield, Drakohahn, Evilhumour, Gamex27, Hvulpes, Masterweaver, Midnight Crescent, ScornTex, wildrook, Zerorock41)<p>

(This series of snips would be split up, but I didn't have individual attributions)

"THE BIGHT! SHALL LAST! FOREVER!" Nightmare Moon declared, grabbing her surfboard and heading into the newly created Bight of Ponyville to catch some waves.

\* \* \*

><p>"THE SPRITE! SHALL LAST! FOREVER!" Nightmare Moon declared, as she turned every water supply in Ponyville into lemon-lime, fizzy soft drinks.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"THE WRIGHT! SHALL LAST! FOREVER!"<p>

Defense Attorney Always Right (otherwise known as Phoenix Wright) sighed, "Yeah yeah. Just get it out of your system now."

\* \* \*

><p>"THE FLIGHT! SHALL LAST! FOREVER!" Nightmare Moon declared, as she looped passed Ponyville for the fifth time.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"THE MIGHT! WILL LAST! FOREVER!" proclaimed the muscular alicorn on the stage, shooing off her sleek abs. "And <em>you<em> could be this fit too if you purchase the Lateral Unified Natural Augmentation Home Gym! Yes, with the L.U.N.A. home gym, you'll be showing off a perfect body in as little as two weeks! Send your orders to MareMoon incorporated, half off for a limited time only!"

"YEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!" Bulk Biceps yelled.

\* \* \*

><p>"TWILIGHT! WILL LAST! FOREVER!"<p>

"Luna, put me \_down.\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"THE TWILIGHT... SAGA! WILL LAST! FOREVER!"<p>

Leah face-palmed. "Yeah, I don't see that happening," she muttered. "We don't have baseline extensions..."

\* \* \*

><p>"THE SIGHT! SHALL LAST! FOREVER!" Nightmare Moon declared, as she created a beautiful aurora borealis over Ponyville with a simple spell. As the ponies <em>ooohed<em> and \_ahhhed\_ over the sight, Twilight rolled her eyes.

"Luna, you're getting a bit carried away with the pun-"

"NEVER!" Luna cackled. "THE PUNS ABOUT THE NIGHT! WILL LAST  
\_FOREVER!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"THE FIGHT! SHALL LAST! FOREVER!"<p>

Twilight rolled her eyes. She then ducked as some debris went flying by.

"You're running out of material, Luna."

"YOU GOTTA FIGHT!" Pinkie sang. "FOR YOUR RIGHT! TO  
PAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARTY!"

"No more Beastie Boys for you," Twilight muttered, face-hoofing. "And that's not even part of the pun!"

\* \* \*

><p>"THE PLIGHT! WILL LAST! FOREVER!"<p>

Twilight rose an eyebrow. "What plight?"

"The plight of inflation." Nightmare Moon gestured around the room. "How expensive were these banners?!"

\* \* \*

><p>"THE KITE! WILL LAST! FOREVER!" The alicorn on stage announced, looking through the window at the sea of kites outside.<p>

Every Awake Looper in the Town Hall face-hoofed.

"Stop, Luna." Twilight pleaded. "Just stop..."

"AAAAAAUAAAAAAAAGH!" Pinkie shouted, pointing. "THE TREES ARE EATING ALL THE KITES!"

\* \* \*

><p>"THE BLIGHT! WILL LAST! FOREVER!"<p>

Applejack glared out at her withering farm and turned her stink eye to Luna before ascending. She pointed her newly formed horn at Luna and shouted, "It better not!"

Luna shrunk in on herself as she coughed, "Uh...Well, perhaps I was hasty."

She cast a spell, causing all the trees to resume their healthy look. Applejack looked at the farm and smirked, "Thank ya kindly."

Luna coughed again, hiding a laugh and whispered, "Thou might not wish to thank myself so soon."

\* \* \*

><p>The moon diarch was long gone when Applejack discovered her apples were now pear trees. She took a deep breath before screaming in the Canterlot Royal Voice, <strong>"LUUUNNNNAAAA."</strong>

\* \* \*

><p>"The Wight will last forever! The fright will last forever!"<p>

"Buck." One of the sanitarium orderlies muttered, as he and several of his co-workers wrestled the alicorn princess into a straitjacket. "Why do we always get the really crazy ones?"

"Could be worse." Another groused. "At least she's not biting."

Luna stopped mid-ranting, and blinked innocently. "Would that help?"

\* \* \*

><p>"THE NIGHT SHALL LAST-Gah! Put me down this <em>instance! <em>No in the pool, away from the pool, no no no no GAH!" The mare shouted as she leap out of the freezing pool, shivering. " I promise to cut back, okay?!"

\* \* \*

><p>"THE BOOZE! SHALL LAST! FOREVER!"<p>

"That's not even a rhyme for night!" said Spike, before being kneed in his ribs.

"Shut up Spike! Our new perfect leader has spoken!" said Berry Punch with a growl to the dragon before glowing at the alicorn and then endless bottles of alcohol.

\* \* \*

><p>"THE NIGHT...SHALL RAVE...FOREVER!" Nightmare PON3 yelled as Octavia face-hoofed at the makeshift night-club in the Mayor's Office.<p>

"Dear Celestia, Vinyl," she muttered.

\* \* \*

><p>"CANS HAZ NITES 4EVER?"<p>

"Okay, who introduced Nightmare Moon to Lolcats?"

\* \* \*

><p>"THE TIGHTS! SHALL LAST! FOREVER!" Nightmare Rarity declared, as she conjured spandex uniforms and clothes over everypony in Ponyville.<p>

"Thou art taking this pun \_too far\_!" Luna complained, wincing as she tried to get rid of the wedgie the cursed garments were causing on her flanks.

"Pot calling the kettle black, darling," she simply said in reply, as she observed the crowd of ponies beginning to complain in unison how the clothes were rubbing up against their fur, or how it didn't match their eyes, or such. In her opinion as a fashionista, it was fine.

\* \* \*

><p>152.5: (Masterweaver)<p>

"What are you fillies doing here?!" Celestia shouted as she landed. "There are two massive golems fighting right over there!"

"Ah know. They asked us ta keep score." The yellow earth pony adjusted a dial on the goggles she was wearing. "Also, technically speaking they aren't golems."

"What?"

The white unicorn rolled her eyes. "You see, Vinyl Scratch recently figured out how to use sonic vibrations to make sculptures, so she went around boasting about being the fastest carver. Applejack heard about that, though, and being an earthbender kinda got riled up. So they were going to have a sculpture making competition, but then AJ's little sister here suggested they make something more complicated..."

Celestia blinked as one of the stone giants piledrived the other. "But... You... Honesty... This is incredibly dangerous!"

"Which is why big sis made sure ta do it away from civilized areas-hold on." The yellow filly suddenly grew wings and a horn. **\*\*"Don't think Ah didn't see that, AJ! Repairin' a leg mid-session is a twenty point penalty!"\*\***

"Yeesh, I'd of thought Vinyl would be the cheater," the unicorn quipped.

Celestia stared at the madness in front of her. "Did... did you just... she became an alicorn."

"Yeah, that..." Sweetie rolled her eyes. "Look, Celestia, I'd explain, but we're kind of busy right now. I think Twilight's available though, knock on her door three times and she'll tell you anything."

\* \* \*

><p>152.6: (Masterweaver)<p>

"Rarity?"

"Yes Twilight?"

"Why is Cheerilee leading a citizen's revolution against the tyrannical forces of Canterlot this loop?"

Rarity put down her picket sign and sighed. "Twilight, as much as I love this gag, this is a serious situation."

"I can see that," the other unicorn replied, gesturing to the screaming crowd of protesters around the castle. "I'm just not sure what it is that has everypony so riled up."

"Cutie Mark-based Employment is legally enforced this loop," Rarity explained. "Since Cheerilee's cutie mark is flowers, it is quite literally against the law for her to teach."

"Wait... seriously?"

"Mmmhmmm." Rarity picked her picket sign up. "Why are you here, anyway?"

"Oh, Celestia sent me out to 'break up the crowd.' But I think I'll just fail at that and go have a few words with her." Twilight shrugged, lighting up her horn. "It's a good thing she's not Awake, or I'd be really upset..."

\* \* \*

><p>152.7: (Masterweaver, Midnight Crescent, wildrook)<p>

"So why am I the game master again?" Shining asked. "And seriously, why are we doing this? We've been to Oerth..."

"You've got the head for numbers, all of us are better actors, and we're doing this to screw around and have fun." Cadance pulled out her character sheet with a manic grin. "I rolled up a half-orc monk!"

"A... what?" Trixie tilted her head. "I don't think that's actually legal, can half-orcs be monks?"

Chrysalis rolled her eyes. "Her husband's the GM, best not to question it."

"Then I'll be playing a Dwarven Rogue," Trixie said, before seeing all the blank stares. "What?"

"You do realize that involves being quiet," Shining Armour asked in response. "So no explosions, or illusions."

"Well of course I do." Trixie replied in a huff. "It's not like I actually have to do it myself. Besides, Trixie has been a master thief before," she said, smirking at the Royal couple. "She has experience, as you both well know..."

"Ok," Shining Armour conceded. "But why a Dwarf?"

Before she could respond, Trixie found Chrysalis' hoof in her mouth. "She's just going to give a long speech about nothing," the Changeling queen said, rolling her eyes. "So I'll skip to the real reason is she just wants to do the female Dwarves with beards bit."

"...Spoilsport..." Trixie whispered, handing a character sheet over to Shining Armour before slumping down in her chair.

"Fine," Shining said, "but as long as we don't tip the Henderson Scale of Plot Derailment up to 9000, I won't consider the

team-killing option."

\* \* \*

><p>152.8: (Masterweaver)<p>

Anakin Skywalker stared out of the cockpit in disbelief. "I... I'm sorry, what did you just say?"

"It's all a big city. The whole planet--"

"This planet is named Equestria?"

The pilot laughed. "Yes. Funny story, that, the pre-republic natives are actually miniature horses..."

\* \* \*

><p>152.9: (Gym Quirk)<p>

Twilight stumbled into Mac's bar. "What do you have that's barely safe for Alicorns?"

"I think I have the ingredients for one of Trixie's Jaegerbombs," offered Berry.

"That'll do for a start." The Anchor lurched to a stool and slumped down, chin on the bar, forehead massaged by a hoof.

"So how bad was it?" asked Mac.

"Four words: Pinkie Discord Mirror Pool."

"Ouch."

Berry held an energetically fizzing mug with a digital countdown timer in front of the unicorn. "You need to ascend, hon."

"I'll think about it. Just give me the drink."

\* \* \*

><p>152.10: (Masterweaver)<p>

Cheerilee groaned. "Why is this even here?"

Berry Punch leaned out from the kitchen, absently washing some dishes in her telekinetic grip. "What's up this time, sis?"

"This loop, teachers are required to fill out license renewals every five years. Something about ensuring only legitimate teachers stay in business or something, there was apparently a series of scandals way back when involving tutors..." The mare let out a groan. "And part of the required info is my sexuality."

Berry shrugged her wings, levitating the dish to the drying rack before descending back to her usual earth pony form. "Just put down asexual."

"Not an option." Cheerilee held the paper up. "It's homo, hetero, or

bi."

"Wait, what?"

"Nothing on tribe, nothing on out of pony species, nothing on frequency... just homo, hetero, or bi." Cheerilee rolled her eyes. "I mean, I consider myself a low-libido heterosexual with some bisexual tendencies and a preference but not requirement for romantic partners, but can I write that all out? Nooooooooooooo."

Her sister gave the paper a look. "So... just fill in the hetero option."

"Yeah, that works for me, but it doesn't work for everyone." Cheerilee started scribbling in the bubble anyway. "You know what? Later this week, I'm going to go talk to the mayor about this. Get it changed."

"First the cutie mark revolution and now this." Berry sighed. "Cheerilee... sis... promise me you won't let doing the right thing make you into a self-righteous jerk."

"Of course I won't! I'm not some..." The teacher paused. "There's this phrase they use in loops with internet..."

"Social Justice Warrior?"

"That's it, that's the one. I'm a Social Justice Teacher, not a warrior. I think." Cheerilee frowned. "...you know what, just... let me know if I go too far, alright?"

\* \* \*

><p>152.11: (Masterweaver)<p>

Lilo dragged a hand down her face. "This again...?"

"Hey," Nyx protested, "it's not like either of us planned this!" She wagged her lower arms, her antennae twitching in concentration. "Huh, you know, I thought that having six limbs normally would prepare me more for this, but the flexibility of these things-

"So now all of Jumba's experiments are going to be ponies." Lilo threw up her hands. "Which means I'm going to be the obviously girlygirl who collects magical talking ponies because, oh why not!"

"Hey, I got a lot of pings," Nyx pointed out. "That means a good portion of us are Awake. Look, all we have to do is run it baseline till they get dumped all over the island, then we can start poking around to find the loopers and get them to help us do... whatever it is we're supposed to do."

\* \* \*

><p>152.12: (Masterweaver)<p>

"...what."

The grey pegasus took a deep breath, held it for a moment,

and...

"My mother wanted to name me Bright Eyes but she was so high on painkillers when I came out that the doctors thought she said Ditzzy Doo so that was what they put on their birth certificate but mom still called me Bright Eyes all the time so when I went to school I was confused when grown up ponies called me by my legal name and a lot of the foals around me started teasing me by calling me Derpy Hooves only I decided I liked Derpy better than Ditzzy since Ditzzy sort of implied I was airheaded which i'm not I'm just a bit strange thinking so at one point I tried to get my name legally changed to Derpy Hooves so I could take the insult as a badge of pride only there was a paperwork snafu and my full legal name became Derpy Ditzzy Doo Hooves but I didn't really care and then later I was given the false cover identity of Bubbles as part of a witness protection program but I spent so long in it that it became an official identity and then most recently I was elected the Muffin Matron Mare in an Equestria-wide voting ceremony and it's usually shortened to Muffin but it's really more of a title anyway."

Twilight stared at her. "That... that is the craziest variant I have ever-

"Actually," the pegasus interrupted, "all that happens more often than not. I mean, some loops parts of it are missing, but..."

"...you mean to tell me you have-" Twilight ran some quick calculations in her head. "-around \_five\_ names in \_baseline?!\_"

"I think so. Could be damaged code or something."

\* \* \*

><p>152.13: (Alex Prior, BIOS-Pherecydes, Dave ID, Detective Ethan Redfield, Evilhumour, Masterweaver, Midnight Crescent, wildrook<p>

Rainbow slammed her mug down. "Okay, okay, I got one. Variants. Weirdest mother you ever had?"

Apple Bloom rolled her eyes. "You."

"I had Tirek as my mother for a loop." Twilight sighed. "And before you ask, no, my house was \_still\_ destroyed at the end of it."

Rarity sighed. "Applejack."

"Wait, what?"

"You were actually a pretty good mother, Applejack."

"But you and me, you were mah daughter one loop?"

"You're surprised?"

"Err, well... Shoot, ya got a point there."

Celestia grimaced. "One Loop, Luna and I were the children of The



Tree of Harmony."

All conversation came to a stop. Twilight managed to find her voice first.

"Wha..."

Luna slammed an empty glass down, gesturing for Mac to refill it.

"That was not even the worst of it. Our father was Discord."

Applejack slammed down the rest of her drink. "At least that's a magic tree..."

Luna raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

"One loop, our family literally grew on our trees..."

Big Mac and Applebloom's eyes widened and twitched in unison.

"Eeyup," Applejack continued, pulling her hat down over her eyes. "Bloomberg..."

"The bogbug tree," Chrysalis grumbled with a shudder. "Apparently Star Swirl locks up some potent evil in a tree in the middle of a bog with mounds of dead ponies floating in the water, and then some unicorn comes along and tries to destroy the tree, but the evil whatever flows into the insect-infected bog from the hole in the tree and suddenly evil insect zombies that eat love."

Everypony stared at her.

"I absolutely hate that variant," she continued. "Because guess who comes out first? And it means that we're all naturally evil, it's..."

She shuddered again. Trixie put down her drink and wrapped her hooves around her with a gentle nuzzle; Chrysalis managed a small smile.

"...I'm not sure that technically counts as a parent," Rainbow Dash mused. "Origin story, yeah, but the tree didn't do anything to actually raise you, did it? You just come into being-

"Rainbow Dash if you don't shut up right now you're going to be the focus of my next firework display," Trixie stated very calmly.

The "human" of the group sighed. "Bonbon was our mother and Octavia was Vinyl's mom."

Applebloom frowned. "Tha's nuthin'. One Loop Ah was mah own mom."

Applejack patted her sister on the back. "Mikasa Glitch?"

"Eeyup."

Discord entered the conversation, then stepped out of the conversation and into the actual bar.

"I don't think I ever had a mother in the Baseline. For me any mother is unusual. However there was this one time when I had Maud Pie as my mumsy dearest. Can you imagine? Me the Spirit of Chaos, the son of the least chaotic pony in all of Equestria!"

"There was the time I was literally born from the world's first DJ table," Vinyl mused.

"Wait, what?"

"Yeah, strangest thing. She even taught me how to do this!" The unicorn happily began to dance a most righteous disco.

Twilight blinked. "I just-how did-you can't just-!"

Lt. Redfield of the Resident Evil series waited until he had several deep mugs of the local swill before replying, "Albert Wesker, both born from a female and as a clone created during his time at the Spencer Manor."

The rest of the bar loopers winced in sympathy, except one, an iguana named Leon that had replaced Gummy, "That's pretty bad, but I was once his and Claire's child by birth. Thank God you weren't awake for that one."

"Slaanesh." Leman shuddered. "Dear \_TREE\_ there was not enough booze to erase \_that\_ horror from my mind!"

Nyx rubbed her snout against her boyfriend, "Awake or asleep?"

Leman hugged her close, shuddering. "I don't know and I don't \_want\_ to know!"

"I recall Twilight Velvet was my birth mother that one time," recalled Celestia. "There was a Stealth Anchor. Twilight called me the 'coolest big sister ever!'"

She sighed.

"You were so adorkable."

Luna scowled. "I remember that one. \_My\_ mother was Nightmare Moon, and wasn't \_that\_ the greatest family. There was way too little CAKE, or would have been if somepony-we-shall-not-name hadn't STOLEN them all."

Interestingly enough, both Celestia \_and\_ Nyx gasped. "You were \_Awake\_ for that one?"

Twilight facehooved.

"Sleipnir." Everypony stopped and looked at Scootaloo in awe. Their eyes were demanding more information from the slow drinking filly. With a long sip and exaggerated sigh, the filly continued. "It was a weird variant, but you know how Loki is Sleipnir's mom? Following in the family's hoofsteps in that loop."

"Wait, who was your father?" Sweetie Belle asked.

"A male Hel." Scootaloo blinked and paused, tapping her chin. "I think; there were a lot of male figures around the time I was conceived according to grandma Loki, some of who I am not allowed to say." She then tipped her head at the real Sleipnir who was simply burying his head into the table.

Spike sighed and pointed at Rarity. "Remember that Games of Thrones loop?"

Rarity shuddered and hugged husband at that memory being brought to the forefront.

"SCP-504," a male voice said, revealing Sasuke in pony form. "On the upside, I have a disdain for Dane Cook and I learned my Tomato Stand CAN be used for combat...only for bad jokes."

As soon as Rainbow Dash opened her mouth, though, Sasuke glared.

"Don't you DARE use THAT joke. You know, the one used against Nazis in the Monty Python Branch?"

"How'd you even..."

"Hub Loops."

"Figures," Dash muttered. "Other than that, well...there was a Herd Loop...and my Mom was Firefly, but I was raised by the Wonderbolts."

"Again?" the others asked her.

Dash rolled her eyes. "Never said which generation," she replied. "It was one of those Variants where Generations were mixed...and I was raised by Captain Firefly."

Twilight then hovered over her, almost sparking. "Tell me everything!" she yelled.

\* \* \*

><p>152.14: (OathToOblivion)<p>

It was another bright and shining day in Ponyville. Twilight and Spike were exiting the Golden Oaks Library, just shooting the breeze.

Twilight sighed in disappointment. "I was really hoping the others would be Awake this Loop. I needed to talk to them about something important."

"Gee, thanks," Spike said wryly. Twilight flushed at her unintentional insult.

"Sorry, Spike," she apologized to her number one assistant/brother/son/whatever.

"Eh, it's fine. Anyway, last Loop I was over at Anakin's place, and he told me something interesting he'd heard from Oshawott. Basically, it-" Spike was cut off when a metallic arm came out of nowhere and clutched him around the midsection and pulled him away.

"Spike!" Twilight yelled in concern, whirling around to see who it was. What she saw was so distracting that she stopped everything. And so did everypony else nearby. What do you say when you see a giant cat-shaped hot air balloon? Only...something about it looked familiar to Twilight.

"Listen, is that a purple unicorn I hear?" a white pegasus with a long red mane asked from within the balloon's basket.

"It's speaking to me loud and clear," her companion, a white unicorn with a short blue mane replied. He was fiddling with something within the basket.

"On the wind!"

"Past the stars!"

"In your ears!" their final companion, a cat that was walking on its hind legs, stated, having finished locking Spike in a pink cage of sorts. Then they continued on with a flourish.

"Bringing chaos at a breakneck pace!"

"Dashing hope, putting fear in its place!"

"A rose by any other name is just as sweet!"

"When everything's worse, our work is complete!"

"Jessie!"

"James!"

"And Meowth, now dat's a name!" And then suddenly it clicked for Twilight just who they were.

"Putting the do-gooders in their place..."

"...we're Team Rocket!"

"IN YOUR FACE!" Meowth crowed, before hitting the button on a remote he had. From the basket, twin rocket engines extended, sending the balloon rocketing away.

Twilight blinked once, then twice, then immediately panicked. "Hang on, Spike!" she yelled, summoning her Element, ascending, then flying after the balloon as fast as she can.

\* \* \*

><p>While Team Rocket made like their namesake and rocketed away, Spike was not very impressed. "You guys know I can get out of here any time I want, right?" he pointed out.<p>

"Ha! That's what you think! Tell him, Meowth!" Jessie declared.

Meowth, however, did not like this idea. "Why me?! I'm steerin' dis thing! Make James do it, he's not doin' anythin'!"

"I'm keeping an eye on our incoming pony princess! I can't do it!" James shot back.

"Grrr-! Fine, I'll do it!" Jessie seethed, before turning back to the amused dragon Jedi. "All right, this is how it works! For starters, that cage is made out of pure Pixie Plate!" she announced.

Spike blinked. "Pixie Plate?" he asked in confusion.

"That's right! Arceus's Fairy-type Plate, courtesy of a certain Togepi! And as everyone knows, Fairies are immune to Dragon stuff! In other words, you can't use any of your dragon abilities in that cage! And as for your little Jedi tricks, we've coated the thing with miriskin!"

Spike quickly grew a deadpan look. "Miriskin is a hoax. Only living ysalamari can block the use of the Force," he pointed out.

James grinned, and turned around to look at him. "Ordinarily, but we obtained it in a variant where that's not the case!" he rebutted, waving his hoof back and forth in an imitation of a wagging finger.

"The cage is also built so that you can't use your little size-shift thing either. You'd crush yourself! You're not getting out of that cage until we let you out!" Jessie declared.

"Or we blast off..." Meowth added under his breath.

Spike shook his head. They really had him backed up in a corner here. Just, one thing was still confusing him. "Why are you guys even doing this anyway? You're obviously Loopers, considering you have miriskin, and whatever a Pixie Plate is. So..."

At that, the Looping Rocket members all grew somber. "When we first started Looping, we were a tad frustrated with how we never won in baseline," Jessie began.

"We figured that there was nothing wrong in trying to be the good guys, since we are pretty good at it. But..." James continued, before pausing.

"It jus' wasn' us! We're good at bein' good, but we love bein' bad! It jus' took us a while to remember!" Meowth summarized.

"Well, to be more accurate, we're bad, but we're not \_evil\_, if that makes any sense," James mused.

"Okay, but why kidnap \_me?\_"

Jessie shrugged. "Practice." She would have elaborated more, when James paled on seeing what was coming up behind them.

"Uh, Jessie? Meowth?" he squeaked out.

"Wat?!" Meowth asked in irritation, before the other two Rockets turned around. Then they too paled.

Seeing the Rainbow of Light flying right at them would probably do that to anyone. The Rainbow slammed right into the balloon, causing a giant explosion! While Spike's cage was caught by Twilight, the other three went flying in a completely different direction.

"Looks like we'll have to go back to the drawing board," James sighed.

"GAH! I thought we only look bad in comparison to the twoips!" Meowth raged.

"That's it. We're using a cloaking device next time," Jessie snarled. But then the three grinned, because they knew what was coming next. And as much as it tended to annoy them, there was a bit of nostalgia involved with it. So...

"LOOKS LIKE TEAM ROCKET'S BLASTING OFF  
AGAAAAAAAAIIIIIIIN!"

\*\*\*twinkle\*\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>152.15: (Bardic Knowledge)<p>

Sunset stared vacantly into the Equestrian distance, a glass of cold tea by her seat on Twilight's balcony. She'd stopped by after Discord's return and resealing, which was unusually late for her if she were coming by at all in a Loop.

"So, what's on your mind?" asked Twilight, coming up beside her.

"It's not much, really, just an odd encounter." Sunset replied, taking a sip from her tea before continuing. "I Awoke while still dating Flash, as usual, but this Loop I thought I might stick with him. Eventually, though, I was introduced to his uncle. One he doesn't usually have, by the way."

"Which means Variant or Fused," Twilight nodded in understanding.

"I'm pretty sure it was Fused, though the old man wasn't Awake. Anyways, we were having a chat with his family, when 'Uncle Haggard' looked incredibly deep into my eyes - which was creepy enough - then said that he couldn't see himself in my eyes. According to his son, Sea Bridge, he was getting a bit strange in his old age, manifesting in an obsession with unicorns, of all things."

"Wait. Are you talking about...?"

Sunset floated a book out of her Pocket. "The Last Unicorn, by Peter S. Beagle. Yeah."

"Whoof."

"You said it." Sunset put the book away before draining her glass. "Almost makes me wonder if we'll meet with that unicorn some day."

"...you know, I think I've never \_met\_ her, but... I'm pretty sure I've \_been\_ her..."

\* \* \*

><p>152.16: (wildrook)<p>

"Dis-COOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOORD!" Twilight yelled.

Discord appeared behind Twilight. "What did I do this time?" he asked her.

She then thrust the bottle of shampoo towards him...annoyed.

"You didn't apply it on yourself, did you?" he asked her. "Because it CLEARLY states that Unicorns, Pegacorns, and Alicorns aren't supposed to use this."

"No, but that's part of the problem," Twilight replied. "Well, two parts, due to asking what a Pegacorn is, but the main problem is THAT." She then pointed to a yellow Luna declaring she was a banana...like on Celestia's off unAwake Loops when she has a banana obsession.

"What do you want me to do, make the warning more prominent? Or put it INSIDE the bottle? The warning is emphasized."

Twilight gave him a look that spelled doom to those who walked past her. "Put more emphasis, then. I'm going to see if I can reverse the whole thing before Luna turns the moon into liquid portal conductors."

Discord blinked. "I thought you were going to say cheese for a minute there."

\* \* \*

><p>152.17: (Vadrigar 1994) (MLPHalf-Life)

Twilight was a happy unicorn. Last loop she finally received the finished version of a large book she and Hermione had co-written that detailed how the loops worked for newer Loopers, and with everything in the loop looking normal so far, she intended to spend a nice, peaceful baseline loop reading the finished product.

Those plans went out the window when Rainbow Dash decided to fly through her window.

"Uh, Twilight, there's a pony near the Everfree, and he's swearing up a storm. Stuff about "where are my fingers" and such, so I figure we have a new Looper on our hooves."

"Doors, Rainbow. Doors still exist and millions of years haven't changed that. And why don't you talk to him? Work on your diplomacy while I read."

"Nuh uh, after Naoki I've made sure that you're the first to talk to Loopers we've never met. Especially the ones that are swearing about fingers."

"Oh, good point. Alright, I'll go talk to him, and you let everyone who's Awake know we have a visitor."

Rainbow Dash saluted and flew back out the perpetually broken window, and Twilight made her way to the edge of the Everfree. It wasn't hard to find the Looper, she just followed the yelling until she saw a bright orange pegasus, with glasses and a crowbar cutie mark. He saw Twilight approaching and glared at her, seemingly ready to yell again. She cut him off before he was able to do so.

"Hello, I'm Twilight Sparkle, Anchor of the Equestria Sanctuary Loop. And your name is?"

The Pegasus stopped glaring, and seemed to think for a second. Twilight guessed his Loop memories were coming in, so she waited patiently.

"My name is, uh, Doctor Freemane, I guess. Why do I have a different name here? My name should be Gordon Freeman."

"Well Gordon, anyone who Loops into Equestria is turned into a pony and given a unique name. Some Loops do that by default."

"Wait, I'm a PONY!? Is THAT why I don't have fingers?"

"Well technically you're a pegasus, but yes, a pony. I'm guessing body transformation is new to you?"

"The Loops themselves are still kinda new to me. I've had some fused ones and had the Loops explained, but I'm still trying to ease my way into this nonsense. Most of the time I'm a human in a research facility fighting for my life for days on end, next thing I know I might be a kid in a forest with a talking fairy, I might be in a test course for portals looked after by an A.I., or I might be a freaking pony!"

Twilight was beginning to understand why Gordon swore so much. Having a stressful Baseline took its toll, and waking up in completely unfamiliar locations in the middle of doing that over and over again can wear anyone down. Thankfully, she was already thinking of dozens of ways to help decompress Gordon, and with the help of her friends she was sure they could help him out.

"Well, don't you worry Doctor Freeman, this is a sanctuary Loop, which means this is a Loop of total relaxation for you. As long as you don't hurt anyone, feel free to do whatever you like."

"Learning to walk properly would be a nice start."

\* \* \*

><p>"Hooves are awful."<p>

"You've mentioned this. Three times."

"I'll stop mentioning it when they cease to be awful. How am I even



supposed to pick things up? I've seen several objects in your world that are designed for fingers."

"Use your mouth. I would say use your wings to help, but you'll need practice for that."

Twilight was leading Gordon to her home, trying to keep him from being too loud and annoying anyone nearby with his, frankly, blunt comments about the town. She only hoped that he wouldn't freak out Spike, who wasn't Awake.

"Okay, here, we're at my house. But I should let you know--"

"This is a tree."

"Gordon, I have someone else living with me, please don't startle him when you--"

"How do you live in a tree? Shouldn't all the hollowing out and stuff inside of it make it collapse?"

"The short answer is magic. Now, I have a little brother, he's not Looping, please don't startle him."

"Why would I startle him? It's not like he hasn't seen ponies before. Unless you keep him in the basement and stop him from coming into contact with anyone ever. Do ponies keep slaves?"

While Twilight had heard and seen her share of disturbing things in her travels, Gordon's mind immediately going to child slavery still startled her. She reminded herself to have him go to a therapy session with Fluttershy, who, thankfully, was Awake. She was going to tell Gordon off for saying such things, until Spike walked into the room.

"Hey Twilight. Who's your friend?"

"Spike, this is Doctor Freemane. Doctor, this is Spike."

Spike walked over to shake Gordon's hoof, but Gordon took a step back, glancing at Twilight with apprehension.

"Um, hi? Do you bite? The last time I saw something that looked like you it tried to kill me."

Spike, thankfully tuning out the last part of Gordon's statement, looked excited at what he had said. He leaped forward at Gordon, who flinched and looked ready to punch him.

"You've met other dragons?! When? Where? What were they like? How big were they?"

"Spike, can you go over to Rarity's for a bit? I need to talk to Doctor alone, please."

"But Twilight, he said he met other--"

"Spike, he hasn't met any dragons, he's just confused. Go help Rarity for a bit, and I'll meet you later so we can head over to the Summer Sun Celebration."

Spike looked a bit disappointed, but went to help Rarity nonetheless. Only then did Gordon speak up.

"Okay, what was that? Did it say it was a dragon?"

"A baby dragon, yes" Twilight responded. "Please don't do anything to upset him, he's still a child. Now then, is there anything you wanted to do before tonight?"

"But, dragon, what?"

"Gordon, I'm sorry, I know you're full of questions, but the Summer Sun Celebration is in less than twelve hours. During the celebration, an exiled princess who's taken the name of Nightmare Moon will try to trap the world in eternal darkness and enslave it. She's a pushover by now, and we usually let visiting Loopers choose how to take care of her. Any ideas?"

"Getting rid of an threat? Oh yeah, just let me get out my rocket launcher and we'll-"

"Wait, rocket launcher?!"

"You said "threat" right? Why, is she larger than you? No problem, I have some experimental laser weapons that should blow her to bits."

"NO! Gordon, she's the sister of our princess and she's just possessed by evil! This has to be a non-lethal solution. We usually just prank her somehow and then get rid of the evil inside her. Can't you think of anything like that?"

Gordon looked lost in thought, and it was dawning on Twilight how used he was to just killing whatever threatened him. Hopefully, getting him used to pranking his enemies would get him out of this mindset.

"How long is it until the celebration again?" He asked.

"You have a little over seven hours. Look, if you can't think of something safe, we can just fall back on what my friends and I usually do."

"No, I'm getting an idea. Show me where she shows up, I may be onto something. Also, how much do ponies weigh, on average?"

\* \* \*

><p>"The night shall last  
FOREV-"<p>

"CANNONBAAAAAAAAAAAAALLLLLLLLLL!"

\* \* \*

><p>"YOU BROKE HER SPINE IN THREE PLACES!"<p>

"YOU SAID NON-LETHAL! AND YOU HEALED HER, DIDN'T YOU?"

"YOU COULDN'T HAVE POSSIBLY KNOWN I HAD HEALING MAGIC!"

"HEY, I SAVED THE WORLD, DIDN'T I?"

"BY BREAKING PRINCESS LUNA'S BACK! SHE WAS PARALYZED AND CRYING!"

"WHO'S PRINCESS LUNA?!"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

152.1: Batpony? (DC Comics)

>152.2: Trying to put theory into practice.<br>152.3: Dragondance.

>152.4: All the groans.<br>152.5: Games ponies play.

>152.6: Marksism. (Planned economy, see? More than just a pun.)<br>152.7: Game night.

>152.8: Capital of the Galactic Republic. (They've still got Celestia though.)<br>152.9: Gargle blasters.

>152.10: Sometimes there's just not the right option on there.<br>152.11: Written on page 626 of the thread. (Lilo & Stitch)

>152.12: Name troubles.<br>152.13: Another mother.

>152.14: Team Rocket, of course, normally do this. (Pokemon)<br>152.15: "Meet" is a strange term.

>152.16: Oh dear.<br>152.17: Life, half-life.

## 160. Chapter 160

153.1 (Masterweaver)

**\*\*Glitched Up Harmony\*\***

Vinyl rolled her eyes, maneuvering around the detritus in her foyer. "Alright, alright, I'm coming! Hold your horses... snrk." She opened the front door... and burst out into a wide smile. "Cheerilee! 'Sup girl, didn't 'spect you to come round!" Her eyes darted left and right. "I don't have to take remedial classes do I?"

"Relax, Vinyl, I'm not going to force responsibility onto you this loop." Cheerilee shook her head with a smirk. "I had enough of a hard time teaching you when you, Octavia, and Lyra were all crusaders."

"Huh. Wasn't awake for that one." Vinyl grinned broadly. "You'll have to show me the pics sometime."

"I'll dig them out later. Actually, I was hoping you wouldn't mind teaching me about the maintenance of amplification speakers." The schoolteacher shrugged. "Part of the whole 'learn everything' plan..."

"Yeah alright. Not right now though, kay?" Vinyl gestured to the mess behind her. "Octy's coming down from Canterlot for the Summer Sun celebration so I need to clean up before she gets here. Mostly I'm just dumping junk into my pocket so I can organize it later..."

Cheerilee chuckled. "Only you would use your pocket as a dustbin... Speaking of which, have you told Octavia about the loops this loop?"

"I teleported a letter and her journal to her. Put a little 'notice me' charm on the letter, just so she'll read it..." The unicorn rubbed the back of her head. "Actually, I've had a weird feeling ever since I wrote that letter. Something seems a little off. Maybe I should talk to Twilight..."

The earth pony shook her head. "Derpy used her scrying bubbles to track the pings this loop. We've got a guest anchor, her pony name is Moon Bunny and she's replacing Trixie." She shrugged. "She wanted to take her time coming to ponyville, be a real traveling showmare."

"Huh." Vinyl tilted her head. "Derpy has scrying bubbles now?"

Cheerilee waved a hoof. "They're basically crystal balls she makes out of... spit."

"Neat. So who is awake?"

"Me, you, Derpy, the mayor, Lyra, and Sunset."

"Yeah... maybe I'll ask Sunset when she gets into town..." Vinyl bit her lip. "I dunno what it is, but something is really bugging me this loop... So, anyway, what's our plan for Nightmare Moon?"

"Well, Lyra called dibs. Apparently she wants to pretend to be a seapony from the moon and..."

\* \* \*

><p>"NNNNNNnnnnnnnnnnrnrngngngngnn."<p>

Derpy Hooves peered around the doorframe. "Problems, Scroll?"

"Look at this. Just look at the laws my unawake self passed." Ivory passed the document to the grey pegasus. "See how she plotted the municipal district?! This is going to bite me in the flank." Her head hit the desk. "I'm honestly tempted to let Nightmare Moon rampage through it so I can fix it up later..."

"Huh, I... have no idea what I'm looking at." Derpy shrugged, putting the paper back on the desk. "Look on the bright side, after tonight you'll be able to spend some time with that sea serpent again."

Ivory rose her head and frowned. "Steven isn't actually the kind of fellow I like. Don't get me wrong, he's a good man, but... well, unless he's half drunk he's just a touch too gentlemanly for my taste." She rolled her eyes. "And he's high maintenance. Do you know, one loop he single-handedly caused a market collapse in toiletries?"

"Oh, high maintenance boyfriends are terrible," Derpy agreed. "There was this time where Dinky's father was actually prince Blueblood. I

mean, the money was good and he was actually pretty skilled, but apart from that!"

"You have my sympathies. Honestly, I think some of my best loop flings have been outside Equestria."

Derpy chuckled. "I get you. Did I ever tell you about the time I replaced Arwen?" She sighed happily. "I mean, Aragorn wasn't Awake, but it was still... mmmm."

"I can imagine. I have fond memories of Tom myself."

"Tom the boulder?"

"No, Tom Riddle."

The pegasus blanched. "You dated \_Voldemort?!\_"

"What? No!" Ivory Scroll waved her hooves. "No, nonono. This was before he became a dark lord. I mean, we broke up later, amicably enough I suppose..." She sighed. "I was a little upset when he did turn to the dark, though. Thought I had changed the timeline enough... I may have published all his embarrassing teenage secrets rather publicly in the Prophet, though."

"Oh... he couldn't have been happy about that."

"The death eaters tried to track me down, yes." She smiled maliciously. "They were expecting a helpless muggle-born pencil pusher. The look on Bellatrix's face..."

Derpy grinned an evil grin. "Oh, that had to have been good. Shame I missed it." She glanced at the clock. "Darn it. I should probably head out to pick up Dinky. I mean, I could just teleport but then ponies would ask questions..."

"No, I understand." Ivory sighed, turning back to her desk. "At least I should have most of this cleared up by the celebration..."

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra winced as two ponies with highly frazzled manes suddenly appeared beside her. "Whoa, whoa, what the oak?!"<p>

"Sorry, couldn't get to the train." Sunset Shimmer shook her head, glaring up at the city hanging off the mountain. "The royal guard decided that I needed to be captured at all costs."

"Why?"

"Well, \_obviously\_ the 'ex-student' of princess Celestia has to be a fugitive, because why else would Celestia dismiss her unless she was completely evil?!" The unicorn took a moment to magically style her mane with a grumble. "Apparently they've been pinning every other unsolved crime on me. So now I'm a serial killer, drug dealer, foal molester, jaywalker-Seriously, what the actual fuuuudgebuckets?!"

"I'll admit I was a little worried when you burst into my home," the other mare finally managed. "You have built up quite the boogie-mare

reputation, and if it hadn't been for that journal Vinyl teleported to my table... Speaking of which, I'm actually amazed you managed to teleport us both down to Ponyville after all of that." She sighed. "I hope I'm not pinned as an accomplice or anything like that... No offense meant, miss Shimmer, but a regrettable portion of my career has to do with image and, well, you can see my problem."

"No, it's fine Octavia." Sunset rolled her eyes. "Just so you know, the real reason I was dismissed was basically 'I threw a hissy fit and jumped into another world.' Which isn't that different from baseline."

"I know how bad a bad rep can be," Lyra said with a sympathetic nod. "Especially pre-loop reps, you know? Being known as 'that crazy mare' really makes life difficult."

Sunset blinked, looking at the other unicorn with concern. "Lyra..." she said slowly. "...you are crazy."

"Well, yeah, but I don't want to be treated like it!" The mint green unicorn huffed. "It's not like I'm a psychopath or anything, I just have more than one me. I can function normally in society."

Octavia rose a hoof awkwardly. "Ah, more than one...?"

"She's got five selves because of a glitch." Sunset turned to Lyra. "It is five, right? You haven't gained another Lyra in there?"

"Well, five and a half," Lyra admitted. "Siren Lyra is part of Seapony Lyra, but not. It's complicated." She rolled her eyes.

"See, that doesn't help with non-loopers. When you say things like that, ponies are going to think you're crazy."

Octavia snorted. "Like how you burst into my home, shattered a window, told me that you jumped out the window, and then ran upstairs?"

"Yes that." Sunset nodded firmly. "Exactly like that. Did you tell the guards I jumped out your window, by the way?"

"I... yes." Octavia sighed. "I mean, I had no idea what was going on- are you going to fix my window, by any chance?"

"Yeah, sure, later." Sunset waved a casual hoof. "Point is, if you don't want to be treated crazy, don't act crazy."

"But it's my pre-awake self that was acting crazy!" Lyra whined.

"...Point."

"What do you two even-whatever." Octavia flicked her tail and stormed off. "I'm going to find Vinyl. She's the kind of crazy I can understand, at least..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Octiiiiiii!" Vinyl cried, wrapping a warm hoof around the

frazzled gray mare. "You made it! Just in time, too, I think the celebration is starting in a few minutes."<p>

Octavia shook her head, a small smile on her face. "Well, I'll admit I had a bit of trouble getting here, but here I am." She glanced around nervously. "So... is it true?"

"The loops? Yeah." She held up her hoof quickly. "Just so you know, though, we've got a guest anchor so Twilight's not Awake. Which basically means I don't know her this time."

The earth pony rolled her eyes. "Right, right. Another promise you can't keep."

"Hey now! Give it a couple months!" Vinyl leaned in conspiratorially. "I can get you to see her very soon, if you can stand horrible dresses. And I mean hideous, stupid enough that even \_I\_ can't see them as anything but zwonky."

"...would I have to be wearing them?"

"No, thank Yggdrasil! I'd never purposefully subject you to that torment!"

"Thank Celestia for small favors..." Octavia said, letting out a relieved sigh. Her eyes started to wander around the crowd of ponies walking toward the town hall. "There is, uh, something I don't understand."

"Yeah?"

"When I read your letter, you mentioned something strange. I didn't get a chance to do more than flip through the journal you sent..."

Vinyl Scratch chuckled. "Come on, Octy, out with it."

"...Vinyl, what is the Mare in the Moon?"

Vinyl blinked. "What are you talking about? It's the pattern of..."

She froze, her hoof pointing at the familiar white disc in the sky. She had expected to see the silhouette of a unicorn's head formed out of black splotches on its surface, but instead... Instead they made the image of a pair of almost serpentine horns on a square face. Vinyl's eyes widened as she dove into her loop memories, trying to recall Nightmare Night-but instead came forth with a holiday where all the little ponies dressed up as dragons, and left candy at the hooves of a centaur statue.

"Oh \_fascicle.\_"

"What?"

The unicorn twisted on the spot, gripping the gray pony's shoulders. "Octavia, find a basement and lock yourself in. If anypony knocks, ask them who Nyx is dating, and if they don't say Leman Russ \_don't open the door.\_"

"I'm sorry, what did you just-?"

"CHEERILEE!" Vinyl bounded away, rushing up to her fellow looper.  
"Cheerilee, the moon!"

Cheerilee gave her fellow looper a glance, looking up. "Vinyl, I don't see what \_oh sweet Ficus!\_"

"I know! Can you get the foals somewhere safe?!"

"The stars are already moving, Vinyl! I'll try, but-"

"Excuse me," Octavia interrupted, "but what exactly are you two talking-"

"Octy, please, round up whoever you can and get them to safety!" Vinyl was already galloping toward town hall. "I've got to warn the mayor!"

"I... Cheerilee, right?" Octavia turned to the other mare. "Why are you worried?!"

"Twilight's not awake," Cheerilee muttered. "Most of the older Loopers aren't either... This could go badly. Very badly. I hope Vinyl gets to Ivory in time..."

"Why? What's so important?! WHAT'S GOING ON?!"

The schoolteacher looked at her grimly. "The Summer Sun Celebration is about to have an unexpected guest."

\* \* \*

><p>Ivory Scroll ran a comb through her mane, checking her appearance in the mirror as she adjusted her glasses. She wasn't vain, exactly, but a town executive had to present a certain image to the public, and that meant being well groomed and presentable. With a final ruffling of her cravat, she trotted out to the stage accompanied by the now all too familiar fanfare.<p>

Hmm. Maybe next loop she could change the tune to some light metal...

"Fillies and gentlecolts," Ivory projected with a small smile, "As mayor of Ponyville, it is my great pleasure to announce the beginning of the Summer Sun Celebration!"

She felt her heart warm up as the ponies in the crowd cheered. Her eyes roved around-there was Twilight, nervously standing in the center of the crowd, and-ah! Derpy was hovering over Lyra and Sunset, chatting amicably about some loop nonsense, she was sure.

Clearing her throat, Ivory turned her attention back to the crowd in general. "In just a few moments, our town will witness the magic of the sunrise, and celebrate this, the longest day of the year! And now, it is my great honor to introduce to you the ruler of our land, the very pony who gives us the sun and the moon each and every day, the good, the wise, the bringer of harmony to all of Equestria..." She paused dramatically, giving the two mares on the upper level a few seconds to get ready. "...Princess Celestia!"



The birds gave their chorus as Rarity tugged back the curtains, revealing an empty balcony. Ivory Scroll rolled her shoulders as the crowd began to chatter among themselves, trying to figure out where Pinkie had ended up-even in baseline loops, even unawake, that pony could end up doing almost anything. And there she was, wrapped midway up a pillar and cleaning her binoculars.

"Remain calm, everypony." Ivory kept Pinkie in her peripheral vision as she spoke. "There must be a reasonable-!"

Vinyl burst through the town hall's doors, closely followed by Cheerilee. "IVORY! MOONSWAP! MIDNIGHT CASTLE!"

The unicorn paused for a moment, realizing all eyes were on her.

Then she shrugged. "Okay, you know what? Screw secrecy. Time is broken, I've been here before, and everypony needs to clear out \_now.\_"

As if to confirm her words, a pillar of fire suddenly burst into being on the upper balcony. Thick black hooves stepped out, bulging red arms snapping forward as powerful red hands ripped the railing out. "BEHOLD, PATHETIC PONY SCUM! I HAVE RETURNED!"

Welp, Ivory thought to herself, that scuttled her plans for the loop. "Everypony head for the nearest basements or other shelters! Guards, ensure the civilians are escorted to safety!" Reams of spell paper burst from nowhere, surrounding her and lifting her into the air. "Tirek, I am suing you for destruction of public property!"

The centaur slammed down to the first floor, cracks forming under his hooves. "You think you can match me, little pony?! I AM THE EPOCH OF ALL THINGS MAGICAL! I! AM YOUR \*\*CHOSEN \*\*\_\*\*TYRAAAAAAANT\*\*\_!"

Ivory Scroll dodged a blast of fire and sent her stacks of paperwork on him. "YOU! ARE! VIOLATING! ZONING! LEGISLATION!" \_Drat. That sounded more epic in my head.\_

"Auntie Leelee, what's going on?!" Ruby Pinch shouted as she gripped Cheerilee's leg. "The mayor is doing weird things with paper and that scary red ponything is spitting out fire beans and I can't find my momma anywhere-"

"Beams, sweetie," Cheerilee absently corrected, letting her eyes dart around the panicked crowd as a stray bolt of magic hit the wall behind her. "It's fire beams-" Her eyes lighted on an overturned table in the center of the room, or more specifically the foal huddled behind it in a desperate attempt to avoid being hit by one of the many stray bolts of magic. "Shrub."

"What?"

"Um, never mind." The teacher hunkered down behind the buffet, pointing across the way. "You see Dinky over there?" Her niece looked over and nodded, wide eyed. "Well, we're going to have to go over there."

"What?!"

"I know you're scared, but she is too, and I'm going to find a way to get you both out of here." Cheerilee leaned down. "You've known me all your life, Ruby. You know I wouldn't ever put a foal at risk. I promise, I will keep you safe."

"I... I..." Ruby whimpered for a moment. Then she shut her eyes tight. "I trust you, auntie Leelee..."

"Eyes open, Ruby, it's easier to dodge that way." The teacher lifted her neice's chin. "Look, after this is all done, we'll all head over to sugarcube corner and I'll get you a big plate of cookies, okay?"

"O...okay."

"A wise pony once said that bravery is not the absence of fear, but the willingness to act despite it."

Ruby opened her eyes, peering around the table at the red-skinned centaur fighting a pony in a paper mecha. She watched him set the walker on fire and swallowed hard. "...I think we're about to be very brave, then."

"Heh." Cheerilee smiled to herself. "Yes we are... On the count of three, we run to Dinky. One... Two... three!"

Mare and filly darted across the intervening space. True, it was only a few feet, but with the panicking ponies and Tirek's bolts of power shrieking through the air, it was almost a war zone. The only thing missing was the actual army, Cheerilee mused as she dodged under a magical blast. She nudged Ruby out of the way of a panicking mare-

"GYIAGH!"

Cheerilee fell to her side with a pained gasp. Ruby snapped her gaze around. "AUNTIE LEELEE!"

"I'll... I'll be fine!" Cheerilee tried to push herself up, but collapsed with a wince. "It was just a little fire beam to the ribs. Nothing to be upset about!"

"But auntie Leelee-!"

"Get to Dinky for me, alright?" Cheerilee forced herself to smile and waved the filly out. "Go on! Behind the table, you'll be safe there..."

"Dinky!" Derpy cried, gliding over the crowd rushing through the wall she had just bucked down. "Oh dear Druantean Dryads- Dinky! Are you alright?!" She wrapped the foal up in her wings.

"I'm scared mommy..." The unicorn hiccuped. "What's going on?! Who is that big mean horse-ape thing?! Why is the mayor fighting him?! Where's the princess?!"

"Oh, it's... it's all so complicated, I can explain later-"

"Miss Derpy!" Ruby cried, hopping for attention. "Auntie Leelee's

hurt!" She skittered up to them and pointed at where the teacher was groaning. "We gotta help her!"

Derpy let her eyes rove around the town hall quickly, realizing there were still a large amount of panicking ponies rushing for the exits, before her gaze fell on a mint unicorn. "LYRA! I need you to get these two out of here!"

"Gotcha!" Lyra whisked up a couple of hands with her magic and grabbed the two fillies. "Come on, we've got things in hoof!"

"But auntie Leelee-!"

"I'll take care of her, Ruby, don't you worry." Derpy gave the filly a reassuring smile before turning back to her daughter. "Now you be nice for miss Lyra, okay? The mare's completely crazy, but she's got a good heart."

"Hey, I'm only, like, seventy five percent crazy! At most!" Lyra plunked the two foals on her back, rearing up. "Hold on tight girls. CHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARGE!" She rushed through the broken wall with the gurgling battle cry of the seaponies rippling out of her throat.

Derpy let out a breath as she saw her daughter leave the battlefield, but couldn't help rolling her eyes with a small smile. "Never change, Lyra..." Glancing carefully at the ongoing battle-and noting that Sunset was now hopping from paper platform to paper platform swinging her keyblade at the increasingly frustrated centaur-she snuck over to Cheerilee. "So, you're not looking that well."

"Oh, don't you worry about me," Cheerilee reassured with a wince. "A little death and I'll be just fine."

"Sorry, but we have a parent-teacher conference this week, and I'm not willing to put it off a loop. Hold on-" Derpy turned sideways and concentrated for a few seconds.

"Dinky made it out alright?" Cheerilee asked. "I saw her hiding behind a table-Fsssscccc!"

"She and Ruby are with Lyra. That mare's good with kids." The bubbles in Derpy's flank suddenly rolled upward, gaining irises and pupils which began to rotate as they peered at the fallen teacher. "Ah... hmm. Ah, that would do it."

"What... what are you doing?"

"Hindsight with X-Ray vision," the pegasus explained simply. "You've got a couple of broken ribs, you've pulled a shoulder muscle, your magic is running over time to patch the damage, and your barrel's covered with second degree burns."

"...Derpy, you are a mare of many talents," Cheerilee muttered. "This one is incredibly creepy."

"To be fair, I could have just used my normal eyes, but more eyes means more accuracy." Closing the eyes in her rump again, Derpy leaned down. "I can't do much about the muscle, but I can heal the burns and then set the bone."

"Heal the burns? Oh, sweet oak, you're talking about-!"

The pegasus started running her tongue over Cheerilee's barrel.

"OH ICK! Aggh-gaaargh, auugh, not there I'm ti-hi-hi-hickilish there-!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Now stay out here where it's safe, you two." Lyra grabbed Dinky and Ruby off her back, placing them on the ground. "I need to go back in and make sure everypony makes it out safe."<p>

"But miss Lyra-!"

"Ut ut ut! Bonbon can look after you, she's great with kids."

"WHAT?!" cried a cream mare with dual-toned mane. "I am not!"

"Well now's as good a time as any to learn. Just think of them as two little mes!" And with that, Lyra galloped back into the town hall.

Bonbon paled, meeting the eyes of the nervous fillies with a weak chuckle. "So, um... how about we hide at my candy store while this blows over?"

Ruby glanced back at the building. "I... I think we should go to my house, so my mom can find me if she..." Her voice trailed off.

"...yeah, um. I'm pretty sure she's going to be fine." Bonbon awkwardly patted Ruby's head. "Lyra probably knows what she's doing in there."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Do we have any idea what we're doing?<em>

Seapony shrugged. \_Nah, human, we're just winging this.\_

\_Okay, just checking.\_

Unicorn Lyra temporarily took control of the eyes, looking around the room. \_Okay, I see Sunset and Ivory fighting Tirek, Derpy is licking Cheerilee for some reason-\_

\_Healing spit,\_ Miscellaneous chimed in. \_Remember that Middle Earth loop?\_

\_Oh yeah, that's right! Smaug drop kicked that steward guy, I remember now-\_

\_You know, I'm not the one usually doing this, but \_\_\*\*focus people!\*\*\_

\_Good call, Sweet Roll. Oh, and there's Vinyl, trying to convince... oh no, it's the flower trio and a few dozen panicking ponies.\_

Unicorn Lyra sighed, trotting over. "Hey, Vinyl, what's the sitch?"

"WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE!" Roseluck cried at the top of her lungs. "HORRIBLE SCREAMING DEATHS OF FIERY PAIN AND AGONY!"

"There's a big double door across the room!" Vinyl protested. "And Derpy knocked a hole in the wall \_right there!\_"

"THE TOWN HALL IS COLLAPSING!" Daisy yelled.

"IT'S GOING TO FALL ON OUR BURNING BODIES!" Lilly added.

"HORRIBLE AGONIZING BURNING SPLINTERY DEATHS IN A COLLAPSED TOWN HALL!" Roseluck screamed.

"Dammit, why are ponies so skittish?!" Vinyl turned to Lyra. "I can't seem to corral this lot at all-"

Sunset suddenly slammed into the ground next to them, releasing a little groan. "Okay, so my mega attack just pisses him off... I'm taking five." She waved her keyblade in the air with a weak cheer. "Go mayor, kick his flank...!"

"OH SWEET CELESTIA HE KILLED... uh... WHOEVER THAT IS!"

Lyra pushed Vinyl to the side. "Right, let me handle this. PONIES! LEND ME YOUR EARS!"

"WE'RE DOOOOOMED!"

Lyra rolled her eyes. "Yeah, no. See, this is all just a floor show."

"I'M TOO YOUNG TO wait what." Roseluck gave Lyra an incredulous look. Vinyl was giving her an equally unbelieving expression, but it was thankfully hidden behind her tinted glasses.

\_Human, what was that about?\_

\_Had to get their attention. Um, I don't know where to go with this-\_

\_Let me.\_ "See, Celestia wanted to do something to honor the mayor, cause she's worked her flank off with organizing all this, but she didn't feel something like just giving her a ribbon would be enough."

\_Good story, Unicorn.\_

"But the wall-" Roseluck protested.

"This old building was on its last legs anyway," Lyra explained casually. "The mayor figured a little 'destruction' would just help get the paperwork through quicker, bribed the performers."

"But there's only one centaur up there-"

"What, you think he's responsible for the lightshow?"

"And the mayor \_just turned into an alicorn-!\_"

"All politicians can do that," Lyra interjected quickly.

\_Sweet Roll!\_

"They usually don't because the bills pile up," she continued. "You know, a few thousand years of groceries, plus the whole fine on using cosmic forces-It all adds up."

"But Celestia-!"

"Tenure."

"What?"

"She has tenure."

"How does that make any sense?!"

"Look, what makes more sense: A magical centaur nopony but a DJ's ever heard of kidnaps the princess and starts tearing down the town hall while the mayor makes paper missiles and ascends into an alicorn, or this is all just one big staged performance by a really bored Celestia?"

Roseluck opened her mouth to speak-

"Huh." Lilly glanced at Tirek. "You know, for a performer, that centaur seems to not care for keeping his audience safe."

"He's drunk," Lyra replied. "We're holding an intervention. It'll be a bit personal, though, so it would be best if the bare minimum of ponies were here." She waved at the hole in the wall. "Would you all kindly file out? Single file, please, no pushing or shoving."

Daisy shrugged. "Yeah, alright. Come on, ponies, show's over." Over the baffled half protests of Roseluck, the crowd of ponies calmly walked through the hole in the wall; a number of them complained over frighteningly hyperrealistic magic effects.

"You can't honestly believe the nonsense this mare is spouting out! That, that, that's a big red centaur and our mayor is an alicorn and there's paper everywhere and-"

"Roseluck?" Lyra put a hoof on her shoulder. "Go home."

"BUT-YOU-THIS IS-!"

"Home. \_Now.\_"

Roseluck stared at her for a moment. Then she huffed, spun around, and stormed out the door. "Why am \_I\_ the only sane pony in this town...?"

As the last non-looper exited the building, Sunset Shimmer pulled herself up and gave Lyra a dazed look. "I was kinda out of it for that, but... did you just do what I think you did?"

"If what you think she did was lie through her teeth and convince a panicked Ponyville populace that this was actually a floor show, then yeah, she just did that." Vinyl shrugged. "You know, I didn't think that would work."

Lyra shrugged. "Luna Lovegood once gave me a good piece of advice: 'if you can't lead them with logic, baffle them with bullshit.' That's all I was doing."

"Baffle them with..." Sunset's eyes snapped wide. "Jiminey Cricket! Lyra, you're a genius!"

"Part of me is," Lyra allowed with a confused look.

Vinyl quirked an eyebrow. "...'Jiminey Cricket'?"

"...My first loop was Kingdom Hearts."

"...Still. Jiminey Cricket?"

"...oh shut up."

Vinyl put up her hooves. Lyra snickered.

Sunset rolled her eyes and jumped forward. "TIREK!" she shouted, pointing her keyblade dramatically. "Your reign of terror is at an end!"

The centaur laughed, backhanding Ivory as she tried to strike him from behind. "Brave words from a \_foolish \_pony. You CANNOT \*\*HOPE \*\*to stand against my \_\*\*POWER\*\*\_!"

"That's where you're wrong!" the unicorn replied, sweeping her keyblade around in a grand gesture. "For we have the very \_power\_ that defeated you so long ago! The Elements of Harmony stand ready!"

"Hah! A great fool you are! There are no elements here!"

"Oh really?"

With a dramatic twirl, Sunset pointed her blade. "Vinyl Scratch, who blurred the whole truth to all of Ponyville, represents the spirit of... Honesty!"

"Wait, is this what we're doing?" Vinyl asked. "I'm not saying no, but... hey, where's my shiny gem thing?"

"Ivory Scroll!" Sunset continued without pause, swinging her keyblade around. "Who dropped everything to protect the citizens of her fair town, represents the spirit of... Loyalty!"

"Huh. I suppose taking Tirek one on one is rather like miss Dash-"

There was a sudden splintering sound as a stone globe crashed through the wall and clonked Vinyl on the head. "OW! Hey!"

"Cheerilee! Who dove in front of a beam of fire to save the foals around her, represents the spirit of... Generosity!"

"I'm alright now," Cheerilee added as the mayor casually caught the second stone globe coming through the wall. "Just in case anypony was wondering."

"Derpy Hooves! Who showed concern for the terrified foals and assured their safety before tending to a wounded pony, represents the spirit of... Kindness!"

"Wait, both of those were kind acts!" Derpy protested as she dodged the orb rushing toward Cheerilee. "It's not like I could have done both at-dang it, I could have cloned myself couldn't I?"

"Lyra Heartstrings! Who calmed down a crowd of panicked ponies by weaving an incredibly ludicrous and unbelievable story, represents the spirit of... Laughter!"

"BOOYAH! Oh hush up Sweet Roll, don't take all the credit." Lyra rolled her eyes as Derpy caught the fourth orb flying through the wall, but there was still a big smirk on her face.

"Your speech matters little in the long scheme of things!" boomed Tirek imperiously. "You only have access to four of the-"

Another splintering sound resounded through the hall, and Lyra jumped in the air to snatch her own orb.

"...five of the six Elements!" The centaur scoffed, gathering power between his hands. "And NOW you ALL shall \*\*PERISH!\*\*"

"You forget, Tirek, there is a legend!" Sunset raised her keyblade skyward. "'When the five elements are gathered, a spark shall make the sixth appear!' That spark is the spark between us all, the spark of camaraderie, of mutual respect and care, of glorious accord! It is the spark of friendship, and today, this friendship shall summon the final and most elusive element of harmony: MAGIC!"

A great light poured out of each of the five stone orbs, wrapping around the ponies holding them and causing them to glow with blinding power. Tirek shielded his gaze as a beam suddenly shot from each of them, converging on the tip of the keyblade that Sunset held aloft and spiraling down to the pony herself. She shut her own eyes as the essence of harmony flowed through her; when she opened them again, they were shining white. Sparks danced between her ears and around the necks of the other five, taking shape for the briefest of instants-

Six streams of colors flew up, twining round and round in the air until they formed a glorious rainbow. Tirek cried with rage as it wrapped around him, but soon enough the sound was overcome with the explosive hum of Harmony.

"Whoa. What a trip!" Vinyl swung her mane around, glancing at the orange eighth notes hanging from her neck. "I can see why Twigang likes these baubles. Wait, aren't we all supposed to be unconscious?"

Lyra shrugged helplessly. "Don't ask me, I don't pay attention to how these things work." She looked at her own torc and rose an eyebrow. "Huh. I was wondering how my Mark would look as a gem. I mean with



the strings and all, it's not very solid-"

"Solidness isn't a mandatory aspect of the Harmony Gems." Derpy gestured to the pink bubbles wrapped around her neck. "But yeah, that is some impressive gemcrafting. Kindness, huh? I guess I can see it..."

"Did you really have to lick my flanks?" Cheerilee grumbled, absentmindedly rubbing the purple bloom resting on her chest. "I'm pretty sure you have some other form of healing spell."

Ivory Scroll sighed, letting her wings and horn disappear with a flash. "I have a red scroll around my neck, how long until I become known for Faustian bargains? Still, I suppose this was a good idea."

"Indeed it was." With a melodramatic flash, Celestia appeared in the middle of the town hall. "It is good to see that you..."

She paused, staring at the gathered ponies.

"...Ah... pardon my rudeness, but where is Twilight Sparkle-?"

"I'm a Magic bearer."

Celestia's eyes widened as they fell on the yellow unicorn sitting stunned in the middle of the town hall. "Sunset? Is... is that you?"

"I... I'm a Magic bearer." The unicorn rose a hoof to the tiara on her head, nervously removing it. "I... I have the Element of Magic..."

"Oh... Oh my, Sunset, I..." Celestia stepped forward. "I haven't seen you in so long. I-"

"Magic," Sunset continued, ignoring her. "I... this... if, I shouldn't have, it, not worthy, she should-"

Derpy rolled her eyes, walked up to the hyperventilating unicorn, and slapped her.

Sunset blinked in shock for a few seconds, before taking a deep breath. "...I needed that. Thanks." She turned to Celestia and cleared her throat. "Oh, uh... hi."

"...Hello." Celestia twitched a wing awkwardly. "Sunset, I... I just want to say I'm-"

"Sorry, right now I'm going through a lot of emotions. Can we reconnect later?" Sunset gestured to the stage. "I'm sure that Tirek needs you more than me right now..."

Celestia blinked. "Right. I... suppose I should talk to my husband-"

"Right, we've hit too much information." Lyra stood up, brushing her chest off. "Everypony, Looper cool-off party at Vinyl's place."

"What?! Why my place?"

"You've got records, and likely booze." The mint unicorn tapped Sunset on the head. "Besides, we need to work together to get this mare straightened out before she panic attacks Ponyville into oblivion."

"I'm not panic attacking," Sunset said, annoyed. "I'm having an existential crisis."

Ivory Scroll rolled her eyes. "Be that as it may, I need to file a lot of paperwork for this... mess. And I suppose explain things to Celestia..." She glanced behind her. "After she's done making out with Tirek."

"Why don't you unicorns go set things up? Me and Derpy should head out and check on the foals." Cheerilee started trotting for the hole in the wall.

Derpy nodded, flying out after her. "We should probably go find Twilight as well. If she's not Awake, she could be halfway to the Everfree by now..."

\* \* \*

><p>Vinyl flicked on the lights of her front room, leading Sunset in with a gentle hoof. "Lyra, could you go to the basement and tell Octavia that Nyx is dating Leman Russ? It's a codephrase."<p>

"Yeah, alright." Lyra walked in, looked around for a couple of seconds, then awkwardly rose her hoof. "So... where is the basement?"

"Through the kitchen there, it's the trapdoor in the pantry."

The mint unicorn saluted, walking briskly in the indicated direction. Vinyl pushed Sunset onto the couch, sitting down next to her and adjusting her shades. "How're you feeling, filly?"

For a moment, Sunset was silent. The crown between her forehooves tilted, its sun-shaped gem catching the light and refracting patterns on her face.

"...This... this shouldn't have happened." She put the jewelry down. "We should have spotted this was a variant, even without Twilight. And we're loopers, we should have been able to take on even a variant Tirek without using the elements. But I, I had a stupid idea, and I jumped on it."

"And it worked." Vinyl picked the crown up. "Look, I'm not going to lie, I don't fully understand how these thingies are supposed to function, but... they run on friendship, right? They wouldn't have worked if we really hadn't considered each other friends. You didn't manipulate us into doing the things you said we did. What happened happened, and we're all better for it."

"Better?" Sunset let out a weak chuckle. "Stronger, maybe. But better? I just robbed this Twilight of her destiny."

Lyra walked back in, leading a confused gaggle of ponies through the

room. "So it's all over now, just head on out and go check on your homes. Miss Cheerilee should be bringing foals along if any of you are missing them-" Her eyes fell on the two other unicorns. "Um, Octavia, could you make sure everypony heads out? I think I need to..." She waved at Sunset vaguely.

The gray mare glanced over, her eyes widening. "Oh. Is this a... \_thing?\_"

"This is a \_thing,\_ yes."

"Alright. Ahem, just keep moving, everypony!" Octavia beamed nervously, making regular gestures with her hoof. "Nothing to see here, just move along..."

Lyra rolled her eyes, walking over to her fellow unicorns. "So what's up?"

"Sunset's depressed 'cause she thinks she stole Twilight's destiny," Vinyl reported.

"PFFFFFFT-"

Lyra barely managed to hold back a snicker as Sunset glared at her.

"Stole her destiny? Sunset, just because we get magical tramp-stamps doesn't mean our destiny is set in stone! So yeah, Celestia was trying to work Twilight into being, well, the proto-princess from baseline, but that doesn't mean she's going to just drop dead if things take a different turn. Heck, you might have just freed her from a heck of a lot of stress! And if you're really that worried, just take her under your wing. Trust me, Twilight will be fine."

"I guess..." Sunset rolled over, resting her chin on the couch's arm. "I mean, I know we can work overtime to keep her from going into a downward spiral, that's our duty as loopers, but... if it were just that, I could put it all aside."

As the last of the ponies exited, Octavia made a move to shut the door. However, a pegasus of a slightly lighter shade of gray managed to glide in just before it clicked shut. "Okay, I got Twilight and the others out of the Everfree. They're Celestia's problem now." She paused, glancing around. "Um, Octavia? Between you and me, this celebration party seems to be kinda low-key."

"From what I can gather, miss Shimmer is having a crisis of conscience because of her being..." Octavia frowned. "...Excuse me if this is an odd-sounding question, but, ah, are you feeling, well, \_loopy?\_"

"Yes, Octavia, I'm a looper. And so are Cheerilee and the mayor."

"Right. Just checking..."

Derpy trotted over to the trio of unicorns, frowning as she saw the expression on Sunset's face. "Oooooooh, I know that look. That's the look Dinky gets when she's forced to do something she doesn't like. Is this about the element of magic?"

Sunset rolled her eyes. "Oh gee, is it that obvious?"

That got a chuckle out of the pegasus. "You sound just like my little Sparkler sometimes... Sunset, you should know better than anyone that nopony is going to force you to use that thing. And more importantly, you should realize that just because you had a bad history of handling power before, it doesn't mean it'll harm you now. You've learned from your mistakes, become somepony so much better than you were... you're not just a teenager anymore." Derpy giggled again. "No matter how much you sound like it."

"Hey, I Wake Up as a high school rebel most of the time. You're lucky I'm not boycrazy." A brief smirk flickered on the yellow unicorn's face, but the frown quickly returned. "Yeah... high school rebel. Saboteur of relationships. That's me..."

Octavia was standing awkwardly off to the side, watching the group and rubbing one of her legs, when there was a knock on the door. She turned and opened the door quickly, just managing to dodge as a unicorn foal ran past her. "What in the-?"

"Sorry about that." Cheerilee gave her an apologetic smile. "I just thought after all the foals had been returned, it would be good to get Dinky to her mother ASAP. She was so worried-" The mare giggled as the foal brought her mother down with a running tacklehug. "I hope you don't mind that I brought her here."

"Well, no, this is Vinyl's house," Octavia replied. "I just pay the rent," she added under her breath.

"What was that?"

"Ah, I assume you want to help with miss Shimmer's self-confidence issues? That seems to be what all you 'Loopers' are doing."

"Oh, dear, is she still on about that?" Cheerilee frowned, walking over the couch.

"I'll just stand here, I suppose. Serving as a doorpony." The gray mare shut the front door. "Since that's such a good use of my skills."

Sunset glanced over at Dinky and Derpy play-wrestling on the floor. "Huh. Well, those two seem pretty happy."

"Mmmhmm," Cheerilee agreed. "While we were coming over, Dinky asked who was brave enough to help take on Tirek, and I mentioned that you were the new bearer of Magic. Do you know what she said? She said you had to have a heart almost as big as her mother's. Risking your life to save everypony in Equestria... well, I don't know about you, but she thinks that anypony who would do that has the soul of a true hero."

"Really?" The unicorn smiled faintly. "She said that?"

"Mmmhmm. From the mouth of babes, as the saying goes."

Octavia frowned as another knock came from the door, opening it quickly. "Let me guess: another looper?"

Ivory Scroll smiled at her. "The last one, it looks like. Well, aside from our guest anchor, but she shouldn't be around for another few weeks."

"I see. Well, do come in, make yourself at home I suppose--"

"Don't worry, miss Octavia. I will personally ensure that the shenanigans are kept to a minimum." The mayor gave her a reassuring pat on the shoulder as she strode into the home. "Everypony, I've explained the situation to Celestia and she has agreed to handle damage control for the day. I also explained that while Sunset Shimmer is eager to reconnect with her, we... would insist on waiting until tomorrow at the very least."

Sunset lifted her head up. "We?"

"But of course. After all, it was obvious how much your... actions were weighing on you. What kind of friends would we be to make you go to her alone?" Ivory adjusted her glasses. "But for today, let us all simply relax and enjoy each other's presence."

"Good call!" Vinyl cried, standing up and walking over to Octavia. "First order of business, though: My mare is feeling neglected because of all the looper shenanigans so I'm going to take her to the bedroom for a little private time and reassurance."

"V-Vinyl!" The mare blushed brightly. "I'm not-well, I mean I might be a little, but-You didn't have to blurt it out!"

"Element of Honesty, babe, it's just how I roll. Help yourselves to the kitchen!" With that, the DJ dragged the cellist up the stairs.

Dinky frowned. "What did she mean by 'private time'?"

Cheerilee and Derpy both facehooved, the pegasus letting out a little groan as Lyra burst out laughing. The mayor rolled her eyes. "I'll go whip something up for us to eat. You lot explain all this to the filly."

Sunset smiled at the antics around her briefly, before examining the crown she was still holding between her hooves. For a moment, she considered the gem with a deep frown.

Then, she lifted it back on her head.

The fit... was actually... rather nice, come to think of it.

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><p>153.2 (BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

**\*\*Big Mac On Campus\*\***

Big Mac had had more than his share of unusual beginnings to a Loop, ranging anywhere from the time he died saving a boy from a car right after Awakening to the time he caught a pet tiger using a tuna fish sandwich, and quite a bit in between. (For some reason he had a tendency to Replace the local Anchor whenever he Looped somewhere

new, and judging by what little of his surroundings he saw he doubted he was in Equestria.) However he was pretty sure this was the first time he had Woken Up a half second before being run over by a girl on a bicycle. Sitting up he barely took the time to notice that he was a human this go around before he moved to help his accidental assailant.

"Are y'all alright?"

"Owww... I'm sorry. I didn't mean to crash into you like that, but I was feeling dizzy. I have anemia so sometimes I get a little lightheaded." the pink haired girl stated as she looked up at Macintosh, who immediately recognized her, with an embarrassed blush.

"Are ya feeling a bit Loopy Miss...?" he questioned leadingly, not taking any chances.

"Oh, I'm sorry! My name is Fluttershy Akashiya. It's nice to meet you. I feel much better now." she said with a small bow. Straightening, she averted her eyes from his gaze only for them to widen suddenly.

"Ah! Your cheek, you're bleeding!"

Pulling out a small handkerchief she moved to clean the small cut, before seeming to go into a daze.

"Oh, the scent of blood. I...I...can't - I lose control when I smell that scent. I'm sorry. I can't help it, because I'm a Vampire."

Before Big Mac could even attempt to process that, the Unawake human version of his friend had closed the distance between them and using surprising strength pulled him in close and bit at his neck. He stiffened, but didn't push her away. His Loop memories didn't say anything about Vampires being a common thing in this Loop, but he had dealt with partial pictures before. Whether he was going to turn himself was uncertain, he wasn't sure how Vampirism worked here, but either way it was too late to do anything now and Unawake or not he refused to hurt his friends. Besides it didn't actually hurt all that much, he wasn't the type to overreact to something like this.

Once she had finished her macabre snack, Fluttershy pulled back with a sigh. "Oh thank you, your blood was very tasty. I know I don't really look like it, but I'm actually a Vampire. I hope you don't hate me."

Mac nodded his understanding, the previous events and her words beforehand had made that perfectly clear.

"Its fine."

"Thank you so much, you don't know how much that means to me. I was feeling lonely since I don't know anyone here, but now I feel so much better. If you're willing I'd like to be friends."

Well that was simple enough.

"Ah'd like that Miss Fluttershy."

\* \* \*

><p>Halfway around the world Twilight Sparkle Woke Up. Taking a quick peek into her Loop memories, she quickly summed up the main points. She was now, and always had been, human. She was a student at Canterlot High. She was apparently taking Fluttershy's place in their group of friends, the pink haired girl and her family having moved somewhere far away almost a decade beforehand. Applejack and the Apple family were also gone, having left only a few years later. AJ's place in the group had been filled by Sunset, who had apparently Awoken shortly after exiting the Mirror and had thus managed to avoid hurting anyone.<p>

"Huh. This is different."

"It's a good different though, or at least mostly." Realizing she had been in the middle of a conversation with Sunset, Twilight nodded.

"True, and wherever they are Fluttershy and Applejack are able to take care of themselves. So, do you have any new plans to try and redeem Sonata this Loop?"

Sunset grinned.

\* \* \*

><p>Shortly after reaching the campus which had been their destination the pair had been forced to part ways, Mac heading to his homeroom while Fluttershy went to speak with the Headmaster. Currently Mac was taking a look around the classroom where he was seated. To his surprise he actually recognized two people with him. The first was a human version of Blueblood, currently reclining arrogantly in his chair looking for all the world as if everyone around him was beneath his notice. In other words, exactly the same as usual. The second was standing in front of the class giving a speech. Not unexpected considering she was the instructor.<p>

"Hello everyone, and welcome to Youkai Academy. I am your homeroom teacher Cheerilee Nekonome. I'm sure you all are already aware of this, but this is a school for monsters."

Mac perked up at this. Explanations were always good to have whenever certain things didn't match up with in-Loop memories, and the existence of Vampires definitely counted.

"As of now, the world is under control of the humans. In order for us monsters to continue to survive we have no choice but to continue to live alongside them. Therefore at this Academy, you will be studying 'How to coexist with humans.'" the energetic teacher emphasized this by pointing dramatically to a large, if poorly drawn, diagram which took up the majority of the blackboard.

"For that reason, school rule number one is that all students must maintain their human disguises at all times except for in extreme circumstances. School rule number two is no student must ever tell another what their true form is for any reason. Do you all understand?"

"Feh, Such ridiculous rules. Hey Teacher, wouldn't it be simpler to just eat any humans we found. That's what I would do."

Cheerilee frowned and took a look at the seating chart. "You are...Blueblood Kamiya correct? Well there's no chance of that happening, because everyone here both teacher and student are monsters. No exceptions. This school is sealed within a powerful barrier, if any humans did manage to find their way inside... they'd be killed on the spot. Or something."

...Well shoot. That complicated things. According to his memories he was completely human, so how did he even end up in a school like this anyway? Taking a harder look at his memories he soon found the answer. It looked like this was actually a fused Loop, and not a different one entirely like he had thought. His family had moved around a lot over the years and as a result his education had suffered. Therefore after they had settled in Japan he had had difficulty getting into a local high school. His father, and it was always nice to have a chance to see him and his mother again, had found a flyer advertising the Youkai Academy and before he knew it he had been on the bus.

Somehow Discord had managed to be weirder as a bus driver than as the Spirit of Chaos.

Any further thought on the issue was cut off by the sound of the door sliding open. Standing in the entrance was the familiar figure of Fluttershy, her bag held in front of her as she gave an apologetic bow.

"I'm sorry I'm late. I got a bit lost after the Entrance Ceremony."

Cheerilee waved off the pinkette's apology with a smile. "Oh its no problem. Come up and introduce yourself."

Big Mac watched as Fluttershy moved to stand in front of the class, and gave her introduction. He could have done without the whispered muttering which followed however. Yes she was attractive, he would have had to be blind not to see that and more stubborn than Applejack not to admit it, but even so the class was behaving as if they had never seen a pretty girl before. Of course as the only calm person in the room he stood out from the crowd and as a result was easily noticed by Fluttershy from where she was standing. Big Mac was quickly reminded of the fact that however much she looked like her, this was not the person he had known for thousands of Loops as she all but flew across the room and grabbed him in a flying hug. Much to the dismay of his classmates.

\* \* \*

><p>There was always something just plain uncomfortable about Waking Up in a relationship with one of his friends, and it was rarely a simple effort to explain the situation in a way where there were no hard feelings. Walking down the hallways with a Vampire version of Fluttershy pulling him along beside her while clinging onto his arm was quickly bringing up the same awkward sensation and the resulting death glares from the surrounding students didn't help the issue. Nor did the fact that technically he was a completely average human in a school of monsters.<p>



Although he could always take care of any problematic situations that came up using the few abilities he had kept from other Loops, he preferred to leave that as a last resort and rely on in-Loop abilities unless provoked. Which, again, left him at the tender mercies of a hostile student body. A fact of which he was keenly aware, especially as he felt a spike of Killing Intent just as Blueblood stepped into their path.

"You are Fluttershy Akashiya correct?"

Without bothering to wait for an answer, Big Mac abruptly found himself dangling a foot off the ground by his lapel. Immediately he forced himself to push down the surge of green which made to overtake his sight, although he did allow himself to grip his attackers wrist hard enough to draw Blueblood's attention. He responded by throwing him down the hallway into a nearby vending machine.

"Please enlighten me as to why a Lady of such beauty as yourself would associate herself with a person like this."

"Macintosh!"

Fluttershy attempted to rush over to Mac's aid, but was pulled up short by Blueblood's grip upon her shoulder.

"Wouldn't someone like myself be a far more superior option than a weakling like this. Why don't you and I go somewhere and get to know one another a little better."

This suggestion was made with a sleazy grin, which Fluttershy luckily remained unaware of due to her focus on where Mac was getting to his feet. For his part, Mac was trying to decide whether he might actually need to utilize some of his abilities. Blueblood's strike was unfortunately similar to some of the attacks he had had to deal with as the Hulk, and if Narrative Causality had taught him anything it was that the first enemy was always the weakest. Which meant if things continued to escalate, he might find himself running out of other options sooner rather than later.

Unaware of her Looping friends thoughts Fluttershy, as politely as possible of course, brushed aside Blueblood's hand and rushed to Mac's side; grabbing his arm and pulling him behind her as she fled.

"No thank you. I'm sorry, but I'm having fun with Macintosh." she called back over her shoulder as she ran, not bothering to look back as she did so. As a result she completely missed the white knuckled fist Blueblood made as she so easily ignored him, as well as the dark look on his face which promised ill things to come.

\* \* \*

><p>After their impromptu race through the halls the duo found themselves recovering on the roof of the Academy. In the distance the moon shone out over the cemetery and the red ocean waters, while overhead the sun beamed down brightly allowing them to take in the full sight of the school grounds. While the view wasn't exactly the most interesting to Big Mac, Fluttershy appeared to enjoy it;

monsters apparently had odd ideas of what a pleasant environment was supposed to look like.<p>

"That was scary, are you sure you're alright Macintosh?" Fluttershy said, flittering worriedly around him as she checked for injuries.

"Ah'm fine, just a bump on th' head. An' Ah told ya, Ah'd prefer ya ta call me Big Mac."

"Oh, I forgot." she punctuated this by tapping her fist gently against her head with a sheepish smile. "I was just so worried. Blueblood hit you really hard."

"It's fine, nothin' ah ain't dealt with before." Mac denied. "So that's th' power of a monster here huh?"

Fluttershy giggled and patted Big Mac on the back playfully.

"You're silly Big Mac. You act as if this is your first time seeing a monster."

Mac chuckled ruefully from his new position on the ground. '\_Not even close. An Ah definitely need to brush off some a mah Loop skills.'\_

Standing up and dusting off his uniform Mac turned to face Fluttershy who gave him a blinding smile.

"Let's keep having fun. We should check out the rest of the Academy."

Big Mac nodded agreement and the two headed off. Not long after, having explored the rest of the campus they found themselves in front of a large decaying property which looked as if it was ready to be torn down.

"This is the dormitory where we'll be staying. Isn't it wonderful, such a dignified building; so full of character. It's perfect for us monsters."

Taking another look at their apparent home for the next several years, or however long the Loop typically lasted, Mac gave a deadpan stare. Again, monsters' taste in architecture was odd. That aside, after looking closer he could see that despite outward appearances it did seem to be rather sturdy; and from what he could see through the windows the inside looked more normal than the entrance would suggest. Still, disregarding the housing situation for now, something else was bothering him.

"About that, ya'll look perfectly normal ta me. Ya don't really seem like a monster, an I don't feel comfortable calling ya one."

Fluttershy smiled and gestured to a small Rosary hanging around her neck, and uncomfortably close to her cleavage for Mac who quickly averted his gaze.

"Only right now. I know I don't look like a Vampire, but that's all because of this Rosary. If I remove it though, then I take on my true

form, a super scary Vampire. My real self caused me to be all alone, so that's why I wear this protective seal. Normally Vampires are hated and feared, so I've never had any friends before I met you."

Mac frowned.

"That don't seem very fair, yer a real nice gal an ya shouldn't have ta hide who ya are to fit in. Don't ya worry none, Ah promise ya I won't ever hate ya and Ah ain't afraid of ya neither."

Fluttershy's eyes widened, tears gathering in the corners, before Big Mac suddenly found himself on the ground again; pinned by the happy pinkette as she stared gratefully down at him.

"Thank you so much, I know we'll be best friends forever."

Mac just blushed brightly as he took in his situation. A cold shower would have been nice right about then, especially as the gaze of the young woman above him grew unfocused and she began to draw closer.

"You know, until today I've never had fresh blood before. I always had to drink from transfusion packs. You're my first. I'll never forget that, the taste, the sensation..."

"Wait, wha?"

Before Mac knew what was happening, Fluttershy had already bitten him again.

\* \* \*

><p>The next day Mac headed out early so that he could take a look around the campus. Despite the appearance of the Dormitories, the rest of the school looked rather normal. Ignoring the nearby cemetery and nearly dead trees of course. Some of the other students, his classmates he supposed, were also moving about the pathway and Mac was able to overhear some of their conversations. Nothing overly abnormal stood out in most of them, although he made a mental note to avoid the Biology Club in the future.<p>

Walking towards the school as the traffic began to pick up he saw an unfortunately familiar figure leaning on a nearby tree. His attempt to ignore Blueblood was unfortunately unsuccessfully as the Loop's version of the stuck up noble grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Hold on there Casanova. You had a lot of fun yesterday with Fluttershy Akashiya..." he stated arrogantly, before grabbing Mac by the coat and slamming him against a nearby wall. "And you're going to pay for it today."

Mac once again felt a rush of energy surge into his body, accompanied by a primal roaring in his ears, however eons of experience allowed him to control how much of the power he allowed himself to tap into and he simply gripped Blueblood's wrist tightly. Blueblood hissed as the bones in his arms began to bend under the force being applied, and slammed Mac harder into the tree.

"You're not as pathetic as I had thought. Your true form, what is

it?!"

"Ah'm human." Mac replied tersely, not willing to lie. Having the Element of Honesty as his little sister probably had something to do with that. However his efforts to control his inner beast added a bit of edge to his normally laid-back tone as he tightened his grip, and Blueblood bones audibly groaned under the pressure. Blueblood grimaced before throwing him to the side.

"Bullshit! No pathetic human could be that strong. Don't screw around with me!" he roared as his fist bulged hideously and he slammed it into the wall, demolishing it. Mac stared back unaffected by the casual destruction; He had seen and done far worse.

"Tch. Whatever. Don't go near Fluttershy again. If you even talk to her, you're dead."

Watching as Blueblood left, massaging his arm, Mac sighed. Around him the remaining students avoided his gaze and quickly moved on, obviously not believing his words any more than Blueblood had.

Standing to his feet Mac examined his uniform for damage, and seeing that other than being a little dirty it was still fine turned around to resume his interrupted exploration. Only to come face to face with a stunned Fluttershy, her hands held in front of her face as she stared in tearful disbelief.

"You can't be... you were just lying right? You can't be a human, you just can't!"

Unfortunately Mac's silence as he tried to come up with a way to explain without lying seemed to push her over the edge, and without another word she turned and fled.

"Ah, Fewmets."

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy ran through the forest at the edge of the campus unseeing, her eyes blinded by tears as she recalled memories of isolation and bullying from the past.<p>

\_ 'No! No way! The first friend I ever had... I finally thought I had made a friend! But all along he was a human! It's not fair. It's not fair! Why?!'\_

Collapsing against a tree she pulled her knees in close and wrapped her arms around them, as if to protect her from the painful memories as she sobbed.

\_ 'I hate those humans! They were always so cruel, as if it were better that I had never existed.'\_

Her mind replayed the harsh words and actions from the students at her previous schools. They had been so mean, calling her names because they didn't believe in monsters; making her into an outcast just because they thought she was weird.

Abruptly she paused as she remembered Big Mac's words from the

previous day.

Macintosh was her friend. Her first and only friend. He had said that no matter what he didn't hate her. But when when he told her his own secret she had run away from him. She... she was a terrible friend. How could she just leave him like that? She wasn't any better than the humans from before.

So what if Big Mac was a human? He was her friend and that was all that really mattered. If he could accept her for being a Vampire than she would do the same. Wiping her eyes she stood determinedly. She had to go back. She had to make things right. Even if... even if Big Mac didn't forgive her she had to try.

However upon turning back to the school her way was blocked by a familiar blonde figure. "Well now, what a surprise. Why is such a beautiful woman like you all alone?"

Moving closer, casually invading her personal space without a thought, he grinned a twisted smile before grabbing her wrist and yanking her into his arms. "Why should you be alone, when you can be with someone like me?"

Fluttershy struggled against Blueblood's grasp, his breath far to close to her face and his arms holding her even closer against his chest. Her writhing managed to loosen one of her own arms and she pushed against him, trying to get away.

"Let me go! Please."

Blueblood laughed, a sickening mockery of a sound as he leaned in closer. "Truly your beauty is one of a kind. Far superior to any of those humans I've taken. I must have you as my own!"

"NO!"

Fluttershy lashed out, her nails gouging a trail down Blueblood's face and causing him to recoil. She quickly scrambled out of his reach. However instead of becoming angry Blueblood laughed even harder.

"Yes, perfect. That's just how I like my women. I can't help myself, when I get like this I can't hold back. I can't even hold my human form."

And indeed, giving truth to his words, he had begun to grow; his school uniform beginning to strain at the seams as his body swelled. His arms bulged grotesquely as they tore his shirt and jacket into tatters, while his shoes were reduced to scraps as he became too large for them to contain any longer.

Finally the transformation was complete and he stood tall, having shed the illusion of humanity and revealed his inner beast. He was easily ten feet in height and at least half that in width. Both of his arms were easily as large around as Fluttershy and were slightly longer, nearly reaching to the ground and topped with savage claws. His torso was packed with wiry cords of dense muscles and as well as bony protrusions.

Gone was the cultured appearance which he had done his best to maintain in class, replaced by a feral savagery. His teeth had come together into sharp points, clearly that of a carnivorous predator and his eyes had lost any semblance of civility which they had held, replaced by cold cruelty and inhumane hunger made all the worse by the intelligence guiding it. Worst of all however was his tongue, which had extended by more than a foot and moved in a manner which screamed of cruel intent.

In the span of a few moments Blueblood had become a horrific monster, his true self. Towering over Fluttershy's stunned form he grinned a bestial smile, filled with teeth and malice. "I'm going to enjoy removing that spirited attitude."

A small part of Fluttershy's mind identified Blueblood as an Orc, a half-breed monster with mixed heritage. The rest of her mind however was preoccupied with screaming in terror.

\* \* \*

><p>Mac frowned as he moved through the underbrush, trying to follow the trail left by Fluttershy in her rush. Even if she wasn't the Fluttershy he knew, that didn't mean he wasn't still her friend. Friends never left each other when they were troubled and it didn't take Mac's experience as a bartender to tell that this version of Fluttershy was clearly troubled. Mac wasn't the type of pony, or human, to leave that be if it was something he could help.<p>

"Dangit, where'd she run of ta?"

Of course, she could have made it easier. Any further musing however came to a screeching halt as the sound of a piercing scream echoed through the forest. A familiar scream.

"Right. Ferget this."

Reaching into his soul he found the barrier which held his inner beast at bay. Then he tore it open. Moments later the only thing in the area was a trail of shattered trees and upturned earth as a hulking creature tore through it's surroundings towards the source of the cry.

\* \* \*

><p>Blueblood was having a wonderful time. By pure chance he had managed to come across the current target of his attention. Even better, they were completely alone with no one to hear her scream anywhere around. Grabbing the terrified woman by the arms he lifted her into the air, bringing her close to his face; his tongue caressing the side of her face in a warped parody of a lover's touch.<p>

"What's the matter Fluttershy? Why don't you transform? Aren't you going to fight back?" he taunted.

Mustering her nerve Fluttershy gave him a glare. "It's against the rules to reveal your true form."

Blueblood threw his head back and laughed before returning his

attention to his captured prize. "We're not in the school right now, their rules don't matter."

Fluttershy's eyes widened in fear as Blueblood's widely grinning face moved closer to her own and she began to struggle harder. Luckily for her before her captor could complete his action a large figure appeared out of the forest and struck him in the jaw, causing him to drop her as he stumbled under the blow.

Fluttershy stared up in numb horror as a second behemoth stood over her with fist outstretched.

\* \* \*

><p>Upon reaching the clearing where he had heard Fluttershy's shout Mac tore through the surrounding trees. The first thing he saw was a figure which bore an eerily similar appearance to Abomination, from the Loop where he had first Replaced the person who's power's he was now using. Less than a second after that he recognized the person hanging from the figure's grip. The sight resulted in only one thought in Mac's mind, one which both halves of himself fully agreed upon.<p>

\_'Mac Smash.'\_

Moments later he had crossed the distance and planted his fist firmly into the unknown enemy's face. Forcing himself to stay in control he turned to check on Fluttershy, and seeing that she appeared to be unharmed returned his focus to his recovering foe. Not that he was willing to give him time to do so.

"Wha th hll?"

That was all Blueblood was able to say around his sore jaw, before Mac charged him again with an uppercut. This was immediately followed by a hay-maker, before he grabbed him by the arm and slammed him into the ground. Not giving his opponent a second to get his bearings he grabbed him by the ankle and spinning around twice, launched him over the side of the hill toward the roadway.

Only once he had made sure his enemy was down, did he turn back to Fluttershy who flinched at his gaze. Breathing mildly heavy he approached her, frowning as she shied away.

"Are... ya'll... alright."

Mac was beginning to regret not spending more time actually practicing with his abilities, rather than just his control. Although it did make it easier to ignore the cries of his darker half to go finish what he had started.

"M-macintosh? But... but how? I thought you said you were human?"

Mac grimaced. "Long... story. Tell... later."

Reaching down he lifted Fluttershy from the ground, his current size allowing his hand to almost completely fit around her waist. Once on her feet, Fluttershy tentatively reached forward to place her hand on Mac's arm. Turning to stare into Mac's eyes, her own widened as she

caught sight of something. At the same time Mac's senses yelled at him and he turned quickly to face the furious form of Blueblood as he charged him.

Reaching behind him without looking, Mac tried to move Fluttershy out of the way just as Blueblood came into range with roar. Two things happened then. Firstly Blueblood's fist came crashing into Mac's chest, pushing him off balance as he rolled with the attack. Secondly Mac's hand caught against the Rosary Fluttershy wore, and with an unheard clink, tore it off.

As Mac regained his footing, he was just in time to watch as Fluttershy was replaced by a more mature silver haired woman with fangs and crimson eyes. Eyes which were glaring death and bloody murder at Blueblood. With a wordless snarl she tore across the ground, closing the distance between her and her target almost faster than Mac could follow. Only his experience allowed him to watch the brutal beating which occurred, and even as fast as his power allowed him to move in the scant seconds which it took him to cross the area she had managed to deal an almost obscene amount of damage.

Placing himself between the barely breathing Blueblood and the murderous woman Mac held his ground, even as she stalked towards him. Coming to a stop directly in front of him, glaring up into his eyes she growled.

"Move."

Despite the seething hate put into the single command, Mac held firm. However he couldn't reason with the unknown woman as he was, and so even knowing the risk he forced back the raging tide of emerald fury within his mind. Soon he had once more returned to his Loop-normal self.

"Ya'll need ta calm down."

If anything Mac's words only served to increase the woman's anger, her eyes flashing.

"I don't know who you are, and right now I don't care. I have put up with this event more times than I can count, and I have long since had enough. This may not be the Saizo I know, but his actions are the same."

Mac frowned. If this was a baseline event for this person than he could understand why she might be more than a little upset. Even still. "That may be true, but if'n ya'll keep try'n ta kill him Ah'll have to stop ya."

The woman smirked. "I have no intention of killing him. Death is too good for the likes of beasts like this and I would never soil my hands on someone so pathetic. Despite how it may appear, I can assure you that he will recover from his injuries."

Here she paused to glare at Blueblood. "However I have no intention of allowing him to walk away without a permanent reminder of his arrogance."

Mac's frown grew. One the one hand he wasn't sure it was a good idea to let this woman deal with Blueblood, however on the other hand his



actions and intended actions were unforgivable. And if this was something that occurred every Loop for this woman than her anger was more than justified. In the end it was the thought of what he would do if someone like this were to ever try something like this against Applebloom that made up his mind.

"Ya'll give your word ya won't kill 'em?"

The woman nodded, and with a grimace Mac stood aside. The native Looper strode over to stand over the surprisingly recovered Blueblood with a cold look.

"You who thought he could take by force that which belongs to only one man."

Lifting her leg high into the air she slammed it down hard. Mac winced and subconsciously crossed his legs as Blueblood's eyes shot open and he release a high-pitched scream which lingered throughout the area for several seconds.

Tossing her hair behind her neck elegantly, she turned away dismissively. "Know your place."

\* \* \*

><p>Shortly afterwards the two exited the woods, neither having spoken during their trip. Only once they had left the treeline did the still unknown woman turn to face Mac with a considering gaze. "Since Tsukune isn't here I'm assuming that you're also a 'Looper' then."<p>

Mac nodded in response.

"I see. My name is Moka Akashiya. I'll admit that this is still new to me, knowing that others are dealing with this as well. I was only recently informed of the nature of the Loops. Unfortunately I have not had an opportunity to speak with Tsukune yet and inform him of what I have learned as for the time being I appear to have been made into a Traveling Looper. Catching up for lost time I suppose."

Reaching into her Pocket she pulled out a small mirror. "I can only hold a few items at the moment, but this is by far one of the most useful. A variant of an item from the Baseline."

Moka turned her gaze to the mirror which released a flash of blinding light. When it cleared Mac was surprised to see the unconscious form of Fluttershy being cradled in Moka's arms. "She does bear a resemblance to my Outer self."

Standing without trouble, despite the sleeping girl in her arms Moka smirked. "Very well, if Tsukune will not be present in this Loop then I suppose I shall just have to make do. First things first, I believe we'll need to speak with the Headmaster about securing quarters for myself. Afterwards I would like to know more about what to expect from a more experienced Looper."

Mac just nodded agreeably as they walked back to the campus. If Moka was new to this, the least he could do was help her adjust. The last thing anyone needed was a misunderstanding like had happened with his

own Awakening. Besides, this Loop didn't seem so bad. What was the worst that could happen?

Mac paused.

"Ah, Fewmets. Me an' mah big mouth."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

153.1: Somewhere, Twilight is hiding. Probably.

>153.2: Being schooled. (Big Human On Campus.) <p>

## 161. Chapter 161

154.1 (wildrook)

"Pinkie, did you just make pancakes on Twilight's head?" Applejack asked her.

"She's cheaper than the stove," Pinkie said, smiling.

"Twenty bits says that you get a diamond two weeks after sticking a lump of coal up Twilight's..." Rainbow Dash started before getting cut off by a glare from the purple Alicorn in question. "Oh, you were listening?"

"You whispered that to me," Twilight said.

\* \* \*

><p>154.2 (wildrook)<p>

Lemon then looked at the green mass wearing the blue hat to Discord's Orange and cringed.

"Something the matter, Rush?" Discord asked him.

Lemon shook his head. "Nothing," he said. "I just find it odd that the Smooze is green instead of purple."

The Smooze gave him a look and just bubbled.

Discord just looked at Lemon and translated, "You're talking about his estranged cousin. He never talks about THAT one for good reason. It's just...depressing to the point where it isolated itself into a volcano."

That's when an explosion was felt through the airship wreckage, two Earth Ponies and an unconscious Daring Do nemesis were seen piled onto the ballroom floor.

"NOT AGAIN, GRANDDAD!" a voice yelled. "This is why we don't let you on anything that can fly!"

"Well, how ELSE was I supposed to get rid of an immortal demigod thingy?" another voice replied. "Seriously, Jotaro, it's not easy piloting a plane with no fingers and a Stand!"

Ahuizotl was seen in pain from the airship crash as two ponies were arguing about the results of the landing...much to the flabbergasted looks of the onlookers, especially Rainbow Dash and a certain brown Pegasus, the former poking the man.

"Joestars," Leman and Discord muttered.

"And we're nowhere NEAR an active volcano," Discord added.

\* \* \*

><p>154.3 (Gamma Cavy)<p>

Well this was odd. Twilight had been many things before, but a living set of repeating explosions was not one of them. She was a Twilight Magic, her loop memories reported, and Spike a living lighter, dearest companion of the small explosions of Explosiva. And they were ruled by Luna-tick, eternal fountain of stars, who stood proof against the dreaded Infernal Blaze, whose light made them pale and dwindle to nothing.

This wasn't quite the strangest variant, but it was the strangest one she'd seen since the one where Alicorns were living fusion reactors, and ponies silicon based lifeforms. And how was she seeing with only explosions for a body?

Wait, bigger question. \_Was Trixie awake?\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>Some loops later.<em>

"...And that is how Trixie got her medical license," the showmare finished proudly.

The other occupants of Mac's bar just stared.

\* \* \*

><p>154.4 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Cheerilee walked into the bar, where Mac was cleaning glasses. "Hard cider, please."

"Bad loop?" Twilight asked from where she was sitting.

"I replaced you."

"Oh."

Cheerilee hung her head. "Being a unicorn made for an interesting loop. And learning from Princess Celestia was fun. Even having a different Element wasâ€| different. But near the endâ€| well, you know how you get when your tree gets destroyed?"

"Ye-esâ€| "

"Turns out I freaked out just as badly when my school got blown up. It was empty at the time, but stillâ€| arrrgh!" She snagged the glass

from Mac, and took a drink.

Twilight nodded. "I'm sorry to hear that."

Cheerilee sighed as she continued to sip her cider. "At least I got a good picture out of it." She rummaged through her pocket and pulled one out. "Here."

Twilight's eyes widened as she saw Tirek completely wrapped in duct tape and being used as a pinata. "Wow."

Cheerilee blushed. "I couldn't help myself, I was just so mad!"

"I understand completely," Twilight said, placing a comforting hoof on her friend's.

\* \* \*

<p>154.5 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Twilight looked up from her drink as a large group of looping ponies approached her.

Rainbow Dash spoke up first. "Er, Twilight, we... have to ask you something."

"It's somethin' that's been botherin' us since that expansion with the yaks, and..." Applejack faltered.

"Oh, fine, I'll ask. Twilight, darling, WHY in the name of all things green and growing are you afraid of quesadillas?" Rarity asked. "It just sounds so... silly."

Twilight sighed. "All right, I'll tell you. But I have to warn you, I don't know if this is from baseline or a variant."

The others nodded.

"You remember what Diamond Tiara was like in baseline? Er, sorry to have to use you as an example, Diamond."

"It's not a problem," Diamond told her. "I know I was Ponyville's biggest little bully. And believe me, there are times I wish I'd have a mini-me loop so I could biff the other me one in the snoot for the way she acted."

"I wouldn't go that far, but you were pretty bad," Twilight acknowledged. "But at least some of my loops, when I was first starting out as Celestia's students, I had classmates that were just as bad." She shuddered. "That's also part of why I was so terrified she'd send me back to Magic Kindergarten, because it meant dealing with those kinds of ponies all over again."

There were nods of assent. "Ah can understand that," Applejack put in. "At least some variants of me had to deal with bullies who teased me because of mah parents bein'... well, gone."

"And Fluttershy and I had to deal with bullies in our school too," Rainbow Dash added.

Twilight nodded back. "Anyway, at least one loop, one of my classmates decided to play a really, really mean prank on me. She offered me a quesadilla, and I accepted. Then I took the first bite, and it felt like my mouth was on fire."

Fluttershy gasped in horror.

"I found out later she'd stuffed it with the hottest peppers and other spices she could, and that's what caused the burning sensation. At the time though, I was too panicked to think clearly. It was almost as bad as the day I took the entrance exam, though at least I didn't have a magical surge like I did that day. Fortunately, Princess Celestia showed up and helped me out. And afterward, the filly who'd done it to me got suspended from school for a month. But ever since then, every time I see a quesadilla, it reminds me what happened then, and I start to feel that burning sensation all over again." Twilight looked up. "So, that's why at least some variants of me are afraid of quesadillas, because of the bad memories."

Looks were exchanged.

"Well, I guess that makes sense," Rainbow Dash decided.

"Yep. Fortunately, I'm getting past it. And I think these are helping." Twilight pulled something out of her Pocket. "Chupaqueso, anyone?"

"Ooh, sounds yummy!" Pinkie smiled as she took one. "And... TASTES yummy too!"

"Glad you liked." Twilight raised hers. "Cheers!"

"CHEERS!" And then there was a round of loud munching and slurping as the girls enjoyed their fried cheese treats.

\* \* \*

><p>154.6 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

\_Dear Celestia,\_

\_I just got back from an...interesting loop, and it's one I felt I should share, in no small part because of the lesson I learned. It doesn't necessarily have to do with friendship, but it's still important.\_

\_It was a human variant, and I was the only one Awake, as happens far too often. Unawake versions of you, Luna, Trixie and Nyx were all there too. According to my Loop memories, Nyx and I were your daughters, and Trixie was Luna's daughter, and therefore our cousin. Our dads, whomever they were, had been out of the picture for a long time, so Momlestia (my personal nickname for your in-loop incarnation) and Luna were raising us by yourselves. Unfortunately, though they loved us, they weren't always the most reasonable people at times.\_

\_Now, I have to tell you about this version of Trixie. She was brilliant, but forgetful. Everyone was always reminding her "Your book, Trixie," or "Your keys, Trixie." Or a lot of similar phrases. Supposedly, she was so busy being brilliant inside her own head that

she didn't have time to remember the little things, like her luggage, which she was supposed to bring to the car when we were going on a long trip (apparently, someone forgot to say "Your suitcase, Trixie" before we left, so we had to go back and get it). Some friend of the family had offered us the use of their cabin in the woods for the weekend, so off we went.\_

\_It turned out it wasn't so much a cabin as a big house deep in the woods. There was also a barn nearby. The day after we arrived, Momlestia and Luna decided it would do us some good to go on a little nature walk, and while we were out there, Trixie had to be reminded to take off her shoes before we went wading in a small creek we found.\_

\_After getting back from that, Nyx, Trixie and I explored the house a bit, and I got the creeps when I found someone had scrawled a message on a wall in one of the extra rooms. It said, "Beware the Sentinel". I showed it to Momlestia and Luna, but for some reason they both decided I'd done it and was just trying to scare them and Nyx. Which, of course, I wasn't.\_

\_We went out on another nature walk, and Trixie nearly forgot to bring her lunch with her (we were planning on finding a spot to stop and have a picnic). Exploring a different part of the woods was, again, fun. But I couldn't help feeling like something was watching us.\_

\_When we got back, both Momlestia and Luna got mad at me because Trixie didn't have her jacket, which was somehow my fault. I think my exact response at the time was "What do I look like, a walking memo pad?" And that made them even madder, so I went to my room and stayed there until dinner so we'd all have a chance to calm down.\_

\_After dinner, Momlestia and Luna went off to the nearest town (which was several miles away) to pick up some supplies and left the three of us by ourselves. We mostly read and played Monopoly for a while, but eventually I heard something scratching outside. I tried to warn Trixie and Nyx, but they didn't believe me (Nyx apparently took after Momlestia that way), still thinking I was trying to scare them. Trixie finally stuck her head out, and saw something big roaming around, which scared her, but finally convinced her I was telling the truth.\_

\_Since it was coming to the front door, we decided to duck out the back and hide in the barn. Unfortunately, it was locked, so we couldn't get in, and decided to run around the front of the house when the creature came out the back, which it did. We made it inside, locked the doors and went upstairs to hide. That didn't stop the creature: it had Trixie's jacket (which I pointed out to her), and could use it to smell where we were, like some kind of enormous scent-hound. We heard it come through the front door, stomp up the stairs, and finally start banging on the door of the room we were in.\_

\_When the door came in, we were finally able to see the Sentinel of the Woods. It was massive, it was hairy, and it was scary.\_

\_Then it looked at Trixie, and spoke:\_

\_"You forgot your jacket, stupid."\_

\_It threw the jacket at her, turned around and stomped back down the stairs.\_

\_Which is why, until the loop's end a little over a year later, nobody ever had to remind Trixie about her wallet, or her jacket, or anything else, ever again.\_

\_After all, if you leave stuff lying around, you never can be sure just who might bring it back.\_

\_Yours truly,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle\_

\* \* \*

><p>154.7 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight looked at the object in front of her and the beaming ponies next to her.

"...Is something wrong Momma?" Nyx blinked, looking at the object on the plate, poking it with a fork with nothing ripping out from the fabrics of space and time. "Doesn't \_seem\_ dangerous."

"Please Twilight, I worked \_really\_ hard to make it without cheating or going off script." Lemon muttered. "I'd ask Nyx but I feel she'd say anything I'd cook would be good since I took all those lessons."

"Right..." Twilight winced as she levitated the meal up to her mouth. With clenched eyes, she bit into the quesadilla and chewed for a few seconds before bolting to the bathroom.

"There there Lemon," Nyx patted her boyfriend, who was hanging his head low. "There's always next time. We can keep on trying until you get it right and Mamma promised us she would help!"

"You're right!" Lemon smiled as he went back to the kitchen to make more of the simple meal.

\* \* \*

><p>154.8 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight stared at Celestia and the diner she found herself in.

"This is not going to be some horrible joke about quesadillas again, is it?" Twilight was wary of her looping mentor, a massive prankster even in baseline.

"Of course not Twilight, that's for the Grand Galloping Gala... Possibly." The princess flashed her a smile. "This is a simple lesson that is long over due."

Levitating a hayburger to her mouth and taking a bite, Twilight asked what kind of lesson only for a newspaper to hit her on the nose and a squirt of cold water in her face.

"No Twilight, we do not speak with our mouths full."

Frowning, Twilight gulped her food down her mouth, using the next hayburger to wipe her face. "Are you really-"

Again, the Equestria Daily descended onto her nose with the cold water of the squirt bottle splashed into her face. "No Twilight, we do not use food as a napkin."

With a sigh, Twilight faceplanted into the table, only for Celestia's golden magic to lift her head up so she could bonk her nose again and dump the rest of the water from the squirt bottle onto her head. "No Twilight, we do not vacuum up our food."

Twilight went to protest this but she found that she did indeed have a hayburger halfway into her mouth.

Thus began their renewed lessons from days long passed, with one mare passing the wisdom to another over the food of champions.

\* \* \*

><p>154.9 (Evilhumour)<p>

Celestia turned her head to see Luna fly to her tower, with a massive grin on the alicorn's face.

Judging by the smell, she had been in a barn with a lot of hay and sniff, it was the Sweet Apple Acres if she was smelling the apples correctly.

Sniffing again as she flew around her sister's tower, she picked up the faint scent of musk from a stallion and a grin that big usually meant a pony got intimate with another. As she watched her sister fly away with a bulging saddle bag, it was likely the ponies in question were up to no-

"WAIT WHAT?!" Celestia's mind finally caught to her as Luna disappeared over Ponyville. Her sister and Big Mac were a couple? She had so many ponies to tell now!

\* \* \*

><p>"Thank you so much, dear friend." Luna blushed as she arranged the special items for this special moment, her body quivering in anticipation. Her eyes glanced at the stallion aiding her in this most precious of moments and then a blush rushed against her face.<p>

"Ain't nothing Luna." Big Mac plainly said as he reached down for the sweet pie he had been smelling all night. "Before you start, you want to eat?"

"Oh, how kind of you." Luna smile continue to grow as she brought a piece to her mouth, her tail twitching as she ate the loop famous Apple family pie. "And how kind of you to tell me of this location." Flaring her wings out, she looked at her blank canvas and began to paint, with Big Mac watching his friend bring her latest masterpiece to life.



Turning his head, he saw his little sister run towards him, probably asking why Luna was here and what not. Although that shocked look on her face did worry him a bit.

\* \* \*

><p>154.10: (Evilhumour)<p>

"Ah don't believe it." Applejack muttered, looking at the passed-out Rarity, unable to handle the horrors going in front of her.

"GO! GO! GO! GO!" Dash chanted with the other yaks.

"\_TIME!\_" Pinkie Pie shouted, with cheers ringing out from both parties.

"Ha! I ate thirty nine apple pies! How many pies did little purple princess eat?" The yak prince boasted, looking at his opponent.

"I ate \_forty\_ pies." Twilight grinned, her face covered with the remains of the pies of the pies she had devoured in the impromptu eating contest.

"What?" The prince reared back in surprise.

"Forty pies, that's as many as four tens." Twilight grinned, placing a hoof into his side.

"And it was \_terrible!\_" Rarity moaned before passing out again.

The yaks stared at their neighbours from the south and then they began to laugh.

"I think this is the start of a wonderful friendship, princess." The yak prince's grin grew, elbowing her slightly. Twilight recognized that as the early signs of affection but what was the worst the could happen in a few months?

\* \* \*

><p>"And with this union, our two nations will be one!" The yak king boasted, with Twilight stealing more glances at the clock for the loop to end, with her friends doing their best not to laugh their flanks off and with the yak prince, still smitten with her, leaning in to kiss his bride.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>154.11 (ToaMataNui5000)<p>

"I OBJECT TO THIS UNHOLY MATRIMONY!" The double doors were slammed opened to reveal a certain blue-haired, orange pegasus with a frown on his face. The whole wedding crowd let out a round of gasps before falling into silent murmurs.

It was Shining Armor who immediately broke said silence. "Flash Sentry! Why aren't you wearing your armor? Or at your guard post?"

"There he is! The doppelganger that looks like me!" Flash's voice was somehow heard from the halls beyond the double doors.

"Aw crud..." The first Flash grumbled before facing the groom and bride. "I'll be back for you, Twily!" And on that note, he fled back into the halls.

"Hey! Get back here, you face-stealing scum!" The second Flash yelled, which was then followed by the distant rumble of multiple guard yaks and ponies growing even quieter. Once again, awkward silence returned to the wedding hall.

"Okay, him learning how to walk on four hooves that fast is ridiculous enough, but HOW DID HE EVEN FIND OUT ABOUT THIS WEDDING IN THE FIRST PLACE! LET ALONE GET PAST THE MIRROR PORTAL!" Twilight's eyes twitched slightly, caused the yak king and prince to back up slowly. \_'I mean, I'm actually very grateful, but still, HOW?'\_

And meanwhile, among her now laughing friends/bridesmaids, Sunset chuckled particularly trollishly.

\* \* \*

><p>154.12 (Evilhumour)<p>

Lyra looked at Candy Cane and sighed.

"Okay, this was a mean prank." Lyra shook her head as they watched Twilight run away from the quesadilla virus Nurgle created, placed in key locations by Tzeentch, perfected by Slaanesh and honed to fight by Khorne. "Care to stop them and save Twilight?"

"Sure thing," the pony sighed as Twilight took flight to dodge the attacking quesadillas, which grew wings to chase after her. "I'm going to have to inform Leman about this. He \_does\_ care for Twilight like a second mother; anyone who hurts the mother of the girl he loves is \_not\_ going to last long."

(Masterweaver)

"ALRIGHT. That's enough."

Pinkie Pie was quite visibly annoyed. Maybe it was the eyebrows, just slightly tilted over each of her twelve eyes. Maybe it was the frown, curved downward around a maw of sharklike teeth. Maybe it was the way she snorted from each of her three noses, or how she kicked at the ground with one of her eighteen legs, or how her ninefold ears were laid back against her skull.

There was also the fact that she'd transformed into one of her more chaotic avatars, but that was rather besides the point considering just who she was talking to.

"Nurgle, I am ashamed. Using your skills to create living quesadillas just to torment Twilight \_psychologically?\_ Your love is meant to come through in physical pain, not mental pain, otherwise it isn't really love! This is by far one of the worst-quality things you have EVER done."

Nurgle buzzed his wings awkwardly. "You... you're right, Pinkie. I

was going through a dead spot creatively and... well, I have no excuse."

"Tzeentch! Basically, the same thing. Quesadillas? Tortillas with melted cheese? If it were used in a subtle assassination plot, maybe, but this plan is blindingly obvious to a six-year-old! You have got to shape up, mister!"

The raven-headed god harrumphed. "You just don't see the subtleties of the plot I put in motion-"

"And Slaanesh! Slaanesh, you didn't even spice them up at all! You just made sure they could stay alive long enough to jump into a pony's mouth! I cannot BELIEVE you missed this opportunity to overwhelm the senses, you're practically a little brother to me, Slaanesh, and you MISSED this!"

"Hey! I object! Brother is a gendered term and-" The god of overwhelming passion withered under the glares that they received.

"And you. Khorne. What in the WARP were you thinking, training them to fight? THEY DON'T EVEN HAVE BLOOD! THEY AREN'T EVEN MEAT PRODUCTS! This was a waste of your time!"

"I just thought... you know, with the jumping to their death and all..." The fourth god fidgeted on his throne of (gopher) skulls.

"Now then. What's going to happen is this: You are going to APOLOGIZE to Twilight Sparkle, you are going to ROUND UP all the quesadillas you made, you are going to give them all to ME so that I can find a PROPER use for them, and then you are going to spend a whole month \_\*\*ON THE ROCK FARM WITH MAUD.\*\*\_"

The four gods shivered in terror. "No!" Slaanesh cried, clutching at Pinkie's hooves. "Not her, she's just so, so... \_boring!\_"

Pinkie frowned. "Do you want to go for \_two\_ months?"

"NO! Nonono, no." Tzeentch grabbed Slaanesh and pulled them back. "We heard you. Um... Sorry, Twilight. The Quesadilla thing was..." He swallowed, gagging a bit. "It was-ugh, It was... Itwaspoorlythoughtout oh good warp those words taste so \_awful!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>154.13 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Twilight stepped out of her treehouse and picked up her morning newspaper. Her eyes scanned the town, in case Tirek had gotten loose early. The flower ponies were always a good indication that something was wrong (and quite a few things that weren't), but they were mostly watering their flowers. She couldn't help but notice though that they were giving her pitying and sad looks every now and then. Since it was too early in the morning to ponder their looks, she shrugged and returned to her house.

After pulling out a small record labeled Octavia's 9th, she started it up and rested on the ground while opening the newspaper. And then,

her eyes bulged at the title:

TWILIGHT SPARKLE, DEAD AT 18

TELEPORTATION INVARIABLY FATAL, WARNS LEADING SCHOLAR

She kept reading, until finally she came to the end. Her horn flared as she shouted, "SPIKE, GATHER THE GIRLS!"

\* \* \*

><p>Overnight Stringer thought his plan to generate a sensational story was genius, draw in hundreds, thousands of new readers across Equestria. But then, he was cornered by Princess Twilight Sparkle and her five friends. The five stood behind her, looking angry and bored. Twilight, meanwhile had given him a three hour verbose lecture on the pitiful state of modern media, the importance of checking facts, how disappointed his ancestors would have been with him, and so on and so forth. Worse, the Princess had cast a type of attention grabbing spell along with an insomnia spell that wouldn't let him sleep.<p>

She finished her lecture with, "And that, is why our media center is in Canterlot now, instead of based in the Griffon Lands. Honestly, insisting that I would invade the griffons because I commented that their mountains are beautiful and that I'd like to visit someday is preposterous. You learned your lesson today?"

Stringer's eye twitched as he jumped at the chance to escape, "Yes! I got it. I'll be sure to print a retraction later, please no more lectures, I beg you."

He even got on his belly and bowed his head. Twilight nodded, channeling her inner Rarity in reply, "See that you do. Honestly, saying I'm 18 when I'm 17, it's absolutely scandalous."

She started stepping out when Stringer asked, "W-wait, what?! What about the teleportation spell kills and spawns a clone at the desired location?"

Twilight gave a small laugh, "Oh that made me laugh all the way here. Keep it if you want."

The girls followed Twilight out. Once they were outside, Applejack stepped forward, "Uh, Twi', you sure ya wanna let him keep printin' that phony article?"

Twilight rolled her eyes and smiled, "Please. No scholar worth his or her mind would ever believe that. The other newspapers will print articles countering the Canterlot Times' article, and they'll be forced to close within a year's time."

"And if they try an' use yer quote as a reference to prove it true?"

Twilight conjured a pair of shades for the Mane Six, surrounded Stringer's Office in a magic barrier, and unleashed a flash of light throughout the building. With that, Twilight removed her glasses and said, "No pony except Stringer will ever remember we were here. I'll just deny all allegations that we were ever here."

\* \* \*

><p>154.14: (Evilhumour)<p>

"Okay, tell Trixie why she is here again?" Trixie huffed, blowing her mane out of her face. "Trixie was trying to help you get over your silly fear!"

"I know that Trixie and I promise as soon as I can, I'll get you out of tartarus." Twilight patted her friend on the back. "It's just that when your illusions failed and I saw I was about to eat a quesadilla instead of a hayburger, I panicked a bit."

"...Twilight, you banished Trixie to Tartarus with more spells and runes than Tirek here!" Trixie tilted her eyes to the side, unable to move her entire body, gesturing to her roommate. "Trixie also has an itch on her nose that she cannot scratch because somepony overreacted!"

"Again, I panicked."

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

I landed in the Grand Line this time. This world is one where pirates are all searching for a legendary treasure called 'One Piece,' said to make the one who finds it rich beyond their wildest dreams. The Anchor here, Luffy, ate something called a Devil Fruit; fruits that grant those who have eaten them special powers and abilities. In Luffy's case, he is basically made out of rubber. He can't swim, though.

Moving on, Luffy and his crew are a band of misfits, but they are true friends. Kinda reminds me a bit of Equestria's values, honestly. They are willing to do anything to help each other.

They accepted me as a crew member almost instantly when I met them as they were journeying to fight the madman called Crocodile in one of their many adventures; they understood why I feel I have to make up for my past, but they were more than glad to befriend me. I was glad to have them by my side. I really couldn't learn anything new here, but I could hone my skills a lot.

We had a lot of adventures together. I'm glad to have met them. Once again, I have seen what friendship means.

I want to think I'm totally different from the cruel person I once was, and when I return to Equestria, I'll be glad to put what I now know about friendship to good use. I have a lot of things to atone for, after all.

\* \* \*

><p>154.15: (fractalman)<p>

"Welcome to Equestria" said Twilight. "I understand you might be

hungry, so I've prepared two tables of food: one with all my own favorite dishes, and one with our best efforts to recreate your own cuisine, should you not find equestrian dishes to your liking."

The Yaks walked over to the former, and gulped down several hayburgers, a daffodil sandwich, and a couple bowls of celery soup.

"Taste strange, but good!" said the Yak prince.

\* \* \*

><p>Alas, the very next loop, the Yaks were upset by, of all things, how salty the hayburgers were. A quick series of teleports confirmed that, like Ponies, Yaks had salt licks and enjoyed them.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Several loops later in the hub:<p>

"I had no idea Yak tongues were so sensitive!" said Twilight as she watched the Yaks complain about the taste of equestrian snow.

"Well, this certainly goes a long way towards explaining why we've been having so much trouble with the Yaks." agreed Rarity.

\* \* \*

><p>154.16 (Evilhumour)<p>

"What, you going to cry again?" The adult bullies from flight school usually didn't bother Fluttershy anymore, as they were usually \_very\_ childish from her long time looping. Of course, as they tried to box her in, there was always exceptions.

"Please, let me go by." Fluttershy said, her eye darting upwards.

"Oh yeah, who's going to make us Flutter\_cry\_?" The bullies laughed to themselves, thinking themselves clever.

\_THUD THUD THUD THUD\_

"Hello, my name is Lemon Rush," a giant, yellow earth pony stallion grinned viciously at the pegasi. "These are my brothers." Nodding his head at the gigantic towering red unicorn stallion, Lemon continued his introductions. "That is Big Maroon." Pointing his head to the somewhat equally tall and terrifying green earth pony that was holding a massive warhammer in his mouth. "That's Forging Fire." Finally, he nodded his head to the dauntingly large scowling bat-pony who was baring his fangs. "That's Corn Curse."

Leaning downwards to the scared senseless pegasi, Lemon whispered into their ears. "We're four of her nineteen \_sons\_. Now what were you saying to our dear mother?"

In a sign of clear intelligence, the pegasi bullies took off into the sky with speeds that would have made Rainbow Dash a bit jealous.

Fluttershy simply shook her head at her sons actions, embarrassed in how overprotective they were to her and told them such as they walked her back to the cottage where Butcher Nails was wrestling with the Ursa Minor again.

\* \* \*

><p>154.17 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Everything was going perfectly. Shining's sister and her friends didn't realize that her precious babysitter had been replaced by the Queen of all Changelings. She stared into the Mirror, about to start singing about her ultimate victory when someone knocked on the door. By how quietly it sounded, there was no doubt it was Fluttershy. The disguised changeling opened the door and gave her an irritated look, "What do you want now?"

Fluttershy hid her eyes behind her mane, "Oh, um, I'm sorry, but one of my animal friends said she was a close personal friend of yours. She's waiting outside the building."

Chrysalis sighed and pointed, "Very well. Lead on."

The two stepped out the door, and Chrysalis abruptly froze in terror. Before her was an oversized...dragon...lizard perhaps...with a mouth that could eat a dozen ponies in one bite. The dragon lizard growled out its delight, "Cadence! So good to see you!"

The queen gave a shy grin, "Uh, right! It's been so long since we last saw each other...who were you again?!"

The waved her off, "Oh, you remember me. It's Roxy! We met at in the park a long time ago! You gave me some dating tips."

The Dragon leaned in really close with her teeth showing, "\_Remember?\_"

Chrysalis nodded enthusiastically, "Oh, yes right! How is your...relationship with..."

Chrysalis stopped when the realization hit her that she had no idea who Roxy was dating. Roxy was helpful, "Godzilla. Haven't seen him in a bit, but I'm sure I'll run into him before long. Maybe we'll go on a nice stroll through the city."

If this Godzilla was as big as Roxy, there might not be anything left of the city when they were done. Worse, the Queen couldn't feel anything from this beast, so she had no idea what Roxy was planning. Chrysalis gave a terrified grin, "Well, I got to get back to getting ready for my wedding. Bye!"

The door slammed closed. A moment passed, then Roxy looked down at Fluttershy while the pony looked up at the T-Rex. Roxy asked, "How did I do?"

Fluttershy beamed, "You were great! A little more on the teeth and maybe a growl or two and she'll be running before the Wedding begins, I have no doubt."

\* \* \*

><p>154.18 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

Celestia gaped at the sight in front of her. Luna hung over the stage on a circular rock that looked suspiciously like the moon. And considering the moon was missing from the sky, the Alicorn was inclined to believe that that rock was indeed the moon. To add to the surreal nature of the sight, Luna spinning end over end on the moon and shouting the whole time, "Whee!"

And this had been going on...\_for ten minutes!\_ Celestia shouted in frustration, "Sister! Get off the moon, put it back in the sky and let me do my job!"

The solar diarch pressed a hoof to her mouth in surprise at her own outburst. Luna stopped rolling for a second and gave a puppy dog look, "Aww...do I have to?"

\* \* \*

><p>154.19 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

The streets of Canterlot hustled and bustled as it always has, with many different but familiar ponies going about doing their business. One pony, however, was different this time around. Fancy Pants had been replaced by a chocolate coated earth pony with a stylish mustache and a small afro style mane. The pony was an oddity, always seen wearing his trademark blue shirt, navy cape and pants, as most ponies usually forewent clothes except on formal occasions. He practically oozed charm as he showed a purple alicorn into his business establishment. He held out a single hoof at the three floored building and declared, "Welcome, princess Sparkle, to Bespin Mining and Transportation."

Twilight gave a nod, "Thank you High Roller...or should I call you Lando, or Mr. Calrissian?"

Lando held up a hoof in placation, "I have most calling me Lando here. And Mr. Calrissian sounds like this one eyed commander of the Imperial Dreadnaught I knew at home. Let me show you around."

The building had a grand foyer along with two stairways, one leading upward and the other down. He pointed at the downward one, "This leads to the underside of Canterlot, where we mine rare minerals used in construction of the guard's armor and equipment. We released the formula for crafting durasteel to the local blacksmiths. Sometimes, we run across rare gas deposits, which we siphon off and deliver to pegasi to reinforce their cloud cities in case of inopportune squalls escape the local weather teams over the oceans or Everfree Forest."

He looked at the princess and gave a knowing grin, "I understand it that your friend, Miss Dash, has purchased some for improving her own home."

They strolled through the mines while showing his safety regulations he follows. After completing the tour of the mines, she was lead back up the stairs and into the foyer, where he went out one of the back doors. Several Earth Ponies stood, hitched up to their loads, which was floating via anti-gravity technology, "I borrowed the designs



from my universe back home, reinventing the hover technology for pony use. The carts weigh practically nothing. Even a filly could transport this to Ponyville, though that would be highly irresponsible for a respectable businesspony like myself."

Twilight quirked her eyes, "If it weighs nothing, then why don't you have larger loads."

The business Pony gave a knowing grin, "Supply and demand, my dear. We usually only get small orders outside Canterlot, except for the Pegasi. But there, our supply is limited, since we don't know when we'll run across gas pockets."

Lando issued her back into the building and towards another room filled with unicorns, "I have several of the brightest minds in Canterlot crafting a surveying spell, that will map the entirety of Canterlot Mountain. Perhaps, you'd be willing to lend us your services."

Twilight gave him a smirk, "I would like that, except that the less reputable side to your company prevents me from doing so."

Lando's quirked an eye. His smile didn't even twitch, showing that he was very good, "I don't know what you mean."

Twilight shrugged, "I'm sure there was a very good reason for a highly valuable bust of King Sombra being found at the border to griffon lands in a Bespin Crate."

"I have many shipments sent to the griffon lands, and all of them are scanned by one of Captain Armor's Lieutenants. If there was a smuggled artifact found in one of my shipments, it happened after it had left Canterlot."

It was Twilight's turn to quirk an eyebrow, "And the fact that you hire quite a few former black marketeers?"

"I believe in giving people second chances, a fresh start at life. You yourself have given quite a few former rebels a second chance yourself, with Nightmare Moon, Discord, Trixie and many more."

Twilight gave a small, "Hmm..." but said nothing further. Lando lead her to the roofs, where he showed Twilight the third portion of his business, "And here, we prove that we do not discriminate against anyone. We have Pegasi also handling the aerial transportation aspect."

Twilight nodded, "This is all very impressive."

She then gave him a serious expression, causing the mood to shift slightly, though Lando was largely unphased, "Supposing you were in the business of transporting relics in a...shall we say, less than legal way, remember to check your artifacts. Some of them can destroy Equestria after all."

Lando shook his head, never losing that cocky smirk, "I don't know what you mean, Miss Sparkle. Here at Bespin Mining, we believe that safety is the number one priority. Without Equestria, we couldn't turn a profit. Besides, I would never participate in such a shady

venture."

The businessman showed her down the stairs and asked, "Since the tour is over, how about a game of Sabacc?"

Twilight was led into a small room off to the side where a table and a deck were set up. It even had a card dealer. The Princess smirked, "My Sabacc is a little rusty. You mind going a bit easy on me?"

Lando chuckled, "Commander Shepard already tried that one awhile ago, it didn't work then and it won't work now."

Twilight pouted a bit, but the two played well into the afternoon. Fortunes and oddities from many loops were won and lost in that game, but Twilight had still made a new friend. Life was good.

\* \* \*

><p>154.20 (Evilhumour)<p>

Rainbow Dash blinked as the door opened to Fluttershy's massive cottage; the extra size needed for all the colts under her care to both run around, sleep and burn off their excessive energy. Fluttershy stood there, the proud Little Mother to all nineteen foals and one evil looping bunny that the colts were running from.

Shaking her rainbow mane, Rainbow Dash walked up to Fluttershy and spoke softly.

"Fluttershy, I am one of your oldest friends and what I am about to say may seem harsh but it is need."

Fluttershy blinked as Rainbow Dash took her hoof and gently patted it with her own. "Wh-what is it?"

"You have got to learn how to say No." A twinge showed her smirk for a moment but Rainbow Dash forced herself calm and collective. Already Fluttershy was drawing back in shock and embarrassment. "Most ponies only have three or four foals, not nineteen."

"Rainbow Dash!" Fluttershy tried to rear back, but Dash was holding onto her hoof tightly. Her hold on her smirk was, alas, very loose.

"If you have any more foals, you'd be a mother of a nation!" She started to snicker at her friend's face; a mixture of outrage, embarrassment and some amusement creeping in.

"Hey that's our Mother you're talking about!" Lemon shouted with Angel Bunny on his head, the two of them in a middle of a battle, with his other brothers putting away their bets in front of their looping mother. "Come on guys, let's get her!" With that, a mighty roar was heard as all of the ponies raced for the doorway and the blue pegasus standing in it.

"Gotta fly!" Dash shouted as she ascended to alicornhood as she tried to escape the wrath of nineteen colts with Fluttershy holding her sides as she laughed at the ridiculousness of being the Little Mother to all the Primarchs.

\* \* \*

><p>154.21 (Masterweaver)<p>

The difficulty in keeping one's mind after being bucked off a bed while waking up in both senses of the term could not be understated. Nevertheless, Applejack had reacted quickly, rolling away from the attacker and snapping to a standing position-

"Aw crabapples, this is a mini-me loop ain't it?" The mare sighed as her eyes fell on the panicked pony standing on the bed. "Look, Ah'll explain everything, just calm down-"

There was a knock at the door. "Applejack? What's goin' on in thar, young'n?"

"Just fell off the bed, Granny!" Applejack turned to her shocked duplicate, putting a hoof to her lips, before looking back at the door. "I'll be out in a minute!"

"Ya'll had better, the whole family is already up and waitin' on ya!"

A slow clip heralded the departure of the Apple Family matriarch. Applejack nodded to herself, walking up to the bed and puttin' a small pamphlet at her duplicate's hooves. "This'll explain the basics. As soon as ya get the chance, meet me in the west orchard-look for the tree with no bats."

"But-"

"You've got a Summer Sun Celebration to prepare for, filly!" Applejack insisted, pointing at the door. "You'd best get your work done afor' anypony questions where ya are!"

"Who the hay-?"

"West orchard. Meet me there, after you've got everything ready." Applejack opened the window, pulled out a grappling gun, saluted, and swung out.

Left behind, Applejack blinked at the window for a moment or two. Then she turned her gaze down to the pamphlet.

"...What in the hay is going on?!"

\* \* \*

><p>154.22 (Masterweaver)<p>

"So, Pinkie, how do I put this..." Twilight rubbed the back of her head. "In the last expansion, me and the girls stumbled on your, uh, 'party cave'. Is that... is that baseline?"

The pink pony giggled. "Oh, that old thing? Yeah, back when I started working with the Cakes I put a lot of my party stuff in the basement, then after the parasprites destroyed it I budgeted a few secret passageways when rebuilding sugarcube corner, and then Spike broke through and I just went whole hog. Of course that was before I

started looping," she added quickly. "Nowadays I just use my pocket as a portable party planning post for practical and preposterous purposes."

"Waaaaaaait, wait wait wait, hold on. You have a party base \_in your pocket?\_"

"Uh-huh! Let me show you!" With lightning fast speed, Pinkie Pie grabbed Twilight, jumped into her own tail, and-

Twilight's eyes went wide. She stood at the center of a room shaped like a cyan cupcake liner, if that cupcake was as big as Canterlot Castle. Hanging off the walls in haphazard tetrominos were hundreds upon thousand of files, attended to by a series of flying robots made out of what seemed to be baking products; one wall was dominated by a massive screen, currently showing a map of Equestria with various pinpoints flashing in magenta cross-hairs. The floor was littered with a collection of half-constructed machines, uncoiled streamers, oddly bubbling potions, scattered confetti, the occasional weapon of mass destruction, and a number of perfectly prepared pastries. At the center of the room was a round table with a selection of hovering, custom-made holographic keyboards, each operated by what Twilight recognized as chaotically-formed duplicates of the pink pony pranking alongside her. Occasionally, one of the robots would slip out one of the slits spaced evenly in the side of the liner; through them, Twilight could see various signs like "Balloon-making Factory," "Armory of Amusing Armaments," or "Baking Ovens 856-1097," all covered with odd forms of caution signs. Her eyes drifted upward to where she would expect a ceiling-

"NO." Pinkie grabbed her face and pulled it down, sticking a pink plastic visor on her head. "Up \_there\_ is the Eye of Parties, a chaotic energy source for this whole operation that also serves as a pretty neat ceiling light. Few mortals can look upon it and stay sane, and as the Anchor you have a responsibility to protect your sanity at all costs." She jabbed a hoof into Twilight's chest. "So DON'T. LOOK. UP."

Twilight blinked, nodding after a couple of seconds. "You're the boss here. This place... this is amazing! You have all this in your pocket?"

"Uh-huh! This is the Cupcake of Creativity, where I put my party plans into place and passage. A lot of failed tests happen here, but also a lot of fun successes! And of course party plans," she added, gesturing at the file cabinets on the walls. "All of the party plans, everywhere."

"By Everfree," Twilight breathed, walking up to the table. "This is like your own personal batcave."

"Yeah, me and Brucey have a bit of a prepared plot competition going on whenever we meet up." Pinkie walked up next to her, nudging one of her chaotic duplicates to the side. "We kinda try to outwit each other and whatnot; I mean, he's the older looper, yeah, but I've got chaotic powers which give me an edge."

Twilight couldn't help but smile. "Let me guess, he's in the lead?"

"...yeah," Pinkie grumbled. "But only by two points!" she added quickly, grabbing a rolled-up fabric from a passing robot and unrolling it on the table. "I've got a plan, see, I just need to figure out how to imprint my own circuitry on one of his batarangs. Now, I could go the easy route and stick it in one of the high-tech ones, but he'd probably find that on a routine check. So I'm trying to figure out if I could maybe sneak it onto one of his basic metal 'rangs..."

"You know, I'm not sure that would help at all," Twilight pointed out. "I mean, even if you somehow stick your own circuitry on a batarang, which isn't something I'm ruling out, you'd need a supercomputer capable of interfacing with it in order to make any use of the thing.

"Oh I have one of those!" Pinkie pressed a button and gestured toward the white pegasus now on the massive screen. "You remember Surprise, EDI's daughter from that time you had me code a digibomb?"

"Hi auntie Twi! Isn't granny Pie's places so cool?!"

Twilight nodded faintly. "It... it sure is." She cleared her throat. "Well... this has been fun, Pinkie, but I need to get back to the library-"

"Say no more." Pinkie grinned, grabbing a multicolored hammer. "I'll get you there in a jiffy!"

\* \* \*

><p>Amethyst Star jumped in surprise as a purple pony dropped out of nowhere. "Gah! What-Twilight Sparkle? Where did you come from-?"<p>

Twilight grabbed her face and pulled it in. "I have looked into the abyss. And the abyss has looked into me."

"Wh-?"

\_"Pinkie Pie is more organized than either of us, Star."\_

\* \* \*

><p>154.23 (Evilhumour, Masterweaver, wildrook)<p>

"Hey Bonbon, I know you're an ex-secret agent. I know that because \_I\_ am stuck in a time loop. Well I say I, I mean we, there's five-ish personalities in here. Anyway, I just want you to know that I don't care about anything you did before, I love you no matter what you are, and you can always feel comfortable around me. Well, I'm off to go help some of my fellow loopers play a prank on Nightmare Moon, see you at the celebration!"

Lyra kissed the shock-frozen Bonbon on the cheek and waltzed out the door.

"...Psych ward," Bonbon muttered. "DEFINITELY the psych ward."

Lyra then walked back into the room, rolling her eyes. "Sorry, the gals want to give you a kiss too."

\* \* \*

><p>154.24 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Me love this pony treat!" Prince Rutherford declared, stamping his hoof. "Yaks will be friends with ponies, if ponies give yaks Quesadillas!"

Twilight's eye twitched.

\* \* \*

><p>154.25 (Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight Sparkle had had just about enough of this expansion, and she'd only gone through it three times.

Oh sure, the embarrassing secret about her irrational fear had been exposed-and probably would be to her looping friends, eventually-and yeah, she didn't like having to repair a crystal palace, but what really got her-what really got to her was the yak prince. The way he insisted everything be so-so. The way he demanded that his homeland be replicated with exact precision. The way he destroyed everything when a small problem arose.

And then, there was-

"We declare WAR!"

Yeah. That.

Twilight smiled, oh so serenely. "Just so we're clear: your declaration of war is official?"

"YES!"

"And you're making it right here. Right now."

"YES!"

"Well then." With a flash of her horn, a series of enchanted manacles bound themselves around the yaks' legs. "As my first act in this war, I hereby capture you and declare you prisoners of war. Furthermore, a message will be sent to Yakyakistan about your frivolous excuses for battle, your dishonorable conduct during combat, and the children you wounded in your undirected rage."

"What?!" The prince tugged at his chains. "Me no hurt child!"

Twilight flicked a wing at Spike. Even not looping, he was quick enough on the uptake. "Oh, uh-AH! My leg, aaah!" He clutched at his foot and fell to the stage floor. "Oh somepony, please, PLEASE!"

"Oh, and legally speaking that particular child has been adopted into my family, so there's that." Twilight grinned broadly. "I wonder how the chieftains will react knowing exactly how deplorably their prince fights?"

"You spout lies! Me am very honorable fighter!"

"You've yet to demonstrate it," the alicorn replied calmly. "As a matter of fact, I have half a mind to march up to the king of Yakyakistan and demand compensation for your behavior today. He would be so disappointed to hear about all of this..."

The prince glowered at her. "Pony princess fight dirty."

"Oh, I'm not fighting right now. I'm \_lecturing.\_ Believe you me, you do not want to see me \_fighting.\_" She leaned in close. "Of course, we could avoid all of that, you know. If you didn't actually declare war, if that was just a slip of the tongue, then I'd have no right or reason to inform your father how you behaved. I wonder what the history books will say about that..."

"...Me..." The prince sighed. "Me am ending war with ponykind. Me declaration was made in anger without thought."

"And I am very grateful for that." Twilight vanished the chains holding him prisoner. "I apologize for making you feel uncomfortable, prince Rutherford. Perhaps we can continue our discussions more amicably from now on."

The yak frowned at her. "You one to talk..."

\* \* \*

><p>154.26 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Apple Bloom?"

"Yeah sis?"

"Care ta explain why our big brother is a livin' fireball now?"

Applebloom winced as a tree caught fire. "Ah put up caution signs durin' the experiment, Ah swear!"

They watched as Big Mac continued stoically doing his chores.

"...think we could make fried apple slices?"

\* \* \*

><p>154.27 (Masterweaver)<p>

"So... what did you just give Fluttershy?"

"Oh, just a slip of paper."

Epona crossed her arms, tapping a hoof as she gave her husband a flat stare. "Right. Of course you did, Lokison. So, what did you \_write\_ on the slip of paper?"

Sleipnir smiled awkwardly. "Oh, just... a series of characters in no particular order-"

"Sleipnir Odinstead, stop being coy with me and tell me what the code is for."

The eight-legged stallion sighed. He glanced over each one of his shoulders carefully, letting his eyes rove around the ceiling and the floor. Then he leaned into his wife's ear to whisper.

"It's a gate code."

Epona gasped, shoving him back. "A-?!"

She looked about warily, searching the room for cameras before she pulled the stallion close. "Sleipnir," she whispered harshly, "the gates were sealed eons before we even started the loops! And there was a good reason for it, too!"

"I know, I know! And it's not like I told her what it was!"

"But still, you gave her a gate code! Even if she doesn't understand it she could figure out how to use-"

"Epona, look." Sleipnir folded his ears back. "Ever since the Crash and Billy happened, I've... been noticing things. Maybe I'm being paranoid, maybe it's just a bunch of weird glitches, but... what would happen if somebody from, say, the Lovecraft pantheon tried to stage a coup right now? With Yggdrasil running as it is, we could be undermined before we even noticed."

The anthropomorphic horse rolled her eyes. "Please, the only subtle one in that lot is Nyarlathotep. We'd notice long before he tried anything-"

"I just used that pantheon as an example," Sleipnir whispered quickly. "My point is, there are some admins and more than a few MLEs that might... try something. And normally I'd be all for a glorious war, or even a cunning battle in the shadows, but..."

He put a hoof on her slightly bulging stomach. "The fallout could be... too much for me to bear."

Epona wrapped a hand around the hoof and sighed. "Sleipnir, your intentions... I can see why you're making contingencies, I know, but if you got caught doing this-"

"I told Fluttershy to only open that slip of paper if the time ever came. She swore nine separate oaths not to do it before, all of them mystically binding. She can keep this a secret."

His wife let out a slow breath. "Alright... so you covered your tracks pretty well. But what do you think she can do, even if... she opens the gates?"

Sleipnir flicked an ear backward. "If a coup does come, they'll target us. The Admins. Maybe they'll attack the loopers at some point, but they wouldn't expect them to be able to escape the loop without breaking that reality. And... well..." He bit his lip. "Bearers of Kindness are omniglots, and I'm pretty sure that computer coding counts-"



"Oh, so you're setting her up for guerrilla warfare using Yggdrasil code?" Epona bit her lip. "That... actually makes a lot of sense."

"I just hope I am being paranoid," Sleipnir muttered darkly.

"...Hey." Epona hugged him tightly. "Either way... I'm here for you."

Sleipnir sighed, returning the embrace. "And I you."

\* \* \*

><p>154.28 (Masterweaver)<p>

"FIX THIS!"

"Vinyl, I'm trying, just let me focus!"

"I don't see that horn glowing, Lyra!"

"Look, I need to figure out the spell I cast-when you jumped me with that DJmobile of yours, I might add-so I can do the proper reversal-"

"I don't care about the technobabble! YOU TURNED OCTAVIA INTO A CELLO! That's... ironic and all, but it's not funny and she's probably panicking! FIX THIS!"

\* \* \*

><p>154.29 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Derpy, I need to talk to you."

"Yeah Twilight? What is it?"

"Amethyst says that she was the best organizer in Ponyville before I came along, right?"

"Uh-huh. My little Sparkler is such a life saver."

"So... is she the reason Winter Wrap Up never gets completed on time in Ponyville until I come around?"

"Actually, no. Her plans are almost always immaculate, but the other team leaders only ever read their parts and there's no communication and, well, as much as I hate to admit it my daughter can be just a touch stand-offish which makes it so a lot of ponies just tune her out."

"...huh."

\* \* \*

><p>154.30 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Pink princess as perfect picky as Yaks! Yaks name pink princess honorary yak!"

"Yeah, about that," Twilight drawled, pulling the real Cadance from behind a door. "\_That\_ Cadance is actually an impostor and a member of a shapeshifting race known as changelings. \_This\_ is the real one."

"What?! Pink princess is trick! YAKS DESTROY!"

Cadance's jaw dropped as she watched the ensuing destruction. Twilight just smiled. "It's the little things you learn to appreciate."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

154.1: They don't have a genuine Rapidash.

>154.2: Yeah, things just happen sometimes. (JoJos Bizarre Adventure.)<br>154.3: She's also qualified on biologicals.

>154.4: School's out. Permanently. (I don't know who the anchor was.)<br>154.5: Tasty.

>154.6: Sometimes the lessons are a bit of a stretch.<br>154.7: I can't tell if this is progress or the opposite. (It's not Progress, though.)

>154.8: Well, a Princess must have good manners.<br>154.9: Of course it was being misleading.

>154.10: Yak it to me.<br>154.11: Yes, she somehow got in exactly the same situation twice. This is not just a continuation. (As far as you know.)

>154.12: She can keep them in line.<br>154.13: Absence of evidence.

>154.14: They're kind of getting obsessed with this.<br>154.15: Iterating yak food.

>154.16: Do not irritate the Mother of Primarchs.<br>154.17: Meet Roxanne. She's that T-rex from Jurassic Park. The whole eating people thing is behind her.

>154.18: A different way of mooning on stage.<br>154.19: Card Shark?

>154.20: Rough housing means complete havoc.<br>154.21: Imagine what it's like for Celestia.

>154.22: Pinkie's pocket is a bit less scary than her mind.<br>154.23: Non loopers get no chance to learn to take things in stride.

>154.24: Diplomacy involves sacrifices.<br>154.25: Overwhelming force in overwhelming quantity. Also overwhelming smug.

>154.26: Grilled Mac. (And cheese?)<br>154.27: Emergency measures.

>154.28: Excessive violins.<br>154.29: In spite of themselves.

>154.30: Yaks have impulse control issues.<p>

## 162. Chapter 162

155.1 (Masterweaver)

"Rarity?"

"Yes Twilight?"

"I can get why you'd make clothing out of doors, since I know you like a challenge. \_But why the birch is your line so popular?!\_"

"Well, it's a long story involving social engineering, professional manipulation, and a touch of lucky coincidence, but the long and short of it is I'm famous enough that everypony wants something Rarity."

\* \* \*

><p>155.2 (Masterweaver, Valentine Meikin)<p>

"I'd like a lactose-free quesadilla please..." Twilight requested, for everyone's head to shoot round, as she ate the baked tortilla, burped lightly, wiped her mouth, then walked off.

"It was that simple?!" Pinkie declared, "No wonder she waves off milk..."

"OK, Who here now feels really embarrassed?" Rainbow Dash asked, for several hands to go up, "Next time, Ask for the full story... Right."

"Waaaaaaait a second." Pinkie tapped her chin. "She's eaten hayburgers, and I know they have cheese. And the whipped cream I put on the pancakes also has dairy. And then there's all the cupcake icing-"

"Whoa, hold on, wait, what?" Rainbow tapped her hooves. "Time out. What?!"

"She's not lactose-intolerant!" Pinkie insisted. "I just know it!"

"Then... then what was that?!"

\* \* \*

><p>Trixie bumped hooves with the purple unicorn. "That is going to screw with their heads for weeks!"<p>

"You know this plan wouldn't have worked if Pinkie wasn't there." The purple unicorn shifted into a black changeling queen.

"Oh pish posh. Twilight deserves it after throwing me in tartarus."

"...point."

\* \* \*

><p>155.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Hold up, Pinkie, why didn't ya'll tell ever tell us Twi was afraid of Quesadillas?"

Pinkie sighed. "Well, it was just me and Twilight looping when I found out, and I maaaaay have told your non-looping selves to get them to help, and that maaaaay have actually made the situation so

much worse that Twilight hunted me down, chained me to the side of the library, and made me Pinkie Pie swear not to ever tell anypony about it." She shivered. "This was way\_ before \_I was a chaos god of parties, mind. It... the whole situation kind of stuck with me."

Applejack rose an eyebrow. "Chained ya to the library?"

"Like I said, early early loops. She was a little more Magic Kindergarten paranoid back then."

\* \* \*

><p>155.4 (Masterweaver, wildrook)<p>

"Thanks, you guys!" Moondancer glanced about nervously. "Is... is Twilight coming?"

Minuette winced. "Well... er... you see-"

Suddenly and without warning, there was an explosion right in the middle of the party. Well, it looked like an explosion until the fireworks cleared way, leaving behind a strikingly posed unicorn dressed in an outlandish cape and hat.

"The GREAT and POWERRRRRRFUL TRRRRRRRRIXIE has come bearing a message from one Twiiiiiiilight Sparkeeeeeeeel!"

Moondancer blinked as the strange blue mare suddenly jumped forward. "I-wha-who are you?"

"I am the GREAT and POWERRRRRRFUL TRRRRRRRRIXIE! Consort to queens, purveyor of explosions, and showmare extraordinare. And YOU! Are one Moon-danz-\_er\_, if I am not mistaken?"

"Um... y-yes?"

"TWILIGHT SPARKLE! Sends her most apologetic and deepest of condolences. When she heard of your gathering, partay, soiree, she so desperately wanted to come, but alas!" Trixie swooned onto Moondancer's back. "The princess herself has called her away to Ponyville, there to stay in hopes of researching ancient artifacts of untold power."

"She..." The pale unicorn sniffed, adjusting her glasses. "She's not coming?"

"Tis true," Trixie replied sadly. "BUT FRET NOT! She sent you gifts fourfold!"

With a wave of her hoof, the showmare produced three individually wrapped giftboxes. "HERETO! Is the first gift, gathered and forged by her lifelong assistant. Though its contents are humble, they come from the claws of a dragon, and rare is that with which they part. HENCEWITH! Is the second gift, selected from her library by Twilight herself! If parting possessions from dragons is difficult, you and I know that only the greatest throb of her heart can convince Twilight to give away one of her precious tomes. HOWFORTH! Is the third gift, tickets and money so that you may move to Ponyville on your own initiative! Though she be forced to relocate, she wishes not to

abandon, and so provides these as a token partial in hopes of ensuring you remain in the same district of citydom!"

"Flair for the dramatic, this one," Lemon Hearts murmured. Twinkleshine nodded in agreement.

"Oh. Oh wow, these are-wait." Moonshine narrowed her eyes. "You said four gifts. There are only three boxes here..."

"Indeed, for the fourth gift requires no box. In point of fact, Twilight Sparkle has hired your party an entertainer! Whom, you might ask? Why, none other..." The unicorn struck a pose. "...then I! THE GRRRREAT AND POWERRRRFUL TRRRRRRRRRRRRRRIXIE!"

Moonshine frowned. "Does your 'entertainment' all consist of pointless ego stroking?"

Trixie grinned like a maniac. "Let me show you how to make thermite."

\* \* \*

><p>Halfway across the world, Gilda shivered. "Why do I have the urge to strangle a certain showmare right now?"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>155.5 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...so you see my problem, right Lyra?"

Lyra nodded. "Yeah, Moondancer would take the party very seriously. She's got the same perfectionist streak you do, Twi. Maybe you should go to her party from now on."

"But then I have no excuse to send the letter to Celestia, and she has no way to send me to Ponyville, and-"

"Whoa, whoa whoa. Twilight. This is Celestia we're talking about." Lyra held her hooves apart. "Even as a friendly teacher, she has a habit of placing ponies in situations with minimal information, and expecting them to figure out things on their own. Factor in that she would have basically spent a thousand years planning on how to heal Luna, and I can't think of any reason why she wouldn't seek you out at the party."

"Well, maybe. Maybe she'd just Spike-mail me. Or it could be one of those variants where she's planned everything to the letter-"

"Look. Here's what you do. Go to Moondancer's party with Spike. If he's not awake, and Celestia doesn't draco-fax you in time, just fake a draco-fax to yourself with the whole 'Summer Sun celebration, make friends, yadda yadda' schpiel. Then apologize to Moondancer-maybe ask her to look over your house, or come with you or something-head to Ponyville, and run it baseline from there. If anyone gets suspicious about how you know stuff, say 'I read about it once' or something." Lyra shrugged. "See? It's easy. Moondancer doesn't feel rejected, you still go through the Nightmare Moon thing, and if you do need to go back to Canterlot to reassure Moondancer you can just talk to Minuette to get 'interested' or whatever."

Twilight stared.

"...What?"

"I never thought you would have good advice!" The alicorn coughed. "Well, I mean, good friendship advice. Which isn't to say you aren't a good friend. It's just you're kind of... uh... crazy."

Lyra chuckled. "Sometimes, it takes the crazy to see the situation in it's fullest."

\* \* \*

><p>155.6 (Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight had thought the loop was running baseline. Oh, sure, she was doing her usual 'loop-plus' actions to sidestep most of the baseline issues, and yeah that did include a lot of trips to Canterlot to talk with Moondancer, and it did seem that the bookish unicorn was actually opening up and becoming more confident, but...

\_"Crysssstall slaaaaaaves-GAH!"\_

"No, dear. Crystal ponies." Moondancer levitated the squirt bottle meaningfully. "I'm sorry about this, Twi, my fiance can be a bit of a hooffull."

"Fi...fiancee."

"Yes, well, I summoned him a few months back from some old black magic tome, we got to talking, he proposed last week..." The unicorn sighed. "But now the empire's back and he's misbehaving again-"

\_"But-but-crystal sssslaves!"\_

"NO, Sombra. You don't get to laze about."

Twilight could only stare in shock as the black miasma grumbled and turned away from the train station. What in the what...?

\* \* \*

><p>155.7 (Masterweaver)<p>

Pinkie Pie entered the bar with a sag in her step, sidling up to her usual stool without her usual enthusiasm.

Macintosh rose an eyebrow. "...brain bleach?"

"...nah. I'm good. Just..." The mare sighed. "I'm not sure you're the pony I need to talk to about this. But get me something anyway."

The stallion nodded, reaching for one of his denser drinks-

-but his hoof was slapped away by a frowning Berry Punch. "Trust me on this, she needs a very specific drink." She turned back to Pinkie, pulling out ingredients from her pocket and mixing them

together in a light wineglass. "Here you go, Pinks, one Momma's Bad Day."

Pinkie gave a weak smile as she accepted the drink, sipping at the straw. "Wow... this is just how I'm feeling. How'd you know?"

"It's something you pick up on after a while."

"Yeah... that makes sense." Pinkie took another sip.

"So, who was it? Sombra? Discord? Tirek?"

"Nah, my last loop wasn't in Equestria." Pinkie took a deep breath. "My kid was the Joker."

Dead silence filled the bar.

"...yeah, that's what I figured you'd say." The mare shook her head, sipping at her drink again. "I mean... even if he was a maniacal mass murderer, he was still my kid, you know?"

\* \* \*

><p>155.8 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...Okay. Twi?"

"Yeah, Dash?"

"When we get back to Equestria, I'm going to tell them Haycartesing Daring Do into one of her own books leads to Eiken."

"It was \_your idea!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>155.9 (Gamerex27 ,Masterweaver, wildrook)<p>

"Oh princess!" Starlight called, waving Twilight over. "We just wanted to say thank you again for doing this for us."

Twilight, not for the first time in the last three hours, silently congratulated herself; having the foresight to cast a spell that would prevent her eyelids from twitching meant that most of the awkwardness wasn't outwardly projected. "Oh, I'm just happy I could help."

"And I'm really happy you did! When Rekky here proposed, he was worried that Equestria wouldn't recognize us." The unicorn leaned up and kissed the centaur full on the lips. "Admit it, big guy. You were wrong."

"Alright, alright, you got me." Tirek held up his hands and laughed amicably. "But really, Glim-glim, if it weren't for you I'd probably still be on my silly little quest for vengeance."

"And I'd probably still be plotting to force equality on Equestria," Starlight replied. "Funny how the world works, isn't it?"

"I'm happy for you two," Twilight said, her eyelid noticeably not

twitching at all. She really needed to use that spell more often.  
"Really. I am."

"My most sincere thanks, your highness." Tirek bowed-and Twilight was again reminded that he was still only the size of a pony right now. "Were it not for your efforts, I've little doubt Celestia and Luna would have taken me from my one true love." He looked deep into Starlight Glimmer's eyes, slowly pulling her in for another loving makeout.

"Just-just helping out. I, I... I should go." The alicorn turned around and trotted quickly toward the buffet table.

Rainbow Dash sidled up to her. "Okay, Twilight, I'm only going to ask this once. What the hay."

"I don't know, Dash. I just don't know."

Dashie stopped to think for a moment, then smirked, turning to one of the wedding guests and opening her mouth to make a snide joke.

"No," Cadence said flatly.

"...Huh?" the other mare asked, confused. "But, you of all ponies-"

"Too busy being baffled by all this to admire this wedding," the Princess replied, tilting her head yet again as the happy couple threw the bouquet into the crowd. "Also, they're evil-most of the time-so I really can't be happy for them, especially after everything they did to you.

"I mean," she said, sighing, "I hope they're happy and all...for all the scant few months the Loop lasts for, but this is not the couple for me."

Chrysalis grinned. "So the love goddess finally found the unshippable ship."

"Oh shut up."

"SECOND unshippable ship," Twilight muttered, surprising Chrysalis. "Four words, My Little Equality Unicorn."

Both Twilight and Cadance shivered at the memory of THAT Loop., Within the castle, Trixie cringed while trying to work on her latest trick. Within Equestria High, Sunset cringed as she nearly missed a note during rehearsal.

Derpy frowned. "This might be cliché, but... I don't get it."

"Let's just say that we objected due to their plans being WAY too similar," Twilight replied, "and the only method we could use was explosive overclocking. And Sunset learned the art of Trinity Limit. Funnily enough, the name was last minute, but the anagram was FOOF due to how the entire castle couldn't contain it."

"You, Trixie, and Sunset," Dash said. "Blowing up an entire Loop because the two were not only going to wed, but they were going to commit equality and genocide. And you three decided, 'Buck that Loop'



and gave out your objections."

"And I was forced to bind them in holy matrimony," Cadance muttered. "Next thing we knew, we were in Eiken."

"No, I mean, who did she marry?" Derpy asked. "Equality unicorn doesn't tell me a lot. There are a lot of people in the multiverse that want some twisted form of equality."

"...Celesto," Twilight and Cadance said, the name itself like a poison in their heads.

Shining recognized the name and cringed. "You two should have came to us sooner," he said, as a fellow victim of that variant.

Derpy frowned. "Is... is that a guy from the katamari loop? I've never heard of him before."

"Derpy," Rainbow Dash replied, "as your friend and sometimes wingpony, there are some variants you should be relieved at for not knowing until now. The setting of My Little Unicorn and the stuff the Star Trek Anchors would break Prime Directive for stealing the name 'Starfleet' and using it for mass genocide as well as Celesto being a three-horned unicorn that looked traumatized by Twilight's voice and wanted racial cleansing with her at the forefront of his EMPIRE is one of them."

Twilight sighed. "That's just the abridged version," she said. "The full story is worse. MUCH worse."

\* \* \*

><p>155.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...huh."

Spike sighed. "That's the 'I don't know what to think' huh, isn't it?"

"Yeah." Twilight held out a letter. "Shining actually remembered to tell me he got engaged this loop."

"...huh."

\* \* \*

><p>155.11 (Masterweaver, wildrook)<p>

"Hey girls!" Nyx jumped into the clubhouse with a huge grin. "Guess what?! I got a new pet!"

She eagerly presented the billowing cloud of fear smoke. "And the best part is, it's baseline! Me and Tanty will almost never be apart!"

Rarity cringed as she looked at the fear smoke, but was relieved when Nyx called it Tanty. "I thought its name would be Larry," she muttered.

Nyx blinked. "Wait, Rarity? I thought-" She looked across the fillies

and sighed. "So this is a reverse-sibling variant?"

"Looks like, sugarcube." Applejack adjusted her bow. "Never could figger why Bloom loves these things-"

"Anyway, yeah, its full name is Larry Tantabus Shadowfright, but-"

"You do realize that's literally a manifestation of Luna's guilt, right?" Rainbow pointed out.

Nyx frowned. "And I'm literally a manifestation of a split personality brought about by envy. I don't see what the big deal is."

"I thought Luna made that after she was purified," Rarity noted. "How exactly did you-?"

"No matter how she's purified, an unawake Luna will feel guilty and this little guy usually happens. A little bit of dream magic, a quick in-and-out dive, and boom."

"...and what if she's looping?"

"Haven't tested that yet."

\* \* \*

><p>155.12 (Dave ID, Masterweaver, wildrook)<p>

"Larry!" a male voice yelled. "LARRY! Where are you, Larry!?"

Normally, in Ponyville, pony names and pet names are more creative to their owners on their best judgment.

"LARRY!" a white unicorn male yelled, galloping through the area.

When Shining Armor found out about Nyx's pet, however, the full name does raise questions.

"THIS ISN'T FUNNY, LARRY!" Shining Armor yelled.

Cadance and Twilight Sparkle were quite surprised...then Twilight face-palmed.

"Shiny," Cadance, the only one who hasn't heard, asked, "who's Larry?"

"Oh, Twily," Shining Armor replied. "Cadance. You guys haven't seen a fear cloud, have you?"

"Fear...cloud?" Cadance asked them.

"He's referring to Nyx's new pet," Twilight said. "How do you lose a fear cloud?"

"I don't know!" Shining Armor yelled. "I've never even thought of a fear cloud as a pet! LARRY TANTABUS SHADOWFRIGHT!"

That's when screams of terror were heard from the Academy of Gifted Unicorns.

"Oh, found him," Shining Armor muttered. "Twily, I might need assistance."

Twilight groaned. "I'll find the others and see if Moondancer's not traumatized," she said.

"Am I the only one not getting the full story?" Cadance asked them.

"We'll explain later," Twilight replied. "We forgot it was Sleep Study night at the Academy."

\* \* \*

><p>"Bad Tanty!" Nyx sprayed the fear cloud with her squirt bottle. "Bad! We do NOT give nightmares to ponies who do not deserve it."<p>

Moondancer was flabbergasted as she watched the chaos unfold.

"What in the name of Celestia..." she muttered, looking at the fear cloud.

"Moondancer, this is Larry Tantabus Shadowfright," Twilight said. "Larry, this is Moondancer."

"That thing has a NAME!?"

"Long story. VERY long story!"

"It involves a nightmare!" Pinkie Pie said.

"Pinkie, why are you here?"

"Somepony here made a Pinkie Promise, and I'm going there right now. Oh, gotta go!" Pinkie disappeared.

"Is that normal?" Moondancer asked.

"It's actually pretty low-key for her."

Moondancer just sighed with resignation. "Is everyone from Ponyville this...crazy?" she asked Twilight.

Twilight shrugged. "They're pretty decent people, but they are eccentric."

"Hey mom, Tanty's been tamed. Do you have the carrier?"

Moondancer's eyes widened as Twilight produced a plastic box covered in runes. "Wait, did that little alicorn just call you \_mom?\_"

"I adopted her," Twilight explained simply. "Found her panicking in the forest, completely amnesiac. Get in here, Larry." She shoved the fear cloud in with her magic.

"Thanks mom! Oh, who's this?"

"Oh, this is Moondancer, one of my oldest friends. Moondancer, this is Nyx Sparkle, my adopted daughter."

Moondancer just waved. "Nice to meet you, Nyx," she said. "Now if you'll excuse me, I need to lie down." At that moment, she fainted.

'\_At least she didn't snap under pressure,\_' Twilight thought.

\* \* \*

><p>155.13 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

"Twilight?"

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Why is there a rabbit on your head?"

"Because after several Loops replacing Puu, Ryo-Ohki and Diana, riding around like this got to be a habit," the rabbit replied. "So when I found Momma earlier, I asked her nicely, and she said yes."

Rarity stared. "Nyx?"

The rabbit smirked. "Yes?"

"WHY are you a rabbit?"

"I think it's a play on the old 'rabbit on the moon' myths from the Hub," Twilight interjected.

Nyx nodded in agreement.

Rarity smiled. "You realize, of course, this is going in my photo album."

"As long as we get copies," Twilight told her friend with a grin.

"But of course."

\* \* \*

><p>155.14 (Gym Quirk)<p>

Moondancer's party was winding down. Twilight had said her farewells and was about to offer Pinkie a teleport back to Ponyville.

"Hey, Twilight?" Pinkie's demeanor was oddly serious.

"Yes, Pinkie?"

"Could you teach me that 'Enter the Book' spell?"

"I'm not sure if I can adapt it to earth pony magic, or even your version thereof. You'd probably have to ascend to use it."

"No biggie. It's just that I've got these..." The party pony pulled a pair of printed primers from her pocket. "I can manifest inside most books, but I don't pick up much of anything in there. You said your spell lets you absorb some of the content..."

Twilight examined the volumes. "\_Discours de la MÃ©thode\_? \_Meditationes de Prima Philosophia\_? Bit of a departure from your usual reading list, aren't they?"

"Yeah. I kinda got onto a philosophy jag when Cheerilee asked me 'What is happiness?' for that 'History of Thought' course she's working on."

"Sure, Pinkie. Let me know when you have a couple of free hours."

\_Never thought that Pinkie'd be one to get trapped by putting Descartes before the Horse\_, mused Twilight.

\* \* \*

><p>155.15 (wildrook)<p>

Mac couldn't believe his eyes...neither did the Looping Crusaders, for that matter.

"No way," Diamond Tiara muttered.

"Ah'm just as surprised as you are," Apple Bloom replied, noticing the moves on the thug that tried to threaten Sweetie Belle.

"PILE DRIVER!" Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo yelled.  
"PILE-DRIVER!"

Indeed, Cheerilee had attempted a piledriver on the rogue pony that tried to threaten Filthy Rich, Granny Smith, and Rarity at the same time. Normally, you had to be very dim in order to threaten not only Filthy Rich's daughter and her best friend, the youngest of the Apple Family, Rarity's sister, Rainbow Dash's adopted sister, and Twilight Sparkle's daughter by themselves (especially since Big Mac was there chaperoning their trip to Manehattan) and ask for unconditional surrender or else they off one of the students. Before any of the Elements and Big Mac could step in, it was Cheerilee that made the first move.

And the first move was a right jab into the stomach to the closest one.

"Big Mac," Apple Bloom said, "did you know about Miss Cheerilee being a wrestler?"

"Ee-nope," Big Mac replied.

And he wasn't kidding. Half the moves could be mistaken for a bear's massage therapy, but to see Cheerilee pull this off was quite a development.

"RETREAT!" the lead pony yelled, carrying their wounded and getting AWAY from the teacher.

Cheerilee had looked at the seven that were standing there, gaping.

"Oh," she said. "Sorry...guess I lost myself."

"Miss Cheerilee," Silver Spoon asked her, "what was that?"

"Turns out in some Loops, I've got a twin sister that's in the wrestling business," she replied. "Figured that I'd contact her and learn a few things from her. I just didn't think I'd have to use it before the others got here..."

"No," Nyx said, "they're on clean-up duty. Although I didn't take Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo as wrestling fans."

"And Ah really appreciate you defending Apple Bloom," Big Mac said, blushing. "Kind of wish Ah could have assisted."

"Maybe next time, Big Mac," Cheerilee replied. "Until then, let's continue the rest of the field trip before something else happens."

\* \* \*

><p>155.16 (wildrook)<p>

"KING ASPEN!" a voice yelled. "ARE YOU READY TO FACE THE MINOTAUR WITH PROGRESS ON HIS MIND!? WELL, TONIGHT, IN THE EVERFREE FOREST, YOU WILL FACE THE STAMPEDING, WORKHORSE, CHINA SHOP CONSTRUCTOR, WELLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLL-TOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO-DOOOOOOOOOO!"

Twilight face-hooved as she looked at the situation. Well-To-Do, for some odd reason, was channeling Recoome from the Abridged Dragon Ball series and challenging Aspen to wrestling.

"AND THIS IS GOING TO BE ALL-OR-NOTHING AS WHEN I WIN, THE FOREST WILL BE MARKED FOR THE PARK AND YOU WILL BE MY MASCOT! BECAUSE I AM WELL-TO-DO, AND I WILL BE YOUR DOOM! AND YOU'LL START FEELING PAIN, ALL! TOO! SOOOOOOOOON!"

King Aspen glared as he and Blackthorn were assessing the situation.

"Shouldn't Cheerilee be here with us?" Rarity asked them. "Her sister's the wrestler..."

"She has a sister?" Rainbow Dash asked her.

"...Wrestling's fake," Blackthorn said, plainly.

That caused an uproar among the minotaurs.

"This is a worse idea than making a Card Game vital for the fate of the world," Twilight muttered, "I swear to the Roots of the Horse Chestnut."

"Agreed," a voice said, among the Minotaurs. "You never were the smartest bulb, Well-To-Do."

The Construction Pony freaked out. "Wait, I know that voice..."

"So do I," Fluttershy replied. "It's..."

"IRON WILL! How did you find me?"

"How can I not find you?" Iron Will asked Well-To-Do. "One of the carrier pigeons was sent to me by mistake!"

"But I had my men catch all of the carrier pigeons that were to be sent to Princess Celestia and...I said that out-loud, didn't I?"

King Aspen then growled. "So that's why she never got my messages," he muttered. "So, Mr. Will...how'd you get my message?"

"Let's just say that Well-To-Do's policies were illegal even by my race's standards, Lord Aspen," Iron Will replied. "And raiding the Everfree Forest? Last I checked, there was a Hydra living here! I'm just here to make sure he doesn't get killed before I turn him in myself."

Aspen was blinking. "Not exactly my usual title," he said, "but at this point, when it comes to assistance for damaging my kingdom and finding out why the Royal Sisters never replied, I'd be glad for the assistance if you're after the ringleader."

"As soon as you recall the vines from Ponyville and Canterlot," Twilight replied. "Then, we'll move them out of the way...other than that, Fluttershy, how DID you send the Pigeon to Iron Will?"

"Misdirection," Fluttershy replied. "I CAN tame the animals of the forest, remember?"

"Oh...right...well...anyone up for popcorn?"

"As soon as we take care of the mafia," Pinkie Pie replied, "THEN we can watch Iron Will and King Aspen throw down the hurting on Well-To-Do. Seriously, why didn't we think of this before? It's like we were losing IQ points in this kind of situation..."

\* \* \*

><p>155.17 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight blinked at what came out of the egg during this test and then at her parents. Widening her eyes and quivering her lip, she unleashed the best puppy eyes she had to beg Twilight Velvet and Nightlight to keep the newly hatched being.

The fact that Celestia shrunk the Awake Tyrannosaurus Rex looper and said young reptile was sucking on her tail certainly did help matters.

\* \* \*

><p>155.18 (OathToOblivion)<p>

As Phoenix Wright Awoke, he noticed that he was standing in a

familiar tree house. \_(Looks like another Equestria Fused Loop. Wonder what's up this time?)\_

"Phoenix!"

Phoenix turned to see Twilight looking at him. She looked slightly worried, so Phoenix felt the need to put her at ease somehow. "Hey, Twilight. What's the matter?" he asked. However, upon his saying that, Twilight looked slightly confused.

"Oh, uh, nothing much. It's just a typical Fused Loop, like we normally have. You know, the Equestria 500 and everything. But...are you all right?" she wondered.

\_(? What's that supposed to mean?)\_

"Um, of course I am. Why, did you think something happened?" Phoenix questioned, a confused look on his face.

"Well, it's just...Last Loop we saw each other, you said that you had told Apollo about his mother, and were worried about how you were going to tell Trucy about her..." Twilight started.

\_\*\*HOLD IT!\*\*\_

"What? I never said anything like that! I told Trucy about that a long time ago!" Phoenix exclaimed. Now he was really confused about what she was talking about.

"Huh...that's bizarre. I distinctly remember you telling me about that. And then I heard that somebody from one of those Kamen Rider Loops had seen you crying away on a bench. Something about Trucy abandoning you, sending you a letter, and going with Apollo to Borginia?" Twilight mused.

"! ...That never happened!" Phoenix denied. "Or rather...Trucy did go to Borginia with an Unawake Apollo one Loop, and sent me a letter. But I'm the one who let her go in the first place, and I had Maya trailing behind them as backup!"

Twilight scrunched up her face in thought. She knew Phoenix wouldn't lie to her about something like this, and she herself wasn't lying. But that meant...

"'When you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains must be the truth'," she quoted. "Neither of us are lying about what we're saying, which means the Phoenix Wright I met that Loop was an imposter!" she declared.

\_\*\*OBJECTION!\*\*\_

"But whoever that was knew about that one early Loop where Trucy went to Borginia, and they knew that Apollo started Looping. Which means it has to be someone we personally know. And that also doesn't explain the appearance of that person in the Kamen Rider Loops. I know some of those guys, and they wouldn't pull anything like this," Phoenix pointed out.

"You're right. This is a mystery that isn't going to be solved that easily," Twilight agreed. "But right now, we have one trial to



overcome. Let's focus on Rainbow's Trial first, then let's think about this mystery."

"All right..."

\_(I can't believe it. Someone's been impersonating me? I already had my fill with that in baseline, what with Furio Tigre and the phantom. I don't want a Looping one too!)\_

\* \* \*

><p>155.19 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Moondancer's jaw dropped. "You... apologize?"

Twilight Sparkle bowed her head solemnly. "I was completely thoughtless and self-absorbed. I never thought about your feelings, and that was wrong. I'm very sorry, and if there's any way I can make it up to you, I will. I still want to be your friend."

"Oh," Moondancer said, and, "Er," and, "Ah," and after a prolonged pause, "Could you pardon me a moment?" The door to Moondancer's long-neglected house shut, and from within Twilight heard the cessation of a sound she hadn't realized was there; the high-pitched electro-mechanical whining on the edge of hearing descended rapidly through the range of tones and faded into silence.

Then Moondancer reopened the door, smiling awkwardly and chuckling nervously. "There we go, had to go turn off the stove. Totally not at all shutting down my Doomsday Revenge on All Ponies Device two minutes before zero hour. Because I don't have one of those. What pony would? Hahahahaha!"

Pinkie Pie leaned over and whispered in Twilight's ear, "Wow, she really IS just like you!"

"Er... would you like to come to a party?" Twilight said, choosing to ignore the blatant lies. "It's going to be in the courtyard park where you were going to have yours. I thought-"

"Um, yeah, sure!" Moondancer nodded. "It'll be good to catch up on old times. But I may be a little late. I still have a bit of tidying up to do. And by tidy up I definitely do not mean overseeing the complete shutdown of a hot arcanite reactor and the restoration of eight redundant fail-safe triggers to no-go status."

"That's OK!" Pinkie responded. "We're still waiting on the cake anyway! See you at four o'clock?"

"Sure- oh, one more thing?" Moondancer reached behind her door and held out a large white cat, even fluffier than Opalescence. It growled at Twilight menacingly. "Could you find a home for Blofeld here? He kind of came with the swivel chair I absolutely do not have."

\_I must remember,\_ Twilight noted to herself, \_not to leave reconciliation with my Canterlot friends so late in the Loop, no matter what other distractions there are. Variants happen.\_

The thing which Twilight had taken as a minaret, but which looked

more and more like a magical blast emitter array, slowly retracted itself into Moondancer's roof, which closed shut over it with a click.

\* \* \*

><p>155.20 (Tangent)<p>

"I'm so glad you could all make it to my party," Moondancer stated with a shy smile at her gathered friends. She was especially glad that Twilight Sparkle had come as, among the four, Twilight was the one she felt the closest connection to.

"I Just wish I could stay longer," Twilight replied.

"What do you mean?" Moondancer asked.

"I just got an assignment from Princess Celestia to oversee the Summer Sun Celebration in Ponyville this year. I have to be there before noon tomorrow if I'm supposed to make sure everything is in order."

"Ooh, I'll be moving back to Ponyville after graduation!" Lyra Heartstrings mentioned. "You'll love it there! The library is actually built into an enchanted oak!"

"What? Like a classic mage house?" Minuet asked.

"I thought that those only popped up in fantasy stories?" Lemon Hearts interjected.

"Fantasy or not, that's apparently where I'll be staying while I'm away on the assignment. Moondancer?"

"Yes, Twilight?"

"I'm probably only going to be gone for a few days, but just in case it takes longer, would you mind watching over my apartment for me?" Twilight asked, levitating a spare key over to the surprised unicorn.

"You want me to watch your apartment?"

"You can even study there if you want. It's kind of set up like a mini-library."

"HA!" Minuet exclaimed cheerfully. "I knew you lived in a library!"

"I would be honored," Moondancer accepted Twilight's spare key with a smile.

Twilight Sparkle smiled herself as she made a mental note to make sure to keep in touch with her friends in Canterlot from now on, unless she was riding a loop tight to the base-line for whatever reason. Hmmm... After Nightmare Moon was dealt with this time, perhaps she'd extend her requested apartment sitting to an offer to actually stay there instead? After all, apparently Celestia had never gotten around to assigning the tower apartment to anypony else while she was gone...

\* \* \*

><p>155.21 (BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

Trixie stared at the small booklet in her hooves with glazed eyes, before turning back to Chrysalis. "Has Trixie told you how much she loves you recently?"

"You could stand to mention it more often." the changeling queen replied with a smirk. "I simply thought you could use some new material, I know how much your act means to you."

Trixie nodded eagerly as she skimmed the packet again. "Indeed it does. And Trixie knows exactly who should be the first to witness Trixie's newest and greatest performance! After the last few Expansions Twilight asked Trixie to give her regards to her friend Moondancer. It is quite enjoyable to have an appreciative audience and so Trixie has been doing exactly that!"

"In other words you like having your ego inflated."

Trixie humphed and refused to dignify that with a response.

\* \* \*

><p>Moonshine frowned. "Does your 'entertainment' all consist of pointless ego stroking?"<p>

Trixie grumbled under her breath at the amused look Chrysalis directed at her before re-donning her stage persona. "The Great and Powerful Trixie has prepared a small performance for this event which she is certain you will find most enjoyable."

So saying she climbed to the stage of her cart and activated a self-playing piano. Once the song had reached the proper intro Trixie began to sing.

\_ "Iiit's Hexanitrohexaazaisowurtzitaaane\_

\_ Even though the synthesis is really quite insaaane\_

\_ If it touches almost anything it will go up in  
flaames\_

\_ Hexanitrohexaazaisowurtzitaaane!\_

\_ Um diddle diddle diddle um diddle boom!\_

\_ Um diddle diddle diddle um diddle boom!\_

\_ Um diddle diddle diddle um diddle boom!\_

\_ Um diddle diddle diddle um diddle boom!"\_

Moondancer was surprised by the unexpectedly scientific nature of the song and found herself smiling, a fact which her friends were pleased by as they joined her for the show. To their surprise a violet Alicorn figure which Moondancer recognized as bearing a resemblance to the mythical sister of Celestia walked onto the stage.

\_ "When I was learning chemistry\_  
\_ I made a few mistakes\_  
\_ My potions weren't that good\_  
\_ But my explosions were first rate\_  
\_ One day I met a mare who said\_  
\_ She'd show me what to do\_  
\_ I tried to make Dioxygen Difluoride\_  
\_ And I woke up on the moon" \_

Moondancer giggled at that, finding the irreverence to the supposed origins of the Mare in the Moon to be highly amusing. Even though they didn't get the reference the others also found it rather funny, if Minuette's reaction was anything to go by. Abruptly they gasped as the Alicorn figure suddenly revealed herself as a changeling before shifting into the form of a griffin they didn't recognize just in time for the chorus.

\_ "Hexanitrohexaazaisowurtzitaaane\_  
\_ Even though the synthesis is really quite insaaane\_  
\_ If it touches almost anything it will go up in  
flaames\_  
\_ Hexanitrohexaazaisowurtzitaaane!\_  
\_ Um diddle diddle diddle um diddle boom!\_  
\_ Um diddle diddle diddle um diddle boom!\_  
\_ Um diddle diddle diddle um diddle boom!\_  
\_ Um diddle diddle diddle um diddle boom!\_  
\_ I've been around the world\_  
\_ From Fillydelphia to Roam\_  
\_ I've seen a lot of things\_  
\_ That I could never see at home\_  
\_ But all the places that I've been\_  
\_ I didn't want to be\_  
\_ I never tried to get there\_  
\_ I was sent by TNT" \_

Accompanied by a small explosion of smoke, the fear of the changeling was replaced by laughter as the smoke cleared to reveal a seemingly

charred griffin.

\_ "Hexanitrohexaazaisowurtzitaaane\_

\_ Even though the synthesis is really quite insaaane\_

\_ If it touches almost anything it will go up in  
flaames\_

\_ Hexanitrohexaazaisowurtzitaaane!\_

\_ Um diddle diddle diddle um diddle boom!\_

\_ Um diddle diddle diddle um diddle boom!\_

\_ Um diddle diddle diddle um diddle boom!\_

\_ Um diddle diddle diddle um diddle boom! '\_

\_ 'You know Trixie could take it further and synthesize  
Heptanitrocubane"\_

The changeling quickly leveled a glare at the unicorn performer who  
immediately backed down.

\_ "But that's going a bit too far, don't you think?"\_

At this point Moondancer was trying not to join in on Minuette's  
uproarious laughter, wanting to at least see the end of the act. Now  
completely revealed as a Changeling both mares on the stage continued  
singing.

\_ "So if Tirek approaches\_

\_ There is no need for despair\_

\_ Just synthesis this chemical\_

\_ And hurry out of there\_

\_ But better do it carefully\_

\_ Or it could change your life"\_

The Changeling moved forward to center stage. \_ "For  
example"\_

\_ "Yes" \_Trixie led.

\_ "One night I gave it to my marefriend\_

\_ And she blew up my Hive"\_

This was said with a glare which nearly cost Moondancer her  
composure.

\_ "Hey! Trixie said she was sorry"\_

Aaannnd, there it went. Collapsing into laughter along with her  
friends Moondancer barely noticed as the duo on stage finished their

act.

\_"It's Hexanitrohexaazaisowurtzitaaane\_"

\_"Even though the synthesis is really quite insaaane\_"

\_"If it touches almost anything it will go up in  
flaames\_"

\_"Hexanitrohexaazaisowurtzitaaane!"\_"

As the music wound down Trixie stared with satisfaction at the result of her performance. Combining two of her favorite things in Equestria into one glorious act, truly her love knew her well. Pushing affectionately against Chrysalis' side she moved to the front of the stage to take her bow.

(Masterweaver)

"It's obvious they stole that tune," Lemon Hearts whispered to Minuette, "but I can't figure out from where!"

"Shush," Minuette replied. "Not everything has to be completely original, and look how happy Moondancer is!"

\* \* \*

><p>155.22 (Masterweaver)<p>

Bonbon blinked, looking around. Ponyville seemed kind of strange at the moment... what with Derpy being a giant that meowed, amongst other things. What in the world was-

"MnnMnn?"

The earth pony looked down at her hoof.

Her green hoof.

Her four green hooves.

Each with a face.

And the sweet roll that had replaced her tail.

"...uh... Lyra? What's going on?"

\* \* \*

><p>155.23 (Masterweaver)<p>

"EEEEP!" Applejack jumped up as Luna burst out of the closet. "What are ya-oh. Right. This is a dream, ain't it?"

Luna nodded. "I apologize, but the Tantabus-" She leaned her head to the side. "Ah... who exactly is that?"

"Oh! Uh..." Applejack blushed. "Well, ya see... Luna, this is mah dream husband. Dream husband, this is Luna. Ah, uh, Ah can't actually always control mah dreams, and a filly can go wondering

sometimes-

"Say no more. This is hardly the most awkward situation we have stumbled upon." Luna flushed, glancing away. "There are quite a few dreams in which I star-

"Heh, Ah can only imagine how awkward that must be. Take it as a compliment!" Applejack suggested with a broad grin. "Ah mean, if them colts and, Ah suspect, fillies feel yer the best... partner that they can dream up, there's gotta be a reason for that! Ain't that right, dream husband?"

"Why absolutely, miss Applejack my fine filly! Don't you agree brother of mine?"

"Indubitably, brother of mine! There's no such thing as bad publicity!"

The orange mare's face fell. "Tantabus hit him while Ah wasn't lookin', didn't it."

Luna raised a hoof. "I'd... suspect as much, yes, I was rather distracted by my own thoughts."

"Right." Applejack rose a hoof and materialized something she'd seen an Ork carrying once. "Why don't ya'll go on huntin' the durn thing, Luna? This dream's about ta get mighty bloody."

\* \* \*

><p>155.24 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Oh hey Luna." Nyx waved at the approaching alicorn. "How's life?"

"Life is fair, Nigh-ahem, Nyx." Luna cleared her throat. "Might I ask why you are forming this shared dream?"

"Oh. See my friends, a bunch of looping fillies, they get into competitions every so often. 'Who can build the best battleship,' 'who can build the best starship,' that sort of thing. So recently, they decided to have a little dream competition. Last one sleeping wins."

The larger alicorn nodded, watching the chaos around her. "I... see. So long as you're not abusing your powers, I suppose..."

"Nah, I'm the referee here. Care to stay and watch?" Nyx summoned up some dream popcorn. "I mean, it's a look into the minds of loopers that most Unawake ponies will never get."

\* \* \*

><p>155.25 (Evilhumour)<p>

"-ood day miss." the person in front of her said, handing her a package of groceries which she did her best not to let hit her in the face with her magic. Nodding numbly as Vinyl Woke up, she backed up and let herself be carried away in the crowd of strange looking people in this odd looking city. Kinda of a mixture of Rare's

fashionness and Discord's weirdness, she thought to herself as people more or less ignored her except to tell her off for bumping into them.

Grunting back the multiversal curses to the idiot, the unicorn \_tried\_ kick start her loop memories of \_where\_ she looped in and what the \_sap\_ was going on. Jumping back in surprise as there was a sudden splash of water from the wheel of a cart being pulled close to the gutters that nearly hit her face, she was sorely tempted to do the simple thing and ask someone where they were when she heard the loudest cry ever-even louder than the time that Twilight's library was stuck in an infinite destruction loop bug for that one loop. Using her magic to pull several people her side of the street as several of the buildings across of her were simply \_gone\_. Already, people around her were panicking and shouting.

"What was that?!" One person shouted, looking around like a chicken with their head cut off.

"Dammit Vinyl, you got me covered in mud!" Another person glared at her from the gutters, looking if he would grab some himself and toss it at the white unicorn.

"To hell with you, the mare just saved your life!" The woman next to him slapped his hand and shoved him into the mud completely.

"Excuse me, but where the \_spruce\_ did that come from?!" Vinyl shouted, her magic already reaching out to move several of remaining rubble to a single spot, people already looking for survivors.

"I don't know but it \_seemed\_ to come from the royal pala..." the person trailed off, Vinyl already in the air with her wub hooves propelling her the distance as her loop memories finally kicked in.

\* \* \*

><p>"So you see I-<em>OW<em> dammit kid, my ears do \_not\_ come off-" Vinyl grunted to the baby on her neck, laughing his head off as discovered more things of his new toy. "I heard the little tyke crying, and since I kinda am the master of all sound-\_EEEEK!\_" Vinyl squeaked as the infant discovered her glowing horn, and had \_very\_ cold hands. Blushing, she let the mother lift the infant up, moving to sit beside the mare. Smirking, the mother sat down beside the looper so the child could be near the mare who was eying the tail. "A-and when I heard \_him\_ cry out, I knew I could easily tame it and put it under control."

"Which you have shown effortlessly, Lady Scratch," the woman opposite of her said with a smile. "And I am glad that young Blackagar Boltagon will have a fine mentor training him to use his powers safely." the smile then turned a bit vicious, leaning down to stare into Vinyl's red eyes. "To which you will agree to, correct?"

"Yeah..." Vinyl blushed, looking the still furious royal guards, their weapons still all pointed at her. Perhaps bursting into the room where the queen was giving birth, using her magic on the infant without saying anything was \_kinda\_ a poor idea. "Again, I'm kinda sorry about that..."



"We all make mistakes, Lady Scratch," the woman said, nodding her head as she began to feed the young prince. "But what counts is that you do not \_repeat\_ them, understand?" the glare was back, making Vinyl more scared of her than the guards that were ready to poke her with a lot of pointy objects. Nodding her head, the woman smile relaxed. Reaching out with a free hand, she pressed down on the unicorn's nose. "Go-"

"\_MEEP!\_" Vinyl squeaked, as she shot off some dubstep magic into the air, blushing as she did so. "Um...\_please\_ no booping my nose?"

\* \* \*

><p>155.26 (Evilhumour)<p>

"\_Nyooooooooooooxxx, call off your pet!\_"

Twilight blinked as she was stirred awake by somepony shouting.

Sticking her head out of the window, she watched Lemon running in circles as the fear cloud chased after him, spitting out lightning bolts at the stallion for no adequately explained reason.

Turning her head to the side, she saw a makeshift rope coming out of her daughter's bedroom window and began to smirk to herself.

As Nyx pulled the Tantabulus off her boyfriend and began to soothe the fear-cloud, she chuckled and began to record.

It looked like the traditional boyfriend-sneaks-into-girlfriend's-room concern wasn't much of one.

\* \* \*

><p>155.27 (Evilhumour)<p>

"I've got an army," Loki bragged.

"We've got this muffin. Here, catch!" Tony smiled as he tossed the baked good at the surprised Asgardian.

"You really think a \_muffin\_ will stop m-" That was as far as Loki got before he was bowled over by Derpy.

\* \* \*

><p>155.28 (Evilhumour)<p>

"I can't believe you \_stole\_ them!" Twilight shouted, shaking her head.

"I didn't \_steal\_ them, I \_found\_ them!" Sticky Hooves flared his wings out. "It's not \_my\_ fault that I \_care\_ for precious artifacts of the past unlike the rest of you and they were just \_laying\_ there for anyone to find and use!"

"Gah!" Twilight groaned, rubbing her head with her hoof. "Well, would

you \_please\_ give me the Elements of Harmony? We kinda need them."  
Twilight looked over her shoulder to watch Rainbow Dash lead  
Nightmare Moon around the Everfree Castle.

"I'd like to give you a complete set before I do so..." Sticky Hooves  
muttered.

"We \_do\_ need to use them to recreate the sixth element you know..."  
Twilight raised an eyebrow at the looper who grumbled as he pulled  
out the stone orbs of the Elements of Harmony.

Twilight quickly gave them to her friends to save Luna and rid her of  
the Nightmare Forces.

\* \* \*

><p>Slowly, as Twilight woke up from using the Elements, she noticed  
something was missing.<p>

"Uh girls, where are the Elements?" Twilight asked the confused mares  
before realizing there was a note attached to her nose.

\_ 'I found the Elements of Harmony \_first \_Twilight, so they are \_my  
\_relics, not yours.\_

\_Chapter Master Sticky Hooves of the Blood Ravens.\_'

Frowning as she crumpled the paper up, Twilight said, "Bloody  
magpies."

\* \* \*

><p>155.29 (Heliomance)<p>

Twilight's library shuddered, shook, and finally one wall smashed  
entirely. From the wreckage rolled a pair of enormous treads,  
carrying a vast tank. Nearly fourteen metres long, it looked slightly  
absurd emerging from the tree, that was clearly too small to hold it.  
The absurdity was compounded by the fact that it was painted a  
bright, cheery shade of pink, and each of its seven cannons was  
adorned with balloons.

Lemon Rush gaped at the Balloonblade Super Heavy Party Tank as it  
rotated its turret to aim at Tirek. "But - how?! To hide that tank  
there, you'd have to be some kind of-" - realisation flashed across  
his face - "tactical genius!"

Twilight's eye started to twitch, as the dust from her demolished  
library began to settle around her. "PIIIIIINKIIIIIIIE!"

\* \* \*

><p>155.30 (BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

The members of the Cutie Mark Crusaders sat quietly, for once, in  
their clubhouse. The reason for their silence had less to do with a  
lack of activity and more to do with the giant blueprints spread out  
across the floor.

"Okay girls, today's tha big day. This Loop has a second holiday to

honor the Founders besides Hearthswarming Eve and thanks ta gettin some help from a few other scientists in some a' mah recent Fused Loops, Ah think we're finally ready to put the last touches on the special suits we were makin' for Cookie, Clover and Pansy."

Taking over from Applebloom Silver Spoon floated over to a specific section of the schematics. "The original design had some problems with my Alchemy skills, so I had to do a lot of research to try and figure out the various differences between Alchemy and Equestrian Magic. Twilight and Trixie helped a lot, and I think I can replicate most of the necessary parts using my Chaos Magic. That should allow them to access normal Earth, Pegasus and Unicorn Magic as long as the Transmutation Circles don't wear out."

Scotaloo and Sweetie Belle moved forward. "With Sweetie's help I was able to put together something to get the suits air ready. We just needed to figure out how to get all the parts working together. Sweetie had the idea to fuse Song Magic into the parts so that they when they were put together it basically uses the magic for Heartsongs to act like a normal body, no extra effort needed. That way they don't have to try and relearn how to use their bodies. Plus we can use it for all three instead of just for the pegasus model. I did all the manual stuff while Sweetie worked her magic and the results look promising."

Nyx smiled happily as she stepped up. "I know how much this means to you guys, so I volunteered to be the one to provide the power." Reaching into her Pocket she retrieved a red gem nearly three times the size of her hoof. "I used about a thousand years worth of my Magic from the Loops to make this Philosopher's Stone. According to Silver the mix of energies should help her cover the gaps where they don't match up right."

Applebloom nodded and took the lead again. "And Ah put it all together usin' th' nanites Ah reverse engineered way back. Ah think we're ready."

\* \* \*

><p>Pansy shifted nervously in her seat, her wings fluttering anxiously behind her. The euphoria she felt at finally having a body again, one just as good as her original and perhaps better even, was momentarily set aside as she looked at the view in front of her. Seated next to her were a mechanical Earth and Unicorn pony, Cookie and Clover respectively. They seemed to share her feelings if the looks on their, surprisingly expressive, faces were any indication.<p>

"We're gathered here today ta \_officially \_welcome the newest members of the Cutie Mark Crusaders: Smart Cookie, Clover th' Clever and Private Pansy." Standing next to the three Intelligent Devices, turned robots, was the CMC; each of whom was wearing their member only capes. The same capes which decorated the chassis' of the Founder trio.

"Uh, Applebloom? Do we really need to be doing this?" Cookie asked, nervously glancing down the very steep hill they were perched upon. The filly nodded with a wide smile.

"A'course. It's tradition." And with that she gave the wheelbarrow in

which the three founders of Equestria sat a gentle push, sending it rolling rapidly downhill. As they watched their friends rocket through the center of Ponyville and towards the Everfree, the CMC gave the departing group a parting cheer.

"Happy Founder's Day!"

\* \* \*

><p>155.31 (Masterweaver) (continuation of 150.1)<p>

Berry shook her head. "Scho. Scho Leelee. I'sch wasch thinking about zebralicorni."

Her sister hiccuped. "You, you mean Zecora, yesh?" She tilted her glass and peered at it. "Alsho, why are we drunk again?"

"For old time'sh schake, filly. Canna be a brewer if 'n ye don't sample sometimes!" Berry giggled at her horrendous scottish accent. "Aaaaaanywaaaaaysh. Sho Zecy's a zebabra, yesh?"

"Uh-huh."

"But, but she goesh alicornity. Zebrabicorn."

"Yeah, she \*hic\* she does. Why don't you ever do, do the drunk \*hic\* thing?"

"Ish genetic."

"We're shishters!"

"My point. My point is. Alicornys are mixies of all three ponies. But Zecy's a zebzeb. Sho she, she's not got earth pony, yesh?"

"Okay...?"

"Sho, sho if she hashen't got'sh hershelf earth pony, maybe, maybe she'sh not got hershelf peggypony or cornypony either?"

Cheerilee held up a hoof, paused for a moment, then gasped for ten seconds with two interrupting hiccups. "Whoa. Sho what, what happensh if she triesh to ushe her unicorn magic or \*hic\* her, her pegasush magic-?"

At about that time, Cadance ran into the bar. "Okay, there's a reasonable explanation for this, but my dating simulator is currently flooding Canterlot mansions with exotic tea and me and Zecora need help putting it down!"

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

155.1: Clothing quality is secondary. Everyone wants a Twilight Suit.

>155.2: Now that is subtle.<br>155.3: It's just a savoury meal!

>155.4: Finally, no-one around to stop her.<br>155.5: It's not

simple, but it works.

>155.6: It's a long story. And would probably make a good rom-com.<br>155.7: Some things are not funny. (Joker's from DC.)

>155.8: I'm not sure why, but it does.<br>155.9: Erg. That's a marginally worse rated rom-com.

>155.10: Some variations are minor.<br>155.11: Hence a pet.

>155.12: Hence trouble with a pet.<br>155.13: Nice perch if you can get it. There's even a handhold.

>155.14: Ow.<br>155.15: School of hard knocks.

>155.16: Some solutions are simple.<br>155.17: Spike replaced.

>155.18: You really need the shouts to be flashing and in an odd format.<br>155.19: Not-quite-mad science.

>155.20: Or you could do that.<br>155.21: Ah, a song.

>155.22: This could get inconvenient.<br>155.23: Oog.

>155.24: Competitive bunch, aren't they...<br>155.25: It's complicated. (Marvel)

>155.26: They just saw Romeo and Juliet.<br>155.27: It works. (Marvel)

>155.28: Dang Blood Ravens. (40K)<br>155.29: Dang Creed. (Also 40K)

>155.30: A long, long term project.<br>155.31: In vino veritas.

## 163. Chapter 163

### 156.1 (Masterweaver)

"Okay." Cadance grinned. "Twilight and Moondancer."

Chrysalis twisted her lip, bringing a hoof to her muzzle. "I'm... going to say no."

"What? But you've seen how close those two are in baseline. And with help from looping Twi, Moondancer can grow into a ridiculously competent and confident mare--"

"And there's the problem." Chrysalis took a sip from her tea. "See, romance is about give and take, but Moondancer... Moondancer grew attached to Twilight because Twilight had the confidence that Moondancer didn't. I mean, both of them were... well-read, shall we say, but I feel that Twilight's lack of sociability relates more to her insistence on maintaining control alienating her from other ponies, whereas Moondancer seems to be a natural introvert justifying her lack of sociability as other ponies simply not being intelligent enough to understand her. Twilight was basically Moondancer's exploratory social probe growing up, at least on a subconscious level."

"So it'd be perfectly natural for her to develop a crush on Twilight," Cadance pointed out. "After all, not only is the filly an intellectual equal, but the level of trust and admiration necessary to employ Twilight like that could easily develop into infatuation. Admittedly, it might dull for a bit once the two of them gain the crowd of other Canterlot friends, but it could still be there, lingering until re-awakened. While the whole part where Twilight took leave of her party during the Nightmare Moon incident would be

problematic, I can see them getting together with a little nudging and the looping Twilight wouldn't even have to worry about that."

"Except that Twilight, looping or not, would not be contributing to this relationship," Chrysalis argued. "She would consider Moondancer a close friend, but the non-looping Twilight would probably be too high-strung to deal with a potential relationship even if outside influences assisted her, and the looping Twilight is pretty decently set into a low-libido low-romance mindset to the point of identifying as asexual. Either way, she would probably shut down any advances. I'm sorry, but bringing Twilight into any romantic venture is almost guaranteed failure." The changeling took another sip of her tea. "Although, they would look cute together, if it happened."

Cadance sighed. "Yeah, I suppose you're right." She flipped another pair of cards. "Alright, Rainbow Dash and... Fancypants."

\* \* \*

><p>156.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

Apple Bloom fell over laughing. "Oh sweet birch, ash, an' oak!"

Diamond Tiara blushed, hiding her face. "We're in the middle of an epic battle here, Bloom-"

"Oh come on!" The yellow filly pointed. "Hahaha, just look at him!"

Diamond looked up and groaned. "Daaaaaad! You're embarrassing me!"

Honestly, flying around on a cloud of moneyâ€¦|

"I guess money really can do anything," Apple Bloom sniggered. "Hey, can he make consequences go away?"

\* \* \*

><p>156.3 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Here you go Lemon," Fluttershy smiled as she placed the plate of green vegetables in front of the colt. "Now I'd like you eat all of it before you go ou-"

"Done!" The yellow colt smiled, holding the clean plate to her. "I'm off-"

"Did you really eat it?" Fluttershy raised an eyebrow to her son, who was already sweating bullets.

"Ye-yes?" Lemon squeaked out, looking off to the side. Fluttershy raised an eyebrow, looking under the table to check for any tossed veggies. "I really did eat them, see?" Lemon titled his head and bared his teeth to show some green leaves on them. "So can I go-"

Fluttershy leaned in and sniffed his mouth. Wrinkling her nose, she

quickly grabbed his ear and dragged him back to his seat. "Next time, don't use your acid spit and toss it into your pocket Lemon." Placing down another plate with even more green vegetables down onto the table, Fluttershy looked at her soon. "Now please, eat your dinner."

Groaning, Lemon Rush stabbed the meal with a fork and began to eat his salad.

\* \* \*

><p>156.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

He'd tried to pull the picture off the wall, but Berry had taken one look at it, ascended, and used her magic to bind it to the cabinet while laughing maniacally. And then, of course, these two had waltzed in...

Moon Bunny, as the locals called her, leaned over the bar counter with a broad grin. Luna was right next to her, grinning even wider.

Their hooves were each on their own compacts.

Macintosh, for his part, staunchly ignored them. Never make the first move. That was one of the key things in these situations...

\* \* \*

><p>156.5 (Gamerex27)<p>

The door to Mac's bar opened, and a shoggoth proceeded to drag a drooling gryphon into the bar with its tentacles.

Mac glanced at the Cutie Mark both non-ponies inexplicably shared: an eight-pointed star. "Want me to open up a tab, Nurgle?"

"You never charge Loopers," the plague god said, seating the gryphon on a stool and propping him up with a few macroscopic bacteria. "And this is not a time for jokes. My companion need help. Badly."

Mac looked at Tzeentch for a long time. The glazed eyes, the drooling, the occasional whimpers of terror...and the hormones of anti-arousal Mac's trained senses from eons of working with fermenting crops he picked up on. There was only one explanation.

"Who'd he walk in on?"

"Slaanesh and Naoki."

Big Mac winced. Putting aside the Equestrian Loopers' rocky relationship with the so-called "Mad Anchor" (which was sometimes gossiped about in his own bar), that couple did not seem like anything he ever wanted to see. Or think about. Or be in the same Loop in. "Was it a one night stand, orâ€|?"

"Me only knows. No, wait, I don't, and I have n\_o desire to\_. My dear boy, we need the strongest drink you've got\_."

The entire bar fell quiet at this request. Twilight and the rest of the Elements of Harmony gazed at each other warily, then dived into their Subspace Pockets in perfect, practiced unison.

Nodding gravely, Mac ducked underneath the bar, and was followed by the sounds of dozens of electronic, bioelectric, arcane, and mundane locks turning and opening. A few minutes later, he popped back up, gingerly holding a small bottle no bigger than a teacup in his hoof.

"Don't. Spill. Any of it," Mac warned, as he slowly and carefully poured it into the mug.

Nurgle glanced at the label on the bottle. "Are you trying to swindle us? That label clearly says it's the \_second\_ strongest drink in your collection!"

"Strongest stuff is fer Admins only," Mac replied. "A Looper drinks any of it, it automatically crashes the Loop fer safety's sake. An' that's just the stuff from \_my\_ stock: Oak knows what's in Berry's personal cellar."

"Very well, then." Nurgle tipped the drink into his fellow Chaos God's mouth, then took a sip for himself. "Keep it coming."

\* \* \*

><p>156.6 (Filraen)<p>

Starlight Glimmer tried not to groan in frustration. Her humiliation from Twilight Sparkle won't go unpunished! She, however, knew her on limitations: even if she was a unicorn talented and driven enough to create the cutie mark removal spell she wouldn't be good against an alicorn princess like Twilight Sparkle in direct combat. That was the reason for her current plan: learning about Princess Twilight Sparkle, her strong points and weaknesses. While going to Ponyville might be too suspicious, using one her many travels to Canterlot resulted in a good chance to learn about her without being discovered.

That was the reason Starlight Glimmer was at this restaurant today, watching Princess Twilight who seemed to be a meeting of ponies from her time in Princess Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns, eating her salad sandwich while not attracting suspicions to herself. Eventually the group left, and Starlight ended eating the delicious sandwich.

"Waiter, check please." Just because Starlight was on a mission doesn't mean she's to be discourteous to those poor ponies who still haven't been taught the Harmony of Equality.

Now Starlight could go home and organize the information she had gathered this week about Twilight Sparkle in Canterlot.

"Excuse me Miss," the waiter said in a baritone tone. "But it seems like your bill has already been paid for."

"What?"

"Here, please have the receipt." and the waiter handed it over. To



Starlight's surprise, the receipt was scribbled with a small note.

\_Be careful, I'll be watching.\_

\_Princess Twilight Sparkle\_

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

My next Loop brought me to the world called Spira. When I Awakened, I soon found myself alongside the Blitzball player Tidus. He reminded me a lot of the guy with the same name back on Destiny Islands, right down to his appearance. It was weird to say the least; not half as weird as some of the things I've experienced so far.

The journey to help this Loop's Anchor, a summoner callef Yuna, defeat the monster called Sin, reminded me a lot of the adventures I had back with King Mickey, and the monsters here were kinda interesting challenges.

In the end, we defeated the being called Yu Yevon, and Sin was gone for good. But the 'dream of the fayth', the slumber of the souls which created the summons, had to end to allow such a victory, and since Tidus was from said dream, he had to fade away as well.

I expected the Loop to end there, but was I wrong.

For the next two years, I honed my skills fighting monsters, beating up bad guys...that sort of thing. I met up with Yuna again while I had been exploring ancient ruins atop Mount Gagazet; she had joined a group of treasure hunters called the Gullwings. I found myself traveling alongside Yuna once again, along with another friend from our first adventure- Yuna's cousin Rikku. And no, she's not connected to Riku from the Kingdom Hearts Loop, and yes, the joke has been made a million times. It is weird how similar her voice sounded like you, Twilight. There was also new friend, the aloof swordswoman Paine.

In something that shouldn't have surprised me, we ended up saving Spira AGAIN; the threat this time was from a giant machine called Vegnagun, which a lost soul called Shyuin planned to use to destroy Spira. The resemblance to Tidus was uncanny, right down to the fighting style, but we won in the end.

Thanks to the fayth, Tidus returned shortly after Shyuin was defeated, and peace had returned to Spira.

Having two adventures in one Loop like this was rare, but it was fun. I learned some new spells here, and experienced a lot. I await the next adventure I have, whatever Loop it may be in...

\* \* \*

><p>156.7 (HarmonyChaos, Masterweaver)<p>

Celestia rolled her eyes as, once again, the new bearer of generosity started freaking out over her dress. Yes, she was an immortal

princess, but honestly it wasn't as though a casual visit required so much primping up. Although it would explain why her faithful student was so late... and she'd been hoping to introduce Philomena to her too-

Ah yes, there was Twilight!

...in a collar.

...on a leash.

...next to a yellow pegasus that was also leashed and collared.

...and followed by a blue pegasus that was holding both of said leashes.

Celestia managed to keep her calm mask on, as centuries of handling Equestrian politics had trained her, but only just. "Twilight! It is so good to see you. And... I see you're, ah, experimenting?"

The unicorn gave her a flat look. "I lost a bet."

"And I'm just here for moral support," the yellow pegasus added.

"Hey princess!" The blue pegasus waved brightly. "How do you like my new pets? Aren't they just, heh heh, the cutest things ever?!"

Suddenly a white flash flooded the room, and Discord appeared with Pinkie Pie on a leash, and collared.

"Hello everpony!" He said as he grabbed a glass of fruit punch, drinking the glass.

THUD!

Everyone turned to the unconscious Princess.

"Wait, so it's not bring your pony to work day? Huh." Discord said as he snapped his talon, removing the leash and collar from Pinkie and making a chocolate rain cloud appear above her.

"Same time next week?" He asked.

"Yup!" Pinkie said as she practically sang a choir all by herself and ran upstairs with it.

\* \* \*

><p>156.8 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Gah! Aaargh-PRINCESS! GET YOUR PURPLE BUTT OUT HERE!"

Twilight rolled her eyes, stepping out to her palace's balcony. "What is it Sunset-?\*snnnnnrk\*!" She put her hoof over her muzzle.

"She's like me... but with wings?" The purple unicorn latched Sunset Shimmer's rear leg gave her a fraughtful teary look. "I can grow

wings senpai! And I'll, I'll stay in this weird horse world if you want me to..."

"Are you, hee, having a little trouble there Sunset?"

Sunset glowered up at the giggling alicorn. "Just... just get down from there and help me."

\* \* \*

><p>156.9 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight had to admit as she walked through the moonlight while ponies both stabbed each other and waved to her, this was one of the variant loops that she still wasn't sure she really hated or not, despite going through it many times in the past.

It was a variant where Nightmare Moon was the ruler over all in Eternal Night, and everypony had embraced their nightmare selves while still remaining true to their normal personalities. An example was Donut Joe grinding up several ponies for his pastries in the window, before levitating over a specially made doughnut just for her. The ponies in question who were being ground up by Equestria's number one baker popped back into existence and tried to run, when the owner stopped them and gave the teenagers the riot act for trying to dine and dash.

That was another fact that made things hard to really judge this loop; death was pretty much a free choice option which was a benefit as many ponies' talents relied on the temporary murder of their neighbours and friends, and ponies were so friendly and upbeat about it, despite the constant gloom and blood splatter.

As she nibbled on her flesh doughnut, she set out a Ping which had no reply back. Either that meant it she was soloing this loop or someponies were being quiet. Waving to her dracolich assistant, she walked past the vampiric thestral guards who were talking about the best blood bank to take their mares for a double dinner date, and she smiled at her mentor of this loop.

"My dear, precious student," Nightmare Moon boomed, a napkin dabbing the remains of the cockatrice meal away. "I am most proud of your studies and work, my dear Eternal Twilight." Flying over to nuzzle the potential Arch Mage and the number one voted cutest necromancer of the year, the Princess threw a literal blood gem toward Spike. "You have continued to grow and improve by leaps and bounds, with your studies in the relationship of light and dark magic with that wonderful paper arguing the label a type of magic has does not make it evil, but I must confess I have a concern with you." Holding up a letter, Nightmare Moon cleared her throat while wrapping a wing around the mare. "It is a letter about the return of my dear sister Solar Flame... or as she calls herself now, Celestia," Nightmare Moon spat out, shuddering at the lost Princess's mad name. "She is going to make her return shortly; a few days at most and will try to dispose me and then try to change the natural order of life in Equestria- have death be a final action the first time around, use magic to control the seasons permanently, have the sun and moon up every day in a year opposed to a the standard hundred year shift, and so many other poor insane ideas." Sighing, the Princess pulled Twilight closer to her in a tight hug. "Whilst I do appreciate you

trying to create several new spells to hold her back, I wish you to travel to the most chaotic town in our fair Empire, Ponyville, for two important details." Nodding at the dracolich who had already got out a scroll and a feather out, Nightmare Moon walked over to her throne.

"Number one; I, Princess Nightmare Moon, entrust Eternal Twilight to oversee that the annual ceremony goes perfectly as possible, and number two; that you make some friends that you did not raise from the dead." Princess Nightmare Moon smirked, watching the young necromancer blush at being reminded of that event several years ago.

As Twilight was ushered out of the throne room, she kept a mental checklist open to see how this loop really stacked up.

\* \* \*

><p>As the thestral vampires pulled the carriage into Ponyville, Twilight watched as everypony gave her a look over before going back to their usual business, with very little outside of the normality of her home.<p>

Of course, as soon as she thought that, she noticed that Bon Bon was walking with Lyra, who seemed to be switching between a unicorn, human, seapony, a pegasus, a griffon and other species. Wondering if this was something natural of this Loop or Lyra sending a code to her, Twilight wasn-

"HIYA!" Jumping in surprise, Twilight snapped her head around to see a bouncing and perky Pinkie Pie, dressed exactly like her Cupcake variant self, with her normal grin on her face and a long butcher knife in her hoof. "I'm Pinkamina Diane Pie, but you can call me Pinkie! I'm the number one pastry chef in all of Ponyville, and if that dang hack in Canterlot will finally retire, and all of Equestria! You must be the pony coming here to oversee the festival tomorrow morning as I have never seen you before today and Mayor Ivory Scroll said that the cutest necromancer of the year will be the one in charge and you do match the pony on the cover of Young Heart Stealers unless you are changeling but I doubt that as the changeling queen is looking for her daughter with your brother and the entire hive."

Spike simply blinked his eyes in confusion. "Uhâ€¦nice dress?" He said lamely, blinking his undead eyes again.

"Awww, thank you mister undead dragon!" Pinkie Pie grin grew as she bounced around in place, the cutie mark dress fanning outwards. "It's made from all my friends so I always have them close to me and I can remember all the fun we had together and I am always looking to add new friends to my dress. If you don't mind, I would love you add you to my dress!" Leaning in close with the knife, Pinkie Pie gave her puppy eyes.

"But we just met!" Twilight protested, backing up slightly at the odd request.

"Silly filly, a stranger is just somepony you haven't met yet and a friend is gained whenever you say hello or trade stories with or just talk with about the randomest things like did you know I can lick my

whole face as my tongue is super long and I can talk for a very long as I was gifted by a traveling pony with extended lungs that was meant to be a curse and I am able to tell instantly what kind of cupcake a pony will like the best unlike that \_HACK\_ Donut Joe and I can reach into my mane for all kinds of stuff and I can-"

"Okay Pinkie, okay!" Twilight laughed, hugging the mare tightly who returned the gesture with great enthusiasm. Twilight then snickered and giggled loudly as the mare stabbed her flanks with the long butcher knife and cut her cutie marks off before Pinkie sliced her jugular vein open. As it was part of the free option with death in this Loop, the intent behind the murder determined the pain felt and with a mare like Pinkie Pie, it was like a thousand of feather being run across her entire body. Wiping a tear away with a giggle still in her mouth, Twilight looked down to see a cupcake being offered to her by the number one party pony as Twilight appeared over her own dead body. Using her magic to bring the offered treat to her mouth to take a bite, Twilight had to resist an urge to send out a magical spark from how tasty it was. With a wide grin on her face, Pinkie Pie leaned over to hug her again before bouncing away with the corpse in tow.

Spike turned his head to Twilight and opened his mouth before a cupcake was placed in by a pink hoof. "Sorry about that mister dragon, I almost forgot to give you one too! Bye!"

Spike blinked again and began to chew the muffin with a grin on his face. "Wow this \_really\_ tasty!" Hopping onto Twilight's back, the dragon pulled out a list. "I can't wait to meet more ponies of this town! They seem amazing!"

Smirking, Twilight agreed to that fact as she made her way towards Sweet Apple Acres to meet this Loops Applejack.

\* \* \*

><p>156.10 (Gamerex27) (Continuation of 150.12)<p>

"So. Um...how's your Nyx?"

"She's fine," Twilight said, sipping her tea and trying to ignore the Royal Guards sitting at either end of the four-seated table, to the sides of herself and the entity currently controlling Starlight Glimmer's body.

"She's still going steady with Lemon Rush," she continued. "And I think she said something about a hot springs trip with Minato during a gender-switched Loop?"

"Eh, he's a girl about half the time now," Ryoji replied, sipping his own cup with Starlight's hooves, speaking in his own, more masculine voice. "Something to do with the Edit knocking off his gender marker. Even though that...\_thing\_...isn't in our Loop, it still did something to our Branch since they're connected. The biggest thing were these Persona users from Tokyo getting glitched by-"

He trailed off, as he nervously glanced at the guards. "C'mon, is this \_really\_ necessary?" he whined. "I've got her under control!"

"Be that as it may," one of the guards replied, "the pony you are possessing still committed mass violations of equine rights. Although the Princess confirmed she is no longer a threat," he explained, pointing to Twilight with a forehoof briefly, "Princess Celestia still assigned us to watch you until the trial can begin."

"Or until your friend gets you into another body," the other guard added.

"Oh," Ryoji said. "I guess that makes sense. She was being naughty, if you get what I THAT DOESN'T GO THERE!"

He slapped Starlight's hoof to her mouth.

"...um, sorry," he said. "She breaks through sometimes."

"We'll need to call in more backup, just to be sure." One guard took a sending stone out of his saddlebag. "Shining Armor, we'll need two more guards here-"

"That's...not needed," Twilight interrupted, gently pulling the stone out of the guard's hooves with her magic and setting it on the table. "I trust Ryoji enough that he can keep her under control. Though it is a temporary solution."

"Yeah, I wanna get this over with too," the Herald of Nyx agreed. "I feel bad for her. Trapped like an animal, with all her freedom stripped from her, not even allowed to move her face or be herself, and I'm suddenly describing all her victims\_, aren't I?" Ryoji shrugged, then yanked a roll out of the breadbasket and popped it into Starlight's mouth.

"Irony, I guess. Or karmic, whatever the right word is. So, when is the THAT'S NOT WHAT HOOFCUFFS ARE USED FOR!"

As Starlight briefly took control of her body back, crumbs of the roll lodged themselves in her throat, and she began choking as Ryoji seized control of their shared form. As the guards gave him the Heimlich Maneuver, Twilight rolled her eyes.

"Still heard worse."

\* \* \*

><p>156.11 (Gamerex27)<p>

"Sombra locked in a room, check," Discord said, marking a box on his checklist.

"\*\*Crystal?\*\*" the dictator asked.

"Rock of some kind, check," he continued, marking that off too.

"It's quartz," Applejack replied.

"Can't say I care," the chaos spirit said, shrugging. "Though I'm grateful that you helped with this."

"The varmit deserves it," the mare said. "So, there's someone else in

there too?"

"Bah!" a raspy voice hissed from inside the cage. "Foolish mammal! You think this cage can contain \_me?!\_ I shall use this CRYSTAL you foolishly left in this box to MAKE MY ESCAPE, and have my rev-"

"\*\*Crystal!\*\*" Sombra screamed. "\*\*MINE!\*\*"

"The CRYSTAL belongs to me! Get your own, inferior mammal cloud!"

"They're perfect fer' each other," Applejack said, grinning.

"This is either going to end in them fighting it out Thunderdome style, or with them falling in love and getting married over their mutual love of rocks." Discord produced a large bucket of popcorn from out of nowhere, and popped several kernels into his mouth, as the box began to jump and creak from the massive brawl inside. "Either one works for me."

The box creaked. Several splinters of wood flew into the air (thankfully away from the spectators), and Sombra promptly slammed Doctor Dinosaur against the damaged side of the box.

"Place your bets!" Discord announced, putting a green eyeshade visor over his face, and replacing his popcorn with a pile of gambling chips in the blink of an eye. "The evil tyrant, our old classic Sombra? Or the newcomer, a dinosaur with questionable medical experience (could be an honorary degree, I suppose) and a bias against mammals that's just \_sad\_, Doctor Dinosaur!"

"Eh, Ah'll put some bits on the Doc," AJ said, slapping some bits into Discord's outstretched palm. "It don't matter much, though. Whoever loses, we win."

\* \* \*

><p>156.12 (Gamerex27)<p>

Twilight Awoke lying on her back.

\_Not my usual spot to Wake Up\_, she thought to herself. \_Alright, checklist.\_

As she tried to get up, she noted that she was bipedal this Loop, rather than in her usual pony body. \_Okay, human Loop. Haven't had one of those in a while\_. She felt at her neck. \_No Adam's Apple and less bulk means female, which means I don't have to get used to a totally different center of balance, always nice. Clothes...yes. Age...late teens, I think. Body shape...\_

She looked in the mirror. Other than the fact that her skin was tan and not lavender, she looked exactly like she did on the other side of the Mirror World back home.

\_Eh, close enough.\_

"Twilight?" she heard her mother's voice call from outside the door. "Are you up yet?"

"Yeah," she said, as she filtered through her Loop memories. "C'mon, Mom, it's Saturday. Let me sleep in a bit more."

"You can't, dear," Twilight Velvet continued from the other side of the door. "You need to head over to Applejack's for practice!"

"Practice?" Twilight echoed.

"Yes, dear! You have to get more riding hours in before the race!"

"Ri-" Twilight's Loop memories chose that exact moment to kick in. She blinked, then groaned and facepalmed.

"I'll give you a few more minutes to get dressed and ready. If we don't leave by ten, we'll get caught in traffic!"

"On it," she sighed. Slowly, she looked around her room. There was all the usual stuff a middle-upper-class Western teenage human girl had in her room—makeup, a dresser, some posters, an entire wall stacked with books, all of which Twilight had already read at least twice over...

...but there was one thing out of the ordinary. On her bedside table, Twilight glared at the framed photograph of her Unawake self, holding a golden trophy...and standing next to a white-coated mare—not a pony, a horse, complete with a saddle and blinders. She was wearing cowboy boots and a jockey's uniform.

"Celestia," she muttered under her breath, "as my noble mare. In horse racing." She massaged her aching temples with her fingers. "May as well get this over with."

**\*\*The Equestrian Equestrian Competition\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>(Gamerex27)<p>

**\*\*The Equestrian Equestrian Competition, part 2:\*\***

"Ah know, Ah know," Applejack said, patting Rainbow Dash on the neck as she refilled her water trough. "It's annoyin' that we can't use our Pockets, so ya can't go back to normal."

The other mar-other female snorted in agreement, rolling her eyes. She began tapping her hoof on the ground.

.- - / .-. . .- ... - / .. / -. . - / - - / .-. .- -.. . (At least I get to race), the clops went.

"Horse Code, huh?" Applejack asked. "Guess that's the best way for us to talk, at least fer' now."

.-. - - -. . . / - ... .- - / .- .- -.. (Looks that way), Rainbow Dash agreed. ... - .. .-. .-. -.. / - ... .. / .-. - - .-. /  
... ..- -.. -.. ... (Still, this Loop sucks).



"Glad to see you girls are Awake, too," Twilight said, as she walked into the stable.

"Heya, Twi," Applejack greeted her friend. "You still goin' in the race your Unawake self signed up for?"

"Why not?" the Anchor said, chuckling. "Not like I get the chance for this everyday. Who else is Awake?"

"Me," Sunset Shimmer said, rounding the corner from the last stall in the stable. "Gilda too."

... .. :-.. :-.. :-.. / -... . / :-.. .. -.. .. -.. -.. / - . / .. -.  
/ - ... . / :-.. :-.. :-.. . \_(She'll be riding me in the race)\_,  
Rainbow Dash explained. -.-. - ..- :-.. -.. / -... . / :- - :-.. ... .  
-.-.- \_ (Could be worse)\_. \_

"Also, Nyx should be around here somewhere," Sunset continued, counting off on her fingers, "as well as Luna, Fluttershy, and-

"Me!"

Twilight blinked. She didn't remember hearing that voice before in her home Loop. Was this a foreign Looper, or...no, she did remember. He spoke so rarely that she didn't even remember what his seldom-heard voice sounded like.

"Hi, Angel," she said. "How-"

"And it's about time I get to talk, too!" he said, the white-haired rabbit-turned-human sauntering over to the group. "I never got to finish our conversation the last time I could talk, when I was a dragon that one time. I think...yeah, the Loop crashed when I was getting to the bit about maim\_mmmmmmgghg!"\_

Whatever he was about to say was cut off by a hoof sticking itself in front of his mouth, jutting out from the closest stall. Which was followed by a whiny of dismay and a dull thud as the horse in question realized that she wasn't flexible enough in this body to pull that off for long.

"Thanks, Fluttershy," Twilight said, leaning into the stall as Angel Bunny clawed at his tongue to get the dirt and mud from Fluttershy's hoof out of his mouth. "Are you alright?"

The other Looper nodded weakly, pushing herself to her hooves and glaring at the Sith Lord sternly.

"So, which stable is Celestia in?" Twilight continued.

"Um..." Applejack said, twiddling her thumbs, "right over there. But" she continued as Twilight swung the door open and entered the Unawake Princess's stable "...she ain't feelin' too good."

Celestia sniffed, then huffed and dragged at the ground with her hooves. Then the comparatively gigantic horse sniffed again.

"Are you feeling alrigGAAAAAAAH!"

After a earth-shatteringly loud sneeze, Twilight's hand slowly reached out and motioned for a towel, a hose, and copious amounts of soap.

\* \* \*

><p>"Alright, I see your point," Twilight finally said once she had cleaned herself of...well, she would like <em>very much<em> never to think of it again. "So who am I going to be racing on?"

"There's this new stallion that we got just last week," Applejack replied. "Pretty cheap, too. 'Bout as big as the Princess, similar muscles 'n leg structure...haven't had the chance to see him for mahself yet, though. Follow me."

"What?" Twilight asked as the pair walked out of the main stables. "Why isn't he here with the others?"

"Ah heard Applebloom said he don't get along well with the others," the farmer explained as they entered the auxiliary stables. "Bit of a kickin' habit, and he don't take too kindly to riders."

"I can handle it," her friend said, shrugging as she opened the stable door and walked into her new mount's section. "It's not like...it's..."

She trailed off as she stared at her ride. Blood-red fur. The "beard" of differently-colored fur around his mouth. And those eyes radiating pure menace.

Twilight stared at Tirek, as he snorted and turned to face the other wall, unimpressed.

Then Twilight walked over to the entrance of the stable, and started to bang her head against the wall in frustration.

\* \* \*

><p>156.13 (ThanosCradik)<p>

This Loop was going to give Twilight a headache, she could feel it. Everyone was a muppet; ponies, changelings, griffins, buffalo, dragons, even \_Discord \_was made of cloth... felt... whatever muppets were made of.

That wouldn't be so bad by itself, but everyone kept making puns left and right! It was like being in a bad comedy act twenty-four/ seven, with almost no let up.

\*CRASH\*

"Oh, sorry! You aren't hurt, are you?"

"Don't worry, I barely even \_felt \_that!\_"\_

She suddenly wanted to go back to the Lego Loop, now.

\* \* \*

><p>156.14 (Gamerex27)<p>

The two ponies-for a given definition of the term-glanced around the room awkwardly, not meeting each others gazes.

"Um..." Fluttershy said, creeping up to the bolted door. "Can you let us out now?"

The small hatch in the door opened, and a pale, bleached skull peered through.

"Neigh," it said. "For those who have conquered Death time and time again, it is foalish to remain afraid of mere bonds. Neither of you shall leave this room 'till you make amends."

"Uh...what he said," another skeleton agreed, which could just be seen polishing its bike in the background. "Stop being wimps."

"We already-"

The slit slammed shut, cutting off the Demi-Fiend's protests. Slowly, he sighed, then turned around to face Fluttershy.

"I...so..." he tried to say. "F\_k me\_, I suck at talking. No clue what to say."

"Er...well...let's start with the basics," Fluttershy suggested. "Who...are those demons outside? Are they from-"

"Amala, yeah," Naoki confirmed, trying very hard not to look down at his currently equine body. "And before you ask, no, they aren't from my Branch, because no one else from my Branch can get Activated now\_. At least, they're not native to any parts of Amala we know."

"Um...what does that mean?"

"All we know is that they're always Loop Aware entities that pop up in any Loop at random, or that the part of Amala they came from is gone from the Event that started this whole mess. Or, their branch is still around, but it's so corrupted Masakado hasn't managed to sort out the files for backups or render anything about it besides keeping it Read Only. Or, they were from Amala as a whole, and when the Loops forced the Admins to split the fragmented universe into different Branches, they never had a home Loop since they were from the multiverse... so they just got shunted from place to place." Naoki tried to shrug, then noticed his current lack of shoulders, and scowled. "That last one's the most likely, I think...but I really am not sure how many of them are Looping or not."

"Oh."

The two of them were silent for a good thirty-ish seconds.

"You know," Fluttershy said timidly, "I could teach you how to shapeshift back to your human form. I-"

"No."

Fluttershy blinked in surprise. "But I thought you were still really

uncomfortable\_ seeing us as ponies? Or...\_being\_ a pony?"

"This...yeah, it's \_jarring...but it's something I need to \_get over\_, " Naoki explained. "I said I was going to put everything in the past, and to do that, I need to start with this. A body's just a bunch of meat, Magnetite, Magatsuhi, and a soul pinning it all together, anyways. It \_shouldn't\_ \_really\_ matter what it's shaped like."

He paused for a second, seemingly spacing out.

"Wait. The souls were \_still\_ there\_ after the serum?!" he exclaimed. "\_Why\_ didn't you tell me that?!\_"

Another pause.

"\_'I never asked,' my ass!\_" he yelled, again to thin air. "Okay, okay, she \_had\_ to die, I get that, I \_agree\_ with that, but-wait, \_razed\_ the planet to the ground?!\_"

"Um...who are you talking to?" Fluttershy asked.

But Naoki didn't seem to notice. He just kept ranting and raving at a voice only he could hear.

"You just said you \_destroyed\_ her kingdom!\_" Naoki roared. "Killed the tyrant?! What about the \_thousands\_ of brainwashed humans\_, and, hell, those \_non-brainwashed, weak-as-hell\_ \_\_\*\*ponies?!\*\*\_"

Another pause.

"Don't give me, \_'I was willing to do the same in Baseline!\_' In case you forgot, the world was \_dead\_ already! \_And\_ Lucifer never gave me the full story! That manipulative \_bastard\_ never said we'd break all of reality by trying to-"

He trailed off as he happened to look towards Fluttershy, noticing how she was suddenly standing on the other side of the room.

"...Shit," he exclaimed. "Fine, we'll put this on hold. But it's \_far\_ from over\_, dickwad."

Sighing, he pulled out a piece of paper, fumbled at it for several seconds with his hooves, then gave up. "Urgh. There goes making a diagram to explain all this crap. Okay, you deserve an explanation for all that. I didn't...\_mean\_ to scare you. This time, I mean."

"I wasn't scared," Fluttershy said, her body visibly relaxing. "I just thought you might blow up again, so I was trying to-"

"-Get away from the ticking time bomb," he finished. "...can't say I blame you for that. Okay, here's what happened: remember how I told you in my Baseline that I ended up destroying the multiverse? That's only \_kind of\_ true. It \_was\_ me, but it also wasn't."

"Wait, let me go from the top," he said, smacking himself in the face, then grunting as he was unable to balance on only three legs and fell to the floor.

"Basically," Naoki said as he stood back up, "I was tested throughout my journey by those assholes," he said, jerking his head in the direction of the door, "and we fought over candelabras, which opened the door to a giant maze full of the worst traps ever. I pass all the tests, and learn the whole deal about the Great Will's infinite resets of the universe via the Conception, how he was trying again and again to find a world without free will, all that junk. So, Lucifer offers me power to try and break this system. What he didn't tell me was that I wasn't just getting the heart of a demon: I was getting the soul of one, too. He basically broke open my psyche and pumped metaphysical steroids into my id until it gained sapience. Which...uh...killed me."

"But an Anchor needs to survive a Loop in order for it to run, right? Unless...is it like with Toothless and Hiccup?"

"Co-Anchors, yeah," the demon confirmed. "One second Lucifer is throwing a lightning bolt at me, and the next I'm back on the subway near the hospital. Activating the Loop joined us together, since he basically tore his way out of my soul to exist. Took us a while to stop arguing-and by the time we did, we died in the Conception. So in the next Loop, we shut up long enough to learn what I missed in the rest of Baseline. Some stuff I really wanted to stay missed. You know the rest."

Naoki suddenly stopped, his ears twitching.

"What is it?" Fluttershy asked.

"You're...you have a body this time?!" Naoki asked his split personality. "The last time we tried that, you ended up incarnating as a Slime!...How the hell are we still talking if you're not in my mind right now?"

More silence.

"Forget it," he growled. "Guess it doesn't matter. You have any idea where you are?"

Silence again.

"Alright. Just don't kill any tough demons without me," Naoki replied. "A good fight's probably in short supply here."

"Will he be alright by himself?" Fluttershy asked, sensing that the inter-personality conversation was over.

"He punched an avatar of the Great Will so hard, it stopped existing in every reality ever. He'll be fine." Slowly, on unsteady legs, Naoki walked over to the door. "Open the door."

He was met by the sound of a blaring trumpet, blowing him backwards and right onto his flank.

"So, no," Naoki confirmed. "The hell do you want us to do, then? Sit around and talk about our feelings?! I want to get over all this, yeah, but I'm not gonna hold hands with her and whine about how my life is a literal goddamned mess. What the hell with that solve?!"

"And...we kind of already talked about that when we saw each other again through the Mirror," Fluttershy added.

They were met with no response, save the rumbling of an engine starting up and the Hell Biker driving out of wherever the heck Trumpeter had stuck them.

"The gate has been sealed with my strongest of magics," Trumpeter muttered, "as have the walls, ceilings, and floors. There is no escape 'till you commune and overcome the-"

"You want us to fu-\_no!\_" Naoki yelled. "Why would you even say that?!"

"Wait." Fluttershy stared at the door. "The doors and walls are all magically reinforced."

"Correct," said the Trumpeter.

"...what about the hinges and locks?"

The Fiend was silent for a few moments.

"Oh, \_damna\_-"

It was cut off by an adamantium door crashing right into its face.

Slowly, the vines and tendrils of dark magic withered and faded away from where they had wormed into the door and wrenched its workings apart.

"Oh, \_no!\_" Fluttershy gasped, galloping over to where Trumpeter's body was. Was, as in the past tense: it had vanished in a flash of light mere seconds after it was crushed by the door. "I didn't mean to-"

"Relax," Naoki said, bending down to slowly and carefully pull out the dropped Macca from where the other demon was. "Demons never stay dead where I come from. You kill 'em, and they just pop back up in the Expanse and sulk for a while."

"...your universe is \_strange.\_"

"Never heard that one before," Naoki muttered, slowly pulling the demonic currency into his Pocket. "Though...I guess I owe you for all that's happened. Where's the local equivalent of hell?"

"Tartarus," Fluttershy automatically answered. "But...why are we going there?"

"Figure this is something anyone who spends any time with someone from Amala needs to know. Ye-\_Fluttershy\_," he corrected himself, "you're going to learn how to \_negotiate\_ with demons."

\* \* \*

Twilight yawned as she entered Mac's bar with a sleepy stride.

Mac paused in the cleaning of 'that one glass' Twilight would swear he had behind the bar just so he could look busy when someone came in. "Somethin' wrong, Twilight? I thought you were at yer brother's fancy wedding."

Twilight nodded as she slid into a seat. "I was. And I thought it would be a pretty baseline wedding too, since neither Shiny or Cadance are awake, but I was wrong, and I'm honestly a little conflicted on how to feel about it. On one hoof? Awesome blackmail, and funny as all get out. But on the other, I kinda feel bad for my brother. Oh, um, just a water with lime please, I'll be flying back tonight."

Mac nodded and poured her drink. "Since I'm the only one here, but you came all this way anyway, I'm guessin' you just couldn't keep it to yourself?"

Twilight nodded. "Got it in one. Turns out Cadance is a kind of pseudo-alicorn this loop. She started out as a unicorn Grand Sorceress."

Mac blinked. "Now correct me if I'm wrong Miss Twilight, but I thought this loop hasn't appointed one a' those in centuries?"

Twilight shook her head as she sipped her drink. "You aren't wrong, she found a way to emulate alicorn immortality. She kind of fuses her present body with a willing partner, even if the partner doesn't know what they're agreeing to. The pooled magic extends the lifespan."

"... Wait, so yer sayin'..."

Twilight sighed and cast an illusion spell, showing Mac an image of a highly feminine alicorn princess, tall and with a long flowing mane and tail, smiling as she gracefully strode down a castle hallway, greeting the guards with a smile and receiving happy and respectful bows in reply. She also had a white coat, a blue and silver mane, and a starburst shield cutie mark.

"Yep, she only wanted my brother for his body."

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

156.1: Shipping actuarial tables.

>156.2: Money is power.<br>156.3: There's something relaxing about being childish.

>156.4: It's the picture of his Make Up. (Sailor Moon present.)<br>156.5: Mac's drinks go to eleven. (40K)

>156.6: The subtle touch.<br>156.7: I'm pretty sure they were just trying to overload Celestia. With what, remains to be seen.

>156.8: Events have transpired.<br>156.9: Death has no lease. But it does have contract clauses.

>156.10: Some loopers have quite different morals.<br>156.11: Maud will presumably show up at some point.

>156.12: Kind of a strange situation.<br>156.13: What a bunch of

muppets.

>156.14: A long, long term reconciliation.<br>156.15: Kind of icky.

## 164. Chapter 164

157.1

"...so I guess the main problem was how to handle all those guys up near the pole," Nyx went on.

"Yes, I can see how," Lemon agreed. "They're certainly Chaos cultists, and they'd come down and burn most of the civilized world if possible, but... it's not as though you could just go in smiting."

"For both practical and moral reasons," Nyx nodded. "So... the solution I picked instead was to soft-land the moon."

Her coltfriend blinked. "That's unusual even for Loopers. Where?"

"Over the hole in reality," Nyx filled in. "I plugged it - well, mostly - and that made things a lot easier."

"I-"

The door opened suddenly.

"Lemon Rush, what do you think you're doing up this late?" Fluttershy asked, stepping into the room. "And Nyx Sparkle! When your mother-"

Nyx held up a hoof, and Fluttershy paused.

"Sorry, 'shy," she said, shaking her head. "I'd rather we not do this for now."

"All right," Fluttershy agreed straightaway, her Righteous Parental Anger dissipating in a moment. "You too, Lemon?"

Lemon Rush nodded. "Yes, thank you."

Fluttershy nodded. "All right, I'll leave you to it. But don't forget to go adult if you'd rather be treated adult, it's the best way for me to tell."

The two young ponies exchanged a glance, then aged up to at least young adulthood. Nyx did it by altering her preferred shape, using her rarely-used shapeshifting powers, while Lemon used a slightly more tricky method.

"There we go," Fluttershy said with a smile, looking over the pegasus and the alicorn. "Much easier."

There was a crash from downstairs.

"Oh, dear..." Fluttershy's ears drooped slightly. "Angel Bunny, stop using scythes in the kitchen!"



Another crash.

"I'll go deal with him," Fluttershy said apologetically. "Sorry about this."

"It's okay," Nyx said. She glanced to Leman. "Shall we go get a snack?"

"I'm game," Leman agreed.

\* \* \*

><p>"Sorry about earlier," Nyx said, as they ate.<p>

It wasn't a romantic candlelit dinner. It wasn't something cooked by one or other of them, or by a friend, and it wasn't even a restaurant meal either.

No, they were having hay fries and a burger each from a fast food stall.

"What's there to be sorry about?" Leman asked, frowning.

"Well..." Nyx shrugged. "I tend to prefer being young, because it's more... well, more fun. It gives me an excuse to act like a lot of loopers do, but no-one really pays as much attention. If a filly exists on a diet of whatever she feels like, then that doesn't even draw comment, and..."

She stopped herself. "Anyway. My point was, I hope it's okay that when we spend time it's usually as... well, kids."

"I didn't realize we were goats all of a sudden," Leman quipped. "But... no, it's fine, Nyx."

He smiled. "Actually, it's nice for me too. You've been in the Dark Millennium, you know what it's like... and even with my brothers and the Gods and even Father on-side, it's still a long, hard slog. Decades of fighting and planning and politics, even when I dump everything on Ciaphas at the first opportunity and go practice driving."

"I feel sorry for Mars," she said, and he chuckled.

"I deserved that one. But... after that, over and over again, it's nice to just... be a kid. Where everything's on a smaller scale, where I can drive a wooden cart down a hill and it feels more exciting than doing the same thing with a Land Raider... and where, once it inevitably crashes, it's just treated like that."

Nyx smiled. "I know what you mean... it's nice to unwind sometimes."

"And here's where I do, usually," Leman confirmed.

They each had a few more fries.

"...so, I'm pretty sure tomorrow we can try sledging," Nyx suggested. "From the Canterhorn."

"I like it," Leman replied.

\* \* \*

><p>157.2<p>

"Okay, so... run this by me again," Twilight requested.

"Right," Spike nodded. "First thing is... we're in a giant canyon. Like, miles deep."

"I saw," Twilight confirmed. "I also saw that Ponyville, Canterlot, Manehattan and in fact just about everywhere important is in the \_same\_ broad, flat canyon."

"Second, this place has low gravity." To demonstrate, Spike tossed a marble in the air. It described a lazy trajectory, rising for much longer than it might have been expected to before reaching the apex and slowly coming back down.

"With you so far."

"Thirdly... well, thirdly, we're all smaller than average. Just a bit." Demonstrating, Spike took out a ruler. Twilight measured her height, confirmed it with his, and nodded.

"So, how does all that add up to Rainbow Dash being taken into custody?"

"We're on a world where ponies are small enough, the gravity is low enough, and the air â€" at the bottom of these deep rifts â€" is \_dense\_ enough that pegasi can fly without magic," Spike said. "And of course Dash didn't notice until she'd flown eight kilometres above the zone that no other pegasus â€" even the gliders â€" can reach in flight at all."

"Right, I think I can fill in the details," Twilight said. "She's doing something they thought was impossible, her explanation's incoherent... so they decided to take her into protective custody and see if they could replicate the effect."

"Yep," Spike agreed. "Celestia was very nice about it, but... kind of insistent."

"Right," Twilight nodded. "Okay, time to solve the problems here too. Let's see... total air volume is going to be... right... and just convert the mass..."

"Twilight?" Spike asked, warningly. "What are you about to do?"

"Add enough argon to the atmosphere to make it ninety percent noble gas," Twilight replied, already rummaging in her pocket. "No ill effects, partial oxygen pressure should remain healthy if I mix a bit of it in, and that way \_everyone\_ will be able to fly without magic."

"You mean every pegasus, right?" Spike checked. "AJ still doesn't have wings, Twi."

"That's why I'm \_also\_ setting up a shop to produce custom self-powered wing harnesses," Twilight replied. "There'll be a \_bit\_ of magic in there, just to keep them topped off, but who's counting?"

"Only you, Twilight," Spike sighed. "Only you."

\* \* \*

><p>157.3<p>

"Excuse me?" Twilight asked. "Miss... Mayor?"

"I go by Ivory Scroll to friends," the Mayor replied, exchanging a meaningful look with Twilight. "What is it, miss Sparkle?"

"Well, your mayoralship, I was wondering if I could help with Winter Wrap-up," Twilight said, giving a somewhat less meaningful look back.

Internally, Ivory sighed â€" wondering what her Anchor had planned this time.

"Very well, miss-

Twilight's horn flared. Ghostly wings appeared for a moment, cupping her body, and her eyes flashed pure white.

A half-full sun mark appeared on her forehead, just below her horn, and then there was light.

\* \* \*

><p>All over Ponyville, ponies picked themselves up off the floor.<p>

They beheld... summer.

Full, high summer, green of grass, with the trees burgeoning with their crop and the fields waving with growing corn. There were white, fluffy clouds in place of the grey snowstorms that had been there seconds before, and birds flitted with some confusion between the flowers and young fruits that studded the trees and bushes.

\* \* \*

><p>"...miss Sparkle," Ivory sighed, as her assistant <em>stared<em>. "As you know very well, the Winter Wrap-up in Ponyville is done with as little magic as possible."

Twilight shrugged, her caste-mark fading. "That wasn't \_that\_ much magic..."

"Not by your standards, maybe," Ivory said. "But unleashing an anima banner is usually an indicator of some considerable power."

Twilight glanced up at the enormous white pillar of energy that spiked into the air overhead, complete with the star-of-magic.

"I see."

Ivory stamped a hoof on the floor, and paperwork condensed out of the air. "I'm going to need you to sign here, here and here. A fine of thirty bits is being levied, and... turn it back to winter."

"What, really?" Twilight asked, disappointed.

"We have booked the wrap-up today," Ivory replied, unflappable.

"Fine," Twilight muttered. She rose into the air again, spoke words in a tongue that seemed more real than the mouth speaking them, and a moment later there was once more snow.

The birds sounded seriously annoyed by this point.

"Thank you," Ivory said. "I will expect payment promptly."

She turned to leave, then added a parting shot. "And turn the banner off! It's not real anyway, you know that as well as I do."

"...still looks good..."

\* \* \*

><p>157.4 (Evilhumour and Gamerex27)<p>

The Question, part one of four.

It was a strange day for Eldrad, and among the many strange and unusual ordeals he had to deal with the loops, this was the oddest of all things possible. It had thrown the Eldar race into chaos at the implications and results, with all their plans for their new god now void and pointless. It pushed many of them to drink and other horrible vices without fear of Slaanesh claiming their souls, despite history showing them how horrible an idea that was.

Not that the Chaos God really did eat his race's souls anymore in the loops to be fair, but this news was still beyond anything he could have ever expected. An individual was willingly entering the Eye of Terror that was flat out immune to the Dark Prin-Slaanesh's mind altering powers to be with the Chaos God. It even went to the point that the person next to him admitted that the Daemon Prince was not only a looper, and Anchor for an entire branch, but that the two were actually regularly seeing each other.

"\*\*It is an unwelcome thought to entertain, I will admit.\*\*" The Emperor spoke to him, handing over some of the finer alcohol from the loops to steady his hand, as he skimmed over the looping newsletter that Kent owned and wrote for. It had produced an article on troubled Branches, each one receiving a chapter detailing the incident, its problems, and the solutions which the Admins and the Loopers had come up with to meet the danger. He remembered talking to the Man of Steel about his own part in his loop's crisis, Vail giving the blue superbeing the latest part of her additions to the newsletter. "\*\*\*No one, not even \*\*\_\*\*I,\*\*\_ \*\*expected Slaanesh to develop such strong feelings for another, let alone \*\*\_\*\*two\*\*\_\*\*, but whenever Naoki and the daemo-\*\*\_\*\*demon\*\*\_ \*\*Kashima are present, all of hir usual chaos activities cease. The greatest possible danger they posses to others

is by looking at the Eye of Terror when they are pleasuring each other."\*\* The Emperor of Mankind shuddered visibly before taking a sip of his own beer. "\*\*The first time they had their fun, it broke Tzeentch's mind and crashed the loop, but not before causing the Eye of Terror to blink out dirty messages in morse code."\*\*

"How did they do that?" Eldrad asked in disbelief before slapping himself to keep his mind from thinking of Slaanesh involved with anyone.

"\*\*I do not wish to know and I am told that Fenrir took a cold bath after that stunt."\*\* The Emperor of Mankind really did not want to know what they did to cause their Admin to bathe, but his mind was forcing himself to think the most unpleasant of thoughts.

"\*\*Regardless, it would be best not to tell Leman of this. He has not forgiven Naoki for his actions with the ponies, especially not with how far Naoki pushed the woman that raised him. Bjorn has reported more than once that Leman has been training himself to 'settle the score', and has been worried about what will happen they do meet."\*\*

"Have no fear, I am not planning to get involved with that mess," Eldard muttered, taking a sip of his beer. "I would be invoking the wrath of several more powerful entities than myself, one that once equated my race's souls to pizza."

Unbeknownst to them, Leman was waiting at the door to talk to his father about lifting the humiliating ban on him from driving, as he had gone through several different DMVs throughout the loops where he wasn't a Primarch to prove he was a safe driver.

Now he was on a different path as he stormed out of the Palace on Holy Terra, pushing those in front of him out of his way. He leaped into the nearest Bike and took off to the Eye of Terror.

It was time to settle a score with the bastard that harmed his family.

\* \* \*

><p>Naoki had to admit, this was a new one for Slaanesh, and actually almost touching in hir own, perverted way. In hir room, all of the toys they usually used were all on the shelves and put away. Slaanesh <em>had</em> offered to use them in a tone that anyone who had not spent eons with the Chaos God would have missed but Naoki could tell that shi was nervous about this.

"I'm pretty sure we've done it plain in the past, Slaanesh," Naoki muttered as he examined the bed. The Chaos God had the faintest of blushes on hir face, almost hidden by the red lighting in the bedroom.

"Meh, I know, but I thought to myself, why the fuck not?" Slaanesh said a bit too quickly, eyes darting to the side. "I mean, sometimes you've got to return to the basics if you want to get inspir-"

"You do know we don't have to screw, right?" Naoki was surprised to see Slaanesh actually recoil in surprise from what he said, and a tiny bit delighted to see hir calm down. "You're one of, like, twenty Loopers that didn't try to kill me on sight the first time we met,

and it'sâ€|"

"I know," Slaanesh muttered. "Same for me." Slaanesh tilted his head. "In a way, I suppose." Slaanesh's face scrunched up, as he began to wring his fingers together. "I mean, I do fe-"

"Hey, do you hear that?" Naoki muttered, turning his head to the wall where the rumbling was coming from. It was odd, as none of Slaanesh's toys on that wall were battery operated.

That was all the warning he had before Leman Russ psyker blasted him across the room and through the wall, howling in pure rage and riding after him on a shuddering bike that was being pushed to its limits.

[he]

"Oh, \_come on!\_" Naoki muttered as he picked himself up. "Can we go \_one Loop\_ without someone trying to kick my ass for something I did \_billions of years ago?!\_"

"Shut up and die, you damn monster!" Leman roared, pulling out the blade that Vulkan had made for him so long ago, swiping the air where the other man was standing millisecond ago. Summoning his mighty psyker power, he readied himself for another blast, only to turn it into shield as Naoki shot a pair of Freikugel eye-lasers at him. "You threatened my mother and my family! You put them through utter \_HELL!\_"

"What part of 'psychotic break due to being in an \_endless time loop of hell'\_ do you people \_\*\*never\*\*\_ \_get?!\_"

"Big \_fucking\_ deal!" Leman shouted, spewing fire from his mouth at the quick moving daemon prince, already darting through the Materium. "\_My\_ world is like an \_ocean\_ of fucking blood, violence and death and \_NONE\_ of \_my\_ loopers, my \_friends\_, broke!" Leman watched Naoki pause at this. "Face it; you are \_nothing\_ but a whining, crying little \_bitch\_ that lashes out at \_EVERYONE\_ and I will put you down like the worthless piece of garbage you are!"

Before he could do anything else, Naoki lunged at him, and sank his fist into his chest. Literally.

"I'm a \_lot\_ of things, Prince Furry," the Demi-Fiend growled, as Leman backpedaled to let his gaping chest wound heal, "but I've \_never\_ whined about a \_damn thing\_. I know how this goes. You'll lecture me \_on and on\_ about how I'm a monster and you're the good guy , \_guess what\_" he hissed before howling in fury, steam rushing out of his mouth to obscure Lemans' senses. "No room for your \_fancy speeches in a fight\_! You wanna \_go\_?! Then lets \_go!\_"

Leman roared, the Curse of the Wulfen engulfing him as he grabbed the man opposite of him and slammed him through another wall of the Materium.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, what did you put in the food this time?" Isha asked, sighing. "AIDS? Herpes? Ebola?"<p>

"Um...just food," Nurgle said hesitantly. While he would have loved to put his usual ingredients into his cooking for the date, several Loopers had cautioned him against putting deadly viruses in there, as that typically killed the mood. Among other things. After all these eons, he still loved Isha, and he wished he could prove it to her at long last. "I did gather the recipe from Lina, and I did try to my best not to experiment and-"

"I understand, Nurgle." Isha did her best to soften her tone. She was well aware of his affections for her, and since she had started looping, it made things a bit...awkward between the two of them. She still remembered how he proved his love for her by setting her free and returning her to the Eldar on the advice of that lovely young equine creature during her second loop. It was a gesture she could not just ignore, and she had decided to see if she could influence the better aspects of the Chaos God opposite of her with some mixed results. His garden was slightly less evil when they were both Awake, with Eldars being allowed in if they were invited by her and did not try to escape with her without her consent or Nurgle's awareness, and the daemons were ordered to listen to her every command as if it came from Nurgle himself or that nice looping fellow that often replaced one of Nurgle's Greater Daemons. Oh, what was his name again? Samwise Game something, she was not quite sure.

He was a nice looper to talk to, and one that Nurgle greatly approved of as he always managed to have the lands in Nurgle's garden in perfect order. He was one of the few freely allowed in at any time, Awake or not.

Pulling her attention back to Nurgle, she thought about the two of them again. On one hand, he had stopped force-feeding her new diseases, allowed her greater freedom and was trying to embrace his more positive aspects. On the other hand, he was still the Chaos God of decay and ruin, and at times, he needed to be reminded of why some people would not like his kinds of gifts. And then there was the fact she wasn't sure of how to feel about his affections for her. It was touching, what he had done for her, but she was still unsure how she felt about him. In the end, she resolved to give him a fair chance whenever he tried to prove his love for her. Hence this dinner date.

She looked down at the fairly ordinary oriental human meal and, after a quick check to make sure that Nurgle did not forget any diseases, of which there were thankfully none, she picked up a chopstick and began to eat. Suddenly, two beings crashed into Nurgle's private chamber and straight through the dinner table.

"Y'know," one of them said, climbing out of the wreckage of the table, "to use an old cliché, you hit like a girl. A two year old girl who hasn't even learned how to walk yet."

Leman simply responded by grabbing the table leg and smashing Naoki across the room. "I won't stop until I rip your bleeding heart out of your damn chest!"

Naoki rolled his eyes in response, grabbed something from his position on the floor, and tackled Leman. Instantly, the Primarch felt a searing pain in his chest, his secondary heart kicking in.

"No you." Removing the chopsticks from his chest, Naoki grabbed the heart in his free hand, and dropped it into his mouth. Chewing for a few moments, he grimaced as he blasted Leman back with another set of eye lasers. "Not bad," he said, "but I can taste the \_stupid\_ in every blood cell. May want to cut back on the carbs, dude."

Leman surprised Naoki by dashing over with speed that should have been impossible, his fist pulling in the very fabric of reality around it in blinding light, and smashed his Warp-empowered purity power fist into Naoki's chin, knocking him clear out of the Warp and back into the realm of men. "You honestly think that you can withstand the light, you filth spawned monster?! I swear I will not stop until I rip your damn head off!" Leman roared, leaping after the other Anchor.

The room was silent for a moment.

"NO!" Nurgle finally screamed. "The food! I worked so hard on it!"

"It just fell on the floor," Isha muttered, getting up and wiping what little food she had eaten from her chin. "Wouldn't you be all over that?"

"They \_incinerated it!\_" Nurgle moaned, pointing at the piles of ash on the floor. "There's nothing left to eat!"

"I \_told\_ you you'd love this!" a nasally voice said in the background.

Slowly, Nurgle turned around to see Tzeentch and Khorne sitting in lounge chairs slightly behind them. Tzeentch rested one clawed hand on a jukebox and sipped a martini with the other. As a number of beeps sounded in the background, Khorne got up and took a small paper bag out of a microwave. Opening it, he grabbed a handful of popcorn and shoved it into his mouth.

"For once, I agree with you," the war god said, grabbing a pair of binoculars and looking at the faraway planet the two warriors had landed on. "This is \_priceless!\_"

"Are you going to do \_anything\_ else to help other than just \_sit there?!\_" Nurgle demanded. "They \_ruined my date!\_" And just after I finished learning how to properly cook for Isha, too!"

"Hel no!" Tzeentch cackled, keeping his talons on the music player. "This is the \_funniest\_ thing I've seen in \_years!\_" he said, the famous track of "Yackety Sax" ringing throughout the Immaterium as the two Anchors brawled without any sign of stopping.

"Help you?!" Khorne asked mockingly. "And ruin this \_incredible\_ fight? This is the most fun I've had in \_centuries!\_" he exclaimed between mouthfuls of popcorn and Khorne Flakes.

Nurgle sighed and let the ruined splinters of the dinner table drop from his tentacles, Isha simply shaking her head in disbelief.

\* \* \*

><p>Nyx smiled at the Primarch opposite of her as she closed the



book. "Thank you, Magnus. It was simply wonderful."<p>

"I had an inkling you would enjoy it, Nyx." He gave her a light smile, enjoying the company of his brother's girlfriend. Despite their rocky start, she was everything he would expect of the daughter of a librarian, almost equal to his own private collection in his humble opinion. She was kind, smart, funny, honest - a perfect match for his brother. The savage was so much more agreeable when she was around. He wasn't sure if it was the loops, Fenrir or something else, but he had seen the Space Wolves fall over in loving respect for her in the past when they saw their King so happy, along with how well she interacted with each of them. "I'm a bit surprised you had not already read this book; I am sure that Twilight would have it on stock."

"Well, to be honest," Nyx shook her mane, blushing a bit as she took a sip of the apple cider that Magnus had prepared for her. "Most of the time I am with the girls, out crusading and-"

"Say no more, I understand." Magnus shook his head. "I understand the siren's call of adventure from those close to your heart."

"Well, I -" Before the equine could continue, a figure appeared in the private room.

"\_There\_ you are!" the Chaos God grumbled loudly, reaching out for Nyx. "The two of them have been fighting for \_hours\_, breaking \_all\_ of my toys. Nurgle isn't lifting a finger to help after those \_morons\_ crashed his dinner date with Isha, Tzeentch won't stop playing that \_fucking\_ music and Khorne is eating his \_fucking\_ popcorn!" Slaanesh smashed a wall down in pure rage, scaring Magnus slightly to see him enraged instead of trying to seduce him. "I don't get a lot of chances to see Naoki and it pisses me \_off\_ that your damn boyfriend is c-"

"Na-\_oh\_." Nyx said. She sank deeper into her stool, her ears drooping, and suddenly became much more interested in staring at the ground than in making eye contact with anyone. She opened her mouth to speak, but couldn't find any words.

"Did he end up killing you during his freak-out or something?" Magnus asked, nervously sipping his cider as he sat in the middle of the two.

"It...it was \_our fault\_," Nyx said softly. "We...we didn't realize \_how badly\_ he needed help. We let him go off on his own, since that what we were supposed to do as a Sanctuary. But he lost it, and...His Shadow took control of his body, and made him rampage across the Loops." She bit her lip before finding her steel. "Slaanesh, \_please\_, take me to them."

"With \_pleasure\_!" Slaanesh grumbled loudly, unhappy with how the situation was playing out and this darker part of \_his\_ daemon prince's past. "You're the only one that can actually talk some damn sense into Leman after he gets like this!" With that, Slaanesh teleported them to the latest place where the two Anchors were spotted.

Magnus simply sighed, swirling his cider a bit before drinking it down. On one hand, he should try and stop his brother from attacking

Naoki, as it would be poor to let a grudge grow between loops. On the other hand, Leman was downright terrifying when pushed too far, and he was nowhere near strong enough to fight his brother going all out.

\* \* \*

><p>157.5 (Gamerex27)<p>

"GaaaaAAAAHHH!"

Waking Up to hear your parental surrogate/big sister/housemate screaming her ears off was not the best way to start a Loop, as Spike later decided.

"What's wrong?" he asked, jumping out of bed and flying into the library with swiftly-grown wings.

"Itches!" Twilight replied, scratching at her head with her forehooves. "Itches so badly!" She switched to scratching her sides with her back hoof as she flopped to the ground, her hooves digging into her scalp.

"Is it a rash?" the (biologically) young dragon asked. "Bug bites?"

"Fleas!"

"...fleas?" Spike asked flatly. "Can't you just yank them off with magic or something?"

"I've tried!" the Anchor cried, rolling over to a bookshelf and using it to scratch her back. "They're really resistant to magic! And there're from the Everfree-"

"Where else would it be from?" Spike muttered under his breath.

"-so nopony can figure out how to remove them! Zecora said she'd be on the case, but she says the ingredients she needs are in...urgh...Discord's sock puppet dimension! I don't even know how she knows that!"

"Is it just confined to you?" Spike asked, stepping closer to Twilight to try and help somehow.

"It's all over PonyvillAAAAAH!" As she rolled across the floor to scratch the itch, she ended bowling Spike over. The two sat there for a few moments, a tangled mess of hooves, tails, and scales.

"We need to get Discord!" Twilight said, standing up and trying to ignore the furious itch all over her body. "ASAP!"

\* \* \*

><p>Grumbling, Rainbow Dash crawled out of bed and walked into her shower. Even as she activated the cloud above her and bathed in its heated rain, those <em>dang fleas<em> were still there!

"Great," she moaned. "Maybe doing a Rainboom will shake them off or something." She stepped out her front door of her cloud house and

perched on the cloud's leading edge, stretching her muscles.

But as she leaned back and braced her wings for takeoff, she heard some squeaky voices.

"Now, hear this!" one proclaimed. "Ludicrous Speed!"

"Sir," another voice said, "you better buckle up!"

"Ah, buckle \_this\_," the first voice declared, as Dashie rolled her eyes and mentally counted down. "Ludicrous Speed! GO!"

With a deafening sound and a burst of rainbows, the pegasus rocketed into the sky. Alas, the various Machs of speed she passed had no effect on dislodging her uninvited guests. Looking back behind her, she could just spy several tiny elephants and lions falling out of the fleas' zoo, followed by what looked like an entire shopping mall about the size of her hoof.

"Stowaways," she growled, as she flew ever faster, to no effect.

(Evilhumour)

Lyra looked up and rolled her eyes, scoffing. "My friend units are so silly." It was \_so\_ much simpler to just turn herself into a cyborg to avoid the fleas then wait for the cure from Zecora. Although, using the Cyberman technology was proving to be a bit of annoyance as her other selves were fighting back the invading program. Shrugging, Lyra still thought it was better than waiting the ten minutes for Zecora to get into town.

\* \* \*

><p>157.6 (Scorntex)<p>

The Moon. Now.

Three figures popped into existence on the grey and barren surface. One yellow and red, one white and pink, the last orange and purple. All three bore strange necklaces around their necks. Seconds later, a large mass of metal appeared after them.

"Hey." Someone called out (via magic, since they were in a vacuum). The Cutie Mark Crusaders turned about, looking for the source of the voice. It was Nyx, who was sitting a short distance away. Behind her was Princess Luna, whose gaze was alternating between a pack of cards and the newcomers.

"Mornin', Nyx." Apple Bloom waved. "Woke up early or somethin'?"

"Yes." Luna declared. "For whatever reason, we couldn't break through the magic keeping us here."

"So we decided to play "Chaos" until we could." Nyx smiled, before glancing back toward her big sister. "She's winning."

Luna frowned. "I \_was\_. Until my assets were turned into farm-animals."

"Anyway." Nyx looked back towards the trio, and the thing they'd brought with them. "What's that?"

Apple Bloom waved a hoof at her, holding a hoof up to one ear. "Sorry, gotta take this. Hey, DT. We're here. Yeah, it's here too..."

She removed the hoof for a second and looked back at Nyx. "DT says 'hey'."

Sweetie Belle glided over towards Nyx, as Apple Bloom continued discussed something with Diamond Tiara. "Twilight had an idea." The unicorn explained. Nyx noticed the worry present in her friend's eyes.

"What happened?" She asked. Sweetie Belle looked down at the lunar surface.

"Twilight had a rough last Loop, apparently." Clover spoke up. Nyx gasped, instantly gathering her magic, before realizing Sweetie Belle's hoof was on her shoulder.

"She's fine!" Nyx's friend quickly said. "... well, she sort of took some of Big Mac's brain bleach, so whatever it is that upset her, she doesn't remember right now."

Nyx frowned, ruefully, at the thought of not having been present to help her mother. Sweetie Belle noticed it.

"I'm sorry." She said. "Anyway, before she wiped her memories, she handed us her plan for this Loop. I think it's meant to be used on Sombra."

Nyx examined the structure, as several more objects began appearing via teleportation. "Is it...?"

"Yeah!" Scootaloo grinned, looking up from several parts she'd been added. "It's an Orbital Friendship Platform."

Nyx looked about the moon all five ponies were standing on. "Um..." She began. Scootaloo rolled her eyes.

"We're gonna move it when we're done building, obviously."

Luna wandered over to look at the sight, one eyebrow raising as she examined everything. "I almost feel sorry for Sombra, if this is to be used on him."

"And you're building it on my moon... why?" She added. All three Crusaders shared guilty looks.

"Because..." Scootaloo began. "Reasons?"

"Princess Celestia had reservations." Smart Cookie declared. "And she insisted on being the first one to fire it..."

"Her and everypony else in the bar." Pansy piped up.

"Well, really." Luna pouted. "It's my moon! I should have first

go!"

Nyx scowled. "And it's my mom's idea, I should get first go!"

Luna and Nyx stared intently at one another. "Rematch at Chaos?" Luna asked, slowly. "First one to win gets to fire."

"\_You're on.\_"

The two sort-of-siblings walked off, leaving the three Crusaders looking at one another.

"Think we should tell them Apple Bloom got first go when she won the contract to build it?" Clover asked, hesitantly.

Apple Bloom looked as the two alicorns began aggressively shuffling their cards. "Maybe wait a while..." She suggested, before looking back to the massive pile of parts.

\* \* \*

><p>157.7 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"Hey, Sunbutt!"

The guards flanking the throne stiffened. This was not language petitioners to the Day Court normally used. (Granted, the newly restored Princess Luna used it in private chambers now and again, and Celestia's chosen student Twilight Sparkle had used it once or twice in personal conversation, but those were friends and family of the Princess, not mere peasants.)

"Good morning, my little griffon," Celestia said, apparently unruffled by the hostile greeting. "May I ask your name?"

"I'm Guido of Griffonstone!" the somewhat pudgy griffon in the threadbare three-piece suit snapped, advancing to the throne with hackles raised and feathered crest laid back. "And I want to know what gives with all the early snow you're dumping on our mountains!"

"Oh, the snow?" Celestia asked innocently. "Why, it's part of my economic stimulus package for your city, Guido. Didn't you know that?"

"Economic stimulus, blah blah blah!" Guido mocked, miming a puppet with one talon. "You rebuild the library nobody uses, a new hotel nobody stays in, and send us a wagonload a week of this weird powder." He pulled a can of baking powder from under his wing. "We never paid any attention because it didn't cost us any money, but now it IS costing us money! We can't get out and work or shop or anything with this weather! You wanna stimulate the economy, then start dumping bits on Griffonstone instead of your stupid snow!"

"So, bits are important to you?" Celestia asked.

"Money is EVERYTHING to a griffon!" Guido shouted. "You know that!"

"I remember a time," Celestia said, "when pride and honor were

everything to a griffon. When doing a job well and trading fairly with others were more important than squeezing them for every bit they were worth."

"Yeah, yeah, more fairy tales of Grover the Great," Guido grumbled. "A likely story. But it doesn't put scones on the table!"

"Perhaps not," Celestia agreed. "However, you will be glad to know that I intend to put quite a lot of scones on every griffon's table, so to speak. The snow is falling because I intend to spend the entire winter learning how to snowboard."

Guido blinked. "Learning how to what?"

Celestia pulled a surfboard out from behind her throne. "I do so enjoy surfing," she said, "but my free time in summer is so brief. My duties are less pressing in winter, but the ocean's too chilly then. So I'm putting a thick snowcap on the Griffonstone Range so I can spend the entire winter in your historic town surfing on snow."

"You mean," Guido snarled, "you're burying my home for your personal-" The griffon's white-feathered face took on a distinct reddish tone.

"Of course, ponies being ponies, there will always be those who insist on bringing me work," Celestia sighed. "So I have no doubt they'll seek me out in Griffonstone. In fact I feel the new hotel is entirely inadequate for the number of visitors you're likely to have."

"Ha! That'll be the-" The brain is seldom the most talented organ in any griffon's body, but Guido's brain had just caught up to his mouth, frantically waving large, simple signs in front of his imagination. He suddenly saw whole caravans and convoys of ponies ascending the passes to Griffonstone. Ponies, moreover, with saddlebags full of bits. Ponies who would want lodging, food, personal services.

Celestia saw Guido's eyes glazing over, counted silently to five, and muttered, "And don't forget professional guides for skiers and hikers."

\_Yeah, them too,\_ Guido's brain told the rest of him.

\_Good idea,\_ Guido admitted. \_Glad I thought of it.\_

"Of course," Celestia noted, "I doubt I'll be able to get away two years in a row. So if you would like those ponies to come back after I leave... well, I'm afraid it'll be up to you to keep them."

Guido's brain had gotten itself up to a brisk jog, and with the power of momentum it flashed less happy images across the griffon's imagination. Pony tourists disgusted with the shambles of the town, the decayed statues, the horrible food. Pony tourists angry at extortionate prices, disloyal and surly employees, substandard services. Griffonstone going from a forgotten has-been burg in a remote corner of Equestria into a byword for all things dingy, decayed, and horrible.

"I'm giving you an opportunity," Celestia said politely. "What you make of it- or fail to make of it- is your decision."

"Er... could I prevail upon Your Most Serene Highness to kindly withdraw further snowfall for a matter of, say, three weeks?" Guido said with a shaky tone of voice. "I fear there are many preparations that need to be made for your visit in... when shall we expect you?"

"Winter Ramp-Up proper doesn't begin in the lowlands for another month," Celestia said. "Expect me shortly after Hearth's Warming."

"Five weeks," Guido rasped. "Then if you will at least reduce the snowfall, I shall put things into motion."

"Very well, Mr. Guido," Celestia smiled. "I shall see to it. Next petitioner, please?"

A burly pony stepped around the still befuddled Guido. "Your Highness," he said, "I'm here to ask what's to be done about the underemployment of stonemasons in Canterlot. Why, even a contractor like me is out of work-"

Guido grabbed the pony's foreleg. "No he's not!" he shouted, dragging the protesting pony away at top speed. "You're hired as of yesterday! I need two ski lodges, three hotels, an overnight inn, and massive repairs to three hundred eyries! Money is no object! Go, go, GO!" In a cloud of mane hair, feathers and confusion, the two sped out the throne room doors, which slammed with an echoing thud.

Celestia smirked and turned her head to look behind her throne, where Twilight was trying to stifle her giggles. "And that is how the thing is done," the sun princess said.

"You'll do anything for a vacation Loop, won't you?" the Anchor replied.

\* \* \*

><p>157.8 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

A certain trio of ponies observed Twilight Sparkle dancing a happy (and completely uncoordinated) jig around a book lying on the grass. This didn't seem at all strange to any of them. If anything could get Twilight dancing it would be a book, and of course the dance was just as awkward as the social behavior they'd come to expect of her.

The trio approached cautiously and waited a minute or two until Twilight noticed their presence. They had to stifle giggles as the purple unicorn froze in place for a moment, slowly looked at the three of them, and then sat properly on the grass to face them. "Eheheheh, sorry," she said, "I just, er, had some really good news."

"Really?" Minuette grinned. "C'mon, tell us, tell us!"

For a moment it looked like Twilight was going to tell a lie; there was the briefest evasion of eye contact and a single fidgety movement of her forehoof. "Er, I've just heard Princess Celestia is going to

send me to oversee the Summer Sun Celebration in Ponyville!" she said. "It's such a huge honor! Knowing that the Princess trusts me with such authority!"

The three girls lost their smiles. "Oh," Lemon Hearts said. "Does that mean you're going to miss Moondancer's party?"

Twilight thought about this. "Well, I can only stay for a little while," she said, "but I wouldn't miss Moondancer's party for anything! And neither would Spike! I'll go get him and meet you by the fountain, okay?"

"Spike! Are you Awake?" Twilight shouted as she barged into her tower. She'd received two Ping replies, and the sooner she told someone the news the better.

"Yes, I'm Awake," Spike said, having moments before stepped aside so that overeager unicorn hooves wouldn't disembowel his present for Moondancer. "What's up with you? I almost never see you this happy at the start of a new Loop."

"I just had the best Baseline Loop ever!" Twilight grinned. "Well, mostly baseline. I didn't do anything major out of the ordinary, except avoiding the usual really stupid stuff like Want-It-Need-It. And the Golden Oaks survived the Loop! I didn't do anything to save it, it just never blew up!" She rose on her hind hooves and spread her forelimbs wide, adding, "When we unlocked the box from the Tree of Harmony, its magic transformed the library into this immense world-tree castle, with books from all sorts of worlds! We went on adventures when the books summoned us! It was SO COOL! And I saved most of the books just before the Loop ended! I'm going to so love reading all of them- NEW BOOKS, and my library DIDN'T BLOW UP!" At this point Twilight was dancing again, and her voice had surpassed fangirl levels of squeal.

The dancing ceased when a belch of green dragonflame interrupted her happy babbling. Spike opened the scroll from Celestia and read aloud:

\_My dear Twilight Sparkle, \_

\_I hope you have Awakened (that's a capital A) well and are ready to face the day. Unfortunately I have to call on you for a special duty. For reasons not currently known the tree library in the town of Ponyville spontaneously combusted hours ago. The contents of the library were a total loss. Like you, I am saddened by the loss of so many books.\_

Twilight's happy dancy mood, realizing the weather was no longer right for it, flew north to Whinneypeg for the summer.

Spike continued reading:

\_I must ask you to supervise the emergency replenishment of Ponyville's library, to be located in the town hall until a new building can be found. This takes priority over Summer Sun Celebration preparations, but I'm sure you can find good friends who will help you take care of it all.\_

\_Sincerely yours, Celestia.\_



"Well," Spike shrugged as he rolled the scroll back up, "easy come, easy go."

Twilight Sparkle flopped onto her side, rigid. In the next courtyard over, a goat bleated.

\* \* \*

><p>Even unAwake, Twilight's Ponyville friends proved up to the challenges of bringing thousands of books into Ponyville and organizing them as a library in a single day. Pinkie Pie helped arrange the paperwork with Ivory Scroll and organized the contractors to get the bookshelves installed into Town Hall in record time. Applejack's extended family carted the crates of books from the train station to Town Hall, while Rainbow Dash's weather pegasi flew chariots full of extra books in from Canterlot. Fluttershy's animal friends unpacked and shelved the books (Harry Bear, it turned out, had a talent for alphabetical organization). Rarity reorganized the decorations for the Summer Sun Celebration to turn the functional bookshelves into artistic and decorative symbols of learning. Twilight's less-than-a-surprise party became the early start of Celebration festivities, held in Town Hall as thousands of Ponyville residents and visitors from other cities gathered to spend the shortest night of the year.<p>

Twilight couldn't believe how smoothly it all went. She'd even had time to meet her Canterlot friends, including Moondancer, at the train station at sunset. The Apple catering was just as good as ever. Fluttershy's bird choir sang sweetly. The nighttime sky was clear and starry, the Mare in the Moon perfectly visible... until, suddenly, she wasn't. Twilight, as usual, was the only pony who noticed the change in the moon.

And then, when the mayor introduced Princess Celestia, everything froze, as usual. No alicorn, as usual. Pinkie Pie complimenting the predictive powers of the mayor, as usual.

A total absence of malevolent laughter... not as usual.

The ponies began to chatter.

Evil midnight fog failed to materialize.

The ponies went silent again, beginning to be very afraid as minutes went by with no sun and no Celestia.

And then the rustle of a page being turned snapped through the silence like a whip crack.

All eyes snapped to one bookshelf. A large armored alicorn, coat blacker than midnight, pupils slit like dragon eyes, lay next to the bookshelf, holding a book about three inches from her eyes with her magic. Based on the number of pages already turned, she had apparently been reading for some time.

Sensing all the attention coming her way, Nightmare Moon looked up. "Could you wait a few more minutes?" she asked apologetically. "I just want to read one more chapter. Daring Do just broke her wing crashing into the jungle, and I want to see how she gets across the

alligator-infested river without flying." Having said this she returned her head to the book, lost to the world around her.

Moondancer leaned over to Twilight and whispered, "Isn't that Nightmare Moon? The evil alicorn who gobbles up bad little foals and fillies?"

"That's her," Twilight whispered back.

"Huh," Moondancer grunted. "I think she needs to get out more."

\* \* \*

><p>157.9 (BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

"Are you sure we should be doing this?" Carrot Cake asked, looking nervously at the large \_thing\_ the young dragon " who had apparently gone through a growth spurt recently " had brought with him.

"Hey c'mon Mr. Cake. It's Guys Night Out, this is nothing." Spike said as he adjusted his goggles.

"Well, yeah, but don't you think the Princess might get upset?"

"Nah, she's on a surfing Vacation on the sun and left Luna in charge." Spike replied as he grabbed his mustache from Big Mac's bag who, already mustache equipped, had stepped up to join them as Carrot Cake protested.

"Don't ya worry none, it's completely safe." the large apple stallion said as he tightened his pack.

Carrot Cake took a deep breath and nodded. "Alright."

Placing his own goggles onto his head, he strapped the large glider to his back and looked out over Canterlot from the Castle Tower. Before he could change his mind, Mac gave him a push and he found himself airborne.

\* \* \*

><p>"Reckless violation of airspace, disturbing the peace, crashing into Donut Joe's and worst of all, <em>not inviting me," <em>Shining Armor read the list of charges to the ponies and dragon currently resting in the castle cells."I hope it was worth it."

"It was." Carrot Cake replied, still wearing a large smile from his recent flight.

Spike and Mac grinned. It was nice to get back in touch with their non-Looping friends every once in awhile.

\* \* \*

><p>157.10 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

It was a typical day for this Loop. Celestia, who wasn't Awake this

time, had gone off on a diplomatic visit to the Minotaur Kingdom and had left Twilight (who'd ascended early, after a reenactment of the events that brought Nyx into her life) in charge. At the moment, she was in charge of the Day Court in Celestia's absence.

"Um, your Highness?"

"Yes?" Twilight raised an eyebrow at the unicorn petitioner who was standing before she and Nyx, and appeared to be staring rather intently at the smaller alicorn.

"Is it just me, or do you have the incarnation of adorableness sitting next to you?"

Twilight's eyebrow raised even further as she smiled. "Yes. Yes, I do."

"I thought as much." The unicorn stood back, looking rather satisfied as he began reading his petition.

\* \* \*

><p>Later that afternoon, mother and daughter were enjoying a small break in their duties.<p>

Twilight looked down at Nyx. "So. That stallion from earlier? That was a much better reaction than you normally get when we do this."

Nyx nodded. "Definitely."

\* \* \*

><p>157.11 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Twilight Sparkle Awoke.

Hmm. Apparently, they were right outside the dragon's cave near Ponyville, ready to make it move elsewhere. She'd done this more times, and more ways, than she could count. Maybe this time...

"Twilight?"

Twilight's head snapped up. "Applejack?" The other pony was right next to her, looking concerned.

"You okay, sugarcube? You looked like you were dozin' off with your eyes open. An' I think you'd want to be Awake for this."

Twilight blinked, and shook her head. "I'm fine. Just lost in thought. And... are you Awake?"

Applejack nodded. "Me, 'Shy and Rarity. And now you."

Twilight nodded. "Well, let's get to it. Any plans for the dragon?"

"Nothin' specific," Applejack replied.

"Okay. I'm going in."

Inside the cave, directly in front of the dragon, Twilight took a deep breath. "Excuse me, Mr. Dragon?"

One eye opened. The dragon snorted.

"Sir, as Princess Celestia's duly appointed representatives, we're terribly sorry, but we'll have to ask you to take your nap somewhere else. Your smoke is causing a real problem here."

The dragon's other eye opened, as it reached one clawed finger out for Twilight. Then, as it tapped her nose, it spoke.

"Boop."

Twilight's eyes widened. "That's not... Are you..." She shook her head in surprise. "Um, Mr. Dragon? Is the same period of time repeating for you?"

The dragon snorted, and closed its eyes again.

"I'll take that as a no."

Back outside, Twilight sighed. "Persuasion didn't work, even when I told him Princess Celestia sent us. Rarity, you're up."

"Not a problem, darling." Rarity walked into the cave. "Yoo-hoo, good sir! Might I have a word with you?"

A few minutes later, Rarity walked out, covered in strawberry syrup. "Not. One. Word," she hissed.

Twilight raised an eyebrow. "Oh-kay. Pinkie?"

"Woohoo! Party time!" She dashed into the cave.

And came back out, looking confused. "Twilight? Can dragons use their tongues like noisemakers?"

Twilight raised her eyebrow again. "Not that I'm aware of. Why?"

"Because this one can! And..." Pinkie's eyes widened. "When he did, it tickled my nose!" She giggled.

"All right, that's it," Rainbow Dash interrupted. "This dragon is going down!" Before the others could stop her, she flew into the cave, yelling.

Then there was a loud honk.

Rainbow Dash stalked out of the cave, her eyes blazing. "That dragon," she growled, "is not playing fair. And neither will I. I'll be back when I have some good thunderclouds." She took off.

Applejack sighed. "That filly," she remarked to nopony in particular, "is going to get herself in a heap of trouble if we don't do

something fast. Fluttershy? You got any ideas?"

"Well, I could try talking to him," the butter-yellow Pegasus said. "It's what you brought me here for." Steeling her nerves, she walked into the cave.

"Er, Mr. Dragon?"

Once again, the dragon's eye opened.

"Um, I hate to disturb you, but... your smoke really is causing a lot of problems for everypony nearby. So, could you please, please move to a cave away from inhabited areas?"

At this, the dragon raised its head. "For you, dear Fluttershy, anything." One snap of his fingers later, and a familiar draconequus stood before her. "It's all right, girls! You can come in now!"

"Discord!" Fluttershy's eyes brightened as she flew up and hugged him. "I didn't expect to see you this early!"

The spirit of chaos winked. "Well, I woke up around the time Luna came back from the moon, and I thought, why not give my best friends a pleasant surprise? Besides, I may be part dragon, but it occurred to me, I'd never tried filling in for one. Or at least, I hadn't tried it in longer than I can remember. So, here I am!"

"And here we are," Twilight added as she and the others walked in, Applejack just barely restraining a furious Rarity from charging him. "I knew something was up, but I couldn't put my finger on it. Though you certainly did," she added with a smirk.

Discord chuckled. "Oh my, Twilight. Is that a sense of humor I'm detecting from you?" As he was speaking, he snapped his fingers, causing the syrup on Rarity's coat to vanish. She huffed, but didn't look as mad anymore.

"It's a sense of something, all right," Twilight agreed. "But, if you're here... where's the dragon? You didn't put him in Celestia's garden, did you?"

"Certainly not. There's a plane statue there."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>In the gardens of Canterlot Castle...<strong>

Luna looked confused. "Sister? Is this some new type of abstract art thou hast obtained recently?"

Celestia, staring at the statue of a Sopwith Camel that had replaced Discord's stone form, shook her head. "I didn't put it here," she told her sister.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>At the cave...<strong>

"As for the dragon, I already gave him a better place to sleep, where

nothing can disturb him." Discord snapped his fingers, summoning a large mirror. "See? He's quite happy!"

Approaching the mirror, five ponies looked... and at least three of them facehoofed as they saw the large red dragon, a smile on his face as he continued snoring away on his hoard, which was now surrounded by the palm trees of a very familiar island.

\* \* \*

><p>157.12 (Evilhumour)<p>

Lemon looked at Larry on the floor, and tilted his head at his girlfriend sitting next to him.

"Nyx, what is it with you and ...your pet choices?"

Nyx blinked, tossing the treat a bit farther than she intended, with Larry running out of the living room. "I dunno, to be honest. I guess I can relate to the more unusual animals, the more dangerous ones can really be misunderstood," Nyx sighed. "I just like how big dangerous monsters can have a real soft inside."

Lemon chuckled, rubbing against Nyx as he said, "I guess I know why you like me now Nyx."

Blushing, Nyx began to sputter when Lemon roared playfully, nuzzling against her again.

Giggling, Nyx tried to push Lemon off of her. "Quit it."

Shaking his head, Lemon went "Rawr," again, playfully nibbling on her wing.

Giggling louder, Nyx used her hooves to shove him back, to which her boyfriend let out an over dramatic grunt. "Down boy, or no treats!" Nyx managed to say that without giggling, although it was hard to contain them behind her massive smile.

Lemon paused at that, tilting his head before grinning widely at her. "Rawr rawr." Shaking his head, he pounced towards Nyx, catching her side as she tried to flee. Holding her close as they tumbled down to the floor, Nyx was trying to tell her boyfriend to heel while giggling her head off with Lemon simply rawring and stealing nibbles on her mane and wings, doing his best not to break down in laughter too.

\* \* \*

><p>"Should we tell them supper is getting cold?" Spike asked Twilight, watching his sister and boyfriend try and tickle each other now.<p>

"You do that and I will tell Rarity all your secrets, Spykoranuvellitar." Twilight said sharply, grinning from ear to ear at how adorable the two were.

\* \* \*

><p>157.13 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Applejack walked into the bar, a haunted look on her face.

"Big Mac?"

The older stallion looked at his sister with concern. "Yeah, Applejack?"

"You need to have a talk with Apple Bloom."

"About what?"

"I just walked in on her, and..." Applejack shook her head. "I... I almost don't know what to say."

Mac put down the glass he was cleaning. "Who was it, and where do you want me to buck 'em to?"

Applejack looked aghast. "It's not THAT kind of thing, Mac! But you do need to have a word with her."

Mac regarded his sister. "If it's not that sort of thing, what was it?"

Applejack sighed. "Mac... you really need to remind her... why we \_do not build nuclear reactors in our bedrooms!\_"

There was a pause.

Then Mac sighed. "I'll get right on it."

\* \* \*

><p>157.14 (Evilhumour)<p>

As Twilight entered the portal, the Anchor noticed something was off. Perhaps it was the fact Twilight was wearing pants instead of a skirt as the portal turned the pony into a human. Perhaps it was the fact that instead of the hard boots there were soft shoes. Or the fact that Twilight Sparkle was now Dusk Shine.

What really clued in the Looper was the fact he crashed into one very surprised and flummoxed Sunset Shimmer, with many students wiping out their cell-phones and taking pictures of the two.

"This is \_awkward\_, " Sunset muttered. "Mind getting \_off\_ before things get wor-"

"Miss Shimmers, Mr Shine, \_please\_ keep your relationship appropriate or you will be in detention," Principle Solaris said walking past the two now blushing students, holding his coffee mug to his lips. "...Separate rooms, of course."

\* \* \*

><p>157.15 (Evilhumour)<p>

\_Plunk\_. \_Plunk. Plunk. Plunk.\_

"Luna, if you are trying to sneak by using suction cups on the

ceiling again, need I remind you that, A) you have both wings \_and\_ magic, and B) that slice of cake is \_mine\_." Celestia said looking at the scroll in hoof, not even gracing her sister a glance  
upwa-

\_PlunkPlunkPlunkPlunkPlunkPlunkPlunkPlunk.\_

"Oh no you don't!" Celestia flew down the hall in a desperate race for the last slice of cake, leaving the delegation of ambassadors very confused and slightly hungry.

\* \* \*

><p>157.16 (Scorntex)<p>

Princess Celestia watched as the sun made its way below the horizon, with the moon already beginning its own journey through the night sky, guided by her sister, now returned and restored from the dark magic that had held on to her for so long, thanks to Twilight Sparkle and her friends.

Even some hours on from the joyous reunion, and Celestia was still finding it hard to believe.

"Sister?" She turned, to see Luna making her way towards her, clearly concerned about something. While she was sadly aware Luna behaviour was a blind spot of hers, Celestia couldn't help but notice something had changed by a great degree already in her sibling.

Before, where she had been quiet and withdrawn, or overcompensating with directness, now she carried herself with far more confidence and self-assurance, even if she was trying, for whatever reason, to mask it.

Luna looked out across the night, and across Ponyville as well, some distant noise coming from the town hall, even after most of the ponies present at the Summer Sun Celebration party had gone home.

"Nice night." Luna remarked. Celestia nodded.

"They always were." There was the tiniest twinge of something from Luna, something that made Celestia wonder if she'd said entirely the wrong thing.

"Tia?" Luna asked.

"Yes?"

Luna took a deep breath. "I... I was wondering if I might ask you something?"

"O-of course." Celestia smiled, as warmly as she dared. And there was another thing about Luna in the last few hours. She'd managed to come to terms with modern Equestrian with surprising speed. "You know you can always ask me anything?"

"I know." Luna said. Not, as Celestia had been expecting, with any undercurrent of sadness, or self-flagellation, just... just as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.



"So, what is it?" Celestia asked. Luna's eyes darted briefly.

"It's just..." She trailed off.

"Go on." Celestia said, encouragingly.

"I was talking with your student, with Twilight Sparkle, and..."

Celestia took a few seconds to realise she was smiling at the thought of her sister and her student getting along well. Luna took another deep breath.

"I am going to be blunt here, Tia..." Suddenly Celestia had an odd sinking feeling in her stomach, as Luna paused, a small roll of parchment appearing in a burst of her magic. Celestia looked at her sister, confused as to what matter was so troubling Luna couldn't see through to telling her, resorting to using parchment instead.

Carefully, she unfurled the scroll. And as she did, something became startlingly clear.

Instead of a carefully worded letter as she had been expecting, there was...

... it looked like a bill.

"What?" She found herself asking. Luna's expression was now one of cast-iron seriousness.

"'tis a service charge, dear Tia. You have been using my property for the last one thousand years, without my permission. I would simply like to be paid that which I am owed."

Celestia's mind was adrift in the metaphorical sea of confusion. "I don't... I... what?"

Luna rolled her eyes. "My moon, dear sister! You know, the big shiny thing in the sky at night."

Celestia stared blankly. She had to be kidding. She had to be kidding. And yet, there was the b-

Then she noticed one of the other names on the bill. That of her own student.

"Since when is Twilight Sparkle an employee of the royal treasury?" She asked.

"Since around three hours ago." Luna stated, nonchalantly.

Celestia's mind was now plain sunk, as her sister walked up next to her and wrapped a hoof around her. "Of course, you are my sister, Tia, and I do love you. That's why you have five whole years to repay me."

Then Luna's warm smile vanished. "But seriously, I do want you to

repay me."

And with that, she began trotting away, leaving the dumbfounded Celestia to stare blankly. "Good night, sister."

\* \* \*

><p>157.17 (Scorntex)<p>

Arms folded, eyes narrowed, and mood simmering, he tried to convey his utter boredom as the being across from him motioned at the display.

"This is your target." The being intoned, in that emotionless echo. A small holographic display lit up on the table displaying a... well, a \_thing\_ was an apt description.

There were the large bloated legs, attached to a misshapen torso from which dangled undersized skeletal arms. The head, crowned with five horns, was dwarfed by what appeared to be large engines of some kind, attached to what could've been mistaken for wings. Reaching from its back were two gargantuan tails.

It wasn't difficult to see the expression on the thing's face, that of pure unfettered rage and insanity.

If he could've been bothered, he would've laughed.

"It is called Majin. That roughly means "demon". A fusion of our technology, Nebulan and a biosynthetic god-emperor's solar-powered weaponry. Conventional weaponry doesn't phase it. \_Un-\_conventional weaponry only angers it. Its internal fuel systems are solar-powered and hyper-efficient beyond near anything we have seen. It does not know pain, it does not know fear. Whatever little sentience it has is focused solely on laying waste to all in its path. But it is not entirely unstoppable."

The display zoomed inward to the creature's ugly features, illuminating the third of its three eyes. "For reasons we cannot determine and will not question, this third eye seems to be its' only weak spot. But it would require someone with unparalleled accuracy, or a weapon too overpowered to be practical, to possibly destroy this monster."

Bright yellow eyes glared intently. "We understand you have some skill in this area. If you were willing to solve this matter for us, all the charges you have previously built up would be... \_forgotten\_."

There was a pause before the robot spoke again. "So, Angel Bunny of Equestria. Do you have what it takes to kill an un-killable monster?"

Angel glanced from the display, to the Decepticon. And slowly, he began to grin.

\* \* \*

><p>157.18 (Filraen)<p>

A sudden gust of fresh air and the light from a dawning sun made Big Macintosh realize he was in a new Loop. The always inviting sight of Sweet Apple Acres before him and the full basket at his side made him realize his current task: gathering fresh apples for the Apple family reunion, as usual for a normal first day when the Summer Sun Celebration is celebrated in Ponyville.

Well, he couldn't let Granny Smith wait for the apples so he hurried to the house.

After arriving to the kitchen and leaving the basket with Granny Smith Big Macintosh found Applejack already making breakfast. Looking at his sister in the eyes Mac greeted her with a nod.

"Mornin' to you too, Mac." AJ answered as she cut some apples. "Li'll filly still hasn't shown up. Can you go wake her up?"

"Eeyup."

On the walk to his littlest sister's room Big Mac was certain something was amiss but he couldn't put his hoof on it. Applejack wasn't Awake, he could tell, and the sun and chores were the same as usual. Maybe Applejack was allergic to bananas again? His thoughts only went in circles trying to find this loop's curveball until he got to the room.

Apple Bloom being tucked completely under the sheets suited Macintosh just fine as it was easy to wake her up with a swift pull. So he did just that.

"Rise and shine, A-!"

Big Macintosh froze as he suddenly realized this wasn't Applebloom. In his shocked state his loop memories finished his sentence, though with a much more subdued voice.

"... Sunny Fields."

The white earth pony filly sat herself in bed and pulled her pink mane out of her face after a huge yawn. Then she looked at herself as inspecting herself and her big brother -who still had his muzzle open- and spoke.

"Oh, hi Macintosh."

It took Big Mac a considerable effort to stop the raising panic at his sister's gaze, because he knew that look in her eyes: it wasn't one of a little filly. Princess Celestia was Awake, and she was his littlest sister.

\_Fewmets\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Applejack, go wake up Sunny. She's goin' to miss breakfast."<p>

At the sound of Granny Smith's voice Applejack left the sliced apples for breakfast aside, looked around for her brother. "Granny, have you seen Big Mac?"

"Already out at the fields. Said something about plowing for the upcoming apple planting."

Again the same thing. Lately Big Mac had been losing himself in farm work; and while there was nothing wrong with working hard Applejack could hardly see Big Mac at the house. She just hoped there was nothing to worry about, he didn't need to repeat what she almost did last Applebuck season.

\* \* \*

><p>A farm's work is never really done, so to make it easier Applejack and Big Macintosh usually divided the load it took. Today it was Big Mac's turn to go to Ponyville's market to sell apples. This morning had been a fairly good sell, and so he returned home for lunch satisfied with a good morning's work, even if the work wasn't at the farm.<p>

He noticed Applejack was with a thoughtful look on her face looking at a note. "Hi, sis. What is it?"

"Oh, hello Big Mac," Applejack replied, seeming to realize her brother's presence just now. "Ah'm a mite worried about Sunny."

A questioning head tilt from him prompted Applejack to continue. "She's starting to wake up later and later every day. And to top it Cheerilee sent a note yesterday because Sunny's already gotten late to school four times this..."

Applejack was interrupted by a choke.

"Big Mac?"

The answers were in snort "Sorry... It's... you couldn't..." And then Big Macintosh truly lost it to laughter, at the astonished looks of Granny Smith.

Big Mac couldn't really help it, but the picture of Princess Celestia, Sol Invictus, the Everlasting Sun, with probably a thousand titles more, and more importantly \_the pony who raises and lowers the sun every day\_ being so good at sleeping in was inherently absurd.

It was minutes before he could calm himself.

"Y'er alright, Mac?" Granny Smith asked worriedly.

"Ah'm fine now, Granny. And sorry Applejack, but Ah wasn't laughing at you."

Applejack levelly looked at Mac, to which he made his best effort to calm down the smile that was still trying to find a place on his muzzle. Apparently it satisfied his sister because a moment later she continued talking, "like I was saying, I'm worried Sunny is sleeping in too much" Macintosh managed to contain his smile to his left side only, where neither mare could notice "and it's causing trouble in school."

After a silent moment, during which the laughter completely left the

stallion's features Big Macintosh gulped and lowered his head. "Fine, sis. Ah'll go talk to her."

\* \* \*

><p>"I was wondering if it was going to get me in trouble."<p>

Big Macintosh wasn't sure what to do with this reaction. He knew Princess Celestia should know she shouldn't wake up late but it didn't seem like she was in a pranking mood.

Suddenly Celestia seemed to look to somewhere far away. "'You want what you can't have.' You've heard that, right?"

Mac nodded. He wondered if his face had the same look.

Celestia walked so she was by Big Macintosh's side, then she sat down and leaned on him. "Normally I can do many things, from visiting all corners of Equestria to make a city flourish, to get chamomile or mint tea if I want, to go surf the ocean's waves or prominences. Everything but sleeping in."

Off in the distance, the rays of day's end bathed the sky in pink and blue.

"Luna is usually recovering from her time as Nightmare Moon, Cadance is just starting to grow into her power, and Twilight still stays as unicorn most of the time. And when you're the only one who raises the sun, no matter how late you wake up the sun isn't out yet."

With wind and birds sounds as the backdrop both siblings looked at the Sweet Apple Acres fields for some time, and at some point Sunny Fields could feel the shifting weight of Mac leaning a bit towards her.

"But you still have to get to school on time, Cheerilee sent a note home about that."

"Yeah." Then the filly stood up and looked at her big brother. "Hey, Mac, How about you wake me up later?" At Big Mac's unasked question she continued "I have no trouble getting up quick, but I want the most sleep I can get."

"We'll give it a go for a week, otherwise it's back to wake up to see the sunrise. Deal?"

"Deal, big bro."

He smiled, despite himself. That was going to take some getting used to.

\* \* \*

><p>Her old bones weren't good enough to buck trees for long anymore, but Granny Smith had lived long enough to have some degree of wisdom and highly refined skills, like checking with her earth pony magic how healthy the fields were, when the apples will be ripe to take, all sorts of little tricks that, may Twilight Sparkle permit it, she'll pass on to her family.<p>

Family.

She had been worried for a while, since around the time of the last Summer Sun Celebration, Big Mac had been acting strange around little Sunny, and if Granny Smith hadn't raised him herself then she'd believe Macintosh was actually afraid of little Sunny.

So that's when Granny Smith saw those two children on the cliff leaning on each other she decided to change her route and go straight to the house, where Applejack was surely getting things ready for dinner.

"Applejack! Stop what you're doing mare and bring a jam of Zap Apple Jam for tonight!" Today was a day for celebration.

\* \* \*

><p>Sometimes Big Macintosh wondered if Sunny had set a bet if she could have a tree sap disaster using only pure earth pony abilities to match Applebloom's usual standard.<p>

Everything was going as normal as crusading usually went, or so he was told. Cutie Mark Crusaders scooter track builders they were today. How that became a wave of tree sap when he was bringing Babs Seed to the clubhouse was something he intended to learn, as soon as he could get out of this goop.

Now, if only it wasn't sap from zap apple trees it wouldn't shock him every time he tried to move. That'd be nice.

\* \* \*

><p>It was late at night and Big Mac took a look at the calendar he had on his room. Today's date was circled and had been for some time, the last day of the loop. Looking back, he could easily see it had been a good run, with only the occasional monster or dragon attack. It was sort of expected, really. You couldn't live so close to the Everfree Forest and not have an encounter with some sort of creature.<p>

A soft knock on the bedroom door interrupted Big Mac's thoughts. When he opened the door the pony behind it wasn't a surprise; the knock had been from too low in the dood for being anypony else.

Sunny Fields stood by the door, a blanket around her barrel. "Mac, can I sleep with you tonight?"

Big Mac smiled "Sure Sunny, Ah was going to bed myself."

And so Sunny joined Mac in the bed, both earth ponies piled small atop large

as the bed was a bit small for both. His last thoughts before going to sleep were about tomorrow when he... well, tomorrow wasn't going to arrive anyways.

\* \* \*

><p>A sudden gust of fresh air and the light from a dawning sun made Big Macintosh realize he was in a new Loop. The always inviting sight

of Sweet Apple Acres before him and the full basket at his side made him realize his current task: gathering fresh apples for the Apple family reunion, as usual for a normal first day when the Summer Sun Celebration is celebrated in Ponyville.<p>

However, this time Big Macintosh took a moment to bathe himself in the sunlight. Even in this cool morning it felt warm, warm like a little filly's hug.

Then the moment ended and Big Macintosh took the apple filled basket to carry it to the farm. After all, he couldn't leave Granny Smith waiting.

\* \* \*

><p>157.19 (Awesomedude17)<p>

Luna was simply sipping her tea when Cadance burst through the doors.

"AUNTIE!"

"What is it, our dear niece?" Luna asked.

"My love, it's been stolen!"

"Pardon?"

"My ability to love, it's gone. And there was this note next to me!"

Luna grabbed the note and read it, and then screamed to the heavens.

"CARMEN SANDIEGO AND LUPIN III!"

And thus was the tale of how two thieves found love, and stole it right from under the Princess of Love's nose.

\* \* \*

><p>157.20 (Gamerex27)<p>

Continuation of 156.14

She should have known something was wrong when her castle's Map cut off mid-signal.

"Where the hay's everypony?" Applejack asked, as the group of five (Fluttershy was visiting a friend that day) walked throughout the deserted town.

"It doesn't look too old," Rarity commented. "It looks like ponies lived here just recently. I don't know \_how, \_since all of the architecture and decor is drab and dull enough to put anypony to sleep."

"I...think they evacuated," Rainbow Dash said, putting the pieces together as she glanced at the ground. "Look down. See all the hoofprints? Judging by how far apart they're spaced, I think they

stampeded outta here in a hurry."

"Maybe they had a flash mob or surprise party somewhere outside of town?" Pinkie Pie suggested. Her usual ear-to-ear grin had diminished somewhat: there was something about the atmosphere of the town that put a damper on her spirits.

"Some kind of emergency, I think," Twilight said, as she cast a simple scrying spell. "They ran away from something...no, some\_pony\_."

"What was the matter?"

"I...whatever it is, somepony's still here." Twilight glanced at an alleyway between the houses. "Come out. We won't hurt you."

"I sincerely doubt that you would," said a stallion's flat, nearly-emotionless voice. "Or \_could\_."

Slowly, a brown-coated colt trotted out from the shadows. Glancing at the group of five, he frowned. "So, you came after all. Lesser mares may have fled in terror at what happened here."

"So...you know what went down here?" Dashie asked, taking a step back from the intimidating unicorn in front of them.

"That I do," the other pony declared, the black markings on his coat swaying as he stepped forwards. "I shall tell you what transpired. But only to \_her\_," he said, pointing a hoof at Twilight.

It suddenly dawned on Twilight who this was, as the combination of the markings, the too-sharp horn, and the Cutie Mark of a pony's bleached skull came into view. "If...if you're sure about that."

Assuring her friends that she wouldn't be too far, and that they could come running if they thought anything at all was up, she followed the being into the cave on the edge of the abandoned town.

\* \* \*

><p>"-<strong>been trying to feed a pet cat,<strong>" the titanic creature made entirely out of sapient blood asked Fluttershy. **"\*\*Would you happen to know what they like to eat?\*\*"**

"Um..." Hesitating, Fluttershy glanced back towards her companion out of the corner of her eye.

"Tell him whatever comes to mind," Naoki said. "Or whatever he wants to hear. That usually works better."

"...they'll eat a lot of things, really," she continued. "But, they usually prefer small rodents. Freshly-killed mice usually gets their attention."

**\*\***"I see," the beast rumbled. **\*\***"The newly-shed gore gets the attention of a carnivore. Maybe now she'll stop meowing all over the place when I'm trying to work."**\*\*** Smiling, the demon knelt down to her eye level. Fluttershy forced herself not to back away as some of



the beings blood splashed over her. "\*\*\*I should probably get going, but here's something for your trouble. You wanted me to Contract, right? I need to go on a company retreat, but you can have 10 Hunger Tarot cards to call be back later\*\*."

"It worked this time?" Fluttershy asked, as the demon faded into nothingness and the small pile of playing cards fell to her forehooves, and the hoof-mounted computer on her left. "But that pony in the bodysuit tried to push me into traffic when I tried to help her cross the street. Why do I keep getting...mixed results?"

"You're treating 'em like they're all the same," Naoki explained, as he batted past a crowd of incubii leering at a group of sirens on their Girls' Night Out. "That was a soundless \_shinobi\_. They \_hate\_ sound, and was just messing with you to see if you'd figure it out. Always go wordless with them." He sighed. "That Rabbit a few Circles up? He left 'cuz he \_didn't\_ want those carrots. Doesn't matter he looked like a mortal bunny: he's a primordial force of fertility. The schoolgirl-looking one tried to gut you because she wanted a pencil rather than advice. And that generic fairy left mid-talk because you gave her too \_much\_ money: they don't like people who can't say no. Treating demons like they're some faceless mass of monsters who all think alike will either get you nowhere or in the graveyard, fast. And \_everyone\_ gets bad results sometimes. About a quarter of \_my\_ negotiations end with the demon trying to \_maul\_ me, no matter \_what\_ I say."

"I \_know\_ that," she said. "I've have \_some\_ success. I've got some Tarot Cards for later summoning, I made a truce with a few angrier ones, and I even got a free flu shot from that one dead nurse. Why can't I get consistent results?"

\_Because you're not used to any hardship or dissent at all\_, a bitter voice said at the back of Naoki's mind. \_Just mind-bash everyone into thinking the same.\_

Fluttershy's expression hardened, and she gave him a Stare at around 44.44% intensity.

"...what?" Naoki asked, his face twisting in confusion.

\_And you're an angry, mean misanthrope who drags everyone else down with him!\_

Fluttershy abruptly turned red. "Um...I didn't say that!"

"No..." Naoki said under his breath. "You...thought it..."

In the blink of an eye, the Demi-Fiend had darted across the room and yanked a giggling, floating brain out of a bush made of dead branches. "Knock it off, \_jackass!\_"

After punting the meddling prankster into the horizon, Naoki sighed, rubbing at his head with a forehoof. "We didn't say that out loud: it must have been dicking around with some telepathy bullshit. All over-exaggerated and blown out of proportion, too.

"Look," he said, turning back around to face Fluttershy, "I can't just forget about the Bureau overnight, or what I did to you guys

when I lost it. It's gonna take \_time\_ for my brain to stop jumping from 'pony,' to 'racist homogenizing horse.' And I'm sure you've got something similar with me. But I'm \_trying\_."

"I know," she said. "It can be easy to forgive...but much harder to forget. But we do what we can. Fix things, piece by piece."

Both of them were silent for a few moments.

"...this is the last layer, I think," Naoki announced, trying to change the subject as they moved deeper into Tartarus and waved some stolen passes towards some sleeping guards.

"Indeed," rumbled a deep voice. "This is the last. For you."

Trembling in anger, Tirek stepped out from the shadows, every hair on his coat bristling at rage upon seeing one of the ponies that had humiliated him so.

"...should I try negotiating with \_him\_?" Fluttershy asked.

"...\_what\_."

"Don't see why not," Naoki said, shrugging. "I mean, he \_is\_ a demon, right? Not all of 'em are open to normal talks-"

"you \_dare\_ ignore-"

"-so we may be better off waiting until a full moon," Naoki continued. "Those mess with some demons' minds. Or-"

"I am \_standing right\_--"

"-could try using one of Langdon's fancy apps to calm him down enough to talk," the Demi-Fiend went on. "The DEMONICA can do some really weird shi-"

He was cut off by a blow to the head, sending him crashing into a nearby wall with a painful-sounding \_thud\_.

"\_Don't you dare ignore me!\_" the incensed centaur roared. "\_ME! LORD TIREK!\_"

"Don't care," Naoki grunted, climbing to his hooves. "Look, Timex, or whatever-"

"\_Ti. Rek,\_" hissed the demon, as he opened his maw wide.

"...wait, \_that's a really bad idea!" \_Fluttershy warned, jumping onto her hind legs and waving frantically to attract the monster's attention away from her companion.

"\_YOUR MAGIC IS MINE!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>"What did you do?" Twilight asked as soon as they were out of earshot.<p>

"Come again?" Naoki(?) asked as he sat back on his haunches, spitting onto his forehoof and wiping something off of his horn.

"The entire town stampeded out of here, the wall of Cutie Marks is empty, and Starlight is nowhere to be seen," she clarified. "What did you do?"

"Let us not dance around the topic," the man agreed. "I killed her."

"Why?"

"You know why," he snorted, wiping the brown-colored mix of saliva and...dried blood...off of his horn. "I suppose you're expecting me to recount how I used some grand, ironic punishment on her. Drawing and quarteting her in front of her entire dictatorship, maybe? Flaying her alive, perhaps? No. Every journey begins with a single step, Twilight Sparkle. And, so too, do they end."

The Princess of Friendship glared at him.

"A single step at roughly under the speed of sound," he explained. "It is difficult to tear out someone's soul when you are bleeding out the throat and jugular vein. No grand humiliation, or magnificent plan. The look on her face when she realized that her plans were undone was enough for me. The town didn't even get past the first verse of their song before she fell," he recalled, smirking.

"This is a Sanctuary Loop, Naoki. We won't do anything to hurt you, but that doesn't mean you can go around murdering anyone you want."

"I am not Naoki." Red eyes blinked at her in irritation.

Twilight stared, likewise blinking in confusion.

"I am born of him, but not him," said the entity in front of her. "A demon, crafted out of the human's id by Lucifer himself, for the purpose of striking down the Great Will. You may call me Kashima, if you must name me."

Twilight briefly recalled something her daughter had told her in between sobs after that fateful Loop-how a red-eyed version of the Mad Anchor held off the enraged Naoki's presence in his mindscape as she delved deeper in to combat the Shadow.

"It doesn't matter who you are," she said. "You can't go around killing whomever you want."

"Why not?"

Twilight stared at him in disbelief. "Because...killing people is wrong?"

"Is it?" Kashima asked, tilting his head slightly.

Twilight saw no malice, no mockery, no arrogance in his eyes. Just confusion.

"...oh, sweet \_turnip\_, you don't actually \_know why\_, " she said, facehoofing. "Alright, let's start from the beginning."

In the span of three minutes, Tirek had gone from a haughty monster to a quivering, shrieking demon trying very, \_very\_ hard to hide himself behind a convenient boulder.

"Found you, Timex."

Screaming, Tirek tried to scramble away, but was summarily smacked in the face by a tossed rock. Yelling in pain, he fell to the floor as blood began to trickle from his broken nose.

"Can't really think of any catchy one-liners at the moment," a bored-looking Naoki said as he cantered to the fallen centaur, the binding magic of the cursed stone kicking in. "So, I think I'll just kill you now."

"Wait!" the demon screeched.

"Oh, and stealing some MP doesn't guarantee victory," he idly said as he lifted up a forehoof towards Tirek's center-of-mass. "I mean, most of my attacks run off of physical health-or HP, as nerds would say. Besides, I've got enough Magatsuhi crammed in my Pocket to make up for whatever teeny bits of power you made off with. If any. At all."

"Please! I'll do anything!" he begged as Naoki pulled back his hoof for a final blow. "I'll...I'll form a contract \_just let me live!\_"

"Wait!"

From somewhere behind him, Fluttershy tackled Naoki to the ground.

"Yeah, forgot to mention some demons bargain when you're about to smash their faces in," he grunted, as both of them got up.

"So, I just hold this up, and-"

As he openly wept from fear and shame, Tirek dissolved into a stream of ones and zeroes, flowing from the ground in front of them into Fluttershy's COMP.

"Congrats," Naoki said, slapping Fluttershy hard on the back, "you've got your first demon. A Tyrant-class one, no less. Those tend to be high end. Ish."

"Glad to hear it," Fluttershy said, blushing a little. "So, do I need to remember to break the Contract before the Loop ends, or-"

"Nah, demons get ejected from a Compendium before the Loop ends." Naoki brushed some of the dirt and tears from the fight off of his coat. "The data's still there, though. You'll be able to get your own Timex out of there whenever you want. Provided you'll pay the Macca."

"Tirek, not Timex."

"Same thing." Naoki grinned, his troubles finally pushed to the back of his subconsciousness for the moment. "Let's keep going. Up to tracking down Trumpeter and smashing his skull in with his own trumpet?"

\* \* \*

><p>"So that is why," Kashima said, <em>hours<em> after Twilight had begun.

"\_Yes! THANK you\_!" Twilight said, her mane long-since frayed from exasperation of having to explain the entirety of an Ethics 101 course to what she had clearly learned was a sociopath.

"Mh." Truth to be told, Kashima \_still\_ didn't really get it. Nor did he particularly \_care\_. He was \_not\_ human (or equine), and the finite was always tough to understand for immortal Amalan demons.

Yet, he supposed it was in his nature to kill, as an incarnation of Death Itself.

He could not blame the eagle for flying, or the serpent for sliding on its belly. Nor could he blame the pony for befriending others and bringing them into their herd over death. Strength in numbers, he guessed, as they \_were\_ a prey species.

"Tell me, though," he said. "One of the reasons you listed for this is because murder breaks the law of your land."

"Yeah. You don't want to be thrown in jail for the rest of the Loop, right?"

"A foolish justification. Harmony is nothing more than a transitory--"

"Oh, \_no you don't!\_"

Suddenly, Kashima was yanked off of his hindquarters, and found himself dangling in the air in front of a \_furious\_ Anchor.

"I have \_had it\_ with people like you \_complaining endlessly\_ about how 'friendship is a lie,' or 'power comes from isolation,' or 'friends tie you down,' or \_any of those road apples!\_ Don't you \_dare\_ start on \_that lecture!\_ \_I've heard it a hundred times, and I WON'T hear it again! It doesn't matter if it's a rainbow beam or just having people to support you! Friendship \_is magic!\_ Not \_foolish!\_"

"...Of course it is," Kashima said, with complete sincerity.

"...za?" Twilight said, dropping Kashima to the cavern's floor suddenly.

"All of these foes, you have vanquished through the bonds you have made," he continued, picking himself up. "The allies you have wrought, the connections you have forged, the power you have gained from doing so. Attempting to deny that there is \_power\_ in the bonds of Man and Mare is an exercise in futility. Amongst so many Branches

in Yggdrasil, this concept appears again and again and again. I would be a fool to dismiss it after the sheer amount of support your ideals gain.

"All these dangers on this planet," he went on, motioning out the cave's mouth. "Beasts seeking to rend you limb from limb. Tyrants and overlords dot the landscape, ready to rip the freedom and power you hold dear from you and make you their slaves. The planet itself is stagnant, and would rot and decay into nothing without constant, neverending supervision. All of these lethal threats, dealt with without even raising a single hand against them. All of them, toppled by friendship." He smirked. "People dismiss you and your folk as little more than babes and weaklings, all due to your forms and philosophies. But I know better. You are warriors. Each and every single one of you. Fighting 'gainst death and entropy each and \_every\_ day: not through spells or blades, but through words alone. That...is worthy of respect, Twilight Sparkle."

"...then...what \_were\_ you going to lecture me about?" Twilight asked, baffled.

"Harmony," Kashima spat, as if the word were a dirty curse. "Do not claim that all things are balanced, and that laws or order mean anything in the long run. We both know better."

Kashima had suddenly gone from the other side of the cave to right in front of Twilight's face. She did not flinch in the slightest, staring the world-devouring demon right in the eyes, devoid of fear.

"Just as Man has eaten of the Fruit of Knowledge," he proclaimed, "so too has Mare. Do not pretend otherwise. I see it in your eyes. I smell it on your breath. You cannot close your eyes and return to ignorance. The knowledge that harmony and equality are naught but transitory states have sunk in: chaos is the natural order of things. I claim not to understand it, but Friendship does indeed transcend the laws of reality. This is a fact you have proven, time and time again. Yet I know for certain that Harmony does not.

"But you have your wish," he said, backing off. "I shall go to pains not to slay anyone for the duration of my stay here, unless I am directly provoked into a fight. I shall...what did you suggest?"

"Pranking...them," Twilight said slowly. "It's a lot more fun to mess with your enemies than to just kill them. Killing only ever does one thing: it makes people die. Pranks can be \_so much more\_."

"I see." Kashima broke into a grin, with far, \_far\_ more teeth than any herbivore was meant to have. "Why didn't you just say so in the first place?"

Twilight froze in place. For several seconds.

"I would have gladly agreed to torment my foes than kill them, had you said so in the first place," he said, still grinning. "No lecture needed."

A few moments later, Twilight's friends (who had patiently been waiting outside the cave, and had just wrapped up an impromptu game

of Eye-Spy courtesy of Pinkie Pie), were jolted to attention by the sound of roaring rapids, followed by a surprised stallion falling out of the cave on a gargantuan wave of water.

Screaming in nonsensical anger, Twilight put away her supercharged squirt bottle, replaced it with a foam sword from her Pocket, and proceeded to go to town on the demon.

"I was considering a spar, anyways," Kashima said, eventually getting to his hooves and parrying her blows at the first opportunity. "Non-lethal, since you so insisted. A god, and a demon meant to kill one. Let us see who is victorious."

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

I'm sorry for the extreme length of the pause between updates - there's been some general loop shakeups going on, and I've also been a bit generally overworked.

Rather than do a pithy comment for everything, I'll just note a few of the high points.

157.1: It's sometimes good to let out your inner child - even if they're not your normal shape.

157.2: World design from Planetcopla, used without permission.

157.3: No, she's not really an Exalted. But it looks shiny.

157.4: Oh, look! Plot!

157.7: Savvy.

157.8: Well, it is a good book.

157.15: Plunkplunkplunkplunk

157.16: Settling accounts.

157.20: Some people just won't Friend easily.

## 165. Chapter 165

### 158.1 (Masterweaver)

The loop had only just begun, and Steven had only just confirmed that the Crystal Gems were awake, when Amethyst's eyes suddenly widened. "Oh frack!"

Pearl gasped, quickly clasping her hands over Steven's ears. "AMETHYST!"

But the purple gem was already running for the temple door. "Garnet can you handle the centipeedles okay thanks Steven and Pearl you're with me!" With only that brief warning, she wrapped her whip around the very confused pair and dragged them into her massive mess of a room.

"Amethyst, what are you-?!"

"Okay, I need you two to help me get this-" Amethyst winced.  
"\_organized\_ as quickly as we can."

Pearl dropped Steven in shocked glee. "\_Really?\_"

Steven stood up. "Um... why?"

The purple gem was already disassembling one of her piles. "There's a new woman in Beach City this loop, if my memories are right, and if she's who I think she is-"

A bubble suddenly warped into existence in front of the panicking gem, containing the image of a cross-eyed blonde smiling at her. "Hi there, honey! I'm still a little busy dealing with my Pre-Awake set-up, but I should be able to drop by in half an hour! Hope to see you soon!" She waved brightly at Amethyst for the briefest of seconds.

Then the bubble popped.

Pearl's eyebrow quirked. "'Honey'?"

Amethyst sighed. "I... I replace her oldest daughter a lot. Like, a lot a lot. And Amethyst Star is \_super\_ organized! I don't want to let her down!" She grabbed a tub, gave it a brief look, then stuffed it in her pocket. "Now come on, we've only got like thirty minutes before she gets here!"

\* \* \*

><p>158.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

"You're wrong, Nightmare Tangle!" Twilight shouted. "The Elements of Fashion are \_right\_ here!\_"

She pointed at her friends, one by one. "Applejack, whose level-headed nature kept everyone from panicking when the cliff collapsed, represents the spirit of Practicality!"

"Darn tootin'!" The mare flipped her mane. "Press it every morning, brush it every night!"

"Fluttershy, whose charm and poise was enough to calm down a raging manicomore, represents the element of Elegance!"

The pegasus lightly stroked her mane out of her eyes. "This is all natural, by the way. It's a gift, really."

"Pinkie Pie, who showed us how to laugh off the damage of your mud-flinging fear trees, represents the element of Confidence!"

"I'm pudgy, pink, have frizzy hair, and I'm damn sexy to boot!" Pinkie paused. "Wait, are we keeping this G-rated?"

"Rarity, who gave fashion tips to one of the most up to date sea serpents in the forest, represents the element of Style!"

"Filly please." Rarity struck a pose that would have stallions



everywhere drooling. "\_Everything\_ I do, I do in style."

"And Rainbow Dash, who pounded your army of barbershop minions while rocking a guitar solo, represents the element of Flair!"

"My mane is only twenty percent as awesome as me! AND IT'S A FREAKING RAINBOW!"

"Vut, vut zis cannot be!" Nightmare Tangle protested. "Vu du not have, how do you say, ze sixthe elemint!"

"But I do!" Twilight cried. "For you see, each and every one of these ponies has taught me so much about how to maintain my image, and that has sparked in me a wellspring of reflection and creativity. I look upon ponies now, and I see so much potential! I have the sense of fashion that I so long lacked. I have... ze Magics!"

The crown descended on Twilight's head, and the Nightmare's eyes went wide as the six ponies all began to glow. "Zis iz impossibley! Non... NON... NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOON!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Welp, this is certainly a weird variant," Applejack mused. "Ah mean, Ah've got like five different shampoos back at home and Ah know fer a fact that's the least amount in Ponyville!"<p>

Fluttershy chuckled. "Shampoo, conditioner, coat soap, hoof sealant, and antiperspirant deodorant, I'd imagine?"

"I'm just glad I'm not the pony that got the Element of Style," Rainbow muttered. "I don't think I'd be able to live that down."

Pinkie held up a hoof. "Quick question: how do balloons relate to confidence? Or is this just another 'shaped like the cutie mark' thing?"

"I'd presume something about being carried above doubt would factor into the interpretation," Rarity mused. "Oh, Twilight, do you know when Celestia's Replacement is going to arrive? She seems a little late."

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Well, given that appearance is really important this loop she does have a prep-kit she has to use, but Aloe should be here within twenty minutes. In the meantime, though, maybe we should help Lotus freshen up? I cannot believe I just said that," she murmured.

\* \* \*

><p>158.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

"I... I don't like to talk about it," Sunset explained reluctantly.

Twilight frowned. "What? Why?"

"Well... um." The teenage girl fiddled with her fingers. "...Twilight, when you're a male, you're basically just... you, but

as a guy. Nerdy but still... uh, charismatic."

"...yeeeeeeeeesss?"

Sunset cringed, twiddled her thumbs for a couple moments, then threw up her hands. "Look, I don't know whether it's because my first loop was in Kingdom Hearts or if it's a glitched code or if I'm just this attractive normally, but whenever I'm a guy I'm completely bishonen! Like, the prettiest man that all the girls secretly fawn over, you know?"

Twilight blinked. "Wait... so that loop where you came to me and hid in the cardboard box, that's NORMAL for you?"

"YES!"

\* \* \*

><p>158.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

There were loops, and there were loops.

Twilight Sparkle had long ago come to the conclusion that her baseline was, for lack of a better term, sketchy enough that a certain amount of variation could occur without actually requiring that the loop be labeled a variant. Small things, like whether or not Quills and Sofas only sold red quills or sold a rainbow, or whether Nightmare Moon was the result of possession or just insane jealousy. The main story would remain the same, all things being equal, but these little micro eventualities popped up sometimes, and she simply had to deal with them.

Like, for instance, the stallion that had just stepped out of the crate that was just delivered to her palace.

Twilight looked from his face, back to the letter in her hoof, around at her (thankfully all Awake) friends, and then back to his face.

"...So," she said in as casual a tone as she could, "Princess Celestia just magically made us all a boyfriend." She paused. "To share, apparently."

"That there is a thing that just happened," Applejack agreed, rubbing the back of her head. "Has... has this ever happened before?"

"Well, she does occasionally spend some loops trying to set me up with various beaus because I'm romantically uninclined, but she doesn't usually involve you lot. And making a pony is new."

Rarity sighed, standing up and walking over to the stallion. "I'm terribly sorry to inform you of this, but I'm already married." She nodded her head toward the large dragon who was crossing his arms stoically. "I think he and I are just going to leave the rest of the girls to handle the situation." With that, the pair left.

Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes. "Well, she took the easy way out. Now what?"

Pinkie tapped her chin. "We draw straws?"

Fluttershy cleared her throat. "Ahem. We should probably see what mister Anypony's opinion of the situation is."

"I don't know, Fluttershy." Twilight finally put down her letter, gesturing at the still smiling but now sweating stallion. "If he is artificial-which, in this loop, is apparently a possibility-he might be running under a limited logic-directive system and therefore not have developed any opinion whatsoever outside an initial command to love and adore us all."

"Still, it's worth a try. Besides, we all attended Apple Bloom's lecture on synthetic psychology a few loops back, didn't we? Just because he starts with a limited logic-directive system does not guarantee he won't develop in a direction outside the initial framework."

"...Fair point," the alicorn conceded. "Still, of the ponies left in the target group, I'm asexual, Rainbow Dash probably would want a committed multi-loop relationship, and Applejack..."

She paused, giving Applejack an awkward look. "I'm sorry, but how do you feel about one-loop stands?"

The farm mare shrugged. "For me, marriage is part o' the family. Ah don't take in nopony who ain't gonna make a good Apple."

"...fair enough. So that just leaves you and Pinkie."

"To be fair," Pinkie quipped, "he is cute. And I'm pretty free-love, all things considered, although I'm not very good at the relationship side of things."

Fluttershy shrugged. "Well, I for one have had multiple one-loop stands, thank you very much, and I don't mind taking mister Anypony in."

Rainbow blinked. "Wait. You? I mean, I knew about you and Link, but-"

"Sometimes I like to feel like a caring wife," Fluttershy explained. "And what comes with that is what comes with that. I'm sorry, Pinkie, but in this case I think I might be better able to take care of him."

The pink pony shrugged. "Fair enough. Mister Anypony, you're okay with that, right?"

The stallion nodded.

"...You can talk, right?" Rainbow raised an eyebrow. "I mean, you're not just eyecandy, are you?"

The stallion shrugged, helplessly.

Twilight flicked up her wings. "Right. Fluttershy, you just take him to your cottage, and I'll... I'll write up a letter to Celestia explaining the loops and why a relationship is a bad idea." She turned away, rubbing a hoof against her clenched shut eyes.

\* \* \*

><p>158.5 (Alex Prior)<p>

Twilight trudged into the bar.

"Drink. NOW."

Mac took one look and swallowed a laugh. The mare traipsing into the bar had two long horns poking from her shoulder-blades, with a single wing where the horn should have been.

Mac weighed his options for a moment. Then he left Berry in charge of Twilight's drink and absconded into his pocket. One would think he'd have been jaded enough.

Berry looked Twilight over. "Spell backfire or a funky sense of humor?"

Twilight just glared.

\* \* \*

><p>158.6 (Filraen)<p>

\_From all of us together, together we're friends. With the marks of our destinies made one, there is magic without end!\_

Upon writing the now completed version of Starswirl the Bearded's spell, nopony was more surprised than Twilight Sparkle when the Elements of Harmony reacted, forming a magic storm around her. Maybe a punishment for their misuse and almost condemning her friends to live lives which would made them completely unhappy?

However, after a moment of panic Twilight realized the magic storm was around her but not affecting her, a simple feel of the Elements' magic told her that wasn't the case. She could feel the connections between herself and her friends. Applejack, Rainbow Dash, Rarity, Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie, Twilight could feel their connection just when they used the Elements against Nightmare Moon or Discord, that everything was going to be just fine.

When the whirlpool of magic finally collapsed towards Twilight she closed her eyes, smiled and let herself go.

\* \* \*

><p>Next thing Twilight knew she was standing in the middle of a shiny space, standing on solid nothing... and she needed to wake up properly and find somepony else.<p>

"Hello? Where am I? What is this place?"

All of a sudden Princess Celestia appeared before her  
"Congratulations, Twilight. I knew you could do it."

Twilight kept her frown even after a nuzzle to greet her mentor.  
"Princess... I don't understand. What did I do?"

"You did something today that's never been done before. Something even a great unicorn like Starswirl the Bearded was not able to do, because he did not understand friendship like you do. The lessons you've learned here in Ponyville have taught you well. You have proven that you're ready, Twilight."

"Ready? Ready for what?"

"For your final test, Twilight Sparkle." Another alicorn suddenly appeared at Princess Celestia's right side.

"Princess Luna!"

"We're so glad you've made it this far, Twilight." Princess Cadance appeared at Princess Celestia's left. Twilight gave just a nuzzle to greet the arriving Princesses; this didn't seem the moment for Cadance's nursery rhyme.

"What do you mean?" At this point Twilight wasn't sure who she was supposed to ask. Was this supposed to be a final test? She... she didn't have her study materials! She didn't have any time to prepare herself! She-!

"Follow us, Twilight." Princess Celestia's calm voice hopefully cut through Twilight's panic before the Princesses started walking.

As Twilight followed them she could see many images passing by, all of her time since she arrived to Ponyville: trying to investigate Pinkie's Pinkie Sense, the Running of the Leaves, Shining Armor and Cadance's wedding, that time traveling fiasco and many, many more. Twilight was so entranced by the images she didn't notice the Princesses had stopped, all of them looking at a big black glass panel.

The Princesses were now holding a short white stick each in their magical aura. When Princess Luna gave her a fourth small stick Twilight realized it had a small light, even if it didn't seem to be magical at all.

"Your bonds with your friends are strong, Twilight," Princess Celestia spoke as the black glass panel suddenly illuminated, showing different images unlike anything Twilight had ever seen. "But today you need to show their endurance, that your friendships can resist even the most devious of challenges."

Twilight kept looking at the colorful images of the glass panel until they stopped, this time teasing her with words holding an unknown meaning.

"Mario... Party?"

\* \* \*

><p>158.7 (Masterweaver)<p>

Usagi \_had\_ been running the loop baseline, mostly as a form of meditation while she thought about what to do the next time Ami and Rei were both Awake. But that all changed after the Attack in the Alleyway... where her rescuer did not have strawberry curls in a pony tail, but a short-cropped dirty blonde set of locks.

"...Ya alright, miss?"

The warrior of the moon allowed herself to be pulled up by the muscular woman-and she was muscular, Usagi noted, not just fit as usual. Her eyes traveled up and up to meet the green eyes of her rescuer-oh. Ooooh.

She grinned a grin that wouldn't be out of place on the face of her in-loop mentor. "Big \_Mac\_oto, I presume?"

The taller girl-and she was definitely a girl, she was just as 'talented' as the person she was replacing-let out a quiet huff. "Eeeeyup."

Usagi burst out in uncontrolled laughter. "This is great! This is just so great! You, you're replacing Sailor Jupiter, she's, she's like the strong one! This makes total sense!"

"Ah hope ya don't mind if'n Ah opt out," Mac grumbled. "Ah'm not really a fighter-"

"Ah ah ah noooo. No, sorry, there's this whole destiny thing going on," Usagi explained. "So you're going to have to fight. And! And there are the things that Makoto does in baseline that lead to important situations, and, snrrrk, you'll definitely need to, to introduce yourself to the girls, and constantly compare guys to, to...pfffffahahahahahahahaha!"

The anchor collapsed in another laughing fit. Mac tried to cross his arms, realized where that would put them, blushed, and settled for pinching his brow. "...Ah'm \_not\_ going to be obsessing over mah ol' boyfriend."

"Oh my god, oh my god, that would be hilarious though! Just you in that deep voice and, and, every time, you would say 'he looks just like my old boyfriend'!" The noble princess of the moon tittered with unmitigated glee.

"...Ya know," Mac mused, "most o' the anchors Ah meet tend to be a tad less... teasing."

"Original seven, I'm a total loon. A Lunatic, if you will!" Usagi finally managed to contain her laughter somewhat, standing up. "Oh, hee hee, my sides... okay, but seriously, you're going to be kicking ass in a miniskirt, no arguments."

\* \* \*

><p>158.8 (Masterweaver)<p>

One of the problems with being an immortal-at least, in the context of the loops-was, quite simply, the lack of context. Celestia could recall being hatched from an egg, formed from raw magic, being the final survivor of a super-soldier program, being created by Discord on a random whim, being the manifest consciousness of the Sun itself, and that wasn't even mentioning the many, many times she had a deific mother. It had gotten to a point where she wondered if she would ever know her 'true' origins, and sometimes... if it even mattered.

Still, no matter where she came from, she loved being a filly. There was just so much innocence and freedom and-

"The \_princess \_does not have \_time \_for playing \_games\_, " growled the guard next to her. "She is \_attending \_a \_ceremony \_later today. Now \_move along.\_"

Aaaaand the other fillies were cowed and backing away.

Well, \_this \_wasn't something she'd let happen.

"Isn't it the princess's duty to know how her subjects are living?" she asked innocently.

The guard frowned at her. "That is why you are attending the \_ceremony\_."

"But everyone's going to be so controlled and trying to look good!" Celestia whined. "It's not going to be \_real\_! I think I'd learn more about my subjects by playing with them then by being part of some silly ceremony."

"You have a responsibility to attend that ceremony and claim your position as-

"Besides, it's not like the ceremony is any time soon," the little alicorn pointed out. "I think I have time for one eensy teensy little game with them, don't you?"

"Princess, it is unbecoming for a mare of your stature to be seen cavorting with-

"Stupidguardsayswhat?"

The guard narrowed his eyes. "Young mare, I am your personal bodyguard, and I-

Celestia grabbed his helmet in her magic and slammed it over his head, not so accidentally also covering his ears. "Tell him I ran for the bakers," she whispered conspiratorially to the shocked fillies watching, flapping up into a tree. She couldn't help a tiny giggle at the ridiculous scene before her. Yes, sometimes it was really quite enjoyable, being a precocious and highly intelligent filly.

\* \* \*

><p>158.9 (Masterweaver)<p>

Equestria was uniquely blessed with a large number of stable loopers.

That wasn't to say they were \_sane\_, mind. They were as stir crazy as other universes, when one got right down to it, and a very few of them did have legitimate mental conditions that would not have existed without the loops. Even with that, though, there weren't really any problem loopers, any of them that needed careful watching, and most of them were smart enough to realize when they needed to go to others to talk.

So it was entirely understandable that the Anchor might miss a few signs. Especially when said anchor had, as a hobby, at least twenty scientific experiments running at once, whilst also juggling a self-imposed responsibility toward ensuring the mental health of others, and to be quite frank hadn't exactly extended as much care toward the looper as she did her closer friends. It wasn't a case of negligence-it was a case of overestimation, miscommunication, and perhaps if she admitted it to herself an unwillingness to approach a pony who she often saw as a co-bartender outside situations where the pony would be, in fact, a co-bartender.

"...Berry," she said as gently as she could, "let him go. You're scaring him."

"FIVE HUNDRED AND FIFTY LOOPS! He's been unawake for five hundred and fifty loops, Twilight!"

"I know, Berry." Part of Twilight wanted to snap back and shout about all her friends that were for the... rounding it up to three thousandth time completely dumbstruck by the situation, but she knew from experience that different people were affected by different measures. "I understand," she instead stated. "And I... I suppose I haven't been as friendly as I should have been-"

"This isn't about friendship!" Berry snapped. "I mean, you're a great friend and all, Twilight, but-I just... I just-"

The anchor let out a small sigh. "Berry, you and I both know that he isn't him. Maybe he'll Wake Up later, maybe he won't, but this right here isn't right. Just... just let him go, and... and we can talk later," she finished lamely. "Please?"

It took a long and tense moment, but finally the other mare sighed, releasing her grip and backing away. "I... you're right... I just... I don't know..." With a vague look on her face, she ruffled her wings. "I'm going to... just... go, okay?"

"It'll be alright, Berry." Twilight smiled. "I promise."

With a deep breath, Berry Punch teleported away.

After a moment, Discord raised a talon. "So... before I was turned to stone, purple ponies didn't just turn into alicorns on a whim. And I must say having one tacklehug me right after my escape is unexpected-"

He cut himself off when he caught sight of Twilight's glare. "Princess, please take my friends to the throne room, I'll explain everything when I'm done here."

\* \* \*

><p>158.10 (elmagnifico)<p>

It was an odd loop, but not because it was Berry Punch's turn to clean one of the omnipresent cups. She did it with the experience of a thousand years' practice, but the way she kept even the tiniest speck of soap residue from splashing on her habit was a new skill.



The loop was odd because here, a Bar had existed before Macintosh awoke. This was apparently the back-end of a loop where Twilight and Applejack had replaced the Royal Sisters, and this particular bar was part of the ministries of Sweet Apple Abbey, devoted to Her Highness Applejack The Strong. He'd wanted to take his traditional place at the bar as soon as he Awoke, but the abbey only let males do the cleaning, serving alcohol was strictly the domain of the nuns.

Berry's cornette bobbed as she talked, and a pinkish hoof adjusted the headgear to keep it from falling off as she worked.

"So Mac, ever thought about joining the horn-and-wings club?"

Macintosh concentrated on his own chore until he could put his thoughts into words. Rub, rub, rub, went his dishcloth, until the laminated bar surface squeaked with cleanliness. The pregnant pause went into its third trimester before he spoke up.

"Don't get me wrong, nothin' wrong with alicorns. One of the first things ah learned was that wings an' a horn don't make a pony real different inside. Y'd think ah'd get it th' first time, but ah've been learning that again and again..."

Images of sisters, both big and little, orange, yellow, purple, and off-white pink, danced behind green eyes.

"What ah'm worried about though, is what ifn' somepony like me Wakes Up?"

Silence fell when Berry didn't reply immediately, and Macintosh let it stretch before he continued his stately freight-train of thought.

"Remember back before y'all started loopin', when there was only one alicorn? She was th' be-all an' end-all, despite her best efforts. How do y' think a mortal pony's gonna feel, suddenly surrounded by be-alls an' end-alls?"

Macintosh continued scrubbing at a stubborn spot on one of the lazy susans.

"Ah'm th' oldest looper 'round here who ain't got extra limbs on-call, an' while ah don't have anything against th' things, ah'd like to hold off on 'em ifn' at all possible. Might be good to have somepony who's been 'round th' tree a few times fer them to turn to."

Thoughtful quiet prevailed again until, by way of reply, Berry held up the tumbler she was scrubbing, and it sparkled with the sheen of something more.

"It's just, apparently your baseline self, during one of the expansions, dreamed of ascension."

Mac grunted from the table he was wiping down.

"Maybe at some point, but ah'm thinkin' that was to protect mah family. Kin ta an alicorn don't hafta worry about a bad cider harvest

or a pair of two-bit con artists sinkin' their farm. You seen mah sisters lately? Hardly need it now."

As though summoned, Applejack crashed through the front door, twice as large as usual and sporting the alicornal extraneous extremities. Her drawl lent something to the Royal Canterlot Voice that made the floorboards jump even as she slammed the stout timbers home again.

"BERRREEEY! MAAAAAAAACK! Oops, sorry. Berry, Mac, ifn' y' don't mind ah want th' biggest tankard ah Sweet Cinnamon Cider y'all got, an' a bit of privacy."

Mac nodded and went to the entrance, which had already started vibrating with the hits of Applejack's pursuers. His parting barb was just audible over the sound of a Royal Canterlot Chug as he leaned on the inside of the door.

"Besides, Berry, if there's one thing ah've learned-

He shook his head, and by way of the result of that bomb all those Loops back, his determination to protect his sister from her worshippers-cum-papparazzi added just enough strength to hold the door against five earth ponies in robes, two unicorns with cameras, a quarter-dozen pegasus devotees, and one griffon convert.

Berry waved the cosmic tumbler playfully in one hoof, her habit swishing as she used the other to withdraw another small barrel of the relevant liquid from her pocket.

Macintosh gave a meaningful nod at the windows, where photo flashes and hymns were filtering through as though the heavy curtains weren't drawn.

"Eeno. Bein' a normal pony is the best, bar nun."

\* \* \*

><p>158.11 (Sonic Raynboom)<p>

Calvin Awoke, checked his Loop memories... then slowly turned to the draconequus beside him.

"You're not Hobbes." Calvin stated the obvious.

"No, I'm not. My name's Discord. And who are you?"

"My name's Calvin... wait, I've heard of you. You invented that card game, right? Have you ever heard of Calvinball?" asked Calvin, grinning wickedly.

Discord grinned back. "I haven't, but by your expression, I can tell I'm going to love it..."

\* \* \*

><p>158.12 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...Twilight?"

A sigh. "Please, Rarity, please don't do this-"

"Why does your new palace look like a cuttlefish?"

The alicorn rubbed her face. "I wish I knew. I wish I knew."

\* \* \*

><p>158.13 (Masterweaver)<p>

There are various cliché reactions to awkward shock. The simple blink, which allows the person to take a moment for processing. An "uh" or possibly "er", very rarely an "ah", all useful pause noises as they try to figure out what to say. Various little sentences involving the word what: "I'm sorry, what?" "Wait, what?" "What was that?" "What did you say?" or even just "What." all on its lonesome.

However, there are times when none of these are appropriate for the situation. The Grand Galloping Gala was a high-society gathering, after all, and plebeian stuttering or direct admission of confusion was generally quite frowned upon... for rather idiotic reasons, to be sure, but it was the principle of the matter.

Thus, Nyx settled for a polite, "...Excuse me?" The implication of a What was there, but since it was not actually present she had not committed any faux pas.

The Smooze gurgled again, holding out a small pseudopod with a wide... grin was the closest word, although it couldn't really be called a grin without teeth.

"...I... suppose I could, yes." Still bearing some mild confusion on her face, the black alicorn stepped onto the dance floor with her new partner, circling around as slow music played. "I'm honestly just... surprised that you asked."

"Glorphlbrgmrphigl."

"Aha, thank you I guess..."

The green goop adjusted its tie self-consciously.  
"...Gurglmorgmphlora?"

"Well, not... not exactly," Nyx admitted. "My mother used her plus-one to let me in, and I..." She trailed off, staring out the window at the stars. "...well, at the moment, I'm unattached I guess. The whole thing's really... complicated."

"Garmphola," the Smooze glorped sympathetically.  
"Glerfigamporflomargolimafara."

"Well, yes." Nyx gave the green goop a joking smile. "You know, for a creature without eyes you're incredibly perceptive."

The smooze licked its lips, awkwardly orienting them upward.  
"Glrifamicaraaaa..."

Nyx frowned. "...what? What is it?"

After a moment, the Smooze turned back, contracting in embarrassment. "Glorficama... Gimoorgiahsjocasina. Glerpinmorgangargonmorga..."

Nyx sighed, rubbing her forehead. "And he told you the whole thing, didn't he. Well, yes, me and my... ugh. I had a serious fight with the person I was dating, yeah."

"Glifmorgaramorgan," the smooze glugged drily.  
"Glimfirmigamorgamiforgicaghljrewau-"

"He \_what?!\_"

The smooze held up some consolatory pseudopods as quickly as it was able. "Glrembargafloogen! Gliphragmorbighara-glar, glimaragaminorf-glarma..." It grappled at its hat, trying to take it off in a gentlecreaturely manner. "Glormigarifcarigkakamorg... glimarfagamorgana, gloomaragaglimgara?"

Nyx rolled her eyes as she sat down. "Look, Smooze... you're a nice creature and all, and... and I get that Tantabus sent you my way because he was worried about me. But... I really don't think that it would work out between us. Besides, Tanty is... well... Tanty is very childlike. Just because you look like a cool 'dad' doesn't mean, well..." She gestured vaguely. "I'm not saying you'd be a bad parent, but I don't think you could attend to his unique needs. Or mine, really. I do appreciate the gesture, but... I'm going to have to say no."

"Gliffffffffff..."

"...hey, it's not all bad." Nyx patted the Smooze's... ventral surface reassuringly. "You're a very sensitive and caring individual, clearly. I'm sure you just need to find the right pony â€" as a matter of fact," she added with a sly smile, "I do happen to know a pony who has an odd fixation on tubs of jelly. Maybe I could arrange a date...?"

\* \* \*

><p>158.14 (Edvarius)<p>

Celestia Awoke in a manner that was odd for her, surrounded by a shimmering, pyramid-shaped barrier of many hues. She quickly readied her magic and cast her glance all around her. To her dismay she found she knew \_exactly\_ where she was. Her old castle, where Luna had turned into Nightmare Moon, and the damage to the castle wasn't from an ancient battle. It was fresh, and the Elements of Harmony lay as stone orbs at her hooves. But why the barrier this time?

Celestia gasped in horror as the Loop Memories hit her.

Nightmare Moon had attacked as usual, but the castle had been occupied this time. Her unawake self ordered the guards to evacuate everyone, lead them away from this place, but when one of Nightmare Moon's blasts had sent her through a wall three had disobeyed the order and come charging back to protect her. They couldn't possibly have defeated her sister on their own. But then they hadn't even tried. One of them, a unicorn, had arranged his companions into a triangular formation around her, and they'd used her lives to create this shield to give her time to recover and fight back. Now that

Celestia knew they were there she looked down at barely visible, translucent forms of ponies at the corners of the shield, and what little there was of them was soon gone from sight. Celestia bowed her head in sorrow. \_Perhaps it would be best if Luna didn't Awaken in this Loop. She shouldn't be forced to live with those kinds of memories.\_

The barrier she was within faded as the ponies who had cast it did, but somehow the shimmering in the air around her had not. If anything it was getting moreâ€¦ focused. The wavering air took on the form of the ponies that had died to save her, but with coats and manes of a ghostly white. One of them, an earth pony, turned to the unicorn, and Celestia heard her voice ringing within her mind. :\_Five minutes! You couldn't go five \_gods damned minutes \_before you got us all killed again!:\_

Celestia blinked in shock at the unexpected voice from beyond the grave. Given the gestures the spirits were making apparently the conversation was continuing, albeit more privately. This was definitely one of the odder ways she had started a Loop, althoughâ€¦ the earth pony which had "spoken" seemed familiar to her from somewhere. Then it hit her. "Yfandes, is that you?"

The spirits turned their attention back to her and the same mental voice as before answered, :\_Yeahâ€¦ that's my name. Have we met before?\_:

"My name is Celestia. I Looped in as Queen of Valdemar, remember."

The third of the ghostly group, a pegasus, nodded in recognition. :\_Oh, now I remember. You were the ones who had the really oddly colored Companions. You'd mentioned you were normally a pony. Funny running into you like this\_:

Celestia tried to calm her temper. "Funny? You think having me see three of my little ponies die right in front of me in an effort to hold back my sister under the influence of dark magic is \_funny?!\_"

The unicorn spirit held up his hooves in a placating manner. :\_Stefen didn't mean it like that. We're sorry for the scare, but we Awoke during the attack and saw you were in trouble. I'm sorry if it seems we were a bit too hasty with that spell, but to be honest we're sort of used to dying at this point.\_:

:\_It would be nice to spend at least a \_little \_time alive to get to know a place before we have to make the Heroic Sacrifice.\_: Yfandes grumbled. :\_Maybe sample some of the local cuisine while I still have a digestive system.\_:

Stefen started giggling at that, causing the irritated earth ghost to turn her attention to him. :\_Sorry, it's justâ€¦ the Loop memories just hit. Guess what I'm called as a pony.\_:

:\_Is it any worse than Vanilla Yell?\_: the unicorn more commonly known as Vanyel inquired.

:\_I'm Songwind!\_:

Vanyel and Yfandes blinked at that revelation. :\_You can't be Songwind. We already have a Songwind.\_:

Stefen just stuck his tongue out at his boyfriend. :\_Too bad, I'm keeping it. He doesn't usually Wake Up until he's changed his name to Darkwind anyway.\_:

Celestia tried to massage her forehead to quiet down the headache the past few minutes had brought her. "Well regardless of what you want to call yourselves, I suppose it's my duty to welcome you to the Equestrian Loop. We consider ourselves a sanctuary loop, so you don't need to feel like you have to get involved in any problems that crop upâ€" Celestia paused for a moment "Well, any \_more\_ problems that crop up. You can just relax and consider this a vacation."

:\_Actually, how long does this Loop usually last?\_: Yfandes asked.

"From this point? You're looking at around 1000 years before our Anchor usually Awakens, and another 5 years after that."

:\_Well, it's a bit longer than we usually spend as forest spirits, but all things considered it's not all that much more.\_: Vanyel commented. :\_If nothing else this should give me plenty of time to study your world's magic and get an impressive garden going.\_:

\* \* \*

><p>"Sorry we haven't been around to keep you company." Twilight apologized to the spirits of what was known in this Loop as the Everhaunt Forest.<p>

:\_Think nothing of it.\_: Vanyel responded. :\_Celestia has been an excellent host, and has always made sure to take the time to visit. Besides, even though we can't leave the forest that still left us with an entire castle's worth of reading material. Now hold on, we're coming up on the picnic grounds now.\_:

The spirits lead Twilight and her friends through some old, gnarled trees with curtains of vines hanging from the branches. The girls gasped in awe at the scene in front of them. Where just before had been a dark and creepy forest, now they stood in a sunny meadow. Flowers of every color imaginable swirled about in intricate patterns impossible to have occurred naturally, though no sign of anypony else setting hoof here before this was evident. The ponies took in the scene as they approached a large stone slab table. Celestia lounged on a flat rock next to the table, pouring tea into her cup from the kettle already set up. Songwind floated up to face Twilight. :\_Well, what do you think?\_:

"This place is beautiful. You guys didn't need to go through this much effort just to give us a place for a picnic."

Yfandes waved Twilight's comment aside. :\_Hey, coming up with new breeds of flowers for this place gave us something to do.\_:

"You breed all new flowers for this?" Applejack asked.

:\_Like 'fandes said, it gave us something to do. Researching how

certain species, both flora and fauna, can be altered through generations of subtle magical mutation and good old fashioned breeding is a project of mine.": Songwind explained. :\_And it's not just flowers. I've been experimenting with some of the other plants native to the forest as well. You should see what I've accomplished with Zap Apples.\_:

"Well I must say this is all very lovely," Rarity offered as she poured herself a cup of tea. "If you don't mind my asking what sorts of flowers did you start out with?"

Vanyel's eyes seemed to twinkle as he turned to face Rarity, though that may have been a trick of the sunlight shining through him. :\_Oh, all the flowers in this particular meadow are a variety of Poison Joke.\_:

The girls turned and looked back at the blossoming field they had just walked through, and the Princess of the Sun smiled as she placed her cup back on the table. "Gotcha."

\* \* \*

><p>158.15 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Twilight Awoke to the unmistakable sight of Dream Valley- grass, bushes, some oak trees here and there, and a number of half-panicked ponies.

\_Ugh, \_she thought. \_A G1 Loop? Why am I here? I've been good. I didn't crash any Loops recently. I stopped Apple Bloom from building that Infinite Improbability Drive. What did I do to deserve this?\_

\_No, wait, focus. This is the Loops. There might not be any reason. Besides, this looks like Tirek right at the start, which means there's no time to waste on wondering why.\_

Twilight's eyes caught a glimpse of movement overhead. Firefly and a couple of other pegasi had appeared from the rainbow filling the sky overhead. Each had a human of some kind on their backs. \_Yep. Megan, right on time... but I don't remember her siblings coming along on her first trip...\_

"Twilight! Twilight!" Firefly came to a somewhat wobbly landing, allowing her rider to dismount. "I found the hero! Her name is Megan!"

"Er... it is?" Twilight looked carefully at the figure. Megan Richards was thirteen, somewhat soft-faced, and blonde. This figure looked to be not younger than sixteen. She had a face which could be most charitably described as strong, with a nose that, in old age, would do credit to a Discworld-style witch. The strands of hair that peeked out from under her motorcycle helmet were either platinum blonde or just plain gray.

And there were the guns. Oh, yes, the guns. The sniper rifle and shotgun strapped to her back, the pistol in its holster on her belt.

And oh, yes, there were the eyes. Not the red of an albino, but the

red of a fire engine, or of blood, or (if you wanted to think GI-appropriate thoughts) of a ripe apple or cherry.

\_You are not Megan. You're \_\_\*\*VERY \*\*\_\_not Megan.\_

"Um... hi there," Twilight managed to say. "Welcome to Dream Valley. I'm Twilight!"

"Charmed, I'm sure." The voice was a deep contralto with a decided rasp to it. "I am Megan. Megan Troness, to be precise."

Things clicked in Twilight's head, including her teeth (after closing her gaping mouth.) "Megatron?" she asked.

"At your service," the young woman standing in front of her said ironically, bowing at the waist.

Twilight narrowed her eyes. "Since when are you female?" she asked.

"It happens," Megan Troness grumbled, dropping her cordial facade. "Sometimes the Loops mock me by making me human. Sometimes they prefer mocking me by feminizing me. But when they really wish to test my patience, they do both." After a soft growl, she added, "This is not the first time for this. I'm just grateful Optimus isn't here to see it this time. Or worse, Starscream."

"I still remember what happened the last time you visited Equestria," Twilight continued. "Or should I say, destroyed it?"

Megan Troness shrugged. "I will not apologize," she said. "That was to prove a point. After all, you were hardly singled out that Loop."

"Um, Twilight," Firefly asked, prancing nervously on her hooves, "what are you two talking about? Do you know each other?"

"It's... it's nothing important," Twilight replied. "At least, it had better not be, right?"

"No, indeed," Megatron agreed. "Firefly told me much on our trip over. I'm sure I will have ample legitimate opportunities to... shall we say... work on my anger issues?"

"Don't worry, Twilight," a male voice chipped in from behind Megatron. "We'll keep our... sister... in line."

Twilight looked around the robotic-dictator-turned-farmgirl to see the other two pegasi unloading their passengers. The boy who'd spoken was about eleven or twelve, gangly for his age, with orange-red hair kept as meticulously tidy as his black and purple clothing. The little girl, by contrast, looked perpetually scuffed; dirty-blond hair, worn clothes, freckles, and a grim expression.

Megatron sighed. "Allow me to make known to you my little brother Gan and my little sister Skyla," she said, gesturing to each. "You probably know them better than I do."

"Ganondorf and SkyNet?" Twilight asked.



"Thanks for not saying, 'Is that you?'" SkyNet muttered, pulling a squirrel rifle off her shoulder and checking its action.

\_Megatron, Ganondorf and SkyNet in G1. Replacing the Richardses.\_

\_I MUST have done something truly horrible, \_Twilight groaned mentally, \_if only I could figure out WHAT...\_

Megatron waved a hand in front of Twilight's glazed eyes. "Does she do this often?" she asked.

"Eh, build her a library later and all will be forgiven," SkyNet shrugged.

"True," Ganondorf... tried to rumble. Preteen boys aren't built for rumbling voices. Instead he squeaked, "But for now, I believe we have a magical centaur to dispose of."

"Ah, yes," Megatron said with satisfaction. She smiled, the same smile that Autobots had learned to dread over millions of years and millions of Loops. Despite being on a teenage girl wearing a beat-up old open-faced motorcycle helmet, the smile didn't look out of place. "I'm looking forward to that, \_oh yes indeed.\_"

\* \* \*

><p>Many Loops later, Twilight stared down the barrel of an armed fusion cannon with complete calm. "No, Megatron," she said. "I've seen the picture, but I do not currently possess a copy, and I certainly never distributed any."<p>

"Then WHO?" The Decepticon leader, in his proper body, jammed the weapon on his arm a little closer to its target.

"That would be me," said a voice much closer to Twilight Sparkle's height than Megatron's. "Would you like a copy?"

Megatron redirected his furious gaze to the female human child, who held up a photograph. In the picture a female human, clearly Megatron despite the different species and gender, sat tranquilly in the shadow of a tree with a pony's head in her lap. She was brushing out the pony's mane, evidently at peace with the world.

"No, I would not like a copy, SkyNet," Megatron snarled. His huge metal arm swung away from the unicorn to aim at the girl. "I would like REVENGE!"

"I don't think so," SkyNet replied.

"Do you think you can stop me? In my own Loop? Here and now?" Megatron asked.

"Well, since I replaced Unicron the last time I was here..." The little girl raised the hand not holding the photo and snapped her fingers. Megatron's posture shifted immediately, torso hanging below elbows, hands and feet swinging limply like a poorly handled marionette.

"Now, I don't intend to abuse this power, Mr. Dark Energon Addict," SkyNet said, "but if you don't drop this issue right now and

apologize to Twilight Sparkle, I'm going to video your performance of the Little Teapot Dance."

"SkyNet," Twilight said warningly. "Let him go, please." As Megatron recovered control of his servos, she asked, "What's wrong with the picture, anyway? Did somepony mock you for liking ponies?"

"Of course not," Megatron growled. "It's all too well known I have a soft spot for your world and don't care who knows it. But that... that expression!" He jammed a finger down at the photo, which SkyNet obligingly kept held out for him. "I will NOT have it said that I, Megatron, supreme tyrant of Cybertron, conqueror of worlds, am going... \*\*pacifist!\*\*"

"Okay, I understand," Twilight smiled. "Just let me know when you figure out how to administer brushies in a menacing way, and I'll help you pose for the pic."

"That doesn't help," Megatron grumbled, as the whine of his fusion cannon faded away.

\* \* \*

><p>158.16<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Epic! Rap Battles! Of History!<strong>

\*\*Twilight Sparkle!\*\*

Twilight looked up from her diary, startled.

\*\*Versus!\*\*

\*\*Nanoha Takamachi!\*\*

Nanoha expanded out Raising Heart, looking for the source of the voice.

\*\*Begin!\*\*

The two Anchors stared at one another.

"So, how's things?" Twilight asked.

"Oh, not bad," Nanoha shrugged, switching Raising Heart back to dormant. "You?"

"All right, in general... but I just found out my adoptive daughter's dating a friend," Twilight told her. "Not sure how to feel about that, though overall I think I'm positive."

"Take it from me, the urges to kill the guy - or girl - go away after a while," Nanoha said sagely.

\*\*Begin!\*\* the voice repeated.

Both Anchors mostly ignored it.

"Ever had a fused loop like this before?" Twilight asked, waving her hoof across the boundary between the library background of her half and the Mid-Childa of Nanoha's half.

"I've heard of them," Nanoha shrugged. "I think Fate once found the videos on a trip to the Hub."

**\*\*Epic Rap Battles of History!\*\*** the voice announced, in case they hadn't heard it the first time.

"Any idea if we can leave?" Twilight checked.

"If we can't, then I'll fix that," Nanoha replied.

"No need to blast right through the walls, miss skeleton key," Twilight sighed. "At least not at first. Look, I'll try a teleport."

She ascended with a flash of her Element, and then both vanished with a flicker of purple light.

There was silence for a few seconds.

**\*\*Uh...\*\*** the voice hedged.

The background collapsed.

"Did somebody say Sailor Moon?" Usagi asked, her Furinkan background blossoming behind her... then frowned. "Oh."

**\*\*They left!\*\*** the voice told her.

"That's a pity," Usagi sighed. "I like these loops."

\* \* \*

><p>158.17 (Evilhumour and Gamerex27)<p>

The Question, part two of four.

Before either Leman or Kashima could move, there was a distinctive pop and an equine form appeared, causing one of the two bloodied and battered men to tense fiercely; unlike many creatures of chaos and the dark, he knew full well that ponies were not to be taken lightly. Especially one who had been able to brave the maelstrom of his host's mind brewed up by his Shadow..

She was not the same little creature that either knew, but a fully grown adult, dressed for battle. Her head was covered by a helm, her hooves by steel horseshoes with spikes at the heels for tearing flesh. Her neck and chest was protected by a peytral of the same near-indestructible material, and the glare she wore enforced the ceasefire.

The pony cast a single look at the warzone of the two mighty warriors and stepped in front of one, her wings outstretched to defend the other behind her.

The figure in the golden armor snarled at this sight, his anger building as he was denied the chance to have his vengeance on the one

who harmed his family.

"Nyx, move NOW!" he roared, his pskyer power building up into a single point, forcing it to take physical form in the shape of blade that would kill the monster in this loop, and hopefully, othe  
-

"\*\*NO!\*\*" she shouted back at him, her hoofsteps causing mounds of earth to fall inwards into the dying world; the unleashed fury of the two god-like warriors attempts' to kill one another having devastated the planet. "Why are you doing this?!"

"It caused you, my family and our friends so much pain!" Leman shouted back, forcing himself to stay still and not run around her to attack the monster. "Why are you protecting it?!\_"

"They," muttered Kashima under his breath as he stood back up, tilting his head at his fellow creature of darkness.

Nyx's face twitched as Leman degraded the person behind her with the same words she once heard used against herself. But she pushed aside her feelings for the moment; she had to make things right with Naoki and stop Leman from killing him. "He is not at fault for what happened! It wasn't his choice!"

"I don't believe that!" Leman said, eying Nyx equally in the face. "It knew exactly what it was doing; there is no excuse for an Anchor to be that fucking crazy and dangerous without doing it on purpose!"

"There was the matter of the flaw that drove the boy to such  
\_"

"YOU SHUT UP!" Without even looking, Leman launched a bolt of psychic energy at Kashima, who sidestepped it but got the message nonetheless. As the two lovers argued, he slowly withdrew some soma out of his Pocket and chugged it in one gulp, the powerful magic reknitting his bones and wounds.

"It made you murder your mother!\_" Leman screamed. "It made my mother slip into her Nightmare mode! It tried to ASCEND AND DESTROY ITS ENTIRE FUCKING BRANCH!"\_

"He wasn't in control at the time!" she shouted back, fighting with everything she had to not unleash the building anger she had inside her. It was so hot and terrible, it was starting to burn her insides. The aftermath if she lost control now would be catastrophic beyond measure.

"It-"

"\*\*STOP CALLING NAOKI AN 'IT!'\*\*\_" she bellowed. "Naoki is a person and every one deserves a second chance!"

Leman roared back, equally loud, "A heartless monster like it doesn't deserve a second chance! It should be put down like the feral monster it is so it can never harm another person ever again!"

Nyx reared back as the words tore at her heart before her rage

finally exploded out of her control. "A \_monster?!\_ Did you forget who \_I\_ am!?" she howled in the Royal Canterlot voice, her wings extending an impossible distance as she channeled the part of herself that she despised the most, the part she rejected to the point where she almost forget it was \_there\_. "I am Nightmare Moon! The \_monster\_ of Equestria's young, the being they \_all\_ fear and would do \_anything\_ to get rid of! Or did you forget \_MY\_ \_baseline\_ you inconsiderate bastard?!" She leaned in and laughed in his pained face, eager to share some of the heartache she was feeling. "Oh that's right, you \_don't\_ think, you \_stupid\_ moron! All you ever do is fight and crash everything you get into because it is \_fun\_ and your \_mommy\_ isn't there to stop you!"

"You leave her out of this!" He roared, shoving his face into hers.

"Or what, you'll kill me too? Kill everyone who gets in your \_bucking\_ way and who you deem a \_monster!\_" She slapped him across the face with a ironclad hoof, drawing fresh blood. "Or are you really too much of a damn idiotic savage \_child\_ to think beyond the \_bucking\_ \_moment\_ and you \_always\_ need someone else to help you figure out what to \_bucking\_ do!"

"At least I was SUPPOSED to EXIST!" The instant the words slipped out of his mouth he regretted them, the anger and rage he had been feeling gone instantly.

Nyx's face broke for a moment, reeling back as if physically struck and shaking her head in disbelief at what she had just heard as tears ran down her face. The daggers that were piercing her heart before had completely run it through now. Leman was mouthing words of apology, but she was beyond caring at this point.

"I HATE YOU! YOU \_DAMN\_ \_\_\*\*FUCKING BASTARD!\*\*\_" she wailed, her rage overtaking her fully. "We're \_through\_!" she shouted, her magic tearing the planet apart further. "I NEVER WANT TO SEE YOU AGAIN!"

Before anyone could say anything else, Nyx's magic split the planet they were all on. Normally, both Anchors would be able to shrug it off, but in their battered and weakened state, they were both killed instantly. Without any Anchor present, the loop ended.

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

158.2: Keep your hair on.

158.5: A horned uniwing?

158.6: Well, if they can stay friends after that they're unbreakable.

158.7: Is this technically a dream come true?

158.9: Waiting is a hell of a thing.

158.10: Someone's got to be grounded. (Well, relatively speaking.)

158.11: And then things were exactly the same.

158.15: Hasbr-oh no.

158.16: WHO WON? WHO'S NEXT? (Nobody, I can't write rap.)

158.17: Oh cojones.

## 166. Chapter 166

159.1 (Evilhumour, Gamerex27)

\* \* \*

><p>The Question, part three of four.<p>

Twilight was reorganizing the library when the front door slammed open and an obsidian blur tackled her over, clinging tightly to her.

Twilight instantly knew four things. One, this was her daughter. Two, her daughter was very upset. Three, she was going to go alicorn and absolutely destroy the monster that hurt her daughter. And four, her daughter was crying, which made her mind instantly go into full panic mode and default to automatic parent response mode.

"Nyx, what's wrong?! Are you okay? Are you hurt?" She was dimly aware of her mane already springing out of place.

Her daughter simply whimpered, her head buried into Twilight's side, and then shook her head weakly.

Twilight used her magic to wipe away some of her own tears, her forelegs wrapped around her sobbing daughter. Nothing, not even the knowledge of how to permanently save her tree, could get her to let go of Nyx now.

"Please, Nyxie, can you tell me what happened, because I'm so worried and-

"We broke up!" Nyx shouted into her side, sobbing harder now that Twilight had reopened the wound.

"Wh-what?" Twilight blinked in surprise, pulling back slightly but not enough to actually let go.

"Le-Leman, that \_mother bucking idi-ot\_." Her angry snarl stuttered before she began to cry again. "He attacked him, I told him he was better and he didn't listen and he said those things and I -"

"There, there, Nyxie dear," Rarity cooed, which astonished Twilight greatly, as she hadn't heard her friend walk into her library or come this close to them. Rarity further surprised Twilight by managing to wiggle herself around Nyx, holding the alicorn teenager close to her barrel and away from Twilight. "Come, let's go to the spa and we can talk this over. How does that sound?"

Twilight was livid! How \_dare\_ she think going to the \_spa\_ would fix her daughter's heart after what Leman di -

"That sounds nice," Nyx sniffled, rubbing her face against Rarity's coat before muttering an apology.

"Oh, please, dearie, it's alright," Rarity cooed again, rubbing Nyx's back. "We're going to get pampered while we get this whole matter straightened out. I know from experience that after my Spikey-Wikey and I have our little tiffles, the best thing is going to the spa with some friends to talk things over."

Nyx sniffled again, and nodded her head. Rarity just patted her on the withers, guiding her out of the library and down the streets with Twilight in tow.

\* \* \*

><p>Aloe and Lotus walked past Nightmare Moon again, Twilight and Rarity across from her, and tried their best not to listen too obviously to the conversation the three mares were having about Nightmare Moon's love life.<p>

"I see." Rarity nodded as the young alicorn finished her amazing and heartbreaking tale.

While they did not understand everything the three mares said, they understood well enough that Nightmare Moon - Nyx - was apparently Twilight's daughter, and she was going through her first breakup. And from what the twins could hear, it was a nasty one.

"Well, I suppose you two never do things small, after all."

"No," Nyx muttered, sinking deeper into the pool. Lotus tsked, reaching in to help her out before she got her mane wet again. "Thank you," she murmured in the same soft tone, the twins smiling sadly at the sight. How deep must their young love be for somepony like her to be this sad. If this Leman Russ were here, neither knew what they would do to that stallion who broke this poor filly's heart.

"Come here, darling." Rarity patted the table next to her softly, the young mare walking slowly over and onto the table with Aloe already working on her wings. Lotus in turn was working on the nervous wreck that was the mother of this sad, poor filly, trying her hardest to calm down Twilight Sparkle. "Good," Rarity sighed, reaching out to pat the alicorn's hoof. "Now, do you want me to start or do you?"

"Iâ€|" Nyx took a breath, tears threatening to break out. "I was horrible, wasn't I?"

"To a degree, Nyx, to a degree." Rarity spoke honestly, causing Twilight to twitch in anger. Lotus instantly touched a pressure point and Twilight's body became limp with bliss. "Leman could have definitely stopped and listened to you, but you could have also stopped and spoke with him about the whole matter clearer and explained the real situation about his psychotic meltdown and why Naoki was not a threat anymore."

"And I could have tried not to get so angry -"

"Absolutely not, darling," Rarity sharply interrupted her, tightening her pressure on her hoof. "What Leman said was downright disgusting, and it is horrible to know that Leman still has some of that mentality about those who stumbled in the past. Do not think even for a second he was right to say that to you, Naoki or any

. Everyone deserves a chance to redeem themselves. You are living proof that he is wrong." She leaned over and gave her a very tight hug.

"Remember that everyone can be redeemed. All they need is a helping hoof to show them the way and loving support from others. Look at yourself. The reason you are here now is because that wonderful mare over there saw a scared little filly and took her in as her own without a second thought. She raised you all on her own when others would have tried to harm you for what you once did. She taught you how to be kind to others, even when they don't deserve it. She showed how to be the best little filly you could possibly be, taking care to ease your fears when you were scared, kissing your wounds when you scraped your knees, and raising you as if you were her own flesh and bone daughter. She taught you how to be such a wonderful pony that when you were forced to grow up by other ponies to rule Equestria, you did not become the monster they wanted but instead remained the sweet pure young filly we all know and love. You fought to save your home and family, your mother, and willingly gave everything up just to make things right, even when you did not have to. Remember how you earned your cutie mark; you did it when you defended those close to your heart. Nyx Sparkle, you are a beautiful mare who has long ago eclipsed any past sins you might have once committed and I am beyond honoured to be your aunt."

Holding the younger mare close to her chest, Rarity did not care that her tears were ruining her makeup. Aloe and Lotus surreptitiously wiped their own tears away. Twilight used her magic to give the girls their own tissues to dab their eyes, smiling fondly at her friend and her daughter.

Nyx hiccuped a bit, smiling bashfully at all the praises placed on her. "Thank you, Aunt Rarity." She nuzzled the mare again before laying back down on her own table. Aloe returned to work on her wings; the right one, already cleared of dead feathers, gleamed flawlessly. "I just wished I knew what to do about Leman." She sighed sadly, still broken up about the stallion who had hurt her so deeply.

"Nyx, do you love your mom, yes or no?" Rarity asked in an almost lazy fashion.

"Wha -" She blinked at the white unicorn, confusion glimmering in her big bright eyes.

"Yes or no, do you love Twilight Sparkle?"

"Ye-yes, but -"

"Is your favourite meal tulip soup and alfalfa sandwiches?"

"No, it's -"

"Are you a Cutie Mark Crusader?"



"Yes -"

"Is your coat black?"

"\_Yes\_."

"Was the water in the bath cold?"

"No."

"Do you love your friends?"

"Yes."

"Do you love reading?"

"Yes."

"Do you love your aunts?"

"Yes."

"Do you like being Nightmare Moon?"

"No." Nyx responded, uncomfortable with the line of questioning. She tried moving her head to look at Twilight for guidance, but Rarity kept her head in place by her stare alone.

"Do you like crazy seaponies?"

"No."

"Do you like being a princess?"

"No."

"Do you like being reminded of your dark past?"

"No!"

"Do you still love Leman Russ?"

"\_YES!\_" she shouted, then blinked at the announcement. She placed a hoof over her mouth, surprised at what she just admitted to herself. "I \_still\_ love him." The words must have been strange to her, but they were also the truth, judging by the smile on her face.

"I figured as much, darling." Rarity smiled coyly to herself. "You just needed to hear it from yourself, without you overthinking it."

"I -" Nyx shook her head slowly, Twilight watching the whole event tensely. As a mother, she was a bit overprotective, and the use of this common trick on her daughter rubbed her the wrong way. But any complaint Twilight might have had was quelled when the alicorn hugged the unicorn tightly. "\_Thank you\_," she whispered softly. "Thank you so \_very\_ much."

"No problem, Nyx." She smiled, patting her back and nodding her head

at Twilight to come over. The purple unicorn walked over and claimed her rightful spot, her legs around her daughter, nuzzling with only the love that a mother could give. "Now, we need to come with a plan as to how you two should talk when you do meet again, how it should go, and what you should use over his head." Rarity's smile grew a bit predatory, but Aloe and Lotus simply laughed, the rough aspects of a breakup cut off by Rarity's wonderful, skillful words.

"Trust me, both my little brother and I are rooting for you two and we don't want to see either of you staying hurt like this." A giant, eight legged \_stallion\_ said from the bath, causing both of the twins to jump backwards. "We might get in trouble for this, and certainly have Skuld yell at us for pulling this stunt, but nuts to that." The large \_male\_ equine figure flashed a smile to the noticeably less startled other three mares, but they all gave the \_stallion\_ the same \_look\_ that the twins were giving him. He blinked, tapping his face. "What? Something on my face? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"While we \_do\_ appreciate your help, Sleipnir," Twilight said sharply, as Aloe moved to stand by the mare and Lotus went to block the exits, "this \_is\_ the \_mare's\_ room of the spa, and you \_did\_ just barge in \_without\_ knocking."

The pony-like creature blinked again and blushed, starting to move upwards. "Oh. Um, er... sorry, I'll just show myself ou -"

"Oh no, Sleipnir, please \_stay\_." Rarity gave him the same predatory grin she had given Nyx earlier, causing him to gulp. "We can go over our plans while Aloe and Lotus give our good friend a makeover. Right, girls?"

Sleipnir looked around and sighed, "Dammit."

\* \* \*

><p>159.2 (Awesomedude17)<p>

Discord looked around the room, trying to find out where Berry Punch was.

"Berry? Where aaaaaare yooooooooooooooooou?"

Discord pouted, and looked around.

"Berry?" Discord teleported away.

"Berry?" Discord came out of a cupboard.

"Berry?" Discord said, coming out of the teacup Angel was sipping from, causing him to have a panic attack.

"Berry?" Discord then saw a cardboard box with the words 'Boop Box' on its side. Discord opened the box, and Berry booped Discord's nose.

"Gotcha."

"Oh ho ho... That's really clever. Boop Box, I like it. I'll tell Pinkie."

"Oh, shut up, Discord, and come in here." Berry smiled.

Discord gave a sly grin, and booped Berry's nose.

"Of course."

\* \* \*

><p>159.3 (Vinylshadow)<p>

It was probably a Chaos Game for the history books.

Discord, Luna, Celestia, Twilight, Cadence and Chrysalis all sat on clouds looking down at the game board. The reason for that soon became obvious.

The game board stretched for roughly a mile in every direction and more than two hundred cards were laid out in front of each player.

Due to the vast distance, they had switched to walkie-talkies to communicate.

"Hah! I countered your counter's counter-counter to my trap by redirecting it off of Luna's fifth counter to Twilight, using Chrysalis' deck as the anchor for it," Celestia said smugly.

"Yes, but in doing so, you activated Cadence's love effect, which reduced the accuracy of your attack," Chrysalis replied, rubbing her hooves together in glee.

"Which boosted my own attack and disabled Discord's twelfth card," Cadence said, looking at the board with binoculars.

"So the hand goes to me," Twilight said triumphantly.

Chrysalis and Luna swore violently.

"I had to give up two Loops' worth of cuddles with Trixie for my eighth offensive against you!" Chrysalis raged, while Luna looked with apprehension at the bunny suit she would be stuck in for the next four Loops she was Awake for.

Discord scowled and reshuffled the deck.

"Best out of seventeen?"

\* \* \*

><p>159.4 (Vinylshadow)<p>

The Cutie Mark Crusaders sat in a circle in their Clubhouse, discussing their Cutie Marks.

"I've had microphones, disco balls, a subwoofer, nearly every musical note and a plane," Sweetie Belle said, holding up pictures of each.

"I've had every known type of building material," Apple Bloom said

proudly.

"I've had nearly every kind of wing or feather from every kind of flying animal," Scootaloo said thoughtfully.

"You said 'nearly,'" Apple Bloom said. "What're you missing?"

"I've not had a butterfly," Scootaloo said.

"Well, to be fair, they'reâ€| wellâ€| slow," Sweetie Belle said slowly. "I don't think that's your thing. If you're anything, you're a..." She trailed off, frowning.

"Say chicken. I dare you," Scootaloo said flatly.

"No, no, not that. You're more like aâ€| hummingbird," Apple Bloom said. "You're very maneuverable, and they're some of the only birds that can hover and fly in reverse."

"Well, whatever it is, I'm sure it'll be perfect for me," Scootaloo said with a smile. "As will yours, I'm sure."

"Aw, you're going all sweet on us," Sweetie Belle teased, giving her friend a hug,

"And no matter what marks we get, we'll always be friends, right?" Apple Bloom asked, hugging them both.

"Right!"

\* \* \*

><p>159.5 (Masterweaver)<p>

Nyx sat in front of Golden Oaks, idly stroking her pet as she watched the ponies around her going about their day. "I don't know, Tanty. I mean..."

She sighed.

"It's just... You know how I usually don't like acting mature? Like how I'll try to remain a filly if I can, or maybe a party hardy teenager sometimes?"

The fear cloud next to her grumbled. A passing mare shivered in sudden existential terror, looking at her cutie mark like it was a foreign entity.

"I know, I know, technically I'm a couple billion - er, \_million\_ Loops old." The alicorn shifted, resting her head on her pet like a pillow. "But that's the thing. Usually when I think of myself as a grownup, I think of myself as... \_Nightmare Moon.\_" She grimaced.

Larry wrapped a comforting pair of tendrils down her foreleg, growling comfortingly. One of the foals playing tag nearby suddenly realized that one day he would inevitably die.

"But... but it was always different with Leman, you know?" Nyx held up a hoof to the sky. "I mean, sure, we were kids together sometimes,

but I could... I could be an adult around him, and it felt \_okay.\_ It felt \_right.\_ I was still Nyx, not Nightmare Moon. You know?"

She sighed, again. "And then he had to go and... and be some testosterone-filled jerk, and that thing that he said -"

Larry's tendrils tightened, the creature gurgling in sympathetic anger. A stallion nearby had a vision of another world and curled up into a fetal position.

"Ow! Hey! Hey, too tight Tanty!" Nyx playfully batted at the tendrils, which retracted with a small whine (a pegasus nearby started hallucinating and her wings locked up, causing her to fall out of the sky). "Oh... awwww, I could never stay mad at you. Come here, let me give you a big hug."

This was the scene that Cheerilee walked into. "Um... Nyx? I think you need to restrain your pet's psychic powers again."

"What?" Nyx looked up from her hug, looking about. "What are you talking... oh. Ooooooh."

She winced.

"Um... Sorry about that, everypony! I, uh, I promise I'll personally pay for the therapy bills! Heh heh..."

\* \* \*

><p>159.6<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay!" Applebloom said, firmly. "Order! Ah'd like to call this session of the Cutie Mark Crusaders to order â€" but 'cause I ain't getting it, I'll settle for less chaos."<p>

Scotaloo chuckled, then nudged her friend.

"Sorry I don't find it as funny," Sweetie said, sighing. "I'm just kind of worried."

"Yeah, so'm I," Applebloom admitted. "Okay, girls, let's try to work this one out."

"Cutie mark crusader detectives?" Scotaloo offered.

"Let's say more like private investigators."

"We're not working for anyone," Sweetie pointed out.

"Which is why it's private," Applebloom finished the joke. "Now. Item one: Diamond Tiara's bein' kind of a jerk."

"What else is new?" Scotaloo snarked. "Standard issue Diamond Tiara, at least when she's not Looping."

"Yeah, but usually when I set things up with the business deals an' all, she sweetens up," Applebloom reminded them. "Nothin' doing."

The others nodded.

"Silver's the same," Sweetie said. "Just... kind of cold."

"That does sound unusual," Scootaloo said. "Variant?"

"Well, it's not just that," Applebloom hedged. "But yeah, ah think th' 'Variant' stamp fits for this Loop."

"Why, what else is there?" Scootaloo asked.

"You ain't run into Twilight yet, have you?"

"Well, I haven't either," Sweetie said. "It's something else that's bothering me... basically, Rarity's not Awake, but she's not acting usual either."

"So are my sister and brother," Applebloom said. "Little things, but there. And as for Twilight..."

"What?" Scootaloo begged. "Is she a dragon? Is she evil? Is she secretly Trixie in a suit? Has she been replaced by Bella Swan?"

The others stared at her.

"No, no, what and ew," the earth pony filly said. "In that order."

"Then tell me, come on!" Scootaloo insisted.

"She's wanting to go baseline - some kind of experiment," Applebloom said.

"Well... maybe she's trying to see if she can skew things with the Gala or something?" Sweetie offered weakly.

"Dunno," Applebloom said, shaking her head. "Anyway. That's about all we know."

There was a pause.

"So... wargames?" Scootaloo asked. "I've got this great design for a hydrofoil torpedo boat..."

"While fun, I think that might wreck Twilight's plans," Applebloom said. "No for now."

Scootaloo pouted.

"I've got a board game," Sweetie volunteered. "Picked it up on Marain. Only... we might need a bigger clubhouse."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked up at a knock on the door.<p>

"Wonder who that is..." she mused, putting down her copy of the newspaper and trotting over to the door.

Opening it, she looked out on the worried faces of three young fillies.

"Come in," she said straight away, turning the library sign from \_please, come in, read a book for once\_ to \_oh, forget it\_.

It had earned her a few laughs.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, what seems to be the problem?" she asked, as Spike made tea.<p>

There was a splash, an \_ow\_, and a hiss from the kettle.

"Did you tip it on yourself?" Twilight called.

"Uh... yeah," Spike admitted.

"Spike!" Twilight said, with a sigh. "If you keep doing that, one of these days someone who's not heat resistant is going to be next to you!"

"Uh..." the little dragon said, nervous.

"It's okay," she decided. "I think... actually, I'm sure the girls would like something sweet. Can you go get three turnovers from Pinkie?"

Spike nodded, hanging up his apron. "Sure!"

"And get yourself one," Twilight added. "Plus a garnet for your trouble."

"Thanks!" Spike said, and hurried out the door.

"Nice work," Applebloom complimented.

"Thanks," Twilight smiled. "I thought it might be something Loopy... what's the matter?"

"Well," Applebloom began. "Remember how we had trouble with our families?"

"Speak for yourself," Scootaloo said with a shrug. "Mine are actually quite normal this time."

"First time fr' everything," Applebloom muttered. "Anyway, uh, we were wondering whether it was some kind of Loop Variant or something. And you're the Anchor... anything unusual about this Loop?"

Twilight frowned. "Not that I'm aware of, beyond what I've already told you... why, is something up?"

Sweetie presented her flank. "Look!"

Twilight looked.

"...there's nothing there," she said hesitantly. "Unless you got invisibility cutie marks?"

"Don't think so," the songstress said. "And I tried doing some music, too."

"I made a giant robot," Applebloom said. "It fell apart."

"And doing ramps in my scooter didn't work either," Scootaloo completed. "Normally that's enough to get me marked, but..."

Twilight's expression went unreadable for a moment. "That does sound like a problem," she said instead. "What about going alicorn? I remember usually..."

She trailed off.

"We ain't able t' test it," Applebloom sighed. "Two Loops back. We got killed in the middle of doing something impressive and lost the necklaces."

The Anchor gasped. "Are the Founders-"

"They're fine," Sweetie assured her. "But they got pulled back into our minds â€" we kinda need new ones, but Diamond Tiara built the chassis for our last ones and we'd kinda prefer that quality. Clover doesn't mind waiting a few Loops."

Twilight let out a whoosh of relieved air. "Thank teak, I was worried that they'd â€" you know."

"Pansy says she begs leave to inform you that it kind of stung," Scootaloo reported.

Twilight smiled. "Well, if she can joke she's clearly not too badly off... okay, I'll do what research I can. I'm sorry I don't have an answer for you that works."

"It ain't no biggie," Applebloom said.

"But," the Anchor went on. "Can't you just use your Element necklaces and crown?"

The Cutie Mark Crusaders (core group) froze.

"...no, we didn't think of that," Applebloom admitted. "Perhaps \_"

"Pastries are here!" Spike called, and the shop bell \_dingled\_. "Pinkie gave us seven for the price of four, because she said there were six ponies that needed cheering up. Any idea what she meant?"

Scootaloo coughed.

"Not really," Twilight said, taking the bags in her telekinetic grip. "Probably just Pinkie being Pinkie."

\* \* \*

><p>"Sorry, girls," Twilight said, shrugging her new wings.<p>



"This just ain't fair," Applebloom said, kicking at the floor. "I mean, what the hay kind of Loop even is this?"

"One where the baseline's fighting back," the newly reminted Alicorn said. "I couldn't ascend up until when I was supposed to..."

"Has this happened before?" Sweetie asked. "I mean â€" you've got more experience with Loops than the rest of us..."

"Well, sometimes," Twilight shrugged. "I've certainly run into the odd one where something's bound and determined to happen, like when that chest finally opened... but that was a kind of half-Awake haze, and you're all fully Awake."

"Speak for..." Scootaloo yawned. "Yourself..."

She shook her head. "Sorry, didn't get much sleep last night..."

"Sleepless nights excepted," Twilight agreed. "Anyway, if that is what's going on then... you've got a choice. Do we go along with it or try to break it?"

"Option three," Scootaloo declared, focusing. "We find Discord and get him to stop... huh."

Twilight's expression was a question in itself.

"He's not Awake," Scootaloo explained. "I thought for sure this'd be his doing."

"Well, if it ain't him, then..." Applebloom sighed. "We go along with it for now, I vote."

"Agreed," Sweetie said. "Unless it turns out it's trying to make us do something completely, unambiguously stupid."

"Well, I was planning on seeing if Gilda would mind some unofficial under-the-table Equestrian help with the Griffinstone situation - if that's where the Griffins are this Loop," Twilight clarified. "So... baseline?"

"Fine," Scootaloo agreed. "But I kinda want to do the long-jump at the Games anyway."

"I'll enter you for it," Twilight agreed. "You'll be good at it, actually..."

\* \* \*

><p>The soft, sparkling light faded.<p>

"What just-" Applebloom began, looking around. "That felt... uh..."

"Kinda familiar," Sweetie finished the sentence. "But it wasn't exactly the same - what is it, Scoots?"

Scootaloo pointed.

Sweetie looked at her flank.

"What the..."

It was a cutie mark.

It wasn't the musical-note cutie mark she was used to, though there was a pink note device at the core. It wasn't any of the hundredfold variations she'd had over the course of the Loops, nor the 'true' version that adorned the flank of her alicorn self.

But, at the same time... the purple star on its three-colour shield felt more right than anything else she'd ever seen.

Neither of the others were looking at it any more, though. They'd turned to their own flanks, and seen something almost like the mirror of Sweetie's new mark – the same shield, but an apple for the earth pony and a feather for the pegasus.

And, as she'd had a musical note, Scootaloo had a stark pink lightning-flash and Applebloom a simple pink heart.

"Now that ain't normal at all..." Applebloom managed.

"Yeah, but..." Scootaloo took another look. "It kind of feels like it \_is\_."

"You've got your cutie marks," Diamond Tiara said. She blinked, and looked confused for a moment – then broke into a broad smile.

"Congratulations!"

"Sure, now that we got cutie marks, she's all -" Scootaloo began to mutter, then got shushed by Applebloom as Tiara was still speaking.

"I was wondering how long it would take," she went on. "But – well, I suppose you had to luck out some time."

"Luck out?" Sweetie repeated, sounding confused rather than outraged. "Luck -"

She stopped.

"Are you Awake?"

"She's not, I checkedâ€" Scootaloo began, and then Tiara materialized an Element of Generosity and the pegasus rather abruptly had to eat her words.

"I wasn't until about a minute ago," Diamond explained, taking pity on them and letting her Element dissolve again. "But Silver and I ran into this expansion before. We didn't tell you back when we met in Hogwarts, because I thought it'd be better as a surprise."

"You knew about this back then?" Applebloom asked. "An' y'all didn't think to tell us?"

Tiara gave a broad, happy grin. "Of course I didn't tell you - why would I spoil the surprise?"

"...okay, fine," Applebloom muttered. "But this is gonna be strange to get used to... think we can do either baseline?"

"I'm still not clear what this one even \_means\_, " Scootaloo admitted.

"Oh, dear, and you worked mine out..." Tiara said, shaking her head. "It's obvious. The ability to help others find \_their\_ marks. That's why it's tri-coloured â€" you helped one another, and you help others."

"Oh, right!" Sweetie said. "So the outer layer is our teamwork, the middle layer's what we are, and the inner core is \_who\_ we are, too. Deep down."

They considered that.

"I still think engineering's pretty good," Applebloom said, shrugging. "But this one feels nice too."

She glanced at Tiara. "Mind if I use this to mess with your baseline self next time around?"

"Oh, please do," Tiara shrugged. "I'll be the first to admit I need a bit of a kick in the flank..."

\* \* \*

><p>159.7 (Vinylshadow)<p>

Luna woke up with a massive yawn. Getting out of bed, she stumbled to her window and drew back the curtains to a most interesting sight.

Changelings buzzed around Canterlot, but instead of terrorizing the populace, they appeared to be handing out small paperback books.

Her curiosity aroused, Luna opened her window and whistled to a Changeling.

It - \_she\_, if the fins were anything to go by - flew over.

"Hi! We're selling the newest volume of \_The Changeling Queen\_, would you like a copy?"

Luna took the offered book and blinked, all traces of sleep gone. Adorning the cover of the volume was Chrysalis wearing something Luna vaguely recognized as a Magical Girl uniform, tailored for quadrupeds. Also on the cover was the Smooze. Luna arched an eyebrow.

"How many volumes of this series are there?" she asked.

"Thirteen, and we've started a spin-off series based on an alternate scene from volume 10," the Changeling said happily.

Luna was silent for a moment before she spoke. "I don't suppose you

have the first volume on you?"

\* \* \*

><p>Several days later, Celestia knocked on her sister's door.<p>

"Luna? Are you feeling alright?"

When her sister didn't answer, Celestia opened the door.

"Lulu? Are you..." her voice trailed off into stunned silence.

Luna was curled up on her bed, horn glowing softly as she watched a quill zoom across a scroll. She pricked her ears and looked up.

"Hello, Celly. Sorry I haven't been around. I'm a little busy at the moment."

Celestia could only nod dumbly, staring at the posters of characters from the wildly popular \_The Changeling Queen\_ series that covered her sister's walls.

\_Well played, Chrysalis...\_ Celestia thought in bemusement.

Of course, she'd later deny \_her\_ collection of paraphernalia was \_much\_ larger than her sister's.

\* \* \*

><p>159.8 (Sonic Raynboom + Vinylshadow)<p>

"Cornilight?"

"Yes, Raricob?"

"Why are we each a piece of corn?"

"It's a bad pun, Raricob. A very bad pun."

Raricob snickered. "Cornilight. Corny Light."

Twilight angrily popped her kernels.

"When you become an alicorn, will you be Twilicorn?" asked Raricob.

Twilight's kernels popped harder.

\* \* \*

><p>159.9 (Masterweaver)<p>

Thoughtfully stroking the mane of her pet, the queen looked at the prisoner her guards had brought.

"Subjects," she drawled imperiously, "leave the throne room. I shall deal with this one... \_personally.\_"

Quaking in silent terror, the room emptied, one or two sympathetic glances surreptitiously shot toward the chained individual. In mere moments the doors were shut; only the guards, the prisoner, the queen, and her pet remained.

After a moment, she leaned forward. "Well?"

"...Chrysalis, what the bark is going on here?"

"Ah, a feisty one. So interesting-"

"Come on, Chrysy, we both know you're Awake." Gilda pointed at the mare next to the queen. "Trixie wouldn't have agreed to this if you weren't, and your drones made a freaking Star Wars reference while bringing me here."

The changeling queen let out a sigh and leaned back. "In that case, I apologize for the chains. I just needed to make sure you were Awake before I decided how to handle you." She gestured to one of the drones, who stepped forward and started unlocking Gilda's shackles. "As for my presence... well, this is a bit of a project of mine."

The griffon shook her talon, rubbing at her wrist for a moment. "Really? Taking over Griffonstone?"

"Ah-ah-ah, I'm revitalizing Griffonstone." Chrysalis shrugged. "The takeover is mostly to ensure that I get the attention of the griffons. I've already ordered several civic projects started â€" well funded, of course, so that the griffons don't get too uppity at being ordered about. I've already had the central aquifers rebuilt, did you notice that?"

"Yeah, I did. So, what, you forcefully improve the standard of living, and...?"

"And," Chrysalis continued, "as much as the griffons resent me right now, as their lives improve they'll grow to appreciate what I've done for them, becoming very fond of me â€" and my changelings, of course," she added.

Gilda let out a little 'ah' of comprehension. "So they'll love you for what you've done. Mutually beneficial situation. Alright, I getcha there. Couple of questions, though." She pointed at Trixie again. "One, what is she wearing and why?"

"Trixie designed this herself," the mare replied. "It is meant to evoke the feeling of subjectivity to the queen, in both the positive sense of being adored and beautiful in her eyes and the aggressive sense of rebellion having potentially lethal consequences."

"No, I got the whole 'slave girl' thing, I was wondering about the feathers."

"That was supposed to symbolize griffons who attempted to resist and failed," Trixie explained. "The whole 'so beneath me I gave their pelts to my pet' sort of thing."

"Bones would work better for that," Gilda pointed out. "Right now you just look floofy. Alluring, but floofy."

"Noted."

"Secondly," the griffon continued, turning back to Chrysalis, "again, why the chains?"

"Right now I'm still in the domineering overlord segment of my plan," the changeling queen explained. "Since you left Griffonstone, you could-in theory-be the kind of griffon that led an uprising, so if I were the domineering overlord I appear to be I would, in fact, be obligated to bring you before me in chains and break your spirit. So basically appearances."

"Alright, makes sense. Send me warning next time, and I'll be your secret agent or something."

"Fair enough."

"Thirdly," Gilda finished, "speaking of rebels, what do you do when some griffon comes to kill you?"

"Basically I battle them one on one until they're down. Then, depending on how they did, I assign them community service somewhere or other." Chrysalis shrugged. "Usually border patrol or something like that."

"...You ran away from a fight with a dragon!"

"Just because I can't take a dragon doesn't mean I can't take a Nonlooping griffon. I'm much better at dueling than monster slaying."

\* \* \*

><p>159.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Spike, does this dress make me look fat?"

"There is a bit of bulge around the barrel, but it's pretty obviously ruffles. If anything, the excess makes you look a bit underweight."

"Thank you, dear. A designer needs to know these things."

\* \* \*

><p>159.11 (Masterweaver)<p>

Applejack stared.

Macintosh stared right back, sheer force of will keeping him from blushing.

"...So."

"...Eeeyup."

"...Just to be clear here, you're... still male."

"Eeeyup."

After a moment, Applejack shrugged. "As long as you're comfortable, Ah guess Ah can't stop you. Little weirded out, yeah, but this isn't the strangest thing the Loops have thrown at me."

Macintosh released a breath he didn't know he'd been holding. "Well... thanks for not freaking out, Ah suppose."

His sister looked over the dress he was wearing. "Trust me, Mac, Ah'm freaking out on the inside."

\* \* \*

><p>159.12: (Masterweaver)<p>

\_Oh sweet tree, not this again...\_

Nyx turned to the cultists with a frown. "No, I will not bring about eternal night. Nor will I kill and or torture your enemies. That was all a phase, and I'm perfectly fine with my life as it is thank you. Now please, release me from this summoning circle. I was in the middle of making pancakes for my mother."

The hooded ponies were silent, presumably in shock.

"I'm serious, I left the stove on, and if the house burns down on my watch she's going to be really mad."

"...I was sure I got the sigils right," one of the figures muttered, rapidly flicking through a book.

"Maybe we used the wrong blood for the offering?" another suggested. "I mean, she might like less, uh, \_pure\_ blood-"

"Is that what this is?" Nyx asked, looking down at the bowl at her hooves with disgust. "Ew! I don't drink blood! I prefer celery soup, \_thank\_ you."

\* \* \*

><p>159.13: (Masterweaver)<p>

Celestia had just finished her construction when Twilight Sparkle teleported into her chambers. This was most unusual, given that her chambers were specially enchanted to prevent such occurrences, and that Twilight had apparently grown a new pair of wings.

"Ah, Twilight! What a pleasant surprise-"

"No."

Celestia blinked. "Um... what?"

"No," Twilight repeated. "You are not going to use that device. You are going to disassemble it right now."

The white alicorn looked to her unfathomable machine. "Twilight, I'm far older than you are and-"

"No."

"...Yes, I am-

"Time loop."

"...all right, fair enough," Celestia conceded. A time loop would explain Twilight's odd behavior. "Still, as the solar princess I do have some privileges-

"This is going to end horribly for you and all of Equestria," Twilight replied. "Disassemble the love bomb now."

\* \* \*

><p>159.14: (Evilhumour)<p>

"But you must!" the alicorn in the window pleaded.

"I said no!" the foal in the bedroom yelled back.

"Luna," Twilight shouted, her mane splintering around with bloodshot eyes. "We're trying to sleep, so stop bugging my daughter to take over your job so you can prank your sister!" Twilight was also annoyed, as someone stole her spray bottle and thus lacked the ability to spray ponies who needed it with the righteous cold water of justice and logic.

"...She is my daughter too," Luna said slowly, looking from side to side. "She should spend more time with me too."

"As long as Nyx wants to go with you and you don't fob over your work to her, then be my guest!" Twilight snapped, walking back up to her bedroom.

"So...do you wish to come with me, Nyxie?" Luna said weakly before Nyx pulled out Twilight's enchanted spray bottle and blasted Luna to the moon in a roaring torrent of water.

Slamming the door open, Twilight looked at her daughter snoring loudly in her bed, the massive rainstorm leading out of her window and the spray bottle that Nyx quickly pushed out of her hooves and went back to snoring loudly.

Twilight stared at her daughter, who had the decency to crack a serpent eye open at her, before sighing. "I don't care, Nyxie, I'm going back to bed and deal with Ivory and Luna in the morning."

" 'Night, momma."

" 'Night, dear." With that, Twilight closed the door to her daughter's room and went back to her comfy bed to sleep.

\* \* \*

><p>159.15: (Evilhumour)<p>

"So, Luna," Celestia drawled out, looking at the city on fire, where ponies panicked as the Royal Guards did their best to enforce order. "You are telling me your hunger suddenly gained sapience and did



\_all\_ of this?"

"Of course, Celestia," Luna said a bit too quickly, eyes darting back and forth. "What do you think it was?"

"Oh, I don't know, maybe a certain princess decided to go on a \_bender, \_considering \_she is still drinking her cider loudly in my ear!\_"

Luna dashed away, her cask spinning in a circle as she ran off into the distance with Celestia chasing after her, leaving the black alicorn filly to facehoof. Her loyal fear cloud attempted to mimic the motion, but ended up resembling a large teacup.

\* \* \*

><p>159.16: (Alex Prior)<p>

"Hayburger?"

Chrysalis sighed. "Remind me why was this a good idea again?"

"Because Trixie is helping Cady with her coffee machine and we decided to "get out of the way", so to speak?"

"Yes, I know that part. Why lunch?"

"Why not?"

Chrysalis was feeling conflicted. On the one hoof, it was greasy food which she liked. On the other, it felt like a date with a stallion she'd once loved (and gotten over, mind you.) She looked him in the eye. "Why are we here?"

With a sigh, Shining put the burgers away. "You were married to me once." He received a deadpan look. He sighed. "You're not that over it, are you?" He held up a burger. "We're friends having lunch while our other halves are dealing with something that's probably explosive." Shining shrugged. "Let's not make it awkward."

"You're the one that brought it up."

"Because I could see it written in your face."

"...No it wasn't."

"It still is." He levitated a pocket mirror up. "Look for yourself."

With slight bemusement, she read 'was once married to Shining Armor' on her forehead. She facehooved. "I knew he was up to something..."

Shining shrugged again. "He gets bored from time to time. Have I told you about the time..."

\* \* \*

><p>Discord, having disguised himself as a nearby gargoyle, grinned.

He loved it when a plan came together...<p>

\* \* \*

><p>159.17: (Rowan Ex)<p>

"...and because of that, you got chaos by tails and chickens?" Silver Spoon asked.

Sweetie flicked her tail, causing a chicken to fly past them. "Yeah, but sometimes good ol' Tree gives those Nesting Doll Loops a slight difficulty as well, you know, we Loop, then it usually takes 100 Loops just to end that Nesting Doll Loopâ€|"

"'Those Nesting Doll Loops?'" Silver asked, raising an eyebrow.

Sweetie flicked her tail again. "Variants, and that."

"Oh." The two then looked at Discord who was currently trying to contain a chickenado. "Hey, want to help Discord?"

Sweetie spun her tail ninety degrees. All of a sudden, all of the chickens hopped into Discord's head and vanished in a variety of colored feathers. The Spirit of Chaos looked at the two before he snapped his talons, causing tree sap to fall at them.

"Hmph." Discord walked away as he snapped his talons again, causing the tree sap to disappear. "That's for the chickens."

\* \* \*

><p>159.18: (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Rarity looked over the rim of her glasses at Sassy Saddles, who shifted uncomfortably on her chair. "As grateful as I am that you volunteered your services so soon after the announcement of the Canterlot Boutique," she said, "I hope you understand that this job interview is no formality. It simply wouldn't be fair to either of us to enter into a long-term business arrangement without understanding one another's goals and intentions."

"Of course not," Sassy Saddles replied, a touch of nervousness in her tone.

Rarity gave a second look at the slender, well-bred Canterlot unicorn fidgeting on the other side of the desk. \_What,\_ she asked herself, \_what, what, WHAT\_ possessed my unAwake self to hire this mare, sight unseen, and put my career in her hooves based solely on a padded resume? I admit I am a trusting soul at heart, even by pony standards, if I do say so myself. But how could I have built a business from scratch in - I love Ponyville dearly, but the truth must be told - a cultural \_backwater\_, and earned enough money to open a shop in the most expensive city in all Equestria, with business skills like THAT? Hayseed Turniptruck has more savvy than that, for fir's sake! Was I bit with some kind of mosquito carrying Stupid-itis?\_

\_Calm down, Rarity. You're beginning to sound like Pinkie or Dash. Now is the time to be professional. Ms. Prim and Proper. Ms. Primmy

Prim-Prim Properson of the Primville Propersons.\_

\_Oh, dear. Well, I'm not sounding like Rainbow Dash anymore, at least. Fifty percent success.\_

"Let us begin with your education," she said aloud, grateful her internal monologue hadn't leaked through her muzzle. "A degree in business arts with a focus in marketing, I see. Any classes in dressmaking? Fashion? Any artistic studies at all?"

"Good Celestia, no!" Sassy Saddles laughed, an edge just barely noticeable. "I love fashion - I used to say fashion is my passion, but I used that line to promote one of my former employers - but it's my love, not my talent. My dream is simply to run the greatest fashion boutique in all Equestria."

\_And how does one do that without understanding the artistic mindset, my dear?\_ Rarity asked in the privacy of her head. \_Did that leak out? No, she didn't react. Good.\_ "We'll come back to that point," Rarity said carefully. "Moving on, when you contacted me you said you had a business plan already prepared that would catapult the Canterlot Boutique to the top of the Equestrian fashion scene."

"Oh, yes!" Sassy Saddles levitated a large scroll over the desk and unrolled it. "It's a simple plan designed to maximize both profits and market share while making your name the talk of the town!"

"I see," Rarity said, looking down the illustrations. "We begin with the boutique, looking nice and classy."

"\_Beautify the Boutique\_, " Sassy Saddles nodded. "And then, once we have an establishment fashionable ponies will want to enter, we move on to \_Marketing to the Mares!\_"

"Quite so," Rarity nodded. "We must let ponies know the boutique exists, after all."

"Not that kind of marketing," Sassy Saddles said. "We find out what mares want and base our product line around that!"

"Aaaah," Rarity nodded. "Well, as it happens, being that I spend rather a lot of time following fashion trends and artistic styles, I believe I have that step covered, thank you." Sassy Saddles looked ready to interrupt, so Rarity overrode any possible response. "Moving on again, we see a picture of my friend Twilight Sparkle. Might I ask what this represents?"

"\_Celebrity Status,\_" Sassy Saddles replied. "It's well-known that fashionable ponies want to wear things that celebrities wear. And you happen to be friends with the four greatest celebrities Equestria has! So if we can get one of them to wear one of your dresses at our grand opening -"

"Ah, yes," Rarity interrupted. "That leads directly into this cluster of ponyquins all wearing the same dress. I presume this would be whichever garment my friend would be wearing?"

"\_The Success of the Signature Dress,\_" Sassy Saddles nodded. "With everyone buying and wearing your design, your name will-"

"EXCUSE me," Rarity cut in. "Design? Singular?"

"Er, yes," Sassy Saddles said. "That's what a signature dress is, you see? And then we go to the \_Assembly Line,\_ where we get you away from the sewing machine entirely and leave you to design the next signature dress!"

Rarity didn't do Fluttershy's Stare. She did, however, have a decent disappointed expression which her reading glasses magnified. "My dear," she said carefully, "have you even considered that, just perhaps, I do not wish to be parted from my sewing machine?"

"Er... but that's only manual labor," Sassy Saddles replied.

"It is a vital part of the creative process," Rarity said. "A creative process which you do not seem to understand, especially since every step of your business plan from the second item on works to destroy that very creative process." Taking the chart into her own magical grip, she brought it closer so she could point at each item. "Rather than pushing the creative envelope, as Rainbow Dash might say, you put the creative decisions in the hands of the public. You then push a product which might not itself be a fine masterwork by associating it with a popular figure- and, in the process, put a strain on my friendships by pressuring my friends to support my business. Then you mass-market a single design, ensuring that the thought on everypony's mind will be, 'Ho-hum, I've seen that before. That Rarity, she's a one-trick pony.' This is not fashion, this is a fad!" With a dramatic flourish she crumpled up the floating scroll and dashed it to the boutique floor. "This is not a business plan for a fashion boutique. This is how you DESTROY a fashion boutique!"

Sassy Saddles sat back in her chair, the large eyes on her narrow face full of sadness and fear.

"Employment history!" Rarity snapped. "Seven years ago, Double Pleat's Sweet and Elite. Where is it now?"

"It... closed," Sassy Saddles admitted quietly.

"Five years ago, Prench Lace's Discreet Designs. Where is it?"

"Closed."

"Four years ago, Beau Brummule's Business Best. Where is it?"

"Closed." Sassy Saddles' voice barely rose above a whisper, trying to crawl under the carpet and hide.

"Two years ago,  
Charles-Yves-Pierre-Soult-Sans-Brilliat-Savarin-Ferdinand-Thomas-Richard-Henri-Manfried-Mot-Jacques-Rocquefort Pony IV's Castle Couture.  
Your previous employment. Where is it now?"

"Er... it fell over, burned down, and then sank into a swamp," Sassy Saddles confessed. "Mr. Pony grew a little bit... er... peculiar towards the end of our association."

"And I know, because I looked it up, that all of those boutiques were busy right until the moment they closed. But Double Pleat is now a humble seamstress in Trottingham, Prench Lace left the industry entirely, Beau Brummule has become a notorious salt addict, and CYP-double-S-BSFTRH-double-M-JR Pony makes his designs in crayon on the walls of his padded cell at Celestia's Home for the Lamentably Peculiar!"

"I thought it was... just... you know, the artistic mindset," Sassy Saddles moaned.

"It IS!" Rarity's hoof slammed onto the desk. "That's what happens when the artistic mindset is constantly thwarted, forced to repeat the same thing, day in, day out, without satisfaction!" Rarity stopped herself from adding the words And it is all your fault to the end of that sentence. Sassy Saddles trembled in that chair, trying to curl in on herself. No, she was cornered now; time to lead her out of the corner, hooves on the right path.

"Miss Saddles," Rarity said in a much softer, gentler voice, "we designers enter this business not for the money but for the joy of matching the right clothes to the right pony. It is the joy of creation which raises us from mere tailors and dressmakers to the leaders of Equestrian fashion. When ponies come to us, they aren't simply looking to buy a dress. They are hiring the personalized services of a highly talented individual. They are hiring our vision, our imagination, our eye detail... and above all else, they are hiring our personal attention to the needs and desires of the customer. We charge top bit for those services. When we force the customer into a cookie-cutter solution for their image, we are short-changing the customer. We are also short-changing ourselves."

Taking off her glasses, Rarity stepped down from her chair and walked around the desk to Sassy Saddles' side. "I know this is a lot to take in at once," she said gently. "And it's the sort of thing which gets short shrift in business school. This is why I'm going to take you to stay with me in Ponyville for a couple of weeks to see how it works in practice. Once you understand Rarity's Rules of Time, Love and Couture, then you'll be prepared to operate my Canterlot Boutique."

Sassy Saddles blinked. "You mean... you mean I'm hired?"

"Provided you take that plan of yours away and burn it somewhere, yes," Rarity nodded. "You obviously have skills if you can make and keep a boutique profitable despite the, er, displeasure of the designers. And the Canterlot and Manehattan fashion scene dote on your ability to spot the coming thing. Once you understand the importance of the personal touch and the creative spirit, I can't imagine any manager in all of fashion could hold a candle to you!"

First Coco, and now Sassy, Rarity thought. These baseline expansions seem to have a theme of my redeeming well-meaning ponies. And indeed, it is the generous thing to do.

But I'd much rather not blunder into it through a traumatic experience, thank you, Yggdrasil. Perhaps you could just drop them on my doorstep in a basket with a note on the handle? Otherwise I might

end up being the basket case. Thanks ever so, amen.\_

"Incidentally," she added, "I occasionally experiment in unusual materials for fabric. Do you have any phobias I should know about? Spiders? Water? Heights? Fundamental forces? Abstract concepts made manifest in tangible form? I won't tell anypony else, but it is really quite important that I know."

\* \* \*

><p>159.19 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"Broderbund Bonds and Bounty, this is Ralph."

"Good evening, Ralph. This is Rarity. I'm just calling to let you know that I found Carmen Sandiego."

"You WHAT?" the voice on the other end of the phone shrieked.

The master thief leaned over to the phone and cooed, "It's true. She found me."

"Not particularly difficult if one has an eye for detail and a snazzy wardrobe," Rarity added, stepping away from the handcuffed thief.

"Where are you?" Ralph asked frantically. "The statute of limitations expires in ninety minutes! I'll send a car right over to--"

"I'm at LAX, darling," Rarity said. "I just called to let you know I'm letting her go."

Carmen blinked as a key floated behind her. The locks on her cuffs went click.

"YOU WHAT?"

"Next time don't mock a lady's costume changes, dear," Rarity said. "Ta-ta!" She slammed the pay phone back on its hook.

"Well, congratulations," Carmen said, handing the cuffs back to Rarity. "You're the seventh Looper to successfully track me down and capture me, not counting those kids in my home Loop."

"Oh, dear," sighed Rarity. "Only seventh?"

"Well, you act like it's a large number," Carmen replied. "Not counting robotic or cybernetic Loopers in a surveillance state... let's see, the last one was that Goodwin chap, though I understand his boss is Looping too. Before him was Inspector Zenigata, not that he was actually aiming for me you understand. Wrong place, wrong time."

"Yes, I've met the younger Lupin," Rarity said. "I hadn't been aware the Inspector was Looping, though."

"Before him was Mr. Bond. That was... entertaining." Carmen smiled a smug little smile before continuing, "And before that it was the redoubtable Mr. Holmes. You know, the look on his face when he just barely fails to catch me is almost as beautiful as when he actually

did?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Ah, yes. Before that, of course, was Saotome. If Ranma ever decides on a career of Looping crime, my dear, I shall have to hang up the trenchcoat."

"Never!" Rarity gasped, looking the beautiful burgundy coat up and down.

"And of course, the very first one to capture me was my dearest, darling Waldo."

Rarity blinked. "Waldo? Who's Waldo?"

"You haven't heard of Waldo?" Carmen asked. "Shy chap, loves red and white stripes, carries a cane, wears glasses--"

"THAT Waldo?" Rarity asked. "But - but he's just - I mean he does - he's not a detective at all!"

"It doesn't matter," Carmen shrugged helplessly. "How can you run from a man when, no matter where you go, there he is?"

\* \* \*

><p>159.20 (BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

It was a quiet Loop in Big Mac's Bar; other than him, only Berry Punch and the Visiting Looper Ruby Rose occupied the room. Idly cleaning his glass, Mac observed the duo as they waited. Berry, as was typical of her, was thinking up a new drink for future Loops; fully immersed in her creative process, she was hardly aware of anything else. Ruby herself was sipping a glass of non-alcoholic Apple Acres Cider as she disassembled and reassembled her scythe, testing to see if any part of it needed maintenance.

The sound of the door opening and a flash of sun drew the group's attention as Applejack made her way into the bar. Wiping the sweat from her brow she gave the trio a friendly grin as she pulled up a seat. "Howdy, ya'll. Now, I'm sure yer wonderin' why Ah asked ya two to meet me here, so Ah'll just skip to the point. Not that long ago, Ah had a Loop where Ah Replaced that Gilgamesh fella from Shirou's Branch."

Abruptly both sets of eyes were fixed firmly upon the Earth Pony with laser focus.

"You mean Gilgamesh 'I own all the best weapons since ever' Gilgamesh?" Ruby asked excitedly.

"The same Gilgamesh who has the Conceptual Existence of wine fit for a god by the barrel?" Berry continued, all but drooling at the idea.

"Heh. The very same. And jest before the Loop ended, Ah jest so happened to empty the Gate of Appylon into mah Pocket. Ya'll two wouldn't happen ta be interested in a little trade now would ya?"

Mac was surprised the two didn't break their necks from how rapidly they were nodding.

"Free drinks! On my tab, for the next hundred - no, thousand Loops! And half my blackmail folder!" Berry yelled, almost falling over herself to get a hoof of the legendary liquor. The things she could create! The drinks she could mix! The wine she could drink! There was no way she could allow this opportunity to slip from her hooves.

"Hooey! Ah'd have ta be a dang fool to pass up that kinda offer. Ya'll got yerself a deal." Applejack replied, spitting on the frog of her hoof and extending it forward. Berry didn't hesitate, repeating the gesture and bumping Applejack's hoof in agreement.

While Berry began scrawling new plans for her recent purchase, Applejack turned to Ruby. "As one Museum Curator to another, Ah'll make ya a deal. If'n Ah ever need any help with maintainin' all the techno gadgets Applebloom 's got stashed everywhere, ya'll agree to help me out, ya hear?"

Ruby nodded eagerly.

"And also Ah wouldn't mind gettin a bit a that there Dust Ah know ya keep taking from that Torchwick feller. Ah'm kinda curious if Ah ken use mah Earth Pony magic to grow different kinds a apples in it."

Almost before Applejack had finished speaking Ruby had pulled out several crates of Dust that she had 'liberated' from Roman. "Is this enough? I have more, do you want more?"

Applejack gave a laugh. "That there's plenty, thanks. Ah think this calls fer a celebration. But uh, since ya'll don't drink... Hey Mac, break out the good Cider will ya?" she called out over her shoulder.

Mac paused from his cleaning and gave a languid nod. "Eeyup."

"Thanks. Since Berry here has agreed to give me free drinks, ya'll ken go ahead and put it on mah tab. We'll talk later 'bout them Noble Phantasms and such."

Ruby grinned appreciatively and gave a salute. "Right."

Watching as the Huntress all but skipped over to the counter where Mac poured her a mug of his best (non-alcoholic) Cider, Applejack gave a good-natured grin before turning back to the still-out-of-it Berry. Nudging her withers a bit, she pulled her brother's helper from her fantasies. "There was one other thing Ah wanted to talk about. Ta try and redeem mah good name after the... Potato Acid incident. Ah think Ah've proven since then that Ah ken still brew a good drink with the best of em, but that still sticks in mah craw like nothin' else so Ah felt that Ah needed to do somethin' 'bout it.

"A long time back Ah had mahself a right doozy of a Loop involvin' SCIENCE! and Discorded Lemons. Ah ended up buildin' a super collider



to get me some yeast quarks that Ah could ferment ta make 110 or more percent pure alcohol, although honestly that don't rightly make sense when ya stop an think 'bout it. Called it Large Hadron Cider. Point is, Ah figur'd out how to build it without having mah head all twisted 'bout and Ah thought Ah should share it with ya. If'n ya'll agree ta make sure everypony knows where ya got it from and ta stop talkin' bout the Potato Acid, Ah'll let ya have the instructions fer it."

Berry stared for several moments before she grabbed Applejack in a hug. She had made quite a few drinks over the course of the Loops, even the one which allowed her to ascend, but the number of them which could transcend the typical boundaries of natural physics numbered less than a dozen, and of them only the 307 Ale could be produced using standard equipment found in the Baseline. And even then, it was neither easy or cheap to create a tesseract in which to brew the powerful liquor. Not that bits had been a problem ever since she started Looping, but still.

Yet here she was, being offered a device which would allow her to brew alcohol which was potent all the way down to the subatomic level. That opened an entirely new avenue of fermentation research to her delighted mind, and already questions were beginning to swirl around her head involving the possible results from combining the Tesseract Still she used for her 307 Ale and the supercollider for the Large Hadron Cider.

She couldn't wait to start working. She had so many new ideas to try, she was practically giddy. And it was all because of the Apple Acre farmpony before her. As far as she was concerned Applejack had just become her new best friend.

Applejack laughed. "Ah take it that's a yes, then. C'mon, grab a seat and Ah'll pour us a glass. Careful, though, it packs a mighty powerful wallop at first."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Note:<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>159.1: Fall out fallout.<br>159.3: Honestly I think they're just suffering from a sunk costs fallacy.  
>159.4: Not foreshadowing in the slightest.<br>159.6: And speaking of cutie marks...  
>159.7: Authorial changelings. What next?<br>159.8: Ow.  
>159.9: Chrysalightened despotism.<br>159.10: She asked.  
>159.12: The perils of being labelled as evil.<br>159.13: Celestia gets lonely sometimes.  
>159.15: It is a high stress environment.<br>159.17: Coping With Chaos Powers.  
>159.18: Vet your employees.<br>159.19: Well, she was dressed as a PI.  
>159.20: The best drinks. Ever.<p>

## 167. Chapter 167

160.1: (Crisis)

Twilight looked around the utter mess that Pinkie Pie's room had become. In addition to the usual party paraphernalia, there were also charts, beakers, research papers, incomplete blueprints, and devices of varying design and function (not all of which were readily apparent). "I'm going to regret asking this, but what exactly are you doing, Pinkie?"

"I'm trying to figure out how to goof on, silly!" Pinkie chirped back.

"How to...?"

"Goof on! Everyone knows how to goof off, but I want to invent the goofer so I need to know how to goof on as well!"

Twilight blinked slowly as Pinkie continued her explanation, the party pony chanting 'goof on! goof off!' several times; the unicorn then pulled a breathalyzer out of her subspace pocket. She proceeded to breathe into the sensor long and slow before fiddling with the device for a bit using her magic.

"As I suspected."

"As you suspected what?" Pinkie cut off her explanation curiously.

"I am entirely too sober to be having this conversation."

\* \* \*

><p>160.2: (Vinylshadow - MLP Ultimate Hellsing)

\* \* \*

><p>Cadence Woke up with a loud snort that would have sounded more appropriate coming from a pig.<p>

"Oh, you're Awake," a voice beside her said. Cadence turned to see Shining Armor looking at her. Meeting her eyes, he winked.

"What's going on?" Cadence asked, yawning.

"Blueblood was replaced by someone from Hellsing. Schnitzel or strudel..." Shiny replied.

"Ah, the Major. Sturmbannführer," Cadence said with a nod.

"Uhm...why aren't we murderlizing him?"

"Well, he's not completely sociopathic. He apparently picked up some of Blueblood's traits. And he simply loves speeches. He's been going on for the past four and a half hours."

Cadence could only blink in bemusement. "Bring any popcorn?"

At Shining's nod behind her, she turned to see Alucard and Integra scarfing down popcorn. At her polite cough, the two offered her some.

\* \* \*

><p>160.3: (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

"Lyra, this is a terrible idea."

Twilight rubbed her forehead as she watched her partner setting up her stargate, which she had pocketed during the Variant where Nightmare Moon was a Goa'uld named Epona. Now, Twilight was learning Lyra occasionally tested the Stargate/DHD to see if they were connected. And this Loop, Lyra managed a successful connection with Abydos. Now, she was insistent on connecting with SGI and joining the team this Loop.

Lyra scoffed. "Come on, Twilight. Don't tell me you're not a little bit bored with hanging around Equestria all day. Don't you want to get back out there, explore the universe and see things you don't see very often? Everything outside our Solar System changes from Loop to Loop. Explore the stars and you'll never be bored again."

Twilight bit her lip. Admittedly, the idea was appealing. But the method was...questionable at best, "They have the iris protecting their gate. One step through and the Loop will automatically end, painfully."

Lyra waved her off, "Please, I can magic the iris open from this end easily. Come on, have some fun!"

Sighing, Twilight nodded, "Fine."

\* \* \*

><p>As they stepped out of the gate, they were met by dozens of soldiers decked out with heavy machine guns, along with a pair of mini guns hanging from the ceiling, all pointed at the two ponies. Lyra was grinning in excitement, while Twilight was facehooving and keeping a shield up in case someone decided to shoot first, ask questions later.<p>

In the control room, Daniel Jackson blinked several times and gave a short wave while Colonel Jack O'Neill mimicked Twilight in facepalming.

\* \* \*

><p>160.4: (Vinylshadow)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Trixie, are you sure this is a good idea?" Twilight asked, watching the azure-coated showmare make a few last minute adjustments to her plan.<p>

"Yes, Twilight. I've triple-checked everything from start to finish. Now shoo, go have your 'lazer battle' with Tirek and leave the rest to me."

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight immobilized Tirek with ease, but she had been too slow to stop the blast that usually leveled the library. She watched as it

neared the tree and she winced.<p>

Suddenly, a ring of explosions erupted from the base of the tree and the entire structure sank into the ground with a \_whumph.\_

The blast sailed over the sunken tree and nuked Town Hall instead.

Twilight stared and turned to see Trixie grinning from ear to ear.

"See? Exactly as I planned!"

Twilight thought about it for a moment, then facehoofed, much to Trixie's confusion. "Yes, you saved the Library, but everything \_inside\_ is probably all over the place now."

"...Oh."

\* \* \*

><p>160.5: (ORBSyndicate)<p>

Twilight Awoke to the words, "And this is my partner, Twilight Sparkle." She blinked, turning her head to see a man introducing her to... some random person. "We work for the local P. T. Buffalo 'wax your buns off' parlor. Would you like to purchase some scented candles?"

As the random person shut the door in their faces, Twilight blinked. \_What the buck is this Loop?\_

She sent out a Ping, hoping to pick up anyone to talk to. She only got one response, presumably from the man standing right next to her, since he tapped her in the forehead saying "PING!" just as she felt it. "Hello, Twilight, I am Shawn, psychic detective. I sense you are baffled, confused, and perhaps need a banana pancake covered in strawberry drizzle. Come with me. I know just the place, my purple-skinned friend."

Twilight followed Shawn in a daze, racking her brain for her Loop memories.

Then they hit. Her name was Berta Sparkle, lifelong friend to Shawn Spencer. They had recently started a psychic detective agency known as Psych and solved cases for the Santa Barbara Police Department. There was just one problem -

"You aren't really psychic!"

"Usually not, but did that ever stop James Roday?" Shawn said, grinning. "Now I suppose I should welcome you to the Psych Loop, say I'm the Anchor, yada yada... But you know what? That's boring. I have something much better planned. My little pony, can you do magic now?"

Twilight tested. "Yep."

"Good. When I yell 'Lassie' and point, I want you to turn whatever I point at into a dog."

"What do I get out of this?"

"A full Loop-long membership in Psych Inc., the best psychic detective agency in the universe." Shawn smiled. "Which, as you have figured out, has nothing at all to do with being psychic."

"You're using your knowledge of the Loops to take advantage of-"

"BWAAAAAP!" Shawn blared, grinning. "Psych existed BASELINE, little princess. I just used my amazing powers of observation and Gus's super sniffer. I was like the Rainman. Now shush, I'm about to scream 'Lassie.' Ready? "

"Um... sure?"

"Okay." Shawn Spencer threw open the doors of the Santa Barbara Police Department. "HEY LASSIE!"

Detective Carlton Lassiter looked at Shawn standing there, pointing at him. "Mister Spencer, I really don't have time for your antics right now. So how's about you hook up with your snobby little purple friend -"

At THAT point Twilight turned him into a dog. He started barking. Shawn cracked up laughing. "Yes! This has gotta be the fifth best time I've turned Lassie into a DOG!"

Twilight briefly pondered this before turning Lassiter back.

He stared, blinking. "What just happened?"

"Berta turned you into a dog, Lassie! Isn't that wonderful? You've got a superpower now... you could be... the SUPERLASSIE! No... that's not right... the BAT DOG! Copyrighted by at least a dozen universes... the... Berta give me a hand here."

"Berta's Amazing Pup?"

"As embarrassing as it is, Lassie deserves a legitimate superhero name. No dice. Perhaps something relating to this version's Lassie having an obsession with red socks -"

"I DO NOT!"

"Dude," Shawn said, putting a hand to his forehead. "My psychic vibes are telling me you like red socks. Particularly on dogs. Perhaps the Red Socked Avenger. Or..."

Twilight sighed. This was going to be interesting...

[br]

Mac looked at the brown pony with a nose cutie mark. He looked... really relaxed.

"You have no idea how long I've been waiting..." Super Sniffer (more commonly known as Gus) told Big Mac. "I heard about this Sanctuary Loop centuries ago. I've been waiting forever for a BREAK. Have you

met my Anchor? Shawn? He's the most immature man in existence."

"I reckon he can't be the most immature -"

"He pranked our entire planet by replacing the world leaders with piles of cow pies."

"Eewhat?"

"Nothing," Gus said, chugging down a drink. "Now if you excuse me, I'm going to relax for a few years before I inevitably get dragged back home to be dragged around through who-knows-what."

Another pony walked in, a member of the fluffy pony race with white fur. He shot death glares into the ponies with just his presence.

"Not a word." Lassie said. "Not. One. Word."

\* \* \*

><p>160.6: (ORBSyndicate)<p>

Gravity Falls: Friendship is Magic

Twilight Awoke on a bus, with all five of her closest friends with her. She could feel the right combination of Elements, guessed that they were all Awake, and waved. They waved back. They were all human, in their Canterlot High forms. (Although they were younger, and Rainbow Dash was wearing jeans instead of a skirt.)

She sent out a Ping, receiving one response other than the Element bearers. The six of them scanned their Loop memories, quickly noticing one odd detail:

"Sextuplets?" Rarity said, eyes wide. "Is that even possible?"

Twilight nodded. "Hub world record for most children born at once that survived is eight. That's two more than six." She decided to examine the surroundings. It was midday, the sun high enough in the sky that the bus' roof completely obscured the ball of energy at all angles. The sky was cloudless, which was standard for a summer day in the Oregon forest. Speaking of forest, there were trees. Everywhere. Gigantic tall pine trees that loomed ominously against the sky, brushing the air with their tips. The bus itself, the Speedy Beaver, was a piece of junk. Torn up cushions, random stuff under the cushions -

"Hey! Let's play treasure hunt!" Pinkie yelled, peeling up a cushion. "Oo! Old gum, a stain that looks like Shawn, a cockroach, and a balloon!"

Twilight ignored Pinkie's antics. Right now, she was trying to figure out where they were. She reached into her Pocket and began to search through Hub fiction, looking for anything similar to their situation. She was stopped by Fluttershy. "Twilight? Can we not try to know what's going to happen? Justâ€¦ live through the Loop?"

Twilight blinked. "Sure. Why not." She put the Hub fiction device

back into her Pocket and sat down, attempting to enjoy the ride.  
"Where are we going, anyway?"

Applejack pointed out the window at a sign. "Some town called Gravity Falls. Our Grunkle Stan is going to watch us for the summer. My unAwake self was looking forwards to this trip, been a while since we'd been in the country apparently."

Rarity sighed, leaning on her hand in a overly-dramatic pose. "We're going to a back-of-the-woods town in the middle of nowhere. There's not likely to be ANYone who has ANY fashion senseâ€|"

Rainbow Dash grinned. "Back-of-the-woods town? Sounds like adventure! We shall explore the entire town and root out all sorts of mysteries! THE MYSTERY SIX! I shall -"

"Darlingâ€|" Rarity said. "The Scooby-Doo Loop wasn't THAT funâ€|"

"It was fun enough to warrant a name. Mystery Six. We will brave great dangers and discover the mysteries of the townâ€|"

"Yer bein' redundant," Applejack muttered, adjusting her hat.

"Oh, really?" Rainbow said. "I'll have you know I'm an author and I know redundancy. I did not mention danger the first time, and mysteries just needed to be solidified. MYSTERIES!"

Pinkie Pie jumped in, wearing her deerstalker and sugar-bubble pipe. "MYSTERIES!" she yelled, taking a deep breath, springing into a heartsong.

\_Mysteries, mysteries!\_

\_Oh how I love these!\_

\_Mysteries, mysteries!\_

\_Bigfoot! Mothman! Hunks of swiss cheese!\_

\_These are all my big mysteries!\_

\_Is it true or is it not?\_

\_These are all the questions I've got!\_

\_Can you see?\_

\_My curiosity?\_

\_Mysteries, mysteries!\_

\_Oh how I love these!\_

\_Mysteries, mysteries!\_

\_Halflings! Zalgo's screen! Blue zombie plagues!\_

\_There stories are all just so vague!\_

\_Big ol' pot of Neglish rot!\_  
\_Or mutants that like tater tot?\_  
\_What is truth?\_  
\_Can we be the true sleuth?\_  
\_Mysteries, mysteries!\_  
\_Oh how I love these!\_  
\_Mysteries, mysteries!\_  
\_Stargates! Zodiacs! Constellations!\_  
\_Mysteries from all the nations!\_  
\_All of them congregate there!\_  
\_A place which we are so near!\_  
\_Can you feel?\_  
\_The great alluring zeal?\_  
\_Oh look there, here is the place!\_  
\_The place where gravity falls, and earth becomes sky!\_  
\_Beware the beast with just one eye!\_

As the song ended, the Speedy Beaver bus pulled into the small town of Gravity Falls, stopping at the outskirts. The six sisters stepped out, looking at their new surroundings. The town was situated in what appeared to be a gorge, with two steep crevasses towards the northern end of the town, which were connected by a metal wire-frame bridge. Beneath the bridge were two large gashes in the crevasses, giving them the appearance of two Pac-Men staring at each other. The river flowed between them into town, where it met up with a waterfall, creating a small, but deep, lake. The southern edge was bordered by thick, deep, dark forest, the water tower standing up out of the canopy. Several large mansions could be seen lining the higher-elevation areas, looking down on the mish-mashed look of the town itself. There was a mixture of cars and bikes, modern looking buildings such as a mall, old sheds that looked like they'd been there since the days of Lewis and Clark, and other buildings that looked like some unholy combination of the two. The town seemed to be a living contradiction: modern mixed with ancient, fancy cars alongside horse-drawn carriages.

What really caused the six to reconsider was the fact that roughly half the buildings were somewhat familiar. Although there was much less pink dashed around everywhere, there was no mistaking the ice-cream shape of Sugar Cube Corner, the tall and circular design of the Town Hall, the Library made out of a giant treeâ€

There was no doubt about it. This town was a fusion of two places. Gravity Falls and Ponyville, thrown together in the backwoods of Oregon.



Twilight pondered this. "Huh. Wonder who we'll see here?"

Pinkie grinned. "I can't wait to know EVERYONE and find out ALL THEIR BIRTHDAYS and ALL THE PARTIES and&#128;| a whole new town Twilight! Can you believe it? Woohoo!"

Applejack blinked. "Pinkie, every Loop you have a new town. And this is far from the first one that's been at least partly like Ponyville \_"

"Hush now, one-who-is-standing-in-the-way-of-party. ALL new places are amazing!"

Rarity spoke up. "Darlings, we should probably check in with our Grunkle Stan first, so we don't upset anything. That is, if we are going to follow this Loop through."

Twilight nodded. "Come on girls, we need to head to the Mystery Shack."

"The mystery whatsis now?" Rainbow said "Sounds lame and run down. I want ADVENTURE!"

Twilight rolled her eyes. "Let's just get settled in first. We can go searching for trouble later."

[br]

Stan Pines, Mister Mystery, was waiting at the front door like he did every Loop. He was a tall man with a thick figure, and despite his old age he managed to look strong and even full of energy. He wore a red fez, with a strange golden symbol on it that resembled Pac-Man crossed with a goldfish cracker. The Pac-Man fish's mouth was open ever so slightly, seemingly reaching for the golden dot in front of it. Unfortunately, being nothing more than a symbol on a hat, the Pac-Man fish would never, ever be able to eat the dot. Such a shame, really. Stan's face was square-jawed, covered in stubble, and had an eyepatch across one eye. He was wearing what appeared to be a black and white showman's uniform crossed with a tuxedo. It gave the appearance of being fancy, while at the same time looking somewhat cheesy and overdone. Choking his neck was a red cord tied into a knot with four tassels. He was currently staring intently at his watch.

"Five&#128;| Four&#128;| Three&#128;|. Two&#128;| One&#128;|" he said before opening the door quickly. Twilight, who had been in the process of preparing to knock, stumbled into the front room. "Um&#128;| Hi. I'm Twilight. I assume you are Grunkle Stan? You sure must be Loopy to take all six of us for the entire summer."

Stan grinned. "My unAwake self made that decision, as he does every Loop. Come in, make yourselves at home." He generously gestured with a wave of his arm. The six walked into the Mystery Shack, into a large room. There waswere paraphernalia littered everywhere, from T-shirts to baseball caps to snowglobes, all priced at least four times too high. Further along several examples of obviously-fake taxidermy littered the walls. There was a jackalope with three antlers, a horse made entirely of corn, and a squirrel with a duck head. Each of these "exhibits" had a rather uncreative name attached

to them: "trackelope," "ecorn," and "squck" just to name a few. There were also "adventuring supplies", such as a grappling hook, rope, a crossbow, and more rope.

"OK - i take the first part back. NOT lame," Dash said. "Some of this stuff is actually pretty cool!" she said as she picked up a crystal eye.

Stan quickly tore the red crystalline eye out of Rainbow's grasp. "That's not for sale. Don't touch that."

"I thought we were living with you - why can't I touch your whatsawagigs?" Dash said.

Twilight sighed inwardly at Rainbow's use of "whatsis" again.

Stan glared. "My shack. My rules. I say what happens and what doesn't. Also, I'm the resident Looper here. I know things."

"Oh, well, good for you, Mr. Protective," Dash sarcastically muttered, rolling her eyes as she picked up a multi-colored geode.

"You touch it, you buy it," Stan said, gesturing to Dash to fork over some money.

Rainbow Dash quickly checked her wallet, then proceeded to give Stan a five dollar bill. Stan stared at her in disbelief. He had obviously not expected her to actually pay him. "Erâ€| okay then. Listen up! You six, are going to work for me at the mystery shack -"

"So I get my five bucks back?" Dash asked. "As payment?"

Stan twitched. He was not in the mood to be interrupted. "Your payment will be your rooms. No, you won't get paid. You know what, just for that?" He turned to look at all the sisters. "I'm not telling you anything. You all have to figure this Loop out for yourselves. Have fun; this place is a real pain in the back when you don't know what's going on. Your room is up the stairs, down the hall, first door on the left. Work begins tomorrow."

The six element bearers stood in the Shack, staring at the place where Stan had just been. Applejack was the first to recover, shrugging. "I say we go an' get our room together. Then we figure out what we're gonna do."

The others nodded, and they walked up the wooden stairs to their room. The ceiling of the room was slanted, indicating the rooms position in relation to the roof. The room had a single triangular-shaped window, a lot of power outlets, several old wooden dressers with lamps on them, and two beds.

Only two beds.

Twilight twitched. "Girls, who carries extra beds in their pockets?"

Pinkie Pie grinned. "I do! I always carry them around in case of a bed emergency!"

Rarity looked around the room. "Are you sure there's room in this little room?"

Pinkie Pie produced two bunk beds, setting them in between the two other beds, taking up most of the space in the room. "Just barely!" Pinkie grinned. "But it works!"

"Hrmmmâ€¦ it needs to be about twenty percent roomier." Dash said  
"'Cus reasons."

Fluttershy smiled. "I don't mind a cramped place. It'll let us bond more."

"Fluttershyâ€¦" Twilight responded. "We've had billions of years to bond. I think we've got it down."

Pinkie Pie dropped down from the ceiling, somehow. "Oh really? Riddle me this: what am I thinking about right now?"

"Fooling me?" Twilight guessed.

"Nope! I was actually thinking of croissants. I'm hungry." She pulled one of the crescent-shaped pastries out of her pocket, digging in like a rabid squirrel.

Twilight shrugged. She wondered what this world would have in store for them. The town was brimming with magical energy, flowing in and out around her. She would have to study it in detail. It looked like she might get to have a genuine adventure with her friends for once. It had been quite a while since she'd been in a place with all five of her friends that none of them had been to before. And they were sure as aspen going to have fun with it.

Twilight considered thanking Stan for not telling them what was coming. It was always more interesting that way.

\* \* \*

><p>Stan sat back in his room, pondering life. He took off his fez, studying it deeply. It was his symbol, that strange fish thing. It was who he was. It was his destiny. It represented his baseline self. Which, admittedly, wasn't altogether that different from him now. Millions of Loops hadn't changed his core self that much, but that was probably because he'd already been old when he started.<p>

Would he be able to go through a baseline run again? It would be a challenge, physically, mentally, and emotionally. As fun as it was to watch visiting Loopers go through the mysteries completely baffled, he usually stepped in at some point, to change what was going to happen.

It had been a really, really long time since he had seen it through all the way to the end.

Maybe this was the time he'd face it. Maybe. Maybe not.

He sighed, taking a picture of his niece and nephew, Dipper and Mabel Pines. Anchor and Looper for this branch of the great world-tree Yggdrasil. His frown deepened. They had changed so much, and he was still the same old man he had always been.

Maybeâ€¦| maybe this would be the Loop.

Just maybe.

Outside time, and outside space, a creature of nightmares stirred. His single eye flipped open, and he knew everything. He laughed.

"This is going to be fun!"

\* \* \*

><p>160.7: (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

"Afternoon, Mac."

"Afternoon, Mayor."

Ivory Scroll chuckled as she settled in on her stool. "I just had a really, really weird Bureau Loop, and I know we don't like to talk about themâ€¦| but I need to get this one off my back."

"How so?"

"It was a LITERAL Bureau Loop. As in, I was a chest of drawers in someone's house."

Mac raised an eyebrow as he slid a drink her way. "Now, this I have to hear."

Ivory chuckled. "Wellâ€¦|"

\_Ivory Scroll, sometimes known as Mayor Mare, Awoke feeling very strange. Curious, she tried to move and found she couldn't.\_

\_Frowning (such as she could), she triggered a Ping, and several responses came back almost immediately.\_

\_Tapping the Force abilities she'd gained from one Loop, she stretched out her senses, and began picking up other voices.\_

\_"\_Twilight?\_"\_

\_"\_Yes, Rarity?\_"\_

\_"\_I think I'm a sofa.\_"\_"\_

\_There was a pause. "\_I know how you feel.\_"\_"\_

\_Ivory sighed in relief. "\_Twilight?\_"\_"\_

\_"\_Ivory?\_" Twilight's mental voice came. "\_Oh good, we aren't alone. I felt the ping, so I knew there had to be more of us here, but I couldn't tell who.\_"\_"\_

\_Ivory chuckled. "\_Yes, I'm here. Anyone else?\_"\_"\_

"\_Shiny and I are,\_" came Cadance's voice. "\_I appear to be a credenza? And Shiny's an armoire.\_"

"\_And here I thought I had it bad the time I Looped in as literal armor,\_" a grumpy voice added.\_

"\_At least you aren't a bureau like me,\_" Ivory told him.\_

\_There were several shudders at that. Including one from an actual pair of shutters. "\_I have to admit, this is definitely among the stranger things I've been,\_" Sunset Shimmer commented.\_

"\_Yes,\_" Twilight replied. "\_Yes, it is.\_" There were several chuckles in response.\_

"It's a good thing we could still talk with one another like that," Ivory concluded. "Otherwise, it would have been a very boring Loop, just having to stand there all day and do nothing."

Mac chuckled. "Eeyup."

\* \* \*

><p>160.8: (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

"Ah, literature, literature," Mrs. Twilight Sparkle sighed as she studied the shelves of her mansion's library. Around the room, her maid and their five guests were each contently reading one of the books from her vast collection.

Then she and the others all blinked Awake at the same moment.

Looking around, Twilight blinked. "Um, girls? Are we in Boddy Manor? The real one, not just a copy we made for a game Loop?"

"Yep yep yep!" Miss Charlotte "Pinkie Pie" Scarlet bounced in her seat. "But I think you mean Sparkle Manor, this time."

Colonel Martin "Rainbow Dash" Mustard raised an eyebrow. "And I see you're the only one reprising your old role, Pinkie."

Next to her, Mrs. Wilhelmina "Fluttershy" White nodded as she set her copy of \_Make Way for Ducklings\_ down. "I don't mind being in this role, actually."

"Well, ah do mind this one," Mr. Gerald "Applejack" Green remarked. "Why in tarnation am ah the corrupt businesspony? Do ah look like Flim or Flam?"

"No, but your family does run a successful business," Mrs. Patricia "Rarity" Peacock commented. "So excluding his criminal activities, you are the closest to the character's background."

Applejack reluctantly conceded the point.

"I just have one question," Professor Paul "Spike" Plum threw in. "Why am \_I\_ the absent-minded professor this time instead of Twilight?"

"Because you're purple?" Twilight suggested. "At any rate, I think this is the book version. And unlike Mr. Boddy, I have no intention of being murdered or robbed blind. So... Vacation Loop?"

"Vacation Loop," everyone else chorused.

\* \* \*

><p>160.9: (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

"TWILIGHT!" a panicked-looking Rarity shouted as she burst into the library.

Rolling her eyes, Twilight looked up from her book. \_Even the unAwake versions are getting into it now...\_ "Yes, Rarity?"

"Come quick! We've a situation, and Fluttershy isn't here to help with it!"

Twilight raised an eyebrow, but followed her friend out the door. "Animals where they're not supposed to be?"

"Yes! In the swimming hole! Where my sister and her friends were playing!"

"And... what kind are they?"

"See for yerself," a much calmer Applejack put in as she walked up to them. "Ah've seen 'em and they aren't causin' any real trouble, but Mac's watchin' 'em anyway, so everything's jist fine. And Rarity, I know you can get a little worked up at times, but did you really, really have to run screaming like that?"

"Our sisters are in danger and you think I shouldn't be 'worked up'?! Why, you..."

Ignoring the frantic Rarity as she continued to rant at an obviously exasperated Applejack, Twilight sighed. \_Why, oh, why did Rarity have to be such a worrywart this Loop?\_

A few minutes later, as the three mares walked up to the swimming hole, Twilight raised her eyebrow even higher. \_Okay, even in the mostly baseline Loops, I can still be surprised.\_

A family of bears, one adult and five cubs, were happily splashing around with the Crusaders, while Mac kept a careful eye on the group from where he was sitting. Concentrating, Twilight sent a Ping, to see if any of the bears would react. They didn't, though Applejack (whom Twilight already knew was Awake) quirked one ear. \_Not visiting Loopers then. Huh.\_

Walking up to the water, she coughed to catch their attention. "Room for one more?"

"Twilight!" Three happy fillies chorused. "Come on in, the water's fine!"

The mother bear looked up too, shrugged, then went back to resting on her side of the swimming hole.

Smiling, Twilight waded in and joined the group in their playing.  
\_Ah... I needed this.\_

Several hours later (Rarity having stormed off in a huff at some point, and Applejack having returned to her farm, knowing Mac and Twilight had things well in hoof), the last of the group finally left the water and shook themselves dry. Watching the six bears lumber off, Twilight turned to her three younger friends with a smile.  
"Thanks for letting me join you, girls."

"Oh, it was no problem!" Scootaloo chirped. "So... same time next week?"

Twilight smiled. "Works for me."

\* \* \*

><p>160.10: (Anon e Mouse Jr.; with one line by Masterweaver)<p>

Diamond Tiara stuck her nose in the door of the Golden Oaks Library.  
"Hey, Twilight? Spike said you wanted to see me?"

Twilight nodded from where she was shelving books. "It's about your unAwake self last Loop."

Diamond groaned as she walked into the room. "Oh no. What'd she do \_this\_ time?"

"Nothing bad," Twilight reassured her.

"Oh. Phew." Diamond sighed.

"She just acted exactly like Maud normally does."

Diamond stared. "What."

Twilight nodded. "She looked just like you, and had the same basic voice, just with Maud's personality. Deadpan expression, always speaking in a monotone... she even had the same obsession with rocks and gemstones. And she was about as protective of Silver Spoon as Maud is of Pinkie."

Diamond smiled at that. "Nice to know some of my other selves can be decent ponies too."

"Yep." Twilight crinkled her forehead. "The only problem... it was a little disturbing to see Maud's "Look" on your face. Promise me you won't start doing that?"

"Only in emergencies," Diamond assured her.

"Good." Then she cocked her head. "...soooo, does this mean the Maud of that Loop acted like my unawake self or-?"

"Fortunately, no. And even more fortunately, you two never met when she came to town at the usual time."

"You don't mean..."

Twilight nodded, and shuddered. "Trust me, the universe is not ready for Maud in stereo. I'm just glad they were different enough from one another for it not to be a problem in that Loop where there were six of her."

\* \* \*

><p>160.11: (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Twilight Awoke in the chariot on the way to Ponyville. A quick check of her Loop Memories told her this had been a mostly baseline Loop for her so far, and two quick Pings, one with the elements and one without, told her only one of her friends - specifically, a bearer of Loyalty - was Awake. Then, she felt a tap on her leg.

Standing beside her, Spike looked up. "Hey, Twilight. Feeling Loopy?"

Twilight breathed a sigh of relief. "Yes. You just Woke Up too, huh?"

"Yeah. So, what's the plan for this Loop?"

"Nothing in particular, I..." Twilight stared. "What the birch?"

Their chariot had landed in Ponyville while they were talking, and an unusual sight lay before them:

Every single pony had a miniature version of Derpy Hooves sitting on their head and looking cute.

Spike facepalmed. "Okay, what."

As one pony walked past them, the pegasus mare on her head waved to the pair.

Twilight, still looking around in surprise, nodded to the pegasus and then glanced at her dragon assistant. "Something tells me this is going to be an odd Loop, Spike."

A little while later, Twilight and Spike were still walking through Ponyville, and still wondering about the miniature pegasi that everypony, be they adult or younger, had. The youngest ponies had proportionally smaller ones, while one elderly pony Twilight saw had a very aged-looking Derpy on his head. Even Pinkie Pie (who'd done her usual "gasp and run" routine with them) had one on her head, though hers was apparently wearing a small party hat. (It took everything Twilight had to keep from squeeing at the sheer adorableness of the sight.) As the two approached Sweet Apple Acres, they could see all the ponies there had the miniature pegasi as well.

A familiar Earth Pony walked up to them. "Howdy, y'all!" Applejack called. "Welcome to Ponyville, miss..."

"Twilight. Twilight Sparkle. And, um... how could you tell I'm new here?"

Applejack chuckled. "Your head's bare, that's how! Everypony around



here's got one of these little darlin's on their head, so of course anypony without 'em's gotta be new." As she gestured, her own miniature pegasus popped out of the brim of her hat and waved.

Twilight waved back. "Okay... now, I have to ask. Why \_does\_ everypony have a tiny pegasus on their head?"

"Cute, ain't she?" Applejack chuckled. "This here's a Derpie. Near as we can tell, they're an offshoot of the... \_Breezies\_, I think Fluttershy called 'em. They're supposed to be kind of a mix between ponies and butterflies, but this kind look like normal Pegasi, 'cept for the size an' all havin' the same color scheme. Anyway, whole bunch of 'em moved into town a few years ago, an' since they don't cause any trouble, we let 'em stay."

"So, why is she on your head?"

"That's what Derpies do," Applejack replied. "They settle down on folks' heads and look cute. An' we found out they make good lookouts too, since they can see in every direction at once. Don't ask me how, they just do it."

"Don't you have to feed them?"

"Nah, they just pull some of the ambient magic out of the air an' eat that. Though for some reason, they always make it look like a muffin before they eat it."

Her Derpie giggled and demonstrated.

Twilight raised an eyebrow. "Well, that's... interesting. So, Spike and I are here to check up on the preparations for the Summer Sun Celebration?"

Nearly twelve hours later, Twilight was seriously wondering about this Loop. Aside from the Derpies sitting on pony's heads, it was effectively the same as baseline. Applejack and her family were still friendly and welcoming, Rainbow Dash was still just as good at handling the weather (though Twilight had to wonder how her Derpie held on when she was moving at top speed), and Rarity, Fluttershy and Pinkie were the same as well. Nightmare Moon had shown up right on time, and Twilight had led her friends through the Everfree to get the Elements and purify the corrupted Alicorn. Now, Princess Celestia was there and speaking to them.

"Spike, take a note, please. \_I, Princess Celestia, hereby decree that the unicorn Twilight Sparkle shall take on a new mission for Equestria. She must continue to study the magic of friendship. She must report to me her findings from her new home in Ponyville.\_"

As the others cheered, Twilight blushed. "Thank you, Princess. Staying here with my friends, making Ponyville my new home, it means the world to me."

Just then, a Derpie flew in out of nowhere and settled on her head, a big smile on its face as Twilight looked up at it. Another flew in to settle on Spike's head, making him grin.

Applejack chuckled. "Well, lookee here, Twilight! Guess you really

are one of us now!"

As the room filled with laughter, Twilight just smiled. This was going to be an interesting Loop.

\* \* \*

><p>160.12: (Evilhumour, GamereX27)<p>

The Question, part four of four

Nyx flew through space, with eyes narrowed as she made her way to the unoccupied moon. Sleipnir had informed her of the location during the last Loop, to where she could meet him.

She braced herself both physically and emotionally as she flew up to the lunar rock and landed in front of the giant in gleaming power armor trimmed in fur. His helm was resting on the surface, and he sat on a raised ridge.

Nyx knew his physical appearance very well, to the point she was certain that she could draw all the lines in his face without a reference.

Yet the mournful lines were a new addition to the faceâ€¦|

He looked up at her and caught her eyes with his.

They were heavy with sadness and regret, shame and remorse as he looked at her. Yet there was a spark of determination and hope, of resolution and joy in his eyes as well.

There was an awkward silence as the two beings looked at each other. The man finally sighed, eyes darting to the side.

"Hello, Nyx." Leman spoke softly, unable to look at her anymore.

"Hello, Russ," Nyx responded curtly, letting a small bit of anger and hate that she still had out onto the man that had hurt her.

"Nyx, you -" Leman began before shaking his head. "Nyx, I cannot begin to say how sorry I am, how much I regret saying that to you."

"Try," Nyx said, far harsher than she had planned. "Actually saying the words 'I'm sorry for being a hurtful jerk' would be a start!"

The powerful Primarch winced at that, folding inwards slightly. "Nyx, I want to say I am sorry - I am sorry for everything that happened, believe me - but just saying I am sorry feels like I am understating what I did to you. It doesn't feel enough!"

Nyx huffed, silently agreeing that if Leman had simply apologized, she would have thrown it back into his face. She didn't want to agree with him right now, but he was right; a simple conversation would not be enough. "Then what do you propose then, Russ?" She watched him wince again, and she was surprised at herself that she did not feel guilty at doing this to him. But she was relieved that she felt

guilty for not feeling guilty about hurting him.

"Nyx, I," Leman started before shaking his head. "I don't know if we can go back to what we had, but we need to talk about -" He broke off, looking into space. "Did you feel that?" He frowned, tilting his head.

"What are you talkin-" Nyx blinked, ears twitching around as she felt something that was like nails on a chalkboard in the magical aether. It was a very unpleasant feeling, and as she listened into it, she could hear the screams of people and the screech of metal against metal.

"Damn it all to hell!" Leman swore, racing towards an assault bike parked against another ridge. "Those daemons will kill those people!" Throwing himself onto the bike, he started the machine when Nyx placed her hooves on it to stop him.

"What are you doing? You can't drive that -" Nyx reared back in surprise as Leman took off and began to head to the people in trouble. "How are you doing that? I thought you couldn't drive anything smaller than a \_tank!"\_ Nyx shouted at him as she flew alongside him, keeping one eye on the direction they were heading to make sure they were still on track.

Leman snorted, shaking his head. "Nyx, that's a \_lie\_, a self lie." Stealing a glance at her, Leman ran a massive hand through his hair while letting out a sigh. "Everyone, especially Anchors like me and your mother who are \_always\_ Awake... We \_need\_ something to keep ourselves and others occupied during the Loops, and sometimes the silliest of things amuses others, so we keep to it no matter what. You really think your mother, whose special talents are Learning and Magic itself, would be unable to save her home time again and again with her vast experiences and knowledge?"

Nyx blinked at that, feeling a bit uncomfortable with how much sense that made. "So your cooking skills are another self lie?"

"No, I \_really\_ suck at cooking." Leman blushed. "I \_still\_ don't know how I made a warp storm with just a toaster and toast."

Nyx couldn't help but giggle at that, with Leman smirking at her before frowning as they came upon the escort ship under siege by three odd-looking daemons. One of them was a black-robed figure riding inside a wheel made of fire - no doubt one of Khorne's. The second was a teal-ish transparent blob of a being, with its sole, heart-shaped organ visible and covered with black tumors. Nurgle's, obviously. The third was a feminine figure, white wings flapping as her only articles of clothing - Slaanesh type chains and leather that just \_barely\_ covered her decency - whipped about in the nonexistent breeze of space's vacuum.

"How should we handle this?" Nyx looked at Leman for a bit of guidance, eager to swoop in but aware of how foolish that would be.

"You take care of the ship; I'll distract the daemons." Leman stared at her, holding a finger to silence her protesting. "If we do it the other way, I'd be too worried about you and more than likely abandon them to get back to you."

"Oh." Nyx blinked, feeling at odds with the unspoken words that they both knew Nyx wouldn't be tempted to go back to aid Leman.

"Let me give you some coverage, Nyx, and tell the Imperial Guards on board that page six hundred twenty one of the Imperial Infantryman's Uplifting Primer goes double for you if they try anything." Leman smirked before firing at the daemons and hollering on the top of his lungs at the daemons that Nurgle's own abominations and daemons were far better on the eye. Roaring in outrage, the trio flew after him as Nyx teleported herself onboard, already feeling the stares and weapons locked onto her.

"I am Nyx Sparkle, and Lord Russ has stated that page six-two-one of the Imperial Infantryman's Uplifting Primer goes double for me, whatever that is!" It was telling that a few Imperial Guards actually blanched at that, most dropping their rifles to standby positioning. "I'm going to create a shield around this ship so those daemons won't attack you while your pilot gets this ship back into safe space." As she took a step towards the enclosed command bridge, the Imperial armed forces raised their weapons back up.

The Commander frowned at this, but bade his men allow her forwards and drop their arms. "We shall use the coverage that Lord Russ gave us until we can regroup with the others." Raising an eyebrow, the Commander looked Nyx square in the eyes. "You claim that you are able to produce a shield that will protect us?"

With her horn glowing, she summoned a basic shield around the ship that eased the blows against the hull. Raising an eyebrow back at him, Nyx did her best not to smirk, as it would be pushing her luck.

With a nod of his head, the Commander stepped to the side, allowing her inside the bridge; the door slammed shut behind them.

Nyx quickly used the view of space around them to modify her shield, acting as a camouflage as Nyx matched the night sky with the ship. The Commander's frown briefly turned into smirk. "Nearly invisible, Sparkle," he remarked, ordering the crew of four inside the bridge to travel faster. "You and Lord Russ have saved us this day."

"It was nothing special." Nyx brushed off the praise, trying to concentrate on the spell. "Leman and I were nearby when we heard you in distress."

"Oh?" A black haired officer in front of her spoke up, turning to face her. Looking at the second-in-command, Nyx stared at him before he continued to speak. "If I may ask, Lady Sparkle, why were you and Lord Russ nearby?"

Nyx sighed slightly, keeping her attention on the man. "Long story short, multiple usages of time travel allowed us to kinda find each other and we started to go out. Recently, we broke up due what that bucking idiot said, and this was our first chance to really talk to each other when the daemons attacked."

"That sounds oddly familiar." The man chuckled dryly, an odd look on his face for a moment - one that belonged to a much older person. "If I may ask further, Lady Sparkle, what are your plans with Lord

Russ?"

"I... I don't know." Nyx bit her lip. "I do still love him, but what he said really hurt me."

The man gave a short bark of laughter, pushing his purple lips together. "It's a good sign, then, that you're this hurt." Holding a finger up to halt her, he smirked at her. "The ones that love you the most know you better than anyone else. It stands to reason if they love you so much, that by turning that love on its head they'll be able to hurt you so much." Scratching his head, the man gave an awkward, stilted laugh. "Unless he had been faking the love for so long and did this on purpose."

"No, that's impossible!" Nyx shouted, before remembering to concentrate on the spell as it was starting to wax. "But I am still hurt by what he said and I don't know if I can ever forgive him for saying that to me."

"What did you two do in your last fight, by the way, before this one?" The man arched an eyebrow, smile briefly lapsing into a deep frown, his face falling in concern.

"This is our first real fight." Nyx blushed, keeping the man in her line of sight. "We usually don't have much time together, and it's liable to end at any point, so we resolved to keep things as pleasant as possible."

"That doesn't sound too smart to me, handicapping your relationship like that." The man pointed out the fact that Nyx had been regretting ever since it had been pointed out back at home. "But regardless, if you two do love each other, then let him prove it to you and accept what Lord Russ said as a horrible mistake."

"I -"

"Lady Sparkle, we're here." The Commander caused Nyx to snap her head toward the fifth man in the room. "Thank you for the support and coverage."

"You're welcome, sir." Nyx smiled at the man, pleased at how the trip went, although it had been a bit too quiet for her liking. For some reason, though, Nyx felt a lot better about her relationship with Leman now. "If you do not mind, I will be returning to aid Leman."

Before the Commander could respond, Nyx left him and the four-man bridge crew with a pop as she teleported away.

By the time she entered the space where she had left Leman before, the fight had tipped heavily in the favour of the daemons. Leman was using the blade Vulkan made for him against the daemons', but he was off balance - the assault bike had been destroyed at some point, and the primarch was left floating in space.

"LEMAN!" Nyx shouted, her voice carrying out in space and into Leman's helmet. As he turned his head to look at her, Nyx realized she had made a horrible mistake. She had distracted Leman from the fight and allowed one of the daemons an opportunity to slice his head off.

Snapping her wings and using her magic to propel herself forwards, Nyx used her horn to block the blade leaning against Leman's massive form. Another daemon roared in anger, its chain-blade poised to chop her neck in half. Within a second, Leman switched the massive frostblade to his left hand and caught the daemon's blade with his right hand; the weapon dug past the protection of the ceramite as blood oozed out of his wound. Then the third daemon attacked, swinging at Nyx's unprotected left side with its fiery blade. Without any hesitation, Leman brought his left arm upwards to block the blade with his own.

Leman grunted loudly in pain as the force of the daemon's attack, as well as the poor angle that Leman used, knocked the Primarch's left arm out of its socket with an ugly snap. It was only through sheer force of will that Leman kept his arm upright to protect Nyx.

"Go, Nyx," Leman grunted. "Teleport away and I -"

"Are you insane? They'll kill you!" Nyx shouted, pushing more magic into herself to keep the blade from breaking her horn in half.

"But you'll be alive and that's what matters!" Leman shouted back, leaning more into her side. The daemons' blades were getting harder to repel.

"I've got an idea, but -"

"Good. Let's do it!"

"Do-don't you want to know what it is?" Nyx looked at him, wondering what was going on through Leman's head.

"Why?" Leman blinked in honest confusion. "I trust your judgement completely, Nyx. You know that."

"I -" Nyx blushed at that, trying to get her mind in order. "When I give the signal, push and toss, then get ready for some light jousting, do you get it?"

"Ye-yes, I believe I do," Leman responded before closing his eyes to concentrate on the Warp powers he had. "I got something ready, Nyx, whenever you're ready."

With a grunt, Nyx let a build up of magic flare out in a blinding light to knock the daemon in front of them away; Leman pushed the blade in his right hand away and tossed his frostblade at the daemon to the left. Nyx swooped down and then up to get Leman onto her back as Leman summoned some solid Warp-constructed armour for her entire body and a makeshift chainsword for himself.

As he swung the blade to block one strike from the daemon on the right, Nyx summoned her own weapon, a sickle, with a kite shield to defend against the daemon on the left. With his legs squeezing her sides lightly, Nyx began to exploit the extra dimensions that space offered and the fact that space was her domain. Pulling at the fabric of the void, she knocked the Khornate daemon out of its wheel and flung it towards them. As Leman blasted the Slaanesh-spawn back with a Warp blast, Nyx swung at the fiery monster with her sickle, cleaving its arm clean off.

Swerving at a right angle, Nyx allowed Leman to stab the Nurgle-like daemon's wings in place while Nyx plunged her sickle into the heart-shaped organ, then channeled some burning magic throughout the daemon's entire body. It broke down and dispersed into dust, more than likely returning to the Warp.

However, it was not enough. The Slaanesh-like daemon's chain grabbed Leman off of her, the Warp blade in his hands vanishing as his concentration broke. Nyx's eyes flicked back from Leman towards the Khorne-like daemon, its flaming blade angled to slice her head open. Raising her shield, she managed to deflect the strike, although it did cut through the top of her horn, sending a massive surge of magic back at Nyx and forcing her into blackness. As her vision faded, she could see her reflected blow smashing the Khornate daemon's head into an ethereal mess, followed by Leman's fading scream of rage and the faint sound of a wolf's howl.

\* \* \*

><p>With a start, Nyx woke up to find herself in a massive bed. Looking around, she saw that she was inside a massive room, befitting someone of Leman's size. There were no windows in the room; Nyx's pegasus magic told her she was deep underground. Looking around the room, she saw that on the nightstand next to her was a light blue version of the vest she usual wore and her headband.<p>

"Ah, you are awake, Lady Sparkle." An Adeptus Custode spoke cleanly, drawing her eyes towards the doorway. "How are you feeling, my lady?"

With a twinge of pain, Nyx was aware of her injuries. Her sides had a slight soreness to them; her right wing felt a bit heavier than it was supposed to be, and then there was the uneasy numbness of her cut horn, although it seemed that someone that had sanded it down so the bone wasn't exposed to the air.

"I am fine, thank you," Nyx said politely enough, using her magic to put on the headband as the golden soldier offered a brush.

"Thank the Ordo Xeno for your survival, Lady Sparkle," the Adeptus Custode responded. "Lord Russ made it clear that you were to be treated with as minor modifications as possible. A waste, if you ask me, but he was clear that you were not to be altered in any fashion and were to be provided with those items next to you."

With a nod of her head as she brushed her mane and coat in place and placed the vest on herself, Nyx's eyes darted around the room. "Where am I currently, if I may ask?" She was trying to wrack her mind as to where this could be, but nothing came to mind.

"We are in Lord Russ's chambers, underneath the Imperial Palace, Lady Sparkle. After you and Lord Russ dispatched the first two daemons, you were rendered unconscious by the third one. Luckily, the Space Wolves were nearby and were able to fight off the daemon, rescue both you and Lord Russ, and bring you back to Holy Terra for treatment. That was a week ago."

Nyx blinked in surprise at the length of time, but before she could really digest that, her stomach growled in hunger.

"Ah, if you will follow us, Lord Russ has ordered a meal made to your preferences for when you awaken," the man said, leading her out of the bedroom where it seemed that the entire company of the Great Wolf was guarding the room, with massive Fenrisian wolves stalking along her side as extra determent against anyone that dared to raise so much as a combat blade, guiding her upwards. "Despite Lord Russ's orders of a light honour guard, they refused to leave their post."

"You have brought back Lord Russ to us," a man that Nyx recognised as Logan Grimnar growled out, sending glares at those lesser people that went past their escort. "That alone speaks volumes with our packs; considering how much Lord Russ treasures you, that we shall guard you with our lives."

"And what did Leman say about all of this?" Nyx raised a brow, keeping a low burn of magic on hoof if she needed to suddenly flee or fight. "Call you silly or something? I do appreciate this gesture, but I can defend myself, Old Wolf."

There was a trace of a smirk on the Great Wolf Lord's face as he slowly shook his massive head back and forth. "'Foolish pups that are guarding the slumbering she-wolf after a tumble down the hill.'" With a trace of a blush, the Chapter Master's eyes darted upwards. "Lord Russ's original words were a bit more crass, but he ordered us to never speak them in front of you and use those lesser words."

With a dry chuckle, Nyx was amused at how Leman was still light-footed in regards to her despite everything she had done  
-

'Or, it could be that Leman is doing his best to think before he speaks, and trying not to offend you again by calling you a she-bitch.'The thought snaked through her head, causing her to pause mid-step, with all the men around her giving worried and concerned glances at her.

A flash of smile eased them as they brought her out onto one of the many balconies of the Imperial Palace. The air felt nice on her coat, and her wings opened slightly to catch the breeze, although the heavy presence of Vlka Fenryka was slightly off putting. As she walked up to the balcony, her escort breaking apart to let her pass, she saw that a simple table was placed in the center. A metal tray was on one side and Leman Russ, looking almost everywhere but her direction, on the other.

As she approached her seat, Leman seemed to notice her at long last, rising up and move over to pull out her chair for her. As she let herself be pushed in, Leman pulled the lid up to show that there were a large number of daisy sandwiches and a big bowl of celery soup.

"It was a bit of chore to find daisies, to be honest." Leman chuckled as Nyx lifted one up to her mouth. "Kinda sad as well. I've seen Terra in the early days, well before the first millennium, and it was always so beautiful with how green the land was, the flowers of all colour and size."

Nyx was unsure how to respond to that, deciding to chew on the first



sandwich to give herself some time. With a light smile, she gulped the food down and placed the remainder of the sandwich back onto the platter. "Well, wherever you found it, the land should be greatly admired. This tastes wonderful. Did you make it?"

Leman let out a snort of laughter. "Nyx, you just recovered from fighting several daemons; you really think I'd be willing to poison you so quickly with my cooking?"

Nyx giggled at that, placing a hoof to her lips to halt it. "I suppose that is true, Mister I-can-summon-warps-storms-with-a-slice-of-bread."

Chuckling again, Leman raised his hands in defeat. "I'll never live that one down, will I?"

Giving him a smirk, Nyx leaned into the table. "What do you think?" As she flashed her eyelids, Leman let out a playful grunt.

"My mouth never stops flapping, does it?"

"No, Leman." Nyx leaned back into her seat, a content smile on her face. "It's like your mouth is its own entity."

"I hope I can control it better in the future around you." Leman's smile started to shrink as he looked off to the side. "If there is a future with you, I meanâ€¦"

"Leman," Nyx sighed, leaning over to caress his rugged face, which forced him to look at her. "A major problem in our relationship was that we were not honest with each other, and we didn't let ourselves experience the low times that a relationship needs to grow into something stronger." Letting go of his face, Nyx folded into herself. "I don't know if we can get back to what we had, but I think it would be a good start for us to be completely honest with each other."

Leman nodded his head, tapping his fingers against the table. "That seems reasonable to me," Looking back at her, he stared her straight in the eyes. "What do you want to know first?"

\* \* \*

><p>"That's one <em>hell</em> of a terrible nightmare Loop," Nyx conceded, shuddering at the description of the Chaos God Emperor of Mankind. "I can see why you never brought it up before."

"I never wanted you, or the others, to be worried about what we had to endure, so I never brought it up," Leman told her, feeling lighter than he had in eons. "That, and it rarely happens without warning. Fenrir told me ages ago that for some reason whenever he tries to pull together the information about my lost brothers, the next Loop is always that Variant, so he takes upon himself to warn me about it." With a distant look, Leman followed up with, "I think he has given up on trying to fix them, to be honest."

"Well, I'm sure one day they'll be found and their data will be fixed." Nyx patted his side, trying to comfort him.

"One day, perhaps," Leman agreed before looking at her. "Do you wish

for a blanket, Nyx? It's getting late, and it does get cold up here."

Nyx looked up at the sky, the sun nearly setting on them, before shaking her head in the negative. They had spent nearly the entire day talking to each other, revealing secret after secret to each other. While it had been unpleasant to reveal personal secrets, the two felt better about everything that had happened so far. They felt closer to each other now, and what they had now had more meaning than what they had had before.

"So is that everything, Leman?" Nyx raised the glass of water to her mouth.

"Ye-yes," Leman's eyes darted to the side. "That's everything Nyx."

"Leman..." Nyx dragged out his name, frowning at the man opposite of her. "We just had a long talk about being honest and -"

"I know, I know. Leman held his hand up, halting her. "It's just that this is kinda of embarrassing and awkward now, considering everything that has happened between us."

"Well I've got to hear it now." Nyx grinned, placing the glass down. "Go on, tell me. Or do I need to bring out the big guns?" Nyx started to widen her eyes, at which Leman placed a hand on his chest in mock defeat.

"Okay, you twisted my arm Nyx. Promise not to laugh?" Leman asked as he rose to his feet.

"I promise nothing, Leman." Nyx chuckled, leaning comfortably in her chair. "Stop stalling and tell me."

"Alright, alright," Leman paced back and forth, trying to build up his nerves. "Nyx, I -"

"Yes?"

"Nyxie!" Leman moaned, blushing now.

"I'm sorry, I see that you prepared for whatever this is and my little comments aren't helping your concentration."

Rolling his eyes, Leman took a deep breath before turning to face her.

"Nyx, you know me. You know that I am not one for much words, letting my actions speak for me instead." He paced in front of her, keeping his eyes on her. "I do love you, a great deal, Nyx. I wanted to show you this for a long time and at a time, I felt I had got it right." Pausing in front of her, Leman reached into his subspace pocket for something. "I then realized that I was not thinking enough for you and restarted it. The second time around took me far longer; learning how to cast the spells and attach them to it, and then place them within the project, took me eons, but it was worth every second spent."

What Leman did next caused Nyx's brain to come to a screeching

halt.

He dropped down to one knee, holding in his hands the object he had taken out of his Pocket: a small, common-looking box.

Her heart leaped into her throat as Leman opened the box to reveal a horn ring inside with a gem on top.

"Nyx Sparkle, will you marry me?"

As she used her magic to examine it, processing every aspect of the ring in front of her in an instant, her conscious mind barely comprehended what she saw. The gem was made of polished onyx, common and modest-looking, but there was something inside of it. Delving deeper into the ring, she saw that it held a depiction of her cutie mark made of shining lights that looked like stars.

Becauseâ€¦ because they were stars. Beautiful stars that were lovingly created and shaped by mortal hands, each one different from the other with unique details that made each stand out to her.

Then she was aware that each star had a bit of a magic spell attached to it - a memory spell. Letting her magic brush against them, her heart thundered in her head as she saw countless moments of her and Leman together, doing both the amazing and the simple, having a grand adventure and snoozing in front of a fire together. She saw the first time they met, the dates they went on, the simple talks they had, the pranks they played, all the other special times they had done together when they were dating.

Blinking through her tears, she broke her magic away from the stars and the onyx gem and looked at the silver band, which had both an alicorn pony and a wolf emblazoned on the side, reaching towards each other at the bottom of the ring. Peering inside, she saw that was an inscription.

\_'Nyx, like you, this ring's modest exterior barely hides the unimaginable beauty that lies inside\_. \_Leman'\_

\* \* \*

><p>Leman sighed, pushing himself upright and letting Nyx look at the ring. "I told you it was foolish, and I know how awkward it is to hear me say that after everything that has happened. But I hope to one day, if we can -"<p>

"Yes." A whisper behind him caused Leman to turn around.

"Yes?" he repeated in confusion, looking at Nyx holding the ring in her magic with a dazed look on her face.

Smiling, Nyx lifted the ring up to her horn and placed it on. Tears running down her face, Nyx nodded her head and repeated the soft, "Yes."

Realization slammed into Leman, cutting his legs out from under him. Falling to his knees, he reached out towards the mare, a hand trembling. "\_Y-yes?\_"

Throwing her hooves around his neck, Nyx rubbed her face against his,

laughter and tears of joy escaping from her. With certainty and steel in her voice, Nyx answered his question with a solid, "\_Yes\_."

Leman quickly wrapped his hands around her withers, tears running down his face as he leaned into her. He started to rumble with joyous laughter, letting out a bellowing "\_\*\*YES!\*\*\_" to the sky.

As the two held each other, warming each other with their bodies and tears, their laughter started to ebb and they looked at each other.

Without any words spoken and with eyes locked on each other, the two leaned in for a kiss. It was not the most romantic of kisses, it was not the best of kisses, it was not even a very comfortable kiss.

But for Leman Russ and Nyx Sparkle, a simple kiss was all that was needed.

Because they had each other and that was all that mattered.

They had each other and everything was going to be just fine.

\* \* \*

><p>AN:<p>

160.1: Goof on, goof off.

>160.4: Still progress.<br>160.8: Pinkie, put down that comically large rubber knife.

>160.10: Diamaud tiara.<p>

160.12: Awwwww...

## 168. Chapter 168

161.1

"Aaaaah!"

The ground trembled as hundreds of ponies stampeded away in all directions.

Princess Luna blinked, looking back along her body. "But We are dressed as a bright yellow bug with googly eyes! How can that possibly be scary?"

Twilight coughed. "Parasprites."

"Oh..." Luna said, nodding. "I see. Our thanks for your advice, Twilight Sparkle" "We had forgotten about when that plague struck this fair town."

"My pleasure," Twilight replied, mainly glad she'd handled the Canterlot Voice issue earlier. "Hold on, I'll go talk them down..."

\* \* \*

><p>Some minutes later, the ponies of Ponyville were more-or-less

settled.<p>

"Ahem!" Luna said, having painted black stripes on her costume so she was now a bee. "May We have your attention?"

"Sure!" called one of the Cutie Mark Crusaders.

"Hey, don't speak for us!" Diamond Tiara snapped. She coughed. "Ahem... we would be glad to listen, your majesty."

Luna frowned. "Is that not what the first one said?"

"But..." Tiara looked momentarily lost. "I was more polite about it..."

"Indeed, but all We wanted was an answer," Luna explained. "In any case - it is Our pleasure to inform you that Our royal sister will also be participating in the festivities!"

There were excited mutters through the crowd.

"Our royal sister left Canterlot some time after We did," Luna went on. "And even We do not know what her costume may be."

She stood back a step, and watched.

The day royal chariot skimmed down low over the rooftops, turned, and alighted.

A griffin got out.

Luna's face became slightly fixed. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Lulu, it's me," the griffin explained. "I've got a \_really good\_ costume this year!"

"...really?" Luna asked, taking a step forwards. \_"Really."\_

"Yep," the griffin confirmed.

"Prove it," Luna challenged.

Rolling her eyes, the griffin lashed her tail. Then she shrugged. "Nah, too easy to do it that way..."

"Oh, no..." Twilight said, very quietly, as she realized what was going on.

"Instead - I've brought the Lost Photo Album, an artefact only a Princess can retrieve from its vault."

Luna paled. "Well, that seems-"

"Look!" the griffin-who-was-apparently-Celestia went on, opening it. "It's you fighting a monster made of hay!"

She looked closer at the photo, fending off Luna with a foreleg. "No, wait, it's you buried underneath a pile of hay because you ordered four hundred and fifty servings of hay fries at the restaurant last

month, because you thought you had to say how many pieces of hay you wanted."

"We accept your claim!" Luna said. "Please close the album!"

"Of course!" the griffin said, folding it closed and giving a grin. "You were saying?"

"Right," Luna said, nodding. "As We were about to explain, We are going to do Nightmare Night toge-"

A white shape of wings and horn landed with a clatter in the crowd.

"-sister!" Luna said, interrupting herself. "How-"

"What?" the griffin asked.

"Wait, you mean me?" asked the white-coated alicorn standing at the back of the crowd. "Nah, I'm just dressed up as Celestia. It's really me, Gilda the Griffin."

Luna sat back on her haunches. "We give up."

\* \* \*

><p>"So, which of you came up with this idea?" Twilight asked, some minutes later.<p>

"Actually, it was Zecora," Celestia chuckled, no longer using her 'Gilda voice'. "She arrived five minutes after we did, and no-one even noticed she was an alicorn..."

\* \* \*

><p>161.2 (LordCirce, Evilhumour)<p>

Sleipnir poked his head in the door to his marefriend's office. "Hey, do you want me to escort you down?"

Epona looked up and blinked. "Escort me down to what?"

Sleipnir chuckled. "To your advancement ceremony. Did you forget that it was today?"

Epona stared blankly back at him, before raising an eyebrow. "My... advancement... when did this get announced?"

Sleipnir's chuckles died off. "... Susanoo forgot to tell you, didn't he?"

"To tell me \_what\_?" Epona's voice had turned soft and icy.

"Given your exemplary performance in handling the Hyrule Universe, it has been decided that you shall be promoted to Full Administrator Status." Sleipnir grinned as Epona's mouth fell open. "Now, come on, we need to get you down to Tyr's office to officially accept and sign off the last bit of paperwork."

As the two departed, Susanoo let out a deep breath from where he had

hidden behind the door. He had been trying to sneak in to let Epona know, and to try and figure out a way to tell her that wouldn't result in her exploding over him forgetting to mention it for the past few days...months... whatever...

\* \* \*

><p>"This is a very nice town, Twilight." Moondancer smiled, looking around the small village. "Although with how you described it, I thought Ponyville would be a little more crazy."<p>

"Ponyville is a bit much at times, but it is still a normal-

"\_Heya Twibright!" \_a drunk voice called out, drawing both mares' attention towards the center of the town, where an eight-legged stallion staggered around. "\_Guess what? Girlfriend my Epona got higmoted to bull Adminsnip!" \_The stallion hiccuped and paused, tapping his chin. "\_I mean promoted to ship Adminship!" \_He giggled, walking over to Twilight and Moondancer to give them a hug, reeking of alcohol, before collapsing in front of them.

Before they could react, they heard a sigh from behind them. Turning around, they saw a massive wolf walk past them and grab the stallion's tail. "Sorry, Twilight, my brother had a bit too much last night celebrating Epona's promotion to full Adminship. He wasn't suppose to work today, and let his assistants take the brunt." Fenrir gave them a sheepish smile before glaring at the drunk Sleipnir. "You better not pass wind or I \_swear \_that I'll toss you into the la-"

Everyone winced as a foul air was suddenly exhumed from the passed-out stallion, which made the wolf rear back in disgust. Fenrir gave the mares a smug look before grabbing the horse by the barrel. "I \_did\_ warn him, ladies." With a jerk of his head, the eight legged horse went through the sky and crashed into the lake with a mighty shout. "I was never here!" Fenrir shouted, running away from the now furious and sober eight-legged horse, both taking to the air with speeds so fast they caused a sonic boom.

Moondancer slowly turned her head towards Twilight and raised an eyebrow.

Twilight raised her hoof up. "Ponyville is a \_mostly\_ normal town."

\* \* \*

><p>161.3 (fractalman)<p>

Twilight stared through her window at the mob of assorted lifeforms.

"Spike, is it just me, or are we being visited by every mlp reviewer on youtube?"

Spike jumped onto her back. "Hmm...sure looks like it."

Then an explosion flung a singed hippogriff in through the window. Twilight facehooved.

\* \* \*

><p>Elsewhere, Chrysalis chuckled as Trixie gave her a back massage.  
"She bought it. "<p>

Trixie scoffed. "Not to disparage your abilities, but Sparkle will figure it out within the hour."

Chrysalis chuckled. "Wanna bet? If she figures it out within the hour, you get to do whatever you want to me. But..."

Trixie nodded. "\_IF\_ Sparkle cannot figure out that she's been duped by a bunch of changelings, then you get to turn me into soup like you've been wanting to do. Just be sure to resurrect me afterwards." She scoffed again. "Not that Sparkle will take that long."

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

My next Loop found me in the world of Assassin's Creed. In that Loop, two secret groups called the Assassins(who represent free will and the right to choose) and the Templars(who believe in order and control) had fought in secret for millennia.

I had landed in the end of the 15th century, just as the Anchor of that era(like the Star Wars Loops, different eras have different Anchors), Ezio Auditore, had arrived in Rome. He soon took me in as an apprentice in the Assassins, training me in their ways. The first thing he told me was not to use my Loop-acquired abilities under his training, as he wished me to learn without relying on my other powers.

Makes sense. As I had figured a very long time ago, I can't be sure when I won't be able to use my abilities. He trained me in stealth, blending into the crowds, and other tactics. He reminded me of Big Boss a good bit; Ezio and he are friends, apparently. Since that timeframe didn't have the kind of weapons Big Boss' era had, I had to rely more on hiding in plain sight, parkour in case I had to run for it, and close-range combat when all else failed.

I found myself meeting a lot of interesting people, and finding myself a prime player in the fight against the Templars. Some of my comrades even figured I was Ezio's favorite apprentice. After his trip to learn more about his ancestor, Altair, happened, they were right, as he named me his successor.

It was interesting to play a role in history, however miniscule it might be, and I learned new things to add to my list of skills. But in the end, my honor got the better of me, and in a battle against a Templar commander, I was caught by surprise, and I...died.

It was scary to feel my life fade away, though I knew I'd just Awaken somewhere else, but that doesn't mean I don't fear death. Far from it.

Hopefully, I'd learn from that death...



\* \* \*

><p>161.4 (Crisis)<p>

Sunset Shimmer groaned as she tried to shake the static out of her hair. Waking Up after the whole Fall Formal demoness incident was never all that fun, especially as it repeatedly reminded her of what kind of person/pony she used to be. Still, the incident served to introduce magic to the alter-Equestria which gave her an opportunity to try and figure out how it worked. She could only lament the fact that she'd forgotten how much she loved doing field research until recently. So many lost opportunities... Still, she'd managed to learn quite a bit about the multiverse. One of the things she'd quickly proven was that magic in one reality did not necessarily work the same as magic in another. Much like the laws of physics, actually. It made for lots of interesting research opportunities.

If only the magic of her friends, the alternates of the Elements of Harmony and the members of The Rainbooms band in this reality, didn't keep finding amusing ways to zap her when she tried to take readings. She could make assumptions on what her friends might be capable of when 'ponying up', but how and why it happened in the first place not only continued to elude her, she was certain that the magic was actively sabotaging her efforts to understand it.

"I give up..." she moaned from where she'd allowed herself to collapse on the floor while the Rainbooms began band practice away from the instrumentation she'd set up. "I'm no closer to knowing how magic works here than I've ever been..."

"That easily?" a male voice that Sunset wasn't used to intervened in her thoughts, reminding her that she had a pair of visitors this Loop. Something she normally didn't. Visiting loopers usually ended up in Equestria with Twilight and the others.

"Do you have any idea how many times I've run tests like this, only to end up zapped, splatted, defenestrated, and otherwise humiliated?"

"Watching you cough up a puff of rainbow smoke \_was \_kind of funny," a female voice admitted and Sunset snorted in amusement despite herself.

"Yeah, well, thanks for helping me out, Rock, Roll," Sunset sighed and sat up, trying to brush herself off as she looked at the twin loopers. "Have I mentioned how glad I am to see you again?"

"A few times," Rock grinned.

"At least you didn't ask us to autograph your copy of \_Daring Do and the Curse of the Magi\_ again," Roll grinned. (\*) "Or any of the other books written about that Loop."

"Sorry about that by the way," Sunset blushed. "It just sounded so impressive when I read about it the first time. Ahuizotl, Tirek Sunstar, Discord, Waltz, the Dark Mane, King Sombra," Sunset trailed off and her expression turned somber, "Dr. Willy subverting the Elements of Harmony..."

"Um..." Roll hesitated on seeing Sunset's guilty expression. "That

wasn't in any way your fault, you know."

"Yeah," Rock agreed. "You weren't even part of that Loop. What Wily did with the Elements and their bearers had nothing to do with you."

"Maybe..." Sunset hugged herself. "Maybe not. After all, I was the one villain in the baseline who successfully subverted an Element of Harmony, however temporary. I can't help but feel that the possibility itself is tied to that event."

Rock and Roll remained silent and exchanged glances with each other.

"You know what your problem is, Sunset?" Roll asked, getting a look from the other girl. "You give up too easily."

"What?"

"Yeah, especially on yourself," Rock nodded as he dialed a number on his phone. "Hold on. Hi dad, yeah I'm at school with friends. Look, we've got a budding researcher here who's so frustrated with a lack of results that she's ready to give up the whole thing. Uh-huh. Yeah, Sunset Shimmer. You remember her, right? Studying magical manifestations. They happen while playing music. Gotcha. See you soon," Rock ended the call. "He'll be right over."

"Uh..." Sunset blinked. "How soon?"

A door suddenly slammed open, startling Sunset as well as the Rainbooms from their practice. Silhouetted in the doorway was a stout bearded man in a labcoat, holding several rolled-up charts and wearing stylish shades. Dr. Light had arrived.

"Um... doesn't that door lead to the band closet?" Pinkie expressed the band's collective confusion.

"I come in the name of SCIENCE!" Dr. Light declared, pointing dramatically.

"How?" Sunset wondered incredulously.

"Remember how we told you that dad studied Pinkie Pie's abilities that Loop while Unawake?" Rock whispered. "Well, after we last met, he Dreamed up the research one Loop and set about replicating them."

"Again, how?"

"Why, with SCIENCE! dear girl!" Dr. Light declared from behind Sunset, making her jump several feet into the air.

"That makes no sense!" Sunset accused upon landing.

"It makes perfect sense!" Dr. Light returned, striking a pose. "After all, what is SCIENCE! if not study? What is it if not the power to stare into the unknown and declare that it shall be made known? To seek out the shrouded mysteries of existence, present yourself before them and say 'teach me!?' To unravel the secrets of the cosmos with neverending wonder, marveling at each new tidbit of knowledge they

give up, and persisting no matter if the research takes a day or a lifetime? Or, indeed several lifetimes? The drive to ask questions of the unknowable and transform it into the known! That is SCIENCE!"

The room was silent for several beats as six of the eight students gaped in astonishment at the man.

"Dude!" Rainbow found her voice first. "Did you actually just make studying sound awesome?"

"Sheeeeeoooooooooot..."

"Is it wrong that I suddenly have the biggest schoolgirl crush on your dad?" Sunset whispered to Roll while blushing crimson.

"I wish I could say this was the first time that happened," Roll sighed.

"Now, head researcher Sunset," Dr. Light continued, causing the girl to jump at the address, "I believe you were studying the manifestation of magic through music?"

"Head researcher? Me?" Sunset blinked in astonishment. "Er... I mean, yes, but all the readings I took just blew up in my face. The instrumentation can't get any clear reading."

"Well, then, we start with observation of the phenomenon then," Dr. Light proceeded, unperturbed. "Perhaps ask questions of the subjects afterwards about how the manifestation feels."

"Well..." Fluttershy responded quietly, "it does feel kind of warm and nice, like being hugged by lots of cute fluffy bunnies."

"Mine rather feels like a walk down the runway while wearing the most fabulous dress," Rarity added.

"The satisfaction of a hard day's work," Applejack nodded.

"My sheer awesomeness!" Rainbow Dash strutted.

"THE MOST EPIC PARTY EVER!" Pinkie yelled.

"And," Dr. Light stopped Sunset from writing those down by placing a gentle, but firm, hand on Sunset's notepad, "do not forget to include all known subjects."

"Huh?"

"Dear Sunset," Dr. Light chuckled, "I was there at the battle of the bands. I saw you undergo the very same phenomenon you are trying to study. How the magic works with you is as relevant to this research as how it works with them."

"Yeah!" Rainbow shouted, holding up Sunset's guitar. "Get up here and pony up with the rest of us!"

Sunset looked between the Rainbooms and the visiting loopers for a few moments, before giving in to the emotions of the moment and joining her friends.

"Alright! One... two... one two three four!"

\* \* \*

><p>161.5 (ORBSyndicate)<p>

Sunset just couldn't figure out where it all went wrong.

All she wanted to do was try some fishing. Sunset happened to like meat, after all. And fish was particularly good when grilled with a light batter and some fresh herb seasoning and-

She really had been affected by the Cooking Mama loop... It was probably best to get that out of her system pronto.

So she had gone fishing. She had taught herself how to put a hook on a line (after much jamming of hooks into fingers) put bait on a hook (worms, while dirty, were excellent for luring in the scaly critters) and casting (snags. Snags had been difficult to overcome).

Just as she had gotten relatively good at fishing, Applejack had shown up, saying that she had never bothered to learn how to fish, and that she'd like to now. Sunset taught her, of course.

Rainbow came next. She was difficult, simply because of how impatient she was. But Sunset prevailed, getting her to sit on a rock for an hour and reel in big fish. Rainbow enjoyed the fight. And the eating, but mostly the fight.

Pinkie didn't even need to be taught. Rarity did, but never really learned. Fluttershy had originally had qualms, but she let them do what they wanted.

It became a bit of a tradition for them to go fishing every day after school. They got lots of fish. It was enjoyable.

Then more people started coming.

Snips and Snails, who were so loud they kept scaring the fish.

Flash, who just... couldn't do it correctly. Not for lack of trying.

Trixie, who just kept yelling "THE STUPID AND INSOLENT FISH ARE NO MATCH FOR THE GREAT AND POWERFUL TRIXIE!" Which, of course, scared the fish away. Sunset was amazed at how many people seemed to think fish didn't have EARS.

And more and more people came. Sunset had become the teacher of fishing. It was what she was now. She was the fisherwoman.

The river was extremely crowded now, and people didn't actually catch fish as often. Sunset twitched. She just wanted to sit, fish, and enjoy herself. But fishing got annoying after several days of catching nothing and-

"What an impressive thing you have done, miss Shimmer."

Sunset looked up. "Principal Celestia?"

"It's amazing that you have gotten so many vastly different people here, together, having a good time. Look at all of them."

Sunset did so. People were talking, chattering. Bullies were next to nerds, not actually at odds. The human Cutie Mark Crusaders were trying out their new better fishing invention (which didn't work). Bulk Biceps was screaming "YEAAAAAH!" when he successfully tied a hook, and everyone clapped. People were talking, laughing, and having a good time. There was the table set up with a portable gas skillet, where Flash was cooking up the fish that were caught, dishing them out to everyone. It was... a nice image.

Sunset sighed. She supposed it was a good thing. She looked up at Principal Celestia. "You want to learn how to fish as well?" She offered.

"Me? No. I fished a lot when I was young. My sister is the one here who needs to learn. LUNA!"

Luna came out from behind a tree. "Do I have to?"

"Yes, you need to learn."

"But worms are... icky."

"Yes they are, but fish are tasty and you need to catch up on missed childhood opportunities."

"But-"

"Luna."

"...Fine. I suppose it might be enjoyable."

Sunset rolled her eyes and began to teach Luna the basics of putting a hook on a line. Maybe this wasn't such a bad thing after all-

"EVERYBODY DUCK!" Applebloom yelled as the CMC ran away from their odd fishing device as fast as they could. The river exploded, a fish flying out of the river into Sunset's face.

The news tomorrow would have a section about the four minutes it rained fish. Sunset still had no idea how the device, which just looked like a triple fishing pole, had managed THAT.

\* \* \*

><p>161.6: (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"We'll never succeed," Buttercup moaned, trying to brush bits of lightning quicksand out of her dress. "We may as well die here."

"No, no," Westley assured her. "We have already succeeded. I mean, what are the three terrors of the Fire Swamp?" He held up one gloved finger. "One, the flame spurt - no problem. There's a popping sound preceding each; we can avoid that." He added a second finger. "Two,

the lightning sand, which you were clever enough to discover what that looks like, so in the future we can avoid that too."

"Westley," Buttercup sighed, "what about the HODS?"

Westley shrugged. "Horses of Diminutive Size? I don't think they exist."

The instant the terminal \_t\_ of the last word passed his lips, a cannon shot rang out from a nearby bush. Westley and Buttercup flinched, then slowly uncurled as they realized, instead of grievous bodily wounds, they each bore a plate with a slice of cake in one hand and a small cup of fruit punch in the other. Paper party hats perched atop their heads.

Two popping sounds rang out, and a moment later twin fountains of flame erupted from the swamp, illuminating a banner: HAPPY ESCAPING-HUMPERDINCK-AND-SURVIVING-THE-FIRE-SWAMP PARTY!

Under the banner stood six ponies of improbable colors and, yes, rather diminutive size. Two had wings. One had a horn. One had both. And one in particular had a case of chronic bouncing.

The purple one with both wings and a horn pointed to the bouncy pink one and said, with a touch of embarrassment, "It was her idea."

\* \* \*

><p>161.7 (Anon e Mouse Jr., Masterweaver, Vinylshadow, fractalman)<p>

"Oh yes," Twilight confirmed, "Cadance makes excellent pizza. It's just amazing."

"What does she make it with?" Applejack asked.

"She makes it with love," Twilight said flatly.

Rainbow Dash cringed.

"That was awful," Pinkie said.

Fluttershy and Rarity rolled on the ground with laughter.

"But seriously, what \_does\_ she make it with?" asked Spike.

"Mostly water, bread flour and yeast," Cadance spoke up from behind him. "Plus a few more ingredients. But the real secret is in how you work the dough once it's ready."

Pinkie nodded. "Yep yep yep!"

Twilight eyed her suspiciously, then turned to Cadance. "I have to ask, when did you get so good at making pizza? I don't remember you liking it in baseline."

Cadance smiled. "I had a Hub loop a while back, and one of the people I met spent a lot of time watching the Food Network. Thanks to him, I got hooked on a really good cooking show called \_Good Eats\_, so before the Loop ended, I made sure to get all the host's books and

DVDs, and even transcripts of the episodes, so that I could try out some of the non-meat cooking applications when I came back here. His pizza dough is really good. And wait until you try the peanut butter fudge!"

"You have books?" Twilight's eyes widened. "Where?"

"You have fudge?" Pinkie said at the same time. "Where? Where?"

Applejack rolled her eyes. "She said the magic words."

Her eyes narrowed, Twilight huffed at her friend as the others laughed.

Elsewhere in Equestria, Chrysalis munched on her slice. "Mmmm... made with love..."

Trixie watched her marefriend and snickered to herself. \_Trixie will definitely have to thank Cadance for giving her a sample of her work.\_

\* \* \*

><p>161.8 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Twilight Sparkle really, really wished Trixie was Awake for this Loop.

"An' then we hit th' actuator," Apple Bloom said. "An' that's when that happened."

Twilight's gaze followed Apple Bloom's pointing hoof up into the air, where the remains of one of Sweet Apple Acres' older barns floated about twenty feet in the air, the debris collapsed upon itself in an ever-tightening ball. She could hear the occasional crackle and snap of old timbers being compressed.

"We thought," Scootaloo added, repeating part of the inexplicable explanation from before, "that since so many other things we build trying to get our cutie marks blow up, that we should try making something designed to blow up."

"And instead," Twilight replied, "you got that."

"Instead of explosion, we got implosion," Sweetie Belle agreed. "We were hoping you could tell us what went wrong."

Part of Twilight's mind was amused, possibly even enthusiastic, that the Cutie Mark Crusaders had somehow stumbled across an entirely novel and unknown magic spell to generate artificial gravity- unknown even to herself. That was the minority opinion inside her skull; the majority still voted for finding the nearest unaffected wall, or possibly one of the conveniently nearby apple trees, and banging her head against it until the world and all its insanity went away.

How? \_How? \_\_\*\*HOW?\*\*\*\_

\_They aren't even AWAKE this Loop!\_

Not far off, a ripe, heavy apple snapped off its stem and fell up.

\* \* \*

><p>161.9 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

\_"There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to mortals. It is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of a pony's fears and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call the Twilight Zone. "\_

Twilight looked up from the script she was reading. "And no, it is not a clever euphemism for my house!"

Off-screen, somepony groaned. "CUT!"

Twilight grinned. "Sorry, Director. I couldn't resist."

Famed Mercy, the series director, was too busy face-hoofing to respond, but his assistant could, and did. "Twilight, when you agreed to be the hostess for this show, you promised you'd take the job seriously."

"I know, Coco, I know." Twilight's face brightened. "But look at it this way: when the DVDs come out, now you have the first blooper for the extras."

"There is always that," Coco Pommel acknowledged. "All right, let's take it from the top!"

As Twilight cleared her throat and began reciting her lines again, she was grinning inwardly. Loops where I decide to be an actress and work in Applewood are fun. I should do this more often!\_

\* \* \*

><p>161.10 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

"Hey, Twilight."

"Sunset!" Twilight looked up from the comic she'd borrowed from Spike. "Oh thank goodness. This latest Loop expansion... I haven't had anything new to do in a while, and it's driving me out of my tree! Metaphorically speaking," she added. "So, what brings you here?"

"Not much." Sunset shrugged. "Our side's expanding slightly, but not a whole lot yet. And since it's the weekend and nobody had any plans, I figured I'd drop in and say hi. And, give you a warning."

"A warning?" Twilight's eyes widened. "What kind of warning?"

"After all the Fused Loops I had at the start, I have a couple of different kinds of precognition." Sunset tapped the side of her head. "And right now, they're all telling me something big, like Sombra or Tirek-big, is coming up. I don't know exactly what it is, or when it's going to happen, but... keep your eyes peeled, okay?"



Twilight nodded. "I will." She cocked her head. "So, what kind of expansions are you having?"

"Well, there's this big competition coming up between Canterlot High and the Crystal Prep Academy..."

\* \* \*

><p>161.11 (masterofgames)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay everypony, what's the first song you weaponized as a heartsong?"<p>

Vinyl shrugged. "Call me a sucker for the meme, but I used, 'Everybody do the Flop!' for my first." she admitted, chugging the last of her drink and then smashing the wooden mug with her forehead. "... Okay, ow! Ow... ow... ow... That seemed like a better idea before I did it. Ow..." she groaned, flopping to the floor and holding her head, rolling side to side slowly.

Twilight rolled her eyes, leaning back just a bit in her chair to look under the table. "I'd heal you, but then you wouldn't learn anything." she called down to her.

Fluttershy raised a hoof. "You already know mine. 'I like trains', remember?"

"Trixie performed a rousing performance of 'Trigger Happy' during the Canterlot wedding invasion." Trixie smirked.

Spike grinned. "Same time, same place, 'Ultimate Showdown'. I played the part of Godzilla myself."

Trixie shot him a scowl, and reluctantly resigned herself to paying for her next drink.

Gilda shot Trixie a look. "Huh. Go figure. I thought you would have used 'Drop the Bomb'. Ah well. I used 'Mortal Kombat'. It only seemed right after my training with Ammy to do something that sounded Eastern, even if it wasn't."

Shining slumped his shoulders. "I used 'Kung Fu Fighting'... I'm not winning this one, am I?"

Rarity shook her head. "A bit too cliché I'm afraid, though it beats mine. I simply used the washing up song from Snow White's baseline against the Diamond Dogs."

"I know I'm not eligible for the prize," Berry called from the bar. "but I did a five part marathon, weaving together 'Beer', 'drink and fight', '307 Ale', 'seven drunken pirates', and 'f\*\*\* you, I'm drunk'."

Nobody said anything for several moments as they all turned to look at Berry, who in turn ignored them and kept putting the clean glasses away.

\* \* \*

><p>161.12 (Evilhumour)<p>

Inside a clubhouse, three little fillies Awoke and looked at each other with a tired sigh.

The living glop of water and dirt filly with a bright red bow looked at her normal equine shaped friend with one oddity.

The exception to the norm was that instead of possessing a normal equine head, she instead had a pin sticking out of her neck.

Their third friend had mostly normal features of a pony; one head, a mane, four legs and a tail. What was different about her was that her entire body bared a striking resemblance to that of a feather duster, one bright orange one to be exact.

With a glop as Applebloom opened her mouth, the mud pony said, "Ah \_really\_ hate this variant."

Sweetie Belle simply chimed her annoyance with her pinhead, trying to learn how to speak again without possessing lips.

The feather duster normally known as Scootaloo nodded her head, trying to take off from the ground, her entire body buzzing as it struggled to lift her in the air. With a plop as she fell to the ground, the fillies began to cough as dust was sent everywhere.

\* \* \*

><p>161.13 (Vinylshadow and Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

"Twilight?"

"Yes, Rarity?"

"...did we inadvertently anger Pinkie Pie in a previous Loop?"

"I'm sure there's a perfectly reasonable explanation as to why we are pastries in Sugercube Corner... one that's not related to Pinkie Pie."

"Hi girls!"

Twilight looked at the pink cupcake to her left (as much as she could without being able to move). "Pinkie?"

"Yuppers!" The cupcake smiled. Somehow. "This is fun! I've been a cupcake before, but this is the first time any of my friends have been desserts with me!"

Twilight metaphorically shook her head. "â€¦ I don't even want to know."

A yellow-frosted cupcake could be heard making a squeaking noise nearby.

A moment later, several ponies turned pastries were internally screaming with terror as they were scooped up and put into a box, realizing what this meant. (Pinkie, on the other hand, could be heard

going "Wheee! I'm going for a ride!")

About half an hour later, the box was set down on a kitchen table, and opened. "Girls?" Lyra stared at them. "I got all of you, didn't I?"

"Ah hope so," an apple fritter replied. "Um... you aren't going to eat us, are you?"

Lyra stared in disgust. "Of course not! Why would I eat my own kind? Let alone my friends?"

Twilight blinked (so to speak). "Your own... Sweetroll?"

The pastry turned unicorn nodded. "I'm in charge of our body this Loop - that's how I can understand you, by the way. And I Pinkie Promise, I have no intention of eating any of you. Or of letting anyone else do so."

There were several sighs of relief. (And one whisper of "Foreverâ€¦" from the pink cupcake.)

"I will have to stick you in the freezer though. Just so you don't spoil."

An ice cream cake nearby sighed in relief. "Please do, before I melt!"

Sweetroll nodded. "Right away." As she opened the freezer, the pastry ponies heard a hiss.

"The lllllight, it burnsssss ussss!"

Sweetroll rolled her eyes. "Hello, Luna, I've bought your friends over."

"Friendsss?" the Moon pie chirped.

"She's been in there for a few weeks... better than the moon, but still, she's not had company..." Sweetroll explained, putting the colorful edibles around the black and white pie, and making sure to set the ice cream cake right next to it. "Play nice and I'll keep an eye out for anyone else."

A while later, one black raspberry eclair, one vanilla cream eclair, one pink-frosted cupcake, one yellow-frosted cupcake, one apple fritter, one tray of Rainbow Cookies and the ice cream cake that was Celestia had settled into their new home for this Loop.

Rainbow Dash shifted uncomfortably (as much as a tray of cookies could). "Soâ€¦ now what?"

"I don't really know, Rainbow Dash. I don't really know." Twilight sighed. "Soâ€¦ anyone know any good bar discussions that just the eight of us could do?"

\_The next Loopâ€¦\_

Mac looked up as seven unhappy mares walked into his bar. "Bad loop?"

"Mind-numbingly boring," Twilight corrected him. "We were all pastries or other desserts, and spent almost two years locked up in Lyra's freezer. Fortunately, it was just us, and nobody else had it happen to them."

Mac winced.

"We couldn't move," Twilight continued. "We could talk, butâ€¦ well, two years in the dark, not moving, and running out of conversation topics after a whileâ€¦ it got to us. Well, except Pinkie, but you know what she's like. That's why she's doing her usual routine now instead of being here with us." She shook her head. "Needless to say, we're all more than a little stir-crazy, so hit us with your best shots!"

As Mac nodded and walked away to get their drinks, Rarity sat down on the stool next to Twilight's. "Really, darling? "Hit us with your best shots"?"

Twilight blushed. "I kind of came up with that one in a Hub loop a very, very long time ago, and I've been waiting for a chance to use it."

"Understandable."

\* \* \*

><p>161.14<p>

Twilight Sparkle Awoke, and found she had just finished reading a book on how Princess Luna (not Nightmare Moon, already a good sign) had banished the mad Princess Celestia to the sun.

She took the fact that she was still reading in broad daylight as a good sign, as well as her memories showing no sign of anything potentially worrying about Luna, who was still her mentor, or her behaviour.

So, baseline with some names moved about a little, it seemed. Nothing dangerous or worth getting concerned about at the moment.

And then a scroll appeared in front of her. Mildly intrigued, she unfurled it, and read.

"\_Twilight. I'm Awake, and for reasons that cannot be explained within the length of a single letter, so is Nyx. We're fine. Yes, Celestia is imprisoned in the sun. And I am worried a thousand years with nothing to do but think may have given her some great ideas for pranks.\_

\_Also, she could be slightly insane.\_

\_Also also, Nyx requests that I tell you she sends her love.\_

\_Luna.\_"

Twilight carefully double-checked the scroll, then carefully folded it up and turned in the direction of her library.

It was, she noted, a very good thing she hadn't made any plans for that Loop.

A few minutes later, after some checking with Spike, and arranging a few details for that Loop, along a quick triple-check to make sure everything was taken care of, Twilight teleported to Ponyville.

As the light dimmed down from her eyes, she saw the tell-tale signs of Rainbow Dash approaching.

"Hey, Twilight." The Pegasus declared, "What's up this Loop?"

Twilight quickly filled her and Spike in.

"So, Celestia's the one that got banished." Rainbow observed. "But otherwise same as normal, right?"

"So it would seem."

"Cool, cool." Rainbow nodded. "The rest of the girls are Awake by the way. I'm not sure if everyone else is, though."

"Alright then." Twilight said. "All we have to do is keep watch until Celestia "escapes"."

"Is she Awake?" Rainbow Dash asked.

"No idea. If she is, she's not giving any hints."

"Oh, great."

\* \* \*

><p>The hours passed. Day turned to night turned to day again. The longest day of a thousand years came and passed with no dramatic alicorn appearances whatsoever. Or even the slightest hint anything was at all amiss.<p>

Which naturally had everypony suspicious.

"Okay!" Twilight said, to the gathered element bearers. "Celestia is free, and if she is Awake she's not telling us. So, where would a (potentially) mad alicorn who's escaped from a thousand years imprisonment go?"

Several microseconds blinked past as the six ponies each realised there was only one solution.

A quick teleport later, and the six arrived on the front doorstep of the former palace of the pony sisters.

Carefully, and with Pinkie acting as the scouter for any traces of "fun", they tentatively made their way inside.

Fortunately, there were no pranks lying in wait. Instead, there was something much stranger.

Lo, and behold, there indeed was Princess Celestia waiting for

them.

Aside from her mane and tail being alight, and the way her eyes were aglow with a fearful malignancy, she looked pretty sane.

Mainly because crazy ponies weren't usually perusing what looked like paperwork.

On seeing the six approaching, she smiled and waved at them.

"Good afternoon, everypony." She said. Twilight stopped and looked outside, at the dark purple night.

"It's nine in the evening." She declared. Celestia blinked, looked out of the nearest window, and then looked embarrassed. She then muttered something under her breath.

"Sorry." She said. "I got distracted with work."

"Celestiaâ€|" Twilight began, "You are Awake, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, I am." Twilight allowed herself to relax slightly.

"It's justâ€|" Celestia paused, "I had some ideas I'd like to try out. Can we hold off the Element blasting for a few weeks?"

Twilight considered this for a moment. "Okay. Alright."

"Thank you." Celestia smiled, before it suddenly vanished and her visage turned serious.

"Now then, you fools, you may have your Elements"

"Overacting much?" Rainbow Dash asked. Celestia stopped what she was doing and considered this, before shrugging.

"Eh. I am supposed to be insane." She stopped, and looked about. "Where was I?"

"Fools." Fluttershy said.

"Thank you." Celestia smiled. "You may have your Elements, but I have my trusty minion! Sunset!"

At this, Sunset Shimmer strolled into the room, as if this was perfectly normal.

"Uhâ€|" Applejack began. Words apparently failed her, and she went for a good old fashioned "What?"

"Oh," Sunset said, "I woke up early. And I wasn't Luna or Nyx's student. And the portal was hidden somewhere. So I had to find something else to do, and then yesterday Celestia shows up and asks me if I want a job as an Evil Minion."

Celestia looked sheepish. "I was trying to assemble a group of counterparts, make a real show of it, but the interviews didn't go very well for some reason."

"I think," Sunset said dryly, "that had something to do with offering

them tea."

"I was just being polite."

"And you scared them away. Evil maniacs don't offer prospective minions tea and biscuits!" Sunset retorted. "Now I have to do all the work."

"What work? We haven't actually done anything yet."

The yellow and red unicorn stopped for a moment and considered this.  
"Trueâ€|"

At this, the two looked at the assembled group looking at them.

"Then we had better get started." Celestia declared, her horn suddenly coming alight. "See you in a few weeks, everypony!"

And with a flash of light, the two were gone, leaving the six ponies standing there. After a few seconds, everypony became aware of a strange noise coming from Twilight Sparkle. Rarity, being the closest, gingerly placed a hoof on her shoulder.

"Twilight, are you alright?" She asked.

"Justâ€|" Twilight announced through gritted teeth, "Peachy."

There was the tell-tale sound of two ponies teleporting into the room, followed quickly by planned speeches dying on the tongue (it was something you learnt after a good half a dozen thwartings).

"I'm going to guess things didn't go to plan." Twilight heard Nyx say.

"You sure you're alright?" Rainbow Dash asked Twilight. "You're going a funny colour."

After a few seconds of calculating the exact response, and what exactly Celestia's most likely plan was, Twilight could find only one answer.

"I need a drink."

\* \* \*

><p>It took three weeks before the first sign of Celestia's schemes appeared.<p>

Quite literally, a sign.

"I..." Twilight began, as she took in the sight. "I don't..."

"Yeah..." Nyx commented, "I'm kind of confused how this is supposed to work as well. Given, y'know..."

The "sign" in question was a large billboard, prominently displaying Celestia (mad glowing eyes and ethereal fire-y mane and all), along with seven words.

**\*\*Vote Celestia!\*\*** It proclaimed. **\*\*A Name You Can Trust!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>161.15 (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

"THE END IS NEIGH, THE END IS NEIGH!"

Countless ponies fled in all directions, running back and forth, out of and back into villages. Houses were ransacked as some tried to pack up and leave in a hurry, only to realize they were packing up the wrong house. Somehow, this ended with Golden Oak's Library being uprooted in the resulting madness and carried away to the furthest edge of Equestria...though that might have been Doctor Whooves at work upon later reflection. Right then though, Twilight stared down the centerpiece of the chaos, a trio of fillies that were giggling to themselves.

"What do you have to say for yourselves, girls," asked Twilight.

Scotaloo held up her hoof, "Ascending in the middle of Ponyville is fun!"

Twilight's glare grew heavier as the girls started rubbing their manes out of nerves. Sweetie Belle tried next, "Uh...randomly ascending in the middle of Ponyville might not have been the best idea."

Twilight rolled her hoof over, causing Applebloom to give a sheepish grin. "And...making a bet with the town that we'd become alicorn princesses before we'd ever get our cutie marks might surprise them just a bit."

Spike sighed and shook his head. "I think what really set them off was when Rainbow Dash joked about the Crusaders becoming alicorns would herald the end of the world as we knew it."

Twilight turned her glare on Spike. "It didn't help that they decided to ascend immediately after she said that."

\* \* \*

><p>161.16 (Evilhumour, with Purrs's help)<p>

Rubbing her face with a hoof, Twilight groaned as her tree spontaneously combusted yet again.

"\_Why \_did you blow up this time?" Twilight demanded rhetorically.

She hadn't expected an answer at all, and she certainly hadn't expected this one: "I want to get Senpai Yggdrasil to notice me, Twilight!" The loud, shrill voice pierced the air; Twilight recoiled as her tree shook violently. The flames, which had died down as quickly as they had sprung up, returned with an even greater intensity. "\_NOTICE ME, SENPAI!\_" the Golden Oaks wailed.

Twilight stared at the lovelorn library, muttered, "Screw this," and



stormed off to the bar to get drunk and forget this had ever happened.

Once she had left, two mares cackled their way out from behind the tree.

"You do know that, once Twilight figures out what we did, we'll be sent straight to the moon, right, lovebug?" Trixie smirked at her marefriend, moving in for a nuzzle.

The changeling queen smirked right back. "Where there's nopony else but us for hundreds of thousands of miles? That's hardly a punishment at all."

"Very true." The showmare failed to stifle a squeak of laughter. "\_The look on her face!\_"

"Besides, it is her fault for banishing you to Tartarus." Chrysalis's façade of sternness crumbled into giggles. "No one messes with \_my\_ little pony!"

\* \* \*

<p>161.17 (Evilhumour)<p>

"I'm going to be a mom?" Cadence repeated in the same stunned tone as before.

"Yes, as that's what the details are indicating," Sleipnir said to the two ponies sitting across of him. "While I do not know all the details for sure, the royal family is going to have a new member very shortly."

"That's," Shining licked his lips as his emotions were threatening to break out, pausing to gather his thoughts. "I don't know how to say it, but..."

"I'm going to be a mom?" Cadence was still in shock at the news, repeating the same words again.

"All we ever wanted since we've started to loop sir," Shining placed his hoof on his wife's arm, "We thought we'd have to wait until the loops \_end\_, but this is simply all of our dreams come true."

"I'm going to be a mom?"

"I know," Sleipnir said with a soft smile to the couple. "Although, your child more than likely will never loop, unless I get a \_lot\_ more details out of your Branch to support your child."

"Sir," Shining Armor shook his head, liquid pride flowing freely from his face. "The fact we finally \_get\_ to be parents, of our own \_child\_, \_is\_ our dreams come true. If we have to wait a few more eons to have our child to grow up, then so be it," Shining then smiled at his Admin. "Besides, I'm sure Caddy will love to be with her foal no matter what."

"Shining," Cadence's change of words caught Shining and Sleipnir's attention. Looking straight at her husband, she was crying tears of joy. "I'm going to be a mommy!"

Hugging his wife tightly, Shining nodded his head as the both of them cried, their greatest wish answered so unexpectedly. Sleipnir took his leave from the expecting couple, feeling better about his duty then he had for a very long time.

\* \* \*

><p>161.18 (Scorntex)<p>

\_Funny\_, Cadance thought. She'd been through this moment, this day so many times. Details varied, of course, as they so often did. Sometimes someone would be Awake, or there would be a newcomer in play, or someone wanted to test something out, or Twilight had gotten distracted with a project.

She'd have thought after all those times, all those tries, she'd have stopped feeling the way she did. Nervous, perhaps. Tense. And somewhere, deep down, buried beneath everything else there was actually regret.

For him.

For Sombra.

She knew why. Because she believed that at least one version of him had to have been a good pony at some point. Because she believed there must have been something, perhaps, worth saving in the darkened pit that was his heart.

But then she remembered that Loop. That one so long ago. The one she'd woken up as his... as \_his.\_ In that twisted parody of Equestria, and the memories that came with it.

And suddenly all desires of forgiveness and redemption vanished.

She was tired. The result of playing things a little too closer to baseline for comfort meant he'd been hammering away at her and Shining's defences for days now, stronger than usual too. And getting the Crystal Ponies to cheer up and remember themselves had been proving difficult all of a sudden.

And then Spike and Rarity couldn't find the Crystal Heart anywhere.

The surprise had caused the shields to weaken, just enough for him to seep through. Crystal Ponies ran in a blind panic, as she slowly walked through the streets towards where he was hovering.

Those wild eyes focused on her. Maybe this Sombra still had a mind. Maybe he was the maddened beast of some Loops. The harsh growl that reverberated through the air as she approached wasn't much help.

"\*\*You.\*\*" Came his voice. The dark clouds of his form roiled.

"King Sombra," she declared. "I offer you one chance to surrender yourself."

He wasn't going to take it. Not that she truly had much hope for

that, but there was always the chance.

The noise that could have been laughter, and the sneer on his face was his response.

"\*\*Or what, little girl?\*\*" There was something that could have been a snort. "\*\*Will you fight?\*\*"

"Yes." She said.

"\*\*You can barely stand.\*\*"

"I will still fight." She said. "I will protect these ponies from you."

He laughed. It wasn't, frankly, the best noise to ever hear.

"\*\*Protect? How? I am a part of them. I am in their very hearts, I am in their souls. When they close their eyes, I am waiting for them. When they sleep, it is in my shadows. This is MY EMPIRE. MINE!\*\*"

She stared at him, ignoring the aching of her legs with practiced ease. "No it isn't. This is not your empire, and these ponies do not belong to you!"

"\*\*And how will you take it from me?\*\*" Came the snarled response. Behind his visage, the dark clouds gathered together.

Cadance just smiled back, and with careful effort removed an item from her pocket. Sombra rumbled.

"\*\*A ring?! That is how you fight? Jewellery?\*\*"

She looked at the ring, hovering harmlessly in the air. Still looking as new as it had been the day she'd been given it. Not remotely one of her better days, frankly. The days when she still had that reputation. Mad Cadance. Strange Cadance. Obsessed with marriage and romance.

She was certain it wasn't the dark magics of Sombra, or her physical tiredness which brought up the unpleasant thoughts in her mind. The voice in the back of her head, asking if she was truly willing to risk it. A double-edged sword, just for the sake of spectacle.

They'd warned her. The ring tended to make those who wielded it obsessed with love. Blinded by it. Well, she knew about that.

Her friends were nearby. Her family. They would fight Sombra. The friends who never noticed, the voice said. The friends who never seemed to care when she'd started turning. It'd just been a joke. Silly Cadance. Funny Cadance.

Yeah, Cadance thought. That cinched it. She reached out to the ring.

I know who I am. I have friends who love me. Family that cares about me. A husband that adores me. Why should I be afraid when I have them?

The ring intuitively altered itself so it could be wielded. Instantly, she felt it, almost like she'd stuck her hoof in the electric socket of the universe. It felt strangely warm, and pleasant. Like a gentle kiss on a summer's day. Like watching the sunset. Like a thousand moonlit moments with Shining.

Like purest and truest love.

"I am Princess Mia Amore Cadenza of Equestria." She smiled, as the warm feeling spread through and from every part of her. "I welcome myself into the Star Sapphires."

There was a roar from Sombra, his horn glowing with an unpleasant light.

"\*\*Words. Words and tricks.\*\*" He growled.

"No." Cadance replied. "Love. Or did you think this mark on my flank was for show?"

A bolt of shadow reached out, and the ring reacted. The bolt smashed off a glowing purple shield construct. One she recognised as Shining's own cutie mark.

Well, she thought, it was hardly going to be anything else.

And then she felt it. The tug from the ring, a dozen, a hundred, even a thousand faint blips. What was it they'd said, those two, the day they'd saved her from that gem's control?

Goodness, it had been a long time.

Another shadow bolt smashed off of what looked like Nyx's mark. And it came back to her.

They'd said the ring didn't just draw its power from the love of whoever wielded it, but from those around them. However faint, however buried, the ring could recognise it.

And deep down inside them, each of the Crystal Ponies still had love inside them.

She couldn't believe she'd actually forgotten them.

A quick set of spells, and some moving out of the way as Sombra moved to move destructive magics, and she was ready.

"Everypony," she declared, her voice spreading through the whole city, "this is Princess Cadance. I know you're afraid. Afraid of Sombra, and what he did to you. What he's still doing to y- hey," she called out, as Sombra soared past her.

"Where was I? Oh, yes. But that fear is nothing. Because even after all Sombra has done, there is still love inside you. Waiting, sleeping." A large chunk of darkened crystal soared at her head, only to be smashed apart by the hooves of a giant glowing Shining Armor construct, which then leapt after the shadowy king.

"Even all he could do could not remove love from your hearts. Not completely, not forever. So now I ask, not as a Princess, or an

alicorn, just as your defender, that you remember the love. Remember what Sombra could not destroy."

Suddenly there was a strange noise, and the feeling from the ring stopped. The giant Shining Armor vanished, and Sombra, realising his chance, cackled.

"Please..." Cadance finished, "do as you have always done."

There was a tiny, almost inconsequential noise from the ring. "\_Ring charge: 0.00% remaining.\_"

Cadance stopped, and looked at it. Low battery power. That would... yes, she noted, because she'd never charged it.

Had there not been a mad tyrant looking to enslave a few ponies, she might have facehoofed. But she didn't have the time.

"\*\*Your last chance failed you, little princess.\*\*" Sombra's voice echoed. "\*\*There is no love left in their hearts! The Crystal Heart you seek was destroyed!\*\*"

"What?" Cadance blinked. Quite suddenly the fallen king stopped chortling, and looked at her like she'd grown a second horn.

"\*\*Well, I'd have been damned stupid keeping it around, wouldn't I? I don't need it.\*\*"

Cadance found herself grinning at that. Seconds later, she started laughing.

"\*\*What?\*\*" Sombra roared. "\*\*What is so funny?\*\*"

"I'll let you- heh - work it out." Cadance said, "sorry. Laughing. Not very appropriate in a fight. But just give it a second."

There was a light nearby. A strange bright blue one, that was moving. Cadance squinted (she was, after all, very tired), and could make out what looked like a head, and limbs somewhere in the glow.

It was a pony. Floating. Floating and glowing. Floating and glowing Crystal Ponies.

That was a new one.

Soon there was another light. And another. And another, and another and another.

"\*\*What.\*\*" Sombra rumbled.

"You broke the Heart." Cadance pointed out. "But you didn't destroy it. And you couldn't, not with a thousand spells."

"\*\*What?!\*\*" Sombra roared.

"Think about it. Crystal Heart? Crystal Ponies?" By now, the Crystal Ponies were all hovering over the city, all glowing brightly. "Never mind," Cadance sighed. "You'll never get it."

"\*\*This...\*\*" Sombra said, "\*\*This cannot be!\*\*"

"It can, actually." Cadance replied, as she looked down at the ring, trying to remember how to recharge it. There'd been an oath, hadn't there? How had it gone aga-

Ah, yes. Now she remembered. And how fitting.

"\_For hearts long lost, and full of fright,\_

\_For those alone in blackest night,\_

\_Accept this ring and join our flight,\_

\_Love conquers all-\_"

The light of the Crystal Ponies exploded outward, as Cadance finished.

"\_WITH VIOLET MIGHT!\_"

There was a wave of light, washing over everything, and a pained roar from Sombra. Over the din of that, and the rushing feeling in her ears, Cadance was certain she could hear the ring gently noting something about power levels.

She wasn't paying the greatest attention, as she suddenly felt so relaxed and calm and happy, and just had to close her eyes for a mome-

\* \* \*

><p>Cadance awoke, in the palace, in her bed, with everypony standing over her. Shining Armor was smiling.<p>

"Hi, honey." She grinned. He grinned right back. Then Cadance's brain pointed out there were others present.

"Sorry," she said, "I probably should've said something about that ear-"

Twilight shook her head. "Don't apologise, Cadance."

"How long-" She began. The answer was the same as it usually was.

"The Crystal Ponies?" She asked.

"Fine." Twilight said. "Better than fine, actually. But that's probably because they managed to recreate the Crystal Heart by themselves. I still don't know how they did that!"

"They won't let her study them." Spike cut in, "Or the heart, either, actually."

"But I did get a few tricorder scans!" Twilight said triumphantly.

"So, everything's alright?" Cadance asked. There were a few cautious glances.

"Yes?" Shining said, cautiously.

"What happened?"

"Oh, nothing." Twilight said hurriedly. "Definitely nothing dangerous or anything like that, it's just..."

"Yes?"

"The Heart." Shining said. Cadance raised an eyebrow.

"What about the Heart?"

\* \* \*

><p>"It's... purple." Cadance noted, as she looked at the very purple indeed Crystal Heart. There wasn't much else to say. It was definitely purple.<p>

"Looks pink to me." Rainbow Dash muttered.

"I think," Twilight said, ignoring her friend's comment, "It has something to do with that Star Sapphire ring of yours, something I'd incidentally also like to talk to you about by the way."

"My ring?" Cadance repeated.

"Yeah." Twilight nodded. "Something about using it in conjunction with the heart when it was forming and... I actually wrote a paper on it, if anyone's interested." She said, holding up a few pieces of paper. "Kind of rushed, but it's just preliminary..."

"Is it being purple a problem?" Cadance asked. Twilight looked about cautiously.

"Shouldn't think so." She shrugged.

"Alright then." Cadance smiled. "Anyone up for lunch? I'll buy."

There was a general nodding of heads at that. And the group moved off, Cadance remaining to look at the Crystal Heart for a moment.

"You okay?" Shining's voice cut through her thoughts, and she turned to him.

"Me?" She asked, "Yes, I'm fine."

She smiled warmly at him, and Shining smiled right back.

"I'm fine."

\* \* \*

><p><p>

\*\*Author's Note:\*\*

161.1: How do you make a zebralicorn completely unremarkable?

161.2: Emphasis on "most".

161.3; What's a fourth wall?

161.4: Mega Man cross.

161.6: Well, there's several Princesses. Don't think any of them is a Bride, though. (Princess Bride)

161.8: Fail to fail.

161.9: Twilight Zone.

161.12: Literal slurs.

161.14: This is worse than usual! She's getting... electoral.

161.17: Something nearly every looper has long decided they will never hear.

161.18: It's better to light a lantern than curse the darkness.

## 169. Chapter 169

### 162.1 (Masterweaver)

Nightmare Moon cautiously prodded the pink pony that had just added a crater to her residence. She jumped back when the mare gave out a little groan.

"Ohhhh. Oh." After a moment, the mare managed to push herself up. "Oh. Ooooookay, well..." She glanced around. "Okay. Note to self: Do not tease Twilight about her laboratory with outdated scientific concepts. Oh hi Luna!" she added, waving at Nightmare Moon. "Good to see you!"

"...Who art thou and how hast thou the knowledge of my former name?"

"I'm a crazy baker and I know because we've met looooooads of times before. Ooo! While I'm here, want to help me plan a counter-prank on your sister's protege?"

\* \* \*

### ><p>162.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...not saying you're not strong, I'm just stronger. Plus, as a human I'd have a bipedal stance-"

"Look, Lemon, it says right here in the rules that shapeshifting isn't allowed!"

"During the match, Nyx. See here? 'So long as the two participants retain a reasonable form decided prior to the match-'"



"Well, yeah, but that was just so that Spike could keep tossing Rarity."

"And this is basically the same thing!"

"Equestria doesn't have humans most loops! There's no way the judges would rule a freaking Space Marine as reasonable!"

"So you do admit I'm stronger!"

"I admit you're bigger and most of that mass is muscle, but if we want to be allowed in the spouse toss competition-"

"I thought it was-?"

"Gender equality, Lemon, try to keep up."

\* \* \*

><p>162.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight looked about Canterlot Carousel with an odd feeling of nostalgia.

Rarity, awake, could easily achieve this with her foreknowledge and pocketed wonders. That, however, hadn't been the case in her first few loops. To find that she could " that she would have done it baseline...

The princess of friendship looked to the unawake unicorn. If she had to put her feelings into words... she might have compared it to a grandmother seeing her daughter earn their cutie mark. Well, great aunt, more likely.

She subtly unpocketed a few small cameras and plugged them around the building, setting them to record. Rarity would love to see what she accomplished. Only the experience of loops kept her from tearing up.

"If wearing a dress will help the shop," she finally managed, "then I say... stick a pin in it!"

\* \* \*

><p>162.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

Rainbow let out a melodramatic yawn, knocking on the door of the room. "Miss Spitfire, ma'am? What are you doing in there?"

"There's no time to explain-"

With a quiet roll of her eyes, Rainbow opened the door. "Listen, I know I'm only a reserve, but I do have personal experience saving Equestria from monsters. Whatever it is, I can either help or get somebody who can here in ten seconds. Twenty, tops."

The yellow mare paused, her jumpsuit half zipped. "...alright, alright. I just got a letter. My mother has Pegasitis, and the only known cure is the ice Iris, but they only grow on the crystal

mountains."

"Ice Iris, where have I heard that- oh yeah!" Rainbow grinned. "My friend AJ's growing a couple of them."

Spitfire froze halfway out the window. "...wait, what?"

"Don't get me wrong, she comes from a long family of apple farmers and she is mostly about apples," Rainbow Dash explained. "Buuuuut a pony can only spend so much time around apples before they go a little bit crazy. She started branching out a while back, experimenting, ordering fancy seeds â€" I dunno if she's got any full-grown Ice Irises, but she ordered them a year ago, and she's just down in Ponyville."

"Oh thank Celestia." Spitfire let out a small sigh, turning to the other pegasus. "Can you take me to her?"

"Absolutely, ma'am." Rainbow saluted. "We can be there and back in twenty minutes."

Could she have exposed Wind Rider? Sure, he was right behind that curtain. But... well... she'd already beaten all his records ages ago. It wouldn't hurt to let the old fogey have some scrap of pride left.

\* \* \*

><p>162.5 (Masterweaver)<p>

Rarity pursed her lips as the film stopped rolling.

"...hmm."

Twilight turned to her. "Hmmm?"

"Hmm."

"Ah."

There was a quiet moment.

"I mean," Rarity began, "I should be proud of that achievement, no matter which version of me pulled it off. It's just... a boutique in Canterlot?" She waved a hoof over towards a locked door. "Compared to my material creations lab, I... well, it's just so..."

She shrugged, helplessly. "'Quaint' is the best word I can come up with..."

Twilight nodded. "No, I understand. It's like... looking at an old experiment. Do you know, way back when I started looping, I actually set up a number of them trying to figure the whole thing out? Only the most expensive, restricted set of equipment â€" Celestia back then was worried too, because neither of us had heard of anything like this..." She let out a little chuckle. "Fat lot of good that did. But... I still remember that time, and I still feel kind of nostalgic thinking about it."

"Hmm." Rarity nodded vaguely. "That's somewhat different though, it's something that... that happened, if that makes sense. Here, though, this is something that... will happen? Should happen?" She gave her companion a wry smile. "Did you invent a tense for this situation?"

"Future Possible tense, yes. Different from future impossible tense because this is something that would happen baseline without alteration. It's the si prefix."

"Yes, well, you get my point. I have a choice to make here â€" actually, a number of choices, what with Sassy Saddles apparently preferring trendy sales over fashionable ones â€" but the thing is..." Rarity rolled her hoof. "When the situation with Moondancer came up, you obviously \_didn't\_ want it to happen again, so you decided against, well, going baseline â€" outside unique circumstances. Here, this is something that I... might want? I honestly don't know. It's a net positive, but I... usually, when expansions come, there's something we want to reject. You know, turning Fluttershy into a vampire, letting Tirek rampage about â€" I'm just a little unbalanced at how good this whole thing went. Will go. Was recorded as it will go." She frowned. "One of these days I really must memorize that tense project of yours..."

"You're... actually surprised that a good thing happened to you?"

"Hmm, yes, that... would summarize it, I believe. It's rather more complicated than just that, of course, but that's one of the core... reactions I'm having." Rarity tapped her chin. "There's also the fact that I could easily run mass distribution and personalized wardrobes at this point, so it's sort of a silly expense â€" and, oh yes, what to do with Sassy Saddles. It's all rather... overwhelmingly underwhelming? I don't know how to put it into words, Twilight!"

"Why don't you just... think on it," Twilight suggested. "Run this loop baseline, see how you like it, and go from there?"

"...That is a good idea. I... suppose I'll do that, then."

\* \* \*

><p>162.6 (continuation of 159.18) (Masterweaver)<p>

Two days later, Sassy Saddles blundered into Berry's bar, wide eyed and stammering. "Ra... dre... ma... fire..."

Berry Punch sighed, gesturing for the unicorn to have a stool. "She was showing off, wasn't she?"

"Fire. Dress fire. Fwoosh, stitch stitch stitch." Sassy managed to get herself onto the stool. "Rarity, fire, stitch stitch. How? \_How?\_"

"She cheats, basically." Berry carefully selected one of her more balanced brews. "She once made a dress of her own feathers."

Sassy stared at her. "What... Rarity? Unicorn!"

"Currently."

For a moment, Sassy just stared at the bartender. Then she grabbed the drink with both hooves and gulped it down.

\* \* \*

><p>162.7 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...I apologize, but in truth I fear that I have misheard your words, my dear. Did you honestly just suggest that I take as a quest the opening of a laboratory in a mountainside city built upon a quarry?"

"Oh yes!" Sassy Saddles nodded vigorously. "Canterlot is severely lacking in the alchemical arts, and I felt a second location could expand your business quite a bit."

Zecora stared at her for a long time.

"...I'm sorry, but I believe my answer is no. I cannot see any reason to go."

\* \* \*

><p>"...and I felt that the success you had in teaching your own students could be replicated tenfold in Canterlot-"<p>

"Miss Saddles, I'm afraid I must correct you. My methods only work because I know my students so well. Attempting to divide my attention would only cause my work to suffer."

The unicorn's ears drooped. "Oh. Well, maybe I could learn your methods and put them in a book for other teachers-"

"My methods are tailored to my class, I'm afraid..."

\* \* \*

><p>Diamond Tiara waited patiently.<p>

"...Ah..." The unicorn recovered quickly. "I'm... terribly sorry, I wasn't expecting a master gemcrafter to be so young."

"I get that a lot."

Sassy glanced at the scroll in her magic, looked at Diamond again, then visibly adjusted something going through her head. "W-Well, I was thinking, maybe, you'd like to open a second store in Canterlot...?"

"Hmm." Diamond leaned back. "Well, as much as I would like to hobnob with the nobility, the fact is I'm an underage filly and I can't really do that without my father's permission. He is a businesspony, though, so it's possible... but a lot of his ventures are tied up in Ponyville." She shrugged.

"Ah." Sassy cleared her throat. "I... I see..."

\* \* \*

><p>162.8 (Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight warily approached the ring of caution tape and the thick metal dome set within. "Trixie... what's going on?"

"Oh, Discord and Pinkie decided to try to read each other's minds." Trixie gestured at the doom. "I provided the safety features is all."

Twilight blinked. "So... hold on, are you waiting for an explosion?"

"Kinda sorta. It's a stress test of my new shield fabrication method. Tectonium is great, but it's ludicrously hard to create and that's WITH Rarity's help." The blue unicorn shrugged. "See, this is technically pure steel, but created in such a way that-"

A stream of cookie dough suddenly burst from the dome, forming a small puddle between the two ponies. Twilight jumped back, but Trixie just shrugged and adjusted the caution tape to go around the new puddle. After a moment, a long green tentacle reached out, split in two to reveal a mechanical rotary sponge, and started to suck up all the wayward sweet.

"...well, that was five minutes to the first breach," Trixie quipped.

Twilight groaned. "I... I'm just going to leave you guys to it and hope this doesn't crash thheLrg:rlKSGTJKLR:Ghrbppp-0-

\* \* \*

><p>162.9 (Masterweaver, Scorntex)<p>

"...why do you wear a saddle all the time?"

Sassy levitated her clipboard down. "What?"

Rainbow pointed at the mare. "That saddle. You're always wearing it. I can get the dress, sure, but why the saddle? Is it just because it's in your name, or what?"

The unicorn sniffed primly. "I have my reasons."

"What are they?"

"This is a dress shop, miss Dash. If you're not here to purchase a dress, or talk to your friend, I'll have to ask you to leave."

"I'll buy a dress if you tell me why you wear a saddle."

Sassy rolled her eyes. "No deal."

Rainbow waved a hoof at Pinkie. "If you do not tell, my friend and I will return here, every. Day. Of the week."

"Frequent customers? That will encourage ponies looking for the popular dresses."

\* \* \*

><p>162.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Aren't they just so KIIIIUTE together?!" Pinkie squealed, hugging Rarity tightly. "Just look at them, sharing a sapphire-amethyst smoothie!"

The unicorn nodded vaguely. "I... suppose they are..."

"OOOOO! Does this make us sisters in law?!"

"I'd have to say no," Rarity replied slowly. "Looping and nonlooping versions of the same person don't really qualify as the same person and/or related."

Pinkie pouted for a brief second... before shrugging. "Eh, I'll get us all in a family some loop. But back to what matters right now-" She gestured through the window. "SO CUTE! SO SO CUTE!"

"Yes, yes, your sister and Spike are cute. Maybe I'll design them something... before the loop ends..."

\* \* \*

><p>162.11 (Anon e Mouse Jr., Gamerex27, Masterweaver, ORBSyndicate, Scorntex)<p>

"...and that is how Starlight Glimmer managed to not only halt the conversion bureau, but become a hero of two worlds in the process," Twilight finished.

"Huh." Rainbow tapped her chin. "Makes sense, all things considered. Still, pretty epic. Taking on Xenolestia like that, she had to have some pretty big brass balls."

"Literally \_and \_metaphorically!" Pinkie quipped.

"She goes against a basic tenant of Equestrian society in \_baseline\_, Dash. I may not like her, but I've never doubted her sheer determination." Twilight sipped at her mug, glanced around the bar, and a sly grin formed on her face. "Actually... New game. What is the weirdest way you've seen a baseline villain become heroic?"

Chrysalis held up a hoof quickly. "Corollary, villain must not be Awake! Otherwise everypony would be pointing at me and/or Discord."

"Lord Sombra versus the Fiendish Minions of Orthodontistry!" Sweetie Belle declared.

"Lord?" Luna asked.

Celestia stared quizzically at her sister. "You're more concerned about that than evil dentists?"

"... Maybe."

"Tirek ate Sombra." Berry Punch said. "I may or may not have drugged

him with something."

"Sombra ate Tirek." Cadence countered.

Discord jumped up between the two of them. "Discord ate every villain simultaneously!"

"Discord!" Chrysalis yelled. "Not Awake!"

"Oh it wasn't me. I was replacing Starlight. A most interesting experience..."

"Being Starlight or being eaten by yourself?"

"Running that little equality town inside my own stomach, actually. But thank you for playing. You win a kumquat."

"There was th' time Starlight Glimmer put her plans into action early," Mac put in. "She snuck into Canterlot and stole Celestia and Cadance's Cutie Marks, an' Twilight's too because she heard 'em talkin' about what it meant, then put all three of 'em into some kind of magically-induced coma while they were too stunned to fight back. After that, she somehow persuaded all th' nobles that th' Princesses and Twilight's own Cutie Marks turned against 'em for bein' so powerful, and that all Cutie Marks would do the same thing some day, unless they got rid of 'em. Seein' what'd happened to their princesses, everypony was too busy fallin' in line to realize they'd been suckered." He shook his head. "Fortunately, a few of us were smart enough to figure out somethin' weren't right, so we painted over ours to make it look like she'd zapped us. We kept our individuality, an' laid low as we tried to figure out how to stop her."

"A few years later, when Nightmare Moon came back, she found Starlight in charge of a nation full of dull, "equalized" ponies, and was so disgusted with what she saw, she almost went back to the moon then and there. But before she could go, Apple Bloom found her, saw she still had her Cutie Mark, and begged her to help. She took her back to th' farm, where we told her about Starlight and how she'd taken over. I Woke Up about then, right as Apple Bloom was beggin' her to stop that maniac an' bring back the Cutie Marks, 'cause what she was doin' jes' tweren't natural." He chuckled.

"Sure as shootin', Nightmare Moon couldn't help herself when she saw the look on that little filly's face. She agreed to help, then went an' spied on Starlight to find out exactly how she'd stolen all the Cutie Marks. Once she found what she was lookin' for, she freed the Marks, banished Starlight to Tartarus for her crimes, an' even woke up her sister, Cadance an' Twilight. When Princess Celestia found out what Nightmare Moon had done, she gave her back her throne right then an' there, without even tryin' to have her de-Nightmared. 'An she made a new national holiday in her honor too, to celebrate how she'd given Equestria back its freedom."

There was a long silence.

"That... is quite possibly the most terrifying thing I have ever heard," Celestia managed. "Twilight, are you sure we shouldn't make stopping her a priority at the start of every Loop?"

"Positive," Twilight told her. "I'm just glad Luna - er, Nightmare - was willing to wake us up after stopping Starlight that time. I would not have enjoyed spending the rest of that Loop Awake, but still in a coma."

There was a pause as a few ponies tried to digest this.

"So, anypony else got one?" asked Rainbow Dash.

"Tirek Sunstar?" Pinkie suggested. "Although, I don't know if that qualifies. He was basically a theme-flipped Nightmare Moon, and his brother Tirac was basically a theme-flipped Celestia..."

"And that was a fused loop," Rarity pointed out.

"Tirek, bane of the Derp." Derpy offered.

Everyone begged her for more information.

"My cutie mark that time was entropy, and everywhere I touched literally exploded. It made sleeping quite a problem." She slurped her drink. "I tried sleeping while flying, but that never worked. Anyway, I became a menace. Completely by accident of course. But I kept just.. exploding into places. I completely leveled Applejack's orchard multiple times, somehow managed to blow Cloudsdale into orbit, and causing half of Canterlot to just... vanish."

Anyway, years of this I did sorta manage to not run into things as much, though I kept blowing things up. And nobody could keep me still because the chains would just explode. Then Tirek came, on his rampage, ready to eat all the magic in Equestria. He ate mine removing my ability to explode things, and everyone simply loved him, wanting to become his personal army for conquering. Pinkie actually threw him a party, which destroyed the one building I had somehow managed not to touch that entire loop."

Twilight rammed her horn into the counter. "The library."

"Yeah. Sorry. I tried. Anyway Tirek wasn't actually redeemed... he kinda just decided that he could rule as a hero. The elements eventually did drive him out, though i don't remember exactly how... I was sleeping. I slept till the end of the loop. I didn't wake up until Rainbow unleashed the sonic rainboom next loop."

"There was this one time the Flim Flam brothers mosied over to Sombra's place an' set up shop there," Applejack recalled. "Ah didn't really expect them to actually hire any of them crystal ponies. Or bring along Iron Will to give seminars to increase productivity. Their work ethic an' confidence got so strong, they just up and bucked Sombra out of the kingdom when he tried to come on back."

"...wait, were they trying to help, or were they just doing their usual dirty business?" Ivory Scroll asked.

"Hay if Ah know. Ah think they just ended up helpin everypony by accident: probably just wanted to get some cheap labor, make cheap cider, and set up a corporate town. That'd explain why Cadence kicked them out of the kingdom once she took the throne."



The mayor shivered. "Urgh. There was this one time I Looped in as a mayor of a company town in the Gilded Age. That was horrifying, what went on there. And it took years to organize a union and find enough loopholes in the contract to kick the corporation out of there."

"Okay, so." Sunset put down her mug. "I was going with a whole 'redeem the sirens' path, not too unusual, and I managed to get them good and back to Equestria shortly before Discord's release. Now, what I expected was them to use their singing ability, you know, some sort of tune about 'the power of harmony,' or 'chaos and entropy,' or something."

"So?"

"So... in that loop, siren and seapony were synonymous. As in, Sirens were specifically seapony warrior legends." She winced. "They quite literally drowned Discord in his own chocolate milk. And then later, washed away the changelings, and then they trapped Sombra in liquid crystal-no idea how that worked-basically, the whole loop was spent with them laying a watery smackdown on every antagonist."

\* \* \*

><p>162.12 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Al\_right\_, I've put this off long enough."

Twilight revved up her chainsaw, glaring at the crystal map in front of her. "I can get you hiding your secrets when you were a lockbox. I can understand that as a fount of missions for us, you're supposed to have a mysterious connection to the powers of fate. But I am a scholar, I am a scientist, I am a tree damn wizard, and I will NOT be mocked by hidden knowledge inside my very own home! So," she finished, lowering the chainsaw slowly, "it's time to see just how you tick. OWL, activate recording. Twilight Sparkle log, experiment HCM 1, beginning initial incision in three, two, onegtklab;dfjgh;parwu90tgeajlb/dfkg0:NUDSO;kflehsnd/lgk-

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Awoke in Unicornia, glancing around and giving a little groan. "Really? G3 again?! REALLY?!"<p>

She kicked at the ground. "Ugh. Fine. Fine, whatever."

\* \* \*

><p>162.13 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Twilight?"

"Rarity, just ask. Just ask."

"Why is it that everyone is an alicorn this loop? I mean, even the sheep!"

"I'm going to blame Loki, because Loki."

\* \* \*

><p>162.14 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Hey Twi?"

"Yeah Dash?"

"SPOILER ALERT!"

"...wait wh-?"

At this point, Scootaloo clipped the alicorn with one of her plane's wings. "Oh geeze! Sorry bout that!"

\* \* \*

><p>162.15 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...Rarity?"

"Yes Applejack?"

"Coco said them Method Mares were... professional actors?"

Rarity sighed. "I've checked. They're... not celebrity tier, but they are top bracket."

Applejack trotted down the lamplit street, musing to herself. "...that's what passes for acting in Manehattan?"

"That's what passes for acting in Equestria, darling." Rarity's ears drooped. "The fact of the matter is... well, ponies in general aren't very good at becoming roles that aren't them. Lying, sometimes, but wearing masks?" She shook her head. "Of all our arts, theatre is the one that suffers the most. I honestly can't tell if our hokey movies are a result of our relative tech level not allowing much theatrical comparison, or if we're really that naive compared to other loops."

The farm mare gave her a look. "Speaking from experience?"

"I used gemstones in the costumes for a children's play. Yes, I was just a foal, but... our entire culture has a lack of subtlety, preferring explosions of color and shapes to fades in and out. It's... I don't know how to describe it, I mean I do love it but just limiting myself to one style?!" The unicorn swung a hoof at the lamplight. "It's... it's like artistic light pollution! These streetlamps are everywhere and ponies like them, but the stars are drowned out!"

"Huh. You feel pretty passionate about this, don'cha?"

"Sometimes. Sometimes I just feel... drained." Rarity chuckled wryly. "It's an artsy thing, I suppose. But, yes, there are some actors in Equestria that are... definitely better than the Method Mares, but they're considered avant garde."

\* \* \*

><p>162.16 (Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight grinned to herself as her comm beeped. She had a good idea who was on the other side, and what they wanted to talk about.

"Ye-low, this is Twilight Sparkle, if you don't know what you're handling please bring it to my palace-"

"Ya'll could have told me Mac was going to try to join me in the social!"

"Oh come on, Bloom, it's an expansion!" Twilight adjusted the comm, carefully pouring some chemicals into a few beakers. "Surprises for all! And he did look good in a dress-"

"He's going to wear a \_dress?!\_" There was a low groan on the other end. "Ah thought he was just gonna be himself! Ah only realized what was going through his head a minute ago!"

"Trust me, you do not want to miss your dear sweet \_cousin\_ Orchard Blossom. Quite a sight, if I do say so myself."

"Nnnnnnnrgh-Ah guess at least Applejack's not Awake for this..." There was a sigh. "Shame Rainbow Dash is though."

"It's not really that bad," Twilight pointed out. "I mean, we're technically a semi-nudist society with clothing generally being considered an affection of personality rather than a cultural requirement. Really, the only reason we as loopers are unnerved by the concept is because of our frequent interaction with humans and other such clothing-oriented groups."

There was silence on the other end.

"Plus," Twilight added, "he really pulls off the look."

"Alright, that's it, Ah'm hanging up now." With a click, the comm fell silent.

Twilight shrugged, turning back to her beakers. "She'll get over it."

\* \* \*

><p>162.17 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...wait, seriously?"

Berry Punch nodded. "Seriously! They let me race with my own daughter!" She paused and frowned for a moment. "They wouldn't let me join with Cheerilee, though. It makes sense, since the event's more for the foals, but she's the pony who's \_actually\_ my sister-"

"Well, I know they let Celestia and Luna join sometimes," Twilight mused, "but that could be just because they're princesses and whatnot..."

"You know, though, I was thinking." Berry leaned over the table. "What if, next loop, we got all our foals together for sister-hoof

shenaniganery? Like, you could enter with Nyx, and Zecora could enter with Silver Spoon â€" I don't know who Diamond would enter with, exactly, but you get the idea."

After a moment, Twilight nodded. "That's actually a pretty good idea! Maybe we can talk to the CMC to see if they'll mix up their partners too..."

"Oh, that could be fun."

\* \* \*

><p>162.18 (Masterweaver)<p>

Silver Spoon hummed to herself as she set out her Ping, smiling at the number she received back. A lot of loopers were Awake, which was always good. Twilight would certainly be happy-

Her ear perked as she felt a shift in magic right outside her door. She turned to it with some confusion, but smiled broadly when she opened it. "Diamond! Good to see... you?"

Diamond Tiara sighed. "...so. Expansion. My mother... has, uh, stabilized."

"Oh my gosh, Diamond, I'm so... happy for you?" The silver kelpie (currently) frowned as she took in her friend's drooping ears. "...is... isn't that a good thing?"

"...her name's Spoiled Rich."

Silver winced. "Oh."

"She's a socialite. High class."

"Ah."

"...she doesn't like it... when I fail..."

Silver Spoon stepped to the side quietly, gesturing for Diamond to step in. The pink filly trudged through the door.

"It's just... Twilight did warn me, but I didn't... I didn't want to believe it. I mean, before, she could be dead, or divorced, or- or whatever, and I didn't like it, but I treasured... I treasured the times we had together, the loops where she still existed. I liked my mother, no matter who she was, because... because luck of the draw meant she was usually, you know, a mother. And now..." Diamond sat down. "And now I have Spoiled Rich, and she's... she's what made my baseline self so... you know. And the thing is, I look at her and... I don't know. I don't feel like she's my mother. Not like the ones I had before, you know? She's... I don't..."

Without a word, Silver Spoon shut the door, shifted her body, and lay down next to her friend.

Diamond blinked as a big fluffy tail wrapped around her. "...fox? Really?"

"Trust me, squirrels at this size look creepy." Silver nudged her

gently. "Now shut up and enjoy the warm fuzzies."

The filly managed a small smile, for the briefest of moments. Then she sighed.

It would be a long while before either of them moved.

\* \* \*

><p>"A<em>ha!<em>"

Nyx strode into the bedroom, pointing at the other four fillies and large grey fox. "Momma said you'd probably be here, and she was right! You're all here!"

"Yeah..." Sweetie Belle rubbed the back of her head. "Getting cutie marks in baseline is... cool and all, but when we figured what Diamond would have to go through-"

"Yeah, I know she soloed it and you three went through it unawake. And you know what? Comforting her, that's a good thing, props to you lot. But I have a problem with this situation."

There was an awkward pause.

Diamond Tiara eventually emerged from the fluffy tail. "Um... there are a number of problems, actually-"

"I am the literal manifestation of a goddess's self-loathing," Nyx continued, "mixed in with some rage and a minor guilt complex. That means that I get to be the brooding darkmare. If anypony else is angsting more than me, something is seriously wrong! So you know what, we are going to address your problems head on, and get through this together as quickly as possible, because otherwise I won't be able to build my moon death ray in good conscience!"

There was another awkward moment.

Diamond's face twitched. She snorted. She tried, very desperately, to keep a serious face.

Then she just gave up and fell over laughing.

Sweetie Belle rolled her eyes. "Nyx, you're Honesty, I'm Laughter, get it right." There was a big grin on her face regardless.

\* \* \*

><p>162.19 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Three ponies got almost the same cutie mark simultaneously?!"

Twilight nodded. "Yes, Moondancer. It was really quite-"

"Do you know what this MEANS?!"

"...well, depending on who you ask, it could mean that they're good friends, the world's largest cutcenara, that fate has a sense of-"

"THIS CALLS FOR SCIENCE!"

Fortunately for everypony, the loop ended three minutes later.

\* \* \*

><p>162.20 (Alexrior, geohikari152, Hvulpes, Masterweaver, Purrs)<p>

Twilight gave out a groan of frustration as she wore yet another rut into her library. Her mentor, who was visiting at the moment, was watching curiously from her spot.

"Twilight, what is the matter?" Celestia asked, lifting a cup of tea to her lips in her usual serene manner.

The lavender unicorn huffed. "I just realized that, in all this time in the loops, I never did find out how Sunset knew to enter the portal, and how she managed to figure out I had a crown! It's been nagging me for ages!" She huffed again.

"Actually, it's rather simple," Celestia said after a small sip of her tea.

Twilight turned, raising her eyebrow at her mentor. "Oh?" she asked with interest.

"I used the journal to contact Sunset. I wrote her all the time, she just never answered. How else did you think she knew to steal the Element of Magic in baseline?"

Twilight blinked. "...That... actually explains a lot."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Later...<em>

"...so when Celestia told me that, it's as if everything made sense again." Twilight paused. "Wait. Suppose you got all your information from there, how the hay did you know what my crown looked like?"

Sunset shrugged. "I didn't."

"Wait, what?"

"I simply theorized that the new Fall Formal crown was a counterpart item, and got lucky when my hypothesis that it actually corresponded to the Element of Magic turned out to be true."

Twilight blinked again. "Huh." She thought for a moment. "Wouldn't that mean there would be some necklaces to be counterparts to the other Elements of Harmony?"

"Yep. But those are for the Fall Formal Queen's court. For some reason, they get picked the day after the main dance. Letting somebody be Queen for a Day or something like that," explained Sunset. "By the way... Applejack, Fluttershy, Rarity, Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie did get them, and each of them got the correct

necklace," she added.

"Actually, that sort of makes sense. Hey, with me being a Princess in Equestria and a Fall Formal Queen here, with counterparts of my friends being my Court, wouldn't that make my friends in Equestria my Ladies in Waiting or something?"

As Twilight finished speaking, a squeal of delight (which kind of sounded like a certain fashionista) echoed from the statue at Canterlot High. Both humans raised their eyebrows.

"Well, Rarity sounds happy about that," Twilight commented. "How she heard it from another universe... no, not again. That way leads to Pinkie Sense Madness," she finished.

\* \* \*

><p>162.21 (Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight Sparkle was halfway to her tower when space rippled in front of her, a ragged portal spitting out a familiar pink pony. "Hey, Pinkie, what's-s-?"

"Twilight!" Pinkie grabbed her friend's shoulders tightly. "Have you gone through the recent expansion?!"

The unicorn smiled, rolling her eyes. "Yes, Pinkie. I have. You don't need to worry about keeping it secret from me."

"OH THANK EVERFREE." Pinkie collapsed on the ground with a huge smile. "You know it was really hard with that stealth anchor, I just don't think I could have kept myself from blurting out-"

"Oh, but Cadance hasn't yet," Twilight added as an afterthought. "I wanted to surprise her, you know?"

Pinkie's grin froze.

Very calmly, she stood up, turning her gaze to the purple unicorn and staring at her for ten whole seconds.

"...Excuse me for a second, would you please?" She stepped back through the portal.

Nightmare Moon, busily preparing for her soon-to-be escape, jumped suddenly as an unholy scream reverberated throughout the ground she was standing on. "What in Mother's name was that?!"

\* \* \*

><p>162.22 (Evilhumor, Masterweaver)<p>

"Wait a minute, why's everypony so worried?" Vinyl asked. "I mean, new baby, yeah, but the kid's not coming for a few expansions or so, plenty of time to prepare-"

She was promptly assaulted by a bevy of whatever objects the loopers had on hoof.

"Whoa, Shiny!" Cadence shrieked as she tossed across the room,

landing square on the poor unicorn of Blunt Honesty.  
"Careful!"

"Sorry Caddy!" Her husband blushed, rubbing his neck. "Gut reflex and all..." He let out a trail of embarrassed chuckles, eyes darting to the side.

"Very cute and all, but would someone get her off of me!" Vinyl squeaked from under the expecting mare.

\* \* \*

><p>162.23 (Masterweaver)<p>

"So... you couldn't meet me in person?" Trixie asked the changeling drone, leaning back in her chair. "I'm hurt, Chrysy, really I am."

The drone had the decency to look embarrassed, fiddling with a menu. "Yeah, I... well, I kind of feel the need to stay around Cadance right now."

Trixie rose an eyebrow. "I thought you didn't like taking her place anymore--"

"No no, it's not that. It's just â€" there's this new expansion, and she, well, she found out she was pregnant--"

"OHMYGOSH!" Trixie grinned widely. "REALLY?! THAT'S INCREDIBLE!"

"Yes, it's amazing, I get it, but she doesn't give birth before the loop ends!"

Trixie blinked. "...I... thought that was impossible, though--"

"It's a bit of a loophole," the drone hedged. "She is, eventually, going to give birth â€" Sleipnir came down to personally assure her of that â€" but at the moment, she ends the loop still... you know, hormonal. And it kind of carries over..." The drone waggled a hoof. "I personally think it's psychosomatic, but the point is that for the foreseeable future, Cadance is going to end almost every loop with cravings and possibly mid moodswing. Kind of a jarring adjustment, if you catch my meaning."

The unicorn sighed. "Yeah, I have loop memories from variants where Silver's my daughter. Or Twilight, sometimes. I can see how that would be a problem." She gave the drone a glare. "Still doesn't explain why you need to be there personally, Chrysalis."

"It's a personal touch, I'll admit," the drone allowed. "But you know, better that I handle this directly rather than let, say, a mindless drone do it. And yes, the drones are mindless this loop, I checked..."

\* \* \*

><p>162.24 (Masterweaver)<p>

Chrysalis giggled good naturedly, sipping her tea. "I can imagine!



The poor dear must have been so confused..." She tilted her head curiously. "...How many Ichigos are there across the multiverse?"

"Oh, quite a few I'd imagine. From what I've heard, the shinto pantheon was quite imaginative back in the day-" Fluttershy frowned as the teapot she held failed to produce any tea. "Oh, conifer. All out already? This is so embarrassing, that was my last batch."

Leman Russ, currently a cute pegasus colt, rolled his eyes. "I told you we were running low yesterday."

The queen of changelings chuckled. "Don't worry about it, Fluttershy, I don't mind."

"Oh, but it... it just doesn't feel right to have a tea party without, you know, tea." Fluttershy stood up awkwardly. "I'm terribly sorry about this... would you two mind if I went to the market and bought a couple more brews?"

"If you insist," Chrysalis replied with a reassuring smile. "Me and Leman can just talk about things while you're gone, how the Warp is doing these days, that sort of thing."

The pegasus colt shrugged. "Same old blood and chaos. Don't worry, little mother, we'll be alright."

Fluttershy smiled gently. "I'll only be a few minutes. Try not to kill each other," she joked as she left the cottage.

Leman chuckled as the door shut. "Kill each other... That'd be pretty difficult. I mean, no offense, Chryssi, but you're a stealthy kind of mare, and I was made to battle demons. If we did fight, only one of our deaths would be ensured."

Chrysalis smiled and put her teacup down. "I know. That's why I laced my drink with sedative venom and swapped our cups while you weren't looking."

"Hahaha... wait. Wh-?"

The next thing that Leman knew, a holey limb had pinned his entire upper body against the wall and the changeling's face had morphed into a rictus-inducing snarl.

"Listen to me very closely little man," Chrysalis growled, "because I am NOT going to be repeating myself. It doesn't matter whether a person's existence is carefully constructed and plotted out or if they were just some freak accident, nobody is meant to exist. They make meaning out of their own existence through their own actions. So maybe your damned emperor built you up to be a glorious warrior for his little blue planet, so what? Most people are just born like normal; heck, me and Nyx break baseline just by being ourselves. And you know what? We're better for it. The world is better for it. The damned multiverse is better for it!"

She leaned into the struggling colt's face. "So if I ever hear you said anything about people who 'weren't meant to exist' again, I will personally go up to the chaos gods and have them Pinkie Pie swear to torment you for ten loops straight. At minimum. The only

reason I haven't done so yet is because you were at least smart enough to realize you were in the wrong and somehow, \_somehow,\_ got Nyx to forgive you. Do I make myself completely and totally clear?"

"Y-Yes," croaked Leman. It was definitely a croak from lack of air, and not a squeak of terror. "C-Can you put me down now please?"

Chrysalis glowered at him for a moment.

Then she let him drop to the floor, wheezing for breath.

"Well, I feel much better now, getting some of that off my chest." Her face once again a friendly mask, Chrysalis helped the colt up to his feet. "I'll admit I'm still sorely tempted to tear you apart and pummel you into oblivion, but that would be quite rude and honestly I think I got my message across. I think I'll head back to the badlands now and make some red dragons black and blue, they're really a terrible breed this loop. And no," she added over her shoulder, "you \_can't\_ come."

"G... got it."

Fluttershy opened the door. "You wouldn't believe the luck I had! I managed to snag the last box!" She held up the brew with glee.

Chrysalis gasped. "Oh, it's my favorite blend too! But... I'm terribly sorry, Fluttershy, some queenly business just came up and I'm afraid I'll have to dash." She leaned down and nuzzled her. "Save it for next week, alright?"

"Oh, certainly." Fluttershy stepped aside, letting the changeling fly out. "Goodbye, Chrysalis, have a nice day!"

She turned to Leman... and frowned. "Um... Leman? Are... are you feeling okay?"

The colt gave her a long, flat look. "...I'm going to go take a nap."

\* \* \*

><p>162.25 (Masterweaver)<p>

Well chlorophyll Twilight grumbled

Whats the matter asked Spike Then he blinked Whoa this is weird

Theres no punctuation this loop Twilight replied Which is really confusing because I dont see how it could logically affect us like this

Twilight Spike interrupted Remember what happened when you questioned the lack of tactile telekinesis

Twilight sighed Alright Ill drop it for now but I cant be blamed if the loop crashes anyway

\* \* \*

><p>162.26 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

"Hey, Diamond?"

Diamond Tiara looked up from her homework. "Hey, Twilight. What's up?"

"New Loop expansion. And..." Twilight took a deep breath as she stepped into the room, closing the door behind her. "I need to apologize to you."

"What for?"

"Back in my first few centuries of Looping, I thought the only thing you were good for was a bad example." Twilight bowed her head. "But when you actually became friends with Apple Bloom and started Looping, I changed my mind. I still thought your Unawake self was only good for being a bad example though, and that she'd probably never change. Now..."

Diamond turned and walked up to her. "Twilight?"

"She's changed. We found out why she was such a brat, and then she genuinely turned over a new leaf and became a better pony. And it's not just a variant - it's a baseline expansion. It's something I never thought could happen, even after knowing the Looping you for so long, and... well, I'm sorry I doubted you."

Diamond took a deep breath. "Twilight?"

"Yes, Diamond?"

"Apology not accepted. Because quite frankly, you have nothing to apologize for." She blushed. "I'll admit, I'm surprised to hear it too. But knowing what I was like in baseline, I can't blame you for thinking I'd never change without Discord or some other super-powered being intervening."

Twilight smiled. "Thank you, Diamond. Thank you." She pulled the little filly close and hugged her. Then, she whispered.

"So, want to see pictures of the girls' faces when they got their baseline Cutie Marks for helping other ponies, including you, realize their own talents and what their existing Cutie Marks mean?"

When Diamond Tiara's eyes widened and a loud "WHAT!" echoed through the room, Twilight was glad she'd worn specially enchanted earplugs for this, and that she'd soundproofed the room when she'd stepped in. And that she knew the "memories to photos" spell, because the look on Diamond Tiara's face this moment? It was definitely going in her latest album.

\* \* \*

><p>162.28 (Alex Prior, Anon e Mouse Jr., banjo2E, Evilhumour, Gamex27, Masterweaver, wildrook; edited by Masterweaver and Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Cadence perked up.<p>

"Oh, I got one. What's the strangest/weirdest/most mind-boggling thing Twilight Velvet has done/you've seen her do throughout the loops? Variant or otherwise? And please, keep it foal-friendly."

Twilight groaned. "First my library, then my mother. My family must \_love\_ picking on me."

Nyx, who was sitting next to her, patted her hoof. "I already apologized for that, Mom."

"I know, Nyx. But stillâ€¦" She looked at Cadance coolly.

Cadance shrugged. "It's nothing personal, Twilight. But I just came from a Loop where Velvet was my magic teacher when I first moved to Canterlot, and it got me thinking about what other variations of her might be like."

Twilight pondered. "Okay, I can understand that, but I reserve the right to get ridiculously drunk if they get \_too\_ weird. Carry on."

Hearing that, Vinyl grinned. "There was that one time she decided to adopt the entire Dragon Migration."

Twilight's eyes narrowed before she slammed her drink back. "Worst part, she succeeded! You can guess what happened to my poor, poor library when the family came to visit..."

"That explains why Garble sent me his entire hoard as an apology," Spike said to the others. "Crazy enough, there were two Rarities... one of them was a Dragoness."

"Mikasa glitch, darling," Rarity replied.

Rainbow Dash then gave it a thought. "Does working with A.K. Yearling count?" she asked Twilight.

"No, because that's mostly every other Loop," Twilight replied. "Or BEING A.K. Yearling."

"Oh. Nuts."

"Underground Wrestling Champion," Cheerilee put in. "At least... that's how I met her through Cloverleaf."

Nyx raised a hoof. "I remember a human variant Loop with Tibbles as our anchor. Luna was my only parent - bio-dad took off before I was born - and Grandma was her best friend. I knew her as "Auntie Velvet" once I found out about her when I was a teenager."

Twilight blinked. "I don't see anything strange about that."

"She was also an ambulatory human skeleton who came back to life to save Mom-Luna from a pedophile when she was six, and had been living

in our attic ever since."

"Okay, that IS strange."

Nyx nodded. "G-mom and G-dad figured she was either a really skinny zombie, or a ghost haunting her own skeleton. Mom-Luna preferred the "haunted skeleton" theory."

Luna nodded. "It does make sense. Speaking of Velvet though, there was this one Loop she switched places with my unAwake sister."

Celestia had the grace to blush. "Actually, I was Stealthy that Loop."

Rainbow Dash set her mug down. "Okay, I got a different one. You know how Soap Opera Loops usually go? Well, in the last one I was Awake for, Twilight Velvet was behind everything. The multiple time travelers, the changeling circus, the release and sealing of Tirek, all of my pregnancies before and after my sex change operation, and the bucking founding of Equestria... she masterminded it all. She wasn't even an alicorn or anything, she just had the special talent of actually understanding what the hay was going on!"

Twilight faceplanted into the table and groaned. "I remember that one. There was exactly one thing she wasn't behind-she apologized over Hearth's Warming dinner for not realizing the bomb in the orphanage was a fake. The real one had been planted in my library the whole time."

"That explains why there was a secret agent dove in the lasagna," Pinkie Pie replied.

"One moment, please," Isabeau said, grabbing a scroll from her Pocket, and fumbling it open with her clumsy, finger-less hooves. "Since my fellow Anchors are typically scattered across the Multiverse after the Edit, we have given each other a list of responses to drinking games that we are to read in their steads when they are absent."

"...you don't hafta be so formal, sugarcube," Applejack said. "Yer in a bar, hun."

"Old habits die hard, as they say," the Samurai said, shrugging. "Hm... Question Six hundred ninety six thousand, nine hundred and sixty nine (Twilight facehooved in the background, muttering about tired jokes): questions in regard to incidents with Equestrians, subset 107: Twilight Velvet slash Twilight's Mom."

She read on. "Flynn: 'She was my steed during one Loop. Mikado was much larger that time, so each Samurai was assigned a pony to carry them to and from missions.'"

"Wasn't that the one where Pinkie baked a pie bomb and delivered it right to the monastery?" Shining Armor asked, looking at Pinkie Pie hesitantly.

She shrugged. "Hey, no one died from it. And I filled it with that anti-magic cream, so those meany-pants Archangels' cover was

blown."

"\_And\_ Mikado fell into anarchy as a result, leading to mass deaths," Isabeau recalled, sighing. "Inevitabilities regarding Amala asides, let us continue. Maya: 'Along with all of the other primary Elements of Harmony's mothers, Nyarlathoetep stole her form to use in his 'Great Mother' body when we fought him in our first Equestrian Loop.'"

"WHAT?!" Fluttershy screamed, then winced at her unusually loud tone. "Oh... I forgot that this is a \_different\_ Nyarlathoetep. \_Bucking\_ Amala.\_"

"'She was fortunate enough to be the head, at least," Isabeau continued. "'Four of them were stuck being the legs, and poor Miss Pie's mother was the tail. At least she was facing outwards so she wouldn't have to stare at the incarnation of all evil'sâ€|' er, flank.'" She looked up. "She uses a different word, but you did say to keep it foal-friendly."

Shining Armor cleared his throat. "May as well share my own example. Princess Twilight Velvet."

"Yikes," Rainbow Dash winced. "What changed there?"

"Twilight and I only attained our Baseline positions due to nepotism," Shining answered, "all of the Royal Guard's army were coated in glitter, and Nyx was \_still\_ Nightmare Moon."

"She banished me to the Moon because she caught me \_kissing Leman!\_" Nyx whined. "And stealing from the cookie jar, \_but that's beside the point!\_"

"Trixie recalls a Loop where she and Velvet had switched places, meaning Trixie was Twilight's mother." The blue showmare paused, and looked at Twilight. "It was rather disconcerting, since Trixie was just coming off a Loop where she was an orphan until her Uncle Night and Aunt Velvet adopted her as your sister. And since Trixie has a surprising number of Loops where Night Light is her mother's brother for some reason. Not that she's complaining," she added. "Trixie quite likes Loops where she has more family. It's just odd that this particular variant pops up so much."

Twilight nodded. "I've had some of those too. Having you as my sister again was fun, Awake or otherwise."

Chrysalis smiled. "There was a Loop I really liked, where Changelings didn't live in hives. We were ponies, just like any other, but with our baseline shapeshifting abilities. Velvet and her family were actually the first Changelings to reveal themselves to Celestia in the hopes that we could peacefully integrate into the rest of society rather than live in hiding like we had for so long, and when Shining Armor and Cadance met for the first time..." She smiled again. "It was love at first sight. So their marriage was technically a political one, but neither of them objected in the slightest. I was one of the bridesmaids."

"I remember that one," Cadance chimed in. "You did a wonderful job as bridesmaid."

Chrysalis blushed. "Thank you."

Luna considered. "Here's another one I remember. It was an Animorphs fused Loop where Velvet was actually an Andalite. When her ship crashed here, she met your father, fell in love and permanently morphed into a pony to stay with him. Then the two worked out a sort of "notice-me-not" shield that hid our star system from any hostile alien races, including the Yeerks, preventing them from ever invading. Years later, when Discord was freed, she tried to stop him from attacking Twilight, and he detected that she wasn't a normal pony. Whatever he did then, it accidentally jumpstarted her morphing ability so she could turn back into her original form. Then she terrified him into behaving."

Discord shuddered at that. "Sounds like her. I'm just glad I wasn't Awake \_that\_ time."

Raising an eyebrow at this, Luna continued. "After that, she finally admitted to my sister and I where she'd really come from, and about the shield she and Night Light had created."

A voice spoke up. "There was that one time where I was a ninja. I noticed Twilight and Shining were both acting very strange, so being the concerned mother that I was, I decided to follow them to wherever they were headed."

The entire bar fell silent. One by one, the patrons let their gazes climb upward.

"Hi hon." Hanging from the ceiling and dressed in a skintight suit, Twilight Velvet waved at her daughter. "Time loop, huh?"

"...yep."

"I guess we both have our secrets." She paused a moment, then pointed at Nyx. "Did that black filly call you \_mom\_ earlier?"

"I'm not drunk enough to answer that yet."

The yellow pegasus next to Nyx was eternally grateful that she didn't question his appearance. \_Every time\_ he ran into Twilight Velvet, she terrified him with the long, painful talks about his relationship with Nyx.

Sensing tension, Lyra spoke up. "There was this one time she turned out to be the Princesses. All of them."

Rainbow looked skeptical. "Even Twilight?"

Lyra nodded gravely. "Especially Twilight."

Velvet blinked. "I must have been quite a busy mare then."

"You were," Gilda added. "I remember that one too. I was one of the royal advisers." Seeing a few odd looks at her, she shrugged. "It was a living. Besides, how often do you get hired to tell your employer when she's being a pain?"

"I've hired your non-Awake self for exactly that reason a few times,"

Celestia told her.

Gilda looked rather smug at that.

Discord raised a claw. "I woke up when I was being released the second time, and my Loop memories told me about how I'd met Velvet before." He looked nervously at the Ninja-Velvet still hanging above her daughter. "After I corrupted all six of you, I went around doing it to other ponies, and Velvet was one of them. But once she was... ah-heh-heh... changed, she took one look at me and roundhouse-kicked me in the face. Repeatedly. No matter where I was or what I was doing. I finally turned everypony back to normal and myself back to stone just to get away from her. And now you know why I'm glad I wasn't Awake for her Andalite loop."

Celestia leaned over and patted Discord on the back. "Sometimes, when trying to take Twilight as my student, I'm met with serious oppositionâ€¦ actually, it happened this Loop too, but we worked things out in the end. I had no idea she was like that though," she added, gesturing to the ceiling.

"That was the idea!" Velvet called down.

Nyx looked to the stallion next to her, still close to bolting. "Lemon here sees and deals with so much violence on a daily basis but mention Twilight Velvet-" Her magic grabbed the colt, dragging him back. "He gets so scared of seeing his fiancée's grandma."

Twilight Velvet perked up on the "fiancée", and looked at Lemon, who whimpered loudly.

"Now son," Fluttershy said with a smile, "you knew she was going to have to know eventually."

"Oh, I..." Velvet dropped down from the ceiling. "I take it you're my daughter-in-law to be?"

"Fluttershy, yes." The yellow pegasus bumped hooves with the catsuit wearing unicorn. "I'm Lemon's adopted mother. He was so adorable as a baby, do you know?"

"Little mother, please-"

"Oh they always are!" Twilight Velvet grinned broadly, a sly twinkle in her eye. "Do you have pictures?"

"Holo-recordings, even!" Fluttershy produced what seemed like a brass pocketwatch. "Although he wasn't a pony back then, it's a quirk of this universe-"

"Little mother!"

"Are we still talking about the weirdest thing Twilight Velvet's done?" Sweetie Belle asked. "Because I think this right here might cap it."

"Now here he is making snow-wolves with his pack. I tried to get him to wear warm clothes, well any clothes, but he wouldn't listen!"



Leman Russ, noble primarch and part-time pegasus, buried his face behind his feathers.

As the others were preoccupied with their own conversations, almost nobody saw Twilight leave the room. With one exception, who quickly followed her into the hall.

"Um, Twilight?"

Twilight looked behind her. "Yes, Scootaloo?"

The orange filly looked down. "I had one more version of your mom - not something too weird, but I still thought you should know about it."

Twilight smiled. "Go ahead."

"Well, it was one of those Canterlot High variants. My mom - my biological mom, that is - was a real jerk that Loop. She neglected me for the first few years of my life, then dumped me entirely and ran off on her own. If our neighbors hadn't heard me crying, I don't know what would have happened to me."

Twilight hugged her. "I'm sorry to hear that."

Scootaloo hugged her back. "It's not your fault, Twilight. But thank you." Clearing her throat, she continued. "Anyway, our neighbors heard me, took me home and helped me when I needed it most. They called the cops to report my mom, who was caught and arrested. My new family - County Services let them take me in as a foster kid, and after the courts stripped bio-mom of her parental rights, they petitioned to adopt me, and got the go-ahead the year after." She looked up at Twilight. "My new family already had an older daughter. It was Rainbow Dash. So we got to be sisters again that Loop."

Twilight smiled. "So you got a happy ending then. Butâ€¦ what does this have to do with my mom?"

"She was the assistant director of the county's Department of Social Services. She's the one who gave the approval for them to adopt me."

Twilight blinked. "That'sâ€¦" Then, she smiled and pulled the younger Looper into another hug. "Thank you, Scootaloo. I needed that."

"You're welcome," the little filly told her.

\* \* \*

><p>162.29 (Crossoverpairinglover)<p>

\*\*MLP/Phineas & Ferb\*\*

Yawning early in the morning, a long night celebrating with Pinkie Pie for her ###^4th loop party, Fluttershy noted her mailbox was rather full.

Idly noting the contents, she began the time honored tradition of

sorting mail in a long stream of regular words.

"Ad, Ad, Ad, Bill, Bill, Ad, Ad, Bill, Bill, Court Summons for Angel, Restraining Order for Angel, Business Card for Angel..." she stopped her idle sorting daze when she noted the business card that had found its way into her mailbox.

"Are you an evil genius with limited physical ability? Are you constantly being made a fool of? Want to achieve great things? Join the Legion of Doom. Call 1-800-Evil-Doom, ask for Hienz," Fluttershy read off the card, before turning the card over and noting the large skull shaped Headquarters of said group, with discreet letters on the bottom of the card saying 'Note, design of evil lair design not final'.

Covertly looking around for anyone who might have been watching, Fluttershy swallowed the card before Angel Bunny could get it.

\* \* \*

><p>162.30 <strong>(Crossoverpairinglover)<strong>

\*\*MLP/Star Wars\*\*

"Elation. I feared that my exile to this maker-forsaken place filled with happiness and joy would cause me to loose my sense for artistic and precise murder. It is with great joy I have come across an organic with such, vision."

Twilight normally had nothing against trans-loop bonds of friendship, family and love. However, in this case...

"Query. Angel Bunny, have you ever considered the most efficient way to destabilize quadruped governments via efficient and discreet assassination?"

She could not, in good conscience, allow a friendship of mutual murderous intent to form between Angel Bunny and HK-47.

\* \* \*

><p>162.31 (fractalman)<p>

Applejack snorted in satisfaction as she watched the Flim-Flam brothers high-tail it out of Ponyville before they could scam the residents. But then..."Granny, where did you get that?"

"Eh? Oh, a nice pony named Silver Shill sold this here tonic to me." said Granny, before taking a drink.

"Granny, that's nothing but apples and beet leaves. It doesn't really-"

Granny Smith took off in a blur.

Applejack blinked. "Work. What the..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight, I need your help. Granny's runnin' around at high

speed, and ahm worried she'll break somethin."<p>

"Sure thing, Applejack."

\* \* \*

><p>"HEY! LEMME GO!"<p>

"Now just a minute, Granny! Ya gotta calm down before ya hurt yerself. "

"Say, Applejack, when did she get so fast, anyways?"

"She drank some of that no-good tonic and then took off like the Roadrunner."

"Hmm...do you still have some of it around? It obviously works this loop, or Granny wouldn't be running that quickly."

"Well ah...huh, that's a good point..."

"WILL YOU TWO VARMITTS LET ME DOWN?"

\* \* \*

><p>"So apparently, the tonic doesn't actually work, except in the case of Granny Smith."<p>

"Any idea why that might be, Twilight?"

"Not sure. Maybe if I get a good scan of her magic I can figure it out. "

\* \* \*

><p>"LEMME OUT OF THIS DARNED CONTRAPTION RIGHT NOW!"<p>

"Sorry, Granny, but this is as much for yer own safety as it is for Twilight's curiosity."

"AHAH! Chaos magic! When Discord messed around with the ponies in Ponyville, he made Granny's legs move extremely quickly! The elements of harmony must've left some of that behind, and it became active when Granny drank the tonic!"

"That...explains a lot, actually. Ah did wonder why Granny never seemed to suffer from overexerting herself in baseline..."

"This calls for SCIENCE!" yelled Twilight with a big grin on her face.

\* \* \*

><p>162.32 (fractalman)<p>

"Twilight?"

"Rarity, if you're asking why we're ants in Shining's ant farm, it's probably because I've been obsessed with becoming an aunt lately."  
"

"..."

"HI UNAWAKE ME!" yelled Fluttershy.

"At least Fluttershy's taking it well. I'm surprised she's going with that sort of reveal, though."

\* \* \*

><p><p>

\*\*Author's Note:\*\*

162.1: Space mail! Pony to orbit in one quip!

162.2: That moment you have to add a lot more rules all of a sudden.

162.5: Metanostalgia.

162.6: And sometimes you just want to mess with someone.

162.7: She's persistent, at least.

162.10: Now that's frankly confusing.

162.13: He's innocent, he tells you. Incidentally, I assume the term is "winged sheepicorn".

162.15: I am not yet done mit trying the subtle!

162.16: Yeah, that was a bit of a surprise for everyone.

162.18: Sometimes there's... not good things. Fortunately, there's friends.

162.24: Protective not-relatives. Worse if anything than the other kind.

162 25 I am already hating this one

162.26: Some things you need to apologize for. No matter how long it's been.

162.27: SNIP NOT FOUND

## 170. Chapter 170

163.1

"Okay, so explain where you were going with this," Twilight invited.

"Sorry, Twi, can't quite hear you," Rainbow Dash apologized. "So, anyway, the idea was - well, first I needed the sand. Really good, high-quality sand. The kind of sand you get on a beach which has never known anything more sophisticated than a stick, run through five layers of filtering so it's nothing but pure silicon dioxide."

She coughed. "I had to get Maud to help with that bit."

"I can imagine that would help," Twilight said, looking around at all the bits of shattered amorphous silicon dioxide.

"Still can't hear you! Anyway, then I got Spike to help - he's Awake, as I'm sure you're aware what with being a brainy pony and all - and he helped me get the forging temperature up. Up so high that most of my tools were melting, and I think that actually helped a bit - you know, additives." Twilight raised a hoof, but Dash kept going. "After that, I fitted it into the mold which it had taken your brother \_and\_ Celestia to help build - you know, to handle the high heat and stuff."

"At this point I just want you to skip to the end," Twilight requested.

Not hearing her, Dash kept going. "Then I had Luna do the calculations on the rifling grooves, and cut them with a shallow pattern. Once that was done, I was able to fit the striking mechanism - it had to use some neat stuff Rarity discovered when trying to make \_"

"Okay!" Twilight shouted. "Just tell me what happened, please, not your project notes!"

Dash looked Twilight in the eye. "It's simple! I can now conclude, experimentally, that a glass cannon \_can\_ fire a shot! But that you really need to watch how much propellant you use."

Twilight just sighed. "What next?" she asked rhetorically. "Are you going to build a mighty glacier?"

Dash looked shifty. "...hold on a moment, I need to have a chat with Flutters. Later!"

\* \* \*

><p>163.2 (Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight and her friends sipped their drinks, watching the aerial display of hotheadedness from two competitive ponies; some ponies were in the Rainbow Dash corner, Scootaloo in particular cheering her heart out, while Lyra supported her fellow musician with typical seapony enthusiasm, although without any gunfire or explosions.

After Twilight told Nyx of Vinyl's latest attempt at using her sonic powers, what had started out as a debate between which style of flying was more efficient had broken out into a serious debate between the alicorn of speed and the wub queen.

So, like any mature people, they took to have a contest of sorts to see which one was better. Rainbow Dash had won the department for speed while losing to Vinyl for better control. The two went back and forth between winning and losing contests with Ivory Scroll telling them to \_end\_ the birching thing.

Which led to this game of Tag with a twist.

"Come back, ya slowpoke!" Dash shouted, throwing more balloons filled with striped paints. The speeding unicorn promptly pulled up, allowing Rarity to be hit again; the fashionista shrieked as Vinyl's plaid paint filled balloons left her hideous.

With a quick change of tone in Vinyl's wub hooves, she paused mid flight. Throwing several balloons at her, Dash flew past her and into the Golden Oaks. Unfortunately for everyone involved, Dash was in the midst of a sonic rainboom, which dragged the DJ into the library too. With a mighty blast of music, screaming and splashes, the streets and ponies were covered with striped, plaid, or a mixture of both paints, leaving many screaming about the horror. Oddly enough, the Flower Trio were perfectly fine with this and were rolling their eyes at everypony else for being drama queens.

Twilight's eye twitched as the door opened on her ruined library to reveal two technicoloured mares walking out, each with a hoof on the other's withers, laughing with each other.

After that, everypony learned that Twilight was slower than a galloping Rainbow Dash or a wubbing Vinyl Scratch.

\* \* \*

><p>163.3 (Evilhumour)<p>

Rainbow Dash: looper; pony. Searching for a way to go even faster than all other pegasi. Then an accidental crash with a wall eyed mare alters their body chemistry. And now when Rainbow Dash grows peckish or hungry, an amusing metamorphosis occurs. The creature is driven by a desire to eat all muffins and is pursued by her friends to get videotapes of this.\_

"Girls, please stop laughing at me and leave us alone!"

The creature is wanted for winning an eating competition that she didn't want to enter. Rainbow Dash wants the world to believe she's dead, and she will let the world think that she is dead, until she can find a way to control the adorable klutz that dwells within her.\_

**\*\*The Incredible Derpy\*\*!**

\* \* \*

><p>163.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

Derpy Hooves, a grey pegasus with googly eyes, snowboarded by on Cera, an orangey-tan triceratops. Hiccup, a thin Nordic human, paused and turned to Wrex, an alien super-turtle mercenary.

"...Is it weird that the only thing I want to do right now is critique their technique?"

\* \* \*

><p>163.5 (DrTempo- Fused Loop with RWBY)<p>

'Another Loop, another one of those opening exams,' Jaune thought as he was once again launched into the forest. He had never liked that,

but by now...

As he landed, he saw the Replacement for Pyrrha land gracefully. It helped that she could fly.

"Hey, Sunset. Enjoy your flight?" Jaune had heard some stories about this Equestrian Looper, who had experienced a very long series of Fused Loops before she had returned to her home Loop.

As he got up, Sunset chuckled a little. "Once I managed to fly under my own power. How in the heck you handle it every Loop...yeesh. So, what first?"

GROWL.

"Those guys." Jaune pointed behind Sunset, as a few Grimm had snuck behind the duo. Sunset nodded, and in a flash, the Grimm fell down, slain by Sunset's Keyblade. He had to admit, that level of speed was pretty good.

More Grimm showed up, and Sunset dispelled her Keyblade, drawing the weapon her Unawake self had: a hooksword with a gun in the hilt. Oddly, it did look like a giant key. Sunset cracked her knuckles. "Your turn, Jaune. Let's see what you got!"

Jaune removed a green hat from his Pocket and put it on.

"HAH!" He launched a flurry of attacks with his sword and shield, taking down the hordes of Grimm that had shown up.

Sunset clapped. "Hyrule Warriors Loop?"

Jaune nodded. "Yep. A perfect place to train my skills. Shall we?"

Sunset smirked. "Let's!"

The two charged into battle, ready for a fight!

\* \* \*

><p>163.6 (Crisis)<p>

"Hey Twilight!" Vinyl Scratch called out, waving her forehoof in one of the subtle visual signals for 'I'm Awake, are you?' the Equestrian loopers occasionally used.

Twilight blinked in surprise before waving the unicorn mare over with the appropriate countersign. It was a bit odd to see Vinyl this early in the Loop. After all, she hadn't even gotten the order to oversee the Summer Sun celebration yet.

"Hey Vinyl, what's up?" Twilight thought of reasons why Vinyl would make an effort to come see her, and came to an obvious conclusion. "Was there something you wanted to try this Loop?"

"Oh, is there ever," Vinyl grinned widely. "Tell me Twilight, how'd you like to be a rap star?"

"A..." Twilight blinked as that registered. "I can't say I've ever

thought about that. I mean, we sing all the time, but full-blown music star? Can't say I've ever had the time... Or the coordination outside a heartsong for that matter."

"I can help with that if you don't mind some subconscious subharmonics," Vinyl waved off the concern and pulled out a manila folder thick with loose sheet music. "Anyway, take a look at these songs I wrote for you and tell me what you think."

Raising a curious eyebrow, Twilight accepted the folder with her magic, opened it, and started reading the first page. "I like big plots and I cannot lie... yeah, no, not happening." Twilight stopped reading and turned to walk away, only to find a pleading DJ in her face.

"Aw, come on!" Vinyl wheedled. "Read just a couple more lines before you call it a wash!"

Twilight debated the merits of just teleporting away versus the annoyance of Vinyl hounding her about this for who-knew-how-long, and decided to humor her for a moment longer.

"...my bibliophilia I can't deny. When you see a new book thick around the spine with those crisp fresh pages smelling fine... Okay, I take it back, this is rather clever."

"So you'll do it?" Vinyl grinned.

"I'm thinking..." Twilight stalled while looking through some of the other rap songs Vinyl had put together for her to apparently sing. "You're really playing up the 'nerd' angle with these."

"What can I say? I've been planning this for a bit. You should see what I wrote up for the others."

Twilight paused and looked up at the grinning DJ curiously. "Even Applejack? Because I'm having a hard time imagining her as a rapper."

"Even if I bribe her with pictures and recordings of Twilight the rap star?"

"That might do it. Of course, now I feel kind of shorted. What do I get out of this?"

"Oh, as the first you automatically get rights to pictures and recordings of the others doing this," Vinyl grinned. "Plus if you want in on making it happen any time we're both Awake, I'll be happy to include you."

"Better," Twilight went back to looking through the songs Vinyl had written for her. "Okay, I think I'm okay with doing this, so..."

Twilight paused on one particular song and slowly raised her head back up to stare Vinyl straight in her sunglasses.

"'Twilight and Nerdy'? Really?"

\* \* \*



><p>163.7 (fractalman)(inspired by Conicer's " family generosity and demonology")<p>

Lemon Rush yawned, stretched, glanced down at his hooves, and got out of bed. 'Ah, another Equestrian loop. I hope Fluttershy is Awake,' he thought.

Then the loop memories kicked in. "Why am I a member of the pony Inquisition?" He paused as he considered the memories in detail. "Huh. I've never really thought of Equestria that way before, but it makes sense."

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra's horn glowed a sickly, bubbling green and purple, while eyes sprouted across her body and flames licked away at the floor.<p>

"The cookies are ready, Lyr- Oh, I see you're busy. Should I come back later?"

"THANKS, SWEETIE DROPS. JUST LEAVE 'EM ON THE TABLE."

Claws sprouted out of Lyra's hooves, while tentacles grew from her back.

\* \* \*

><p>"EEEEK!" yelled Roseluck as Lyra - or at least, something that vaguely resembled her - made its way to Sugarcube Corner. "Call the Inquisition! Call the Inquisition!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Lemon raised an eyebrow as he squashed his grin and giggle. "So, is it trying to destroy our plane of existence?"<p>

"No..." said Roseluck, while the Lyra-thing popped a cupcake into its mouth.

"Is it trying to bring about eternal night or otherwise destroy our planet?"

"No..."

"Is it or has it been trying to harm anypony?"

"No, but-"

"Then there's nothing to see here, citizen! Move along!" finished Lemon with a grin.

"But...but...but..." protested Roseluck, while the Lyra-thing wandered away, burbling about changing mazes.

Lemon's grin widened. "Our planet's already a daemon world. Haven't you noticed that the seasons and weather change according to the whims of ponies, and that the sun and moon move to the whims of a pair of particularly powerful ponies? I can assure you, that's not

normal."

Roseluck's eyes widened. "Oh...I...I see..."

Lemon chuckled as he flew off to Fluttershy's house to check on the Little Mother before heading back to Canterlot. According to his loop memories, Lyra would be back to normal within a day or two - maybe a week, tops, and none the worse for wear. All in all, it promised to be a hilarious Loop -

"HEY! GET BACK HERE! IT DESTROYED ONE OF MY FLOWERS!" yelled Roseluck at Lemon's retreating form.

Yep, definitely hilarious.

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, hi Lemon, I didn't expect you," said Fluttershy.<p>

Lemon grinned. "NOPONY EXPECTS THE CANTERLOT INQUISITION!"

Fluttershy sighed and gave Lemon the stinkeye.

\* \* \*

><p>163.8 (Darkmage97)<p>

"Twilight?"

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Why are we made of meat?"

Twilight turned to stare incredulously at Rarity.

"Rarity, we were always made of meat."

Rarity frowned, "No darling, we're usually made of horse, but this time we're made of meat."

Twilight cocked her head to one side.

"Rarity, horses are always made of meat."

"That simply isn't true, darling. Horses are made of horse and meat is made of meat."

"Rarity, horses are still made of meat."

She stomped the ground, "No, we're not. Griffins are made of griffin, birds are made of bird, dragons are made of dragon, cows are made of cow, bears are made of bear, but we're horses that aren't made of horse. Instead, we're made of meat."

Twilight stared at Rarity, "Rarity are you..." Then her in-Loop memories hit her like a load of bricks.

"Rarity?"

"Yes, Twilight?"

"Why are we made of meat?"

\* \* \*

<p>163.9 (ORBSyndicate)<p>

Gravity Falls: Friendship is Magic 2 - Tourist Trapped

Stan looked at his options.

He needed the perfect candidateâ€|

The pink one was far too eager. She would do anything, no matter how absurd, with a smile on her face and a stupid grin. That wasn't what he wantedâ€|

The white one wasn't anywhere near observant enough. She'd probably do it after a lot of annoying whining and then completely miss the point. Unless she was more than she appeared, which was always a possibility.

The orange one wasn't anywhere near curious enough. She had a natural talent for conducting tours though.

The yellow one was either way too quiet, way too shy, or way too into animals. She hadn't been around long enough for him to truly figure her out.

That left the purple and rainbow onesâ€|

"Eenyâ€| Meenieâ€| Mineyâ€| You," he said, pointing at Twilight. He shoved a hammer, nails, and MYSTERY SHACK! advertisement signs into her hand. "Go into the forest and hang these signs up in the spooky part of the forest." Stan grinned. "We'll attract lost hikers! Make a fortune!"

Twilight sighed. He was sending her into the creepy part of the woods. Great. "You do realize weird things are in those woods right? Something is definitely off. Just today my mosquito bites spelled out beware."

Stan glared at her. "That says beware." Twilight, from years of experience, noticed the I've-said-that-so-many-times-I'm-about-to-puke face on Stan. "And don't be silly. All of those stories are just a bunch of hillbilly legends."

Twilight blinked. Stan was a good liar. If she hadn't just seen a fairy in the forest yesterday, she would have believed him. He really was going to be able to keep secrets from them.

Interesting.

She shrugged, took the hammer, nails, and signs, and marched to the creepy part of the forest.

Stan waved. "Remember to nail them into every tree you conceivably see!"

Twilight raised an eyebrow. A hint? Perhaps. She smiled. This was very interesting.

[br]

Pinkie yelled. "I JUST THOUGHT OF SOMETHING!"

"What, dear?" Rarity said.

"You're married -" As soon as the words left her mouth Stan spat out his Pitt Cola and entered a coughing fit.

Rarity squinted. "I'm an adult most of the time, Stan. Really."

Stan nodded. "I'mâ€¦ going to go sit downâ€¦ I don't need to hear this conversationâ€¦"

Pinkie continued. "Anyway, you're married, I'm the goddess of parties, Fluttershy's married to the Emperor a lot of the time  
\_"

"Um, that's not, um, actually a big thing." Fluttershy said.

"And everybody loves Rainbow and Twilight. But you know what? \_Applejack's never really even had a date or a relationship of any kind! \_Or at least not much of one. She usually just doesn't get involved."

Applejack squinted. "And that's a problem why?"

"Don't you see? You need to FEEL the romance! Your Looping life has been broken without it! You need to experience companionship!"

"Thanks, but I'll pass."

"Great! Let's get started today."

"What?" Applejack said, before Pinkie grabbed her and pulled her away.

"We're going to find you a date!"

"Pinkie put me down this instant -"

Fluttershy, Rarity, and Rainbow Dash simply stared in silence.

"Thatâ€¦" Rainbow Dash muttered. "Can't end well. Yeah. I'm out. I'm going to go see what Twilight's up to."

And with that Rainbow Dash produced wings and flew off.

Rarity facepalmed. "DEAR! You can't just go giving yourself wing- and she's gone."

Fluttershy smiled. "Maybe things will be quiet now."

"You two! Get down here! I need someone to rip off some customers!"

Stan yelled.

Fluttershy sighed.

[br]

BAP! BAP! BAP!

Twilight had quickly discovered that nailing signs into trees was hard work. She was sweating, tired, and had yet to find anything even remotely interesting. She was beginning to wonder if Stan wasn't just messing with her because he could. The old man obviously had a fondness for pranks, seeing as he'd already spooked Fluttershy three times with that fish-man mask of his.

She held up the last sign, ready to pound it into the tree. She lifted the hammer to drive the nail into the wood.

She was not expecting a metallic CLANG to resound through her body. She dropped the tools instantly and investigated the tree. There was a metallic panel which she pried off, revealing a hidden lever. She cautiously pressed the lever, and heard a loud clunking sound behind her. She turned to see a hole in the ground, in which was nestled a book.

It appeared to be a really old red leather-bound journal with an eyeglass attached to it. On the front was a big golden symbol of a six-fingered hand with a large "3" inked on it.

Twilight picked up the Journal, blowing the years of dust off it. The first page had the words "Property of" with the lower half of the page ripped out. The second was dated June 18:

\_It's hard to believe it's been six years since I began researching the strange and wond'rous secrets of Gravity Falls, Oregon. In all my travels, never have I observed so many curious things! Gravity Falls is indeed a geographical oddity.\_

Twilight flipped through the journal's pages. The book was filled with strange and fantastical drawings of things such as gnomes, ghosts, a strange thing known as a leprecorn, and strange triangles with eyes littered throughout the journal. She found that the second half of the book was blank, and that there was a hastily scribbled message on the last pages:

\_Unfortunately, my suspicions have been confirmed, I'm being watched. I must hide this book before He finds it. Rememberâ€"in Gravity Falls there is no one you can trust.\_

\_TRUST NO ONE!\_

Twilight blinked. She had figured this was going to be a silly, comical Loop that she'd just have to live through while being forced to suffer through Stan's sense of humor.

But this book had many things in it that wouldn't be in a normal happy Loopâ€" like that one page with lots of blood stains.

It looked as if the author of the journal might have been insaneâ€"

"Hey! Whatcha looking at?"

Twilight yelped in surprise. She dropped the book to see Rainbow Dash hovering in front of her. "Rainbow!" she gasped, shaking her head. "Don't do that! Ser- \_Do you have wings right now?"\_

"Um, yeah? Why? It's not like anyone can see me out here -"

"\_That's not the point!\_ We are \_normal\_ humans without wings!"

"Fineâ€|" Rainbow Dash muttered, her wings vanishing. "Ya know, I probably could just fly without the wings -"

Twilight's glare indicated that that wasn't acceptable either.

"You're no fun." Rainbow Dash leaned in closer. "Now, \_what are you looking at?"\_

"It appears to be a strange book filled with all sorts of secretsâ€|"

"Coolâ€|" Rainbow said, joining Twilight as they pored over the amazing secrets of the journalâ€|

[br]

As Twilight and Rainbow Dash walked back to the Shack, they heard Stan yelling at the top of his lungs. "GET THE PINK ONE AWAY FROM MY MERCHANDISE!"

Twilight sighed, rushing into the Mystery Shack. They found Pinkie jumping up and down with excessive energy. "OHBOYOHBOYOHBOYOHBOYOHBOYOHBOY!" She grabbed Applejack by the face. "I still can't be\_lieve \_that we got you a date this quickly!"

Applejack sighed. "Neither can I. I was tryin' to sabotage the whole thingâ€|"

"YOU MUST BE DESTINED FOR SUMMER ROMANCE!"

"Pinkie, are ya sure you're all right? This isn't like you -"

"I'M LIKE EVERYTHING!" Pinkie grinned.

The doorbell rang.

"Thatmustbehim!"

Applejack moaned. "No. Please noâ€|"

"Come on, everyone, let's meet AJ's new boyfriend!"

"I'm tellin' ya, this is an absolutely horrid idea and he's not my boyfriend!"

"That's just what you thinkâ€|" Pinkie said, grinning. She flung the

door of the Shack open. "HI THERE!"

At the door was a tall boy wearing a dark black hood. His skin was pale, his eyes were distant, and he had what appeared to be blood on his face. "Sup," he said.

Pinkie pushed Applejack forward. Applejack put on a fake smile. "Uhâ€¦ hi there."

Rainbow Dash poked her head forwards. "What's your name?"

"Uhâ€¦ NORMAL! \_man!\_"

Stan facepalmed. "Every timeâ€¦"

Pinkie shook her head. "Silly, your name is Norman! Come on!"

Twilight blinked. "Are you bleeding, Norman?"

"Uhâ€¦ it'sâ€¦ jam," "Normal Man" responded.

Stan shook his head. "That's it. I'm out. Again."

Pinkie shoved Applejack closer to "Norman." "Now go have fun, you two!"

Applejack looked at everyone with a pleading look as Norman walked off with her.

Pinkie grinned. "This is great!"

Rarity, Fluttershy, and Twilight all exchanged glances. "Uhâ€¦ yeah, no."

Rainbow Dash, however, had a completely different reaction -

"OH MY GOSH! He's a zombie! LIKE THE BOOK SAID!" She grabbed Twilight by the face. "Let's go save her!"

"Now, Rainbowâ€¦" Twilight said. "I'm sure he's not a zombie. I'd be able to sense the undead. And while there is magic about him, that is probably just because of all sorts of weird magic in the area \_"

Rainbow Dash grabbed the journal and opened it up to the page on the Undead. She read aloud. "Known for their pale skin and bad attitudes, these creatures are often mistaken for teenagers. Beware Gravity Falls' nefarious zombies!"

"DUN DUN DUUUUUN," Pinkie added, grinning.

Twilight shook her head. "As I said, I would detect the undead."

"Yeah!" Pinkie said, bouncing. "And plus, wouldn't it be AWESOME to have a ZOMBIE FOR A BOYFRIEND?"

Rarity blinked. "Darling, are you sure you're okay? You're being moreâ€¦ extravagant than usual."

"This is nothing. Wait till you see me towards the end of the summer!"

"What?"

"I'm being mysteriousâ€|" Pinkie said as she hopped out of the room backwards.

Rainbow Dash sighed. "Come on, guys! We need to form a rescue team!"

"Uhâ€| no," Twilight said. "He's not a zombie. No need to go crazy, Rainbow. Unless you have proof -"

"Fluttershy!" Rainbow Dash said, pointing. "You and me are going to spy on Applejack and Norman all day!"

"Umâ€| why?"

"For the admirable goals of proof and blackmail!"

"Umâ€| okay."

Rarity and Twilight rolled their eyes. "You're on your own," was the general consensus.

Rainbow Dash cracked her knuckles. "Let's do this."

Fluttershy sighed, wondering once again why she had let herself be dragged into this.

[br]

Soos, handyman of the mystery shack and the man in the question mark shirt, was screwing in a lightbulb in the attic. Red light streamed through the triangular stained-glass window. Soos shuddered. He always felt like that thing was watching him.

He briefly looked around, wondering if there was someone to talk to. There wasn't. He sighed. Yet another lonely day working in the Shack. The sextuplets were nice, but all of them were doing things not-attic-related.

He might be here all day screwing in lightbulbs.

Was this a metaphor for life? An eternal screwing of lightbulbs, doomed to continue until the end of time?

Was the eye in the window reminiscent of a higher power observing his every move, watching his lightbulb screwing, waiting for the day he messed up?

Was there a point to being this philosophical?

Soos shook his head. His wisdom was both a blessing and a curse. Maybe he should get some comfort foodâ€|

"SOOS!" the voice of Stan yelled from the floor below. "THE PORTABLE TOILETS ARE CLOGGED! AGAIN! AGAIN! AGAIN! AGAIN! AGAIN!"



AGAIN! - "

After innumerable "again"s, Stan finally ran out of breath. "Justâ€¦ just fix them," he said, hoarse.

Soos saluted to Stan, even though they were on completely different floors. "Duty calls, lightbulb."

[br]

"Okay, Fluttershy, what zombie-like things have we seen Norman do so far?"

"Uhâ€¦ stumble around as if he had no control over his bodyâ€¦"

"Goodâ€¦"

"Fall into an open graveâ€¦"

"Goodâ€¦"

"And break a window in the diner."

"Good. I think we've got enough."

"I still think Norman's perfectly normal."

Rainbow Dash groaned. "CAN'T YOU SEE? Something's off about him!"

"But he doesn't smell like any sort of death. I should know."

Rainbow Dash didn't bother asking how she would know. "Butâ€¦ You know what, I'm just bringing this evidence to Applejack."

"Umâ€¦ she's not the one who's in control of whether she sees Norman or not."

Rainbow Dash blinked, realizing.

She had to convince Pinkie.

"Great." She grabbed the camera from Fluttershy, and rubbed her hands together. "Let's go to Pinkie -"

"Why would you need to go to me?" Pinkie said, holding up a camera.

"AUGH!" Fluttershy screamed in surprise.

Rainbow Dash was not amused. "Why do you have a camera?"

"They're just so cute together!" Pinkie said, grinning.

"You're turning into Cadence. That is not a good thing."

"Oh come on! It's fun! Hey Applejack!"

Applejack poked her head out of the bush. "Is he gone?"

"He's been gone for a couple hours."

"Good. He'sâ€¦ unnerving."

Rainbow Dash turned to Pinkie. "See? Even Applejack thinks he's off!"

"She just has cold hooves - um, feet," Pinkie responded, grinning. "Now come on, Applejack, we need to get in some kissing practice!"

"WAIT WHAT -"

"Oh not with me, silly! With a leaf blower!"

"\_WHAT?\_"

Rainbow Dash yelled after them. "NORMAN IS NOT WHAT HE SEEMS!" She held up the book. "SEE?"

"GNOMES?" Applejack yelled as she was being dragged off.

"What?" Rainbow Dash looked at the book, which was open to the gnomes page. "No! ZOMBIE!"

Applejack gave her the "seriously?" look before she was dragged out of sight.

Rainbow Dash sighed. "Greatâ€¦ We've got nothing." She groaned. "There's gotta be some sort of concrete evidence on himâ€¦"

Exactly two hours later, Rainbow Dash was still reviewing the video footage. A lot of Norman acting weird, but nothing completely indicting. There he was attempting to hold Applejack's hand before she swatted it away. There he was munching on her hat and getting a punch to the face. There was him getting the "THIS IS NOT A RELATIONSHIP" speech and just going "ger." There was him losing his hand and reattaching it. There was him with a -

Wait WHAT?

Rainbow Dash rewinded. Sure enough, Norman's hand had fallen out of its sleeve and he had quickly picked it up and reattached it. Rainbow Dash yelled. "FLUTTERSHY, WE NEED TO-"

She realized she was alone outside in the middle of the forest. Fluttershy must've left at some point.

"Great," Rainbow Dash muttered, summoning her wings back. "Guess I gotta do this myselfâ€¦" She took off into the woods, trailing rainbows.

[br]

Norman and Applejack were alone in the forest.

Applejack was resigned to spending the rest of the day with him before locking herself up in the Mystery Shack's cellar for a week.

The guy either just couldn't take a hint or had no brain.

No brainâ€|

â€|nah. He couldn't be a zombie. Nah. That was just crazy talk.

"Uh.. AJ?"

"Yes Normanâ€|" Applejack sighed.

"I've gotâ€| something to tell you before we go any further with this."

Applejack facepalmed. This guy was not up to date on social interaction. "Look Norman you don't hafta do anythin-"

"But I have toâ€| Don't freak out, okay? Keep an open mind. Be cool." Norman reached to the zipper on his jacket, unzipped it, and pulled it off.

Applejack's jaw hit the floor. Standing in front of her were five gnomes. Two acting as the legs, two acting as the body and holding the arms, and one acting as the head.

"Umâ€| so, yeah. We're gnomes. First off. Get that one out of the way," the gnome on the top said with a voice that was no longer brooding teenager, and more annoying middle aged man.

Applejack continued to stare, gaping.

"This is awkward, isn't it. Well. I'm Jeff, this is Carson, Steve, Jason, and -"

"Schmebulock," the lower left foot gnome said.

"Right Schmebulock. ANYWAY! Long story short, we have been looking for a new queen, and -"

Applejack didn't even stop to think about what she was doing. She bucked them. She had long ago figured out that a combination of a handstand and a power kick could accomplish more-or-less the same thing her pony bucking could. The gnomes went flying.

"No," she said.

"Oh, come on. I didn't even show you the ring ye-"

"I SAID EEEENOPE!" Applejack said, glaring down at Jeff.

Jeff looked up and glared. "Fine. We understand. We'll never forget you, Applejack."

"You bet you won't," Applejack said, having had enough of the whole ordeal.

"Because we're going to kidnap you."

"Wait, WHAT?"

[br]

Rainbow Dash yelled at the top of her lungs. "AJ, I'M COMING! JUST HOLD ONTO YOUR BRAINS A LITTLE WHILE LONGER!" She briefly wondered why she was taking this so seriously. Applejack would be just fine. Probably. Then again, she didn't think he was a zombie. So that could be a problem.

Rainbow Dash arrived on the scene to see Applejack standing over five gnomes, each of which were continually barfing rainbows. She blinked. "Whatâ€¦ happened here?"

"Norman was a bunch of gnomes. And they turned out to be a bunch of jerks. Oh, and they tried to kidnap me."

"What else is new," Rainbow Dash deadpanned.

Jeff stood up, shaking his fist. "You will regret this! GNOMES OF THE FOREST! ASSEMBLE!"

Rainbow Dash and Applejack watched as hundreds of gnomes poured out of the woods, running into each other. They watched as a pile of around a thousand gnomes piled into a single, giant, humanoid shape. They had become a giant gnome of gnomes. The gnome of gnomes roared in anger.

Rainbow Dash didn't bother to ponder how a being that was literally just a thousand gnomes stacked on top of each other could be roaring. She simply opened the Journal. "What's it say about gnomesâ€¦ Ah, hereâ€¦ Little men of the forestâ€¦ Weaknessesâ€¦ \_Unknown?"\_

Applejack facepalmed. "Seriously?"

Rainbow Dash grabbed Applejack and flew away just as a gnome-of-gnomes' fist tried to crush them. "NEW PLAN! FLY AWAY!"

"YOU WILL COME BACK HERE, HARPIE! YOU DO NOT MESS WITH THE GNOMES! WE ARE AN OLD AND POWERFUL RACE!"

"Yeah, wellâ€¦ uhâ€¦" Rainbow Dash had been about to say that she wasn't a harpie when she realized that that actually was pretty close to what she was right now, wings and all. 'Uhâ€¦ well, you're slow!" She took off, leaving a trail of rainbows.

"FOLLOW THE SKITTLES!" Jeff yelled.

"What are skittles?" the gnome below him said.

"It's what humans call barf trails."

[br]

"And now, folks, come look at the world's most distracting object!"

Stan had long ago replaced the old distracting object with one that looked identical but had an actual distracting enchantment. He pulled the string.

All the customers of the Mystery Shack stared at the device, unable to look away. Rarity, Fluttershy, Pinkie, and Twilight gazed deep into its swirling movements.

\_It's simply darlingâ€|\_ Rarity thought.

\_It makes me think of fluffy non-murderous bunniesâ€|\_ Fluttershy thought.

\_Books!\_ was the only word in Twilight's head, for some reason.

What Pinkie was thinking was, literally, \_zdwfk zlwk ph. \_No telling why.

The only person in the Shack not looking at the world's most distracting object was the teenage cashier, Wendy, a redhead who was busy being bored out of her skull. She studied the knots in the mismashed conglomeration of real-wood and fake-wood planks that made up the ceiling. She was so into the boredom she didn't even notice the rumbling of the ground as a giant gnome chased Rainbow Dash and Applejack back to the Shack.

"Rainbow! We can't let this thing destroy the Shack!"

"What do you suggest? Fight it?"

"Well, we are Loopers. We could do all sorts of things."

"Oh. Yeah. Right." Rainbow Dash dropped to the ground, causing Applejack to slam into the ground.

"HEY! Coulda done that a little SLOWER."

"Maybe. Didn't feel like it." The cyan human (or harpie?) turned to look at the assailant. The gnome of gnomes was running towards them.

"Any particularly interesting ideas on how to take this thing out?" Rainbow Dash asked, turning to her friend. She blinked. "Why is your face all red?"

"Pinkie's 'kissing practice' came with hazards. Like a leaf blower stuck to your face -" Applejack's eyes lit up. She reached into her subspace pocket, grinning. "Aha! I DO have one in here!"

She pulled out a leaf blower the size of a pine tree, and pointed it at the gnome of gnomes.

The gnome of gnomes stopped, and stared.

"How are you holding that?" Jeff yelled down from his place at the top of the gnome of gnomes.

"Does it matter? I'm pointin' it at y'all!"

"Riiiiight. You know what? ATTA-"

The gigantic leaf blower turned on, blasting the gnome of gnomes into its fundamental parts (a lot of gnomes) and spreading them out across

the forest. The gnomes growled and yelled before running off into the bushes.

Jeff stood up. "YOU WILL FACE THE WRATH OF THE GNOMES -"

Applejack pointed the leaf blower at him at point-blank range. "You were saying?"

"Uh. Right. Bye." He took off as fast as his little legs would carry him (which was about as fast as a one-legged cat).

Applejack and Rainbow Dash cheered, rushing into a hug and laughing.

"That. Was. AWESOME!" Rainbow Dash yelled, grinning. She flipped open the Journal to the gnomes page, taking a pen out of her Pocket. "Weaknesses: LEAF BLOWERS! WOOT! This deserves a party!"

Another excited hug followed, before the two walked back into the Shack.

Stan watched them, lightly sipping his Pitt Cola.

So they escaped the awkward sibling hug. That wasn't too unusual. As far as he knew, anyway.

He smiled. They were nice girls. As they walked into the Shack, he gave them a smile. "You know what? I overstocked on inventory and I need to clear some stuff out. You six can get something from the gift shop. On the house."

Twilight blinked. "You mean, free? Without paying?"

"Sure. Why not. Now hurry, before I change my mind."

Rainbow Dash instantly grabbed a rainbow baseball cap with a lightning bolt on it. "This is mine." She grinned.

Twilight took a triangle-shaped pendant with an eye in it, because it looked interesting. Applejack took a crossbow. Rarity took one look at the gift shop and decided the only thing she even remotely liked was a shiny pen.

Pinkie Pie yelled, "GRAPPLING HOOK!" She grinned, holding the device for all to see.

Stan laughed his head off. "Sure, sweetie, you can have the Grappling Hook. Go climb some dangerous cliffs for Grunkle Stan."

"YAY!" Pinkie said, running out of the Shack.

Wendy and Soos walked up to Stan. "Uhâ€¦ Mister Pines?" Soos said, twiddling his thumbs. "We were wonderin' if we could, uhâ€¦"

Wendy took over. "We'd like something from the gift shop, too."

"I pay you two to do work. I don't pay them." Stan grinned. "I'm amazing!"

Wendy sighed. "Fine," she said, walking back to the cash

register.

Soos saluted, walking back to the lightbulbs.

Stan smiled. This day had gone well. So far so good.

Of course, he knew that eventually the new people and locations in town would affect the Loop somehowâ€|

He would have to keep going.

\* \* \*

><p>163.10 (Vinylshadow & Evilhumour)<p>

Twilight, Luna and Fluttershy met in front of the Mirror to Canterlot High, each bearing a simple message from Sunset Shimmer.

\_Nyx and Leman want to talk - please come to the Mirror World.  
-SS\_

Sharing worried looks, the trio entered the Mirror and found themselves in the familiar courtyard in front of the high school.

"Glad you could make it," a voice called out to them. As one, the trio turned to see Sunset Shimmer walking towards them.

"Sunset, what's going on?" Twilight asked, her mind running a mile a minute with possibilities as to why they had been called.

The traveling Looper shrugged. "They wouldn't tell me anything concrete. They just asked me to send messages to you and left."

"Left? Where -" Fluttershy began, but was cut off by a gruff voice.

"Glad to see you could make it," said someone unoriginal.

The four Equestrians turned to see two people walking towards them, their hands laced together.

On the left was a petite perky goth girl whose face lit up upon seeing Twilight. Standing next to her was a very tall male teenager, nearly a head taller than the small female. His whole appearance screamed dangerous, with his biker jacket, broad shoulders, messy blond hair and a very hard face, which softened slightly when he laid eyes on the pink-haired woman who had raised him.

He offered a nod to Fluttershy. "Little Mother, may I offer my sincerest apologies for my rude behavior towards you?"

Fluttershy swallowed the lump in her throat and nodded. "I'll always forgive youâ€| you know that. You're my son. Even when you push me away, I will always love you." She stepped towards him, a hopeful expression on her face. Leman took a step away from Nyx and opened his arms; Fluttershy didn't need another invitation, and hugged him tightly.

While the two spoke quietly to each other, Nyx approached Twilight and Luna shyly. "I'm sorry I pushed both of you away. I -"

She staggered back as both Luna and Twilight wrapped their arms around her.

"You don't have to say anything, Nyx," Luna whispered into her hair, stroking her younger sister's back.

"We're your family," Twilight said, voice thick with emotion.

The entire group was quiet for a few minutes before Twilight gently pulled away from Nyx and cleared her throat. "You said you had something to tell us?" she asked, eyeing Leman warily.

"Let's go somewhere where we can sit down?" he offered, gesturing towards the café Twilight remembered visiting during several Loops.

\* \* \*

><p>The six Loopers commandeered the corner booth, which offered ample room on one side for Sunset, Luna, Fluttershy and Twilight while Leman and Nyx sat across from them.<p>

"Well, if it wasn't obvious, we've taken the time to clear our heads..." Leman winced. "Not in the best ways, looking back, but..." he fumbled his words. Nyx gave his hand a light squeeze and a look passed between them.

"So you've reconciled?" Luna asked, resting her chin on her hands and looking at them with a neutral expression.

Nyx nodded, and the other Loopers relaxed.

"So you're dating again?" Sunset asked, happy to see the two talking again.

"Well, once we cooled down, we took some time for ourselves to think about our relationship. Nyx eventually contacted me and we talked it out," Leman said.

"We did it during a Daemon hunt, actually," Nyx chimed in.

Fluttershy and Twilight both blinked in surprise. They knew Daemons were dangerous, and usually required your full attention on them, but the two mothers knew their children wouldn't have been too distracted by a chat.

"How did that go?" Fluttershy asked.

"It...hurt," Nyx said. Twilight reached for her, a worried expression on her face, but Nyx raised a hand, stopping her. Before Twilight could withdraw her hand, Nyx clasped it gently. "It wasn't any fault of the Daemons, mom."

Twilight relaxed and Fluttershy let out a relieved sigh.

"Seeing Leman after avoiding him for so long hurt worse than any



death I've suffered," Nyx said. "But it was a good kind of hurt. I knew I had made the right choice with him, so once we had finished our hunt, we sat down and talked."

Sunset and Luna leaned forward, anxious to hear the news.

"Turns out we both had similar reactions to our spat. We withdrew from the Loops, pushed everyone who wanted to help us away and thought about what we had done wrong," Nyx said, leaning against Leman.

"We..." Leman started, then paused, grimacing. "This is probably gonna sound stupid, butâ€¦ everything we've done together, everything we've sharedâ€¦ made us realize what we were giving up if we split. Iâ€¦ love Nyxâ€¦ she's amazing, caring, patient, beautiful - ow!" he grunted as Nyx elbowed him with a glare. "Alright, sorryâ€¦ but once we got our feelings out in the open, Iâ€¦ wellâ€¦"

Together, they raised their left hands.

Twilight and Fluttershy's jaws dropped, Luna gasped, and Sunset's eyes went wide.

On their ring fingers were a matching set of engagement rings.

"I asked her to marry me," Leman said quietly, looking at Nyx with a smile.

"And I said yes," Nyx said, leaning in and kissing him.

Nyx's eyes darted from one Looper to another anxiously. She fidgeted as the silence grew before she spoke hesitantly. "We wanted you to be the first to know, which is why we were so quiet about it. Umâ€¦ I was expecting more of a reaction. Are you mad?"

Her voice seemed to snap the other Loopers out of their blank state, and Twilight found her voice first.

"No! No, we wereâ€¦ well, I was, at any rate, shocked." She took a shaky breath. "Reconciliation is one thing, but to propose," her eyes darted to Leman, and he shrank back from her piercing stare, "and to acceptâ€¦" Twilight's voice trailed off and she teared up. "I'm not mad, I'm happy."

Fluttershy simply smiled at Leman. "I'm glad you finally worked up the courage to ask her, Leman," she said. "It's always a mother's dream to see her son finally find someone he wants to spend the rest of his life with, and I don't think you could've chosen a better wife than Nyx."

Sunset felt out of place in such a serious conversation. She had spent Loops with both of them, but she still felt uncomfortable around both of them. The young woman simply offered a small smile to the two, which seemed to relax them further.

Luna had leaned forward, her eyes on the engagement ring. "Do you mind if I take a look at that?"

Nyx and Leman exchanged confused glances, but gave their rings to Luna somewhat reluctantly.

The Night Mare examined them closely. "That's a beautiful gesture you've done for her, Leman. I've had ponies ask me to put their Cutie Marks in the night sky, butâ€¦ I dare say you've done one better and put the stars into a ring she'll have forever." She passed the rings to Twilight, who admired the enchanted rings with something bordering on awe.

"A modest ring barely containing the beauty insideâ€¦ That's definitely my daughter," Twilight said softly, which caused Nyx to blush happily as Twilight handed the rings back.

"Should we head back then?" Sunset asked, standing up and stretching her arms behind her head. Everyone but Nyx and Leman agreed, but when neither made a sound, Fluttershy turned to look at them curiously.

"What's wrong?" she asked, her voice worried.

Leman ran a hand over his face with a sigh before speaking.

"I hurt a lot of people, especially those back home, with what I said to Nyx. And even after all this time, I'm not sure if they've forgiven me for what I did."

Twilight shook her head. "If you want me to explain to them -" she began, but fell silent as Leman abruptly stood up.

"No, no, it was my fault, and I should be the one to apologize for my behavior."

Nyx rolled her eyes, muttering, "Men!" under her breath as she stood up and gave him a reassuring hug.

"Come on, my sweet Lemon Baby, let's go spread the news. The sooner we start, the sooner we can get to the honeymoon."

Without another word, the couple left the cafÃ©, leaving behind a quartet of dumbfounded Loopers.

"'Sweet Lemon Baby'?" Sunset finally managed to ask, clearly not sure whether to laugh or retch.

"Oh, don't be like that, Sunset," Fluttershy said, patting her shoulder. "When you find someone, you'll come up with cute nicknames for them as well."

"Never gonna happen," Sunset said flatly, crossing her arms and looking away.

Luna snickered. "If I had a bit for every time I've heard that..."

Chatting, the group followed after the engaged Loopers.

\* \* \*

><p>As Lemon, Nyx, Twilight, Sunset, Luna and Fluttershy walked out of the portal, the young couple looked at each other.<p>

"Momma," Nyx smiled, nuzzling up against Lemon, "can you tell Cadence about the news, and how we've decided to ask her if she wants to be our wedding planner?"

"Uh, Nyxie," Lemon frowned, looking down at the black alicorn he had already wrapped a wing around, "didn't we agree to tell her together? I am fairly sure that Mi Amore Cadenza will be very cross with me if we use a proxy to ask her about this offer."

"She'll understand that it was necessary, as I will have to teleport us to Ponyville without giving you any chance to prepare yourself for meeting our friends," Nyx said with a soft smile before leaning up and placing a kiss on his face to distract him.

It seemed to work as Lemon's eyes became unfocused as the younger alicorn of the night teleported the two away, leaving the rest of the group a bit confused.

"Twilight," her sister in-law asked as she walked over to her family and friends with an eyebrow raised. "I just felt some powerfully strong love here. Care to explain?"

One short explanation later, all the glass in the Crystal Empire broke due to one very shrill shriek of joy.

\* \* \*

><p>With a pop, Lemon and Nyx found themselves in front of the Sugarcube Corner, with the stallion trying to look cross at the mare next to him.<p>

"Nyxie, I thought we planne-" Lemon started when he noticed he wasn't alone.

"Hiya." Nyx smiled at a frowning Applejack, Rainbow Dash and Rarity Belle. Pinkie Pie was simply smiling a bit less, which was easily equatable to a frown. "How are you?" With a less than subtle elbow to the ribs, the alicorn mare nudged her head towards the four mares already present to meet the two.

"Hello, miss Apple, miss Dash, miss Belle, miss Pie," Lemon said in a strained tone, looking to the side. "I -"

Before he could continue speaking, a purple scaly hand reached down and grabbed the alicorn stallion. Lifting Lemon up in the air, the dragon glared at the pony. "If you ever hurt my sister again, we will learn exactly how long it takes for my body to digest you, got it?!" Spike thundered, eyes narrowed in barely restrained anger.

"Spike!" both Nyx and Rarity shouted, causing Spike to reluctantly place the stallion back down on the ground. The unicorn's eyes glared up at her husband before glancing over at the young alicorn mare and gasping loudly as she noticed the piece of jewelry on her horn.

"Nyxie, dear, is - is that what I think that is?" she asked, a hoof pressed against her chest and eyes already watering in joy.

"If you think it is an engagement ring, it is!" Nyx smiled, beaming

with joy as all the other mares gasped loudly at the news. Spike leaned down to hug his sister tightly, his grin going from ear to ear.

"Well, shucks, ain't that the best news Ah've heard in a while!" Applejack took her hat off, kicking the ground with one foot.

"Thank you, miss App- OW!" Lemon shouted in pain as Applejack punched him square in the shoulder.

"That's \_for being a total idiot, ya darn fool!" Applejack was brooking no argument, already landing another punch into his shoulder. "That's \_for thinking we wouldn't forgive ya, and don't ya dare try and tell me otherwise."

Lemon's ears folded, muttering curses in Low Gothic as he tried to reclaim usage of his right foreleg, to no real success. It was not helped when Applejack punched him again in the same place, causing Lemon to swear a bit louder.

"What the hay was that for, Applejack?!" Lemon growled, his anger growing before he was aware of it.

"That's \_for treating us like strangers, silly," Pinkie Pie said, pulling Lemon and Nyx into a tight hug. "Now tell us how it happened! Auntie Pinkie Pie needs to know!" Her grin was far larger than normal, and no one was sure if it was due to Pinkie Pie being Pinkie Pie or if she was using her warp goddess powers to fully express her joy.

"Well, if you don't mind, I am going to let the girls know the good news so Lemon can tell you all the details!" Nyx leaned up for another kiss before taking to the air, leaving her fianc   alone with her slightly predatory aunts to let the stallion know she was still a bit sore about their breakup. "See you soon, Lemon baby!" she shouted, giggling as Lemon gave her a rude gesture in return for using the same trick twice on him, only for Dash to smack him upside the head.

\* \* \*

><p>"So, girls," Nyx smiled as she flew into the clubhouse, where her five best friends were sitting, "you heard that Leman and I are talking again?"<p>

"Eeyuup." Apple Bloom nodded her head, looking at the alicorn with a raised eyebrow. It was noticable that she wasn't a filly like usual, but a young mare on the cusp of full marehood. "Mah sis mentioned you summoned Twilight, Fluttershy and Luna for somethin', and we figured that we should all be here for whatever news you've got for us."

"Yeah." Nyx's smile grew as she nodded her head, letting her mane drop from her horn; a reflective gleam caught the eyes of all the fillies. "You can say that." Nyx let an awkward laugh out, rubbing her hooves together. "I'm engaged!"

There was a loud gasp from everyone in the room, with a rush of congratulations, praises and questions rushing out of their mouths before they all paused and looked at each other before they all

shouted in unison.

\*\*\*"DIBS ON MAID OF HONOUR!"\*\*

The five looked at each other again, sharing a wicked glare.

"Wait, girls, I know how to handle thi-" Knowing what was coming, Nyx tried to prevent the chaos and destruction but was too late.

\*\*\*"CUTIE MARK CRUSADER MAID OF HONOUR YAY!"\*\* With that, the five fillies dashed off to create the rules of how to decide who would be their best friend's maid of honour, leaving Nyx feeling very sorry for everyone.

Licking her lips, Nyx decided that she should go rescue her fiancÃ© from her aunts, though she had been the one who'd left him to deal with them. She then giggled to herself: her fiancÃ©! With a smile, she flew back to Sugar Cube Corner, hoping that Lemman hadn't annoyed Applejack again; he was already down one leg, after all.

\* \* \*

><p>163.11 (Bliss Authority) (Undertale)<p>

"â€|Thus did the humans win the great war, their seven greatest sorcerers sealing away Ponykind beyond the Barrier MirrorOOOOKAY this Loop is sure starting with a bang," Twilight said as she Woke Up. She closed the book she had been reading, looked at the cover, saw that the cover was the same as baseline, and reopened it to the chapter on the great war between Humans and Ponykind.

Spike dug at the inside of his ear with a claw. "Okay, did I mishear that, or is this one going to be a strange one?"

Twilight drew a tree in the ground. "Root and Branch, please let this not be a Bureau loop."

"Boy, you can say that again," Spike said. "So what do your loop memories say? Cause mine aren't really all that relevant. Just a bunch of baseline #1 assistant things. Which reminds me â€" we should totally do Moondancer's party this time."

"Oh yeah, wouldn't miss that for the world," Twilight said, flipping through the book. "A â€" huh. There we go. Nightmare Moon was banished for trying to breach the Mirror and war on humanity, and on the thousandth year of the longest night the yadda will yadda in her yadda." Twilight sent out a quick Ping, frowning. "Given everything else about the loop's history, I REALLY hope Sunset is Awake this iteration..."

"Do ya have Celestia's half of her diary in your Pocket?" Spike said.

Twilight shook her head. "Good thinking, but I'm not going to risk tipping off an Unawake Sunset if there WAS a war between ponies and humans and she defected â€" or worse, still thinks she's 'on ponykind's side.' That can wait for a Loyalty to confirm it's her. Still -"

Twilight just then got thirteen responses to her Ping in rapid succession, including Spike's. Thirteen fellow Loopers, no other information â€" frustratingly vague, but at least she wouldn't have to do this alone. "Right. Send out the usual letter and ask if there have been any stirrings around this 'Barrier Mirror' in particular. In the meantime, make your preparations for the party: I'm going to get some going-away presents for my Canterlot friendsâ€| and some history books."

Spike gave her a brisk salute. "Aye aye, Captain!" he said, with only the barest hint of irony.

\* \* \*

><p>Frisk woke up to the familiar sensation of tumbling headfirst into the darkness, rolled her eyes, and got set to break her fall. There was a blur of yellow beneath her as usual â€" but somehow, there was also some pink â€"<p>

\*\*POMPF.\*\* She landed in prime position to roll on her arms. Only this time, there was a soft squeal, something like the sound of a dog toy squeaking, as she landed â€" followed by the unmistakable sound of someone blowing a raspberry.

The pink, shaggy, vaguely equine monster that broke Frisk's fall turned to look at her, then stuck out its tongue with another raspberry sound.

Frisk blinked at it. It repeated the gesture back to her.

Acting on impulse, Frisk threw her stick. The creature gasped, then shot off after the object.

Chuckling, Frisk looked around the room, trying to see if anything was different, and took a bag of popato chisps from her pocket for a snack while she did so. Jizo's explanation of what Loopers could do had been thorough without being pedantic or irritating; Loop memories and a Pocket were the first things she'd figured out, and she was working on the Ping.

Hell, her actual lowercase 'P' pockets acted as sort of a small uppercase 'P' Pocket, even in baseline; there was no other explanation for how she managed to keep (even ever-fresh, monstrous) slices of pie, hot-dogs, \_ice cream, \_burgers, steaks, \_tutus\_ and \_frying pans\_ in there and still retrieve them all in completely pristine condition. Frisk hadn't questioned how until now, but it was undeniably useful â€" especially since she now could carry items with her into the next Loop.

Suddenly, there was a pink snout under Frisk's arm. The fluffy creature had returned with the stick (from, Frisk noted with some amusement, a completely different direction than the one Frisk had thrown said stick) and was now inspecting the chisps with its (her?) nose.

Clearly the proper thing to do was to pet it and give it some chisps. Petting fluffy monsters had gotten Frisk pretty far in the loops, and she wasn't about to stop now. This earned another happy gasp â€" not a big surprise, as petting had always proved to be the blatantly correct choice.

"I see you have made another friend," a familiar voice said. Frisk turned towards that voice â€

â€" and started at the huge, goat-eyed, quadrupedal creature wearing Toriel's robes.

"Tori?" Frisk asked.

"Do not be afraid," the goat sighed. "I remain your friend, Toriel, caretaker of what has proven a very different set of Ruins this Loop. You are fortunate that this particular Loop's version of Flowey is â€" indisposed, at the moment. But she will not be for much longer. We must make haste before they find us here."

"Why are you a goat, mom?" Frisk asked. "And what do you mean, 'indisposed?'"

Toriel â€" this transformed Toriel â€" sighed, putting a split hoof to her forehead. "If you have not yet consulted your Loop Memories, do so now. I understand they are usually much more useful for Sans and I in particular, but this is of the most vital importance."

Frisk shrugged. She knew how this story went anyway â€" getting in an argument with her parents and running away (sometimes), getting lost exploring Mount Ebott (sometimes), her friends at Canterlot High School daring her to touch the statue of a horse (sometimes), and â€

Wait a second. Canterlot High School? From a former equine city â€" equine, not monstrous â€" that the humans claimed as their own, the site of the Mirror Barrier?

The pink fluff pony gasped, then rooted through the potato chips that Frisk had dropped in her shock. It squealed its delight.

"It's a bit unnerving when your memories and those memories don't match up, isn't it?" murmured Toriel.

"Oh shit," Frisk groaned.

"Language," Toriel scolded.

"Ptthbt," Fluffle Puff replied.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight walked into Moondancer's party with Spike, several gifts, and a frown. Celestia's return letter made it clear that she wasn't Awake, but otherwise raised more questions than it answered. In particular, it emphasized that Twilight was to "show the visiting emissaries of the Goat Kingdom a good time." She spoke with Moondancer and the others on the subject, trying to fish for information.<p>

"They ARE only our closest allies," Moondancer said, smiling â€" clearly glad to be the expert in this situation, to be able to teach Twilight something important instead of the other way round. (Ficus, was she always this obvious about her regard for Twilight in

baseline? But that was a tangent.) "Their research into magitech and applied metaphysics is second to none, particularly as it applies to soul theory â€" among other things, their Royal Scientist figured out some things with very interesting implications about cutie marks."

"I heard a rumor that they helped develop some of our most powerful weapons, right after the Human War," Lyra said, looking Twilight right in the eyes. "As in, just in time to fight Discord and Nightmare Moon."

"You hear ALL SORTS of rumors," Lemon Drop said, laughing. "Tell us again about how three humans beat Tirek instead of Firefly Thunderhoof."

"They helped Firefly, they didn't beat him on their own," Lyra said. She winked at Twilight. "Stay woke, all of you."

Aha. Lyra â€" well, all of the Lyrae â€" were awake. That made things significantly easier. (Also the events of a Gen 1 loop were apparently the antiquity of this Loop â€" possibly useful information.)

"I don't think I'll be able to get much sleep done when I have a job this important," Twilight said. "But that's nothing new. I'm always Awake. When does that ever change?"

"We always did have too much blood in our caffeine systems," Lemon Drops said.

Moondancer brayed laughter. "Amen. You should get some Pony Joe's coffee grounds for the road â€" I know they always help me when I cram."

Twilight had done her shopping and packing for the trip already and considered saying way ahead of you. Then she thought better of it, and beamed at her biggest fan instead. "Good idea, Moondancer; I think I'll have time tomorrow. I'm going to need to find a replacement in Ponyville â€" Lyra, you live there, where do you recommend?"

Lyra got up. "You know what, we should probably compare notes. Mind if I borrow Twilight, Moonie? Don't worry, I'll bring your waifu back safe and sound."

Moondancer stammered something incoherent in reply.

"Great!" said Twilight, who was suddenly uncomfortable herself. "I'm just getting some fresh air, and don't worry â€" she's taken."

Oh, Branch. Why did Twilight say that? Moondancer put her hooves over her glasses as they left, Lemon Drops giving her the waggly eyebrows.

As soon as they were out of earshot of the others, Twilight turned to Lyra. "I hate the Variants where I need to turn her down," Twilight muttered. "Right, Lyra. Who's Awake?" she said. "Is Sunset awake? Let's start with that."

"Yes, Sunset's Awake, thank Pine," Lyra said, her expression



unusually stern. "We've also got Spike, the other five original Element-Bearers, Trixie, Shining, De- well she's going by Muffins Redacted this loop, but you know who she is â€œ"

Twilight facehoofed. "Muffins. Redacted."

"I told Bon Bon I knew about her deep cover 'Monster Aggression Response Equines' stuff and 'Muffins Redacted's' mom is Bonnies' handler this loop, Data Expunged. Okay? Great, now I lost my train of tho-"

Lyra shook her head, and her entire body language changed. She stood up on her hind legs and cracked her neck. "Okay, I'm going to take over cause \_I\_ didn't lose track," Lyra said. "The other three are Chrissy, Candy, and Ivory."

"I'm addressing human-Lyra, right?" Lyra nodded at Twilight's question â€œ" and Twilight cringed. "Oh root it, you're part human. That might beâ€œ| troublesome for you," Twilight remarked.

"Like you wouldn't believe," Human-Lyra growled. "This Loop's cosmology is all about souls, and I have a human soul â€œ" speaking! â€œ" and a bunch of others. Have you brushed up on this Loop's Soul Theory?"

"I was going to after Moondancer brought it up," Twilight said.

"You better," Human-Lyra said. "I'm pretty much ascended without the wings or hooves right now, and if anyone who isn't Awake or Bon-Bon finds that out I'm in deep trouble."

"WHAT!?"

"Keep it down, Twilight," Lyra hissed. "But yeah, I've gone full Alicorn without actually going full Alicorn, just by having a human soul jumbled up with the rest of my alters. Turns out monsters, including us ponies, can take them this Loop; I remember someone on the wrong side of the Mirror willingly giving me one with their dying breath as part of my Loop Memories â€œ" human-side Lyra. Phenomenal cosmic powers â€œ" all you need is a dead human and you're in business."

"Oh no," Twilight groaned. "No, no, no, no, no. That's what the war was over in the first place, wasn't it?"

"Bingo." Lyra sighed. "Tirek was the only one that tried to steal souls, but Tirek was bad enough to get the rest of humanity panicking about the fillies and gentlecolts from across the Rainbow Bridge."

"I'm not sure if I can blame them," Twilight said. She put her hoof under her lip and frowned. "Equestria isn't exactly a bad place to live, but it's also a lot more dangerous than Sunset's world even without that additional temptation. Abacus Cinch aside, anyway."

Lyra folded her fetlocks. "Oh, and you can go through the Mirror to and from Canterlot High, but you can't get out without at least a human soul and a monster soul in one body. Loop Memories say we used to sneak across, shifting bodies with magic. M.A.R.E. took advantage

of that, with my and Bonnie's permission."

"This has to be a Fused Loop," Twilight said. "But I've never even heard of a universe that functioned this way before."

"Maybe it just started Looping?" Lyra suggested, shrugging.

"Are you two okay?" Moondancer called from across the hall.

Twilight turned and waved. Then, after shaking her head, Lyra got on all fours and started trotting back.

Twilight followed, thinking. Assuming a Fused Loop, the other universe was new enough that the Loopers didn't know how to Ping yet â€" none of them had responded to any of the fourteen native pings. Moreover, the Goat King wasn't baseline â€" if he wasn't the Looper, one of his retinue almost certainly \_was,\_ and they were all VIPs on their way to the Summer Sun Festival.

She was going to get the Loopers on the same page with letters from Spike, and get a course of action ready - to greet the new Loopers, and to get them up to speed, and protect them from what was looking to be a much more dangerous Nightmare Moon than baseline.

Right after she dealt with the much more fearsome task of friendzoning Moondancer.

Twilight audibly gulped.

\* \* \*

><p><p>

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

163.1: Admit it, you'd do it if you had the resources.

163.2: Well, it's a data point.

163.3: On balance, I'm more sorry for Dash.

163.4: Let's just say that strange things happen in the Loops and leave it at that.

163.5: Remnant. Guilt free carnage since some time a while ago.

163.6: She may regret this later.

163.7: It actually makes a great deal of sense.

163.8: The short story by Terry Bisson. (Sort of.)

163.9: I do not know enough to comment. And, based on what I've heard about this show, neither do you at this point.

163.10: An ouncement.

## 164.1 (Rowan Ex)

"Any plans?" Twilight asked her fellow Loopers. They had just defeated Nightmare Moon, at which point Nyx Awoke; said filly was now was sitting with them at Town Hall. "Besides watching out for Variants, or trying to do an impossible thing, such as trying to replicate Divinium, which I fancied doing when I had a Call of Duty Zombies-like variant?"

"Wellâ€¦" Pinkie, one of the Awake Loopers present, pulled out a long list from her Subspace Pocket. "I was planning on mass-multiplying my party cannon and giving every party pony in the whole of Equestria one."

Applebloom looked at Pinkie before she presented her own plan. "I was plannin' to create my own alethiometer this Loop."

"Isn't that the compass-thing that can tell the truth?" Applejack guessed. "Why you makin' it?"

Applebloom stared at her sister. "Just something I wanna experiment on since it was said to, you know."

Seconds passed before Twilight spoke up. "Are you trying to expand your technological knowledge by replicating some of the greatest yet probably the most powerful, corruptible items in the whole Yggdrasil?" Applebloom nodded. "Are you okay, or it's just your Element of Magic sputtering and clanking?" Twilight joked. "Just kidding. Are you sure you want to replicate one?"

"Why?" Applebloom asked.

"Wellâ€¦" Twilight tried to come up with an explanation on how she attempted to create her own only to cause a Loop Crash because of multiple dimensions. "... Good luck on that, Little Engie."

"'Little Engie?' Really?" Nyx asked.

"Don't ask me where I got that nickname," Twilight casually replied. "It's a secret."

"Awâ€¦"

"That, and even your pouty face just makes me remind me NOT to tell where I got the nickname," Twilight insisted.

As they were talking, Applebloom sneaked out and headed towards the CMC clubhouse, where two Awake friends waited for her.

"So, baseline cutie marks?" Scootaloo suggested.

Sweetie Belle looked at her blank flank and then to Applebloom.

"Sure," Applebloom decided. "After I do this."

\* \* \*

><p>In the CMC Clubhouse GarageSubspace Garage/Applebloom's Tinkering

Workshop etc., Applebloom tried to draw out the blueprint of the golden compass. Nyx just watched.

"I don't know why you want to build your own alethiometer but Twilight once tried to build it," said Nyx. "I'm also not sure if that would be fine..."

"Why not? Ah can do it!" Applebloom defended. "What happened to her alethiometer anyway?"

"Didn't got finished and ended up crashing the Loop," Nyx explained.

Applebloom paused and looked at Nyx. "It did? Huh." She continued sketching her blueprint. "Have ya heard by chance the story of 'The Little Engine That Could?' Maybe that'll make ya think a bit. Besides, Ah'm sure Ah can do it without making the Loop crash."

While Applebloom continued, Nyx remembered something.

"Isn't the alethiometer's thing to tell the truth, like an Element of Honesty?" Nyx asked. "Why are you building your own?"

Applebloom chuckled. "It's not all the time the others are Awake, and not every Loop will have an Element of Honesty Awake, y'know."

Nyx considered the thought and smiled. "Good luck with that."

\* \* \*

><p>164.2 (AlexPrior, Masterweaver)<p>

"...Wait, so... there's a giant egg-shaped boulder in the middle of your family's rock farm."

"Yep!"

"Which, according to legend, your family founder discovered in a \_dragon nest.\_"

"Uh huh!"

"...Now, admittedly, I know for a fact that Spike's egg is usually only about the size of a filly. But... Pinkie, something egg-shaped. Found in a nest. A nest, I must add, belonging to a rather gargantuan species."

"...what about it, Twilight?"

"...call me crazy, but is it possible-just possible, mind you-that the boulder in question might, oh I don't know, actually be \_a feathering dragon's egg?!\_"

Pinkie paused, frowned, tapped her chin, and hmmmmed. "...you know, I never really thought about that. I guess it could explain why my family tends to be so... off..."

\* \* \*

><p>Discord tapped the boulder thoughtfully.<p>

"Dragon egg? What was Twilight on? That's not a dragon egg. It's a \_draconequus\_ egg." He looked startled. "Good heavens, I think I just figured out Pinkie Pie."

The draconequus glanced around furtively. "Better keep that to myself. Twilight's going to go pancakes over this..."

He disappeared with a flash, leaving no evidence for him ever being there.

\* \* \*

><p>164.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Twilight?" Applejack cautiously walked up to her friend, hat to her chest.

The unicorn gave her a careful look. "...yes Applejack?"

"Well... ya know how..." Applejack rubbed the back of her head.

"Well, uh... how yer tree is destroyed every loop?"

Twilight winced. "\_Yes.\_"

"Ah just wanna say, Ah'm right sorry for all tha times Ah poked fun at that."

That got Twilight to raise an eyebrow. "Not that I'm rejecting your apology, but... what exactly brought this on?"

Applejack sighed. "Am Ah that obvious?"

"New expansion, sudden apology..." Twilight shrugged. "I hear about Holder's Boulder a lot in lonely loops."

Applejack winced. "Yeah... even when Ah avoid tha rock farm, somethin' happens to that rock, and somehow it gets back to me. Last loop there was a volcanic eruption on the Pie's farm, thing just ended up crashing through mah roof." She gave Twilight a worried look. "Do ya ever get a reprieve?"

Twilight put a hoof on her shoulder, looked deep into her eyes, and smiled broadly. "\_Never.\_"

\* \* \*

><p>164.4 (Vinylshadow)<p>

Moondancer was rather surprised at the turnout her party had garnered. While she wasn't all that surprised to see Lyra, Minuette, Twinkleshine and Lemon Hearts, she \_was\_ surprised to see a familiar lavender unicorn sampling the punch.

"Twilight Sparkle?" she asked, approaching the lavender unicorn slowly. Twilight turned to face her and surprised the yellow-gray-coated mare with a hug.

"Moondancer! It's so nice to see you. Have you been keeping up with

your studies?" the bookworm asked, pulling back to grin at the utterly bemused unicorn.

Caught off guard, Moondancer fixed her glasses with her magic and smiled awkwardly. "Of course I have. I'm surprised you made it, though; you usually have your nose buried in a book..." her eyes went wide. "You didn't run out of books to read, did you?"

Twilight snickered. "Of course not," she said reassuringly. "I just wanted to spend time with my old friends before heading off to Ponyville."

"Ponyville?" Moondancer echoed. "Can't say that rings a bell."

"Well, I've been doing some reading on early settlements..." Twilight shot a mock glare at Moondancer, who quickly turned her stifled laughter into a cough. "And it has quite the illustrious history. It's also one of the few places in Equestria where Zap Apples grow naturally."

"Oh, sounds like you're going to be busy then," Moondancer said morosely. Twilight shook her head.

"Nonsense, it's only a short train ride away. Besides, I'm sure I'll have plenty of time to come and visit you; I'm...\_very\_ good with managing my time."

Moondancer didn't look convinced and Twilight added casually, "I'll also bring you any books I find that might interest you..."

Moondancer arched an eyebrow. "Really? And what kind of books would an old town like Ponyville have to offer?"

"You'd be surprised," Twilight said seriously. "Probably quite a few historical volumes that cover events that took place in the nearby Everfree forest, home to the ruins of the Castle of the Royal Sisters for starters."

Moondancer sighed dramatically. "Very well, I guess I'll have to put up with infrequent visits and poring over long dusty novels."

"Ah, don't be like that, Moonie," Twilight said, throwing a hoof across the other mare's withers. "The day is still young, so let's liven this party up with our tandem dancing, like the old days!"

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia and Luna watched the thick cloud of smoke rising from Canterlot with varying levels of amusement. Luna nudged her sister.<p>

"I can see where Twilight got her dancing skills from. You never were that graceful on the dance floor."

Celestia bravely took the blow. "She never asked for lessons, so I never bothered to bring in a dance instructor..." Her voice trailed off, and a look that would've cowed a dragon took its place on her face. "Luna, bring me the phone book. I have some calls to make."

\* \* \*

><p>164.5 (Vinylshadow - PrototypeMLP)

Alex Mercer wasn't used to dreaming. He had started out with a single desire to survive when he had entered the dying body of the original Mercer. After that, most of his experience had come secondhand from consuming people.

They had hopes, desires, wants, needs...and dreams. He had spent some time going over the strange sequences of memories that plagued humans once they fell asleep and hadn't had what he considered a true dream until he started Looping.

Unfortunately, his dreams - while in Equestria, at least - had been of the Conversion Bureau and the things he had done there to a mostly UnAwake Equestria.

He had been relieved to know he hadn't harmed any Awake Equestrian Loopers, since he had become friends with a few of them.

Still, the things he had seen and done didn't fall under any of the criteria that resembled a dream, so what...?

"They're called nightmares," a voice said quietly. The Prototype Changeling jumped a little and turned to see Luna regarding him neutrally.

"Good evening, Princess Luna," he said, dipping his head.

She made a sour face. "We're friends, Alex, no need to be so formal with me," she said, rubbing a hoof over her leg. "Neither of us - my sister and I - like having friends refer to us as Princesses, so..."

"I understand," Alex said, which caused the Mistress of Dreams to relax.

"Your memories of the Bureau are...not uncommon," Luna said slowly. "It's probably one of the most hated Loop Variants throughout Yggdrasil and rarely are Loopers penalized for crashing such Loops, since anything is better than living through it." She trailed off, looking somewhat hesitant before she asked, "Have you ever had another Loop there?"

Alex shook his head. "No, nothing but various points in your Baseline. The Changeling Invasion of Canterlot was...interesting."

Luna arched one eyebrow. "Why's that?"

"Getting hurled halfway across Equestria by a wave of supercharged Love is just as agonizing as you'd expect," Alex said with a grin. "Although I was disguised and helping ponies escape the city, it still picked me out, burned my wings off and picked the sturdiest tree to smash my head through. Brought back fond memories of my Baseline, actually."

Luna looked at him oddly. "You're a strange one, Mercer."

"I learned from the best," Alex said with a shrug. "The Loops are a strange place. I find it's easier to tolerate them if you either find or make reasons to laugh at them rather than letting the horror of what's happening sink in. Besides, spend enough time with the Doctor and you kinda become numb to the point where all you can do is laugh at the absurdity of it all."

"So you're happy?" Luna asked.

"Quite so," Alex said.

"Well then, I hope you enjoy the rest of the Loop. It was nice talking to you," Luna said, her horn lighting up as the dream dissolved around them.

\* \* \*

><p>164.6 (katfairy)<p>

There was a pony in the library. An actual, non-Looping pony. Clearly looking for a book.

Twilight wasn't sure how to handle this. She could count the number of times it had happened on the fingers of one foot, and since she had hooves, that said a lot. Still, it was behavior that she wished to encourage, so she greeted the honey-colored mare with a smile, telling her that if she had any questions, all she had to do was ask and Twilight would be more than happy to help. The mare thanked her, then began to browse the shelves. After a minute or so, it became obvious that she was doing exactly what it looked like, so Twilight returned her attention to her latest project: cross-indexing the Variant Cutie Marks she'd seen.

"Excuse me, Miss Sparkle? I'm looking for a book on Pavlov's Dog and Schrodinger's Cat?"

"It rings a bell, but I'm not sure if it's here or not," she replied absently.

A stifled snicker brought her back to the real world, and she reviewed the last few seconds.

\* \* \*

><p>Chrysalis zoomed through Ponyville, laughing so hard that ponies were surprised she could maintain her course, pursued by a suddenly-alicorned Twilight Sparkle wielding an inordinately large squirt bottle. Roseluck gaped at them, almost dropping the peck of apples she was buying.<p>

"Twilight Sparkle is an alicorn?" she gasped.

"Looks like," Applejack drawled. "That'll be two bits, please."

\* \* \*

><p>164.7 (Vinylshadow)<p>

\* \* \*



><p>Luna Woke Up on the surface of the Moon. Taking a moment to go over her Loop Memories, she realized she had only been there for a few decades of her thousand-year exile. She knew she could easily break the seal, but there were times she liked to use the period of quiet to review previous Loops.<p>

And maybe meet the other moon creatures.

The Night Princess had been surprised to find living creatures on and below the surface of the celestial body she usually controlled. The creatures ranged from batponies to seaponies to strange creatures collectively called the Nyx.

The Nyx often had varying backstories. Sometimes they were in fact named after the Greek goddess of the night. Others, they had been named after Nyx Sparkle, who sometimes shared the Moon with her as Nightmare Moon. Other times, it was because the only word they said was 'Nyx.'

Communicating with them also varied. Sometimes they could speak, other times, it was telepathy. The most bizarre version had been the time they spoke the word 'Nyx' and Luna could read an entire paragraph or two from the word itself.

Unfortunately, Luna was alone this Loop, so she started doodling on the surface of the moon. It was another of her favorite pastimes. Over the Loops, she had turned the moon into the Death Star, Death Egg and the Moon from Termina. The last one had convinced ponies that they had somehow angered the moon and petitioned Celestia to release her early.

This time around, however, she decided on something a little more low-key.

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia Woke Up a few days before the Summer Sun Celebration and walked out onto her balcony to lower the moon.<p>

Looking up, the Solar Diarch stopped and stared up, jaw hanging loosely as she beheld her sister's latest masterpiece.

Opposite the usual Mare-in-the-Moon blemish was another stylized mare's head. Whereas the Nightmare's head was darker than the moon's surface, this one was lighter than it.

"Impressive, Lulu," Celestia murmured approvingly.

\* \* \*

><p>164.8 (Rowan Ex)<p>

Watching her library tree get burned down by her Unawake means with Rainbow Dash, Twilight stared at the rainbow-maned pegasus and coughed to get her attention.

"So, make Unawake me listen to a song with an undefined word causes this," Twilight pointed out. "What you gonna do?"

Rainbow Dash pulled out a gold-plated sword and raised it. "Well, probably stir up some 'lost girls' and shout the undefined word?"

Twilight smirked. "Oh sure, bangarang."

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia was about to rest her head for the day until her sister barged in wearing wooden armor.<p>

"Bangarang, Luna!" a very familiar voice shouted. "Take the throne!"

'\_Is that Twilight and her friends?'\_ Celestia thought as what would seem as the ponies of Ponyville and a changeling hive surrounded the palace. '\_What are changelings doing here?\_'

\* \* \*

><p>Meanwhile, Chrysalis and Twilight Sparkle enjoyed the sight for a change. Chrysalis had to ask though.<p>

"What gave you the idea to form this?" the changeling queen asked.

Twilight pulled out a salvaged 'bangarang', which was just a flaming boomerang or a flamarang. "Unawake me listened to Rainbow Dash's music, got totally weirded out by the word 'bangarang,' made this thing, got the library burning, and then I Woke Up."

"I just had to ask," Chrysalis muttered.

\* \* \*

><p>164.9 (Scorntex)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm so glad you all stayed here for my lecture," Twilight concluded, "without having to be coerced or blackmailed this time. And that's it."<p>

Throughout the room, several ponies awoke from their completely accidental naps they had definitely not intended to take.

"Except of course," Twilight's smile vanished completely, "for one last item of business. \_Pinkie.\_"

"Yuh-huh?"

Twilight turned to look at the party pony with an almost terrifying glare. "Stop it. \_Now.\_"

Pinkie glanced about the room nervously. "S-stop what, Twilight? I'm not doing anyt-" Twilight kept glaring. At this, a change overcame Pinkie Pie. The smile vanished, her mane deflated.

"Fine." Pinkie Pie lifted a hoof to her head, and with one swift motion... removed what turned out to be a surprisingly good mask and

wig, revealing the face of Starlight Glimmer.

"Wait." Rainbow Dash said, "What?"

"Starlight has been filling in for Pinkie since we first met," Twilight declared.

"How, exactly?" Rarity asked.

"Acting," Starlight said, "bluffing. A few pages of notes from the mare herself. Really insane luck."

She glowered at Twilight. "And I would've gotten away with it too, if it weren't for you!"

"Gotten away with what, exactly?" Fluttershy asked. "Have you actually been doing anything bad?"

Starlight looked about. "No. My plan was to imitate Pinkie Pie."

"The entire plan?" Nyx asked. Starlight nodded glumly.

"It made more sense when I thought about it..." she murmured. "And I kind of got lost in character."

"But..." Applejack said, "Hold on... that... wait..."

"The more you think about it," Twilight said, "the less it makes sense."

"It doesn't make any sense in the first place!"

"My point exactly," Twilight replied. "That's what the beer's for."

Applejack looked to her side, where there was now a flagon of beer, as there was with everypony else in the room. "How did - ?"

"I passed them out," Starlight said sheepishly. "I, ah, got kind of good at imitating some of your friend's ways."

The five Element Bearers and Nyx shared a morose look. "Girls," Twilight declared, "I declare we drink until this makes sense... or we pass out. Either one."

There was a resounding cry of "hear, hear" from everypony in the room.

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

My next stop on my journey was the home Loop of one Henry Walter Jones Jr. Or, as he's better known, Indiana Jones. The guy has done a lot of awesome things in his baseline in his search for legendary relics (though said relics tend to get destroyed, lost forever, or get stored in a warehouse; Indy is still angry about that last

one.)

And yes, he's been compared to Han Solo. The two have spent a lot of Loops in the other's role, so he's heard that comparison a million times. And he's also been compared to the popular Equestrian book character Daring Do, and he's heard that enough as well.

We became friends pretty quickly; guess it helps that like me, Indy is pragmatic when it comes to battle; such as the time when he faced a swordsman, instead of grabbing a sword himself, Indy just drew his pistol and shot the swordsman. He also tends to think on the fly in situations, rather than plan them out to the last detail.

Indy is always trying to find rare artifacts during his Loops, but his luck tends to be the same as in baseline on that. Basically, he finds the artifacts, but something always happens to them.

When we met, he was wielding the Vampire Killer whip; as it turns out, my assumption that the Vampire Killer whip drains the life out of Loopers who Looped in as Belmonts, but kept the whip after due to the whip doing so to non-Belmonts in baseline was wrong. Well, I guess I can't always be right about analyzing how artifacts like that are from Loop to Loop.

Indy was willing to teach me what he knew about archeology during my time here, but as always with him, adventure soon follows.

Naturally, I joined Indy on his adventures, and he does get into a lot of crazy situations, even in baseline.

And even to this day, he STILL doesn't understand how he survived a nuclear explosion by hiding in a fridge. And yes, that is baseline.

I had a lot of fun on my adventures , and learned a lot as well. As always, I wonder where I'll end up next.

\* \* \*

><p>164.10 (Rowan Ex)<p>

(Dedicated for Nightmare Night and Egyptian Lovers!)

Sunset Shimmer Woke up walking towards Canterlot High School on what seemed to be a regular Loop until something clanged on her chest. She looked at the thing dangling from her neck and checked it out. It was a lavender Ankh amulet which seemed to glow faintly.

Shrugging, she Pinged. The amulet pulsed violet in response and wondered who was Anchoring this Loop since she never received any Pings in return, except for a small voice in her head. She tried to listen closely as she walked until she bumped to Fluttershy who meeped in surprise.

"Oh, Sunset!" The animal lover greeted. "Talking to that voice in the amulet again?"

\_... Can you hear me now, Sunset?\_ the voice finished. \_Sunset Shimmer? It's me, Twilight. I'm Awake. I got your Ping.\_

"Uhâ€|" Sunset looked at her amulet then to Fluttershy. "I guess."

"Oh, Sunset," Fluttershy said as she giggled. "We're about to be late at class. Hurry up!"

"Game on, Fluttershy." They came charging in and got the whole student body to follow along, laughing.

\* \* \*

><p>Sunset noticed that the Loop was actually a variant since there was no Equestria with ponies and the town where Canterlot High was is in England. However, she recognized the accents and there was no british accented among the group causing her to think that this town is an isolated island slightly near the English Archipelago.<p>

As she went home, the first thing that greeted her were two dog small statues beside the door. '\_I must've been a world traveler this Loop,'\_ she thought. '\_Because those look like Chinese stuff.'\_ She entered her house to find thousands of artifacts all neatly designed between everything else. '\_This isâ€|" amazing for my Unawake self.'\_

As she looked around, her eyes landed on a picture with seven figures on it. She approached the picture and saw who they were.

\_Huh, you're basically a superstar this Loop,\_ Twilight commented.

"Why so?" Sunset asked, clutching her amulet and staring at it.

Twilight was silent for a few seconds. \_You're friends with them, especially human Fluttershy. I've never seen her race with you like that.\_

"Like what?" Sunset idly asked before she recounted what she said. "You never saw her like that before?"

\_I never visit that much, \_Twilight admitted. \_Since when every time you Wake up, you come over to Equestria most of your visits. Hey, speaking of Equestria, have you tried sticking your Keyblade in where the portal was supposed to be?\_

"Very subtle," Sunset answered. "Yes, I tried it and it didn't work."

\_So that means you're a native to this world this Loop.\_ Twilight guessed. \_I just wonder something.\_

"Ask me anything," Sunset said.

\_Why am I a disembodied spirit living in a lavender Ankh amulet?\_ she asked. \_And does it mean as long as the amulet being not destroyed the Loop will continue?\_

"One, my Loop memories tell that I got this amulet from a pyramid expedition with hieroglyphics talking about ponies," Sunset replied.

"Two, maybe. What will happen if I placed it in my Subspace Pocket?"

\_That might count as destroying, so maybe you should try it before the Loop ends,\_ Sunset felt a tug and looked at the amulet which was floating. H\_ey, I can do this too! What if Iâ€¦| Sunset, this might hurt a little bitâ€¦|\_

"Why?" Sunset asked. She was answered by the amulet flying towards head, knocking her unconscious.

\_Whoops, my bad!\_ Twilight told her. As she waited for Sunset to wake up, she thought of something and immediately set it into motion.

\* \* \*

><p>Sunset woke up and realized she couldn't move her body at all. She tried to look around only to realize that she replaced Twilight Sparkle in the Ankh amulet which now glowed orange.<p>

"Sorry about this," Twilight said to the amulet. "But apparently knocking out someone who wears the amulet can make the disembodied spirit inside switch bodies with the wearer."

\_Does that mean I knock you out and everything will come back to normal?\_ Sunset asked, an imaginary mischievous grin forming on her head.

"Yes," Twilight replied. "Why did youâ€¦"

\*CLANG!\*

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy and her other friends looked at Sunset Shimmer who was in a hospital bed due to a concussion in her head and possibly brain damage. As they left their own regards, Sunset called them back to fetch her Ankh amulet. After a moment's hesitation, Sunset realized that Rainbow Dash was wearing the amulet and using Twilight's knowledge to pass her grades.<p>

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me," Sunset swore.

"Nope," Rainbow Dash proudly stated. "This amulet of yours made me 20% more awesome."

"What's with the thingamajig anyway?" Applejack asked.

"A very intelligent but slightly paranoid librarian spirit trapped in that magical amulet which is thousands of years old," Sunset replied. "I got it from a pyramid expedition."

Dash frowned. "She says she's not paranoid."

"I rest my case, Rainbow Dash. I rest my case." Sunset thought of something. "Unless you're not Rainbow Dash, Twilight Sparkle."

Rainbow gasped and slack-jawed as the amulet glowed in an angry shade of blue.

\_The Next Loopâ€|\_

"Uhâ€| Twilight?"

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Sunset Shimmer's forcing me to make thousands of Egyptian-themed dresses. What should I do?"

Twilight looked at Rarity. "I don't know. Maybe make a lot of those Egyptian crosses instead and place it around the Boutique. Besides, Nightmare Night is near. Maybe she also wants a costume."

"Ok, thanks for the opinion darling!" Rarity left afterwards, leaving the librarian alone.

Twilight looked around and summoned Sunset Shimmer, who was an Egyptian pony for this Loop since the Crystal Mirror only connected towards two points in the local dimension this Loop. "So, Sunset, what's with this Loop?"

"No pony believes me that I'm a pharaoh," Sunset complained. "And remember that crazy amulet?"

"What about it?" Twilight asked.

Sunset pulled out the Ankh amulet and wore it causing her appearance to change into those of the pharaohs. "See?"

"You gave the amulet a spell which made your appearance different," Twilight pointed out. "And you used that amulet last Loop."

"Yeah," Sunset replied. "Apparently it was cursed and when I placed it in my Subspace Pocket, it landed directly into a neutralizer which broke the curse, setting whoever was trapped in it free."

"And since I was the one trapped and I don't have a body that Loopâ€|"

"Yup, Loop crashed. All that I lastly remember is Osiris mad at me," Sunset answered as she hid the amulet again causing her appearance to return to normal. "Where's Rarity?"

"She just left," Twilight said. "Why do you want to have thousands of Egyptian-themed dresses anyway?"

Sunset smirked. "I just have a tiny plan."

\* \* \*

><p>164.11 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...so, I think we figured out that bug with the uneven expansion a while back," Sleipnir finished, "but for some reason trying to fix it tangled up the timeline a bit, so for the moment you're going to get a Nightmare Night AFTER Hearth's Warming. It should only be a few loops before we can fix that, though."

Twilight sighed. "Well, thanks for the heads up anyway... sounds like

you've got quite a mess up there."

"Mmm... yes and no. There are a number of small bugs we're noticing, but they're very much 'grit in the gears' kind of things. For the most part, things are going quite smoothly."

"Really?"

"Yeah, it's pretty incredible, all things considered. I mean, there's even been talk of-" Sleipnir glanced around suddenly. "...well, I can't really tell you, because I don't want to get your hopes up."

"Oh, come on!"

"No, really. Sanity and all that."

Twilight groaned. "You realize the curiosity is going to eat away at me for whole loops now that you've said that?!"

"Look, it's not even really my department. If it works, I'll make sure you know, but honestly I'm mostly in the dark as well. It's just a rumor, anyway." Sleipnir cleared his throat. "On... another note, has Rainbow finished any more of her Iris Drake novels?"

"What?"

"It's just... me and Epona sometimes read our kid bedtime stories, and she really likes Iris Drake..."

\* \* \*

><p>164.12: (Masterweaver, Vinylshadow)<p>

Clover looked at Pansy.

Pansy looked at Clover.

Smart Cookie looked at them both. "Well, one of you is going to have to change." She tilted her head, suddenly adopting a somewhat more british accent. "I am of course programmed with costume options from over six hundred different cultures, and I would be very happy to provide alternatives for the both of you."

Pansy and Clover stared at their golden-painted companion's glowing eyes. They gave each other a look.

Then, as one, they lifted their right hooves and started walking forward. "DELETE... DELETE... DELETE..."

Unfortunately for the Cyberponies, gold was their one weakness and they soon had to give half their candy to the protocol droid.

\* \* \*

><p>164.13 (Masterweaver)<p>

Most people looking at Sunset Shimmer would probably not realize she was panicking. In fact, most people would assume, from the way she



was very deliberately going about and making amends for her past behavior, that she had in fact gained some sort of confidence in herself that let her be less... standoffish.

Very few would pick up on the way she tapped her hip rapidly with a single finger, the occasional roll of her shoulder as she straightened her back, and the brief adjustments of her forelock of hair.

When she'd heard the ping on \_this\_ side of the mirror, she'd quickly contacted Twilight and let her know. She had assumed that the looper in question was a student either at Canterlot High or, possibly, Crystal Prep. However, a perusal of both their records had led to no inconsistencies... at least, none she could note. She'd looked into the teachers next-maybe the looper was older-but, no, everyone was who they were supposed to be there too. The visitor could have been a random citizen, that was true, but... there was still the option of the Sirens.

Which was a problem, because the Sirens tended to operate off the map; their paper trails were almost nonexistent and filled with aliases, \_where\_ they set up shop would vary disturbingly often, and they could pack up and slip away if they caught even a whiff of a follower. It did make sense, given that they'd presumably been hiding from civilization for a thousand plus years, but it did mean that Sunset almost always had to make a scene if she wanted to find them. And that was before she factored in the Ping; one of the Sirens was a looper this time round, and she couldn't tell if it was a Replacement or, perhaps, if one of them had been activated in a Fused Loop.

Either way... either way, the situation could go south in a hurry.

Still, there were a few things she had on the Sirens. For one, Sonata Dusk almost always liked tacos-Sunset didn't understand \_why\_, but trademark foods were trademark for a reason. That meant whenever the Sirens went on their conflict raids, they'd usually choose Mexican restaurants to antagonize. Staking one out was easy enough; arrive every night with a few bucks and a winning smile, buy herself a meal, and then just wait till the shop closed. Sure, the staff got a bit curious, but all she had to say was that she was "waiting for somebody," and most of them dismissed her as a lovestruck teenage girl.

Which was a bit weird, all things considered. A lovestruck girl at a Mexican restaurant? Then again, there was a unicorn and a dragon married on the other side of the mirror, so she really couldn't judge the ideas the locals came up with...

It took about a month (and ninety five tacos) before her efforts paid off. Two familiar faces entered the building with an almost too casual manner, with only their eyes moving about to quickly ascertain there weren't any threats. Sunset noted that they weren't wearing their usual hoodies and sweatpants \_or\_ the deliberately provocative Battle of the Bands outfit, but something... casual. That was certainly odd. However, it wasn't until Aria leaned out and gestured that the third member entered, confirming Sunset's suspicions. She had green skin and wore her red hair in what could be called a ponytail of dreadlocks, a far cry from Adagio's own orange poofy

mess.

With a small grin, Sunset Shimmer stood up and started walking toward the group. Aria noticed her first, sidling between her and the green woman quickly. As soon as the other two turned to look, Sunset sent out a ping and gave a Vulcan salute.

The green woman rose an eyebrow. "...Subtle."

Sunset frowned. "Yeah, well, sometimes I feel a little Loopy, you know?"

That got a snort. "Oh, I know. Keeps me Awake."

Aria glanced between the two. "Passaggio, do you know this person?"

"Mmm, not personally... but I've heard things about her little group." The woman patted Aria's shoulder reassuringly. "If she is who I think she is, she'll want to talk to me privately. Why don't you take a table where you can keep an eye on us?"

The purple singer's eyes darted between the two. "...come on, Sonata. Let's find a seat." She grabbed the blue woman's elbow, giving Sunset a pointed look as she passed.

\* \* \*

><p>164.14 (Evilhumour)<p>

[Warhammer40K/MLP]

Siege Patrol was working on the repairs of the Golden Oak Library with Twilight when he suddenly turned his head to the side. Staring straight at the tool box he said, "Pinkie Pie, I need the omniwrench you are sitting on."

"Okie dokie!" A pink pony hopped out of the tool box, to which the grey stallion nodded his thanks as he pulled out the omniwrench out and went to work on the foundation of the new tree.

He then paused, reaching into the cupboard and pulled out the offered cupcake that Pinkie Pie had out on a platter. Taking a bite with a hint of a smile on his face, he gave another nod of thanks and went to grab the reinforced tree trunk of the new library when he was stopped by a slack jaw Twilight.

"What?" Siege Patrol asked, blinking in confusion.

"H-h-\_how\_ are you doing that?!" Twilight squeaked out.

"What do you mean Twilight?" the pony titled his head.

"Finding Pinkie Pie!" Twilight shouted.

"Ah," Siege Patrol smiled as he walked over to a tiny stone. "Pinkie Pie has a miniature version of the Eye of Terror in her pocket, don't you?" he asked the stone.

"Yuppers!" Pinkie Pie said as she hopped out from under the stone,

nodding her head excitedly. "And since Siegy here can always tell where an Eye of Terror is, he can always find me!"

"Okay," Twilight said slowly as Pinkie Pie bounced away. "So you know how she does that?"

"Of course not!" Siege Patrol scoffed. "I may be a daemon prince most of the time but I would not dare to try and understand that chaotic masterpiece."

Twilight simply decided not to ask anymore questions as she remembered what happened in baseline when she tried that little song and dance and let the stallion get back to repairing her tree.

\* \* \*

><p>164.15 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Behold as the Great and Mighty Trixie shall control the sun and moon itself without using her magic!" Trixie boasted to an annoyed group of ponies, including two disbelieving princesses.

"Trixie, I don't thi-" Twilight started when Trixie ran up to Celestia and tapped her nose.

The sun went out, causing massive panic in the streets, which Trixie quickly fixed by tapping Celestia's nose a second time, causing the sun to catch on fire again.

With a captivated audience, Trixie then bounced over to Luna who had her hooves over her nose.

With a wry smile on the showmare's face, she reached up to adjust Luna's ears, causing the moon to rise and created a solar eclipse.

Trixie then took a bow to her crowd, letting their praise wash over her.

\* \* \*

><p>164.16 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

Pinkie Pie, having Awakened as a filly, had decided to introduce her sisters to the concept of Nightmare Night, at least as the non-rock-farmers of Equestria celebrated it.

Thus four fillies trotted away from a house. All four had decided to go as ghosts, using old sheets their mother had set aside to be cut apart for quilts. One such sheet was perfectly ordinary- white, two eyeholes, that's all. Another had not so much cut eyeholes as made two angry slashes in the proper spots, giving the ghost a permanent glare. The third ghost proned along, glorying in its paisley-ness. The last filly, slightly larger than the rest, hadn't unfolded the sheet before cutting, and thus was more holes than ghost.

"What did you all get?" Paisley P- er, Pinkie Pie asked.

"I got a pack of gum!" Limestone snarled. "I hate gum! Why do people even make candy you have to spit out?"

The normal looking ghost mumbled something indistinct and waved her own treat bag.

"Marble's willing to trade you for her chocolate bar!" Pinkie said. "It's got nuts in it."

"Rrrrg... I suppose!" Limestone made the swap with her usual good grace.

"And I got a caramel apple!" Pinkie giggled.

Maud Pie, the Holey Ghost, held out her prize. "I got a rock," she declared.

The other three fillies gathered round to stare.

"Wow! That is a ROCKIN' rock!" Limestone said, a rare tone of approval in her voice.

"...!" Marble agreed.

"He's a rock with ambition," Maud agreed. "His name is Boulder. I think I'll keep him."

\* \* \*

><p>164.17 (Vinylshadow)<p>

Vinyl hooked her foreleg around Lyra's neck and hoisted a mug of cider into the air.

"Alto-gether now!" the tipsy DJ slurred as Lyra squirmed in her grip.

"Really, Vinyl? Puns at this hour?" the unicorn grumbled.

"Did you know my family didn't want to expose me to music? They were worried about all the sax and violins," Vinyl went on. "Landed me into a lot of treble during my community college days, hoo!"

"Any chance you can scale it back?" Applejack said, moving her own mug out of the path of the drunken musician.

"We don't have the staff for it," Berry said, topping off the farmer's drink. The two blinked then did a simultaneous facehoof.

"Come on, ponies, we've got to guitar act together. Me and Lyra are pretty sharp when it comes to conducting our business," Vinyl said.

"Well, that fell rather flat," Lyra muttered.

"Could you repeat that?" Vinyl asked innocently, finally releasing the minty unicorn and taking a swig. "Just a note, some of these fall a little flat, the key to this is to make sound all natural, so only the sharp ponies get it. I mean, play it low key, there's no need to jazz it up too much. Some ponies can't keep up with the tempo of all these jokes; after all, music jokes aren't everyone's forte. Harping

on and on about it can get ponies frustrated. Keep it trill, bro," she said in a single breath before keeling over.

"Is she alright?" Twilight asked worriedly.

"Whenever she gets like this we tend to spike her drink. She winds up crashing sooner or later," Big Mac said.

Octavia burst into the bar, eyes roving over the crowd. When she saw the unconscious DJ, she let out a relieved sigh. "Not too much trouble, I hope?" she asked, hoisting her onto her back. Big Mac shook his head and Octavia apologized again as she left with her snoring counterpart.

\* \* \*

><p>164.18 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Gah!" Vinyl shouted, spitting out a mouthful of water. "No more, no more!"

Her cries were ignored as her head was pushed back under water and a scrub brush descend onto her back once more.

It was taking over five bath tubs, as the sheer dirt that came from the unicorn had clogged the first five tubs' pipes, but Octavia was determined to have her roommate clean for their 'friend' date at Grand Galloping Gala.

"By Celestia's mane Vinyl, if you bathed more than once every five years, this wouldn't be necessary!" the cellist yelled at the floundering mare, giving a thankful look at Twilight, who ready to teleport them to another awaiting tub of hot water and soap. "I mean seriously Vinyl, you've got such a lovely coat and you hide under this filth?"

"It's not filth, it's just comfort!" Vinyl retorted angrily.

Octavia responded by dunking her head back under the water.

\* \* \*

><p>164.19 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Uh..." Vinyl looked down at the mare next to her, cuddling up to her tightly. Normally, she'd loved to be in this place with Octy considering how often the mare didn't believe her tales about the Loops, convince Tavi that she had changed and was now a mature adult-which normally fell flat due to her poor lying skills- or she wanted to woo the mare over honestly. The last few loops that Vinyl had been Awake for, Octavia simply did not exist and she had been cellist deprived for too long, resolving to make her grey mare sing all night long.

But this? This was just Yggdrasil being a mean, cruel bastard of a world tree computer.

"What is it Vi?" Octavia yawned as she woke up, a blush on her face.

"Nothing Octy," Vinyl said truthfully, as she could handle this.  
"Have a good night sleep?"

"Yup," the mare leaned in for a tight hug, which did not help what her inner Vinyl was thinking. "Thanks for letting me sleep with you sis."

"Any time Octy," Vinyl said while keeping out her frustrations out of her voice. "Any time."

\* \* \*

><p>164.20 (Alex Prior)<p>

"Everypony, be prepared. We don't know what is going to come through that door!"

Twilight mentally steeled herself. She had decided to go through a Baseline Loop this time. That, however, didn't mean she liked going through Starlight's little town. It always was a pain. And speak of the devil...

The door creaked open, letting the mare walk through. "Welcome," she greeted, a fake- wait. That was not a fake smile. Starlight's eyes landed on Twilight. She let out a gasp. "Twilight?"

The mare's thoughts ground to a halt. "You've heard of me?" That was always a safe answer.

Which was as far as she got before getting squeezed in a hug. At this point, Twilight was content to let this play out - for now. She half-listened to the mare's babbling.

"Oh, Twilight, look at you! You've grown so much - and grown wings, too! Oh, last I saw you, you were just a little filly - but you don't remember me, do you?" Twilight recieved a telekinetic pinch to the cheek. "I'm your Auntie Starlight, Twilight! Oh, just look at you, you've grown so pretty! Do you have a coltfriend yet? Oh, you would look marvelous with glasses, colts would just flock to you, no joke - it really is a shame we don't have an ocular's cutie mark or a designer's cutie mark, oh you should have told us you were coming, even if in official capacity; turning up just like that is a little bit rude, dear." Starlight paused, looking over the rest of the Elements. Twilight allowed herself a peek, too.

Pinkie was wearing a highly skeptical expression. Rainbow was snickering. Applejack's eyebrows had ascended orbit. Fluttershy was hiding a smile. Rarity was taking pictures.

Twilight rolled her eyes.

As Double Diamond got to introducing the rest of Twilight's friends to Starlight, the alicorn contemplated her situation. All signs pointed to a Cutie Mark Rental variant, with Starlight as the doting matriarch. Twilight supposed she was okay with it.

As Starlight and Double Diamond were beginning to dote over a suddenly very embarrassed Fluttershy, Rarity sidled over to Twilight.

"Ahem. Twilight, Darling?"

\_Oh no, not again.\_ "Yes, Rarity?"

"I hope you realize this is going in the album."

\_Sigh. \_"Naturally."

\* \* \*

><p>164.21 (Scorntex)<p>

Big Macintosh was quietly cleaning one of his drinking jars, in the time-honoured manner of otherwise unoccupied bartenders across the whole of existence, when the doors opened, and a beaten and battered shape dragged itself into the bar, eventually slumping on top of a stool.

One bruised and swollen eye opened. And realisation dawned on Mac that he was looking at Vinyl. "Bartender," she croaked, "I need something medicinal."

Macintosh looked at the mare, who was nonchalantly leaking at an impressive rate. "Oh, right," Vinyl murmured as she looked at her numerous injuries, "it'll stop in a while. And I'll clean it up, I swear."

Not feeling reassured for some mysterious reason, he quickly fetched a drink, and gave it to the mare, who drank. "Thanks," she managed to get out once she was done.

After a short while of just sitting there, she finally looked at him. "You're probably wondering how this happened, right?"

"Yeah," he admitted. There was a low, humourless chuckle from Vinyl.

"Well, you know how we're all some kind of supernatural creature this Loop, right?" Big Macintosh didn't bother responding to that. "Well, turns out 'Tavi's a were-wolf. Which I guess explains the glossy hair, at least... another?" she nudged her drink.

"So, anyway," Vinyl continued, "guess what I am this Loop?"

"Some kind'a were-wolf hunter?" Mac offered.

"Nope."

"A vampire?"

"Nope."

"A different kind of were-wolf?" He nudged the refilled drink over to Vinyl.

"Close," Vinyl said, "but still nope."

"'kay, then what?"

There was a pause as Vinyl downed the entire drink in one breath. "A

were-\_cat.\_"

She groaned, and motioned for another drink. "And it was all going fine, but then one day Tavi's a bit more wolf than pony, she tries sniffing my butt and the next thing I know we're trying to tear each other to bits!"

The mare's head slammed against the bar, and she groaned further. "So stupid..."

\* \* \*

><p>164.22 (Evilhumour, with masterweaver's help)<p>

"So that's what I've been hearing Twi," said Vinyl, explaining as best as she could about the mysterious beat she had been hearing, describing what it sounded like as well as where it seemed to be coming from to the best of her ability. "I guess it could be on some sort of frequency that's present in multiple loops, but I really doubt it'd be like that."

"And Sleipnir would have mentioned something if it were anything truly worrisome," Twilight concluded, tapping her chin. She began to levitate some books in preparation for research. "I think it could-"

"There you are Twilight!" Cadence said with a smile.

Twilight returned it happily, initiating their usual greeting. "Sunshine, sunshine, ladybugs awake, clap your hooves and do a little shake."

As the two fell over in a fit of laughter, the alicorn noticed the other pony in Twilight's chambers. "Hello there, who may you be?" Cadence asked carefully.

"Hiya, I'm Vinyl Scratch, DJ Pon-3 and number one wubiest mare out there," Vinyl said with a wide smile, eyes closed behind her shades. "I'm an old friend of Twilight; we've been on far out adventures in the past and have done pretty crazy stuff together," Vinyl threw a leg around a glaring Twilight, who was mouthing at her to Shut up and Stop it \*\*now\*\* but Vinyl had lived with Octavia far too long to be scared by such a simple glare. "She's just advising me about the strange noises I've been hearing in my head; as to what they are, we've agreed that they're coming from a strange place."

"O...kay," Cadence said slowly, trying to take everything in. "So, Twilight, why haven't you mentioned your little friend before?"

"I dunno, Caddy," Vinyl shrugged. She felt the heat of the glare of the mare behind her but did her best to hide her grin. "Can't be because I've got a marefriend; Twilight has that strange sexual preference, after all."

Cadence's eyes grew at that, a small hint of a blush on her cheeks. With a delicate cough, Cadence forced her attention to Vinyl and her cutie mark, "If you do not mind me asking, I would like to hear a sample of your work. There is a small get together with the noble youths tonight and we do need some sort of entertainment



tonight."

"Ain't no problem Caddy," said Vinyl, horn glowing as she created some of her own music for the princess to hear. By how her head was following the beat, it seemed that the unAwake mare was enjoying it a great deal. "How's that?"

"It was wonderful, my little pony." Celestia said walking into the room, Vinyl falling into a proper bow. She might enjoy trolling Twilight a bit too much, but even she knew when to toe the line.

Most of the time.

"I am sure that the younger generation will just \_love\_ it, Ms Scratch, but I must ask, how old \_are\_ you? There will be alcoholic drinks served and I'd be failing in my own duties if I didn't make sure that I won't have an inebriated minor on my hooves."

"What are you talking about, Princess Celestia?" Vinyl laughed just a tad too loudly, stretching out every syllable. "I am \_certainly\_ not lying to you by saying I am old enough to drink. Ha, ha. Very funny joke Princess Celestia!"

Celestia simply raised an eyebrow at \_that\_, before shaking her head and conjuring up a pass for her to enter the castle later that night. "I will see that a mixing stand is in place for you tonight, Miss Scratch. Please be here around eight o'clock so you can coordinate with the lighting staff for your performance. The attire is semi formal, so it would be best if you wore either a dress or some sort of fancy jewelry."

With a bob of her head in the affirmative, Vinyl took the pass and placed it into her saddle bag. She waved goodbye to her Anchor as she left under the eye of Princess Celestia.

Cadence turned to look at Twilight with a wide grin on her face. "So Twilight," she started, wrapping a wing around the young mare. "Care to tell us about these adventures you had with your friend?"

Twilight realized that she would not be getting out of this easily, not after how Vinyl had acted beforehoof. With swears to various flora, Twilight started to explain in the least amount details possible to her future sister-in-law about the least insane thing she had with Vinyl. Which, unfortunately, involved a bar fight and a swarm of rats.

\* \* \*

><p>Vinyl made sure for the last time that her coat was brushed to a shine, her Element of Honesty proudly around her neck and her records safe in her reinforced saddle bag, made by one Rarity Belle.<p>

She knew that while Rarity would like to have her brand broadcasted to the nobles, doing it before she met the mare in-loop never ended well for Vinyl. But, as she was going out of her bedroom window to avoid her parents noticing her absence, she thought it was a moot point.

The unicorn made the distance from her home from the somewhat lower levels of Canterlot with her wub hooves, easily cutting off half an hour or so of travel and eventually landing with grace ingrained by many failed attempts in the past. She flashed her pass to the guards at the front of the doorway; a servant guided her to the ballroom.

Already, it was clear that they were in the final stretch of preparations for the little party, with pegasi flying around to fix the lights and buscolts making sure all the food on the table was perfectly arranged. This was all done under the glare of one Prince Blueblood, barking sharp orders here and there to servants, who made it clear they did not think highly of the prince when his back was turned.

Waving a hoof to the ponies around the mix station, Vinyl removed her shades and began inspecting the device. It quickly became apparent to them that she knew what she was doing. Either that or the Princess told them about her and were willing to let her take the fall if something went wrong.

Vinyl's ear flicked when she heard a cough, but her attention was solely on the wonderful machine in front of her. Ignoring the interruption, Vinyl moved some wires around while using a bit of her own magic to make improvements when the pony coughed a bit louder. This time it did distract her, causing her to zap herself with a bad wire change.

"Oi, the featherbrain with the cough, mind covering your mouth? Seeing as I am working with live wires here and I just got zapped because of it!" Vinyl snarled, looking around for the sprucehead and found it in the form of one very annoyed looking unicorn stallion.

"That is Prince Blueblood to you, peasant," Blueblood sneered down at her. "I've got no idea who you are or what you are doing with Ponfar or whatever that musician that Auntie hired for Cadence's party is called but by Celestia's mane, I will not let you ruin his machine."

Biting back a snort at his accidental innuendo, Vinyl shook her carefully styled mane and gave a laugh that she learned by sitting through many high end dinner dates with Octavia. "The name is DJ Pon-3, your highness," she said as she gave him a light bow, knowing he would look less if he called her out on it. "Not Pon Farr as you said, which by the way is the name of an alien mating season in that old tv show, your highness." She enjoyed the blush on his face and the snickering on the servants around them. "If you do not mind, I would like to make sure that this mixing station is ready for Princess Mi Amore Cadenza's party and that requires my full attention, along with me coordinating with the pegasi lighting crew. And time is going to be tighter now that I had to have this talk with you."

His fur bristled at her dressing down; eventually, though, Blueblood nodded his head reluctantly and allowed Vinyl to get back to work. More than one pony came by and gave the young mare a pat on the withers and a grateful smile.

Hopefully, Vinyl thought to herself, this would be an easy gig to

do.

\* \* \*

><p>It was turning out to be a fairly boring gig, if Vinyl was being honest. And as the Bearer of Blunt Honesty, she <em>was<em> being honest.

Oh sure, it was for a \_very\_ good cause, bringing together all the tribes to show and prove that the new generation of future leaders were forward thinkers and progressive in their actions. With a wide range of lower noble pegasi and earth ponies interacting openly and honestly with the unicorn nobles, it seemed that Caddy's little party was a hit.

Then again, they were clearly waiting for the sun to go down. Vinyl learned that the young \_young\_ nobles would be sent home and to bed once the moon was in the sky, and then the more 'adult' party would begin. \_Real\_ drinks would be flowing and Vinyl could start playing her music.

Levitating another glass to her mouth, she magically changed the content into something a bit more suited to her alcoholic taste.

With a grumble, Vinyl's bladder decided that she wanted attention now and demanded a trip to the little filly's room. Moving as quick as her wub hooves would let her, she darted into the restroom and took care of nature's calling.

As she returned to her mixing station, she saw that it had been moved around. Turning her head in time, she saw a flick of a blond tail leaving the room.

"Oh no no no no!" Vinyl swore under her breath, seeing that she had just been robbed of all her records. "\_Redwood!\_" she swore, trying to think of what she could do. While she could go search her pocket for records, she doubted she had the time to do so.

A thought occurred to her, the same odd sound that had been plaguing her \_was\_ \_unique enough that she could use it for the party. Of course, she would need to wubify it first.

As she listened to the beat reverberate around inside her head, Vinyl quickly used her wub hooves to interface with the mixing station, manipulating the sound systems so what she produced would seem to come from it and not herself. She began to unleash the music within her out across crowd, the lighting crew reacting flawlessly to the sudden change in plans. It was loud, powerful, all consuming music that instantly captured the attention of all the ponies in the room, dancing in flow with newly created music in perfect harmony.

Vinyl herself found in a center of pure focus, letting the melody play through her mind with a growing smile. She didn't notice the time pass, allowing the song to dictate how long it should go. With a deepening sense of balance and fullness in her music that she had not felt in a long time, Vinyl ended her first set with a flourish, wings high in the air and a clap of her hooves echoing like thunder, staring at the stunned crowd of ponies.

With a wicked glare on her face, Vinyl tipped her shades up with her magic so they could see her red eyes. "And that's just the opener folks!" With a cackle that she had learned from Luna, Vinyl dove back into her passion and began to bring out the wubs.

\* \* \*

><p>Vinyl groaned, the aftereffects of a hangover stabbing her in the head.<p>

She knew that she could do two things. She could go through her pocket, braving the headache and the stomach ache and retrieve the pills that would end her pain in an instant. Or, she could remain face down and wait out to the end of the loop so she wouldn't have to deal with the pain of her hangover.

"GooOood morning Vinyl!" The drawn out singsong from Twilight was like a pickaxe into her poor brain. Vinyl groaned, burying her head into the pillow. "How are you feeling this fine day?"

"Buck you Twilight, my head feels like someone ripped it apa-oh sweet sapling, don't tell me I made out with Blatherblood again!" Vinyl's head shot up in terror- before she winced in pain, lowering it back down onto the pillow.

"No Vinyl, you did not make out with Blueblood, although you did make a good impression on him and you two do have a little dinner date to talk shop over several topics," Twilight said, trotting loudly over to Vinyl and pushing the mare to an upright position. "What do you remember from last night Vinyl?"

"All I remember is doing my first set, which was wubtastically awesome, and nothing after that," Vinyl groaned, keeping her eyes shut, her ears folded back, and her wings flush against her body. "What's with all the questions Twi?"

"You really don't remember?" Twilight asked close to her ear, forcing Vinyl to crack an eye open in frustration. "Come with me to the bathroom, and I'll show you."

With a grumble, Vinyl pushed herself to her hooves and followed the purple pony into the other room. "Twi, you do know once my head isn't filled with a thousand Pinkie Pies bouncing around, I will need to make a really snarky comeback to that. Probably involving a threesome."

"Yes yes, I know," Twilight said with practiced ease, flicking on the light (and cementing her position as chief of calamities to Vinyl's tortured eyes). "Ooops, sorry Vinyl."

"I'll believe it once I see it," Vinyl moaned, rocking around on her hooves as she waited for her eyes to work again. "So why did you want me here agai-"

Vinyl's eyes fell on the full length mirror and went wide. In the reflection, there was a smoking hot alicorn with a wubbing blue mane staring right back at her. As she walked over to it, the alicorn opposite of her copied her movement flawlessly. She slowly lifted her foreleg to the glass; with a soft clop, the alicorn mare touched her hoof.

The alicorn mare in the mirror was Vinyl Scratch.

The alicorn mare was herself.

She was the alicorn mare.

Vinyl Scratch was an alicorn mare.

"Twilight Sparkle..." She said slowly to the mare next to her, not looking away from her image. "Why do I have wings now and why is my mane producing better wubs than me?"

Twilight rolled her eyes, placing a foreleg around Vinyl's neck. "I did some research about that mysterious sound you have been hearing and through several experiments, I have managed find the source. As you are aware, the universe is usually created with collapse of super forces into a single dense point that then causes the explosion that makes all known reality. From that-"

"Twi, English for me, the hungover mare is not well versed in nerd speak. I'm freaking about waking up with wings and a wubbing mane that is not making my headache worse for some reason, why is my wubbing mane not hurting me?!"

With a quick usage of her squirt bottle, Twilight started her explanation over again. "Vinyl, you were hearing the echo of the big bang, the heartbeat of the ever expanding universe. You then, wearing your Element, proceeded to use that strand of noise in your performance, remixing it, mind you. These?" Twilight tapped Vinyl's wings, looking her in the eyes. "This is what happens when a mare who's special talent is music, that has a magical artifact like an Element of Harmony, does exactly what you did last night." Wrapping her forelegs around the musician's neck into a hug, she let out a burst of laughter. "Congratulations Vinyl, you ascended by quite literally wubbing the universe a new one."

Vinyl hugged back out of reflex, still a bit stunned by the news. She tried to let everything that was told her sink in but she was still entrapped by her blinking reflection and what it meant. "That's very nice Twilight, but can I please have some time alone?"

"I understand," Twilight replied, letting her go. "I'll be outside, when you are ready." With that, the unicorn slipped out of the room, leaving the alicorn alone with herself.

Vinyl Scratch stared at her reflection, extending her wings outwards and examining them closely. While she had had wings before, she had not had both a horn and wings.

It could mean so much, now that she had ascended! What would she differently now that she was a bucking alicorn? She never planned to become an alicorn, she just planned to go with the flow with the loops. Buck responsibility, buck becoming a princess, buck becoming an alic-

She frowned, noticing her purple shades on the counter. She picked them up, and stared at them.

They were a great part of DJ Pon-3's identity, part of her.

Part of her.

Smiling to herself, she put her shade back onto her face where they belonged. She was an alicorn now, another awesome part of her already awesome self.

With a flick of her wub mane into a more proper position, Vinyl felt her confidence bloom. Listening to the wub coming from her mane and bobbing in time with the beat, she decided that she had best ethereal mane of all her friends.

"So Twilight," Vinyl shouted through the bathroom door. "Since I used the universe to ascend, does this make me the Princess of Motherbucking Everything?"

Twilight groaned. "One time. One time that happens, and you never let me forget it..."

"Because I'm pretty sure that wubbing the universe make me the master of it!" Vinyl continued with a wide smirk.

Chuckling as Twilight began to lecture of why using the universe to ascend didn't make one the princess of everything, Vinyl pivoted around and walked out the door. The new princess was ready to wub the world.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Note:<strong>

164.1: To tell the truth, I think this is going to go hourglass-hourglass. (If you don't get that then you may need to

comb through Northern Lights to catch the reference.)

164.2: May or may not be canon.

164.5: Why can't other apocalyptic abominations be as nice as the Blacklight virus?

164.6: Worth it. (Also, dang those apples are cheap.)

164.8: Don't ask.

164.9: You can ask for this one. It won't help.

164.10: Canter like an Egyptian.

164.12: Costume clash.

164.13: Not actually sure for this one.

164.14: Eye don't know.

164.15: Well, she's technically right.

164.16: Rock the night.

164.17: I just tune all these out.

164.18: Yes, this is a dirty story with Vinyl and Octavia in.

164.19: And this isn't.

164.20: Well, that's correct. They didn't know.

164.22 Badum tish, boom boom, bang, clatter, clash, WHAM.

## 172. Chapter 172

165.1

\* \* \*

><p>"...wait," Shining said. "Did you just..."<p>

"What?" Twilight asked.

"Did miss Princess-of-Librariesâ€"

"\_Friendshipâ€\_"

"â€"misspell a word?"

Twilight paused, and went back over the last few minutes.

"...you will never speak of this to anyone," she hissed.

"Of course," her brother agreed.

Cadence giggled. "I'm sure you'll make a great ant, Twilight."

Twilight's eye twitched.

"In all seriousness, given the loops, you'll probably be one of those first," Shining noted, trying to hide his smile.

\* \* \*

><p>162.27<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"â€"ow," Trixie said, shaking her head. "What justâ€""<p>

She swallowed, and stuck her tongue out. "Bleh. So that's what it feels like when someone crashes the loop in a different time period... dang Starlight Glimmer..."

Gathering herself, she took a look around.

A few hundred audience members looked back. One of them waved.

"Oh, come on!"

The blue-coated magician sighed. "Okay, I don't have the patience for this. Sorry, everypony."

Her magic focused, swirled, and a wand-star circlet appeared for a brief moment before there was a blinding white flash.

When it faded, she was already airborne and winging her way towards Canterlot.

"...did she always have wings?" one of the earth ponies asked.

"Whoa," said her friend. "This Trixie is good."

\* \* \*

><p>165.2 (Evilhumour, Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>There was a knock on her door set to an almost recognizable beat, but it was only found when examining the univâ€" <p>

Twilight stared at the sight in front of her, with the mint green mare smiling from cheek to cheek and the white mare looking very annoyed. Looking down, Twilight quickly pieced together why and did her best not to laugh.

"So Lyra, how was Princessâ€" "

"Queen." the mare opposite of her snickered as the white mare's ear twitched.

"Right, how was Queen Scratch for her first royal loop?" She watched the other mare remove her glasses and stare at her with her bloodshot red eyes, which made it look like her pupils were full of blood. Very off putting if the whole situation wasn't so funny.

"Oh it was a blast!" Lyra said hugging Vinyl, nuzzling against her. "She was the very best musical queen we could ask for!"

Sighing loudly, Vinyl glared at them both before turning away. "If anyone needs me, I'll be in the bar, getting drunk off my flanks trying to get rid of my ages old headache before going to that damn peace talks with Celly and Luna."

As she left, Lyra called out to her. "Shoo bee doo!"

The seapony queen responded back the same to her fellow seapony before realizing what she said and groaned loudly.

"First Derpy had only a century on the moon," Twilight mused, "and now Vinyl's the seapony queen."

Lyra gave her a questioning glance. "Well yeah. Is there a pattern or something?"

"Just that they were both unusual, and they both activated by glitch." Twilight gave Lyra a large grin. "What's your princess loop going to be like, I wonder?"



Lyra coughed. "I... haven't ascended yet, you knowâ€" "

"Right, sorry. Just speculating."

Before Twilight could finish thinking of what kind of horror or weirdness would happen when Lyra ascend and have her princess loop, there was a scream of fear coming down the road.

"That was Applejack!" Twilight shouted, building her power to teleport when there was a loud BANG and then a second shout, one of pain this time. Turning her head, she watched as a white object smash into the weak side of her library, causing it tip over and crash into the ground.

"My library!" Twilight shouted, mouth hanging low at what just happened.

"My Queen!" Lyra shouted, pushing the ball of magical infused water forwards as she rushed forwards, helping the dizzy white seapony up.

As Twilight walked close to the pony that just toppled her house, her ear flicked as she heard Applejack running towards her.

"Note to self," Vinyl wheezed as she sat against the destroyed library, laying a fin over her chest. "Do not surprise Applejack ever again."

Turning her head to the embarrassed farmer who was blushing now at her overreaction, Twilight blinked and tried to close her mouth.

"Sorry about that Vinyl," Applejack said, holding her hat. "Ah'm not that bothered by seaponies anymore, but when one as big as you comes up from behind, Ah just plain got spooked."

"It's okay," Vinyl wheezed as her horn glow blue, her body making popping sounds as the bones were starting to set themselves. "Not the first time I've got bucked by an earth pony so I'm used to it, although promise me you'll not teach Octy any fancy tricks?" She batted her eyes at the apple farmer, who was snickering now.

"Ah'll do my best partner," she leaned over to pat Vinyl on the back as well to help her up. "Come back to the farm, drinks on me."

"Sounds great to me," Vinyl said, stretching out now. "Lyra, Twilight, wanna join us?"

The mint green seapony didn't need any more encouragement to join but Twilight needed to be asked a second time before responding. Although teleporting to the moon to scream was a bit harsh of a response.

\* \* \*

><p>165.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetie Belle gave Vinyl a wide grin. "So... you ascended by remixing the beat of the universe."<p>

"Yep."

"I, on the other hoof, ascended by literally singing a universe into being."

Vinyl glared at her. "Okay, first of all you had a backup chorus. Secondly, you technically ascended when you turned Melkor good."

Sweetie Belle merely continued smiling. "You can think that all you want, \_nÃ-n\_ \_lobor laes\_. In the end, I sing, you remix."

"There's nothing wrong with remixing!" Vinyl protested.

"Never said there wa-as!" Sweetie singsonged as she trotted away.

\* \* \*

><p>165.4 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So..." Sunset managed as she sat down across from the green woman. "...Passaggio?"<p>

"Passaggio Muse, yes." The woman gave her a half smirk. "You know, the names here are remarkably fresh. No generations of repeated names going through lingual drift."

"Yeah, it's... one of this universe's many quirks. My name, for instance, is Sunset Shimmer." She shrugged. "I'm native, so I don't usually go by anything else."

"Well, I have Polymnia to fall back on if I ever get tired of Passaggio." The green woman examined her fingers casually. "Or I could go by doctor, professor, or psychopathic bitch. You know, titles."

Sunset rose an eyebrow. "Psychopathic bitch."

"A misnomer, obviously. I'm not even a sociopath, all things considered, but..." She shrugged. "When you're a civvy in a high-target military base, you have to grow some thick skin and learn to be creative."

"Ah. So... you're from Warhammer 40K?"

"Nope. But I will tell you I'm from a 4K." Polymnia was giving her a sly grin.

Sunset snorted. "So, this a guessing game?"

"Maybe."

"Okay." The teenage former unicorn leaned over the table. "Let's see, you're a professor and or doctor of some sort, you work at a military base in the future, you've got a reputation for dangerous mad

science, and you're replacing the leader of the sirens." She tilted her head. "Have any musical talent?"

"Mmm, you could say that."

"Is it critical for your survival?"

"No. Well, not usually." Polymnia shrugged. "I'll admit that I'm able to pick more obscure frequencies when I like for some...dramatic results. This producing conflict thing that the sirens have, that's a bit of a new one on me. Usually I just use psychology."

Sunset frowned, leaning back. "Fair warning, this is a sanctuary loop. And while you, as a looper, are our top priority, the nonloopers deserve respect too."

"Oh, relax. I started changing the feeding method months ago." Polymnia flipped out a business card and snapped it toward her.

Sunset caught it easily, glancing at it. Then peering at it, just to make sure. "Couples counselling?"

"Mmmhmm. Pair of lovers comes to our office, we do our bippity boppity, they have it all out while we're feeding, then I send the other two away and give the pair some real therapy." Polymnia smirked. "More conflict is better, of course, but intensity is just as nutritious as spread. Best of all, I get rave reviews: 'One session will make everything better,' that sort of thing."

"That's..." Sunset glowered at her. "That's not ethical at all."

"Everybody gets what they need, nobody is permanently hurt physically or mentally... I'm failing to see the problem."

"Mental manipulationâ€" "

"Is standard in some loops," Polymnia pointed out. "But that's neither here nor there. Either I keep up the couple's counselling or I have to take the sirens back to the old way of doing things." She frowned. "You would not believe how much I had to twist Aria's arm to get her to agree. 194 degrees!"

Sunset slammed her hands down. "Okay, what is your loop like? Because you seem way too comfortable with torture and brainwashing."

Polymnia stared deep into her eyes. "...it's actually mostly me," she admitted. "My anchor is a far more conscientious objector. But since I'm the second looper, and we haven't got another up yet, we're making due."

"So, you're just crazy."

"When you've seen the things I've seen," Polymnia mused, "you have to deal with it in some way. Me, I chose to be an unrepentant ass. No offense to the donkeys on the other side of the mirror," she added as an afterthought.

"...you still haven't told me what loop you're from."

Polymnia grinned. "Watching people wrack their brains amuses me. Actually, I'm not sure if my Anchor has been here either..." She shrugged. "Well, I figure I can tell you if you can't guess by the end of the week."

\* \* \*

><p>165.5<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey Twilight," Lyra greeted the purple pony. "I ascended last loop."<p>

"...what, really?"

"Yeah, weirdest thing..."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>The Lyracension Chronicle, Part One<strong>

\*\*(Written mostly by Oraclemask, with touches by Masterweaver)\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra Awoke to find herself under a tree reading a book. Glancing down, she saw a somewhat uncommon sight: the book with the tale of the Mare in the Moon. Only it was different...right, there were the loop memories. Lyra Heartstrings, personal student of the Princess Cadence, the Alicorn of Music and Harmony, and both Celestia and Luna were currently in lunar time-out. Lyra had seen this variant loop before, though apparently Cadence wasn't a golem this time.<p>

It was just as Lyra was contemplating turning the Elements of Musical Harmony into a band and going on tour that she realized that her mind was being unusually...quiet.

'\_Uh...Human? Seapony? ...Sweetroll? Are you in there?\_' Lyra thought.

Nothing. Lyra glanced into her mindscape and found it completely empty. Well...this was a bit...alarming. Deciding to figure out what was going on later, Lyra pinged.

A minute later, Lyra staggered back upright, slowly recovering from the brain-rattling experience of what felt like half a dozen pings at point-blank range.

\_Ow.\_

Right, NOT doing that again. Time for Plan B.

\* \* \*

><p>Since she was replacing Twilight Sparkle, it made sense that Spike was her assistant this loop. He wasn't awake, which was a

shame; Lyra could use a Force-Sensitive taking a look under the hood. She hadn't dared ping again, but the chariot was landing in Ponyville now. Hopefully SOMEpony would be Awake and able to lend her a hoof with whatever was going on now! Maybe it would even be Chrysalis "because then maybe Bon-Bon would be a changeling again and Lyra could commiserate with her over the whole mess.<p>

" "the Princess told you to make friends, Lyra," Spike was saying, "You should try talking to some of the ponies here in town! I bet they have interesting things to say!"

Lyra heard a gasp from nearby. Right, that would be Pinkie Pie " Lyra barely looked around in time to see a blur of green and white heading straight for her before she was glomp-tackled into the dirt.

"OhmygoshohmygoshOHMYGOSH! PONY! There you are, FINALLY, I was so worried after I Woke up all alone in this strange body! I know it's just a pony body and THAT'S not strange normally but I'm an Earth Pony for some reason and usually we're a unicorn or a seapony or even a human, have you seen Human anywhere by the way? I tried to Ping before but there was this HORRIBLE thing that happened instead and I'm really not totally used to having a body as much as everyroll else so MAYBE I did it wrong but at least this pony has super-duper-uber-poofy hair! I think I like poofy hair, I'm going to keep it but what do you think Pony? ...Pony?"

Lyra kept staring. A mint green Earth Pony with the \_swirliest\_ green and white mane she had ever seen was looking brightly back at her.

"...S-Sweetroll?!"

Sweetroll Lyra grinned. Then she gasped again.

"Wait a second you came on the chariot into Ponyville so you must be replacing Twilight this time that means I'm replacing Pinkie Pie! Though I kinda guessed it when I Woke up in Sugarcube Corner, plus can you hear how fast I'm talking right now, I must be channeling Pinkie Pie when she's on a mega duper sugar high, but really how can anyroll function without sugar? I mean it's just so VITAL, DUH " but this means I get to throw you the Welcome To Ponyville party this loop! With candy and cupcakes and streamers and I better get going I need to find where my unawake self hid the party cannon!"

And with that, Sweetroll was off like a shot. Leaving Lyra to twitch. This was shaping up to be an...INTERESTING loop...

Spike did a fake cough to break the awkward silence that followed.

"...well, I guess we'd better get started on inspecting things for Princess Cadence's celebration!"

"Inspecting things? Oh yeah, \_those\_ things! Those things that we \_totally\_ came here to inspect and stuff! ...What exactly are we inspecting again, Spike?"

Spike sighed.

"...The Summer Song Celebration?"

"Oh yeah, that thing," Lyra replied, grinning sheepishly.

What with the strangeness of the loop so far, she had completely forgotten about this loop's version of the Summer Sun Celebration.

\* \* \*

><p>"First up is the catering, courtesy of Sweet Apple Acres!"<p>

The farm certainly seemed normal...Lyra breathed a sigh of relief as she and Spike trotted through the apple trees. Applejack would be just the pony to help her out! Everything was going to be justâ€œ"

"EEEEK!"

CRASH!

"OOF!"

Lyra groaned, tasting dirt for the second time today. Not a flavor she was fond of. She tried to get back up, but a heavy weight was sprawled on top of her.

"Sweetroll, not now..." Lyra grumbled.

There was a gasp.

"Pony?!"

That wasn't Sweetroll...Lyra peered up to see Human staring wide-eyed back down at her. The pair of them blinked once, then twice. And then the apple trees shook with a deafening SQUEE.

"FINGERS! I almost NEVER get to see our fingers from this angle!" Lyra exclaimed, grabbing at Human's hand.

"Oh my gosh our mane and tail is SO SOFT!" Human Lyra squealed, grabbing at Lyra's mane.

\* \* \*

><p>"...and according to my loop memories, after falling through the mirror I eventually ended up working here as a farmhand," Human finished, "Which helped the Apples a bunch, because Applejack â€œ" well, <em>Orange<em>jack now â€œ" stayed in Manehattan this time. I'm also in charge of supervising the catering for the Summer Song Celebration since the Apple Reunion turned out to be the same day."

"\_Mulberry\_," Lyra sighed, stomping a hoof in frustration, "So much for getting Applejack's help. What about everypony else?"

Human shook her head.

"I don't remember seeing them at all. No Pinkie, no Rainbow Dash, no Fluttershy, no Rarity. I was kinda hoping Twilight would be able to

explain what's going on."

She frowned for a moment longer, before smiling.

"Oh well! Worst comes to worst, we can overwhelm Queen Meanie with our superior numbers!"

\* \* \*

><p>On the way to see the pony in charge of decorating the venue, Lyra stopped and looked up at the cloudless sky. Spike kept walking for a minute before he realized he was alone and doubled back. Understandably, he looked around for any crazy ponies or humans lurking in the vicinity before asking Lyra what the matter was.<p>

"Aren't we supposed to check who's managing the weather, Spike?" Lyra asked.

"I don't think so..." Spike pulled out a checklist and skimmed it, "Nope. Princess Cadence doesn't really mind what kind of weather goes on during the celebration anyway, remember?"

His eyes narrowed.

"...You don't have a pegasus cousin who's going to drop out of the air and squish us next, do you?"

Lyra chuckled nervously. The excuse she'd give him about why Human and Sweetroll knew her was that they were distant cousins, but Spike didn't seem to buy it totally.

"Not that I know of..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Out of the way please, you're standing right where the next set of pylons are going in."<p>

Lyra and Spike backpedaled hastily as metal rods telekinetically began arranging themselves next to the entrance. In a way, Lyra was relieved that Seapony wasn't in charge of decorating since she only had two styles: underwater and explosives, usually combined. But Thief/Scientist/Everything Else was almost as bad. Especially since she looked to be in full science mode, lab coat and cyborg implants on full display. The inside of Town Hall was starting to look fairly metallic to boot.

"\_Thief.\_"

"Yes yes, hi to you too Pony. Don't worry, these are perfectly harmless...but I promised Mayor Mare that I wouldn't compromise the building's structural integrity and so I had to construct additional pylons."

Lyra facehoofed.

"How long have you been waiting to say that?"

Thief gave her a cheeky smile.

\* \* \*

><p>"<em>Ooh-oh, ooh-oh<em>...now that's TOO sireny, gotta make sure the audience isn't brainwashed..."

Seapony was the last on the list. Sure enough, Lyra and Spike found her hanging around in a pond not far from where Fluttershy's cottage normally was.

"Seapony?"

"Hmm, maybe if I lead off with the fireworks, THEN the audience will be too deafened to be hypnotized! But then they won't hear me sing...that's not good..."

"Seapony!"

Seapony looked up and waved a flipper at her.

"Hey there Pony! Quick question, what part of the Equestrian National Anthem goes best with fireworks? I can't decide!"

Lyra facehoofed for a second time.

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra trotted up to the Golden Oaks Library with about as much enthusiasm as most loopers had for a trip to Eiken. After a long, LONG talk with Seapony, Lyra was confident that the other Lyra wouldn't go completely overboard when the festivities began tomorrow morning. But there was still whatever party Sweetroll had cooked up to go through, plus planning for the inevitable return of Nightmare Moon and whatever Evil Celestia was calling herself...Lyra wished her unawake self had been paying closer attention to the book before she Woke up. Was it Solar Flare this time?<p>

Momentarily caught up in trying to remember which it was, Lyra walked into the library and was greeted with a pie to the face.

...Ooh, blueberry! Yum!

\* \* \*

><p>Sweetroll hadn't <em>quite<em> gotten the hang of throwing a Pinkie Pie-styled surprise party...it was a very nice party, and the townspies all seemed happy to be present...but Sweetroll in her excitement had decided to increase the Pie ratio by making each guest a pie, and then throwing them into the guest's faces when they arrived as the surprise.

"She also got everybody's favorite flavors right too," Human said, still cleaning whipped cream out of her hair with a towel, "I don't know whether to be more or less scared."

"Mine was a \_mud\_ pie," Thief pointed out.

"You don't \_like\_ mud pies this loop Thief? Sorry, I'll make you a twisted-triple-lime-extra-salty-taco-supreme pie later to apologize!"



Mollified, Thief shook her head wildly to get the last bits of mud off, splattering the others in the process.

"Uh, fillies and gentleLyras? Shouldn't we work on making a plan or something?" Seapony interrupted, "In a couple hours we're going to be stuck facing two crazy Alicorns with ZERO Element-users! Although there's always Plan S."

"We're NOT doing Plan S," Lyra sighed, "Remember the \_last\_ time we did Plan S?"

"...the crater wasn't THAT big..."

"Mayor Mare will have my head if we do that to her Town Hall," Thief pointed out, "I \_like\_ having a head this loop."

"We don't have the firepower for Plan S anyway, silly Seapony," Sweetroll added, "No pocket, remember?"

The other four Lyras froze, then began waving hands/hoofs/flippers around comically in an attempt to reach a space that they had suddenly realized wasn't there.

"Oh this is badâ€œ"

"How did we miss this?!"

"Thief, aren't you doing something to the Town Hall? How did YOU miss this?"

"I was using local materials this loop! You know, for the challenge of it!"

Sweetroll nibbled on a pumpkin pie as she watched the other Lyras panic. To think none of them had checked at all! Of course, the only reason Sweetroll knew was that she'd tried checking their pocket for her unawake self's party cannon. Clearly she'd hidden it really, really, REALLY well...

\* \* \*

><p>Now that they were complete, Thief's decorations were less mad science-y than the other Lyras had anticipated. A lot of lights began flashing when Seapony went up to sing the anthem, revealing the true purpose of all the metallic bits and bobs: improving the audio quality in the venue.<p>

"And helpfully also canceling out the more siren-y bits," Thief added smugly, "I read the list of events and performers before I started designing."

"Why didn't you tell me before I spent all that time trying to sing less siren-y on my own?!" Seapony demanded.

Thief shrugged.

"It was funny."

"Fillies and gentlecolts!"

Mayor Mare's voice drew their attention to the stage.

"As Mayor of Ponyville, it is my great pleasure to announce the beginning of the Summer Song Celebration! The longest day of the year, where we celebrate the beautiful music and harmony that has enriched the lives of all ponies in Equestria! And now..."

There was a drumroll from somewhere in the audience. Mayor Mare nodded approvingly.

"...now, may I present to you, the beloved ruler of our kingdom...Princess Cadence!"

And the curtains drew back to reveal an empty platform, to the surprise of exactly zero Lyras.

\* \* \*

><p>Nightmare Moon had barely gotten out her first "FOREVER!" before a blinding flash of light appeared over her head.<p>

"FOALISH LITTLE SISTER! HAST THOU FORGOTTEN ME ALREADY?!"

"Hammy Olden Time Celestia, that's rare," Human noted.

"YOU!" Nightmare Moon bellowed, "BEGONE, INTERLOPER! YOUR DAY HAS NO POWER HERE!"

Evil Celestia â€” tree dammit, this was going to bother Lyra for the rest of the loop! â€” laughed, lighting up her horn and sending a massive wash of heat and light out. Unfortunately for Ponyville, their Town Hall was currently made of wood and thus flammable.

"Run for your lives!"

"The horror, the horror!"

Nightmare Moon and Evil Celestia ignored the stampeding ponies and the crackling flames as they began launching magical blasts back and forth. The building was barely evacuated in time before Nightmare Moon body-checked her sister through a retaining wall and sent the structure tumbling down.

"I don't remember this from baseline!" Seapony exclaimed, "They're still going at it!"

There was another crash and three more houses caught on fire. A fourth one froze over from a deflected spray of pure night. Looking upwards, Lyra winced as the sun and moon started moving back and forth: going from total eclipse to midday and back again.

"They're going to wreck all of Equestria at this rate!" Lyra stomped her hooves in frustration, \_"And I still can't remember that stupid name!"\_

"Who cares about the freaking name?!" Thief cried. "We've got to do something!"

"I've got the book!" Sweetroll yelled, already galloping toward the

Everfree. "We can read up on the way!"

Seapony splashed some water on a couple of the houses as she passed them, quickly catching up to the three galloping ponies. "Has anybody thought about what we're going to tell Spike? Or anyone, really?!"

Human caught up with the group, panting slightly. "Got it covered! Told Spike to, to help Cheerilee with the foals. Cause he's a dragonâ€"slow down!" she whined. "I'm an endurance runner, not a speed runner!"

With a nod to the others, Lyra slowed her gallop to a trot, walking alongside their bipedal companion. "I'm cool with giving you a ride. All we got to do is find the Elements of Harmony, and we'll be good." She shrugged a bit as Human slipped onto her back. "Granted, we've all earned the Element of Laughter, so I don't know how it'll break down this timeâ€" "

"Uh, problem ponies." Sweetroll had pulled the book out of her saddlebags and was reading through it as she walked along. "Apparently this loop, the Elements of Harmony are Dynamics, Pitch, Rhythm, Timbre, Tempo, and a mysterious sixth element that will suddenly appear when the other five are gathered."

The group all stopped and stared at her for a moment.

"Well," Thief mused, "That's an oddly literal interpretation."

"Calling it now, the last element is Melody," Human quipped.

"Only one way to find out." Seapony pushed her waterball forward again. "Come on, ponies, let's get going before the princesses destroy everything."

"And hope the sixth element appears out of nowhere," Lyra deadpanned. "Because that always works!"

\* \* \*

><p>165.6 (Vinylshadow)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Octavia was starting to regret moving to Ponyville. Not only did it mean she had to plan trips to Canterlot for concerts days and sometimes weeks in advance, she also had to put up with its residents and weekly problems as well. And then there was her <em>roommate.<em>

Nearly every morning, the cellist would come downstairs to find her off-white, deranged-maned menace withers-deep in some new contraption, doing what the unicorn had dubbed "Wubbifying" the hapless machine she set her eyes on.

Toasters, ovens, blenders, beds, couches, ceiling fans, televisions, the thing under Vinyl's bed Octavia didn't have a name for...they had been forced to call in one of Fluttershy's sons to destroy it when it came to life and started terrorizing the town, much to Vinyl's

chagrin.

"Vinyl, didn't you already...wubbify the dishwasher?" Octavia asked warily, cradling her glass of orange juice protectively against her coat, hoping the fur would help protect it from the harmonic vibrations that Vinyl's machines produced. She had stopped using glass after the first dishwasher incident and knowing Vinyl, the mare would find a way to shatter plastic if given enough time.

"Mornin' Octy," Vinyl said. Coming up for air, she smiled at the Canterlot Earth Pony. "Nah, I'm simply fine-tuning it. The Dubstep Dishwasher is now...the Wubstep Dishflosser."

"Er...gesundheit?" Octavia said, taking a step back.

"Relax, I didn't add a setting above ten this time," Vinyl said soothingly. "It only goes up to 9.9."

"Vinyl, you shattered glass in Yakyakistan with your Sonic Refrigerator when you set it to two-and-a-half," Octavia said, remembering the delegation that had been sent to Ponyville and the fallout from \_that\_ debacle—which had rendered her trapped in Ponyville once the Yaks had destroyed the train station.

"Okay, fine, I'll put it on one. Gimme your cup." Without waiting for an answer, Vinyl took Octavia's cup, drained it and tossed it into her machine. Turning the dial to "1," Vinyl grinned and pushed the "START" button.

The sun went out.

Seconds later, there were two flashes of light, one golden, one magenta.

"Vinyl. What. Did. You. Do?" a slightly-panicked Twilight Sparkle asked, while Celestia fruitlessly tried to reignite her connection to the sun. "I felt a \_massive\_ spike of Wubergy from your house!"

"You finally came up with a name for it?" Vinyl said with a chuckle that died in her throat as the two princesses glared at her in the light from the myriads of glowsticks Vinyl had strung up in case of situations like this.

Twilight moved past her and stared at the Wubstep Dishflosser with a critical eye, then pressed the "STOP" button. Celestia let out a relieved sigh as she felt her connection to the sun come back and she turned it back on.

"Alright, you accidentally invented a device that can sever a pony's connection to magic," Twilight said slowly.

"Seriously?" Vinyl blinked behind her shades and grinned. "That's awesome...ly bad...very, very bad," she added as she faced down Twilight's Super Soaker. "Alright, I'll go back to the Dubstep model," she grumbled, stepping behind the machine and uncrossed the red and blue wires.

"How do you put up with her?" Twilight asked Octavia as Celestia perused Vinyl's music collection.

"Just smile and nod when she pauses for breath," Octavia said, smiling fondly at her roommate. "And I wouldn't have it any other way."

\* \* \*

><p>165.7 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>It was a nice and quiet afternoon, and a yellow coated stallion had been left home alone without any supervision.<p>

Lemon Rush tapped his chin, looking at the sparse kitchen he shared with his seven brothers: Big Maroon, Corn Curse, Forging Fire, Butcher Nails, Siege Patrol, Regal Stone and Blood Flower, his mother, his fiancée, two massive timberwolf brothers, a fear cloud called Larry and an evil fluffy white bunny.

"Hmm," Lemon grunted, raising an eyebrow at said evil bunny, who was cleaning his weaponry in the sink. Angel had become somewhat of a trusted partner in crime, Lemon supplied the bunny with ammunition, and Angel never told the Little Mother about the more questionable stuff the Anchor had done. "Everyone is out... I wonder if I should surprise them with a cooked meal. What do you thiâ€" Lemon frowned as he heard the front door slam shut. Running to the window, he opened it to shout out, "Coward!" at the fleeing rabbit.

With a huff, Lemon reached around for a random cookbook and looked for a nice, simple and easy recipe to follow, with only a few steps and a hooffull of ingredients.

"Okay, I am fairly sure I won't screw up this time!" Lemon said hopefully as he pulled out some of the needed food.

\* \* \*

><p>By Ponyville standards it had been a peaceful day, though those standards were admittedly suspect considering how much insanity Ponyville seemed to attract and how quickly the ponies living in the small farming town adapted to it.<p>

A family gathering of seven massive stallions and two much smaller mares, with two massive timberwolves and one cute little fear cloud, dominated the main room of the Sugarcube Corner. All deferred to Fluttershy, the small, soft spoken pegasus mare that they affectionately called Little Mother, but normally went by Fluttershy, who beamed at her sons and soon-to-be-daughter in-law. Nyx, the second mare of the family outing, rolled her eyes at the latest comment her future brother-in-law Big Maroon made.

Suddenly, there was a massive roar.

As the seven brothers were normally primarchs, they were able to react to this new and unexpected danger without any hesitation. Charging outside through the wall with weapons already drawn, all eyes were directed towards the monstrous form approaching Ponyville from the direction of the Everfree Forest... or more accurately, judging by the giant yellow stallion in the monster's grip, from the

direction of Fluttershy's cottage.

The monster roared again, and a few moments later the yellow stallion came flying over houses, stores, and river, adding a second hole in Sugarcube Corner's wall to match the first.

"I followed the \_entire\_ bucking recipe, and I didn't \_cheat\_ at all!" Lemon grumbled, shaking himself clean. "I \_only\_ added an extra teaspoon of honey as I \_know\_ you like it, Nyx!"

With a huff, Nyx smacked the back of her fianc 's head. His brothers rolled their eyes as they set forth to make their way to deal with the monster their brother cooked up by mistake.

Fluttershy squinted her eyes. "Is that Angel riding the monster?" she asked, noticing a distinctive white blob goading the monster on. Even from this distance she could see a massive grin on the bunny's face.

Lemon turned his head around and began to beat it against the wall of the restaurant in response to his mother's question as Nyx patted his withers comfortingly.

\* \* \*

><p>165.8 (fractalman)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Stone...soup?" asked an Unawake Applejack.<p>

"Yep!" said Pinkie. "Don't you remember when Maud Pie ate the rock that fell off Rarity's hat? Rocks are crunchy!"

"Huh?"

Pinkie's grin actually faltered for a moment. "Ooooooh, righhhht, that didn't happen in this timeline."

Maud and Marble slurped up their soup.

Applejack's face turned green. "How can anypony eat \_rocks\_?"

"Welll..." said Pinkie, "You need to be an earth pony or alicorn for starters, or you won't be able to digest them properly. After that, uh, lots of practice? Hm, I never really thought about it..."

Applejack pushed her bowl away. "Well excuse me, I think I'm just going to skip dinner."

\* \* \*

><p>165.9 (fractalman)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia smiled as she sent off the two Gala tickets  and was promptly buried in a small mountain of Gala tickets.<p>

She poked her head out from the pile; a scroll materialized in front of her. "I hope Twilight has a good explanation for thisâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Celestia<em>

\_I have more Gala tickets where those came from. I have more Gala tickets than I know what to do with. I know, I'll invite everypony in Equestria!\_

\_Your faithful student,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle\_

Celestia's eyes widened in horror; livening up the Gala by inviting lots of non-noble ponies (Twilight's immediate friends, and \_maybe the rest of Ponyville) was one thing. Inviting everypony in Equestria? Not only would that result in utter chaos (and probably Discord breaking free before the Elements were fully recharged), but it begged a very important question: "How did she get so many tickets, anyways?"

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Twilight<em>

\_Please don't! Everypony in Ponyville is fine, but everypony in Equestria is too many!\_

Celestia sighed in relief. Yes, everypony in Ponyville should be just about rightâ€¦"

Another scroll materialized in front of her.

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia<em>

\_Oh, Ok! I'll just invite Discord and everybody in Tartarus. That should be a bit easier to manage.\_

\_Your faithful student,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle\_

Celestia's ear began to twitch.

\* \* \*

><p>165.10 (Fractalman)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Bubblegum?"<p>

"Check."

"Sphere of tree sap?"

"Check."

"Super catapult?"

"Ready to fire!"

"CUTIE MARK CRUSADERS SUPER CATAPULT BUILDERS YAY!"

\* \* \*

><p>In a distant corner of Equestria, a random, wandering sort of stallion found themselves in a ratherâ€¦peculiar situation.<p>

"So. I have to marry you." said the stallion.

"Wellâ€¦yes," said the mare, "unless you can find another mare to throw into the ritual circle, you either have to marry me within the week or you'll die. "

The stallion made a face, "Are you sure we can't get some unicorn to dispel this stupid spell?"

The mare shook her head. "\_Maybe\_ the Elements of Harmony could do it. This is an ancient spell made from around the same time using arts that were lost during the carnivorous parasprite plague. A normal unicorn doesn't stand a chance." She shrugged. "On the bright side, we'll only have to kiss each other once a week to keep the enchantment happy."

\* \* \*

><p>"WHEEEEEEE!" screamed Sweetie Belle as she hurled through the air. She paused in her screaming just long enough to cast a spell to make herself more durable.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Did you hear that?" asked the stallion.<p>

"Hear what?" asked the mare, right before a white projectile crashed into the ritual circle, along with a bunch of tree sap.

\* \* \*

><p>"Soâ€¦I have to marry you or you'll die."<p>

"That's the gist of it" said the stallion glumly.

"Andâ€¦we can't just find somepony else to take my place?"

The mare shook her head. "The spell only accepts one substitution."

"What about letting you die and then resurrecting you?"

The mare considered with her hoof to her face. "Wellâ€¦"

The stallion's eyes widened. "NO! No, let's not take any chances with my life, I'm rather attached to it!"



Sweetie Belle scrunched her face up. "Would it help this be less awkward if I aged myself up?"

The stallion erred out a tentative "Yes?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Now, Sweetie, I'm rather surprised to learn you're actually old enough to marry, but I don't care if you're two million years old or two billion, I simply <em>must</em> design your wedding dress. Now hold still while I take your measurements."

"Rarity, It's not even a real wedding! It's a sham wedding we're going through to satisfy some old enchantment!"

"Nonsense, if you're going to wed you may as well do it properly."

\* \* \*

><p>"All in all, it was an OK loop, although a little awkward as I never did get his name." said Sweetie Belle to her now Awake crusader friends.<p>

Scootaloo smirked. "Prepare to be jealous. Rainbow Dash and I had an awesome variant that started with us punching our way through a sharknado, and only got better from there..."

\* \* \*

><p>165.11 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight sighed, levitating Starlight Glimmer out of a bush. "Really? <em>Really?</em>"

"RELEASE ME, YOU BRAINWASHED PAWN OF HATRED!"

"A bush." Twilight rolled her eyes. "Of all the places to hide, you chose. A bush."

"I SHALL OVERTHROW YOUR DYSTOPIC TYRANNY!" the pink unicorn snarled.

"...You know what? I don't even have the patience to deal with you right now." Twilight dropped Starlight back into the bush with no ceremony whatsoever, walking away. "Have fun watching me screw with the spirit of chaos, I guess."

\* \* \*

><p>165.12 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight, it all turned out fine in the end."<p>

"Trixie, two things: One, your medical license is in cancer treatments, not midwifery. Two: You obtained it in a loop in which

ponies \_were literally living explosions.\_"

"Look, I was the only licensed doctor aroundâ€"

"The Cake twins aren't supposed to be living fireballs!"

"Point of order, only Pumpkin is constantly on fire. Pound just generates unending electricityâ€"

"I was being melodramatic for the sake of the point. Which you are missing."

"Really? What \_is\_ the point then?"

"Mister Cake has a cybernetic limb. Princess Celestia had to overturn twelve laws just to keep Pinkie out of jail. I had to go down to Griffonstone \_personally\_ to make reparations!"

"...and?"

"And?! And this should never have happened!"

"It wasn't \_my\_ fault they decided to vacation in Manehattan!"

\* \* \*

><p>165.13 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Whoa whoa whoa whoa whoa <em><strong>whoa!<strong>\_" shouted Vinyl, crashing through the library window and slamming into the floor. Twilight watched in horror as the mare began to spin in circles with her sonic propulsion hooves pushing her around, the power of the sound come from the hooves destroying all the books in the library. She tried to step forwards but got a mouthful of feathers for her troubles as Vinyl desperately flapped her wings to get some stability.

With a snarl, Twilight conjured up a dictionary and placed it on Vinyl's stomach to pin her in place, only to redirect the new alicorn into a single direction,: namely, the librarian. Struggling to shove the DJ off of her, the unicorn slowly took in the state of her library. It was a complete mess, everything a wreck in the span of less than a minute.

Turning her head slowly, she leveled a Fluttershy-grade stare at the musician, who was starting to stand upright on shaky legs.

"Note to self," Vinyl whimpered, switching her shades around. "Either use wings or wub hooves, \_not\_ both." Then she noticed the building rage in the unicorn next to her and gulped loudly as the mare began her lecture.

\* \* \*

><p>165.14 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I'd like to see your license, <em>sir</em>," a stallion's brisk voice forced Mac's head upright. Standing in front of his counter was a pair of city guards with a number of privates behind them, all of them holding batons with eager looks in their eyes. "As I have heard reports that there has been alcohol flowing from this underground bar and according to my sources, there is no bar authorized in this location," with a malicious grin on his face, the leader of the two leaned in close to Mac's face. "So unless you can pull out a license to in the next five seconds, we're going to tear down this speakeasy and drag your flanks before the court of law."

"A've got a royal blessin'," Mac said sternly, doing his best not to smirk as several of the privates noticed one of his clients and paled instantly. "So Ah can operateâ€"

"A royal blessing!?" the pony laughed in Mac's face before slamming his hooves into the counter, denting the wood. "That's the most stupidest thing you can say son and I will look forward dragging you in front of Princess Celestia for your liesâ€"

"He's got a royal blessing of the Princesses, my little pony," a voice from the guard's direct left caused the officer to gulp. Turning his head slowly, he noticed the drunk glare of Princess Celestia. "Sire Macintosh of the Apple clan has the blessings of all the princesses of Equestria and you, sir, are harshing the royal buzz," Celestia then loomed over the terrified guard, folding in himself in fright. "Although, you can do something for me and I will forget this has ever happened."

Blinking, he tentatively asked, "My princess?"

"Please catch Luna, she's drunk enough to the point where she thinks she is a hummingbird and ponies are flowers again," Celestia said before to the bar tender. Throwing back her drink, most of which landed past her open mouth and onto the floor, along with a stone mug that shattered into many pieces. "Another!" the princess shouted before passing out on the floor.

With a scream, a private ran in fear before being tackled by a loudly buzzing dark blue alicorn.

\* \* \*

><p>165.15 (Awesomedude17) (MLP x Donkey Kong)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie Pie raised an eyebrow at the sight before her.<p>

"What's going on?"

"My sister is having a banana fight with a gorilla." Luna replied.

Celestia tossed several bananas at Donkey Kong, who blew steam out of his his ears, took out a massive barrel filled with pudding, and tossed it.

\*SPLAT\*

"My coat! It's on like... you know what I'm talking about, Donkey Kong!"

Donkey Kong howled in response and charged, entering a slap fight with the sun princess.

Pinkie Pie grinned and took out a camera.

"I can't wait to show this to Bowser!"

"You know him?"

"Of course. One loop, we were roommates!"

"The horror..." Luna muttered.

\* \* \*

><p>165.16 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Meeting Octavia's parents was always an off-putting prospect.<p>

Not frightening, in Vinyl's opinion, because as much as some versions of the two would disapprove of her the fact remained that Octavia was usuallyâ€”\_usually\_â€”quite rebellious in those cases and that would render the whole point moot. Unless they were the kind of ponies that sent assassins after her or tried to sabotage her career, in which case Vinyl usually enlisted Sweetie Belle as an up and coming singer tagalong who \_just so happened\_ to be both a ludicrously competent PR pony and a surprisingly dangerous opponent in combat. The point was, though, in the long run Vinyl just did not care whether Octavia's parents were squares; she liked it when they got along, of course, but she wasn't as put off by angry fathers and disgusted mothers as a normal pony would be.

Maybe that was a bit distant of her, yeah... but in the end, it was Octavia that mattered, not the ponies that raised her.

Still, with something so loop variable, each iteration of the visit tended to set the unicorn off balance. What was a jovial pair just last loop could be a cold sneering father this one, and the next loop might have him replaced with a rocker of a mother. She'd learned to treat each version of them as they came, with as much respect and care as they deserved.

"...and furthermore, young lady, I will not have my own daughter live as a layabout with some ruffian of a mare when she has an entire estate to run! Your musical talent is all well and good for entertaining others, but I insist that you return home and remain here until you have learned how to handle proper finances!"

Looking from the cold glare of the stallion to the cringing, huddled form of her marefriend, she promptly decided that this version might not deserve any at all.

"Excuse me," the unicorn interjected as she handed her untouched wineglass to the maid, "but Octavia didn't bring me here to watch you

berate her. She brought me here because you asked to meet me. Well, demanded probably. Point is, if we're going to do this right you should be talking to \_me\_, not her."

The stallion glanced briefly in her direction. "This is not your concern. You may leave."

The unicorn grinned, the same kind of grin that was stereotypically associated with sharks but really could be found more often on the face of an asylum patient. "Well, I'm choosing not to. So first thing's first, introductions!" She walked forward, jamming her hoof just inches away from his muzzle. "Name's Vinyl Scratch, also known as DJ PON-3, lady of the nightclubs and goddess of wubbology, although I dabble in all sorts of electronic techno music and remixing. My muse is very multi-talented."

The stallion growled, but rose his own hoof in greeting. "Charmed, I'm sure. Now, if you'll excuse usâ€"

"Oh, also, me and your daughter are madly in love and having weekly bouts of gratuitously passionateâ€"

"â€" \*\*WHAT?! \*\*"

"Don't worry, we usually keep it in the bedroom. Usually. Safe, sane and consensual, you know?"

The stallion was now reeling back in utter disgust, glaring at Vinyl as he puffed up. "You sick wretch! Perverting my daughter with such terrible idealsâ€"

"Speaking of ideals!" Vinyl interrupted, grinning broadly. "Let's talk about an ideal parent. They're supportive, they teach their kids right from wrong, they discipline them sometimes but always have a reason for it, and they don't, oh, abuse their daughter psychologically to the point where said daughter treats their presence as the source of all nightmares." She stepped forward, still grinning, but her eyes narrowed. "I can't help but notice that dearest Octavia is cowering on the floor, misterâ€"oh, where are my manners! You still haven't told me your name!"

"How dare you!" the stallion roared. "You walk into my house, tell me you're using my daughter as your plaything, and now you insult me by claiming not to know who I am?"

"Oh, I know who you are. Fact is, I don't give a twig. Because to me, the only important part of who you are is the part where you are the pony that Octavia's terrified of." Vinyl stepped forward again. "Which, in my mind, means I've got to make sure you never hurt her again. Now there are a number of ways I could go about that, the usual threats of killing you or fates worse than death, yadda yadda, but I think the best way to move forward is to rob you of all the power that you have."

"You?" The stallion snorted. "You're nothing more than a delinquent pervert with a few idiotic devotees."

"Oh, I'm also Celestia's daughter."

"Now that is obviously a lie. Celestia is pure, untouched, and she

would neverâ€”"

"Wings," said the suddenly an alicorn Vinyl Scratch. "Bam."

The stallion's mouth opened and closed rapidly. "...Fake! Those are fake wings that you made invisibleâ€”"

Vinyl hovered in mid air with a couple of flaps. "Yeah, when I said I was a goddess of wubbology, I wasn't kidding."

"...I see," the stallion mused, stepping back carefully. "I... suppose I have been rather... unbecoming."

"Yep. Of course, Mom tends to be mostly forgiving," Vinyl mused. "Except where I'm concerned. She's incredibly overprotective like that. Heck, my existence is a state secret, just in case ponies try to assassinate me. Oh yeah! Tell anypony about this and Mom'll have one of Chrysy's drones kill you."

"It's true!" piped up the forgotten maid, who suddenly wasn't an earth pony but some black zombie bug thing... in a maid uniform.

"...what...?"

"Spy network. Changelings are good at that. Sooooo, yeah. Since you've been an utter bastard to my marefriend, you're going to find a lot of your privileges curtailed and basically spend the rest of your life looking over your shoulder. Don't worry, I'll help Octavia achieve her dreams without you." With a salute, Vinyl landed and transformed back into a unicorn. "Okey doke, I've said my piece."

She turned away from the stunned stallion and, very gently, walked over the cowering ball of grey pony that she loved. "Hey. You want to blow this joint?"

Octavia managed to look up at her with tear stained cheeks.

"I'm only asking because this place seems pretty horrible for you," Vinyl explained. "Aaaaaand because I'm worried if I pressure you into anything I could accidentally be hurting you even more, but that's probably just because I'm really worried about this whole thingâ€”"

"Home." Gray hooves wrapped around her neck. "Take us home."

Vinyl Scratch smiled. "Door, or dynamic?"

Octavia actually paused to consider that for a moment. Then she smiled back. "Dynamic, definitely."

The unicorn chuckled. "There's my Tavi." Pulling a grappling gun from absolutely nowhere, she wrapped her hooves around the gray mare and shot it out a window, rappelling them both out with a cacophonous shatter of glass.

The stallion stared at the destruction in complete shock. The zombie bug maid pouted and let out a tiny sigh. "And I'd just finished wiping that clean, too..."

\* \* \*

><p>165.17 (Scorntex)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Shining was used to waiting. Even before the Loops, he'd been good at it. Part and parcel of being a guard meant lots of standing around, waiting for things to happen. The Loops had only honed that more.<p>

However, at the moment, centuries upon centuries worth of discipline were going up against concern and worry for his (well, supposedly her, this Loop) wife's ("husband's") mental well-being at that moment.

Not that Cadance (or Bolero) had never been in stressful situations before, and not with the very pony she was currently with, but that had been different.

As Princess Mi Amore Cadenza, she'd been a sister to protect, and watch over, or ignore, and in a few of the far more disturbing Loops... Shining didn't think about those.

But as Prince Bolero, she was... another stallion. One of the guys. True, "his" special talent was unusual, but at the same time, an affinity for love and affection had been determined as exactly the sort of thing two guys on a night out on the city needed.

Of course, since the other "guy" was Blueblood, large amounts of alcohol were also going to be involved somewhere.

Shining had been there. He'd warned Cadance about what was likely to happen, what she was likely to see, or worse, hear. She had gently kissed him, smiled one of her more reassuring smiles, and told him she was fairly certain she could handle whatever madness her "brother" could dole out.

He had considered going to find her. He had considered calling Twilight and her friends, or perhaps Princess Celestia herself. Anything, anything but leaving her with him.

Then he'd reminded himself that he'd been as insistent as Cadance when it had happened to him. All he could do was wait for her return.

Which was trying his patience. He had already worn a groove into the floor from pacing.

After what felt like an eternity, he heard the jangle of keys, and a tiny click. His ears perked upward, as the door swung open.

It was kind of impressive how even after a night out on the town, and clearly more than a few rounds of drinks, Cadance still managed to look composed and regal (and, in his professional opinion as her husband, beautiful).

"Shining?" "Bolero" asked, as she noticed the pony waiting for her. She grinned one of those grins that outshone the sun. "You waited up

for me?"

He nodded as she walked over towards him, staggering slightly. "Sorry," she murmured, "Not sure how much I actually drunk. Drunk? Drank?" She blinked. "Whatever."

Then she grinned and batted a hoof playfully at Shining's hair. "Cady, stop that," he groaned.

She pouted. "What? I think you look cute with curls." She grinned. Shining pouted back. For whatever reason, instead of the usual name he had when everypony's sexes got swapped, this time the universe had apparently decided he was Shining \_Amour\_, and that this meant swapping his and Cadance's usual hairstyles (though he was of the mind that she managed to style his mane, and better than he ever could).

"You should have curls more often," she said.

Shining leaned against his wife. "Wanna talk about what happened?" He asked.

Cadance shuddered. "Not really," she murmured, "I kinda want to take a shower, then forget any of it ever happened." She sighed deeply.

"I know what you've been through, honey," Shining said, "and I'm here for you, you know that."

She smiled again. "I know, dear." She looked about the room furtively. "Maybe after I've showered the heck out of myself, we could..."

The suggestive smile she'd been sporting faltered. "Snuggle? Sorry, sweetie, but after a few hours with Blueblood, listening to him talk about... things, I don't even want to \_think\_ about... y'know?"

Shining nodded, solemnly. "I know, honey. What about a nice back rub?"

"I'd like that... I really would." She kissed him. "I love you."

With that, she began to drag herself towards the stairs leading to the bedroom. "And Shining?" she said, turning to smile once again as she got to the first step. "Thanks for waiting for me."

Shining just smiled back, Cadance's own smile increasing as he did. "Always, honey."

\* \* \*

><p>165.18 (Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm sorry, Harry. It's just that this is the sixth time in the past five hundred fused loops that someone from a near-Hub loop has tried for the joke," Twilight told the tall lanky brown unicorn



stallion with the pentagram cutie-mark.<p>

Harry "Blackstone" Dresden coughed uncomfortably into a hoof. "It happens that often?" he asked with a weak smile.

"Actually, no. You're just latest in a flurry of them," explained Twilight. "Nearly every smart-ass in the multiverse gets the idea eventually, and it's best to just let them get it out of their system. We're mostly disappointed in your comparative lack of effort. Most of the others go to the trouble of getting copies of the original texts. The Doctor actually provided an autographed first edition of La GÃ©omÃ©trie."

"So you thought you'd try the 'Descartes before the horse' gag with a copy of Philosophy for Dummies?" Spike asked, holding up the yellow-and-black trade paperback. The dragon shook his head.

The Chicago wizard chuckled uneasily. "I don't suppose a trip to a rare book dealer would help to salvage this?"

\* \* \*

><p>165.19 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...so I really need you to read at least the first few pages before we go any further," Vinyl finished, handing the journal to a very puzzled looking Octavia.<p>

"Well, I... I suppose I might as well go along with this," the earth pony managed, giving the cover of the book a wary glance. "I mean, I've done stranger things with you, and you do seem oddly serious aboutâ€"

It was at that point that Twilight Sparkle teleported in, wings flared. "Vinyl Scratch, sorry for the interruption but we've got Grogar this loop." She began pulling a small collection of objects out of her pocket. "Put this on, keep this close at all times, remember the rules. Oh! Here's an extra set for Tavi, can you explain how this works to her?"

The white unicorn blinked. "Uh... Twilight, what's a Grogar?"

"What's â€"oh, pines, you haven't gone through a Grogar loop have you?" Twilight Sparkle groaned. "Right. Okay, I can... okay, so you know how we're kinda sorta linked to the Dream Valley world?"

"...The what worlâ€"?"

"It's a land of magical talking ponies which is basically Equestria post-Hearthswarming and pre-Discord, except Tirek shows up early," Twilight explained. "Long story short, there are lots of bad villains there. Heck, we thought Tirek was a native to that world for the longest timeâ€"turns out our world had a version of him too!"

Octavia cleared her throat. "Excuse me, ah, miss...?"

"...Oh, you haven't read the journal yet? Sorry, Twilight Sparkle, local Anchor, currently in panicked explanation mode, sorry I'm being rude."

"No problem. I take it Grogar is one of these bad villains you just mentioned?"

"Yes. Necromancer ram, extremely crafty and dangerous, kidnaps unicorns mid-teleport in order to enslave them in his dark realm. And that's just in Dream Valley," Twilight clarified, turning back to Vinyl. "Whenever he crops up here, he's an incredibly dangerous chessmaster type. No, he's not looping, loop aware, or even dreaming; he's just very observant, very cunning, and happens to have the usual lust for power and immortality villains have without the usual tendencies toward self-sabotage."

Vinyl blinked. "So...?"

Twilight sighed, pulling a thick sheaf of paper out of her pocket. "Here are the rules for the loop, obey them until I tell you otherwise. Standard procedure is to track Grogar down as quickly as possible then imprison him in orbit at an arbitrary pointâ€"not on the sun or moon, too obvious and he'll probably have contingenciesâ€"and keep him under triple-looper-guard watch at all times until the loop ends. Trust me on this: It's for the best. I've got to go get the others and warn them, hopefully Apple Bloom has some ideas..."

With that, she teleported out, leaving various bits of equipment on the table.

Eventually, Vinyl cleared her throat. "Yeah, so... to be fair, I didn't know about this at all..."

\* \* \*

><p>165.20 (Vinylshadow)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>The Cutie Mark Crusaders Woke up and did a simultaneous Loop Memory check and grinned at each other.<p>

Looking up, they looked at their latest masterpiece, an airship to rival those built by the Canterlotians.

"Wow," Scootaloo said with an awed whistle. "The things our UnAwake selves build. Nice work, Apple Bloom."

Sweetie Belle squinted at the bow of the ship. "Huh, wonder if the name means anything."

Scootaloo flew up to examine it closely. "Apple Bloom, you named it; does \_Aiedail\_ mean anything?"

"Morning Star in some old language I picked up from the texts," the mare replied, checking the gauges and pulling levers.

"'The texts'?" Scootaloo asked, landing carefully among the

tools.

"Apparently unicorns this Loop are an old species, either dying out or rarely being born. Those that are born are usually scooped up and taken to Canterlot byâ€" "

The door to the airship bay crashed open and a voice called out.  
"Nopony move!"

Several unicorns stormed into the bay and surrounded the trio. They recognized Lyra, Minuette, Trixie and, to Sweetie Belle's surprise, Rarity.

"And apparently we're wanted fugitives," Sweetie Belle muttered under her breath, firing up her horn and prepared a stunning spell, only to yelp as a violet beam connected with her horn, shorting it out.

Twilight Sparkle strode imperiously into the room.

"Finally, after all these years, we've finally caught you," she said with a sneer and a swift wink. The Crusaders flicked their ears as they received two Pings, presumably from Twilight and Trixie.

Thinking quickly, Apple Bloom looked around and spotted a vial on a table beside Trixie. She nodded minutely at it and Trixie accidentally knocked it off the table, producing a cloud of smoke.

"Get them!" Twilight screamed, firing a beam that went wide and severed a mooring rope.

Grabbing her friends, Scootaloo shot upwards toward the Aiedail.  
"Just like we've practiced, girls!" she called, running on the wheel and started pulling levers and pushing buttons to fire up the engines and open the roof.

Apple Bloom examined the readouts for the weapons systems and frowned. "We've only got five working cannons out of twenty."

"Then make your shots count!" Sweetie Belle said, using her magic to undo the rest of the ropes. "Hit it, Scoots!"

The airship lifted off, deflecting the spells fired by the unicorns below.

"We've got company!" Scootaloo bellowed. Three airships bearing the sigil of the sun, moon and starburst were nearly on top of them.

"Bloody hell, which do we shoot?" Apple Bloom asked.

"I highly doubt either royal sister is aboard those ships, and the Luna is fast with some heavy weaponry. Aim for their weapon emplacements." Sweetie Belle said, peering into a telescope.

"Seems like a crippling design flaw, putting your weapons on deck," Apple Bloom said, calibrating the guns. "Ready."

"Fire!"

The airship zoomed towards the smaller Luna, guns blazing, forcing it to abandon position and created a gap for the Aiedail to slip through.

By the time the other ships reoriented themselves, it was long gone.

On the ground, Twilight and Trixie exchanged glances.

"You seemed to enjoy yourself," Trixie said with an amused smirk.

"Not very often I get to play the villain and not get sent to the moon," Twilight said. "Besides, this usually isn't a violent Loop Variant, so even if we captured them, they'd simply be put to work building better airships."

"And the chase is always part of the fun," Trixie agreed. "Shall we pursue?"

Twilight grinned and rubbed her hooves together with a long-practiced evil laugh. "We shall."

\* \* \*

><p>165.21 (Scorntex)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"... Rarity?"<p>

"Yes, Twilight?"

"I don't suppose you could step away from the unfeasibly large ray-gun for a moment, could you?"

Rarity stared blankly at Twilight, then to aforementioned ray-gun, which sparked occasionally as she held a screwdriver over an opened panel.

"But I'm almost finished..." she said plaintively.

"I know," Twilight stated, calmly. Then she saw the glint in Rarity's eyes, as the mare stared off into the distance.

"And once my fashion ray is complete, nopony will ever wear unfashionable clothing ever again! AHHAHA! \*\*AHAHAHAHAHAHA!\*\*\*"

As the echoes of Rarity's demented laughter died away, the mare looked awkwardly down at her friend. "On second thought, perhaps you're right, dear."

She set down the tool, and began walking down the service ramp toward Twilight. "It's just... I got so enthralled by the idea. And it really did seem sensible when I began..."

"Rarity," Twilight said gently, "being passionate about fashion isn't a crime. But when you're building a thirty-foot tall ray-gun, without

stopping to sleep I might add, you're taking things too far."

Rarity looked back to the giant weapon. "I suppose..." she demurred.

"If it makes you feel better," Twilight said, as she made sure the invisible, inaudible camera got several good shots of her un-Awake friend's invention, "it is very impressive. If also very terrifying at the same time."

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

165.1: Auntieclimactic.

162.27: Sometimes time just ski-ski-ski- a beat.

165.2: With friends like these, you probably need blood pressure meds.

165.4: Don't ask me.

165.5: It's going around lately.

165.6: Think of it like Spiral Power but more repetitive.

165.7: Leman Russ considers crit fail to be normal in cooking and driving.

165.9: Hell of a party.

165.16: Not great parents.

165.18: Harry Dresden is a little after the mode.

165.20: And thus they become The Bumbling Inquisitor And Her Sidekick. (Which is which is a matter for debate.)

165.21: Friends don't let friends suffer from Science Related Memetic Disorder.

### 173. Chapter 173

166.1 (165.5 continued)

\* \* \*

><p><strong>The Lyracension Chronicle, Part 2<strong>

**\*\*(Written mostly by Masterweaver, with touches by OracleMask and Purrs)\*\***

\* \* \*

><p>Everfree seemed to be about the same as baseline. Lots of trees and gunk all over. Lyra took the lead, with Thief to one side and Seapony's water sphere rolling to the other. Human and Sweetroll trailed along behind them. They easily bypassed the obvious dangers - timberwolf tracks and Poison Joke - and tried not to look up as the sky continued to brighten and darken at regular

intervals.<p>

"Y'know what?" Sweetroll piped up as the path they were following skirted the edge of a cliff, "I think we were worried about nothing. I don't see any traps around at all!"

"They wouldn't work that well if they were easy to see," Human pointed out, "I bet they're magical."

Thief scoffed. "Of course they're magical. The book said Luna put them there, so they're at least a thousand years old! Normal traps won't last for a thousand years...and they wouldn't be able to stop Celestia either."

Sweetroll nodded. "Yeah! I bet they're more like the Tatzlwurm nest we're walking through: sneaky and ready to pounce the instant we let our guards down!"

There was a moment of silence.

"...Sweetroll, did you just say 'Tatzlwurm'?"

Sweetroll nodded again. "Yeah, see?" She promptly hopped over to the nearest tree, took hold of it, and pulled it to the side. Revealing that it was in fact totally hollow and covering a large hole that began to hiss angrily. Quite suddenly the massive pink worm emerged.

"Eeep."

\_"Eeep later! Run now!"\_

The Lyras bolted down the path as the Tatzlwurm roared and charged after them. They didn't get far before another fake tree was knocked aside and a second angry Tatzlwurm rose up in front of them!

"Into the trees!" Human yelled.

The trees she was pointing at began to rattle and hiss.

"Never mind."

"Jump over the cliff!" Seapony exclaimed.

"What?!" Thief bellowed, "You seriously expect us to throw ourselves \_off a cliff?!\_"

"Only if you don't want to be worm food!"

Lyra stomped a hoof. "Everypony! Over the cliff! NOW!"

Seapony didn't wait, rolling her own sphere of water off the edge. Sweetroll and Human clung to each other as they jumped after her. Thief rolled her eyes before following as well. Lyra waited until all her other selves were safely over the cliff, then jumped just in the nick of time as the Tatzlwurms lunged for her, roaring.

Then Lyra was falling, falling, falling -

SPLOOSH!

"\_Shoo shoo be DOO\_, it took you long enough," Seapony complained.

Grunting from the effort, the seapony used her hydrokinesis to keep the large floating globe of water they had all landed in from descending too quickly. "I can't exactly keep this trick up all loop, you know? Lucky for us, Tatzls hunt via sound, so I can dampen our presence with water-"

"We get it," Thief grumbled. "You had a plan." She glanced up at the pink wurms writhing on the cliff above them. "Okay, from now on, we have to be more careful. A LOT more careful..."

\* \* \*

><p>"...waffles."<p>

Lyra gave Sweetroll a sidelong look. "Pardon?"

"Waffles. Are they pastries or are they just a form of bread?" She looked around at the strange glances her companions were giving her. "What? I can't be the only one who's asked this question!"

Human tapped her chin. "Well, practically speaking the difference between pastries and breads is dinnertime. If it's acceptable to eat them before going to bed, it's a bread. Otherwise, it's a pastry."

"That's only for above-land cultures," Seapony pointed out. "Baking is totally different under the sea, since actual grains are quite a bit rarerâ€"

"Oh for the love of Yggdrassil, can we table this until after we've fixed the sky?!" Thief groaned. "It's irritating enough for normal eyes, but cybernetically enhanced changeling vision just makes this whole thing even WORSE."

"Yeah, I've been meaning to ask you about that." Lyra carefully maneuvered around a wayward branch. "So you're a changeling this loop?"

"Hybrid. My cybernetics actually started off when my two biologies started conflicting with each other, and then they just got crazier from thereâ€"

"Right, right. Makes sense... I guess that would explain why you were in Ponyville."

Thief eyed her with a frown. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well, I meanâ€"Well, if any of us were Celestia's student, or Cadance's in this case, I would have thought it'd have been you, seeing as... well, seeing as you're the original Lyra..."

There was a moment of awkward silence.

Eventually, Thief let out a sigh. "Look... Pony, you're as much Lyra as I am. More, even, you get most of the 'normal' memoriesâ€"

She was stopped suddenly when Sweetroll stuffed a hoof in her mouth.

"Wmmâ€"?!"

"Shhhh."

Human turned toward the tableau with a frown. "Sweetroll, what are youâ€"

"\_Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh\_."

With utmost delicacy, she removed her hoof from Thief's muzzle and pointed through the trees. Human peered through them and almost â€\_almost \_â€" gasped.

Thousands of bats were hanging from the bare branches of a tree. Every last one of them was looking at the group with glowing red eyes. And they didn't look like Equestria-standard fruit bats; if anything, the sheer black of their fur recalled some of the more terrifying variants of vampires out there.

Seapony gulped.

Sweetroll, however, let her hoof point down at Lyra's. She looked, finding a broken twig under it.

One of the bats stirred ominously. They all froze until it stopped moving.

Human, very cautiously, waved her hand in front of one. She frowned, glancing Lyra's hoof and the broken twig. With a wave, she pointed at the bats, covered her eyes, and then cupped her ears.

Thief let out a little annoyed snort, freezing when the bats suddenly all shuffled ever so slightly. The whole group tensed, watching the red eyes nervously, but the bats didn't seem to care to take off.

After a moment, Sweetroll's ears perked. She gestured at herself, pointing off in a random direction. Then she wove her hoof across the other four, holding it up for a few seconds. Once again she pointed at herself, fancily waving up from her head and out from her shoulder. Then, finally indicating the others again, she pointed down the path.

\_I'll go that way. You wait here. I'll be Trixie. Then you run.\_

It said a lot about the group that they were able to interpret the gestures so easily.

Nods were had all around, confirming that the plan was acceptable. With a cocky grin and a salute, Sweetroll tiptoed quietly into the swarm of bats. They didn't even notice her pass through them, and soon enough she had vanished.

Human, Thief, Seapony, and Lyra stood completely still, glancing at the red eyes surrounding them. Aside from the constant shifts of the sky, there was no way for them to tell how long they'd been waiting there.



KABLAM!

The bats all snapped around, wings snapping wide as Sweetroll's crazed laughter echoed through the trees. "THAT'S RIGHT, YOU CUT-RATE MINIMOOGS! IT'S PARTY TIME! \*\*COME AND GET ME!\*\*" The branches grew even more bare as the hoard all flew toward the repeating sounds of cannonfire; soon enough, the group was free to run. And run they did, every once in a while looking back at the swirling storm of dark black with red dots.

"...should we try to help her?" Lyra asked.

Thief shook her head. "She's channeling Pinkie right now. She'll be fine."

THWACKAKOOOM!

Thief winced at the small but sudden blaze of fire in the storm of bats. "See? She's totallyâ€œ"

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA I'MONFIRE I'MONFIRE I'MONFIRE!" Sweetroll came careening toward them, a small flame atop her poofy mane. "PUTITOUTPUTITOUTPUTITOUTPUTITOOOOOOOOOOOUTâ€œ!"

Seapony shot a stream of water at her with a roll of her eyes.

Sweetroll let out a relieved sigh. "Oh, \_thank you.\_"

"Don't mention it."

"Hee. So! I have good news and bad news. Good news is, I found my party canon! Bad news is..." The earth pony gestured toward the increasingly panicking and burning bat population. "Well, I had to rig it to blow in order to get out of that mess." She sighed. "They're \_expensive\_ to replace, you know?"

\* \* \*

><p>"You know Fluttershy's going to Stare you into oblivion when she hears about what you did with the bats, right?"<p>

Sweetroll scoffed at Lyra. "One: Those bats were most likely either magical constructs or magically enslaved, in which case killing them was the merciful thing to do. Two: She's not Awake, so there's no reason to tell her. In this loop or any other."

"...eh, fair enough." Lyra shrugged. "If she's mad at one of us, she'd be mad at all of us."

The group walked along, careful to watch the trees to either side for any more surprises. Thief cautiously took the lead, letting her scanners spread out in front of them.

Suddenly, she started snickering. Human turned to her with a raised eyebrow. "What?"

"Oh, sorry. Just thinking back... remember that loop where we tried to show Bonbon what a human looked like, and ended up all

mishmashed?"

Human nodded, a small smile forming on her own face. "Heh. Yeah, that was back when we were still trying to be one Lyra. None of us had even really coalesced yet!"

"Well, she kind of did," Seapony pointed out, waving a flipper at the cyborg. "I mean, consideringâ€"

"Well by that argument, so did the rest of you. I mean, first loop I got three other sets of memories." Thief paused, then turned to Sweetroll with an apologetic smile. "Uh, no offense..."

"Nah, none taken. I'm cool with being the young hot one."

"Oooooo!" Lyra grinned. "We just got burned by a pastry!"

"Oven burned!" Seapony agreed.

The group all chuckled for a bit.

"...Oh pines, though. Bonbon was clearly holding back a freakout when we did that." Thief shook her head. "You know, we're really lucky to have her. She's so understanding."

"Caring," Lyra agreed.

"Intelligent," Human pointed out.

"Sweet," Sweetroll sighed.

"Spunky," Seapony purred.

They all shared a glance.

"And those shimmering eyes!" Thief added.

"That incredible voice!" Seapony sang out.

"That luxurious mane," Lyra moaned.

"That tasty tongue," Sweetroll whimpered.

"That tight, plush rump," Human growled.

They all shared another look.

Then they burst out laughing again, Human leaning on Lyra as she wiped away a tear with a finger, Sweetroll suddenly swimming through Seapony's water sphere to give her a hug and a nuzzle, and Thief just grinning.

After a moment, though, Lyra frowned. "Ah, chlorophyll... Girls? I just remembered, there's only one Bonbon this loop."

The laughter died away.

"...well," Human eventually offered, "we probably should explain the entire situation before we pursue her anyway..."

"This is a Mikasa Glitch," Thief pointed out. "No matter which one of us she chooses, we'll all remember it next time."

"Well, assuming she doesn't choose us all," Sweetroll pointed out.

"Or choose somepony else," Seapony muttered.

"My point is," Thief continued with a glare, "we're going to be okay, no matter what happens. I mean, we did just go through that crushing column path together, right?"

There was an awkward moment.

"Uh..." Lyra cleared her throat. "Crushing column path?"

"Yeah, the columns that were rising and falling and trying to crush us... all..." Thief took in the looks she was receiving. "Was... was I the only one that saw that?"

The others all nodded.

Thief sighed, grabbed a rock, and tossed it behind them. After a couple of moments, the rock suddenly shot up into the air and shattered with a sickening crunch.

"...\_invisible\_ crushing columns," Seapony mused. "Huh. Glad we had you around."

\* \* \*

><p>"...so my theory is that our mental connection caused the Ping to reverberate through our skulls like an echo chamber," Thief finished. "Not something I'd want to test, you know, but all things consideredâ€œ"<p>

"Yeah, it makes sense," Lyra agreed. "Still, you should write down your observations for our next loop, Twilight'll love them."

Human cleared her throat. "Speaking of... so we've probably got a stealth Anchor this loop. Anybody want to bet on who they are and where they're hiding?"

Lyra snorted. "I'll go with the classic and say ol' Kirk is pulling possum duty again."

"Nah, too mundane." Seapony flicked a flipper around. "How about... oh, I dunno... Littlefoot? Out in the badlands somewhere, hibernating like dragons do."

"Ooo! Ooo! I know! It's a newly activated Anchor, but they don't know anything about the loops and are stumbling around in Manehattan!"

Everypony stared at Sweetroll, who was beaming broadly.

Thief groaned. "As if this loop wasn't weird enough!"

"Let's just hope she's wrong," Lyra managed.

"Yeah," Thief agreed. "I'll put my bits on, oooooooh, Twilight, but she's replacing Trixie and won't awaken until after she puts on the Alicorn Amulet."

"Oh, that's a good one," Human quipped with a grin. "As for me, I... wait." She held up a hand. "Do you hear that?"

The other four Lyras paused, their various ears rotating around in confusion.

"...I'm going to say no," Lyra finally replied. "Which is weird, because I know for a fact that pony hearing is slightly better than human hearing in most cases..."

Thief, Seapony, and Sweetroll all nodded in agreement.

"There's this constant... sound," Human explained. "It's oscillating up and down, but I can't tell where it's coming from..."

"You sure you're not just imagining things?" Sweetroll asked.

Human frowned at her. "No, I'm not, but that doesn't mean we should just dismiss this!"

"You know," Seapony mused, "out of all of us you're the least... well, magical. Maybe that has something to do with it?"

Thief perked her ears. "Magical... of course! The sound must be woven into the background thaumic field, fooling our own senses into assuming it's a natural phenomena not worth noticing! So basically we can't hear it for the same reason ponies can use Heartsongs to sneak around unnoticed..."

"...but since I'm from a world with little to no natural thaumic field, I'm more attuned to the subtle differences!" Human finished.

"Right." Thief sat down, adjusting her cybernetic attachments. "I'm going to try to get a read on whatever it is you're hearing. Can you mimic the tune for me?"

"Sure."

Human sat down, took a deep breath, and began to hum a simple tune. Thief nodded as she flicked her ears toward her, adjusting her own audio receptors manually. "Okay... okay, almost... THERE it is!"

She stood, lighting her horn as she began to sing an exact countertune. It wasn't long before the air before them began to shimmer, ripple, and fade away.

Where before there had been nothing, now there was a large dragon glaring at them.

Lyra gulped, stepping back. "Uh... hey! I don't know if you noticed, but the sky is kinda on the fritz right now." She grinned broadly. "There's a way for us to fix it, but we kind of need to get to the ruins of a castle that's in the forest... in order to do that, I mean."

The dragon snorted.

"...so," she continued. "I... we'd like to get through, if you wouldn't mind?"

"...you do not serve the mistress," rumbled the dragon. "Yet you neutralized her gift to me."

"Holy cranberries, Luna made a dragon invisible?" Sweetroll groaned. "Well, this is going to be FUN..."

Human rolled her eyes. "Look, scales, Luna's gone crazy and we're really not scared of you at all, so unless you want to try to kill us, emphasis on try, you'll step aside."

The dragon stared at her for a long, tense moment.

The human stared right back.

The dragon, eventually, nodded. "Very well. I will let you pass, for the moment. But once the sky is fixed, there will be no further bargain."

"Gotcha." Human waved the rest of the group forward. "Come on, gang, let's get moving."

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay, I think we're getting close." Thief glanced around the forest warily. "Granted, there's no river this time, but we can chalk that up to Luna and Celestia's little war way back when."<p>

"That means Pony gets the bridge!" Sweetroll singsonged.

Lyra blinked, turning to her with a confused look. "Beg your pardon?"

"For your Element test!" the usually-a-pastry clarified. "The rest of us already did ours!"

There was a moment of contemplative silence.

"...you know," Human mused, "she has a point."

Seapony nodded. "Yeah, I did the tatzlwurms, Sweetroll did the bats, Thief did the columns, Human did the dragonâ€"

"Does it count if I go in knowing?" Lyra asked plaintively.

Thief shrugged. "To be completely honest, I don't think it matters in this particular case. Baseline Elements require friendship to work, plus attunement. We've all lived in the same skull long enough that I think we'd amount to being friends. Even if this variant has Elements that run on, oh, an understanding of music... that's our special talent, you know? Granted," she added, "you'll probably have to prove yourself worthy of one of the new Elements, but it's really a formality at this point. And we've come to the chasm," she finished, gesturing to the cliffs in front of the group, "so it's your time to shine. Make us proud, Pony."

"Right." Lyra stepped forward, looking across the chasm carefully. "Uh... so both the dragon and the columns were invisible, so..."

She kicked a pebble in cautiously. It fell across the cliff face, clicking and clacking ominously as it went. A few final bounces had it clatter to the bottom, where it rested unperturbed.

The gathered Lyras all held their breath, peering over Pony Lyra's shoulder.

The pebble... remained completely inert.

Lyra let out a little sigh, giggling. "Of course nothing would happen. She had nests for the first two, then invisible traps. Never repeat a trick!" she cried hysterically. "It's predictable after the second time!"

Human flinched. "Uh, Ponyâ€"

"I'm fine. I'm fine, really!" Lyra turned around with a small grin. "I'm sorry, it's just \_okay we need to run NOW.\_"

She didn't give any other warning, and she didn't need to; the others had seen the sheer panic in her face and instantly jumped away from where they were standing. Lyra herself just barely managed to teleport out of range of the fireblast, ending up on the other side of the chasm.

"AWAY, YOU FOALS!" The evil version of Celestiaâ€"and Lyra was \_really\_ starting to get annoyed she hadn't given out her nameâ€"swooped in from above. "YOUR TRESPASS ON OUR SACRED GROUND SHALL BE FORGIVEN ONLY ONCE!"

"BEGONE, SISTER! THIS PALACE IS \_MINE\_ AND MINE ALONE!"

Lyra's eyes widened as Nightmare Moon charged up her horn, quickly taking in as much of the situation as she could. "Thief, left, \_now!\_"

The cybernetic-half-changeling obeyed without hesitation, dodging a bolt of night that turned the ground into sharp grassicles. "Urf! Treedammit, if I had access to the pocket I could end this right now!"

"Yeah, well, that's not goingâ€" Lyra's gaze fell on the grassicles, and she gasped in realization. "Human! Stick close to Seapony!"

"Uh, sure!" The bipedal party member saluted, dodging around another fire blast as she rolled next to the sphere of water.

Lyra nodded. "Good, just stay there... Sweetroll!"

The currently-an-earth-pony snapped to attention. "Yeah?!"

"I need you to keep Evilestia's attention!"

"Evilestia?" The elder alicorn frowned. "\_Evilestia?!\_ I am CORONA BLAZE, you peasant, and I will notâ€"AURGH!" She flailed her wings, trying to shake off the earth pony that had parkoured up a tree and jumped atop her. "Let me go, you crazed mare!"

"NEVER!" Sweetroll cried. "I AM THE STICKIEST OF PASTRIES, AND I WILL HUG YOU UNTIL I CAN HUG NO MORE!"

Nightmare Moon gave the scene a small look of bemusement. "So..." She turned to the Lyras. "Have you seen truth, then? Do you wish to join me?"

Lyra moved around the chasm edge, flicking her eyes toward Seapony and her sphere of water. "Well, you could say we've seen the truth, miss night pony. But you see, that truth... is that you are a complete and total moron that would doom the world in a hissy fit."

The black alicorn blinked, staring at her.

"...also," Lyra added, "You're ugly. Really really ugly."

"...Art thou trying to provokeâ€" "

"Ugly as the night sky," she continued. "Which is really saying somethingâ€" "

"OH THOU DIDST NOT!"

"SEAPONY, SPRAY ME NOW!\_"

A stream of water hit Nightmare Moon's magical blast in midair, freezing almost instantly. In mere moments, Seapony's entire sphere of liquid had been solidified, falling into the chasm and forming a makeshift bridge of ice. This did have the unfortunate side effect of leaving the aquatic pony helpless... but Human was already scooping her up and running for the new crossing.

"What-?! TRICKERY!" The black alicorn lit up her horn, intent on blasting the running primate. At the last moment, a stick flew into her face and her shot went wide.

Thief was already grabbing another rock from the ground, grinning. "Forget about me, princess?"

Nightmare Moon turned to her with a glare. "Thou wilt pay for thine insolence, abomination of nature!"

Lyra turned to Human as she finished crossing the icy bridge. "Throne room, I'll meet you two there."

"Gotcha!" Without missing a beat, the young woman turned and rushed up the castle's stairs, Seapony tightly clutched to her chest.

Thief rolled out of the way of another blast of freezing night. "Okay, seriously, I get the yin-yang thing," she snarked, "but do you have to use ice all the time?!\_"

"Thief!" Lyra waved at the ice bridge. "This won't last long!"

The cyborg glanced at her incredulously. "Did you miss the crazy bitch shooting freeze rays at me?!"

"Ugh!" Lyra rolled her eyes, lit up her horn, and teleported onto

Nightmare Moon's back. "GUESS WHO!"

"REMOVE THY HOOVES FROM MY GAZE, WHELP!"

"Whoa!" The unicorn just managed to keep her grip as the black alicorn tumbled in midair. "Get a move on!"

Thief saluted, rushing across the melting bridge. "See you two soon!"

"Right!" Lyra gripped Nightmare Moon's barrel between her rear legs, looking across to where Sweetroll was still clinging to Corona Blaze. "YO EVILESTIA! THE ELEMENTS OF HARMONY ARE IN THE THRONE ROOM!"

\*\*"WHAT?!" \*\*two Royal Canterlot Voices cried.

The unicorn pulled her hooves back as the pair of princesses rose into the air. "Hang on, Sweetroll, this is going to get rough!"

\* \* \*

><p>"...and that's the last of them!" Human cried in triumph, dropping the final stone sphere. "Good <em>tree<em>, these things are heavy."

Seapony rolled her eyes from her position against the base of the sphere-holding structure. "Sorry I couldn't help you, but..." She flicked her flippers meaningfully.

"Nah, your thing with the ice bridge was good enough. I'm a little worried that the sixth Element won't turn up, though..."

Seapony nodded in sympathy. "Yeah... do you think we could summon the Element of Laughter?" she asked. "I mean, it's soulbound, not Pocketedâ€"

"Normally I'd be all for experiments," Thief quipped as she galloped in, "but somehow I suspect we're locked in abilities as well as tools."

Human waved. "Got the globes ready! Where's Sweetroll and Pony?"

"Last I saw them, they were wrangling alicorns." Thief shrugged. "But I'm sure they'll be here soon enouâ€"

Two forms, one wreathed in flames and the other in ice, abruptly smashed through the wall, each skidding across the cobblestones as they slowed down. A pair of smaller green forms were thrown from their back, bouncing to the feet and hooves and tail of the assembled Lyras.

"AAAA FIRE!" the blazing one shrieked. "STOP DROP AND ROLL! STOP DROP AND ROLL!" It spun back and forth on the dusty surface.

"Sweetroll!" Human cried, quickly pulling off her shirt and smothering the earth pony as best as she could. "Birch and pines, how many times are you going to get set on fire?!"



Thief was already helping the shivering Lyra to a standing position, chipping away at the ice frozen to her skin with her cybernetic hooves. "Well, you got in, and you're only halfway dead."

"Y-Yeah," Lyra replied, her teeth chattering through her smile. "N-not one o-of my brrrrrr-brighter idea€"\_chooo!\_â€"ideas, I'll a-a-admit..."

"Still pretty awesome," Seapony pointed out. "Hey, Sweetroll! You okay there?"

The usually-a-pastry coughed up a cloud of smoke, but managed to grin brightly as Human put out the final flickers of fire. "Well, my mane's totally ruined. Oh, and I'm covered in third degree burns. On the upside, Trixie's going to be totally jealous when we tell her about this."

"Yeah, riding a flaming alicorn through a wall... don't think she's ever done that." Human lifted her shirt off Sweetroll and pouted. "This is a complete wreck now! Mac's going to be so disappointed I ruined \_another\_ great piece of clothing..."

"Then you should be glad you are not long for this world."

The Lyras all turned as Corona Blaze stepped forward, fury in her eyes. "You have entered our sacred home, and for that you must die. However..." Her gaze darted to the rocks at their feet. "Should you give me the Elements, I will ensure that your demise is swift and painless."

Nightmare Moon growled, almost charging at her sister then and there... but her own eyes fell on the stones, and she held back. "Nay, fair fillies. Though you have... \_vexed\_ me greatly," she hissed, "I will let you live should you hoof them over to me, and me alone."

Corona Blaze snarled, turning on the black alicorn. "Stay your tongue, foul deceiver! You would break them as soon as the elements were in your hooves! I at least am truthful in their fate, one better than the one you would promise!"

"You promise death! What sane mare would agree to that?!"

"And your promises are as void asâ€"!"

"H...heh, \_choo!\_, heh heh..."

Corona and Nightmare stopped in their bickering, turning their gaze to the laughing pony.

"Y...You two really don't get it, do you?" Lyra shook her head, smiling up at them. "You think these rocks are ac-actually the Elements. It'sâ€"\_choo!\_â€"It's a bit more com-complicated than that... They're just husks, d-devices for the true Elements to focus their power."

Nightmare Moon narrowed her eyes. "You lie. My stars tell me the Elements are here, in this very room!"

"Oh, they're r-right," Lyra replied, before sneezing again. "'Scuse

me... But they're not the rocks. The p-power of the Elements lies w-within \_us\_."

"You?" Corona Blaze scoffed. "A burnt earth pony, a dried up seapony, a half-dressed apething, an abomination, and a frost-bitten unicorn? Surely you cannot hold any power like the Elements!"

"O-Oh, \_can't \_we?"

Lyra drew herself up, pointing at the base of the element-holding statue. "The Seapony, who used her water to hide our voices from the tatzelwurms, has mastered the Element of Timbre." Her hoof shot towards the burnt pony. "The Sweetroll, who kept us silent and released a loud burst of sound, has mastered the Element of Dynamics." She swung her limb toward the cyborg next to her. "The Thief, who led us through a row of crushing columns, has mastered the Element of Rhythm." Then at the shirtless girl. "The Human, who heard something the rest of us could not, has mastered the Element of Pitch." And lastly, she gestured at herself. "The Pony, who directed the speed of our battle with you, has mastered the Element of Tempo."

Nightmare Moon laughed. "Such a bold speech! And yet you lack the final Element, so all your struggles are for naught."

"A-Actually, I have to correct you there." Lyra smirked. "As a-any musician knows, the most important part of harmony is the melody, the series of notes that form into a singular entity. Each of us, all f-five of us, can provide one such note, and if we want to use them together? There's nothing stop..."

She almost, \_almost\_ sneezed, but managed to hold it in.

"...\_ping\_ us," she finished.

The other Lyras all widened their eyes in realization.

Corona Blaze glowered at her. "...Then it seems that we have no choice but to end your lives here andâ€"

"NOW!" the unicorn cried.

When only one of the Lyras pinged, the sound bounced through their collective mindscape like an echo chamber, making only so much noise.

But when all five of them pinged in unison, the result reverberated, resonated, resounded through their shared intelligence, building and connecting and becoming something more.

Their inherent magic fell into sync with the tune only they could hear, the stone spheres rising and circling each of them as they began to lift slowly into the air. Each one of them started to glow, brighter, brighter still, orbiting 'round a center point as their mouths opened and released a song of unity, a wordless music that tugged even at the hearts of the two alicorns who were forced to look away as the light grew into a blinding shine. And then, with a crescendo, the light burst out, fading away in wave after wave of grandeur.

When Nightmare Moon and Corona Blaze managed to look back, they were shocked to see not five individuals with a single sphere spinning round them, but one backed by a slowly rotating collection of five. And what an individual it was; a curled scaly tail hovering just above the ground, hanging from a skirt that resembled nothing more than a cupcake liner, a torso like a minotaur woman wearing only an open-backed leotard emblazoned with the image of twisting rolls, a set of ragged insectile wings flickering and fluttering from the bare back, a pair of arms that ended in mechanical gauntlets covered with odd little lights... and the head and face of a unicorn, one at peace with herself as her mane rippled and twisted away from an odd tiara in a hypnotic fractal of light and sound.

"What..." Corona managed. "What monstrosity is this?!"

The green creature opened her golden eyes. Its gaze fell on them, first one, then the other.

\_ "The eager heart of Sweetroll, so desperate to be.\_

\_ The fervent will of Seapony, from which so many flee.\_

\_ The clever mind of Human, that dreams ideas with glee.\_

\_ The layered soul of Thief, which forms our central key.\_

\_ The loving song of Pony, source of epiphany.\_

\_ These five form one being, for these are always \*\*me!\*\*"\_

Nightmare Moon growled. "Your speech means nothing, creature! Submit to the night or perish!"

She stared at her... and laughed, a laughter that sounded like nothing so much as the joyful strings of an orchestra.

"You dare to mock me?!" The black alicorn pawed at the ground. "SO BE IT!"

Corona Blaze gave her a look, cautiously sidling away.

A burst of pure night shot forth at the creature, as potent and dangerous as Nightmare Moon could make it—and Lyra merely raised a metal hand, catching the magic in her grasp before letting it dissipate harmlessly.

\_ "Do you not understand, princess, nor know what I can hear?\_

\_ I hear the song of everything, the world, I should say.\_

\_ So if you wish to thwart me, you should know something, my dear:\_

\_ It's not me, but all of magic, that stands now in your way.\_

The figure floated forward, her arms outstretched to the wary alicorns.

\_ "I don't see you as enemies, but merely long lost friends\_

\_Consumed by envy, greed, and by the silence of the soul.\_

\_Please, let me assist you, let us all now make amends\_

\_For I can tell what you've been through has taken quite a toll.\_

\_Celestia, becalm yourself, remember your own creed!\_

\_The ponies who adored you for your wisdom and your heart.\_

\_So go and take no more, for you've got all you could need,\_

\_Just relax so I can help you make yourself a brand new start.\_

\_And Luna, please, I know you simply want your subjects' love\_

\_And I can see how you would soon defend them with your might.\_

\_Now scores of ponies all adore the stars that come above,\_

\_Perhaps you can join them in joy once on a peaceful night?\_

\_This duel of yours, this battle grand, must end right here and now.\_

\_And I will force its end, but I give you the choice of how.\_

\_Forgive each other, be the sisters that I've heard about\_

\_Or once more be subject to the power that put you in time-out."\_

Corona Blaze frowned. "So you would force peace at the end of a spear? You are as much a mockery of peace as Cadance was!"

"And your singing voice is terrible!" Nightmare Moon added.

Their opponent narrowed her eyes.

\_"One chance I gave, and you denied, and then you insult my voice?\_"

\_Very well, princess, but know this, what follows was your choice!\_"\_

She raised her hands, various vents on them opening as the orbs behind her began to spin faster.

\_"And just so we're all clear, I want to make sure that you know,\_"

\_\*\*It was Lyra Heartsong that made you taste the rainbow!\*\*\_"\_

Beams of spectral light shot from the rapidly spinning rocks to the tiara on her head, gathering and swirling in an increasingly large multicolored sphere. Lyra wrapped her hands around the globe, spinning it in her grasp until it was cleanly divided in two—and

then launching both rainbows at the faces of the shocked alicorns.

\* \* \*

><p>The great battle in the sky ended abruptly, both sun and moon setting and leaving behind a vast void. To the ponies of Ponyville, the silence seemed to last ages; in reality, though, it was mere moments before the sun peacefully crested into sight; a soft, warming sun, more familiar than the red fireball that had dominated the battle before. Across the world, many children slowly crawled out from under their beds, parents gathered their families back together, and governments set to work assuring everyone that the situation would be investigated and an answer was coming.<p>

In a short time, the pink alicorn that descended toward a long forgotten building in a forest of horrors would join them. For now, though, she simply landed, ready to congratulate her student on her momentous accomplishment.

\_"Greetings, dearest teacher mine,\_"

\_might I say you look quite fine?"\_

Cadence's words died on her lips as she stared at... well, what might once have been Lyra. The face was right, and it was the right color, and... and absolutely nothing else matched up with what she was expecting.

Lyra Heartsong rolled her eyes. "Would it help if I wasn't singing? I mean, I thought the singing was nice and dramatic, but if you'd like me to be more casualâ€"

"Ah, I'm sorry. I just did not anticipate..." Cadence visibly gathered herself, clearing her throat. "Well! I suppose I must congratulate you, Lyra Heartstringsâ€"

"Heartsong."

Cadence blinked. "You... changed your name?"

"Kind of sort of." Lyra gestured at herself. "This isn't just one Lyra, but... well, it's five Lyras united to make an essence of Lyranness, if that makes any sense. Heartsong just felt... right."

"Five Lyras...?"

"It's a long and complicated story," Lyra began, absently pulling a pamphlet out of thin air. "I could explain it all, but thisâ€"wait a minute."

She peered at the pamphlet in shock.

Then she facepalmed. "Of course! The crosslinkage that connected us during the ping also resulted in a distorted connection with our subspace pocket preventing access, but our unification resulted in the cause of the distortion being removed and thereforeâ€"

Cadence winced as Lyra Heartsong... well, exploded was perhaps the best way to put it. Five separate forms fell to the ground, each of

them grunting in pain as they landed.

"Thief, really?" The seapony rolled herself to her belly, wrapping her tail around one of the stone spheres as she glared at a strange pony with metal parts. "We were so in sync, and then you had to go spouting theories!"

"Well, now we know we've got to keep working together to keep Heartsong going." A strange ape stood up, brushing her tunic off. "Oh, hey! Got my shirt back undamaged. Neat!"

"And I'm not burned anymore!" cried a bouncy earth pony with a fluffy, curly mane. "And Pony's not a walking ice cube! Everyone wins!"

The final form—her student, Lyra Heartstrings—rose with a small groan. "Yeah, all's well that ends well. Oh, hey princess! How about you check on Celestia and Luna, and after you've got them all settled in we can explain all this?" She waved a hoof at herself and her companions.

"Your... yes. That seems like a good plan," Cadence admitted, warily backing up a step. "I take it you managed to utilize the Elements of Harmony on them?"

"Huh? Oh. Yeah, that! We did that."

"Very good. I'll just go... check on my aunts then..."

\* \* \*

><p>"...and after the usual Princess party we explained everything to her," Lyra finished. "Even convinced her to let us keep the Elements of Musical Harmony in our pocket, eventually. Of course, we had to pull out Heartsong to deal with all the usual Harmony shenaniganery!"<p>

Twilight Sparkle was rubbing her forehead. "So, let me get this straight. How did you ascend?"

"Well, even if they weren't the baseline set, the EoMH are still potent magical artifacts," Lyra pointed out. "And my talent is, generally, something about harmonics. Pulling off a heartsong to bond with an entire set of Elements, I think, pretty much qualifies."

"Yes, alright, I can see that, it's just..." Twilight waved a hoof at Lyra. "This! I mean, it's weird enough that Silver's a draconequest, I don't even know what to call this!"

Lyra smiled, wrapping her tail around the barstool as she casually gripped her mug in a robotic hand. "I'm Lyra's Heartsong. Lyra Heartsong. That's what I told Cadence, and that's what I'm telling you."

She frowned. "I just hope Bonbon is as okay with it as she was last loop..."

\* \* \*

><p>166.2 (Awesomedude17) (Mario Bros x MLP)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"BWA HA HA! Mario, it is time to release my latest weapon that will destroy you for good!" Bowser yelled out, confident in his plan.<p>

"And what is it?" Luigi replied, standing near his brother, determined as he was.

"My old college roommate! MWA HA HA HA!"

"Your college roommate?"

"Yes. Come on over to the party!"

"YAY!" Pinkie Pie cheered, dropping from the ceiling.

Luigi screamed in terror, already aware about the Looper's skills.

Mario elbowed his brother, and with a stern look, calmed down his brother. Shortly after, he reached into his subspace pocket and took out a cupcake.

"Oooh..." Pinkie's eyes followed the delicacy.

"You want?"

"Yeah."

"Then go to our side then."

"But what if I don't want to switch sides? I like my old friend, Bowser."

"Yeah, I'm pretty awesome!" Bowser grinned.

"I'll-a offer a baker's dozen."

"I don't know. Can we negotiate?"

"Why are you doing this? I could bake you a dozen cakes, times infinity!" Bowser yelled.

"Now now, let's be civil now." Pinkie said.

\*Several hours of boring debating later\*

"So, Pinkie Pie will be an outside party and receive a monthly fee of 40 cakes from both sides so that she doesn't intervene, correct?" Bowser read the contract being written.

"Sounds-a good. Luigi?"

"I can live with it."

"Good! Let's shake on it!"

"YOUR NASTINESS!"

"WHAT IS IT?!" Bowser yelled at his subordinate.

"The Princess, she escaped!"

\*\*"WWWWWWHAAAAAAT!"\*\*

"Oh, so that was what that woman in the pink dress was? Oo, I better go meet her then! Bye!" Pinkie pronked off, singing to herself, leaving behind the three dumbfounded individuals.

"Forget the contract!" Bowser yelled. "I'm done for this loop! If you want me, find me in Isle Delfino!" Bowser stomped off.

"D-Did we win?" Luigi asked.

"No idea." Mario shrugged.

\* \* \*

><p>166.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight's eye twitched as she entered the bar, wearing blinders. "For the sake of my sanity," she announced to the whole room, "I am temporarily ignoring all baseline bearers of the Elements of Harmony plus Discord." She stormed up to the bar, giving Macintosh a wide smile. "I need something that can convince me the world isn't crazy, please."<p>

The stallion frowned, pouring a drink cautiously. "Somethin' happen between you lot?"

"Between me and the looping versions? No. But this last expansionâ€"nnnnrgh..."

She sighed, taking the drink in her hoof. "Okay, first time round, I decided to sort my books for a weekend. I mean I was kinda wondering what would happen, but you know, I figured the plot would find me. So it turns out Discordâ€"an unawake Discord, I checked!â€"decided to spend the time bonding with the other bearers, and so I leave the palace and they're all buddy-buddy with in-jokes and whatnot. And I figure, hey, that's a titch odd, but whatever. No reason to fret. I figure I'll join them next loop."

Twilight took a sip of her drink. "Exceptâ€"well, the next loop when that weekend rolls around, I come up to join them allâ€"but I don't make it. I'm caught up in an incident with Bonbon, sorry, Agent Sweetie Drops, and by the time I've resolved it, the whole thing happens againâ€"but the in-jokes are completely different! And I'm a little annoyed, but it's not their fault, it's just a fluke..."

She sighed.

"But then the next loop rolls around and it happens again. And again. And then Pinkie's awake and she tries to make sure I'll be there, but somehow I get caught in a time lock that, guess what, takes the whole weekend to open! So the next time, I head over to Sweet Apple Acres



really early and plant spy cameras everywhere so I'd at least know what happenedâ€"except just as the weekend starts, the group decide to hang out in Rarity's boutique instead because AJ is doing... something, I don't remember, with the farms. I have determined that my presenceâ€"or rather, my \_absence\_â€"is as much a narrative event as my tree being destroyed. And that's not the worst bit, oh no. The worst bit: The in-jokes change every loop." She took another swig of her drink. "Do you know how that feels, Mac? Knowing that your friends are always off with crazy shenanigans, and you just can't join them ever...?"

Macintosh let out a little sigh. "...Yeah. Ah do." Without any other word, he refilled her glass.

\* \* \*

><p>166.4 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"OI!" Vinyl shouted, trying to dislodge the person on her back with every flap of her wings and pulse of her wub hooves. "I said get off <em>hours<em> ago!"

"Nope, this is so much fun!" Her unwelcome rider said with a grin. "Human wanted to do this for \_ages\_, Seapony is having a blast with how fast you are going, Thief is just plutzing with all the technical stuff, Sweetroll and Pony are enjoying this so I am perfectly content with this." With a shout, Heartsong slapped Vinyl's side. "SHOO BEE DOO SILVER, AND AWAY!"

"Gaaaaaah!" Vinyl shouted, trying to get her friend off her back.

\* \* \*

><p>166.5 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra Heartsong was happily nomming on a sandwich when a newspaper boinked her on the nose.<p>

"\_No\_, bad Lyra. Bad," Sleipnir playfully lectured, thwacking her on the nose again. "Stop causing us to create new definitions and guidelines to go over. Do you \_know\_ how much paperwork I've got since you did...this?" He gestured with his two left forehooves at Lyra, who was rubbing her snout before frowning and looking at her Admin.

"Nope, and are you okay buddy? You look tired as all spruce," Lyra leaned over and placed a metal hand on the closest hoof available.

"I'm fine..." Sleipnir sighed, shaking his head. "It's just our kid is growing up and she is getting close to a hard stage of growing. Me and Epona are worried about her andâ€" "

"Sleipy, listen to me," Lyra smirked, "All kids have the 'hard' stage. You two just need to make sure she has a good..." Lyra paused, trying to think of a word that would have all the Lyras in agreement.

"Guiding direction."

"Try doing that when you work long hours and in a place like ours," Sleipnir grumbled, taking a bite of the sandwich. "I just hope I am doing a good job at being a dad, you know?"

"Well, if you need any help, just ask us, we'll be glad to lend a hand/flipper/hoof/other," Lyra blurted out, shimmering for a moment before solidifying again. Frowning, she pointed a finger at her Admin, her wings buzzing angrily. "Hey that's my sandwich!"

"It was your sandwich," he corrected, finishing it off with a loud gulp. "Thank you for the offer and please promise me no more craziness, okay?"

With a grin on her face, the strange being flashed away to leave a pouting seapony. "Sorry girls!" Seapony Lyra said to herself, blushing as her Admin left.

\* \* \*

><p>166.6 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Octy, can ya come here? I've got something wicked to show you that I know you will love!" Vinyl's shout through the house aroused the earth pony's attention and she made her way out of her Vinyl-soundproof room. Walking down the stairs, her jaw dropped at the object in her roommate's hooves.<p>

"Is that what I think it is?" Octavia licked her lips, her eyes roaming the object with raw lust.

"Eeeyup," Vinyl nodded her head, her horn glowing as she lifted the item over to Octavia, which she pulled close to herself before letting Vinyl take it back to insert it in her.

"Vinyl, I know that you can do this but it is so big. Are you sure it is safe?" Octavia said with a bit of a worried tone, seeing what had happened last time Vinyl did it with the eggwubbeaters she made; the mess to clean up after that was a true nightmare.

"Oh yeah, it's perfectly safe!" Vinyl flashed her a honest smile as she eased the wonderful object into her body, biting her lip as it was slightly rough going in. Octavia leaned over, dabbing the blood up from the insertion before looking at the mare again. "I've done this before Octy, with far bigger ones. You know that little filly Apple Bloom? I did it with hers first and hers are massive."

"Okay Vinyl," Octavia said, still eyeing the object before reaching over and strumming it. Vinyl let out a bit of moan of sound before her horn glowed again, dragging over what Vinyl called her wonder-maker machine and then the two mares made beautiful music all day long.

\* \* \*

><p>Panting, Octavia and Vinyl looked at each, smiling broadly at each other. Octavia trotted over to Vinyl's face and gave her an

affectionate nuzzle before placing a soft kiss on the unicorn's face. "That was <em>wonderful</em> Vinyl, just wonderful," Octavia helped ease the object out of Vinyl's body. "Are you okay?" she asked instantly after watching Vinyl flinch in pain, not caring about the blood falling onto the floor.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fine Octy," Vinyl flashed her ruby eyes at her, beaming with joy and pride. "I've suffered a \_lot\_ worse than something like this!" With a goofy grin, Vinyl leaned for light kiss on the lips, causing the earth pony's ears to fall back in bliss. "Besides, I heard how happy you were and that's all I need to make it worthwhile.

"Well thank you dear," Octavia said as she moved to get the case. "And thank you for getting me this beauty."

"Well, Octy, I \_had\_ to get you this electric cello once I saw it and if you ever start looping, I'm sure you will enjoy having it all to yourself," Vinyl said healing her neck from where the plug was in all day. "It took me \_so\_ long to find one for a pony to play and I wanted to make I could make the sound come out just right and I-"

Vinyl was silenced when she was kissed on the lips again before Octavia whispered something into her ear, causing the unicorn to blush madly.

"Y-you mean it?" she asked hopefully, to which the earth pony nodded her head and headed up the staircase. Placing the cello into her pocket, Vinyl quickly wubbed herself up the staircase and into the bedroom Octavia just walked into, closing the door behind her.

\* \* \*

><p>166.7 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hiya Vi," Rainbow Dash landed next to the mare, causing the mare in question to look up from her lunch. "How are ya?" she asked with a large grin growing on her face.<p>

Slurping her noodles into her mouth and wiping it clean her wing, she answered "Pretty good," she blinked, cleaning her shades with her magic. "Being an alicorn is neat, I guess." Letting out a burp with a hasty apology, she then tapped her chin in thought. "Not much different to be honest. Flight is kinda the same, magic is normal and being suddenly strong as Octy \_is\_ nice as she can't really buck me through a wall anymore Dashie." Vinyl winced though, reminded of what happened when she surprised the mare about her ascension in the morning. Worst Hearts and Hooves Day \_ever.\_

"That's not what I heard," Dash said, sliding in close to Vinyl's side. "About your flight, I mean."

"Ah, I see. Twi told you about that eh?" Vinyl chuckled weakly, a bit worried how large that smirk on the pegasus face was.

"Yes she did, and \_I\_ thought I should help you!" Dash then leaned close Vinyl's ear. "Remember our friend when we were teaching you to

use your wub hooves, the Dizzitron?"

"Ohappletrees\_no\_," Vinyl whimpered softly, already trying to fly away when she realized that Dash had wrapped a strong wing around her side. "Nonononnononono!"

\* \* \*

><p>It was roughly an hour later that the sky exploded in rainbows, music, swears, and two mares that crashed into a certain tree in Ponyville. Luckily for them, the owner was visiting her sister-in-law to help with the changeling invasion in Crystal Empire.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>166.8 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I...what?" Twilight blinked, looking at the two blushing poniesâ€"or at least <em>one<em> blushing pony as the other one was so bundled up in clothing, all she could see of Vinyl was her eyes. With a heavy sigh, Twilight asked a question she knew she would not want to remember later on. "What are you two doing?"

"Whmmhmmh," Vinyl mumbled through her scarves before she realized she was being muted. Using her hooves to push them down and spit out some fluff, Vinyl gave a weak chuckle. "Well, Octy and I wanted to play a little game, and after I told about some we've played in other loops as humans, she got interested but only to a variant of our usual game," Vinyl then gave a small playful frown. "Then I learned that this Octy is a \_baobab \_card shark!"

"It's called bluffing, Vinyl," Octavia smirked to herself. "And you \_cannot\_ bluff. Now either admit defeat or we can find some \_more\_ clothes for you to put on when you lose the next hand."

"We'll see about that!" Vinyl shouted, laying her cards down on the table. "A straight flush, beat thâ€"

"\_Royal\_ straight flush, dear," Octavia purred out, walking over to place a hat on the unicorn. "Anyways, Twilight, what brings you over-where did she go?"

Vinyl shrugged her shoulders before tapping on the table for another round.

\* \* \*

><p>166.9 (katfairy) (D&DCMLP:FiM)

\* \* \*

><p>Tiamat sat in her cavern, thinking. Just as she had done for all of her other Loops so far. There were many who would be surprised to learn that she thought at all, but as a creature of eternity, or at least what she'd thought had been eternity, she spent almost as much time pondering as she did napping. And she did love her naps; it was satisfying to know that, when the mortals were particularly dull or annoying, she could simply sleep for a century and awake to find that

the problem had self-corrected.<p>

This Loop was different, though. The young Dragonkin had told her of these, so it did not come as a surprise, but it was vexing. She had not yet come to a firm decision on how she would deal with these Loops, and finding herself in the wrong reality was a distraction that she did not appreciate. Still, this was a very pleasant cavern, as such things went, and she had spotted prey animals should she wish to eat. She had heard several Pings, but had not responded. She did in her home Loop, out of courtesy to the Dragonkin, but until she knew such existed in this place, she had no interest in speaking to anyone.

It was not often that she spent so much time on a single subject, generally preferring to consider matters within their context of the greater world, but if she had become of any importance to the survival of all planes, even in a minor role, that was worth thought both long and deep. Even moreso when a threat to that survival existed at all. She would have preferred to believe the Dragonkin was deceiving her, but she knew he was not. She was a god in her own right, beyond Dungeon Master and certainly beyond his foolish and fallen offspring; the Dragonkin merely gave a name to something she had not even realized she was aware of. And now that she was aware of it, she had to give it all the consideration it warranted. To do less would be unworthy of her.

If nothing else, it was considerably more interesting than waiting to see what that daft fool Venger would attempt next.

"Um, hello? Yeah, this ain't normal."

Tiamat growled; it was usually enough to scare off the average mortal. To her surprise, she heard the footsteps of a small creature approach. She would give it credit for nerve, but if it persisted, she would still obliterate it.

"You are really not our usual dragon. Five heads, five headsâ€¦ why is this familiar?" As it approached, she could hear the click of claws on stone. So this was an intelligent creature, and not one of the Races of Man. That was a slight improvement; they frequently had different perspectives on the world. Perhaps she would not destroy it after all. Then its words penetrated beyond the small portion of her thoughts that she allowed to deal with distractions and she turned one head to look.

"\_A hatchling?\_" As dragons went, it was barely bigger than the fairy dragons, but it was unmistakably of her kind. "\_A hatchling and a Looper asssss well. You have my interesssst.\_"

"Oh, good," it replied with a cheerful grin. "You're Awake. And you know what the Loops are. Were you trying to stealth through this Loop? 'Cause this cave always ends up with a dragon in it, and most Loops we have to convince it to go somewhere so we can, y'know, \_breathe\_ down in Ponyville."

"\_Ponyville? Then the prey animalsssss are more than I believed. Foolisssshhh of me to not look clossssser at the town. Jussst asssss well I have not yet eaten.\_"

"â€¦Wow. Okay, I'm guessing you got The Speech from somepony, but not

the Looper's Guide. Or whatever it's being called right now. You're in Equestria, ponies are really, really not food, and anyway, dragons here aren't meat eaters."

The name was familiar. And even though this was merely a hatchling, it was still a dragon; she gave him the courtesy of her full attention, turning all the way around to face him. Through the door of the cave she could see six of those oddly-colored equines: two unicorns, two pegasi, and two that would have been normal mortal ponies if one was not bright pink and the other a soft golden-orange. She afforded them a closer look, and immediately revised her opinion of them; she knew power when she saw it, and all six had it. As did the hatchling.

"\_Sssso. I ssssee that I have been uncharacterisssstically foolisssssshhh. Yessss, I am a Looper, and still new to being Awake, even by mortal sssstandardsss. Thissss isss why I did not ressspond to your Pingssss; I am sssstill unsssure what role I will choosssse in thessse Loopssss. I am eternal; I do not russshhh mattersssss.\_"

"Yeah, that makes sense. Look, Equestria is a Sanctuary, and we take that pretty seriously. Since you aren't smoking up the town, you're welcome to stay as long as you like. We'll make sure nopony bothers you. Well, as much as we can, anyway."

"\_A generousssss offer. I accsssssept, and offer my name. I am Tiamat, Mother of All Dragonssss. In my own world, of courssssse.\_"

"Tiamat!" The hatchling smacked his forehead in the way mortals did when they knew they had been foolish. "Right; you're from one of the Dungeons & Dragons Loops. Didn't know any of their Tiamats were Looping yet. Who's your Anchor? Oh, and I'm Spike. Well, Spykoranuvellitar, but unless I'm using my full size, I like having a name that isn't bigger than I am."

"\_That isss not unreasssssonable\_, " she acknowledged. She had known other hatchlings to forgo using their full names until they felt worthy of it. "\_My Anchor is Dragonkin.\_"

There was a murmur of confusion back amongst the equines, and the purple unicorn pulled a book out of the air and began to page through it, using magic to turn the pages. So there was at least one scholar in this Loop; good. Perhaps this was the right time to truly enter the Loops.

"Dragonkin? I know of a Dragonborn, but he's from Skyrim. Sort of. When he isn't she. Or from somewhere else. Orâ€¦ yeah, that Loops kind of a mess, and not too dragon-friendly." Spike scratched his head, thinking, and Tiamat realized that her description might have been too vague.

"\_That isssss hisss title, and I do not know if he hasss claimed it. But he hasssss sssspent at leassst one Loop asss a dragon, and isss therefore Dragonkin in my eyessss. He wasss once mortal, and hasss a mortal name. I do not know what it isssss, for mortal namesss are too transssssient for me to remember. He bearssss the golden bow gifted to him by Dungeon Masssster.\_"

"Oh, Hank!" the orange pony exclaimed. "Shoot, ya mean he finally got a new Looper and it wasn't one of his group? No offense, ma'am, but that don't seem quite fair to him."

"\_None taken\_" Tiamat shrugged. The orange pony was right; it was hardly just that the first to join the Dragonkin in these Loops was one who was no friend to him. But that was what had transpired, and they all had to live with the consequences.

"Well, if Hank gave you The Speech, he probably didn't give you the Guide, mostly because he didn't have one for a while. It got eaten by a rabid flobberworm in that messed-up Hogwarts Variant," the purple unicorn said, trotting forward. "I've got a dragon-friendly version of it, and I always have extra copies around. Here you go. Oh, I'm Twilight Sparkle, by the way, and I'm the Anchor for this Loop. My friends are Rarity, Fluttershy, Rainbow Dash, Applejack, and Pinkie Pie. There a lot of other Loopers around, but we're the only ones who come up here most Loops."

"\_I have heard of you\_" Tiamat acknowledged, now impressed. The Dragonkin had told her many tales of the Loops, both his own experiences and what he had heard, and many involved those names. She truly had made a grievous error in not exploring this world from the start. No matter; she did not err often, but when she did, she lost no time in rectifying the matter. "\_Twilight Ssssssparkle the WIsssssse, whose love of learning knowsssss no boundssss. Rarity the Fair, who won the heart of a dragon, firsssst by her beauty, and then by her sssstrength. Fluttersshshy the Kind, who can be fierssssce assss any dragon when protecting othersssss. Rainbow Dassshhhh the Sssswift, the besst flyer in all of the Loopssss. Applejack the Bounteousssss, who turned a desssert planet into a paradisssse. And Pinkie Pie the Joyousssss, whose wisssshhhh isss for all to be assss merry assss they may. And Ssssspike the Noble, who commandsssss great power and yet doesssss not wield it. I am honored to be in sssssuch company.\_"

"Um, that's a good thing?" Spike said. Tiamat met his eyes, both young and as ancient as her ownâ€"moreso, in fact; if the Dragonkin's tales were even half true, then in comparison, she was the hatchling. It was a humbling thought, and she was not accustomed to being humbled. But she was also not in the habit of deluding herself.

"\_Any fool may acquire power, and many do. To have great power, and yet not wield it sssssave when there issss needâ€"that issss the mark of wisssssdom. There are thosssse who would tear their own worldsssss assssunder for the sssssake of gaining power, but once you have sssssundered your world, what then? That issss evil, and worssse, it isss foolisssshh. I may be called evil, but only becausssssse mortal mindsssss rarely comprehend true evil. No, I am sssssimply other. Sssso I watch, coming forth only when mattersssss require my presssensssce. Or sssssome fool dissssturbssss my nap.\_"

"So waking up cranky really is a dragon thing," Rainbow Dash snickered. Tiamat nodded one of her smaller heads; she could not deny it. Then she recalled something Spike had said earlier.

"\_If dragonssss do not eat meat here, what do we eat? I rarely need to, but that doesss not mean I do not occasssssionally enjoy it.\_"

"Gems and minerals," Spike said, pulling a large sapphire from his Pocket. "Try this and see if you've adapted; if not, we'll see if we can find something you can eat without killing anypony."

"\_I only eat those who may converse with me when they annoy me\_, " Tiamat said, but took the gem. She examined it for a few seconds, noting the size and clarity. In The Realm, this would be a priceless treasure. Judging from what she saw studding the walls of the cave, this was simply one of thousands, if better quality than many. She was surprised to find that it actually smelled good, like that lavender mead she'd once taken from the cellar of a wizard she'd eaten. The mead had tasted far better than the scrawny mortal. But the sapphire had a similar cool yet heady fragrance, and she took a cautious nibble. Then popped the whole thing in her mouth; it had the cool, clean taste she'd expected, with hints of other herbs like fennel and wintergreen. Yes, she would be quite willing to forgo meat for this Loop if this was an available alternative. She said as much, and the ponies relaxed. She was not offended; had their positions been reversed, she would have felt the same. "\_Can we eat all rocksssss?\_"

"Some are better than others," Spike said. "Sedimentary rocks tend to be kinda blah, although there are a few exceptions. Oh, and you don't wanna eat a lot of marble; it's really fattening. But it's pretty rich, too, so most dragons don't eat a lot of it anyway. Granite and basalt are best if you want a good hearty meal. The metamorphics get kinda complicated, but there are some that are really amazing! You'll have to tryâ€œ"

Tiamat listened to Spike lecture, genuinely interested. She still did not know if she would find anything of worth in the other Loops, but this one she would enjoy. There was much to be learned here, and she had to find a suitable gift with which to repay Twilight Sparkle; a book designed for dragons to read, on such an important subject, was a gift of great price, and she could not leave the scales unbalanced. And the Dragonkin had told her that Pinkie Pie threw everyone a party on their arrival in the Loop; she had never attended such a mortal affair as a party, but one thrown by a goddess could not help but be worth experiencing. And perhaps Spike could teach her to speak without hissing; that alone would make these Loops worthwhile.

\* \* \*

><p><p>

\*\*Author's Note:\*\*

166.1: Huh. That's a new one.

166.2: Live by the Pink... be annoyed.

166.3: Mac knows that feel.

166.9: Tiamat hasn't yet been to the multiversal dragon union meetings.



167.1: (Masterweaver)

"...but Ah figure that Ah don't really have the figure to pull off the black dress."

"Mmm, yes, I can see the problem," Rarity mused. "Slinky is more for curves, and you tend to have a more defined musculature..." She tapped her chin thoughtfully. "What if... we went with a more flaring half skirt, and gave you just a touch of shoulders? Not enough to form an actual sleeve, mind you, but enough to lessen the impact of your definition?"

Her customer nodded. "Yes, that looks feasible... Ah'm kinda half considering a belt, here, but Ah can't decide if it would work better with or without."

"Belts accentuate the divide between front and back, dear, which depending on the dress can bring either one into the fore. You could probably pull it off, but if you're trying to go for totality I would suggest notâ€"

Applejack walked in. "Hey, Rarity, have ya seenâ€"oh." She coughed. "Right, well..."

There was an awkward moment.

"...Right. Sorry, Ah'm still trying to get used to this side of ya." The farm mare held up a hoof. "Not judgin', not makin' any statements, if ya want to look pretty that's yer right." She cleared her throat and forced herself to look her brother in the eyes. "Just... make sure you get your chores done afor' ya leave the farm next time, okay?"

Macintosh nodded calmly. "Eeeyup."

\* \* \*

><p>167.2: (Alex Prior)<p>

Twilight sighed. She really didn't want to do this... but she supposed there was some sort of morbid curiosity in all this.

"Ma Hooffield?"

"Yes, Princess?"

Twilight bit her lip, seemingly self-conscious about something. "This apology cake... It's genuine, right?"

Ma nodded. "Sure thing, dearie. You bet it is." She surreptitiously grinned to herself. Twilight noticed.

"...Pinkie Promise?"

"Pink-ee what now?"

Twilight smiled awkwardly and began explaining.

\* \* \*

><p>"...stick a cupcake in me eye," Ma finished. Twilight smiled. Variants could happen, and it <em>was</em> possible the old mare was indeed honest, but Twilight couldn't help but be curious.

She went through the motions of giving away the cake, and, just in case, added in a speech about honesty, integrity, and friendship. The McColts were gathered around the cake...

...And the Hooffields burst out of it. Fluttershy was the first to gasp with horror.

"Ma Hooffield! How \_could\_ you?"

The mare shrugged. "What, you all thought we were actually serious? Ha! Like a Hooffield would ever pass up an opportunity like \_this!\_"

Twilight gulped. "You broke a Pinkie Promise."

"I did what nowâ€œ" Oh! That!" Ma grinned. "Sure did!"

The surrounding areas got very quiet, as if in anticipation of a storm. Twilight reflected for a moment on if she did the right thing, setting Pinkie on them like that, quickly reached the conclusion that nope, she did not, and hid under the nearest tree trunk.

And then Pinkie popped out of the cake. "\_Did somepony break a \*\*Pinkie Promise?\*\*\_ \_Nopony\_ \_breaks a Pinkie Promise!\_"

\_Yep\_, thought Twilight. \_Definitely not doing that again.\_

\* \* \*

><p>167.3: (Masterweaver)<p>

Vinyl Scratch glared at Lyra Heartstringsâ€œ"well, one of the Lyra Heartstrings that was spread across the battlefield.

"Look," the tiny creature said, raising its claws in a placating gesture, "we just Awoke last week, and we kind of had to spend the time breaking free of the Black Voice. We're totally willing to back off Auir now, but it's going to take some time and we can't risk our core mind being obliterated."

Vinyl continued to glare.

"I know that you've had bad experiences with this Branch, and I'm really really sorry about how it's going now. Can you just... I don't know, delay Tassadar? Please?"

After a moment, Vinyl sheathed her psionic blades. \_Will you give Octavia back?\_

"Oh, yeah, definitely!" The Lyra nodded eagerly. "I mean, I'm going to have to explain things to her, and I can't have her appear right off the bat because of the war, but I'll tell you when she gets up." She coughed. "And, uh... could you see if Bonbon's around?"

\_I'll look into it.\_ Without another word, Vinyl turned and stalked away.

\* \* \*

><p>167.4: (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\_My dearest student Twilight Sparkle, \_

\_I confess your explanation about time repeating itself still leaves me a bit confused. It really is a lot to take in all at once! \_

\_You mentioned that other ponies also experience these "time loops." I presume this includes your new (old?) friends in Ponyville. Who else? \_

\_Your loving teacher, \_

\_Celestia \_

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia,<em>

\_At last count over thirty ponies were Looping, including yourself. However, most ponies don't remember all their Loops, which is why you're not aware (we call it being "Awake") of your own past Loops. Would you like a complete list? Many of them are ponies you probably haven't met yet. \_

\_Your faithful student, \_

\_Twilight Sparkle \_

\* \* \*

><p><em>My dearest student Twilight Sparkle,<em>

\_So, I also am a "Looper"? How fascinating! What am I like as a Looper? Do I still do a good job of protecting my little ponies? Do I get along well with my sister? I don't do anything too peculiar, do I? \_

\_Your loving teacher, \_

\_Celestia \_

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia,<em>

\_All Loopers, to be honest, are a bit insane. In fact, the last Loop I shared with you when you were Awake was in a human-like world. You and Luna were angels\_â€"that's a sort of a holy spirit or minor god in human religion. The peculiar part was that you were a frequent and passionate speaker in support of atheism. The sight of an angel, glowing with an aura of holiness, speaking forcefully against religious worship was... well, just a bit mind-boggling, and I've seen a LOT in the Loops. \_

\_I have other stories, but they're probably best saved for when I next see you in person. \_

\_Your faithful student,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>My dearest student Twilight Sparkle,<em>

\_I don't see anything strange about it at all. Do you think we could start an atheist movement in Equestria? If it stops everypony bowing or kneeling every time I trot down the street then I'm all for it. And maybe I could get a vacation for a change... I haven't gone to the beach in almost a century... I wonder if my shorts still fit?\_

\_Your loving teacher,\_

\_Celestia\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>Dear Princess Celestia,<em>

\_Don't worry. It seems like you're just like your Looping self.\_

\_Your faithful student,\_

\_Twilight Sparkle\_

\* \* \*

><p>167.5: (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Twilight Awoke, in both senses of the word, with a yawn.

A similar noise came from beside her, prompting her to look down at the small filly at her side withâ€| aâ€| smileâ€| \_wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!\_

The zebra filly looked up at Twilight. "Hello, Twilight, and good morn. This is a pleasant change from the norm."

Twilight nodded. "Good morning to you too, Zecora. Did you have a good night?"

"I did indeed; thank you for this. Being young again is bliss."

Twilight smiled. "It certainly has its advantages." She cocked her head. "I take it you don't get to be a filly that much in the Loops?"

"Indeed I don't, but never fear. This Loop I will enjoy, my dear."

"I know I will too."

\* \* \*

><p>167.6: (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Twilight's eyes widened as the village ponies surrounded her and her friends, just as they had in so many past Loops. "It's a trap!"

That was when things changed.

A massive thunderclap caught everypony's attention, and moments later, a glowing rip opened in the air. Out stepped Discord.

A very, very \_angry\_ Discord.

\*\*\*"WHO DARES HARM MY FRIENDS?"\*\* the furious draconequus bellowed.

"Uh..." Clearly, the ponies, even under Starlight Glimmer's influence, knew better than to mess with a being like this. "She did it!" they yelled en masse, pointing at the startled mare.

Discord's eyes turned to Starlight, and in an instant, she was wrapped in anti-magic chains. "Then for your crimes... for treason against the crown, and more importantly, for trying to hurt my \_friends\_, the ponies who forgave me even when I'd betrayed them and all of Equestria, you shall \*\*PAY!\*\*" Snapping his claws, he opened another rift, grabbed the terrified Starlight, flung her through before she could utter so much as a squeak of protest, and closed it. Then he turned to the rest of the villagers. "Anypony else?"

There was a mass stampede as the ponies who'd followed Starlight promptly ran for the exit.

Discord watched them go, then sighed. "You know, I thought throwing that... that scummy Big Brother wannabe into an inescapable dungeon in the Princess' old castle would make me feel better, but it didn't," he remarked sadly.

"Discord?" Twilight walked up to him. "Is something wrong?"

The draconequus waved a hand. "Oh, just a really bad Loop. When I Woke Up a little while ago, I was so... angry, to say the least, over what happened, I needed to work out my aggression on somepony who deserved it. But it's not helping, and I'm still upset." He sighed again. "I don't even dare go near Berry or Ruby until I've calmed down, so I don't lose my temper at them." He looked down. "They don't deserve that. None of my friends do. I'd better go." He raised a claw.

"Discord, wait!" Fluttershy hurried up to him. "You don't have to go." She slipped a wing around him, and looked up at his face. "No matter how mad or upset you get, we'll be here for you."

"All of us," Twilight added.

"Mm-hmm!" The others agreed.

"Thank you, girls. Thank you very, very much." Discord smiled as the six mares surrounded him. "You know, it's times like these when you really appreciate friendship."

"I know just what you mean," Twilight told him.

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued (KrisOverstreet) [MLPTerminator]

\_Wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!\_

The filly stirred, then jumped to her hooves, awake instantly. "What? Where... ah. Yes. Organic again." She looked down at herself, sighed, and said, "At least I'm not too young for peanut butter."

"Sky Catcher, are you Awake?" Twilight asked.

"Er... do you mind if you call me SkyNet in private?" the filly asked. "Bringing motherhood into our relationship feels a bit..."

"Awkward?"

"Frightening," SkyNet continued. "Usually the only time I Loop into a child body is when I replace John Connor."

Twilight giggled. "Well, I doubt you have to worry about that here in Equestria"

The bedroom door smashed in, and a larger-than-life brown stallion wearing a leather coat and sunglasses stepped through the wreckage.

"Way to jinx it... mom," SkyNet grumbled, as mare and filly fled for their lives.

\* \* \*

><p>167.7 (Anon e Mouse Jr.) [MLPBack to the Future]

"Hey, Sunset!" Twilight called as she crossed the Canterlot High parking lot.

"Twilight!" Sunset grinned from where she was standing. "You got my message, I see."

"Of course." Twilight smiled as she walked up to the other girl. "So, what's up?"

"Well, I just got back from a Fused Loop a little while ago, and I picked up some nifty souvenirs. And I wanted to share them with you." Sunset patted the tarp-covered shape next to her.

"Souvenirs?" Twilight looked at her. "What kind of souvenirs?"

"We'll start with this." Sunset pulled the tarp away, to reveal

A DeLorean. A very, very familiar DeLorean.

Twilight looked at her friend. "Sunset, that's a time machine. From another Branch."

"I know."

"But time machines are Read-Only! The admins made sure of it! They won't work outside their native Branch!"

"This one's different." Sunset patted the hood. "Doc loves to tinker, and since the Loops started, he's built up a whole fleet of DeLoreans in his Pocket, with or without upgrades. He likes using the factory-standard versions as the base for his time machines and other designs, so when I asked if I could do some tinkering of my own, he said yes and gave me an extra. We had a lot of fun with it."

Twilight nodded. "I see. So, what kind of modifications are we talking about?"

"Well, for starters, it's actually the flux capacitor that's Read-Only, and we never installed one of those in this particular DeLorean. So even in Doc's Branch, it couldn't be used to time travel."

"Ah."

"But I did use a couple of the other upgrades he made to the original DeLorean, the one from his baseline."

"Other upgrades?" Twilight stared. "Sunset are you telling me this is?"

Sunset nodded, grinning even wider. "Who needs a time machine when we've got a flying car?"

Twilight's eyes were even wider. "Flying car?" She grinned. "Sunset, if I was into mares, or any other gender, I'd kiss you."

"Twilight, if you weren't like a sister to me, I'd let you."

There was a pause, and then the two girls broke out giggling.

"So, want a ride?"

"I thought you'd never ask." Twilight climbed into the passenger seat. "Any particular roads you were thinking of going on?"

In the driver's seat, Sunset strapped on her seat belt. "Twilight, you've seen the movies. You know what the Doc said about roads."

Twilight nodded.

Then, as the DeLorean lifted off, the two chorused: "Where we're going, we don't need roads."

Seconds later, a trail of flames lit up the sky as the two shot off for parts unknown.

Meanwhile, in her office, a familiar face had seen everything, and was now staring into the sky in the direction the car had vanished in. "Great Scott!" she breathed.

"Sister? Is something wrong?"

Princess Celestia, who had Awoken as her human counterpart this Loop, looked over at Vice Principal Luna as the other woman stood at the door. "Nothing's wrong, Luna." A happy smile crept across her face. "Nothing at all."

[br]

Meanwhile, up in the sky, Twilight and Sunset were having the time of their lives. But finally, Twilight thought of something.

"Sunset... shouldn't someone have noticed us flying around like this?"

Sunset shook her head. "Not a chance. The hover conversion was just the first thing I added. After Doc's baseline had problems with the original engine running out of gas, he started using alternate fuel sources for more than just the flux capacitor. The new motor in here runs on an energy cell with a half-life of five thousand years, and Doc made it so it can be recharged with almost any power source in the multiverse." She glanced at Twilight. "Before you ask, he got the idea for the five-thousand years thing from the Ghostbusters Branch, but the recharging bit is new. And I have plenty of spare power cells and backups for every part in here, just in case."

Twilight blinked. "Wow. That's... creative. And useful. Are you sure you aren't really Apple Bloom in Sunset's body? Spike told me she's Awake this Loop, but when I stopped by Sweet Apple Acres, she didn't recognize me at all. And I haven't heard from her in person since I Woke Up."

Sunset laughed. "Actually, she Looped in as her human counterpart this time, and last I saw, she was trying to get hold of Vinyl's Wubmobile again. Besides, you know me, Twilight. I like to learn as much as I can from every Branch I visit. You never know when it'll come in handy."

"Point." Twilight looked at her. "So, we aren't being noticed because..."

"Right." Sunset tapped a button on the dashboard, then turned to Twilight. "Well, besides the hover conversion and new motor, Doc, Marty and I installed an autopilot, which I just turned on—it'll keep us going in one direction, and avoid any incoming obstacles. We also installed a cloaking device, and I turned that on about the time we sped off. It's designed so we're basically invisible to anyone who isn't in the DeLorean with us. No technology, magic or human or animal senses can pick us up. Even an Imperial Super Star Destroyer wouldn't be able to detect us if one were in orbit. Or lower-tech scanners like the one Han had in the Millennium Falcon that one variant."

Twilight blinked. "Low-tech scanners? Wouldn't that mean it wouldn't be as effective?"

"Actually, that Loop, the Empire's cloaking shields were designed to fool the eye and newer technologies. But low-tech versions picked up



cloaked ships just fine. Han's kept them on hand ever since, just in case."

"Ah."

"Anyway, we're completely shielded from detection. So as long as we stay out of the way of any planes, helicopters or hot-air balloons, we'll be fine. And for now, the autopilot should handle that."

"Good." Twilight was silent. "So... Marty?"

"Marty McFly, the Back to the Future Branch's Anchor. I Replaced his older sister Linda, actually. He's a nice guy, and he figured out I was a Looper early on. Then he introduced me to Doc, and we had a lot of fun working together after that. He's also the one who explained that he and Doc have been picking up tech from all over the multiverse, and he told me how they mostly use it for tinkering with and improving the DeLorean and their Time Trains. They've added all kinds of features to their versions, like the autopilot and cloaking device I have." Sunset gestured to the backseat. "He also likes collecting hoverboards from 2015 every time he goes to that year, and he gave me a bunch of his spares as a gift. We can try them out later, if you want."

"I'll think about it." Twilight looked at her.  
"Sunset?"

"Yes?"

"You said I was like a sister to you. Did you mean that?"

Sunset was silent for a moment, then looked Twilight right in the eye. "Yes. Yes, I did. I'm like Scootalooâ€"my family varies from Loop to Loop, especially since I've Awoken while related to so many Anchors. There's one in particular that I really, really want to see again, in fact." She shook her head. "But since I first Awoke, you and Celestia have been constants in my life. She's the only real mother figure I know for sure that I had in baseline. And youâ€"you're the one who really changed me for the better, and the closest I have to a sibling. You don't mind if I think of you that way, do you?"

Twilight smiled. "No. Not at all."

That said, the two girls flew on, contented.

Then, Twilight looked at her with a mischievous smirk. "Of course, you realize this means Shining Armor reserves the right to pull the "over-protective big brother" routine on any potential boyfriends of yours."

"Not something I'll ever have to worry about, Twilight," Sunset told her with a laugh. "I don't do one-Loop stands, and I haven't found any Loopers I'd want a long-term relationship of that sort with. Nor am I seriously looking. I've got friends and family, and that's all I really need right now."

"Understood, but I thought I'd let you know anyway."

"Of course."

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued (KrisOverstreet)<p>

\_Wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!\_

A long spiraling horn rose from a brilliant pink mane. White wings lay folded tightly against a pristine white coat.

Filly Celestia yawned and opened her eyes. "Morning, mommy," she said. "Can I visit Auntie Nyx and Cousin Luna after you raise the sun?"

Twilight sighed. "Only if you behave," she said. "Remember what happened the last time you and Luna had a spat."

"It was only a little explosion," Celestia pouted. "Besides, Luna deserved it. She cheats at Parcheesi."

\* \* \*

><p>167.8 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

"Twilight?"

Twilight looked up from her book. "Yes, Fluttershy?"

"Um, could you check me for spells?" The shy pegasus blushed, while Angel Bunny, who was sitting next to her, raised an eyebrow. "I mean, if you don't mind. I'm not sure why, but I think I've been enchanted somehow, and while the effects are convenient, I don't like the idea of being enchanted against my will."

Twilight nodded. "Will do, Fluttershy."

"Oh, thank you so much."

A little while later, Twilight nodded as she went over the readouts on the last of her instruments. "Well, it all checks out. Despite all your recent good fortune, Fluttershy, you are not under any sort of spell."

"Oh, thank goodness." Fluttershy paused. "But, if I'm not under a spell, what's causing all this? I mean, I'm not normally this lucky, and I don't think I've done anything different to cause it."

Twilight looked at Angel Bunny, who twitched his nose. "Um, has Angel been with you every time good stuff was happening?"

"Why... yes, he has. Are you saying \_he\_ was causing all this?"

Twilight grinned. "I'm almost positive about it. You know, they say rabbit's feet are lucky charms."

"Rabbit's... oh my! I've seen those before, and..." Her lip started to tremble as her eyes teared up.

"Fluttershy, don't worry about it! I'm sure most of the rabbit's feet charms you've seen were just fakes with minor luck spells on them. Or not enchanted at all. But \_genuine\_ rabbit's feet really are lucky charms. And you know what else they say?"

Fluttershy sniffed. "No, what?"

"That rabbit's feet are luckiest when still attached to the rabbit!"

Beside Fluttershy, Angel Bunny sighed, then winked and grinned at Twilight.

Inwardly, Twilight was grinning as well. \_Oh Angel, you really are a rascally rabbit sometimes.\_

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued (RowanEx and Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

\_Wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!\_

"Oh, hi mom," Sunset greeted with a smile, before she stopped, her expression changing to startled. "That was an odd Awakeningâ€"eep! Moâ€"er, Twilight! That was my ear!"

A mischievous-looking Twilight smiled as she looked down at her fellow Magic Bearer. "But it worked. Morning, Sunset."

Looking annoyed, Sunset paused to compose herself. "Soâ€" "

Twilight whistled innocently, annoying Sunset further. The amber unicorn glared. "I'm your daughter this Loop, you know..."

Twilight stopped whistling and nodded. After a few seconds of staring, Twilight decided to break the silence.

"Anything else to share Sunset?"

"Nope," Sunset replied. \_Not yet, anyway.\_

"Care for some ice cream?"

"Sure," replied Sunset Shimmer, "Haven't had one since last two to three times five Loops."

Twilight flinched at the number before they headed to the nearest source of ice cream.

\* \* \*

><p>167.9 (katfairy)<p>

"So, Boss," Berry Punch said a little too casually, "you and mare's clothing."

"Eeyup."

"Any particular reason?"

"Ah like it."

"Okay." She went back to polishing glasses for a few seconds, then continued. "No problems being a stallion, then?"

"Eenope. Ah just like dresses. Ah'm fine bein' a stallion. Ah'm fine bein' a mare, when those Loops pop up. Ah'm still me, whichever Ah am. Human, Pony, Dragon, Alicornâ€"Ah'm always me, and if Ah'm Awake, Ah likely always will be. Like puttin' cider in a wineglass 'stead of a mugâ€"it don't change what's inside."

"Makes sense."

"Eeyup."

"But didn't you say you didn't want to be an alicorn?"

"Ah don't. But if it happens, then it'll be because Ah needed to do it, and Ah don't waste time cryin' over doin' what needs doin', even if it means a change Ah may not be lookin' for. Ah may have worried 'bout that back a ways, but Ah've learned better. Ain't none of you changed by becomin' alicorns; Ah don't see why Ah should be different."

"Makes sense," Berry repeated. The two fell silent then, concentrating on getting the bar ready to open for the Loop. She was glad to hear he'd mellowed his stance; the last time they'd discussed it, his comments had seemed okay at first, but the more she'd thought about them, the more insulted she'd felt, as it seemed that Mac thought that somehow becoming an alicorn meant being less of a pony, or that they thought that it made them too good to concern themselves with the lesser breeds. She'd hoped that she was wrong, but she'd never had the nerve to call him on it. Now it seemed as though she wouldn't have to. But there was one thing she did need to say. "Hey, Boss?"

"Hm?"

"I picked up some lace a bunch of Loops backâ€"I was a human in a near-Hub Loop, making artisanal wines and vinegars and selling them at craft fairs, and one of them had this woman who made amazing hand-knotted lace. I bought as much as I could, but when I got it back here, I found out it didn't look right on me, so I saved it until I could find someone who could pull it off. Wanna check it out?"

"Eeyup!"

\* \* \*

><p>Applejack walked into the almost-ready bar to find her brother festooned with lace. Not the dainty tear-if-you-breathe-on-it lace, but something that managed to be light, sturdy, and elegant at the same time, like cream-colored wrought iron. He was looking at it critically, trying to judge if it suited him. A flicker of discomfort crossed his face as he spotted her, and she stifled a twinge of guilt; Berry Punch caught Mac's flicker and raised a sardonic eyebrow.<p>

"Ah'm getting' used to it," Applejack said. "Don't go worryin' yerself 'cause Ah can't shake mah hangups quick as Ah ought to. Reckon that lace suits ya, though."

"That's what I thought," Berry said. "The creamy shade makes such a nice contrast against the red of his coat, don't you think?"

"Eeyup. Shown it to Rarity yet?"

"No, I only just got it out. We've got plenty of time before the bar opens; want to do it now?" Berry and Mac looked at Applejack, one challenging, one accepting. Applejack took a deep breath.

"Ah'll walk there with ya. Ain't quite ready to go all the way in with ya, but yer still my brother, this don't hurt nopony, and it makes ya happy. That oughta be enough fer anypony, and if it ain't, well, that's their problem."

Their reactions told her everything she needed to know; the grin from Berry and the faint smile from Big Mac made her feel like she done the right thing. She still didn't understand it, and she wasn't sure she really liked the idea, but if Mac was going to pick up a quirk, he could have done a lot worse.

And that lace really did suit him.

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued<p>

(Anon e Mouse Jr.)

\_Wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!\_

"Morning, auntie."

One check of Loop memories later, and Twilight smiled and nuzzled the younger pony. "Good morning, Scootaloo."

"Are Mom and Dad back?"

"Not yet."

"Good." Scootaloo lowered her head and yawned again. "Means I can spend a little more time here with you." Within seconds, she was asleep again.

Watching her in-Loop niece snoozing (and snoring, much to her amusement), Twilight made a mental note to let Rainbow Dash know about this Loop. The original Bearer of Loyalty was always glad to hear about Loops where Scootaloo actually had loving parents (or parental substitutes), and her brother and Cadance certainly qualified.

\* \* \*

><p>167.10 (Vinylshadow)<p>

Lyra Heartstrings burst into the Golden Oaks library, mane unkempt, eyes wide, screaming.

Twilight jumped in surprise, spilling magic ink onto a one-of-a-kind document that then burst into flames. Turning on the cerulean mare, Twilight bit back her scathing snarl when she saw how upset the mare was.

Using her magic to silence the lyrist, Twilight spoke.  
"What."

Releasing Lyra's lips, the librarian waited for her to catch her breath.

"My head is \_empty\_, Twilight. No Human, no Seapony, no Lyra except my own," Lyra babbled, limbs twitching. "How do you live like this, Twilight?! \_How can you stand only listening to one voice in your head?!\_"

She curled up on the floor of the library, rocking back and forth, shivering.

Twilight had no idea how to respond to Lyra's problem. Wracking her brain, she came up with a rather flimsy list of possibilities.

"Uhm...maybe each Lyra has their own body this Loopâ€"?"

"Twilight! You're a genius!" Lyra said, scrambling to her hooves, suddenly all smiles. "If I'm Awake, that must mean my other personalities \_must\_ be somewhere in Equestria! Thank you! Me and Bon Bon are going on a road trip! We're getting the band back together!"

Grabbing Twilight's face, Lyra gave her a kiss on the cheek before bolting out of the library, leaving behind an utterly bemused Anchor.

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

\_Wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!\_

The small purple unicorn looked up at Twilight, then down at herself. "Different gender AND different species this time. This should be an interesting Loop."

Twilight facehoofed. "Good morning, Spike."

\* \* \*

><p>167.11 (Evilhumour)<p>

Without any warning, the house of Vinyl Scratch and Octavia Melody exploded as a \_thing\_ roared out in auto-tune. It appeared to be a mismatched conglomeration of everyday household items and appliances, with a toaster as its head. With a stomp of a dishwasher, it launched several burnt pieces of bread into the town center.

Twilight Sparkle destroyed her library due to being startled awake by a piece of toast smacking her in the face, with many ponies running

to either put out the fires streaming from the burning library or try and stop whatever came from the two musician's home.

"Vinyl, don't you think we should try and heâ€" Octavia shouted, holding onto her friend for dear life as Vinyl began beating her new wings and using her wub hooves to attain speeds that would have made Rainbow Dash green with envy.

"Oh \_hell\_ no," Vinyl shouted back, her voice heavy with fear. "I am \_not\_ going to spend the rest of this Loop on the moon, listening to Twilight nag me endlessly!" With a thud, Vinyl landed on a small island with a few palm trees darting the area.

Octavia huffed, jumping off her panting friend and fixing her a glare. Vinyl's ears shot up after a few seconds and turned to face her. "Don't say itâ€"

"I \_told\_ you Vinyl," Octavia turned around, walking into the trees to get out of the sun. "\_Not\_ to try and combine all of your wubbified stuff together with that \_thing\_ under your bed!"

Vinyl groaned at the lecture she was getting, banging her head against a tree repeatedly until she got conked on the head by a coconut.

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued<p>

(Anon e Mouse Jr.)

\_Wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!\_

"Mama? 'r you okay?"

Shaking off her momentary surprise, Twilight smiled again. "Everything's just fine," she told the smaller unicorn. "You can go back to sleep, sweetheart."

"'Kay," the little unicorn yawned. Within moments, she was sound asleep again.

\_Of all the beings I've replaced over the Loops,\_ Twilight reflected as she watched her younger self sleep, \_Mom was probably one of the most unexpected. But right here, right now, I really don't mind.\_

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued<p>

(Anon e Mouse Jr.)

\_Wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!\_

Twilight suddenly started as the grayish-amber filly next to her suddenly popped her head up, her eyes wide as she shouted "Sellow fitizens! Er, I mean fellow citizens!" Then she fell back into sleep, leaving a confused Twilight to blink.

\_Now what,\_ she wondered, \_Was Ivory dreaming about to make her say

something like that?\_

\* \* \*

><p>167.12 (Evilhumour)<p>

"Pfffft?" a white ball of fluff asked the purple one.

"Pffft," the purple one answered, shaking her head as she did \_not\_ want to try and know why they were fluffle ponies.

"Pfffft," the white one shook her head, before blowing another raspberry. "\_Pffffft\_" she then pulled out a stuffed chrysalis doll. The purple one reached into her fluff and pulled out a near identical one, only with a tiny notebook attached to it.

"Pffft." the purple replied, blinking in surprise.

All the while a certain changeling queen was doing her best to escape the army of fluffle ponies chasing after her.

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued (Evilhumour)<p>

\_Wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!\_

Gleaming Shield looked up at her. "Agree to keep quiet on this one Twily?"

Twilight simply responded by taking pictures of her little sister.

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued (Alex Prior)<p>

\_Wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!\_

Twilight Velvet looked up to her mommy, blinking.

"Y'okay, mommy?"

Twilight Sparkle barely refrained from rolling her eyes. "I'm fine, Twilight. Now how about we go get some waffles?"

"Yay!"

\* \* \*

><p>167.13: (Masterweaver)<p>

Vinyl smiled gently as the crowd started to disperse, walking up the stage to the gray mare gently tuning her cello. "Hey."

Octavia let out a small sigh. "Hello."

"Just wanted to let you know... you were great up there."

"I was performing in shadow, Vinyl. Everypony was focused on Coloratura."



"Yeah, well... I know how important a supporting musician can be." The DJ wiped away a tear. "My whole career is just... taking perfection and reinterpreting it, really. Trust me, you were incredible, even if nopony else knows it."

The gray mare turned to her. "...thanks." She took in the expression on the unicorn's face. "Ah... is... something wrong?"

"...It's just... well..." Vinyl sighed. "You know the Loop's ending soon."

Octavia nodded, leaning her cello against a chair. "I know. I've been trying not to think about it..."

"It... it kind of sounds silly, saying this out loudâ€”I mean, most likely I'm going to see you again next Loop..." Vinyl shrugged. "Part of me knows it's still... still the same Octavia, still the pony I love, but... I just... I've never gotten over this feeling that every time the Loop ends, I lose you."

Octavia took a moment to contemplate, assembling her thoughts.

"...I..." She sighed. "Vinyl, if it's... If you... It might not be a good thing, fixating on me. I mean, from what you've said, and Twilight, and the journal... I don't know if I'm ever going to Loop, and... Vinyl Scratch, I just want you to know that I am totally okay if you want to date somebody who is Looping."

"What?" The unicorn shook her head. "No. Never. If a Loop arranges it pre-Awakening, I'll deal with it, butâ€”Octavia, if I can, I will always choose you."

"Vinyl, please! I don't want you torturing yourself over me!"

"Being away from the pony I love would be even worse, trust me."

"Vinyl, I just can'tâ€”"

"Shh." Vinyl lifted a hoof to Octavia's muzzle. "You've clearly spent some time thinking about this. Thing is, I have too. I've weighed the options and... well... this is what I want. This... this would be better for me." She brought her hoof down to the mare's chest. "This soul is the one that I fell in love with. I could try to replace it with something else, something longer, but... compared to the warmth I feel around you, the music you inspire, the comfort I have when we simply rest on each other's withers... replacing this would only leave me cold and distant. You are my muse, Octavia, the glorious root of my own song. And it doesn't matter that you're not Looping, and it doesn't matter if you never Loop; I will never give you up, never let you down, never turn around and desert you."

The cellist sniffled. "You... you really mean that?"

"Yeah. Well, okay, that last bit was tacked on from a really cheesy love song, but I meant it seriously."

Octavia blinked the tears out of her own eyes, smiling back at her.

"Even when you're being serious, you're remixing."

"Hey you know me; I see what I want, and I make it my own."

"Are you sure you don't just want to keep what you call 'the world's best butt' to yourself?"

"It's a perk, I'll grant ya, but a butt can only go so far..."

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued:(Masterweaver) [MLPWarhammer 40,000]

\_Wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!\_

The pinkish filly looked up at Twilight with a huff. "Promise you won't tell anyone about this."

Twilight tried to place the voice. "That... you woke up in bed with me?"

"No, that's something I'd be proud of. I mean me having a confirmed gender!" Slaanesh gestured to her thankfully concealed nether regions. "The other chaos gods have a field day when this happens, It's so embarrassing..."

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued:(Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

\_Wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!\_

The little gray alicorn filly looked up at Twilight. "Morning, auntie!"

As her Loop memories kicked in, Twilight smiled. "Morning, muffin."

A familiar gray-furred face popped in. "Did somepony say, muffins?"

Twilight facehoofed. "Good morning to you too, Derpy."

"No time for small talk, sis! It's time for breakfast!"

Dinky grinned. "Yay!"

As the two raced off, Twilight's smile grew wider. This was an interesting variant... apparently, she and Derpy were having another "Sisters" Loop. But unlike their first one, Derpy had gone the path of Luna and wound up banished to the moon for the full thousand years. When she returned, the Elements of Harmony had split her corrupted side off and reincarnated it as Dinky Hooves, whom Derpy had promptly adopted as her daughter.

"Definitely have to tell Nyx about this the next time I see her," the Alicorn of Magic mused to herself.

\* \* \*

><p>167.14 (Evilhumour)<p>

Luna smiled to herself, sneaking past the battlefield of the Solar Guards and Lunar Guards battling for their princesses, Canterlot Castle thundering as ponies used powerful spells against each other. The massive strike forwards was working well in her favour, with her guards shouting her onwards as the Solar Guards failing to stop all of her fake clones storming the doorway.

Finally, there was break in the fight and Luna dived forwards, tucking her wings in with her crossbow pressed against her barrel. Landing inside the room, Luna quickly bucked the doors closed with her guards on the other side now defending the passageway from the terrified and angered Solar Guards, angry for failing their most sacred duties and terrified at what the Princess of the Night would do.

Luna cared not for their concerns, as she knew that victory was assured as she crept up on her sister's sleeping form, her long head dangling out, just begging for somepony to strike. Standing directly beside her sister's head, her crossbow aimed at point blank range with no chance of error, Celestia finally stirred from her slumber.

"Luna, what's going on?" Celestia mumbled, still groggy with sleep.

"The end of your reign, dear sister," Luna's smile turned cruel, her magic teasing the trigger of her weapon. "This ends now."

Celestia quickly awoke at that, although her body was slow to react. "Luna, don't you darâ€" "

Luna dared, squeezing the trigger and firing directly at her sister, the Princess of Equestria, the Princess of the Sun, with a loud BOINK! as the bolt hit Celestia square on the nose.

"HUZZAH!" Luna shouted in the Royal Canterlot voice, with the Lunar Guards cheering as they heard their Princess's victory cry. "We art still the unquestionable Princess of Nerf Warfare!" Luna dodged Celestia's sweeping hooves, firing more bolts into Celestia's torso with Luna crying out with joy from each shot that found its target. Luna then sped towards the doors, with the Lunar Guards opening the door for her as Luna made her escape, the Solar Guards promising that they would win the next round when the Princesses resumed their wargames.

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued: (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!

Twilight took a closer look at the filly next to her, who looked just like a miniature Applejack, but with a familiar red bow instead of her usual hat. "Apple... Bloom?"

"Eeyup." The youngest Apple sighed. "Looks like it's another palette swap Loop."

Twilight raised an eyebrow and conjured a mirror, sighing as she found a familiar white coat and blue mane looking back at her. "So I switched with my brother, and you switched with Applejack?"

"Not quite. I have hers, she has Mac's, and he has mine."

"... That must be awkward."

"Not as awkward as the Loop where it just happened to him and Granny."

"Point taken." Twilight considered. "Um... I don't have my Loop Memories just yet, so... why are you in my room?" She looked around. "And what's that sound?"

"Element of Magic-only sleepover." Apple Bloom pointed to one side. "Sunset's conked out on the couch in the other room, and Trixie's over there somewhere. And apparently, she snores this Loop. Or she turned on her prop chainsaw in her sleep again, I'm not sure which."

A dark green form raised its head, blinking sleepily and indignantly. "You will never let Trixie live that down, will you?"

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued: (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

\_Wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!\_

Two bright-eyed fillies in rose and mulberry looked up at her with big smiles. "Hi, Momma!"

Twilight smiled back. "Good morning, girls."

A groan came from her other side. "Too early, sis..."

Berry Punch, the eldest of the sisters, looked up at their in-Loop mother. "And here I thought \_I\_ was the one who wasn't a morning pony," she whispered.

Twilight smiled. "Cheerilee just had a late night studying, girls. Why don't we let her rest?"

"Okay! Come on, Ruby!" And with that, the two rushed off.

Twilight then looked at her middle daughter, who appeared to have dozed off again, and smiled. Really, she looked so adorable as a filly. Even at her crankiest.

An ear twitched, and a head rose, with bleary eyes. "Twilight?"

"Yes, Cheerilee?"

"Why, exactly, are we the only ones in this family with enough sense to stay in bed when it's this early?"

"Because Berry's too young to have to deal with hangovers this Loop and is taking advantage of it. And Ruby was always a morning pony in

baseline."

"Oh." Her head fell forward with a thump. "Well, you'd better go watch over those two, and don't let them wake me up again until noon."

Twilight chuckled. "Will do."

\* \* \*

><p>167.15 (ORBSyndicate) Gravity Falls: Friendship is Magic 3: Legend of the Gobblewonker.<p>

"I'M BORED!" Pinkie screamed at the top of her lungs.

Applejack blinked. "Pinkieâ€|" She said, gesturing to the table. "We have thirty different kinds of syrup here. How can you be bored?"

Rainbow Dash moaned from the floor. "Yeahâ€|" I mean I just chugged three bottles of the stuffâ€|" Questionâ€|" who convinced me to do that?"

Stan rushed into the room, flipping his eyepatch off one eye to the other. "I DID! Because stomach aches are terrible! Haha!"

Rainbow Dash blinked. "Ughâ€|."

Twilight turned to Stan. "Legitimate question: how did you convince Rainbow to do that?"

"Easy. Told her it would be a contest with Applejack."

Rainbow Dash moaned. "Too. Much. Syrup."

"I'M STILL BORED!" Pinkie yelled.

Stan's visible eye lit up. "Hey, I have an idea. Who wants to put on some blindfolds and get into my car?"

"YAY!" Pinkie screamed.

Everyone except for Rainbow Dash lightened up with Pinkie's yay and responded with a resounding "YEAH!" Then they all thought about what they had just agreed to for a few seconds. "Wait WHAT?"

Rainbow Dash simply moaned.

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight Sparkle had experienced many people who were absolutely terrible at driving in every shape and form. She had met smart people who for some reason couldn't turn left. She'd met idiots who would smash through everything. She had met people who would somehow crash vehicles without ever touching the gas pedal.<p>

Stan Pines was something else entirely. He was somehow managing to make the most angular turns, the most brutal accelerations and braking, and actually \_launching the car into the air\_. And yet, somehow, the car didn't seem any worse for wear and nobody suffered

any sort of physical damage. Unless you counted Rainbow Dash's stomach agony. (she managed to keep her lunch down though.)

Then again, Twilight supposed that \_maybe\_ the experience was a tad heightened because she was blindfolded.

Twilight's thoughts were interrupted by the sound of Stan's car smashing through a fence. Then the feeling of old car tires on beach sand. (Twilight briefly reflected on the fact that she'd experienced old car tires on beach sand enough to identify it while blindfolded.)

Then, to the joy of all present, the car \_stopped moving.\_

Twilight threw the car door open and jumped out. She instantly found herself tripping and landing face first in some water.

\_At least i'm clean nowâ€¦| Haven't had a shower since I got hereâ€¦|\_

Stan's voice reached her ears. "Blindfolds off!"

Twilight and her friends ripped the offending blindfolds off their faces. They blinked, adjusting to the brightness of the sun.

They were obviously at the Gravity Falls lake, formed by the waterfall spilling off of the right half of the odd cliffs. There was a small island in the center of the lake, and there were lots of people in fishing boats on the shore. It was, evidentially, fishing season. Stan grinned. "TAH-DAH! It's fishing season!"

Twilight and the Elements took a moment to absorb the absurdity that was the town of Gravity Falls fishing. The old waitress, Lazy Susan, was holding a pan over the water hoping to coax fish to just jump in. This world's version of Derpy was waving a muffin under the water with her hands, sending ripples everywhere (and overturning the boat. Somehow.) Toby Determined was taking a picture of a man with a giant fish, the flash causing the man to promptly drop the fish back into the water before falling into the water himself. Sonata was on a boat filled with empty tacos. Wendy's dad and her brothers were literally grabbing fish out of the water with their bare hands and beating them up with punches. The boys cheered as their father beat the fish into submission, and nearby a man stared on with glee, saying "Get 'em! Get 'em!" Nearby, the cakes were apparently being the most successful with worm flavored cake as their bait.

Stan grinned. "Look at this! Fishing season! Time for some quality family bonding!"

Twilight blinked. "â€¦bonding?"

"Yeah! We go fishing in our little boat, sail the seas for adventure, and get tasty fish!"

Applejack squinted. "Why d' ya wanna \_bond \_with us all of a sudden?"

"Come on this is gonna be great! Some official Gravity Falls fishing, one time offer for you Loopers right now! Seriously! Come. Fish. Fishing's good right?"

"Perhapsâ€|" Rarity said, not sure.

"Oh come on! What could be better than you, me, and a bunch of corny jokes for ten hours?"

Fear appeared in the eyes of Rarity, Applejack, Twilight, and Pinkie. Pinkie began shuddering. Anything but bad jokes.

Twilight looked around quickly. \_There must be some way out of thisâ€|\_She thought for a moment. \_I could just tell him we don't want to go.\_

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of an old man screaming. "I SEEN IT! I SEEN IT AGAIN!" The old man in question, local insane elder man McGucket, leapt onto Stan's car, bellowing to the beach. "THE GOBBLEWONKER IS BACK! I SEEN IT! COME QUICK BEFORE IT SCRABDOODLES AGAIN!" He started making extremely odd and angular gestures with all his limbs.

"OOH!" Pinkie lightened up. "I can do that happy dance as well!" She proceeded to imitate McGucket's moves perfectly. In midair. To his credit, McGucket wasn't even fazed by "Pinkie being Pinkie" and instantly grabbed her by the shoulder. "NO! IT'S A JIG OF GRAVE DANGER!"

At this point the ranger in charge of the beach came out and sprayed McGucket as if he were a cat. "Hey hey! Stop scarin' people! This is your last warning Dad!"

Twilight winced inwardly. This old man had obviously lost his marbles, which was bad enough, but he also had a son who apparently didn't want anything to do with him. She sighed, knowing that this was a common occurrence across Yggdrasil, knowing that this was just how things were. It didn't make it any less sad.

Old Man McGucket yelled in a strange old-timer voice. "I HAVE PROOF THIS TIME! BEHOLD! THE DOCK! It's the Gobble-dy-wonker what done did it! It had a long neck like a gee-raffe! And wrinkly skin likeâ€|uhâ€|. question why isn't there an older person in this audience with wrinkles I can point out?"

Stan was currently hiding behind a dumpster. He was \_not\_ going to be called old and wrinkly again.

"The beast chewed my boat up to smithertootinoons, and shim-whammies over to SCUTTLEBUTT ISLAND! YOU GOTTA BELIEVE ME!"

The sheriff simply smiled. "Attention all units! We got ourselves a crazy old man!"

And the entire beach started laughing at McGucket as he walked off, dejected and muttering. "Aww, donkey spittleâ€|"

After the crowd cleared, the ponies-turned-human looked at each other. Pinkie grinned. "We all know what this means."

"MONSTER HUNT!" They cheered. Well, everyone except Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy, the latter of which was quiet as a mouse, and the former of which was still delirious from syrup.

McGucket, somehow back at the dock, yelled "MONSTER HUNT!" as well. Everyone except Pinkie just stared at him blankly. He sheepishly backed away.

At that point, Soos pulled up in a large motorboat named the S. S. Cool Dude. "Did you dogs say something' about a monster hunt?"

Pinkie cheered. "SOOS!" She said, instantly leaping onto the boat. "I hereby commandeer this boat for the sake of MONSTER HUNT!"

Applejack shrugged. "I don't see why not."

They began to go towards the boat (or, in Rainbow Dash's case, stumble) when Stan walked up to them. "All right, all right, let's think this through! You could go waste your time on some stupid monster-finding adventure, or you could spend the day learning how to tie knots and skewer worms with your Grunkle Stan!"

[br]

Twilight, Applejack, and Pinkie yelled "WOOHOO!" at the top of their lungs, ready for adventure. Rarity was on the other side of the boat, talking to Soos about fashion. Surprisingly, he had some rather interesting ideas. The handyman was a man of many skills.

"So, darling, how do you drive this boat?"

"It just goes straight unless I hold the wheel!"

"So we're just going straight."

"You got that right Little Diamond!"

"Do you have a nickname for everyone?"

"You're Little Diamondâ€¦ then there's Blitz, Cowgirl, Sparky, Flutters, and Pinkie."

"Pinkie most certainly is justâ€¦ Pinkie."

"Indeededoo. Whoops I should probably go to the wheel before we crash into somethin'."

As Soos went to the wheel, Twilight, Applejack, and Pinkie were discussing the plan.

"So, step 1: we find the Gobblewonker."

"Uh-huh." Applejack agreed.

"Step 2: determine if hostile or not."

"Gotchaâ€¦"

"Step 3: Depending on the result of step 2, either confront orâ€¦"



"THROW A PARTY!" Pinkie said, wheeling out party cannons, some with "Nessie" designs on them.

Applejack chuckled. "How many cannon designs do you have?"

"I lost count at a trillion!"

"Uh-huh. So if hostile we confront, if not, we make friends. Convince it to stop eating people's boats."

"But what if it needs boats to survive Twilight?"

Twilight sighed. "There's no way in the realm of possibility that it \_needs\_ to eat boatsâ€¦"

Beneath the waters, something watched them, eyes glowing.

\* \* \*

><p>Stan was pleasantly surprised.<p>

Fluttershy had opted to \_stay with him.\_

He could count the number of times a visiting Looper offered to stay with him from the start on his hands. Heck it was such a problem he rarely asked anymore. He didn't like being on the old Stan o' War alone.

Of course the experience was soured by the continual moaning of stomach-ache Rainbow Dash. He was beginning to regret his little Syrup prank.

"So, since you already know how to fish, how about a bit of a competition? Biggest fish wins!"

Fluttershy smiled warmly at stan. "Okie Grunkle Stan!"

Stan grinned. He was actually having \_fun\_. \_He, for once, was happy. This was great. Fishing with a niece (even if it wasn't his regular niece) and having a nice day on the lake.

Also he had managed \_not\_ to mess up Reginald's proposal by that horrid "HER AIM IS GETTING BETTER" Joke.

"Joaje." He muttered, remembering a particularly unpleasant vision of a Hublike universe he had been gifted several hundred Loops ago.

"What was that Grunkle Stan?" Fluttershy asked.

"Nothing Flutters. Nothing at all." A fish bit his hook. "I GOT ONE!"

Fluttershy smiled. She recognized a man who needed company when she saw it. "Nice!"

Rainbow Dash moaned. "Can you two stop being so cheerful!"

"Kid, if I ever hear that sentence come out of your mouth again I will personally dunk you under the water where there are electric

eels."

"Thereâ€¦ aren't electric eels here."

"I have a Pocket filled with all sorts of things."

"You aren't supposed to hold living thingsâ€¦"

"DNA replication gun."

Rainbow Dash moaned. "Carry on withâ€¦ urkâ€¦. one secâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>"HERE WE ARE! Scuttlebutt island!" Pinkie said, gesturing towards the sign nailed into a random tree.<p>

Soos held up his hand, covering up the "scuttle." "Hey look. 'Butt' island!"

Pinkie observed the sign. "I think scuttle island is better. Imagine this thing getting up and scuttling around. Like a beautiful spider!"

The five friends continued onwards, looking through the strange mist that penetrated the island.

"Question, darlingsâ€¦" Rarity said, glancing left and right. "This island is perfectly visible from the beach correct?"

"Yah. What's your point?" Applejack wondered.

"Well how is there an extremely dense mist here?"

Twilight blinked. She hadn't noticed that. Crap. That was probably badâ€¦"

At that point they heard an intense roar in the distance.

Twilight flicked her wrists, ready to cast magic. Applejack took out her lasso. Pinkieâ€¦ continued whatever it was she did. Rarity backed up.

Soos looked at Twilights hands. "Woah Sparky! Are you some kinda wizard or somethin'? That'd be wicked cool!"

Twilight blinked. "Sure. Wizard. Let's go with that and \_not\_ magical unicorn."

"What?"

"Nothing." The group slowly moved towards the sound, seeing a silhouette in front of them. It was perfectly still, and looked vaguely like a head.

"Ready girls?" Twilight asked.

Soos was the only one who responded. "Totally, dog."

They moved forward, ready to face the beast, only to see a bunch of

beavers chattering on a broken boat.

Only Pinkie understood what the beavers said, and she burst into hysterics. "AHAHHAHA!"

"Pinkie? What is it?" Twilight asked.

"You really don't want to know! Ahahhaha!"

Twilight blinked. "Ooookayyyyâ€|."

"Butâ€| what was the sound then?" Applejack asked.

"BEAVER WITH A CHAINSAW!" Pinkie pointed, grinning like a madwoman.

Applejack immediately subdued Pinkie + chainsaw never ended well. Even though there usually wasn't death of any kind, the result was generally beyond terrifying.

Twilight shrugged, magically tossing the roaring chainsaw into the water. "Okay thenâ€| what now?"

"Maybe he really was crazyâ€|." Applejack muttered.

Pinkie just stared into the water, longingly looking at where the chainsaw was. Even though she had several thousand chainsaws in her Pocket, she still wanted to add another to her collection. A beaver-chainsaw was something newâ€|

Then she heard the chainsaw noise again.

That was odd. It couldn't possibly be making that noise underwaterâ€| Her pinkie sense went ballistic.

"GUYS SOMETHINâ€|" She was interrupted by a large sea-beast rising out of the water and slapping her to the side. It roared.

"The Gobblewonker!" Twilight said, gasping. "It really is real!"

Applejack walked right up to the great beast. "Now listen 'ere reptile, we don't want no trouble, but we would appreciate it if you'd stop attacking people's boatsâ€|"

The Gobblewonker roared, lunging for Applejack. She leapt backwards, landing firmly on her feet. "Suppose that was expectin' too muchâ€|"

Twilight cracked her knuckles. "Let's teach this lizard a lessonâ€|"

"Darlingsâ€| do we reallyâ€|"

Applejack raised a hand. "Rarity, there comes a time in every Looper's life when they just want to beat the tar out of some giant lizard."

Rarity sighed. "Fineâ€| I just have the feeling this isn't going to go well."

[br]

"Okay listen up troops."

Fluttershy listened intently. Rainbow Dash was able to sit up without moaning, but that was about it.

"Since we've caught a grand total of log, moss, and other fishing poles on this trip, it's time to do what I do bestâ€"

"Lure the fish in with your charm?"

"Nope. Steal fish from other people."

Fluttershy blinked. "That doesn't seem particularly niceâ€"

"Oh come on let's just have some fun being con-men. Er. Women. Human? Pony? I don't even know anymore. The point is that they have fish and we are going to take them. Any skills you bring to the table?"

"I can talk to most animals." Fluttershy offered

"I can.. URK! Fly!" Rainbow Dash said, before leaning over.

"Yeah, multicolored tomboy? Take a rest, we've got this. Fluttershy, we are going to pull up and I am going to make a utterly and completely terrible joke. While they're distracted get their fish."

"Umâ€| You know I don't really thinkâ€|"

"MISSION GO!" Stan yelled, rowing towards another boat, filled with Manly Dan and his sons. "Hey there pops! Wanna hear a joke?"

"If this is about Wendy being lazy you're the one who hired her." Manly Dan growled.

"Oh this is nothing about it! Just a joke! Seriously! How many lumberjacks does it take to screw in a lightbulb?"

Manly Dan hefted his axe and glared Stan in the eye.

Stan realized something at that moment.

Manly Dan was a lumberjack.

"Uhâ€| ABANDON MISSION!" Stan yelled, rowing away at high speed.

Manly Dan roared. "BOYS! GET IM WHILE I HEADLOCK THIS FISH!"

The same man from earlier shouted "GET IM! GET IM!" with astounding glee.

"THATS RIGHT TYLER! THOSE ARE MY BOYS!"

Stan rowed faster.

\* \* \*

><p>"WHAT IS WITH THIS THING?" Twilight yelled as the Gobblewonker just completely <em>ignored<em> yet another magic blast. "Reptiles should be affected by that! ITS AN ANTI-REPTILE SPELL FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!"

Applejack tied up the Gobblewonker only to have her lasso rip. "It's also ridiculously strong. What is this thing's deal?"

It roared, charging once more.

Rarity sent a magic blast at it. While nowhere near as powerful as Twilight's, they still had a decent amount of power behind them.

What surprised Twilight was that the Gobblewonker actually seemed to \_feel\_ the normal spell.

"What spell was that?" Twilight asked.

"Just a normal one! Magic beam of some kind! Nonspecific!"

Soos laughed. "Dude you're a wizard too?"

"Yes and Pinkie is as well get over it Soos."

Soos looked at Pinkie, who was getting up from the ground. "Can I burn it?" She asked Twilight.

"I'd rather you didn't. Chaos fire is terribly hard to put out."

"Okie dokie lokie!" Pinkie said, appearing behind the Gobblewonker somehow. "TWILIGHT! SHOOT THE LEG WITH A NORMAL MAGIC BEAM!"

Twilight did so, and the leg exploded. Pinkie took a screwdriver out of her pocket and rammed it up the hole. Sparks flew.

"What?" Twilight said, confused, as the Gobblewonker fell to the ground.

Pinkie grinned. "When it hit me I figured out that it was metallic, a machine! That's why your anti-reptile spell didn't work Twilight! And I just noticed a small break in the leg!" She grinned, completely innocent looking.

"It'sâ€¦ a machine?" Rarity said, blinking.

Twilight used her magic to pop open a hatch on the side of the machine, revealing a control room with McGucket inside. "Aww banjo polish!"

Everyone's jaws dropped (excluding Pinkie). "McGucket?" Twilight managed to say. "W-Why?"

"Uhâ€¦ uhâ€¦. AW I just wanted attentionâ€¦!"

"What?"

"Well, first I just hootenannies up a biomechanics brain wave generator, and then I learned to operate a stick-shift with my beard!" McGucket said, demonstrating his ability to use his beard as a limb.

"Uhâ€¦ Why?"

"Wellâ€¦ when you get to be an old fella like me, nobody pays any attention to you anymoreâ€¦. My own son hasn't visited me in months! So.. I figured maybe I'd catch his fancy with a fifteen ton aquatic robot! AHAHAHAHAHAHAâ€¦." He sighed. "In retrospect, it seems a bit contrived. You just don't know the length us old-timers go through for a little quality time with our familyâ€¦"

"Did you ever consider talking to your son?" Twilight asked.

"No sir! I got to work straight on the robot! I made lots of robots in my day! Like when my wife left me and I created a homicidal pterodactyl-tron! Or when my pal Ernie didn't come to my retirement party and I constructed an eighty ton SHAME BOT THAT EXPLODED THE ENTIRE DOWNTOWN AREA! AHHAHAHAHAHH! Well, time to get back to work on my death ray! Any of you kids got a screwdriver?"

Twilight blinked. "Pinkie does."

"Why thank you miss."

Twilight stared at the obviously crazy and most likely evil scientist. She probably shouldn't try to help him get back on his feet or he'd try to conquer the world or something. She really shouldn't. She realllllllly shouldn'tâ€¦.

"I have a better idea" She told Old Man McGucket, cursing her good nature.

In the end, she supposed she would stop him if he did go on a rampage. . .

\* \* \*

><p>"What are your sisters doing?" Stan asked the two Equestrians on his boat.<p>

"I'mâ€¦ not sureâ€¦" Fluttershy said, cocking her head.

The four girls, Soos, and Old Man McGucket knocked on the door the ranger occupied. McGucket's son came out. "What do you want?"

Twilight took a breath, time to put on the twelve-year-old-girl charmâ€¦ "Ranger, we found this old man sitting on an island all alone, mumbling to himself about how he missed his son and he seemed really sad. We figured we could bring him to you and since, you know, you're a Ranger and all you might be able to do something."

McGucket smiled, looking into his son's eyes. "So, Tate. Uhâ€¦ sorry 'bout ruining your beachâ€¦"

"Dadâ€¦" He said, blinking. He closed the door, and walked back inside the house.

McGucket sighed. "Welp. We tried. Thank ya anyway."

Twilight sighed. "Keep trying. He'll open up eventually."

"You really think so?"

Twilight smiled. "I know so."

Then, the door opened again. Tate stepped out with a baseball and a some gloves. "Dad. Think we can finish that game we never got to?"

McGucket got tears in his eyes. "You betcha' sonny! Now remember the ratio of the curveball to the air resistanceâ€¦"

"I know Dadâ€¦" Tate said, smiling.

Twilight grinned. "Mission accomplished girls. We got to face a lake monster AND solved a friendship problem! BONUS!"

Pinkie's sense twitched. "Something's going onâ€¦" She looked around, unable to see anything odd. She shrugged. Maybe it was just an itch.

Stan, however, saw something. In the distance, he saw three young kids with binoculars trying to hide behind a bush. He recognized the kids, they stopped by the Mystery Shack a lot this Loop, calling themselves the Mystery Crusaders.

He frowned. They were watching them.

He wondered why.

Pinkie's sense tingled again, and she turned towards the lake just in time to see something surface for a few seconds.

Something very reptilian.

She smiled. The real Gobblewonker was saying hi. How nice.

Then Tate's curveball hit her in the back of the head.  
"OW!"

Everyone laughed.

The rest of the day was spent with baseballs, fishing, and tales of monster hunts and robotsâ€¦

\* \* \*

><p>pbvwhub fuxvdghuv vslhv jr!<p>

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued:(Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

\_Wait a moment, that wasn't Nyx!\_

The filly, with a half-lidded expression of apparent disinterest,

looked up at Twilight. "Yes, Mom?"

"Umâ€¦" Twilight decided it was way too early in the morning to deal with this. "You can go back to sleep, Maud."

"Okay." And with that, she closed her eyes, curled up and drifted off.

Looking to her other side, Twilight raised an eyebrow at the loudly snoring and splayed out Pinkie. \_Sometimes I wonder about those two, she reflected, \_How they can be polar opposites, and yet still be so close.\_

\_Just another mystery of the magic of friendship, I suppose.\_

\* \* \*

><p>167.5 continued: (KrisOverstreet)<p>

Applejack Awoke, in both senses of the word, with a yawn.

A similar noise came from beside her, prompting her to look down at the small filly at her side withâ€¦ aâ€¦ smileâ€¦ wait a moment... \_small filly?\_

Twilight Sparkle stared bleary-eyed back at Applejack and said, "I guess I'll have to go crusading now, won't I?"

Applejack sighed and settled back on her bed. "Don't worry, Twilight," she said, chuckling. "No matter what happens, I'll always be right by your side."

After a moment the farm pony stiffened, trembling slightly as she added, "Er, I, um, I meant that strictly in th' platonic sense, y'understand..."

Twilight shot her big-sis-for-the-Loop a dirty glance, chuckled, closed her eyes, and went back to sleep.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Note:<strong>

167.1: He's growing his horizons.

167.2: Twilight had to try it once.

167.3: Star Pony.

167.4: Twilight has had this conversation many times, but it's still interesting.

167.5: Yes this happens a lot.

167.6: Friendship through superior firepower.

167.7: It is quite a good car.

167.8: A lucky angel.



167.9: Well, he could have ended up a Pinkie cultist. This is mundane.

167.12: Pfft.

167.14: Plz Nerf.

## 175. Chapter 175

168.1: (Masterweaver)

"I would not feed those to a chicken!" Svengallop cried, scowling as he slapped the plate of oats out of Pinkie's hoof. "I want top-of-the-line Appleloosan oats! Next, it appears that we are surrounded by apple trees. Bring me five hundred pre-peeled, pre-cored apples, and I want those things in twenty-four hours!"\_

And then... Pinkie smiled.

"You know what, mister Svengallop? Let's cut to the chase." She waved a hoof, gathering all the scattered oats into a floating sphere. "You want to be treated. You want, oh, the tastiest foodsâ€" The oats took the form of a large cake. "â€"the rarest of treasuresâ€" Then they morphed into a large diamond. "â€"the most beautiful of mares, hmm?" A sultry silhouette swayed saucily before the shocked stallion's eyes. "You want to demand the impossible, and have ponies all around scramble to obey. You want to be the most important pony around."

Pinkie's smile only grew as the oats broke formation, slinking around Svengallop's head. "What is thisâ€"?"

"I can make it all happen, mister Svengallop." Pinkie grinned. "You know the connections I went through to get Countess Coloratura here? That is only scratching the surface of what I can do. I can be in Prance in a second, and return with fresh scones. I can conjure mountains of gems from midair. I know an entire species of open, ready mares that can look like anything, anyone you want." She let the river of oats trail around his barrel before gathering it all back on the plate. "All I need in return is one eensy, teensy, weensy, small thing."

Svengallop glared at her. "And what would that be?"

"Typical faustian bargain: Your soul. I've got the paperwork ready and everything!" The party pony pulled out a scroll. "And I'm not even going to pull that 'hidden text' thing, that's how you know I'm on the up and up."

"Really." The stallion rose a pink eyebrow. "You're going to try to pull thisâ€"?"

"Pinkie, what are ya doin'?" Applejack demanded, walking into the orchard. "Ah thought you were better than this!"

"Oh come on, AJ! It's been ages since I've had a real soul contract!" The pink pony pouted. "It's not like we get many chances in Equestria."

"Ah'd assume that soul contracts would be off the table no matter what," Applejack countered.

Svengallop snorted. "Oh, of course the country pony would believe in this soul business."

"Oh, trust me, Pinkie can deliver. What \_Ah'm\_ tryin' ta say is that she shouldn't!"

"You really expect me to believe this pink pony is some sort of demon?"

"Goddess," Pinkie corrected. "Chaos goddess. The demons are basically cells, I'm waaaaaaay above them." She shrugged. "I mean, it's not like you're using your soul anyway!"

"Why, I neverâ€"!"

Applejack sighed. "Pinkie, it's the principle of the matter. Ah may dislike Svengallop and how he warped my old friend's image into a mockery of her talent, but that don't mean Ah want him to wander about soulless."

"A mockery ofâ€"?!"

"Pleeeeeeeeeeease AJ? It's just, every time I Loop into 40K I have to borrow from the other chaos gods for poker night!"

"Really? \_That's\_ why you're tryin' ta get Svengallop's soul?"

"That and he's a dick. Karmic justice, you know?"

"I have heard just about enough of this!" Svengallop cried. "I don't care whether or not you can actually pull off what you claim, but I will not tolerate thisâ€"this \_insulting\_ treatment any further! The countess and I are leaving!" He stormed off toward the gaggle of schoolcolts and fillies.

Applejack groaned. "Now look what you did, Pinkie, he's going toâ€""

"Ut ut ut!" Pinkie held up a hoof. "Wait for it..."

The farm-mare rose an eyebrow, turning to watch Svengallop as he stormed up to Coloratura.

Words were exchanged, with Svengallop starting out angry, Coloratura wincing... and then glaring, standing up and growling right back. Svengallop stamped a hoof, pointing toward her palanquin, but Coloratura shook her head and gestured toward the increasingly confused looking foals. The stallion growled, waving his hoofâ€"the pop star gave him an incredulous face, and he rolled his eyes, speaking calmly but firmly. And the mare... looked at the kids again, and narrowed her eyes, and shook her head. Then Svengallop exploded, pushing into Coloratura's face, but the foals would not stand for his words and gathered around her protectively, shouting their own defiance at him. In the end, he stormed off, stomping toward the stage with angry grumbling.

"...you planned that, didn't ya?"

Pinkie shrugged. "Either I got a free soul, or I got to see Svengallop humiliated in front of foals. With a camera," she added, pointing at Photo Finish. "Maybe it's petty of me, but come on! It's just so satisfying to see him get his just desserts!"

Applejack sighed, rubbing her forehead. "Yeah, Ah getcha there... just... just don't do the soul bargain thing, okay? Ah was really worried there for a second."

"...oh, alright, fine." The pink pony waved toward the foals. "Coloratura seems happy, though."

"Yeah... yeah she does." The farmer gathered herself. "Ah'm gonna have to try to get her away from Svengallop way earlier next Loop. Maybe around the GGG or somesuch..."

\* \* \*

><p>168.2: (Evilhumour)<p>

"I understand you are worried about the coming of the Boogie Mare and her funky bat ponies minions, but rest assured Sparkle child, I can handle my wayward sister," the unAwake Celestia bobbed her head, her massive afro glistening with all of its normal colours. "I have a far out, more important task for you to do; I need to go out this fresh town called Ponyville to help with my little get together, you dig?"

The Anchor opened her mouth and closed it a few times before she nodded her head, looking at the large discoball-shaped moon that had the outline of an unicorn on it, flashing across the planet every few seconds in an array of different colours.

"I dig, Princess Sunbeam," Sparkle said, making sure to record this Loop for future blackmail, eager to see how Rarity would look in this disco variant.

\* \* \*

><p>"Silly filly, you don't got them Elements of Disco on you, and my party shall last forever without that square P Sunbeam putting the brakes to my moves," the Boogie Mare said with a bark of laughter filling the old Sister Princesses Disco Parlor.<p>

"That's where you're wrong, Boogie Mare," Sparkle said with a grin, looking at her friends doing their best to out boogie the bat ponies that were pushing them into a corner.

"AhahahaJay's got the bongo beat and a feisty act; totally makes her the Bearer of Salsa!" The poncho-wearing farmer grinned as she one-twoed the large bat pony right in a group of encroaching bat pony mares.

"Flutters, raising from terror to blood-pumpin' love, what else could she but the Bearer of Soul?" The yellow filly's peace necklace swirled around her tie-dye shirt as she mesmerized her foes.

"Sparkling D, flashy and to the beat of the new music, can only be the Bearer of Pop!" The bat ponies blinked back as the unicorn wearing a zoot suit drowning in sequins hip bumped their leader away.

"The Pinks is totally flexible and able to move, thus the Bearer of Dance!" With a grin, the tights-wearing pink mare had taken the lead away from several of the bat ponies following her and sent them into a large pile.

"Radical Dashie, moving and swaying to whatever is playing, this makes her the Bearer of Funk!" A pegasus with rainbows painted literally all over her whipped out her sweet musical axe and strummed it challengingly.

"Haha, that's five of the six mighty Elements of Disco, Sparkle child, but without the last one, they're just fine stones hanging in the air!" With a loud laugh, the Boogie Mare flew into the air before lining herself up to knock down Twilight. "You've lost little filly and you cannot even dance. What hope did you ever have to beat the Boogie Mare herself with no rhythm or flow?"

"That's where you're wrong because with my posse together, I've learned how to adapt and move to their beat. With them, I've learned how to Groove, the sixth Element of Disco!" With that, a sixth stone appeared over Sparkle's head. The Boogie Mare tried to pull up but it was too late. A pulsating rainbow swept through the room and hit the Boogie Mare straight on with an explosion of music, leaving Princess Moonbeam on the dance floor.

\* \* \*

><p>168.3: (Evilhumour)<p>

"Hmmm..." Vinyl tapped her chin in front of the window, before she was tackled over by several people. "Gah, what the sneezewort girls?!"

"No Vinyl, we've seen what you have done when you 'wubbify' things and we are not having another attack of your stuff when it gets out of control!" Twilight shouted, trying to wrestle the woman's arm down with Rainbow Dash and Lyra's help.

"Oh come on, that's was just because I got bored and wanted to see what would happen if I used the All-Spark onâ€" "

Before Vinyl could say what, exactly, she was going to use the All-Spark on, she was jumped on Applejackâ€"who quickly demonstrated that she still knew how to hogtie people.

"Come on girl, we've got a little meet together with ma sister about proper usage of advanced techno-contraptions," Applejack grumbled, dragging the girl away from the kitchenware store's window.

"But I need to replace the coffee machine before Octy gets back," Vinyl whined loudly as she was lifted up onto the farmer's shoulder and carried out into the streets of Ponyville. "Also, I need to make sure that the toaster didn't gain sapience and try to take over Equestria again."

Twilight blinked and sighed heavily, facepalming before she sprinted down the street to the musicians' house to make sure that there would not be another rampaging toaster attack.

\* \* \*

><p>168.4: (Gamerex27)<p>

She hadn't really bothered to question it. It was pretty fun, after all.

Smiling, Pinkie Pie grabbed an oar in her mouth and hopped onto a gondola. Leaning her head towards the side of the boat, she channeled her earth pony strength to row herself across the canals of Ponyville.

The canals that hadn't been there yesterday.

She waved at several tired pegasi running what looked like a water filter through the new lake surrounding Ponyville, then squeaked as she almost fell off the boat due to the sudden imbalance of weight.

Steadying herself, she steered her vehicle over to Twilight's castle. As she tied her boat down to the hastily-created dock, her ears perked up as she heard somepony approach.

"Hiya, Twilight!" she said, spitting out the licorice knot and trotting to the entrance of the castle. "So...we've been Awake for years. Don't you usually do these experiments at the start of a Loop?"

"This...this was an accident," Twilight feebly protested, sighing as she dumped a large pile of sponges into the water to help drain the town. "All I did was do a bit of research, publish a paper, and next thing I know, everypony tries to rewrite every water molecule in the town's water supply, and now we're all flooded."

"...How's that a bad thing?" Pinkie chirped, absentmindedly nibbling a bit of leftover candy as she spoke. "It's fun! I haven't actually been to cities in the waterâ€"Venice, Altomare, Soleanna...actually, I was in that last one, but Silver accidentally sent me into space early on, so I spent the rest of the Loop getting a monopoly on Eggmanland's candy stores so I could manipulate him into going out of business and I could buy the place and make it actually fun, but I'm not letting you talk again, am I?" The earth pony giggled nervously. "Whoopsie! So, what happened?"

"...you've seen how there are so many mares in Ponyville and the rest of Equestria, and so few stallions, right?" Twilight asked.

"Um...there's not a shortage, but the number's kinda different, so...yeah?"

"After we learned that Cadence will be pregnant in the future, I did some research-ultrasounds, studies, divining spells to see if we can find what her foal may look like before that comes in the timeline," she continued, "along with some other Loopers last Loop. And

we...found this."

She hoofed over several sheets of paper stapled together. Pinkie grabbed it and looked it over.

"Comparison on the Effect of Natural versus Tap Water in Fetal Differentiation," she read aloud. "By T. Sparkle, R. Belle, and Z. Cora."

She flipped rapidly through the paper. Control sample, mean amount of magnetite, p-value, codon, trimester of pregnancy...In spite of what some ponies would think of her, she did have enough of an attention span to pay attention to her friends' work, and she was more than smart enough to understand the basic terminology of the study, if not the nitty-gritty details and scientific jargon. Not that she ever bragged about that: that would be mean.

"So...you were trying to find out if Ponyville's water supply was tainted?"

"Not so much 'tainted' as skewing the gender ratio." We basically looked into whether there was something in the water doing this," Twilight elaborated. "Turns out, there was. There's some kind of magical compound in the water that, when ingested by pregnant mares, makes the zygote more likely to develop into a filly. No other side effects, but I'm not sure yet if this is in Baseline, or just a glitch in the water's Yggdrasil code or something: we'll do a follow up study next time we're all Awake. We published the paper, and...I think the locals took it the wrong way."

"Water always tasted fine to me," Pinkie commented, watching as the Unawake Cutie Mark Crusaders struggled to pilot their canoe to school, and how Pony Joe's dough shipment was caught in a nasty traffic jam behind a vessel packed with Apple family cider and Filthy Rich's luxury yacht. "Don't you put those things in journals only other scientists read?"

"Yes, but those are sometimes cross-referenced and mentioned in mainstream papers." Twilight dug around in her Pocket, pulled out yet another sponge, and enlarged it with a quick sizesifting spell, dropping it into the lake. "This one was after that incident with Rainbow Dash and Tank going into hibernation, and I think a lot of ponies misread it to read that the water was poisoned. They tried to put some filters in, and...uh...the dam flooded the town by mistake."

"Oh." Pinkie blinked, and watched as Fluttershy flung out a net to catch some algae for her friends near the sea, and as Spike floated across the water on a pool float, sipping some lemonade. "Well...it looks like fun to me!"

"...yeah," Twilight said, chuckling as she dropped another massive sponge into the lake. "I guess it's harmless enough. Other than the property damage, nopony got hurt, and it's making getting across town interesting, at least...Oh! Your Unawake self made these blueprints for a boat made out of candy this one time. Want to see if it's seaworthy?"

\* \* \*

><p>168.5: (Vinylshadow)<p>

Shining Armor Woke up to a steady stream of \_thwoks\_ coming from the balcony of his bedroom in the Crystal Empire. Sitting up, rubbing his eyes, he blinked himself awake to see Cadence swinging a golf club and seeding the Empire with crystal golf balls.

Dragging himself out of bed, he made his way over to his wife and waited until she had emptied her current bucket of balls.

"Good morning, Cady," he said. She pricked her ears and turned to smile at him.

"Wide Awake?" she asked.

"And Loopy as ever," he replied warmly, sharing a nuzzle with his Crystal Princess of Love. "What are you up to?"

"Practicing," she said.

"You play golf now?" Shining asked curiously.

"It's not exactly \_complicated\_. At least not when you're simply smacking balls into the wild blue yonder."

"That 'wild blue yonder' looks an awful lot like our Empire made from crystal," Shining noted.

"They're decorations," Cadence said defensively. "And they \_usually\_ just bounce off whatever they hit."

"Usually?" Shining asked, arching one eyebrow.

"I...may have broken a few windows...but I've gotten much better," she admitted.

"Behold, Crystal Empire, your Putt-Putt Queen," Shining said with a grin.

Cadence bopped him on the head with her putter and pouted.

\* \* \*

><p>168.6: (Masterweaver)<p>

Lyra did a double take. "Waitâ€" \_that's\_ Countess Coloratura?!"

Twilight shrugged. "I know. Complete contrast to what AJ was talking about. Turns out her manager is an image-manipulating egotist, soâ€" "

"Yeah, yeah, I got that. Uh, do I meet her in baseline?"

"Well, there's a line of fans for 'hoovesies,' which is a little stamp kissing thing, and you usuallyâ€" "

"Right, I'm getting in." Lyra trotted to the line quickly, schooling her face to that of an eager fanfilly's. Twilight glanced after her suspiciously; even at the best of times, the mysteries of the green

mare's thoughts could barely be fathomed. Still, for the moment, Lyra didn't seem intent on causing trouble...

As always, Svengallop pulled Coloratura from AJ. As always, the line of fans went forward. And then, it was Lyra's turnâ€

"Shoo-be-doo," the green unicorn greeted casually.

"Shoo-shoo-be-doo," the popstar replied without thinking, before her eyes widened in shock. "Uh, umâ€"

Lyra winked.

"H-Hoovesies!" Coloratura managed, smiling all too wide as she partially smeared the green cheek with her stamp. She watched warily as Lyra trotted cheerfully away, before turning back to the line.

Twilight sighed. "Really? Really?"

"Had to be sure," Lyra explained.

\* \* \*

><p>168.7: (Masterweaver)<p>

"...Soooooooooooooooooooo."

Cadence sighed, putting her book down. "What is it, Chrysalis?"

"...You and Slaanesh collaborated on a publication?"

"Yes, we did." Cadence managed a faint smile. "It was actually quite interesting. We seem to approach the same subject from very different angles, and our discussions were very detailed. Granted, I had to talk hir down from some subjectsâ€"

"No, no, I've read the book," Chrysalis assured her. "I just..."

She paused, rubbing at her holey leg awkwardly. Cadence rose an eyebrow. "What?"

"Well... I know Slaanesh, since shi's a chaos god, has hir devotees and high priestsâ€the people shi grants, shall we say, powers?"

"...don't tell me that you want to become a Slaaneshi cultist!"

"No! No no, not at all, not with hir!" Chrysalis shivered. "There are some things I would not do for all the love of a universe."

"Oh. Well... good."

"I was thinking of becoming a Cadenza cultist, actually."

The pink alicorn blinked. "...come again?"

"Weeeeell, I don't know for \_sure\_ if you wrote that book in the



forty-first millennium," Chrysalis hedged, "but if you \_did,\_ that implies that maaaaaaaybe you were a warp godâ€”major or minor, I don't know. But as a warp god, you would, possibly, be able to 'bless' some individuals; given how the Loops work, it wouldn't surprise me if you retained that particular ability."

"A Cadenza cultist," Cadence repeated.

"Yes. Somebody devoted to the spread and maintenance of... well, I don't know what form of love you embody, precisely, you seem to dabble in romance and family equally these days... Let's call it familial love of all kinds?" Chrysalis shrugged. "I mean, as a species that literally feeds on loveâ€”as a mother over thirty-three-thousand times over, I would be, you know, a devoted worshiper. And if this comes with benefits, saaaaaaay like the ability to generate enough love to feed my whole hive, all for the better."

"I'm sorry," Cadence held up a hoof. "I'm still trying to wrap my head around the idea. I mean, there have been cults in variant Loops, and Shining did that thing back in Oerth, but... have an actual Looping high priest? Being an actual, you know, figure of worship? I... I don't know."

"No, no, I get that. I mean... I don't want this to get in the way of the friendship we... kinda sorta have," Chrysalis allowed. "It's just an idea that's been... in my head."

"Can you let me think about this?"

"Oh, yes, certainly. I'll just... go find Trixie now."

The changeling queen backed out of the room, leaving the princess of love to stare at the golden shoes that adorned her hooves.

"...Cadenza cult. High priestess Chrysalis of Cadenza..."

She glanced at the crystal heart on her flanks.

"Hmmm."

\* \* \*

><p>168.8: (Masterweaver)<p>

"WHAT. THE. BUCK."

Coloratura was startled to see a white unicorn stomp onto the stage, pushing past her and snarling at Svengallop. "You monster. You complete. And total. Monster."

"I beg your pardon, miss?"

"You see this?!" The unicorn pointed at the eighth notes on her flank. "THIS represents my talent for remixing. I can take anything, ANYTHING! And make a new tune out of it. I've made a \_career\_ out of revitalizing songs that others thought outdated, or bringing a singer into a whole new light. I can throw together amazing blends of light, color, and sound on the \_fly\_ because I \_understand\_ how they all

work! I \_respect\_â€"neigh, \_adore\_ every sound clip in my library, every song that I reform! And do you know what I just saw?!"

Her hoof pointed at the stunned popstar. "I saw a beautiful voiceâ€"an incredible talentâ€"mangled and mocked with magic, gasping beneath glitz and glam, barely recognizable as even a joke! I saw a performance meant to deride and insult the prime actress, so shallow that she doesn't even have to be here for it to work! I saw a pony used as a prop, a plaything, a practical putz! And the worst part, the absolute worst part?! I saw her \_agree\_ to it! Not out of spite, or sadness, but pure ignorance! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO THIS BEAUTIFUL SOUL?!"

"Look, miss, I am Countess Coloratura's managerâ€" "

"WRONG! You are her OWNER! You imprison her with lies, little tidbits that say you're necessary, and then sit back as she flounces about in whatever pitiful dance you've arranged this time! Well, I for one won't stand for it. I insist, demand, and in fact enforce that you remain away from her! If I find that she is forced to go through another such INSULT of a performance, if I discover that you continue to lock away the true pony behind your pathetic tricks, not only will I not attend your charity show but I will ALSO spread your name! Your face! And word of your \_sick and depraved\_ treatment of this pony to all the musicians and musical venues I can contact. One way or another, I will not let you torture Coloratura anymore!"

With that dramatic statement, Vinyl Scratch, known as DJ Pon-3, stormed off the stage. Ponies gave her a wide berth, noticing how the very ground beneath her hooves began a dramatic drumbeat. If any looked behind her tinted glasses, they would see it in her eyes: The Goddess of Wubbology was absolutely and utterly livid.

\* \* \*

><p>168.9: (Elmagnifico)<p>

Twilight looked out at the herd of strange creatures assembled in Ponyville Square with a mixture of bewilderment and relief. On the one hoof, they were not accosting any of the citizens. On the other, the citizens had retreated into their homes at the things' approach, and Twilight honestly couldn't blame them.

She'd been gearing up to deal with the Plunder Vines, it was about that time of Loop. The specially-bred eggs from Bert Gummer's Branch were just a quick aging spell from reaching maturity. She'd hoped the giant worms' now highly specific diet, calibrated specifically to target the Vines' unique blend of chaos magic, would keep both species from causing too much havoc.

Instead, she now was looking out on a plaza full of trees that had eyeballs instead of leaves. She'd seen something similar once before in what she'd later learned was the Starbound Branch, but those trees had been sessile. This entire forest had apparently uprooted itself and walked into Ponyville. Now she and the other elements of harmony had been assembled to deal with this problem. Discord was in town at this point as well, but he had quite visibly been keeping his claws to himself. By detaching them and placing the lot in a chest that was still tucked under one arm, but it was the thought that counted.

One of the ocular copse's members blinked in their direction and shuffled forward. The other elements tensed, and Twilight found herself wondering absently what the things' abilities were beyond its bizarre appearance. A certain smug-looking spirit of chaos just sort of floated in her peripheral vision.

Before anypony could do anything, the tree creaked and groaned a bit as its bark shifted until what looked like a ligneous mouth opened up. At this stage, Twilight really wasn't surprised when it spoke in a voice with an odd timbre.

"Pardon me, ladies, but would any of you know the way to Appleoosa? It seems my friends and I have gotten lost."

The Anchor raised an eyebrow for half a second, until a hunch that had been brewing since she'd first saw the creatures coalesced enough to be expressed. She turned to Discord with a look so deadpan that a nearby deceased skillet came down with acute jealousy.

"You wouldn't happen to have something to do with this, would you?"

There was a niggling feeling at the back of her mind that she was going to regret that phrasing as the Spirit of Chaos' mish-mosh face spread in a wide grin.

"My dear Twilight, off-course eye wood!"

\* \* \*

><p>168.10: (Gym Quirk)<p>

Cheerilee walked over to stand next to Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon as they watched the magic envelop the Cutie Mark Crusaders. Despite their foreknowledge, the blinding flash still dazzled the teacher and her students for several seconds.

Gasps from the fillies and colts in the schoolyard accompanied the restoration of their vision.

Before the crowd now stood three alicorn fillies.

Three blank-flank alicorn fillies.

"Now that's just a bit cruel," observed the teacher quietly, as astonishment fought disappointment on the faces of the unawake Crusaders.

Diamond Tiara nodded sadly. "I hope it's just a one-time glitch in the Tree's 'Important Event' library or something like that."

"Should I go get 'Queen Mum'?" asked Silver Spoon. "She skipped the baseline ascension crisis this time around, right? I hope that wasn't the reason for this..."

\* \* \*

><p>168.11(Evilhumour)<p>

"Twilight, what is that?" Spike pointed to a new book in the reference section of the library.

"Oh, that's a book that Cadence and Slaanesh worked on, the Big Book of Love," Twilight said, looking up from her latest book from Rainbow Dash with a happy smile on her face. "It was really good."

"But Twilight, why are you having a book like that in public and not in the private section?" Spike's claw was reaching out for it but his other one was doing its best to stop it.

"It's not bad at all Spike," Twilight said, shaking her head as she levitated both the drake and book over to her side. "I must admit I was very skeptical about it when I heard it, and saw that it was a pop up book of all things, but trust me, both of them decided to show that they were talking about love and not sex. That's their other book." With a flick of her hoof, she opened to a random page—a section of the ability and strength of True Love's Kiss, with a miniature hologram of Shining Armor and Cadence's wedding day with the room almost to exact detail. There was even a tiny Chrysalis hovering around them. Spike pulled the tag, which got Shining and Cadence to kiss, sending out a ray of light that sent the tiny Chrysalis flying away. "Ahem, 'The power of True Love's Kiss is a mighty weapon between soulmates, and can achieve much to the people's defense and defense only. While many would see this as a weakness, our example here shows how much can be done by defending one's True Love. Sometimes, the shield is mightier—" Spike!" Twilight shouted as Spike kept pulling the tab which sent Chrysalis flying over and over again. "What are you—"

"Look," he pointed with a claw to a corner of the room, and Twilight let a round of giggles. It seemed that Cadence and Slaanesh had planned for Chrysalis to have a soft landing in the form of a blue showmare's hooves.

"Okay, that's really cute," Twilight grinned as she handed the book over to Spike, watching the drake read it from the beginning before she went back to her own book.

\* \* \*

><p>168.12: (Masterweaver)<p>

"I'm terribly sorry about this," Sleipnir said without preamble as he stepped into Cadence's room. "She insisted."

"Wha—"?"

A buxom human with flowing golden hair shoved the eight-legged stallion aside as she entered. "Heh-LOW horsey sis! It's nice to meet you, at last!" She twirled forward and wrapped the alicorn in a tight embrace, giving her a peck on each cheek before she let go. "I mean, wow, the local love goddess? And a pony to boot, look at you. Of course, you've heard about me already, haven't you?"

Cadence shot a questioning glance toward Sleipnir, who mouthed a single word. "Oh! Aphrodite, right?"

"Yeah, that's me!" The woman sat down on the bed next to the pony, wrapping an arm around her neck. "Best love goddess around, ask

anyone."

"Right, yes. I have heard of you..." Cadence mused. "...quite a bit, actually. You admin the Eiken branch, is that right?"

"Well, yes, but that's only to get Skuld off my ass," Aphrodite replied, waving her hand dismissively. "Not that it's a bad place, it's actually pretty great!"

"I see. Is it true you're married to Hephaestus?"

"Ugh." The woman stuck out her tongue. "Yeah, it was a marriage of convenience. He's absolutely hideous."

"So I understand," Cadence said neutrally. "Still, he did a good job raising your kid."

"Eros? Yeah. Had to foist him off on somebody when Ares wouldn't take responsibility. I mean, the guy is hot as hell, don't get me wrong, he's just a bit... short tempered, is all."

"Oh, I can see how that would be."

"Where are my manners, though!" Aphrodite leaned back with a grin. "You know all about me, and I know nothing about you! How are things for you in, uh, Equinia?"

"Equestria."

"Yeah, that!"

"Well..." Cadence took a moment to contemplate. "I have a loving, handsome husband... I've been told I'll get a baby soon, that's fun... and oh! Recently one of the Loopers started worshipping me."

"What?" cried Aphrodite.

"What?!" shouted Sleipnir.

"Yeah, a lover and a mother near countless times," Cadence confirmed with a grin. "I mean I was a little nervous when she started out, but high priestess Chrysalis has been pretty consistent in helping me out."

"Oh, you've got a high priestess!" Aphrodite squealed happily. "I remember my first high priestess... or maybe she was my third...? Well, I had such great fun with her, you know. Oh, Sleipnir!" she cried. "A high priestess! They grow up so fast, right?"

"I... guess they do?" the stallion managed, giving Cadence an odd look. "You're not looking to Ascend, are youâ€"?"

"Oh, nononono, no," Cadence assured him quickly. "All my stuff is here! My family, my castle, my worshippers..." She let out a melodramatic sigh.

Aphrodite cooed, running her fingers through the mare's mane. "Oh, what's wrong horsey sis?"

"It's just... as much as I \_love\_ Chrysalis worshiping me now, I feel like she doesn't quite know how to do it right," Cadence bemoaned, leaning into Aphrodite with large, wet eyes. "I mean, she preaches about \_loyalty\_ and \_selflessness\_ and \_chastity\_, you know?"

The woman nodded sympathetically. "I know! It's like the complete antithesis of a love goddess, but they keep insisting!"

"Sometimes I wish, oh, that a chosen one would descend from on high to teach her the error of her ways," the alicorn whined. "But I don't know who I could possibly send!" She surreptitiously winked at Sleipnir, flicking a wing toward Aphrodite.

The trickster's son caught on fast. "You know, in the old days some of us would take on mortal forms to guide others," he mused. "Maybe I could get Aphrodite to manifest in one of Chrysalis's daughters."

"Oh my gosh!" Cadance turned a hopeful beaming smile on the buxom woman. "Would you do that for me, Aphrodite? You're such an \_experienced\_ love goddess after all..."

"Well..." Aphrodite rubbed her chin. "I'm not sure..."

"You'd probably need to put your full focus on it," Sleipnir pointed out. "Skuld wouldn't be able to reach you at \_all\_ until the Loop ended."

Realization took root in the woman's eyes. "Yeah, that... well, the Eiken Loop could last without me for a short bit," she admitted. "Okay, why not? Sleipnir, let's head upstairs and work this thing out!" She wrapped her arms around Cadance again. "Just you wait, this time tomorrow Chrysalis will have a brand new daughter to help her become the best pony priestess EVER!"

Both she and the eight legged stallion flashed out of existence. After a moment, Cadance turned to her vanity, opening a drawer and tapping the enchanted mirror within. "Chrissy? Yeah, I have a godly mission for you..."

\* \* \*

><p>"Welcome to the world, my dear child."<p>

Aphrodite stared at the ragged-haired, hole-ridden, fanged bug thing staring at her. She looked at the eggshell around her, felt the fin on her bald head, and gasped at her own emaciated form.

Chrysalis, wearing a motherly smile, politely ignored the soul-wrenching scream.

\* \* \*

><p>168.13: (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Twilight raised her eyebrows. "Really? You can predict the future?"

Sitting in front of her, the other unicorn nodded. "And I knew you were going to say that."

"..." Twilight shook her head, and sighed. This new pony had come into town earlier, and proclaimed herself a seer of things to come. Twilight, suspecting a visiting Looper or a weird variant (it wasn't the first time somepony new had shown up in place of Trixie, or even the millionth), had promptly decided to check the newcomer's abilities for herself. Steadying herself, she looked the other pony in the eye. "So, what else can you see in my future?"

The pony pressed her hooves to her forehead. "I'm seeing... I'm seeing... hugs from an Alicorn!"

Then, in one fell swoop, she grabbed Twilight, and pulled her close. And as the illusion fell away to reveal her true form, the now winged pony grinned. "Surprise."

"Princess Celestia!" Twilight smiled and hugged her mentor back.

When the two finally separated, Twilight looked up. "It's so nice to see you again. It's been far too many Loops since the last time, hasn't it?"

"Yes. Yes, it has." Celestia smiled. "And it's always nice to know I can still surprise you."

"You always were good at that," Twilight told her with a smile of her own.

\* \* \*

><p>168.14: (Purrs)<p>

"619,324,885,207,346,950,184,0\_30\_...  
619,324,885,207,346,950,184,03\_1\_... 619,324,885,207,346" Her count was interrupted by a purple claw tapping on her shoulder. "Spike!"

"Twilight, what are you "

"Figuring out how many Loops it takes to get to a googleplex.  
619,324,885,207,346,950,184,03\_2\_..."

Spike cocked his head. "That's a lot. How many Loops has it been so far?"

Twilight froze, then facehoofed. "Oh, \_jacaranda\_."

\* \* \*

><p>168.15: (Evilhumour)<p>

"And make sure that those sardine cupcakes have extra mustard on them, please," Shining said to Pinkie Pie, causing a just-Woken-up Twilight to tilt her head in confusion. After a quick confirmation that he was Awake, she asked about the elephant in the room.

"Eh, Shining, is this one of those macho guy eating contests?" Twilight blinked, looking for the massive ponies that were a part of Fluttershy's brood. Then again, Shining wasn't the most manly of

ponies to begin with...

"Uh not really," Shining blushed, looking to the side as Pinkie Pie brought up his order. "Cadence has cravings and this is the second-best place in all of Equestria next to Donut Joe's, but he doesn't take requests."

"Eeeyup," Pinkie Pie said with a forced smile. "That will be twenty five bits because you mentioned that hack of a pony that doesn't even try to be a good cook unlike me!"

Shining rolled his eyes at that, doled out the bits, ascended to alicornhood and flew off to feed his wife.

\* \* \*

><p>168.16: (Vinylshadow)<p>

Twilight and Trixie entered Big Mac's bar and took seats at the counter.

"Huh...no Mac tod-AGH!" Twilight yelped, falling back off her stool as Berry Punch popped up in front of them with a wide grin.

Berry leaned over the counter worriedly. "Too much hospitality?" she asked, extending a hoof to help Twilight up.

"No, no, not at all," Twilight assured her. "Cider please."

"Make it two, please," Trixie added. As Berry went to pour their drinks, Apple Bloom and Silver Spoon entered the bar and took a seat beside the older mares.

"How was your last Loop?" Silver Spoon asked Trixie, who exchanged looks with Twilight.

"You tell them," Trixie said. Twilight took a few breaths.

"Alright, so, it started off pretty much Baseline, but with several subtle hints that it wasn't following it to the letter," she began. "Very small things. Nightmare Moon mentioned she had outside help with her escape; someone or thing from Equestria itself broke the seal and let her out," she clarified. "So we nuked her with Rainbows and Luna mentioned someone else had taken up her duties of monitoring dreams, but Celestia wasn't the one who did it. The first huge difference was Trixie showing up wearing the Alicorn Amulet."

Berry arrived with their drinks and looked rather disgruntled at having to go pour more while Twilight talked.

"So instead of having an Ursa Minor amble into town, I had to duel Trixie, who was drawing far too heavily on the Amulet's power. Which nearly cut off her connection to magic; I was able to trick her in removing it and that's when she Woke up."

Trixie sipped her cider and carefully avoided eye contact.

"Nothing out of the ordinary until Discord's return, which ended with him escaping once I'd fixed my friends rather than waiting around to be stoned again," Twilight said with some amusement. "He then turned



into your average overarching villain, behind the Problem of the Day. Turned the Wonderbolts into the Shadowbolts, orchestrated the Invasion of Canterlot, brought back the Crystal Empire, that sort of thing. Loop ended shortly after my usual ascension."

"What happened?" Silver Spoon asked.

"Discord tampered with the Elements when I recited Starswirl's spell. I didn't have the knowledge to fix it instantly like I usually do, so I had to deal with the problems that arose from your friends living different destinies. Then I met Celestia who told me she and Luna had been using their power to stall Discord, preventing him from interfering directly, but he simply acted indirectly through proxies. I enjoyed it overall," Twilight declared, taking a deep drink of her cider and set the mug down with a content sigh.

"That sounds a lot better than what really happened," Discord said casually. "I'm much more interesting as a big bad than some boring friend." He drank fruitcake and nibbled on eggnog as the ponies picked themselves off the floor from his abrupt appearance. "You're so much fun to tease."

\* \* \*

><p>168.17:(Masterweaver)<p>

Sharp Sylence sat herself down near the entrance of the mine, carefully adjusting her tail. "Perfect Fyre is busy reassessing the protection around Holder's Boulder. We should have roughly half an hour to ourselves."

The pony to her left giggled. "Perfect Fyre! It just fits her, don't you think?"

"As much as Bryllyant Byscuyt fits you."

"You know, my family has an odd obsession with the letter y this Loop," Pynkye Pye pondered. "I'm sure Twilight'd love to study it, if, you know, we weren't hosting guests. How's Equestria been treating you so far anyway?"

The two gray ponies shared a look.

"Well," Bryllyant began, stretching out a bit as she flicked her braided mane back, "I have to admit that it's been... helpful to rebalance my own thoughts on sisterhood. Not that I don't love my sisters, especially after me and Toph found them in the circus, it's just... It's nice not to be a septuplet, but at the same time I wouldn't want to be an only childâ€”having a fraternal twin and older sisters is a good compromise for me." She gave Pynkye a grin. "And you've been a great twin, before and after you Woke up! I know that Mai's enjoyed the sister thing too, she just doesn't emote very often."

"Differently," Pynkye corrected. "She emotes differently. I've had Loops of experience with Maud and Marble, I can read Mai easily." She gave the pony in question a little nudge. "Come on, I'm your little sister this Loop. You can tell me what's eating you."

Mai gave her a flat look. "The hooves. It's hard for me to get my

hair right without fingers. And somehow Ty Lee does it without thinking."

"Huh." Ty Lee looked down at her own forelegs. "You know, I never realized that before. How \_am\_ I braiding my mane withoutâ€"?"

"Tactile telekinesis," Pynkye replied quickly. "Trust me, questioning any further might crash the Loop. So why don't we talk about what's really bothering you two instead?"

"What?" Ty Lee gave her in-Loop twin a worried look. "Bothering us? What are you talking aboutâ€"?"

Pynkye gave her a level frown.

Ty Lee let out a small sigh. "Is it really that obvious?"

"It wasn't back before we Woke up," Pynkye admitted. "At least, it wasn't to me. Now though... looking back... you two were terrified of Perfect Fyre weren't you?"

"I do admit, even as a pony she can be pretty... frightening," Mai agreed, her eyes darting upward. "Which is somewhat incredible. I suppose now that I'm Awake I should be less scared of herâ€"especially since \_you're\_ with us," she mused, nodding toward Pynkye. "But... It's just... even if she's not Looping, even if she doesn't have any bending, even if she's not trained in military manners, she is still \_Azula.\_"

"Granted, she wasn't \_as\_ bad as she usually is," Ty Lee pointed out. "Being a peasant, having to do everything herself, has curbed her ego quite a bit. And then of course, there's the fact you never reacted to her manipulations," she added, giving the pink mare an odd look.

"Yeah, I think I don't actually \_have\_ a fear response." Pynkye shrugged. "I mean, I can tell when something \_should\_ be terrifying, and I'm really good at faking it, but I've seen how fear affects others and I just don't get that. But this isn't really about me. This is about you two and Azula."

"She's a sociopath with attention-seeking habits who quite literally terrorizes people into following her commands so she can get her way." Mai shrugged. "That's really all there is to is."

There was a moment of silence.

"...she's also one of our few real friends," Ty Lee admitted.

Mai actually frowned at that. "Her? A friend?"

"Well, you know what it was like at finishing school," Ty Lee pointed out. "All those politics and family maneuverings that we were just a touch too young to understand, striving to be the bestâ€"she could have brought in any of the other girls. Any of my sisters. And she chose us."

"She chose to ally herself with the talented and wealthy," Mai countered. "That's not really friendship."

"But it's the closest thing we knew at the time. And she didn't just do the usual 'favors' either. I know it varies whether it happens or not, but doesn't she usually visit you when Tom-Tom is born?"

Mai glared. "Yes. She attends the soul rising. She looks at the baby and says... something about a promising child. She gives us a giftâ€”usually a set of training armor or weapons for when he's 'old enough', and then she makes some vague princess excuse and leaves. It's all rote and duty, it's not real."

"I don't know," Ty Lee mused. "You know how uncomfortable she is in normal social situations. Even attending a party in person is... well, it's outside her comfort zone."

"You're usually at Tom-Tom's soul rising. You know how formal it is. It's not really outside her normalâ€”"

"Lu Ten's funeral."

Mai blinked. "What?"

"Lu Ten's funeral," Ty Lee repeated. "The whole royal family is supposed to be stoic at the time, but..." She let out a small breath. "We know Iroh is always... always struck hard by that, but nobody focuses on Zuko and Azula. But almost every time, you and I are there."

"Zuko sends us invitations."

"No. He sends you an invitation. Mine... Mine's from Azula."

Mai blinked, her tail flicking briefly. "...are you... sure that's baseline?"

"It's pretty consistent," Ty Lee confirmed. "And... maybe it's a move, I don't know, but it's not one that makes sense for her. Not in any tactical way."

Mai's gaze lowered. "...I didn't know."

"To be fair, I never really told you." Ty Lee's ears folded back as she shot her an apologetic smile. "Sorry about that."

"Mmm."

Pynkye cleared her throat. "Well, Ty, it sounds like you have conflicting feelings regarding Azula."

"She's really the one who motivated me," Ty Lee explained. "I mean, before the school I just felt like one of the seven, but she... she picked me out of the crowd and devoted attention to me. I mean, yes, it wasn't anything nice but it was... something. It was her drive that... well, it's what convinced me to run away from home. It's how I decided to become who I am. Without her... without her, I wouldn't be me. And somehow I don't think she'd be Azula if... if we weren't there for her in the first place."

"The yang to your yin," Mai suggested.

Ty Lee blushed. "Well, yes. And... well, sometimes I think about baseline, about how she acted around us. She was the leader, sure, but we were... we were a team. Not her soldiers, which is kind of how she treated everyone else. She'd never sacrifice us. I mean, sure, she'd shoot lightning at us, coerce us, intimidate us, make us chase after the Avatar without rest, participate in overthrowing the Earth Kingdom..."

She shook her head.

"But that was just how she was trained to treat people, motivate them. Actually let us die? No..." "well, not until after Boiling Rock, which is when she started to lose it, and that's kind of our fault anyway..."

Mai gave her a long look. "...you... you want her Looping, don't you?"

"...yes." Ty Lee returned her look staunchly. "Yes, I do. I know there are risks, but... Mai, she's not evil. Not completely. She's just... lost. She doesn't know how to handle love, real love. She's only fourteen when Aang returns, for Agni's sake! And if she does start Looping," she added firmly, "we should be there to help her. Help her adjust to the Loops, and help her... help her heal whatever sickness is in her soul. Because, in the end, maybe we've got Zuko and Sokka and all the other Loopers, but right now all she has is us. She's our friend, Mai. She's a horrible one, but she's still our friend."

After a moment, Mai stood up. "I really don't know. Maybe if she started Looping from a variant..."

"No." Ty Lee shook her head. "That wouldn't be the real her. Mai, please." She stood up, walking over to the other gray pony. "Please, I know it's a lot to ask. Especially with all you go through. But if she starts Looping... can you promise you'll try to help her? Or at least that you'll help me while I'm helping her?"

Mai stared out of the mine.

"...Perfect Fyre's going to be done checking the security measures soon."

"Mai..."

"I'll think about it. That's all I can say right now."

\* \* \*

><p>168.18: (Vinylshadow)<p>

Angel Bunny sipped his cup of tea, delicately placed a monocle over his right eye and squinted fiercely at Fluttershy.

"I say, woman, where the devil have you been? It's been twenty minutes since my last carrot and I am starving. Were you off saving Equestria with your... friends or something? What a waste. I didn't hire you to gad about with them all day. I have an important meeting in a few days and I need to look my best."

With a harrumph, he picked up the newspaper and snapped it open.

Fluttershy, having only recently Woken up, could only stare in utter bafflement.

\* \* \*

><p>168.19: (Alex Prior)<p>

"Oooh! We have lots of tasty oats, right here in Ponyville!"

Once again, Applejack watched Svengallop belittle an unawake Pinkie. She stepped forward, just as that lousy svengali said he wouldn't feed 'em to a chicken.

"That's mighty pretentious of ya," she commented, "seein' as they're Princess Luna's favourite. We don' rightly advertise that," she added seeing his suddenly shocked expression, "'cause we believe in fair trade an' all, but we all know it."

Applejack stepped up to the svegali. "Now, Ah don' know which corner of Equestria you are from, but here in Ponyville we won't tolerate somepony jest tramplin' over another just because they think they're better than others. An' frankly?" She poked him in the chest. "Those that think so, never are."

Svengallop puffed himself up. "How dare you! Who do you think you are, anyway?"

Applejack simply raised an eyebrow at him. "Ah'm Applejack. Element o' Honesty, meanin' you bein' dishonest to my old friend Rara set off mah alarm bells. Mind ya," she added, "if ya'll need a second opinion, ah jest can go ask Twilight what she thinks."

The stallion seemed conflicted. "E-excuse me. I have some, ahem, business to take care of." He ran off.

Applejack sighed. "Go an' get some rest, Pinkie. Ah'll go make sure he won't go an' fill Rara with any mighty dishonest ideas or somethin'." She trotted off too.

\* \* \*

><p>168.20: (Vinylshadow)<p>

Vinyl draped her hooves over the railing on the ship's bow and sighed. Once again stuck on a boat with an icy Octavia. Thankfully, she had Woken up early enough to heal most of the problems with kind words and gestures, even cheerfully giving her entire alcohol supply to Berry Punch.

Vinyl idly wondered how the ship would sink this Loop and briefly entertained the idea of sinking it herself, like she had done once.

Discreetly, of course.

She closed her eyes and let the wind blow over her for a while.

She was startled by a hoof touching her side and she jerked, slamming her barrel against the railing as her hooves slipped.

"SNRRKK! Ow...Wha?!" she flailed, blinking and taking a moment to catch her breath. She turned, rubbing her chest, to see Octavia looking at her with worried eyes.

"Are you alright? When you didn't come to the cabin, I became worried and went looking for you."

Vinyl looked at the sea and perked up. The sun had set, the moon and stars bathing the ocean in a sparkling sea of light.

"Tavi, Iâ€"

Vinyl was interrupted by a loud screech of metal on ice as an iceberg decided to steal the boat's virginity.

"Oh for buck's sake," Vinyl snarled. She first sent up a blinding distress flare, designed to be seen for at least 75 miles in any direction. It formed into an arrow marking the sink site. She then ascended and grabbed Octavia, placing the startled earth pony on her back. Once her precious cargo was secured, she leaped over the railing and wubbed her way across the ocean.

"Er...Vinyl, dear?" Octavia asked a while later. Vinyl looked back at her. "While I appreciate the gesture, you did kinda leave all those ponies behind on a sinking ship..."

"Don't worry, Lyra has everything under control," Vinyl said soothingly.

The horizon lit up with a huge explosion, the shockwave blasting both mares' mane's back.

"...That's perfectly normal," Vinyl said. "The Seaponies don't like wreckage littering their homes so they usually vape it completely."

"Seaponies...yeah, okay," Octavia squeaked, eyes wide as the mushroom cloud blossomed, forming into a caricature of a happy Seapony.

\* \* \*

><p>168.21: (Evilhumour)<p>

There was barely constrained laughter, causing the stallion's left ear to twitch.

"Twilight, girls, you have seen me many times in the past," Sleipnir said patiently. "This is simply the first time I've been at your size so I'd hope you'd all be matuâ€"

"Awww, he's so cute!" Cadence said, leaning over to pinch her Admin's cheek, causing the other Loopers to break out in full laughter. "I'm sorry Epona but I just couldn't help myself and Iâ€"

"No no, it is quite alright," Epona chuckled to herself, patting her daughter's head. "It's one of the reasons I married him, after

all."

Sleipnir simply groaned and facehooved with two of his forehooves.

\* \* \*

><p>168.22 (Masterweaver)<p>

Epona burst through the door, grinning broadly. "Cadance! Guess what?! You're going to have a baby!"

"I know!" the pink pony replied, waving off the guards peering into her bedroom. "Sleipnir told me a few loops ago!"

The anthropomorphic horse's smile shrunk a bit. "He... did?"

"Yes!" Cadance chuckled. "It's amazing isn't it?"

"Oh... oh of course it is!" Epona gave a couple of weak chuckles of her own. "It's incredible, nobody thought... well, I thought I'd have to... well, it's incredible."

Cadance blinked. "You... don't seem too enthusiastic-"

"No, I am, I am! Really!" Forcing her smile to return, Epona turned back to the pony. "This is incredible. You're very lucky and... yeah. You're..."

She sighed.

"...I just feel a bit... I don't know... out of the loop, these days. I mean, I love my new job, it makes me feel useful, but... My family is very fragmented, widespread. A lot of us are scattered in small secretary or gofer positions, and we rarely ever gather to talk. But Sleipnir, he... well, we're married, obviously, and his family feels more welcoming. And you... well, I like to consider you my friend. But if Sleipnir talked to you without letting me know..."

Epona ran a hand through her mane. "I just... this feels like something I should have known about. That he should have told me. I mean, I'm not that important in the grand scheme of things, but he's my husband and-"

"Stop." Cadance put a hoof on her mouth. "I think I see the problem. Both of you are so overworked and worried that you're not communicating. And that's... not a good thing, but it's not either of your faults. Maybe you should schedule some... together time, or something. Talk to each other. At least once a week-" She tapped her chin. "Do you even have weeks up there, or is time different?"

The horse woman rolled her eyes. "It's... well. It is what it is. But I get your point." She let out a slow breath. "Look, I'm sorry I unloaded all of that on you-"

"No, no, it's fine. Special talent, remember?"

"But with what you're going through right now-"

"Relax, I was captured by changelings once. I can handle this."

Epona blinked. "I... don't see how that relates at all."

Cadance shrugged. "Neither do I. My point is, sometimes we all need to vent. And that's okay. Now, go on, I'm sure you've got a lot of duties over in Hyrule to complete, and the sooner you do that the sooner you can grab Sleipnir, chew him out, then snog him silly."

That got a laugh. "Am I really that predictable?"

The alicorn grinned. "Hey, it's what I would do with Shiny."

\* \* \*

><p><p>

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

168.1 Pinkie has the whole Chaos Deity thing going on.

168.2: Diggety.

168.5: She seems putt-upon.

168.6: That explains a bit.

168.7: Tempting.

168.8: Scratch be angry.

168.9: Ow.

168.10: The Alicorns of Nothing?

168.11: It's full of charts and facts and figures, and instructions for dancing.

168.12: It is rare that admins manage to get back on one another...

168.13: A pleasant kind of prank.

168.14: Twit.

168.16: Discord be trolling.

168.17: Y? (Avatar loopers.)

168.18: What a ballyhoo.

## 176. Chapter 176

169.1 (Masterweaver)

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey Twilight, Moondancer is having a little... get-together..."<p>



Lemon Hearts paused, looking at the purple unicorn. "Um..." She noted the twitching eyelid, the clenched teeth, the tightly wound hooves. "Twilight? You okay there?"

"I want you to pick up the book in front of me, then back away to a radius of five feet."

The yellow pony blinked at the intense response, but did as she was told, waving back the other ponies. Something about the way she'd given the order made it clear that obeying was mandatory.

Tension mounted in the air as Twilight slowly looked skyward.

Then, in one brief moment, she exploded-wings snapping out as she glowed pure white, her mane transforming into a pillar of flame that burned the grass around her, red eyes still visible as she stood and screamed at the sky.

\_"\*\*"SLEEEEEEEEEEEIPNIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIR!"\*\*\_"

Lemon was shoved aside by an incredibly large stallion as the fire died down to a controlled circle of embers. "Twilight Sparkle, control yourself!"

"I AM. Controlling myself," Twilight snarled, turning her fiery gaze on the newcomer. "I am very, very carefully making sure that while I express my anger, nobody gets hurt. I am, however, incredibly, dangerously angry."

"I can see that," the stallion deadpanned, rubbing his head with two forehooves "and, Lemon realized belatedly, standing on six. "And I'm pretty sure I know why"

"That last expansion. Was that baseline? I need you to tell me \_now.\_"

"All signs point to yes."

"The time travel. The map " the, the spell. Sleipnir, you're the son of a trickster. Tell me you're joking."

The stallion " Sleipnir " crossed his hooves over his heart. "May my mother never prank again should I be wrong."

The flaming pony stared at the giant for a long time. Lemon coughed, awkwardly.

Eventually, though, the flaming mane turned back to normal as Twilight kicked at the ground. "FERN. Fern fern fern fern fern." She rolled onto the ashen ground with a groan. "Well, at least \_now\_ I know how to keep \_that\_ from happening. I just... I just... UGH. Those timelines, that spell-

"Coding all that isn't going to be easy," Sleipnir commented sympathetically. "At least we have patches for the situation from other time travel loops."

"Yeah. Yeah I guess... I shouldn't have snapped at you, this isn't

really your fault." She sighed. "And I guess we can figure out how to get Starlight to calm down now..."

Sleipnir leaned back. "You know, with how angry you are I was kind of worried you'd try to seek revenge on her or something."

"No, no, there's no real room for grudges in the loops. Learned that with Gendo, unfortunately." Twilight rolled over, releasing another sigh. "And it's not who I am, anyway. And... she really didn't get what she was doing, in the end. The best revenge is living happily after all... Is anybody else Awake?"

"Well, I was in the middle of checking when you... blew up. I know Nyx is, at least."

"GOOD. I could use some cuddling after that." Twilight moaned. "Oh, everfree, now I have a headache..."

"You might want to lose the wings," Sleipnir suggested, gesturing to Lemon Hearts.

"Huh?" Twilight glanced at her, raising her eyebrows. "Oh. Oh right." With a flash, she was once again a unicorn, rising from the ash around her. "Lemon, could you tell... tell Moondancer that I'm going to be late to the party? I need to go home and... wash all this grit off, maybe go through a tub of ice cream. Make sure she knows that I \_am\_ coming," she added as she plodded off.

Lemon Hearts nodded vaguely, watching her go with wide eyes.

After a moment, she turned to the eight-legged stallion. "Um... what just happened?"

Sleipnir cleared his throat. "Just... give her a day or two to calm down, and she'll explain everything. I have to go. Pleasure to meet you," he quipped, saluting before vanishing abruptly.

\* \* \*

><p>169.2 (Gym Quirk)<p>

"Now things are just getting silly," muttered Twilight as yet another alternate timeline unfolded during her face-off with Starlight Glimmer.

"What is all this stuff?" asked Spike as he lifted his feet from the viscous liquid coating the map table and the surrounding landscape. "Is this another Smooze future?"

Twilight bent down to sniff at the substance. "Worse," she sighed. "I'm not even going to try to reconstruct the chain of events, but I'm pretty sure that this time, the absence of the rainboom led to the Cutie Mark Crusaders triggering the Tree Sapocalypse."

\* \* \*

><p>169.3: (masterofgames)<p>

Lyra, Lyra, Lyra, Lyra-and-a-half, and Sweetroll all took their places at the Council Room Of Lyra's Head (TM pending).

"I call this meeting to order!" Pony Lyra grinned, knocking her hoof on the table twice. "First order of business, our new guest!" she continued, gesturing to the over-sized chair at the far end of the table. Residing in it were five stone orbs floating more-or-less in place, with an aquamarine, harp-shaped jewel floating over them, spinning slowly.

Seapony Lyra nodded. "Yeah, what gives with that? Why a chair for an abstract entity? Or an abstract entity for a chair, as the case may be?"

"Yeah, I would have sworn it would either have our combined form in it, or be empty unless we all sat in it to combine again." Human Lyra shrugged.

"I have a theory there." Thief-borg Lyra chimed in. "Perhaps it's because our combined form isn't a set shape."

Everyone turned to look at her, eyebrows raised.

"Well think about it! Each of us had a different part, and a different element."

"Yeah, we got that much." Seapony nodded.

"Well, each element can only be bonded to one person. But who did each one bond to? \_Lyra!\_ We're all the \_same\_ person. If we swap elements around, we might be able to swap parts as well. We might even be able to change proportions of who changes how much, or combine our influence in the same parts if we harmonize up correctly."

"Well, we're alone outside right now." Sweetroll shrugged. "If we're going to test it, now's as good a time as any."

Thief-borg nodded. "My thoughts exactly! I think I still have something left over from our mecha project..." she muttered as she slid out of her chair and under the table. "If I can just... reconnect a few wires... ugh... come on... Anything yet?"

"Nope."

"Gotta be the other one then... there! That should do it!" Thief-borg grinned as she pulled herself back up into her chair, the center of the table flickering briefly before revealing a hologram of Pony Lyra. "Awww yeah! Still got it!" she hoof pumped in glee.

"So... we mess around with the elements... and this shows us how we change outside?" Human asked.

"Yep! So let's do some science!"

Sweetroll gathered the orbs and handed them out. "Okay, might as well start with Pony, then Human syncs up on the left, and Seapony from the right."

"My left or hers?" Human asked as she slid around the table and focused, the image above the table starting to shift.

"Both! It's the same left!" Thief-borg rolled her eyes.

"Oh, \_abstract\_ left! Got it."

Sweetroll looked over the image as it settled into its' new shape, the others managing to more or less fall into place in the link. "Hmm... We kinda got a centaur look with a fish tail. Maybe if... Try letting Pony take a bit more of the connection... No, now the horn is off center. Our aim would be completely shot. Maybe Thief here?" she gestured to a spot on the image.

"I'll synch with Human then, and... okay, loving the cyber wings, but now we have \_two\_ horns."

"\*Snrrk!\* S-save that one. We kinda look like Tirek. If we can widen the space between them, and bulk up just a little muscle, we can freak Twilight out in a few loops!"

"Ha! Awesome! Okay, settings saved to shortcut 1. Seapony, try swapping out with Sweetroll and joining Human, then add me to the link."

"Down to two legs, but I am LOVING the cinnamon swirl circuitry designs on the skin! Horns are longer as well. Kinda mino-esque!"

"What about clothes?"

"What \_about\_ \_clothes?"

"Meh, point I guess. Do we want a pony, or a human head?"

"I'm good either way, but pony would get fewer weird looks."

"So human then?"

"On this side of the mirror at least. Weird looks are fun! Hmm... maybe we can... Ooh! Is that a shockwave gland in the throat?"

"Must be my siren side influencing things. Maybe if I move over here..."

"Nice, but that kicks \_me\_ out! This won't work without all of us! Here, why not try..."

\* \* \*

><p>169.4: (Edvarius)<p>

Twilight double checked her loop memories to make sure that there was nothing that would give her away with this prank. Everything seemed to be running the same as baseline, though the early start she had here gave her an opportunity she didn't normally have. Seeing that she didn't have the loop memories of asking this to anypony yet she then set up her recording devices and hid them behind various veils and perception filters. With everything in place she nodded to herself and approached Princess Celestia's chambers. The guards on either side smiled down at the young filly and opened the door for her, under orders to let her pass if she needed anything. There were

times being the Princess' personal student had its advantages.

Inside her room Celestia was softly rocking a newborn Spike. She gently hummed a lullaby as Twilight walked quietly over to the cradle to look at Spike in his most adorable stage. Celestia motioned with her hoof to her mouth that they should be quiet before lifting the cradle gently with her magic and carrying it into the inner chambers so they wouldn't disturb the baby dragon. Once the door was softly closed the princess turned to her young protégé. "Was there something you needed Twilight?"

"Yes. I finished reading that book you gave me," she replied as she lifted the tome from her saddle bags. Then she did her best to look a bit hesitant, "And, umâ€¦"

"Was there something in there that confused you? You don't need to be ashamed of that Twilight. Asking questions is an important part of learning."

"Well I did have a question, but it didn't have to do with the book. I, I probably shouldn't ask you. I'll just go. Goodnight, Princess Celestia."

"Don't be silly, my little pony. You can always ask me about anything."

"Oh, well in that caseâ€¦" Twilight glanced over at the door to the inner chamber where Spike was sleeping. "I know that baby dragons come from eggs now," she said, before turning back to her teacher with a face full of innocent curiosity. "But where do baby \_ponies\_ come from?"

\* \* \*

><p>169.5 (Edvarius)<p>

Clark Kent Awoke lying in bed as a rooster greeted the morning. \_Huh, must be starting out a bit early this time around.\_ He got out of bed and stretched out when a few odd things were brought to his attention. First off was that this wasn't the room he had growing up. Yet it was still somehow familiar. While the furniture didn't exactly match up to what he normally used, and much of it seemed made for somebody of a far smaller stature than him, it was nonetheless arranged in the same kind of way he typically arranged his bedroom. The second odd thing was that he didn't see the fields he was expecting when he looked out the window, rather there were acres of apple trees heavy with fruit. The thing that seemed the most out of place however was that also outside of the window he could see a bright red pony pouring seed into a small feeding trough for the chickens. Clark gave himself a quick look over. \_I still look human. How am I in an Equestrian Loop while still looking the way I usually do?\_ As he tried to go over the possibilities a voice called out "Star Apple! Ya up yet?!"

"Yes, Granny." he replied reflexively.

"Well hurry up and get down here for breakfast. We got a heap o' work to get done with both the reunion and the Summer Sun Celebration commin'!"

"I'll be down in a minute." he answered and went over to his dresser to find something to wear. As he pulled out a faded pair of overalls and a red shirt he silently chuckled at what his loop memories were telling him. \_Landed on the wrong planet, huh?\_

Once he arrived downstairs Granny Smith handed him a stack of pancakes. "It's about time. What took ya so long this mornin'?" she asked.

Clark took a seat next to Applejack and Applebloom. "Sorry Granny. I just woke up feeling a bit Loopy I guess."

Applebloom didn't seem to respond to that statement, but Applejack gave him a wink. "Know what you mean. Woke up feelin' the same way myself. Wide Awake now though."

"Well I'm glad to hear you're full o' beans this mornin', 'cause we're gonna need it!" Granny exclaimed, missing out on the hidden meaning of the quick exchange between loopers. "Now Star Apple, I want ya to help Big Mac bring in enough apples to make food for the celebrations, and Applejack I need help getting some extra beds set up in the barn for those that are gonna have to stay the night. Camping out might be fine for you young sprouts, but us old folks are another thing altogether."

"Yes Granny" the two replied before hurrying to finish their breakfast and get started on the chores for the day.

\* \* \*

><p>Clark, also known in his home loop as Superman, a being capable of moving planets, gave the tree in front of him a carefully measured kick, shaking the plant with enough force to cause the apples to fall down into the waiting baskets below. Somepony behind him whistled. "Well shoot, I was plannin' on givin' ya a few pointers, but it looks like yer applebuckin' like a pro already."<p>

He turned back to see Applejack and shrugged at that statement. "In a sense I've been doing this for years already."

Applejack chuckled at the reminder, "Yeah, got me there." Then she took her hat off and glanced off to the side. "Look Clark, I feel really guilty about havin' somepony who's supposed to be a guest doing what's normally my job. I can handle this while you go find somethin' ya \_want\_ toâ€¦"

Clark stopped Applejack with a finger to her mouth. "You don't need to feel guilty about anything. I might not be used to apple farming, but I still grew up on a farm. Getting to do this for a few years sounds like a great way to spend a vacation loop to me. It's almost like being back home." He bent over to pick up the fruit-laden baskets with a pole, which he then balanced over his shoulders. "Besides, my name isn't Clark this loop. Ma and Pa named me Star Apple, remember?"

"Alright, if that's what ya want. Well, if ya'll pardon me I need to get back before Granny wonders just where I've been off to."

Star Apple accompanied Applejack back with his load while he thought

to the upcoming gathering. \_If my memories are serving me correctly there's always a few kids at each reunion who haven't seen me before and they always end up gawking. I wonder if I should just roll with it and show off some tricks I can do to make it a \_real \_show for them?\_

\* \* \*

><p>169.6: (Edvarius)<p>

Rarity groaned as she Awoke in bed. The pillow her head was resting on was damp from somebody's hysterical crying, quite possibly her own. She lifted herself out of bed and quickly determined that she was apparently human in this loop, and also that this wasn't her usual home. \_Oh well, this is hardly my first fused loop. The chambers themselves are quite lovely. Am I royalty this around? Although these clothesâ€¦\_ The clothes would obviously have to go. She could understand wearing nothing but black, she'd obviously been crying pretty heavily before she Awoke and black was often used for mourning so that made sense at least, but why in Yggdrasil had the person she was replacing chosen such an unflattering one piece? She looked like a down-on-her-luck street performer, not a princess. \_Ugh, and I hate to think of what this hood is doing to my poor hair.\_ Rarity walked over to the vanity and used the small basin of water there to wash her face before tugging her hood down to see about fixing her hair.

The hood didn't budge.

Rarity pulled harder and harder, but the hood remained completely immobile. She tried tugging at the neckline, searched frantically for a zipper, **\*\*anything\*\***, but the ugly outfit stuck fast to her like it was a part of her skin. A scream escaped from her throat as realization and her loop memories hit.

\* \* \*

><p>Link groaned as he walked up to the Kingdom of Hytopia once again. He was not fond of this latest expansion. Yes the people here needed help, but the problems here just seemed so ridiculous compared to what he was used to facing. But far worse however was that knowledge that <strong>sooner or later<strong> one of the others would find themselves here as well, and then he'd never hear the end of it. It didn't matter how **\*\*practical\*\*** any of them might be, there were some pieces of equipment he could not allow his friends to know about. He could already hear Zelda laughing as she asked if he could borrow his gown for a state function, Ganondorf mocking his pink cheerleading miniskirt, or Ruto screaming in outrage at the Zora costume. Link was so fixated on the imagined screams that it took him a few seconds to realize there was **\*\*actual\*\*** screaming coming from the palace. All thoughts of embarrassment aside he rushed forward past the surprised guard at the gate, who did little more than call out to him as he shouldered his way past.

Link had imagined that the curse on Princess Styla could have been worse this time. She could have been turned into something monstrous instead of merely having to wear something she didn't like. Possibly even injured or killed outright. What he did not expect was to see the familiar outfit still in sight but with an unfamiliar face. Or that the princess would be wrestling with her own guards.

"LET GO!" Rarity screamed as she fought for ownership of one of the guard's spears.

"Please, your Highness, compose yourself!" Sir Combsley pleaded over King Tuft's sobbing. "We've already put out a request for a hero. Soon somebody shall come and defeat the Lady of the Drablands. You don't have to risk your life like this, just please have a little patience!"

"Patience?!" Princess Rarity yelled as she finally twisted enough to cause the guard to lose his grip on his weapon and sent him stumbling backwards. "Am I not a member of the royal family?! It is our **\*\*duty\*\*** to protect the realm and its culture! I cannot simply stand by and wait for somebody to come to fix our problems for us! I shall hunt down this so called Lady and put an end to her crimes against fabulosity myself!"

Link shrugged as King Tuft started blubbering something about the curse driving his little girl mad. At least this would be better than using those dolls. Though he wondered what he might have to bribe the visiting looper with in order to keep her quiet about this loop. She seemed as passionate about fashion as any of the actual natives of this land; maybe he could let her have her pick of his now extensive wardrobe before the loop ended?

\* \* \*

><p>169.7 (Fractalman)<p>

A long bundle of pink hair sighed, and looked towards a yellow bundle of hair. "This is going to be an interesting loop," it said in a soft deadpan.

The yellow hairs looked at the pink hair "Ah'll say!"

Both bundles hit the ground as a pale blue bundle looked towards them. "Frankly, the great and hairy Trixie thinks this whole thing is ridiculous." It turned the other direction, towards a bundle of orange hair. "Big Macintosh, I'm guessing?"

"Eeyup," said the bundle.

Meanwhile, one hundred and eighty degrees away, a curling purple ribbon of hair spoke up. "Twilight, why are we-" and was promptly silenced by a sixth, stripy string of hair grabbing it.

A darker purple appendage sighed. "Well, momma, I don't normally mind being close to you, but this is ridiculous."

"HUZZAH! THE FUN HAS BEEN OCTUPLED!" boomed a final voice.

Crickets began to chirp.

The yellow bundle coughed politely. "Ahem. As y'all have noticed, we're a spider-mane this loop. More specifically, it's legs. Ah suggest we get a move on before we have a run in with a scissor-snatch, and let's try not to get all tangled up."

\* \* \*



><p>"Why is that manticore chasing us?!" yelled Applejack, as she ran via moving around in a circular pattern; the still unfamiliar motion was tricky enough on its own, even without the struggle to remain coordinated with the other manes. "We're not even on its menu, are we?"<p>

"It's chasing us for the same reason that cats play with balls of yarn," Fluttershy explained. Applejack could have sworn she heard a faint "nature is so fascinating" out of Fluttershy.

The manticore lunged, mouth wide open.

"AIIIEEEEEEE!" shrieked Rarity as the baby manticore bit into her. It didn't hurt, but the slobber felt absolutely gross.

Then the manticore started batting them around like a ball of yarn.

\* \* \*

><p>Several hours later, an extremely tangled, dirty, and twig-encrusted ball of mane-hair rolled its way into the spa, and explained the situation to a very sympathetic Aloe and Lotus.<p>

"So, do ya think ya can get us untangled?" Applejack asked.

Aloe considered. "I...may have to cut a few strands here and there, but yes."

The ball shivered.

"Frankly, I don't like it, but I'd rather lose a few strands than be stuck like this for the next several years," Nyx said.

"Do whatever it takes to get me \_clean,\_" Rarity declared.

\* \* \*

><p>169.8 (Gym Quirk)<p>

Twilight felt just a little guilty about what she was about to do, but it was one of those itches that she had to scratch before she could get on with things.

"...Spare me your overblown ego! No group of friends, not even Princess Twilight's, is that important!" ranted Starlight Glimmer.

Before the unicorn could cast her disabling spell at Rainbow Dash, Twilight summoned an Alicorn Amulet from her Pocket â€" She'd long-ago worked out how to counteract its tendency to push its wearer toward megalomania â€" and used its power to cast a time-stop spell and a localized version of her Hold Pony enchantment to prevent Starlight from taking any additional actions.

"Excuse me for cheating; I'll release the spells after I've gotten a few things off my chest. We can go back to what we were doing when I'm done," the alicorn said.

"The fact that you can fight me to a standstill and your ability to adapt Starswirl's spell to your needs clearly shows that you are a unicorn of formidable talent and power. Quite possibly stronger than I was before I got my wings. We'll save discussion of how that works with your ideology of enforced equality for another time.

"But do you know what really bugs me about what you've decided to do with that ability? It's what you failed to do.

"You spent considerable effort researching me and my friends to find the critical point in time that links us. But you then ignored everything that we did for Equestria since then.\_

"Now, we don't go around bragging about our exploits â€” Except for Rainbow Dash, and even she prefers to focus on her flying over the five times we saved Equestria. Half the time, ponies don't even realize that I'm an alicorn, but I digress.

"You didn't bother to note the three stained glass windows in Canterlot Castle depicting how we redeemed Nightmare Moon, defeated Discord, and saved the Crystal Empire.

"You utterly failed to recognize the significance the Elements of Harmony and our link to them. Free hint: Their power is based on...wait for it...Friendship.

"You can only say that no group of friends is important to the fate of Equestria because you completely ignored any and all evidence to the contrary.

"We didn't ask for the dubious honor, but the fact is that we six were the wielders of the Elements: The only ponies able to employ their power against Equestria's enemies. And you decided that your lust for revenge overrode any possible negative outcome that their absence would have on everypony else!"

She took a deep calming breath.

"Computer. End program."

The cloudscape faded into a yellow grid on a black background. She slowly walked to the entrance arch, which obediently opened at her approach.

\_Well, at least I got that out of my system without inflicting it on any living ponies. Now I just need to work out a suitable trade with Apple Bloom so that she deletes her logfile of this session...\_

\* \* \*

><p>169.9<p>

"Amateur," Trixie scoffed, as she and Twilight dropped back down behind the boulder.

"How is that amateur?" Twilight asked, indicating the activity in question with a toss of the head. "She's making one of our most dangerous opponents much more dangerous â€” and it's the one which ties into her conversion-and-alteration talent, too."

"Ah," Trixie said. "But it's a matter of style! Of subtlety! She's just given a pony with a big stick a bigger stick!"

"Trixie!" Twilight hissed. "Keep it down! I'd rather do this with finesse rather than just level the mountain."

"Fine," Trixie said, a little huffily. "Trixie will use subtlety."

"Uh oh..." Twilight muttered, noticing the switch to third person.

\* \* \*

><p>"Attention!" Trixie shouted, letting off a stream of fireworks. "Attention, so-called King Sombra and Starlight merest-glimmer-of-intellect!"<p>

Twilight banged her head into the rock wall.

"You're new," Starlight said, looking up. "Come to join?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes!" Trixie said, flourishing her cloak. "Not to join the army, but to join the event! For Trrrixie Lulamoon, Most Awesome Pony Here, challenges you both to a duel!"

"Trixie..." Twilight moaned.

"I know that voice," Starlight said, voice contorted with hate for a moment. "Twilight goody-four-hooves Sparkle. What brings her here?"

"We walked," Trixie said, skipping how they'd gotten into the past. "Now! I hereby issue my challenge! Also declare victory."

Starlight blinked. "What?"

Then Sombra's entire army jumped on her and their erstwhile master.

"While Trixie was talking, she was reversing the polarity of the subliminals," Trixie explained, with a grand flourish. "And that, Twilight, is how you fight a time war."

"I'll stick to my normal, thanks," Twilight said delicately. "What do we do with them now?"

Trixie considered. "Well, we could just banish them to the moon. It's a classic."

\* \* \*

><p>169.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...I can speak from personal experience when I say the power of cutie mark magic is very real," Twilight lectured. "My friends and I can trace our cutie marks back to a single event, something which happened even before we ever met. We've all wondered about what our lives would be like if we had a different mark, and for most ponies that would be all that it would be â€" idle speculation. However,

there is a talented unicorn who has managed to make impressive strides in the study of cutie marks, and I feel it would only be appropriate to invite her up to speak. Starlight Glimmer, would you come down here please?"

The look of shock on the pinkish unicorn's face was, Twilight reluctantly admitted, quite amusing. As was the sudden blinking and glancing about by the few other ponies in the know.

However, Starlight quickly schooled her face into a polite smile, standing and walking down the stairs cautiously. "I'm terribly sorry, \_princess\_, I wasn't expecting this at all. I have nothing prepared!"

"Why don't you explain the principles behind your cutie mark alteration spell?" Twilight offered. "If nothing else, it would be fascinating from a scholarly point of view."

Starlight shot her a look as she stepped up to the podium. "Ahem. The spell which I developed was intended to provide a pony a chance to retreat from their own destiny if said destiny got to be too... overwhelming. The operation included a temporary removal of the cutie mark, followed by the installation of a spell form on the subject and the placement of the cutie mark into a magically sealed environment. The spell form, located on the subject's flank, would suppress the ability directly leading to the cutie mark â€” the special talent, if you will â€” so as to allow the pony to explore other abilities; it also prevents the subject from developing a second mark while the first is hermetically sealed. The marks themselves do have a natural attraction to the personal magic which generated them, hence the storage."

"While I admit that I was a little unnerved when I discovered Starlight's retreat," Twilight interjected smoothly, "I feel I can understand the motivation behind its founding. It was, unfortunately, forcefully decommissioned shortly after I left, due to political strife in the region. However, while I personally did not enjoy the treatment, the potential for temporary removal of cutie marks to assist in psychological therapy was intriguing enough for me to set locating Starlight as one of my long-term goals â€” especially after I learned she was forced to vacate the region rather quickly."

"You give me \_far\_ too much credit, Princess," Starlight said, only the faintest of growls entering her voice.

"Not at all! It really is an impressive spell..."

\* \* \*

><p>169.11 (masterofgames)<p>

Twilight had a plan. It was a cunning plan. As cunning as a fox what used to be Professor of Cunning at Oxford University but has moved on and is now working for the U.N. at the High Commission of International Cunning Planning, if she could borrow a phrase from that one cynical British looper she had once met.

It would require a few loops to get the full version down, but really, Starlight had handed her the victory personally. All she really had to do was zap mini-Starlight when the present day one took

her back in time to explain her point. But Twilight WAS a pony, and as such, violence was not the answer to problems for her.

Unless VERY comedic.

And so, with one question, the plan began.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well what about you? Your cutie mark must mean something, or you would have removed it as well!"<p>

Starlight scowled. "It means something alright. The spark represents friendship, and the smoke, just how easily it can evaporate into nothing for the sake of something meaningless, like talent! It's proof thatâ€" are you taking NOTES!?"

"Yep. All I needed. Thanks! Bye!"

\* \* \*

><p>"See!? There I am! Left back while my friendâ€" "<p>

Twilight hit Starlight with a stunner mid sentence, then leaned in the window to mini-Starlight. "Don't just sit there! Go to him!" She called quickly. "He'll probably be going to a special magic school! Go make sure he won't feel alone while he's away!"

Mini-Starlight's eyes widened in shock, and she quickly darted out the door, never noticing as her own mark appeared, representing friendship, and how something meaningless, like a moment of inaction, not working to keep it, could threaten it, making it all the more beautiful and precious in the first place.

This, in turn, got her sent to school right alongside her friend.

The Starlight next to Twilight on the ground faded away.

\* \* \*

><p>"â€"and then everything was fine when I got back, but things went to hell a week later because I didn't make her my student, so she wasn't here!" Twilight ranted to Berry as she downed yet another drink, levitating the glass to the top of a pyramid she was building with her tale of frustration. "A-and when I tried to fix that, She became Celestia's student instead of Sunset, and the Sirens returned! And after that, SHE wound up princess instead of me, and Tirek took over! And then the changelings brainwashed Sombra and took over the Crystal Empire! And then Sombra possessed Flam! And then Discord attacked Saddle Arabia instead of Canterlot and Ponyville! And then there were the yaks, and the bugbear, and Trixie, all at once! And then... t-then..." she sniffed, her lip trembling as she fought to hold her emotions back, before giving it up as a lost cause.<p>

"I BUCKING HATE TIME TRAVEL!" she broke down sobbing, using her magic to yank Berry into a bone crushing hug and crying on her shoulder.

Berry sighed and patted Twilight on the back. "There there. We can

always find an answer once you calm down. Maybe we should talk about this another loop? One where you AREN'T a weepy drunk?"

\* \* \*

><p>169.12 (Masterweaver)<p>

"...Why'd ya use a venn diagram in this slide?"

Twilight blinked. "What?"

Apple Bloom pointed. "Here. You've got me and the other Crusaders in a three-part venn diagram. And... Okay, Ah get the shield in the center, but why am Ah sharin' mah appleheart with Scoots? And Sweetie's starsong with Sweetie â€" hang on, is mah circle the dark purple one? That's Scootaloo's mane color, Ah should be the red one!"

"I... it was an easy graphic, and I was half tired," Twilight admitted. "I didn't really think about the venn diagram part... how would you have done it?"

"Shield as the backdrop, each o' us in the center o' the column with our mane color, with the outer emblem below and the inner emblem above."

"...huh. Okay, I'll update it..."

\* \* \*

><p>169.13 (Masterweaver)<p>

"Octavia, I have something really important I have toâ€"

"SWEET CELESTIA, YOU CAN \_TALK?!\_"

Vinyl rolled her eyes. "Yes. Yes I can. Now stop pressing yourself against the wall so I canâ€"

"You can \_talk.\_ You \_can\_ talk. I... I have to reassess my entire world view." Octavia slid down the wall, her hooves pressed against her forehead.

"There's actually something else that's really important. You seeâ€"

"Why have I never heard you talk before?!" the cellist demanded. "I mean, we've been roommates forâ€" we've been dating for years, Vinyl!"

"That's because I couldn't talk before," Vinyl explained patiently. "But nowâ€"

"What?! Did you have, have some sort of corrective surgery without me knowing?! Vinyl, that could have been dangerousâ€"!"

"This book will explain everything." Vinyl produced the journal from thin air, putting it on the table.

"Did you cast a spell on yourselfâ€"?"

"Yes."

"Vinyl, self casting canâ€™"

"Have horrible side effects."

"Can you not act so casual aboutâ€™"

"I knew what I was doing, Tavi. Look." She pushed the book forward. "Do you want to read the explanation yourself, or do you want me to explain it? Because if you keep acting hysterical, I'll leave you to it."

Octavia just stared at her.

"...I... I'm still trying to get over the idea of you, um... talking."

"Take your time."

\* \* \*

><p>169.14 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

"There's one magic you can never take away, Tirek!" Twilight Sparkle said for the umpty-hundredth-thousandth-whateverth time. "And that's the most powerful magic of all! The magic of friâ€™"

The glow of Rainbow Power flickered out as Twilight Sparkle fell to the ground, having been struck unconscious by a suspicious-looking forked stick.

"Twilight Sparkle has fallen!"

The other five Elements spun around in midair to look at the unicorn hovering in the air behind them. She kind of looked like a certain equality-obsessed pony... except, instead of shades of blue, this one was white with a red and white streaked mane. Behind the newcomer, something wooden clattered to the earth below.

"But fear not! I, Starscream Glimmer, shall be your new leader! Ponies of Friendship, \_follow me to victory!\_"\_

Applejack muttered to Rarity, "D'ya think she's Awake? He. Whatever. You know?"

Rarity glanced over at a glaring Tirek, and down to the ground where Twilight Sparkle was rubbing her head with one hoof and looking up with blood in her eyes. "He'll be sound asleep in a few minutes, darling," she muttered in reply, "one way or the other."

\* \* \*

><p>169.15: (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Twilight looked at her friends as they stood around the Chest of Harmony. "Together! We have to do this together!"

"Mm-hmm!" Six hooves reached out, and together turned the keys.

Six locks clicked.

Six panels opened.

And with a flash of light, something unexpected happened.

"Hi, everypony! You wouldn't believe what I've been up to!" A familiar wall-eyed pegasus popped her head out of the chest. "What have you been doing?"

Twilight blinked. "Derpy? What - what are you doing in there?"

Derpy shrugged. "Long story." Looking upward, her eyes narrowed. "Now, if you'll excuse me..." Her wings flaring, she launched out of the chest, and towards Tirek, who was still wreaking havoc.

Twilight looked at the others, who were staring after Derpy, their eyes wide. "Um, girls? I think we might want to see this."

There was a round of nods, before six ponies, one dragon and a draconequus ran for the exit.

Back outside, as Tirek unleashed another fiery blast from his jaws, he caught movement out of the corner of his eye. "Hmm... looks like another pony's still out there. Well, it won't get me much magic, but I'll still take it!" He turned, and stared.

A now giant Derpy stood before him. "HI TIREK!"

"No... it can't be... it can't! I - you - AHHHHHHHHHH!" The gigantic centaur promptly turned around and made tracks for Tartarus, screaming all the way.

Derpy blinked Awake at that moment, just in time to see the centaur-made trail of dust passing over a hill. "What did I say?"

Then, the Loop Memories hit. "Oh."

Meanwhile, in Tartarus, three Alicorn Princesses were sitting where Tirek had chained them. Then, Luna's ear quirked. "Sister, do you hear... screaming?"

There was a loud rush of wind, and a familiar "AHHHHHHHHHH!" as Tirek ran past them.

Then, he paused. "Here, have your magic back, and get out of here! Just keep her away from me!" Tossing several orbs of magic their way, he ran off, still screaming.

Celestia blinked as she reabsorbed her stolen magic, and levitated several more of the orbs. "I knew Twilight was good, but even I didn't think she could scare Tirek that badly."

Taking wing, she led the other two Alicorns out of Tartarus, and back towards Ponyville.

Several hours later, with explanations made and all of the stolen magic returned, the group was sitting in the newly-formed castle,



where Derpy, having shrunk back down to her normal size, was cuddling her daughter. "So that's how you got in that box?" Twilight asked.

Derpy nodded. "And when I got out of it and saw Tirek again, I used one of my alternate Cutie Mark talents to blow myself up like a balloon and scared him off!" She giggled. "Guess he remembers me from the first time I helped send him to Tartarus."

Twilight nodded. "That would make sense." She paused, and gestured to the circle of thrones, including one with a familiar set of seven bubbles on its back, and a smaller throne next to it. "So, do you and Dinky want to join us?"

Dinky, her eyes wide, looked up at Derpy. "Can we, momma?"

"Of course, muffin," Derpy told her with a smile.

\* \* \*

><p>169.16: (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Twilight Sparkle was a mare with a plan.

In the past, she'd used several different ways of handling Starlight Glimmer and her village. Now, she had a new tactic she wanted to try out, and while the basic strategy had proven effective before, she'd never tried this particular variation.

Shaking her head before she got too lost in her thoughts, she turned to watch the villagers and Starlight, so she didn't miss her cue. \_Ah, here we go! just in time.\_

Starlight Glimmer's face was bright red as she ranted. "\_I\_ brought you friendship! \_I\_ brought you equality! \_I\_ created harmony!"\_

Twilight raised a hoof. "\_I\_ brought a hug-happy draconequus."

Starlight barely had time to blink in bewilderment before Discord popped out of nowhere and glomped her.

Watching the baffled unicorn as she hung in Discord's arms, too surprised to move, Twilight smirked. \_If you can't reason with them, confuse them.\_

\* \* \*

><p>169.17: (The One Butcher)<p>

"Hello, I am Twilight Sparkle. I'm a completely normal Pony. And I came here to check on the food for the Summer Sun Celebration."

If Applejack thought the brightly smiling Pony in front of her seemed a tad strange, that was only corroborated when upon sampling her family cooking she exclaimed: "That food tastes great! Because I am a Pony and those eat food!"

Applejack was suspicious, but she still seemed nice enough when she

smiled warmly at her. "Your Apples are grown with so much love and all that food is brim full of it, it feels just..." She trailed off in horror. "I mean I can see that! Somehow! You know, because it's so good, it has to have been made with... with... care, yes, I mean care! I'm a Pony, after all and Ponies cannot feel the love that went into stuff! Anyway it was really nice meeting you, but I really must tend to the rest of my chores. You know how we Ponies are, always busy building and making and tending to stuff!" With that she was off.

\_Darn,\_ thought Applejack \_that was one suspicious...\_

â€|

Well, probably not a Pony.

\* \* \*

><p>A cheery shout greeted Rainbow Dash just as she prepared herself for her Routine.<p>

"Hello fellow Pony! With Wings! That would be a...", the purple mare looked at a sheet of paper for a second, "Pegasus! Anyway Hivequeen... â€" I mean Princess Celestia told me to make sure you cleared the clouds. I cannot go up there and do it myself, because I'm a Pony and not a Changeling- Er I mean I'm a unicorn and not a pegasus!"

"What's a Changeling?" asked Rainbow, only to have the mare go into overdrive.

"WHAT? I'm not a Changeling! I'm a Pony! I... I mean a Changeling? Where? I don't see any Changelings! Only completely normal Ponies wherever you look!", she said with a panicked rictus.

Rainbow raised an eyebrow. "Sure... you're a normal Pony." she stated in a deadpan voice.

She didn't expect the Changeling to visibly relax and let out a huge sigh of relief. "That's good. I mean, yes. I am a completely normal Pony. Anyway, the clouds! I cannot help you because Unicorns, that's what I am, a Pony with one horn, cannot fly. Unlike what you are, a..."

"Pegasus.", Rainbow helped the completely normal Pony.

"Unlike a Pegasus!" She said brightly. She then turned away a little and wondered: "What do gaseous pegs have to do with wings?"

"Yeah, anyway the clouds are no problem, I'll do them later."

The Changeling visibly deflated. "But I have to have seen the clear skies to make a check on my checklist. I still have to check a ton of other stuff... Oh, this will take much too long and then I'll make Miss Fluttershy wait and I can't keep that Promise I made to that really cool Pink Pony."

"Fluttershy? A Pinkie Promise? Don't worry! I'll clear those skies in ten seconds flat!" And boy did she do that. The Changeling was staring at her slack jawed.

"You... you're that filly who made the sky explode! When I was in Cloudsdale that one time I saw that huge wave of Magic that \_shattered\_ reality and substituted its own! Uh... I mean I... I heard there was that huge awesome explosion in Cloudsdale! I wasn't there before today, because, you know I am a Unicorn and not a Chan... Not a Pegasus. Anyway, see you at the Celebration, I gotta run!"

Rainbow Dash watched the Changeling run away. Her razor wit made several deductions: \_Changelings look like Ponies. Changelings pretend to be Ponies. Changelings aren't Ponies. If that was a Changeling and I haven't ever heard of them they probably blend in pretty well. Changeling... Change... She's a Shapeshifter! Also that mare is Fail on four legs... If there's a conspiracy of Shapeshifters... Then she's the weak link! And a fan...\_

\_I better watch out for her. Even if she's not dangerous, I might need to protect her from herself.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Thank you Rarity!" The strange Unicorn that came to her with a slightly mussed up mane said, "I am after all a normal Pony. I can't just, Poof, make myself look nice again like a Changeling. So your help was very appreciated. And you put so much love in your work, it's just deli... I mean it's very friendly of you."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Very good my friends! If you sing like that tomorrow Princess Celestia is sure to love it. That's all for today then, see you tomorrow." While most of the flock arced over her, one of the birds landed on her nose.<p>

"Yes Mr. Piperson? You don't trust the Royal Inspector? What inspector?" The bird pointed behind her. When she turned she saw a purple unicorn conversing softly with the other birds.

"Oh." On the one hand that was a strange pony, on the other hand it was one that could talk to animals, just like her!

"That's a Royal Inspector? Oh, my, did she like the song? But... why don't you trust her?" The bird squeaked and flapped his wings and then looked shiftily from side to side and put his wings in front of his face.

"It's not a Pony at all, but some kind of Monster posing as one?" Well. If it was some kind of animal... Now that she thought about it it didn't seem threatening to her at all and it's body language reminded her more of a dog than a Pony. A cuddly dog that had eaten a lot. Oh my, a whole new species! But wait, if it was some kind of Shapeshifting predator and it turned into a Pony that meant it ate Ponies!

"Hey! Who are you?" Fluttershy rushed to the strange animal. If she didn't think of it as a Pony she could do this!

"Hello! I am Twilight Sparkle! I am a completely normal Pony and I have come here to oversee the Summer Sun Celebration! Hivequeen

Celestia send me here, to make use of my Unique talents to..." The being froze.

"Er, I mean, my Special Talent, you know, these Magical Pony thingies! Which I have, because I'm not a Changeling! Which is uh...", the monster checked it's flank with a puzzled expression, "Uh... Magic? Anyway, Celestia send me and I have already met two of your friends, who fed me and... I mean... Applejack fed me, because I eat food and not love! I am a Pony you know!"

Fluttershy nearly couldn't hold herself back... It was \_sooooo cute\_! "Oh yes!" She said. "You are a real Pony, completely normal!"

The Changeling smiled. "YES!", then it looked embarrassed, "I mean, yes, of course."

It was just precious. On the other hoof, if it fed on love, that is probably intentional, just like how flowers smell nice.

"Anyway, I just checked in with your birds and they say everything is ready for tomorrow."

One of the birds chirped at her. It had a deadpan expression. "They can't? But... I've seen her talk to you!" She looked at Fluttershy and asked with a pleading expression: "Ponies can talk to animals, can't they?"

Fluttershy looked at her apologetically. "Most can't, but some, like me get it as their special talent."

"Uh..." the Changeling looked panicked.

Fluttershy took pity on it. "Well, Miss Twilight, if your special talent is Magic you probably went and learned a Spell that lets you talk to animals and cast it before you came here, didn't you?"

"Oh! Yes that is clever! Yes, that is it! I used a Spell that makes me able to understand everyone! Thank you Fluttershy for the ideeeeeeinsight. Insight I mean. Anyway, I see you have the Music in hoof. Until later, at the Celebration! I need to find my lodgings." With that the Changeling started to trot off.

Fluttershy panicked. It was so young and inexperienced! What if the Ponies in town try to hurt it, because it's a monster! \_I have to protect it!\_ "Wait!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Well why of course you can come in Fluttershy! I am a Pony after all and Ponies are very welcoming!" She turned towards the door and took a step back. "Ohh! Friendship!" she closed her eyes in bliss and trotted forward, slamming into the door.<p>

"Oh! What a delicious Party!" she said after not being surprised at all, "Thank you Pinkie Pie! I mean, the food is Delicious! Because I am a Pony! And Ponies like delicious food. Yum Yum." She seemed to eye the cupcake in her hooves suspiciously, before analyzing it with her magic, "Mashed and heat treated dead plants? Er, I mean, my favorite!"

\* \* \*

><p>"You are Luna, the <em>other<em> Princess of the Ponies which vanished one thousand years ago!" the strange Changeling without self preservation shouted at the Dark Alicorn. Fluttershy, Rainbow Dash and Applejack exchanged a glance, grabbed her and dragged her away. Rarity and Pinkie Pie followed.

\* \* \*

><p>"Why did you do that?" the cornered Changeling asked defensively, "I'm not a Spy!"<p>

Rainbow Dash couldn't let that go uncommented: "Well, yeah. We believe you. Nobody in their right mind would ever make YOU a spy."

"WHAT?" the creature exclaimed in sudden indignation, "I am a very skilled infilllllllll... I mean, yeah! I'm not a spy at all, just a Pony!" she laughed.

"Anyway," interrupted Applejack, "Yah said yah're friends with Celestia and Ah believe that is true. You knew who that evil Princess was and seem pretty knowledgeable in gen'ral. Maybe if'n we all knew more about her we could come up with a better plan of action than shoutin' at her."

Twilight blinked. "Well... She was said to have been defeated a thousand years ago. The legend doesn't properly describe how, but there's a Changeling legend of this powerful Superweapon of the Ponies, the reason why even the Dragons are afraid of you. They are... the Elements of Ponydom."

\* \* \*

><p>"The Kindness of Ponies was represented by Fluttershy accepting all creatures as equal. The Loyalty of Ponies was represented by Rainbow Dash standing by her Friends in the face of all her desires being offered to her. The Laughter of Ponies was represented by Pinkie Pie banishing your evil illusions with her powerful feelings, while accepting mine because... I mean accepting my feelings of friendship! I don't use illusions!"<p>

"But that's only five! The Spark didn't work!"

"They don't need a sixth Pony. Ponies get their Magic from within and don't have to collect it. But that doesn't mean they cannot use the power of their feelings. Just like they can share their power with a Changeling, they can give power to each other. The last Element is shared by them all. It is their Friendship. Friendship brings forth the last and sixth Element. The last and most powerful of the Elements of Ponykind: Pony Magic!"

With that a bright light shone forth from over her head, coalescing into the Tiara of Magical annihilation and Mind-Hugs. Nightmare Moon was blasted like always, but Twilight made sure to use less power than the first time and compensate with fine control. So no one was unconscious this time.

"I... I don't understand..." Twilight said with water from a small

bottle she put in her pocket in her eyes. "The legends all say the Elements cannot be used by Monsters. When other Changelings or even Draconequi tried to take them it didn't work. Only a true friend can handle them." She looked around at the others, who looked at her with sympathetic tears of their own. Maybe she laid it on a bit too thick?

"Twilight," Fluttershy spoke for the others, "No matter who or what you are. No matter what happens, I am a hundred per cent sure that you are not a Monster."

"Yeah." "Yup." "Absolute Telutely!" "Indeed, darling."

They all joined in a group hug. There was a moment of contented silence.

"Yeah," Twilight finally said, "I'm a Pony after all!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Yes, Princess Celestia. It's... It's a shame I cannot stay in Equehhh... I mean I cannot stay in Ponyville with my new friends..." Twilight looked to her new friends really sadly and their hearts went out to her. <em>Who cares if she is strange or a Changer or anything, she's a good filly at heart.<em>

Princess Celestia was already ahead of them.

"Raven, take a note please! I, Princess Celestia, decree, that the Unicorn Twilight Sparkle, shall take on a new mission for Equestria. She must continue to study the Magic of Friendship. She must report to me her findings, from her new home in Ponyville!"

Everypony cheered at that announcement. With a Royal decree stating it their new friend was a Unicorn before the Law, she could thus stay in Equestria forever and to them that was all that mattered.

"Oh thank you Princess Celestia! I'll be a good citizen! And I'll study the Magic of Friendship harder than ever before!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Spike! You are in Equestria!"<p>

"Sparkle! Nice fur! So glad to see you! And you look so healthy and well fed! Did you finally get a coltfriend?"

"Oh, you... This is Spike, one of my very first friends. I met him out in the lone plains of... of Canterlot! Anyway he really helped me out when I was hungry, because he came to love me like a sister and... I mean he was making sure I eat properly when studying late nights! He... helped me as my assistant in the Library of Canterlot! With shelving books and writing letters and stuff." Twilight said nervously.

The four Ponies (and one shivering fothergilla, complete with pink tail) looked at the forty foot Draconic Library assistant, who shrugged. Then back to Twilight Sparkle, the completely normal Pony and not a Changeling. They just nodded in unison.

"Anyway: This is Prince Spykoranuvellitar of Equestria, adopted son of Princess Celestia, you should listen to her talk about him! It's absolutely hilarious, because she can't get over how quickly he grew up! And Spike's not even a Changeling, who grow to adulthood in a few weeks, he's a Dragon and so he's centuries old and she still calls him a Baby! No wonder Celestia never had Pony children."

Spike lowered himself down to Twilight's level and said: "Ha. Ha. I see you still haven't learned when to stay quiet about anything. Revealing that was highly rude."

"Oh... I... shouldn't have said that about Celestia, you really love her. Uh... Anyway, these are my friends! Applejack is an Earth Pony and the Element of Honesty. But," she whispered, loudly enough for everypony to hear, "Celestia gave me a Royal Decree stating that I'm legally a Unicorn. Therefore she can't find out my secret when I tell her that I'm not a Changeling."

Spike rolled his eyes and whispered back loudly: "That is good. I was almost worried someone would find out." He winked at Twilight, who winked back really obviously.

"Next we have Pinkie Pie, the Element of Laughter who uses her power to make everyone laugh which strengthens her powers which helps her making ponies laugh and so on in a positive feedback loop. By now physics are just gentle suggestions to her and she can look into the future. Rainbow Dash is the Element of Loyalty. When she defends her friends she too can break the laws of physics, but with her Iced Fig Newton's laws of motion shatter in a giant Explosion of Rainbow colored light."

Rainbow digested that information. \_Oh. So that's why I never managed a second Rainboom.\_ She took a glance at the fothergilla. \_I defended Fluttershy's honor back then.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Oh, ein Greif. Ich hab schon lange keinen Greif mehr gesehen! Mein Name ist Twilight Sparkle! Ich bin ein Pony und kein Wechselbalg!" Twilight spoke in unaccented east Griffish.<p>

Gilda raised an eyebrow. "Bist du dir sicher, das du ohne deine Mama hier sein darfst?"

\* \* \*

><p>"Excuse me Miss Trixie," Twilight interrupted before Rarity took the stage, "but a PONY wouldn't brag that much." Twilight's friends made abortive gestures. "Are you sure you are a real Pony? Ponies are kind and nice and honest and loyal and they take you in, even if you are a... a completely normal Pony and not a Changeling at all!"<p>

Trixie took the bait like it was made of the MMMM. "Well. That is suspicious as heck! I think we have a Changeling Spy in our midst! Seize her!"

"HAHA!" Countered the unicorn, "I have here a Royal Decree by Princess Celestia herself, stating that I am legally a Unicorn living in Ponyville! And as such only the crown or a certified fire or

health inspector can throw me out of Ponyville!"

Twilight's knowledge came in handy here, because absolutely paradoxically: "Double Haha! I have actually a certificate of qualification as a fire safety inspector! I needed it for my fireworks!" There happened to be a clinically insane examiner for the Bureau of Magical and Fire safety. (Or not, baseline Trixie had some restraint.)

"Just one apple bucking minute," Applejack cut in. "Everyone here knows what Twilight is and we love her anyway."

Rarity came forth next: "And Princess Celestia herself has really given her a special dispensation to live in Ponyville. If you throw her out she'll probably revoke your certificate. My, to think, being known as the Pony who went against the express wishes of Princess Celestia over petty racism would surely do wonders for your career."

Finally Rainbow chimed in: "Not to forget that the Princess of the Night and an Elder Dragon both have a personal interest in this mare's wellbeing and happiness and will probably messily kill whoever harms a hair on her head."

With her friends readily coming to her defense and shutting the show off down hard they didn't need to step on stage to be humiliated. After the Ursa attacked and Twilight put it back to bed like the unruly foal it was the "Fail on four legs." was met with disbelieving stares: "What? It's not that hard to tame one little bear if you are a well fed... Pony with so many friends who love you." Twilight's friends saw the "cute little fella" in a new light and began to understand what it meant to overfeed a Changeling.

\* \* \*

><p>"Yeah" Twilight said with a half choked sob. "I mean, this is Ponyville... We... We are all ponies here. We don't... we don't want any Zebras or... or Changelings in this town, do we?" Twilight was a mess. Snot dripping from her sniveling nose, tears running down her face, her eyes red. A Changeling's shapeshifting, it seemed, transplanted their emotions right on their face. That might explain why the book had said that most Changelings tend to train themselves to be emotionless.<p>

All her friends looked at Twilight with horrified realization and began to talk over each other.

"What, no! It's not because she's not a Pony! It's because she lives in a spooky forest infested with Mons..." Fluttershy began.

Only to be cut off by Rainbow's hoof in her mouth: "We mean the Everfree is dangerous and weird and," hoof meet mouth.

"We mean it's dangerous in there, why would yah live there unless yah git something ta hideâ€" this dainty white hoof was covered in a blue hoofkerchief, but it did the job valiantly.

"Not that there's anything wrong with that, everyone has their secrets anâ€"mpf." Pinkie wanted in on the fun even though Rarity hadn't said anything tactless.



"Ah! They must be evil bad secrets, not harmless normal ones, like if you are a Pony or not!" Pinkie finished and snatched Fluttershy's hoof with her mouth to complete the circle, grinning around the yellow appendage.

"The Everfree Forest is also full of the kinds of magical plants which Zebra healers need." Twilight said miserably. "She's probably just a doctor."

The others looked at each other. Then let out a collective sigh, muffled by the hooves in their mouths. "C'm'n g'ls!" Applejack broke the hoofie chain with a "ptooey", much to Rarity's dismay.

"C'mon gals! We faced off against Nightmare Moon and our not-a-Changeling's well fed enough to take on an Ursa Miner. We'll go talk to her."

\* \* \*

><p>"Look, I've found a spell to give a Pony Wings!" Twilight told her friends before the best Young Fliers' competition. "Now I have an excuse, I mean, now I have a way to have wings again! For the first time!"<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Something was strange... Where was Photo Finish? It was about the right time for her to show up. Twilight looked around Ponyville for the mare and finally found Rarity and Fluttershy discussing Fluttershy's modeling career. "No, really... it's... wonderful." Fluttershy lied.<p>

\_Ah, I get it.\_ Nobody wants to tell her any secrets. Well, that meant she didn't have to promise anything!

"But Fluttershy, how can that be true? I can't feel anything you like about it." Fluttershy jumped at Twilight's presence and made abortive gestures.

"Ah!", she leaned over and whispered loudly, "You just do it to spare Rarity's feelings." It wasn't often that Fluttershy facehoofed, but when she did, it was because of Twilight Sparkle the absolutely normal Pony. Who leaned over to Rarity. "And you can't tell Fluttershy that you don't like her modeling for the Pony which betrayed you, because you think she must like modeling."

Twilight leaned back and sat on her haunches. "Ponies are really weird in how they can talk to each other without really saying what they mean."

"Betrayed?" Fluttershy asked confused.

"Well, Rarity wanted her to photograph her creations, but Finish, who doesn't like fashion, only modeling and presentation, absconded with her exclusive model and made her her own. Now, Rarity is angry at Finish, but can't say anything because she doesn't want to ruin \_your\_ chance to make it big. Ponies however cannot really conceive how other Ponies think and can only haphazardly model other's feelings. Therefore she never realized, that making it big is the

last thing you want and that you would actually love to help her pay back Photo Finish for the backstabbing." Twilight lectured. "I am actually considering a thesis on comparative psychology and group dynamics in non-empathic magical species. It's really interesting how Ponies just assume other minds work like their own. Especially considering their Special Talents giving each Pony unique mental structures. I mean nobody ever realized how Rainbow's special talent established a direct link between her senses and her memories while using it, to give her perfect memory and situational awareness while in flight."

\* \* \*

><p>"Pssst Discord, let me tell you my plan."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Ha, a Changeling could never successfully wield the Elements against me!" exclaimed the Lord of Chaos, "She's not really your friend. Your friend would be honest, wouldn't she? She just wants you to feed her," he said with a sinister expression.<p>

"So what?" called Applejack, "The rest of Ponyville wants me to feed them too! It's my Cutie Mark even! And about Honesty? Twilight couldn't tell a lie to save her life, I've seen that with my own eyes more times than I can imagine. Literally! We had to cover for her! But apart from that she's the best friend anypony, no, anyone could hope for."

With that Twilight released another pulse normalizing Discord's latest target.

"ARGH!" the Draconequus Twilight reformed with a twenty minute presentation as soon as he came out of the statue screamed at the harmless light, "You damned Ponies haven't seen the last of me. And without a proper Element of Pony's Magic to defeat me I can try again and again!"

And so Discord did his temptations and attacks again and again until the Elements managed to corner him one last time, with a plan to banish him from this dimension once and for all (he agreed to retire to a certain island for the four years Twilight's prank would take).

It was Fluttershy's turn for the rousing speech: "Twilight might be a Changeling..." "I'M NOT!" "She might have been born a Changeling," "Lies! Slander!" "But she is our friend and if she wants to she can be a Pony. In fact, she is so Funny, Kind, Loyal, Generous and Magical, she is the Greatest Pony there is!" "Don't forget Honest!"

"Yeah," Rainbow rolled her eyes, "Honest..."

With that the Elements fully activated and the swirling Rainbow of light took hold of Discord and pushed him into the portal. His final curse echoing throughout the landscape: "DAMN YOU PONIES! YOU MIGHT HAVE CHASED ME OFF, BUT CHANGELINGS NEVER GET OLDER THAN FOUR HUNDRED YEARS! AND THEN I WILL BE BAAAAAaaaaack!"

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked at the Cakes strangely. It was Twilight's birthday and they and Pinkie Pie had just delivered a ginormous cake. "Wait a minute." She told her friends. "You told me the Cakes were expecting a foal! But if the Cakes are here and Pinkie Pie is here and nearly everyone in Ponyville is here at this Party too: Who's watching the Egg? What if it dries out, or gets too hot or too cold!" Twilight nearly seemed to panic. Her friends looked at her funny again. Then Fluttershy had an epiphany.<p>

"Don't worry Twilight. The Foal is completely safe. Ponies are Mammals."

"Oh, yes, I knew that. Mammals. Could you wait just a minute while I go powder my nose?" With that she went to the other side of the room and hid behind the couch... For certain values of hid, if you counted her tail and her ears sticking out. A few books floated from a shelf right next to them and also vanished behind the couch.

"Melanism, Mendelian, Malpighian, malignant... Ah, Mammal. Mumble mumble." The ears vanished.

There was a pause.

Then there was a loud exclamation:"EEWWWWW!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Shining Armor is getting married? Oh! He's that Royal Guard whose family helped me come to Equestria! He's like a brother to me." Twilight looked at them in horror. "Oh wait, he... he... IS my brother! His family helped me come to Equestria, because they are, like totally my parents! So they brought me into this world and so brought me into Equestria! Clever, huh? I mean, that's totally the truth."<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Where is little Spike?" Celestia asked the assembled mares, only to receive a snort from Rainbow Dash, "I wanted to put him in charge of the Bachelor Party. As Shining Armor is the Captain of the Royal Guard it would get out of hoof otherwise."<p>

"He's napping." Twilight answered.

"Ah, okay, it's just been a while since I've seen him, but as a baby dragon it's important he gets his sleep." She was a little disappointed that the Element of Loyalty was snickering at Spike. But then again...

"Ah, I understand. The little guy is in that phase where he tries too hard to act grown up, isn't he?" she smiled knowingly at the Elements, causing them all to start snickering, even Rarity not managing to hide an unladylike snort.

\* \* \*

><p>"Everyone!" Twilight's eyes shifted from left to right. They had never seen her so nervous or flustered before. "There's something I have to tell you! There's..." she hesitated, "a Magical race of

beings... They can shapeshift to look like anyone they want and there could be one of them hiding everywhere as anyone and you wouldn't notice! They sometimes kidnap and replace a Pony and feed on the love other Ponies have for them and if they feed on true love, they can become stronger than even Celestia. These Mystical Beings are called..."<p>

"Changelings," Rainbow Dash preempted her, "We know. It's the kind of thing you are not. Geez..."

"How do you know?" Twilight Sparkle asked confusedly.

"Oh, you might have let that name slip once..." Rainbow drawled, "...a minute. For the last two years. And we kind of read up on them, just in case they were allergic to something or had some kind of weakness we had to pay attention to and avoid."

"Uh..." asked the purple being nervously, "why would you want to avoid Changeling weaknesses?"

"No reason."

"Anyway," the Most Definitely a Pony continued with a relieved expression, "there's a few ways to tell if someone is a Changeling. For once a Changeling will always be able to notice another Changeling and communicate with them silently. And there are some other ways, which I can't remember off the top of my head... I mean which I used to cleverly deduce that the bride has been abducted and replaced with a Changeling!"

Applejack turned to her friends and shrugged: "Well... I guess she's the expert."

\* \* \*

><p>"Haha! That spell has evicted all Changelings from Canterlot!"<p>

"You mean all enemy Changelings, Twilight," Rainbow snarked.

Shining Armor was confused by this: "Huh? Why? Were there any friendly Changelings? If so, I'm sorry, but that spell was indiscriminate, to give it a friend or foe recognition... well, it's not impossible, but that would have probably chucked out Blueblood too."

"Huh?", said Rainbow, "You're kidding. You're kidding, right?"

Celestia stepped up to the trio. "No, if you had any friends among the Changelings, I'm sorry; that Spell worked specifically against all Changelings."

...

...

"What?"

...

...

"Why are you looking at me like that? I've been telling you I wasn't a Changeling from day one."

\* \* \*

><p>The morning before the one thousandth Summer Sun Celebration had Applejack get in some last minute bucking when Applejack noticed a pony standing next to her. She stood ramrod straight, almost as if she was standing at attention. "<em>Good. Morning. Are. You. The. Pony. With. Personal. Designation. Applejack. Apple? I. Am. The. Pony. Situated. Completely. Within. One. Standard. Deviation. Of. The. Expected Value. Of. An. Equestrian's. Ponydom. With. Item. Designation. Twilight. Sparkle. And. Not. An. Aperture. Science. Hydraulorobotic. Pony. Device.<em>"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Note:<strong>

169.1: Some expansions suck. And now more than Twilight's mane can catch fire when she's annoyed.

169.2: Saps.

169.3: When Lyra has a personality conflict, it's resolved by debate.

169.5: Honestly not much different to normal.

169.6: "Drablands". Ouch.

169.8: Some things you need to get off your chest.

169.9: And sometimes you just point Trixie at it and dive for cover.

169.10: It's hard to tell if this is passive-aggressive or aggressively passive.

169.11: Oh dear.

169.14: Curse your sudden but inevitable betrayal.

169.17: She is completely honest.

## 177. Chapter 177

170.1 (Evilhumour)

\* \* \*

><p>"Princess?" Twilight looked up at her mentor, with a sidelong glance at Luna. "I have a question about you two."<p>

"What is it, my dear student?" Celestia smile was soft and motherly, like always.

"Well, I know for a fact that you raise and lower our sun, Princess Celestia, and Princess Luna raises and sets the moon and creates the night sky," Twilight said slowly, with both princesses nodding their heads. "So why is Luna considered the \_weaker\_ princess?"

Celestia blinked in confusion, sharing the same look on her sister's face. "Please Twilight, can you explain what you mean by that?"

"Well," Twilight traced her hoof in a small circle. "Princess Luna moves \_thousands\_ of stars every night to create amazing masterpieces as well as the moon itself, and you Princess Celestia just move \_one\_ star every day. So why is Princess Luna is considered the weaker of you two?"

"Well, you see Twilight," Celestia was really off balance, eyes darting around as she tried to come up with an explanation that didn't amount to being born first. "It's like this..."

(Hvulpes)

Celestia decided on the truth, "Magic wise and battle wise, Luna is stronger. But I have a greater power, stronger the those powers!"

"What power?" asked the curious lavender pony.

"Political powers. Luna can't handle one government meeting without falling asleep, getting bored or frustrated. Meetings like what goes into Equestria's text books on subjects. Subjects like who the more powerful Alicorn Princess is."

"Wait! You manipulated the text books in your favour?"

"Political Powers!" was the answer.

("Masterweaver)

"So..." Twilight suggested, "In theory, if a pony were to amass more political power then you, they'd be considered more powerful?"

"Well, yes, but not a more powerful alicorn. It's a little thing, I'll admitâ€" "

"I see." The purple unicorn beamed innocently. "Well, I'm not headed back to ponyville for a couple of days. Did you see the new treatise about..."

\* \* \*

><p>Two weeks later, the former mayor of Ponyville was crowned the most powerful alicorn of all time.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>170.2 (Rowan Ex)<p>

Sometimes being a changeling queen was something worthy of

pranks.

Like the time Twilight and Chrysalis, both Awake, were sisters with their own hives and Twilight was bored out of her head while her changelings did their routines. She had just finished rereading Hub fanfics about changelings until she remembered a particular comment from one of them.

For those also bored, listen up, Twilight began. We're going to prank Ponyville.

Sure, that Loop was also a Mikasa Glitched Loop, but wouldn't it be nice to have something for fun and pictures (which Chrysalis unusually found she had an interest for this Loop).

\* \* \*

><p>Ponyville was having a quiet day until its inhabitants noticed something on their library. One of them, the partiest partylicious party-liking party pony, opened the doors only to run off towards the Everfree Forest to check on the Mirror Pool.<p>

\_'The Pool isn't open!\_' she realized. \_'What's going on!?'\_

Back in a secret place near Ponyville, Twilight and Chrysalis were staring at the mess they had made and laughing. It was amazing how ponies could forget that Twilight was a changeling this Loop. Watching the ponies react to 40 unicorn Twilights chanting "Books!" was hilarious.

"You know Twilight," Chrysalis said amongst the unfurling chaos. "This sure looks fun."

"Have you seen Pinkie's face, though?" Twilight asked. "I mean, she knew the mirror pool cave had been closed."

"Yeah, I saw that." Chrysalis looked at Princess Celestia, Awake, as she arrived on the area only to leave with an amused smile. "Let's do this again sometime."

\* \* \*

><p>170.3 (continuation of 169.17) (Masterweaver)<p>

"...Yeah, no." Applejack frowned. "Sugarcube, you're our friend and all, but there's no way you're not a changeling."

"Wait, what?" Shining Armor held up a hoof. "What are you going on about?"

"Look, mister Armor, it's alright, you don't have to protect her." Rarity wrapped a foreleg around Twilight's neck. "We've known from the first day she was in Ponyville. No offense, Twilight darling, but... you are actually very bad at hiding it."

Twilight blinked. "Er... but... I actually am a pony."

"Shhh." Fluttershy nuzzled her gently. "It's okay. We accept you as both pony and changeling. There's no need to be scared anymore."

Celestia and Shining Armor shared a confused look.

"Uh, I don't know what you mares are talking about," the stallion finally managed, "but we actually do have Twilight Sparkle's birth certificate. And other paperwork."

Pinkie giggled. "Of course you do, silly! Cadence was Twilight's '\_foalsitter\_', right? Us pink poniesâ€" She paused, glanced around, then gave a nervous smile. "Er... us pink ponies all know how to forge paperwork."

Celestia stared. "WHAT."

"Yeah, pink is kinda negative green, and that can lead to certain legal problems... I'm pinker than most, so I'm more talented at it, but a pink princess would probably have access to higher levels of bureaucracyâ€" "

"That's ridiculous!" Cadence cried. "I mean, I love Twilight and all, but do you really think I'd have the time to forge all those documents?"

Shining's eye twitched. Twilight had to repress a giggle.

Rainbow groaned. "Look, the point is, we know Twilight's a Changeling, and we're okay with it because we know she's not evil. To us, she's just another pony... with some, ah, unique needs. And we know that you, as her adopted big brother, want to keep her safe, but you don't have to hide it anymore. We're all totally fine with Twilight being a changeling."

"But..." Shining shook his head. "But she's not!"

Twilight nodded in agreement, although her lips kept twitching upward. "I really am not a changeling, girls."

"Of course not," Fluttershy cooed. "You're an ordinary pony."

"No, seriously, I'm not."

Rarity sighed. "Please, Twilight. I know you're worried, but do you really believe that we wouldn't notice how odd you acted?"

"You mares must be very confused," Cadence managed. "Look, maybe... maybe the changeling swarm's hive mind managed to interfere with your memories when you became Chrysalis's bridesmaids somehow?"

There was a moment of silence.

Then Applejack snorted. "That's way more ridiculous than her being a changeling."

\* \* \*

><p>170.4 (Vinylshadow)<p>

Twilight looked up at the fuming Yak Prince who had just declared war on Equestria and sighed.



Reaching into her saddlebag, the Princess of Friendship pulled out a black scroll tied with a red ribbon.

"Spike? Send this to Princess Celestia please."

The dragon reluctantly took the scroll and blew on it, sending it swirling towards Canterlot.

"What did pony do?" Rutherford demanded, stomping a hoof. Twilight adjusted her mane and took a step to the right, moving out of the way of the line of fire.

"Just sending a message," she said.

The ground shook and everyone turned to look at Canterlot. The entire top of the mountain slowly opened and a large crystalline cannon slowly rose out of it. It rotated on its pedestal and aimed at Ponyville.

"Girls, duck," Twilight said. Her friends dropped flat, hooves over their heads as the cannon went off with a massive **\_\*\*BOOM\*\*\_**.

A streak of dark blue slammed into the Yak Prince, sending him bowling into his companions and sent all three flying in the vague direction of the San Palomino Desert.

Applejack got to her hooves and stared at Twilight. "Mind explaining what just happened?"

Twilight smiled and went over to where the Yak Prince had stood and helped a woozy Luna to her hooves. "I just took a leaf from Celestia's way of fighting wars. Throw your sister at it."

Luna rolled her neck, sighing in bliss as she flexed her wings. "We'll have to have someone re-calibrate the cannon. We are not as small as we once were and it was a rather tight fit."

Rarity clucked her tongue and trotted up to the princess. "Well, that won't do at all, Princess. Shall we adjourn to the spa and get pampered like we deserve?"

"I don't think sending your problem blasting off means that it's gone," Spike grumbled.

He was ignored.

\* \* \*

><p>170.5 (ORBSyndicate)<p>

Gravity Falls: Friendship is Magic 4: Headhunters

The Mane 6 and Wendy were watching TV. On the screen was a duck in a Sherlock Holmes hat and a constable.

"I'm afraid your services won't be required here, sir." The constable said. "My men have examined the evidence, and this is obviously an accident."

Then the duck started quacking, with subtitles appearing to translate

it from duck: "An accident, constable? Or is itâ€¦ Murder?!"

Fluttershy gasped, turning red. "That naughty duck!"

Applejack sighed. "He wasn't sayin' what it said he was sayin' was he?"

"Not at allâ€¦"

Wendy shrugged. "If you were a duck being forced to act on a sub-standard show, I'm sure you'd love to get away with as much as possible."

Rainbow Dash muttered something about "animal translation spells." Her nose was deep in Journal 3. Twilight was half reading over her shoulder.

Soos ran in. "DUDES! You'll never guess what I found!"

After various responses (ranging from "cute bunny" to "annoying dog" to "time machine.") Soos shook his head. "Nope! A SECRET ROOM!"

Everyone left the TV quickly, rushing into the secret room. Soos slowly opened the door, revealing a bunch of wax figurines.

Rarity blinked. "An old abandonedâ€¦ waxâ€¦ museum?"

"So lifelikeâ€¦" Twilight commented.

"Except that one." Rainbow Dash said, pointing to one that looked like Stan.

"HELLO!" Stan said, grinning like a madman. Everyone jumped. He never got tired of that. \_Ever. \_Though that one time he had cloned himself several times was even \_more\_ amusing.

"Behold, the Gravity Falls Wax Museum! Stuff. It was one of our most popular attractions. Before I forgot all about it. The first time anyway."

Wendy cocked her head. "First timeâ€¦?"

"Oh wake up." Stan said, gaining a confused look from Wendy and a chuckle from a few of the equestrians.

"Anyway, my personal favorite was Abraham Lincoln. Howeverâ€¦" Stan sighed, gesturing to a pile of wax goop. "He appearsâ€¦ melted. Like the sun wanted to wrestle his pointless life from himâ€¦"

Twilight blinked. "Wax statues aren't alive."

"Right, right of course." Stan said, waving his hand dismissively.

Pinkie grinned. "I WILL MAKE YOU A NEW WAX FIGURE!"

Stan groaned. He knew it'd be her. The wax figure day was always a hard one for him. But hey, he'd get through it. He always did.

He put on a smile. "You really think you can make one of these puppies?" He snorted.

"Grunkle Stan, I'm an arts and crafts and parties and chaos and pink and energy and power and magic and cotton candy and sugar and cake and sweets and dreams and happiness MASTER! Of course I can make one!"

Stan blinked, slowly taking all this in. Old loopers had an odd way of making him feel even older. It was a paradox.

"Uhâ€| sure. MAKE YER GRUNKLE PROUD!"

Stan was 90% sure he knew what the wax statue was going to be. As usual. But not before she shot a million ideas at a brick wall.

\* \* \*

><p>Stan had not meant that literally when he had thought it, but in hindsightâ€|<p>

"SHALL I MAKE A WAFFLE WITH ARMS?" Pinkie asked a magic 8 ball while blindfolded. She then tossed the ball into a wall, shattering the ball. Pinkie then turned to look at the angle of the sun and test the wind. "Guess not." She said.

Stan blinked. "What theâ€|"

Then an 8 ball hit him right in the face.

"THE 8 BALL HAS SPOKEN!" Pinkie said. Stan swore he saw pink fire light up behind her with various eyes inside it. But when he blinked, it was gone. He shook his head. The Loops were making him go insaneâ€| And not the fun kind of insane either.

"I SHALL GET TO WORK!" Pinkie declared, plucking some of Rainbow Dash's hair for supplies as she ran past.

"Whâ€" OW! HEY!"

"Sorry Dashie! Need rainbow powered paintbrushes and your hair is just naturally rainbow infused!"

"Um. Next time use scissors?"

Pinkie paused. "I never thought of thatâ€|"

\* \* \*

><p>Later, The Mystery Crusaders, Applebloom Corduroy, Sweetie Belle, and Scootaloo (just Scootaloo) were in the audience of the Mystery Shack's "grand reopening of the Wax Museum."<p>

Of course, they weren't there for the free pizza. (Well, maybe Scootaloo was). They were here to watch. To be SPIES!

And of course to see creepy wax figures. Because, duh, creepy wax figures. Awesome stuff.

They watched as Stan walked up to the podium. "You all know me folks! Town darling, Mister Mystery! Also ladies, quit staring at me like I'm the devil incarnate. Thank you!"

Silence greeted the strange man.

"I give you enchantments and wonderments, novelties and befuddlewhatsizbitz, the likes of which the world has never known in the history of all timelines! But enough about me. Beholdâ€¦ ME!" And with that, Stan uncovered the one Wax Statue not out for the public to view: a perfect replica of Stan himself, except with glitter added. It was very shiny.

Also if you looked at it in the wrong light it appeared to be on pink fire.

Sweetie Belle stared. "So shinyâ€¦!"

Applebloom and Scootaloo groaned.

Pinkie leapt up and took the mic. "HELLO! THANK YOU FOR COMING TO THIS PARTY! I made this sculpture with my own two hooves! Or.. Hands! Or whatever! IT IS COVERED IN MY BLOOD, SWEAT, TEARS, PINK FIRE, HAIR, NATURAL GLITTER, AND OTHER FLUIDS!"

The Mystery Crusaders pondered this before recoiling in disgust.

"I SHALL NOW TAKE QUESTIONS!" Pinkie yelled, a party cannon going off.

Applebloom frowned. There was something really off about this Pinkie girl. She made special note to watch her closely.

McGucket asked the first question. "Old Man McGucket, local kook. are the wax figures alive? And follow-up question, can I survive the wax-man uprising?"

Pinkie grinned. "YES! NEXT QUESTION!"

Applebloom cocked her head. "Yes?"

Scootaloo rolled her eyes. "That answer meant nothing. If they were alive, she answered yes to that. If they weren't, she answered yes to the kook surviving. She's clever."

Sweetie frowned. "How can she be clever if she made a wax Stan?"

"I have no idea." Scootaloo said.

"We shall solve this connâ€¦ conunâ€¦ conundrum." Applebloom said.

Meanwhile, the questions were still going on. "Toby Determined, Gravity Falls Gossiper. Do you think this constitutes a wonder of the world?"

Stan put a stupid grin on his face, obviously enjoying this. "Your microphone's a turkey baster, Toby."

"It certainly isâ€¦!"

"Put Toby Determined down as someone to watch." Sweetie said.

"Eh why?" Applebloom said. "He's just as weird as everyone else here."

"Exactly."

Scotaloo and Applebloom rolled their eyes before continuing their observation.

Berry Punch jumped up. "You PROMISED FREE WINE!"

Pinkie shook her head. "No. You must've misread the flyer. What we have instead isâ€¦" Pinkie said, grinning. "FREE PIZZA!"

From literally nowhere, it began to rain pizzas. Everyone was happy, particularly Free Pizza Guy, who ate one of them mid-flight in one bite. Pinkie gave him a trophy.

Maud, for some reason, sprinkled pebbles on a pizza and walked away with it.

The Mystery Crusaders stared on, slack jawed.

Perhaps \_this\_ was why they were watching the Mystery Shackâ€¦| Spontaneous pizzas were not normalâ€¦|

\* \* \*

><p>Stan sighed.<p>

It had happened again.

Wax Stan's head had been chopped off.

He had figured out how to prevent this from happening long ago, but he was trying to go with it. And thus, Wax Stan had to suffer.

It was a euphemism for his life, really. Because Stan was Stan, people had to suffer.

One person in particular.

He watched as, of course, the mane 6 defied the sheriff and his deputy and decided to investigate the murder of Wax Stan and bring the perpetrator to justice. Everyone did. Stan thought he knew who the culprit was, but he couldn't be sure. The Loops liked to mess with his head and have other beings kill Wax Stan than the expected ones.

He cautiously eyed Wax Sherlock Holmes.

Next Loop, he was turning that one into a Ducktective statue.

He watched as the mane 6 found the axe, as they wandered around gathering clues, avenging him.

Of course he went along with it, with his "AVENGE ME!" speech and jumping around in mock anger.

But in reality he was justâ€¦ sad. This statue always reminded him of the person he was in baseline.

A person he still was, to some extent. A lying cheat.

And not the amiable fun kind either. A backstabber.

He sighed again.

He also noticed that those Mystery Crusaders were following the kids around.

He wondered whyâ€¦

\* \* \*

><p>"So, Mystery Crusaders, what do we have?" Applebloom asked.<p>

"We observed them investigating the "death" of Wax Stan." Scootaloo said, holding up the pen pad. "We have witnessed them somehow get past the security of the "Lumberjack Bar." We did manage to follow them, at the cost of Sweetie getting a black eyeâ€¦"

"I told you we should have made fake IDs as well!"

"Woulda taken too long." Applebloom said. "Go on."

"Then we watched them realize the axe was left handed, so Manly Dan couldn't have done itâ€¦ Then we watched them go through and investigate everyone who as at the pizza partyâ€¦ Lost a lot of pencil leadâ€¦ and then accuse Toby Determined. We all know what happened next." Scootaloo said, shuddering at the memory. Who on earth spent hours kissing a cardboard cutout of a reporterâ€¦ Who did that?

"Anyway, Toby was shown to be innocent, and everything turned out to be pointless." Scootaloo frowned. "We also observed Rainbow Dash look deep into some Journal with the number 3 on it. And I swear that Pinkie girl defies all logic."

Applebloom nodded. "Stan will be holding a funeral for Wax Stan later today. We should be there to watch it."

\* \* \*

><p>Stan always held the funeral.<p>

He could never bring himself not to. It was too important to him.

Perhaps it was an attempt to undo his wrongs. Perhaps it was an attempt to make peace with everything.

Whatever it was, he always cried.

\_Always.\_

Even in those amazing variants where \_he\_ was here with him, he still

cried.

He ran out, Soos and Wendy following him, leaving the mane 6 in the room with the wax statues.

Rarity looked around. "How did he convert this place into a ceremony room?"

"He's a Looper." Twilight said. "Does he need to follow logic?"

Pinkie butted in. "Who said anything needs logic?"

"Good point."

Twilight sighed. "We didn't solve the mysteryâ€”"

Applejack frowned. "Wait. You just said it."

"Oh no." Twilight said, looking around panicked. "Okay so where's the clue here that we are going to find seconds too late?"

Rainbow Dash pointed at the body of Wax Stan. Specifically, his foot. "That holeâ€ matches the footprint we foundâ€"

Slowly, the mane six turned to see the wax statues turn towards them.

Wax Sherlock Holmes twirled his pipe and glared. "Ah yes, they found us out didn't they chaps? It's a shame they're too late to do anythingâ€œ"

The wax figures, now alive, moved in to attack.

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey!" "Get off!" "No you get off!" "Toteming is a science!" "Not if your foot is in my eye!"<p>

"Girls!" Applebloom said. "Hold still! I can't see in the window!"

Sweetie and Scootaloo shot death glares at each other, but held steady. Applebloom stared in through the window.

"Is thatâ€¦ pink fire?"

Then a wave of liquified wax poured out of the window with a force of a tidal wave. The Mystery Crusaders were completely covered.

And it began to harden.

"ACK!" Applebloom yelled.

Scotaloo tried eating her way out while Sweetie just went "EWEWEWEWEWEWEWEWEWEWEWEWE!"

The voice of Pinkie could be heard from inside. "Yeah, taking the candle away from us wasn't very effective was it?"

"Pinkie." Twilight said, trying not to lose it. "Please put out the chaos fire."

"Oh sure. Right away."

"I think you melted Wax Stan's head as well."

"YOU DID \_WHAT?" \_The voice of Stan could be heard.

The Mane 6 blinked, before nodding to each other and dashing off in separate directions.

The Mystery Crusaders trekked back to their base, the wax caked onto them.

The report of that day was inconclusive.

\* \* \*

><p>Li rqob Prulduwb kdg slqn fkdrv iluh...<p>

\* \* \*

><p>170.6 (Masterweaver)<p>

Twilight blinked. "Wait... seriously?"

"Yep. Fluttershy actually made her the costume." Pinkie smiled. "Of course, we all know she's not actually a pony, but she's so shy about it that we pretend she is for her sake."

Twilight rubbed her head. "And you're sure she isn't a visiting looper?"

"About ninety percent sure. I kinda think she's actually somebody from Shoggoth-chan trying to relax for a bit, but I can't tell for certain."

The purple unicorn shot a glance over to where a blue pony with red eyes was perusing the shelves. It was almost possible to ignore the stitches on her skin... aside from the occasional green tentacle slipping out of them to grab a book and flip through it.

"...well, I suppose I am the princess of Friendship," she finally said. "And if 'Cuddlehu' wants friends, I can help her with that. I'm just worried about, you know, the whole..." She gesticulated.

Pinkie Pie rolled her eyes. "Twilight, I already took her aside and explained about boundaries. You'll be fine. After all, you're friends with me, and if you can handle that then one little tentacle monster in a suit should be easy!"

\* \* \*

><p>170.7 (Evilhumour, Vinylshadow, OathToOblivion)<p>

"Wow," said Rainbow Dash, very impressed. "Lemon sure can bench press your daughter, Twi."

"Yup," Twilight nodded her head, watching the two move up and down.



It was oddly hypnotic in a way, the repeated motion somehow captivating. "They've been going at it for hours."

"Nearly six hours, Twilight," Lemon responded with a grunt, earning himself a swat on the nose from Nyx as he had been uneven with his latest raising of her. That earned them chuckles from the crowd surrounding them, more the mares than the stallions.

"So how exactly did all this start Twilight?" Dash tore her head away from the duo and towards her friend.

"Well, from what I heard Lemon was working out here with Nyx reading nearby," Twilight's attention was still focused towards her daughter and her husband to be, a smile on her face at what the kids were doing. "One of themâ€"

"It was Nyxie who marveled at my steadiness and wondered if I could continue it with a much more precious load," Lemon responded, earning him another swat on his nose. "So far, I've continued my work out and Nyxie is still reading her book."

Nyx nodded her head, resting comfortably in her finacÃ's hooves as turned the next page of her book as Lemon lifted her back into the air and then down.

"Huh," Rainbow Dash blinked, and then nodded her head. "Neat." She then flew back into the sky while the crowd continued to watch Lemon Rush bench press Nyx Sparkle in front of her mother.

"What's Nyx reading anyway?" Applejack asked.

"The Complete Unabridged History of the Loops, 42nd Edition, by Mewtwo," Twilight replied. "It weighs about two and a half thousand tonnes."

"I could have done without knowing that," Lemon said with equineamity.

\* \* \*

><p>170.8 (Vinylshadow)<p>

Sunset Shimmer Woke up in Equestria and immediately did a double take, falling backwards in shock.

Starlight Glimmer looked at her curiously. "You alright?"

Sunset's mouth opened and closed as she tried to puzzle out what was going on. A polite cough got her attention and she turned to see Twilight offering her a hoof.

"Explanation?" Sunset murmured to her as the Anchor hauled her up.

"Variant where pretty much every unicorn from Baseline is in Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns. Including Flim and Flam. Don't try the mystery herbs," Twilight said, gesturing around them.

Sunset saw Moondancer and Trixie in a heated debate over a chalkboard filled with staggering amounts of theories, some of which Sunset

recognized, while there were thaumic theories that made her head spin just by looking at them.

"Okay, I've had weirder," she said, shaking her head. "Any real plans this Loop?"

"Nope, but I'm taking notes on everything so I can puzzle over them later," Twilight said cheerfully. "Shall we join the battle?" she added, nodding to Moondancer, who had a tick on her head as she and Trixie moved closer to each other.

"I doubt we'd survive, but hey, nothing ventured, nothing gained," Sunset said with a feral grin. "Have at thee!"

\* \* \*

><p>Rarity arched one eyebrow as Twilight approached her. She was fairly positive she knew what Twilight wasâ€" <p>

"Where were you last Loop?" the Anchor demanded.

"If you're talking about the one where you and your friends went to Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns..."

Twilight winced. "Ah...well...that's not...they're your friends too!"

"True, but I was occupied elsewhere, I'm afraid."

"Where?" Twilight asked, pricking her ears.

"A lady never tells, Twilight," Rarity admonished her gently with a smile.

\* \* \*

><p>170.9 (Evilhumour)<p>

"The Night shall last forâ€" " Nightmare Moon declaration was cut off when she was tapped on the side.

"Ahem, excuse me?" a younger, softer version of Nightmare Moon coughed slightly as she rolled her eyes. "I know you are trying to be independent of your sister Luna, and make yourself what ponies cling to, have your Night respected by all and whatever, but..." the younger mare trailed off, her horn glowing as the moon went down with the sun coming up. "But you are doing it under my name which could get me in trouble with my mom over there," Twilight meeped as the younger alicorn waved over to her, ponies taking a step backwards. "You're not really thinking about the long term issues with having only the moon up â€" did you ever think to have a second moon to act as a source of light that will act as replacement for the sun as it works surprisingly well â€" and you didn't even try to co-op rulership over Equestria! I mean, look Luna, you and Celestia," she wrapped both her forelegs around the princesses, surprising everypony as they didn't even see Celestia there a second ago, and lead them to a podium that had blueprints and plans, also something that wasn't there a moment ago. "I mean, look, if you directed the winds like so, you two could have the sun and the moon up for a thousand years or so each, switching back and forth. And if that doesn't work, there

\_are\_ others things we can try."

"Wait," the older Nightmare Moon, or Luna as she was called, started to protest, shaking her head. "We have comeâ€"

"Back to Equestria, I know, if you have noticed, there are banners and a massive party set up just for your return. See?" the younger alicorn pointed to the newly decorated town hall in the colours of the first Nightmare Moon, the younger one giving a wink to a pink party mare. "So everypony \_did\_ remember you Luna, celebrated your night and a lot enjoy it now. Now come, we've got a lot of work to do girls." The younger alicorn guided the princesses out of the room, leaving everypony inside in dead silence.

In the crowd, a white unicorn pony turned to a purple unicorn pony.

"Excuse me, Twilight?" she asked.

"Yes Rarity?" she responded.

"What the \_hay\_ just happened?!"

"I \_don't\_ know, Rarity and I don't know why she called me \_mom!\_"

\* \* \*

><p>170.10: (Detective Ethan Redfield)<p>

The sky over Golden Oaks Library tore open, revealing a vast expanse of nothing. It was not space, it was not anything. And from it came a tentacled horror, a monstrosity that cannot be put into words. It was like the void sprouted eyes and glared at everything. Ponies that were not stricken dumb or insane at the sight ran screaming in terror (a surprising amount for such a panicky race). Over the sound of the panicking ponies, one overly loud groan roared with two words.

\*\*"NOT AGAIN!"\*\*

As Twilight prepared for the inevitable destruction of her tree so that their loop might be saved, a certain pink haired pony approached Twilight and said, "Hey Twilight! I want to apologize."

Twilight looked at Pinkie with a manic grin and a twitchy eye, "What?! What now? Don't tell me you're the daughter of Cthulhu?!"

Pinkie blinked and laughed. "You're funny Twilight. That's just insane."

Twilight shook her head, dispelling her concern. "Ok, then I'm sure it's not as bad as what's about to happen. Lay it on me, Pinkie."

"I'm not an Earth Pony. I'm a Narwhal!"

Twilight was blinded as Pinkie transformed in a flash of white light. And then she saw Pinkie had grown fins and a horn. A second later, Pinkie threw herself at the opening in the sky, body checked the

tentacled horror and sealed the breach. Twilight blinked several times, then shouted, "What the birch just happened?!"

\* \* \*

><p><em>On the Other Side of the Breach<em>

Pinkie, Hastur, Cthulhu, and many other Eldritch Abominations sat around, playing a game of poker. Pinkie finished laughing and said, "Thanks everybeing."

Cthulhu nodded. "We should do this again. What do you say, next time Twilight isn't awake?"

Pinkie put a fin to her face, "Only if Twilight can keep her sanity. I mean, what's fun about pranking a pony who's speaking an ancient language and no longer realizes she's still in Ponyville?"

\* \* \*

><p>170.11 (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

Nyx blinked. "Seriously? This happened because you were bitten by a radioactive book?"

"It could have happened!" Twilight, currently a mobile (and concerned) illustration on the cover of a book, exclaimed.

Those words, and the fact that she also knew a spell to get exactly that effect, were why Nyx doubted her mother's story, and she sighed. "Here I thought Auntie Velvet's story about being bitten by a radioactive skeleton was one of the most ridiculous things I'd ever heard."

Twilight blinked. "Radioactive skeleton... you mean, from that Family Skeleton-based Loop you told us about?"

Nyx nodded. "It was one of the theories she had about \_why\_ she was a living skeleton. We never really believed it then, and I still don't."

From the book cover, Twilight sighed. "Oh well. It was fun while it lasted." She concentrated, and a moment later, emerged from the book. "You know, you \_could\_ try to play along with these little jokes sometimes."

Nyx nuzzled her mother. "Maybe if you were trying to prank someone other than me."

"I'll keep that in mind."

\* \* \*

><p>170.12: (Evilhumour)<p>

"â€"and I still can't dance without crashing into something, Spike," Twilight said as paced back again, causing the drake to roll his eyes as his latest attempt to help Twilight was rendered useless. "I mean, I know that they're not getting married soon but one day they'll tell us they're ready and I \_can't\_ embarrass Nyx with our dance at the

reception because if I do she'll hate me forever and then she won't want to talk to me ever again and when they have kids I'll never see my grandchildren but then again I know that Nyx won't be that mean, that monster Leman won't let me see my grandchildren because of how badly I danced at their wedding, how dare he hold that against for me so long why I outtaâ€œ"

"Hi Mom, we're home," Nyx entered the library with her fiancÃ© carrying in the groceries on his back. "How are thinâ€œ"

"LET ME SEE MY GRANDCHILDREN YOU EONS OLD GRUDGE HOLDER!" Twilight shouted, tackling Lemon through a wall, leaving Nyx alone with Spike.

"Don't worry," Spike said as he went to get the broom and dustpan to clean up the mess. "I already contacted Cadence to help us out and she should be here soâ€œ"

"Already here Spike," Cadence teleported in, looking around for her sister in-law. "What is it this time?"

"Twilight was worried that her poor dancing will drive a wedge between Nyx and her, and she jumped to the conclusion that Leman won't let her see their future children because of it."

"Ah," Cadence nodded sagely as she went outside to pry the purple mare off the yellow stallion. "Won't be that hard to deal with."

Nyx sighed, shaking her head as her aunt talked her mom out of her breakdown as she picked up the groceries and took them to the kitchen.

\* \* \*

><p>170.13: (Evilhumour)<p>

"Interesting," Perturabo, or as his memories told him his name was Siege Patrol, muttered to himself as he Awoke as an equine creature, a pony as his brothers told him beforehand of the correct term. He had been expecting this for a while now, considering what he read about jump-started branches like his own in that guidebook, but he was not expecting...the gentleness of everything around him. In his home Branch, in the worldcrafting Branch and the few others he had been to, there was always some sense of danger around the corner, something to really prepare and defend against.

Here, there was nothing pressing against him to gather up his weaponry or anything of the â€œ"

"Excuse me, but are you okay?" a yellow equiâ€œ" pony with wings looked up at him with genuine concern, her blue eyes showing not a trace of any malice within her being. "Because if you do not mind me saying, you do look a bit Loopy."

"Yes...but I am wide Awake miss..." he said carefully, dimly aware that this mare was familiar to him, somewhat resembling who his brothers described as Flâ€œ"

"Fluttershy," her smile grew as she walked up closer to him. "Perturabo?" she asked delicately, not fear in her voice but actual

\_hope\_.

"Yes," he nodded his grey coated head, shaking his dark mane into his face. "I have heard that my other brothers call you the Little Mother due to you raising Russ... and my other brothers in other loops in the past."

"That's correct," the pegasus replied. "Like I told Magnus, Vulkan and Konrad, they did not need to call me Little Mother or view me as their mother if they did not want to, and I will not force you too if you do not want that kind of relationship," she then flashed another true, caring smile at him. "I will let you know the offer is always open and that there is always room in my cottage for you if you wish to come."

"Thank you, miss Fluttersâ€™" he trailed off his speech as he noticed a young pony, a colt his memories corrected him, walk into view carrying a large bag upon his back.

"I've got all the stuff for supper, Little Mother, although I \_do\_ think I should be allowed to cook for you again," the yellow earth pony that had his brother's voice grumbled, eyes at the ground.

"Lemon Rush, after what happened last time be grateful that City Guard didn't press charges on you after how much was burned to the ground," the mare turned her head to lecture the colt who rolled his eyes at the speech. He then froze at the sight of the young grey stallion, who had a smile creeping on his face. "Also, your brother Perturabo is Awake and might be joining us for dinner so I would like him to eat something that will not fight back."

The colt began to stammer, face flushed with embarrassment as Perturabo found himself in the throes of laughter at seeing the mighty Wolf King as a tiny little colt, seeing exactly \_why\_ his brothers told him he had to see this sight for himself.

Siege Patrol knew from that moment on that this was going to be a \_very\_ good loop for him.

\* \* \*

><p>170.14: (Evilhumour)<p>

There was a string of explosions outside the Golden Oaks, and a young alicorn ran into the library.

"Hi-mom-where-is-the-fire-extinguisher-that-puts-out-water-based-fires-Is-it-still-under-the-sink-Oh-good-it-is-Don't-worry-we-got-everythin-g-under-controlâ€™"

\_\*\*BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!\*\*\_

The shock wave caused everything inside the library to rock back and forth, dust from the ceiling coating the floor along with every book being knocked out of their shelves.

"\*\*THAT WAS \*\*\_\*\*NOT TRIxie, TRIxie SWEARS IT!\*\*\_" a voice bellowed out, shattering all the glass in the library and the town, causing

more than a few to go temporarily  
deaf.

"Sorry-mom-I-have-got-to-make-sure-the-girls-don't-destroy-anything-else-Hey-Applebloom-stop-using-those-rockets-You-agreed-not-to-use-splitting-rockets-for-this-contest-to-see-who-is-going-to-be-my-maid-of-honour," the alicorn paused to look at the librarian and gave her a weak smile. "Sorry-mom-I-really-need-to-go-now-I-love-you-bye." The young alicorn raced over to the purple mare and gave her a kiss on the cheek before running outside, slamming the door behind her.

Twilight blinked at the strange sight she just watched and wondered who that alicorn was, who Trixie was and what the hay was going on in this city!

\* \* \*

><p>170.15: (Vinylshadow, Purrs, OathToOblivion)<p>

"I is Wakefulness!" Twilight is words slowly! Twilight is frown and Twilight is effort again! Twilight is scowl and Twilight is impact head against table! "What is event to words?!"

"Know not I do, but amused I am," Zecora is words and Zecora is grin! "At least talk somewhat normal, I do, unlike you."

Twilight is glare at Zecora and Twilight is slump miserably! "Hard is message to Celestia letters! Words is not utility good!" Twilight is appearance like Twilight is imminence tears!

"{I'm really sorry about this, Twilight,}" Pikachuâ€œer, Past Participleâ€œapologized â€œ having replaced Spike this Loop â€œ "{Looks like you fell prey to a Grammermon Loop.}"

\* \* \*

><p>170.16: (Evilhumour)<p>

Dashing Rainbow looked at Shyingflutter who was rubbing the back of Sparkling Twilight.

"This is such a stupid variant," the Anchor grumbled, looking at Armoring Shine. "So stupid!" she whined, faceplanting into the table.

"It could be worse," Shyingflutter said. "You could be like my son Rushing Lemons and get all those immature joke thrown at his face."

"Wait, someone actually teased one of your boys about their names?" Dashing asked in disbelief.

"Well, actually no, not after he put that pony through the hoofball hoop..." Shyingflutter said, trailing off as she tipped her chin.

Sparkling groaned and faceplanted again.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Note:<strong>

170.3: Sometimes you tell the truth, and you just don't get believed.

170.4: Of course it means the problem is gone. The problem is no longer here.

170.7: The title is, of course, a lie. Nothing can be completely unabridged.

170.9: Some non-Equestrian Anchor or other not shown.

170.13: She does it to all the Primarchs.

170.14: Another non-Twilight Looper.

## 178. Chapter 178

171.1

\* \* \*

><p>Gilda drew her tail across with a slashing motion, slapping the projectile aside. "Your guards are unconscious, and you can't do a thing. Give up!"<p>

"Yes!" her opponent said, nodding eagerly. "Anything!"

"Hah!" Gilda said, eagle-claws slamming down on the packed earth. "Okay, there's going to be some changes around here. For starters, this is a pathetic imperial palace."

"Sorry, what?" he asked. "Imperial palace?"

"Well, yeah," Gilda said, shrugging. "Why?"

"...this is the town hall."

Gilda looked around. At Griffinstone.

"Oh, damn and blast," she said, closing her eyes and putting a clawed forefoot up to her face. "Wrong kind of Griffins."

"Something wrong?" Guido asked, nervously looking up to see if his guards were awake yet.

"Right," Gilda sighed. "Oak-ay, new plan. I wanted an empire this time, so I'm making one. I think there's some unclaimed land somewhere over to the east of the ocean..."

\* \* \*

><p>171.2<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Fluttershy looked up, and smiled. "Ah, excuse me a



moment."<p>

Her interlocutor shrugged. "Okay by us."

The pegasus got up, and opened the door. "Hello, Nyx - what a pleasure. How are you today?"

"I'm okay," Nyx replied. "I just wanted to come over to snaffle some of your tea."

"Well, you'll have to move quickly," Fluttershy replied. "My guests are trying to do that as well."

"In our defence," the coyote said, picking up another cup. "It really is very good tea."

The great big wolf next to her muttered something.

"Oh, quiet," smiled the coyote, flicking her tail at his flank. "We're guests here."

The wolf contrived to make it clear that it was the coyote whose manners were in question, not his.

"That's very impressive," Nyx said, nodding. "You did that without a single word or noise. Was it really all body language?"

The coyote rolled her neck, and then turned into an earth pony with a paw-print cutie mark. "Honestly, I think he just likes showing off. But it's magic - it's pack magic, drawing strength from the entirety of an alpha's pack."

She smiled. "Which means me at the moment, of course. Mercedes the Volkswagen mechanic, at your service."

Nyx looked politely blank.

"Mercedes... Volkswagen... they're different kinds of cars?" asked the coyote shapeshifter, then sighed. "Oh, whatever, I guess there have to be some places they don't get the pun."

There was a clatter from in the kitchen.

"Now, look here!" Fluttershy's voice came, stern but fair. "I know you enjoy tricking people, but I was carrying boiling water and could have gotten badly hurt!"

A clatter.

"Sorry, Mrs. Hauptmann," Fluttershy sighed, coming back into the main room with a stick in her mouth. "This naughty little scamp tried to trip me up, so I've told him off ever so much."

"...that's a walking stick," Nyx said, pointing. "How..."

Angel looked up from his hammock and gestured.

"I know I'm a secondarily-looping daughter of an evil side and a blood sacrifice, but it's not polite to say it," Nyx retorted.

Angel flipped the bird and got back to snoozing.

Amused, the big wolf rumbled.

"No, you can't eat him," Mercedes said. "You wouldn't anyway, you big softie."

\* \* \*

><p>171.3<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Celestia looked up as a letter materialized.<p>

"Ah," she said, smiling. "It seems my student has sent me a letter. Luna?"

Luna looked up from what Celestia considered exquisitely made tea and Luna considered an inadequate supply of biscuits. "Sister?"

"Would you like to read it with me?" Celestia offered.

Luna considered.

"All right," she said. "But mayhap we can get a refill of the biscuits? The chocolate ones, which are a remarkable invention."

"Of course," Celestia agreed.

\* \* \*

><p>Biscuits obtained, Celestia unrolled the scroll.<p>

As she did, she noticed that Luna was already on her third biscuit, but didn't make an issue. "Let's see, now... Dear Princess Celestia..."

She blinked.

"What might it be, sister?" Luna asked, swallowing.

Celestia showed her.

Luna's eyes flicked over the parchment, and she blinked.

\_Dear Princess Celestia,\_ it read.

\_Gur svefg pyhr vf ng gur obggbz bs gur Pnfgyr bs gur Eblny Cbal Fvfgref.\_

\_Cvaxvr cebivqrq gur cevmmrf. Rawbl!\_

\_c.f. Gur Pnxr vf Rabezbfh.\_

"...has thy student lost her mind?" Luna asked, examining it. "It does not seem to be Equestrian, nor Old Griffish, nor any other tongue I have read nor spoken."

Celestia shrugged. "I've no idea."

\* \* \*

><p>"...and then, when they get knocked off the path by the boulder, they'll be all 'oh, no!' until they land in the lava and find it's really cotton candy lava," Pinkie rattled off.<p>

"Are we absolutely certain this is a good idea?" Spike asked.

Twilight shrugged. "I wanted to do something sweet."

Spike winced. "That pun was old the \_first\_ time around."

"Besides," Twilight added. "I checked the library records to be sure, but Luna's already read all the Daring Do books just in the month since we cured her. This is basically live-action Daring Do."

"If you say so..." Spike opined.

\* \* \*

><p>"So?" Spike asked. "How'd it go?"<p>

"I may have overdone the puzzles," Twilight admitted. "Who'd have thought they'd get stuck on the 128-bit private key encryption problem in the third temple?"

"Almost anyone," Spike deadpanned.

"Fortunately, Pinkie made the door out of gingerbread, so they made it through anyway," Twilight shrugged. "And I think the jump-scare bit should beâ€"

The ground shook.

"â€"about then. And it seems like Luna's easily surprised," Twilight went on, as though nothing was amiss.

"Wait." Spike raised a claw. "They're still in the puzzles?"

\* \* \*

><p>Cadence stared at the pile of paperwork and the herd of petitioners.<p>

"...they're both missing, see," explained the seneschal apologetically. "And we found that you're third in precedence, so..."

"But..." Cadence blinked. "Wouldn't it be Blueblood?"

"Would \_you\_ accept Blueblood, or look for a loophole?" her boyfriend asked \_sotto voce\_.

"...okay, fair enough..."

\* \* \*

><p>171.4<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"This is Rarity, Princess," Twilight explained. "She is the Bearer of Generosity."<p>

"Noble Rarity," Celestia repeated, bestowing a smile.

"Actually, your Solar Highness, I'm just a shopkeeper," Rarity said.

Celestia's eyes twinkled. "Not any more."

Rarity blinked. "What?"

"You are now Lady Rarity Belle of the Carousel Boutique," Celestia explained.

There was a soft sliding sound, and Rarity fainted onto a couch.

"Was the couch there before?" Celestia asked.

"No, she does that," Dash explained for her.

"Thank you. And... you must be one of the Apple clan," Celestia noted. "Who might you be?"

"Applejack, ma'am," Applejack said. "Ah run Sweet Apple Acres with m' brother."

Celestia nodded. "Ah, your apple products are the delight of many a day. But - is there any way I can reward you for your aid to my sister?"

Twilight winced.

"Nope," Applejack replied. "There ain't a single thing."

Celestia blinked. "Really? How can this be?"

Twilight winced again.

"Well, 'cause of th' time travel, an' all, ah know how t' handle most anything that might crop up," Applejack said.

There was a moment of silence.

"Applejack," Twilight said, not unkindly. "We need to talk about dissembling."

"What, like unbuildin' things?"

"Sorry, Twilight," Celestia said, slowly. "Did she just sayâ€"

"It's a long story," said Twilight, who was now an Alicorn. "We're still getting to grips with it."

"Hey, how come SHE gets to time travel?" Dash asked. "I'm the one who can travel at, like, faster than uncool..."

\* \* \*

><p>171.5 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Rainbow Dash flew into Mac's bar and leaned heavily on the counter.<p>

"Strongest you've got and most undetectable, stat!" she groaned, eyes darting towards the door.

"Okay Dashie, truth time, what's wrong?" Twilight's curiosity was peaked and thus she leaned in to hear what got Dash so worked up.

"Starlight Glimmer did it again, tried to mess up my first Sonic Rainboom," the mare sighed, holding a hoof up to stall her friend. "Only this time, Glimmer decided to go after my family first, and..." she groaned, faceplanting into the counter.

"Wait, are you saying what I think you are saying Dashie?" Twilight's mouth was curling up into a grin and right on dramatic cue, a certain mare entered the bar.

"There you are, my little Dashie!" a much older Starlight Glimmer bounded over to the pegasus mare, wrapping her hooves around the Element of Loyalty tightly in a hug. "So this is where you and your little friends go to have fun?" she then turned and flashed Twilight a big and honest smile. "I have heard so much about you Twilight, and all your adventures with my Dashie here!" Glimmer then, with Rainbow Dash still in her forelegs, used her magic to lift out a big thick book. "Care to see some pictures of my Dashie when she was little?"

"Mom!" Dash squeaked out, her face going red as her step mother showed her friends the only pictures remaining of the time that Dash was in the ballet.

\* \* \*

><p>171.6: (ORBSyndicate)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Gravity Falls: Friendship is Magic 5: Gideon and Ghosts.<p>

Go to the Tent of Telepathy, Twilight had thought. It'd be a good idea, Twilight had thought. It would annoy Stan and it would be much more interesting than watching the utterly brainless TV shows this Loop had, Twilight had thought. Maybe he really was psychic and could be interesting, Twilight had thought. This could be fun, Twilight had thought.

Now Twilight was being levitated in midair with a pair of shears directed at her face.

She was really, really, tempted to just burn the little ventriloquist dummy and get it over with, but he had an air of importance about him that Twilight had learned to detect from millennia of looping.

So that was out of the question.

To be honest, Twilight hadn't really expected it to go like this. The strange boy had asked Rarity on a date. (The thought of which was absolutely disturbing to begin with.) Rarity had shut him down.

The First time it was a gentle "no".

The next time involved a bit of slapping.

The third turn down Rarity called her friends (or siblings) in.

It was quickly discovered that the little "psychic" was a big. Fat. Creep.

Who also, for some reason, had a folksy voice that made no sense in an eight year old.

"Y'all are in the way of my sweet Rarity Diamond! I will have her! Ya hear? YA HEAR?"

Applejack had done her human-form-buck to get the boy far faaaaaar faaaaaaaaaaaaaaaar away.

And yet, somehow, he was back, using his now apparent psychic powers to point a pair of shears at Twilight's face.

She cursed herself for thinking his plot line was over.

"Nowâ€¦ You are just one of five in the way of my conquest of Rarity! She will be mine!"

"Look, Gideon. You probably aren't aware of this but back home she already has a guy. He's named Spike and he's quite niceâ€¦"

"I SHALL BLOW HIM OFF THE FACE OF THE PLANET!"

"Yeah okay kinda figured you'd say thatâ€¦" Twilight muttered. "Was worth a shot I guessâ€¦"

"Now be a good little sheep and lose your faceâ€¦"

"GIDEON!" The voice of Rarity yelled throughout the warehouse.

"Darlinâ€¦?" Gideon said, a smile growing on his face. "I knew it! You've come to me!"

"Yes yes now put my sister down pleaseâ€¦"

"Of course my sweetâ€¦" Gideon said, lowering Twilight.

What happened next involved Rarity levitating Gideon's necklace right off him, and then proceeding to toss the pudgy child around like a golf ball.

"OW! OW! HEY! DARLIN! I THOUGHTâ€" "

"YOU THREATEN MY FAMILY, HAVE THE NERVE TO FORCE YOURSELF ON ME, AND ABOVE ALL WANT TO WIPE SPIKE OFF THE FACE OF THE PLANET!" Rarity stared deep into Gideon's eyes. "YOU. MADE. A. BIG. MISTAKE."

Twilight was quickly reminded why she never got Rarity madâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>Gideon roared. (Or tried to, with all his bruises it kinda came out as a MArGFFF!)<p>

His amulet was gone. His precious Rarity had just been mind controlled to beat him up. How cruel!

She was being kept away. That was the only answer. She couldn't think that of him. He was a true gentleman!

Gideon was not known for his knowledge in the matters of romance.

He pulled out handmade dolls of the entire pines family and set them up on a replica of the Mystery Shack.

Kid was beyond creepy.

Gideon picked up the Twilight doll. "What are you going to do without your precious amulet?" He mimicked.

He grinned, pulling a book out of a bookshelf. "Ohohohohâ€| You'll see. You'll see." He looked at the cover, which displayed a golden six-fingered hand with a "2" on it.

Far away, both Pinkie and Rainbow Dash twitched. They exchanged glances.

"How'd you get that?" Pinkie said, confused. "You don't have Pinkie Senseâ€|" "

"Noâ€|" Rainbow said, looking at Journal 3. "But I do have thisâ€| I wonder what it means?"

Pinkie, with a faraway look, spoke in a monotone voice. "That plot is comingâ€|" "

"What?"

"Dashie you seriously aren't going to make a butt joke about that remark?"

Rainbow Dash was completely bewildered. "I. Wait. What? Plot? But. Uhâ€|" She shook her head. "What's that got to do with anything?"

"AB-SO-LUTELY NOTHING!" Pinkie said, grinning.

Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes, not thinking more of it.

\* \* \*

><p>"So. Uh. This is awkward. Today's the day one of you is supposed to get a crush on Wendy, or at least reveal it to everyone." Stan said, looking at all six of them awkwardly. "Uhâ€|"<p>

Everyone stared back at him blankly.

Pinkie spoke first. "I PUT FORTH APPLEJACK AS TRIBUTE TO WENDY!"

"PINKIE!" Applejack yelled. "You do realize there are TWO problems with that right? One, I don't want to. TWO, she's the older sister of Applebloom this loop! IT'D BE LIKE DATING MYSELF!"

"Aw okayâ€|" Pinkie said, dejected.

Twilight frowned. "Isn't she like three years older than us? In this age range that generally isn't an accepted thingâ€|"

Stan shrugged. "I said nothing about her returning the affection."

"Ah. Tragic and overused plot line."

"Tell me about it." Stan said, proceeding to choke on some Pitt Cola. "Anyway, you kids probably want to join Wendy and her friends in their little outing. Go forth and have fun."

Rainbow Dash and Twilight shrugged. Why not.

\* \* \*

><p>"STAAAAAAAAAAAAAN!" Twilight yelled at the top of her lungs as the entire abandoned convenience store's gravity went upside down.<p>

"I'm going to punch him when we get back." Rainbow Dash muttered.

Wendy looked at the two of them. "What's he got to do with this?"

"Uhâ€|" The two of them said, trying to think of a way out of this,

A possessed Fluttershy quickly provided a distraction by blowing up a shelf full of popcorn.

"Okay okayâ€|" Twilight said, thinking hard. "There's probably some reason behind this and we have to be able to solve this without sending Pinkie crazyâ€|"

Rainbow Dash quickly flipped through the Journal. "Umâ€|" There's some stuff in here about using a silver mirrorâ€|"

"Yeah I don't think that's going to work." Twilight muttered. "Since we have no silver mirrors."

"Check your Pocket."



"Ohâ€¦ Wait. I've got it. What was everyone else doing when they wereâ€¦" "haunted?" "

"Being sarcastic? Cellphone?"

"TEENAGER STUFF!"

"Soâ€¦" Rainbow Dash blinked. "It can't be that simple. No. It can't."

Twilight poked her head out. "HEY GHOST!"

"\*\*YES?" \*\*Not-Fluttershy said, turning a full 180 with the head.

"I'M NOT A TEENAGER!"

"\*\*OH I'M NOT SURE ABOUT THAT. YOUR MIND IS VERY IMPRESSIVE, THERE IS NO WAY YOU'RE THAT YOUNG.\*\*"

"Oh. Great. The one time being a Looper is a disadvantage-"

"WHAT THE HECK IS A LOOPER?" Wendy asked.

"Uhâ€¦" Rainbow Dash said, looking around nervously. "How about we just agree that that'd take too long to explain and just scar your mind more than it already is?"

"Ah." Wendy responded.

Twilight was quickly levitated by the ghost, andâ€¦ just vanished.

Rainbow Dash blinked. Twilight would have at least tried to defend herself at that point. How did the ghostâ€¦"

Pinkie roared, revving up a pink flaming chainsaw. "ALLRIGHT GHOST! This is an exorcist's old weapon from something so long ago you couldn't even comprehend the eon! AND I WILL USE TO SEVER YOU FROM FLUTTERSHY!"

"\*\*WON'T THAT HURT HER?"\*\*

"Eh probably but she's been through worse."

"\*\*YOU WILL NOT USE IT!" \*\*It said, snapping Fluttershy's fingers (in such a way that made them break.) The chainsaw vanished.

Pinkie began to light herself on pink fire. Her voice deepened. "\*\*You are going to regretâ€¦" \*\*"

"Wait!" A little voice said, running into the room. Applebloom fell to the floor, Sweetie and Scootaloo close behind her. "These are our friends! Please don't hurt them! We're just kids!"

Fluttershy was instantly dropped and a pair of old ghosts appeared. "Oh just wonderful! Children! Hello there!"

"Hi!" Sweetie said, suddenly not as afraid. "Yeah can you not hurt

them? Please? They're nice!"

"And one of em's mah sister!" Applebloom yelled.

The two ghosts frowned. "We could let them go if you did a cute dance and song."

The Mystery Crusader's eyes lit up. They asked for the ghosts to give them their special costumes!

\* \* \*

><p>"TAKE YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS OUT OF HERE! THAT RACKET WAS WORSE THAN RAP MUSIC! WHAT ON EARTH IS WRONG WITH CHILDREN THESE DAYS?"<p>

The teenagers, mane 6, and Mystery Crusaders left the building running. Some from the horrible racket that the Mystery Crusaders had let out rather than the ghosts themselves. (Twilight hated that song. Every time it appeared, it was just bad. Not even the Looping crusaders could seem to sing that song well, although they had't tried that much.)

After they paused to take a breath, everyone began laughing.

"THAT. WAS. AWESOME!" Wendy yelled, high fiving some of the guys. Rainbow Dash whooped and Pinkie ate an entire packet of Smile Dip.

Fear struck Twilight's heart. \_Oh no!\_

For the moment, however, Pinkie didn't explode. That wouldn't last long though.

The teens were happy. The Mystery Crusaders were happy. Everyone was happy and laughing and having a good time.

Except Robbie, the annoying guitar player guy.

"Look at these kids! They're just lame kids who got us into a big mess!"

"Um!" Wendy said, cocking her head. "As I recall they saved us."

"Whatever." Robbie muttered.

Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes. What a dolt.

She quickly turned to the Mystery Crusaders. "Now! what were you three doing there?"

"Uh! Uh!" Applebloom said, trying to think of a way out.

"We were watching you!" Sweetie said, grinning.

"Why?"

"MYSTERIES!"

Rainbow Dash sighed. "It's likely going to get dangerous. Please stop watching us. And Scootaloo?"

"Yeah?"

"Stop drawing pictures of me in that notebook while I'm talking. Actually just stop it."

"What? But how did you know?"

"Maybe I'm psychic." Rainbow Dash said, grinning. "Now stop watching us. We don't like to be spied onâ€¦"

Fluttershy walked up. "I mean, we forgive you, but it is a little creepyâ€¦"

The three hung their heads. "We're sorryâ€¦"

"Oh don't be sadâ€¦" Fluttershy said. "You can hang out with us now! I'm sure everyone's really happy you saved them."

The three crusaders looked at the group laughing and having fun. "Ya think so?"

"I know so."

"YIPPEE!"

At that point, the Smile Dip settled into the consciousness of Pinkie. "OHOHOHOHOHOHOHOHOHOHOHO I WANT \*\*MY CHAINSAW BACK!\*\*"

Everyone stared blankly as the abandoned store went up in flames.

\* \* \*

><p>"We're not gonna to spy for ya' anymore." Applebloom said, looking up. "It's rude and they're nice people."<p>

"Rainbow Dash is cooooooolâ€¦" Scootaloo said, trying hard to resist the urge to sketch.

"Basically, we're lettin ya do yer own work. We won't tell on ya though, yer nice enough for that."

"But we're going." Sweetie said. "You do your own thing."

As the Mystery Crusaders walked off to join their suddenly large circle of friends, their "employer" frowned.

Lyra folded up a large mint-green journal engraved with a design of two five-fingered hands.

She supposed she'd have to investigate on her own now.

All the better.

\* \* \*

><p>Obud Khduwvwulqjv-Slqhv<p>

\* \* \*

><p>171.7 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight groaned as she entered Mac's bar. "Can I get something for 'what the hay just happened' please?" The stallion slid her a drink, and she nodded in thanks.<p>

After a sip, she sighed. "Last loop was... okay, so Granny Smith was a changeling. And had always been a changeling. And for some reason, decided to moonlight as Vinyl Scratch and actually fell in love with Octavia. And then helped save the world by destroying the force field around a demonic basketball hoop so Celestia could do a slam dunk."

She threw her head back for another gulp.

"...Seriously. It was just... what. What the heck happened?"

\* \* \*

><p>Sleipnir jerked awake, pulling his head off the keyboard.  
"Wha-huh?!"<p>

Skuld glowered at him, arms crossed.

"Aw, crud." Sleipnir gave an embarrassed chuckle. "Sorry, I was just... I was just up all night, checking my daughter's room for monsters, you know how it isâ€"

\* \* \*

><p>171.8: (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"So... what is it about Starlight's time travel that gets you so riled up?"<p>

Twilight groaned as she enchanted another loop-unique book and put it aside. "Every time I cycled through that portal, there was a different timeline. That's seven timelinesâ€"baseline! Not counting the variant timelines where something else happens, which don't really matter because Yggdrassil can 'forget' them easily." She pulled another book off the shelf and inserted it into the datascanner. "Even now that I know how to short-circuit Starlight, it's not guaranteed to work, and it's not always her that casts the spellâ€"plus, it took me a couple of tries to figure out the wording, which means the timelines iterated enough that Yggdrassil is trying to firm them up." The scanner beeped and glowed red, so she put the book back on the shelf. "That means that the next few expansions are actually going to be 'sideways' instead of 'forward', because Yggdrassil is going to be busy trying to fill out the gaps, so we're going to end up in the Sombra war, or the Changeling resistance, or the Nightmare realm or the world of Chaos or Tirek's reign of terror or Flimflam incorporatedâ€"I don't even know how that

happened!"

Rainbow nodded. "So, all the extra timelines are bugging you?"

"That's only part of it. A big part, but..." Twilight sighed, turning away from her task. "Time travel is delicate at the best of times, Dash. And with Yggdrassil in the state it is, we're nowhere near the best of times. I'm worried that she's going to make some minor change to the spell, some unique variant... I'm worried that she's going to pull a Lyra on us. I mean, I know that Sleipnir is watching constantly, but with the sideways expansions and how hard it is to pin her down before and after the village, all it would take is one little detail and bam!" She slammed her hoof on the floor. "Equestria glitches out of existence." She turned back to the shelves. "I know it's not likely, and I know she's intelligent enough to try to avoid that, but she's not looping, Dash. She doesn't KNOW. That spell is dangerous."

\* \* \*

><p>171.9 (Scorntex)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"The night shall lastâ€"!"<p>

Nightmare Moon stopped, looking about the hall of startled and terrified ponies, her ears twitching.

"Did anypony else just hear that?" Several ponies numbly shook their heads. After a few seconds the armoured alicorn shrugged.

"Oh, well. Where was I?"

"The night shall last forever?" Fluttershy murmured. Nightmare Moon nodded.

"That's right." She coughed, and raised her wings once more.

"The night shall lâ€"there it is again!"

Several ponies in the audience, now feeling slightly less terrified, exchanged odd looks and confused glances (Pinkie Pie, meanwhile, just looked disappointed).

As for Twilight Sparkle, she was examining a bowl of punch she conveniently happened to be nearby.

For while Nightmare Moon had been mini-monologuing, the bowl had been shaking.

Somehow, she had a horrifying suspicion that this had something to do with the fact that all of the Crusaders had been missing since shortly before she'd arrived in Ponyville.

"Really," Nightmare Moon demanded, "I cannot be the only one here who can hear it. No-one?"

Fluttershy raised a hoof. "I think I can hear it, your

highness."

The ripples in the bowl were increasing, and now Twilight was certain over the murmur of the crowd that she could hear something herself.

It sounded like something going \_thoom\_.

"You know what? Never mind, I shall deal with it in a moment," the dark alicorn declared. She coughed again, but with much less patience this time.

\_thoom.\_

\_thoom.\_

\_thoom. thoom.\_

"THE NIGHT SHALL LAÂ€!"

Twilight wasn't actually certain if Nightmare Moon actually finished her declaration, as just halfway through the roof caved in, when a great green copper hoof effortlessly smashed through it, splintering wood and glass as it descended towards Nightmare Moon.

About the only thing missing as the poor mare was flattened instantly was a comical sound effect.

Twilight looked up through the sizable hole in the roof, and saw the sight of the Statue of Harmony (which was kind of obvious, with the giant metal hoof and all) standing there.

Over the noise of bits of building still falling, Ponyville's citizens reacting with their customary restraint and caution, and a muffled moan from Nightmare Moon, Twilight could hear music (Sweetie Belle, from the sound of it) coming from the surprisingly animated statue.

That, and the distant sound of Scootaloo and Diamond Tiara arguing over who got the "next go".

She sighed, as she prepared a lecture on animating statues and/or historical monuments, and why while it was fun, it was also very wrong.

\* \* \*

><p>171.10 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Not surprisingly, there was mass panic in Ponyville.<p>

"It's the end of the world!" one pony shouted, looking up at the celestial body in the sky that was coming closer.

Surprisingly enough, it seemed to be appropriate for once as the moon was jerking erratically in the sky while all the time coming closer to Equus.

Twilight Sparkle, Anchor and mage supreme, was already on the case and she was not amused by what the cause was.

"Lemon, quit it!" Nyx Sparkle giggled and snorted as her fianc  ran his wings along her side, her horn still glowing and attached to the moon.

Panting, Nyx turned her head to the purple mare banging her head against the wall. "Oh, hi mom, what's wrong?"

\* \* \*

><p>171.11 (Masterweaver) <p>

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie didn't even need her loop memories to hit to know this was going to be a bad one. True, she'd Awoken with a flat mane before, but the short-cropped tail and the distantly familiar scent of pony sweat on top of that made for a foreboding combination.<p>

Still, she wasn't quite prepared when the truth arrived.

Lunaâ€"dead, killed by a conspiracy theorist Twilight Sparkle when she returned. Celestia, raging, breaking Discord in two when he emerged. Chrysalis... missing, for some reason. Perhaps because Celestia forbade Cadence from ever leaving her sight after Luna died, or maybe staying hidden out of fear.

And then Sombra emerged...

She'd been warned by Twilight that this was likely to happen. Twilight didn't know where anybody but Applejack and Rarity would be in this timelineâ€”but Pinkie, oh, Pinkie rapidly assembled all the memories from her life, her service in the army, her partnership with her sister and the Unbroken Flyer. Her years, and years, and years of hate.

She sent out a ping. She got a few in reply. Then, with the power of lantern and chaos and force, she reached out to touch the mind of her anchor, languishing in a dungeon.

\_Twilight, please tell me we don't have to play this straight.\_

There was a moment of terse silence.

...not this time, Pinkie, \_ the telepathic reply finally came, almost relieved. \_Go be a beacon.\_

Normally, Pinkie's smiles were filled with cheer and endless joy. But just this once... just this once, she allowed herself a grin as grim and dark as the world she was in.

```
"iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiIIIIIIIIIIIIII**IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIT'S **_**PARTY
TIIIIIIIIIIIME!"**
```

The creature that exploded out of the barracks was nephrotic,

glimmering, cackling, and dusky dusky pink.

Across the battlefield it charged and danced, smacking soldiers away from each other, long curling arms taking darkened helms and throwing them into the massive maw. Mad laughter spun about, the confused armies finding themselves wearing colorful conical hats that oh so incidentally kept them shielded from any assault. Even Celestia paused as the monstrosity whisked past her, blinking in shock when five eyes seemed to wink eagerly.

Sombra quickly rose up on his crystal, but it was no use. The thing crawled up and curled around it like a tower, sharp teeth exposed. "OH HO HO HO! SOMBRA, DEAR KING SOMBRA. Are you afraid?" Its voice suddenly dropped to velvet. "You're the guest of honor here, Sombra. You shouldn't be afraid... no, I have something special planned for you. You... should be... **COMPLETELY TERRIFIED!**"\*\*\_

\* \* \*

><p>171.12 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>The Time Out Tale, Part 1<strong>

Cheerilee looked up from her papers as the school door was almost slammed open. Almost, because while the door did swing fast and hard, the pony with her hoof on it still had just enough control to bring it to an abrupt stop before there was any real damage. Of course, given who the pony in question was, such a level of restraint wasn't really surprising... although the unnervingly wide smile and the odd springs of hair curling away from her mane did give the schoolteacher some pause.

"...Hello, Twilight. Is there something I can help you with?"

"Yes, actually!" the unicorn chirped just a little too brightly. "You heard all the pings, I hope?"

"Yes. It... seems as if every looper's Awake right now." Cheerilee cleared her throat. "Is there a reason for that?"

"Oh, we're fillysitting. See, Sleipnir's kid got up to some antics with a dollhouse and a rubber duck and the Amala code and... well, apparently Al Saiduq is dealing with a minor case of Cathisophobia, the whole branch is locked down while the admins try to make sure Lucifer isn't looping, and guess where dear old dad decided to put his precious tyke in time out!"

Cheerilee noted the odd twitch to Twilight's ear. "Ah." She paused. "Is she... really that badâ€"?"

"Cheerilee, she's been staying with me for three days, and while I normally try not to leap to conclusions, I can very definitively state that she is worse than... than..." Twilight frowned, thinking. "...than Diamond Tiara as raised by prince Blueblood!"

The schoolteacher frowned. "Tiara changed in \_baseline,\_ as I recallâ€" "



"Yes, I get it, overly stereotyped, not fair to the filly, look Cheerilee I am really stressed out." The unicorn leaned forward with an earnest look. "I need some relief. I need some time where I can gather myself. Please, let me enroll her here; eight hours a day away from her might be enough for me to handle this."

Cheerilee looked into her Anchor's eyes for a long moment.

"...alright." She began pulling out the necessary paperwork from her desk, retrieving her Element of Generosity from her subspace pocket. "So, I assume since Sleipnir isn't here, you're her legal guardian...?"

\* \* \*

><p>Apple Bloom rose an eyebrow as she entered the schoolhouse, her eyes falling on not one, but <em>two <em>black alicorns seated near the front of the class. The one on the left was familiar, at the least; a frazzled blue-purple mane, weary slit indigo eyes, and just the hint of fangs in her forced smile. The one on the right, though...

Her luxurious crimson locks cascaded from around her elegantly spiraled horn, rippling to a rest between an incredible set of delicately feathered wings. Her eyes, gold with violet speckles, stared haughtily at Nyx as though judging her just worthy of attention. Apple Bloom glanced about as she moved to her seatâ€"yes, yes, all the colts were staring at her astounding form, some part of their hind brains trying desperately to jumpstart puberty.

The farmer leaned toward Sweetie. "So, we got a Sue this loop?"

"Worse." Sweetie discreetly nodded to the pair of black ponies. "Apparently that's Sleipnir and Epona's kid. As in, the Admins."

"Nyx told us that she's been locked into Equestria for a loop," Scootaloo confirmed. "So basically, she's a brat and now we have to deal with her."

Silver Spoon let out a sigh. "Come on, just because she's a red-and-black alicorn doesn't mean she's a bad pony. Maybe she just made a little mistakeâ€" "

"Ahem." Cheerilee stood in front of the class, absently nudging the Element of Generosity around her neck. "Class, before we begin, I'm sure some of you have noticed our two new students. I know many of you remember Nyx from the Summer Sun celebration, and I've been assured she's been trying to make friends with many of you, so I don't think I need to introduce her to anyone. Especially not after yesterday's little ice cream incident."

There was a smattering of giggles from the foals, and Nyx blushed. The other alicorn briefly had an expression of confusion, about to speakâ€" "

"The other, however, is a last minute transfer." Cheerilee smiled gently at the red-maned filly. "Why don't you come up and introduce

yourself to your classmates, dear?"

Apple Bloom noticed the way that the filly paused, considering their teacher for a brief moment. Almost instinctively, she summoned Smart Cookie round her own neck; to her left and right, she saw the other Founders flash into being.

With utmost regality, the black alicorn stepped out of her desk and walked to the front of the classroom. She gathered herself, looking just a touch nervousâ€”but only a touch.

And then...

\*\*\*"BEHOLD THE GLORY OF JORUNN! CHILD OF THE GREATEST OF DEITIES, SORCERESS SUPREME, APOTHEOSIS OF ALL! SHOULD YOU WISH TO WORSHIP SHE WHO IS BETTER THAN EACH OF YOU, YOU WILL FIND NO OBJECTION! SING WHATEVER HOSANNAS YOU SO DESIRE!"\*\*

The filly stood, panting and grinning before the stunned foals. For a moment, everything was silent.

Diamond Tiara's shoulders slumped, letting her head meet her desk in a simple and elegant expression of aggravation. Apple Bloom reached out and patted her comfortingly.

Cheerilee sighed. "Yes, \_well.\_ I'm afraid I cannot allow hosanna singing during classtime. Please take a seat, Jorunn."

\* \* \*

><p>"...and so, after the Count surrendered, Fillydelphia became the first township to have an electorally selected mayor." Cheerilee turned from her easel of education to look to the class. "Does anypony want to tell me what that meant for Equestria?"<p>

Twist hesitantly raised a hoof, clearing her throat as Cheerilee gave her a nod. "Um, the ethablithment of local governernth for all townth in Equethria?"

"That's absolutely right Twist!"

Jorunn flipped her mane dismissively. "And having said that, you have made your sole contribution to this classroom, township, and country and will now fade into obscurity."

Cheerilee frowned at her. "Jorunn, Twist is your classmate and I expect you to treat her as such."

The alicorn scoffed, giving her a challenging look. "And just how \_am\_ I supposed to treat my classmates? Let us not forget that I am inherently superior to them, simply because of my heritage!"

"Being more powerful, or having more powerful parents, does not make you superior." Cheerilee gestured to the easel. "I \_just\_ finished explaining what happened to a pony who thought that."

Jorunn glared. "So you want me to prove my own greatness?"

"I \_want\_ you to treat everypony with respect."

"And what have they done to \_earn\_ that respect?"

"They \_exist.\_ That's enough."

"Um..." Twist cleared her throat. "Miss Cheerilee?"

The schoolteacher broke off her glare competition and shook her head, giving the filly an apologetic smile. "I'm sorry about that! I shouldn't have gotten caught up in... well, ahem. Where were we?"

\* \* \*

><p>"...and that is how my father saved your entire world for the fourth time," Jorunn finished grandly, staring out at the enthralled masses... well, alright, they were <em>only</em> her classmates, but apparently that was important enough.

"Um." A tall, yellowy orange colt in the back raised a hoof. "I... don't remember any of that happening."

"Well, of course you wouldn't. Only the ponies that were looping then would!"

"Oh." After a moment, the colt raised his hoof again. "So, um... your dad sounds... awesome?"

"Merely AWESOME does not even \_BEGIN\_ to approach the \_\*\*MAGNIFICENCE\*\*\_of \_\*\*SLEIPNIR ODINSTEED!\*\*\_"

"Hey, if your dad's so awesome," squeaked the rotund bluish-green colt next to him, "what are \_you\_ doing \_here?\_"

Jorunn's feathers tightened for a moment, but she rallied quickly. "My presence here is a test of my own skills. I was placed in this world to train my powers, and in so doing become \_worthy\_ of joining my father in his glorious duties!"

"Oh yeah? How?"

"Iâ€!" Jorunn's hoof held in the air for a moment. "I... am not sure, but I KNOW that I can complete ANY task set before me! That is why I was granted the magic of your unicorns! THAT is why I have the WINGS of the PEGASI!"

There was a quiet moment.

"Er..." Apple Bloom cleared her throat. "And... the strength of the earth ponies?"

"Whâ€"? Ahem, \_yes\_. I have THAT as WELL!" Jorunn decreed haughtily. "In fact, I'll prove it! Right now!" She hopped off the table she was standing on, putting her forehooves underneath and straining. "Watch in, unngh, unabashed AWE, unf, as I \_easily\_, nnnrgh, lift this \_fjandinn Ã¼ngur borÃ° ViÃ°skiptamiÃ°stÃ°!\_"

The foals, looping and none, watched with flat gazes as she struggled to gain purchase on the grassy ground beneath her, trying to lift the wooden picnic table with various grunts and groans of effort.

Eventually she did manage to nudge it to the side, letting out a heavy breath. "What... what kind of enchanted wood is this made from?!"

"Ah'm thinkin' apple," Apple Bloom deadpanned.

"Could be oak," Nyx added with a shrug.

"You're not actually an alicorn are you," Twist stated. "You're a... what'th the word? Pegacorn?"

"I... perhaps I do not, in fact, have the strength of the earth ponies," Jorunn allowed. "But that does not LESSEN my deific HERITAGE in the slightest!"

"Oh come off it!" a pegasus colt snorted. "You're just building up all this pretend story about your dad being some awesome hero because you're jealous that you're not a princess!" He stood up, walking away from the audience of foals. "Come on, guys, recess is half-way over, let's not waste any more time on her."

"What?!" Jorunn cried, waving her hoof as the other foals began to get up and follow the pegasus. "That is preposterous! Every word that has left my lipsâ€"well, every word in regard to my father is real! What are youâ€"where are you all going?! Get back here! ÃŹÃ°  
Ã¼risvar-bÃ¼lvaÃ°ur bÃ¼rn! \_Hvernig dirfist\_ Ã¼Ã° hunsa glÃ¼sileika minn! \*\*Ã¼g mun rÃ¼fa sÃ¼lir yÃ¼ar Ã°t og nota Ã¼Ã¼ eins og smjÃ¼r!  
\*\*\_\*\*Fjandinn ykkur Ã¼ll!"\*\*\_

"Just ignore her nonthenthe," Twist advised the others. "My mom thayth ponieth like her thrive on attention."

\* \* \*

><p>Cheerilee frowned to herself. This was the third day in a row that Jorunn had opted to remain in the schoolhouse during recess. The crusaders had, of course, explained what had happened, and today it was Silver Spoon who was sitting next to the black pegacorn; Jorunn was fiddling with her magic, trying to grip a pencil in her telekinesis.<p>

"...I wish I was back home," she grumbled. "I could just shapeshift hands... why didn't Father \_tell\_ me earth ponies had magic? If I'd known, I'd have made sure my mortal vessel had it too!"

"Most ponies don't get to choose how they look at all," Silver pointed out. "The only reason \_I\_ can shapeshift is because of hard work and a random glitch."

"Yes, you earned that gift, I've heard the story." The golden magic levitated the pencil half an inch off the deskâ€"before shorting out with a violet spark. "GAH! I rigged my unicorn powers to be incredibly potent, but this Ã³heillvÃ¼nlegur lÃ¼tiÃ° stafur keeps \_mocking\_ me!"

"Power and control are two very different things," Cheerilee explained calmly, putting aside the papers she was grading for the moment. "You're actually doing very well for a filly of the age you assumed."

"That was Mother's one stipulation," Jorunn grumbled, flexing her wings. "She let me have a coat as ebony as her own hair, and the red mane of great uncle Thor, but I would appear as a child of the pony race. I did not realize it would come with so many restraints..."

"And what would you do if those restraints weren't there?" inquired Cheerilee. "If you could do all the things your parents can, if you had their power, what exactly \_would\_ you do?"

Jorunn frowned. "I... Well, I wouldn't use Equestria as my dollhouse. Doing that is the reason I'm stuck here in the first place."

Silver blinked. "That raises so many questions I didn't know I wanted to ask."

"Still, that doesn't answer the question of what you \_would\_ do," the schoolteacher pointed out.

Jorunn was silent for a while.

Then she tried to levitate the pencil. This time, though, it caught on fire.

"AAAAARGH! Til fjandans me! Ætta! Æg hata Ætta Ærl-ti! stafur, Æg fyrirl-t Ætta heimskur heim, og Æg er orðin lei Æ; h; Æi \_barna Æeir h³ra\_ er Æg neyddist til að sk³la me!"

Silver Spoon frowned. "Their mothers are actually mostly respectable mares, Æ sk-th|ll."

The black filly whirled on her. "Wha€"\_you understood that?!\_"

"Kindness. Omniglot. Speaking of which, Miss Cheerilee!" She raised a hoof melodramatically, waving it for attention. "Jorunn said a bad wooooooooord! Are you going to wash her mouth out with soap?!"

Cheerilee shook her head. "The soap treatment can have terrible side effects." She pulled a drawer open and withdrew a bottle of Listerine. "I prefer mouthwash."

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm worried about her."<p>

Twilight looked up from her cup of tea. "Who? Jorunn?"

Cheerilee nodded. "When she first came to my classroom she made a speech. 'Behold the glory of Jorunn,' and all that. But after she tried to show off in front of her classmates... well, she's grown more withdrawn. Especially around nonloopers." She took a sip of her own drink. "And around loopers she just... grumbles a lot. Curses in that tongue of hers..."

"She threw quite the tantrum the other day," Twilight revealed. "Demanded to know what it takes to become an alicorn, and€"well, she didn't take it very well when she realized she'd need to find a cutie

mark first." A weary chuckle escaped her lips. "I swear, if this keeps up Davenport's going to be one rich pony."

The teacher nodded to herself. "I did notice she didn't have a mark... do you think it's possible for her to attain one this loop?"

"I... maybe?" Twilight wagged a hoof. "Cutie mark magic is a mystery in baseline, and even with all my research there's still a bit of weirdness. And Jorunn isn't all here anyway, technically; as I understand it her actual extra-dimensional form is basically VR'd into Equestria." She rolled her eyes. "I don't know if I've ever heard a more literal interpretation of 'bring your daughter to work day'."

"Still, from our perspective—which is being forced on her, if I understand correctly—she's still got quite some time left in the loop." Cheerilee rubbed at the flower-shaped jewel round her neck. "...actually... I think I'll test it."

"What?"

"I'm going to try to help Jorunn get her cutie mark," she explained. "It might do her some good. It'll give her something of her own to be proud of. Not something she needs to piggyback off her parents."

Twilight Sparkle nodded. "Well... I guess you did always care for your students a lot. It's worth a shot."

\* \* \*

><p>"Hmm." Apple Bloom tapped her pencil on the paper. "Well... we could throw her through all our baseline attempts... wouldn't necessarily help her reputation, mind..."<p>

Scotaloo shrugged. "At the very least, we'd get an idea of where her interests lie. We can work on directing her attention after that."

"I don't know girls... a lot of this seems to be more about her position in the pantheons," Sweetie mused. "Maybe we should run through the Norse and Celtic lists, see if there's anything missing?"

Cheerilee sighed, rubbing her forehead with a frown. "I should have known that this would be more complicated than I thought..." She gave the fillies a small smile. "Thanks for taking the weekend to help me with this. I know you must have your own plans—"

"Eh, this is more important than trying to set Braeburn up with Lil' Strongheart again." Apple Bloom rolled her eyes, idly scribbling down some basic crusades. "Honestly, Ah can never tell which way he swings... every loop it's always either stallions or mares, never both, even when he's interested in people outside his species. Never bi. Statistically it's weird as all get out, but there ya go."

Sweetie gave her a look. "Huh. Is there a trend in either direction?"

"Not any real big one. It's always ten loops or less in one direction or the other."

"Wow, that is weird. A near-even binary split trend... We'll have to talk to Cadance to figure out what that means."

Scotaloo cleared her throat. "As much as I adore talking about a cowpony's sexuality, I think we should focus on our current project. Besides, he's obviously a closeted ace."

Apple Bloom blinked, then facehooved. "Why didn't Ah think o' that?! Herd based society in early industrial revolution, obviously asexuals would not know what they areâ€"

"Well, to be fair," Cheerilee pointed out with an amused smile, "you three don't have a track record of recognizing a pony's romantic preference."

"Hey, the love poison was just one time!" Scotaloo objected. "And me and Di are just taking it slow, is allâ€"

"Wait," Sweetie Belle interjected, "you're dating Diamond Tiara?! When did this start?!"

"She was getting kind of annoyed at friendzoning Alula every loop, my in-loop parents were always seeking to pair me up with some rich colt, we decided to give it a shotâ€"I mean, we're not sure if it's serious or not, but this has been going for a few loops now."

"Huh." Apple Bloom looked at the pegasus. "Ya know, that would explain why you're missin' every fourth saturday. It's just... you and Diamond?"

"Berry's dating Discord," Cheerilee pointed out.

"Yeah, but... they're both kinda weird. Ah'm tryin' ta figure out what it is that would keep Scoots and Diamond together..."

A great and massive roar resounded from outside the house. The four of them shared a look.

"...I don't think we had any monster attacks scheduled for today," Sweetie Belle mused. "Maybe we should go check that out."

\* \* \*

><p>"GRAAAAA! YOU PATHETIC LITTLE PEST!" A massive red claw swiped at a black spot in the sky. "GIVE ME BACK MY GOLD!"<p>

"GefÃ°u Ã¼aÃ° til baka? Hvers vegna Ã¼tti Ã°g gera Ã¼essi Ã¼Ã° grÃ³in eÃ°lu?" Jorunn dodged the swipe and blasted at the claw with her magic. "Ã°g Ã¼tlar aÃ° nota allt hoard Ã¼ og ganga Ã°r mundlaug Ã¼ viÃ° Ã¼aÃ°, svo aÃ° Ã°g geti \*\*synt Ã¼- blÃ³Ã°i flÃ¼Ã°ir frÃ¼ lÃ¼-k Ã¼itt!\*" She grinned maniacally as the crown she was holding juggled from one hoof to the other.

"DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU FACE?! I AM \*\*VERTRAINZER THE GRAND, TERROR OFâ€"!\*"

The red dragon blinked as Jorunn rammed into his chest.

"...What are you doing."

"Glæðilega blað mitt má; gata brjóstið og setja hjarta á mitt á eldinn!" the tiny pegacorn cried, pushing her head into his thick scales. "Logarnir verður ljós á; nánur himinnur á- margar vikur til að koma!"

"...you do realize I don't understand you, right?" Vertrainer sighed, reaching down to pluck Jorunn off. "Of course I'd have to deal with the crazy pony hatchling... Now why don't you give me that crown and AAAAARGH!" He opened his claws and tried to shake the filly's toothy grip off.

It was at this moment that the twenty-four associated bearers of Harmony (and Angel Bunny) all gathered at the mountain base. Twilight Sparkle pulled a megaphone out of her subspace pocket. "Okay! This fight is over! Mister Dragon, please put the filly down!"

"This crazy pony attacked me!"

Twilight sighed. "Jorunn, please stop attacking the dragon. And give him back whatever you stole!"

"I WILL NOT BE DENIED MY GLORY!" Jorunn crowed, flying high and lancing a beam of magic up the dragon's arm.

"See?" The red reptile gestured at the filly. "She's the one pulling all this!"

"Is she actually hurting you?" Twilight asked through the megaphone.

"Well..." Vertrainer raised a claw, and then lowered it awkwardly. "No, actually, she's not."

For some reason this only got Jorunn to scream louder. "Þú mun mala beinum þáar á- ryki og ganga á þá kákur á þá af þeim!" She dove at his wings. "Þú mun ráfa augun á þá hálftu á þá þú inni og umbreyta þeim á- mikla ráðum á- eigin hálftu minni!" Magic lanced from her horn. "\*\*\*\*\*Innyflum á á- n verður ... vera ... vera eitthvað virkilega fánst og skelfilegur!" Her hooves pounded at his scales. "\*\*\*\*\*Óg á tla að skera á stytta af má á þá hálftu á þá á-na!"

"...Well, now she's hurting me just a little bit." The dragon rolled his eyes. "Can you understand what she's saying?"

Twilight glanced at Derpy, who shook her head flatly. "You don't want to know."

Silver turned to Cheerilee. "How many bottles of mouthwash do you have?"

"As many as I need... Twilight, can I have the megaphone for a moment?"

The purple unicorn shrugged, handing it over. "Go ahead."



"Thank you. Ahem." Cheerilee brought the megaphone up to her muzzle. "Jorunn, fighting a dragon isn't brave, it's reckless. Especially if the only reason you're fighting is to prove yourself. What are you hoping to accomplish with this?"

"I FIGHT FOR GLORY!"

"You won't get any glory here. You'd be more likely to get glory if you helped your classmates out."

"NO! I WILL FINISH THIS!" Jorunn darted toward the dragon. "PREPARE TO Drrrkâ€"!"

Vertrainzer looked at the pony gripped between his thumb and forefinger, raising an eyecrest as he plucked a gold crown from her hooves. "This is mine." Without another word, he released her and turned around.

The pegacorn shook her head, slightly dazed by the grip but focusing on the large field of red in her vision. "Urrnrngh... GET BACK HERE YOU COWAâ€"!" She failed to notice the massive yellow wing until it clonked her in the head.

\* \* \*

><p>"Mmmmrnnngh. Unnn... hunh?" Jorunn's ears perked at the odd beeping sound she heard. Beeping... was she home?<p>

"Looks like you're up."

No... that was the voice of the teacher pony. So she was still in Equestria. But what would the beeping...?

Her eyes shot open and she catapulted to a sitting position. "WHAT BLASPHEMOUSâ€"?!"

"You were knocked out by the dragon's wing when he turned around," Cheerilee explained. "Dash managed to catch you before you hit the ground. The doctors say you're going to be fine, thoughâ€" "

"NO! I WASâ€"I was... No. Nonononono. NO. No..." Jorunn buried her head in her hooves. "Noooooooooooo... I was so close. I was so close."

Cheerilee frowned, but said nothing.

Jorunn started to sob. "WHY?! Why do you seem so determined to, to keep me away from everything?! Why... why... why..."

\* \* \*

><p>The students had, of course, heard what happened. There really wasn't any way to avoid it: A filly purposefully antagonizing a dragon would make news anywhere, especially in the small town of Ponyville.<p>

Their responses were... mixed.

"...she only did it for attention," Rumble pointed out. "She even said so herself! Everyone knows she attacked him 'for glory',

whatever that means!"

Twist shook her head. "I'm not thaying that'th not true, it'th jutht... how crazthy do you have to be to try that? How dethperate?" She glanced toward the schoolhouse. "Have you notithed she doethn't ever come to retheth with uth?"

"Yeah, so? She's trying to be all high and mighty up in her palace."

"Or maybe she doethn't have any friendth..."

"Nyx and her buddies seem to do fine with her." Rumble snorted. "I don't know why they're wasting time with her, but whatever."

Twist gave him a long look. Then she trotted toward the schoolhouse.

"Hey! Where're you going?"

"I jutht want to have a chat with Jorunn, that'th all."

"...Fine, whatever. We'll be out here once she's done yelling at you."

Twist rolled her eyes, pushing open the schoolhouse door. The fillies known to the rest of the class as the Nyx Six had always kept an eye on Jorunn in shifts, but ever since the dragon incident they'd really upped their attention; no less than three of them remained with the black pegacorn. Today it was Diamond, Sweetie Belle, and Nyx herself... and of course miss Cheerilee.

"Did you need something, Twist?"

"I jutht wanted to talk to Jorunn." The filly adjusted her glasses. "That'th okay, ithn't it?"

Cheerilee nodded, giving the sulking pegacorn a glance. "I don't have any problem with it if she doesn't."

Twist approached her classmate slowly. "Hey there."

"...Mmmm."

"...so. Uh... how've you been?"

"Why would it matter?"

"Um... becauthe you're... around," Twist managed lamely. "If you're here, then how you are matterth, right?"

Jorunn gave her a flat look. She picked up a pencil. "Does this matter?"

"...I'm going to thay yeth. Becauthe... becauthe you can write with it!" the filly claimed triumphantly. "Tho, thinthe you matter, what you write matterth, and that meanth what you write with matterth!"

The pegacorn stared at her, violet-flecked golden eyes half lidded.

"Look, my point with I... want to know how you're doing, because I kind of care about you. A friend."

Jorunn looked away. "We're not friends."

"But we can be, if you want."

"Why bother? Loop ends, you'll forget me, and I'll be back home."

Twist bit her lip. "That... Okay, I thill don't get that, to be honeth, but if it's th true that's th all the more reathon for me to be your friend now! Cauthe you've gotta treathure ponieth while they're around."

There were those golden eyes again, giving her that look. Twist stood firm, though, smiling back at her.

"...I suppose I was put here for a reason," Jorunn finally allowed, giving a reluctant sigh. "If you really must know how I am, I feel..."

She trailed off.

Twist nodded. "Yeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeth?"

"...I don't know. It's not sadness, sadness is active. But it's not boredom, boredom just... covers. It's... hollow."

"Lithleth?"

"...Listless," Jorunn agreed with a nod. "That's a good word for it."

"Huh. Well when I'm feeling down I can always go home and bake something. Maybe you could help me with that?"

"Well, I suppose. Not that I have anything better to do, and from what Apple Bloom's mentioned you willâ€œ"

"Ut-Ut-Ut!" Diamond interjected quickly. "That particular part of the future is something we don't reveal."

Jorunn blinked. "What? Why would you notâ€œ"

A pink hoof pushed into her muzzle, and Diamond shot Twist an apologetic smile. "Could you excuse us please? She'll be at your home later today, I promise, we just need to clear this up real quick."

"Uh... sure?" Twist tilted her head. "Are... are you god-child time travelerth too?"

"No, just ordinary time travelers. Long story, we can explain later." Diamond nodded toward the door. "For now, though, please?"

"Oh. Uh... okay." Twist backed out of the schoolhouse, returning to the rest of the foals.

"So?" Rumble asked. "Did she start swearing in that fake language of hers again?"

Twist frowned at him. "No, she did not. In fact, she's coming over to my place later. There!"

\* \* \*

><p>"...Thooooo," Twist said casually. "Why are you here, Mith Cheerilee?"<p>

"Well, I'll admit that Jorunn is a special case for me." Cheerilee gently ruffled the grumpy pegacorn's mane. "So I decided that I'd join her in her little trip over. Don't worry, I'm just here to keep an eye on her, you won't even notice me."

Jorunn said absolutely nothing. The grim scowl on her face was enough.

"...Ooooookay then." Twist turned to the filly with a wide grin. "Hey, wanna tell me where I make my thweeth?"

"That is what I came here for," Jorunn deadpanned, giving her a glare.

"Great!" Twist cried, pretending not to notice. "Come on, the kitchen is this way!" She grabbed Jorunn's hoof eagerly and dragged her into her home, Cheerilee following with an amused smile.

As soon as they entered, Twist went about gathering sugar and starch, peppermint and vanilla, various pans and pots, all placed around a central stove-top oven. Jorunn found herself stuffed into an apron, her wings fluttering rapidly as she was pushed toward the cookware. "What are youâ€"?!"

"Well, if I'm not going to be around after this loop thing you talk about a lot, I have to teach you how to bake thweeth now, right?" Twist grinned, slipping on her own apron. "Don't worry, I know what I'm doing, and if anything goes really bad Mith Cheerilee will pull you out of trouble."

The pegacorn shot a pleading look to the schoolteacher... who merely crossed her forelegs and leaned against a wall. "She's got a point."

"ÃžÃ° slÃ|gur svikari..."

"Just because I left my mouthwash at the school doesn't mean I don't take notes."

"I wasn't swearing," Jorunn smarmed, fluttering her eyelashes innocently. "I was only comparing you to my grandmother."

"Oh, you have a grandma?" Twist asked brightly. "What's she like?"

"Very intelligent, great sense of humor, accepts all

sorts."

"Thoundth like a nithe lady." Twist looked over her shoulder. "Uh... Mith Cheerilee, are you laughing?"

"No. Most certainly not." The schoolteacher couldn't keep a smile off her face. "You were going to show Jorunn how to bake sweets?"

"Oh yeah!" Twist turned back to Jorunn. "Tho what we do firth ith check to see if our cooking toolth are clean. We can do that byâ€"

Jorunn washed a wave of magic over the pots and pans.

"...um, what did you juth do?"

"Cleansing spell," replied the black filly. "This body is technically a construct, so I wasn't sure if it was immune to common Equestrian diseases, so I kind of sort of made purifying things one of my natural abilities."

"...riiiiiiiiiight." Twist decided not to press any further.

"The spell really does work," Cheerilee added from behind them. "I've seen Rarity do something similar once or twice."

"Rarity? Thweetie'th thithter?" Twist frowned. "How many of you time travelerth \_are\_ there?"

Cheerilee pursed her lips. "Let's see... four sets of bearers, that's twenty-four, plus Celestia, Luna, Discord, Cadence, Shining Armor, and Angel... an even thirty, I think. Oh, and Mac, can't forget him! Not counting the Founders, or Pinkie's A.I. granddaughter or that talking fruit hat she carries in her pocket... or Applejack's magical science fiction tree, that's another soul-bound intelligenceâ€"

She belatedly realized Twist was staring at her and coughed. "So, thirty-one regular timer travelers and a few associated others that kind of tag along."

"...um. Right." Twist shook her head. "I'm not even going to quethion it. Hey, Jorunn, what'th your favorite candy?"

"Rocks."

"...you mean rock candy?"

"No. Rocks."

Twist blinked. "But... you're not an earth ponyâ€"

"Not literal rocks, Rocks! They're... I don't know, they have nuts and raisins in them, and some spices..." She waved vaguely. "I think it's a kind of cookie."

"Oh... Oh! They're called Rockth cauthe they look like rockth, right?" Twist was already pushing away most of the dishes and putting together an assortment of ingredients. "Okay, what I want you to do ith to meathure out the ingredientth I athk for into thith bowl..."

\* \* \*

><p>171.6 continued (ORBSyndicate)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Gravity Falls: Friendship is Magic 6: The Diner<p>

Rainbow Dash stumbled into the Diner, clothing in tatters and looking like a haggard mess. Her wings were manifested, although folded up.

The patrons of the diner gave her a glance, but quickly got back to their coffee. It was way too early in the morning to deal with a harpie.

And it wasn't like they'd remember any of this in an hour anyway.

Rainbow sat down with the rest of the 6 and Stan.

"Uhâ€¦ Rainbow?"

"Yes Stan?"

"The only thing you're wearing for a top is a big leaf."

"I had to go with what I could find."

Rarity blinked. "You \_do \_keep extra clothing in your pocket right dear?"

Rainbow sighed. "Went through all five outfits today."

"What on earth were you \_doing?"\_

"Well Stan remember when I was trying to karate chop that plank of wood?"

"And you failed miserably?"

"I still think it was rigged."

Stan grinned. "So what if it was? You needed a lesson in humility."

"Uh-huh yeah. So I stormed off into the forest punching trees down and stuffâ€¦" Rainbow went on, taking the smoothie Derpy Hooves managed to bring to the booth without anything breaking in a spectacular fashion. After quick slurk, she continued. "And then I sorta got involved with some manataurs in a bit of a manliness testerâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>"HOLE OF PAIN!"<p>

"I CAN TAKE PAIN!"

"ACROSS A GORGE!"

"I CAN HAVE WINGS!"

"MUSCLES!"

"I HAVE WING MUSCLES!"

"WRESTLING!"

"TAKE THAT MANATAUR!"

"WARPAINT!"

"AAAAAAAAAA!"

"DRAMATIC SHIRT SHREDDING!"

RIIIIP!

"ONE HIT KNOCK-OUTS!"

PUNCH.

"YELLING FOR NO REASON!"

"AAAAAAAAAA (reprise)"

"EPIC TRAINING TAPE"

"THIS SOUNDS LAME!"

"DRAMATIC CRITICISM!"

"THIS SOUNDS LAME!"

"Tea Party."

"SMASH ALL DISHES!"

\* \* \*

><p>"Then of course I was told to, for the final test, kill the Multibear beast. Turns out he's a nice guy, even if he does have odd music tastes. So I returned and told the manataurs that I wouldn't do their dirty work." Rainbow guzzled the rest of the smoothie. "Then. Well. I went back and announced that I wouldn't do anything to the bear. Then"

\* \* \*

><p>"What are you some kind of girl?" Tirek, king of manataurs roared.<p>

"ACTUALLY YES!" Rainbow said, grinning, pulling the only dress (and last outfit) she had out of her Pocket. "TAH-DAH!"

Gasps were heard around the group.

"Man you guys are stupid." Rainbow observed.

"But.. Butâ€¦" Pupitaur said. "How? HOW ARE YOU SO AWESOME!"

"FEMALES CANNOT BE AWESOME!"

"RUN MY BROTHERS! RUN FROM THE ABOMINATION!"

Tirek stood, glaring at Rainbow Dash before enveloping her in flame.

\* \* \*

><p>"â€¦and that's what happened to my dress. My other outfits were consumed by the tests. Two by the hole of pain."<p>

Stan rolled his eyes. "That was dumb."

"I know." Rainbow Dash said, grinning. "I now know I can pass a manliness test."

"You didn't take out the Multibearâ€¦"

"I did bring them a T-rex head."

Stan blinked. "â€¦Fair enough." He said, chugging some Pitt Cola. (He had long ago mastered the art of swallowing the pit.)

Lazy Susan walked up to them, saying "WINK!" while looking at Stan. She giggled. He laughed nervously.

Rainbow Dash's face turned into a sly one. "Oh? Oh what's this? What exactly is happening-?"

"I told the Pinkie and Rarity that I \_didn't want to get hooked up with her this time!\_"

"Oh darlingâ€¦" Rarity said, a bit sheepishly. "But she seemed perfect at the momentâ€¦"

Twilight blinked. "What is WITH everyone and playing MATCHMAKER this Loop?"

"Demonic influence?" Pinkie offered, her eyes going completely white.

Stan blinked. "Just to be clear, she's NOT a demon. Right?"

"Oh no of course not." Rarity said, smiling.

"She's just a Goddess of Chaos." Fluttershy said.

Stan took a spit-take, launching the Pitt into Fluttershy, knocking her out cold.

"TWENTY MANLINESS POINTS!" Rainbow yelled.

Stan backed away slowly. "You don't meanâ€¦ one of THOSE Chaos Gods? Please no." Stan said, backing away, bad memories flashing across his mind.



"I take it you've been to 40k then?" Twilight asked.

Stan turned to glare. "I. Absolutely. Hate. Those. Guys."

"Oh the looping ones are much nicerâ€|" Fluttershy offered.

"Can it Empress." Stan grumbled. "WHAT is SHE?"

Pinkie stood on the table in front of Stan. "I am Pinkamena Dianne Pie Pines, Chaos Goddess of Parties, Fun Lord of the Sith, The One Who Sends Shoggoths Gibbering in Terror, the Joy of Faust, the One with Cosmic Pinkie Sense, the One who is Sometimes Made of Cotton Candy, the Pink One of Many Skills, Seer of ALL and BEYOND, The Koopa King's Former Roommate, Part-Time Eldritch Abomination, and I am here to SPREAD PARTIES!"

Stan just stared, unblinking. After what seemed like many long minutes, he spoke.

"So, worse then?"

"AB\_SO\_LUTELY!"

Stan turned to Twilight. "Yeah. She's the second most terrifying thing I've ever met."

"What's the first?"

"You'll find out." Stan said, his face clouding ominously.

"I already know." Pinkie said, staring deep into Stan's soul.

"Yep. This just got weird. Goooodbye." Stan said, standing up and walking out.

The mane six were left in the diner. "Soâ€|" Applejack said. "Anyone got a new shirt for Rainbow?"

"The leaf functions just fine." Rainbow said in a huff. "I can survive on my own clothing skills."

Applejack blinked. "Uh-huh. Yeah. You do realize that there's a caterpillar on it slowly eating it away."

"FIIIIIIIIIIINE."

"Ooh!" Pinkie said, grinning. "I have just the thing!"

And that was how Rainbow Dash ended up wearing a pink sweater.

\* \* \*

><p>Stan walked out of the diner, breathing heavily.<p>

That pink girl. That pink girl was justâ€|" bringing back many bad memories.

He was fully aware old loopers had really impressive resumes and he was fully aware that Pinkie wasn't listing even a small percentage of what she knew. He had heard about her, the Looper who was able to

retain many many many abilities between loops. The party pony. The creature that had only one purpose in existence: to party.

That wasn't what concerned him. (Although his rather unpleasant experiences with the other Chaos Gods had been horrid, he could at least understand them after a bit of thought.)

The vast majority of people he came across he could understand, analyze, figure out how to swindle or otherwise.

Pinkie defied that. However, plenty of people out-swindled him throughout the Loops.

No - What concerned him is the WAY she did it. Complete randomness. A look of all-knowing. Staring into spaces where there was nothing, and somehow knowing too much. A mind that is always working, continually plotting things out. A mental state that seemed random, but couldn't be, because it got so much done.

She was a being of nigh-unimaginable power.

And she had a mind frame suspiciously close to that of Stan's enemyâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>Lyra sat at the diner, observing. She was sitting at the same table as Berry Punch and Bon Bon, carrying on a conversation of sorts. In reality, she was just trying to look like she was. She had discussed with Bon Bon the art of pretend conversation. Bon Bon was controlling the topic, and Lyra was nodding and apparently fixated on the conversation. Berry Punch was there as an unwitting part of the plan: she was drunk as a skunk and was talking louder than a wolf howled, and Bon Bon was responding. With the three-way dynamic of conversation leader, crazy drunk, and quiet responder, it looked like they were having a very in-depth conversation to the casual observer.<p>

Lyra was, in reality, scribbling in her Journal under the table. (She had long ago mastered writing without looking at the paper.) And was making note of Rainbow Dash'sâ€| well wings. Not to mention that the girl was all beat up like she'd just been through a trial.

Lyra pondered this. Possible run in with the manataurs? Multibear? Nah the Multibear was a nice guy. Bit odd taste for music thoughâ€|

Pinkie and Twilight were the other ones she was watching closely. She had caught Twilight using magic effortlessly, which should be impossible. Everything Lyra ever found needed some form of energy conversion, and more often than not an incantation of some sort. From what she observed Twilight had just used magic with no outward change, no loss of energyâ€| Perhaps she just wasn't using enough or had some kind of magi crystal?

Then there was Pinkie.

Lyra had forty pages on Pinkie.

She still understood nothing.

Pink fire seemed to be a theme with her, as were the party cannons. She was either the most friendly person ever, or the most ominous. Lyra didn't get it.

The other three, Applejack, Fluttershy, and Rarity seemed more or less normal. Lyra suspected she just hadn't found out what they were capable of yet.

As the six of them walked out of the diner, Lyra folded up her book. "Bon Bon, let's go."

Bon Bon nodded.

The two left Berry Punch (drunk as a skunk) talking to nothing.

They walked out, carefully avoiding the red-hooded men surrounding the dinerâ€|

\* \* \*

><p>Ylen naq Fjrrgv r Qebcf fubhyq ernyy l gunax Oreel Chapu...<p>

\* \* \*

><p><p>

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

171.1: It isn't easy being imperialist.

171.2: Mercy Thompson. She hangs around Leah more.

171.3: ROT13.

171.4: Early Applejack-as-looper.

171.8: Confused?

171.12: Yeah, confused.

## 179. Chapter 179

172.1 (Vinylshadow)

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight paused in reading her book as five knocks sounded on her door. She didn't understand why ponies knocked on her door, the Library was a public place, after all.<p>

Sighing, she marked her place and opened the door.

"Hello Lyra...Lyra, Lyra, Lyra, and Lyra..." she said, already feeling the headache coming on. Five identical turquoise unicorns stood outside wearing identical sheepish grins. "Lemme guess, you want an explanation?"

"Yup."

"Unquestionably."

"Sure."

"Without fail."

"HANDS!"

Four Lyras looked at a fifth and Twilight arched an eyebrow.

"Aaanyway..." she said, "I'm guessing each of you is one of Lyra's personalities...but rather than your own unique bodies, you've simply been copied into Lyra's body..."

She blinked then asked warily, "Do each of you have the others' voices in your heads?"

The five mares exchanged glances.

"Aye-aye."

"Roger roger."

"10-4."

"Fo' shizzle."

"Beyond a doubt."

Twilight's eye twitched.

\* \* \*

><p>In the Crystal Empire, Cadence pricked her ears as a howl of frustration pierced through the howling blizzard and into the recesses of Cadence's palace.<p>

"I know that sound. That's the sound of a very upset unicorn..."

Shining lifted his head off her barrel and squinted, pricking his ears. "Huh...you're right. Those sure were the days, hm?"

Cadence grinned and nuzzled him. "Sneaking kisses when she wasn't looking? Oh yes..." she purred, wrapping her hooves around him and snuggling close.

\* \* \*

><p>172.2 (wildrook)<p>

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><p>Twilight blinked as she and her friends listened to Cheese Sandwich's rambling as Pinkie had asked the question involving his life's story.<p>

So far, she couldn't make heads or tails out of his story as the

story was mostly disjointed. It started from Pinkie's Surprise Party for Maud, then it mentioned something about a bait shop, then a disdain for sauerkraut. Something about being force-fed for...twenty-seven years? She kind of stopped paying attention when Dash got confused at the number of molecules on AK Yearling's plot ("Off by three?" Dash asked herself).

Spike was about to ask a question, but noticed Pinkie Pie listening intently...or what looked like it. They could never tell with her as they were hearing about the airship flight from hell (The albanian mares with high body odor, the young foal throwing up repeatedly, the flight running out of soda and salted peanuts, and the in-flight movie about a giant dome starring the Flim-Flam Brothers) not to mention the crash he survived, which Trixie would confirm to be slightly impossible ("Oh, the Equinity!" says Rarity before getting the couch out).

Then he got to the part about the disfigured pony with the seagull haircut and sole nostril at the Heart's Warming Inn fighting over a lucky snorkel. Applejack was more confused at the fight itself. She's not one for fancy mathematics like her brother, but didn't a degree need to be required in order to take out an appendix and to give a colon irrigation? ("Oh, my," Fluttershy muttered).

When it got to the part about the donut shop with no donuts, Spike wondered what kind of cruel joke was played on him. The answer came when Cheese Sandwich was given a box of one dozen starved crazed weasels, which made Fluttershy be the one to faint. The screaming he did was not helping the situation. It did show that he had love for a short time, although it was hard to tell whether or not they met a painter pony in one of the previous loops. Still, what kind of divorce involved membership to a record company? ("Ah know Svengallop's not a nice stallion," Applejack muttered, "but isn't that overreactin?")

However, things started to come to a point after mentioning that he got a part-time job at a Hayburger Joint, but putting out a grease fire with his face? Twilight wondered what kind of surgeon would make his face scar-less. Then it took a turn for a dark when he mentioned how he couldn't understand sarcasm and actually cut someone's hooves off with a chainsaw. Then the anecdote came up where when told somepony hadn't had a bite in three days, he bit their jugular vein (Once again, Rarity fainted).

"Anyways, um..." Cheese Sandwich said, spacing out for a bit. "Where was I? I kind of lost my train of thought." He then looked at his listeners as they were in various states of facial expressions. "Well, I guess this is a roundabout way of saying it. The whole point I'm trying to make here is... \*\*I! HATE! SAUERKRAUT!\*\*\*"

Twilight face-hooved at that while the others (sans Pinkie) were dazed and confused by the time the Heartsong ended.

"Eleven minutes and twenty-three seconds," Spike muttered, taking a quill and writing the record down. "Cheese Sandwich has us beat..."

"That's your life story?" Twilight asked him. "The timeline was all over the place...and all of that was due to having a diet of Sauerkraut?"

"Of course," Pinkie Pie replied. "When fed one thing for too long, you tend to go a little nuts." Applejack nodded, remembering her visit with the Pie Family.

\* \* \*

><p>172.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Riley blinked Awake, glancing around her room. "Okay guys, what's the plan for this loop?" she whispered under her breath.<p>

\_Hold on, mysterious voice, we're still getting our loop memoriesâ€"\_

The young girl winced and clutched her head as the sound of hundreds of marbles reverberated through it. If she could have thought through the haze, she might have questioned the whole 'mysterious voice' comment.

Thankfully, though, the headache went away as quickly as it came.

\_...okay, I can get us being emotional avatars in another consciousness,\_ a voice only she could hear groused. \_But why am \*\*I\*\* Sadness?\_

\_Process of elimination, I think. Sweetroll as Joy and Seapony as Anger is obvious, then Thief as Disgust because sometimes science is just creepy, and really a pony wouldn't be good for Fear so I wound up with that.\_

"Um... hello?"

\_There's that voice again... \_The new voice gasped. \_Waitâ€"Riley?! Can you hear us?!\_

Riley rolled her eyes. "I'm the loop anchor. Welcome to my mind, I guess. Who are you?"

\_Oh! I can take this one! \_The eager voice was accompanied by a sudden burst of amusement; probably whoever was replacing Joy. \_Hi, we're all Lyra Heartstrings! Well, kind of sort of. I'm Sweetroll, and then there's Pony and Seapony and Human and TheifScientistMiscellaneousOriginal. I'm taking Joy, Pony's sadness, Seapony's angerâ€"\_

"I heard you talking before. I think I can get that... hold on. You're all Lyra?"

\_Disassociative Loop Identity Disorder, \_came the voice with a twinge of sass. \_I accidentally broke my loop with a mirror and a time machine, so when I was activated I got a lot more loop memories than usual every loop. After a while, I made these guys to sort through it allâ€"\_

\_Quick question, \_interjected a sour tone. \_Do we have to act like our emotion all the time? Because I'm feeling a compulsion to mope,

which just isn't me...\_

"No, you can be whoever you want to be. But whenever you touch the console, I feel the appropriate emotion."

\_Wait, hold on, \_a nervous voice asked. \_Are you saying that \*\*we're \*\*responsible for your mental health?!\_

"...pretty much, yeah."

\_Well shoo-be-featherin'-do. You're \*\*screwed\*\*.\_

\_Oh come on, you two! \_chirped... Sweetroll, right. \_Having a little bit of crazy is perfectly healthyâ€"!\_

\_Whoa, hey, why are you banging on the keys?! \_demanded... the one with a lot of names.

\_I just want her to be happy with us! I mean we're going to be stuck here for a full loop...\_

Riley's growing grin was suddenly replaced by an annoyed frown.  
\_Well, don't force it. Just... act naturally, okay Sweetroll? Sorry about that Riley.\_

"You may want to get your own hand off the console," the young girl replied.

\_Wha-OH! \_Her annoyance vanished. \_Sorry about that. We're not used to having a jungian psychology setup...\_

\* \* \*

><p>172.4 (Vinylshadow)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Fate has been cruel and order unkind<em>

\_How can I have sent you away?\_

\_The blame was my own; the punishment, yours\_

\_The harmony's silent today\_

Celestia blinked Awake and found herself looking up at the familiar visage of the Mare in the Moon. Bringing a hoof to her eye, she wiped away the gathered tears and smiled a little as she heard her sister's voice, carried by the moonlight coating Equestria in its gentle glow.

\_How my deeds pain me as time stretches long\_

\_How could I have hurt them this way?\_

\_So rest easy now, my punishment's mine\_

\_The weight of my crimes are my own\_

Luna found herself on the surface of her beloved moon, looking up at

the familiar planet of Equus. She wiped the crystal tears that decorated her face and smiled as her sister's warm voice wrapped around her.

\_But into the stillness I'll bring you a song\_

\_And I will your company keep\_

\_Till your tired eyes and my lullabies\_

\_Have carried you softly to sleep\_

Celestia let the Heartsong flow out of her, shaping her magic as she held the moon in her magic. She could feel her sister on the surface, free of the taint that had touched her all those decades ago and she wished she could control the length of the banishment, but it seemed to be hard-coded into the Loop at a thousand years. Either sister could break it, but it wasn't always a surefire way and crashes were common.

\_But into that stillness you brought me your song\_

\_With your voice my company kept\_

\_For your tired eyes and sweet lullabies\_

\_In exile I pay you my debt\_

Luna sighed softly, closing her eyes, enjoying the distant touch of the sun's warmth. Every time she felt the sun on her coat, it reminded her of how the sisters would spend their childhood nights cuddled together, reading through old tomes and learning about history and magic.

\_Once did a pony who shone like the sun\_

\_Look out on her kingdom and sigh\_

\_She smiled and said, "Surely, there is no pony\_

\_So lovely and so well beloved as I"\_

Celestia grimaced. It varied from Loop to Loop. Sometimes she was a heartless tyrannical ruler, forcing her ponies to love in love and harmony according to her rule. Every Equestrian Looper loathed them and whenever they told Celestia about those kinds of Loops, Celestia congratulated them if they managed to end her reign or slap some sense into her.

\_Once did a pony who gleamed like the moon\_

\_Look out on her kingdom and sigh\_

\_Dejected she cried, "Surely there is no pony\_

\_ "Who loves me, or finds any love in my night."\_

Luna frowned. She knew every race on Equestria enjoyed her nights. It was the fact most of them didn't realize there was a Princess of the Night that sometimes irritated her, but she had grown used to it



over the Loops. She had thousands of friends to talk with, share stories and swap things with.

\_So great was her reign and so brilliant her glory\_

\_That long was the shadow she cast\_

\_Which fell dark upon the young sister she loved\_

\_And grew only darker as days and nights passed\_

Celestia closed her eyes and focused of memories of her sister. From foals, to fillies, to mares, to Princesses...they had done everything together. Sometimes they fought " it was nearly impossible \_not\_ to, with siblings " but they were rarely serious. After...that incident, Luna had let darkness into her heart.

\_So great was her pain, she rose in rebellion\_

\_Against those who cared for her most\_

\_She let the Nightmare fall on those she ruled\_

\_And threatened to grip them in permanent cold\_

Luna closed her eyes, clad in her sister's magic embrace. She let out a soft sigh and let her mind wander. She loved her sister, no doubt about it, yet there had been times she had rubbed her coat the wrong way and Luna had distanced herself, trying to find a balance.

\_Lullay moon princess, goodnight sister mine\_

\_And rest now in moonlight's embrace\_

\_Bear up my lullaby, winds of the earth\_

\_Through cloud, and through sky, and through space\_

Celestia opened her eyes and stared at her sister, who stepped forward and the two sisters shared a nuzzle.

\_Lullay, dear Tia, good night sister mine\_

\_Rest now in starlight's embrace\_

\_May this cool lullaby reach you in dreams\_

\_And ease you your passage of days\_

Luna opened her eyes and stared at her sister. Stepping forward, the younger sister gave her elder a nuzzle.

\_Carry the peace and the coolness of night\_

\_And carry my sorrow in kind\_

\_Luna, you're loved so much more than you know\_

\_May troubles be far from your mind\_

\_And forgive me for being so blind\_  
\_May my apologies find you this night\_  
\_And may my sorrow in kind\_  
\_Tia, you loved me much more than I knew\_  
\_Forgive me for being so blind\_

Celestia stroked over Luna's coat, murmuring tenderly to her, as only a sister could do and she felt the young Alicorn relax.

\_Soon did that pony take notice that others\_  
\_Did not give her sister her due\_  
\_And neither had she loved her as she deserved\_  
\_She watched as her sister's unhappiness grew\_  
\_Soon did her sister do what was demanded\_  
\_And gave to the Moonlight her due\_  
\_Breaking the Harmony, she saved her ponies\_  
\_And banished her, as a wise ruler must do\_

Luna felt Celestia stroke over her and she leaned into her touch, as only a sister could do and she felt the stress leave her body.

\_But such is the way of the limelight, it sweetly\_  
\_Takes hold of the mind of its host\_  
\_And that foolish pony did nothing to stop\_  
\_The destruction of one who had needed her most\_  
\_Such is the weight of the crown that we wear, sister,\_  
\_Duties we always uphold;\_  
\_May you forgive me that foolishness mine\_  
\_And live on with no burden upon your soul\_

Celestia wasn't entirely sure about the Nightmare. Sometimes it was Luna's feelings given form, others it was a parasite that fed on and magnified negative emotions. Both were things she despised " Nyx being the sole exception " and the Loops where she replaced Nightmare Moon were ones she detested, since she hated being reminded of her own flaws.

\_The years now before us, fearful and unknown\_  
\_I never imagined I'd face them on my own\_

\_May these thousand winters, swiftly pass, I pray\_

\_I love you; I miss you, all these miles away\_

\_The space now before us, empty and forlorn\_

\_I never imagined we'd face them all alone\_

\_May these sunless seasons swiftly pass, I pray\_

\_I love you, I miss you, all these miles away\_

Celestia murmured three simple words to her sister, ones that came from the core of her very being, words that never grew old and withered.

\_May all your dreams be sweet tonight\_

\_Safe upon your bed of moonlight\_

\_And know not of sadness, pain, or care\_

\_And when I dream, I'll fly away and meet you there\_

\_May all your dreams be sweet tonight\_

\_Safe upon that bed above the lights\_

\_And know not of heartache, fear, nor gloom\_

\_And when I dream, I'll fly away to meet you soon\_

Hearing those three words from her sister, Luna smiled and looked up into the face she adored with a smile and answered with two of her own.

\_"I love you."\_

\_"I know."\_

\* \* \*

><p>172.5 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"It's Hearth's Warming Eve, Lemon, so why can't you just enjoy it with me?" Nyx pouted up at her fiancé who had his forelegs wrapped around her. He was wearing the itchy sweater that Velvet made him and the joke antlers that Nyx had placed on his head after putting it on. Nyx gracefully wore the Fenris styled hairband along with the wolf and pony pattern sweater that Lemon swore he made for her. She was inclined to believe him as she stared at her engagement ring fondly before remembering that she was cross at Lemon for being a party pooper.<p>

"It's just that I am not really religious in that way, you know?" Lemon rubbed his chin against her head, causing the mare to blush a bit. "I mean, I have seen countless Santas, Krampuses, the whole shebang" Jack Frost and I even have a little score to settle ever

since he started that planetary snowball war on Fenris," Lemon huffed, blowing air into her ears, causing her to giggle. "But even with my long looping experience, I just can't really shake off my Imperial roots of not believing in gods and religiâ€" "

Lemon stopped speaking and stared straight at the window, frowning and making subtle movements to get up. "Did you hear that Nyxie?"

"Yeah," Nyx nodded her head, nuzzling against Lemon's muscular barrel to keep him in place. "Probably some animal in the bushesâ€" "

There was a loud \_THUD\_ on the roof of the cottage they were in, soon followed by loud scraping and then a horrendous crash. Both ponies sprang to their hooves and ran outside to find a rather large earth pony in a red suit, face down in the snow.

"Oh my spruce Lemon, that's Santa Hooves and he's dead on our lawn and it's your fault!" Nyx started to shout, causing Lemon to snap his head at her.

"Wait, how is this \_my\_ fault?!" Lemon shouted back, leaning down to check for a pulse, only to find a faint one. Without wasting any time, Lemon lifted the pony off the ground and moved back inside the cottage.

"I \_told\_ you to clean off the roof so Santa would have a safe landing and you said you did and you \_lied\_ to me!\_" Nyx shout caused the windows to rattle, her wings flapping furiously in the cold winter air.

"I thought you were kidding, Nyxie, when you said it was for Santa!" Lemon placed the pony on the couch they were just sitting on and then started to pace. "Okay, I've got an idea of how to fix all of this!"

"Oh?" Nyx asked as she used her magic to put the gifts back into the sack.

"Time travel spell; we go back in time and warn Santa about the roof!" It was not the best of plans, but it was the first one to come to Lemon's mind and he latched to it desperately.

Nyx peeked over her fiancÃ©'s shoulder at the injured pony and guilt made her mind agree to the somewhat reckless idea rather than the much more sensible idea of just healing the large pony.

With a quick spell, Nyx sent herself and Lemon back into the past to save Santa.

Unfortunately, they were a bit off the ground when Nyx sent them into the past... and directly in front of him.

As they landed in the bush, they both watched in mute horror as they startled the poor stallion off the roof.

As they watched themselves panic a bit, Lemon turned his head slowly to Nyx and saw she had a massive grin on her face.

"What \_now\_ Nyx?" he whispered to her, waiting until they teleported

back into the past to speak louder.

"You know what we've got to do now Lemon?" she said with some excitement in her voice.

"What are you thinâ€" \_No, \_I love you with all my heart but there is \_no\_ way I am doingâ€" "

"\_Please?\_" she asked, widening her eyes and making them twinkle a bit, causing Lemon to fold in an instant.

"\_Fiiiiiiiine\_, but you cannot tell \_anyone\_ that I going to do this, okay?"

"It's a deal!" Nyx said as they teleported into the past, leaving the two to move more freely. Nyx grabbed the sack of toys, Lemon closed the door to their cottage and ascend to his alicorn form. Nyx then used her magic to create a sled and tied it around Lemon's neck.

"Ready?" Lemon asked, with a grin emerging on his face.

"Ready, my trusty reindeer!" Nyx shouted back, laughter escaping her mouth as the two took off to save Hearth's Warming Eve, with a stallion in a cottage smiling to himself, crossing off a very special gift delivery before going back to Yggdrasil proper. It \_was\_ his time in the sun after all and he had a lot more stops to make.

\* \* \*

><p>172.6 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Little Mother, I am both mentally a fully grown adult and fully capable of staying up past the setting of the moon," Lemon certainly did not pout but it was sure like it. "So I do believe that I can stayâ€" "<p>

"Lemon," Fluttershy said sternly, wrapping a wing around her little colt. "Shhh," She then began to hum a few bars, causing Lemon's ears to twitch as he fought to stay awake, but his younger body was already giving in with his eyelids becoming heavy and his heartbeat slowing down. "You go out adventuring out tomorrow, but tonight is a school night. So it's time for you to go toâ€" " She blinked, looking down at Lemon who was already fast asleep.

With a gentle smile on her face, she lifted her son up onto her back and carried him off to his bed.

A simple loop like this was a real treat for her, she mused as she placed Lemon into his bed and tucked him in.

Looking as Freki and Geri hopped onto the bed and curled up near Lemon's face, Fluttershy bit a soft chuckle as she blew out the candle and closed the door.

\* \* \*

><p>172.7 (DrTempo and kingofsouls) [Kingdom HeartsMLP]

\* \* \*

><p>Sunset Awoke during a class. She'd been at Canterlot High for so many Loops she could do the classwork in her sleep. One time, she literally had done just that. Considering how boring this teacher was, she was tempted to do it again.<p>

"We have new students joining us at CHS," the teacher said. Next to her stood the students in question. The trio consisted of a dark brown skinned boy with brown hair; a second boy who looked younger than the first; he had green skin and blond hair that clashed with his skin; and a girl who had blue skin and light blue hair. They waved hello to their new classmates "Allow me to introduce Earth Shaker, Wayward Wind and Rainfall. They just moved into town, so please help them feel at home."

The three took their seats soon after. Wayward Wind sat next to Sunset, while Earth Shaker and Rainfall found a pair of seats in the back.

"Hey," he said, extending a hand towards Sunset.

"Hey yourself," Sunset said back; in her mind, she already had an idea as to who these new students were. "So, new in town?"

"Just moved in today," came the answer. "I'm looking forward to seeing everything here."

"I've lived here for a while." Sunset laughed mentally; when she meant 'a while', it was actually about thousands of years at least. "I could show you and your two friends around. Maybe after school?"

"That sounds great." Wayward Wind smiled.

"Glad to hear it, Ventus."

Wayward Wind's, Earth Shaker's, and Rainfall's jaws dropped, their mouths dangling for all to see.

"How did she..?" wondered Earth Shaker.

Before he could finish asking, Sunset cut him off. "Meet me on the soccer field at lunch. I'll explain there."

\* \* \*

><p>At the soccer field, the trio were curious. Ven asked, "How did you know our..."<p>

Sunset summoned her Keyblade, and Rainfallâ€"or rather, Aquaâ€"facepalmed. "Oh yeah. Mickey told us about you."

Sunset smiled. It was nice to hear her old friend remembered her after all these years.

"Glad to see you three are Looping. I did always want to meet you," Sunset explained and added, "Since we're here, how about a sparring session? I'll only use my abilities from your Branch, and you can

fight however you want. If you guys knock me out, you win. If I knock you three out, or you yield, I win."

Terra chuckled. "You're dealing with three Keyblade Masters, Sunset."

At this, Sunset raised an eyebrow.

Aqua replied, "Terra managed to pass the Mark of Mastery soon after we first Awoke. And Ven actually impressed Eraqus enough to take the Mark of Mastery with me and Terra one Loop."

Sunset shrugged. "Makes sense, considering how skilled Ventus was during that last battle." She breathed in and grinned. "Okay...LET'S DANCE!"

\* \* \*

><p>The four warriors summoned their Keyblades; as Sunset waited for her opponents to strike, she felt like something was targeting her.<p>

"Oh crap..." And then the first attack was launched. A barrage of blasts flew towards Sunset as she braced herself for the onslaught.

The trio, having fired their ultimate Shotlocks, watched as the smoke cleared. They were shocked to see Sunset still standing, not even a scratch on her.

Dusting her clothes off, she smirked. "My turn. METEOR!"

Aqua quickly formed a barrier, blocking the spell. Then, just as the barrier fell, Terra charged right at Sunset and used his Ars Solum attack. Sunset readied her Keyblade and parried the flurry of blows, the blades striking against each other with lightning speed. With the final strike, he leapt backwards to avoid a counter of Sunset's. Just as Sunset readied herself to chase him, Ventus leapt in, unleashing an Ars Arcanum combo. Sunset dodgedâ€"the blade just missing herâ€"turned her Keyblade into a whip, and aimed her strike for Aqua. The mage-knight did not react in time; the whip coiled around her leg and trapped her. Ven growled, his priorities shifting.

"Hey Sunset! FAITH!"

Sunset had to dodge out of the way of the mighty blast of light as it approached her, which caused her to have to let go of Aqua's leg and return her Keyblade to its normal form. The mage responded with a Seeker Mine spell, but to her surprise, Sunset managed to deftly dodge the homing attack. However, with Sunset distracted, Terra leapt at Sunset, intending to finish the fight with one mighty strike. The attack apparently hit home; Terra smirked.

Unluckily for him, Sunset managed to block it with her bare hands, which left him utterly shocked at the feat of strength. Terra was tossed away, hitting the ground. As he shook off the dirt, a clearly angry Ven, his face having a really mad look on it, used a Tornado spell, only for Sunset to dodge that as well, the attack eventually fading away. By now, the trio were getting annoyed at how things were going; every attack they had used was countered or blocked. Terra

slammed his fist into the ground, not happy that they were being so easily defeated.

Sunset yawned, saying, "That all you got?"

Aqua soon realized, "We can't just attack. She'll dodge or counter. She's just too experienced."

Terra wasn't one to give up, and as Sunset landed a Meteor Crash attack on Ven—who ended up getting hit by the rain of meteors and knocked off his feet—he decided to end this.

"DARK HAZE!" He surrounded himself with darkness and charged right at Sunset, hoping to land the strike that'd end this duel.

However, Sunset saw the attack coming and blocked Terra's attack with ease. As he was hit with a counterattack, Aqua frowned at his choice of attack; even now, after they had Awoken, Aqua was still worried about Terra overusing the power of darkness. In response, Terra shrugged, saying, "Ok, I got frustrated."

Sunset had taken this moment to set up a big attack. Darkness surrounded her, and she yelled, "DARK AURA!"

The trio quickly got out of the way of an onslaught of attacks as Sunset charged at them several times; she ended by slamming into the ground, dark energy flowing around her. The trio were knocked back by the attack, all three having taken a lot of damage.

The trio healed their injuries, and realized it was all or nothing. As if enacting an unspoken plan, the trio yelled out together, "MEGA FLARE!"

Sunset barely summoned a barrier in time, but the attack still did a lot of damage when the three powerful fire spells left a large flame in the blast zone.

Nothing a Curaga spell couldn't heal, though, which Sunset cast after the flames disappeared. As the healing spell ended, Sunset looked at her opponents only to see they had dispelled their Keyblades. Terra frowned, looking unhappy with the result, and said, "We yield."

\* \* \*

><p>As the trio caught their breath, Sunset offered them a Mega-Potion. Ven grabbed it, saying, "Thanks. I admit we stood no chance."<p>

Sunset smiled. "I've been Looping for millennia. Heck, my long series of Fused Loops when I began Looping put me in in many Branches that emphasized battle. I had to become skilled."

Aqua frowned. "Did all that fighting affect you?"

Sunset smirked. "I enjoy a good fight, true. But I haven't lost sight of the values of Equestria. I've always believed that people can change and become better people. But I also know that some people just won't listen."

Terra nodded in agreement. "Like Xehanort." Clenching his teeth, he



took a breath. "Sorry. Considering what he's done.."

Sunset shrugged. "Well then, how about some training? I've wanted a chance to learn the techniques you guys have."

Aqua laughed. "Don't expect us to go easy on you, Sunset."

"I won't go easy on you, either."

\* \* \*

><p>172.8 (KrisOverstreet, Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"No, you DON'T have DLID!" Breaking News shouted. "Your baseline is stable, for crying out loud!"<p>

"Okay, one, I've got enough personal distance from the Anchor that my personal background does flex quite a bit," Lyra replied with a growl. "TWO, I get an overload of loop memories every time I Wake Up. So yes, I do have DLID, and honestly I'm kind of insulted that you say I don't!"

"Oh, really? REALLY? Well I'm insulted that you're using my condition and pretending it justifies your... your weirdness!" the yellow unicorn cried, pushing her glaring face into Lyra's. "Do you know how much I suffer because of it? How, how hard it is to know your place when the whole world can't decide?!" Tears streamed down her raging face. "And here you are, with your fake multiple personalities and a stable relationship, and... and you... you just...!"

Lyra took a breath, shutting her eyes. "Okay... Okay. Okay, I... I'm sorry. I didn't mean to... I don't take your condition lightly, and I don't take my condition lightly, even if I seem a bit... silly, at times, about it." She put a hoof on the other pony's shoulder. "Look, April... I get that you're the one that pretty much everyone references when they talk about Disassociative Loop Identity Disorder. I understand that you feel like a case study at times, and... that's very stressful, both because it implies you're an authority on the subject and that you're, uh..."

"...broken?"

"Okay, see, that word applies more to me than to you," Lyra joked. "Since I actually almost literally broke my own history. But, yeah, the whole people looking at you with that mixture of pity and caution..." She sighed, waving a hoof. "Let's just say my human obsession doesn't usually net me many friends."

Breaking News, elsewhere known as April O'Neil, sagged to the floor. "It's... it's worse when they come from the turtles. From loopers. I know it probably doesn't happen as often as I think, but I've seen it..."

"Yeah."

The two of the sat in the empty room for a few moments, each looking

at their forehooves with their own thoughts.

"...DLID-B."

"What?"

"Disassociative Loop Identity Disorder Baseline." Lyra shared a look with her. "Ordinary psychological syndromes tend to have multiple manifestations, or be on a scale. Why not DLID? You have DLID-B, and I have... uh... DLID-P, for Personal History."

April snorted. "Wouldn't that be DLID-PH?"

"Nah, PH is for DLID caused by drugs." She looked at the blanks stare. "You know, because the pH scale defines acidity, and acid is slang... for... okay, the joke fell flat, I get it."

"It's not so funny when one of your punishment Loops has the whole universe revolving around telling kids not to do drugs," April grumbled. "Seriously, it's like you can't walk a block without finding a kid about to take a hit or something. And you get this overwhelming compulsion to spout an anti-drugs platitude every three sentences or so." The newshorse shuddered with memory.

Lyra stepped over and pressed herself comfortingly against April. "Need a drink?" she asked.

"Oh, yeah," April replied unironically.

\* \* \*

><p>172.9 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Now kids," Berry preached to the audience, "you all came here expecting me to tell you not to do drugs."<p>

She took a sip of her sherry.

"But I've just ingested alcohol," she pointed out with a wide grin, "so instead I'm going to say 'never do drugs without an expert's advice, permission, or monitoring!' Because that's really a lot less stupid."

"BRAVO!" cried the director, standing up and clapping rapidly. "BRAVISSIMO! OLÃ%, ENCORADA! MAGNIFIQUIS!"

"I dunno, Discord." The camerafilly stopped rolling. "I mean, it's funny, but too blunt. Mama, you want to rewrite for an expanded version?"

Berry shrugged. "Well, I am trying to get the message across to your age bracket. Give me five minutes."

\* \* \*

><p>172.10 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Excuse me, are you the current matriarch and or patriarch of the Hooffields and or the McColts?"<p>

Mama Hooffield gave the brown pony a glare. "What, do I look like a stallion?"

"Sorry, paperwork regulation." Ivory Scroll waved her parchment, neatly sidestepping a bronze teapot. "There was this whole mess a while back, but you really don't want me to go into the details.

"Hmph. Yeah, sure, I'm the Hooffield Matriarch. What's it to ya?"

"Well, I am here on behalf of the princess herself. She wishes me to inform you that her and her retinue are arriving next week."

"Really?" The old mare stuck a pumpkin in a massive slingshot. "For what?"

"Why, to take a vacation in her summer home, of course."

Mama Hooffield jolted, her hooves slipping and releasing the pumpkin early. "Her summer WHAT?!"

"Her summer home," Ivory repeated, tapping her parchment. "That is why she granted the Hooffields and the McColts this land in the first place, they agreed to construct and maintain a home fit for her majesty where she could relax away from the pressures of court."

"This is the first I'm hearing of it!"

"Really?" Ivory Scroll peered at her. "Well, that's really a shame. The contract was signed roughly two hundred and seventy five years ago." She pulled a large scroll from her saddlebags. "Her majesty was kind enough to provide me with a copy."

Mama Hooffield waved at her clanmates. "ALRIGHT EVERYPONY, STAND DOWN FOR A MOMENT! Got something I need to check." With an annoyed grumble, she trotted over. "I swear, if this is some sort of McColt prank... Gimme that."

Ivory Scroll allowed the document to be swiped out of her hoof, watching calmly as she ran her eyes over the wording.

"...'failure to deliver will result in the incarceration of employed parties...?' What the hay?"

"Incarceration means you'll be thrown in the dungeonâ€"

"I know what it means," the matriarch growled. "It's just... what, we build this summer home in a week or we get locked up?"

"And stock it with food," Ivory added. "Since this is a bit short notice, the princess and her retinue are bringing their own toiletries and whatnot."

Mama Hooffield looked from her, to the scroll, to the other hill, to her. A slow, horrified comprehension began to dawn. "This real?"

"It has the backing of the princess, yes."

"...oh my Celestia." She sat on her haunches. "A week. A week to get a summer home up."

Ivory glanced across the valley. "Well... you've gotten part of it up, anyway." She nodded towards the McColt fortress.

"THAT'S NOT!"

The matriarch paused.

"...not actually... the princess lodgings," she finished awkwardly. "It's, uh, for us. The Hooffields and... and the \_McColts\_." The word was all but spat out. "If'n you'll excuse me, I need to talk to my... business... partner."

Ivory watched her steel herself and begin her march. "I'll need that scroll back before I go!"

\* \* \*

><p>172.11 (kingofsouls)<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>â€"Realityâ€"<em>

\_"Hey Sadness?"\_

\_"Yes Joy?"\_

\_"Got a quick question. Why is Riley a pony?"\_

\_"That is a good question Joy. Riley, why are you a pony?"\_

"No idea." Laughed Riley, or Hockey Mind was she was told her name was in this loop. Everywhere around her, there were ponies. Some were pegasi, some unicorns, and some regular ponies like herself. What drew Riley's attention was the coloring, colors running the gamut no normal horse could ever be, and the marks on their flanks. A quick check through her memory told her that the marks were called Cutie Marks, each one representing an individual's special talent. Taking a quick look at her own flank, Riley saw her mark considered of a hockey stick with five circles in a line parallel to it, with the colors being yellow, blue, red, green, and purple in that order.

Riley never considered herself a pony person, but then again she never thought she would be a mage drawing mana from the land itself. "Gotta say, it's pretty interesting though."

â€" \_Headquartersâ€" \_

"It sure is!" Joy then bounded off, jumping here and there in a fit

of joy. "Oh, this is going to be so exciting! This is the first time we've ever been a pony and I want to see everything in this Loop!"

Sadness rolled her eyes, a sly smile on her face. Leave it to Joy to see the bright side of Looping every time she was Awake. "Hey Joy, I have a question."

"Yes Sadness?"

"Why is Riley a pony, but we're not?"

That stopped Joy in mid leap, frozen in midair. "Huh." Joy then floated gently down to the ground like a leaf. "That is a good question."

"\_Wait, you guys look the same?"\_

Sadness did a quick scan of the room, eyeing Anger reading the Mind Reader, Disgust fussing with her nails, and Fear trying his best to look brave. They all looked the same, unchanged in any way. "Guess we do."

"\_Huh. That's..."\_

"Weird, right?" Joy rushed in, rebounding back from the quick case of wondering why she wasn't equine. "It's almost as weird as..."

As if on cue, a large gasp was heard throughout Headquarters with such magnitude that Headquarters started to violently shake.

\_â€"Realityâ€"\_

Looping had prepared Riley for many unexpected things. Zombies, the Tri-State Area, an annoyed internet critic, and easily a dozen more random encounters that Riley could recall right here and now.

But there were somethings you just could not prepare for. The pink pony with three balloons for a mark let loose a long gasp that was equal parts surprise and equal parts shock was one of them. The pony then landed and a split second later raced into the horizon, a trail of pony shaped dust left in her wake.

\_"...that."\_

Riley just stood there, trying to comprehend the randomness. "...Let's just send a Ping out and see where to go next, okay?"

"\_Sound great to me."\_

â€"Laterâ€"

Twilight opened the front door, revealing whom had knocked: A young earth Pony with a yellow coat and brown mane. "Hi, and welcome to the Golden Oaks Library. How can I help you?"

"I'm looking for somebody." She replied.

Twilight responded with a warm smile. "Visiting Looper?"

\_"Wow, that was fast."\_

Riley was just as impressed as Joy was. "How did you know?"

"You used somebody instead of somepony." Twilight explained. She welcomed Riley in, her horn glowing as a teapot and cups hovered out of the kitchen. "That means this is your first time in Equestria, isn't it?"

"Sure is. I'm Riley Andersen. I'm the Anchor where I come from."

"Twilight Sparkle, and I am also an Anchor. " In a poof of magic, a table appeared and the teapot and cups gently sat themselves onto it. Riley followed suit, sitting on a nearby cushion.

Though she seemed to be lost in thought. "So...have any plans?"

Riley did not answer. "Riley?"

That snapped her out of her moment of distraction. "Oh? Uh, did you say something?"

"I was wondering if you had any plans this Loop."

"Oh. Well, Joy wants to see the world, and Sadness would like to read some of the books here." Riley answered. "As for me, I kinda want to do a little of both."

"Uh...who?"

"Oh. They're my emotions." Riley replied with a straight face. "They're Looping with me. Joy and Sadness are Awake, but the others aren't."

"Sounds a lot like the Postal Dude."

"I...don't think I met him."

\_"I haven't."\_

\_"I haven't either, and that makes me a little sad."\_

"Trust me, you not missing much." snarked the unicorn. "Anyway, since this is your first time here, Equestria is a sanctuary loop."

This was the first time Riley heard that term before when describing a Loop.

"Me and my friends try to have our Loop be one where visitors can relax after a stressful loop." explained Twilight.

"That actually describes my Loop. Not a lot happens besides my family and I moving to San Francisco, except when Joy is Unawake."

\_"Hey."\_

\_"It's true you know."\_

\_"Well Riley could have been a little more gentle."\_

\_"Nah, you did good."\_

Joy just sighed in resignation. \_"Thanks Anger.'"\_

"That bad?" asked Twilight.

Riley suddenly looked very nervous. "We...don't like talking about the weirder ones."

"That's the Loops for you." Twilight took a sip of tea, the brew untouched until that moment. "Anyway, tonight is when Nightmare Moon returns from her banishment from the moon, and it's a tradition to let visitors handle taking her on. You wanna try?"

"One second." Riley asked. She then turned her thoughts inward.

\_"What do you guys think?"\_

\_"I think it's a trap. I have no idea what any of you, Joy, Sadness and this crazy unicorn are talking about and trust me, this is bad news."\_

\_"Oh, live a little Fear! We got this! Riley has magic, and she's pretty good with it."\_

\_"I am not convinced."\_

\_"Fear is right," \_Disgust piped up. \_"We're a little overwhelmed with this Looping business. Heck, are we even supposed to be talking to Riley in the first place?"\_

\_"Doesn't seem to stop those two,"\_ Anger huffed.

\_"Uh...do you know I can hear you, right?"\_

There was an eerie silence in Riley's head. \_"Well that got awkward..."\_

\_"You think?"\_

Riley heard sadness sigh for the blue emotion poke up. \_"We're gonna need a little time to calm him down Riley."\_

"Thanks for the offer Twilight, but I think we'll sit this one out." Riley explained, fear obvious in her tone. "Fear gets afraid and right now he's probably mashing the panic button like his life depends on it."

\_"IT DOES!"\_

Well, you know where to find me if you change your mind." Twilight explained. "Oh, and before I forget, you might want to expect my friend Pinkie Pie dropping in."

"Oh? Why?"

Pinkie Pie suddenly shot out of the bookshelves, books falling like leaves. "TWILIGHT!" The pink party pony proclaimed, grabbing Twilight's head and staring into her eyes. "There's a new pony in Ponyville and I need to set up the secret welcome party for her so please don't tell her about the secret party because then it won't be a secret anymore! Kay thanks, bye!"

Pinkie Pie then raced out of the library via jumping out the window, Riley stunned in confusion. Twilight on the other hand was unfazed. "Oh, just a hunch."

\* \* \*

><p>(Masterweaver)<p>

Riley had to admit, Pinkie Pie's reputation was well-earned. Even unAwake, the mare threw an incredible partyâ€”doubly so when Twilight gave her a small list of loopers to invite.

"...so I suppose I'd actually be closer to Luna's Anger if it came down to it," Nyx commented, "although I only say that because Tanty here would obviously be her Disgust. Disgust is the self-loathing emotion, I think..."

"How does she work without you in her mind, though? I know that when I first experimented with externalizing my emotions, there were..." Riley bit her lip. "There were side effects..."

"Well, we're not strictly speaking emotional constructs. Nightmare Moon is either an external corrupting force or an insane persona \_constructed\_ by rage, and Tanty is explicitly an artificial construct meant for self punishment. Obviously we've both rejected our initial roles, although Tanty here sometimes needs a little spritzingâ€”"

"HEEEEEEEEEEEY!" A green unicorn jumped through the door, grinning widely. "Riley! Remember me?"

\_"Wait..."\_ Sadness said suspiciously.

\_"Is that...?!"\_ Joy asked warily.

"Lyra Heartstrings?!" Riley cried out.

"Yeppers kiddo! All five of us in one fancy package." She stuck out a hoof. "Good to meet you in the flesh."

There was a moment of silence.

Then Sadness and Joy both began yelling.

\_"YOU! DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU DID?!"\_

\_"WHEN WE WOKE UP THE NEXT LOOP THE MINDSCAPE WAS A MESS!"\_

\_"SEVEN CORE MEMORIESâ€”SEVEN! HOW IN THE NAME OF CARL JUNG DID YOU MAKE SEVEN IN ONE LOOP?!"\_

\_"ME AND ANGER HAD TO SPEND THREE DAYS IN LONG TERM SEPARATING YOUR MEMORIES FROM RILEY'S!"\_



\_"CHEMICAL WARFARE ISLAND! \*\*CHEMICAL WARFARE ISLAND!\*\* SHE'S A ZARQIN' PRETEEN!"\_

\_"THAT SEAPONY SONG SUPERCHARGES ALL EMOTIONS AND IS JUST AS MUCH AN EAWORM AS TRIPLE-DENT!"\_

The filly winced. "Er... give me a moment, I need to calm down my emotions..."

"Oooooooh." Lyra pulled back her hoof with a nod. "Yeah, tell them we did our bestâ€"actually, hit us up for a telepathic conference later," she amended. "It'd be cool to compare notes."

\* \* \*

><p>172.12 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Okay everypony," Twilight said with a wide grin, "I've gathered you here for a very, very good reason. Recently, I had a near-hub loop... and I managed to purchase something very, very special."<p>

The other ponies glanced at each other.

"Well, don't keep us in suspense darling." Rarity leaned forward. "What did you get?"

"Fillies and gentledrake... BEHOLD!" Twilight produced a metal octagon with a flourish.

Spike rose a claw. "Is that a film-reel case?"

"It is, INDEED, a film reel case. But the film reel within is very special, very precious, and very, very incredible." Twilight Sparkle rotated the case around so that its label could be seen. "May I present to you, the long awaited addition to one of the most foundational hub-world sagas... STAR WARS EPISODE VEE EYE EYE: THE FORCE AWAKENS!"

Gasps resounded through the room. Fluttershy held her hooves up. "Oh my... how did you get your hooves on that?!"

"It wasn't easy," Twilight admitted. "I had to spend a pretty penny and smarm my way into the right circles. I mean I could have just stolen it," she admitted, "teleport spell and all, but I wanted to go to the effort. Seemed fairer to the makers. BUT IN THE END! I got this new film, just for us." She paused. "...well, I may have watched it myself first. For reasons. But only once! Pinkie, you don't seem that enthusiastic."

"Yeah, sorry... it's just I think I looped into the expansion this is based on. I know living something's not the same as watching a movie and Luke had been through it a couple of times before, but..." Pinkie shook her head. "Look, I'm not going to spoil anything for the rest of you girls but there was this one idiot who really didn't understand the Dark Side."

Rainbow Dash frowned. "Um... Pinkie? You're a sith lord."

"I know! I'm an expert! And this guy took it the completely wrong way!"

"Be that as it may," Twilight managed, "if Luke was Awake and not running Baseline there could be a number of differences in the movie. Especially if you were helping him."

"Yeah... okay, set it up." Pinkie grinned. "Who knows, the movie might be awesome!"

\* \* \*

><p>172.13 (Gym Quirk)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"...First Age only happens once every thousand or so loops," OlÃ³rin said as he led the lavender alicorn past the gardens of LÃ³rien. "The vast majority of baseline loop starts are split between roping Bilbo into the Erebor trip, and setting up for his eleventy-first birthday party."<p>

UndomÃ« Tintila, sister of Nahar (known elsewhere in the multiverse as "Twiley", "Her Highness, the Princess of Friendship", "Egghead", "That meddling do-gooder pony", etc.) nodded as they made their way to the base of the mound of Ezellohar in the mingled gold and silver light of the two trees at its summit. "And this loop started after the Great Music, so we're stuck with Melkor in his baseline form then?" she asked.

"Alas, yes," the wizard-in-waiting said as they started up one of the paths that led to the top of the hill. "I try to mitigate the damage as best I can, but there's only so much just one mid-level maia can do, loop-augmented abilities or not. Anyway, you are welcome to treat this loop as a vacation. Ah, here we are," he announced as they approached the summit. "This is the reason why I was anticipating your Awakening."

At the crown of the wide hill were two trees, one glowing with golden light, the other silver. However, unlike the depictions she'd heard from tales told in Rivendell, or read from the Hub sources, they were not the slender graceful beings from elven song, but considerably more substantial.

They were both nearly identical mature oak trees of many yards girth. The arrangement of the branches was very familiar to any being who had spent any substantial amount of time in Ponyville. If one looked carefully, one could make out patterns in the bark that brought to mind windows and even a door. Twilight felt her left ear start to twitch.

"When I saw what Yavanna had wrought, I was fairly certain it would only be a matter of time before you showed up," said the maia, offering a comforting pat on the alicorn's shoulder. The equestrian Anchor produced a small holorecorder from her pocket and documented the sight for the next time she could have a word with Sleipnir.

"Gandalf? Are you aware of the speculation on how Yggdrasil, independent of the admins, has its own, rather twisted sense of humor?" asked Twilight, whose right eye had started its own counterpoint rhythm. "I'm adding this to the pile of supporting evidence." She felt a low burning anger start to build. "If Oromë decides on an expedition to capture Melkor, I think I'll tag along to go Ungoliant hunting," she added in a calm detached tone that fooled no one. "Actually, scratch that. I'll go on my own," she decided, pulling several implements of destruction from her Pocket for inspection, starting with a standard Seapony Diplomatic Liaison Package and working up from there.

"Um...Twilight?" asked Gandalf with growing concern.

"Oh. I'm sorry. Would you like to go with me?" she asked as she contemplated a set of the Elements of Harmony. "Using these solo can be very tricky, and there isn't any moon to send her to yet, so there's also that problem..."

"When I suggested that you might blow off some steam..."

"Having friends along to help use them also makes them more effective. I don't suppose you could think of a few more people around here who might be interested..."

"I fear I may have to insist..."

The alicorn paused and took a breath, schooling her expression into something a bit less disturbing. "Don't worry. I won't crash the loop, and I'll try to limit the property damage. I suppose I should prepare an apology letter to the Valar before I leave."

"Just a small problem with that," observed the maia. "Writing usually doesn't get invented until the Elves awaken, and we've got a fair amount of time before then."

Twilight just stared at him.

\* \* \*

><p><p>

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

172.1: Pentalyra.

172.3: Yeah, this one was obvious.

172.4: It's nice to have a song now and again.

172.5: Time To Save Hearth's Warming. I think.

172.10: You Don't Do That.

172.11: And this was basically inevitable too.

172.12: Metacritic.

172.13: Poor, poor Twilight.

180. Chapter 180

173.1 (Vinylshadow & Masterweaver)

\* \* \*

><p>Vinyl Scratch stared at her marefriend who had staggered into their home at some ungodly hour of the night.<p>

The cellist blinked and yawned as she put her case down.

"G'ev'in," she mumbled as she crawled on top of Vinyl and nuzzled her. "C'n I h've cuds please?"

"Tavi, you feelin' alright?" Vinyl asked, only for the mare to sit bolt upright, driving her knee into Vinyl's stomach.

"THEY LAUGHED AT MY CELLO. I PLAYED IT AT THEIR FUNERALS! WHO'S LAUGHING NOW?!"

Collapsing back on her fluffy blue-and-cream pillow, Tavi nibbled on Vinyl's chest fur.

"Riiight, well. I think I'll be canceling your gigs for the next month and taking you somewhere nice," Vinyl wheezed.

Octavia blinked tiredly. "Can it be a cruise?"

Vinyl felt her stomach drop as she remembered every other cruise she had ever been on and she bit her lip.

"...Yeah. That sounds...nice," she said with a smile. "Anything for you."

A loud snore greeted her, and Vinyl stroked Octavia's mane lightly.

\* \* \*

><p>"...Vinyl?"<p>

"Yes, Octavia?" Vinyl asked as the two approached the ship settled in Manehattan's harbor.

"I can't help but notice our cruise liner has various protrusions that look unnervingly like incredibly large cannons."

"Yeah, Apple Bloom has some quirks when it comes to ship design. Still, she got us a free ride on the maiden voyage. And hey look, there's a pool too!"

"You have that \_look\_, Vin."

"What look?"

"The '\_I wanna fire the cannons\_' look."

"...There's a look?"

"With you, yes."

"...I wanna fire the cannons."

\*\*\*NO.\*\*\*

"Leastways," quipped a passing filly, "not without mah permission. And supervision. There's a waitin' list in the auditorium, if you want to apply." She stuck a yellow hoof out to the shocked Octavia. "Captain Apple Bloom, pleasure ta have ya aboard."

Octavia shook the hoof. "Ah... nice to meet you."

"Likewise. If ya'll excuse me, Ah've got some things to run through before we depart." She saluted and trotted off.

"Heh. That's adorable. A filly pretending to be a captain."

Vinyl cleared her throat. "...Tavi, hon, she's not pretending."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Several hours later<em>

Vinyl, Octavia, Apple Bloom and several others floated upon the sea in lifeboats, watching the burning wreckage of Apple Bloom's pride and joy sink beneath the waves with a hiss.

"HOW?!" Apple Bloom wailed, "I designed that ship to be unsinkable!"

"And remember what happened to the last ship with such a claim?" Vinyl pointed out. "On the other hoof, I'm 12% sure this wasn't my fault."

"Twelve percent," Apple Bloom stated flatly.

"It was a very big, very hairy spider?"

The rescue ships that found them were later quoted as having "followed the screams."

\* \* \*

><p>173.2 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Soon, soon you'll be mine."<p>

Cadence raised an eyebrow at her husband, who was speaking to her belly as he rubbed it with his chin.

"Soon, one day soon, I just know it, you will be born and you will be our little foal." Shining smiled up at her, reminding her of the life that was inside her, the promise of what was to come. Her heart bloomed at the love she sensed in Shining's voice; tears formed in the corners of her eyes.

Still...

"You are such a dork," she scoffed playfully, leaning down to boop his nose.

"I know, but I am your dora"did you feel that?" Shining looked up at her with wonder and joy. Cadence had indeed felt that, and placed a hoof on her stomach.

Again, their little foal kicked, bringing fresh tears to the adults' eyes.

"One day soon, Cady," Shining said; as he felt with one hoof their foal making its presence known, he raised his head to meet hers. "One day soon," he said, and kissed her on the lips.

"I know." She smiled, nuzzling his head fondly. "I'm going to be a momma."

The two of them spent the rest of the day feeling their baby kick, marveling at this wondrous sight they had never thought they would get to have, waiting for the day when they would be able to hold their child at long last.

"One day soon."

\* \* \*

><p>173.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Sunburst loop location log #4593. Found easily. Current career..."<p>

Twilight sighed into her recorder.

"...entertainer at a gentlemare's club. Will have to engage in discussion to discover persona. Hold log."

It had seemed like a brilliant idea, trying to track down and quantify the various versions of this particular pony. No doubt if Starlight ever started Looping " which Twilight Sparkle had decided was somewhat likely, given the mare's time spell " she'd want to do a similar investigation herself. So preparing the information in advance was, in theory, a great idea.

In practice, it led to... well, this. Which had happened a good two hundred and thirty times. A statistical minority, but more common than it could be.

"The colt has a talent for magic that convinces his family to move to Canterlot," she grumbled, "and he chooses to sell his hooter instead of his horn. What the actual fern."

\* \* \*

><p>173.4 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Trixie, I am worried," Chrysalis said, nuzzling the blue mare affectionately.<p>

"About what?" Her attention diverted from her latest performance plans, Trixie blinked upwards at the changeling.

"About Cadance and Shining's baby," she said slowly, causing the showmare to stare at her with great confusion. "I mean, I don't know why, but I'm somewhat scared that I'll turn up in baseline trying something stupid, like spiriting their child away or something, and Iâ€"

"Sssh. Trixie will hear no more foolishness." Trixie placed a hoof over her marefriend's lips while doing her best to look sage. "Whatever the future holds, we all know that you won't do anything bad when you are Awake, and I really doubt our baseline will do that to you." Trixie stared into her eyes with more love than the changeling queen saw in a hundred Loops on her own. "And I will still be beside you, no matter what happens."

As she wiggled out of Trixie's silencing hoof, Chrysalis leaned down to nuzzle her again. "Thank you, my little lovebug."

"Anytime, my queen." Trixie smiled back as she went back to her plans, wondering if she should use more saws for her latest trick.

\* \* \*

><p>173.5: (Anon e Mouse Jr.; one segment by Masterweaver)<p>

**\*\*Ponyville's Lighthouse Library, Part 1\*\***

"Twilight?"

"Yes, Rarity?"

"Ermâ€| my Unawake self this Loop has been wondering about something since she was a little filly."

Twilight raised an eyebrow. "Go on."

"Ponyville isn't anywhere near the ocean, or any other large body of water, soâ€| why do we have a lighthouse here, and whose idea was it to make it the town library?"

Twilight shrugged. "Good question." She looked up at the Golden Oaks Lighthouse and Library (which, despite its name, had actually had its main body done up in five horizontal black and white stripes, while the uppermost section, where the lantern room was located, was all in black), and at the darkened light (since it was the middle of the day, and the sun was shining) at the top. "I've been looking in the local history section since I moved in, but I haven't found anything yet. And I even asked Princess Celestia, but she didn't know off the top of her head either."

Rarity nodded, and joined her in looking up. "Well, if you find out why, do share it with us, darling. It's not the oddest thing we've ever had in Ponyville, but it's still unusual enough to make more than a few of us wonder."

"Will do, Rarity."

"Hey, girls!"

The two unicorns glanced over to see Pinkie Pie next to them, her eyes fixed on the sky. "So, what are we looking at, anyway?"

There was a pause, and then Twilight and Rarity started laughing.

Pinkie looked at them strangely. "Um, girls? What's so funny?"

That just made them laugh harder.

The pink mare blinked. "What?"

\* \* \*

><p>Much later, Twilight and Rarity were facing Applejack, who had a simple explanation for them.<p>

(Masterweaver)

"It was for pegasi colonizers. Way ta avoid the Everfree."

Twilight stared at Applejack. "That's... that's it?"

"Well, Granny Smith could tell you moreâ€"apparently there are a lot o' mysteries about that ol' lighthouseâ€"but... that's why it was made, yeah."

Rarity frowned. "Well... that was... anticlimactic, really."

(Anon e Mouse Jr.)

Twilight quirked her ear. "What other mysteries?"

"Well, we're still not sure who actually built itâ€"or even who the first keepers were. Some ponies say there's a lot more to all that than what I told ya. But none of it's ever been confirmed." Applejack shrugged. "Plus, we still don't know who decided it would make a good library, or even who they were neither. There's lots of theories about all those things, some of 'em crazier than others, but none of it's ever been proven."

Twilight exchanged glances with Rarity. "Really?"

Applejack nodded. "Eeyup. What we do know is that one day about a hundred years or so ago, they hadn't heard from the keepers in a while, so somepony went inside to check on 'em and found the whole place was all full of books an' shelving, an' not a pony in sight. Then, when they went down to Town Hall, they found all the paperwork to make it into a library had been filled out an' signed so it was all legal. But they never found the old keeper, and they never found any proof of who'd done any of it or why, so they just shrugged and appointed a new keeper and librarian to run the whole place, an' it's been that way ever since."

"I see."



"For most of us, as far as we're concerned, it's just one of the town's little quirks, and there's nothing there to really worry about, so we leave it be. But sometimes, there are ponies who start to wonder, and all kinds of rumors spring up from that."

"Huh." Twilight looked in the direction of her lighthouse library. "Well, at least we know something more. Thanks, Applejack."

"You're welcome."

As the two unicorns walked away, if they'd been looking up at that moment, they would have seen a small silhouette in the lantern room, before it flickered and vanished.

\* \* \*

><p>173.6 (Vinylshadow)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Sparrow Jack, the intrepid captain of the totally-not-parked-in-the-middle-of-the-street-it's-slightly-to-the-left-thank-you Black Pearl swaggered into Sugercube Corner and looked around.<p>

"'Ello, fillies and gentlecolts and whatever species that lovely striped madam in the corner is, mind if I join you?"

The hustle and bustle of the confectionery store ground to a halt as everypony (and one zebra) stared at the dreadlock-maned pony in the pirate getup with varying degrees of dread.

Before anyone said anything, a voice bellowed from outside.

"OY, YOU!"

Sparrow turned on his hoof and gave as good as he got.

"I TOLD YOU, IT'S NOT PARKED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET! I LEFT A NOTE AND EVERYTHING!"

Shooting an apologetic smile at the patrons, he whispered a quick "Excuse me" and ducked out, where the tirade between him and what most guessed was some irate officer continued.

"You can't just leave your ship parked here! You're blocking traffic!"

"What's the problem? There's plenty of room right there, see?"

"You're also parked in Daisy's stallâ€"how in the blazes did you get a ship this far inland?!"

"Well, there was this freak windstorm and I knocked over some large green statue in the harborâ€" "

"WHAT?!"

"And then I nearly smashed into a mountain, so, swerving around that, I then brought it to land here."

"...You're lying, right?"

"Of course I am. That's the stupidest thing I've heard. No, I was brought here by crabs."

"...Crabs."

"Yes."

"...Alright. Just...nope, I'm not dealing with this on a Monday. Enjoy your day, sir."

\* \* \*

<p>173.5 continued (Anon e Mouse Jr.)<p>

## Ponyville's Lighthouse Library, Part 2

Two weeks later, Twilight was convinced that something was definitely up with her home.

She'd managed to handle most of the early problems this Loop (fortunately, Rarity, Trixie, Zecora and Diamond Tiara were all Awake to help out with that), and was now doing her best to find out what more she could about her library's history. That included visiting with the grandson of one of the town's founders, which is what she was doing just then.

"So, not long after a number of pegasi who were coming to Ponyville for the first time began having accidents around the Everfree, due to its wild weather getting out of hand, somepony proposed they build a large lighthouse to help with that." Filthy Rich frowned. "Funny, they never could identify who exactly made the proposal, since they never came forward after the initial suggestion. Then, after they'd picked out a site for it, when the workers went to break the ground to start construction for the first time, they discovered somepony had already put in a foundation overnight, and made it much larger than was initially planned. A couple of ponies, my grandfather among them, decided to watch over the site that night to try and find out who was responsible, but they never saw anypony besides themselves. Yet when the sun rose, somepony had added to it without their ever seeing a thing. It only took one week, from start to finish, before the entire thing was done, including the side building. And from then on, it was always lit at night, or during storms, before anypony could ever come near the building."

"Well..." Twilight looked surprised. "That's... very interesting. And they never found out who did it?"

"No trace of anypony was ever found," the older stallion told her. "Even the best mages from Canterlot couldn't find any traces of magic of any kind there. It remained a mystery for the ages."

"Wow." The unicorn mare looked at him. "What about a hundred years ago, when it got turned into a library?"

The Earth Pony stallion shrugged. "It was almost exactly the same."

Town Hall had eventually hired an official lighthouse keeper to watch over the place, even if they didn't have to do much. Then, one day, they stopped coming out, so somepony was sent in. And like your friend Applejack told you, they found the building had been converted into a five-story library, with living quarters still on the sixth story and the top being the lantern room, as always. Again, they sent for mages from Canterlot to investigate, but they never found any proof of who'd been there or why."

"What about the keeper?"

Again, Filthy Rich shrugged. "Who knows? Personally, I think they just moved away and didn't bother to give proper notice, but that doesn't explain who converted the lower floors into a library or why. Or how they even got in. Not that I'm complaining about it, mind you. I used to spend hours in there when I was a colt, and I loved every minute of it."

Twilight smiled. "Well, that's always nice to hear. And thank you for telling me all of this."

"It was no trouble at all, Ms. Sparkle. I'm always glad to help a fellow bibliophile and historian. Especially when my daughter speaks so highly of them."

Twilight's ears lowered as she blushed. "Ohâ€¦ well, thank you again, Mr. Rich. Diamond Tiara is a wonderful little filly to work with, and I'm sure she has a very bright future ahead of her."

A little while later, as she was walking the streets of Ponyville, Twilight glanced up, and her ears flicked back. The lighthouse's lantern was onâ€¦ and she could see movement up there! Alicorn instincts kicking in, she flared her (currently non-existent) wings and sped for home.

Her heart racing as she approached the building, Twilight let herself in and raced up the stairs. And finally, she burst into the lantern room.

Which was as empty as it had been before she'd left to visit the Riches.

Narrowing her eyes, Twilight scanned the room, both visually and magically, but still found nothing.

I am going to find out what's going on here, she silently vowed. By book or by crook!

\* \* \*

><p>More time passed, and Twilight continued her investigations.<p>

The strange silhouette she'd spotted before had appeared in the lantern room on several occasions since then, and she'd even spotted it moving around other rooms, but had never managed to catch it. Neither had Spike, who had Woken Up not long after her visit to the Rich home, and agreed to help search. But whatever it was had managed to evade her best scans and traps, and even Spike's Force abilities and Diamond Tiara's telepathic senses. Consequently, Twilight was

starting to get annoyed. Yet at the same time, she was having more fun than she'd had in ages.

But now, it was time to end this. Spike was over at Rarity's, and Twilight had seen the strange figure in the lantern room again just moments ago. They weren't moving, and this time, she was going to catch them for sure.

"I know you're in here," she told the figure as she opened the door to the lantern room. "Come out and show yourself!"

For a moment, there was no movement. Then, a small figure emerged from the shadows.

"I've been expecting you, Mama," Nyx said with a grin.

"Nyx?" Twilight gaped. "It was..." She shook her head. "Oh, I'm so glad to see you."

Nyx laughed. "I am too, Mama."

And then the two raced forward, and for a moment, there was no time for words. Only hugs.

When the two finally separated, Twilight held her hooves on her daughter's shoulders. "So, I take it you set all this up?"

"Yup!" Nyx grinned. "I woke up a couple hundred years early, through the Pony of Shadows. And since I needed to do something to keep me busy while I was waiting for you, I decided to set up a mystery you couldn't help but try to solve, once you were Awake."

"You certainly succeeded," Twilight told her. "So, why a lighthouse?"

Nyx shrugged. "I hadn't ever done anything like it before, so why not? I built this place, set it up so it'd drop into my Pocket at the end of the Loop like your own library does, and had a lot of fun "haunting" it on and off, just to give myself something to do and Ponyville something interesting to talk about every now and then. I was so happy when I heard Rarity asking you about it that day, because I knew it meant you'd come looking for me soon."

Twilight eyed her daughter. "But why didn't you show yourself to me sooner?"

"Because it wouldn't be any fun for either of us if you didn't have at least something of a challenge," Nyx replied. "I know how you get when you're trying to figure something out."

"You have a point there." Twilight leaned forward and nuzzled the filly. "You really are my daughter, you know that?"

Nyx nodded and nuzzled her back. "And I wouldn't have it any other way."

Twilight's smile only widened at that.

\* \* \*

><p>173.7 (Vinylshadow)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Time Turnerâ€"better known as the Doctorâ€"stepped out of his TARDIS and took a deep breath of Equestrian air.<p>

"Mmm...the perfect place to relax after a hard Loop of being a Raxacoricofallapatorian under the control of the Mighty Jagrafess of the Holy Hadrojassic Maxarodenfoe. Very hard to do anything with those beastly nails..."

Untying his tongue, he trotted into Ponyville's market. He browsed the stalls and eyed Applejack's warily. Usually when he was here and a certain pale olive filly wasn't Awake, he was brow-beaten into buying some applesâ€"or in the case of a few loops, pears.

Lucky for his stomach, Apple Bloom appeared wide Awake since she had her Cutie Mark and was selling...

"Cutie Mark Counseling! Three bits an hour!" she hawked. Which, thinking about it, was rather pointless in Ponyville due to the fact more than 90% of its population had Cutie Marks, except the young ponies.

"Shouldn't you be in school?" Time Turner asked the engineer, stopping in front of the stall.

"Nah, Cheerilee's Awake too and is currently studying Horse mythology."

At the Doctor's blank stare, she elaborated. "Norse."

"Ahh, I see. How interesting," the Doctor replied in a voice of one who's had tea with said deities and hadn't been impressed. "Not as bad as the Roam Empire's, I suspect."

Apple Bloom snickered. "No, probably not. What brings you to Equestria?"

"Eh, some giant technolotree broke and sent everything ever made into repetitive time loops to fix itself. You know how it is," he replied with a bored wave of a hoof.

"True. Well, I hope you enjoy your stay here."

"And you as well, Miss Bloom."

\* \* \*

><p>173.8 (HarmonyChaos)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Archmagister!" the Ghost of Starswirl yelled, running up to Twilight. "Something hath come out of the Astral Plane, and whatever it be, it seems powerful, at least as powerful as you are."<p>

Twilight frowned. If one of the other Houses or that accursed Cult

got in here, behind her shield, behind her proud unicorns, and attacked, things could get messy. "Bring me to it! If it's the Cult of Laughter..." She shuddered, though not from fear. Her unicorns could handle them. They had the power of Celestia and Luna on their side! She got up and ran out with Starswirl.

They arrived a few minutes later to a table of Equestria. Starswirl ran past it, apparently getting a fix on whoever, or whatever, it was. Trixie walked out and joined them, along with two Knights, one of Celestia, the other of Luna, and two Legionnaires carrying an Arcane Manipulator who, upon finding an Earth Pony, forced him to pull it along. It was all they were good for. Well, that and she couldn't have any of her precious unicorns dying before the slaves were dead... and she begrudgingly supposed that they were necessary for food production.

"Who could have done this?" Trixie asked as they came to a room full of unconscious ponies.

"Whoever it was, they know their stuff," a Nightmare named Shadow Stalker said as he appeared beside Twilight. "A room stun and sleep spell combo, barely got out of here myself. I am sorry to report that I didn't get a good look at the intruder; I only know that it's a she and she's purple. I'm sorry I couldn't get any more info."

Twilight gritted her teeth together. "It's fine, so long as you're alright."

"I am, and I believe she was heading to the balcony."

"Good, I want you to go and lock the intruder in." Twilight grinned; she wouldn't be stopped here!

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight was looking all across the shattered remains of what was once Equestria, now nothing more than a shadow of its former glory, no thanks to her counterpart in this timeline she assumed. Speaking of which... She turned towards the doors and opened them, revealing her counterpart, a small group of unicorns, and a strained, malnourished Earth Pony pulling a weird tower that had the symbol of Luna on it. Her counterpart stepped forward.<p>

"Hello there. My name is Archmagister Twilight Sparkle, and I would like to welcome you to House Moon and Staâ€" Her eyes widened once she saw Twilight's wings and horn. "You're an alicorn?!"

"Yes, I am. My name is Princess Twilight Sparkle," Twilight said. "And please don't bow, I already get that enough from my timeline. Also don't begin worshipping me. I don't need it, just trying to fix the timeline."

"How did you become an alicorn? Please tell me!" the Archmagister said.

"And why should I tell you?" the Looper asked. "I can end this universe with a thought."

"Because you were once a unicorn like me, and your assistance could help us find Celestia and Luna," the Archmagister said.

"I'll give you a hint. It requires something you don't have," the Looper said, smiling. "I'll give you three guesses; at the end of them, I'll give another."

"Power?"

"Nope."

\* \* \*

><p>173.9 (Vinylshadow - MLPPotC)

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><p>Sparrow Jack, part-time captain for the totally-not-stolen-I-leased-my-soul-for-it-thank-you-very-much-and-let-me-tell-you-the-trouble-that-caused Black Pearl lay on the ground, groaning.<p>

"Sir, are you okay?!" a worried voice called out. A blue-gray head topped by a straw-colored mane popped into view, misaligned eyes bright with worry.

Sparrow blinked and squinted at her. "Huh...must be dead, because you're much too beautiful for this world," he mumbled. "Have you seen my ship? Giant black thing."

The mare looked around, then winced. "Ah...it's currently lodged in the side of Sweet Apple Acres' barn. Just finished rebuilding it too. Again."

"Could you take me there? I need to talk to Applejack," Sparrow said, struggling to get to his hooves. "What's your name?"

"Currently, it's Derpy, and you're not going anywhere," the mare said firmly, pushing him back down. "You need to rest. I'll get Applejack for you."

Sparrow sighed and rested on his back. "Fair enough, lass. The sunset is lovely at this time of year."

A few minutes later, Derpy and Applejack came back up the hill. Applejack's face was one of amusement while Derpy's was wreathed in concern.

"Back again, Jack?" Applejack said with a sigh. "You do realize you nuked my cider supply by ramming your ship into it, right?"

Sparrow's face contorted in horror and his dreads drooped. "Ah..sorry 'bout that, lass. Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Yes, you'll be helping rebuild it, for one. As payment, I'll give you some barrels of my finest cider from my Pocket."

Sparrow grinned. "Deal."

"Get up, we can work in the moonlight," Applejack said. Derpy frowned.

"But he's injured. You can'tâ€"

Applejack shook her head. "He's about as injured as a rodeo clown. Most of the time he's actually a living skeleton. Give it a minute," she said, looking up at the moon.

A beam of moonlight fell across his torso, revealing the bones underneath. Derpy's eyes went wide and Sparrow got to his feet, cracking his neck with a grin.

"Quite handy to survive ship crashes though," he said lightly. "Makes it god-awful hard to enjoy drinks though. They go right through me and don't let me hold my liquor."

Applejack rolled her eyes. "Come along, Sparrow. You've got a long night and day ahead of you."

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><p>173.10 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"But daaaaad, I have to go out!" Rainbow Dash whined, eyes darting up at her cross father.<p>

"I'm sorry Dashie, but you've got homework," the stallion picked his daughter up with his teeth and plopped her in front of kitchen table. "If you had done this Saturday, like I asked you to, you could go out and play with your friends. But you didn't and now we are going to sit right here until you are done andâ€"

"Then I can go out?" Rainbow Dash said with hope in her voice, leaning out of her chair to look at her father.

"Nope," he gave a lopsided grin, booping her nose. "I want you to remember this a lesson Dashie; that there are consequences to your actions and even if you say you're sorry and do everything to make amends, you may not be able to make things right," he frowned, tapping his chin. "I'm sure that sounded a lot wiser in my head Dashie," with a chuckle, he leaned over to ruffle her mane. "Besides Dashie, I am pretty sure that Equestria won't crash and burn because you didn't go out and play one day."

Dashie gulped weakly, scratching the back of her head and wondered how she would explain this one to Twilight.

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><p>173.11 (Vinylshadow - MLPPotC)

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><p>Applejack Woke up standing next to Rainbow Dash in the town hall, eagerly awaiting the arrival of Princess Celestia to raise the sun.<p>

She watched the smoke coalesce into...



Her jaw dropped and she fought hard to stifle a snort of laughter, coughing harshly.

"FILLIES AND GENTLECOLTS! AS YOUR NEW RULER, LET ME BE THE FIRST TO SAY...THE RUM...WILL LAST...FOREVER!" the pony skeleton wearing a pirate getup bellowed, staggering drunkenly about.

Rather than screams of terror and panic, the ponies looked at each other, murmuring quietly. Applejack pricked her ears as she overheard some eager stallions whisper excitedly.

"Just think! No more having to wait for the taverns to resupply!"

"Yes! Long live...uh..."

"What's your name?" a pony called out.

Sparrow Jack, the sometimes-semi-not-dead captain of the for-the-last-time-I-don't-know-where-the-blasted-monster-octopus-latched-to-it-came-from-I'm-sorry-but-it-really-isn't-my-problem-if-it-ate-something-you-liked Black Pearl blinked and peered down at the assembled ponies.

"Me? What, you've never heard the legends of the Flying Dutchmare? I met her captain a few times. Ugly as sin, but a surprisingly good kisser once you get enough rum in him...erm...sorry, name...name...noun verb, noun verb...ah! I am...Nightmare Rhum Vieux."

The sound of a hoof hitting face echoed through the room.

\* \* \*

><p>173.12 (Evilhumour)<p>

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><p>"Ahem, sir?" Rainbow Blaze did a double take as Princess Celestia appeared in his living room. As he bowed to the floor, he swore he heard the princess give a somewhat embarrassed cough, like Dashie would when she was about to do something really naughty. "I am dreadfully sorry for this but this must be done for the safety of the future of Equestria." With that, the Princess of the Sun walked over to the corner of the room, picked up his daughter that was in time out for what happened at school and threw her out the window so hard that there was a sonic rainboom.<p>

She teleported out of the room and then back into the room moments later with a totally hyper ball of fluff he recognized as his daughter.

The Princess then dropped the filly into his hooves and bowed her head. "Equestria thanks you for your duty and you missy, behave yourself, understand?"

"Yuppers!" Dashie squeaked from Blaze's hooves before looking up at her father. "Daddy, look! I've got my Cutie Mark!"

"That's wonderful Dashie," Blaze said affectionately, distracted by

the good news before he noticed that Celestia was already gone. Making a mental note to seek an audience with the Princess later on, he went to plan his Dashie's party before remembering that she was still grounded for fighting.

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><p>173.13 (Evilhumour)<p>

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><p>"So dear, how have your children been?" Upper Crust sneered at Twilight Velvet, with the rest of the noble ladies at this little luncheon. Most of the mares here were already bored to death about Upper Crust's little spiel about her spoiled little child and how much they have done in Prance, and were suddenly very interested in how Velvet of the Twilight House would react to this.<p>

"Well," Velvet drawled out, taking a slow sip from her teacupâ€"mostly to hide her grin. "My oldest son is now married to Princess Mi Amore Cadenza, snogged her so hard at their wedding that he actually gained wings and became an honest alicorn. They are now expecting their first child and I am sure that the Crystal Empire will be ever so glad to see that their Empress has a child at lastâ€"did I mention that they are rulers of their own nation?" Velvet smiled at Upper Crust, whose face was starting to drop. "Which reminds me of my other son, Spykoranuvellitar, who helped save the Crystal Empire by rescuing the Crystal Heart from King Sombra and is married to a lovely mare named Rarity Belle. What a dear she is, and she definitely has a fine head on her shoulders. Why, I am sure you have heard of the Belle clothing franchise while living in Prance?" With a hoof pressed to her chest, Velvet dashed her eyelashes in such an exaggerated fashion of simplicity that made the mares around them snicker. "Made seventy different dresses with different material in roughly a fortnight and ascended into an alicorn when she was done!"

Pausing, Velvet glared at Upper Crust, enjoying this far too much. "Of course, there is my daughter Twilight, former student to Princess Celestia. Of course, she had to stop being her student after completing Starswirl's last spell. Wouldn't be right for a princess to be a student under another princess, after all. But then again, Twilight still listens to the Princess greatly, doing whatever she and the other Element Bearers of Harmony can do to save Equestria from the latest world ending threat."

"I seeâ€" " Upper Crust tried to butt in but Velvet wasn't finished just yet.

"My dear Twilight does have a big heartâ€"I mean, not many would take in a reincarnation of Nightmare Moon and raise her on their own," Velvet gave a soft smile, staring at the pale unicorn mare across of her. "Nyxie has truly grown by leaps and bounds. Why, she is even engaged to a prince of the Imperium of Ponykindâ€"you know, the ancient homeland?â€"and they are going to get married any day now!" Velvet swooned, leaning back into her chair.

Upper Crust took a breath inwards, licking her lips before saying, "Well, that's very nice and all if it is true, butâ€" "

As if on cue, there was a series of thuds and pops, and everypony turned their head to see five poniesâ€"all alicornsâ€"and one gigantic purple dragon teleport in and land on the garden floor. Another alicorn, a white mare with a perfect purple mane, slid down from the dragon's head and they all turned to Velvet with a big smile on their face.

"Hi mom!" a choir of voices heavy with love said, all the newcomers coming closer to nuzzle Velvet.

She smiled happily at her family before turning her head back to Upper Crust. "Do you want to hear about my cousins, dear?"

\* \* \*

><p>173.14: (Evilhumour)<p>

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><p>"Lemon, I..." Nyx blinked at what she was staring at, her fiancÃ© smiling proudly. "HOW!?"<p>

"Well, I was trying to cook from this cookbook again, I turned my eyes away for a moment and the next thing I knew, Meaty here was licking my face!" Lemon then reached over to pat the meat dragon's snout.

"Meatyâ€"Iâ€"gah!" Nyx sputtered before magicking the cookbook over. "'The Nomnomicon?!' That's the cookbook you were using?!"

"Is it a problem Nyxie?" Lemon titled his head as the dragon licked the back of his head again, causing the stallion to giggle. Nyx decided to show it was a problem by hitting him over the head with the cookbook over and over again.

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><p>173.15: (Evilhumour)<p>

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><p>"You don't have the Elements of Bearers and thus Eternal Day shall last forever!" Luna cackled at Magic.<p>

"That's where you are wrong Luna, for the Bearers do exist, in my friends!" Magic shouted, looking at her pony friends.

"Honesty, telling us all about farming and apples when went down the cliff, represents the Bearer, Applejack!"

"Kindness, using her wide eyed looks to tame the beasts, represents the Bearer, Fluttershy!"

"Laughter, making inside jokes that I don't get as I just got to this town, represents the Bearer, Pinkie Pie!"

"Generosity, giving us all these styling but impractical outfits, represents the Bearer, Rarity!"

"Loyalty, flying to catch us after she threw us clear the other of

the chasm, represents the the Bearer, Rainbow Dash!"

"Ha, you are one Element of Bearer away and without it, my night loving sister will be imprisoned forever!" Luna let out a victory laugh, flying into the sky. "The Day shall last forever!"

"That's here you are wrong, Luna, for the last Bearer does exist!" Magic shouted, the smashed crown starting to fly around her, just like the necklaces were doing to her friends. "I have learned to tolerate new people and call them friends due to social conventions, just making me the representation of Twilight Sparkle, the last of the Bearer!"

As Magic spoke, the crown and necklaces spun around them counterclockwise, turning into orbs of stone before firing a dark rainbow at the panicking alicorn.

As the alicorn was cleared of the taint, Princess Nightmare Moon stood tall with her loving sister Corona Blaze, who raised the moon back into its proper place.

It was at this moment, everyone in the room Woke up and took one look at their loop memories before facehooving as hard as they could from what they saw.

They all knew now that this was going to be a long loop to deal with.

\* \* \*

><p>173.16(Vinylshadow)<p>

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><p>A long time ago in the magical land of Equestria, there was an oppressive Empire that ruled over the once-peaceful ponies, led by the Dark Lord Sombra. He wished to subjugate the entire planet, using his mighty magic and control over shadows.<p>

A rebellion, led by the brave unicorn Rarity, fought back, striking at key points of the Empire's rule, hoping to break its iron grip. Victories and defeats teetered back and forth between the factions with settlements and towns caught in the middle.

During one struggle, Rarity was captured and sentenced to be executed.

A band of rebels, consisting of three fillies, a drake and his old mentorâ€œ"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa; what do you mean, old?!"

Spike blinked, looking up from his roll of parchment, quill poised to write as he met the gaze of one Twilight Sparkle.

"It's just a story, Twilight," he said patiently. The mare grumbled. Spike rolled his eyes. "Besides, 'old' in this case merely means she was his mentor before he went off and joined the rebels. Taught him everything she knew," he added with a wink, causing Twilight to smile.

"Hm, if you say so. I'm rather proud of you for not gushing over Rarity either," she said with a grin. Spike waved a claw.

"Eh, they wouldn't even get together until the third or fourth book. She'd ignore him for the most part, then claim later she had been testing his resolve or something."

Twilight snickered. "Sounds interesting. Can't wait to read it."

"Can you keep it a secret for now? I'd like to surprise everyone with it."

"Pinkie Promise," Twilight said.

"Thanks, Twi. You're the best sister I could hope for."

The two shared a hug and Twilight left him to his writing.

\* \* \*

><p>173.17 (BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

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><p>Twilight looked bemusedly at the sight of her daughter huddled under the blanket of her bed. She had reverted to her filly form rather than the adult body she had been using before while Lemon was here. It had been a spectacularly normal Loop thus far, and as far as she could tell there was nothing unusually frightening about Ponyville right now (so long as you ignored the mildly crazed laughter coming from Sweet Apple Acres as a certain red maned filly worked on her latest inventions) so for the life of her she couldn't understand why Nyx was shaking like a leaf and hiding in the Golden Oaks. It was far too late in the Loop for it to be a result of whatever her last Loop had been so nothing she could think of explained the sight that had greeted her upon returning to her home.<p>

Kneeling down before the trembling filly, she pulled Nyx into a hug which she gratefully leaned into. "You want to tell me what's got you so frightened?"

Nyx shook her head.

"Alright."

The mother daughter duo remained like that for several minutes before Nyx spoke. "Lemon tried cooking again."

Twilight heroically refrained from groaning. "Were there any victims? What about your house, how much of it is left?"

Nyx gave a strangled laugh. "The house is fine and nopony got hurt."

Twilight frowned. "Lemon didn't kill it did he? It may not have been supposed to come to life, but it still deserves to live."

"It didn't come to life."

Twilight blinked at that. "Toxic hazard?"

Nyx shook her head. "It was a perfectly normal dinner. Spaghetti and wheatballs. Nothing came to life, or poisoned anypony or even violated the laws of nature. It was a perfectly normal dinner," She said, staring into the distance unseeing.

Twilight was silent for several moments as she tried to process that before shuddering. "Move over Nyxie."

\* \* \*

><p>Back at their home in Canterlot, Lemon Rush did his best to explode the dishes sitting in the sink with his eyes. "The one time I manage to make a normal dinner, and it was a total accident."<p>

Discord chuckled from his place in the dishwater sea as he propelled his bowl along with a serving spoon.. "Well don't look at me. I'm not the one who stayed up all night playing poker causing him to sleepwalk through his date night."

Lemon's glare doubled. "Bullrush! You were the dealer."

Discord pointed behind the stallion. "Oh no, not I. Twas he who you played against my dear Lemon Sparkle."

Turning to look where the Spirit of Chaos was pointing, he found himself confronted by an identical draconequus wearing a sleepmask. "What did I miss?" he asked his diminutive counterpart.

"While you were sleeping, Lemon here all but sleepwalked through his date and somehow managed to create a perfectly edible meal for once," Discord told himself.

Confronted with two smirking Draconequii, Lemon groaned. "Somehow I think it would have been better if I accidentally created an Eldritch Cuisine."

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight? Why are you, and Nyx cowering under your blankets?" Rarity asked, having come to return Twilight's copy of the latest Iris Drake novel.<p>

"Whatever it is can't be that bad right Twi?" Spike asked from beside his wife.

Poking her head out from beneath the cover, Twilight looked around frantically before pulling the couple into the bed with them. To their surprise they found themselves standing in a much, much larger space than could possibly fit inside the Library where Pinkie Pie was hastily organizing the citizens of Ponyville towards their designated stations. "Something has gone horribly wrong with this Loop. It's a miracle it hasn't crashed yet, but I can't take any chances. We're evacuating."

"Evacuating? Surely it can't be so serious that you think we need to

abandon Ponyville," Rarity said with wide eyes as she watch the organized chaos taking place under Twilight's sheets.

"Ponyville? No you don't understand. We're evacuating Equestria. Once we finish preparations I'm going to teleport everypony to the moon. After that Nyx and I will see about finding a new planet for us to colonize," Twilight replied seriously.

"Whoa! Hold on Twi. Don't you think you're overreacting a little? What even happened anyway?" Spike asked curiously, scratching the scales on the back of his head.

Twilight visibly steeled herself before responding. "Lemon Rush managed to cook something normal," she practically hissed.

Spike and Rarity stood still for a moment as they considered that.

"Right. No time for the fainting couch. Spike you stay here and help Twilight. I'm going to pack up the Carousel Boutique. Time is of the essence. Let's move!"

\* \* \*

><p>173.18 (BIOS-Pherecydes)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Princess Cornea Blaze glared at the camera, as beside her an aged unicorn stallion stood. "Hello. I'm Stein Bin. Do you have dry, itchy, burning eyes. Get Clear Eyes. It removes redness, and has the ingredients to moisturize."<p>

His magic lifted a small item and with her permission, poured a few drops into her eyes. In a flash of prismatic light, the newly Awakened Celestia blinked confusedly.

He turned back to the camera. "Wow. The difference is clear. Clear Eyes."

"An' Cut! Okay everypony that's a wrap." Applebloom shouted from behind the director's chair.

Diamond Tiara came in wearing a headset and looking at a clipboard. "Okay Princess, that's it for today. Don't forget, tomorrow you're scheduled early for a Coppercolt suntan lotion commercial so be sure to get plenty of rest."

With that she turned away, already barking orders into her headset.

Celestia stared at the departing filly silently for several moments.

"What."

\* \* \*

><p>173.19 (Vinylshadow)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight winced as Tirek slapped her friends down one by one. She hated Loops that restricted her to baseline power; she'd not had one in a long time and she hadn't adjusted to the power difference, which was how Tirek was thrashing their collective flanks.<p>

"I thought you were stronger than this, Princess," Tirek growled, towering over the fallen Alicorn.

"Stay away from her!" a voice cut across the ruins of Ponyville. Twilight and Tirek turned to see a blue-gray pegasus mare standing amid the flames.

Her misaligned eyes hadâ€"in one of their rare momentsâ€"zeroed in on the centaur.

Tirek laughed. "What's this, then? Reinforcements? You must be desperate to die."

"Derpy! Run!" Twilight gasped out. Derpy met her eye and winked.

"Don't worry, I've met his type before," she said, returning her burning gaze to the centaur.

She flapped her wings, taking flight towards Tirek. A red-orange blob of magic formed between his horns and fired at the mare, who swung around it in a lazy loop as it then scorched the remains of Twilight's library.

"Oh for Amentotaxus yunnanensis' sake," Twilight griped, helping her friends to their hooves before looking at Derpy, who impacted Tirek.

The two sailed through the air, Derpy hammering home hits on the centaur's broad chest before she whirled and slammed him into the ground with her hind legs. Derpy landed hard on his torso, driving the air from him.

As he wheezed for air, Derpy glared into his eyes.

"Do you know what you did during your altercation with Princess Twilight?"

Tirek stared at her without comprehension. Derpy brought her face close to his.

"You almost hit my muffin."

She then lightly booped his confounded face on the nose and he popped like a bubble. Shaking the suds off her hoof, Derpy took wing and landed beside Twilight.

"Are you alright?" the mailmare asked. Twilight stared at the sizzling pile of suds, then at Derpy.

"What...how did you do that?"

"During his draining spree, he took my magic," Derpy said. "Turns out



he also got one of my Cutie Marks' downsides, he'll come back but not for a while... No doubt you could've handled him, but when his attack nearly hit Dinky..."

Twilight winced. "Sorry. My magic was lessened this time around. Usually it's not much of a problem, but I wasn't prepared and I Woke up on the wrong hoof..."

"Not your fault, Twilight," Derpy said.

"Mama!"

Derpy pricked her ears at the shout and turned, sweeping up her daughter, twirling her around and blowing into her belly, tickling her with her wings, causing Dinky to shriek with glee.

Twilight dipped her head. "Thank you."

Derpy nodded and nuzzled her daughter with a tender smile on her muzzle.

\* \* \*

><p>173.20 (Vinylshadow)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight kicked down the door to her library and walked in, super soaker primed and ready.<p>

"If I find my daughter cuddling on the couch with her boyfriend again, I'm gonna...what are you two doing?"

"Well, you said 'on the couch' so we moved to the floor," Lemon said, curled around Nyx and nuzzling her mane. "ACKTHPH!"

Twilight pumped her soaker and narrowed her eyes. "You do realize this is a public building?"

"It was Nyx's idea," Lemon grumbled, wringing water out of his mane.

"No, mine was you licking whipped cream off myâ€"ack!" she squeaked as Twilight soaked her. "I was going to say nose!"

"I wanted you two to match," Twilight said innocently.

"Nyx?"

"Yes, Lemon?"

"Plan W."

"What's pla - not in the library!" Twilight yelped as the couple pulled out water balloons, diving for the door.

Two gleeful ponies followed her, only to stumble to a halt as they met a wall of water being suspended by magic.

"That's not fair," Lemon complained, bracing himself for a long wet

war.

\* \* \*

><p>"Sister?"<p>

"Yes Luna?"

"We've gotten reports that the town of Ponyville has flooded."

"Luna?"

"Yes, Celie?"

"Get my Water Wings. We've got a water war to win."

\* \* \*

><p>173.21 (Vinylshadow)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Leman and Nyx stared as Nightmare Moon's castle shuddered from another internal explosion.<p>

Faintly, they could hear the snarling voice of Twilight Sparkle as she wreaked revenge against the Cultists.

"Brainwash my daughter will you?!"

"Is that blood?! Were you making my daughter drink blood?!"

Leman glanced at his fiancÃ© with an arched eyebrow. "You never told her you were Awake, did you?"

Nyx shrugged. "Sometimes she needs an outlet for stress. Too much and she gets really nasty. This is cathartic for her."

"Ah," Leman said, once again mentally reminding himself to never get on Twilight's bad side. He glanced at Nyx and smiled softly.

After a few more hours of screams and shrieks for mercy, Twilight emerged from the castle and gave her daughter a hug.

"Oh, and you're grounded for not telling me you were Awake," she whispered into Nyx's ear.

"Oh come on!"

\* \* \*

><p>173.22 (Scorntex)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"THE NIGHT SHALL LAST FOREVâ€™!"<p>

"Excuse me, Your Highness?"

The terrified crowd watched as Nightmare Moon stared blankly at the elderly pony who'd approached her, apparently unconcerned that he had just interrupted her declaration.

Twilight, cautiously sitting at a distance, noted the old pony, and the odd manner in which he spoke. It sounded familiar to her somehow, but she could remember where.

"... Yes, subject?" Nightmare Moon said, tentatively. The old pony just kept smiling warmly.

"I was wondering if perhaps you might like something to drink."

"I... what?" The dark alicorn shook her head. "No. Begone."

Twilight Sparkle, watching cautiously from a distance, saw the old pony bring out a saucer and teapot from nowhere.

"Surely I cannot tempt your highness to even one lone cup of tea? After a thousand years, locked away in the moon, you must be thirsty."

Nightmare Moon sniffed at the scent coming from the teapot. Her expression changed to a mix of suspicion and intrigue. "Well," she began, "perhaps one cup of this "tea" would do no harm..."

The old pony poured out a small cup, and gave it to Nightmare Moon, who slowly took a sip from it.

Her first reaction was surprisingly dramatic; the dark alicorn vanished without even the intermediate stage of a puff of comical smoke, replaced by Princess Luna.

Her second, however, not so much.

The crowd waited as Luna stared, eyes wide in shock, at the tea cup. And they waited. And waited.

And waited.

And they waited.

Twilight walked over toward the old pony, who had taken the saucer from Luna and was now frowning at it.

"Uh, that... was meant to happen, right?" Twilight asked.

"I think I overdid it on the "calming" part," he murmured.

"You definitely overdid something," Twilight stated, as she tried not to look at the slightly eerie sight of Princess Luna stand completely still.

"I'm Twilight Sparkle, by the way," she said, cordially. The old pony bowed his head.

"Iroh, of the Fire Nation."

"Oh, yes," Twilight smiled, "I've heard of you. Princess Celestia

mentioned you, a while back. She said you made some very good tea."

She glanced toward the teapot. "I probably should've guessed it was you, what with the tea. And the tea-leaf Cutie Mark. And the fact that you didn't seem concerned by Nightmare Moon, at all."

She looked back toward Luna, who was still not moving (beyond breathing, and blinking).

To say Twilight Sparkle had a sinking feeling would have been understating. At this point, she might as well have been on the ocean floor itself.

"This is going to wear off eventually, isn't it?" she asked.

"I'm afraid I do not know," Iroh replied, "but I should hope so."

\* \* \*

><p>It was not until a full hour had passed that Luna finally did something.<p>

"Perfect," she gasped, in a hushed awe, as she shed a small tear. "Absolutely perfect."

Instantly, Twilight recognised where she had seen this reaction before, in the coffee house of Mechanicsburg, and the sinking feeling was replaced by an immediate stab of utter dread.

"The taste," she whispered, "the smell, nay even the texture, they are all perfect. And the way they adhere to the saucer, perfect. And the saucer itself, 'tis a thing of perfection, the perfect synthesis of style and function! PERFECT, I SAY!"

Twilight looked skeptically at Iroh, who was rubbing a hoof against his chin contemplatively.

"I can fix that," Iroh paused for a moment, before looking back to Luna.

"I think."

\* \* \*

><p>173.23: (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Ah, Equestria! Learned about the loops here, you know."<p>

Sea Swan, elsewhen known as Elizabeth, tilted her head. "I thought Poseidon gave you the looping speech."

"Aye. Then I got so blind drunk I forgot it, so he arranged for me to be dumped in here. Don't let the colorful ponies fool ya." Sparrow Jack, elsewhen known as OY YOU!, gave her a broad grin. "There's debauchery aplenty if you know where to look. Case in point!"

The brown stallion's hoof swung to indicate a red barn. "Looks

ordinary, don't it. Sure, maybe they'd make some drinks here, but you'd think that servin' them would happen elsewhere." He smirked as his hoof pointed at a particular cellar door. "Down there, though, lies one of the most skilled bar-mixers in the multiverse, and if rumor is to be believed, she's shackin' up with a chaos spirit."

Sea Swan rose an eyebrow. "You're going to go in."

"No, lass. We're goin' to go in."

\* \* \*

><p>173.24 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Moondancer drew her bandanna tighter over her muzzle, scraping some dirt off her goggles as she walked through the shattered buildings at the base of the mountain. She sighed as she examined the ground; broken earrings, shattered necklaces, twisted bracelets. This was probably a jewelry shop before it fell—it would have been mostly useless then and it was mostly useless now. Still, good gems could be used in spell arrays; she levitated a few small pieces and placed them in one of the pouches dangling from her saddlebags.<p>

She was about to turn away when suddenly she felt a POWERFUL magical surge, as though a hundred unicorns had shoved their magic into one spell. It wasn't hard to figure out where it came from; the rubble in the distance suddenly started floating and spinning, large chunks of masonry rearranging themselves in midair. Moondancer backed up a step or two without thinking; she hadn't seen so much raw magic in over a decade, and even then it had been Celestia herself—

The thought was grabbed, held. She examined it from all angles. Celestia had definitely died, there was no doubting that, but... if she had regenerated somehow, or if there was a new alicorn...

Whatever the case, there was a pony with quite a bit of magic. If she could convince them to ally with her, she could... well, life would be a lot easier.

The masonry dropped back to the ground with a loud crash, kicking up dust and grit. Moondancer rolled her eyes and braced herself, holding her breath as the massive dust cloud passed over her. She still had to cough when it was gone, rubbing the dust out of her goggles.

Then, with some trepidation, she began to walk toward the magic's source.

\* \* \*

><p>It was easy for Moondancer to guess when she arrived at her destination. For one thing, the rubble was held back by a hoof-high force field. For another, there was a series of colored tiles just beyond that, circling a hut scavenged and salvaged from an old Canterlot spire. And the pair of alicorns busily levitating various items around desks was a pretty big clue.<p>

The smaller black one noticed her first, standing outside the edge of the magic, and let out a large gasp. "Mom! We've got a visitor!" She put down what looked for all the world like a series of test tubes and galloped up to the edge, grinning even as the purple one turned. "Oh my gosh, there are ponies still alive!"

Her eagerness was joined by the larger purple one, though that smile was more restrained as she trotted up. "I told you I hadn't done a detection sweep yet. Hello, miss... wait." She peered. "Reddish mane, purple stripe... Cream hooves?! Moondancer, is that you?!"

Moondancer froze, suddenly very wary.

"...Oh. Right, you haven't met me this loop. Sorry, you must be very confused." The purple pony backed up a step. "My name is Twilight Sparkle. This is my adopted daughter, Nyx, and Luna is currently resting inside. And... none of those names mean anything to you, do they."

Very slowly, Moondancer shook her head.

"Right. I'm going to make an airlock for you." Twilight's horn lit up, and a glowing arch appeared before of the unicorn. "There's now a small magical field right in front of you, intersecting the greater shield. If you step in, I'll run a quick decontamination, get that dust off of you, then release you into the plaza."

"Why are we calling it a plaza?"

"Because, Nyx, I haven't had time to think of a better word. Well, Moondancer? You coming?"

**\*\*Author's Note:\*\***

173.1: Vinyl has bad cruise luck.

173.2: Anticipation all the sweeter after so long thinkig it was impossible.

173.7: Well, it's mostly horse mythology around here.

173.8: Not one of your better selves.

173.9: Yes, he does something like this almost every time.

173.10: Rainbow-Dad is probably going to be rather surprised.

173.11: See what I mean?

173.12: A variation on a theme.

173.13: Game, set, match.

173.17: Inversion.

173.24: Post apocalypse, but not post manners.

## 181. Chapter 181

### 174.1 (BIOS-Pherecydes, Masterweaver, Vinylshadow)

\* \* \*

><p>Nyx jumped as the door opened. "MOM! You're home early!"<p>

"Well, I had to stop and help Pinkie out, but it turned out she bought all my groceries for me ahead of what is that on the table."

"It's..." Nyx coughed. "It's a glass."

Twilight Sparkle frowned. "Nyx, while I have nothing against you drinking wine in an adult body, you're currently very much a fillyâ€"

"It's not, uh..." Nyx rubbed the back of her head. "It's... it's not alcoholic..."

The unicorn rose an eyebrow. "Are there any other drugs in it?"

"Nope, I triple-filtered it!"

Nyx's eyes shot wide when she realized what she had just said. Twilight's own eyes narrowed. "And why, exactly, would you have to filter that in the first place?"

"...mmm..."

"Young lady. What is that liquid."

"Uh... well... you see... I..." Nyx sighed. "It's blood."

"...Blood."

"Specifically rabbit blood." The filly kicked against the ground. "Lot easier to obtain than pony blood."

"...Why are you drinking blood?"

"I... uh... weeeeeeeell..." Nyx craned her neck. "It's... um... I don't know... cults keep finding me, and... it's an acquired taste, you see..." Twilight simply stared at her daughter, who shifted nervously before continuing rapidly. "Plus, um, you'd be surprised how often the 'fangs' aren't just for show. Or where the Nightmare Force is actually a sentient demonic aura, or a curse, or Eldritch Possession requiring Seapony intervention, or, orâ€"

Twilight cut her off by pulling her into a hug. "Shh. It's fine, I guess I can see why you might have gotten used to it. Just, try not to make too much of a habit alright? You didn't hurt anypony, right?"

Nyx hesitated.

Twilight gave her daughter a speculative glance. "Nyx?"

A soft voice spoke up from behind them. "Oh! Um, I'm sorry to interrupt. I should go, don't mind me."

"No, it's fine, Fluttershy. I was just having a talk with Nyx. Did you want something?" Twilight questioned.

"Oh, no. It's not something you need to worry about. I'll just go," she protested, backing up towards the entrance way.

Twilight gently closed the door behind her Unawake friend with her magic, causing her to bump into it. "Seriously, it's okay Fluttershy. What else are friends for, right? What's wrong?"

Fluttershy hid behind her mane, but nodded. "It isn't that big a deal, honest. I just can't find Angel Bunny anywhere. I'm starting to get worried. He almost never misses his mid-morning snack. Haveâ€"have you seen him anywhere?"

Twilight gave a suspicious look at her cringing daughter. "No, I haven't seen him. But if I find out anything, I'll be sure to help."

Fluttershy nodded sadly. "Oh, okay. Thank you. If you find him, can you tell him I made his favorite: roasted carrots in cucumber sauce."

Twilight nodded and watched as Fluttershy left before rounding on Nyx.

"Okay, I know what you're thinking, but in my defense he really was evil this Loop. I swear. And he attacked me first." The embarrassed filly spoke before Twilight could start lecturing.

Twilight sighed and kneaded her head with one hoof. "Alright, I can accept that you had reasons for it, but right now Fluttershy is worried sick. So here's what you're going to do. For the rest of the Loop you're going to be taking Angel's place. And I still expect you to do all of your chores as well, and your homework. And no clones or time-spinners. You made this mess, now you have to deal with it."

Nyx opened and closed her mouth repeatedly, before nodding dejectedly.

"Good. Maybe next time you'll do the sensible thing and just ask Vinyl for some of her extra bloodpacks. Ficus knows she ends up a vampony more often than not."

Nyx's head jerked up. "Wait what? All this time, and she didn't share!? When I get my hooves on herâ€" "

"Ah ah ah, young filly. Vengeance later. You have somewhere and someone else to be. March!"

Nyx grumbled and shifted into Angel Bunny's form, giving Twilight a dirty look before bouncing off after Fluttershy.



Twilight groaned. "Ugh. Kids." Unthinkingly picking up the wineglass from the table, she took a sip... before her eyes widened and she spit the 'drink' out forcefully.

"NYX!"

Across Ponyville, Vinyl shuddered and went to check on her blood packs.

"Don't worry my precious. Momma's here now," she crooned.

\* \* \*

><p>174.2 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"YOU HAVE GAZED UPON THE NIGHT FOR FAR TOO LONG!" cried Cornea Blaze. "THE BLINDNESS! SHALL LAST! FOREEEEEEEVER!"<p>

Twilight sighed, setting off the Equestria-wide mass manifestation of sunglasses. Again.

\* \* \*

><p>174.3 (Masterweaver)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Hey, Twilight! Didjya hear about Zecora's big adventure with your brother?!"<p>

Twilight Sparkle's smile was both indulgent and resigned. "Yes Dash, I've heard. Twelve times, this loop alone."

"...oh."

They walked and flew in silence for a few seconds.

"...you want to gush about it."

"I \_totally\_ want to gush about it."

"Alright, I'm listening."

Rainbow grinned, already gearing her mind into story-telling mode. "Let me set the scene for our intrepid heroes..."

\* \* \*

><p>174.4 (Vinylshadow)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Luna weakly lifted her head to see one of her worst nightmares looking down at her.<p>

Not the Tantabus. Not the Nightmare. Not her failure as a princess to her subjects.

The burning eyes of Corona Blaze smoldered, filled with nothing but contempt for the pony lying broken before her.

Luna breathed heavily, her mind wandering as she fought to stay conscious. The Loop had started shortly after the sisters' battle with King Sombra. Celestia hadn't been Awake, Luna knew, since she wouldn't have started researching Sombra's dark magic if she was.

The older sister threw herself into her studies of the dark arts, growing distant from her subjects, her sister and her role as guardian of the sun. Luna had taken responsibility, raising both the sun and moon, as well as tending to the needs of the country.

The night mare had tried approaching her sister, but the elder ignored her and soon stopped talking to her at all.

Then, one morning, Luna had woken up to an unbearable heat. Going outside, Luna had found her sister completely wrapped in darkness, horn blazing with sickly purple and green magic as she dragged the sun closer to the planet.

Luna had screamed at her to stop and had been attacked.

"You have been deceiving me," Corona snarled, looming over the smaller Alicorn, backlit by the seething sun. "You've been planning to usurp me and take the throne. You aren't my sister. You...are a \_rival!\_"

Her horn blazed and Luna threw herself back, scrambling to get her hooves under her as she felt the ground under her heat up. Lighting her horn, she focused and teleported. Luna reappeared in the air and looked around in horror.

The land was cracking under the blistering heat, homes bursting into flames as ponies inside ran out, only to perish in the firestorm.

Luna's wings flapped unsteadily as she tried to figure out what to do.

\_Luna...\_

She nearly stopped flapping as a voice echoed inside her head. The castle below erupted in a molten spout and a voice howled out.

\*\*\*"Luna!"\*\*

The lunar princess dodged a spear of light and dived, weaving between the sinking ruins.

\_Luna!\_

Luna looked around, trying to figure out where the voices were coming from. She winced as her feathers brushed against superheated rock and she teleported again.

Reappeared, she gazed out over what she knew in the future would have become the Everfree Forest.

\_Harmony...\_

Luna rubbed her forehead, then blinked. "Of course," she murmured. Looking around, she winged her way towards the castle ruins. Focusing, she teleported once again and reappeared in front of the shrine holding the stones.

Placing her horn against the center orb, she withdrew the Element of Magic.

The room grew dark and Luna turned to see a large winged shape growing larger through the stained glass window.

Grabbing the other Elements, Luna braced herself as the window shattered.

Flinching back from the shards, Luna looked up to see an enraged Corona, who pointed a hoof at her.

"Traitor! I knew it! You wanted them for yourself!"

Before she could continue, and before \_she\_ lost her nerve, Luna let the Elements take control. Wreathed in golden light, Luna rose until she was level with Corona.

Corona fired a beam of light, which pinged harmlessly off the harmony magic.

Then a massive ray blasted from the Elements, slamming into Corona, who shrieked in agony. The blast carried her out of the room, to the sky and into the sun, pushing it away from the planet. Simultaneously, a wave of magic pulsed outwards, restoring the scorched and melted surface of the planet

Luna was gently lowered to the floor and she stumbled as the magic left her, drained. She staggered outside, looking up at the sun.

On it, a series of dark mottled shapes that vaguely resembled the head of a mare glared down at her.

Luna threw back her head and let out a primal shriek before she flared her wings and launched herself skywards, climbing towards the sun. She reached out with her hooves, as if to embrace the shining orb that held her sister.

"Celie..."

\* \* \*

><p>Luna Woke up with a sharp gasp and lifted her head. She met the six faces of the Element Bearers. Frowning, she looked around and saw her.<p>

The Solar Diarch. The Guardian of the Sun.

"Sis...!" Luna choked on the word, her throat dry. Celestia met her lunge and wrapped her wings around her younger sister.

"Twilight? Take the girls back to Ponyville," Celestia said curtly.

"Don't wait for us."

Luna dimly heard Twilight acknowledge and nuzzled deeper into her sister's embrace.

"Don't leave me," Luna rasped. Celestia gently touched her cheek and lifted Luna's face. The Moon Maiden averted her eyes and Celestia gently kissed her forehead.

"Lulu, you know that I'll never, ever leave you, betray you or harm you. That wasn't me." Celestia knew her sister. Knew her deepest darkest fears, just as Luna knew hers. She knew there was only one thing could shake Luna this badly.

"I know that...it's...just..." Luna mumbled. Celestia wrapped her wings around her and gently settled down. Luna burrowed into her and sighed.

Celestia hummed a wordless tune, a lullaby sung to them by their mother long ago and Luna, after a moment, relaxed before resting her head against her sister and fell asleep.

Celestia gently stroked Luna's mane and kissed it softly.

"I love you, sister mine," she said softly. "Then, now and always."

\* \* \*

><p>174.5 (wildrook)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Shining Armor was annoyed.<p>

No, it wasn't because of Blueblood being a more outrageous prick than normal. He was used to that and a few other variants where the Prince was tolerable at his best.

It also wasn't because he had endured the cold as well as various obstacles that happened before the snowstorm. Why the Hydra had been p\*ssed off involved a gaping minotaur-shaped hole in its stomach, but that was another story entirely.

What really p\*ssed him off was that the Yaks were planning to start a war with them. Turns out there were a few yaks unhappy with Pinkie Pie's intervention and decided to sabotage the meeting. The irony is that Blueblood was actually HELPFUL in spotting out the traitors in a similar method that made Pinkie Pie an effective torture device.

"Your Majesties," Shining said to the Yak Prince and Blueblood, "if you mind..."

"By all means, Captain," Blueblood replied. "Auntie Celestia was the one to set you as my bodyguard, so if you would be so kind."

The Yak Prince blinked, but got the idea as he nodded.

He then looked at the traitors to the crown. "Now," he said, "if you

have my attention, I'd like a few questions. And these are very important because they involve the fate of your kingdom when you decide to attack without consequences. First, why did you plan to overthrow the Prince of your own kingdom?"

"Because Yak Tradition dictate that they must not be stopped even by stupid pink pony that quelled fight," the yak upstart replied.

Shining gave them stare. "That, I can guess," he said, "but it was still a stupid decision, even by certain standards of warfare. Why take him out now while Equestrian Diplomats tried to visit?"

"To pin blame on you when the attempt to set Prince as war criminal."

So, they WERE aware of what protects Equestria. That just makes it even dumber in hindsight.

"Okay," Shining said. "One more question, and this is vital for your way of life to exist." He then took a breath. "You have a bunch of traitors to the crown and at least three of your best men trying to subdue us. If you capture all three of us, there will be a letter sent to Canterlot and the Crystal Empire of the capture of both Princes and Princess Cadence's consort. Yes, they will resort in diplomacy, but that's just plan A. Plan B would be sending in seven individuals which consists of a citizen of the Apple Family, the Pink Pony that stopped the war you wanted, a fashionista and her draconic husband, a rainbow-maned pegasus that can break the sound barrier, another pegasus that can control the local wildlife with kindness, and last but not least, my sister, the Princess of the Everfree."

"We are aware of said Princess," the Yak Upstart said, "and we can tell you that..."

"I'm not finished," Shining said, cutting the upstart off with a glare and a shield in the form of a muzzle. "I haven't even gone down our other alternatives. Plan C involves my wife, Princess Mi Amore Cadenza, bringing the army of the Crystal Empire down on your heads if you don't let me and her cousin go. Plan D involves the friend of the Beastmasters', the Chaos Spirit known as Discord, going for a very enthusiastic walk in case Plan B fails to work. And if you're not backing down by then, Plan E involves the Princesses' response. In which...Prince Blueblood, if you will?"

"In which both the moon and the sun align to create a Solar Eclipse," Blueblood replied, smirking. The Yak Upstarts were shocked at Blueblood not only getting the answer right, but the smile on Shining's face saw a small bit of pride.

"In other words, they've accepted your declaration and you will have no kingdom to run," Shining finished. "Because the Eclipse is what happens when you've crossed the line and angered them to the point where even the coldest climates will be unstable for your taste." He then looked at the Yak Traitors and smiled. "With all that, the question itself makes itself known...knowing all of that will be directed at you, do you really want to start a war with Equestria?"

There was silence from all parties as the Yak Traitor considered his options.

"We surrender," he said, squeaking.

"Good man," Shining replied, finally smiling. "Your Majesty, take them to the local prison while I mail a letter to my sister and wife."

Blueblood gave the Yak Prince a look. "You heard him," he said.

"How do you find capable Captain?" the Yak Prince asked Blueblood.

"Would you be surprised if I said 'He's a Dungeon Master in his free time'?" the Prince replied.

\* \* \*

><p>174.6 (Evilhumour)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Rainbow Dash, <em>no<em>," Twilight glared at her friend who was staring at the new looper in their Loop. New to Dash anyways, as Twilight met him several hundred loops ago. "My daughter is dating his brother and I forbid you to go after him!"

"But Twi, look at him!" Dash whined, pointing at the massive pegasus stallion, using his impressively long wings to bow to a pair of passing giggling mares. "Just look at his wings!" Dash let out a bit of a squee, biting her lip as the blond mane stallion bobbed his head as he told a joke to the ponies around him, gaining laughter from the crowd.

Twilight groaned, wondering how to dislodge her friend's focus when Fluttershy patted her shoulder and took over.

"Dash," she said softly, catching the stuntmare's attention. "You have taken care of Lemon in the past for me, right?"

"Well, yeah," Dash blinked in confusion while she nodded her head in the affirmative. "He's kinda like a nephew to me...oh spruce you Flutters!" Dash grumbled, shaking herself as she glared unhappily at her new nephew. "That's fighting dirty and you know it!"

"I was just asking you a question Dashie," Fluttershy's smile suggested nothing of the sort, with Twilight letting out a sigh of relief. "I'm glad to hear that you think the same of Blood Flower too."

Dash just grumbled some more, until she let out a squeak of surprise as somepony opened a cloud over her head.

"Sorry Dash," a soft voice called out with amusement, the massive pegasus flying down to land in front of the mares and into the shower of water he made. Glistening, he looked down at the mare and lifted her hoof up gently. "You looked a bit overheated, and I thought you need to cool down. Are you okay?"

Rainbow Dash simply looked at the stallion before she let out a shout of frustration and took off to the skies.

"Russ was right, this is truly a fun loop to be alive in!" Blood Flower's laughter was cut short by the looks he was getting from the two mares. "Do not worry Twilight, Little Mother, I will make it clear to Dash I was only joking with her. Until later." With that, the pegasus flew off into the sky after the original Bearer of Loyalty.

"Wait, did you just try to forbid me Twi," Dash asked as she flew back to the mares. "From dating somepony?"

"I-I," Twilight blinked as she realized what she had done. "I'm sorry Dash, I don't know what came over me but I-"

"It's okay, I know you really didn't mean it," Dash rolled her eyes. "We've been friends long enough that we can joke about this kind of thing, right?"

"Yup," Fluttershy said, nodding her head. "If you wish to date my son and one day call me mom, I will be fine with that."

Rainbow Dash glared at her friend once more before taking off again.

\* \* \*

><p>174.7 (Vinylshadow)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Pony sat on a bench.<p>

Thief sat on a bench.

Human sat on a bench.

Seapony sat in a bucket on a bench.

Sweet Roll sat on the ground.

"We need a bigger bench," she grumbled.

\* \* \*

><p>174.8 (Vinylshadow - MLPPrototype/Doctor Who)

\* \* \*

><p>Derpy checked her mailbag for any other letters and, finding it empty, breathed a sigh of relief.<p>

Winging her way to the post office, she signed out for the day and trotted out into the Ponyville Market, filled with ponies of all kinds selling their wares, from Applejack selling apples, to the Crusaders with...

Derpy stared at the fillies in disbelief.

\_"Got an Eldritch Abomination infestation?\_ read one sign. \_"Free removal!"\_ said another.

Torn between curiosity and her survival instinct kicking in, Derpy resolved to ask them about it later. A familiar leather jacket caught her eye and she trotted after the stallion, who had stopped by Time Turner's clock-fixing stall, which had a familiar blue phone booth behind it.

"Alex, Doctor, good afternoon," Derpy called, coming up to them. The two stallions turned with a rather eerie unison to face her.

"You're rubbing off on him," Derpy said with an amused grin to the Doctor, nodding at Alex. The Prototype and the Time Lord blinked their icy blue eyes simultaneously.

"Nonsense, we're nothing alike," they chorused, then looked at each other in surprise and broke down laughing. Derpy rolled her eyes.

"So, what have my two favorite stallions been up to?" Derpy asked, leaning on the stall and examining the clocks curiously.

"Just finished a Loop with Weeping Daleks, Sontaran-based Cybermen and Auton Zygons," the Doctor said.

"Fused Loop with Fallout; ended up King of the Mirelurks through means I'm still not entirely sure about," Alex said, poking a clock that then chirped angrily at him and tried pecking him.

Derpy snickered and rewound a clock that had thirteen numerals on it. She did a double-take and stared at it before putting it back carefully.

"Well, since I have full functionality of my TARDIS, I suspect we're in a fused Loop with my branch. Shall we see what we can find?" the Doctor asked, starting to toss clocks back into a case, some beeping, some clicking, some screaming in dead languages.

"I'd like that," Derpy said, perking up, with Alex following suit.

"Splendid. Got everything? Where's Dinky?"

"Amethyst is taking care of her. Besides, hello, time travel?" Derpy grinned.

"Fair enough. Worst-case scenario, we come back some fifteen years later—"ow!" the Doctor rubbed his head and glared at Alex, who stuck out his tongue.

"Play nice," Derpy admonished them. "Come along, boys!"

She entered the TARDIS and Alex exchanged a glance with the Doctor.

"We're not her boys," the Prototype said. The Doctor tilted his head, arching an eyebrow.

"...Yeah, we are," Alex admitted before he entered the TARDIS,



followed by the Doctor.

Within a few seconds, the phone box dematerialized, leaving behind an angrily chirping clock.

\* \* \*

><p>174.9 (Anon e Mouse Jr.) [MLPDaria]

\* \* \*

><p>Twilight looked around Ponyville. No real changes that she could see. She resolved herself to another, mostly lonely Loop start. (Cadance had written shortly after she Awoke, but the two weren't planning to meet up for a few days.) As she and Spike eyed things, Twilight saw Pinkie. <em>Right. Usual start. Let's do this.</em> She trotted up to the pink mare.

"Hi, I'mâ€|"

Pinkie cut her off with a loud gasp, then raced away, prompting Twilight to sigh inwardly. \_Still almost exactly the same response, every time.\_ Then, she caught a hint of movement out of the corner of her eye. \_Wait, is thatâ€| Maud?\_

She hurried in the direction of the other mare, who promptly disappeared into a crowd. Twilight quirked an ear. \_Wonder what that was about.\_ Turning back to Spike, she began asking him where they needed to go first.

Hours later, Twilight took one last look around the busy main room of her library, where her "Welcome to Ponyville" party was still in full swing, and slipped away to the upstairs. As she headed for her bed, she heard a hoofstep behind her, and turned.

Maud Pie stood in the doorway. "Hey."

Twilight flushed. "Um, hey."

"Sorry about all the chaos down there. I love my sister, but she can be a littleâ€| over-exuberant sometimes."

"So I guessed."

"Yeah. Of course, times like these, you'd think we'd be used to chaos. It tends to make one a littleâ€| Loopy."

Twilight's eyes widened. "A littleâ€|"Maud, are you Looping?"

The mare shook her head. "I don't know if Maud Pie is Looping, but I am." She held out a hoof. "Daria Morgendorffer, visiting Anchor."

Twilight shook it. "Twilight Sparkle, local Anchor. Very pleased to meet you."

"Same here."

"Soâ€| what's your Loop like?"

"High school. Four years at two different high schools. The first was home to two of the stupidest people in the multiverse, and at least a couple at the second were only marginally above that. It's not entirely their faultâ€"part of the reason we moved away was because we found out the town had uranium in the drinking water, which probably accounts for at least some of their idiocy." Daria sighed. "I was so glad, when I found out I was an Anchor, that it meant neither of them was."

"Uranium inâ€"that's horrible!" Twilight shuddered.

Daria nodded. "I found out later they put what they called a "Destructive Stupidity Patch" on those two to keep them from Looping, actually, which was a relief. They're right up there with Billy and the Tick, and you know how bad those two are."

"Billy, yes. I've never met the Tick, but I've heard of him."

"Trust me, you're very lucky. I have met him. It wasn't fun." She looked up. "Morons aside, my Loop isn't all bad. I've got one of the best friends in the world at my second high school, and she and her brother are both Looping. So are my sister and one of her friends, so at least they aren't alone. And we've bonded more since the Loops started, which has helped. She'd probably love it here, actually."

"Well, that's good." Twilight looked at the other mare. "I certainly hope you have a good time here, Daria. Equestria is a Sanctuary Loop, soâ€" relax and enjoy yourself."

"I will." Daria smiled. "I'm glad to finally be here, you know. Word gets around about some of these Loops, so I've heard a lot about you before, even if I've never met any of you until now."

Twilight smiled. "I take it you're big on friendship."

"Actually, if I'd come here first instead of going to Lawndale High when I did, or as my first Fused Loop, I'd have run screaming."

Twilight did a double-take. "Really?"

"Yep. Another few years changed me, somewhat. But even when I started Looping, I wasâ€" still more cynical and closed off than most people liked. I've adapted though. Made some new friends. It's helped a lot. And I've already got one close friend here, even if she isn't Awake."

"Really? Who?"

"Pinkie. In her own way, she's a lot like my sister: happy, popular, a lot smarter than people assume. If she and Quinn ever meet, I don't know whether I'll be happy for them or walk away in a daze."

"Probably both."

"Probably." Daria looked around, and raised an eyebrow. "I'm still the same person I've always been, even after so many Loops. This Loopâ€" it runs on friendship, in a big way."

"Very much so."

"You know what I've always run on?"

"What?"

"Cynicism, sarcasm, snark, and the fact that there is no aspect, no facet, no moment of life that can't be improved with pizza."

Twilight quirked an eyebrow. "Interesting philosophy. I'll have my sister-in-law send over some of her cooking for tomorrow's party."

"What party?"

"The one Pinkie is going to throw after she, some friends of ours and I save the world from Nightmare Moon."

Daria's eyebrow raised further. "You save the world from a supervillain, right off the bat, at the start of every Loop?"

"Yes. And another couple of times over the next couple of years."

"Sounds like fun."

"â€¦ You're being sarcastic now, aren't you."

"Yes. Yes I am."

\* \* \*

><p>174.10 (Vinylshadow)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"Twilight?"<p>

"\_Yes,\_ Pinkie. I \_know\_ we're loaves of bread. I \_know\_ we're pure-bread ponies. Haha, funny Loop."

"Well, I can see you're living up to your sourdough nature," the loaf of Pinkienickel bread said with a huff. "No need to fly to pieces over it."

"I'd smack you if bread could move."

"Oh yes, I'm sure you're enjoying just loafing around. Are you toasty? In a bit of a jam, perhaps? Rye so serious? You knead to crumb down. No raisin to be upset."

"I loaf you so much right now."

"Loaf you too."

\* \* \*

><p>(DrTempo)<p>

From the Journal of Sunset Shimmer:

\* \* \*

><p>After my...interesting adventure with Ryuko Matoi and company, I figured a break would be interesting.<p>

\* \* \*

><p>I got one in the Sword Art Online Loop. There, MMORPGs have changed via VR devices which essentially create whole virtual worlds.<p>

It had started with Kayaba, the creator of the first VRMMO, Sword Art Online, turning it into a death game where if you died, you were dead for real. However, that is not where my tale started here.

I found myself as a player in Alfheim Online, another VRMMO which luckily, had you not die for real if you died there. My abilities were limited while in the game, as it was not capable of handling the skills Loopers can use.

\* \* \*

><p>Which meant I had a challenge. I soon met Leafa, a player who was related to Kirito, the player that had ended the Sword Art Online incident. Despite that, Kirito is not the Anchor. That title goes to his girlfriend Asuna.<p>

Who happened to have been kidnapped by the guy running ALO.

Shortly after introductions, we decided to spar. Before the duel began, Leafa acted in a way I had seen many times before; that of a Looper Awakening. However, in this case, this would be the first time Leafa had Awakened.

As can be guessed, she was confused as heck. In our ensuing duel, I managed to easily win, thanks to my superior swordsmanship. After I explained things to Leafa, Kirito showed up. He told us that Asuna had already escaped her captor, and kicked his butt.

Drat. I had wanted to fight the jerk. Still, that meant I could enjoy the game, and so I did.

After a while, I learned of another VRMMO, Gun Gale Online, which was more modern than the classic fantasy game ALO is. It was the top player that caught my eye, though.

His name? Big Boss. Curious as to this, I entered GGO, and met Sinon, another Looper, who took me to Big Boss.

It was indeed the Looper I knew, and he had basically set up Outer Heaven as the top guild in GGO. Sinon had recently been asked to join, and I also was recruited.

During the tests Big Boss had set up to make sure we were worthy of becoming official members of Outer Heaven, Sinon told me of how Big Boss and her had met. During a competition to determine the top GGO player, Sinon had clashed with Big Boss, and lost easily. Big Boss

saw potential, though, and soon had one of his top players, Ocelot, ask her to join up.

And interesting enough, my thoughts on Ocelot Awakening soon during my Loop where I'd met Big Boss was actually right. Ocelot had indeed Awakened that very Loop, but was confused, so he did things as per baseline. Since then, Ocelot has been honing his skills.

But back to my adventures in GGO. After passing the tests, Sinon and I were sent to help stop 'Death Gun', a GGO player who was very dangerous. Sinon and Kirito had stopped him in baseline, and this time, I would get the honor.

\* \* \*

><p>After that, I returned to ALO, and met Yuuki, a girl who, due to her illness, was using the technology that VRMMOs worked on nearly all the time. This meant she was very skilled, and our duel was quite an epic one. She nearly defeated me.<p>

After this Loop, I felt like I had had a good time. I was ready for whatever awaited me next.

\* \* \*

><p>174.11 (Kris Overstreet)<p>

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm always glad to have you visit," Fluttershy told the immense lupine Admin seated on his haunches in her living room. "But I don't understand what exactly an Admin needs an examination from me for."<p>

"Well, it's like this," Fenrir said, his eyes flickering from Fluttershy to a shiny plate on the wall to a bird shifting from perch to bookshelf and back to Fluttershy. "My behavior the past few eons has been... well... out of character for me. And I'm concerned that there might be something wrong with me. And since I... well, I just can't bring this up with my co-workers, all right? That left seeking out animal experts among the Loopers."

"I understand," Fluttershy said.

"You know, I get enough grief from my coworkers as it is," Fenrir continued as Fluttershy carefully examined his body from head to tail. "Some of them rub my ears when I'm too busy to tell them to back off. A couple of the braver ones are even rubbing my belly. How can I trust people with that little respect?"

"Have you tried talking to them about it?" Fluttershy asked, taking Fenrir's tail in her hooves and gently bending it.

"Ha! Norse pantheon, remember? No whiners in Odin's house!" Fenrir paused and added, "Well, except Dad, but he's a special case."

"Hmm," Fluttershy murmured, and then added, "Tell me, have you noticed that the tips of your ears have become slightly floppy?"

"A little," Fenrir admitted. "I thought it was just fatigue. It's been rough recently."

"And how stiff your tail is?" Fluttershy added.

Fenrir shook the tail experimentally. "I hadn't really noticed, but yeah," he said.

"Has your attention span been growing shorter of late?"

"Er, yes. I've been having to work through that."

Fluttershy gestured to his back. "And your winter coat is coming in multicolored," she continued. "In a healthy wolf it should be two colors, no variation."

Fenrir blinked. "Is that serious? Tell me, Fluttershy. I can handle it."

"Well..." Fluttershy looked away from Fenrir. "It's not exactly serious... but I've never seen this happen quite this way before. Usually it's an inherited condition that takes several generations to manifest."

"What?" Fenrir curled back on himself, staring with worried yellow eyes. "What? What is it?"

Fluttershy took a deep breath. "I think you may be coming down with... domestication."

Angel Bunny looked through the front door of Fluttershy's cottage, saw the mountain-sized wolf wailing and weeping disconsolately while Fluttershy held him over her shoulder, and decided he had business elsewhere. He'd find out what it was when he got there.

\* \* \*

><p>174.12 (ORBSyndicate)<p>

Gravity Falls: Friendship is Magic 7: Guitars and Dancers and PINKIES!

\* \* \*

><p>"Duplicating copy machine." Twilight said, observing the rundown machine before her. "I would question how it's still functional in this state, but you'd all probably just sayâ€" "<p>

"MAAAAAAGIIIIIIIC!" Pinkie said, spreading her hands out slowly.

Fluttershy looked at the thing, blinking. "Soâ€" what are we going to do with it again?"

Twilight took out some random sciencey tool from her Pocket. "We are, of course, going to do SCIENCE to it."

"What else?" Pinkie said, grinning. "I'll grab the soap bars!"

Flutter shy blinked. "Why would we need soap barsâ€|?"

"Reasons!" Pinkie said, depositing several dozen bars of soap on the floor. Then she blinked. "OH NO! I have to help with the party today! I can't do both at the same time!"

Slowly, the pink pony-turned-human angled her head towards the beat up copy machine.

"No, Pinkie." Twilight said. "That's just a bad idea."

"Okay Twilight." Pinkie grinned. "I'll just clone myself the regular way then!"

Twilight blinked. "You can't be seriousâ€""

\* \* \*

><p>Stan was slightly disturbed.<p>

Pinkie was \_everywhere.\_ Even more \_everywhere\_ than usual. She was in the bathroom, in the rafters, outside planting things, on the roof hanging streamers. He knew he should have called off the party, but he'd decided to go with it. Go as baseline as possibleâ€|

Now the entire Mystery Shack had balloons. Everywhere. And cannons filled with (he hoped) confetti.

Confound those ponies, they were driving him toâ€"

"BOO!" Pinkie said, causing Stan to fall backwards onto his back. "Did I getcha? I gotcha! WHOO! Here have a cupcake."

"Uhâ€|"

Seconds later she came back. "Hey, did I pass through here a while ago?"

Stan blinked. "Uhâ€|" He blinked, an idea coming to him. "Oh. Yes, just a ways to the left." She grinned, bouncing off.

Stan quickly jumped into the back room, checking the duplicating copy machine. Long ago he had discovered how to see what exactly it had copied recently. So if it showed Pinkie getting copiedâ€|

He looked at the records. There was no mention of copying Pinkie Pie. What was there, howeverâ€|

"Thirty metric tons of soap? What on earth?"

\* \* \*

><p>Soos was playing on the keyboard. "Soos is best DJ." He said, hitting the explosion key over and over again.<p>

Rainbow Dash leapt over. "Soâ€|. keyboard. What other sounds does it make aside from "boom?"

"A dawg, it can make all sorts of noises! Like blood curdling zombie screams!"

"Cooooool."

"And, of course!" Soos dramatically raised his hand, pointed his finger, and pressed down on the key. The speakers let out a "Ye-AH!"

"Yes!" Soos said, grinning.

Rainbow Dash blinked. "Okaythen. So what's the plan for the party, exactly?"

"Dance off slash karaoke!" Soos grinned. "There'll be a bunch of punch and the dancers will dance till the house falls down!"

Rainbow Dash leaned in. "Want to make it more interesting?" She said, producing a guitar from her Pocket.

"Woah dude where'd you get that?"

"The seat cushion over there, you just didn't see it. Now, how's about instead of just a dance-off?"

\* \* \*

><p>Pinkie smiled at the party. She was proud of her work. And Stan was still fretting internally about how she had managed to do it.<p>

Or maybe he was fretting about the thirty metric tons of soap. It wasn't like she read his mind or anything. Perhaps she should

Applejack was nearby, a little bored. She wasn't really into the party, so she had kinda just sat next to the wall. She was trying to get into that perfect position where she could have her hat over her eyes, lean effortlessly against the wall, and fall asleep without anyone noticing. It was a skill she had developed.

"Hi." A small girl in a green shirt next to her said. "Are you attempting the ancient art of sleeping while standing?"

Applejack blinked, turning to the girl. "Uh yeah. Howd'ya know?"

"I have tried it many times myself, though to no avail. It is why I have a headache today." She giggled. "I'm Candy. The large one behind me with the iguana is Grenda. And the one behind her is".  
Uh.

"Lyra Heartstrings." Lyra said, walking up to shake Applejack's hand. Applejack took it, not giving it a second thought.

"So what are y'all doing here?"

Grenda pounded her chest. "I'M HERE FOR THE PUNCH!"

"Grenda it does not involve any actual punching." Candy reminded her



large friend.

"I DON'T CARE. I WILL MAKE IT HAVE PUNCHES!"

"CAN IT HAVE TACOS?" Sonata shouted from the background. Nobody listened to her. She became dejected.

Candy shrugged. "She is a bit over the top. I am here to watch her."

Lyra shrugged. "I'm just here because party. You don't get many parties in Gravity Falls."

Applejack twitched. Her Element of Honesty had suggested something was up here. A half-truth. "Really?"

"Well I suppose the Northwests organize a party every year or so, but nobody lets them in. And the rest of the 'parties' are just people messing with Old Man McGucketâ€|"

The old man in question let out a yell and started dancing hillbilly style. "I can't feel my legs! It makes it so much more interesting!"

Applejack blinked. "Mmkay thenâ€| Anyway I'm just goin' to be sittin' here till the endâ€""

"Oh look what the poor wretches dragged in!" A blonde girl said, stepping up to the four of them. "Look at all you pathetic losers! You know, you're not good enough for even this party!"

"I live in this place, ma'am." Applejack retorted.

"Oh look. \_Excuses.\_ How quaint. Nice accent by the way. Sure to attract all the best hillbilly guys."

"I CAN ATTEST THAT IT WORKS!" McGucket yelled, now unable to move his legs.

The blonde girl chuckled. "But you're new, so I'll give you a pass this once. I'm Pacifica Northwest, and what I say is law. And I say that the four of you are cramping the style of this already substandard partyâ€""

Pinkie ran right up to Pacifica. "Did. You. Just. Say. Substandard. Party?"

"Did you really think this was a good party? I mean the balloons are tacky, the house is falling apart, and what on earth are those cannons even \_for?\_"

"FOR PARTIES!" Pinkie said, growling. She slowly backed away. "I have my eyes on you. All of them."

Applejack really hoped that Pinkie didn't bring out any of her Eyes of Chaosâ€|

Pacifica turned back to them. "Now, all of you get off. Shoo. We don't need you cluttering up the place."

Candy and Grenda sighed. "We suppose you are rightâ€¦." They began to turn away, dejected.

Pacifica was about to leave when Applejack stomped her foot on the ground. "I won't stand for this." She muttered. "These three just want to have a nice party and enjoy their time here! You've obviously made it your mission to make them and others feel worthless. Well let me tell you something miss Northwest, you are nothing more than a petty rich girl who just thinks she can stomp all over everyone. Well I won't stand for that, miss Northwest. I'm not budging. They are \_staying.\_"

Pacifica glared. "Where did your accent go?"

"I happen to think you're one of those shallow types who listen to accents rather than actual words."

"Who on earth would \_choose\_ to talk like that?"

"People like me who like who they are." Applejack glared. "And I have a feeling that you are secretly a little insecure about yourself."

Pacifica glared. "You know whatâ€¦"

Her thoughts were cut short when Soos let out the announcement. "And now, we have our karaoke dance off! But our great friend Rainbow Dash has suggested that we make things more interesting! So, instead of just a simple dance, there will be teams! There will be someone playing an instrument and someone singing! Do whatever you want, but prepare for awesome music battle! I realize that it's kinda no longer karaoke, but just treat it like something that makes life more interesting, downs!"

Rainbow Dash leapt up to the stage, holding her guitar up high. "I'll play music! Who's dancing? I hear Pacifica, the dancing queen, is in the audience!"

Applejack smirked, turning to Pacifica. "How about we settle this in a little competition? Or do you even have anyone willing to play music for you?"

Pacifica snapped her fingers. "SUNSET! Play the guitar!"

Applejack watched as unAwake Sunset walked up, strumming a guitar. "Of course, Pacifica." She grinned menacingly.

Applejack leapt up to the stage, grinning. "Rainbow, you and me versus the two of them. Let's do it."

Rainbow Dash blinked. Applejack wasn't talking in countryisms. It wasn't hard to tell why.

\_Okayâ€¦ throw out giving other people even a chance at winning. We're going to give them the utter and complete awesome beat down!\_

Sunset strummed her guitar, and the competition began.

To be fair, Pacifica and Sunset did pretty good. Pacifica wasn't just

some rich kid who won because they were rich, she did have some skills. And every version of Sunset ever met knew how to play the guitar with at least some skill.

If Applejack and Rainbow Dash hadn't been Loopers, they would have been beaten.

Howeverâ€¦.

Rainbow Dash moved her fingers across the strings of the guitar faster than was physically possible, making it sound like she was playing two of the instruments at once. Applejack performed a bunch of exceedingly complex dancing maneuvers, purposefully avoiding bucking and other "uncivilized" and/or "hillbilly" moves. She was going to beat this rich girl at her own game. She even used complex ballet maneuvers. Everyone stared as she did continually more intricate maneuvers. At one point, Rainbow dash "ponied-up," but people didn't pay much attention to this. Applejack's dance was just so.. surprisingly graceful. Of course this was the entire point.

When it ended, Applejack did a dainty bow, turning up to grin right at Pacifica. "How's that, miss Northwest?"

Pacifica's eye twitched. "Youâ€¦ Youâ€¦"

"Now that wasn't even my best performance." Applejack walked right up to Pacifica. "Now, miss Northwest, I can be just as uptight and proper as you. I just choose not to." She returned to her normal voice. "And that's just fine with me. Now SOOS! How'd we do?"

Soos leapt up, yelling like a monkey. "THAT WAS A HEATED BATTLE DUDES! Now, the team who gets the most applause will win! Let's hear it for.. Rainbow Dash and Applejack!"

The clapping for the two Loopers was astounding, loud, and everywhere. Candy and Grenda clapped profusely. Lyra simply took notes on what had just transpired on the notebook she had behind her back.

"Now let's hear it for Pacifica and Sunset!"

The clapping for the two of them was small, and seemed forced. Pacifica steamed, pulling a roll of hundred dollar bills out of her pocket and waving them in the air. The amount of people clapping increased, but in the end, it wasn't even close. She seethed.

"So." Applejack said, walking up. "Can ya' see that you aren't the best simply because you're more civilized? Can you also see that some people like it down here where there aren't so many fancy rituals and shenanigans? Like forks. I could never understand the fascination with forksâ€¦"

Pacifica glared. "You were just faking. You don't actually have any status!"

Applejack's eyes sparked. "You have no idea, Pacifica."

She glared. "Come on girls! We're leaving!" She began to storm out.

She didn't make it far, as suddenly several dozen Pinkie Pies ran into the dance room.

"THE SOAP PILE IS GOING TO EXPLODE!" One of them yelled.

"EVERYONE FIND SOME COVER!" A second said.

"WE'RE ALL GONNA DIE!" A third said.

The real Pinkie Pie blinked. She was sure she'd gotten rid of all the clonesâ€|

Then of course the soap exploded.

It was later discovered that Twilight had taken a Pinkie clone for study with the soap. She did SCIENCE with the soap, Pinkie clone, and the duplicating copy machine. She let the three things sit in a closet while she read some stuff from the Journal.

Said "stuff" was a spell that made things work at optimum efficiency. The copier copied, the pinkie clones got moreâ€| pinkâ€|, and the soap exceeded critical mass and exploded.

Twilight still wasn't sure how that was possible, but she decided further experimentation simply wasn't worth it. Perhaps in another Kerbal Space Program loop she'd try it as a new type of rocket fuel.

Lyra, of course, recorded everything.

\* \* \*

><p>Wkh vluhqv zhuh rqfh d phqdfh, exw Vrqdwd mxvw zdqwhg wdfrrv.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Note:<strong>

174.1: Nyx is in big trouble. Bunny trouble.

174.2: Yeah, dark-adaption.

174.5: Yakkity yak.

174.11: Poor wolf.

End  
file.